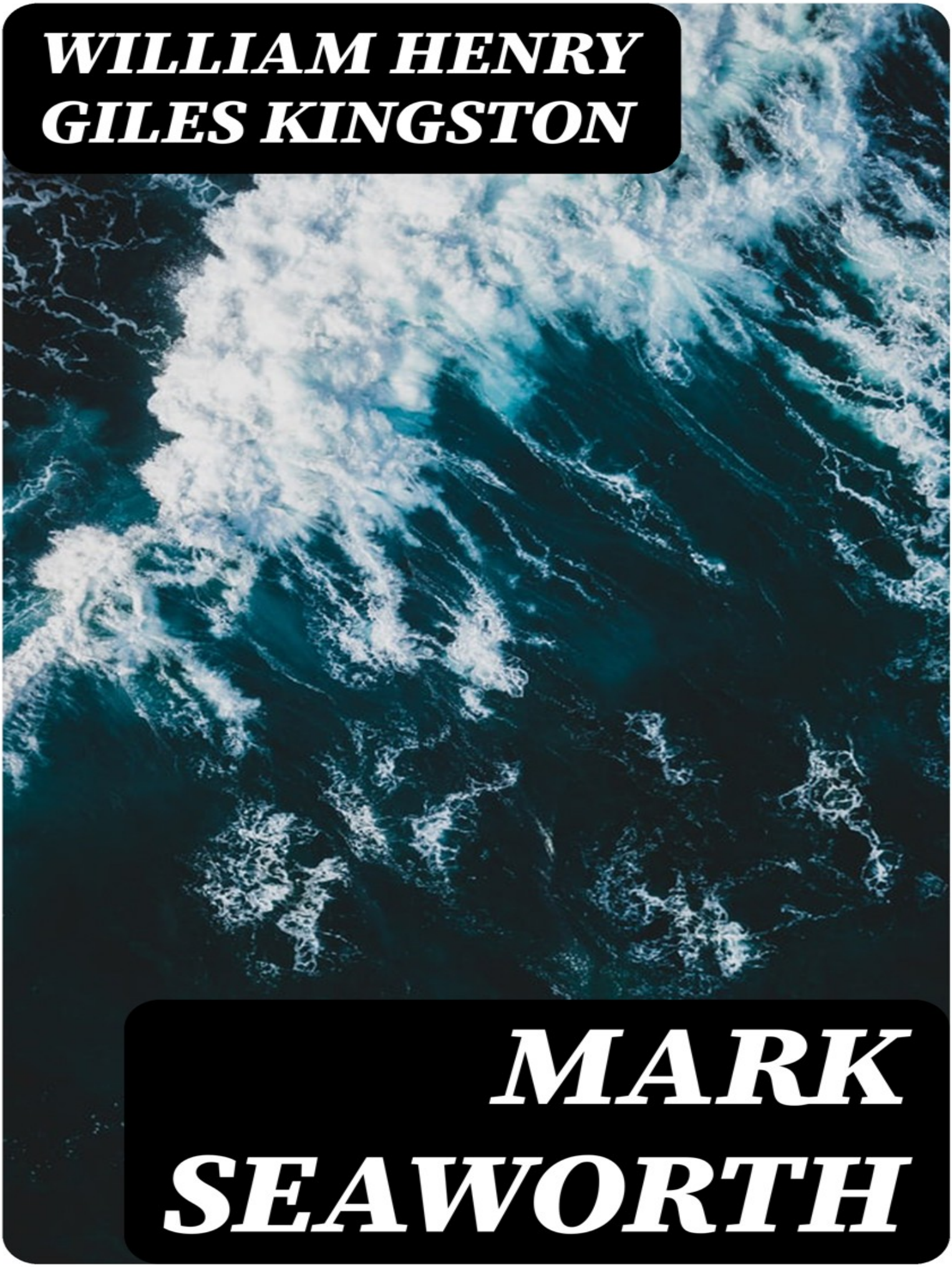
WILLIAM HENRY GILES KINGSTON



MARK SEAWORTH

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Chapter One.

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Mark Seaworth.

Picture a wide expanse of ocean, smooth as a polished mirror, and shining like molten silver; a sky of intense blue, without a cloud or speck, forming a vast arch resting on the water; no land or rock in sight; the boundless sea on every side; the sun travelling slowly and majestically along the arch, and casting his burning rays upon the glittering plain below.

