Saint Mary's Beacon.

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ST. MARY'S BEACON

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WRECKS AND RUINS.

How like to life baubles seem we here!
In pride of health to-day,
To-morrow, fading like the violet were,
When Winter wanderings of the dying year,
Unwept, we pass away!

Against what odds in life we place our stakes
We rear our castles high;
Send forth upon Time's ocean joyous lakes
Grand stogma arise, ships sink and leave no marks,
Castles in ruin lie.

What dreary sadness makes our hearts its home!
We two who early loved—
Our paths diverge; why must the shadows come
Of castles high, and ships in shrouded gloom?
Too late our hearts are moved.

Oh, Earth! rebuild the ruins storms have wrought,
Our voices call to thee;
Oh, rolling floods! in vain our eyes have sought
For white-winged sign of treasures lost, but
Sighing!
Can wrest our barks from ye.

On earth our hopes are vain! beyond the bourne,
To which our footsteps tend,
Our home is reared, where we no more shall mourn
O'er castles overthrown, our ships from anchorage
torn—
Our sorrows there shall end.

THE LITTLE OLD GENTLEMAN.

"Would you like to look at the *Times*, sir? Singular trial, that of Rish Allah Bey against the *Daily Telegraph*."

The speaker was a little old man, cleanly dressed, shaved, with short, crisp, white hair, and a face like a red pippin; such a face as is hardly seen out of this country and even here rarely, save amongst farmers, game-keepers, or others who are much in open air at all seasons. This little—for he was very small indeed as to size—this little old gentleman was encountered in a first class smoking carriage on the Southwestern railway.

"Curious trial, that, before the Lord Chief Justice," continued the old gentleman, as if he wished to promote further conversation. "I was once tried for murder myself," (with a pleasant smile.)—"Yes," said the little old gentleman, "and very near hung too. I did not get off free. I was sentenced to transportation for life; went through seven years of it, and then they pardoned me for what I had never done."

"You see," said the little old gentleman, smiling more than ever, as the five other smokers in the carriage stared at him. "You see, I was for many years a cattle merchant in London. My business consisted in receiving from abroad—from Holland, Germany, Normandy, or wherever I could form a consignment—oxen, cows, sheep, pigs, some on my own account, others to be sold on commission for correspondents, who sent their animals to me for sale. The trade was a profitable one. Every beast sent over on my account was fully insured, so that if they died on the passage, I came upon the insurance company. I had very few casualties, and taking one thing with another, I may have fairly calculated upon realizing at least twenty-five per cent. on my capital every three months. In other words I got a profit of one hundred per cent. on the money I had commenced business with.

"But with money comes the desire for more. There was a time before I began to deal in cattle when I thought myself rich if, at the end of a year, I had two hundred pounds in bank, over and above my expenses for the last twelve months.—Now it was otherwise. I lamented that I had not always an idle balance of fifteen hundred or two thousand pounds. I was fond of money for money's sake. I could not make money fast enough for my wishes in the cattle trade, and therefore determined to do a little in the loan and discounting way.

"It is nearly twenty years ago, and I have gone through a great deal of trouble since. My system was never to put too many eggs in one pot—never to lend very much to any single person—but to lend very small amounts to various people.—I used to answer the advertisements of tradesmen in difficulty, and if I found the borrower had good security to offer, I would lend him perhaps thirty or forty pounds, taking ten pounds a month for the accommodation, and much more in proportion for longer periods. One of my clients was a printer, with a small business, near what was then called the New Road, near Maryiebone Road. He had often borrowed twenty, thirty, and once sixty pounds from me, and had always repaid me to the day. The security he gave me was all the same, joint note of hand of himself and his brother, a grocer up Hackney way. The name of this borrower was Strange—Edward Strange. He was in a delicate state of health, always suffering from his chest, and in severe winters he used to be laid up for weeks together with a bad cough. He was a widower, without children.

