

## Off Westward Ho!

A RECORD OF THE APPLIEDORE MEN.



CHRISTMAS was three days past in the year 1868. The Feast of the Holy Innocents was ushered in by one of the most terrific gales which ever bore down in fury on the North Devon coast. The ground swell sounded its solemn warning, and the rushing wind tore wildly across the Atlantic's breast, driving the raging billows before it in great walls of water, to be dashed into fragments of foam on the rock-bound coast of Bideford Bay.

No one who has witnessed the grand and awful sight of a storm at Westward Ho! can ever forget this mighty war between the ocean and the land. The wild sea horses with white gleaming manes rush up the rampart of the Pebble Ridge, striving with fury to leap over its summit and gain the plain below; they fling their stinging foam far inland till the green turf is hidden with the flakes. But their force is broken at last by the steadfast barrier, and they crash back, bearing away in their angry flood many a huge boulder, uttering their distinct roar of rage midst the other voices of the storm.

Woe to the vessel which sails these waters in such a storm! Her fate is sealed. Nothing can save her from destruction. But for her crew there is hope. For Appledore sailors—brave, strong, and tender of heart—will never suffer a man to perish while pluck and skill can

snatch him from the devouring ocean, whose power they know so well.

Crowds of men and women were on the look out for ships in distress, with eyes and ears on the alert for signals, on this 28th of December aforesaid.

Two vessels are discovered through the blinding foam, drift-in towards the fatal beach. The *Hope* lifeboat has been prepared for her errand of mercy. No sooner does her brave coxswain, Joseph Cox, hear that two ships are embayed than he assembles the crew, foremost among the number their brave stroke-oar, David Johns. The wife and children who clustered with him round the Christmas fire but three short days before will not keep him back; he has his work to do in the lifeboat, a work of salvation. The boat is placed on her carriage, and driven off to the rescue. One of the distressed ships, an Austrian barque, is descried still striving to beat out of the bay; but experienced eyes, knowing the shore, see that the attempt is vain. The lifeboat is kept moving along the beach directly under her lee till the fatal moment comes, and the cry rises that she has grounded.

Then away gallop the horses, and the lifeboat carriage crashes up the steep Pebble Ridge, leaping over the huge boulders. Now, with many a gallant effort and fearless risk of life, the *Hope* is

launched into the terrific surf which foams at the base. Strong arms and great hearts sweep her through the breakers.

'God speed her!' is the heartfelt prayer from many a watcher.

How eyes are strained to watch her perilous course! Now lost to sight in the yawning gulf between the mighty billows—now in full view, upright as a ladder against a wall, on the side of a gigantic roller—only to vanish again, swept from stem to stern by the furious seas which strive to dash the men from their seats. So she ploughs through the mountainous way to the doomed vessel off Westward Ho!

At length, after a valiant struggle, the ship is reached; but a new risk surprises the *Hope* and her crew, for each moment she is in danger of being engulfed beneath the barque. There is no time to be lost in the work of rescue. The Appledore men shout to the crew of the *Pace*. The shivering, despairing foreigners, swept from the deck by the raging waves, cling to the rigging, and seem unable or unwilling to move. At last a boy runs to the side of the vessel and drops safely into the lifeboat. Still the precious minutes wear away, and it seems as if all effort would be in vain. The crew dare not trust themselves to the lifeboat. Suddenly, with a rush, eight men scrambled across the deck, jumped helter-skelter over the side, missed the boat, and disappeared into the seething waters. But all save one were recovered by the gallant rescuers.

Meantime the *Hope* herself is in imminent peril; struck by a tremendous sea she is driven under the counter of the *Pace*, her rudder

carried away, her coxswain all but killed, just saved by his life-belt. The crew feel that the effort to reach the shore with those already saved can be delayed no longer. In vain they call to the men remaining on board to leave the ship; their shouts produce no result; so with those they had truly dragged from the very jaws of death they start rudderless on the terrible return journey. Once more the strong arms and brave hearts sweep through the terrific surf, and rescuers and rescued are safe on shore, utterly exhausted after their exertions.

Do you think my story is finished?

If so, you do not know the men of Appledore! Have you forgotten there were still living men on board the *Pace*? Appledore men did not forget on that awful night. Battered and bruised the old coxswain might be, but while he could hold an oar he would not give in. Only one of the late crew was in a fit state to accompany him; but he appealed to the bystanders for recruits, and in an instant the lifeboat was more than manned, though her stern was much damaged, and an oar had to be used to steer with in place of the lost rudder.

