

Flint and Steel.

CHAPTER I.

QLD Job Bruce had taken a load of fish from Westbeach to Scarmouth, and having disposed of it satisfactorily, had a little time on his hands before he started on his journey home. It was quite an undertaking for Job, going to Scarmouth, which is a big, noisy, bustling seaport town, and full fifteen miles from quiet Westbeach, which is nothing more than a few fishermen's cottages, clustered close on the shingle round a little flint-built church. Job Bruce had lived all his life at Westbeach. He was born there, grew up there, married there, and there his wife lay buried, and there he still lived with his only son David. Job was not used to go into Scarmouth often; he generally sent his fish by Miles Parker; but Miles was ill, and Job had offered to take his cart to the town for him, and sell the fish. He was not really old, though he was called "Old Job" in the village, but a strong, hale man of fifty, and as he made his way through the streets, leading the rough pony, many people turned to look at his broad, well-knit figure, and honest, sun-burnt face.

The streets were full of people that day, as there was a fair of some kind going on; and when Job had done his business, and put up the pony, he set out to take a look round, and see what was stirring. He soon tired, however, of the crowded, noisy marketplace, and he made his way down to the quay, where he was sure of finding one old friend among all the strangers, and that was the sea, which, after fifty years' experience of storm and sunshine, Job Bruce was still never tired of. He used to say that he did not feel like himself if he did not hear its voice, which had lulled him to sleep in his cradle, and which he hoped might be the last sound in his dying ears. The sea this afternoon was bright and smiling, and Job sat down on some timber, and soon fell into talk with two or three sailors. As they talked, Job's eye was caught by a boy who was idling about near them, climbing the heaps of timber, or throwing pebbles into the water. He looked about the same age as Job's son David, but was very different in every way from that big, strong, broad-shouldered fellow, with his slow ways and good-tempered face. This was a narrow-chested, sharp-faced boy, with pale cheeks, and sharp, quick eyes, and light, active movements. Job compared the boys in his slowly-working mind, and came to the conclusion that in a fight "my Davy would double him up pretty quick, I warrant."

A steambot had just come up to the pier, and Job walked towards it, to look on at the passengers coming ashore. He was not alone in his interest, for soon a number of people were collected watching, and Job drew himself away, to be out of the bustle. Suddenly a movement in the crowd attracted his attention, and the next minute the boy he had been watching before the steamer came in, made his way out of the crowd, and ran at full speed down the pier, towards the town, followed closely by a policeman.

"Stop that boy!" the policeman shouted, as, owing to his own heavy build, and the boy's light frame, the distance between them rapidly increased.

"What's he done?" Job asked, as the man ran by.