

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### AT CLIFFSIDE.

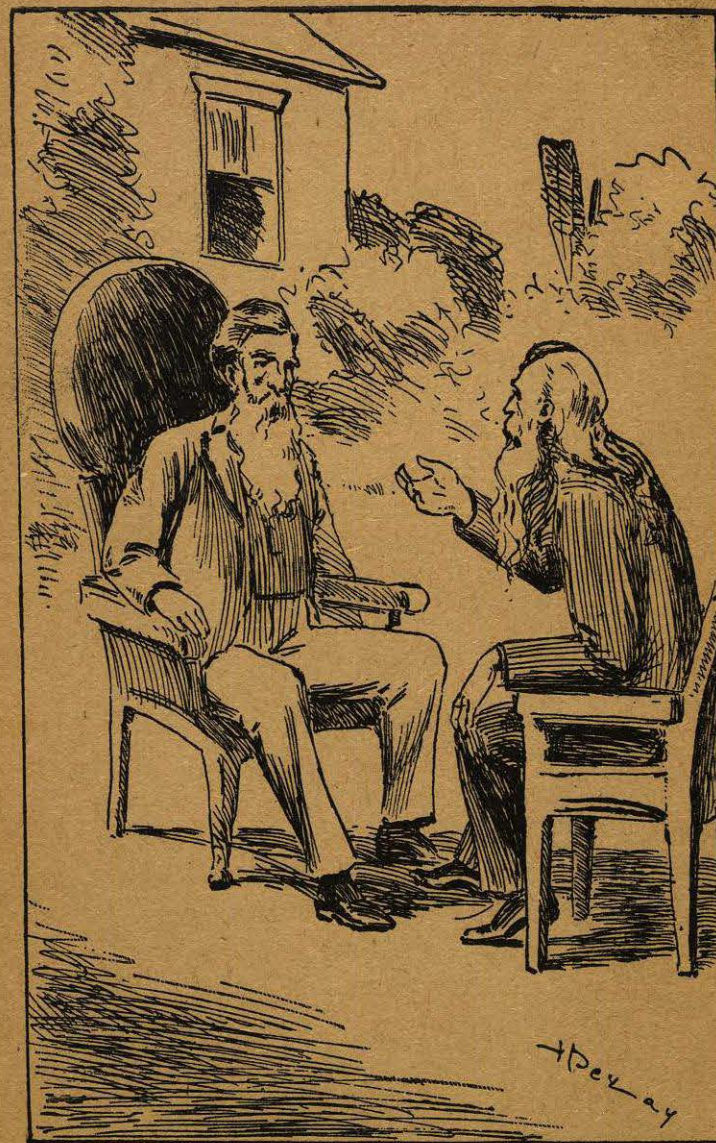
The summer had passed and the cool days of autumn had come, bringing with it the golden fruit and painting leaf and blade in the rich, beautiful tints of gold and brown. It was one of those warm, pleasant autumn times—such as in New England we call Indian summer—and all Kimberly and the country round about were rejoicing at this, the close of a very bountiful and prosperous season.

It was a beautiful May morning, the sixth of May, which by the way is fall of the year at Kimberly, and James Winterstine and the old hermit were sitting upon the sunny side of the old cottage home at Cliffside which, since the death of Loffden, had been restored to its original owner.

Here, let me say, that all the vast estate of Silas Loffden which originally belonged to James Winterstine and Henry Lovell who first settled upon the land, but which, by some means or other not particularly of interest here, had passed into possession of old Silas Loffden and descended to his son, was restored to the rightful owners and they had returned to the old homestead at Cliffside.

The two old men bent with age and now stricken with the awful sorrow which the loss of little Tom and her lover had cast about their hearts, had been talking of their lost children.

(182)



"THE HAPPY DREAM OF MY OLD AGE HAS BEEN BLASTED." P. 186

"James," said the old hermit in a tone of melancholy sadness, "the happy dream of my old age has been blasted; my hopes, my prayers, are alike of no avail—all, all are vain. I have hoped and prayed that our children—I must call them so, for indeed, they are our children—would yet return to gladden and cheer our hearts and home in our last days. With you, it is not so bad for you have other children, but for me there is no hope—life is but a burden. Five months have passed since the children went away, perhaps, O God, I fear, never to return. James, if I were a few years younger, I would solve the mystery of their fate. I feel that some awful tragedy has been enacted—the disappearance of Loffden, the story of 'The Star of Kimberly,' the finding of that great diamond, the 'Devil's Eye,' which passed through so many scenes of blood and murder twenty-five years ago (for it was the same stone that I and my five companions found and lost, and which was lost up there in the mountains by the robbers), and the bloody tale told by the Kafir's, all point to a dark and bloody tragedy. No, I don't believe that they were lost on the 'Cape Town.' I don't believe the story of old Hans Grauerholtz—"

