



***WALTER  
BESANT***

***ARMOREL  
OF LYONNESSE***

**Walter Besant**

# **Armored of Lyonesse**

**A Romance of To-day**

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# ***PART I***

## **CHAPTER I THE CHILD OF SAMSON**

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It was the evening of a fine September day. Through the square window, built out so as to form another room almost as large as that which had been thus enlarged, the autumn sun, now fast declining to the west, poured in warm and strong; but not too warm or too strong for the girl on whose head it fell as she sat leaning back in the low chair, her face turned towards the window. The sun of Scilly is never too fierce or too burning in summer, nor in winter does it ever lose its force; in July, when the people of the adjacent islands of Great Britain and Ireland venture not forth into the glare of the sun, here the soft sea mists and the strong sea air temper the heat; and in December the sun still shines with a lingering warmth, as if he loved the place. This girl lived in the sunshine all the year round; rowed in it; lay in it; basked in it bare-headed, summer and winter; in the winter she would sit sheltered from the wind in some warm corner of the rocks; in summer she would lie on the hillside or stand upon the high headlands and the sea-beat crags, while the breezes, which in the Land of Lyonesse do never cease, played with her long tresses and kept her soft cheek cool.

The window was wide open on all three sides; the girl had been doing some kind of work, but it had dropped from her

hands, and now lay unregarded on the floor; she was gazing upon the scene before her, but with the accustomed eyes which looked out upon it every day. A girl who has such a picture continually before her all day long never tires of it, though she may not be always consciously considering it and praising it. The stranger, for his part, cannot choose but cry aloud for admiration; but the native, who knows it as no stranger can, is silent. The house, half-way up the low hill, looked out upon the south—to be exact, its aspect was S. W. by S.—so that from this window the girl saw always, stretched out at her feet, the ocean, now glowing in the golden sunshine of September. Had she been tall enough, she might even have seen the coast of South America, the nearest land in the far distance. Looking S. W., that is, she would have seen the broad mouth of Oroonooque and the shores of El Dorado. This broad sea-scape was broken exactly in the middle by the Bishop's Rock and its stately lighthouse rising tall and straight out of the water; on the left hand the low hill of Annet shut out the sea; and on the right Great Minalto, rugged and black, the white foam always playing round its foot or flying over its great black northern headland, bounded and framed the picture. Almost in the middle of the water, not more than two miles distant, a sailing ship, all sails set, made swift way, bound outward one knows not whither. Lovely at all times is a ship in full sail, but doubly lovely when she is seen from afar, sailing on a smooth sea, under a cloudless sky, the sun of afternoon lighting up her white sails. No other ships were in sight; there was not even the long line of smoke which proclaims the steamer below the horizon; there was not even a

Penzance fishing-boat tacking slowly homewards with brown sails and its two masts: in this direction there was no other sign of man.

The girl, I say, saw this sight every day: she never tired of it, partly because no one ever tires of the place in which he was born and has lived—not even an Arab of the Great Sandy Desert; partly because the sea, which has been called, by unobservant poets, unchanging, does in fact change—face, colour, mood, even shape—every day, and is never the same, except, perhaps, when the east wind of March covers the sky with a monotony of grey, and takes the colour out of the face of ocean as it takes the colour from the granite rocks, last year's brown and yellow fern, and the purple heath. To this girl, who lived with the sea around her, it always formed a setting, a background, a frame for her thoughts and dreams. Wherever she went, whatever she said or sang, or thought or did, there was always in her ears the lapping or the lashing of the waves; always before her eyes was the white surge flying over the rocks; always the tumbling waves. But, as for what she actually thought or what she dreamed, seeing how ignorant of the world she was, and how innocent and how young, and as for what was passing in her mind this afternoon as she sat at the window, I know not. On the first consideration of the thing, one would be inclined to ask how, without knowledge, can a girl think, or imagine, or dream anything? On further thought, one understands that knowledge has very little to do with dreams or fancies. Yet, with or without knowledge, no poet, sacred bard, or prophet has ever been able to divine the thoughts of a girl, or to interpret them, or

even to set them down in consecutive language. I suppose they are not, in truth, thoughts. Thought implies reasoning and the connection of facts, and the experience of life as far as it has gone. A young maiden's mind is full of dimly seen shadows and pallid ghosts which flit across the brain and disappear. These shadows have the semblance of shape, but it is dim and uncertain: they have the pretence of colour, but it changes every moment: if they seem to show a face, it vanishes immediately and is forgotten. Yet these shadows smile upon the young with kindly eyes; they beckon with their fingers, and point to where, low down on the horizon, with cloudy outline, lies the Purple Island—to such a girl as this the future is always a small island girt by the sea, far off and lonely. The shadows whisper to her; they sing to her; but no girl has ever yet told us—even if she understands—what it is they tell her.

