

THE PRECIPICE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "GILBERT EARLE."

"Here's the place:—stand still. How fearful
And dizzy 'tis to cast one's eyes below."—SHAKESPEARE.

The following Norwegian tale will show the spirit of vivacity and energy that animates the *Friendship's Offering* for 1827. To comprehend the story aright, we must suppose ourselves introduced to a company of goat-herds, who, on a dreary winter's night, relate their adventures among the mountains to one another. Having told their tales, an elderly hunter, who had sat in silence during the narrations, thus introduces himself to our notice:

"My young friends," said he, "you have been telling us some very marvellous adventures; but as I am an old hunter, and, therefore, am fond of the spirit which leads you into them, I will not strive to sift the grain from the chaff, the exact facts, from the colours in which you have dressed them. But I will give you, in my turn, an account of an accident which, you well know by report, did actually happen to me, as the limp in my gate can testify to this day.

"It is now about twenty years ago that I was, one day, out hunting as usual. I had got sight of a chamois, and was advancing upon him, when, having almost got within shot, I sprang across a chasm a few yards wide, upon a ledge of snow opposite. The outer part of this was, alas! only of snow; it was frozen hard; but, as I came upon it with considerable force, I felt it giving way beneath me. The man who says he never felt fear, never was in a situation such as this. The agony of terror, and what agony is greater? rushed throughout my frame. My first impulse was to spring forward, to reach the firm ground. But the very effort I made to save myself, accelerated my fate; the mass broke short off, and I fell!

"I have since been to view the spot, and, standing in safety on its brink, my nerves have shivered, as I have looked down the awful precipice. How I escaped being dashed into as many atoms as there are pebbles at its base, is impossible to divine. The height is upwards of seventy feet: there was no projecting rock, no jutting tree, to break my fall. Perhaps the snow, which fell along with me in great quantities, and which crumbled as it fell, served to protect me. When I perceived my footing yield, the earth, as it were, sink from under me, I felt the common hyperbole, that my heart sprang to my throat, almost ceased to be one. One grasp of mortal agony, as it burst from my lungs, gave me the sensation of choking, which the phrase I have mentioned strives to express. The feelings of my mind may be all summed in the exclamation which, I believe, escaped me—'Oh, God!—I'm gone!' My next thought was one momentary appeal to that God's mercy—and then I thought no more.

"When I recovered my senses, day was beginning to close. I lay enveloped in snow. My hunting spear was beside me, broken; and, stretched upon my bosom, lay my faithful dog, spread out, as it were, to protect me from the cold, and breathing upon my face, as if to communicate his life to bring back mine. Poor fellow," the old man continued, and the tear glistened in his eye as he spoke,—"poor fellow, he is dead, long since, and his son," stooping and fondling the dog at his feet, "is old now; but, if I had but one crust of bread, and one cup of water in the world, old Thor should share them with me for his father's sake."

The dog looked up, as though he understood his master's meaning; for he smiled in his face, with that expression of thankful fondness which the countenance of his race alone shares with that of the human species.

"I felt," continued the hunter, "I felt numbed and stiffened, and in considerable pain, all over; so much so that I could not distinguish any one particular hurt as being more severe than the rest. I endeavoured to rise, and that soon showed to me where my chief injury lay. I fell back again instantly; my thigh was broken. In addition to this, two fingers of my right hand, and one of my left, were broken also, and I was bruised in almost every part. But I was alive! As I looked up to the pinnacle from which I had fallen, I could scarcely believe that to be possible.

"The spot where I lay, was in a narrow cleft between two cliffs, which diverged from each other as they advanced, leaving a sort of triangular platform open between them and a third. A torrent threw itself, like a wild horse's mane, from the rock above me; but in the numberless eddies which whirled in the hollow, it was dispersed into air before it reached the place, distant though its depth, where I lay.

