

FRED.

~~They were. They still are, though years have rolled over their heads.~~ But this afternoon my obligation ceases. Individually, I love you all with affection unspeakable; but, collectively, I look upon you with a disgust that amounts to absolute detestation. Oh! pity me, my beloved friends, for such is my sense of duty that, once out of my indentures, I shall feel myself bound to devote myself heart and soul to your extermination!

ALL.

Poor lad – poor lad! (All weep.)

KING.

Well, Frederic, if you conscientiously feel that it is your duty to destroy us, we cannot blame you for acting on that conviction. Always act in accordance with the dictates of your conscience, my boy, and chance the consequences.

SAM.

Besides, we can offer you but little temptation to remain with us. We don't seem to make piracy pay. I'm sure I don't know why, but we don't.

FRED.

I know why, but, alas! I mustn't tell you; it wouldn't be right.

KING.

Why not, my boy? It's only half-past eleven, and you are one of us until the clock strikes twelve.

SAM.

True, and until then you are bound to protect our interests.

ALL.

Hear, hear!

FRED.

Well, then, it is my duty, as a pirate, to tell you that you are too tenderhearted. For instance, you make a point of never attacking a weaker party than yourselves, and when you attack a stronger party, you invariably get thrashed.

KING.

There is some truth in that.

FRED.

Then, again, you make a point of never molesting an orphan!

SAM.

Of course: we are orphans ourselves, and know what it is.

FRED.

Yes, but it has got about, and what is the consequence? Everyone we capture says he's an orphan. The last three ships we took proved to be manned entirely by orphans, and so we had to let them go. One would think that Great Britain's mercantile navy was recruited solely from her orphan asylums – which we know is not the case.

SAM.

But, hang it all! you wouldn't have us absolutely merciless?

FRED.

There's my difficulty; until twelve o'clock I would, after twelve I wouldn't. Was ever a man placed in so delicate a situation?