

The Shipwreck eBook

The Shipwreck

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CHAPTER I.

Two Young Friends.

At the mouth of the great river of Canton lies a maze of islands large and small, of which the most important is Hongkong on account of its fine harbor. More than half a century ago the English seized upon this island and forced the Chinese to cede it to them. Then it was little more than a barren rock with a low swampy shore on which were a few villages inhabited by poor fisher folk. The swamps have been drained, gardens planted, and villas built, until now the once barren heights vie in beauty with the grass-grown slopes of the hills at the foot of which in the shade of great trees nestle pleasant little fisher hamlets. On the north side of the island stands the capital city, Victoria, in which tier above tier, stair-like the rows of houses and splendid buildings rise one above another up the side of a hill. Beautiful quays, broad streets lined with shade trees, churches, barracks, theaters, hospitals, hotels, and shops with great show windows take one back in thought to the European capitals; and as the elaborately decorated pagodas are not near to the Christian churches, and, as there are not many more Chinese than English people in the streets, one can almost forget that he is within the confines of China and a tropical land.

In this great capital city nearly all the missionary societies of China have settlements, and in each of the missionary seminaries the stranger finds a hospitable welcome, but the one we like best of all to visit is the beautiful College of the Holy Saviour in Mayland. It stands in the very shadow of the cathedral, the tall spires of which, towering to the heavens, tell us in which direction to turn our steps to find it. We know full well that the door-keeper, the old Italian Brother with snow-white hair and coal-black eyes, will greet us cordially, and show us the garden and the grounds on which blonde-haired European boys play in brotherly fashion with pig-tailed Chinese youths. When Brother Onufrio—for this is the name of the door-keeper—is in very good humor and has the time he tells us stories of his experiences in the College of the Holy Saviour in which he has been in active service since its foundation. One of these is the wonderful history of the small Irish lad, Willy Brown, the son of a sea captain, and his friend, the Chinese foundling, Joseph. We shall tell the tale just as Brother Onufrio would tell it, beginning with the day in the first year of his residence in Hongkong when the crosses were placed on the spires of the dome of the cathedral.

* * * * *

A few days before the Chinese New Year in 1858 the work on the cathedral had progressed so far that the great golden crosses could be erected. Securely fastened with strong ropes they lay at the foot of the scaffolding ready to be drawn up into place, and standing about in a half circle were missionaries, pupils, and workmen. The Apostolic Prefect, dressed in festal robes, and attended by the small acolytes, Willy Brown and



the Chinese Joseph, had blessed the crosses. Then at a signal the workmen pulled the ropes and, as they rose on high, the clear, piping voices of the boys rang out in the splendid old hymn:

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The Royal banners forward go,
The Cross shines forth in mystic glow;
On which the One Who in our flesh was made
Our sentence bore, our ransom paid.

When the crosses had been put in place the Prefect made a speech, saying among other things, "Now afar over Hongkong and its harbor where it may be seen not only by all the people who dwell here but also by those who come in ships from far distant ports shines the sign of Our Lord." Of all that the head of the order of missionaries said on this occasion this impressed little Willy most, and when the celebration was over the small acolyte went to Father Somazzo and said: "Father, the Apostolic Prefect said that the cross on the cathedral could be seen from all the ships that come into the harbor. From the cross can you see all the ships?"

"Yes, certainly, Willy," he answered. "From all the ships, streets, open squares, and hills round about from which the cross is visible, any and all those places are visible from the dome on which the cross stands."

"Oh, then, Father, let me climb up. It is not dangerous. The ladders are fastened tightly to the scaffolding, and the scaffolding is so strong that it will hold big men. Yesterday at recess Joseph almost climbed up; he would have gone to the very top, if the Prefect had not seen him and called him down. O Father, don't frown so at me, but let me go. I want so much to see whether my father's ship has come. He wrote that he would be here before the New Year, and I would know his ship at a glance from the golden picture of holy Saint George that's on the bow. Please, Father, please."

Father Somazzo shook his head and said: "The ship is too far away for you to see what is painted on the bow, and besides it is too dangerous for you to climb up there. You might get dizzy and fall, and what would your father say if he were to come here and find you a corpse, or with your legs and arms broken?"

"Oh, but Father, I do not get dizzy. I have often been up on the rigging of the 'Saint George', in the crow's nest, and even on the very highest yard. I know every bit of the rigging of the ship. O Father, let me climb up right now."

The teacher looked at Willy earnestly and raised his finger chidingly. "Willy," he said, "you've got that stubborn little head of yours set again. How often have I told you that it is not becoming for you to insist on having your own way. No, you cannot climb up to the dome under any circumstances. I forbid it."

With that Father Somazzo left the small boy standing in the garden and followed the other missionaries into the house. Willy looked about him, half frightened, half defiant, and giving his cap a jerk down over his curly yellow hair muttered, as he glanced at the

shining cross: “I will climb up there, and he can punish me if he likes. Let him catch me first.”

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Willy Brown was really not a naughty boy, but he could be very willful at times. Irish by birth and accustomed to more liberty than the Italian teacher was wont to give his pupils in Hongkong, he did not always submit readily to the rather strict discipline of the school, but aside from this was an exemplary child. In order to break him of his habit of being so stubborn his teacher often commanded or forbade him to do things which otherwise would never have been thought of a second time. Just now the one desire of Willy's heart was to see his father's ship, and to him the climbing of the scaffolding seemed so wholly without danger that he looked upon the command which he had received as an act of tyranny, and resolved to disobey. His conscience said to him, "It is a sin to disobey," but he heeded not the small voice within him. Before going up he sought out his favorite companion, a little twelve year old Chinaman. The boys were of an age and were to receive their first communion at the same time—facts which created a bond of sympathy between two children almost as totally unlike as it was possible for children to be. The young Chinaman was a foundling. His parents after the fashion of many of the Chinese had exposed him when but a few days old, thus consigning him to death, although their heathen religion forbids the practice, and if the Sisters of Mercy had not found and cared for him in the orphanage he would have perished. There the boy was baptized and brought up in the Christian religion. And when the years passed by, as Joseph—this was the name given him at baptism—showed decided talent, he was put in school, and finally given over to the missionaries in the college, to be trained for the priesthood, if God called him to the work.

At the very time that Willy was seeking for Joseph, Joseph was seeking for Willy, and, when he heard the voice of his red-cheeked companion, his black slanting eyes danced and his yellow face flushed with pleasure.

"Hello, Peppo," said Willy, addressing him by the nickname which old Brother Onufrio had given him.

"Come with me behind the camelia-bush where Father Somazzo cannot see us."

"But why must he not see us? You are not going to do anything wrong, are you?" asked the small Chinaman trembling.

"What? Anything wrong? I'll play him a trick or two—the tyrant—and that will not be wrong, I say. Is there anything wrong about my looking to see whether my father's boat is here? Come with me right now." Peppo hesitated. "Come this minute or I'll drag you along by your pig-tail the way naughty Freddy used to do before I took you in charge."

Joseph went with his protector without more ado, but did not approve of the plan disclosed to him behind the camelia bush.

"Don't do it, Willy. It will be disobedience, and it's against the fourth commandment."

“The fourth commandment of God tells me to love my father, and for love of my father I want to climb up and look for his ship. That cannot be against the fourth commandment,” said the sinful distorter.

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The sophism did not enlighten small Peppo. "I believe, Willy," he said, "that it is against the fourth commandment, because the Father has forbidden it. He will be very sorry to have you do this, and will give us a dreadful punishment. Only think! the day after tomorrow will be the Chinese New Year, and then in the evening we shall be allowed to go to the marketplace and the harbor to see all the lights,—and the fireworks,—and the Punch and Judy show, if we are good boys. You have never in all your life seen anything so beautiful,—green, and red, and blue, and yellow lanterns,—and all the people,—and the sky-rockets,—and the puppet show. Wouldn't you be sorry to have to stay at home for punishment while all of us boys go to the show?" Willy was almost persuaded and hesitated a moment; then he struck his heels into the ground defiantly and said:

"Never mind, Peppo, Father Somazzo won't catch me, and, if he does, I won't tell on you. Now you've got to help me over the wall, and I'll climb up on the other side where he can't see me from the house. Come, now hurry up, Peppo, if you want to be my friend."

Unwillingly the young Chinaman yielded to his comrade's command. He felt it was wrong to lend a helping hand to one who was disobeying, but he did not wish to lose his best friend, the one who had so often defended him from the teasings of his companions. He slipped along with Willy in the shadow of the bushes, then helped him climb the wall, but even when the youthful sinner had swung himself from the wall to the scaffolding he remonstrated, saying:

"Willy, don't do it. Come down."

"Nonsense, Peppo," he said as he began to ascend.

"Willy,—he does not hear me. I wish I had not helped him," sighed Peppo, as he slipped away to his companions with an uneasy conscience.

CHAPTER II.

Sad Tidings.

A very few moments after Willy with the help of Peppo had climbed the garden wall the bell called Brother Onufrio to the door. There stood a stranger. He wore a cap marked with a golden anchor and inquired for an Irish lad named Willy Brown.

"Yes, Willy is here. You are his father, are you not? For days he has talked of nothing but your coming. He will be so pleased to see you. Come in, Captain, I'll announce your arrival to the Father Prefect, and call Willy."



With these words the Brother showed the Captain into the small reception-room near the door, and would have left quickly had not the stranger motioned him to wait.

“Hm,—hm,—my coming,” he said, “will not give the boy so much pleasure as you think. I am not his father but his guardian. His father died suddenly last week at sea.”

“Oh, how sad! And the poor child knows nothing of it,” sighed the Brother. “I’ll first speak to the Father Prefect in private; he must prepare him somewhat for this sad news. Wait a moment. Father Somazzo will be here immediately.”

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The Captain gave the gray-haired man a sinister look as he left the room, then muttered to himself: "Prepared! As if such a piece of news could have much effect on a healthy child. If it would only frighten him to death.—Well, there'd be no great damage done. Then I'd have his inheritance—which is really not a trifling sum—instead of being merely the administrator, and my creditors would not be driving me almost out of my senses. If his father had only given me a lump sum of at least ten thousand pounds, as I begged him to do before he died!—Our ship will be confiscated in Melbourne. The 'St. George' does not belong to me but to my nephew, my ward.—Oh, if I only knew how to get myself out of this predicament! One fortunate thing has happened since the death of my brother. I have managed to get all the books and accounts out of the way, and perhaps things will go better, if I once get the boy in my power." These were the thoughts which occupied the mind of John Brown, as, with downcast eyes and sullen mien, he paced up and down the reception-room.

John Brown was the younger brother of George Brown, Willy's father. Both men had received from their parents, in Dublin, a large amount of money, but they had not managed it equally well. George, choosing to go to sea had invested his in a merchantman, and in a short time through prosperous voyages to the Indian and Chinese Seas doubled his capital. In Hongkong he married a Catholic maiden, who unfortunately died, leaving a child, Willy, now barely eight years old. In accordance with her last wish this child was taken to the Missionary College of the Holy Saviour to be educated. Here the father had frequent opportunities of seeing him, as his trading expeditions often took him to Hongkong. The reports of the child's progress and behavior were always good, and he seemed so happy and contented that the father questioned the advisability of taking him to a larger European institution, especially as Willy begged to remain where he was. Oftentimes the Captain took his little son with him on short trips to the neighboring ports of Canton and Malacca; and for one of these Willy was now hoping, as his father was just returning from a voyage to Ireland. But instead of the father, there came the uncle, whom he had never seen, and of whose existence he did not even know, bringing the sad news of the death of George Brown.

John Brown was a man of an altogether different stamp, and had lived an altogether different life. Possessed of a passion for drinking and gambling he had indulged in riotous living until he made an end of his patrimony, then appealed to his brother to pay his debts. In order to save the family name from disgrace George furnished him money, but the appeals for more were so constant that he was obliged to give no heed to them or else ruin himself. On the occasion of his last visit to Dublin he found his brother in trouble, and, to escape the charges preferred against him in the criminal courts, took him with him on what proved to be his last voyage. Captain Brown died a few days out from Hongkong and was buried at sea.

