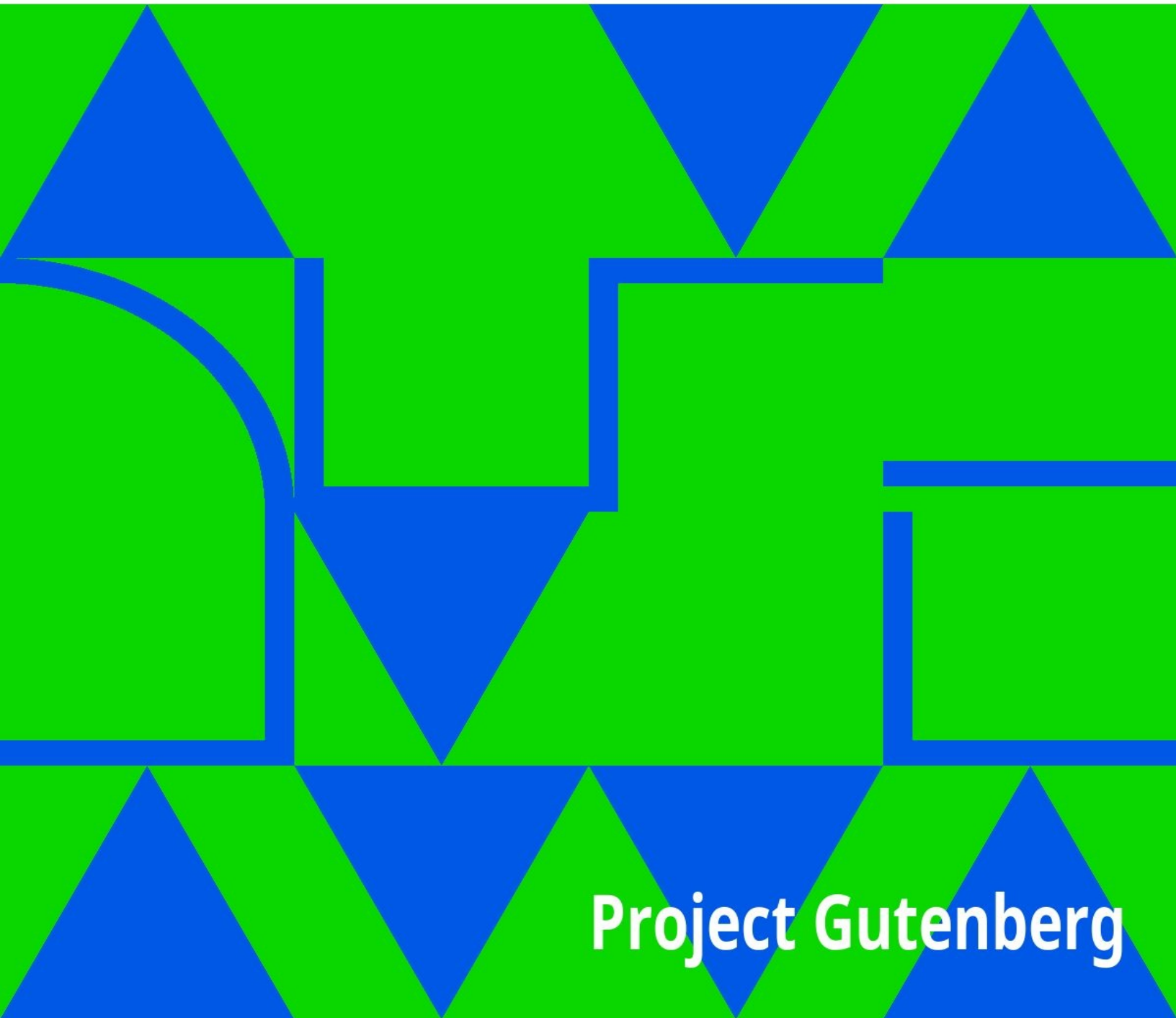
A Sailor's Lass

Emma Leslie



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"HE PICKED UP THE WHITE BUNDLE, AND HURRIED AFTER PETERS."

A SAILOR'S LASS

BY

EMMA LESLIE,

AUTHOR OF "THE GIPSY QUEEN," "DEARER THAN LIFE,"
"GYTHA'S MESSAGE," ETC.

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CHAPTER I.

ONE STORMY NIGHT.

"Mother, we're afloat agin." It was a gruff, sleepy voice that spoke, and the old fisherman turned over and snored on, as though the fact of their home being afloat was of no consequence to him. His wife, however, was by no means so easy in her mind, for it was only during the equinoctial gales and an unusually high tide that their home was lifted from its moorings; and now it had been swinging and swaying for hours, and the rusty chains that held it fast to some posts were creaking and straining as though the next gust of windwould certainly carry them out to sea or drive them up the river, where they would inevitably be swamped in a very short time, for their boat-home was leaky at the bottom—had been a water-logged boat before the fisherman took possession of it and turned it into a quaint-looking cottage by running up some wooden walls along the sides, and roofing it in with planks and tarpaulin. Thus converted into a dwelling-house, the boat had been secured, by four chains fixed to posts in the ground, on the top of a mud-bank that formed the boundary of the mouth of the river.

The ocean itself was less than a quarter of a mile from where the old boat was moored, and so the poor woman might well be excused for growing more alarmed as the minutes went on and the gale increased, until the boat fairly rocked, and the children in the adjoining cabin began crying and screaming in their fright.

"Coomber! Coomber!" she said at last, shaking her husband, and starting up in bed; for a sound more dreadful than the children'sscreams had made itself heard above the din of the wind and waves.

"There's a ship, Coomber, close in shore; I can hear the guns!" screamed his wife, giving him another vigorous shake.

"Ship! guns!" exclaimed the old fisherman, starting up in bed. The next minute he was on his feet, and working himself into his clothes. "She must be on the sand-bar if you heard the guns," he said.

A sudden lurch of the boat almost pitched the old man forward, and the

children's screams redoubled, while Mrs. Coomber hastily scrambled out of bed and lighted the lantern that hung against the wall.

"What are yer going to do?" asked her husband, in some surprise; "women ain't no good in such work as this."

"What are you going to do?" asked Mrs. Coomber, almost crying herself; "the boat will soon be adrift with this wind and tide, and we shall all be drowned like rats in a hole."

"Nay, nay, old woman, the boat was made taut enough before I brought you here, and you think she wouldn't have broke away before this if she was going to do it? Don't be a stupid lubber," he added.

"But the children, Coomber, the children. I ain't afraid for myself," said the mother, with a sob.

"Well, well, the old boat'll hold the boys for many a day yet," said the fisherman; "you go in and stop their noise, while I get help for the poor souls that are surely perishing out there."

"But what can you do for them?" asked his wife; "there ain't a boat besides ours at Bermuda Point, nor a man to help you manage it besides Bob."

"No, no; Bob and I couldn't manage the boat in such a sea as this; but he shall go with me to Fellness. Bob! Bob!" called his father, in the same breath.

"Aye, aye," came an answering shout from the adjoining cabin.

"Slip into your things as quick as you can; we must be off to Fellness; there's a ship out there on the bar sands."

"I'm a'most ready, dad; I heard mother call yer, and thought you'd let me go along," replied Bob.

Before the fisherman put on his sou'-wester he took a black bottle from a recess, and after taking a hearty draught, he said, "It's lucky we've got a drop to-night," as he handed it to his wife; and with a parting word to her not to be afraid, he and Bob stepped out of the boat-house door, to meet the full fury of the blast, that threatened at first to carry them off their legs. The three miles' walk to the little fishing village of Fellness was no easy task such a wild night as this, for although the road was inland, it was fully exposed to the sea, and between the wilder outbreaks of the wind and rain they could hear the guns of distress, and occasionally see a rocket piercing the midnight blackness of the sky, appealing

for help for the drowning men.

At the coastguard station, midway betweenthe Point and the village, they found the men on the alert, and two volunteered to go with Coomber and help man the boat. Then the four plodded silently along the slushy road, for talking was next to impossible in such a gale, and it needed all the strength and energy they could muster to fight the wind and rain.

They made their way to the beach as soon as they reached Fellness, and, as they expected, found most of the men gathered there, watching the distressed vessel.

"Halloo! here's Coomber from the Point," said one, as the new-comers pushed their way in among them.

"What are yer standing here for?" shouted Coomber, in some impatience; "looking won't do her no good."

"We can't do nothing else," said the man; "we've got Rodwell's boat here—she's the best craft on this coast for such a trip, and we've made three tries in her, but it's no good; nothing could live in such a sea as this; we've been beat back every time, and well-nigh swamped."

"Well, mates, I don't say nothing but what yer may have tried; but suppose now one of yer had got a boy out in that there ship—*I've* got a boy in that, or another, if he ain't gone to where there's no more sea," said the old fisherman, with a groan; and before he had done speaking, one or two had moved to where the boat had been dragged on to the low sandy shore.

"We'll try again," they said, in quiet but determined voices.

"Let the youngsters go," said Coomber, as two or three married men pressed forward; "them as has got wives ain't no call to go on such a trip as this. There'll be enough of us; there's me and Bob, and Rook and White came with us a purpose, and——"

"But how about your wife, Coomber?" interrupted one of the men.

"Oh, never you fear, lads; she'll not grudge me if I save her boy. Now, lads, look here; seven of us'll be enough, and we've got four."

There were so many volunteers for the three vacant places, that the men seemed on the point of quarrelling among themselves now for the privilege of joining in this dangerous errand; but by common consent Coomber was constituted the leader of the party, and he chose three of the most stalwart of the single men, and

the rest were allowed to run the boat down through the surf. Then, with a loud cheer from all who stood on the shore, the seven brave men bent to their oars, and during a slight lull in the wind, they made a little headway towards the wreck. But the next minute they were beaten back again, and the boat well-nigh swamped. Again they pushed off, but again were they driven back; and five times was this repeated, and thus an hour was lost in the fruitless endeavour to get away from the shore. At length the fury of the storm somewhat abated, and they were able to get away, but it was a long time before they could get near the dangerous bar sands, on which the vessel had struck, and when they did get there, the ship had disappeared. There was plenty of wreckage about—broken spars, fragments of masts and torn sail-cloth.

"We're too late," groaned one of the men, as he peered through the darkness, trying to descry the hull of the vessel. They had not heard the guns or seen a rocket thrown up for some time.

"They're all gone, poor fellows," said another, sadly; "we may as well go back now, before the gale freshens again."

"Oh, stop a bit; we'll look among this rubbish, and see what there is here; perhaps some of them are holding on to the floating timber," said Coomber, who had frequently been out on a similar errand.

They raised their voices together, and cried "Hi! hi!" trying to outscream the wind; but it was of no use; there was no answering call for help, and after waiting about for some time, and going as near to the dangerous sands as they dared, they at length reluctantly turned their boat towards the shore, and began to row back. But before they had got far on their way, they descried the gleam of something white floating in front of them.

"Only a bit of sail-cloth," said one, as they paused in their rowing to concentrate all their attention upon the object.

"Let's make sure, mates," said Coomber. "Steady, now; mind your oars; let her float; it's coming this way, and we'll pick it up;" and in another minute Coomber had reached over and seized the white bundle, which he found to be carefully lashed to a spar.

"It's a child!" he exclaimed. "Mates, we ain't come out for nothing, after all. Now row for dear life," he said, as he carefully laid the bundle in the bottom of the boat. They could do nothing for it here, not even ascertain whether it was dead or alive; and they pulled for the shore with even greater eagerness than they had

left it.

The dawn was breaking before they got back, and they were welcomed with a shout from their waiting comrades, who were watching anxiously for the return of the boat. There was disappointment, however, in the little crowd of watchers when they saw only the brave crew returning from the perilous journey.

"What, nothing!" exclaimed one of the men, as the boat drew close in shore.

"Only a child, and that may be dead," shouted one of the crew.

"But I think it's alive," said Coomber. "Run, Peters, and rouse up your missus; the womenfolk are better hands at such jobs than we are;" and as soon as he could leave the boat, he picked up the white bundle, and hurried after Peters, leaving his companions to tell the story of their disappointment.

Mrs. Peters was a motherly woman, and had already lighted a fire to prepare some breakfast for her husband, in readiness for his return from the beach, so the wet clothes were soon taken off the child, and they saw it was a little girl about five years old, fair and delicate-looking, decently, but not richly clad, with a small silver medal hung round her neck by a black ribbon. At first they feared the poor little thing was dead, for it was not until Mrs. Peters had well-nigh exhausted all her best-known methods for restoring the apparently drowned, that the little waif showed any sign of returning life.

Coomber stood watching with silent but intense anxiety the efforts of the dame to restore animation, not daring to join in the vigorous chafings and slappings administered, for fear his rough horny hands should hurt the tender blue-white limbs.

