

* * The Story Page. * *

Recognized and Rewarded.

BY HENRY SETON MERRIMAN.

"I have heard that there is corn in Egypt."

Slyne's Chare is in South Shields, and Mason's Chop House stands at the lower corner of Slyne's Chare—Mason's Chop House, where generations of honest Tyne-side sailors have consumed pounds of honest mutton and beef, and onions therewith. For your true salt loves an onion ashore, which makes him a pleasanter companion at sea. Mason's Chop House is a low-roofed, red-titled, tarred cottage, with a balcony—a "balcony" overhanging the river. It is quite evident that the "balcony" was originally built, and has subsequently been kept in repair, by ships' carpenters. It is so glaringly ship-shape, so redolent of tar, so ridiculously strong.

The keen fresh breeze—and there is nothing keener, fresher, stronger and wholesomer in the world than that which comes roaring up between the two piers of the Tyne—this breeze blows right through Mason's, and blows the fume of cooking out into Slyne's Chare.

It is evening—tea time—and the day's work is almost done; for Mason's does little in suppers. A bullet-headed boy is rubbing pewter pots at the door. Mrs. Mason, comfortably somnolent at the entrance of the little kitchen, watches her daughter—comely, grave-faced Annie Mason—"our Annie," as she is called, who is already folding the table-cloths. A few belated customers linger in the partitioned loose-boxes which lend a certain small privacy to the tables, and often saves a fight. They are talking in gruff, North-country voices, which are never harsh.

A man comes in, after a moment's awkward pause at the open door, and seeks a secluded seat, where the gas overhead hardly affords illumination. He is a broad-built man—a Tynesider; not so very big for South Shields; a matter of six feet one, perhaps. He carries a blue spotted handkerchief against his left cheek, and the boy with the pewter pots stares eagerly at the other. A boy of poor tact this; for the customer's right cheek is horribly disfigured. It is all bruised and battered in from the curve of a square jaw to the cheek-bone which is broken. But the eye is intact; a shrewd, keen eye, accustomed to the penetration of a Northern mist—accustomed to a close scrutiny of men's faces. It is painfully obvious that this sailor—for gait and clothes and manner set aside all other crafts—is horribly conscious of his deformity.

"Got the toothache?" inquires the tactless youth.

The newcomer replies in the negative and orders a cup of tea and a herring. It is Annie who brings the simple meal and sets it down without looking at the man.

"Thanks," he growls in his brown beard, and the woman pauses suddenly. She listens, as if hearing some distant sound. Then she slowly turns—for she has gone a step or two from the table—and makes a pretense of setting the salt and pepper closer to him.

Three ships had come up with the afternoon tide—a coaster, a Norwegian barque in ballast and a full-rigged ship with nitrate from the west coast of South America. "Just ashore?" inquired Annie—economical with her words, as they mostly are round the Northern River.

"Ay!"

"From the West Coast?"

"Ay," grumbles the man. He holds the handkerchief to his cheek and turns the herring tentatively with a fork.

"You'll find it a good enough fish," says the woman bluntly. Her two hands are pressed to her comely bosom in a singular way.

"Ay!" says the man again, as if he had no other word.

The clock strikes six, and the boy, more mindful of his own tea than his neighbor's ailments, slips on his jacket and goes home. The last customers dawdle out with a grunt intended for a salutation. Mrs. Mason is softly heard to snore. And all the while Annie Mason—all the color vanished from her wholesome face—stands with her hands clutching her dress gazing down at the man who still examines the herring with a self-conscious awkwardness.

"Geordie!" she says. They are all called Geordie in South Shields.

"Ay, lass!" he answers, shamefacedly.

Annie Mason sits down solemnly—opposite to him. He does not look up but remains, his face half hidden by the spotted blue handkerchief, a picture of self-conscious guilt and shame.

"What did ye do it for, Geordie?" she asks breathlessly. "Eleven years, come March—oh, it was cruel!" "What did I do it for?" he repeats. "What did I do it for? Why, lass, can't ye see my face?"

