

CHAPTER XIX

THE S.S. "EVAN EVANS"

"Then three times round went our gallant ship."—*Old Song*.

THE time is next morning, and the first grey hour of daylight. The scene, an unlovely tidal basin crowded with small shipping—schooners and brigantines dingy with coal-dust, tramp steamers, tugs, Severn trows; a ship lock and beyond it the river, now grown into a broad flood all grey and milky in the dawn.

Tilda and Arthur Miles sat on the edge of the basin, with Godolphus between them, and stared down on the deck of the *Severn Belle* tug, waiting for some sign of life to declare itself on board. By leave of a kindly cranesman, they had spent the night in a galvanised iron shed where he stored his cinders, and the warmth in the cinders had kept them comfortable. But the dawn was chilly, and now they had only their excitement to keep them warm. For some reason best known to himself the dog did not share in this excitement, and only the firm embrace of Tilda's arm around his chest and shoulders held him from wandering. Now and again he protested against this restraint.

Tilda's eyes never left the tug; but the boy kept intermittent watch only, being busy writing with the stump of a pencil on a scrap of paper he had spread on the gritty concrete. Somewhere in the distance a hooter sounded, proclaiming the hour. Still but the thinnest thread of smoke issued from the tug's funnel.

"It's not like Bill," Tilda muttered. "'E was always partic'lar about early risin' . . . An' I don't know what *you* feel like, Arthur Miles, but I could do with break-fast."

“And a wash,” suggested the boy.

“It don’t look appetisin’—not even if we knew ’ow to swim,” said Tilda, relaxing her watch for an instant only, and studying the water in the basin. “We must ’old on—’old on an’ wait till the clouds roll by—that was ’one of Bill’s sayin’s. An’ to think of ’im bein’ so near!” Tilda never laughed, but some mirth in her voice anticipated Bill’s astonishment. “Now read me what yer’ve written.”

“It’s no more than what you told me.”

“Never mind; let’s ’ear if it’s c’rect.”

Arthur Miles read—

“‘DEAR MR. HUCKS,—This comes to say that we are not at Holmness yet, but getting on. This place is called Sharpness, and does a big trade, and the size of the shipping would make you wonder, after Bursfield. We left S.B. and the M.’s at Stratford, as *per* my favour—’

“What does that mean?” asked the scribe, looking up.

“It’s what they always put into business letters.”

“But what does it mean?”

“It means—well, it means you’re just as sharp as th’ other man, so ’e needn’t try it on.”

“—as *per* my favour of yesterday. And just below Stratford we picked up with a painter from America, but quite the gentleman, as you will see by his taking us on to a place called Tukesberry in a real moter car.’

[Let it be pleaded for Arthur Miles that his spelling had been outstripped of late by his experience. His sentences were as Tilda had constructed them in dictation.]

“‘Which at Tukesberry, happening to come across a gentleman friend o’ mine as used to work for Gavel, and by name William, this American gentleman—’”

“Sounds odd, don’t it?” interposed Tilda.

"There's too much about gentlemen in it," the boy suggested.

"Well, but *you're* a gentleman. We shall find that out, right enough, when we get to 'Olmness. 'Ucks don't know that, and I'm tonin' 'im up to it. . . . You 'aven't put in what I told yer—about me tellin' 'Mr. Jessup as Bill was my brother-in-law an' 'is callin' 'back to us that 'e'd look after us 'ere."

"No."

"W'y not?"

There was reason for Tilda's averted gaze. She had to watch the tug's deck. But why did her face flush?

"Because it isn't true."

"It got us 'ere," she retorted. "True or not, 'twouldn't do yer no 'arm to allow *that*, seemin' to me."

Although she said it defiantly, her tone carried no conviction.

Arthur Miles made no response, but read on—

"—this American gentleman paid our fares on by railway to join him, and gave us half a suffering for X's."

"Is that right?"

"Sure," said Tilda. "Gold money is all sufferin's or 'arf-sufferin's. I got it tied in a corner o' what Miss Montagu taught me to call my shimmy—shifts bein' vulgar, she said."