For some time the woman was too much occupied with her task to notice his presence, but when her labour was rewarded by a faint sigh, and a slightly-drawn breath parted the pale lips, she heard a grunt of satisfaction behind her; and turning her head, she exclaimed, "What gowks men are, to be sure."

"Eh, what is it, dame?" said Coomber, meekly; for he had conceived a wonderful respect for Mrs. Peters during the last ten minutes. "Ha' you been a-standing there like a post all this while, and never put out yer hand to help save the child?" she said, reproachingly.

"I couldn't, dame, I couldn't with such hands as these; but I'll do anything for you that I can," whispered the fisherman, as though he feared to disturb the child.

"Well, I want a tub of hot water," snapped Mrs. Peters. "You'll find the tub in the

backyard, and the kettle's near on the boil. Look sharp and get the tub, and then go upstairs and get a blanket off the bed."

Coomber soon brought the tub, and a pitcher of cold water that stood near, but it was not so easy for him to grope his way upstairs. The staircase was narrow and dark, and seemed specially contrived that the uninitiated might bump and bruise themselves. Coomber, in his boat-home, having no such convenience or inconvenience in general use, found the ascent anything but easy, and the dame's sharp voice was heard calling for the blanket long before he had groped his way to the bedroom door. But what would he not do for that child whose faint wail now greeted his ears? He pushed on, in spite of thumps and knocks against unexpected corners, and when he had found the blanket, was not long in making his way down with it.

"Now what's to be done with her?" demanded the woman, as she lifted the little girl out of the water, and wrapped her in the blanket.

"Won't she drink some milk?" said Coomber, scratching his head helplessly.

"I dessay she will presently; but who's to keep her? You say there ain't none of the people saved from the wreck to tell who she belongs to?"

"No, there ain't none of 'em saved, so I think I'll take her myself," said Coomber.

"You take her!" exclaimed the woman; "what will your wife say, do you think, to another mouth to fill, when there's barely enough now for what you've got—four hearty boys, who are very sharks for eating?"

"Well, dame, I've had a little gal o' my own, but ain't likely to have another unless I takes this one," said Coomber, with a little more courage, "and so I ain't a-going to lose this chance; for I do want a little gal."

"Oh, that's all very well; but you ain't no call to take this child that's no ways your own. She can go to the workus, you know. Peters'll take her by-and-by. Her clothes ain't much, so her belongings ain't likely to trouble themselves much about her. Yer can see by this trumpery medal she don't belong to rich folks; so my advice is, let her go to the workus, where she'll be well provided for."

"No, no! the missus'll see things as I do, when I talk to her a bit. So if you'll take care of her for an hour or two, while I go home and get off these duds, and tell her about it, I'll be obliged;" and without waiting for the dame's reply, Coomber left the cottage.

illustration

illustration

CHAPTER II.

THE FISHERMAN'S HOME.

"Why, mother, are you here?" Coomber spoke in a stern, reproachful tone, for he had found his wife and the cowering children huddled together in the corner of the old shed where the family washing and various fish-cleaning operations were usually carried on; and the sight did not please him.

"Are yer all gone mad that yer sitting out there wi' the rain drippin' on yer, when yer might be dry an' comfortable, and have a bit o' breakfast ready for a feller when he comes home after a tough job such as I've had?"

"I—I didn't know when you was coming to breakfast," said Mrs. Coomber, timidly, and still keeping close in the corner of the shed for fear her husband should knock her down; while the children stopped their mutual grumblings and complaints, and crept closer to each other behind their mother's skirts.

"Couldn't you ha' got it ready and waited wi' a bit o' fire to dry these duds?" exclaimed her husband.

"But the boat, Coomber, it wasn't safe," pleaded the poor woman. "We might ha' been adrift any minute."

"Didn't I tell yer she was safe, and didn't I ought to know when a boat's safe better nor you—a poor tool of a woman? Come out of it," he added, impatiently, turning away.

The children wondered that nothing worse than hard words fell to their share, and were somewhat relieved that the next question referred to Bob, and not to their doings.

"You say he ain't come home?" said Coomber.

"I ain't seen him since he went with you to Fellness. Ain't you just come from there?" said his wife, timidly.

"Of course I have, but Bob ought to have been back an hour or so ago, for I had something to do in the village. Come to the boat, and I'll tell you all about it," he added, in a less severe tone; for the thought of the child he had rescued softened

him a little, and he led the way out of the washing-shed.

The storm had abated now, and the boat no longer rocked and swayed, so that the children waded back through the mud without fear, while their father talked of the little girl he had left with Dame Peters at Fellness. They listened to his proposal to bring her home and share their scanty meals with very little pleasure, and they wished their mother would say she could not have another baby; but instead of this Mrs. Coomber assented at once to her husband's plan of fetching the child from Fellness that afternoon.

The Coombers were not a happy family, for the fisherman was a stern, hard man by nature, and since he had lost his little girl he had become harder, his neighbours said. At all events, his wife and children grew more afraid of him—afraid of provoking his stern displeasure by any of those little playful raids children so delight in; and every one of them looked forward to the day when they could run away from home and go to sea, as their grown-up brother had done. Bob, the eldest now at home, was already contemplating taking this step very soon, and had promised to help Dick and Tom when they were old enough. It had been a startling revelation to Bob to hear his father speak as he had done on the beach at Fellness about his brother, for he had long ago decided that his father did not care a pin for any of them, unless it was for the baby sister who had died, and even of that he was not quite sure. He had made up his mind, as he walked through the storm that morning, that he would not go back again, but make his way to Grimsby, or some other seaport town, after his business at Fellness was done. But what he had heard on the beach from his father somewhat shook his purpose, and when he learned from Dame Peters afterwards, that the child they had rescued was to share their home, he thought he would go back again, and try to bear the hard life a little longer, if it was only to help his mother, and tell her his father did care for them a bit in spite of his stern, hard ways.

Perhaps Mrs. Coomber did not need to be told that her husband loved her and his children; at all events, she received Bob's information with a nod and a smile, and a whispered word. "Yer father's all right, and a rare good fisherman," she said; for in spite of the frequent unkindness she experienced, Mrs. Coomber was very fond of her husband.

"Ah, he's a good fisherman, but he'd be all the better if he didn't have so much of that bottle," grumbled Bob; "he thinks a deal more about that than he does about us."

It was true enough what Bob said. If his father could not by any chance get his bottle replenished, wife and children had a little respite from their usual hard, driving life, and he was more civil to their only neighbours, who were at the farm about half a mile off; but once the bottle got filled again, he grew sullen and morose, or quarrelsome. He had recently made himself very disagreeable to Farmer Hayes in one of his irritable fits, a fact which suddenly recurred to his wife when she heard of the sick child being brought home to her to nurse, but she dared not mention it to her husband. When Coomber brought the child that afternoon, he said, gaily: "Here's a present for yer from the sea, mother; maybe she'll bring us good luck coming as she did."

"It 'ud be better luck if we'd picked up a boat," muttered Bob, who was standing near.

"Why, she ain't such a baby as you said," exclaimed Mrs. Coomber, as she unpinned the shawl in which she was wrapped; "she is about five."

"Five years old," repeated Coomber; "but she'd talk if she was as old as that, and Dame Peters told me she'd just laid like a dead thing ever since she'd been there."

"She's ill, that's what it is, poor little mite—ill and frightened out of her senses;" and Mrs. Coomber gathered her in her arms, and kissed the little white lips, and pressed her to her bosom, as only a tender mother can, while the boys stood round in wondering silence, and Coomber dashed a tear from his eye as he thought of the little daughter lying in Fellness churchyard. But he was ashamed of the love that prompted this feeling, and said hastily: "Now, mother, we mustn't begin by spoiling her;" but then he turned away, and called Bob to go with him and look after the boat.

For several days the child continued very ill—too ill to notice anything, or to attempt to talk; but one day, when she was lying on Mrs. Coomber's lap before the fire, the boys mutely looking at her as she lay, she suddenly put up her little hands, and said in a feeble whisper, "Dear faver Dod, tate tare o' daddy and mammy, and Tiny;" and then she seemed to drop off into a doze.

The boys were startled, and Mrs. Coomber looked down hastily at the little form on her lap, for this was the first intimation they had had that the child could talk, although Mrs. Coomber fancied that she had showed some signs of recognising her during the previous day.

"I say, did you hear that?" whispered Dick. "Was she saying her prayers, mother,

like Harry Hayes does?"

Mrs. Coomber nodded, while she looked down into the child's face and moved her gently to and fro to soothe her to sleep.

"But, mother, ought she to say that? Did you hear her? She said 'dear God,'" said Dick, creeping round to his mother's side.

Mrs. Coomber was puzzled herself at the child's words. They had awakened in her a far-off memory of days when she was a girl, and knelt at her mother's knee, and said, "Our Father," before she went to bed. But that was long before she had heard of Bermuda Point, or thought of having boys and girls of her own. When they came she had forgotten all about those early days; and so they had never been taught to say their prayers, or anything else, in fact, except to help their father with the boat, shoot wild-fowl in the winter, and gather samphire on the shore during the summer.

She thought of this now, and half wished she had thought of it before. Perhaps if she had tried to teach her children to pray, they would have been more of a comfort to her. Perhaps Jack, her eldest, would not have run away from home as he did, leaving them for years to wonder whether he was alive or dead, but sending no word to comfort them.

The boys were almost as perplexed as their mother. The little they had heard of God filled them with terror, and so to hear such a prayer as this was something so startling that they could think and talk of nothing else until their father came in, when, as usual, silence fell on the whole family, for Coomber was in a sullen mood now.

The next day Tiny, as she had called herself, was decidedly better. A little bed had been made up for her in the family living-room, and she lay there, quiet but observant, while Mrs. Coomber went about her work—cooking and cleaning and mending, and occasionally stopping to kiss the little wistful face that watched her with such quiet curiosity.

"Am I in a s'ip now?" the child asked at length, when Mrs. Coomber had kissed her several times.

"You're in a boat, deary; but you needn't be afraid; our boat is safe enough."

"I ain't afraid; Dod is tatin' tare of me," said the child, with a little sigh.

Mrs. Coomber wondered whether she was thinking of the storm; whether she could tell them who she was, and where her friends might be found; and she

ventured to ask her several questions about this, but failed to elicit any satisfactory answer. The child was sleepy, or had forgotten what Mrs. Coomber thought she would be sure to remember; but it was evident she had taken notice of her surroundings during the last few days, for after a little while she said, "Where's der boys—dat Dick and Tom?"

Mrs. Coomber was amused. "They're out in the boat looking after the nets," she said.

"When they toming home?" asked the little girl; "home to dis boat, I mean," she added.

"Oh, they'll come soon," replied Mrs. Coomber. "But, now, can't you tell me something about your mother and father, and where you lived, my deary?" she asked again.

"I tomed in a s'ip, and 'ou my mammy now," said the child, looking round the cosy room with perfect content.

"But where is your own mammy, who taught you to say your prayers?" asked Mrs. Coomber.

The tears came into the sweet blue eyes for a minute as she said, "See dorn up dere, to tay in Dod's house, and Tiny do too if see a dood dal."

Mrs. Coomber laid down the jacket she was patching, and kissed the serious little face. "Is your mother dead, my deary?" she asked, while the tears shone in her own eyes.

"See done to see daddy, and tell him about Tiny," answered the child; from which Mrs. Coomber gathered that mother and father were both dead; and when her husband came home she told him what she had heard, which seemed to afford the old fisherman a good deal of satisfaction.

"Then she's ours safe enough, mother," he said, rubbing his hands, "and when she gets well she'll toddle about the old boat like our own little Polly did."

"But I thought you said Peters was going to see the newspaper man to tell him to put something in the *Stamford Mercury* about finding her, so that her friends should know she was saved, and come and fetch her."

"I said her mother or father," interrupted Coomber, sharply; "but if they're dead, there ain't anybody else likely to want such a little 'un, and so we may keep her, I take it. But Peters shall go to the newspaper man, never fear," added Coomber;

"I don't want to rob anybody of the little 'un; but if nobody don't come in a week, why then, Mary——" and Coomber paused, and looked at his wife.

"Well, then, I'll get out little Polly's things; they'll just about fit her," said Mrs. Coomber, hastily wiping her eyes with her apron for fear her husband should reproach her again for her tears.

When the boys came in, the little girl said, shyly, "Tome and tell me about the nets."

Dick looked at her, and then at his mother.

"What does she mean?" he asked, drawing near the little bed where Tiny lay.

"She wants to know about the fishing," said Mrs. Coomber. "Have you had a good take, Dick?" asked his mother, rather anxiously, for she wanted some more milk for Tiny, and her little secret store of halfpence was gone now.

