

THE CAPTAIN'S STORY

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Cover art

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"He sat down to rest himself."—Page 10.

THE CAPTAIN'S STORY

OR
THE DISOBEDIENT SON
ADAPTED FROM THE GERMAN

BY
WILLIAM S. MARTIN

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THE CAPTAIN'S STORY.

CHAPTER I.

The Stranger—The Castle—The Captain's Soliloquy—The Pastor—The Invitation.

"I travelled among unknown men,
 In lands beyond the sea;
 Nor did I know, sweet home, till then,
 What love I bore to thee.

"'Tis past, that melancholy dream!
 Nor will I quit thy shore
 A second time; for still I seem
 To love thee more and more.
 —WORDSWORTH.

Towards the close of a beautiful day in autumn, the last rays of the setting sun were gilding the tops of the mountains, which overhang the picturesque valley of Bergstrasse, along which winds the road from Heidelberg to Frankfort. The heavily laden country carts and waggons were toiling slowly along the dusty highway, both horses and drivers looking hot and tired, and both, no doubt, very glad that they had nearly reached the end of their day's journey; while every now and then a horseman, or a carriage with ladies and gentlemen inside, dashed rapidly along, and soon left the more heavily loaded vehicles far behind. What a striking picture of human life and the great journey we all are taking—some of us struggling wearily, and oftentimes painfully, but always, let us trust, hopefully, under a heavy load, and others trotting merrily along their course, happy, and

apparently at least free from care. Who shall say which of the two shall reach the end most safely!

While the broad high-road presented this animated scene, the steep rocky footpath cut in the side of the mountain, and leading up to the old ruined castle of Aurburg on its summit, was almost deserted; not quite deserted, though; for, toiling up the steep ascent was an old man, who, in spite of the help afforded him by his stout bamboo cane, looked very tired as he went slowly along. He was rather a strange-looking old man, respectably dressed, and with a pleasant-looking face; but his clothes and general appearance were different from those of the people commonly seen about there, and his bronzed, weather-beaten features showed him to be, if not a foreigner, one who had evidently been for some time in a foreign country. Indeed, the little boy who passed him on his way down to the valley with his goats, and the little girl going home with her bundle of sticks for the fire, seemed half afraid of him as they bade him good-night, and even when he had gone by, they turned round to look at him as he went on up the mountain-side.

In spite of his evident weariness, the stranger kept bravely on; and just as the sun was disappearing behind a long range of mountains in the west, he reached the ruins of the old castle, of which only one tower and a few walls were then standing. Here he sat down to rest himself on a large heap of stones which had long since fallen from the walls of the castle, and were now all overgrown with lichens and ferns, and seemed for some moments lost in thought. His eyes wandered over the rich landscape which lay spread out beneath his feet; then, giving vent to the emotions which filled his heart, he exclaimed: "Yes, this is the old place again, and after forty years' absence I have at last returned to take one more look at these mountains and forests which I remember so well. There, too, far away down the valley, glides the beautiful river, along whose banks I so often wandered when I was a boy. Ah, it is a true saying, 'There is no place like home!' And yet, after all, our real home is not in this world, but in heaven. There are all who were dear to me, and there I trust soon to meet them again; but now I am left alone—alone in the world! What a change a few short years have made!"

The old man sat silent for a few minutes, and then in a voice full of emotion began singing part of a beautiful English hymn which touchingly expresses the instability of all human affairs:—

"Change and decay on all around I see:
O Thou that changest not, abide with me."

While he was singing, two children, hearing him, came close up behind him, and

when he had finished began to cough in order to attract his attention. For some time he took no notice, but at last he turned, and saw two nicely-dressed children, a little boy and girl, who wished him good evening and made a bow. He was about to speak to them, when their father, who had also heard him singing, came up, and supposing him to be an Englishman, said to him in English, "Although, sir, we are strangers, it is true, those beautiful words you were singing, which I am sure come from your heart, prove to me that we both look up to one common Father in heaven. I am the pastor of the little village you can see down there, at the foot of the mountain. But it is growing dark, and if, as I presume, you are a stranger in these parts, I can gladly offer you the simple accommodation of my cottage for the night."

The stranger answered in German: "Your kind invitation is very welcome, sir. An old sea-captain like me is not much in the habit of paying compliments; I can only say I gladly accept your hospitality."

Guided by the last glimmer of twilight, they took their way at once towards the peaceful village, the steeple of which was just peeping up above the trees. On their way the captain told the pastor that he had only arrived at the neighbouring village of Aurbach that afternoon. "But," said he, "I could not rest, tired as I was with my day's travelling, until I had been up here to look at the old castle, which I have not seen for forty years."

CHAPTER II.

The Children's Expectation Disappointed—The Scapegrace—The Forester's House—Curiosity of the Villagers—Their Remarks—The Captain's Luggage.

"I knew by the smoke that so gracefully curled
 Above the green elms, that a cottage was near;
 And I said, 'If there's peace to be found in the world,
 A heart that was humble might hope for it here.'

"It was noon, and on flowers that languished around,
 In silence reposed the voluptuous bee;
 Every leaf was at rest, and I heard not a sound

But the woodpecker tapping the hollow beech-tree."
—MOORE.

Night had already closed in when they reached the village, and the moon was just appearing over the tops of the mountains. Here they were met by the pastor's wife. She had already heard of the stranger's arrival from the two children, who had run home before. "Pray do not be alarmed at the sight of a strange and unexpected guest," said the old man to her, "I hope my arrival will not inconvenience you at all." "Not in the least, sir," replied she, "you are very welcome to such accommodation as we can offer."

Upon this they entered the house, and were soon comfortably seated in the parlour, while the children, who had heard that the stranger was a great traveller, listened very attentively, hoping that he would begin talking of his long voyages, and perhaps tell them some interesting stories of his adventures. This evening, however, they were doomed to be disappointed, for though the captain could easily have satisfied their curiosity, and amused them for a long time with an account of some of the dangers he had passed through, and the many foreign countries he had visited, he seemed just then to be more inclined to seek for information on different points, than to talk about himself and his own doings.

He began by asking the pastor a great many questions about different places in the neighbourhood, and the people (several of whose names he knew) who used to live there; and seemed very much interested in all he heard. He then inquired whether there were still living any descendants of the former pastor, a Mr Buchman. "So far as I know, there are none," replied the pastor, "indeed, I understand he had only one son, a regular scapegrace, who left home a long time ago, and has never been heard of since." "It must be nearly forty years since Pastor Buchman lived here," he added, "perhaps you remember him?"

"Indeed I do," said the captain, "I remember him well, for he was my father, and I am no other than the only son you spoke of!"

"Is it possible?" cried the worthy man, a little disconcerted; "are you indeed that very young man, of whose wilful character I have heard so many speak? Forgive me, my friend, for having spoken of you as a scapegrace. How could I imagine that you, who as a boy were so wild and disobedient, would have become a quiet and pious man, as you seem to me to be." "Yes, thank God," said the captain in a voice trembling with emotion, "He has at length, after many hard trials and severe chastisements, shown me the error of my ways, and guided my feet into the way of peace. But pray excuse my speaking more on this subject just now. I could scarcely relate all the details of my long story to-night, and, fatigued as I am, it would be too much for me; indeed, as it is, the idea of passing the night

under your roof almost overcomes me; for this is the very house that I was born in, and here, too, my parents both died.”

Notwithstanding his anxiety to hear a full account of the extraordinary events in the life of his guest, the worthy pastor considerably forebore to touch on the subject again during the evening. As to the children, they did not cease to pay the greatest attention, hoping to hear, at least, something interesting, but in vain. The captain sat buried in thought, and during the short time before supper scarcely spoke a word. Directly after supper, the pastor read a chapter from the Bible, and made a short evening prayer, and then the children had to go to bed. This seemed to them a greater hardship to-night than it had ever done before, and they could not help thinking, as they went up-stairs, that perhaps the captain might relate his adventures after they had gone, and so they should miss hearing them. They kept all these thoughts to themselves, however, for they were good, obedient children, and went to bed without murmuring.

After they had left the room, the captain still refrained from speaking on the subject of his travels, only telling the pastor of his intention of spending the rest of his life in his native village, if he could find a suitable house, either to rent or buy. His host heard this resolution with pleasure, and told him that there was a neat, comfortable cottage, close by his own parsonage, which was for sale; it had belonged to a forester who had died about six months ago, and would, he thought, be very likely to suit him. They continued talking on various subjects for some little time, till the pastor’s wife reminded them that it was past ten o’clock. Upon this they went up to bed; but for nearly an hour afterwards the pastor heard his guest, who slept in an adjoining room, walking up and down, and occasionally praying in a loud voice. After a time, however, all was silent, and peaceful sleep closed the labours of the day.

The next morning the two children were the first down-stairs. They had always been accustomed to get up early, and little Willie, when only four years old, once said to his father, ”Isn’t it a shame, papa, to let the sun get up before we do? He must be more tired than we are, for he has such a long way to go every day.” Their father usually employed the first part of the morning in taking them both out for a walk, either up the mountains, or in the fields, or perhaps into the forest, where they would gather ferns or flowers, and get him to tell them their names. But to-day they seemed so anxious to hear the captain’s adventures, that they did not like to go out far, for fear they might miss some opportunity of hearing his story; and they could scarcely contain their joy when their mother told them that he was not going to leave Dornbach (that was the name of the village), but was going to live at the forester’s house.

