



BY ARTHUR E. COPPING.

Illustrated by VICTOR PROUT.



OLD sea dogs will tell you that retrievers are the dogs for the sea. Of that breed was "Rover," who belonged to Harry Hurst, mate of the *Flamingo*. Not to know his master's whereabouts worried Rover like nothing else. One afternoon, when the fleet was becalmed, Harry shut Rover in the cabin, lowered a boat, and went aboard the *Merry Mary*. The cabin door being opened anon, the dog, having informed himself the mate was gone, plumped into the sea and swam to the *Cholmondeley*, the nearest habitation in that floating village. Never a vessel in all the fleet but would have afforded facilities for boarding as cheerfully to Rover as to the admiral himself. Moreover, the special form those facilities should take in the dog's case was a matter of general knowledge. A loop of rope must be lowered over the sides, whereupon Rover, to such good purpose had Harry instructed him, would paddle half-way into the hempen semi-circle, and be comfortably hoisted to the deck. A few minutes' search sufficed to satisfy the dog that his master was not on the *Cholmondeley*; so splash into the sea again, and with all speed to the next nearest smack. But neither was Harry on the *Nancy Bell*, nor on the *Bullfinch*, nor on two other craft visited by the persevering creature. The end of the incident was that Harry, playing draughts with Jimmy Milton in the cabin of the *Merry Mary*, was

astonished by the descent down the companion of Rover, glistening and dripping with the North Sea, and wagging a guilty tail. Late one afternoon the *Flamingo* was berthed at Aberdeen, and Harry resolved on an evening at the music hall. Again he shut Rover in the cabin, though this precaution seemed superfluous, as the landing stairs in the jetty wall were far removed and out of sight. When the performance was over, and Harry had descended in the stream of people from the balcony, he found Rover at the entrance; and an irate constable testified, not only that the dog had withstood all efforts to drive him away, but that he had thrice attempted surreptitiously to bolt upstairs. One day, towards the end of a week at home, Harry yielded to the temptation of going off alone on a jollification. At 10 p.m., fearful that some mischance had befallen her spouse, Mrs. Hurst put on her bonnet and started abroad with the dog, whom she tearfully implored to find his master—a task to which, it being so constantly on Rover's conscience to perform, he needed no second prompting. In the order of the quadruped leading, they traversed a number of narrow, dingy thoroughfares, until at last, in perhaps the dingiest of them all, Rover pulled up before a disreputable-looking little public-house. At this you may judge the surprise, gradually giving place to a new alarm, that assailed the mind of Mrs. Hurst, whose strict notions, be it said, Harry had respected too highly ever

to offend openly. With his nose to the junction of the private bar doors, Rover barked many times, and presently there issued forth his master, with something more than a mariner's roll in his gait, and with an expression of wisdom and limitless benevolence—which expression was gone in a flash, and, his eyes riveted upon his wife, Harry's face became the mirror of a mind astonished to the degree of temporary blankness. It was a melancholy home-going, and the abject penitent suffered a visitation of words and tears that endured till the dawn of the following day, when forgiveness was vouchsafed on a solemn promise of lasting amendment, which, I am sorry to say, has not stood the test of time. Before taking leave of Rover, let me say that, with all his fondness for the man's society, his sympathies were with the woman's ethical code. Be he never so thirsty, he would not lay tongue to water in a public house; and I am willing to accept Harry's assurances that opportunities were afforded the animal in plenty.

"Mascot" was a dog of the same sagacious sort. He belonged to the *Ethel Stamford*, which went north after cod. At times a fish will drop off the hook at the stage of lifting him aboard, and, being "drowned" in the pulling in of the line, will float away as a white conspicuous object in the waves. Mascot, on the alert for such a mischance, would straightway plunge over the side and bring back the derelict between his jaws. For each cod so recovered it was a point of honour that the dog should be given a buttered biscuit; and on days when the fishing was good, and the water broken, these dainties accumulated in a pile that provided Mascot with luxurious eating for maybe a week to come.

