

I reply in the negative, feeling very uneducated and apologetic.

He points out one or two planets, telling me their names and a few other particulars about them, to which I listen in almost unbroken silence. What a time Gracie is fetching those crewel silks!

"Come out for a stroll," suggests Mr. Fane. "But had you not better fetch a wrap?"

I am about to say I do not need one, when I remember that if I have an excuse for going upstairs, I may possibly meet Gracie, and induce her to accompany us.

However, I see nothing of her, so Mr. Fane and I pass out on to the terrace alone.

I care very much about the heavenly bodies, they are so beautiful; but about their distance from the earth, the figures they describe in their motions, &c., I am as indifferent as I am ignorant. So I walk by Mr. Fane's side as he attempts to explain a few of these scientific facts to me, feeling dreadfully bored, while, womanlike, I am most anxious to appear deeply interested.

Suddenly my heart beats quickly, and then almost stands still. Two figures are standing not many yards in front of us in the bend of a winding pathway, partitioned off by a high well-kept hedge on either side. One is that of a woman, and although, seen in the gloaming, she appears to be draped in black, I cannot help thinking it is Gracie, with a cloak thrown over her white dress. Her companion is an exceptionally tall man, and he is standing close, very close, to her. They have their backs towards us, and as we are walking on the grass, they do not hear our approach.

Mr. Fane proceeds with his account of Venus—evidently having at this moment no thought beyond the synodic period of that planet, which he is in vain endeavouring to make clear to me. Where can his

eyes be, I wonder, until I remember that Gracie told me he was short-sighted.

In another moment, however, he steps off the grass on to a gravel walk, and the sound of his footfall causes the two figures to spring apart.

In an instant the man disappears, having, as I imagine, gone farther up the pathway, while Gracie, for it *is* she, comes towards us.

"To whom were you speaking?" asks Mr. Fane.

"Only to Kershaw, uncle," replies Gracie, but I fancy that her voice trembles slightly.

"Who is Kershaw, Gracie?" I inquire, almost sternly, as Mr. Fane makes his habitual pause before again speaking.

"Kershaw is the head gardener, Olga," and her tone is rather defiant, as if she resented the question.

The head gardener! And yet I could be almost certain that the man was in evening dress, with a light grey overcoat.

"That reminds me: I must speak to Kershaw about those peaches," and Mr. Fane takes a step or two in the direction from whence Gracie has come to us.

"Not to-night, uncle, surely?"

"Why not? I shall probably forget it again if I leave it till the morning. Kershaw was on his way to the greenhouse, I suppose?"

"Yes, uncle. But if you will leave it till to-morrow, I will be sure to remind you."

"No; I won't put it off any longer. But you and Miss Vesey need not come with me, unless you like."

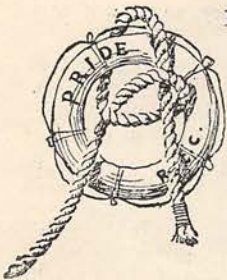
So saying, Mr. Fane goes briskly up the narrow pathway.

For a moment Gracie stands quite still, and I fancy she clasps her hands together under the cover of her cloak.

Then, without a word, she follows her uncle.

END OF CHAPTER THE THIRD.

SEA BELLES.



BRIGHT September sun is killing the southerly breeze, and the bonnie "Skipper," at the tiller of the *Pride*, is doing all she knows to keep the white sails filling as that smart little cutter drops with the ebb tide down the upper reaches of Morecambe Bay. To southward the low land is wavering like some uneasy serpent, with the Yorkshire hills beyond

hidden in a misty haze. Aft, the Westmoreland Fells are slumbering in the heat, their limestone fronts gleaming dusty white; ahead the open sea heaves gently like molten silver, flecked here and there with solitary fishing craft, or the indistinct outline of some far-away

coaster; whilst hard by, on the starboard hand, the boulder-dotted beach and copse-fringed shores slide past like a painted picture, to the low musical hum of waters dancing along the yacht's side, swirling under the bows of the dinghy and against the sharp stem of a Rob Roy canoe which are towing astern.

"We ought to be standing across for Carnforth now," says the "Bos'un" coming aft.

"Let us try and run over the banks, it will be so much jollier than working along that old channel," answers the fayre "Skipper" with a bright look in those bewitching brown eyes of hers.

"We are half an hour too late, and shall get 'banked' to a dead certainty if we do."

"Oh, never mind," chimes in the "Mate" as she tosses back a ripple of dark waving hair which will

every now and then escape from under her straw sailor hat. "It will be no end of fun if we do, and we can go on shore and picnic on Humphrey Head."