In a retired country village like Dornbach, where everything went on from one week’s end to another in the same quiet manner, it was rarely indeed that

anything occurred to furnish the villagers with a new topic of conversation, and every traveller who stopped at the road-side inn, if it were only to bait his horse, created quite a sensation. If the stranger should happen to get into conversation with any one, for the next three days at least every one in the place would be talking about him. This was specially the case now when the report was spread that the captain of a ship had arrived at the parsonage, not for a passing visit, but with the intention of settling in the neighbourhood; and when it was further reported that this old captain was no other than the much talked-of son of the late Pastor Buchman, well remembered by the older inhabitants as the scapegrace, the excitement of the good people of Dornbach was immense. This was now the subject of everybody's conversation. The people all seemed to have forgotten their ordinary occupations; everywhere they were to be seen gathered together in groups, talking about the news of the day, of which, however, as yet they knew very little.

"Oh yes, I have seen him," said old Hannah; "I saw him yesterday, when he first came to the village."

"Is he not very rich?" asked another.

"Of course he is," said Frau Margaret; "how can he be otherwise, if he is really the captain of a ship? I'm sure he must have a million of money."

"A million of money!" muttered the old bailiff; "if he had half as much as that he would never think of shutting himself up in an out-of-the-way village like this."

"If he had twice as much," said old father Nicholas, with an air of irony, "he would not have it long, if he is anything like what he used to be. Ah, I remember him well: I was at school with him, and if ever there was a spendthrift in the world, one who did not even seem to know there was such a word as 'save,' believe me, he is the man."

In short, every one had something to say on the subject, in spite of the fact that no one knew anything about it; and after a great deal had been said, they came to the conclusion that there was nothing for it but to wait and see what would happen.

While all this was going on in the village, the captain had sent down to the inn at Aurbach, where he had left his luggage, and ordered it to be sent to Dornbach, to his new house, which the bailiff had put into good repair for him. He had also borrowed some necessary furniture from his good friend the pastor, until he could get some of his own from the neighbouring town. When the cart arrived with his boxes and portmanteaus in it, the curiosity of the villagers received a fresh impetus. "What can he have in that strong-looking box?" said one. "If it were money, two men could never carry it. And look what a number of packages besides! I can't think what a single man can want with so much

luggage.”

”How do you know he is single?” answered another: ”he may, for all we know, have a wife and family, who will come down here when his house is ready for them.”

”Well, well, perhaps that is it,” said a third, who stood opposite; ”we must wait and see.”

Willie and his sister Mary were quite as curious as any one else, and kept asking their papa what all those boxes contained. ”I really do not know,” was his answer; ”perhaps when he has unpacked them he will show you some day, if you are good children.”

The captain soon set to work unpacking, but for more than a week he did not ask any of his friends to go and look at his treasures. Even the old servant whom he had engaged was not allowed to go into the room where most of his boxes were, so that for a time every one’s curiosity remained unsatisfied. As it was only a few steps through his garden (which joined that of the pastor) to the parsonage, he had made arrangements with the pastor’s wife to dine with them regularly, so that he might not be troubled with the duties of housekeeping.

CHAPTER III.

Invitation to Tea—Negroes—Curiosities—The Fable of the Grasshopper and the Ant—The Explanation.

”Now stir the fire, and close the shutters fast,
Let fall the curtains, wheel the sofa round;
And while the bubbling and loud hissing urn
Throws up a steamy column, and the cups,
That cheer but not inebriate, wait on each,
So let us welcome peaceful evening in.”

—COWPER.

One evening, a little more than a week after the captain had moved into the forester’s house, he invited the pastor and his wife and the two children to go

and take tea with him. On arriving at the house they were shown at once into the room which had been kept so securely locked up since the luggage had arrived, and were delighted at seeing the result of his labours. The children, too, were much amused with looking at some tapestry which covered one of the walls, representing three black slaves in the act of handing coffee and refreshments to the visitors. These were as large as life, and so well done, that at first the children were quite frightened, believing them to be real negroes. When they were all seated, the captain gave them some genuine and very rare tea served in fine porcelain cups which he had brought from China, and also some nice preserved fruits and sweetmeats from the Indies. The room was quite full of curiosities of all kinds, and the pastor's wife was much interested in looking at some beautiful silks from the Levant, and several curiously carved boxes containing spices from the Molucca Islands, and also coffee and cocoa-berries, cotton-pods, and specimens of many other useful articles, which in their prepared state were well known to her.

The chief attraction for the pastor and the two children was a fine collection of objects of natural history, which the captain had already found time to put in order. There were some stuffed birds from foreign countries, which the captain had shot, and several cases containing a great many splendid butterflies from Brazil. They saw also, hanging on the walls of the room, wooden spears and roughly-made axes, with bows and arrows, and other weapons used by the savages of different countries which their host had visited. On the mantel-piece, too, were some lumps of amber from the Black Sea, porphyry from the ruins of Carthage, large shells and fine pieces of coral, agate, and many other curiosities from the sea. Beside the large shells on the mantel-piece, there was a beautiful collection of smaller ones in a small cabinet on the sideboard. In another cabinet, which was made of ebony, and handsomely inlaid with mother-of-pearl and silver, they were shown a valuable assortment of precious stones from Persia and the Indies.

The delight of the children when they saw all these curiosities was unbounded, and they asked so many questions, first about one thing they saw and then about another, that it was impossible for the captain to satisfy their curiosity in one evening. When the time came for them to go home, they were very sorry, but were consoled by the hope of often visiting their kind friend, and getting him to tell them all about his different treasures. After this first visit, the children were often allowed to go over to see the captain, and each time they did so he had something new to surprise them with—either some curiosity to show them, or perhaps a long and interesting story to tell them about some of the foreign countries he had visited. Sometimes, too, he would let them read to him out of a little book full of pretty stories and fables which he had bought, and then he

would explain to them all that they read.

One day they had been reading the fable of the grasshopper and the ant, in which the grasshopper is represented as blaming the ant for working so hard during the fine summer weather, instead of enjoying the bright sunshine, and leaving the future to take care of itself. The ant replies that she knows it is very pleasant to have nothing to do but to play and sing among the grass and the flowers, but instinct has taught her that the bright warm weather must in time be exchanged for cold gloomy days with frost and snow, when no food is to be got, and so she is seeking, while she has an opportunity, to lay up a store against a rainy day. The captain asked little Mary if she knew what was meant by the grasshopper in the fable. "I don't know," was her answer; "but I think it must mean a man."

"Yes, my dear," said he, "it does represent a man; but what sort of man? Perhaps Willie can tell us."

"I suppose," said Willie, after thinking a little while, "that the grasshopper in the fable is intended to represent those people who live without any care for the future, and who, when they have plenty of everything around them, forget that a time may come when they will not be able to work, and who never lay up anything for their future wants."

"That is quite right," said the captain, "and we may learn, too, from this fable, to make a good use of our opportunities while we have them,—not only to lay by money as a provision for old age, but, while we are young, to try by diligence and study to lay in a store of useful knowledge, and above all to 'remember our Creator in the days of our youth,' instead of leaving it to an old age, which we may never live to see."

CHAPTER IV.

The Portrait—The Captain begins his Story—His Wilfulness—Goes to the University—Bad Behaviour there—His Father's Letter—Refuses to send him Money—He Runs Away.

"In all my wanderings round this world of care,
In all my griefs—and God has given my share—
I still had hopes, my latest hours to crown,

Amidst these humble bowers to lay me down;

* * * * *

Around my fire an evening group to draw,
And tell of all I felt, and all I saw.”

—GOLDSMITH.

Every time the pastor went to see the captain, he could not help noticing that his eyes were very often fixed on a portrait which hung just over the looking-glass, and he noticed, too, that whenever he was looking at it, his eyes were filled with tears. At first, from a feeling of delicacy, he did not like to ask him the cause of this; but at length he thought that his title of friend added to that of pastor made it his duty to endeavour to free his friend from the burden of some unhappy memory, under which he was evidently labouring. One day, then, when he found him alone, he said to him, "My dear friend, how is it that you are always gazing at that portrait with such an expression of sadness on your countenance?"

"All, my dear pastor," answered the captain, "your question touches the spring of all my grief. Even now, that all my wanderings are over, and I am settled down here, leading such a peaceful, quiet life in my native village, how can I be happy when every moment the memory of him whose face you see there comes up before my mind?"

"Whose portrait is it, then?" asked the pastor.

"It is my father's," was the reply; "but for you to fully understand my feelings when I think of him, you must know something of my history; and as the present is a good opportunity, I will relate my story to you and to your family. I should like you all to know what troubles I have passed through."

The pastor's wife and children did not want asking twice to come and listen to the captain's adventures, which they had so long been hoping and longing to hear. When they had all come and were seated, he began his story.

