

THE BLUE FLAG

Written in 1861

By Sarah Schoonmaker Baker

Chapter 1 A Young Sailor

Theodore Gould was going to sea. Theodore was no scapegrace, about to tie up his bundle and sneak out a back-window as a runaway. If he had no Christian principle to keep him from such a mean act, he was too truthful and honorable so to grieve and try his widowed mother.

He had fairly and frankly told that mother that no life could so please and satisfy him as life on the sea. A strange fancy, it seemed to her, to want to be always in the midst of the wild roar of the ocean, and exposed to its fierce storms and thousand lurking dangers. And yet she reasoned with herself, "If no one fancied this rough career, what would become of our commerce? Who would man our ships of war, and carry our stars and stripes to the ends of the earth? The very missionaries themselves could never tread on foreign soil, were there no strong-hearted sailors to choose the ocean for their home."

Yes, it must be right that some boys should incline to this dangerous occupation, and she would not withhold her son from the profession of his choice. True, her mother's pride had received a sad blow. Theodore had been first in his class at the high school and praises of his manly deportment had been sounding on all sides. She had hoped to see him distinguish himself through the talents with which she was sure he was gifted. Well, that was all over now. One absorbing desire had taken possession of the boy's mind, a sailor and a sailor only, he wished to be.

Mrs. Gould had no friends in high quarters to win for her son a position in the navy. She had not even an old sea-captain for an uncle to get her boy a good berth. He must take his chance before the mast, if he became a sailor at all. A rough, hard way of life, truly, for a lad who had enjoyed all the comforts of a quiet New England home.

Theodore, for his part, fancied beginning his career at the lowest round of the ladder. He said he didn't want to be pushed and bolstered. He preferred to fight his own way and so have some satisfaction in his victory.

He had watched the packing of his chest with infinite satisfaction. Such garments could belong to none but a sailor. He was beginning to realize that the favorite wish of his heart was about to be fulfilled. He had a pleasure in talking bravely of shipwreck and danger, when his sister Ella spoke timidly of what might befall him on the sea.

"Never fear for me, Ella," he said cheerily. "I feel it in my bones that the salt water is to do me no harm. You know I can swim like a fish, and climb like a squirrel, and as to hardship, there's not a fellow in school can stand what I can."

"May God preserve you from danger, my son," said Mrs. Gould, soberly and sorrowfully, "a trust in His protection is a better safeguard than any human strength."

"It is natural for women to be timid. I don't wonder you feel as you do about my going," said Theodore, affectionately, "but never fear, mother, you'll have me back again, taller and browner may be, but just the same son to you."

The boy put his arm round his mother as he spoke, and looked tenderly into her face.

“Dear Theodore,” she said, “much as I dread the dangers of the sea for you, I fear still more the influence of wild, reckless companions. How could I bear to see you a poor dissipated creature, like too many sailors who disgrace our country at home and abroad.”

The mother covered her face with her hands, at the frightful picture she had conjured up.

“Oh, mother, how can you think that possible? I hope I am too much of a gentleman to be so degraded,” said Theodore, proudly.

“Will you bring me home an elephant?” interposed little Bob, the pet of the house.

Bob was always sure to have something to say, when any painful discussion seemed coming up in the family. His odd, inappropriate remarks had broken up many a threatened difficulty at the fireside.

“I’ll bring you home something, certainly,” said Theodore, pleasantly, “what, I can’t say, but I shall be able to tell you all about elephants. I shall see plenty of them in India, and boa constrictors too, and tigers, and a thousand curious things besides.”

Bob looked up with profound respect at the tall brother who was to see so much, and who was so strong in his confidence in his own power and virtue.

Mrs. Gould meanwhile gazed tenderly at the manly, frank-faced boy, and yearned to hear him utter if it were but one word which would show that his trust was in God, rather than in his poor human strength and his own poor human heart.

No such words were to gladden her ears in that last interview. Theodore’s cheerful, affectionate spirit held out until the moment came for saying good-bye, then, in the midst of his assurances that all would be well, he dashed away warm tears from his eyes, tears of real sorrow at parting with the dear ones at home.

The sailor boy, in his sailor’s dress, jumped into the stage-coach that was to bear him to the seaport, where the good ship Kearny, bound for India, was lying at anchor. Hope again twinkled in his eye and glad smiles played around his mouth. He had no fears, no misgivings for the future.

Chapter 2 Good Samaritans

While Theodore Gould is getting on his “sea legs,” and learning some of the pleasures and pains of life on the ocean, we will turn our attention to matters taking place on shore in another place.

The cool evening air of autumn was settling over an Atlantic seaport. No country lake or stream had yet consented to travel mile and mile underground, to spout up at hydrants, and supply innumerable bath-rooms for the benefit of the good folks of the growing town. No, no. Those were the old days, when pump-handles were to be plied or well-ropes pulled, and every gallon of fresh water was procured at the expense of somebody’s muscles.

A tidy little girl had patiently waited for her turn at the corner pump, and now her bucket was full, and with the peculiar, sidling motion of carrying a weight upon one arm, she was moving along the pavement.

Suddenly she stopped, and putting down her burden, stood perfectly still. She was not giving up, wearied out, half-way home. Not she. That was not the spirit of Jennet

Coney. Jennet had come upon a scene that had arrested her attention. Here was something she could not pass by, and with an air of eager interest, she stood a mute spectator of what was going on before her.

A middle-aged man in a sailor's dress was sitting on the edge of a low flight of steps, with his head bowed upon his hand. One leg of his loose trousers hung helplessly down from the knee, plainly showing that the stout calf and broad foot that should have matched its fellow near by had been left somewhere on life's journey, much to the loss of the owner. This in itself would have attracted Jennet's attention and aroused her prompt sympathy, but the dejected air of the stranger still further called forth her compassion.

A knot of little boys had gathered around the sailor and were trying, by pretended attacks on his person, and by noisy raillery, to move him from his position.

"Let me alone, boys. I'm sick," he said at length, looking up sorrowfully.

There was a momentary pause while the children questioned among themselves the truth of his defence. Pity soon stole over several countenances and there was a decided falling back, when one of the roughest of the little crew exclaimed, "It's a sham. May be he is sick, though. May be he's got it very bad." Then, by imitating the motion of drinking from a bottle, he hinted to his companions the kind of sickness from which he believed the stranger to be suffering.

"I don't drink, boys. I'm sick," said the man, with the same sorrowful look as before.

There was an attempt at a halloo from the rude leader of the attack, but the smaller boys had slipped away, evidently convinced that there was no fun to be got out of such a sad stranger.

All this Jennet Coney had seen with burning indignation and now she promptly stepped to the sailor's side, saying,

"Mister, it's getting late. If you are sick, you had better just come on a few doors to where my mother lives, and I know she'll let you stay at our house tonight."

The man raised his eyes. There was truth and real hearty interest in Jennet's face, but still he hesitated.

"I don't know anybody. Nobody'll take me in. May be I'm going to be very sick. When the folks find me, they'll take me to the hospital. Go along, child. Your mother won't take in a poor sick fellow like me."

"Please, sir, my father was a sailor," urged the little girl.

Jennet seemed to think this was a conquering argument, for she picked up the cane that had dropped from the stranger's hand, and giving it to him, resumed her bucket, as if the move was about to be made. There was something in her assured way that had its weight. The sailor rose with difficulty, and slowly followed his young guide.

Jennet's home was, as she had said, but a few doors off, and it was soon reached, even by her trembling, tottering companion.

"It's a poor sailor, mother. A sick man," said Jennet, bursting in before him. "The boys were making fun of him and he's only got one leg. So I brought him home for you to take care of. He's real sick, mother."

"Very sick, ma'am," said the stranger, his pale face and trembling limbs proving the truth of his words.

A sick sailor! Ah, that was a thought that touched good Mrs. Coney to the quick. Had not her own Jack, her strong-hearted husband, died a stranger in a foreign hospital. This was a claim not to be resisted.

"Come in, sir. You are welcome," she said heartily. "You did right, Jennet. You did

right, my child.”

Chapter 3

A Family Council

Mrs. Coney was one of those genial, kindly, busy people, who like nothing so well as being actively engaged, especially if benefiting others as well as themselves. For three weeks she had been active enough to suit even her stirring, energetic spirit.

The stranger's illness had proved no sham, and no thing of a day to be put to flight by a single visit from a knowing doctor. The sailor was still fast in bed, and suffering woeful pains, judging from his moans and exclamations. More explicit communications than these he had not made since he was kindly hurried in to Mrs. Coney's only spare room, on the night of his arrival. The fever, which had raged in his veins ever since, had so confused his brain that any conversation with him had been impossible.

Tenderly, as if he had been a sick child, the poor fellow had been nursed by Mrs. Coney, Gideon, and Jennet, and in their family councils he was talked about as if he were somebody who was particularly dear to them. The sailor's clothes were marked, "Binnings," and by that name he was confidently called.

Gideon Coney had come down stairs to breakfast, after a night of attendance on the sick man. Gideon was no beauty at the best, and now his light hair was standing off from his fair, pale face in every direction, giving a wide-open look to his large, round blue eyes.

"Go, put yourself in order, Gideon," said Mrs. Coney, as if shrinking from the appearance of the youth about to present himself at her table. There was nothing on the table particularly worthy of respect. The little black teapot had only a plate of bread and a dish of roasted potatoes to keep it company. But if Mrs. Coney had been going to sit down with her children to crusts and cold water, she would have insisted upon their appearing in a decent and orderly manner.

As Gideon started off to do her bidding, her voice sounded out pleasantly after him, as she said, "Wash your face well, and clear up your thoughts, my son. I want to consult you about matters of importance."

What! did the thrifty, busy Mrs. Coney ever ask advice of her slender, simple-looking boy? Many people would have considered brisk little Jennet a far better counsellor.

Mrs. Coney was thoughtful and silent during the meal, and when it was over particularly prompt and active in clearing away the table.

When the small common room of the Coney's was in order once more, Mrs. Coney stepped to the stairway and called Gideon from the post he had resumed at Binnings' bedside.

"How is he now?" inquired Mrs. Coney, as anxiously as if she had summoned Gideon solely to hear of the stranger's welfare. "In a real quiet sleep, mother," said Gideon, and his plain face actually looked handsome, as it was overspread with hearty, kindly satisfaction at the good news he was telling.

Mrs. Coney motioned Gideon to a chair near the now empty table, and then sitting down opposite to him, she was about to open the conversation, when Jennet came bustling in and established herself beside her mother.

"Gideon," said Mrs. Coney, very soberly, "how long is it since Binnings came."

"Three weeks tonight. I was counting it up just now," was the prompt answer.

“Three weeks. I thought so,” mused Mrs. Coney. “Well, Gideon, we’ve paid up everything—medicine, doctor, and all—are you sure there’s nothing owing?”

“Not a cent, mother,” said Gideon proudly.

Mrs. Coney took from her pocket a small worn purse and emptied slowly on the table four half-dollars and two bright quarters. “There, children, that’s all there is left. Gideon, shall we have Binnings sent to the hospital and give up doing for him?”

“I’ll go without meat for a week, if you’ll keep him,” said Jennet, quickly.

“We’ll hold on to him, while there is any life in him,” said Gideon, decidedly.

“That’s right, my children, so we will,” said Mrs. Coney, with unusual warmth. “We won’t give up a poor sailor, when he’s at the worst.”

Mrs. Coney had a habit of asking the advice of her children, not only to strengthen herself in resolutions she had formed, but to interest them in helping to execute her plans. They well-knew her spirit, and were quite sure to advise in accordance with it.

“Now we’ve made up our minds, how shall we carry it out, Gideon?” continued the mother. “Thanks to Jack Coney’s thrifty ways, he didn’t leave me without a roof of my own over my head, but there’s the bread and butter to be found, and a woman’s needle don’t make gold in a hurry. I mustn’t wrong my own for strangers. We must sell something, Gideon. What shall it be?”

Jennet’s thoughts rapidly passed through her own possessions, while Gideon’s eye restlessly wandered round the room, with a glance, now and then, at his mother as if to discern the plan she had in her mind.

In one corner stood a rude case of shelves, on which were arranged bright-colored shells from every clime and an assortment of corals that would have charmed a collector.

Here Gideon’s eye rested and the sorrowful approval in his mother’s face assured him that he was right.

“Shall we sell the shells, the shells father brought home?” exclaimed Gideon, with pained astonishment. The idea that those treasures, which had been considered too sacred for him to touch, should fall into the hands of strangers, was hard to be received.

“To help a poor sailor in his need, Jack would have wished it,” said Mrs. Coney, slowly, with difficulty. Ah, every one of those bright treasures of ocean had other whispers for her than the roar of the far-off waves, that seems ever imprisoned in their secret cells. They told her of the glad returns from distant perils of the one she loved best. She well-knew which had been brought from islands in the sea, which from the tropic heats where Jack had lain sick of a fever, and which from the inhospitable shore where he had once wandered, a ship-wrecked mariner.

One little shell that had its own tiny case, Mrs. Coney now took in her hands. The rest might go, but she could not part with that. Had not Jack sent it to her by a messmate, with the honest earnings that he had hoped himself to lay in her hand. Had he not bade her remember, when she looked at that harp-shell, that he was now sounding his harp where there was “no more sea” and no more parting. The rest might go, but she could not spare that dear relic, which ever reminded her that he whom she mourned had cheerfully and believingly passed to his eternal home.

It was Jennet who watched at Binnings bedside that day, and as the sailor quietly dozed, the little girl plied her nimble fingers, feeling at each stitch that she was not only doing her part towards refilling the family purse, but having her share in befriending the desolate and afflicted stranger.

Gideon, meanwhile, had gone forth to try his skill as a salesman, disposing of

treasures which could be to no one so precious as to the sailor's wife.

Chapter 4 A Discovery

Ten dollars! That seemed a paltry sum to receive for the inestimable cabinet, which had been Mrs. Coney's chief treasure and the wonder of all the neighborhood. Yet she cheerfully slipped the money into her worn purse, sure that she was doing better honor to the memory of her husband by befriending a destitute sailor, than in clinging to the dear mementos of the past. With even this small addition to the family stock, by self-denial and strict economy, they would be able to give Binnings the comforts that he now so needed for restoration to health.

Ah, it is the poor who are the best friends of the poor. They who have been pinched by poverty are most eager to draw others from her painful clutches. He who "suffered, being tempted," was best fitted to succor the suffering and the tempted. We have here the explanation of the afflictions through which many of God's people are called to pass, that they may be fitted to minister, Christ-like, to the sons and daughters of sorrow.

Their joint efforts for their sick guest seemed to have knit Mrs. Coney and her children into a closer bond of union. Binnings was their common subject of interest and their common topic of conversation. Now that he was actually recovering, a merry spirit was pervading the house, and the humble repasts were seasoned by chat quite as cheerful as if the viands were better.

