

WITH BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE

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CHAPTER I

ON a frosty night, when George III was King, certain men, for the most part familiar customers, sat in the bar of the "Golden Anchor," Daleham; and amongst them appeared that welcome addition to the usual throng: a stranger. For his benefit old tales were told anew and ancient memories ransacked; because this West country fishing village enjoyed rich encrustation of legend and romance, and boasted a roll call of great names and great deeds. Here dwelt the spirits of bygone free-traders, visible by night in the theatre of their lawless enterprises; and here even more notable stories, touching more notable phantoms, might also be gleaned from ancient intelligencers at the time of evening drinking.

The newcomer listened grimly to matters now much exercising Daleham. He was a hard-faced man with a blue chin and black eyes, whose short, double-breasted jacket, wide breeches, glazed hat and pigtail marked a seafarer.

"As for ghostes," he said, "can't swear I've ever seed one, but no sailor-man, as have witnessed the Lord's wonders in the deep, would dare to doubt 'em."

"Just picture a whole throng, my dear!"

John Cramphorn spoke. He was an ancient fisher, and his face might have stood for the Apostle Peter's; but it quite gave the lie to his character, for this venerable man was hand in glove with the smugglers, had himself been a free-trader of renown, and now very gladly placed his wit and experience at the command of the younger generation. No word was ever whispered against him openly, and yet the rumour ran that Johnny had his share of every cargo successfully run upon these coasts, and that he was the guiding spirit ashore, while "Merry Jonathan," or Jonathan Godbeer of Daleham, captained on the water that obscure body known as the Daleham free-traders.

With such a sailor as Jonathan afloat and such a wise-head as Mr. Cramphorn at home, the local smugglers earned a measure of fame that reached even to the Revenue. Indeed, at the moment of this story's opening, the little fishing village, with uneasy pride, was aware that a Preventive Officer had been appointed for its especial chastisement and control; but none feared the issue. Every woman and child at Daleham knew that it would

task men of uncommon metal with hard heads and thick skulls to lay their local champions by the heels.

"Ess," said the white-bearded Cramphorn, "ghostes of men an' ghostes of hosses tu. Ban't many parishes as can shaw 'e such a brave turnout of holy phantoms, I lay. You might have seed that ruin in the fir trees 'pon top of the cliff as you comed down the hill p'raps? Wheer the fishermen's gardens be. Well, 'twas a famous mansion in the old days, though now sunk to a mere landmark for mackerel boats. But the Stapledons lived theer in times agone, an' lorded it awver all the land so far as Dartmouth, 'tis thought. Of course they died like theer neighbours, an' many a brave funeral passed out-along wheer I grow my bit of kale to-day. Yet no account taken till theer comed the terrible business of Lady Emma Stapledon — poor soul. Her was ordered by her cold-hearted faither to marry a Lunnon man for his money — a gay young youth of gert renown, an' as big a rip as ever you see, an' a very evil character, but thousands of pounds in the bank to soften people's minds. Her wouldn't take him, however, an' peaked an' pined, till at last — two nights afore the marriage-day — her went out alone along that dangerous edge of cliff what be named the Devil's Tight-rope. In charity us'll say the poor maiden's foot slipped, though if it did,

why for should her funeral walk ever since when January comes round? Anyway it shows her had Christian burial no doubt, an' the funeral can be seen evermore — hosses an' men, hearse an' coffin. Every moony night in January it may be marked stealin' like a fog awver the tilth by the old road from the ruined gates; an' to see it only axes a pinch of faith in the beholder. I've watched it scores o' dozens o' times — all so black as sin an' silent as the grave. My sweat falled like rain fust time I seed it, but I minded how the Lord looks arter His awn. Of course an honest, church-going man's out o' the reach o' ghostes."

Mr. Cramphorn stopped and buried his beautiful Roman nose in some rum and water. Then Mrs. Pearn, mistress of the "Golden Anchor," mended the fire, and a man, sitting in the ingle, asked a question.

"Where's Jenifer to? 'Tis late for her to be out alone."

The old woman answered: —

"Gone up the hill for green stuff. Her laughs at all you silly men. I told her how 'twas the time for Lady Emma's death-coach; but her said so long as they didn't want her to get in an' sit along wi' she, her'd not mind no death-coaches, nor ghostes neither."

"'Tis very unseemly for a maid to talk so," de-

clared the stranger, gravely. "Them as flout spirits often have to pay an ugly reckoning."

Others were also of this mind and Mr. Cramp-horn gave instances.

