

## THE PHANTOM SAILOR.

### I.

ONE sunny afternoon in October, just after the village school had been dismissed for the day, a sailor-like young fellow, apparently about twenty-five years old, sauntered down the main street of Fairport, Maine. The town, an old-fashioned sea-port, now dead and dull, but in those far-off days tolerably active and bustling, is nestled on the side of a promontory which slopes to the bay on the east and to a series of coves and inlets on the west. The promontory is joined to the main-land by a narrow isthmus in the midst of a marsh, and the only highway from the town to the rest of the world passes over a narrow bridge built on the aforesaid neck of land, a canal having been cut across it by the British troops during the occupation of the place in the war of the Revolution. So, when the townfolk beheld the stranger walking down their main street, they knew that, unless he had dropped from the skies, he must have come into the village over the neck and up the hill.

He was a handsome young fellow, with curly hair, and with a face tanned and roughened by the winds of many seas. He wore canvas trowsers, once white, a checked shirt with a wide-rolling collar, and a blue jacket cut and trimmed in what is known as "man-o'-war" style. On his head, jauntily cocked over his dark curls, was a flat knit cap without a visor, and of the pattern known as Scotch. He was in light walking trim, this sea-faring stranger, carrying over his shoulder, lightly swinging from a stout stick, a bundle of "dunnage" tied in a bandana handkerchief.

Into the back of his right hand had been pricked with a needle a female figure in red, presumably the Goddess of Liberty, leaning on a blue anchor. In the middle of his left hand was a cruel scar, that looked as if it might have been made by the thrust of a cutlass or a boarding-pike.

We boys had just been let out of school, and, whooping and racing down the common, in a very ecstasy of animal spirits, we were confronted by this somewhat unusual apparition. For, since the steam-frigate *Missouri* had made a short call at the old port, several years before, nothing like a man-o'-war's man had been seen in town. The sailors of the fishing fleet, which was then wont to flit in and out of the port, were untidy and rough, and were clad, for the most part, in odds and

ends of garments which were, as one might say, amphibious, since they were worn in farming time as well as on their short sea voyages. An occasional ship from Cadiz or Liverpool, with a cargo of salt, brought only a gang of sailors who never staid in Fairport long enough to show any shore clothes, if they had them. This alert young stranger, with his rolling gait and seaman-like rig, instantly arrested and fascinated our boyish attention. We seemed to be brought face to face with the romance of the seas. Here was a bronze-cheeked man who brought with him from distant shores the odor of spices and the briny wave. He had seen strange countries, perhaps had fought pirates, nay, had possibly been cast away on coral reefs or in the maelstroms of the northern seas.

"Hullo, youngsters!" he said, with a flourish of his hand and an indescribable roll in his voice, as if it, too, partook of the undulating motion of the sea. So saying, he turned from Main street into elm-shaded and grassy Court street, followed at a distance by a small and curious mob of boys. Village boys have a certain frank inquisitiveness which cannot be repressed by any conventional notions, and which is very different from the curiosity of all other boys beneath the heavens, so far as my observation goes. A stranger in their village is like a new planet swimming into the ken of an astronomer. He must be watched, studied, and assigned his place in the phenomena of nature. So, when the sea-farer turned the corner by the town-house, and walked down Howe's Lane, every boy within sight ran after him and watched him until he unhesitatingly entered the cottage of old Mother Hubbard.

Lest I do despite to the memory of an estimable old mother in Israel, now long since departed this life, let me say that Mrs. Hubbard was the widow of the captain of a fishing smack, the *John and Eliza*, wrecked on the Banks, with all on board, in 1841, during the gale which is even now remembered with terror by the people of the New England coast. One of the Hubbard boys, Elkanah, was lost in the wreck of *The Chariot of Fame*, off the Bermudas, five years after, and the widowed woman, left with but one child, had vainly tried to keep the young man at home. But Lafayette Hubbard ran away to sea in the bark *Tonquin* six years before the sailor of my tale walked down the village street,

and he had never been heard of from that day to this.

Mother Hubbard grew gray, wrinkled and sad. She took in washing, went out among the neighbors in times of sickness and death, doing such chores as are most likely to fall to the needy and willing hands of a lone and childless widow. If she sometimes paused in the wringing of her clothes to wipe a salt tear that trickled down her nose, or if she turned her face hungrily toward the shining sea, while walking to and fro with some other woman's sick baby, it was because she was thinking of the absent and long-wandering boy. But beyond this, she made no sign of the mourning mother-love that slept within her aged breast. The neighbors, kindly belying their own convictions, would sometimes tell her that Lafayette might be alive and well in some far-off corner of the world, and that he would yet come home to make her old age happy. But there were too many vacant places in the family circles of Fairport, made by wrecks that had never sent a token of the lost ones, for Mother Hubbard to cherish any hope. Her sorrow was common enough; and so she said, as many another bereft one said, "I shall see him again when the sea gives up its dead."

In front of Mother Hubbard's door grew clumps of hollyhocks, red, white, and yellow. A few of these lingered yet on their tall stems, although the frosts had come. Standing afar off, we saw the sailor pluck one of the bright flowers, look into it with a smile, and cast it from him. Then he knocked on the door sharply with his brown knuckles, and, as soon as it was opened, he strode in and shut it behind him. Drawing near, we heard a crying and a sobbing within, mingled with the tones of a deep, manly voice. Mother Hubbard, as if she had heard the childish murmurs outside, came to the window and let down the green-slatted shade. But we saw that there were tears on her cheeks.

