18. *An End to Boats and Middlemen*

OUR BOATS IN DINGLE SEIZED FOR RENT · THEY ROT AS UNREDEEMED PLEDGES · A POUND A COW AS RENT FOR THE FUTURE · THE ROUGH FIELD · DEATH OF MY FATHER AND MOTHER

ABOUT three years after the boats had been brought from Valencia we took them both with us to Dingle, full of everything likely to bring in money—wool, pigs, sheep, fish, and so on. They had a big cargo, and sixteen men to work them. We had a fine following wind east through the bay till we reached the quay and the landing-place in Dingle. The boats were put in safety, the crew sold all their goods, and then there was the night to spend in the town.

If that was a merry night for us, it was followed by a sorrowful noon on the morrow, for, when we went to the boats there were strangers in charge of them who wouldn't let us touch them—police who had authority to keep them from us. They had orders from the rent collectors, and, as we were not paying the rent in any other way, there was little fear that it would be paid now when we were cut off from our boats, our road through the sea, and our livelihood.

It was the talk of all Dingle—the Blasket Islanders imprisoned in the town. A number of people came from the countryside to see the wonder, and a friend or two with a trifle of money in his pocket to help us to redeem the boats.

The whole rent of the Island was demanded before there was any chance of freeing the boats, though there were

many in the Island who had nothing to do with them. Two friends of mine from the country came to me offering money to redeem my share in the boats, but I refused it with thanks, for I saw no sign that they intended to let them go yet anyhow.

We wandered up and down the streets, and a kind shopman here and there offered us money if we intended to redeem the boats; but none of us would take it: we said that if there was any idea of redeeming them, we would come back to them. And we spent another night in Dingle.

Next morning we were in gloom and misery, without any change or advance in our troubles any more than the day before. We stayed there till midday. Then we were at the end of our patience, and the sixteen of us set out from the town, breathing rage and consigning all the middlemen and landlords to the black devils. We reached Dunquin, some of us getting lifts, but most of us going on foot. We had to hire a cart to carry back whatever goods we had bought. We had spent a little money on our journey, but we were forced to put up with it and keep on until we returned to the place we had left.

We were left with no big boats then, and ever since until to-day, only canoes. The rent collectors were beside themselves, for, when the boats had been put up for sale, they couldn't find a purchaser to pay a pound for the lot, and they had to put them into a field till the moths ate them, and they never got sixpence or a penny for them. That broke the courage of the bailiffs and the rent collectors from that time on, as far as the Island went. Since they didn't get a thing out of the boats that time, it was long before any rent at all was demanded of us; and the upshot of the whole affair was that you wouldn't find it hard to reckon up all the rent we've paid from that day.

We had to take to the canoes then and do our best to fish the sea with them by day and night—lobsters by day from

Mayday to August, and mackerel by night, every night that came fine when the fish were there.

We spent a few years like this, with more strangers coming for the fish every year till there were five companies at last after them, and there was a demand for the mackerel, too. So, if it was a cruel and toilsome job to come by catches of this kind, those who were taken up with this business never knew privation or hunger. If we had been as careful of the pounds in those days as we have been for some years past, it is my belief that poverty wouldn't have come upon us so soon.

Soon after this there came a change in the world, and not in one way only. The middleman had to give up the land, and shortly after a man came to the Blasket sent by the Earl of Cork himself. At that time the rent was at the rate of two pounds per cow—that is, eighty pounds on the whole Island—and this man summoned the Islanders together to come to some sort of agreement as to how much they thought they could possibly pay—that was the sum of his business with them.

After they had spent some time thinking it over, a rake there spoke at last and said:

'My soul from the devil! if I'd consider it worth my while to put a spade in earth unless I paid at the rate of a pound a cow for it!'

