ALONGSHORE

STEPHEN REYNOLDS

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ALONGSHORE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

A POOR MAN'S HOUSE

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THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

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A LONGSHOREMAN.

ALONGSHORE

WHERE MAN AND THE SEA FACE ONE ANOTHER

BY

STEPHEN REYNOLDS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY MELVILLE MACKAY

'Here begins the sea that ends not till the world's end. Where we stand. . . .'—SWINBURNE.

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NOTE

Most of the chapters in this volume have been printed serially in the *Westminster Gazette*, to the Editor of which the Author's special thanks are due. Two sketches of fishing on a large scale from a French port have been added by way of contrast, and of those two 'A Herring Haul' has been printed in *Blackwood's Magazine*. Three other chapters are based on articles which have appeared in the *English Review* and *Country Life*. The Appendix 'Small Holdings on the Sea,' is reprinted from the *Daily News* in the hope that more attention may be drawn to the subject before it is too late.

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ALONGSHORE

Break, break, break,
  On thy cold grey stones, O Sea!
And I would that my tongue could utter
  The thoughts that arise in me.

O well for the fisherman's boy,
  That he shouts with his sister at play!
O well for the sailor lad,
  That he sings in his boat in the bay!

Tennyson.

TO SAMUEL WOOLLEY

Dear Uncle Sam—A friend of yours and of mine, a man very experienced in affairs, was saying one day that you would have been distinguished in any walk of life; even in a starch-collar and a high-poll hat. I thought so too; but—and there to me was all the difference—you wouldn't have been Uncle Sam. You'd have been yourself, of course; and some one else. No doubt your keen eye would have been valuable in science; but I'd rather bathe a poisoned finger in your elder-flower water than have you knife it as a surgeon afterwards. No doubt your long accurate memory would have made you a scholar; but I'd rather you taught me your own sea-lore than a mountain of other folks' learning; and I am sure it is better to listen to your own peculiar wisdom, gathered from a hard-spent life, than it would be to have you a professor or a sky-pilot, living soft. No

doubt that lashing tongue of yours—when you'm up for it—would have served you well in Parliament; but I'd rather Uncle Sam heaved the tiller at my head for not keeping the boat steady, than that Samuel Woolley, Esquire, M.P., and so forth, should smash the liberals or the conservatives—which?—what do *you* say? I do doubt whether your reckless independence would have suited trade, where you would still, unless I am much mistaken, have been more concerned to see on how little you could live in your own way, than how much you could make somehow else. But there are other people to do those other things. There is only you to be Uncle Sam.

And you, I believe, could only have been you upon the longshore, where land and sea meet, where man and the sea face one another. For the longshore is powerful to mould men, because, to make a living there, they must fit their whole lives to it, not merely their working hours, but their sleeping and waking and eating, their aims and watchfulness. We wait long and often there: the sea and the fish wait never. There, and there only, can be found the peculiar conditions which make longshoremen what they are—a breed somewhat apart—courtiers of the sea, more intimate

with her than landsmen can imagine, more dependent on her slightest mood than those who go down to her in ships.

It was about those conditions, in the broadest sense of the word, that I wanted to write a book; not about certain men, women, and children this time, but about the sea and the beach and your rocks; the tides and eddies, both of water and of humanity, that set alongshore; what you and the likes of you have to contend with and what you glory in. I wanted, in a word, to describe not certain longshoremen, but the longshore itself.

Here's my attempt. You'll see the difference. In *A Poor Man's House* the sea was a background for people; here people are in the background; are a part, so to speak, of the scenery. What I have tried to describe, we both love, and both curse at times. Writing and fishing—fishing for words and fishing for fish—have much in common. Hence, perhaps, our fellow-feeling.

And accept the dedication of the book, Uncle Sam. It is indebted to you; not so much for what you have actually told me with your mouth, as for what your manner of life has taught me, and what you have put me in the way of learning for myself; the beauty and poetry of the long-

shore, as changeable as the sea, as baffling as men, and even harder to catch in words than fish in nets. You will know what I have left out and where I have gone wrong; but, having such eyes of your own, you will at least credit me with having eyes too, and will not be blind enough to suppose that everything I have observed somebody must be blamed for telling me. With those incapable of reading books to any better purpose than that of identifying the characters in them, nothing can be done, I suppose, except smile at the absurd mistakes they make, and will certainly make over this book; but of one thing I am glad; there is no character, drawn from life, in this or the other book, of whom I have not spoken, quite truthfully I believe, a deal better than the aforesaid book-detectives and beach-gossips do. Nor have any fishing secrets or marks been given away by me. You who know them best will know that too. 'If people only know'd what fishing's like . . . .' you've often said. I have tried to tell them. But one thing I have left out, namely just how to catch the fish upon exactly the right mark. That we'll do together, when 'tis fitty and we'm up for it.

Such zest you have found in life alongshore,

that, though old, you wish you may never die. Long life to you, Uncle Sam! It's a great thing to look upon life open-eyed, with its evils and hardships and troubles, and upon men with their ways, and still to find them good. That, you succeed in doing, grumble and cuss as you may. This book, these words, are like your conversation, an echo of life lived.—Yours, STEVE.

July 1910.

I

I B

I. THE LONGSHORE

Last night the sea-wind was to me
A metaphor of liberty,
  And every wave along the beach
A starlit music seemed to be.

To-day the sea-wind is to me
A fettered soul that would be free,
  And dumbly striving after speech,
The tides yearn landward painfully.

To-morrow how shall sound for me
The changing voice of wind and sea?
  What tidings shall be born of each?
What rumour of what mystery?

THE very soul of the longshore is echoed in that little poem of Mr. William Watson's; so far, that is, as it speaks to a man who only thinks and feels there; who treats it as a work of nature's art; who answers out of himself the thoughts suggested to him by the sea, and in that sense holds conversation with it. But when one day I showed *Changed Voices* to a longshoreman

born and bred, he first inquired what 'metaphor' means, and then pronounced judgment thus: 'Aye! 'tis all very good so far as it goes, but it don't go far enough. 'Tis true what he talks about, I'll say that; I've often an' often felt the same when I've been out there alone by night, or wi' my mate asleep under the cutty; only the likes of us can't make verses out o' what us feels. That's the time when things enter into your mind, for all you may be keeping watch so that a fish can't jump wi'out you noticing o'it. Thic chap, wi' his sea-wind yesterday an' to-day an' to-morrow. . . . Why, I've a-see'd it change every hour o' the day an' night! If he was depending on the sea-wind for his living, an' his life too, come to that, an' had a parcel o' chil'ern depending on him, he'd watch the wind more careful'n that. He'd watch it three days afore 'twas come, an' three days a'ter 'twas gone. He'd watch it like you watches your wife just afore her goes up over for her first. I knows thic mystery he speaks of; but there's a hell of a lot more in it than that, 'cause thee casn't watch for mysteries if thee doesn't live, an' thee casn't live if thee doesn't watch all o'it, mysteries an' all. I wonder do thic fellow wake up at night every time the wind changes?'

The poet would probably think the longshoreman dull and ignorant; the longshoreman would be quite sure of the poet's ignorance. Small changes in the wind are hardly noticeable back on land; there is no true wind at all to be found among the eddying draughts of cities. Deep-sea sailing vessels beat up against it, or run before it, and steamships steer into the teeth of it; but a longshoreman, in his little open boat, is at the mercy of its every variation. If the wind freshens he must hard up and get home; if it falls to a breath he must take to his oars and row. An hour's fair weather, and he is to sea about his business. He may not have another chance that moon.

There is not for him less poetry, if fewer poems, in the changing voices of the sea, because they command his life as well as talk to him; because they bespeak his workaday doings as well as his moods of wonder; because they assail his ears so continuously that he no longer listens consciously to them, any more than he listens to his own heart-beats—*s'écoute vivre,* hears himself live, as the French say. If it is the deep ground-rumble of London which makes one feel continually, at the back of one's mind, the presence of

the great city all around, how much more shall the unending rumour of the sea keep a longshoreman dimly, yet constantly, aware that he lives not only on the edge of the land, but on the edges of great mysteries! He puts to sea—fish being in the bay and the weather fine—the night after he has buried mother, father, child, or friend, or the night before his wedding. What do the changing voices say then? He keeps company with his maid along the cliff-tops, past which the noise of the sea rises thin and spiritualised into the upper air; he brings home his bride along the beach. What, again, do the changing voices say? Probably he does not listen. But he cannot help hearing. And is it not what a man hears without specially listening, what sinks imperceptibly, sneaks subtly, into his being, that most determines the colour of his days? The greatest poetry embraces life, not singling out sensations. The greatest mysteries are not incompatible with wonder as to whether breakfast is ready; nor are they confined to the highly educated, or to those able to make pot-shots at putting them into words. Lovers and people very deeply religious have always known it. Longshoremen have an inkling.

The gist of life alongshore is, that it varies

on variability itself, as wavelets may vary on the surface of irregular waves, or puffs in a veering wind. With the winds and waves it varies, down to its smallest detail. At the present moment I sit here at a table writing this, not simply because I want to, and have been wanting for some days, but over and above all because I am given the opportunity by a fresh north-easter that is turning up the sea feather-white, and is driving in upon the beach a surf which our small craft cannot face; or at all events will not face, now that the tide is low upon the flat sand, and the thump and rattle of the ground-swell at high water has changed gradually, first to the riotous saw-edged roar of half-tide, then latterly to the snarling plash of combers, breaking far out, and several at a time, their white spray smoking into the air, blown backwards off their crests by the same easterly wind which, farther out to sea, has heaped them up. In a few minutes I shall go and buy seedling cabbages, for this chain of reasons: Fair dry winds earlier in the year gave my skipper plenty to do on the beach. Hot sunshine had started the timbers of his boats, so that they needed (and still need) a good deal of caulking and varnishing. Less time than usual, therefore, was left him to attend to his

garden. In a mood of singularly blind activity (which a little rowing would have righted, had the sea been calm enough), I took over the garden and made a start by planting shallots. After the heavens hadn't rained upon them for a month, I bought a watering-pot out of some money I had earned on a fine day with a boat. The shallots grew! They grew so green and tall (the garden is sheltered from sea-winds) that I was encouraged to plant other vegetables, which grew more discretely. To-day, however, because he can't get to sea, and because these same easterly winds have kept the mackerel out of the bay, the Ol' Man is rather low-spirited and critical.

'Thy shallots be full up wi' weeds,' he said at breakfast. 'Never see'd the like. I've a-know'd thic garden crammed wi' stuff by June.'

'Well, they'm growing, anyhow.'

'They weeds 'll draw all the nature out o'em; bound to.'

'Thee't hae thy pickled shallots all right in due season. 'Tis watering 'em has brought the weeds up.'

'Aye! watering of 'em when I wanted thee out to beach. Due season 's late hereabout, seems so—like the macker.'

The weeding-out ought to be done at once, of course; but these easterly winds make one cussed, and, instead, I have decided to plant out cabbages (must hurry up!), leaving the weeds in peace till they are bigger, and easier to catch hold of. And finally, if the cats don't conduct their courtships too ferociously among the seedlings, and if the pretty little butterflies' moll-scrawls don't eat the unfortunate little cabbages right up, we, in our turn, next August or September, shall have greens for dinner that we owe to this north-easter. 'Hasn't never see'd it aforetime?' as the Ol' Man says. 'I have!'

But, cabbages included, there is no way of life so bound up with all the changes of wind and sea as the longshoreman's, not alone as regards the business of it, but in all its intimacies, from what is trivial and of the moment, even to the begetting of children. Where sea and land meet in an age-long fight between energy and stubbornness; where men snatch their living, by leave of the winds, from waters that yield to skill, but are never conquered; there, alongshore, is the scene of the greatest activity, the quickest reaction, the keenest, trickiest struggle between the two. There the sea is watched with more than emotion

and wonder—with a never-ending care that has behind it all the forces of self-preservation. Fish, which are life to a fisherman, go into the nets upon the flood tide; dying fishermen go out upon the ebb—so it is said. That sort of thing sounds impressive to a landsman, especially if he be poetical; but to a longshoreman it is crude enough. For him there is a deal more than that in it. There is his own life. He never can finish telling all his lore. He never ceases adding to it.

2. TIDES AND THE BEACH

FROM things very familiar or intimately a part of daily life, the definite article *the* is, in our dialect, clipped off. 'In house,' we say, instead of 'in the house'; 'down under cliff,' instead of 'under the cliff'; and even 'up to station.' Most of all do we say 'out to beach' where people from land would say 'out to *the* beach.' 'Have 'ee been out to beach?' we ask each other at breakfast, unless, of course, one of us has had to be out there for boat-hauling, or has been mackerel-hooking at dawn, or has returned in the night from drifting or prawning. It is as if those things from which the *the* is clipped have ceased, on account of close association with mankind, to be entirely inanimate, and have developed personalities. The words denoting them have become, as it were, proper names. By some such mental process the ancient pagans must have

created first personalities, then gods and goddesses, out of nature. If humanity changes but little, it is certain that those who have to do with the oldest things—earth and the sea—change last and least of all. In a measure, they are pagans still.

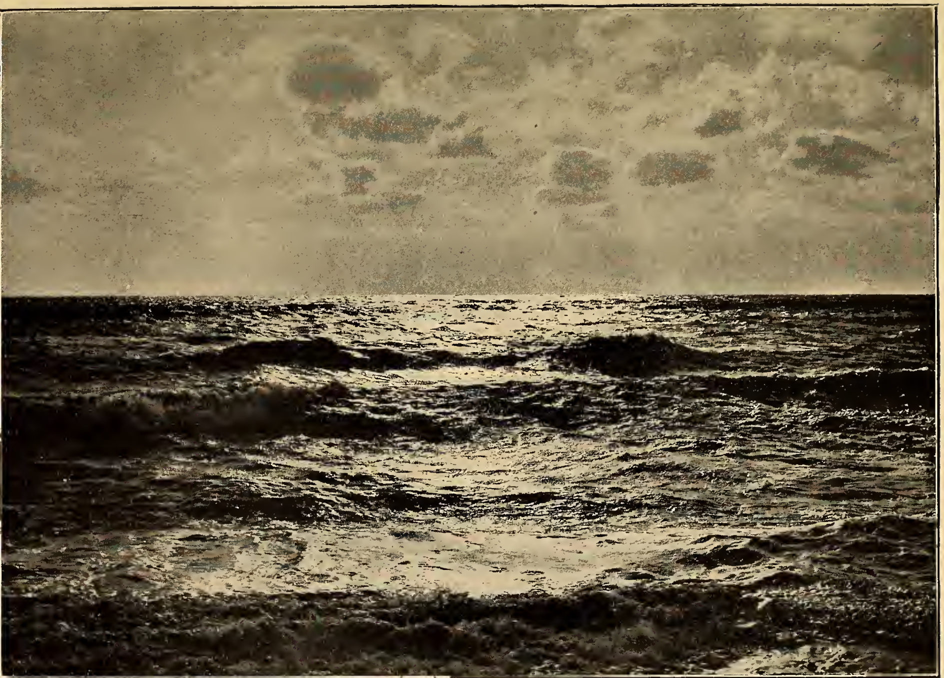
Now that I have worked and watched upon the beach by day and night, I cannot see it any more with the eyes of a seaside visitor. Everything about it means too much. It has undergone the change from an acquaintance, whom one likes, into a friend whom one loves, yet hates for a moment sometimes. Only some chance sound, or peculiarly radiant light, or salty whiff of seaweed, recalls the old feeling, when the beach was simply a sunny bank of shingle, pleasant to lounge upon and interesting to watch; when boats, belonging to I did not know whom, lay along it, and fishermen, whose nicknames and names I had not learnt, mended their nets or stood about with their hands in their pockets, for ever idle, as it seemed, and picturesque, because the toilsome part of their work was seldom seen. Great waves were then a glory; so they are now; but it is also a question of what body of water they contain and how far they will run up the beach among the boats.

Mishaps, wettings in beaching and shoving off, provided then a fine entertainment; now they provide shame if they are my mishaps and anxiety if they are somebody else's. No wonder fishermen say, 'The likes o' they can't tell what the likes o'us got to contend wi', nor never won't!' We have to contend, for one thing, with a shifting beach.

To fishermen who are compelled by lack of harbourage to keep their boats and gear upon a lee shore, the beach is almost more than home itself. From it they shove off, saying, 'Just fitty for mackerel, this,' or 'Us ought to hae a catch o' herrings this here logie [calm, dull] night.' To it they return, sometimes hardly caring whether they have caught anything or not, half perished with cold, and almost too tired to climb the crunching gravel on their way to bed. Upon it they are fleeced by fish-buyers who have spent their night snug. A fisherman will seldom wander far from his beach, and when he is away from home it is thoughts of the beach which bother him; how far up the sea is running, and whether, if it comes on to blow, some one will think to haul his boats higher. His life is not imperilled there, except when a big boat takes way upon it and

rushes from top to bottom, but his means of living are. For there his whole property is. It is upon the beach that a chance wave may beggar him, or, worse than that, may sweep away or stove in the savings of a lifetime. Men who no longer go to sea spend their days, and frequently their nights too, in stumping from house to beach and back again into house. They cannot rest away from beach. No one can. They worry themselves and everybody else: "'Tis going to blow, I tell thee, or *I* never see'd it coming; an' the tides be on the move. If thee doesn't haul up, thee't lose the lot o' it. That's what thee's going to do one o' these days, sure 'nuff!' And in consequence nobody hauls up till the last moment. A beach, sole defence against the sea, is scarcely less treacherous. Effectively, it is more so, for it lends a confidence that it betrays, and fewer small craft are wrecked afloat than are lost ashore. A brave thing is a boat upon a rough sea, but washed off the beach with its oars and bottom-boards turning somersaults around it, bumping along in the tub of the surf, it is a wholly pitiful sight.

From the beach, too, men look out to sea as a mother gazes at her child, noting every movement, every expression, every shadow, and wondering



Broad Ebb.

what the future may have in store, with pleasure and misgiving mingled.

Every beach has an individuality of its own, known to those who watch continually. Ours—the portion of it that lies in front of the town and sea-wall—faces nearly south, and is about a third of a mile long. To the eastward it stretches across the river-mouth (usually choked with shingle) for a couple of miles under the cliff, as far as the reef of rocks called Broad Ebb. West of the wall it extends, for a mile or so, to the rocks under Steep Head. Because Broad Ebb and the Steep Head rocks rise well above high-water mark they form natural groynes, and the beach is therefore contained within what is technically known as a compartment. Inside that compartment it shifts much or little with every tide, according to wind and weather, but it evidently does not go beyond, for very little shingle is at any time to be found among the rock groynes. East of Broad Ebb, moreover, the beaches contain a greater proportion of black flints, and to the westward of Steep Head more flat pebbles. Every cove that breaks into the cliffs forms a small compartment for a little beach that neither alters in character nor shifts outside. In front of the town,

where the boats are, the beach may be swept away till it is twenty feet below the wall, or be piled up level with the top. In a tide it will so change. Next to good catches fishermen like a good beach. They know only too well how much night watching, how much hauling up-over, they will be saved if they can leave their boats high in safety—out the way o'it!

To many visitors a man in a blue jersey is a sea-encyclopædia. But when they ask us, 'What time is it high tide?' we have very often to guess. What we do know is, whether the tides are pinching or on the move; whether, in other words, they are shortening or lengthening, neap or spring. At long tides (the longest is usually on the third day after new or full moon) every craft must be drawn up higher, and every man in the boating season, at low water, must get wet and strain himself to pieces, hauling and shoving boats across the flat sand at the bottom of the beach, or carrying ashore ladies no longer featherweight. Besides which, for an equal strength of wind, the waves possess an altogether greater force when the tides are on the move. A sou'westerly gale on the top of a long equinoctial tide keeps everybody out to beach, and sweeps the shingle

along. . . . 'My word,' says Benjie, 'what I have a-see'd shift herefrom before now, and boats washing across the road! And then they comes along to 'ee an' says, "Magnificent sea, isn't it, my man?"—"Iss," I tells 'em, "lay a hand on this here rope, if you please, an' haul! We'm all equal at these times, before seas like this. We was all born, an' us all got to die!" '

High water here does not synchronise with the flood-tide, nor, consequently, low water with the ebb. The flood begins running up alongshore, from west to east, about three hours before high water, and lasts for three hours after it; the ebb, from east to west, runs down for the six hours before and after low water. That it is which preserves our beach from being swept away from us by the prevailing westerly winds and piled up at the eastern end of its compartment; because, though westerly winds blow oftener, and, with the flood's aid, constantly carry the beach eastwards, an easterly wind, blowing against the flood, raises a bigger sea and shifts westward a far greater quantity of shingle in one tide. Hence easterly and westerly winds more or less balance one another.

When, during a southerly gale, the breakers

just reach the sea-wall, they pile the shingle on the top of the beach; but should they run well against the wall, then they rake the beach away, sweeping it east or west. The northerly off-shore wind which usually follows, lifts the shingle upwards, first making at high-water mark steep cops, or banks, that are bad to land against; and, finally, though the sea inshore be ever so calm, digging out gullies with hog-backed mounds between them; a formation which curiously resembles the gullies on the flanks of chalk downs.

Yet nothing can be accurately predicted of the beach. Winds, waves, tides—high or low, long or short—and even the weather in the Western Ocean may differ in a thousand ways as to strength and time, and all exercise their due combined effect; likewise the lay of the land. High water itself is seldom or never punctual to the tide-table. One morning last year high water ought to have been not later than eight o'clock. A stiffish breeze had been blowing the day before, but at peep o' day the sea, though still leaden and troubled, as it always is after strong winds, was not too rough for launching a small boat. Just before six, however, a lobster-potter was nearly capsized by three huge ground-swells that suddenly rose and broke outside his

boat. Thereafter the swell from the Western Ocean came hurling in, broad and swift rather than high, flecked with foam—great bodies of water carrying secondary waves on their backs. They began sweeping the shore, running up it not so much with violence as with power. In a few minutes boats and gear were awash all across beach. Men bundled out from their beds, hauling up-over where they could, but perforce leaving the boats down where there was no room, between the wall and the surf, to push them back for placing the shoots under their bows. Then the owners could only steady them with ropes, and wait helplessly. Looking across beach, under a lowering sky which seemed to flatten everything, one could see busy blue men jumping about among brown boats that lay no longer in orderly ranks, bows upwards, but were askew and even broadside on, between the unmoving wall and the vicious land-licking surf that darted upwards like hungry flames. Sometimes boats moved in jerks: that was men hauling. Then they glided: that was the sea had hold of them. Oars, ways, boxes, and gear galloped alongshore in the wash.

Wet to the skin, but with all our boats hauled upon the sea-wall, we waited: the sea heaved

pebbles at us. By a quarter to ten the tide seemed at last to be falling. We came in house to breakfast. No sooner had we sat down and taken off our boots than there was a noise of shouting. A couple of ground-swells, larger than all the rest, had driven four of our boats across the Front and had filled them with shingle and water, so that had they shifted again their own weight would have stove them in. That was at least two hours after nominal high tide. "'Twas a wonder you hadn' a-losted all they boats!' we were told. It was a wonder, but what else could we have done? We could not have foreseen a tide and swell that would come to our beach from the distant, invisible Atlantic.

A mad gale followed.

3. WINDS AND WAVES

'*Sudden gale!*' Benjie repeats with an immense scorn for the weather-foolish. '*Sudden,* did 'ee say? I've a-see'd this here coming these three days past. Didn't want no barometers for to foretell this, n'eet no newspapers nuther. They things! Why, 'tis the sky tells me, and the sea, and the clouds; an' they'd tell you too, if you studied 'em like I do. Didn' 'ee see they wool-packs lying low down on the horizon the day before yesterday? I did. "Ah, me boys!" says I, "you'm waiting there an' looking at us. You'm coming!" Didn' 'ee see this wind blowing outside there, out in the offing, last night? Black 'twas on the water, black as pitch, an' I see'd the water turning up white; an' in here 'twas a flat calm. 'Bout ten o'clock I see'd the little billow coming in. "Here 'tis then!" I says. "Come along if you'm coming." Lord! when I was out

here about one last night, after I'd had an hour's sleep an' a cup o' tay—while you was snug abed —the sea was crying, crying 'twas on the sand at low tide. An' you knows what it means when you hears thic.'

'I know'd something or other was coming,' a bystander remarks. 'My corn was stabbing all yesterday. . . . I got the rheumatics chronic in this left shoulder now. . . .'

'G'out wi' thy corns! They didn't tell thee what 'twas was coming, like the sky an' the sea told me. I an't got no corns; I knows how to cure they; my gran'mother told me; know'd a bit, they ol' women did; an' I an't got no rheumatics, though I been wet through in my time so long as you been born. An' you wouldn't hae no rheumatics nuther if 'twasn't for drinking so much o' thic there coffin-polish. I don't want no corns nor no rheumatics for to tell me what sort o' weather 'tis going to be; n'eet no double-X for to help me bear it. I don't need for 'em to tell me that us bain't finished wi' it eet. 'Tis going to blow harder afore it blows soft. Casn' thee hear the gulls screaming back over the houses like as if they was in pain? They knows so well as you an' me; aye, better! Pretty things!

'Tis looking wild, I tell thee—black an' hard. If a rainstorm comes 'twill veer in nor'west, an' blow off; but I don't say 'twon't back to the south-east'ard, an' then look out for Lord Runkum! He'll pile some drift-wood up for me down under cliff, Lord Runkum will; an' maybe bring us along a bit more beach. They big bass 'll be in 'long after this, next long tides, after the sand-eels an' brit [shoals of fry]. I see'd some o' 'em—gert busters—days ago. Mackerel maybe 'll play along shore too. 'Tis an ill wind that don't blow Benjie no good; like 'twill if you follows it right through; an' if 't don't, I knows how to put up wi' it like us have had to afore-time.'

Hitching up his antique trousers—a sign that the last word has been said—Benjie shakes himself like a dog just out of the water, and gloats over the hazards of the weather. 'Wild!' he repeats, 'I tell 'ee 'tis looking wild. Blow till thee's bust!' he exclaims, unknowingly echoing Shake-speare, 'an' then p'raps us'll hae it moderater.' There is only one wind of which he speaks mourn-fully, and that is the down-easter, east or north-east. 'Blow by day an' calm by night,' it is then, 'an' thee casn' do nort by nuther. How the

wind do hang when it gets up in thic there tatie-digging quarter, sure 'nuff!'

Fishermen who do nothing else may easily be baulked by weather too calm or too rough; but the proper longshoreman can find something to do at all times, even if it is nothing more than saving his boats and gear in the height of a storm. When he can catch nothing with nets, he often can with lines. When prawns and lobsters fail, there are mussels and winkles to be picked at low tide, or laver [edible seaweed] to be gathered off the sandy rocks and boiled according to various semi-secret recipes. When nothing to eat or sell can be got from the sea, jetsam for firewood can be collected alongshore, and hidden in safe places under the cliffs. And when the sea refuses to give up anything at all, living or dead—then the boats can always do with a brushful of paint and the nets with at least a little mending. Experts in the weather sometimes prefer to do nothing but talk about it; on the principle, admitted in most walks of life, though frequently dubbed laziness alongshore, that connoisseurship in anything whatever confers a right to consider one's talk about that thing as work—hard work. Witness the connoisseurs in music, pictures, theology, aye! and life it-

self. Like most men who have always, day and night, some job to do, your compleat longshoreman is a philosopher at leaving it undone. Benjie is the compleatest longshoreman I know. He is a pastmaster both of doing and not doing.

He has a pride in the winds and waves; more than pride, a joy. Though he cannot diminish the wind by a puff nor the waves by one jot of spray, yet by forecasting them he tames them to his purpose. They are pets of his; perhaps, essentially, not wilder than his cats. On account, it may be, of Dartmoor, upreared to the clouds in the midst of South Devon, and certainly owing to the configuration of the hills and valleys just around us, our weather is in some degree local, and does not exactly follow the great storm-systems of the Western Channel, unless they are both strong and wide. Many a day when we can see it blowing sou'west out in the offing we have in here a nor'west wind off land, with sunshine and shower. Always a wind from the north blows out of the valley, on the west side of the town as if it were a north-east wind and on the east side of the town as if it were a nor'west wind, so that on either tack there is a headwind, and a dig with the oars is the quickest way home. Benjie is

never taken aback by such purdling winds. He curses them for baffling him, and for fulfilling his expectations he approves them, all in the same breath. He is the winds' candid friend.

Immoderate weather is sufficiently predicted by the Meteorological Office, by barometers, and by chemical weather-glasses, the liquid inside of which fills with feathery crystals on the approach of storm—or, misleadingly enough, during fine frosty spells. On our local and on moderate weather Benjie is still the supreme authority, whatever science says. The rest of us know that brassy skies mean brazen weather; that a hard eastern horizon presages an easterly wind; that when the high white clouds, instead of racing out to sea with a brisk northerly breeze, stay almost motionless above it, then the wind will back out and blow harder; that little white ragged clouds—Benjie calls them messengers—floating underneath the darker higher masses, foretell wild weather; that southerly winds are felt first on the tops of the cliffs; that the weather changes usually on the turn of tide; that swells precede storms as well as follow them; that fine 'foxy' days, when hot sunshine burns the breeze up, don't last; and that sunset and dawn have a hundred secrets to

tell—all that we know, but we do not observe it with Benjie's keenness; and the delicate indications which are too small and too numerous to argue from, which can be felt as a whole rather than observed separately—those we cannot feel as Benjie does, nor sum them up so surely with his nearly infallible instinct.

Most of all, his pride in the winds and waves arises from this fact, that he has weathered all weathers himself. When younger men jeer at his speeches he is able to declare, 'I've lived rough; I've been hungry; I've gone barefooted; and I'd wear down you youngsters yet. Just you come 'long wi' me. . . .' But they don't go; they don't take up the challenge. Benjie would win. He has won already. After a long life, which no one could call successful in the worldly sense, he finds it in him to say often, 'If I lives to be a hundred—an' I hope I may. . . .' Unlike the deep-sea sailors, he seldom speaks of 'dirty' weather, preferring to call it wild. The choice of phrase contains his verdict on the winds and waves. Moderate weather ministers to his necessities, wild weather to the wildness of his heart.

That, indeed, is what the winds and waves do for us all. Therein lies their strange kinship with

mankind. They minister to our wildness—to that wildness which, after all these centuries of civilisation, we still feel to be the best part of us. And if they kill us. . . . Is not every passion a dangerous thing? Is not man's soul itself an explosive within him—the explosive which drives him, like a projectile, across time? Invalids near the sea have been known to grow madly excited with a rising gale, so much so that they had to be calmed with drugs, and, when the gale had blown itself out, were as if they lacked life. But it is good to see how the eyes of sturdy men, though bloodshot and half bunged-up with salt spray, will kindle in a storm. They will show embarrassment sometimes on finding themselves observed, as they might if you had suddenly come across them hugging their maid in a quiet corner.

Rarely, except in mid-ocean, when it has been blowing steadily for some time, can the height and speed of waves be in exact proportion to the wind. In here, if a southerly wind send a ground-swell along before it, then by the time it arrives it has already that swell to its advantage. Tides and currents add to or lessen its effect. Waves rise quicker in shoal water, but never to the same height as in deep. Rain flattens down the sea, like

oil, but not so much. The most experienced longshoreman cannot always tell why the sea makes so much faster at one time than another.

There is a tale hereabout of two fishermen brothers who flourished about a hundred years ago. In the very early morning one of them used to get out of bed and hold a lighted tallow dip outside the window. If it blew out, "'Tisn't fit, Bill,' he would say. 'Us can't go to sea. 'Tis blowing hard.' And if it did not go out, he would say, "'Tisn't no good, Bill. There isn't wind 'nuff for to sail a feather.' And then he would shut the window, crawl back to bed, and the brothers would put away another hour or two. Perhaps they were hard of hearing; for otherwise they had no need to use a candle. Just as different winds make different sounds among different sorts of trees, so every wind and every kind of wave—lop, swell, run, and so forth—has its own characteristic noise upon the beach. It is the first thing one listens for on waking up, and saves one many a shivering journey from a back room to a front window. All that is necessary is to know what the sea was like the evening before, and the time of high and low water. Easterly winds have in them more malice than westerly gales. A south-easter—Lord

Runkum—sounds as if it is driving against the beach in fighting order; whereas sou'westerly waves seem to be driven ashore pell-mell, and, as it were, against their wish. With easterly winds there is more rattle of shingle, but a less confused roar of water. A ground-swell with little wind thumps the shore more heavily than the lop raised by much wind, but there are quieter intervals between the thumps. When a northerly wind blows fairly true off land, there are either no waves at all, the merest murmur along the beach, or else, if there be a swell, it is utterly tired and lazy. Gusty west or west-sou'westerly winds are accompanied by the babble of little waves breaking sideways against the beach, and very rapidly one after another—such a sound as you may hear beside an inland lake. But the swell that those winds send in from the Channel, if they blow long enough, contains great bodies of water which pile themselves up off-shore and seem to hesitate, gathering together their forces before they break; then swirl in, foam-crested, and run far up the beach with a long scraping rattle. The progress of a gale can likewise be gauged without opening one's eyes to watch through the window the clouds bundling across a rectangular murky patch of sky.

First comes the busy scuffle of the lop, an almost continuous washing noise; then, as the wind rises and the sea makes, each wave and the rattle of its undertow gradually detaches itself from the general confusion of waters, until finally, at high tide, the thud of great breakers shaking the shore with their weight dwarfs the uproar between them almost to the similitude of silence, and keeps the ear for ever on a stretch of anticipation.

Then it is that the wind seems to be coming to us from right round the globe. Our bay ceases to be our boundary. We live no longer inhabitants of our one little spot. The same wind and waves that dare us to leave the beach, lest we lose boats or gear, make us, in feeling, inhabitants of the whole wide world. Hence the power, at such times, of the one phrase, *All together, boys!* For we, a handful of men, concerning ourselves deeply in small matters, are brought face to face with the boundless.

4. SQUALLS

FIFTY years or more Benjie has been knocking about in little boats, and he declares at least once a week, "'Tis better any day to row wi' two oars than to sail wi' two reefs. There ain't never no dependence to be placed in they squally winds. *I* knows 'em!' He knows them because he has sailed in them so often at all times, both day and night. The twenty-mile stretch of coast along which he picks his periwinkles, catches his prawns, fishes for mackerel and herring (not often now), and plays with the sea-birds, is nothing if not squally. Our home beach, as one might say, lies at the mouth of the largest of several deep combes that run southward, through the hog-backed Devon hills, to the sea. On either side, the great red cliffs, splashed and topped with green, rise steeply five hundred feet, then dip to sea-level, then rise again. Down the combes, which narrow and

deepen as they approach the sea, the northerly wind gathers force. From the gaps in the cliffs it springs. There is something cat-like in its malice, in its agility, in its very repose between successive puffs. Well does Benjie speak of its blowing out 'spiteish' from the land. Inexperienced people can hardly credit what it is like half a mile to sea, even when they are plainly told; and this is the sort of thing which frequently happens when visitors are about: The day is brilliantly sunny, the sea calm; or, at all events, there is no lop or swell. Some swift dark patches on the water do but throw into relief its sparkle elsewhere. Close alongshore there is hardly a ripple, only breathings upon the surface; further out the wavelets are tipped with white; the offing looks frothy (or is it only sunshine?) and the skyline is curiously jagged. Any one who troubles to glance overhead can see that the lofty white clouds are wind-blown and are driving rapidly to sea. Few, if any, boats are out. On such a day a gentleman and two ladies, perhaps, will stroll across beach. They want a trustworthy and, for preference, a picturesque man. They approach, therefore, a couple of old fishermen, and speak to the one who pretends better to a profound

respectfulness. 'Boatman, can you take us out for a sail? Is there wind enough? Eh?'

'Well, sir, 'tisn't much of a time, sir.'

'Why not?'

'I wouldn't go to-day if I was you, sir.'

'But why?'

''Cause 'tisn't hardly fit, sir.'

'Why isn't it fit?'

'You'll get wet, sir.'

The ladies look down their clothes. The gentleman assumes the air of an army officer or a salted mariner. 'Oh, *we* don't mind wet! Besides, the sea is calm—almost too calm. I like it a bit rough.'

'Iss, sir, so 'tis calm in here; but 'tisn't fit, I do assure you.'

'Why isn't it fit? Don't you want a job, my man? Rather lounge about here? Eh? Why isn't it *fit*, as you call it?'

'Why, bother the man!' the less respectful fisherman bursts out. 'An't he told 'ee for why? Why, 'cause 'tisn't fit! That's for why! How many more times do 'ee want telling the reason why? *'Cause 'tisn't fit!*'

'Better to go along t'other end o' the beach, sir,' says the first fisherman. 'Per'aps they'll

take 'ee out therefrom. *I* shan't.' And when the party has moved out of earshot, if not before, he remarks: 'Fair southerly wind, an' they sort o' people don't come near 'ee. An' when 'tis squally, fit to blow 'ee out of the water, then they'm mazed for to go to sea.'

It is not good to have landsmen aboard a small open boat in squally weather. They shift about so slowly; they seem to be all legs; and they appreciate neither the urgency of a squall, nor, when wet and alarmed, the stiffness of a well-handled craft. But for a crew that knows its boat and knows the coast, a wind that is squally (within limits) is the most sporting wind of all. Books on boat-sailing usually say, in effect, if not in so many words: 'Keep a sharp look-out to windward for squalls. They are indicated by a darkening of the water. When the squall strikes, luff up. If the squall is strong, ease the sheet as well. And if the squall is both strong and long, haul down and shorten sail.'

Benjie's directions are much more precise. 'If 'tis only cat's-paws,' he says, 'you can often dodge 'em. But if the puff comes black on the water, you look to your tiller and luff up; an' when you sees 'em coming green, jest you keep the sheet in

your hand, an' luff up an' ease the sheet off too; an' if they rushes upon 'ee white and roaring, all of a boil an' froth, then you let fly the sheet an' reef down snugger, or haul down an' take to your oars, an' get in out o'it so quick as you can. Don't you play wi' they shiny harum-scarum jokers. My senses! Don't you get taken aback by one o' they!'