Let us pause and contemplate that scene. What grandeur and sublimity there is in it! What a magnificent edifice does it seem! When compared with it, how utterly insignificant and contemptible do all the works of man’s hands appear! Then watch the sun sink with rays of glory in the west; the bright rich tinge glowing for a time, and gradually fading away before the obscurity of night; the stars coming forth and shining with a splendour unknown in northern climes; and then the moon, a mass of liquid flame, rising out of the dark sea, and casting across it a broad path of the silvery light. Watch the tranquil luminary glide also through her destined course, till once more the sun rushes upward from his ocean-bed in a sheet of fire, and claims supremacy over the world. This is one of the many grand and wonderful objects beheld by those who sail across the ocean, and amply does it repay for a long voyage those who have taste to appreciate its beauties.

Now let us return to the scene as I first described it, and, by looking closer into the picture, we shall observe a boat floating in its very centre. There are no masts or sails, nor are there any oars moving. The boat lies motionless like a log on the water. She is a large boat, a ship’s launch; her gunwale seems battered in as if she had undergone some hard usage. Above it nothing is seen moving; and, at the first glance, it would seem that there are no human beings on board. On looking down into the boat, however, we discover several persons, but whether dead or alive it is difficult to say, they are so quiet and so silent. Towards the bow are the forms of two men. They are on their backs—one is at the bottom of the boat, the other stretched along the thwarts, in uneasy postures. Their eyes are open and glaring unmoved at the bright sun; their lips are parted, black, and dry; the hand of death has, alas! at all events, fallen on them; nothing living could present such an aspect. By their dress and their complexion they seem to be British seamen. There is a small breaker or keg in the boat, but the hung is out—it is empty. There is also a bag, containing some hard ship-biscuit; it is still half full, but there is no other provision.

In the after part of the boat there is a sort of awning, formed of a shawl stretched across the gunwale, with a mat on the top of it, so as to form a thick shade. Near it, with her back leaning against the side of the boat, sits a dark-skinned woman. She has a turban on her head, and massive gold ear-rings in her ears, and bracelets round her arms, and anklets of gold round her legs, and her loose dress is of gay-coloured striped cotton of delicate texture. She is alive, but faint and weak; and, by her dim eye and short-coming

breath, death seems to be approaching with stealthy strides to claim her as his own. Still, the soul is struggling to triumph over the weakness of the flesh. With an anxious gaze she looks beneath the awning, for there is something there which claims her constant solicitude. She turns her gaze towards the forms of the two seamen—she does not seem to know that they are dead. A faint cry comes from under the awning. Again she looks towards the bow of the boat; she sees that her companions in misery are not watching her. She now stealthily draws from beneath the folds of her dress, where she has carefully concealed it, a bottle of water. Did she, then, while the seamen slept, steal the water from the cask to preserve the existence of those committed to her fostering charge, and far more precious to her, in her sight, than her own life? There can be no doubt she did so. She discovers that she is not observed. There is a small tin pannikin near her, and several pieces of biscuit. She crumbles the biscuit, as well as she can with her weak fingers, into the pannikin, and then pours upon them a few drops of the precious fluid. She looks at the water with longing eyes, but will not expend even one drop to cool her parched lips. She mixes the biscuit till it is completely softened, and then casting another furtive glance towards the bow, unconscious that the dead only are there, she carefully lifts up the awning. A low weak voice utters the word “Aya;” it is that of a child, some three or four years old perhaps; at the same time there is a plaintive cry from a younger infant. A smile irradiates the countenance of the Indian woman, for she knows that her charges are still alive. She leans forward, though her strength is barely sufficient to

enable her to move, and puts the food into the mouths of the two children. The eldest, a boy, swallows it eagerly; for though somewhat pale, his strength seems but little impaired. The infant is a girl: she takes the mixture, so little suited to her tender years, but without appetite; and it would appear that in a very short time her career, just begun on earth, will be brought to a speedy close.

When the food is consumed, the nurse sinks back to her former position. She tries to swallow a piece of the biscuit, but her parched lips and throat refuse to receive the dry morsel, and the water she will not touch. Again the children cry for food, and once more she goes through the operation of preparing it for them as before; but her movements are slower, and she now has scarcely strength to carry the food to the mouths of the little ones.

The day passes away, the night goes by, the morning comes, and still the calm continues. The children awake and cry out for food. The nurse turns her languid eyes towards them, but her strength has almost gone; she even forgets for an instant the meaning of that cry. There is a struggle going on within her. At last her loving, faithful, and enduring spirit overcomes for a time the weakness of her body; she prepares the mess, and feeds the children. She gazes sorrowfully at the bottle—the last drop of water is consumed. She leans back, her bosom heaves faintly; the effort has been more than her failing strength would bear. She turns her eyes towards them; they are the last objects of any earthly thing she is destined to behold. A dimness comes stealing over them. Her thoughts are no longer under control, her arms fall by her side, her head droops on her

chest, she has no strength to raise it. In a few hours more the faithful nurse will have ceased to breathe, and those young children will be left alone with the dead on the wild waste of waters.