If there wasn't laughter over the rascal's speech, it isn't day yet; even the gentleman laughed. They understood the poor fellow to mean that he would feel himself in God's Heaven if he held his piece of land at the pound rate, considering that his father before him paid five pounds a cow, and often enough they had to pay more even than the five pounds, for the scoundrels used to be confiscating cattle every day from anybody who had them, for in those days they didn't give a rush for the law itself, and the poor had no means of taking up a case against them.

Whatever rent there was on the land after this, there was some improvement. We were done with bailiffs and injustice from that out. When once your rent was paid, no second demand could be made for it until the right time came round again.

We passed the time like that for a good space, and the Islanders were well satisfied with the arrangement, though the rascal who suggested the rent of a pound a cow got a jab or two now and again, as they thought that they could have got it for ten shillings just as well. However, they never felt the price of anything at that time, so long as a dozen lobsters fetched ten shillings, and a hundred of mackerel a pound; there was a plentiful supply and a constant demand. I remember a tank boat coming from England with three hundred pounds of yellow gold on board, paying a shilling a fish that day—and the three hundred pounds wasn't enough to pay for the fish.

People say that the wheel is always turning, and that's a true saying, for in the part of the world that I have known it has turned many times; and if the world improved a bit round the Blaskets at that time, and God gave us that much good fortune, I fancy we didn't take the care we should have done of it, for 'easy come, easy go' is always the way.

Looking round me in this year (1888) I found I had a little field of rough land in the upper part of my holding, and I determined to break it up, for it was very old land and useless as it was, and in my enthusiasm I purposed to break in half of it that year and the other half the year after.

Often a man has made an unprofitable plan, though at other times it doesn't turn out like that. This plan of mine wasn't worth much, for it resulted in a great deal of labour for me, and I gained little from all my work. I must set my face to the strand to get weed for manure; I had an old

black ass, and he had to travel a mile and a half under every load, every step of it uphill.

Well, often has a man taken on a job, and before he'd had it long in hand he's found that he's had enough of it, and certainly that was the way with me. Very soon I was sick of it, more particularly as the old black ass was letting me down.

In the end I set half of the little field with potatoes. When I was planting them my father was in good trim; he was seventy years of age, and all that was wrong with him was that he was a bit bent. However, he used to pay a visit to this field every day, though he was getting weaker and slower every day.

Before long he began to give up his visits to the field altogether, though he was keen enough about it at first. One day, when I imagined he was in the field, I looked out and I couldn't see a sign of him there, and that struck me as odd. I asked a lad who was going by for news of him, and he said that he was in the house of Kate, his daughter, and sure enough there I found him.

'Father,' I said to him, 'wasn't I thinking that it was in the little field you were since you had your morning meal?'

'I don't hanker after it much,' said he.

'But you had a great fancy for it at first.'

'I had, but I don't feel like that now. I shan't see a potato come up in that field.'

There are many things we don't heed until it's too late. And after my father was buried I regretted that I hadn't questioned him and asked him whether he had seen or heard anything in the field when he visited it. No doubt, something of the kind happened to him, considering that he dated his life's end so accurately.

My father was in the grave before the potatoes showed above the ground. That left more of the world's trouble on poor Tomás; and that wasn't the end of my troubles either.

Round about Mayday there were mackerel to be caught that year, and we made a good penny out of them. I had five pounds put by at the end of a single week. Then my father died, and I had to take my five pounds and coffin him with them. Coffins weren't as dear in those days as they are to-day. The whole funeral cost about ten pounds then. It has often cost thirty pounds since then.

After I had gone through all this I had to wring more work out of my bones, and after all my toil working the little field there weren't two sackfuls of potatoes in it; only I got three crops of oats from it and the last crop was the best of them.

I set about the other side of the little field the next year, and I made a great deal more profit out of this half than out of the other that I had broken up first, for I had more experience of the nature of the soil, and I arranged my manuring to suit it.

There were ten sacks in this half of the field, and oats, too, for three years, for I paid more attention to it, as my eyes had been opened by my experience of the other half. Another thing, too, many a neighbour soul gave me his blessing, for I often reached my hand out to them when they wanted seed.