She had been lying there, quiet and motionless, for an hour or more, ever since the tea-things had been taken away—at Holy Hill they have tea at half-past four. The ancient lady who was in the room with her had fallen back again into the slumber which held her nearly all day long as well as all the night. The house seemed thoroughly wrapped and lapped in the softest peace and stillness; in one corner a high clock, wooden-cased, swung its brass pendulum behind a pane of glass with solemn and sonorous chronicle of the moments, so that they seemed to march rather than to fly. A clock ought not to tick as if Father Time were hurried and driven along without dignity and by a scourge. This clock, for one, was not in a hurry. Its tick showed that Time rests not—but hastes not. There is admonition in such a



clock. When it has no one to admonish but a girl whose work depends on her own sweet will, its voice might seem thrown away; yet one never knows the worth of an admonition. Besides, the clock suited the place and the room. Where should Time march with solemn step and slow, if not on the quiet island of Samson, in the archipelago of Scilly? On its face was written the name of its maker, plain for all the world to see—'Peter Trevellick, Penzance, A.D. 1741.'

The room was not ceiled, but showed the dark joists and beams above, once painted, but a long time ago. The walls were wainscotted and painted drab, after an old fashion now gone out: within the panels hung coloured prints, which must have been there since the beginning of this century. They represented rural subjects—the farmer sitting before a sirloin of beef, while his wife, a cheerful nymph, brought him 'Brown George,' foaming with her best home-brewed; the children hung about his knees expectant of morsels; or the rustic bade farewell to his sweetheart, the recruiting-sergeant waiting for him, and the villagers, to a woman, bathed in tears. There were half a dozen of those compositions simply coloured. I believe they are now worth much money. But there were many other things in this room worth money. Opposite the fireplace stood a cabinet of carved oak, black with age, precious beyond price. Behind its glass windows one could see a collection of things once strange and rare—things which used to be brought home by sailors long before steamers ploughed every ocean and globe-trotters trotted over every land. There were wonderful things in coral, white and red and pink; Venus's-fingers from the Philippines; fans from the Seychelles; stuffed birds of

wondrous hue, daggers and knives, carven tomahawks, ivory toys, and many other wonders from the far East and fabulous Cathay. Beside the cabinet was a wooden desk, carved in mahogany, with a date of 1645, said to have been brought to the islands by one of the Royalist prisoners whom Cromwell hanged upon the highest carn of Hangman's Island. There was no escaping Cromwell—not even in Scilly any more than in Jamaica. In one corner was a cupboard, the door standing open. No collector ever came here to gaze upon the treasures unspeakable of cups and saucers, plates and punch-bowls. On the mantelshelf were brass candlesticks and silver candlesticks, side by side with 'ornaments' of china, pink and gold, belonging to the artistic reign of good King George the Fourth. On the hearthrug before the fire, which was always burning in this room all the year round, lay an old dog sleeping.

Everybody knows the feeling of a room or a house belonging to the old. Even if the windows are kept open, the air is always close. Rest, a gentle, elderly angel, sits in the least frequented room with folded wings. Sleep is always coming to the doors at all hours: for the sake of Rest and Sleep the house must be kept very quiet: nobody must ever laugh in the house: there is none of the litter that children make: nothing is out of its place: nothing is disturbed: the furniture is old-fashioned and formal: the curtains are old and faded: the carpets are old, faded, and worn: it is always evening: everything belonging to the house has done its work: all together, like the tenant, are sitting still—solemn, hushed, at rest, waiting for the approaching end.