"I was, as you know, born in this village in the year 17—. Shortly after my birth, my mother died, leaving me, her only child, to my father's care. He, sadly distressed at her loss, resolved never to marry again. He was a pious and very learned man, and as I grew up he took great pains to instruct me in the fear of God; but his parochial duties and his studies prevented him from having me constantly under his own eye. I was, indeed, left in a great measure to the care of an old aunt, who was very deaf, and whose weak, easy good-nature could not restrain my naturally headstrong disposition, so that I had no lack of opportunities for disobeying my father's commands, and satisfying my own taste for amusements of which he did not approve. I never found any difficulty in learning, and indeed could always get my tasks done long before the time I had to say them, so that I

had a great deal of spare time on my hands which I used to spend in the streets, playing with the little boys of the village, who taught me a great many bad habits. Whenever I was found out, it is true, I was severely punished, and for a little while was more sharply looked after, but I too often managed to deceive my father, and did not hesitate even at falsehoods in order to be able to follow the bent of my own bad disposition.

"My father had intended that I should become a pastor like himself. My taste, however, was rather for a life of travels; but I dared not set up my will in opposition to his, and in my eighteenth year I left his house and entered the University at Giessen. The liberty which the students there enjoyed pleased me amazingly, and I endeavoured to avail myself of it to the utmost. I studied, however, with great diligence, and my natural aptitude for learning always left me plenty of time to devote to pleasure. Little by little I found my studies become irksome to me, and my desire for amusement increase, until at length I entirely gave up all serious occupations, and used to pass all my time either in pleasure-parties or in the public house. Before I left home my bad behaviour had gained for me the name of the Scapegrace, and at the University I did my best to show myself worthy of the title.

"It was not long before my father was informed of my disorderly conduct, and you can understand what impression such a report made upon him. He wrote me a most affectionate letter, full of the most touching exhortations to give up my evil course. This at the time sensibly moved me, and made me seriously resolve to turn over a new leaf. Soon, however, my love of pleasure, aided by the influence of bad companions, made me break through all my good resolutions; I was ashamed of what my associates called my weakness, and I soon fell lower than ever. Oh how deeply has the experience of that time proved to me the truth of that saying of an old French writer, 'The being ashamed of what is right is the root and source of all our misery.'

"When my father saw that all his exhortations were without effect, and all my promises without any result, he tried the plan of refusing to send me any more money, hoping that the want of means to indulge my bad habits would bring me back to a better frame of mind. This plan, however, was far from being successful. I soon got into debt, and when at last no one would trust me any longer, I sold my books and every article of value that I had, and getting on the coach, I resolved to make my way to Amsterdam and go to sea. The journey to Amsterdam suited me very well, for I found most of my travelling companions were young men of about my own stamp, and with them I passed the time pleasantly enough. Over and over again, I repeated to myself the foolish wish, 'Oh that I could be always

as happy as I am now.”

CHAPTER V.

He writes to his Father—Arrives at Amsterdam—His Father’s Answer—The Curse—On the Quay—Meets a Fellow Countryman—Is Kidnapped and Robbed—Sent to Sea—Endures many Hardships.

”Thorns and snares are in the way of the froward: he that doth keep his soul shall be far from them.”—PROV. xxii. 5.

”Before quitting Giessen I had written to my father to tell him of my resolution, and I had also the effrontery to ask him to send me some money. He was, you may be sure, deeply grieved on receiving such a letter, but when I reached Amsterdam I found an answer from him, in which he enclosed £20. The letter contained the most earnest and affectionate exhortations to me to return and repent, assuring me of his willingness to forgive me if I did so; if, however, in spite of all he could say, I should refuse and still persist in my mad and wicked course, he added, ‘My curse shall be upon you, and follow you always.’ I was much agitated by these terrible words, and I seriously thought when I read them that I dared not go on; but whether it was that I was ashamed to go back, or from my desire to travel about the world, or the idea that such a threat uttered, I was sure, in a moment of anger, would never be fulfilled, I hardened my heart against my better feelings, and obstinately persisted in the course I had chosen. Alas, how soon was I to know, by bitter experience, the terrible effects of a father’s curse!

”However, I strove to dismiss all such thoughts from my mind, and went down to the quay with all my money, nearly £30, in my pocket, to look out for a ship about to sail either for North America or the Indies. I was not very particular which, my great desire being to get to sea as soon as possible, and then, I thought, my happiness will begin. Having heard that there was a fine vessel then loading for Surinam, I took a boat and went on board to see the captain, but I soon found my means were insufficient for such a long voyage, and returned from the ship quite low-spirited. This may seem strange, but it is a fact that whenever we are doing wrong wilfully, and pursuing any course which our conscience cannot

approve, the slightest repulse is sufficient to cause us great uneasiness, and any little hindrance we may meet with, which at another time we should think nothing of, is then enough to make us quite unhappy. This was the case with me, and I felt very miserable as I was walking up and down the quay. The course I had chosen was one of disobedience and sin, and I was realising the truth of the words, 'There is no peace to the wicked.'

"I had been walking up and down for nearly a quarter of an hour in this way, when on raising my eyes I noticed a well-dressed young man apparently waiting to speak to me. When I got near him he bowed politely, and addressed me in German, 'Excuse me, sir, but you seem to be a stranger in this town, and, if I am not mistaken, a German. I am also quite a stranger here, and I am rejoiced to meet with a fellow-countryman.' I was very glad to hear this, and assured him of the pleasure I felt at meeting him, and thus we soon got into conversation together.

"When he heard that I intended to go abroad, and thought of going to North America, he seemed agreeably surprised, and told me that he had just engaged a passage to New York in a vessel which was to sail the next day, and added, 'If you like, I can take you to the captain's house, for I think he has room for another passenger, and on our way we can see the vessel, which is not far from here.' I thanked him for his kind offer, and we walked arm in arm down the quay, where he soon showed me the ship riding at anchor. She was a fine vessel, newly painted, and looking very trim and neat. It seemed a very long way to the captain's house, and I am sure we must have gone more than a mile together before we got there. My new friend seemed to know the house well, and led me down several passages, to a little room at the back of the premises, where he left me, telling me he would go and call the captain. As he went out, I heard a slight grating noise, as though he had locked the door after him; and, though I quite laughed at the idea, yet after waiting impatiently for nearly half-an-hour for the captain to come, I thought I would just look up and down the passage and see if I could find any one who would tell me where he was.

"On reaching the door, you may imagine my consternation at finding it was indeed locked. Horror seized me, for I found I was like a mouse caught in a trap. I flew to the window and found it was securely nailed down, and then saw, what I had not noticed before, that it was guarded outside by stout iron bars. I now began to realise the situation I was in, and concluded that I was the victim of one of those crimps, or kidnappers, who in those times infested seaport towns, and, as I had read, used all manner of artifices to decoy unwary travellers into their dens in order to rob them, and then sell them into the military service of some distant colony. This thought almost drove me frantic. I tore my hair and wrung my hands, and stamped on the floor with my feet. I screamed and called for help,

but all in vain: my prison was too well chosen for my cries to reach any but the persons of the house, and after an hour spent in vain endeavours to escape, I sank exhausted into a chair, and sullenly awaited my fate.

"After waiting about two hours (as it seemed to me) in this terrible state of rage, grief, and despair, I heard the door unlocked and prepared myself to make one desperate effort for my liberty. The door was thrown open, and I felt my last chance of escape was gone, when I saw two men enter with pistols, loaded and cocked, in their hands. They soon compelled me, by threats of instant death if I resisted, to hand over all my money to them, and then I was obliged to change my clothes for a very dirty sailor's dress which one of them had brought with him. They were deaf to all my entreaties for pity, and though I wept and besought them to let me go, even if they took all I had from me, and promised them a liberal reward, it was all in vain; they took no notice whatever of my complaints, and merely putting down some bread and cheese, and a mug of water on the table, they gathered up all my clothes, and left me to my own reflections.

"When night came on, I was again aroused and taken out of the house by a back-door and conveyed on board a ship, where I found several other young men, who, I concluded from their melancholy and dejected air, were in a similar predicament to myself. Our captors were too numerous and well-armed for resistance to be of any avail, and as I could see that anything of the kind must only end in making our situation still worse than it was, I made up my mind to suffer all my misery as patiently as I could.

"As long as we were in sight of the land we were kept down in the hold, and carefully guarded day and night by armed men, and I was quite thankful when we got well out to sea, and were allowed to go on deck. We soon found, however, that our masters had no intention of letting us be idle during the voyage, for we were kept constantly employed about the ship, and made to do all the hardest and dirtiest work. This was very distasteful to me with my lazy habits, for I had never done a day's hard work before in my life, and latterly even study had become quite irksome to me. The curse which my father had pronounced upon me had already begun to be terribly fulfilled, and I now began to believe that it was indeed to follow me always."

CHAPTER VI.

The Tempest—All Hope Lost—The Ship Founders—The only Survivor—The Spar—Remorse—The Rock—A Sail in Sight—The Signal—Despair—The Sail in Sight again—The Signal Seen—Saved—He Works his Passage to England—Is Tired of a Seafaring Life.

”Colder and louder blew the wind,
 A gale from the north-east;
 The snow fell hissing in the brine,
 And the billows frothed like yeast.

”Down came the storm and smote amain
 The vessel in its strength;
 She shuddered and paused, like a frightened steed,
 Then leaped her cable’s length.”
 —LONGFELLOW.

