

HOW IT HAPPENS.

For a fortnight you are moody, for another you are rash—
And you smoke with mad indifference to your liver and your cash—
Grow quite mute in Nettie's presence, glare defiance at her beaux,
And at last, in desperation, you resolve that you'll propose.
You'll propose—you think it over—she is modest, sweet and wise,
With a whole domestic heaven hidden in her azure eyes!
You'll propose—that puppy Larkin has grown too presumptuous quite,
And you make your toilet, swearing you will "settle him" to-night!

You arrive—and Fate's propitious! Yes, Miss Nettie is alone.
With the lamplight softly shaded to the most becoming tone;
In an artful ruffled apron, with a rosebud in her hair,
And her sweet unconscious greeting sends you headlong to despair.
Then you grasp her hand so rudely that you fairly make her quail,
And you stumble to the sofa, treading, on her lap-dog's tail!
While, as she soothes the yelping of the wretched "little dear,"
You mutter something naughty—that 'tis well she doesn't hear.

Then she prattles on; you listen, in a dazed, unconscious way,
Wondering how you'll ever say it, and what the deuce to say;
And you think of Harry Larkin, ever gallant, gay and cool,
While you crimson like a school-boy, and you stutter like a fool!
Then at last—though how it comes about you scarcely care to know—
When all hope and courage vanish, and you grimly rise to go,
There seems something like a rainbow gleaming in her downcast eyes,
And you burst into the folly that is wisest in the wise.

You say—well, all the foolish things that other men have said;
You give your rushing heart the reins, and quite disdain your head;
You swear you've felt a thousand things man never felt before,
And vow, if life or death betide, you'll love her evermore.
You're reckless as to perjury, and reckless as to lies,
And reckless as to all the world, save that in Nettie's eyes.
You pause; and blushing, trembling like a rose-bud 'neath the dew,
She whispers of "dear Harry!" and "she really thought you knew!"

ENGLISH BOARDING HOUSES.

A MERCHANT CAPTAIN'S ROOST IN LONDON.

Oh! dear Mrs. O'Cannikin, what muse is fit to sing your charms; to dilate gleefully upon your stalwart form, like that of a very fully developed life-guardman in petticoats, your bright round face with its profusion of untidy iron-grey hair, your strong rich voice embellished with the very finest Tipperary brogue, your big aplay feet encased in nankeen boots, with each its rent and patent-leather tip, and finally your rollicking hearty manner, and friendly slap on the back? Truly you are a broth of a woman, and all who know you love you—ay, and respect you, spite of your queer ways. No wonder that your house is always full, that the same set of highly respectable merchant-captains, ship-owners, and mates, frequent your boarding-house, returning faithfully to you at the close of each recurring voyage; for you are merry as the day is long; joyous with the highly-coloured exuberant ever-welling fun of the better Irish farmer class, chirruping up-stairs and down-stairs, looking after every body's comfort, bandying jolly jokes, exchanging firm handshakes with all, having a hard word for none. The O'Cannikin's establishment stands very near the Docks, within the precincts of the Minorities, down a blind alley so dull and still, at a first glance, as to suggest an asylum for mutes. There are six houses in this blind alley, all of a quaint, cock-eyed, shambling sort, thin, tall, dirty, vacant of expression. One hangs out signs of being a nautical hotel, but mould appears to have gathered on its hinges, herbage to have sprung up about its door-stones, while its windows are so carefully packed in cobwebs as to suggest that it will shortly be shipped off with the other cargo ever groaning past the outer thoroughfares for some colonial destination, possibly as a model lodging-house for the Fiji Islanders. The other houses show no sign of being inhabited at all, except the centre one, from the open windows of which shirts and socks imbibe the balmy air, while a tiny brass plate above a bell bears a modest announcement that its owner is O'Cannikin. The alley stands like an islet of silence amid a sea of sound, for on one side a stream of merchandise is ever drifting towards the Docks, from whence penetrates

a continuous hum of lading and unshipping, of hammering and nailing, varied with a measured cry at intervals as one man tosses a keg or package to another in the string; from the Tower hard by come whiffs of regimental orders, and then a sharp musket click and tramp of men; omnibuses roll incessantly down Eastcheap, and the thunder of trains to Woolwich and the wharves causes each tenement to vibrate and shake itself together after the shock, as they tear over the iron bridges.

