

ferent stamp from these; and all the wars, and discipline, and doctrine I have encountered, never could imbue me with

the cruelty of my betters. Therefore I was shocked at thinking that the little dear was dead.

CHAPTER VI.—FINDS A HOME OF SOME SORT.

However, it was high time now, if we had any hope at all of getting into Sker-house that night, to be up and moving. For though Evan Thomas might be late, Moxey, his wife, would be early; and the door would be open to none but the master after the boys were gone to bed. For the house is very lonely; and people no longer innocent as they used to be in that neighborhood.

I found the child quite warm and nice, though overwhelmed with weight of sleep; and setting her crosswise on my shoulders, whence she slid down into my bosom, over the rocks I picked my way by the light of the full clear moon, towards the old Sker-Grange, which stands a little back from the ridge of beach, and on the edge of the sand hills.

This always was, and always must be, a very sad and lonesome place, close to a desolate waste of sand, and the continual roaring of the sea upon the black rocks. A great grey house, with many chimneys, many gables, and many windows, yet not a neighbor to look out on, not a tree to feed its chimneys, scarce a firelight in its gables in the very depth of winter. Of course, it is said to be haunted; and though I believe not altogether in any stories of that kind—despite some very strange things indeed which I have beheld at sea—at any rate, I would rather not hear any yarns on that matter just before bedtime in that house; and most people would agree with me, unless I am much mistaken.

For the whole neighborhood—if so you may call it, where there are no neighbors—is a very queer one—stormy, wild, and desolate, with little more than rocks and sand and sea to make one's choice among. As to the sea, not only dull, and void it is of any haven, or of proper traffic, but as dangerous as need be, even in good weather, being full of draughts and currents, with a tide like a mill-race, suffering also the ups and downs which must be where the Atlantic Ocean jostles with

blind narrowings: it offers, moreover, a special peril (a treacherous and shifty one) in the shape of some horrible quicksands, known as the "Sker Weathers:" these at the will of storm and current change about from place to place, but are for the most part, some two miles from shore, and from two to four miles long, according to circumstances; sometimes almost bare at half-tide, and sometimes covered at low water. If any ship falls into them, the bravest skipper that ever stood upon a quarter-deck can do no more than pipe to prayers, though one or two craft have escaped when the tide was rising rapidly.

As for the shore, it is no better (when once you get beyond the rocks) than a stretch of sandhills, with a breadth of flaggy marsh behind them all the way to the mouth of Neath river, some three leagues to the westward. Eastward, the scene is fairer inland, but the coast itself more rugged and steep, and scarcely more inhabited, having no house nearer than Rhwychyns, which is only a small farm nearly two miles from Sker-Grange, and a mile from any other house. And if you strike inland from Sker—that is to say, to the northward—there is nothing to see but sand, warren, and furze, and great fields marked with rubble, even as far as Kenfig.

Looking at that vast lonely house, there were two things I could never make out. The first was, who could ever have been man enough to build it there?—for it must have cost a mint of money, being all of quarried and carried stone, and with no rich farm to require it. And the second thing was still worse a puzzle: how could any one ever live there?

As to the first point, the story is, that the house was built by abbots of Neath, when owners of Sker-manor, adding to it, very likely, as they followed one another; and then it was used as their manor-court, and for purposes more important, as a place of refectation, being near good fisheries, and especially Kenfig Pool,