A short while after this my mother began to fail and to bid this world farewell, being eighty-two years old now. She had no cramp in hand or foot at that age, and she stood as straight as ever she did in the days of her youth. She was not ill long once she had been taken sick, and maybe it was as well for her to be done with the world then; and I had small chance to look after her then, the affairs of the world were so thick upon me. One night she was very bad and I had decided to stay up with her, when who should come in to me but uncle Diarmid, and he told us all to go to bed at once; he it was who would tend on the sick woman till morning.

Before the dawn came he called out: 'She's in the next world.'

I set about getting myself ready to face for Dingle to get the furnishings for the funeral. The weather stayed fine till my mother reached her family churchyard in Ventry—a long journey by sea and land from the Blasket, and, although there was a fine following of many horse-drawn cars, it was on men's shoulders that she went to her grave.

So ended the two who put the sound of the Gaelic language in my ears the first day. The blessing of God be with their souls!

19. *The Little Canoe*

MY BROTHER BACK FROM AMERICA · FISHING FOR LOBSTERS · THE SHIP WITH THE GENTLEFOLK · THE STRONG DRINK · LOBSTERS AT NIGHT · 'THE SHAMROCK' · THE SEALS ON THE ROCK · THE DRIFTING BEAMS

A WHILE after this my brother Pats came over from America to me. I was amazed at his coming over this second time, for his two sons were grown up by this; and I fancied they were on the pig's back since they were on the other side. When I saw my brother after his return, anybody would have conjectured from his ways that it was in the woods he had spent his time in America. He was hardly clothed; he had an ill appearance; there wasn't a red farthing in his pocket; and two of his friends in America paid for his passage across with their own money. Though he hadn't had a day out of work all those long years he had spent every penny of his pay on his two sons; he wouldn't let them go to work, and any sixpence that was left over when he had paid the expenses of the three of them, it was his way to go to a bar and drink it up—and I fancy that it was little enough that he had to drink with.

I don't mean to spend much of my story talking about them, but will make a clean sweep of them and their fortunes: how they dealt with the father who had worked for them all those years, spending his sweat in the States of America trying to make men of them, to bring them up to man's years—and succeeding. The sum of the whole matter is that not a one of those two has ever asked after him since.

I knew my brother's mind and manners well enough beforehand, and though that was so, what was I to do?

I couldn't send the only brother I had adrift after he had come back from America. The fact is it was as much as he could do to keep in his right wits, and, if it hadn't been so, he wouldn't have had to depend on anybody, for he was the best worker to be found wherever he went. But where will you find a wise man without his weak side?

Well, just at this time there was fine fishing to be had round the Blaskets—mackerel and lobsters—and a great demand for them, and when I saw that Paddy was minded to help me, I thought the best thing I could do was to invent some way to put him to use.

The plan I fixed on was to take an old canoe that I had and cut it down so that it would be easy for two to carry it up and down, for most of the canoes at that time had only a crew of two for the lobster fishing in the season. We used to have a score of pots in the little canoe, and it would have delighted your heart to watch us fighting the sea with her, and I tell you that we did well at the fishing, though we never went far from home. We used to work round Beginish, and so we managed to get home for the three meals of the day. Others of the canoes used to go far afield, as far away as the Teeraght, Inishtooshkert, Inish na Bró, and Inishvickillaun—all the Lesser Blaskets.

The crews that went far afield like this had to take provisions with them every day and stay out from the dark of morning till the dark of night, and they were pretty tired by the day's end. No doubt the lobsters were far more plentiful in those islands than near home, though the home-worker drew level with them, for he visited his pots more often.

We sold many a pound's worth to the vessels that plied north and south through the Sound of the Great Blasket. They would have their 'speckled snowy sails' set, and often there wasn't a breath of wind out of the sky. We often

had our dinner on board, and we used to give them crabs and other small fish: they would give us tobacco and other things, and a glass of whisky for me—Pats never tasted a drop after he had left America, for he had bought his sense.

