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KEZIAH COFFIN



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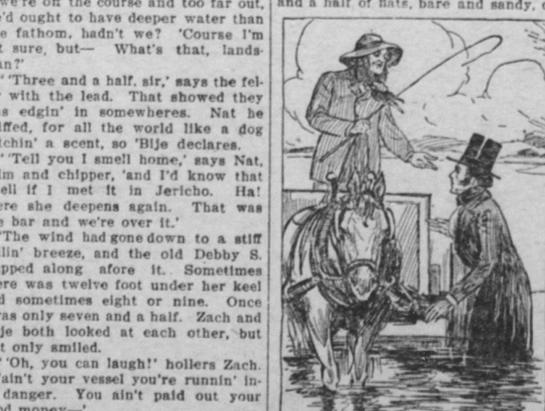
Joseph C. Lincoln Author of Cy Whittaker's Place Cap'n Eri, Etc. Illustrations by Ellsworth Young

SYNOPSIS. Mrs. Keziah Coffin, supposed widow, is arranging to move from Trumet to Boston, following the death of her brother, for whom she had kept house. Kyran Pepper, widower, offers marriage, and is indignantly refused. Capt. Elikanah Daniels, leader of the Regular church offers Keziah a place as housekeeper for the new minister, and she decides to remain in Trumet. Keziah takes charge of Rev. John Ellery, the new minister, and gives him advice as to his conduct toward members of the parish. Ellery causes a sensation by attending a "Come-outer" meeting. Ellery's presence is bitterly resented by Eben Hammond, leader of her guardian and Ellery escorts her home in the rain. Capt. Nat Hammond, Eben's son, becomes a hero by bringing the packet into port safely through fog and storm. Ellery finds Keziah writing a letter to some one, inclosing money in response to a demand. She curiously started when informed of the arrival of Nat. Nat calls on Keziah and it develops that they have been lovers since youth. Daniels remonstrates with Ellery for attending "Come-outer" meetings.

CHAPTER V.—(Continued.) "Stand by!" roars Nat. "It's a squall, dead astern and comin' abillin'! I'll take her, 'Bije. You look out for them tops'ls." "So Nat grabs the wheel and 'Bije tears forward and sends the two fo' mast hands aloft on the jump. Zach was skipper, but all he done was race around and holler and trip over his own feet. It hit 'em 'fore they got even one tops' clewed down. That one, the foretop's 'twas, split to rags. The main tops' was set, and when the squall struck, the rotten old topmast went by the board 'Kerrash-oh!' Course splinters flew like all possessed, and one of 'em, about a foot long, sailed past Nat's head, where he stood heavy in his whole weight on the wheel, and lit right on the binnacle, smashin' it to match.

CHAPTER VI. In Which Captain Nat Picks Up a Derelict. It is probable that John Ellery never fully realized the debt of gratitude he owed to the fog and the squall and to Captain Nat Hammond. Trumet, always hungry for a sensation, would have thoroughly enjoyed arguing and quarreling over the minister's visit to the Come-Outer meeting, and, during the fracas, Keziah's parson might have been more or less battered. But Captain Nat's brilliant piloting of the old packet was a bit of seamanship which every man and woman on that foambordered stretch of sand could understand and appreciate, and the minister's indiscretion was all but forgotten in consequence. The "Daily Advertiser" gloated over it, of course, and Captain Elikanah brought it up at the meeting of the parish committee, but there Captain Zeb Mayo championed the young man's course and proclaimed that, fur's he was concerned, he was for Mr. Ellery more'n ever. "A young greenhorn with the spunk to cruise singlehanded right into the middle of the Come-Outer school and give an old bull whale like Eben and the gaff is the man for my money," declared Zeb. Most of his fellow-committee agreed with him. "Not guilty, but don't do it again," was the general verdict.

Keziah watched anxiously for a hint concerning her parson's walk in the rain with Grace, but she heard nothing, so congratulated herself that the secret had been kept. The tide at Trumet, on the bay side, goes out for a long way, leaving uncovered a mile and a half of flats, bare and sandy, or anchored right in the deep hole inside the breakwater, as sure as I'm knee high to a marlin spike!



"Better Get Aboard, Hadn't You?" carpeted with sea weed. Between these flats are the channels, varying at low water from two to four feet in depth, but deepening rapidly as the tide flows. The best time to visit the flats—tide serving, of course—is the early morning at sunrise. Then there is an inspiration in the wide expanse, a snap and tang and joy in the air. Ellery had made up his mind to take a before-breakfast tramp to the outer bar and so arose at five, tucked a borrowed pair of fisherman's boots beneath his arm, and, without saying anything to his housekeeper, walked down the lawn behind the parsonage, climbed the rail fence, and "cut across lots" to the pine grove on the bluff. There he removed his shoes, put on the boots, waded through the nearly yellow sand forming the slope of the bluff, and came out on the white beach and the inner edge of the flats. Then he

splashed on, bound out to where the fish weirs stood, like webby fences, in the distance. A cart, drawn by a plodding horse and with a single individual on its high seat, was moving out from behind the breakwater. Some fisherman driving out his weir, probably. The minister had been on the bar a considerable time before he began to think of returning to the shore. He was hungry, but was enjoying himself too well to mind. The flats were all his that morning. Only the cart and its driver were in sight and they were half a mile off. He looked at his watch, sighed, and reluctantly started to walk toward the town; he mustn't keep Mrs. Coffin's breakfast waiting too long.

