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A Parson's Tale.

(‘Hand and Heart.’)

‘Yes, sir, every afternoon as the clock strikes four he comes there to the pier head, as you see him now, and calls out to the sea. Sometimes he waves his umbrella. Sometimes he takes off his hat. But, anyhow, he always comes every afternoon at four o’clock to the pier head—wet or fine—and stands there a minute or two looking out at the sea.’

I was staying at Riverhead. It is a little seaside place on the south coast, rapidly coming into favor. I am not sure that it will improve. Hotels, villas, parade and so forth are a doubtful exchange for quiet inns, old-fashioned cottages, and the seashore. But such things as changes must needs be!



THE SEA LOOKED MOST TEMPTING.

Riverhead as yet, however, is unspoilt. There is a hotel, and some good houses, and most respectable lodgings—but it is not one of your spick and span watering-places.

There is, however, a pier, and a very good pier, too. A band plays on it twice a day. In the summer steamers make excursions, starting from the pier, all down the coast. And of course, I need hardly say this pier is a favorite promenade.

When I am out on a holiday I delight in a pier. Give me a place with a good pier—frequented by nice people—with cosy corners, sheltered from the wind, and I am happy. To me it is a perfect pleasure just watching the people as they promenade to and fro. What pictures you see! What tales you can read! What romances con-

jure up! Every face is a study of one kind or another, and as such worth watching.

One afternoon as I was chatting to the one-armed pierman, who had charge of a telescope, which he hired out at a penny a look, I noticed a strange-looking individual run up the pier, waving his umbrella and working his arm backwards and forwards, as if in a race. He approached the pier head, looked out over the sea, took off his hat, said something I could not catch, and then with a disappointed air turned away.

I asked my telescope friend who the stranger was. He gave me the answer with which I began my tale. More he couldn't tell me. He had heard that for fourteen years the man had been there day after day, just as I had seen him, and never missed. But he couldn't exactly say if this were so,

always a favorite place for visitors was Riverhead. People came from all parts, and steamers called daily in the summer, as they do now. The pier was built about two years after I came. Well, among the visitors some fourteen years ago was a Dr. White and his family. They came from London. He was a noted physician, I believe. Comparatively young, but a rising man. His wife was one of the sweetest-looking women I ever saw; he had two children, a boy and girl, eight and ten years old, or thereabouts.

‘The new pier, I say, had just been built, and the steamers came every day for trips. Some of the steamers started from here, and took people out for 2s. 6d. for a day's excursion down channel, touching at one or two noted places. The doctor and his wife were very fond of these excursions. They went frequently. ‘It is as good as a voyage, without the discomforts,’ he said to me one day. And indeed it is so. It would do you, sir, good—more good than any medicine I can give you.

‘Well, one day the doctor had gone up to town to see a patient, and was returning next day about six o'clock. It was on a Thursday he was coming back. Mrs. White and her two children had planned to go a short trip on a steamer, starting at eleven, and back at four. It was a lovely day, and the sea looked most tempting. Off they went. The trip was to Shelstone Point and back. Do you know the place? A lovely bay, but with a nasty bit of reef, just covered at high tide, before you get in. They hadn't been gone more than an hour when who should turn up but Dr. White! He had caught an early train from London and come down before his time. He found out where his wife and children were, and then came on to have lunch with me. ‘I shall meet them at four,’ he said, as he left me; ‘how astonished they will be!’

‘Now, as you have found out, no doubt, fogs arise here very suddenly. At any rate, a sea-fog came up that day unexpectedly about two o'clock, and you could see nothing beyond the pier. It lasted till three, and then gradually swept out to sea. By four o'clock it was clear, and the glasses were turned on the corner of the bay, round which the ‘Merry Monarch’ was to come.

‘‘She is bound to be late,’’ said the doctor.

‘‘Yes, sir,’’ said the pierman; ‘‘we must give her time.’’

‘But at five o'clock there was no sign of the steamer. At six o'clock the watchers on the pier became anxious, and when at half-past six they saw a strange vessel bearing in they became alarmed.

‘It was coaling vessel, and those on the pier soon made out a group of men and women huddled together on the deck quite apart from the sailors. They were not left long in doubt as to who they were. The vessel came alongside. About thirty or forty men and women with seven children were disembarked. They were all that were left of the gay company that had sailed in the ‘Merry Monarch’ for Shelstone Bay that morning.

‘The fog had come down just as they were leaving the bay. The captain got bewildered. The steamer was brought too near the corner of the bay where the reef was, and

as he himself had only been three years on the pier.

I often watched the stranger after this, and once was near him at the pier head—so close I caught his words. He had not taken off his hat that day, but was just staring out over the sea. His lips moved, and I heard him say, ‘Mary! Mary! Mary!’ There was a story here, I felt sure. Poor fellow!

Before I left Riverhead I learnt his story. I had been unwell, and obliged to call in the local doctor. We chatted. I asked about the stranger on the pier. The doctor knew all about him, and this was his story.

‘I have been here,’ said the village doctor, ‘over twenty years. Ah, the place has changed since then. Only a jetty instead of your grand pier when I first came. But it was