

AT THE BLACK ROCKS

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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK AT THE BLACK ROCKS

Produced by Al Haines.

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”Shove hard, but sing easy.” Page 33

AT THE BLACK ROCKS

BY REV. EDWARD A. RAND

LONDON, EDINBURGH,
DUBLIN, AND NEW YORK
THOMAS NELSON
AND SONS

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AT THE BLACK ROCKS.

I.

WAS HE WORTH SAVING?

"I might try," squeaked a diminutive boy, whose dark eyes had an unfortunate twist.

"Ye-s-s, Bartie," said his grandmother doubtfully, looking out of the window upon the water wrinkled by the rising wind.

"Wouldn't be much wuss," observed Bartholomew's grandfather, leaning forward in his old red arm-chair and steadily eying a failing fire as if arguing this matter with the embers. Then he added, "You could take the small boat."

"Yes," said Bart eagerly. "I could scull, you know; and if the doctor wasn't there when I got there, I could tell 'em you didn't feel well, and he might come when he could."

"That will do, if he don't put it off too long," observed the old man, shaking his head at the fire as if the two had now settled the matter between them. "Yes, you might try."

Bartie now went out to try. Very soon he wished he had not made the trial. Granny Trafton saw him step into the small boat moored by the shore, and

then his wiry little arms began to work an oar in the stern of the boat. "Gran'sir Trafton," as he was called, came also to the window, and looked out upon the diminutive figure wriggling in the little boat.

"He will get back in an hour," observed Gran'sir Trafton.

"Ought to be," said Granny Trafton.

It is a wonder that Bartie ever came back at all. He was the very boy to meet with some kind of an accident. Somehow mishaps came to him readily. If any boy had a tumble, it was likely to be Bartie Trafton. If measles slyly stole into town to be caught by somebody, Bartie Trafton was sure to be one catcher. In a home that was cramped by poverty—his father at sea the greater fraction of the time, and the other fraction at home drunk—this under-sized, timid, shrinking boy seemed as continually destined for trouble as the Hudson for the sea.

"I don't amount to much," was an idea that burdened his small brain, and the community agreed with him. If the public had seen him sculling Gran'sir Trafton's small boat that day, it would have prophesied ill before very long. The public just then and there upon the river was very limited in quantity. It consisted of two fishermen wearily pulling against tide a boat-load of dried cod-fish, a boy fishing from a rock that projected boldly and heavily into the water, and several boys playing on the deck of an old schooner which was anchored off the shore, and had been reached by means of a raft.

The fishermen pulled wearily on. The boys on the schooner deck ran and shouted at their play. The young fisherman's line dangled down from the crown of the big shore-rock. The small sculler out in Gran'sir Trafton's small boat busily worked his oar. Bart did not see a black spar-buoy thrusting its big arm out of the water, held up as a kind of menace, in the very course Bart was taking. How could Bart see it? His face was turned up river, and the buoy was in the very opposite quarter, not more than twenty feet from the bow of the boat Bart was working forward with all his small amount of muscle. A person is not likely to see through the back of his head. Closer came the boat to the buoy. Did not its ugly black arm, amid the green, swirling water, tremble as if making an angry, violent threat? Who was this small boy invading the neighbourhood where the buoy reigned as if an outstretched sceptre? On sculled innocent Bartholomew, the threatening arm shaking violently in his very pathway, and suddenly—whack-k! The boat struck, threatened to upset, and did upset—Bart! He could swim. After all the unlucky falls he had had into the water, it would have been strange if he had not learned something about this element; but he had reached a place in the river where the out-going current ran with strength, and took one not landward but seaward. How long could he keep above water—that timid, shrinking face appealing for pity to every spectator? The boys on the deck of the old schooner soon saw the empty dory floating past, and they now caught also the cry for help

from the pitiful face of the panting swimmer—a cry that amid their loud play they had not heard before.

“O Dick,” said one of the younger boys, “there’s a fellow overboard, and there’s his boat! Quick!”

At this sharp warning every one looked up. Then they rushed to the schooner’s rail and looked over. Yes: there was the white face in the water; there was the drifting boat.

The boy addressed as Dick was the leader of the party. His black, staring eyes, and his profusion of black, curly hair, would have attracted attention anywhere. His eyes now sparkled anew, and he tossed back his bushy curls, exclaiming,—

“Boys, to the rescue! Attention! Man the *Great Emperor*.”

“Throw this rope,” was a suggestion made by another boy, seizing a rope lying on the deck. A rope did not move Dick’s imagination so powerfully as the *Great Emperor*. The rope was not nearly so daring as the raft, though it would have given speedy and sufficient help.

“To the rescue!” rang out Dick’s voice. “Not in a rush! Ho, there! Orderly, men!”

Strutting forward with a blustering air, Dick led his rescue-band to the *Great Emperor*, which at the impulse of every rocking little wave thumped against the schooner’s hull. The band of rescuers went down upon the raft with more of a tumble than was agreeable to Captain Dick of the *Great Emperor*. Dick concluded that there was too much of a crew to dexterously manage the raft in the swift voyage that must now be made. Several would-be heroes were sent back disappointed to the schooner, and they proceeded, when too late, to cast the rope which had been ignominiously spurned. It splashed the water in vain. Bartie tried to reach it; but it was like Tantalus in the fable striving to pluck the grapes beyond his grasp.

“Cast off!” Dick was now shouting excitedly, pompously. “Pull with a will for the shipwrecked mariner!” was his second order.

This meant to use two poles in poling and paddling, as might be more advantageous.

In the meantime the boy fisherman on the rock had been operating energetically though quietly. He had seen the catastrophe, and had not ceased to watch the little fellow who was struggling with the current somewhere between the schooner and the shore. Bartie had aimed to reach the shore, and the distance was not great; but just in this place the current ran with swiftness and power, and the little fellow’s strength was failing him. He had given several shrieks for help, but it seemed as if he had been doing that thing all through life; and as the world outside of gran’sir and granny had not paid much attention to his appeals,

would the world do it now? Bart had almost come to the conclusion that it would be easier to sink than to struggle, when he heard a noise in the water and close at hand. Was it the *Great Emperor*? No; its deck was still the scene of an impressive demonstration of getting ready to do something. The noise heard by Bart had been made by the boy fisherman, who, stripping off his jacket, kicking off his boots, and sending his stockings after them, had thrown himself into the water, and was making energetic headway toward Bart. It was good swimming—that of some one who had both skill and strength on his side.

"Bartie!" he shouted.

What a world of hope opened before Bartie at the sound of that voice!

"Here! here! Put your hands on my shoulders, not round my neck, you know. There! that is it. Now swim. We'll fetch her."

Fetch what? It was a pretty difficult thing to say definitely what that indefinite "her" might mean. The current was still strong. Bart's rescuer, if alone, could have gained the shore again; but could he bring the rescued? Bart's face, pitiful and pale, projected just above the water, and as his wet hair fell back upon his forehead his countenance looked like that of a half-drowned kitten.

A third party on the river, that of the fishermen in their cod-laden boat moving slowly up river and hugging the shore for the sake of help from the eddies, had now become conscious that something was going on.

"What's that a-hollerin'?" asked one of the men, Dan Eaton, reversing his head.

"Trouble enough!" exclaimed Bill Bagley, who had also taken a look ahead.

"Pull, Bill!"

"Put for them two boys, Dan! one is a-helpin' t'other."

The boat began to advance as if the dead cod-fish had become live ones and were lending their strength to the oarsmen.

"Good!" thought the rescuer in the water, who saw between him and the far-off, level, misty sky-line a boat and the backs of two fishermen. "Hold on there!" he said encouragingly to Bartie; "there's a boat coming!"

The help did not arrive any too soon. Bartie's hands were resting lightly on his rescuer's shoulders, and he was arguing if he could not throw his arms around the neck of his beloved object, whether it might not be well to relinquish his feeble, tired hold altogether, and drop back into the soft, yielding depths of the water all about him; such an easy bed to lie down in! Life had given him so many hard berths. This seemed a relief.

"Ho, there you are!" shouted Dan, as the boat came up. He seized Bartie, while Bill Bagley gripped the other boy, and both Bartie and his companion were hauled into the boat, rather roughly, and somewhat after the fashion of cod-fish, but effectually.

"Now, Dan, let us pull for that cove and land our cargo!" said Bill. "You boys can walk home? We have got to go to the other side and take our fish to town."

"Oh yes," said the rescuer.

"I-I-can-walk!" exclaimed the shivering Bartie.

"Ah, youngster, you came pretty near not walking ag'in if it hadn't been for t'other chap."

This made Bartie feel at first very sober, and then he looked very grateful as he turned toward his rescuers and said,—

"I-thank-you all. I-I-I'll do as-much for you-some time."

"Will ye?" replied Bill Bagley with a grin. "Really, I hope we shan't be in that fix where you'll have to."

"See there!" exclaimed Dan. "There's the boat adrift!"

The Trafton boat was leisurely floating down the stream. Bart had forgotten all about this craft. A frightened look shadowed his face.

"Don't you worry, Johnny!" said Bill Bagley kindly. "We will land you, and then go a'ter your craft."

"But I promised gran'sir to go for the doctor."

"Dr. Peters?"

"Yes."

"Wall, Dan and I are goin' near the old man's, and we'll send him over.— Won't we, Dan?"

"And I'll bring your boat up to your landing," said his young rescuer to Bart. "So you go right home and get warm and don't worry."

A thankful look, like sunshine out of a dark cloud, broke out of Bart's black eyes, and he shrank closer to the sympathetic breast on which he leaned.

"I'll do as much for you," he whispered to the boy fisherman.

"That's all right, Bartie," replied his rescuer.

"See here!" now inquired Dan. "What are those spoonies up to? Where are they a-goin', I wonder, on that raft? To Afriky?"

"Guess that craft's got to be picked up too. She's a-makin' for the sea in spite of all their polin'," said Bill.

The *Great Emperor* was indeed moving seaward. Captain Dick was frantically ordering his crew to "pull her round;" but like sovereigns generally, the *Great Emperor* had a mind of its own, and would not be "pulled round." Deliberately the raft was making headway for the open sea, and possibly "Afriky." It might be a conspiracy on the part of wind and tide to aid in this wilful attempt of the raft; but if a conspiracy, it was no secret. The tide was openly pressing against the raft with its broad blue shoulders, and the wind openly blew against the boys, as if they were so much canvas spread for its filling.

"What you up to, fellers?" shouted Dick to Dab and John Richards, who managed one of the poles. "Bring her round and head her for the shore!"

"We can't," said John pettishly.

"Can't!" replied Dick in scorn. "Why can't you? Tell me! Then we will spend the night on the sea.— You pull, Jimmy."

"Can't!" said Jimmy Davis nervously. "She—she—won't turn—and—"

Here his pole slipped out of its hole and down he tumbled on the raft, his pole falling into the water.

[image]

"Down he tumbled on the raft, his pole falling into the water." Page

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"Oh dear!" shrieked Dick. "What a set! There goes that oar! Reach after it, Dab!"

Dab already was beating the water furiously with his pole in his efforts to reach that "oar" now adrift. It was all in vain. The conspiracy to take them all to sea and there let them spend the chilly night had spread to the very equipments of the *Great Emperor*.

"Catch me on a raft ag'in!" whimpered John Richards.

"Catch me on one with you!" replied Dick fiercely. "Might have got that boy if you had pulled, and now those other folks have got him."

"Those other folks' are coming after us!" observed Dab Richards.

"Oh dear!" groaned the humiliated Dick. "Make believe pull up river."

"I won't!" said John Richards.

"Pull so that they may think that we don't need them. Now!" urged Dick.

"I won't!" declared Dab.

Jimmy Davis also was going to say, "I won't," but he remembered that his pole was in the water, and refrained. He looked rebellious, though he said nothing.

There was now not only a conspiracy among the elements, but a mutiny among the crew. Dick sulked.

"Let her drift!" he said. "I don't care!"

"She won't drift long!" remarked Dab sarcastically. "The *Great Emperor*, that started to pick up somebody, is now going to be picked up by somebody."

Yes, the fishermen were pulling out from the shore. They picked up the boat, attached it to their own craft, and then laboriously rowed for the vessel in the hands of conspirators without and mutineers within.

"Where you chaps bound?" shouted Dan.

"Bound for the bottom of the sea," said Dick grimly.

"We'll stave that off," said Bill. "Here, take this rope! Now, we must try to git you ashore."

It was rather a queer tug-boat that did the towing—a fisherman's dory in which, sandwich fashion, alternated piles of codfish and oarsmen rowing; Bill, Dan, and Bart's rescuer. It was a singular fleet also that was towed ashore—the *Great Emperor* and Gran'sir Trafton's boat.

"Who is that boy rowing with those fishermen?" wondered Dick. "Can it be—"

Then he concluded it could not be.

Again he guessed. "Must be—"

Then he declared it was somebody else.

Finally, when this strange fleet had been beached, Dick shouted out, "That you, Dave Fletcher?"

"Nobody else," answered Bart's rescuer, advancing. "I have been nodding to you, but I guess you didn't know who it was; and I don't wonder—the way I look after my bath. Haven't got on the whole of my rig yet. How is Dick Pray?"

The two shook hands warmly.

"I haven't seen you for some time, Dave. I have been from home a while, going to school and so on. I am stopping at my cousin's, Sam Whittles, just now."

"And I have been here only a few days, visiting at my uncle's, Ferguson Berry."

"All right. We will see each other again then. I'll leave the old raft here and come for it when the tide is going up river."

"And I am going to get the doctor. Oh no, come to think of it, these men will get him for that little fellow's folks—the one we picked up, you know."

"We? You, rather. You did first-rate. Well, who was that little shaver?"

"I heard somebody call him Bartie. That's for Bartholomew, I guess."

"Oh, it's 'Mew,'" explained Dab. "Bartholo*mew*"; and they say 'Mew' for short—'Little Mew.'"

"His face looked like a kitten's there in the water," said Dick, "and he mewed pitifully. I've heard of him. Sort of a slim thing. Well, may sound sort of heartless, but I guess some folks would say he is hardly worth the saving. Oh, you're off, are you?"

"Yes," said one of the two fishermen who were now pushing their boat off from shore. "We must get to town with our fish as soon as we can."

"Well, friends, I am much obliged to you," said Dick Pray.

"So am I! so am I!" said several others.

"Count me in too," exclaimed Dave Fletcher. "Might not have been here

without you.—Give 'em three cheers, boys!”

Amid the huzzahs echoing over the waters, the fishermen, smiling and bowing, rowed off.

”Many thanks, boys, if you will help me to turn Bart’s boat over and get the water out. I must row it up to the rock where the rest of my clothes are, and then we might all go along together. We can pick up the fellows on the schooner.”

The remnant of Captain Dick’s crew on board the schooner gladly abandoned it when Gran’sir Trafton’s boat came along, and all journeyed in company up the river.

And where was Little Mew? He went home only to be scolded by gran’sir because he had not brought the doctor, and because he had somehow got into the water somewhere. Granny was not at home, and Little Mew dared not tell the whole story. He was sent upstairs to change his clothes and stay there till granny got home.

”Gran’sir don’t know I haven’t got another shift,” whined Little Mew. ”Got to get these wet things off, anyhow.”

He removed them and then crept into bed. It was dark when granny returned.

From the window at the head of his bed Bartie watched the sun go down, and then he saw the white stars come into the sky.

About that time the evening breeze began to breathe heavily; and was that the reason why the stars, blossom-like, opened their fair, delicate petals, even as they say the wind-flowers of spring open when the wind begins to blow?

”They don’t seem to amount to much—just like me,” thought Bartie; and having thus come into harmony with the world’s opinion of himself, he closed his eyes, like an anemone shutting its petals, and went to sleep.

Don’t stars amount to much? They would be missed if, some night, people looking up should learn that they had gone for ever.

And granny coming home, having learned elsewhere the full story of Little Mew’s exposure to an awful peril, went upstairs, and, candle in hand, looked down on the motherless child in bed fast asleep.

”Poor little boy!” she murmured. ”I should miss him if he was gone. Yes, I should terribly.”

She wiped her eyes, and then tucked up Bartie for the night.

II.

CAUGHT ON THE BAR.

Dave Fletcher and Dick Pray were boys who had grown up in the same town, but from the same soil had come two very different productions. They were unlike in their personal appearance. Dick Pray would come down the street throwing his head to right and left, scattering sharp, eager glances from his restless black eyes, and swinging his hands.

"Somebody is coming," people would be very likely to say.

Dave Fletcher had a quiet, unobtrusive, straight-forward way of walking. Dick was quite a handsome youth; but the person that Dave Fletcher saw in the glass was ordinary in feature, with pleasant, honest eyes of blue, and hair—was it brown or black?

Dave sometimes wished it were browner or blacker, and not "a go-between," as he had told his mother.

Dave and Dick were not as yet trying to make their own way; but they were between fifteen and sixteen, and knew that they must soon be stirring for themselves.

They had already begun to intimate how they would stir in after life.

Dave had a quiet, resolute way. There was no pretence or bluster in his methods. In a modest but manly fashion he went ahead and did the thing while Dick was talking about it, and perhaps magnifying its difficulty, that inferentially his courage and pluck in attempting it might be magnified. Dick's way of strutting down-street illustrated his methods and manners. There was a great deal of bluster in him. Nobody was more daring than he in his purposes, but for the quiet doing of the thing that Dick dared, Dave was the boy. Somehow Dick had received the idea that the world is to be carried by a display of strength rather than its actual use; that men must be impressed by brag and noise. Thus overpowered by a sensational manifestation they would be plastic to your hands, whatever you might wish to mould them into. Dick did not hesitate to attack any fort, scale any mountain, or cross any sea—with his tongue. When it came to the using of some other kind of motive power—legs for instance—he might be readily outstripped by another. Among the boys at Shipton he had made quite a stir at first. His bluster and brag made a sensation, until the boys began to find out that it was often wind and not substance in Dick's bragging; and they were now estimating him at his true value. Dave Fletcher was little known to any of them save small Bartholomew Trafton; but Dave's modest, efficient style of action they had seen in the saving of Little Mew, and they were destined to witness it in another impending catastrophe.

"Uncle Ferguson, who owns that old schooner off in the river?" asked Dave

one day, as he was eating his way through a generous pile of Aunt Nancy's fritters. It was the craft to which had been tied the *Great Emperor*.

"Why, David?"

"Because some of us boys want to go there and stay a night or two. We take our provisions with us, and each one a couple of blankets, and so on, and we can be as comfortable on the schooner as can be. Would you and Aunt Nancy mind if we went?"

"Mind if you went? No; I don't know as I do.—What do you say, Nancy?"

Uncle Ferguson was a middle-aged man, with ruddy complexion and two blue eyes that almost shut and then twinkled like stars when he looked at you.

Aunt Nancy was a plain, sober woman, with sharp, thin features, and bleached eyes of blue.

"Don't know as I mind," declared Aunt Nancy. "If you don't git into the water and drown, you know."

"Oh, that's all right," said the nephew.

"Only you must see the owner of the schooner," advised the uncle.

"The owner?"

"Yes; Squire Sylvester. He is very particular about anything he owns."

"Oh, I didn't know the thing had an owner," said Dave, laughing. "It seems to lie there in the stream doing nothing. The boys didn't say anything about an owner."

"Squire Sylvester is very particular," asserted Uncle Ferguson. "He got his property hard, and looks after it."

"Yes, he is very pertickerlet," added Aunt Nancy.

"Well, we will see him by all means. We boys—"

"Didn't think; that is it, David. Now, when I was a boy we always asked about things," said Uncle Ferguson.

"Well, husband, boys is boys, in them days and these days. I remember your mother used to say her five boys used to cut up and—"

"Well," replied Uncle Ferguson, rising from the table, "this won't feed the cows; and I must be a-goin'. I would see Sylvester, David."

"All right, uncle."

Dave announced his intention to Dick half-an-hour later.

"Well, go, if you want to. We fellows were not going to say anything to anybody. Who would be the wiser? The thing lies in the river, knocking around in the tide, and seems to say, 'Come and use me, anybody that wants to.'"

"If we owned the schooner we would prefer to have it asked for, if she was going to be turned into a boarding-house for a day or two."

"I suppose it would be safer to ask. If we didn't ask, and the owner should come down the river sailing and see us, wouldn't there be music?"

"We will save the music, Dick. I will just ask him."

As Dave neared Squire Sylvester's office he could see that individual through the window. He was a man about fifty years old, his features expressing much force of character, his sharp brown eyes looking very intently at any one with whom he might be conversing. Dave hesitated at the door a moment, and then summoning courage he lifted the latch of the office door and entered.

"Good-day, sir."

The squire nodded his head abruptly and then sharply eyed the boy before him.

"We boys, sir—"

"Who are you?" asked the squire curtly.

"David Fletcher. I am visiting at my uncle's, Ferguson Berry."

"Humph! Yes, I know him."

"We boys, sir, wanted to know if you would let us—"

"What boys?"

"Oh, Jimmy Davis, John Richards—"

"I know those."

"Dick Pray—"

"Pray?"

"He is visiting his cousin, Samuel Whittles."

"Oh yes; I've seen him in the post-office. Curly-haired boy; struts as if he owned all Shipton."

"Just so."

"Well?"

"John Richards's brother—that is all. We want to know if you will let us stay out in the old schooner for a while. We will try to be particular and not harm the vessel."

"How long shall you want to be gone?"

"Oh, two or three days and nights."

"Humph! Well, you can't have any fire on board. Got a boat?"

"Yes, sir."

"Of course, for you can't wade out to her. Put it out there on purpose so folks couldn't paddle and wade out to her, such as tramps, you know. Well, if you have a boat you can cook on shore."

"Yes, sir."

"You may have a lantern at night. No objection to that."

"We will remember."

"All right, then."

"Oh, thank you! Good-day, sir."

"Good-day."

The squire's sharp brown eyes followed Dave as he went out of the door, and then watched him as he tripped down the street laughing and whistling.

"Like all young chaps—full of fun. Rather like that boy."

Dave announced the result of the conference to several boys anxiously waiting for him round the corner.

"Got it?" asked Dick Pray.

"Yes; tell us what he said," inquired Dab Richards.

The boys pressed eagerly up to Dave, who announced the successful issue of his application. A burden of painful anxiety dropped from each pair of shoulders, and the boys separated to collect their "traps," promising to meet at Long Wharf, where a boat awaited them. Did ever any craft make a happier, more successful voyage, when the boat received its load two hours later and was then pushed off?

"Everything splendid, boys!" said Dick. "Won't we have a time while we are gone, and won't we come back in triumph?"

The return! How little any of the party anticipated the kind of return that would end their adventure!

"There's the schooner!" shouted Dave. "I can read her name on the stern—*RELENTLESS*. Letters somewhat dim."

"She is anchored good," said Dab Richards. "Got her cable out."

"Anchor at the bottom of it, I suppose," conjectured Jimmy Davis.

"We will find out, boys, won't we? We will just hoist her a bit, as the sailors say, and see what she carries," said Dick, in a low tone.

"Nonsense!" said Dave. "Sylvester has our word for good behaviour."

"Oh, don't you worry!" said Dick, in a jesting tone. "Let's see! Shall we make our boat fast round there? Where shall it be?"

The best mooring was found for the boat, and then a ladder with hooks on one end was attached to the vessel's rail, and up sprang the boys eagerly.

The *Relentless* was an old fishing-schooner. She had been stripped of her canvas, and portions of her rigging had been removed. There were the masts, though, still to suggest those trips to distant fishing-grounds, when the winds had filled the canvas and sent the *Relentless* like an arrow shot from one curving billow to another. There was the galley, empty now of its stove, and showing to any investigator only a rusty pan in one corner; but the wind humming round its bit of rusty funnel told a story of many a savoury dish cooked for a hardy, hungry crew. And the little cabin, so still now, save when a hungry rat softly scampered across its floor, had been a good corner of retreat to many when heavy seas wet the deck on stormy nights and sent the spray flying up into the rigging.

The boys transferred their cargo of bedding and eatables to the deck, and then scattered to ramble through the cabin or descend into the dark, musty hold.

They came together again, and lugged their baggage into the cabin, save the dishes and eatables, which were stowed away on shelves.

"This is just splendid, Dick!" declared Dave, leaning over the vessel's rail. "It is going to sea without having the fuss of it."

"That's so, Dave. You don't have any sea-sickness, any blistering your hands with handling ropes, any taking in sail—"

"Oh, it's huge, Dick. Now you want to divide up the work."

"Not going to have any; all going to have a good time."

"But who's going to cook, and bring water, and—"

"Oh, I see! Forgot that."