From lip to lip the rumor spread: Lafayette Hubbard had come home. He had brought a handkerchief full of gold, and gems, and precious things. He had been captured by a pirate, and had served on a slave-trader. He had also been on board of a man-o'-war, and had seen and heard all that was incident to a wandering sailor's life. It was as delightful as a story-book. Long time we boys hung around Mother Hubbard's cottage, waiting for the fascinating sailor to come forth and show himself. Some of the smaller boys grew tired of the long suspense, and went home to their bread-and-milk; for the short autumnal day was waning apace.

What went on in that weather-beaten little

cottage none of us ever knew. But, as we whiled away the time with knuckle-down and mumble-the-peg, there grew a feeling that this might not be Lafayette Hubbard, after all. Perhaps he was only a wayfarer who had met him at sea and had come to bring tidings of the lost one. Perhaps—awful thought!—he had seen Lafayette die in a distant foreign land, and had mercifully come to relieve the poor mother of all uncertainty of her boy's fate. As these speculations grew, the door opened, and the young sailor settled all our doubts by saying, "I wont be gone long, mother." Then he kissed her withered cheek, and we knew that Lafayette Hubbard had come home at last.

The abashed boys slunk away from the stranger, who smiled cheerily and kindly at them as he lightly swung out of the little front yard, and so down Howe's Lane to Water street. Good Mother Hubbard, with a shining face, looked after the sailor as he went down the steep lane, smiling and whispering to herself.

"Is that 'Fayette?" asked three or four boys at once.

"Yes, that's my boy," said the widow, with a little thrill of pride in her voice. "And I'm sure I'm dreadful thankful to the Lord that he has come home ag'in to his poor old mother. Thank the Lord for all His mercies! I give him up long ago. But it's him! It's him!"

Mother Hubbard did not commonly encourage the approach of the village boys. We all felt that she was happier when no boy was near her clothes-line laden with snowy linen. She seemed to think that a boy was a destructive and a soiler of all that was bright and clean. Bad boys stoned her hens, and other boys, not so bad, had sometimes trampled down her southernwood and camomile. But her joy now was great. She took us into her little cottage and showed to our wondering eyes a whale's tooth, elaborately carved and etched with designs of sea-monsters and mermaids. There was likewise a marvelous handkerchief, as it seemed to us, rainbow-tinted and sheeny in the sun.

"Almost too gay for his poor old mother's neck," said the widow, pensively, as she held it up to the light. "Then there is a bunch of coral, the rale red coral, boys, not the common white stuff," said the old woman. "Wal, now, I just wonder what has become of that coral," said she, musingly looking around. "Wal, I guess Lafayette put it away somewheres."

And she mentioned the name of her long-lost boy with a certain unction which even we youngsters could not help noticing.

Sammy Hodgson, who always was a forward

chap, asked the dame where Lafayette had been so many years. Mother Hubbard took a pinch of snuff, and said, as if addressing some far-off person :

"I s'pose six years seems like an eternity to these younkers,—but, dear me ! dear me ! it don't seem long to an old woman who has seen so many days and full of trouble." Then rallying herself, as it were, she explained. "Wal, you see, boys, Lafayette was took a prisoner on board one of them pirate ships that trade and plunder off the coast of Madagascar. He was sold into slavery somewheres onto the main-land, Afriky, I s'pose, and he didn't get a chance to get away until about a year ago, and ever since that he has been expectin' to come home to his poor old mother. Thanks be to the good Lord, he's come at last ; and I'm too glad to ask any more questions, just now. He's goin' to overhaul his log, as he calls it, and reel me off the whole story, as soon's he gets rested."

This was delightful. We should hear "the whole story," too, some of these days. Meanwhile, the sailor who had been in the hands of the pirates, and had been sold into slavery on the coast of Africa, had gone down the lane, so his mother said, to see some of his old friends who lived on Water street. He staid at home only long enough to be sure that his mother was alive and well, and to assure her of his being the identical Lafayette Hubbard who had been gone away to sea for six years. There was the scar on his left hand, the scar of a cruel wound ; how well she remembered it ! and how well he remembered it ! that scar made by a fish-hook fastened by some malicious boy in the back-stay of the ship *Nautilus*, so that when 'Fayette slid down that way to escape the ship's keeper, he was caught in his hand.

"Dear suz me !" mused the old woman, "that seems only a day or two ago, and it's going on fourteen year !"

The sailor-man, turning to the left at the bottom of Howe's Lane, had walked along the street which skirted the bank overhanging the old wooden wharves of the port. Under the bank were cooper-shops, blacksmith-shops, and the like, and along its edge was a row of shabby cottages, the homes of fishermen, longshoremen, and people who constituted the lower stratum of Fairport society. Into the house of the Drinkwaters the young sailor walked without so much as saying "by your leave."

The head of the Drinkwater family was the wife of old Bill Drinkwater, a dissolute and worthless elderly man, who lounged about in the sunshine, on the wharves, and under the fences, in the summer-time, and who often

found his way into the poor-house in the winter. He was a ne'er-do-weel, but harmless, the butt of the mischievous boys of the port, and an object of contempt to everybody else, including even his wife, a shrill-voiced termagant, who was the terror of the neighborhood. The eldest boy of the family, Bill, was one of the absent lads of the town who had gone to sea and never had been heard of more. Bill, restive under the lashing of his mother's tongue, and ashamed of his father's vagabond habits, had shipped on board an English bark that had put into port, nine years before, with a cargo of salt. Beginning as a cabin-boy, when he had last been heard from he had worked his way up to be able seaman. But this had been four years before, and, in the meantime, news had come that he was on board the United States frigate *Preble*, which, as the reader may remember, was wrecked in the Bay of Biscay, in 1842.

