

How are these conditions best remedied? Change of scene is to be recommended and active occupation to be provided. But, as in so many other conditions, much depends upon the individual. A determined effort must be made to overcome weakness—a continual endeavour to cease from morbid brooding; attention must be directed from self and concentrated on others, and as time elapses less and less difficulty will be experienced in realising that, after all, there still exists an interest in life. When this stage is reached complete recovery is not far distant.

I have directed attention to what may be termed the major disappointments of life, but it must not be

forgotten that little disappointments, especially if they are frequently repeated, exercise far-reaching influence. Those of us who take interest in children and their little ways know well how bitterly they feel the non-fulfilment of a promise too often lightly made and soon forgotten.

Apart from the possible influence on character, there is no doubt that sensitive children suffer in health by such neglect. They grieve and brood over what they consider a serious slight, and lie awake, unable to sleep, and rise in the morning unrefreshed to begin a new day. It ought to be a matter of conscience to perform every promise made to a child.

A NIGHT ON A LIGHTSHIP.

BY HERBERT RUSSELL.



IN THE GLEAM OF THE FLASH LIGHT.



HE sight of the tiny bright spark, regularly waxing and waning far out upon the windy blackness which shrouded the stormy ocean, put it into my head to wonder what manner of life it was on board a lightship; and the thought brought a resolve to im-

prove my acquaintance with the calling of those who man that familiar object of our home waters—the floating coast beacon.

I was spending a short holiday at the quaint, breezy old town of Deal, abreast of which stretches that most perilous of all shoals, the Goodwin Sands. It chanced that during the morning following the night on which I had stood watching the winking spark dancing out upon the deep, as I strolled along the shingle slope of the beach, I came to where several longshoremen were making ready to launch one of those famous boats locally termed a galley-punt.

They were bound away on a cruise to look out for ships requiring assistance, and invited me to accompany them. I sprang over the gunwale, the others followed, and away sped the little craft, souse into the surf that was making the pebbly shore resonant as mountain-crags in a thunder-storm. We sailed the bleak Channel till nightfall, but the foaming waters were as destitute of ships as though we had been out in mid-Atlantic.

I had been seated for upwards of an hour upon the floor of the boat, to get some shelter from the

keen wind piping up out of the east, but shortly before it fell dusk I raised my head above the level of the gunwale to take a look around, and found that we

the surges, dipping her bluff bows with wild headlong plunges into the billows, and crushing them into a short rolling surface of snow, which washed seething past her



"STOOD WATCHING US AS WE APPROACHED" (p. 186).

were within biscuit-toss of the *Gull* lightship. In the west, through a rift in the lead-coloured sky, showed the sun, hanging blood-red and rayless close down to the hard green rim of the sea that way, and tinging the atmosphere with an angry crimson flush, which came shaking in a dull trembling glow across the foaming heads of the waves.

The red-hulled vessel, with her name painted in huge glaring white letters upon her side, rode heavily over

ruddy bends. The light of the setting sun found a dull reflection in her wet sides, and the water all about her was full of lambent fires flung by the gleaming red planks.

An idea came into my head whilst I watched the tossing fabric, and I said to the man steering the galley-punt—

"Can you put me aboard that lightship?"

"What for, sir?" he answered.

"I should like to spend the night on her. You can take me off again to-morrow."

"Why, it's against rules to allow visitors aboard after sunset," he said. "But one of her crew is an uncle of mine, and maybe they'll take you. Leastways, we'll ask them."

He slightly shifted the tiller, and under the impulse of her powerful lugsail the long slender boat went surging towards the lightship. A man came to her bulwarks, and stood watching us as we approached. Recognising the Deal-men, he waved his hand.

"That's my uncle," said the boatman.

He then shouted—

"Jim, here's a gent as wants to spend the night out along with ye. Let him come aboard, mate. We'll fetch him again in the morning."

"I must ask the mate," replied the other, and vanished.

But in a moment he reappeared at the side, accompanied by a man clad in pilot cloth and brass buttons, who, after staring at me for a moment, shouted to the men to bring the boat alongside. With wonderful dexterity they steered the galley-punt close to the wallowing hull. Watching my chance, I sprang, and in a moment gained the deck.

My first impression on stepping over the side of the lightship was that of the massiveness and strength of every object upon which my eye rested. The decks were broad, and looked the roomier for the absence of the familiar details of shipboard furniture. Everything was painted the same bright colour of red, from the short stump of bumkin forking out over the bows, to the long arched tiller twitching at the ropes which lashed it amidships as the sea eddied round the rudder.