"Oh, it ain't much," said Dick; "Bob has taken a few plaice to Fellness, and I dessay he'll bring back some bread or some flour."

"But I want some milk for the child; she can't eat bread and fish and potatoes now she's ill. Couldn't you run up to the farm, Dick, and ask Mrs. Hayes if she wants a bit o' fish, and I'll be thankful for a drop o' milk for it."

But Dick looked dubious. "I'd like to go," he said, "if it was only to have a word with Harry Hayes, and ask him about his rabbits; but father don't like the farm people now, and he said I was never to speak to them. You know they've had a quarrel."

"Well, what are we to do? They are our only neighbours, and they ain't a bad sort either, Mrs. Hayes is a kind soul, who has children of her own, and would let me have milk in a minute if she knew I wanted it for this poor little mite," said Mrs. Coomber, in perplexity as to the best thing to do.

"I'll go, mother, if you can find any fish worth taking," at last said Dick.

Mrs. Coomber went and turned over what the boys had brought. The best had been picked out and sent to Fellness, and what was left was not more than sufficient for themselves; but she carefully looked out the largest she could find and washed it. While she was doing this her husband came in.

"It's a poor take to-day, mother," he said.

"Yes, and I wanted a bit extra, to get some milk for the child," said Mrs. Coomber; "but I think I can manage with this," she said, still busying herself

with the fish, and not turning to look at her husband.

"What are yer goin' to do wi' it?" he inquired.

"I want to send Dick up to the farm; Mrs. Hayes will give me some milk for it, I know," replied his wife, trying to speak in a matter-of-fact tone.

Illustration

"'ME LIKES 'OU,' SHE SAID." [*See page* 40.

"And you'd send Dick to that place when I said they shouldn't go near the house," said her husband, angrily. "Take the fish and cook it for supper. Not a bit o' my fish shall they have."

"But the milk. What am I to do for the milk for the child now she's ill?"

"What have yer done afore?" demanded her husband; and the poor woman was obliged to confess that she had taken milk from the man as he went past in his cart to the village each day since the child had been there. "She couldn't do wi'out milk," protested Mrs. Coomber.

"How do you know she couldn't?" said her husband. "What business have you to spend money for milk—what business have you wi' money at all?" he inquired, suspiciously; for he saw in this wastefulness a cause for the recent strange scarcity of whisky; and he felt he had been deeply wronged. His quarrel with Hayes had also been disregarded, and this made him further angry with his wife, and he strictly charged her never to have any more dealings with any of the farm people.

"We can live very well without milk," he said. "I will feed the little 'un, and you'll see she can eat fish and bread as well as the rest of us."

It was useless for Mrs. Coomber to protest against this; she knew if her husband made up his mind to do anything he would do it; but she almost dreaded supper-time coming, for she could not tell how Tiny would like the proposed change in her nurse and diet.

But as it happened the little girl was very pleased to be lifted out of bed and seated on Coomber's knee at the table.

"Me likes 'ou," she said, patting his cheek with her little white hand; and she ate the fish and bread as though she was quite used to such food.

decoration

decoration

CHAPTER III.

TINY'S HOPE.

The slant rays of the setting sun lay on the wide stretch of level sand surrounding Bermuda Point, for the tide was out, and had left it smooth, or slightly rippled as with tiny wavelets. Standing at the very edge of the sands, with her eyes shaded, and her clothes blowing round her bare legs, was a little fair-haired girl. She was slender and delicate-looking still, in spite of the sun-browned arms and face. Months had passed, but Tiny was still at the Point.

She stood gazing seawards for some minutes, and then turned and walked slowly across the rippled sand.

"I can't see him, Dick," she said, in a disappointed tone.

"Oh, well, never mind," said the boy, who sat scooping the loose sand up in a heap, beyond the reach of the present ordinary tides.

"Have you filled both the baskets?" asked the little girl, as she waded through the loose dry sand to where the boy was sitting.

"No, that I ain't," answered Dick, "mother said you could pick the samphire to-day."

"Yes, but you said you'd help me," said the girl, walking steadily across the sand to the salt-marsh beyond. Here the samphire grew in abundance, and the little girl set to work to fill the two large baskets that stood near.

"You might come and help, Dick," she called, hardly repressing a sob as she spoke.

"Look here, I'll help if you'll just come and make some more of them letters. You said you would, you know," added the boy, still piling up the sand.

"Oh, Dick, you know I can't; you know I've forgot a'most everything since I've been here;" and this time the little girl fairly burst into tears, and sat down beside the half-filled baskets, and sobbed as though her heart would break.

The boy's heart was touched at the sight of her distress, and he ran across to comfort her.

"Don't cry, Tiny; I'll help yer, and then we'll try agin at the letters. I know three —A B C: you'll soon find out about the others, and make 'em in the sand for me."

But Tiny shook her head. "I'd know 'em if I had a book," she said, sadly; "ain't it a pity daddy ain't got one?"

"What 'ud be the good of books to dad?" said Dick. "Harry Hayes has got some, I know; but then he goes to school, and knows all about 'em. There, let's forget we see him with that book yesterday, for it ain't no good for us to think about it," concluded Dick; for he did not like to see Tiny's tears, and the easiest way of banishing them was to forget the original cause, he thought. But the little girl was not of the same opinion. She shook her head sadly as she said—

"I've forgot a'most everything my mother told me."

"Oh, that you ain't," contradicted the boy, "You never forget to say your prayers before you go to bed. I wonder you ain't forgot that; I should, I know."

"How could you, Dick, if you knew God was waiting to hear you?" said Tiny, lifting her serious blue eyes to his face.

"Then why ain't He waiting to hear me?" asked Dick.

The question seemed to puzzle the little girl for a minute or two; but at length she said—

"He is, Dick, I think; I'm a'most sure He's waiting for yer to begin."

"Then He's waited a good while," said Dick, bluntly; and he got up and began to pull away at the samphire, by way of working off or digesting the wonderful thought. After working away in silence for some minutes, Dick said—

"D'ye think God cares for us down here at Bermuda Point?"

Tiny paused, with her hands full of samphire.

"Why shouldn't He?" she said. "I know He cares for me. He loves me," she added, in a tone of triumph; "my mother told me so. She said He loved me just as well as she did."

"I'd like to know whether He cares about me," said Dick. "D'ye think yer could find out for us, Tiny? Yer see everybody likes you—mother, and father, and Bob; and Harry Hayes showed you his book yesterday. You see you're a gal, and I think you're pretty," added Dick, critically; "so it 'ud be a wonder if He didn't like you."

"And why shouldn't He love you, Dick?" said Tiny.

Dick looked down at the patched, ragged, nondescript garments that served him as jacket and trousers, and then at his bare, sunburnt arms and legs. "Well, I'm just Dick of the Point. I ain't a gal, and I ain't pretty." Nobody could dispute the latter fact, which Dick himself seemed to consider conclusive against any interest being taken in him, for he heaved a sigh as he returned to his work of picking the samphire.

The sigh was not lost on Tiny. "Look here, Dick," she said, "you ain't a gal, and p'r'aps you ain't pretty, but I love you;" and she threw her arms round his neck as he stooped over the basket. "I love yer, Dick, and I'll find out all about it for yer. I'm a'most sure God loves yer too."

"Oh, He can't yet, yer know," said Dick, drawing his arms across his eyes to conceal the tears that had suddenly come into them. "I don't never say no prayers nor nothing. I ain't never heerd about Him, only when dad swears, till you come and said your prayers to Him."

"Still, He might, yer know," said Tiny; "but if you'll help, I'll find out all about it."

"What can yer do?" asked Dick.

"Well, I'll tell yer why I want dad to come home soon to-night," said Tiny, resting her hands on the basket, and looking anxiously across the sea. "Mother said he'd take the samphire by boat to Fellness, and I thought perhaps he'd take me too."

"Well, s'pose he did?" said Dick, who could see no connection between a visit to the village and the attainment of the knowledge they both desired.

"Why, then I might get a book," said Tiny. "I'd go with dad to sell the samphire; and then we'd see the shops; and if he had a good take, and we got a lot of samphire, he'd have enough money to buy me a book, as well as the bread and flour and tea."

Dick burst into a loud laugh. "So this is your secret; this is what you've been thinking of like a little goose all day."

Tiny was half offended. "You needn't laugh," she said; "I shall do it, Dick."

"Will yer?" he said, in a teasing tone. "If there wasn't no whisky, and there was bookshops at Fellness, you might. Why, what do you think the village is like?"

he asked.

"Like? Oh, I dunno! Everything comes from Fellness," added the little girl, vaguely.

To the dwellers at the Point, the little fishing-village was the centre of the universe; and Tiny, with faint recollections of a large town, with broad streets, and rows of shops all brilliantly lighted at night, had formed magnificently vague notions of Fellness as being something like this; and she had only got to go there, and it would be easy to coax the old fisherman to buy her a book, as she coaxed him to build her a castle in the sand, or take her on his knee and tell her tales of ships that had been wrecked on the bar sands.

"But do you know what Fellness is like?" persisted Dick. "There ain't no shops at all—only one, where they sells flour, and bread, and 'bacca, and tea, and sugar, and soap. They has meat there sometimes; but I never sees no books, and I don't believe they ever has 'em there," concluded the boy.

"Perhaps they keeps 'em in a box where you can't see 'em," suggested Tiny, who was very unwilling to relinquish her hope.

"Pigs might fly, and they will when they sells books at Fellness," remarked Dick.

"Where does Harry Hayes get his from?" suddenly asked the girl; and at the same moment she espied a speck on the horizon, which she decided was a fisherman's boat. "He's coming, Dick, dad's coming," she exclaimed. "Make haste—make haste and fill up the baskets;" and she tore away at the seaweed, piling it into the baskets as fast as her small hands would permit. "Now we'll carry one down," she said, taking hold of the handle. "Catch hold, Dick;" for she wanted to be at the edge of the sands by the time the boat touched the shore.

But Dick was in no such hurry to meet his father. "There's plenty of time," he said, leisurely untying a knot in a piece of string.

"No there isn't, Dick; don't you know I'm going to Fellness in the boat."

"But you're afraid," said the boy; "ain't father tried to coax you lots o' times to go out with him, and yer never would? You'll just get to the edge, and when yer sees it rock a bit yer'll run away."

"No, I won't, Dick, this time," said the little girl. But as she spoke a shiver of fear and dread ran through her frame at the thought of the swaying boat.

Dick saw it, and laughed. "Didn't I tell yer you was afraid," he said, in a mocking

tone; "what's the good of going down there, when you're frightened?"

"But I want a book, Dick; I must learn to read, and find out what we want to know. Oh, do make haste!" she added, as she saw the boat approaching the shore.

Dick was still laughing, but he helped her carry the basket, though he teased her as they went along about being frightened. They got across the sands with their samphire, just as Coomber and Bob were springing ashore.

"Oh, daddy, take me with yer to Fellness," called Tiny, shutting her eyes as she spoke that she might not see the treacherous waves and the swaying boat.

"Halloo, halloo! What now, deary?" exclaimed Coomber. And it was wonderful to see the change in his hard face as he lifted the little girl in his arms and kissed her.

"She says she'll go," said Dick, "but I don't believe she means it."

"Yes I do. You'll take me, daddy, won't yer—'cos I've picked a lot of samphire—all that, and another basketful up there? Go and fetch it, Bob, and daddy can put it in the boat. And I'm going, too."

"So you shall, deary, so you shall," said the old fisherman, in a pleased tone, for he had often tried to coax her out with him on the sea; but the memory of that awful night on the bar sands still clung to her, and the sight of the boat, swayed about at the mercy of the waves, filled her with a nameless terror.

"There won't be a storm, will there?" asked Tiny, with a shiver of fear, as the fisherman carefully lifted her in and placed her beside the basket of samphire.

"My deary, if I thought the wind 'ud be even a bit fresh to-night, I wouldn't take yer," said the fisherman, in an earnest tone.

He had never been so tender with one of his own children—unless it was to the little girl lying in the churchyard—as he was to this little waif of the sea; and now, as he pushed off from the shore, he was careful to keep the old boat as steady as possible, and sat watching her little frightened face as he plied his oars. He kept as close to the beach, too, as he well could, just skirting the sand-banks, so that she should have the comfort of seeing the land all the way along.

After a few minutes Tiny grew less frightened, and ventured to ask a question about where they were going.

"Oh, I'll take yer to see Dame Peters while Bob unloads the boat," said Coomber,

nodding at her in an approving manner.

"And shall I see the shops?" asked Tiny; for she did not believe what Dick had told her.

"Shops, shops!" repeated the fisherman, resting on his oars for a minute to stare at the little girl. "Well, there's a shop," he said, slowly; "but I don't see what you can want there."

"Do they sell books?" asked Tiny, eagerly.