Luffing up—bringing boat, and the sail with it more nearly into line with the wind, so that the lateral, capsizing, pressure of the wind becomes less—involves steering out of the course. Easing off the sheet does not; for then only the sail is slacked into line with the wind. Either method, or both, can be used in a boat with one lug-sail, or a lug and mizzen. Fishermen, who like to keep a hand free and therefore make fast the sheet with a slippery hitch, become marvellously clever at gauging beforehand the strength of a squall and luffing up to it just sufficiently. Seldom do they lose way on a boat or drop over upon the other tack. 'Touch her up through' is an expression of theirs for beating to windward through squalls, and no phrase could hit off better the delicacy of the operation, as they do it, and their sensitive handling of the tiller. Usually they seem to

mistrust working the sheet as a means of standing up to puffs; they leave it fast, letting fly in emergency; but working the sheet, carefully done with gear that runs free, should be as safe, and prove quite as speedy, as luffing. A very sporting race might be sailed over a squally course by two boats, one of which agreed to luff up to squalls, leaving the sheet fast; the other to 'saw' its sheet and hold its course. In few places, however, do squalls blow true enough for such a match. Squalls are as various as the clouds and almost as beautiful. They are indeed clouds—water-clouds, owing their forms as much to the wind as the clouds in the sky do.

At Steep Head the highest of the cliffs bulges out into the sea and ends abruptly. On the west side the cliff slopes gently downwards to Refuge Cove. To the east is a gap called the Windgate. Steep Head stands in the path of the winds escaping from the inland hills and valleys. Air-eddies rush around it in all directions, so much so that, rowing beneath it with the wind northerly, it is sometimes hardly possible to make way against easterly puffs, and in sailing there with the wind north-east the boat may have to be put round to face a westerly squall. When the wind is

strong nor'west, the Windgate squall, which is regular and powerful, stretches in a broad bluish-green line for a couple of miles south-east to sea. At the base of the cliff and in the little bays on either side, purple cat's-paws flit fanwise on the water, curve about, dodge the rocks—like one-winged butterflies—and disappear as suddenly as they arose. They seem to be formed by bundles of wind, as it were, dropping from a height upon the sea. Puffs too long and strong to retain the cat's-paw shape strike water further from the cliff; they are commonly a purple-black where the wind presses most, and behind and in front of a slightly opalescent green, as if a few gallons of milk had been spilt into the green water. Sometimes—for reasons connected, no doubt, with the angle of the wind's impact—the colouring is reversed, and only the edges of the squall are purple. Like that in colour are the 'shiny harum-scarum jokers' which follow a boat round and catch it aback. Still stronger puffs proceed straight out to sea and make it feather-white, or raise wonderful streaks of foam, like lace without any cross-stitches. Whether the streaks diverge, or appear to converge—and they do both—probably depends also on the angle between wind and water. A little

out from Steep Head is a spot called the Doldrums, the exact position of which varies with the wind. Squalls dart around it, but do not often break into its calm. Fishermen steer a mile to sea in order to avoid the place, because it must be crossed with the help of oars, and because, on emerging from it, one never knows from which side the first squall is coming. Steep Head is bad to pass; I have seen a boat beneath it let the sheet fly half-a-dozen times and haul down twice; but it is then that squalls are at their loveliest. Watched from the top of the Head, they are the winds' playfulness made visible. For men in a boat they are the winds' caprice, and at night the winds' devilry, only half visible—spiteful, tormenting, and uncanny.

5. FOGS

Benjie warned us all right. While he was helping shove the boat off the beach he took his hands away from the gunwale, stood more than upright, and looked keenly out to sea. 'Aye!' he said, 'southerly wind, an' the leastis bit of a chill in it. I've a-see'd fogs come in on a day like this, for all 'tis the middle o' summer. Where be you young fellers bound for?'

'Down along,' we replied.

We didn't tell him we were after cakes and scald cream because Benjie, having in youth made a virtue of necessity, now, in his old age, scorns too many meals a day.

'Four o'ee, is it?' he continued. 'An' all o'ee skipper, I'll lay. Well, jest you take care to keep a good look-out. You bain't passengers on a steamship, remember. Fogs don't matter to the likes o' they; all they got to do is to bide quiet

where they be to, 'cause if the skipper runs 'em ashore or into a collision, they got to go, an' if he don't, they an't; 'tis *his* look-out, not theirs, an' they can't help o'it one way or t'other. They an't got no responsibility for their own lives aboard they there steamers; the crew's got that; but in these yer little packets you'm all crew, an' jest you keep a good look-out. If you sees a fog rising, you get in under land so quick as you can. You won't hurt there, not unless it comes on to blow, an' if 't does, the fog 'll lift. An' if you don't come home, I reckon I can row down under cliff an' find 'ee. Don't you be in too much hurry to hoist your sail,' he added with his sea-gull's chuckle. 'Row to the out-ground o' Broken Rocks, an' then if you hoistis sail, you'm going to fetch they there cream-pans, you'm after, in one tack!'

We did; and we ate the cake and cream lying in a circle round a teapot, on a beach so sunny that the heat of the pebbles struck through jerseys and shirts to our elbows. On our homeward journey the wind dropped, whilst the lop still kept up, making the mast jig in its step, the sail flap to it, and the boat plunge about on the water like an empty barrel. Although two of the crew were fishermen's boys, and the third was a land boy

mazed to go to sea (he wears navy uniform now instead of corduroys that stiffen like boards with salt-water), they began to be yellow in the face—not with sea-sickness exactly, so much as with what one might call sea-cream-sickness. Therefore, for their stomach's sake, I got them to take the oars, and a bad look-out was kept—a bad look-out until one of us said: 'Southerly wind again to-morrow. Look at thic bank o' cloud out there.'

The one who was nicknamed Captain took the trouble to look. 'Clouds, you fool!' he exclaimed; ''Tis fog! 'Tis a gert fog-bank.'

We were a mile and a half to sea, and a couple of miles from home. We started rowing hard. The fog-bank crept towards us still faster. Useless to try to escape it. A bird must feel so when a cat, flattened to the ground, crawls down on it without apparent motion.

Soon the warm light of the sun was polluted by a cold whiteness. The sun itself, for a passing moment a shining round thing in the heavens, disappeared altogether. The fog was upon us, thickening. In an instant the great high red cliffs to landward were snuffed out as if they had been a shuttered light. The fog got down our throats,

putting us in mind of suffocation nightmares. We were curiously alone; no land, no sun, no clouds, no sky; hardly any sea; not even darkness visible! And the thickness of the fog was parting us, as it were, from one another. We even spoke louder.

There was nothing to guide us. Nobody aboard possessed a compass. We steered by the lay of the waves, keeping careful watch on them; for the direction in which they are travelling is not easy to tell in a fog, and had the boat turned right round we should have gone on rowing straight out to sea without knowing it.

A drifter loomed up very close to us. 'Where be us?' they inquired.

'A mile to the sou'west'ard.'

'You'm not going right,' they shouted.

'You follow us!' we replied.

They did put themselves on the same course as ours (so much for youthful assurance!), and in a minute, because we could row our smaller boat the faster, they were hidden by mist. We were alone again.

After we had pulled some distance further, and felt almost certain that we were rowing out to sea, we saw suddenly, not very far from us, a pair of

boots. There they were! a pair of boots with feet in them; and they moved up and down laboriously. To the boots legs added themselves, trousered legs; then hips and waist and shoulders. It was like an apparition, like the creation from nothingness of a modern man, clothes and all. At last, just where the fog was darkest and tinged with red, owing to the red cliffs behind it, there appeared the complete figure of a man walking on the beach beneath the low-lying cloud. We had been, without knowing it, not a couple of hundred yards from land!

While we rowed home with a cheerier stroke, the fog gradually lifted itself up the face of the cliffs, like a balanced canopy of gossamer fabric suspended in the air by countless threads of infinite fineness and elasticity, until finally—as if the bushes at the top of the cliff were smouldering—very slowly, very gently, very lingeringly, it drifted away over land.

The boat we had spoken followed us ashore, and when Benjie reproached us with trying to row back, instead of waiting for the fog to lift, we retorted gaily: 'Well, anyhow, Benjie, we got here, and we piloted a drifter home into the bargain.' Benjie, at that, began a discourse on

the fogs he has experienced in his sixty years, on ships ashore, and on ships he has found in the fog that had lost their way.

It is a proud event for a fisherman when he goes in search of a ship—most often an excursion steamer—that is lost near shore in a fog, finds her, tells her where she is, and guides her into safety. 'My senses!' he will say, 'to think o' they there captains navigating up an' down this coast all the year round, an' then depending on the likes o' us in our little craft, what an't got no navigation cistificates, for to bring 'em into safety direc'ly there's the leastis bit o' fog. They ought to be 'shamed o' theirselves! I don't never lose meself, however thick 'tis. I always knows where I be, when 'tis anywhere near land, an' 'tisn't often I carries a compass, 'cept drifting, though I got a fine one put away in house, only I don' know where to lay me hand on it.' Many fishermen (not all) do seem to have an extra sense, which tells them when they are near land, especially near cliffs. Whether it is that they can detect a back-wash from the shore, a hardly perceptible change in the boat's motion (boats drag in shallow water); whether a faint echo, or a deadness in the air warns them; or whether, knowing tides, currents, boat,

and their own stroke, they are able to estimate the distance they have covered—they cannot explain. Simply, they *feel* they are near land. And that, indeed, may be the correct explanation; for if the human body is so sensitive to changes of pressure that its health varies with the height of the barometer, and if, as scientists have proved, high masses of land can deflect a pendulum sideways, against gravity, it is possible that a cliff, by slightly altering the pull of gravity on a man, may make him aware of its nearness.

The stretch of coast where we follow the fishing is so far free from mistiness that it was not till long after I ceased going to sea as a mere gen'leman, well-nigh as irresponsible as a steamboat passenger; not, in fact, till my first night's herring-drifting as mate, that the compass which I always carried after the cakes and cream trip was of any real use in steering home through a fog of the worst kind—one of those black north-easterly fogs that come *in* the wind as well as in the absence of wind.

We were drifting in Seaton Bay in February. When we arrived there after six or seven miles rowing with the sweeps, we remarked on the blackness of the sky behind Seaton, and laughed, because against such a background the houses of Seaton,

built along a bar of shingle, looked like a row of poll-parrots on a perch; and almost as we laughed the north-easter came piping down the valley of the Axe till the bay was feather-white and all of a hiss with broken wavelets. "*Tis* a black ol' shop!' the Ol' Man complained. 'I'd sooner hae six nights west than one night east up here. 'Tis more homely like, west. One thing, us needn't to shoot if us bain't minded, but if us do, 'tisn't no good hauling in 'fore two or three in the morning, 'cause the tide won't serve for landing. What time did 'ee say 'twas? Seven o'clock? Four hours, we been, getting up here! Come on, then! Let's heave 'em out if we'm going to. Might pick up a night's work.'

We shot six forty-fathom nets, made fast the road, boiled up some cold tea on a paraffin flare blazing smokily in an old pot. Then we put on all the clothes we could find, stuffed our feet into sacks, and lay down for'ard; but not to sleep, for even the ability to doze off with numb feet does not greatly help one to go to sleep in a north-easter that bites through the clothes all over one's body. "Tis going to come snow, I believe,' the Ol' Man said. 'Pretty turn-out o't! Where be us now? I reckon this yer strong flood-tide is

going to drive us up to Lyme afore 'tis time to haul in.'

The moon went to bed in a shining mist. We watched on, sometimes kneeling against the side to peep out over, sometimes standing up to stamp our feet. Seaton lamps were put out; nothing but Beer light, on the western side of the bay, remained. When it grew black around we kept watch on the North Star and its Pointers, which slowly sneaked down the heavens till they almost ceased to point. If we could not tell how far east the flood-tide was going to drive us, we wanted at least to be sure where north was. Now and then the wind, gathering strength, made the boat kick like a live thing. Baling out warmed us; hauling in half a net, to see how the herrings were—or wern't—going in, warmed us still more; but greater chilliness followed, so that we almost looked forward to the immense labour of hauling in-board nearly half-a-mile of wet and heavy net.

And in such a scuffle, against such a breeze, the hauling in, hand over hand, foot by foot, buoy to buoy, was a full hour and a half's work. We could not attend to much else. At the end, when we stood up to blow and to look around—there was nothing to look at! Stars, Beer light, everything,

had gone. We were in an empty waste of blackness, with only the white wave-tops perking out of it. And after drifting so many hours we didn't know exactly where we were. It was not a thick fog so much as a state of air in which nothing could be seen. It was as if the air, without losing its transparency, had suddenly turned colour and gone black.

In place of the mainsail we hoisted to the mainmast an old mizzen.

'Got thy compass?' the Ol' Man asked.

'Aye!'

'Can 'ee see ort?'

'No.'

'Can 'ee hear ort, then?'

'Nort 't all!'

'Thee's better get up for'ard, out the way o' the lamp, an' see if thee ca'st make out Beer light.'

Not a glimmer could I catch sight of, though I strained my eyes till they saw stars of themselves. I did not even know in which direction to look.

'Come aft again wi' thy compass,' said the Ol' Man, 'an' sit under the lamp an' tell me where I be steering to. Where's west now?'

'Over the port bow.'

'Well, I reckon if us steers a little bit south o'

west that ought to get us out o' this yer bay, past Beer Head all right. If us urns [runs] on they rocks there, wi' this weight o' nets in the boat, us won't get off in a hurry. Be I steering west now?'

Beer Head being white—the southernmost chalk in England—it shows up so little on the clearest of nights that we didn't expect to see it in the fog. My compass, moreover, had in it a tiny ball of dirt which jammed the needle, and needed jerking out of the way every time a bearing was taken. While the Ol' Man stood shivering at the tiller I sat against the mizzen halyard, on which the lamp was made fast, and jerking, peering into, the compass, called out the course every minute or so.

'You'm just west of south.'

'Eh?'

'You'm just west of south!—You'm north of west.'

'Eh?'

'You'm north of west!—You'm going sou'sou'-east.'

'Eh?'

'Casn' thee hear? Thee't going sou'sou'east! —East 'tis now, due east!'

'Eh?'

'How on earth can I tell 'ee if thee's keep thy cap down over thy ears? East! Bit north of east now. . . .'

What with the flickering of the lamp, the ball of dirt in the compass, uncertainty, and being obliged to repeat everything, I could have taken up the tiller and beaten it about the Ol' Man's head. At one time or another we steered for every quarter of the compass. Near the cliffs, where deep combes open to the sea, the wind purdles around, as we say, so that it is impossible to steer a boat simply by keeping her up to it. We sighted a light which must have been in Beer village, though we couldn't be certain then that it was not a drifter's riding lamp further out to sea. We closed up that light, though again we couldn't be certain that it was not the fog hiding it. We heard surf on a shore. We heard surf again—on the wrong side of the boat! We heard sea-gulls fly out, screaming, from a cliff. Then we knew that we were under Beer Head—close under it—close enough to bring the sea-gulls out.

'Tiller down!' I shouted. 'Put her about! Tiller down, quick.'

'What?'

'Put the tiller down! Steer out! Casn' thee

hear? We'm near enough Beer Head to bring the gulls out.'

'We'm. . . . *Be us?*'

With a scuttle and lounge, at last the Ol' Man put the tiller down. The drifter swerved roundly out to sea. Once past white Beer Head, we knew that due west would bring us home. All along on the starboard beam we could hear the rushing, as it sounded in the fog, of surf on a shingle shore. Presently we glimpsed the looming cliffs, a mountainous haze within a haze, over the flat foggy sea; and before long they took on an outline, but not such a one that we could tell by it how far down the coast we were. Then, in as little time as it took us to say what was happening, dawn stared out with the face of a sullen idiot. The cliff looming above us turned out to be the cliff next to home. We saw our beach, our boats, the front of the little town, and, last of all, our own beacon light. It was as if we had returned to the world after a night's journeying in extra-terrestrial chaos; we had been so utterly alone; more divided from all that mankind sees and hears and touches than ever a prisoner in his cell, more distant from all the familiar things which prove to a man from moment to moment that he is

'Our own Beacon Light.'

indeed alive, a dweller on earth, a man amongst men.

'I hate these yer fogs!' the Ol' Man said on landing, with years of animosity in his voice. But I could not entirely agree. Fog alongshore is a part of coast scenery. By varying the immobile cliffs it gives them life. By hiding the sea it gives even the sea spaciousness. Not long ago a northerly wind, suddenly springing off land, drove a fog to the south'ard in great billowy clouds that rested on the water, and it seemed as if the heavens had come to earth, as if the sky was lowered and turned upon its side. And I have seen the lifeboat put to sea on a foggy day. High in the prow she was, high in the stern, and apparently motionless except for the sweeping of the oars, which was just discernible. Misty and mysterious on the water, she looked like some ancient galley coming to land after a voyage that had lasted hundreds of years. Men of old time, long since dead, might have been expected to jump out of her when she beached. Through that fog history peeped. For fog, which takes away from ships their reckonings, is powerful to destroy also the reckonings of men's minds.

6. OLD BOATS

THEY lie along the beach, the old boats, more scattered than the old men and pensioners who sit in a row on the seat under the south wall, and much more silent, yet saying as plainly, 'My work's done. It's only a dead-calm sea I shall face any more. Do 'ee mind the time?. . . .' Aye! do 'ee mind the time when this was a sea-worthy craft that brought in great catches of herring and sailed for the offing at dawn—fair wind out and fair wind home—and earned food for two generations of children, and saved men's lives, and ran ashore in that gale? My God, what a sea it was that night! and dark! and raining! and cold!

Old boats, like old men, are the historians of fishing—saved, it might seem, from the scrap-heap expressly for that purpose. As the old men hold one's ear, so the old boats catch one's eye, lying

there, along the beach. Their faded paint is of colours favourite long ago, and it is laid on as they used to do then. Deep-keeled, beamy, and high in the gunwale, their unwieldiness was no drawback at a time when by day or through the night there was plenty of help on the beach, before fishermen began looking out after softer jobs on land, for themselves and for their children. There was space to move about in those old boats. That was the reward of men who could handle cross-handed their long heavy oars, instead of the spoon-bladed paddles which have since come into use. Though a few of them were so proudly built that they are as clean in their lines now as when they left the shipwright's yard, the greater number are in outline shaky and broken, like old buildings drawn by bad artists who in that way only can convey a notion of antiquity. Among the varnished gigs, punts, skiffs, and dinghies of to-day, the old boats are simply—old boats. Dead men's names remain on some of them.

When the clouds called woolpacks have gathered up in the sou'western sky, and gulls are screaming over the house-tops, and a ground-swell, ambling shorewards, already heralds wild weather; and when, too, the Meteorological Office (but so it

is nowadays!) has foretold a gale,—men go along the sea-wall looking down at the beach, questioning if the boats are high enough up, or if, in order to avoid night-watching, they ought to be hauled up-over the sea-wall itself, out the way of the surf. Then, for once, the old boats receive attention, and some one says, 'Why don't So-and-so take a sledge-hammer to thiccy ol' craft o' his? 'Tis only labour wasted, I reckon, to haul thic thing up-over the wall. Better her'd wash away an' be done with. Her's fit for firewood, nort else. *Her* won't never put to sea no more.' Nevertheless, the same man refuses to scrap his own old boats, and that old boat, when the time for hauling up comes, will not be left behind. Though her weight strain men to pieces, though laughter and derision greet her, up she comes. Only, be careful in hauling; don't jerk; steady does it; for the cut-rope [painter] of an old boat is apt to be very rotten; and while she is balanced on the edge of the wall, with her broad bows high in the air and one more pull needed to bring her home, the hauling crew, as likely as not, will find themselves suddenly on their backs, legs waving, heads and elbows bruised, and a slack rope's end in their hands. Back bumps the stern of the old boat

upon the shingle. But a new cut-rope is made fast through the fore end of her keel; she is hauled right up and across to the roadway gutter; and there she squats, to be lowered back to the beach in fine weather, to be cursed again another day.

Toil, not price or rarity, still less picturesqueness, has conferred a value on these old boats. Toil created love for them. Left out in all weathers, so that the rain turns their bottom-boards green (if they have any) and the dry east wind starts their timbers, no procession bears them like coffins into winter quarters, nor brings them out again when the gulls are nesting under the cliffs and southerly winds blow gentlier. Neglected, cursed, and laughed at, still they hold a place in some man's life, in some fisher family's existence; still they are faithfully looked after when storm reduces fishermen's work to a primitive fight with the sea, and it's *All together, boys!* As veterans they enforce a tacit respect on those to whom they are a nuisance. "Twould be a grief to him if thic there ol' craft was losted.'

How carefully the old boats must have been scraped—spattered with blood, too, from knocked and bleeding knuckles;—how patiently they must

have been allowed to dry, for their paint to lie upon them so long! Look at the rowlocks, solid oak or elm, worn a couple of inches deep by innumerable strokes of the oars. This was, this is, the boat in which they rowed from Devon to the East-country, digging at the oars all the way; that, the boat in which old Hobbledy Bill rowed for three hours to try and pass Steep Head against a westerly wind, then broke a thole-pin, and before he could whittle down another, was drifted back again to where he started. He couldn't do it now, nor could the old boat; but he'd be willing to try, if he had his health and strength, and the old boat had hers too.

For in his day men expected little else except toil at the oars. Those old boats, for all their virtues, sailed badly to windward. They carried, as a rule, only a small storm-sail for running before the wind. 'Better to row than reef,' men used to say. 'Drive her through it,' we say now. And again they used to tell the youngsters: 'A man what won't put out his win'ard oar is a man too lazy to be trusted wi' a sail at all. Let 'en row!' Since then, jibs and mizzens have come into use. Drifters, the most conservative of boats, have drop-keels to keep them up to the wind, and some

of them have even forsaken for a handier rig the old dipping lugsail that is so powerful with a leading wind, so tricky to manage in a seaway, and so beautifully like a gigantic sea-bird's wing. If the old men could return, how scared, how shocked they would be to see a drifter, laden with nets, drop-keel down, jib, standing lug, and mizzen all spread, ploughing out to windward with the spray flying right over her. "'Tisn't fitty,' they would say. Their own aim was a 'comfor'able sort o' leisurable craft'; ours is to get there quick. Fish were more plentiful in their day. They could afford to take their time; they were willing to give their labour. The catches those old boats used to bring ashore!

The newer boats are mistrusted by the old fishermen who survive—by Benjie, for instance—however great their advantages. The quickness that they have on the water, as if their centre-keel was a pivot to spin on, is an annoyance, their wetness in the wind a constant exasperation. What did it matter to those old men if, in tacking, the boat missed stays? They had the windward oar out: they rowed her round. Benjie sometimes declares that his old craft is still for all purposes the best upon the beach—with a

little doing to her. It would be hard to argue with him that she was not the best, once. He knows. He used her for forty years, and he threatens to fit her out for sea again. Whether or no she is the oldest of all the old boats, and what her name originally was, nobody seems sure. The *Rover* she is called, on account of his having roved in her so far and so often, day and night, east and west under the cliffs, in search of the many things which can be found there by one to whom the rocks are as familiar as his native streets and alleys. Of late years she has also been nicknamed the *Fearnaught,* because she will never go to sea again and therefore has naught to fear. Her stern is stove in, and daylight can be seen between her strakes. Her sail is rotten, her cordage gone, her oars broken, her mast split. Her paint, once white, is the colour of a dirty sky in thick weather. Everything loose in her—bottom-boards, stern-seats, the step even—was long since stolen for firewood. Blades of grass spring up along her keel. But in Benjie's eyes, in his memory rather, she is still seaworthy. One of us once said, in chaff, when we were standing by ready to haul her up-over the sea-wall, 'Why don' 'ee bring out thy sledge, Benjie, or just let

her wash away? Her'll never be no good to thee, n'eet to nobody else.'

Benjie let go the cut-rope.

'No good!' he shouted, raising his voice not alone because of the noise the sea was making. 'No good! Time you've been half so many miles as this yer's carried me, you can talk 'bout *no good.* If I was to do her up her'd go farther yet than some o' 'ee's ever been, or's likely to go. I tell 'ee I'd rather lose me drifter an' all her nets an' gear than hae ort happen to this one. Haul away! Haul away, there, an' let's get her into safety!'

Believing what he said, we hauled with a will and silently, a little ashamed. If Davy Jones were to give him the alternative of losing either his drifter or else the *Rover,* he might be forced to let the *Rover* go, because he depends on the drifter for part of his living, whereas the *Rover's* earning days are done. Even then an angry defiance of such a hard alternative might cause him to send the drifter to Davy Jones and destruction, if only by that sacrifice the *Rover* could be saved. For she is the old boat he loves. She is as one of his limbs. 'Tis to be hoped she will last him out; that he will be spared the loss of

her. And when he himself has to go it will be best if a storm arises, if great waves sweep her off the beach, carry her out to sea, and grind her into chips and splinters too small for firewood. Then they will be able to haunt the rocks together. Otherwise, firewood she will be.

II

7. FISHERMEN'S HOUSES

It is at school that children get hold of such notions: 'Peuh! why can't us move into one o' they nice little new houses up on land, instead o' biding in this yer mucky ol' hole?' At first it used to make me very fearful of having to leave this salty old house, founded on the shingle itself, for a prim, cramped, jerry-built box, one of two interminable rows, a mile or more from the sea. Now I realise better that such chatter is only an echo of the reproaches levelled at us by a progress-proud generation which will disappear after its life of fuss and worry—a life no happier than, if so happy as, ours here—leaving the world but little different, and men, at heart, the same as ever.

Fishermen and their habitations have been looked down upon, it seems, for a good many years. John Leland's *Itinerary*—that marvellously vivid collection of topographical jottings, written

down in King Henry VIII.'s time—is full of phrases like, 'Newlin ys a poore fischar toune,' and, 'The town of Seton is now but a meane thing, inhabited by fischar men.' Yet, as if in revenge, Leland's sentences have never so living a tone as when he is talking about those same fishing towns and villages. Who, except an antiquary, wants to know that 'In the south isle' of Sonning church 'be 2. or 3. Vouesses buried, kinswomen to Bisshop of Saresbyri,' or that 'The personage of Axminster is impropriate to the chirch of York'? 'Tis done with; dead and buried; like the Bishop of Salisbury's kinswomen. But any day along the sea-wall, just such talk as this of Leland's can be heard, and ten to one it will interest whosoever listens: 'There was begon a fair pere for socour of shippelettes at this Bereword [Beer]: but ther cam such a tempest a 3. yeres sins as never in mynd of men had before was sene in that shore, and tare the pere in peaces. . . . By al the north se yn Cornewall be sundry crekes, wher as smawle fisshers bootes be drawne up to dry land, and yn fayr wether the inhabitans fysche with the same. At Paddestow haven, Lanant, and S. Yes [Lelant and St. Ives], the balinggars and shyppes ar saved and kept fro al weders with keyes or peres.'

As Benjie says to-day: 'My senses! they got fine harbours an' fine craft to Cornwall. 'Tis a country created, like, for boats and shipping. I've a-put in, 'fore now, to Penzance and St. Ives, an' an't I a-catched they master-congers off Falmouth, here's luck!'

In the ancient book, the notes on fishermen and fishing ports sound the most modern, because to put it the other way round, in modern times fishermen live in the most ancient manner. They depend on that which is changeless in its changeableness, the sea and luck. They have the more primitive conservatism of men to whom two days are never the same—a conservatism backed by the active fatalism (as opposed to the passive variety) which comes from the hazards of fishing and the sea. Having few things certain in life, they hold the more stubbornly to those that are. 'If the fish be there, us'll hae 'em, an' if they bain't us won't. That feeling they carry home. 'What will be, will be; 'tis the way o'it, an' us can't help o'it; you can but plug out and do your best.' That is commonly their philosophy. Therefore they stay in the oldest houses, speak the oldest forms of dialect (among themselves), keep to their customs and their own rig, and,

indeed, preserve themselves against odds that would kill off most other people. They rub along, as they put it.

Go where you will—to Folkestone, St. Ives, Brixham, Clovelly, or across the water to Boulogne, Le Portel, and the other northern French ports—the fishing quarters have all a close resemblance. They differ as much from putrid slums as from those modern dwellings which are designed in their entirety beforehand, on paper, and into which families are tipped like fish into barrels. Most people nowadays have to grow into their houses; fishermen's houses have grown to them, and in so doing have become humanized. They are higgledy-piggledy, up and down, huddled and patched; their roadways, or, as is often the case, their stepways, are narrow; and they have out-houses stuck upon them wherever possible; for fishermen do not like storing gear in their front bedrooms, though many are obliged to do so, and many's the bride that has thrown her wedding garments upon a pile of fishy herring-nets.

Fishermen are obliged to live near their boats, seeing they never know what hour of the day or night they may be called out. When gear grows old, they had always rather make shift than get

new, and being seamen, they have usually the handiness to do it. How often is one told, on remarking that a rope, or a strake, or a spar, ought to be replaced: 'Ah, let it bide, let it break! 'Tis different wi' the likes o'us from what 'tis wi' gen'lemen's boats. When *they* sees summut be wore, or a rope's losted its nature, they orders a new 'un; but the likes o'us, us lets it bide till summut carries away, an' then us *knows* 'tis done for, an' nort more's to say about it!' A certain tenderness, too, for that which is old and has served well puts out of mind the possibilities of danger from breakage.

As it is with boats and gear, so it is with buildings; and hence it is that fishermen's houses are huddled, patched, and old, and above all picturesque. They fit the men around whom they have grown, and whose harbours they are, as the placid, dirty, walled-in, sheet of water down below is a harbour for the larger craft, or the littered beach outside a berth for the little boats; and, continually buffeted by the salt cleanly winds, they fall to pieces without, as it were, ever becoming rotten. In house, the shipshape neatness of the mariner tradition disputes power with the unorderliness of fishermen, who, in whatever

leisurely fashion they prepare for work or lounge about between whiles, almost always set to work in a hurry. For if you mean to brave the sea in a big ship, you may take your time; but if you have to outwit the sea, in small boats, then the sea's time must be yours, and unless you hasten you cannot follow it up.

8. SEMAPHORE

Semaphore is a longshore baby.

Two halves do not make a whole for Semaphore; she is half her father's, half her mother's, and half mine. She was born in my writing-room, where there is a large flat white bed, usually piled up with brain-babies in the shape of books. Susan Jim declares that she has never had a baby in such a draughty room, and I can quite believe it, especially when the wind is blowing half a gale from the sou'west and salty drops ooze through the rotten old window frame. The sound of the sea fills the room like the scent of flowers; a scent that flows and ebbs with each wave outside; but Semaphore, although she is a fisherman's daughter—his thirteenth child counting the dead ones—and as such is in a sense an offspring of the sea—Semaphore must have heard her grannie's chackle long before the sea's voice

soaked into her consciousness; for the month was February, and she was probably born with the window shut.

The Polar Eskimos hold that each human being consists of a soul, and a body, and a name. Jim, the Ol' Man, and Susan Jim gave Semaphore her body and called her soul unto it. Her name, that part of her, is mine. When I returned from the exile into which her coming drove me, my kitchen corner, that used to contain boots and guernseys and socks for darning, was occupied by a cradle and a squeak. Over the cradle, which rocked in bumps on the uneven stone floor, was hung a line of tiny many-coloured garments. At intervals, being hungry, the squeak squeaked. A crazy patch-work quilt heaved feebly. (The heave is less gentle nowadays.) Two tiny red arms waved themselves about; jerked and waved. 'Twas like a semaphore—with a foghorn attached. 'What a semaphore of a baby!' I remarked. 'Semifore! Semifore!' cried the elder children. She possesses other names of course. Had I been asked to act as her godfather. . . . But girls only require one godfather, and among Semaphore's people, whatever the Church may say about parents not being

fit godparents for their own children, a man is thought ill of if he will not 'stand up to' his child at the font; the implication being that he does not believe the child his. So, without opposition, Semaphore was christened Grace Kathleen, or something of the sort. But Semaphore is her proper name. When, after a night at sea or mackerel hooking at peep o' day, I 'go up over' in the afternoon to 'put away an hour,' then am I kept awake by shouts of 'Semifore! Semifore! Dirty bundle!' (A term of endearment hereabout.) 'Woo-ah-h-h! Woo-ah-h-h-h! Kiss me then. Semi-fooore!' How can one be very bad tempered at that? It is the name of Semaphore which makes her partly mine.

She has another link with the Eskimos. I don't know why one wants to kiss babies. One does. I did; but, being a bachelor, failed to attain to the full deed. Semaphore and I touched noses merely. She was delighted. I remembered that in a book I read when I was a little boy the Eskimos were said to greet one another by rubbing noses. 'Noses, Semaphore! Noses!' She understood; and now when we kneel before her while she is squat on her mother's lap, she smiles suddenly, as if she had recollected a

pleasant dream, bends forward graciously, and just touches our noses with hers, like a leaf in a light air; then buries her face in her mother's breast and gurgles. If 'gentry-people' take notice of her upon the beach, and chatter baby-talk for a kiss, she refuses with kicks and head-turnings and digs of her small sharp nails; but afterwards, relenting, she inclines her nose towards theirs, and the smile she does it with, sly humorous smile, enchants them altogether.

Everybody's baby possesses at least one good quality which raises it far above anybody else's baby whatsoever. Defects and superiorities are, indeed, the same thing in babies, and the tragedy of their growing up is the way their little exhibitions of intelligence become, without change in nature, big exhibitions of naughtiness. That amusing touchiness of yours, Semaphore, will one day be simply wicked temper. Your fine appetite will be greediness in a year or two's time, and when you make a wry face at food you don't like, your mother, instead of cuddling you to her, will exclaim, 'Cawdy little cat! You shan't hae nort.' *Sic transit gloria infantiae.*

Semaphore, however, has two superiorities which can hardly age into defects. She is extraordinarily sharp and lively; for do we not pet her and play with her and talk to her every moment her eyes are open, and sometimes when they are not? And—second superiority—she always wakes up smiling. If she is left smiling too long, then certainly she smiles no longer; but she has awakened smiling, anyhow. Should I be first down and take upstairs the morning cup o' tay, it is Semaphore receives me, smiling up from betwixt her parents, blithely awake some seconds before her mother has finished yawning and digging the Ol' Man in the ribs. Be the window-blind up or down, she catches one's eye before anything else in the room—before her father's weathered red face, or her mother's hair streaming across the pillow, or the bag of family biscuits on the bedside table. There is something peculiarly proper and beautiful in the sight of a little child snuggled in bed between its father and mother, the fruit of their union still hanging, as it were, with its bloom upon it, to the parent tree, and not unaffected for good, perhaps, in after-life by the longer proximity. As for the risk of over-laying, shall not those who gave

life sometimes also crush it away? We are too squeamish over death, too neglectful of life. Separations come all too soon.

Semaphore has had her illnesses. But that is enough about that. I would have some heavenly drill-sergeant come every day and give her the order, 'As yer wuz! Stand heasy!' I would like to see her, still a baby, flapping about naked in the wash-tub, this day twenty years. She will be thinking of babies of her own then. One understands why pictures of the Holy Family have such a hold upon the imagination of mankind when Semaphore is on her mother's lap and her father comes in, all wet from sea, and kisses her, and licks her face like a great dog, and she laughs aloud and drags him to her by the hair. The mother is so full of patience and the consciousness of power, the father of eagerness and the exercise of power, and the child contains in small so much of God knows what, that every attitude, every movement of the three is at once graceful, cosy and world-wide; delicate and strong. 'Where's Joe?' some one asks. Semaphore looks towards the fender where the cat sleeps. 'Where's Jim?' She turns round to her father. 'Where's Dad?' She smiles across

at me! Were it not that her eyes are sea-blue, like her father's, instead of muddy grey, like mine, and all her gestures echoes of his, gossips would no doubt be saying that she was mine. I wish she were.

9. THEY THERE KIDS

'D*** an' ***** they there ****** kids—that ever I should be so wicked as to say so! They comes an' rides about the boats, an' don't take a bit o' notice o'ee when you speaks to 'em. Aye! answers o'ee back wi' their chake, they do, however civil you tells 'em o'it. Pounds' wuth o' damage they does. Lookse! There they be! At it again, after all I've a-said to 'em. Git out o'it, you ****** little ******* (God forgie me for talking like it!), or, by ******, I'll pick up a rope's-end an' lay it about thee till thee casn' sit down for a week; an' then thee ca'st go'n tell thy father, an' I'll settle wi' he, too, if 'er wants it. Now, then! None o' your chake! As for thic there Mr. Silverpoll. . . . Fair knock-out he is! If I was his father. . . . But, there, 'tisn't no use saying ort. Might so well talk to Blowhole Rock as to they there kids. They got the advantage

o'ee. Thee casn't treat 'em cruel. They be but chil'ern. . . .'

That's it. They have an advantage over us which, whether knowingly or not (I believe they have an inkling), they use to the full.

> 'We are but little children weak,
> Not born to any high estate!'

they as good as say. 'You can't hae the heart to wallop us, 'cause you'm so much bigger'n us be; you could beat our brains out easy, like you'm always telling. An' 'tisn't no good thinking we'm going to pay for what us breaks, 'cause us an't got 'nuff 'ap'nys for to do it wiv. 'Sides, if you was to hurt us, you'd hae to have a shindy wi' our father, an' you an't got no call for that. He an't done 'ee no harm; you an't got nort against he. My father'd 'at thee into a jelly, if he was to start on 'ee. You wouldn't like for to see 'en beat *your* chil'ern, n'eet your dog nuther. No, you wouldn't—not come to it. Us be going to play see-saw wi' your little punt d'rec'ly your back's turned—'fore 'tis, if you like. Git 'ome wi' thee talk 'bout stove in! Us have played in boats ever since *us* can mind, an' *us* an't never see'd one stove in. Come on, you kids! let's go'n squat down

'longside his stupid ol' boat. 'Er can't say nort to thic; an' then us can slip inside o'en when he's gone across beach. You take thiccy paddle. . . . Look out! Coo'h! how the gert poop do swear! Sounds so bad. P'raps us had better git 'long.'

Git 'long they do—for ten minutes, or until more kids arrive. One could kill them willingly were it possible to bring them back to life before nightfall. (Fancy a child rising from the dead to find it was just bedtime!) As 'tis, in this world of headwinds, there is nothing to do but cuss. And it does not follow that a man who swears at the kids dislikes children. Rather the contrary; for if he did they would give him and his boats a wide berth; whereas, if at the back of his mind he has a fondness for them, the wise little scoundrels get to know it, hang around him and his boats, and torment him the more. Still less does it follow that his remarks corrupt their youthful communications. They can cuss as well as he, among themselves; I have overheard them many a time; good manners demand merely that they should not cuss before their elders. It is one of the very first things they learn at school, if not before. Only the other day, a golden-headed little baby of my acquaintance was being fed at

her mother's breast, and because everything was not to her liking, she drew back, looked across at me, and rapped out, as one might do when a boot-lace breaks: 'Damn!' Quite charmingly she said it (never mind from whom she caught the word), and a proper little kid she is; game to the back-bone, uncommonly strong in the squall. You may think what you like about her language: if you had to live with her—eat with her, play with her, rest with her, sleep in the next room, and take her out in boats—you would at any moment rather she cussed a wee than started a hullaballoo. I would, anyhow. And if babes and sucklings set us elders the example. . . .

