

## The Story Page

### The Tancook Schoolma'am and her Man.

BY REV. JUDSON KEMPTON.

"O, heave 'er up, an' away we'll sail!  
Good by, fare you well—  
Good by, fare you well—  
For 'Homeward bound'  
Is a jolly sound;  
Hurrah, my boys we're homeward bound!"

It was a jolly crew that worked the windlass and set the sails on the fishing schooner, Mary Ann, as at last with a hold full of cod, she got under weigh from an obscure cove on the Newfoundland coast, and pointed her nose southwest for Halifax harbor. Loud was their laughter and free their talk; for they had been away from home four months, and knew not who might be dead or who might have been married while they were cut off from communication with the world of news and gossip.

"Cheer up, Ben Lantz," shouted the tallest and heaviest handed man at the iron bar, as the anchor broke out of the blue clay, and the strain on the windlass was suddenly removed. "Cheer up, you old sea-dog, an' don't look so thunderin' glum; only three weeks, or four at most, an' you'll see the little schoolma'am!"

In the words and the loud laugh that followed a stranger would have detected nothing but horse-play, but to the fishermen, who knew one another so intimately, there was an open and boastful challenge in the ring of seeing fun. Ben Lantz caught its full force, but he was luckily relieved from the task of making a lame reply by an order from the wheel. "Give her the jib an' the flyin' jib, an' ketch up the anchor, there!" The foresail and the mainsail were already on her, and were now bellying with the northeast wind.

But as, a few minutes later, Ben hurried aft, and passed his tormentor amid-ships, easing off the foresheet, he struck him a blow in the short ribs that would have knocked the breath out of a less powerful man than Ike Walton, the Mary Ann's champion sailor, fighter, story-teller, chantey-singer, high-line fisherman, and Ben Lantz's rival, who was always bantering him, always getting the better of him, and yet, perhaps because Ike was so big and Ben so little, with whom he was always on the best of terms.

"Ike Walton," said he, knowing that his blow had made as much impression as it would have made on the Mary Ann's mainmast, "you feel big you're high-line, an' have sailed down five quintals more than me, but, when it comes to the little school-teacher, you're coming out second best!"

Ike's laugh sounded high above the swish, plash, of the dashing waves as the Mary Ann 'winged out' and speedily left the rocky coast-line of Newfoundland looking like a low cloud on the horizon.

Four weeks later, and the cargo was sold and transferred to a warehouse on the Halifax docks; the Mary Ann was stripped to her poles and made fast, stem and stern, to a wharf at Lunenburg; and her crew had scattered, some going to Mahone Bay, some to Chester, and two had their dunnage in the bottom of a whaler, and were gliding off across the beautiful Chester Basin toward Tancook Island.

"An' how's the little schoolma'am?" asked Ike of the boatman.

"She has begun school alretty," answered the Tancook man, with the ordinary Germanized English of that curious little island.

"I tink," he continued, "dat you vill go to school yet this winter?"

"Sure thing," answered Ike. Ben said nothing.

For two winters Alice Iser had taught the school on Tancook. For two winters the young fishermen, who from November until the third week in March had little to do but darn their gear, milk their few cows, dabble in paint and tar, tell sea yarns and sing sea songs, had been attending the school in unusual numbers.

Not that they studied much. The more earnest and intelligent ones took arithmetic and what savagitation the little school-teacher knew; but for the most part the young men's slates served only as the dark background of pictures of gallant ships, whalers and crafts of all kinds, wondrously drawn in lines of white. So the winter slipped away, and

the school-teacher was charming to all, but intimate with none. Only two of the fishermen had ever ventured to accompany her home from a concert—she did not attend their dances—or from church of a Sunday evening; and both Ike and Ben had left her at the door, no one knew whether voluntarily and discreetly, or because they had had no invitation in. To the Islanders it seemed clear that Ben had no chance at all with his stalwart, able-bodied rival. But to Ben himself this was not so sure.

Once when he had spent recess working out a problem in navigation that was in advance of the teacher's logarithmic knowledge, he had looked up in triumph to find her eyeing him from the desk with that brooding look which a mother sometimes gives her child. The other sailor lads were ranged in the back row of seats, and were lustily singing,

"On Jordan's stormy banks I stand,  
And cast a wishful eye."

Her quick glance was not at all 'wishful,' but rather proud and wondering, as if she felt she had some unspoken right to be glad that in his reasoning he could overtake and forge ahead of a country-girl school-teacher, and as if she, for a second at least, saw in him something greater than a Tancook fisherman.

And then on the last day of school, before he was to go to Lunenburg to ship for the Banks, as he went down to the desk to bid her good-by, the same look had come back into her black eyes, and she had left her hand in his palm a moment longer than was necessary, and had felt of his knuckles with her finger-tips.

"Are you coming back to school next winter?" she said.

"I guess so," he replied.

"No," she said, "you musn't. Next winter you must spend your time more profitably. You have learned what I can teach you. From now on you must teach yourself. And you must study hard!"