For answer the fisherman burst into a loud laugh. "What does a little 'un like you know about books?" he said. "But I know of something they do sell, as 'll suit you a deal better; they sell sweets, and almond rock, as well as 'bacca and bread, and you shall have some, my deary."

The fisherman expected a joyous outburst in anticipation of these unwonted dainties, but the little girl said slowly—

"Don't they sell books, too, daddy? I'd rather have a book than almond rock," she added.

"Why, what do you want with a book, a little 'un like you?" said Coomber, impatiently.

"We both wants it, Dick and me; we wants to find out whether God loves boys as well as gals."

The fisherman looked at her serious little face for a minute, and then burst into a laugh again. "Well, you are a rum 'un as ever I came across. Did you hear that, Bob?" he asked, appealing to his elder son, who was steering. Bob turned his sulky face round.

"What's she saying now?" he asked.

"What was, it little 'un—whether God loved boys and gals, wasn't it?" asked the fisherman, who was highly amused at the question.

"He don't love none of us, I can tell her that," said Bob, sharply. "He forgot us long ago, if ever He knowed anything about us."

"There, what d'ye think o' that, little 'un?" said the fisherman, pulling away at the oars.

Tiny looked perplexed for a minute or two, but at length she said: "I think God knows all about the Point, 'cos He loves me, and He listens when I say my

prayers. But s'pose I tell him," she suddenly added, as though the thought had just occurred to her; "I can ask Him to bless you and mammy, and Dick and Bob. But I should like to get a book," she said, in conclusion.

"Oh, the sweets 'll do as well," said the fisherman, who saw little use in books. He might have humoured Tiny in what he looked upon as a most extraordinary whim, but he never remembered seeing such a thing as a book in Fellness all the years he had known the place. People might have books, some of them, at least, but they were not of much use to fisher-folks, and he rather despised them.

The sun had gone down before they landed; but the moon was rising; and so, between daylight and moonlight, they would be able to get back without any difficulty, when the fish and samphire were disposed of.

"Now, Bob, get her unloaded, while I take the little 'un up to see Dame Peters," said Coomber, as he lifted Tiny out of the boat.

She was looking round eagerly in search of the houses and shops, for in spite of what she had been told, she could not divest herself of the idea that Fellness was a grand, glorious place, where everything could be bought if people only had fish and seaweed enough; and surely two big baskets of samphire were sufficient to buy a book.

But to her disappointment she saw only a few lounging fishermen and children —like herself and Dick—instead of the crowds of people she had expected; and as for shops—well, she could see a row of stone cottages at a distance. There might be a dozen, perhaps, and a few sheds and outbuildings, but the rest of the landscape was flat and unoccupied as their own Point; and at the sight Tiny hid her face in the fisherman's neck and burst into tears.

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CHAPTER IV.

TINY'S TREASURE.

"Well, now, if you can make her out, it's more than I can," said Coomber, pausing in the doorway of Dame Peters' cottage, after he had seated Tiny by the old woman's fire.

"Oh, leave her here for half an hour; she'll be all right by the time you come back; there's no 'counting for children, and she may feel frightened a bit, for all she ain't cried till she got ashore."

"It's just that that beats me," said the fisherman; "she's as lively as you please in the boat, but as soon as she gets out, down she pops her head, and begins to pipe her eye."

"Well, there, you go and look after Perkins and the fish, and I'll see to her," said Dame Peters, a little impatiently; for she had some potatoes cooking for her husband's supper, and she knew they needed attention. After looking to these, she turned to Tiny, who had dried her tears by this time, and sat watching the old woman. "D'ye like to see pictures, deary?" she asked; and at the same time she opened the top drawer of an old-fashioned chest of drawers, and brought out a print, which she laid on the table, and lifted Tiny, chair and all, close up to look at it.

Pictures were not to be seen in every cottage a few years ago, as they may be now. The *Band of Hope Review* and *British Workman* had not been heard of in Fellness at the time of which we write, and so Dame Peters was very choice of her picture, although she knew nothing about the reading at the back of it.

Tiny brightened up wonderfully when her eyes fell upon this treasure; but after looking at it for some minutes, while Dame Peters turned out the potatoes, she ventured to lift it up and look at the other side, and she exclaimed joyfully: "Oh, it's a book! There's reading on it!"

"What, what!" exclaimed the old woman, turning from the fireplace to see what had happened. "What is it, child?"

"See, see, there's reading—G O D! What does that spell?" asked Tiny, looking

up in the old woman's face, her finger still resting on the word she had picked out.

"Bless the child, how should I know? S'pose it is some sort of reading, as you say; but I never learned a letter in my life."

"And I've a'most forgot," said Tiny, sadly; and then her finger roved over the printed page, and she found that she could remember most of the letters now she saw them again; but how to put them together was the difficulty. She had forgotten how to do this entirely. G O D spelt a word familiar enough to her at one time, but which of all the words she used now those letters were intended to signify, she could not remember. Again and again her finger returned to the well-remembered letters, but beyond this her memory failed her; and she sat, with puckered brow and steadfast eyes, still looking at the printed page instead of the picture, when Coomber came back.

"Oh, daddy, daddy, look here!" exclaimed Tiny; "here's a book with reading!"

"She's just sat and looked at them letters, as she calls 'em, ever since you've been gone," said Dame Peters, in a half-offended tone; for her picture was not valued as much as it ought to be, she thought.

"Oh, she's a rum 'un," said Coomber. "Well, now, are you ready, little 'un?" he asked.

Tiny looked up wistfully in the old woman's face. "Couldn't I take this home, and show it to Dick?" she asked, timidly, laying her hand on the print.

"Take my picture home!" exclaimed the old woman.

Coomber turned the paper over, and looked at it contemptuously. "Peters got this when he went to Grimsby, I s'pose?" he said.

"Yes, he did."

"Well now, couldn't you let her have it, and let Peters bring you another?" said the fisherman, who was anxious that his darling should be gratified if possible.

But the old woman was little more than a child herself over this picture, and was unwilling to part with it at first. At last she agreed to sell it to Tiny for a basket of samphire, for this seaweed made a kind of pickle among the fisher-folk, and was of some marketable value, too, for it did not grow everywhere along the coast, although round Bermuda Point it flourished in great luxuriance.

Tiny was only too glad to obtain such a treasure on such easy terms, although

she was paying about five times the value of it; and when it had been folded up and carefully stowed away in Coomber's pocket, she was quite ready to go to the boat, although Dame Peters pressed them to stay and have some of the hot potatoes for supper.

Tiny seemed brimful of joy that night; and when she was seated in the boat, and they were rowing over the placid water, she so far forgot her fears as to begin singing. Something in the surroundings had recalled to her mind the time when she used to sing nearly every night her mother's favourite hymn. It all came back to her as freshly as though she had sung it only last week; and her sweet young voice rang out bold and clear—

"Star of Peace to wanderers weary,
  Bright the beams that smile on me;
Cheer the pilot's vision dreary,
 Far, far at sea."

She paused there, not feeling quite sure of the next verse; but Coomber said quickly—

"Go on, deary, go on; don't you know the next bit?"

"I'll try," said Tiny; and again the voice rang out in its childish treble—

"Star of Hope, gleam on the billow,
  Bless the soul that sighs for Thee;
Bless the sailor's lonely pillow,
  Far, far at sea."

"Who told you that, deary?" asked the fisherman, eagerly, when she paused again.

"My mother used to sing it every night. She used to say it was meant for daddy. And she told me I must always sing it, too, only somehow I've forgot everything since I came here."

"Never mind the rest, deary; try and think about that. It's just the song for a sailor and a sailor's lass."

"That's just what my mother used to say—that I was a sailor's lass!" exclaimed Tiny.

"And she taught you just the right kind of a song. Now try a bit more, deary," he added, coaxingly.

"Star of Faith, when winds are mocking
  All his toil, he flies to Thee;
 Save him, on the billows rocking,
Far, far at sea."

"I don't think I know any more," said the child, as she finished this verse.

"Well, you've done first-rate, deary; and mind, you must sing that song to me every night," he added.

For a little while they went on in silence, and nothing could be heard but the gentle lap, lap of the waves at the side of the boat, until Coomber said: "Come, sing to us again about that sailor's star. Bob, you try and pick it up as she sings," he added.

So the verses were sung through again, and without a break this time; and Tiny was able to recall the last verse, too, and sang—

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"Star Divine, oh! safely guide him,
  Bring the wanderer back to Thee;
Sore temptations long have tried him,
  Far, far at sea."
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"Bravo, little 'un," exclaimed Bob, who was completely charmed out of his sulky mood by the singing.

"I say, Bob," suddenly exclaimed Coomber, "is the bottle up there?"

"I ain't seen the bottle," sulkily responded the lad, his ill-humour returning at once.

"I—I took it up, and told 'em to fill it," exclaimed Coomber; and as he spoke he drew in his oars, and felt under the seat, and all round the boat. "I must ha' forgot it, thinking about the little 'un and her picture," he said, after searching round the boat in vain.

"It's too late to go back," said Bob; "it'll be dark soon."

"Ye-es, it's too late to go back with the child," said Coomber, slowly and regretfully; though what he should do without his nightly dose of whisky he did not know.

"Sing again," whispered Bob to Tiny; and the next minute the little voice rang out once more its "Star of Peace."

It brought peace to the angry fisherman—the more angry, perhaps, because he had nobody but himself to blame that the bottle had been left behind. Before they landed the singing had worked its mysterious charm, and the fisherman had almost forgotten his anger, and his bottle, too.

"You tie up the boat, and make haste in, Bob," he said, as he took the little girl in his arms, and stepped out upon the shore. A light was shining in the window of the old boat-house, and Tiny was all impatience to get home and show her treasure to Dick.

"Take it out of your pocket, daddy, and give it to me," she said, as they were crossing the sands; and the moment the door was opened she ran in, exclaiming, "I've got it! I've got it, Dick!"

"Hush, hush, deary; Dick and Tom have gone to bed, and both are fast asleep. Come in and get your supper; it's been waiting ever so long for you." As she spoke, the poor woman cast several furtive glances at her husband, fearing that he was more than usually morose, as he had not spoken; but, to her surprise, he said, in a merry tone:

"Bless you, mother, the little 'un has got something better than supper. Dame Peters wanted her to stay and have some hot potatoes; but she was in such a hurry to be off with her prize that she wouldn't look at the potatoes."

"I've got some reading," said Tiny, in a delighted whisper, holding up her sheet of paper.

"Why, what's the good of that?" exclaimed Mrs. Coomber, in a disappointed tone. "Nobody at the Point can read, unless it's the Hayes' at the farm."

"And she'd better not let me catch her with any of them," put in Coomber, sharply.

"Dick and me are going to learn to read by ourselves," announced Tiny, spreading out her picture on the table. This would enhance its value to everybody, she thought, since Dame Peters set such store by it solely because of the picture. And so she did not venture to turn it over to con the letters on the other side until after Bob had come in, and they had all looked at it.

"What's it all about?" asked Bob, turning to the smoking plate of fish which his mother had just placed on the table.

"Don't you see it's a kind man putting his hand on the boys' heads?" said Tiny, rather scornfully.

"Oh, anybody can see that," said Bob. "But what does it mean? That's what I want to know."

But Tiny could only shake her head as she gazed earnestly at the print. "I dunno what it is," she said, with a sigh.

"Come, come, you must put that away for to-night," said Mrs. Coomber; "you ought to have been in bed an hour ago;" and she would have taken the picture away, but Tiny hastily snatched it up, and, carefully folding it, wrapped it in

another piece of paper, and then begged that it might be put away in a drawer for fear it should be lost before the morning.

Mrs. Coomber smiled as she took it from her hand. "I'll take care of it," she said, "and you go and get your supper."

It was not often that the fisherman's family were up so late as this, but no one seemed in a hurry to go to bed. Coomber himself was so good-tempered that his wife and Bob forgot their habitual fear of him in listening to his account of how brave Tiny had been, and how Dame Peters thought she was growing very fast. Then Tiny had to sing one verse of "Star of Peace," after she had finished her supper—Mrs. Coomber would not let her sing more than that, for she was looking very sleepy and tired—and then they all went to bed, with a strange, new feeling of peace and content, Mrs. Coomber vaguely wondering what had become of the whisky bottle, and wishing every night could be like this.

As soon as her eyes were open the next morning Tiny thought of her treasure, and crept into the boys' room to tell Dick the wonderful news. But to her surprise she found the bed was empty; and, peeping into the kitchen, saw Mrs. Coomber washing up the breakfast things.

"Oh, mammy, what is the time?" she exclaimed, but yawning as she spoke.

"Oh, you're awake at last. Make haste and put your clothes on, and come and have your breakfast," said Mrs. Coomber.