And give us the provocation! At the beginning of August, when the boats are lying along the beach, new-varnished for the holiday-season and washed out for a busy day, with the oars lying neatly together in them, and all the ropes and sails in order, down come the kids. Down they come to the Front in a chattering swarm, more regular than any shoals of fish, most like a flock of birds collecting for migration: tousled, joyous, and turbulent; boys on the look-out for a chance of getting to sea; small girls in charge of little ones, little ones dragging babies. We try to get

rid of them tactfully. 'Git home,' we say, 'an' tell thee mother to wash thee face!' Poor woman, she has probably done it once or twice already, since they got up, and wants to hurry on with her housework. The kids look, taking our measure. But they don't go. They mean to get down to the beach, they and their babies, and bundles, and perambulators, and go-carts, and slices of bread-and-butter, and penny bottles of raspberry champagne. We, who wish them further, have to help them. For what can we do when a small girl, single-handed, bumpety-bumps a go-cart, containing a baby, half-way down the sea-wall steps, gets stuck, and stops frightened, with the baby wobbling perilously in its swaying go-cart? Drag them up, and they'll only try again. There's nothing for it but to pick up baby, go-cart and all, and carry them down to the beach.

Then if we should go 'in across up over' for a drink before the thirsty work of the day begins, or if we put early to sea, leaving boats ashore, the kids have their chance. In one boat will be a baby playing with pebbles, each of which will have to be picked out separately by hand. Along the stern-seats of another, which may happen to overhang the water, ready shoved-down for a 'fright,'

They there Kids.

a row of laughing girls will be seated, splashing their naked legs in the sea, splashing the boat as well with water and with sand. See-saw is played by rocking a boat from side to side on its keel. Boys will be rowing on dry land, to the great destruction of paddle-blades; or they will be using feather-weight sculls to recover from the sea their toy ships and the boats' ways that they have chucked into the water; or else they will be pushing and straining to shove off the lightest of the punts. Should they succeed, that boat will earn no money for a few hours. Paint and varnish is scratched with hob-nail boots, sails sat upon, gear trampled over. Rowlocks, lines, footing-sticks, all sorts of things are scattered abroad. What a festival it is! The kids don't care; and, indeed, why should they? Long before they came into the world the boats were on the beach. They found them there, a resource to be made use of, a means of amusement waiting for them; just as they found the sea and the land, daylight to play in, and darkness to sleep away. Boats which they neither made nor bought are to them simply so much material for enterprise, like goldfields, or fisheries, or untilled soil to men. And if they do damage. . . . Do not we grown-up children

trample down something beautiful and valuable with every step forward in our own belauded enterprises?

Meanwhile, in some of their mysterious young minds, so clear yet so obscure, like spring water standing in shadow, a process is beginning which will end only with their lives. The sea is laying hold of them, tightening her grip, asserting her authority over seafaring blood. She is picking and choosing among those happy-go-lucky kids; and whom she chooses she never really lets go. If she cannot have their service afloat she still can wreck with cross-purposes their lives ashore. Their imaginations will for ever be running away to sea if they themselves don't. When they had best go straight on they will look back to her call. They will suffer an interior divorce between what must be done and what they have a hankering to do. How many ineffectual land-lubbers, men never prosperous, or prone to decay in prosperity, would have made good seamen had they been allowed their youthful way?

Mr. Silverpoll—the sea has laid hold on him firmly enough. No more than three or four years ago he was a chubby, blue-eyed, flaxen-haired baby —'Dada's baby-boy,' as his father used to sing.

To-day he is already a fisher-lad, growing lanky, and strong at the oar. Then, he used to beg in a most pitiful whine: 'Dad, will 'ee let me go out in the boat? Will 'ee take me 'long with 'ee? Dad? Dad?' Now, he asks confidently: 'Will 'ee come an' help me to shove off, please?' And to sea he goes, all on his own, arriving back just in time to snatch up a hunch of bread-and-butter and race off to school. 'A proper slammick, the boy's getting!' says his mother; but little he cares about his clothes, his boots, or his hair, which the sun has browned and crisped, so long as he can get afloat; and punishment he disarms with fishing talk after the style of an ancient mariner. In so short a time he has grown out of all knowledge, has found his feet; or, as perhaps one should say, he has taken the tiller into his own hand.

But during that time of quick growth, after his remove from the infants' to the boys' school, he was well called a fair terrifier; the worst of all they there kids from the boat-owners', if not from the sea's, point of view. Nothing was safe. Among kids in mischief on the beach he was ringleader. 'You'm a fisherman's son,' I used to say to him. 'You ought to keep the other kids out of the

boats, not in them.' He would look up thoughtfully and defiantly, would look down, would go away—or wait till I was gone away.

Nevertheless, the idea stuck in his mind; he realised that a fisherman's boy was not the same as a kid from up on land. When a boat came in, instead of grabbing the nearest plaything that caught his eye, he began to try and do something useful; to put a way under the bows or to string up fish; and though pushed aside time after time for bungling and told to get out of the light, he would turn up as smiling as ever to seize the cut-rope of the next boat in. At sea, he left off behaving like a passenger. He looked round for a job to do, and, if there was none, sat quiet. He even cleaned up a boat before he had finished being seasick. In house and along the beach his questions followed one about: 'Be 'ee going to sea? Bain't 'ee going fishing t'night? Well, be 'ee going t'morrow, then? Can I come? Coo'h! you promised!'

This year he took it into his head to shove off by himself whenever he found a boat near enough to the water's edge. Then he would row to the other side of Broken Rocks and take aboard several of his schoolfellows. A boat would be wanted.

'Where's the *Nancy*?' 'Who's got the *Sweet-brier*?' we would ask.

'Why, there 'er is! Casn' see? There, by the outside mark-buoy. Thic there Silverpoll an' half a dozen o'em! I'd gie 'en a darn good lacing if he was a boy o' mine. . . .'

'He *shan't* hae the boats,' his father would say angrily. 'Parcel o' kids like they to take a boat when they'm minded!'

But how otherwise was Silverpoll to learn to row, and to fit himself for a profession that needs to be started early, if at all?

Finally, against orders, he went down west one evening, and a fresh breeze sprang up from the east. He had to be fetched home. After the boat was hauled up he was given his lacing with the rope's-end. Face downwards on the beach, he wept bitterly, and for nearly a week he hardly set foot in a boat. Yet he *had* to go to sea; he was certain to do so one way or another, and better openly than sullenly or slily.

So a compact was made to the effect that if he was shoved off every day when the weather was fit and a boat free, he would take care not to sneak off without asking. That compact, after a preliminary breakage or two, just to test it, he has

been man enough to keep. Entertainments, tea-fights, picnics, and living pictures have as little attraction for him as Sunday-school. Out of school is out to sea. Where he got his style in rowing, I don't know; it came natural, I suppose. They make the boat travel, those kids.

When last I shoved them off I asked another, a bigger, boy whether or no he was going to jump in. 'If Silverpoll will take me,' replied the bigger boy.

Which means that Silverpoll is in fact and deed the skipper of his craft.

Two magnets are dragging those longshore kids two ways, towards the sea and towards the land. Prudence, money, parents, love, friendship —to say nothing of cowardice, laziness, comfort, and a score of other considerations—all throw in their weight increasingly against the sea. But the sea calls:

> Now the great winds shoreward blow,
> Now the salt tides seaward flow;
> Now the wild white horses play,
> Champ and chafe and toss in the spray.
> Children dear, let us away!
> This way, this way!

And some of the children hear; and time and

again the sea wins. I confess to a feeling of triumph whenever the sea wins.

It is as certain as anything can be that Silverpoll will become a seaman. If he is put to work on land, back he will go to the sea. (Perhaps that vast floating machine-shop, the Navy, will seduce him.) There is a tale told here of a good fisherman, who, when a lad, was told to get regular work on land. 'You will have to come before breakfast, and clean the boots and knives, and carry up the coal,' said the gentleman to whom he applied; 'and you must be ready to run errands, or help in the house and garden. . . .'

'Yes, sir; yes, sir!' the lad burst out. 'But what about it, sir? S'pose there's something doing out to sea? What about that? Can't come, sir.'

S'pose there's something doing out to sea? The lad was right. That is the cry of the longshore, where men live upon land with their eyes upon the sea.

S'pose there's something doing out to sea, you kids!

10. FRIGHTS

FRIGHTS are two-legged fish. When a lady who is walking down to a boat with the intention of hiring it hears one fisherman call out to another: 'Dick, there's a fright for thee there!' she is apt to look a little startled. It has to be explained to her that *fright* is a way of pronouncing *freight.* But I don't think most ladies like it, after that.

The movements of visitors are so mysterious, and yet so regular, that were they not human beings, more or less accountable for their actions, we should certainly say that their comings and goings were as purely a matter of instinct as the migrations of birds and fish. Once we had an archbishop staying here. He used to come out and take the sea-air about noon. Straightway, it seemed, from every side-street and almost every house, would appear a clergyman, and as the archbishop promenaded so they would promenade

too, passing and repassing under the august eye, until you might have thought that the earth was a heaven-bound ship, and our little Front the bridge of it, crowded with sky-pilots. An observer from another world, who knew not our civilisation, might well have imagined them to have been under the sway of some irresistible instinct; and perhaps they were. Or had he been scientific, he would have made a note somewhat to this effect. '*Human Migrations.* Movements of the clergy. Curates attracted by archbishops. *Query:* Does the attraction reside in his face, his hat, his gait, or his gaiters? Is its nature spiritual or temporal, psychopathic or radio-telegraphic? *Mem.:* Procure an archbishop for vivisection and subsequent dissection.'

Visitors are here to-day and gone to-morrow. They are not; and suddenly they are. Besides that great permanency the sea they flit like butterflies. Men say along the beach: 'Aye! They bain't here, an' they bain't coming, I tell thee; not like they have a-done. They've got they there motors to play about wi', an' more o'em's going further west, to Cornwall. 'Tisn't like 't used to be, an' it never will be again. I've a-seed it this time o' year when they was mazed

for boats an' would snap up any ol' craft along the beach. Now they wants 'em varnished. Ah! times be altered.'

Soon, of an afternoon, the 'bus comes down from the station piled up with luggage, and a line of cabs races across the Front, each one containing people who gaze at the sea with a happy anxiety. 'There thee a't! There they be! They'm coming in. There's thic chap—do 'ee mind?—what used to go to sea 'long wi' me an' carry away all the mackerel us catched. . . .'

''Twas my fright, by rights. They went to sea long wi' me first, only I was to sea the second time when they come'd down to the boats, an' thee wast here; an' then they continued, like, 'long wi' thee.'

'Well, 't don't much matter that I sees, not wi' they sort that hauls an' tears abroad your lines, an' then carries away all the fish you catches, wi'out giving o'ee anything extra. What do they want wi' six dozen macker, unless they'm fishmongers or lets 'em rot? Anyhow, the people's beginning to come in, sure 'nuff.'

Shortly afterwards they come out and walk along the front, still rather townish in clothes and manner and complexion, greeting acquaintances if

they are old visitors, asking the funniest questions if they are new-comers, and all of them worrying about the weather. Sometimes, when we tell them it is likely to be foul, they appear to be offended with *us*. As if we could help it! They have been let loose from their cities for so short a time that indeed we rather pity them. We like to see them getting sunburnt.

As with visitors in general, so with frights—but more so. I sometimes think of them as spray thrown at us haphazard by a seething sea of humanity in the interior of the country. Fine days they neglect. Foul days, when they are sure to be wet and sea-sick, they want to go out, and often have to be told that 'tisn't fit. If the steamer has gone away crowded on a popular trip, we know why the boats lie idle. When a private boat, resplendent with paint and varnish and brass fittings, shoves gaily off and suggests to a score of people that they might be on the water, we can understand that too. But there are subtler suggestions at work. We may sit on the sea-wall half a fine day, yarning, yawning, kicking our heels, and remarking, 'Sleepy sort o' a turn-out, this! Makes 'ee tireder 'n doing ort.' Then suddenly some one asks for a boat; others follow;

boat-owners run along the front searching for men to take frights out, and in half an hour every boat is off the beach. 'If thee's want to do ort frighting, thee's got to follow it up. There's never no knowing when they'm coming down to the boats all of a heap an' a tear, an' thee casn't tell who they'm coming down to. All they wants then is to get to sea quick, else they shunts. That's what makes a fellow rush about like he do, for all we knows it don't get 'en no for'arder in the end. Aye! an' when thee's come in for a bit o' grub, even in rough weather, p'raps that five minutes 'll be the means o' not seeing some one what'd go to sea every fine day for a month. I tell thee, in frighting, thee's got to work for work. "Lazy fellows!" some o'em says when they sees 'ee waiting wi' thy hands in thy pockets. But when they comes down to go to sea an' can't find no lazy fellows waiting for 'em, then they'm annoyed an' accuses 'ee o' making a fortune quick.'

Why people who are here only for the day should frequent that part of the beach which is near the main street is fairly obvious. But it is not so easy to explain why certain men should be chosen by omnibus parties, nor why some frights

should prefer a talkative, amusing man, some a young man, others an outspoken old man who orders them about; some a man who can do the sea-going flunkey well, and some few a man who can tell them silly scientific stuff about weather systems and the sea, when their holiday-making, or rather holiday-attempting, minds would be far better occupied with the beauty and joy of it all, and only a poet could tell them what they ought to want to know. The dividing-line between their going out with anybody, or only with the man and boat of their choice, is a very fine one. A little gentle persuasion sometimes. . . .

Frights have this advantage over fish: their greater regularity. Fishing, bad though it has become, is still as good as frighting, and probably better if keenly followed up; but fish may fail altogether for a season or two, whereas the shoals of visitors always arrive at their usual time; and that is a consideration not to be overlooked by men who have families to house, feed, and clothe, and no reserves of money to stay them through the bad seasons. They can hardly be blamed for refusing to face the greater gamble, for adopting the safe, the middling course. And thus the fish have their revenge on fishermen—an insidious

long-armed revenge; for boating seldom breeds the men that fishing does. Here, however, fishing is still kept up—by some men right into the frighting season—until the toil of fishing by night and boating by day compels them to leave off one or the other; and, if they possess several pleasure boats, it is the fishing has to go. We are proud of the fact that we have no boatmen on the beach; only fishermen who do boating. We do not tout for frights, or run after people along the Front, badgering them to go to sea, as they do in some towns that we could name. We wait to be hired, like barristers and physicians. Frighting is the fisherman's form of pot-boiling.

It is, of course, a comparatively non-productive kind of labour. Money changes hands just as it does in fishing, but no wealth, in the shape of fish-food from the sea, is at the same time added to the resources of the country. (Yet only a shallow economy reckons as labour in vain the production of pleasure and health.) And it cannot be pretended that frighting is so independent and worthy a job as fishing. There are more misunderstandings over a week's frighting than over a whole season's fishing. At its best, even with those who may be called personal friends aboard, one has to a certain

extent to do the flunkey. One holds one's tongue for no better reason than because one has to earn one's pay. My own first fright has amused me ever since. It was a young man from up-country, of the smart, cute, commercial sort; a decent enough fellow in his way, no doubt; but he didn't know how to treat a hired man. Therefore I sat on him severely, with my best brand of dignity, and before we came ashore the unfortunate young man was calling me *sir*. 'Good night, sir,' he said, handing over his couple of shillings. . . . But that sort of thing doesn't do. I've had to learn better since. In a boat, sometimes, a sudden gust of hilarity strikes me, on realising that, like those horrid children who no longer exist outside old people's recollections, I have to be seen and not heard, and wait to speak until I am spoken to. I burst out laughing at myself. The frights think I am grinning at them. And the fat's in the fire again.

To do the flunkey really well is a work of art and artfulness, worthy of respect; for how else should authors, painters, and musicians be respected, who, except they ignore their public altogether, are brain-flunkeys? Indeed, we are all of us flunkeys in one fashion or another. Flunkeyism does not

lie in the non-productiveness of the labour, or in service, or in menial attendance; there is no shame in acting lackey to those we love, because we love them. Flunkeyism is a suppression of personality for pay. It is a negation of living, a slap in the face of life—a slap we have most of us to give in order to live at all. It cannot come to an end till each man works for love of his labour and his fellowmen, and loves his neighbour as himself.

There is, about frighting, a give-and-take between hirer and hired which redeems it from pure flunkeyism. Whether paid or not, the boatman must for safety's sake remain skipper of his craft; yours to command ashore, in command afloat. Under his care, as into the hands of a specialist, the fright must place itself, and usually is prepared to do so. Hectoring does not do with boatmen who are also fishermen. Some people will try to beat the prices down, forgetting the wear and tear of boats on an open beach, and the number of months they lie idle. A few frights have been known to take tea with them, to eat it on a beach with their boatman sitting by, and never to offer him a crumb. But mainly they are kind, in intention at all events; for they are on a little adventure which tends to make men kin; and if

they err it is commonly through ignorance, through assuming too readily that their boatman is the ignorant party, before whom they pass in a straggling procession, showing themselves up to him, away from the rut of their customary surroundings and habits, and under the self-revealing conditions of sea-sickness, alarm, or frank enjoyment. Small wonder that most boatmen are philosophers in their way! Small wonder that curious sea-friendships crop up, which belong only to the neighbourhood of boats, and do not extend into the ordinary land-lives either of the fright or their man! For, as a rule, we who take them to sea know next to nothing of them, neither their occupations nor even their names. We call them by their lodgings: 'No. 3 Seaview wants a boat at two.' Or else, if we think enough of them, we give them nicknames: 'Bald-Pate,' 'White-Face,' 'Bobs' (on account of a likeness to Lord Roberts), 'Thic fine piece,' 'The Spider-Crab,' 'Ol' Jelly Fish.' They come, impressing themselves upon us because they are means towards a livelihood; they are judged from our angle; and then they go. Sometimes they say good-bye, and sometimes they don't, to us who have had their lives in our hands. Old ladies, there are, so drawn to the sea

that they cannot keep off it, so infirm that they have to be carried down and up the beach. If the boat capsized. . . . Courageous old ladies! Admirable frights! They've *got* to sit still in the boat.

11. AN OLD MAN'S TALE

DADDY PEARN, Uncle Henry Oborne, and Granfie Coombe were sitting in a row along one of the seats on the sea-wall. While they talked of old times they watched the new—that is to say, Granfie Coombe and Uncle Henry watched, and both reported what they saw to blind Daddy Pearn, who sat quite still, his tall body bent like a twisted bow, his chin resting on the handle of his stick, and his long, pointed nose—from which his face had, as it were, wasted away—so drooping downwards that it seemed as if it would soon lengthen out into a second prop for his grey shaky head.

Close inshore a fleet of racing dinghies of the most modern design, brightly varnished, and with white, silken sails, darted about on the water, heeled over to every cat's-paw of wind, and spun round like tops upon their centre-keels. Further

out, where the off-shore breeze blew truer, several Ware trawlers sailed stiffly across the bay to their western fishing-grounds. With their dark, bellying lugsails of an ancient cut, their beaminess, their high freeboard and their black and leaden paint, they looked like craft not so much from another fishing village as from a bygone age.

'Do 'ee mind thic time, Daddy,' Uncle Henry was saying, 'when you an' me went down 'long wi' the boat-nets an' catched gert lobsters so fast as us could haul, an' it come'd on to blow, an' us pretty nigh losted the lot?'

Granfie Coombe, who, not having been a fisherman, was soon tired of fishing yarns, deliberately turned away to watch the dinghies. 'There!' he exclaimed, pointing. 'Did 'ee see thic one go about? 'Tis wonderful how they gets they boats to sail nowadays.'

'What, boy?' retorted Uncle Henry Oborne. 'They things o' skimming dishes!'

'I an't never seen they dinghies they tells so much about.' Daddy Pearn simply mentioned it as a fact. 'They wasn't come about when I had my sight.'

'Ah!' said Uncle Henry. 'They Waremen's the lads for me. You can sail somewhere in

one o' they, not round and round buoys. But Ware isn't what 't used to be, nuther. Why, I can mind when there was pigs running about among the boats on Ware beach, eating up the fish offal what nobody couldn't sell. Gert, flop-eared, evil-looking brutes they was, an' savage; but they did keep the beach sweet. Commemorated in a song, they pigs was, printed on one o' they there ol' broadsheets what used to be sold for a penny; an' a blind man used to come along an' sing it. I forgets what 'twas called. There ain't no such songs now. . . .'

'*The Bride's Return*, it was called,' said Daddy Pearn.

'That's it.'

'I was to Ware when it happened.'

Daddy Pearn straightened himself up. He turned towards the other two old men, waving his stick in the air. And while he talked, speaking, as it were, out of the old times, it was the dinghies that looked strange upon the sea, not the black Ware trawlers.

'I was there,' he said. 'What do 'ee think o' that? I was working for the same bride's father up to Ware. 'Bout ten year old I must have been; 'twas my first place, afore I took to the

fishing. Aye! a proper hard man farmer was, but he knew how to grow good crops—right on the top o' Ware Head, where the land an't been tilled this fifty year.

'Ruth, the farmer's maid, was sea-struck, like I've a-heard say they gets stage-struck nowadays. Her'd be out on the end o' Ware Head both day an' night, watching the boats in an' out o' the Roads, till the fishermen named her Ware Beacon, an' said if her watched 'em out 'twould bring 'em luck. An' it did: I've a-proved it. "Here, boy," the farmer'd call me. "Go'n tell the maid that if her isn't in to dinner be time I've finished, there's none for her." An' there wasn't nuther, though maybe he'd linger a bit over it.

'By'm-bye her took to going down to beach for to see if any o' the pigs there was fit for farmer to buy an' saltin—so her'd say—an,' taking her food 'long wi' her, her'd bide there all day, an' half the night too if the weather was dirty an' the boats not home. Haul 'em up, her would, like any man, an' you'd see her there most days, making or mending nets, which her'd learnt to do, sitting on the beach amongst the boats an' pigs wi' Dan'l Biscoe's little boy squat beside her. Farmer'd rage an' tear an' send me down after

her till I got hardly no work at all done; but her'd never leave thic beach till Dan'l's boat was in, an' her could deliver up to 'en his little boy. "Hullo, you! Be 'ee there, maid?" he'd shout as he fetched the harbour.

'"Hullo, you!" her'd shout back, imitating the fishermen's manner o' speaking, which did drive farmer fair mazed when her tried it on up to the farm just for to annoy him an' please herself. "Hullo, you! If thee 't comin', come, an' I'll haul thee up; an' if thee a'tn't, zay so, an' I'll bring out the li'l punt."

'Dan'l Biscoe named his new trawler the *Ruth* after her. Wild chap, he was, wilder than most Waremen is, or used to be. His first wife, they said, died o' worrying about 'en, his doings to sea an' ashore; which may well have been, 'cause her was a wisht puling body by all accounts. Not but what he was a good fisherman an' earned good money. He was always lucky, an' he'd go to sea when never another boat did dare to put its nose round the Head.

'Nothing would satisfy Miss Ruth but to go to sea in the *Ruth*. 'Twas known as Ruth's *Ruth,* thic boat, an' it come'd to farmer's ears that 'twas so. He said her should never go out in her, n'eet

go down to Ware beach any more, an' threatened to lock her up. But when the new trawl was ready, what her'd had a hand in the making of . . . . I mind her creeping away from the farm thic evening wi' some food an' extry clothes under her arm. "Pearnie," her said, "what do 'ee make o' the weather? I be going to sea in my boat 'long wi' my man."

' "Your man, Miss?" says I.

' "Silly boy—Dan'l Biscoe," her answers back wi' a blush, turning down the cliff path so lightsome as a rabbit. Her eyes was very bright, an' yet they had the look o' a suffering animal in 'em. Young as I was, I know'd well 'nuff what that meant.

"*Twas* a night, thic night. The sea were roaring under cliff, an' when farmer sent me down to Ware village for to find out what was become o' her, the spray was flying right over the Head. I was only a boy an' got frightened. 'Twas such a rush an' a roar o' wind wi' it all. I hid meself in a linhay an' catched clean off to sleep. It might have made a difference if I'd gone on; an' it might not; nobody can tell.

''Bout midnight Dan'l's boat drove in. They was half-drownded aboard, Ruth most of all. Her

hadn't no shift o' clothes, an' anyway 'twasn't no fit time for her to trudge up over the Head, so Dan'l's mother puts her to bed in Dan'l's house an' stays there 'long wi' her.

'Farmer heard o't, o' course. Next day, when Ruth—her clothes dried—comes home, he meets her, barring the gateway, an' says, "No fish to-day, *thank* you, fishwife." That's all he said, but 'twas his way of saying it. Her know'd her wasn't to go back there no more.

'Meeting me later on in the day, her says, "Pearnie, can 'ee walk ten miles?"

' "Aye, Miss," says I, for I'd have up an' followed her anywhere. Her was that sort.

' "I'm going to my aunt's, to Otford," her says, "an' Dan'l's coming down in our boat for to marry me an' fetch me home by sea. I'm going to sail home," her says, "like a fisherman's wife ought to. Pearnie, boy, come on! Pearnie, boy, come on!" her says. An' with the same, us started.

'They was married to Otford Church, an' the wedding party walked down 'long wi' 'em to Otford Cove, where the *Ruth* was hauled up, for to help shove 'em off. Ruth shoves, too, an' jumps in over the bows like any fisherman, wedding dress an' all, an' helps hoist sail. "Good-bye!"

her calls, "Walk home quick, Pearnie." Her wouldn't have none aboard for to help sail the boat but her an' Dan'l. Blowing north-easterly, 'twas, an' squally. From the top o' Steep Head I watched 'em beating home, sitting together in the starn. Wi' my own eyes I saw a squall catch 'em off Ware Head, an' the *Ruth* go over. I saw it, I say—you knows how gently a boat fills an capsizes to them what's looking on.

'When they picked Dan'l up there was nothing to be seen o' Ruth; an' nothing was seen o' her until six days afterwards Dan'l's little boy by his first wife runs in house, saying, "Daddy Biscoe, the pigs be eating my Ruth."

' "What, cheel?" says Dan'l's mother.

'But Dan'l, who was up to bed, 'cause he couldn't sleep nohow by night—Dan'l heard, an' Dan'l know'd. "God!" he shouts, running from his bed just as he was. Down to beach he goes, an' there he finds his bride wi' the pigs fighting—fighting for possession o' her. Aye! an' they followed 'en right up street, grunting an' snorting to his very door, as he carried her home to his house.

'That was the Bride's Return. What do 'ee think o' it, you?'

'Makes me feel sick, it does,' Granfie Coombe complained.

'Poor things! Poor things, to be sure,' lamented Uncle Henry Oborne. 'Ah! 'tisn't like 't used 't be, not up to Ware nother.'

But Daddy Pearn, before resting his chin on his stick, chuckled as if with amusement. 'Dan'l Biscoe,' he said, 'went away to sea an' was drownded off the Cape of Good Hope, which I reckon was the best that could happen. That was seventy year ago, near about. When I looks back. . . .'

Daddy Pearn laughed outright.

He is so very, very old that human joy and pain have perhaps become a little distant to him.

III

12. LONGSHORE FISHERIES

THE typical longshoreman uses nothing larger than second-class sailing boats, well under fifteen tons, and mostly undecked. He is more or less remote from any of the great fishing ports, with their harbourage for big boats and their established fish-markets, and owing to the smallness of his craft, he is bound as a rule to fish within twenty miles from shore. Hence his name. He pays for help on the share system, and the capital value of his boats and gear seldom exceeds a hundred pounds, hardly ever two hundred. He is, in fact, the small holder of the sea.

It is true, as the song says, that

> The husbandman has rent to pay,
> And seed to purchase every day,
> But he who ploughs the rolling deeps,
> Though never sowing, always reaps;
> The ocean's fields are fair and free,
> There are no rent days on the sea!

Therein lies the strength of the fisherman's economic position: the fish he brings ashore he has paid nothing for, and what he is paid for his labour he spends at home; so that the country has its fish and keeps its money too. But it is equally true, from the longshoreman's point of view, that he does pay rent, and to a most capricious landlord, the sea itself—his rent being the upkeep of his boats and gear, and damage or total loss by storm. (Boats on a beach are not insurable.) And in any case, it is clear that low rent, or no rent at all, will be quite useless if he cannot obtain for what he has to sell a price high enough to pay his working expenses; if, in other words, he cannot find, ready for him, markets good enough to procure him that price. (Fishing companies and combines, like large farmers, are able to a great extent to make their own markets and look after themselves.) Of the many longshore fisheries around the British coasts, most are declining, and some are practically dead. Such decay can be put down partly to the depletion of British waters, and partly to social and educational changes, which have made men less ready to face the hardships of longshore fishing; but, as one sees after turning over in one's mind

a score of remedies that wouldn't work, it is mainly due to the want of a fair sale for catches. Facilities for sending fresh-caught British fish into the central markets—of which Billingsgate is, of course, the chief—have not kept pace with the facilities for sending home iced fish caught by large vessels outside British waters. (Our railway here was once induced to grant a lower freightage on fish to London; whereupon they started charging for the return of empties; and therefore the expenses of carriage came to much the same thing in the end.) Thus the local markets have been spoilt, and the central markets remain for the longshoreman neither accessible nor good; nor, there is every reason to believe, are they even passably honest. 'What's the use,' say fishermen, 'of putting to sea and hauling about our boats and gear, when we can't catch 'em like we used to, an' what we do catch we can't get the proper price for?' Bad markets lead to half-hearted fishing, which leads to greater irregularity of supply, which leads to worse markets again; and so a vicious circle is formed and perpetuated.

An analysis of the trade of our own fishery, which is fairly varied and typical, will probably convey the clearest idea of the longshoreman's

situation and of the difficulties with which he has to contend. The town is both fishing port and watering-place, growing yearly less and less of the former and more of the latter. Indeed, were it not for some pleasure boating in the summer, as a stand-by, fishing could hardly continue. The largest boats used, open boats under twenty-five feet in length, are the mackerel and herring drifters. Whereas twenty years ago upwards of thirty drifters used to put to sea, there are now fewer than ten in active service. Fishing is become sad.

The fish is sold:

(1) By sending it directly to Billingsgate on commission.

(2) By selling it on the beach to local buyers, who either forward it to Billingsgate or distribute it among fishmongers and hawkers.

(3) By selling it on the beach in small lots to fishmongers and hawkers.

(4) By the fishermen hawking it themselves, or selling it privately to the consumers.

There are thus three markets for the fish: (*c.*) the central markets, for large quantities; (*l.*) the local market, for smaller quantities and in hot weather; and (*p.*) the private market, for very small catches of the choicer kinds.

The catches in order of importance, with their markets in order of probability, are:

Mackerel (May to September), in drift nets, by hooking, and in seines (*l., c.,* and *p.*).

Herrings (November to March), in drift nets (*c.* and *l.*).

Sprats (autumn), in seine nets (*l.* and *c.*).

Flat-fish, in seines and trammels (*l.*).

Lobsters, in pots and prawn-nets (*l.* and *p.*).

Prawns, in skim, setting, and boat nets (*p.* and *l.*).

Bass and *Mullet,* only occasionally, in seines (*p., l.,* and *c.*).

Pollack, in pollack nets and on lines (*l.* and *p.*)

Dog-fish, in drift and moored nets; *skate,* and *conger* (*p.* and *l.*).

Whiting (*l.* and *p.*), *cod,* and *hake* have not been caught of recent years.

There are possibilities in trawling on a small scale, as a stop-gap, when nothing else is doing, but there is hardly a livelihood in it without a harbour fit for larger boats.

It might seem, at first sight, that the markets for fish are both abundant and adequate. In point of fact their abundance is a sign of their inadequacy. Fishermen would be only too glad

to sell all they catch in one market, if they could.

To criticise the methods of disposing of fish in reverse order:

(1) Private sales are at best only a means of picking up odd small sums on what would not otherwise be sold. And fishermen, if they are fishing, have no time for hawking.

(2) Fishmongers and hawkers expect something like 100 per cent profit for carrying fish up the street and selling it. They sometimes make as much as 150 or 200 per cent, and will not as a rule buy unless they foresee 50 per cent. And hawkers by no means always pay up the amount they have agreed.

(3) The fish buyers usually act merely as agents for larger buyers, who themselves distribute the fish or send it to some central market. Each of the several middlemen takes his pickings, of course. If the buyer should lose on his speculation, he is not above asking the fisherman to accept a less price than was agreed upon, and practically the fisherman is obliged to do it. If, on the other hand, the speculation is very successful, then the fisherman hears nothing about it, and has no means of finding out. Informal rings among

buyers and buyers' agents, to keep prices down, are the rule rather than the exception.

(4) Billingsgate, with the best possibilities, is the least satisfactory of all the markets. Longshoremen have not enough capital to speculate in the market, nor can they be there, and fishing too, or afford agents on the spot. No check can be kept upon Billingsgate. Returns may not be believed, but they have perforce to be accepted. Collusion between salesmen and buyers, the buyer being secretly an agent of the salesman, is an undoubted fact, though difficult to prove legally. To send catches to Billingsgate is frequently to receive, instead of money, a demand for payment of freightage. A fisherman has been known to go up and see his own fish sold, and then to receive from the salesman about a third of the sum, together with a note to the effect that there had been a glut on the market. Another fisherman, having brought a catch ashore, telegraphed to Billingsgate, and heard in reply that prospects were good. He sent up twenty-two thousand herrings (*i.e.* 26,400 at ten dozen to the 'hundred'), and in return received a penny stamp and a halfpenny stamp! His payment for help and the damage done to his nets by the heavy haul

must have cost him at least a pound. Plenty of such evidence can be collected among longshoremen, but unfortunately without documentary proof.

Remedies are not easy to devise, at all events before the extent of the corruption of the markets and of the wastage through defective organization has been accurately ascertained. For the channels through which the fish goes on its way from longshoreman to consumer are both badly organized and wasteful. The fisherman is obliged to play into the middleman's hands. Three winters ago, when almost the only smooth water round Great Britain was off the South Devon coast, where we were catching plenty of herrings, the price at St. Ives rose to 96s. a thousand. Yet we had no means of knowing it in time, and we never obtained more than 42s., and that only for one night's haul. The chief difficulty in the way of better organization is the extreme irregularity of supplies from longshore fisheries. But that difficulty ought not to be insurmountable in these days of telegraphs, telephones, and rapid (if not cheap) transit. Before their reduction in numbers, the coastguards used unofficially to telephone along the coast for fishermen. Information as to markets

should be supplied from some central office, as weather forecasts have recently been supplied to farmers.

Longshoremen cannot combine against the buyers. They are not men of business training, and if they did make themselves familiar with business methods they would be too busy to put them into practice just when they most needed them, namely, when they were catching fish. Besides which, they have not the capital to combine against their economic enemies for the purpose of keeping prices up. One bad season would bring them off their high horse. Better bad prices than starvation.

And it is useless to spring upon them full-fledged schemes of co-operation. The sturdiness of character which, combined with their sturdiness of physique, makes them such valuable members of the community, at the same time unfits them for the give-and-take of co-operative methods. But something might be done to improve the fisheries and prepare the longshoremen for successful co-operation, if men of business ability and sufficient capital would compete with the buyers on their own ground, in their own manner, and then would divide the surplus profits

among the fishermen in the shape of bonuses, as co-operative societies divide their profits among their members.

The most immediate, the most necessary, step is the improvement of Billingsgate and the other central markets, before fishermen, for lack of encouragement, become further impressed with the maxim, so fatal to the development of any trade, that a bird in the hand is always worth two in the bush. Only when the centres of the fish trade have been dealt with can the outlying branches be brought into a healthier state.

Longshoremen are a hardy, independent race of men, very cheap to the nation, and at the foundation of its seafaring. They only want the chance to live. It would be a pity to discover their value too late, and to try and revive them after they were, as a breed, extinct.

13. A FLEET OF NETS

It is fifty years or more since machine-made drift-nets of cotton were first boated on our beach, amid loud prophecies of failure, in place of the old hempen nets made by hand; yet some of the prestige accorded to hand-made gear, some of its sentiment and the affection in which it is held, seems still to cling about a fleet of nets. No longer brided knot after knot, mesh after mesh, through months of patient toil, by women and old men, they still convey that keener sense of possession which toil gives. There are things proper to be done with them, whether necessary at the moment or not. They have their traditional ceremonies. They ought to be spread on the beach to dry at such and such times, and barked at certain seasons. That a fisherman does not trouble to treat his nets well is a handy slur to throw at him. They are the costliest part of his gear; they require the most careful looking after.

Unlike patches on old garments, new pieces in old nets invariably give way before the yarn around; and that maybe is the reason why nets are mended and have pieces let into them long after it would be more profitable to sell them for strawberry beds and buy new ones. To own a fleet of nets is never to catch up with one's work; for they always want something doing to them, and there is no better instructor in the art of putting off till to-morrow what can be done to-day. But in so far as a man possesses a fleet, although he has lost his boats and all his other gear, and has even become a laughing-stock, he still, in virtue of his nets, commands a certain amount of respect. 'Fine time for the herrings, this; where's ol' Billy-Boy's fleet o' nets?' some one will remark about Christmas.

'Time he brought they out if he means to do ort wi' 'em,' will probably be the reply, though they have never been out this ten years.

'G'out! the mice have eaten holes in they, I reckon,' follows by way of practical comment.

'A proper fleet o' nets, ol' Billy-Boy's!' sums up the situation.

Had I a fleet of my own, I could easily find a boat to put them in, but if I had only the boat towards it, I could scarcely expect to borrow a fleet of nets.