A division of work was finally pronounced sensible. Dave became "cook," Jimmy Davis was elected "water-boy," Dick took charge of the sleeping arrangements, and the brothers Richards were constituted table-waiters and dish-washers—"without pay," Dave prudently added. All that day, up to twilight, life in the old fishing-schooner was smooth and happy as the music of a marriage-bell. Dave's cooking was adjudged "splendid," and between meals there were spells of story-telling, of games like hide-and-seek about the ancient hull, and of fishing from the deck, though there sometimes seemed to be more fishermen than fish.

At twilight most of the boys were seated in the stern of the vessel, looking out to sea and watching the light fade out of the heavens and the warm sunset glow steal away from the waters.

"There's the light starting up in the lighthouse near the bar," said Dab Richards.

Yes, Toby Tolman, keeper of the light at the harbour's mouth, and not far from a dangerous bar, ever changing and yet never going, had kindled a star in the tall lantern as the western clouds dropped their gay extinguisher on the sun's dwindling candle. Between the boys and the outside, dusky surface of ocean water stretched a line of whitest foam, where the waves broke on the bar.

"Getting chilly," said Dave. "Hadn't we better go into the cabin and light our lantern?"

"Guess Dick is looking after that," said Jimmy.

No; Dick was looking after—meddling, rather, with something else. He had whispered to John Richards, "Come here, John," and then led him to the bow of the vessel.

"See here, Johnny."

"What is it, Dick?"

"Wouldn't it be nice to see this old ark move?"

"Move! what for?"

"Oh, I've got tired of seeing it in one place."

"Why, what do you mean? How?"

"Why, just have it go on a little voyage, you know."

"Voyage?"

"You booby, can't you understand?"

"Understand? No," replied John good-naturedly. "Don't see how we can have a voyage without sails, and the masts are bare as bean-poles when there ain't any beans on 'em."

"Oh, you're thick-headed. Don't you see this anchor?"

"Don't see any. I suppose there is one somewhere—covered up, you know, down on the bed of the river."

"Only water covers it, and it could be raised, and we could have a sail without any sails."

"Come on!" said John, who was the very boy for any kind of an adventure.

"But," he prudently added, "how could we stop?"

"Drop the anchor again. Why, we could stop any time."

"So we could."

"We could sail, say a hundred feet to-night—tide would drift us down—and then we could drop anchor; and to-morrow, when the tide ran up river, we could sail back again and drop anchor, just where we were before."

"We could keep a-going, couldn't we, Dickie?"

"Certainly. I don't know but we could go quarter of a mile and then back again. We should have, of course, to go with the tide; but the anchor would regulate us."

"So we could. Just the thing. Let's try it. Shall I tell the fellers?"

"No; let's surprise 'em."

"But they'll hear us."

"No; they are quarrelling about something, and they won't notice anything we do here."

"But how can you manage the anchor?"

"Raise it."

"But how raise it?"

"Johnny, I believe you have lost your mind since coming here. What is this I have got my hand on?"

"The capstan."

Dick here laid his hand on a battered old capstan, around which how many hardy seamen had tramped singing "Reuben Ranzo" or some other roaring song of the sea.

"Don't you know how this works?"

"Not exactly."

"I will tell you. You see this bar?"

Dick with his foot kicked a battered but stout bar lying at the foot of the

capstan.

"There! one end of the cable to which the anchor is hitched goes round this capstan, you see. Now, if I stick this bar into that hole in the capstan and shove her round—I mean the bar—the capstan will go round too, and that will wind up that cable and draw on the anchor. Don't you see?"

"Yes, I see."

"Well, now we are ready. I will sing something like real sailors."

"The boys will hear us."

"No: they are fighting away; they won't notice."

It was a tongue-fight, but that may be as absorbing as a fist-fight.

"You know 'Reuben Ranzo'?"

"Yes."

"Well, sing in a whisper and pull."

The bar was inserted into the capstan, and the boys, as they shoved on the bar, sang softly,—

"O poor Reuben Ranzo!

Ranzo, boys, Ranzo!"

"That's the chorus, Johnny. Sing the other part. Shove hard but sing easy."

"Oh, Reuben was no sailor.

Chorus—O poor Reuben Ranzo!

Ranzo, boys, Ranzo!

O poor Reuben Ranzo!

Ranzo, boys, Ranzo!"

"Sing another verse, Johnny. That shove just took up the slack-line, and the next will pull on the anchor. Hun-now, Johnny! You're a real good sailor. Sing easy, but shove."

"He shipped on board of a whaler.

Chorus—O poor Reuben Ranzo!

Ranzo, boys, Ranzo!

O poor Reuben Ranzo!

Ranzo, boys, Ranzo!"

The last tug at the bar came hard, but the boys took it as an encouraging sign

that the anchor too was coming. They were not mistaken. Another minute, and Johnny eagerly exclaimed,—

”Dick, I do believe she’s going!”

”Good! That’s so. I knew ’Reuben Ranzo’ would bring her.”

Yes, the *Relentless* had relented before the fascinating persuasion of ”Reuben Ranzo,” and without a murmur of resistance was softly slipping through the dark sea water.

”Can you stop her any time, Dick?” asked Johnny in tones a bit alarmed.

”Easy. Just let the anchor slip back again, you know.”

”Shan’t we tell the boys?”

”Wait a moment. We want to surprise ’em. They’ll find it out pretty soon.”

The boys at the stern had been discussing a subject so eagerly that every one had lost his temper, and when that is lost it may not be found again in a moment. It was like starting the *Relentless*—a thing quite easily done; but as for stopping her—however, I will not anticipate. The boys were quarrelling about a light on shore, and wondering why that illumination was started so early, when it did not seem dark enough for a home light. In the course of the discussion a second light, not far from the first, came into view. Over this the controversy waxed hotter than ever, and led to much being said of which all felt heartily ashamed.

No one heard the creak of the capstan-bar at the bow or the devoted wooing of the *Relentless* by the fascinating ”Reuben Ranzo.”

”That’s funny,” said Dave, after a while. ”One of those lights has gone. They have been approaching one another, I have noticed. Look here, fellers: I believe this old elephant is moving!”

”She is,” exclaimed Jimmy Davis.

They all turned and looked toward the bow. The figures there were growing dim in the thickening twilight, but they could see Dick and Johnny waving their hats, and of course they could plainly hear them shout, ”Hurrah! hurrah!”

”What’s the matter?” cried Dave, rushing across the deck.

”Having a sail,” said Dick.

”And without a sail too,” cried Johnny triumphantly.

”What do you mean?” asked Dab.

”Why, we just hoisted the anchor, and the tide is taking us along,” replied Dick. The party at the stern did not know how to take this announcement.

”But,” said Dave, advancing toward the capstan, and remembering his promise to Squire Sylvester that he would be ”particular,” ”we are adrift, man!”

”Oh, we can stop any time—just drop the anchor—and the next tide will drift us back where we were before.”

”Y-e-s,” said Dave, but reluctantly, ”if we don’t get in water too deep for our

anchor. I like fun, Dick, but—”

”Oh, well,” replied Dick angrily, ”we will stop her now if you think we need to be so fussy.—Just let her go, Johnny.”

Johnny, however, did not understand how to ”let her go.” It seemed to him and the others as if ”she” were already going.

”Oh, well, I can show you, if you all are ignorant,” said Dick confidently. ”Just shove on this bar—help, won’t you?—and then knock up that ratchet that keeps the capstan from slipping back—there!”

The weight of the anchor now drew on the capstan, and round it spun, creaking and groaning, liberating all the cable that had been wound upon it; but when every inch of cable had been paid out, what then?

”There! The anchor must be on bottom, and she holds!” shouted Dick in triumph.

”No—she—don’t,” replied Dab. ”We are in deep water, and adrift.”

”Can’t be,” asserted Dick. ”All that cable paid out!”

Dick leaned over the vessel’s rail and tried to pierce the shadows on the water and see if he could detect any movement. ”Don’t—see—anything that looks like moving, boys. Surely the anchor holds her,” he said, in a very subdued way.

”Dick, see that rock on the shore?” asked Dave.

A ledge, big, shadowy, could be made out.

”Now, boys, keep your eyes on that two or three minutes and see if we stay abreast of it,” was Dave’s proposed test.

Five pairs of eyes were strained, watching the ledge; but if there had been five hundred, they would not have seen any proof that the vessel was stationary.

The ledge was stationary, but the *Relentless*—

”Well,” said Dick, scratching his head, ”I don’t think we need worry. We—we—”

”Can drift,” said Dab scornfully.

”It is of no use to cry over spilled milk,” said Dave, in a tone meant to assure others. ”Let’s make the best of it, now it’s done, and get some fun out of it if we can. All aboard for—Patagonia!”

”Good for you,” whispered Dick. ”The others are chicken-hearted. We shall come out of it all right; though I wish the schooner’s rudder worked, and we might steer her.”

The rudder was damaged and would not work.

”Say, boys, we might tow her into shallow water!” suggested Dave. ”Come on, come on! Let’s have some fun. And see—there’s the moon!”

Yes, there was a moon rising above the eastern waters, shooting a long, tremulous arrow of light across the sea. The boys’ spirits rose with the moon, and as the light strengthened, their surroundings—the harbour, the lighthouse

near the bar, the shores on either hand—were not so indistinct.

"Not so bad," said Dick in a low tone to Dab. "There's our boat, you know. We can get into that and let this old wreck go. We can get ashore. We will have a lot of fun out of this."

The situation was delightful, as Dick continued to paint its attractions. They could have a "lot of fun" out of the schooner, and at the same time abandon the source of it when that failed them. Dave talked differently.

"Come, boys, we must try to get the old hulk ashore," he said. "I believe in staying by this piece of property long as we got permission to use it; but we will make the best of our situation. All hands into the boat to tow the schooner into shallow water!"

The boys responded with a happy shout, and climbed over the vessel's side, descending by the ladder that still clung to the rail.

"What have we got to tow with?" asked Jimmy Davis.

"That is a conundrum!" replied Dave. "Didn't think of that!"

"May find something on the deck," suggested Dick.

A hunt was made, but no rope could be found.

"Boys, we have got to tow with the boat's painter; it's all we have got," said Dave, in a disgusted tone. This rope was about ten feet long. It was attached to the schooner's bow, and how those small arms did strain on the oars and strive to coax the *Relentless* into shoal water!

"Give us a sailor's song, Dick," said Jimmy Davis.

"I will, boys, when I get my breath," replied Dick, puffing after his late efforts and wiping the sweat from his brow. "I'll start 'Reuben Ranzo.'"

The boys sang with a will, and their voices made a fine chorus.

"Reuben" had been able to coax the schooner away from her moorings, but he could not win her back.

True to her name, she obstinately drifted on.

"Don't you know anything else?" inquired Dave.

"I know 'Haul the Bow-line.'"

"Give us that, Dick."

"I'll start you on the words, boys,—

'Haul the bow-line, Kitty is my darling;

Haul the bow-line, the bow-line haul.'

Sing and pull, boys."

The boys sang and the boys pulled, and there was a fierce straining on that bow-line; but no soft words about "Kitty" had any effect on the *Relentless*. It seemed as if this obdurate creature were moved by an ugly jealousy of "Kitty,"

and drifted on and on.

"It's of no use!" declared Dick. "I move we untie our rope and go ashore and let the old thing go. We have done what we could to get ashore."

He did not say that he had done what he could to get the *Relentless* adrift, and had fully succeeded. Dave did not twit him with the fact, but he was not ready to abandon the schooner.

Some of the boys murmured regrets about their "things." They did not want to forsake these.

"Well, boys," said Dick, with a boastful air, "I'll get you out of the scrape somehow. We might go on deck again, and hold a council of war and talk the situation over."

Any change was welcomed, and the boys scrambled on deck again. Dick was the last of the climbing column.

"Hand that painter up here and I'll make it fast," said Dave. "Then come up and we will talk matters over."

"Oh!" said Dick, who was half-way up the ladder, "I forgot to bring that rope up."

He descended the ladder and reached out his foot to touch the boat, but he could not find it! When he had left the boat, a minute ago, he gave it unintentionally a parting kick, and—and—alas! The boat was now too far from the schooner's side to be reached by Dick's foot.

"Get something!" he gasped. "Bring a-pole-and-get that boat!"

The boys scattered in every direction to find a—they did not know what, that in some way they might reach after and capture that escaping boat. Their excitement was intense but fruitless. There were now two vessels adrift—a schooner and a dory—serenely floating in the still but strong current, steadily moving seaward, and the moonlight that had been welcomed only revealed to them more plainly the mortifying situation of the party.

"Ridiculous!" exclaimed Dick.

Most of the boys looked very sober. Dave put his hands in his pockets and whistled.

"Well, boys, don't you worry! I'll get you out of this in good fashion yet," cried Dick. "We can't go far to sea, and then the tide will bring us back again in the morning."

"Far to sea!" said Dab mockingly. "There's the lighthouse on the left, and it looks to me as if we should hit the bar!"

The bar! The boys started. At the mouth of the river the sand brought down from the yielding shores would accumulate, and it formed a bar whose size and shape would annually change, but the obstacle itself never disappeared. There it stretched in the navigator's way, seriously narrowing the channel; and

of how many catastrophes that "bar" had been the occasion! The breakers above were soft and white, and the sand below was yielding and crumbling; and yet just there how many vessels had been tripped up by that foot of sand thrust out into the harbour! The boys laughed and tried to be jolly, but no one liked the situation. It was a very picturesque scene,—the moonlight silvering the sea, the calmly-moving schooner and boat, that lighthouse like a tall, stately candlestick lifting its quiet light; but, for all that, there was the bar! Either the night-wind was growing very chilly, or the boys shivered for another reason.

"Don't worry, fellows," said Dick, putting as much courage as possible into his voice. "When this old thing hits, you see, we shan't drift right on to the bar, but our anchor will catch somewhere on this side. That will hold us. I can swim, and I'll just drop into the sea and make for the light and get Toby Tolman's boat, and come and bring you off."

He then proceeded to hum "Reuben Ranzo;" but nobody liked to sing it, and Dick executed a solo for this unappreciative audience.

"How—how deep is the water inside the bar?" said chattering Jimmy Davis. He felt the cold night-air, and he shook as if he had an ague fit.

"Pretty deep," solemnly remarked Dab Richards.

The musical hum by the famous soloist, Dick Pray, ceased; only the breakers on the bar made their music.

Dick began to doubt seriously the advisability of dropping into that deep gulf reputed to be inside the bar. It was now not very far to the lighthouse, and the surf on the bar whitened in the moonlight and fell in a hushed, drowsy monotone. People by the shore may be hushed by this lullaby of the ocean, but to those boys there was nothing drowsy in its sound; it was very startling.

"I—I—I—" said Jimmy.

"What is it, Jimmy?" asked Dave.

Jimmy did feel like wishing aloud that he could be at home, but he concluded to say nothing about it. Steadily did the *Relentless* drift toward that snow-line in the dark sea.

"Almost there!" cried Dave.

"May strike any moment!" shouted Dab.

Yes, nearer, nearer, nearer, came the *Relentless* to that foaming bar. The boat had already arrived there, and Dave saw it resting quietly on its sandy bed. Did he notice a glistening strip of sand beyond the surf? He had heard some one in Shipton say that at very low tide there was no water on portions of the bar. This fact set him to thinking about his possible action. It now seemed to him as if the distance between the stern of the vessel and the bar could not be more than a hundred feet. The bow of the vessel pointed up river. She was going "stern on." How would it strike—forcibly, easily?

[image]

"Nearer and nearer came the 'Relentless' to that foaming bar." Page 43]

"Ninety feet now!" thought Dave. "Will the shock upset her, pitch us out, or what?"

Sixty feet now!

"The bar looks sort of ugly!" remarked Johnny Richards.

Thirty feet now!

"Wish I was in bed!" thought Jimmy Davis.

Twenty feet now!

Had the schooner halted? The boys clustered in the bow and looked anxiously over to the bar.

"Boys, she holds, I do believe," said Dave.

"All right!" shouted Dick—"all right! The anchor holds!"

It did seem an innocent, all-right situation: just the quiet sea, the musically-rolling surf along the bar, the stately lighthouse at the left, and that schooner quietly halting in the harbour.

"Now, boys," exclaimed Dick, "we can—"

"I thought you were going to swim to the lighthouse?" observed Dab.

"Oh, that won't be necessary now," replied Dick. "We are just masters of the situation. The moment the tide turns we can weigh anchor and drift back again just as easy! Be in our old quarters by morning, and nobody know the difference. Old Sylvester himself might come down the river, and he would find everything all right. Ha! ha!"

Dick's confidence was contagious, and when he proposed "Haul the Bow-line," his companions sang with him, and sang with a will. How the notes echoed over the sea! Such a queer place to be singing in!

"Mr. Toby Tolman," said Dick, facing the lighthouse, "we propose to wake you up! Let him have a rouser. Give him 'Reuben Ranzo!'"

While they were administering a "rouser" to Mr. Toby Tolman, somebody at the stern was dropping into the sea. He had stripped himself for his swim, and now struck out boldly for the bar. Reaching its uncovered sands he ran along to the boat, lying on the channel side of the bar and not that of the lighthouse, leaped into the boat, and, shoving off, rowed round to the bow of the schooner. There was a pause in the singing, and Dick Pray was saying, "This place makes you think of mermen," when Dab Richards, looking over the vessel's side, said,

"Ugh! if there isn't one now!"

"Where—where?" asked Johnny.

"Ship ahoy!" shouted Dave from the boat. "How many days out? Where you bound? Short of provisions?"

"Three cheers for this shipwrecked mariner just arrived!" cried Dab. And the hurrahs went up triumphantly in the moonlight. Dave threw up to the boys the much-desired painter, and the runaway boat was securely fastened.

"There, Dave!" said Dick, as he welcomed on deck the merman: "I was just going after that thing myself, just thinking of jumping into the water, but you got ahead of me. Somehow, I hate to leave this old craft."

"I expect," said Dab Richards, a boy with short, stubby black hair and blue eyes, and lips that easily twisted in scorn, "we shall have such hard work to get Dick away from this concern that we shall have to bring a police-officer, arrest, and lug him off that way."

"Shouldn't wonder," replied Dick. "Couldn't be persuaded to abandon this dear old tub."

"Well, boys, I'm going to the lighthouse as soon as I'm dressed," said Dave. There was a hubbub of inquiries and comments.

"What for?" asked Dick. "Ain't we all right?"

"I hope so; but I want to keep all right. I want to ask the light-keeper—"

"But all we have got to do is to pull up anchor when the tide comes, and drift back."

"Oh yes; we can drift back, but where? We can't steer the schooner. We don't know what currents may lay hold of her and take her where we don't want to go. There are some rocks with an ugly name."

"Sharks' Fins!" said Jimmy. "Booh!"

"What if we ran on to them?" said Dave. "We had better go and ask Toby Tolman's opinion. He may suggest something—tell us of some good way to get out of this scrape. He knows the harbour, the currents, the tides, and so on. Any way, it won't do any harm to speak to him. I won't bother anybody to go with me. Stay here and make yourselves comfortable; I will dress and shove off."

When Dave had dressed and returned, he found every boy in the boat. Dick Pray was the first that had entered.

"Hullo!" shouted Dave. "All here, are you? That's good. The more the merrier."

"Dave, we loved you so much we couldn't leave you," asserted Dick.

"We will have a good time," said Dave. "All ready! Shove off! Bound for the lighthouse!"

The old schooner was left to its own reflections in the sober moonlight, and

the boat slowly crept over the quiet waters to the tall lighthouse tower.

III.

DID THE SCHOONER COME BACK?

Mr. Toby Tolman sat in the snug little kitchen of the lighthouse tower. He was alone, but the clock ticked on the wall, and the kettle purred contentedly on the stove. Music and company in those sounds.

The light-keeper had just visited the lantern, had seen that the lamp was burning satisfactorily, had looked out on the wide sea to detect, if possible, any sign of fog, had "felt of the wind," as he termed it, but did not discover any hint of rough weather. Having pronounced all things satisfactory, he had come down to the kitchen to read awhile in his Bible. The gray-haired keeper loved his Bible. It was a companion to him when lonely, a pillow of rest when his soul was weary with cares, a lamp of guidance when he was uncertain about the way for his feet, a high, strong rock of refuge when sorrows hunted his soul.

"I just love my Bible," he said.

He had reason to say it. What book can match it?

As he sat contentedly reading its beautiful promises, he caught the sound of singing.

"Some fishermen going home," he said, and read on. After a while he heard the sound of a vigorous pounding on the lighthouse door.

"Why, why!" he exclaimed in amazement, "what is that?"

He rose and hastily descended the stair-way leading to the entrance of the lighthouse. To gain admission to the lighthouse, one first passed through the fog-signal tower. The lighthouse proper was built of stone; the other tower was of iron. They rose side by side. A covered passage-way five feet long connected the two towers, and entrance from the outside was first through the fog-signal tower. The foundation of each tower was a stubborn ledge that the sea would cover at high-water, and it was now necessary to have all doors beyond the reach of the roughly-grasping breakers. Otherwise they would have unpleasantly pressed for admittance, and might have gained it. The entrance to the fog-signal tower was about twenty feet above the summit of the ledge, and from the door dropped a ladder closely fastened to the tower's red wall. Around the door was a railed

platform of iron, and through a hole in the platform a person stepped down upon the rounds of the ladder. Toby Tolman seized a lantern, and crossing the passageway connecting the two towers, entered the fog-signal tower, and so gained the entrance. Just above the threshold of the door he saw the head and shoulders of a boy standing on the ladder.

"Why! who's this, at this time of night?" said Toby.

"Good-evening, sir. Excuse me, but I wanted to ask you something."

It was Dave Fletcher.

"Any trouble?"

"Well, yes."

"Come in, come in! Don't be bashful. Lighthouses are for folks in trouble."

"Thank you."

When Dave had climbed into the tower Dick Fray's curly head appeared.

"Oh, any more of you?" asked the keeper. "Bring him along."

"Good-evening," said Dick.

Then Jimmy Davis thrust up his head.

"Oh, another?" asked Toby. "How many?"

"Not through yet, Mr. Tolman," said Dave, laughing.

Johnny Richards stuck up his grinning face above the threshold.

"Any more?" said the light-keeper.

And this inquiry Dab Richards answered in person, relieving the ladder of its last load.

"Why, why! wasn't expecting this! All castaways?"

"Pretty near it, Mr. Tolman," said Dick.

"Come up into the kitchen, and then let us have your story, boys."

They followed the light-keeper into the kitchen, so warm, so cheerfully lighted.

In the boat Dick Pray had been very bold, and said he would go ahead and "beard the lion in his den;" but when at the foot of the lighthouse, he concluded he would silently allow Dave to precede him. The warmth of the kitchen thawed out Dick's tongue, and now that he was inside he kept a part of his word, and made an explanation to the light-keeper. He stated that they had had permission to "picnic" on the schooner, had-had-"got adrift"-somehow-and were caught on the bar, and the question was what to do.

"Perhaps you can advise us still further," explained Dave. "One suggestion is that when the tide turns we pull up anchor and drift back with the tide."

"Anchor?" asked Mr. Toby Tolman. "I thought you went on because you couldn't help it. Didn't know you dropped anchor there."

Dick blushed and cleared his throat.

"The schooner was anchored, but," said Dick, choking a little, "we-we-

got-got-into water too deep for our anchor, and kept on drifting till the anchor caught in the bar."

"Oh!" said the light-keeper, who now saw a little deeper into the mystery, though all was not clear to him yet. "What will you do now? It is a good rule generally, when you don't know which way to move, not to move. Now, if you pull up anchor and let the next tide take you back, there is no telling where it will take you. Some bad rocks in our harbour as well as a lot of sand. 'Sharks' Fins' you know about. An ugly place. Now let me think a moment."

The light-keeper in deep thought walked up and down the floor, while the five boys clustered about the stove like bees flocking to a flaming hollyhock.

"See here: I advise this. Don't trouble that anchor to-night. The sea is quiet. No harm will be done the schooner, and her anchor has probably got a good grip on some rocks down below, and the tide won't start her. A tug will bring down a new schooner from Shipton to-morrow, and I will signal to the cap'n, and you can get him to tow you back. What say?" asked the keeper. "'Twill cost something."

"That plan looks sensible," said Dave. "I will give my share of the expense."

Dick looked down in silence. He wanted to get back without any exposure of his fault. The tug meant exposure, for the world outside would know it. The tide as motive power, drifting the schooner back, would tell no tales if the schooner went to the right place. There would, however, be danger of collision with rocks, and then the bill of expense would be greater and the exposure more mortifying. He scratched his head and hesitated, but finally assented to the tug-boat plan, and so did the other boys.