The only young thing at Holy Hill was the girl at the window. Everything else was old—the servants, the farm labourers, the house and the furniture. In the great hooded arm-chair beside the fire reposed the proprietor, tenant, or owner of all. She was the oldest and most venerable dame ever seen. At this time she was asleep: her head had dropped forward a little, but not much; her eyes were closed; her hands were folded in her lap. She was now so very ancient that she never left her chair except for her bed; also, by reason of her great antiquity, she now passed most of the day in sleep, partly awake in the morning, when she gazed about and asked questions of the day. But sometimes, as you will presently see, she revived again in the evening, became lively and talkative, and suffered her memory to return to the ancient days.

By the assistance of her handmaidens, this venerable lady was enabled to present an appearance both picturesque and pleasing, chiefly because it carried the imagination back to a period so very remote. To begin with, she wore her bonnet all day long. Fifty years ago it was not uncommon in country places to find very old ladies who wore their bonnets all day long. Ursula Rosevean, however, was the last who still preserved that ancient custom. It was a large bonnet that she wore, a kind of bonnet calculated to impress very deeply the imagination of one—whether male or female—who saw it for the first time: it was of bold design, as capacious as a store-ship, as flowing in its lines as an old man-of-war—inspired to a certain extent by the fashions of the Waterloo period—yet, in great part, of independent design. Those few who were permitted to gaze

upon the bonnet beheld it reverently. Within the bonnet an adroit arrangement of cap and ribbons concealed whatever of baldness or exiguity as to locks—but what does one know? Venus Calva has never been worshipped by men; and women only pay their tribute at her shrine from fear—never from love. The face of the sleeping lady reminded one—at first, vaguely—of history. Presently one perceived that it was the identical face which that dread occidental star, Queen Elizabeth herself, would have assumed had she lived to the age of ninety-five, which was Ursula's time of life in the year 1884. For it was an aquiline face, thin and sharp; and if her eyes had been open you would have remarked that they were bright and piercing, also like those of the Tudor Queen. Her cheek still preserved something of the colour which had once made it beautiful; but cheek and forehead alike were covered with lines innumerable, and her withered hands seemed to have grown too small for their natural glove. She was dressed in black silk, and wore a gold chain about her neck.

The clock struck half-past five, melodiously. Then the girl started and sat upright—as awakened out of her dream. 'Armored,' it seemed to say—nay, since it seemed to say, it actually did say—'Child Armored, I am old and wise. For a hundred and forty-three years, ever since I left the hands of the ingenious Peter Trevellick, of Penzance, in the year 1741, I have been counting the moments, never ceasing save at those periods when surgical operations have been necessary. In each year there are 31,536,000 moments. Judge, therefore, for yourself how many moments in all I have counted. I must, you will own, be very wise indeed. I

am older even than your great-great-grandmother. I remember her a baby first, and then a pretty child, and then a beautiful woman, for all she is now so worn and wizened. I remember her father and her grandfather. Also her brothers and her son, and her grandson—and your own father, dear Armorel. The moments pass: they never cease: I tell them as they go. You have but short space to do all you wish to do. You, child, have done nothing at all yet. But the moments pass. Patience. For you, too, work will be found. Youth passes. You can hear it pass. I tell the moments in which it melts away and vanishes. Age itself shall pass. You may listen if you please. I tell the moments in which it slowly passes.'

Armorel looked at the clock with serious eyes during the delivery of this fine sermon, the whole bearing of which she did not perhaps comprehend. Then she started up suddenly and sprang to her feet, stung by a sudden pang of restlessness, with a quick breath and a sigh. We who have passed the noon of life are apt to forget the disease of restlessness to which youth is prone: it is an affection which greatly troubles that period of life, though it should be the happiest and the most contented; it is a disorder due to anticipation, impatience, and inexperience. The voyage is all before: youth is eager to be sailing on that unknown ocean full of strange islands. Who would not be restless with such a journey before one and such discoveries to make?

Armorel opened the door noiselessly, and slipped out. At the same moment the old dog awoke and crept out with her, going delicately and on tiptoe, lest he should awaken the ancient lady. In the hall outside the girl stood listening. The

house was quite silent, save that from the kitchen there was wafted on the air a soft droning—gentle, melodious, and murmurous, like the contented booming of a bumble-bee among the figwort. Armorel laughed gently. 'Oh!' she murmured, 'they are all asleep. Grandmother is asleep in the parlour; Dorcas and Chessun are asleep in the kitchen; Justinian is asleep in the cottage; and I suppose the boy is asleep somewhere in the farmyard.'