"Night now began to thicken fast; the faster on account of the deepden in which I was. The wind blew as though all the quarters of the heaven sent forth their blast at once, and they all met and battled there. I had escaped one dreadful death, and I now began to fear another more dreadful still, because more slow and more felt. I feared that I should die through cold and hunger, and untended hours. The cold, too, I now felt more severely; for, shortly after I had given up, in despair, all attempts to extricate myself from my situation, my dog, after whining and yelping piteously for some time, went off. As he turned the corner of the rock, which hid him from my sight, I felt as if my last hold of life had gone from me; as though the friend of my bosom had left me to die. 'He, too, abandons me!' I exclaimed, and I blush to confess it, I burst into tears. Being forsaken by that which I thought faithful, cut me to the heart. Who, indeed, can bear that?

"The world now seemed to have closed upon my sight for ever; my wife, my children, my dear home—I should see them no more! I figured to myself all the delights and charities of that home, and I felt how bitter it is to be torn from life while life is yet strong; all its ties firmly knit; all its affections glowing. As darkness settled around me, I thought of my wife anxiously listening for my step, or rather for the well-known step of Thor preceding me; and the bright fire gleaming upon smiling children's faces, the fairest ornament and the dearest comfort of a fireside; and the rosy lips held up for a father's kiss; and the little hands clinging round the knees, to attract a father's notice; and their mother's glad smile of welcome to me, and unchiding reproof to them. Such was the picture I drew mentally; such was the group which I knew was awaiting me. I looked around me, and the contrast of the reality flashed upon me in all its horrors. The wind raged and howled through the darkness, and in the hush, the spray of the torrent bedewed my face and froze there. I was encompassed by awful precipices, here and there visible only by being covered with snow. Snow, also, was the bed on which I lay, the bed on which I was to die. And to die, oh God! to die thus! Alone, through pain and famine; through cold and the exhaustion of suffering nature! The terrors of tempest and of night were the precursors of the terrors of death. From hence, I never was to stir more; this was to be my end!

"We often forge ourselves causes of unhappiness, and allow slight things to mar our quiet. But he who has undergone, not what I underwent that night, for who has done so? but, circumstances of peril and despair, in kind, if not in degree, like unto these, he, only, can know to what extent our nature can suffer.

"I lay, in pain of body and anguish, for a space of time which, from these causes, seemed endless. At length hope dawned upon me. Along the top of the cliff to which I had leaped, and from which I had fell, passed, as I knew, a path which led from the village in which I lived, to another about two leagues off. This had not appeared to me as a chance of escape; for by night, it was but very rarely traversed, and morning I never expected to see again. On a sudden, however, I saw a light gliding along this path, as though borne by some one; and I conjectured it to be, as in fact it was, the lantern of a villager returning homewards. 'I shall be saved yet!' was the idea which thrilled through my heart, and I shouted with the whole strength of my voice, to realize the hope which had arisen. At that moment, a furious gust of wind swept through the chasm, and hurled back my cry against me like the smoke of Cain's rejected sacrifice. I could feel that my voice did not ascend twenty feet above my head. The light glided onwards. Again I shouted with that desperate strength which none but the despairing own. The light did not stop; no answering shout gladdened my ears; the light disappeared!

"The agony of that moment, who can conceive? The drowning man, as he struggles his last effort, and feels the waters closing round him; the criminal, as he mounts the scaffold, and sees his last hope melt from his grasp,—such persons may have experienced what I felt then, and such persons only.

"My despair now became fixed and total. I felt that my last hour was come; I endeavoured to turn my thoughts from this world, and fix them on the next. But the effort was dreadful. As I strove to prepare myself for death, the hope of life would flash across me again, and interpose between me and my prayer. If a sound caught my ear, I raised my head for to listen; if the variation of a shadow passed over the surface of a rock, I strained my sight to look; but the sound would cease, and the sight would pass away,—and I sank, again, upon the snow; and, again, I prepared myself to die.