"Where's Dick?" asked Tiny.

"He's helping daddy and Bob with the net; and you can go, too, when you've had your breakfast. Daddy wouldn't let the boys come and wake you 'cos you was so tired last night."

"What are they doing to the net?" asked Tiny, as she came to the table.

"Mending it, of course. Daddy's going shrimping to-day."

"What a bother that net is," said Tiny. "Daddy's always mending it."

"Yes, so he is, deary. It's old, you see, and we can't afford to get a new one."

"I've got to get a lot of samphire to-day, and I promised Dick I'd make some more letters for him in the sand," said Tiny, meditatively.

"But daddy wants you to help him with the net," suggested Mrs. Coomber. The little girl had always been so pliant, so amenable to control, that Mrs. Coomber was surprised to hear her say passionately—

"I won't do that nasty net. I must pick the samphire for Dame Peters, and show Dick my picture, first;" and then she snatched up a basket, and ran out, not to the sands, where the fisherman and his boys sat mending the torn net, but away to the salt-marsh, where the seaweed grew thickest, and she could fill her basket most quickly. In an hour or two she came home, looking tired and cross.

"Ain't Dick come home yet?" she asked, throwing herself on the floor.

"They ain't done the net yet. Tom came to fetch you a little while ago."

"I don't want Tom, I want Dick. We're going to make some letters, and learn to read," said Tiny.

"You'd better leave the reading alone, if it makes you so cross," said Mrs. Coomber.

"No, it don't make me cross; it's that nasty net."

"But you always liked to help daddy wind the string and mend the net before. Why don't you go to them now?"

But Tiny would not move. She lay on the floor, kicking and grumbling, because Dick could not leave the net and come and see her picture.

"You're a very naughty girl, Tiny," said Mrs. Coomber at last; "and I don't see how you can think God will love you if you don't try to be good."

The little girl sat up instantly, and looked earnestly into her face. "My other mammy used to say something like that," she said, slowly. And then she burst into tears, and ran and shut herself in the boys' bedroom.

What passed there, Mrs. Coomber did not know; but, half an hour afterwards, as she glanced out of the little kitchen window, she saw her running across the sands to where the group of boys sat mending the old net; and she smiled as she thought of what her words had done. She did not know what a hard fight Tiny had had with herself before she could make up her mind to give up her own way; she only thought how pleased her husband would be when he saw the child come running towards him, and that a fit of ill-humour, from which they would probably all have suffered, had been warded off by the little girl's conquest of herself.

But neither Tiny nor Mrs. Coomber ever forgot that day. A new element was introduced into the lives of the fisherman's family. The little girl learned her first lesson in self-control, and Dick and Tom began to master the difficulties of the

alphabet; for, when the net was finished, and Bob and his father waded out into the sea on their shrimping expedition, Tiny ran and fetched her pretty picture to show the boys, and then they all set to work with bits of stick to make the letters in the sand.

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CHAPTER V.

ON THE SANDS.

Tiny was somewhat disappointed as the days went on to find that her pupils, Tom and Dick, took less and less interest in learning the letters she marked in the sand, or pointed out on the paper. They teased her to know how to put the letters together and make them into words which they could understand. But, alas! labour as she would, Tiny could not get over this difficulty even for herself. She had a dim idea that G O D spelt God, but she could not be quite sure—not sure enough to tell Dick that it was so. It was enough, however, to quicken her own interest in what the lines of letters might be able to tell her if only she could solve the mystery of putting them into words, for doubtless they would clear up her anxiety as to whether God loved boys as well as girls.

She did not spend her whole time poring over her picture. She gathered samphire, helped to sort the fish when it was brought in, or mend the much-despised net; but every day she spent some time diligently tracing out the letters she knew and spelling over G O D.

She might have mastered the difficulty with very little trouble if the fisherman had been less obstinate in his quarrel with the farm people, for Harry Hayes and his sisters were often down on the sands, sometimes bringing their books with them, and Dick, who longed to join them in their play, tried to persuade Tiny to go and ask them to help her with the reading difficulty.

"Dad won't say anything to you, even if he should see you talking; but he won't see, and I won't tell," urged Dick, one day, when the children from the farm were at play among the sandhills, and occasionally casting sidelong glances towards Dick and Tiny.

But the little girl only shook her head. "I can't, Dick," she said; "God wouldn't like it; mother told me that long ago."

"But how is He to know if you don't tell Him?" said the boy, in an impatient tone.

"Don't you know that God can see us all the time; that He's taking care of us

always?" said Tiny, slowly.

"Oh, come! what'll you tell us next?" said Dick, looking over his shoulder with a gesture of fear. "He ain't here now, you know," he added.

"Yes he is," said the little girl, confidently; "mother said God was a Spirit. I dunno what that is, but it's just as real as the wind. We can't see that you know, but it's real; and we can't see God, but He's close to us all the time."

The boy crept closer to her while she was speaking. "What makes you talk like that?" he said, in a half-frightened tone.

"What's a matter, Dick?" she asked, not understanding his fear. "Don't you like to think God is close to you, and all round you," she suddenly added, in surprise.

Dick shook his head. "Nobody never thinks about God at Bermuda Point, so p'r'aps He don't come here," he said, at last, in a tone of relief. "Oh, I say, Tiny, look! Harry Hayes has got a book! Let's go and see what it's about!"

"Well, we'll ask dad when he come home to-night, and p'r'aps he'll let us," said the little girl, turning resolutely to her own paper again.

"Oh, then, it's dad you're afraid of, and not God?" said Dick.

"Afraid! What do you mean?" asked Tiny. "God loves me, and takes care of me, and so does daddy; and if I was to talk to Harry Hayes, it would make him cross, and God doesn't like us to make people cross; and little gals has to do as they are told, you know."

"Oh yes; I know all about that," said Dick; "but what do you suppose God thinks of dad when he makes himself cross with the whisky?"

"Oh! He's dreadfully sorry, Dick, I know He is, for He makes me afraid of him sometimes, when he's had a big lot; and he's just the dearest daddy when he forgets to bring the bottle home from Fellness."

"Ah, but that ain't often," grunted Dick; "and if God wouldn't like you to talk to Harry Hayes, 'cos dad says you musn't, I'd like to know what He thinks of dad sometimes, that's all." And then Dick ran away, for if he could not speak to the farm children, he liked to be near them when they came to play on the sands.

A minute or two after Dick had left her, Tiny was startled by a sound close at hand, and, looking round, she saw Coomber coming from the other side of the sandhill.

"Oh, dad, I thought you was out in the boat," she said.

Illustration

**"'I WANT YOU TO SING A BIT,
WHILE I RUB AWAY AT THIS OLD
GUN.'" [*See page 81.***

"Bob and Tom have gone by themselves to-day, for I wanted to clean the gun ready for winter," said the fisherman, still rubbing at the lock with a piece of oiled rag.

Tiny looked up at him half shyly, half curiously, for if he had only been on the other side of the sand-ridge, he must have heard all she and Dick had been talking about.

But if he had heard the fisherman took no notice of what had passed.

"Come, I want you to sing a bit, while I rub away at this old gun," he said. "Sing 'Star of Peace'; it'll sound first-rate out here;" as though he had never heard it out there before, when, as a matter of fact, scarcely a day passed but she sang it to please him.

When she had finished, he said, quickly: "What do you think about that 'Star of Peace' deary? It's the sailor's star, you know, so I've got a sort of share in it like."

"I think it means God. I'm a'most sure mother said it meant God," added the little girl.

"Ah, then, I don't think there's much share of it for me," said Coomber, somewhat sadly; and he turned to rubbing his gun again, and began talking about it—how rusty he had found it, and how he would have to use it more than ever when winter came, for the boat was growing old, and would not stand much more knocking about by the rough wintry sea; so he and Bob must shoot more wild birds, and only go out in calm weather when winter came. Then half shyly, and with apparent effort, he brought the conversation round so as to include Farmer Hayes.

"He ain't a bad sort, you know, Tiny, if he could just remember that a fisherman is a bit proud and independent, though he may be poor; and if you could do one of them young 'uns a good turn any time, why, you're a sailor's lass, yer know, and a sailor is always ready to do a good turn to anybody."

"Yes, daddy," said Tiny, slowly and thoughtfully; and then, after a minute's

pause, she said: "Daddy, I think Harry or Polly would just like to help me a bit with this reading."

For answer the fisherman burst into a loud laugh. "That's what you'd like, I s'pose?" he said, as he looked at her.

"Yes; I want to find out about this picture, and these letters tell all about it, I know—if I only could find out what they mean," said Tiny, eagerly.

"Oh, well, when I'm gone indoors you can go and ask 'em if they'd like to help you," he said, with another short laugh. "Maybe you'll be able to tell us all about it when winter comes, and it'll soon be here now," added the fisherman, with a sigh.

Never before had Coomber looked forward with such dread to the winter. Until lately he had always thought the fishing-boat would "last his time," as he used to say; but he had patched and repaired it so often lately, until at last the conviction had been forced upon him that it was worn out; and to be caught in a sudden squall on the open sea, would inevitably break her up, and all who were in her would meet with a watery grave. He was as brave as a lion; but to know that his boat was gradually going to pieces, and that its timbers might part company at almost any moment, made even his courage quail; especially when he thought of his wife, and the boys, and this little helpless girl. Some hard things had been said at Fellness about his folly in taking her upon his hands when she could without difficulty have been sent to the poorhouse. A girl was such a useless burden, never likely to be helpful in managing a boat, as a boy might be; and it was clear that no reward would ever be obtained from her friends, even if they were found, for her clothing made it evident that she was only the child of poor parents.

This had been the reasoning among the Fellness busybodies ever since Coomber had announced his intention of taking the little girl home; but he was as obstinate in this as in most other things. He had followed his own will, or rather the God-like compassion of his own heart, in spite of the poverty that surrounded him, and the hard struggle he often had to get bread enough for his own children.

"I'll just have to stay out a bit longer, or go out in the boat a bit oftener," he said, with a light laugh, when they attempted to reason him out of his project. He did not know then that the days of his boat were numbered; but he knew it now—knew that starvation stared them in the face, and at no distant date either. He could never hope to buy a new boat. It would cost over twenty pounds, and he

seldom owned twenty pence over the day's stock of bread and other household necessaries. Among these he counted his whisky; for that a fisherman could do his work without a daily supply of ardent spirits never entered his head. Blue ribbon armies and temperance crusades had never been heard of, and it was a fixed belief among the fisher folk that a man could not work without drinking as well as eating, and drinking deeply, too.

So Coomber never thought of curtailing his daily allowance of grog to meet the additional expense of his household: he rather increased the allowance, that he might be able to work the boat better, as he fancied, and so catch more fish. When he forgot his bottle and left it at Fellness, it struck him as something all but marvellous that he should be able to work the next day without his usual drams, but it had not convinced him that he could do without it all together. Of its effect upon himself, in making him sullen, morose, and disagreeable, he was in absolute ignorance, and so the children's talk about it came upon him as a revelation. He knew that Tiny sometimes shrank from and avoided him; but he had considered it a mere childish whim, not to be accounted for by anything in himself; and so to hear that she was absolutely afraid of him sometimes was something to make him think more deeply than he had ever done in his life before.

But he did not say a word to Tiny about this. When he had done rubbing his gun he carried it home, and Tiny was left free to make acquaintance with the farm children.

She walked shyly up to where they were sitting—Polly reading, and Harry throwing sand at Dick, who had seated himself at a short distance, and was returning the salute.

"Would—wouldn't you like to tell me about these letters, please?" said Tiny, holding out her paper to Polly.

"Well, that's a rum way of asking," said Harry, with a laugh. "Suppose she wouldn't now, little 'un," he added.

"Then she mustn't," said Tiny, stoutly; though the tears welled up to her eyes at the thought of all her hopes being overthrown just when they seemed about to be realised.

"Don't, Harry; what a tease you are!" said his sister. "I should like to tell you, dear," she added, in a patronising tone. "Come and sit down here, and tell me what you want."

"It's what you want; don't forget that, Polly, else she'll get her back up, and go off again," laughed her brother; but he was not sorry the embargo had been taken off their intercourse with the fisherman's family; for although he had had surreptitious dealings with boys sometimes, they had to be so watchful lest they should be discovered that the play was considerably hindered. Now he understood that this advance on Tiny's part was a direct concession from Coomber himself, for he and the boys had long ago agreed to try and draw the little girl into some intimacy as the only way of breaking down the restrictions laid upon them. But Tiny had proved obstinate. She had been asked again and again, but she had always returned the same answer: "Daddy would let her some day, and then she would play with them." So Harry Hayes was perfectly aware that she had won the fisherman's consent at last, although no word had been said about it.

