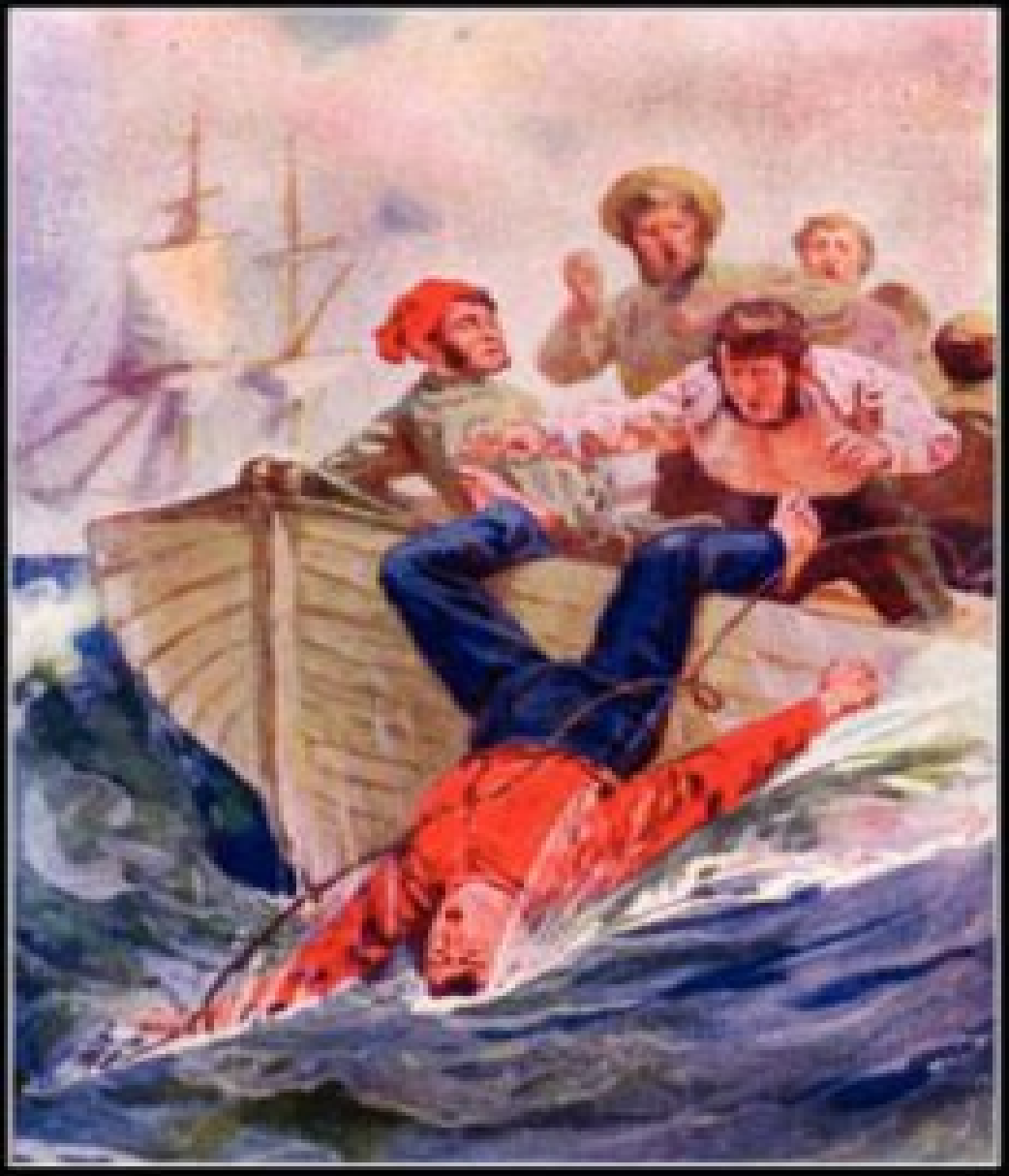

Jeff Benson; or, the Young Coastguardsman

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"Jeff Benson, or the Young Coastguardsman"

Chapter One.

Our Hero Introduced with some of his Friends.

A poor schoolmaster named Benson died, not long ago, in a little town on the south-east coast of England, which shall be called Cranby.

He left an only son, Jeffrey, and an elder brother, Jacob, to mourn his loss. The son mourned for his father profoundly, for he loved him much. The brother mourned him moderately, for he was a close-fisted, hard-hearted, stern man of the law, whose little soul, enclosed in a large body, had not risen to the conception of any nobler aim in life than the acquisition of wealth, or any higher enjoyment than a social evening with men like himself.

The son Jeffrey was a free-and-easy, hearty, good-natured lad, with an overgrown and handsome person, an enthusiastic spirit, a strong will, and a thorough belief in his own ability to achieve anything to which he chose to set his mind.

Up to the time of his father's death, Jeff's main idea of the desirable in life was—*fun*! Fun in all its more innocent phases seemed to him the sum of what was

wanted by man. He had experienced it in all its scholastic forms ever since he was a little boy; and even when, at the mature age of fifteen, he was promoted to the rank of usher in his father's school, his chief source of solace and relaxation was the old play-ground, where he naturally reigned supreme, being the best runner, rower, wrestler, jumper, gymnast, and, generally, the best fellow in the school.

He had never known a mother's love, and his father's death was the first blow that helped to shatter his early notions of felicity. The cloud that overshadowed him at that time was very dark, and he received no sympathy worth mentioning from his only relative, the solicitor.

"Well, Jeff, what d'you think of doing?" asked that austere relative, two days after the funeral. "Of course at your age you can't carry on the school alone."

"Of course not," answered the boy, with a suppressed sob.

"What say you to entering my office and becoming a lawyer, Jeff?"

"Thanks, uncle, I'd rather not."

"What will you do, then?" demanded the uncle, somewhat offended at this flat rejection of his proposal.

The lad thought for a moment, and then said quietly but decidedly, "I'll go to sea."

"Go to the world's end if you like," returned the uncle, who was proud and touchy, and hated the sea; "but don't ask me to help you."

“Thank you, uncle,” replied the lad, who was as proud as himself, though not touchy, and had a strong affection for the sea; “having no particular business at the world’s end just now, I’ll put off my visit to a more convenient season.”

They parted, and we need scarcely add that the brief intercourse of uncle and nephew which had thus suddenly begun as suddenly ceased.

It is not usually difficult for a strong, active lad, with merry black eyes and cheery manners, to obtain employment. At least Jeffrey Benson did not find it so. A few miles from his native town there was a seaport. Thither he repaired, and looked about him. In the harbour lay a small vessel which looked like a yacht, it was so trim and clean. On the quay near to it stood a seafaring man with an amiable expression of countenance.

“Is that your schooner?” asked Jeff of this man.

“Yes, it is.”

“D’you want a hand?”

“No, I don’t.”

Jeff turned on his heel, and was walking away, when the seafaring man recalled him.

“Have ’ee ever bin to sea, lad?” he asked.

“No, never.”

“D’ye know anything about ships?”

"Next to nothing."

"D'ye think you could do anything, now, aboard of a ship?"

"Perhaps."

"Come along, then, wi' me to the office, an' I'll see to this."

Thus was Jeff introduced to the skipper of the coasting vessel in which he spent the succeeding six years of his life. At the end of that time his schooner was totally wrecked in a gale that sent more than two hundred vessels on the rocks of the British Isles. The skipper was washed overboard and drowned, but Jeff was saved along with the rest of the crew, by means of the rocket apparatus.

By that time our hero had become a tall, powerful man, with a curly black beard and moustache. Through the influence of a friend he was offered a situation in the coastguard; accepted it, and, to his great satisfaction, was stationed in the neighbourhood of Cranby, his native town.

Now, near to that town Jeff had a confidante, into whose sympathetic bosom he had poured his joys and sorrows from the days of little boyhood. Of course this confidante was a woman—a thin, little, elderly creature, with bright blue eyes, and grey hair that had once been golden, who had a sort of tremble in her voice, and whose frame was so light that the fishermen were wont to say of her that if she was to show her nose outside when it was blowing only half a gale she'd be blowed away like a fleck of foam. Nevertheless Miss Millet was a distinct power in

Cranby.

Being off duty one fine afternoon, our coastguardsman walked along the beach in the direction of Cranby, bent on paying a visit to Miss Millet, whom he had not seen for several years. On his way he had to pass a piece of common close to the town, where he found that a number of the townsmen and some of the fishermen from the neighbouring hamlet had assembled to hold high holiday and engage in athletic exercises. The memory of school-days came strong upon him as he watched the sport, and he longed to join, but was modest enough to feel that his offering to do so in connection with games which seemed to have been already organised might be an intrusion.

Two men were wrestling when he joined the circle of spectators—one was a fisherman, the other a huge blacksmith of the town. They were well matched; for, although the fisherman was shorter than the blacksmith, he was an unusually powerful man.

Great was the excitement as the two herculean men strove for the mastery, and loud was the cheer when at last the blacksmith prevailed and threw his adversary.

But the enthusiasm was somewhat damped by the boastful manner in which the victor behaved; for it is not easy to sing the praises of a man whose looks and words show that he greatly overrates himself.

“You don’t need to look so cocky, Rodger,” cried a cynical voice in the crowd. “There be lots o’ men as could throw thee, though they ben’t here just now.”

Rodger turned sharply round, intending to give an angry

defiance to the speaker; but seeing that it was only Reuben Drew, a white-haired old shoemaker of small stature, he burst into a sarcastic laugh.

"Well, I don't deny," he said, "that there may be many men as could throw me, but I defy any of 'ee now present to do it."

This was an opening for Jeff Benson, who was not slow to avail himself of it. Stepping into the ring he threw off his coat.

"Come along, Rodger," he said, with a good-humoured look; "you'll have to make good your words."

Of course our hero was received with a cheer of satisfaction; for although Jeff was two inches shorter than his adversary—the latter being six feet two—it could be seen at a glance that he was at least his match in breadth of shoulder and development of muscle. But in truth the young coastguardsman was much more than the blacksmith's match, for at school he had received special training in the art of wrestling from his father, who was a Cornishman, and hard service in the coasting trade had raised his strength of limb to the highest possible point.

"Surely I've seen that young man somewhere," whispered one of the spectators to Reuben.

"So have I," returned the latter. "Don't he look uncommon like the old schoolmaster's son? Hallo!"

And well might Reuben exclaim "hallo!" for Jeff, instead of grasping his opponent round the waist, had suddenly seized him with one hand by the neck, with the other by the leg, and lifting him completely off the ground, had

flung him on his back.

The people were too much astonished at first to cheer. They burst into a fit of laughter, which, however, extended into a hearty cheer when Reuben cried out, "It is Jeffrey Benson, as sure as I'm alive," and claimed him as a townsman.

"You're right, Reuben," said Jeff, as he put on his coat, "though I am a good bit changed, no doubt, since I was here last."

"Then the townsman have beaten the seaman after all," exclaimed one who was inclined to triumph.

"Not so," returned Jeff quickly, "for I'm a seaman myself and take sides with the fishermen."

"Well said; give us your hand, mate," cried John Golding, one of the latter, holding out his hand, which our hero grasped warmly, for he had known the man in former years.

"You've done well in credit o' the sea."

"An' better still," said little Reuben, "in doing credit to the land by refusin' to boast."

Nevertheless, though Jeff Benson did not boast, it is but just to say that he *felt* considerable satisfaction in his triumph, and rejoiced in the possession of so powerful a frame, as he continued his walk to Miss Millet's house. It did not occur to him, however, to thank God for his strength of body, because at that time "God was not in all his thoughts."

