

The Wreckers of Sable Island.

BY  
MACDONALD OXLEY.

CHAPTER VII.—A SABLE ISLAND WINTER.

"WELL, now, look here, mates," Ben continued: "Fair and square's the word between us, ain't it? If I choose to take a notion to these two here, it's my own lookout, and it's not for any other chap to be interfering with me, any more than I'd be after wanting your things, eh?"

They were beginning to see what he was driving at, now, and one of them said, with a sort of sneer:

"You're not afraid of anyone wanting your boy, or his dog, either, are you?"

"Not exactly," answered Ben. "But what I've on my mind is this: Seeing they're my property, I don't want anyone to meddle with them, or give them any trouble; that's only fair, ain't it?"

"Fair enough, Ben; but what are you going to do with the boy when we leave here?" asked one. And there was a murmur of assent to the question.

"That'll be all right, mates," replied Ben, promptly. "I'll be surety that he doesn't get us into any trouble. You just leave that to me, and I'll warrant you I'll get him away from us quiet enough. What do you say, mates?"

Although by dint of bluster and brutality Evil-Eye had forced his way to a sort of leadership among the wreckers, there was really none of them with so much influence as Ben. With the exception of Evil-Eye, they were all now quite ready to accept his assurances of Eric not proving a source of trouble, and to consent to his remaining with them. Evil-Eye growled and grumbled a good deal, but could get nobody to heed him; and Ben, satisfied that he had carried his point, and that Eric and Prince were safe, took his seat again, and lit his pipe.

He was perfectly sincere in promising that Eric would not get his associates into any trouble. He certainly never imagined what would be the result of his taking him under his protection. Could he have had a peep into the future, perhaps he would have hesitated before becoming his champion. As it was he gave himself no concern upon the point.

Eric felt wonderfully relieved at the result of his protector's appeal. It settled his position among his strange, uncongenial companions. They might take no notice of him, if they chose; indeed, that was just what he would prefer. But they had, at all events, not only recognized, but consented to his presence; and this took a great load off his mind.

Although his objections had been ignored by his companions, Evil-Eye was by no means disposed to give up altogether his designs upon Eric. There were two reasons why he hungered for the boy's life. It was against his principle of dead men telling no tales, that he should be spared; and, again, he hated Ben, and the mere fact of his being interested in Eric was quite sufficient to cause the innocent lad to get a share of that hatred. In the days that followed, Eric could not fail to be conscious of the frequency with which the ruffian's one eye was turned upon him, and of the hyena-like look with which it regarded him. Happy for him was it that there was a restraining influence which kept that awful look from finding its way into fitting deed.

Though they did not distinctly recognize any leader,—their motto being each man for himself, and one as good as another,—the wreckers regarded Ben with a respect accorded no other member of the motley crew. This was in part due to his great size and strength, and in part to his taciturn, self-contained ways, which prevented any of that familiarity that so quickly breeds contempt.

Evil-Eye feared Ben no less than he hated him, and dared not openly attempt anything against him; although the fire of his fury burned hotly within his breast. In his fear of Ben, much more than in the decision of the other wreckers, lay Eric's safety. Ere long, this defence was strengthened in a manner most strange, startling, and happily most effective.

A week of almost incessant stormy weather had compelled the wreckers to spend most of their time in the hut. Finding the hours hang heavy on their hands, many of them had sought solace in drink, of which the Francis' fine stock of wines and liquors furnished an unstinted supply. No one drank more deeply than Evil-Eye. Day after day was passed in a state alternating between coarse hilarity and maudlin stupor. Ben, on the other hand, hardly touched the liquor,

contenting himself with sipping a little at his meals.

It was well, indeed, that he should be so moderate, for his cool head and strong hand were in demand more than once to prevent serious conflicts among his intoxicated companions. Eric, in spite of the stormy weather, kept as much out of doors as possible. He preferred the buffeting of the wintry winds to the close atmosphere of the hut, foul with oaths, and reeking with tobacco and spirits.

Evil-Eye's carouse had continued several days. Early one night, after he had fallen into a sotted sleep upon his bunk, and the others had, later on, one by one, turned in for the night, leaving the room in a silence broken only by the heavy breathing and stertorous snoring of the sleepers, the whole hut was suddenly aroused by an appalling yell from Evil-Eye. Starting up, his companions saw him, by the light of a moonbeam that strayed in through one of the port-holes, rise to his feet with an expression of the most frantic terror upon his hideous countenance as he shrieked at the top of his voice:

"I will, I swear I will. If you'll only let me alone."

Then, throwing up his arms, he fell over, foaming in a fit.

For some minutes the hut was a scene of wild confusion, as its bewildered inmates, so suddenly aroused from their sleep, stumbled about in the darkness, trying to find out what was the matter. But Ben, who was not easily frightened, soon restored order by striking a light, and showing that whatever may have been the matter with Evil-Eye, there was certainly no real cause for alarm. Thereupon, with many a growl at him for disturbing their night's rest, most of them grumbling went back to sleep.