A couple of men, dressed in a costume very similar to that of men-of-war's-men, with the word *Gull* embroidered in red letters across the breasts of their jerseys, sat together forward upon the barrel of the great windlass. By my side stood the man in brass buttons, and the fellow whom the boatman had hailed.

I said to the former—

"Are you the captain?"

"No," he answered. "I am the mate, but I am in charge of the vessel."

"But you carry a captain, I believe?" said I.

"Our crew," he replied, "consists of ten hands, not including the skipper nor myself. These are divided in this manner: nine of the men forward are told off into three reliefs, one of which is always ashore for a month at a spell, so that we never have more than six of them in the fore-castle, with one extra hand, in the shape of the carpenter. In this way the men get two months of shipboard life and one month of Trinity House work ashore. The skipper and myself take it in turns each alternate month to command here."

"I understand. And how many men do you keep on deck looking out at a time?"

"The six forward hands are divided into three watches, and each watch takes its turn of four hours on deck and eight below. For myself, I am free to

come and go as I please. Of course, I am always called when anything happens demanding our attention."

I crossed the deck and looked over the bulwarks, which came breast-high, towards the Sands. The tide was about half-flood, so that the shoal was completely covered, but the pale flicker of the breakers against the deepening gloom of the evening plainly showed their whereabouts. I asked the mate how far off the edge of the Goodwins the *Gull* lightship was moored.

"A little over a mile," he answered. "Not a bit too far, sir, I can assure you, when a heavy northerly or north-easterly gale is blowing, and we are making bad weather of it, with all our chain—two hundred fathoms—paid out."

"Suppose you were to break adrift, with such a lee-shore as that: what would you do?"

"Well, we should set the sail, a great lug, and try to reach clear of the shoal. But the odds are ninety-nine in a hundred that we should take the ground and go to pieces; although I have heard of a lightship parting her moorings and washing clean across a bank, eventually driving right out to sea. We always have a spare anchor and cable ready for letting go. But you may take it that when one chain has parted the other isn't going to hold you for very long."

Just at this moment the hour of sunset, as shown by the nautical almanack, arrived, and the mate, after glancing at his watch, called for the men to light and hoist the lamp. It was a magnificent lantern, built round the base of the mast, full of silver reflectors, which flashed prismatically as the rolling of the vessel caught the western gleams.

The wicks were ignited, the rope by which the beacon was hoisted to its proper altitude taken to a winch, and four men, laying hold of the handspikes, rattled it up the mast. As soon as the lamp was in its place it began slowly to revolve. Although it was still broad twilight, the radiance beamed out brilliant almost as the noontide sun. It was difficult to tell the full intensity of the flashing from the deck: one needed to be half-a-mile away to judge the effect of those long shafts of light sweeping round like the spokes of a wheel upon the gleam. But I could see the glancing of the crystal squares in the sheen, and where the lantern was screened off to give the flashing appearance to its revolutions was to be known by the long black shadow that always followed the slow gliding beams of radiance.

I said to my companion—

"That is a splendid signal."

"Ay, sir, it's a good light. Hoisted to a height of thirty-eight feet above the level of the sea, it's visible for ten miles in clear weather."

My eye fell upon a little cannon trained through the bulwarks aft. I inquired if the piece was used for firing distress signals. The mate replied that it was.

"When we see a vessel standing in dangerously near to the Sands," said he, "we fire a warning gun. If she goes ashore, we begin firing guns in quick

succession ; and if it be night-time, send up powerful magnesium rockets. But the present system of signalling is capable of much improvement. Should the wind be off-shore, our guns cannot be heard on the land ; and if the weather is thick, our rockets are not seen. My belief is that it will ultimately come to telegraphic communication with the coast."

"Tell me," said I, gazing out into the fast deepening gloom, "what you would number as the risks of a lightsman's life?"

"Why," he answered reflectively : "first, there's the ceaseless danger of being anchored close to a deadly shoal. Then there are the chances of collision. You would be surprised how frequently lightships are run foul of by vessels. It seems rather hard that we, who are stationed for the safeguard of ships, shouldn't be free from the dangers attending careless navigation. But apart from the conditions I have named, I do not know that we run any particular risks."

"Are the men liberally treated by the Trinity House?" I asked.