Miss Millet was a woman of action and projects. Her whole being was absorbed in one idea—that of doing good; but her means were small, very small, for, besides being exceedingly poor, she was in delicate health and getting old. She subsisted on quite a microscopic annuity; but, instead of trying to increase it, she devoted the whole of her time to labours of love and charity. The labour that suited her health and circumstances best was knitting socks for the poor, because that demanded little thought and set her mind free to form unlimited projects.

The delight which Miss Millet, experienced in meeting with her old friend Jeffrey Benson was displayed in the vivacity of her reception of him and the tremulosity of her little cap.

"It's just like coming home, auntie—may I still venture to call you so?"

Jeff had been wont to sit on a stool at the good lady's feet. He did so now—on the old stool.

"You may call me what you please, Jeff. It was your child-fancy to accord to me that honourable relationship; so you may continue it if you will. How you are grown, too! I could not have known you had I met you—so big, and with that horrible black beard."

"Horrible! Miss Millet?"

"Well, terrible, if you prefer it. It's so bushy and unnatural for one so young."

"That can hardly be, auntie," rejoined the youth, with a smile that sent quite a ripple down the objectionable beard, "because my beard was provided by Nature."

"Well, Jeff," returned the spinster promptly, "were not scissors and razors provided by—no, it was art that provided *them*," she continued with a little smile of confusion; "but they *are* provided all the same, and— But we won't pursue that subject, for you men are incorrigible! Now tell me, Jeff, where you have been, and why you didn't come to see me sooner, and why your letters have been so few—though I admit they were long."

We will not inflict on the reader all the conversation that ensued. When Jeff had exhausted his narrative, Miss Millet discovered that it was tea-time; and, while engaged in preparations for the evening meal, she enlarged upon some of her projects, being encouraged thereto by Jeff, whose heart was naturally sympathetic.

"But some of my projects are impossible," she said, with a little sigh. "Some small things, indeed, I have accomplished, with God's blessing; but there are others which are quite beyond me."

"Indeed! Tell me now, auntie, if you had Aladdin's wonderful lamp, what would you ask for?"

"I'd ask for—let me see (the old face became quite thoughtful here)—I'd ask for a library. You see, Cranby is *very* badly off for books, and people cannot easily improve without reading, you know. Then I would ask for a new church, and a school room, and a town-hall where we might have lectures and concerts, and for a whole street of model-houses for the poor, and a gymnasium, and a swimming-bath and—"

"A swimming-bath, auntie!" exclaimed Jeff. "Isn't the sea

big enough?”

“Yes, but children won’t learn in the sea. They’re too fond of running about the edge, and of romping in the shallow water. Besides, the bath could be used in winter, when the sea is too cold. But I’m praying for all these things. If God sees fit, He will give them. If not, I am content with what He has already given.”

A somewhat sceptical smile rested for a moment on the young man’s lips. Happily his heavy moustache concealed it, and saved Miss Millet’s feelings. But she went on to vindicate the ways of God with man, and to impress upon Jeff the fact that in His good wisdom “ills” or “wells,” and things that seem to us only evil, work out gracious ends.

Jeff listened, but said little, and evidently his difficulties were not all removed. Presently, observing that three cups were laid on the table, he asked, “Do you expect company?”

“Yes, my brother the captain is coming to tea. He is about to start for China, and I’m so glad you happen to be here; for I’d like you to know each other, and you’re sure to like him.”

Jeff did not feel quite so sure on that point, for he had counted on a long *tête-à-tête* with his old friend. He took care, however, to conceal his disappointment, and before he had time to reply, the door opened with a crash.

“What cheer, old girl? what cheer?” resounded in bo’sun’s-mate tones through the house, and next moment a rugged sea-captain stood before them.

Chapter Two.

A Sea-Captain Relates his Adventures, and Refuses to Draw Morals.

Captain Richard Millet, like his sister, was rather eccentric. Unlike her, however, he was large, broad, and powerful. It would have taken considerably more than "half a gale" to blow *him* away. Even a gale and a half might have failed to do that.

"Glad to meet you," he said, extending his solid-looking hand with a frank, hearty air, on being introduced to Jeff. "My sister Molly has often spoken of you. Sorry to hear you've left the sea. Great mistake, young man—great mistake. There's no school like the sea for teaching a man his dependence on his Maker."

"The school is not very successful, if one may judge from the character of most of its pupils," replied the youth.

"Perhaps you misjudge their character," returned the captain, with a look of good-natured severity.

"I'm *sure* he does," cried Miss Millet, with enthusiasm. "Noble-hearted, simple men, who would probably never go wrong at all if it were not for their unsuspecting trustfulness and bad companions! Come, sit down, Dick. Tea is ready."

"Yes, young man," continued Captain Millet "you misjudge 'em. You should not judge of a school by the shouting and mischief of the worst boys, who always flaunt their colours, while the good ones steer quietly on

their course. You'll understand that better when your beard is grey. Youth is fond o' lookin' at the surface, an' so is apt to misjudge the character of men as well as the ways of Providence."

Jeff took the rebuke in good part, readily admitted that youth was prone to err, and slily expressed a hope that in his case coming in contact with age might do him good.

"If you mean that for a shot at me," cried the captain, with a loud guffaw, "you've missed the mark; for I'm only forty-five, an' that isn't age; is it, Molly?"

"Of course not. Why, you're little more than a baby yet," replied Miss Millet who greatly enjoyed even a small joke—indeed, she enjoyed almost everything, more or less, that was not wicked. "But now, Dick, I want you to tell Jeff some of your adventures in foreign parts—especially those that have a moral, you know."

"Why, Molly, that's a hard job—you don't want me to *draw* the moral, do you? I never was good at that, though I've known fellows with that peculiar cast o' brain as could draw a moral out of a marline-spike if they were hard put to it. Seems to me that it's best to let morals draw themselves. For instance, that time when I was wrecked on the South American coast, I came to a shallow river, an' had to wade across, but was too lazy to pull off my boots, 'cause they were long fisherman's boots, right up to the hip an' rather tight; so in I went boots an' all. Just as I was gettin' to the other side, a most awful alligator seized hold o' my right foot. It's wonderful how easy my boot came off just then! Although I was used to tug, an' shove, and gasp, and pull, at that boot of a night, no sooner did the alligator

lay hold on it than my leg came out like a cork out of a bottle, and I was out o' the water and up the bank like a squirrel. Now, Molly, what would you say was the moral that should be drawn from that—Never use an alligator as a boot-jack—eh?"

"I should say, Never wade across a South American river without your boots on," suggested Jeff.

"Well, now, *I* should say, Never wade across a South American river at all," said Miss Millet; "but, brother, that's not what I meant. Before you arrived, Jeff and I had been talking about God's ways with man, and I was trying to show that disasters and what we call misfortunes are not necessarily evil, but are often the means of great blessing. I don't think Jeff quite sees that. I can't explain myself clearly, brother; but you know what I mean."

While the old lady was speaking, the captain had become thoughtful.

"Yes, I know what you mean," he replied, "and I agree with you heartily. Is it not written of our Saviour, 'He hath done all things well?' and is He not unchangeable? Of course it is not to be expected that we shall always see through and understand His ways though we can always trust Him; but sometimes He lifts a corner of the veil and lets us see. Very odd, Molly," continued the captain, extracting a large black pocket-book with some difficulty from a breast-pocket, "very odd that you should have touched on this question, for I have somethin' to say to you that bears on it. Look here. What's that?"

He handed an oblong piece of paper to his sister, who examined it slowly.

“Why, Dick, it’s a cheque for 500 pounds.”

“Just so, old girl, an’ it’s yours.”

“Mine!”

“Ay, I might have given it to you when I first came back, but I took a fancy to keep it as a little surprise for our last evenin’ together, so that I might leave you with a good taste in your mouth. Now, listen, an’ I’ll spin you an’ Jeff a yarn. But first fill up my cup. I’m fond o’ tea—nat’rally, bein’ a teetotaler. Up to the brim, Molly; I like a good bucketful. Thankee—now, let me see.”

The captain put his hand to his rugged brow, became thoughtful for a few moments, and then resumed.

“Just before startin’ on my last voyage to China I ran down to Folkestone to see Rosebud—that’s my little daughter, Jeff. Surely you must have seen her when knocking about here?”

“You forget, Captain, I have not been in these parts for six years. Nevertheless, I did see Rosebud some ten or twelve years ago with her nurse in this very room.”

“Yes, so you did,” chimed in Miss Millet. “She was six at that time, and the dearest little angel I ever saw.”

“She was all that and a great deal more,” said the enthusiastic father. “It don’t become me to have much of an opinion about the angels, but I wouldn’t give my Rosebud for the whole lot o’ them, an’ all the cherubs throw’d into the bargain. Well, as I was sayin’, I ran down to Folkestone to the school where she is, and as

we were partin' she made me promise when I got to Hong-Kong to run up the river to see an old schoolmate o' hers that had gone out there with her father. I was to give Clara Rosebud's dear love, and her photograph, and get hers in exchange. I would have done this, of course, for my darlin', anyhow, but I promised all the more readily because I had some business to do with old Nibsworth, the father.

"Well, after I'd got to Hong-Kong an' seen the ship all snug, I thought of runnin' up the river in a small steamer that was ready to start. It so happened that I got a letter that very day from Nibsworth himself, who had heard of my arrival, askin' me to come without delay, as there was a grand chance of doin' a bit of business that might turn in some thousands of pounds. But it would have to be settled next day, or the chance would be lost. You may be sure I didn't waste time after readin' this, but when I got to the river-side, I found that the steamer had started, and there wasn't another till next mornin'."

"*What* a pity!" exclaimed the sympathetic sister and Jeff in the same breath.

"Yes, wasn't it? Of course it wasn't a personal loss, but it was the loss of a splendid out-o'-the-way chance to do a good turn to the owners. It was an ill wind—Jeff, almost a disaster. Hows'ever, I had to grin an' bear it. But I couldn't rest till next day; so I hired a native boat, determined to do my best in the circumstances, and you may be sure I wasn't in the best of humours, as we went creepin' slowly up that river, when I knew that the hours of opportunity were slippin' away.

"It was not till the evenin' o' the next day that I reached old Nibsworth's house. Just before we rounded the bend

of the river that brought it into view, I noticed smoke risin' pretty thick above the trees. Of course I thought nothin' of it till I found that it was the old man's house was a-fire! Didn't we bend to the oars then with a will!

"As we drew near, we found that all the servants and work-people about the place were runnin' here and there, shoutin' and yellin' for ropes and ladders. Most people seem to lose their heads in a fire. Anyhow those people had; for nobody could find a ladder long enough to reach a top window, where I could see that someone was waving his arms for help. The moment we touched the beach, I jumped out o' the boat and ran up to the house. It was blazin' fiercely in the lower rooms, and I soon found that old Nibsworth and his daughter were inside—driven to the attics by the fire and smoke. They soon left the window where I had first seen the arms waving, and threw open another that was further from the fire.

"I saw that the old man was frail. The girl, they told me, was delicate. 'Get straw, hay, branches—anything soft,' I shouted, 'an' pile 'em under the window.'

"'Him's too weak for jump,' gasped a native servant.

"'Do as I bid ye,' said I, with a glare that sent 'em all off double-quick. Happily I found a rope handy in a storehouse hard by. I made a coil of it. You know a seaman can usually heave a coil of rope pretty well. I made a splendid heave, an' sent it right in at the window. The old man caught it.

"'Make fast to a bed-post,' I roared, 'or a table, or chest o' drawers—anything big.'

"He understood me, I could see, and presently he looked

over the window an' shook his head. Then I could see the face of a dark-haired, beautiful girl. Even through the increasing smoke I could tell that she was deadly pale, and drew back with a shudder. By this time a big pile of straw lay under the window. I saw there was no hope of such an old man lettin' himself or his girl down by a rope, so up I went hand over hand. Many a time had I done the sort o' thing for a lark when I was a youngster; but bein' out o' practice, and a good deal heavier than in old days, I found it hard work, I can tell you. Hows'ever, I managed it and got in at the window, an' didn't my heart give a jump when I saw that the old chap had only made the rope fast to a light bedroom chair. If I'd bin a stone heavier, I'd have pulled that chair right over the window!

