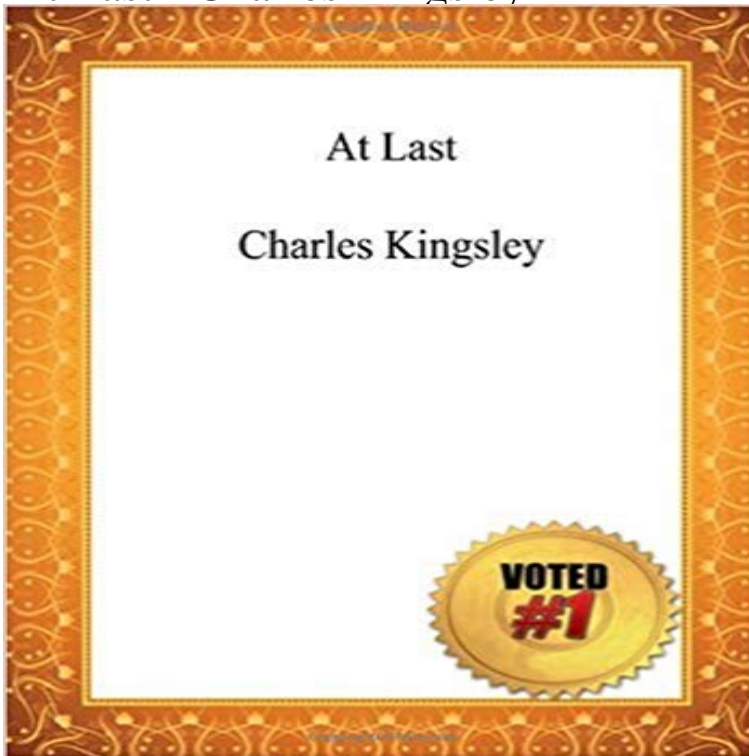


At Last - Charles Kingsley



A passage from the book... At last we, too, were crossing the Atlantic. At last the dream of forty years, please God, would be fulfilled, and I should see (and happily, not alone) the West Indies and the Spanish Main. From childhood I had studied their Natural History, their charts, their Romances, and alas! their Tragedies; and now, at last, I was about to compare books with facts, and judge for myself of the reported wonders of the Earthly Paradise. We could scarce believe the evidence of our own senses when they told us that we were surely on board a West Indian steamer, and could by no possibility get off it again, save into the ocean, or on the farther side of the ocean; and it was not till the morning of the second day, the 3d of December, that we began to be thoroughly aware that we were on the old route of Westward-Ho, and far out in the high seas, while the Old World lay behind us like a dream. Like dreams seemed now the last farewells over the taffrel, beneath the chill low December sun; and the shining calm of Southampton water, and the pleasant and well-beloved old shores and woods and houses sliding by; and the fisher-boats at anchor off Calshot, their brown and olive sails reflected in the dun water, with dun clouds overhead tipt with dull red from off the setting sun—a study for Vandevelde or Backhuysen in the tenderest moods. Like a dream seemed the twin lights of Hurst Castle and the Needles, glaring out of the gloom behind us, as if old England were watching us to the last with careful eyes, and bidding us good speed upon our way. Then had come—still like a dream—a day of pouring rain, of lounging on the main-deck, watching the engines, and watching, too (for it was calm at night), the water from the sponson behind the paddle-boxes; as the live flame-beads leaped and ran amid the swirling snow, while some fifteen feet beyond the untouched oily black of the deep sea spread away into the endless dark.

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