"Very well, then," said the keeper, "make yourselves at home, and I'll do all I can to make you comfortable."

What, stay there? Did he mean it? He meant a night of comfort in the lighthouse.

What a night that was!

"I wouldn't have missed it for twenty pounds," Johnny Richards said to those at home.

And the breakfast! It was without parallel. The schooner was held by its anchor inside the bar, and the boys in the morning visited their provision-baskets, and brought off such a heap of delicacies that the light-keeper declared it to be the "most satisfyin' meal" he had ever had inside those stone walls.

About nine o'clock he said, "Now, boys, I expect the tug-boat will be down with that schooner. When the cap'n of the tug-boat has carried her through the channel, I will signal to him—he and I have an understanding about it—and he will come round and tow you up, I don't doubt. You might be a-watching for her smoke."

Soon Dab Richards, looking up the harbour, cried out, "Smoke! she's com-

ing!”

Yes, there was the tug-boat, throwing up a column of black smoke from her chimney, and behind her were the freshly-painted hull, and new, clean rigging of the lately launched schooner. The boys, save Dave, went to the *Relentless*, as the light-keeper said he would fix everything with the tug-boat, “make a bargain, and so on,” and Dave could hear the terms and accept them for the party if he wished. The light-keeper had also promised in his own boat to put Dave aboard the tug.

But what other tug-boat was it the boys on the *Relentless* saw steaming down the harbour? They stood in the bow and watched her approach.

“She looks as if she were going to run into us,” declared Dick.

“She certainly is pointing this way,” thought Johnny.

“Our friends may be alarmed for us,” was Dab’s suggestion.

This could not be, the other boys thought, and they dismissed it as a teasing remark by Dab. And yet the tug-boat was coming toward them like an arrow feathered with black smoke and shot out by a strong arm.

“It is certainly coming toward us,” cried Dick in alarm. Who was it his black eyes detected among the people leaning over the rail of the nearing tug-boat?

He looked again.

He took a third look.

“Boys,” he shouted, “put!”

How rapidly he rushed for a hatchway, descending an old ladder still in place and leading into the schooner’s hold! Fear is catching. Had Dick seen a policeman sent out in a special tug to hunt up the boys and secure the vessel? Johnny Richards flew after Dick. Jimmy Davis followed Johnny. Dab was quickly at the heels of Jimmy. Down into the dark, smelling hold, stumbling over the keelson, splashing into the bilge water, and frightening the rats, hurried the still more frightened boys.

“Who was it, Dick?” asked Dab.

“Keep still boys; don’t say anything.”

“Can’t you tell his name?” whispered Johnny.

There it was, down in the dark, that Dick whispered the fearful name. When the tug-boat, the *Leopard*, carrying Dave neared the schooner, the captain said, “You have another tug there. It is the *Panther*.”

The *Leopard* hated the *Panther*, and would gladly have clawed it out of shape and sunk it.

“I don’t understand why the *Panther* is there,” said Dave; “I really don’t know what it means.”

“You see,” said the master of the *Leopard* fiercely, “if that other boat is a goin’ to do the job, let her do it (he will probably cheat you). I can’t fool away

my time. The *Sally Jane* is waitin' up stream to be towed down, and I would like to get the job."

"We will soon find out what it means, sir. Just put me alongside the schooner."

"I will put my boat there, and you can jump out."

Who was it that Dave saw on the schooner's deck? Dave trembled at the prospect. He could imagine what was coming, and it came.

"Here, young man, what have you been up to? A precious set of young rascals to be running off with my property. I thought you said you would be particular. The state prison is none too good for you," said this unexpected and gruff personage.

"Squire Sylvester," replied Dave with dignity, "just wait before you condemn after that fashion; wait till you get the facts. I did try to be particular. I don't think it was intended when it was done; boys don't think, you know—"

"When what was done?"

"Why, the anchor lifted—weighed—"

"Anchor lifted!" growled Squire Sylvester. "What for?"

"Just to see it move, and have a little ride, I think."

"Have a little sail! Didn't you know, sir, it was exposing property to have a little sail?"

Here the squire silently levelled a stout red forefinger at this opprobrious wretch, this villain, this thief, this robber on the high seas, this—with what else did that finger mean to label David Fletcher?

"But the anchor was dropped again, and it was thought, sir, that it—that it would stop—"

"And the vessel did not stop! Might have guessed that, I should say. You got into deep water."

"We were going to hire the *Leopard* to tow it back, and any damages would have been paid. I am very sorry—"

"No apologies, young man. What's done is done. I have got a tug-boat to take the vessel back."

"And you don't want me?" here shouted the captain of the *Leopard*.

"Of course not," muttered the captain of the *Panther*, showing some white teeth in derision.

"I don't know anything about you," said Squire Sylvester to the captain of the *Leopard*; "this other party may settle with you."

"I'll pay any bill," said Dave to the *Leopard*, whose steam was escaping in a low growl.

"Can't waste any more time," snarled the *Leopard*. He rang the signal-bell to the engineer, and off went his tug.

"Well, where are your companions?" said Squire Sylvester to Dave.—"O Giles," he added to the *Panther*, "you may start up your boat if you have made fast to the schooner."

"Weigh the anchor fust, sir."

"Oh yes, Giles."

The anchor weighed, the *Panther* then sneezed, splashed, frothed, and the *Relentless* followed it. Squire Sylvester declared that he must find the other run-aways; that they must be on board the schooner, and he would hunt for them. He discovered them down in the hold, and out of the shadows crawled four sheepish, mortified hide-aways.

And so back to its moorings went the old schooner.

Back to his office went Squire Sylvester, mad with others, and mad with himself because mad with others.

Back to their homes went a shabby picnic party, and after them came a bill for the expense of the *Relentless's* return trip. It costs something in this life to find out that the thing easily started may not be the thing easily stopped.

IV.

WHAT WAS HE HERE FOR?

Bartie Trafton, *alias* Little Mew, was crouching behind a clump of hollyhocks in a little garden fronting the Trafton home. It was a favourite place of retreat when things went poorly with Little Mew. They had certainly gone unsatisfactorily one day not long after the sail that was not a sail. He had perpetrated a blunder that had brought out from Gran'sir Trafton the encouraging remark that he did not see what the boy was in this world for. Bartie had retreated to the hollyhock clump to think the situation over. He was ten years old, and life did have a hard look to Little Mew. He never supposed that his father cared much for him. When the father was ashore he was drunk; when he came to his senses, and was sober, then he went to sea. Bart sometimes wondered if his mother thought of him and knew how he was situated.

"She's up in heaven," thought Bart among the hollyhocks, and to Bart heaven was somewhere among the soft, white clouds, floating like the wings of big gulls far above the tops of the elms that overhung the roof of the house

and looked down upon this poor little unfortunate. If earth brought so little happiness, because bringing so little usefulness, then why was Bart on the earth at all?

"I don't see," he murmured.

The question was a puzzle to him. He was still looking up when he heard the voice of somebody calling.

"It is somebody at the fence," he said. It was a musical voice, and Bart wondered if his mother wouldn't call that way. He turned; and what a sweet face he saw at the fence!—a young lady with sparkling eyes of hazel, fair complexion, and cheeks that prettily dimpled when she laughed. He surely thought it must be his mother grown young and come back to earth again. There was some difference between that face, so picturesquely bordered with its summer hat, and the puzzled, irregular features under the old, ragged straw hat that Bart wore.

"Are you the little fellow I heard about that got into the water one day?" asked the young lady.

"Yes'm," said Bart, pleased to be noticed because he had been in the water, while thankful to be out of it.

"Well, I'm getting up a Sunday-school class, and I should like very much to have you in it. Would you like to come?"

"Yes'm," said Bart eagerly, "if—if granny and gran'sir would let me."

"Where are they? You let me ask them."

"She's got a lot of tunes in her voice," thought Bart, eagerly leading the young lady into the presence of granny and gran'sir.

They were in a flutter at the advent of so much beauty and grace, and gave a ready permission.

"Now, Bartie—that is your name, I believe—"

"Yes'm."

"I shall expect you next Sunday down at that brick church, Grace Church, just on the corner of Front Street."

"I know where it is."

"And one thing more. Do you suppose you could get anybody else to come?" asked the young lady.

"I'll try."

"That's right. Do so. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

Bart was puzzled to know whom to solicit for the Sunday school. Gran'sir was so much interested in the young lady that Bart concluded gran'sir would be willing to go if asked and if well enough; but Bart concluded that gran'sir was too old, and he said nothing. Sunday itself, on his way to the church, Bart saw a recruit. It was Dave Fletcher.

"Oh, you will go with me, won't you? I haven't anybody yet," he said eagerly.

"What do you mean?" replied the wondering Dave.

"Oh, go to Sunday school with me. I said I would try to bring some one."

Dave smiled, and Bart interpreted the smile as one half of an assent.

"Oh, do go! I said I would try. And she's real pretty."

"Who? your teacher?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is an inducement. But I am only going to be here a Sunday or two. My visit is almost over."

"Oh, well, it would please teacher."

Dave smiled again, and this Bart interpreted as the other half of the assent desired.

"Oh, I am so glad! I'll tell you where it is."

"W-e-l-l! It won't do any harm. I can go as visitor, and I suppose it would please my family—"

"Family?"

"My father and mother and sister, if they should know I had visited the Sunday school. Come along! We don't want to be late, you know. I'll be visitor, and perhaps they will want me to make a speech at the school. Ha! ha!"

Bart pulled Dave eagerly into the entry of the church, and then looked through the open door into the room where he knew the Sunday school met; for Bart had been a visitor once in that very same place.

"Oh, I see teacher," thought Bart, spying his friend in a seat not far from the door. Her back was turned toward him, but he had not forgotten the pretty summer hat with its fluttering ribbons of blue. Dave, with a smile, followed the little fellow, who was timorously conveying his prize to the waiting young lady. She looked up as Bart exclaimed, "Here, teacher! I've got one."

[image]

"Here, teacher! I've got a recruit." Page 63.

"Why, Dave," she exclaimed, "where did you come from?"

"Annie—this you?" he said. The two began to laugh. Bart in surprise looked at them.

"This is my sister, Bart," explained Dave. "Ha! ha!"

That beautiful young lady and the big boy who had saved him sister and brother? He might have guessed such a friend as Dave would have such a sister

as this nice young lady. She was visiting at Uncle Ferguson's.

"You see, Dave, when I began my visit I did not expect to teach while here; but I met the minister, Mr. Porter, and he said he wished I would start another class for him in his Sunday school and teach it while here, and I could not say no; and went to work, and have been picking up my class. I didn't happen to tell you."

The Rev. Charles Porter, at this time the clergyman at Grace Church, was an old friend of the Fletcher family. Meeting Annie in the streets of Shipton, and knowing what valuable material there was in the young lady, he desired to set her to work at once; and when her stay in town might be over, he could, as he said, "find a teacher, somebody to continue to open the furrow that she had started."

Dave enjoyed the situation.

"I will play that I am superintendent, Annie, and have come to inspect your class, and will sit here while you teach."

"I don't know about allowing you to stay here, sir, unless you become a member of the class and answer my questions, Dave."

Annie was relieved of the presence of this inspector; for a gentleman at the head of a class opposite, noticing a big boy among Annie's flock of little fellows, kindly invited Dave to sit with his older lads.

"I am Mr. Tolman," said the gentleman. "Make yourself at home among the boys."

"Thank you, sir," said Dave; and his sister, with a roguish smile, bowed him out of her class.

That Sunday was an eventful day to Little Mew. It was pleasant any way to be near this young lady, who seemed to him to be some beautiful being from a sphere above the human kind in which he moved. And then Bart was interested in the subject Annie presented. She talked about heaven and its people. She talked about God; but she did not make him that far-off being that Bart thought he must be, so that the louder people prayed the quicker they would bring him. She told how near he was, all about us, so that we could seem to hear his voice in the pleasant wind, and feel his touch in the soft, warm sunshine.

"But-but," said Bart, "he seems to be behind a curtain. I don't see him."

And then the teacher, her voice to Bart's ear playing a sweeter tune than ever, told how God took away the curtain; how he came in the Lord Jesus Christ; that the Saviour was the divine expression of God's love; and men could see that love going about their streets, coming into their homes, healing their sick, and then hanging on the cross that the world might be brought to God. Bart had been told all this before, but somehow it never got so near him.

"What she says somehow gets into me," thought Bart, looking up into the teacher's face. He thought he would like to ask her one question when he was

alone with her. The school was dismissed, and Bart lingered that he might walk away with the teacher.

"Could I ask you about something?" he said, trotting at her side and lifting his queer, oldish face towards her.

"Certainly; ask all the questions you want. I can't say that I can answer them, but there's no harm in asking them."

"Well, what am I in this world for?"

He said it so abruptly that it amused Annie.

"What are you in this world for?"

"Yes'm. I don't seem to amount to much."

Bart eagerly watched the face above him, that had suddenly grown serious; for Annie was thinking of the little fellow's home—of its unattractiveness, of the two old people there that seemed so uninteresting, especially the grandfather, who, as Annie recalled him, seemed to be only a compound of a whining voice, a gloomy face, a bad cough, and a clumsy cane. Then she recalled the slighting way in which she heard people speak of this odd little fellow, who seemed to be a figure out of place in life's problem; one who seemed to run into life's misfortunes, not waiting that they might run into him—one ill-adjusted and awry. Well, what should she say? She thought in silence. Then she stopped him, and looked down into his face.

Bart never forgot it. It was as if all of heaven's beautiful angels she had told about that day were looking at him through her face, and all of heaven's beautiful voices were speaking in her tones.

"Bart," she said, "the great reason why you are in this world is because—God loves you."

What? He wanted to think that over.

"Because what?" he said.

"Why, Bart," she said, "God is a Father—a great, dear Father."

Bart began to think he was; but he had been getting his idea of God through gran'sir's style of religion, and God seemed more like a judge or a big police-officer—catching up people and always marching them off to punishment.

"God is a great, dear Father," the tuneful voice was saying, "and he wants somebody to love him; and the more people he makes, the more there are to love him, or should be, and so he made you. But oh, if we don't love him, it disappoints and grieves him!"

"Does it?" said Bart, thoughtfully, soberly.

"When you are at home—alone, upstairs—you tell God how you feel about it, just as you would tell your mother—"

"Or teacher," thought Bart.

"As you would tell your mother if she were on the earth."

That day, all alone in his diminutive chamber, kneeling by a little bed whose clothing was all too scanty in cold weather, a boy told God he wanted to love him. When Bart rose from his knees he said to himself, "Now, I must try to love other people."

He went downstairs. Gran'sir was lying on a hard old lounge, making believe that he was trying to read his Bible, and at the same time he was very sleepy. Bart hesitated, and then said,--

"Gran'sir, don't you--you--want me to get you a pillow and put under your head?"

"Oh, that's a nice little boy!" said the weary old grandfather, when his head dropped on the soft pillow now covering the hard arm of the lounge.

"And, gran'sir, I ain't much on readin'; but perhaps, if you'd let me, I might read something, you know."

"Oh, that's a dear little feller," said gran'sir, closing his eyes, so old and tired. He had been trying to read about Jacob and the angels at Beth-el; but the lounge was so tough that the feature of the story gran'sir seemed to appreciate most sensibly was that Jacob slept on a pillow of stones. I can't say how much of the story, as Bart read it, gran'sir heard that day, for he was soon as much lost to the outside world as tired Jacob was. He had, though, a beautiful dream, he afterwards told granny. Yes; in his sleep he seemed to see the ladder with its shining, silver rounds, climbing the sky, and on them were so many angels, oh, so many angels!

"And, granny," whispered gran'sir, "I was a little startled, for one of them angels seemed to have Bartie's face. I hope nothin' is goin' to happen, for I am beginnin' to think we should miss that little chap ever so much."

V.

THE LIGHTHOUSE.

"You say this is your last Sunday at Shipton. Sorry! We shall miss you in the class," said Dave's new Sunday-school acquaintance, Mr. Tolman.

"Thank you, sir," replied Dave; "but as this is only my second Sunday in your class, you won't miss me much."

"Oh yes, we shall. See here, David. There is going to be some company at

my house to-morrow night. Bring your sister round to tea."

Dave and Annie were at Mr. Tolman's the evening of the next day; and who was it Dave saw trying to shrink into one corner? A stout, fat man, altogether too big for the corner.

"He looks natural," thought Dave.

At this point the man saw Dave. He had been looking very lonely, but his face now brightened as if he had suddenly seen an old and valued acquaintance.

"Think you don't remember me!" he said, advancing toward Dave, and extending a large brown hand shaped something like a flounder. Dave thought at once of a lighthouse, a sand-bar, and an old schooner halting on the bar.

"Oh, the light-keeper, Mr. Tolman!" cried Dave. "You here?"

"It is my uncle from Black Rocks," said the younger Mr. Tolman, stepping up to this party of two. "Uncle Toby doesn't get off very often from the light, and we thought he ought to have a little vacation, and come and see his relatives."

"My nephew James is very good," said Mr. Toby Tolman. "The last time I saw you," he added, addressing Dave, "I put you on board that tug-boat."

Dave dropped his head.

"Oh, you needn't be ashamed of that affair. I didn't think at the time you could be the cause of the mischief, and I've been told since who it was that was to blame for it."

Dave raised his head.

"Fact is I've been a-thinking of you. Want a job, young man?"

"Me, sir? I expect to go home to-morrow."

"Got to return for anything special?"

"Well, my visit is out."

"Nothing special to call you home?"

"Oh, I help father, and go to school when there is one."

"Well," said the old light-keeper, fixing his eyes on the boy, "how should you like to help to keep a lighthouse for three weeks?"

"Me?" said Dave eagerly.

"Yes, you. You know I have an assistant, Timothy Waters. He wants to be off on a vacation for three weeks, and I must have somebody to take his place. I want somebody who can work in there, sort of spry and handy. Now, I think you would do. How should you like it?"

"When do you want to know?"

"The last of this week."

"I will go home to-morrow and talk it over with the folks, and I can get you an answer by day after to-morrow."

"Yes, that will do."

Dave went home, obtained the consent of his parents, and the boat that

brought Timothy Waters to Shipton to begin his vacation took back to the lighthouse Dave Fletcher and his trunk. It was the light-keeper, Mr. Toby Tolman, who brought the former assistant to Shipton, and then accompanied Dave to Black Rocks. It was a mild summer day. The wind seemed too lazy to blow, and the sea too lazy to roll. There were faint little puffs of air at intervals, and along the bar and the shore the low surf turned slowly over as if weary. The light-tower and its red annex the fog-signal tower rose up out of one sea of blue into another of gold, and then above this sea of sunshine rolled another of blue again, where the white-sailed clouds seemed to be all becalmed. It was low tide, and the light-keeper's dory brushed against the exposed masses of the ledge, weed-matted and brown, on which the lighthouse rested.

"This looks like home to me," said the keeper, when they had climbed the ladder and gained the door in the fog-signal tower. When they entered the light-tower the keeper detained Dave and said, "I want to tell you something about my home here on the rocks. There, this tower is about seventy feet high. It is built as strong as they can make stone masonry. This is the first room. We keep various stores here. Do you see this?"

Mr. Tolman with his foot tapped a round iron cover in the floor and then raised it.

"Down here is the tank where we keep our fresh water."

The iron cover went down with a dull slam; and then he pointed out various stores in the room—vegetables, wood, coal, and a quantity of hand-grenades (glass flasks filled with a chemical, to be used in putting out fires).

"How thick are the walls here, Mr. Tolman?"

"Four feet here of stone, solid; and then there is an inner wall of brick, foot and a half thick. Now we will go up into the kitchen. You saw those hand-grenades of ours. Precious little here that will burn. You see the stairways from room to room are of iron, and then every floor has an iron deck covered with hard pine. Ah, my fire is still in!"

Yes, the kitchen stove had guarded well its fire, and the heat of the room was tempered by a mild, cool draught of air that came through an opened window from the flashing sea without. Besides a softly-cushioned rocking-chair near the stove, there were three chairs ranged near a small dining-room table, and their language was, "You will find a welcome here." Clock, looking-glass, cupboard, lamp-shelf, and other conveniences were in the room.

"Let's take a peep at the next room," said the keeper.

Again they climbed an iron staircase, and reached a bedroom. Besides a single bed, there were a clothes-closet, three green chairs, a green stand, a gilt-framed looking-glass, and on the wall several pictures of sea-life. The floor was covered with oil-cloth, and directly before the bed was a rag mat that had a very

domestic look.

"There—this is my room; and now we will go up into the assistant's, your quarters. We will bring up your trunk directly," said the keeper. This room was furnished like the keeper's, only it had two chairs, and before the bed was a strip of woollen carpet.

"I can put my trunk anywhere, I suppose, Mr. Tolman?"

"Anywhere you please."

"Mother gave me a few pictures, too, that she said I could stick up, to make it look homelike."

"Just what I like to have you do. Now for the watch-room."

This was at the head of another iron stairway, and held a small table, a library-case, a green chest, two chairs, and a closet for the keeping of curtains that might be used in the lantern, and other useful apparatus.

"This room is where we can sit and watch the lantern," explained the keeper.

"And what is this?" asked Dave, pointing at a weight that hung down from the ceiling.

"That weight? It is a part of the machinery that turns round the lens in the lantern. Now, let us go up into the lantern."

The lantern was a circular room. The walls were of iron, up to the height of three feet, and cased with wood, and then there was a succession of big panes of the clearest glass, making a broad window that extended about all the lantern. In the centre was a lens of "the fourth order," shaped like a cone, and consisting of very strong magnifying prisms of glass. Within this lens was a kerosene-lamp.

"There!" said Mr. Tolman; "all this tower of stone, all the arrangements of the place, all the serving of the keeper and his assistant, all the doing by day and the watching by night, is just to keep that little lamp a-going. Put out the lamp at night, and you might just as well send the keepers home and tear down the lighthouse."

"It is not so big a lamp as I supposed."

"No; that is a small lamp for so big a light as folks outside see. It is this lens that does the work of magnifying."

"Can I step outside, sir? I wanted to when we were down here that night, but we did not have so good a chance for looking about."

"Oh yes."

Outside of the lantern was a "deck," about six feet broad, and compassing the lantern. It was a shelf of stone covered with iron.

"Good view here," said the keeper.

"Yes; nothing to hide the prospect," replied Dave. "There is Shipton up beyond the harbour, and there is the sea in the other direction."

Only sea, sea, sea, to north, south, east—one wide, restless play of blue

water.

"The wind must blow up here sometimes, Mr. Tolman."

"Blow! That is a mild word for it; and in winter it is cold. It is no warm job when we have to scrape the snow and ice off the lantern. Folks outside must see, and it is our place to let them see."

When the keeper and Dave returned to the kitchen, preparations for dinner were started, and then Mr. Tolman said, "We have a few minutes to spare, and I guess we will take up our boat."

"Take it up?"

"Well, if it should promise to be a quiet day I could moor it near the light; but, of course, in rough weather, when everything is tumbling round the rocks, I had better have it h'isted into a safe place. I'll show you."

"Isn't it going to be quiet?" asked Dave eagerly. "I'd like to see a storm out here."

"Better see it than feel it, I tell ye. I don't know but that it will be fair," said the keeper, at the door of the fog-signal tower, looking out upon the water, while a light breeze gently lifted and dropped the thin gray locks on his brow. "May be fair, but still—still—I don't know. A bit hazy in the no'th-east."

"Oh, if it would storm!" said Dave enthusiastically.

The keeper smiled at his eagerness, and said: "I think you'll have your wish before you get through; and it's a tough place out here in a storm, the wind howling round the light, the big breakers thundering and smashing along the bar, the spray flying up to the lantern, or, if there is a fog, the old fog-horn screeching dismally. What do you think of it? That don't suit you, does it?"

"Oh, splendidly!"

"Well, we will get the boat up. You see we have 'tackle and falls' right here at the door, rigged overhead, you see, and we can get up 'most anything. If you will go down and make the boat fast, we will then raise her."

Dave descended, attached the boat at her stern and bows to the suspended tackle, and returned to the keeper's side. Then they pulled on the ropes. The boat came readily up, and hung opposite the door of the fog-signal tower.

"Now we are all right," declared Dave. "This is a fortress where we have a boat, and can go off if we wish, but no enemy can get to us."

All this increased the keeper's pleasure in witnessing the eagerness of Dave. At dinner the keeper rehearsed his duties, and added,—

"May not seem as if there was much to be done, but to keep everything in good condition it takes some time, and then there may be fogs—oh my!"