"'God bless you!' cried the tremblin' old man; 'save my Clara!'

"There was no time for pretty speeches. I made fast the end of the rope to the leg of a table, made a loop on the other end, threw it over the girl, caught her round the waist an' swung her over the window. I was in such a hurry that the rope nearly took the skin off my hands; but I landed her safe on the straw below. The old man was heavier, and not so easy to manage; but I got him lowered safe, and then, slipping over myself, began to descend. The flames had by that time got headway, and were dartin' like fiery serpents' tongues out o' the windows below. One o' them gave me a wipe in passin', an' cleared eyelashes, eyebrows, and half the hair o' my head away. Another twined round the rope and singed it; so that when I was half-way down, it snapped, and I came to the ground with a thud that damaged my canvas ducks, though they were by no means delicate. Hows'ever, the pile of straw broke the fall, and I was

none the worse.

"The gratitude o' that poor old man and his daughter knew no bounds, specially when he found I was the father of his Clara's favourite schoolmate.

"'Now, Captain Millet,' says he at partin', 'nothin' in this world can repay what we owe you. I know it would be insultin' to offer you money for such service, but sometimes men like you like to help a good cause. Will you accept of five hundred pounds for such a purpose?'

"'No sir,' says I, 'I won't! But I've a sister at home who spends all her time in tryin' to do good. If you'll be kind enough to send it to her, she'll consider it a blessed windfall, and will lay it out to the best possible advantage.'

"'Good,' said he, seizin' his pen an' writin' out the cheque. 'Is your sister well off?'

"'She might be better off,' said I.

"'Then pray beg her in my name to accept of a few shares in an Australian tin-mine which came to me a few days ago. They are not worth much, but I don't want to be troubled with them; indeed, will consider it a favour if she will take them off my hands.'

"The old fellow said this with a laugh—so there you are, Molly, 500 pounds to the credit of your charity account an' I don't know how much tin transferred to your own."

"O brother, how good—how kind!" Miss Millet paused here, and gazed in silence at the cheque, for she had already begun to calculate how far that sum would go

towards the library, and the church, and the town-hall, and the model-houses, and the gymnasium, and the swimming-bath.

"And now, young man," said the captain, turning to our coastguardsman, "the missin' of that steamer, at which I growled so much that day, turned out to be a great blessin' after all, although it seemed such a misfortune. For it caused me to arrive just in the nick of time to save two human lives—besides givin' the old girl here somethin' to think about and work upon for the next twelvemonth to come—whereas, if I had arrived the day before, I would have bin sleepin' in the house, and mayhap have bin burnt alive wi' old Nibsworth and his daughter. Seems to me as if that little story had some sort o' bearin' on the subject you was discussin' wi' Molly. But I'm not good at drawin' morals, so I'll leave you to draw it for yourself."

Chapter Three.

Our Coastguardsman Meets with a Serious but very Common Fall.

Whether Jeff Benson drew the moral of Captain Millet's story for himself or not, we cannot tell; but it is certain that his mates found him after that date a man who was prone to solitary meditations, with occasional fits of absence of mind. They also found him a pleasant companion and a most active comrade in all the duties of his station.

Sometimes these duties involved great hardship, and frequent risk to life and limb; for, as is well known, our coastguardsmen not only perambulate our shores in all weathers, but often work the rocket apparatus for saving life from shipwreck, and are frequently called upon to assist the lifeboat-men by putting off to the rescue in their own boats when others are not available. In all these duties Jeffrey Benson did his work with tremendous energy, as might have been expected of one so strong, and with reckless disregard to personal safety, which was appropriate in a hero.

One evening, about a year after the period of which we have been writing, Jeff was returning along shore with a party in charge of the rocket-cart, after having rescued the crew of a small coasting vessel—four men and a boy, with the skipper's wife. The service had been prolonged and pretty severe, but feelings of exhaustion were, for the time at least, banished from the coastguardsmen's breasts by the joy resulting from success in their heroic work. On the way, the party had to pass close to Miss Millet's cottage—her "cottage by the sea," as the romantic old lady was fond of calling it.

Jeff—although fatigued and hungry, besides being drenched, dishevelled about the hair, bespattered with mud, and bruised, as well as lacerated somewhat about the hands—determined to pay a short visit to the cottage, being anxious to "have it out" with his confidante about that matter of good being made to come out of evil.

"O Jeff!" exclaimed the horrified old lady when he entered, "wounded? perhaps fatally!"

"Not quite so bad as that, auntie," replied Jeff, with a

hearty laugh, for Miss Millet's power to express alarm was wonderful. "I'll soon put myself to rights when I get back to the station. I ought to apologise for calling in such a plight, but I've been thinking much since I last saw you, and I want to have a talk."

"Not till I have bound up all your wounds," said Miss Millet firmly.

Knowing that he would gain his end more quickly by giving in, Jeff submitted to have several fingers of both hands done up with pieces of white rag, and a slight cut across the bridge of his handsome nose ornamented with black sticking-plaster. He not only enjoyed the operation with a sort of reckless joviality, but sought to gratify his friend by encouraging her to use her appliances to the utmost, intending to remove them all when he quitted the cottage. The earnest little woman availed herself fully of the encouragement, but could scarcely refrain from laughing when she surveyed him after the operation was completed.

"Now, auntie, have you finished?"

"Yes."

"Well then, tell me, do you really think that at all times, and in all circumstances, God causes events that are disastrous to work out good?"

"Indeed I do," returned Miss Millet, becoming very serious and earnest as she sat down opposite her young friend. "No doubt there is much of mystery connected with the subject but I can't help that any more than I can help my beliefs. Of course we know, because it is written, that '*all* things work together for good to them

that love God;' but even in the case of those who do *not* love Him, I think He often sends sorrow and trouble for the very purpose of driving them out of trust in themselves, and so clearing the way to bring them to the Saviour. And is it not written, 'Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee?'"

The young man remained silent for a few moments.

"Well, now," he said, "what think you of this case? The skipper whom we rescued this afternoon, along with his wife, told me that he has been reduced to beggary. He owned the vessel which now lies out on the rocks there, a total wreck. It was his last venture. He had put all that he possessed into it, and not a scrap of the cargo will be saved. Having been a lucky man all his life previously, he said he had determined to 'chance his luck' this time, and did not insure vessel or cargo: so that all is gone. His wife and several children are dependent on him. He has no relatives rich enough, or willing enough, to help him; and, poor fellow, he has received injuries while being rescued, which will probably render him helpless for the rest of his life. Now, do you think that good will come out of all that?"

"I am *sure* it will," returned Miss Millet confidently, "and good to *him* too if he seeks it; though of course I know not how or when."

"But why are you so sure?"

"Because, Jeff, it is written that God does not 'afflict the children of men willingly.' He does it for their good, and that good cannot fail of accomplishment, unless they refuse the good and choose the evil."

Again Jeff became silent and thoughtful. "I have meditated much of late," he said, "about Captain Millet's adventure in China—"

"By the way," interrupted Miss Millet, "that reminds me that the captain's little girl Rose—Rosebud, as he calls her—is to come here this very evening to stay with me for a week."

"Indeed? that will be pleasant, auntie. I must come and see her as an old acquaintance."

"Oh yes, you must, Jeff. You've no idea what a sweet girl she has become. I am quite charmed with her—so modest, and unselfish, and clever, and good, and—and, in short, I call her the four F's, for she is fair, fragile, fervent, and funny."

"What a catalogue!" exclaimed the youth, laughing; "you may well be charmed with her. But what do you mean by funny? Does she try to make people laugh?"

"Oh dear, no! In company she can scarce be made to speak at all, but she *is* so fond of fun—has such a lively appreciation of humour, and laughs *so* heartily. She has grown quite into a woman since I last saw her when her father went to sea. There she is!"

Miss Millet sprang from her chair with the agility almost of a young woman, and ran to open the door, for a cab was heard pulling up in front of the cottage.

There was a delighted little shriek from "Auntie!" and the warmest salutations of welcome; and the next moment Miss Millet, with the captain's daughter, arm in arm, embracing one another, entered the parlour.

The coastguardsman was transfixed, for there, before him, flushed and panting, stood—

"A maid with eyes of heavenly blue,
And rippling hair of golden hue;
With parted lips of Coral too,
Disclosing pearls—and—"

All the rest of it! Yes, no wonder that Jeffrey Benson was transfixed. Still less wonder that Rosebud stood in much the same condition; for, a young giant in pilot-cloth, damp and dirty, dishevelled, bespattered with mud, tied up about the fingers and plastered over the nose, was not precisely what she had expected to find in Aunt Millet's parlour.

They were soon introduced, however, and on the best of terms; for the shrinking from Jeff's filthy appearance changed in a moment to hero-worship in the romantic heart of Rose, when she was told the cause of the youth's condition, and heard all the details of the rescue from his own manly lips.

It was love at first sight with both of them; more than that, it was first love at first sight! We have profound sympathy with young people thus circumstanced, especially when they are reticent, and don't give way to sentimental silliness. A good manly and womanly case of this sort of love, in which the parties concerned take a serious header and go deep down, without the smallest intention of ever coming up again, is pleasant to contemplate and agreeable to record.

Of course it must not be supposed that Rose Millet understood what had happened. She was fully aware,

indeed, that something unusual had occurred within her inexperienced breast, but she quietly set it down to hero-worship. She had read Carlyle on that subject. She had seen occasional reference in newspapers and magazines to lifeboat work, and she had been thrilled by the record of noble deeds done by heroic seamen and coastguardsmen. At last it was her lot to come athwart one of those heroes. He quite came up to her conception—nay, more than came up to it! She regarded Jeff with feelings approaching to awe. The idea of love in connection with a damp, dirty, wounded, nose-plastered, hair-ravelled giant, with beard enough to make an average hearth-broom, never entered her fair head. If suggested to her she would have laughed it to scorn—had it been possible for one so bright and "funny" to become scornful.

As for Jeff—he more than suspected what had happened in regard to himself. His experience of life had been varied and extensive for his years—at least in a nautical direction—and that is saying a great deal.

"Done for!" he remarked to himself that evening, as he left the residence of Miss Millet and sauntered slowly homeward, divesting his fingers of the wrappings in an absent manner as he went along; but he forgot the plastered nose, and was taken to task about it by his comrades.

"Why, wherever did you get the stickin'-plaster?" asked David Bowers, an Anglo-Saxon much like himself in form and size, only that his locks and beard were yellow instead of dark brown.

"From a friend," replied Jeff.

“A female friend?” asked Bowers, with a sly glance.

“Yes,” replied Jeff, so promptly, and with a look of such benignity, that the Anglo-Saxon felt constrained to give up his intended badinage.

That night curiously enough, Rose and Jeff were beset by dreams exactly similar in kind, though slightly modified in form. Both were in the midst of howling blasts and raging billows; but while the one was saving a fair and slender girl in circumstances of great but scorned risk, the other was being rescued by a young giant with a brown beard, in a style the most heroic, and in the midst of dangers the most appalling.

Next day, when Jeff—having got rid of the nose-plaster, and removed the mud, and brushed the dishevelled hair, and put on dry garments—paid another visit to Miss Millet, the Rosebud formed a more correct estimate of her condition, became alarmed, and shrank like a sensitive plant before the gaze of the coastguardsman; insomuch that she drove him to the conclusion that he had no hope whatever in that quarter, and that he was foolish to think of her seriously. What *was* she, after all? A mere chit of a school girl! It was ridiculous. He would heave her overboard forthwith, and trouble his head no more about her. He would not, however, give up visiting his old confidante on *her* account—oh dear, no!