Once again they conquered the awful perils of the raging billows and neared the *Pace*. Then a terrific wave broke over the bow of the lifeboat, enveloped her crew, and carried young Cox, her steerer, overboard. Another moment and the *Hope* was broadside on, and her crew struggling in the raging surf.

Quickly righting herself, however, young Cox scrambled in first, and then one by one the

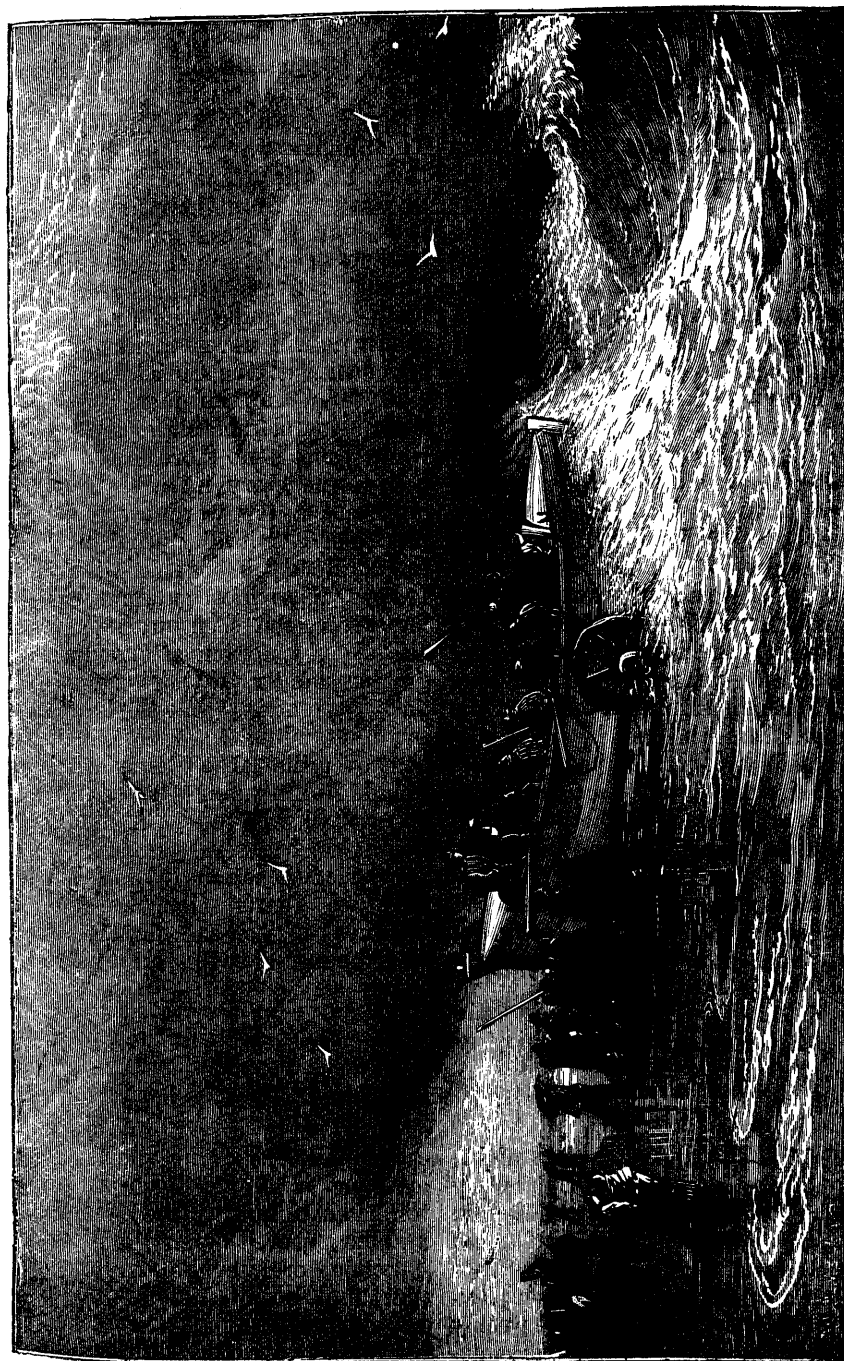
crew emerged from the swirling waters and regained their seats. But where is their brave old coxswain? At length he is discovered, drifted off to some distance, and in sore peril. Only three oars left! He *must* be saved though. The boat's head is turned round, and with superhuman effort the drowning man is reached and an oar is stretched out just in time for him to clutch. Almost dead he is pulled into the boat, it makes for shore, and once more the *Hope* is dragged up the Pebble Ridge, her crew complete.