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John Brown was innocent of his brother's death, and so the officers and crew of the "St. George" believed, yet the death came so suddenly and opportunely that it gave grounds for suspicion. John was left administrator of the estate of his nephew, and, directly on landing in Hongkong, had himself, as next of kin, appointed Willy's guardian, with the idea of taking him with him on board the "St. George." But how to get him away from the school in the middle of the term was a puzzling question.

Father Somazzo appeared in the doorway and greeted the stranger politely, but with utmost reserve. "You are the brother of the esteemed Captain Brown, the father of dear little Willy," began the priest, noting as he spoke the dark features of the man and the striking resemblance which he bore to his brother.

"I am the Captain's younger brother and the guardian of his son. George died at sea last week, as the door-keeper undoubtedly told you," said the man with a stiff bow. "How is my nephew? Is he doing well? Is he advanced sufficiently so that he can take business training or have the schooling of life at sea prove of value to him?"

"We are much pleased with Willy and the progress he is making," answered Father Somazzo, inviting the stranger to be seated. "He is a good, pious child, only somewhat stubborn and capable of playing mad tricks at times. Just now he has been guilty of disobedience for which we would punish him, were it not that he must be told of the death of his father. That, of course, drives away all thought of harsh treatment."

"What has my nephew been doing?"

"Oh, nothing so very bad. He climbed to the dome of the Cathedral on the scaffolding, or, rather worse than that, he went after being expressly forbidden to go. Of course, he did it—he can in a measure be excused—out of love of his father, whose ship—"

"Is that the careless way in which you watch over the boys in this institution?" interrupted the Captain. "On a bright day like this can your pupils climb the scaffolding on that dome at will without being stopped? Now, what if my nephew, for whose welfare I, as guardian, have a care, had fallen headlong and been killed or crippled for life? My dear Father, that decides me right now to take my nephew out of your institution immediately."

"Captain Brown, before I give the boy over to your care you must give proof of being his guardian. And, then, too, before taking such a rash step you ought to consider well what is for his best interest. His revered father would have sanctioned no such thing as this; your reasons for taking him away from here are groundless. He is neither ready to go into business, nor into training on shipboard, and what is more has no desire for any such thing. Of that I'm very sure."

Father Somazzo spoke very quietly and firmly, yet not without anger, as he scrutinized the man before him, and pictured what Willy's life would be on board the "St. George."

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Captain Brown gave the priest a wicked look and said sarcastically: "Indeed, my ward is to be neither a sea-faring man nor a business man—but a priest, I suppose, in which case you would inherit the not unimportant property which has been left him by his father?—Oh, do not look so angry—holy intentions of such a sort as that are not unheard of. That is another reason for my taking the boy away from your influence. Here is the official proof that I am his guardian, and I wish him given over to me at once."

Father Somazzo examined the paper. It was legal, therefore he could not refuse the request, but he asked permission to keep the child until the following day to comfort him as much as he could over the death of his father. The Captain objected and Willy was sent for. Frightened and with tears streaming from his eyes he was led into the reception-room by Brother Onufrio. At sight of his uncle he screamed, "I won't go, I won't go with him," and buried his face in Father Somazzo's skirts. "Father, send the bad man away that says he is my uncle, and that my father is dead. He doesn't tell the truth. I have no uncle. My father never told me anything at all about having an uncle. And see what wicked eyes he has. I don't want to, and I won't go with him."

With difficulty Father Somazzo quieted the child, saying:

"God knows that I am willing to keep you here, Willy, but your uncle—the Captain is your uncle, even though you never have seen or heard of him—has control over you, and you owe obedience to him in all things which are not sinful. Go with him, and may God and his guardian angels watch over you. We will pray to the Blessed Virgin for you, and I hope she will safely bring you back to us. Perhaps you will come sooner than you think for."

Blessing the boy the priest sprinkled him with holy water and then gave him over to the Captain, saying:

"Only because I am compelled to, Captain, do I give this boy into your care. He is good and innocent. Bear in mind that from now on you are accountable to God for his soul."

The Captain muttered something which could not be understood and tried to make an end to the scene. He took the boy by the arm, made a stiff bow, and stepped to the door. Here, on hearing the news that Willy was about to leave the school, most of his companions had assembled to bid him good-bye. Many shed tears, and Peppo, at the last moment, came flying in breathless. "Oh, Willy, Willy," he cried embracing him, "never, never shall I forget how good you were to me. Who will protect me now when they all tease me?"

"Oh, but you are all here together and like each other so much," answered Willy. "Who is going to protect me from this bad man?" The last words he whispered in the ear of his little friend.

“Your holy guardian angel,” he answered, “and we will all pray for you.”

“Come on, nephew, I don’t want to stay here any longer,” urged the Captain, and a moment later the two had left the College of the Holy Saviour and were out in the street.

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Immediately after their departure Father Somazzo called his pupils into the chapel and there they commended their small companion to the Blessed Virgin and the holy guardian angels. Of all there assembled small Peppo prayed most earnestly.

“O holy guardian angel, thou who art my protector,” he said in his childish simplicity, “Willy will now have need of two guardian angels instead of one, if God will permit, go and help Willy’s guardian angel to protect him from the bad man who has taken him away. You see here where I am the good Fathers will watch over me, and it will be enough if each day you but look at me and then fly away to Willy. But, dear angel, come to me when I am in danger and call for help.”

After this the boys returned to the schoolroom, and as soon as they were at work, Father Somazzo took his hat and walking-stick and went to the city to consult Mr. Black, an English lawyer. To him he stated the case assuring the learned gentleman that the father would not willingly have placed his child under the guardianship of this younger brother, who was a gambler and a spendthrift, and asked if there was any way of getting the boy a way from him. Mr. Black said that according to law the uncle, as next of kin, could claim the guardianship of his brother’s children, and unless sufficient proof that he was not a fit person to have such guardianship could be secured immediately, months might elapse before he could be taken from him. At the time of our story Hongkong was not connected with Europe by telegraph, as it now is, and it took from eight to ten weeks to communicate with people in Dublin.

CHAPTER III.

Aboard the “St. George.”

The Captain took his nephew directly to the harbor. The boy cried softly to himself as he trudged along, and at last his uncle said to him in a mild tone of voice, “Willy, stop your crying. See, all the passersby are looking at you. If I were a boy like you, I would be only too happy to get out of such a tiresome old place where you just learn and pray all day long. I am going to take you into quite a different school, one in which all is bright and gay. On board the ship you won’t have any old exercises to do.”

“Oh, but I liked everything at the College so much, and in the new school there won’t anybody know me,” wailed Willy. “And you—are you really my uncle?”

“Most assuredly. How can you doubt if? Just look at me! Have I not the same hooked nose that your father had?”

“Yes, but you have no such friendly eye. And my father always had so much reverence for the Father Prefect.”



“While I speak to the Father Prefect only compliments in which all the i’s are dotted and all the t’s are crossed most punctiliously—ha! ha!—not so bad. But now see here: let us strike a bargain. You recognize me as your uncle to whom you owe obedience, and everything will be all right. If you go on in this obstinate, defiant way, you shall, so sure as my name is John Brown, this very day make the acquaintance of the cat-o’-nine-tails, and take a diet of bread and water in the company of the rats in the hold of the ship for awhile.”

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Willy had once seen a cabin boy flogged with a cat-o'-nine-tails, and there was nothing in the world which he feared more than rats, so he thought it best to make peace with his uncle. After a pause he said:

"If you really are my uncle, I must obey you, but don't whip me, and don't shut me up with the rats, please.—If you wish me to love you very much indeed, send me back to the College."

"Don't say another word about that College," snarled the Captain with a dark look. "Now dry your eyes. Here we are on the shore, and here is our boat. Get in, obey—else—"

The Captain sprang into the boat and Willy followed without more ado. He looked back toward the city to seek among the domes that of the Cathedral of the Holy Saviour, and soon recognized it by the scaffolding. At sight of the glittering crosses tears came to his eyes, but the thought that those he had left behind would pray for him comforted him. Unmoved he gazed while the boat glided in and out between the great ships at anchor in the harbor, and at last, far out, they reached the ship they sought. The "St. George" was a beautiful boat with three masts, and as we have said Willy had made more than one trip on it with his father. He was then the darling of the crew. Now as he climbed the ladder behind the Captain strange faces peered down at him over the railing; there were new officers, and officers and crew alike seemed rough fellows. Late in the evening as he stood on the rear deck watching the golden crosses of the Church of the Holy Saviour in the light of the setting sun, he heard a well-known voice behind him speak his name.

"Oh, it is you, Tommy Green!" said Willy looking around in a friendly manner. "So there really is after all one old friend on board. Are you still the second mate? Where are James and John and all the rest?"

"Well, Master Willy," said Tommy, "they are all gone, one to the 'South Star,' and the others to 'The Water Rose.' I was on the point of leaving"—then he added, looking around cautiously and lowering his voice, "for the life on the 'St. George' is not what it was when your father was alive. God rest his soul! Now instead of rice sacks and bales of merchandise we carry human freight—slant-eyed, pig-tailed Chinamen bound for the gold fields of Australia."

"I am so glad you are here, Tommy; there is one human being on board I know," repeated Willy.

"Why Master Willy, do you not know your uncle, the Captain?"

"I did not know until today that I had an uncle."



“Is that possible? Well, your father surely had no reason to be proud of his brother. Why, in a single night he gambled away 'The Gold Nixie' and more, too. I believe that he would gamble away the 'St. George' if it were his, but it belongs to you, Master Willy. I ought not to say anything to such a young lad as you about the matter—I know that, but—”

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In the cabin Redfox, the first officer, and the Captain sat in earnest conversation. "Redfox, your wish is fulfilled. My nephew is on board, but, do you know, now that I have seen the boy—he so much resembles my poor dear brother when he was his age—I have not the heart to carry out our plan," said the Captain.

"Hm, hm," answered the first officer, stroking his red beard, and giving the Captain a wicked side glance, "hm—and we have everything so well planned. It is our only salvation. Must I repeat the reasons why?"

"It is not necessary; I understand them, but when our salvation is bought at such a price—shall I say it?—bought at the price of crime."

"Mr. Brown, you can do it, and it is not only your salvation, but also mine.—I am far from planning to sacrifice the half million for which the 'St. George' is insured on account of any evasion on your part. The half million will suffice to pay our debts and give us enough to live on for awhile. After your brother had the good grace to die just at the right time—"

"Do not speak to me of his death. As time goes on I become more and more convinced, Redfox, that you had a hand in his death."

"Your brother died a natural death," said the first officer with a lowering look; "and even if that were not the case, the most of the suspicion would fall on you instead of me. And so surely as I stand here, I swear to you, that if you upset my plan I'll manage matters so you'll be condemned as the murderer of your brother. Since his death nothing stands in our way except this boy. Now, if he should—accidentally—follow in the footsteps of his father, he would surely go to heaven, that is, if what the priests teach is true. If he does not die now in the days of his innocence, ten chances to one, he will grow up to be as reckless and worthless as ourselves. It would be the greatest luck imaginable for him, if now—by chance, of course,—he were to make his journey to heaven."

"True, most true. I wish that I had died when I was his age," groaned the Captain.

"You leave all with me. The boy is on board. That is enough—"

CHAPTER IV.

With the Priest of the God of the Golden Fish.

On the south side of the island of Hongkong are a number of small villages occupied by fishermen. Any one of these hidden away under the shade of the great bamboos may be taken as a type of all the others. The little houses have roofs made of reeds and bundles of twigs, but these do not serve so well for protection from wind and weather as

the thick foliage of the overhanging trees. On the beach fishing nets are spread to dry; and in the calm waters of the little bay a number of poor old junks ride lazily at anchor. One of these is drawn up on the shore and the men are examining the haul of fish just brought in. Women and children with baskets and buckets are hurrying

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down to the beach to do their part in the work of sorting. The large shining blue fishes with bands of blue and rose-red and the yellow ones with spots of red and green they pack in small baskets between rows of green leaves. The lobsters, always plentiful, they place in baskets having compartments so that they cannot get at each other and mangle their bodies fighting; the oysters they throw into a large common bucket, keeping out the small and inferior ones to carry to their huts to use for food. Whenever wind and weather permit the men go off on fishing expeditions, and this is the usual scene which attends their home coming. Then, according to whether the haul has been a good or a poor one, Lihoa, the oldest man in the village, says: "We will take to the God of the Sea who rides on the Golden Fish a thank offering," or "The God who rides on the Golden Fish is angry with us; we must pacify him with strips of gold-paper." And, regularly on an appointed day, the old man goes up to the cell of the priest carrying the thank- or the sin-offering, as the case may be, to the God with the dreadful goggle eyes who rides a gilded sea-monster.