It was wonderful what an amount of guarding seemed to be required by the coast in the vicinity of Miss Millet’s cottage during the following week! Any one observing the frequency of Jeff’s visits to it, and his prolonged earnest gazing at the sea, would have imagined that the ancient smuggling days had revived, or that the old tendency of the French to suddenly come o’er and find the Britons

awaiting them on shore, was not yet extinct.

One evening our hero, after paying a little unwonted attention to his toilet prepared to set out for Miss Millet's cottage. He had obtained leave of absence for the evening, and had made up his mind to spend an hour or two in metaphysical discussion. Rose had not yet left her aunt but no matter. If she could not assist in the conversation, she could at all events listen, and might be benefited.

In passing through the station, the officer on duty called to him.

"I want you, Benson, to take Wilson's place to-night. He is unwell and off duty. We may possibly require all our force, for the barometer has suddenly fallen much lower than usual."

No shade of disappointment betrayed itself on the grave countenance of the well-disciplined Jeff as he replied, "Very well, sir," and went out; but profound disappointment nevertheless harrowed his broad bosom, for he had promised himself such a long and pleasant evening of discussion; possibly of benefit to the young girl for whom he cared nothing now—a mere passing fancy, pooh! But even while ejecting the "pooh!" he wondered why the disappointment was so severe. Was it possible that he was being taught by experience the lesson which Miss Millet's reasoning powers had failed to inculcate?

It was blowing hard when Jeff reached the cliffs, and, bending forward to the increasing blast made his way to the rugged coast which was to be the scene of his night vigil. As he stood on the shore with hands in pockets and

legs apart, to steady himself, and gazed out upon the darkening sea, he saw plainly enough that the prophetic barometer was right. Far out on the water a ledge of rocks, barely covered at high water, caught the billows as they rolled shoreward, broke them up, and sent them spouting into the air in volumes of foam. On the horizon the clouds were so black that the shrieking sea-birds passed athwart them like flakes of snow. Low muttering thunder was heard at intervals; and as night drew on, gleams of lightning flashed in the obscurity.

During one of these flashes Jeff thought he saw a vessel labouring heavily. He could not be quite sure, for by that time spray, borne on the whistling wind, was blinding him. Suddenly a red flash was seen, followed by a report. It was a signal of distress.

Every thought and feeling save that of duty was instantly banished from the mind of our coastguardsman, as he hurried away to give the alarm and join in the rescue.

Chapter Four.

A Wreck and Rescue.

Terrible was the gale which burst that night upon the shores of old England, and awful the fate that awaited many of the vessels which were nearing port at the time. Better far for many of them had they met the foe in the open field of what seamen term blue water, for no place is so dangerous as the shallow waters off the coast when the storm-fiend is abroad.

Perhaps it may be news to some readers that the losses of this country by shipwreck form a perennial drain of life and wealth as regular and certain as the recurrence of the seasons. Nearly two thousand ships, two millions sterling, and little short of a thousand lives are lost each year on the shores of the United Kingdom—sometimes more, sometimes less,—each and every year. We give round numbers, because they are more easily remembered.

On the particular night of which we write, many a gallant ship was driving over the sea, making for her port, nearing home and friends, rushing to her doom! Passengers and crews alike had by that time, doubtless, become so familiar with whistling gales and heaving seas, that they had ceased to fear them; but some among them had yet to learn, when too late, that the dangers of the deep are insignificant compared with the perils of the shore.

Among these hapless ships was one to which we direct the reader's particular attention. She was a large ship, with a crew of between twenty and thirty men, bound from China to the Thames. She carried no passengers, and was commanded by our friend, Captain Millet.

No captain in the mercantile navy of Britain was better qualified than he to take his ship across the trackless main, and, if need be, carry her safely into port; but seamanship and knowledge of channels and bars and currents avail nothing when the sails and cordage of a ship are unseaworthy and her timbers worn out.

The owners of the *North Star* cared little for human lives. They were economists of the strictest kind. Hence her

condition was bad.

The gale overtook the *North Star* when she was not far from the coast where nestled her captain's native town of Cranby. A pilot had been signalled for in vain, for the night was thick as well as stormy. At last one was obtained, and all went fairly well until the vessel was off the black rocks on which the eyes of Jeff Benson had been resting for some time. Fearing that he was too near that point of danger, the pilot gave orders to go about. While the vessel was in stays, one of the ropes parted, and she missed. At the same moment a squall came down on her, and carried away the main and fore-topmasts with the jib-boom. Instantly the vessel was unmanageable, and drifted bodily towards the rocks.

Captain Millet and his men toiled like heroes to clear away the wreckage, and orders were given to fire the signal-gun. As we have seen, our coastguardsman was swift to carry the alarm to his station, and without delay the lifeboat was launched. At the same time orders were given to get ready the coastguard boat, in case its services should be required.

The regular crew of the lifeboat had, as usual, been on the alert, and the bright blue boat of mercy was at once run down to the beach, until her carriage reached the edge of the foaming sea.

"Now, lads, jump in!" shouted the coxswain.

It was found, however, when they had taken their places and seized the oars, that two of the crew were missing. Volunteers were instantly called for, and Jeff, with his friend David Bowers, answered to the call. They put on the cork life-belts, took the vacant seats, and grasped

the oars. Then the transporting carriage, with the boat and crew on it, was pushed by many willing hands as far into the sea as possible, the men bending forward with the oars out, ready to pull at a moment's notice.

The launching ropes were already manned. At another signal from the coxswain, the boat plunged into the boiling surf, the oars were dipped, ten strong backs were bent, and away they shot on their errand of mercy—drenched and filled by the first great billow through which they cut their way, but not swamped, for the water ran out through the discharging tubes as fast as it came in.

An hour of hard toil brought them within sight of the wreck. Keeping well to windward, the coxswain cast anchor, and the bowman, taking a turn or two of the cable round the bollard, allowed the boat to drop down to the wreck, stern foremost.

"Can't you get round to leeward of the wreck?" asked Jeff, who sat near the stern of the boat, keeping a firm grasp of his oar, which the rushing and breaking seas well-nigh forced out of his hands.

"No, not as the rocks lie," replied the coxswain curtly.

On drawing a few yards nearer, it became evident that no boat could live in the seething caldron of rocks and foam that lay under the lee of the wreck. Their only chance lay in approaching from the weather side, which was not only a difficult and dangerous operation, but was rendered doubly so by the violent swaying of the wreck from side to side.

The roaring of the gale and thunder of the seas, combined with the darkness and the hurtling spray,

rendered it impossible for the men in the life-boat to distinguish anything clearly, until close to the wreck. Then it was seen that the whole crew had taken to the rigging of the mainmast—the topmast of which had been carried away by the fall of the foremast and mizzen.

A lusty cheer told that the shipwrecked men were still strong in hope, though their situation was terrible; for every lurch of the hull shook the swaying top so violently as almost to tear even the strong seamen from their grasp.

"Jeff," said Bowers, who sat on the same thwart with his friend, "did ye not recognise a voice in that cheer?"

"Ay, that I did," returned Jeff, with feelings of great anxiety. "'Twas uncommon like Captain Millet."

"Look out for the rope!" roared one of the lifeboat men, as he swung and discharged the loaded stick with a line attached.

The heave was successful. The men on the maintop of the wreck caught the line, and by means of it passed a stout warp between the mast and the boat, down which they began to shin like squirrels, for the prompt appearance of their rescuers had not left time for the exhaustion of their strength.

"Is your vessel the *North Star*, commanded by Captain Millet?" shouted Jeff in the ear of the first arrival, for the noise of raging elements rendered ordinary tones almost useless.

"Ay, she is," replied the man; "but you won't see *him* till the last of us is safe aboard."

“Hallo! Captain Millet!” cried Jeff, with a roar that almost equalled the elements.

“Ay, ay, is that you, Jeff?” came back in a similar roar (but greatly softened by distance) from the swirling spray-clouds that raged above the wreck.

“Cheer up, Captain; we’ll save you all right,” returned our coastguardsman in another enthusiastic roar, which of itself did something to cheer up all who heard it.

About a dozen of the sailors had been got into the lifeboat, when a tremendous rending sound was heard, followed by a loud cry of alarm, as the mast broke off a few feet above the deck, and plunged, with the men still upon it, into the boiling sea. To add to the confusion and terror, some part of the cordage caught the lifeboat, and completely sank as well as overturned it.

To an ignorant observer it might have seemed that all hope was gone—that every man must perish. But this was not so. The buoyant qualities of the magnificent lifeboat brought it to the surface like a cork the instant it was freed. Its self-righting qualities turned it on its keel. The self-acting discharging tubes emptied it in less than two minutes; and the crew, supported by their cork life-belts, caught the life-lines festooned round the boat’s side for this very purpose, and clambered into her.

Of the men of the wreck who had been tumbled into the sea along with them, some clung to their rescuers, whose belts could easily sustain two. Others were able to lay hold of the boat, and a few held on to the floating wreckage till they were saved.

Suddenly the voice of Captain Millet was heard, "Hold on, lads; don't go without me. My foot's jammed here, and I can't—"

He stopped abruptly, for the head of the mast plunged under water at the moment, taking the captain along with it.

Without a word Jeff rose and sprang into the sea at the spot where his friend had disappeared. Almost at the same moment the end of the mast re-appeared, and struck our hero on the side with terrible violence. In spite of the blow, however, he was able to free the captain, who was caught by several strong arms, and hauled inboard at the same moment that his rescuer laid hold of one of the hanging life-lines.

While they were still heaving at the captain, David Bowers heard Jeff's voice—

"Your hand, Davy!"

The stout coastguardsman was not slow to obey and he received a grip like that of a drowning man; but his mate made no other effort to save himself.

"Help here, two of you," cried Bowers.

Another moment, and six brawny arms embraced Jeff, and lifted him into the boat.

"Not hurt, I hope, Jeff?"

"Not much, Davy—at least not to speak of; only I'm a bit stunned. Just let me lie here. One o' the *North Star's* men can take my oar."

There was no time for delicate attentions or inquiries in the circumstances, for the wreck of the mainmast had already given the boat, strong though it was, some damaging lunges as it shot wildly to and fro in the mad sea.

"All there?" demanded the coxswain of the saved men, who had been rapidly counting their numbers.

"All here, thank God!" answered Captain Millet.

"Haul off, lads!"

The men laid hold of the hawser, and hauled with a will—not a moment too soon, for the wreck was breaking up, and the sea around was strewn with heavy timbers. Having hauled the boat up to her anchor, the latter was got in, and the oars were shipped. These last being made fast to the boat with strong lines, had not been lost in all the turmoil, though two of them were broken. They were replaced, however, by spare oars; and then the lifeboat, being pulled out of danger, hoisted her scrap of sail and scudded away gaily before the wind for the shore with her rescued freight.

Of course the news spread like wildfire that the lifeboat had come in with the crew of the wrecked *North Star*—some said the whole crew, others, part of the crew; for verbal reports of this kind never do coincide after travelling a short way.

"Jeff, I must go straight to my sister, and be first wi' the news," said Captain Millet on landing. "You said my Rosebud is with her just now?"

“Yes, I’ll go with ’ee, captain.”

“Come along, then, lad; but I fear you’ve got hurt. You’re sure it isn’t broken ribs?”

“Oh, nothing to speak of,” replied the youth, with a light laugh.

“First however, I must telegraph to the owners,” said the captain.

This duty performed, and his men comfortably housed in a neighbouring inn, Captain Millet and Jeff went off to the cottage. It was about two in the morning when they reached it. No one had yet been there. In his excited state of mind, the captain, who had no nerves, thundered at the door.

