

The Manchester Journal.

MANCHESTER, VT., TUESDAY MORNING, JULY 26, 1864.

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\$5 AT THE END OF THE YEAR.

The Manchester Journal,
is published every Tuesday Morning at
MANCHESTER, VT.

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THE SKIPPER'S WIFE.

Founded on Fact.
From One's Work.

Elrui is much like other fishing villages on the Suffolk coast, nothing particularly striking in scenery. Some say the lights on the water are more varied than in many places, and when the sun sets in the sultry summer evenings, there certainly is a particularly bright hue of dancing light from the horizon, ending where the waves ripple in at the base of the cliff.

I say cliff, for there is only one at Elrui, jutting out into the sea some forty yards farther than the rest of the mainland, which forms almost a straight line from the harbor, a mile to the east of the village, to the remains of the old castle, a hundred yards to the west of the cliff.

The Shark's tooth Cliff, as it is called, rises about sixty feet above the sea; it used to be much higher once, but every year, as the tides run high, a portion gives way.

One of the fishermen has often told me that he could remember well, as a child, its being a perfect hill, and that he and the other lads used to amuse themselves by sliding down the slippery turf facing the sea, and gathering the mushrooms for which the hill used to be so celebrated.

The sea encroaches very fast, though not so rapidly as it did before they put up the breakwater.

At certain times, when the tides are very low, you can see a rock covered with long matted sea weeds; this the fishermen call the Belfry Rock, and it is where the old parish church used to stand.

Three years ago, when the tides were very low, I hired a boat, and was rowed out to the Belfry. The waters were as still and clear as crystal, and, gazing over the sides of the boat, I could distinctly make out in places where the foundations must have stood. I had been reading the account of the old church in the county history, and it seemed to me so strange to be floating over the foundations of those Norman arches that had once been so much admired.

As I gazed down, I saw the red lines of sea-weed lazily moving at the bottom, where the shrimps were darting quickly about, and the little eels showing their pointed heads from the crevices of what might have been old building stones.

It was an important village once, Elrui, and the church (so said my county history) was the pride of the neighborhood.

The noble family of Bliss for many a hundred years owned the entire parish, and, among other strange things, I read how, up to 1600, they used to enforce a toll on every boat in the village, as it returned from the herring or mackerel harvest; and now no boats were permitted to put out on the day that a body was borne from the castle to the family vaults, long since filled with sand and sea-water.

The fishermen's wives, even to the present day, frighten their noisy children into silence by threatening to hand them over to the Black Earl.

Who this Black Earl was, I could never quite satisfactorily discover; but tradition said that an owner of the place, some hundreds of years ago, had finished a life of unexampled wickedness by springing off the cliff into the sea; and this I know, that, even to this time, before a storm the fishermen will tell you that the form of the Black Earl is to be seen hovering over where the chance of the church once stood, and where his body, if it could have been found, would have been buried.

"Can't see much of the ruin," young gentlemen, said the old fisherman who had rowed them out, and who had been watching, with evident satisfaction, the interest I took in surveying the site of the church, which, by the way, in common with the other villages, took great delight in pointing out.

"Very little," I said, waking from the reverie about the old Norman church, St. Matthias, its vaults filled with sand and sea-weed, and all those bodies testing round it, where the once grassy churchyard stretched, waiting till the sea shall give up its dead.

I had been thinking and dreaming, till I could almost fancy that the low rolling of the sea was the sound of the organ, and that once more Elrui Church stood before me, with its lofty spire and deep-set windows, and that I could see the simple fishing folk bowing before the old Earl's pew, who, with his wife and daughters, sat in ruffled state, surrounded by the quaintly carved monuments of sleeping ancestors.

"Did you ever see the Black Earl?" I said, raising my eyes from gazing over the side of the boat, seeing that my companion expected me to talk.

"Thank the Lord, never," he answered, refilling his pipe; my mother did, however, before that storm which blew so uncommon hard fifty six years ago. One day she comes in and says, 'I say, Bill, I was a coming back along the cliff just now, when I seen a black shadow, like a man, floating round the Belfry Rock.'

