

2.

THE

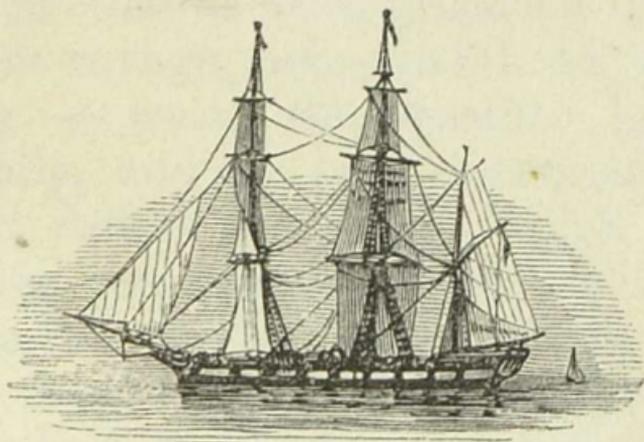
SEA BOY'S GRAVE.



ENHIMPER 57

THE
SEA BOY'S GRAVE.

RELATED BY A CLERGYMAN.



J. GROOM, BAZAAR, SOHO SQUARE, LONDON ;
AND
185, BROAD STREET, BIRMINGHAM.

—
MDCCCL.

W. M^cDOWALL, PRINTER, LITTLE QUEEN-STREET,
LINCOLN'S-INN-FIELDS.

THE
SEA BOY'S GRAVE.

Sleep on, dear saint! and sweetly rest
In Jesus' boundless love;
Soon shall you wake for ever blest,
And reign with Him above.

T happened, said the writer, that as we approached the end of our voyage, being in lat. 41° north, long. — west, the weather became squally, and we had, occasionally, a good deal of sea going, which made things very uncomfortable on board. A sailor, who had behaved very ill at the outset of the voyage, and whom the men had declined keeping company with, shortly after this treatment of him began, had been seized with a fever; and although it had been in some measure subdued, yet the poor fellow was in a very dangerous state. He had been a very bad man, and now

that he was apparently drawing near to death, he was desirous that some care and kindness might be shewn him, *in regard to his soul*. The captain and crew were very indifferent upon the subject; and I had myself been so ill that I was scarcely even able to get out of my berth. There happened, however, to be a little boy on board, who went, among the sailors, by the nick-name of "Pious Jack;" or what was, perhaps, equally to his honour, or at least to the honour of the philanthropist from whom he derived it, (though intended for a deeper mark of contempt,) they used to call him Jack Raikes, from the circumstance of his having been educated in one of the Sunday Schools of the "truly immortal Robert Raikes of Gloucester," of which city, the boy, John Pelham, was a native. Poor Jack, however, cared very little for the sneers and scoffs of the seamen; and

the meekness, patience, and temper, with which he endured the jibes and jeers of many on board, often gave me occasion to say—"Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast ordained strength, that thou mightest still the enemy."

When Williams, the poor sailor, was dying, and indeed all the time he had been ill, nobody had shewn him any kindness except little Jack, and a negro woman who was on board, the attendant of a child, a Creole of the West Indies, whom she was bringing over to some relations in England. This woman, Cleopatra by name, but who was always called Cleo, ministered to the temporal wants of the dying seaman, nursing him with great tenderness, preparing with her own hands whatever she thought would be likely to tempt his sickly appetite.

The little Creole whom Cleo had

in charge was a sweet child, about four years of age, or younger. I saw her very seldom, for she generally amused herself on deck, when the weather would permit, playing with a pet kid which had been spared for her sake—which followed her wherever she went, and which she had taught to go down and up the companion ladder; and Cleo brought it in her arms into my cabin, almost every morning, when she came to ask me how I did.

This excellent negress was kindly attentive to the sick and young, for we had two or three of both on board; and though she had little idea of the profounder doctrines of Christianity, yet she possessed some knowledge of the truth, many benevolent and charitable feelings, and, above all, a deep sympathy for the soul of the dying man. She could not read herself, but she knew that the Bible revealed the Christian's God, and taught the

way to heaven; and she sat with devout attention, listening to every word which the dear boy Jack read from that holy book, not only from day to day, but whenever he could persuade Williams to hearken to it; and in the event that soon after followed, I have much reason to hope, his pious cares and humble prayers for his poor mess-mate, were abundantly blessed, both to the seaman and to this interesting daughter of the despised posterity of Ham.