"But surely, Henry," interrupted James Winterstine, "old Hans could have no object in deceiving us—"

"No object!" exclaimed the hermit. "Ah, indeed, I am not so sure of that. Why is it, James, that their names does not appear upon the list of passengers which was recovered from the wreck? Yes, I know that Hans says that they went aboard just as the ship was

ready to sail—perhaps they did, yes, perhaps that it may be true. There was a man killed there at old Hans', and they say that Harry did it. There is something strange about that, for Harry is not a man that would take another's life unless he was forced to do it. Why was he forced to take that man's life? Could it be that he did it in defense of his own? The people of Port Orange knew the story of 'The Star of Kimberly,' they had heard from the Kafirs the stories of the bloody struggles for the possession of it; and they had heard, too, of the finding of that stone which some believe to be 'The Star of Kimberly,' while others believe that it's Tom and not the stone that bears that name—so old Hans says, and he confesses that the people believed that the children had the diamond with them—no I don't believe, I can't believe that the children perished on board the Cape Town."

"I am afraid, Henry, that it is all but too true," said the other. "If they had survived, we would have heard from them before now."

"It may be, it may be! Perhaps they were murdered on board the ship and then she was run onto the rocks and destroyed in order to cover up the crime—"

"No, no! I knew Captain Marlin; he was an honest man—"

"Who is that, James?" asked Aunt Jane from the door, interrupting the conversation. "There are two of them, they are coming down through the meadow—a man and a boy."

Both old men looked attentively at the advancing couple.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Aunt Jane, rubbing her eyes in a vain endeavor to clear their sight. "Dear me! I have seen that man before. I—"

"Ahem, I wonder—I—" but the old hermit did not finish the sentence, for somehow his tongue refused to articulate—cleaved to the roof of his mouth; his eyes grew suddenly dim and he was obliged to cling to the veranda post in order to support himself and prevent his falling.

"Lord-a-massy!" ejaculated Aunt Jane, adjusting and re-adjusting her spectacles; then pushing them up upon her forehead, she looked again. "Lord-a-massy! I do believe—" and adjusting her spectacles, after wiping them with her bandana, she took another look.

"Did you ever!" cried Lucy, appearing upon the scene.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### HOMeward BOUND.

"O Harry! look, look!"

These exclamations, loud and clear, and uttered in a tone of mingled joy and doubt, rang out upon the still morning air of the little island home, and the very next morning after the happy union witnessed upon the "look-out" only a few short hours before.

"Look, look, Harry, it's a vessel!" cried little Tom, who, with her golden head thrust half-way out of the door to their little nest, had spied the white sails of a small vessel not a half mile away, which was headed directly toward the island. In an instant, Harry was beside her and together they stood and watched the approaching vessel till she came to anchor and sent a boat ashore.

Going down to the water's edge, the two castaways stood and welcomed the approaching boat with hearts bounding with joy and thankfulness.

"Oh, if we could have known, if we had waited another day," muttered Tom, and a warm blush mantled her fair cheek; "but then, we didn't know—"