But still those miserable dark specks are visible, clinging to the mizentop of the *Pace*—fewer, alas! than there were at first. Those specks are human beings, and cannot be left to perish. The coxswain might be more dead than alive, but while alive he would not give in. Regaining his breath, he called for another crew, and Apple-dore men, headed by their vicar, rushed to the front eager to fill the vacant places in the *Hope*. The seamen, however, displaced the landsmen, and the vicar was compelled to relinquish his place to those who could more skilfully fill it. But all the oars were broken or lost, so nothing could be done till the return of the messengers who had galloped off on horseback to fetch more, as soon as the difficulty was discovered. Meantime the tide turned, and it was reluctantly decided not to launch the *Hope* for the third time, though not only her volunteer crew were anxious to do so, but the crew of the Braunton life-boat also clamoured for the privilege. The Braunton men had made a brave and determined effort to reach the *Pace* with their boat, but, finding

they could not succeed, had come overland to offer their help.

The rocket apparatus had been tried, but the strength of the gale rendered it useless. Worn out and benumbed with the cold, the poor foreigners dropped one by one from the rigging, and only three were eventually saved. It seems that the Austrian captain had forbidden his men to leave the ship, not trusting unknown rescuers on that dangerous shore. Very different were his feelings when, just before leaving the scene of the shipwreck, he wrote to thank his gallant preservers, and the many others from whom he and his crew had received kindness and sympathy. Well were his grateful words deserved by those to whom they were addressed. 'While memory holds her seat, never, never shall I forget such acts of heroism and humanity; and that the richest blessings of the Almighty may be bestowed on the nation which owns such courageous, warm, and charitable hearts, is my prayer.' Such were his parting words.

Perhaps now you think that the story of that eventful night of the Feast of the Holy Innocents is told. Surely there has been sufficient heroism displayed for *one* night, even for the men of Devon. But no! Have you forgotten that *two* ships were struggling helplessly in the Bay? The *Leopard* was clearly visible to the crowd watching on the Pebble Ridge. Powerless they were to stay her fated course as she drifted before the driving blast, soon grounding with her broadside exposed to the heavy seas which made clean breaches over her decks. The coastguard men were waiting with their rocket appa-



tus in readiness to seize the first opportunity for sending assistance, and soon the fiery messenger is seen rushing through the air. Defying wind and wave it sweeps onward, and brings the line safely to the expectant crew, who quickly make it fast. Then there is delay—and delay means death to worn-out, weary men. Something is wrong. The basket which should carry them to safety will not work properly. Who will risk his life to go and set it right?

One who has risked it *once* already on that awful night—David Johns, of Appledore, now somewhat recovered from the effects of that first perilous expedition to the *Pace*. Skilfully and cautiously he set out on his dangerous journey. Breathlessly watched the crowd on the Ridge, breathlessly watched the crew on the *Leopard*, as he slowly traversed the yawning gulf which stretched between the shore and the wreck, while the surging breakers leaped up as if to seize and sweep him away, and the shrieking blast howled round him as if rejoicing at his peril. He reaches the wreck; the apparatus works well now. The crew are saved, every man of them, but at the heavy price of their pre-

server's life. Struck on the head by a heavy piece of the wreck, the hero was knocked off the line into the seething waters below, and dragged down in the undertow. The hungry waves claim him as their prey in place of the many he has torn from their devouring jaws, and they cast on shore at last only the storm-tossed casket of that brave spirit, over which hang the weeping wife and children who will never more cluster round him at the Christmas fire-side. God in His mercy grant them a joyful meeting in the land where there is no more sea!

My true story is told. I will only add a few words from the report of the local committee to the National Lifeboat Institution. It says 'that a more gallant service has never been seen on the North Devon coast, nor one attended with greater danger to those engaged on it,' and adds, 'that the launching and landing again of the lifeboat over the large stones of the Pebble Ridge was a work of much risk to all who assisted, and in doing which several persons narrowly escaped serious injury.' Well may we thank God for such instances of self-sacrifice in the sacred cause of saving human life!