Jennet had taken Binnings his dinner, and had watched him with satisfaction as he ate mouthful after mouthful of the tender steak with the relish that only comes after the long fast of fever.

"There, child, that's a meal, a real hearty one," he exclaimed, as he laid the fork down on the empty plate. "I wonder if you can take comfort that way. Wasn't that steak good!"

"I am glad you enjoyed it," said Jennet, her whole face sparkling with pleasure.

"Tell me, how did it taste to you?" he said, pleasantly.

Jennet was embarrassed and for a moment was silent.

An uncomfortable thought struck Binnings like a knife. "Oh, child," he said quickly, "do you give me better dinners than you have yourself? Tell me that, speak out plain."

"We have all we want. We are very comfortable indeed," persisted Jennet. It was in vain for Binnings to try to get any more definite answer.

Jennet might as well have spoken out plainly. Binnings had guessed the truth. He had read the unselfish kindness of the humble family, who had been denying themselves that he might have the nourishing food needed to restore strength to his limbs and vigor to his frame. Ah, that thought made him feel weak indeed, and it roused such a tide of grateful love as well-nigh unmanned him. Truly he thanked God that in his hour of peril he had fallen among good Samaritans.

Jennet was dispatched at once to call her mother.

Mrs. Coney hurried upstairs, fearing that the patient was threatened with a relapse. She did not find Binnings either in a fit or a faint. There he sat in the calico-covered easy-chair, with his leg and a half stretched out on a wash-bench, and a general air of comfort pervading the small but neat apartment.

"Sit down, ma'am, sit down, ma'am," said Binnings, trying to put on a business air,

when his heart was full to overflowing. "You are a widow, ma'am, I know, a sailor's widow. God forbid that I should ever devour the substance that belongs to a sailor's children and be a burden on a sailor's widow. I thank you for your goodness to me, more than I am able to say now. I'll tell you about that by and by. But here's the question, What do I owe you?"

Mrs. Coney was taken utterly by surprise. Nay, poor as she was, she was actually hurt and disappointed.

"I haven't looked for any return. I did for you as I would have wished folks to do for my Jack in like case," she replied.

"And your Jack would have paid up like a man, as soon as he was able. Isn't that so?" urged Binnings quickly.

Mrs. Coney was overcome and confused by this sudden turn in the argument and was forced to answer truly, "I believe he would. Jack never liked to be beholden to anybody, if he could help it. He had an independent spirit in him."

"And so have I," said Binnings. "I can't pay you for what you've done for me. The Lord will reward you. He keeps reckoning of them that care for the sick and the stranger. I just want to pay my honest debts."

Mrs. Coney gave a doubtful glance around the room, as if to see where the stores were from which Binnings was to make his payments. The young scamp, who had led the band of boys about him on the night when he was taken sick, had not failed to relieve him of his pocketbook in one of his pretended attacks on his person. This Binnings and the family well knew.

A quiet smile passed over the sailor's face as he said, "I've been ashore too many times in a strange place to keep my earnings by me overnight. I took care to put what money I had with my nest-egg in the savings bank as soon as I set foot on land. There it stands, charged to John Binnings, to go to sailors' orphan children when John Binnings has done with this world. I am going to let you see that I can write my name, and that somebody's heard of me before. Get me some paper and a pen, Jennet."

Jennet brought the required articles, and Binnings wrote a draft on the City Savings bank for twenty dollars, signing his name with the necessary flourishes, which he considered a lawful part of his signature.

"This from John Binnings to Jack Coney's children, to see that they fare as well as he does," said the sailor, handing it to Mrs. Coney. He well-knew that any form of giving her the money would be more pleasing than a direct payment. Blunt as he was, the rough man was not wanting in delicacy of feeling. He had received that which no money could repay, and he would not pretend that he considered the matter finished by a settlement in dollars and cents.

Gideon Coney made his first visit to the bank the next morning and his round eyes opened wider than ever when, in return for John Binnings' feeble scrawl, he received twenty gold dollars, bright and shining as if just from the United States mint.

Chapter 5

A Long Story

Binnings was rapidly recovering. He began to feel the old vigor in his strong arm, the old energy in his stout heart. With returning health, his customary love of fun came back to him, and his store of sea-stories, that had been as in a sealed casket, was drawn out

for the delighted children.

Gideon now well-knew how and where Binnings had lost his missing foot, and Jennet could give a correct account of every one of the three long scars that marked rather than defaced Binnings' strong-featured but pleasant countenance.

Binnings had been taking tea with Mrs. Coney and her children, and now they had all pushed back from the table, and Gideon and Jennet were clamorous for a story, a real true story.

"Well, here goes. I've had it in my heart to tell it, for a week back," said Binnings, settling himself comfortably in his chair.

"Once there was an old sinner of a sailor, who, though the Lord had saved him from forty and nine troubles, when the fiftieth came was always for taking matters in his own hands, and being his own captain. This same sailor had been on the sea ever since he was a wee chap, and shipped with his father to wait in the cabin, before he was fit to lend a hand among the ropes. The sea was more like a home to him than any place else, and not strange either, for he hadn't kith or kin either living or dead on the land, saving his mother, bless her soul, who died when he was born. He had been used to go to sleep with the singing of the waves in his ears, and he fancied he couldn't rest right or feel right anywhere but aboard ship.

"Now it happened this same old fellow was in a boat that got capsized once upon a time, and a shark bit his leg clean off—shoe, stocking, and all. His messmates got what there was left of him aboard, and they nursed him up as if he was worth saving—the poor sinner. It was hard enough to lie by and be waited on like a girl, and there were pains to put up with that it is not worth while to speak about, but this was not what went hard with the one-legged man. May be you won't believe me, when I tell you he turned his face to the wall and actually cried, when he thought he wasn't fit for any thing 'board ship any more, and must just be put ashore to stump it on land as best he could. He was weak then, or he wouldn't have been such a baby. He was a sinner or he wouldn't have murmured against the Lord's doings.

"When he got so that he could go round with a wooden pin where his leg used to be, and that leg nobody knows where, there came sickness aboard ship, and he turned nurse, going from berth to berth and standing by the fellows that were so hot with fever the doctor was most afraid to touch 'em. Poor sick chaps. They looked at the one-legged man, such looks as mothers get sometimes, so loving and so grateful. He didn't deserve them, and he knew it in his heart. May be there was some kind sort of feeling in him, that kept him watching night and day, but that was no credit to him. Way down deep he was hoping the fever would seize him, and let him finish off his life aboard ship, like a sailor, and be dropped down in the deep waters, like his father and brothers before him. Never mind that now, it wasn't the Lord's will.

"He came ashore, as down-hearted a poor fellow as ever was turned out from home, to see the old door-steps no more. He knew, when he turned his back on the ship, he had had his last voyage, and had done with that way of life forever. He didn't care much what became of him. And when, towards night, he felt a heavy sickness stealing over him, he hoped it would soon come to an end, and put him in a quiet place. He thought he was a Christian, but he knows now that it isn't the Christian kind of spirit to want to die, to get rid of the troubles the Lord sends us.

"You know who took him in, and nursed him back to life, as if he was the king's son. I won't talk about that now. I couldn't say what I feel about it, if I were to talk as long as I have strength. But I tell you, John Binnings has learned a lesson, and he's got a plan in

his head. I've been thinking of the poor sick fellows that come ashore with no friend to take them by the hand, and of the young chaps that are dragged down to the devil and plundered of all they have, because there's nobody to put an honest roof over their head. John Binnings had laid up money, no great store, rich folks would say, but it will answer his ends. May be the Lord kept the poor sinner alive for just this particular work. I can't live on the sea, but I mean to live for the sailors, and I shall have a talk with a messmate now and then, and may be I can get some of them to set sail for the sure harbor, and nail the Christian's colors to the mast. I'll try for it, while there's life in me."

Binnings was excited, and he stopped for a moment to take breath. Gideon laid his hand in the sailor's, as if to join partnership with him, while Jennet hurraed her delight. Bustling, busy Mrs. Coney was wiping her eyes. She was not of the tearful kind, but Binnings had touched the tenderest chord in her heart, and awakened her sympathies where they had their surest stronghold.

"Who has the other part of your house, Mrs. Coney?" said Binnings, abruptly putting the question. Now it had always been a trial to Mrs. Coney that when Jack had built a house of his own, with a pretty plot of ground around it, he should have had it back to back with that of another messmate, so that they both had no front door, as the woman had often said, and neither had a house to themselves, after all. She would not reflect on her husband's judgment now, though she was not slow in relating her various trials from her near neighbors. But she closed up cheerfully, as she always did after a storm, by adding that there was nobody there now, she was thankful to say, though 'To let' had been posted up at the front windows for three weeks steady.

"It's just the thing. I'll rent that house tomorrow, if I am spared to see the sun. You shall do the business for me, Gideon. And now for something more. You love the sailors, Mrs. Coney, that's what I want. There's no driving woman, if she was ever so smart, that could come up to what I want, if the real feeling for folks that follow the sea wasn't in her. This is my plan. I'll get the house ready, but I want you to keep it in order, and see that the poor fellows are comfortable. Those that are able to pay, shall pay and welcome, and those that hav'n't the cash shall be cheerfully taken care of, while I am hobbling about this world. When the months come round, if there's any money made, it shall be yours. If there's any money lost, I'll make it up. Is it a bargain? Will you help me to have a decent place to take sailors to and keep them out of mischief?"

"With all my heart, and God bless you for the thought," said Mrs. Coney earnestly.

"We'll all do what we can," said Jennet, who liked to have it understood that she was a partner in all her mother's concerns.

Gideon said nothing, but he grasped Binnings' hand tightly, while he earnestly prayed that God would send a blessing on their new undertaking, and make himself known to the children of the sea.

Chapter 6 The Blue Flag

"As neat as wax! As neat as wax!"

Binnings was walking through his new house and everywhere bestowing his praise. Mrs. Coney and Jennet and Gideon were following him in procession, enjoying his hearty satisfaction. Very hard they had all three worked, and there had been much planning and replanning before everything could be bought, and brought into its present

condition of perfect order.

All was plain, as plain as possible, but as Binnings said, "Neat as wax, and wholesome and comfortable to boot." Oilcloth on the floors, cheap white spreads on the narrow beds. In the sitting room down stairs, a newspaper laid on the great round table and a Yankee clock ticking out the time from above the mantel-piece.

"It's complete," said Binnings, after making the round.

"We ought to have a sign out, LODGINGS FOR SAILORS, or something of that kind," said Jennet.

"No, no, that a'n't my plan," said Binnings quickly, "that might get in too many of the wrong sort. I mean to pick them up about the wharves, and bring home just such as I like, till we get the run of the right kind of customers."

"But we ought to have some way of letting them know the house," persisted Jennet. "You can't wait on every body here you want to send home. The houses a'n't numbered, you know."

"Suppose we hang out the 'Stars and Stripes,'" suggested Gideon.

"And have our house taken for a fub-a-dub recruiting office!" said Binnings, "and yet we might have some kind of a flag, just to mark it."

Mrs. Coney disappeared for a moment, and soon returned with something carefully wrapped in a napkin. Jennet well-knew the square of blue cloth, like her father's last jacket, which her mother had carefully preserved among her treasures. Now its blue folds were shaken out, as Mrs. Coney said, "This is the sailor's color. Will this do for our flag, Mr. Binnings?"

Jennet had whispered to the old sailor the association which had given a charm to the offering Mrs. Coney was now making, and he took it respectfully in his hand as he said, "It is just the thing, Mrs. Coney, the true sailor's color. May many a poor fellow bless the day when he found his way to the house with the Blue Flag."

It was an easy task for Gideon promptly to procure a flag-staff and then he eagerly exclaimed, "May I nail it fast, Binnings?"

"Yes, nail it to the corner of the house and may it never come down while I live."

The Blue Flag was fluttering in the wind, and the children were eagerly watching it from the window, when Binnings called on them for their attention.

Reverently he took down a large Bible from a shelf in the corner and laid it on the table. Slowly and distinctly he read aloud the one hundred and seventh psalm.

"Let us pray," said the deep voice of the sailor, and the little group knelt down together. Binnings began to pray, and although it was a new thing for him to address his Maker in the presence of human beings, he forgot all earthly things in his earnest desire to consecrate the opening of his house to the God whom he wished to serve.

"So will I, with all who shall be in this house, begin and end every day," said Binnings, as he rose from his knees, "and may God add His blessing."

Chapter 7 A Stranger

It was two years since Binnings had first opened his house for men of the sea, and the "Blue Flag" was now well-known among such sailors as wanted a temporary home,

where they could be comfortably accommodated, free from those temptations which ordinarily assail "poor Jack" as soon as he sets his foot on shore.

Many a hardy man had thanked God for this timely shelter, and gone forth again to his rough life cheered by John Binnings' pledged friendship and kindly counsel. We will not say how blessed a stay at the "Blue Flag" had been to youths who were as yet too ready to believe the paths of sin ways of pleasantness, and too blind as to their certain end in misery and degradation.

For sailors of this class, Binnings was ever on the look-out. The sound of noisy merriment in the street was sure to draw him forth to strive to win some of the roisterers to a night's rest under his roof, rather than to the continued revel to which they were tempted.

Binnings and Gideon were sitting among the group gathered around the large stove in the common parlor one evening. Gideon was a great help to Binnings in his efforts to give the fire-side talk a profitable turn, and they often started off in the discussion of religious topics with such hearty interest, that the rough tars around them would be unconsciously won to mingle in the conversation.

"I say, Gideon," said Binnings, after a moment's quiet thought, "it wouldn't take long to convert the world, if every sailor was a missionary."

The idea was a new one to Gideon, and his face beamed with pleased surprise as he fully took it in.

"That's capital," he exclaimed, "I never thought of that before. Why, they go everywhere, don't they, and if they were real thorough-going Christians, they'd be taking the right banner clear into the midst of the heathen."

"Just so. There are some of them, I know, who are doing that very thing," said Binnings cheerily.

"That a'n't the way with most of us, by a long shot," interrupted one of the four sailors in the little circle around the fire. "It's a chance if heathen folks don't learn more mischief than good from such chaps as I've generally sailed with."

"More's the pity. But there's a better time coming. Sailors are beginning to understand what it is to be a high-minded Christian man, who would scorn to do that in a strange country that he'd be sorry to have his mother know of."

Binnings was in the mood for a long talk, but at that moment there was a noise of hallooing near the window, that at once attracted his attention. He started up, exclaiming, "Come, Gideon. Come, messmates, have you a mind to save some poor fellows from getting into more mischief? Let's go out."

Binnings stumped along, leading the way, and his little party were soon in the midst of a noisy crew, who were shouting and staggering as they attempted to carry one of their companions, who was so thoroughly intoxicated that he was unable to take another step for himself.