On the day on which the crosses had been erected on the Cathedral of the Holy Saviour Lihoa and his people had had a miserably small catch of fish.

"My children," cried Lihoa, "what crime against the God of the Golden Fish have you committed? So small a haul as this we have not had for a year and a day. The New Year is at hand. How can we have our usual celebration with only a sapeck or two in our pockets?"

"How shall we celebrate the New Year?" cried one. "How shall we appease the God?" wailed others mournfully.

An old Chinaman, whose wrinkled face looked like parchment cried out:

"Why do you even ask the cause of our bad luck? Do you not know why it has come upon us? Were not those white-faced women here again yesterday whose God is the enemy of our God? Again they have carried off bur babies to the great white house in Hongkong. Why do not the people kill the superfluous children according to the old custom of the land? Why let living children get into the hands of these foreign women to be murdered and to have their eyes and hearts stewed up into magic drinks? The God of the Golden Fish is angry with us. Not another good haul shall we have; and what is more we shall be swallowed up in the sea, if we allow any more children to be taken to the house of the foreign God."

"Be still, be still, old Loha," answered Lihoa. "You don't know what you are taking about. I myself have been to the great white house of the foreign women in Hongkong. There they do naught but good, and nobody ever hears of your doing anything good from morning till night. Our children are better taken care of there than here in our poor

old huts. If our women only loved their babes as much as these white-faced women do! Be still. Your drivelling talk about stewing

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up their eyes and hearts to make drinks is all a foolish lie. Did we not open one of the graves of one of the children to see if the eyes and hearts were there? And they were. A nephew of mine, the son of my sister Luli, who was exposed twelve years ago by his mother, because her husband was drowned and she had no means of bringing him up, was taken to the great house and now he is a splendid big boy. From there they sent him to the school, and he can speak and write the Chinese language and also that of the West. Some day I shall go and get him and bring him back to live with our family.—Ah! here we stand and gossip like old women, while the sun is sinking. It is time to take the fish and the oysters to the market. Whose turn is it to go?”

Four men stepped forward and raised the wooden yoke having attached to it buckets of oysters and baskets of fish. The sack containing the crabs Lihoa himself swung over his shoulder, and they started at a quick pace up the hill over which the path to Victoria lay. The women as they turned to go with the children to the huts to prepare the evening meal bade them farewell and called out, “A fortunate sale!”

Night settled down quickly, for in a tropical climate the twilight does not last so long as with us. In Hongkong the sun hardly sets before it is dark, and this evening as the moon, almost at the full, stood high in the heavens, Lihoa had no occasion to light the little lantern which he carried with him. He found the footpath leading up the hill without difficulty, and his people followed after him goose-fashion in single file. Almost at the top they came to the cell in the rock occupied by the priest of the God of the Golden Fish, and in the moonlight to their astonishment saw in the broad open space in front of it a group of men from the neighboring villages. At a signal from Lihoa the carriers placed their burden upon the ground and all went forward to see what the gathering meant.

“Have you heard nothing, Lihoa, of the great scheme which is on foot?” asked the leader of the most important of the villages on the north coast of Hongkong. “Has not the recruiting officer of the rich Natse been to your village?—Oh, it is so small and hidden away that he does not deem it worth his while to go to you, and then, besides, the three hundred who are wanted have announced their intention to go, for who would remain here and tiresomely drag out existence with the niggardly sums to be made from fishing when elsewhere the gold lies in such heaps that one can pick up whole bags full in a few days?”

“How? What? For heaven's sake!—sacks full of gold in a few days?” cried Lihoa, who, like all Chinamen, was covetous of great wealth. “Speak, Lohe, tell us, can we get some of the gold,—at least a handful or two? It is just as you say, our village is the last and the very least in the world, and not a soul has come to us with the good news. Tell us the road to fortune.”

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The agent Lohe, who for each able-bodied Chinaman whom he secured, received a hundred sapecks, agreed to tell Lihoa the road for the reason that he was "his cousin and was glad to do him a little service". He pictured to him a land, bearing the barbaric name Australia, which the "devils from the West" had discovered many days' journey away beyond the islands to the south, where the gold lay in the fields like the stones on the island of Hongkong, and where great nuggets, as large as a man's head, were to be had. This Goldland "the devils from the West" wanted for themselves, but the priest of the God, in whose cell he had just been, said that this gold could be taken away only by the sons of the Celestial Kingdom, that the treasures of this land belonged to the Chinese, and not to the barbarians of the West. The sly discoverers of the Goldland had come to get the Chinese to bring these lumps of gold to their ships, where the men from the West and the sons of the Celestial Kingdom would divide the spoils. The rich Natse was out in search of three hundred men to bring this gold from the distant land to the south. Of course, each one of the three hundred fortunate enough to go would receive his own weight in gold, and for him and his entire family there would be a life of wealth and honor on his return home.

Thus Lohe explained the situation.

"More than a hundred pounds of gold, and wealth and honor," repeated Lihoa, on whom the story of the gold which the God had said was to be given to the Chinese and not to the hated barbarians from the West, had made a deep impression.

"Have you heard it, my people? We can all become as rich as rich Natse, and even richer, if we go on the ship to the southland."

"Yes", said one of the oyster carriers, "if all that is true—"

"And if we are not drowned on the long journey," put in another.

"Or, if 'the devils from the West' do not kill us for our money after we have brought all the gold from the land to the ship for them," put in the third fish carrier.

"Yes, but if I knew that I would surely come back with some of the gold, I would go," added the fourth.

"There, just see how sharp you all are!" said Lohe. "Just such doubts as these troubled my friends and myself, so we are here to consult the priest of the God of the Golden Fish, who surely knows. We have promised to have a new fish made of solid gold to replace the gilded wooden one, if he counsels us well and has a care over us while on the way. The priest is now in his cell burning incense before the God, and when the moon reaches that constellation in the middle of the heavens, he will tell us the God's answer."



The moon had almost reached the place designated. Lihoa and his followers with the rest of the men seated themselves on the mossy rocks before the sanctuary, to await the answer of the spirit. The nearer the time came the quieter they were; until at last they scarcely dared breathe. The rim of the moon touched the constellation: no sound was heard in the cave. Softly the silver beams of light fell upon the bare rocks and cast over the "waters of the sea a shimmering bridge that stretched from the foot of the hill away into the darkness.

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"Will the spirit not answer?" whispered Lihoa impatiently.

"Wait. The moon is not yet in the middle of the constellation," answered Lohe. Hardly had he uttered these words when from the cell came the sound of a gong, then a song in a high nasal tone, which was plainly heard, but being in a strange language was not understood by any of the listeners.

"The Spirit speaks to the priest," said the credulous men, trembling with superstitious fear. The secret song lasted for a minute perhaps, then from the depths of the cave came a flash of lightning and a loud peal of thunder. Many of the Chinamen, half frightened out of their wits, fled screaming at the top of their lungs. Again the gong sounded, and the priest came to the entrance of the cell with a smoking pan of incense in his hand. So suddenly did he appear, that it seemed as if he had sprung out of the very rock on which they stood. All gave a wild cry of terror, as with utter abhorrence they gazed, while a little deformed old man described figures in the air with his smoking pan, and said, shaking his great bald head:

"What do you fear, O children of the Middle Kingdom? Surely not my master, the terrible God that rides on the back of the Golden Fish, nor me, poor old Lihong. For you and you alone I have just subjected myself to his terrible gaze. Had you seen his burning eyes, your courage would have failed you. He is angry because some of you do not hate enough those who serve the foreign God, his deadly enemy; yet he answered your questions, because many of you have heretofore brought to him your offerings. Listen to the words of the Spirit which rides upon the back of the Golden Fish:

Gold, gold, gold,
In distant fields so far away!
'Tis his who comes to seek, I say;
'Tis his to take where'er he will,
'Tis his go where he will—his still.

Gold, gold, gold,
In getting it three things beware!
In discord take no part or share;
Beware the sea's engulfing waves,
And thirst which drives men to their graves."

With open mouths the Chinamen listened to the mysterious words of the priest, and when he had finished his slyly contrived speech, they sat for a time in mute astonishment. Finally Lohe spoke up:

"To me the answer seems favorable. The God confirms the idea of there being gold in a distant land to the south, and says that we can get and keep possession of it, if we only

take heed of three things—discord, the sea, and thirst. As to discord—it lies within our power to avoid that; as to the sea—we could be drowned quite as easily on our own coast as on a long journey to the south, if that is to be our fate; and as to thirst, who would not endure thirst for the sake of becoming ten times richer than the rich Natse?”

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All agreed that the answer was most favorable. The greedy priest did not stop, but went on to tell that the God could not be relied upon to take them safely through all dangers, unless rich sacrificial offerings were made. "Daily", said he, "I will burn incense and strips of gold paper before his picture. The clouds of smoke will appease the spirits of the storm and fall upon you as rain-drops which will quench your burning thirst, and the gold paper will reconcile the spirits that watch over the gold in the distant Goldland, so that they will willingly give to you their treasures."

The Chinamen reached into their pockets and handed over their last sapeck to the priest, then in silence left, firmly resolved to attempt the journey to the Goldland.

CHAPTER V.

In the City.

Lohe attached himself to the party of fish carriers, because he did not wish them to get away before binding themselves to go to the gold fields. A two hours' walk diagonally across the island brought them to a high point of land above the city of Hongkong. Below them the white houses shimmered in the moonlight, stretching row after row like steps down to the harbor, and out on the glistening sea many large vessels lay at anchor. The carriers put down their burden to rest for a time before descending into the streets of the city.

"The barbarians of the West are a capable people after their fashion," said Lohe. "See what a great city they have built here where a few years ago there were only a half dozen or more bamboo huts. And, too, each day their power increases. Over there another great building with towers reaching to the very sky is going up. What can it be?"

"One of their pagodas," answered Lihoa, "and down there is the school in which one of my nephews is being instructed in the learning of the West. The white-faced women with the long veils brought him up because my sister exposed him when a baby. They found and cared for him in the great white house where a light burns in the window; there they bring up the children which our women are not able to care for. Let us go down and see what is going on at this time of the night."

Lohe and Lihoa went down to the long low orphanage in which the Sisters of Mercy care for a hundred or more foundlings. The shutters were drawn, but they found a tiny hole through which they could peep. In the dormitory they saw four rows of small white beds, all spread with beautiful white linen, and in each little bed lay a child. The most of them were asleep, but a few were crying and fretting—for Chinese babies have quite as many troubles as American children. Some of the nuns were walking up and down between the rows of beds, lovingly tucking up the fretful little beings, giving the bottle to

some, and rocking others with the utmost patience. Hardly did they quiet one before another began to whimper, and so it went on. Shaking their heads the two Chinamen slipped away. They had seen for themselves the love and patience with which the Sisters care for these poor deserted infants.

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"I thought we were going to find them putting the children's eyes out," said Lohe, "when I heard the cries in there. These women show greater love for these babes than their own mothers."

"Yes, yes," answered Lihoa. "It is wonderful. I wish our priests would do for our children what the foreigners do for them."

Without further delay Lihoa went to Nona, the fish dealer, who lived in one of the alleys near the harbor. All night long he watched and waited for the fishermen who came to him from all parts of the island. Complaining as he took what Lihoa had brought, he weighed the fish and poured the oysters out in a heap to estimate their value, then handed the old Chinaman a tael (\$1.50) and several sapecks.

"What? Is that all you are going to give me, when you know that the sum must be divided among twenty families?" complained Lihoa. "To-morrow morning in the market you will get three times that amount for the beautiful fish."

"Well—and why not? When I take inferior things to the market, I have to content myself with a small price.—Not a sapeck more for you," answered the dealer.

