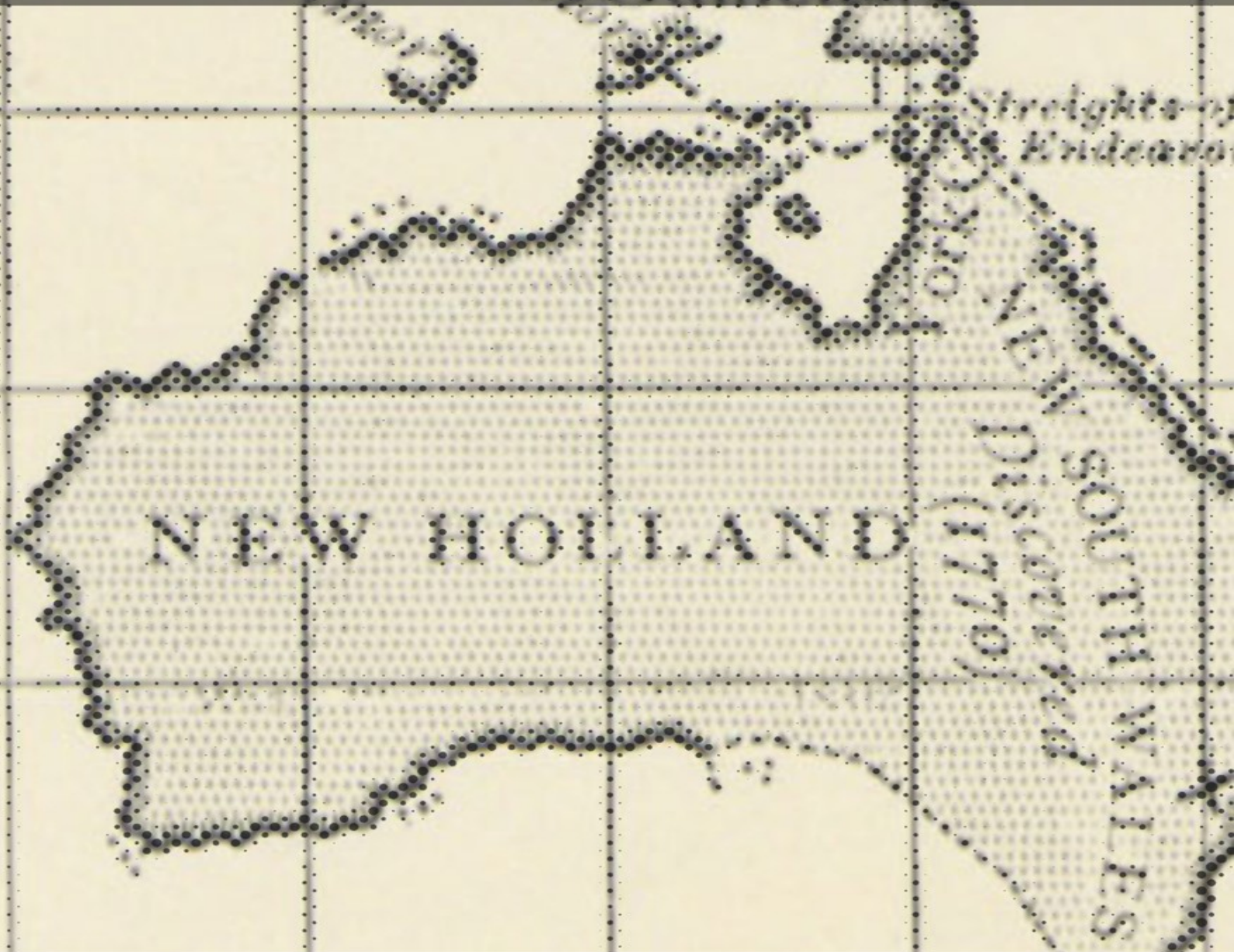


**Louis Becke, Walter
Jeffery**



*A First Fleet
Family*

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A First Fleet Family



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Preface

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The Editors of this narrative, some months since, received from Mr. W. J. Dew the journals of his grandfather, Sergeant Dew, with the request that if they were likely to be of interest to the public, the Editors would put them into the form of a book and have them published.