”When I was at the university, I had indeed been accustomed to low society; but when I came to hear the conversation of some of the sailors on board, my hair stood on end with horror. I would have given anything to have been employed in some way, so that I might have avoided hearing all day long the terrible oaths of these wicked men, compared with whom I seemed to myself to be a very model of excellence; but as I had neglected the study of mathematics when I had the opportunity, I had not sufficient knowledge of the principles of navigation to be employed in anything but manual labour.

”Our ship was freighted for Batavia, so that I had no hope of any change for the better in my miserable condition for a long time, and my wretchedness reached its height when I was told that on our arrival I should be compelled to join a regiment of Dutch troops. No life, indeed, could be less to my taste than that of a soldier, on account of the strict discipline which is always enforced in the army. It was, however, decreed that we should never reach our destination.

”Soon after we had crossed the Line, a sudden and violent gale drove our vessel out of her course, and for two days and nights we were driving at the mercy of the wind. No sooner had we succeeded in making some little way against this gale, than a violent tempest arose, and we were obliged to devote all our attention to saving the ship. AH round the ship the sea and sky were enveloped in thick darkness, broken by repeated flashes of lightning, which served only to show us the danger of our position. At one moment the vessel rose on the tops of the immense mountain-like waves, and the instant after plunged down into a vast hollow, leaving the waters standing up around us like a wall. While one party of

the sailors were trying in vain to furl the sails, the rest were kept busily at work at the pumps. By this time the hold was half full of water, and every moment we were expecting the ship to go to pieces, as her timbers were too old and rotten to bear the strain upon them. Soon we lost all hope of saving the ship, and the crew ceased making any further exertions, every one seeking for some means of saving his own life. The vessel then began to settle deeper and deeper in the water, and soon after disappeared beneath the waves. Before this, however, I had thrown myself into the sea, and was then clinging to a part of the mast, which had been washed away. Several of the crew beside myself had sought for safety in a similar way; but when the sky grew a little lighter, and I was able to look around me, I could see no one, I seemed to be the only survivor.

[image]

"Clinging to a part of the mast which had been washed away."

"The storm continued to rage furiously all night, and it was with difficulty that I managed to keep on the slippery spar which was now my only support. All night long, amid the howling of the tempest, I seemed to hear my father's words ringing in my ears. I tried to pray, but remorse was busy in my heart, and conscience kept repeating to me, 'Why did you not return to your father, like the prodigal son, when you knew he was ready to forgive you, and to receive you with outstretched arms?' At length this terrible night, the longest I have ever passed through, came to an end, and when at last daylight returned, I was very thankful to see, close by me, a large rock, which I managed to reach, though not without great difficulty. Benumbed as I was with passing the night in the water, I clung eagerly to it, and, after resting a while, dragged my weary limbs as high above the water as I could, and gazed eagerly out over the wide expanse of sea. For a long time, however, I looked in vain for any signs of help; but at length, to my great joy, I descried a sail far away in the distance, apparently making towards me.

"I was so weak and faint with my long immersion, that although this sight seemed to put new life in me, it was as much as I could do to clamber up to the top of the rock, and my hands and feet were much cut by the sharp shells and edges of rock. I scarcely noticed this, so great was my eagerness to make a signal to the ship I had seen, and to let those on board know that on this solitary reef there was a poor shipwrecked mariner. I had of course no means of making a fire, so I at once pulled off my shirt and waved it in the air, as the only way I had to make myself seen. All was in vain: the ship was too far off to notice my

signal, and instead of coming nearer, as I had hoped, she tacked round on another course, and gradually disappeared in the distance.

"As the vessel slowly faded away from my sight, I sank down on the rock in despair. My situation was indeed desperate; the small rock on which I was, was only about fifty yards in circumference, and had nothing but a little moss and sea-weed growing on it. It is true there were a few shell-fish clinging to it, but I knew it would be impossible for me to support myself long on them, and besides, I had not a drop of water. I feared that I had only escaped death by drowning, to perish more miserably still by starvation. But even in this extremity, God's goodness was watching over me, although I had so long despised and forgotten Him. Suddenly a breeze sprang up from the westward, and I had the unspeakable joy of seeing the very ship which had passed in the morning heave in sight once more. Again I waved my shirt in the air, and made every signal I could think of, and, after a long time, what was my delight to see that I was observed. A boat was soon lowered, and half an hour afterwards I found myself on board the good ship *Morning Star*, homeward bound to England from India.

"The captain received me very kindly, and supplied me with some dry clothes, giving me at the same time a good meal, of which I stood much in need. The anxiety and exposure I had undergone, however, made me quite ill, and for three or four days I was under the doctor's care. On my recovery, I was obliged to work my passage home, and this employment became so distasteful to me, that I quite lost all my love of roving, and made up my mind, if once I got safely on shore, never again to set my foot on board ship."

CHAPTER VII.

He Arrives at Portsmouth—Resolves to Return to his Father—Arrives at Rotterdam—Sunday Morning—Writes to his Father—Is Penniless—The Curse of Disobedience—The Sermon—Is Starving—Obtains Temporary Belief from an Old Fellow-Student—Receives News of his Father's Death—His Sorrow and Remorse—Goes to Sea Again—Becomes Captain of a Ship.

"Wild is the whirlwind rolling
O'er Afric's sandy plain,
And wild the tempest howling

Along the billowed main;
 But every danger felt before—
 The raging deep, the whirlwind's roar.
 Less dreadful struck me with dismay,
 Than what I feel this fatal day.”

—GOLDSMITH.

”After a favourable voyage we arrived at Portsmouth, to which port the ship was bound. I took leave of the captain to seek my fortune elsewhere. He wished me good luck, and paid me my wages for the homeward passage, which, however, did not last me long. Finding myself again penniless, and without any means of earning my living, I resolved to return to my father. Accordingly, I shipped as a common sailor on board a bark bound for Holland. We had beautiful weather, and after a very good passage I landed at Rotterdam. It was early on a Sunday morning, and as there was no business connected with the ship to prevent me, I thought I could not do less than go to church, and there give thanks to God for the great deliverance He had given me. This will show that the dangers through which I had passed, and the experience I had gained, had not been without some influence on the state of my soul. I had become more serious, my outward conduct, at least, was much improved; but, notwithstanding this, I had as yet experienced no real change of heart.

”Had I but fully realised the meaning of the sermon I heard that day, I should have felt that something more than this was necessary—a real inward purification, and a complete renunciation, even in thought, of the sins which had led me astray. One part of the discourse ran thus:—’God regards not only those things which a man does, not only his outward actions; His eye can also see our inmost thoughts, and He knows the true motive of every action of our lives. He regards not the outward appearance, but the inner reality; not the shell, but the kernel; that is, the inmost feeling and disposition of the heart; the shell is only the outward act. He sees the grain, and not the husk only; the treasure, not the box which contains it; the sword, and not the scabbard which hides it from our less penetrating view. What can it avail to have the scabbard ornamented with gold and jewels, if in the day of battle the sword is found edgeless, and covered with rust? Who would value a crop, however fine it might look as it stands in the field, if all the ears of corn were blighted and withered? Doubtless it is well that our outward actions should be of the highest and noblest character; this is indeed the sign of a well-regulated and religious life; but only truly are they such when they proceed from pure and noble motives, and are the expression of sound principles within.’

"The same day I wrote to my father again, and told him how I was situated. I assured him of my true repentance, and begged him to send me sufficient money to enable me to return to him. But while waiting to hear from him, I had only about two shillings in my pocket, and this was entirely gone by Wednesday. I knew his reply could not reach me for four days, and in the meantime I had not a penny to pay for board and lodging. I would not beg, though my circumstances were really worse than those of the poorest beggar in the streets, and I had not then that faith and trust in our heavenly Father's care, which I have since through His mercy been enabled to feel. I knew not as yet what it was to be a child of God. I determined, however, to bear my hunger till some relief arrived from my father. All day on Friday I had literally nothing to eat, and by Saturday night I felt weak and ill in the extreme; and still those words of my father were ringing in my ears, 'My curse shall be upon you.' I had long lived in abundance, and squandered away pounds upon pounds; now I was to know by experience what it is to be in want. In this pitiable condition, having no means of obtaining a lodging, I crept under a boat hauled up upon the beach for the night, and obtained a few hours' forgetfulness of my misery.

"When I awoke, I felt very wretched and low-spirited; but remembering that this was Sunday, I determined to go to church again and listen to another sermon, hoping to hear something there that might afford me some comfort. My hope was not in vain. The minister spoke most feelingly of the love of God, and of the care which He takes of all His creatures. His text, and the explanation he gave of it, seemed so exactly suited to my own case, that I almost thought the preacher must have known my circumstances, and chosen it expressly for my benefit. I was much affected, and on my return I wrote on a sheet of paper (which I have ever since carefully preserved), the following passages, which seemed peculiarly applicable to my own case. The text was from St. Matthew vi. 26, 'Behold the fowls of the air.'—'Yes, consider them attentively, for even they can teach us a lesson. How beautiful they are! how lively and active in all their motions! They of all created things seem specially adapted to give delight to the eye of man by their brilliant plumage and graceful evolutions, and to charm his ears by their melodious songs. Their homes are in the tops of the highest trees; they wing their course far up above our heads, and indeed seem to belong more to heaven than to earth.