"My stars! You'm makin' me cream with fear, I'm sure," said Mrs. Pearn, after supping full on their horrid recollections; "best to go up the hill, Jonathan Godbeer, an' find the wench. 'Tis your work, seeing you'm tokened to her."

The stranger started and cast a sharp glance where sat the man addressed. Merry Jonathan was a tall and square-built sailor with a curly head and an eye that looked all people squarely in the face. A crisp beard served to hide his true expression, and the cloak of a smile, usually to be found upon his lips, concealed the tremendous determination of his countenance. Indeed he habitually hid behind a mask of loud and somewhat senseless laughter. But those who served him at his secret work and in times of peril, knew a different Jonathan, not to be described as "Merry." Now the man rose and grinned at the stranger amiably until his grey eyes were quite lost in rays of crinkled skin. He out-stared the other seafarer, as he made it a rule to out-stare all men; then he prepared to obey his future mother-in-law.

"Mustn't let my sweetheart be drove daft by —" he began, when the inn door opened and a girl,

with her hair fallen down her back and a terrified white face, appeared and almost dropped into Godbeer's arms. "Gude powers! What's the matter, my dear maid?" he cried. "Who've hurt 'e? Who've dared? Tell your Jonathan an' he'll smash the man like eggshells — if 'tis a man."

Jenifer clung to him hysterically and her teeth chattered. They took her to the fire and her mother brought a tumbler of spirits and water at Mr. Cramphorn's direction.

"Oh my God, I knawed how 'twould be," wailed the old woman. "Her've seed what her didn't ought, an' now her'll suffer for it!"

Jenifer was on her lover's lap by the fire and tears at last came to her eyes. Then she wept bitterly and found her tongue.

"Put your arm around me," she said; "close — close — Jonathan. I've seed it — Lady Emma's death-coach — creeping awver the frozen ground up-along. It passed wi'in ten yards of where I was cutting cabbages, an' never such cold I felt. It have got to my heart an' I'll die — I knaw it."

"You might have been mistook, young woman," said the blue-muzzled man, civilly; but she shook her head.

"A gert hearse wi' feathers an' a tall man in front, an' four hosses all blacker'n the fir-wood they comed from. An' the moonlight shone through 'em where

they moved away to the churchyard; an' I fainted, I reckon, then come to an' sped away afore they returned."

"They'd have been there again in an hour or two," declared old Cramphorn. "That's the way of it. Ten o'clock or so they sets out, an' back they come by midnight or thereabouts."

Then the stranger rose to retire, but before doing so he declared his identity.

"I may tell you, neighbours, that I be the Preventive Officer sent to work along with the cutter from Dartmouth. My name be Robert Bluett, an' I'm an old man-o'-war's man an' a West countryman likewise. An' I look to every honest chap amongst 'e to help me in the King's name against law-breakers. So all's said."

A murmur ran through the company.

"Question is what be honest an' what ban't. Things ban't dishonest 'cause Parliament says so," growled a long-faced, sour man. "Free tradin's the right answer to wrongful laws, an' 'tis for them up-along to mend Justice, not rob us."

Jonathan Godbeer, however, stoutly applauded Mr. Bluett.

"I be just a simple fisherman myself," he said; "but what I can do against they French rascals I will do. You may count upon me."

Mr. Bluett regarded Johnny Cramphorn and saw

that the patriarch's eyes were fixed on Godbeer and full of amazement.

"You to say that!" he murmured, "you — when us all knows — but ban't no business of mine, thank the Lord. At least you may count upon an old man to stand by the King and his lawful laws, same as I always have and always will so long as I be spared."

Riotous laughter greeted these noble sentiments, and Bluett, vaguely aware that the company laughed as much with the ancient as at him, departed to bed. He was staying at the "Golden Anchor" until his lodgment at Daleham should be ready for him.

CHAPTER II

GREAT confusion, shouting and swearing kept Robert Bluett wakeful for some time, and next morning he learned the reason of it. As he walked early upon the quay before breakfast, tried to master the intricate coast-line at a glance and longed to be afloat that he might get a wider and juster view of the red and honeycombed cliffs, a woe-begone figure approached him — a bent and hobbling creature that crawled on two sticks, wore a three-cornered hat and had his right eye concealed by a big black patch. Only the flowing beard of Johnny Cramphorn proclaimed him.

"God save you, Master Bluett, or I should say 'Cap'n Bluett,'" he began. "The very man I wanted for to see."

"Who's been clawing you?" asked the Excise Officer.