This made Dave, of course, none the less anxious to hear the big breakers booming against the lighthouse, and as an accompaniment the fog-horn moaning hoarsely. The keeper gave Dave his course of duties during the day; and while

they despatched dinner he told Dave also about a heavy storm just "ten years ago that very day." And this only fired up Dave's anxiety to see what the keeper termed "a howler."

"Don't you feel lonely here sometimes, sir?"

"Well, we get used to almost everything. I am only lonely when my assistant is away; and if I am occupied, then loneliness don't bother me much. I am generally pretty busy. By sunrise my light must be out in the lantern. I must make a trip upstairs for that, any way. Then there is breakfast. People's appetites are apt to be pretty good out here, and sometimes it is no small job just to do the cooking. I believe in living well—in having plenty to eat, and in having a variety. After breakfast, first thing, Timothy and I have prayers—same as folks do at home, you know. Then we look after the lantern. That takes time—to trim the lamp, keep the lens clean, and see that the windows of the lantern are polished bright. Then in the forenoon I do my baking—bread, cake, and so on. Well, if the fog should set in, that would upset other arrangements, and we must watch the fog-signal. Oh, there is a lot to be done! Noon comes before one knows it. In the afternoon I like to get a little time to read; but then it may be foggy, or one must go to town, or perhaps the town may come to us. I have a good many visitors in summer-time. That makes a pleasant change."

"How do you manage at night?"

"We relieve one another. One is on watch till twelve, and the other takes his turn till sunrise. I will make it as easy for you as I can, and—"

"Oh, I can stand it."

"Well, we will see. But speaking about daytime, one must make up then for the sleep he loses at night. So you see the hours are filled up. I read in the night considerable. I am going to propose one thing. You will find some valuable books up in the library-case in the watch-room. I want you to select one and read it. I have been astonished to see how much I could read by keeping at it sort of steady, as we say; giving myself a stint perhaps every day, and sticking to it. Hadn't you better try it?"

"I think I will."

Dave noticed that the light-keeper was very particular to have prayers each morning directly after breakfast, and then at some other time during the day he would be likely to be bending over his Bible. It was an impressive sight. The ocean might be rolling the heavy breakers across the bar as if driving heavy, white-headed battering-rams toward the land. Against the tower itself the ponderous billows would throw themselves, and sweep in a crashing torrent between the light and fog-signal towers. Within, in the sheltered kitchen, the light-keeper would sit at his table bending over his Bible, his countenance at rest as the shadow

of God's great protecting promises fell over him.

VI.

FOG.

"Here are some letters for you," said the light-keeper, returning from Shipton one noon and handing Dave a package of letters.

"This is a funny-looking one," thought Dave. "It is not written, but printed. Somebody sent it that did not know how to write. Let me see what it says:-

"DEAR DAVIE I THOUGHT I WOULD WRITE YOU A LITTLE AND SAY I AM WELL AND HOPE YOU ARE GRANSIR IS BETTER BECAUSE I READ TO HIM HE SAYS I LIKE MY TEACHER SHE IS YOUR SISTER SHE SAYS SHE MAY TAKE ME TO THE LIGHTHOUSE AND I WOULD LIKE TO COME I SHALL PRAY FOR YOU WHEN THE STORMS COME AND EVERY DAY YOUR TRUE FRIEND
"BARTHOLOMEW TRAFTON."

Dave was so much pleased with this communication that he read it to the light-keeper.

"Dave, I wish you would invite your sister and her friends to come down here. Ask those boys who were with you in the schooner."

"That would be pleasant. Thank you."

"I will try to make it interesting for them."

"Oh, I wish you would do one thing."

"What is that?"

"Tell us what you know about lighthouses."

"Well, let me think. There is one thing I could do. I have in my drawer an account of lighthouses I have written off at spare moments, just to keep me busy, you know, and I could read that."

"I think we would all like that very much."

"All right; let us plan for a visit."

"I think you have had some visitors since you have been here that you did

not plan for.”

”Yes, indeed; and they may come any time, just as your party surprised me. Sometimes, though near me, they may not get to me. I was saying the first day you came here it was the tenth anniversary of a great storm. It was a foreign vessel, a Norwegian bark. The vessel struck on the bar—”

”Couldn’t they see the light?”

”The fog was very thick, so that they couldn’t have got much warning from the light. The first thing to do now in a fog, of course, is to start the signal. But we had none then—only an old bell I used to strike; but when the wind was to south’ard it carried away from the bar the sound of the bell. This was a southerly storm, and such storms are not likely to be long, but they may blow very hard while they do last. I heard the storm roaring through the night; and when I looked out in the morning, there was this vessel just on the bar! Oh, what a tumult she was in! Such a raging of the waves all around that vessel! I always go off to the help of people if I can reach them; but there was no reaching that vessel with a boat. Yes, I could see them and they could see me in the morning, when the fog lifted, but there was no getting from one to the other. I could see them clinging to the rigging, hanging there as long as the waves would let them. I would watch some immense sea—and they roll up big in a storm, I tell ye—come rushing at the vessel, rolling over it, completely burying the deck. After such seas some one would be missing. I never want to see that sight again. There they were dying, and I couldn’t get anywhere near them! The vessel did not break up at once. She was there the next day, and I went to her, and others went, but we found nobody aboard. I think they saved part of her cargo; but the waves pounded her up fearfully, and carried off many things of her cargo. One by one they came ashore. It did touch me one day, when I was down on the rocks fishing, near the lighthouse at low tide, to see something floating on the water. ’Why, that is a box,’ I said. We are all curious, you know, and I wondered what was in that box. I went to the lighthouse, got a long pole, and reached the box and brought it ashore. I’ll show it to you if you would like to see it.”

”I would, very much.”

”I have always kept it here, for it seems to belong to the lighthouse rather than anywhere else. Here it is.”

He went to the closet in the kitchen, and reaching up to the highest shelf, took down a box of sandalwood. It was an elaborately carved piece of work, and had served among the articles for a lady’s toilet. When the light-keeper opened it Dave saw two handkerchiefs, a hair-brush, a comb, and there was also a man’s picture. Dave looked with interest at this relic washed up out of the buried secrets of the sea, and still keeping its own secret there in the light-keeper’s kitchen.

”Did you ever get any clue to the ownership of this, Mr. Tolman?” asked

Dave.

"Let me tell you of one strange thing that happened about a year ago. One night I was very sure I heard a cry out on the bar. The waves make so much noise that it is hard to hear anybody if they do shout; but sometimes when the sea is still you can hear a call. Said I to Waters, 'Timothy, I hear a hollering.' Said he, 'I think I hear it myself. Let us go to the door and listen.' We were both in the kitchen, you know. 'Twas the fore part of the evening, though dark. Sure enough, at the door we could hear somebody shout. 'Timothy,' said I, 'that is a plain case. Let's launch the boat.' So off we put. The person kept hollering and we kept rowing. There on the bar we found a man. Crazy he acted, and he couldn't tell much about himself—how he got there, or where his boat was. He was not sober. On our way to the light what should we run into but a boat. 'Here is the rest of him,' whispered Timothy. We took him and his boat to the light. How we got him up the ladder I don't know, but we tied a rope round him, and drew him, and shoved him, and somehow got him into the lighthouse. The next morning he was entirely sober. Of course he was very much ashamed, but he could not give any account of himself, only that he had been in a boat and had trouble. Well, for some reason I had that box down from the shelf that morning he left, and I had been looking at it. He saw it. He started as if the box had struck him. He stepped up to it softly, looked into it, and said, with an amazed look as I ever saw on a person, 'Where—where—did you get it?' 'It floated from a wreck off here.' 'Anybody ever claim it?' 'Never,' I said; 'but I am ready to give it up to any claimant.' 'Well,' said he, 'if anybody comes and claims it, you give it up; but if not, don't part with it till you hear from me.' I asked him what he meant; but he would make no explanation, only repeating his request. He was very grateful for what we had done, and I took the liberty to say in a proper way that he must take warning, or he would be wrecked on a bar where there would be no saving. He burst into tears, thanked me, said he knew he was a great fool, and left in his boat. We watched him, and saw him row to a vessel lying at anchor in the harbour. Then we guessed he had been ashore the day before in the ship's boat, and got into mischief. I told Timothy we would find out about the vessel; but a fog came up and kept us here. She slipped out to sea as much a stranger as ever. Fishermen afterwards told us it was a vessel that ran in for shelter.

"From that day to this I have never heard about the man. Sometimes I think it was a foreigner; again I fancy it is somebody at Shipton, but I could not say. I am there very little to know about people; and Timothy couldn't tell about it. He don't belong to Shipton. There is the box. Pretty, isn't it?"

Dave nodded a yes.

"Mr. Tolman, could you tell the man if you should see him again?" asked Dave.

"Could I? yes, indeed."

"How did he look? What was the colour of his hair, his eyes; and how was he dressed?"

"Now—you will think it strange—I can't tell any of his features or what clothes he wore, and yet if I should see him I don't believe I should miss him. I could tell him by the look of his eyes—a look that somehow appealed to me—a look without hope. Often when at night I see the froth on the bar in the moon-light, I seem to hear that man calling to me, and I take it as a sign that he is still in a worse fix than if on the bar. It is an awful curse, rum, and I am a sworn foe to it."

Here the light-keeper placed the sandal-wood box again on its shelf, and Dave turned to look out of the window near the kitchen table.

"See here, Mr. Tolman; what's that?"

"Where?"

"Floating and curling over that point!"

"Can't you guess?"

"Looks like fog! Yes, I can see now plainly. Oh, can we start up the fog-signal?"

"Wait a while. When the fog is so thick that you can't see Breakers P'int, then we start the fog-signal. That is the sign in that direction. On the other side of the lighthouse it is Jones's Neck that must be hidden. I guess both the P'int and the Neck will be covered this time. I must start the fire in the engine and have everything ready, at any rate. Let us go into the fog-signal tower."

Dave was delighted.

"I suppose, Mr. Tolman, people like to hear the signal?"

"Yes, if in a fog. They want to know which way to go. Even fishermen about here, who are supposed to know the way about the harbour, may be bothered by the fog; but people just off for pleasure may be bothered a good deal."

"See here! Isn't the fog lifting round Jones's Neck, Mr. Tolman?"

Dave was looking out of a window in the tower, and Mr. Tolman joined him.

"You are right; and Breakers P'int is clear too. We will hold on then, have everything ready, you know, for the fog may shut down suddenly."

Dave continued to look out of the window.

"Coming again!" he cried to the light-keeper, who had kept up his fires in the engine-room, but had gone for a few minutes to the kitchen. "Fog is round Breakers Point and Jones's Neck!"

Yes: like an immense gray sponge the mist had once more advanced, wiping out the vessels slowly sailing into harbour, the far outlying points of land, and now erased an islet called the Nub, mingling all in one confusing cloud.

"All right," said the light-keeper; "we will start the signal."

There was the driving of a stout piston; there was the stirring of a big wheel; there was the movement of other machinery; and there was finally—"What a noise overhead!" thought the listening Dave. It seemed as if five thousand bees all buzzing at once, twenty-five thousand crickets all shrilly piping at once, and fifty thousand wood-sawyers all sawing at once, had combined their noises and were forcing all through the flaming fog-trumpet above. For ten seconds Dave held his fingers in his ears. Then there was a blessed stillness, save as the play of the machinery interrupted it.

"What do you think of that?" asked Mr. Tolman, grinning broadly. "Some lung power left in it yet."

"Lung power! They can hear that down to the Cape of Good Hope. One is enough for both sides of the ocean."

"Want another? Time is 'most up. Here she goes!"

She went.

"Toot-buzz-boom-whiz-fizz-z-z-bim-m-m-m!"

Among the breakers tumbling on the sandy shores, along the face of weather-beaten island-edges, down amid the waves and up in the clouds echoed the sharp, strong, fog-piercing, ear-cutting blast. And wherever it went it said, "Of fog I warn-n-n-n!" for ten seconds.

In one of the intervals of rest Dave remarked, "Now that must be kept up as long as the fog lasts?"

"Of course."

"Doesn't it get tiresome?"

"Well, that's how you take it. I was told of a lighthouse where the signal was going twenty-one days."

"Day after day! Just think of it!"

"Well, there is this side of it: off on the water there is somebody bewildered by the mist, perplexed day after day, it may be, and they catch the sound of the signal. Oh, ain't that good news? That's what makes me contented at it. I have sometimes wished I was a musician, and could please others by my playing; but I tell you I have stood by this old engine dark, rainy, foggy nights, and oh, I have been so happy starting up and sending out this old whistle. There it is!"

"Toot-buzz-boom-whiz-bim-m-m-m!"

"Somebody heard that, you may believe, and somebody, too, more pleased than if I had been a whole band of music, and had sent out just the sweetest tune."

The light-keeper stood by the tugging engine and wiped the perspiration from his brow, and his big, rosy face was as happy as that of a school-boy going off on a long vacation.

"Hark! what is that? Sounds like a bell," said Dave.

"It is the bell-buoy at Sunk Rock. We only hear that when the wind is blowing off the sea."

"Didn't hear it before."

"Wind hasn't been just right to hear it loud. I have caught it since you came; but then I am used to its sound, and can tell it easily."

"I must see it."

"Oh, we shall have a chance, I guess."

The fog-signal had been shrieking away an hour, and Dave heard another sound.

"That isn't a bell I hear now," he said.

"Well, no; that's a hollering."

Was it a cry from the lighthouse tower or a cry outside of it? a cry from what quarter? Dave looked out of a window near him. He could see only fog above and waves below.

"I will go down to the door and try to see who or what it is," said Dave, "for there is that cry again."

He descended to the door of the tower and looked down through the hole in the platform. Then he saw a dory tossing in the water that now flowed all about the tower, swashing against its iron walls. There was a boy in the boat. He was not looking up, but clinging to a rope stretched for purposes of mooring from the tower to a sunken rock forty feet away. Steadying his boat by this rope, he was waiting for some response to his repeated calls.

"Hullo, there!" shouted Dave.

The boy looked up, still grasping the rope.

"That you, Dave?"

"Yes. That you, Dick? Where did you come from?"

"Yes, Dick Pray, and nobody else."

"Won't you come up?"

"Well, yes, I should like to, but the water is uneasy. Can't get out of my boat."

"Hold on; I will come down and help you." He stepped within the tower and reported, "Mr. Tolman, this fog has brought somebody."

"Don't wonder at it. Give him any help he needs."

"I want a short rope."

"There's one hanging on that nail."

Dave took the rope, went to the door of the tower, and descended the ladder.

"Here, Dick! Take your painter and tie it to that mooring-rope, allowing enough slack to bring your boat almost to the tower and yet not touch it. There! if that length isn't right you can try it again. Now catch this rope and make fast to the stern there. So! That's it! Now I'll pull you in."

Dave drew on his end of the rope, and pulled Dick's boat so near the ladder that Dick could spring to it, and yet the boat itself was left to swing in the waves while it could not strike the tower.

"I'll just make fast my end of the rope, Dick, and we will go up the ladder."

"All right. Glad to get out of that old boat and go up with you."

"Why, where under the sun and moon have you been?"

"Me? Been camping out on the Nub."

"You haven't!"

"But I have."

"That your tent over there?"

"Mine and Sam Whittles's."

"Tolman and I noticed it to-day for the first time. How long have you been there?"

"Long enough to eat you or Toby Tolman—you may draw lots for the honour—if you don't give me some food."

"Oh, we will soon give you that. Among other things I will give you some fish. Got some splendid cunners, and I will divide with you."

"Good! I could eat 'em raw. Hungry as a shark. Sam is hungrier. I don't know as he will wait for me, but throw himself into the water and go after the fish himself."

"O Dickie, we will make you feel like a new being. Come in and see Tolman. He is a splendid old fellow. Come in this way."

The boys went up into the engine-room.

"An old acquaintance, Mr. Tolman," said Dave.

"I see, I see," replied the light-keeper, recognizing Dick as one of the schooner party.

"Whiz-bim-fizz—"

"It sounded splendid out at Shag Rocks," shouted Dick to the light-keeper.

"You been there?" inquired Mr. Tolman.

"Yes; and this old fog came up and confused me, and I didn't know where I was, and I heard the signal and I put for it," said Dick.

"Out there fishing?"

"Yes, sir; or—I wanted to fish, but didn't catch a fin."

"Shag Rocks you went to?"

"Yes, sir; two ledges with a strip of sand between them."

"Oh, those are 'Spectacle Rocks,' as the fishermen say. They look like a pair of spectacles. You wouldn't catch much there. Shag Rocks are to the nor'ard."

"Well, I'm willing they should stay there."

"Next time, you come here. Splendid chance off this very ledge; Black Rocks, as we call them."

"That would be wise, I think."

"Well, make yourself at home.—Dave, you give him something to eat."

"I thought I would let him have some of those cunners to take with him."

"So do, but give him something now.—And you don't want to go back in this fog?"

"Well, I'd rather have clear weather if I have got to find the Nub," said Dick.

The fog, though, refused to clear up that day, and Dick remained all night.

"I pity Sam," he told Dave; "but he has got a teapot, and he must live on that till morning. I'll give him a surprise to-morrow, I tell you. I will throw my line into the water off these rocks here, and carry to camp a string of fish worth having. I'll open Sam's eyes for him."

Dick, though, overslept his intended hour of rising. It was Dave who came rushing into the assistant-keeper's room, where Dick had been sleeping, and he cried, "Dick, Dick! there is a furious shouting for you. Two men and a young fellow are down in a boat at the foot of the tower, and want you."

"I'll be there directly," said Dick, springing out of his bed. He dressed quickly, and rushed down to the door of the signal-tower. Looking below, he exclaimed, "That you, Sam Whittles?"

"Yes. Where have you been? Didn't sleep a wink last night. Thought you were drowned and everything else. Got these two fishermen who came along to pull me here in their boat. Come, boy, come home!"

"Fury!" said Dick in his thoughts. "Won't—won't you come up?" he asked aloud. "I was going to surprise you, take you some fish, and so on."

"Fish!" said Sam contemptuously; "these men will sell it to me by the acre."

"Squar mile, ef he wants it," said one of these piscatory individuals, looking up and grinning.

"Won't you all come up?" asked Dave Fletcher.

"Can't, thank you," said Sam. "Just throw that Jonah overboard, and we will go home."

"Jonah" said it was "too bad," and stole down the ladder, feeling worse than on the day he returned in the runaway schooner.

VII.

THE CAMP AT THE NUB.

Two days later the light-keeper gave Dave a holiday, that he might spend a day at the Nub. Dick Pray came after him, and as he rowed off from the lighthouse he called out to the keeper, who stood in the tower door, "Don't worry about your assistant. I will bring him home after dinner. Get here by four."

The keeper nodded his head. He said to himself, "May be; but if I don't see a boat starting off from the Nub by a quarter of four, I shan't leave it to you to bring him, but go myself for him. You are great on what you are going to do; I like the kind that does."

It was a pleasant boat-ride to the Nub.

"Welcome!" shouted several young men in chorus as Dick's dory neared the shore of the Nub. They stood on a broad, flat stone, for which the rock-weed had woven a brown mat, and on the crown of the ledge behind them rose a tent tipped with a dirty flag.

"Hurrah!" responded Dick.

"Hurrah!" shouted Dave.

"I thought, Dick," said Dave, "only Sam Whittles was here."

"Oh, these fellers came down last night. Just to spend a couple of days, you know."

"Who are they?"

"Oh, Jimmy Dawes, I believe, and there's Steve Pettigrew and a Keese Junkins."

Dave's feelings of like and dislike were very quick in their operation, and he now said to himself, "Don't fancy those specimens!"

They were showily rather than tastefully dressed, strutted about with a self-important air, and their talk was loud, coarse, and slangy.

"Who is that little fellow?" asked Dave, noticing a small boy in the rear of the tent.

"Oh, that is a kind of servant they brought down with them. He came down, and waits on them just for his board. He is a queer chap, and makes fun for us all. We call him Dovey. Don't know what his real name is. Splendid place here for camp!"

"Tolman doesn't like it; says you can't get on or off easy."

"O Dave, Tolman is an old fogey. But here we are."

The boat was bumping against the landing-rock, and Dick and Dave disembarked amid a chorus of "How are ye?" "Step ashore!" and other friendly salutations. So cordial were these that Dave's dislike was put to sleep, and he said to himself, "They are pleasant. Good-hearted, I daresay."

The tent within was an assortment of bedding, camp-chests, old clothes, and provisions, all mixed up in great confusion. Dave thought the outside of the tent would be more agreeable than the inside, which was clouded with tobacco

smoke. He took a seat without, and looked off upon the sea. It was a vivid summer day. All the colouring of nature was very bright and sharp. The sky was very blue; the clouds were very white; the water was very dark, and the foam of the breakers white as the flakes scattered by the storms of January. Dick and the others were discussing plans for dinner. As Dave sat alone, watching the white sails slowly drifting across the distant sea, a light hand was laid on his shoulder by some one who had stepped up behind him. It was not a big, coarse hand, but a gentle pressure such as a child might make.

"Oh, it is the boy Dick told about," thought Dave; "it's that Dovey." He looked up, and to his surprise there was Little Mew!

"Why, Bartie, you down here?" exclaimed Dave, turning and looking with interest at the small, twisted features of Bartholomew Trafton.

"Yes; and I am glad to see you. Did you get my letter?"

Bart had seated himself beside Dave, and rested his hand on Dave's knee as if he were a little boat gladly tying up to a friendly pier.

[image]

"Bart seated himself beside Dave and rested his hand on his knee."

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"Yes, I got your letter, and it was a very nice one. There is a party, too, coming down to the lighthouse, and I thought you might be in it. My sister will be one, I expect."

"Teacher?"

"Yes; and Mr. James Tolman, my teacher when I was in the school, is going to bring them."

"Oh, I wish I could go. I don't like it here."

As he spoke he turned his head and looked about as if to make sure that no one heard him save Dave.

"Well, how did you come here?"

"Reese Junkins," said Bartie, again looking back. "He lives near us. He came to the house and told gran'sir and granny they wanted a boy to go with them and just wait in the tent, and he would look after me, and I might like it. But I don't like it."

Here if his eyes had been straight, and Dave had followed their glance, he would have noticed that Bartie was looking at a basket of bottles near a rear corner of the tent.

"I don't like to be with such people; they make too much noise."

He bravely concealed the fact that they made fun of him, though his soul was vexed and torn by their unkind jokes.

"Well, you know Dick."

"Yes; but he has forgotten me. He only saw me that day."

That day meant the time of the rescue from the water. Dave looked into the face turned trustingly toward his own.

"Don't you worry, Bartie; I will look after you."

The boy looked up so gratefully, and the hand on Dave's knee pressed harder. The little boat rejoiced to have found such good moorings.

About half-past three Dave said to Dick, "I think I must be going, if you can row me across. You know I said I would be back by four, and I shall be needed at the light."

"All right," replied Dick.

"Going?" called out Sam. "Don't hurry."

"Thank you; but I think I must be starting," said Dave.

"Don't go!"

This last was a timid, pitiful voice.

Dave turned, and there was Little Mew.

"Oh, I must go, Bartie. You see I said I would go back this afternoon, and the keeper will look for me at the light."

"Oh take me!" he begged aside.

"You really want to go—really, Bartie?"

"Oh yes; I'll ask them."

Bart turned to Dick and Sam, and asked if he could go to the lighthouse.

"We have no objection," they said.

"Very well," said Dave, who saw the place was a prison for the little fellow.

But what did it mean that Steve, Billy, and Reese leaned against the boat, and looked sullen as a fog-bank on the horizon?

"You can't have this boat!" muttered Steve.

"But it's one I borrowed," shouted Dick angrily. "Hands off! This fellow is my company, and he shall be treated as he ought to be."

"We will row him over ourselves in the morning, or—or—maybe—we will spill him out half-way across. Ha! ha!"

Billy's tone was sarcastic and offensive.

"No, you won't!" said Dave, who, indignant beyond the power to quietly state his feeling, had remained silent. "Somebody's coming after me."

"What?" said Reese in amazement, looking toward Black Rocks.

"Who's a-coming?"

They all looked off and saw a dory advancing from the direction of the lighthouse.

"That's Tolman, the light-keeper!" explained Dick.

"Who cares for Tolman, the light-keeper?—Boy," said Billy Dawes, turning to Dave and shaking a dirty fist insultingly, "we don't want anything to do with you."

"You may be glad to have my help," replied Dave.

"No help from babies. Remember that," said Billy.

