THE

SAILOR'S RETURN.

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FOURTH EDITION.

DUBLIN:

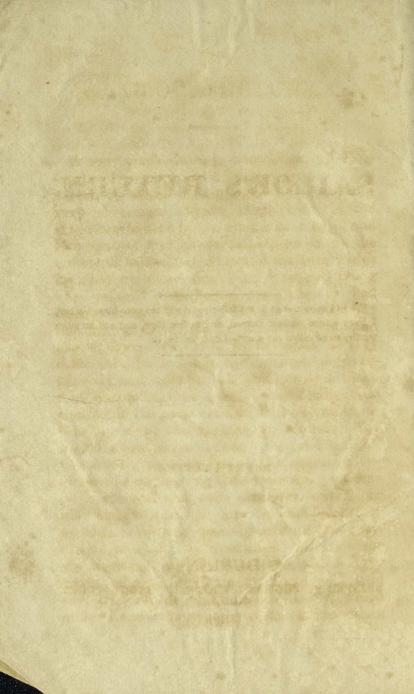
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1829.

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A FEW years since, in travelling from Boston to New York, to take the command of a vessel, in which I had made a former, and very successful voyage, there were in the stage coach with me, a master of a ship, and two mates; and conversation, as might be expected, often turned upon matters which had happened at sea. We travelled along very happily together, though the day had been stormy; but at night the road having become very bad, the horses impatient, and the darkness so great as to make it very difficult to guide them, the carriage was overturned; and we were all sufficiently bruised and uncomfortable, to make us glad of the shelter of the meanest hut, and of the kindness, even of the poorest individual. We looked about us, and soon perceived a light, and almost as soon heard the cheering language of sympathy and benevolence. "Come in, come in," said the stranger, extending his hands to feel us; for we could scarcely be seen. We very readily accepted his invitation, and entered the house. At the door we were received by a woman, about sixty years of age. "Come in, come in," said she, with all the generous hospitality, which none knows better how to value, than

a sailor, "I hope no one is injured." "Not much," said I; " a sailor would not think it much to be cast away if he could step at once into as snug a cabin as this." The word sailor, caused her immediately to observe us more attentively; and I saw in her countenance an expression of peculiar sensibility and anxiety. She piled wood upon the fire, went to the door to listen to the voice of her husband, returned, and inquired what she could get for us; and after a moment or two, went again to the door to listen. My fellow travellers, in congratulating themselves upon their safety, and one in examining his arm, and another his leg, were too much engaged to notice the good woman, any further than cordially to thank her, and to assure her that they needed no assistance. But my curiosity was awakened: and I was in no small degree gratified, when the old man entered and said, "Well, gentlemen, you must put up with such accommodation as I can give you for the night; for the coach is so much broken, that we cannot repair it till the morning."

The good woman seized the first favourable moment of whispering to her husband, "These are sea-faring men, my dear." Instantly I perceived a new, and more striking expression of countenance. It was an expression of pleasure; but mixed as I cannot describe, with something which I was certain was painful. It was a countenance of the greatest kindness, but deeply marked with

lines of suffering. He came towards us, while his wife began immediately to make provision for a supper. I rose, and giving him my hand said, "We are sailors, and accustomed to danger." A tear started into his eye; and offering his hand to each, he gave us the most cordial welcome. He then left us, to assist the driver in the care of his horses, and to bring our baggage into the house.

It was half an hour before our host returned; and in this interval, two or three stories told by my companions, so fixed the attention of the farmer's wife, and once or twice appeared to produce in her so great an agitation of spirits, that for a moment I was even alarmed. A good supper, however, was soon, provided, and my weary companions were glad to be shown to bed. But I excused myself from going with them, as in truth I preferred the fireside, and was very desirous of a more intimate acquaintance with my new friends.

