

# HALIFAX PEARL

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## THE TWO LIGHT-HOUSES.

A TALE OF THE OCEAN.

By the old Sailor.

"There is a Providence that shapes our ends,  
Rough how them as we will."

It is now some five-and-twenty years ago that I sported my naval uniform on board that pretty little brig of his Majesty's, which was built by the shipwrights' apprentices of Deptford dock-yard, as a surveying vessel. She had a handsome bust of the great circumnavigator, Captain Cook, for a figure-head; and her stern was tastefully decorated with divers and sundry ornamented carved work, characteristic of the service on which she was to be engaged. There was only one fault in her construction—she was too narrow for her length. The surveyor was a master in the navy, who had undergone many vicissitudes in life, and his memoirs might rival those celebrated details of Robinson Crusoe, which every school-boy loves to peruse.

Our first survey was between Lowestoft and Harwich; but as it would be tedious to mention many little curious circumstances that occurred during our operations, I shall confine myself to one, the narration of which interested me very much at the time, and I trust will not be wholly unwelcome to the reader.

Upon a projecting point of flat shingle on the coast of Suffolk, running far into the ocean, and forming the extreme point of the northern boundary of the estuary into which the river Thames empties its polluted waters, stand two light-houses, nearly a mile apart from each other, for the double purpose of warning the mariner of his "whereabouts," and acting as correct guides to keep his vessel clear of shoals in this difficult and dangerous navigation. The one on the ever sea-beat point is termed the Low Light, and its overlooker more inland, is called the High Light. The former was an ancient erection with a small out-building attached; a few cart loads of mould had been carried thither, and attempts made to rear something like vegetation; but it was a fruitless effort, and except a cabbage or two which was at all times ready pickled by the spray of the sea, nothing would grow. All around, for a long distance, was loose shingle that yielded to the tread, and where the sea-fowl mingled their eggs with the pebbly stones, that formed a barrier against the inroads of the ocean, and protected the creek-like river which ran inside to a haven for small craft. Not a tree or a shrub of any kind appeared upon that stony bed, and the noise of the waves either whispering in calm, or raging in storm, was never, never ceasing. It was a wild, dreary spot on which the Low Light stood; and not unfrequently the tempestuous winds would raise the white frothy comb of the breakers, and scatter it nearly to the very summit of the building; then the saline particles, incrusting together, glistened brightly in the sun, and the old woman, who moved about on the beach, regardless of wind or sea, obtaining a due portion for her share, might have well been compared to Lot's wife, for externally she exhibited a mass of salt.

The Upper Light was of more modern construction (the old one having been pulled down to give place for it), and it held its aspiring head above its humble neighbour, displaying its gorgeous illumination with a sort of patronage towards the venerable pile that bore the brunt of the storm; but like the grades in society, one was useless without the other. During our operation in taking angles, we had to measure a base-line between the two light-houses, and this led to an intimacy with their inhabitants, who perfectly corresponded in appearance and manners with the buildings they tenanted.

The Low Light had its bold, hardy keeper, part fisherman, part pilot, part wrecker, and, (the truth must out), a dabbler in contraband; his wife in an old blue pea-jacket, and a mob-cap, rendered ample assistance to her husband in each and all of his professions and callings; besides which, she was taster to the spirit trade, and could, in an instant, tell the degree of proof so as to be enabled to increase the quantity by a reduction of its strength.

The High Light man was a small farmer, a little bit of a sailor, dressed like a gentleman on Sundays, and, with his lady and daughters, sat in a good seat at the church to show their finery. The girls were pretty, and, as a matter of course, I did a bit of the amiable towards the best looking; but one evening I detected her arm-in-arm with a rough smuggler-looking sort of a genius, in a frieze jacket; they parted hastily, and as the man passed me, I saw the countenance and large whiskers of the young Earl of— and from that time they had one gull less in the nest than usual,

and I betook myself for my accustomed walk to the light-house at the point.

"You have a strange amphibious sort of a life of it here, Martin," said I, addressing the old man. "You are like the petrel, always in the storm. Are you not afraid that some night the light-house will get under way and carry you out to sea?"

"No, master," replied he, "I've pretty good houjding ground, and though the old building does sometimes shake in the cold wind, yet it has weathered out many a gale—and I dare say will weather many more. Howsoever, it has made the fortune of some folks, though one of the former keepers was tried for murder."

"Indeed!" said I, ever hankering after the romantic; "how was that? Come, Martin, let me have the particulars, I see you know them; and I dearly love a good yarn."

"Well, well, sir, answered he, "I don't mind if I do overhau the consarn to you, seeing as I've got this net in piece, and hands and tongue can go at the same time. Sit down, sir; and dame bring us out a drop of the right sort, full proof—there's a darling old soul! Why, you must see, sir—but it's many years ago—the two light-houses were inhabited by two brothers. David Bligh had this here, and Jonas Bligh had the t'other; it's pulled down now, and a new one built."

But I shall take the liberty of departing from the idiom of the old man, and give the tale in language of my own.