If there was one thing that Miss Millet had a horror of, it was housebreakers. She leaped out of bed, and began to dress in terror, having roused Rose, who slept with her.

“Burglars never thunder like that, auntie,” suggested Rose, as she hastily threw on her garments.

Miss Millet admitted the force of the argument and then, somewhat relieved, concluded that it must be tipsy men. Under this impression she raised the window-sash—her bedroom being on the upper floor—and looked timidly out.

“Go away, bad, naughty men!” she said, in a remonstrative tone. “If you don’t I shall send for the police!”

“Why, Molly, don’t you know me?”

“Brother!” shrieked Miss Millet.

“Father!” exclaimed the Rosebud.

Need we say that, after a few more hurried touches to costume, the door was opened, and the untimely visitors were admitted? Need we add that when Rose, with a little cry of joy, leaped into her father’s arms and received a paternal hug, she leaped out of them again with a little shriek of surprise?

“Father, you’re all wet! a perfect sponge!”

“True, darling, I forgot! I’ve just been wrecked, and rescued by the lifeboat through God’s great mercy, ’long with all my crew; and there,” he added, pointing to Jeff, “stands the man that saved my life.”

If Rose loved the young coastguardsman before, she absolutely idolised him now. Something of the feeling must have betrayed itself on her fair face, for Jeff made a step towards her, as if under an irresistible impulse to seize her hand.

But at that moment he experienced an agonising sensation of pain, and, staggering backwards, sat down—almost fell—upon the sofa.

“Nothing—nothing,” he replied, to the anxious inquiries of Miss Millet. “Only a little pain, caused by the rap I got from that mast. Come now, auntie, don’t fuss about me, but sit down and hear what the captain has got to say.”

Chapter Five.

Miss Millet Receives a Surprise, Rosebud a Disappointment, and our Hero Another Blow.

Miss Millet was one of those cheery, unselfish, active-minded women who are not easily thrown off their balance—deranged, as the French say—by untoward circumstances.

The arrival of any two friends at two in the morning would have failed to disturb the good nature or weaken the hospitality of that amiable creature. Her joy, therefore, at the sudden, though untimely, appearance of her brother and friend was not marred by selfish considerations; and although she was eager to bear what the captain had to say, she would not let him begin until he and Jeff had retired to an attic chamber and put on dry habiliments.

How male attire came to be so handy in a spinster's house is easily accounted for by the fact that her regard for the memory of her departed father was so great as to have induced her to leave his hat and stick in the passage in their wonted places after his death, and to leave undisturbed the chest of drawers which contained the greater part of his wardrobe. Nothing short of absolute necessity would have induced Miss Millet to disturb these sacred relics; but she knew that death might result from sitting in drenched clothes, and her well-balanced mind at once pointed out that here was a case which demanded a sacrifice. She therefore bowed to the inevitable, and handed her brother the key of the chest of drawers.

As the late Mr Millet had been a large man, the result was that her visitors were admirably fitted out—the only disadvantage being that the captain had to turn up the legs of the trousers and the cuffs of the coat.

Meanwhile Miss Millet lighted a gas-stove, which she had always ready for invalid purposes, and Rose arranged the table, so that when their visitors returned to the parlour, they were greeted with the sight of food and the singing of the tea-kettle.

"I can offer you brandy, brother," said the little hostess, "*as a medicine*!"

"Thankee, Molly—not even as a medicine," said the captain, with a benignant look; "tea is better in the circumstances. I can speak from a vast amount of experience. But of course I speak only for myself. I don't know what Jeff's principles—"

"My principles," interrupted the coastguardsman, "are to leave every man to judge for himself. My judgment for myself is, that, as I don't require strong drink, I'm much better without it."

"My principles go much further than that," said Miss Millet who was an enthusiastic total abstainer. "The Bible justifies me in denying myself the use of wine and all spirituous liquors *for my brother's sake*, so that I may set him an example, and also have more weight when I reason with him, and try to get him to adopt my views."

"Why, Molly, to hear you talk like that about giving up drink for your brother's sake, one would think that I had bin a tippler all my life!"

"You know that I refer to my brother—man, brother."

"Ah, of course—of course; and also your sister-woman, I suppose," cried the captain, seizing the loaf and beginning to cut it into inch-and-a-half slices. "What's *your* opinion, Rosebud, on the drink question?"

Rose, whose cheeks emulated her namesake flower, replied that, never having tasted wine or spirits in her life, or thought upon the drink question at all, she had no opinion to express.

"Long may you continue in that innocent and humble state of mind, my Rosebud," cried the captain, with a laugh which caused him to choke on his first mouthful of tea. After recovering himself and wiping his eyes, he said —

"Now, Moll, I must tell you all about the wreck;" on which he launched out into a graphic description of what the reader already knows.

You may be sure that he did not underrate the services and heroism of Jeff, who sat wonderfully silent during the recital, and only acknowledged references to himself with a faint smile.

"But, brother," exclaimed Miss Millet, with sudden energy when he had finished, "what will the consequences of this wreck be?"

"The consequences, my dear, will be that the owners will lose a good many thousand pounds, for neither ship nor cargo were insured. An' it sarves 'em right for the vessel was not fit to go to sea; an' they knew it, but were too

graspin' to go to the expense o' refittin'. Besides, they've bin what they call so lucky in past years that they thought, I fancy, there was no fear o' their luck departin'."

"But I was not thinking of the owners, brother; I was thinking of the consequences to yourself."

"Why, as to that, Molly, as I've lost my ship, I'm pretty safe to lose my situation; for, from what I know of the owners, they are sure to lay all the blame they can upon my shoulders, so that I won't find it easy to get another ship. Worse than all, I had made a little private adventure of my own, which was very successful, and the result o' which I was bringin' home in gold-dust; and now every nugget o' that is at the bottom o' the sea. So you see, Molly, it's loss an' disaster everywhere—nothin' but a black horizon all round."

Jeff glanced quickly at Miss Millet. This seemed to bear somewhat on their recent discussions. Miss Millet as quickly returned the glance.

"I know what you are thinking, Jeff," she said, with an intelligent look.

"Well, auntie," returned the youth, "it does seem hard to think that any good can come out of all this—doesn't it?"

"Young man," said the captain, regarding Jeff with an almost stern look, "if a savage were taken into a factory and shown the whirling wheels and bands and rollers working in all directions, and saw filthy old rags boiled and mixed up with grass and evil-smelling substances, and torn to shreds and reduced to pulp in the midst of dirt and clattering noise and apparent confusion; and if

that savage were to say, 'Surely nothin' good can come out of all this!' wouldn't you—knowin' that great rolls of fair and spotless paper were to come out of it—pronounce that savage a fool, or, at least, a presumptuous fellow?"

"True, captain; I accept the rebuke," said Jeff, with a short laugh and a swift glance at Rose, who, however, was gazing demurely at her tea-cup, as if lost in the contemplation of its pattern. Possibly she was thinking of the absurdity of taking tea at all at such an hour!

"Well, then, Jeff," continued the captain, "don't you go and judge unfinished work. Perfect men and women are, in this world, only in process of manufacture. When you see them finished, you'll be better able to judge of the process."

Jeff did not quite agree with his friend; for, gazing at Rose, he could not help feeling that at least one woman had, to his mind, been almost perfectly finished even here! However, he said nothing.

At this point the conversation was turned by Miss Millet suddenly recalling to mind her brother's generous friend in China.

"You have no idea, Dick, how much good I have been able to do with that money. Of course it could not pay for the swimming-bath, or the church, or but here, I have a note of it all."

She pulled a soiled red note-book from her pocket and was about to refer to it, when she was arrested by the grave, sad expression that had overspread her brother's countenance.

"Ah, Molly," he said, "dear Clara Nibsworth was dying when I last saw her, and I fear her father won't survive her long. You remember, I told you the poor girl was delicate and her father old, and the excitement and exertion of that night of the fire was too much for both of them. When I arrived this time in China, I took a run up to their place to see them, and found Clara almost at the point of death. I had little time to spare, and meant to have returned the next day; but the poor broken-down father entreated me so earnestly to remain that I at last agreed to spend three days wi' them. Durin' that time I read the Bible a good deal to the poor girl, and found that she had got her feet firm on the Rock of Ages. She was very grateful, poor thing, and I never saw one so unselfish. She had little thought about herself, although dyin' and in great sufferin'. Her chief anxiety was about her old father, and what he would do when she was gone.

"It was impossible for me to stay to the end, for no one could guess how long the poor thing would hold out. I did my best to comfort the father, and then I left, bringing away a kind message to you, my poor Rosebud. She seems to have loved you dearly, and said you were very kind to her at school."

Rose had covered her face with her hands, and with difficulty restrained her tears.

"But you said the doctors had *some* hope, father; didn't you?" she asked.

"No, darling, the doctors had none—no more had I. It was her poor father who hoped against hope. Death was written on her sweet face, and it could not be far off. I

doubt not she is now with the Lord. When I was leaving, she gave me a small packet for you; but that, with everything else in the *North Star*, has gone to the bottom. But we must be goin' now," continued the captain, rising. "I see Jeff is gettin' wearied—an' no wonder. Besides, it won't do to keep you two up here talkin' till daylight."

Jeff protested that he was not weary—that in such company it was impossible for him to tire! but Rose was too much distressed by her father's narrative to observe the compliment.

Still, in spite of his protest, there was something in our hero's manner and look which belied his words; and when he returned to the coastguard station that day, and was about to lie down for much-needed repose, his friend and mate, David Bowers, was surprised to see him turn deadly pale, stagger, and fall on his bed in a state of insensibility.

"Hallo! Jeff, what's wrong?" exclaimed Bowers, starting up, seizing his friend's arm, and giving him a shake, for he was much puzzled. To see a man knocked into a state of insensibility was nothing new or unfamiliar to Bowers, but to see a powerful young fellow like Jeff go off in a fainting fit like a woman was quite out of his experience.

Jeff, however, remained deaf to his mate's hallo! and when at last a doctor was fetched, it was found that he had been seriously injured; insomuch that the medical man stood amazed when he heard how he had walked several miles and sat up for several hours after his exertions and accident at the wreck. That medical man, you see, happened to be an old bachelor, and probably did not know what love can accomplish!

"I very much fear," he said to Captain Millet, after inspecting his patient, "that the poor fellow has received some bad internal injuries. The mast, or whatever it was, must have struck him a tremendous blow, for his side is severely bruised, and two of his ribs are broken."

"Pretty tough ribs to break, too," remarked the captain, with a look of profound distress.

"You are right," returned the doctor; "remarkably tough, but not quite fitted to withstand such a powerful battering-ram as the mainmast of a six-hundred-ton barque."

"Now, doctor, what's to be done with him? You see, the poor young fellow is not only my friend, but he has saved my life, so I feel bound to look well after him; and this isn't quite the sort o' place to be ill in," he added, looking round the somewhat bare apartment, whose walls were adorned with carbines and cutlasses.

"The wisest thing for him to do is to go into hospital, where he will receive the best of medical treatment and careful nursing."

"Wouldn't the nursing of an old lady that loves him like a mother, and a comfortable cottage, do as well?"

"No doubt it would," said the doctor, with a smile, "if he also had proper medical attendance—"

"Just so. Well, that's all settled, then," interrupted the captain. "I'll have him removed at once, and you'll attend him, doctor—who better?—that is, if you can spare the time."

The doctor was quite ready to spare the time, and the captain bustled off to tell his sister what was in store for her, and to order Rosebud to pack up and return to school without delay, so as to make room for the patient.

Great was his astonishment that his Rosebud burst into tears on receiving the news.

"My Bud, my darling, don't cry," he said, tenderly drawing the fair head to his rugged bosom. "I know it must be a great disappointment to have a week cut off your holidays, but I'll go down to Folkestone with you, an' take a lodging there, an you an' I will have a jolly time of it together—till I get another ship—"

"Oh! father, it's not *that*!" exclaimed poor Rose almost indignantly; "it's—it's—"

Not being able to explain exactly what it was that ailed her, she took refuge in another flood of tears.

