



THE CRUISE OF THE TOMTIT

By WILKIE COLLINS

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THE CRUISE OF THE TOMTIT
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INTRODUCTION

'The Cruise of the Tomtit' is an account of a 12-day sailing trip from Weston-super-Mare in Somerset to the Scilly Isles in the last two weeks of September 1855 made by Wilkie Collins and his close friend Edward Francis Smyth Pigott (1824-1895). The plan was probably hatched in the last week of August while Collins was staying in Folkestone with Charles Dickens and when Pigott visited them and stayed the night. On 2 September Collins wrote to his mother

"We are to start about the 10th, and, if we can manage it to include in the trip a ten days cruise in the Bristol Channel, sailing ultimately to the Scilly Islands. I shall not be back for good, most likely, before October." (*The Letters of Wilkie Collins* 1999 I 143).

And he wrote to Pigott a few days later

"Now about the yacht trip—Everything very jolly, except the tremendous consideration of the Equinox. I find by my Almanack that it begins on the 23rd September. Surely we shall not have time for the Scilly Islands, starting only on the 18th or 19th? And as for returning in an Equinoctial Gale in a boat of 8 tons, with one able seaman on board, is that not rather "tempting Providence" by making a toil of a pleasure? Had we not better make a brief burst upon the Welsh coast, and get back before Boreas can overtake us?" (*The Letters of Wilkie Collins* 1999 I 145).

Collins's fears were overcome – perhaps because the boat they used was heavier and they engaged three crew – and they did sail to the Scilly Isles. The timetable seems to be that Collins and Pigott left London on Thursday 13th and went to Bristol where they bought supplies and stayed the night, possibly with the land agent Edwin Fox. The next day, Friday 14th, they travelled 11 miles to Brockley Hall, Yatton – one of two homes of Edward's brother, John Hugh Wadham Pigott. They stayed there three nights, plundering the place for supplies. On Monday 17th they travelled the seven miles to Weston-super-Mare, which Collins appropriately calls Mangerton-on-the-Mud. The town is in the Bristol Channel, the broad mouth of the estuary of the river Avon. When the tide goes out the whole estuary is a sea of mud. After a busy day plundering supplies and visiting the local doctor, Joseph Stringfield, they stayed the night at the Grove – the other home of Pigott's brother. They started on their voyage on Tuesday 18th anchoring off the Welsh coast that night and off the Somerset coast the following night. They visited Ilfracombe on 20th and Clovelly on 21st, sailed past Hartland Point on 22nd and Longship's Lighthouse off Land's End the next day, 23rd. They arrived at Hugh Town in the Scilly Isles on 24th staying one night in Tregarthen's Hotel owned by Captain Frank Tregarthen and two nights with the leaseholder and reformer of the islands, Augustus John Smith (1804-1872) at his house on Tresco. They left the islands at noon on 27th and are carried the whole 200 miles home in 43 hours by strong favourable winds, arriving back at Weston at seven in the morning on 29th. That day Collins wrote a letter to Dickens with an account of his trip and Dickens replied on September 30.

"Welcome from the bosom of the Deep! If a hornpipe will be acceptable to you at any time (as a reminder of what the three brothers were always doing), I shall be... 'happy to oblige'... Kind regards to Pigott." (*The Letters of Charles Dickens* Pilgrim VII 711).

Significance

'The Cruise of the Tomtit' is a jolly romp but contains two significant passages. Near the start Collins sets out his writing principles which he stuck to throughout his career.

"I am going to tell things just as they happened. What some people call smart writing, comic colouring, and graphic describing, are departments of authorship at which I snap my fingers in contempt."

And later he sets out a political principle. There were five men on board the boat Pigott, Collins and three sailors — the Brothers Dobbs. But they lived in Collinsian unconventionality.

“In the first place, let me record with just pride, that we have solved the difficult problem of a pure republic in our modest little craft. No man in particular among us is master—no man in particular is servant. The man who can do at the right time, and in the best way, the thing that is most wanted, is always the hero of the situation among us... So we sail along; and such is the perfect constitution of society at which we mariners of England have been able to arrive.”

Although Collins was proud that he and the wealthy Pigott lived as equals with three common sailors, he parodied the experience just a few months later with this passage in ‘Tomtit’:

“Our freedom extends to the smallest details. We have no stated hours, and we are well ahead of all rules and regulations. We have no breakfast hour, no dinner hour, no time for rising, or for going to bed. We have no particular eatables at particular meals. We don’t know the day of the month, or the day of the week; and never look at our watches, except when we wind them up. Our voice is frequently the voice of the sluggard; but we never complain, because nobody ever wakes us too soon, or thinks of interfering with our slumbering again. We wear each other’s coats, smoke each other’s pipes, poach on each other’s victuals.”

This becomes a few months later in *The Dead Secret*:

“It was breakfast-time with Mr. Treverton - that is to say, it was the time at which he felt hungry enough to think about eating something. In the same position over the mantel-piece in which a looking-glass would have been placed in a household of ordinary refinement, there hung in the cottage of Timon of London a side of bacon. On the deal table by the fire stood half a loaf of heavy-looking brown bread; in a corner of the room was a barrel of beer, with two battered pewter pots hitched onto nails in the wall above it; and under the grate lay a smoky old gridiron, left just as it had been thrown down when last used and done with. Mr. Treverton took a greasy clasp-knife out of the pocket of his dressing-gown, cut off a rasher of bacon, jerked the gridiron onto the fire, and began to cook his breakfast.”

Publication

Although Collins told Pigott just before the trip “I must work every morning, having a new iron in the fire, which I will tell you about when we meet” (*Letters of Wilkie Collins* 1999 I 145), he did not in fact seem to be very busy. The only imminent publication was ‘The Monktons of Wincot Abbey’ which appeared in *Fraser’s Magazine* in November and December 1855. But this story had in fact been written in 1852 and rejected by Dickens for his weekly periodical *Household Words* because its theme of hereditary insanity would be too upsetting for his family readership. It is possible that Wilkie was revising it for publication but that would hardly qualify as “a new iron in the fire.” He was not writing anything for *The Leader* – his last piece for the radical weekly had appeared on 25 August. His most recent story in *Household Words* has been published in July and his next, for the Christmas number on December 15, was not begun until he returned. Perhaps he was already starting on ‘Uncle George or the Family Mystery’ published in *The National Magazine* in January 1856.

Soon after his return from the trip he found time to write the 9,000 word account of the voyage as ‘The Cruise of the Tomtit’. It was his first non-fiction piece for *Household Words* and he was paid the going rate of 10s-6d a column, a total of £10 for the eighteen columns and seven lines it filled. Collins had started writing for *Household Words* in 1852 and had contributed six stories before ‘The Cruise of the Tomtit’. Dickens liked it. He wrote to Pigott on 12 December “He has written a charming paper since, about your Cruise. Nothing can be more pleasant, easy, gay, and unaffected. Full of plain story-telling merit besides. I have just now read the Proof.” (*The Letters of Charles Dickens* Pilgrim VII 763). It was published on 22 December 1855 as the third of five pieces in the 24 page issue.