The papers were submitted to the Editors, whose names appear with this work, on the ground that one of them is a personal friend of the present Dew family, and both of them are well acquainted with the localities and the events referred to by the Sergeant.

Sergeant Dew, before his death, left instructions that should his descendants at any time determine to make public his remarkable narrative, everything that could possibly cause pain to any person living might be withheld from the printer.

As a matter of fact, the Editors found nothing in the papers the publication of which could cause anyone a moment's feeling of annoyance; but any attempt made now to disguise the principal characters in the story would be futile, for the New South Wales Government has published, in a work called *The Historical Records of New South Wales*, nearly every fact here related.

In fact, a short account of the Bryants' escape so far as the official knowledge of it goes — is to be found in most of the so-called histories of the Colony.

This being the case, the Editors determined to give the narrative as it stood, with only one reservation, and that is

in the case of the name of Fairfax, which name is a fictitious one; for the family whose ancestor was the officer who is known in the book under this name, might possibly object to being thus brought before the public. Some slight alterations have also been made in the English portion of the narrative in order to disguise the exact locality of the early scenes in Mr. Dew's life.

It is only fair to the Editors to reproduce here a part of Mr. Dew's letter, written by him, after reading the MS. of the work: —

"You have performed your task in a manner very gratifying to me. I quite agree with your change of—'s name to Fairfax, and with your change of locality. I see you have corrected some of my grandfather's English and spelling. He was a little weak in the last particular, and some of his English would, of course, be too much out of date in these days of foreign words.

"I am, yours gratefully, W. J. Dew."

The Editors express their indebtedness to the Historical Records above mentioned, and to Mr. Barton's volumes in particular, for much information which enabled them to verify facts and dates in this narrative. The conspicuous ability of Mr. Barton's work has enabled them to gain a knowledge of Phillip and his principal officers that, taken with Sergeant Dew's papers, has portrayed to their minds a vivid picture of the men. The necessity for curtailment, and the lack of ability on the part of the Editors, are the excuses offered to the reader, if he, when he has read this book, has not a fair idea of what manner of men they were. The Historical Records of New South Wales are largely indebted

to Philip Gidley King, Esq., M.L.C., of New South Wales, for much of what is published in them relating to King. The present Mr. King is a grandson of Lieutenant King, and he very generously presented his country with many of his grandfather's papers. These documents have been of great use in preparing Mr. Dew's narrative. Much that is purely history in Sergeant Dew's journal has been of necessity omitted from this narrative; but if sufficient interest is taken by the public in what is here printed, plenty of material is contained in the Dew papers to make another book of the Sergeant's early adventures, in which the matters related would bring to light many things never before published.

Sir Henry Parkes, while this was being prepared for the press, was severely attacked by certain "patriotic" members of the New South Wales Assembly for having ordered from England a statue of Phillip, to be erected in Sydney.

It may appear strange to English readers that while there is more than one statue of Cook in Sydney, it is scarcely known to the majority of the Australian people that Phillip was the man who founded their country and that Cook was never inside the Heads of Port Jackson.

The school histories of the Colony are beneath notice, and the few men who have written anything of the country's early days, such as Bonwick, Bennett, or Barton, are never read. It is safe to say that not one man in a thousand has the remotest idea of the early history of New South Wales, beyond the fact that a number of convicts were transported to it something over a hundred years ago. Great injustice has been done to the early founders of the Colony by forgetting them; greater injustice still is too often done to

