

Percy B. St. John



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A Story Told in Eight Chapters.

By

Percy B. St. John.



Chapter I.



In the waiting hall of a railway station in Brittany, one of those bare and airy pounds where French travelers must expiate the offense of missing their train, three persons were sitting one showery day, or rather two of them sat still, while the third for the most part roamed up and down like a caged lion in manifest ennui and impatience. At one end in the first-class compartment, reading a newspaper to pass away the time, was a ruddy, white-haired old gentleman, with prosperous John Bull written plainly on every feature of him, from his clean-shaved face to his well-polished boots. In the larger pen beyond, open to more humble travelers, a little girl balanced herself on the edge of a bench, as if doubtful of her own presumption in sitting down at all, hardly daring to move, firmly grasping a basket in one hand and a paper parcel in the other. Their restless companion was a boy whose Eton jacket and collar showed him to be also a stranger in this country, while his face bore a strong family likeness to the old gentleman, no other in fact than his grandfather, taking him for a first holiday trip to the Continent.

The crossing to St. Malo had been rough; our young friend for one had been very unwell, to his great disgust in every way; the boat came in late. These passengers had failed to catch the direct train to their destination, and now found themselves stranded for certain weary hours at a little junction, where they had nothing to do but look out at the pelting rain and study the mysteries of a time-table which displayed a bewildering maze of branch lines. So the boy had some excuse for being in an ill-humor, which led him to take a critical view of foreigners.

»How silly they all look!« was his remark on the porters in their blouses, the passing gendarme in his cloak and cocked hat, the polite station-master in his quasi-military uniform, the peasant women with their great caps, and all the other unfamiliar figures that from time to time gave him something to stare at through the long windows opening out on the platform.

»Just what they say about us, Algie, when they come to England,« laughed his grandfather, who, as an old traveler, took his troubles more philosophically.

Now when the girl heard them speaking English she pricked up her ears, and, peeping over the partition that divided the waiting-room, ventured to steal a sly look at her companions, And presently, as Algie, rampaging from one compartment to another, stopped opposite her, she stood up, dropped a prim little curtsey, and timidly said: »If you please, can you tell me when my train comes?«

»Why, here's an English girl!« quoth Algie, in surprise.

So it was—or rather an Irish one—as appeared when his grandfather came to question her, the boy thinking too much of himself to take any particular trouble about such an insignificant person. The poor child had traveled from the west of Ireland all alone on her way to a convent school in some remote nook of Brittany. She did not speak a word of French, but carried a crumpled scrap of paper, on which was written in that language a request for kind persons to direct her at each stage of the long journey. This she showed to the old gentleman with an imploring look that betrayed how much at a loss she felt among foreigners, as well she might. Consulting the time-tables, it took even him some pains to make out that she must change carriages three times yet, and at the best could not reach her destination till late at night.

It seemed, indeed, a trying journey for one so young and inexperienced. But while Algie only wondered, his grandfather spoke encouragingly to the little adventurer, and did his best to help her. He wrote down plainly where and when she must change, furnished her with an orange and some biscuits by way of refreshment, and when her train came up, as luckily she had not long here to wait for it, put her under the charge of a good-natured-looking nun who was going part of the same road, and readily promised to look after her so far.

»Now we have more than two hours still to kick our heels in this beastly he!« grumbled Algie, when the bustle of the departing train had passed away, and he and his grandfather found themselves alone in the empty waiting-room.

»Well, we can't expect the whole railway system of the country to be timed for our convenience,« said the old gentleman. »There is nothing for it but patience. Just think of that child; how much more to be pitied she is! If you were in her case you might well fret to have your journey over.«

»What a lot of bother you gave yourself about her!« said the youngster, in the tone of one who had hit upon another grievance.

»I can't say the same of you, Algie. It would have been more like a gentleman to have shown some kindly—at all events, civil—interest in her story, instead of gaping at her as if she had been a sight at a fair.

Master Algie felt himself snubbed and was silent. Certainly it was little aid or encouragement the girl would have got had his Grandfather not chanced to overhear her appeal.

»Every one is bound to be friendly to such a helpless young traveler,« continued the old gentleman, »all the more when she turns out to be a country-woman so far from home. And I ought to be able to feel for her if nobody else did. I have known what it is to shift for myself among strangers in a foreign country when scarcely older than this girl. My plight, indeed, was more forlorn and pitiable. The first time I ever traveled on the Continent it was as a barefooted vagabond. I had not a penny, or a pocket to put it in not even a stitch on me that I could call my own. How would you like to be as badly off as that, my boy?«

»You!« exclaimed Algie, casting eyes of incredulity on the stout, well-to-do-looking figure, in all the respectability of spotless white linen and fine broadcloth. It seemed impossible that this flourishing, gentleman could ever have been in a state of destitution. »What do you mean, grandfather?«

»I am not joking. Did you never hear about my first trip abroad?«

»No—do tell me!« cried the boy, brightening up at the prospect of such a singular story as this promised to be.

»Well, since we have so long to wait, perhaps you can find patience to listen to my juvenile adventures, which are indeed well worth relating, especially for high-stomached gentleman like some of you of the rising generation, who give yourselves such airs over everything not in your own way of life, and grumble so discontentedly when you can't get just

what you have been accustomed to eat and drink, and can do nothing but yawn and fidget when amusements fail you for an hour or two. I sometimes think that a little of my early experience would do you good, Algie, my lad, by showing you what less fortunate youngsters have to put up with as best they can.«

»Oh, grandfather, we are not so bad as you make us out! But it is a horrid bore waiting here, without even a book to read.«

»Very well, then, as you had not the sense to bring a book, sit down, and I will tell you all about that first adventure of mine.«

Here follows the story which was then told in the waiting-room, filled out a little perhaps as the narrator might have done for it had he had the advantage of pen and ink.

My tale so far resembles Waverley that it is one of sixty years ago, when the cannon of Waterloo still rang in men's ears, and George IV. ruled over England, and stage coaches flourished, and indulgent old gentlemen tipped their grandchildren in guineas or crowns, and nervous old ladies were terribly concerned about radicals and rioters, now that they had no longer Boney to be their bugbear, and I was a lanky boy of fourteen or so, with my arms growing fast out of the sleeves of my jacket, and an excellent appetite for all my meals.

We had taken a house at Ramsgate, then a smaller and more genteel watering-place, if not a more lively one, than it is now. My sisters and I had been recovering from the measles, and it was thought well to give us a long spell of sea-air while we were in the way of it. Youngsters of our day by no means went from home every year. So we lingered on into the autumn, when most of the other visitors had gone away. You may guess I had no objection to miss a quarter's schooling, for in those good old times school was a much more severe and painful place than you know of, and, strange as it may seem to you, the boys of that day seldom loved their lessons so well as the delights of idling about the shore, rollicking in the waves, making friends with old tars who had stirring yarns to tell of exploits in the great French war, and watching the ships that then excited every hearty lad's idea of romance in a way you can hardly understand.

We had not so many books of travel and adventure as you have, so I think our imagination was all the more ready to take wing on the patched sail of every fishing-boat, and there was no crawling coaster that in our eyes did not seem bound for El Dorado—to speak for myself, at least; but before long I was to have more than my fill of excitement on the ocean wave.

Well, one bright October afternoon, which came after a week of rain, as if to give us one more glimpse of summer, I started out for a ramble along the coast. I walked for some miles past Broad-stairs, till I got as far as the North Foreland, and almost in sight of Margate. Then, as the sun was so warm, I felt tempted to have a bathe—perhaps the last I should enjoy at the seaside, where earlier in the season I had spent half the day in and out of the water. and thus came to be not a bad swimmer. I undressed in a little cove under the cliffs, and as the tide was well up, I had not far to run across sand and shingle before Splashing head over heels into the sparkling sea.

After a little ducking and playing with the waves, out I went into deep water, now swimming on my breast, now on my side, now floating on my back, looking up at the blue sky above and reveling in the sense of being at home in a conquered element. I had no fear of getting too far away from land, for the tide appeared to me to be coming in, and so long as I could make way against it I calculated on being easily able to let myself go back with it. Then, if this was to be my last swim. I had a fancy for seeing how far out I could get, to boast of when I returned to school. So on I went, recklessly, I know not how long, till. I began to feel as if I had had almost enough of it.

Now, taking my bearings, I was rather startled to see how far. off the shore looked, and that the cove where I had left my clothes was out of sight. Either I had not swum straight out, as I reckoned to do, or there must be some current drifting me along. Anyhow, it was high time to think of getting back again, now also that the water began to feel just a little chilly when one stopped to rest.

I turned at once and struck out for the beach, losing no time now, but putting forth my best skill to get on shore as soon as possible. But I found it much harder to swim back than I had expected. Making

vigorous strokes and putting myself quite out of breath, it seemed to me, after some minutes, as if the shore were no nearer than before. When I let myself float for a little to take breath, I could not be sure that the waves were carrying me in the right direction. I stood upright, treading the water and paddling gently forwards; then I saw a piece of seaweed slowly drifting past me out to sea.

Could I have made a mistake? It flashed across me that either I had been wrong about the tide still coming in, or else it might have turned since I entered the water.

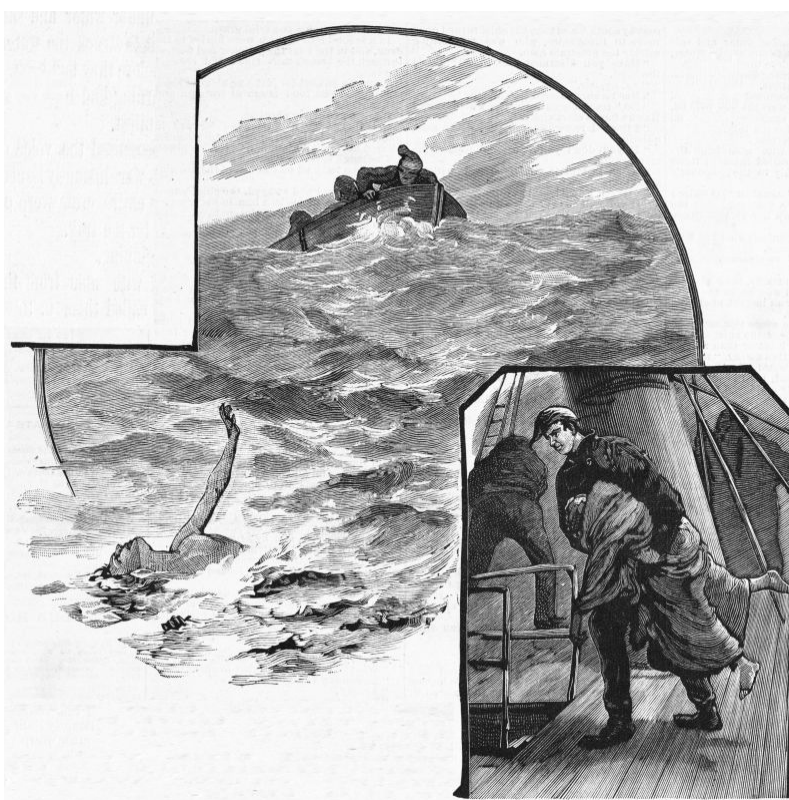
That must be so, and, to make the matter worse, a good deal of wind was blowing off shore, which hitherto had helped me on my heedless course, when I gave all the credit to my own exertions.

Struggle as I might, I could make little head against wind and tide together, and presently had to confess that I was growing tired, while if I ceased my efforts for a moment there was nothing for it but to be swept out to sea. Now I began to be not a little afraid about the chance of getting safe back, and wished with all my heart that I had been more careful. I looked anxiously to each side, and saw a buoy at some little distance. Though this was rather further from the shore, I thought best to make for it, in hopes of being able to take a rest here and gather strength for the long swim that lay before me.