The account was republished in 1861, with some small revisions, as a postscript to a new edition of Collins’s account of his 1850 trip round Cornwall, *Rambles Beyond Railways*. In the preface dated March 1861 Collins gave his own view of his six year-old work. It was

“written, I am afraid, in a tone of somewhat boisterous gaiety—which I have not, however, had the heart to subdue, because it is after all the genuine offspring of the ‘harum-scarum’ high spirits of the time. The ‘Cruise of the Tomtit’ was, from first to last, a practical burlesque; and the good-natured reader will, I hope, not think the worse of me, if I beg him to stand on no ceremony, and to laugh his way through it as heartily as he can.”

Note on transcript

This e-text is a character for character transcript of the original version published in *Household Words* 22 December XII No.300 22 December 1855 pp. 490-499. It differs slightly from the 1861 version which Collins, despite his protestations, did revise. All the original spelling and punctuation has been retained, even where it is – or seems – wrong in 21st century usage.

Acknowledgements

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References

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Paul Lewis

THE CRUISE OF THE TOMTIT.

“AT any other time of the year and for a shorter cruise, I should be delighted to join you. But as I prefer dying a dry death, I must decline accompanying you all the way to the Scilly Islands in a little pleasure boat of thirteen tons, just at the time of the autumnal equinox. You may meet with a gale that will blow you out of the water. You are running a risk, in my opinion, of the most senseless kind—and, if I thought my advice had any weight with you, I should say most earnestly, be warned in time, and give up the trip.”— *Extract from the letter of A Prudent Friend.*

“If I were only a single man, there is nothing I should like better than to join you. But I have a wife and family, and I can’t reconcile it to my conscience to risk being drowned.”—*Report from the Farewell Speech of A Prudent Friend.*

“Don’t come back bottom upwards.”—*Condensation of the Valedictory Blessings of several Prudent Friends.*

We received the enlivening expressions of opinion quoted above, with the perfect politeness which distinguishes us both. At the same time, with the firm resolution which forms another marked trait in our respective characters, we held to our original determination, engaged the boat and the crew, and put to sea on our appointed day, in the teeth of the wind and of our friends’ objections. But before I float the present narrative into blue water, I have certain indispensable formalities to accomplish which will keep me and my readers for a little while yet on dry land. First of all, let me introduce our boat, our crew, and ourselves.

Our boat is named the Tomtit. She is cutter-rigged¹. Her utmost length from stem to stern is thirty-six feet, and her greatest breadth on deck is ten feet. As her size does not admit of bulwarks, her deck, between the cabin-hatch and the stern, dips into a kind of well, with seats round three sides of it, which we call the Cockpit. Here we can stand up in rough weather without any danger of being rolled overboard; elsewhere the sides of the vessel do not rise more than a few inches above the deck. The cabin of the Tomtit is twelve feet long, eight feet wide, and five feet six inches deep. It has roomy lockers, and a snug little fireplace, and it leads into two recesses forward, which make capital storerooms for water, coals, firewood, and so forth. When I have added that the Tomtit has a bright red bottom, continued, as to colour, up her sides to a little above the water-mark; and when I have further stated that she is a fast sailor, and that she proved herself on our cruise to be a capital little sea-boat, I have said all that is needful at present on the subject of our yacht, and may get on to our crew and ourselves.

Our crew is composed of three brothers: Sam Dobbs, Dick Dobbs, and Bob Dobbs; all active seamen, and as worthy and hearty fellows as any man in the world could wish to sail with². My friend's name is Mr. Migott³, and mine is Mr. Jollins⁴. Thus, we are five on board altogether. As for our characters, I shall leave them to come out as they may in the course of this narrative. I am going to tell things just as they happened. What some people call smart writing, comic colouring, and graphic describing, are departments of authorship at which I snap my fingers in contempt.

The port we sailed from was a famous watering-place on the western coast, called Mangerton-on-the-Mud⁵; and our intention, as intimated in the letter of our prudent friend, was to go even further than the Land's End, and to reach those last bits of English ground called the Scilly Islands. But if the reader thinks he is now to get afloat at once, he is grievously mistaken. One very important and interesting part of our voyage was entirely comprised in the preparations that we made for it. To this portion of the subject, therefore, I shall wholly devote myself in the first instance. On paper, or off it, neither Mr. Migott nor myself are men to be hurried.

We left London with nothing but our clothes, our wrappers⁶, some tobacco, some French novels⁷, and some Egyptian cigars. Everything that was to be bought for the voyage was to be procured at Bristol. Everything that could be extracted from private benevolence was to be taken in unlimited quantities from hospitable friends living more or less in the neighbourhood of our place of embarkation. At Bristol we plunged over head and ears in naval business immediately. After ordering a ham, and a tongue, marmalade, lemons, anchovy paste, and general groceries, we set forth to the quay to equip ourselves and our vessel. We began with charts, sailing directions, and a compass; we got on to a hammock a-piece and a flag; and we rose to a nautical climax by buying tarpaulin-coats, leggings, and sou'-westers⁸, at a sailors' public-house. With these sea stores, and with a noble loaf of home-made bread (the offering of private benevolence) we left Bristol to scour the friendly country beyond, in search of further contributions to the larder of the Tomtit.

The first scene of our ravages was a large country-house⁹, surrounded by the most charming grounds. From the moment when we and our multifarious packages poured tumultuous into the hall, to the moment when we and the said packages poured out of it again into a carriage and a cart, I have no recollection, excepting meal-times and bedtime, of having been still for an instant. Escorted everywhere by two handsome, high-spirited boys, in a wild state of excitement about our voyage, we ranged the house from top to bottom, and laid hands on everything portable and eatable that we wanted in it. The inexhaustible hospitality of our hostess was proof against all the inroads that we could make on it. The priceless gift of packing perishable commodities securely in small spaces possessed by a lady living in the house and placed perpetually at our disposal encouraged our propensities for

¹ Single-masted with a mainsail and a foresail.

² Collins sailed again with one of the Dobbs brothers in 1860 to Ireland – To Harriet Collins 12 September 1860 *The Letters of Wilkie Collins* 1999 I 188-9

³ Edward Francis Smyth Pigott (1824-1895), a close friend from childhood of Wilkie Collins. They studied to be barristers together and were lifelong sailing companions.

⁴ This is not the only time Collins referred to himself as Jollins in a story. He also used the name in a humorous account of the visit of Hans Christian Andersen to Dickens's home Gad's Hill Place in 1857 published as 'The Bachelor Bedroom' in *All The Year Round* 6 August 1859 I pp. 355-360. Dickens referred to him as Jollins in a letter to Pigott on 17 January 1856 "We should all be sorry if you don't come to Paris—but I don't expect you. I am expecting to hear from Jollins as to his coming any day." And in a further letter to Collins on 19 January.

⁵ Weston-super-Mare, a coastal town in north Somerset where the Pigott family had a large house and who were largely responsible for turning Weston into a Victorian seaside resort. The town is at the mouth of the estuary of the River Avon and at low tide the mud stretches out as far as they eye can see.

⁶ A cloak or overcoat

⁷ French novels were more explicit in their sexual content than English ones and hence were not respectable reading. Collins considered Balzac one of his three "Kings of Fiction"

⁸ Oilskin waterproof hat with brim and cover for the neck.