Things had gone on in this way for some time, when one day Jack came into my cabin, his face bathed in tears, a look of horror in his countenance, his whole frame trembling with agitation, and himself unable to speak: I thought from his appearance that poor Williams was dead, and that, dying, he had left poor Jack no "hope in his death."

"What's the matter, Jack?" I said,

starting up on my elbow in bed, "What has happened? Williams—is he dead?"

"Dear sir," said the boy, regardless of my question, "Williams—poor Williams! he is in agony of soul; he says he is lost—that he is a ruined sinner—that he must, sir, he must—oh! I cannot say the word—he says God will cast him into the place, (continued Jack, in a burst of inexpressible anguish)—where is weeping and gnashing of teeth!——Oh! what shall I say to him?"

"Dearest boy," I said, "do not afflict thine own soul so bitterly. It is well that Williams feels all this—take it, my child, as a token for good from the hand of thy Heavenly Father, who doubtless has not been unmindful of thy many prayers and labours of love towards this trembling penitent. Go to him again; bid him call upon his God; hath he not said, 'Call upon

me in the time of trouble, and I will deliver thee?' Tell him that God is indeed, as he believes him to be, a just God, who will by no means clear the guilty without an atonement; lead him to believe in the blood of that atonement already made for the sins of the many; tell him God *can* be just, even while he pardons all his sins, if he throws himself upon his mercy in Christ Jesus. Say to him, it is not too late to believe—neither is it too late for God to have mercy; the Lord delighteth in mercy; only let him seek repentance at the throne of grace, and faith in the blood that cleanseth from all sin. Oh! say to him, God waiteth to be gracious."

"Sir," replied Jack, "I have told him all this already, but he says he cannot believe it. He says every body's sins are forgiven but his. I have told him the history of the thief

on the cross—of the labourer called at the eleventh hour—of the lost sheep—and all the parables about God's love to sinners—and how Christ came into the world on purpose to save sinners, even the chief. But he says, he cannot believe it; and he will not pray!”

“Nevertheless, go to him again, my good dear boy; read to him the Service for the Sick, and I will come and pray with him.” This I said, not knowing that the boy was of himself able to pray for another.

Accordingly, I rose with difficulty, and having dressed myself, found my way into the place where Williams was sitting up in his hammock, his face pale and ghastly, his eyes sunk in his forehead, and his bosom labouring with the heavy respiration of death. The whole circumstances of the scene will not easily be forgotten.

Jack and Cleo were both on their

knees beside his berth, and the little child unconsciously, or at least not well knowing the meaning of what she did, had covered her face with her hand; she was evidently looking through her half-closed eyelids. Jack was reading the Office for the Sick, according to the custom of the Church of England; Williams, deeply agitated, his hands clasped, and his emaciated fingers strongly, convulsively compressed against each other, was now and then attempting to pray. After every petition, the little sea-boy paused for the dying man's response, saying, he would read no further, if Williams still refused to pray to God.

“Open thine eye of mercy, O most gracious God,” said the boy at last, closing the book, and speaking, I suppose, from memory, or perhaps out of the abundance of his own heart, “Open thine eye of mercy upon this dying man, who most earnestly de-

sireth pardon and forgiveness, but will not pray for it."

"O! earnestly," exclaimed the wretched man, with a voice so full of the bitterness of death, that it sent back the blood in a cold shiver to my heart.

The boy here paused again, and looked with an eye of unutterable supplication upon Williams, beseeching him, as if with the whole tenderness of his soul, to reiterate the petition; but Williams replied only with a look of inexpressible horror, too dreadful even to be thought upon.

"For the sake of Christ," resumed the little suppliant, (who knew not that I had entered the apartment) "For the sake of Christ, who bore our sins in his own body upon the cross, shew thy pity on Harry Williams."

The boy again paused, and taking the hand of Williams, attempted by an

act of kind compulsion to raise it into an attitude of supplication.