I turned then toward the buoy, but to my alarm found myself, tired as I was, mastered by a current or a strong set of the tide, which carried me out beyond that point of refuge. There could be no doubt about it, the sea was too much for me, and I must be drowned if help did not come. Where was it to come from. There were two or three vessels passing not far out, but too far to see or hear me, as I believed. Yet I shouted as loud as I could on the chance that these hails might reach them. On the beach and the cliffs above not a soul was to be seen who could even pity my helpless fate.

I was now letting myself drift at the will of the tide, reserving all my strength to keep afloat, and from time to time sending a cry of distress over the cruel waves that half an hour before had seemed such joyous playfellows. What did I think of in those anxious moments? It was hard indeed to drown so young; but, to tell the truth, I thought of others

rather than of myself. I thought how I should be missed and waited for and searched out in vain—how some chance passer-by would come upon my clothes—how only after days of suspense, perhaps, my poor father and mother and my dear sisters would learn what had become of me. That was the bitterest of it! And mother had always been so nervous about my love of swimming, for her old-fashioned notion: was that this accomplishment led to more opportunities of getting into than out of danger; how would her fears be justified if ever the sea threw my lifeless body up on that sand where we had all spent so many happy days? This thought inspired me to one more effort.



With fluttering heart I tried to gasp out a prayer that was silenced by the water washing into my mouth.

A very short time and every hope vanished. My strength began to fail; I ceased to Struggle; my mind grew-confused; I sank beneath the surface, and saw no more.

All the events of my life seemed to pass before me as east by some magic light of memory on a rapidly outstretched sheet. I believed that this was already death. Then the dizziness and the dread gave place to a quiet sense of vague content, I no longer cared what became of me. My

last faint effort to hold up my head had shown me a boat tossing among the waves close at hand; but in another minute I had forgotten to long for help.

How long this state of unconsciousness lasted I cannot say. I was aroused from it for an instant by some one grasping my hair and dragging me upwards towards the light. Then all grew dark again, and I knew no more of how I was rescued.

Chapter II.

When I quite came to myself I was lying snugly tucked up beneath blankets, with a comfortable sense of warmth in all my limbs. Beside me stood a boy with something hot in a tin pannikin, which he was putting to my lips by means of a spoon. Then I was aware of a great shaking and rattling and heaving that soon told me this dark, close-packed place in which I found myself must be some sort of ship's cabin. But for the moment I was too bewildered to remember how I had come there.

»Where I am I? What's the matter? Who are you« I stammered out, staring about me; and the boy replied with a grin, to which he added certain unintelligible words, and attempted to administer another spoonful of the hot stuff; but such an awkward nurse did he make, that he split most of it over my face, and then grinned again as if in admiration of his own clumsiness,

»That'll do,« said I, turning on my side to 'make sure it was not all a dream. »Now I remember. You picked me up when I was drowning, didn't you?«

Again the boy answered by sounds for which I was none the wiser; then, seeing I did not understand a word he said, betook himself once more to grinning.

Such a grin I never saw—a Cheshire cat could be nothing to it!—it spread all over his chubby face from ear to ear, throwing his short nose and small eyes into the shade as it were, so that for the moment all of him seemed to be mouth, that was not blue shirt and tarry canvas breeches. But it appeared to be a grin of benevolence rather than of derision, from which I might at least understand that I had fallen into friendly hands.

When he had grinned himself out, so to speak, finding that we got little further towards mutual comprehension, and that I would have no more of the steaming cordial which he was still forcing down my throat, he took leave of me with another grin, and hitched himself out of the tiny cabin, the grin first disappearing and lastly his boots, which were almost as big.

Left thus to myself, after a minute or two I resolved to follow him, that I might see with my own eyes how matters stood. I crawled out of the bunk on which I lay, wrapped one of its coverings about me, and staggered towards the door, steadying myself by holding on to everything that came in my way, for I still felt too dizzy to walk straight. Then I had only to put my head up the hatchway, and two or three steps brought me out on the deck of a small cutter, hardly larger than a fishing-boat.

There were two men on deck besides my friend, the boy, now engaged apparently in making his report of me to one who stood in the bows with a telescope at his eye. This was a tall man, so tall and thin that he looked fit to be the bowsprit or foremast of his own little craft. The man at the helm, on the other hand, was so short and fat, or so padded by the many clothes he wore, that he could better have done duty as a buoy had he not been certain to go to the bottom in all his cumbrous equipment of long hoots, wide breeches, and thick jackets one over the other, the whole crowned by a red woollen nightcap, large and brilliant enough for the cutter's ensign, beneath which rose the smoke of an enormous long pipe, that, with a little imaginative exaggeration, suggested the funnel of a steamboat, a novel curiosity in those days such as I had seen for the first time that summer, and greatly wondered at.

He formed a complete contrast to his companion, for he was all curves and bumps, as the other was all points and angles.

These observations I made afterwards more at my leisure. What chiefly arrested my attention for the moment was the familiar cliffs of Thanet fast receding behind us as the cutter bounded on, her sail filled by a fresh breeze from the land. And every heave she gave was taking me farther from home.

»Put me on shore, please. I live at Ramsgate. My father will pay you well. Oh, they won't know what has become of me!« I exclaimed, appealing first to one man and then to the other.

They both spoke at once, answering me in a foreign language; then they burst out laughing together at the figure I cut as I stood there on deck—or rather tried to stand—the blanket fluttering about my nakedness, and pointed towards the land with excited gesticulations.

But they were not ill-natured, for when a roll of the vessel sent me sprawling against the bulwark, and I hung to a rope still with eyes turned landwards, the tall man took two strides aft to speak to me in kindly tones, answering my pantomime of entreaty with signs, from which I could guess—as was indeed the state of the case—that they had no time to lose, that beating back against the wind would be too hard work, that I must go along with them for the present and make the best of it. And the fat steersman, too, took his pipe from his mouth to say a few words that seemed meant for encouragement.

But I remained in despair, almost as great as when I believed myself drowning. I clung to the rigging, and could not take my eyes off the land. The sun had set, yet through the gathering twilight I fancied I could recognize the jetty at Ramsgate, the row of bathing-machines on the beach, and the crescent of white houses in which we lived. This indeed was a pure piece of imagination on my part, for what I saw must have been not Ramsgate, but Margate.

Along the coast lights began to twinkle out in the dusk. Perhaps one of these shone from the cozy parlor, where at this very moment they would all be wondering why I did not come home to tea. What a night of anxiety, what days would they pass at home! My clothes would turn up sooner or later, then how long would it be before they had news that I was still alive? The cutter might be taking me to Hong Kong or to Botany Bay for all that I knew.

My teeth began to chatter with cold, and my hands grew so numb that I could hardly hold the blanket wrapped about me to keep off the wind and rain, which now came on in heavy showers, for the fine afternoon had been but a deceitful blink in our long spell of bad autumn weather. The skipper, as I took the tall man to be, after making one or two friendly attempts to persuade me to leave the deck, tucked me up bodily beneath his arm and carried me below, where he rigged me in an old woollen shirt and a pair trousers much too large for me, Then the grinning boy appeared with preparations for supper.

The skipper invited me to share his meal, but I was in no mood to eat. I felt as wretched in body as in mind, and I could do nothing more than nibble at a biscuit. The fact is that I was turning seasick. My host saw

what was the matter, and left me in peace, while he ate enough for the two of us. And all the while the wind howled and the vessel creaked more alarmingly, and every pitch and roll added to my misery. She was no longer running smoothly before the wind, but tacking and tumbling at the mercy of gusty squalls, which made a rough night of it for such an inexperienced sailor as I, who had never been at sea before, except for short fair-weather trips in a Ramsgate boat.

When the tall man had finished the fat one came down, bringing his pipe with him, which did not improve the atmosphere of that stuffy and dingy little cabin. He would not be said no to like the other, but insisted on talking to me at the pitch of his voice and shoving the dishes under my nose by way of pressing me to eat. He held out greasy bits to me on the point of his knife; then as often as he drank he would wink at me and nod jovially, as if it were the greatest joke in the world to be carried away from home and fall among strangers, who did not understand a word one said, and make acquaintance for the first time with the woes of seasickness.

Perhaps he meant kindly. Anyhow, these pleasantries of his had such a depressing effect on me that I could have burst out into tears had I not considered that a British boy ought not to cry before foreigners. It was a great relief when this fellow relit his pipe and took himself off.

Last, the cabin-boy came to have his supper, which he ate with his eyes fixed on me and his mouth wide open all the time, partly to grin and partly for convenience of more speedily bolting down the victuals. That broad grin of his was the last thing I clearly recollect. I could stand the choking den no longer. I staggered up on deck and was very sick.

It may have been hours for all I know that I stayed above in the wind and wet. I suppose the men carried me down and put me in the bunk again. There I lay, hardly heeding what went on about me, asking nothing but to be left alone. Such a sense of utter helpless wretchedness is the form sea-sickness takes with some of us. The rest of the night passed thus, like a hideous dream, and a good part of the next day went by for me the same doleful blank.

Some time after the feeble lamp had been extinguished in the cabin I became conscious that the wind had lulled or changed, and though there

was still a great deal too much motion to be pleasant. The men hung up their dripping overcoats when they came down to dinner, a sign that the weather had improved. But I turned my face away from them, and had no desire to get up, till at last the rocking and heaving gave place to a comparative calm, and I was aware that my trials had, for the time at least, found relief. Then only I took heart to crawl on deck and look about me.

The rain had stopped now, though the sky was still as gloomy as my luckless fortunes. The cutter lay hove-to in sight of a village or small town, which at first appeared to me to rise right out of the water, but presently I saw that it stood on the point of a spit of sand joining it on to a range of low sand-hills behind. That this could not be England, whatever it was, I knew at a glance when I saw a boat approaching us, rowed by a man with a great mustache, a thing then familiar only in foreign parts. He was smoking a cigar, too, another outlandish sign in my eyes. On the other Side, in the offing, was a large ship, making signals to which my friends seemed to be replying.

What was going to happen now? The men looked at me and talked together. The boat came up, and they made signs for me to get into it.

They shook hands with me; the fat man patted me on the back, and the tall one presented me with a coin that looked like a bad sixpence. I took it that they also made me a present of the well-patched shirt and trousers in which I stood, and which, with the aforesaid piece of money, made all my belongings. I was in no position to refuse their gifts; one could not land in a foreign country stark naked and altogether penniless.

I got down into the boat, since so it must be. The cutter at once stood off for the ship, while the fisherman, or other seafaring personage now in charge of me, rowed away towards the village. He must have been told that I did not speak his language, for he did not trouble me with questions. I occupied myself in looking at the village, which, from a little distance, was exactly like a collection of houses out of a child's toy-box pitched in the middle of the sea. As we drew nearer I made out bright colored bricks and wooden buildings, with red roofs and funny weather-cocks on the top of them, and rows of tarred piles at the water's edge,

and nets and red shirts, and strings of fish hanging out to dry, and a knot of strangely dressed persons standing about to watch our arrival at the half-rotten jetty for which my conductor made.

So now, for the first time in my life, I set foot on foreign soil—what soil I did not yet know. But I may as well say here at once what I found out only later on. It was a Dutch village at the mouth of the Scheldt in which I had been put ashore. My preservers, one or both of them, were Channel pilots, belonging to Flushing. That ship must have been signaling for a pilot, and there was no time to lose about taking the job. I dare say they thought it the best thing they could do for me to land me here to be shipped over on the first opportunity, whereas their business might keep them at sea for days-and weeks together.

And now the question was how to get home and how as soon as possible to relieve the distress of my anxious family, who must by this time believe me lost forever.