"—So here we are, and W.B. capital. Which we hope to post our next from Holmness, and remain,

"Yours respectfully,

"TILDA.

"William will post this."

"But you're not sure of that, you know," he urged.

Hereat Tilda found the excuse she wanted for losing her temper (for her falsehood—or, rather, the boy's pained disapproval of it—yet shamed her).

"'Oo brought yer 'ere, I'd like to know? And where'd yer be at this moment if 'twasn't for me an'

'Dolph? In Glasson's black 'ole, that's where yer'd be! An' now sittin' 'ere so 'igh-an'-mighty, an' lecturin'!"

The boy's eyes had filled with tears.

"But I'm not—I'm not!" he protested. "Tilda!—"

"As if," she jerked out between two hard, dry sobs (Tilda, by the way, never wept)—"as if I wasn' *sure*, arter chasin' Bill all this way on purpose, and 'im the best o' men!"

Just at this moment there emerged from the after-companion of the *Severn Belle*, immediately below them, a large head shaped like an enormous pear—shaped, that is, as if designed to persuade an upward passage through difficult hatchways, so narrow was the cranium and so extremely full the jowl. It was followed by a short bull neck and a heavy pair of shoulders in a shirt of dirty grey flannel; and having emerged so far, the apparition paused for a look around. It was the steersman of yesterday afternoon.

"'Ullo, below there!" Tilda hailed him.

"'Ullo yerself!" The man looked up and blinked.

"W'y, if you ain't the gel and boy?"

"Where's Bill?" she asked, cutting him short.

"Bill?"

"Yes, Bill—w'ich 'is full name is William; an' if 'e's sleepin' below I'd arsk yer to roust 'im out."

"Oh," said the stout man slowly, "Bill, is it?—Bill? Well, he's gone."

"Gone?"

"Aye; 'e's a rollin' stone, if you wants my opinion—'ere ter-day an' gone ter-morrow, as you might put it. There's plenty o' that sort knockin' around."

"D'yer mean—ter say as Bill's—gone?"

"Maybe I didn' make myself clear," answered the stout man politely. "Yes, gone 'e 'as, 'avin' only shipped on for the trip. At Stourport. Me bein' short-landed and 'im fresh off the drink."

"But Bill doesn't drink," protested Tilda, indignant in dismay.

"Oh, doesn't 'e? Then we're talkin' of two different

parties, an' 'ad best begin over again. . . . But maybe," conceded the stout man on second thoughts, "you only seen 'im sober. It makes a difference. The man I mean's dossin' ashore somewhere. An', I should say, drinkin' 'ard," he added reflectively.

But here Godolphus interrupted the conversation, wriggling himself backwards and with a sudden yap out of Tilda's clutch. Boy and girl turned, and beheld him rush towards a tall, loose-kneed man, clad in dirty dungaree, dark-haired and dark-avised with coal-dust, who came slouching towards the quay's edge.

"Bill! Oh, Bill!" Tilda sprang up with a cry.

Perhaps the cry was drowned in the dog's ecstatic barking. The man—he had obviously been drinking—paid no attention to either; or, rather, he seemed (since he could not disregard it) to take the dog's salutation for granted, and came lurching on, fencing back 'Dolph's affectionate leaps.

"G' way!"

He advanced unsteadily towards the edge of the basin, not perceiving, or at any rate not recognising the children, though close to them.

"Lef' my cap be'ind," he grumbled; "elst they stole it."

He drew himself up at the water's edge, a dozen yards or so wide of the *Severn Belle's* stern.

"Oh, Bill!" Tilda flung herself before him as he stood swaying.

"'Ullo!" He recognised her slowly. "And wot might *you* be doin' 'ere? Come to remember, saw *you* yesterday—you *and* your frien'. Yes, o' course—ver' glad t' meet yer—*an'* yer friend—any friend o' yours welcome, 'm sure."

He stretched out a hand of cordiality towards Arthur Miles.