The air of Folkestone is capable of giving you an appetite which the reminiscences of her fishermen are calculated to destroy. Most of those reminiscences are dated Friday, May 31st, 1878. In dodging a couple of sailing-boats, the *König Wilhelm* blundered into the sister ironclad *Grosser Kurfürst*, which straightway sank. The Folkestone fishermen paid a heavy price for Germany's gratitude. There and then they picked up eighty-five live men out of the water, which was a cheerful service enough; but during many succeeding weeks they were busy with the corpses—a melancholy occupation full of strange horrors. Daily did the luggers go a-trawling, but not for fish. Two hundred and seventy-eight drowned men take a lot of finding. An incident on "M'ogany's" boat

(he acquired the name by happening on a shoal of mahogany planks off the Goodwins) was the simultaneous raising of two bodies, one of which, bent and stiff, bounced so queerly, on falling from the trawl, as to administer what seemed a kick to the face of a stooping fisherman, whose life, it is said, was shortened by the shock. Dick Taylor's boat got a fat corporal of marines, with shrimps entangled in the hair; and one of the crew, affected with an enduring distaste for the sea, has remained on shore from that day. For many weeks the £2 per corpse was what the fishermen had to live on. There was no market for anything else they caught. Fourpence would buy you three pairs of soles, and herrings were used as manure. This introduces the problem whether fish are innocent or guilty of eating human flesh. Any smacksmen would go bail for the finned kinds, flat and round, knowing them, in his experience of baits, for dainty and exclusive feeders. Even crabs, when arraigned before their daily captors, who should have best acquaintance with these creatures' manners, leave the court with unstained characters. Suspicion hovers alone, so far as I can learn, over the reputation of the whelk, a matter of the less moment because he is, at best, a viand for bold stomachs.

Our deep sea fishermen are a companionable, unsuspecting people. Theirs is a fresh-air life, good for the liver and the digestion. They weren't quite such nice fellows awhile ago. But the little Dutch grog ships have now been driven away by the Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen. Not that the race of "copers" is extinct. One will occasionally be seen lying in wait for the codmen or cruising after the herringers. But she will give the fleets a wide berth.

To the making of a North Sea fisherman's daily life in winter, put twenty hours' watch and toil, four hours' sleep, and as much wet clothing as will cover a man; season with sea blisters and weever stings; and serve with a garnish of icicles and frozen rope. Small wonder if the deep voice is sometimes used for grumbling. Jack Trotter, mate of the *Morning Star*, is for ever reviling the life. His idea of earthly bliss is to ride about England on a bicycle, stopping whenever he is tired. True, he owes the sea a peculiar grudge as the author of his domestic trouble.

As master of a small coaster, he was taking china clay from Cornwall to Hartlepool, when, being stretched on the locker with a murderous attack of influenza, he put in at

Southampton, and telegraphed for his newly-wedded wife. She came, the fever went, and Jack hit on a thrifty project for saving four-and-twenty shillings. Said he to his wife, "You shall come along o' us, Bess, instead of returning by train; I'll put you ashore at Lowestoft, and you'll enjoy the trip." But the weather decided otherwise. A gale came out of the nor'-nor'-east, doing grievous harm alike to Jack's ship and wife. Poor Bess took no food for five days, and rounded off her miseries by falling flat on deck. A strong, healthy woman was transformed into a bed-ridden invalid for life.



"Steve sat with bowed head at the cabin table, dropping tears of remorse."

Jack would never more set foot on a coaster. He joined a smack, and from that day has been busy catching fish to pay doctors' bills. In his bitter moments he sits apart from his mates and tries to calculate how many hundred pounds it has cost him to save four-and-twenty shillings. It must be in the reaction from these fits of melancholy that the bicycle idea takes hold of his fancy.

Having the skipper's wife aboard is not an unknown experience on North Sea smacks. The opinion generally obtains—so far as I can gauge it—that the arrangement may be pleasant to all concerned, or

mightily the contrary, according to the temperament of the lady. She needs something more than a sea stomach and a heart for dangers; the right sort of woman has been described to me as having one needle for buttons and another for sails. The case of Steve Hobrow, of the *Elizabeth Jane*, presents features probably unique. Steve owned and loved a black cat and a canary, who both returned his affection. Provided he were near, the one would sing and the other purr, let the wind be never so high. But the time came when, having gone ashore a bachelor, Steve came on board with a wife—a plump little person, with dimples to her rosy cheeks and saucy brown eyes. Small wonder that the honest fisherman loved her with an ardent exclusiveness that left all other creatures outside the pale of his affections. But this was a heavy sadness to the cat and canary. The former took to the forecastle and to swearing, losing all concern for the glossiness of her coat; the other's case was even more deplorable. From the morning of Mrs. Hobrow's arrival the little minstrel was dumb and dejected. I picture this neglected pet, with plumage of jealousy's hue, as sole and disregarded witness of many soft endearments exchanged between the pair of humans, absorbed in the delight of one another's society. The canary sulked to death, and Steve, remembering too late the lumps of sugar he had forgotten, sat with bowed head at the cabin table, dropping tears of remorse on the little yellow corpse. And it came about that the lady, discovering her husband in this lugubrious situation, laughed a laugh that was not all sweetness. To-day the Hobrows keep a small public-house near Yarmouth. As happy a man as you could meet, Steve nevertheless suffers the minor distress of a constant desire ungratified. He wants to keep a canary, but his wife won't let him.