It used sometimes to be said of great catches, that there was a herring in every mesh, until it occurred to some one to reckon up the meshes in a sixty-fathom net (scale, thirty-two meshes to the yard), and they were found to number not far short of a million. With a fleet of a dozen such nets, between ten and eleven million meshes are shot out in order to catch—perhaps half-a-dozen mackerel or herrings. *Catch,* I say, meaning it in the active sense, just as one might say that a hook catches fish, but in a landing net they are caught; for drift nets do not simply enclose the mackerel and herrings; they mesh them. Seine nets, which are shot around the fish, enclose them. Trawls scrape them up. Trammels, on the other hand, consist of three walls of net hanging closely side by side, the two outer walls made of very large square meshes, the inside wall of small-scale net, so that when a fish swims through an outer mesh on one side, it hits the small-scale net in the centre, carries it on through a large mesh on the other side, and so finds itself trapped in a narrow-necked pouch of small net. But a trammel is moored near rocks, and is seldom over fifty fathoms long, if so much; whereas a fleet of drift-nets, on its way up and

down with the tide, sweeps several miles of sea. The fish swim into its meshes, and, on account of their fins and gills, are unable to back out again. How many small fish swim right through the net, how many large ones cannot get in, how many of all those that strike the nets fail to mesh themselves—nobody knows. Possibly a very large number. Some nights a good proportion of fish are dragged inboard along with the yarn, entangled rather than meshed. It is probable that at such times they have been simply cruising about, instead of migrating or pursuing their food.

A fish's-eye view of a fleet of nets, could one take it, would be a strangely impressive sight. One would see—looking up through water growing rapidly a darker green in the twilight—the keel and bottom-strakes of a small boat. In clear water one might also see her foresail hauled down, leaving only the mizzen up in order to keep her head to the wind. Then, with that peculiar soft plash which netting makes, fathom after fathom of it would be shot overboard in heaps, and would float away, straightening itself out until there extended from the boat—itself a mere black bubble on the water—an immense brown curtain more than half-a-mile long, and five or six fathoms

deep. For mackerel it would hang from the surface downwards, but for herrings it would be sunk in the depth of the water, supported by buoys and lanyards, so that its foot was just free of the bottom—an improvement in fishing discovered not so very many years ago. The motion of the death-curtain, hanging free and unleaded from its headrope, would be inconceivably graceful; for not the finest fabric floating in air, nor the most accomplished dancer, nor even smoke, can vie in delicacy and softness and exquisite suspense with the waving of net in water. So, throughout the night, it would be just visible, drifting in the flood and the ebb tides, and curling back on itself during slack water. And towards dawn the two men in charge of it would be seen to peep out over the gunwale, the boat and nets would draw towards each other, and finally the whole curtain, that had stretched far out of sight, would return to the unknown land whence it had come, snugly piled up between two thwarts of the drifter. To a fish of some intelligence, yet without enough to distinguish between human limbs and the apparently animate nets they shoot out, there would be something terrible in the long arm of fishermen; something as mysterious and as darkly

uncanny as the interference of spirits in the familiar life of mankind; something beautiful with the fascination that always accompanies destruction.

People who could not stand the work and exposure for one night, let alone for a week on end, come down to the beach and ask questions, and attempt to give instruction: it is really wonderful how kindly and instructive they sometimes are. 'Why don't you do this? You ought to do that. Tell me now. . . .' they say; for fishermen are expected to drop the work they have in hand if gentlefolk want to talk to them, and because they have not much school education they are often thought to be ignorant of their own work too. 'It's simple enough,' the wiseacre continues. 'You go out to sea in fairly calm weather. You shoot your nets. The fish go into them while you're asleep. . . . You do sleep out there, don't you?'

'Sometimes us closes an eye when there's nort about to look out for, but 'tisn't the same thing as sleeping in your bed, not out there on the bare bottom-boards in our little open boats; an' very often we'm too cold, or 'tis too shuffly, like, wi' a breeze springing up, or you can't catch off, or summut.'

'Well, you do get *some* sleep, anyhow. And then you bring your fish in to market and sell them, and you can afford to laze about here all day long. I paid threepence for a mackerel this morning. A thousand threepences. . . .'

'Us didn' get threepence each for 'em. Us got six shillings a hunderd.'

The fisherman remains obstinately short-spoken and evasive until his questioner moves on, and then he bursts out with, 'What the hell's the good for the likes o' they to chatter like that? Questioning o'ee an' wanting to know how much thee's earn, an' how thee's earn it! S'pose we was to ask the people what us takes out to sea how much their income is, an' how they earns it, and w'er they gets it honest or not. If they sees 'ee doing all right for a week or two, they says thee't making a fortune, an' when thee casn't do nort week a'ter week, they don't take no notice o' thic. Let 'em get a fleet o' nets o' their own, an' work 'em themselves, an' see what 'tis like. I'll bound they'd jolly soon tire o'it an' want our help, the likes o' they mazed articles. They 'ouldn't laze about all day a'ter nights to sea; they'd go right to bed, an' better 'fit us did the same out the way o'em. An' yet they comes along telling off the

likes o'us an' asking questions. They knows, seems so, an' the likes o'us, what's had the experience o'it, don't. Why, I reckon that if you got a fleet o' nets you'm so much meshed in 'em as ever the fish be. . . .'

A fleet of nets, indeed, is pretty nearly one man's work, though some seasons they hardly earn enough to pay for barking, and all the time, whether ashore or boated, they are wearing themselves out. When they come to the beach, and are drawn out of the maker's sacks, they look like ropes of cream-coloured lace, so fine is the yarn until two or three lots of bark have been boiled into it. Turned to a rich shade of terra-cotta by their first barking, they are put into their head-ropes and boated; and thenceforward they must never be let out of mind. For not only have rents in them to be mended before they get bigger—ticklish work that not every fisherman can do well in these days of machine-made nets—but they have to be spread out in the sun, turned over like hay, and dried, sufficiently often to keep them from rotting, yet not so often as to damage them even more by hauling them about on the shingle. At the end of each season, before they are barked and bagged, they have to be washed by two men

standing knee-deep in the sea, and after a big catch, especially of herrings, they are also given a slouzing, because, in spite of the tannin of the bark, fish slime in a heap of nets will cause them to ferment and heat up, so that after one night's neglect new nets have been hauled out of the boat as brittle as tinder. Even after they are bagged and put away in a dry place, little bits of seaweed that have not been picked out will take moisture from the air and act as centres of rottenness, and mice, which seem to delight in the taste of bark, will eat holes into them. Nets, like boats and men, are most safe when they are in use.

With care and good luck, a fleet of nets in active service may last ten years. In their end—whether they are simply worn out, or rot to bits, or get foul of the bottom, or are lost, cut away, torn out of their headropes by rough seas, or are broken up by a heavy catch, or, most of all, when poverty sells them for half their worth—there is always something of tragedy. For nets are things very close to men. They are a means of livelihood, and, more than that, they are instruments of gambling—of gambling with the many chances of the sea. Upon them fishermen stake their lives; and often, but not always, they win.

14. LAME DUCK HUNTING

One after another the herring-drifters left the beach, and, with a nor'west breeze off-land, steered for the sou'western fishing-ground. Men ran into the water to give them a last shove. The crews, already wet-footed, scrambled aboard over the bows. Mizzens fluttered out aft. Tall dipping lugsails went up the masts in jerks, while the shouts of the men hauling the halyards taut came ashore over the water strangely calmed by the spaciousness around; and as the boats, one by one, luffed up into the wind, the winter afternoon's sunlight shone white on their sails, on clean new sails and dirty sails alike. Small craft though they were, their going for the night made a stately procession down into the west.

We stood round our own drifter, which had been hauled to the water's edge, waiting for Jim

to come out of house. 'Is thic fellow going to be all night getting ready?' asked Richard.

'Iss,' said Benjie, following his own train of thought and peering to sea with his keen old eyes; 'I shouldn't wonder if thee doesn't make a haul t'night. Two or three boats from the west'ard had 'em last night, so many as they could haul aboard. Got a good mind, I have, to shove off thy sailing-boat, Richard, an' come down t'night an' see what you'm 'bout. Might take a line, too, an' see w'er there's any o' they whiting left to the out-ground o' Refuge Cove. I've a-see'd plenty caught there thees time o' year.'

Richard stood up on the heap of nets in the boat and spoke very deliberately. 'You'd better to,' he said. 'If us gets more'n us can carry, an' has to cut away nets, you may just so well hae 'em as they chaps from the west'ard, what tears 'em abroad for 'ee anyhow, an' p'raps you never sees 'em again. Can take my boat all right. Her don't leak much.—Whenever's thic fellow coming? Time us was there, now, wi' our nets shot. Waiting 'bout yer!'

We arranged to be on the out-ground of Refuge Cove by seven o'clock; to show we were there by dipping a flare in threes, with one minute intervals;

and to make at once for the drifter if it gave the same signal. Jim came along the beach sea-booted; spare guernseys, oilskins, a bottle of tea, and a paper bag of sandwiches under his arm.

'Coom on!' Richard growled.

'Plenty o' time, ain't there?' said Jim unhurriedly. Mast, sails, sweeps, and ballast were bundled into the drifter. With an 'All together, boys!' we shoved them off. And afterwards we hauled the smaller sailing-boat down to the water.

We were about to put to sea ourselves when a visitor came down the beach to the boat. 'Where are you going at this time of day in that boat?' he demanded as if by right.

Benjie hitched up his trousers, put his hands into his pockets, and gazed into the man's face with mischievous candour. 'Where be us going, sir? Why, we'm going lame duck hunting.'

'Lame duck hunting? Is that allowed? Isn't it poaching? Where are the ducks?'

'That's for us to find out, sir.'

'Well, what d'you do with them?'

'That depends on w'er us finds any. Time we was off. Good-afternoon, sir.—Shove!'

Once afloat, Benjie broke into loud laughter. 'Aye!' he said, his mind no doubt harking back

to the days when there were few visitors about to ask questions. 'Thic starch-collar joker 'll be down under cliff t'morrow looking for broken-legged ducks, you see. I bain't going to tell the likes o' they question-asking interlopers that our sort o' lame ducks is drifters wi' more herrings in their nets than they can take aboard. Let 'em look!'

Darkness had by this time crept over the sea. Along the southern horizon was a shadowy bank of cumulus clouds. 'They woolpacks,' Benjie remarked, 'bain't there for nort; nobody won't go to sea t'morrow night.' In the cloudless nor'-west, the sky, faintly tinged with green, was dark, deep, and, as it seemed, infinitely empty; yet from it, black on the water, came spiteish puffs of wind that heeled the boat over and quickened the lap-lap of the wavelets against her strakes into one continuous, most musical note. Behind us the comfortable stationary lights of the little town receded into a blur; while, as we neared the fleet, its glimmering, slightly swaying lights increased in number till it seemed that, before us, was a forest hung with lamps. 'They west'ard chaps,' said Benjie with a chuckle, 'be up 'long t'night. They'll hae 'em!'

On the out-ground of Refuge Cove we down-sailed, baited our hooks, and threw out the lines. Immediately, the riding-lights of the fleet, which before had seemed so remotely fixed, began to bob and dip. One, brighter than the others, dipped thrice; dipped thrice again.

'They'm signalling!' I cried.

'Bide quiet,' whispered Benjie. 'I got a whiting nibble. Likely as not 'tis the boats rocking.'

We poured paraffin oil into the baler upon a rag torn from Benjie's coat and set light to it. The flame shot up, was dipped three times, and then I had to drop the baler into the boat, where the oil spread and threatened to burn us out. 'They coastguards,' said Benjie, 'will think we'm a ship in distress.'

'Let 'em!' said I, sucking an oily burnt finger.

Once more the brightest riding light appeared to dip three times.

We wound up the lines—"Twas a whiting bite, sure 'nuff!'—made sail, and steered sou'west to the fleet. Presently, with some of the larger riding-lights straight outside us, we crossed several of the long lines of corks that buoy up the head-lines of the drift-nets. We spoke one of our own

craft, asking the course to a west'ard port. 'Yu'm heading for it,' they replied.—'G'out, 'tis Benjie. What be doing yer?'

'Lame duck hunting, for sure. Have 'ee catched ort?'

'Us been foul an' had to haul in. Shooting their nets all up in heaps, they be, t'night.'

'Aye! an' so they will when there's herrings about. Where's Jim and Richard?'

'Right down there to the west'ard.'

Next we boarded a large harbour craft that had a fore-cabin. They made us hot coffee on a red-hot stove which leaked till the air was thick and stifling. Fishermen in their stockinged feet lay around smoking, while Benjie sat bolt upright and lectured on what the likes o'us have to contend wi' and on the discomforts of our small open boats compared with such craft as we were in. Another mug of coffee each; then 'Gude night to 'ee, an' thank you,' and the cold open sea.

From one of the two westernmost boats a man came aboard of us. We rowed him half a mile down his nets, found them foul of a harbour craft's longer fleet, hauled several fathoms in-board, and shot clear again. The other western-most drifter was ours. 'Row quiet,' said

Benjie, 'they'm asleep, I'll warrant; an' they'm foul.'

The drifter itself looked asleep, rolling gently to its nets on the swell. Round and about the mizzen halyard the riding-lamp swung. The mainsail was spread abroad over the bows. Our boats bumped. The sail heaved like a gigantic loose-skinned animal awakening; it was flung back, and from underneath Jim's startled face looked out. Richard snored on, wrapped in a fearnaught jacket, his head under the cutty. 'Thought we was in a collision,' Jim explained. 'Us an't catched nort. Hauled in two nets for a hunderd an' a half. We'm foul, I b'lieve, o' thic inside boat's nets. Row down 'long the buoys, will 'ee? Us won't try an' haul in till the moon rises. Cold, ain't it? I'd only just catched off to sleep. . . .'

But his sleepiness belied him.

Already the clouds to the eastward were filling with a chilly light. We rowed down the buoys; passed the inside drifter; saw the two lines of corks drawing closer and closer together; and, finally, found the two fleets of nets buoy to buoy. Hailing the inside drifter, we told them so.

'What be chattering 'bout?'

'You'm foul; that's what 'tis.'

'G'out!'

Benjie chuckled. 'I'll settle 'em,' he said. 'You see.'

Whereupon we rowed back to the end buoys, and, dragging up those of the inside drifter, we shortened the lanyards by a fathom, so that the nets hung shallower in the tide. Benjie laughed hoarsely, as if in answer to a gull that was hovering round. 'That's settled 'em—shooting foul like that! They won't catch herrings, but they'll drift clear. "Some artful ol' devil," they'll say, "as knows drifting has been along here!"'

Then we upsailed for home. Soon the twinkling riding-lights seemed miles away on the shining water; shining, because the moon had risen above the bank of woolpacks, and was riding up the sky. From the land a ghostly moon-rainbow arose, arching to sea, protectively, right over the tranquil fleet. A peace beyond words reigned. It was almost impossible to imagine that there to the west'ard, under the wide, bright, silent heavens, under the great moon-rainbow, men hauled and strained and tore and swore at their fouled nets.

'Us an't found no lame ducks nor got no herrings for our pains,' said Benjie, pulling with

quenchless vigour at the windward oar to help the boat along. 'But us an't been down for nort. We've a-set some *broken-winged* ducks right. Aye! I reckon they inside chaps 'll wonder when they sees their lanyards taken up, an' so 'll thic starch-collar interloper when he goes down along t'morrow to hunt lame ducks for his dinner. Lord, what a night 'tis, to be sure! I an't never see'd a better, an' I don't suppose I ever shall.

'Not now,' he added.

15. A SORT OF A KIND OF A WRECK

Instead of dying away towards evening the south-easterly breeze blew steadily fresher, and along-shore the lop rose higher. Those drifters which had been anchored off since the previous night's mackerel-fishing kicked to it at their moorings. The sea was of a living blueness, flecked gaily with white foam; so blue and so white that the sky itself looked pale above.

'Be us going, or bain't us? 'Cause if we be, jump in!' And into the punt they jumped—Benjie, who owns the drifter, together with Jim and Richard, who work her for him. After Benjie had brought the punt ashore again, and we had hauled her up together, he remained with her cut-rope still in his hand, seated on the shingle, gazing rather anxiously out to sea. Opening his snuff-box with the air of a man who has plenty of waiting before him, he took a long strong pinch.

'Iss,' he said, sniffing, as the drifter's lugsail went up more jerkily than usual because she was plunging so into the seas, 'they'd better ha' turned their starns to it like thic drifter that's come ashore over along. 'Tisn't no fit time; an' they wouldn't ha' gone, I'll warrant, if her hadn't been a'ready moored off. Thunder weather, this is; an' I'd rather be catched in a gale, what comes on proper, than in one o' they thunder-puffs, what comes down on 'ee in five minutes, blows like a hurricane for ten, an' then 'tis so calm you got to strip to your flannel an' row home. But there! they can go if they'm minded, though 'tisn't never worth while to risk losing your fleet o' nets, an' endangering your own life too; an' that you'll find out when you'm so old as I be, if you don't know it when you'm young. Nor I bain't going to drive anybody to sea in wild weather, not if the drifter don't pay for barking her own nets. Ah! the old *Henrietta* was the boat. Pity I ever sold she up to Ware, an' bought thic there lumbersome gert thing. I've never done no good wi' her, nor never shan't, not like us did wi' the *Henrietta*. Come'd down, they did; put her gear in her an' shoved off; an' upsailed for Ware wi' a fine leading wind. Her went from me, me watch-

ing, an' I'd give all I got for to hae her back again. Lord! the catches we've a-brought home in her afore now—more in a week than thic there's ever catched in a season. Perty li'l boat, her was; handy, an' swimmed like a duck; would carry a weight in her, too. I only wish her was back again.'

Benjie picked pebbles out of the beach, moistening them with his tongue to see what sorts they were. He held out one, saying, 'Moss-agate!' and without another word threw the moss-agate into the sea. The old *Henrietta* was in his mind.

Whilst the sun was setting in a haze behind Steep Head, the sea's laughter changed to greyness, its joyfulness into savagery. Clouds that had for some time been lying along the horizon began to lift into the sky. 'They've hauled down,' said Benjie, shading his eyes against the glint of sunset on the water. 'I can't see nort but their mizzen. They must be shooting their nets b' now. Better if they'd a-turned home wi'out shooting o'em.—There!' he exclaimed, 'did 'ee see thic? Lightning! Down there to the sou'-west. There 'tis again, up over land! Aye, 'tis gathering up. See how this here lop's making. I wish they was ashore. 'Tis time.'

Darkness fell. On going out again after supper, Benjie was there, still watching, crouched down on the lee side of a boat. 'Can 'ee glimpse their light?' he asked. 'I can't. But they'm hauling their nets right enough. They won't bide out there in this. I only hopes they gets 'em aboard all right wi'out hauling o'em out o' the headropes. C'ooh! *'tis* hauling; *I* knows. I've a-been out there before now in a scuffle like this here, an' had to let fathoms o'it slip through me hands 'cause I couldn't hold on to it. 'Tisn't no fit time to be out there. These here thunder-puffs. . . .'

The south-easterly wind was still freshening, the lop still making. Distant flickers of lightning showed the sea as a vast troubled cavern underneath the clouds; flashes overhead lit up the turmoil of it; otherwise only the grey crests of the inshore breakers were visible. It began to spot with rain. 'This 'll lay the sea a bit if it comes on proper,' Benjie remarked. As if some magic had spirited them away, the townsfolk who had been walking the Front to watch the lightning disappeared. Their tramp and their chatter suddenly ceased. The Shore Road was empty, but for a few shadows hastily crossing the wet shine beneath the lamps. The sea hissed as it does

when the wind, increasing faster than the lop, drives scudding wavelets over the surface of the swell. During the hushes that preceded the mutterings of the thunder it was easy to fancy that one saw the drifter out there—a little boat glimmering in a waste of heaving foam, tossed high, plunging low—two men hauling and straining to get the nets inboard. Perhaps they were already running home under reefed foresail.

We waited on. The lamps along the Front were turned down. A few people who come out on rough nights to see the boats run in and lend a hand, gathered round in wet mackintoshes. 'I sees a light!' cried Benjie, peering into the thickness over the sea. "Tis her! Come on!'

Almost before we could run to the foot of the beach, the drifter, under full-bellied sail, swooped across the breakers and grounded, like a bird shot down in a high wind. Benjie ran into the water for the cut-rope. I hooked it on to the capstan wire. That done, she *was* ashore. 'Heave away!' we shouted. With six or eight at the capstan bars she crunched ponderously up the beach.

'How many have 'ee catched?' we asked when she was trigged and made fast.

'Five or six dozen,' Richard replied.

Five or six dozen in two-thirds of a mile of nets!

'Hauls in hard, 't do,' said Jim, 'when thee casn't see no macker coming in 'long wi' it.'

'Bain't thic t'other boat in?' inquired Richard, nodding towards the next berth.

'No.—Not eet.—Time her was!'

We waited on, all of us together, wet and dry. The rain pelted down. We took refuge in the shelter and stood on the seats looking out to sea. ''Tis lulling a bit,' Benjie observed. Almost as he spoke a squall from the sou'west made the shelter itself rock. It blew for a few minutes violently; then backened back to the south-east. In spite of the rain we went down under beach.

At last the other drifter came ashore, looming up suddenly and staggering like a drunken man, because the small mizzen which she had hoisted in place of her mainsail was not enough to keep proper steerage-way on her among the breakers. 'An' lucky, too,' said one of her two men, 'that us *had* got thic mizzen to the mast. You wouldn't ha' see'd us else—not afore the crabs had picked holes in us. As 'twas, thic sou'westerly squall struck us all aback an' pretty near capsized us. Couldn't see nort.'

'What can 'ee 'spect,' growled the other man, 'when you'm drove to sea in foul weather?'

But that he said in the excitement of the moment, not meaning it.

Midnight struck on the church clock.

We came in house; snatched up something to eat and drink from what remained on the supper-table; made a couple of cups o' tay to warm us; stripped off our wet clothes and put them to dry; and, leaving the kitchen in a sufficient pickle, went up-over to bed.

Just as I was catching off to sleep, I heard dimly a flump-flump on the stairs; then a knock, and a hurried voice outside my door: 'A't thee asleep? Turn out! Quick! There's Waremen cast ashore, an' they'm crying for help. 'Astn't heard 'em? Crying for help, they be. Hurry up! Turn out!'

We ran out and along the Front, keeping together in the murk by the sound of each other's footsteps.

At the bottom of the beach, against the whitish broken water of low tide, the blurr of a boat was just discernible. She lay broadside on, canted away from the sea, exactly as she had knocked ashore. 'Who be it?' Jim called down.

'George an' Harry.'

'What?'

'In the old *Hen*.'

'The old *Hen*!' shouted Jim joyfully, bounding off the sea-wall. "'Tis the old *Hen*—ol' Benjie's boat come back again. Whoever thought to see she. Come on! Come on! Haul her up! 'Tis the old *Hen*!'

'Thee casn't haul her.'

'Where's the cut-rope o' her? Where's a capstan?'

'There ain't one. Thic thing up top beach is only fit to haul up punts.'

'Well, then, lighten her then. Then, maybe, us can haul her up to it. 'Tis only the old *Hen*. Her's so light as a feather, her is, wi'out her nets an' gear.'

"'Tisn't no good I tell thee. . . .'

'Come on an' lighten her an' see.

We stumbled up the beach with her mast, oars, and ballast. We climbed a lamp-post and turned up the light. Then we began hauling the tangled nets out of her, passing them to the top of the beach as fire-buckets are passed along. Some were so rotten that they tore under the fingers; of one net only the head-rope was left. After a couple of

hours' work nearly everything was out of her. Creeping round with the capstan bars so that no sudden jerk should part the rusty wire, we hauled the *Henrietta* up the beach, and then, leaning against her gunwale—which gave to the weight of one's shoulders—we stood around her. We looked inside. Even in the dim shifty light we saw that the poor old *Hen* was all to bits.

'This here's *my* last mackerel drifting this season,' said one of the Waremen. 'I've had enough o'it. I only came for a stopgap. Crabbing's my job.'

'An' *I* wouldn't ha' put to sea in her,' said his brother, 'if 't hadn't been for obliging my mate that I goes trawling with—him that owns her an' has let her get like this. Rotten nets, rotten ropes, rotten gear, rotten everything! Us 'ould ha' managed to beat home all right if the sail hadn't blow'd away. When us ran ashore two or three big seas knocked us up high and dry, an' there we was. God's sakes, what a night!'

Jim was patting and smoothing the *Henrietta*. Waremen have a reputation for going cheerily to sea with gear that's long past it; but Jim had carried with him for many years a memory of the old boat in her prime; and now he could not deny

to himself what she was come to. Anxious still to find some praise for her, he said: 'Aye! but her know'd her berth, the old *Hen* did. This was her own berth her knocked into. 'Twas just here us come'd ashore wi' thic catch o' herrings—do 'ee mind? 'Twas just here her shoved off from—the last time. Her know'd her berth. *Her* know'd!

'Come along in house, you,' he added. 'Bring in your catch in thic bucket. The old *Hen* 'll lie so snug there as ever her did. Her's come to her rightful home, an' her knows it.'

So we brought the Waremen in house, found some food, made tea once more, and for a change of clothes we routed out old sweaters, patched trousers, and darned guernseys. The kitchen was choked up with the remains of three suppers and with wet garments lying in heaps on the floor. They stripped and dried themselves where they sat. One of them had the chest and belly muscles grandly clean-cut—developed to perfection by a life spent at the oars. Yet even while I was wishing that some great sculptor would carve his likeness before labour wore him out (knowing very well all the time that no stone statue in a gallery could equal the play of the lamplight upon the living

body in a fellow-fisherman's little kitchen) the man jumped up suddenly, and, with a tightened face, staring before him at nothing, he pressed his chest hard against the corner of the table. It was as if, without warning, he had indeed been changed to stone. Straightening himself up slowly, he took our hands and placed them against his chest. The muscles which had been so lissom were knotted and strung to the hardness of wood. ''Tis the cramp,' he said. 'I gets it cruel—gets it to sea sometimes. It passes away.'

'Aye,' said Jim; 'an' I gets the indigestion awful sometimes. We'm all o'us wrecks one way or t'other.'

He was still trying to excuse the ways of fate to the old *Henrietta*.

It was four o'clock. Dawn was filling the garden with a thin greenish light, which made one feel that the coming day was overlooking us, whose minds were dark with the past night.

The Waremen camped out on an unmade bed. And next morning we drank with them, discussing mainly the merits of men and women long since dead. About noon they hoisted their tattered sail with a halyard spliced in two places. Another leading wind filled it, and in a few minutes the

Henrietta was only a distant dusky spot among the waves. We scarcely regretted her second going. Benjie himself kept aloof with his hands in his pockets.

'Why wasn't 'ee there for to lend a hand shoving the Waremen off?' asked Jim.

'My God! What a wreck her is! Made me sick to see her,' was all he replied.

'That's it,' said Jim. "Twas a sort of a kind of a wreck, I reckon. Her come'd ashore safe, but her was a wreck afore ever her put to sea, the old *Henrietta* was. An' that there's the way o'it wi' boats an' men.'

Nevertheless, if we go up to Ware twenty years hence, those Waremen will welcome us on account of that night, and will have our glasses filled again and again till we are drunk, if we want it; and we shall talk about the old *Henrietta*. 'Do 'ee mind thic night?' they'll say, referring to her wreck. 'Do 'ee mind thic night?' we will answer, thinking of her youth and her catches of fish.

Not everything can be wrecked.

16. SEINING

'THERE they be! There they be! There they be!'

Instantly the beach is all agog.

Very likely fishermen have been standing on the Front, hands pocketed, the whole of a late summer's day, too lazy to live, it would seem, yet never with their eyes for long off the sea. 'Mackerel ought to play up this evening,' is the word passed along. The sea looks like it; the time of year is come; and perhaps a report has been brought in that the water was 'pretty near dry wi' fish outside.' Or a screeching flock of gulls may have been sighted on the out-ground, fluttering over the surface of the sea, and making furious jabs down into it. Or possibly the brit (our name for shoals of fish-fry and whitebait) have already fled along shore, darkening the water, and jumping out of it like little streaks of silvery light.

In that case, the seine's crew will have strolled quietly together nearer the boat, still to all appearance merely loungers on the beach, but in reality as drowsily watchful as cats outside mouse holes.

Suddenly one of them stiffens up and points—points as if his life depended on it, as if some sort of fit had struck him so.

'There they be! There they be! There they be!' he cries under his breath.

'Where?'

'There! Casn' see? To Steep Head o'us.—There they be again!' he shouts outright; for it no longer matters if the mackerel are sighted by other seiners. Not far from shore the water is splashing with them. Gulls plunge into the greenish swirl, and, chased by other gulls, circle round with fish in their beaks. The shout gathers force:

'Lookse! There they be! Two schools o'em! Heading east they be. Come on! Haul the boat down. Us'll hae thic lot. Coom on, I tell thee! What's bide gaping there for? Roosh the boat down.'

Men race along to the seine-boat, looking back over their shoulders at the sea.

'Is the plug in? Baler there?'

'Aye. . . . Better to look. Aye!'

'Down with her then. Haul. All together!'

She is rushed down stern first to the sea: never mind about greasy ways for her to run on; seine-boats have to stand some knocking-about. Two or three men scramble aboard over the bows as she takes the water. One man stands upright on the net that is piled between the midship thwarts. For a minute or two the others lie on their oars, while the boat swims weightily on the gently heaving sea.

Not far from her—given good luck—the fish break water again. The man on the net points to them with a wide gesture which at the same time points a course for the boat; jumps off his perch on the seine, and prepares to shoot it. Spray flies from the hastily, heavily dug oars. Ten to one a thole-pin snaps. 'There they be!' sounds for the last time, with less of anxiety and more of triumph in its tone. 'There they be!' is echoed from the gathering crowd on the beach. The end of a rough grass rope, which was coiled upon the net, is thrown ashore and caught. As the boat goes off it is paid out. Then, rowing outwards, along, and back to the beach, the seine is shot overboard by armfuls, until—if all has gone well

—the fish find themselves hemmed in between the shore and a semicircular wall of net, eighty or a hundred fathoms in length, large-meshed in the arms but of a smaller-scale mesh towards the centre, or bunt; the head-rope corked and the foot-rope leaded, so that the top of the net holds up to the surface while the bottom of it bites the sand or shingle underneath.

By means of the grass ropes, the two ends of the net are hauled ashore anything up to a hundred yards apart. The haulers on either arm divide, some taking the head-rope and standing up, in order to keep it high, the rest taking the foot-rope and bending down or kneeling, in order to keep it low; all working together and at intervals dragging the two arms across the beach nearer one another: indeed, the hauling of a seine-net done fitty, with all hands, whether standing or kneeling, properly placed and keeping good time, is like nothing so much as a stationary dance at the land's edge, a votive ceremonial dance under the wide sky, before the inexhaustible sea, the mother of life.

The mackerel, if it is not a mere 'water-haul,' finding themselves caged, make frantic rushes from one side of the net to the other and from

top to bottom of the water. The pool within the semicircle of head-rope corks is all of a boil with them. 'Easy thic head-rope o' yours! Easy!' is the cry, when the corks on one arm bob under; for should some of the fish discover a gap, the remainder will follow like a flock of sheep, and a water-haul it will be. Or again, 'Keep thic foot-rope down, casn'?' lest the leads rise off the bottom and any flat-fish there may be in the net escape underneath. As the seine comes in, getting less and less in weight, the pace quickens, until, with brit streaming out of every mesh, and the fish flapping and floundering about inside, the bunt of the net is hauled ashore in a wave.

Then the confusion is at its height. If the seine has been shot in the daytime anywhere near the Front, a crowd bundles down, treads right over the net, and almost presses the seiners into the water in its eagerness to see the fish, and to torment the already harassed fishermen with a hail of questions. Children grab at the poisonous little stinging-fish, or weevers, and look up with bland inquiring eyes when they are roughly handled to make them drop their pretty little fishes quick. (Were they stung they would probably have to be carried home.) Boxes are shouted

for, and into them the catch is sorted: first and foremost the mackerel, then almost always some flat-fish, and afterwards specimens of nearly all the commoner fish that swim in our inshore waters —bass, pollack, pout, gurnard, whiting, mullet, thornbacks, conger, sand-eels, smelts, squid, lobsters, wild crabs innumerable, and even once in a way a small salmon that has come to go up the river, and has found it barred with shingle.

Not often is the catch so great that men have to go into the water and lift the bunt, or the seine cannot be brought ashore at all unless most of the fish are scooped out of it into a boat with skim-nets. The chackle at such times is indescribable, made up very largely of contradictory orders and heavy-booted cuss-words. For seining hereabout is not a job done really fitty. It cannot be. It is too chancy, too much of a rush. Nobody can foretell the exact moment of the fish playing up, and, when they do come, the seine-boat's crew, if it has a complete crew of six or eight, are seldom altogether on the spot. Therefore the help of any bare-kneed strapper who runs down to the ropes must be accepted. Among them is pretty sure to be a blaremouth, whose tongue no one can still. And there is no proper skipper in sole charge.

All are skippers. The owner of the net may not have sighted the fish first, and usually there is present a man of even more experience, who knows best what rock-ledges, under which the foot of the net may catch, happen to be uncovered by the sand; to whom the owner himself is ready enough to defer, but not his scratch crew. We have none of the Cornish tuck-seines, for use at sea without hauling them ashore; nor have we the Cornish organization. Never a haul is made without all hands acknowledging, though not in so many words, that it ought to have been done better.

Yet nothing can destroy the fascination of seining, because it takes place so often when sea and sky are at their loveliest; and for that reason—not simply on account of the excitement—hauls with the seine stay fresher in one's mind than almost any other fishing turn-outs. Benjie would certainly show surprise were he reminded how many years it is since he made his last wonderful night of long-hauls. On a Sunday evening he came across beach: 'What's say if us shoves off the seine-boat an' makes a haul or two? Water's nice an' thick. Tide's just right.'

'Sunday evening, ain't it? Thought thee

di'sn't do no Sunday work,' replied the regular hands, togged up in their best clothes and starch-collars.

'Aye,' returned Benjie, whose Sabbath is a fisherman's, and lasts from sunset on Saturday till sunset on Sunday. 'Might pick up a few shillings up under the eastern cliff. There's some fine soles to Kicking Donkey. I've a-see'd 'em. Thee ca'st change thy clothes, casn'?'

''Taint wuth it. All right t'morrow, looks so.'

'I bain't going to stay home for no best clothes,' flashed Benjie. 'Lord! 'twould ha' gie'd they there ol' fishermen fits, I reckon, if they was to come back from the grave, for all they used to wear high-poll hats week-days and Sundays alike. Fine soles they be, too. Here's off.'

Accordingly, he picked up a volunteer crew and shoved off.

We made an ordinary haul to the west of the town, and another from the beach. The Sunday evening promenaders collected round. 'My senses! let's get out o' this,' exclaimed Benjie; so we went up under the eastern cliff, where we knew that Sunday boots and shoes would never follow us along the shingle. There we started long-hauling.

‘A Moonglade that Stretched to the End of Sight.’

The shore faces almost due south, and we worked from west to east; but instead of bringing the eastern arm of the seine semicircular-wise back to the beach, it was shot out almost straight in a south-easterly direction. The boat rowed towards shore as far as the grass rope would reach; a grapnel was put down for anchor; and the three of them aboard, sitting down and swinging to it as if they were rowing, hauled on the grass rope till the eastern arm of the net came level with the boat. Having taken up the grapnel, they again rowed towards shore, paying out the rope, and again they anchored and hauled in their end of the net another rope's length. Finally, paying out the rope a third time, they reached the shore itself and went on hauling therefrom.

We worked all night, the eight of us, four on each arm of the seine—shooting, long-hauling, boating the net, boxing the fish, shifting further east, and shooting again. Eight hauls we made. The harvest moon rose red above the horizon; climbed the sky; bathed sea and cliffs in a silvery shimmer. Before us was the limitless water and a moonglade that stretched to the end of sight; above us the cliffs seemed to reach right up to the tranquil star-splashed heavens; and underneath,

on a narrow strip of shingle, netting a little strip of sea, we laboured till dawn was heralded by a change in the colour of the moonlight. Thereupon, with aching backs and stiff sore hands, keeping as close as possible to the water's edge for fear any cliff should fall upon us, we tramped along a couple of miles of shingle home. On the beach, before people were about, Benjie sorted the fish, distributed some for breakfast, and wished us 'Good morning!' to bed. There were not, after all, many soles.

Benjie it was, too, who brought about the great catch of bass. Long before it was light, one summer's morning, he came in house.

'Hi! Be there? Wake up! Tell Jim to turn out. The bass be in upon the sand to Western Bay. I've see'd 'em—like a shoal o' gert salmon—see'd 'em there this two or three mornings. Us can make a haul o' they. There's a kettle o' boiling water up to my house, if thee's care to bring up the tay-pot. Time 'nuff for that. Ah! they'll be there come peep o' day. Us'll hae 'em!'

We drank our cup o' tay, sitting round the kitchen ready-booted, and by the first glimmer of daylight we rowed the seine-boat and a punt across Broken Rocks to Western Bay. Benjie crept alongshore.

The tide was dead low upon the flat sand, and in the shallow wash hundreds of bass, their back-fins sticking out of the water, were chasing, and feeding on, the sand-eels. Very quietly we shot the seine-net around a likely shoal, then hauled with the utmost care, so that not a single sunken cork nor a trip of the foot-rope should leave a way of escape.

As the seine came in the bass swam madly round, like a fleet of green-backed torpedoes gone amuck. We dragged, lifted, and lurched the punt nearly clear of the sea. And at that moment the tide turned. It flowed in round our feet, flowed under, above, and through the net. On all sides bass found just enough water to turn themselves the right way up and swim. Out they darted, gave a flip or two, and were gone. To have hauled the net still higher would have meant losing more. Into the water we plunged, therefore, the six of us who were there, catching the bass by their tails, hooking our fingers under their gills, scooping them out upon the dry sand, throwing them into the punt, and even kicking them up the beach. Their sharp dorsal fins and the spines upon their gills tore our hands till the blood came. Some of them, when they flapped, were too strong

to hold. Fully as many as we caught must have got clean away.

But it was with five hundredweight or so in the punt that I went off home. And while I was sheaving across Broken Rocks the sun rose, orange-coloured and immense, above the eastern cliffs. The sea lighted up, faint pink and blue, as if it had been a vast glow-lamp. That, above all, is the sight which comes into my mind with recollections of seining. Often at night, about bedtime, Jim says, 'Well, let's get up-over, and see what the morrow 'll bring forth.' When, returning home from seining at peep o' day, I see the sun rise so, upon a grey land and sea, above the eastern cliff, it seems to me not that the morrow is being brought forth—which would be simply dawn—but that the morrow is bringing forth what the morrow has in store; that the future, up there, is looking down upon us with steady eye.

