

CHAPTER XXX.

CONCLUSION.

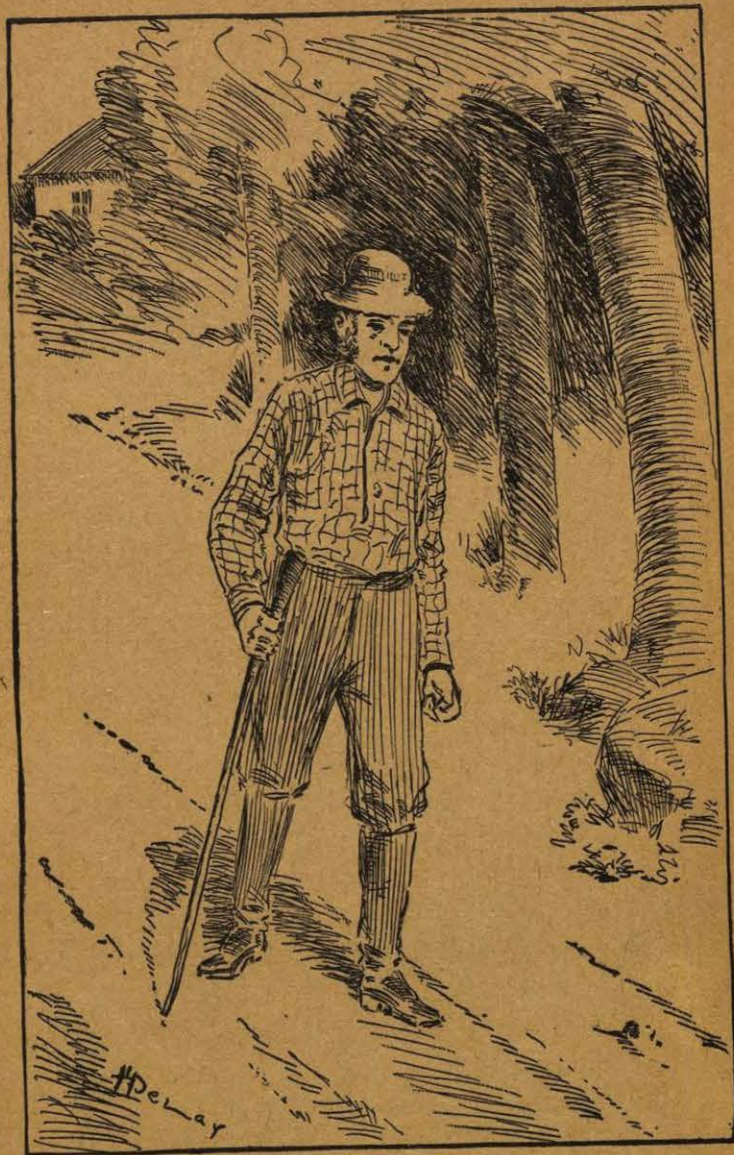
The night had closed down dark and ominous, boding ill to the unwary mariner who might be caught unprepared. It was, in fact, just such a night as, little more than a year before, had closed in around the doomed ship—Cape Town—and shut her out from the world forever.

As darkness closed down on the placid, shining waters of the great ocean, hiding the Lady Maud from view, Tom turned from the door where she had been standing, watching the sun go down beyond the veil of dark, leaden clouds, just peeping above the dark line where the sea and sky meets and, bending low over her sleeping babe, kissed her sweet, red lips. Her cheek was pale and there was that same sad look, that mournful expression in her wide, beautiful eyes that so often before, in times of danger and suffering, had wrung Harry's heart with a keen pang of anguish and pity for the brave, tender-hearted, little girl.

"Tom, come here," said Harry.

Hastily brushing away a tear that had fallen upon the sweet, little face of the sleeping baby she instantly obeyed.

"Tom, I want you try and not worry so much over what has happened here to-day. It was to be; and what is to be, will be, and there's no help for it. I tell



A FOOT-SORE AND WEARY TRAVELER, COMING SLOWLY
DOWN THE LONG, OAK AVENUE.

you, Tom, that fate decreed that we should come here—it was to be and we couldn't have done otherwise. Tom, aren't you willing to submit to the will of Him who writes the destiny of man?"

"O Harry, I don't mean to complain, but I can't help it Harry. I feel sad! But it is not altogether what *has* happened, but oh, it is what *may* happen! Harry, I feel that we have not seen the end of this yet."

"Don't borrow trouble, Tom; don't prophesy!" said Harry.

"Don't go back on your own preaching, Harry," said Tom; "for according to your own theory, I can't help to do what I do—it is to be, you know, and it will be—I can't help it!"

"That's so, Tom; you have got the better of me this time, and I will give up," declared Harry.

Just then a low moaning was heard; it sounded like the low mournful sighing of the distant sea. Closer and closer it came. Louder and louder and yet more mournful it sounded. It was an approaching storm.

Silently, almost breathlessly the anxious and fearful friends sat and waited—waited and watched for the coming of the storm.