⁹ Brockley Hall, Yatton, North Somersetshire also owned by the Pigott family.

unlimited accumulation. We ravaged the kitchen garden and the fruit-garden; we rushed into the awful presence of the cook (with our ham and tongue from Bristol as an excuse) and ranged predatory over the lower regions. We scaled back-staircases, and tramped along remote corridors, and burst into secluded lumber-rooms, with accompaniment of shouting from the boys, and of operatic humming from Mr. Migott and myself, who happen, among other social accomplishments, to be both of us musical in a free-and-easy way. We turned out, in these same lumber-rooms, plans of estates from their neat tin cases, and put in lemons and loaf-sugar instead. Mr. Migott pounced upon a stray telescope, and strapped it over my shoulders forthwith. The two boys found two japanned boxes, with the epaulettes and shako¹⁰ of an ex-military member of the family inside, which articles of martial equipment (though these are war-times, and nothing is meritorious or respectable now but fighting¹¹) I, with my own irreverent hands, shook out on the floor; and straightway conveyed the empty cases down-stairs to be profaned by tea, sugar, Harvey's sauce, pickles, pepper, and other products of the arts of peace. In a word, and not to dwell too long on the purely piratical part of our preparations for the voyage, we doubled the number of our packages at this hospitable country-house, before we left it for Mangerton-on-the-Mud, and the dangers of the sea that lay beyond.

At Mangerton we made a second piratical swoop upon another long-suffering friend, the resident doctor¹². We let this gentleman off however, very easily, only lightening him of a lanthorn¹³, and two milk-cans to hold our fresh-water. We felt strongly inclined to take his warmest cape away from him also; but Mr. Migott leaned towards the side of mercy, and Mr. Jollins was, as usual, only too ready to sacrifice himself on the altar of friendship,—so the doctor kept his cape, after all. Not so fortunate was our next victim, Mr. Purler, the Port Admiral of Mangerton-on-the-Mud, and the convivial host of the Metropolitan Inn¹⁴. Wisely entering his house empty-handed, we left it with sheets, blankets, mattresses, pillows, table-cloths, napkins, knives, forks, spoons, crockery, a frying-pan, a gridiron, and a saucepan. When to these articles of domestic use were added the parcels we had brought from Bristol, the packages we had collected at the country-house, the doctor's milk-cans, the personal baggage of the two enterprising voyagers, additions to the eating and drinking department in the shape of a cold curry in a jar, a piece of spiced beef, a side of bacon, and a liberal supply of wine, spirits, and beer, nobody can be surprised to hear that we found some difficulty in making only one cart-load of our whole collection of stores. The packing process was, in fact, not accomplished till after dark. The tide was then flowing; we were to sail the next morning; and it was necessary to get everything put on board that night, while there was water enough for the Tomtit to be moored close to the jetty.

This jetty, it must be acknowledged, was nothing but a narrow stone causeway, sloping down from the land into the sea. Imagine our cart, loaded with breakable things, at the high end of the jetty, and the Tomtit waiting to receive the contents of the cart at the low end, in the water. Imagine no moon, no stars, no lamp of any kind on shore; imagine one small lanthorn on board the vessel, which just showed how dark it was, and did nothing more; imagine the doctor, and the doctor's friend, and the doctor's two dogs, and Mr. Migott and Mr. Jollins all huddled together in a fussy state of expectation, midway on the jetty, seeing nothing, doing nothing, and being very much in the way. Imagine all these things, and then wonder, as we wondered, at the marvellous dexterity of our three valiant sailors, who actually succeeded in transporting piecemeal the crockery, cookery, and general contents of the cart into the vessel, on that pitchy night, without breaking, spilling, dropping, bumping, or forgetting anything. When I hear of professional conjurors performing remarkable feats; I think of the brothers Dobbs, and the loading of the Tomtit in the darkness; and I ask myself if any landsman's mechanical legerdemain can be more extraordinary than the natural neat-handedness of a sailor?

The next morning the sky was black, the wind was blowing hard against us, and the waves were showing their white frills angrily in the offing. A double row of spectators had assembled at the jetty, to see us beat out of the bay. If they had come to see us hanged, their grim faces could not have expressed greater commiseration. Our only cheerful farewell came from the doctor and his friend and the two dogs. The remainder of the spectators evidently felt that they were having a last long stare at us, and that it would be indecent and unfeeling, under the circumstances, to look happy. Give me a respectable inhabitant of an English country town, and I will match him, in the matter of stolid and silent staring, against any other man, civilised or savage, over the whole surface of the globe.

If we had felt any doubts of the sea-going qualities of the Tomtit, they would have been solved when we "went about," for the first time, after leaving the jetty. A livelier, stiffer, and drier little vessel of her size never was

¹⁰ A kind of military hat

¹¹ Crimean War 1854-1856. The war hit fiction sales and Wilkie had written in 1854 "if this war continues, the prospects of Fiction are likely to be very uncertain". He generally despaired of the several wars he lived through.

¹² Joseph Stringfield who lived at Verandah House, Weston-super-Mare

¹³ lantern

¹⁴ In fact the London Inn. The 1861 census shows the landlord as Charles Serle

built. She jumped over the waves, as if the sea was a great play-ground, and the game for the morning Leap-Frog. Though the wind was so high that we were obliged to lower our foresail, and to double-reef the mainsail, the only water we got on board was the spray that was blown over us from the tops of the waves. In the state of weather getting down Channel¹⁵ was out of the question. We were obliged to be contented, on this first day of our voyage, with running across to the Welsh coast, and there sheltering ourselves—amid a perfect fleet of outward-bound merchantmen driven back by the wind—in a snug roadstead¹⁶, for the after-noon and the night.

This delay, which might have been disagreeable enough later in our voyage, gave us just the time we wanted for setting things to rights on board. Our little twelve-foot cabin, it must be remembered, was bedroom, sitting-room, dining-room, store-room, and kitchen, all in one. Everything we wanted for sleeping, reading, eating, and drinking, had to be arranged in its proper place. The butter and candles, the soap and cheese, the salt and sugar, the bread and onions, the oil-bottle and the brandy-bottle, for, example, had to be put in places where the motion of the vessel could not roll them together, and where, also, we could any of us find them at a moment's notice. Other things, not of the eatable sort, we gave up all idea of separating. Mr. Migott and I mingled our stock of shirts as we mingled our sympathies, our fortunes, and our flowing punch-bowl after dinner. We both of us have our faults; but incapability of adapting ourselves cheerfully to circumstances is not among them. Mr Migott, especially, is one of those rare men who could dine politely off blubber in the company of Esquimaux, and discover the latent social advantages of his position if he was lost in the darkness of the North Pole.

After the arrangement of goods and chattels, came dinner (the curry warmed up with a second course of fried onions), then, the slinging of our hammocks by the neat hands of the Brothers Dobbs, and then the practice of how to get into the hammocks, by Messrs Migott and Jollins No landsman who has not tried the experiment can form the faintest notion of the luxury of the sailor's swinging bed, or of the extraordinary difficulty of getting into it for the first, time. The preliminary action is to stand with your back against the middle of your hammock, and to hold by the edge of the canvas on either side. You then duck your head down, throw your heels up, turn round on your back, and let go with your hands, all at the same moment. If you succeed in doing this, you are in most luxurious bed that the ingenuity of man has ever invented. If you fail, you measure your length on the floor. So much for hammocks.