But, reader, do not for one moment suppose that therefore they are doomed to perish. There is One above, the eternal, all-powerful God of goodness and love, who is watching over those helpless infants. His arm can stretch to the uttermost parts of the earth, and over the great waters: even now it is put forth to shield them, though we see it not. Even without a human hand to administer their food, in that open boat on the wide sea, over which a storm might presently rage, while billows may rise, threatening to overwhelm them, far away from land or living beings but themselves, those children are as secure, if so God wills it, as those who are sleeping on beds of down within palace walls; because, remember, reader, that He is all-powerful, and He is everywhere. Trust in Him; never despond; pray to Him for help at all times—in times of peace and prosperity, in times of danger and difficulty; and oh! believe that most assuredly He will help and protect you in the way He knows is best for your eternal happiness.

This is the lesson I would teach; for this is the lesson I have learned by means of all the difficulties and dangers I have undergone during the scenes of wild and extraordinary adventure which I have encountered in my course through life. Often and often, had I not been convinced of this great truth, I should have yielded to despair; and the longer I have lived, and the more dangers I have passed through, the more firmly convinced have I become of it. Often have I felt

my own utter helplessness—the impossibility that the strength of man could avail me—when standing, it seemed, on the very brink of destruction; and in a way beyond all calculation, I have found myself rescued and placed in safety. It was for this reason that I have drawn the picture which I have exhibited to you. Ungrateful indeed should I be, and negligent of my bounden duty, did I not do my utmost to teach the lesson I have learned from the merciful protection so often afforded me; for know that I was one of those helpless infants! and the picture before us shows the first scene in my life of which I have any record; and this is the moral I would inculcate—“That God is everywhere.”

Chapter Two.

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A large ship was floating on the ocean. I use the term floating, for she could scarcely be said to be doing anything else, as she did not seem to be moving in the slightest degree through the water. Some straw and chips of wood, which had been thrown overboard, continued hour after hour alongside. She was, however, moving; but it was round and round, though very slowly indeed, as a glance at the compass would have shown. The sea was as smooth as glass, for there was not a breath of air to ruffle it; there was, in fact, a perfect calm.

The ship was a first-class Indiaman, on her outward voyage to the far-famed land of the East; and she belonged to that body of merchant princes, the East India Company. In appearance she was not altogether unlike a frigate with her

long tier of guns, her lofty masts, her wide spread of canvas, and her numerous crew; but her decks were far more encumbered than those of a man-of-war, and her hold was full of rich merchandise, and the baggage of the numerous passengers who occupied her cabins. Her sails, for the present, however, were of no use; so, having nothing else to do, for the sole purpose, it would seem, of annoying the most sensitive portion of the human beings on board, they continued, with most persevering diligence, flapping against the masts, while the ship rolled lazily from side to side. The decks presented the appearance of a little world shut out from the rest of mankind; for all grades, and all professions and trades, were to be found on board. On the high poop deck, under an awning spread over it to shelter them from the burning rays of the sun, were collected the aristocratical portion of the community. There were there to be found ladies and gentlemen, the sedate matron, and the blooming girl just reaching womanhood, the young wife and the joyous child; there were lawyers and soldiers, sailors and merchants, clergymen and doctors, some of them holding high rank in their respective professions. The captain, of course, was king, and his mates were his ministers; but, like the rest, he was bound by laws which he dared not infringe, even had he desired to have done so.

On the deck below were seen craftsmen of all sorts, occupied in their respective callings. Carpenters hard at work with plane and saw; blacksmiths with bellows and anvil; tailors and cobblers, barbers and washerwomen, painters and armourers, rope-makers and butchers, and several others, besides the seamen engaged in the

multifarious duties in which officers know well how to employ them. Among the crew were seen representatives of each quarter of the Old World. There were Malays and other Asiatics, and the dark-skinned sons of Africa, mingled among the hardy seamen of Britain, each speaking a different jargon, but all taught by strict discipline to act in unison.

Besides the human beings, there were cattle and sheep destined for the butcher’s knife—cows to afford milk to the lady passengers, the invalids, and the children—even horses were on board, valuable racers or chargers, belonging to some of the military officers; there were several head of sheep penned up in the long-boat; and there were pigsties full of grunting occupants, who seemed to be more happy and to have made themselves far more at home than any of their four-footed fellow-voyagers. Ranging at liberty were several dogs of high and low degree, from the colonel’s thorough-bred greyhound to the cook’s cur, a very turnspit in appearance; nor must I forget Quacko, the monkey, the merriest and most active of two-legged or four-legged beings on board. It might have puzzled many to determine to which he belonged, as he was seen dressed in a blue jacket and white trousers, sitting up on the break of the forecastle, his usual playground in fine weather, cracking nuts, or peeling an orange like a human being, while his tongue was chattering away, as if he had a vast amount of information to communicate.