"Now then, Nona, don't be surprised if you get no more fish from us. We are going into a more profitable business. We are going to the distant Goldland, and shall come back rich men."

"What? What do you mean, you fools?" cried Nona. "Do you want to be drowned? Well, if you get back with whole skins you'll be doing well, and no matter how much gold you get, the rich Natse will have it all before you are through with him."

"As far as drowning is concerned, we could drown easily in the business in which we are now engaged, and as to Natse's getting our gold, we'll attend to that." With these words Lihoa put the money in his pocket and started with his followers to the harbor, where, behind one of the warehouses, they laid down and took a nap.

At break of day they went to interview Natse, who was trying to get three hundred men to sail on the "St. George". When they arrived, he had just engaged a hundred or more, and there seemed no likelihood of there being a place for Lihoa and his followers, "though Lohe's people always had the preference". "But", said Natse, "if you have some one among your people who understands the language of the West well enough to act as interpreter, perhaps I can arrange for you and a dozen or more of your friends to go."

Then an idea popped into old Lihoa's head: "Wait until to-night, and I will bring you an answer," he said. "I think I can get an interpreter."

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Lihoa sent his companions to the hamlet with the command, that those who wished to go on the trip to the Goldland were to get ready immediately, and he betook himself straight to the College of the Holy Saviour. There he asked to see the foreign teacher. Father Somazzo came into the reception room, and learned to his utter astonishment that the old Chinaman had called to demand his beloved pupil, little Peppo. Quietly the priest listened while the old man spoke, then took a pinch of snuff, and said: "My dear friend, for twelve years we have had this boy in our care, and have spent much time and money on him, and now that he is old enough to be of use, you ask us to give him to you. You are unreasonable. Prove in the court that the child is yours, and then, that we took him illegally, and you can have him. He has not been brought up in your religion, as you know, but is a Christian. We have many plans and hopes for him, and I am sure he will not care to leave us. Go, and may peace attend you."

"But I am the boy's uncle, and an uncle has paternal power over his sister's children according to Chinese law. I know the boy by the birthmark on his wrist," said Lihoa.

"Take your claims into court, and we will settle them there. In the meantime may peace attend you," repeated the missionary as he left the man.

Lihoa expected a refusal, for he was not so simple-minded as to believe that the child would be given over to him without ado, but the answer that he received, according to his way of thinking, justified his kidnapping his nephew. He knew a Chinese youth, who was a servant at the seminary, and to him he went for help to carry out his plan of getting possession of Peppo. In a nearby tavern he waited for Totu—for that was the youth's name—knowing that while the missionaries and their pupils were at table, he was accustomed to come here for a glass of saki, a wine made from burnt rice. When he entered, Lihoa went and sat down beside him, addressed him as cousin, and ordered and paid for a second glass of saki. The two conversed for a time in low tones, then finally Totu said:

"Agreed! The day after to-morrow, at the New Year's celebration, I'll see to it that you get your nephew, but may the gods of the sea destroy your ship, if you do not pay me the money you say you will. I must have three tael to-morrow, for this may cost me my job, and you know, 'No penny, no paternoster'." Lihoa promised what Totu asked, and the two separated.

CHAPTER VI.

The Chinese New Year.

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The New Year came and found Hongkong in festal array. All the Chinese houses were decorated with plants and flowers, and from long cords stretched from house to house, and diagonally across the streets, were suspended hundreds upon hundreds of lanterns of various colors. At the first peep of day thousands of people, dressed in holiday attire, began to throng the streets and crowd into the great open squares, where eatables of all sorts were to be had. Here were tables loaded down with all kinds of Chinese delicacies, many of which, I fear, my little readers would not find palatable. For example, there were sugar-coated worms, preserved red snails, trepang,—a kind of sea-worm,—and putrid doves' eggs in an unspeakable sauce. The cakes made of honey, sugar and rice-meal, I am sure, would have been much more to your liking. Each hour the crowd increased, as the people poured into the city from the villages on the island of Hongkong, and from neighboring places. It was a general reception day. Whenever a Chinaman met an acquaintance, putting his hands in the wide, flowing sleeves of his gown, he greeted him with many bows, wished him a happy New Year, and invited him to have a cup of tea or saki. Even the poorest people had saved up enough to take part in the celebration. All over the great city joy reigned.

The missionaries, glad to give their pupils English as well as Chinese, all the pleasure they could, always celebrated the New Year by having a more elaborate supper than usual, and taking the boys to see the brilliantly lighted city and the puppet shows. For weeks beforehand all looked forward to the great holiday, and could hardly wait for the time to come when the city would be in holiday attire, and the fireworks and puppet shows in progress. On this night supper was over, the bell had rung, and the boys were in a double line ready to start on their little excursion. At the head of the ranks stood young Peppo, the leader, in a state of subdued excitement. He was anxious to see the beautiful lights, and also hoped to find his little companion, Willy, at the puppet show, where he knew he would be, if possible. Just as the happy band was about to start, Father Somazzo called Peppo back, for it occurred to him that perhaps the man, who had a few days previous to this so impudently demanded possession of him, might try to kidnap him.

"Peppo", he said, addressing Lihu by his Italian nickname, "Peppo, you know that I mean well by you."

"Yes, Father," answered the boy impatiently, "but please don't keep me now. We are going to the city and I am to be the leader of the ranks."

"Peppo, not very long ago you said that you were willing to make a great sacrifice to God, because he saved you from death, and permitted you to be baptized, and because you are soon to receive your first communion."

"Yes, Father, I did, and I will willingly make a sacrifice, but let me go now. Brother Onufrio has already opened the door."

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"Peppo, would it not be a beautiful sacrifice for you to give up going to-night?"

"O Father," stammered the child with tears in his eyes, "no, I don't want to. I will make a sacrifice, but not to-night. I want to see the fire-works and the puppet show. And Willy will be at the puppet show, I want to find him, too. He will go if he can, for he knows that every New Year's night we boys go. Please, Father, do not keep me. I will willingly live on rice and water for a month rather than stay home to-night."

"Poor child, you do not know what is for your best good," answered Father Somazzo. "I wanted you to look upon this as a sacrifice which you were willing to make, but since you will not, I command you to remain at home, for a reason which I cannot tell you. Come, Peppo, into the class-room. You may take my big picture-book with all the pictures of European cities and churches, ladies and gentlemen in fine clothes and battles and ships. The time will pass quickly. Come and win the reward of obedience."

"I don't want to, I won't go!" cried the boy, crying at the top of his lungs and stamping his feet on the floor.

"What? What? Such a thing as this from you? That is no way to behave. If you do not come with me willingly, you shall not have the pretty picture-book."

With these words Father Somazzo led the weeping child into the class-room, while he went to get the promised book. Totu, the servant, who was standing near the door at the time, was a witness of the scene. His plan was to seize the boy at the puppet show, when the attention of all the by-standers was on the stage, fasten him to himself by a cunningly contrived chain and belt, so that he could not possibly escape in the crowd, and deliver him over to his uncle. When he saw that the boy was detained against his will, the sly fellow changed his tactics.

"Ha, ha," said he, "this is much easier for Totu," and hurrying into the garden, stationed himself under the window which opened into and was on a level with the garden. As soon as Father Somazzo left the room, Peppo went to the window to watch the sky rockets that every now and then went shooting into the sky, and to listen to the shouts of the merry revelers in the streets.

"What, little Lihu, are you not going to the celebration? Why, down in the marketplace there is the finest puppet show that was ever seen or heard of anywhere," said Totu in a sympathetic tone of voice.

"I can't," said he, "Father Somazzo is an old tyrant. He wants me to renounce this pleasure, to make a sacrifice to God to-night by staying at home."

"Oh, nonsense!" answered the tempter. "You come with me. I'll take you down into the city, and to the puppet show, and the fireworks, and everything else. We'll be back in an

hour, and Father Somazzo, who is saying his prayers, won't even know you've been away."

"He has locked the door, and will be angry if he finds me gone," said the boy, half ready to yield to the tempter.

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"He won't find it out. Quick. Climb up on the window-sill, I'll lift you down, and in a moment we'll be out through the little gate in the wall, for I have the key that unlocks it. We've no time to lose. Don't you hear the drums and tomtoms in the market-place? The puppet show is beginning."

Little Peppo's conscience told him that he ought not to go, but his anger at what seemed to him an unjust command, caused him to give no heed to its dictation. "Well, anyway, when Father Somazzo shuts me up for punishment, I'll have seen the puppet show and the fireworks," he said, climbing up on the window-sill, and the next moment he was in the garden. Taking Totu by the hand, he slunk along in the shadow of the wall to the little gate, and soon the two were with the crowd out in the brilliantly lighted street.

Father Somazzo was detained a short time, and when he returned to the classroom was dumbfounded to find his favorite pupil gone. He went to the window and called "Peppo, Peppo", but received no answer. At first he could scarcely believe that the boy, who had always been so obedient, could be guilty of such a grievous breach of discipline; but as calling and searching proved of no avail, at last, with a heavy heart, he had to admit that even good little Peppo had yielded to temptation.

"Lord, deal not harshly with the erring," sighed the missionary, and then he prayed: "Let not his disobedience cause him and us too much sorrow, Blessed Virgin. Take the poor child to thy motherly bosom, and bring him back to us in safety. Thou knowest we have great hopes for him."

Father Somazzo could do no more than this, for he could not leave the house alone; and, even if he had been able to do so, his attempts to find the child in the crowds that thronged the streets would have availed nothing. Hoping that Peppo would join his companions and return with them, the good Father waited, but in vain. He neither came with the boys, nor later by himself.

On the following morning Father Somazzo received a visit from Mr. Black, the lawyer, whom he had consulted concerning the guardianship of Willy. He came to report that he believed he had sufficient proof to ask the court to take Willy away from John Brown, and also to cause his imprisonment. He had through agents sought out the sailors dismissed from the "St. George", and from them not only learned of the life of John Brown in Dublin, but also of the peculiar circumstances attendant upon his brother's death at sea. Mr. Black asked whether he should prosecute, adding: "Whatever is done, must be done quickly, for I am told that the 'St. George' will sail to-morrow morning, or the morning after at the latest, for Australia with three hundred Chinaman on board."

Father Somazzo signed the necessary papers, then told of little Peppo's disappearance, and his conjecture that he had been carried off by a Chinaman named Lihoa, who claimed to be a relative.

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"I'll wager ten to one, this Lihoa is one of the greedy Chinamen who is going to sail on the 'St. George'," said Mr. Black. "Let's go down to the office of the Chief of Police, and, if my conjecture is true, we'll find the people we want on board the 'St. George'—'kill two birds with one stone', as the old saying has it. Be quick, Father, get your hat and walking stick and come with me. We haven't a moment to lose."

The two men hurried down to the harbor. The Chief of Police received them in a friendly manner, but when they laid their case before him, he shrugged his shoulders and said: "I am very sorry, indeed. You have come just eight hours too late. The 'St. George' sailed this morning at two with the tide and a favorable wind."

"What is to be done?" questioned the Father.

"We will send your papers to Melbourne and Sidney and have the Captain and Lihoa arrested when they put into port. That is all that can be done," answered the Chief.

Matters had to be left thus. Mr. Black returned to his office to make out the necessary documents, and Father Somazzo to the College to commend both boys to God and his ministering angels.

CHAPTER VII.

An Unexpected Departure.

On the morning following the Chinese New Year, with a favoring west wind the "St. George" put to sea with Green at the helm, because the Captain was unable to find a man that he liked better, who was capable of taking his place. Restlessly the Captain paced up and down the deck, gazing at the island in the moonlight until it was lost in the sea. As soon as the morning light gave better opportunities, he climbed to the crow's nest and with a field glass searched the western horizon, and not until the sun was well up did he push the glass together. Then he muttered to himself as he came down from the rigging:

"My fears are vain. Why, that Italian priest wouldn't have the Chief of Police send a steam launch after us on account of that boy. And yet Redfox states positively that he sent the agents of the police to the sailors' home, to sidle up to the crew that I dismissed and to try to get out of them all the information they could. But what do they know? What can they prove?—Oh, I am such a coward! Come, John, come. Drive these stupid fears out of your head. Think of the future and not of the past."