"Oh, Bill—we've been countin' on yer so—me an' 'Dolph. This is Arthur Miles, an' I've told 'im all along as you're the best and 'elpfullest o' men—an' so you are, if you pull yerself together. 'E only wants to get to a place called 'Oln'ness, w'ich is right below 'ere—"

“ ‘Olmness ? ”

“ It’s an Island, somewhere in the Bristol Channel. It —it *can’t* be far, Bill—an’ I got ’arf-a-sufferin’——”

“ Where ? ” asked Bill with unexpected promptness.

“ Never you mind, just now.”

Bill assumed an air of injured but anxious virtue.

“ ‘Course, if you don’t *choose* to trust me, it’s another matter. . . . but I’d like to know you came by it honest.”

“ ‘Of course she did ! ” Arthur Miles spoke up to the rescue hotly.

Bill turned a stare on him, but dropped it, somewhat abashed.

“ Oh, well, I’m not sayin’ . . . ” he muttered sulkily, and then with a change of tone, “ But find yer an Island—somewheres in the Bristol Channel—me ! It’s ridicklus.”

Tilda averted her face, and appeared to study the masts of the shipping. Her cheek was red and something worked in her throat, but in a few seconds she answered quite cheerfully—

“ Well, the first thing is to pick up a breakfast. If Bill can’t find us an Island, maybe ’e can show us a respectable ’ouse, whêre they make their cawfee strong—an’ not the ’ouse where ’e slept last night, if it’s all the same to ’im.”

They found a small but decent tavern—“ The Wharfingers’ Arms, *Shipping Gazette* daily ”—and breakfasted on coffee and boiled eggs. The coffee was strong and sticky. It did Bill good. But he persisted in treating the adventure as a wild-goose chase. He had never heard of Holmness. It was certainly not a port ; and, that being so, how—unless they chartered a steamer—could they be landed there ? ”

“ That’s for you to find out,” maintained Tilda.

“ Well,” said he, rising from the meal, “ I don’t mind lookin’ around an’ makin’ a few inquiries for yer. But I warn yer both it’s ’opeless.”

“ You can post this letter on yer way,” she commanded. “ I’ll pay fer the breakfast.”

But confidence forsook her as through the small window they watched him making his way—still a trifle unsteadily—towards the docks. For a little distance 'Dolph followed him, but halted, stood for a minute wagging his tail, and so came trotting back.

"'E'll manage it," said Tilda at length.

Arthur Miles did not answer.

"Oh, I know what you're thinkin'!" she broke out. "But 'tisin' everyone can look down on folks bein' 'born with *your* advantages!" She pulled herself up sharply, glancing at the back of the boy's head: for he had turned his face aside. "No—I didn' mean that. An'—an' the way you stood up fer me bein' honest was jus' splendid—after what you'd said about tellin' lies, too."

They wandered about the docks all day, dodging official observation, and ate their midday crust behind the cinder-shed that had been their shelter ever-night. Tilda had regained and kept her old courage, and in the end her faith was justified.

Towards nightfall Bill sought them out where he had first found them, by the quay-edge close above the *Severn Belle*.

"It's all right," he said. "I done it for yer. See that boat yonder?" He jerked his thumb towards a small cargo steamer lying on the far side of the basin, and now discernible only as a black blur in the foggy twilight. "She's the *Evan Evans* of Cardiff, an' bound for Cardiff. Far as I can larn, Cardiff's your port, though I don't say a 'andy one. Fact is, there's no 'andy one. They seem to say the place lies out of everyone's track close down against the Somerset coast—or, it may be, Devon; they're not clear. Anyway," he wound up vaguely, "at Cardiff there may be pleasure steamers runnin', or something o' the sort."

"Bill, you're an angel!"

"I shipped for a stoker," said Bill.

"But what'll it cost?"