Two of the boys who had attended the sailor to the door of Mother Hubbard's cottage had followed him afar off as he walked down the lane. Lafayette had gone to see the Drinkwaters. He had undoubtedly brought tidings of the missing William ! He had possibly seen him in foreign lands. Perhaps Bill and 'Fayette had been in captivity together. The thought was too enchanting to be seriously entertained. While Nathan Dyer and Sylvanus Crawford stood and watched the shabby and dirty old house into which 'Fayette had disappeared, the door opened, and four or five of the numerous white-headed brood of Drinkwater children came tearing out and ran, a confused mob, toward the cooper-shop, where old Bill chanced to be employed for the day.

"Our Bill's got home !" shrieked the biggest of the train, Sal Drinkwater, a long-legged girl of nine years. She had heard of her absent brother Bill, but never until this day had she laid eyes on him. "Our Bill's got home !" she cried to the neighborhood, as she sped down the bank, followed by five or six tow-headed infants of assorted sizes.

"Why, Vene, he's an impostor !" said Nathan, looking at Sylvanus, with distended eyes. An impostor, I think, was really more novel and more captivating to the imagination than a sailor who had been shipwrecked, taken by pirates, and sold into slavery. There was something horribly fascinating about an impostor. But why should we think that 'Fayette Hubbard, otherwise Bill Drinkwater, was an impostor ? Perhaps there was a mistake somewhere.

By the time that old Drinkwater, rather the worse for liquor, had unsteadily scrambled up the bank, attended by a band of gabbling

infants, several of the boys who had been inspecting the premises of Mother Hubbard arrived on the scene and learned from Nathan and Sylvanus all that had been said and done. An excited company of lads accompanied old Drinkwater to his door. The aged vagabond was snuffing and sobbing.

"Yes," he said, "my pore Bill's come home to his pore old father. I hope's he's brought means with him so's t' keep his pore old father out of the pore-house, come winter."

"Taint Bill Drinkwater no more than I am," said Sammy Hodgson, stoutly. "It's 'Fayette Hubbard, if it's anybody. He's just been up to Mother Hubbard's, and she told us it was 'Fayette."

"Hey! what's that, you young bunch of oakum?" cried Bill Drinkwater, senior. "Not our Bill? Shet your head! I tell you, it's our Bill come home to his pore old father." And so, grumbling, and wiping his eyes on the cuff of his tarry shirt-sleeve, old Bill stumbled into his own door. Marm Drinkwater, as she was generally called in the town, appeared on the threshold, and, with an angry face, assisted old Bill into the house, saying, as she did so:

"Drunk ag'in! it's jist what Bill said he expected to see when he seen you at home."

The door was closed on the excited family group, and the boys, standing at a safe distance from the house, held a colloquy as to what should be done. Some of the bolder ones were for going to Mr. Woods, the town constable, to lodge a complaint against "the impostor." Others thought the selectmen were the most proper persons to be waited upon. But Jo Murch, making a speaking-trumpet of his hands, in the sailor fashion which was appropriate to the occasion, shouted at the house, "Impostor! come out and show yourself!"

At this, the greater portion of the boys turned and ran a little way to await developments. Marm Drinkwater, scowling, came to the door. Shaking her fist at the panic-stricken huddle of boys, she cried:

"It's my Bill who has come home, ef you want to know. He's no impostor, I say. Ef any on you boys stay 'round here insultin' decent people, I'll break every bone in your bodies. Don't I know my own flesh and blood? Now, you jest clear out o' this!"

Greatly puzzled, and not without reasonable fears of Marm Drinkwater, the boys reluctantly sauntered off toward the village stores, which stood all in a row at the foot of Main street. Some of the smaller lads went home, for it was nearly sundown, and the hour for supper was at hand.

While we were eagerly telling to those who would hear our strange tale of the sailor-man, Sal Drinkwater, the long-legged daughter of the family before mentioned, trotted along the dusty street with a yellow pitcher in her hand.

"Hullo!" cried Sammy Hodgson, "you've got an impostor down to your house!"

"I don't know what you mean by an impostor," said the girl. "It's our Bill. He's come home from Hijero, or some such place, and Pa has sent me over to Stearns's for a pint of rum. So, now! And there's the money that our Bill give me to pay for it." And the child, crossing the street, exhibited in the dirty palm of her hand, but with evident suspicion of the boys, a big silver dollar of Spanish coinage. "Now, then, I guess you're satisfied. Impositors don't sling 'round big silver dollars like that, do they?" And, so saying, Sal pranced away, proud of being the sister of a sailor who had come home from strange countries, after many years.

Mother Hubbard, getting out her slender stock of best china, and drawing from its retreat her only jar of preserved quinces,—for 'Fayette had always had a sweet tooth,—had made ready as inviting a supper for the returned prodigal as could be furnished forth from her stores. The pickles and the quinces were on the table, with the thin slivers of dried beef, and the brown loaf of Saturday's baking. Before the open fire-place was a tin of hot biscuits neatly covered with a towel, and the mingled and delightful odors of Young Hyson tea and toasted red herrings were diffused around.

The sun had set behind the fort, the revenue cutter in the harbor had hauled down her flag, and old Fitts, the barber, who never allowed a lighted lamp inside his shop, was closing his shutters. In Marm Drinkwater's house, a swarm of hungry and expectant children hung around a table on which unwonted luxuries were spread. The Drinkwater children were always hungry, but they had not been so expectant as now since last Thanksgiving-day, when they had had a real turkey for dinner. This was a festal occasion. Bill had come home. There was cake on the table, likewise white bread, and ham and eggs were frying on the stove. Bill had gone out to see some of the neighbors, leaving behind him a painted snuff-box of radiant colors, brought from foreign parts for his mother, who was always fond of snuff, as Bill well knew. And he had not forgotten to fill the box with the finest Maccaboy, a small bottle of which was also included in his slender kit of gifts. For Sal, born since he went to sea, he had brought a handful of shells—love-shells, they were called, delicate

pink and white, with a golden tint through the same.