"Oh!" she thought to herself, "if I might only stay and nurse him!" but she blushed at the very thought, for she was well aware that she knew no more about scientific nursing than a tortoiseshell cat! Three months of the most tender and careful nursing by Miss Millet failed, however, to set Jeffrey Benson on his legs. He was very patient and courageous. Hope was strong, and he listened with approval and gratitude to his nurse's teachings.

There came a day, however, which tried him.

"You think me not much better, doctor?" he asked, somewhat anxiously.

“Not much,” returned the doctor, in a low, tender tone; “and I fear that you must make up your mind never again to be quite the same man you were.”

“Never again?” exclaimed the youth, in startled surprise.

The doctor said nothing, but his look was—“never again.”

Chapter Six.

Good News to the Captain—Also to Jeff.

There is a period, probably, in the life of every man, when a feeling akin to despair creeps over him, and the natural tendency of his heart to rebel against his Maker becomes unquestionable. There may be some on whom this epoch descends gently—others, perhaps, who may even question whether they have met with it at all; but there must be many, of whom Jeff was one, on whom it comes like a thunderbolt, scathing for a time all the finer qualities of heart and mind.

“If it had only come at a later period of life, or in some other form, auntie,” he said one day, as he lay on a sofa at the open window of the cottage, looking out upon the sea; “but to be bowled over at my age, when the world was all before me, and I was so well able—physically, at least—to fight my way. It is terrible, and seems so outrageous! What good can possibly come of rendering a young man helpless—a strong, capable machine, that might do so much good in the world, useless?”

He spoke in an almost querulous tone, and looked inquiringly in his nurse's face. It did not occur to the youth, as he looked at her, that the weak-bodied, soft, and gentle creature herself had been, and still was, doing more good to the world than a hundred young men such as he!

Miss Millet's face was a wholesome one to look into. She did not shake her head and look solemn or shocked. Neither did she laugh at his petulance. She merely said, with the sweetest of little smiles, "You may live, Jeff, to be a very useful machine yet; if not *quite* as strong as you were—though even that is uncertain, for doctors are fallible, you know. Never forget that, Jeff—doctors are fallible. Besides, your living at all shows that God has something for you to do for Him."

"Nonsense, auntie. If that is true of me, it is just as true of hundreds of men who live and die without making the smallest attempt to accomplish any work for God. Yet He lets them live for many years."

"Quite true," returned Miss Millet; "and God *has* work for all these men to do, though many of them refuse to do it. But I feel sure that that won't be your case, Jeff. He finds work just suited to our capacities—at the time we need it, too, if we are only willing. Why, in my own very case, has He not sent you to me to be nursed, just as I had finished organising the new night-classes for the usher-boys; and I was puzzled—absolutely puzzled—as to what I should do next and here you step in, requiring my assistance, and giving me full employment."

"That's it—that's it," returned Jeff hastily. "I am without means, and a burden on you and Captain Millet. Oh! it is hard—very hard!"

"Yes, indeed, it *is* hard to bear. Of course that is what you mean, for, as God has done it we cannot suppose anything that He does is really hard. If your illness had been the result of dissipation, now, or through your own fault, you could not have said exactly it was God's doing; but when it was the result of noble self-sacrifice—"

"Come, come, auntie; don't make me more vain than I am. I'm bad enough as it is, and—and—I'm *very* weary."

The poor youth's head fell back on the pillow, and he sighed deeply as his nurse brought him some strengthening food. He needed it much, for he was reduced to a mere shadow of his former self.

His fine eyes had become quite awful in their size and solemnity. His once ruddy cheeks were hollow. His well-formed nose had become pinched, and his garments hung on, rather than clothed, a huge skeleton.

During all Jeff's illness Captain Millet was unremitting in his attentions, insomuch that a certain careworn expression began to take up its settled abode on his countenance. But this was not altogether owing to sympathy with his friend, it was partly the consequence of his financial affairs.

Having lost his situation, as he had expected, he found it difficult to procure another, and was under the necessity of living on the small capital which he had accumulated in the course of laborious years. Had his own subsistence been all his care, he would have had little trouble; but Rose had to be supported and educated, his sister had to be assisted, his charities had to be kept up, and now Jeff Benson had to be maintained, and his doctor paid. The

worst of it all was, that he could not talk on the subject to any of the three, which, to a sympathetic soul, was uncommonly hard—but unavoidable.

"Yes, quite unavoidable," he muttered to himself one evening, when alone in his lodging. "They think I'm a rich old fellow, but I daren't say a word. If I did, Jeff would refuse to eat another bite, an' that would kill him. If I told Rosebud, it could do no good, and would only make her miserable. If I told Molly, I—I really don't know what she'd do. She'd founder, I think. No, I must go on sailin' under false colours. It's a comfort, anyhow, to know that the funds will last some little time yet, even at the present rate of expenditure; but it's perplexin'—very."

He shook his head, wrinkled his brows, and then, rising, took a well-worn pocket-Bible from a shelf, and sought consolation therein.

Some time after that Captain Millet was seated in the same room, about the same hour, meditating on the same subject, with a few additional wrinkles on his brow, when he received a letter.

"From Hong Kong," he muttered, opening it, and putting on his glasses.

The changes in his expressive face as he read were striking, and might have been instructive. Sadness first—then surprise—then blazing astonishment—then a pursing of the mouth and a prolonged whistle, followed by an expressive slap on the thigh. Then, crumpling the letter into his pocket he put on his glazed hat, sallied forth, and took the way to his sister's cottage.

At that cottage, about the same time, a great change

had taken place in Jeff Benson—spiritually, not physically, though even in the latter respect he was at all events not worse than usual. Having gone from bad to worse in his rebellion, he had at last reached that lowest depth wherein he not only despaired of the doctor's power to cure him, and his own power of constitution, but began silently, and in his own mind, to charge his Maker with having made a complete failure in his creation.

"Life is a muddle, auntie, altogether!" he exclaimed when he reached this point. It was the lowest ebb—hopeless despair alike of himself and his God.

"A muddle, Jeff?" said the little woman, raising her eyebrows slightly. "How can that be possible in the work of a Perfect Creator, and a Perfect Saviour who redeems from all evil—your supposed 'muddle' included?"

Our young coastguardsman was silent. It was probably the great turning-point when the Holy Spirit opened his eyes to see Jesus, and all things in relation to Him. For a long time he did not speak. The lips of his nurse were also silent, but her heart was not so. At last Jeff spoke—

"It *must* be so. Perfection is bound to work out perfection. This apparent evil *must* be for good. 'He doeth all things well.' Surely I have read that somewhere!"

In a low clear voice his nurse said—

"'He doeth all things well,'
We say it now with tears;
But we shall sing it with those we love
Through bright eternal years."

“I think the light is dawning, auntie.”

“I am *sure* it is, Jeff.”

Again they were silent, and thus they remained while the natural light faded, until the western sky and sea were dyed in crimson.

The first thing that diverted their thoughts was a quick step outside, then a thunderous knock at the door, and next moment the captain stood before them, beaming with excitement, panting heavily, and quite unable for some minutes to talk coherently.

“Sister,” said he at last, “sit down an’ listen. Jeff, open your ears.”

He drew a crumpled letter from his pocket, spread it on his knee, put on his glasses, and read as follows:—

“‘My ***Dear Captain Millet***,—

“‘You will, I know, be grieved, though not surprised, to hear that your old friend Nibsworth is dead. Poor fellow! his end came much as you and I had anticipated when we last parted. He followed his dear Clara about two months after her death. I suppose you know that she died three days after you left their house.

“‘My object in writing just now, however, is to convey to you a piece of good news; namely, that Nibsworth has left you the whole of his property, which, altogether, cannot amount to less, I should think, than eighty thousand pounds.’”

At this point the captain paused and looked over his glasses at his sister, who, with wide-open eyes, exclaimed—

"Brother! he must be joking!"

"Sister," returned the captain, "my friend *never* jokes, except when in extremely congenial society, and then his jokes are bad—so bad as to be unworthy of repetition."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Miss Millet.

"Singular," murmured Jeff, whose thoughts seemed to be engaged with some far-off prospect.

"He goes on," continued the captain, reading: "'I am left the sole executor of his affairs. Pray, therefore, write as to what you wish done. I am not at present conversant with the precise duties of an executor, but of course I will get the best advice possible in the circumstances, and do the best I can. I would recommend you to do the same at your end of the world, and let me have your instructions as soon as possible. The enclosed statement will show you the nature of your property. The greater part, you will observe, is in hard cash. I may add that the house and grounds here would sell well at present, if you feel inclined to dispose of them.

"'In conclusion, allow me to congratulate you on this piece of good fortune—perhaps, knowing your character so well, I should have written, this good gift from God.'"

"Ay, my friend," said the captain, folding the letter, "you might have written, 'this unexpected and undeserved gift from God.' But now, Molly, what think ye of it all?"

"Wonderful!" exclaimed the good lady in reply; and beyond this word she seemed unable to go for a time, save that, after a strong mental effort, she varied it to "amazing!" Suddenly she seemed to recover, and said with a quick, earnest look—

"Dick, what are you going to do?"

"Do?" exclaimed Captain Millet, smiting his knee and looking from his sister to Jeff with a broad smile. "I'll run up to London, an' take a mansion in the West End, call at Long Acre in passing, and buy a carriage and four. Then I'll run down to Folkestone an' buy a villa there, or a castle if they have one in stock; if not, I'll order one o' the newest pattern, with gas, water, electricity, and steam laid on. After that I'll buy a steam-yacht and take a trip round the world, so as to calm my brain and think over it. Of course I'll drop in at Hong Kong, in passing, to have a look at my property; and then—"

"Hush, brother! don't run on with such nonsense when we ought to be only filled with serious thoughts."

"How can a man be filled with serious thoughts, Molly, when a sort of Arabian Nights' affair has tumbled on him all of a sudden—took him aback like a white squall, and thrown him on his beam-ends?"

"And what a selfish fellow you are, too!" said Jeff; "not one word in all you propose to do about anybody except yourself—no mention even of Rosebud."

"Pooh! Jeff, are you so green as not to know that a wise man never puts his best foot foremost? Don't you know that it is usual, when a man makes a speech, to keep tumblin' out one point after another—clinkin' 'em all as

he goes along—until he comes to the 'last but not *least*' point? If you had let me alone, Molly, I was comin' to Rosebud and yourself too; but as you've been so unmannerly, I'll keep these points till another time. By the way, when you write to Rosebud, not a word about all this. It might unsettle the darlin' with her lessons. An' that reminds me that one o' my first businesses will be to have her supplied wi' the best of teachers—French, Italian, Spanish, German masters—Greek an' Hebrew an' Dutch ones too if the dear child wants 'em—to say nothin' o' dancin' an' drawin' an' calisthenics an' mathematics, an' the use o' the globes, an' conundrums o' that sort."

"Really, brother, if you go on like this, I'll begin to think your good fortune, as you call it, has turned your brain."

"Never fear, Molly, when I come to say what I'm going to do about the little church, an' the night-classes, an' the soup-kitchens, and the model-houses and the swimming-bath, you'll whistle another tune. But come, Jeff; it's time to ask how you are gettin' along. You look better, my boy."

"I *am* better, captain—much, *much* better," returned the youth, with a flushed cheek and sparkling eye, "for I, too, have got news this morning of a fortune which exceeds yours in value, and the security is better."

The captain was puzzled. "A fortune, Jeff?"

"Yes; but my news will keep. You are too much excited to hear about it just now. Enough to say that I am much better. Now, if you are wise, you will go without delay and take some steps about this affair."