"I don't want ter speak boas'ful, after the tone you took with me this mornin'" —Bill spoke with scarcely

dissembled pride—"but that's where the cleverness comes in. You see, there ain't no skipper to 'er—leastways not till ter-morrow. The old man's taken train an' off to Bristol, to attend a revival meetin', or something o' the sort—bein' turned pious since 'is wife died," w'ich is about eighteen months ago. I got that from the mate, when 'e shipped me. The mate's in charge, with the engineer an' two 'ands. The engineer—'e's a Scotchman—'as as much whisky inside 'im already as a man can 'old an' keep 'is legs; an' the 'ole gang'll be goin' ashore again to-night—all but the mate. The mate 'as to keep moderate sober an' lock 'er out on first 'igh water ter-morrow for Kingroad, where she'll pick up the old man; and as natcher'llly 'e'll want *somebody* sober down in the engine-room, 'e's got to rely on me. So now you see."

"I think I see," said Tilda slowly. "We're to ship as stowaways."

"You may call it so, though the word don't 'ardly seem to fit. I've 'eard tell of stowaways, but never as I remember of a pair as 'ad the use of the captain's cabin, and 'im a widower with an extry bunk still fitted for the deceased. O' course we'll 'ave to smuggle yer away somewheres before the old man comes aboard. But the mate'll do that easy. 'E promised me."

"Bill, you *are* an angel!"

It was, after all, absurdly easy, as Bill had promised; and the easier by help of the river-fog, which by nine o'clock—the hour agreed upon—had gathered to a thick grey consistency. If the dock were policed at this hour, no police, save by the veriest accident, could have detected the children crouching with 'Dolph behind a breastwork of paraffin-casks, and waiting for Bill's signal—the first two or three bars of *The Blue Bells of Scotland* whistled thrice over.

The signal came. The gang-plank was out, ready for the crew's return; and at the head of it Bill met the fugitives, with a caution to tread softly when they

reached the deck. The mate was nowhere to be seen. Bill whispered that he was in his own cabin "holding off the drink," whatever that might mean.

He conducted them to the after-companion, where, repeating his caution, he stepped in front of the children and led the way down a narrow twisting staircase. At the foot of it he pushed open a door, and they gazed into a neat apartment, panelled with mirrors and bird's-eye maple. A swing-lamp shone down upon a white-covered table; and upon the table were bread and cheese and biscuits, with a jug of water and glasses. Alongside the table ran two bunks, half-curtained, clean, cosy and inviting.

"Say what yer like," said Tilda half an hour later as, having selected their bunks, the children composed themselves to sleep, "but Bill 'as the 'ead of the two."

"Which two?" asked the boy, not quite ingenuously.

"As if I didn' know yer was comparin' 'im with Sam Bossom all day! W'y, I seen it in yer face!" Getting no answer, she went on after a pause, "Sam'd never a' thought o' this, not if 'e'd lived to be a 'undred."

"All the same, I like Sam better," said the boy sleepily.

They slept soundly after their wanderings. The crew returned shortly before half-past eleven, and tumbled aboard "happy and glorious"—so Bill afterwards described their condition, in the language of the National Anthem. But the racket was mainly for'ard, and did not awake the children. After this, silence descended on the *Evan Evans*, and lasted for five long hours. Still they slept; and the voice of the mate, when a little before dawn he started cursing and calling to the men to tumble up, was a voice heard in dreams and without alarm.

It was, as a matter of fact, scarcely more operative in the fore-castle than in the cabin. But Bill in the intervals of slumber had visited the furnaces, and kept up a good head of steam; and in the chill of dawn he and the mate cast off warps and (with the pilot) worked

the steamer out through the ship lock, practically unaided. The mate, when not in liquor, was a first-class seaman; and Bill, left alone between the furnaces and the engines, perspired in all the glory of his true vocation.

The noise of hooting, loud and protracted, awoke Tilda at last, and she raised herself in her bunk to stare at the apparition of Bill in the cabin doorway—a terrifying apparition, too, black with coal-dust and shining with sweat.

“Wot’s ’appened?”

For one moment her sleepy brain confused him with the diabolical noise overhead.

“Nothia’,” he answered, “’cept that you must tumble out quick, you two. We’re off Avonmouth, an’ the whistle’s goin’ for the old man.”

They tumbled out and redded up the place in a hurry, folding away the rugs and linen—which Bill, with his grimed fingers, did not dare to touch—and stowing them as he directed. A damp fog permeated the cabin. Even the engine-room (Bill reported) was full of it, and how the mate had brought her along through it and picked up Avonmouth was a marvel.