"Here, give us the charge of the boy, we'll give him snug quarters till the morning, and then you can call and ask after his health," said Binnings, going up to the disorderly group.

"We'll look after him ourselves," said one of the young sailors, accompanying his hiccupped speech with an oath, and an attempted blow at the would-be friend.

"Have a care there! Look out what you do, man. Binnings is my friend. It's Binnings of the Blue Flag. I know him by his wooden pin," exclaimed another of the party.

It was plain that the last speaker was not in a condition to know any body without some very distinguishing mark of identity. Yet, half intoxicated as he was, his naturally

kind feelings were not altogether dulled. He sidled up to Binnings and said confidentially, "Take him, Binnings. I know about the Blue Flag. He's a young 'un. He can't stand what we can."

Binnings, thus encouraged, persuaded the stumbling, staggering fellows to yield up their heavy burden, and they gave a shout of relief as Gideon and the four strong sailors bore their silent companion away.

On the bed in the neat, quiet "sick-room" of the establishment, the poor young sailor was laid, for the time unconscious as the dead. Ah, if he had passed into eternity from that state of brutal intoxication, what would have been the fate of his soul?

In the presence of Gideon and the four friendly tars, Binnings took possession of the lad's pocket-book, after duly counting his money, and laid beside it in his strong-box the few other loose articles he had about him. Among the latter was a photograph on silver plate.

"The boy's sweetheart, I'll bet a dollar," exclaimed one of the sailors.

"His mother, rather," said Binnings, as he looked into the sweet face that gazed on him from the picture. Time had marked the brow with passing years, but it bore no signs of harrowing grief.

"Poor woman," murmured Binnings as a bright drop suddenly glistened in his eye, "She wouldn't look like that if she could see him now. May God bless the lad and give him true repentance."

Chapter 8

Awaking

"Who am I? Where am I?" These were the questions proposed to the confused brain of the new inmate when he awoke, after his long heavy sleep.

He had none of the joyousness now that had made him a leader in the last night's carousal. Head and heart were sick. Body and soul were reaping the miseries of sin.

To the first question the answer slowly came, and in its overwhelming realization the second was for the time forgotten.

"Theodore Gould!" That was the name that thrilled through the brain and heart of the young sailor, a name of which he had once been proud, a name his mother had called so fondly, a name his little brother had spoken as of one above the common faults of men. Ah, Theodore had fallen, yet God had not yet deserted him. There was one ray of hope, even in his present condition. He could see his degradation, he could loathe himself.

With bitter, bitter loathing, he thought of what he once had been, and what he now was. Step by step he traced his downward path. His first oath, uttered timidly. The habit of profaneness that had grown upon him. His Bible deserted, his Sabbaths dishonored, and to crown all, and increase the power of every temptation, the free use of that intoxicating cup which promises pleasure, but surely turns to poison.

In the midst of these reflections, Theodore heard the sound of an approaching footstep. He shrank from meeting any human eye. He lay in utter silence as if asleep while someone busied himself about the room, adjusted the bedclothes, and arranged the curtain so that the broad light of day need not stream in on his face.

Then there was a slight rustling, followed by a moment of stillness, as Gideon knelt at the bedside. He had looked at the young face of the sleeper, until his heart yearned over

the stranger as if he had been a brother, and the deep wish of his soul broke forth in prayer.

For the stranger Gideon pleaded with loving earnestness, for the sake of his absent mother. He implored that repentance might be granted him, for the sake of that Friend of sinners who came to seek and to save them that are lost. Such prayer comes only from believing hearts, which are touched with a Christlike desire to save the souls of their brethren. As Gideon rose from his knees, he looked again upon the face of the sleeper. A tear was stealing from under the closed lid. Gideon would not speak, to learn whether he had been heard or not, but silently closing the door, he walked away with hope stirring at his heart.

Chapter 9

Theodore

Theodore Gould had been for several days an inmate of the "sick-room" at the Blue Flag. Although he was evidently well enough to come down stairs, it was plain that he was unwilling to leave his retirement, and Binnings did not urge him to do so. He well understood that the youth had food enough for secret thought, and work to do which must be done alone with God.

We will not undertake to describe the agony of repentant sorrow, which for a while so filled poor Theodore's mind that he was deaf to every voice of comfort. Humbled and stricken as he was, he at last dared to hope that, through the merits of a divine Savior, even he might be forgiven and accepted in the Beloved. Binnings' straightforward way of talking on religious subjects was a great help to Theodore during his time of doubt and darkness, and he learned to look on the honest old sailor as a loved and trusted friend.

Binnings came into Theodore's room one morning and found him, as usual, with an open Bible in his hand. The restored picture on silver plate lay beside him. Binnings took it up, and opening it, said suddenly, "When are you going to see her? We don't want to hurry you away, but she must be aching for a sight of you."

Theodore rose and gazed at himself in the small looking-glass. Ah, in every feature there were too plain traces of the life he had been lately leading. In imagination there peered over his shoulder the frank, boyish face he had worn when he left home, so full of hope and self-confidence. How sad the change that had come over him!

"I cannot see my mother. One look at me would break her heart," he exclaimed. "She had better think me dead, than know what I am."

"A forgiven sinner," said Binnings quietly.

"Forgiven, I hope," murmured Theodore, "but oh, still so weak and sinful, so little like what I ought to be. I mean well now, but who knows how soon I may fall? I have lost all confidence in myself."

"So much the better, so much the better," exclaimed Binnings heartily. "Look to your Captain to hold up your right hand and strengthen your right arm. He's able to take you safe through fire and water, through men and devils, temptations and afflictions, evil report and good report. Look to your Captain the Lord Jesus, Theodore. Pray to Him, lean on Him, and trust in Him, and He'll bring you off conqueror."

"It will be His strength that keeps me up, if I don't fall, for I know I have no power to stand temptation," said Theodore humbly and sorrowfully.

"See your mother, boy. She'll know how to counsel you," said Binnings, turning the

picture towards Theodore.

Theodore gave it one long, loving look, and then covering his face with his hands, he exclaimed, "I cannot go to her. I cannot fill her heart with sorrow. I will take another voyage and try my new principles. Perhaps I may yet be a son whom she will not blush to own."

It was in vain that Binnings tried to combat Theodore's resolution. It could not be shaken. He insisted that as he had returned in a different ship from that in which he had embarked, she would not hear that he had been in the country and that it would be better that she should mourn him as dead, than know how miserably he had fallen. "She shall not know how degraded I have been, till she can be sure that I am thoroughly reformed." These were Theodore's reiterated words and Binnings at last was obliged to leave him to the course he had chosen.

Chapter 10 Binnings' Journey

Through the kind efforts of Binnings, Theodore obtained a berth on board a temperance ship with a pious captain. The humbled lad was thankful now to avail himself of every aid to support his new resolutions, and as Binnings said, was safer in his fear of doing wrong, than if he was the most stout-hearted fellow in the world who trusted to his own goodness to keep him out of temptation.

During Theodore's stay at the Blue Flag, he was the chief subject of interest in the kindly household, but now a new topic for conversation had arisen, about which each one had something to say.

Binnings was going on a journey. The honest sailor thought it a more perilous undertaking to travel two hundred miles by land than to circumnavigate the globe in a good ship, pronounced by the insurers sound from topmast to keel. Like most men of the sea, Binnings had but little confidence in horses and deemed it a kind of voluntary running into danger, for human beings to place their precious lives in the keeping of four-footed beasts. And as to the lumbering stage-coach, Binnings called it "a poor affair in comparison with the smallest schooner that ever put out from Cape Code."

Yet upon the journey Binnings was determined, cost him what it would. A stanch old sailor had promised to take his place at the head of the household at the Blue Flag. Yet Binnings declared that he would not have dreamed of leaving home, even for a day, if it were not for the continual presence of Mrs. Coney, who would not let a poor Jack Tar want for anything, so long as she had a crust of her own.

Jennet had packed the small black traveling-bag which Binnings had bought for the occasion, Gideon had helped the stout owner of the Blue Flag into the stage-coach, last words were over, and away rolled the coach. While Binnings let his great spotted pocket-handkerchief float from the window, like a signal of distress.

Binnings was not a man to ride all day in silence, crowded into less than nine square feet, with eight living specimens of his own kind. He did not mind speaking first. When a lady drew away her dress, as if afraid of injuring his wooden pin, "Never fear, madam, you won't tread on my toes. I've room enough," he exclaimed cheerily, and the smile which followed his remark seemed to put the whole company at ease at once.

Of course, during the long slow drives uphill, the travelers wanted a story from Binnings to while away the time. And before long he let out enough of his personal

history to make the passengers curious to hear more. And they did hear how the sick man was nursed by the sailor's widow, and how the Blue Flag was put up, that there might be one place where a tar's earnings would be safe from shore robbers, and his soul from cunning tempters in human form. His hearers felt what he said in their hearts, and then felt in their pockets too, and found their purses there, and on the spot a contribution was taken up for the library at the Blue Flag, that put Binnings in a humor to be well-pleased with landsmen for that day, at least.

Binnings was several days on his journey. He did not travel at night, not he, to look like a thief escaping from justice or a runaway bridegroom, as he said. There was no need of his losing his lawful rest, and he took it wherever he found himself when evening came on. He took his rest, which was more than could be said of anybody who was near him. His great broad chest and capacious nose seemed to conspire together to trumpet forth the soundness of his sleep. While now and then, the over-weary man was moved to shout sea orders in his dreams, which startled his neighbors into any thing but a good humor. Nobody, however, wanted to quarrel with their fellow-traveler, the sailor with the wooden leg.

Binnings' warm heart had made itself known in more ways than one through those long days. The delicate young mother remembered who carried her baby when she was too much worn out to hold it. The sick lady, who had found the rolling of the heavy coach as trying in its effects as the lurches of a ship in a storm, had not forgotten who got out for her at the first stopping-place, and administered a sip of brandy, at the same time declaring it was all the stuff was good for, to be used as a medicine in desperate cases. The boy-traveler, who had stored away the boat and the bow that Binnings had cut out for him, was willing to be waked from his first nap by such a good-natured friend as Binnings had proved himself to be.

Faint-hearted Christians who had feared to rebuke the profaneness of the rough driver, could not but respect the hardy sailor, who declared that he could not hear his "great Captain's name spoken that way, on sea or on shore, without speaking his mind about it."

Binnings had not thought of making a missionary tour, but he had been silently preaching the law of charity day after day, and had roused in more than one heart a new interest for men of the sea. More than one of his fellow-travelers had parted from him, with a resolution formed to do something to give the sailor the Gospel on board ship and a Christian home on shore. The journey had actually proved a pleasant thing to Binnings, and for private reasons of his own, he was sorry when, on Saturday evening, it came to a close, as he had reached his place of destination.

Binnings had no pride about appearing at church in his sailor dress. He rightly thought God's house open to every sincere worshipper, and the state of the heart of far more importance than the cut of the apparel. He did not mind the little boys who nudged each other and giggled in the pew next him, nor did he care for the young miss who tossed her head, as she was forced to take her seat at his side. He was an honest man, clean in his dress and right in his intentions, and it was little to him what anybody thought of him, so he could join in the precious words of prayer in the great congregation, and hear the Gospel preached by one of God's own chosen messengers. The morning service was over, but Binnings' head was still bowed in private prayer. He felt that he needed uncommon strength for the duty before him, and he had a particular reason for calling down a blessing on that congregation.

As he rose to leave his seat, the throng of people was already pouring down the

aisle, and as he was pushed by somewhat roughly, his tarpaulin was swept from his hand. Stooping down was a somewhat difficult performance for Binnings, and this fact seemed at once to strike a sweet young girl who chanced to stand at his side. With the kindness of true politeness, she restored the hat to its owner, and with a smile of such real interest that Binnings was moved to say, "Thank ye, miss, God bless you," from the depths of his heart.

Chapter 11

Tidings

Binnings was abroad early on Monday morning. The sights and sounds of the noisy hotel made him sick at heart, and he longed to be out in the clear fresh air, where he could have his quiet thoughts to himself and meditate in his own peculiar way.

Binnings did not give up his morning walk wholly to meditation, as was evident by the reconnoitering of a particular house, in which he seemed to take a special interest. To that house he made his way when breakfast was over, and his ring at the bell was that of one who was fully resolved on what he had undertaken.

The door was promptly opened and Binnings at once inquired if he could see Mrs. Gould.

The blank look of the servant sent a thrill of pain through Binnings' very heart and he impatiently waited for the reply. Could it be that Mrs. Gould was no more on earth to hear tidings of good or ill?

"Mrs. Gould don't see anybody. She a'n't well. She don't see anybody," was the hesitating reply.

At that moment a familiar face passed along the hall, even the face that had called forth Binnings' fervent "God bless you" the day before.

"It's a sailor, miss, asking for Mrs. Gould," said the servant, in answer to the questioning look of the young girl.

"Come in, come in, I can see you. Had you any particular message for my mother?" The words were spoken hurriedly, and in an earnest, anxious way, that plainly told to Binnings that here was a true sister's heart, yearning to hear of the absent one.

"Not a message exactly, he didn't certainly know I was coming."

"My brother!" exclaimed Ella Gould, the sudden tears filling her eyes.

"Just so, miss. He couldn't make up his mind to come and see you himself."

Again Binnings was interrupted, but this time by an expression of anger. "In this country? Theodore here and not come to see his mother! This is too bad."

"Boys won't be reasoned with, you know, miss. But he's all right. He'll be a true Christian man. I feel sure of it."

The shadow swept from Ella's face and a bright look of hope took its place as she exclaimed, "My mother, my dear mother!"

"The boy went wrong, miss. Sailors are just shut up to temptations, you know. No Sabbath, no minister, no sister's arms around their necks, no mother to whisper what's right to them. Poor Theodore went wrong, like many a young fellow before him. He said it would break his mother's heart to see him looking the way he did, and he'd take another voyage, and try and come back a different man. Thank God, I believe the worst is over with him and he's put his trust where he won't be disappointed. He's strong in the Lord, I believe in my soul."

Ella covered her face with her hands and wept like a little child. To hear of her lost brother thus! It was hard to bear. He of whom she had been so proud, he whom she had mourned as one of the noble, cut off in the innocence of his hopeful youth! That he should have been so drawn into sin that he dare not look his mother in the face!

There was rising anger in Ella's heart in the midst of her sisterly sorrow. Her erring brother seemed to her for the moment the enemy of the dear mother who had so fondly cherished them both. How had that mother's hair grown white with anxiety, and was she now to be cast down with shame for her son?

Binnings was not slow in reading what was passing in his hearer's mind. There was an unmistakable flash in her dark eye, as she raised her face from time to time to ask some question or to utter some exclamation of sorrow or displeasure.

