

## A DAY'S BETROTHAL.

(From Chambers's Journal.)

'Well, Jenny, it will be hard to part on the morrow.' Jenny answered not a word, but turned away her head, looking out to sea with a wistful, sorrowful glance. The next moment my arm was about her waist. She did not repulse me. 'Jenny,' I cried, 'why should we part at all? If you will take me for a skipper, we'll sail through life together.'

We are on board the barque *Petrel* of Greenock, bound eventually for London, with a miscellaneous cargo from the Mediterranean; and we are now anchored in the roadstead of Havre, a little to the north and west of the pier-head. Jenny is the skipper's daughter, and I am only a passenger.

How it was that I came to be a passenger on board the *Petrel*, and making love to our Jenny, I may here briefly explain. An official reorganisation had set me at liberty with a moderate pension; in the prime of life, with all the world before me, and ere making a fresh start, I had determined to have my 'wander-year.' So, after having wandered over half of Europe, I found myself standing on the quay at Naples one tranquil evening, watching the movements of the shipping, jingling the few sovereigns I had left in my pocket, and wondering if they would hold out till quarter-day, when I was suddenly accosted by name with friendly accents in my native tongue. It was some time before I recognised my interlocutor, or could bring to mind under what circumstances I had previously met with Captain Macfarlane of the *Petrel*, for such he gave himself out to be. All of a sudden, I got the clue.

Up to the last eighteen months, I had been employed in the Transport and Victualling Office in Whitehall. The *Petrel* had been chartered as a transport; and to Macfarlane, much bothered with official forms and circumlocutions, I had been of some little service, putting him in the way of getting his accounts passed, and so on. He had said at the time, that if he ever had it in his power to do me a good turn, he would. And now, here he had an opportunity.

'And why not take passage with me to Old England?' urged the hospitable Scot, as we sat smoking and discussing a bottle of wine at a neighboring *café*. 'Come! it shan't cost you a bawbee. Come! the blue-peter's flying. We weigh anchor to-night. Go and fetch your traps, and ye'll come on board with me.'

The offer was too tempting to be refused. Time was no object with me, whilst money was. Before I well knew what I was about, I found myself and my portmanteau stowed away in the captain's gig, which was leaving the tranquil waters of the bay. Next, I was swinging myself up the side of the *Petrel*, and then I saw a pair of great soft brown eyes looking down upon me, and almost lost my footing by the start they gave me.

'Hoot! it's just our Jenny,' cried Macfarlane, in answer to my look of inquiry directed towards our fair fellow-fellow passenger.—'Jenny, this is Master Willie Thornley, to whom I'm under great obligations, and I hope we'll mak' him comfortable among us.'

Well, it was too late to recede, and, after all, it would not be for long.

And if it hadn't been for those baffling winds, we should have been safe enough. We did not get to be real right-down friends, Jenny and I, for a whole fortnight, by which time we ought to have been in sight of the white cliffs of old England, and the sobering influences connected with them. But we had three weeks more of it—a happy halcyon time—that culminated in the scene with which I began this narrative.

We had called at Havre, to dispose of part of our cargo, and the captain and mate having gone ashore to settle some dispute with some of his crew who had unwarrantably deserted the ship, left Jenny and me on board, in charge.

We were practically alone on board. The steward was busy in his caboose, the black was asleep somewhere forward—in the sun—the ship was riding easily at her anchor with almost imperceptible motion. The town was shimmering pleasantly in the sunshine, and the white villas on the wooded heights above shone like so many caskets of ivory. It was low tide, and a strip of wet glistening sand was visible along the shores of the bay; bathers were splashing about; amateur shrimpers were pushing their nets before them in the shallows. Beyond, the bold headland of the Cape la Heve, crowned by its two white light-houses, assumed the appearance of some lazy pacific beast conchanted on the sands. Time and place were alike propitious. I turned to Jenny, and spoke to her of our approaching separation; then I made the final plunge. O those baffling winds! how much they had to answer for.

What Jenny's feelings might have been after that decisive moment, I cannot tell. Mine approached stupefaction. All the difficulties and disadvantages attached to the step I had taken, now showed themselves to my mind's eye in the strongest colours; and a life of straitened means and perpetual petty self-denial, tinged with the idea of a life of miserable respectability, presented themselves in ghastly array.

There is an advantage, however, in seeing the worst at once. Having suffered my moment of agony, I began to recover. Jenny, poor child, had not noticed the sudden chill that came over me; she was too much agitated and occupied with her own feelings; and as her head rested upon my shoulder, and her eyes looked into mine with trusting confidence, I began to realise the truth, that I had succeeded in winning for myself a charming affectionate companion; that my life would no longer be lonely and self-contained.

