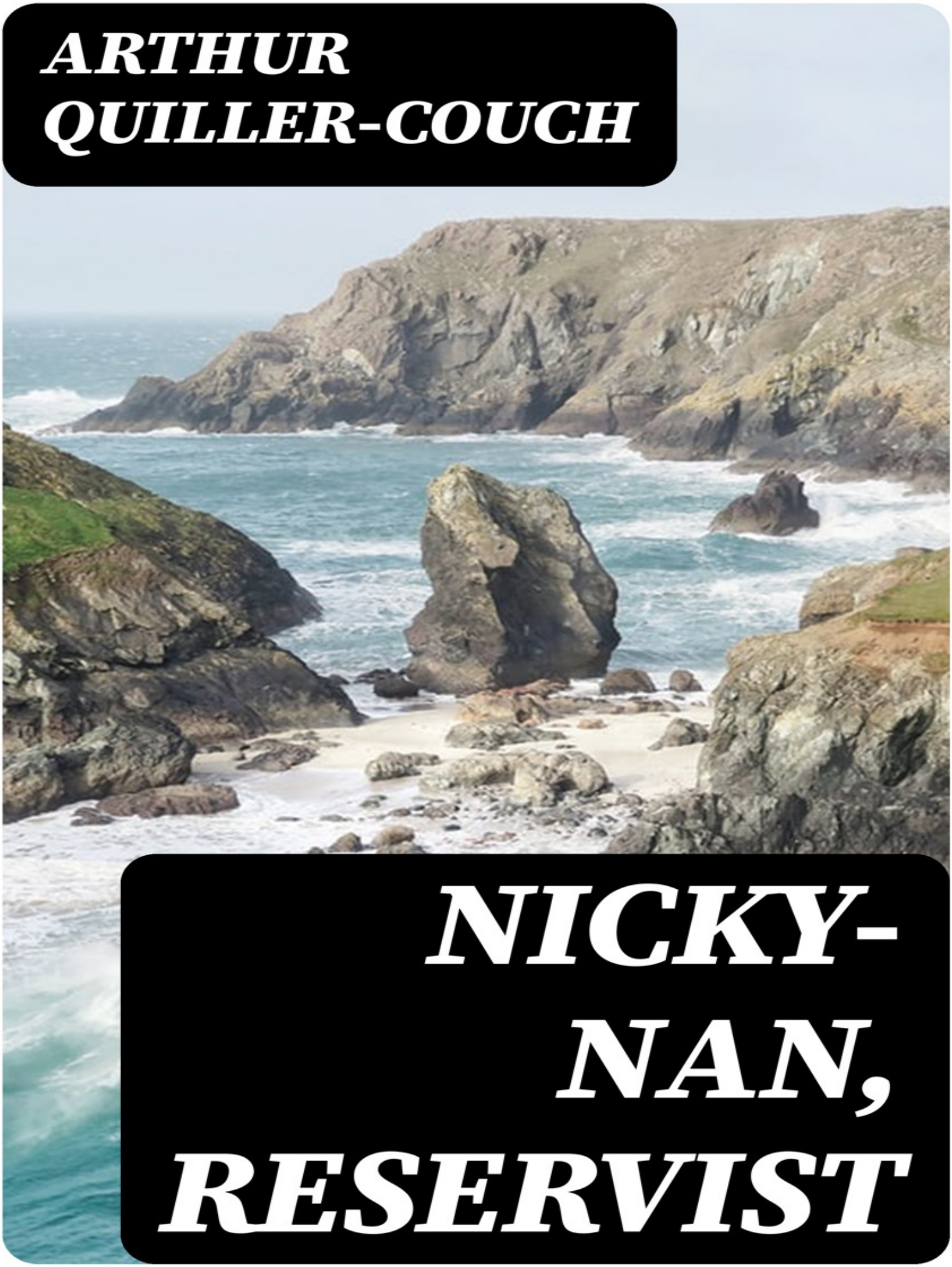
ARTHUR QUILLER-COUCH



NICKY-NAN, RESERVIST

Arthur Quiller-Couch

Nicky-Nan, Reservist

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CHAPTER I.

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HOW THE CHILDREN PLAYED.

When news of the War first came to Polpier, Nicholas Nanjivell (commonly known as Nicky-Nan) paid small attention to it, being preoccupied with his own affairs.