"One day Strange came to me and said that he had a very enticing offer to enter into partnership with a printer who had been established in business several years. The sum required to be paid for the partnership was three hundred pounds and he asked me to advance that amount upon the security of a policy insurance for one thousand pounds upon his life.—On inquiry I found that, years before, Strange had, when a young and healthy man, effected an insurance upon his life for five hundred pounds. This policy he always managed to keep up, and still wished that it should not relapse. As it had been running on for nearly twenty years, and as he paid a very small premium, and was now in very bad health, the insurance company would have been very glad to have purchased it back.—Therefore, after looking at the affair in every possible way, I came to the conclusion that the security was good, and that I might safely advance the sum of three hundred pounds upon the security policy being indorsed over to me. This was done and I advanced the money. Gentlemen, it was the worst day's business I ever did in my life.

"In general, a creditor sees but little of his debtors, whether they are few or many. The man who owes money generally avoids the individual to whom he owes it. But it happened otherwise with Strange and myself. With the new business that he had bought he was not expected, nor even wished, by his partner to interfere; and the town business bought made it very desirable that he should be as free as possible from the confined air of the close printing rooms. The partnership he had purchased secured for him a certain amount of income which, together with the interest he had besides, allowed him to go about in divers part of the country, traveling being much recommended by the medical attendant.—Knowing I had to make weekly trips to Harwich, and that I had often to go to Rotterdam in the way of business when looking after cattle, he asked me whether he could be of use to me as clerk. He asked for no salary, only his actual traveling expenses; and for this he was to keep my accounts and write my letters and make himself generally useful. The bargain was a good one for both parties. On the one hand my business was increasing every week, and, having to go about a great deal at fairs and to see a great many dealers, I had no time to look properly after my accounts, which sometimes got rather complicated. On the other hand, Strange had enough to live upon, but not enough to pay traveling expenses with comfort. Having been friends for several years, when we traveled together we always had our meals in common and in country places, or where the inns were very bad we generally took a double-bedded room between us.

"After a time I found Strange's assistance of such value to me that I was able to increase my connections very materially indeed. Being a sharp man, he was able at the end of twelve month to make purchases and conduct my business as well as I could. This led, naturally enough, to a partnership being formed between us, by the terms of which I was to lend him five hundred pounds to put into the business, of which he was to have the fourth of the net profits. As surety for the five hundred pounds he insured his life for another thousand. Thus, when we commenced working together as partners, Strange owed me eight hundred pounds, and I held policies of insurance on his life for two thousand pounds.

"Our business trips used generally to last from a week to fortnight. Sometimes we were detained at the port to which we had to ship the animals we purchased, waiting for a fair wind for shipping them to England. Sometimes our vessel (of course we always sailed in a steamer) was windbound, or, perhaps, a storm would come on and we would be detained for days together. Sometimes, one of us would remain in London conducting the business, while the other was sent him abroad. And this had happened when the event of which I am now going to tell you took place.

"As Strange could speak French very well, I often sent him alone to the fairs in Normandy and Brittanny, nearly always going myself to those in Holland and the north of Germany. It was somewhere about the end of a certain May that he went over to France, intending to remain there about six weeks, and go from one fair to another on a certain round. Three or four consignments of beasts had reached me in London, and the last was to come over in a day or two. My partner had visited all the fairs he intended to go to and was to join me. I wrote at Southampton, where he was to land, saying that I would meet him there, take a look at the cattle he had bought, and send some to London and go with the rest to some of the southern counties, where there was likely to be a market that would suit my books.

"I reached Southampton on the day named and met Strange. We dined together in the afternoon at a small inn near the docks, and, finding we could not get two bedrooms, engaged a double-bedded room for the night. Then we began to square up accounts, and spent the afternoon seeing how we stood in the matter of money. But something that Strange had done vexed me sorely. He had, in the face of what I had written to him in London to the contrary, paid some two pounds a head more for about thirty or forty beasts than we should ever realize. When I told him how foolishly he had acted, he answered me back that he had done his best, and that he had as much right as I had to speculate with our joint funds. To this I replied that, although it was undoubtedly a partner in the concern it was I who put in all the capital, and that he had only an interest of twenty-five per cent. in the profit. His rejoinder I remember well. He said that if he died, I would get all the money he owed me and more. To this I retorted in a passion, that I knew it, and that I did not care how soon he died. All this wrangling took place in the coffee-room of the inn, before the girl who waited on us, the cook of the house, the barmaid, the landlady and the landlady's husband. The latter, when he saw we were getting angry, tried to make friends between us, but in vain. We were each annoyed at what the other had said, as well as at our own folly, and neither would be the first to say he was sorry for what had happened.