"Let us consider now what we are told about them in the text. "They sow not, neither do they reap." They are, in fact, utterly ignorant of the fact that an ear of corn sown carefully in the ground would in due season bring forth sixty or a hundred-fold. They see the berries and the corn, about the growth of which they have never troubled themselves, and there they find enough for their daily wants. Their free and joyous spirit seems to have no care for the future; they never

”gather into barns.” How many animals are otherwise! Look at the squirrel with his hoard of nuts, the bees with their rich provision of honey, the careful ants, and many others, whose foresight teaches them to provide against the season of scarcity. These, too, are all the creatures of God, and His ”tender mercy is over all His works;” but how different is their life from that of the birds! Singing and rejoicing seems the sole end and aim of their life. Their songs, and all their joyous motions in the air, are like a perpetual hymn of praise and thanksgiving to God, by whose providence they are sustained. ”Your heavenly Father feedeth them.” Is He indeed the Father of the ravens? Is He indeed the Father of the sparrows? Only inasmuch as He is their Creator, and the supplier of their wants. But to you, my friends—to you He is more than this: to you indeed He is a Father—the true and loving Father of all who hear His words, and ”remember His commandments to do them.” Oh, let us not forget all His benefits; let us remember that from Him alone we have all the blessings we enjoy, all blessings both of body and soul. But, above all, let us thank Him for the unspeakable gift of His dear Son, Jesus Christ, for our redemption, and of His Holy Spirit for the renewal of our hearts.

”And oh! as we think over all His benefits, as did David when he penned the 103d Psalm, must not all that is within us bless His holy name? And whatever His providence may send us, whether wealth or poverty, sickness or health, let us look up to Him with thankfulness for His mercy, and say, ”Doubtless Thou art our Father.”

”Behold the fowls of the air;’ their work, indeed, seems to be only singing and rejoicing; but what is yours? ”Are ye not much better than they?” You, who are children of God, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, who are strangers and pilgrims in this world of sorrow and suffering, but whose home is in heaven; you, for whom God hath prepared an eternal mansion in the kingdom of heaven, to which, indeed, you shall one day go to enjoy bliss unspeakable and full of glory, if only while here below, you walk as children of the light, and trust in that great salvation which Christ accomplished for you, by His life and by His death,—”Are ye not indeed much better than they?”

Here Willie interrupted the captain’s story by asking, ”Why, then, are we taught in the fable to blame the careless and improvident grasshopper for not laying up a store for the winter, when the birds are praised for living without troubling themselves about the future? I can’t quite understand this.”

His father answered him: ”All animals, my dear boy, follow the instinct which God has implanted in them; it is not for us to blame them or to praise them. But, at the same time, they may be used as examples to us, so far as we find in each anything good, loveable, or useful: and one and all may be employed to illustrate the characters of different men. From the ant, for instance, the idle may learn to work, and the careless to save. Do you remember who says, ’Go

to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways and be wise?' So, on the other hand, from the birds the covetous and over-anxious may learn that it is possible to live, however scanty our store may be, if we only have faith in our heavenly Father's care. It is wrong to be too anxious and troubled about the things of this world, while, at the same time, we must avoid falling into the opposite error of carelessness, idleness, and improvidence." Then, turning to the captain, he said, "Excuse our interrupting you, my dear friend; pray continue your story."

The captain then resumed his narrative in these words:—"The pastor's sermon seemed to console me very much, and gave me fresh courage, and I thought to myself—"I am, it is true, a stranger in this large city, without money or friends, but there is One above who knows my pitiable condition; His eye is upon me, and if it seem good to Him, He can easily feed me this one day at least, as He feeds 'the young ravens who cry unto Him.' Soon after leaving the church, I noticed a young man, whose features seemed well known to me, reading the Latin inscription on the monument to Erasmus, which stands in the middle of the market-place. For some minutes, I could not remember clearly who he was, or where I had met him before, but all of a sudden I recognised him as an old fellow-student at the University of Giessen; and stepping up to him, I held out my hand, saying, 'Korbec, is it you?' 'That is my name,' said he, staring at me, 'but I can't say I recollect you.' I then remembered that, what with my sailor's dress, my famished appearance, and my bronzed and weather-beaten features, it was scarcely likely that any of my old companions would know me at first sight. I soon told him who I was, and he recollected me at once and shook me heartily by the hand.

"I had no need to tell him I was hungry; my appearance sufficiently showed that, and he considerately spared me the shame and pain of asking him for relief, by taking me to an inn close by. Here a good dinner was quickly provided for me, and I need scarcely say I ate with the ravenous appetite of an almost starving man. As soon as I had satisfied my hunger, I told him some of my adventures. He saw at once that I was in need of further help, but as he was just about to join a ship to which he had been appointed surgeon, he had need of all his money, and was only able to give me a few shillings. These I accepted with gratitude, and was very glad to be in a position to pay for a night's lodging. Thus God, who 'filleteth all things living with plenteousness,' supplied me with the necessaries of life, as soon as I began to trust to His care; even before I had learned truly to know Him, He dealt with me as though I were one of His faithful children. Oh that I had been able to recognise this love to me! But as soon as I found my distress relieved, I thought no more of His love who had helped me, and very soon fell again into my former state of indifference.

"The money my friend had given me was almost all gone, when on the

following Wednesday a letter reached me, not indeed from my father, but from one of my uncles, who told me that my father was dead, and that what little property he left had been barely sufficient to pay off my university debts. The letter also contained an order for five pounds, which my uncle sent me, without, however, telling me whether I was expected to return home, or whether I was left free to continue my wandering life. On reading the sad news of my father's death, I fell into a chair, and covered my face with my hands. I seemed again to hear those terrible words, 'My curse shall be upon you,' and I was for a long time unable to utter a word, or to shed a single tear. At length, however, my grief found vent, and I passed the greater part of the night in bitter and passionate weeping.

"When the day broke, my troubles began again, and the future now looked to me blacker than ever. What was I to do? Whither should I direct my steps? Whatever I undertake, I thought, I can never escape the terrible curse which I have brought upon myself by my disobedience. My father is dead, and it is now too late to obtain his forgiveness! Oh, what would I have given to have seen him alive once more! I would have thrown myself at his feet, and on my knees have sought his pardon for my wickedness, until he exchanged his curse for a blessing. But now, alas! it is too late—too late!

"Reproaching myself thus, I at last made up my mind that it would be useless now to return to my old home, and that the only course open to me was to go to sea again, and I determined to go and offer myself as a sailor on board the ship in which I had come over. The captain received me very kindly, and engaged me as their mate, promising, at the same time, to teach me something of navigation. We soon set sail, and before we had been very long at sea, the second mate, who had been drinking too much, fell overboard. It was dark at the time, and there was a heavy sea on, and though the boats were lowered, no traces of him were discovered. As I had in that short time paid great attention to my duties, and to the kind instructions of the captain, I was promoted to his place. The next voyage I was made first mate, and some years later I became captain of a ship bound for Peru, and continued in that capacity for about ten years. During this time, I had a good opportunity for making private speculations, which proved so successful, that at the end of the ten years I was able to buy a ship of my own.

"While I was thus busily engaged, I had little time to think of my father, and his last letter to me; and so long as I continued in prosperity, I neglected prayer altogether. Yet I passed before all the world for an honest man, and, judged only

by my outward acts, no one would have doubted that I was a God-fearing one.”

CHAPTER VIII.

His Marriage—The Portrait—His Terror—His Good Fortune Deserts him—Heavy Losses—The Beggar—Recognises an Old Enemy—His Two Children are Drowned—His Wife Dies—Is Bankrupt—In Prison—The English Clergyman—Is Brought to Repentance—Is Set Free—The Fisherman and Basket-maker.

”God moves in a mysterious way,
 His wonders to perform;
 He plants His footsteps in the sea,
 And rides upon the storm.

”Deep in unfathomable mines
 Of never-failing skill
 He treasures up His bright designs,
 And works His sovereign will

”Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
 But trust Him for His grace;
 Behind a frowning Providence
 He hides a smiling face.”
 —COWPER.

”About this time, too, I had got married, being then about thirty-five years of age. This was at Liverpool, and after the ceremony was over I called at the clergyman’s house to get a certificate. While he was writing it out for me, I looked round the room, and saw hanging on the wall that very portrait which you see there over the looking-glass. I started back with astonishment, and began trembling violently, so much so, indeed, that I was obliged to support myself by holding on to the table. The clergyman asked me what was the matter. ’Oh, nothing, nothing at all, it is only an attack of giddiness,’ said I, with my eyes still riveted on the

portrait. I seemed to see my father alive before me, with his eyes fixed upon me in anger; and in my agitation I even fancied I saw the lips of the picture move, and thought I again heard those terrible words, 'My curse shall be upon you, and follow you always!' 'No, no,' I cried aloud, being unable to overcome my terror, 'Oh, do not, do not curse me!' The clergyman, filled with astonishment, asked me the cause of so strange an exclamation. I confessed that it was the portrait of my father, and my meeting with it so unexpectedly, which had produced so strong an impression upon me.