Indeed, for some days the children knew more about it than he, being tragically concerned in it—poor mites!—though they took it gaily enough. For Polpier lives by the fishery, and of the fishermen a large number—some scores—had passed through the Navy and now belonged to the Reserve. These good fellows had the haziest notion of what newspapers meant by the Balance of Power in Europe, nor perhaps could any one of them have explained why, when Austria declared war on Servia, Germany should be taking a hand. But they had learnt enough on the lower deck to forebode that, when Germany took a hand, the British Navy would pretty soon be clearing for action. Consequently all through the last week of July, when the word "Germany" began to be printed in large type in Press headlines, the drifters putting out nightly on the watch for the pilchard harvest carried each a copy of *The Western Morning News* or *The Western Daily Mercury* to be read aloud, discussed,

expounded under the cuddy lamp in the long hours between shooting the nets and hauling them.

"When the corn is in the shock,
Then the fish is on the rock."

A very little of the corn had been shocked as yet; but the fields, right down to the cliffs' edge, stood ripe for abundant harvest. I doubt, indeed, if in our time they have ever smiled a fairer promise or reward for husbandry than during this last fortnight of July 1914, when the crews, running back with the southerly breeze for Polpier, would note how the crop stood yellower in to-day's than in yesterday's sunrise, and speculate when Farmer Best or farmer Bate meant to start reaping. As for the fish, the boats had made small catches—dips among the straggling advance-guards of the great armies of pilchards surely drawing in from the Atlantic. "'Tis early days yet, hows'ever—time enough, my sons—plenty time!" promised Un' Benny Rowett, patriarch of the fishing-fleet and local preacher on Sundays. Some of the younger men grumbled that "there was no tellin': the season had been tricky from the start." The spider-crabs—that are the curse of inshore trammels—had lingered for a good three weeks past the date when by all rights they were due to sheer off. Then a host of spur-dogs had invaded the whiting-grounds, preying so gluttonously on the hooked fish that, haul in as you might, three times out of four the line brought up nothing but a head—all the rest bitten off and swallowed. "No salmon moving, over to Troy. The sean-boats there hadn't even troubled to take out a licence." As for lobsters, "they were becomin' a winter fish, somehow, and up the harbours you started catchin' 'em at Christmas and

lost 'em by Eastertide:" while the ordinary crabbing-grounds appeared to be clean bewitched.

One theorist loudly called for a massacre of sea-birds, especially shags and gannets. Others (and these were the majority) demanded protection from steam trawlers, whom they accused of scraping the sea-bottom, to the wholesale sacrifice of immature fish—sole and plaice, brill and turbot.

"Now look 'ee here, my sons," said Un' Benny Rowett: "if I was you, I'd cry to the Lord a little more an' to County Council a little less. What's the full size ye reckon a school o' pilchards, now—one o the big uns? Scores an' scores o' square miles, all movin' in a mass, an' solid a'most as sardines in a tin; and, as I've heard th' Old Doctor used to tell, every female capable o' spawnin' up to two million. . . . No; your mind can't seize it. But ye might be fitted to grasp that if th' Almighty hadn' ordained other fish an' birds as well as us men to prey upon 'em, in five years' time no boat'd be able to sail th' Atlantic; in ten years ye could walk over from Polpier to Newfoundland stankin' 'pon rotten pilchards all the way. Don't reckon yourselves wiser than Natur', my billies. . . . As for steam trawlin', simmee, I han't heard so much open grievin' over it since Government started loans for motors. Come to think—hey?— there ben't no such tearin' difference between motors an' steam—not on principle. And as for reggilations, I've a doo respect for County Council till it sets up to reggilate Providence, when I falls back on th' Lord's text to Noey that, boy an' man, I've never known fail. *While th' earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest shall not cease.* And again," continued Un' Benny

Rowett, "Behold, I say unto you, *Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest*."

If pressed in argument he would entrench himself behind the wonderful plenty of john-doreys: "Which," he would say, "is the mysteriousest fish in the sea and the holiest. Take a john-dorey or two, and the pilchards be never far behind. 'Tis well beknown as the fish St Peter took when Our Lord told 'en to cast a hook; an' be shot if he didn' come to hook with a piece o' silver in his mouth! You can see Peter's thumb-mark upon him to this day: and, if you ask *me*, he's better eatin' than a sole, let alone you can carve en with a spoon—though improved if stuffed, with a shreddin' o' mint. Iss, baked o' course. . . . Afore August is out—mark my words—the pilchards'll be here."

"But shall *we* be here to take 'em?"

It was a dark, good-looking, serious youth who put the question: and all the men at the end of the quay turned to stare at him. (For this happened on the evening of Saturday, the 25th—St James's Day,—when all the boats were laid up for the week-end.)

The men turned to young Seth Minards because, as a rule, he had a wonderful gift of silence. He was known to be something of a scholar, and religious too: but his religion did Dot declare itself outwardly, save perhaps in a constant gentleness of manner. The essence of it lay in spiritual withdrawal; the man retiring into his own heart, so to speak, and finding there a Friend with whom to hold sweet and habitual counsel. By consequence, young Seth Minards spoke rarely, but with more than a double weight.