“You’re right, lad,” returned the captain, rising quietly and clapping on his hat; “so good-bye to ’ee both. I’ll soon be back. At present I’m off to consult my—my—solicitor! though I don’t know who he is yet, more than the man in the moon.”

Chapter Seven.

An Unquiet, Adventurous Morning in the Shell-Cave.

“I think,” said Jeff Benson one fine morning, as he got up and stretched himself, “that I feel well enough to-day to get down to the shore without assistance. You know, auntie, I shall never be able to walk alone if I give way to laziness, and lean so much on others. I’m like the babies now, and must be encouraged to try it on my own hook.”

He looked at Miss Millet with a half-pitiful smile, for there was something woefully true in his words, and his good little nurse found it necessary to go in search of the household keys for a minute or so before answering.

“Well, Jeff, perhaps you are right and the day is splendid—sunny, calm, and warm—so you won’t be likely to catch cold. Only don’t go far, for you might become tired out. So, promise that you won’t go far, and then I will let you go.”

Jeff promised; but of course he did not do exactly as his nurse wished, for, in such circumstances, the word “far” has a wonderfully varied significance. At first, leaning on

his stick and pausing frequently to recover strength, he made his way to the shore; but when there, the invigorating air and the exhilarating sound of ripples on the sand, and a rest on the rocks, made him feel so much better, that he thought he might walk the length of the shell-cave without breaking his promise.

He tried, and succeeded, but was so fatigued, when at length he threw himself on the soft sand at the cave's mouth, that he felt uneasy about getting home again.

The shell-cave was a favourite nook in a lonely part of the cliffs, which Jeff had been wont to frequent in his coastguard days, especially at that particular time when he seemed to expect the revival of the smuggling traffic near Miss Millet's cottage. He had frequently spoken of it to Rose as a beautiful spot where innumerable sea-shells were to be found, and had once taken her to see it.

It was, as we have said, a lonely spot, far removed from the fishing town, and was sought out by Jeff because he did not yet feel strong enough to hold much intercourse with his friends and former mates—none of whom had seen him since his illness began. But the poor invalid was doomed to several interruptions that day.

The first comer was his comrade Wilson, of the coastguard, whose place he had taken on the eventful night of the wreck. On rounding the point of rock, and coming suddenly on our hero, that worthy was struck dumb and motionless for at least a minute, while his eyes gradually opened wide with surprise, and his mouth partially followed suit.

"Not Jeff Benson!" said Wilson at last, in quite a solemn tone.

“What’s left of him,” answered Jeff, with a faint smile.

“An’ it ain’t much!” returned Wilson, with a kind of gasp, as he approached softly.

“Not much more than the bones an’ clothes,” said Jeff, with a laugh at his friend’s expression; “also,” he added more seriously, “a good deal of the spirit, thank God. How are all the lads, Wilson?”

The man tried to answer, but could not. The sight of his old stalwart chum so reduced was too much for him. He could only go down on one knee, and take the thin large hand in his. Seeing this, Jeff returned his squeeze, and relieved him by saying—

“You can beat me now, Wilson, but I could squeeze till I made you howl once, and mayhap I’ll do it again—who knows? But you must not think me unkind if I ask you to leave me, Wilson. The Doctor is always insisting that I must keep quiet; so, good-day to you, my boy, an’ remember me kindly to my comrades.”

The next visitor, who appeared half an hour later, was the terrier dog of the station. Bounce belonged, of right, to David Bowers, but, being amiable, it acknowledged the part-ownership of all the men. On suddenly beholding Jeff, it rushed at him with a mingled bark and squeal of joy, and thereafter, for full two minutes, danced round him, a mass of wriggling hair from tip of tail to snout, in uncontrollable ecstasy. Mingled misery and surprise at Jeff’s sudden and unaccountable disappearance, prolonged agonies of disappointed expectation, the sickness of heart resulting from hope long deferred, all were forgotten in that supreme moment of joy at reunion

with his long-lost human friend!

Jeff had to rise and sit down on a shelf of rock to escape some of Bounce's overwhelming affection. Presently Bounce's owner appeared, and went through something of a similar performance—humanised, however, and with more of dignity.

"I can't tell 'ee how glad I am to see you again, Jeff," said Bowers, sitting down beside him, and grasping his hand. "But oh, man, how thin—"

The huge coastguardsman choked at this point, as Wilson had done before him; but, being more ready of resource, he turned it into a cough, and declared, sternly, that night-work must have given him a cold, or "suthin' o' that sort." After which he made a great demonstration of clearing his throat and blowing his nose.

"But you'll soon be yours—at least, somethin' like your old self, before long, Jeff. The doctor told us that, the last time he was at the station."

"If God wills," returned Jeff, softly; "I am in His hands, and willing to be what He chooses. You remember, David, the talk we once had about Miss Millet's argument, that God brings good out of evil. I didn't believe it then; I believe it now. I've bin to school since I last saw you, David, and I've learned a good lesson, for I can say from my heart it has been good for me that I was afflicted."

Bowers did not reply, but looked at his friend with an expression of puzzled surprise.

"Yes," continued Jeff, with rising enthusiasm; "I have

lost my health—the doctor thinks permanently. I've lost the strength that I used to be so proud of, and with it the hope of being able to make a living in any active line of life; and I've lost much more besides. But what I have found in my Saviour far more than makes up for it all."

In the "much more besides," poor Jeff mentally referred to his loss of all hope of ever gaining the hand of Rose Millet; for if his chance seemed small before, how immeasurably was it reduced now that his health was shattered, and his power even of supporting himself gone. No; he felt that that door was closed—that he must avoid the girl as much as possible in future; and, above all, be particularly careful not to fall in love with her. Of course, it was only a passing fancy as yet, and, like fruit, would never ripen unless the sun shone. He would avoid the sunshine! Meanwhile, of all these rapidly fleeting thoughts, he said never a word to his friend David Bowers, but after a little more conversation, begged him also to go away and let him rest.

All very good, friend Jeff; but what if the sun should shine in spite of you?

Just about that time, in the course of his eager and somewhat erratic wanderings among solicitors and other men of business, Captain Millet made a sudden pause, and, by way of taking breath, rushed down to Folkestone, brought Rose up to Cranby, hired a dog-cart, and drove along the sands at low tide, in the direction of his sister's cottage.

"I think it probable that you may see him today, Rosebud," he said, "though I'm not quite sure, for the doctor is afraid of a relapse, and friends are not yet allowed to visit him. To be sure bein' only a little girl,

you probably wouldn't disturb him at all—'specially if you didn't speak. Anyhow, you'll see auntie, which will be more to the purpose."

"Father," said Rose, whose name seemed remarkably appropriate at that moment, "I should like to get down here, and walk the rest of the way. By the time I arrive, you'll have had a little talk with poor Jeff and auntie. Besides, there is a pretty cave that I used to gather shells in when I was last here. I would like so much to pay it a visit in passing."

Of course the captain had no objection, and thus it came to pass that Jeff's fourth visitor on that unquiet morning was the Rosebud!

How feeble are written words to convey ideas at times! If you could have obtained one glance of Rose and Jeff at that moment, reader, words would not be required. No peony ever blushed like that Rose—to say nothing of the blank amazement in those wide blue eyes. Jeff, still seated on the rock, became petrified.

Recovering first, as women always do, Rose hurried forward with—"I'm *so* glad, Mr —," but there she stopped abruptly, for the unexpected sight of that stalwart coastguardsman, reduced to a big skeleton with pale face, hollow cheeks, cavernous eyes, and an old-man stoop, was too much for her. She covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

What could Jeff do? He forgot his prudent resolves. He forgot his weakness because his strength seemed to have suddenly returned. He sprang up, intending to comfort the poor girl in a brotherly sort of way. Somehow—he never could clearly remember how—he had her

seated on the rock beside him, with his arm round her waist and her head on his shoulder.

A few moments later—he never could tell how many—the wickedness of his conduct came down upon Jeff like a thunderbolt. He removed his arm, drew away from her about three inches, and looked in her surprised face with a solemn, self-condemned expression.

"Forgive me, Rose," he said, in the deep, hollow voice which had become natural to him since his illness began; "my love for you proved too strong to be restrained just now: but believe me, I had fully made up my mind never to open my lips to you on the subject; for what right have I, a helpless, and, I fear, hopeless, invalid, to dare to aspire—"

There must have been something peculiar in the very slight, almost pathetic, smile which overspread the tearful face of Rose at that moment: for the arm was suddenly replaced, the three inches were reduced to nothing, the fair head again rested on the once stalwart shoulder, and thus they remained until the cavern was filled with the sounds:—

"Hi! Ho! Hallo! Rose—Rosebud ahoy! That girl would worry any man to death! Where are you? Hi! Ship ahoy! Hallo-o-o!"

We need scarcely remark that Rose did not wait for the last stentorian halloo! Bounding from her lover's side, she ran to meet her father—red at first and then pale—exclaiming, "Oh! father I've found him!"

"Found who, child?"

"Jeff— I mean Mister—"

"Not dead?" exclaimed the Captain, interrupting with awful solemnity.

He was answered by the invalid himself coming out of the cavern, and wishing him good-morning with a confused and guilty air.

"Well now," said Captain Millet after a moment's pause, while he glanced from the one to the other, "this beats the polar regions all to sticks and stivers. Rose, my dear, you go round the p'int, an' wait by the dog-cart till I come to 'ee."

"So, young man," he said, turning sternly to Jeff, "you've bin cruisin' after my little girl without leave."

"I am guilty, Captain Millet," said Jeff humbly, "but not intentionally so. Long ago, when I learned that there was no hope of recovering my old strength, I had determined to give up all thoughts of dear Rose; but I was taken by surprise this morning—was off my guard—and, I confess, wickedly took advantage of my opportunity to tell her how dearly I loved her. Yet it was done under a sudden, irresistible impulse. I do not excuse myself. I would give worlds to undo the evil I may have done. But after all it *may* be undone. Rose may have mistaken her extreme sympathy and pity for love. If so, she will not suffer much, or long. Indeed, now I think of it, she won't suffer at all, except regret at having been led to raise false hopes in my breast."

The mere thought of this was so depressing, that Jeff, who was already almost worn out with excitement, leaned heavily on his stick for support.

“Jeff,” returned the captain severely, “how could you do it?”

“I hardly know,” rejoined Jeff, feeling something of the old Adam rising in his breast; “but my intentions were honourable, whatever my conduct may have been under impulse and strong temptation. Perhaps I might appeal to your own experience. Have you never done that which you did not mean to under the power of impulse?”

“You’ve hit me there, boy, below the water-line,” said the captain, relaxing a little: “for I not only put the question to my old woman without leave, but carried her off with flyin’ colours against orders; but it came all right at last, though I didn’t deserve it. However, Jeff, you’ve no need to look so blue. My little girl has raised no false hopes in your breast. Moreover, let me tell you, for your comfort, that I saw the doctor this morning, and he says that your constitution is so strong that you’re in a fair way to pull through in spite of him, and that you’ll be fit for good service yet—though not exactly what you were before. So, keep up your heart, Jeff! Never say die, and you shall wed my Rosebud yet, as sure as my name’s Dick Millet.”

There was need for these words of comfort, for the poor youth was obliged to sit down on the sand for a few minutes to recover strength.

“I’ve had a pretty stiff morning altogether, captain,” he said apologetically; “but I’m thankful—very thankful—for the succession of events that have brought me to this happy hour.”

“And yet, Jeff,” said the captain, sitting down beside him, “you and I thought these events—the wreck, and

the loss of employment, and the overturning o' the lifeboat, and the thump on the ribs, and the long illness —nothing but misfortunes and full of evil *at first*. There, —I'm not goin' to draw no moral. I never was good at that. Come, now, if you've rested enough, we'll up anchor and away. I've got a dog-cart beatin' off an' on round the p'int there, an' my Rosebud will be gettin' impatient."