"Who but the Dowl's own anointed? You heard the tantara in the tap-room? Well, 'twas upon an aged piece like me they varmint's falled like heathen wolves. Look here!"

He lifted his patch and showed a pale blue eye

set in a bruise as black as ink. Thus seen it suggested a jackdaw's.

"Jonathan Godbeer's hand done that — the Lord judge un! Wi' his bullock's fist he knocked me down, 'cause I withstood un to his face, like the prophet withstood David."

"Ban't no quarrel of mine," said Mr. Bluett, "though if all I hear be true, me an' Godbeer may fall out afore the world's much older."

"Ess — if you'm honest, you'll fall out wi' him. 'Twas honesty brought me these cruel bruises. When you'd gone, I rose in my wrath an' axed un how he dared to lie to you so open; then he smote me."

Mr. Bluett's natural probity here led him into un wisdom.

"To be plain," he said, "I haven't heard no very good account of you neither."

"Ah, 'tis so hard to get away from one's sins! I'll be honest, Cap'n, same as you be," answered Mr. Cramphorn. "I doan't deny but I've been a free-trader in my time, though 'twas little enough ever I made by it but a score on the wrong side of the Book o' Life. But I've long been weary of ill-doing and be set 'pon the right road this many years, as Parson Yates will tell 'e. 'Twas for the cause of right I got these blows — same as Paul his stripes — an' though I've been that man's friend in time past, now I'm gwaine to take vengeance

against un, an' next time I hears tell of his games, you'll be the fust to know it."

"That will suit me very well," answered Bluett.

"An' I ax you to back me up an' protect me henceforth in the King's name," continued Johnny. "To think of a man as would wallop an old blid like me! No better'n a murderer — there he is now! Doan't you go away from me till he've passed us by."

Jonathan Godbeer walked along the quay to the boats. He scowled at old Cramphorn and touched his hat to the officer.

"Marnin', sir! I see thicky old rat have got 'e by the ear. I thrashed un last night, ancient though he be, for calling me a smuggler afore the company; an' I'll thrash un every time he dares to do the like. Take care how you put your trust in him, for the Faithful of Lies be a fule to that man. He never done nobody a gude turn in's life; though he'll get a gude turn yet hisself when the cart goes from under him an' leaves him dancin' 'pon a rope. I warn 'e against un for all his white beard!"

Jonathan grinned at his own prophecy and departed; Cramphorn shook his fist and chattered curses; and Mr. Bluett went upon this way. He was puzzled but not ill-pleased.

"When thieves fall out, honest men come by their own," he reflected, and returned to breakfast.

Jenifer Pearn waited upon him at his meal and took occasion to give Mr. Bluett yet another version of the brawl that had troubled his slumbers over night; but as she loved Merry Jonathan, her story redounded little to the smuggler's discredit.

"They all want to be your friends," she explained; "but, except my Jonathan, theer ban't a pin to choose among 'em. He'm honest as daylight."

Mr. Bluett thereupon changed the subject and trusted that Jenifer was none the worse for her fright. The girl had a dark, keen face, was built generously and evidently enjoyed unusual physical strength for a woman. Yet the old sailor recollected that she had been no more than a pleasant armful for her future husband.

"I be well again," she said, "yet I wish I hadn't seen no such dreadful contrivance, I'm sure. 'Tis a very sad thing, an' mother sez how Parson Yates did ought to be axed to faace they phantoms in the name of the Lord wi' a bell, a book an' a cannell, 'cordin' to the right an' holy way in such matters. But Gran'faither Newte an' Toby Pearn, my great-uncle, an' a gude few other auld parties say that Lady Emma's funeral be the chiefest glory of Daleham an' 'twould be a thousand pities to go an' lay it wi' a bit of parson's work."

The officer was interested.

"For my part," he said, "I think if the poor soul

killed herself two hundred years ago, 'tis time her was laid peaceful an' reg'lar as by law appointed. 'Tis all us can do for ghostes; to lay 'em; an' even then it axes a clergyman. An' the holiest have got to mind theer *p*'s an' *q*'s, for, make a mistake, an' so like as not they'm tored to pieces for their trouble."

"I'd rather not hear tell no more about it," answered Jenifer, shivering and looking uneasily about her. "But this I knaw; Parson Yates ban't the man for the job — so meek as Moses he be, an' would run from a goose, let alone a ghostey."

"If 'tis proved his duty, he've got to faace it, however, — same as all of us has got to faace our duty," declared Mr. Bluett.