Dave's face was red with wrath. What would he do? He was in no danger, for close at hand was Toby Tolman, a champion of no mean size, and the rowdies stupidly gazed at him rowing his boat with all the ease of a strong, skilled oarsman.

"All ready!" exclaimed Dave, advancing to meet the light-keeper's boat. "Good-bye, Dick."

"Oh—oh—take me!" sobbed Bart.

"What does that booby want?" asked Reese.

"He wants to go to the lighthouse," explained Sam.

"Well, let him go," replied Reese. "He has been a bother ever since he came."

With what joy Bart's small legs wriggled over the side of the keeper's dory!

"This little fellow, in whom I am interested, wants to go, if you will let him," said Dave to the light-keeper; "and he can go to Shipton with the party expecting to come down, you know, to visit us."

"All right; and tumble in yourself, Dave."

"Here I am!" replied Dave. "Let me push off!"

Toby Tolman's boat was quickly rising and falling with the sea that rocked about the Nub, and the departure was watched in an amazed, ignoble silence by the three rowdies leaning against Dick's boat.

"I am so much obliged to you for coming," said Dave to the keeper, "though I did not mean to trouble you. Things were rather squally at the Nub, and you came just in time. I will tell you about it."

When Dave had given his story, the light-keeper, resting on his oars, exclaimed, "There! I guessed as much. I didn't feel easy about you. That Dick is a well-meaning boy, I don't doubt; but when I found out that Sam Whittles was with him, I guessed what kind of a camp they would have at the Nub, and it seems my guess was about right.—And this little lamb?"

Bart's eyes brightened at this pitying title; the appellatives bestowed upon him had generally been of a different nature.

It was a happy party that went into the lighthouse after the trip from the Nub.

"Oh, isn't this nice!" cried Bart, as he entered the kitchen. The sense of peaceful, safe seclusion, the warm fire in the kitchen stove, above all, the protecting friends near him, made the place seem like—Bart whispered to himself what he thought it must be like—"heaven!"

When he thought of the Nub he shuddered.

What a happy boy it was that tumbled into the bed where the keeper told him he could sleep that night! Dave added to his happiness by an acknowledgment made. "Bartie," he whispered.

"What, Davie?"

"I owe you a good deal for stopping me at the dinner at the Nub."

"Stopping you?"

"When I didn't think, and lifted that glass, you know."

"Oh, but you wouldn't have touched it."

"If you had not been there, Bart, I don't know what might have happened."

"Oh, I am sure you would have come out all right," shouted confidently this diminutive mentor. And yet as he was falling asleep that night, hushed by the sound of the waves musically breaking against the walls of the lighthouse, a thought came to him and steeped his soul in comfort, that as Dave might have yielded, he—just Little Mew—might have been of some use, and so not for nought had God sent into the world this puny little fellow.

VIII.

VISITORS.

Into the kitchen of the old lighthouse they came trooping the next day—Annie Fletcher, with all her winning vivacity; Jimmy Davis and his sister Belle, Dab and John Richards, and May Tolman, with her black, lustrous eyes, in which diamonds seemed to be dissolving continually (so Dave thought). May Tolman was the light-keeper's granddaughter. Then there was Mr. James Tolman, who came as skipper of the sail-boat bringing the party. Dave and Bart joined them at the door of the fog-signal tower; and to what a scampering, laughing, singing, and shouting did the gray stone walls listen as this flock of young people hurried in! Behind all was the gray-haired keeper; but no heart was lighter than his that day. Unobserved he went to a window through which blew the cool, sweet,

strong air from the sea, and he silently thanked God for the gift of youth renewed that day in his own soul and lifting him on wings, so that he too wanted to sing and shout, to race up and down the iron stairs, to clap his hands jubilantly, as from the parapet around the lantern he saw the breakers foam below and the white sea-gulls soar up and then down on strong, steady wing.

"Yes, bless God, I am still young—and ever shall be," thought the old light-keeper. Ah, he had renewed his youth long ago at the fountains of spiritual life, in the drinking of whose waters the soul becomes perennial in a new sense.

"Now, what shall I do for all these young folks?" he said to himself. "I will certainly do whatever I can."

He showed them the lighthouse from storeroom to lantern, and then he carried them into the engine-room of the fog-signal tower and explained all the machinery there.

"*If*—if—we could only hear one toot!" exclaimed Annie Fletcher.

"Maybe the fog will come," replied Toby Tolman.

"Oh, if it would!" said Annie; and—it didn't.

"Too bad," everybody said.

"What else can I do?" wondered the light-keeper. Dave reminded him of one thing.

"Oh yes," the keeper replied. "Well, get them all together in the kitchen."

There clustered, the keeper told them, if they would excuse it, he would by request read them something about lighthouses.

"Don't expect much, though," he warned them, as he lifted his spectacles and adjusted them to his sight. "I have written this off at different times, perhaps in the evening when I have been watching, or in a storm when I could catch a little rest from work, or when I felt a bit lonely and wanted something to occupy me. I won't read all I have got, only what I think will interest. I first speak of ancient lighthouses."

Hemming vigorously several times, blushing modestly behind his spectacles in the consciousness that the world was summoning him forth to be a lecturer, he then began:—

"I suppose the first lighthouses were very simple—that is, they were not lighthouses at all, but men just built big fires and kept them burning at points along an ugly shore, or to show where a harbour was. Not long ago I was looking at a picture of a lighthouse doing work in our day and generation in Eastern Asia. It looked like a structure of wood. It probably had on top a hearth of some kind of earth, for there a fire was burning away. Not far off was the water. That looked primitive.

"If one turns to Rollin's 'Ancient History,' he will find in the first volume an interesting account of an old lighthouse, and it was so wonderful they called it

one of the seven wonders of the world. It was built by order of Ptolemy Philadelphus, and he laid out eight hundred talents on it. One estimate of the value of this sum would bring it pretty well up to £180,000. As it stood on an island called Pharos, near Alexandria, the tower had the name of the island. That has given a name to like towers. In French, I am told, the word *phare* means 'lighthouse.' In Spanish, *faro* means 'lighthouse.' In English, too, when we say a pharos, we know, or ought to know, what it means. I can see how useful this old lighthouse may have been. On its top a fire was kindled. Alexandria was in Egypt, and the city is standing to-day, as we all know. It had at that time a very extensive trade, and as the sea-coast there is a dangerous one, it was very important that the ships should have some guide at night. I can seem to see the old craft of those days plodding along, the sailors wondering which way to go, when lo, on Pharos's lofty tower blazes a fire to tell them their course.

"The architect of this tower was Sostratus, and there was an inscription on the tower said to have read this way: 'Sostratus, the Cnidian, son of Dexiphanes, to the protecting deities, for the use of sea-faring people.' His master, Ptolemy Philadelphus, was thought to have been very generous because he allowed the putting of Sostratus's name in place of his own. But Sostratus's name seems to have been put there by a trick, and it was finally found out. Sostratus cut in the marble this inscription that had his name; but what did he do but cover it with plaster! In the lime he traced the name of the king. How pleased Ptolemy must have been to see his name there! The lime, though, crumbled finally, and the king's name crumbled with it, and the tricky architect's inscription came out into notice. This lighthouse was built about three hundred years before Christ.

"In later years the tower of Dover Castle was used as a lighthouse. It was called Caesar's Altar. Great fires of logs were kept burning on the top. This was before the time of the Conquest, so called in English history. Then at the end of the sixteenth century a famous lighthouse a hundred and ninety-seven feet high was built at the mouth of the Garonne in France.

"About fourteen miles off Plymouth are the Eddystone Rocks. They are very much exposed to south-western seas. One light-builder was Winstanley, and he was at his work four seasons, finishing in 1698. The lighthouse was eighty feet high. Made stouter and carried higher afterward, it was almost a hundred and twenty feet high. It stood until November 20, 1703. A very fierce blow of wind occurred then, and the tower was wrecked by the storm. Two grave mistakes were made. Its shape was a polygon, and not circular. Waves like to have corners to butt against, and these should therefore be avoided. It was highly ornamented for a lighthouse, and ornaments are what winds and waves are fond of. It gives them a chance to get a good grip on a building and bring it down.—In 1706 one Rudyerd thought he would try his hand, and he did much better. The tower

was built principally of oak; yet when finished it stood for forty-six years, fire bringing it down in 1755. Its form commended it, for it was like the frustum of a cone, circular, and was without fancy work for the waves to take hold of.—In 1756 Smeaton began to build at Eddystone his famous tower. He was the first engineer who built a sea-tower of masonry and dovetailed the joints. The stones averaged a ton in weight. He reduced the diameter of the tower at a small height above the rock. He reasoned about the resemblance of a tower exposed to the surf and an oak tree that faces the wind. That has been shown not to be good reasoning; and looking at the shape of his tower, I should say the idea would not stand fire—or in this case water; for if at a small distance above the rock you reduce the diameter of the tower very much, it gives the waves a good chance to crowd down on the sides of the tower. However, Smeaton's tower stood a good many years. Its very weight enabled it to offer great resistance to the waves, and weight is one thing we must secure hi a tower, avoiding ornament and all silly gingerbread work. In 1882 a new tower was built in place of Smeaton's."

The light-keeper then gave some details of our lighthouse service. His paper deeply interested his auditors.

Subsequently Annie Fletcher asked, "What is that ringing like the sound of a little church-bell?"

"Then your ears were quick enough to catch it?" replied the keeper. "The window, too, is up, and so you could hear it. That is a bell-buoy at a bad ledge off in the sea."

"A bell-buoy?" asked Annie.

"Yes. It is a frame from whose top is suspended a bell. The bell is fixed, while the tongue, of course, is movable. The buoy floats on the water—fastened, you know, to the rocks beneath; and as the waves move the buoy the bell moves with it, and rings also—like a cradle rocking!"

"The buoy is the cradle, and the bell is the baby in it," suggested Dave.

"And waves are the mother's hand rocking the cradle," added May Tolman.

"Mother's hand—that is, the ocean—is pretty rough out there sometimes," said the light-keeper. "In a storm, when the wind brings the sound this way, the baby cries pretty loud."

"It squalls," declared Dave.

"I'd like to see that bell-buoy," said Johnny Richards.

"Should you?" replied the keeper. "Well, the sea is smooth, and we can all go easily in two boats.—James, you manage one, and I'll cap'n the other. It won't take more than twenty minutes to row there."

The two boats now commenced their journey.

The two boats from the lighthouse were quickly at the bell-buoy. It was a bell hung in a frame, which was swung by the waves. It was an object of deep

interest to the visitors, and they lingered about it, and then rowed back to the lighthouse.

IX.

THAT OPEN BOOK.

Toby Tolman, keeper of the light at Black Rocks, sat by the kitchen stove in this lighthouse on the frothing, stony rim of the sea. He liked the seclusion of this kitchen in the strong rock tower. He liked to hear the steady beating of the clock—"tick, tick, tick, tick." He liked the feeling, too, of the warm fire, and especially on this cool, windy day. True it was August, but then the wind was blowing from the north-west as if from an ice-floe up in Alaska, and the air was chilly. As he glanced out of either of the two windows—the deep recessed windows in the kitchen—he saw a cold, angry sea broken up into little waves, each seeming to carry a white snow-flake of the size of the crest of the wave. The distant ships, too, had a cold look, as if they also were snowflakes.

"A cool day," thought the light-keeper; "and the fire feels good."

While he was in the kitchen Dave was up in the watch-room, hunting in the little library for a history he meant to read, in accordance with a plan suggested by the keeper, "a little every day, and to keep at it."

Mr. Tolman had a book in his lap—"The best book in the world," he said to himself. It was his big-print Bible, and especially did he rejoice in that sense of protection, its promises give on days like this, when he heard the wind rushing and storming at the window, suggestive of the wild tempests that might blow any hour.

Just this moment the keeper was not reading. He was thinking, and the Bible was the occasion of his meditation about Dave Fletcher.

"I don't see Dave reading his Bible much," he said to himself; "and I don't believe he cares very much about prayer—acts that way, at any rate. I should like to help him; but how?"

He called Dave before his mind, this brown-haired, blue-eyed boy, with his quiet manners and methods, but, as the keeper put it, "loaded with a lot of grit."

"Yes, I should like to help that boy," continued the keeper in his thoughts. "I would like to influence him to be a Christian; but how, I wonder? He is one of

that kind of self-reliant chaps you feel that he had rather find out a thing himself than be told of it. He doesn't want me, I know, to tell him all the time about his duty, and yet—yet—I should like to influence him, and I wonder how?"

Of course, there was one's example first of all.

"Try to do what I can here," thought the keeper. "I might speak to him, though I don't want to run the thing into the ground. Well, I shall be guided."

The thought came to him, "Now there is a bit of a thing I can do which certainly won't do harm."

The thought was just to leave his Bible open on the kitchen table.

"Perhaps he may see a verse," thought the keeper, "and it will set him to thinking."

After that on the table would lie the keeper's Bible turned back to some impressive chapter. Dave would have been uneasy if in contact with some styles of religion, but such a kindly natured, sunny, generous, and tolerant soul as Toby Tolman he could not find disagreeable. Toby's religion was never obtrusive, never unpleasantly in the way of people; though always prominent, out in open sight, it was the prominence of the sunshine, of a bird's happy singing, of nature on a spring morning. Dave felt it, but he was a silent lad over important subjects. He was different from his sister Annie. If her soul were stirred by any profound emotion, she must in some way give expression to it. Dave, though, would look very serious and continue silent. His mother, who knew him so well, said that Dave felt most when he said the least, and the hours of his greatest stillness were to her the surest signs of an intense activity within.

"Dave is fullest when he seems to be emptiest," Mrs. Fletcher would say. Because now-a-days at the light he would often have long seasons of silence, was it any sign of mental occupation?

"I don't think I understand that boy yet," was Toby Tolman's thought. "He is thinking about something, I know."

It was a day near the close of Dave's stay at the lighthouse that the keeper said in the morning,—"Beautiful day! Everything just as calm! It seems as if it would stay so always, but it won't."

How the sea might rock and roar in twenty-four hours! The lighthouse was very peaceful. The morning's work was despatched promptly, and the tower was very quiet. With any rocking, roaring sea would come a change in the life of the tower. There would be hurrying feet, and the fog-signal would shriek out its sharp, piercing warning.

The flow of life in nature, though, out on the sea, up in the sky, was undisturbed all that day, and in the tower of the fog-signal the machinery stirred not, while the light breeze playing around the mouth of the fog-trumpets aroused no answering blast. It was peaceful on the sea and in the tower. And yet in the

light-keeper's own bosom it seemed that afternoon as if an ocean tempest had been evoked and was suddenly raging. About three Dave, who chanced to be in the storeroom of the tower, heard a voice outside.

"There's some one down at the foot of the ladder," thought Dave. "I will see who it is."

He went to the door of the signal-tower and looked down.

"Ho! that you, Timothy? Coming back?" said Dave.

Down in a boat lightly resting on the smooth, glassy water was Toby Tolman's assistant, Timothy Waters. Dave knew that Timothy was coming back very soon, and he thought that Timothy might have concluded to anticipate the date appointed for his return and resume work now.

"Not just yet," replied Timothy. "Get the cap'n soon as you can. I won't come up. Spry, please."

The keeper was quickly at the door.

"What's wanted, Timothy? Coming up, are you not?"

"Wish I could, cap'n, but I want to take you to town. Your-is-very--"

The sea heaved just then sufficiently to disturb the speaker's balance and also to interfere with his message. There he stood, trying to steady himself by the help of the mooring-rope and then looking up again.

"What? who?" asked the keeper.

"Why, your granddarter May, cap'n," replied Timothy. "She is very sick. They don't know that she will live. She has been begging to see you, and if you could come a few hours I will get you back again all right afterwards."

"I will be with you right off." The keeper turned to Dave: "You heard that. It's ugly news. Now if I go, can't you light up and watch till half-past eight? I'll be back, sure. Don't worry. It will be a quiet night; no sign just yet of any change in the weather."

"Oh yes, Mr. Tolman; that is all right. You go. I would if I were you. I will look after things. I can handle them."

"I think you can; and I shall be obleged to you. My, my! this is sudden. Wasn't looking for May's sickness."

He was quickly in the boat with Timothy Waters; and then Dave watched the two men pulling stoutly on their oars and making quick progress landward. The boat turned the corner of a bluff projecting into the harbour and disappeared. Dave stepped back into the lighthouse, and sat down beside the kitchen stove. It was very peaceful there. The clock ticked as usual on the wall; and on the table, lying open, as if laid down a moment ago by the keeper, was his Bible. Dave glanced at the opened pages a moment. As his eyes slipped down the line of verses he noticed such assurances as these:--

"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the

shadow of the Almighty.... Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night.... For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone."

He lingered a moment looking at these passages, and then turned away.

"I will go upstairs," he said, "into the lantern, and make sure that everything is ready for the lighting at sunset. That's sudden about May Tolman," he began to reflect. "Why, I seem to see her going up and down these stairs the day she was here, so full of life."

He could hear her voice; he could see her black, glowing eyes, that had a peculiar fascination for Dave.

"Sorry," he said. "That's real sudden. Things do happen quick in this life sometimes."

Dave felt unusually sober that day. If he had told all his thoughts to any one, he would have confessed to a singular soberness of feeling for some time.

He had been shut up for several weeks with a man whose religion, without any pretence, any show, and any peculiarities, controlled his life, and came prominently to the surface in everything. Dave felt his sister's religious influence at home; but there were influences interfering with it and partly neutralizing it. Dave Fletcher's mother was too busy, she assured herself, to attend to religion; and Dave's father declared—also to himself—that he did not "feel the need of it." "I am as good as my neighbours; and I guess that will do," he said. He quoted in his thoughts Dave's lack of interest, saying, "There is Dave, good boy; and he takes his father's view of things."

But here at the lighthouse Dave declared that he was "cornered." Here was a simple, humble, unselfish life living in communion with his heavenly Father, bringing that presence down to that lonely tower in the sea, and filling it, and surrounding the boy who was the light-keeper's companion. No neutralizing associations here.

"It sets me to thinking," declared Dave, as he climbed the successive stairways to the lantern the afternoon of the keeper's absence. "And May Tolman's sickness—that is sudden. Nothing is certain. Well, we must just look after matters right around us. One can't give his thoughts to all these possibilities of accident. I'll just remember that I am a keeper of a lighthouse."

Keeper of a lighthouse! The moment he uttered this thought to himself there settled down upon his shoulders a new and serious weight of responsibility. He began to realize that for several hours he must carry the burden of a keeper's duties. He must look after the fog-signal, if a dusky veil of mist should suddenly be dropped from the sky and curtain off both the sea and the land. If there should be any accident upon the sea in the neighbourhood of the lighthouse, where the keeper might be expected to give any aid, Dave must render that help. When

night came, or sunset rather, he must light the lamp in the lantern, and he must watch it, and see that for the sake of the many vessels upon the sea this light burned with steady lustre. Upon just a boy's shoulders how heavy a care seemed to be pressing down!

"I can stand it," he said, in pride and confidence. The very pressure of the responsibility aroused within him a corresponding measure of strength. However, it did not lessen the shadow of that sober thinking in which he often walked nowadays.

"I'll take that history I am reading," he said on his return from the lantern, "and get over a good number of pages to-day."

He read until supper-time, but somehow his thoughts did not seem to stay on his book. They were like birds on the telegraph wires along the railroad track—flying off and then alighting again, only to lift their wings and beat the air in another flight.

"A long afternoon!" he said finally, laying down his book. "I am glad it is tea-time."

How lonely the kitchen began to seem! The rattle of his knife and fork, the clink of his spoon, the occasional clatter of dishes, usually such pleasant sounds to a hungry man, now sounded lonely and harsh.

"Don't like eating by myself," declared Dave. "Glad tea is over. Wonder when Mr. Tolman will be here?" He looked at the clock and said, "I believe he thought he should be back by half-past eight. I wonder how May Tolman is getting along. Poor girl!"

The sun seemed that night a longer time than usual in setting, as if it were an invalid, and there must be a very deliberate and lengthy bundling up in yellow blankets.

"At last the sun is about going down," said Dave. He was now up in the lantern, match in hand. He looked off through the broad windows of glass upon the surface of the sea, growing calmer and more shining in the west; but in the east its lustre had faded out, and there was a great expanse of dull, heavy, lead-like shades. Two fishing-boats were creeping into harbour. The surf on the bar rolled lazily, as if it would like to go to sleep, even as the sun. A schooner was creeping along the channel, its sails hanging in loose, flapping folds.

"There goes the sun!" thought Dave, watching the disappearance of the last embers of its fires below a blue hill. He turned with relief to the lamp, removed its chimney, kindled its wick, replaced the chimney, and then carefully adjusted the flame.

"There—that is done! Now do your duty, and burn all right," was Dave's direction. Rising, he looked away, and saw that in other lighthouses their keepers had kindled guiding tapers, burning slender and silvery in the still lingering

daylight.

"Everything here is all right, I believe," said Dave, looking about the lantern. "Holloa! what is that up there in the corner? A cobweb? Guess I must take it down. Don't want the window to have that thing up there. Can't reach it. I will get a little box down in the watch-room. That will elevate me."

When he had brought the box, standing on it he saw that the web was on the outside of the lantern, and he went without to remove the film from the glass.

"There!" he said, reaching up to the corner of the window as he stood on the box. "Come down here. Don't have cobwebs on the windows of this lantern."

He now turned about, and chanced to face the tall red pipes projecting from the roof of the signal-tower with their trumpet-shaped mouths.

"Is one of those pipes damaged?" wondered Dave. "Afraid so. I must take a sharper look at that."

At the foot of the railing of the parapet he placed the box, and from that elevation, leaning his arms on the railing, inspected as closely as he could the fog-signal. This parapet for timorous people was an ugly spot. When the wind blew hard it was not easy to maintain one's footing outside the lantern. One could cling to the railing, which was firm, but it consisted only of an iron bar resting on upright iron rods three feet apart. There was no danger of a fence-break, but the gaps between the iron rods were wide and ugly, and if one should chance to drop on the smooth stone floor and just tip a little-over-toward-the-edge-ugh! One did not like to think of that fall down-down-into the sea-perhaps upon the Black Rocks when the tide was out. Toby Tolman had told Dave that for a long time he did not care to go near the rail about the lantern and stand there a while, as it made him "nervous;" but he had ceased to be a "land-lubber," and could now face, sailor-like in confidence, any quarter of the sea and sky, just clinging to that little rail. Dave had felt pleased with his steadiness of nerve when he found he could look over that rail and then down upon the whirling sea without very much trepidation.

"Shouldn't like to have a dizzy fit when I was looking over," he said. "No danger, though."

He repeated this as he now stood on the box planted at the foot of one of the iron supports of the rail, and continuing to rest his arms on the rail, inspected closely, as already said, the fog-signal. Suddenly his arms slipped, and over the horrible edge of that narrow little railing he found himself going. Sometimes we compress years into moments apparently. We go back, we go forward, we gather it all up into the thought of a very brief now. But oh, how vivid!-like all the electric force in a great mass of cloud concentrated in one dazzling, blinding lightning-stroke. As Dave felt that his body was sliding over that rail, he seemed to realize where he had been in the past. He thought of his parents-his home-

Uncle Ferguson at Shipton—how it was that he came to the lighthouse, and then he seemed to realize vividly his situation there in the lighthouse: that he was there as the responsible keeper just then; that the safety of many vessels at sea all relied on the thoroughness of his watch; and yet he was sliding over that rail, going down toward the waves, the rocks—he dared not look toward them! He could see only this one thing between him and death: beneath his hands was an iron support of the railing. There was no other object he could grasp for three feet on each side of him. It is true there was the granite rim of this lantern-deck, so called sometimes, but he could not grasp it. His hands would slide over it. Just that iron stanchion was his hope, and as he was sinking down he convulsively clutched at it, caught it, clung to it—shutting his eyes as if blinded. He dared not look anywhere until he felt that his grasp was sure, and then he somehow worked himself back, up, over the railing, and the whole of his body was on the lantern-deck again. He crawled into the lantern, shut the door, and threw himself on the floor weak as a baby.

“Horrible!” was his one word. There he lay thinking. What if he had gone down into that yawning pit of the sea! When would they have found his body? Horrible! horrible! When he was steady enough he slowly crept down the stairs. He entered the kitchen. It had seemed as if everything threatened to fall when he was in danger of going down into the sea—lantern, watch-room, lighthouse—all into the merciless sea. But here was the kitchen. No change here. It was so quiet, so restful. A lamp burned on the table. The fire murmured in the stove. The clock sang its cheerful little tune of a single note. And there was the old light-keeper’s Bible. It still lay open, its pages shining in the lamp-light, and there were the promises of the psalm Dave had already noticed. What did it say? “They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.”