17. A GLUT OF MACKEREL

'*I* NEVER see'd the like o' it before, not all the years I been out to beach.'

'G'out! I have then; an' more o'em too, an' bigger mackerel; gert schools o'em, when they used to catch 'em in the seine by scores o' thousands, an' pack 'em an' send 'em in wagons to Exeter, afore anybody was troubled wi' thic humbugging ol' railway, keeping o'ee waiting an' not returning your empties. . . .'

'Aye! gert schools o'em p'raps; but have 'ee ever see'd 'em like now, all along touching the beach from the eastern cliff to Western Bay, miles o'em wi'out a break, so thick as the pebbles they'm jumping out on?'

'That may be. But I tell thee what I have a-see'd: I've see'd 'em fetch their price, which this lot won't never do, n'eet no fish never won't again

in this here rotten, cranky, fools' harbour of a place. . . . 'Tis a shame to catch the poor things what you can't sell. Lord! when I thinks of what 't used to be an' what 'tis got to now. They there fish-buyers won't always hae everything their own way. You see, though I shan't be here to see it very likely. *Their* time 'll come; always does come to they sort that grinds them as an't got nort an' takes away the fruits o' others' labour; labour what they couldn't do theirselves, not if they was paid for it. . . .'

The first speaker was a man that has done fishing as a standby, without being altogether a fisherman; the second, an old fisherman who has seen the great days when five times as many drifters used to put to sea of an evening; who in the hungry days before that was sometimes glad to pick up a crust of bread; and who, now that he has outlived both, scorns with barbed words our jog-trot, latter-day habit of fishing when there is nothing more profitable to do, and selling the catches how we can. He himself fishes when he is minded, no matter what else is doing. Hardly a big catch for the last fifty years that he cannot recollect in all particulars—who caught it, where and how they fished, the number of the catch, and

how it sold—once he can track it back among his crowded memories.

The truth seems to be, as regards this year's glut of mackerel, that they have seldom or never come so close to shore in such numbers, in one vast shoal of no one knows what extent, instead of broken up into schools. Something must be allowed to the fact that the old man was not speaking to a lifelong fisherman. And something on the other side must also be allowed to the so sudden, the almost dramatic appearance of the mackerel after a season's scarcity, just when it was being said along the beach: 'Aye! This year's mackerel's done. They an't come an' they bain't coming. They've got their own minds to please so well as you an' me. See'd it aforetime, an't us?'

Of May and June mackerel, which fetch good prices, the drifters caught only dozens. Early in July some of the nets were washed, barked, dried, and put away; to be brought out again later in the month, when a few hundreds were being brought ashore by the remaining drifters. Not till August was the first thousand caught, and at that time of year they were worth very little, because they are a fish which travels badly in hot weather. It was worse with the hookers, who

usually start towards the end of July, and catch the mackerel on lines trailed behind sailing boats, their bait a bright strip of skin cut from a mackerel's tail. Up to the middle of August the best catch was six dozen in a day, when it should have been two or three hundred (ten dozen to the hundred) by breakfast time. Hooking was not worth while, except with frights aboard prepared to pay for their sailing, whatever the sport. And with the seine-nets it was worst of all. Once in July three hundred and a half fair-sized mackerel were hauled ashore; otherwise such shots as were made resulted mainly in seaweed and sand-crabs, with at most a dozen or two small mackerel. The absence of the early mackerel we could explain; for they are known to live in the spring on tiny marine organisms and larvæ, whereas later on, in the summer, they chase and devour the shoals of fish-fry that we call brit, and people eat as whitebait. (Hence the uselessness of trying to hook them on baits in imitation of small fish till the latter half of the season.) This year, owing to continued easterly winds, the temperature of the water was five degrees below normal—a difference very considerable to microscopic life. Had the early mackerel come into the bay they would in all probability

have found their food, if not unhatched or ungrown, at any rate comparatively scarce. On the other hand, we cannot explain why they still kept away after the brit had become plentiful, unless, being out in the colder deep water, it took them a month or so to find out what a feast was waiting for them alongshore.

Come they did, however, at last; hungry and in multitudes.

About twilight, at the end of August, a few little schools of small mackerel played up inshore. It was Sunday, and the sea roughish; nobody troubled to shoot seine. Next morning I was out on the beach before it was fully daylight, in order to make sure that the boats were clear of high tide. Nothing was to be seen; the gulls were not screaming; nor was anybody about. The air was cold; full of dew. I went back to bed. And when I got up a couple of hours later, Jim was saying, 'The mackerel's been in; I know'd they 'ould; an' they chaps from t'other end have a-shot seine an' catched two or three thousand right under our boats. If we'd been out a bit earlier, we'd have had they.'

'I *was* out,' I said. 'Out before daylight, to see the boats were all right.'

'Why di'sn't stay out, then, till 'twas daylight? Nice little haul that'd ha' been—day's work afore breakfast. Us have a-missed thic bit lying in bed.'

'*You* were in bed. . . .'

'*You* might so well ha' been!'

The drifters came in with several thousand a boat. Immediately prices fell. After breakfast two or three large hauls—chiefly of small fish—were again made by the men from the other end. Buyers refused to deal. Mackerel were left on the beach.

During that day, while the sun was high in the sky, the fish held off. They were not, it seemed, on the feed. Hookers caught nothing extraordinary. But at sundown the shout went up, 'There they be! Lookse! there they be again, all alongshore!'

'Let 'em bide,' said fishermen. 'They bain't wuth the bother o' catching.'

'There they be! There they be!' urged the beachcombers and loafers, who wanted a few mackerel for breakfast, or half-a-dozen to sell for a drink, and knew that after the haul was made they would not be troubled with the net or boat. 'There they be! Right under your nose!' they cried. 'Can't help but catch 'em.'

'What's say?' asked Richard. 'Shall us have a go for the sport o'it, like? Might wash out the net.'

We shot seine from the westward end of the beach for about five hundred good-sized fish and two or three thousand small ones, all of which we brought back together in the punt, where they lay in a glittering heap, the under ones half squashed, the top ones flapping their tails, gasping with wide-open gills, and tattooing violently as mackerel will do before they die; their living brightness fading all the while. We sent for the buyers. They held aloof. We shouted for boxes: 'These here'd sell up-country; might get summut for 'em.' Boxes were not to be had; they were all gone away full. Till long after dark one or other of us was out by the boat, trying to sell our catch in three-ha'p'orths and three-pennyworths—three-pence a dozen the small fish, and sixpence, or what we could get, for the large.

Next morning—the day on which the mackerel were thickest and closest inshore—we threw back the remainder of our haul. It was no use leaving it in the boat to rot. As far along as eye could see the water was all of a splash with brit jumping

right out of the sea upon the beach, and mackerel chasing them. Many of the fish we had thrown back were washed up again. We tossed them to the gulls, who simply squatted on the water a few yards out and blinked at us. They too, even the gulls, were fed up.

All day long the hookers made big catches. In the evening it was found that to catch mackerel there was no need to do more than drop overboard a yard or so of line, baited, but without a lead. A bright bare hook would catch them. Very soon, scarcely a boat or line was left upon the beach. The sea was crowded with people rowing up and down shore as close in as possible. Some visitors found a kind of sport in tossing out lines from the beach and dragging them in again. Which wasn't good for the lines.

Seen from a boat, looking down into the water, the mackerel were like a dark green river flowing alongshore in the flood-tide—a river within a river; and across the beach, in the glow of sunset, the hopping brit that had been chased out of the water were like an endless band of gems. Under the splash of an oar the mackerel scattered for a moment, but the smoother motion of the boat they took no notice of. Some had small

fish in their mouths. Others worried the bait like a pack of dogs, snapping at it, shaking it, and being hustled out of the way by their fellows. It was easy that evening to verify what we had long suspected—namely, that mackerel take brit or bait not by the tail but by the head. Swiftest of fish, they swim up to and even past their prey, turn partly round, seize it from the side, and swallow it head-first. For that reason the tackle-makers' artificial baits with hooks behind them are less successful than our strips of mackerel skin, which have the hooks in front; and that is why a score of fish can be caught on the same bait without its being much damaged. Eight out of ten could be seen to attack the bait that way.

But there was small sport in catching fish that would not keep off the hook; no satisfaction in killing what would not sell. At sundown the sailing hookers rowed ashore—for the sea was a white calm—with several dozens each. Hardly anybody was willing to buy fine mackerel at eight-pence the dozen, or at sixpence, or even at four-pence. We asked people to take them away. 'Hae 'em at a gift,' we said.

'No fear!' they replied. 'Enough's as good as a feast.'

A message came from not a hundred miles up-country that mackerel there would fetch five shillings a hundred; and still no boxes were to be had.

Mackerel lay in the boats, in buckets, in heaps on the beach and along the sea-wall. Every other person on the Front had mackerel dangling from his hand. In all directions one's eye caught the shine of them. 'Go'n see,' we said to the kids, 'if thee ca'st sell half-a-dozen. Gie thee a 'ap'ny out o' it.'

'Git 'ome!' they retorted. 'I'll gie thee a sweet out o' my next 'ap'orth if thee ca'st sell dree.'

And still the mackerel were playing up all alongshore.

In a light which made everything seem shadowy and distant, even the sound of voices and the crunching of shingle; tired, as much with the confusion and chatter as with rowing and hauling, —we stood upon the beach waiting for the rest of the boats to come in. We waited and looked around.

'A bloody slaughter, that's all 'tis!' said Richard at last; and for once the expression was appropriate.

To the south-east, over the sea, the moon was rising blood-red above a bank of low-lying cloud. Blood-red light from it glistened on the heaps of mackerel, on the mackerel in people's hands, on the mackerel that were being hauled aboard the boats still afloat, on the mackerel scales that spattered our faces and clothes, and on the line of brit along high-water mark. The very shadows, the blackening darkness itself, were tinged blood-red. It was as if a miasma had arisen from the thousands of dead fish; as if the blood of their slaughter were settling upon our heads.

'For God's sake,' said Richard, 'let's get in out o'it!'

Over our beer we discussed the price and worth of mackerel; their value as food and their value during a glut. 'They'm never wuth less'n eightpence a dozen,' argued one.

'Thee's better try an' get it t'morrow!' said another.

But in the night the wind shifted, the mackerel sheered off, and next day they were clean gone. Again they were worth wholesale their eightpence a dozen; and it was better so.

IV

18. BEACHCOMBINGS

'GOOD-MORNING!' that and no more, is good enough for town. 'Good-day!' the countryman's older-fashioned greeting, has the advantage of suiting itself to times and persons. 'Dirty day!' alongshore changes back on land, where rain pelts down gentlier and the wind is less felt, into that most comfortless of optimisms, 'Nice growing weather!' On the sea-wall, from those who have an interest in the fishing, 'Nice beach now!' is a common form of salutation, whenever there happens to be a good beach and often when there is not. For the beach is hardly less variable than the weather, and only those who have boat-hauling to do ever know its state accurately.

Ordinarily it descends to the water in a series of banks, called cops—a flight, as it were, of great irregular steps with slopes, flats, or even hollows between them. (Better to wait the tide

at anchor than to run in with a load of nets and herrings against a steep cop, and have the boat swamped before she can be hauled out of the water.) Breezes, calms, and land winds leave the beach in cops, the lowest of them marking the height of the last tide. Neap-tides in settled weather, shortening daily, leave each a small cop, which is smoothed out again when the spring-tides lengthen and rise. But a gale of wind from the sea, which carries the pebbles alongshore almost as if they were snowflakes drifting, and shifts incalculable tons of shingle—that leaves the beach smoothest of all. It makes a clean sweep, and should it be from the west of south, blowing up-channel with the flood, it bares the shore right down to its marly foundations. Old wooden stakes, rounded and rotten, come back to light: like blackened heads they are, and they give one a feeling that the old times are staring at us out of the beach in which long ago they were buried. The larger pebbles vanish, swept along and covered over with small. All the shore is left with a surface of gritty shingle, caked together near the foot of it with hard black mud.

That is the beachcombers' chance. Fishermen themselves, usually contemptuous of beachcombers,

turn to and join in the hunt. 'When there's nort else to do an' p'raps thee ca'st pick up the price o' a drink quick. . . .' While the great seas, breaking well out, are pounding the foot of the beach and are rushing up it slantwise, so that the swish of each run and the rattle of the under-tow sound all one, without any break, men stand along the sea-wall and nod prophetically.

'This here'll shift summut,' says one in much the same tone as an old woman speaks of death shifting her neighbour into the next world.

'This'll strip it down to the bare bones,' echoes another.

And then the treasonable hope peeps out—treasonable because a beach good for combing is as bad as can be for boats.

'Lady lost a gold watch hereabout last summer.'

'Thic won't be wuth much time it's found, if ever 'tis.'

'Must ha' been some money dropped, too, wi' all they there people squat about.'

'I've a-know'd sovereigns found. Ol' Jimmy Steer picked up three or four besides sil'er after thic gale—must be up thirty year ago now. Aye, an' spade guineas! I found one, only didn't do to say so at the time, else they'd ha' been a'ter 'ee for

to get 'en out o'ee. Smith, the jeweller, dropped some liquor on it out o' a little bottle, an' said t'was gold. Give'd me dree-an'-six for it, he did.'

'They'm wuth more'n that.'

'That's what 'er give'd me for 'en, anyhow.'

'Some o'ee always has all the luck. . . .'

'Us don't hae what us don't earn; n'eet so much. I tell 'ee there's plenty to be found down under beach if you'm minded to look for't when 'tis there. There's never no knowing what thee ca'st pick up.'

There's never no knowing. And, indeed, at low tide during or after a gale, the beach looks a wildish place that, like the sea itself, may yield up who knows what. So long as fine weather lasts, town and sea merge, and to most longshoremen the sea is the more familiar. In a storm the two part company; the boundary between them is clean-cut; the beach is that boundary. It belonged to the town by usage; now for a while it is the sea's. Boats, the handiwork of man, his implements, which had, as it were, domesticated the shore, are in safety upon the top of the wall. One long shallow curve, of shingle flecked with spindrift, extends to the water's edge, increasing for the eye all distances upon the beach, and lending

'The Shoal Water of Low Tide froths, tosses, and cries upon the Sand.'

it some of the waste greatness, as well as the wildness of the gale. Down at the bottom—far off it seems now—the shoal water of low tide froths, tosses, and cries upon the sand.

There the beachcombers go, not as if they wanted to find something, but as if they were minded to take a stroll by the waves, for their health's sake or to meditate. They foot it featly by the sea's margin—

> Do chase the ebbing Neptune, and do fly him
> When he comes back.

Demy-puppets they look, down there; small, remote, not altogether real, in the misty spray that blows off the sea, and against the sea's grandeur. With philosophic gait one walks along; not stooping much (because he's subject to lumbago) but peering steadfastly, and occasionally turning over a stone with his boot, or scratching with his toes like an old hen. Another ventures too far after treasure, tucks up his legs beneath him, and jumps askew, lest a wave fill his only pair of boots. Another might be gleaning, his back is so bent and he picks up so much of no worth. Boys run into the water, rejoicing in wet feet. 'Whatever are they doing down there?' asks the stranger. 'Has anybody lost anything?'

'No'm, not as I knows of,' replies the witty man on top. 'Nothing except their senses. They'm looking for what ain't there.'

What is there includes usually some copper coins, battered and corroded, a few blackened silver pieces, bits of old brass and of copper wire, nails, bolts, keys, and a selection of all the household scrap-iron that has been thrown away into the sea or river. Presently the rising tide drives the beachcombers back to dry land. If they have not earned the price of a drink, if they have not gained enough to pay for their spoilt shoe-leather, at least they have had their chance. The sea is like that. It gives men in payment not their due earnings, but the chance of more or less. It is a gamble. Were it not so, seafaring proper, as opposed to mere sea-trading, would come to an end.

Men comb the beach for trifles. Relentlessly the beach combs the town for men. More human wrecks are stranded on it than ever wrecks from the sea. Fishermen are those able to brave its chances and live, or as they themselves more often put it, 'pick up a living one way an' t'other.' In their youth they are usually put to some trade. But the beach is still there; that they bear always in mind. It is at once a haven and a venture; it

appeals both to their hunger for peace and their thirst for the fray. If their labour irks them; if they get into trouble; if they lose their job,—then back they come to the beach, seldom to leave it, however loudly with their tongues they may regret a fixed wage, a regular life, and work that's done when it is done.

Landsmen stranded upon the beach, who cannot follow up the fishing sufficiently to become fishermen—not every man can do it, by any means,—they remain derelict. They make the beach what it so curiously and exactly is, a copy in small of the great industrial world, with its employed, its unemployed, its unemployables, and its men who, having no heart except for certain particular sorts of work, will half starve rather than force themselves to any other. They come—God knows how they come there! Each coming is a tragedy, and usually a comedy as well. The beach is the town's look-out. What more natural than that a man out of work should drift there to stand about and chat? Maybe the herrings are in: hard frosty weather is their time. Fishermen pay generously for unskilled help, just when they want it. Then, by being ready and waiting to lend a hand, there is money to be earned, and an

air of busyness and jollity to work in. But they employ no one regularly; they cannot provide work in the slack seasons when they have little or none themselves. Hands often lent become soon unfit to sell. A drink, which establishes no precedent of pay, is all they are worth, is all they get; and perhaps some fish thrown out with a 'There thee a't for thy supper!' It is no good to make a parade of starvation along the beach. There is no one there to appreciate it as a spectacle, unless it be visitors who are as likely as not to say, 'Nasty man! why don't you keep him out of sight?' (Not so likely, however, as those who make money out of visitors.) Nearly every one else has had an acquaintance with emptiness at one time or another, and may easily experience it again; which spoils it as a show. To become fixed in men's minds as a proper beachcomber, as a man of odd jobs, a man waiting for what may turn up, is to find the whole little world in an unconscious conspiracy to preserve that standing. Every greeting, every copper in payment and the way it is handed over, every kindness even, frames itself naturally to that end. When a man can be chaffed publicly on his being a beachcomber, then indeed he is one, and only a more than human energy, or

the policeman's—for some trivial offence against respectability—can wrench him from it. There he is; there he stands waiting in weather-worn clothes that were not made for labour; there he has his being and his pipe. It gives one a turn sometimes to think: 'That man I was joking with out to beach just now has nothing to eat and doesn't know how to get anything. How on earth can he crack jokes?' Or, on the other hand, to hear some hard-working man remark, 'Ol' Mussels, he don't trouble hisself about nort, an' he's just so happy, seems so, as them that do. Nice quiet chap, Ol' Mussels. There's plenty would employ him if they could, 'cause he's a fine man at his trade; only if you gives 'en a job you can't be always running down to beach after him. There isn't no dependence to be placed in him, that's how 'tis.' He has, in fact, placed all his dependence on the sea, and on those who do that there is no dependence to be placed. He exists, he succeeds in existing, at constant low water. What can anybody do? Active doing, in such a case, requires a sense of superiority, and when it comes to the point one cannot escape an uncomfortable feeling that the likes of Ol' Mussels have solved some of the problems of existence better

than oneself has solved, has had occasion to solve, or ever will solve them. If we were out in a boat together, and had to hard up for our lives, what would be the difference? Perhaps Ol' Mussels would find it easier to laugh, then, too.

Besides, we who frequent the beach are all of us beachcombers more or less, one way or another. It is a habit one gets into, a vice—one of those vices that cannot be eradicated without loss, because, for the time of indulgence at all events, they quicken life, and are therefore rooted in life itself. Nor, on the beach, is that quickening a mere illusion. It hardly seems as if the men who stand there hour after hour, hands in pockets, are living faster than they could otherwise do. Yet so it is. To be absent for an hour is to miss something, or the chance of something. A boat may be wanted. A ship may make signals for some one to go out to her. Fish may play up and seine be shot. A change in the weather may pass unnoticed. The tides are never to time, and want watching.

'What time was it high water?'

'Don' know. Wasn't out here.'

'Oh! That's it, is it? Do 'ee know what time 'tis dinner?'

'That there depends on the tide, don' it?'

For the beach is more than a place of trade. It is the narrow channel through which the converging tides of a longshoreman's life flow, from the sea where he works to land where he lives, and back again to the sea by which he lives. On the beach, high and low tide, and that tide in the affairs of men, join forces, and are watched as one.

'Just turned out then?' is the first question asked, should one stay in house till noon; the inference being that only bed would keep a man away. A man *on the beach,* as he describes himself professionally, seldom strays far on land; and then as often as not to some vantage point whence he can view the shore or sea. His first move, on coming downstairs in the morning, is to walk out to beach; after his cup o' tay, if it can be had quickly, but before, for a peep out over, if the kettle is long a-boiling. When there is nothing doing, he will spend the whole day chattering on the sea-wall about old times, or walking every half-hour from the beach into house, from his house back to the beach. The sea alone can keep him long away from it; and for this reason, that as a place of *never no knowing* the beach is only bested by the sea.

19. FLOTSAM AND JETSAM

SOU'WESTERLY winds rake the beach out. A south-easterly gale—Benjie's *Lord Runkum,* Lord of the Longshore—piles up the shingle till all that the common beachcomber values is buried deeply underneath. But at the same time it blows from the Channel into the bay, and scatters alongshore the miscellaneous flotsam and jetsam of the sea, in which, after prawns and lobsters, Benjie takes his greatest delight. For Benjie is no ordinary beach-comber. While these men are grubbing about on the beach in front of the town, he stands on the sea-wall and sniffs, digs his hands into his pockets, turns his back on so pitiful a sight, and talks of what was seen in the old times. 'They there bain't fit for nort else,' he says with a shrug of the shoulders. 'My senses! I've a-see'd so much picked up in one tide, up 'long or down under cliff, as they there mumpheads 'll find if they

scratches about till their time comes. Only 'tis too far, where I goes, for the likes o' they. Them steamers ha' spoilt the best o'it; they keeps so far out, don't ratch [reach] into the bay like proper sailing vessels; an' if they'm wrecked—poor things, that's wrecked! how I do pity 'em, to be sure!—or if they has to heave their deck-cargo overboard, it don't wash in hereabout. Why, I mind thic schooner coming ashore in Western Bay. . . . Twenty thousand deals her had aboard! Bain't sure I an't got some o'em up to my house now. There's a schooner ashore up to Chesil Beach, they tells me. Breaking up, her is. 'Tis 'bout time us had a south-easter for a change. Then some o' her'll be down here along. Lord Runkum's the boy. I'll hae some o'it. You wait till Lord Runkum comes along. You wait!'

So long as Benjie talks aloud, one thing is certain; that very little is to be found either up east or down west under the cliff. It is when an ancient sea-knowledge of winds and currents is called for, to predict in exactly what spot a piece of flotsam sighted at sea will be cast ashore; when daily and nightly watchfulness is needed to save the jetsam from being washed off again by rising tides, that his turn comes. And then he says nothing.

One calm cold January morning after a south-easterly gale, while the ground-swell was still ambling in from that quarter and as lazily urging itself up the beach, we met on the wall in a hail-fellow conversation. Without break in the flow of his talk, without even a change of tone, Benjie lowered his voice to secrecy. 'Aye, 'tis bad,' he had been saying, 'this here ground-swell keeping up. You can't get out easy after the herrings—and when you can there's hardly enough for to make it worth while. They won't hang about in the bay wi' this scuffle. . . .

''Twouldn't do,' he went on very quietly, ''twouldn't do for to get catched down there. . . .'

'Catched where?'

'Why, down west; if this here little draught from the north-east'ard was to freshen or drop out more east, an' us couldn't row home again. But there, us could haul up to Refuge Cove an' walk home, sure 'nuff; only I wants to go west o' that, west o' Dog's Tooth Ledge, when I goes. . . .

'This swell'—he raised his voice for a passerby to hear—'it don't go down like it ought to. Must be blowing fresh outside now. . . .

'After that'—speaking softly again—''tisn't

too bad for to shove off the little boat; if you gets it on a nice greasy way. What's say? Be 'ee up for a bit of a pull? Ought to be summut washed in down to Landlock Bay. 'Tis there, right 'nuff, if nobody an't been; an' I knows they an't, 'cause I was down there on foot while 'twas blowing two days agone. An' I got some bits o' wood stored up in the cliff, what I put there two or three months back, if none o' they thieving hellers an't been an' walked it off for me. Might so well bring that home too. You be out here 'bout two this a'ternoon if you'm minded an' an't got nort else on. Us'll hae some sport down 'long.'

By half-past two we were afloat. 'They'm wondering where we'm off to,' remarked Benjie, emptying the water out of his boots and nodding towards the figures that were ranged along the wall. 'Let 'em wonder! They should ha' been where I was last night when 'twas raining, an' blowing—*an'* dark. Then they'd ha' know'd. Beautiful afternoon 'tis, to be sure.'

The oily sleepy ground-swell, lifting the boat as it flowed shoreward and witnessing that storms had been; the absence of other boats on the water; the processional sound of the breakers,

approaching, culminating, and dying away in the distance, one after another; the very certainty that at the time of year such fine weather could not last long—all alike served to intensify the utter peacefulness of a January dead-calm. Near the southern horizon a winterly sun shone brightly, but without warmth or glow, as if it were hung there merely, and had no part in life on earth. On the tall red cliffs it cast a faint mistiness—hardly a mistiness so much as a haze of colour—that, far from obscuring them, brought every crack and pinnacle into prominence against the sky, and suggested only that there was sleep upon the face of them—an infinite, world-wide repose.

Notwithstanding which, the sky itself was fresh, clear, and deep, and in our nostrils the air was keen.

Benjie sat in the stern of the boat, a little human spot aggressively alive in the midst of the calm. 'Keep her in,' he urged, 'keep her in; so close as you can hug wi'out knocking ashore. The last of the flood must still be running up 'long. Keep her in out o'it. Us'll get there all the sooner. By sea, I tell 'ee, the longest way round is oftener'n not the shortest way there. An' so 'tis wi' people too, only they full-sail cracking-on

mazed-heads, what tries to lord it over 'ee, don' know it. But I've a-proved. . . . Look out, you! Put her bows to it. Thic swell's going to break outside. 'Tis shoal-water in here.'

Three breaking waves passed under us, making the boat sit on her stern like a dog upon its haunches. 'That's right!' said Benjie. 'I don't want a bathe wi' my clothes on, an' I'm certain sure I bain't going to undress an' make an exhibition o' my nakedness like they there summer water-wallopers.'

From the old sack that he usually carries over his shoulder Benjie drew out an implement not unlike a short reaping hook, with a handle at each end, and proceeded to whet it on a flat, rough-grained pebble. 'Don' know what that's for, do 'ee?' he asked, making the motions of a spoke-shave. 'You'll see, please God, afore this afternoon's out, if what I wants it for is still where I lef' it. Ah! nobody don' know what I got in my bag o' mysteries. But they want to. Back t'other day one o' they papern-collared poops stops me up over cliff: "Hi, ol' fellah! what have you got in your sack?"

' "Hullo, young 'un!" says I, "what you got in your pockets? When you turns out they, I'll

turn out my bag, an' not afore. If you'd gone where I been, 'long wi' me, you'd know. But you can't go where I goes. You'd tire o'it, the likes o' you would. You'd get your feet wet."

' "No offence, me man," says he.

' "Then don't you go out o' your way to give it for the future," says I. "My sack's my pocket —remember that. T'others have got holes in 'em. I wishes you good afternoon."

'Lord! they sort couldn't go where I goes. They an't got it in 'em, not to go twice, an' day after day, if they goes once just for curiosity. 'Tis funny how they hates to see the likes o' me carrying a bag they can't look into, they four-meal-a-day soft-sleepers. Thinks I got game or rabbits, I s'pose. Thic day, as't happened, I did hae a young rabbit what I'd picked up down under cliff —falled out an' killed itself. 'Twas just so well for me to hae a dinner off o'en as for the gulls. 'Tisn't 's if I wired 'em or trapped 'em. I never does that. I couldn't bear for to kill the poor little things. They enjoys their life so well as you an' me. Hast ever felt it going out warm under thy hands? I have; an' I don't want to no more. Wi' fish 'tis different. They'm cold-blooded. . . . Little bit out 'n' west, you.'

Hard cliffs of igneous stone, which stand unchanged within the memory of man, have little in common with the generations that flicker across earth. There is nothing human about them. Ours—of a red marl that in places is all but mud—change ceaselessly; they are ruins never ruined; they are partners in our fragility; and it is, I think, because they crumble and fall and age visibly that we look on them with so careful, so friendly, an eye, and speak of them always with a tinge of regret, as one speaks of an old man who is no longer what he was. To leave them and then come back is like returning to a familiar house that has been altered into something more and something less than home. Pinnacles that jutted boldly into the sky, buttresses that appeared to be a support have fallen into water-washed heaps upon the beach below. Springs have ended by breaking down the patches they decked with greenery. The tide flows streaky-red with fallen land. New cracks have opened, are opening all the time.

Benjie has frequented the beaches and rocks under cliff night and day for sixty years. While he crouched on the stern-seat and, with a strange mingling of lament for change, and

triumph at having outlived it, recited in a sing-song voice his tale of long past years, I wished that I, too, could glimpse the pictures that were crowding his mind's eye, of fair weather and foul under his cliffs, of white calms and grim pulls home against wind and chop, of catches and failures, of journeys over the rocks in search of flotsam and jetsam, of the slopes he used to climb, what they were like in that distant boyhood of his, which one cannot imagine because he has grown so to fit the longshore that it seems he must always have been as he is. Through his voice, that rode so easily on the sound of the surf, a spirit of the place seemed to be speaking, and doubtless was. 'Aye!' he said, 'You see thic hollow between second an' third roozing [cliff-fall]. I've a-climbed up there into the field above. Couldn't do it now. 'Tis gone. Clean gone! An' some more o'it 's coming down soon. 'Twill all be down. . . . There's a fresh roozing. Do 'ee see? Slid out, like, down on to the beach. 'Tis bound to fall up 'bove, sooner or later. There ain't the rabbits there was, up over. They knows. . . . Must ha' been a gert landslip once, for to make they there plats up to Windgate. Many's the bag o' sand an' seaweed that I've a-carried up there on my back, an' digged

into the ground. Shan't do it no more. Pity they left off tilling it. Best place round here for growing early taties, it was. Ah! 'tis too hard work for 'em nowadays. They've a-lef' it for the rabbits. . . . Thic poor little rock, cocking his head up there for the gulls to sit on, he's going to topple over, come a few south-easters, some o' they there ol'-fashioned sort. I reckon I'll see the last o' he. . . . Ah! ah! ah! I thought t'would, when they frostises was last winter—Green Point's going. Do 'ee see how 'tis fallen away down underneath? Do 'ee see thic crack up 'bove? An' when Green Point's gone, what's solid rock, 'tis the beginning of "Good-bye Steep Head!" Thousands o' tons o't be waiting for to come down t'other side, a crack you could get down into. An' 'tis opening faster 'n' faster. Steep Head 'll all be down—all o'it—what's been a landmark to seafaring folk for centuries. I've a-gathered holly on it afore now. Steep Head holly it always was at Christmas time for them as know'd the way down to it. Fine holly ways it made for the boats, too. Grows sturdy there in the sun and damp, an' southerly gales toughens it. . . .

'Now steer her in. I got some wood in under there—an' I'll hae thic fencing up 'bove on the

edge of the cliff one o' these fine days when it all falls into the sea. Pull your right hand oar—back left—easy—now for'ard. . . . That's it. Know where you be to? You're in one o' my private harbours—what the sea's made for me; an' so it will—do ort for 'ee, if you watches;—an' you wants it, I can tell 'ee, up an' down here by yourself. Can always land on these here rocks, in here, this time o' tide, 'cepting when the wind's south-an'-west, an' then you must please to go farther on. Now then!'

Benjie skipped out of the boat as if he had been going, not to pick up bits of wood, but to catch fish that required smart handling.

A swell, scattering itself upon the rocks in white foam and spray, had taken charge of the boat and had tilted rather than driven us into a quiet rock-pool, where the water, thick with sea-weed, simply rose and fell as the seas outside forced their way in between the boulders around. Benjie's directions were: 'You row down to Refuge Cove while I goes along an' gathers up what's there. An' you'd better get out o' this quick unless you wants to be stuck here till the tide flows. It's still got a bit to fall. That's the only bad thing about my harbours—they'm very

tidal. They bladderheads, what brings a jar to sea, bain't smart 'nuff for to use 'em.'

With a scrape on the rocks, I pulled and pushed the boat out, not any too soon; and while I rowed on down to Refuge Cove, Benjie hopped along under cliff, pouncing on jetsam like a hungry bird, at times hardly distinguishable upon the shore he has grown so to resemble. Gulls flew round about him and circled over the weather-beaten rocks from which the land has fallen away, not uttering their angry or frightened cries—they know Benjie too well—but mewing as they will also do, over the sea when shoals of fish are about, and over land when a storm is brewing.

At Refuge Cove we beached and hauled the boat up. Benjie flung his bag over his shoulder. 'Now for it!' said he. 'Lord Runkum an't forgot Refuge Cove an' Benjie, that I can see. My senses, what a shackle must ha' been here! 'Tis an ill wind that don't blow me no good somehow.'

The farther west one goes in our bay, the quicker and higher an easterly sea rises; hence, possibly, the almost superstitious dread that exists of going west when the wind is, or is likely to be, east; for in addition to finding oneself to leeward, the worst seas have to be encountered

farthest from home. The south-easterly gale must have hurled itself furiously into Refuge Cove, though it lies well back between headlands of rock at either end. An overpowering smell arose from the high-water cop, which was nastily soft and springy underfoot because so much rotten seaweed was buried in it among its blackened pebbles. All the beach, particularly where it stank most, was strewn with flotsam and jetsam; with boxes and scraps of plank, tins, bolts, and twisted timbers, from ships; sticks stripped of their bark, bushes and tree-roots, from the river; corks, cordage and battered lobster-pots, from fishermen's lost gear; worm-eaten balks from the depths of the sea. One's stomach turned a little at the sight; it was as if the sea had disgorged. We had lighted on one of its charnel-houses. The wash of the surf was black, foul, and scummy with decay. There seemed to be something ghoulish about Benjie too, as he picked his way along, throwing above high-water mark everything that could possibly be of value to him. Behind Dog's Tooth Point the sun dipped. A chill shadow overspread the Cove.

Benjie shouted, holding aloft what turned out to be a yellowed and water-worn tallow dip.

'Poor fellows! Poor fellows, where this come'd from. Shipwrack, that's what that is, unless some fool throwed 'em overboard. Here's another. Lookse! An' another too.' Fourteen or fifteen of them he picked up and put carefully in his pocket; for he still reads in the old-fashioned way, the book, like a folio, spread flat on the table in front of him, and by his side a candle which he snuffs between forefinger and thumb each time his long-sighted eyes begin to smart.

Shortly afterwards he fell a-cussing. One o' they there—and so forth—had taken some wood of his from a hole up in the cliff, to which he had only been able to climb with difficulty. By long-shore custom anything below high-water mark belongs to the man who finds it, but what is above and in the cliff should be left for whoever placed it there. (Wreckage of any value, marked, in which government and various other people claim a share, belongs, wherever it is, to the man who can show his mark upon it.) 'Wouldn't I like to catch they thieves at it!' exclaims Benjie with the short-lived fury of a squall. But he never does. He never lies in wait. He has, I think, too great a contempt for those who gather his leavings, and feels so certain that in the long run

he can outwit them, with stinging words at all events.

Returning to the boat with our splintered loads, we laid them in tenderly and evenly, as if they had been merchandise. Benjie stripped off his jumper and jersey; took up his two-handled chopper. The great business of the day was to begin.

Hidden behind a big rock were three sodden pit-props of undressed pine-trunk—deck-cargo washed overboard from some Baltic tramp steamer. In the sweat of our brows we laboured, stripping off the wet bark to lighten those pit-props. Then, shouldering them, we staggered and slithered down the beach to the unfortunate little boat.

She was out of trim; deep and lop-sided in the water. 'Us got 'bout enough, *I* think,' observed Benjie. 'Good job 'tis calm. I'll just go ashore again under Steep Head and get what I got there. Mustn't leave it behind these low tides, else somebody 'll hae thic too.'

Ashore he went, with a saw, to collect and shorten for the boat his bits of timber. There was no little harbour handy at that time of tide. He therefore laid his burden on a flattish shelving rock; then stood over it, waiting, like a cormorant.

In very gingerly fashion I backed the boat ashore. A swell carried it right up to him. He began sliding the wood aboard over the stern. But the sea receded, leaving the boat high and dry on the ledge. Succeeding waves were not big enough to float her off. Instead, they rocked her on her keel, as if she herself had been a piece of wreckage. The wood slid from one side to the other. The heavy pit-props began rolling about: one could hear the boat crack under them. I was rolling too, and nearly broke an oar; did break a thole-pin. Wave after wave fell short; they only hit the boat, without lifting her. The rough rock was grinding into her timbers underneath. To hear it, to feel it. . . . One feels for a boat at such times as if it were a living thing. Benjie's leisurely sliding in of his rubbishy wood seemed deliberate cruelty to the unhappy little craft. I 'busted off'; and with all the longshore language at my command, I swore hard at him.

And then, of course, after we were once more afloat, I was ashamed. For Benjie *is* venerable and to be respected, above all in a boat.

He, however, was not in the least put out. He treated my forcibleness as merely another

common object of the seashore. 'Ah!' he said with a smile of doubtful import, 'does make a fellow say what he wouldn't when he runs his craft aground. Lord, what I have a-heard 'em say! They ought to have been aground on a dark night, like I have, when you don't know which way to shove nor which side to jump out. My senses! how they'd ha' chackled. An' they wouldn't ha' know'd where they was to, nuther, which I always did, there or thereabout.

'If us had a-had time an' if the tide had falled a little lower, I'd ha' gone down farther west an' see'd w'er any more copper bolts is rotted out o' the timbers o' thic ol' ship what was wrecked in '63. I'll hae some more o'em one o' these fine days when 'tis dead low water an' long spring tides, an' everything's fitty. *They'm* there! I'll hae 'em!'