"About six o'clock I took up my hat and went to see some friends in the town. When I got back it was past eleven o'clock, and Strange, the housemaid told me, had been in bed and asleep more than an hour. I paid my share of the bill, for I intended starting early, went up stairs, found Strange fast asleep, and went to bed myself. Next morning I was called at five, packed my bag, swallowed a cup of coffee, and in half an hour was on my way to London. On leaving the inn, I told the porter that my companion was asleep; and, as he was only going by the ten o'clock coach to Brighton, they need not call him yet. I should not forget to tell you that while I was dressing in the morning Strange awoke, and that we shook hands over our dispute of the previous day. We moreover agreed to change our plans, and Strange was to meet me in London on the next day. As I was closing my carpetbag, he asked me to lend him one of my razors; a thing which I had the greatest objection to, (for if I am particular about anything I possess, it is about my razors,) but, having just made up my difference with him, I could hardly refuse him so small a favor.

"The days of which I am writing, were before railways had extended to Southampton. Leaving the latter place at half past five in the morning, it was half past six in the evening before I got to town. I went to bed, got up next day, and while I was sitting at breakfast with my wife, our servant told me that two gentlemen wished to speak to me. I went down to see them, and before I could open my mouth to ask them what they wanted, found myself with handcuffs on, arrested for the murder of Edward Strange.

"It seems that, finding Strange did not come down by half past nine, the porter went up to call him. He found the door locked, but no key in it. After knocking some time on the outside, the door was broken open, and poor Strange was found with his throat cut from ear to ear, and a razor in his hand. The key of the door was afterwards found in the coffee-room under the very bench on which I had sat to drink my cup of coffee before starting.

"I was brought before the magistrate at Bow street the next morning, and was by him sent down to Southampton to await the result of the coroner's inquest upon my partner. The verdict was wilful murder, and after commitment by the magistrate to the sessions, I was put on trial for my life at Winchester.

"The trial lasted only a few hours. It was fully proved that Strange and myself had quarreled and had high words the night before, and that I had said I did not care how soon he died, so that I could recover the money I had lent him. A great deal was made of the fact that by Strange's death I should be entitled to the insurance upon his life to the amount of two thousand pounds, by which I should gain a clear gain of one thousand two hundred.

"It was further shown that the razor found in poor Strange's hand was mine, and three medical men declared their conviction that, although that instrument was undoubtedly used to kill the deceased man, it must have been placed in his hands after death. Moreover, there were not only evident marks of a struggle about the bed and bed-clothes, but Strange's throat was cut from right to left, which no one could do but a left handed man which Strange was not.—Then again, the fact of the bed-room door being locked, and the key laid close to where I had breakfasted, told fearfully against me. It was clear that Strange could not by any possibility cut his own throat and then locked the door of his own room on the outside. It was attempted by my counsel to throw discredit upon this part of the evidence. The learned gentleman tried very hard to elicit a setting which might even lead the jury to imagine that the door had been locked after the murder, and that some person unknowingly let the key drop in the coffee room. But it was of no avail whatever. It was clearly proved that the key had been inside the door when I went to bed, and that it had never been seen again until it was found in the coffee room.—My defense tried hard to make out that some person likely to commit the murder might have been in the house on that day, but all of no use. As the trial went on even I, who knew of my innocence, could not help allowing myself that the evidence, though purely circumstantial, was very strong against me. The only points in my favor were that, on the day of the murder I was supposed to have committed, I traveled up to London, and had not the least appearance of a man who had anything on his mind.