One fine day there came to us through the Sound from the south a small steamship towing another ship after her that had only sails, and was painted every colour under heaven. The sailing ship was black with people, every one of them looking more of a gentleman than his fellows as far as dress and ribbons went. The two ships were travelling slowly so that they could look at our Blaskets in comfort.

It happened that I was hauling up a pot near them at this moment, and what should be in it but a blue lobster and a crayfish, just as the two ships were passing by us on their way north. I held up the crayfish in one hand and the lobster in the other, and no sooner had I done that than every soul in the ships on deck, man and woman, was beckoning to us, and they stopped short on the surface of the sea till we came up to them. Nobody was ever welcomed like the two old fishermen. We had a dozen lobsters and two dozen crabs and three dozen of other fish, and the gentry didn't worry about how we looked, or our little canoe; all they thought about was to get fresh fish from us. One of the crew lowered a bucket to take up the lobsters, and when I looked at the bucket I fancied that he wouldn't have put a lobster in it for five pounds—it was such a fine vessel! He lowered it again to take up the crabs, and a third time for the other fish.

When he had collected all the contents of the little canoe on deck, he lowered the bucket again without a moment's delay, and, upon my oath, I thought that it was a hunk of bread that we had in the stern of the canoe that he wanted this time. But it wasn't as I thought, for,

when I caught it in my hand and looked at it, what was to be seen in it was money. The man who lowered it to me spoke in English and said that there was a shilling for every fish I had sent up to him in the bucket. My gentleman drew the bucket up again, and before long I saw it coming down to me again, heaped up and running over, and the greatest lady of all on board was letting it down this time, so I thought, and she was the finest woman for manners and beauty that I ever saw. The bucket was crammed with every kind of food and 'kitchen', and I couldn't put a name to half of them. When I had emptied it in the stern of the boat, I doffed my cap and bowed to the lady, thanking her.

Soon a man came to the waist of the ship and told me to hand him the empty bottle we had in the boat. I did so, and before long he sent it down full of clear water, and asked me again whether we had another bottle in the boat. We hadn't. He left me again, and when he came back he had a splendid bottle with him that would hold about six glasses. He handed it down and told me to use a good deal of water with a little of the contents of the other bottle.

We said farewell to one another with a blessing. By this time we were a mile and a half from land. That wasn't far, for the day was fine. We had not parted with one another for long when my ill fortune prompted me to try what was in that bottle. The other man said that I'd better have sense and move in to the land first before I tasted it, and that I had plenty of time for it.

It was no good talking to me. I said that all I wanted to do was to taste it to see what sort of drink it was. I thought that, unless it was some special sort of poison, I should be safe enough with it; but, as with everything else, a poor sinner can't do what is best for himself. It was the little wooden cup that we used for the bailer that I took, and I poured about a spoonful, I thought, out of the bottle.

When Pats saw how little I had poured out, he said: 'Since you are at it, what's the good of a trifle?'

'Try the river before you venture into the current,' said I, like a wise man. And that's the last word he got out of me for two hours after that. We'd gone about a mile of the way by this, and there was another half-mile to go, and, to cap all, there was a gust of wind blowing, working up to a flurry, white with foam. That much I had seen before I drank the stuff in the cup.

Down it went. When I had drunk it, I stood a moment —so Pats told me afterwards—and then fell flat in the bottom of the canoe. The poor fellow thought I was dead, and fancied that there must have been poison in the bottle, and that the gentry had given it me by mistake. The poor chap worked the very stuff and marrow out of his bones struggling to make the land. Just after he had got there, at his last gasp, to a sheltered pool inside a creek in Beginish, that's when I came out of my swoon, with no hurt or harm.

'Maybe you'd better take another little drop of it!' said Pats to me.

I realized that it was disgust made him say that, and I kept quiet. Indeed, I was ashamed enough when I saw what a gale was blowing outside, and understood what a hard time he had had of it trying to make the creek with the little canoe, with me lying a dead weight in the bottom of it.