The Captain went to the helmsman and found the boatswain and first officer, Redfox, with him. All greeted the Captain in a becoming manner and wished for favoring winds to carry them on their way.

“We could make use of them all right,” cried the Captain. “Gray, the ship can carry more canvas. Set all the sails, and Green, do you steer as straight as a crow flies for the Channel of Balintang. How far is it to Balintang, Redfox?”

“Four hundred and fifty sea miles, but we can save a hundred miles by holding for the southern point of Luzon—”

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"Yes, and be wrecked on some one of the hundred reefs and islands which make the route by the Philippines so dangerous! No, Mr. Redfox, though it is of great importance for me to get to Melbourne as soon as possible, I shall not take any risks going that way. We'll go farther to the north through the Balintang, from there down between the Palau and Caroline Islands, on through by the Soloman Islands, and the Lousiade Archipelago."

"We shall meet with dangerous seas that way, too, but if it's the route you've decided on, that's all there is to it. What's going on with the three hundred Chinamen in the steerage?"

"I don't know. Let them stay down where they are; they won't suffocate yet awhile, and we'll have peace on deck for an hour or two," growled the Captain.

"With the last lot that came on board there was a little pigmy, barely ten years old," said Gray. "An old Chinaman carried him in his arms and said he was asleep. It seemed to me that he was in a stupor, and I had more than half a mind to send them back, and then it occurred to me that we could use the lad in the kitchen, as the cook's assistant. I'll get the boy, Captain, and let you see what you think of giving him over to the cook. By cuffs and knocks perhaps he can be developed into something useful."

"Go ahead, Gray," answered the Captain. "And you, Redfox, want my nephew, of whom this small Chinaman makes me think." Then he added in a low tone: "Since our last talk I have thought the thing over.—You are right. It cannot be otherwise. He must disappear, at least for a time, that is, until we are in possession of the money; later I will restore it to him."

"Quite right. And if—by any accident—he should fall from the rigging, or else—"

"No, no, I won't have him put to death. God knows I wish my brother were alive. The thought even that perhaps in my drunkenness I sanctioned the changing of his medicine, almost drives me mad.—I am satisfied, though, that we will have to hide this boy for a time in some institution, and then announce to the authorities that at the shipwreck, which we contemplate having, he perished."

"Captain, you are always for half-way measures. But as you like, so long as you hold fast to our agreement—the half of the property."

"On the day on which I come into possession of the property, the half is yours."

"Very well. You have sworn to this, and now be assured that just so surely as you betray me, or attempt to cheat me out of the wages of my sins, you are a dead man, even if at that very hour I go to eternal damnation with you."

“You may depend upon me. Half and half, just as I have sworn. And now I’ll go for my nephew.”

With these words the Captain stepped into the cabin. Through this cabin ran a partition, and in one corner of the smaller part Willy had hung his hammock. So soundly had he slept, that his first knowledge that the “St. George” was under sail came when he noticed the motion of the ship, and heard the swishing of the water.

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“O dear! We’ve left Hongkong, and Father Somazzo couldn’t get me away from my uncle,” was his first thought. “And last night I dreamed that he did get me away, and that Brother Onufrio and Peppo were with me, but I can’t remember where.—O dear, we are out at sea and on the way to Australia, or God knows where.”

Willy was almost in tears. Father Somazzo’s comforting words came to his mind, then kneeling down for a short morning prayer, he commended himself to the care of his guardian angel. Strengthened by the thought that God’s holy guardian angels are companions and protectors at sea as well as on land, he was rising from his knees just as his uncle came into the room.

“What, up and dressed! By the seven sleepers of old, I verily believe that you have been praying! That’s what they set you to doing at the pension, but you’ll soon get over it; a seaman has no time for any such superfluous business as that.”

“Superfluous to say one’s prayers?” questioned Willy in utmost surprise, opening wide his big blue eyes. “The good Fathers prayed every day, and used to say that ‘he who knows not how to pray, the sea will teach to pray’. What will become of us, if God and his angels do not watch over and guard us?”

“Oh, dear me! You talk just like the preaching Brothers,” laughed the Captain, in a way that made the boy shudder.

“Well, for aught that I care keep on praying to your guardian angel to watch over you, but now go into the kitchen and get a cup of coffee and a biscuit or two. Hurry yourself. In five minutes be ready for work and report on deck to the first officer.”

In the meantime the boatswain had started for the steerage, where three hundred Chinamen were packed like herrings on the floor and in the berths along the sides of the room. When he opened the trap-door to go down the stairs, the poisonous stench which assailed his nostrils almost knocked him down. “By all the great sharks in the sea,” he cried angrily, “I believe it would be easier to breathe in the bottom of the ocean than down there with those pig-tailed Chinamen! He! I don’t want to go down there. Be quick, and send the interpreter up here,” he called.

A babel of Chinese words came from the unventilated room which was lighted by an old kerosene lamp, and the crowd pushed to the gangway to get up on deck. The boatswain thundered “Back”, and to make his words emphatic as well as intelligible, drew his revolver. The men went back, and Lihoa brought his nephew, the small Peppo, to the foot of the gangway. “Tell him that he is to let us come out on deck before we suffocate in this vile hole,” commanded Lihoa.

As soon as Peppo began to tell in English what he had been told to say, the boatswain cried out: “Ha, ha! So you are the interpreter, you little pigmy? Why, that’s all right.

How lucky! Come up. I am looking for you, but your pig-tailed cousins will have to stay down there. They won't suffocate for awhile; the air of the steerage is thicker and more nourishing than that on deck."

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After a little parleying Lihoa let his nephew go. Quickly he ran up the ladder, and when Gray had closed the trap-door he threw himself at his feet, and with outstretched hands begged to land, because he had been brought on board against his will.

“Land?” laughed Gray. “Land on what? We have been under sail for six hours or more and are now a goodly number of miles from Hongkong, and probably won’t see land again for weeks. For good or for evil, for better or for worse, my little pigmy, you’ll have to go with us until we land those cousins of yours in Australia. Get up. I’ll take you to the kitchen, and there our cook will find so much for you to do, that you won’t have time for sad thoughts.”

With these words he seized Peppo by the arm and led him to the kitchen, where he gave him over to the cook. The fat cook with the big white apron looked at the slender youth half angrily, half compassionately, and grumbled:

“That little Chinaman is to give me the promised help? How is he to lift the heavy kettles of rice off the fire, Mr. Gray?”

“Well now, Mr. Blue, it’s better to have a little help than none at all. Why, indeed, you’ll have to lift the heavy kettles off the fire yourself. The boy can peel potatoes and wash dishes.”

“Yes, and break more than his neck is worth in Brothers. I understand.—Now, little one, come here and get into this apron, and begin work.—Oh, wait a moment. You have not had any breakfast. There, take that bowl of rice; you are more accustomed to that than to our bread and coffee. When you have finished get at those dishes, and wash and wipe them quicker than scat, and for every one you break a precious good thump you’ll get.”

With tears in his eyes poor little Peppo choked down his rice, and went to work. “Oh, dear,” he said to himself, as he dipped the plates in hot water and burned his fingers trying to get them out, “Oh, dear, how God is punishing me for my disobedience! If I had only stayed where I was told. Father Somazzo must have known what Lihoa was going to do. This is what I get for running off and having my own way. And who knows whether I’ll ever see Hongkong and the good Fathers again so long as I live?”

Poor little Peppo’s cup was full to overflowing. As with trembling fingers he kept on fishing the hot plates out of the dishpan, he noticed that all the plates had on them the word “St. George”; then he recalled that that was the name of Willy’s father’s boat. Just as it was dawning on him that he must be on the “St. George” the kitchen door opened and he heard a well-known voice say, “Give me some breakfast quicker than a wink, dear cook, for I’ve got to go to work as cabin-boy right away.”



Peppo was walking across the floor to the crockery chest to put away a dozen or more clean plates which he had in his hands, when at the sound of the voice he turned and saw Willy whom the Captain had given a push that sent him half across the kitchen. The small Chinaman gave a cry of surprise and let the plates fall on the floor where they broke into a thousand rattling pieces. Angrily the cook sprang at him, and would have struck him with the big wooden cooking spoon, if Willy had not come between them and received the blow meant for Peppo.

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“Peppo, Peppo,” he cried, “are you here?”

“Yes, Willy, as a punishment for my disobedience. And now see what more mischief I have done, and what more punishment I shall get. The cook will beat me half to death for breaking all the beautiful plates,” moaned Peppo.

“But I was all to blame for that,” said Willy. “I frightened you so that you let them fall. That’s so, isn’t it, dear cook? You won’t punish him, will you?”

The cook’s anger was somewhat mollified. The good-natured man was pleased with the boys, and gave them both some breakfast on a little table. Peppo told of his adventures, and Willy comforted him by saying, “You have been disobedient and you’ll have to take your punishment, but the dear God ordained it that you should come to me. We’ll pray together and be good, so that our holy guardian angels will take us back to Hongkong again to the Fathers.”

Just here the boatswain came in and ordered Willy on deck, or they would have continued talking indefinitely.

CHAPTER VIII.

A Very Real Danger.

Meanwhile the “St. George” under full sail and well over on her side was running before a strong west wind. The waves washed over the deck; the sea was so rough that it was hard for an experienced seaman to make his way, and only those sure of foot and hand dared venture on the rigging. Nevertheless Redfox ordered Willy to climb the mainmast with him to help unfurl the sail at the very top.

“If you want to be a good seaman like your father you must learn to climb the rigging not only in a light breeze like this but also in a hurricane. You want to get so that you can run around up there like a squirrel in a Christmas tree. There is no danger; just hold tight to the rigging with one hand and don’t get frightened when the boat pitches. You can’t learn to do any climbing that’s worth while standing around here on deck. Up, my little man, let’s see if you have any nerve.”

“Yes, I have nerve, and lots of times in pleasant weather I’ve been up the mast, but when the ship rocks as it does now, my father would never let me think of going up,” answered Willy.

“And he had good reason, too,” put in the helmsman, who was standing near Redfox and had heard all the conversation.



"I never heard of such a thing as asking the cabin-boy to climb the rigging when the sea is rough, and before he has had a chance to prove himself a good climber in pleasant weather. Master Willy, don't obey any such foolhardy order. The Captain, I am sure, does not want you to try any such thing."

"Oho, helmsman, you dare to order this boy to be insubordinate, do you? I'll have you put in irons for your impudence," cried Redfox, giving him a wicked look.

"Green, don't be frightened. I can climb much better than you think, and then besides my guardian angel will watch over me and keep me from falling. I am sure I won't come down any more of a corpse than I did from the dome of the cathedral. I must obey this man. Let me go. You just see my guardian angel will take care of me."

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"Mr. Redfox, I tell you plainly it's a foolhardy game you are playing with that boy," said the helmsman earnestly. "If anything happens to him you'll answer for it on a charge of criminal carelessness at the first port we put into."

"Wait till you get a chance," growled the officer to Green; to Willy he said, "Go on up."

Willy crossed himself, then swung himself without fear up on the rope ladder leading from the side of the vessel to the crow's nest. Right after him followed Redfox. With anger and fear Green watched how the wind blew Willy's blonde hair and the officer's red beard; for a moment the two disappeared behind the sails, then they appeared scaling the topmost ladder. The wind had increased; the vessel tipped still more to the side. Willy clambered on courageously higher and higher up, but the real danger was yet to come.

"Now see, he is astride the yard sliding out fully twelve feet from the main mast—now he is loosening the rope by which the top-sail is fastened to the arm! Redfox ought to do that himself," said the helmsman to himself. "But no, he forces the boy before him out on the yard, orders him to stand up and unfasten the rope. The inhuman wretch!—That means the boy's death. It is no easy task even for an experienced seaman. And he is not even holding him by the belt, only by the bottom part of his jacket.—Now he is holding him tighter. There—O holy Mother of God the boy is falling!" Green closed his eyes for a moment and gasped. "No, he is sliding along the yard. Hold fast, Willy, hold fast for two or three minutes. I'll come to help you."