I began to inquire of the old man the size of his farm, the number of his cattle, and the produce of his fields. But I soon found that I had not touched the string, on which his sorrows hung. In return, he asked me of my voyages, and of the dangers and sufferings of sailors. I saw in his eye, and in the whole countenance and manner of himself, and his wife an unutterable anxiety and depression of mind. "My good friend," said I, "sailors are not the worst of men. There are good

and bad among them, as in all other classes of society; and I have known as good menaye, a few as truly good—as I have known upon the land. But the temptations to which a young seaman is exposed, are very great." " Pardon me, Sir," said the old man, as he drew his rough hand over his eyes; "Iknow -yes, I know the dangers of a sailor's life. My second son is a sailor; and I know not that we shall ever see him again. He has not returned to us these four years, and I fear"-He could not express his fears. Unable longer to restrain her emotions, his wife now wept in that silent agony of grief that I knew not myself how to speak, and scarcely how to refrain from weeping. But immediately forming the resolution, "You shall not lose your son, if it be possible to save him," I said. "Your boy, notwithstanding, may be alive and well; and if I can find him out, you shall have no reason to complain of the storm of this night, nor of any of the trouble which we have given you." "O speak not of trouble," said the old man;" "I thank God for seeing you; and if you could indeed find my child"-He paused again, leaving his sentence unfinished; but after a moment continued, "Yet it is not impossible." "How old," said I, "is your son?" "Twenty-four, last October," he replied. "He left us at fifteen; and in a year returned, much grown; but ah! unlike what he was when we gave him our parting blessing. He went again, A 2

and again returned. But how shall I tell you of the anguish of my heart? Again he left us with the best council which we could bestow, and with many prayers. But at twenty we saw him—O! it is more than a father's heart can sustain." He sobbed. He rose and walked; and his wife, unable to bear the double burden of his grief and her own, left the room. How affecting are the tears of the aged! Above all, the tears of an aged father and mother mourning over the lost virtue of their child! I must have had a heart of stone,

to have been unmoved-yes, I wept.

"Are you a father?" said the old man. "I am," I replied; "but my children are yet too young to excite much anxiety." "God preserve you," he said, "from the anguish of a broken heart. You are a stranger to me, and are the first stranger to whom I have opened my sorrows. But you have drawn them from me. I have lived sixty-five years, and have received many, very many blessings; and can remember too, many days of bitter suffering. But this last trial is the heaviest of all. I have buried a son, strong, active, generous, and in early piety, all that a father might delight in; and a daughter of seventeen, tall, straight as our own pines, beautiful, the delight alike of her mother and myself. But they died with an unshaken faith, and a hope full of immortality. They are at rest; and concerning them I am in peace. But our days pass in sorrow; and our nights, especially when the storm rages around us,

in painful watchfulness. His mother will not sleep to-night; for the image of our poor boy, in times like this, is constantly before us." "I will leave no exertion untried for you, my good friend," said I; and if he is to be found, he shall find in me a friend." He turned short, and grasped my hand, "The Father of mercies bless you!" said he. "Should I fall asleep in such a night as this, in my dreams I should be seeking my Charles in some desolate country, while I felt myself to be exposed to all the severity of the weather; or I should be with him on the ocean, and see him falling from the mast into the sea, and in the agony of death calling upon me to save him; or I should be in some place of profaneness and profligacy, where I should hear his voice; where I should see him; but from which he would escape, and leave me to the pursuit of him amidst all the horrors of the storm." "I have forgotten," said I, " to ask his name." "It is Charles Grafton."

I sat till twelve with the old man, and was then willing to retire. He felt that he had said enough, and became silent. It was no common effort which he had made, and I felt too deep a reverence for his silence, unnecessarily to interrupt it. I retired, but not to sleep. I could not think of these distressed parents and sleep. I knew Charles, for he had once sailed with me; but I knew nothing of him, with which I could console the heart of his father. "But," thought I, he has had a religious education; and though the seeds

which have sprung up be choaked, their root perhaps is not dead. There have been many examples of young persons, to whom the early instructions they received have been blessed, after many years of carelessness and sin; and though no youthful sinner should encourage himself by this reflection, an afflicted parent may. He has that promise, " Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days." There is hope of a tree if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease, though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground, yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant." Job, xiv. 7-9. This was a precious reflection; and I cherished it as a comfort from the Lord. My anticipated voyage had now an interest altogether new, and I felt that I should be compensated for any efforts, if I might be the instrument of rescuing this young man from ruin, and of gladdening the hearts of his aged, and most worthy parents, by witnessing his return to virtue and true happiness.

In reflections like these, the hours of night wore away; and when I came with my companions, in the morning, to the room which we had left, we found the old man and his wife at the fire. The thought now first occurred to me that we had together occupied all their beds. It was so: but apology, or an expression of regret, was utterly forbid-

den. A good breakfast awaited us; and by the assistance of the old man and his eldest son, the stage coach was soon in readiness, and we were prepared to resume our journey.