The gale was still raging, with no sign of settling; but all the same we had the shelter of the land now, and, to be sure, we weren't an unprovisioned boat at that moment. Though we were by Beginish—and that wasn't far from home—we had no thought of leaving the creek where we were.

After a while the gale went down a bit, so that Pats said:

'Perhaps we might manage to lift the pots? There's a lull in the wind by these rocks.'

I wasn't very keen to do it, but he was a man who liked to have attention paid to what he said, and when you crossed him, he'd be no use for three days to come.

We set about doing what he proposed. Most of the work fell on himself, for he was doing the rowing, while I was lifting the pots. We'd only just lifted them when the gale blew the crests clean off the waves. We managed to make the creek again. We got a dozen lobsters out of the pots.

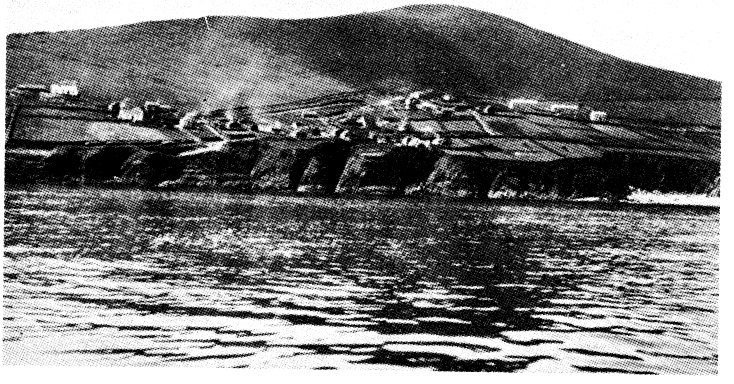
It was midnight by the time we reached the Island that night, and our people were in a terrible state of mind, going round to get help to go and look for us, for they were sure we were drowned.

That was a great year for fish. At every shift of the pots you would get a dozen lobsters, and that meant a dozen shillings: those twelve shillings bought a half-sack of flour, and eight shillings a half-sack of meal, and so with everything else. A poor man could live easily enough in those days.

After those ships had gone from me there came an exceptionally fine month, without a ripple on the sea anywhere, and that was the sort of weather that was best for catching the fish that were going; and, what was even better, there was a great call for any fish you had. Pats and I were doing very well with the little canoe, for we had all the range we wanted, and there was nobody to interfere with us. The lobsters come into the pots best in the late evening. One evening we were very late, and they were going in thick and fast.

'It's a great shame for anyone to go home on a calm, peaceful night that isn't long or chilly,' says Pats to me, 'when there's gold to be got in the pots. If the folk of this place had been where I was for a while, they'd have a bit more knowledge.'

SCHOOLCHILDREN



APPROACHING THE ISLAND FROM THE MAINLAND

'Before we get home now it'll be day again,' says he. 'Let's leave the pots a bit and there'll be as much again in them as we've got out of them already, and, if that's so, isn't it a pity to leave them there.'

Now, he was the kind of man that, if you didn't give him his head, wouldn't go with you to-morrow, however much you needed him; and so, though I wasn't too pleased with the idea, I had to fall in with him, or I should have had to work the little canoe alone the next day.

'Come along,' says he, 'we've given them time enough; we'll have a look at them.'

So we did. When we drew up the first pot, you never heard such a row as was going on in it.

'I fancy there's a conger in it,' says Pats, who was at the oars in the bow.

'No, I don't think so.'

I thrust my hand down into the pot and drew out a fine lobster, and another one after him.

'Are there two in it?' says the man in the prow.

'There are. Two fine ones, too,' said I to him.

'That's two shillings. O, God of the Miracles! how I should have had to sweat in America to make two shillings, and all I have to do here is to pull up a pot through two fathoms of water!'

When we'd finished drawing the pots, there were a dozen splendid lobsters in them.