"Upon this he took down the picture and showed me, by the name on the back, that I was mistaken in thinking it was my father's portrait, it being that of an English clergyman who had been dead for some years, so that the resemblance was quite accidental. He spoke also very kindly to me about the words I had used, and gradually led me to tell him the story of my disobedience and my father's anger, and took much pains to convince me that my father's curse could not exercise any unfavourable influence upon me, if I had truly repented of those sins which provoked him to utter it, and if, as a proof of my sincerity, I were now living a different life. All his arguments, however, failed to quiet my conscience, and I returned to my house much troubled in mind.

"Shortly after this I set out for another voyage, but my late good fortune seemed to have deserted me. We met with very rough weather before we had been a month at sea, and in order to save the ship I was obliged to order a great part of the cargo to be thrown overboard, so that when at length we arrived at our destination I found I had lost several hundred pounds on the voyage. The homeward voyage was equally unfortunate, and when, after nearly twelve months' absence, I reached my home and found my dear wife ready to welcome me with our baby in her arms, the joy of such a meeting was marred by the fear that the punishment of my disobedience might fall on the heads of those I loved.

"I have little to tell you about the next six or seven years, during which time my bad fortune still followed me, and the state of my affairs grew gradually worse and worse. One thing, however, I must relate. I had been out one afternoon for a walk, and on returning, just at dusk, I found a poor miserable looking beggar, with a wooden leg, sitting on the grass near our cottage door, eating some food which my wife had just given him. I said a few words to him when I came up, and as some of his answers interested me, I asked him to stop a little while and give me an account of himself.

[image]

"I found a poor miserable-looking beggar with a wooden leg."

"He began, 'I was born at Amsterdam'—and in a moment I recollected him. He was no other than the very crimp whom I met on the quay when I first went to that city, and who had decoyed me into his house, where I was robbed and sent to sea as I have told you. I said nothing, however, but let him go on with his story. He told me that he had been once in business, but had met with so many losses that at length he was obliged to go as a sailor in the English navy, and that during an engagement he had received a bullet in his left leg, which had to be amputated, so that when he received his discharge he was compelled to get his living as he could. While he was speaking, a thousand recollections crowded on my mind, and when he had finished I fixed my eyes sternly on his face and said, 'Do you remember me?' He said he had no recollection of ever having seen me before, Thereupon I told him the story of our meeting on the quay at Amsterdam, and reminded him of what had followed his treachery. As I spoke somewhat loudly and angrily, he became quite pale with terror, and did not attempt to deny that he was the man who had used me so cruelly; in fact he seemed quite paralysed with fright. 'Don't be afraid of me,' I said, 'God Himself has punished your wickedness, and I will not revenge myself on you. Only take yourself off from hence, and never let me see you again.'"

The captain here broke off to ask the children whether they thought he had done well in acting thus?

"Oh yes, certainly," said Mary, "you were surely right not to be revenged upon him."

"That is true," said Willie, "but the Bible says we are to love our enemies, and I think, sir, if you had loved this man, you would not have driven him away from you."

"Quite true, my boy," rejoined the captain, "and if I had followed the example of our blessed Saviour, I should have tried to help this man out of his troubles, and endeavoured to obtain some influence over his heart, and so have been really useful to him by leading him to see how wicked he had been. But I could not do it, I did not even know my own heart, and I thought I was doing a wonderfully good action in not punishing him for his cruelty and inhumanity towards me. I lived many years longer holding this good opinion of myself until God gave me the grace of humility, and brought me by means of more troubles to know the wickedness of my own heart.

"As my affairs became gradually more and more embarrassed I was often very much troubled on account of my children, of whom I had now two, for during these few years all my savings had been expended, and I could not see my way clearly to provide for their education as they grew up. Their promising dispositions were, however, a source of great satisfaction to me, and I comforted myself with the hope that things might yet soon improve with me, and that one

or two successful voyages would place me in a position to provide for all their wants.

”With my mind thus filled with mingled feelings of joy at my safe return to my family, and anxiety for the future welfare of those dependent upon me, I returned one day late in the summer of 17—, after a three months’ voyage. I had written to my wife a few days before to tell her when I should be at home, but having got into port a day earlier than I had reckoned upon, I anticipated giving my wife and children a pleasant surprise by my unexpected arrival. Even at this distance of time I can scarcely trust myself to speak of the terrible disappointment that awaited me. On entering my cottage, instead of being greeted with the affectionate caresses of my dear wife and children, I was surprised to see that the only person in the room was a good woman, who lived in a neighbouring cottage. As she looked up and recognised me on my entrance, something in her manner made me fear that all was not well with my family. I eagerly inquired after them, and the woman, who was an old friend of my wife’s, burst into tears, and in a few words told me the extent of the misfortune that had befallen me. My two children, for whose welfare I had been so anxious, were both dead, and my poor wife was confined to her bed by illness. I learned afterwards, for I was so overcome by the news of this awful calamity that I could not listen to the particulars just then, that the two little ones had gone down to the seashore to play with a little companion about a fortnight before I reached home; the last time they were seen alive they were amusing themselves in one of the fisherman’s boats which was lying upon the beach. By some means or other they must have got the boat afloat, and so been carried out to sea unobserved. The night proved very stormy, and the next day the boat was seen floating, bottom upwards, out at sea, and during the day their dead bodies were washed ashore. The anxiety of my poor wife during that awful night, and her great agony of sorrow on learning their unhappy fate, had preyed so much upon her health that it was scarcely expected that she would ever recover from the shock. I pass over the events of the next few days—it would be too much for me, even now, to enter into any detail of the meeting between my wife and myself; nor can I, without tears, think of her as I watched her day by day growing weaker and weaker. Within a fortnight after my arrival she, too, followed our children to the grave, and I was left alone in the world.

”This surely should have been enough to soften even a heart of stone like mine. It was not so, however. I only hardened my heart more and more. ’This is the punishment of my disobedience,’ I thought to myself. The concluding words of my father’s letter echoed again and again in my ears, and instead of producing a good effect upon me, only made me more obstinate in refusing to listen to the gentle appeals of my Saviour. If I did not remember, but too well, my feelings at

this time of my life, I could not now believe that any poor wretched human being could carry his pride of heart and stubborn rebellion against God to such a pitch as I did.

"In order to divert my mind from the harassing reflections which beset me, and made the solitude of my once happy home intolerable, instead of bowing to God's holy will, and recognising, as I can now do, the fact that all that had befallen me was sent in love to my soul by a heavenly Father, who is too wise to err, and too good to be unkind, I sought relief, where no one ever yet found it, by giving myself up to those bad habits which had been the cause of all my misery. I spent my whole time in the society of wicked and thoughtless men, and turned a deaf ear to the remonstrances of all my real friends. There were many who expressed the deepest sympathy with me in my sorrows, and made many vain efforts to recall me to a sense of my duty. But I disregarded all their kind exhortations, and always answered sullenly, 'What is the use of my trying to do right? I am under a curse.'

"Such a state of things could not last long. For the last year or two, my income had been insufficient to support my family, and I had unavoidably contracted some few debts, and now my extravagances rapidly increased them. My creditors soon began to importune me for payment, and after putting them off from time to time, I was obliged to tell them that I was utterly and hopelessly bankrupt. I was then brought before the court, and my ship, my house, and all my goods, were ordered to be sold, and these being insufficient to meet the claims against me, I was thrown into prison. Then, indeed, my cup of sorrow was full. Again I heard my father's malediction sounding in my ears, and this time without being able to drown the painful memory in the riotous pleasures of the world. And though, in my former troubles, I had not shrunk from upbraiding God's providence for oppressing an innocent man, as I called myself, I could not but feel that this new misfortune was the just consequence of my own folly and extravagance. I was now forced to listen to the reproaches of a conscience racked with remorse. Nevertheless, I could not yet resolve to recognise the justice of God. I obstinately resisted His appeals, and still remained impenitent.

"I cannot tell what I might have become while in prison, had I been left altogether to myself. All men seemed to have forgotten me entirely, but God had not even then deserted me. He had pity on me in my extremity, and by an extraordinary dispensation of His Providence, sent to me that very clergyman in whose house I had seen the portrait which so resembled my father. My first words when I saw him were, 'You see I was right: my father's curse is following me, and you see to what a state it has brought me.' 'No,' replied he, 'this is not the effect of your father's anger; it is the consequence of the curse of sin. If you had seriously turned to God, He whose property is always to have mercy and

to forgive would assuredly have delivered you from that curse, and would have turned it into a blessing.'

"I refused to listen to these words, and obstinately persisted in saying that God had doomed me to misery, and that nothing could alter my fate. 'Take care,' said the clergyman, solemnly, 'that you do not provoke God's anger still more by your rash and inconsiderate words. He has surely shown you, plainly enough, that to rebel against Him is the act of none but a madman. Tell me, have you ever tried to free yourself from your load of sin? Have you ever prayed earnestly for God's help to deliver you out of your troubles?'" 'No, said I, 'I have never tried. I cannot do so! I am suffering beneath the weight of an unjust curse, while thousands of other men, who are worse than I am, never suffer any punishment at all, but prosper in all they undertake.' 'My answer to that,' said the good man, 'must be, that you who have studied for the ministry, as you told me, must know, on the authority of God's own word, that one single sin is sufficient for a man's condemnation; how can you then dare to call your punishment unjust? As to your objection that thousands of men are never punished for their offences in this world, that can have no weight; for, even if no punishment reaches them here, they cannot escape at the great Day of Judgment in the world to come. You ought rather to thank God for the just chastisement you have received, which is a proof that His pity and His love are not yet wholly withdrawn from you. Every misfortune you have undergone is as the voice of God calling you to serious repentance. Remember, "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth," and beware lest by your obstinacy you bring down His wrath upon your head.'