It would be easy enough nowadays, you will say. I should only have to go to the nearest post-office and send a telegram, then cross to Dover by the next steamer. But there were no telegrams and few steamboats in those days, and I had no money but a coin of doubtful value—a Dutch shilling, in fact, worth about sixpence—and I didn't know how even to ask for help—I who had never before traveled alone any further than the boarding-school on Clapham Common, and altogether there was no saying what or when was to be the end of my adventure.

BILD A STRANGE TRIP ABROAD.—with FLUTTERING HEART I TRIED TO GASP OUT A PRAYER THAT WAS SILENCED BY THE WATER WASHING INTO MY MOUTH. A VERY SHORT TIME AND EVERY HOPE VANISHED. MY STRENGTH BEGAN TO FAIL; I CEASED TO STRUGGLE; MY MIND GREW CONFUSED; I SANK BENEATH THE SURFACE, AND SAW NO MORE.

Chapter III.

WHEN he had moored his boat, nodding to me to follow him, the fisherman led the way into this village, which was evidently the sort of place where a very little event is enough to attract a great deal of public attention. Before we had gone far we were surrounded by a mob of idle youngsters, who pressed about me, and laughed and gaped and stared as if I were some kind of queer fish newly caught for their amusement. For my part, what struck me most about them was that those who did not go barefoot wore clumsy wooden shoes, a thing I had never seen in my life. I was to see many other novelties before getting to the end of my involuntary travels.

This tumultuous reception I found rather annoying, especially when one or two young rascals went so far as to divert themselves by shying shells at me. Was it a crime here, then, to be a foreigner? Alas! I had to remember how, not long before, I had joined my school-fellows in hooting and pelting another boy accused by us proud Britons of being a Frenchman, and therefore unworthy to intrude upon our sacred soil. That is always the way with the ignorant and thoughtless. Every conceited rooster is inclined to peck strange fowls out of his own farmyard. Now it was my turn to hang my head and sneak along, the hapless mark of public derision.

It seemed as if I were marching to execution; but luckily this ordeal did not last long. The procession stopped at a house, in front of which a row of sailors stood idly smoking their pipes beneath a stone jug, hung out by way of sign, with a board bearing the motto, »Hier verkoopt man tranken,« which I did not in the least understand, but rightly guessed that it announced a tavern. My conductor brought me in, introducing me to a burly person whom I supposed to be the landlord, and made out that he was to take my case in hand, for the fisherman left, as he had no further use for me.

The innkeeper didn't seem to have any other information. I immediately realized that he meant well, and although I couldn't be entirely sure whether he was really awake enough to notice my presence, he gave the impression of sleeping in his chair.

He certainly proved provokingly slow and, because before he did anything else, when we were left alone, he took many puffs from his pipe and looked me all over from top to bottom. He shook his head solemnly and thought for a few minutes, during which time I had to stand there. I was like a humble and awkward suppliant. Finally, the good man had the idea of offering me something by the fire, kicking his foot against a bench and pointing to it. I nodded to him, while he was constantly busy holding his long pipe in one hand, the other snugly buried in the depths of his capacious pockets.

When, the pipe having gone out, he began talking to me and kept at it for a some time until he recognized that this was waste of breath. He seemed to think that by putting his mouth to my ear and shouting, his voice I must in the end be forced to understand him. I could only shake my head and wish that his breath didn't smell so strongly of onions, as well as of tobacco. I was almost deaf when he gave up in despair and drawing to regard me with a smile of, and he even exerted himself to scratch his head over the puzzle of a boy who being deaf to the loudest Dutch.

After his time, however, fishermen and other men characters had kept dropping in, and than one of whom was acquainted with knew words of English, so that we were able to hold some sort of conversation. I let them know that I came from Ramsgate, and wanted to be taken back there, the sooner the better. But they shook their heads and puffed stolidly at their porcelain pipes without making any motion to oblige me.

»Wind bad—no good,« said one ancient mariner, and then they apparently began to talk about something else, just as if my affairs were of no great consequence, unless to serve as subject for a minute or two's curiosity. But perhaps they may have been telling the story of my adventures, which of course would have to be repeated to every new-comer, as the news of this arrival spread through the village. The landlord could certainly afford to entertain me, for I might flatter myself I was the attraction that kept filling the low-roofed room, till I could scarcely see across it for the cloud of smoke, which was only a

little cleared from time to time by the opening of the door to let in some fresh customer.

For a youngster I had a very good opinion of myself in those days, and what much vexed me was their all seeming to take me for a common sailor-boy or the like, to whom mishaps such as the present were quite ordinary events, and nothing to make great ado about. I could not get them to understand that I was not at all accustomed to this sort of thing, but a young gentleman of quite unadventurous antecedents, the son of well-to-do people, who would pay them handsomely for bringing me back without delay. Indeed, in my shabby and scanty costume I looked like nothing better than a ship-wrecked scarecrow, who might be well content to find himself with any roof over his head.

Then presently one of the company taking pity on my dumb dejection, explained to me in broken English that the landlady of this house was a very clever woman, who happened to be away from home just now, but that when she came hack she would know what to do about me. With this prospect I had to remain satisfied, sincerely hoping the mistress would come home soon. For one thing, my stomach began to feel very empty after its late sufferings, and my experience of mistresses and housewives generally was that they would not be ignorant of juvenile human nature's propensity to hunger.

In the course of the evening there entered an important-looking personage to whom everybody took off his hat, and whom I supposed to be some sort of a magistrate. He brought a large book in which he seemed to write down such an account of me as could be gathered from those present, while I had not a word to say for myself. But he withdrew without taking any steps to provide me with the refreshments which I was too shy to suggest in expressive pantomime. For one thing, I did not know how far that shilling of mine might go in the way of victuals, and the pinch of starvation was not yet keen enough to bring me to beggary-point.

So I waited in silent hope that the subject would be introduced by some of my new acquaintances.

And sure enough, after I had sat twiddling my thumbs for an hour or two it occurred to my sleepy host that I might want something to eat. He

set about the business with his accustomed deliberation; but at length, by the aid of a girl, who had already her hands full in serving drink to the fishermen, the meal did get itself ready. I was heartily glad to see it, consisting as it did of tea, some brown bread and butter, and fat bacon, on which I fell with all the appetite of my twenty-four hours fast. The landlord looked on approvingly, and when I stopped nodded and smiled as an invitation for me to fall to again.

I must say I should have enjoyed my supper more if there had not been so many spectators of it. By this time the room was crowded like a booth at a fair. Every one who entered began by taking a good long stare at me; and I had to eat under the same sort of curious inspection as if I had been a wild beast exhibited in its feeding-time. I felt inclined to walk round asking them all to take notice that I had a mouth and the same number of fingers and toes as other people, and have done with it. But all I could do was patiently to submit to an amount of public attention which, however disquieting, was ill-mannered rather than ill-natured.

When I had eaten my fill I felt a little more cheerful, but weary enough of sitting there on an uncomfortable stool with nothing to do but listen to the babel of unintelligible talk around me. The room was so hot and full of smoke that I longed for a breath of fresh air, or, better still, some place to lie down in and be quiet.

At last I began to nod off to sleep; and after I had nearly tumbled forward into the fire two or three times, my host took the hint to lead me to bed.

It was a large room upstairs into which he brought me, with three beds in it. There I could not take long to prepare for repose. I had no night shirt to put on, and felt shy of undressing before the old man, who stood waiting to take away the candle, so I just slipped off my tarry trousers and tumbled straightway into bed. Scarcely had I time to enjoy the delightful sensation of finding myself once more beneath crisp, clean sheets and cozy blankets before I went off to sleep and fell into a joyful dream that I was being carried in a balloon back to Ramsgate, where it turned out after all that nobody had much missed me, but everybody was none the less glad to see the safe at-home.

I could not have slept more than three or four hours when I was roused by a great disturbance going on below. This wooden house let you hear noises from any part of it almost as plainly as if in the next room. I sat up in bed, and, for all my ignorance of the language, had no difficulty in making out the shrill tones of an angry woman. Had the landlady come back then? and if so, what could be thus exciting her?

I was not long left in doubt. The hurricane of wrath swept up the creaking stairs, with a tramp of hasty footsteps and a discharge of angry ejaculations, nearer and louder every moment. The door of the room in which I lay was burst open, and in bounced a red-faced woman followed by the scared-looking servant girl carrying a light, and the rear was brought up by the landlord, who seemed mildly remonstrating with his spouse's wrath, while she pointed to me and harangued at the pitch of her voice, so that I might perceive myself to be the innocent cause of the whole commotion.

The fact is she had a true Dutch housewife's idolatry of cleanliness, and was indignant that a dirty vagabond like me should have been allowed to curl himself up in the spotless sheets of one of her best beds.



Without further ceremony she now dragged off the coverings, caught me by the scruff of the neck, and hauled me out on the floor.

Continuing to denounce the whole household, it would appear, for having permitted such scandalous impropriety in her absence. She even shoved me to the door, as I stood too confused for at once taking this rough hint to know my place; so, much amazed and abashed, I had to slink off downstairs, with my trousers in my hand, leaving mistress and maid to strip the bed of its defiled linen.

The landlord came down after me into the public room below. There, after rubbing his ear in thought a minute or two, while I stood buttoning up on the cold stone floor, he opened a cupboard, brought out a large jug of some beverage, and silently invited me to take a drink by way of consolation, at the same time slyly pointing: with his thumb over his shoulder, as if to hint that she needn't know anything about it. His looks said as plain as words could do:

»You see how it is! she is a regular Tartar, and I am a henpecked husband. So we must both put up with her notions, and be glad things are no worse.«

I shook my head sulkily; I was too much offended and annoyed by having been so roughly turned out of bed to accept the friendly offer of refreshment. Then his churlish wife was heard clattering down-stairs, and the good man shut the cupboard with a haste unusual to him, and, taking up a lantern, motioned me to follow.

I was as well pleased not to encounter that termagant again. He led the way out into the yard and showed me a hayloft where the like of me could find a fitting couch. When he had left me alone I wrapped myself in the hay, trying to get to sleep again. But now I could not sleep. To tell the truth, this place swarmed with fleas, which kept me scratching and rubbing in a most uneasy fashion. Then there were rats or mice running about in the roof and walls; and every moment I expected to find them nibbling at my bare toes or scampering over my face, so that, between these imaginary terrors and the reality of the fleas, I lay hour after hour in a fever of restlessness.

And the worst of all was my sore feelings. The landlady's contempt had stung me to the quick, This was my first taste of the kindness of strangers. To think what a happy home I had left on the other side of the Channel, and here to be treated as a dirty outcast, not good enough to lie in a tavern bed! It was a mortification to stir all my youthful pride into bitter resentment.

What would those dear ones at home be thinking all the time! If they knew what their boy was suffering! If they only knew that he was alive! Again, I half forgot my own troubles to remember that already my poor mother must be breaking her heart over my supposed fate. Now that nobody could see me but the fleas and the mice, I confess that I did have a quiet cry all to myself. It was so hard to exchange such loving care for a plight like my present one.

Thus I lay, fretting and wakeful all the rest of the night; and at last my excited mind worked itself up to a rash resolution. I would have no more to do with low people, who didn't know a young gentleman when they saw him in ragged clothes. I would go of on my own account, and seek help elsewhere. Surely there would be somebody or other in the neighborhood who could speak English, and might understand and take

pity on my ease. Anyhow, I was not going to stay here, exposed to the insolence of an ill-natured Dutchwoman.

»Let her bully her stupid husband, if he chooses to put; up with it,« I said to myself. »Perhaps they may both come to be sorry that they have driven me out to starve. If I do starve, everybody will say it was a shame of them, and that will serve them right.« I was in the angry mood when, as the saying gee: one will cut off one's nose to spite one's face.

Chapter IV.

With the first streaks of dawn I got up, shook off the hay that stuck about me, and stole out into the court-yard to reconnoiter. No one appeared to be stirring. The back door of the tavern was open. I slipped into the dark room, and on the table, still littered by mugs and puddles of spit liquor, laid that shilling of the pilot's. Even though it cost me all my small means, I scorned to be beholden to those hosts for such entertainment as they had given me.