The girl led the way, and the dog followed.

She passed through the door into the garden of the front. It was not exactly a well-ordered garden, because everything seemed to grow as it pleased; but then in Samson you have not to coax flowers and plants into growing: they grow because it pleases them to grow: this is the reason why they grow so tall and so fast. The garden faced the south-west, and was protected from the north and east by the house itself and by a high stone wall. There is not anywhere on the island a warmer and sunnier corner than this little front garden of Holy Hill. The geranium clambered up the walls beside and among the branches of the tree-fuchsia, both together covering the front of the house with the rich colouring of their flowers. On either side of the door grew a great tree, with gnarled trunk and twisted branches, of lemon verbena, fragrant and sweet, perfuming the air; the myrtles were like unto trees for size; the very marguerites ran to timber of the smaller kind; the pampas-grass in the warmest corner rose eight feet high, waving its long silver plumes; the tall stalk still stood which had borne the flowers of an aloe that very summer; the leaves of the plant itself were slowly dying away, their life-

work, which is nothing at all but the production of that one flowering stem, finished. That done, the world has no more attractions for the aloe: it is content—it slowly dies away. And in the front of the garden was a row of tall dracæna palms. An old ship's figure-head, thrown ashore after a wreck, representing the head and bust of a beautiful maiden, gilded, but with a good deal of the gilt rubbed off, stood on the left hand of the garden, half hidden by another fuchsia-tree in flower: and a huge old-fashioned ship's lantern hung from an iron bar projecting over the door of the house.

The house itself was of stone, with a roof of small slates. Impossible to say how old it was, because in this land stonework ages rapidly, and soon becomes covered with yellow and orange lichen, while in the interstices there grows the grey sandwort; and in the soft sea air and the damp sea mists the sharp edges even of granite are quickly rounded off and crumbled. But it was a very old house, save for the square projecting window, which had been added recently—say thirty or forty years ago—a long, low house of two storeys, simply built; it stands half-way up the hill which slopes down to the water's edge; it is protected from the north and north-east winds, which are the deadliest enemies to Scilly, partly by the hill behind and partly by a spur of grey rock running like an ancient Cyclopean wall down the whole face of the hill into the sea, where for many a fathom it sticks out black teeth, round which the white surge rises and tumbles, even in the calmest time.

Beyond the garden-wall—why they wanted a garden-wall I know not, except for the pride and dignity of the thing—

was a narrow green, with a little, a very little, pond; in the pond there were ducks; and beside the green was a small farmyard, containing everything that a farmyard should contain, except a stable. It had no stable, because there are no horses or carts upon the island. Pigs there are, and cows; fowls there are, and ducks and geese, and a single donkey for the purpose of carrying the flower-baskets from the farm to the landing-place; but neither horse nor cart.

Beyond the farmyard was a cottage, exactly like the house, but smaller. It was thatched, and on the thatch grew clumps of samphire. This was the abode of Justinian Tryeth, bailiff, head man, or foreman, who managed the farm. When you have named Ursula Rosevean, and Armored, her great-great-granddaughter, and Justinian Tryeth, and Dorcas his wife—she was a native of St. Agnes, and therefore a Hicks by birth—Peter his son, and Chessun his daughter, you have a complete directory of the island, because nobody else now lives on Samson. Formerly, however, and almost within the memory of the oldest inhabitant, according to the computation of antiquaries and the voice of tradition, this island maintained a population of over two score.

The hill which rises behind the house is the southern hill of the two, which, with the broad valley between them, make up the island of Samson. This hill slopes steeply seaward to south and west. It is not a lofty hill, by any means. In Scilly there are no lofty hills. When Nature addressed herself to the construction of this archipelago she brought to the task a light touch: at the moment she happened to be full of feeling for the great and artistic effects which may be produced by small elevations,



especially in those places where the material is granite. Therefore, though she raised no Alpine peak in Scilly, she provided great abundance and any variety of bold coast-line with rugged cliffs, lofty carns, and headlands piled with rocks. And her success as an artist in this *genre* has been undoubtedly wonderful. The actual measurement of Holy Hill, Samson—but why should we measure?—has been taken, for the admiration of the world, by the Ordnance Survey. It is really no more than a hundred and thirty-two feet—not a foot more or less. But then one knows hills ten times that height—the Herefordshire Beacon, for example—which are not half so mountainous in the effect produced. Only a hundred and thirty-two feet—yet on its summit one feels the exhilaration of spirits caused by the air, elsewhere of five thousand feet at least. On its southern and western slopes lie the fields which form the flower-farm of Holy Hill.