"I could not answer such arguments as these; but though my reason was convinced, my heart was untouched. On leaving me, the clergyman gave me a New Testament, and persuaded me to read it with attention, and particularly recommended me to meditate prayerfully upon the Epistle to the Romans. He then left me, and promised to come and see me again. When he had gone, I thought to myself there could be very little good in my reading the book he had left me. In my university studies, I had read it so often, that I knew pretty well what it contained, and I did not expect to find anything in it that I did not know before. Accordingly, I left it unopened for some days, and it was only to divert my melancholy thoughts that I at length, for want of anything else to read, opened the Testament, and began to read the Epistle to the Romans. 'Is this indeed the same epistle that I used to read at the university?' was my first thought, when I had read a few verses. It was indeed the same, word for word; there was no alteration in the book, but since I last read it, I myself had undergone a change. Since that time, I had passed through the rough school of adversity, and the experience of years had shown me more than I then knew of the corruption of my own heart. When I read the words, 'That every mouth may be stopped, and all

the world may become guilty before God' (Rom. iii. 19), I was filled with terror, and to this was added an overwhelming sense of the infinite majesty of God, whose goodness and justice I had so lately dared to question. Then I came to the passage, 'For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all, O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counsellor? or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things; to whom be glory for ever. Amen.' (Rom. xi. 32-36.) Upon this, a ray of hope dawned upon my heart, and I cried out with emotion, 'O God, since Thou hast mercy on all who come to Thee, have mercy also on me.'

"Little by little my heart was softened, and tears of true penitence streamed from my eyes. I was weeping when the clergyman came to see me again. 'God be praised,' said he, as he entered, seeing the tears in my eyes, 'God be praised, for He has had compassion on your soul.' I could not answer, for my heart was too full for words. He then knelt down with me, and prayed with much earnestness, that God would carry on the good work He had begun in me; and as he prayed, I was deeply affected, and at last I too called aloud to God for mercy. This cry was not in vain; the peace of God descended upon my heart, and I was enabled to believe in the possibility of obtaining pardon for all my sins, through faith in a crucified Saviour. After this, I found myself in a much happier frame of mind. I acknowledged that I had been a miserable sinner, and that but for the infinite mercy of the Most High, I must have perished in my sins; I saw now that all my misfortunes had been in reality a token of the loving-kindness and tender mercy of Him, who 'willeth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live.' The Word of God, which for so many years had been a dead letter to me, had now become a source of sweet and life-giving nourishment to my soul; and I spent the greater part of my time while in prison in reading and meditating upon the precious volume. The clergyman offered to lend me some other books; but I declined them all, telling him that the Book of books was enough for me.

"After this worthy man had thus attended to my spiritual wants, he busied himself in endeavouring to set me free from my unhappy confinement. By his exertions, and those of several friends, whom he had interested in my behalf, it was not long before I was set at liberty. I was glad to be once more a free man, but could not regret my imprisonment, inasmuch as it was in the prison that I had been led to a knowledge of Him 'whose service is perfect freedom.' The kind friends who had interested themselves in me provided me with a small sum of money, with which I took a little cottage by the sea-side; and having bought a

small boat and some nets, I was able to get my living all through the summer as a fisherman, and supported myself during the winter by making baskets, which I sold in the neighbouring town. I begged my good friend the clergyman to give me the portrait so like my father, which had caused me such terror when I first saw it in his house, but which I could now look upon without distress of mind, knowing that I had obtained grace and pardon from my heavenly Father. On receiving it, I hung it up over the fireplace in my humble cottage.”

CHAPTER IX.

Accepts the Command of a Ship—The Pirates—The Fight—Victory—Meets an Old Friend—His Friend’s Adventures.

”Come, peace of mind, delightful guest!
Return and make thy downy nest
 Once more in this sad heart:
Nor riches I, nor power pursue,
Nor hold forbidden joys in view;
 We therefore need not part.”
—COWPER.

”The blessing of Heaven seemed to rest upon my humble employment, and I was not only able to earn sufficient to keep myself, but was able to lay by a little money from time to time, so that within two years I saved sufficient to repay my kind friends the money they had lent me to start with. Among those who had interested themselves in my welfare was a rich merchant who was the owner of several ships; and on the death of the captain of one of these, he wrote to me and offered me the command of it. I did not at all like the idea of leaving my peaceful cottage, where for nearly two years I had lived a very happy and contented life, studying the Word of God, and rejoicing in His mercy, but at the same time I did not think it my duty positively to decline such an offer as this without careful consideration.

”In this state of uncertainty, I resolved to consult my good friend the cler-

gyman, from whom I had no secrets, and who had already rendered me so many services. I did so, and his first question was, whether I had really considered the motives which led me to think of accepting the offer, and if I was quite sure that I was not influenced by the desire of riches, or any contempt for my present humble lot. I replied truly that no such idea had ever entered my head. I was quite contented and happy in my present employment, but I hoped to be able, by means of an increased income, to pay all my old creditors in full, and perhaps lay by some provision for my old age. Satisfied with this explanation, he advised me by all means to accept the appointment, and added that he himself had induced the merchant to make me the offer. Having now no longer any doubt as to which was the right course to pursue, I let my cottage to a fisherman, and taking the portrait of my father with me, I set sail, full of confidence in God's protecting care.

"I was now in the Mediterranean trade, and had to call at several ports with merchandise, and to take in goods for England. On our return, we left the island of Corsica in company with several other vessels. My ship, however, being a very fast sailor, we were not long before we left them all behind. The weather was fair, and our voyage had been very successful, so that I was in good spirits. Suddenly the sailor at the masthead saw a suspicious-looking craft in the distance. I examined her attentively with the glass, and at length became convinced that we were chased by pirates. I felt at once that escape was impossible, and resistance seemed almost hopeless, as we numbered in all only seventeen hands and six passengers. Nevertheless, I resolved to fight to the death rather than suffer myself and all on board to be earned away into slavery. I hastily ordered the decks to be cleared, and having armed all the crew and the passengers, I had our six cannons loaded, and waited, with a beating heart, for our deadly enemy to overtake us. The pirates evidently did not expect any resistance on our part, hoping, no doubt, that we should yield without striking a blow. They had made no preparations for action until they saw that we were prepared for an engagement. We heard afterwards, too, that their vessel had received a good deal of damage in an action the day before with an English cruiser, in which several of their crew had been killed; indeed, their vessel only escaped by her wonderfully fast sailing. As soon as they got within range, I fired one of the guns, which created great confusion on board our enemy, having, as I afterwards learned, killed their captain and two of the crew. I kept up a brisk cannonade for some time, to which they replied very feebly, and without doing us any serious injury. In a short time they ceased firing, and I perceived that they were endeavouring to retreat, but had much difficulty in doing so in consequence of the damage our firing had caused. Seeing this, I crowded all sail in chase, and we soon came up with them, when they threw down their arms and suffered us to board them without any resistance. We took

about fifteen prisoners, whom I landed at Gibraltar, and delivered over to the authorities there to take their trial for piracy. As for the ship, we found it needed but little repair to render it sea-worthy, though the mainmast was shot away, and the rest of the rigging had suffered considerably; so, after doing what was absolutely necessary to keep her afloat, I brought both ship and cargo with me to England.

"In the hold we found several prisoners whom the pirates had taken, and whose joy at their happy deliverance was unbounded. Among these, to my great surprise and delight, I recognised my old fellow-student the surgeon, whom I met at Rotterdam, and whose kindness to me, in my distress, had saved me from dying of starvation. His astonishment and joy at such an unexpected meeting was as great as mine, and was increased on finding so great a change for the better in my circumstances. I told him my history since our last meeting, and he in return told me his, which was almost as full of adventures as my own. He had, he said, been wrecked on a desert island in his last voyage, his ship and all the crew, except himself and two sailors, being lost. Having built themselves a hut, they supported themselves for some months on some edible roots and berries, which his knowledge of botany enabled him to discover on the island, and their fare was occasionally improved by the addition of a bird or animal, which they managed to shoot with roughly-made bows and arrows. During this time they were busily engaged in constructing a boat, in which they hoped to be able to reach the mainland, which was just visible in very clear weather. After more than one failure they succeeded in making their boat water-tight, and set out with as large a store of provisions and water as their frail craft could carry with safety. Having chosen a calm day for their attempt, and the wind being in their favour, they reached the land without any accident, but found themselves scarcely in a better position, if so good, as when they were on the island. Before they were wrecked the ship had been driven entirely out of her course by a terrific gale, and they were now utterly ignorant as to their whereabouts. They had not been many days on shore before a band of armed savages discovered them, and as they were not in a position to offer any resistance, they were taken prisoners, and led away some distance inland. Here they suffered many hardships, and were in constant fear of being put to death by their cruel captors. Several months passed away in this manner, during which they were compelled to do the most laborious work, and were very scantily fed, and were often besides beaten and threatened with death, until at length they effected their escape, made their way to the seashore, and were fortunate enough to be rescued by a homeward-bound Austrian merchantman, which had stood in near the coast for the purpose of obtaining fresh water. While on their voyage up the Mediterranean, (the destination of the vessel being Trieste), they were captured by the pirate from whom I had so

providentially rescued them. When we reached England my friend seemed so much to dread going to sea again that I easily persuaded him to accept from me a sum of money sufficient to enable him to return to his own country, where I have since heard he set up as doctor in his native town, and died a short time ago, beloved and respected by all who knew him."