I soon sailed for Liverpool, from whence I was bound to the North-West Coast. I have no wish to write a narrative of my voyage, for considered simply as a voyage, it was not more interesting than have been a hundred other long voyages. But a short account of Charles Grafton, may perhaps be useful to some young sailors; and in the course of it, I would very respectfully offer a few remarks to masters, which I can only wish may be as candidly received as they are

kindly intended.

We left New York at the close of April; and on the 20th of May were in the river Mersey. Not a day, nor I can safely say, for many hours together, was the image of the venerable distressed farmer and his wife, absent from my mind; and inconsiderate as I could not but sometimes think that I had been, in awakening in these parents even a hope, that I might bring their child to them, I was resolved not to enter a port, nor to visit a vessel, without inquiring for him. To seek for a sailor, without knowing even to which quarter of the globe he had sailed, seems, indeed, an almost hopeless enterprize. But I had given my word, and was determined to be faithful to it. When I accomplish an important object, and especially when I have many times secretly looked to God,

with the hope that I should not be disappointed, I feel what all the reasonings of the world could not disprove to me, that to God I owe my happiness, and that he has a claim to my best gratitude. A ship arrived from Holland, only the day before I was ready to sail, and I took the earliest opportunity of making my last application. For a moment my happiness was complete. The first person whom I saw was Charles Grafton. It is possible, under other circumstances, that I might not have known him. But the habit which I had acquired of thinking of him with his resemblance of his father, whose countenance I can never forget, made me instantly remember him. Have I found you? said I. But recollecting that my first business was with the captain, I immediately inquired for him.

and I wrote the following note:-

To Mr. J. Grafton.

My DEAR SIR,

Your son is with me. I shall not probably return for two years, but depend upon it, I shall not forget my promise; and I hope yet again to enjoy your brown loaf and black jug

under circumstances in which they will furnish a sweeter repast than the best spread tables of the world. Accept my affectionate remembrance and best wishes. G. H.

My first object was to gain the confidence of Charles Grafton. His attachment to me, and my influence over him, might follow of course. Captain L-, said that he was a very good sailor. I soon found him also to be grateful. A fortnight passed after leaving Liverpool, during which I showed him all the kindness which was consistent with his situation; and I had him in the evenings several times in the cabin. On these occasions, and when alone together, I gave him the advice which I thought that he most needed; referred him tenderly to the unhappiness of his past life; and without suggesting to him that I had seen his parents, drew from him the acknowledgment, that he had not seen them for more than four years. A serious recollection of his father and mother affected him deeply, and he began to lament his new engagement, because it prevented him from returning to them. I occasionally threw out suggestions, of the anxiety of parents, when their children have been long absent; of the happiness of parents in the virtue, and their misery in the misconduct of their children: and of the joy with which a father and mother must receive a child, who they had feared was perhaps lost to them for ever. The reflection was sometimes as much as he could bear; and so desirous did he

become, if there should be an opportunity of working his way immediately to America, that I one evening said to him, "Suppose, Charles, you could get to your native country again, would you go home?

"Would I, Sir? O certainly. It is now the only blessing which I ask of heaven, to

see my old father and mother."

"But four years," said I, "is a long time. Perhaps—it is possible—should you arrive

that you might not see them."

"The thought, Sir, is misery. I cannot endure it. I have been indeed a wretch. But the prayer which I learned at my mother's knees, I have hardly failed of saying, at least on ship board, as often as I have thrown myself into my hammock. But perhaps I have been the murderer of that mother; of as good a father, as ever was given to a child."

I let him give full vent to these strong feelings. At length he said, "What would I not give—what would I not do—but for an hour to see them!" "And what would you do," I replied, "could you but hear from them?" "Is it possible?" said he. "It is indeed, I have seen them, and in a short time they will know that you are with me." "My God, I thank thee!" he exclaimed with as strong devotion, as I believe could be felt by man. I explained to him the circumstances which had introduced me to his parents, and my promise of endeavouring to find him. "And now, Charles," said I, "go to your hammock." "Thank you, Sir," he replied;

and, if you will allow it, at another time, I will give you some account of myself, which will at least be a relief to my own mind; and enable me, with greater advantage, to put

myself under your future direction."