"Again, Strange was know to have had on his person a gold watch and a purse containing a few sovereigns and twenty-five pound notes, the numbers of which latter were ascertained at the bank of Southampton, where he had procured them in exchange for a bank-bill bill.—The watch had been taken and was never traced; the sovereigns had also disappeared; but the bank notes had been exchanged at the Bank of England on the day of the murder, and before I was fully proved, had any communication with any one in London. Of this last point my counsel made the most, but it did not help me much, if anything. The jury retired, and after deliberating some time, returned into court and declared, that I was guilty of the wilful murder of Edward Strange.

"Gentlemen, a man who has gone through that ordeal—who has heard the jury pronounce him guilty of a capital crime, and heard the judge pass the sentence of death upon him—a man, I say gentlemen, who has gone through that ordeal and still lives to tell the tale may (or am I presumptious?) be looked upon as a man who has really gone through what, in these days, would be called a sensational time. I heard every word the foreman said, and found myself wondering what the judge's black cap—(of which every one has heard but few have seen—would be like. Then I was in a kind of dream for a time until I heard the words condemning me to be hanged by the neck until I was dead. A sensational effect upon me, gentlemen, or am I presumptious? And will you favor me, sir, with a light?

"In spite of appearances," said this little old gentleman, smoking with exceeding relish, "my friends did not believe me to be guilty of the fearful crime for which I was to be hanged by the neck until I was dead, in ten days after the trial. They moved heaven and earth to obtain a commutation of my sentence, and after a great deal of trouble they succeeded. At the time of which I speak, there was in England a temporary but strong reaction against capital punishment. I cannot recollect all the circumstances of the case, but in a trial for murder two men had been condemned to death and duly executed, and shortly after they had been hanged by the neck until they were dead, their supposed victim made his appearance, well and hearty. The public took up the question of not hanging upon circumstantial evidence, and I benefitted to the extent of my life by the temporary excitement. I was respited and condemned to transportation for life, and very shortly afterwards—for in those days transportation was in full play—found myself on my way out to Van Dieman's Land, a convict for life.

"For seven long years, gentlemen, did I undergo this punishment for a crime of which I was perfectly innocent. Curiously enough the man who really had murdered poor Strange, as he afterwards confessed, went out in the same ship with me, condemned to seven years transportation for burglary. He must have heard me tell my story and declare my innocence over and over again; for in the colony we worked together in the same gang. He was afterwards assigned to a master who lived near the prison where I had to slave out my time, or in those days "liters" whose sentence had been commuted from capital punishment, were never allowed to leave the chain-gangs. But after three years in Van Dieman's Land, this real murderer took to his trade of burglary. To avoid being captured he fled to the bush, and on a party of police being sent after the band to which he belonged, he shot a constable in cold blood. He was captured, sentenced to be hanged by the neck until he was dead, and two days before his execution confessed that my had murdered at Southampton, a person called Strange, for which murder person had been sentenced to death.

"His statement was taken down, and it was exact. It appeared that he had been out for several nours in the inn, intending to steal whatever he could lay his hands on. Early in the morning he found his way in poor Strange's room, hoping to pick up something before the house was astir. But his entrance awoke Strange, who struggled for a few moments with him, and he kept hold of him. The razor which I had lent Strange being still lying on the bed, he murdered his victim with it, and then put it into Strange's hand in order to make it appear that he had committed suicide. He secured the watch, purse and the bank-notes of the murdered man, and stole out of the house, locking the door of the bed-room on the outside and hiding the key. He declared that he had got into Strange's room before I left the house, and that, for sometime after, his fear was lest I should come back. Had I done so, the murder would, in all probability, have been prevented.

"When the statement made by this convict had been duly verified, and when certain references had been made to the home authorities, I was duly liberated.—That is to say, gentleman, I obtained the royal pardon for having committed a crime which I never committed. And very sensible I am, gentlemen, of the royal clemency. Though it seems odd."

"All tickets, gentlemen, all tickets ready!"

The train had reached the ticket platform at Vauxhill.

"Ah! yes!" said the little old gentleman, producing his; "mine's a return ticket, but it had came very nearly been otherwise!"

"SHORTEN SAIL."