Below the farmyard the ground sloped more steeply to the water: the slope was covered with short heather fern, now brown and yellow, and long trailing branches of bramble, now laden with ripe blackberries, the leaves enriched with blazon of gold and purple and crimson.

Armored ran across the green and plunged among the fern, tossing her arms and singing aloud, the old dog trotting and jumping, but with less elasticity, beside her. She was bare-headed; the sunshine made her dark cheeks ruddy and caused her black eyes to glow. Hebe, young and strong, loves Phœbus, and fears not any freckles. When she came to the water's edge, where the boulders lie piled in a broken mass among and above the water, she stood still and looked across the sea, silent for a moment. Then she began to sing

in a strong contralto; but no one could hear her, not even the coastguard on Telegraph Hill, or he of the Star Fort: the song she sang was one taught her by the old lady, who had sung it herself in the old, old days, when the road was always filled with merchantmen waiting for convoy up the Channel, and when the islands were rich with the trade of the ships, and their piloting, and their wrecks—to say nothing of the free trade which went on gallantly and without break or stop. As she sang she lifted her arms and swung them in slow cadence, as a Nautch-girl sometimes swings her arms. What she sang was none other than the old song—

Early one morning, just as the sun was rising,  
I heard a maid sing in the valley below:  
Oh! don't deceive me. Oh! never leave me.  
How could you use a poor maiden so?

In the year of grace 1884 Armored was fifteen years of age. But she looked nineteen or twenty, because she was so tall and so well-grown. She was dressed simply in a blue flannel; the straw hat which she carried in her hand was trimmed with red ribbons; at her throat she had stuck a red verbena—she naturally took to red, because her complexion was so dark. Black hair; black eyes; a strongly marked brow; a dark cheek of warm and ruddy hue; the lips full, but the mouth finely curved; features large but regular—she was already, though so young, a tall and handsome woman. Those able to understand things would recognise in her dark complexion, in her carriage, in her eyes, and in her upright figure, the true Castilian touch. The gipsy is swarthy; the

negro is black; the mulatto is dusky: it is not the colour alone, but the figure and the carriage also, which mark the Spanish blood. A noble Spanish lady; yet how could she get to Samson?

She wore no gloves—you cannot buy gloves in Samson—and her hands were brown with exposure to sea and sun, to wind and rain: they were by no means tiny hands, but strong and capable hands; her arms—no one ever saw them, but for shape and whiteness they could not be matched—would have disgraced no young fellow of her own age for strength and muscle. That was fairly to be expected in one who continually sailed and rowed across the inland seas of this archipelago; who went to church by boat and to market by boat; who paid her visits by boat and transacted her business by boat, and went by boat to do her shopping. She who rows every day upon the salt water, and knows how to manage a sail when the breeze is strong and the Atlantic surge rolls over the rocks and roughens the still water of the road, must needs be strong and sound. For my own part, I admire not the fragile maiden so much as her who rejoices in her strength. Youth, in woman as well as in man, should be brave and lusty; clean of limb as well as of heart; strong of arm as well as of will; enduring hardness of voluntary labour as well as hardness of involuntary pain; with feet that can walk, run, and climb, and with hands that can hold on. Such a girl as Armorel—so tall, so strong, so healthy—offers, methinks, a home ready-made for all the virtues, and especially the virtues feminine, to house themselves therein. Here they will remain, growing stronger every day, until at last they have become part and parcel of

the very girl herself, and cannot be parted from her. Whereas, when they visit the puny creature, weak, timid, delicate—but no—'tis better to remain silent.

