

THE ALBATROSS.

The albatross has often served poor Jack a good turn when his larder has run low, or when he has been cast upon some desolate sea-bird island; and many anonymous anecdotes are told in the fore-castle respecting them. But the most remarkable I have ever heard, bordering indeed on the marvelous and incredible, if not itself a providential miracle, is the following, contained in substance in a letter from an officer in the eighty-third regiment of the English army to his friends in Montreal. While the division to which the writer belonged was on its way to the Orient, being at that time a short distance eastward of the Cape, one of the men was severely flogged for some slight offence. Maddened at the punishment, the poor fellow was no sooner released, than, in the sight of all his comrades and the ship's crew, he sprang overboard. There was a high sea running at the time, and, as the man swept astern, all hope of saving him seemed to vanish. Relief, however, came from a quarter where no one ever dreamed of looking for it before. During the delay incident on lowering a boat, and while the crowd on deck were watching the form of the soldier struggling with the boiling waves, and growing every moment less distinct, a large albatross, such as are always found in those latitudes, coming like magic, with an almost imperceptible motion, approached and made a swoop at the man, who in the agonies of the death-struggle, seized it and held it firm in his grasp, and by this means kept afloat until assistance was rendered from the vessel.

Incredible as this story seems, the name and position of the writer of the letter, who was an eye-witness of the scene, places its authenticity beyond a doubt. But for the assistance thus offered, no power on earth could have saved the soldier, as in consequence of the tremendous sea running, a long time elapsed before the boat could be manned and got down, all this time the man clinging to the bird, whose flutterings and struggles to escape, bore him up. Who, after this should despair? A raging sea—a drowning man—an albatross; what eye could see safety under such circumstances? or who will dare to call this chance? Is it not rather a lesson intended to stimulate Faith and Hope, and teach us

never to despair, since, in the darkest moment, when the waves dash, and the winds roar, and a gulf seems closing over our heads, *there may be an albatross at hand*, with a commission to save us from Him, of whom it is said, "As birds flying, so will the Lord of hosts defend Jerusalem; defending also, he will deliver it, and passing over, he will preserve it."

There is another lesson taught me by this most majestic and beautiful of birds, for which, I think I am a wiser man than before. We observe that when captured and set at liberty in the ship, it can never of itself rise from the even surface of the deck, though outwardly unconstrained and free; but we must toss the noble bird over board, or lift him quite clear of the ship's rail, before he can raise his glorious pinions and mount aloft into the air. Then he will stretch those ample wings, and sail away through space in the very poetry of motion, as if the elastic element of the air and the bird were one, making the gazer wonder and fairly long to be taking the same aerial flight.

Even so it is sometimes with the Christian. He is brought by Providence into straits and perplexities, whence he cannot rise and extricate himself alone, where the wing of faith and love seem to be of no avail to him, until a friendly hand lifts him up and throws him out upon the deep, where he must say with Peter, "Lord save, I perish." Then at once he loses despair; he surmounts the difficulty; he breaks his prison; he mounts up as on eagle's wings; now the pinions of faith and love nobly sustain him and bear him away aloft, and he wonders at the night-mare of doubt and fear that kept him from using them before. He is ashamed of the wrong thoughts of God that had begun to gather and darken in his mind. He sees that God was infinitely wise and good in appointing the discipline to which he has been subjected, and he flies all the higher and better for it in holiness now. Like the Ancient Mariner, who has served us for illustration once before,

"He goes on like one that hath been
stunn'd,
And is of sense forlorn;
A better and a wiser man
He'll rise to-morrow morn."

—Rev. H. T. Cheever.