When the girls were left to themselves, Polly took up the picture and looked at it, then turned it over and read, "God is good to all: He loves both boys and girls." At this point Tiny interrupted her by laying her hand on her arm, and saying eagerly: "Are you quite sure that is what it says?"

"Why, don't you think I can read?" said Polly, in a half-offended tone. But the subject was new to her, and so she was anxious to read further, and turned to the page again and read on. At the bottom was a line or two in smaller print, and Polly read these longer words with a touch of pride: "Jesus said, Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God."

"Then this must be Jesus, and these are the little children," concluded Polly, as she turned over the paper to look at the picture again.

The two girls sat and looked at it and talked about it for a few minutes, and then Tiny said wistfully: "Will you show me now how you make up them nice words?"

"Oh, it's easy enough if you know the letters; but you must learn the letters first," said Polly; and she proceeded to tell Tiny the name of each; and the little girl had the satisfaction of knowing now that she had remembered them quite correctly, and that G O D did spell God, as she had surmised.

She was not long now in putting other words together; and before she went home she was able to spell out the first two lines of the printed page, for they were all easy words, and intended for beginners.

What a triumph it was to Tiny to be able to read out to the fisherman's family what she had learned on the sands that day. She was allowed to have the candle all to herself after supper, and they sat round the table looking at each other in wondering amazement as her little finger travelled along the page, and she spelt out the wonderful news, "'God is good to all: He loves both boys and girls.' It's true, Dick, what I told you, ain't it?" she said, in a tone of delighted satisfaction.

Dick scratched his head, and looked round at his father, wondering what he would think or say. For a minute or two the fisherman smoked his pipe in silence. At length, taking it from his mouth, he said, in a slow, meditative fashion: "Well, little 'un, I s'pose if it's printed that way it's true; and if it is, why I s'pose we've all got a share in that 'Star of Peace' we was talking about to-day."

Tiny did not quite follow his train of thought; but she nodded her head, and then proceeded to tell them what she had heard about the picture, and the conclusion she and Polly had arrived at upon the subject—that Jesus, the kind, loving man of the picture, had come to show them how kind God was to them.
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CHAPTER VI.

BAD TIMES.

Winter around Bermuda Point was at all times a dreary season, and the only thing its few inhabitants could hope for was that its reign might be as short as possible. A fine, calm autumn was hailed as a special boon from heaven by the fisher-folk all round the coast, and more especially by the lonely dwellers at the Point.

A fine autumn enabled Coomber to go out in his boat until the time for shooting wild fowl began, and the children could play on the sands, or gather samphire, instead of being penned up in the house half the time. But when the weather was wild and wet, and the salt marshes lay under water, that meant little food and much discomfort, frequent quarrels, and much bitterness to the fisherman's family.

This autumn the weather was more than usually boisterous; and long before the usual time the old boat had to be drawn up on to the bank, for fear the waves should dash it to pieces. The fisherman sometimes went to Fellness, on the chance of picking up a stray job, for it was only the state of his boat, and his anxiety to keep it together as long as possible, that prevented him braving the perils of the sea; and so he sometimes got the loan of another boat, or helped another fisherman with his; and then, rough though they might be, these fisher-folk were kind and helpful to each other, and if they could not afford to pay money for a job, they could pay for it in bread or flour, or potatoes, perhaps, and so they would generally find Coomber something to do, that they might help him, without hurting him.

But there was little work that could be done in such bad weather as this, and he knew it, and his proud, independent spirit could not brook to accept even a mouthful of bread that he had not earned; and so there were many weary days spent at home, or sauntering round the coast with his gun, on the look-out for a stray wild fowl. Tiny often went to bed hungry, and woke up feeling faint and sick; and although she never forgot to say her prayers, she could not help thinking sometimes that God must have forgotten her. She read her paper to

Dick, and he and Tom had both learned to spell out some of the words, and she read to herself again and again the Divine assurance, "God is good to all: He loves both boys and girls;" but then, as Dick said sometimes, Bermuda Point was such a long way from anywhere, and He might forget there were any boys and girls living there.

When she was very hungry, and more than usually depressed, Tiny thought Dick must be right, but even then she would not admit such a thought to others. When she saw Mrs. Coomber in tears, because she had no food to prepare for her hungry children, she would steal up to her, pass her little arm round the poor woman's neck, and whisper, "God is good; He'll take care of us, mammy; He'll send us some supper, if He can't send us any dinner;" and the child's hopeful words often proved a true prophecy, for sometimes when Coomber had been out all day without finding anything that could be called food, he would, when returning, manage to secure a wild duck, perhaps, or a couple of sea magpies, or a few young gulls. Nothing came amiss to the young Coombers at any time, and just now a tough stringy gull was a dainty morsel.

It threatened to be an unusually hard and long winter, and at last Mrs. Coomber ventured to suggest that Tiny should be taken to the poorhouse, at least until the spring, when she could come back again.

"Look at her poor little white face," said the woman, with her apron to her eyes; "I'm afraid she'll be ill soon, and then what can we do?"

"Time enough to talk about that when she is ill," said Coomber, gruffly, as he took up his gun and went out. They were generally able to keep a good fire of the drift-wood and wreckage that was washed ashore, for unfortunately there was scarcely a week passed but some noble vessel came to grief on the perilous bar sands during the more boisterous weather. Once, when they were at their wits' end for food, and Bob had begged his mother to boil some samphire for supper, Tiny was fortunate enough to discover an unopened cask which the sea had cast up the night before, and left high and dry behind the ridge of sandhills. She was not long fetching Bob and the boys to see her treasure trove; all sorts of wild speculations passing through her mind as to what it could contain as she ran shouting—

"Bob! Bob! Dick! Dick! Come and see what I've found."

Illustration

**"'DICK, DICK, COME AND SEE
WHAT I'VE FOUND.'" [*See page 96.***

The boys were not long in making their appearance, and Bob fetched a hatchet, and soon broke open the cask; and oh! what joy for the starving children—it was full of ship biscuits!

"Oh, Dick, didn't I tell you this morning God hadn't forgotten us?" said Tiny, in a quavering voice, when Bob announced what the cask contained.

"Oh, yes," said Dick, "so you did;" but he was too hungry to think of anything but the biscuits now—too hungry even to shout his joy, as he would have done at another time. As soon as they could be got at, he handed one to Tiny, and then Tom and Dick helped themselves, filling their pockets and munching them at the same time; but Tiny, though she nibbled her biscuit as she went, ran at once to tell Mrs. Coomber of her wonderful discovery; and she, scarcely daring to believe that such good news could be true, ran out at once to see for herself, and met the boys, who confirmed Tiny's tale. But she must see the cask for herself, and then she ate and filled her apron, and shed tears, and thanked God for this wonderful gift all at the same time. Then she told the boys to come and fetch some baskets at once, to carry them home in, and she would sort them over, for some were soaked with sea-water, but others near the middle were quite dry. Bob took a bagful and went in search of his father along the coast, and everybody was busy carrying or sorting or drying the biscuits, for they had to be secured before the next tide came in, or they might be washed away again.

When Coomber came home, bringing a couple of sea-gulls he had shot, he was fairly overcome at the sight of the biscuits.

"Daddy, it was God that sent 'em," said Tiny, in an earnest, joyful whisper.

The fisherman drew his sleeve across his eyes. "Seems as though it must ha' been, deary," he said; "for how that cask ever came ashore without being broken up well-nigh beats me."

"God didn't let it break, 'cos we wanted the biscuits," said Tiny confidently; "yer see, daddy, He ain't forgot us, though Bermuda Point is a long way from anywhere."

The biscuits lasted them for some time, for as the season advanced Coomber was able to sell some of the wild ducks he shot, and so potatoes, and flour, and bread

could be brought at Fellness again. If the fisherman could only have believed that whisky was not as necessary as bread, they might have suffered less privation; but every time he got a little money for his wild fowl, the bottle had to be replenished, even though he took home but half the quantity of bread that was needed; and so Tiny sometimes was heard to wish that God would always send them biscuits in a tub, and then daddy couldn't drink the stuff that made him so cross.

Mrs. Coomber smiled and sighed as she heard Tiny whisper this to Dick. She, too, had often wished something similar—or, at least, that her husband could do without whisky. Now, as the supply of wild fowl steadily increased, he came home more sullen than ever. His return from Fellness grew to be a dread even to Tiny at last; and she and Dick used to creep off to bed just before the time he was expected to return, leaving Bob and Tom to bear the brunt of whatever storm might follow.

He seldom noticed their absence, until one night, when, having drunk rather more than usual, he was very cross on coming in, and evidently on the look-out for something to make a quarrel over.

"Where's Dick and the gal?" he said, as he looked round the little kitchen, after flinging himself into a chair.

"They're gone to bed," said his wife, timidly, not venturing to look up from her work.

"Then tell 'em to get up."

"I—I dunno whether it 'ud be good for Tiny," faltered the poor woman; "she's got a cold now, and—and——"

"Are you going to call 'em up, or shall I go and lug 'em out of bed?" demanded the angry, tipsy man.

"But, Coomber," began his wife.

"There, don't stand staring like that, but do as I tell you," interrupted the fisherman; "I won't have 'em go sneaking off to bed just as I come home. I heard that little 'un say one day she was afraid of me sometimes. Afraid, indeed; I'll teach her to be afraid," he repeated, working himself into a passion over some maudlin recollection of the children's talk in the summer-time.

His wife saw it would be of no use reasoning with him in his present mood, and so went to rouse the children without further parley. They were not asleep, and

so were prepared for the summons, as they had overheard what had been said.

"Oh mammy, must I come?" said Tiny, her teeth chattering with fear, as she slipped out of bed.

"Don't be afraid, deary—don't let him see you're frightened," whispered Mrs. Coomber; "slip your clothes on as quick as you can, and come and sing 'Star of Peace' to him; then he'll drop off to sleep, and you can come to bed again."

"I will—I will try," said the child, trying to force back her tears and speak bravely. But in spite of all her efforts to be brave, and not look as though she was frightened, she crept into the kitchen looking cowed and half-bewildered with terror, and before she could utter a word of her song, Coomber pounced upon her.

"What do yer look like that for?" he demanded; "what business have you to be frightened of me?"

Tiny turned her white face towards him, and ventured to look up. "I—I——"

"She's going to sing 'Star of Peace,'" interposed Mrs. Coomber; "let her come and sit over here by the fire."

"You let her alone," roared her husband; "she's a-going to do what I tell her. Come here," he called, in a still louder tone. Tiny ventured a step nearer, but did not go close to him.

"Are you coming?" he roared again; then, stretching out his hand, he seized her by the arm, and dragged her towards him, giving her a violent shake as he did so. "There—now sing!" he commanded, placing her against his knee.

The child stared at him with a blank, fascinated gaze. Once he saw her lips move, but no sound came from them; and after waiting a minute he dashed her from him with all the strength of his mad fury.

There was a shriek from Mrs. Coomber, and screams from the boys, but poor little Tiny uttered no sound. They picked her up from where she had fallen, or rather had been thrown, and her face was covered with blood; but she uttered no groan—gave no sign of life.

"Oh, she's dead! she's dead!" wailed Dick, bending over her as she lay in his mother's arms.

The terrible sight had completely sobered Coomber. "Did I do it? Did I do that?" he asked, in a changed voice.

"Why, yer know yer did," growled Bob; "or leastways the whisky in yer did it. I've often thought you'd do for mother, or one of us; but I never thought yer'd lift yer hand agin a poor little 'un like that."

Coomber groaned, but made no reply. "Hold your tongue, Bob," commanded his mother; for she could see that her husband was sorry enough now for what he had done.

"What's to be done, mother?" he asked, in a subdued voice; "surely, surely I haven't killed the child!"

But Mrs. Coomber feared that he had, and it was this that paralysed all her faculties. "I don't know what to do," she said, helplessly, wiping away the blood that kept flowing from a deep gash on Tiny's forehead.

"Couldn't you give her some water?" said Dick, who did not know what else to suggest. Coomber meekly fetched a cupful from the pan outside, and Mrs. Coomber dipped her apron in it, and bathed Tiny's face; and in a minute or two Dick saw, to his great delight, that she drew a faint, fluttering breath. Coomber saw it too, and the relief was so great that he could not keep back his tears. "Please God He'll spare us His little 'un, I'll never touch another drop of whisky," he sobbed, as he leaned over his wife's chair, and watched her bathe the still pallid face.

"Open the door, Dick, and let her have a breath of fresh air; and don't stand too close," said his mother, as Tiny drew another faint breath.

The door was opened, and the boys stood anxiously aside, watching the faint, gasping breath, until at last Tiny was able to swallow a little of the water; and then they would have closed round her again, but their mother kept them off.

"Would a drop o' milk do her good?" whispered Coomber after a time; but she was sensible enough to recognise his voice, and shuddered visibly. He groaned as he saw it; but drew further back, so that she should not see him when she opened her eyes.