them when they are remembered. For what has hitherto been written and read about the very early days has been, with few exceptions, stories depicting the cruelties of the punishments inflicted upon the convicts. The felons have always been the heroes and the authorities the villains of the piece. Nearly everyone who has written has followed the lead of Marcus Clarke. The result is that his powerful novel, and true enough picture of one side of the case — *His Natural Life*—has been the only point of view most readers are acquainted with. As a consequence, the men have been mistakenly blamed for the errors of the system, and no allowance has been made for the times in which the events described took place. A maudlin sympathy with the convicts has become the only impression too many people have of the times; they have no thought for such men as Phillip and King, whose great hearts conquered the prejudices of their times and strove to look upon their duties as less those of gaolers than reformers. And, above all, everyone seems nowadays to have overlooked the fact that the men who came prisoners to this country in the very early days were, for the most part, criminals who had forfeited their lives to their country's laws. In a word, they had, as they put it among the class from which they were drawn, "got into trouble," and we are apt, so great is our sympathy for these prisoners, to forget that no one asked them to do so. For it was only the ancestors of persons now living who were sent out for poaching and political crimes and such like trifles. Everyone who knows Australia must have learned that all the convicts who are remembered by people at this end of the century were really quite decent people; the records

show that those who came in the last century were generally the worst of felons.

If this narrative of a man who lived among these people, and saw them as it were from two points of view, does not enable readers to look at both sides, as Sergeant Dew did, and if the story lacks interest, it is not the fault of Sergeant Dew's journal.

The Editors
Sydney, *June*, 1895.

Chapter 1

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Solcombe

To you, my dear children, who have as yet experienced no privations and know not the true dreadfulness of a life of great hardship, I leave this record of your father's early career. May it serve to bring to your minds, when those about you too readily judge harshly of their fellow-men, that all, even the humblest and poorest, may, if they steadily do their duty, rise to a comfortable station in life and win the respect of those whose respect is worth the winning.

That you may be able to follow your father's fortunes from his earliest youth down to that happy time when he was able to return from his foreign adventures and settle, a prosperous man, in his native country, I have added to my diary such particulars as my now failing memory and the recollections of my old comrades supply me with.

In the old family Bible which, as children, has so often afforded you, with its pictures, a pleasant and proper Sunday afternoon's entertainment, you will find on that leaf where your names are written this entry:—

“William Dew, born February 28, 1764.”

It would be no good for me to pretend to be younger than I am, for, with the excellent schooling you have had, you could very easily cypher out my age. Your grandfather was a good, honest farmer, with a fine turn for smuggling — as who had not in our little village in those days? In truth, as is well known, smuggling was carried on among all conditions of people who lived on the English coast and in the Isle of

Wight; not only the fishermen but the small farmers, and even the big squires and landed gentry— some of whom held His Majesty's Commission of the Peace — had a hand in the contraband trade. Indeed, if all we hear be true, the art of landing a keg of good brandy under the noses of the Preventive Service is not yet lost upon the island.

Let me try and describe Solcombe as it was in those days, and you can see for yourselves if it has as much altered as the men and women are changed who live in it.

Solcombe — where some of you, as well as your father and grandfather, were born — lies at the back of the Wight, which is the side of the island nearest to the French coast, and when I was a boy the farms thereabout ran down almost to the water's edge — that is to say, to the ledges of the high chalk cliffs which formed a boundary wall and shut out the sea from sight, though in heavy weather its salt spray was flung high upward in drenching showers upon the gardens of the villagers. On a rough winter's night in the Channel, the roar of the breakers, as they smote the steep-to cliffs in all their unchecked fury, would shake the houses of the village, and strike terror to the hearts of those women in Solcombe — and there were many — who had their men-folk away at sea. Sometimes, especially when the force of the wind had broken a bit, the wild clamour of the beating surf could be heard half-way across to the other side of the island. Beating like this for ages against the cliffs, the sea had hollowed out of them many a dark and winding cavern, some of which ran far back into the very bowels of the land. And on both sides of Solcombe every little inlet and indentation on the coast-line gave a harbour to the

smugglers for running their cargoes, and the natural caves provided glorious warehouses for French brandy and bales of fine silk and other gear sought after by grand ladies who cared but little that such things sometimes cost blood and death besides the money paid for them. In these caves the smuggled goods would remain till favourable opportunity came for either selling them on the island or sending them away across the Solent to where they would be quickly disposed of to people who lived by smuggling alone.