By a curious compensatory process, the oftener a thing unseen is talked about, the more it becomes to one a sort of myth, a fairy tale. And the greater the faith of the few, the more it seems an illusion to the many. By the force of their faith, indeed, they remove themselves from the everyday world, in which a thing either is, or is not. They speak out of a world in which 'everything

possible to be believed is an image of truth.' Nobody doubts the copper bolts are there, down west, among the boulders and weed-grown rocks, in the rotting hull of an old ship. Benjie has said so times without number. Years and years ago he fished up one or two of them in a skim-net, and scraped them till he came to the soft shining copper. But we do doubt if we shall ever see any of them. It is doubtful if even Benjie will ever see them any more. He has talked them from a fact into a tradition. Long enough he has been meaning to go again, and has not gone. The tides didn't suit; the day, wind, boat, mate, gear—something wasn't fitty. 'Let 'em bide. *They* won't shift. Someday us'll hae 'em.' The old wreck is a memory and a hope to him—a longshoreman's Promised Land. 'Copper bolts! They there copper bolts!' The words themselves have acquired a magical sound. They brighten Benjie's eyes. To us who have heard about them so often, the copper bolts are a fairy tale. They belong to fairyland. They are a reality which has slid back into the past.

Nevertheless, it is a fairyland in which Benjie lives. While we rowed homeward, the sun finished setting behind the westernmost cliffs. A

very silent darkness began to take possession of Western Bay. But out to sea, where the sun's rays still reached, or were reflected from the thin evening clouds, the water was of a delicate pink and blue, most ethereal, most fairylike—the ghost of colour rather than colour itself. While Benjie sat in the boat bare-armed, with only his flannel on (little he minds the cold), talking of his copper bolts and again of the old times, I had a laughable notion that he was some grotesque old fairy that had floated in from the offing to tell of what was in a place that didn't exist. Not that he wasn't the same old Benjie, tattered and patched, hard and weather-beaten. But memory has a way, sometimes, of shining through old men's faces; of making them a lamp by means of which the past throws a glamour over the present. It so shone through Benjie's face then. Is it not the kindliest joke time plays on old men, to make reality flow backwards?

Beaching the boat was like waking up. She was overheavy. Her cut-rope parted as soon as the capstan hauled it taut. There was a deal more cussing and not a little chaff. To lighten her, Benjie carried his wreckage up the beach and flung it down. And there he left it.

Others helped themselves during the night; several whom he met, he sent to do so. The sport of it, for him, was over. The sea will send him plenty more. What remained, two or three days afterwards, he carried up to his house and placed with the wood that has been there, some of it, for fifty or sixty years.

That stack of wood, over which the cats disport themselves, is the record of Benjie's lifetime alongshore, and also warmth laid up for his old age. Each piece he burns will yield him up its history and his own. He loves it, and he will not turn it out, even to make room for nets.

20. BEAUTIFUL ONIONHEAD

Every one on the beach, every man who works hard when the sea allows, is pretty well of the same opinion. 'Old Onionhead — Beautiful Onionhead as they calls 'en—he's another o' they sort, an' thee casn't alter 'em. Sometimes he'll come down an' lend a hand, an' take what you gives 'en; an' sometimes he'll stand on the wall an' watch thee in the tub o' the sea—aye! watch thee knock ashore broadside wi'out lifting a finger to help 'ee. He don't care. He've a-let hisself go. Don' know w'er he's any use to hisself; he ain't much use to anybody else, 'cept when he's minded, an' then thee cousn't wish for a better. He's always on his hoppers; one o' they sort that's happy on a shilling, only he don't never show when he's happy, if ever he is. Yet I've a-see'd 'en throw a couple o' coppers into the sea 'cause he thought 'twasn't enough for what he'd a-done.

Funny chap; but he's amusing when you gets 'en into conversation. Nobody knows where he come'd from; nobody knows what he's here for—not to do hisself any good, that's a sure thing;—an' I be blow'd if anybody knows how he'll manage when his time comes to pack up. He's a ****** mystery, Beautiful Onionhead is!'

A mystery, where most men are acquainted with each other's lives from babyhood, his tall, limp figure slouches about amongst us, his comings and goings hardly an object of curiosity. When he cannot raise the price of a bed at the common lodging-house, he takes his rest standing against a lee wall with his hands in his pockets and his shoulders bent round forward, waiting—waiting, it seems, for nothing at all, not even for the hours to pass. His clothes have the additional soaked seediness of sleeping rough. His chin remains always in that state when it neither has, nor has not, a beard. The eyes of men like him, who snatch a living when and where they can, have often the fixed wildish look that one sees in predatory animals. Beautiful Onionhead's eyes have it; all the more because an insufficiency of food, as it will do, has made the rims of them red. Being a man who keeps himself to himself, and

does as he is minded, whether to his own disadvantage or not, he has earned a certain amount of respect. Certainly he is chaffed: 'Hullo, you! How do 'ee seem? Can 'ee keep yourself warm? Be 'ee empty inside, like? Wouldn' 'ee like a couple o' roast ducks sot down before 'ee? Could make short work o' they, cousn'? Just as an appetizer for more, like. . . .' But he is seldom asked in seriousness what has brought him to where he is, or how he succeeds in keeping himself alive from day to day. And then, if he does not with a stare turn upon his heel and walk off, he may reply in the well-worn words, 'Aye! when you'm down, what they does is to keep 'ee down.' That is all; it is less a complaint than the statement of a fact; and nobody laughs it out of court as a lazy man's excuse because everybody on the beach knows that so far as it goes it is quite true. Down *is* down. Beautiful Onionhead represents each man's downward possibility standing before him in the flesh. His fantastic nicknames do not now raise a smile, except when, during slack times, fishermen are chattering together on the sea-wall, and are turning round, as it were, to look at themselves. 'Bee-utiful Onionhead—Lord, what a name! Do 'ee know what his proper name is?

Blest if I do! T'other suits 'en better I s'pose. . . .'

Children take to him: it was a child that dragged from him the only bit of his history we know. She had run up to him, and perhaps because she had not grown old enough to be steady on her legs, perhaps because Onionhead's clothes are dirty, her father called her back as children are called back from big dogs. Beautiful Onionhead took her up and carried her to her father. 'Do 'ee think *I* an't had no chil'ern o' me own?' he burst out.

'Hast?—What! be 'em dead then?'

'No—they bain't dead—not that I knows of.'

'Don' 'ee never see 'em then?'

Beautiful Onionhead did not reply.

Apart from that, almost the whole of his known history is contained in his two nicknames.

One summer he was asked by a busy fisherman to take a party of visitors to sea. They were, it seems, the sort of people who continually go into loud raptures over the beauty of the cliffs and water and sky. 'Beautiful! Beautiful!' they would exclaim. 'Oh, isn't it beautiful! Don't you find it beautiful to live here, boatman?' For some reason—possibly because he, too, could

appreciate the beautiful—they took to Onionhead, and, though he wetted them to the skin bringing the boat ashore, they would go to sea with no one else. 'Thic chap's fright,' they were called. He caught their catchword from them. 'Beautiful!' he would say, at first in fun or mockery, afterwards out of habit. And Beautiful he came to be called, at first also in fun, but afterwards because the name was so appropriately inappropriate.

His fright, that would go to sea only with him, gave him a certain amount of reputation. 'Must be something in the chap, thee's know, for they sort o' people to stick to 'en like that.' Had he spruced himself up he might have been given employment in the busy seasons. He did look after himself till his fright went away. Then he returned to his old ways; he got drunk, fought a man (he was in the right), was turned away from his lodging, and slept out. One fright refused to go in a boat with him a second time. They said in a stage-whisper that he wasn't nice—'Not at all nice for ladies.' Benjie, who felt for Beautiful under such an insult, whether merited or not, offered to take him winkle-picking. They rowed down westward, Benjie going easy with his oar in order not to pull the boat around against Onion-

head's feebler stroke. Near the rocks among which periwinkles are most abundant they hauled up and left the boat. Taking a bowl and a ballast-bag each, they clambered to the place. Benjie pointed out the winkles. 'There, if you looks under the stones in thic pool, you'll find 'em sure 'nuff. Lovely gert gobbets they be. They'm there!' He himself moved off a little way, splashed into the water, bent down nearly double, raised the fringes of weed, dredged with his hands, straddled the smaller pools, and lifted carefully the flat, heavy stones under which winkles take shelter at low tide. Soon they were clattering into his bowl, which, when it was heaped full, he emptied into his ballast-bag. Then at it again; without any interval to ease his strong old back and knees. 'How be getting on?' he asked after he had gathered three or four quarts. 'You'll hae to hurry up if you'm going to catch me, looks so.'

Beautiful was admiring the scenery. 'I tell 'ee what,' he said. 'You pick the winkles into the bowl, an' I'll empty 'em into the bags.'

Benjie was so struck by Onionhead's division of the labour that he forgot to 'tell him off' at the moment. But he told the tale along the beach. 'What for the Lord's sake did 'er think? I was

to pick the gobbets an' he was to empty 'em into the bag. . . . Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful! Blest if thic there wouldn' be beautiful! But there! what can 'ee 'spect from the likes o' they sort, what an't got no heart for to do ort?'

And in consequence nothing further *was* expected from Beautiful, even as a stop-gap.

A French onion-man gave him his second nickname. He sold Beautiful a couple of strings of onions and agreed to wait for the money until he returned in the evening from some villages back on land. Beautiful, of course, sold the onions again, and with the money went to the 'Beacon Light' for a pint of beer. There he stayed, and excited much wonder by calling for drinks round. The Frenchman returned; inquired after Beautiful; was told about the onions. Very wrathful, he followed to the 'Beacon Light,' asked Beautiful for his money, wanted to fight it out of him. But that couldn't be allowed—not from a Frenchman. While they held him back, he jerked out his grievance amid roars of laughter, and flung at Beautiful all the English he had learnt while hawking round his strings of onions. 'You ****** ****** Anglishman!' he jabbered. 'You buy an' you tell me faithful

zat you vill pay, an' you sell ze ognons—an' you drink! You Anglish! You pig! You fathead! You have ze head like an ognon! I vould push my knife into you. . . .'

The onion-man was chucked out; for, after all, Beautiful was an Englishman and the other only a foreigner. But the joke went round. 'Thic ****** Frenchie said ol' Beautiful had a head like an onion. Blow'd if he an't, too!' The kids got hold of it; the kids he liked in his odd way. When they passed him in the street they said as if to one another: 'Onions! Onionhead!' They did not, however, dare to shout out after him; he never came down quite to that; and after a time they forgot, or baited some one else; while the name of Onionhead, no longer with any sting in it, was added to his other name of Beautiful.

For a time he hawked fish, selling them first and paying afterwards out of his sales, until he was found out to be a herring-hawk. That is to say, when the boats were coming in at night he would help or pretend to help haul one of them up, would take the half-dozen herrings that were thrown out to him for his breakfast, run and stow them away, go on to the next boat,

and do the same right across the beach. Then by selling all his herrings for a few coppers he would gain enough for a pint or two, and queer the fishermen's own retail market. The upshot was that everybody refused to let him have fish they could sell elsewhere, though he still was given his so-called breakfast for lending a hand, because help when a boat is coming ashore should never be refused, lest one rough day it be needed very badly.

His existence thenceforward—unemployed, untrusted, unhelped—became the puzzle it is; yet he did not seem to live a life of misery. One sunny spring morning—the first in the year when the air was soft and the sea really sparkled—I found him lying on the beach, like a piece of old rain-soaked sacking with human limbs protruding from it, and passed the time of day with him. He looked up luxuriously. 'Beautiful morning, isn't it? Beautiful, very beautiful!' I am sure he meant it, and have wondered ever since how he could find it in him to do so. On another occasion I saw him putting up decorations, holly berries, and cotton-wool snowflakes in a public bar as merrily as if he had a home and Christmas of his own. He did it well, too, and tastefully; and shouted cheerily with a jolly oath or two.

It was his presence there among the outward signs of Christmas that shocked one on his behalf.

The police got wind of how he slept. They moved him on from an upturned boat. They turned him out of two linhays in the allotments. They procured him seven days for sleeping under the leaky roof of the bark-house upon the sodden nets that are left there in heaps. Again, he was tracked to a cave under the cliffs. That meant fourteen days hard. Beautiful Onionhead became a public character, an incorrigible, a subject of argument. The town, which is parasitical—on gentry, visitors, and fishermen—and hates its brother parasites in a lower class of life, would have had him put away for fourteen months or years. The beach, robuster, more happy-go-lucky, and tenderer to those who prey upon it, wanted to know: 'Why the hell couldn' 'em let the poor ol' chap bide in his cave? He wasn't doing no harm to nobody. Snug enough he was, an' he couldn't hurt nothing 'cause there wasn't nort there for to hurt. If 't had been a gen'leman wi' money in his pocket an' a bed at home, they'd ha' let 'en bide so long as he was minded to. 'Cause 'tis an old man that an't got no money for a bed an' don' know where to get it, they goes

an' shoves 'en in chokey. Wonder how they'd feel, what put 'en there, if they was situated like it. They'd be glad 'nuff for to crawl away into a warm cave.' The police, on the other hand, spoke of other kinds of parasites, of having to disinfect the cells after Beautiful Onionhead, of visitors objecting to him on the seats and in the shelters. Some people went so far as to declare that it was a kindness to old Onionhead to clap him in jail. 'Suppose he was to be taken ill and die, sleeping out like that. . . .'

Perhaps Beautiful Onionhead was prepared to take that risk. When he came back to the beach, washed and clipped, he said merely with an immense contempt, 'Let 'em chatter. 'Tisn't so bad, just for a change like.'

Jim summed up the situation. 'Aye!' he said. 'That there's the way o'it. I s'pose us be getting more civilized. But this here civilization, thee's know, is terrible cruel towards them as bain't minded to fall in wi' it, or can't; an' it don't follow they'm any worse'n the rest o'em after the rate.'

Therefore Beautiful Onionhead's present sleeping-place will not be given away, though several of us know it. Snug, ingenious, and safe, it will

take a long time to find. Its only disadvantage is, that when he cannot get there unobserved he has to wander about all night, and then, maybe, he hardly finds the wet cold darkness beautiful.

21. A DROWNDED CORPSE

BENJIE had talked of going westward that day, after a peck or two of winkles.

The weather was joyful, a song played in colour by the sunshine upon the bright shifting sea, a dance of light water. East and west the cliffs stood out like ramparts. Alongshore there was just enough lop to fill the air with a fresh-sounding murmur, and to cool it.

'Bain't 'ee going to shove the boat down, Benjie?'

He did not say *No*. Across beach, where the sea puts an end to the best laid of plans, and day and night springs work upon men without warning, a definite *No* is almost as rare as an unconditional *Yes*. ''Tisn't fit, is it?' and 'Aye, if 'tis fitty,' are beach decisions.

Benjie did not go so far as to say even that. He stood scanning the in-shore water as if a shoal

of sprat or mackerel had been sighted by means of the deep blue shadow or the oily patch that they make when the sea is clear and fairly calm. 'Poor young feller!' he said. 'I been down 'long to Steep Head, an' *I* can't see nort o'en. There was his clothes, right 'nuff, lying on the beach under the height o' the hill, an' he wasn't inside o'em, an' hadn't been for some time, looked so. Had those 'laskit things for to hold up his socks. Why can't 'em wear stockings, same as I always done, if they can't hold up their socks wi'out they things? Ah! *'twas* stockings they there ol' women, what's gone, used to knit. Poor young feller! He won't do nort no more. He's finished. He must ha' giv'd out suddent, like, when he was swimming, or been took wi' the cramp p'raps, or else one o' they stinging fish got at 'en, an' the more he struggled the farther the water carried 'en out, like it always do whichever way the wind an' tide is, when you only struggles an' don't swim. Well, *I* can't do no more, not till the flood tide makes, unless the wind goes up easterly.'

Therefore Benjie talked. First one, then another, came up to question him, and stayed to stand on the sea-wall gazing out to sea; their conversation very subdued, except when they got

into an argument upon the probable course of the body in the sea; for a corpse known to be driving alongshore is rather like a reputed ghost in a neighbourhood; it does not so much frighten men as make them conscious that everyday life is not everything.

'So thee's found his clothes, Benjie. . . . How's come to go down there then?'

'Why, they sent an' asked me to go down an' look, didn' 'em? They know'd where he was gone to an' they know'd he wasn't come back.'

'Asked you, I s'pose, 'cause you've a-found drownded people before an' brought 'em back. That's a thing I an't never done, an' I don' know as I should like to nuther.'

'Benjie has the luck. They gives he fust chance o' earning the Board o' Trade five shillings. . . .'

'Hell about your five shillings! I'd sooner gie they five than that anybody should be drownded. If thee casn't do thee best for the dead wi'out five shillings, 'tis a poor look-out, I say. Where there's any one drownded there's sorrow, an' so it continues till they'm found an' put underneath decent an' done with. I an't always had the five bob. . . .'

'Somebody's had it then.'

'That's very likely wi' the sort there is about; an' I don't begrudge it to 'em if they'm wicked enough for to do it. Let 'em hae it. 'Twill find 'em out some day, sure 'nuff. 'Tis a thing us be always liable to, ain't it, what picks up a living alongshore, for to stumble across a drownded corpse lying on the beach or to see 'en washing about in the tub o' the surf—an' when you least expects it too. You never knows. They talks about Davy Jones's locker, an' the sea taking its toll o' bodies—so't do—an' it gives 'em back to the likes o' us; or some o'em anyhow. "Ah!" I've a-said to meself 'fore now, when I've a-stood an' looked down on one o'em, "You was alive, an' now you'm dead, an' there's all the difference." Which is one o' they things nobody can't deny, nor don't want to that I knows of; only it brings it home to 'ee, like, such times. Drownded people is so cold an' slippery, an' terrible difficult to handle, specially in the dark.'

'Wer's reckon this chap 'll turn up then, Benjie?'

'All depends. If 'er don't get buried over in the sand, or don't get jammed an' fixed, washing across Broken Rocks, or get carried out to sea, he might

be up 'long here next tide. Maybe they'll shoot seine herefrom an' get 'en thic way. I hopes they will. When anybody's been in the water many days an' got knocked about an' bitten, 'tis almost so well for their folks never to set eyes on 'em no more. Bad they be to look at when they'm like that. Poor things, I pities 'em, what's waiting for to hear news o'en. Who wouldn't hae a feeling for 'em? 'Tisn't no good news they got coming, however 'tis.'

So the talk went on among the changing groups that stood along the sea-wall. Visitors, scenting diversion in the air, stopped to ask questions, then stare at the sea, ask more questions, and shudder. Bathers were few; for who could be sure he would not knock against the body in the water? Regular fishing came almost to a standstill: who knew when the body might be sighted, or where cast up? There was nothing to be done; unrest took the place of action. It was as if the corpse had taken over command of the beach, and had put into all hands not good heart but a dead suspense.

On the flood-tide the seine-net was shot. Long hauls were made, so that the net circled well out and scraped over all the sandy bottom

at the foot of the beach. Small crowds watched; no one could tell, while the ropes were being hauled ashore, what was underneath the semicircle of bobbing corks, what was rolling over the sand in the bunt of the net. And when, at the end of each haul, the bunt was coming in, with its rotund mass of seaweed inside it, though some rushed down to look, the most part remained on the wall, inquiring, 'Have they got it? Have they got it?'

What they did get was a few fish that no one hastened to buy.

Next day the seining continued, and the next. It was at least something to do. Then men began to ask: 'An't none o' his folk been out eet? They chaps what's been seining have a-losted three days' work for nort. 'Tisn't that they wants to be paid; us knows that; they'd be so glad as anybody else if they could find 'en. But I reckon somebody ought to thank 'em an' make some acknowledgement, like, to 'em for what they've a-done. 'Tisn't giving o'em no encouragement.'

And meanwhile, without doubt, the relatives sat in house, trying in vain to give each other some encouragement; thinking there was no sorrow like theirs, and how kind people were;

thanking them most by placing all dependence upon them.

It was the beginning of a change in feeling: the body was becoming, as it were, the sea's; a public property, an institution; nobody's and everybody's. Perhaps, now, it would never be seen at all. Grim realistic jokes began to be made about it; yet when a man was taxed with keeping quiet, as likely as not he would reply: 'I was just thinking to meself about thic there chap. It don't let a fellow rest, like, him riding about out there. 'Tis a wonder summut an't been see'd o'en. 'Tisn't as if us had a-had a breeze for to drive 'en out to sea. The crabs must ha' got he in among the rocks.'

'Ah! you won't see nort o' he now, not till 'er rises in the water after the seventh day. Men, they says, rises face downwards—don' 'em?—an' women face upwards. You'll see he when his time comes.'

A suggestion was made that if the Brixham-men were allowed to trawl in the bay. . . .

'*They* wouldn' bring 'en in, don't you make no mistake about that. Certainly they catches dead bodies in their trawls, an' a horrible state they'm in, too, sometimes; but they don't take 'em into

port. Not they! If they took 'em aboard they'd hae to pay for their burying. Lord! 'tis nothing in Brixham for one o' they there trawlers to come in short o' a hand or two, drownded; an' sometimes the relations offers a reward; but all the same they don't take the body aboard, in case the reward shouldn't be paid, an' then they'd hae to bury 'en at their own expense. 'Sides, they wouldn't sell none o' their fish if 'twas know'd they'd had a dead body in the catch. They Brixham-men, they just puts bodies back where they come'd from. An' I reckon 'tis better so, all ways, to let 'em bide, an' rest where they be to. As for thic fellow there, I been down under cliff, an' up east too, an' *I* can't see nort o'en. Buried up in the sand, I 'spect.

On the eighth day, however, a boat coming ashore from fishing reported that the body had been seen floating about under water not far from the place of drowning. It might have been one of the yellow porpoises that were known to be in the bay. It could not, they declared, have been a jelly-fish. It was the wrong shape.

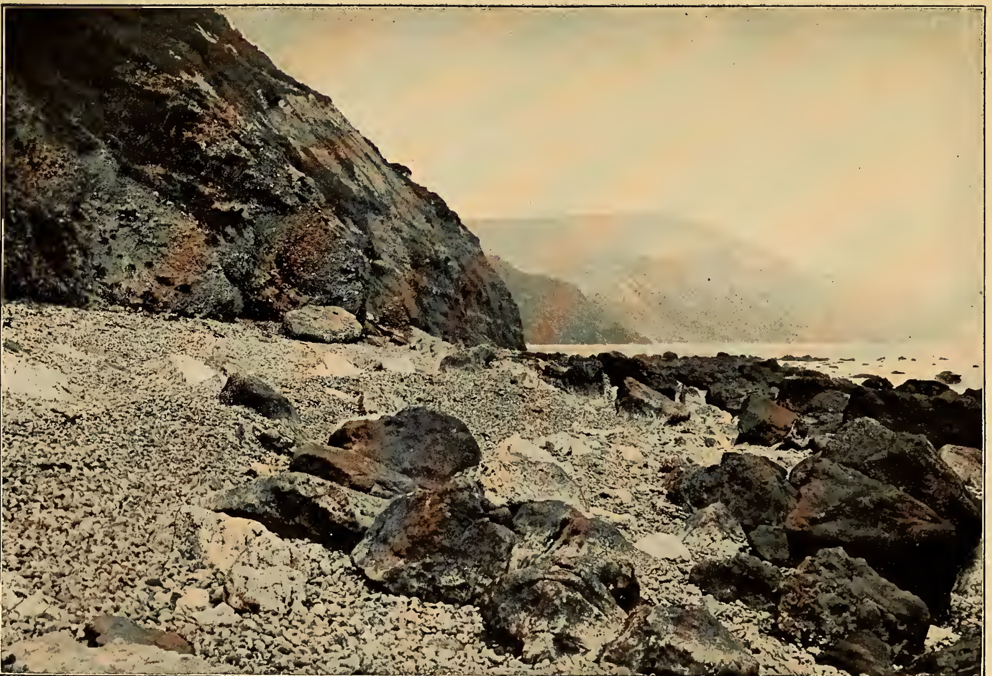
Tides were long. Bathing had begun again. Next morning the bay on the far side of Broken Rocks was merry with people swimming and

splashing and lying in the sunshine; was beautiful with the sight of live human bodies against the blueness of the sea. There the corpse was, or among Broken Rocks: it could not have travelled far. At low tide, when the rocks were much uncovered and the water was shallow on the sand for a long distance out, some of us went down among the bathers, and, half swimming, half walking, we trod the sand to try if by any chance we could find the body with our feet. Others, when we returned without success, were flocking to Broken Rocks as if the price of mussels had suddenly risen to ten shillings a peck. One man came across the sandy pools carrying a varnished boat-hook. 'What's got thic thing for?' we called out.

He stopped suddenly and looked at it with comic surprise. 'I don't know,' he said. 'Felt I wanted summut in me hand, I s'pose.'

Before we had finished smiling, there followed an old white-bearded man, and he carried in his hand a rusty dented bucket.

A bucket for a corpse. . . . We burst out into laughter. The spell of the dead body was broken for us, and as the tale of the boat-hook and the bucket travelled across beach, it was still further



Broken Rocks at Low Tide.

broken. Laughter broke it; the laughter which, by dissolving sorrow and death in life, prevents an awful accumulation of them in the mind of man.

The search was given up. 'He've a-drifted out to sea, an' I reckon that's the best could happen.'

But the very next day, in its own time, the sea just chucked him up at the feet of a woman who was sitting in the sunshine on the beach.

It was not much damaged—only the fingers and toes.

22. THE BARE-KNEED MATE

'WHO? Thic there whipsey little chap scraping Bill Brimworthy's drifter? There isn't nort the matter wi' he, not that I knows of. He looks a sight better 'n he used to, anyhow. But he don't look like a fisherman that's been at it all his life—do he?—for all he wears a guernsey like the rest o'us, which you've got to if you goes to sea much an' handles nets. Coat-buttons catches in everything. An' he ain't a proper fisherman, nuther, though he's a chap as goes fishing an' been on the beach this ten year or more. If ever anybody was mazed for to get to sea, he was; an' as 't turned out 'twas me give'd 'en his fust chance. The Bare-kneed Mate, us calls 'en, 'cause he jumped into the boat bare-kneed, on the hop, like, wi'out ort wi'en.

'An't 'ee never spoke to 'en? *He* could spin 'ee up a yarn if he was minded. Ol' Bare-knees have a-see'd hard times, if anybody have. I reckon

he've a-heard his chil'ern more 'n once crying for summut to eat when there wasn't nort in the house, nor any chance o' getting ort unless you went over to Broken Rocks at low tide an' picked some mussels, an' borrowed a bit o' salt an' coal for to cook 'em with. *That's* been done. He wasn't never one o' they sort what talks about it outside or whiddles around district visitors an' the likes o' they, an' goes an' sings hymns for grocery tickets like some o'em do. I mind a parson coming down to beach one Sunday evening, an' started preaching about going to sea of a Sunday. Ol' Bare-knees up an' told 'en quick: "Look here, sir, you has Sunday once a week, don' 'ee?"

' "Yes, my man," said the parson like they do talk, as if you didn't know nort about nothing. "Certainly."

' "Well, us have had Sunday every day for two months this winter, while it's been too rough for to go to sea or the fish wasn't there. *They* don't take no heed o' Sunday. An' now they *be* there, if they an't sheered off. If you, sir, 'll go to your church an' pray for the fish an' us to hae Sunday once a week, like you do, an' your prayer's answered, I be damn'd if I won't keep Sunday your way—an' wi'out your pay for the same."

'Shuts his hooter, thic parson did.

'That was after ol' Bare-knees had been going to sea two or three seasons, an' bad seasons they mostly was, I mind; enough to take the heart out o' any man. Only, you see, if you been brought up to fishing you don't look to anything else to help 'ee out o'it, an' that *makes* 'ee follow it up. 'Tis different when you got something to fall back on.

'Ol' Bare-knees have, if he was like to do it. He's a carpenter by trade; a good workman, I've heard 'em say; an' used to earn good wages. Used to spend half o'em, I should say, on mackerel hooking in the summer, for all us let 'en hae a boat cheap, him being one o' the likes o' ourselves. He could sail a boat all right long afore he come'd out to beach. Then, suddently, wi'out saying a word to anybody what he was about, he throw'd up his job an' walked out to beach, saying he was going to try that an' go to sea. Us laughed at 'en, not thinking he meant it; but there he was, an' there he stayed. Nobody know'd why he'd a-lef' his work. Some said he was clean mazed an' the next place he'd sail to would be the 'sylum, an' be took in a cab wi' a strong chap sitting each side o'en. An'

some o'em said 'twas a move o' his master's; how he was going to hae boats on the beach, up against us, an' had sent his foreman out to learn the job, like, for when he should hae 'em. I thought p'raps he'd had a word or two wi' his master—never wasn't the chap to stand much yap from anybody. I mind well enough he had a cough what seemed as if 'twas going to tear his inside out; shaked 'en, it did, like a southerly gale on my ol' front window. There he'd stay, an' cough. "Why doesn't get in house or go back to thy work in the warm?" I asked 'en one day when I see'd 'en standing 'bout out to beach.

'"I can't," he says.

'"Can't!" says I. "G'out! What do 'ee mean by *can't*? Take an' go back to thy job. There bain't nort for 'ee out here."

'"An't 'ee got a job for a chap?" he says.

'"I can't give 'ee a job," I told 'en. "An' if 'tis going to sea you wants, I can't take 'ee 'long wi' me, not while I got Jack Ruccombe"—that's my wife's brother—"not while I got Jack Ruccombe for mate. I don't want no other. 'Twouldn't be fair on he."

'"Then you'm fixed up?" says he.

'"Fixed up—aye!" I said. "How could us keep a roof over our heads if us wasn't fixed up."

'"So be I fixed up," he says; an' with the same he puts his hands over his ears—like so, as if it hurt 'en there—an' starts coughing.

'Anyhow, 'er soon found out the difference 'tween coming out to beach an' going out to sea. Us have a-see'd they strappers what jumps into a boat so long as there's ort to be earned, an' then when there isn't nort to be earned and summut wants doing, thee ca'st whistle for 'em like thee's whistle for the wind, an' sometimes 'twill come an' sometimes 'twon't. Not that he didn't pick up a copper or two boat-hauling an' the like, an' a pint wi' anybody that went in to hae it; all hands was free an' open enough wi' him, knowing pretty well how he was situated; but they know'd too that he was only waiting his chance for to jump in a boat an' stick there—an' there 'twas. Couldn't expect nobody to turn out for he, an' 'twasn't no use making 'en think so when he ought to ha' been back at his work.

'He had to pick up odd jobs what'd come to him on the beach, like carpet-beating an' moving luggage. An' then he began to let

hisself go. They talks about men letting theirselves go, an' so they might; I tell 'ee it costis money not to let yourself go, an' ol' Bare-knees hadn't got none. But I took partic'lar notice, if you asted 'en how he was, by way o' speaking, he'd answer, "Better, better"; an' sometimes he'd look 'ee in the face an' say, "Don' 'ee think so?"

'One night when Jack Ruccombe an' me was keeping o'it up—us hadn't gone to sea thic night 'cause our nets was over to the bark-house—Harry Drake, him what's a fisherman but don't never trouble hisself to do nort 'less he can pick it up quick an' easy, his wife being a nurse—Harry Drake an' ol' Bare-knees comes an' fetches me an' Jack out o' the "Beacon Light."

' "Lookse!" says Harry, pointing out to sea. "One o' the drifters have been burning flares. Can't be nort wrong wi' 'em, nice fine night like this here. They've a-got a load o' herrings an' wants help. Can't take in all their nets, that's what 'tis. Thee's better go out to 'em. Come on!"

''Twas Harry said that, but I reckon 'twas Bare-knees put 'en up to it. Fine chance for he. Harry wouldn' ha' troubled hisself. Too much rowing for he.

'Well, us hauled the seine out o' the seine-

boat an' dragged her down over beach to the water, an' Jack gets in an' Harry Drake jumps in. I was just shoving an' jumping in too, when *Bump!* goes my head up against ol' Bare-knees. I see'd stars. 'Twas him jumping in same time. I hangs on to the boat. "'Tisn't no use four o'us going," I says. "'Tis only extra weight so's us can't take in so many herrings." Then I turns to Bare-knees: "If you'm going, I bain't."

'There us stands, the two o'us, wi' the seas lopping in over the starn o' the boat. An' dark 'twas too.

' "Come on!" says Jack to me. "Devil! 'tis thy boat, 'en it?"

'So I shoves, an' jumps in, leaving ol' Bare-knees standing on the beach.

'An' he was still there when us come'd back. *I* wouldn' ha' been, if anybody 'd a-treated me like us did him. Loaded wi' herrings, us was. They'd had to gie up two nets to us. Pretty sweat 'twas, rowing in.

'Us hauled up, an' then Bare-knees says to me, sideways like: "Gie us a couple o' thy herrings, will 'ee?"

' "Why!" says I. "Wasn't I going to tell 'ee to pick up a dozen or two? What's the hurry?"

'"There ain't no hurry," he says. "Only I got the missis bad in house an' an't got nort for her. An' the kids be crying. . . . I come'd away out o'it. I an't told no man. . . ."

'"Look here," I says, like I did afore. "Why doesn't go back to thy work? 'Tisn't only thyself. . . ."

'An' he says, "Can't!" again.

'"What?"

'"I dursen't," he says, "I an't never troubled no one wi' my private affairs. . . . The doctor told me as how I should be dead in two years if I didn't get outdoor work."

'"Well, thee 'astn't got it."

'"No, I an't."

'"An' it don't do," I tells 'en, "to listen too much to what they doctors says. *They* don' know always."

'He poked his face up into mine—proper ghastly he looked there in the dark, sure 'nuff. "But I know'd 'twas true," he said. "I know'd it; felt it in meself. Thee ca'st feel things like that, thee's know."

'"Why di'sn't tell anybody?" I says. "Then p'raps a fellow could ha' put summut in thy way, if he know'd how 'twas."

' "Tell anybody!" he says. "What's the good? Would anybody ha' give'd me a job to go to sea if they'd ha' know'd I wasn't proper up to it—a dying man as you might ha' said then. Would you?"

' "Don' know as I should," which was true. You can't afford to risk your life to sea wi' a man what isn't up to it, though it *has* been done often enough 'fore now.

' "'Sides," he says, "the doctor telled about sending me to one o' they hospital places where you goes an' dies away from everybody you got. I couldn't face thic."

"They places bain't no good," I says. "'Tis better for to die comfor'able if you got to. But *I* can't make way for 'ee, an' let my missus an' kids starve for to feed yours."

' "I knows it," he says.

' "N'eet any other chap in his senses."

' "I knows that too, now," he says. "Aye, don' I know it!"

'An' with the same, he burstis out crying. Fair broke, he was, if ever a man was broke; broke like men be sometimes, an' no fault o' theirs nuther.

' "Here," I says. "Take a dozen or two of

herrings—sell some o'em if thee't minded—an' here's a shilling for thee to go on with. Thee's get thy chance," I told 'en, "if thee's wait."

'He did too; an' from me.

'It come'd on to blow next day, an' us didn't go to sea for a week; an' when it did stop blowing, it come'd in foggy. Jack an' me had our nets in the boat, an' was having an argument, like us do, w'er us should shove off or not—not but what we wasn't o' the same mind really, which was to stop ashore.

'Bare-knees comes along while we was arguing of it out. "What's the use o'it?" Jack was saying. "You shoves the boat down an' hauls about your gear, taking out o'it more'n thee's earn, an' all the time thee doesn't know w'er the herrings be still in the bay or not."

' "Us always got to find 'em, an't us?" I said.

' "Aye!" says Jack. "An' thee ca'st find 'em in this here fog, an' not know after that where you've a-found 'em to, nor where to shoot your nets, an' very likely lose or tear abroad the whole fleet o'em wi' shooting too far in. How ca'st *thee* tell where thee a't in a fog."

' "Well, I've a-see'd fogs lift afore now."

' "An' us have a-see'd 'em get thicker, an't

us? 'Tisn't as if us know'd the herrings was there after a gale like what us have a-had. They'm gone into deep water. There isn't no prospects, I tell 'ee."

'"I've a-catched 'em times likes this," I says.

'"Seems to me," says Bare-knees joining in, "that them as can go out don't want to go, an' them as wants to can't get the chance."

'"Thee's better ****** well go then," says Jack. "I bain't going."

'"Do 'ee mean it?" I says.

'"Mean it—aye!" says Jack, wi' his rag proper out. "Take 'en, if thee't minded. An' if thee's lose nets thee ca'st get he pay for 'em."

'Which put my rag out too. "Come on!" I says to Bare-knees; an' down us shoved the drifter. "Don' 'ee want to go home an' fetch some things?" I asted 'en. "No," he says; an' in he jumps, just like he was, bare-kneed. If he'd ha' gone home for to fetch ort, very likely us wouldn't ha' gone, 'cause the fog come'd on thicker'n ever; couldn't see nort. An' I daresay, if the truth was told, he hadn't got nort to his name for to go an' fetch. Cheated the gulls out o' some bread an' stuff o' mine what had been in the

bow o' the boat a week, he did; an' kept hisself warm cleaning up the boat out to sea—out to sea, mind you. Us mostly leaves 'em dirty.

'Us catched six or seven thousand thic night—off Steep Head us found us was when the fog lifted t'wards daylight;—an' next morning Jack, my mate, was so wild as a conger. "Pretty thing!" he says, "now you've a-took he out an' fell across the fish. What be I to do? Can't turn 'en out 'cause you've had a catch; 'twouldn't look fitty; an' now I an't got a boat 't all. Better 'fit you'd stayed ashore."

"'Twould ha' been better; but as it happened we wasn't the only boat what had an argument over going out thic night. Bill Brimworthy an' *his* mate, what never wasn't much good to 'en, pretty nigh come'd to blows, an' separated; an' it come'd into my mind to say to 'en: "Here's a mate for thee, Bill. *He'll* clean up thy drifter for 'ee. Did for me last night, out to sea."

' "That's what I wants," says Bill, being angry. "Not no more o' they ****** what only snores an' takes their share." An' he took 'en, an' he's had 'en 'long wi' 'en ever since; an' an't heaved the tiller at his head once, they says, for all Bill's one o' they sort would so soon heave the tiller at

your head as look. A man gets like it fishing, thunder-puffy like. . . .

'Just you stroll over an' take a look inside Bill's boat what he's scraping. 'Tis like a new pin, oldish boat too, wi' everything in its place better'n a ship's cabin. The Bare-kneed Mate's tool-chest, I reckon 'tis. He *is* a carpenter by trade.

'Funny thing, too, he turned religious after that. I've a-see'd men, afore, turn religious when they was *in* trouble, but not over coming out o' trouble. Must ha' been the strain an' the anxiety, an' then me finding o'en a job.'