"Give me the sticking-plaster, Dick," said his mother, when Tiny had somewhat revived. Mrs. Coomber was used to cuts and wounds, and could strap them up as cleverly as a surgeon. It was not the sight of the ugly cut that had frightened her, but the death-like swoon, which she did not understand.

"How about the milk, mother?" Coomber ventured to ask, after Tiny's forehead was strapped up and bandaged.

Again came that shudder of fear, and the little girl crept closer to the sheltering arms. "Don't be frightened, deary; daddy won't hurt you now."

"Don't let him come," whispered Tiny; but Coomber heard the whisper, and it cut him to the heart, although he kept carefully in the background as he repeated his question.

"Would yer like a little milk, deary?" asked Mrs. Coomber.

"There ain't no money to buy milk," said Tiny, in a feeble, weary tone.

But Coomber crept round the back of the kitchen, so as to keep out of sight, took up the bottle of whisky he had brought home, and went out. He brought a jug of milk when he came back. "You can send for some more to-morrow, and as long as she wants it," he said, as he stood the jug on the table.

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CHAPTER VII.

A TEA MEETING.

Tiny was very ill the next day—too ill to get up, or to notice what was passing around her. Mrs. Coomber, who had had very little experience of sickness, was very anxious when she saw Tiny lying so quiet and lifeless-looking, the white bandage on her forehead making her poor little face look quite ghastly in its paleness. The fisherman had crept into the room before he went out, to look at her while she was asleep, and the sight had made his heart ache.

"I never thought I could ha' been such a brute as to hurt a little 'un like that," he said, drawing his sleeve across his eyes, and speaking in a whisper to his wife.

"It was the whisky," said his wife, by way of comforting him.

But Coomber would not accept even this poor comfort. "I was a fool to take so much," he said. "Wus than a fool, for I knowed it made me savage as a bear; and yet I let it get the mastery of me. But it's the last, mother; I took the bottle to the farm last night, and they're going to let me have the value of it in milk for the little 'un, and please God she gets well again, it's no more whisky I'll touch."

It was not easy for a man like Coomber to make such a promise, and still more difficult to keep it. For the first few days, while Tiny was very ill, it was not so hard to send Bob and Tom to Fellness, with the teal and widgeon he had shot; but when she began to get better, and the craving for the drink made itself felt, then began the tug of war. During the first few days of the little girl's illness, the fisherman kept carefully out of her sight, though he longed to see her once more, and hear her say she had forgiven him the cruel blow he had dealt to her.

Tiny, too, longed for him to come and see her in the daytime; but as it grew dusk the longing passed away, and every night, as the hour drew near when he usually came back from Fellness, a positive dread and terror of him seized her, and she would lie shivering and holding Mrs. Coomber's hand whenever she heard his voice in the kitchen.

Mrs. Coomber tried to persuade her husband to go and see the child in the daytime; but he only shook his head. "She hates me, and I don't deserve to see

her agin," he said, gloomily.

He returned the same answer again and again, when pressed to go in and see her before he went out with his gun in the morning. At length, as he sat at breakfast one day, he was startled by Tiny creeping up to him, just as she had slipped out of bed.

"Oh, daddy, why didn't you come to me?" she said, with a little gasping sob, throwing her arms round his neck.

"My deary, my deary," he said, in a choking voice, gathering her in his arms, and kissing her, while the tears rolled down his weather-beaten face.

"Oh, daddy, don't you love me," said Tiny; "that you didn't come to see me all these days?"

"Love you, my deary? Ah, you may well ask that, after what I've done to yer; but it was just because I did love yer that I kept away from yer," he went on; "I thought you'd never want to see yer cruel old daddy any more; and as for me, why I'd punish myself by not trying to see yer, or get back your love. That's just how it was, deary," said the fisherman, as he looked tenderly at the little pallid face.

"But, daddy, I love you, and I wanted you all the days," said Tiny, nestling closer to him as she spoke.

"Bless you, deary, I believe you're one of God's own bairns, as well as a sailor's lass," said Coomber.

"I wanted you all the days, daddy; but—but—don't—come—at—night," she added, in a hesitating tone.

"I know what you mean; mother's told me, little 'un," he said, drawing his sleeve across his eyes, and sighing.

"I can't help it, daddy, I can't help it," said the little girl, with a sob.

"Well, I s'pose not; but you needn't be afraid now, you know. I've done with the bottle now; and it wasn't me you was afraid of, mother said, but the whisky."

Tiny nodded. "Yes, that's it," she said; "and I shan't be afraid long if I know you don't have it now;" and from that time the little girl set herself strenuously to overcome the terror and dread that nightly crept over her; but still it was some time before she could endure Coomber's presence after dusk.

Meanwhile pinching want was again making itself felt in the household. For

some reason known only to themselves, the teal and widgeon did not come within range of the fisherman's gun just now; and sometimes, after a whole day spent in the punt, or among the salt marshes along the coast, only a few unsaleable old gulls would reward Coomber's toil. They were not actually uneatable by those who were on the verge of starvation; but they were utterly unfit for a child like Tiny, in her present weak, delicate condition; and again the question of sending her to the poorhouse until the spring was mooted by Mrs. Coomber. Her husband did not refuse to discuss it this time when it was mentioned, and it was evident that he himself had thought of it already, for he said, with a groan—

"It seems as though God wasn't going to let me keep the little 'un, though she's getting on a bit, for never have I had such a bad shooting season as this since I knocked the little 'un down. It seems hard, mother; what do you think?"

But Mrs. Coomber did not know what to think; she only knew that poor little Tiny was often hungry, although she never complained. They had eaten up all the store of biscuits by this time; and although Dick and Tom often spent hours wandering along the shore, in the hope of finding another wonderful treasure-trove, nothing had come of their wanderings beyond the usual harvest of drift wood that enabled them to keep a good fire in the kitchen all day.

At length it was decided that Coomber should take Tiny to the poorhouse, and ask the authorities to keep her until this bitter winter was over; and then, when the spring came, and the boat could go out once more, he would fetch her home again.

But it was not without many tears that this proposal was confided to Tiny, the fisherman insisting—though he shrank from the task himself—that she should be told what they thought of doing. "She is a sailor's lass, and it's only fair to her," he said, as he left his wife to break the news to Tiny.

She was overwhelmed at the thought of being separated from those who had been so kind to her, and whom she had learned to love so tenderly, but with a mighty effort she choked back her tears, for she saw how grieved Mrs. Coomber was; though she could not help exclaiming: "Oh! if God would only let me stay with you, and daddy, and Dick!"

Her last words to Dick before she started were in a whispered conference, in which she told him to pray to God every day to let her come back soon. "I will, I will!" said Dick through his tears; "I'll say what you told me last night—I'll say it

every day." And then Coomber and Tiny set out on their dreary walk to Fellness, reaching it about the middle of the afternoon.

Bob and Tom had let their old friends know that their father had given up the whisky, and now he, foolish man, felt half afraid and half ashamed to meet them; but he was obliged to go, for he wanted Peters to go with him, and tell the workhouse people about the rescue of the little girl, for fear they should refuse to take her in unless his story was confirmed.

Coomber explained this to his friend in a rather roundabout fashion, for he had not found Peters on the shore, as he had expected, and where he could have stated his errand in a few words. He had found instead that all the village was astir with the news of a tea-meeting, that was to take place that afternoon in the chapel, and that Peters, who was "something of a Methody," as Coomber expressed it, had gone to help in the preparations.

He was astonished to see Coomber when he presented himself, and still more to hear the errand he had come upon. He scratched his head, and looked pityingly at the little girl, who held fast to Coomber's hand. "Well now, mate, I'm in a fix," he said, slowly, and pointing round the room; "I've got all these forms to move, and to fix up the tables for 'em by four o'clock; but if you'll stay and lend a hand, why, you and the little 'un 'll be welcome to stay to tea, I know; it's free to all the village to-day," he added, "and the more that come, the better we shall like it."

Coomber looked at Tiny, and saw how wistfully her eyes rested on a pile of cakes that stood near; and that look decided him. "Would you like to have some of it?" he said, with a faint smile. The little girl's face flushed with joy at the prospect of such a treat. "Oh, daddy! if I could only take Dick some, too," she said.

Both the men laughed, but Peters said, "Well, well, we'll see what we can do; come in here while daddy helps me with the forms;" and he led the way into a small room, where several of the fishermen's wives were cutting bread and butter. Peters whispered a word to one of them, and she seated Tiny by the fire, and gave her some bread and butter at once. When the tea was all ready, and the company began to arrive, Coomber fetched Tiny to sit with him, and the two had a bountiful tea, and such cake as the little girl had not tasted for a long time. But she would not eat much. She took what was given to her, but slipped most of it into Coomber's pocket, that he might take it home to Dick, for the little girl thought they would go on to the poorhouse as soon as tea was over.

But while the tea-things were being cleared away, and they were preparing for the meeting that was to follow, the fisherman drew her aside, and whispered: "I do believe God has heard what you've been a-praying for, deary, for Peters has heard of a job of work for me since I've been here."

"Oh, daddy! and we shall go home together again," exclaimed Tiny, looking round for her bonnet at once.

"Yes, but not jest yet. There's to be some preaching or somethin', and—and—little 'un, I've been a bad man, and I dunno as God'll have anything to do wi' helping such a tough customer to be any better; but if He would—"

And here Coomber drew his sleeve across his eyes, and turned his head aside to hide his emotion.

The little girl threw her arms round his neck, and drew his face close to hers. "Oh, daddy, He will! He will!" she whispered, earnestly; "He loves you, and He's been waiting all this long time for you to love Him; and you will, won't you, now, you know?"

But there was no time for Coomber to reply, for the people were taking their seats again, and Peters touched him on the shoulder, motioning him to do the same. The two sat down, feeling too eager for shyness, or to notice that others were looking at them. A hymn was sung, and a prayer followed, and then Coomber began to feel disappointed, for he was hungering to hear something that might set his doubts at rest. At length he heard the words that have brought help and gladness to so many souls: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Then followed a simple address, enlarging upon the text, and an exhortation to accept God's offer of salvation. "The Lord Jesus Christ Himself said: 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,'" continued the speaker, "and in His name I beg each one of you to become reconciled to God. He is waiting: He is willing to receive each one of you."

These were his closing words, and Coomber, who had listened with eager, rapt attention, stayed only for the people to move towards the door, and then followed the speaker into the little vestry. "Beg pardon, sir," he said, pausing at the door, "but 'tain't often as I gets the chance of hearing such words as I've heard from you to-night, and so I hopes you'll forgive me if I asks for a bit more. I'm a bad man. I begins to see it all now; but—but——"

"My friend, if you feel that you are a sinner, then you are just one of those whom

the Lord Jesus died to redeem. He came to seek and to save those who are lost—to redeem them from sin. He gave His life—dying upon the cross, a shameful, painful death—not, mark me, that they may continue in sin. To say we believe in God, and to live in sin, makes our belief of no effect. We must learn of Christ, or He will have died in vain for us. We must learn of Him, and He will help us to overcome our love of drink, our selfishness, and sullenness, and ill-temper;" for the gentleman knew something of Coomber, and so particularised the sins he knew to be his easily besetting ones.

"And you think He'd help me? You see, sir, He's done a deal for me lately, bad as I am," said Coomber, twisting his hat in his hand.

"Help you! ah, that He will. If He gave His only Son, what do you think He will withhold? 'What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him.'"

"And what are the good things that I'm to ask for," said Coomber. "I know what the asking means; this little 'un here has taught me that praying is asking God; and though I ain't never done it afore, I'll begin now."

"Do, my man. Ask that the Holy Spirit may be given you, to lead you, and teach you, and guide you into all truth. Without His help you can do nothing; but, seeking His help, trusting in his guidance, you will be enabled to overcome every difficulty and obstacle, however hard it may be."

"And you think God will forgive me all the past?"

"My brother, Christ died—He shed His precious blood, to wash away our sin, to set our conscience free from guilt, and to assure us beyond a doubt of the perfect love of God towards us."

The words spoken fell into prepared soil, for Coomber had been hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and he went home that night feeling that he had been fed.

What a happy walk home that was for Tiny and the fisherman! As he left the little chapel at Fellness, a basket, well filled with the odds and ends left from the tea-meeting, had been handed to Coomber to take home, and Peters whispered, as he went out: "I've heard of another job for yer, so be along in good time in the morning, mate." To describe Mrs. Coomber's joy, when her husband walked in

with Tiny asleep in his arms, and also with the basket of bread and butter, would be impossible.

"God has given us the little 'un back, mother," he said, placing the child in his wife's arms. "He's been good to me, better than I deserved, only the Lord Jesus Christ has died for me, and that explains it all."