"What mean ye, my son?" demanded Un' Benny. "Tell us—you that don't speak, as a rule, out of your turn."

"I think," answered Seth Minards slowly, "there is going to be War for certain—a great War—and in a few days."

Three days later the postmistress, Mrs Pengelly (who kept a general shop), put out two newspaper placards which set all the children at the Council Schools, up the valley, playing at a game they called "English and Germans"—an adaptation of the old "Prisoners' Base." No one wanted to be a German: but, seeing that you cannot well conduct warfare without an enemy, the weaker boys represented the Teutonic cause under conscription, and afterwards joined in the cheers when it was vanquished.

The Schools broke up on the last day of July; and the contest next day became a naval one, among the row-boats lying inside the old pier. This was ten times better fun; for a good half of the boys meant to enter the Navy when they grew up. They knew what it meant, too. The great battleships from Plymouth ran their speed-trials off Polpier: the westward mile-mark stood on the Peak, right over the little haven; and the smallest child has learnt to tell a Dreadnought in the offing, or discern the difference between a first-class and a second-class cruiser. The older boys knew most of the ships by name.

Throughout Saturday the children were—as their mother agreed—"fair out of hand." But this may have been because the mothers themselves were gossiping whilst their men slumbered. All Polpier women—even the laziest—knit while they talk: and from nine o'clock onwards the alley-ways that

pass for streets were filled with women knitting hard and talking at the top of their voices. The men and the cats dozed.

Down by the boats, up to noon the boys had things all their own way, vying in feats of valour. But soon after the dinner-hour the girls asserted themselves by starting an Ambulance Corps, and with details so realistic that not a few of the male combatants hauled out of battle on pretence of wounds and in search of better fun.

Nicholas Nanjivell, "mooning" by the bridge twelve paces from his door, sharpening his jack-knife upon a soft parapet-stone that was reported to bring cutlery to an incomparable edge and had paid for its reputation, being half worn away—Nicholas Nanjivell, leaning his weight on the parapet, to ease the pain in his leg—Nicholas Nanjivell, gloomily contemplating his knife and wishing he could plunge it into the heart of a man who stood behind a counter behind a door which stood in view beyond the bridge-end—Nicholas Nanjivell, nursing his own injury to the exclusion of any that might threaten Europe—glanced up and beheld his neighbour Penhaligon's children, Young 'Bert and 'Beida (Zobeida), approach by the street from the Quay bearing between them a stretcher, composed of two broken paddles and part of an old fishing-net, and on the stretcher, covered by a tattered pilot-jack, a small form—their brother 'Biades (Alcibiades), aged four. It gave him a scare.

"Lor sake!" said he, hastily shutting and pocketing his knife.

"What you got there?"

"'Biades," answered 'Beida, with a tragical face.

"Han't I heard your mother warn 'ee a score o' times, against lettin' that cheeld play loose on the Quay! . . . What's happened to 'en? Broke his tender neck, I shouldn' wonder. . . . Here, let me have a look—"

"Broke his tender fiddle-stick!" 'Beida retorted. "He's bleedin' for his country, is 'Biades, if you really want to know; and if you was helpful you'd lend us that knife o' yours."

"What for, missy?"

"Why, to take off the injured limb. 'Bert's knife's no good since the fore-part o' the week, when he broke the blade prizin' up limpets an' never guessing how soon this War'd be upon us."

"I did," maintained 'Bert. "I was gettin' in food supplies."

"If I was you, my dears, I'd leave such unholy games alone," Nicky-Nan advised them. "No, and I'll not lend 'ee my knife, neither. You don't know what War is, children: an' please God you never will. War's not declared yet—not by England, anyway. Don't 'ee go to seek it out until it seeks *you*."

"But 'tis comin'," 'Beida persisted. "Father was talkin' with Mother last night—he didn' go out with the boats: and 'Bert and I both heard him say—didn' we, 'Bert?—'twas safe as to-morrow's sun. The way we heard was that Mother'd forgot to order us to bed; which hasn't happened not since Coronation Night an' the bonfire. When she came up to blow out the light she'd been cryin'. . . . That's because Father'll have to fight, o' course."

"I wish they'd put it off till I was a man," said 'Bert stoutly.

At this point the wounded hero behaved as he always did on discovering life duller than his hopes. He let out a piercing yell and cried that he wanted his tea. 'Beida dropped her end of the ambulance, seized him as he slid to the ground, shook him up, and told him to behave.

"You can't have your tea for another hour: and what's more, if you're not careful there won't be no amputation till afterwards, when Mother's not lookin' an' we can get a knife off the table. You bad boy!"

'Biades howled afresh.

"If you don't stop it,"—'Bert took a hand in threatening,—"you won't get cut open till Monday; because 'tis Sunday to-morrow. And by that time you'll be festerin', I shouldn't wonder."