After learning how to get into bed, the writer of the present narrative tried his hand on the composition of whiskey punch, and succeeded—which has always been his modest aim through life—in imparting satisfaction to his fellow-creatures. When the punch and the pipes accompanying the same had come to an end, a pilot-boat anchored alongside of us for the night. Once embarked on our own element, we old sea-dogs, are, after all, a polite race of men. We asked the pilot where he had come from—and he asked us. We asked the pilot where he was bound to, to-morrow morning—and he asked us. We asked the pilot whether he would like a drop of rum—and the pilot, loth¹⁷ to discourage us, said Yes. After that there was a little pause; and then the pilot asked us, whether we would come on board his boat—and we, loth to discourage the pilot, said Yes, and did go, and came back, and asked the pilot whether he would come on board our boat—and he said Yes, and did come on board, and drank another drop of rum. Thus in the practice of the social virtues did we wile away the hours—six jolly tars in a twelve-foot cabin—till it was past eleven o'clock, and time, as we say at sea to tumble in, or tumble out, as the case may be, when a jolly tar wants practice in the art of getting into his hammock.

The wind blew itself out in the night. As the morning got on, it fell almost to a calm; and the merchantmen about us began weighing anchor, to drop down Channel with the tide. The Tomtit, it is unnecessary to say, scorned to be left behind, and hoisted her sails with the best of them. Favoured by the lightness of the wind, we sailed past every vessel proceeding in our direction. Barques, brigs, and schooners, French luggers and Dutch galliots, we showed our stern to all of them and when the weather cleared, and the breeze freshened towards the afternoon, the little Tomtit was heading the whole fleet. In the evening we brought up close to the high coast of Somersetshire, to wait for the tide. Weighed again, at ten at night, and sailed for Ilfracombe. Got becalmed towards morning, but managed to reach our port at ten, with the help of the sweeps, or long oars. Went ashore for more bread, beer, and fresh water; feeling so nautical by this time, that the earth was difficult to walk upon; and all the people we had dealings with presented themselves to us in the guise of unmitigated land-sharks. O, my dear eyes! what a relief it was to Mr. Migott and myself to find ourselves in our floating castle, boxing the compass, dancing the hornpipe, and splicing the main-brace freely in our ocean-home¹⁸.

¹⁵ ie the Bristol Channel

¹⁶ A sheltered anchorage offshore

¹⁷ Variant of loath

¹⁸ Collins seems to want three similar phrases. Boxing the compass means to do a complete turn-about. Splicing the mainbrace is a naval euphemism for serving an extra rum ration. Dancing the hornpipe, a traditional sailor's jig, seems to be something the Dobbs brothers at least tried to do – see letter from Dickens 30 September 1855 in the Introduction.

About noon we sailed for Clovelly. Our smooth passage across the magnificent Bay of Bideford is the recollection of our happy voyage which I find myself looking back on most lovingly while I now write. No cloud was in the sky. Far away, on the left, sloped inward the winding shore, so clear, so fresh, so divinely tender in its blue and purple hues, that it was the most inexhaustible of luxuries only to look at it. Over the watery horizon, to the right, the autumn sun hung grandly, with the fire-path below, heaving on a sea of lustrous darkest blue. Flocks of wild birds, at rest, floated, chirping on the water all around. The fragrant, steady breeze was just enough to fill our sails. On and on we went, with the bubbling sea-song at our bows to soothe us; on and on, till the blue lustre of the ocean grew darker, till the sun sank redly towards the far waterline, till the sacred evening stillness crept over the sweet air, and hushed it with a foretaste of the coming night. What sight of mystery and enchantment rises before us now? Steep, solemn cliffs, bare in some places—where the dark-red rock has been rent away, and the winding chasms open grimly to the view—but clothed for the most part with trees, which soften their summits into the sky, and sweep all down them, in glorious masses of wood, to the very water's edge. Climbing from the beach, up the precipitous face of the cliff, a little fishing village coyly shows itself. The small white cottages rise one above another, now perching on a bit of rock, now peeping out of a clump of trees; sometimes two or three together; sometimes one standing alone; here, placed sideways to the sea, there, fronting it,—but rising always one above another, as if instead of being founded on the earth, they were hung from the trees on the top of the cliff. Over all this lovely scene the evening shadows are stealing. The last rays of the sun just tinge the quiet water, and touch the white walls of the cottages. From out at sea comes the sound of a horn, blown from the nearest fishing-vessel, as a signal to the rest to follow her to shore. From the land, the voices of children at play, and the still, faint fall of the small waves on the beach are the only audible sounds. This is Clovelly. If we had travelled a thousand miles to see it, we should have said that our journey had not been taken in vain.

On getting to shore, we found the one street of Clovelly nothing but a succession of irregular steps, from the beginning at the beach, to the end, half-way up the cliffs. It was like climbing to the top of an old castle, instead of walking through a village. When we reached the summit of the cliff, it was getting too dark to see much of the country. We strayed away, however, to look for the church, and found ourselves, at twilight, near some ghastly deserted out-houses, approached by a half-ruinous gate-way, and a damp dark avenue of trees. The church was near, but shut off from us by ivy-grown walls. No living creature appeared; not even a dog barked at us. We were surrounded by silence, solitude, darkness and desolation; and it struck us both forcibly, that the best thing we could do was to give up the church, and get back to humanity with all convenient speed. The descent of the High Street of Clovelly, at night, turned out to be a matter of more difficulty than we had anticipated. There was no such thing as a lamp in the whole village; and we had to grope our way in the darkness down steps of irregular sizes and heights, paved with slippery pebbles, and ornamented with nothing in the shape of a bannister¹⁹, even at the most dangerous places. Half-way down, my friend and I had an argument in the dark—standing with our noses against a wall, and with nothing visible on either side—as to which way we should turn next. I guessed to the left, and he guessed to the right; and I, being the most obstinate of the two, we ended in following my route, and at last stumbled our way down to the pier. Looking at the place the next morning, we found that the steps to the right led through a bit of cottage-garden to a snug little precipice, over which inquisitive tourists might pitch quietly, without let or hindrance. Talk of the perils of the deep! what are they in comparison with the perils of the shore?