"We are all sinners, miss," said Binnings at last. "We would all go down to the pit, but for the walls a merciful Providence puts around us. It's not our own goodness that saves us. Theodore stands before God this day with his sins forgiven for the sake of the Lord Jesus, and his poor fellow-creatures might at least let bygones be bygones, and take him by the hand. That's my way of looking at it, miss."

"I forgive him from the bottom of my heart and I wish I could tell him so," exclaimed Ella, "but mother, I am afraid it will kill her. She has not been like herself for months. It's the thought of Theodore that preys on her, I know, though she never talks about it. You would not wonder at the way I feel, if you knew how changed she is. She hardly notices anything. She sits as if she was in a dream."

"The Lord has sent her something to wake her and to bring her to her knees to thank Him for His mercies," said Binnings warmly. "The sooner she hears the truth, the better, that's my way of thinking."

"Perhaps you are right," said Ella thoughtfully.

At this moment there was a interruption to the conversation. A stout, curly-headed boy burst into the room, exclaiming, "I told mother there was a sailor downstairs talking with you and she wants to see you this very minute. I say there, she is coming herself."

In another instant an eager, sorrow-stricken face was presented at the door. Binnings made a short story this time. He saw it was no occasion for slow breaking of news. "Your son, ma'am, is alive and well. He'd gone far on the road to ruin, but thank God, he's turned about and is forgiven through Christ Jesus."

"Thank God! thank God!" were Mrs. Gould's fervent words. She had no room in her mother's heart for blame for the offender. She could forgive him all, and be thankful that he had found the only Rock of safety. She could even pardon his turning his back on his native land, without once entering the home he loved so well. She knew what he must have suffered, when his proud spirit was humbled by the degradation into which he had fallen. She appreciated the tenderness which had made him unwilling to let her see the face, so dear to her, marred by traces of sin. The mother's heart understood all, and forgave all. And the fond sister felt and comprehended that, deep as may be a sister's devotion, there is no fount of human love like that which God has hidden deep in the soul of the true mother.

Chapter 12

The Box

Binnings was back at the Blue Flag, going on with his duties more cheerily than ever,

from the consciousness of having taken sunshine to one household by the journey he had planned and executed with so much thought.

Sunshine indeed was now pervading Theodore's home. The apathy that had hung over Mrs. Gould like a pall, had been broken by Binnings' blunt communication. Mrs. Gould had rallied from her long torpor to a new life and energy.

She had heard every particular of Theodore's stay at the Blue Flag and honest Binnings had not now a more fast friend on earth than Mrs. Gould. A mother's love quickened her to understand the dangers that war against the soul of the sailor by sea and land, and she determined to leave no means untried to induce her fellow-Christians to awake to the importance of bearing the blessed message of the Savior to the hardy men who have no fireside round which to gather at evening, no voices of childhood to call to mind the Babe of Bethlehem.

To work for shipwrecked sailors had become a pleasure with Mrs. Gould. And while Ella and she were busy over the red flannel garments, there was no lack of conversation between them. Theodore had left Ella a pleasant child, subject to her mother in all things and leaning upon her for constant advice. The state of mind into which Mrs. Gould, for a time had fallen, had changed their relations, and rapid as was Ella's physical growth, her character matured with still greater rapidity. She felt herself her mother's guardian and nurse, and though at times somewhat headstrong and hot-tempered, Mrs. Gould believed in her heart that there was not in the known world a more devoted daughter than her Ella.

To sustain her mother's renewed cheerfulness, Ella gave full play to the natural vivacity of her disposition, and Bob was heard to declare that sister Ella was as funny as a story-book.

Bob had a blue flag flying from his empty dog-kennel, as an indication that four-legged strangers would be hospitably entertained. As yet there had been no applications at his Snug Harbor, though Bob stumped about with a cane thrust up his trousers, and imitated honest Binnings in a way that gave him at least entire satisfaction.

"Any messages for the Blue Flag?" inquired Master Bob, drawing up his tiny express-wagon at the drawing-room door.

"I shall have a box to send tomorrow," said Mrs. Gould, pointing to a great box, beside which Ella was kneeling while the packing went on. "Suppose you go, Bob, for the real expressman and ask him to call early tomorrow."

"My line connects with his. I'll do it, ma'am," said Bob, with a flourishing bow as he withdrew.

"I wish I could be there when they open the box. I wonder what that smart little Jennet will say. I hope the hood will fit her," said Ella.

It was doubtful if more pleasure would be felt when the box was unpacked at the Blue Flag, than was experienced at Mrs. Gould's in preparing it.

When the cover was finally nailed on, and the real expressman, with Bob's pretended assistance, bore it away, it was followed by kindly thoughts and good wishes that would in themselves have been a valuable present.

Chapter 13

The Present

It was not a rare thing for Binnings to have a present. Many a tribute was brought to

him from over the sea by grateful sailors and the table at the Blue Flag was furnished with many a luxury for which neither Binnings nor Mrs. Coney had expended a copper. A box or a barrel from on board ship was no rarity, but a box left by a stage-coach, and bearing neither sign or mark of a recent voyage, was something to be wondered at.

Jennet was the first to report the arrival and was equally prompt in providing Binnings with a hatchet and wedge, that she might have a peep at the inside as soon as possible.

Mrs. Coney's motherly heart told her the secret at once. She did not need to inquire who had been sending Binnings a present from a far-off inland town.

A great packet of religious newspapers was taken out first. Then came several valuable books for the library of the Blue Flag. Then Jennet's hood, then a nice shawl for Mrs. Coney, then a beautiful Bible for Gideon, and then a store of clothing just fit for sailors' use. As these last were drawn out, Binnings actually clapped his hands with delight. "This is what we need," he exclaimed. "Why, we could fit out half a dozen poor shipwrecked fellows with what there is here."

Binnings had admired Jennet's hood, and praised the other contents of the box, without apparently once thinking that, although his name had been on the cover, there had as yet been no special remembrance for him. This fact had not escaped either Mrs. Coney or Jennet, and the latter, having perched her hood on her head, was exploring the depths of the box as if seeking something.

Binnings was busy looking over approvingly certain stout trousers and heavy overcoats that he held in his hand, and his attention had to be forcibly drawn to a small package which Jennet had at length come upon in her researches.

"Here, Mr. Binnings. This has your name on," she exclaimed with eagerness. "I do so wonder what it is. Perhaps there is a letter in it to tell who sent the box."

Binnings either had less curiosity than Jennet, or he was not without suspicions as to the kind hands that had packed the box so full of acceptable gifts. An any rate, he seemed in no hurry to open the letter which the little parcel contained. It remained untouched, while he gazed and gazed and gazed with moist eyes at a picture on silver plate which had accompanied the letter. Every one about him seemed to be forgotten and there was something in his manner that hushed even talkative Jennet into silence.

Yes, Binnings' thoughts were wandering far from the spot where he stood. Over the wide sea he was following the Dolphin in her course, and earnestly calling down the blessing of heaven on a repentant sailor, who had indeed started on a new voyage, with angels as his well-wishers.

"There is what the poor boy was," said Binnings at length, as he handed the likeness quietly to Mrs. Coney. "His mother wanted me to see what a son she had parted with. It's a splendid face. God help the boy. He's gone far astray, but He who has changed him can sustain him. What says the book? 'If two of you shall agree as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them.' These are the words of the faithful promise. Shall we strike hands now that we'll all pray for that boy every night before we sleep? He needs the prayers of his friends, the poor fellow."

The picture had been passed from hand to hand while Binnings had been speaking, and every heart was touched by the sad contrast between its frank boyish face, and the countenance of the Theodore Gould they had known in his humiliation.

There was no loud assent to Binnings' proposal, but the low, earnest, "We will," was a pledge of the faithful fulfillment of the agreement.

Mrs. Gould's letter was such a letter as only a mother can write, welling up with tenderness for the absent one, and invoking untold blessings on the household who had

received him as one raised from the dead. Binnings had not a great many earthly treasures, but he put that letter and picture into his strong-box, to be kept till the day of his death.

Chapter 14 Companions

A blameless teacher has not always blameless pupils, nor is a pious captain always accompanied by a pious crew.

Theodore Gould made this discovery on board the temperance ship with Captain Glynn. In the fore-castle there were German, Italian, and American sailors, all understanding enough English to obey ship-orders, swear horrible oaths, and try to persuade Theodore to join in their games of chance, or sly drinks at the various bottles smuggled into their chests.

The poor boy struggled manfully against their influence, yet he had to mourn many a hasty word he was prompted to speak, and to see the smile of satisfaction come over their countenances as he was unconsciously led to utter oaths while joining in their conversation.

Why is it that the wicked love to draw others into the mire where they are miserably wallowing?

Daily sinning and daily repenting, Theodore fought against the temptations that surrounded him, until he was almost desperate.

One Sunday morning, Theodore had taken his Bible and was striving to read in the midst of the disturbance his associates wilfully made around him. At length, he laid the book suddenly down, and looking at the hardy group, he said, "Messmates, I am younger than any of you. I believe you feel kindly towards me, and would willingly do me a favor. Will you listen while I tell you a story?"

The Captain had no work done on Sunday but simply what was needed for sailing the ship, and the crew were therefore willing to while away their time in listening to what sailors so dearly love, a story. There was besides not a little curiosity as to Theodore's previous life. While his companions had been free to tell their hairbreadth escapes and their exploits in scenes of wickedness, the young sailor had kept a profound silence as to his own history.

Now the ice was broken. He described the happy boy, indulged by his kind mother in his fancy for the sea. He painted his departure from home, so full of hope, and so strong in the sense of his own hatred of what was low and wicked. His downward path was faithfully sketched, how faithfully some of his listeners well knew. His deep degradation he did not shrink from revealing, nor his horror when he woke to find himself what he had once hated and despised.

The agony of those dark hours at the Blue Flag were now first fully made known to human ears—the deep despair of one who sees the loathsome pit into which he has wilfully plunged soul and body. The dawn of hope, when he could first believe that even he could be forgiven, the preciousness of that Savior who could so blot out the past, and offer a future of blessedness, the resolution formed to serve that Savior until death.

On these themes Theodore dwelt with an earnestness and sincerity that went home to every heart. He spoke of his mother, that dear mother whom he so yearned to see, and yet from whose loving eye he shrank away as unfit for her pure glance. "I want to

see that mother, a changed man, one that she can be willing to own as her son. I want to serve the Savior who accepted my poor repentance, and gave me peace when I was in the depths of misery. Messmates, I want to reach that heaven which is the only sure harbor. Will you make me know again the bitterness of one who hates and despises himself? Will you make me turn my back on my mother and my Savior and heaven? Oh, messmates, will you drag me down to the depths of that hell whose torment has no end? I am weak and wicked, and easily led astray. I am afraid I shall not have strength to stand out against you. I feel old habits coming over me again. I am horribly afraid that I shall sink, sink to perdition. Won't you have pity on me and spare me your temptations?"

There was a humble, sorrowful earnestness in Theodore's tone, which told how truly he was speaking from the depths of his heart, as he pleaded for what was dearer to him than life.

Theodore had touched the right chord. "God help you, boy. I don't want to stand in your way," said a rough old tar, extending his hand to the excited lad. "I wish I was as far on the right track."

Theodore seized it with a hearty expression of gratitude.

"Shall we join hands round, that we'll let him alone?" said the same sailor, turning to the rest of the crew.

Every palm was forthcoming for the pledge, and from that day forward, no direct effort was made to lead Theodore from the path of his choice.

Chapter 15

The Sick Bed

The good ship Dolphin was leaping as gaily over the waves as leaped the hearts of her sailors at sight of land. The shores of France were almost reached, and the men were rejoicing that a time of freedom was at hand—a time of riot and carousal, a time of sinking deeper in the sins which had already dragged them far down on the way to ruin.

Theodore Gould had discovered to his sorrow that although Captain Glynn, of the ship Dolphin, was blameless as to his own life, he did not dream of doing anything more than enforcing the rules of morality on board his vessel. Not one effort had he made to lay in the hearts of his crew, the only sure foundation of a virtuous life, not one effort to lead them to Him who is the only hope, the only safeguard, the only sanctifier of sinful men.

Theodore had not suffered latterly from direct attempts to draw him into temptation, but he felt that the habits and manners of his companions were ever dimming the true light in his soul. Their presence was as a cloud that hid from him his best source of consolation and threatened to envelop him in darkness. Welcome indeed to him was the thought of being at liberty to have at least a solitary walk, when he could meditate without the sound of oaths in his ears, albeit he should be a stranger in a foreign land.

Theodore was not now to tread the French soil. When the Dolphin cast anchor, and all hands were rejoicing that the harbor was safely reached, Theodore was lying upon his bed in an agony of pain. A fall down the hatchway had so bruised and shaken his whole frame, that Captain Glynn declared it was impossible to tell where he was hurt most, and there was no hope for him but to go to a hospital, and be put under treatment as soon as possible.

Borne on a litter by his messmates, Theodore was placed in a hospital, where one

among the rows of sufferers, he awaited his share of attention from physicians and nurses. He was but a poor, bruised sailor. He had no claims upon the special tenderness or interest of anyone about him.

Ah, how he longed then to have his mother's hand on his brow, or to hear his sister Ella moving gently around his couch of pain. His mother! Should he ever live to ask her forgiveness? Should he ever hear her words of counsel, cheering him on his Christian course? These were trying questions to Theodore, yet again and again they recurred to him, to have the same sad, doubtful answer.

Now Theodore saw and felt with bitter regret that the lingering pride of his heart, as well as tenderness for his mother, had kept him from appearing before her, disgraced as he was, to ask her forgiveness. He had shrunk from the course of the repentant prodigal, hoping to return, clad, not in the rags of sin, but in the better garment of a new righteousness.

Who can tell the thoughts that try the hearts of those poor sufferers among whom the hospital nurses move so calmly?

To die alone in a foreign land, with no friendly eye to shed a tear over his lifeless body, this seemed to Theodore a hard lot, but on this he did not dwell. Better thoughts stole gently over him. He realized that there was One at his bedside, more loving than any human friend, even the merciful Savior, who had received him in his agony of repentance and had called him His own forever.

With no human being to turn to in his time of desolation, Theodore was but drawn the nearer to Him who is everywhere present to cheer and console all who truly look unto Him.

It was almost with disappointment that Theodore heard at last that his life was no longer in danger, and that for him recovery was now confidently expected. He had dwelt upon death as his certain portion, and safe as an infant in its mother's arms had seemed his soul in his Savior's keeping. The battle fought, the struggle over, temptation forever hushed, heaven secured through the One Mediator—these had been Theodore's glad subjects of meditation. Almost he had beheld the gates of the heavenly city, yet he was to turn back and risk again the soul-destroying influences of earth.