One Saturday evening the boarding-house door was open, but not to take in the summer air; trunks and boxes, umbrellas and wraps littered the stones, while a powerful voice cried from within, "Now then Kattie, Jewel, call those cabs; Mrs. M'Faddle is ready, and the dear old lady will catch cold. The Paratamna starts to-morrow, and she must ship to-night. Try a glass of cordial before you go, Mrs. M'Faddle, darling; it's very soothing." But the old lady wouldn't, and finally got under way—a hale old lady of seventy-six, part owner in several vessels, who had made the voyage to Sydney twelve times, and was now starting on probably her last. Attendant and expectant nephews and nieces were zealously "seeing her off;" the grumpy cook from below stairs nodded farewell from her area; the housemaid from the first-floor front; and every window framed its two or three weather-beaten faces, each waving the veteran traveller God-speed. At length the cavalcade was fairly off, and the O'Cannikin turned briskly from the past, wiping a tear from her "eye," to attend to the clamorous demands of the present. "Och! Kattie, and how'll we get 'em all in? We've only one room free, and there's Captain Lucas coming to-morrow, and Captain Felsen coming to-night, and Mrs. Moriarty, the ship-owner's lady, who's so fond of beer, and whom I couldn't refuse as belonging to our Immanuel Oisle; she must have a bed somehow; and then there's two mates coming from the Pernambuco, but, bless me sowl, theirs are young legs, and we'll provide them at the top. Let's see. I can make up two beds in the front parlour, with a mattress on the floor. Captain Lucas must have a shakedown on the sofa in the dining-room. Oh, we'll do it somehow. He had the best bedroom last time, and it's fair he should suffer a little now, as I make the same charge to all, two shilling a night. Och, but he calls this place Hullabaloo Hall; I call it Ramshackle Castle, and we must all do what we can." And the good body bustled off, shouting her orders in all directions, dragging about mattresses and pillows till the stair-well was choked, and the evil-smelling street was pleasanter than remaining in-doors with its attendant odours of musty old clothes-bags and untanned leathers.

Although the O'Cannikin is all-powerful, a male semi-dependent unit exists in the back-ground in the person of a venerable, white-haired stone-deaf, smoking-capped individual, who sits generally silent in the dining-room, behind a large pipe, a cake of cavendish, and a board fitted with a hinged knife for cutting the tobacco, which he offers—the cavendish as well as the knife or board—to anybody who is willing to smoke patiently opposite to him, and shake his head knowingly at intervals in default of conversation, for any period of time not less than sixty minutes. Unable to hear anything less forcible than a shout, Mr. O'Cannikin gives vent to his sentiments, some of them of an especially personal and pointed character, in stage whispers much more audible than ordinary speech, which give rise to complications and little embarrassing dilemmas requiring presence of mind from all parties. But all fully comprehend how the matter stands, accepting his mistakes good-naturedly, and so the old gentleman is somehow or other usually the dignified centre of a little circle of seafaring persons of the merchant class, who smoke and nod and smoke again imperturbably until the whirlwind O'Cannikin shall sweep them all into the garden, either for the preparation of some meal, or for the manufacture of impromptu shake-downs.

The "garden" is a very wonderful place, entered from the dining-room window, consisting of some four square yards of earth surrounded on all sides by high walls, giving it the appearance of an embryo mining shaft, from which about strange ledges and gables, of no use, it would seem, except as a promenade for cats. The garden boasts of no flowers, but instead is made glorious by ornamental layers of great pink and mother-of-pearl shells, such as we see exhibited sometimes in oyster shops, varied by rows of huge flints like fossil octopuses, further diversified with stray water-pails and torn paper collars, accompanied by a sardine box or two, a pair of braces, or other stray fragment of cast-off apparel. The chief feature of the garden, however, is a wooden arbour set against the wall, made of wide green-painted planks, like half a boat set up on end, with benches and three-legged stools about, and here the old gentleman and his captains sit on fine days, or when ejected by the O'Cannikin, enjoying perpetual twilight, and occasionally pelting with pebbles and mud any unwise grimaldin that shall be misguided enough to indulge in a gymnastic walk within reach of their missiles.

The O'Cannikin's arrangements extend generally far into the night; for no sooner has she flopped down panting upon her sofa, exposing a fine view of stocking and nankeen boot, with a yawn like the gape of a hippopotamus, than a telegram is sure to arrive from Plymouth or Southampton, announcing the coming of yet other captains between the hours of twelve and two, which will necessitate still more scheming and ingenious pie-nicking among the furniture.

"Ah, now, Captain Wellin's coming; well,

he'll be welcome, he's a dear man. I'm glad he should arrive. Kattie! There's another coming. Another mattress and a pillow. Where can we put him? There are two already in the front room up-stairs. The two-pair back is ready to burst. Well, we'll put him somewhere—last time he brought me some guava jelly that was mighty nice."