'Mary Virgin! how many easy shillings there are in the sea!' says he. 'When you think of other places where you have to sweat blood to make a shilling! 'Pon my soul and body, there are people in America who, if they could come by money as easily as this, would never slumber or sleep. They'd be pulling up all the time.'

I believed him well enough so far as that went, though he blethered a lot generally, and I often had some difficulty in believing him. I wasn't so ignorant that I

couldn't understand how it was in countries overseas—hard work, and the ganger spying on you, two of them sometimes.

We waited about an hour when I saw him putting out his oars again.

'It looks as though we were going to sleep altogether. Since we are spending the night out, we may as well have something for it,' says he, throwing into the sea one of the pot ropes in the bow which anchored the canoe while we were at rest.

As I've said already, I had to act as his servant instead of being the master, or we'd never have got anything done. We started to work again, and when we'd finished with the pots, we had another dozen. We anchored again.

'No wonder there are so many poor wretches on the coasts of Ireland,' says Pats, 'as indeed there are, and may there be more of them! For they deserve to be—such a crowd of lazy devils, snoring away at this time on a fine calm night, when there's gold and silver to be made for a little trouble and sweat.'

You might think there was something in what he said. Still you have to consider that a poor sinner can't keep at it night and day alike.

We stopped for a bit. I fancy that I dropped off into a doze. He said I did, and that I had a good bout of sleep.

'I think the grey glimmer of dawn is coming and that we'd best take another turn out of the pots, and then we'll get home, and not a soul will know how we've spent the night,' says Pats, throwing off the rope and putting out his oars.

I promise you I wasn't so lively by this time—the morning was beginning to peer then. I had an empty belly and was all numb and chill, whatever was the case with the man in the prow. But I pulled myself together, since I had to, and by the time we had the pots drawn, I was broad

awake, and we had a dozen more lobsters, and two on the top of that.

When we turned our faces home, what should we see but a vessel coming to anchor, and it was plain that it was a stranger. She was in the Sound in front of us, and it wouldn't take us out of our way to go and have a word with her. When we came alongside we saw her name—*The Shamrock*. She had a tank for lobsters inside her, and it was lobsters she was after. They asked us how many lobsters we had, and how much we wanted for them. We told the captain that we hadn't much on board, but that we had as much again in a store pot over there. Moreover, we wouldn't ask more of him than we would off any other ship.

'Off with you, then, and bring all you have in the pot,' says he. We went, and the pot wasn't too far away. We came back to her with six dozen. He counted them one by one and handed three gold sovereigns to us. That was the catch of one day and one night. I told the captain so and that we had been up all night. We were pretty tired, but all the same our night was well paid. He told us at once to come on board. We begged his pardon, saying that we weren't far from home now. He wouldn't accept that, but made us come on board. 'We've got a meal ready here, and eat your fill,' says he.

We had to accept his invitation. We made a good meal. I was rather shy, being so smudgy and dirty in a place like that, but the other chap never gave it a thought; all he wanted was to fill his belly; he'd left all the shyness and nervousness of his early days in foreign lands, and he told me, too, that if I'd been away from home a bit, I wouldn't have cared what sort of a place I got food to eat in.

When I came on deck the captain was strolling up and down, and he began to question us about the lobsters, and he asked whether there were more of them about the

Island. We told him how things were. In a while we left him and bade farewell. When we reached the harbour, some of the others were just leaving it, and another lot were still in bed.

When we had landed the canoe, Pats said:

'We'd better take a bottle of milk and a dozen eggs out to the ship. We shan't be long.'

I liked to hear him speak in this generous style; though often enough he said things that didn't please me. Off I went along the Island, and he stayed where he was until I came back with two dozen eggs and a bottle of milk. We went out again to the little ship. I handed up the bottle and the box of eggs. One of the crew caught hold of them at once and took them on board—for they've no way of getting eggs and milk while they are ploughing the sea. When the box came back, it was full to the brim—biscuits, tobacco, a joint of meat—and to top all, when I searched the box afterwards, what should I find there but half a pint of whisky. We rowed in and went home and went to bed till dinner-time—a new thing for us to do.