I had these facts from Joseph Bunhill, who sailed as mate in the *Elizabeth Jane*. It is easy to conceive his misgivings when the skipper's other mate made her appearance. Fifteen years before he had served on a schooner whose captain—a gentle-mannered man named Price—was also accompanied at sea by his wife. The lady had a masterful way with her and a tongue that was seldom still, so that one voyage was enough for Bunhill. There was a touching leave-taking between him and the captain, the two men having learnt to like one another. "I hope, sir," said the departing mariner humbly, "you don't think no blame to me for leaving

the ship?" "No, no," the skipper replied with some emotion, as he gripped the outstretched hand; "my feelings at your going ain't blame, Joseph—they're only envy." The remark made a profound impression on Bunhill, who, though he must now be nearly fifty, is still unmarried.

If woman in the flesh is a rarity on a fishing-smack, she is often enough present as a sustaining memory. At the age of fourteen Alfred Nettlefold found himself

an apprentice on a Grimsby trawler. With a blacking-box for a desk, and the slenderest equipment of paper and print, he devoted laborious hours to the business of learning to read and write, in which endeavours—scholarship being then but lightly esteemed on the *Dogger*—he was frequently interrupted by the miscellaneous missiles of unsympathetic seniors. But the student was upheld by a purpose which flying boots and brushes were powerless to defeat; he was bent on exchanging letters with his sweet-

heart. Exhibiting so much grit at the outset of his career, it is scarcely surprising that at the age of nineteen Alfred was skipper of a lugger. His case is a good one to illustrate how, in the calling of a fisherman, merit may be swamped by bad luck. His first voyage failed through rotten timbers, his second through rotten water; and to-day he is before the mast.

More sociable men than our fishermen you could not find. When a calm is really flat, a group of sailing-boats will sometimes lash

broadside to broadside, making a terrace of floating habitations, which expedient affords welcome opportunity for large dinner parties and an exchange of friendly calls—only somewhere aloft an expert eye must be watching for the rising of the wind. Not always has merry-making on the smacks been of the suburban villa variety. Out of Grimsby, within the memory of middle-aged men, there sailed the "Bottled Ale Brigade"—some half dozen skippers who, content with

their winter earnings, largely abandoned themselves to pleasure in the summer. They were bound by the tie of a common obligation—that none should set sail with less than ten dozen bottles of ale on board. Throughout a voyage, members of the Brigade took it in turns to receive all the rest to supper, when there was much hilarity and the constant drawing of corks. At times a practical joke would crown these festivities. Thus one night, when "Flash Fred's" boat was the scene of the entertainment, "Lordly Butcher" was