The constancy of the ocean kings is very touching. One would imagine that after a long voyage in rough weather, and privations of every kind, they would be glad, when once on terra firma, to enjoy comfortable quarters in one of the numerous hotels about America-square sooner than be the victims of such shifts, with no abiding place but an ill-stuffed pallet beneath the kitchen table; but constant they evidently are, and grateful too for small mercies, which is evidenced by the fact that they never return empty handed, bringing always either some preserved fruit, or a trinket, or a silk handkerchief, for the gratification of the kind lady, who never fails to embrace the donor with a loud smack of the lips like the crack of a coach-whip, and a "Well, now, you're a good chold."

Very free and easy is the O'Cannikin in her ways, although her morals are beyond all reproach. She calls everybody, servants, boarders, old ladies, battered seamen, and budding hobbledoys, by their christian names. The servants are generally "Jewel," the old ladies "darling," and the rest "dear boy." She is extremely garrulous, sitting down in intervals of management beside you, and discoursing of her most private affairs, although she saw you for the first time but ten minutes ago, then bustling off to hold a stentorian colloquy down the back-stairs, and returning with her hair about her ears, and scratching her head pensively with her back-comb, to continue her confidences, as to how Aunt Jenny died at Melbourne, leaving a legacy of five hundred pounds, and how an heir-at-law intervened, and won a lawsuit, thereby behaving very shabbily. And then she will start up again, tossing the comb upon the table, exclaiming, "Now do try a poise, now do, doether, dear; I'm going to try a dhrop of something, feeling cauld in my insode." Presently she creates a diversion by altogether vanishing from the scene for awhile, till the deaf old gentleman, having hunted for her high and low, announces that "somebody's took her." We rise and explore the place. She certainly is neither in her room, or in the kitchen, or anywhere apparently, unless she be devising new impromptu beds among the chimney-stacks. "Yes, somebody's took her," sure enough, the old gentleman repeats in his loud stage whisper, on the stairs. "Is it me you're wanting? Sure, I'm in the front parlour, busy," calls out the jubilant voice, and we rush anxiously thither, to find her gravely sitting on the floor beside old Captain Bluffer, each with a hot flat-iron and a cut brown paper like a tailor's pattern. "Sure, we're smoothing rheumatiz. The tar, or something in the paper, with a little heat's mighty good for it, and, as I can't reach my shoulder, the captain's kindly doing it for me, while I smooth down his shin." And thus the evening will pass away, varied by departures and arrivals; by schemes for packing people as closely as possible, utilising every inch of space; pipes, and little drops of something, until it is time to go to bed. And what a strange house it is up-stairs! Ever so many little doors open on to each landing, displaying vistas of wonderfully incongruous things within. Uniforms, caps, telescopes, hung on pegs along the wall; sea-chests, half unpacked, with corroded brass ornaments; tiny parcels, evidently presents for friends; ill-made mufti coats, and brand-new tall hats; opossum skins, skins of birds; nicknacks from the South Seas; Fiji curiosities; tropical linen clothing, woollen Arctic clothing, and generally a dirty bed or shakedown, sprinkled with boots, and not made or arranged since the previous night. Many of the rooms have been subdivided into two or three, barely capable of holding more than a bed, by means of wooden partitions overlapped and painted, giving the queer little pigeon-holes the aspect of ships' bunks. I enter the one assigned to me, having declined the resting-place under the dining-room sofa, and observing large yellow squadrons winding across my pillow like ants about their hill, or like the huge German columns leaving Kaiserslautern previous to the battle of Worth, set to work to investigate my surroundings.

The feather-bed and pillow with its tawny blanket is quite an interesting study of animal life. There are large insects, small insects, running insects, creeping insects, scuttling insects, long insects, live centipedes; mothers of families and their offspring to the fourth generation; tribes more numerous than the children of Israel in the desert; all winding in and out, falling into patterns like the fragments in a kaleidoscope, most entertaining to behold provided one were not expected to join them in their gambols through the night. I accordingly, commence a wholesale slaughter, sardonically arranging my game in tasty rows along the wall-paper until I achieve a bag of forty-three, when observing the number of my enemies apparently undiminished, I give up the chase, throw open the window, and prefer endeavoring to forget their presence by admiring the prospect thence. This affords me quite a picturesque view of cats jumping on the tiles, throwing diabolical shadows in the moonlight of tails curled and straight, lengthening and shortening with distressing suddenness. Tower Hill, the scene of so much bloodshed, glitters innocently white beyond. The grand old Tower, with its four turrets dark against a scudding sky, is before me; beyond again I can make out a misty array of masts, infinitely various, stretching