He threw the rope over the wheel and ran like a cat up the rigging. Willy, in utmost danger of falling, was sliding and swinging along between the sails of the fore and mainmast, every moment expecting that his strength would give out and that he would fall on the planks of the deck below or into the sea.

"Holy guardian angel," he cried, "take me; I cannot hold on any longer!" Everything swam before his eyes, and in a moment he would have fallen, if the helmsman had not, almost miraculously reached him and seized him in his arms. He carried him down to the deck and laid him in a dead faint on a pile of rope, and began working over him. Before Redfox came down from the rigging Willy had recovered. "You see," he said to Green, "my holy guardian angel did not leave me."

"Indeed, Master Willy, you speak the truth, for without the help of your guardian angel I should not have been able to save you," affirmed Green, wiping drops of cold sweat from his forehead. Then he thundered at Redfox:

"Thank God, that you lay yourself down to rest tonight without a murder on your conscience. It is no fault of yours that that boy came down from the rigging alive."

"I forbid any such talk," answered Redfox without meeting the gaze of the helmsman. "The stupid youngster got dizzy when I let go of his jacket and started to get a better hold of his belt."

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"No, no, Mr. Redfox," answered Willy firmly, "you pushed me instead of getting hold of my bolt. I did not get dizzy."

"Ridiculous! Your fear put that notion into your head. Now if you go to telling that story round here—even once—I'll have the Captain shut you up in the steerage with the Chinamen. You go to telling the wrongs you suffer from your superior officer and you'll get yourself into trouble. No more of this."

Redfox went to the Captain's cabin. Indignantly the helmsman looked after him, and then he again asked the boy if he was very sure that Redfox had pushed him.

"Quite sure," he replied, "and he looked at me more wickedly than I thought any man could look. What has he against me? I have never done him any harm. And my uncle, too, acts so strangely, he has never once given me a pleasant word or look."

"I understand well enough," answered the helmsman. "Be on your guard with Redbeard and your uncle; I don't dare to tell you any more. I'd like to open your eyes, but I can't. Trust in God and your holy guardian angel who saved you almost miraculously today. In the first port that we put into Redbeard will answer for what he did today—and for a few other things, too."

To the Captain Redfox reported, "I did not think it possible for that boy to come down from the rigging alive, and now he is telling that I tried to push him off the yard, and, of course, that numbskull of a Green is only too ready to believe him. That fellow has got wind of some things, too. We must see to it that he gets no chance to tell what he knows or thinks he knows."

"You are my bad angel, Redfox, and want to drag me deeper and deeper into crime," said the Captain. "Haven't I told you again and again that I will not have that boy put out of the way?"

"Oh, you are always for half-way measures. I take no account of them in my reckonings. It would have been very fine for you, if—accidentally—he had fallen from the rigging," growled Redfox.

"No, no, I won't have any bloodshed," said the Captain most earnestly. "There are enough things now for which I have to answer,—and there will be more when we wreck the 'St. George' on one of the many reefs off the east coast of Australia, as we have planned to do. Now, if against my will, you do anything to that boy, I'll have you turned over to the authorities, even if I run the danger of being arrested as your accomplice. You may know what to expect."

With these words the Captain left Redfox standing at the door of the cabin. He muttered to himself, "Well, do you know, I really believe his conscience is troubling him

—the mushhead! I must deal with him more firmly.—No, no, Captain, after what happened this morning the only thing to do is to get him out of the way,—and the helmsman along with him. I'll tend to that. Ha, ha! Mr. Captain, you'll get up in the morning early to turn Redfox over to the authorities!"

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CHAPTER IX.

A New Plan.

Weeks had passed since the happenings told of in the previous chapter took place, and nothing of any importance had occurred. Redfox had not again ordered Willy to climb the mast with him, and even when the ship was becalmed and lay with slackened sails on a sea smooth and clear as a looking-glass, he would not allow him to go up to the crow's nest.

"Oh, no, no, if you were to get dizzy and fall, you'd tell that I pushed you," he sneered at every possible opportunity. Green he avoided as much as possible.

"The boy was perhaps mistaken, and my suspicions of the Captain and Redfox may be wholly unfounded," thought honest Green, when week after week went by without their taking revenge on either him or Willy. The voyage had been an extraordinarily quick and fortunate one. The days which ships usually spend in being becalmed under the Equator the 'St. George' spent under full sail with favoring winds. Everything on shipboard was going very well, yet the Captain was always sullen and morose. He and Redfox sat in the cabin and gambled and drank most of their time. Rarely did they finish one debauch before they began on another. Redfox seemed to exercise hypnotic power over the Captain.

Willy, the darling of the crew, at first was much grieved over his uncle's behavior and the aversion which the first officer showed for him, but he soon became accustomed to their ways. The companionship of Green, who initiated him into the mysteries of the compass and the practical work of steering the ship, was pleasant, and he had Peppo. The Captain had allowed the boatswain to put up another hammock in Willy's cabin, so that Peppo could sleep there instead of going down into the steerage. Together the boys said their morning and evening prayers, just as they were accustomed to do in the pension in Hongkong, and slept like nabobs in their little hammocks while the ship went ploughing its way through the placid ocean.

The "St. George" was at this time in the sea between the New Britain Archipelago, as the group of islands which now goes by the name of the Bismarck Archipelago was at that time called, and the Soloman Islands. With full sail the boat was running before a stiff northwest breeze. The fiery tropical sun burned in the heavens, and far as the eye could reach the waters rolled in a long swell on the deep blue southern sea. A pair of screaming sea-gulls circled round the top of the mast, the sails flapped, the rigging creaked, and the waters swished and dashed against the sides of the vessel. Other sounds there were none. The vessel might almost have been a phantom ship upon an enchanted sea.

Green sat near the wheel in the shade of one of the sails smoking his pipe and with difficulty keeping his eyes open sufficiently to glance at the big compass and the distant horizon occasionally. "If our reckonings are right we shall sight the Soloman Islands now at any minute," he said to himself, and was about to call to the man on watch in the crow's nest to see that he was not asleep, when Willy came out from the cabin and motioned to Green that he had something important to tell him.

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“Hello, Willy, what’s the matter? Any one would think from the expression on your face that you had seen ‘The Klabautermann!’”

“The Klabautermann” is a spirit of the sea similar to the brownies of the mountains and the goblins which play such a part in children’s stories. Ordinarily unseen this spirit helps the sailors in their work when they are good and true, but when he appears with a fiery head and green teeth, attired in riding boots, yellow hose, and pointed hat,—as the sailors assert they have seen him—then look out. Beware of misfortune. Some awful fate awaits the ship, so the superstitious sailors solemnly swear.

“I have not seen ‘The Klabautermann’,” answered Willy, “and I don’t believe there is any such spirit, although you are so positive about it; but I have something to tell you that will surprise you more than a visit from the Flying Dutchman’s haunted ship, that you told me about.”

“Well, let’s have the surprise.”

“Can any one play eavesdropper here?”

“No; no one at all. We are here all by ourselves aft and who is there that would want to listen to us?”

“Redbeard and my uncle, but they are in the cabin, drinking and gambling as usual. Last night, you know, Peppo had toothache all night and couldn’t sleep, so this afternoon I took his place in the kitchen while he went up to have a nap in his hammock. He just came and told me that he had overheard Redbeard plotting some dreadful thing against us. Peppo couldn’t understand it all, but he got this much, that at the island to which we are coming today, or at the latest tomorrow morning, he is going to send you ashore for drinking water. He has let the water leak out of the casks. ‘When Green goes ashore,’ he said, ‘I haven’t a doubt in the world but that the young one, who stands in your way, will want to go with him, and the little Chinaman, whom I do not trust, will also want to go—We can just send them, even if you don’t hanker after this plan. And—well—if they don’t come back, why the wild Soloman Islanders will know what to do with them.’ Peppo heard the first officer say this.”

“Oh, the traitor!” said Green. “And so he is going to furnish the cannibals with a nice juicy stew for their pots, is he? And pray tell, what did that nice uncle of yours, the Captain, say to all this?”

“At first he would not listen to a word of it; then Redfox threatened him with something which Peppo could not understand, and at last he said, ‘Oh, you are my bad angel. I am in your power. Do what you must, but I won’t have any part in it.’”

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“Pontius Pilate made similar remarks when he gave Our Lord over to death, but handwashing of that sort is of no use. As for the rest you are right. Redfox is the chief sinner and forces the Captain into things which he would never think of doing otherwise.—But what are we to do? Here we are helpless in the power of these monsters. We might give them over to the authorities at the first port at which we touch, but the trouble with that plan comes in just here: Gray will not listen to or believe what that little Chinaman says. It couldn’t be done without a life and death struggle. I must win over the Chinamen—and if I fail, by so much as a hair-breadth, I’ll go to the gallows as a rebel.—And yet—I must risk my life for you as well as for the rest of us. Quick, bring your little friend here. I’ll tell him what to say to the men in the steerage. They will be on our side for they have been badly treated.”

Willy did not understand all that the honest helmsman said for he was half talking to himself, but he got enough to realize that they were in great danger, and that Green scarcely knew what to do. Why did Redbeard wish their death? Green had told him a number of times, but the boy could not understand the question of the property, even after it was explained to him, and now there was no time to talk about it. “Be quick, go get Peppo for me,” repeated the helmsman, instead of answering his questions. “The crisis may come any moment. In the meantime pray to your guardian angel, who once saved you miraculously from the power of these monsters.”

A few minutes later Peppo slipped down to the steerage and delivered Green’s message to his uncle, and he in turn held a secret counsel with the most resolute of his companions. They talked much of the warning which the God of the Golden Fish had given them about keeping out of broils without arriving at any conclusion, though their feelings prompted them to wreak vengeance on the Captain for his rough treatment of them. While they were talking a voice from the crow’s nest called, “Land—ahoy!” and in a moment the ship was all life. The boatswain sounded his pipe calling every sailor to his place and the Captain came on deck to give orders. On the left in the South Sea a wooded hill rose from the water, and quickly became larger, as the ship flew towards it like a bird. The Captain and Redfox stepped up to the wheel and the Captain said to Green, “We must heave to.”

“What? Heave to in such a fine breeze as this? What have we got for the cannibals over there?”

“We must have water,” said the Captain without looking at the helmsman. “Redfox says that the cask has leaked and that there is not enough water to last us through to Australia.”

“I saw the cask yesterday, and then there was no leak in it. If it is empty now there has been foul play.”

“Hello! What ails the man?” cried Redfox. “Who has been doing the foul play?”

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"Since you ask I'll tell you. You have. And as you let the water run out you can see to getting more to put in. Under no circumstances will I do it."

"Well, Captain, what do you think of the fellow's impudence? I say he belongs in chains," cried Redfox in a rage.

"Quite right. Insubordination on shipboard cannot be tolerated. Either you take a small boat and go for water to fill the cask or I'll put you in irons. A dozen Chinamen and the small interpreter are to accompany you."

"Just as I thought. And your nephew is to go, too, and when we are on shore the 'St. George' is to take advantage of favoring breezes, and we are to be left for the cannibals. You'll have to murder the boy and me right here; we'll not run our heads into any such trap. Heda! my little Chinaman, now is the time for your countrymen to defend themselves. The responsibility is mine," and with these words he threw himself upon Redfox who drew out his knife with a curse. Green struck him a blow that knocked him senseless, and then turned on the Captain, who called loudly for help. The sailors to a man rushed to his aid, while the Chinamen refused to mix in the white men's quarrel. Green was quickly overpowered and was thrown into chains in the steerage. There the Captain also put the boys who had openly taken the helmsman's part.

CHAPTER X.

The Hurricane.

In utmost astonishment the sailors looked after the helmsman and the two boys as they were led away. All honored and trusted Green as a man true to his duty and a brave comrade; the Captain's nephew was the favorite of the crew, and everybody liked faithful little Peppo. What did it all mean? Now before their very eyes the helmsman had attacked the first officer and the Captain, and even commanded the Chinamen to be insubordinate, and the boys openly had taken sides with the helmsman.

"Green has lost his mind," cried an old sailor.

"It must be so," answered his companion. "Perhaps he is moonstruck; more than one good fellow has gone moonstruck in the tropics."