Difficult of access by land — save in rare cases — and familiar only to the dwellers in their near vicinity even by sea, these smugglers' storehouses were seldom discovered by the Preventive Service men; but occasionally an informer would betray the intention of the smugglers to run a cargo, and then, perhaps, a desperate fight would follow, and more than one poor fellow would lose his life doing his duty, and a few prisoners would be manacled and gyved, and marched away and committed to Winchester Gaol.

George the Third was king in those days, and the war with the rebellious American colonists was looming up, though no one, as I have since heard, ever thought it would prove such a great and disastrous conflict as it did.

Father had a great notion of giving me some schooling, for he was something of a scholar himself, having in his young days been taught a good deal above his station; and so I was kept at the village school till I grew to be quite a strapping fellow, and was full sixteen years of age.

The old schoolmaster had at one time been a soldier, and was always telling us boys about the doings at the wars. He had fought with Marlborough in more than one battle, and

was very proud of a scar from a bayonet thrust through his leg. Sometimes, at the village inn, where the talk would turn upon the wars that were then going on, he would say to those present that, though it ill-becomed him at his age to boast, yet could he give them ocular demonstration that he had served his country and received honourable wounds; and then, after some little coaxing, he would show the calf of his right leg, and condescend to drink a pint of ale with the company to the toast of "God save His Majesty, and confusion to his enemies."

Those were stirring times, for old England was fighting the Spaniards and the French and the Dutch, besides having on her hands the rebellion of the American colonies and the riots in London. And so it came about that, seeing my head had got stuffed full of silly notions of soldiering and going abroad to fight the king's battles, my father took me from school and set me to help on the farm, in the hope that in following the plough I should forget all about the glory of a red coat and white cross-belts and the rattle of the drum. My mother died just about that time. She was always ailing, and I am afraid that anxiety about me hastened her end, for she was terribly cut up at the way I was bitten with the craze for going a-soldiering.

Even now, after such long, long years, I can sometimes see her face, so rough and wrinkled with care, yet so full of tenderness and love, as she clasped my hands in hers, with the death-shadows deepening upon her features, and a strange, yearning look in her fading eyes that brought a quick gush of tears to mine. Her last words to anyone on earth were spoken to me, for after she had, with failing

strength, placed her hand upon my father's head as he knelt beside her, she turned to me and with her last breath murmured, "And God keep you, my son." Then she gave a long, heavy sigh and closed her eyes for ever.

After the shock of my mother's death had somewhat worn off, I turned again to my work upon the farm, but the only effect that following the plough had upon my mind was to make me continually ponder upon the subject of my wishes all the more. I was in great doubt as to which of two ways of serving the king and gratifying my inclinations was the shortest road to glory, whether it was better to go to sea and fight the Spaniards and French under such a man as Rodney, and return to my native village with a pocket full of prize money, or to seek honour and fortune with the land forces under our generals in the Americas.

Chapter 2

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Mary Broad

Thus a year or two went by, and I grew less and less inclined to work honestly on the farm, and father grew more and more dissatisfied with me. Sometimes it was in my mind to take a boat over to Portsmouth and put myself in the way of the press-gangs, and thus get sent to sea in such a way that father would be made to believe that it was through no fault of mine; but yet, I thank God, I reflected that, whatever father might think, my conscience would give me no rest for acting such a lie.

It was about this time that Mary Broad became lady's-maid to Miss Fairfax, the daughter of the Squire of Solcombe, and I, foolish lad, fell in love with Mary the first time I saw her, and thus, with my love for going a-soldiering and love for her, my mind was in anything but a proper condition.

Squire Fairfax lived at Solcombe Manor House, and was the great man in that neighbourhood. He was a widower, with one son and one daughter, and in appearance was a fine, portly man, with a keen, blue eye and a face that showed his generous heart and hasty temper. The son, Charles Fairfax, was a lieutenant in the Marines at the time that Mary Broad went to live at the Manor House, and I was very jealous of the effect his red coat and gold lace would be likely to have upon the girl.