The "Bos'un" pauses irresolute. "What do you say, Admiral?"

"Let the girls do as they like," is the good-natured reply from the best of fathers, smoking peacefully under the shade of the foresail.

So, as usual, the fairer half of the crew get their way, and the *Pride* holds on her course past the one deep channel which here turns sharp across the bay to southward. For a real *dolce far niente* effect there is nothing like being afloat on a bright warm day, when the lazy breeze just keeps the boat going, and the smooth water sings a lullaby as it ripples at the stern; when the sun shines full upon the warm deck, and the tiller needs but the gentlest finger-touch; when the land glides majestically astern, and the sounds of its life float, softened by distance, over the tide.

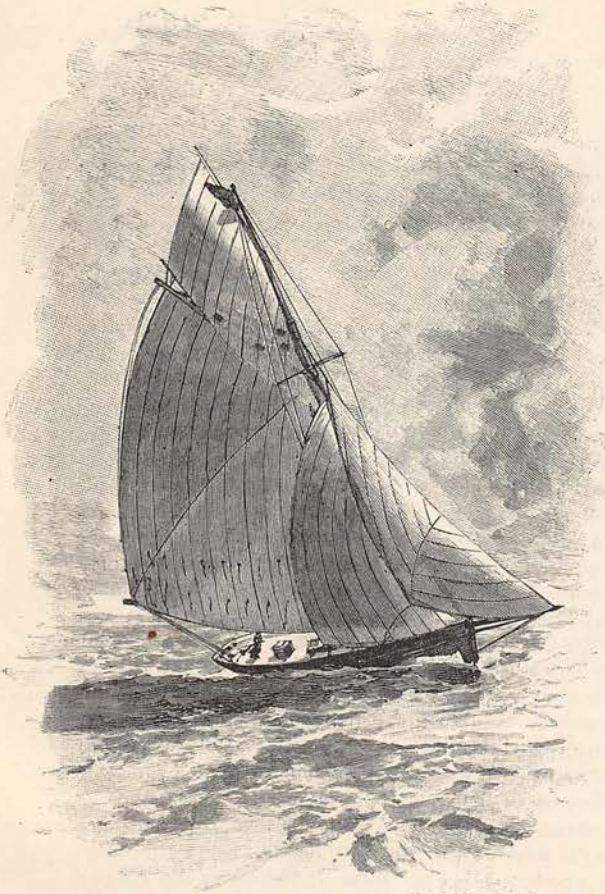
The ebb is running harder and bearing the yacht quickly onward, and sanguine voyagers already see themselves over the shoals and feel in fancy the long regular heave of the open sea. But the crest of the outlying banks is yet a good



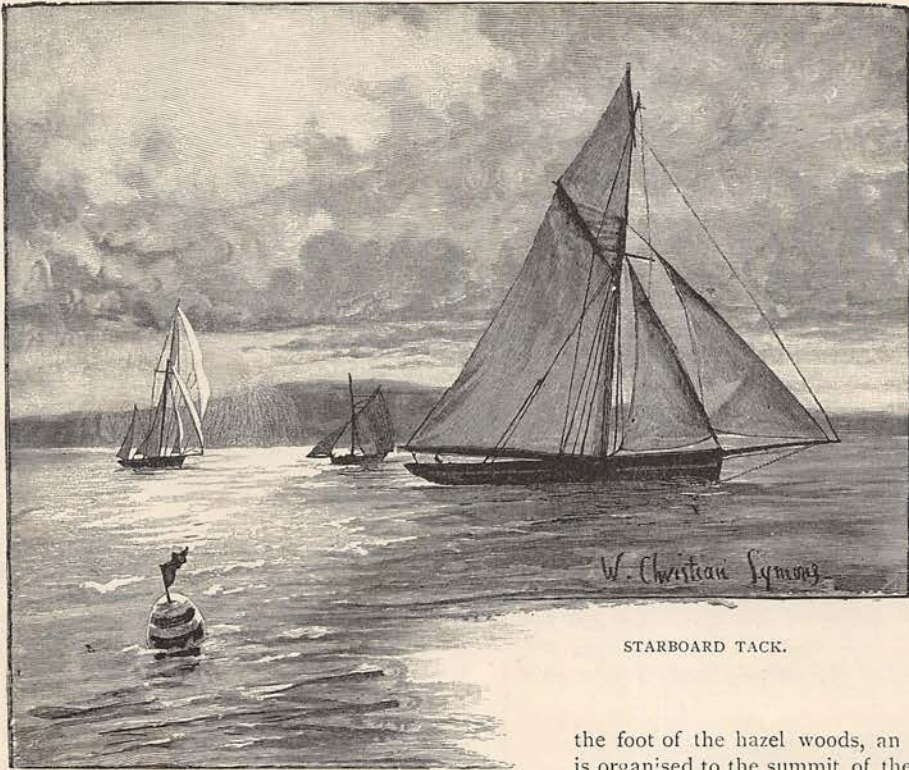
'BOUT SHIP.