23. NAVY CHAPS

Most times there is a bluejacket on the Front, always a naval pensioner or two. This little town is Navy. It is no good begetting sons here and mapping out their future with too much certainty. They grow up till they begin to have secret minds of their own. Something comes over them. Off they go into the Navy, and one more family is stretching its eyes about the world.

Politicians and newspapers talk about ships, the public reckons up its safety and its purse in terms of battleships, and the Admiralty humours them all for its own purposes. On occasion, chiefly during an election, we too talk battleships; and a pretty mess we make of it; for each man speaks of the Navy that he knew; the ships he knows, or did know years ago. But ordinarily, when we speak of the Navy, we mean men, not ships; the man behind the gun, as he calls himself in these

days of gunnery. (He does not call himself what he equally is, the man before the gun—somebody else's gun.) Battleships are tracked from port to port in newspapers as often as not a day stale; but who cares about the battleships themselves?

'The *Bellaruffin* [*Bellerophon*] was due in to Devonport this morning to pay off, so I see'd on the paper. . . . When's your Ted coming home on leave? Passed for leading seaman, an't he? When's 'er going to go through the gunnery school?' That's what we want to know. 'Do 'ee mind thic time when us was pretty near bottled up, the lot o' us, an' ol' Ted give'd thic Irishman a thick lip?' That is what we do mind. Dreadnoughts. . . . 'Hell about Dreadnoughts! They'm going to do away wi' pensions to pay for they Dreadnoughts, bain't 'em—so they was telling out to beach yesterday.' Here are old men who served their time in sailing ships. They have seen something of life, and they don't think much of the modern ironclad, or its crew either. 'There!' they will say, making some pretty old knot or intricate sennit. 'There, my boy! There isn't one man in a hundred in the Navy now that can show you how to make that. In my time, I tell you. . . .' Dreadnoughts are nice new toys

for a nation to play with. The point for us is that battleships have brothers, sons, and friends, husbands and fathers, aboard them; that they are wet ships, happy ships, or proper sad. On merry evenings we sing:

> '*They* may build the ships, my boys,
> And think they know the game,
> But they can't build the boys of the bulldog breed
> That made Old England's name!'

And we mean it, both then and at times when we should laugh at the blatancy of the song; for to us, *they* stands for more than foreign nations; it stands for our own Admiralty as well. They build the ships without which there could be no Navy. We provide the men, the living flesh and blood, without which their ships would be so much misshapen scrap-iron. Brains and material and money, all in plenty, go to the making of their ships. God knows how much more has gone to the making of those who man them!

'They there Navy chaps. . . .' The phrase denotes a difference that really exists. They form within the nation another nation with its own traditions, customs, manner of growth, habits of thought, and its own internal politics, about which the outer world hears next to nothing until a brief

Admiralty notice or a new regulation ends each hot discussion. They seem to grow to their uniform so that they cannot wear civilian clothes well. Even a service dialect is superimposed on each man's native own, and so persistent a speech as that of Devon becomes clipped instead of lingered over. To go into the Navy is to leave home in more senses than one. It is to become in part a stranger in their own land, among their own people.

For well-grown youths the service is a bank to which they can mortgage the best portion of their lives in return for the means of life—shelter and rations. It is a standby and a trap. It seduces them young, and returns them smarter than they were, but worse off than they might have been. For the hardships of the Navy are not the hardships of the longshore. It is difficult to make the change from one to the other; to turn from disciplined work aboard ship to the haphazard labour, the perseverance through ill-luck, of fishing. And the routine life of the Navy does not teach men to put by during good seasons against bad. They live as they go. When the fish fail they cannot say, 'Us have see'd it afore, an't us? An' will again. Just you hold on a

bit!' Naval pensioners, having what they wanted, what everybody wants—something to fall back upon—may possibly be happy in a jog-trot fashion. Most of them don't look it. The liveliest part of their life is past. They live with their eyes behind them.

Hence, perhaps, the underlying jealousy and contempt of the Navy that one hears sometimes in the talk of old longshoremen who have never come under its spell. 'Ah!' they will say, of a bluejacket on leave. 'He'd ha' done better if he'd a-stayed at home an' gone 'long steady. What is it, the Navy? You'm in and you'm out, an' you bain't no for'arder than you was. 'Tisn't no job for a man what's got any go in him, being ordered about by the likes o' they; and they knows it too after they been in it a while; only they'm there then. If I had a son growing up I'd see *he* didn't join no Navy. . . .'

But very likely the son would.

All sorts of bad I have heard about the Navy, over and over again, from men sober and men drunk, men argumentative or disappointed, above all from men who have done well in it. What it used to be like, they were not there to see, and they have not, most of them, read such books

as *Sea Life in Nelson's Day*. The discipline of to-day, probably, with its multitude of careful regulations, is more irksome, if less terrible, than the happy-go-lucky violence of the past, when men were put to death for small offences—and then they couldn't grumble any more. Changes in the service, however great and beneficial in the long run, are changes from what men are at home in to what they do not know; soft jobs have tended of late years to become harder. Sea pay has increased less than that of the other services; for ordinary seamen it has not increased at all. Nothing can remove the fundamental cause of grumbling, that neither one and sevenpence a day nor any other sum is sufficient for being killed in an infernal floating machine by devilish explosives, should that happen. It is all very well to die for one's country, but if one is to be paid for the same, the pay should be adequate; and that cannot be. In the end, one begins to think that a good deal of the grumbling is not so much at the Navy as at life itself with the Navy as scapegoat.

And yet, in spite of all they say, if I had my time over again, I think it is in the Navy I would be (I doubtless should soon regret it); not for wanting to do their routine work, not for wishing

to walk the slippery plank of their discipline; but rather in order to be one of such a fine set of human animals all turned towards a definite purpose; to be in a ship that knows her course and steers by it, full speed ahead, instead of lying bound alone in shallows and in miseries; to have at any rate the illusion of living faster, harder and more effectively than one could otherwise do. For just as a fuddle by oneself is a poor affair compared with a spree in good company—'when you'm all up for it'—so if life is to be a bit of a spree, good company is still needed; and that there is in the Navy, with a long tradition and a common pride to back it up.

One day before breakfast we were out mackerel hooking roundabout a cruiser that was anchored in the bay. Very bulky, black and lifeless she lay on the calm sea in the early morning haze. Suddenly the guard-call sounded brazenly. Men ran about the decks. The guard fell in across the quarter-deck. Eight bells struck and the bugle sounded *Attention!* Whereupon, while the guard presented arms, and the crew saluted or stood at attention facing aft, according to their rank, the white ensign fluttered out from its staff astern. The ship had awakened. The wide sea

was awakened. It was the hour of official sunrise—a comic notion. But it seemed out there, beneath the great ironclad, that the sun by some vast power had been stayed in his course till then.

That power of the Navy, not indeed over the heavens but over the minds of mankind, acting obscurely alongshore, draws men into the service at least as surely as the uniform that is usually blamed, because youngsters take to it as, and for much the same reasons as, birds put on fine feathers at the beginning of the mating season. Here we have the Navy eye, so to speak. A soldier going by in full pipeclayed regimentals, very stiff, very tight, very smart, excites only surprise and laughter: 'Shouldn't I like to see he hae to bend down two-double an' pick a peck o' winkles!' But half a dozen bluejackets striding loose-knit along the sea-wall. . . . 'Smartish chaps!' some one exclaims, and inquires how they are doing in the Service. They are splendid full-blooded animals, in the sense that to be fine animals is what we all desire. And more; for the bluejacket is no longer a sea-labourer. He is a specialist at something or other, besides being an expert in a special way of life. While talking to petty officers one gathers hints of an admirably

tolerant, rough and ready tact in the management both of the lower ratings and higher ranks, below and above them. The growth of intelligence in the Navy and the adaptation of the old sea-discipline to it has created problems more difficult to solve than gun control. Men have feelings and prejudices and cussedness. Vitality is stronger than cordite.

In one thing, at all events, longshoremen have the pull over Navy chaps. However perfectly the latter may be able to bring one craft alongside another, they cannot beach boats well on a lee shore, and, it seems, never have been able to do so. 'My dearest friend,' wrote Nelson as far back as 1801 in those sea-sick letters of his to Lady Hamilton, 'it blows strong from the westward, and is a very dirty day, with a good deal of surf on the beach; but Hardy and Lutton recommended my going on shore this morning, as they believe it may blow a heavy gale to-morrow. . . . I hope the morning may be fine; but I have ordered a Deal boat, as they understand the beach better than ours; and if I cannot land here, I shall go to Ramsgate pier, and come to Deal in a carriage.' When, a year or two back, men from H.M.S.—— landed their Admiral on our beach, just where they

were advised not to, and got his back very wet, and put him out of temper with the place, a couple of us caused something like consternation the night afterwards by fetching an officer out of a ballroom, hunting him down in jerseys among the starch-collared or low-necked dancers, and hour and a half after the time for which he had ordered a boat to take him to his ship. It was thought that the Admiral's wetting . . . . Admiral's ill-tempers are not to be played with. But in point of fact, it was only that we were tired of waiting so long after midnight for that officer. Across the low-tide sand one of us carried him like a baby, but head downwards, which is the easiest way. He couldn't give *us* 10A or chokey for disrespect. Moreover, he stood it very well. It was when we took a party of lieutenants aboard, and over the whiskey and cigarettes they gave us (good luck to them—we had rowed hard!) began teasing them about their beaching of boats, that unpleasantness nearly cropped up. They were tender on the subject. The Admiral again, I suppose—though they didn't say so. On another night at two in the morning, we rowed three boat-loads of midshipmen three miles to their ship, and neglected beforehand to agree between ourselves as to the charge. Or

rather, mine, in their exuberance, rowed me out, as nearly as possible smashing the paddles and capsizing the boat. Thinking it was worth it—and so it was at that hour—I charged them half-a-crown each, and they paid like lambs. The next man's boat-load decided finally to offer him two shillings. The third man, who had sweated at his oars with a cargo of twelve, obtained a shilling from each with difficulty. Doubtless they compared prices afterwards. It was perhaps as well for us that the ship left next morning. Naval officers are a peculiar people, very pleasant when they are pleasant, though apt sometimes to try and treat outsiders as they can their own men.

But the Navy chaps, them we know. When they come home in numbers, on Christmas or Easter leave, they are like a breeze springing up on a sultry day. They make things hum, as they put it. What does it matter to them how much they spend, so long as they have it to spend? When it is gone, they must wait till they get some more. They raise the scale of generosity for the time being. Easy-going as they are, however, they can do ceremonies, which is always a sign of really corporate life. Behind the coffin of a dead bluejacket they marched in order,

voluntarily under the command of the senior petty officer present (their footsteps had the effect of a dead march), and returned in as good order till they were dismissed; whereupon with one accord, like rabbits, they bolted into the nearest public-house. But they had finished their ceremony perfectly, nevertheless. Civilians would have straggled away. One morning it was observable that all the bluejackets on leave were in their best jumpers. They had the regulation creases about them. Near mid-day the church bells struck up a peal. Soon a regular quick tramp of feet was heard, and there wheeled round the corner a cab hauled by a score of Navy chaps on a rope. Inside of the cab one caught sight of a bluejacket —very blue in the black cab—and of his bride with white flowers. Across the Front they went at a quick trot, as if to defy the sea that was soon to separate husband and wife; thence round another corner to their new home. I heard more than one woman say that she would have jumped out of the cab; but these were not the wives of Navy chaps. *We* couldn't have done it; we should have fallen out half-way, saying, 'I be puff-blowed!' and perhaps have left the cab standing.

When some hundreds came ashore for a few hours' leave, a laughing crowd collected upon the sea-wall late at night, to watch them shove off to their ships. It had been an evening of it. The lights of their cutters, steadied by men with poles, swayed at the water's edge like big fireflies. The complement of each boat was told over almost frenziedly. 'Where's So-and-so? Where the ****** ****'s *he* got to? Go'n find him. Tell 'en to hurry up for the Lord's sake!' Language on the beach was starlike. Now and again the crowd turned, whilst a bluejacket came racing down the street, leapt off the wall, and rushed to the boats. One man dived overboard twice, whether from stimulated depression or from an excess of jollity, I do not know. He was rescued, a limp bundle, and sat upon. Some had their arms round maidens' waists, kissing openly. They had been in the town only one evening. People talked. But it seemed to me better that the Navy chaps should have such a way with them, than that the maidens should have been more modest. It was a bacchanalia, an outbreak of primal forces good to watch, and reassuring in these decorous days. Our own beachcombings are odds and ends, flotsam and jetsam, to eke out a living.

The Navy chaps beachcomb for maidens, the means of more life, the future, into which they rush light-heartedly. And so the Navy justifies its theft of young blood from the longshore. It gives it back with usury.

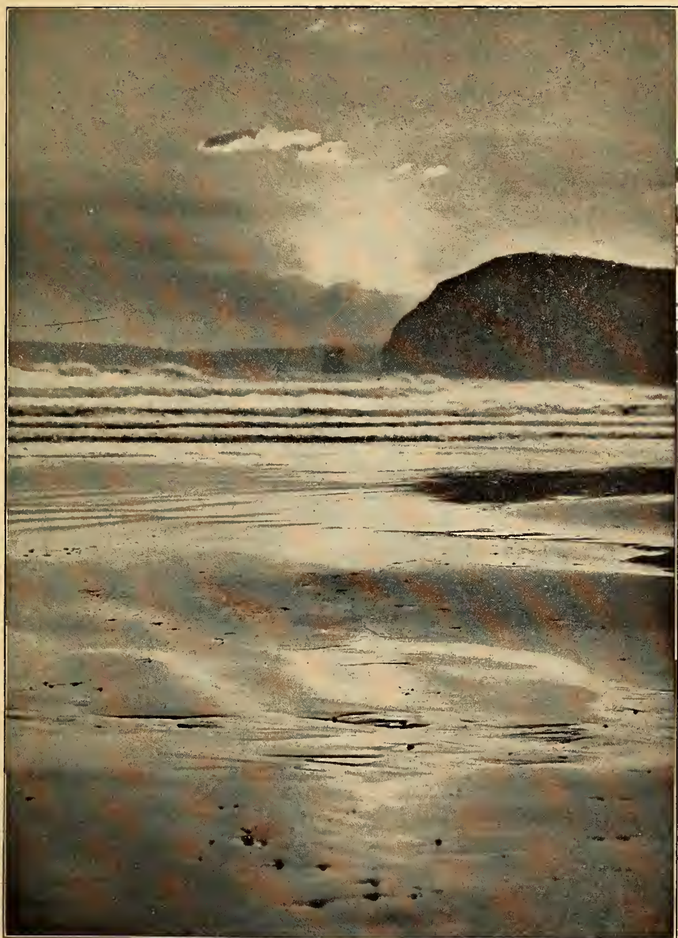
24. A LEGEND

Most old places by the sea have their legends and traditions. And when they have not, it seems necessary to make legends for them; even as the folk of all times have peopled nature with half-human beings, calling them gods; or as seamen have given to their coasts grim names and tales. Only so seems nature to have a meaning for man, when he has given her a portion of his humanity. Hereunder is such a legend, for a wild spot on a rock-bound shore.—The Legend of the Black Abbey Rock.

Back in those days there was a man who could find no foothold in life. Therefore he took his wife to the grey cottage in the combe of the Black Abbey Rock, at the western edge of the land, hoping always to find peace and something that his soul might hold to and have. Twice in a day and night the sea came up to the house, and twice in a day and night the waters went back and left a wilderness of great stones, in the midst of which uprose the Black Abbey. It was as if a guardian had been set to keep the grey

cottage from the inrush of the tides, and around it the waves beat so that their spray was blown into the combe of the Black Abbey and upon the faces of the dark cliffs on either side. In the evening when the sun was sinking behind the farthest wave in the west, the Black Abbey cast a long shadow over the cottage, until its grey stone walls and the green-grey lichens upon them were black like the Black Abbey and the rocks roundabout. During many ages continually, the cry of the sea had filled the combe. And the gulls wheeled round and mewed to the sea for food.

The man loved the body of his wife, who was beautiful, as a lily is beautiful on an altar in a dim church. Yet he hated her too, for her soul was vast and empty, so that the four winds of heaven could not have filled it, and in her eyes was nothing. She feared the sea that he loved, and that was more beautiful than she was. She stayed always in the grey cottage, or wandered, and was like light, in the day-long dusk under the pine-trees which were as thick as giant moss upon the slopes of the combe. When he hated her he was sorry, and when he loved her, sorrow was the end of it. Two sorrows he took to the sea.



'THE HEAVY RELUCTANT BREAK OF THE GROUND-SWELL.'

Often he waited among the rocks near the Black Abbey, seeking he knew not what. He heard the heavy reluctant break of the ground-swell, throbs of the earth's heart, and while he listened Promise and Hope were borne to him on the sound of the sea.

One night when the north-west wind blew over the waters, and a mist of spray arose where waves struck the rocks, he saw the lights of a ship. And the Rock-Woman came to him, and was beside the Black Abbey. Her hair was like fine spray that the land-wind blows from the crest of the waves when a cloud veils the sun and its light is golden and cold; her garment was a swirl of foam that reached up to her; her face was like still white water before dawn; but her eyes he could not see. She looked where the ship battled; the strength of her gaze swayed her like desire. It seemed that she was what the man had asked of the sea, and he yearned for her, and started up; whereupon she went from his sight; and a laugh, in nowise different from the plash of waters, was echoed from the cliffs to the sea, from the sea to the cliffs, and back again. A breaker washed around his feet. He stumbled as he drew back, on one of the boulders that

the tides take up and roll about the shore, and fell.

Whether in dream or not, he was within the Black Abbey. Blue and green was the floor of it, like the sea; of black rock were its pillars; and in the roof was darkness. There was no sound save the throb and swish of the waters leaping against its walls. The man and the Rock-Woman were together before the altar; at the head of which was written PROMISE; but on the face of it was written YEARN. Sheen of the sea and sheen of the moon swept through the Black Abbey, and lingered around its pillars and cornices, and flooded its arches. And the light was music; for in this place the roaring of the waves is a kind of silence. The spirit of the sea, when it is hushed before storm, and streaked with smoothness, went slowly, like a deep breathing, through the Black Abbey.

The wedding was complete. The Rock-Woman called the man to her. Joy lightened her face, but when he looked into her eyes, he saw there the whelming of a ship. It sank behind waves; it lurched high above the great dark troughs; white horses hunted it, and frothed upon its decks. It staggered like a hero dying.

Of a sudden its lights went out, and the Black Abbey was shaken. The colours that had made music, were still, and filled the Abbey like an eternal note on some weighty instrument. The Rock-Woman was triumphant, but horror overcame the man. He put her from him. Darkness fell on the Abbey and on the sea, out of which came a voice saying: 'Because thy wife is beautiful, the two children that she shall bear at a birth shall be beautiful; but because her soul is empty, the soul of the one child shall be of me and the soul of the other child of thee. Yet thou and they shall all be mine, because thy soul is mine.' In answer to the man, a laughter that was nowise different from a plash of waters, hovered about the surf.

When dawn came he was upon the shore. Around him was the torn wreckage of a good ship. Dead bodies of men were washed up in the day.

Two children were born, and the woman that feared the sea died. The man remained with his children in the combe of the Black Abbey; they were all he had. One was fair with its mother's beauty, but that it had hope and yearning in its eyes; the other was dark and its eyes were dark, so that whoever looked into them saw far, yet

was baffled. The fair child was tenderfooted in the wilderness of rocks. The dark child would not be separate from the sea, and cried even in the grey cottage which was close by. One was afraid when storms blustered up the combe and the voice of the sea was loud; but at such times the other was happy.

It happened that one evening when sunshine glittered on the shore, the dark child climbed upon a spur of the Black Abbey Rock, and enticed the fair child to the foot of it. In a little while, a storm-swell rolled in from the Atlantic and the sunshine faded. A menace of winds was heard over the water. Then the dark child laughed; and it took up a stone that was washed upon the Rock, and it dropped the stone upon the fair child, and clapped its hands for happiness.

Twilight was come. The man remembered his wife who had feared the sea; and he cursed the dark child whose soul was the soul of the Rock-Woman, and killed it. He watched the two children lying beneath the Black Abbey. Darkness crept along the face of the cliffs. He was alone.

The shadow of the Rock-Woman went past the combe. He called, but she would not come

to him. A company of colours flickered along the cliffs, driving the darkness before and leaving blackness behind. He besought the Rock-Woman. A mysterious light was upon the Black Abbey. The moon shone fitfully through the clouds, mocking the storm and him. And at high tide, three great waves swept up the shore, and washed the two children away into the west. Then he remembered the words of the Rock-Woman: 'Yet thou and they shall all be mine, because thy soul is mine.'

A laugh, that was plash of waters, grew till it drowned the rattle of the surf, and died away in the combe.

Afterwards the man forsook the cottage in the combe of the Black Abbey, and returned among mankind, hoping to find forgetfulness and something that his soul might hold to and have; but always he yearned for the sea, and always the Rock-Woman haunted him, till he too died.

V

25. TWO FISHERS ABROAD

MATE to a longshore fisherman is not light work for one whose early youth has been misspent in study. Even Jim, who was bred up to it, has often an ache in his bones. While we were hauling the hooked mackerel aboard, hand over hand, and prices were fair, he said that if we could afford it we would have an autumn holiday together. When prices fell, and fish were left to rot on the beach, he declared that we, being fishermen, of all men deserved a holiday. And when the mackerel season closed with small profit, then we made up our minds to have the holiday, whether we could afford it or not. We framed estimates, all of them hazy. Jim took golden sovereigns from a place of hiding upstairs, and I drew two months' fishing pay and a little more besides.

We strolled about London, and after three or

four days of it we happened to see a railway poster which brought the Continent within hail.

'There's very cheap tickets to Boulogne, Jim. Shall us go to France?'

'Had us better to?'

'Why not?'

'Upsail, then. Give the order. You'm skipper here. How many hundreds of miles is it to France herefrom?'

Jim has sailed a twenty-foot open boat from Devon to Kent, has run across Folkestone Bay under bare poles in a gale, and fetched the harbour amid cheers, but he has hardly yet succeeded in realising that France is not an island, or where on the face of the globe it is. He did not do geography at school, and it doesn't much matter; for the coast he knows, he does know.

Our start was not promising. On the previous evening, lounging around a log fire, we had smoked cigars, and had drunk red wine, and Jim had sung sea-songs. The uncustomary wine, the cigars, did it. Jim's face could not lose its weathered tan and red, but it was white, white underneath. His description of his head is indescribable. He, a seaman, was very nearly sea-sick on the cross-Channel steamer. Upon our third-

class week-end tickets was stamped, 'Issued subject to the Aliens Immigration Act.' I had visions of being herded with exceptionally verminous aliens into a big wooden room; of trying to convince an East-country inspector of human cargoes that Jim's broad Devonian tongue, with its modified *u*, was not foreign English; of having to worry our way back to our own England. 'I bain't no alien!' said Jim. But had it not been remarked that he singularly resembles a Breton fisherman in build and, as if to confirm it, had not a London 'busman shouted out to him in the Strand in cockney French? We almost wished ourselves back in our own West-country.

'The fishermen and their families,' so Baedeker says of Boulogne, 'occupy a separate quarter, La Beurrière, on the W. side of the town, and form one-tenth of the population. They partly adhere to the picturesque costume of their ancestors, and differ somewhat in character and customs from the other inhabitants of the town.' It was the fisherfolk we hoped to fall in with. For cleanliness' sake we chose a grand hotel to sleep in, and forced our way to it through a pestering crowd of outporters, interpreters, and touts.

'Be thic the sort o' thing they does hereabout?'

asked Jim, not a little shocked when the chambermaid entered the room while we were half-stripped for washing, and requested us, as usual, to write down on two little slips of paper our birthplace, profession, and so forth, for the benefit of the police. I explained to him that French and English mock-modesties differ. But how explain ourselves to the police? At the moment I could not remember whether *pêcheur* meant a fisherman and *pécheur* a sinner, or the other way round; and besides, I thought, if the Boulonnais look down on fishermen as Devon tradespeople do, we may—as common, low fishermen—be requested to move on. Also there were my wretched spectacles. Not one fisherman in a thousand wears spectacles. But how else describe ourselves? I had had some experience in Paris of the suspiciousness of the French police. There was no knowing what scrapes we might get into. The newspapers at that time were very full of a spy scare, and Boulogne is a garrison town with an arsenal. We could not deny that we were a rather extraordinary pair. The one, Jim, was dressed in a full fisherman's rig, his sole concession to travel being a starched collar, which was completely hidden beneath his jersey, and only made him appear to

have a badly swelled throat. The other one, though clothed in respectable navy serge, wore a comfortable, unstarched, soft-collared shirt and a leathern belt—something between a tramp steamer's second mate ashore and a Wild West scoundrel.

However, I remembered that I had upon me my certificate of discharge from the ss. *Coranian*, on which my character for conduct and character for ability were both stamped 'Very good.' So I presented Jim to the police, and incidentally to the hotel-keepers, simply as *marin*—leaving them to decide whether he was Monsieur le Capitaine or a mere A.B. Myself I put down as *marin* (sea-faring man) *et homme de lettres* (wearing spectacles).

And they soon made up their minds about us. In vain I protested that Jim was my skipper; that I worked for him, not he for me. 'No doubt you do work,' said an amiable fellow in a cabaret. 'I can see very well that your hands are strong and hard. But believe that you two are of the same occupation, absolutely . . . . *Jamais de la vie!* Why, you are the two extremities. Your friend is a small-built man. You are biggish. You are pale and monsieur is very red. Monsieur doesn't

speak a word of French, but you, you speak it—*comme un Anglais bien instruit!*'

I was, it appeared, a large boat-owner visiting Boulogne with one of my captains in order to pick up ideas for my fishing-fleet. Boulogne, they hastened to explain to me, with all a Frenchman's charming pride in his own town, is the greatest fishing port in France, and as a market superior to Billingsgate. But the herring season was so far a total failure.

We left the police papers upon the bedroom table. With my most imposing air (what Jim calls my 'hell-about-it gyte') I strode downstairs, across the clattering hall, and out to dinner. Jim followed on tip-toe.

Boulogne that Saturday night seemed to be composed of three things: dark water and ships' masts and scattered lights—yellow little lights, haphazard spots in the mist, with little drab people and gawky two-wheeled carts crawling about among them. In fishing ports, when the season is a failure, the very houses seem to droop. We felt, I think, Boulogne's mysterious connexion by water with all the far hazy world; saw in mind the lighthouses of other Continents and the loom of their coasts; and then, looking the other way,

it seemed as if the town had been erected in a squalid jumble around the bowed old woman who sits hugging her chestnut roaster at the end of the Pont Marguet. It was the crowded masts—or was it the lonely steam syrens?—that made us breathe quicker and step out. So much adventuring forth, so many hopes, are stored up in a harbour.

Cheap meals are dearer in Boulogne than in Paris. We could find nothing less than 'Déjeuner et Dîner à 2fr. 25.' Where were the 'Dîners à 1fr. 15 et 1fr. 25' of the Latin Quarter? After much peeping through steamy windows, we turned into the restaurant of one Madame Bonne, who advertised dinner in a *grande salle à manger* upstairs at the 2fr. 25.

(Jim grew quite fond of Madame Bonne. 'We fed *chez* Madame Bun's,' and *'We, we!'* were the two phrases he took home to his wife; just to show we had really been among the Frenchies.)

Madame was laying her own dinner at one of the little tables beside her zinc bar. We begged, therefore, to be excused the *grande salle à manger*; to be given instead a fry of fish and a salad downstairs. Immediately after us there entered the bar a thin, pimpled, sallow, lithe, shabby-smart young

man, in whose bearing deference and effrontery were very subtly mingled.

'You do not remember me. I spoke you outside the station. I could have much aided you.' He pointed to the word INTERPRETER on his worn peak-cap.

'We didn't want you then. We got on all right without. But take a glass of wine with us now. Madame, three *d'mis'tiers* of white wine, please.'

'You can speak French! But you are not here in Paris. They do not understand *demisetiers*. You must buy in the bottle of a litre. I dine here every evening. Listen, I can show you all Boulogne—all the best Boulogne—the Boulogne the English love to see.'

He turned to Jim. 'You wish—you—*vous voulez rigoler*—go on the bust, you say—is it not?'

'Yes,' replied Jim blankly.

'He doesn't understand you,' I explained. 'Besides, we wish to go on the bust mildly. *Doucement!* Monsieur is father of a family.'

'Ah! he has one, two little ones, three perhaps?'

'He's had a dozen.'

'Madame Bonne, Madame Bonne!' sang out the interpreter. She emerged from her cupboard

of a kitchen. 'This gentleman here has twelve children.'

'How many?' exclaimed stout Madame Bonne. 'Twelve children? Impossible!'

'That's right,' I said. 'He's had twelve.'

'Quel homme!' She smoothed his stubby hair like a mother. *'Quel homme! Je vais lui donner du bon poisson, vite, vite!'*

Jim smiled, and wriggled like a dog that knows it is being talked about. The interpreter drank deep to all his family.

'I've got,' I said, 'a sister whose husband is one of nineteen.'

'What! Nineteen! Of the same wife?'

'Yes. And the uncle of my brother-in-law has had twenty-one.'

Madame Bonne cast up her hands. I had but told the truth; had labelled myself *liar*; a liar so competent that the interpreter troubled us no more.

After dinner Jim despatched postcards to all his family, smoked some black French cigarettes, was very ill indeed, and went to bed.

During the night we were awakened. People were chattering and shouting below. Carts rattled over the setts. Silly-sounding little horns tootled

up the quay. The locomotives in the roadway whistled, and luggage trunks bumped. Syrens shrieked. 'I thought last night,' Jim called across the room, 'as these here Frenchies was nice quiet people. Do 'em waken up at night? Didn' us ought to be out an' about if there's ort to see? *I* can't sleep.' Whereupon he fell a-snoring.

When we did get up, Boulogne was all alive. The harbour was crowded with fishing craft. Whilst crossing the bridge we caught sight of a steam-drifter deeply laden with herrings.

'My senses!' cried Jim. 'Lookse, there's fish for 'ee!'

'What do you think now of our last winter's twenty-two-thousand catch?'

'Why, that weren't nort 't all. This here's the thing. Look! they'm all over the deck, fore an' aft. But ours was a good catch all the same, after the rate.'

Jim was for moving on down the quay to look at the other drifters. 'Let's find breakfast,' I said, 'and come back here directly afterwards. Aren't you hungry?'

'Don't know as I be. Look sharp, then.—Aye! I could eat half a dozen o' they herrings. Ask somebody w'er this is onusual like.'

'The season's going to begin at last,' they answered. 'Fine weather's what we want. Fine weather! *La saison commence!*'

Almost the whole of the north-eastern side of Boulogne Harbour, which is but a narrow river dredged, was giving up to the fishing-boats. Boats, I say. . . . To us who fish in little open sailing craft they were ships, bigger than Brixham trawlers. The steam-drifters (many of them bearing a Scottish shipbuilder's nameplate) were so large and laden that we mistook them for fish-carriers, come in from a fleet outside. Their catches, hundreds of thousands of herrings, overflowed from the great wooden tanks which are placed on either side the boats, amidships, and spread all over the decks in glittering floods marbled with pink herring-blood. Nets, it seemed, were stowed below. Jim was delighted to see that some of the little craft, much like our own, had caught more in proportion to their size than had the steamers.

Dignified fishwives, black shawls upon their heads, were sitting behind their stalls in the market-house. Their names are painted on the wall above them—LOUISE, CAROLINE, JEANNE, and the rest. Laid out carefully before them were several sorts of grotesque creatures, devil-fish, monks, and so

forth, which are not considered good eating in England, where a fish is judged as much by its appearance and reputed habits as by its flavour. In the wholesale market a fat little auctioneer behind a barrier chirped bids, for all the world like a sparrow in shelter from storm. The bustle was tremendous. But how orderly after the hustle, the cursing confusion of Billingsgate!

Roe, scales, slime, and blood of herrings make a fishy mess; with coal-dust added they make a filthy mess. The quayside was coated with it (quick urchins darted in among the crowd to snatch up crushed and dirty fish); the boats were crusted with it, and so were the men's brown overalls. At first, for eyes accustomed to navy-blue jerseys and ears more used to British cuss-words, the Boulonnais fishermen seemed nimble manikins, as all alike as a flock of sheep, their dialect a monkeys' gibberish; but when the sun-light caught the herring-scales it gave jewels to their beards, gems to their ears, and to the tips of their noses. Wives, daughters, and sweethearts, bringing food and steaming hot soup to the quay-side; family breakfast-parties seated around the long loaves aboardship; laughter, kisses, hearty slaps on the back, a box on the ears soundly given

and well taken, completed their transformation into men.

La saison commençait! Carts—like costers' carts stretched to twice their size—were delivering nets, coal, and ice to the boats, and taking away fish. Knee-deep in herrings, men scooped them up into baskets which were handed up-over the quay-edge. The baskets were tipped into measures, which in turn were tipped into barrels on the carts. Here and there a trawler was discharging. Men with bare red hands, and women even, sorted the icy fish. We passed a heap containing tons of dog-fish, another of great thornbacks, and another of conger eels. Iridescent blunt-snouted little weevers, whose taste is as good as their spines are poisonous, were being laid gently into shallow baskets. 'They don't waste nort here, seems so,' remarked Jim with admiration. 'At home us grinds they weevers underneath our feet.'

A very fat old man who had no use in his legs steered himself along the quay on a small three-wheeled cart drawn by three dogs, one harnessed beneath, and the others to the ends, of the axle. Two dogs which were at liberty insulted them. They broke loose. They fought, leaving the old

man stranded. They won. Laughing spectators led back to the old man his yapping victorious steeds; but work was not interrupted, for in the big catch there was more interest than in the little farce.

Hardly could I entice Jim from one sight to another, from one boat to the next. He smiled at the crews, and, looking up a moment, they grinned back. Then he spoke in English, and they shook their heads, or called out, 'Yes? Anglish? No speak it.'

'Hanged if they bain't nice civil chaps!' was Jim's conclusion.

'Good Lord! There's a mess!' he shouted when we came alongside a drifter, which I think was *Notre Dame de Boulogne.* She had fouled her nets with those of another craft. A hydraulic crane was dragging them out of her in a tangle that was all loose ends. A score of brown men on one hawser, and a thin horse on another, were tearing the nets apart. Pieces of yarn and of rope lay all over the road.

'Do you often get in a mess like this?' I inquired.

'Only too often!' was the reply.

'Yes,' said Jim. 'This here stiff twine, what

they has their nets of, fouls worse'n our cotton. But 'tis cheaper. Why don' 'em turn their nets up an' down for a bit, an' look an' see the lay o'it? 'Twould save time in the end—an' gear. They don't seem to trouble how they breaks it abroad.'

'It belongs to a company I expect.'

'Aye! that there's it. You don't take the same care when it belongs to a company, n'eet when 'tis a gen'leman owner's, as you do when the gear belongs to the likes o' ourselves. 'Tisn't natural to.'

Suddenly there was a shout. The crane was hastily lowered. People ran to peer over the quayside. An animal sound arose. Then work went on as before.

We saw on the after-deck a man whose hand was crushed into a blue and red squash, from which hung shreds of skin. They poured petroleum over the wound and bound it up with dirty rag. 'An' that's the way o'it, I tell thee,' said Jim. 'But I'd like to be in one o' these here boats, after that.'

We walked to the lighthouse, which stands on the eastern of the two jetties which have been flung far into the sea to form an entrance for the harbour. Women, each with a basket slung on her back,

were there to watch their menfolk in and out, to give them their first greetings and last farewells. Fussy steam-tugs towed as many as three drifters up and down the strait channel. Hawsers parted. Collisions were narrowly averted. The crews of twenty or thirty men clustered up in the bows, singing themselves to sea, or else made sail in haste to catch the first wind outside. Behind us, over Boulogne, dark clouds hung low, and the smoke from the harbour writhed up to the dome of Notre Dame, so placidly, so protectively dominating the town. The sun came out. It shone on the golden crosses and sacred statuettes which top the topmasts of the sailing vessels. May St. Jacques, the fishers' saint, and Notre Dame de Bon Secours aid them! The sky looked wild, the sun stormy. A sou'westerly breeze sprang up quietly, like an enemy from ambush. It bellied the sails in the offing. It lifted the clouds off the sea. It revealed for a minute or two the white cliffs of England.

'Shall us stay out our tickets, Jim,' I asked, 'and not go home till Tuesday?'

'Had us better to?'

'Can if you like, if we've got enough money.'

We counted our money.

'Well, I do like to see these here women about. They *works* here like men. They don't try to do the lady like they does at home, which they can't do if they wants to. They helps their husbands. An' they wears pretty caps, too. An' they don't giggle an' screech nuther. They'm well behaved here; nice an' quiet like, for all they eyes 'ee sometimes. When I gets back I shall tell the ol' 'oman her'll hae to help me—come down to the boats an' work instead o' biding in house.'

'Who'll take care of the kids?'

'Who takes care o'em here?'

'They haven't got many—two or three at most. They don't want 'em.'

'*I* do. The more the merrier, I say. But I should like to know what they carries in those baskets on their backs, an' w'er the slings don't hurt their chests. An' I'd ask 'em, too, if I could speak the lingo.—Here, my dear! I wants to speak to 'ee.'

'Thee't better not to, Jim.'

'Can't a fellow speak to any girl he wants to in this here country? Her's gone now, an' her smiled to me.'

At home Jim can frolic with very nearly whom he will. He has a way with him. 'Funny ol'

man!' is all they say. But in Boulogne he had to be reminded that Jealous Continentals are apt to use a knife. We did not want *une affaire passionnelle.* His innocent desire to give his arm to the sweetheart of a young workman all but broke up one merry party we had formed. At a quayside *cabaret,* where the girl who served us spoke English, he bubbled over with satisfaction. 'Don't her laugh pretty!' he said.

A pale frowning young man came in and sat down beside her. 'What have those blackguards [*polissons*] been saying?' I heard him ask.

'Oh! they have spoken very, very politely, *avec une propriété parfaite,'* she said.

If Jim had understood. . . . Thenceforward she spoke in French only, and I had to translate it to him.

But he rapidly developed a sign-language of his own. At 'Le Gai Marin' a number of men in light blue trousers filed into the café. One fine, stout fellow came directly up to Jim and shook hands.

'Anglish?'

'Yes—from the West Country."

'I don't belong to Boulogne—no, no! I come from Calvados, I do,' he said pointedly, as if he felt in Boulogne much as we had felt in London.