And, while Mother Hubbard's supper waited and the biscuits grew cold, and while Marm Drinkwater, having carefully covered the ham and eggs to keep them from the eager fingers of her young ones, gazed down the street and softly scolded to herself, Lafayette Hubbard, otherwise Bill Drinkwater, sat happily smiling in the poor and tidy room of Aunt Sukey Morey. We all called her Aunt Sukey, although she was neither aunt nor mother to any one living in Fairport. Her "old man," as she used to call him, was lost at sea, years before, when her only child, Obadiah, was a baby. Obe Morey had grown up, and, not finding congenial work on the land, had gone to sea. He had come and gone on many a safe and prosperous voyage, until one dark and fatal year, when many a young life had been sucked down into the treacherous sea. It was while fishing on the Grand Banks, seven years before, that the *Two Sisters* was run down by a full-rigged ship, staggering along under double-reefed top-sails, for a gale was blowing, and the night was thick where the little "bankers" were riding on the fishing-grounds. Adam Bridges, the boy of the schooner's company, was picked up, sole survivor of the crew, and was brought into Thomaston by one of the fleet a few weeks afterward. Aunt Sukey heard the dread news with calmness. She was "used to sorrer," she said, and, in the hearing of the towns-folk, she made no lamentation. Her straw bonnet had been decked with a bit of black for many a long year, and the only sign of her newer grief was a narrow slab of gray marble in the burying-ground, on which was cut a suitable inscription, ending simply with "Lost at Sea."

And now, in the old Morey house, which stood at the far end of the village street, the last one in the straggling row, the young sailor sat, smiling happily, while Aunt Sukey stroked his cheek, softly crying, under her breath, "My son, my son, which was dead and is alive again!"

In that strange and inexplicable way in which news gets about a little village, it was speedily known at the other end of the street that Obe Morey had returned from sea. At least, a sailor who resembled Obe had been seen going into the widow's home. He had also been seen chopping wood in the little shed where Aunt Sukey stored her fuel, and when he went into the house carrying an armful of stove-wood, Mercy Mullett, unable longer to restrain her curiosity, made an errand into Aunt Sukey's house. While the old woman was filling a tea-cup with the molasses, to bor-

row which Mercy pretended to have come, the sly young girl had kept her eyes about her. On the table was a bunch of bright red coral, and a bandana handkerchief, which, as Mercy Mullett well knew, had never before been in Aunt Sukey Morey's possession.

"This is my boy Obed, Mercy. You don't remember my boy Obed, do you? No? Well, I thought not. Land sakes alive! it's a long time since he was lost to me. Well, Mercy, this is Obed. The good Lord has sent him back to me." And the old woman beamed over the cup of molasses, which the girl nearly spilled on the floor as she stared at the handsome young sailor, who sat and smiled—only smiled—as if amused by Mercy Mullett's confusion.

Alonzo Mullett, a contemporary of Obed Morey, hearing this report from his sister, refused to go into the cottage of the Morey family, now happily reunited. He straightway went over to Hatch's store and told all that he had heard. Four boys, lingering around the store, drank in with eager ears the tale narrated by Alonzo. It was not possible that this fascinating young sailor could be the long-lost son of three several women, although each had lost a son at sea, and each had acknowledged him as her own. It was too much for human belief.

It was also too much for the patience of four honest boys. Something must be done to unmask the impostor, for such it was now decided that the stranger must needs be. And so, as the sea fog was creeping over the town, this volunteer police force proceeded to Aunt Sukey's. The light of a tallow candle shed its little ray from the window of the house as the boys drew near. The sky beyond was gray with night and fog, and no sound was heard but the ceaseless murmur of the tide upon the beach.

A hurried council being held, four boys set up a shrill and incoherent yell. There was no reply. Then Sammy Hodgson, throwing into his piping voice as much manliness of tone as he could command, cried, "Bill Drinkwater! come out and show yourself!" There was something awesome and uncanny in this irreverent invocation to the name of one who had long since been numbered with the dead, and when the door was thrown open and the sailor rushed forth into the darkness and the fog, each individual boy took to his heels and ran as if for his life; nor did they stop until each one was safe at home, where he told this tale.

Aunt Sukey had been bustling about her narrow room, making ready a late supper, for she had partaken of an early and frugal

tea before her long-lost Obed had shown himself at her door. While she chatted with him, learning of his strange adventures on the Spanish main, where he had been cast away twice, and where he had been severely ill with the Panama fever, she toasted a bit of salt codfish, pounded it soft with a mortar-pestle, buttered it, and put it by the fire; and, while she was carefully measuring off a drawing of tea, using the top of the tea-caddy for a measure, smiling to think that she need not be so economical, now that Obed had come home, a shrill cry, as in derision of her joy, rose on the evening air without.

"Land sakes alive!" she cried. "What's them pesky boys up to now, I wonder?"

Then, as she wondered, she heard, with a chilly shiver creeping over her, Sam Hodgson's demand that Bill Drinkwater, Bill Drinkwater who had been drowned at sea, should come forth.

She put down the tea-caddy, dropping some of the precious grains of her Souchong as she did so, and looked at the young sailor. With something that sounded like an oath, he seized his cap, and dashed out of the door; and he never was seen in Fairport from that day to this.

## II.

ELEVEN years afterward, I had completed my education in school, academy, and college, and was at work, with all the kindling ambition of a tyro, on the great New England newspaper, which my readers will recall (at least the elder ones will), when I mention the name of "The Palladium." It was my ambition, secretly confided only to my own heart and to Angelina, to be the editor-in-chief of "The Palladium." But that consummation, so devoutly wished, was very far off, even to the most sanguine of young reporters "working on space" and paid at a very low rate indeed. But nothing is impossible to a young fellow who has his fortune to carve out for himself, and who has, as I had at that time of life, a strong imagination and vigorous health. Moreover, Angelina's father, who was employed in the custom-house, under a Whig administration, had promised us that we should be married when I should be promoted to a "regular sit," which meant that this desired event could only take place when I was on a regular salary. So, of course, a great deal was possible, for a great deal was to be done.