"—And mortification will have set in," promised his sister. "When that happens, you may turn up your toes. An' 'tis only a question between oak an' elum."

'Biades ceased yelling as abruptly as he had started. "What's 'fester'?" he demanded.

"You'll know fast enough, when you find yourself one solid scab," began 'Bert. But Nicky-Nan interrupted.

"There, there, children! Run along an' don't ee play at trouble. There's misery enough, the Lord knows—" He broke off on a twinge of pain, and stared down-stream at the congregated masts in the little harbour.

Polpier lies in a gorge so steep and deep that though it faces but a little east of south, all its western flank lay already in deep shadow. The sunlight slanting over the ridge touched the tops of the masts, half a dozen of which had trucks with a bravery of gilt, while a couple wore the

additional glory of a vane. On these it flashed, and passed on to bathe the line of cottages along the eastern shore, with the coast-guard hut that stood separate beyond them on the round of the cliff-track—all in one quiet golden glow. War? Who could think of War? . . . Nicky-Nan at any rate let the thought of it slip into the sea of his private trouble. It was as though he had hauled up some other man's "sinker" and, discovering his mistake, let it drop back plumb.

While he stared, the children had stolen away.

Yet he loitered there staring, in the hush of the warm afternoon, lifting his eyes a little towards the familiar outline of the hills that almost overlapped, closing out sight of the sea. A verse ran in his head—"*I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help*. . . ."

The slamming of a door at the street-corner beyond the bridge recalled him to the world of action.

On the doorstep of the local Bank—turning key in lock as he left the premises—stood a man respectably dressed and large of build. It was Mr Pamphlett, the Bank-Manager. Nicky-Nan thrust his hands in his trouser-pockets and limped towards him.

"If you please, sir—"

Mr Pamphlett faced about, displaying a broad white waistcoat and a ponderous gold watch-chain.

"Ah! Nanjivell?"

"If you please, sir—" Nicky-Nan, now balanced on his sound leg, withdrew a hand from his pocket and touched his cap. "I've been waitin' your convenience."

"Busy times," said Mr Pamphlett. "This Moratorium, you know. The

War makes itself felt, even in this little place."

If Nicky-Nan had known the meaning of the word Moratorium, it might have given him an opening. But he did not, and so he stood dumb. "You have come to say, I hope," hazarded Mr Pamphlett after a pause, "that you don't intend to give me any more trouble? . . . You've given me enough, you know. An Ejectment Order. . . . Still—if, at the last, you've made up your mind to behave—"

"There's no other house, sir. If there was, and you'd let it to me—"

"That's likely, hey? In the present scandalous laxity of the law towards tenants, you've cost me a matter of pounds—not to mention six months' delay, which means money lost—to eject you. You, that owe me six pounds rent! It's likely I'd let you another house—even if I had one!"

"Even if you had the will, 'twouldn' be right. I understand that, sir. Six young men, as I know, waitin' to marry and unable, because the visitors snap up cottage after cottage for summer residences, an'll pay you fancy prices; whereas you won't build for the likes o' we."

"Your six young men—if six there be—" said Mr Pamphlett, "will be best employed for some time to come in fighting for their country. It don't pay to build cottages, I tell you."

Nicky-Nan's right hand gripped the knife in his pocket. But he answered wearily—

"Well, anyways, sir, I don't ask to interfere with them: but only to bide under my own shelter."

"Owing me six pounds arrears, and piling up more? And after driving me to legal proceedings! Look here, Nanjivell.

You are fumbling something in your pocket. Is it the six pounds you owe me?"

"No, sir."

"I thought not. And if it were, I should still demand the costs I've been put to. If you bring me the total on Monday—But you know very well you cannot."

"No, sir."

"Then," said Mr Pamphlett, "we waste time. I have been worried enough, these last few days, with more serious business than yours. In the times now upon us a many folk are bound to go to the wall; and the improvident will go first, as is only right. Enough said, my man!"

Nicky-Nan fumbled with the knife in his pocket, but let Mr Pamphlett pass.

Then he limped back to the house that would be his until Monday, and closed the door. Beyond the frail partition which boarded him off from the Penhaligon family he could hear the children merry at tea.

CHAPTER II.

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CALL TO ARMS.

NESCIO QUA NATALE SOLUM DULCEDINE CUNCTOS DUCIT ET IMMEMORES NON SINIT ESSE SUI.

—The Old Doctor (to whom we have made allusion) had been moved to write an account of his native place, and had

contrived to get it published by subscription in a thin octavo volume of 232 pages, measuring nine by five and a half inches. Copies are rare, but may yet be picked up on secondhand bookstalls for six or seven shillings.