The adventures of the night were not exhausted, so far as I was concerned, even when we got back to our vessel. I have already informed the reader that the cabin of the Tomtit was twelve feet long by eight feet wide—a snug apartment, but scarcely big enough, as it struck me, for five men to sleep in comfortably. Nevertheless, the experiment was to be tried in Clovelly harbour²⁰. I bargained, at the outset, for one thing—that the cabin hatch should be kept raised at least a foot all night. This ventilatory condition being complied with, I tumbled into my hammock, Mr. Migott rolled into his, and Sam Dobbs, Dick Dobbs, and Bob Dobbs, cast themselves down promiscuously on the floor and the lockers under us. Out went the lights; and off went my friend and the Brothers Dobbs into the most intolerable concert of snoring that it is possible to imagine. I lay awake listening, and studying the character of the snore in each of the four sleeping individuals. The snore of Mr. Migott I found to be superior to the rest in point of amiability, softness, and regularity—it was a kind of oily, long-sustained purr, amusing and not unmusical for the first five minutes. Next in point of merit to Mr. Migott, came Bob Dobbs. His note was several octaves lower than my friend's, and his tone was a grunt—but I will do him justice; I will not scruple to admit that the sounds he produced were regular as clockwork. Very inferior was the performance of Sam Dobbs, who, as owner of the boat, ought, I think, to have set a good example. If an idle carpenter planed a board very quickly at one

¹⁹ Variant of banister

²⁰ This is in fact their third night on board.

time, and very slowly at another, and if he moaned at intervals over his work, he would produce the best imitation of Sam Dobbs' style of snoring that I can think of. Last and worst of all, came Dick Dobbs, who was afflicted with a cold, and whose snore consisted of a succession of loud chokes, gasps, and puffs, all contending together, as it appeared to me, which should suffocate him soonest. There I lay, wide awake, suffering under the awful nose-chorus which I have attempted to describe, for nearly an hour. It was a dark night: there was no wind, and very little air. Horrible doubts about the sufficiency of our ventilation began to beset me. Reminiscences of early reading on the subject of the Black Hole at Calcutta came back vividly to my memory, I thought of the twelve feet by eight, in which we were all huddled together—terror and indignation overpowered me — and I roared for a light, before the cabin of the Tomtit became too mephitic for flame of any kind to exist in it. Uprose they then my Merry Merry Men, bewildered and grumbling, to grope for the match-box. It was found, the lanthorn was lit, the face of Mr. Migott appeared serenely over the side of his hammock, and the voice of Mr. Migott sweetly and sleepily inquired what was the matter?

“Matter! The Black Hole at Calcutta²¹ is the matter. Poisonous, gaseous exhalation is the matter! Outrageous, ungentlemanly snoring is the matter! Give me my bedding, and my drop of brandy, and my pipe, and let me go on deck. Let me be a Chaldean²² shepherd, and contemplate the stars. Let me be the careful watch who patrols the deck, and guards the ship from foes and wreck. Let me be anything but the companion of men, who snore like the famous Furies in the old Greek play²³.” While I am venting my indignation, and collecting my bedding, the smiling and sleepy face of Mr. Migott disappears slowly from the side of the hammock—and before I am on deck, I hear the oily purr once more, just as amiable, soft, and regular as ever.

What a relief it was to have the sky to look up at, the fresh night air to breathe, the quiet murmur of the sea to listen to! I rolled myself up in my blankets; and, for aught I know to the contrary, was soon snoring on deck as industriously as my companions were snoring below. The first sounds that woke me in the morning were produced by the tongues of the natives of Clovelly, assembled on the pier, staring down on me in my nest of blankets, and shouting to each other incessantly. I assumed that they were making fun of the interesting stranger stretched in repose on the deck of the Tomtit; but I could not understand one word of the Devonshire language²⁴ in which they spoke. Whatever they said of me, I forgive them, however, in consideration of their cream and fresh herrings. Our breakfast on the cabin hatch in Clovelly harbour, after a dip in the sea, is a remembrance of gustatory bliss which I gratefully cherish. When we had reduced the herrings to skeletons, and the cream-pot to a whited sepulchre²⁵ of emptiness we slipped from our moorings, and sailed away from the lovely little village with real regret. By noon we were off Hartland Point.

We had now arrived at the important part of our voyage—the part at which it was necessary to decide, once for all, on our future destination. Mr. Migott and I took counsel together solemnly, unrolled the charts, and then astonished our trusty crew by announcing that the end of the voyage was to be the Scilly Islands. Up to this time the Brothers Dobbs had been inclined to laugh at the notion of getting so far in so small a boat. But they began to look grave now, and to hint at cautious objections. The weather was certainly beautiful; but then the wind was dead against us. Our little vessel was stiff and sturdy enough for any service, but nobody on board knew the strange waters into which we were going—and, as for the charts, could any one of us study them with a proper knowledge of the science of navigation? Would it not be better, to take a little cruise to Lundy Island, away there on, the starboard bow? And another little cruise about the Welsh coast, where the Dobbses had been before? To these cautious questions we replied by rash and peremptory negatives²⁶; and the Brothers, thereupon, abandoned their view of the case, and accepted ours with great resignation. For the Scilly Islands, therefore, we shaped our course, alternately standing out to sea, and running in for the land, so as to get down ultimately to the Land's End, against the wind, in a series of long zig-zags, now in a westerly and now in an easterly direction. Our first tack from Hartland Point was a sail of six hours out to sea. At sunset, the little Tomtit had lost sight of land for the first time since she was launched, and was rising and falling gently on the long swells of the Atlantic. It was a deliciously

²¹ In June 1756 Fort William, Calcutta was overrun by the army of the Nawab of Bengal. 146 captured British soldiers were forced into a small cell without ventilation water or food. By morning most were dead. Widely believed in 1855, the story was probably much exaggerated, though modern scholars think many did die. It remains a figure of speech to this day for hot overcrowded conditions.

²² The ancient civilization in what is now Iraq.

²³ Three huntresses, Alecto, Tisiphone, and Megaera, who punish without mercy those found guilty of crimes. Found in *The Oresteia*.

²⁴ The people in Devon used a dialect that would have been unintelligible to people who spoke only English.

²⁵ Matthew 23:27 “You are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outside, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.”

²⁶ These suggestions are exactly those made by Collins to Pigott – see Introduction.

calm, clear evening with every promise of the fine weather lasting. The spirits of the Brothers Dobbs, when they found themselves at last in the blue water, rose amazingly.

“Only give us decent weather, sir,” said Bob Dobbs, cheerfully smacking the tiller of the Tomtit; “and we’ll find our way to Scilly somehow, in spite of the wind.”

We were now fairly at sea, keeping a regular watch on deck at night, and never running nearer the Cornish coast than was necessary to enable us to compare the great headlands with the marks on our chart. Under present circumstances, no more than three of us could sleep in the cabin at one time—the combined powers of the snoring party were thus weakened, and the ventilation below could be preserved in a satisfactory state. Instead of chronicling our slow zig-zag progress to the Land’s End, which is unlikely to interest anybody not familiar with Cornish names and nautical phrases, I will try to describe the manner in which we passed the day on board the Tomtit, now that we were away from land events and amusements. If there was to be any such thing as an alloy of dullness²⁷ in our cruise, this was assuredly the part of it in which Time and the Hour were likely to run slowest through the day.

In the first place, let me record with just pride, that we have solved the difficult problem of a pure republic in our modest little craft. No man in particular among us is master—no man in particular is servant. The man who can do at the right time, and in the best way, the thing that is most wanted, is always the hero of the situation among us. When Dick Dobbs is frying the onions for dinner, he is the person most respected in the ship, and Mr. Migott and myself are his faithful and expectant subjects. When grog is to be made, or sauces are to be prepared, Mr. Jollins becomes in his turn, the monarch of all he surveys²⁸. When musical entertainments are in progress, Mr. Migott is vocal king, and sole conductor of band and chorus. When nautical talk and sea-stories rule the hour, Bob Dobbs, who has voyaged in various merchantmen all over the world, and is every inch of him a thorough sailor, becomes the best man of the company. When any affairs connected with the internal management of the vessel are under consideration, Sam Dobbs is Chairman of the Committee in the Cockpit. So we sail along; and such is the perfect constitution of society at which we mariners of England have been able to arrive.