Conscious of his own weakness, Theodore shrank from new conflicts with temptation. There came a whisper of consolation, "My grace is sufficient for thee." "He who has suffered being tempted, is able to succor them that are tempted." To such promises Theodore clung as his only hope. What other hope has any human soul in its struggle with the powers of evil that beset the earthly pilgrim from without and from within?

"I will return to my quiet home and in some retired calling, I will try to lead a blameless life." This was Theodore's first resolution, as he lay in the weakness of slow convalescence.

As his strength rallied, and the old vigor began to knit again his physical frame, other thoughts took possession of his mind. He would not shrink from the conflict. He would rather fight on the Lord's side in the way of life that had been the choice of his boyhood. Henceforward he would be consecrated to his Master's service pledged to labor for the advancement of His kingdom on sea and land, among people of all nations, wherever the providential hand should lead him.

There was an influence in this new purpose that gave Theodore a new motive to husband his returning strength, and to put forth all his energy towards a recovery which should make him sound in body and mind, to do the work set before him.

Who better than he knew the dangers and temptations of a sailor's life? Who better than he could picture the horrors of a sailor's lonely death, where no friendly voice would tell him of the love of Jesus?

Yes, Theodore Gould chose anew the sailor's life. There was no boyish whim, there was no mere love of adventure prompting him now. He had a high and noble purpose to achieve. He had a Master to serve who could carry him safe through all temptations and give him power to plead and persuade in His name.

***“Launch thy bark, mariner!
Christian, God speed thee!
Let loose the rudder-band,
Good angels lead thee.
Set thy sails warily,
Tempests will come;
Steer thy course steadily;
Christian, steer home!”***

Chapter 16 A New Friend

Theodore Gould was bound on his homeward voyage. There was strength again in his strong hand and a healthful glow on his cheek. There was a new buoyancy in his step and a new light in his eye. He was as distrustful of himself as when he put his foot on board the Dolphin, but he had learned that there was a mighty One, under whose protecting power he need fear no evil.

Eager as he was to begin his good work, he had as yet found no opportunity to take the first step in the career to which he was pledged. He rightly thought that a stranger's first care, in the midst of ungodly men, should be to show in himself a faithful performance of duty, and so to win respect that they may give him a hearing when he shall speak in the good cause.

Theodore was busy on the deck of the “bonnie Jean” among a group of the fellow-sailors. Near at hand was Captain Hook, talking with two of the passengers.

“I want to go below now, mamma,” said a feeble young voice. Theodore's attention was instantly caught. The speaker was a pale boy, whose face alone was visible as it peered from the mass of blankets in which he was wrapped. As he spoke, his eye met Theodore's. The kindly look of the young sailor was not to be mistaken.

“Let *him* carry me down,” said the sick boy, nodding his head towards Theodore. A word from the captain brought Theodore promptly forward. He put forth his strength to lift the prostrate figure, but it rose light as an infant in his strong arms. It was long, long since Theodore had had a young face so close to his, and his heart yearned towards the child who had singled him out for this kindly office. Wasted indeed must be the form that could be so easily borne. Yet the pale face had no marks of a fretful, complaining spirit. There was a look of peace in the large, light eyes, and the thin cheek was lovingly laid on Theodore's breast.

The broad chest heaved and the strong arms trembled as the last step was taken, and the two reached the cabin. That little helpless form had grown very dear to Theodore in those few moments, and he was loath to part with the loving human thing

which had so turned to him.

“Lay him on the settee there, if you please,” said a low, pleasant voice. The tone was cheerful and yet it told how very precious was the burden which Theodore had carried. “That will do, thank you,” and the mother took a seat beside the child whom she had so closely followed.

“I thank you too. Won’t you carry me again? I like the way you hold me, so strong and so kind,” said the boy, with an affectionate look at the young sailor.

“Indeed I will. Send for Theodore Gould and I shall always like to do any thing I can for you,” was the hearty reply.

“My name is Benny,” said the child, fixing his eyes upon Theodore with evident satisfaction.

“Then I am Benny’s horse, always ready to give him a ride,” said Theodore with a cheerful smile, as he bowed a good-bye and returned to his duty on deck. Theodore felt almost as if a home, with all its sweet influences, had sprung up for him in the ship where he had but a few hours before felt so like a stranger.

Benny did not forget his new friend’s name, nor his free offers to be at his service. It soon became an understood thing that when Benny was to be moved, Theodore was to be called upon and very welcome were these interviews to Theodore’s affectionate heart. It was pleasant for him to have someone to be useful to, someone to love once more.

Theodore had placed Benny one morning in a sheltered spot on deck and was arranging his comforters carefully about him.

“You seem very fond of children. Perhaps you have brothers and sisters at home,” said Benny’s mother with an inquiring glance.

“I had a brother and sister. I hope they are alive,” said Theodore with a full heart.

“Why don’t you go and see them?” eagerly inquired Benny.

“I mean to, if we get safe to land,” was Theodore’s short reply.

“I wouldn’t go to sea any more, if I was you. I’d stay at home. I don’t like the sea, do you?” persevered Benny.

“Yes, I love the sea,” said Theodore, looking enthusiastically out on the rolling waves.

“Is that what makes you a sailor?” asked Benny, as much to keep his friend at his side as from any wish for a sincere answer to his question. Theodore was silent for a moment. Perhaps the time had come for him to begin his work. He spoke earnestly as he said, “I mean to be a sailor, because I want to teach sailors about the Lord Jesus and persuade them to follow Him.”

“Is that it?” exclaimed Benny, with a gleam of unusual brightness. “How do you do it? Shall we have church tomorrow? Do you preach?”

Theodore smiled sorrowfully as he said, “I have not done anything yet, Benny. How do you think I had better begin?”

A new idea had taken possession of the child’s mind, and on that he was bent.

“Mamma, mamma, can’t we have worship tomorrow?” he said eagerly.

“I should like it exceedingly, my son. The Lord’s day ought to be observed everywhere, on the sea as well as on land. I believe one reason sailors so frequently are led astray is because they lose all the blessed advantages of Sunday. We must ask Captain Hook about it and see how it can be managed.”

At the moment, Captain Hook drew near the little group and paused, partly to give a smile to Benny and partly to afford Mr. Parker, the pale young passenger on his arm, an opportunity to draw a long breath after the exercise he had been taking.

“Oh, Captain Hook, we want something of you,” exclaimed Benny. “We want to have worship tomorrow. May we? Do say yes.”

“I sha’n’t say no,” said Captain Hook, laughing, “but where’s your parson? I’m too old a sinner myself to set up for a preacher Sundays.”

“I am sorry for that captain,” said Mr. Parker. “I’ve been talking the same thing over in the cabin, but there is no one there who cares to assist me. I am not strong enough to speak many minutes in the open air, but I would not lose such an opportunity to ask God’s blessing on you and your crew.”

“We need it enough,” said the Captain shortly.

“Perhaps,” continued the stranger, “there may be someone among your sailors who would do his part to help on the good work. It may be that this young man would read a passage of Scripture for us and give a few words of exhortation. I have a tract with me that would be just the thing for the occasion.”

Theodore’s earnest, interested look had not escaped the attention of the speaker, and he made this appeal not without hope that he had found the right person for the duty proposed.

“He’s just the one. You will, won’t you?” said Benny eagerly.

Theodore paused a moment and then said, “With Captain Hook’s permission, I will, sir. I will gladly do what I can to see the Lord’s day honored and made profitable.”

Captain Hook turned quickly to Theodore and said, “You have my permission, but I give you warning, young man, that if you take such a stand as that before the crew, you’ll have to walk straight enough, or they’ll overhaul you and post you for a hypocrite before a week is over. You may as well know what hot coals you’ll have to walk on before you make a beginning.”

“I can but try to do my duty, sir. I don’t believe my messmates will be hard upon me,” said Theodore, bowing politely to the Captain as he retired.

Chapter 17

The Sabbath

The looked-for Sabbath proved a fair, calm day, when the ship moved but slowly on through the sunny air.

The call of “All hands on deck” was promptly obeyed. It had been rumored that a religious service was to be held at Benny’s request and there was great curiosity to know how and by whom it was to be conducted. “It can’t be Captain Hook is going to turn preacher, practicing would suit him better, first.” “Why, he’ll swear right out, before he knows it, as sure as he tries to speak off-hand.” “He’d better go by the book, if he ventures at all.” Such exclamations as these were heard from the sailors as they gathered in an orderly file upon deck.

A table and a chair were placed opposite to them, while Benny and his mother were comfortably established near at hand.

Mr. Parker soon took his seat in the place prepared for him. Mr. Parker had lived for years in the knowledge that he might at any time be called into the presence of his Maker. He had learned to live near to the Lord whom he was soon to see, and to talk to

Him as one talks with a friend.

His prayer was the outward expression of the simple, earnest wishes of his heart. His rough hearers felt that it was a real address to a real person, and an unusual solemnity stole over many a weather-marked countenance.

Mr. Parker sat down exhausted with the effort he had made, but peace was on his every feature as he listened to the song of praise which Mrs. Deland now commenced with her own clear, sweet, single voice. Deep, strong voices joined with her as she went on, while Benny's slender notes were heard mingling with the harsher tones, as if an angel had shared in that human song.

There were looks of astonishment and nudges of like meaning, as Theodore stepped forward when the hymn was over. He took up the Bible from the table and first read St. Luke's account of the storm on the sea of Galilee, and then followed it with a few faithful words of exhortation from the tract that had been placed within the volume. There was courage as well as modesty in Theodore's manner as he began, and the wondering looks changed to glances of respect as he went on. It was not alone his distinct, emphatic utterance, or his earnest appealing manner, that gave effect to his reading. His silent prayers were going up with every word that he was uttering, and he spoke as they only can speak who are prompted by the spirit of prayer.

Theodore's work had begun.

That evening Theodore was walking the deck, with Benny in his arms. The child clung to him with new fondness, and now seemed ready to share with him his every thought.

"Didn't we have a nice meeting, Theodore?" said Benny, with a bright smile on his pale face. The boy did not wait for an answer, but ran on as his thoughts prompted him, "I like to hear you read, Theodore. Your voice is just like your arms, strong but tender too. You never seem tired, Theodore. Your father must be very proud of you. Isn't he?"

"I have no father, Benny. Perhaps it is just as well, he might not be as proud of me as you think," said Theodore, sorrowfully.

Benny looked up questioningly, as he said, "You are very strong and well, and very good, I'm sure. My father would give all he owns to have me strong and well. I've heard him say so and he's very rich, you know. This ship is his and ever so many more, and I don't know how much besides, and yet, he says he would be a poor man to see me strong and hearty, like other boys. Only think, he spared mamma to go away to Paris with me, to see if the doctors could not do something for my spine. Poor papa. He stayed all alone for nothing. They couldn't do anything for me and so mamma has to take me back just as I came. I don't mind it for myself. I am used to it, but I wish papa had a great strong son, like you. How proud he would be of you. How he would love you."

"Dear Benny, you make me feel very much ashamed," said Theodore, sadly. "If my mother had a son just like you, he would not have given her half the pain that I have. Benny, a bad son is far worse than a dear sufferer like you. I have done very, very wrong, Benny, and I am going home to ask my mother to forgive me, and to tell her that I want to be a good Christian sailor now, and persuade everybody I sail with to love the Lord Jesus. Do you think she will forgive me, Benny?"

"I know she will. She can't help loving you," and Benny tightened his grasp round the neck of his friend.

"You see, Benny, it is not the worst misfortune to be feeble like you. You must remember that if you had been strong and well, you might have been tempted to go

wrong as I have, and then, Oh, how dreadfully you would have to suffer, even in this world, every time you thought of it. It is a sad, sad thing to go contrary to all you have been taught, and to sink down, down into sin.”

Theodore’s manner was so earnest that Benny shuddered and said, “I should not want to be wicked. It makes me very sorry now when I do wrong, but I don’t fret about it. Mamma says we need not worry about things that are gone by, if we truly repent of them. She says all the past is wiped out, all wiped out, for the Lord Jesus’s sake.”

As Benny spoke, he passed his thin hand across Theodore’s forehead, and smoothed out the deep lines that had unconsciously knit themselves there, as the bitter memories were roused within.

“All wiped out, all washed away, for the Lord Jesus’ sake.” This was the lesson which Theodore needed to learn and Benny’s simple faith made him a blessed teacher of this message of mercy.

Chapter 18

Almost Home

There were no more Sunday services on board the “Bonnie Jean,” no more pleasant groups on deck, no more cheerful gatherings to see the sun go down in a golden glory of sea and sky.

Keen winds and rolling waves were buffeting the “Bonnie Jean,” not speeding her on her course, and only the experienced sailors could keep their footing on her rocking, heaving deck.

Benny saw but little now of his friend, and yet these short interviews were very precious to them both. It was a treat to the poor lad to be carried for a few moments into the fresh air and to hear Theodore tell some pleasant anecdote of Binnings of the Blue Flag, or some sweeter Scripture story, learned at Sunday-school long ago.

These few moments of communion with Benny were to Theodore as glimpses of home and his heart throbbed as he thought that the time was drawing near when his own brother’s voice would be in his ears, and his mother’s words of forgiveness might blend with a blessing on her repentant son.

Home! Was Theodore ever to see the dear faces at his distant fireside? Was he ever to tread again the loved soil of his native land?

Some days had passed since Benny had enjoyed even a glimpse at Theodore. Ah, the sailors on board the “Bonnie Jean” had now no time for tender, loving offices to the timid and the feeble. There was rougher work for their hands to do, work that made the blood come, as they strove to move the ice-clad ropes, and bend the ship to obey their will.

Landsmen may smile as they see tree and shrub, rock and mound, taking on a crystal garment, that shall shine with diamond brightness when the sleet shall cease to fall, the storm-wind die away, and the sun come forth in its glory.

Not so with the sailor. He knows the brilliant casing that holds mast and sail, rope and rudder, as with a grasp of iron, is for him a terrible enemy.

Captain Hook’s face grew dark and desperate as the ice-storm added each moment new stiffness to the already rigid ropes. His orders were given in a louder, harsher tone, and his fearful oaths came thick and fast, as he saw his men powerless to execute them.

The poor fellows worked on bravely, though the frost was taking its keen hold upon

them, until feet and hands were thrilling in an agony of pain. Among these faithful, unflinching laborers, Theodore was foremost, and untiring in his efforts. As the hope of safely reaching his home and his mother once more grew dim, he encouraged himself with the thought that if death were to smite him, he would be found at his post by the stern messenger, faithful in what was committed to him, even to the end.

The night was dark and the rocky shores of our unkindly coast were hidden from the Captain's eager, piercing eyes. Yet there was a sorrowful certainty at his heart that the "Bonnie Jean" was drifting towards a shore where many a brave ship had gone down, mid the wild shrieks of the perishing crew.

