

The poor woman,—a sailor's widow, in very humble circumstances,—raised her hands in astonishment : “ O, my unlucky boy,” she exclaimed, “ what's this?—what brings you here ?” “ The little doggies, mither,” said the boy ; “ I couldna drown the little doggies ; and I took them to you.” What afterwards befell the “ little doggies,” I know not ; but trivial as the incident may seem, it exercised a marked influence on the circumstances and destiny of at least two generations of creatures higher in the scale than themselves. The boy, as he stubbornly refused to return to the farm-house, had to be sent on shipboard, agreeably to his wish, as a cabin-boy ; and the writer of these chapters was born, in consequence, a sailor's son, and was rendered, as early as his fifth year, mainly dependent for his support on the sedulously plied but indifferently remunerated labors of his only surviving parent at the time, a sailor's widow.

The little boy of the farm-house was descended from a long line of seafaring men,—skilful and adventurous sailors,—some of whom had coasted along the Scottish shores as early as the times of Sir Andrew Wood and the “ bold Bartons,” and mayhap helped to man that “ verrie monstrous schippe the Great Michael,” that “ cumbered all Scotland to get her to sea.” They had taken as naturally to the water as the Newfoundland dog or the duckling. That waste of life which is always so great in the naval profession had been more than usually so in the generation just passed away. Of the boy's two uncles, one had sailed around the world with Anson, and assisted in burning Païta, and in boarding the Manilla galleon ; but on reaching the English coast he mysteriously disappeared, and was never more heard of. The other uncle, a remarkably handsome and powerful man,—or, to borrow the homely but not inexpressive language in which I have heard him described, “ as *pretty* a fellow as ever stepped in shoe-leather,”—perished at sea in a storm ; and several years after, the boy's father, when entering the Frith of Cromarty, was struck overboard, during a sudden gust, by the boom of his vessel, and, apparently stunned by the blow, never rose again.