Dave started. Up on the high lantern-deck had any mighty angel stepped between him and death, lifting him back on the floor of stone? Who could say it was not so? Dave sat down in a chair, and then bowed his head and rested it on the table. Here was God, the kindest, dearest being in the universe, Dave’s great Father, from whose arms he had been turning away, trying to avoid them; and now, up on the lofty parapet, they had been held out, restraining him, saving him.

“Oh, I can’t go on this way any longer,” thought Dave. “And I *won’t*, either! If God will only have me—will only—”

He fell on his knees. What he whispered to God he never could recall. He only knew that he felt very sorry that he had been neglecting God—pushing away the arms reached out to him and feeling after him. He murmured something about gratitude, something about forgiveness. Then he was conscious of a surrender, of sliding down—not into a horrible pit from the lighthouse parapet,

but into arms tender yet strong, that went about him, that bore him up, that held him. How long he stayed there he knew not. Some time he arose, and went upstairs to see if the lantern were all right. Its light burned steadily, vividly, hopefully. He looked out on the lantern-deck. There was the box still on the floor. With a shudder he took it in and went downstairs again. Then he prayed once more, and said aloud the words, "They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." He was so thankful for this night's deliverance, so sorry for his forgetfulness of God in the long past! He rose to read again. He heard a step at last in the passage-way between the fog-signal tower and the lighthouse,—a heavy, echoing step, now in the tank-room, then on the stairway to the kitchen.

Dave sprang up to meet the keeper, and he held the lamp in the shadowy stairway.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Tolman."

"Same to you. Here I am, all right, you see. Glad I went."

"How is May?"

"Better. Yes, thank God, she is better. There was a sudden change, and the doctor has hope. She has been in a pretty hard place, but I think she is out of it."

"Good! That's the way I feel myself."

"What!" The light-keeper looked at Dave for an explanation, but Dave was silent. He could not tell everything at once, or even a little to-night. The keeper went to the table, saying to himself, "He meant May when he said that. Ah!" he thought, "my book is turned round. Guess Dave has been reading this. Good! I thought he would get to it some time."

That was a very peaceful night whose hush was on the great sea, on the surf gently rolling along the bar, and in the lighthouse tower. The deepest peace was in Dave Fletcher's soul.

Dave's stay at the lighthouse was exceedingly brief after this event in his life.

"I am really sorry to have you go," said Toby Tolman the day that Dave left. "I shall miss you. I will take you up to town, as Timothy has come back."

Dave received his pay from Timothy, for whom he had acted as substitute, and then with the keeper left the lighthouse.

The journey to Shipton over, Dave quickly walked to Uncle Ferguson's, and

was welcomed warmly.

X.

THE CHRISTMAS GIFT.

Christmas was approaching—Christmas with its white fields, and its skies that seem to part like the opening of doors in a big blue wall, and from it issue the sweet songs of the Bethlehem angels. Still more acceptable is it when our souls seem to open like doors that fly apart, and out to our neighbour and all souls everywhere go assurances of peace and good-will.

To Dave Fletcher and Dick Pray Christmas meant an end of school-days and a return home.

"You will come and see us 'fore you go," was Bart Trafton's meek request to Dick and Dave when he met them in the street. Dick made the first call, just three days before Christmas. Things did not have a festival appearance in the Trafton home that day. Gran'sir was lying on a lounge not far from the fire, and his cough was shaking him harder than ever. Bart, just before Dick's call, had been down on the shore of the river to see if the last tide had remembered the poor, and deposited any more drift on the beach. He brought back only a puny armful, and this armful he divided between the oven and the fire, the first half to dry and be ready to start up the flames which the other half would be quite sure to put down and almost put out. Granny had been calling at a neighbour's, to borrow timidly a little tea, and met Dick just outside the door of the Trafton home. Such a difference as there was between youth with its ruddy cheeks and bright eyes, between plenty with its cheerful and contented spirit, and poor old Granny Trafton!

"Bartie wanted me to call," said Dick.

"Come in, come in," said granny, hospitably. "We're poor folks, but we're glad to see people."

When Dick went away he said to himself, "'Poor folks,'—they're all that. I wish something could be done for them."

Dave made his call, and he left the house saying, "Something must be done."

The two callers met in the street the day of Dave's call, and the same thought was in their minds.

"Dick, see here. Those Traftons are real poor," said Dave. "I wonder if we couldn't get them a little something for Christmas."

"Dave, that very thought was in my mind, and I wanted to speak of it. Come on. It's done."

Hardly done; but that was Dick's way, and when a soul may be timid and discouraged, that confident, self-assured style in another is very strengthening.

"Let's see. There is no other way than to go right round and ask our friends. I know they will give something, Dick."

"Hold on, hold on, Dave. That is a slow way, Let's make a dash and capture the enemy at once. I will pick out some millionaire—"

Here Dick turned round as if to see which "millionaire" he would select from all of Shipton's wealthy residents.

"Yes," he continued; "I will look after that. Don't you give yourself a moment of uneasiness on that score. I will pick out some rich fellow, tell him what he ought to do, and bag the game on the spot. There!"

Dave laughed. He knew Dick's style thoroughly. At the same time it did give one like Dave, who shrank from begging, new courage to have Dick talk so boldly.

"Let's see, Dick. It is now Monday. We might meet on Wednesday at your cousin's store, and find out how we stand, and send our things to the Traftons on Wednesday afternoon; and Christmas is on Thursday, you know."

"Dave, don't worry about the wherewithal." Here Dick, with a very solemn air of assurance, looked Dave steadily in the eye. "I purpose to bag a millionaire and make him do his duty, Dave Fletcher."

The two friends laughed, shook hands, and separated. Dave listened as he was about turning a corner of the street, for he heard somebody whistling. It was Dick whistling, in a loud, bold, cheery way.

"Well," thought Dave, "I'll make a beginning now. I will speak to Aunt Nancy soon as I get home."

Aunt Nancy was stoning raisins in preparation for a Christmas baking.

"Will I give something to the Traftons? Oh, certainly. I expect a good warm blanket would be just the thing for gran'sir, and I'll give that as my share. My share, remember. Your uncle must give his mite. I tell ye, David," said Aunt Nancy in a whisper, "your uncle has some first-class Baldwins down in the cellar. Just touch him upon those."

"I will, aunt, thank you."

And next, would the home of James Tolman give anything?

"Pies and potatoes; you can count on us for some of both kinds," said Mrs. Tolman.

The next place was the home of the light-keeper, Toby Tolman, when

ashore. His wife was dead, and a widowed daughter and her only child, May, lived in his house. He preferred to keep up the home, although personally there but a very little of the time.

"Should we like to give anything? Of course," said the keeper's daughter; "that is what Christmas is for. Only last week I heard father say we could give some wood off our pile, for he calculated we had more than enough to carry us through the winter."

"Don't you let young folks help?" asked a silvery voice, sending at Dave an arch look out of two penetrating black eyes. "You must not think I am an invalid and past helping, if I was so sick last summer. Now I can just go round in the neighbourhood and get together some eatables, I know, and perhaps clothing that might do for Bart."

"That would be splendid," said Dave, stirred deeply by those black eyes, and wishing that in every house visited he was the individual of whom May Tolman would solicit.

When Dave brought these donations into one collection, he found not only the blanket for gran'sir but a shawl for granny. There also were clothes for Bart, and any amount of things for the Christmas dinner.

The next point was how to get them taken up to the Traftons. For the clothing and eatables Dave borrowed Uncle Ferguson's cart, but for the wood only James Tolman's waggon would answer. That procession of two teams, the waggon and the cart, had a Christmas look that would have been recognized anywhere.

"Whoa-a-a!" shouted Dave, as the procession neared the boot and shoe shop kept by Dick's cousin Sam. Dick was behind the counter waiting on a customer. As he saw Dave entering he ran his hand through his hair in a nervous, despairing style, but said nothing until the customer had left.

"There, Dave, it is too bad, but-but-whose are those teams out in the street?"

"Just things I picked up."

"And the wood?"

"Going to the same place."

"That's good. Then I don't feel so bad."

"Well, anything you find, good, you know, for Christmas, why, send it along."

"I shouldn't wonder, though, if-if-it might be too late now; but-you have got something-if-I should be too late-and I do believe I am too late. Sorry. Glad, though, I put you up to it. I knew you would attend to it."

With a triumphant wave of his hand, as if he were permitting Dave to drive off with a donation that Dick Pray had gathered, he accompanied Dave to the door

and then retreated to the counter.

"If that isn't Dick Pray all over!" said Dave.

It would be difficult to tell the feelings of joy occasioned in the Trafton home by those gifts.

"Davie," said Bart, "I had a dream last night, and I guess it is a-comin' true. I thought I saw that ladder that Jacob had a look at, you know, when the angels were a-goin' up and down, and comin' down they had bundles in their arms."

Dave entered the house, bringing in bundle after bundle. Bart thought the angels looked somewhat like that.

"Hadn't you better try this shawl?" said Dave to granny, who looked cold and purple. And would gran'sir be willing to be wrapped in the blanket? The thin, worn consumptive responded with a glad smile, and said in a whisper that he hadn't been so comfortable since he was sick. And the wood-how it set that old stove to shaking and laughing and glowing till its front seemed like a jolly face full of sparkling eyes! That is one good result coming from a stove cracked everywhere in front.

Granny told the minister, Mr. Potter, two days after, how all this generosity affected gran'sir.

"Why, sir, it made him just heavenly! He cried and laughed—it was so good to be warm, you know. And he's softened so, sir. I think it begun when Bartie begun to read the Bible to him, and it has been a-keepin' on, sir, a-softenin', sir—don't scold, you know, or be harsh-like. I—I—I—" Here granny buried her face in her apron and cried. "I'm afraid—sir—may be—he won't live—long—he's—softened so—sir—he has."

It was nothing wonderful. Like the warm breath of the spring on the chilled and torpid flowers, arousing them into the activity of bud and blossom time, the thoughtful kindness of God's creatures brought God nigh to gran'sir; brought the breath of his benediction to gran'sir's soul, and gave him a new life.

"God has been so good—he draws me," gran'sir said to granny an early day in January. "It is—like he's callin' me—and—I guess I'll go."

His going was so peaceful that to say when it was would be like marking the spot where the current crosses the line between the river and the ocean; and yet his soul did cross from time, so short and river-like, into the broad and boundless ocean of eternity. People said it would be as well for the comfort of granny and Little Mew, and even better, for gran'sir they declared to be exacting. They did not know how it was. Granny and Little Mew felt that they were the exacting ones, for they wanted gran'sir to stay. Little Mew's soul was clouded by the shadow of a thought that by the death of gran'sir his mission in this world was very much abridged. He was tempted to wonder again for what God had

sent a little fellow like him into this world.

XI.

AT SHIPTON AGAIN.

"Nothing for me?"

"Nothing."

"Sure?"

"Well—"

The postmistress, in response to Dave Fletcher's anxious inquiry, looked again at a package of letters she had been handling.

"Oh yes, here is something! I didn't see it the first time. Beg pardon."

"All right. I wasn't really expecting anything, but it is so long since I have had a letter that I was kind of hungry for one."

Dave took his letter from the postmistress and walked away.

"Postmarked Shipton!" said Dave, looking at the envelope. "Don't seem to know the address. Let's break that and see what it says."

He glanced down at the name with which the letter closed.

"James Tolman; what does he want?" wondered Dave. He then returned to the first line and began to read:—

"DEAR DAVID,—I have not forgotten that you were in my Sunday-school class when in Shipton, and I felt that I knew you well enough to ask you to take this into consideration, whether you wouldn't like to come and be my clerk. I am in the ship-chandlery business, and have two clerks. One of them is going away, and may leave me for good. I have promised to keep his place open for him three months. At the end of that time he may come back. Now, if I ask you to come for three months, I know—"

Dave crumpled the letter in his hand, thrust it into his pocket, and springing into his waggon, cried, "Get up there, Jimmy! Don't know that you and I will be travelling this road together much longer. Get up there!"

"Jimmy" was urged at an unusual rate over the road, and pricked up his ears in astonishment as his master cried, "Faster, faster!"

"There, mother!" said Dave, when he entered the Fletcher kitchen; "just what I wanted has happened."

"What is that?" replied Mrs. Fletcher.

"Read this, mother, and you will see."

"For three months, Dave, and perhaps no longer, it means."

"Oh, well, it will be a stepping-stone to something, if I have to leave it. Just get started in Shipton and I can go it."

"But you haven't read about the pay, Dave."

"Well, mother, the fact is I like the place—I mean Shipton. I love to be near the salt water and where I can see the ships—"

"And the lighthouse—"

"Yes."

"And May Tolman," sang out a voice from the adjoining sitting-room, and Annie Fletcher appeared at the kitchen door, asking, "How is it, Dave?"

Dave felt it to be the wisest course to keep still and blush.

In a few days he was ready to start for Shipton. He called one evening to see some of his old acquaintances, and the next day started for Shipton.

On arriving he reported for duty at the shop of "James Tolman, Ship-chandler." He was now eighteen, and he felt that active life was beginning in earnest. The shop was an old one, and before James Tolman's business days it had been kept by his father. It was packed with all kinds of goods available for ship-furnishings. As one opened the door a scent of tar issued, strong enough to make the most thorough-going old salt say, "This seems like home." There were coils of rope of every size ranged on either side of the passage-way. There were capstans and anchors and blocks and ring-bolts. There were all kinds of shining tin and copper ware for the cook's galley. There were compasses, and ship-lanterns, and speaking-trumpets, and sheath-knives, and suits of oiled clothing, and slouching "tarpaulins." On stormy days, when Dave from the back windows could see that the waves in the river had stuck in their crests saucy feathers of foam, it seemed to him as if he heard the coils of rope creak in the store and the suits of sailors' clothing rustle; and what wonder if some old salt had waddled forward in one of those stiff suits, and, seizing a trumpet, cried in ringing tones to the pots and kettles hanging from the brown, dusty beams, "Furl your top-sails." It was a pleasure to Dave when an old Shipton sea-captain might heave in sight on stormy days, and, entering the shop, take a seat by the crackling fire and tell of gales round Cape Horn or in the Bay of Biscay.

"I believe I am cut out for this business," said Dave.

His former Shipton acquaintances were glad to see him back. Dick Pray for

six months had been in town, a clerk in his cousin's shop. He now came to bring his congratulations to Dave.

"Glad to see you, Dave," he said.

"Thanks, Dick. How is business?"

"Oh, booming! booming!"

All business that Dick's magnificent abilities came in contact with either had "boomed," or was "booming," or would "boom" very soon. No tame word was fit to describe Dick's business ventures.

And the boy who came shyly, timidly after Dick was—Bart Trafton.

"You well, Bartie?" asked Dave.

"Oh, better!"

"Why?"

"Because you've got back," said the caller, with snapping eyes.

"That's encouraging. And granny, is she well?"

"Oh yes, when—"

He did not finish. If he had completed his sentence, he would have said "when father isn't at home."

The same day two other people were in the shop whom Dave had met previously, though he did not recognize them at once. There stood before the counter a rather tall man, wearing a tall hat and closely muffled about the face, for the day was one of cold blasts of storm.

"I want a good ship's lantern," said the customer.

"Yes, sir," replied Dave, ranging before the man an array of lantern goods.

"You have come to be clerk?" asked the man.

Dave looked up more carefully, and saw that the man wore spectacles.

"Yes, sir," replied Dave.

The man inquired the price of the lanterns, selected one, and went out.

"Halloo! he has given me twopence too much!" exclaimed Dave.

"That doesn't matter," said a man who was watching through a window in the door the storm driving without.

"Oh yes, it does," murmured Dave.—"Johnny!" he called aloud to a younger clerk in the counting-room, "just look after things a moment while I go out."

Johnny came out into the shop, and Dave seized his cap and ran after the customer. The latter was a fast walker, and was hurrying round a corner of the street when Dave overtook him.

"See here, sir! A mistake in the change. I counted it, and you gave me too much."

"Oh—ah! Thank you! I see you don't know me."

The man slipped down a scarf wrapped about his face, took off his spectacles, and there was—somebody, but Dave could not say who.

"Not so rough up here as down at the bar—in a schooner, say."

"O—Squire Sylvester!"

"That's it. I think I was too rough with you that day, for I found out afterward you had nothing to do with it."

"Oh, well, sir—I—"

"I just wanted to say that, and am glad you think enough of another man's property, though only two-pence, to chase after him and give it to him."

Then the tall man tramped on.

"It shows," thought Dave, "that he hasn't forgotten what happened some time ago, and I suppose he had been wanting to say what he got off to me. I don't harbour it against you, Squire Sylvester. When a man's property has been run off with, it would be a wonder if he didn't say something."

When Dave returned to the store the man at the door still stood there, looking out through the little window.

"I think I know that chap's face," thought Dave, "but I really can't say who it is."

The man was disposed to talk. "Did you catch the squire?" he asked.

"Oh yes."

"Did he take the twopence?"

"Oh yes."

"Catch him not take it! The squire would hold on to a halfpenny till it cankered if he could possibly git along without spendin' it. I don't believe in worryin' yourself about sich people."

"Twopence didn't seem much, but then it wasn't mine."

"I see you don't mean to be rich?"

"I mean to be honest."

"And die poor?"

"That doesn't follow."

"Oh, it does 'em good—these rich fellers—to lose a little now and then."

"But they ought not to lose it if we have it and it is theirs."

"Oh, you are too honest. Say, I see you don't know me."

"Well, yes, I ought to know your face."

"I've let my whiskers grow. I didn't have any the last time you saw me. Cut all these off," said the man, lifting a big beard, "and it would make a big difference. Don't you remember Timothy Waters, at the lighthouse?"

"Why, yes. You Timothy?"

"Yes."

"And are you at the light now?"

"Just the same."

"How is Mr. Tolman?"

"Holdin' on. Oh, he likes it! You must come and see us."

Having given this invitation, Timothy left the store. Dave watched him as he moved down the street, turning at last into a little lane leading down to the wharves. Then he thought of Timothy rowing his dory down the river, tossing on the uneasy tide, battling his way forward until he halted at the foot of a great gray-stone tower in the sea. Looking up at the doorway of the tower, Dave saw the keeper's familiar face.

XII.

ON WHICH SIDE VICTORY?

"Well, how goes the temperance fight, Dave?" asked Dick one day.

"We are pushing it. We have organized our society, and are going to hold meetings."

"The fight," as Dick called it, was conducted on the principles of peace; but if peaceable it was not sleepy. A series of meetings of various kinds had been carefully planned, and of these one was a young people's meeting. All the exercises, like speaking and singing, were to be conducted by Shipton's youth. Bart expected to have a humble part in this meeting, and say a few Scripture verses bearing on the sin of liquor-drinking. His father was at home, and Bart did wish that in some way he could be persuaded to go to this meeting. There did not seem to be much prospect of his attendance. One day he received a mortifying check to his course. Having drunk up all his money at the public-house, he was roughly turned out of doors. This time he realized the disgrace of his situation; and the next morning, to granny's astonishment, he did not visit the saloon. To her still greater surprise, he did not leave the house all day. He even sawed and cut some wood for the fire. This was deservedly ranked as a wonder in the history of the man. When Bart returned at night his father was upstairs, "lying down," granny reported.

"Ain't that queer, granny?" whispered Bart.

"I haven't known anything like it, Bartie. He's been cuttin' more wood this afternoon. P'raps he is sick."

Not sick, but mortified and penniless. To such people publicity is not attractive.

"I don't know what it is," said granny, "but Miss Perkins says she hearn there has been trouble down in the saloon."

Miss Perkins was a gossip with a news-bag that seemed to have the depth and roominess of the Atlantic.

"Awful place, ain't it, granny, where they sell rum?"

Granny turned on him—turned quickly, fiercely.

"Bartholomew!"

She rarely addressed him that way. When she did she meant something serious. Bart's timorous face shrank before her sharp, fierce gaze.

"Bartholomew, I want you to promise never to sell rum. Put your hand on this Bible!"

"Oh, I—I never will sell."

"And you won't drink it? Promise!"

"Never!"

It was like Hamilcar of Carthage taking his son Hannibal to the altar, and there making him swear eternal hatred to Rome. Then Bart went softly out of the room.

Into some refuge he desired to steal, tell God that he, Little Mew, was weak; that he wanted to be taken care of; that he did wish to get help somehow for his father—help to be better—and he wanted to remember granny. Up over the steep, narrow, worn stairway he stole into his little bedroom, that, small and humble, had yet been a precious refuge to him, and his bed had been a boat bearing him away across waters of forgetfulness of poverty and hunger to the restful isle of dreams. If he could only forget now! He could pray, and if prayer does not make forgetful it makes restful. He leaned against his bed and told all his trouble to God—told him of his desire for his father, how much he wished God would make his father a new heart; how he wanted help for himself, that he might be kind and patient. It was touching to hear his boyish outcries, as kneeling he pleaded for one so weak, so lost, as his father. Then he went downstairs again. The moment his feet were heard on the stairs, Bart's father, who had been lying in the dark on the side of the bed nearest to the wall, arose, sighed, and went down also. Bart was standing in the little entry leading to the kitchen.

"Bart—I—want to be—" The father stopped.

It was not so much anything he said, for he said nothing definite, but it was his tone that encouraged Bart, and he listened eagerly.

"I want to be a good father to you, Bart; God knows I do."

What? Bart had never heard such language before from this parent with agitated voice and frame. Bart caught instantly at a hope that had just begun to take shape. Would his father go to the temperance meeting with him?

"Father, your ship, they say, won't sail to-morrow; and if it don't, will you

go to the temperance meeting with me to-morrow night?"

"Bartholomew, if my ship don't sail, then I will go with you."

He turned and went upstairs again.

"O Bart," exclaimed granny, "let us pray that God will keep the winds off shore and not let Thomas's ship get to sea!"

The next day the winds still were unfavourable, and Bart and granny looked at one another with happier faces than they had been carrying ever since Thomas Trafton's return.

"Granny, the wind is not fair yet," Bart would exclaim, after eying the vane on the nearest church steeple. Granny would then take her turn, and go out, her apron thrown over her head, and watch the vane. At last they could say, "The ship won't go to-night."

When ever before had that vane been watched to see if it indicated a wind that would keep Thomas Trafton at home?

"Hear me say my verses once more," Bart whispered to his grandmother; and assured that his contribution to the evening's exercises was in readiness, he went with his father to the temperance meeting. Bart's place was among the speakers, and they filled several pews, their bright, hopeful faces lifted above the railings of the pews like flowers above the garden-bed. Bart's father was in the rear of the church. Bart was afraid to leave him at that distant, unguarded point; but he had promised Bart faithfully to stay, and not go out. Was ever any attendant at a meeting in a more discouraged, helpless mood than Thomas Trafton? He had been thinking, somewhat as he was accustomed to think when off at sea and away from temptation, that never again would he touch liquor; but could he keep his resolution if he made one? He felt burdened with a weighty desire, burdened with a sense of shame, burdened with a conviction of weakness, burdened every way and always.

The meeting began. Mr. James Tolman conducted it, but only to call the names of those participating in it. The recitations were varied. Several had quite pretentious speeches, and others gave only a modest extract from some appeal in poetry or prose. There were those who simply had Bible verses, and in this section Bart Trafton had a place. His verses were on the sin of intemperance. When his turn was reached he came to the platform quite readily, and then turned toward the audience. He looked once, saw great, bewildering rows of faces, and all his courage left him. He could not look again at those hundreds of staring eyes. He dropped his head, blushed, and every idea he had taken with him to the platform seemed hopelessly to have left him. Like birds, those verses had flown away, and how could he possibly call them back from that sudden flight? However, he did catch one bird. He could think of one word—"Wine!" He resolved to begin with that. A decoy bird will sometimes bring a flock about it, and if he

said that one word he might think of the others. "Wine—" he screamed. Then he waited for the rest of the flock. He shrieked again, "Wine!" Once more, "W-wine!"

People were now smiling to see that timorous, blushing, stammering lad on the platform, and some of the children broke out into an embarrassing titter. Bart, turned in helpless confusion to Mr. Tolman.

"Forgot it," he whispered,

"Say something," said Mr. Tolman, in an encouraging tone.

Something? What would it, could it be? Bart gave one timid glance at the tittering, gaping rows before him, and feeling that he must say something, gave the first words that came into his mind. Annie Fletcher had taught them to him. Bart's voice was sharp and high, and it pierced all the space between Thomas Trafton and the platform, and the father plainly heard the boy.