Then there were poultry of every description: ducks and geese, and turkeys and cocks and hens, quacking, and cackling, and gobbling, and crowing in concert: indeed, to

shut one’s eyes, it was difficult not to suppose that one was in a well-stocked farm-yard; but on opening them again, one found one’s self surrounded by objects of a very different character to what one would there have seen. Instead of the trees, there were the tall masts, the rigging, and sails above one’s head, the bulwarks instead of the walls of the barns, the black and white seamen with thick beards instead of the ploughmen and milk-maids, and the wide glittering ocean instead of the muddy horse-pond.

This was the scene on the upper deck: below, it was stranger still. There were two decks, one beneath the other, both with occupants; there were cooks at the galley fire, whose complexion no soot could make blacker, and servants in white dresses and embroidered shawls, running backwards and forwards with their masters’ tiffins, as luncheons are called in India.

There were numerous cabins, many occupied by persons whose sole employment was to kill time, forgetting how soon time would kill them in return, and they would have to sum up the account of how they had spent their days on earth.

In the lower deck there were soldiers with their wives and children, and seamen, some sleeping out their watch below, and others mending their clothes, while a few were reading —a very few, I fear, such books as were calculated to afford them much instruction. Below, again, in the dark recesses of the hold, there were seamen with lanterns getting up stores and provisions of various sorts. In one place were seen three men—it was the gunner and his two mates. They had carefully-closed lanterns and list shoes on their feet. They

were visiting the magazine, to see that the powder was dry. They were from habit careful, but custom had made them thoughtless of danger; yet one spark from the lantern would in a moment have sent every one of the many hundred living beings on board that ship into eternity. The flannel bags containing the powder were removed to be carried up on deck to dry, the door was carefully closed and locked, and the gunner and his mates went about their other avocations.

From long habit, people are apt to forget the dangers which surround them, though they are far greater than those in which the passengers of the good ship *Governor Harcourt* were placed at the moment the magazine was opened; and I am very certain that not one of them contemplated the possibility of being blown up, without an instant warning, into the air.

I have indulged in a somewhat long description of this little world in miniature, although I was not one of its inhabitants; but it was a scene not without interest, and I have had many opportunities of judging of the correctness of the picture which was given me by a friend then on board the *Governor Harcourt*. We will now return to the more refined groups sitting and lying about listlessly on the poop deck.

As among the party were several people who exercised a considerable influence over my career, a description of them is necessary. The person of most consideration, on account of his wealth and position, as well as his high character, was a gentleman verging upon sixty years of age. In stature and figure he was not what would be called

dignified; but there was that in the expression of his countenance which made persons of discernment who studied his features feel inclined to love and respect him. The broad forehead, the full mild eye, and the well-set mouth, told of intellect, kindness, and firmness.

The careless and indifferent might have called him the stout old gentleman with yellow cheeks. I mean people—and there are many such in the world—who are unable to perceive the noble and good qualities in a man, and only look at his outward form and figure. If they hear a person called a great man, like Lord Nelson or the Duke of Wellington, they call him great also; but many would not be able to point out the real heroic qualities of these heroes. I cannot now stop to describe in what real heroic qualities consist, further than to assure my young friends that the great men I have instanced are not properly called heroes simply because they were commanders-in-chief when great battles have been gained. Napoleon gained many victories; but I cannot allow that he can justly be called a hero. My object is to show you the importance of not judging of people by their outward appearance; and also, when you hear men spoken of as great men, to ask you to consider well in what their greatness consists. But to return to my kind and generous benefactor,—for so he afterwards proved to me,—Sir Charles Plowden. In outward form to the common eye he was not a hero, but to those who knew him he was truly great, good, and noble. He was high in the civil service of the Honourable East India Company, all the best years of his life having been passed in the East.

A book was in his hand, at which his eye every now and then glanced; but he appeared to look at it rather for the sake of finding matter for thought, than for the object of getting rapidly through its contents.

At a little distance from him sat a lady, busily employed in working with her needle. She was young and if not decidedly pretty, very interesting in appearance. Though she was looking at her work, from the expression of her countenance it might be perceived that she was listening attentively to a gentleman seated by her side, who was reading to her in that clear low voice, with that perfect distinctness of enunciation, which is so pleasant to the ear. A stranger might have guessed, from the tone of tenderness, yet of perfect confidence, in which he occasionally spoke to her, and the glance of affection which she gave him in return, that they were husband and wife; nor would he have been mistaken.

