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CLARA CHILLINGTON; OR, THE PRIDE OF THE CLIFF.

A STORY OF ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

BY

THE REVEREND JAMES LANGHORNE BOXER,

Rector of La Porte, Ind., U.S., and formerly co-Editor with Charles Dickens of *All the Year Round*.

EDITED BY THE

REV. WILLIAM SMITHETT, D.D., of Lindsay, Ont.

CHAPTER XLII.

PREPARATION FOR DELIVERANCE.

The intelligence Lisette brought from France excited the friends of Charles Freeman, and Samphire Cottage became the meeting place for consultation. That residence was literally invaded; its former tranquility had departed, and with it, according to old Betty, had also gone the senses of Jacob Winter. That old servant longed to die; she believed from the confusion going on around her that the world was coming to an end, and she was desirous of taking her departure before that event actually occurred. But death did not hurry himself to accommodate her wishes, and, as a consequence, she had to endure the inconvenience of living.

The dull, cold days of November had come, and with them the furious gales, which, sweeping the bosom of the Atlantic and rushing up the English Channel, have made them a proverb in the mouth of the British sailor. It was at this period of the year Clara Chillington ordered her carriage to be in readiness to take her to Folkestone, and at the moment appointed it appeared at the door, with the coachman buttoned and wrapped in such a manner as to defy the wildest wind to penetrate to his precious person. It was a wild afternoon, and as the carriage was driven along the cliff road, the rushing gale seemed to threaten to sweep the driver from his box, or to blow himself and horses into the sea. But safely he drove his charge, whose thoughts were too much absorbed in the duty of the hour to regard the inclemency of the weather.

Lisette had simply told Clara that she had a plan for the rescue of the prisoner, but of its nature she knew nothing; and as that plan was to be matured that night at Samphire Cottage, thither she was being driven to learn particulars. Fearfully the wind howled through the streets of the old town, as Clara passed on to the place of meeting; and such persons as saw her carriage wondered at what could bring "My lady" from home on such an inclement day. Assembled in the parlour of the residence of Uncle Jacob were the little circle familiar to the reader. Their condition in life was extreme, but a common sentiment had touched the chord of feeling in every heart, and corroborated the fact that the same sympathies dwell with mankind, whatever may be their social condition. The heiress of the Priory was an object of reverence with that little circle, and Lisette was the oracle of the hour. The wonderful gypsy possessed a sacredness in the esteem of all present, and they hung on her lips for counsel in a matter affecting the happiness of them all.

"This is my plan," said Lisette; but before proceeding further she hesitated, and cast her eyes enquiringly around the room. This conduct was quickly interpreted by Uncle Jacob, who enquired:

"Are we who have met here all true men? This is what our friend is desirous of knowing before she proceeds further."

"It is so, sir," replied Lisette; "for success in the matter which fills our hearts can only be achieved by united action. One traitor in our midst would baffle all my skill and energy."

"We are true men, even to death," came from the lips of all.

"Good," returned Lisette, who then told the arrangement between herself and Anthony, in playing the part of an idiot brother until her return. "He is," she continued, "well capable of sustaining that character, and will be ready to aid me further at the proper moment. Now, on my return, should I so far succeed as to release the prisoner, a vessel must be in readiness to bear us across the channel. There must be no delay. The delay of an hour might frustrate all our designs, for should Monsieur find that his prisoner has escaped, rather than we should succeed, he would betray us to the French Government as spies, and we should soon find ourselves in prison. To carry out my plan, then, it is essential that a vessel should be cruising in the offing, and holding daily intercourse with the shore. Who, then, is prepared to furnish a vessel, to man it, and to leave the control of it to my command?" A short silence followed this appeal—a very short one, and then, Uncle Jacob, leaping from his chair, exclaimed:

"Clever girl! here is a blank draft, fill it up with what amount you choose; purchase a man-of-war with the money; do anything, so long as Charles Freeman can escape."

"Money can buy ships, but what I want is men."

"I'll make one to go, marm, if you please," said Dick Backstay, touching his forelock; "I couldn't be drowned with his father, but if Mr. Charles dies in the struggle so will I."