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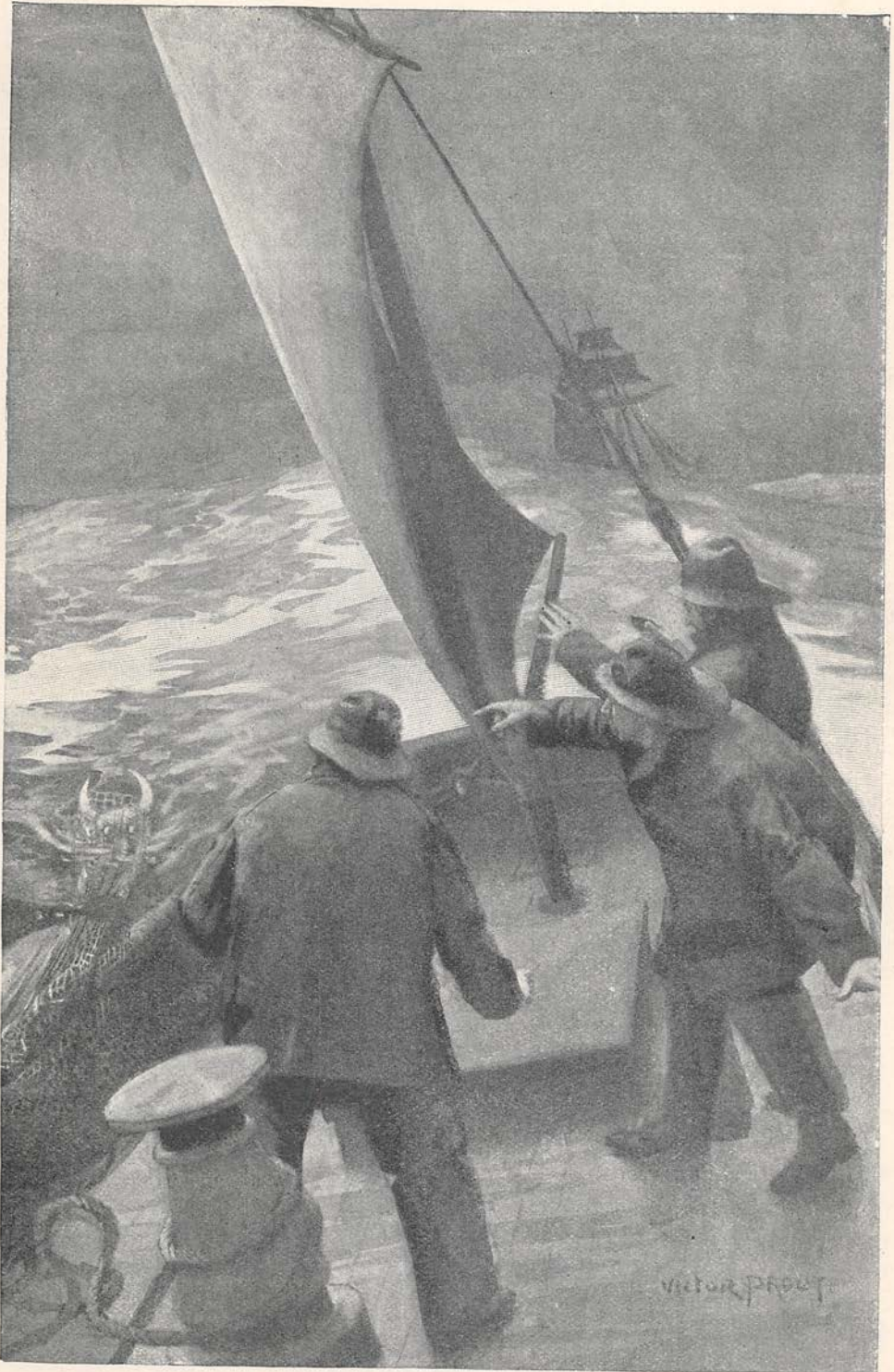
reduced by the beer to the semblance of an inanimate thing, noting which, his companions, who had merely reached the condition of unreasoning joyousness, resolved on a novel form of recreation. Hauling their unconscious comrade up on deck, they stripped him of his raiment, then painted his body green and red in careful, conspicuous stripes. Thereafter four boats rowed away, "Flash Fred" turned in, and the naked man slept alone in the moonlight. Now note how incapable of resentment and

revenge is the heart of a smacksman. Wakening at 3 a.m. to the knowledge of his state, "Butcher" did no murder, neither spake he any blasphemies. Gathering up his armful of clothes, he got him straightway to his boat, which casting off he rowed back to the *Dowager*; and we may well believe that, as the little craft crept in the grey dawn over the sea, this solitary oarsman, arrayed merely in a coat of paint, was a riddle to many a man on watch among the pale lights of the fleet. For the *Dowager's* crew a mystery was prepared which none could solve. During seven days and seven nights "Butcher" remained locked in his cabin, with cotton shirting stretched beneath the skylight, that no inquisitive eye might peer in from the deck. It is true the mate, upon whom devolved the temporary command, shared the cabin and its secret; but Mr. Porter held his counsel like a sphinx. The hands, gaining no knowledge by their questions, kept the sharper look-out for clues that chance might offer. They noted—and delved deep in their brains for an explanation appropriate to the phenomenon—that Mr. Porter, when he thought there were none to see, would give way to private mirth, purring to himself like a cat on a full meal of cream. Also they noted that Mr. Porter carried much besides food to the skipper. Curious, calculating eyes took cognizance of the following quantities being gradually conveyed to the cabin—to wit, about three yards of flannel, eighteen kettlefuls of hot water, two scrubbing brushes, nine pints of turpentine, and the vessel's entire stock of soap. But if "Butcher" was invisible, he was not inaudible. At the wheel, man succeeded man in routine rotation, and a puzzling experience of one was the puzzling experience of all. From the hidden hollow of the skipper's cabin there repeatedly issued the familiar voice, and ever in words and tones that expressed timorous concern for the vessel's safety, and enjoined the necessity for a constant vigilance—which, the weather being continuously fair, and "Butcher" having a name for iron nerves, filled up the cup of the men's perplexity. At the end of a week the skipper returned to the light of day and the sight of man; and that he was his old, reckless self was testified by an absolute unconcern for a wind newly sprung from the nor'-nor'-east. That evening he returned unto his habitual pleasures, joining the Brigade's supper-party in the cabin of the *Bumble Bee*. It was an evidence of his way of looking at life that he made but a