CHAPTER X.

Makes Several Successful Voyages—Becomes Rich—Buys a Ship of his Own—Makes his Fortune—Retires from the Sea—Returns to his Native Village.

——"This active course,
Chosen in youth, through manhood he pursued,
Till due provision for his modest wants
Had been obtained; and, thereupon, resolved
To pass the remnant of his days untasked
With needless services, from hardship free,
His calling laid aside, he lived at ease."

—WORDSWORTH.

"The successful issue of my voyage not only gained me the entire confidence of the owner of my ship, but also put me in possession of a considerable sum of money, with which I was able, to my very great satisfaction, to meet all claims against me, besides supplying my friend's need, as I told you. This, however, left me without anything to live on, so that I was obliged to undertake a second voyage, in spite of a certain uneasy feeling of which I could not get rid.

"Since the time when in the prison I had received the assurance of the pardon of all my sins, I had been, it is true, quite satisfied as to the safety of my soul, knowing that God having received me into His fold, whatever might befall me, 'all things must work together for good.' Still I could not altogether overcome my apprehension at the thought of my father's curse, and of its influence on my temporal happiness and well-being. I felt that I was justified in this when I thought of the fifth commandment, 'Honour thy father and thy mother, that

thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.' He who honours, and consequently obeys his parents, I thought, has a promise here of a long and happy life, not indeed of eternal life, to gain which he must honour God and keep His commandments, that is, he must be converted and have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, for 'this is His commandment.' If he neglects this, he may indeed lead a long and prosperous life here, and yet lose his life hereafter. He who, on the contrary, disobeys his parents cannot be happy and successful in his earthly career, although he may, by sincere repentance and faith, obtain forgiveness of God, for his Saviour's sake, and everlasting happiness. If he has brought down upon himself his father's curse, even this forgiveness will not alter its effects in this world, although in the hands of the Almighty the very sorrows and sufferings it brings upon him may become the means of securing his eternal salvation.

"Thus convinced as I was that for His dear Son's sake God had forgiven all my sins, I still remembered with alarm those words in my father's letter, 'My curse shall be upon you, and follow you always;' and this portrait, which I had always hanging up in my cabin, helped to keep me in mind of them.

"I was, therefore, still a prey to great uneasiness, and even good fortune failed to bring peace to my mind. In all my prosperity I believed myself to be on the brink of some fresh disaster, having proved by experience the instability of earthly things; and when I was surrounded by misfortunes, I of course assigned them to the cause uppermost in my mind. My fears, however, were not realised during a second and third voyage which I made for my employer. On the contrary, they were so successful in a pecuniary point of view, that I was able to buy a ship of my own, which I freighted entirely on my own account. My trading this time succeeded beyond my utmost expectations, and on returning to England, I found myself in possession of a considerable fortune.

"I was now nearly sixty years of age, and was beginning to feel a wandering life almost too much for me. Accordingly I resolved to retire from active work, and return to my native land, to devote my few remaining years to preparation for life eternal and the glory of Him who has led me in such a wonderful manner to Himself.

"Although I have passed through so much during my forty years' wandering about the world, have endured so many troubles, and received so many undeserved blessings, and although God has shown Himself so good and gracious, slow to anger and of great kindness towards me, and though, during these last few years, especially, His blessing has rested on all I have undertaken, still even yet I start with a secret terror at the sight of that portrait which brings before my mind so clearly the father whom I disobeyed. The recollection of his curse is never absent. Sometimes in the middle of the night I wake up, trembling, ex-

pecting the house is about to fall and crush me, and it is only by earnest prayer that I can recover my self-possession.”

Here the captain ended his history, the recital of which had deeply interested each and all of his hearers. The worthy pastor did his utmost to convince him that his fears were only a vain superstition; but the captain shook his head. His kind counsellor saw that it would be unwise to argue the point, and left him with thanks for his graphic narrative, resolving to pray earnestly that God would remove from him the cloud of self-reproach, and enable him to spend the remainder of his days in the brightness of Christian hope.

CHAPTER XI.

The Curse Revoked—Conclusion.

”Commend the past to God, with all its irrevocable harm,
Humbly, but in cheerful trust, and banish vain regrets;
Come to Him, continually come, casting all the present at His feet,
Boldly, but in prayerful love, and fling off selfish cares;
Commit the future to His will—the viewless, fated future;
Zealously go forward with integrity, and God will bless thy faith.”

—TUPPER.

A year had passed away since the captain had taken up his abode in the ”Forester’s House,” as it was still called, in the course of which the intimacy between him and his good friend the pastor had been confirmed by many mutual acts of kindness. The captain was a great favourite with the children, and a visit to his house was looked upon by them as the greatest possible treat, and many were the interesting and instructive stories which he related for their amusement. His long wanderings in almost every part of the world furnished him with an inexhaustible supply of anecdotes and narratives of foreign customs, which the children could never grow tired of listening to. His friends, however, could not help noticing that he had not yet shaken off his fear that some fresh misfortune was in store for him, in consequence of his youthful disobedience and

the curse which his father had pronounced upon him. This he believed, being unrevoked, would, as his father had written, "follow him always."

Thus this one great sin of disobeying his father's commands had embittered his happiness for more than forty years, not only when he was suffering what he justly believed to be the consequences of his wickedness, but long after he had earnestly repented of all his sins, and was living a peaceful, godly life.

Oh that all the boys and girls who may read this story would think over those words of St Paul, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord; for this is right. Honour thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth," (Eph. vi. 1-3), and learn from this narrative that every act of wilful disobedience to a parent's commands is a sin against God, which He is sure to punish.

The good pastor's prayers that the captain might be relieved from his anxiety of mind were not in vain, and he himself was destined to be the happy instrument in God's hands of removing the burden that had so long oppressed his friend. It happened one day when the pastor was writing in his study, that a man called upon him for the purpose of obtaining a certificate of his birth, which was necessary to enable him to receive a legacy to which he was entitled. The pastor inquired his name.

"My name is John Lobert," said the man, "and I have been living at Liverpool for many years; but I now intend to settle down here in my native village for the remainder of my life."

"When you were at Liverpool, did you ever meet Captain Buchman?" asked the pastor.

"No," said Lobert, "I never met him there; but I used to know him very well as a boy; in fact, he was an old schoolfellow of mine. I was astonished when I arrived at Dornbach last night to hear that he was living here. I shall be delighted to see him again."

"The captain, I am sure, will be pleased to see one of his old companions," replied the pastor, "but wait a moment, and I will give you your certificate. In what year were you born?"

"In 17—," answered Lobert.

"Ah, that was in my predecessor's time," said the pastor; "I must look through the old register, which ends at his death in 17—," and unlocking a large box which stood in the corner of the room, he took out the book, and soon found the entry of Lobert's birth. Upon the same page he noticed the name of his friend the captain, and underneath it was fastened a sheet of paper. The pastor unfolded this, and glancing over its contents, cried out with delight, "Oh, what a blessed discovery this is for my dear friend the captain!" He folded up the paper, and putting it in his pocket, wrote out the required certificate for Lobert, who took

his leave, promising to call and see the captain on the next day.

As soon as he had gone, the pastor ran to the captain's house.

"Good news, my friend," said he as soon as they met "I am the bearer of happy tidings for you. Here, read this paper."

The captain's eyes filled with tears as he read, and falling on his knees, he gave thanks to God for the mercy He had shown him, He then rose from his knees and read aloud the important document, which was as follows:—

"I earnestly beg any one into whose hands this paper may fall, to tell my son, Francis Buchman (if he be still living), that his old father before his death has forgiven his disobedience, and revoked the curse which he pronounced upon him in a moment of anger. I pray also that God will forgive him, and turn him from the error of his ways.

"G. BUCHMAN, Pastor.

"Dornbach, 15th June, 17—."

The captain was quite an altered man now. The anxiety that had weighed upon his mind for so many years being removed, his life glided on smoothly and peacefully. The past only seemed to him as a terrible dream, from which he had now awakened.

Lobert duly called upon the captain on the following day, and was received with much joy, which was increased when he found that he too had chosen that better part which shall never be taken away. He soon became intimate with the pastor's family, and the three friends enjoyed each other's society for many happy years. The captain devoted the greater part of his time and his fortune to relieving the wants of the poor in the neighbourhood, and was long remembered by the inhabitants of the little village of Dornbach as the "Good Captain Buchman."

THE END

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