Mary's father was a young French officer who had been taken prisoner and confined, with several others, in

Porchester Castle on the mainland. He was a lieutenant in a Breton regiment, and the Solcombe folks, when he came to live among them, much as they disliked foreigners, said he was a fine, big, handsome man, and he quickly made friends with the Solcombe people when he was released. As he came of a Huguenot family, no one was surprised at a Solcombe girl falling in love with and marrying him. Yet, such is religious prejudice, that when he died, soon after his daughter's birth, the village folks said it was a judgment upon his wife for marrying a man who, although a Protestant, was yet a foreigner. His proper name was not Broad, but this is what his English neighbours made of it, and so, after a time, the family were known as the Broads, and Mary always wrote her name in this way. After her husband's death, Mary's mother got a living by her needle, sewing for the fine ladies who were friends of and visited the Fairfax family, and contrived to give her daughter some little education, as education went in those days. Then they came over and settled at Newport, and Mrs. Broad opened a little shop, in which Mary served, and in which I used to spend a great deal of my pocket money, for no other reason than for the pleasure of being served by so fair and sweet-looking a young shop-woman.

Old as I am now, I have never forgotten her strangely handsome face and graceful figure. She was so different from the other young girls round about, that her manner, as well as her beauty, attracted notice. Her father was, as I have said, a very handsome man, and she had all his dark eyes and hair, and quick, short manner of speech, and even to Squire Fairfax she preserved a demeanour that, while not

quite wanting in respect to such a gentleman, was yet by no means sufficiently humble and proper for one in her condition of life.

Miss Charlotte Fairfax was a spoilt young lady in those days, with a great will of her own, and her father was so bounden to her by his great affection that she could do as she liked with him. One day, when she was in Newport, she went into Mrs. Broad's shop to purchase some lace, or such-like women's fallal, and caught sight of Mary.

"Mercy me," says she, "what a pretty girl! And, pray, who are you, child? and where do you come from?"

Now, the word "child" was not to Mary's liking, for she tossed her head and gave no pleasant answer, although she knew who it was who spoke to her. Then Mrs. Broad stepped into the shop and explained who they were, and the upshot of it was that Mary went into service at the Manor House as lady's-maid to Miss Charlotte, and in a few weeks began to look more beautiful than ever, by reason of the better garments that her mistress clothed her with.

The Squire's daughter was then about two-and-twenty years of age and Mary eighteen. The young lady was a fair-haired and blue-eyed beauty, with a great many silly notions in her head, and a fine contempt for the country life she was leading, and the few opportunities it afforded her to show off the airs and graces she had learned from her grand cousins who lived in London.

She soon made a confidant of Mary, and, indeed, treated her more as a friend than a servant, and I believe that Mary's natural resolution and serious, determined nature soon dominated Miss Charlotte's weaker character, and that

in name only was pretty, yellow-haired Miss Fairfax her mistress.

Indeed, 'twas this strong, determined nature of hers that made Mary Broad go through so much future misery with calm, unswerving fortitude for Will Bryant— as you will see before I come to the end of this journal.

The Bryants were well known in Solcombe, although they lived a few miles from the village. They came of Irish folk, and were not much liked in the neighbourhood, for the Isle of Wighters thought that the Bryants, being Irishers, must be in secret sympathy with the French, and, as was natural and proper, we hated the French in those days, and were active in showing it, too. Why, I remember, long years afterwards, when there came some fear of Bonaparte landing on the south coast and conquering the country, and making us either turn Papists or let our throats be cut, we formed volunteer companies — that is, we served without pay — to defend the island. There is a story that one day a poor monkey that some sailor had brought home from foreign parts was given by him to an innkeeper in payment for his score. The creature escaped, and was captured late at night somewhere near Shanklin, by some ignorant rustics, and hanged in the belief that the poor animal was a French spy. Of course this story may not be true, and I have my doubts about it; but, however that may be, we were very jealous in our hatred of the French, and, indeed, of people who were suspected of having sympathy with them, and the Isle of Wight rustics, to the present day, are very ignorant. Fortunately, the Bryants were Protestants, and, by reason of this, were not so much suspected and disliked as they would

have been had they been Papists, and just at this particular time we did not happen to be quite so bitter against the French, and had not the fear of Bonaparte attempting a landing as we had later on.