They were Captain and Mrs Clayton, who were returning to India after their first visit to England since their marriage. His appearance and manners were very gentlemanly and pleasing, and he was a man much esteemed by a large circle of acquaintance. They had now been married about eight years, and had no children. Mrs Clayton had gone out to India at the age of seventeen with her father, a colonel in the army, and soon after her arrival she was won and wed by Captain Clayton, so that she was still a very young woman.

Sometimes, when she saw a happy mother nursing her child, she would secretly sigh that she was not so blessed; but, I am glad to say, she did not on that account indulge in

the custom of bestowing any portion of her care and attention on puppy dogs and cats, as I have seen some ladies, both single and married, do in a most disagreeable manner. I, of course, desire to see people kind to dumb animals; but I do not like to see little beasts petted and kissed, and treated in every way like human beings, with far more care and attention bestowed on them than are given to thousands of the children in the back streets and alleys of our crowded towns. I trust that you, my young friends, will remember this when you have money or food to bestow; and, instead of throwing it away in purchasing or feeding useless pets, that you will give it to instruct, to clothe and feed those who are born into the world to know God, to perform their duty to Him, and to enjoy eternal life. Dreadful is it to contemplate that so many live and die without that knowledge, who might, had their fellow-men exerted themselves, have enjoyed all the blessings afforded by the gospel dispensation.

But I must go back to my history. Captain and Mrs Clayton were accompanied by a young lady, a distant relative, left without any other friends to protect and support her. She was a laughing, blue-eyed girl, and was now seated with several other young ladies of about the same age on a circle of cushions on the deck, shouts of merriment rising every now and then from the happy group. There were several other people who had been in India before—military and civil officers of the Company, merchants, lawyers, and clergymen; but I need not more particularly describe them.

Ellen Barrow, Mrs Clayton’s charge, was not only sweetly pretty, but good and amiable in every respect. I do not know that she had what is called a regular feature in her face; but her sunny smile, and an expression which gave sure indication of a good disposition, made those who saw her think her far more beautiful than many ladies whose countenances were in other respects faultless. I praise her from having known her well, and all the excellencies of her character, as they were in after-years more fully developed. At present her most intimate friends would probably have said little more about her than that she was a nice, pretty-looking, happy girl.

There was another person on board, of whom I must by no means omit to speak, and that is Captain Willis. He was a very gentlemanly man, both in appearance and manners, as indeed he was by birth; nor had the rough school in which he was educated left a trace behind.

He was the son of a merchant of excellent family connections and his mother was, I believe, a lady of rank. When he was about the age of fourteen, both his parents died, leaving him perfectly penniless, for his father had just before that event failed and lost all his property. He had had, fortunately, the opportunity of obtaining an excellent education, and he had profited by it and this gave him an independence of feeling—which he could not otherwise justly have enjoyed. He was also a lad of honest spirit; his relations had quarrelled with his parents, and treated them, he considered, unjustly; so that his heart rebelled at the idea of soliciting charity from them, and he at once resolved to fight his own way in the world.

He had always had a strong predilection for a sea life, and he was on the point of going into the Royal Navy when his father's misfortunes commenced.

His thoughts consequently at once reverted to the sea; and the day after his father's funeral, he set out with a sad heart, and yet with the buoyant hope of youth cheering him on in spite of his grief, to take counsel of an old friend, the master of a merchantman, who had been much indebted to his father.

Captain Styles was a rough-mannered but a good man, and a thoroughly practical sailor. He at once offered every aid in his power; but Edward Willis, thanking him, assured him that he only came for advice.

"Do you want to become a seaman in whom your owners and passengers will place perfect confidence, and who will be able, if man can do it, to navigate your ship through narrow channels and among shoals, and clear off a lee-shore if you are ever caught on one; or do you wish just to know how to navigate a ship from London to Calcutta and back, with the aid of a pilot when you get into shallow waters, and to look after the ladies in fine weather, and let your first officer take care of the ship in bad?"

"I wish to become a thorough seaman," replied Edward Willis.

"Then, my lad, you must first go to the school where you will learn the trade," said Captain Styles. "I have an old friend, the master of a Newcastle collier. He is an honest man, kind-hearted, and a first-rate seaman. In six months with him you will learn more than in six years in a big ship. If you were younger, it would be different; for it is rough work,

mind you. He is always at sea, running up and down the coast: sometimes to the north, and at other times round the South Foreland, and right down channel. Indeed, to my mind there is not a finer school to make a man a seaman in a short time. It’s the royal road to a knowledge of the sea, though I grant it, as I said before, a very rough one.”

