

had withstood stronger temptations in his time—but leant over the side and answered, in his own firm, clear tones,

“Thanks, a thousand times; but get back out of danger instantly. It is useless waiting for me; I don’t stir. I have given up my place already, and no power on earth would make me take another man’s. If a ship comes near, we may all be saved yet; if not, we know the worst, and I hope we know how to meet it.”

When the cutter had pushed off, Wyverne sat down again, burying his face in his hands, and remained so for some minutes. Suddenly he looked up, and drew the miniature out of his breast, gazing on it steadfastly and long, with a love and tenderness that no words can express, and a happiness so intense that it savoured of triumph. One of the survivors who chanced to be watching him (unconscious of the catastrophe being so near) said afterwards that a strange light shone out Alan’s face during those few seconds—a light that came neither from moon nor fire, but as it were from *within*—a light, perchance, such as saints may, one day, see on the faces of angels.

“Helen—darling Helen,” he murmured, “I always thought and hoped and prayed that I had acted rightly; but I never knew it till now.”

He pressed the picture to his lips, and kissed it twice or thrice fervently. Let us hope that in that impulse there mingled nothing of sinful passion; for it was the last of Alan Wyverne’s life.

In a moment there came an awful smothered roar—a crash of rending timbers and riven metal—all the fore-part of the vessel seemed to melt away, scattered over air and water in a torrent of smoke and flame; the after-part shook convulsively through every joint and seam, and then, with one headlong plunge, went down, like a wounded

whale “sounding.” Some half-dozen strong swimmers emerged alive from the horrible vortex, and all these were saved. Brave Jock Ellison, after recovering from the first stunning shock, never attempted to make for the boats, but swam hither and thither, till his colossal strength failed him, hoping to find some trace of his master. But Alan Wyverne never rose again, and never will—till the sea shall give up her dead.

And now my tale is told.

I have attempted to sketch, roughly what befel a man very weak and erring—who was often sorely tried—who acted ever up to the light that was given him, at the cost of bitter self-denial and self-sacrifice—who, nevertheless, in this life, failed to reap the tithe of his reward.

Alan Wyverne was strong, up to a certain point; but he had not faith enough to make him feel always sure that he had done right, in defiance of appearances; nor principle enough to keep him from repining at results. He could neither comfort himself nor others, thoroughly. He was a chivalrous true-hearted man; but a very imperfect Christian. He dared not openly rebel against the laws of God; but he was too human to accept, unhesitatingly, the fulfilment of his decrees. Throughout Alan’s life, Honour usurped the place where Religion ought to have reigned paramount; he shrank from shame when he would perhaps have encountered sin.

Just see how complete was the earthly retribution.

To that one principle—sound enough if it had not been the ruling one—he sacrificed love, and friendship, and revenge, and life. Yet the happiest moments that he knew for years, were those when he stood face to face with a terrible death—a dead woman’s picture in his hand.