How many times had the girl wandered, morning or afternoon, down the rough face of the hill, and stood looking vaguely out to sea, and presently returned home again? How many such walks had she taken and forgotten? For a hundred times—yea, a thousand times—we do over and over again the old familiar action, the little piece of the day's routine, and forget it when we lie down to sleep. But there comes the thousandth time, when the same thing is done again in the same way, yet is never to be forgotten. For on that day happens the thing which changes and charges a whole life. It is the first of many days. It is the beginning of new days. From it, whatever may have happened before, everything shall now be dated until the end. Mohammed lived many years, but all the things that happened unto him or his successors are dated from the Flight. Is it for nothing that it has been told what things Armorel did and how she looked on this day? Not so, but for the sake of what happened afterwards, and because the history of Armorel begins with this restless fit, which drove her out of the quiet room down the hillside to the sea. Her history begins, like every history of a woman worth relating, with the man cast by the sea upon the shores of her island. The maiden always lives upon an island, and whether the man is cast upon the shore by the sea of Society, or the sea of travel, or the sea of accident, or the sea of adventure, or the sea of briny waves and roaring winds and jagged rocks, matters little. To Armorel it was the last. To you, dear

Dorothy or Violet, it will doubtless be by the sea of Society. And the day that casts him before your feet will ever after begin a new period in your reckoning.

Armored stopped her song as suddenly as she had begun it. She stopped because on the water below her, not far from the shore, she saw a strange thing. She had good sea eyes—an ordinary telescope does not afford a field of vision much larger or clearer across water than Armored's eyes—but the thing was so strange that she shaded her forehead with her hand, and looked more curiously.

It would be strange on any evening, even after the calmest day of summer, when the sun is setting low, to see a small boat going out beyond Samson towards the Western Islets. There the swell of ocean is always rolling among the rocks and round the crags and headlands of the isles. Only in calm weather and in broad daylight can the boatman who knows the place venture in those waters. Not even the most skilled boatman would steer for the Outer Islands at sunset. For there are hidden rocks, long ridges of teeth that run out from the islands to tear and grind to powder any boat that should be caught in their devouring jaws. There are currents also which run swiftly and unexpectedly between the islands to sweep the boat along with them till it shall strike the rocks and so go down with any who are abroad; and there are strong gusts which sweep round the headlands and blow through the narrow sounds. So that it is only when the day is calm and in the full light of the sun that a boat can sail among these islands.

Yet Armored saw a boat on the water, not half a mile from Samson, with two men on board. More than this, the boat

was apparently without oars or sails, and it was drifting out to sea. What did this mean?

She looked and wondered. She looked again, and she remembered.

The tide was ebbing, the boat was floating out with the tide; the breeze had dropped, but there was still something left—what there was came from the south-east and helped the boat along; there was not much sea, but the feet of Great Minalto were white, and the white foam kept leaping up the sides, and on her right, over the ledges round White Island, the water was tearing and boiling, a white and angry heap. Why, the wind was getting up, and the sun was setting, and if they did not begin to row back as hard as they could, and that soon, they would be out to sea and in the dark.

She looked again, and she thought more. The sinking sun fell upon the boat, and lit it up so plainly that she could now see very well two things. First, that the boat was really without any oars or sails at all; and next, that the two men in her were not natives of Scilly. She could not discern their faces, but she could tell by their appearance and the way they sat in the boat that they were not men of the place. Besides, what would an islander want out in a boat at such a time and in such a place? They were, therefore, visitors; and by the quiet way in which they sat, as if it mattered not at all, it was perfectly plain that they understood little or nothing of their danger.

Again she considered, and now it became certain to her, looking down upon the boat, that the current was not taking her out to sea at all, which would be dangerous enough, but

actually straight on the ridge or ledge of rocks lying off the south-west of White Island. Then, seized with sudden terror, she turned and fled back to the farm.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **PRESENTED BY THE SEA**

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'Peter!' cried Armorel in the farmyard. 'Peter! Peter! Wake up! Where is the boy? Wake up and come quick!'