"He must be out of his mind," put in the Captain, "but that's a matter for the judge to find out. You can testify as to what he said and did, and if the judge sends him to the mad-house instead of the gallows, I shall be glad. Redfox has fortunately recovered himself after the murderous attack and is going into my cabin." The Captain started across the deck. "But hello, here!—What's the matter? The wind has changed all of a sudden, or rather the breeze has ceased. The sails are flapping against the mast, and the pennons are not moving. Every man to his post," he shouted. "I fear the wind will veer suddenly

before we have time to turn round, and blow harder than will be pleasant for us. Gray, go to the wheel. The rest of you mount the rigging, furl the sails, all, even the great topsail. Oh, here, you Chinamen, get down stairs."

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The scene which had just taken place on deck had so absorbed the attention of the entire crew that now for the first time they took note of the change. There was the same long swell on the sea, but the beautiful blue green waters had taken on a dull leaden hue. The sky was threatening; instead of being azure, as it had been for weeks, it was of a peculiar grayish color, although not a cloud was visible. In the west the sun surrounded by a dark halo was going down. First a dark bank of clouds appeared above the horizon; then quickly, like a giant's hand with outstretched fingers to grasp the ship which lay motionless on the waters, it spread until it covered the sun. With greatest anxiety the sailors watched the signs of the approaching hurricane, making what preparations they could by furling the sails, locking the hatchways, and fastening every rope securely.

"We're going to have a hurricane, I fear, Captain. Just see how the quicksilver has dropped in the barometer, and we are right upon this accursed island with its coral reefs. God have mercy on us or we are lost," said Gray.

White with fear he looked at the barometer, then at the sky. Already the rumblings of the storm could be heard, and in the distance sheets of foam like a mist were being driven before the wind.

"It will be here in a moment. The first shock will strike us on the side.—If we only don't capsize," said the Captain.

"I cannot turn the ship against the wind so long as it is lying still like this. We must let the waves wash over us—there!"

While Gray was speaking the storm broke and went howling through the rigging, filling the only sail which was unfurled. The mast creaked; the ship groaned in all its joints, as it tipped on its side until the ends of the yards touched the water, and for one awful moment it seemed as if it could not right itself. Then yielding to the rudder it swung round to the west, and offered the point of the bow to the storm. Only the fact that it was very strongly built saved it from destruction.

"Keep to the south as much as you can," called the Captain.

"The first danger is over," said Gray breathless, "but what now? How am I to steer a ship that won't and can't be steered in such a storm as this. I wish Green were here in my place."

"Keep to the south as much as you can. Every inch that we get away from the Soloman Islands is so much away from sure destruction. If we can only avoid those coral reefs we shall be safe.—Oh, that I was ever fool enough to listen to Redfox and steer for those accursed islands." These last words the Captain muttered under his breath, as he realized how quickly God's punishment was overtaking him.

“To the south, Captain, so long as mast and sails remain and the good ship yields to the rudder; but do let Green come and take my place. I am not capable of steering in such a storm as this.”

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The Captain left Gray and went immediately to the room where the helmsman was chained. The thrashing of the vessel, and the noise of the waves dashing over its decks told that a frightful storm was raging, and of the dangers of the coral reefs he knew only too well. Consequently he said when the Captain came in, "It is no time now to talk of grievances and discipline, you need my help. I give you my word that when the ship is saved, if saved it can be, I will put on my chains again."

"I hope it will not be necessary. You will see that there is some misunderstanding.—What was that awful crash? Death is upon us," cried the Captain, interrupting himself.

"One of the masts has broken and gone over board!" cried Green. "Come quickly or we'll go to the bottom. Bring the two boys into the cabin and let them pray. If God will not spare these two innocent children there is no hope for the rest of us. We can only repent and prepare for the end."

A moment later Green was on deck. The mizzen-mast had broken off, but still hung to the side of the vessel with all its tackling.

"Cut the ropes and clear the ship; then try one of the jib-sails, otherwise there will be no such thing as steering," he said.

The sailors obeyed quickly. They were approaching nearer and nearer to the reefs, over which the breakers washed with a thundering noise.

"If only the jib-sail will stand the pressure on it, perhaps we can avoid the reefs. I reckon they are not a half mile away; the ship yields a little," said Green.

The Captain again came on board, but avoided the helmsman. To Gray he said, "Put out the flying-jib so as to be prepared in case the jib does not hold, and get ready to cast the anchor." The sailors took their places at the capstan and made ready to lower the anchor. Meantime the night had settled down quickly, for in the tropics night follows the going down of the sun without any twilight. There was a rainbow but thick banks of clouds driven along by the storm hid it. The darkness was so intense that you could not see the top of the mast, and even on the deck it was impossible to distinguish objects only a step or two away. Now and again a flash of lightning showed the foaming breakers washing over the reefs and the dark outlines of the island beyond them. Anxiously every eye was turned towards the point of danger.

"We're not two knots away from those accursed islands," said Gray.

"The storm is rising. The sails will be in shreds in a moment. Such waves I have never seen before," answered Gray.

The ship danced like a nutshell on the raging waters. The bowsprit raised itself high in the air, while the stern was buried in the trough of the sea. All clung to the ropes or

whatever object presented itself expecting to be washed overboard, as the boat shook and creaked in its agony.

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Hanging for dear life to the railing near the wheel the Captain looked upon the uproar of the elements, and must have admitted to himself that the helmsman's words of accusation were only too well founded. A frightful cry shook his soul. "Cain, where is thy brother Abel? What hast thou done with thy brother's child? What judgment will be pronounced on thee?" Now he did not seek to put the guilt on his corrupter, his bad angel, but admitted that he was guilty, and despair almost broke his heart. "There is no forgiveness, miserable sinner," whispered the arch enemy. "Thou art a murderer, thy brother's murderer!" Then came back a happier thought, a picture of his innocent youth. He saw himself before the miraculous image of the Blessed Virgin, which he then so often visited. There were the lights of many candles, and her motherly eyes looking down upon him, and at the foot of the image written on a little tablet these words: "Mother of mercy, refuge of sinners: pray for us." Like a friendly star in the night of awful darkness came this bright picture, and in his agony he cried to heaven: "O Lord, give me time to repent and atone for my sins."

The vessel swept on. The wind tore the sails to shreds. The sailors cast the anchor. With a thud it went into the sea, and for a moment held the vessel.

"Cut the masts," thundered the Captain. The sailors obeyed orders, but with the first stroke of the ax, above the roaring of winds and waves came the awful human cry: "The anchor is lost! We're drifting!"

"God have mercy on our souls," cried Green crossing himself, and the Captain fell on his knees, moaning, "Mercy, mercy, O Lord, have mercy on us!"

A dazzling streak of lightning showed the white outlines of the reef and the next moment a wave mountain high washed the vessel upon it.

CHAPTER XI.

Stranded.

When the ship stranded on the reef all on board were thrown from their feet, and the anguishing cries of the shipwrecked mingled with the creaking of the vessel and the roaring of the waves. The two boys found themselves in utter darkness in a corner of the cabin. Willy, the first to recover himself sufficiently to speak, said:

"Oh, Peppo, are you alive?"

"I thought the ship was sinking and that we were drowning. Oh, if we had only all repented and atoned," groaned Peppo.

"Hear your people calling," said Willy.

“They are not baptized and will go to hell. Shall we not try to baptize them? Come, quickly, let us try. If I could only find the door—here it is. Come, come.”

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Willy wished to make the effort with his little friend acting as interpreter and preacher, but scarcely had he and Peppo groped their way out of the cabin before they found themselves caught in a crowd of human beings, who screaming and howling at the top of their lungs, were making their way from the steerage into which the water was streaming. The prow of the ship had struck the reef and was high above the water while great waves washed over the stern. All were crowding up the narrow gangway and soon with three hundred Chinaman on deck there was not an inch of space not covered with water which was unoccupied. In their fear of death they climbed what was left of the rigging and hung there like monkeys calling upon Buddha and all the heathen gods for help and giving utterance to wild, maniacal shrieks. The boys would have been pushed overboard in this panic had it not been that they fell in with the Captain and helmsman who protected them as best they could.

"Tell your people," cried Green to Peppo, "that there is no need of this frightful, insane howling. We are so securely lodged that we cannot possibly sink, and the wreck will hold together until morning. Five minutes ago when I saw that we were going to strike the reef, I wouldn't have given a pipeful of tobacco for all our lives." And the Captain said to Willy in a more friendly manner than he had ever spoken: "You prayed well, my little man."

"Will the first officer also be good to me?" asked Willy, happy to receive a kind word.

"Hello, Redfox," cried Green, "we quite forgot you in this mad scramble," and the helmsman went to him and helped him along the deck. "We are all in the same fix, and as Christians who pray 'Our Father' we should forgive and be brothers. Here is my hand." The first officer refused the proffered hand, turning his back on the honest helmsman.

The night with its raging storm wore away; towards morning the moon showing itself in a rift in the clouds lighted the scene. Scarcely two ships' lengths away the sea thundered on the beach; farther out the waves, mountain-high, rolled in endless succession; to the right and left extended the reef like a wall, several meters above the water, except in one place it sank down so abruptly that even at low tide it was under water.

"Truly it is a marvel that we struck this reef just in this particular place, instead of there where it breaks off so abruptly," said the Captain, "yet we are not in a fortunate position. We have been saved from sudden death, but in its place we shall have a lingering and perhaps more agonizing one. The ship is a total loss. The provisions in the stern are under water, and the nearest port is a thousand miles away."—Today the great island of Bougainville, on the east coast of which the "St. George" stranded, belongs to Germany, and now it is not so difficult for those who meet with misfortunes at sea to reach a German harbor, but at the time of my story the nearest ports were those of Australia and New Caledonia.—"How are three hundred Chinamen to live here for an indefinite length of time?"

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The full light of day revealed the fact that the reef which was of great length was only a few feet wide and separated from the main land by an inlet of water. The first thing that the Captain did was to order the Chinamen to take what was left of the sails and build themselves tents; then he gave his attention to the question of the water supply.

"We must cross to the main land and get some drinking water," he said, "for we have only one cask left."

"Just enough to last the big boat on its trip to Australia," whispered Redfox to the Captain. "You and I and Gray, and a couple of the strongest of the young fellows will attempt the journey. Let Green and the boys stay here with the Chinamen until we bring help. Our plans will come out all right after all. The half million for which the ship is insured will be ours—and we shall be able to take it with a clear conscience, too."

"No, Redfox, enough of your machinations. I have resolved to turn over a new leaf, and to do good hereafter, that is, if there is any good left in me. We must fix up these people the best that we can with the wreckage of the ship, build a fort for them yonder on that little brook, and give them arms and provisions, then we will cast lots as to who is to go in the open boat to the nearest Australian port."

The Captain went on then with preparations for crossing to the island for drinking water and edible fruits. Unfortunately the powder and firearms were all under water, so that the men had to make the dangerous landing armed only with clubs and knives. The Captain led the party, taking with him four sailors, a dozen or more Chinamen, and small Peppo to act as interpreter. Willy would have gone gladly, but his uncle would not hear to his risking his life unnecessarily.

"I'll pray for you, uncle," said the boy, "that it won't go with you as—as—"

"As certain people had planned it for you and others," the uncle finished the sentence of the faltering child. "Yes, pray that the old saying that 'He who digs a grave for another, himself falls therein,' may not be fulfilled." Turning to Redfox, he asked: "Don't you want to go with me?"

The latter muttered something under his breath and slipped away. The Captain gave the signal and soon they were on the opposite shore. A group of natives came down to greet them, seemingly in friendly fashion, offered them fruit, and helped to roll the casks up on the beach; then all of a sudden with unearthly shrieks they fell upon them with their clubs. With difficulty the Captain and two sailors managed to get into the boat and across the inlet, to where their companions, pale with fear, stood shuddering to think of the awful fate of their comrades.

"Poor, poor Peppo," wailed Willy, "can't we help him? Will he be eaten up by the cannibals?"

Immediately there appeared on the shore whole troops of cannibals, and more poured out of the woods. Swinging their clubs and giving frightful war cries they challenged the intruders to do battle with them.