A few thoughts it worth while to see what was the matter with Evil-Eye, and of those Ben took command. Little as he loved the ruffian, he could not find it in his heart to let him die for lack of a little care. So, under his direction, the struggling man was lifted out upon the floor. His face was splashed with water, while his arms and legs were chafed by rough hands. In a little while the patient's struggles grew less violent, the purple hue left his face, and his breathing became more natural. Presently, with a great sigh, he fell into a heavy sleep, from which he did not awake for many hours.

Although pestered with questions, upon his return to consciousness, as to the cause of his strange behaviour, he refused to give any reason. But there were two changes in him too noticeable not to excite the remark of his associates. He was much more moderate in the use of wine, taking care not to drink to excess, and his attitude toward Eric curiously different. Instead of regarding him with his former look of hungering hatred, he now seemed to have a feeling of dread. He shrank from being near him, avoiding him in every possible way, treating him, in fact, much as a dog would a man who had been especially cruel to him.

Ben and Eric at once noted the change, and were well pleased at it. Some time after, they learned the cause. It seemed that the evening Evil-Eye had acted so strangely, he had been awakened from his drunken sleep about midnight by a startling vision.

It was the form of a tall man in a military uniform, dripping with sea-water and soiled with sand. On his face was the pallor of death, and his eyes had an awful, far-away expression, as though they were looking through the startled sleeper. Fixing them stealthily upon Evil-Eye, whose blood seemed to freeze in his veins, he held up his forefinger as if commanding attention, and pointed to the bunk where Eric lay sleeping.

At the same time his face took on a threatening look, and his lips moved. Although no words reached Evil-Eye's ears, he understood. As the spectre stood before him, so intense was his terror that it broke the spell which locked his lips; and he shrieked out the words already mentioned. He knew no more until, at broad daylight, he found himself weak and incoherent in his berth.

Like many men of his kind, Evil-Eye was very superstitious. After the vision he looked upon Eric as being under the protection of some ghostly being that would forever haunt anyone who did him any harm.

Henceforth Eric had nothing to fear from him.

Winter on Sable Island is not like winter on the mainland. The Gulf Stream prevents any long continuance of cold. The snow comes in violent storms, and fills the valleys with drifts; but these soon vanish. There is more rain and fog than snow, even in mid-winter, and the herds of wild, shaggy, sharp-boned ponies which scamper from end to end of the island have no difficulty in finding plenty to eat among the grasses which grow rankly in every sheltered spot.

These ponies were a great source of amusement to Eric. But for them and the rabbits, which were even more numerous, the winter, wearisome at best, would have been simply intolerable.

The wreckers had captured a score of the ponies, and broken them in after a fashion. They were kept near the hut, in a large corral built of driftwood, and there were plenty of saddles and bridles.

Now if there was one manly accomplishment more than another upon which Eric prided himself it was his horsemanship. He had been put upon a pony when only five years old, and had been an enthusiastic rider ever since. At Oakdene he had ridden to hounds since he was two years of age, and there was not a lad in the county with a firmer seat in the saddle, or a more masterful touch of the reins. The saddles and bridles at Sable Island were poor things compared with what he had been accustomed to; and the ponies themselves were about as wicked and vicious as animals of that size could be. But this only lent an additional zest to the amusement of riding them. Their bad behaviour did not daunt Eric in the least. With Ben's assistance, a pony would be caught in the corral, and saddled, and then off he would go for a long, lively gallop. Prince, as full of glee as himself, barking and bounding along at his side.

Very often Ben would keep him company; for there was an old black stallion of unusual size which seemed equal to the task of bearing his huge frame. Then Eric's happiness was complete; for every day he was growing more fond of the big man who had saved him from a dreadful death, and who now treated him with paternal tenderness.

With the keen wintry air making his cheeks tingle, he would scamper off at full speed for mile after mile, while Ben lumbered along more slowly, thoroughly enjoying the boy's vigour and daring. Then, halting until Ben overtook him, he would canter on nimbly.

An amusement of which Eric never tired was chasing the wild ponies, as though he wanted to catch one of them. Climbing one of the sand-hills, he would look about until he sighted a herd grazing quietly in the hollows, and guarded as usual by a tousel-manned stallion of mature years. Making a wide detour, and carefully concealing his approach by keeping the hillocks between himself and the ponies, he would get as near as he possibly could without being seen. If necessary, he dismounted and crept along on his hands and knees, dragging his own pony by the bridle, while Prince followed.

When concealment was no longer possible, he would spring into his saddle, and with wild shouts charge down upon the startled ponies; and they would gallop off in headlong stampede.