Then I softly let myself out of the yard, and, with a few early cocks crowing over my departure, came clear of the sleeping village.

Through the night I had conceived a wild notion of jumping into the first boat and making off on the chance of being picked up by some vessel bound for England. But the sobering effect of being on one's legs was alone enough to drive away any such foolhardy scheme out of my head. And I had no sooner got away from the shelter of the houses than I saw the fishermen were right about not caring to put to sea in such weather. A regular gale was blowing upon shore, carrying the salt spray far off that low point on which the village stood, cut off by a mile or two of sandy waste from any other signs of habitation.

Sinking ankle-deep in the sand at every step, I trudged on with my back to the wind, making for one or two lights that twinkled out through the gray dawn; and when it became clear enough to see a little about me, I found myself at the base of a range of low white dunes or sand-hills, that apparently formed the shore of the mainland. One of these I scrambled up, and here, half buried in the loose sand to keep me warm, I remained for some time awaiting daylight.

My plan now was to make for the nearest town, where surely I should fall in with people of a better class, who would understand my story, and take pity on my situation, and do something to help me home. And, sure enough, a straggling ray of sunshine that broke through the cloudy sky at length, showed me the red roofs of what appeared a considerable seaport at a distance of several miles. This was probably Flushing, not that I knew anything about it at the time, but hoped here to find some English ship. Thither I must direct my course, taking the bearings of it

as well as I could, and making straight across the intervening country, which lay before me a monotonous green plain, almost as flat as the colorless expanse behind, where a streak of dirty foam, like soap-suds, showed the sea bursting far out upon the wet sands.

I hobbled on painfully, for my bare feet had been cut by the coarse grass and prickly plants, the only growth on those sand-hills. The trousers, which made the best part of my costume, were so much too large that I had to turn them up to keep myself from stumbling. There were at least few hedges to stop me, but when I had crossed two or three meadows I had to turn along a ditch, too deep to wade and too wide to jump. This took me a good bit out of my way, and after walking the best part of an hour I was again brought up by what seemed an arm of the sea, bordered by an artificial bank, which I climbed to get another view, and found the town no longer in sight. Could it be that I had landed on an island? A tack in another direction brought me to an impassable swamp. I began to see that it would not be so easy as it looked to traverse this flat country.

I had taken a windmill in the distance to steer by, but as the horizon cleared up before me at least half a dozen windmills came into view, and I got puzzled among them. I saw also what I guessed to be a road running along the top of a high embankment, marked out by a line of fir-trees, their scraggy tops all bent the same way to show the force of the prevailing wind. This, however, was miles off, shutting in the prospect on one side, as on the other it was closed by the jagged hillocks fringing the shore.

You may judge if I admired that scenery of ditches and drains, amid which I floundered disconsolately, and could find no dry spot to rest on. The ground was soaked by the rain, which came down from time to time in slanting showers, soon wetting me through to the skin. A wetting would have been nothing but a joke had I known when I should have a chance of drying myself; but it was no laughing matter to be so drenched and utterly at a loss where to turn for shelter. I was tired and hungry already. The damp, raw wind made me shudder in my thin dress, hatless and shoeless. To add to my other miseries, I had caught a cold in

the head, and I did not possess even a Pocket-handkerchief. I thought there could not be a lower depth of want.

I met nobody to direct me. Occasionally, indeed, I caught sight of country people working in the fields, but I rather kept out of their way, my shy pride shrinking from being stared at and jabbered over in the style of yesterday. I was quite pleased once to fall in with a cow. The beast looked so familiar and English-like that I could almost have hugged her as an old acquaintance among those unsympathetic foreigners. But the cow showed no signs of desiring my intimacy; she gave me only sidelong glances of indifference out of her great mild eyes, and went on chewing the grass with a content that I admired and envied. A well-fed cow was not going to trouble its head about any barefooted lad without a stick or stone in the world.

»If I could only milk you!« I exclaimed to the unsuspecting cow, and that idea painfully called up before me the bright well-laid breakfast-table, the bowl of bread-and-milk, the rasher of bacon, the cup of warm tea, to which I should be, ah! how welcome could some good fairy just waft me over the windy Channel and set me down in Ramsgate as if nothing had happened.

But now neither bite nor sup offered itself to the penniless exile. Robinson Crusoe, and adventurers of that sort, I ruefully reflected, were better off than me. They, if story-books are to be believed, always had chests of tools and barrels of provisions, and such like, ship-wrecked conveniently beside them; or, at the worst, they could shoot wild goats or feed themselves with bread-fruit and cocoanuts. But here was I, cast away in a civilized country, not knowing when or where I could next come by a bed and a dinner. I had not yet been brought to stealing; but if a turnip-field had offered itself, I am far from sure that I could have resisted such temptation. All I had to eat that morning was a few hips and haws, or the like, which I gathered off bushes here and there.

Since then I have more than once been living in a foreign country, with no one to speak to in my own language, obliged to put up with strange ways and customs, longing to be back among all the little comforts of home, and I found it dull enough work, even though I had plenty of money in my pocket and might start off by the railroad

whenever I pleased. But in such circumstances, which every traveler has to put up with sometimes, I could take consolation in recalling how much worse off I was on that first trip abroad of mine. Then I felt indeed what it was to be friendless, as I wandered, cold and hungry, about those damp meadows, and a hundred times bitterly lamented the carelessness that had brought me into such a plight.

»I wish I had never gone to school,« was the end of my gloomy reflections, »then I should never have met Jack Brown, then he would never have put it into my head to learn swimming, then I should never have gone out of my depth, and now I should be sitting comfortably by the fire-side at home instead of tramping over a country like this, where people can't even speak English, I wish I had never been born!« I cried, in my desperation, going to the root of the matter; and then I wished I had been a cow, which can make itself at home so easily anywhere out of doors, and is a foreigner in no country that produces grass.

But wishing could not help; and I had to keep always stirring, for it was too cold to let me stand still or sit down in the wind. I had quite lost my bearings by this time, but I plodded doggedly on, making now for a little island of trees with a dumpy church spire rising out of the middle of them, which was the best landmark visible over the plain.

After meeting that cow I had an adventure with a dog. There came in sight a white house with outbuildings which had the look of a prosperous farm. I had almost resolved to make an appeal to its owner, and was trying to think what signs would most clearly express my need. But as I hung shyly outside the yard a great lean cur rushed out, barking and snapping so viciously that I hurried away, taking this as a hint of the kind of reception I should meet from its masters. And there was a pig, too, which looked up from rooting in a heap of refuse to grunt after me as I passed. In my humiliated mood I fancied that this fat uncleanly beast regarded me with an air of contempt, such as so prosperous an inhabitant might well feel towards a destitute vagrant like me. To be despised by a Dutch pig!

I walked on for a mile or so without seeing any more houses but a few miserable mud huts thatched with reeds, and they appeared to be empty. I tried to keep up heart; I told myself that my troubles were

bound to come to an end some time; I sought comfort in picturing the happy day when I should be restored to England, home and roast beef. However stupid these Dutch people might seem, they surely would not let me die of starvation in a Christian land. The very next respectable house I saw I would take fresh courage to knock at the door and put in my plea for help. I was sorry now in a fit of foolish temper to have left that village, where at least people knew what I wanted. But I could no more find my way back there than to the town which I had caught a distant glimpse of. I must just fare on, even if at random, and on I went. I attempted to whistle a tune by way of encouraging myself, but it was a dismal failure and ended in a sneeze.

Before I came to that clump of wood a little raised above the surrounding meadows, which I had taken as a beacon, my feet seemed really too sore to carry me farther. By the side of a marshy copse I saw several bundles of reeds that had been cut down and left there. It occurred to me to make a bed of these, in which I might take a little rest. So I cuddled in among the reeds, piling them over my shivering limbs; and this couch proved such a comfortable one that after a short time I fell into a doze in broad daylight, and lay there sleeping and waking by turns, with the wind for a fitful lullaby and the rain every now and then lashing or trickling on my face to rouse me again.

Of one serious danger I was unaware that I ran by sleeping on that marshy soil. This was the very district where in my babyhood such havoc had been wrought by disease among the ranks of our gallant soldiers. The expedition to Welcherer. made a great noise at the time, and might have proved a well-aimed blow at the power of Napoleon. But the troops had not been a week on shore when its fatal ague began to strike them down by hundreds. Conquered by the pestilential climate before meeting any other enemy capable of resisting it, the army had to return to England with thousands of sickly invalids, and many more bearing the seeds of a fever that would torment them all their lives. We hear much of Trafalgar and Waterloo, but our histories say little about the disasters of that campaign, as deadly as it was inglorious.

To return to my own private history. Once more I was destined to be disturbed in my slumbers. A hand gently placed on my head awoke me,

and I started up to see the queerest figure, so it struck my eyes, moving away the covering of reeds that had almost hid me from his great horn spectacles.

It was an old gentleman, at once kind and dignified-looking, dressed in black from head to foot, with an odd sort of cocked-hat, knee breeches, and a long black coat of formal cut. Such an apparition had at first sight something funereal about it, and might well alarm my confused senses. But soon I recalled the dress of church dignitaries whom I had occasionally seen at home, and found little difficulty in guessing that I must here have to do with some kind of clergyman. So he was, though no dean or bishop, but only the dominie, that is, minister of the parish.

Half wonderingly, half suspiciously, this grave personage stood surveying me through his spectacles as I scrambled out of the reeds and presented myself before him in all my forlornness. He spoke to me in a gentle tone, but I could only shake my head. Then I had the idea of trying him with French, the one foreign language I knew a word of, and few enough words of that. I had lately begun to learn it from my eldest sister as a holiday task, and now managed to come out with:

»Anglais—je suis anglais—garçon anglais.«

It was his turn to shake his head and be puzzled.

»Non parle français,« he said, which sounded to me very like a fib, as he apparently knew quite as much French as I did.

But my miserable appearance spoke plainly enough for itself; and, after a little consideration, the good man, making signs for me to accompany him, walked off towards that island of trees which I have already mentioned. I followed him willingly, footsore as I was, for he had a kind face, and something told me that in a clergyman of any church or country I should be most likely to find a friend. I felt sure that he could not help being kind to me, did he only know how eagerly my heart was longing after one crumb of comfort.

Chapter V.

The clergyman walked slowly, more, it would seem, out of consideration for my halting gait and air of fatigue than for his own long legs, being himself a hale and active man, though his hair was white as snow.

More than once he stopped to address me in words which I fancied to be intended for French, and which he appeared in the meanwhile to have been painfully calling up from the depths of his memory or invention. But IT could no more understand his French than he mine; and we remained at a deadlock for conversation. At all events I was soon out of that dismal wilderness of meadows.

We presently passed through a neat little village, with trees planted on both sides of the street, hitherto concealed from me by the wood which stood on what for that country was quite a hill, being as high as a good-sized haystack.

Ascending this mound by a flight of steps, we had not far to go before reaching a snug old brick house close to the church. My conductor led me in at the back door, and we entered the kitchen to be received by a scream of astonishment or indignation from an old woman wearing a very large and comical cap, who pointed to the door, haranguing excitedly, and seemed inclined to turn us out without more ado.

My heart sank, but I had not been mistaken in thinking that the parson was at home here. He interpreted the wishes of his cook or housekeeper or whatever she was by taking me back to the door and making me wipe my bare feet on a mat, as well I might, for the floor of this kitchen was as clean as a man-of-war's quarter-deck, and the array of pots and pans hanging up around were polished so brightly that you might see your face in them; nor was a speck to be seen even on the open oven, from which proceeded a savory smell that under my present circumstances attracted me far more than the neatness of the place. The Dutch housewives are famous for their hatred of dirt, as I had already had occasion to know.