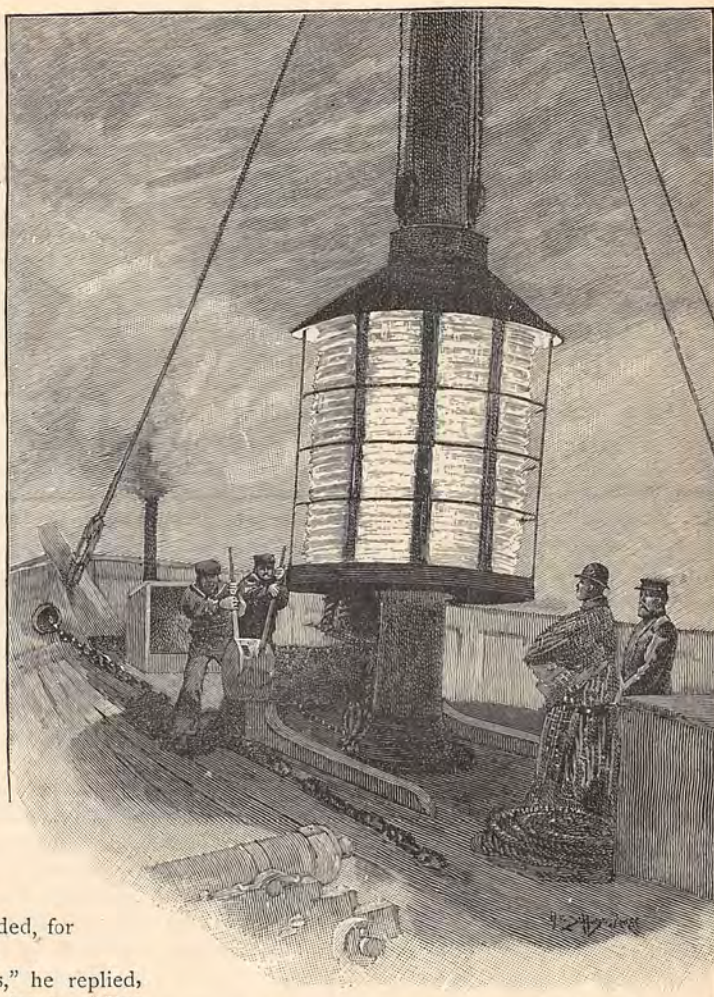
"On the whole, I may say they are, sir. The wages are good : better than those of sailors of corresponding grades."

"The lightsman should be well rewarded, for surely his life is intolerably dull," said I.

"It grows a bit monotonous at times," he replied, looking up at the rhythmically turning lamp. "But aboard this ship we're better off than the crews of most vessels in the service, for we're tolerably close in with the coast ; and there's some comfort in being able to spy your home through a telescope. In the more outlying lightships—the *Middle Swin*, for instance—it must be terribly lonely work. Would you like to step below, sir?"

I followed him to the companion hatch, and we descended the ladder. The cabin was a small, plain, but comfortable interior, with several sleeping berths opening off it. Passing through a short passage, we entered the oil-room, whose odour I had noticed directly on coming below. Four tanks stood ranged against the bulkhead, each capable of holding a hundred and fifty gallons of oil. From the beams above hung rows of spare lamps and reflectors. Passing out of this compartment, we came to the 'tween decks, where stood the powerful clock-work machinery which revolves the lantern. Beyond lay the fore-castle, which I also visited, and found it a commonplace sailors' living room, furnished with hammocks, lockers, and a table cleated to the deck.

Four men sat below here, one of them building a little model by the light of a bright swinging lamp



" ' THAT IS A SPLENDID SIGNAL ' " (p. 186).

and the others puffing at their pipes and watching him. I took notice of their smart and seamanlike aspect.

"Tell me," said I, addressing the man who was building the model, "how you mainly occupy your time on board this vessel?"

"Why, sir," he answered, "those amongst us that have got any skill amuse ourselves by making mats, work-boxes, little articles of furniture, and toys such as this. Then there's a tidy library aboard. In summer-time pleasure-boats frequently come alongside, and throw us parcels of newspapers, which are very welcome, to be sure."

"What sort of food do you get?"

"Ordinary shipboard fare, but the best of its sort. The Trinity House biscuit is famous, I believe, for its excellence."

We returned to the deck again. It was quite dark now : a stormy night, with a shrill blustering of wind on high and a roaring of waters over the side. The effect of the great mist of light shed by the lamp upon the gloom was remarkable. For ever the long

spokes of luminous silver continued to sweep round the orbit of the shadowy mast, lighting up a broad patch of pale waters upon the inky surface of the deep wherever the labouring of the hull flung the shafts of radiance like great moonbeams over the foaming billows.