The good ship N——lay at her moorings at Garden Reach, Calcutta, one hot evening, and the officers were sitting on deck, under an awning, smoking their Manillas, and chatting over their varied adventures in all parts of the world. As may be imagined, some of the stories took a superstitious turn, and the more robust of us were laughing heartily at the fears of our shipmates, when our mail agent, good old Lieut. R——, who had been silently enjoying his weed and brandy-pawne, suddenly broke in with—

"Well, boys there's no harm in laughing at such things, perhaps, but I can tell you an incident that happened to me when I was a young man, which was anything but a laughing matter. I can't satisfactorily account for it to this day; but it is every word true, as I could bring several who were with me at the time to prove."

We were all ears for the story, for we respected the teller of it more than I can well describe. He was truth and honor themselves.

"Well, then, many years ago I was a lieutenant on board the old A——frigate as she was then, troopship as she is now, I believe, commanded by Captain F——.

"As you all know, I dare say, it is the custom on board ship, when carrying troops, for a watch of soldiers to be told off to keep off deck for certain hours, and make themselves useful, in case they might be wanted, by tailing on the braces, tacks, sheets, or any rope that may be put into their hands, and with them certain officers are also told off, who keep watch with the lieutenant on duty.

"Well, it often happened that one particular man, Lieutenant B——, kept watch with me, and we grew to be great cronies, and running down the Trades, we used to place the quarter-deck together, keeping ourselves awake by telling each other our adventures and experiences of life. However, it very seldom happened that we got an entirely quiet watch for we generally had something to do in the shape of shortening sail. It was very odd, when any other man was on watch with me, the weather was generally fair, but no sooner did B——'s turn come than we were sure to have a squall once or twice in the watch, and sometimes so heavy that we were obliged to reduce sail considerably. At last it became so regular an occurrence, that I used to joke B——about it, and tell him that I would not have him keep watch with me, as he always brought me ill luck. The other officers noticed it also, and they finally determined we should no longer keep watch together, as they said we always brought foul weather, and they arranged it so that I entirely lost my watch-mate.

"Things went on in this way till we left Rio Janeiro, when one night, at twelve o'clock, coming on deck to keep the middle watch, I found my friend B——there. The officer who was to have kept watch with me had fallen sick, and B——had taken his place.

"In spite of the ill luck he generally brought me, I was glad to find my old chum on deck, and told him laughingly that I hoped, now we had been separated so long, the spell was broken, and that we should have a comfortable watch.

"Everything looked favorable for a quiet watch, and after mustering the men and giving a look to the sails, I came on the quarter-deck, and commenced walking up and down with B——,

We were soon deep in conversation, and I was telling him an adventure that happened to me in my wanderings many years before, when, to my astonishment, I heard as it were a voice close to my ear, only on the opposite side to which B——was, say, in an earnest and emphatic tone, 'shorten sail.' It was not loud, it was a sort of hissing whisper, very clear—there was no mistaking the word.

"I turned to B——, and said, 'Come, old fellow, none of that nonsense; you're not going to frighten me.'

"'What do you mean?' asked B——, looking fairly puzzled.

"'Do you mean to tell me seriously,' said I, 'that you did not try to play off a joke on me, and whisper some humbug about shortening sail?'

"'Certainly not,' said B——. 'Have you not been looking at me all the time you have been telling your yarn; how could I have spoken without your knowledge? What has put such an idea into your head?'

"'Well, it is strange,' said I, 'but I distinctly heard a voice utter the words, "Shorten sail."'

"Hardly had the words escaped my lips when again came the voice, more earnestly and beseechingly, as it were, 'Shorten sail.' It seemed to come on the wind, but it was distinct and clear.

"'There it is again,' I said; some one must be playing pranks, B——.'

"'On my honor, I am not,' said B——; 'and there is no one else about, it must be fairy.'

"'It's some body,' I said; and I hunted all over the quarter-deck to see if any one was concealed. My search was fruitless. Except the man at the wheel and the quartermaster at the conn, there was nobody on the quarter-deck, but B——and myself.