Willis replied that he was not afraid of hard work, and would follow his advice. Accordingly he went to sea in a collier for three years; then he shipped on board a vessel trading to the Baltic, and next made a voyage to Baffin’s Bay, in a whaler; after which he joined an Indiaman. Here, after what he had gone through, the work appeared comparatively easy. He now perfected himself in the higher branches of navigation, and from this time rose rapidly from junior mate to first officer, and finally, in a few years, to the command of a first-class Indiaman, where he was in a fair way of realising a handsome independence. Captain Willis’s ship was always a favourite; and as soon almost as she was announced to sail, her cabins were engaged. I should advise those who go to sea at the age Captain Willis did, to follow his example; though for a very young boy, the school, I grant, is somewhat too rough a one.

Chapter Three.

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Captain Willis was walking the deck, with his spy-glass in his hand, while every now and then he stopped anxiously to scan the horizon in every direction, in the hopes of

discerning the well-known signs of the long-wished-for breeze.

“Well, Captain Willis, when is the wind coming?” asked one of the young ladies of the merry group I have described, as he passed them in his walk. “We have agreed that you sailors are very idle people, not to make your ship move faster. You do it on purpose, we are sure, to enjoy our society.”

“The temptation would be great, ladies, I own,” said the captain, bowing. “But, I assure you, it depends as much upon yourselves as upon me and my officers; and, I think, if you were all to set to work and whistle with a right good-will, you might soon bring the wind down upon us.”

“Oh then we will all try,” exclaimed the merry girls in chorus. “We see you want to get rid of us as soon as you can.” Thereon they all began to try and whistle, and some succeeded very well, though the chorus was not very harmonious.

I suspect the worthy captain had long before perceived the undoubted signs of wind on the water, for there was a quizzical look in his eye as he spoke; and each turn he made he encouraged them to proceed, and to whistle louder and louder, assuring them it was certain to have a good effect.

Not many minutes had passed, during which the young ladies had tried to whistle till their mouths ached, when the voice of Captain Willis was heard ordering the crew to trim sails. With alacrity they flew to their posts at the joyful sound; and those who but a minute before were so silent and inert, were now all life and animation.

Still the ocean appeared as smooth and shining as before; but in the distance, away to the north-east, there was a line of dark-blue, which seemed to be gradually extending itself on either hand, and to be slowly advancing in the direction where the ship lay. The glassy surface of the water was every now and then slightly ruffled by gentle, scarcely perceptible breaths of wind, such as are called by seamen “cats’-paws,” from their having, I suppose, no more effect in disturbing the water than would the paw of a cat. They came and went continually. Some of the more lofty and lighter sails of the ship bulged out for an instant, and then again flapped against the masts, and all was calm as before.

“If you please, young ladies, I must trouble you to whistle a little longer,” said Captain Willis, with one of his most polite bows, and a merry smile lurking in his eye. “You see the good service you have already done; but the wind seems coy, and requires a longer wooing.”

They all laughed very much, and declared that they could not whistle any more; but still they all essayed again; and sweet Ellen Barrow screwed her pretty mouth up till her lips looked, indeed, like two ripe cherries; and Captain Willis aiding them with his clear whistle, the wind was not long in answering the summons. The spokes of the wheel were seen once more to revolve in the hands of the helmsman, the sails bulged out more regularly, and if they fell back, they quickly again filled till every one drew steadily, and the huge ship moved slowly through the ocean on her proper course. It was pleasant to the passengers to hear the rippling sound of the water against the sides of the ship, and to see it bubbling up so briskly under her bows; and still

more pleasant was it to feel the fresh air fanning the cheeks, and to know that it was wafting them on to their yet far distant bourne. The fresh air had a reviving effect on every one, and many who had sat silent and melancholy began to move about, and to laugh and talk with the rest of their companions.

About an hour after the breeze had sprung up, the captain was observed to turn his glass several times to a point on the starboard bow. He then handed it to his first officer.

“What do you make out of that, Mr Naylor?” he asked.

The answer was not heard.

“So I think it is,” replied the captain. “Keep her two more points to the eastward of her course—steady so.”

Immediately the head of the ship was turned towards a little spot which appeared upon the water, a long way off. The report that there was something to be seen called every one to the side of the ship, and all eyes were fixed on that small speck on the waste of waters. There were many speculations as to what it was. Some said that it was a dead whale, others a smaller fish; a few insisted that it was the hull of a vessel, and there was one party of opinion that it was the top of a rock in the ocean, and were congratulating themselves that they had met with it in daylight and fine weather.