The crisis came for me most unexpectedly one wild and stormy March evening. I had planned to help Charley Whiting on the musical and dramatic that night, for that would

give me a chance to take Angelina to see Warren, and I had promised to call for her if Charley would only agree to my proposition.

At half-past six, just as Charley came panting up the stairs that led to the editorial rooms, old Sanger came out of his den with a bit of ship news in his hand. Sanger was usually known as "Old Salt," for he was the shipping-news editor, and knew, or thought he knew, more about ships, shipping, and navigation than any other living man. Seating himself carelessly on one corner of the musical and dramatic desk (and only Old Salt and the editor-in-chief were allowed this familiarity), Mr. Sanger asked:

"Does anybody in the city room know anything about the reported fall of the Sargent's Ledge light-house?"

Of course, nobody knew anything of the kind. If he had, it would have been his duty to tell of it as soon as he could run to the office. For "The Palladium" prided itself on being ahead of every other newspaper in the United States, not to say the world. Jerry Collins did say, however, that there was a rumor down among the wharves and docks that Sargent's Ledge light had gone down in the March gale that had prevailed for three days past. But Jerry, who was a born newspaper man, and who, poor fellow! was killed at Port Hudson years afterward, while in General Banks's command, had not been content to abandon this as a rumor until he had run the thing down to what seemed to have been merely the statement of an ancient mariner that "if this here gale continued, Sargent's Ledge light would hev to go."

Then Old Salt read, with great deliberation, from his slip as follows: "Herm. brig *William & Sally*, from Fairport, Maine, with a cargo of codfish to Hemmenway and Sons, February 27, reports heavy weather outside; shipped a sea in N. W. Channel, and lost one able seaman, Timothy Holbrook, overboard; also deck-load of lumber. The light on Sargent's Ledge was not burning. Snow flying thick at the time, and heavy sea running."

"The skipper of the *William & Sally* may have been deceived," said Mr. Sanger, shaving his cheek with the edge of his right hand, as was his wont, while he scrutinized the bit of paper before him. "He may have been deceived, for the snow was blinding, and it must have been dusk when he passed Sargent's Ledge, off Sequansett."

The old man, solemn with importance, passed into the chief's room, from which there presently came a summons for Jerry Collins to appear. There was a long and anxious consultation, at the end of which

the chief came forth, followed by Old Salt and Jerry.

"There is a reasonable ground for believing that Sargent's Ledge light-house has been swept away by the gale," said the editor-in-chief, "and it is very important that 'The Palladium' should have the facts. I have decided to send one of you young gentlemen to Sequansett to ascertain the facts. Mr. Guild, what time does the next train for Sequansett leave the Old Colony depot?"

Mr. Guild consulted the time-table and said:

"Half-past six, sir."

"Half-past six!" said the chief, with a faint show of excitement. "Half-past six! Why, zounds, sir, it is now twenty-seven minutes past!"

Guild bowed his head meekly, as if he were responsible for the lateness of the hour, and murmured:

"True, sir."

"And this is the last train to-night, I take it, Mr. Guild?"

"No other train out until eight-twenty tomorrow morning, sir," answered Guild, sadly.

A solemn stillness prevailed in the office, and we could hear the ticking of the old clock in the tower far above our heads. It was, indeed, a crisis. In those days there were no telegraphic wires ramifying through every part of the country. One line connected two or three of the largest cities on the Atlantic sea-board, and over this we had, every night while Congress was in session, at least two hundred words, giving the fullest summary of all the important news from the national capital. There were very few railroads, and many queer devices, unknown in these modern days, were resorted to by the news-gatherers. Our European advices were sent from Cape Race by carrier-pigeons, and the arrival of an ocean steamer mail, with a new part of one of Charles Dickens's stories, was an event to be celebrated by the issue of an extra edition of "The Palladium."

But here was a bare possibility of Sargent's Ledge light-house being destroyed, and "The Palladium" would be obliged to come out in the morning with nothing more than a paragraph beginning with that hateful phrase, "It is rumored." It was not to be thought of. Sargent's Ledge light-house was one of the wonders of modern engineering and architecture. It was built on a set of iron stilts, so to speak, the iron bars being sunk deep into a ledge of rock, and the light-house perched at the apex of the structure, like a martin-box at the top of a pole. There must be a light on Sargent's Ledge, and the contriver of this structure had offered to show his

faith in its power to endure the storms of the Atlantic by taking up his permanent residence in the house. But there were reasons why this handsome offer could not be accepted. And now to think that the famous light-house should be swept away, and "The Palladium" not be able to say anything about it next morning! The thought was madness.

"We'll have a special engine!" cried the chief.

It was as if we had had an electric shock. Every man started, and each was only restrained by the severe discipline of the office from crying "hurrah!" In those far-off days, newspapers did not run special trains or have special dispatches, and the determination of our illustrious chief to hire a special locomotive to go to Sequansett for the verification of a rumor was Napoleonic.

"What is the run to Sequansett, Mr. Guild?" asked the chief.

"An hour and forty minutes, sir," said Guild.

"An hour and forty minutes will give us time to spend two hours in Sequansett gathering the news, if there is any (and let us hope there is none)," said the chief, reverently, "and time to get back to the office at one o'clock in the morning. Mr. Gay, you may keep back the forms until two-fifteen—not one minute later. We shall be back in time to have the facts, whatever they may be, in every edition of the paper."