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Some of the people wondered what that had to do with intemperance. Thomas Trafton did not wonder. He heard nothing else. He did not notice whether Bart stayed on the platform or left it; he did not notice who followed Bart; he heard only those verses. The pew was an old one, and when improvements had been made in the church, this pew was not touched, but, being so far away from notice, was left undisturbed in all its odd and antique furnishings. Thomas Trafton never forgot the exact place where he sat and heard through his son's voice this short gospel that came down from God's lofty throne of love. He would in later days come to this old pew and gladly occupy it and recall this night of the temperance meeting. He would hear again the invitation given in his boy's piercing voice, and again would be repeated, though not as vividly, his experience that night; for he had an experience. It seemed to him as if while sitting there burdened and weary, yet willing, longing to find relief, One came to him,—One who had in his brow the print of thorns, and in his side the mark of a spear, and in his feet the scar of driven nails. Thomas Trafton met his Saviour there, and into peace and strength came the soul of the once drunkard.

Not long after this the west wind blew, its strong wings beating fast and sweeping Thomas Trafton's vessel far away to sea. Very few knew of his surrender to God, which brought a victory over his appetite. The minister of the

church, Mr. Potter, knew, and Dave Fletcher knew.

XIII.

WHAT TO DO NEXT.

When Dave Fletcher became a clerk with Mr. Tolman, he knew he was taking the place of another who might come back in three months, and back he did come.

"Sorry, David, I haven't a place for you," said Mr. Tolman.

"Well," replied Dave, "if there isn't a place here I must find one elsewhere."

But where? He knew that his father did not need him at home, as he had already made plans for all needed farm-work.

"I don't want to go home and be just a burden, hanging round," reflected Dave. "Then I must find work here."

He talked over the situation with Dick Pray.

"What would I do, Dave? Well," said Dick, putting his hands deep down in his pockets, "I should advertise and—wait."

"I mean to advertise, but I think I had better stir round also."

"Just as well to say you want something—say it loud and strong, you know—and then let others ask what is wanted."

Dick did like to sound a trumpet, giving as loud a blast as possible, and then let the world run up and see what "Lord Dick" wanted.

"Oh, I shall advertise, and stir round also, though I don't just fancy it, and I can't say what will come from it."

And what did come the first day?

Nothing.

The second day?

Nothing.

The third day?

Nothing.

"It is getting to be fearfully tiresome," said Dave the fourth day. "I have inquired in all directions, but I can't seem to hear of anything. Oh dear! I shall always know after this how to pity folks out of work. Well, I suppose I must keep at it. If I stop, I shall surely get nothing; if I keep at it, I may be successful. Here goes for Squire Sylvester, though I don't know why I should ask him."

He mounted the steps leading to the door of Squire Sylvester's office, and hesitatingly entered that impressive business sanctum. Squire Sylvester was standing at his desk biting the end of a lead-pencil, and studying the columns of figures on the paper before him.

"Squire Sylvester, do-do-you know of any vacant situation in business?" asked Dave.

The squire looked up.

"Humph! Nothing to do?"

"Can't find it, sir."

"Well, I wish I could find somebody to work for me."

"Have you anything?" asked Dave eagerly, thinking how nice it would be to occupy a desk in the squire's office and assist in the management of such business enterprises as the building of ships or the sailing of them.

"I have been trying to find somebody to cut up some wood for me and stow it away, but I can't get hold of any unoccupied talent."

Dave's countenance dropped. It went up again, though.

"It will pay a week's board, maybe," he said to himself.

"I-I'll take that job, sir. I know how to swing an axe, and I'd rather be doing that than go loafing about."

"Good! I thought there was some stuff in you worth having."

Dave disregarded this compliment, and asked, "When shall I go to work?"

"Any time. Saw is behind the chopping-block in my shed, hung on a nail, or ought to be; and axe, I guess, is keeping the company of the block."

"I will begin to-day. There will be a comfort in knowing I am doing something."

"That is a good spirit, young man; and let me assure you if you stick to that style of doing things, some day you will be able to take comfort—a lot of it."

The squire went to the window of the office when Dave had left, and watched him cross the street in the direction of the squire's home.

"I like that young chap," murmured the squire.

Dave found the house of his employer, left word at the door that he was sent to look after the wood, and went into the shed.

"Here is the chopping-block, and there is the axe, and the saw is all right. I will take my tools outdoors, where my wood is," said Dave.

It was a day in early spring. Snow still clung to the corners of gardens, and hid away under the bushes, and lay thick on the shaded side of buildings. The sun, though, was strengthening its fires every day, and had coaxed a few bluebirds to come north, and say that warm weather had surely started from its southern home, and would be here in due season, though a bit delayed, perhaps. Two hours later, Dave's axe was striking music out of the pieces of wood the saw

had first played a tune on; and it is that kind of music that helps a man to feel independent and self-reliant, contented and cheerful.

"Hollo! that you?" sang out a voice. "How are you, old man?"

Dave looked up, and saw Dick Pray nodding over the fence.

"The old man has found work, you see," replied Dave.

"None of that sort for me," sang out Dick.

In about half-an-hour another voice was calling to him across the garden fence. This was not the flexible, smooth, rounded voice of youth addressing Dave, but there were the tones of an old man. There was a world of friendship, though, in this old man's salutation, "How d'ye do? how d'ye do?"

Dave turned toward it, and there was the old light-keeper, Toby Tolman.

"May I come in?" asked the light-keeper, approaching the gate.

"Oh yes, sir, do! Glad to see you."

The light-keeper came up the gravelled walk, approached the pile, and said, "How much more of a job have you got?"

"Oh, a couple of days."

"Well, then, do you want another?"

"Yes, sir. But how did you know I was here?"

"May, my granddaughter, knew, and she told me. I was at the house, you see. My job for you is to go to the lighthouse and be my assistant. She told me, and I said to myself, 'There's the man for me!'"

"You don't mean it! Why, where's Timothy Waters?"

"Got all through."

"His time up?"

"Well, he went before he wanted to. Wasn't just particular in reckoning what belonged to others."

Dave recalled at once the little affair about the two pennies.

"Who's at the light now, Mr. Tolman?"

"Oh, an old hand, who is just piecing me out at this time when I need help. He leaves day after to-morrow. Now, come! I'm up here trying to look somebody up to be my assistant. Can't bring it about at once; but if you'll go and stay a while I think you'll get the berth, and I don't know of anybody I'd like better to have."

"And I should like to come, too, and I will, just as soon as I finish this job."

"Maybe the squire would let you off now."

"I daresay."

"I'd like to take you back with me to-day."

"And I'd like to go, but I'd better finish up."

"You're right, on second thought. The squire wouldn't hesitate a moment, I venture to say; but then people sometimes grant us favours when at the same time they say to themselves, 'I wish they hadn't asked me.' You stay and finish

your job.”

The second day after this the task was completed, the saw going to its place on the nail behind the chopping-block, and the axe finding quarters near by.

”There!” said the squire: ”I don’t know that I ever paid for a job with greater satisfaction.”

He was handling a roll of bills as he said this, and handed one of these to Dave.

”It is too much, sir.”

”Oh no. That was a peculiar pile of wood, and it took a peculiar kind of merit to get the better of it. For ordinary wood,” said the squire, his eyes blinking, ”I should only pay an ordinary price; but this wood was something more than ordinary, and of course the price goes up. When I can do you a favour, you let me know.”

That day toward sunset a dory was gently tossing at the foot of the lighthouse on Black Rocks.

”Hollo!” shouted Dave, looking up from the boat and aiming his voice at the door above.

”Oh, that you?” asked the light-keeper, quickly appearing in the doorway and looking down. ”My man will be here in a jiffy and go home in your boat, as we fixed it, you know.”

Dave exchanged the boat for the lighthouse, and the retiring assistant quit the lighthouse for the boat, then rowing to his home. Dave heard that night the wind humming about the lantern, saw the friendly rays beckoning from other lighthouses, heard the wash of the waves around the gray tower of stone, and felt that he had reached a home.

XIV.

GUESTS AT THE LIGHTHOUSE.

In a month Dave Fletcher was established at the light on Black Rocks as assistant-keeper—a position that would bring him a far handsomer salary than could any present clerkship at Shipton. This berth was not secured without a struggle by Dave’s friends, as several candidates were willing to take the duties and profits of the place.

"You've got the place, though others wanted it," said the keeper, returning from town one day and wiping his round, red face with his handkerchief. "News came to-day. I don't know but you would have lost it, but they say a friend of yours interceded and told them up and down you must have it any way."

"Who was it?"

"Somebody that said he had seen you run a saw and knew you could run a lighthouse. That's what folks tell me he said."

"Oh, Squire Sylvester!"

"Yes. Queer feller; but he isn't all growl, though he does look like it, maybe."

Some time after this there were visitors at the light. One was expected, the other was not. The first was Bart Trafton, brought by the light-keeper one soft, sunny April day. Bart was very much interested in the lantern.

[image]

"Bart was very much interested in the lantern of the lighthouse."

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"Can I go up with you and see the lantern?" he asked.

"Oh yes," said Dave, leading Bart up the iron stairway that mounted from room to room.

"There!" said Bart, looking round on the glass windows enclosing the lantern and the lamp in its centre: "I think this is a dreadful interestin' place."

"I think so too, Bart."

"And what I think is interestin' is that lamp in the centre. Why, granny uses a lamp that, it seems to me, is no bigger than that, but it can't throw anywhere near such a light as that. I saw your light last night."

"You did? where?"

"From the hill behind our house. I went up there and saw it."

"I did not know that. Then we could signal to one another."

"Signal?"

"Yes, this way. Supposing, now, I should hang a lantern out on the side of the lighthouse toward the land, toward your home, and you could see it: you might take it as a sign that I wanted—well—we will say—a doctor."

"I think I could see it with father's spy-glass; it is real powerful. Say, will you try it to-morrow night? You hang it out, and I will take father's spy-glass and see if I can make out anything. Then I will send you word by the mail. You don't think it is too far from our house to the light?"

"Too far to see? oh no. Now, I said a man might want a doctor here. I have

often thought if one of us was sick—and you know the keeper is getting old—and if the other couldn't get off to bring a doctor, it might be a very serious thing for the sick man."

"Well, if you are in trouble and will hang out a light, and I see it, I will tell the people, and they will get to you."

Dave thought no more of this, but silently said, "I wonder if I haven't something else interesting to show the boy! Yes, I have got it."

He went down from the lantern to the kitchen, and took from its shelf the strange box of sandal-wood, whose story Dave already knew.

The light-keeper now repeated to Bart the tale of the drifting relic. He held it to his ear. Did the boy think it was a shell—that it would murmur a song of wave and cloud and the broad sunshine sweeping down on lonely surf-washed ledges?

"It won't talk," said the light-keeper, beaming on him.

Bart shook his head.

"I wish it would talk," thought the keeper. "It might tell about that man whom we picked up and brought into the light, and who seemed to know something about it. I wonder if he will ever call for it!"

He spoke of it to Dave afterward. The two were up on the lantern-deck at sunset looking off upon the sea. The water was still and glassy. It was heaving gently, as if with the dying day it too was dying, but feebly pulsating with life. One vast surface of shining gray, it gradually darkened till it was a mass of shadows across which were drawn the lines of white surf cresting the ledges.

"Several vessels in the harbour," said Dave.

"Yes: they have been coming down from Shipton this afternoon; but the wind has all died away, and they seem to have made up their mind to anchor there to-night. It is getting cool. Perhaps we had better go down," said the keeper, shrugging his shoulders. While within the lantern he glanced at the lamp, and then descended to the kitchen. Without the twilight deepened. Out of the gloom towered the lighthouse, bearing aloft its guiding, warning rays. The keeper was in the kitchen, trimming an old lantern which had done him much faithful service. That small visitor, Bart, had gone with Dave up into the lantern, anxious to see the working of the lamp.

The keeper lighted his lantern, and then started for the fog-signal tower. He was descending the stairs, when he heard a cry outside of the lighthouse.

"Somebody at the foot of the ladder, I guess, wants me," concluded the keeper, "and I will go to the door and see who it is."

He went to the door, lantern in hand, and looked down.

"Hollo, there!" sang out a man from the shadows below. "Shall I come up?"

"Ay, ay!" responded the keeper. "Low water down there, isn't it, so you can

come up the ladder?"

"I guess so. I will make fast and try the ladder."

The keeper heard the steps of somebody on the ladder, and then a man's form wriggled up through the hole in the platform outside the door.

"I get up with less trouble to you than I did the last time I was here," said the man.

The keeper looked at him.

"Ho! this you?" he asked.

"Nobody else."

It was the man who one day, when intoxicated, had been rescued from the bar, and the next morning had shown singular interest in the little box of sandalwood.

"Come up!" said the keeper, leading the man to the kitchen.

"I have been some time coming, haven't I?"

"Better late than never. Always glad to see people. Take that chair before the fire, and make yourself at home. I did not know as I should ever see you again. You are a Shipton man?" asked the keeper bluntly.

"Yes, I belong to Shipton; but then I am off about all the time. I think I have seen you on the street there."

"I was thinking myself I had seen you, but I couldn't say when, except that time you were at the lighthouse."

"Have you got that box now?"

"Oh yes. Here it is. Nobody has come to claim it."

He took the box down from its shelf and placed it on the table.

The keeper's companion said, "Now I will tell you the story about that box, and this letter, too, will confirm it."

As he spoke he took a letter from his pocket and opened it.

"The man who wrote that was an old shipmate, Grant Williams, a warm friend, and faithful too. He knew I had a weakness, and used to say he was afraid his shipmate would get into the breakers. He sent me a letter from a foreign port; here it is. You look at it. You will see that he gave me some good advice. He laid it all down like a chart; but I was a poor hand to steer by it. 'I expect to sail for Shipton in a Norwegian bark,' he wrote (I think he was born in Norway himself, but had been a long time in America), 'and I am going to get and bring my old shipmate a present of a box of sandal-wood, and I shall pack a few keepsakes into it. I will put my picture in, just to make it seem all the more like a present from me. I will put your initials and mine on the under side of the box. I will leave it at Shipton with your father if you are not there. And now don't forget this: it is to be a reminder of my desire that you should let liquor alone. When you see it, think of an old shipmate, and look at my face you will find in the box.' The first

time I saw the box was that morning after the night you found me in a state that was no credit to the one found. I knew the ship had been wrecked, and only that, and when I saw the face of my old shipmate, and knew that he had been lost on the bar where I came pretty near losing my own life through what he warned me against, I—I—felt it. I didn't see how I could take the box until I was in a condition to give some promise, you know, that I would be a better man; and now I hope I am, God being my helper."

"Well, I think it is plain proof that you are the one whom the man Williams meant, and the owner of this box, if those are your initials on the bottom—if—"

The keeper was about to ask the man for his name, but the sound of a light step tripping downstairs arrested their conversation, and both turned toward the stairway.

It was Bart Trafton. He looked up, stopped, started forward, and exclaimed, "Why, father!"

"This you, Bart?" said Thomas Trafton. "How came you here?—My boy, Mr. Tolman. My vessel is off there in the stream, and while waiting for the wind I just rowed over."

There they stood, side by side, Bart and his father, while the keeper was rising to hand the box to Thomas Trafton. The lighthouse kitchen never presented a more interesting scene than that of the reformed sailor in the presence of his oft-abused child, taking into his hands this gift, that had survived a wrecking storm, to be not only a pledge of the friendship of the dead, but to the living a stimulus to right-doing and a warning against wrong.

Thomas Trafton rowed back to the vessel that night. Bart was carried to town the next day. Bart reached home at sundown, and first told granny about the affair of the box as far as he had been able to pick up the threads of the details and weave them into a story; then he asked, "Where is father's spy-glass?"

"Behind the clock, Bartie," said granny. "What do you want it for?"

"Just to look off," he said, seizing the glass and bearing it out-doors. Granny followed him into the yard and there halted; for Bart was going farther, already bestriding the fence.

"Where is that boy going?" wondered granny.

"Bartie!" she called aloud, "it is a-gittin' too late to see things clear."

He was now mounting a hill beyond the yard.

"Back in a moment, granny!" he shouted.

She soon saw his figure standing out, clear and distinct, against the western sky, and he was elevating the glass.

"Too soon to see anything yet," he said, when he returned.

"Where you lookin', child?"

"Off to the lighthouse."

"They haven't more than lighted her up."

"I know it. I was too early."

"You want to see the light? You won't have to take a glass for that; you just wait."

"I want to see something else. You come with me, granny, when I go again."

"Sakes, child, what you up to?"

Later two figures crept up the hill, one carrying a spy-glass.

"There, granny!" said the bearer of the glass. "Now you look off to the light at Black Rocks, and right under it see if you can't see another light—a little one."

"La, child," declared granny, vainly looking through the glass, "I can't see nothin'. This thing pokes out what there is there."

"Eh? can't you, granny?" replied Bart, levelling the glass toward the harbour. "I see the light. And—and—I think—I see a—something else underneath. Seems like a little star under a moon."

The next day this was dropped in the post-office:—

"DEAR DAVE,—I saw your lantern, I know. Did you hang it out? Your friend, BART."

Dave answered this in person within a week.

"I'm having a holiday," he said to granny—"off for a day—and thought I would call. I want you, please, to say for me to Bart I got his note, and that I did hang out my lantern the night that he looked for it."

"Now, did you ever see sich a boy? He has been up every night to look for that lantern, and he says he feels easier if he don't see it."

"You tell him not to worry. We are very comfortable. A person might live there a century and nothing happen to them."

Notwithstanding this assertion about the safety of century-serving keepers, Bart would sometimes steal out in the dark and climb the bare, lonely hill. Then he would search the black horizon.

"There's the reg'lar light," he would say, "but I don't see anything more. All right!"

THE STORM GATHERING.

There was a tongue of land not far from the lighthouse known as "Pudding Point." How long the water-trip to it might be depended upon the state of the tide. In the immediate vicinity of the lighthouse there was, in the direction of this Pudding Point, such an accumulation of sandy ridges that at low-water the voyage was only a quarter of a mile. At high tide all the yellow flats were covered, and an oarsman must pull his boat across half-a-mile of water to go from the light to the point. Sometimes Dave had occasion to visit Pudding Point. A few houses were there, and they might be able to supply an article needed at the light, and that would save a trip to Shipton. One sunny morning Dave had rowed over from the light, and was drawing his boat up the sands, when he noticed a familiar figure striding along a ridge beyond the beach. It was a person of handsome carriage, and one well aware of it.

"I should know that form anywhere," said Dave. "Hollo, Dick!" he shouted. Dick Pray came running down a sandy slope and gave Dave his hand.

"I am trying to hunt up Thomas Trafton," said Dave. "I believe he has a fish-house around here, hasn't he?"

"You'll find him on that ledge a little way back."

Dave hunted up the fish-house—a black, weather-beaten box. Thomas Trafton was spreading fish on the long fish-flakes in the rear of his humble quarters.

"That you, Dave?" asked the fisherman. "I thought I saw you down on the shore a half-hour ago."

"I was over at the light half-an-hour ago."

"Then it was Timothy Waters."

"How so?"

"Don't you know that if one takes a back view of you and Timothy, although he is really older than you by half-a-dozen years, it wouldn't be easy to tell you apart? Let me see. You are twenty-one?"

"So they say at home."

"Timothy is twenty-seven at least."

"And I look like Timothy?"

"Rear view only, and I can only tell it is him if in walking he throws his arms out. You never do that."

"I am not anxious to resemble Timothy Waters. I thought he was at sea."

"Off and on. He is now, I suppose, in that craft off in the stream."

"The *Relentless*?"

"That's the one. I know I am glad to be out of her. My health improved

steadily after quitting her. I am going to be at home, fishing, this season."

"How do they all do at home?"

"Oh, comfortable."

"Bart is getting to be a big boy, isn't he?"

"Yes, he is. He thinks a good deal of you. Now, you know that habit he got into once—"

"What was that?"

"Of taking my spy-glass and going out to look at the lighthouse at night—"

"To see if I had hung out a lantern because we were disabled—by sickness, you know, or something of the kind?"

"That is it. Well, his granny says he hasn't wholly dropped it now. She will see him go out, and when he comes back she will say, 'Anything?' 'Nothing,' he will say."

"Oh, I guess there never will be any need of his looking."

"No, I s'pose not; but it shows his interest."

"Yes; I am thankful for that.—Well, let us have a fish to broil; have come out for that."

Dave received his fish, paid for it, and very soon turned away, striding off energetically in the direction of his boat.

When Dave returned to the lighthouse, the tide, gradually dropping, had uncovered the rocky foundations, and the water was playing with the fringes of seaweed all about the rocks.

"How gracefully that seaweed rises and falls! Those curves of its motion are very delicate.—Hollo! what is that?" he asked.

Looking at the foundations, he saw in a crevice a little object that was not a lump of rock-weed or a rock, and what was it?

"A pocket-book!" said Dave, leaning out of his boat and picking up this relic tightly wedged between the stones. "I'll look at that when I get up into the kitchen."

Reaching the kitchen, he hastily opened the pocket-book, noticed that it was empty, and then placed it to dry on a shelf. It was very peaceful in the kitchen, and the stove purred and the clock ticked contentedly and quietly as ever. But where was the light-keeper? his assistant wondered.

"Upstairs probably," was the thought in reply; and yet this consideration, reasonable as it might seem at the moment, did not dispose of the question wholly. True, in a lighthouse, where one might say if a man were not downstairs he must be upstairs, that he could not be "out in the yard" or "in the cellar," Dave's conclusion seemed to be correct. He felt, however, a peculiar sense of loneliness. If Dave were a person given to moods, if he were likely to be sombre, he might have said it was only a fancy; but for one of his temperament that

was unusual. Dave with reason had been somewhat worried about his principal. Toby Tolman was growing old. It had been in certain quarters openly said that he was too old for his position. He had been such an efficient keeper, and he had as his assistant a man so valuable, that no one cared to make an effort to remove him from his position. The person who would probably be benefited by any change, and would be invited to take charge of the light, was David Fletcher, and he would not move, for that reason, against his kind old friend. Dave had worked all the harder to fill up any deficiencies on the part of his principal, and the principal would doubtless have been invited to step out if his assistant had not worked so hard to keep him in. Often Dave noticed an indisposition in the light-keeper to attend to that fraction of the duties of the place falling to him, and Dave rightly attributed the indisposition to inability. During the watch-hours belonging to the keeper his assistant had sometimes found him asleep, and when the rest-hours belonging to the keeper arrived, he would unduly prolong his sleep in the morning, and neglect duties to which he had hitherto given prompt attention. Dave also noticed that Mr. Tolman lingered at an unusual length over his Bible. It would be an exceedingly good sign if it could be said of many people that they spent twice as much time as previously with their Bibles; but when a man usually giving to this habit an hour and a half may take three hours, neglecting other daily duties, there may be occasion for inquiry into the change. The light-keeper did not himself notice this peculiarity about to be mentioned, and yet any one seeing the passages read would have appreciated it. The keeper now found unusual comfort in the psalms that spoke of God as a hiding-place, a refuge, a high tower. Was he like the mariner who sees the storm pressing him closely and hastens to find the harbour where he can let fall each straining sail, like the tired bird that drops its wings because it has found its nest?

Dave had other reason for worry. There were in circulation mysterious stories that everything in the administration of the lighthouse at Black Rocks was not satisfactory. There were sly whisperings that goods belonging to Government were given out to others by the keepers, but when, where, and why, nobody said. There was only the repeated story of a mysterious disappearance of Government property. Several friends of Dave tried to catch and hold these rumours. Catch them they did, but hold them they could not. They were like birds that you may think are yours, but when you turn them into a room, lo, they fly out of an open window in the opposite direction.

Thomas Trafton was very indignant.

"Look here!" he said with a reddened face to a fisherman repeating some of these charges, "who told you that?"

"Almost everybody."

"Name one."

"Well, Timothy Waters was one."

"Timothy Waters, a man that had trouble at the light! You wait before you believe the story."

"But others have said the same thing."

"Well, wait; I am going to track these stories to their start."

Thomas Trafton imagined that he was a hunter, and like one following up the trail of an animal, he endeavoured to track these slanders back to their den. Sometimes he would follow the accusations back to Timothy Waters, and then somebody else would be found to assert them, and so the trail would start away again. Amid the multitude of tracks, but without evidence of their origin, this hunter from the Trafton family was bewildered. He mentioned the affair to Dave, feeling that here was an innocent person whom others were attacking, and yet he might be entirely ignorant of the assault.

"I-I-don't want to make you uneasy, but I feel friendly more than you can imagine," said Thomas, "and I thought you ought to know about the stories that are going round."