“But what do you think it is, Captain Willis?” asked Ellen Barrow.

“Why, young lady, I think it is a boat; but I am not surprised that so many people, not accustomed to look at objects on the water, where there is nothing to compare

them with, should be mistaken. Those who fancy that it is a whale or the hull of a vessel think it is much farther off than it really is, while those who suppose it to be a small fish, believe it to be much nearer than it really is. It is only by comparing things together that we can estimate them properly.”

The breeze, although sufficient to fill the sails, was still very light, so that the ship moved but slowly through the water,—at the rate, perhaps, of a mile and a half or two miles in the hour, or, as sailors would say, two knots an hour. She was, therefore, a long time approaching the object. At last, Captain Willis, who had constantly kept his telescope turned towards it, pronounced it, without doubt, to be a boat.

“There appears to be no one in her, however,” he observed; “at least, I see no one’s head above the gunwale.”

“How strange that a boat should be out there all alone!” exclaimed Ellen Barrow.

“Oh no; she has got adrift from a vessel, or has been driven off from some coast or other,” answered Captain Willis.

“There looks to me, sir, as if there were some people in the boat, though they don’t appear to be moving,” sung out the third officer from aloft.

“Mr Simpson, man the starboard quarter-boat, and lower her as we come up with the boat. We must have her alongside, and overhaul her, at all events.”

“Ay, ay, sir,” replied the mate; and soon afterwards the boat’s crew were seen coming aft to lower her into the

water.

Numerous were the conjectures as to who could be in the boat, and where she could have come from; but of course no one could answer the question. The ship glided on slowly, for the wind was still very light. When she got a short distance only from the boat, the captain ordered the sails to be clewed up, and the gig to be lowered. Mr Simpson went away in her, and was soon alongside. He was seen to throw up his hands, as an expression of horror, as he looked into the boat. She was then made fast to the stern of the gig, and rapidly towed up to the ship.

“Be quick there on deck, and bring a chair,” he exclaimed. “Here’s a poor creature much in want of the doctor’s help, if she’s not gone too far for it already.”

The side of the ship on which the boat appeared was crowded with the passengers, eager to see what it contained. The sight which met their eyes was indeed a sad one. In the fore part were two men lying on their backs with their faces upwards, and, from their ghastly expression, it was seen that they were both dead. There was another person, a dark-skinned woman, who, it appeared, the mate considered still living. A chair was speedily slung, and the mate having secured her into it, she was hoisted on deck.

The doctor was in waiting, and having placed her on a mattress on deck, he knelt down at her side to discover if any spark of life yet remained in her emaciated frame. He felt her pulse, and then calling for a glass of wine and water, he moistened her lips, and poured a few drops down her throat. It had the effect of instantly reviving her; she opened her eyes, and uttering a few strange words, she attempted

to rise as if to search for something she expected to find near. For an instant she looked wildly around; but the effort was more than nature could bear, and, with a deep sigh, she sank again and expired. While some of the passengers had been witnessing this melancholy scene, others were engaged in watching the proceedings of the mate. Directly he had placed the poor black woman in the chair, he turned to examine the after part of the boat, over which an awning was carefully spread. Lifting it up, he uttered an exclamation of surprise and pleasure. Carefully placed on a bed formed on the stern-sheets, were two children—a little boy, some three or four years old, or perhaps five, and an infant which could scarcely for as many months have seen the light. The little fellow had been fast asleep. The voice of the mate awoke him, and looking up and seeing strange faces surrounding him, he began to cry.

“That’s a good sign, at all events,” cried the mate. “The baby does not seem much the worse either; send down the chair again, and we’ll have them on deck in a trice.” The chair was lowered, and placing himself in it, with the two children in his arms, he was hoisted up on deck. Scarcely had he reached it, than all the ladies hurried forward to catch a glimpse of the children, many of them almost quarrelling who should take charge of them.

“Stay, ladies,” said Captain Willis, good-naturedly. “The children by right belong to me; and I must let the doctor see to them before anybody else begins nursing them.”

In the meantime, however, Mrs Clayton had taken the infant out of the mate’s arms, while the little boy was snatched away by Ellen Barrow and the rest of the young

ladies, who kept fondling him among them, and showing that they would do their best to spoil him before the voyage was over.

Mr Hawkins, the surgeon, finding that his services were of no avail to the rest of those who had been in the boat, now appeared, and examined the baby as it lay in Mrs Clayton's arms.