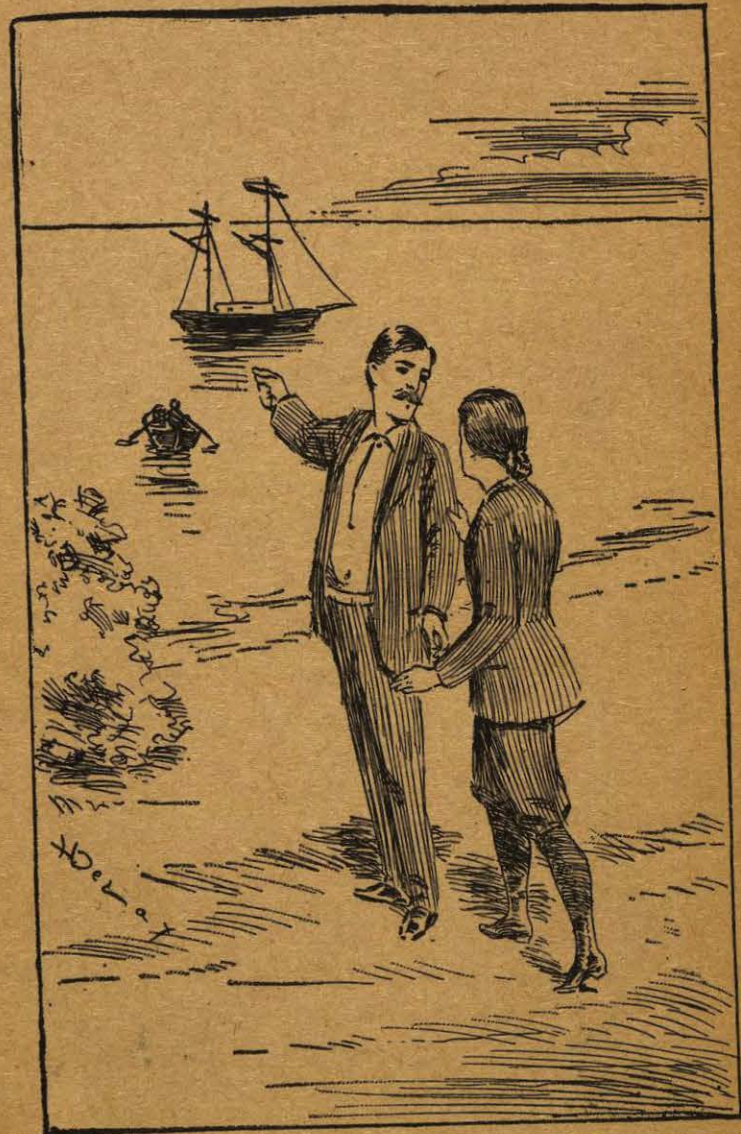
"Are you sorry, Tom?" asked Harry.

"No, no," she replied quickly; "not sorry, Harry, but I was just thinking—"

"Thinking of what, Tom?"

"Won't tell you, Harry," she replied, turning away to

(186)



CASTAWAYS WELCOMED THE APPROACHING BOAT. P. 186.

hide her blushing face from the men who had just sprang ashore and were approaching them.

A few minutes later, Tom, with tears in her eyes, looked back and bade good-bye to her little home—that cosy, little nest where she had been so happy—O so happy!

“Never mind, Tom,” said Harry, observing her tears, “we will come back some day and pay a visit to our little home. Come,” he said, as they reached the ship, “climb up”; and following her, they soon found themselves on the deck.

“God almighty now!” were the first words which greeted them as they stepped upon the deck.

“Captain Marlin!” exclaimed Harry, stepping forward and grasping the hand of the old sea captain. “Then we are not the only survivors of the Cape Town—glad to meet you, captain!” cried Harry, wringing his hands—“glad to see that you escaped; but the rest, captain—what of them?”

“God almighty!” he sputtered, polishing his bald pate. “God almighty, now, but I thought I was the only one left! Glad to see you—blast my eyes but I am! And he grasped the hand of little Tom.

Congratulating one another upon their fortunate and narrow escape, they seated themselves upon a bench and talked long and earnestly of the ill-fated ship and her unfortunate crew.

“I was picked up along toward evening, the next day,” said Captain Marlin, “and taken to Australia. I am on my way home now.”

The day was very pleasant and rather calm, and as a

a consequence they made rather slow progress; but along toward evening the wind rose and everything promised a safe and speedy arrival at the Cape. But alas! how often is the warm sunshine, the most beautiful and most pleasant day followed by the darkest and bitterest of storms; how often the most flattering promises terminate in deep and bitter woe.

Standing beside her husband, with her hand resting upon his shoulder as he sat talking with the captain, little Tom was looking away across the sea when she spied a little white spec, no bigger it appeared than her hand. But watching it, she saw that it was steadily increasing in size, and she asked:

"Isn't that a vessel?"

All eyes were turned upon the object and all pronounced it a vessel. But there was nothing uncommon about that, and so no further attention was paid to it.

"Harry," whispered Tom, after a little, "isn't that a queer looking vessel?"

Harry, as well as the other, arose and scanned the vessel closely. She was heading in such a way as would put herself directly in the course of the ship and seemed to be crowding on all the canvas they could find room for.

"She carries a deal of cloth," said one.

"A perfect cloud of canvas," suggested another.

"Mighty low down in the water," ventured a third.