This was decisive and to the point. But the chief had not intimated who was to go on the expedition of high emprise. I thought of Angelina and of Angelina's father's promise, and perhaps I showed in my expression my eagerness to go. Looking around the office, with a queer air of searching for somebody, the chief said:

"We will give this task to the youngest man on the paper. Mr. Rivers, take your instructions from Mr. Gay. Go to the publication office for money to pay your incidental expenses. I shall send Mr. Oliver at once to the station to engage the locomotive to carry you on your journey, and I wish you great success and as pleasant a trip as can be expected under the circumstances." So saying, the chief turned and reentered his private office.

To say I was delighted at my unexpected good luck, even transported, would faintly describe my elation. My associates crowded around me with hurried congratulations, wishing me success, and expressing their envy of my great good fortune. I felt like a young Columbus, fitted out with a fleet and gifted with all the means for a voyage of discovery.

"What if there is nothing in the rumor?" Of course it was Guild who threw this damper

on my spirits. Guild was always saying unpleasant things.

"Then 'The Palladium' will be the only paper to say to-morrow morning that there is no truth in the rumor that Sargent's Ledge light has been destroyed," said Old Salt, proudly.

"Good for you, Old Salt!" cried Jerry Collins. "Spoken like a true newspaper man. We will have a display head, whatever happens. It will be a big sensation, anyhow; and the old 'Palladium,' as usual, will lay over all the other papers."

But there was no time for idle talk. I must be away from the station by seven o'clock, at the very farthest, and every minute now was precious. I had no time to go to see Angelina, but I scribbled a line to her on the back of a visiting-card as I rumbled and rolled in an omnibus that took me half a square from my lodgings. I informed Angelina that I had been sent out of town on a most important errand, and that we must give up seeing Warren, for that night, at least. My landlady's son, a freckled-faced urchin of tender years, was glad to run with this message, stimulated by a promise of handsome reward. With joy and excitement I hurried on a few extra wraps, for the night was bitter cold, and I was soon rushing out of the Old Colony depot on a locomotive bound for Sequansett.

There is no need to tell of the flying and exciting trip to the south shore. The engine rocked from side to side, unbalanced as she was by any weight of train. The snow flew over the roof of the little cab in which we were ensconced, the engineer and the fireman taking turns at keeping a lookout ahead. But there was no danger of a collision: we had the road to ourselves until next morning at eight-twenty. There was no telegraph wire, however, to warn of our coming, and it was within the bounds of possibility that some other special engine might be out in the thick, dark night on a mysterious errand. Breathless we sped along, plunging into the darkness, shooting through quiet and sleeping villages, or anon rushing past a red light in the storm which showed where some tavern-tiplers were lingering over their hot toddy, loath to go home.

I dozed in a corner of the cab, even the excitement of the trip failing to keep me awake, for I had been up late the night before, and the monotony of the rattle of the locomotive lulled me to sleep. The hour and forty minutes stretched to two hours before the engineer, shaking me by the shoulder, cried, "Look sharp, young feller, we're coming into Sequansett medders."

Sure enough, I recognized the long stretch

of salt meadows, now dimly seen through the driving snow, which skirt the ancient town of Sequansett. The engine was slowed up as we rumbled over the bridge that spans Smith's Run, when the fireman, turning his gaze seaward for an instant, cried, "By Jehosaphat! the light's gone out on Sargent's Ledge!"

The village of Sequansett was as quiet as the grave when we rattled into the engine-yard near the station, to the great amazement of the only watchman on duty. To this man, rough and amphibious in appearance, I at once addressed myself.

"Tell me," I said, with an anxious feeling that my errand might, after all, be bootless, "how about Sargent's Ledge light? Has anything happened to it?"

"Happened to it?" said the cynical half-salt, half-farmer, "wal, yes, she's gone to pieces, slick and clean; nothin' left but a passel of crooked braces. But you can't see 'em—too thick to see anything."

Then it was true! My journey had not been undertaken for nothing. "The Palladium" would have the only account of the loss of Sargent's Ledge light, to-morrow morning. But how to get that account! The Amphibious could not tell me anything about it. He only knew that the light-house was gone, and that the people in the village could not have seen it go, even if they had been watching for the catastrophe. The weather had been thick for two days. "As thick as all possessed," the Amphibious said. It had been reported, however, that Dan More, "a lobsterer," who lived at the edge of the shore, "just beyond the ma'sh," knew something of the affair. It was said that he had seen the light-house fall.

"Was not anybody saved from the people in the light?"

"Nary one. Seven on 'em. Not one ever heerd on since the storm set in. Pore critters! They all went together."

From the Amphibious I learned the way to Dan More's hut, a lonely habitation where lived a recluse, in ill repute with the villagers, who seemed to resent his solitariness as something like a personal slight upon the whole body politic. He was "sort of shaky in his upper story," the Amphibious said, plainly meaning that he was different from all the rest of the villagers in his non-communicativeness. Here was an unpromising subject for an enterprising reporter. But the difficulty of the situation only inspired me with new zeal as, leaving directions with the engineer as to our future movements, I pushed my way across a dreary waste of snow.

After a long struggle with the blasts that



blew across the shore and marsh, and with the uneven and half-obliterated road to the beach, breathless and tired, I reached the door of a cabin, one half of which had been adapted from a ship's caboose and the rest from the spoil of farmers' fences, and all of which was as black and forbidding as a witch's hovel. A vigorous knock on the door of the hut brought no response. A few kicks and thumps were no more successful. All was darkness and silence. Perhaps the old man was not at home. And he was the only person who could give "The Palladium" the account that must be printed to-morrow morning!

I tried the latch of the door. It was fast, but the rattle of this primitive contrivance evidently aroused the solitary inmate, for he called out:

"Hullo, there!"