From this 'History of Polpier' I must quote—being unable to better it—his description of the little town. (He ever insisted in calling it a town, not a village, although it contained less than fourteen hundred inhabitants.)

> "If the map of the coast of Cornwall be examined, on the south-east, between the estuaries of the two rivers that divide the Hundred of West from the Hundred of East and the Hundred of Powder, will be noticed an indentation of the littoral line, in which cleft lies the little town of Polpier. Tall hills, abrupt and rugged, shut in a deep and tortuous valley, formed by the meeting of smaller coombs; houses, which seem dropped rather than built, crowd the valley and its rocky ledges; a rapid rivulet dances in and out among the dwellings, till its voice is lost in the waters of a tidal haven, thronged with fishing boats and guarded by its Peak of serried rock."

The Doctor after this first modest mention of "a rivulet" invariably writes of it as "the River," and by no other name does Polpier speak of it to this day. On the lower or seaward side of the bridge-end, where the channel measures some three yards across, the flank of his house leaned over the rushing water, to the sound of which he slept at night. Across the stream the house of Mr Barrabell, clerk, leaned forward at a more pronounced angle, so that the two neighbours, had they been so minded, might have shaken

hands between their bedroom windows before retiring to rest. Tradition reports this Mr Barrabell (though an accountant for most of the privateering companies in Polpier) to have been a timorous man: and that once the Doctor, returning home in the small hours from a midwifery case, found his neighbour and his neighbour's wife hiding together under his bed-clothes. Upon an alarm that Bonaparte was in the town, they had bridged the stream with a ladder to the Doctor's open window and clambered across in their night-clothes. It is reported also that, on the transit, Mrs Barrabell was heard to say, "Go forward, Theophilus! Th' Old Doctor knows all about *me*, if he don't about you. You can trust en to the ends of the world." "That's right enough, ma'am," said the Doctor in his great way; "but you appear to have gone a bit further." A variant of the story has it that Mrs Barrabell was found beneath the bed, and her spouse alone between the bed-clothes, into which he had plunged with an exhortation, "Look after yourself, darling!" "And what do you think Theophilus found under that magnificent man's bed?" she asked her neighbours next day. "Why, naught but a plumed hat in a japanned case; no trace of alarm, and yet ready there against any emergency."

The Doctor (I should say) had held a commission—worn a Major's uniform—in the local Artillery Volunteers during those days of the Napoleonic peril. They passed, and he survived to die in times of peace, leaving (as has been told) a local history for his memorial. A tablet to his memory records that "*In all his life he never had a lawsuit. Reader, take example and strive to be so good a man*."

In his childhood Nicky-Nan had listened to many a legend of the Old Doctor, whose memory haunted every street and by-lane and even attained to something like apotheosis in the talk of the older inhabitants. They told what an eye he had, as a naturalist, for anything uncommon in the maunds; how he taught them to be observant, alert for any strange fish, and to bring it home alive, if possible; and how he was never so happy as when seated on a bollard near the Quay-head with a drawing-board on his knee, busy—for he was a wonder with pencil and brush—transferring to paper the outline and markings of a specimen and its perishable exquisite colours; working rapidly while he listened to the account of its capture, and maybe pausing now and again to pencil a note on the margin of the portrait. They told, too, of his ways—how for a whole month he came forth from his front door in a crouching posture, almost on all fours, so as not to disturb the work of a diadem spider that had chosen to build its web across the porch; of his professional skill, that "trust yourself to th' Old Doctor, and he'd see you came to a natral end of some sort, and in no haste, neither;" of his habit of dress, that (when not in martial uniform) he wore a black suit with knee-breeches, silk stockings, and silver shoe-buckles; of his kindness of heart, that in the *Notes of Periodic Phenomena*, which he regularly kept, he always recorded a midnight gale towards the close of August, to account for the mysterious depletion of his apple-crop.

But the Old Doctor had gone to his fathers long ago, and the old house, divided into two tenements—with access by one porch and front passage—had been occupied for twenty

years past by Nicky-Nan and (for eight or nine) by the Penhaligon family. Nicky-Nan's cantle overhung the river, and comprised a kitchen and scullery on the ground-floor, with a fairly large bedroom above it. The old Doctor's own bedroom it had been, and was remarkable for an open fireplace with two large recessed cupboards let into a wall, which measured a good four feet in depth beyond the chimney-breast. Once, in cleaning out the cupboards, Nicky-Nan had discovered in the right-hand one that one or two boards of the flooring were loose. Lifting them cautiously he had peered into a sort of lazarette deep down in the wall, and had lowered a candle, the flame of which, catching hold of a mass of dried cobweb, had shot up and singed his eyebrows, for a moment threatening to set the house on fire. It had given him a scare, and he never ventured to carry his exploration further.