single allusion to what had recently befallen him—and that allusion, though charged with reproach, wholly free from spleen. "That a joke's a joke," quoth "Butcher," in one of the solemnest moments of his life, "I won't gainsay; but when you take such liberties with a man as, if his craft happened to go down, he'd be took ashore a corpse as'd set all the fishwives giggling, why then I say it ain't a joke at all—it's right-down thoughtlessness."

I know no finer example of the religious mariner than skipper Cullington. In the days before steam trawlers, when there was no Mission and the "coper" did harm unhindered, Cullington's conduct sometimes stood forth as a conspicuous piece of eccentricity, so that all the fleet marvelled. He had schooled himself to the perfection of offering the other cheek, as two occasions served to show. Angered by a hurt received in the joint labour of hauling in a chain, one of the crew swung his iron fist against his commander's left jaw, loosening teeth and letting blood. But Cullington, never raising an arm, found breath to murmur, "Now hit the other side." Next time his assailant was the boy, and, though the blow was in consequence harder to be borne, the temptation to retaliate was successfully withstood. That evening Cullington had to face the upbraidings and kindly expostulations of a deputation of skippers from neighbouring smacks, and I am heathen enough to find a satisfaction in recording that one of the visitors, suddenly cutting all argument short with the words: "Well, if you won't, I will," pounced on the boy and gave him as sound a jacketing as ever made youngster howl for mercy.

Cullington prides himself on a superiority to sailor superstitions. Yet he freely confesses to an occasion when circumstances mastered his scepticism. One night when the sea was alight with phosphorus—no unusual phenomenon—he gave orders for the trawl to be shot, and presently thereafter the entire crew shuffled into his presence with drawn faces and mutterings of terror. Not easily did he learn the cause of their abject woe. But at length a trembling tongue managed to fashion the words: "The devil's alongside, sir, holding on to the gear, grinning"; and at Cullington's outburst of derision the statement was endorsed all round in a splutter of terrified exclamations. Perceiving that the hallucination was not to be dispelled by words, Cullington besought an introduction to the Fiend of fiends, whose



"So the quaking sailors conducted him aft."

acquaintance, he gaily asserted, he had long desired to make. So the quaking sailors conducted him aft, where it was his nightmare experience to behold a head with horns reared hideous above a countenance of appalling levity; and the head nodded at Cullington with so gross a familiarity that cold waves traversed his spine and terror took hold of the root of his tongue. There was no fishing that night and no sleep; and for all the attention bestowed on wheel and rope the smack might have been a derelict. But morning brought the knowledge that only an ox's head had caught in the overhanging gear.

Toby, deck hand of the *Moss Rose*, had a great name for superstition. One day he went aloft in his brand new sea boots. Anon, ridding himself of the encumbrance, he flung them deckwards with so poor an aim that one fouled with the rigging, fell into the sea, and disappeared. That evening, by a ghastly coincidence, the trawl brought up a human leg encased in just such a left boot as

was recently lost. Toby took possession like a man recovering stolen property, and, indeed, the affair had such a look of retribution on the ocean's part that no shipmate would have dreamt to dispute his claim.

Cleansing processes having held him for an hour, he strode the deck, on his solitary midnight watch, in boots easy to mistake for fellows. Abed, but not asleep, lay the skipper, Captain Joseph Archer, in whom some powers of mimicry are associated with a love of fun. On this occasion the very spirit of mischief must have guided his wakeful fancies. Issuing stealthily from his bunk, his face aglow with a private gladness, he made partial ascent of the companionway, so that—

he all unseen—his nose reached the level of the deck. And these were the words, hoarse and dismal, that broke in on Toby's reverie:



“I—want—my—boot!”

“I—want—my—boot!” After some moments, a dark object splashed into the water, and there stood a white-faced fisherman with no covering to one foot save a woollen sock.