mile off, the wind has died completely, and there is a spiteful hiss in the faster run of the tide which means mischief. Suddenly there is a bump, a shiver, a peculiar grating, and a jar, as when the brakes are biting hard upon an express train, and then a dead stop. The cutter is fast aground, with the dinghy and canoe drifting gaily past until their painters bring them up short and they begin to waltz on either quarter.

To most yachtsmen this would be a disagreeable and undignified state of affairs, but boatsailors hereaway soon get used to being "banked" and think lightly of it; the crew of the *Pride* especially so, for she is much given to experimental cruising, and ignoring of proper channels in these shallow waters. One result of this constant practice is that they know exactly what to do when their ship takes the ground, and they set about it without any fuss or confusion. First the dinghy is hauled alongside and the luncheon baskets and three lady passengers put under the charge of the "Quartermaster," who has orders to scull them to



FULL AND BY.



STARBOARD TACK.

the nearest point of land and then return to the stranded bark. Then comes the command, "Stand by, tops'l halyards. Lower away!" and the white canvas comes fluttering down and is neatly stowed by the quick fingers of "Skipper" and "Mate." The mainsail and big foresail are got off, and by the time that everything is made snug and the cutter is listing heavily to port, the dinghy is almost alongside again.

"Hurry up there, we've not a second to spare, I have hardly had enough water to float me back," hails the "Quartermaster" as he stands on the after thwart and poles the little boat along.

Not a moment is lost, and before the proverbial "Jack Robinson" can be said, an anchor has been laid out ahead of the yacht and the shipwrecked mariners are punting and sculling "hard all" for the shore. But the tide is not going to be beaten, it will have a complete triumph; and so before a quarter of a mile has been covered the dinghy's keel is deep in the sand. It is now a question of either wading to land, or else sitting in the hot sun for half an hour till the sands are bare. So overboard all hands jump into a foot of tepid water, and begin splashing gaily towards the shore, derisively cheered by the "Skipper," who is deftly navigating the canoe and slipping easily over the long ripples. But her triumph is short-lived, for very soon the *Volsung* is fast aground and she too joins the procession of watery pilgrims.

After luncheon and a lazy basking upon the mossy rocks, which slope like a breakwater from the shore to

the foot of the hazel woods, an expedition is organised to the summit of the headland above for a breath of fresh air and a peep at the Lakeland hills. Truly a glorious view is there from Humphrey Head of golden sands and smiling lowlands, of far-off sea and rugged mountain peaks, swelling hills and tumbled fells; a view that fully repays the ship's company for the long, blind scramble through the tangled copse, at the heels of a fair maid, who proved somewhat wanting as a reliable pioneer.

The afternoon wears on and a longing for tea drives the castaways down to the shore by a circuitous course which avoids the thick underwood. A pile of driftwood is soon alight and the kettle, filled at a bubbling spring and cunningly suspended from a stick wedged into a crevice of the overhanging rock, begins its soothing, hissing song. It is quite an *à la* Smugglers' Cave picture—the grey jutting rocks, the dark thicket, the leaping fire, and the group clustered picturesquely around it; though no bearded desperadoes quaffing strong duty-free liquors are here, but sweet maidens and dilettante yachtsmen sipping the fragrant growth of far Cathay. At last the sun dips below the glowing western sea and his parting kisses have left the heavens blushing rosy-red; a purple light is over the Cumberland hills, and the golden sands of Morecambe Bay have rusted to a deep-toned copper-colour. The flood tide must be already making over yonder on the dim shore opposite. So the crew of the *Pride* are piped away and set off to walk to the ship, taking the canoe on the way. The "Admiral" remains behind in charge of a quartet who elect to be picked up by the dinghy, later on, and thereby avoid the long tramp over the

yielding sands and the bustle of floating and of hoisting gear. The cutter looks lonely enough lying over as though longingly watching for the incoming waters, but once aboard all air of melancholy is dispelled. The evening breeze is freshening fast and the harvest moon, rising majestically over the bowed head of Arnside Knot, is every now and again hidden by masses of scud flying up out of the south-west. There is no sign of the tide, so "Bos'un" and "Quartermaster" decide to employ the time in getting the dinghy alongside and thus save the trouble of having to pick her up when the sea is pouring in over the banks. At first sight it would appear no easy task to drag her over the quarter of a mile of sand, but by using the stretchers as skids along which to run the keel it is soon done, and she lies a couple of fathoms astern of the cutter with painter belayed aboard.

