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A BOAT WAS ALREADY BEING LAUNCHED TO THE RESCUE.

A Mother's Lost Boy.

A TALE OF THE WILD EAST COAST.

(Sunday Friend.)

CHAPTER I.

Middlewick is a little village on the east coast of England, a village with queer, tumble-down old houses; crooked narrow streets, paved with shingle from the beach; and an eventful history of wreckage and smuggling. Of late years it has grown ambitious, and has tacked 'On Sea' to the end of its name; while speculative builders have even described it on their bills as 'a rising and attractive watering-place.' But chalk and cheese are more allied to each other than Middlewick-on-Sea and ordinary seaside resorts. No pier runs out with great spidery legs into the bay; no band mingles its music with that of the waves among the pebbles; no bathing machines, no donkeys, hold out attractions to visitors. The boats on the beach are not cockle-shell pleasure skiffs, but honest, rough, clumsy, broad-beamed craft, scarred and seamed and battered, like their owners, with hard work and weather. Instead of huge arcades of shops, two little general stores, selling everything, from boot-laces to butcher's meat, supply the wants of the community; and the 'Rose and Crown Inn' has not yet risen to the dignity of a 'Hotel.'

But there is one thing common to all watering-places of which Middlewick can boast—its 'Season.' Every summer the standing population of some hundred odd souls receives a reinforcement of two or three dozen visitors. A few people come down because they honestly like the place, preferring, strangely enough, the shingly beach, up and down which the waves charge ceaselessly, the funny old houses and the funny old streets, the quaint, honest fisher folk, and the smell of tarred nets and ropes, to all the attractions of London by the Sea. And others—curates and ministers, clerks and shop assistants, with large families and small incomes—find that Middlewick suits their pockets better than Brighton or Margate or Eastbourne; and gives them quite as much health and quite as much tan on their faces, in exchange for their money.

The day on which the incidents I am about to relate took place was the last of the 189—season, a wild, windy, autumn day, with big clouds tearing madly across the sky, and big breakers tearing madly up and down the coast line. Now, as the first and last days of the season are movable dates, determined by the arrival of the first visitors, and the departure of the latest, it follows that some of Middlewick's guests were bidding the little village farewell for another year. Those last to leave on this occasion were the Rev. John Tidsworth, his wife and five small children, who were going back brown and

freckled to their home in an East-end parish.

All Middlewick turned out to bid them farewell, and furnish a guard of honor. Farmer Hobson's cart had been commissioned to take them to the station, three miles distant; and when it turned the corner of the road, and the thin form of the curate, the buxom, rounded figure of his wife, the podgy bodies of the shouting children, and the mound of boxes, bags, spades, pails and umbrellas, which quite hid both horse and driver from view, had disappeared, the gaiety of Middlewick seemed for the time eclipsed.

'It's kind of lonely without them already,' said one good woman, tucking a handkerchief which she had been desperately waving, into her bodice. The handkerchief was like a white flag of truce; for many and many a battle had she waged with the Tidsworth children during the last few weeks. 'Lively little sparks them children was,' she continued, 'as no one knows better than me, what with their balls and things always clattering up against my windows, and their crabs and messy seaweed always thrown among my plants. Still, I'm sorry they're gone.'

'So am I, Mrs. 'Arding; so am I,' said another woman, in whose house the family had been staying.

'Well, that's nat'ral, I suppose. Thirty-five shillings a week for rooms'—

'Oh, I don't mean that,' said Mrs. Madden rather proudly. 'Thank goodness we