The tide had turned; the flood had begun to make. The ship was swinging slowly round, presenting to us th

opposite half of the horizon. A loud warning crash from the awning above made us both look up. Never shall I forget the shock of the altered scene that met our eyes. The sun was still shining bright overhead, but to seaward a vast livid wall of vapour shut out everything from view. A shrill blast of wind trumpeted loudly in the rigging, which began to flap and creak, and strain. The sea was rising rapidly, and waves came rushing in, crested with driving foam. Then the sun was obscured, visible only as a faint and watery blotch; the hills crowned with sunshine, the busy, happy town, all were blotted out; we were alone amid a sudden storm and fierce rising sea.

Jenny sprang to her feet, and, with admirable calmness, began to lower the awning; but in a moment the wind was upon us in full force; the canvas flapped wildly, and then, torn away from its fastenings, flew away to leeward, visible for a minute in the sky, like a white sea-bird, and then lost in the gloom.

'Won't father be angry!' cried Jenny, clasping her hands; 'so many yards of good canvas!'

'Are we not in frightful danger here?' I said. 'Why, I wonder, has your father not returned?'

Jenny shook her head. 'One can't foresee everything. Perhaps he is now on his way.'

She took up the binocular, and peered anxiously through the mist. But no boat was to be seen. The sea seemed of a sudden deserted, except for one or two fishing-smacks to the southward, that with great brown sails half lowered, were scudding rapidly for the harbour. But for us, in the teeth of this south-westerly gale, the harbour mouth was as inaccessible as the moon.

Jenny left the poop, and ran forward to the fore-part of the vessel. I followed her as well as I could, holding on by this and that, for our ship was now pitching heavily upon the swell. I found her by the bowsprit, watching the rise and fall of the ship with anxious eyes. The great black chain that, as the vessel fell, would be invisible in the waves, as she rose, stretched itself tight as a bowstring, with a clank and groan that made one shudder. Our lives hung upon that chain, that the waves seemed to sport with as a toy. As we stood there, a wave larger than the other rose upon us without warning, and swept the deck with irresistible force, bearing everything movable with it. I clung desperately to a belaying pin, and Jenny clung to me; and after a while the *Petrel* rose gallantly to the shock, the water streaming from her sides. Drenched and cowed by the violence of the shock, we made our way back to the poop.

As we reached the cabin door, the steward was reeling across the sloppy deck, carrying a steaming dish of potatoes. It was three o'clock, the hour for dinner. Sink or swim, he would have the dinner on the table by three; then his cares were over for the day, and he devoted himself to rum and tobacco.

'You surely can't eat Jenny,' I cried, as, after she had changed her dripping garments for dry ones, she sat down at the table with what seemed to me almost fiendish indifference.

'Eat! You must eat!' she cried. 'Who knows what an hour may bring forth! If you have to swim for your life, will you have any chance if you start exhausted?'

I saw that she was right, and we snatched a hasty meal together as best we could. Just as we had finished, a quiver ran through the ship; the motion changed; she began to roll heavily. The sofa on which we were sitting broke away from its fastenings, and we were thrown violently from one side of the cabin to the other, in the midst of an avalanche of all the movables that were unfastened, or had broken away.

As soon as we regained our feet, we made for the deck. I thought that the last moment had come, and desired only to see daylight once more. We had parted from our anchor, and were drifting rapidly towards the dark bristling cliffs to leeward.

The sight seemed to restore confidence and courage to Jenny. 'Go forward!' she screamed in my ear; 'go forward, you and the steward, and get the lower sail on the foremast; black Jem and I will steer the ship.'

Jenny's voice inspired me; the prospect of doing something to avert our fate gave me new strength. I stumbled forward, holding on to anything that came to hand. The steward stood at the door of his caboose, having jammed himself into a secure position; a pipe was in his mouth, and a black bottle in his hand. He looked at me with lack-lustre eyes. 'Come along, man,' I shouted in his ear; 'come and help me to get up sail.'

'What's the odds?' he replied in a sullen voice; 'what's the odds? Let's be happy while we may!'

The man was drunk. I cast a despairing glance behind me when the poop, raised high in the air by a towering wave, seemed almost to touch the sky. Jenny was at the wheel, shading her eyes with her hand, looking anxiously forward. Ah! what could I do among all this bewildering maze of cordage and rigging, all shaking and rattling in the wind—I who hardly knew one rope from another? But the sight of Jenny at the wheel, looking out for me, nerved me to do something. I made my way to the foremast, and clambered up the rigging. Sometimes I hung over the boiling abyss; sometimes I found myself pressed against the rigging, looking down at a precipice of water beneath me. Loose ropes and flying blocks threatened me every moment with destruction; but I held on to the ropes like grim death and, inspired by the courage of despair, I essayed that which at another time I should have never dreamed of: I crawled out on the yard, with my knife in my teeth, and cut, one by one, the lashings that bound the sail to it.