The boy was not sleeping, however, and came forth slowly, but obediently, in rustic fashion. He was a little older than most of those who still permit themselves to be called boys: unless his looks deceived one, he was a great deal older, for he was entirely bald, save for a few long, scattered hairs, which were white. His beard and whiskers also consisted of nothing but a few sparse white hairs. He moved heavily, without the spring of boyhood in his feet. Had Peter jumped or run, one might in haste have inferred a condition of drink or mental disorder. As for his shoulders, too, they were rounded, as if by the weight of years—a thing which is rarely seen in boys. Yet Armorel called this antique person 'the boy,' and he answered to the name without remonstrance.

'Quick, Peter!' she cried. 'There's a boat drifting on White Island Ledge, and the tide's running out strong; and there are two men in her, and they've got no oars in the boat. Ignorant trippers, I suppose! They will both be killed to a certainty, unless—— Quick!'

Peter followed her flying footsteps with a show of haste and a movement of the legs approaching alacrity. But then he was always a slow boy, and one who loved to have his work done for him. Therefore, when he reached the landing-place, he found that Armorel was well before him, and that



she had already shipped mast and sail and oars, and was waiting for him to shove off.

Samson has two landing beaches, one on the north-east below Bryher Hill, and the other farther south, on the eastern side of the valley. There might be a third, better than either, on Porth Bay, if anyone desired to put off there, on the west side facing the other islands, where nobody has any business at all except to see the rocks or shoot wild birds.

The beach used by the Holy Hill folk was the second of these two; here they kept their boats, and had their old stone boat-house to store the gear; and it was here that Armorel stood waiting for her companion.

Peter was slow on land; at sea, however, he alone is slow who does not know what can be got out of a boat, and how it can be got. Peter did possess this knowledge; all the islanders, in fact, have it. They are born with it. They also know that nothing at sea is gained by hurry. It is a maxim which is said to rule or govern their conduct on land as well as afloat. Peter, therefore, when he had pushed off, sat down and took an oar with no more appearance of hurry than if he were taking a boat-load of boxes filled with flowers across to the port. Armorel took the other oar.

'They are drifting on White Island Ledge,' repeated Armorel; 'and the tide is running out fast.'

Peter made no reply—Armorel expected none—but dipped his oar. They rowed in silence for ten minutes. Then Peter found utterance, and spoke slowly.

'Twenty years ago—I remember it well—a boat went ashore on that very Ledge. The tide was running out—'

strong, like to-night. There was three men in her—visitors they were, who wanted to save the boatman's pay. Their bodies was never found.'

Then both pulled on in silence, and doggedly.

In ten minutes or more they had rounded the Point at a respectful distance, for reasons well known to the navigator and the nautical surveyor of Scilly. Peter, without a word, shipped his oar. Armorel did likewise. Then Peter stepped the mast and hoisted the sail, keeping the line in his own hand, and looked ahead, while Armorel took the helm.

'It's Jinkins's boat,' said Peter, because they were now in sight of her. 'What'll Jinkins say when he hears that his boat's gone to pieces?'

'And the two men? Who are they? Will Jinkins say nothing about the men?'

'Strangers they are; gentlemen, I suppose. Well, if the breeze doesn't soon—— Ah, here it is!'

The wind suddenly filled the sail. The boat heeled over under the breeze, and a moment after was flying through the water straight up the broad channel between the two Minaltos and Samson.

The sun was very low now. Between them and the west lay the boat they were pursuing—a small black object, with two black silhouettes of figures clear against the crimson sky. And now Armorel perceived that they had by this time gotten an inkling, at least, of their danger, for they no longer sat passive, but had torn up a plank from the bottom, with which one, kneeling in the bows, was working as with a paddle, but without science. The boat yawed this way and that, but still kept on her course drifting to the rocks.

'If she touches the Ledge, Peter,' said Armored, 'she will be in little bits in five minutes. The water is rushing over it like a mill-stream.'

This she said ignorant of mill-streams, because there are none on Scilly; but the comparison served.

'If she touches,' Peter replied, 'we may just go home again. For we shall be no good to nobody.'

Beyond the boat they could plainly see the waters breaking over the Ledge; the sun lit up the white foam that leaped and flew over the black rocks just showing their teeth above the water as the tide went down.

Here is a problem—you may find plenty like it in every book of algebra. Given a boat drifting upon a ledge of rocks with the current and the tide; given a boat sailing in pursuit with a fair wind aft; given also the velocity of the current and the speed of the boat and the distance of the first boat from the rocks: at what distance must the second boat commence the race in order to catch up the first before it drives upon the rocks?