The tempestuous noise going on around took a new significance when I glanced in the direction of the fitful glare made by the breakers raging upon the Goodwins away out abeam. I cannot express the sense of deep loneliness that came to me as I strained my sight in the direction of the reef, and thought of the little ribbed islets which would now be showing their heads above the creaming race of the ebbing tide.

Those sands on such a night would be the very embodiment of the spirit of solitude. The desolation of a silent ice-island, floating pale under the straggling moonbeams down in the far reaches of the Antarctic Ocean, could not be profounder than the weird loneliness of yonder reef, whose yellow grains conceal greater treasure than the coffers of a hundred Oriental princes, and bury the bones of more sailors than manned the combined fleets at Trafalgar.

I inquired of the mate what depth of water the *Gull* was moored in, and he replied, About eight fathoms. The vessel at that moment giving an unusually heavy lurch, that sent me staggering against the bulwarks, I said—

“You must occasionally get some wild tumbling about?”

“It grows terrific at times. You see, we’re but a small ship—I can’t tell you our burthen off-hand, but it’s a trifle under two hundred tons—and being very light, there’s nothing to stop the little hooker from cutting capers when a really heavy sea is set running.”

“I suppose,” said I, “that lightsmen must see a great deal of shipwreck in the course of their professional career?”

“Ah, sir! that’s one of the greatest hardships of our calling. It’s a bitter, bad job for a man to have to stand idle, watching a vessel go to pieces, near enough to hear the cries of drowning sailors. I’ve seen some weird and awful sights in that way on tempestuous nights, when the gleam of our flash-light has regularly thrown out the shadowy shape of some vessel hard and fast ashore yonder, her canvas streaming in tatters from the yards, and the spray bursting over her in clouds. Yet one of our most particular rules is that we must not leave our vessel on any pretext whatever. A ship’s company may be perishing within easy reach of us, but we can do no more than fire guns, send up rockets, and pray that the lifeboat may not be long in coming. On the whole, it’s a wise and proper regulation. The desire to save life is very strong, particularly amongst seafaring men; but what could we do with a cockle-shell like that in such seas as run out here?”

And he pointed to a little double-ended boat hanging at the davits.

At the mast-head, above the lantern, was hoisted a large, red-painted ball. I inquired the purpose of it.

“It is a distinguishing mark,” responded my companion. “For example, the *Gull* is known by her one red ball, the *East Goodwin* by a diamond with a triangle over it, and the *North Sand Head* by three red balls. The Trinity House vary the designs of these signals as much as possible. The *Calshot* shows two red triangles, one on each mast; the *Tongue* and the *Nore* both carry black balls; the *Long Sand* a large red diamond; the *Knock* a large red ball surmounted by a small one; the *Duke of Edinburgh* half a red ball; and so forth. There’s utility in the plan, for a shipmaster spying a lightship too far off to read the letters of her name can tell by her masthead signals, which show clear against the sky, what vessel she is.”

We continued chatting in this fashion till it grew late, and the mate asked me whether I would like to go below and turn in.

“There’s a berth at your service,” said he. “You’ll not care to keep the deck all night long, I suppose?”

I answered that I should be glad to go and lie down; on which he conducted me to a mere box of a sea bedroom. Stretching myself along in the bunk or sleeping-shelf, I lay for a great while, listening to the strange groaning and creaking sounds arising from the wooden walls, and thinking of the inexpressible service to navigation rendered by the gallant fabric tossing under me, and her little crew of brave hearts, with eyes always peering out into the darkness around in search of any ship which should mistake the significance of the noble beacon that flashed forth its warning across the tumbling waters.

My experience had not, indeed, proved a very eventful one; there had been no wrecks, no occasion to fire guns and send up rockets and blue lights. Yet I would not have missed spending those few hours on board the *Gull* for a great deal. I had gained an insight into a phase of the longshore life of our coasts concerning which but very little is known. To most dwellers by the seashore the lightship is an object as familiar as the coast she guards; yet how many, as they gaze forth at the tiny spark, burning bright and clear on a breathless summer night, or fitfully flickering in the howling blackness of a winter tempest, let their thoughts go out to the men who form the crew of the brave old craft?

It needs that sympathy which can only come from understanding the sort of perils that beset him to be able to appreciate what a devoted and heroic calling that of the lightshipman really is.

Thus musing, I presently fell asleep. When next I opened my eyes it was broad daylight, and the mate was standing in the cabin with his hand upon my shoulder, telling me that the Deal galley-punt was again alongside, and waiting to convey me ashore.