A few evenings afterwards, while sitting in the cabin with my first mate, who had been as much indebted as myself to the hospitality of the good people, and who was scarcely less desirous of contributing to the restoration of their child to them, I sent for Charles, and, bidding him to sit, assured him, if this voyage should be accomplished, as I hoped and believed that it would be, that he should never want a friend, while we could assist him. Since he had heard of his parents, and that they knew his present situation, he had become comparatively happy. "And now, Sir," said he, "if it will be convenient for you to hear me, I will give you a short account of myself; not to excuse my conduct, for I feel how guilty it has been, but in some small measure to repay a kindness, to which I have not been accustomed.

"I left the house of my parents at fifteen, entirely ignorant of the world, but with a restlessness of disposition, which could not be satisfied with the occupations of a farm. I had seen sailors, and heard of the sea, and I wished also to see other countries. Painful as I saw that it was to those whom I ought to have leved better than life, I pleaded my wishes so earnestly, that I at last gained their

consent. I slung my pack, therefore, and, in company with a neighbour, went to New York; and, being large and stout of my age, and, as I was then told, having an honest face, I soon shipped myself for London, to return the following spring. It was a bad beginning, Sir. I was thrown in among a crew, in which I heard the most gross profaneness, and in which I saw vice in all its horrors. And horrible, indeed, it then was to my young mind. My spirits sunk; and I would at that time have given a hundred ships, had I possessed them, to have returned to that dear abode, which I had so foolishly forsaken. But it was too late. Being the only new hand on board, except one, who had been differently educated, my simplicity of language and manners exposed me perpetually to ridicule; and, pardon me, Sir, very soon after sailing, I found myself deprived of the last hope which I had indulged of security, in finding the Captain, as far as I could judge, as unprincipled as my messmates. Could I at this time have found in him a friend, a protector, and guide, I might have kept my resolution. But, though he would sometimes treat me with kindness, he would praise me with the most profane expressions; and with heavy curses, at the same time, upon any who had displeased him. By degrees, however, as I became more and more accustomed to expressions, which at first chilled my blood, and made me wonder that God should bear with the wretches who

used them, I began to return, in kind, the language which I received; and in six months I was not in this respect, very far behind my companions. I was now, more and more, thought to be a man among them; and as I was behind no one in activity, and readiness for duty, I was acknowledged to be a good sailor, and received on all hands my full share of commendation. Thus at the end of my first voyage, I had got far enough in the road to ruin, to have secured my very speedy destruction, but for the effects, small as they were, of a visit to my parents." "And such, Charles," said I, "I believe are generally the beginnings of evil. Vicious example is the great destroyer; and a young sailor must have great firmness of character to resist it. It is well for you that you returned to your parents."

"The change in my character, Sir, was at once seen and deeply felt by them. I had never heard, till I used it, a profane expression under the roof of my father. I now wanted too, my allowance of grog; and having money, I went where I could obtain and enjoy it. But how different were now my father's house and the society of my parents, brother and sister, from what they had been! This feeling humbled me and made me wretched, and awakened a solemn resolution to reform. I saw and felt that there is no true happiness, but in virtue and religion. The last half of the month which I passed at home, seemed to have restored

to the hearts of the best of parents, the peace of which I had robbed them; and I left them again, anxious indeed, but not entirely without hope, that their fond expectations would

not be wholly disappointed.

" I shipped myself for Liverpool, intending to return with the vessel; but here again I was unfortunate. We had, in many respects a better master; but while there was no quarrelling, he neither checked profaneness nor indecency in his crew. Upon our arrival, being occasionally permitted, with others to go on shore, I suffered myself to be led into scenes of vice, of which, with all that I had heard, I had scarcely formed a conception. The image of my father and mother now rose before me; and the last words of my revered mother, as she examined my pack, that she might be certain she had not forgotten my Bible, 'remember this blessed book, my dear boy; and may God keep you from temptation!' often rose to my remembrance. But I went a second and a third time; and being persuaded to gamble for a small stake, I adventured upon a larger; and in hearing vile conversation, I learned to converse vilely. Glad was I therefore, to hear that our voyage was to have a new direction. I had lost my wages; was poor in clothes; and felt myself to have become corrupted; and I had gained what? the reputation of being a good fellow. We sailed for India. Often was I disgusted with my messmates, and abhorred myself; and sometimes, taking my Bible, I would

pass a part of the Sabbath in reading it. But even then I found it necessary either to give up my Bible, or the course of life which I was leading. I could not, while profaning the name of God, and depraving my heart, find pleasure in reading the book, in which the judgments of God, against those who continue in sin, are so plainly written. In joining my companions, therefore, and in imitating their examples, I cast away the only anchor of heart and in returning home. only anchor of hope: and in returning home at seventeen years of age, I was afloat upon the world, exposed to every wind of passion, and driven by each in every direction to which it blew. I went home again for a few days; exposed myself in all my profligate dispositions and habits; almost broke the hearts of my parents, brother and sister; and a miserable, but not a returning sinner, I sought for peace, by endeavouring to forget them.