"Here comes the tide; stand by!"

The sands around begin to glisten and gleam wet in the moonlight; there is a low dull hiss in the distance, and a line of white which heaves and tosses and sweeps rapidly nearer; a rush and a bubbling swirl, a fiercer slapping at the bows, and in a moment the *Pride* is surrounded by leaping, dancing waters, and the curling crest of the "bore" is driving far onward up the bay. Now the full force of the sea is rushing past, and yet the yacht shows no sign of lifting; already the waves are breaking and leaping to get into the well, so the mainsail is quickly hoisted to help her up, and with a heave, a slip, and a stagger, she sits on an even keel, then floating clear she gives a joyous start and dashes away. But the anchor ahead checks her mad rush,

and with a wide sheer she doubles back, with the dinghy springing excitedly round like a terrier at a horse's heels. The "Skipper" meets her with the helm, and the head sails being smartly run up steady her at once, and she rides easily to the rolling surges. The cable is hauled steadily inboard, and she comes short over the anchor; the tiller is put gently to port, and with a "Yo-ho-hoi," the little "Trotman" comes clanking to the bowsprit bits.

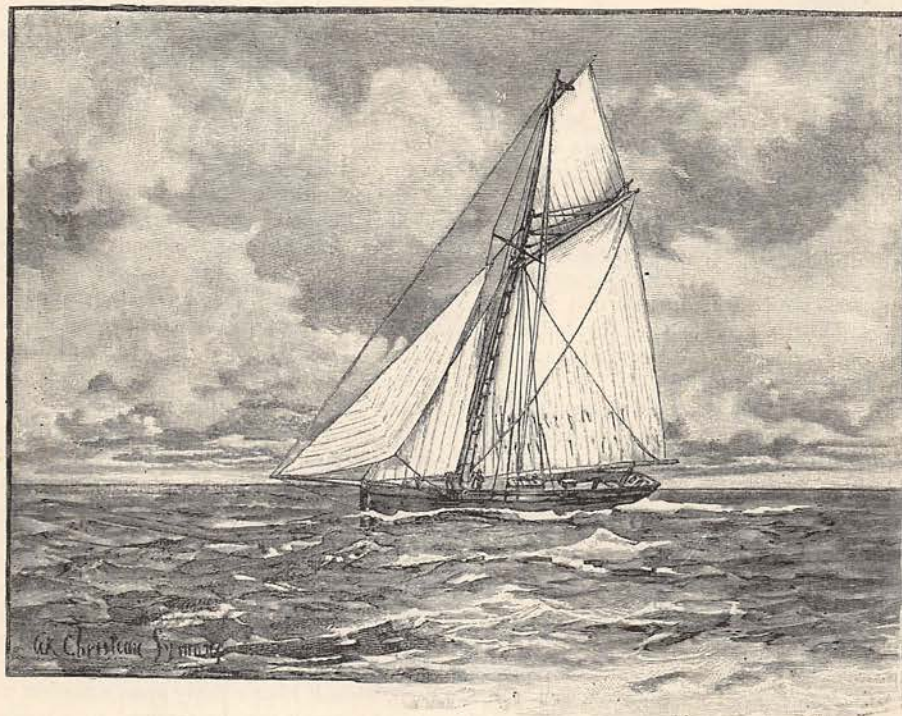
"All clear there forrard?"

"Aye, aye."

"Let draw!"

The jib sheet is hauled a-weather for a second, the mainsheet slacked off, and her head pays off handsomely, then jib and foresail are sheeted home and the boom rounded in, and with a coquettish start and a saucy lift of her counter, the *Pride* is away, close-hauled on the port tack. The wind comes sweeping across the bay, whitening its waters, and the cutter heeling over until her lee scuppers are awash, hums through the rising seas, working steadily inshore. The land is wrapped in thick gloom, for the moon is hidden and the sky is dark with cloud, so the whereabouts of the "Admiral" and his party is a thing only to be guessed at.