His heart was full of joy and gratitude to-night, and he forgot his usual shyness, and told his wife of the good news he had heard at Fellness, both for body and soul. "Now, mother," he said, as he concluded, "you and I must both begin a new life. We must ask God to help us like this little 'un, and we must teach our boys to do the same. We owe it all to her," he added, as he kissed Tiny, "for if she hadn't come among us, we might never have heard about God down here at Bermuda Point."

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CHAPTER VIII.

BRIGHTER DAYS.

The dreary winter came to an end at last, and with the first spring days there was a general bustle of preparation in the fisherman's family, for boat and nets alike required overhauling, and there would be a good deal of repairing to do before the old boat would be fit for further use.

Bob's face was fast losing its sullen, defiant, angry look, and he was whistling as merrily as a lark one morning, when he and Coomber went to remove the tarpaulin that had been covered over the boat during the winter; but the whistling suddenly ceased when the boat was uncovered, for, with all their care, the winter's storms had worked sad havoc with the little craft. Seams were starting, ribs were bulging, and there were gaping holes, that made Coomber lift his hat and scratch his head in consternation.

"This'll be a tough job, Bob," he said.

"Aye, aye, dad, it will that," said the lad, carefully passing his finger down where one rib seemed to be almost rotten.

A few months before Coomber would have raved and blustered, and sworn it was all Bob's fault, but since that tea-meeting at Fellness he had been a changed man—old things had passed away, and all things had become new; and none felt this more than Bob. It was a blessed change for him, and he had given up all thoughts of running away now, if the old boat could only be patched up and made serviceable. But it was a problem whether this could ever be done effectually enough to make it seaworthy.

"If I'd only found out ten years ago that I could do better without the whisky than with it, we might ha' got a new boat afore this, Bob," said the fisherman, with a sigh.

"Aye, aye, and had Jack with us, too, dad," Bob ventured to remark. He had not dared to mention his brother's name for years, but he had thought a good deal of him lately, wishing he could come home, and see the blessed change that had been wrought in his father.

The old fisherman lifted his head, and there was a look of bitter anguish in his face, as he said: "Hark ye, lad, I'd give all the days of my life to bring Jack back. The thought of him is making yer mother an old woman afore her time, and I can't help it now; it's too late, too late;" and the old fisherman covered his face and groaned.

"There now, father, ain't I heard you say it was never too late to repent?"

"Aye, lad, that you have, and the precious blood of Christ can take away the guilt of our sin; but, mark me, not even God Himself can do away with the consequences of sin. Hard as they may be, and truly and bitterly as we may repent, the past can't be undone; and as we sow we must reap. Poor Jack! Poor Jack! If I could only know where he was. Why, it's nigh on ten years since he went away, and never a storm comes but I'm thinking my boy may be in it, and wanting help."

Bob recalled what had passed on Fellness Sands the night they rescued Tiny, and which had helped him often since to bear with his father's gruff, sullen ways and fierce outbursts of temper; but he would not say any more just now, only he thought that but for that tea-meeting his father would now be mourning the loss of two sons; for he had made up his mind to leave home when it was decided to take Tiny to the poorhouse.

They were working at the boat a few days after this, caulking, and plugging, and tarring, when Tiny, who had been playing on the sandhills a little way off, came running up breathless with some news.

Illustration

TINY AND THE OLD MAN. [*See page 130.*

"Oh, daddy! there's a little ugly, old man over there, and he says my name is Coomber. Is it, daddy?"

The fisherman lifted his hat and scratched his head, looking puzzled. Strange to say, this question of the little girl's name had never suggested itself to anybody before, living as they did in this out-of-the-way spot. She was "Tiny," or "deary," or "the little 'un," and no need had arisen for any other name; and so, after scratching his head for a minute, he said: "Well, deary, if I'm your daddy, I s'pose

your name is Coomber. But who is the old man?" he asked; for it was not often that strangers were seen at Bermuda Point, even in summer-time.

"I dunno, daddy; but he says he knowed my mother when she was a little gal like me."

Coomber dropped the tar-brush he was using, and a spasm of pain crossed his face. Had somebody come to claim the child after all? He instinctively clutched her hand for a minute, but the next he told her to go home, while he went to speak to the stranger.

He found a little, neatly-dressed old man seated on one of the sandhills, and without a word of preface he began:

"You've come after my little gal, I s'pose?"

The old man smiled. "What's your name, my man?" he said, taking out a pocket-book, and preparing to write.

"Coomber."

"Coomber!" exclaimed the old man, dropping his book in his surprise.

"Why, yes; what should it be?" said the fisherman. "Didn't you tell my little Tiny that you knew her name was Coomber? But how you came to know——"

"Why, I never saw you before that I know of," interrupted the other, sharply; "so how do you suppose I should know your name? I told the child I knew her name was Matilda Coomber, for she is the very image of her mother when she was a girl, and she was my only daughter."

"Oh, sir, and you've come to fetch her!" gasped the fisherman.

The stranger took out his snuff-box, and helped himself to a pinch. "Well, I don't know so much about that," he said, cautiously; "I am her grandfather, and I thought, when I picked up that old newspaper the other day, and read about her being saved, I'd just like to come and have a look at her. I was pretty sure she was my Tilly's little one, by the description of the silver medal she wore, for I'd given it to her mother just before she ran away to get married to that sailor Coomber."

"Oh, sir, a sailor, and his name was Coomber! Where is he? What was he like?" asked the fisherman, eagerly.

"He was drowned before his wife died; she never held up her head afterwards, the people tell me. I never saw her after she was married, and swore I'd never

help her or hers; but when she was dying she wrote and told me she was leaving a little girl alone in the world, and had left directions for it to be brought to me after her death. With this letter she sent her own portrait, and that of her husband and child, begging me to keep them for the child until she grew up. A day or two after came another letter, saying she was dead, and a neighbour was coming from Grimsby to London by ship, and would bring the child to me; but I never heard or saw anything of either, and concluded she was drowned, when, about a month ago, an old newspaper came in my way, and glancing over it, I saw the account of a little girl being saved from a wreck, and where she might be heard of. I went to the place, and they sent me here, and the minute I saw the child, I knew her for my Tilly's."

The old man had talked on, but Coomber had comprehended very little of what was said. He stood looking half-dazed for a minute or two after the stranger had ceased speaking. At length he gathered his wits sufficiently to say: "Have you got them pictures now?"

"Yes," said the old man, promptly, taking out his pocket-book as he spoke. "Here they are; I took care to bring 'em with me;" and he brought out three photographs.

Coomber seized one instantly. "It is him! It is my Jack!" he gasped. "Oh, sir, tell me more about him."

"I know nothing about him, I tell you," said the other, coldly; "I never saw or spoke to my daughter after she married him; but I'm willing to do something for the little child, seeing it was my girl's last wish."

"The child," repeated Coomber. "Do you mean to say little Tiny is my Jack's child?"

"Well, yes, of course I do. What else could I mean?" replied the other.

"Then—then I'm her grandfather, and have as much right to her as you have," said the fisherman, quickly.

The stranger shrugged his shoulders. "Well, I s'pose you have," he said; "I'm not going to dispute it. I'm willing to do my duty by her. But mind, I'm not a rich man—not a rich man," he added.

Coomber was puzzled for a minute to know what he meant, and was about to say that he wanted no payment for keeping Tiny; but the other lifted his hand in a commanding manner, and exclaimed: "Now, hear me first. Let me have my say,

and then, perhaps, we can come to terms about the matter. You've got a wife, I s'pose, that can look after this child. I haven't; and if she came to me, I shouldn't know what to do with her. Well now, that being the case, she'd better stay here—for the present at least; she's happy enough, I s'pose; and I'll pay you twenty pounds a year as my share towards her expenses."

Coomber was about to exclaim indignantly against this, and protest that he would accept no payment; but just then he caught sight of Bob and the old boat, and the thought of what that money would enable him to do kept him silent a little longer.

"Well now," resumed the old man, "if that plan suits you, we'll come to business at once. You've had her about eighteen months now, so there's about thirty pounds due. You see I'm an honest man, and mean to do the just thing by her," he added.

"Thirty pounds!" repeated Coomber, to whom such a sum seemed immense wealth. But the other mistook the exclamation for one of discontent, and so he said, quickly, "Well now, I'll throw you ten pounds in, as I hear you were the one that saved her, and pay you the next six months in advance. That'll make it a round fifty; but I won't go a penny farther. Now will that satisfy you?"

Satisfy him? Coomber was debating with himself whether he ought to take a farthing, considering what a rich blessing the little girl had been to him. It was only the thought of the bitter winter they had just passed through, and that, if he could get a new boat, he could better provide for the child, that made him hesitate, lest in refusing it he should do Tiny a wrong.

At length, after a pause, during which he had silently lifted his heart in prayer to God, he said: "Well, sir, for the little 'un's sake I'll take your offer. But, look you, I shall use this money as a loan that is to be returned; and as I can save it, I shall put it in the bank for her."

The other shrugged his shoulders. "You can do as you like about that. I shall come and see the child sometimes, and——"

"Do, sir, do, God bless her! To think she's my Jack's child!" interrupted Coomber, drawing his sleeve across his eyes. "Do you know, sir, where my boy went down?" he asked, in a tremulous voice.

But the other shook his head. "I tell you I know nothing of my daughter after she married; but she sent me a box with some letters and these portraits, and some

other odds and ends, to be kept for her little Matilda. I'll send you them if you like;" and the old man rose as he spoke. "Can you go with me to Fellness now, and settle this business about the money?" he added.

"But don't you want to see Tiny?" exclaimed Coomber, who could not understand his willingness to give up his claim to the child.

"I have seen her. We had a long talk here before you came. You may tell her that her Grandfather West will come and see her sometimes. And now, if you'll follow me as quickly as you can to the village, we'll settle this business;" and as he spoke, Mr. West turned towards the road, leaving Coomber still half-dazed with astonishment.

"Bob, Bob," he called at last, "I've got to go to the village. A strange thing has happened here to-day, and I want to get my wits a bit together before I tell your mother. But you needn't do much to the boat till I come back, for it may be we shall have a new one after all."

Bob looked up in his father's face, speechless with surprise. He spoke of having a new boat as though it was a very sad business. But his next words explained it. "I've heard of Jack," he said; "no storms will trouble him again;" and then the fisherman burst forth into heart-breaking sobs and groans, and Bob shed a few tears, although he felt heartily ashamed of them.

"Now go back, Bob, and tell your mother I've gone to Fellness; and if I ain't home by five o'clock, you come and meet me, for I shall have some money to carry—almost a fortune, Bob."

Having heard so much, Bob wanted to hear more, and so walked with his father for the first mile along the road, listening to the strange tale concerning Tiny. Then he went back, and told the news to the astonished group at home; and so, before Coomber returned, his wife had got over the first outburst of grief for the death of her son, and she and Bob had had time to talk calmly over the whole matter. They had decided that the money must be used in such a way as would give the little girl the greatest benefit from it, and that she must go to school, if possible.

"Now, if dad could buy a share in one of the bigger boats where he and I could work, wouldn't it be better than buying a little one for ourselves?" suggested Bob; "then we could go and live at Fellness, and Tiny could go to school—Sunday-school as well as week-day."

"And Dick, too," put in Tiny.

"Yes, and we should all go to God's house on Sunday," said Mrs. Coomber, drying her eyes.

Strange to say, a similar project had been suggested to Coomber by his old friend Peters, who knew a man who wanted to sell his share in one of the large fishing-boats, and was asking forty pounds for it.

"That will leave us ten pounds, mother, to buy the children some new clothes, and take us to Fellness. What do you say to it now?" asked her husband, after they had talked it over.

"Why, it seems too good to be true," said the poor woman, through her tears. "But oh! if only poor Jack was here!" she sighed.

Her husband shook his head, and was silent for a minute or two; but at length he said: "God has been very good to us when we had no thought of Him. I always knew the little 'un must be a sailor's lass, but to think that she should be our Jack's own child is wonderful. The old gentleman had made quite sure of it before he came here—he wouldn't part with his money unless he'd been sure, I know; and now she's ours, just as much as Dick and Bob is. And we'll take good care of her, God bless her, and Him for sending her to us."

The rest of my story is soon told. The fisherman and his family removed to Fellness, and brighter days dawned for them than they had ever hoped to see. When the box arrived from Mr. West, containing the letter and papers relating to the latter years of their son's life, they found that he had become a true Christian through his wife's influence. He had also learned to read and write; and in the last letter sent to his wife before his death, he told her he meant to go and see his parents as soon as he returned from that voyage. Alas! he never did return; but the "little lass," of whom he spoke so lovingly, became God's messenger to his old home, and the joy and comfort of his parents' hearts.

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