## A Happy New Year.

**I**T was a pitch-dark night, so dark that Sybil Grey paused a moment before leaving the shelter of the church porch to step out into the darkness. She had been playing the harmonium for the weekly Advent service, which fact ac-

counted for her being the last to leave the building. Even the sexton had extinguished the last light, and disappeared by another door.

Sooner or later, however, Sybil must find her way home; better nerve herself to make the effort at once.

Outside the church gates a narrow pathway branched right and left into the village, but just in front a deep and rather dangerous ditch yawned, which it had been the intention of several generations of rectors and vestries to fill up—an intention, however, which never passed into action.

Sybil knew of this danger right well—was nervously anxious to avoid it, in fact; but, deceived by the darkness and a little scared by her utter loneliness, she became puzzled, lost her bearings, and before she knew where she was, her foot slipped and she found herself actually at the bottom of the ditch.

She was not, however, hurt, only frightened and covered with mud. She soon scrambled up the side of the treacherous pitfall and made the best of her way home, entering the house by the back door to avoid notice. Pausing by the blazing fire to see what damage her clothes had suffered, she was caught by her brother, who came in by the same door a moment later.

'Why, Syb, what a guy you have made of yourself!' he cried; 'tumbled down, eh? This comes of your everlasting church-going.'

'Oh, Fred, hush!' said his sister; 'don't let *them* hear you,' she nodded in the direction of the parlour; 'they would think I was hurt, and I'm not. As for the church-going, the people want the music, and I love to give it, you know.'

The girl slipped by the young man, and ran lightly upstairs. Her lip was quivering; she felt strangely near crying. The fall had shaken her truly, but some-

thing more than that weighed down her spirits too.

Fred whistled a low whistle, and turned on his heel.

Presently Sybil came downstairs, having changed her dress and washed away all trace of her accident. It was supper-time, and while she carried in the tray she gave her parents a cheerful account of the service, saying nothing of her fall, lest their fears might stand in the way of her going to church another night. She casually brought in Fred's name.

'Why, where is Fred?' asked her mother.

'Disappeared,' Sybil had to say after a visit of search into the kitchen.

The three ate their supper in silence. Fred's comings and goings were the one trouble of the house, the reason of Sybil's bravely concealed depression, the cause of many a furrow in the old people's faces.

Yet the subject was never openly discussed by those who loved the young man. I think each hoped that the grief unrecognised might be supposed not to exist.

John Grey was a builder in a small way—in a very small way. Fred, his firstborn child, had rather despised the business, and chosen to take a place as under clerk in a large clothmill near the village. No harm in that. A clever lad, he might well wish to carve out a fortune for himself, his old father said, with a sigh. But the sighs grew deeper and longer when he found that Fred chose other associates beyond the respectable circle in which the Greys moved—young men who lived fast lives, and spent their money more freely than they gained it.

force that none could stand before them.

The battle was won. The fight was over, but still the brave old elephant stood firm, waiting the order of his mahout. His voice had bidden him 'Halt'—till it told him to march, *there* he would stand; he did not know that that voice was still in death.

Three days and three nights did the faithful 'Hero' remain on the battlefield, refusing to stir. No one could move him. Then the soldiers thought of the mahout's little son, a hundred miles away; he might be able to lead the faithful creature off the burning plain.

Hero knew the boy at once, recognised him as his little driver, and bowed his huge head at his

voice. After looking wistfully round for his own master, obeyed the childish command and began his march home. The trappings he had worn on the morning of the battle hung about him torn and stained. They hid a cruel wound in his side.

At last the encampment was reached, and Hero on his own account began a patient search every tent for his missing master. Not finding him anywhere, trumpeted forth his bitter disappointment. Then, weak with loss of blood, he gently wound his trunk round the orphan boy and died. He had won the battle by his staunch obedience to orders. Now his work was done and he might rest.

## North Devon Men again!

**T** AM an old man now, fit for little but to sit in the chimney-corner with my pipe, reading a bit and thinking a

bit. I always look forward every month to getting the BANNER OF FAITH. There's fine reading there, and many a good true story. But somehow I never thought to see in it a real true story about our own Appledore men, though to be sure they have done many and many a brave deed.

I was surprised when the January number came and I saw, 'Off Westward Ho! A Record of the Appledore Men.' I read it straight off. True, every word of it. I knew the men, and their names,

and all about it, for hadn't I watched from the Pebble Ridge the *Pace* and the *Leopard*, and seen the rescue myself!