One afternoon, while thus amusing himself, he had quite an exciting experience, and rather a narrow escape from injury. He had stampeded a herd of ponies, and, picking out a sturdy little youngster as his particular prey, was pressing him pretty closely, when the pony charged straight up the side of a hill. As it was not steep, Eric followed hard after him, taking for granted the slope would be about the same on the other side. Instead of that, the hill fell away abruptly. Over plunged the pony. Unable to check his own animal, full of the spirit of the chase, over plunged Eric after. For a moment both ponies kept their feet; but, the treacherous sand giving way beneath them, they rolled head over heels. Eric happily got free from his horse in time to save himself from being crushed underneath it; but when they all reached the bottom in a heap together, he could not escape the frantically pawing hoofs; and one of them struck him such a blow upon the head as to stun him.

When he recovered he found himself lying upon the sand, not a pony in sight, and Prince licking his face with affectionate anxiety. His head ached sharply, and he felt somewhat sore after his tremendous tumble; but not a bone was broken, nor a joint sprained. Thankful at having gotten off so well, he made the best of his way back to the hut.

Ben was greatly pleased at the adventure, and regretted he had not been there when ponies, boy and dog rolled down the hill together.

"You ought to let your friends know when you're going to give a performance like that, my lad," said he, after a hearty laugh. "It's too good to keep to yourself."

"Perhaps you'd like me to repeat it for you," Eric suggested.

"No, indeed, Eric. You got off all right that time, but you might break your precious neck the next. How would you like a try at a horse? The men tell me they saw a lot of them at the west end this morning; and as you're so fond of hunting, there's something well worth killing."

(To be continued.)

The Wolf at the Door.

BY REV. J. LAYCOCK.

Oh! the wolf is at the door, my boy,  
The wolf of hunger and woe,  
And grief has taken the place of joy—  
The joy of years ago  
I never dreamed in those happy days,  
That the night would transient prove,  
That till'd our home with the blissful rays  
Of a fond husband's love.  
But the wolf is at our door to-night,  
Your father, I know not where,  
Quaffing the winecup in mad delight,  
We, starving in despair

Oh! the wolf is at the door, my child,  
To-day has been dark and drear,  
But the storm without was not so wild  
As one within of fear—  
A tempest fierce of sorrow and care  
In your mother's grief wrung soul,  
Firebrands of anguish and deep despair  
Flaming beyond control,  
Oh! the wolf is at the door, I know,  
Your sister Minnie is dead,  
Slain by the demon—man's meanest foe—  
Her last sad wail for bread.

Oh! the wolf is at the door, my boy,  
He was there when you went out  
This morning, Ned, to find employ,  
With manful heart and stout,  
As an errand boy: did you find a place?  
Have you earned a loaf of bread?  
O God! if not, e'en to-night my face  
Shall be that of the dead,  
For the wolf is at our door, my child,  
And is glaring now on me  
The black wolf of want so gaunt and wild,  
I'm crazed with agony.

True; the wolf was in the door: but Ned,  
With a child's heart-wail of pain,  
Made his way to Little Minnie's bed,  
A strange fire in his brain:  
Kiss'd the frozen lips and pallid brow,  
Bathed her face with his warm tears;  
"Mother, is Minnie an angel now  
Where no wolf of want appears?"  
But the worn mother, fallen asleep,  
In her dream was muttering o'er—  
"The Lord dear Minnie doth safely keep  
In his fold evermore."

"Oh! the wolf is at the door, my boy,"  
She woke with a pang of pain,  
For the hunger-bite did her dream destroy,  
And evok'd the cry again;  
"Tis the wolf, your father's sin, my son,  
Has brought on us all through drink;  
He has bartered our comforts, one by one,  
And now we all must sink;  
"Oh! the wolf is at the door, my child;  
You have failed to find us bread,  
He is growling now more fierce and wild,  
And shall till I am dead."

"Go! drive the wolf from the door, my son,  
The wolf of famine and woe;"  
But the famished boy was a helpless one,  
The wolf refused to go;  
Then the little boy with the manful brow  
Laid his head against her breast—  
"I got no bread, but tried every how,"  
'Twas then the horrid guest—  
The wolf of want—growled sullenly,  
And with fangs that long'd for gore,  
On the twain sprang most unfeelingly,  
E'en through the luckless door.

"Oh! the wolf has cross'd the door," she cried:  
In a last and fond embrace,  
Folded her arms round his neck and died,  
His face press'd to her face;  
With a broken heart Ned gasp'd for breath,  
Lo; the wolf howl'd loud and long—  
Both sped from him to a home through death  
Where sobs give place to song.  
For an angel swept, through gates of light,  
Their souls from that dismal room,  
And woe and woe faded from their sight  
In heaven's brilliant bloom.

The father came at the midnight watch  
With staggering steps to the door—  
The broken door with no lock, nor latch,  
And stumbled on the floor;  
And he curs'd and swore in maudlin rage  
O'er the lights and fire gone out,  
And mumbling said, "I'll soon engage  
To know why I without doubt;  
But he fell asleep in his drunken plight  
On the threshold of that door,  
And the ravening wolf found him that night  
Dead on the rum-swept floor.  
Fort William, Ont.

THERE ARE NO disappointments to those whose wills are buried in the will of God.—F. W. Packer.