"For the third time, I left my native country, and was absent nearly two years. But how shall I relate it? I returned again, saw the misery into which I had brought my father and mother; was again entreated to remain with them; saw my brother just happily settled in the neighbourhood; and my only sister apparently in a declining state; and yet I was unreformed. God forgive the hardness of my heart. I was then twenty. One night I came home, after having been absent two days; and in passing as silently as I could, that I might not awaken the

family, I was stopped at my father's door, I heard his voice, and it was the voice of prayer. I listened and heard him pray for myself. Had I seen him at that moment, I should have made full confession, and implored his forgiveness. But wearied and exhausted I crept to my bed. In this state of character, I left him; and no poor wretch has passed the last four years more miserably than I have. For some time before I saw you, Sir, I had been desirous, should a good opportunity present, of returning to America; and I can hardly account for it, in the state of mind in which I then was, that I did not refuse the voyage which you proposed to me."

fuse the voyage which you proposed to me."

"The advantages of a pious education,
Charles," said I, "are never to be estimated.

For your good purposes, you are much indebted, under God, to the instructions of

your father and mother."

"I feel it, Sir," said he; "for I know not, but for them, what I might have become. Often has the blood thrilled through my frame, at a sudden recollection of them, in the midst of some guilty indulgence; and even when I had not one serious thought of God, the remembrance of home, and the thought that all whom I most loved, might have sunk in death under the wounds which I had given them; or if alive, that they were mourning for me with more bitter tears than they would have shed over my grave—than they did shed over the grave of my beloved brother—has made my hammock a

bed of thorns, and my hours of watching to be full of agony. The prodigal son left his father's house, to seek for happiness in free indulgence of his evil propensities; but when he had tasted the bitter fruits of sin, he found no place so desirable; and therefore he says, ' How many hired servants of my father have bread enough, and to spare, and I perish with hunger?' Luke xv. 17. But four months ago, I sailed with the best crew, except your own, which I have ever known. Captain D-was a man of principle, and felt it to be his duty to do what he could for the improvement of his sailors. In this ship, Sir, I sailed three months. On Sabbath morning, after breakfast, and again before supper, we were called to prayers; and every man was not only encouraged on that day to read his Bible, but useful books were lent to any one who would ask for them. To Capt. D____, Sir, I owe more than if he had saved my life. In the prayers which I heard him read, I learned how to ask the forgiveness of God, through the Saviour, who died for sinners; and I had not been long with him, before I secretly resolved, 'I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.' If all masters, Sir, were like Capt. D-, there would be, I believe, comparatively few abandoned sailors."

The difficulties of a sea-faring life seem to require that men should go early to sea, and

while yet young be inured to its hardships; and some of the duties of a ship seem to require young and active persons. Those who are entrusted by merchants with so much valuable property, are at the same time entrusted by God with what is of far greater moment-even the principles and morals of some immortal souls. The authority of a ship-master is, and ought to be, complete; and so is his responsibility; but shall the merchant require a strict account of ship and cargo, and expect the captain to use care and fidelity? And shall not God require an account? We know from the words of our Lord himself, "to whom much is given, of him shall be much required." Luke xii. 48.

"It is even so, Charles," said I; "and I wish that all masters felt how much they might do, in restraining vice, and encouraging virtue in their crews. I am not ashamed to acknowledge, that I feel accountable for the good which I have an opportunity of doing among the men who are under my care."

"O, Sir," said he, "if I had first sailed with you, or with Capt. D——, I might now have had a ship to command. I should not have caused the best of parents to be ashamed of me; and I might have led as happy a life as any man. There is no one, Sir, who needs a friend more than a young sailor; and though a true friend may sometimes be found in a messmate, it is not like having a friend in a master, to whom the whole crew look up for an example."