His curiosity was the less provoked because at least a score of the old houses in Polpier have similar recesses, constructed (it is said) as hiding-places from the press-gang or for smugglers hotly pursued by the dragoons.

The Penhaligon family inhabited the side of the house that faced the street, and their large living-room was chiefly remarkable for the beams supporting the floor above it. They had all been sawn lengthwise out of a single oak-tree, and the outer edges of some had been left untrimmed. From a nail in the midmost beam hung a small rusty key, around which the spiders wove webs and the children many speculations: for the story went that a brother of the old Doctor's— the scapegrace of the family—had hung it (the key of his quadrant) there, with strong injunctions that no

one should take it down until he returned—which he never did. So Mrs Penhaligon's feather-brush always spared this one spot in the room, every other inch of which she kept scrupulously dusted. She would not for worlds have exchanged lodgings with Nicky-Nan, though his was by far the best bedroom (and far too good for a bachelor man); because from her windows she could watch whatever crossed the bridge—folks going to church, and funerals. But the children envied Nicky-Nan, because from his bedroom window you could—when he was good-natured and allowed you—drop a line into the brawling river. Of course there were no real fish to be caught, but with a cunning cast and some luck you might hook up a tin can or an old boot.

Now Nicky-Nan was naturally fond of children, as by nature he had been designed for a family man; and children gave him their confidence without knowing why. But in his early manhood a girl had jilted him, which turned him against women: later, in the Navy, the death of a friend and messmate, to whom he had transferred all the loyalty of his heart, set him questioning many things in a silent way. He had never been able to dissipate affection or friendship: and his feelings when hurt, being sensitive as the horns of a snail, withdrew themselves as swiftly into a shell and hid there as obstinately: by consequence of which he earned (without deserving) a name not often entered upon the discharge-sheets of the Royal Navy. But there it stood on his, in black upon white—"A capable seaman. *Morose*."

He had carried this character, with his discharge-sheet, back to Polpier, where his old friends and neighbours—who had known him as a brisk upstanding lad, sociable enough,

though maybe a trifle shy— edged away from the taciturn man who returned to them. Nor did it help his popularity that he attended neither Church nor Chapel: for Polpier is a deeply religious place, in its fashion.

Some of the women-folk—notably Mrs Polsue, the widow-woman, and Miss
Cherry (Charity) Oliver, a bitter spinster—spoke to the Wesleyan
Minister about this.

The Minister listened to them politely. He was the gentlest of little men and had a club-foot. Mrs Polsue and Miss Oliver (who detested one another) agreed that it would be a day of grace when his term among them expired and he was "planned" for some other place where Christianity did not matter as it did in Polpier. They gave various reasons for this: but their real reason (had they lived in a Palace of Truth) was that the Rev. Mark Hambly never spoke evil of any one, nor listened to gossip save with a loose attention.

"The man has a wandering mind!" declared Miss Oliver. "It don't seem able to fix itself. If you'll believe me, when I told him about Bestwetherick's daughter and how she'd got herself into trouble at last, all he could say was, 'Yes, yes, poor thing!'—and invite me to kneel down an' pray she might come safely through it!"

"You surely weren't so weak as to do it?" said Mrs Polsue, scandalised.

"Me?" exclaimed Cherry. "Pray for that baggage? To start with, I'd be afeard the Lord'd visit it on me. . . . An' then it came out he'd Known the whole affair for more than two months. The girl had been to him."

"And he never told? . . . I tell you what, Cherry Oliver! It's my belief that man would set up a confessional, if he could."

"Don't 'ee tell up such things, Mary-Martha Polsue, or I'll go an' drown myself!"

"And why not?—he bein' so thick with Parson Steele, that sticks up 'High Mass' 'pon his church door and is well known to be hand-in-glove with the Pope. I tell you I saw the pair meet this very Wednesday down by the bridge as I happened to be lookin' out waitin' to scold the milk-boy: and they shook hands and stood for up-three-minutes colloguin' together."

When these two ladies joined forces to attack Mr Hambly on the subject of Nicky-Nan's atheism, presumed upon his neglect to attend public worship, the Minister's lack of interest became fairly exasperating. He arose and opened the window.

"Astonishing plague of house-flies we are suffering from this year," he observed. "You have noticed it, doubtless? . .. Yes, yes—about Nanjivell . . . it is so good of you to feel concerned. I will talk it over with the Vicar."

"God forbid!" Mrs Polsue ejaculated.