After our dinner we went out again and began to pull up the pots and set them in trim ready for twilight, for that's the time when the lobsters go into the pots most—they don't like the middle of the day; it's too bright. As the sun was sinking into the sea, we fell to pulling them up again, and they were well filled. We made out then that the night is the best time for catching them. And from that time on we used to spend every fine night out on the sea, so that we made first-rate catches, and nobody knew.

Far on in the autumn, one fine night that we were anchored with a lobster pot rope, we heard a singing, soft and long and sweet, in the deep middle of the night, to the northward of us on some rocks that lay about half a mile from us. My heart leapt in me, and I felt very odd.

'Do you hear it?' said I to the other man.

'I hear it well enough,' said he.

'Let's be off home,' said I.

'Yerra, you poor wretch, they're only seals,' said he.

'They can't be seals, for they have a human voice!'

'Yes, they are indeed, and anyone can tell that you've never heard one of them before. It's their way to carry on like a human being when some more of them come ashore to join the rest, and there's a crowd of them high and dry on those rocks to the west now.'

I partly believed him, and I knew that these people that travel to the lands across the sea don't worry themselves over anything, dead or alive. And at that thought I had to give in.

Before long I heard it again, long and soft and sweet, and it sounded to me like 'Eamonn Mágáine', just as it might come from human lips; and all I could do was to keep my feelings down. As for the other fellow, he tuned up a song himself. They were singing in the west and he in the east. I fancy he did it to put heart in me.

Well, we took a shift out of the pots, and there was a good dozen lobsters in them.

'Have you got a dozen?' says he.

'I have exactly, neither less nor more.'

'Isn't it the devil's own pity you didn't fly off home at the crooning of the seals. You'd be badly left in the countries across the sea.'

No doubt he was right enough as far as that went, though at other times he was often pretty far out. He went on till he came to anchor on the same rope again, and, to top all, this was in the place where the seals could be heard most clearly.

While we were settling down there wasn't a whistle or a cry from anything; but before long they raised their voices in chorus, so that they could be heard everywhere around.

'I wonder what sets them raving like this now and again,' said I to the other chap, 'while they keep quiet at other times.'

'Every time a seal comes to them from the sea, that's when they go on like this. Another has just come ashore, and they were asleep till that happened.'

By this time they were singing so that none ever heard at market or fair so many songs in concert together, and the sound of the one song weaving in and out of the other. I cleaned him out of all he had to say about the seals, for he had a great deal of knowledge of things, far more than I who had never left the corner of the hearth.

'Wait till the day dawns—and I fancy it's not far off now—and you'll see something: all the seals high and dry on those rocks to the west,' said he.

'But I've often seen one of them by himself ashore on a rock,' said I.

'That wouldn't be all you'd have seen of them if it had been a habit of yours to be abroad in the night. You'll pay no attention to them the next night you hear them, my lad.'

I understood him very well by the time he'd got through with this last sentence, hinting, as it were, that I shouldn't fail to be eager to come the very next night! In a little while he said that the dapple of day was beginning to show in the east and we had just as well be shifting the pots again.

'Wait till there is more light in the day, and then we shall have less trouble looking for them from place to place.'

The upshot of it all was that it was bright enough by the time we moved, and at that very moment the singers went completely crazy, every last one of them tuning up in chorus.

'It won't be long till those lads over there will be leaving the rocks,' says Pats.

Soon the full light of day was come and we could see the seals in crowds on the ridge of the rock, some of them with

their heads in the air, another one snapping at his fellows on this side and on that, and, far above them all, a huge big chap lying without a stir on the rock. The other man said to me that this fellow was still asleep, and that, when he should wake, then the hurly-burly would begin. You would have thought to listen to him that he'd spent his life among them, he was so much better at explaining them than I was.

