

THE FOGGY NIGHT AT OFFORD.

CHAPTER VI. THE VOYAGE OF THE "RUSHING WATER."

It is eminently suggestive of our uncertain life here, to mark how time works its changes. Sometimes, in an incredibly short period, changes of the most unexpected and startling nature will take place. Thus it was with the family at Saxonybury. But three years have elapsed since you saw them; and yet the changes which that time has wrought seem to have been sufficient for the marking of half a century.

Lady Saxonybury died of her malady. A twelvemonth afterwards Sir Arthur married the widow of Colonel Yorke, an uncle of Mr. Yorke's. Mrs. Yorke was notable for little, save a somewhat fractious spirit, and for her overweening indulgence of her boy, the son and heir of the late Colonel Yorke. Six months subsequent to his second marriage, Sir Arthur died, and Mr. Yorke succeeded to Saxonybury. The second Lady Saxonybury—often called Mrs. Yorke still by the friends of her old days—removed to London with her establishment and her step-daughter Maria. With intervals of travelling, they had chiefly resided in London since. One year they had gone to pass the autumn at a comparatively little known French watering-place on the north coast—the very town which Mr. Janson had spoken of as being the residence of his mother. Some friends of Lady Saxonybury were there for a sojourn, and that induced her to go. Once there, she became impressed with the idea that a little French schooling would prove of incalculable benefit to her son in regard to the acquiring of the language, and she placed him at the college as an extern, and prolonged her stay through the winter. But the young gentleman appeared to be more apt at picking up the French *petits* he heard in the streets, than at the good French drilled into him in the school.

Maria stayed on, nothing loth, for—Mr. Janson was there. They had met once or twice temporarily since that visit of his to Saxonybury, and now they were in the habit of meeting daily—at least he had met daily until within the last few days. But the crisis had come and gone, and they had parted. It was Mr. Janson himself who invoked it. Led on to believe (and he was very easy for him) that Maria's manner could afford that she would regard his suit favorably, he at length spoke out, telling her how deeply he loved her, how, if she could but reconcile herself to become a surgeon's wife, there was a good practice waiting for him in England. The terms of purchase were arranged, and his mother was ready to supply the funds. It startled Maria beyond everything. It brought her to her senses. She, Maria Saxonybury, sink down into an obscure surgeon's wife, one who had yet his way to make! Her brow grew red at the thought, and she told him quietly that it could never be.

"Why have you led me on, then?" he inquired, his tone one of strangely acute anguish. "Why, indeed! Maria could not answer. She could not tell him that she had loved as passionately as he did, or that the anguish at her own heart was great as his. And so they parted. Nothing more could be said or done. The dream of romance was over, and each must make the best of the future.

About a week went on after this final interview, and the last day of March came. The harbor of this fine old fishing town was alive with bustle. On the following day, the first of April, the Iceland fishing-boats were to go out with the morning's tide. A whole fleet of vessels, some large, some small; some with their complement of ten or twelve men or boys on board, some with but four or five, who were making ready to depart on their annual voyage to the North fishery, praying for success.

Yes, praying. The streets were crowded with promenaders, going to or returning from the beautiful little chapel of the port, a chapel especially consecrated to fishermen. For three days had that small chapel been besieged, so that it was difficult to push a way in or out. It was a small building, little larger than a fair-sized room; models of ships were suspended in it, and it was tastefully decorated with landscape pictures, with gilding, and flowers, and ornaments, after the manner of the favorite chapels of the Roman Catholics. Some marine views in particular were attractively painted. They lined the walls of the porch, five or six of them, in glittering frames, and represented the vicissitudes of a sea-life. One portrayed a calm sea, on which glided a large ship with her white sails set, a scene of peace; another view showed her rocking and tossing in all the perils of a storm, apparently about to succumb to its fury. Here was a small picture, representing a fishing-boat sinking, sinking hopelessly, beyond possibility of hope or succor, its mariners' hands and their beseeching countenances out-stretched to heaven. The frame above it contained a view of another fishing-vessel approaching its harbor in safety. The chances and dangers of its past voyage were surmounted, and home faces were collected on the beach to welcome it in.

proceeding the boats' departure could get an entrance into the chapel; therefore many were content to kneel outside, on the enclosed space of waste ground around it, and there pray. They all managed to steal a look through the open door at whichever image they patronized, bowed to it, made the sign of the cross, and so departed in peace. There glided a lady into the chapel this evening at the dusk hour. She looked of superior class, and was handsomely but quietly dressed. She drew aside to the remotest obscurity of the chapel entrance, and leaned against the bar that was placed there to guard the paintings, waiting till her turn should come to push in with the stream. She was a middle-aged woman, and must once have been beautiful, but her features looked clouded with care. A young woman followed her in the dress of a French domestic servant, wearing the universal dark cloth cloak, and close snow-white cap. The lady was anxious to pray, and soon passed on; the maid was more anxious to look about her and to gossip, so she stopped at the entrance. Presently an acquaintance came up, another woman-servant, who accosted her:—

"Hey, Therese, is it you? Who have you come to pray for? I thought your brother was not going this year."

"I am attending madame."

"Madame Janson! What does she do here? She has nothing to do with the cod-fishery."

"I can tell you that she has, though," was the reply of Therese, "and a fine way the house has been in, through it. You know her son?"

"Who does not? A rackets blade."

"Rackets! Well, he may be a little. Everybody likes him, though."

through the lines of kneelers on the earth, and turning her head and her drooping gold ear-rings from side to side in search of a gossip to walk with. Miss Saxonybury, who had drawn aside to be out of the way of passers-by, found herself suddenly addressed.

"You are Maria Elizabeth Saxonybury?"

"Yes," she replied, wondering at the stranger's familiarity.

"I knew you by intuition. I heard Miss Saxonybury was of rare beauty, and I have not often witnessed beauty to match what I now see in you. If it shall prove the blight to others that it has to me, better for you that you had been a model of deformity."

"I do not understand you," haughtily spoke Miss Saxonybury. "I do not know you."

"I have given you no opportunity to know me. I am Edward Janson's mother. I have lived in this place many years, holding myself aloof from my countrymen, who flock here to make it their few years' residence, or their few weeks' sojourn. I am too poor to compete with some of their ostentatious purses. I am saving for my son; and I am too proud to risk familiarity with doubtful characters—as many of them are. Therefore, your family and I have never met. I wish I could say that you had never met my son. You have played your beauty off upon him, flirted with him, courted him—yes, you have, Miss Saxonybury!—and drawn him in to love you. When that love had reached a height that it could no longer be suppressed within the bounds of prudence, and he told it to you, you rejected him. It may be, with scorn, because he was poor and you were rich; I know not: from him I have learnt nothing. He has kept his own counsel and your secret; but I have watched closely, and know the day that brought to him this despair. In blighting his happiness you have blighted mine."

Maria Saxonybury's glowing features had turned to paleness, and now they were glowing again. The words told her what she appeared to confess to answer, and Mrs. Janson continued:—

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