"One uses up fly-papers almost faster than Mrs Pengelly can supply them," continued the Minister. "And, moreover, she will sell me but two or three at a time, alleging that she requires all her stock for her own shop. I fell back last week upon treacle. Beer, in small glass jars, is also recommended. I trust that if you ladies see me issuing from the Three Pilchards to-morrow with a jug of beer, you will make it your business to protect my character. The purchase will not escape your knowledge, I feel sure. . . . But we were talking

of Nanjivell. I have some reason to believe that he is a God-fearing man, though his religion does not take a—er—congregational turn. Moreover, he is a sick man."

"H'mph!" Miss Oliver sniffed.

"The amount of disease disseminated by house-flies is, I am told, incalculable," pursued Mr Hambly. "Yes—as I was saying, or about to say—it's a pity that, in a small town like Polpier, two ministers of religion cannot between them keep a general shop to suit all tastes, like Mrs Pengelly." Mr Hambly's voice dropped as he wound up. "Ah, if—like Mrs Pengelly—we kept bull's-eyes for the children!"

"And for another year we have to sit under a man like that!" said Mrs
Polsue to Miss Oliver on their way homeward.

Nicky-Nan had one thing in his favour. He came of an old Polpier stock. It had decayed, to be sure, and woefully come down in the world: but the town, though its tongue may wag, has ever a soft heart towards its own. And the Nanjivells had been of good "haveage" (lineage) in their time. They had counted in the family a real Admiral, of whom Nicky-Nan had inherited a portrait in oil-colours. It hung in the parlour-kitchen underneath his bedroom, between two marine paintings of Vesuvius erupting by day and Vesuvius erupting by night: and the Penhaligon children stood in terrible awe of it because the eyes followed you all round the room, no matter what corner you took.

In neighbourliness, then, and for the sake of his haveage, Nicky-Nan's first welcome home had been kindly enough. His savings were few, but they bought him a small share in

a fishing-boat, besides enabling him to rent the tenement in the Doctor's House, and to make it habitable with a few sticks of furniture. Also he rented a potato-patch, beyond the coastguard's hut, around the eastward cliff, and tilled it assiduously. Being a man who could do with a very little sleep, he would often be found hard at work there by nine in the morning, after a long night's fishing.

Thus, though always on the edge of poverty, he had managed his affairs—until four years ago, when the trouble began with his leg.

At first he paid little heed to it, since it gave him no pain and little more than a passing discomfort. It started, in fact, as a small hard cyst low down at the back of the right thigh, incommoding him when he bent his knee. He called it "a nut in the flesh," and tried once or twice to get rid of it by squeezing it between fingers and thumb. It did not yield to this treatment.

He could not fix, within a month or so, the date when it began to hurt him. But it had been hurting him, off and on, for some weeks, when one night, tacking out towards the fishing-grounds against a stiffish southerly breeze, as he ran forward to tend the fore-sheet his leg gave way under him as if it had been stabbed, and he rolled into the scuppers in intolerable anguish. For a week after this Nicky-Nan nursed himself ashore, and it was given out that he had twisted his knee-cap. He did not call in a doctor, although the swelling took on a red and angry hue. As a fact, no medical man now resided within three miles of Polpier. (When asked how they did without one, the inhabitants answered gravely that during the summer season, when the visitors were about, Dr

Mant came over twice a-week from St Martin's; in the winter they just died a natural death.)

At any rate Nicky-Nan, because he was poor, would not call in a doctor; and, because he was proud, would not own to anything worse than a twisted knee, even when his neighbours on the Quay, putting their heads together, had shaken them collectively and decided that "the poor man must be suff'rin' from something chronic."

Then followed a bitter time, as his savings dwindled. He made more than a dozen brave attempts to resume his old occupation. But in the smallest lop of a sea he was useless, so that it became dangerous to take him. Month by month he fell further back in arrears of rent.

And now the end seemed to have arrived with Mr Pamphlett's notice of ejectment. Nicky-Nan, of course, held that Mr Pamphlett had a personal grudge against him. Mr Pamphlett had nothing of the sort. In ordinary circumstances, knowing Nicky-Nan to be an honest man, he would have treated him easily. But he wanted to "develope" Polpier to his own advantage: and his scheme of development centred on the old house by the bridge. He desired to pull it down and transfer the Bank to that eligible site. He had a plan of the proposed new building, with a fine stucco frontage and edgings of terra-cotta.

Mr Pamphlett saw his way to make this improvement, and was quite resolute about it; and Nicky-Nan, by his earlier reception of notices to quit, had not bettered any chance of resisting. Still—had Nicky-Nan known it—Mr Pamphlett, like many another bank manager, had been caught and thrown in a heap by the sudden swoop of War.

Over the telephone wires he had been in agitated converse all day with his superiors, who had at length managed to explain to him the working of the financial Moratorium.

So Mr Pamphlett, knowing there must be War, had clean forgotten the Ejectment Order, until Nicky-Nan inopportunely reminded him of it; and in his forgetfulness, being testy with overwork, had threatened execution on Monday—which would be the 3rd: August Bank Holiday, and a *dies non*.