The Bryant family, father, mother, and two sons, were either always smuggling or poaching, and the eldest son, William — the only one who has anything to do with this narrative — was the most notorious and daring smuggler on the island. He pretended to get his living as a waterman plying between Ryde and Portsmouth, but precious little work he did in that way. But — and this galled my jealous mind greatly — he had served a commission in a king's ship at one time, and had been one of a cutting-out party which captured a big French privateer belonging to St. Malo, as she lay at anchor off the French coast. Many a yarn he would tell of his adventures, and this and his fine figure and great strength made him very popular with men and women both. And then, besides, he was a man ever free with his money, and I believe that this had much to do with the hold he gained upon the affections of Mary Broad.

One autumn afternoon in the year 1786, I was walking moodily along the ledge of one of the high cliffs, looking out seawards and thinking what I would give to be the captain of a frigate that was in sight bowling down Channel before a nine-knot breeze, when, as I turned my eyes landward again, I saw Mary coming towards me.



“I was walking moodily along
the ledge of a high cliff.”

“Ah,” thought I, “to be Captain William Dew, R.N., and to have Mary to wife! What more could man desire?” and then I hastened towards her.

I saw by the turn of her eye that she was not over pleased to see me, for she made as if to walk away in the other direction, but I hastened towards her, and, seeing this, she waited for me.

“Are you frightened of me, or do you dislike me so much that you cannot even stop to speak to me, Mary?” I asked; and the figure of Will Bryant being in my mind made me speak somewhat wrathfully.

“Frightened, indeed! William Dew,” quoth she, and her black eyes flashed and sparkled angrily, “a nice goose I should be to be frightened of a big boy like you.”

“Well, do you dislike me? And if I am but a big boy, you need not turn away because you happen to see me.”

“No, I don’t dislike you. Why should I? But frightened, indeed!” and again she tossed her pretty little head, and drew tighter over her shoulders her scarlet cloak. “Girls like me are not frightened at over-grown boys who spend their days following their father’s plough, drink skim milk instead of good honest ale, and are regular ninnies.”

Now, to be called a ninny angered me, so I answered sharply that even if I was a ninny and followed my father’s plough, it “was better than smuggling and only pretending to work.”

Her white teeth shone from between her bright red lips in a scornful smile. “Oh, you are very honest, I daresay; but if I were a man I wouldn’t be such a coward as to be frightened to help land a cargo; at any rate, I wouldn’t stop all my life idling about a little village. I’d go and see the world like — ”

“Like Lieutenant Fairfax, and come back with gold lace on my coat and make love to my sister’s pretty maid.”

“No, I don’t mean Mr. Fairfax, and I am sure, if I did, it would be no business of yours. I was going to say like Will Bryant. So don’t be so sharp, Mr. Dew.”

This was the way we always talked when we had met lately, for I was very jealous; but I was no match for her at talking, and where, indeed, is the man who can match himself against a woman when the tongue is the weapon?

Of course, you will understand that in such a small place as Solcombe, everyone knew his neighbour’s business, and the women-folk of our village were ever ready to tell stories of one another; but ’tis the same everywhere, even in London. However, be that as it may, it was the regular talk of the village that young Mr. Fairfax had been seen more than once making love to his sister’s maid, and, though everyone supposed he was only idling, yet they all said that Mary took him seriously. Now, since those days, I have seen much of the world, and I do not think that one should always believe what women say of one another, especially where men’s names are mentioned; but yet, at that time, I did suffer much mental tribulation as to whether Mary cared for the lieutenant as well as for Will Bryant — for of Will I did think she thought over much, and so, indeed, did others besides me, for the village-folk said that Will had gained her heart, and that she only tolerated the lieutenant until the handsome young smuggler was ready to take her to his home.