"At length, (to my dying day I shall recollect that moment,) at length, a gust of wind brought to me a sound which I thought I recognized; I raised myself with an anxiety which almost choked me; I listened, all was still; the wind rose and made me doubtful whether I heard it a second time or not; a third, all doubt was over! It was the honest voice of faithful Thor, coming at speed, and barking as he came, to show, doubtless, the path to the spot in which I lay. Again his deep-mouthed bay sounded loud and distinct, as it approached the top of the precipice. There he paused, and continued barking, till, at length, several lights flashed upon the path, along which he had come, and advanced rapidly towards him. A halloo came upon the wind; I strove to answer it as loudly as I could. This time it mattered little whether my voice reached the summit or not; for, as soon as the lights seemed at the spot where the dog stood, he dashed down the cliff, clinging to the irregular surface as he came, now holding by a stone, now sliding down with the rolling earth and snow, till he sprang into my bosom; and almost smothering me with his caresses, made the echoes of the cliffs ring again with his loud and ceaseless baying.

"My companions now perceived where I was. They made a circuit of some little extent, and descended to me by a less precipitous, but still a difficult path. My young friends, unless you have experienced the transition from despair to safety, from abandonment to kind friendship, from death to life, you can form to yourselves no idea of the flood of feelings, both rapturous and gentle, which then poured upon my soul. The chosen of my heart was now no widow! my children were now not fatherless! I was restored to life, to the world, to hope, to happiness, and I owed all this to the loyalty and love of a poor hound! When your hand is next raised to strike your beast in anger, pause,—and think upon the service which old Thor rendered to his master. That master had been a kind one."

NARRATIVE OF A SAILOR'S ESCAPE FROM A FRIGATE.

[From the Night Watch, or Tales of the Sea.]

We were not more than three quarters of a mile from a barren and rocky island, and I determined to risk every thing to gain it, and get on board one of the merchant ships in the morning. The first thing was to get my money from my bag of clothes, which was snugly tied up over my hammock, on the lower deck. I stole quietly down, and was in the act of searching the bag when the serjeant of marines and master at-arms, who were going their half-hourly rounds, nearly caught me; but springing unobserved into my hammock. I lay covered till they passed, and was not a little alarmed to find that I was the subject of their conversation. "Do you know the number of the pressed man's birth?" said the serjeant; "I heard the officers say he was worth keeping, and it would be well to keep an eye upon him." "I don't know his number," replied the master at arms, "but I saw him on the fore-castle just after the watch was mustered." So soon as they were on the ladder, I untied my bag and pocketed my purse. You know, Harold, how soundly men asleep after having been well trounced in a gale, and I got in and out of my hammock without a question from my snoring neighbours, mounted the fore-castle again, and made a point of being seen by the serjeant; after which I skulked through the port holes under the main channels; as the island lay astern. Having buttoned my jacket tight around me and tied the bottom of my trousers, I fastened a rope's end, which was hanging overboard from the channels, (a thing almost unknown in the frigate,) to the irons below, and slid without splash into the water; but when my head was just above the surface I found my legs pressed, as it were, against the bottom of the ship, and it was not till I let go the rope, and struck off a little from the side, that I was disentangled from this effect. I scarcely breathed on the water, and moved my arms and limbs as little as possible; but my heart beat within me as I found myself floating with the tide past the quarter of the ship. I was beginning to feel fresh vigour at observing myself distancing the frigate, when I heard the hoarse voice of an old owl of a quartermaster say to the officer of the watch, "there is something in the water astern, Sir!" The voice acted upon me like electricity, and I do believe I bounded two-thirds out of the water. "Tis a man, by all that's holy, Sir!" said the old fellow. "Ahoi, come back you rascal," cried the officer: "fire, sentinel, fire!" And as it seemed to me, the very moment I saw the gleam on the water, I felt a sharp cut on my left heel. Another and another ball followed, but with less success. "Away there, black cutters of the watch, away!" bellowed the boatswain's man; but luckily for me, the boats had