"Silence, Dick; not so fast, for if you are to be mate in this expedition, I mean to be Captain. I don't know what good I am alive, and if there is to be any danger in this job I mean to be in the front." The old spirit of rivalry was not dead; Dick felt that it was not, and replied:

"I beg your pardon, Uncle Jacob, but I thought marm to be asking for men, and Dick Backstay has never been used to be the last man at his quarters."

"You are a good fellow, Dick! Friends, I have a strong affection for Charles Freeman; I love him better than my own life; I never knew what it was to have a special regard for any person until I saw him; and I have no notion of a man liking in word, and not in deed. Friends, I will hire a vessel, and, old as I am, I'll once more tread the plank for his deliverance. Friends, I cannot make a long speech; sailors were never made to talk; but who will go with us on this expedition?"

Both John Williams and Fred Holman volunteered to take part, and they knew they could hire the rest. Matters being so far arranged, after thanking her friends, Clara retired, praying for their success. On seeing the carriage door closed, Fred Holman, hastily telling those within the house that he was theirs to command at any hour, unknown to the occupant of the vehicle, mounted the box and seated himself by the side of the coachman. A short explanation was sufficient to make that worthy quite satisfied with having him by his side.

The storm of the morning had now increased to a fearful hurricane, and the night was darkness itself. So dense was the darkness that the two lamps suspended from the corners of the carriage scattered their rays without scarcely showing sufficient light to direct their path. Not a word was spoken by either Fred Holman or his companion. It would have been useless to attempt to speak, as their voices would have been lost amidst the fury of the tempest. Clara herself trembled, as she heard the rattle of the terrible blast. Folkestone was now left behind, and they began to ascend the hill leading to the Priory. Passing a lime-kiln at work, the lurid glare from the burning mass lighted up the scene with a horrible distinctness. Just beyond this is a place where two roads meet, and where it would be possible for any desirous of inflicting an injury on travellers to secrete themselves, secure from observation, until the approach of their victim brought them within their grasp.

As the carriage drew near to this point, the storm bellowed forth in fresh fury, and the loud thunder peal reverberated in awful tones across the sky. The posture of Fred Holman was that of a person eagerly watching for something he expected to appear. Sitting on the box, he bent his head toward the wind-ward side, as though listening for any sound which might be borne upon the blast. While thus sitting, a flash of lightning burst forth, and, playing around the withered grass, lighted up the scene, and revealed to his quick eye that there were horses standing sheltered by a rising on the side of the hill. The darkness which followed this flash seemed denser than before, and it was with difficulty the coachman could drive his fiery steeds, alarmed by the fury of the elements. On seeing the horses standing, Fred Holman shouted in the ear of his companion:

"Drive for your life!" As he did so, he drew forth a pistol from his pocket. Flash! crack! went the report of firearms. "Poor practice," said Fred, as he raised himself on the seat. Another and another shot followed, but neither of them struck the carriage. Waiting the bursting forth of a fresh flash of lightning, as it illumined the sky, he fired at the figure of a man he saw running toward them, and a piercing shriek borne upon the blast told that some one was hit. Again another report, and, striking the carriage, the ball smashed one of the window-panes. "Good heavens!" he exclaimed; and then bawled to the driver not to stop. Indeed, had he felt inclined to, he would have found it impossible, for the affrighted horses, now more fearful, were dashing along at full gallop. Fortunately the road was good, and the creatures were not so alarmed as to lose all consciousness whether they were going. A few minutes brought them to a turning in the road leading up to the Priory. On leaving the more direct highway, a feeling of security came over the horses, and, with flanks smoking and still trembling, they permitted themselves to be reined up.

Instantly their speed was checked, Fred Holman leaped from his seat, and, opening the door, beheld Clara lying in a state of insensibility. In a moment he saw she was not hurt, and, giving word to drive on, placed himself opposite her in the carriage. Being prepared for any emergency, he drew from his pocket a flask and, applying the restorative, suspended anima-

tion quickly returned. The sight of a person sitting beside her, and not knowing who it was, suddenly imparted to Clara a supernatural strength, and she prepared herself for resistance. But a moment served to dispel the illusion, and by the time a short explanation was offered they arrived at the Priory. Having delivered his companion over to the safe-keeping of Alice, without remaining longer than was necessary to obtain a little refreshment, he went forth again to breathe the storm.