Our freedom extends to the smallest details. We have no stated hours, and we are well ahead of all rules and regulations. We have no breakfast hour, no dinner hour, no time for rising, or for going to bed. We have no particular eatables at particular meals. We don’t know the day of the month, or the day of the week; and never look at our watches, except when we wind them up. Our voice is frequently the voice of the sluggard; but we never complain, because nobody ever wakes us too soon, or thinks of interfering with our slumbering again. We wear each other’s coats, smoke each other’s pipes, poach on each other’s victuals. We are a happy, dawdling, undisciplined, slovenly lot. We have no principles, no respectability, no business, no stake in the country, no knowledge of Mrs. Grundy²⁹. We are a parcel of Lotos-Eaters³⁰; and we know nothing, except that we are poking our way along anyhow to the Scilly Islands in the Tomtit.

We rise when we have had sleep enough—any time you like between seven and ten. If I happen to be on deck first, I begin by hearing the news of the weather and the wind from Sam, Dick, or Bob at the helm. Soon the face of Mr. Migott, rosy with recent snoring, rises from the cabin, and his body follows it slowly, clad in the blue Jersey frock, which he persists in wearing night and day—in the heat of noon as in the cool of evening. He cannot be prevailed upon to give any reason for his violent attachment to this garment—only wagging his head and smiling mysteriously when we ask why, sleeping or waking, he never parts with it. Well, being up, the next thing is to make the toilette. We keep our fresh water, for minor ablutions, in an old wine cask from Bristol. The colour of the liquid is a tawny yellow; it is, in fact, weak sherry and water. For the major ablutions, we have the ship’s bucket and the sea, and a good stock of rough towels to finish with. The next thing is breakfast on deck. When we can catch fish (which is very seldom, though we are well provided with lines and bait) we fall upon the spoil immediately. At other times we range through our sea stores, eating anything we like, cooked anyhow we like. After breakfast we have two words to say to our box of peaches, nectarines, and grapes, from the hospitable country-house. Then the bedding is brought up to air; the deck is cleaned; the breakfast things are taken away; the pipes, cigars, and French novels are produced from the cabin; Mr. Migott coils himself up in a corner of the cockpit, and I perch upon the taffrail³¹; and the studies of the morning begin. They end invariably in small-talk, beer, and sleep. So the time slips away cosily till it is necessary to think about dinner.

²⁷ Variant of dullness

²⁸ Collins’s love of sauces was well known. In 1869 he wrote to a friend “I look on meat simply as a material for sauces.”

²⁹ The neighbour in *Speed the Plough* by Tom Morton (1798) who is used as a touchstone of what conventional people think and thus acts as a moral guardian.

³⁰ Variant of lotus-eater, someone given up to indolent enjoyment.

³¹ The rail at the stern of a ship.

Now all is activity on board the Tomtit. Except the man at the helm, everyone is occupied with preparations for the banquet of the day. The potatoes, onions, and celery form one department; the fire and solid cookery another; the washing of plates and dishes, knives and forks, a third; the laying of the cloth on deck a fourth; the concoction of sauces and production of bottles from the cellar a fifth. No man has any particular department assigned to him: the most active republican of the community for the time being, plunges into the most active work, and the others follow as they please. The exercise we get is principally at this period of the day, and consists in incessant dropping down from the deck to the cabin, and incessant scrambling up from the cabin to the deck. The dinner is a long business; but what do we care for that? We have no appointments to keep, no visitors to interrupt us, and nothing in the world to do but to tickle our palates, wet our whistles, and amuse ourselves in any way we please. Dinner at last over, it is superfluous to say, that the pipes become visible again, and that the taking of forty winks is only a prohibited operation on the part of the man at the helm.

As for tea-time, it is entirely regulated by the wants and wakefulness of Mr. Migott, who, since the death of Doctor Johnson, is the most desperate drinker of tea in all England³². When the cups and saucers are cleared away, a conversazione is held in the cockpit. Sam Dobbs is the best listener of the company; Dick Dobbs, who has been a yachtsman, is the jester; Bob Dobbs, the merchant sailor, is the teller of adventures; and my friend and I keep the ball going smartly in all sorts of ways, till it gets dark, and a great drought falls upon the members of the conversazione. Then, if the mermaids are anywhere near us, they may smell the fragrant fumes which tell of sacrifice to Bacchus, and may hear, shortly afterwards, the muse of song invoked by cheerful toppers. Thus the dark hours roll on jovial till the soft influences of sleep descend upon the tuneful choir, and the cabin receives its lodgers for the night.

This is the general rule of life on board the Tomtit. Exceptional incidents of all kinds—saving sea-sickness, to which nobody on board is liable—are never wanting to vary it pleasantly from day to day. Sometimes Mr. Migott gets on from taking a nap to having a dream, and records the fact by a screech of terror, which rings through the vessel and wakes the sleeper himself who always asks, “What’s that, eh?”—never believes that the screech has not come from somebody else—never knows what he has been dreaming of—and never fails to go to sleep again before the rest of the ship’s company have half done expostulating with him. Sometimes a little interesting indigestion appears among us, by way of change. Dick Dobbs, for example (who is as bilious as an Indian nabob³³) is seen to turn yellow at the helm, and to steer with a glazed eye; is asked what is the matter—replies that he has “the boil terrible bad on his stomach;” is instantly treated by Jollins (M.D.)³⁴ as follows: Two tea spoonsful of essence of ginger, two dessert spoonsful of brown brandy, two table spoonsful of strong tea. Pour down patient’s throat very hot, and smack his back smartly to promote the operation of the draught. What follows? The cure of Dick. How simple is medicine when reduced to its first principles!³⁵

Another source of amusement is provided by the ships we meet with. Whenever we get near enough, we hail the largest merchant-men in the most peremptory manner as coolly as if we had three decks under us and an admiral on board. The large ships, for the most part paralysed by our audacity, reply meekly. Sometimes we meet with a foreigner, and get answered by inarticulate yelling or disrespectful grins. But this is a rare case; the general rule is, that we maintain our dignity unimpaired all down the Channel. Then again, when no ships are near, there is the constant excitement of consulting our charts and wondering where we are. Every man of us has a different theory on this subject every time he looks at the chart; but no man rudely thrusts his theory on another, or aspires to govern the ideas of the rest in virtue of his superior obstinacy in backing his own opinion. Did I not assert a little while since that we were a pure republic? And is not this yet another and a striking proof of it?

In such pursuits and diversions as I have endeavoured to describe, the time passes quickly, happily, and adventurously, until we ultimately succeed, at four in the morning on the sixth day of our cruise, in discovering the light of the Longship’s Lighthouse, which we know to be situated off the Land’s End. We are now only some seven-and-twenty miles from the Scilly Islands, and the discovery of the lighthouse enables us to set our course by the compass cleverly enough. The wind which has thus far always remained against us, falls, on the afternoon of this sixth day, to a dead calm, but springs up again in another and a favourable quarter at eleven o’clock at night. By

³² The lexicographer Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) was known for his inextinguishable thirst for tea.