"Mayhap it was a cloud or a porpoise," says I, seeing she looked very much frightened about it.

"It wasn't a cloud, boy," she said, "nor a porpoise, either—'twas the

Black Earl; but don't talk no more about it. I should not have minded so much if your dad had not gone out a fishing, and the clouds look very asked."

"Sure enough there was such a gale that night as I ever heard of before or since. I was a sleeping in the same room with mother, when I wakes up, hearing a powerful noise of wind against the window. I starts up, and sees mother kneeling by her bed—'What's the matter, mother?' says I. 'Din't say my mother, rising from her knees, and catching hold of my hand, 'I've been praying for your father; I know 'twas the Black Earl I seen. Lord have mercy on a body! I know my dear man be a dead corpse, and so he was, sure enough. He and his two mates were picked up, three days after, at the foot of yonder building.'

"That's the coast-guard station, is it not?" I said to him, looking at the building he pointed me out, and wishing to change what I know must be a painful subject. "Do you often have any smuggled goods landed at Elrui?"

"Very few, indeed—they keep such an uncommon sharp look out now a days; when I was a boy a deal of business used to be done, and they say as how the great people at the castle were not above trying it on, now and then."

"When do you last remember any goods being smuggled on shore?" I said, seeing from a grim sort of a smile, that he had a good story if he would but tell it.

"Two years ago, come January, was the last time as ever it was tried on, mayhap, sir, you would like to hear about it? Though part seems rather sad-like, here goes."

"Two years ago come January, a ship, looking like a collier coming from Newcastle, anchored in the offing; it was a clear frosty morning, with a sharp breeze from the east, which prevented many from going out fishing. About twenty of us were gathered round the benches in front of the coast-guard station yonder, when we see this ship letting down her anchor.

"What ship be that?" said I; 'taint the Tilda, what brings coals to the Elrui wharf. 'Jack,' says I to my son, 'but home and get the glass, a dle see what we can make of it.'

"Just as Jack comes with the telescope, up comes Lieutenant Barns, who commands the station.

"What do you make of it, my man?" says he, calling him Captain, 'make of it? Why nothing at all; 'taint the Tilda, though she s'ems to be a collier.'

"A salvage case, perhaps," says he; 'but we shall hear all about it directly, as they are letting down the boat, I see.'

In a few minutes the boat was at the shore, and a man with a thick serge coat and very large buttons, jumped out and walked up towards the place where we were standing.

"Does your parson live near here, mates?" says he, as he came up the gangway.

"Parson," says old John Pler, who loves his joke, 'to be sure he does, and he'll marry you as well as any one along the coast; as no doubt you have heard and come about.'

"This sailor was received with shouts of laughter by all, except the man with the big buttons, who put on a most uncommon sad face, and pulled out a large handkerchief, with which he began to mop his eyes.

"Taint my getting married," says he, 'I be come about. Yonder ship be the collier Mary Ann Darley, of Newcastle; and it be along of Mary Ann Darley that I be here to-day.'

"She then wants to get married," only it's not to you, said old John; 'and that's why you put on such an uncommon long face. Well, I be sorry for you, mate, that I be.'

"Mary Ann Darley, who was the beloved wife of our skipper George Halford Darley, and arter whom the ship was named, is dead, dead as a red herring," said the man, with a voice full of anguish, which made old John look ashamed of his former jokes. 'No, mates, without any more trifling with my feelings, which are such as I can't express, tell us where your dear parson lives, because our skipper's mind be in such a state, that he says nothing but the consolation your view can give, of whom he has often heard, can do him any good.'

"This compliment to our minister, the Rev. Mr. Coles, whom we all loved, and of whom we were not a little proud, and the expression of deep sorrow on the man's face, turned all our sympathies towards him, and we all volunteered to show him the way to the vicarage."

"In less than half an hour we saw our minister's tall thin figure coming down the village with the man with the big buttons, and in another ten minutes he was on board the vessel."