Now he was back on Tancook. Before him were six months which he normally would spend as his companions did, practically in idleness. What could he do? What could he study? To how many thousands of young men this question presents itself each winter! How many dismiss it, and saunter off to the barroom or the store to loaf, and lie about, and lose their chance in life!

Ben kept away from the schoolhouse. The first time he met Alice Iser after his return she greeted him with unaffected pleasure, but spoke no word of either encouragement or advice. He saw her next one pleasant afternoon down on his own wharf. He was busy painting a boat that had been hauled up for the winter, when, looking up, he encountered the very person who was at that moment in his mind.

"Miss Iser," he said at once, "all summer and all fall I've been thinking how to take your advice about studyin', but it don't seem any use."

"Why not?" she asked.

"If you want me to be a scholar, it's too late," he said. "Books and me has been strangers too long, and got too far apart to go sailin' mates now. We might get better acquainted with each other, but I can't depend on books an' book-learnin' to get me my bread and salt. I must get them from the sea."

"Ben," the little school-teacher said, with a very earnest look in her black eyes, "you didn't quite understand me; you are partly right. You must not study books. But the men who study books are not the only students. And now you must begin and all winter you must study hard."

"But what?" demanded Ben, putting down brush and paint, and standing erect before the little teacher as before a great problem.

"The thing you like best. The thing in which you excel. The thing in which you can outdo the others, Ike Walton, for instance." There was mischief in her smiling eyes.

"What is that?" he asked.

"I don't know," she answered, and she left him there.

It was provoking, and he thought almost aloud as he resumed his work.

"In fishing I could not beat Ike Walton in a hundred years. I haven't the bone and the muscle. As

a sailor I would stand a better show. I could study navigation, and take the examination for a captain's berth, but Ike could get it, too, and he would make an ideal sea-captain, while I would always be at a disadvantage."

He stopped painting.

"There's only once I ever beat Ike Walton, an' that was when I built my whaler."

On Tancook every man is a fisherman, and almost every man is his own boat-builder. The Tancook whalers, narrow, two-masted fishing-boats are known from Maine to Labrador for their grace and speed. Only one old man, Ben's uncle, who had taught him the boat-building art, had launched a boat in recent years that could blanket Ben's whaler or leave her in the wake.

The mail came to Tancook daily in fine weather; and, the mail boat having arrived, Ben made his way up to the cottage of Eben Hatt the postmaster. Mr. Hatt received the Halifax Herald, and usually, after the handful of mail was given out to the Islanders who called, he read aloud such paragraphs of the paper as seemed of interest. As the old man was slowly wading through the columns, reading in a high, monotonous tone, Ben's mind was still on his problem until he heard these sentences: "So now the Provincial Government, to encourage this proficiency among our seafaring population, will offer a gold medal worth five hundred dollars to the boat making the best time in a race to be sailed on the twenty-fourth of next May, the birthday of our gracious sovereign. Among the restrictions the principal one is that the boat must be under thirty-one feet over all, and she must be owned and built in Nova Scotia."

"Say Uncle Eben," called out Ike Walton, "why wouldn't it be a good idee fer some of us Tancookers to go after that medal?"

"Ach, poy," said Mr. Hatt, pushing up his glasses for a moment, "ef dat would haf been a dory race, er a valer race—" he smiled expansively, and nodded his head corner-wise, but his will be des yacht race dem Halifax fellers vill win. Ve got no chow. Ain't it?"

"But why can't we build a yacht?" persisted Ike speculatively.

"Vat, a yacht? a pleasure yacht? a racing yacht?" cried Uncle Eben derisively. "Dat's a ting nefer vas alretty built on Tancook. Ve ain't got no time fer dat."

But Ben Lantz's mind was made up. He knew now what he was to study. That evening he made bold to call on the little school teacher.

The winter passed on Tancook as other winters had done for a hundred years or more. There were revival meetings; there were dances; singing school and school house school; gossip for the old fun for the young; a few weddings, a few funerals; some play; more smoking of short pipes, and loafing, and—a little work. One young man was thinking and studying, and studying hard. He did not attract much attention. It was noticed that he received an unusual number of letters; but they looked like mere advertisements, for they bore the names of business firms and were addressed in typewriting. But it was commented on when Ben Lantz began to receive books, big flat ones, from Halifax and Boston and; when a bulky roll came from Newport, it was passed around the post office group—Ben not being present.

"Vot dees now? Vot you tink?"

"N-e-w-p-o-r-t," de postmark iss Newport."

"An' here it says, 'Return to Nat Herreshoff! Meppe dat some relation to dem Herreshoffs in Lunenburg.'"

"No, no' dese is chust some pictures—chromos, I tink. Meppe dey vishin' Ben to take a pook agent, yet?"

So with a capital joke the subject was dismissed, and none suspected that Ben Lantz had been so fortunate as to get the goodwill of the greatest designer of thirty foot yachts in the world, and so to be able to study and have the use of drawings that money could not buy. About Christmas time some one mentioned at the boot maker's shop that Ben Lantz was building a boat down to his fish-house but no one seemed to know whether it was to be an