³³ A nabob was a deputy governor in the Mughal empire in India. The phrase is possibly from Thomas Macaulay (1800-1859) “The glorified spirit of a great statesman and philosopher dawdling, like a bilious old nabob at a watering place.” His *Critical and Historical Essays contributed to the Edinburgh Review* 1854 was in Collins’s library at his death and Collins was known to admire his writing. See Baker *Wilkie Collins’s Library* 2002 130.

³⁴ ie Doctor of Medicine

³⁵ Collins suffered from various intractable illnesses all his life and generally mocked the medical profession. In 1868 he wrote “Mr. Franklin replied that a course of medicine, and a course of groping in the dark, meant, in his estimation, one and the same thing.” (*The Moonstone* First Period X).

daybreak we are all on the watch for the Scilly Islands. Not a sign of them. The sun rises; it is a magnificent morning³⁶; the favourable breeze still holds; we have been bowling along before it since eleven the previous night; and ought to have sighted the islands long since. But we sight nothing: no land anywhere all round the horizon. Where are we? Have we overshot Scilly?—and is the next land we are likely to see Ushant³⁷ or Finisterre³⁸? Nobody knows. The faces of the Brothers Dobbs darken; and they recal³⁹ to each other how they deprecated from the first this rash venturing into unknown waters. We hail two ships piteously, to ask our way. The two ships can't tell us. We unroll the charts, and differ in opinion over them more remarkably than ever. The Dobbses grimly opine that it is no use looking at charts, when we have not got a pair of parallels to measure by, and are all ignorant of the scientific parts of navigation. Mr. Migott and I manfully cheer the drooping spirits of the crew with Guinness's stout⁴⁰, and put a smiling face upon it. But in our innermost hearts, we think of Columbus, and feel for him.

The last resource is to post a man at the mast-head (if so lofty an expression may be allowed in reference to so little a vessel as the Tomtit), to keep a look-out. Up the rigging swarms Dick the Biliious, in the lowest spirits—strains his eye over the waters, and suddenly hails the gaping deck with a joyous shout. The runaway islands are caught at last—he sees them a-head of us—he has no objection to make to the course we are steering—nothing particular to say but “Crack on !”—and nothing in the world to do but slide down the rigging again. Contentment beams once more on the faces of Sam, Dick, and Bob. Mr. Migott and I say nothing; but we look at each other with a smile of triumph. We remember the injurious doubts of the crew when the charts were last unrolled, and think of Columbus again, and feel for him more than ever.

Soon the islands are visible from the deck, and by noon we have run in as near them as we dare without local guidance. They are low-lying, and picturesque in an artistic point of view; but treacherous-looking and full of peril to the wary nautical eye. Horrible jagged rocks, and sinister swirlings and foamings of the sea, seem to forbid the approach to them. The Tomtit is hove to—our ensign is run up half-mast high—and we fire our double-barrelled gun fiercely for a pilot. He arrives in a long, serviceable-looking boat, with a wild, handsome, dark-haired son, and a silent, solemn old man, for his crew⁴¹. He himself is lean, wrinkled, hungry-looking; his eyes are restless with excitement, and his tongue overwhelms us with a torrent of words, spoken in a strange accent, but singularly free from provincialisms and bad grammar. He informs us that we must have been set to the northward in the night by a current, and goes on to acquaint us with so many other things, with such a fidgety⁴² sparkling of the eyes and such a ceaseless patter of the tongue, that he fairly drives me to the fore part of the vessel out of his way. Smoothly we glide along, parallel with the jagged rocks and the swirling eddies, till we come to a channel between two islands⁴³ and, sailing through that, make for a sandy isthmus, where we see some houses and a little harbour. This is Hugh Town, the chief place in St. Mary's, which is the largest island of the Scilly group. We jump ashore in high glee, feeling that we have succeeded in carrying out the purpose of our voyage in defiance of the prognostications of all our prudent friends. How sweet is triumph, even in the smallest things!

Bating⁴⁴ the one fact of the wind having blown from an unfavourable quarter, unvarying good fortune had, thus far, accompanied our cruise, and our luck did not desert us when we got on shore at St. Mary's. We went, happily for our own comfort, to the hotel kept by the master of the sailing-packet plying between Hugh Town and Penzance⁴⁵. By our landlord and his pleasant, cordial wife and family we were received with such kindness and treated with such care, that we felt really and truly at home before we had been half an hour in the house. And, by way of farther familiarising us with Scilly at first sight, who should the resident medical man turn out to be but a gentleman whom I knew⁴⁶. These were certainly fortunate auspices under which to begin our short sojourn in one of the remotest and wildest places in the Queen's dominions⁴⁷.

³⁶ The weather on Scilly that day was reported to be “most glorious” Augustus Smith to Lady Sophia Towers quoted in *Scilly and its Emperor* by SFT [Sophia Towers], Uxbridge 1873

³⁷ Also known as Ouessant, an island 12 miles off the northwestern corner of France and part of the Département du Finistère

³⁸ In fact Finistère

³⁹ Misspelling of recall

⁴⁰ Exported from Ireland to England from 1769

⁴¹ The inhabitants of the Scilly Isles were renowned for making their living from shipwrecks.

⁴² Misspelling of fidgety

⁴³ Tresco and St Mary's

⁴⁴ Excepting

⁴⁵ Captain Frank Tregarthen owner of Tregarthen's Hotel

⁴⁶ The resident doctor from 1849-1890 was Dr J G Moyle who was originally from Marazion in Cornwall. Wilkie may have met him in early August 1850 when he passed through Marazion and visited St Michael's Mount. Moyle was also an amateur artist.

⁴⁷ This was of course a ridiculous exaggeration. The British Empire extended around the world and included many far more remote and wild islands than the Scillies – 25 miles off the coast of England and enjoying a generally good climate.

The islands seem, at a rough glance, to form a great irregular circle, enclosing a kind of lagoon of sea, communicating by various channels with the main ocean all around. The circumference of the largest of the group is, as we heard, not more than thirteen miles. Five of the islands are inhabited; the rest may be generally described as masses of rock, wonderfully varied in shape and size. Inland, in the larger islands, the earth, where it is not planted or sown, is covered with heather and with the most beautiful ferns. Potatoes used to be the main product of Scilly; but the disease has appeared lately in the island crops, and the potatoes have suffered so severely that, when we filled our sack for the return voyage, we were obliged to allow for two-thirds of our supply proving unfit for use. The views inland are chiefly remarkable as natural panoramas of land and sea—the two always presenting themselves intermixed in the loveliest varieties of form and colour. On the coast, the granite rocks, though not notably high, take the most wildly and magnificently picturesque shapes. They are rent into the strangest chasms and piled up in the grandest confusion; and they look down, every here and there, on the loveliest little sandy bays, where the sea, in calm weather, is as tenderly blue and as limpid in its clearness as the Mediterranean itself. The softness and purity of the climate may be imagined, when I state that last winter none of the fresh-water pools were strongly enough frozen to bear being skated on. The balmy sea air blows over each little island as freely as it might blow over the deck of a ship.