"Luff a bit, Skipper! we are quite close enough," comes the hail from the look-out forward, and the yacht is squeezed well to windward and almost starved of wind. Suddenly out of the darkness abeam a spark of light flashes for a second, then another and another. It is the shore party burning matches to show their whereabouts, and at once the dinghy's crew are piped



CLOSE-HAULED.

away and sent to fetch them, whilst the yacht stands off and on.

Five minutes later the hail of "*Pride* ahoy!" comes out of the night from a tossing shadow to leeward, and running past, the cutter rounds-to, and with head sheets flying, picks up her boat; then sheets are hauled in, and away seawards like a duck.

A whole breeze is blowing fresh, and the little ship lays herself bodily down and flings the leaping surges left and right as she drives through them, and they stream away aft in a long line of bubbling foam. Every stretch of canvas is drawing, the cordage whips and rattles cheerily, and bright glints of moonlight sweep over the waters, lighting up the deck from stem to stern, and wrapping the group of fair maidens in golden glory. There is a wild feeling of exhilarating freedom in swishing through moonlit seas with a steady whole sail wind piping merrily; and a mysterious gladness seems to pass from the soul of the staunch craft into one's own as she rushes through billowy hollow after hollow, and leaps the foam-capped ridges gallantly.

Fast the minutes fly, and onward the *Pride* sails tirelessly to the soft rhythmic cadences of sweet girlish voices; and the "Skipper" and the "Mate" relieve

each other regularly at the helm, whilst the laughing burgee up aloft whispers to the truck that the tiller is in love with bonnie Laura and with winsome Clare.

But the night is wearing, the tide is turning and will soon be ebbing fast, and it is time to run for port. A last few minutes dashing at the tumbling waves, and then the "Admiral" gives the order—

"Bout ship!"

The "Mate" puts down the tiller, and with a generous shoot the yacht comes up into the wind; head sails lift; the boom swings over; and then sheets come home, and away she plunges northward-ho! for the distant lights of Grange! Up over the slack tide she runs a clean "full and by," and the gurgling waters sliding past softly kiss their good-nights and float away sadly seawards.

And now, as the *Pride* reaches her moorings, the September moon comes out in unclouded splendour, and those beauteous shores sleeping in the soft golden light seem those of the legendary Vale of Avilon—

"Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies
Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard-lawns
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea."

G. VICKARS-GASKELL.

THE GARDEN IN DECEMBER.



THE Garden in December" is, in its general aspect, certainly not a lively theme, but for all that, were we to desert the garden in December entirely, the garden in June would probably be almost as unlively. We shall, then, give a few general hints as to what is *now* to be done in it, and then select, as heretofore, one particular and popular flower, tracing out rather more in detail the kind of treatment that it needs from its seed-time to its decay. And first of all for that uninteresting—some will say, not very necessary—general December gardening.

This is a grand month for attention to any defective garden drainage—a dismal and untidy operation, most certainly; but recollect, nothing will thrive in a swamp. Next, take and sweep together all fallen leaves (and by the end of November they are certainly nearly all down) into one large heap, where they will rot into leaf-mould, or you can utilise them in a hot-bed or pit. Take away or dig in all decaying vegetation, crops that are unsightly and done with, or in the flower garden the stems and nearly decayed leaves of your plants; but all sticks and supports in the way of stakes had better be collected and gone over: those that will do again can be cleaned and retained, and

the worthless can be burnt. A rough trenching should be made in the kitchen garden, and the soil left in ridges to the action of the frost. This will afterwards render the soil pliable, besides ridding you of many garden pests, in the way of slugs, &c. And, further, the garden walks should be well rolled after damp weather, and more particularly after every frost, which always leaves the surface of the paths in a more or less rotten state, when they will the more easily yield to the action of the roller. But if damp and soft weather be well adapted for work along your walks, it is, on the other hand, *not* adapted for much work on the borders, where treading alternately upon them and upon the walks is certainly productive of much untidiness, not to say actual mischief. We may have a few more general hints to give, but must now advert to the cultivation of one flower in particular, selecting for our consideration this month the gladiolus.

This deservedly popular flower is a very showy one, while some of its specimens are exceedingly fragrant. The natural order to which it belongs is that of the Iridaceæ, while the *sword-like* shape of its leaves gives it the name of *gladiolus*. Indigenous, for the most part, to the Cape of Good Hope, the period of its bloom there must surely afford a most glorious sight when we remember how very much set off our English gardens are by merely a few specimens in the summer and early autumn months. The gladiolus, then, while it likes a fairly open situation, must not be reared where it may be exposed to a boisterous wind,