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“Quickly, boatswain,” said the Captain, “order the Chinaman to make a raft from the beams of the boat, and to arm themselves as best they can. We must force a landing and get some drinking water or we are lost. If we only had half a dozen guns and some ammunition.—Just listen to the cries of these men whom they are putting to death,” said the Captain, turning his eyes away from the sickening sight. [1]

By means of signs the boatswain tried to incite the Chinamen to action. They understood perfectly well what was wanted but remained passive, for Lihoa reminded them of the warning of the God of the Golden Fish not to engage in any strife.

“Leave the cowards to their fate,” said Gray. “We’ll take the single cask of water, the salted meat and hardtack which we fished out of the sea and get out of here tonight secretly.”

The sailors to a man agreed to this plan, but as the boat would hold only six persons the thing could not be managed. The Captain offered to remain, and asked who was willing to stay with him. The helmsman was the only one to signify his willingness to stay; the rest preferred to settle the matter by drawing lots. According to this Redfox and Gray were to remain, so the Captain appointed Green to direct the boat to Australia.

“Green, you are the only man equal to the task, and I give my nephew into your keeping. The boy’s life must be saved. The dangers which threaten you on this perilous trip are scarcely less than those which we face here. Perhaps on some neighboring island you can get drinking-water, perhaps you will fall in with some ship which will come to our rescue. If we are here a month, yes, a week, even, without drinking-water, what then? But as God wills. For my part I will willingly offer my life as a sacrifice in atonement for the past. May the best of fortune favor you, and may you save the life of my nephew. The insurance on this boat all goes to him; and if you rescue him, send him to Father Somazzo in Hongkong. If you cannot save us, come back and see that our bones receive decent Christian burial.”

Thus spoke the Captain. The helmsman, who would willingly have stayed behind on the dreary reef, made ready for the trip and at midnight set sail with the ebb of the tide.

[1] *Note*.—What is told here and in the following chapter concerning the cannibals happened at the time that the “St. Paul” was wrecked on the Island of Rossel in July, 1858. Compare this account with the one found in Jos. Spillmann’s story, called “Over the South Sea.”

CHAPTER XII.

At Last.

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Night had settled down. The Chinamen lay under their tents and listened to what Lihoa spoke: "So far we have avoided discord; from the sea we have been saved, and now surely the God of the Golden Fish will not let us perish from thirst. Within a few days it must rain; drinking-water will come to us from the heavens. Tonight, I understand, that the helmsman is to set sail for Australia in a small boat, and take the boy with him. That will never do. As you know the Captain and Redbeard are the helmsman's enemies and have conspired against his life. He will not come back to save them—he would be a fool if he did—but he loves the boy. Our only salvation lies in keeping the boy here with us; in holding him as a whiplash over the helmsman. Otherwise we are lost."

All nodded assent to Lihoa's words, but as they had no way of telling the Captain what they wanted, they decided that when the time came for the boat to sail they would forcibly detain Willy. Just here little Peppo, whom they thought dead, appeared in their midst. He and one sailor had escaped and swum across the little inlet. The cannibals had not killed them when they did their companions for some reason or other but had bound them with cords and left them on the shore. These cords they had managed to unfasten, and, protected by the darkness, had got away. While the sailor was telling his companions of his awful experience Lihoa told Peppo what to say to the Captain, and to add force to the words, the Chinamen in a body attended the small interpreter on his mission. Great was the noise and excitement following his announcement, but how could a handful of men oppose three hundred Chinamen? Willy was ready to stay behind.

"Tommy," he said to the helmsman, "leave me here with Peppo and my uncle. In the boat I'd only be in the way. I'll pray that you may return soon. Good luck to you. Be brave of heart, Tommy, and may your holy guardian angel watch over you."

Those embarking promised faithfully to come back or to send help as soon as possible, and parted with tears in their eyes. Tommy kissed Willy and said: "God knows that if I do not put my faith in your guardian angel there is little hope of ever seeing you again on this earth. Once more good-bye until we meet again. Pray for us all, little one."

Thereupon he sprang into the boat, and they were off. The moon was full and in its light they could be seen as they passed through the opening in the reef. Again they called farewell and waved their handkerchiefs. The crew raised the sail and in a few moments the stiff breeze had carried the little boat beyond the tongue of land and out of sight. With hearts too full for utterance the men sat and wondered what the future would bring. If by chance the boat fell in with a merchant vessel—not a likely thing, as few vessels frequented this route—help might come soon, otherwise under the most favorable of circumstances they must wait for months for Green to go to Australia and come back.

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In the crow's nest of the mast which was still standing they kept a constant watch in the hope of sighting a vessel and signalling of their distress. Day after day went by with no sign of help. Mercilessly the tropical sun burned down on the dreary sandbar. Scurvy broke out. The small amount of rations which they had, water-soaked biscuits and salted meats, increased their thirst, and to add to their distress the cannibals on the opposite shore mockingly showed them bunches of luscious bananas and other tropical fruits.

"Don't look there any more, Willy," said Peppo. "Those dreadful cannibals are only just showing us the fruit to tantalize us, and if we go after it we shall be murdered and eaten up the way I've told you about."

"But, Peppo, I think the thirst is just as bad as being killed," complained Willy, "I'd just as soon be killed as die of thirst."

"That's just what my people were saying today," answered Peppo. "Lihoa told them that they were to be patient a little longer, that the rain would surely come for he had seen unfailing signs. We will bear the thirst with patience for a little time yet. You know why I want them to hold out. I want to convert them. My poor countrymen!"

"Peppo! how came you to think of that?" said Willy, looking at his friend with open eyes.

"I don't know. Just a little while ago when I was praying the thought came to me, and I firmly believe that God saved me from the cannibals for this purpose. I have been talking to Lihoa and the others about the belief in Jesus Christ and baptism, and many of them said that if our God would save them now in their hour of peril, they would be baptized. The most of them are looking for help from one of their gods who rides on a Golden Fish. They expect he will be forced to rescue them from this miserable reef through the offerings of one of their priests."

"A God that rides on a Golden Fish? I'd like to see him," said Willy. "You are right about advising them to be baptized. We may all perish here before Tommy gets back with help. And if we do, the Chinese with the holy grace of baptism will go to heaven. If we are all saved, then they will take back with them to Hongkong a greater treasure than all the gold of the Goldland to the south. That would be such a fine thing for yon, Peppo! Do you not remember what Father Somazzo said about the saving of a soul—that one precious soul was worth more to God than all the gold and jewels in the world. What a happy boy you will be, if you save not one but three hundred souls? Oh, if I only understood Chinese and could help you explain our faith!"

"You can help by offering this awful desire for water to God as a sacrifice. Father Somazzo used to tell us to offer up many unpleasant little things as sacrifices to God for the conversion of the heathens and promised us our reward for so doing."

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Willy did as Peppo suggested and his thirst became easier to bear. Captain Brown who happened to be standing by and overheard this conversation most heartily approved of the plan. Since the rescue from the shipwreck he had been a different man. Redfox no longer held him in his power; drinking and gambling had no attractions for him and he turned away from “his bad angel” in disgust. His sins and frivolity he repented most sincerely, and with tears in his eyes, he said to the boys, “If only you and the rest can be saved I will give my life.—O Lord, Lord, take my life as atonement for the past,” he prayed aloud.

Next day Lihoa’s prophecy came true. The heavens clouded over and there came a frightful thunderstorm. The rain poured down. The thirsty men caught it by spreading out the sails and soon the empty casks were filled. Its coming gave relief to dire distress but brought with it a new misery. The water soaked and rotted the sun-dried wood of the wreck, which the Chinese had made into small huts, until fever broke out to add to the suffering caused by scurvy. The coming of the fever more than anything else caused the Chinese to lose their faith in the God of the Golden Fish.

“Neither by discord, the sea, nor thirst, concerning which our lying priest warned us, have we lost a single one of our number, but now disease rages until our men die like flies,” said Lihoa.

From this time on all of the sick were willing to be baptized—not by the Captain but by the two boys, Willy and Peppo. The Captain became very ill and Willy nursed him. Redfox was taken with fever, and in his delirium would trust no one to wait upon him. Constantly he cried “Water! water!” then would not take it when offered him. Willy gave him a glass and he threw it at his head screaming, “Poison! poison! The boy wants to poison me!” One morning he was gone. His companions searched for him in vain, and finally recognized his agonizing cries from the opposite shore where the cannibals were torturing him. In his delirium he had swum across the narrow inlet which separated them from their enemies; his heartrending cries told of the reception accorded him. “Oh, if he had only repented!” cried the boys with a shudder, as they listened.

* * * * *

The rainy season had been over for weeks and again the water in the casks was running short. When it was gone, what then?—Men looked death in the face and prepared for it. Of the crew barely a dozen were left; and of the Chinamen not more than fifty, and all of them were suffering from scurvy. They wandered about looking more like ghosts than human beings, and now still another danger threatened. For a long time they had noticed that the cannibals were preparing to attack them.

“How shall we protect ourselves?” asked the Captain; “if they really do fall upon us, we are lost. Willy go have Peppo tell his people who have not been baptized that it is high

time that they attend to the matter, and then climb the mast to see if you can make out what the cannibals are doing. We will sell our hides as dearly as possible.”

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Willy delivered the message to Peppo, and climbed the mast, which after the destruction of the wreck had been put up on the shore as a place from which to keep a lookout for passing vessels rather than to spy on the neighbors opposite. The sailors were so sick and weak that none of them could climb the mast to the crow's nest, so the task always devolved on the two boys, who though they had eaten of the salt meat, had not as yet been attacked with scurvy. This time instead of watching the sea Willy gave his attention to the natives who had built a raft and were manning it to cross the inlet and make an attack. After reporting what he saw his uncle called to him to come down and help baptize the Chinamen. Just then the boy glanced seaward and to his surprise discovered a ship lying at anchor not a mile away. "Holy guardian angel! Blessed Mother of God!" he cried in joy. "A ship! a ship! A ship in sight! Ship—ahoy! Wait, wait, they're coming! They're launching a small boat!" Willy was so excited that he did not know what he was saying, as he slid down the mast and ran for the shore followed by all his companions.

It was really true that a ship was at anchor but a short distance away and that the needed help was at hand, for, "When need is greatest God's help is nearest." Just as the first raft loaded with cannibals attempted to land, a boat with Tommy Green at the helm appeared in the opening of the coral reef and a half dozen shots sufficed to frighten away the enemy. A moment or two later Willy was in the arms of his old friend. It did not take long for the men who had survived the horrors of life on the coral reef to make their way to "The South Star."

What had been Tommy Green's experiences at sea in an open boat? He told of storms, a calm, hunger, and thirst, and how more than once he and his companions were in utter despair, but ever to their minds in the hour of greatest trial came the thought "Surely the guardian angels of those two innocent boys will not desert us."

"And they have not," said Tommy, "for they have brought us to you now when you needed us most. Is that not true, my children."

With good care and treatment the most of the sick recovered before "The South Star" put into the harbor of Hongkong. On disembarking at Willy's request the Captain gave each of the Chinamen a sum of gold, which to them seemed a great fortune. Lihoa thanking the Captain for himself and his people said, "This is not the real treasure which we have brought home with us; our real treasure is the true religion." Full of joy they went back to their little hamlet where they told of their experiences and soon converted many of their people to the Christian faith. Still greater than the rejoicing in the little hamlet was that at the College of the Holy Saviour when the shipwrecked boys put in their appearance. Brother Onufrio shed tears of joy and Father Somazzo was deeply moved when told of the sufferings endured on the coral reef. "God has done all things for the best," he said, "and His guardian angels watched over you, my children, in your hour of greatest need."

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When the excitement attendant upon the arrival of the sufferers had somewhat died down Tommy Green asked to be received as lay brother in the congregation of missionaries, in accordance with a solemn vow he made on the night of the shipwreck. Captain Brown showed a desire to follow his example, but God in His mercy took the deed for the word, calling the repentant man to Him within a few months. The two boys continued their studies in the College. Peppo became a missionary, and is perhaps this very day carrying on his blessed work among his people. Willy made law his life work and had an honorable career in his chosen profession.

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