The two Blighs were daring, intrepid men, wholly regardless of danger, and utterly fearless in emergency; both were married, and had families, but it was with difficulty that the parents could procure even a scanty subsistence for them. David was of a homely disposition, loved his wife and children, and, though the manner in which he added to the miserable pittance allowed him as keeper of the light, was not of the most reputable nature, yet he avoided evil company, and was never intoxicated, and endeavoured, to the best of his ability, to provide comforts for his home, Jonas, on the contrary, was the hardened villain, ill-using his wife, neglecting his offspring, drunken in his habits, and connected with a gang of smugglers, who as often perpetrated outrage and depredation as they carried on the contraband, till, at length, he was engaged in a desperate affray, which was very nearly proving of a murderous character, and, after hiding in various places, from time to time, he suddenly disappeared altogether, and no one knew what had become of him. The wife, or as it was more naturally supposed, the widow of Jonas, was permitted to remain in the light-house, and with the assistance of David, and the help of her eldest boy Richard, performed the necessary duties. David, however, had become a stricken man; first his wife, and then, one by one, his children died from him, till he had only a single child left, and she, a poor, delicate creature, seemed totally unfit to encounter, much more endure the hardships of life: nevertheless, she did so, and grew up to be the fountain of comfort to her declining father, weaning him from the illegal traffic in which he had been so many years engaged, and drawing his attention to the Christian's best hope, both in time and in eternity. Still there was ever a gloomy weight of oppression on the old man's mind—a groaning of the inward spirit, as if some deed of former iniquity preyed upon his conscience; but as the music of his great namesake dispelled the evil visions of Saul, so did the smiles or the song of Annie disperse the dark clouds which shaded her parent's countenance. The girl was not beautiful, but there was something in her look and manner that was engaging, and there was a mildness in her expression that interested the heart's best and dearest affections.

Years passed away, and Annie was beloved by rival suitors; the one, the eldest son of the widow of Jonas, the other, a handsome young seaman, belonging to a seventy-four that frequently anchored in the bay with the North Sea squadron, and as he was one of the crew of the captain's gig, he had occasional opportunities of visiting the light-house. Of excellent character, and possessed of a better education than usually falls to the lot of the foremost man, Bill Brailwell was respected and valued by both officers and men. He it was that had encouraged a desire for information in young Annie's breast, and his scanty pay had supplied the means of instruction. Annie had been taught to read by her father; she tried to write—practised it at every leisure moment, and the first epistle she ever penned was addressed to William, containing assurances of unalterable affection for the young seaman. Richard Bligh was kind and attentive to the object of his regard; he would have undergone any and every danger or privation to prove his attachment for her, but there was

no corresponding feeling on her part. Annie knew that, too many of the bad qualities of his father, lurked within his breast; his passions were violent, whenever his wishes were opposed; and he was bitter in his revenge, when he imagined himself injured. That he ardently loved the girl there could not be a doubt; but there was a degree of ferocious selfishness in his love which would have prompted him to any desperate deed that promised a hope of calling her his own.

William's ship was paid off, and he was drafted into a dashing frigate destined for the Mediterranean; he surprised Annie of the change, implored her to be firm and faithful to him, and declared that neither distance nor time should effect the smallest diminution in his honest affection. They might be separated for some time, but there were many chances of making prize money, and he spoke of the bright prospects of future happiness. Accompanying this was a letter to old David, with a post-office order for five pounds, and an exhortation for the father, "to watch with tenderness over the treasure of his heart." Richard had seen these letters at the village post-office; the sight of them had mingled gall and wormwood in his mind, and he tried to get them into his possession, but his scheme failed, and they were forwarded to their proper destination. Poor Annie's heart sunk at the view of a long separation from William, and for a time she refused to be comforted. Richard ascertained the cause, and his mad chagrin was converted into a delirium of joy when he found the object of his hatred would be so far removed, and the being whom he loved in a great measure within his power. The secretly cherished hope that time and absence would operate with Annie, elevated his spirits, and he renewed his suit with redoubled ardour; but both father and daughter, widely, yet firmly, discouraged his addresses, and, in the madness of disappointment, he swore to be revenged.

One evening, inflamed with liquor, Richard took advantage of old David's casual absence, and visited the Lower Light, Annie was alone; there was no creature within hearing; the gulls were screaming their farewell to the sun as they wheeled their flight round the venerable pile; the winds were hushed, the waves scarce chattered on the beach—all nature was tranquil. But unallayed passion, heightened by intoxication, revelled, unrestrained in the young man's breast. Annie saw the lawless flashing of his eye, and trembled; she would have shut herself in, but he came upon her before she could reach the building, and throwing his arms around her, he caught her to his bosom. Annie shrieked; but she was only answered by the wild noise of the sea-birds. She prayed, and her prayer ascended to the footstool of Omnipotence, for unusual strength was given her to escape, and rushing into the light-house, she ascended to the lantern gallery; thither, too, she was followed by her relentless persecutor, but the desperate girl mounting the railings, declared that she would precipitate herself to the bottom if he offered to approach her. Richard shuddered when he saw the danger she was in; it almost sobered him; the railing was shattered and frail, and as she stood it seemed as if the breath of an infant would destroy the balance, and hurl her to destruction. He implored her, he entreated her to come down; but she expressed herself more determined than ever to prefer a sudden death to a life of shame. He prayed her to forgive his base rashness, but the only answer he received was a peremptory order for him to quit the place. At this moment the voice of old David was heard, chiding the dilatoriness of his child for not hastening to meet him.

A laugh of excited delight rung upon the twilight sky, for Annie had caught the sound; her head grew dizzy, she balanced on her position for a moment, then preponderating outwards, she would have been dashed to pieces by the fall, but Richard darted forward with a sudden spring, caught her by her clothes, and she hung suspended in his grasp. Still he could not trust to the shattered barrier on which she had stood; he felt it giving away and both would there have probably perished together, but for the timely aid of a stranger, who, hearing the cry for help, had ascended to their assistance, and they were rescued. Richard immediately took his departure, for he would not meet the reproaches of the father, nor the anger of the child; he hurried from the scene, and with him went the stranger who had been instrumental in saving their lives. Annie was much bruised, and on the following day could scarcely move about; but her father did not leave the place, and with his presence she felt herself secure.

Evening returned again—a beautiful summer's evening—the sun was setting in gorgeous splendour, tinging every thing in nature with its golden life. David sat at the door of the light-house, mending his net, and revolving in his mind the circumstances,