He drops the handkerchief and holds up his poor, scarred countenance. He does not look at her, but away past her with the pathetic shame of a maimed dog. The cheek thus suddenly exposed to view is whole and brown and healthy. Beneath the mahogany-colored skin there is a glow singularly suggestive of a blush.

"Ay, I see your face," she answers, with a note of

tenderness for the poor, scarred cheek. "I hope you haven't been at the drink."

He shakes his head with a little, sad smile, that twists up his one-sided mouth.

"Is it because you wanted to get clear of me?" asks the woman with a sort of breathlessness. She has large gray-blue eyes, with a look of constant waiting in them—a habit of looking up at the open door at the sound of every footstep.

"Think, Annie. Could I come back to you with a face like this; and you the prettiest lass on the Tyneside?"

She is fumbling with her apron string. There is a half coquettish bend of her head—with the gray hairs already at the temple—awakened perhaps by some far-off echo in his passionate voice. She looks up slowly and does not answer his question.

"Tell us," she says slowly, "tell us where you've been."

"Been!—oh, I don't know, lass! I don't rightly remember. Not that it matters. Up the West Coast, trading backwards and forwards. I've got my master's certificate now. Serving first mate on board the Mallard to Falmouth for orders, and they ordered us to the Tyne. I brought her round—I knew the way. I thought you'd be married, lass. But maybe ye are?"

"Maybe I'm daft," puts in Annie coolly.

"I greatly feared," the man goes on with the slow, self-consciousness of one unaccustomed to talk of himself, "I greatly feared I'd meet up with a bairn of yours playing in the dooryard. Loosh! I could not have stood that! But that's why I stayed away, Annie, lass! So that you might marry a man with a face on him. I thought you would not know me if I held my handkerchief over my other cheek!"

There is a strange gleam in the woman's eyes—a gleam that one or two of the old masters have succeeded in catching and imparting to the face of their Madonnas, but only one or two.

"How did you come by your hurt?" she asks, in her low voice.

"Board the old Wallaroo going out. You mind the old ship. We had a fire in the hold, and the skipper he would go down alone to locate it before we cut a hole in the deck and shipped the hose in. The old man did not come up again. Ye mind him. Old Rutherford of Jarro. And I went down and looked for him. It was full of smoke and fire, and something in the cargo was burning rapidly. I got a hold of the old man, and was fetching him out on my hands and knees, when something busts up and sends us all through the deck. I had three months in Valparaiso hospital; but I saved old Jack Rutherford of Jarro. And when I got up and looked at my face I saw that it was not in the nature of things that I could ever ask a lass to have me. So I just stayed away and made believe that—that I had changed my mind."

The man pauses. He is not glib of speech, though quick enough at sea. As he takes up the little teapot and shakes it round-wise, after the manner of the galley, his great brown hand shakes, too.

"I would not have come back here," he goes on after a silence, "but the Mallard was ordered to the Tyne. And a chap must do his duty by his shipmates and his owners. And I thought it would be safe—after eleven years. When I saw the old place and smelt the smell of the old woman's frying pan, I could not get past the door. But I hung around, looking to make sure there were no bairns playing on the floor. I have only come in, lass, to pass the time of day and to tell you ye're a free woman."

He is not looking at her. He seems to find that difficult. So he does not see the queer little smile—rather sadder, in itself, than tears.

"And you stayed away eleven years—because o' that?" says the woman slowly.

"Ay, you know, lass, I'm no great hand at the preaching and Bibles and the like; but it seems pretty clear that them whose working things did not think it fit that we should marry. And so it was sent. I got to think it so in time—least, I think it's that sometimes. And no woman would like to say, 'That's my man—him with only half a face.' So I just stayed away."

"All for that?" asks the woman, her face, which is still pretty and round and rosy, working convulsively.

"Ay, lass."

Then, honey," she cries, softly, "you dinna understand us women!"—*Cornhill Magazine.*

A Little Bread-Maker.