In this house, however, cleanliness had not banished! the virtue of hospitality. Now was called into the kitchen a chubby-faced girl of not

much more than my own age, the parson's daughter, no doubt. All three began to talk at once, evidently holding council over me, while poor I stood silent and abashed, unable to say a word for myself to satisfy their pitying and puzzled looks of inquiry. Even the cook, I could see, was sorry for me, though at first she had been so scandalized by my muddy footprints on her spotless tiles.

Of her own accord she brought me a large glass of buttermilk, which I drank to the last drop with an eagerness that served plainly enough to express my dumb gratitude. And presently she filled a pail with warm water for me to bathe my feet, crusted with mud and bloodstains, while the girl busied herself in fetching out a plateful of bread and cheese from the cupboard, and her father walked up and down, stopping at every turn to take a perplexed look at me through his glasses. What, indeed, was he to make of a young stranger who could not explain who he was and whence he came any more than if he had dropped from the moon into Zealand?

In the meantime I thought of a means of communication between us. It struck me that this clerical person would know Latin, which I had been learning at school for a good many years now, and ought to have some familiarity with after all the pains, in every sense, that had gone to beating it into me. So cudgeling my brains, I brought out one word which did not exactly, indeed, convey the truth of the ease, but seemed near enough to it for a beginning.

»Naufractus,« said I, who, if not shipwrecked, was certainly cast away upon an unknown shore. My reverend host at once pricked up his ears—and stared on me in surprise at hearing one word of learning from such a disreputable-looking character. He replied to me in what I made out to be Latin, but so volubly that I could not catch a word, especially as he pronounced it in quite a different way from what we were taught in England.

Then, perhaps understanding my difficulty, he pulled out a pencil and a piece of paper and wrote very legibly.

»Discipulus literarum es?«

Understanding him to inquire if I were a scholar, I nodded, though inclined to blush at my own impudence, but when he handed over the

pencil to me I found myself at no little loss what to write. What on earth was the Latin for such a simple word as yes? I could say a good many things in Latin, phrases derived chiefly from my grammar and exercise books, but none of them were to the present purpose.

In that tongue, for instance, I could tell him, if he had cared to know, that nobody is wise at all times, that it is the nature of man to err, that silver is of less value than gold, gold than virtue, and so forth, much more readily than I could communicate how hungry and helpless I was. Like most schoolboys of that period, and perhaps of this, I had learned to treat Latin as a dead language, fit for the enunciation of moral sentences and historical relations, but not so capable of expressing the ordinary occurrences and emotions of every-day life. In short, I was as poor a scholar as a boy could be after tinkering away at grammar and dictionary for seven years according to approved school methods.

But as I sat sucking the end of the-pencil I hit upon an example from the syntax rules of my Latin Grammar which came most pat as a suitably modest answer to his question, and I wrote it down, hoping that my memory played me no trick.

»Pueri discendo fiunt docti.« (By learning boys become learned.)

The parson smiled approval, which encouraged me to go on.

»Salve domine-spero te valere!«

At this he smiled again, and said something back, but his smile passed away when I recalled another example from the grammar.

»Me miserum!« I wrote, and the parson interpreted to the others what was meant.

My wits brightened up as I found myself getting on so smoothly, and my next citation was a surpassing one. By great good luck I bethought myself of a passage from one of the very last repetitions I had learned at school. I had good reason to remember it, for there had been sore trouble over that reason, and the doctor—but I need not tell tales out of school. Enough to say that the lines thus imprinted on my unwilling memory now did me a service worth many stripes. They were Greek, too, a bit from Homer's »Odyssey.« Nowadays I could not quote the original to save my life; »but I can give you Pope's translation of the passage—rather a loose one, by the way, if I am not mistaken—which I

was able to set down in my Greek characters, and even to make a shot at the proper accents:

*»Through many woes and wanderings, lo! I come
To good Alcinous' hospitable dome.
Far from my native coast I rove alone,
A wretched stranger, and of all unknown!«*

Never had I thought to get so much good out of that dreary work of learning lines by heart. As soon as he mastered my apt quotation the old clergyman grew quite excited with astonishment and repentance to believe he had been treating a budding scholar as a common vagrant, while I felt very like a humbug when I found what an effect my fragments of scholarship had produced.

Now there was no more question of bread and cheese and buttermilk in the kitchen. Giving orders to his womankind that sent them both at once bustling for my entertainment, the master of the house took me to the best room in it, ornamented with a glass case full of china, and furnished with chairs and tables which seemed to have been freshly varnished the day before, so that I hardly dared to sit down, when the shutters, had been opened and the curtains drawn back to prepare the apartment for an honored guest. There in a few minutes an excellent meal was laid before me, chiefly composed of that savory stew to which my attention had already been directed.

The »dominie« stood by, pressing me to eat, and his daughter waited on me, laughing and looking pitiful by turns, when she saw what an enormous dinner I made. Modesty could not keep me from owning that it was hunger which was most the matter with me.

When I had finished eating, these good people took me up-stairs into a bedroom and let me know that I had better rest before being troubled by further questions. The bed, let into a recess in the wall, not unlike the berths of a ship's cabin, was amply provided with the whitest linen, and over all was laid a great feather cushion by way of counterpane. To make sure of its being warm, the old woman had just been airing it with a little pan of burning turf inside a basket, a strange sort of warming-pan in my eyes.

It seemed odd, too, to go to bed in the middle of the day; but I was too tired to make any objections. As soon as they left me I curled up in this snug nest, and had a delightful nap for three or four hours. Sweetly composing was the sense of having fallen in with real friends after only two days' experience of what it is to be a homeless exile. It seemed almost worth while having gone through such trials to find myself now go deep in clover.

It was late in the afternoon when I awoke. While I slept my clothes had been dried, and by the bedside were laid some welcome additions to that scanty costume, a pair of wooden shoes and cotton socks, a straw hat, and a jacket not much too small for me. In these I arrayed myself, washed my face and hands, and felt like a new boy. Till now I had hardly got out of my head the shaking and tossing of the rough voyage.

I should have felt still more at ease if that difficulty had not remained of communicating with the family, who would before long expect a more full and particular account of their mysterious guest. How was I even to thank them? I had already almost come to the end of my Latin and Greek, and I dreaded the discovery of those pretensions to scholarship which had as yet stood me in such good stead. And after this short taste of kindness how hard to be turned out of doors as an impostor!

Looking out of the window into a little orchard below, I saw the girl, Jantje her name was, as I learned presently, not that I ever could pronounce it without exciting her merriment. She was busy with a basket picking up apples which had been blown down by the wind. So I found the way down-stairs and went out to her, wishing to make myself of use as the only way I had of expressing my gratitude. When Jantje saw me coming she held out a large yellow apple with such a friendly air that for the moment I forgot she was a foreigner.

»Thank you,« I said. »I came to see if I could help you pick them up.«

»Ach! you speak English!« she exclaimed, dropping the basket in surprise.

»Do you know English, then?« cried I, overjoyed at the sound of my own language.

»Ay, a little,« said she, laughing. »But my vaither telled me you were a Frenchman.«

I soon set her right about that, and she ran off into the house to fetch the old gentleman. Now at last was I able to explain myself more satisfactorily than through the medium of scraps from the classics. Jantje's English seemed far from perfect, but it was good enough to interpret my story, which I told them in full, interrupted by many exclamations from both these sympathizing hearers. When I had finished, the clergyman bid his daughter let me know that I need have no further distress, for that his house should be my home till an opportunity occurred for sending me back to England.

We gathered up the apples and went into supper, where we had fish and potatoes, and groats boiled in butter-milk, and other good things, to all of which I did justice in a way to show that my health was not seriously affected by what I had undergone. After supper the old cook—Katto she was called—joined us in the family sitting-room, and the master read prayers in Dutch, by which I was naturally not much edified. But when I said my Own prayers that night you may be sure I did not forget to be thankful for having been guided to such a haven of refuge.

I woke up early next morning, feeling quite refreshed from all the trying experiences of the last three days. As I came shuffling downstairs in the wooden shoes, to which I could not readily grow accustomed, I found Jantje already up, bringing in a pail of milk. She greeted me with a pleasant laugh, which had perhaps as much of amusement as good nature in it, for indeed I must have looked very funny in my miscellaneous rig out.

»How are ye the day?« she asked.

»Very well, thank you. Have you been out already?« said I, for something to say.

»Aye, I've been oot to the kye.«

»Kye. What's that?« I asked.

»Just oor twa coos,« she replied. »I doubt ye dinna always understand my English, and 'deed I've maist forgotten it.«

»Oh, yes, I understand well enough.«

»That's mair than I do wi' you. You dinna talk like oor folk.«

»How do you come to speak English—so well?« I added, rather against my conscience, for I had been thinking that she certainly spoke a peculiar kind of English,

»Eh! but ye maun ken that I'm a wee bit English mysel'—that is, Scotch—and it's a' the same thing.«

»Are you?« I exclaimed.

»My mither was a Scotch-woman,« she said, and her eyes filled with tears; and now I noticed that she wore a black dress.

So I said no more about it at the time; but in the course of a day or two the mystery was explained. I learned that the government of Holland, having formerly Scotch regiments in its service, still maintained in certain towns a Scotch minister and schoolmaster, endowed for the benefit of these foreigners. Jantje's father had married a daughter of the Scotch chaplain at Middleburg, and from her mother and her grandfather's family the girl had picked up a broad Lowland dialect which she spoke with a charming mixture of Scotch and Dutch accent, not knowing but it was the best English. Her name, Jantje, was nothing but the Dutch for Janie. I being the first pure Cockney she had ever come across, no wonder if she were a little puzzled by my more close-clipped speech.

On the other side, I did not always understand her; but I was too glad to hear any kind of English to be very critical. We had a good laugh over their taking me for a Frenchman at first, and Jantje told me as a great joke how she had run up before me into the bedroom to remove a picture of the battle of Trafalgar hanging there, which she thought might hurt my feelings. And, instead of it, she had carefully hung up another engraving that represented the English fleet being soundly beaten by the Dutch! But I was not much concerned, as I could not read the inscription below, and had taken for granted that the English were getting the better of it. It would have been quite a surprise to me in those days to hear that we had ever been beaten, unless by accident.

I had to depend on Jantje as my interpreter, for the few words of Dutch she taught me served mainly to make the others laugh. And now it may be expected that I am coming to the romantic part of my story. The proper thing would be for me to fall more or less in love with the

kind-hearted girl on whom I was thus thrown for comfort and companionship. But I was too young for such sentiments, while she had too much to do. Her father kept no servants but old Katto and a lad to look after the garden; and Jantje worked nearly as hard herself in all the household duties. She was quite a woman of business, this young mistress, who treated me much as if I were a child, allowing me to run about at her heels, and giving me apples and cakes to keep me quiet.

As the weather kept us a good deal indoors, I fear I was often in her way; but I did everything I could to be of service to this family who were so kind to me. I went out with Jantje to drive in the cows; I carried her milk pail; I peeled potatoes for her; I even attempted to work the churn, but proved a poor hand at that. I gave her father help in dusting and arranging all his books, a task which he seemed unwilling to in trust to female industry. Katto's good graces I gained by volunteering to wash the house for her. With a large squirt and a barrel on wheels this fanatic of cleanliness made a point of besprinkling all the walls and windows on the outside when every speck of dirt had been hunted out from within. I thought we had had enough rain to do the business already, but as she appeared to think otherwise, such a job was quite an amusement for me—a schoolboy being able to enter very heartily into any cleansing operation which seemed so like making a mess. Thus, in one way or other, the time did not hang heavy on my hands; and for two or three days nothing worth recording happened to break the quiet current of life at the parsonage, when once its inmates had got over the excitement, of my arrival.

Chapter VI.