“Single-’anded too, as you may say. ’E’s a world’s wonder, that man.”

The children too thought it marvellous when they reached the deck and gazed about them. They could spy no shore, not so much as a blur to indicate it, but were wrapped wholly in a grey fog; and down over the steamer’s tall sides (for she was returning light after delivering a cargo of Welsh coal) they stared upon nothing but muddy water crawling beneath the fog.

They heard the mate’s voice calling from the bridge, and the fog seemed to remove both bridge and voice to an immeasurable height above them.

It was just possible to descry the length of the ship, and they saw two figures bestir themselves forward. A voice answered “Aye, aye, sir!” but thickly and as if muffled by cotton wool. One of the two men came running, halted amidships, lifted out a panel of

the bulwarks, set in a slide between two white-painted stanchions, and let down an accommodation ladder.

"*Evan Evans*, ahoy!" came a voice from the fog.

"Ahoy, sir!" sang out the mate's voice high overhead, and between two blasts of the whistle, and just at this moment a speck—a small blur—hove out of the grey on the port side. It was the skipper arriving in a shore boat.

The children dodged behind a deck-house as he came up the ladder—a thin little man habited much like a Nonconformist minister, and wearing—of all amazing head-gear—a top-hat, the brim of which shed moisture in a steady trickle. A grey plaid shawl swathed his shoulders, and the fringe of this dripped too, as he gained the deck and stepped briskly aft, without so much as a word to the men standing at the head of the ladder, to whom after a minute the mate called down.

"Sam Lloyd!"

"Aye aye, sir!"

"What did 'e say?"

"Nothin', sir."

Apparently the children were not alone in finding this singular, for after another minute the mate descended from the bridge, walked aft, and followed his chief down the companion. He stayed below for close on a quarter of an hour, the steamer all this while moving dead slow, with just a lazy turn now and then of her propeller. When he returned it was with a bottle in his hand and a second bottle under his arm.

"Cracked as a drum," he announced to the seaman Lloyd on his way back to the bridge. "Says 'e's 'ad a revelation."

"A wot?"

"A revelation. Says 'e 'eard a voice from 'eaven las' night, tellin' 'im as Faith was dead in these times; that if a man only 'ad faith 'e could let everything else rip . . . and," concluded the mate heavily, resting his unoccupied hand on the ladder, "'e's down below trivin' it."

The seaman did not answer. The mate ascended again, and vanished in the fog. After a pause a bell tinkled deep down in the bowels of the ship. Her propeller began to churn the water, very slowly at first, then with gathering speed, and the *Evan Evans* forged ahead, shouldering her way deeper and deeper into the fog.

It had certainly grown denser. There was not the slightest reason for the children to hide. No one came near them; they could see nothing but the wet and dirty deck, the cook's galley close by (in which, as it happened, the cook lay in drunken slumber) and a boat swinging on davits close above their heads, between them and the limitless grey. Bill had disappeared some time before the skipper came aboard, and was busy, no doubt, in the engine-room. In the shrouded bows one of the crew was working a fog-horn at irregular intervals, and for a while every blast was answered by a hoot from the steam-whistle above the bridge.

This lasted three hours or more. Then, though the fog-horn continued spasmodically, the whistle fell unaccountably silent. The children scarcely noted this; they were occupied with staring into the fog.

Of a sudden the bridge awoke to life again, and now with the bell. *Ting. . . ting, ting, ting,—ting—ting, ting, ting—* then *ting, ting,* again.

The fog-horn stopped as though to listen. By and by, as from a minute to minute the bridge continued this eccentric performance, even the children became aware that something was amiss.

Abruptly the ringing ceased, ceased just as a tall man—it was the Scotch engineer—emerged from somewhere below and stood steadying himself by the rail of the ladder.

“What the deevil?” he demanded angrily, staring aloft. “What tite deev—”

Here he collapsed on the lowest step. (A Glasgow man must be drunk indeed before he loses his legs.)