When first Mary went to the Manor House, she had walked out with me more than once and given me some slight encouragement, but it only lasted a week or two, until Will Bryant came along, and then I saw my chance of

gaining her heart was very doubtful. Pretty Miss Charlotte Fairfax, as I afterwards learned, had much to do with this, for she was always telling Mary what a fine, brave fellow this dare-devil Bryant was, and how it was a great thing for so young a man to have spitted two French privateersmen, one after another, as he had done, when they cut out the St. Malo privateer. And, truth to say, it was no wonder the women admired him, for he was a big, strapping, handsome man, and, for his skill in a boat, exceeded by no man on the island.

But I was resolved that afternoon to have it out with Mary; and so, presently, I went on, "You must forgive me, Mary, but I can't bear to see you so friendly with a man whose father holds his head so high as old Squire Fairfax. You know that nothing can ever come of it — the old Squire would never allow it; and, Mary, dear, I can't bear to think of the unkind things people are sure to say if they see you together so often."

"Well, I am sure, William Dew! How dare you preach to me in such a way, as if I were some silly child?"

"Mary, you know why I talk to you so. You know I love you dearly. If, when you gave me the cold shoulder for the sake of Will Bryant, I had thought he was worthy of you, I would have broken my heart before I would have spoken as I have done; but now that you speak as if you had thrown him over, as you threw me over for him, just because this gold-laced dandy has chosen to play with you, I must speak to you and speak for your good."

She took a step forward and her eyes danced and sparkled with angry fire. "William Dew, I will never speak to

you as long as I live. I will never forgive you your impudence. Love me, indeed! Throw you over, indeed! Why, you silly, loutish goose, I never thought anything of you! You clodhopping milksop, Will Bryant is worth a dozen of you! Go away like he has done and fight for your country, and try to come home and say that you, too, cut down two bigger men than yourself, as he has done, then you can have something to talk about; and if you don't come back with a gold-laced coat, you can, at any rate, be thought a man. No girl with any spirit wants to talk to you now. So now, William Dew!" and she turned away with a truly fierce look upon her handsome face.

"One word, Mary. Would you think better of me if I volunteered and served a commission in the Service? Do you think I should have any chance when I came back?"

"As to chances, William Dew, I sha'n't say anything, because a girl don't know her mind for long, you know; but if even you had the courage to be a man and see the world, why, of course, everyone would think a great deal more of you."

Then Mary turned her head and walked away, and left me to ponder on her words. Those words led to most of my misfortunes, for though, poor girl! I know now she only meant them to give me some sort of proper spirit, I took them as an encouragement of another kind, and forthwith resolved to try and be a man more to her liking. And, as I have said before, this led to my undoing.

Chapter 3

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I Am Persuaded By Will Bryant To Become A Man Of Mettle

I had now quite determined to enlist in the army or join the navy at the very first opportunity that presented itself, for the taunting words of Mary Broad had more than ever inflamed my mind in the matter. And so that I might become something of a man of the world, and rub off some of my rustic simplicity, I began to spend my evenings in the ale-houses near Solcombe, and study the loud talk and manners of those that frequented them.

One evening I was in a tavern at Ryde where I met Will Bryant. We fell a-talking, and in a while our talk came round to Mary Broad. Although I was so jealous of Bryant, he was such a big, good-natured, if idle and dissolute, fellow, that I could not feel very bitter towards him, and the pint or two of ale that he gave me to drink made my tongue somewhat loose. He understood how the land lay with me, and so far from resenting my admiration for his dark-eyed sweetheart, he seemed to feel a pity for me. Perhaps this was because he regarded me but as an over-grown boy, and so, after some little talk, we grew confidential, and before we parted had become quite friendly.

It came about in this way. Will asked me if I had seen Mary of late, "For," said he, with a good-natured smile, "she may have taken more kindly to you this last week or two. I know that the wench has deserted me for a long while."