For three days I remained in this snug harbor, during which the wind blew steadily from the west, and there was no hope of any vessel leaving port for England. I should have been well content to stay where I was for weeks could I only have got news sent home of my safety. I wrote a letter to Ramsgate, which was duly posted, but it did not arrive till after I did. Nothing more could be done; I had to put up with the delay, which in those days was such a common incident of sea traveling. Jantje told me she had heard from her grandfather how he once took six weeks in the voyage on a small smack from Leith to Flushing.

I am not going to describe Holland for you, as I saw so little of it, and books and pictures have made familiar to you much that was wonderful to youngsters of my generation. But at the time, as you will suppose, I was all eyes for the curious and novel features of Dutch life, which I did not hesitate in privately deciding to be very inferior to everything of the same kind in England. What struck me most about the parsonage was a gaudy summer-house, painted with whitewash and yellow ochre, in which Jantje and her father loved to sit, if ever an idle hour came with a blink of sunshine, enjoying the view of stagnant ditches and sloppy meadows. There were even two mirrors fixed on either side of the window, so as to catch every aspect of this charming scene. I wondered they could think such a prospect worth looking at, and seriously proposed to Jantje that they should both come back with me to England, where I assured them they should find themselves much better off. She had some difficulty in persuading my prejudiced mind that their country was as dear to them as mine to me.

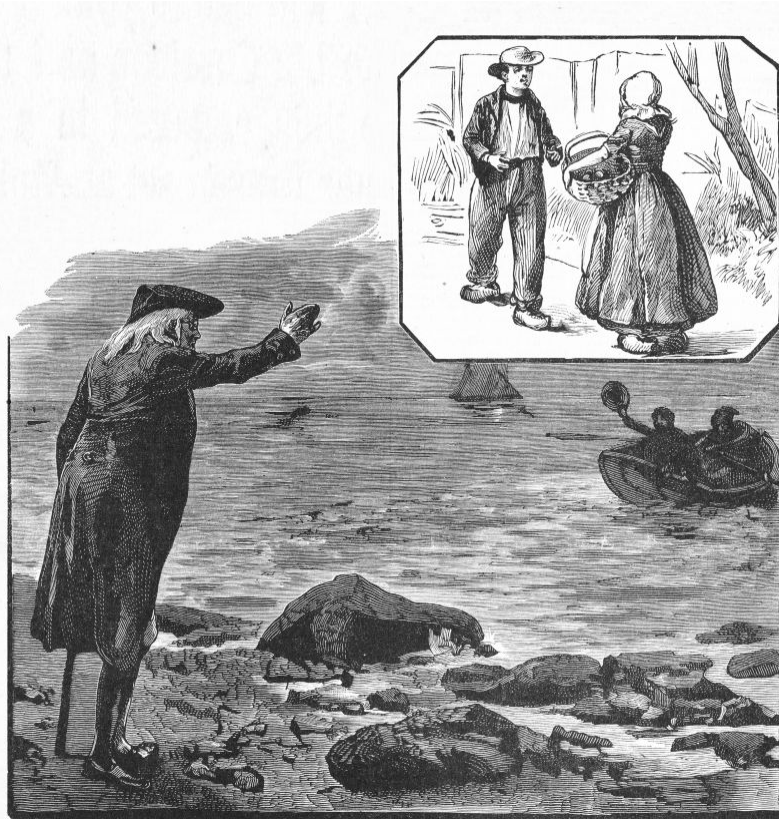
The second day being Sunday, I went to church with my hosts. Naturally I could not attend much to the service, but I had plenty of matter for meditation of my own. What anxious prayers would at that hour be going up for me in a certain church over the Channel! I sat through along Dutch sermon, and if I understood not a word of it, at least I had reason to feel sure that the preacher was a good man.

But I fear I spent much of the time staring about at the unfamiliar costumes of this congregation. There was a sprinkling of seafaring folk

in an amphibious rig of their own, but most of the men were peasants, who wore jackets adorned with double rows of silver buttons or coins, wide breeches, and blue stockings. The women also exhibited a profusion of jewelry, some of them having an odd plate of silver or gold as a head ornament. I noticed that some of the old ladies brought into church pans of burning charcoal or peat, which they nursed under their wide petticoats to warm their toes. Evidently the Dutch had a great notion of making themselves both smart and comfortable in this dismal climate of theirs. Dismal it seemed to me indeed, but Jantje declared that if I would only wait till the frost came, then I should see the country at its best. I must not abuse Zealand, however, since I found such warm friends there to make up for the wind and wet outside.

On the third day the weather improved, and the »dominie « went to Flushing to inquire about vessels crossing the Channel. He returned unsuccessful, but had left the matter in the hands of a friend, who promised to let us know as soon as any opportunity offered itself. Katto and Jantje set to work making a new shirt for me, which they expected to have plenty of time to finish before my departure; and I readily reconciled myself to wait, feeling more at ease in my mind now that the letter was gone.

But the summons came sooner than we looked for it. That same night the household had hardly retired to bed than we were roused up by a messenger charged to bring me away at once. There was just time for a hurried good-bye to my kind friends, and Katto managed to warm up some milk porridge before I started, the messenger pressing to make haste, or this chance would be lost. It was understood to be merely a chance, that, after all, I might have to come back, as I should have done without much regret if home had not been the other prospect.



The old »dominie« himself accompanied me two or three miles to the shore, where the man from Flushing had a boat waiting. He spoke nothing but Dutch, so I could ask him no questions as we rowed away through a chilly mist, for hours it seemed to me in my excitement.

At length we came to a small craft lying at anchor under the lee of the shore. She was painted alight gray, which gave her a ghostly appearance in the faint misty moonshine. But a very flesh-and-blood sounding British voice hailed us as we approached:

»Is that the youngster? A good job he has come, for I am off with the tide in five minutes. Look alive and get on board, boy, if we are to be lumbered with you!«

The reception was not a particularly hearty one, but I felt too glad at hearing my own language to mind that much. When I scrambled over the side the rough-looking sailor who had spoken, giving me a single glance by lantern light, bluntly told me to store myself in any corner so long as I kept out of the way. Immediately at his orders the anchor was raised, the other men got out long oars, and off we rowed down the Scheldt. I was fairly on the way home, my satisfaction dashed only by looking forward to another bout of sea-sickness.

The excitement of this long-hoped for deliverance did not prevent me from falling a sleep presently, huddled up between two sacks. When I awoke it was daylight, and I saw vanishing far behind us the low sand hills among which I had landed in such a lamentable plight.

The men had rigged their mast, hoisted a large lugsail, and before a brisk breeze we were dashing along over the choppy waves of the Channel, which this time proved more propitious to a raw sailor. With the exception of a few qualms at the end of the first hour or two, I was not sick after all, and my spirit rose with every mile nearer England.

It was just as well we had a quiet day for our run, the vessel being nothing but a long open boat, to be worked either by sails or by oars. She had nearly a dozen men on board, some of them English and some apparently Dutch, most of them wearing white guernseys, which had almost the look of a uniform. One man of superior air, dressed like a landsman, seemed to have a certain authority over the rest, though the gruff tar who had first addressed me gave orders as if he were captain. The former I set down in my own mind as the owner of the little craft, and was somewhat puzzled as to what her character might be. Her bottom was close packed with some kind of cargo covered up by tarpaulins, on the top of which boxes and bales were also littered about everywhere, leaving hardly room to move. When the men had once made me give an outline of my story, nobody took much more notice of me than if I had been one of these packages, but after a time I ventured to ask the steersman what they had on board.

The old salt shifted his quid from one weather-beaten cheek to the other, and, after some deliberation, replied with a sly wink:

»Shrimps!«

»Shrimps?« exclaimed I, in a tone to show I could not so easily be made fun of, as two or three others within hearing gave a guffaw; »I should think they have shrimps enough already at Ramsgate!«

»Aye, have they? Well, perhaps it's Dutch cheeses or chalk, for all I know. Ask him here,« said my jocular informant, nodding at the skipper, who at once stopped my mouth with a growl.

»AX no questions, and you'll be told no lies.«

I thought this uncivil, but had to be content with it, especially when that man I have called the owner added his word.

»We have promised to set you on shore somewhere within reach of Ramsgate. But we would just as soon chuck you overboard if you mind anything but your own business, so put that in your pipe and smoke it, my lad«

Thus snubbed, I did not like to ask what I felt far more anxious to know—when we were likely to reach England. It was a disappointment to me to find that the first countrymen of mine I met seemed by no means so pleased to have my society as I was to be with them. But this might go for a small matter if the wind only held that was bowling us along so smoothly. Once let me reach home, and I should have no cause to complain as to the warmth of my reception.

In the meanwhile these men, though so little disposed to be communicative, were not unfriendly. They gave me a share of their provisions—cold meat and sea-biscuits. The biscuits first served for plates, and afterwards as a second course when one had eaten the meat off them. Then while they smoked their pipes they set me singing songs to them, and as I had a pretty good pipe of my own in those days, I was able to rise in their good graces by my performance of »Hearts of Oak« and »Tom Bowling.«

Most of the day I sat in the stern-sheets by myself, and found amusement as well as I could in watching the sails that dotted the Straits of Dover. At length, well on in the afternoon, a white line came into view—the chalk cliffs of Kent—and by and by we could even see the masts of the shipping in the Downs. My heart beat fast at the sight, I strained my eyes to make out Ramsgate; I longed for the wings of a seagull to bear me over the miles still separating us from that joyful shore.

But now it appeared that my companions by no means shared this impatience. Though the wind was well abaft, to my surprise and disgust they unshipped their mast and took to the oars again, by no means over-exerting themselves, but making the boat crawl along at a snail's pace, so it seemed to me, as if they rather wished to put off time than otherwise. Worse still, they even turned her prow from the coast and

stood southwards down channel, leaving on our right the green fields already visible in the glow of the setting sun. Did they actually think it better not to land by daylight?

You may suppose how I fretted inwardly at the delay, but it was not for me to find fault, and after that previous rebuff I did not care to ask questions. I could not make out what they were about. The skipper and his friend in shore-going clothes kept sweeping the horizon with a glass, and presently I noticed that their attention was fixed on a vessel standing towards us under all canvas. In excited tones they spoke to the men, who evidently saw reason to bestir themselves, for now they bent to their oars with a will, while from minute to minute every eye was turned on the approaching sail.

When she drew nearer I too recognized her. Surely it must be the revenue cutter that cruised off the Downs. I had more than once been on board her in Ramsgate Harbor, for the lieutenant in command was a cousin of my father, and had offered to take me with him on a short cruise, but my mother would not hear of it. This was no other than his vessel. The more I looked at her the more certain of it I became.

Delighted by the discovery, I ventured up to those two persons in authority and communicated it to them as a piece of good news.

»The officer is a relation of mine,« said I, not unwilling to display such a title to their respect. »If you are not going straight to Ramsgate you might put me on board her, and he will pay you well for your trouble.«

This proposition appeared to me a most modest and reasonable one, so I was not a little taken aback at the effect of it.

The skipper burst into a hoarse laugh; and the other man, staring at me as if he thought I was trying to make a fool of him, uttered an angry exclamation.

»Here's a pretty passenger!« cried the latter. »You see what comes of obliging your flushing friends, Tom! Well, I was against it for one, and you don't catch me shipping such a piece of goods again without a proper invoice.«

His companion said something in a low voice; then turning to me, roughly told me to hold my tongue and get out of the way, or they would give me another swim for it to Davy Jones's locker.

And as I slunk off abashed, the truth all at once flashed upon me. These were smugglers-the very people it was my cousin's business to hunt down. A pretty fool, indeed, I had made of myself in boasting of that relationship! Now I could understand the nature of the cargo that had puzzled me, and why such a boat had so many men on board. How had I never guessed it before?