"Oh, I suppose people are always talking. Life would be dreadful dull if there wasn't something to talk about; and if I save the world from dulness I may flatter myself that I am doing some good."

"Oh, but it isn't just gossip."

"Isn't?" replied Dave, taking a hint from Thomas

Trafton's significant look more than from any language. "What is it then?"

"Now, I don't believe it, mind ye. I try to stop it, but it is like trying to stop a sand-piper on the beach without a gun. Running after it don't bring it."

"Well, what is it? I know you wouldn't believe anything unfair, but I am bothered to know what it is."

"Why—and I thought you had better know it—they say things belonging to Government are given out from the lighthouse: 'misappropriated'—I believe that is the word."

"Long word! Well, who says it?" asked Dave sternly.

"Oh, I'm sorry to say I've heard a good many tell it who ought to know better."

"It is all a lie! Misappropriation! That good man Toby Tolman—as if he would do such a thing! Why, any one with a head might know better. Toby never would do it!"

"Of course he wouldn't, nor you neither. That is not the p'int, but how to stop 'em?"

Dave was silent. Then he broke out,—

"Who has mentioned it?"

Thomas mentioned the fisherman he had recently confronted and rebuked.

Then he added,–

”I have tried to run the story down to its hole. It don’t seem to start with him, for he says somebody told him, and–”

”Who is that?”

”Timothy Waters.”

”Indeed!”

”Now, I want to know how to stop the story.”

”You let me think it over, Thomas. I am much obliged to you.”

”I am real sorry to tell you,” replied Thomas, ”but I thought you ought to know of it, and I’ll stand by you and Toby to–the last.”

This conversation was only three days before Dave’s visit to Pudding Point. Thomas had said if anything new turned up he would report to Dave. ”Nothing,” he had said to Dave during that call at the fish-house, looking significantly at him.

”I understand,” replied Dave, ”and I have nothing. All I can do is to grin and bear it.”

To suit the act to the sentiment, he gave a smile with compressed lips. It was a rather grim smile.

Dave was thinking of the unpleasant subject continually. What added to his burden was the conviction that he did not think it would be wise to tell his principal, for he suspected–and he judged rightly–that it would do no good, that it would only grieve the light-keeper, and that this burden of grief he was not just then in a condition to easily carry.

”I am acting for two,” he said to himself, ”and that makes it all the harder. If it were just one, just myself, I could seem to tell what to do; but I think it would do an injury to the old man to tell him now; and what shall I do? I guess I must take the advice of that psalm to myself.”

He had in mind the close of the twenty-seventh psalm, read the night before: ”Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.” And this was Dave’s comment on the verse: ”I can rest on that promise. I was not aware when a man didn’t know what to do, which way to turn, that this psalm could help and rest one like that.”

So Dave, like many pilgrims perplexed and tired, came to the shadow of the mountain-promises of God. and there comforted his soul in the assurance that God thought of him, loved him, and would strengthen him. He needed this comfort when he returned to the lighthouse, after his visit to Thomas Trafton’s fish-house, and missed the keeper.

”I will go upstairs to find him,” he said.

How hard and heavy was the sound of his footsteps as he ascended the first flight of stairs leading from the kitchen! Dave went up as if he were carrying a

burden. He pushed open the door at the head of the stairway and looked into the keeper's room, anxiously and yet timidly, as if desirous to find him and yet afraid.

"Ah, there he is," thought Dave.

He was lying on his bed, his eyes closed.

"Is he asleep?" wondered Dave. He stepped to the bed.

"Yes, he must be asleep. Shall I speak to him?"

He hesitated. He wanted to wake him and make sure that an ugly suspicion was without foundation.

He watched the old man's breast, and saw a movement there as of a pulsation of the heart. He held his hand before the keeper's mouth.

"Yes, I feel his warm breath. It must be sleep, and yet—"

He paused. He did not like to express in language what he could not help in thought.

"I will not disturb him," he finally said, "for it may be only just sleep. I will wait, any way, till after dinner."

Deferring and still suspecting, he went downstairs. The kitchen had not changed, and yet it seemed a different place. The clock and the fire now made discordant noises. The sunshine that fell through the window and rested on the floor seemed not so much to bring the light as to show how empty and comfortless the place was. He felt lonelier than ever, this man that people outside suspected of theft, who was cut off from the sympathy of the man suspected with him. He was like one of the ledges in the sea, so isolated, so much by itself, upon which the waves beat without mercy, without rest. In that hour what society, sympathy, strength, he found in the psalms!—a face to smile upon him, a voice to cheer, and a hand to uplift.

XVI.

THE STORM STRIKING.

After dinner Dave mounted the stairway leading to the keeper's room.

"Still sleeping," thought Dave, lingering on the threshold and hesitating to go forward. He advanced, though, in a moment, for he was startled at the keeper's appearance. It was like an intermittent stupor rather than the continued

unconsciousness of sleep. Dave touched the keeper, and he found the temperature to be that of a high fever. At times the old light-keeper would start and open his eyes, and when Dave left the room to search the pantry for some simple remedy on the medicine-shelf, he found on his return that his patient had left his bed and was standing by the narrow window in the thick stone walls. He murmured something about "storm," about the "light," and suffered Dave to lead him back to bed.

"I must look out how I leave him again," thought Dave; and yet how could he manage the case alone?

"I must have help," he said, "and soon as I have a chance I must hang a signal out at the door. Perhaps some one will call, and I'll wait before showing the signal."

Nobody came. Why should they come because suspecting any trouble? The afternoon was pleasant. The sea broke gently upon the stone walls of the lighthouse, and the sun shed its quiet glow like some benediction of peace upon the sea. It was the very afternoon when a spectator would be likely to conclude that the lighthouse was in no need of help.

"I'll go now," at last concluded Dave. "He is asleep; his fever is running lower. I will step to the door of the signal-tower, and throw out a white sheet there, and somebody may see it."

Nobody came, and yet here was a man who might be dangerously sick. At the hour of sunset he ran up to the lantern and lighted the lamp. He quickly descended, saying to himself, "How glad I am that it is not foggy! So much to be thankful for! How could I start that signal! But it won't do to try to get through the night in this fashion. What, what can I do?"

The twilight thickened; the shadows trailed longer, broader, and darker folds across the sea. Dave sat alone with the sick man, who moaned as if in pain.

"I have it!" he suddenly exclaimed, recalling what Thomas Trafton told him. "I can do one thing more. I'll hang the lantern out from the tower; maybe Bart will possibly see it."

Watching his chance when the keeper was less uneasy, he ran downstairs, lighted a lantern, and then suspended it outside a window on the landward side of the tower. The cool air of the sea blew refreshingly on his heated face as he leaned out.

"The air feels good; but I can't stop here," said Dave, hurrying away and returning to the keeper's room. "There! I have done all I could, and now—"

There came to him again the words of the psalmist, "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord."

He could rest on that promise. He was beginning to find out what God could be in the time of trouble. Friends might fail him; on every side there might

be an emptiness, a loneliness. All about him settled the presence of God, filling up this solitude, this waste, this night. He could lean on God and—wait. Others might suspect his integrity. He knew he was not guilty, and he welcomed the thought of God’s knowledge—that God saw to the bottom of his heart, and into the depths of his life, and God knew he was innocent. Yes, he could wait.

That evening Thomas Trafton, his old mother, and Bart sat around the little table of pine on which the kitchen lamp had been placed. The father was telling where he had been that day and whom he had seen.

”Dave Fletcher was down at the fish-house to-day. He spoke, Bart, of your looking through the spy-glass, but he did not think it necessary.”

”Did he speak of it?” said Bart eagerly. ”I have a great mind to—”

”To go out?” asked his father—”to go out and see? Oh, nonsense! No more need of it than my going to Australia.”

”Oh, let him go if he wants to,” pleaded the grandmother; and the father assented.

Bart reached up to the spy-glass resting on a shelf, took it down, and seizing his hat also, hurried outdoors. He was going through the yard, when he saw somebody stealing away from a shed in the rear of the house.

”Why, if that don’t look like Dave Fletcher himself!” thought Bart. ”Dave Fletcher!” he shouted.

Whoever it was—and the form certainly did resemble Dave’s—he made no reply, but hurried through the yard down into the street.

”Somebody else, I suppose!” murmured Bart. ”Wonder what he wanted! Perhaps it was one of the fishermen who wanted to leave something for father. Can’t stop to see now.”

He hurried to the top of the hill, raised his glass, and pointed it toward the lighthouse.

”Father!” he said, appearing the next minute in the kitchen, and speaking hurriedly, ”oh—oh—come here! and you—granny—and see if—”

He said no more, for this was sufficient to startle his auditors, and all three hastened up the hill.

”You didn’t see a second light at the lighthouse?” asked the father.

”Yes, I did,” replied Bart; ”I know I did.”

”Guess you were mistaken,” suggested granny.

”No, I wasn’t; you just look and see your—yourself.”

Granny could not see anything except a hazy glow where the lighthouse might be supposed to stand.

”Can’t say I saw even that as well as I wanted to,” she confessed to herself.

Thomas Trafton’s keen eyes, though, detected a bright little star under the light in the lantern of the sea-tower, and exclaimed, ”No doubt about it! Afraid

there's trouble there, and—"

"Could take our boat, father," said Bart eagerly, who had been already planning for this emergency, "and pick up a doctor; for that is what the signal must mean after what Dave told me, you know, and—and—"

"We will go right off," said Thomas Trafton, in his quick, decided way.

As they were rowing across the river to obtain the services of Dr. Peters, Bart thought of the time, half-a-dozen years ago, when his quest for the physician ended in a river-bath.

"Dave Fletcher did a good thing for me then," thought Bart, "and I will stand by him now."

How he bent to his oars and made them bend in their turn! It was a pleasure to be of some use in the world.

It was that evening that the light-keeper came back for a moment to consciousness, and looking steadily at Dave, said in a very serious tone of voice, "How long have I been lying here?"

"Oh, only since morning," replied his nurse, delighted to hear his voice. "Now, you be quiet and tell me if you want anything—any medicine you take when you are sick this way."

Here the keeper's thoughts wandered again. He talked about the fog that was coming, and a craft that was caught on the bar, and then, looking at Dave steadily, said in a hesitating way, "Hadn't you better—put it—back—Dave?"

"Put back what, sir?"

"What you—took? Let me—as a—friend—advise you."

"Took?"

The keeper lifted himself on his elbow and looked all around, as if trying to find something.

"David, don't hide it!"

Then the keeper fell back upon his bed, and murmuring a few words indistinctly, he was lost again in a stupor. He was no sooner quiet than his assistant's quick ear caught the sound of steps and voices down in the signal-tower; for all the doors this summer evening were open between the keeper's room and the platform at the entrance of the lighthouse. It was the arrival of Thomas Trafton's party, and Dr. Peters was a member of it. If Dave felt that its coming was like the reaching out of a hand that lifted him up and strengthened him, the words of the keeper were like a hand smiting him down.

What did Toby Tolman mean?

XVII.

THOMAS TRAFTON, DETECTIVE.

"Well!" said Dr. Peters, after a night of careful watching of the light-keeper's symptoms. He was a tall, elderly gentleman, with a very smooth, melodious voice, its tones seeming to have been dipped in syrup.

He began again,—

"Well, Mr. Fletcher, I think Mr. Tolman will recover from this. We shall get him through." And when he spoke, Dr. Peters waved his hands as if he had already disposed of this case and now passed it out of sight.

"However, Mr. Fletcher, the case will need careful watching, and you had better take charge of it, unless his daughter might come down to relieve you."

"Possibly his granddaughter," thought Dave.

"I don't think we can ever rely on Toby Tolman's resuming his old duties here—might do a little something, you know—and you had better get Thomas Trafton or some trusty man to help you. When will the inspector be here?"

"Our lighthouse inspector, Captain Sinclair, doctor?"

"Yes."

"In about a fortnight, perhaps sooner. The steamer that brings supplies for the lighthouse will soon be here, and Captain Sinclair will come in her, I think."

"The inspector, to look after matters?"

"Yes, sir. Of course I shall report what you say about the keeper to headquarters at once."

"I would. It is very important. And when Captain Sinclair comes, let me know, please."

"I will, sir."

"Of course it is necessary that things should be inspected. I am glad he is coming. Well to be careful."

"What does he mean?" wondered Dave. "Has he got hold of those stories about misappropriation? Well, when Captain Sinclair comes I hope he will sift things to the bottom. I am not afraid of an investigation."

Dave took satisfaction in the consciousness of his integrity; still it was not

pleasant to be suspected. It was Toby Tolman's mysterious language, indicating that he too held Dave in some kind of suspicion, which troubled Dave painfully. The day after Dr. Peters's visit the light-keeper again referred to this mystery. He roused himself into a state of seeming consciousness, and then relapsed. Again he awoke. He looked around him and fastened his eyes on the top of a clothes-press in the room.

"What do you want, sir? Anything there that you want to put on?" asked Dave.

The keeper shook his head. Pointing at the top of the press, he said, "Dave, I would put it back."

"What do you mean? I don't understand you."

The keeper, though, was gone again, murmuring about the tide, which he said was very late, and when would it come in? He had been awake long enough to cruelly wound Dave once more.

Bart Trafton had gone home with Dr. Peters, rowing him to town in the same dory that brought him to the light the night before. In two days Bart was down again. As he sat in the kitchen eating some apple-pie offered him by his father, he said, "Father, I found something in our shed."

"What was it, Bart?"

Laying down his lunch, Bart drew out of a package a chronometer.

"Found that in the shed?" asked the surprised father.

"Yes, on a shelf."

"Why, Bart, this has got the letters of our lighthouse on it. Must have come from here. And in our shed! How did it get there? I must show this to Dave," said Thomas Trafton.

"Hush-sh!" exclaimed Dave, when his assistant entered the room; "Toby is trying to get some sleep."

"See here!" said Thomas, in low tones. "Must show you something."

"I never saw it before," replied Dave, handling the chronometer. "It belongs here, though. There are the initials. Where did you get it?"

A stir among the bedclothes arrested the attention of the two men. Toby Tolman had opened his eyes, and was looking at them. Something he saw must have pleased him, for he smiled.

"That is right, Dave. I am glad you brought it back. I would put it up."

"Where?" asked the astonished Dave, anxious to lay hold of any clue to a serious mystery.

"Up there."

He pointed at the top of the clothes-press. The press was not a tall one. Dave standing on tiptoe could reach to its top, and he now laid the watch there.

"Is that right?" asked Dave.

The keeper nodded his head, and then closed his eyes, his face wearing a satisfied expression foreign to it all through his sickness.

"Is not that queer?" whispered Dave. "Some mystery that is too deep for me."

He beckoned Thomas and Bart out of the room, and then followed them downstairs.

"Now, how do you explain that?" asked Dave, as the three clustered about the stove, whose heat that day was acceptable, for the air was chilly and the wind was a prophet of storm.

"Don't know," said Thomas.

"I'd give this old pocket-book full of silver," declared Dave, "to have that thing cleared up. It takes a load off my mind, I tell you. The old man has been harping on the fact that I took something, and he has been looking toward that old clothes-press in such a strange way. I didn't know anything was up there. Did you see how he acted, smiled about it?"

"Where did you get this pocket-book?" asked Thomas.

"The day that Toby was taken sick I picked it up among the rocks here. I had been over at your fish-house, and found it when I was coming back. Been in the water, you see."

"Here are some letters on it—T.W."

"That means Tobias Winkley or—"

"Thomas Winkley. Can't prove it to be Thomas Trafton; and if you could no money is in it. 'T.W.,' that is Timothy Watson."

"Or Timothy Waters."

"Yes; Timothy Waters, or anything that would go with those initials. Toby Tolman wouldn't go."

"Now I must go upstairs again to be with my patient."

Dave Fletcher's heart was lighter as he went upstairs again, but the burden now lightening on his shoulders seemed to be transferred to those of Thomas Trafton.

"Don't understand this!" he exclaimed. "Where is Bart? Bart!"

There was no response to this call, and the father went downstairs into the storeroom to hunt up Bart.

"Nobody here. I'll go into the signal-tower," said Thomas; and up in the engine-room, looking soberly out of a window fronting the breakers on the bar, stood Bart.

"You here, Bart? What are you doing here?"

"Thinking," said the boy gloomily.

"What makes you so sober, Bart?"

"Don't like to have folks suspected."

"Neither do I. That old thing was found in our shed, but I don't know anything about it."

It relieved Bart to hear his father's stout assertion of innocence, but his burdens had not all dropped.

"You know they talk about Dave, father."

"Well, you don't believe it?"

How could Bart consent to take Dave Fletcher down from that high pedestal to which he had elevated him? How could he believe that his marble statue was after all only common clay, and even of an inferior earth?

"I won't believe it till it is proved," said Bart stoutly, "nor of you either, father."

This relieved Thomas Trafton.

"Bart, you see if I don't turn this rascally thing over and get at the truth! I'll find the mischief-maker; yes, I will."

Thomas Trafton was by nature a detective. He put himself on the trail of this mystery, and if a trained hound he could not have followed the track more keenly and resolutely. He announced his purpose to Dave, and the latter would ask him occasionally if he had any clue.

"I am at work on it, still running. The scent is good, and I have something of a trail. I'll tell you when I get through," was one reply he made.

XVIII.

INTO A TRAP.

"Cap'n Sinclair!" called out a voice. The man projecting the voice stood up in a boat rocking gently in the harbour. The man addressed stood in a small black steamer, the *Spitfire*, employed in conveying supplies to the lighthouses. He leaned over the steamer's rail and asked, "What is it?"

"I suppose you remember me, Timothy Waters?"

"Oh, that you, Waters?"

"Yes. Could I see you?"

"Here I am."

Captain Sinclair was a middle-aged man, rather stout, wearing a moustache, and flashing a friendly look out of his brown eyes.

"I don't think I was fairly treated," said Timothy, "when I lost my place in the lighthouse, and I wanted to make some explanations. Besides me, you may have heard the stories all round about the goods they are wasting at the light?"

"Well, I have heard something," said the captain impatiently. "Somebody wrote to me about it, but he wasn't man enough to sign his name. May have been a woman, for all I know."

"If you'd let me come aboard—"

"Oh, you can come aboard; but I won't be here long. I must go into the light, and the steamer is going off—at once. Just row over to the lighthouse, and I'll talk with you there."

Timothy turned away and shrugged his shoulders. He said to himself, "I don't want to go in there. However, I think I saw Trafton and that Fletcher rowin' off. I can stand the old man." He turned to the captain and said in a fawning tone, "All right, cap'n. I want you to have your say about it."

When Captain Sinclair and Timothy entered the kitchen of the lighthouse, to the surprise of Timothy he saw Trafton and Dave Fletcher. They had "rowed off," and had also rowed back. Timothy was so unprepared for their appearance that he would have allowed the opportunity for presenting his cause to slip by unimproved. Dave Fletcher, though, was ready to begin at once, and did so.

"Captain Sinclair, be seated, please, and the rest of you. When you were here yesterday I called your attention to certain charges made against Mr. Tolman and myself that—"

"Oh yes, I remember; and here is a letter full of them somebody sent to me, but they were too cowardly to add any name. Let me have the light-book. That will give me some of last year's records."

Timothy was looking on in apparent unconcern, but really in bewilderment, and wondering when his turn would come. He began to address the inspector.

"Cap'n—"

Thomas was ahead of him, and by this time had said three words to Timothy's one,—

"Cap'n Sinclair, I—Cap'n Sinclair, I have something to say. I think the author of all this trouble is here. He"—pointing a finger at Timothy—"came to this lighthouse, took a chronometer, carried it to Shipton, left it in my shed—"

[image]

"Cap'n Sinclair, the author of all this trouble sits there." Page 195]

This torrent of charges, so unexpected, swept away the statements Timothy had prepared for Captain Sinclair. He attempted to stem the torrent, and cried, "It is easy to say you know, cap'n"—Timothy tried to be very bland, restraining his temper—"easy to say you know—"

"I can say that he came to this lighthouse," Thomas broke out again, "and when the keeper was lyin' sick on his bed—asleep, as he thought, is my guess—he took a chronometer—"

Timothy, who had been curbing his temper, now threw away all reins.

"Where is the keeper?" he asked stormily. "I don't believe he can say that."

"Oh, he is upstairs, and well enough to see us. The doctor says he is doing well. And walk up, gentlemen," said Dave, "walk up!"

Bart was reading to the old man, who was seated in a rocking-chair near his bed. The company almost filled the little room, but the light-keeper bade them welcome.

"Mr. Tolman," said Thomas, "won't you tell Cap'n Sinclair what you told me about the taking of the chronometer?"

"Oh yes," said the old light-keeper slowly. "I was feeling very sick, so much so that I concluded to lie down. I s'pose I was lying with my eyes 'most shut, when I heard a step and saw a man come in, and he looked at me, and then he stood on a chair, examined the top of that clothes-press, and took down a chronometer—an old thing, but it might be fixed up. The man thought I was asleep, and I didn't see his face, only it seemed to me as if he had whiskers, and when he stood on a chair to reach the chronometer he looked—standing with his back to me—as if it was Dave Fletcher. Well, I was that weak I couldn't speak, and my visitor went off, supposing, I daresay, that I was asleep. Well, I kept it on my mind, forgetting the whiskers, that it was Dave, and I charged him with it. Sorry I did—"

"Well," said Timothy fiercely, "why wasn't it Fletcher? It is about time that innocent chap should do something."

"He says—Mr. Tolman says," observed Captain Sinclair, "that you and Fletcher look alike."

"Wall," bawled Timothy, "why couldn't it have been Fletcher much as me, don't you see? Come you—you feller—you stand by this clothes-press and reach up, and let's see how you look."

"This 'feller' is ready," said Dave, going to the clothes-press and reaching to its top.

"And here I am. Why ain't it him?" asked Timothy, also standing by the press and reaching up.

"They do look alike when their backs are turned toward us," observed Captain Sinclair.

"Only the keeper said the one he saw had whiskers, and there are Timo-

thy's," remarked Thomas.

Dave wore only a moustache. Thomas's remark called the attention of everybody to Timothy's whiskers, projecting like wings from his cheeks. These wings were red, but their colour was not as vivid as that of Timothy's face.

"Besides," continued Thomas, "Dave wasn't here. He can prove an alibi. He was over at Pudding P'int; came to get a fish from me."

"Why," said Timothy indignantly, "I was—two miles away."

"I saw you round the shore myself; and here is your pocket-book that Dave found at the foot of the light-tower that very morning."

Timothy opened his eyes, swelled up his cheeks, puffed, declared he didn't see how that was, "and—and—"

Here Bart interrupted his stammering, and said,—

"And I saw you up at our shed that evening. I thought it was Dave Fletcher, taking a back view; but when I called 'Dave!' there was no answer to it;—and, Dave, you'd speak if I called, wouldn't you?"

"I think I would."

"This other person that looked like you didn't say a word."

Timothy puffed and protested and denied, growing redder and redder.

"See here, Waters," said Captain Sinclair: "I have been looking at the lighthouse records last year, and I have hunted up places where you have written, and the style is like this in the letter I received—that anonymous one—about the charges against the keepers in the lighthouse. You come up into the room above with me."

Stuttering in his confusion, still asserting his innocence, blushing, he stumbled up the stairway, and then alone with Captain Sinclair he was urged to make a clean breast of it.

"Yes," said the captain, "tell the whole story; for there is enough against you to shut you up in quarters of stone, and it won't be a lighthouse."

Timothy was startled by this. He broke down, and made a full confession to the inspector.

XIX.

A PLACE TO STOP.

Here is a place to bring into a harbour our story drifting on like a boat. Dave Fletcher was appointed keeper of the light at Black Rocks, and Thomas Trafton became his assistant. Bart, though, said he considered himself to be second assistant, and should fit himself as rapidly as possible for a keeper. He wanted, he added, to be as useful as he could be—an idea that never forsook him since the old days of his career as Little Mew. Dick Pray went on in the old style, full of plans and projects, stirred by an intense ambition to do some big thing, but impatient of the little things necessary to the execution of the whole. Always ready to dare, he was as uniformly averse to the doing of the hard work that might be demanded.

Toby Tolman took up his quarters in his old home ashore. As he could not go where Dave was, he said he thought Dave ought to come to him as often as possible. Dave promised to do all in his power, and as a pledge of his sincerity he married the light-keeper's granddaughter, black-eyed, bright-eyed May Tolman. She lived under Toby Tolman's roof; and as Dave improved every opportunity to visit the grand-daughter, he was able to fulfil his promise made to the grandfather.

THE END.

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