The people have the great merit of good manners. We two strangers were so little stared at as we walked about, that it was almost like being on the Continent. The pilot who had taken us into Hugh Town harbour we found to be a fair specimen, as regarded his excessive talkativeness and the purity of his English, of the islanders generally. The longest tellers of very long stories, so far as my experience goes, are to be found in Scilly. Ask the people the commonest question, and their answer generally exhausts the whole subject before you can say another word. Their anxiety, whenever we had occasion to enquire our way, to guard us from the remotest chance of missing it, and the honest pride with which they told us all about local sights and marvels, formed a very pleasant trait in the general character. Strangely enough, in this softest and healthiest of climates consumption⁴⁸ is a prevalent disease among the people. If I may venture on an opinion, after a very short observation of their habits, I should say that distrust of fresh air and unwillingness to take exercise were the chief causes of consumptive maladies among the islanders. I longed to break windows in the main street of Hugh Town as I never longed to break them anywhere else. One lovely afternoon I went out for the purpose of seeing how many of the inhabitants of the place had a notion of airing their bedrooms. I found two houses with open windows—all the rest were fast closed from top to bottom, as if a pestilence was abroad instead of the softest, purest, heavenliest sea breeze that ever blew. Then, again, as to walking, the people ask you seriously when you enquire your way on foot, whether you are aware that the destination you want to arrive at is three miles off! As for a pedestrian excursion round the largest island—a circuit of thirteen miles—when we talked of performing that feat in the hearing of a respectable inhabitant, he laughed at the idea as incredulously as if we had proposed a swimming match to the Cornish coast. When people will not give themselves the great first chance of breathing healthily and freely as often as they can, who can wonder that consumption should be common among them?

In addition to our other pieces of good fortune, we were enabled to profit by a very kind invitation from the gentleman to whom the islands belong⁴⁹, to stay with him at his house, built on the site of an ancient abbey, and surrounded by gardens of the most exquisite beauty⁵⁰. To the wise, firm, and benevolent rule of the present proprietor of Scilly, the islanders are indebted for the prosperity which they now enjoy. It was not the least pleasant part of a very delightful visit, to observe for ourselves, under our host's guidance, all that he had done, and was doing for the welfare and the happiness of the people committed to his charge. From what we had heard, and from what we had previously observed for ourselves, we had formed the most agreeable impressions of the social condition of the islanders; and we now found the best of these impressions more than confirmed. When the present proprietor first came among his tenantry he found them living miserably and ignorantly. He has succoured, reformed, and taught them; and there is now, probably, no place in England where the direr hardships of poverty are so little known as in the Scilly Islands.

⁴⁸ The generally fatal disease now called tuberculosis. Until the mid 20th century it was widely blamed on poor ventilation but is in fact caused by a bacterium.

⁴⁹ Augustus John Smith (1804-1872) obtained a 99 year lease on the islands from the Crown in 1834 and was widely credited with rebuilding and reorganizing the economy of the Islands. MP for Truro 1857-1865. The day after Collins arrived he wrote to a friend 'The author of "Rambles beyond Railways" is now in port in a small yacht; I hope to see him here to-day (this, you know, is Mr Wilkie Collins, son of the artist).' Augustus Smith to Lady Sophia Towers, *op cit*.

⁵⁰ His house was built on the site of Tresco Abbey. Tresco is a smaller island approximately one mile to the northwest of the main island St Mary's.

I might write more particularly on this topic; but I am unwilling to run the risk of saying more on the subject of these good deeds than the good-doer himself would sanction. And besides, I must remember that the object of this narrative is to record a holiday-cruise, and not to enter into details on the subject of Scilly; details which have already been put into print by previous travellers. Let me only add then, that our sojourn in the islands terminated with the close of our stay in the house of our kind entertainer. It had been blowing a gale of wind for two days before our departure; and we put to sea with a double-reefed mainsail⁵¹, and with more doubts than we liked to confess to each other, about the prospects of the return voyage.

However, lucky we had been hitherto, and lucky we were to continue to the end. Before we had been long at sea, the wind began to get capricious; then to diminish almost to a calm; then, towards evening, to blow again, steadily and strongly, from the very quarter of all others most favourable to our return voyage. “If this holds,” was the sentiment of the Brothers Dobbs, as we were making things snug for the night, “we shall be back again at Mangerton before we have had time to get half through our victuals and drink.” It did hold, and more than hold: and the Tomtit flew, in consequence, as if she was going to give up the sea altogether, and take to the sky for a change. Our homeward run was the most perfect contrast to our outward voyage. No tacking, no need to study the charts, no laggard luxurious dining on the cabin hatch. It was too rough for anything but picnicking in the cockpit, jammed into a corner, with our plates on our knees. I had to make the grog with one hand, and clutch fast by the nearest rope with the other—Mr. Migott holding the bowl while I mixed, and the man at the helm holding Mr. Migott. As for reading, it was hopeless to try it; for there was breeze enough to blow the leaves out of the book—and singing was not to be so much as thought of; for the moment you opened your mouth the wind filled it directly, and there was an end of you. The nearer we got to Mangerton the faster we flew. My last recollection of the sea, dates at the ghostly time of midnight. The wind had been increasing and increasing, since sunset, till it contemptuously blew out our fire in the cabin, as if the stove with its artful revolving chimney had been nothing but a farthing rushlight⁵². I climbed on deck, and found that we were already in the Bristol Channel. Ragged black clouds were flying like spectres all over the sky; the moonlight streaming fitful behind them. One great ship, shadowy and mysterious, was pitching heavily towards us from the land. Backward out at sea, streamed the red gleam from the lighthouse on Lundy Island; and marching after us grandly, to the music of the howling wind came the great rollers from the Atlantic, rushing in between Hartland Point and Lundy, turning over and over in long black hills of water, with the seething spray at their tops sparkling in the moonshine. It was a fine breathless sensation to feel our sturdy little vessel tearing along through this heavy sea—jumping stern up, as the great waves caught her—dashing the water gaily from her bows, at the return dip—and holding on her way as bravely and surely as the biggest yacht that ever was built. After a long look at the sublime view around us, my friend and I went below again; and in spite of the noise of the wind and sea managed to fall asleep. The next event was a call from deck at half-past six in the morning, informing us that we were entering Mangerton Bay. By seven o’clock we were alongside the jetty again, after a run of only forty-three hours from the Scilly Islands⁵³.

Here our cruise ended, and here my narrative closes with it. Fare-thee-well, thou lively Tomtit! Tiny home of joyous days, may thy sea-fortunes be happy, and thy trim sails be set prosperously, for many a year still to the favouring breeze! And fare-ye-well heartily, honest sailor-brothers, whose helping hands never once failed us—whose zeal in our service never once slackened—whose close companionship from the day of setting out to the day of return, has left us no recollections but such as we can now recal⁵⁴ and talk over with unmixed pleasure!

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⁵¹ The mainsail is rolled or folded out of the way to minimize exposure to the wind.

⁵² A farthing is a small coin worth a quarter of a penny and was the price of a tallow candle with a wick made of rush, cheaper and a dimmer light than a wax candle.

⁵³ A journey of around 200 miles at a speed of around 4.5 knots.

⁵⁴ Misspelling of recall