"So again we commenced our walk, and gathering up the thread of my narrative, I soon forgot our interruption. This lasted, I suppose, about eight or ten minutes, when to my startled and alarmed ear came again the same earnest voice, but now much louder and in a more imperative tone, 'Shorten sail.'

"'Good heavens! B——,' I exclaimed, 'did you hear *that*? I cannot stand this any longer; I must obey it.'

"'What nonsence,' said B——, 'You surely won't give way to what must be only your fancy, from some unsettled state of your mind or body most likely. See how fine the weather is, and no chance of a squall. What will Captain F——say if you reduce sail?'

"'I don't care what he says,' I replied; 'shorten sail I must and will. Lay aft here the watch. Take in the main top-gallant stunsails, and see all the stunsail gear clear for running fore and aft.'

"I saw the men when they were obeying the order, looking to windward, evidently wondering what I could be shortening sail for on such a clear night; but of course my orders were obeyed, and the sails taken in.

"When this was done, B——and I resumed our walk, though I was much too excited to go on with my story.

"We had not been walking many minutes, when again came the voice waiting last for, 'Shorten sail.'

"I was nearly beside myself. What was I to do? If I skippered the ship of canvas in this light breeze, I should incur the captain's displeasure, and the laugh of my messmates; but how could I resist the warning? After thinking for a minute or two, I gave orders to take in all the stunsails and clew up the royals, and see the top-gallant and topsail, halyards clear for running, and the fore-gear ready to haul the foresail up in case of need. I then went below and called the captain, and told him what I had done, and the reason.

"He laughed at me, though I could see he was inclined to be angry, and said, 'How can you be so foolish, R——? This is only one of your Guernsey superstitions. Go on deck, and if the weather continues the same for half an hour longer see everything right again.'

"Well, on deck I went, sadly distressed, and trying hard to think myself a great fool for giving way to these feelings, when, as I came aft and had just got abaft the mizen mast, I again heard the warning voice. The words were the same, but this time it sounded like a passionate entreaty, as if harm must follow were the warning not heeded, and I determined, whatever might come of it, to obey.

"I immediately had the top-gallant sails clewed up, and went straight down into the captain's cabin again.

"'Captain F——' said I, 'I can bear this no longer. I must beg you to come on deck yourself. Either I am going mad, or else something is going to happen.'

"Growling at my stupidity, and devoting all Guernseymen to a place which shall be nameless, out turned the captain, and proceeded to dress himself, saying, 'Go on deck, Mr. R——; I will be with directly.'

"I left his cabin, and was ascending the companion ladder to the quarter-deck, when I heard a sound as if ten thousand cavalry were galloping overhead. I rushed on deck, shouting, 'Let go the topsail halyards!—Man the foregear! Up with the foresail!' when the squall burst upon us, tearing through the rigging with a crack like thunder, and away went the foresail clean out of the bolt-ropes in a white cloud ahead. 'Turn the hands up!' I cried, and with a strange sensation I added, 'Shorten sail!' after the manner of my mysterious monitor.

"By this time the captain was by my side, and the men came tumbling up from below. The topsail halyards had been let go, but it was with great difficulty we could get the yards down, as the large sails behind out-balanced the squall. Fortunately, it had taken us right aft, and the precautions I had used in clewing up the royals and stunsails, had saved them from being torn to ribbons. The strength of the gale was spent on the masts, but the breeze was still very strong, and the ship was plunging and rolling heavily. Gradually, however, as the men got the yards down, and the sails bended out before the squall, the ship righted, and we were able to look around us. The storm had passed as suddenly as it came, and in the direction from which it came the sky was black as ink, while behind us the moon shone out clear and cloudless. As I gave the ship into the charge of the officer of the watch, I felt a little nervous at the idea of having to face the laughing comments of my shipmates on my night's work, but I was saved the trouble of facing them that night, for I was ordered by the captain to turn in at once, and he would see the men himself. As I left the quarter-deck, I called to B——, and said, 'Come, old fellow, none of that nonsense; you're not going to frighten me.'

"'What do you mean?' asked B——, looking fairly puzzled.

"'Do you mean to tell me seriously,' said I, 'that you did not try to play off a joke on me, and whisper something