"Does Mr. Daniel More live here?" was my answer.

"No, but old Dan More lives here," was the surly reply, and I heard the creaking of boards, as though somebody was getting out of bed and shuffling over the floor. Then there was an unbarring of the door, and, by the light of the snow, I caught a glimpse of a shaggy figure half-clad and evidently just aroused from sleep.

"I have come down from the city, Mr. More," I said, "to get the particulars of the destruction of the Sargent's Ledge light. I understand that you saw it?"

"Yes, I saw it go, and an everlastin' shame it was; but how did you come from the city at this time o' night? The last train got in more'n half an hour ago. Don't b'lieve you." And the man looked at me with an unpleasant expression of suspicion, perceptible more in his tone of voice than on his face, for it was too dark to see that.

"I came down on a special engine," I explained. "I belong to 'The Palladium,' and we want to print an account of the disaster in the paper to-morrow morning."

"Wal, I swan to man!" said Daniel More. "Come in."

Once inside, and in the presence of the man who had seen the light-house go to wreck, I felt my spirits rise. More struck a light, and, as the feeble rays of the candle illumined his face, I saw a handsome, though sea-beaten visage, black curls plentifully mingled with gray, and a full gray beard that swept his bare and hairy breast. There was something familiar in his manner, as if he were some one whom I had met in a previous and far-off existence.

Holding the candle close to my face, as if to scan every lineament of it, he looked me carefully all over from the fur cap on my head to

the snow-covered boots on my feet, and said again, "Wal, I swan to man!"

Then, placing the light on a rude table made from a flour-barrel, he stirred open the fire from the ashes and embers, threw on an armful of drift-wood, and said:

"Wal, youngster, begin."

"But I want you to begin," I said, with some impatience, for the precious time was fast slipping away, and this ponderous old fellow showed no sign of being ready to communicate anything. "Now then, lie down in your bunk there, and tell me what you know about the destruction of the light-house; that's a good fellow; when did it happen?"

Daniel More deliberately tumbled into his bunk, looking curiously at me, and making once more his remark of astonishment. Then, slowly settling himself for a chat, he asked:

"Be you one of them reporters—one of them fellers that write for the papers?"

I told him that I was, and that I should be very much obliged if he would tell me his story as soon as possible, as I must get back to the city by one o'clock at the very latest. With that I whipped out my note-book and pencil, seated myself on a box near the side of the bunk, and waited for Dan to begin.

"It was a wild and stormy day nigh the end of March when an oncommon gale from the nor-nor-east ——" he began.

"Hold on! hold on!" I cried, in dismay. "That's not the way. Tell me just what you saw, in your own language. I'll put in the big words afterward."

"What, young man!" said Dan, raising himself on his elbow, and looking incredulously at me. "Do you mean to say that my story isn't a-goin' into the paper?"

"Certainly it is, but not in that way. Can't you understand? I shall put in your story and not your talk."

With some difficulty I impressed on the puzzled man the idea that he was to tell me all he knew in as simple language as possible. Then he settled himself, and went on with his tale.

It is not necessary that I should retell the old and tragical story of the wreck of Sargent's Ledge light-house. Daniel More was the only witness who beheld from the shore the fearful disaster wrought by that wild March storm. His tale has become, in the lapse of years, a sea-side classic. And I am proud to say that the narration first found publication in the columns of "The Palladium."

But Dan had been out all day, and during the night before, doing what he could to find the bodies of the lost and wrecked from the light-house. I did my best to write down his exact words, but he repeated himself so often,

and so doubled on himself, and used so many localisms, that it was difficult for me to keep the run of his talk. Every now and then, after trying to straighten out what I had written, I would raise my eyes from the fish-box which served as a writing-table and cry, "Now go on, Mr. More!" only to find him fast asleep. The night was wearing away, and I would fly at him, shake him vigorously. Then he would cry, "Avast heavin'!" and begin again with a sleepy ignorance of all that had gone before.

Once, with the perspiration oozing from my forehead, as I began to fear that I might fail, after all, I was aroused by a tremendous snore. I looked at the mariner with something like anguish. Here was this unfeeling wretch fast asleep, and everything depended upon his story being printed in "The Palladium" next morning. I thought of Angelina, of Angelina's father in the custom-house, of the fellows in the office who would envy or deride me, according to my success or my defeat, and of the chief, who could make or unmake me. And there was that aged ruffian fast asleep.

In his sleep he looked more than ever like the handsome young fellow whom I must have met in some previous state of existence. As I shook him again, my eye fell upon his right hand, on the back of which was tattooed the device of a red lady leaning on a blue anchor. Like a flash, it all came back to me. For an instant, I forgot the light-house on Sargent's Ledge, "The Palladium," and even Angelina and Angelina's father. I saw a bronze-cheeked and handsome young sailor sauntering down the green lanes of Fairport, swinging his bundle and stick as he walked into Mother Hubbard's door-way.

Turning heavily, the old impostor muttered, "It's all along o' them blasted cables that the lubbers rigged out for braces. If it hadn't been for them, Sargent's Ledge light ——" The rest of the sentence was lost in an inarticulate gurgle.

Shaking him once more, I bawled into his ear:

"Halloo there! how are you, 'Fayette Hubbard?"

Mr. Daniel More struggled feebly into wakefulness, and said, peevishly:

"Le' me alone! I thought you had got through."

And he was sinking off to sleep again when I cried:

"How are you, Bill Drinkwater? How are you, Obe Morey?"

The aged sinner sat up, wide awake.

"Oho!" he laughed with glee. "I guess you're a Fairport boy."

I acknowledged that I was, and, although the pressure of my errand came back upon

me with redoubled force, and the time was fast flying, I could not help asking him why he had been tempted to personate three missing men, and thus to cheat three poor women into the renewal of an old grief.