The extent of the danger was not fully known in the cabin, yet enough of it was guessed to call forth prayers from those who had never prayed before, and to whiten with terror countenances that were used to smile amid the gay scenes of worldly pleasure.

Mr. Parker and Benny and his mother were wrapt in a sweet calm in this time of alarm. They had committed themselves to the keeping of a merciful Savior before daring the dangers of the sea, and on Him they now calmly relied, either for a safe return to earthly friends, or for a sure entrance to the blessed country where there is no more death.

Morning was breaking and through the mist the Captain could see the cliffs he so much dreaded. Scarcely was he sure of his position, when there was a shock and a crash that made the "Bonnie Jean" tremble and quiver from keel to topmast. She had struck. The sharp rocks had crushed in her strong framework and she would soon be a helpless wreck.

Towards one thing Captain Hook had turned his attention when he found that the ice had rendered the vessel perfectly unmanageable. The strong axes of the men had been plied to set the boats free, and to keep them fit for service, and now they were instantly lowered. The crew rushed forward to fill them, but Captain Hook swung an axe round his head to keep a clear path, while Theodore conveyed the helpless passengers into the boat which was first to leave the ship.

"Go down with him, Theodore. Do your best to save him," said Captain Hook, as Theodore passed him with Benny in his arms. "Tell his father I was true to my duty and did my best for his wife and child."

These were Captain Hook's words as Theodore clasped Benny closer to his breast and sustained Mrs. Deland's drooping form.

It is not our purpose to dwell on the hours of acute physical suffering and agonized suspense which these poor shipwrecked travelers endured before they were cast upon the shore and struggled through the surging waves to the land.

We will not count the strong swimmers, who vainly beat the chilling waves, and went down at last to their endless doom.

Ah, who more than a sailor needs early to make his peace with God? Whose life is edged about with so many and great dangers? Who, more than the storm-tossed sailor, needs, nay, deserves the landsman's loving, outstretched hand to point him to the Lord Jesus, and to beckon him towards the only eternal harbor of safety?

Drenched, shivering, and exhausted, Mrs. Deland stood upon the snow-clad shore, yet her heart was glowing with thankful praise to her almighty Deliverer.

Theodore stood beside her with her precious Benny clasped in his arms.

"His father has not lost him," said Mrs. Deland, looking tenderly into Benny's pale face—the thought of her own possible affliction quite forgotten in the remembrance of

what it would have been to another, thrice dearer than self.

A little band of shivering sailors stood around the passengers and urged them to move on to some place of shelter.

Along the pathless shore they trod, straining their eyes in the hope of spying some poor hovel, some wayside cottage, where they could see once more the firelight and feel the cheering warmth.

Theodore spoke not of the numbness that seemed to press upon him like an iron case. He clasped his precious charge more closely and moved steadily but silently on. There was but one voice to speak in all that stricken party and that was from the weakest, and in his own eyes the least of all.

“Never fear, mother, we shall get on nicely now. The Lord will take care of us. We shall soon come to a house. Father will be so glad to see us.”

Benny’s hopeful sentences fell with a cheering influence upon his chilled listeners and they stepped forward with new courage. It would not do for hardy men to be disheartened when a feeble child could talk so bravely.

“Yes, let them carry you, mother, that is nice,” and Benny smiled as two kindly sailors insisted upon Mrs. Deland’s allowing them to bear her through the snowdrifts that were blocking the way.

Dreary snowdrifts they were, but beyond them rose a blue and gilt curling, upward line, that even in the distance seemed to warm the blood and revive the energies of the weary, benumbed, and almost desperate mariners.

It was a poor place indeed, that hut by the seashore, and rough and coarse were its inmates, yet there the travelers found a glowing fire and a kindly welcome. There Benny’s “Thank God, we are safe,” was echoed by more than one rough heart.

Chapter 19 Binnings Again

“You ought not to go out, Binnings.”

“But I must, Mrs. Coney.”

“You’ll certainly fall. It’s as slippery as glass,” said Jennet, with an appealing look.

“No matter how slippery it is, I can’t stay at home this morning. There’ll be poor shipwrecked fellows coming into town, who, may be, won’t know where to find the Blue Flag or the hand of an honest friend. I tell you, Mrs. Coney, there are times when a man can’t think about himself. The ‘Bonnie Jean’ was in my mind all night, and I couldn’t stand it to sit here by my good fire without knowing more about those poor fellows.”

Binnings moved to get his shaggy coat and his well-tried cane.

Jennet did not spring as usual to wait upon him. She sat by, looking as much as to say, “If you will go out such a day, I am going to have no hand in helping you.”

When Binnings was thoroughly equipped, he playfully put up his wooden pin to the fire as if to warm it, and as he saw the smile he wanted on Jennet’s face, he said, “You’ll forgive me before I go, won’t you, Jennet, and wish me well?” Jennet looked anxious, but not unforgiving. At that moment there was the sound of a sleigh stopping at the door, and immediately afterwards Gideon came in, his face glowing with health and pleasure, as he said, “Oh, Binnings, I am so glad I got here in time. I was sure you would keep your word when you said at breakfast that you should go out this morning. It isn’t fit for you to take a step on the pavement, why it’s all one sheet of ice, just as it was

yesterday. I went as quick as I could to Jerry Bright's, the old hackman, whose son you took in that stormy night, when he was almost frozen. It did my heart good to hear the old chap talk about you. He said he'd rather lend his sleigh to you than to let it twenty times over. And so here it is, all ready for you to jump in, and go where you please.

"A thousand thanks to Jerry Bright and to you too, Mr. Gideon," said Binnings, giving his tarpaulin a swing, as he bowed low. "The sleigh is the very thing. May be I'll have a chance to pay you both with a good turn, one of the days."

"For shame! We are both more than paid beforehand," said Gideon, warmly.

"I suppose you'll say good-bye to me now, Jennet," said Binnings, as he nodded his parting and then went out cheerily.

Binnings was not much of a "whip," but the steady old horse seemed able to keep the road, while the honest sailor held the reins loose in his hands as they moved slowly along. From time to time, Binnings stopped to inquire for news of the crew of the "Bonnie Jean," but no one could give him satisfactory answers.

Binnings was driving along the wharves when a group of distressed-looking sailors at once attracted his attention. "Halloo there!" he shouted at the top of his voice. "Where are you bound? Here, somebody hold my horse."

Binnings tumbled out of the sleigh, and was among them in a few moments, and shaking them by the hand as if they were his dearest friends. "From the 'Bonnie Jean,' I dare say. Glad to see you. Had a hard time, didn't you? Thank God, you got safe through."

There was no resisting Binnings' hearty, sincere manner. Poor fellows who had felt desolate and friendless the moment before, were warmed and cheered by his greeting.

Binnings had not done speaking when a stalwart, brown-cheeked youth stepped up to him and exclaimed, "It must be Binnings of the Blue Flag. If it's you, Binnings, you'll remember Theodore Gould, I'm sure."

"Remember Theodore Gould! May I never forget him or his mother either," said Binnings, as he actually put both arms round the neck of the astonished sailor. "Why, boy, I didn't know you. You've grown a foot, and you are looking so well, for all what you've gone through. It's all right with you, Theodore. I see it. Thank God! You've stuck by your colors. I don't need any body to tell me that."

"My mother!" murmured Theodore. "Can you tell me anything of her?"

"Well and hearty. The best woman living. Heard from her last week. Turn into the sleigh and we'll go right to the 'Blue Flag,' and Mrs. Coney'll know how to get the chill out of you. Come on, boys. You've only got to follow your noses and make a straight track to the right, until you come to a house where a blue flag hangs out, and you'll get a warm dinner and a warm welcome, and a warm bed too, and any thing else you like but a warm toddy. We don't give out such things at the Blue Flag, except in special cases. Will you come on? Do you think you can find the way?"

"Aye, aye," responded the sailors as they started off in the direction indicated.

If Binnings' kindly manner needed any guarantee for its sincerity, the sailors felt that they had it in Theodore's evident satisfaction at meeting with his cheerful friend. A man loved and trusted by Theodore Gould could be relied on.

It was a source of deep joy to Binnings to see Theodore face to face, and to learn from him that he had persevered in the Christian course commenced at the Blue Flag. Yet the honest sailor's joy was doubled at the thought of the good news in store for Theodore's mother, who had so bravely borne up against anxious misgivings since she had heard the glad tidings of her son's repentance and new resolutions.

As they drove along the streets of the busy town, Theodore heard of faithful Binnings' visit to his own dear home, and tasted the sweets of reconciliation even before he beheld his mother's face.

She had freely forgiven him all. With her, the past was all wiped away. Why should he doubt that the One more pure, more holy, more loving, could as freely blot out his transgressions, and receive him to the arms of eternal mercy? Blessed thoughts were these. For the first time, Theodore embraced in its fulness the abundant pardon by which those who are reconciled in Christ Jesus stand before the throne without spot, accepted in the Beloved.

Very different was Theodore's second entrance at the Blue Flag from his first introduction to its sheltering roof. Ready hands were outstretched to welcome him and kind hearts spoke their joy at his return. He was no more a wandering prodigal, but a Christian brother, saved from the dangers of the sea to offer thanksgivings with them who had sent forth the wing of prayer to hover protectingly over him in the midst of perils of body and soul.

"A poor shipwrecked sailor, weary, penniless, and afar from the home of his childhood," so the world would have spoken of Theodore Gould. Perchance the sentimental might have shed tears of sorrow over his desolate condition. But how felt he? How looked he to the angels then?

"Joy, joy, joy!" "Praise, praise, praise!" These were the strong emotions that were throbbing in Theodore's heart.

He had gone forth in weakness, barely clinging to the cross. He had returned with the peace of God filling his soul to overflowing. Truly, the Blue Flag was to him now a Bethel, where he set up an altar, and offered anew his whole being as a living, perpetual sacrifice to the loving, merciful God who had pardoned his transgressions, watched over him in temptation, and brought him in safety to the haven where he would be.

Angels could rejoice over that shipwrecked sailor who with his poor human soul was joining in their eternal song of praise to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Chapter 20

An Interview

When Theodore had been thoroughly warmed and welcomed at the Blue Flag, he began to talk of starting at once to go to his mother. "That won't do," said Binnings, decidedly. "She couldn't stand such good news coming on her at once. Send her a letter, telling her you've got in safely—never a word about the 'Bonnie Jean,' mind you—and then follow it up as soon as you please. She isn't the strongest woman in the world, you see."

"She has had a great deal to bear," said Theodore, sorrowfully, as he remembered how much his own course must have contributed towards making her prematurely old. "Perhaps you are right, Binnings, but I do so yearn to see her once more."

"It's likely you do, and you'd better let Gideon go out now and take your place in the stage for tomorrow morning, to make your mind easy, and then we must fix you up a little."

Binnings brought out a complete sailor's wardrobe and said smiling, "It's your own, Theodore, sent by your own mother, to be given to somebody who needed it. I reckon I could not please her better than by giving it to you. Every now and then comes a box

from her with things in it for shipwrecked sailors. It seems as if her heart was bound up now in doing for the tars, one way or another."

The tears stood in Theodore's eyes as he listened. He well-understood how it eased his mother's anxious heart to be laboring for the companions of her son upon the great sea.

"There now, you look just right, a sailor, a right down sailor, but all trim, fit to speak to anybody," said Binnings, as he surveyed Theodore after he had had the comfort of a thorough bath, and reappeared clad in his new suit. Jennet and Mrs. Coney were not as loud in their praise, but their eyes spoke their approval, and they silently thought Theodore, with his frank, fine face, as noble-looking a specimen of a sailor as it had ever been their good fortune to see.

Mrs. Coney always had two ears, and whatever one might be hearing close at hand, the other was sure to be on the watch to know if all was going right in the other part of the house. Now she listened a moment, and then said quickly, "Binnings, you had better go and see what's up in there. The sailors of the 'Bonnie Jean' seem to have come to wonderfully."

There did seem to be no small stir among the poor fellows, who had by this time been thoroughly warmed and comfortably clad at the Blue Flag.

Binnings instantly disappeared, but soon came back, accompanied by a stout middle-aged man, whose bearing and strongly marked features pronounced him a person of energy and resolution, while his delicate complexion and the pleasant play as of an habitual smile about his mouth told of a refined and loving nature, still having its sway in spite of the cares and temptations of active life.

"This is Theodore Gould, sir," said Binnings, pointing to the young sailor, with evident satisfaction. Theodore was astonished at the hearty way in which his hand was taken in both of the stranger's, and at the emotion that agitated his fine face, as he said,

"God bless you. God bless you for your care of my poor wife and my darling Benny."

"Mr. Deland," exclaimed Theodore, in surprise.

"Yes, Mr. Deland, the man who owes more to you than he ever can repay. What that dear boy is to me, no words can tell."

"And no wonder, sir. He isn't like anybody else," said Theodore, warmly. "The very look of his eye does one good. You don't owe me anything, sir. What I did, I did for one I loved. Is he doing well?"

"He's snug by the fireside, as cheerful and lovely as if he had not a care or pain in the world. He wants to see you and begged me to ask you to come at once to him. We live only five miles from town. Will you go out with me tonight? Mrs. Deland says she feels she has a right to you. She will not rest till she sees you in her own home."

"I thank you warmly, but I must see my mother before I go anywhere else," said Theodore, quickly. "But for Binnings I should be on my way home at once."

"I kept him until he sent a letter first. Joy kills sometimes, you know, sir, as well as trouble. I was afraid to risk his going in upon them at once," said Binnings.

"Right, very right," said Mr. Deland, but it was plain that some thought was troubling his mind.

Mr. Deland had meant to satisfy his feelings in some measure by giving Theodore a golden reward, now as the young sailor stood there before him, he felt it quite impossible to offer him such gifts as had been noisily and heartily acknowledged by his messmates in the common room hard by.

Mr. Deland was puzzled. He could not be satisfied with mere words as an evidence

of his gratitude and yet he was sure that anything else, just now, would give more pain than pleasure.

After a moment's silence, Mr. Deland said warmly, "Remember, young man, we have a claim upon you. You must tell your mother that we will not ask her to spare you from her side, but if she will come with you to us, she shall have a hearty welcome. May I tell Benny you promise him a visit?"

"Certainly, sir. I long to see the dear boy again. Please present my respects to Mrs. Deland and thank her for her kind invitation."

With another warm shake of his hand Mr. Deland withdrew, dissatisfied with his short interview. He could not say what he would, he could not carry out the generous desires of his heart. Beckoning to Binnings to follow him, he lingered in the vestibule.

"I cannot offer that noble young fellow money," he said, "yet I know that in his anxiety to save my Benny, he saved nothing for himself. Take this purse and make him comfortable."