"No," said I, "it is not; and I have always liked to ship a few new hands, and to have young men with me, that I might give them such assistance as I could. But as you have drunk deep enough of the cup of vice, to know the bitterness of its dregs, I hope that you will never raise it to your lips again. And I am sorry to add any thing to what you have already suffered; but there is one circumstance of your father's family, of which you appear yet to be ignorant. When you were last with me, I said nothing to you of your sister."

He appeared, at that moment, to feel the

very chill of death.

"Be comforted, my good fellow," said I, " and grateful to God, who has enabled you so far to return to him. He will meet his returning children while yet a great way off; and in a life of obedience to His will, you may be assured of security and peace. Jesus Christ died for us, that we might not live unto ourselves, but unto him. Persevere then; and if heaven prosper our design, I doubt not that I shall have the pleasure of presenting you to your parents, a more valuable acquisition to their hearts, than would be the treasures of India. But the joy in your father's house will be nothing, compared with the joy that shall be in the presence of the angels of God, if you truly repent of all your transgressions, and pray to that Saviour who died on the cross for you, that he would pardon all your sins, and enable you by his

Holy Spirit to lead a new life."

I have said, that I mean not to write a narrative of my voyage. It was like other voyages, except only, that I believe it was happier than are many, which are equally prosperous. I had an orderly and a cheerful crew; and every endeavour to establish good manners and morals among them, was a means of increasing their cheerfulness, of attaching them to my person and interest, and of securing their fidelity. I did not allow any profaneness, nor did I find it difficult to prevent it; and the religious worship was observed, I think, with as much seriousness as upon the land. A better sailor than Charles Grafton, was never shipped; and I believe that I may now say, that there were few better men. We traded upon the North-West Coast; went to China, and exchanged our furs for teas; and then returned to New York. Having there completed my business, I determined, in the strictness of the letter, to fulfil my promise.

I took Charles with me in the stage coach; and having arrived at the house of his brother, we unloaded our baggage. I was unwilling suddenly to excite too strong emotions in the hearts of the aged and excellent parents. The meeting of the brothers was one of the most interesting sights that I have ever witnessed. Charles now carried in his face the lines of a character not to be mistaken. With the ruddiness of health, there was also the purity of virtue. After allowing

a few moments to the indulgence of fraternal affection, I proposed that the brothers should keep themselves at a short distance, while I first entered the house of their father. My letter had been received. I knocked at the door. It was opened by the old man. He eagerly seized my hand; but looking out with a sort of convulsive gaze, cried, "My boy!" "He is safe," said I, "and well; but let me enter." My words caught the ear of his wife; and springing towards me, she cried, "Where! where!" "My good friends," said I, "be assured that he is well, and will soon be with you; and is all which parents can desire. But permit me to detain you for a moment, and all your wishes shall be satisfied." The old man fell upon my neck. The good woman sunk into a chair; and almost breathless with expectation, was unable to utter a word. I waited a moment; and then begging them to remain where they were, went to the door and called "Charles!" He was immediately in the house. The scene which followed I can no more describe than forget. Once more I wept with this good old man; but they were now tears of joy. The bliss of that hour was full; and it has since sweetened many hours of my life.

There are many sailors, who, like Charles Grafton, early quitting the paternal roof, and entering the service young, become corrupted by bad example; who might have been saved from a vicious and miserable life, and from an untimely death; had those good principles

and affections, first formed at home, been cherished by the master to whose care they are entrusted. To excite attention to these young men, I have been induced to write this little history. Even after they have become depraved, early impressions may become revived by care and attention, and could any master or any sailor feel for one moment the joy of having been instrumental to such a restoration, and of seeing a recovered child in the arms of his parents, who had feared that he was lost to them for ever, they would lose no favourable opportunity of guarding these young men from vice, or of endeavouring to effect their reformation.

The parents of Charles Grafton died within a few hours of each other. Till that time I was well acquainted with the progress of his character, and it equalled all my expectations. He shewed by his conduct, as well as by his words, that his heart was changed by the power of God's Holy Spirit. He sailed soon after; and as the vessel has not since been heard from, he is probably no longer in this world. But as we know that the Lord Jesus Christ is exalted a Prince and a Saviour, to grant repentance and remission of sins, so may we hope and trust, that if Charles has left this world, he has entered another, which is far better, where there is neither sin or sorrow, but where he, with his beloved parents, will have fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore.

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