"Wal, you see, youngster," he explained, "I was a-voyagin' with all three on 'em. They was smart boys. I met 'em, one after another, in them wild days of mine. We was chums, we was. That is to say, we was mess-mates, at odd times, and friends allus. When I heerd tell that 'Fayette Hubbard was lost on the coast of Afriky, I felt mighty bad. And, three year afterward, when I was told that Bill Drinkwater and Obe Morey, all from the same place, had gone to Davy Jones's locker, it seemed kind o' like a special providence. Yes, it did."

"And so you thought it would help things along if you went to Fairport and lied to the poor old women?"

"Avast heavin' there, young feller! I didn't do no such a thing. I was in Belfast, discharged sick, and was to be sent to the Chelsea Hospital. But I was took in hand by a clever old lady. She kep' a sailor boardin'-house, and set me on my pins ag'in. Just then the Old Nick happened to put it into my head that I might take a run over to Fairport and see the old folks. I had never be'n there, and I thought I would go over and see what it was like. The Fairport boys as you hev mentioned was allus a-braggin' about the place. So I made a bargain with a lumberman to set me ashore as he went up the Penobsco't to Bangor. I had be'n to Bangor before."

"And you walked down and across the Neck to Fairport?"

"Exactly. I walked down to Fairport, and on my way I thought it might be a good joke to see if I couldn't pass myself off as one of them missin' boys. But Lord! young feller," and here the old scamp cackled loud and long, "I didn't think to play this off on the very mothers that bore 'em. But I did, though—blow me if I didn't!"

There was no longer any need to shake Mr. Daniel More in order to keep him awake. Even his surliness melted away. He sat up in his bunk, told me his tale as connectedly and lucidly as he could, and, while I labored with my pencil, he diverted himself, in the intervals, with looking at me and grinning silently. Once or twice he roared with laughter, and then, checking himself, cried:

"But I fooled 'em, all three—blow me if I didn't!"

Perhaps he felt a pang of remorse, too, for he once put on a serious look, and said:

"Well, youngster, if it's any favor to you,—

a Fairport boy, like my mates as was,—I'll give you the best I've got by way of story. But, Lord! young feller, I can't spin a yarn like I used to could! But I did fool them old ladies—all three on 'em."

Daniel went on with his story, bit by bit, and I had it all in hand. I knew that Jerry Collins was hard at work in the office, overhauling the files of "The Palladium" and getting into shape all of the collateral branches of the subject, in anticipation of whatever I might bring back from Sequansett. I could give the finishing touches to my manuscript as we bowled along in the engine, homeward bound.

I gathered up my notes with feverish haste. Daniel assisted me with my wraps, with rough officiousness. Stroking down my coat-skirts with a bear-like familiarity, he said:

"Wal, I'm dretful glad to hev seen ye, young feller, and, if you ever come this way ag'in, jest drop in and see a feller."

I shook him heartily by the hand, assured him that I would send him two copies of "The Palladium" next morning, and would come again and see him, some day, and get all of his marvelous tale of the sea.

I had solved two mysteries, and I felt myself repaid for years of waiting and for much anxiety and labor. With something of the thrill of a conqueror, I ran across the howling waste of snow and marsh, and Daniel More, with his hands at his mouth, speaking-trumpet-fashion, bawled after me: "I say, shipmet, give my love to my three mothers when you go to Fairport ag'in." The convicted impostor had no pangs of contrition, after all.

My return to "The Palladium" office, burdened with the tale of the destruction of Sargent's Ledge light-house, was like a triumph. I was in time for the morning edition, and

Old Salt received me with genuine enthusiasm. Even Guild relaxed a little from his stately professional dignity, and Jerry fairly danced with joy. The chief had gone home, leaving minute directions as to the use to be made of my news, whatever it might be. When all was done, and the paper had gone to press, with extra precautions taken against the purloining of our news from an early copy of "The Palladium" by some wicked rival, I sought my lodgings, and, proud and happy, sunk into the sleep of the just, my last thought being of the elation with which the chief would read next morning, in the old "Palladium," the exclusive account of the destruction of Sargent's Ledge light-house. It all came true. We had the news to ourselves, and took the town by storm.

When I think of those unhappy creatures who perished in the wreck of the light-house, and remember that their fate was so closely linked with mine, I cannot suppress a feeling of sadness. Perhaps I might have gained my promotion and Angelina in some other way. But all that is conjectural. It always seemed to me that if the fall of the light-house had not come just as it did, and if I had not been sent just as I was, and I had not found that impostor of the sea just as I did, everything in life would have been very different with me.

And that is the reason why I proposed to Angelina, a year or two afterward, that Sargent's Ledge should be perpetuated in the family. But Angelina said, with a great show of merriment, that Sargent's Ledge was not a proper name for a child. She had her own way, of course, but, somehow, the youngster is always known about the house as the Phantom Sailor; and this is the reason, I suppose, why he declares that he will go to sea as soon as he is big enough.

*Noah Brooks.*

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### HOMESICK.

THIS were a miracle, if it could be!  
 If, never loitering since the prime of day,  
 Since kissing the cool lips of Northern May,  
 This drowsy wind, at evening, brought to me  
 The fragrant spirit of the apple-tree;  
 Or, if so far sweet sounds could make their way,  
 That I should hear the robin's twilight lay  
 Float o'er a thousand leagues of foamy sea!  
 Now, save I know those eyes exchange no beams  
 With yonder star (so curves the earth between),  
 I'd say: My friend doth from his casement lean,  
 And charge Canopus, by his pilot-gleams,  
 To bear love to my port, and lovely dreams  
 Of homeward slopes new-clothed with summer green.

*Edith M. Thomas.*