When Clara had left Samphire Cottage, those remaining entered into the details demanded by the adventure. Uncle Jacob, although not mixing up directly in trade, had numerous shares in the different ships leaving the port of Folkestone.

"What vessels are there at home idle?" he enquired of Dick Backstay.

There is the *Speedwell*; she is a vessel which would ride out a gale of wind in the chops of the channel without shipping as much water as would make tears for a soldier's widder to shed at her husband's funeral."

"But we don't want to go near the chops of the channel."

"You never can tell where you'll go when you get afloat."

"The *Speedwell* is a good craft, and just the thing for the work."

"There isn't a better vessel for that job sails out of this port."

"And her captain, Dick?"

"Her cap'n is a good fellow; but I thought you were to be cap'n."

"So I am, but I shall have a sailing master."

"I don't care what I am, so long as I can once more grab the fin of Mister Charles."

"What an awful villain that Sir Harry Chillington is!" said John Williams; "I feel that killing him would be doing good service to mankind."

"It's only nat'ral for you to feel so, John," replied Dick Backstay; "but don't worry yourself about him. I always said it, and say it now, that it'll come home to him some day. A man may get into the trade winds, and they may carry him a long distance, but he'll be sure to find the breeze will chop round, and then he'll have the gale right in his teeth."

"The sooner the better, in his case."

"For how long, do you think, shall we require the vessel?" enquired Uncle Jacob of Lisette.

"Not less than a week, if everything succeeds as I desire; but it may be for a much longer time."

"It doesn't matter for a week or two; therefore, I think, we had better victual her for a month."

"A month?" enquired Dick Backstay.

"Yes, and what cannot be eaten aboard will serve you when we get ashore."

"I've been thinking that it wouldn't be amiss to see old Luff, and to give him just a hint of what is going on; for if we have to wait long we shall have to stand over to the English shore a good many times, and he may so wonder what we are about as to send something to interrupt us just when we ought to be off back."

"I don't think it will matter about seeing him. Still, as you say, he might wonder what we are about, and he is a good fellow to the backbone."

"He is. Well, we shall leave the matter with you, and shall be ready whenever you say the word."

The arrangement being left with Uncle Jacob, proud of the confidence placed in him, and willing for the work, he soon had the *Speedwell* secretly fitted out, and engaged a crew to sail with him under sealed orders.

CHAPTER XLIII.

LISETTE RETURNS TO HER SITUATION.

Sir Harry Chillington, being anxious for the scheme which was to afford him a mad revenge, on learning that it had failed, became desirous that he might see Lord Lushington. That he might obtain the interview, he started immediately for Canterbury. But he arrived too soon; his noble friend was known to have gone away, but no one had seen him return. Finding his mistake, the baronet retraced his steps toward the place the capture was to have been made. Reaching the spot, he found traces of rough work, and, following the track of carriage wheels, came upon the imprisoned party in the situation the sailors had left them. Hearing the noise made by the shouting and knocking of the prisoners, his rigid countenance relaxed into such an apology for a smile as the feelings of his own heart and the circumstances of the hour would admit of.

There stood the carriage in the pond, but where were the horses? Fortunately, a short, sweet grass, growing in the place where they were liberated, had tempted their appetite, and confined them to the locality. Used only to obey, the privilege of liberty was scarcely appreciated by those worn down creatures, and fearful of indulging too freely, they suffered themselves to be readily caught. But that he had a thousand pounds at stake, the baronet would not have interfered with them.

Having caught the horses, and with some difficulty attached them to the chaise, the prisoners were dragged forth to dry land. The baronet now broke open the shutters and admitted light and air. Bound together, pale from fear, and drenched from perspiration through being so closely confined, on their release they presented a serio-comic aspect. Having cut the cords which bound them, the miserable creatures felt as though they had arisen from the dead.

The first act of Lord Lushington, on regaining his freedom, was to curse everything in existence, and then to include the members of his own body. On the sailors he vowed eternal vengeance, should he ever meet with them, as also on the unknown reveler of the plot. Finding he had reduced the inflation distended by the raging of his passion, Sir Harry turned coolly round and requested the thousand pounds. This fresh invitation again aroused his lordship, who renewed his favourite employment of cursing, and this time included the baronet with all his kith and kin.