These men certainly looked to be ordinary commonplace seafarers like the crew of any fishing-smack, by no means answering to a boy's imaginary idea of smugglers as swaggering dashing fellows, picturesquely dressed and always going armed to the teeth with cutlasses and pistols.

Of course I had often heard of the smuggling which then flourished all along that coast from Ramsgate to Hastings, »free-trading,« as the people of the Cinque Ports called it, who claimed ancient rights to justify them in making war upon the revenue laws. It was indeed an amphibious civil war, which went on from year to year as quite a matter of course, the sympathy of the population being almost entirely with the smugglers. Few persons even among the more respectable class thought shame of being concerned in a »run,« so long as by force or fraud they could escape the penalty. Towns like Folkestone and Deal were honey-combed with hiding-places for the concealment of contraband goods which all the vigilance of the authorities could not prevent being landed at one point or other.

Hot affrays not unfrequently took place between the coastguard and the bold adventurers, who, even if captured, might perhaps be rescued in broad daylight by superior force; and, under cover of night, they had no difficulty in assembling their friends by the hundred to carry off a cargo. Every obstacle was thrown in the way of those who tried to interfere with their dark doings. Officers were bribed or threatened into connivance: country people readily opened the door to smugglers, but not to their pursuers; even magistrates, it was said, often saw cause to wink at what was going on under their noses. Such was the state of things on the coast little more than half a century ago. When only after the end of the long war had government begun to lay a firm hand upon this system of law-breaking, which gradually died out, less by force of

repression than by enlightenment of the public conscience, and as much perhaps through the alteration of our tariffs, which made smuggling no longer a highly profitable business.

Since this employment for adventurous spirits was so profitable in England, it is not to be expected that a more severe view of it would be taken on the opposite side of the Channel. The trade of Flushing having been almost ruined by the great war, few vessels left that port for England which were not more or less engaged in smuggling. My friends over there, then, had seen nothing out of the way there then, had seen nothing out of the way in intrusting me to the hands of »free traders,« who might well have English parsons among their secret customers fand sympathizers. I afterwards knew that I might think myself lucky to have been given a passage on this craft, as such gentry were usually shy of shipping strangers. But they must have understood me to be the son of some Ramsgate man, who would be as likely to swim back to Holland as to lay information against them; and for once in a way they had let good nature get the better of prudence, no doubt also reckoning to turn an honest penny into' the bargain out of the gratitude of my parents. And I may say here that in the end the smugglers did not lose by doing me this service, whatever reason they had to be somewhat coy in claiming their reward.

Chapter VII.

On came the cutter, like a hawk swooping down in sight of prey. All doubt was at an end, when a puff of white smoke wreathed her bows; then we heard the report of a gun, and the ball ricocheted across the water right ahead of us as an order to await the coming of this sea constable.

Now that it was clear we had not escaped notice, all became commotion on board our boat. The sail was hurriedly got up again, Dutch colors were hoisted; and she tacked out to sea, as if to run back to Holland. The wind, hitherto fair for the English coast, had shifted by this time. The cutter tacked also, and stood on in pursuit, straining every inch of canvas to make up with us before dark, as seemed likely enough, for the smugglers' boat, though built for speed, was too heavily laden to do herself justice.

I was in despair to see my hopes thus frustrated just as I had fancied myself so near the end of all troubles. If we got clear away, where would be my chance of landing in England? And if we were captured, what sort of figure should I cut among a gang of smugglers? Rather than return to Holland, however, I wished we might be caught by the cutter, for of course my cousin would know me and believe my story. Surely they would not venture on resistance, though it now appeared that my companions had arms on board, and looked the men to use them. Whatever enthusiastic notions I had once cherished of being a gallant young midshipman and fighting the French, I might well shrink from the prospect of such an inglorious combat, where my part could only be to sit still and take my chance of a stray shot. If it did come to a fight, might the smugglers not begin by getting rid of me, that I should tell no tales? I had a lively belief in the fierceness of such outlaws, who were popularly reported to stick at nothing when provoked to resistance or revenge. So I confess that I was in a fright, all the more when I saw what sullen looks some of these men turned on me, as if I were the Jonah who had brought the danger.

They, for their part, had cause enough to be out of humor. They knew, if I did not, that to show fight would be out of the question against a

well-armed king's ship. Capture meant not only the loss of their contraband goods, but imprisonment or being pressed into the navy, which for such men was a formidable punishment. The cutter was steadily making up with them. Already they had taken the tarpaulings off the cargo, and were preparing to heave the bales and boxes overboard. Now I saw how the boat was fitted with a false bottom, forming a shallow hold, as it were, closely packed with valuable ballast. No wonder that she went so deep in the water.

Lace, silk, tea, tobacco, whatever their venture was, it must be sacrificed as the only chance of escape. And here they began to quarrel. The sailors, I gathered, thought chiefly of lightening their boat, while that landsman and the skipper, who no doubt had greater interests at stake, were for putting off the sacrifice to the last moment.

There was a hot interchange of angry words and threats, which did not tend to quiet my inward uneasiness, If they took to cutting one another's throats, how was mine to be safe among them all?

This dispute was carried on chiefly in Dutch, for, as I have already mentioned, half the men were foreigners, as it appeared that all of them proposed to be for the nonce. I took an opportunity of hinting to that jocular friend of mine, the old steersman, that it might be worth their while to be civil to me, anyhow, since, if captured, I could say a good word for them to my cousin, the lieutenant.

»Stow that!« he said. »I don't understand English.«

»None of us do,« exclaimed the skipper, laying such a heavy band on my shoulder that I feared he was for carrying out his threat forthwith. »Mind you that, youngster, and remember that I'll wring your neck for you if you don't stand to it that we are Dutchmen, every man Jack of us.«

»Very fine!« thought I to myself, »but we'll see whose neck is in most danger when we are once on the deck of the cutter.«

To me it seemed impossible for the smugglers to escape, so fast was the little man-of-war coming up with us. And to make matters more hopeless for them, boom came another shot, this time crashing right through the rigging above our heads and bringing down the yard, cut in two, with the sail flapping about it, a useless wreck. Worse than useless

indeed, for it fell half over the side, throwing the boat on her beam ends; and for a moment I thought she was about to upset.

My involuntary exclamation of alarm was drowned in the noisy confusion that at once arose. The men, scrambling together like cats, whipped out their knives to cut loose the torn and tangled heap of ropes and canvas, letting the whole go overboard in their hurry; and when the boat righted it was to drift on slowly under a broken mast, while the cutter held her triumphant course as steadily as a white seabird skimming the billows with powerful wings.

With no more delay than was needed to get the disabled tackling out of the way, the smugglers took to their oars again, bending at them with a will like men determined not to give up so long as a chance of escape remained. But indeed their case was not so desperate as it appeared to my landsman's eyes. In the very nick of time the weather came to their aid.

As the sun set a dark blue cloud had risen up over the cliffs, descending into the sea and soon blotting out the land and sky to the west. This wall of darkness swept across the waves till it first swallowed up the cutter from our sight, and quickly afterwards was closing in upon us. Then I understood why the men had kept casting such anxious glances landwards, and why a little time back they had ceased to make preparations for throwing the cargo overboard. We were wrapped in a rolling gray fog that brought on the night all at once, aiding everything beyond the distance of a few fathoms.

Did not the smugglers chuckle when they found themselves able to give their enemy the slip.

The boat was presently put about, and boldly dodging past the cutter, stood once more toward the shore, her light-colored sides helping to make her invisible in the fog. I hardly knew what to think of this turn of fortune. Shall I seem too cowardly if I confess to a feeling of relief under the circumstances that there was to be no fighting? But would the chance of a stray bullet be more formidable than the certainty of remaining in the hands of these desperadoes, now that we knew so much of each other? Vanished into mist was my hope of making the rest of the voyage in one of his majesty's vessels; and I had to console myself

by considering that my disreputable comrades must also be bent on getting to land, if they could do so without any further peril.

»There, my hearty! said the skipper, in high good humor, despite of his crippled mast. »You'll have to wait a bit before seeing your friends. But never fear, we'll keep our bargain by you, though you are cousin to a land-shark.«

Nothing more was seen of the revenue cruiser.

We crept on slowly, feeling our way through the fog, which after a time began to clear up a little, yet still hung in a damp mist on the water. It was sore work for my patience. Cramped and chilled I sat in a state of fretful agitation impossible to describe. The smugglers understood very well what they were about, but I did not, and had nothing to do but torment myself over their mysterious proceedings.

They were all in excellent spirits at having escaped so luckily, and extended their satisfaction to an unwelcome guest, as I must now count myself, by pressing me to take some supper with them, but anxiety left me no appetite. One of the men was kind enough to put a thick pea-jacket over me, When, however, I took courage to ask him how soon we should reach Jand, he gruffly replied, »That depends on these precious friends of yours. Perhaps in an hour or two, and perhaps in the middle of next week, and none the sooner for your asking, my shaver!«

Thus hours passed away. Weary as I began to be, I could not sleep. The sound of a church-bell came over the water, striking midnight, but still I saw no sign of our voyage being at an end.

Once; indeed, we approached so near land that voices could be heard above the tide's dashing on the beach, no longer subdued to a distant murmur. I thought we were going on shore here, when suddenly a great bonfire blazed up from a point inland, and at this warning the smugglers sheered off; then all grew dark and silent again but for the measured sounds of the oars and monotonous rippling of the waves on our bow.

After all, I must have caught some snatches of sleep, else I do not know how I contrived to pass the time. Somewhere in the small hours of the morning I became aware that we were again close in shore, From overhead gleamed mysterious flashes through the starless night, repeated at intervals along a line of cliff, and answered by signals from

the smugglers' boat. At length it appeared that they were about to attempt a landing.

When the boat's head was once more turned shorewards, that man whom I have spoken of as something above the rest in speech and appearance, laid hold of me, saying:

»Now we have done you a good turn, I hope you are not the lad to do us an ill one.«

»Let me go, and I will not betray any of your secrets,« I assured him.

»All very well, but we had best make a bit surer of that,« said he, and pulling out of his pocket a large silk handkerchief, in a thrice he had fastened it over my eyes.« Don't you touch that till you get the word,« he added.

I did not like being blindfolded, still uncertain as I was that these men meant me no harm. If they were so suspicious, what reason had I to trust them? There was nothing for it, however, but to submit, devoutly hoping that I should soon get clear of such dangerous companions and their ways of darkness. Afterwards I was to be rather proud of this episode in my adventures, as the one with most spice of romance in it; but at the time it proved highly disquieting. What would they do with me next?

There came a great thump, and our keel grated on the shingle, I heard a rushing of feet over pebbles, a confused talking, and presently the rattling of a capstan.

Jerking and grinding, the boat began to be drawn up to the beach. A man took me on his back, staggered a little way through the water, and let me down on a slippery bed of seaweed. Once more I stood, or sprawled, on my native land.

Forgetting the injunction that had been given me, I was about to loosen the bandage from my eyes, but a firm grip restrained me.

»Wait a bit,« said the same voice in my ear. »The less you know of us the better, so you have got to play blind man's buff yet a while. But there is no call for you to be afraid. You shall be started off at once if you will give your word to say nothing that can get us into trouble.«

»Indeed I don't wish to.«

»Well, there's not much harm done if you can keep from telling more tales than need be. I am sure your cousin, the lieutenant, is too much of a gentleman to make you turn informer. And as you say you don't belong to these parts, you are not likely to set eyes on any of us again. Still you might be young viper enough—but you look like an honest fellow. Give me your hand upon it—there. Now walk on straight ahead, and we shall not be much longer troubled with one another's company.«

I took several steps across the sand, till I was brought up by running against the bottom of the cliff. When I had stood there for a few minutes, chafing at the inactivity, but not knowing where to turn, somebody unceremoniously caught me up and bundled me into a basket. There was a low whistle, and next moment I found myself swinging in the air.