“He has no hope, O Lord, but in thy sweet mercy! Oh, visit him with thy benign salvation!”

“I have no hope,” at last exclaimed the man, wringing his uplifted hands with an expression of supreme despair, “I have no hope!”

“Oh look down from the height of thy sanctuary, and hear the groaning of this poor prisoner, and loose him who seemeth now to be appointed unto death!”

“Oh! I am appointed unto death!”

“O Lord! wilt thou not regard the cry of the destitute; behold he is destitute; we can do nothing to help him—help thou him, oh, our God!”

“Help me, oh! my God!”

“O Lord, save! save this poor dying man; oh! save Harry Williams.”

“Lord, save Harry Williams,” was uttered by all present, even by the

little child; and Williams, softened by their affectionate sympathy, and doubtless also by the power of that word which is both spirit and life, melted into tenderness, and, falling back on his pillow, shed a torrent of tears.

These tears, the first that had moistened his burning brain since the commencement of his sickness, evidently brought relief to his overburdened spirit. As drops of rain to the bruised reed, or as the evening breeze to the smoking flax, they were just what nature required at this moment of deep extremity. I sat by him till the emotion which swelled his heart, and filled his languid eye, had somewhat subsided; but as, when more composed, he was still too much exhausted for conversation, I spoke to him only good words, and comfortable words, not a few indeed, but not too many; and commending him to

the Father of mercies, withdrew again to my cabin.

I saw him not again for many days after this, my own indisposition having increased in consequence of leaving my bed; but I heard of him daily, and indeed many times a day, both from Jack and the negro woman, and each brought me every day accounts more pleasing. Every moment the boy could spare from the duties of his station on board was occupied in reading the Scriptures to Williams—those Scriptures of truth, of which I had here so evident a proof that they were able to make a man wise unto salvation, through faith that is in Jesus Christ. Williams was now often seen engaged in prayer for himself, and he began by degrees to talk less of the *justice* of God, a subject which had always filled him with inconceivable alarm, and more of his *love*. He said, it was a thing he could not un-

derstand. "Nor any man," said his youthful father in Christ, "for it passeth knowledge!"

But though his soul's health was evidently on the increase, his body was hourly waxing weaker and weaker. I told Jack that I wished to see Williams once more, before I could see him here no more at all for ever; and that, being now considerably better myself, I would come and visit him next day. Cleo, however, said that she thought Williams now too near his end for me to delay my visit till to-morrow; so hearing this, I arose in the evening and went again to his berth.

The horror so strongly marked in his every feature the first time I saw him, had dwelt upon my mind with a most acute and painfully retentive feeling; and, on entering the little place where he was lying in his cot, I had a tremulous sort of dread at

the idea of looking on him again. But how sweet was my surprise, when I beheld in poor—no, in *happy* Williams, a countenance full of the most touching complacency, and of a placidity so soft, that one would have thought that death, which was evidently upon the very threshold, was the object, not of fear, but of long desired approach. He had, moreover, suffered much in the interval between my former visit and this, and even that very morning, from many doubts and fears; now, however, they seemed to have been all subdued; and he said to me, with the triumph of one deeply conscious to whom the glory was due, “I am a *conqueror* through Him that loved me! Oh! that wonderful love!”

I spoke to him some time of his state, and of the grounds on which he built his hope, and was much satisfied with all he said in reply. He heard me with that attention which

the subject demanded, and with the courtesy he felt due, perhaps, to one who was, in regard to the distinctions of the world, somewhat his superior; but he seemed as if he thought (so grateful was his heart) that he wronged his young friend in deriving consolation from any one's conversation but his. Every word the boy now uttered, was as much a source of joy to Williams as it had formerly been prolific only of horror. He said to him, two or three times that night, referring to the struggle he had had in the morning, "It is calm now, Jack,—all calm,—is this peace?"

"Yes," replied he, "I trust it is peace—the peace of God, which the Bible saith passeth understanding."

"Who hath given me this peace?" said Williams, as if he delighted in hearing the ascription of praise to his divine Redeemer. "Who hath given me this peace?"

