

At once my heart came back to me ; for I saw at once, as an old sailor pretty well up in shipwrecks, that the boat was no more than a derelict ; and feeling that here was my chance of chances, worth perhaps ten times my catch of fish, I set myself in earnest to the catching of that boat.

Therefore I took up my pole again, and finding that the brace of fish whom I had been over-scared to land had got away during my slackness, I spread the hooks, and cast them both, with the slugs of lead upon them, and half a fathom of spare line ready, as far as ever my arms would throw.

The flight of the hooks was beyond my sight, for the phosphorus spread confusion ; but I heard most clearly the thump, thump of the two leaden bobs—the heavy and the light one—upon hollow planking. Upon this I struck as I would at a fish, and the hooks got hold (or at any rate one of them), and I felt the light boat following faster as she began to get away on the land ; and as I drew her gently toward me, being still in some misgiving, although resolved to go through with it.

But, bless my heart, when the light boat glided buoyantly up to my very feet, and the moon shone over the starboard gunwale, and without much drawback I gazed at it—behold ! the little craft was laden with a freight of pure innocence ! All for captain, crew, and cargo, was a

little helpless child. In the stern-sheets, fast asleep, with the baby face towards me, lay a little child in white. Something told me that it was not dead or even ailing ; only adrift upon the world, and not at all aware of it. Quite an atom of a thing, taking God's will anyhow ; cast, no doubt, according to the rocking of the boat, only with one tiny arm put up to keep the sun away, before it fell asleep.

Being quite taken aback with pity, sorrow, and some anger (which must have been of instinct), I laid hold of the bows of the skiff, and drew her up a narrow channel, where the land-spring found its way. The lift of a round wave helped her on, and the bladder-weed saved any chafing. A brand-new painter, (by the feel) it was that I caught hold of ; but instead of a hitch at the end, it had a clean sharp cut across it. Having made it fast with my fishing-pole jammed hard into a crevice of rock, I stepped on board rather gingerly, and, seating myself on the forward thwart, gazed from a respectful distance at the little stranger.

The light of the moon was clear and strong, and the phosphorus of the sea less dazing as the night grew deeper, therefore I could see pretty well ; and I took a fresh plug of tobacco before any further meddling. For the child was fast asleep ; and, according to my experience, they are always best in that way.

CHAPTER V.—A LITTLE ORPHAN MERMAID.

By the clear moonlight I saw a very wee maiden, all in white, having neither cloak nor shawl, nor any other soft appliance to protect or comfort her, but lying with her little back upon the aftmost planking, with one arm bent (as I said before), and the other drooping at her side, as if the baby-hand had been at work to ease her crying ; and then, when tears were tired out, had dropped in sleep or numb despair.

My feelings were so moved by this, as I became quite sure at last that here was a little mortal, that the tears came to mine own eyes too, she looked so purely pitiful. "The Lord in heaven have mercy on the little dear !" I cried, without ano-

ther thought about it ; and then I went and sat close by, so that she lay between my feet.

However, she would not awake, in spite of my whistling gradually, and singing a little song to her, and playing with her curls of hair ; therefore, as nothing can last for ever, and the tide was rising fast, I was forced to give the little lady, not what you would call a kick so much as a very gentle movement of the muscles of the foot.

She opened her eyes at this, and yawned, but was much inclined to shut them again ; till I (having to get home that night) could make no further allowance for her, as having no home to go to ; and