On hearing this latter effort, Sir Harry felt strongly inclined to lay violent hands on the object of his former adoration, and this he was powerful enough to do with damaging effect, for as many, whose worship is ostensibly of a higher order than anything he attempted, he was likely to let fall the object of his veneration when there was a fear that he would become pecuniarily a loser by holding on to him. But he restrained his passion, and quietly informed his lordship that cursing and swearing left the thousand pounds still unpaid. Before parting, the two plotters agreed that another attempt should be made, and spies were set to watch the movements of Clara.

On the afternoon Clara left the Priory for Samphire Cottage, the report was carried to Lord Lushington, who remained in the neighbourhood to avail himself of any opportunity that might occur. Receiving the news, he formed the plan to waylay her on her return—to shoot the horses, and then to carry her off. This time he was certain of success; the plan was formed so hastily, and the spot for reducing it to practice was so well chosen, that failure seemed impossible.

Fred Holman had never forgotten that he owed his life to Clara Chillington, and knowing that, urged by necessity, his lordship would renew his effort with the first advantage, he kept a secret watch. On the morning of that day he had come across two men in the neighbourhood of the Priory; they were unknown to him, and this strengthened his conviction of a further design. From this conclusion he mounted the box with the coachman, for he knew, was any attempt to be made, the entire route did not present a more favourable spot than the one he listened at that he might catch the sound of human voices. Whoever it was he shot on that stormy night, he was sufficiently a principal in the affair as to stop all pursuit.

The *Speedwell* being ready for sea, those old seamen, who had for various purposes sailed over every ocean, embarked to carry out their mission of love. The night was dark, but calm, with a heavy ground swell, when that gallant vessel dipped her prow to the rolling undulations over which she was to ride as a living thing. Every heart on board that trim built craft throbbed with anxiety as she drew herself forward on her voyage; and Uncle Jacob, with that superstition of his class which was with him a religion, bringing a bottle of brandy from the cabin, poured forth a glassful on the helm of the vessel, accompanied with a short prayer for a successful cruise. This little ceremony being ended, he then passed glasses of the liquor to the crew, until the entire number had tasted it. Lisette smiled as she saw him pour forth the libation, and envied him that simplicity of soul which could make of such an act a source of consolation. Trained in the school of cunning and deceit, the world had been represented to her only as a vast jungle, through which as a wild beast she was to roam to seek her prey. But this simple act led her again to long for the repose of confidence, and increased the vehemence of her desire to become a house-dweller.

Habit, forming a kind of second nature with mankind, Jacob Winter was no exception to the rule. From walking so long only on dry land, he had lost that peculiarity of seamen—his sea legs. He had not thought of such a possibility when he engaged to go once more to sea, and indulged the delusive expectation of suffering no greater inconvenience than when he plied his calling in the Indian Ocean. Indeed, he felt a positive delight in the thought of the pleasure returning to an old and long tried habit would produce; but having for years been only accustomed to the oscillating motion of walking ashore, the pitch and toss of a vessel at sea not only disturbed his equilibrium, but slightly interfered with the state of his health. This latter fact would have mantled his cheek with the blush of wounded pride had not the state of his stomach precluded such a possibility; as it was, therefore, he turned for aid to a glass of brandy, and sought a remedy for the derangement of his system in lying on the flat of his back. The combined efforts of spirits and sleep soon restored the old captain to the former pleasures of his seafaring life, and the colour having returned to his cheeks, he walked proudly the deck, and pitched and rolled with as little inconvenience to his feelings as though he had formed part of the vessel.

It was thought best on board the *Speedwell* not to take direct course for the coast of France, lest falling in with any ship to whose captain or crew she was known, suspicion should be aroused that might interfere with their arrangements. Having the wind in the North-West, the bow of the vessel was, therefore, turned up the channel.

The night, though dark, was not entirely immersed in gloom. The stars twinkled small and feebly in the half-obscured firmament, and the objects on board the *Speedwell* appeared only in indistinct outline. Lisette could not sleep, neither could she be prevailed on to descend to the warm and comfortable cabin. Wrapped in