(To be Continued.)

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## INFALLIBILITY OF GAS METERS.

A householder thus relates his experience: During one of the cold spells of winter the gas meter in my cellar was frozen. I attempted to thaw it out by pouring hot water over it, but after spending an hour upon the effect I emerged from the contest with the meter, with my feet and trousers wet, my hair full of dust and cobwebs, and my temper at fever heat. After studying how I should get rid of the ice in the meter, I concluded to use force for the purpose, and so, seizing a hot poker, I jammed it through a vent hole and stirred it round inside the meter with a considerable amount of vigor. I felt the ice give way, and I heard the wheels buzz around with rather more vehemence than usual. Then I went up-stairs.

I noticed for three or four days that the internal machinery of the meter seemed to be rattling around in a remarkable manner; it could be heard all over the house. But I was pleased to find that it was working again in spite of the cold weather, and I retained my serenity.

About two weeks after my gas bill came. It accused me of burning during the quarter about one million five hundred thousand feet of gas, and it called on me to settle to the extent of nearly three thousand pounds. I put on my hat and went down to the gas office. I addressed one of the clerks:—

"How much gas did you make at the works last quarter?"

"I dunno; about a million feet, I suppose."

"Well, you have charged me in my bill for burning half a million more than you made. I want you to correct it."

"Let's see the bill. Hm—m—m; this is all right. It's taken off the meter. That's what the meter says."

"S'pose'n it does; it couldn't have burned more'n you made."

"Can't help that; the meter can't lie."

"Well, but how do you account for the difference?"

"Dunno; 'tain't our business to go nosing and poking around after scientific truth. We depend on the meter. If that says you burned six million feet, why you must have burned it, even if we never made a foot of gas out at the works."

"To tell you the honest truth sir," said I, "the meter was frozen, and I stirred it up with a poker and set it whizzing around."

"Price just the same," said the clerk. "We charge for pokers just as we do for gas."

"You are not actually going to have the audacity to ask me to pay three thousand pounds on account of that poker?"

"If it was seven hundred thousand pounds I'd take it with a calmness that would surprise you. Pay up, or we'll turn off your gas."

"Turn it off and be hanged," I exclaimed, as I emerged from the office, tearing the bill to fragments. Then I went home, and grasping that too lavish poker, I approached the meter. It had registered another million feet since the bill was made out; it was running up a score of a hundred feet a minute; in a month it would have owed the gas company more than the Government owed its creditors. So I beat the meter into a shapeless mass, tossed it into the street, and turned off the gas inside the cellar.

Then I went down to the newspaper office to persuade the editor to denounce the fraud practised by the company.

AN OLFACTORY "CURE."—Among the leading medical specialists of the French capital is a fashionable physician who professes to cure all the ills that flesh is heir to by olfactory treatment. A wealthy Briton not long ago crossed the channel on purpose to consult him. Having asked his visitor a few curt questions respecting his symptoms, and subjected him to careful ascultation the doctor extracted a bottle from a drawer in his writing table, uncorked it, and handed it to the Englishman with the words, "Smell it!" adding, as soon as his command had been obeyed, "That is well. You are cured." Whatever surprise the patient may have inwardly experienced at being relieved of his malady with such astounding promptitude and ease, he exhibited no external sign of amazement; but, adopting the laconic style of his professional adviser, ejaculated, "How much?" "A thousand francs," was the reply, whereupon, producing a bank-note for that amount from his pocketbook, he held it under the doctor's nose for a few seconds, saying, "Smell it." The astonished *Æsculapius* mechanically complied. "That is well. You are paid," calmly observed the Englishman, pocketing the note: "I have the honor to wish you a very good morning." So saying, he bowed politely, and quitted the room.

GOOD ADVICE.—A traveller tells a story about his stopping at an hotel in New York one night, and being kept awake by a man pacing the floor in the room above. Occasionally he would hear a moan of anguish; and at last he went up, like a good Samaritan, to see if he could not relieve the sufferer. "My friend," said the traveller, gasping sympathetically at the haggard face of the stranger, "what can I do for you? Are you ill?" "No." "What ails you, then?" "I have a note for ten thousand dollars coming due to-morrow, and haven't a nickel to pay it with." "Oh, pahaw!" said the traveller; "go to bed, and let the other fellow do the walking."

THE FAINT HEART REWARDED.—A fair and buxom widow in Portland, Maine, who had buried three husbands, recently went, with a gentleman who had paid her marked attention in the days of his adolescence, to inspect the graves of her "dear departed." After contemplating them some minutes in mournful silence, she murmured to her companion, "Ah, Joe, you might have been in that row if you had only had a little more courage!"