Binnings turned away from the purse as he answered, "While the Blue Flag hangs out, Theodore Gould has a free ticket here. I wouldn't see the boy want while John Binnings had a dollar in the bank. He's my child, as it were, my child in the Lord. I have money too, here, ready for him. His mother sent it for shipwrecked sailors, bless her soul. It belongs of right to him."

Binnings saw Mr. Deland's look of disappointment and hastened to add, "Give it to the sailors, sir, and that will ease your mind. That will please Theodore too. May I tell him you left this to help keep up the Blue Flag, that the poor tars may have a Christian home to come to?"

"With all my heart and there will be more to add to it. I have never half done my duty for sailors. I should not have found Theodore out, if Benny hadn't told me of his love for the Blue Flag, and all about Binnings too. In his eagerness to get my wife and Benny off safely in the first sled that could be rigged up, Theodore did not tell them where he should be when he was able to follow. I have found him now though, and I don't mean to give him up. I may have some way of helping him on that he will not refuse from Benny's father."

"Where there's a will, there's a way," said Binnings cheerily. "He trusts you and believes you, sir, I could see it in his eye. Let him have the satisfaction of enjoying your gratitude now, and do what you please afterwards. That would be my way."

"And a good way too, I believe," said Mr. Deland, as with another hearty shake of the hand he turned his back on the Blue Flag.

Chapter 21

Prayers

Binnings did not find Theodore a talkative visitor that evening at the Blue Flag. It was plain that the young man's thoughts were far away, and his kind host did not try to draw him into unnecessary conversation. Indeed, honest Binnings was almost sorry he had curbed the son's eager longing to go at once to his mother. "I meant for the best," said Binnings to himself, as he looked from over his newspaper at Theodore's thoughtful face. "No doubt it will all turn out right."

This conclusion had just restored Binnings to his usual cheerfulness, when there was a thundering knock at the door, which Gideon promptly answered.

"Is this the Blue Flag? Is Binnings, a one-legged man, here?"

These questions were eagerly asked by a sea-worn stranger, who spoke like one used to command.

"He is. Do you want to see him?" was Gideon's calm reply.

Binnings by this time was at the door to have a look at the new-comer.

Binnings was good at remembering faces, but no associations seemed awakened as his eyes met those fixed upon him.

"Binnings, I suppose?" was the stranger's word of inquiry.

"Yes, Binnings, sir," said Gideon, throwing open the door that led to the sailors' sitting room and then retiring.

The crew of the Bonnie Jean were locked fast in their slumbers, so Binnings and his visitor had the room to themselves.

"Can I stay here tonight?" said the stranger, who seemed to deal in interrogatives.

"Yes, you can, just here on that sofa, if you'll put up with such a bed as that. We are full, uncommonly full, tonight," said Binnings, as if the thought gave him great pleasure.

"I don't care where I lie. I don't expect to sleep much. What I want is to get rid of my old companions. They'd crowd around me like a swarm of bees, if they knew where I was. Honest, kind-hearted fellows too, but they don't suit me just now. I've got things to think about that they can't help me in. You don't know me, I suppose, Binnings."

"I don't, I own," was the short answer.

"Well, I'm a man who has gone through about as hard a way of life and sworn as many big oaths as any you ever saw. Look at me. Should you think I was used to praying? Maybe not. But that's what I've been at and I mean to be at."

"You couldn't be in better business, whoever you sir, saint or sinner," said Binnings.

"Sinner, sinner, sure enough. Why, it's as much as I can do to talk to you now without swearing, and yet I tell you every oath I ever spoke lies on me now like a hundred weight of lead. It's as if my eyes were opened to see what I've been doing all my life, just calling down the vengeance of heaven on my wicked head, that deserved it enough without asking for it."

"It's a pity that more of the swearers don't see things that way," said Binnings thoughtfully.

"Maybe my eyes wouldn't have been opened but for the way things fell out. You see I'm Captain Hook of the Bonnie Jean. Maybe you've heard of me."

"I have, many a time," said Binnings in surprise.

"It's likely you have heard people speak well of me. I deserve it, in a certain way. I have always looked out for the interest of my owners and kept things straight aboard ship. I tell you the truth, I've felt proud before now to hear folks whisper, as I went along the wharves, 'That's Captain Hook of the Bonnie Jean.' I knew what they meant. Maybe they'd be astonished to know what he thinks of himself now.

"You know about the Bonnie Jean. I can't go over with it. I'd sooner have seen my right hand cut off, than have lost such a vessel as that, swift as a bird and sound as a top. Glad enough was every soul to leave her, but one young man, a passenger. He wouldn't set foot in a boat, till everybody else was safe but him and myself. He had no relations to mourn for him, he said, and it was as easy to die on the sea as on the land. And calm as a sleeping baby's face he looked, when even an old tough one like me was all in a shake.

"We got him in the boat though and then says I to the fellows, 'Pull out,' and I swore an oath I shall never forget. He laid his hand on my arm, that young Parker, and said, 'Don't pray that these poor fellows may go to destruction. Let us all pray that God will

save us and bring us safe to land or else pardon our sins and take us to Himself, if it should please Him to call us now into His presence.’ Then it struck me what I had been doing all my life, just praying for the eternal ruin of myself and everybody else.

“The notion stuck to me and when the boat capsized in the rollers, I thought my prayer was going to be answered for myself, as it was for too many poor wretches who went down before my very eyes. I can see their looks of horror now. I can see the awful agony in their poor desperate faces. Oh, how I struggled to reach the shore! I had heard Parker’s calm voice say, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,’ as the boat went over. He knew he had no strength to fight through such waves as those, and he seemed to pass away as sweetly as if he fell asleep. I could not call on God to help me. I had prayed too many times for my own destruction. Yet here I am, as miserable, distressed a creature as ever saw himself on the edge of the pit of darkness and knew not which way to turn.”

It was in vain that Binnings strove, by prayer with the agitated man, and by the most tender counsel, to induce him to turn to the sinner’s only hope. The oaths that he had uttered seemed continually ringing in his ears as so many petitions for his own destruction, which were too surely to be granted. “You must go to sleep, Binnings,” said Captain Hook at last. “I shall stay here and walk the room, or lie down, as suits me best.”

“I am afraid you will be interrupted early in the morning. We have a good many of the sailors from the Bonnie Jean here tonight. They turned in soon after sunset and they won’t sleep late tomorrow,” said Binnings, as he lingered on the threshold.

“Sailors from the Bonnie Jean?” said Captain Hook eagerly. “Is Theodore Gould here? I heard he got safe to land.”

“Here, safe and sound, sitting by the fire in the other part of the house. Do you want to see him?” said Binnings.

“I’d rather see him than any man I know. There’s the real thing in him, I am sure of that,” was the eager answer.

Theodore was not long in obeying Binnings’ call.

“Captain Hook!” he exclaimed, as the agitated face of the Captain met his view.

“Oh, Captain Hook, I am so glad you are in the land of the living.”

There was a solemnity in Theodore’s manner, as he took the Captain by both hands, that was well-understood.

“You were afraid I had lost my chance and had gone down to the destruction I deserved,” said the Captain, with an eager, questioning look.

“I was,” said Theodore gravely. “Thank God, you are still on this side of eternity.”

Binnings quietly moved away and left the Captain and the young sailor together. They talked long and late, and when Theodore bade good-night, his companion’s face had lost some of its anxious wildness.

“I will persevere, as you say. I won’t give up. If so many long months had to pass before a boy like you could shake off the horrors of his old ways, a hardened sinner like me can’t expect to be all right as soon as he turns his back on the track he has been following so long. Pray for me, boy. It will take millions of prayers to balance all the times I’ve called on God to cast me into that most horrible pit. Pray for me.”

Theodore did pray that night, and many, many times afterwards for the poor wicked man who was groping in darkness towards the only source of light.

“Perhaps he won’t remember the house. Hadn’t I better hang my blue flag out the front window, so he can see it clear down the street.”

Bob Gould was walking up and down his mother’s parlor in a state of eager impatience, which made him most anxious to be doing something to hasten his brother’s arrival.

“Theodore could find the house in the dark, I’ll venture,” said Ella, smiling at Bob’s proposal. “You may hang out the blue flag though, if you please, as a sign of welcome to sailors.”

It took Bob some time to hunt up his treasure and to nail it on a stick long enough to reach far over the sidewalk.

Ella was pleased to calm in any way Bob’s restlessness, which she knew was wearing upon her mother. And she was sorry when his task was done, for he began his eager, impatient wishing that Theodore would come, if he was coming, for he was quite tired out with waiting.

“There he is,” exclaimed Mrs. Gould, as she caught the sound of approaching sleigh-bells, which had escaped the ears of her children. “I know the bells. Oh, Theodore!” Mrs. Gould rose to go to the door, but a strange faintness came over her, and Ella had to support her, as she stood looking eagerly towards the entrance.

It suited Bob to have the welcoming to himself. He hugged and hurrahed, and hurrahed and hugged, till Theodore was obliged to run up the steps at last, with a stout little boy hanging to his neck, as if he had grown there.

Bob dropped off suddenly, however, at the door-sill, as he saw the driver handing out a miniature ship, full-rigged, and waiting for somebody to claim it as belonging to his young passenger, who had brought it as his only baggage.

While Bob was doing this office, Theodore entered the house alone. Ah, how it smote his heart to see the change his absence had wrought in his mother.

“Mother, dear mother, forgive me,” he exclaimed, as he folded her in his arms.

“My dear, dear son,” were the only words she uttered, and then her head drooped upon his shoulder in a long and tender embrace.

“God has been very good to me,” she murmured, when she raised her face to look earnestly into his. “And Ella too, you don’t know what a comfort she has been to me.”

“You have done all you could to comfort mother in the trouble I have caused her, and how I thank you for it,” said Theodore, as he tenderly kissed his sister.

“Whose is this? Where did it come from?” said Bob, entering the room, with the ship raised high in his hands.

“It is yours, Bob. Binnings made it for you. You know Binnings,” said Theodore, with a smile.

“Know Binnings? To be sure I do.”

“We all know Binnings,” joined in Mrs. Gould, with the tears in her eyes. “His is a noble work.”

“And there is someone I know, who helps him in it. I am glad you love the sailors, mother,” said Theodore, “they need help to keep them right.”

“I love my sailor-son,” said Mrs. Gould, with a fond look at the tall, manly tar who stood at her side.

That was a blessed, happy evening at Mrs. Gould’s. Yet Theodore retired with an anxious, thoughtful heart.

His mother’s joy at his return and the clinging love with which she turned to him,

forgetting and forgiving all the past, suggested a painful question to his mind.

Ought he not to give up the path he had chosen? Ought he not to stay with the mother by whom he was so tenderly beloved, and who had borne and suffered so much for him? It cost Theodore some wakeful hours of thought and earnest prayer, before he could calmly form his answer. His decision was taken at last. Dear as was to him the path of usefulness he had chosen for himself, he would give it up. His mother should not lack, in her old age, the sustaining arm of a son. He whom she had wept as lost, should be restored to her to be her stay and prop, as she went down the vale of years.

Self thus conquered, Theodore could fall asleep with the sweet assurance that, should he know no earthly waking, his last purpose would have been to keep "the commandment with promise."

If Theodore, before his departure, had been a hero to Bob, he was now looked up to with a double share of veneration. A brother who had seen and undergone so much, was not to be viewed as an ordinary man.

Day after day had passed, and yet Theodore had still something interesting to tell to the eager group at the fireside. Ella and Bob had heard of the wonders he had seen by sea and land, but the better, more important story of his inner life was breathed in his mother's ear alone. She had wept tears of sympathy, of pity, joy, and thanksgiving, as she heard how her dear son was led along the valley of humiliation until, feeling himself utterly nothing, he could yet rejoice in his full sonship in the heavenly kingdom, through the all-prevailing merits of his crucified Elder Brother.

Theodore had concealed nothing from the one who loved him best. His degradation and the deep purpose of his renewed life to devote himself to the work of God among sailors, were alike made known to her and yet his future was not named.

"When are you going to sea again, Theodore?"

This question Mrs. Gould tremblingly asked one morning. The fact she had taken for granted. The time alone remained uncertain.

"I have given up the sailor's life, mother," was Theodore's answer.

He would not name the motive that had prompted him, lest it should seem like boasting of the sacrifice he had made.

Why was it that Mrs. Gould, who had trembled the moment before at the thought of parting, now felt a shadow sweep over her heart at the words of her son?

"Have you given up your noble resolution? Are you not to be the messenger of God's truth and the faithful evidence of the power of the same, by a holy, consistent life? Are you faint-hearted, Theodore? Do you fear the temptations of a sailor's life?"

Quick and searching came the mother's questions.

Her son had no coward, ease-loving heart to shrink from a reply. He tenderly put his arm about her, as he said, "Dear mother, I have caused you too many anxious hours to try you anymore. I want to be your stay and comfort. You need someone to lean on. I will not leave you again. I can be useful on shore, if my heart is right. God knows I do not shrink from the path of my choice, but my duty to you has the highest, dearest claim."

"I can lean on the widow's God, who has hitherto sustained me. I will not keep you, my son, from the path for which you are specially prepared. God gave you a love for the sea that makes its life of hardship a pleasure to you. He has trained and fashioned you as an instrument for a peculiar work. He has given you the deep-seated wish and purpose to labor for his children who 'go down to the sea in ships, and behold His wonders in the great waters.' My heart clings to the sailors' cause. I believe the time will come, when every white-winged ship shall be a messenger of peace and a house of

prayer, and when our seamen shall be a self-sustaining band of missionaries, living and dying among ungodly men and heathen nations, as a perpetual wonder-working proof of the power of the religion of Christ. Go, my son, and your mother's blessing shall be with you and your mother's prayers shall perpetually ascend to the God of heaven, that He may make you an instrument of much good to many souls. Let us pray."

Encircled by each other's loving arms, the mother and son knelt down together, while Mrs. Gould offered unto the Lord her best earthly treasure as a free gift to the cause that she loved. She cast herself on the sustaining arm of the Almighty, while she consecrated to His service the son on whom she might have leaned too strongly, if he had been left at her side, that she might twine around him her clinging heart-strings.

Who could doubt that a work so begun would be blessed and prospered? Who could doubt that Theodore Gould would go forth to sow the good seed and reap an abundant harvest?

Chapter 23

A Visit

Theodore was not to be allowed to forget his promised visit at Mr. Deland's. A letter, dictated by Benny and written by his mother's hand, came to urge the prompt fulfilment of his promise.

Benny's pleading earnestness, and the warm seconding of his invitation in Mrs. Deland's postscript, were not to be disregarded.