away indefinite and vague, like some gaunt geometrical forest. The groaning and tearing down the Minorities had by this time ceased; the rushing trains from Fenchurch-street were still, and the silence was broken only by far-distant sounds of merriment, of carousing and fiddle-playing, evidently a final orgy of some ship's crew about to start to-morrow on a voyage of years. Peals of laughter came upon the air; faint hurrahs as the prosperity of the fatherland about to be left behind was toasted in bumpers; sounds of scuffling in the streets, coupled with laughter or occasional cries of women; and above it all a scarce perceptible monotonous thud from some far-distant vessel making up for wasted time by receiving her cargo after hours. Little by little the shadows of the cats waxed fainter; ere those animals retired to bivouac in the summer-house below; the orgy terminated in a final three cheers more, the City clocks told morning watches in keys varying with the importance of their situation, sullen or flippant, deep or high in tone; a roar seemed to rise up from the distant sea, advancing with increasing thunder as it eddied nearer, washing and lapping lovingly around the cold grey feet of one bridge after another, until a rosy light tipped the tower vanes; then, policemen standing statue-like at corners cut strangely black against the ground; then pale slouching idlers began to creep to and fro; then bands of stevedores marching to their work seemed to spring up from somewhere underground; then the streets by slow degrees became thick with hurrying people; vans and wagons groaned, and creaked, and rumbled in a confused but deafening uproar; and vast, seething, boiling, palpitating London had shaken itself up for the business of another day.

In the morning the O'Cannikin is as blithe as Milesian skylark ever was, bustling about her house in a drab dressing-gown and red leather slippers, with her iron-grey locks flapping down her back.

"Hurroo, doether, you're down the first. Kattie, bring up that steak and some tay and a shrimp or two. The captains are all snoozing, bless you, and why shouldn't they? They've no responsibility now, being off duty, and I loike them to take their rest. Any toime between this and one they'll find a bit o' breakfast. I loike my children to be happy. Didn't I tell you this was Ramshackle Castle?"

Being Sunday morning we are favored with captains in every sort of disguise; bluff hearty fellows, who appear first in all kinds of incongruous toggery, many in stockinged feet and unkempt heads, to blow off a few clouds of cavendish in the "garden," and to hold playful passages of arms with their hostess through the open window; to burst forth, later on, the same but other gentlemen, in all the panoply of ill-fitting black frock-coats, creaking polished boots, and amazing paper collars. Others drop in by twos and threes to breakfast, all ravenous, all cheery, bronzed and battered, some with hands like those of laborers, for in the merchant service the lower grades of officers are frequently expected to work along with those before the mast. Mr. Fruellin, returned from some trip late the night before, comes down with shaky hand, grey, like an unbolled prawn about the face.

"Ah, now, mee chold!" said the O'Cannikin shaking her head at him, and endeavoring the while to coax her flying hair into something like order. "Ah, now, ye've been indulging in sperits, and you promised me to stick to beer. Not but what I think sperits; judiciously administered, the most wholesome of the two to the insode, when you can restrain yerself. Didn't I make you take a private pledge? Oh, but, boys, I must tell you all something. You know the two German children, Herman's their name, mates belonging to the Thecla, of Hamburg? Well, what do you think? Their mother's arrived who hasn't seen either of them for twelve years and more, and they're in such a stew up-stairs; have been crying out for pommatum and hot water ever since eight o'clock, and won't let the old lady see them till they're titivated up. And they've bin questioning me about her, as to what she's loike. Has she grey hair or dark, is she short or tall, does she loike hearty or the other thing? And they won't believe a word I say, and none of their clothes are good enough to wear. It's a mercy it's Sunday, or we'd have them spending all the money they've earned on the last trip in whoite waistcoats and macassar!"

At this juncture one of the lads came rushing down the stairs, in a white heat of anxiety. "We must have a bottle of wine," he said; "and is the front parlor made nice and tidy? She'll be down presently and we shall see her once again!"

"Bless the chold, how he goes on," responded she of Tipperary; "I haven't a dhrop of wine in the house. If I had, you'd be welcome to it all. Ask the neighbor on the right. He's a German like yourself; there are enough of them about here. Ask him to let you buy a bottle. Stay, won't sperits do? I've got some lovely poteen?"

Spirits not being sufficiently aristocratic for the emergency, the young fellow, quite magnificent in a vast display of shirt-front, cuffs like topsails, his hair nearly brushed off his head, flew into the garden, placed a step ladder against the wall, and straightway there ensued a long guttural discussion through a little hole high up, which ended in the unhooking of a grating and the appearance of a withered hand with a bottle in it, which precious flask was well-high broken by the flying leap of the young gentleman as he skipped into the room.

"Now, dear Mrs. O'Cannikin, a clean de-