“Christ,” said the boy, in a voice so solemn and so soft that it seemed rather like the breathing of some ministering cherub than the articulation, though whispered, of a human voice, “Christ is our peace; he hath made peace for us.”

“Yes,” answered Williams, “by the blood of the cross!”

Whether it was that the near presence of death naturally tends to unnerve us, or that my spirits were weak from long confinement, I cannot tell; but I felt compelled at this moment to steal away, to hide the emotion gathering round my heart, and which I was unable any longer to repress. Well, thought I, might Williams say, his little instructor had taught him two wonderful things—“the knowledge of *a love that passeth knowledge*, and the feelings of *a peace that passeth understanding!*”

I lay awake all that night, com-

muning with my own heart upon my bed, and meditating on the things I had seen and heard in poor Harry's berth. No sound disturbed the deep repose of all on board, except the man at the helm, as he pattered over my head, steering us through the mighty waters, and chanting from time to time some seaman's doleful ditty. It was in the midst of this calm, that the spirit of Harry Williams winged its flight aloft; and doubtless, no sooner had he crossed the circle of the earth than he entered into the presence of *Him whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain*, and mingled with the thousand thousands of ministering spirits, which, "thick as stars, surround him!" "Oh beatitude past utterance!" Who knows the rapture of a soul redeemed!

The next day but one, the body of this interesting being—for how soon do they who are beloved by the

Master, become precious in the eyes of the household!—the next day but one, the body of Williams was committed to the mighty deep.

The poor boy, on this occasion, seemed to feel, as if for the first time, that his friend and pupil was indeed no more. But when he heard the heavy plunge of the corpse in the water—when he heard the waves with a gurgling sound close over the body, and shut out for ever all that remained of dear Harry Williams, the boy, unable any longer to control the violence of his feelings, uttered a piercing cry,—and, so infectious is unfeigned sorrow, his grief seemed to find its way to the hearts of most of those who were present; and many a hardened Tar, whose iron countenance gave no indications of a heart within, that day felt his cheek bedewed with tears.

I could but look upon the whole

circumstances of this day's scene, as a kind of merciful and providential preparation for what followed; for, three days after the time of which I am speaking, drawing nearer and nearer to our desired haven, and being not far from the Land's End, there sprung up such a gale of wind from the W. S. W. that we missed the port in the channel for which we were bound, and making for the Downs, expected to have come to anchor there; but the wind shifting, and continuing more boisterous than at the first, we knew not well where we were. It would be in vain for me to attempt to describe the feelings of those on board; suffice it to say, that the moment of danger is not the best time for any one to seek to obtain peace with God; and that which ought to be the object of every day's labour, must not be left to hours of peril and sickness to accomplish. *Now*, indeed is always an accepted time, and God

forbid that I should dare to limit the mercy that is measureless; but they who have neglected the great salvation in the day of sunshine and calm, come with a load of aggravated provocations before God, when they draw near to him only in the whirlwind and the storm.

The wind being now somewhat abated, we hoped in the course of the fourth day from our leaving the Channel to make the Firth of F——, and this, through the mercy of God, we attained. For in the afternoon of the 25th of March, we came to soundings, and the captain ordered out two anchors.

But oh! we should never be unthankful for small mercies; and these we had surely accounted small, for our ingratitude was visited by severer rebuke than we had ever anticipated, even in the most perilous moments hitherto. The storm, which during

the last two or three hours had subsided into a sudden calm, followed only by the mountainous swelling of the sea, burst out again towards sunset with tremendous and redoubled fury, and, driving us from our moorings, carried us among the islands of the Firth, where at half past eleven o'clock, in the absence of moon and stars, and amid cries of "Breakers ahead!" we struck upon a sunken rock, the main-mast coming down with a crash like the wreck of nature.