When I had finished reading I began to think of other brave rescues made by our folk—there was many a one! Long ago, when I was a boy, I remember an awful storm off Northam Bay rows. (It was not called Westward Ho! then.) I've often heard the sailors talk of it. The howling wind rushed in-shore, driving the waves over the rocks and up the Pebble Ridge in great mountain of water. No ship could stand against it, that was certain, and one caught in the bay was drifting helplessly towards the rocks. The

men were after the lifeboat, but even if she could be got off against an incoming tide and contrary wind there was small chance of her reaching the vessel.

Still, the trial must be made. Four brave men, with stout arms and stouter hearts, were willing to run the risk. There was a lad to steer, and when all was ready the attempt was made to launch the boat in the teeth of wind and wave. Back they drove her, though, again and again. At last she was off and struggling desperately in the boiling surf; aye, how we watched her from the Ridge, how they must have watched her from the wreck! The blinding spray hid her for a bit, then a tremendous roller came crashing on. In a moment more the boat was tossing on its crest, bottom upwards, and the shrieks of the women rose above the roar of the storm.

It was impossible to get near the boat, and for a cruel half hour the folks on shore watched the waves roll it over and toss it about like a child's toy, till at last a mighty breaker seized it in its grip and thundered to the shore with it, when it was clutched at once and dragged to land. No man hoped to find any living thing in the boat. It was with difficulty righted; but as it was turned over, a piercing shriek rang out, and something fled wildly across the green. Some folks took it for a ghost, but it was the boy who had steered. Still uttering those dreadful yells, he rushed on as if trying to escape from destruction.

It was a good while before he could be overtaken, the fright of that awful time had deprived him of his senses. In some wonderful

way his life had been preserved by his being caught in the bottom of the boat when she overturned. The rest of the crew were drowned—they had freely ventured their lives for their fellow-men in peril. May God have mercy on them in That Day! I think all the crew of the wrecked vessel were lost.

It was small wonder that, when once again the storm-wind dashed the great waves on our rocky coast, mothers, wives, and sweet-hearts flocked to the Pebble Ridge in stronger force than usual, determined to prevent useless risk of life and to keep their men on shore, wreck or no wreck. It was natural they should love their own the best. But it was terrible to see a fine ship struggling with wind and waves trying to get out of the bay—a vain effort, poor thing, for like many another she was driven irresistibly towards the Ridge.

The lifeboat was waiting, but every woman vowed no man of hers should enter it. The waves were wildly bounding up the Pebble Ridge, and in the face of the gale even the sailors were driven to allow that it would be little short of madness to attempt to launch the boat. So the crowd stood about, silent and disheartened. The fated vessel was drifting nearer, nearer to the rocks. That meant destruction.

Just then two young men on horseback galloped over the Green. Throwing themselves from their saddles and giving the reins to a lad standing by, they ran up the steep Ridge, shouting to know if the lifeboat was off? They were returning from a ride, and from Look-out Gate had seen the vessel

in the bay. They knew what that meant, and rode off at full speed to see what could be done.

They lived down Bideford way, but we all knew them well. The elder, about one-and-twenty, was just going to join the army as a doctor, the other, about eighteen or nineteen, going to Oxford—he would be a parson, it was said; a slight little chap he was. Well! when they got to the top of the Ridge the wind almost knocked them backwards.