It came; and oh what a tempest! Furiously, fiercely, it beat upon the rocks.

Pale as death and with an awful sickening feeling at heart poor little Tom sat, with her head resting upon Harry's shoulder and cried.

"Cheer up my little girl!" said Harry tenderly. "All may be well yet."

"O they will all be lost!" she moaned.

"The worst of it will soon be over," said Harry; "and I ought to go down to the shore and see if—if—"

"Yes, yes, Harry; go, and if any of them are cast ashore you may be able to save some of them."

Out into the darkness and the storm he went; hoping for the best but fearing the worst. He knew that the little yacht could never weather such a storm; but would any of the adventurous crew be able to reach the shore?

It was midnight; the storm had passed and Tom, sitting alone in her tent, awaited the return of Harry who had gone out into the storm, into the night, to try and see, if he could, if their fears concerning the little yacht and their five friends were in fact to be realized. He feared, in fact almost knew, that the yacht could never weather the storm—that she would be cast upon the rocks, but he had some hope for the crew—perhaps that they might yet reach the shore.

In the course of an hour Harry returned in company with two others who were carrying a third.

"O Harry!" cried Tom, wringing her hands in despair.

"He is not dead, Tom," said Harry encouragingly.

"But the others, Harry? Oh God, where are they?" she wailed.

But no one had the courage to answer.

"Two more!" she moaned.

And bowing her head upon the bed where her baby was sleeping, she burst into tears.

"Tom," said Harry, cheer up a little; let us be thankful that it is no worse. Come, stop your crying now—be brave, little Tom—"

"Yes, yes—only three more, Harry, that's all! But where is the diamond?"

"Here, Tom," answered Fred.

But the sight of the precious stone did not, could not cheer the aching heart—could not banish the horrible memory, the awful feeling of gloom which hovered about her. It seemed as if the evil one himself had taken possession of them and was bound to make them pay a dear price for their treasure; to make them suffer all the torments that his evil nature could devise.

But that wild and awful night had given way; and with the day which dawned bright and beautiful, came the welcome sight of an approaching ship. The signal of distress which floated from the highest point upon the desert island, had been seen and a boat was sent to their relief.

It was with a feeling of unbounded thankfulness, that they found themselves once again on shipboard and speeding swiftly away toward the Cape, which, in due time they reached in safety.

The next day, Tom and Harry bade good by to what was left of the successful fortune hunters and prepared to return to the old homestead at Cliffside.

Fred and his two friends were to take passage on board the first ship for Paris where they were going to dispose of the treasure.

"I will write just as soon as I reach Paris," said Fred, "and tell you all about our success in disposing of the stone and send a draft for the amount of your share."

"Give us your note, Fred, for fifty thousand dollars and you may have our share of the stone to dispose of for whatever you can get," said Tom.

"Do you mean it, Tom?" asked Fred, incredulously.

Of course I do," she answered. What do you say, Harry, do you agree to that?"

"Tom makes her own trades—I am satisfied," laughed Harry.

"All right then," he said; and giving Tom his note for the amount, he bade them a last good-bye.

Three days later, a report reached the Cape and was telegraphed to Kimberly, that the Pelican—the ship upon which Fred and his two companions had taken passage—had taken fire, when a day and a half out, and had burned to the water's edge. But fortunately, no lives were lost.

"Just think of it, Harry," cried Tom; "that diamond was aboard of that ship."

"It was fate, Tom, it—"

"It was the devil!" cried Tom, with blanched cheeks.

"Well, devil or no devil," replied Harry, "we will hear from Fred before long. I guess that he must certainly have been able to save the stone."

"I don't think so," replied Tom, I never believed that he would reach Paris with that thing. I don't believe that he ever will."

Nearly a week after the news of the disaster had first reached them, a delapidated, footsore and weary traveler, coming slowly down the long, Oak avenue, which was the pride and glory of Cliffside, turned in at the little

gate and staggered wearily up the graveled walk toward the cottage door.

Little Tom sat at the half open window sewing when she heard the traveler's slow and weary step upon the graveled walk. For a moment she scanned the delapidated traveler, then in a voice of surprise, mingled with doubt and fear, she cried—

"Harry, Harry! Run quick—here comes Fred!"

What more is there to tell?

Only this: Fred told the story of the burning of the Pelican, the fortunate and narrow escape of every one aboard, and concluding, he said—

"It was about midnight when the alarm was given; in a moment everything was confusion. Women and children screamed, men prayed, cursed and swore, while the officers strove with all their might to quiet the terror-stricken passengers."

"The first thing that I thought of was the diamond. I had wrapped it up in a little bundle and placed under my head; and the first thing that I did when awakened, was to look there for it. I raised the pillow and looked—it was gone."

"Thank God!" was the fervent exclamation of little Tom.

"Tom, please don't draw that \$50,000 note on me till I have made another strike," said Fred; "for I am perfectly pennyless—not a penny to my name!"

Thus in mystery ends my story. But it must be so. If this tale was but the idle galloping of a still idler imagination, we would have brought, and with the