This was true—Rose was becoming not only impatient but anxious. When, however, she saw her father and lover approach, all her anxieties vanished.

Chapter Eight.

Conclusion of the Whole Matter.

The wonder-working power of Time is proverbial. Behold Jeffrey Benson once again, looking like his old self, at the hospitable board of Miss Millet. It is an occasion of importance. Opposite to her sits her brother. Jeff is on her right hand. On the left sits Rose—prettier, brighter, and more womanly than ever. A gold circlet on one of the fingers of her left hand proclaims a great fact. A happy smile on her face proves that her confidence has not been misplaced.

Jeff is nearly as stout and strong as he ever was; of his severe illness scarcely a trace remains. The doctor does not know what it was, and it is not to be expected that we should know. Sufficient for us to state the fact that it is gone.

But our hero is not now a coastguardsman. Listen, and the captain will explain why.

"Molly, my dear, another cup of your superb tea, to web my whistle before I begin. It ought to be good, for I know the man that grew it, and the firm through which it came. Well, now, both you and Rosebud will nat'rally want to know about the situation which I've obtained for Jeff. You'll be surprised to hear that he is now Secretary of State to King Richard Longpurse."

"In other words," interrupted Jeff, with a laugh, "your brother thinks—"

"If *you* think, sir," interrupted the captain in his turn, "that King Richard cannot explain matters in his own words, you had better say so at once, and I will abdicate in your favour."

"Go on, sire—I submit," said Jeff.

"Well then, Molly, I was about to say, when my secretary interrupted me, that he and I have at last come to an agreement. After much explanation, I have got him to understand that a king cannot possibly manage all his own affairs with his own hands, and that I am forced to have a secretary, who can at least do the 'three R's' pretty well. You see, although my edication has not been neglected, it still remains a fact that I can't read without specs, that in cipherin' I am slow—slow, though sure—and that in the matter of penmanship I am neither swift nor legible. Therefore, seein' that in such things I don't differ much from other kings and great men, Jeff has generously consented to refuse the lucrative sitooation under Goverment, with nothin' partik'lar to do, which has been offered to him, and to accept the secretary of

state-ship, now at the disposal of King Richard, who will give him at least as good a salary as Government, and at the same time keep his nose closer to the grindstone."

"Oh! Jeff," said Rosebud at this point, shaking her finger at her husband, "I *knew* there was something in the wind!"

"My child," remarked the captain, "there is always something in the wind. According to the best authorities, you may count on findin' oxygen, nitrogen, and carbonic-acid gases in it—not to mention foreign substances at times, such as dust leaves, bits of old newspaper and the like, except at sea, where it is always pure and good."

"But with plenty of salt in it," interposed Miss Millet, "though not enough to cure you of bad habits, brother. Come now, tell us really what you mean."

"Well, sister, what I really mean is this: that the fortune which has been sent to me is far too big for one pair of hands and one brain to manage: so my son-in-law has agreed to help me—and the labourer, you know, is worthy of his hire! Surely I don't need to explain the meaning of that text to *you*! Since we last conversed in this room on the disposal of my surplus funds, Jeff and I have had many a long talk and walk together. Moreover, I have kept the young secretary's nose so tight to the grindstone for some months past that he has produced results which will, I think, interest—it may be even surprise—you."

"Before going further," continued the captain, pushing in his cup, "let's have some more o' that brew to wet my whistle. Well, you will be pleased to hear that I have

changed my mind about the carriage and four, and the mansion in Belgravia, and the castle at Folkestone, and the steam-yacht—given 'em all up, and decided to come here an' live quietly beside you, sister."

"Are you in earnest brother?" asked Miss Millet, with sparkling eyes.

"Never more in earnest in my life; but get out your plans an' papers, secretary, an' explain 'em."

Jeff rose, left the room, and returned with a business-like bundle of papers, which he untied and arranged on the table before him. Taking up one, he said—

"This is a list of the poor people in Cranby, in whom Miss Millet has been accustomed to take special interest. The first on the list is old Susan Jenkins."

"My dear old woman, who has been bedridden so long, and in such terrible poverty?" asked Miss Millet.

"The same," answered Jeff. "Captain Millet has succeeded in getting her admission into the hospital for incurables. We have only just received intimation of the appointment; and as the old woman does not know of it yet, we thought it best to let you be the bearer of the news."

"Oh, brother!" exclaimed Miss Millet, clasping her hands in delight. She knew now that the captain was in earnest, for he would sooner have cut off his own hand than trifle with her feelings.

"Go on, secretary," cried the captain, taking a considerable swig of tea, "an' don't you interrupt, Molly,

else we'll never get through."

"The next name is Martha Brand."

"What, ragged little Martha?" exclaimed Miss Millet.

"The same. A new rig-out has been ordered for Martha, and she is to be sent to school. Joe Puncheon, better known as Vagabond Joe, has been apprenticed to a carpenter—by his own special desire—and goes to work on Monday next in a suit of suitable clothes."

"Come, sir, none o' that in business hours," cried the captain, "and heave that list overboard. It would take us half the night to get through with it. Come to the plans, sir; open the plans."

Putting aside the list, the obedient secretary took up a large document, and, unfolding it, spread it on the table.

"This," said Jeff, with business-like gravity, "is a plan of the Cranby Swimming Bath. The coast near the town being rocky, and in many ways inconvenient for bathing, sea-water is to be pumped into this bath daily by a steam-engine. A professor of swimming is appointed to give gratuitous instruction in his art. The bath is to be in two parts—one for ladies, one for gentlemen—and will have dressing-boxes all round, besides diving-boards and every sort of convenience. At certain hours of the morning and evening it will be open free of charge to all comers; so that there will be no excuse for any man, woman, or child in Cranby being dirty or unable to swim."

"What a blessing it would be," exclaimed the enthusiastic Miss Millet, "if such baths existed all over the kingdom!"

"It is a disgrace to the kingdom," said Jeff, "that a bath such as this does *not* exist in every town of the kingdom. A mere tithe of the money wasted on drink and tobacco," ("and tea," muttered the captain, pushing in his cup for more), "would suffice to do it."

"Come, Jeff, clap a stopper on your long-winded lectures, and go ahead wi' the next plan," said the captain, "and don't moralise if you can help it."

"But, brother, can you afford all this?" asked Miss Millet.

"Afford it? Of course I can. It's wonderful, Molly, what men can afford when they're willing to spend. Why, I've known a man myself who was so uncommon willin' to spend that he ruined his baker an' butcher an' greengrocer before he had done spendin'. If that's so with them as hasn't got money to spend, surely it's for a man like me to do so who's rollin' in four thousand a year, more or less. Besides, I'm goin' to invest some o' the capital in a way that'll pay back three or four hundred per cent interest! I'm not goin' to leave it all to my Rosebud. A reasonable provision she shall have—not more. You see, Molly, I'm of opinion that whatever a man has—whether he makes it by the use of his talents, or inherits it from his father, or has it sent to him unexpected, like mine—he holds it all in trust, to be used for the glory of God and the good of men. Now, cut along, secretary."

"This," said Jeff, "is the plan of the People's Free Library. The purchase of the site was effected last week, and the building is to be commenced next month."

"Ay, and the Prince of Wales is coming to lay the

foundation stone," cried the captain; "leastwise I've asked him to do it, and no doubt he'll come if he's got time. But look here, Molly," he added, becoming impatient and opening out all the plans at once—"here you've got the lecture-hall an' the gymnasium, an' the church, an' the ragged school—all ship-shape—an' what d'ye think this is? Explain it, secretary."

"This is a plan of two cottages exactly the shape and size of this one in which we sit, but with a few more rooms and out-houses behind. The empty space between them represents the site of this cottage. The one on the right is intended for Captain Millet. That on the left for—"

"For the secretary and his wife," cried the captain again, taking up the discourse. "An' look here, what d'ye think the double lines in pencil 'tween your cottage an' mine means?"

"A wash-house, perhaps."

"A wash'us," repeated the captain, with contempt. "No; that's a passage from one house to the other, so as you an' I can visit comfortably in wet weather. There's a door in the middle with two locks, one on each side; so that if either of us should chance to be in the dumps, we've got only to turn the key on our own side. But the passage ain't in the plan, you see. It's only a suggestion. Then, Rosebud, what d'ye think that thing is atop of my cottage?"

"It—it *looks* like a—a pepper-box," replied Rose, with some hesitation.

"Pepper-box!" repeated the captain, in disgust; "why, it's a plate-glass outlook, where I can sweep the horizon

with my glass all round, an' smoke my pipe in peace and comfort, and sometimes have you up, my girl, to have a chat about old times. But that's not all, Molly. Here's a letter which you can put in your pocket an' read at your leisure. It says that the tin mine in which you have shares has become so prosperous that you could sell at ten or twenty times the price of your original shares; so, —you see, you are independent of me altogether as to your livelihood. Now, old girl, what d'ye think of all that?"

The captain threw himself back in his chair, wiped his brow and looked at his sister with an air of thorough satisfaction.

"I think," returned Miss Millet slowly, "that God has been very good to us all."

"He has, sister, He has; and yet the beginning of it all did not seem very promising."

The captain cast a glance at Jeff as he spoke. The youth met the glance with a candid smile.

"I know what you think, father," he said. "You and I are agreed on that point now. I admit that what appears to be evil may be made to work for good."

"True, Jeff," returned the captain; "but I have lived long enough to see, also, that the opposite holds good—that things which are questionably good in themselves sometimes work out what appears to be evil. For instance, I have known a poor, respectable man become suddenly and unexpectedly rich, and the result was that he went in for extravagant expenditure and dissipation which ended in his ruin."

"But that," said Miss Millet quickly, "was because he did not accept the gift as from God to be used in His service, but misused it."

"True, Molly, true; and such will be my fate if I am not kept by the Holy Spirit from misusing what has been given to *me*."

The Rosebud opened not her lips, only her ears, while this conversation was going on; but the next day, seated on a stool at Jeff's feet, with her fair little hands clasped on his knee and looking up in his kind, manly face, she said—

"I wonder, Jeff, what auntie would say if, instead of working out such pleasant consequences to us, all these things had ended only in what we term disaster, and bad luck, and poverty, and death—as happens so often to many people."

"I wonder, too, my Rosebud," returned Jeff. "Suppose we go and put the question to her."

Accordingly they went, and found the quiet old lady busy, as usual, knitting socks for the poor.

"Now, auntie," said Jeff, after stating the question, "if everything had turned out apparently ill for us—according to what men usually call ill—would you still hold that everything had really turned out well?"

"Certainly I would, Jeff, on the simple ground that God is good and cannot err, though He has many and strange methods of bringing about His ends. You can prove it by taking an extreme case. Go to one of the early martyrs, who lost not only property, and health, and friends, and

liberty, but finally his life at the stake. The unbeliever's view would be that everything had gone against him; his own view, that God had put on him great honour in counting him worthy to suffer and die for Jesus; and you could not doubt his sincerity when you heard his hymns of praise on the way to the stake—ay, even in the *fire*."

"Then, whatever happens—good or bad—auntie," said Rose, "you would say, 'All is well.'"

"I would believe it, dear, whether I had courage to say it or not. If strength were given, I would certainly acquiesce, and say, 'Thy will be done.'"

"Amen! Long may we live to say that, Molly," said Captain Millet, entering the cottage at that moment. And the captain's prayer was granted; for he and Molly—and the ex-coastguardsman with his Rosebud lived many a year after that to see the completion of the swimming-bath, and the people's' library, and the gymnasium, and the evening classes, and the model houses, etcetera, and to experience the truth of that blessed Word which tells us that "all things work together for good to them that love God."

The End.

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