Somehow Nicky-Nan had forgotten this too. It did not occur to him until after he had supped on boiled potatoes with a touch of butter, pepper and salt, washed down with water, a drink he abhorred. When it occurred to him, he smote his thigh and was rewarded with a twinge of pain.

He had all Sunday and all Monday in which to lay his plans before the final evacuation, if evacuation there must be. The enemy had miscalculated. He figured it out two or three times over, made sure he was right, and went to bed in his large gaunt bedroom with a sense of triumph.

Between now and Tuesday a great many things might happen.

A great many things were, in fact, happening. Among them, Europe— wire answering wire—was engaged in declaring general War.

Nicky-Nan, stretched in the four-post bed which had been the Old Doctor's, recked nothing of this. But his leg gave him considerable pain that night, He slept soon, but ill, and awoke before midnight to the sound—as it seemed—of sobbing. Something was wrong with the Penhaligon's children? Yet no . . . the sound seemed to come rather from

the chamber where Mr and Mrs Penhaligon slept. . . . It ceased, and he dropped off to sleep again.

Oddly enough he awoke—not having given it a thought before—with a scare of War upon him.

In his dream he had been retracing accurately and in detail a small scene of the previous morning, at the moment quite without significance for him. Limping back from his cliff-patch with a basket of potatoes in one hand and with the other using the shaft of his mattock (or "visgy" in Polpier language) for a walking-staff, as he passed the watch-house he had been vaguely surprised to find coastguardsman Varco on the look-out there with his glass, and halted.

"Hallo, Bill Varco! Wasn't it you here yesterday? Or has my memory lost count 'pon the days o' the week?"

"It's me, right enough," said Varco; "an' no one but Peter Hosken left with me, to take turn an' turn about. They've called the others up to Plymouth."

"But why?" Nicky-Nan had asked: and the coastguardsman had responded:

"You can put two an' two together, neighbour. Add 'em up as you please."

The scene and the words, repeated through his dream, came back now very clearly to him.

"But when a man's in pain and nervous," he told himself, "the least little thing bulks big in his mind." War? They couldn't really mean it. . . . That scare had come and had passed, almost a score of times. . . . Well, suppose it was War? . . . that again might be the saving of him. Folks mightn't be able to serve Ejectment Orders in time of War. . . . Besides, now he came to think of it, back in the week

there had been some panic in the banks, and some talk of a law having been passed by which debts couldn't be recovered in a hurry. And, anyway, Mr Pamphlett had forgotten about Bank Holiday. There was no hurry before Tuesday . . .

Nicky-Nan dropped off again into a sleep punctuated by twinges of pain.

Towards dawn, as the pain eased, his slumber grew deeper and undisturbed. He was awakened by—What?

At first it seemed to be the same sound of sobbing to which he had listened early in the night. Then, with a start, he knew it to be something quite different—an impatient knocking at the foot of his bed-chamber stairs.

Nicky-Nan shuffled out of bed, opened his door, and peered down the stairway.

"Who's there?" he challenged. "And what's your business? Hullo!"— catching sight of Bill Varco, coastguardsman, on the flat below—"the house afire? Or what brings you?"

"The Reserves are called out," answered up Bill Varco. "You'll get your paper later. But the Chief Officer's here from Troy with a little fellow from the Customs there, and I be sent round with first news. I've two dozen yet to warn . . . In the King's name! An' there'll be a brake waiting by the bridge-end at ten-thirty. If War isn't declared, it mighty soon will be. Take notice!"

Bill Varco disappeared, sharp on the word. Nicky-Nan paused a moment, hobbled back to bed and sat on the edge of it, steadying himself, yet half-awake.

"It's some trick of Pamphlett's to get me out," he decided, and went downstairs cautiously.

CHAPTER III.

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HOW THE MEN WENT.

In the passage he found Mrs Penhaligon standing, alone, rigid as a statue. By her attitude she seemed to be listening. Yet she had either missed to hear or, hearing, had missed to understand Varco's call up the stairs. At Nicky-Nan's footstep she turned, with a face white and set.

"Sam's got to go," she said. Her lips twitched.

"Nonsense, woman! Some person's playin' a trick 'pon the town."

"They start from the bridge at ten-thirty. There's no trick about it. Go an' see for yourself." She motioned with her hand.

Nicky-Nan limped to the porch and peeked out (as they say at Polpier). Up the street the women stood clacking the news just as though it were a week-day and the boats had brought in a famous haul. Feminine gossip in Polpier is not conducted in groups, as the men conduct theirs on the Quay. By tradition each housewife takes post on her own threshold-slate, and knits while she talks with her neighbours to right and left and across the road; thus a bit