"Blast my old head-lights!" bawled old Captain Marlin, after surveying the suspicious looking craft through a glass. "God almighty, now!"

"Give her a wide berth," commanded the captain. "She seems determined to run us down."

"And in a few minutes, obeying orders, the seamen had crowded on every available inch of canvas that could be used.

"We'll show them a clean pair of heels at any rate," declared the captain.

Bearing directly down upon them now, came the stranger.

"God almighty, now!" bawled Captain Marlin, while exclamations of dismay arose from the crew upon every hand; for, at that instant, a black flag with grinning skull and cross-bones was displayed at the mast-head, which quickly and decisively banished all doubt from the minds of the anxious, waiting seamen as to the real character of the strange vessel.

"It's a Malay Pirate!" ran breathlessly from mouth to mouth.

"God almighty, now!" came in a subdued tone from Captain Marlin, as with eyes fairly starting from their sockets, he peered over the bulwarks and watched the pursuing vessel.

Now, it could be seen that the decks were literally swarming with men, for they no longer tried to conceal their true character. Guns, which had heretofore been masked, were displayed and it was plainly seen that all preparations necessary for action were made.

"Pipe all hands on deck," commanded the captain. "Clear up and prepare for action. We must meet them like men or die like dogs, for the Malay Pirate spares

neither age nor sex. Make everything snug and distribute the arms," commanded the officer.

His orders were soon given and for a while the men rushed quickly about and soon all was ready for battle.

On, on flew the gallant ship. On, on came the fleet pirate.

It was an exciting race, and was made doubly exciting by the fact that the two vessels were evenly matched in speed—so nearly matched that after an hour's race no perceptible difference in distance could be detected between them.

On flew the pursued and pursuer.

But now there was a new hope awakened in the hearts of the anxious, expectant seamen—if they could hold their own until dark, they could make good their escape.

Again the spirits of the men rose. But even so, when our spirits are lightest, when our hopes are brightest, darker gathers the storm clouds about us; so now, for at this time a cloud of white smoke arose from the bows of the pursuer and, an instant later, a solid shot went whizzing through the sails.

Again and again that puff of smoke was followed by the whiz of a shot through the sails and rigging.

Then came a puff followed by a fearful crash, and the main mast toppled for an instant, then fell crashing upon the lee deck.

"God almighty, now!" bawled Captain Marlin.

"Clear the wreck!" commanded the ship's captain.

Quickly, the wreckage was cleared away. But now, it was too plainly evident that escape was utterly impossible—to fight was the only alternative. Every man

was fully determined to sell his life dearly, to fight to the bitter end, for they expected no quarter—the Malay Pirate asks no mercy, neither will he give any.

On they came, swiftly now, bearing down upon the crippled ship with the speed of the wind. Sweeping down in a wide circle like an eagle upon his prey, the Pirate dashed along-side and grappled with the ship.

Every man was waiting—anxiously, impatiently waiting for the bloody fray. Crouching behind the bulwarks, grasping their weapons, every nerve strained to its utmost, every fiber vibrating beneath the intense tension, they awaited the word of command. It came—low, yet distinct. Instantly a line of grim faces appeared above the bulwarks and a line of red fire crept from the muzzles of fifty muskets.

For a moment the surging mass of blood-thirsty demons wavered before that withering fire, then with wild, fierce yells they rushed impetuously to the attack. But they met a determined resistance and soon the white, polished deck of the merchantman was wreacking with blood and strewn with ghastly corpses. With the horrible yells and curses, the screams of the dying, the incessant popping of pistols and clash of cutlass and sabre, the polished deck of the proud ship which, but a few hours before had been the scene of such peace and good-will, was turned into a veritable hell.

Fiercely the contest raged, though hopeless indeed appeared the fate of the brave, hardy seamen, for outnumbered as they were, the now almost victorious pirates had gained possession of the deck; but now, a change

came over the scene, for away to the northeast a black cloud of smoke was first noticed by little Tom.

"Look, look!" she cried, pointing it out "O it is a steamship! Thank God, we are saved!"

For a moment all eyes were turned in the direction of the approaching steamer; then, as if by some magic spell, the pirates vanished, leaving their dead and wounded behind and were soon speeding swiftly away.

Now, came the work of clearing the decks. The dead found a resting place in the sea and the wounded were placed on board the steamship, which proved to be an English cruiser; and, after a little indcision, the ship was abandoned as hopelessly wrecked and the survivors were transferred to the cruiser and taken to Calcutta.