"In about an hour's time the boat landed Mr. Coles again, who, as he passed us, stopped to shake hands with the Lieutenant, who had again joined us, bringing his own glass with him."

"Most interesting case," said the vicar. 'I never saw a man more completely prostrated by grief; poor fellow! his wife dead—just three days—only been married two years! I never witnessed more sympathy ex-

hibited for any one than the whole crew expresses towards him; to see it was quite charming. The man with those large buttons is a good, honest, sailor-like fellow, with the tenderest of hearts. I was deeply interested in all the particulars of the young woman's death, which he told me. He ended by beseeching me to persuade the skipper to bury his wife, as the crew can't bear a dead body on board ship, and the skipper, he says, is almost always sitting and crying by it. I could not help agreeing with him that it was no use in keeping the poor woman above ground."

"And what have you settled to do?" said the Lieutenant, returning his glass into its case.

"Why, of course, the thing was rather irregular, but as all the men on board seemed very anxious about it, I told the skipper, poor fellow, who seemed as overcome by grief as any man I ever met, that if he liked, I would perform the last rites over his poor young wife this very afternoon. At first, as I was told to expect, he would not hear of the funeral taking place anywhere but at Newcastle, his home, but after some persuasion he yielded the point, and the thing is all settled; so, as I must tell the sexton to prepare a grave by half-past three, I must not talk any longer; and really, the scene I have just come from makes me feel that I should like to be alone for a time. I am most thankful to say that the conversation I had with the poor fellow has done much to make him resigned. He had heard of me often before, he said, and on his table I noticed my little tract on resignation, which he told me, to use his own words, had been a balm to his wounded spirit. Very gratifying, was it not? Good morning to you, my dear Lieutenant; good morning, my good men, he added, as we raised our caps to him, and saw his kindly face turn towards home."

"Before long the bell began to toll, and as I went home to my dinner, saw the sexton hard at work at the grave, which at the skippers request was to be made on the side nearest the sea and farthest from the village, since he told the vicar it would be so comforting, when his ship passed by Elrui, to see the spot where his Mary Ann was sleeping."

"The report that there was to be a funeral from the strange ship in the offing, spread like wildfire through the village, and half an hour before the body was to leave the ship, the cliff was crowded by the villagers, the women with their shawls tied over their heads, leading their children by their hands."

"Funerals are always a great attraction to our people, but since the last Earl at the castle was buried, none had caused so much interest as this."

"Poor Skipper Darley!" says my old woman, 'won't he feel lonesome just, when he gets back to his ship without his missus?'

"Werry," says I, 'no doubt; he ain't been married more nor two years. Lor, what a good sort of a female she must have been, all the crew seem so fond of her; look you here, old lady, through the glass. D'ye see the figure head of the vessel yonder?'

"Yes," says she, resting the glass on my shoulder; 'a figure of woman in green gown and yellow hair.'

"That be no doubt, an exact likeness of Mary Ann Darley," says I; 'it's a very common plan that, and as old Cap'n Bist, as commanded the Tilda years ago, used to say: 'Whenever I follows my wife, I goes right; as I sticks her at the end of my vessel, the Tilda alters goes right.'

"Lor!" says my wife, again looking through the glass, 'how beautiful Mrs. Mary Ann Darley must have been! Never did I see such a bust, hair, and hearings. They are coming at last, the boats are being let down.'

"The church bells tolled sadly through the keen frosty air, and there was not a heart among all those on the cliff that did not feel the deepest sympathy for the widowed skipper."

"Slowly, and with a long measured stroke, came the two boats, into the first of which we had noticed the coffin being lowered."

"The bier had been taken down to the shore so, when they had all landed, the coffin was placed upon it, and borne up the gang way by four of the crew."

"The other four came behind; the skipper, who appeared dreadfully agitated, lent heavily on the arm of the man with the big buttons, his face buried in his handkerchief, from which at times we could hear a deep sob."