The first channel he came to was considerably deeper than when he forded it on the way out. He noticed this, but only vaguely. The next, however, was so deep that the water splashed in at the top of one of his boots. He did notice that, because though he was not wearing his best clothes, he was not anxious to wet his "other ones." The extent of his wardrobe was in keeping with the size of his salary. And the third channel was so wide and deep that he saw at once it could not be forded, unless he was willing to plunge above his waist. He hurried along the edge, looking for a shallower place, but found none. At last he reached the point of the flat he was on and saw, to his dismay, that here was the deepest spot yet, a hole, scoured out by a current like a mill race. Turning, he saw, creeping rapidly and steadily together over the flat behind him, two lines of foam, one from each channel. His retreat was cut off.

He was in for a wetting, that was sure. However, there was no help for it, so he waded in. The water filled his boots there, it gurgled about his hips, and beyond, as he could see, it seemed to grow deeper and deeper. The current was surprisingly strong; he found it difficult to keep his footing in the soft sand. It looked as though he must swim for it, and to swim in that tide would be no joke. Then, from behind him, came a hall. He turned and saw moving toward him through the shallow water now covering the flat beyond the next channel, the cart he had seen leave the shore by the packet wharf, and, later, on the outer bar. The horse was jogging along, miniature geysers spouting beneath its hoofs. The driver waved to him.

"Hold on, mate," he called. "Belay there. Stay where you are. I'll be alongside in a shake. Git dap, January!" Ellery waded back to meet this welcome arrival. The horse plunged into the next channel, surged through it, and emerged dripping. The driver pulled the animal into a walk. "Say," he cried, "I'm cruisin' your way; better get aboard, hadn't you? There's kind of a heavy dew this mornin'. Whoa, Bill!" "Bill" or "January" stopped with apparent willingness. The driver leaned down and extended a hand. The minister took it and was pulled up to the seat.

"Whew!" he panted. "I'm much obliged to you. I guess you saved me from a ducking, if nothing worse." The horse, a sturdy, sedate beast to whom all names seemed to be alike, picked up his feet and pounded them down again. Showers of spray flew about the heads of the pair on the seat. "I ain't so sure about that duckin'," commented the rescuer. "Hum! I guess likely we'll be out of soundin's if we tackle that sink hole you was undertakin' to navigate. Let's try it a little further down." Ellery looked his companion over. "Well," he observed, with a smile, "from what I've heard of you, Captain Hammond, I rather guess you could navigate almost any water in this locality and in all sorts of weather." The driver turned in surprise. "So?" he exclaimed. "You know me, do you? That's funny. I was tryin' to locate you, but I ain't been able to. You ain't a Trumette, I'll bet on that."

"Yes, I am." "Tut! tut! you don't tell me. Say, Shipmate, you hurt my pride. I did think there wa'n't a soul that ever trod sand in this village that I couldn't name on sight, and give the port they hailed from and the names of their owners. But you've got me on my beam ends. And yet you knew me." "Of course I did. Everybody knows the man that brought the packet home." The cart was afloat. The horse, finding wading more difficult than swimming, began to swim. "Now I'm skipper again, sure enough," remarked Hammond. "Ain't gettin' seasick, are you?" The minister laughed. "No," he said. "Good! she keeps on a fairly even keel, considerin' her build. There she strikes! That'll do, January; you needn't try for a record voyage. Walkin' more in your line than playin' steamboat. We're over the worst of it now. Say! you and I didn't head for port any too soon, did we?" "No, I should say not. I ought to have known better than to wait out there so long. I've been warned about this tide."

"S-sh-sh! that's all right. Always glad to pick up a derelict, may be a chance for salvage, you know. Here's the last channel and it's an easy one. There! now it's plain sailin' for dry ground." The old horse, breathing heavily from his exertions, trotted over the stretch of yet uncovered flats and soon mounted the slope of the beach. The minister prepared to alight. "Captain Hammond," he said, "you haven't asked me my name." "No, I seldom do more'n once. There have been times when I'd just as soon

cruise without too big letters hangin' side my figurehead." "Well, my name is Ellery." "Hey? What? Oh, ho! ho! ho!" He rocked back and forth on the seat. The minister's feelings were a bit hurt, though he tried not to show it. "You mustn't mind my laughin'," explained Nat, still chuckling. "It ain't at you. It's just because I was wonderin' what you'd look like if I should meet you and now— Ho! ho! You see, Mr. Ellery, I've heard of you, same as you said you'd heard of me." The minister, who had jumped to the ground, looked up. "Captain Hammond," he said, "I'm very glad indeed that I met you. Not alone because you helped me out of a bad scrape; I realize how bad it might have been and that—"

"Shesh, shh! Nothin' at all. Don't be foolish." "But I'm glad, too, because I've heard so many good things about you that I was sure you must be worth knowin'. I hope you won't believe I went to your father's meeting with any—"

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