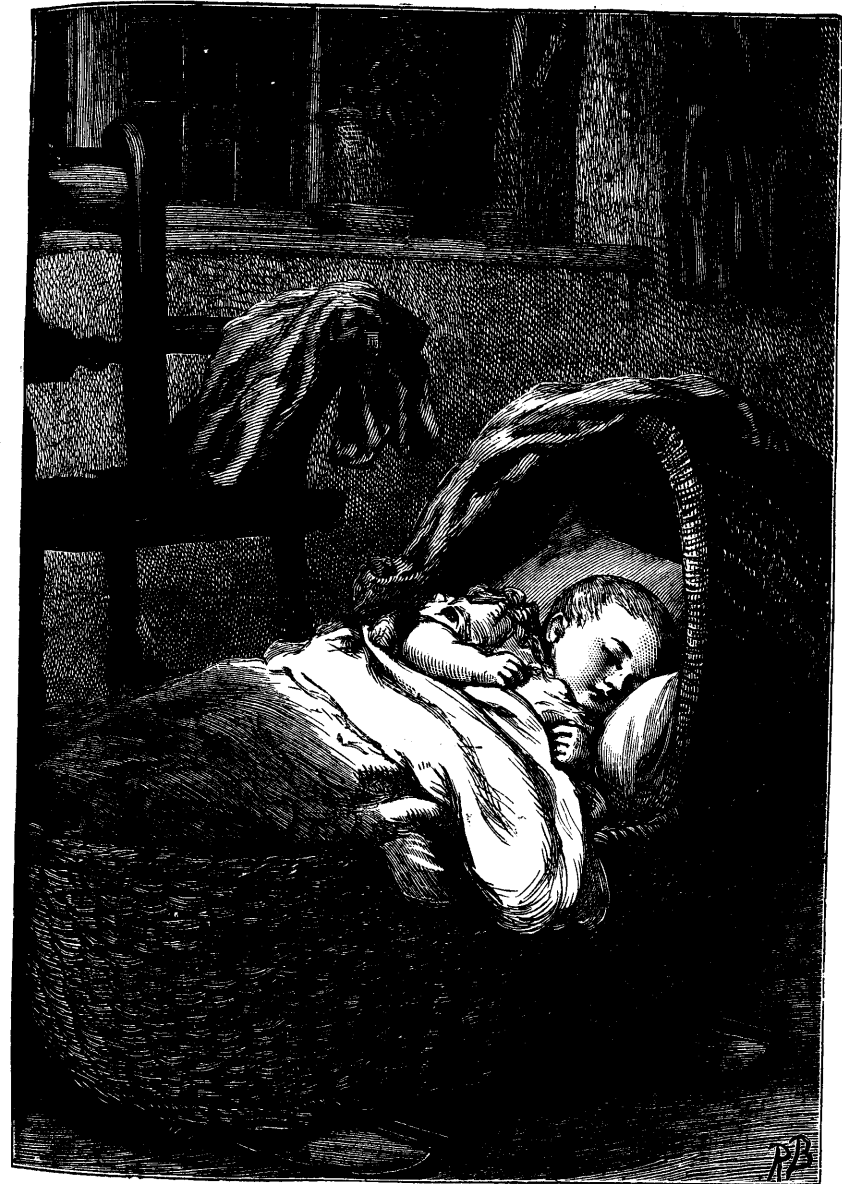
Very angry they were to see the lifeboat there, and no crew ready, nor any preparations for starting. The sailors told them it was madness to try, that no boat could be launched in the gale; but they would not listen. In they jumped and vowed they would go, calling loudly for two men to join them and complete the crew.

There was a stir among the men, but when one tried to come forward, wife or mother dragged him back, and with cries and prayers clung round him. Eh, it was a scene! The vessel all the while drifting nearer and nearer to destruction and no one putting out a finger to help. It drove those brave-hearted gentlemen mostly wild. Then a lad volunteered to steer, and the three determined to put out alone in the lifeboat, since they could not complete the crew. It was just a forlorn hope. Their hearts were strong enough, but their arms were but lads' arms, and there were but two where there was work enough for four.

The sailors didn't half like help-

ing to launch them to certain destruction, as they said, but got off at last, and gallantly the young men pulled and strained their oars; not a bit of use though they were powerless in that sea. Again and again they were driven back by the waves, drenched and blinded by the stinging spray, but with set teeth and strained arms they were at it again. No use, no use! A towering wave caught the boat, and tossed her ashore, leaving her and the three inside her high and dry.

Then it was too much for the sailors. Shaking off the clinging women, they rushed forward, dragged the exhausted lads out of the boat and took their place. No lack of a complete crew there, even the women seemed to find their natures changed and cheered them on. Off they went with a wild shout, the men's strong arms swept the boat through the surf and on into the open. The wreck was reached, the crew saved; the desperate man jumping rashly from the deck missed the boat, struck against its side, and was helpless into the raging waves with a broken limb, but he also was rescued. Another bad half-hour and the whole lot, savers and saved, were standing and thanking God on the Pebble Ridge, and the women were crying over their own come back to them. That's—that's Appledore men all over, and I mind a lot of other stories too I could tell, but one has to take a bit after a tale like that. It takes it out of one.



## Our Baby-Girl.

THEY say men scantily love an infant child,  
While to the mother it is all in all,  
I only knew when our bright baby died  
The whole world seemed to wear a funeral pall.