"It seems to have been wonderfully sustained," he observed. "I can discover nothing the matter with it; and with some of the food our goat can supply, I have no doubt in a few days it will have perfectly recovered. Let me relieve you of the child, madam, and give it to one of the women-servants to nurse."

But Mrs Clayton showed no inclination to give up her charge. There were feelings rising in her bosom whose exquisite delight a fond mother, as she presses her first-born to her breast, can well appreciate. The lady gave an imploring look at her husband, which he well understood.

"Do as you wish, dearest," he whispered.

She returned him a glance full of grateful thanks.

"Captain Willis," she said, in a voice agitated with the fear that her request might be denied, "I will, if you will allow me, take charge of the poor deserted one, till its proper guardians can be found; and I daresay we shall be able to learn from the little boy who they are."

"To no one would I more gladly commit the infant than to you, madam," returned the captain. "And pray, consider her your property till claimed by others with greater right to her."

So it was settled; and Mrs Clayton did indeed prove an affectionate mother to the little foundling. Captain Willis, however, was much disappointed in not being able to obtain the information he expected from the elder child. The little fellow could speak very rapidly, but it was in a language neither he nor any of the young ladies could understand, though he seemed to comprehend what was said to him in English. They tried him with a variety of names to endeavour to discover the one belonging to him; but to none of them did he pay any attention.

On a sudden he began to cry to go to his Aya; but as he was kept out of sight of the dead body, and petted by the young ladies, who tried every means to please him, he was soon again pacified. He was then taken into the cabin, where two or three of the married ladies, who had children of their own, set to work to wash him and dress him in clean clothes. He kicked about in the tub of water, and seemed highly delighted, as if it was a luxury to which he was accustomed, while he also appeared fully to appreciate the advantage of clean clothes. He was rather thin, as if he had lived for a length of time on a short allowance of food; but when some broth, which had been got ready for him, was placed before him, he did not eat ravenously as if he had been long without food altogether. Indeed, I may as well here remark, that the mate had discovered a small piece of biscuit, softened by water, by his side when he took the children out of the boat, proving that the faithful nurse had given him the last morsel of food in her possession rather than eat it herself, in the hope of preserving his life. When he had swallowed the broth, he fell fast asleep in the arms

of the lady who was holding him. The little fellow’s perfect confidence in those surrounding him, while it won their hearts, showed that he had always been accustomed to kind treatment.

Mrs Clayton had also brought her little charge below, and was nursing it with the most tender care. It seemed, indeed, but a fragile little blossom; and it appeared surprising that it should thus have escaped from the hardships to which it had been exposed.

Meanwhile, on deck, Captain Willis and his officers, and some of the gentlemen passengers, were making every possible examination of the boat and the dead bodies, to endeavour to discover some clue by which they might be able to trace to what ship they had belonged, or whence they had come. There was, unfortunately, little on their bodies to identify them. One of the men had fastened round his neck by a lanyard a knife, on the handle of which was roughly carved the initials J.S., and on his arm was discovered, marked by gunpowder, among a variety of other figures, the name of James Smith,—one, however, borne by so many people, that it could scarcely be said to serve as a distinguishing appellation. Sir Charles Plowden, notwithstanding, who was taking a great interest in and superintending the investigation, made a note of it in his pocket-book, and took charge of the knife.

There was no name on the boat, nor were there any oars in her, which have generally the name of the ship marked on them. The boat was pronounced not to be of English build; and the carpenter, after a long examination, declared it to be his opinion, that it might possibly be built by some

Englishman, in a foreign place, and with foreign assistants, and with more than one sort of wood, with which he was not well acquainted. The canvas, which had served as the awning over the children, was certainly English, and the seams at the joins were exactly similar to the work of an English sail-maker. The nails used in the boat were English; but then, as the carpenter observed, English nails were sent into all parts of the world.

The complexion of the other seaman was very dark; a crucifix was found round his neck, and he had on a light-blue jacket, and his other garments were not of English make, so that there could be no doubt that he was a foreigner. In his pocket was a purse, containing several gold doubloons and other coins, showing how utterly valueless on some occasions is the money for which men risk so much. How gladly would the poor wretch have given the whole of it for a crust of bread and a drop of water! There was also a little silver box in his pocket, containing the relic of a saint, equally inefficacious to preserve him, although an inscription on a piece of paper in it stated, that it would preserve the fortunate possessor from all dangers, either by sea or land.

In the Englishman’s pocket there was an empty tobacco-box; but there was no paper or writing of any sort, to assist in identifying them.

The clothes of the nurse were not marked, nor was there found about her anything to aid the investigation; but on those of the children were found, nearly washed out, however, letters which were evidently the initials of their names. On those of the little boy were M.S., and on those of