The seaman Sam Lloyd came running, jumped over the

engineer's prostrate body and climbed to the bridge. There was a brief silence, and then he shouted down—

"Dave! Dave Morgan!"

"Ahoy! What's wrong there?"

Another seaman came staggering aft.

"Run, one o' you an' fetch up th' old man. Mate 'e's dead drunk 'ere, an' the ship pointin' any way, this 'arf hour."

"I—I canna," said the engineer, raising himself erect from the waist and collapsing again; but the other staggered on and disappeared down the companion hatchway. Two or three minutes passed before he re-emerged.

"It's no go," he shouted up. "Skipper says as we must 'ave Faith. Called me an onbelievin' generation o' vipers, an' would I kindly leave 'im alone to wrastle."

"Faith?" fairly yelled the voice from the bridge. "Tell 'im the man's lyin' 'ere outside o' three pints o' neat Irish—tell 'im she's been chasin' 'er own tail for this two—three hours—tell 'im the sound o' breakers is distinkly audibble on the lee bow—tell 'im—oh, for Gawd's sake tell 'im anythink so's it'll fetch 'im up!"

Dave Morgan dived down the companion again, and after a long interval returned with the skipper at his heels. The old man was bare-headed now, and the faint breeze, blowing back his grey locks, exposed a high intellectual forehead underset with a pair of eyes curiously vague and at the same time introspective.

The old man clutched at the coaming that ran around the hatchway, steadied himself, and gazed around upon the fog.

"'Eavenly Father!" he said aloud and reproachfully, "*this* won't do!"

And with that he came tripping forward to the bridge with a walk like a bird's. At the sight of Tilda and Arthur Miles, who in their plight had made no effort to hide, he drew himself up suddenly.

"Stowaways?" he said. "I'll talk to you presently." He stepped over the engineer. "Hek? What's the matter?" he called up as he put his foot on the ladder.

“Mate’s drunk an’ ’ncapable, sir,” answered the seaman from above.

“What o’ that?” was the unexpected reply. “Let the poor body lie, an’ you hold her to her course.”

“But she’s chasin’ ’er tail, sir. She’s pointin’ near as possible due south at this moment, an’ no tellin’ ’ow long it’s lasted——”

“Then bring her round to west—west an’ a point south, an’ hold her to it. You’ve got no *Faith*, Samuel Lloyd,—an’ me wrestlin’ with the Lord for you this three hours. See yonder!”—the skipper waved a hand towards the bows, and his voice rose to a note of triumph.

Sure enough, during the last two or three minutes the appearance of the fog had changed. It was dense still, but yellower in colour and even faintly luminous.

From the bridge came no answer.

“Liftin’; that’s what it is, an’ I ask the Lord’s pardon for lettin’ myself be disturbed by ye.”

The skipper turned to leave the ladder, of which he had climbed but half a dozen steps.

“Liftin’ it may be”—Lloyd’s voice arrested him—“but we’re ashore somewheres, or close upon it. I can ’ear breakers——”

“Eh?”

“Listen!”

The skipper listened, all listened, the fog the while growing steadily more golden and luminous.

“Man, that’s no sound of breakers—it’s voices!”

“Voices!”

“Voices—voices of singin’. Ah!”—the skipper caught suddenly at the rail again—“a revelation! Hark!”

He was right. Far and faint ahead of the steamer’s bows, where the fog, meeting the sun’s rays, slowly arched itself into a splendid halo—a solid wall no longer, but a doorway for the light, and hung with curtains that momentarily wore thinner—there, where the water began to take a tinge of flame, sounded the voices of men and women, or of angels, singing together. And

while the crew of the *Evan Evans* strained their ears the hymn grew audible—

“Nearer—and nearer still,
We to our country come ;
To that celestial Hill,
The weary pilgrim’s home ! . . .”

Arthur Miles had clutched Tilda’s hand. She herself gazed and listened, awe-struck. The sound of oars mingled now with the voices, and out of the glory ahead three forms emerged and took shape—three boats moving in solemn procession.

They were of unusual length, and black—at any rate seen against that golden haze, they appeared black as Erebus. In the bows of each sat a company of people singing as they pulled at the long oars ; and in the stern of each, divided from the rowers by the cargo—but what that cargo was could not yet be distinguished—stood a solitary steersman.