In spite of the smuggler's assurance, I could not help recalling grim tales of secluded eaves in the cliffs where such men were said to have their aunts and secretly to make away with victims who might have offended them.

But I was being hoisted into no such den of iniquity. This airy ascent soon came to an end by my being turned out upon wet grass at the edge of a cliff, as I could guess by the cold wind that swept it.

Round about me I heard a neighing and stamping of horses, and many persons conversing in low tones, which warned me that it might not be safe to tear off the bandage and make a run for it, as I was half inclined to do.

But my impatience was not tried much longer. A hand was laid in mine, and a voice bade me come along. Led by this unseen conductor, I stumbled across a grassy down, then crossed one or two stubble fields and struck a path, where I could make my way alone with an occasional floundering here and there into a hedge by the side of it. More than once my companion helped me over a stile, and by touching her clothes I knew it was a woman, which convinced me I had nothing now to be afraid of. Not that she seemed a very agreeable member of her sex. I asked her where we were, and she mockingly told me to look and see, at the same time threatening to call to her friends if I offered to take a peep from beneath the bandage.

This blind folded journey seemed to last half an hour or so. I had a shrewd notion I was not being taken the nearest road, but thought best to let the smugglers have their way of it, so that they should feel no suspicion of my betraying them.

The dim morning light was breaking when the woman took the bandage from my eyes, first turning me round two or three times like a teetotum, to puzzle me as to the direction in which we had come. When I got the use of my sight, I made her out to be a strapping young countrywoman, who could easily have thrown me over the nearest wall if I had given her any provocation.

»There,« she said, »this road you are on leads to Deal; and then you must ask your way. Be off with you, and remember I am watching you don't play any tricks; that was my orders. If I see you as much as looking round I'll come and give you a clout on the head.«

I needed no such warning. I asked nothing better than to turn my back on this ungentle damsel and her comrades. I wished to go nowhere but straight ahead, as with a light heart I set out upon the last stage of my wanderings. There was no more to doubt or fear now that I could stretch my legs on English ground, from which I had been absent just a week. What a long week it seemed.

Chapter VIII.

A TRIP ABROAD..

Daylight came before I reached Deal, and I had no difficulty in finding the high road to Ramsgate.

It was a raw, dull morning, but my spirits rose at every step, as if exhilarated by the brightest skies and the balmiest breezes. Joyfully I recognized all the old familiar country sights—the smock-frocks of the laborers—the brown hedge rows, the trim fields, the lordly woods, the substantial farm buildings nestling amid orchards and corn-stacks, the wayside cottages, with here and there a patch of autumn bloom still lingering in their little homely gardens. There is no place like home, I assured myself, after having seen some few miles of the Continent, and quite satisfied my desire for nautical adventure by two crossings of the Channel. I am of the same opinion still, now that I have been abroad under more favorable circumstances; the greatest pleasure of it always was the coming back again.

Oh, the relief of being able to use one's tongue as freely as one's limbs! For a week past, like the good little children of nursery morals, I had been obliged to put up with being »seen and not heard,« the effect of which was a certain sense of traveling under a glass case. Now I should like to have stopped every one I met for the pleasure of hearing him speak English, and telling him my story. But the early risers on their way to work looked rather askance at me with suspicious curiosity. The people in Holland had not stared harder. Indeed, I cut a most outlandish figure in my motley array of old clothes, every article of which was either too large or too small for me.

It was my wooden shoes I felt most ashamed of. To save being laughed at I took them off and flung them into a ditch, and, to tell the truth, got on almost as well without, for I had not yet been able to learn the trick of raising my feet in them.

Trudging along in well-worn stockings, I should soon have been footsore if I had not fallen in with a piece of luck. A stout old farmer came by in a gig, of whom, to make sure, I asked if I were in the right

road. For answer he began to catechize me as to my business in this part of the country, so I told him who I was and all about it, where upon he was good enough to give me a lift for some miles.

As we jogged on he had a good deal to tell me about myself, my disappearance having made some talk in the neighborhood. I learned from him that my clothes had been brought home next day. Everybody supposed me drowned, and my parents had offered a reward for the body. He even stopped to show me the handbill posted on a wall, in which for the first time I now saw my name in print.

I was not quite clear what to- think of finding myself an object of such publicity. This advertisement seemed to make a sort of ghost of me, who might appear presumptuous in coming forward to claim its rights as still a creature of flesh and blood. All the same it spurred my eagerness to put an end to the mistake, and I wished the farmer would stir on his fat pony to a pace more worthy of the occasion. But he was a commonplace, unimaginative man, who could not enter into my feelings, taking life in general at a jog-trot, and even such an adventure as mine for somewhat a matter of course.

»They won't be sorry to see you at home, I dare say,« he remarked in much, the same tone as if he had been talking of the weather or the crops; so different from Jantje, whose first words when she heard my story had been the echo of my own heart— »What will his mother be thinking?«

But if not a warmly sympathetic person, the farmer did me the practical kindness of driving me most of the way past Sandwich and the ruins of Richborough Castle. Then as he had to turn up a side road, he put me down in sight of Pegwell Bay, and I limped forward along the muddy turnpike, quite forgetting sore feet and empty stomach, when the first houses of Ramsgate appeared on the heights before me.

Just inside the toll-bar I met a little girl, very neatly dressed, walking with her governess. I knew her well, I had danced with her at a small juvenile party only a fortnight before, but she did not know me in my vagabondish guise—and no wonder! I turned away my head, indeed, to avoid recognition under the circumstances, and was slinking by when,

after a word with her governess, she run across the road and put a penny into my Hand.

»Perhaps you are hungry,« she said, with timid pity, and I fear she thought me a very ill-mannered beggar, for I hurried away, too much confounded to utter a word of thanks.

I didn't know whether to laugh or to cry at this first greeting from an acquaintance. The penny I felt tempted to spend at a wayside shop on something to eat, but after consideration I kept it to give back to the kind-hearted girl and have a good joke with her over this act of charity. There was not much self-denial here, for now in ten minutes or so I should be at home in the midst of plenty.

One disquieting thought, however, came to mind. Suppose my family, in their affliction, should turn out to have left Ramsgate and gone home, what was I to do then? I could fancy my mother not being able to bear the sight of those waves which she believed to have swallowed up her boy forever. A nice thing if I were to arrive at the house just five minutes after they had left it! The thought quickened my steps. As it was, I should liked to have run all the rest of the way had I not been afraid of people looking at me.

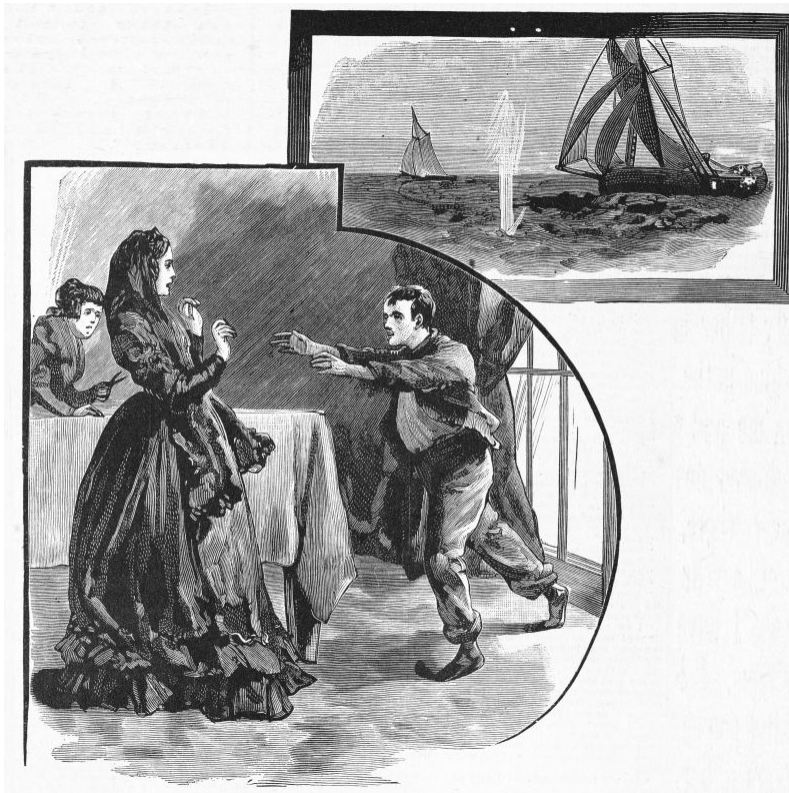
This incident of being taken for a beggar-boy had freshly reminded me to feel ashamed of my appearance. I hardly cared to show myself in the chief streets, but took by ways to avoid public observation, and thus came round to the back door of our house without meeting any one I knew. Just a week ago, and what would I not have given to be standing here!

And here, now that the longed-for moment was come, my heart had almost failed me for fullness of joy. It occurred to me, too, that if they took me for dead I might scare the whole family out of their wits by dropping thus suddenly in upon them. I began to realize the awkwardness, to say the least, of making the important communication that I was not dead after all. Like most boys, I had a certain horror of anything in the way of a moving scene.

But I could not stand long in trembling excitement. I opened the door and stole over the slip of back garden, expecting at each step to be hailed by a cry of amazement. Every shrub, every faded flower-bed was

in its place like an old friend. There was the little rockery I had ornamented with shells, the swing hanging between two stunted trees, the playthings my baby brother scattered on the grass—the whole picture is in my eyes at this very day. At last I had reached home.

On tiptoe I had gained the long window of our ordinary sitting-room, which opened into the garden. All the other blinds were drawn down. I peeped in like a thief. I saw my two sisters busy over a table covered with rolls and scraps of black cloth. They were going into mourning-for me! Again the queer feeling came over me that I had no business to be alive. I was half frightened and half tickled to think how the girls would look if I gave a cough or a tap on the windowpane.



Then the door opened, and my mother joined them, all dressed in black, with such a pale face and such mournful eyes. At this sight I could no longer hesitate. I threw open the window and burst in.

Next moment there was a bewildered outcry that brought my father rushing over the passage to see us laughing and crying by turns in one another's arms.

But the shock was too great, for my poor mother she had fainted away in her overwhelming emotion.

* *
*

At this point of the old gentleman's story he was interrupted by an official entering the waiting-room to inform him that the train was at hand.

»Already!« exclaimed Algie. »How quickly the time has gone, after all.«

»That's a compliment to my storytelling,« said his grandfather, as they gathered up their wraps, hand-bags and so forth, to be ready for a start. »Well, I had just finished, anyhow. You will guess for yourself what a fatted calf was killed to celebrate my unexpected arrival. Also you may suppose what thanks and presents my father sent to the Dutch family who had been such good friends to me in need. The pilots, too, were not forgotten.«

»Did you ever see them again? — I mean the parson and his daughter.«

»Years later I visited Jantje in Rotterdam, where she was married and settled with boys or her own growing up about her, to whom I told the story that I have told you to-day. But her father had died soon after I left them. The wonder was that any one could live in such a damp place.«

»They must have been decent sort of people,« Algie condescended to remark.

»Yes, I am glad that I did not fall rather into the hands of some lofty young gentleman like you, who would perhaps have thought it »too much fag« even to show a foreigner his way. You see, Algie, what good reason I have to feel for wanderers far from home; and I should like you to take the hint in such a small matter as a girl asking about her train. We English, you know, are accused on the Continent of being too stiff and stuck-up towards all persons we don't think worthy of the honor of our acquaintance; and, if it be so, it is certainly no ornament to our national character. We can't always, perhaps, be so confidingly hospitable as Jantje and her father were to me, but at least we owe every

one those civil words and small courtesies which cost us. little yet may be worth much to a puzzled and downhearted stranger. So you would think if ever you had gone through the experiences of my first trip abroad.«

[THE END.]

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