After talking awhile, he asked us what luck we had had with our fishing. I interpreted.

'Us an't done nort,' said Jim, with a gesture so expressive that the big man of Calvados slapped him on the back. 'Better catches, my friend! *De la bonne chance, mon gars!*' Then he rejoined his mates.

After a morning on the quay, we were sitting and chatting over our café-cognac. Two men came in and greeted Mme. Bonne. One was tall, blue-eyed, and fair; the other was a drooping, sad man. His head, eyelids, moustache, and shoulders drooped; his knees, as one might say, drooped.

'You are Anglish?' inquired the fair man. 'I speak it small. My father was Irish, but I have never been there. You will drink with us?'

'No, you with us.'

'Very well, messieurs.'

He produced a large card—*Félix Dupont, Commissionaire*—explaining that he was out-porter at the Gare Maritime.

We ordered beer, shook hands many times, were prodigiously polite, bowed, shared cigarettes. The Irish-Frenchman who had partially lost his sight after fever in Martinique—*'Les colonies françaises sont affreuses!'*—chatted to Jim. I had to

talk to the drooping man, but, on account of the quid of tobacco which filled up his mouth, I could not understand one mumbled word in six; and his deafness, also from fever in Martinique, prevented him from hearing more than one sentence in three of my French—*d'un Anglais bien instruit.* We had therefore to treat one another *avec la plus haute considération*—and more beer. They made the mechanical piano play 'God save the King,' and we put several pennies into the slot for the 'Marseillaise,' to which we doffed our caps. The farewells were affecting. *Vive l'entente cordiale!*

Later in the afternoon, from the hotel window, we saw the drooping man supporting the Irish-Frenchman across the Pont Marguet. 'Lookse!' cried Jim. 'Lookse! Who'd ever have thought thic washy French beer would have made 'en like that there? Must have weak heads hereabout.'

And, later still, we fell across the drooping man alone. He was sadder than ever, and most reproachful. He shifted his quid, but all of his mumblings I could catch was, *'Est très malade!* Very, very ill!'

Next day, on our way to the boat, two porters

ran out from the station to embrace us. Jim began to show fight; then burst into laughter; for it was only the Irish-Frenchman and the drooping man.

'You were very bad yesterday?' I asked.

'Never mind. You're going? What a pity! *Bon voyage, messieurs!* A good crossing. *Au revoir! Mais oui—au revoir,* RE-VOIR, *n'est-ce pas?*'

'*Au revoir; c'est ça!*' we said.

But he died soon afterwards, the Irish-Frenchman, of sleeping rough in cold weather.

As the steamer was making Folkstone harbour, one of the crew, who had been entertaining us with cross-Channel gossip, drew us aside: 'Better get up among the first-class, else you'll be kept back with these rotten aliens.' It was with conscious pride that we hurried for'ard, leaving the aliens to be sorted out abaft the barrier; with a sense of possession that we stepped on an English quay; with I know not what in our minds that we took train for our own West-country.

And a few days afterwards again, we sorrowed —not with the facile distant emotion of newspaper readers—when we learnt that five men of *Notre Dame de Boulogne* had been washed overboard in

a gale, and four drowned. We had talked and laughed with them when their nets were so fouled up.

''Tis the way o' it,' said Jim.

'*C'est ça!*' said I.

26. A HERRING HAUL IN A FRENCH STEAM-DRIFTER

'BUT suppose,' said the skipper of the *Marie-Marthe*,—'suppose we do not catch enough herrings to-night, and remain at sea two nights, or three? *Vous serez contents?* You will not mind?'

We were standing in a group on the grimy edge of the Quai Gambetta at Boulogne. All around was the hubbub of that busiest of fishing ports. The harbour was crowded with craft, the foreground thick with their swaying masts, and the air with their smoke, which rose lazily in clouds, then scudded off raggedly in the windy upper air. Below us, alongside the quay, lay the *Marie-Marthe*, her decks black with a mixture of coal-dust and herring-slime. We were silent—trying to make up our minds. I translated the skipper's question into Jim's better ear, repeated

it, and added, in the vain hope of forcing a decision, 'What about it, then?'

'Do as you'm minded,' he repeated. 'You'm skipper here, not me. Three or four days to sea is a long time when you'm on a holiday. Bit too much like work, ain't it? Might nearly so well be at home herring-catching in one of our own little packets. 'Tisn't as if us had brought any ol' clothes: us'll spoil these here. I'm ready 'nuff, if thee's give the word. Thic craft there'—pointing to a laden sailing drifter that was being towed up harbour—'her's got plenty o' herrings, seems so; an' *they* an't been out two nights, not unless they was out in that nor'westerly gale. 'Twas thic perty li'l maid to the café put this here mazed turn-out into thy head. What did 'ee say to each other? I wish I could pick up the lingo. . . . Be 'ee going or not? They'm waiting for thy answer, looks so. We'm stuck up here like two poops!'

The skipper, a snug little man in the brown jumper of French fishermen, was eyeing us steadily, without a sign of persuasion either way. The *patron* of 'Le Bon Pêcheur,' who had brought us from his café of that name to the ship, sniffed and twisted on his heel, as if to say, 'Well, I've done

my best.' A round-faced fisherman, whom we afterwards came to know as *l'oncle Jean,* grinned all over his face, from his cropped stubbly hair to his stubbly unshaven chin. The *armateur*—whether owner of the *Marie-Marthe* or managing director of a company to whom she belonged, I could not rightly make out—appeared politely impatient to get on with business. Jim's face was scrupulously blank. A high iron cart beside us finished shooting pounded ice down one of the *Marie-Marthe's* smaller hatchways. (Ice certainly did not look like one night at sea.) 'Us bain't 'bliged to go, be us?' said Jim. We were not, of course; but a decision we had to make then and there. The whole of the past two days had been leading up to that. When our money ran short, so that we were unable, in any case, to work along the coast to Brest and cross thence for a final holiday flutter in Plymouth, I had suggested instead a trip in a French fishing-boat. We had argued, too, over and over again, exactly how they manage to haul in drift-nets with steam-winches; and only seeing it done could prove one or the other of us right. Then, mainly for the sake of talking, I had inquired at 'Le Bon Pêcheur' of the merry, pleasant-eyed maid whose hands were red and

cracked with glass-washing and table-swabbing, if it were possible to get out in a Boulogne fishing-boat, and she had replied, 'Oh, it is quite easy, m'sieur, the easiest thing in the world. I will ask the *patron* at once, this moment.' And she did. We had refused the chance of a sailing-drifter, because, we said, it was too like our own craft. We had trailed the length of the quay in the wake of the *patron*. Now the decision had to be made, and—it was plain—by that decision we were to be weighed up, either as café-chatterers or as English fishermen desirous of seeing French methods. Drifters, steam and sail, with much blowing of hooters, were already going out of harbour. The *Marie-Marthe* was taking in her coal. A trip aboard her would be fine to talk about upon the beach at home; but, on the other hand, if it turned out a failure, a mere dull waste of holiday, that also I was safe to hear about at home. Hence the difficulty, the responsibility, of deciding. When would one hear the end of it?

The skipper repeated his question very plainly. 'Suppose we do not return for two or three days?'

After all, it ill became a couple of men with blue jerseys under their coats to shy at three days

away, or four. *'Ça n' fait rien!'* I replied boldly. 'We will come.'

'You will have *le mal de mer,* perhaps?'

'Not likely! We are fishermen ourselves,' I protested, knowing very well that steamers, unlike small boats, do sometimes make me sea-sick.

'It will be very cold. *Beaucoup de vent*—much, much wind outside—and from the east.'

'Never mind. It will not be so cold aboard your steamship as it is trying to sleep at night in our little open boats. Shall we bring our food with us?'

'There is bread and coffee aboard, and fish when we catch it. Bring some eau-de-vie for your coffee, and buy yourselves something at the *charcuterie*. . . .'

Then truly did my heart sink within me. The *charcuterie*—how on earth was I to choose among the multitudinous sausages of all sizes and shapes, cooked, uncooked, and half-cooked, that festoon a *charcutier's* shop? It was worse than trying to pick out the words one understood from the fishermen's dialect. Despairingly I turned to the *patron* of 'Le Bon Pêcheur': 'If it pleases you, monsieur, have the kindness to buy us what we need, and we will pay you willingly what you

charge. Meanwhile, we will fetch from our lodgings some more clothes.'

'Bien, m'sieur. Almost immediately I go to prepare your *equipage.'*

Our equipage! That was the end of deciding to start, which, as all longshoremen know, is the toughest part of fishing. We returned to the café; 'thic perty li'l maid' braved the *charcutier*; and when we went along the quay with coats and the equipage (a bottle of red wine, two bottles of eau-de-vie, and a paper packet of garlicky sliced sausages) under our arms, it was much like going drifting at home. The basket, even, had its handle broken on one side, for all the world like our baskets at home. 'So that's it, is it?' exclaimed Jim, in reference to nothing at all; and I laughed, as one laughs when a weight (in this case, of sausages) is off one's mind. *L'oncle Jean* greeted us. 'You are not coming!' he cried, fishing out a small copper box from underneath his blouse. 'Then make a cigarette—Belgian tobacco—*très bon*—ver' goot, ver' sheap—it has not paid duty.' After that welcome, it was, as it were, our own ship that we boarded, puffing smuggled cigarettes.

By noon the last cart-load of coal had been

shot into the bunkers. Moorings were cast off. The big barked mizzen-sail was hoisted aft—to steady the ship while steaming, I suppose, and afterwards to keep her head to the nets. The skipper climbed up to the bridge, put an arm through the wheel-house window, and gave three blasts on the steam-hooter. With the devil-may-care confidence of fishing skippers on entering and leaving harbour, he signalled 'Full steam ahead.' The *Marie-Marthe* woke up.

'Can us go up on the bridge,' asked Jim, 'an' sing out "Good-bye!" to they there maidens what waits on the pier-head wi' their baskets?'

Up we went, thereby attaching ourselves to the bridge for the rest of the trip;—and we had imagined ourselves taking part in the jollity of the crew, who, when their boat is putting to sea, gather together, a brown crowd upon the fore-peak, loll over the gunwale, and as often as not sing themselves out of harbour. 'Up here,' I said to Jim, 'we'm nort more nor less than frights [freights, *i.e.* passengers]. Hast ever been a fright in a drifter before?'

'Aye!' he replied, 'so us be. '*Tis* a gert thing of a drifter. What did 'ee say they carries? Twenty hands? But,' he added, unbuttoning his

coat—with some pride, I fancied—and pulling his jersey down around him against the cold, 'though us *be* on the bridge, us bain't starch-collar hellers, after that.'

And being on the bridge did not make so much difference as it probably would have done in an English ship. There seemed to be more *camaraderie* aboard the *Marie-Marthe*. The man at the wheel smoked cigarettes and chatted. The captain strolled about his ship, lending a hand where it was wanted. He was distinguishable only by his look of solidness without agility—the figure of a man who has done hard work in his day and finished with it,—and by his Icelandic dog's-hair mittens, which, without fingers, but with three fin-like thumbs each, reminded one of dog's-fishes' heads. Who was mate of the *Marie-Marthe* we never discovered; the work went on but so few commands were given.

Outside harbour the sea was dotted with steam and sailing craft, going to and returning late from the herring ground. Away to the north'ard the cross-channel steamer, high in her upperworks, shallow in draught, was rolling herself awash. (Without doubt the watch on deck were swearing under their breath as they handed the enamelled

tin basins round and pocketed the tips.) We were still within shelter of Cape Griz Nez and the Wimereux coast, but even there the easterly wind was blowing the water into a greenish-white lather, as a strong breeze will do when there is not room for a sea to get up. We steamed away in a sou'westerly direction, past the long outer breakwater and the high-walled fishing village of Le Portel. Had they waited a little longer to wash down the deck, the sea would have done it for them.

'You are cold?' inquired *l'oncle Jean* coming up the ladder.

'We are very content,' we said.

As a matter of fact, the keen wind was blowing through us: we found the difference that night between being at sea with nothing to do and having some work, if only baling out, with which to warm oneself. 'Why,' we asked, 'is she built so high in the bows?'

'Ah! you would see,' said *l'oncle Jean*, 'if you came with us to Iceland in the summer. It is almost always a tempest and great seas there.'

The *Marie-Marthe*, one of the largest steam fishing-boats out of Boulogne, is about the size of a small ocean-going tramp, but much better built

and engined. Very high in the bows and well cut away beneath her overhanging stern—she is lively on the seas; but amidships she is so low that the water came over the gunwale all night. Like most of the steamers which frequent the narrow crowded harbour of Boulogne (including the cross-channel boats) she has a bow-rudder for going in stern first. The engines and deckhouse—on top of which, in front of the funnel, is the wheelhouse and chartroom—are placed well aft in order to leave plenty of room on deck for fishing operations. Looking for'ard up the deck are first the small hatchway of the cable-hold; then the cable's steam-capstan,—an English patent, with its neat little flat engine on the top of it; and then the wide hatchway of the net-hold, extending nearly the breadth of the deck. Between that and the foremast are other holds for ice, buoys, and fish, and very for'ard is the hatchway to the forecastle. Along either side of the deck, against the bulwarks and about as high, are the herring-trunks—that is to say, large, long wooden boxes, divided into compartments into which the herrings are shaken and shovelled. 'Last year,' said the skipper, 'we had an American aboard here who wanted to take photographs. He got dancing

and climbing about while they were hauling the nets in, and fell head first among the herrings. *Mon dieu*, what a mess!'

After we had steamed for nearly two hours, crossing the nets of several other drifters which were riding lumpily to it outside of us, small quantities of coffee were brought round in very large and rather battered tin mugs. 'Or would you rather have beer?' they asked. 'There is a barrel of beer on deck for any one to drink who likes. Very good beer in this boat.' We were come to the fishing ground, about twenty miles to the south-west of Boulogne and ten miles or so from the high scarred sand-hills of the coast. It was the Boulogne home-ground, as one might say, and the fishery on it lasts at its height only for a week or ten days at the beginning of November, after which the herrings move farther west, and are followed as far as Havre. 'And west of Havre?' I inquired.

'Don't know,' said the man who was talking to us. 'I have never fished there.'

A wooden roller about a couple of yards long was rigged up on the port gunwale alongside the net-hold. The *Marie-Marthe's* engines were put as slowly as possible astern, for the wind, now

increasing to half a gale, was strong enough to carry her clear of her own nets. Then the shooting of the net began. The end of the cable, made fast to a big wooden log, was passed over the bow stanchions. The net itself came up out of the hold with lanyards, two or three fathoms long and several fathoms apart, fixed to the corked head-rope that runs along the top of the nets. As the net went over the roller into the sea, the lanyards were held, passed along for'ard, and made fast with clove-hitches to the cable. Midway between the net lanyards other lanyards, with black keg-buoys attached to them, were also bent on to the cable. Every kilometre was marked by a tall numbered buoy, painted in red and white stripes and carrying a flag. Whereas in our small drifters the buoy lanyards are made fast to the head-rope itself, and the head-rope takes the strain of the nets; in the steam-drifter the lanyards of the buoys above, and of the head-rope below, were both made fast to the stout cable, and the cable took all the strain between boat and nets. Down in the sea, therefore, was a vertical wall of net six fathoms [twelve yards] high, its foot-rope near the bottom, its head-rope about seven fathoms beneath the surface; above that a row of net

lanyards hanging from the cable, which ran through mid-water over the head-rope and parallel to it; above the cable again a row of buoy lanyards, and on the top of the water a line of buoys reaching very far out of sight.

So long a cable must needs be made in many pieces, spliced together. As each splice came up out of the cable-hold the ship's boy called its number, being answered from the fore-peak, whilst the ship's dog gave a joyful bark, and gripping the splice in its teeth was carried growling right up to the bows. Two men, one on the head-rope and one on the foot, dragged the net out of its hold; two men likewise shot it out over the roller, working a furious pace with the regular movements of gymnasts at exercise,—red-faced, sweating gymnasts of a grotesque shape, in their brown jumpers, clumsy sea-boots, and short, enormously wide oilskin trousers. It was as if they were running fast and far, not with legs but with arms. When they were breathless, others edged in near them, and, as it were, pounced into their places. Nothing stopped for a moment. Nothing *could* stop. So heavy a vessel, blowing all the time away from the nets, could not be held still, and such an immense fleet of nets could not be moved

in the water. If a hitch occurred either in shooting the nets, paying out the cable, or in bending on the lanyards, there was no slowing down. Somebody, frequently the skipper, had to rush in and help them go still faster. Else the net and cable would have dragged them overboard.

Relay after relay of men was used up. They came away, drank a mug of beer, puffed awhile, then back to work. The sun went down crimson in a hard east-windy sky, lighting up the crests of the waves so that it seemed as if the sea was already tinged with pink herring blood. And still the net was going over the side. Its flap-flap on the water, the slower whack of each buoy, the splice cries, and the barking of the dog, together with the whistling of the wind, the heavy plunging of the ship, and occasionally the savage hiss of a comber as it raced past us into the burning sunset,—all made a raucous music very mysteriously beautiful on the wide water, a dirge for the slaughter of herrings, hundreds of thousands of little deaths, that was to take place out there that night.

The skipper left the deck for the bridge; and suddenly, blindingly, with powerful electric lamps and reflectors, the whole ship was lighted up

brighter, it seemed, than daylight. Drifters around us followed suit, till the herring ground was like a gay illuminated town. It was just after five in the afternoon. 'Be 'em never going to stop shooting thic net?' asked Jim. 'How much ever do 'em carry, for goodness sake?' Six thousand metres, they told us,—nearly four miles. On hearing which, Jim gave voice to the small drifts-man's lamentation: 'No wonder us don't catch the herrings us used to, when these here things sweeps the Channel wi' their miles o' net, an' catches 'em all up afore they comes to us in our bay! It don't give the fish a chance. I pitys 'em, I do. God's sakes, what a sight o' herrings must come into these seas for to stand it! An' if these here fellows could use fine nets like ours—which they can't for their heavy work—instead o' their coarse thick-ply yarn, they'd catch three thousand where they catches a thousand now. Us got the 'vantage o'em there, I reckon. An' lucky for the likes o'us 'tis so.'

The last of the nets went over the side; an additional length of cable, for riding to, was paid out and made fast; and in the twinkling of an eye the deck was deserted, except by those who carried pannikins of food from the galley aft to

the forecastle. We, too, were called for our supper.

In the narrow chart-room, the skipper and two fishermen were wedged bolt upright, along the wallseat. Like three gigantic mechanical dolls they looked, all in loose brown jumpers; and the resemblance of the place to a toy-shop was not diminished by the sacred statuettes in a glass-fronted box shaped like a doll's-house, which hung above their heads between the aneroid barometer and a clock. Upon the brass-bound flap-table, underneath a very modern electric glow-lamp, stood a basin of hot, savoury stew, into which, primitively, they fished for titbits and dipped their hunks of bread. 'Shipboard customs,' the skipper apologised. 'Ours also afloat,' we said, 'only *we* cannot have hot stew at sea.' They would not share our wine and *charcuterie,* saying, 'The ship's beer and stew are better.' And so they were.

'Beer for us! *À votre santé, messieurs,'* said the skipper, nodding.

'À la votre, et à la pêche! De la bonne chance —bonne prise!'

Jim smiled his compliments: he would have been more emphatic had he understood that on

the fulfilment of those toasts depended our getting back to port the next day.

When we had eaten, the skipper told us there were a couple of empty berths where we could turn in, if and when we wished. 'Let me be called at eleven,' he said, and, still like a huge marionette, he disappeared down a trap-door in the floor.

The rest of the night, till eleven, we spent in getting chilled through on deck, or warming ourselves in a dark hole, the floor of which was a grating over the stoke-hole, and one wall the smoke-stack itself. I could not find out its name, but on calling it *le salon à chauffer* every one understood. Mittens and wet clothes hung there to dry, and there the watch—two men, relieved every two hours—spent most of their time. The air within was hot and foul; without, on deck, it was fresh and deadly cold. We had our choice. The best thing to do was to sit on the iron doorstep with one's head craned out into the cool air and as much of one's body as possible poked backwards into the *salon à chauffer*. Riding to nets at night in a small boat and light breeze, it looks as if the whole sea is flowing past in haste to plunge over the edge of the world. There is an intimacy then

about the black, whispering waters. One is almost in them. But aboard the steam-drifter, with the great waves of the gale to which the easterly wind had increased, advancing out of the darkness, rising high for a moment in the light of the ship and hurtling forward into darkness again, it seemed as if the world itself was being tossed into space, and nothing was steady, nothing fixed, except the eyes with which one gazed.

L'oncle Jean brought us a whole packet of the Belgian tobacco, and asked us if we would not like to go to bed. 'Not yet,' we answered. 'We will stay and keep an eye on the whiting lines that the boy has put out.'

'Ah!' said *l'oncle Jean,* 'you ought to be here for a few days. *We* take every chance of sleeping that we can get. Much work, much work!'

But the whiting and the red gurnard were not on the feed. We stayed chatting in the *salon à chauffer.* Every two hours, for the benefit of each watch, we had to give an account of where we came from and how we fished at home; and I had to explain that I was not Jim's boat-owner, but his mate, who worked under him as any other fisherman's mate might do, for more kicks than ha'pence. They plainly pitied us longshoremen;

whereupon we stopped pretty promptly wasting pity on ourselves. They described to us their own year's fishing (the *Marie-Marthe* is convertible into an otter-trawler) off France, off the west coast of Ireland, and in the Iceland waters. That voyage, though it is hard work and very cold, they prefer to bobbing in and out of their own port. Payment, they said, for the men is a regular wage of a hundred francs a month and half a franc on each thousand, whether of ship's earnings or of profits I could not be certain; for their French was as difficult to an Englishman as our Devon talk would be to a Frenchman who had learnt his English among Cockneys. One younger man, not of the stout fisherman build, told us about service in the French navy (he agreed perfectly with the British bluejacket who voiced the lower deck's sentiments by saying, 'An admiralty's a ****** rogue that you can't bring to book!'), and he mentioned the Steinheil case, then just concluded. 'Do you think yourself that she was guilty?' I asked.

'*Je n'sais pas. Qu'importe?* Figure to yourself, she was a pretty widow and had rich friends. . . . Money is what one wants.'

'In England, too. If you are poor, keep clear

of the police, but if you are rich, they are excellent good fellows, the admiration of the world. If I were to get drunk in a jersey and old sea-trousers, I should be run in, and next day a magistrate would lecture me on the evils of intemperance; but if I happened to be in dress clothes, I should tell the policeman to call me a cab, and he would help me in and wish me "Good-night, sir!" respectfully; and next day I should only be lectured on the virtues of various liver pills.'

'It is as bad here; even worse, perhaps,' the French fisherman said. 'But you have more teetotalism in England, and more drunkenness than we have. Your English teetotalism—ah!' he went on in a tone of great compassion, lifting up his hands. 'What an unnatural thing! No wonder you are often drunk, you Englishmen!'

Anyhow he understood, that man, the great and grand spirit of cussedness. 'Won't you turn in now?' he suggested. 'I am going to call the next watch.'

'No, thank you,' we replied with decision. 'We can sleep to-morrow. We are much too interested.'

Which was half a lie. The fact is, after we

had come down from supping with the skipper, Jim had said, 'Did 'ee see they there crawlers up there what I've heard 'ee talk about seeing to France? Scores o'em, up an' down the wall they was.'

'If they've got 'em there, in the chart-room, they'll be swarming in the forecastle. Better to stay here to-night. To-morrow night, if we don't get home, we shall be too tired to care.'

'*I* bain't going down there to sleep, not wi' they things.'

And we didn't; and were hot and cold and desperately sleepy. About midnight, however, I went up after some eau-de-vie, and called Jim.

'Is that all you saw? Those aren't——not what you thought they were. They'm only wood-beetles. And they and you have done us out of our sleep!'

'Aye,' said Jim now, 'an' I'd have liked to ha' gone down 'long wi' 'em an' had a yarn, an' p'raps a sing-song if they was minded. . . .'

'So'd I.'

'Well?'

'Well!'

Then, like the Babes in the Wood, propped up against each other, we fell asleep on the settle.

A subdued grinding of machinery woke us about two in the morning. The ship was noticeably steadier. Away to the north-east Etaples light flashed into the clouds,—we had drifted a long way south-west. On deck, under the bright electric light, every man of the crew was turned out. They had started hauling in the nets. The grinding noise was that of the steam-capstan, a strong thing on the strain. And such was the discipline of the crew that they also seemed a single strong thing greatly on the strain. All around us, under the peacefully bobbing lights of other ships, the same work was going on as swiftly as men could do it, but without haste or hurry.

As the cable came in over the bows two men unbent the lanyards, letting those of the net drop back into the sea and throwing the buoys on one side. Thence the cable travelled along deck, underneath the net, to the revolving steam-capstan, took three turns round it, and descended into the net-hold, where a man coiled it with very great care.

For the net, a long, thin roller the length of the herring-trunks had been rigged up on the port gunwale; and in the centre of the deck a

couple of rollers close together, parallel to that on the gunwale and to each other, reached aft from the foremast to the net-hold. Forming a right angle with these there was a fourth and shorter roller on the edge of the net-hatchway. The whole piece of gear was like nothing so much as a skeleton printing-press, for dealing with nets instead of rolls of paper.

The net, freed from the cable by men in the bows, floated alongside, a few feet under water, with the herrings, not enclosed within it, but, as in all drift-nets, stuck through the meshes and held fast there by their gills and fins. Two men —one on the head-rope and one on the foot— dragged it inboard over the gunwale roller. Two other men stood behind them to help haul and shake. Stretched wide and taut, the net passed over the herring-trunks to the two central rollers on the other side of which stood six men in a line, their brown oilskin-clad figures very upright and still, their gloved hands in ceaseless activity; for it was their work to shake out the herrings while they were crossing above the herring-trunks, tossing the net like a blanket, and to pick out those on the upper side of the net while it was going over the rollers. The net itself fell at their feet

took a half turn so that the under side came uppermost, and passed over the short roller into the hold, with its head-rope now the right way round for shooting next time. Down in the net-hold men laid it evenly from end to end, and picked out the few tightly meshed herrings that remained.

We watched with some anxiety, for on the catch depended our getting home, and, as Jim said, "Tisn't the sort o' thing you wants to look at two nights running when you an't got none of the work o'it to do.' At first the nets were nearly empty; then a few bunches of herrings shone in the water and rose glittering over the gunwale; and then two or three nets were hauled in fairly full. None of them, as will sometimes happen, came aboard solid with fish and ripping themselves to pieces. There was no need to slow down the capstan.

'They herrings shakes out easier,' remarked Jim, 'when they'm fresh-caught than they do when you got to pick 'em out ashore, like us, after they'm dead an' stiff. Lord! if they had to pick each one o'em out ashore, they'd never do it. How long did they say they was hauling in? Six or eight hours? Twelve hours if 'tis

a big catch? If they had to haul in by hand, like us, wi'out thic cable an' capstan to take the strain, they'd be twelve days an' then not finish. They only got the weight o' the fish, where the likes o'us, in our little craft, has the weight o' the fish an' nets an' all; an' our nets bain't no smaller though they'm fewer. I reckon, thee's know, they works longer'n us, an' they sticks at it, too, but they don't hae to work so heavy after that. But there, us wouldn't be out in a gale like this here. Us couldn't. What a scuffle an' shackle must be sometimes!'

All of which was true enough.

The crew made a complete rotation, and still the net and cable were coming in. In the trunks the piles of herrings grew higher; they were shovelled off the decks; men trod among them and upon them. The seas that the *Marie-Marthe* took aboard ran out of the scuppers red with blood and dirty with slime and roe. A stream of herring-scales sparkled in the seas that raced past. With hoarse cries and chuckles, the birds swooped down to the feast. Occasionally the men on the forepeak cried out too, when the capstan had to be stopped an instant because a lanyard was jammed on the cable. Buoy after

buoy clattered across deck. The dog's interest failed him. But the end was nowhere near.

I think we snoozed, though always I could hear the grinding of the capstan.

Dawn came with a darkening of the misty waters to indigo, and a greyness in the eastern sky. Soon the heavens lit up. The combers shone with a greenish glow. Etaples light went out; and it seemed afterwards that the sea was a lonelier place. The loom of the coast was hardly visible.

The hauling-in continued.

Some of the drifters within sight, which carried fewer nets or had started hauling earlier, steamed and sailed off home. A sailing-drifter near us brought up several of her nets foul. She had to help herself as best she could.

Our own nets were coming in without interruption, some of them brilliant with fish in the early morning daylight, others empty for fathoms at a stretch. The gale increased in force—wildish weather; but the steam-capstan went on hauling the net in as steadily as ever. The *Marie-Marthe* plunged and rolled; a greater number of herrings were washed out of the nets before they could be got inboard. That was all.

At eight o'clock the crew was still hauling, and at nine. We could not now even glimpse the sandy coast. It became necessary to shift herrings from trunk to trunk. The fish were coming in rather thicker. There were still enough nets left for the catch to turn out a large one.

The hauling-in no longer presented itself to our minds as an episode of drifting: it was a day's work in itself.

At last, about ten o'clock, the skipper spoke down to the engine-room, 'Put her ahead gently—as gently as possible.' He took the wheel himself in order to steady the ship. 'It is necessary,' he explained, 'to steam up to the last few nets. They have not hold enough on the water to drag the ship towards them.'

The three end nets had been torn out of their head-ropes, which came aboard with only rags of the yarn hanging from them. 'They have fouled the bottom,' said the skipper. 'In weather like this what can one expect?'

Knowing too well what the loss of nets may mean to longshoremen, we were sympathetic; but the French driftsmen, they did not care. 'It is nothing, this: nothing at all unusual. Besides, our Government makes half of our losses good

when ships cut across the nets or bad weather destroys them.'

'Anyhow,' said we, still feeling that the loss of nets is a miserable job, 'you have got a catch.' The trunks were almost full of dying and soiled herrings.

'A catch!' snorted the skipper; 'a very middling catch! It is not more than eighty thousand.' (Which was, in fact, the number in round figures.) 'A good catch is nearer three hundred thousand. I have seen these decks so piled with herrings that you could not walk on them.'

'Full speed ahead,' he signalled to the engine-room, giving the course to the helmsman. 'I am going to run under shelter of the land. It is farther, but I do not wish the catch washed overboard. Bad weather, this is—the worst of all winds for us—beastly bad weather! Good! here is your breakfast.'

They brought us a tin of mackerel chunks, with potatoes baked in butter, which we could not eat, for the air of the *salon à chauffer* had taken away our appetites. Nearer land, owing to shoal water or tide-rips, both swell and shop were higher than ever. We saw then, without going so far as Iceland, the use of the *Marie-Marthe's*

high bows. Buoyant as she was on the water, she dipped her head, her decks were almost continuously a-wash, spray flew over her funnel, and just outside Boulogne harbour a sea went clean through her from stem to stern.

Still at full speed, we raced into harbour The engines were reversed, then stopped. The hawsers were taken ashore by waiting boats. We were home.

At 'Le Bon Pêcheur' they ran towards us and shook our hands—heaven knows why! *'Vous êtes contents?'* they cried.

'We are more than content,' we answered.

When we returned to the harbour after lunch the *Marie-Marthe* was already gone out of port, into the easterly gale. That night, and every night till the end of the herring season, fair and foul, the immense labour we had witnessed was to be done all over again. On the quay Jim made his great discovery. He stopped dead, like a man suddenly inspired. 'Lookse here!' he shouted 'Lookse here! They gert steam-drifters, wi' their three hunderd thousand to a haul, don't bring in so many herrings after the rate, according to their size an' length o' net, as us do in our little twenty-foot craft, when us catches twenty

or twenty-five thousand. No, they don't—not when you comes to reckon it out! For all they got the capital, an' they gert ships, an' steam power, an' us an't got no capital to speak of nor nort, they an't beat us eet!

'I wonder w'er they'm catching ort at home. . . . An' us an't got the nets boated eet in our ol' craft! When did 'ee say us was going back? T'morrow?

But from that moment, really, we were homeward bound.

1909-10.

APPENDIX

SMALL HOLDINGS ON THE SEA

It seems to have escaped general notice that a state of things has arisen round the coast almost exactly parallel to hat which the Small Holdings Acts 'are designed to remedy on land. The small fisherman, owning his own boars and gear, corresponds very nearly with the small holder or peasant proprietor. And in view of the supreme importance to any maritime nation, let alone England, of possessing a numerous and hardy seafaring population —an importance attested over and over again by naval history—the need of encouraging and fostering the small fisheries is no less urgent than the much-debated land problem.

For some time, except where local conditions are specially favourable or private help has been forthcoming, the small fisherman has been subjected to a process of crushing out, and it is difficult to see how that process can be stayed. The raising of the standards of comfort and schooling has, of itself, made young men disinclined to enter so laborious a profession. At the same time, it must be remembered that fishermen are a breed to themselves, and breeds of men, once they die out,

cannot be revived at will. It is useless to try and dose dead men or dead traditions.

Adopt modern methods, say some. . . . It is precisely modern methods and modern conditions which have hitherto gone all against the small fisherman. Capital is required; which he does not possess; and therefore, relatively, each improvement in method leaves him further astern than ever. Moreover, his very independence makes him excessively reluctant to take up capital for business purposes.

Steamboats, steam gear, refrigerating apparatuses, and the quick marketing of fish are all costly. Steam has given amazing prosperity to the great fishing ports, but at the expense (to the nation) of turning independent fishermen into wage-paid servants of companies. Fewer fisher-families are supported by the same number of fish caught. The big ports can take care of themselves; they have the means to do so. What calls for attention is the plight of the small ports, where harbourage is bad; of the places where fishing craft have to be brought ashore in foul weather; and, above all, of the many small fisheries from lee shores, where there is no anchorage and every craft has to be beached. There, steam is in any case barred, on account of weight.

Auxiliary motors are proving a success in sailing trawlers and large drifters, for though such boats do not catch so many fish as the large steamers, they have much less capital to pay on, and they save their markets in calm weather or against head winds as other craft cannot possibly do under sails alone.

If motors can be adapted to beach fishing-boats, in which handiness ashore is every bit as essential as sea-

worthiness afloat, the area of fishing operations will be increased, time wasted in getting to the fishing-grounds will be diminished, quick marketing of fish will be facilitated, and the immense fatigues of fishing, which wear out strong men early, will largely be avoided. In a word, the small fisherman will be in an altogether better position to compete with the big companies, and fishing will offer a better prospect to young, enterprising men. Furthermore, a motor installation, costing up to fifty pounds, would not, as a rule, be beyond the means of a working fisherman who had been able to save or otherwise gain money enough to buy a boat and fleet of nets or trawl. His cherished independence would be preserved.

That being so, it may be useful to describe shortly an experimental motor-boat which has been built by Mr. W. J. Hodge, of Dartmouth, for Bob and Tom Woolley and myself, for service at Sidmouth, where the difficulties of a shifting beach are further complicated by a total absence of shelter and the need in stormy weather of hauling all the boats up over a high sea-wall. For a long time it was said that motor-boats would be impossible on Sidmouth and similar beaches, owing to their weight and the liability of damaging the propeller. The few motor-boats at present in use on beaches are mostly, in fact, of the ordinary harbour type, sometimes more heavily built to stand the knocking about, and they require several men to handle them safely ashore. Our problem was, therefore, to get a new type of boat for general purposes—towing, fishing, and passenger work—which should be seaworthy, and at the same time more manageable on a beach. (The expense of several men hauling a boat up and down shore may easily exceed the cost of the petrol consumed afloat.)

Although we only brought the *Puffin* home last spring, we have had her long enough to prove that she is not only quite seaworthy, but is perfectly manageable ashore. In the latter respect she has exceeded our expectations. Two or three men can launch her, one man on a capstan can haul her up, if the beach is not too steep.

The boat—17 ft. 6 in. long, by 5 ft. 6 in. beam, by 3 ft. deep—is clinker built of elm, and double-ended, in order that waves may not flop aboard over her stern when she is being launched or beached. The main keel, the point which differs most from ordinary construction, instead of ending up short at the propeller, or running above it into the stern-post, continues aft in one piece underneath the propeller, till, curving upwards, it joins the bottom of the stern-post; while a stout secondary keel, into which the after-ends of the lower strakes are rabbeted, runs from the main keel, over the propeller, and into the stern-post higher up. Thus the propeller is protected by the whole strength of the keel, and the boat can be shoved upon the greasy ways down which she is launched, instead of having to be lifted upon them. Buoyancy tanks, a fire extinguisher, a sail and oars are fitted for emergencies. Twelve people, the Board of Trade limit for uncertificated power boats, can be carried, and in the stern, with the side-seats out, there is room for three or four drift-nets.

The engine—a 4 in. bore by 4 in. stroke, single cylinder "Colonial" by Smart and Brown, well under 2 cwt., developing 4-5 brake horse power, and driving a two-bladed reversible propeller—is placed amidships. At rest or up to half speed the boat lies on an even keel. Then the propeller is partly out of the water and thrashes

somewhat, but the small draught of a foot only is of great advantage in shoving off and running ashore. At over half speed, the bow rises, the stern squats (*i. e.* sucks down), the draught increases to over two feet astern, and then the propeller has plenty of water to work in. Why the boat is so speedy we don't exactly know, neither, apparently, does her builder. He would promise us only five miles an hour; we hoped for six miles an hour. As a matter of fact, we get on a calm sea seven miles an hour, with the engine running at six to seven hundred revolutions a minute, and can do upwards of nine. The day we brought her home, with no experience of motors beyond a couple of trips in Dartmouth river, she did thirty-five miles in five working hours. She will tow a twenty-two-foot drifter, laden with nets and ballast, at six miles an hour (she undertakes to tow fishing-boats, fisherman-owned, at cost price of running), and has also towed three racing dinghies the twelve miles to Exmouth pier in two hours. All of which is more than satisfactory.

I have gone rather fully into constructional details because, though there are many small improvements we could now make, the *Puffin* does seem in general design—thanks very largely to her builder and the stout little engine—to have solved the problem of handling motor-boats on beaches. Sooner or later the questions of marketing fish and of middleman's profits will have to be tackled thoroughly. Meanwhile, motor fishing-boats of this type offer some chance, at all events, of arresting the otherwise almost hopeless, and wholly deplorable decline in small fishing.

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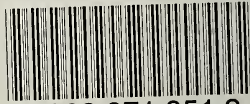
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