As the flood-tide set in, the breakers on the rock became more and more tremendous. The boat was hoisted out; the shore, however, presented, in my opinion, no hope whatever of safety, for it was one unbroken reef of rocks and shelving stones, on which the sea was dashing with a noise like thunder, and a spray that went up as it were to the heavens. I, therefore, determined to abide by the wreck; and seeing I could

but die, I resolved, while I had life, to leave no means of self-preservation unimproved; so, lashing myself to a spar, I silently watched the embarkation of Cleo and her child, dear Jack, and some others of the sailors, in the boat. With much difficulty the men were enabled to set a little bit of sail, and made for the shore in the presence of hundreds of spectators, who, collected from the various villages, were looking with anguish upon our miserable situation. When they put off from the wreck, they went pretty well for about a quarter of a mile or so, the sail keeping them buoyant, and the boat standing with her head against the waves. But while we were beginning to watch with inexpressible anxiety as she drew nearer and nearer the surf, a tremendous squall involved them all in darkness, and torrents of rain quite shut them out from our

view. But oh! how shall I relate what followed!—the sky cleared almost as suddenly as it was overcast—the squall subsided—the sun shone out,—we looked, and looked again till our eye-balls were almost bursting from their sockets; we strained our vision again to look; and the cry, “Where’s the boat? where’s the boat?” the shriek from the spectators on the cliffs, and the groans from my fellow sufferers on the wreck, came at once with a louder and more fearful sweep than even the wildest ravings of the tempest. Again it returned, in one simultaneous burst of anguish. The sea indeed answered the demand, and gave up the boat, but she gave not up the dead; the former appeared driven, with her keel above the waters, but her interesting freight were gone *for ever!*

Oh! the horrors of that moment! —And yet, amid all its horrors, while

I clung, shivering, to the shrouds of the vessel, expecting every moment to be swallowed up of the merciless sea, I felt, as it were, a smile pass over my lips and eyes, like a beam of light kindled by some invisible, some supernatural object, as I followed in spirit the sailor boy, and beheld him, with his ransomed companions, enter into the joy of his Lord.

The wreck, contrary to all human calculation, continued to hold together till next morning; when the storm having been succeeded by a calm, that came smiling, as it were, at the ruin its predecessor had accomplished, my fellow-sufferers and myself were brought, by the kind care of the fishermen and peasants on the coast, safe to land.

When I got to land, I went to bed in a little cottage, whose generous owner hospitably opened her door to receive me. I was faint and exhaust-

ed; and having been long ill before, I hardly expected to survive at all: but the Lord giveth strength equal to our day, even as he “tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.”

In the evening, being refreshed by some hours of sleep, I arose, and went to view the bodies of those who had been washed ashore. On the low, but decent bed of the little village ale-house, Cleo and her “Massa’s child” were lying. They were clasped together in one inseparable embrace, the child’s head reposing on the bosom of her nurse—and the swarthy arms of Cleo were locked around her little darling. Poor Jack!—less honoured, but surely not less worthy of honour, was laid out on a sheet on the floor, a blue chequered shirt his only shroud! His countenance wore a sweet and heavenly expression; and stooping down I robbed his dear head of a little

lock of auburn hair, that lay upon his temple. His effects,—alas! how poor and yet how rich! were spread upon a table in the room, and consisted of a little leathern purse, in which was a well kept halfcrown and a solitary sixpence. His Bible, which he had ever accounted his chief riches, and from which he had derived treasures of wisdom and knowledge, was placed by his side. I took it up, and observed engraven on its clasps of brass, these words:—“The gift of Robert Raikes, to J. R. Pelham, Glo’ster.”—O Raikes! (thought I) O Raikes! this is one gem of purest light indeed; still it is but one of the many thousand gems which shall encircle thy radiant head in that day when the Lord of Hosts shall make up his jewels! *For they alone are had in everlasting memory whose deeds partake of heaven.*

BESET with snares on every hand,
In life's uncertain path I stand:
Saviour divine! diffuse Thy light
To guide my doubtful footsteps right.

Engage this roving, treach'rous heart,
To fix on Mary's better part,
To scorn the trifles of a day
For joys that none can take away.

Then let the wildest storms arise;
Let tempests mingle earth and skies;
No fatal shipwreck shall I fear,
But all my treasures with me bear.

If Thou, my Jesus! still be nigh,
Cheerful I live, and joyful die;
Secure, when mortal comforts flee,
To find ten thousand worlds in Thee:

See also Narratives for Sailors, Nos. 45, 61,
73, 110, 124, 219, and 234, on J. GROOM'S
List of Publications.

37131039910104