"Up the little street the procession went, and among all the women there was not an eye that was not filled with tears."

"Poor fellow!" said my wife, 'he do take on terrible, to be sure, that he certainly does. How kind his friend seems to him, 'aint he crying just a little too?'

"Mr. Coles met him at the church gate, and with some sixty others they entered the church; and my wife stood at the corner of the yard and waited till they came out; which they did before long, and the coffin was lowered into the grave as the clock ceased to chime four."

"After it was all over, Mr. Coles went up and shook hands, in his kind way, with the skipper, and tried to

console him. Much he seemed to require comforting, poor fellow! "Just let me look once more at my Mary Ann's coffin—one more look at Mary Ann Darley's grave afore they fill it up forever."

"Come along, poor mate," said his friend, 'and don't take on so terrible; I have spoke to the hind virg, and he says he will see to the monument being erected right, when you sends the design from Newcastle. Only think how comforting it will be, when you are a sailing along past this here place with coals, to be able just to look through the glass and say, 'I can see the place where, underneath an ill-gotten tomb, rests Mary Ann Darley, what was so very dear to me as a wife and all those who knowed her as a sister.'

"These words seemed to have a comforting effect on the mind of the widower, who suffered himself to be led away, saying in tones which deeply moved us all, 'Bless your good vicar, what wrote that tract, which a one pervenit me following my Mary Ann to the grave broken-arted.'

"The bell began once more to toll, as the sexton filed up the grave, and hid from the admiring sight of the boys the rows of brass nails, which told that Mary Ann Darley was cut off at the early age of twenty-six."

"Cut off as a tulip," said the sexton, who always improved the occasion to the bystanders; 'and her husband remains as an ostrich alone in the desert; and how I wonders he did not have a brick grave, which would have made her comfortable, and been 2s. 4d. into my breeches' pockets, which, as my wife has twins again, would be acceptable—very.'

"Bless ye, John," says my old woman, as we walked home, 'I don't know what ye would do without your missus, to get your meals ready and take the insides out of fishes, nor I without my old man; and it's thinking of this that makes me feel so sad about this poor young man as has lost his Mary Ann, which must have been very beautiful if she was any way like the figure on the ship, which was most pleasing as seen through your glass.'

"I had that evening, I remember, left a net on the sea shore, and as I passed the coast-guard station I saw the Lieutenant watching the ship, which had not yet started. He called me up into the guardroom where he was seated. 'Bill,' says he to me, 'three of my men unfortunately are at Durling this week. I must have at least five men to-night; so if you wish to earn a good night's wages, be down at my house before eight this evening.'

"Before the appointed time I was at the Lieutenant's house; four of the coast-guard were seated round the kitchen fire, each armed with a musket and cutlass."

"This is for you," said the Lieutenant, handing me a cutlass and long pistol; 'now follow me.'

"Where are we to go to?" said I to the man with whom I had to walk.

"To church," says he.

"To church?" says I. 'What a rum go!'

"A rum go, indeed," says he; 'only it's orders not to talk, so don't ax more questions.'

"It was a clear night, and the frosty tomb-stones looked like ghosts as we entered the church, the key of which the Lieutenant had got. In a few minutes we were seated round the stove in the vestry, which we had lighted. A window was just opposite where I was sitting I could see that the light of the strange ship in the offing, and a few yards before us was the new made grave of the skipper's wife."

"I think we must have sat more than three hours, when I noticed the light on the ship, which it was my turn to watch, moving; and through the night-glass I could see that a boat was being lowered into the sea. I called the attention of the Lieutenant to this fact, who said, 'All right,' I thought so; but, as they won't think of landing nearer than the ruins, we shall have to wait some time yet, I'll be bound."

"In less than an hour after this, just as the clock was chiming twelve, I distinctly saw four figures clambering over the church wall. Two of them stopped short, and hid themselves under the shadow of an old tobacco-stone, evidently to keep watch. The other two, keeping as much as possible out of the moonlight, advanced to the new made grave before the window."