Patently these people were unaware of the steamer’s approach. They were heading straight across her path—were, in fact, dangerously close—when at length the seaman on the bridge recovered presence of mind to sound her whistle, at the same time ringing down to stop the engines.

As the whistle sounded the singing ceased abruptly, the steersmen thrust over their tillers in a flurry, and of the rowers some were still backing water as the boats drifted close, escaping collision by a few yards.

“Ahoy there !”

“Ahoy !” came the answer. “Who are you ?”

“The *Evan Evans*, of Cardiff,” responded the skipper between his hollowed palms.

“Whither bound ?”

“Cardiff.”

The foremost boat was close now and drifting alongside. Arthur Miles and Tilda stared down upon the faces of the rowers. They were eight or ten, and young for the most part—young men of healthy brown com-

plexions and maidens in sunbonnets ; and they laughed with upturned eyes, as they fell to their oars again to keep pace with the steamer's slackening way. The children now discerned what cargo the boats carried—each a score or two of sheep, alive and bleating, their fleeces all golden in the strange light.

An old man stood in the stern of the leading boat. He wore a long white beard, and his face was extraordinarily gentle. It was he who answered the skipper.

"For Cardiff?" he echoed.

"Aye, the *Evan Evans*, of Cardiff, an' thither bound. May~~be~~ you've heard of him," added the skipper irrelevantly. "A well-known Temperance Reformer he was."

The old steersman shook his head.

"You're miles away out o' your course, then—five an' twenty miles good."

"Where are we?"

"Right south-west—atween Holmness and the land. You've overshot *everything*. Why, man, are ye all mazed aboard? never a vessel comes hereabouts, and 'tis the Lord's mercy you hadn't run her ashore."

"The Lord will provide," answered the skipper piously. "Which-a-way lies Cardiff, say you?"

The old man pointed. But while he pointed Tilda ran forward.

"'Olmness? Is it 'Olmness?"

He stared up.

"Holmness it is, missie? But why?"

"An' you'll take us off? We're 'ere with a message. It's for Miles Chandon, if you know 'im."

"Surely," the old man answered slowly. "Yes, surely—Sir Miles. But who can have a message for ~~Sir Miles?~~"

"For Miss Sally, then. You know Miss Sally?"

The old man's look changed in a moment.

"Miss Sally? Why, o' course—Do we know Miss Sally?" he was appealing to the crew of men and maidens forward, and they broke into a chime of laughter.

"What's this?" demanded the skipper, stepping

forward. "Here's a couple of stowaways. I know nothing about 'em. It's your risk if you choose to take 'em off."

"If she've a message for Miss Sally——" answered the old steersman after a pause.

"It's life an' death!" pleaded Tilda.

The steamer, the upturned faces below, the fog all around—she saw it as in a dream, and as in a dream she heard herself pleading . . .

"Get out the ladder, there!" called the skipper.

They were in the boat, still as in a dream, sitting among these strange, kindly people. In a dream, too, she was waving to Bill, who had come up from below and leant over the bulwarks, staring as steamer and boats fell apart in the fog. Then, at a word from the bridge, he waved his hand for the last time and ran below. In a minute or so the *Evans* began to feel around and edge away for the northward.

She faded and was lost in the vaporous curtain. Still the children gazed astern after her over the backs of the huddled sheep. The rowers had fallen to singing again—men and maidens in harmony as they pulled—

"The ransom'd sons of God,
All earthly things we scorn,
And to our high abode
With songs of praise return! . . ."

Of a sudden, while they sang and while the children gazed, the fog to northward heaved and parted, pierced by a shaft of the sinking sun, and there in a clear hollow lay land—lay an Island vignetted in the fog, with the light on its cliffs and green slopes—~~an~~ Island, resting like a shield on the milky sea.

"Look!"

Arthur Miles clutched Tilda by the arm and pointed. The old steersman turned his head.

"Aye," said he, "she looks pretty of an evening sometimes, does Holmness."