Of course Mrs. Gould and Ella unselfishly gave their consent. Bob would have stood out stoutly for his right to be within hearing of his brother's words during every moment of his stay on land, if Benny had been a healthy boy like himself, but the merry little fellow drew his hand across his moist eyes as he thought of poor Benny unable to run or play, and he declared at once that Theodore ought to go to him, if he had to walk through snow up to his neck to reach him. No such perils, however, were in store for Theodore on his way to Mr. Deland's.

The bright light from the drawing-room windows and the sudden ceasing of the sound of the sleigh-bells surprised Theodore with the announcement that his pleasant journey was over. The door seemed to open of itself, as for an expected guest, and Theodore was shaken warmly by the hand and led into the drawing-room before he could get over the confusion of the sudden change from the darkness without to the cheerful light within.

Mrs. Deland's greeting was affectionate, but hasty, as if she were unwilling to keep Theodore a moment from the little arms that were outstretched towards him.

"Dear Theodore," said Benny, as he was folded close to the heart that loved him so well. "Put me on the couch now, I want to look at you," he soon added, then, after a long fond gaze at his friend, he said triumphantly, "My father said he should be proud of just such a son as you are. He was not disappointed in you, Theodore, and yet, and yet, he said he loved me best."

"And who wouldn't?" said Theodore warmly. "You are worth a hundred such great

flesh-and-blood fellows as I am. Never mind, we won't talk any more about that. I want to give you the books my brother Bob would send you, though I told him you had a whole library of your own. He said that did not make any difference, so long as you hadn't any books that Bob Gould gave you. He stuffed my pockets with them, so you may put in your hands and pull them out yourself."

It was a pleasant task to Benny to thrust his hands deep in the pockets of the shaggy overcoat, to bring out now a Robinson Crusoe, then a United States Speaker, now a new Bible, then a lively picture-book. Bob had expended all his hoarded pocket-money, intended to purchase a suit of fireman's clothes, to buy Benny's present. Bob would have felt quite satisfied with his investment if he could have seen Benny's pleasure as book after book was drawn out.

"Now take off your coat, Theodore, and let us see you looking as if you were at home," said Mrs. Deland, when the unloading was fairly over.

At home Theodore certainly did feel at Mr. Deland's. There was a glow of kindly hospitality about the place that had cheered many a stranger and now no means were left untried to render Theodore's visit agreeable.

The three days of his allotted stay had slipped rapidly by and there was no persuading the young sailor to protract any longer his absence from the mother who had so unselfishly spared him from her side.

"Then you will insist upon leaving us tomorrow morning?" said Mr. Deland, drawing his chair towards the table at which Theodore was sitting.

Benny was in his father's arms and his earnest eyes silently repeated the question.

"I am sorry to say that I must leave you all, but I shall never forget the kindness I have received under this roof," said Theodore, his face kindling with feeling.

"Theodore," said Mr. Deland, evidently carrying out a train of thought that had been in his mind, "I saw Captain Hook today."

"Did you sir? Is he quite settled on the right side?" asked Theodore eagerly.

"The poor man is 'faint, yet pursuing.' His mind is all confusion and he cannot yet believe that one who has so taken the name of God in vain, can taste His free forgiveness. Yet one thing he is determined, he will lead a different life. He will not wilfully lay up further condemnation for himself. I have confidence in him. He did his best about the 'Bonnie Jean,' and I am going to give him the command of a new ship that is to sail to the Mediterranean on her first voyage two months from this time.

"He wants a mate to go with him, he says, who is a Christian man. One who will lend his influence in his ship for the good cause. One who will be willing to gather the men around him for prayers and teach them Sabbath hymns of praise, to take the place of the coarse songs with which they so often desecrate the sacred day of rest. He wants someone who will help him to see his own way clear as a Christian, someone who has passed through hours of despair, and now tastes the blessedness of a heavenly Father's reconciled countenance. He wants *you*, Theodore, as his mate. Will you go with him? Will you help the repentant man in his struggles towards a better course?"

"With all my heart," said Theodore warmly, as he took Mr. Deland's offered hand. "I understand you, sir, and you have my deepest gratitude."

"The ship is named the 'Benny Deland.' It is called after me. You will like to sail in her, I know, Theodore," said Benny, his face lighting with one of his own sweet smiles.

"Indeed I shall, and I shall try to be sailing straight for the harbor where my dear Benny is bound. There'll be a blessing on that ship, I am sure."

"I believe there will," said Benny softly. "I have asked God so many times to send His

Spirit to all who shall sail in her that I am sure He will. You know He promises His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him.”

“Yes, and we must act as well as pray,” said Mr. Deland. “Theodore, what can I provide you with to help you in your labors for the good of the crew?”

“May I give you the whole list?” said Theodore, with sparkling eyes.

“Yes, and let it be as long as you please,” was the encouraging reply.

“I will begin with a great Bible, for the cabin-table, open to all. Then, any quantity you please of Bibles, Testaments, tracts, and good books, in any or all of the modern languages, and if it is not too much to ask, some books of travels, and a set of maps pasted on bookbinder’s board would be a valuable addition. It would keep the fellows out of mischief to have the maps to gather round. I can see a cluster of them now, pointing their eager fingers here and there, and tracing out their wanderings to their comrades.”

“Are you going to teach modern languages—French and Italian, I suppose you mean?” said Benny, gravely.

“French and Italian, German, Spanish, or Swedish, whatever you please, but I don’t mean to turn teacher, excepting of the truth, the blessed truth, Benny. I want good books to suit sailors of all nations and landsmen too. When we come into port and have scores of visitors, we won’t pass round the bottle, but everybody who comes on board the Benny Deland shall go off with a precious little book in his hand. Isn’t that the way to do on board your namesake?”

“The very way and the right way,” said Mr. Deland, finishing the notes in his memorandum-book, as he spoke.

“I like the way you do everything, Theodore,” said Benny affectionately, “you enter into things with all your heart.”

“You cannot think how happy it makes me, Benny, to have a prospect of carrying out my favorite plans. I owe you more than I can tell, Mr. Deland,” said Theodore, earnestly.

“It makes me happy to have such hints about furnishing a ship. I shall not forget it hereafter. Would to God that I, as an owner, had not so long neglected this matter,” said Mr. Deland, gravely.

“Father, may I write the name in the big Bible?” asked Benny.

“Indeed you shall, my boy. You shall do all for the Benny Deland that your heart prompts you.”

“Then I will see that she has plenty of the best of books, and when I am gone from this world, perhaps she will be sailing, sailing on, carrying the good news wherever she goes. Perhaps I shall meet somebody in heaven, who learned the way there on board the Benny Deland. Wouldn’t that be pleasant!”

Benny’s face was bright with a beautiful light as he spoke. The thought of death was so familiar to him that he talked of it as cheerfully as of the coming pleasures of the morrow.

“Yes, may the Benny Deland be indeed a messenger of good. May the peculiar blessing of God rest upon her captain, mates, and crew,” said Mr. Deland, solemnly.

“Amen,” “Amen,” “Amen.”

Thrice the words were spoken, by three voices, in the deep sincerity of praying hearts.

So it was decided how and where Theodore Gould should start on his new career.

Chapter 24

Conclusion

We cannot trace Theodore Gould through the various partings and reunions, the perils and escapes, the labors and the blessings on these labors which were his lot during twenty years of life on the sea.

We must let twice ten years slip away, ere we again look in upon our friends who are knit together by a common interest in the "Blue Flag" and the sailors' cause.

The spot where Jennet had stood with her pitcher, and cast her first sorrowful look at Binnings, was greatly changed. There was no corner-pump now. The steep descent where Gideon and Jennet had once loved to scramble down to the shore in front of their mother's house was all levelled and graded. Wharves had crept along the shore until they had passed Jack Coney's lot and curved around the turn in the bay beyond it.

As for the house itself, it had moved away on rollers years ago and found a new resting-place in one of the suburbs of the growing city. Half a dozen families lived in it now, and dirty children ranged their mud-pies on what had once been Mrs. Coney's spotless doorstep.

And was Mrs. Coney, houseless and homeless, standing like a monument of the past on the site of her old homestead?

Ah, no. Jack Coney's lot was covered by a great three-story brick building, that was "neat as wax," both outside and in, from garret to cellar. There Mrs. Coney found a sphere sufficiently large for the exercise of her energy and her kindness, which seemed to have increased with her increasing years. Time sat lightly upon her, for Christian charity, Christian cheerfulness, and Christian trust are wonderful antidotes against the ugly lines of age. Mother Coney, as the sailors loved to call her, had her friends and well-wishers in every part of the world.

A blue flag waved as cheerily from the great three-story building as it had done from the humbler dwelling and the name "Binnings' over the wide doorway was a standing invitation to the hundreds of seamen who had learned to know and love the whole-hearted old sailor.

There was no Jennet Coney now. Yet there was a Jennet who said she had first been related to the tars by blood, but was now related to them by marriage. She had her own Jack on the sea to think about on stormy nights, and to pray for through the long day, a fact that made her none the less active and loving as an assistant in the good work to which her mother was devoted.

Gideon had his hands full too. He was one moment in the office posting his books, the next at the market buying provisions, and the next in the sickroom, where some poor sufferer was blessing the hour when in his afflictions he had found a home at the Blue Flag.

But where was Binnings? It is sunset now and we may not look for him on land one moment after the sun dips behind the western sky. Lying at anchor, a stone's throw from the Blue Flag, is an odd-looking craft. She is neither ship, schooner, nor brig, sloop, bark, nor steamer. She carries neither mast nor smoke-pipe, sail nor banner. Yet she is dearer to many an honest tar than the vessel in which he took his first voyage or that which he now commands. There are associations hovering about her which link him to the better haven he hopes to reach, when he has done with the buffetings of time and stands safe on the Shining Shore.

A floating "House of Prayer." This was the name Binnings had given it and it was as dear to him now as the Blue Flag, that still fluttered its welcome to the men of the sea.

On the stern of the odd-looking thing was Binnings' favorite seat at evening. There we may find him counting his mercies, numberless in his eyes as the shining crests of the little waves that are coming up to be tipped by the sunset glow. There is a dip of oars and a boat darts to the side of the "House of Prayer."

A tall sun-burnt man springs on board, and "Binnings!" "Captain Gould!" are exclaimed by the two at their joyous meeting.

Many times had Binnings and Theodore Gould met, since Captain Hook had gone rejoicing to his last home, and the Benny Deland had fallen to the care of his highly prized mate. They had met to strengthen each other's hands, and encourage each other's hearts, in the good work to which they were both pledged.

Binnings dearly loved a talk with Captain Gould and the easy swinging motion of the anchored craft seemed to assist the flow of their conversation. He declared that he had always hated the stiff feeling of a still floor under his feet, and it was a comfort to tread every evening a living thing, that could dance on the waves as cheerily as a mermaid.

"How is Bob getting on with the sailors?" was Captain Gould's first question, after he had taken the seat that had been offered him.

"The Rev. Robert Gould is just the man for us," said Binnings heartily. "I call him Bob too, sometimes. I can't help it. But when he gets up there in the pulpit, he seems like another man—just as kind, just as free, but so solemn, as solemn as if he had seen the Lord face to face, like Moses. He knows how to deal with sailors. As sure as anybody gets sleepy, and the poor fellows do nod sometimes, then Master Bob comes out with something unexpected, one of his sudden sayings, that wakes them right up at once, and then he's down with a real searcher, that takes hold of them and keeps them awake body and soul. Perhaps he calls out, 'All hands on deck!' and then, when everybody has started up to listen, he'll tell them about the great Captain summoning every man of them to do His will. And then turn all at once to the day when there shall be another call from the awful trumpet, and the dead shall stand before the great white throne. I've seen the hardest old fellows shed tears like a child, when he talks to them about the love of Jesus. It seems as if he got close to their hearts and waked up all there is tender in them. He has an uncommon gift for preaching to sailors. It's queer, Captain Gould, how your family love the seafaring folks, and care for them, each in a particular way. There's nobody like your mother and your sister for remembering what we want at the Blue Flag, excepting, maybe, Mrs. Deland. Her whole soul seems to be gone to doing good, ever since that dear boy died."

"Dear Benny," said Captain Gould, with a springing tear. "He's a spur to all of us to remember our heavenly calling and work for our Master while we can. I feel sure the precious child's prayers have called down a double blessing on the Benny Deland. I've good news to tell you from my men. We have had the Lord with us in the ship and when these poor fellows cried, 'Save or we perish,' He heard them and blessed them with His grace, saying, 'Peace, be still.' The Benny Deland has been a 'house of prayer' too, Binnings, and I hope to be here at communion next Sunday, with six as sincere beginners in the Christian course as I have ever known."

"Do this in remembrance of me," said Binnings, solemnly. "How many years it was before even good folks thought that sailors needed to keep that command, as well as anybody else. The dear Lord Jesus is bringing all right. May He soon come in His glory to claim the 'abundance of the sea' as His own."

Captain Gould gave a hearty response to Binnings' pious exclamation. After some further chat, he took the honest old sailor by the hand and bade him good-evening, and was away over the water to his own good ship.

Binnings followed the little boat with loving eyes and then said aloud, "Just like himself, humble to take orders from his heavenly Master and firm to give orders to his men, free to take the Lord's forgiveness for his own sins, and just as free to spread the good news to all he meets, to the unthankful as well as to the grateful sinner. A good Captain, a good Christian, a good, faithful, hard-working, heaven-blessed friend of the sailor. May the Lord reward him a hundred-fold."

Binnings had his own quiet room, where he could act as a guardian to the vessel so precious to him, and at the same time be rocked to sleep by the motion which pleased him best. His hour for retiring was now drawing near and this thought led him into a train of characteristic meditations. "It's a tender little mercy from the hand of the Lord, who cares for us in our least mercies as in our greatest, to let an old fellow like me to have his whim gratified and lie down to rest like a sailor. How wonderful, too, that he should let me be helping on the sailors' cause, in spite of my bodily infirmity!"

This recalling of Binnings' "bodily infirmity" set him to tracing the gentle leading of Providence that had guided him along his earthly path and allowed him to start a good work that should live on when its founder was no more. "The Blue Flag will wave when I am gone, and the House of Prayer will float when I am sleeping low. Mr. Deland and the good men who have joined with Him will see to that. The Lord Himself will take care of His own cause, even as He has taken care of poor Binnings and filled his heart with thanksgiving."

Such thoughts lingered in Binnings' mind till sleep stole gently over him, bringing dreams of the heavenly kingdom where he soon should rejoice in glory.

The quiet night hung over the floating House of Prayer and the darkness wrapped the Blue Flag, but the best Friend of the sailor was watching over all with a sleepless eye. The Almighty arm was stretched out to save on the great deep and to preserve on the land. His loving guardianship is ever on sea and shore, and His blessing descending on all who labor to bring home the lost sheep to the heavenly fold.

The End

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