Dorothy had good reason for thinking that her family was in a sad strait. Her mother was ill, and the doctor had said very decidedly that all she needed was perfect rest, and that that was absolutely necessary. For Dorothy's mother to take a perfect rest opened a vista of untold disasters for the remainder of the family. They

lived in a primitive little town where a housewife was a housewife, and Dorothy's mother was a notable one. She made the best bread in the world, and the serving maid never did it. It was a town where buying bread was held to be a badge of shiftlessness, and the only baker had very poor custom and deserved no better.

Dorothy wondered blankly what her father and her three older brothers would do when they saw the article Gretchen, the raw German girl, had made and called bread—dark, flat slabs of material that could scarcely be cut nor bitten—and how could her mother rest when she saw such bread brought into her room? Dorothy was ten, and the most petted and spoiled of children, but the horror of the situation roused her to action. Her mother could not be consulted. Two doors from them lived Mrs. Dent, reputed to be a cross-grained individual, but an excellent cook.

With fear and trembling Dorothy finally presented herself at Mrs. Dent's back door.

"Dorothy Douglass! How what be you wanting?"

"I want you—to tell me how to make bread!" gasped Dorothy.

Mrs. Dent's difficult features relaxed.

"Do tell! Here, child, come right in. If you've got a good impulse I'd best foster it! Likely it's the first, and may be the last. Come—there's only one way to learn, and that's by doing."

She took a big apron from somewhere, and draped it around Dorothy, obliged her to wash her hands at the sink, and had her go through all the manoeuvres of preparing her yeast and setting her sponge. Dorothy was more than once on the verge of tears, so sharp were Mrs. Dent's comments and criticisms, but she gritted her teeth and spurred herself on with inward admonition until the ordeal was over.

"How, tell me what you did!"

Three times Mrs. Dent made her repeat what she had done, with no sign of relaxing, then untied the apron, instructed her to appear the next morning promptly, and dismissed her.

Dorothy prayed piteously that night for courage to face Mrs. Dent again, rather doubting that it would be granted to her. But she found herself inside Mrs. Dent's kitchen the next morning, valiantly struggling to follow instructions relative to getting the flour into the sponge, and endeavoring to repeat satisfactorily what she had already done. Later came the kneading and the making into loaves, and Mrs. Dent was relentless. Dorothy knew one tear dropped right on the top of a loaf, and she could not see how the fact escaped Mrs. Dent. She had to repeat her lesson again, and was becoming wonderfully glib at it.

At the next trip she had to regulate the fire, put in her bread, and Mrs. Dent bade her stay and watch it, occupying the time by having her repeat forwards, backwards, and upside down all she knew about bread making.

"There are lots of ways of making bread, but this is a good rule, and if you stick to it your bread will never fail you—never! Queer your ma never showed you how to make bread."

"She said I should learn after awhile, and she hates to have anyone putting around the kitchen."

"Certain. Anybody does. But I've made out to put up with you—turn your bread round!"

When it was done the five loaves were so beautiful, such an entrancing brown, such a high, rounded shape, so satisfying in every way, that Dorothy forgot her misery and laughed with delight. Mrs. Dent looked at her pupil and at the bread with undisguised satisfaction.

"I'm a good teacher, if I do say it, that shouldn't!" and then she made her repeat her bread-making lesson twice more.

"Now, child, I'll give you threes of these loaves to take home, and you must bake again at your house and bring me a loaf."

Dorothy promised eagerly, and departed with her light bread and light heart.

The gloom that had settled down on Mrs. Douglass' face when the curious cuttings of bread had been brought to her gave way to an expression of active horror when she saw the fresh, light bread Dorothy brought.

"Dorothy, have you been borrowing?"

"No'm. I made it."

"You made it?"

"Yes'm," her face aglow with excitement. Such triumphs come to few.

"You made it, Dorothy—you, a mere baby?"

"I did, mamma, truly. Mrs. Dent showed me how."

"Well, Mrs. Dent is well able to show you. None knows better. Dorothy," solemnly, "I shall certainly get well very soon. I feel it. This puts new life into me."

"I hope you won't tell your ma you've been borrowing bread, Dorothy," said her father, uneasily, at supper, as he promptly helped himself to bread, and the boys in a great hurry cleared the rest of the plate, believing it to be their only chance.