This second boat, paying close attention to the problem, came up hand over hand, rapidly overtaking the first boat, where the two men not only understood at last the danger they were in, but also that an attempt was being made to save them. In fact, one of them, who had some tincture or flavour of the mathematics left in him from his school days, remembered the problems of this class, and would have given a great deal to have been back again in school working out one of them.

Presently the boats were so near that Peter hailed, 'Boat ahoy! Back her! Back her! or you'll be upon the rocks. Back

her all you know!'

'We've broken our oars,' they shouted.

'Keep her off!' Peter bawled again.

Even with a plank taken from the bottom of the boat a practised boatman would have been able to keep her off long enough to clear the rocks; but these two young men were not used to the ways of the sea.

'Put up your hellum,' said Peter, quietly.

'What are you going to do?' The girl obeyed first, as one must do at sea, and asked the question afterwards.

'There's only one chance. We must cut across her bows. Two lubbers! They ought not to be trusted with a boat. There's plenty of room.' He looked at the Ledge ahead and at his own sail. 'Now—steady.' He tightened the rope, the boat changed her course. Then Peter stood up and called again, his hand to his mouth, 'Back her! Back her! Back her all you know!' He sat down and said quietly, 'Now, then—luff it is—luff—all you can.'

The boat turned suddenly. It was high time. Right in front of them—only a few yards in front—the water rushed as if over a cascade, boiling and surging among the rocks. At high tide there would have been the calm, unruffled surface of the ocean swell; now there were roaring floods and swelling whirlpools. The girl looked round, but only for an instant. Then the boat crossed the bows of the other, and Armorel, as they passed, caught the rope that was held out to her.

One moment more and they were off the rocks, in deep water, towing the other boat after them.

Then Peter arose, lowered the sail, and took down his mast.

'Nothing,' he said, 'between us and Mincarlo. Now, gentlemen, if you will step into this boat we can tow yours along with us. So—take care, sir! Sit in the stern beside the young lady. Can you row, either of you?'

They could both row, they said. In these days a man is as much ashamed of not being able to row as, fifty years ago, he was ashamed of not being able to ride. Peter took one oar and gave the other to the stranger nearest. Then, without more words, he dipped his oar and began to row back again. The sun went down, and it suddenly became cold.

Armored perceived that the man beside her was quite a young man—not more than one- or two-and-twenty. He wore brave attire—even a brown velvet jacket, a white waistcoat, and a crimson necktie; he also had a soft felt hat. Nature had not yet given him much beard, but what there was of it he wore pointed, with a light moustache so arranged as to show how it would be worn when it became of a respectable length. As he sat in the boat he seemed tall; and he did not look at all like one of the bawling and boastful trippers who sometimes come over to the islands for a night and pretend to know how to manage a boat. Yet——

'What do you mean,' asked the girl, severely, 'by going out in a boat, when you ought to have known very well that you could not manage her?'

'We thought we could,' replied this disconcerted pretender, with meekness suitable to the occasion. Indeed,

under such humiliating circumstances, Captain Parolles himself would become meek.

'If we had not seen you,' she continued, 'you would most certainly have been killed.'

'I begin to think we might. We should certainly have gone on those rocks. But there is an island close by. We could swim.'

'If your boat had touched those rocks you would have been dead in three minutes,' this maid of wisdom continued. 'Nothing could have saved you. No boat could have come near you. And to think of standing or swimming in that current and among those rocks! Oh! but you don't know Scilly.'

'No,' he replied, still with a meekness that disarmed wrath, 'I'm afraid not.'

'Tell me how it happened.'

The other man struck in—he who was wielding the oar. He also was a young man, of shorter and more sturdy build than the other. Had he not, unfortunately, confined his whole attention in youth to football, he might have made a good boatman. Really, a young man whose appearance conveyed no information or suggestion at all about him except that he seemed healthy, active, and vigorous, and that he was presumably short-sighted, or he would not have worn spectacles.

'I will tell you how it came about,' he said. 'This man would go sketching the coast. I told him that the islands are so beautifully and benevolently built that every good bit has got another bit on the next island, or across a cove, or on the other side of a bay, put there on purpose for the finest