We stayed anchored to our pot till nearly every one of them had taken to the water, and they wasted that much of the morning's work for us. At last the big fellow woke up out of his slumber, and when he lifted his head you could hear the savage scream he let out of him ringing all round. He was the foreman of the whole gang, big and little. Before long he started down.

He was a bull, as huge a bull as was ever on dry land. He shoved his snout under the seal next to him and flung him into the air as high as a boat's mast, and he never stayed in his flight till he came down out in the sea. Then began the fight at the fair when the rest of them saw that. They hurried to the water at their best speed, and, if any seal went too slow, when this chap came up with him, he put his snout under him and lifted him into the sky ever and always till he'd got them into the water, the whole crowd that had been high and dry on the rock, and there were a lot of them.

The big fellow stayed a while after them on the rock to take breath and to see if he had the whole herd together. Then he, too, plunged into the sea, and the two of us agreed that the wave he raised where he struck the water would have sunk a small ship. All the time this hurly-burly was going on they made neither whistle nor cry, believe me.

We should have had all our pots lifted and safe well enough while this row was going on, and I expected that the other chap wouldn't wait so long, but he did: I fancy

that the tricks they were playing gave him just as odd a feeling as they gave me. We pulled up the pots quickly enough after this, for they were easily seen since there wasn't much water above them. We had made a fair catch by morning, a good three dozen. I tell you that, even though our canoe was a little one, the catch was big. We spent the whole season like this every fine night. Not much goes into the pots by day or night when the sea is troubled. The lobster likes to have the sea calm and quiet when he peers about him.

One morning we were ready to come home and there was a little breath of wind blowing from the west, and when we started there were some spars of drift timber to be seen. We picked them up. There were some more to be got in other places. We soon had the canoe full, and some more were still floating on the tide. We had to turn in to Beginish and clear the boat and push out once more. The driftwood was coming in masses round a point where there was a swirl of tide. There were white planks, absolutely new, afloat. We had to untie a rope from a pot and bind together a dozen planks with it and tow them in our wake and row back to where we had the rest and land them. We took sixteen of them that turn, and hoped to get more while that tide was running. The only thing that was troubling me now was hunger. It was heavy work after a night out, and the toil of getting the planks together was great, but we were determined to carry on so long as there was a piece adrift. As for the Yank, he never felt tired or hungry.

I let him know that I was getting hungry, and high time, too. I wanted to see what he would say, making trial of him, as it were.

'Yerra, my lad! surely you remember the old saying, "Take the fish while you can get him", or do you think that there'll be driftwood to be got any time you like?' says Pats.

I had expected that that would be the answer I should get, for I knew that he was right and that stuff of this kind isn't going all the time. We never stopped so long as the tide that was collecting the driftwood for us held. Our hunger passed from us as the time for taking food went by. A man grows gradually weaker from that time on, and so it was with us.

Later on in the day we saw first one boat and then another, gathering the driftwood like ourselves on this side and on that. By this time the two of us had saved about three-score white planks with the little canoe in Beginish. The poor lout of a Yank worked hard that day. Often enough we'd be a long way from the shore by the time I had a dozen planks tied up, and it was he who'd land them without any help from me.

We were all right, but then what about our people at home—we had left home just after dinner the day before, and now it was dinner-time on the next day and we hadn't returned—all they could think was that we were lost.

Any canoes that were about the houses at this time—and few they were, for they were in the little islands busied about their pots—the few that were not, were in quest of the driftwood by this time. And so there wasn't an oar or a canoe in the creek to go to look for us.

When we were weary and worn and the tide had turned and the timber was growing scarce, we set our face homewards; and I tell you, dear reader, if there had been a puff of wind against us, we should never have made it.

The talk of the village was the quantity of timber that the two of us, with our little canoe, had collected in Beginish, and for many days after that we found planks and fragments and pieces of timber. We sold about half of the Beginish stuff there, and the other half we had to bring home with us, for not a bit of saved timber could ever be left without being stolen.