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Author: William Henry Giles Kingston

Illustrator: Archibald Webb

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE THREE LIEUTENANTS ***

W.H.G. Kingston

"The Three Lieutenants"

Chapter One.

Lieutenant Jack Rogers at home—His brother Tom resolves to follow in his wake—His old shipmates discussed—Letter from Terence Adair descriptive of his family—Admiral Triton pleads Tom's cause—The Admiral's advice to Tom—Leaving home.

"Really, Jack, that uniform is excessively becoming. Do oblige us by standing up as if you were on the quarter-deck of your ship and hailing the main-top. I do not remember ever having seen a naval officer above the rank of a midshipman in uniform before. Do you, Lucy?"

"Only once, at a Twelfth-night party at Foxica, to which you did not go, when Lady Darlington persuaded Admiral Triton to rig himself out, as he called it, for our amusement, in a naval suit of the time of Benbow, belonging to her great-grandfather. I prefer Jack in his uniform, I own, and he looks infinitely better in it than he does in top-boots and a hunting-coat, when he is eclipsed by many of the young farmers who have not two ideas to string together."

These remarks were made in the presence of Jack Rogers by his young and pretty sisters, Mary and Lucy, soon after his return home from China, on his promotion to the rank of Lieutenant, when one morning he entered the breakfast-room, dressed in a bran-new uniform, which, with inward satisfaction, he had put on at their request, that he might exhibit it to them. It set off to advantage his manly, well-knit figure, at which no one could look without seeing that he must possess ample strength of limb and muscle. An honest, kind heart beamed through a somewhat broad, very sun-burnt countenance. His features were good, though, and his head was well set on a wide pair of shoulders, which made him look shorter than he really was, not that he could boast of being a man of inches. Take him for all in all, Jack Rogers was a thoroughly good specimen of the British naval officer. Of course his sisters admired him—what sisters would not?—but their admiration was surpassed by that of his youngest brother, Tom, who was firmly of opinion that there never had been and never could be anybody like him; yet Tom was Jack in miniature, and the portrait of Jack, taken just before he went to sea, was frequently supposed to be that of Tom. At school (Tom went to Eagle House, which, though old Rowley had retired to enjoy a well-earned "otium cum dignitate" in his native Cumberland, still kept up its ancient character under an able master) his great delight was to talk of the sayings and doings of "my brother Jack," and to read extracts from the accounts of the latter, which from time to time came home. Tom's schoolfellows knew almost as much about Jack's adventures as those who, in subsequent years, read them in print, and they all agreed that he must be a first-rate chap.

"I should think so, indeed," said Tom, in a tone of confidence. "If you were just to see him once you'd say I am right, and my great wonder is, that the Lords of the Admiralty don't make him a post-captain right off at once. They couldn't help themselves if they knew him as well as I do."

Thus admiring Jack, it was natural that Tom should have resolved to follow in his footsteps. His whole heart was set upon being a sailor, and going some day to sea with Jack. He did not talk much about his intentions; that was not his way, except, perhaps, to one or two very intimate friends; but he had confided his hopes and wishes to Admiral Triton, who had promised to forward them.

"You can't choose a better profession, and I'll see about it when the time comes," answered the Admiral. "Not that the service is what it was, but I never hold with those who swear that it's going to ruin, and I shall have no fear on that score as long as there are plenty of fine young fellows in it, like your brother Jack and his friends Murray and Adair and scores of others, and such as you'll turn out, Tom, I'm sure. No, no. I've a notion, however, that we should have been much the better if those abominable, smoky tea-kettles of affairs introduced of late years had never been thought of, but one comfort is, that they never can be of the slightest possible use as men-of-war, though they may serve to tow ships into action when forts are to be attacked and such-like work. Never do you get appointed to one if

you can help it, Tom. They'll spoil our sailors as sailors if they do nothing else."

This was said before the *Nemesis* in China, and other steamers had done good service, which even seamen of the old school could not disparage.

Of course Tom regarded steamers with the utmost contempt, and never spoke of them without quoting the remarks of Admiral Triton, who, however, in the course of time, learnt to modify his opinions.

Tom, who had come home for the holidays with secret hopes of not having to return to Eagle House, sat proudly smiling his assent to their sisters' remarks on Jack, stopping for awhile from the vigorous attack on a plate of ham and eggs, which he had before been making. Jack, who had taken a chair at the table, asked quietly,—“do you really wish to hear me hail the main-top?” Mary nodded.

Tom's eyes twinkled, his countenance beamed all over with delight.

Jack got up, planted his feet firmly on the floor, and put his hand to his mouth as if about to hail.

“I had better not,” he said, laughing, “lest I frighten the household out of their propriety. They will think that some wild bull has got into the breakfast-room.”

“Oh, never mind that; we want to hear how you do speak on board ship,” said Lucy; “just a few words, you know.”

“As you like it,” said Jack, and then, putting his hand to his mouth, he shouted simply, “Maintop there!”

The sound made his sisters jump from their chairs. Tom clapped his hands with delight, and laughed till the tears rolled down his cheeks. In rushed the butler and footman and two housemaids, with dusters in their hands, to ascertain what was the matter. Sir John came hurrying in from the garden with a look of astonishment on his countenance, and her ladyship's own maid was sent down to know if anything had happened.

“I told you so,” said Jack to his sisters. “I was only speaking as we do sometimes at sea,” he added, turning to the servants, the female portion of whom lingered to take an admiring look at their young master.

Sir John gazed with a father's pride at his manly son, and then looked at Tom, about whom he had the evening before received a letter from Admiral Triton, saying that if the boy still wished to go into the Navy, he should have great pleasure in getting him forthwith appointed to a ship.

“If the service turns him out as fine a fellow as his brother, I shall not regret should he choose it,” thought the baronet. “I'll talk to him and Jack about the matter by-and-by, and ascertain the real bent of the boy's inclinations.” Had Tom known what was passing in his father's mind he would speedily have decided the question.

The whole party were soon assembled at breakfast—that pleasantest and most sociable of meals in an English country-house. Besides the members of the family already introduced, there was Lady Rogers—fair, comely, gentlemanly—and kind-hearted—Paul the eldest son, studying the law that he might take the better care of his paternal estates; and, lastly, Sidney, a captain in the Guards, at home on leave. Then there were several guests, county neighbours, who had come for a couple of nights, a brother officer of Sidney's and a school-fellow of Lucy's. Jack cast an appreciating glance over the breakfast-table, with its plates of attractive little rolls, its racks of thin, crisp toast, its small pats of butter, swimming amid ice in elegantly-designed bowls of crystal, its eggs under snow-white napkins, its covered dishes containing muffins or sausages or other minute delicacies, its hissing urn and cream and milk jugs, and tea set at one end, and its coffee set at the other, presided over by two sweet-looking girls; and then he smilingly looked over his shoulder at the side-board, on which, among various comestibles, appeared a round of beef, another of brawn, a huge ham, and a venison-pasty.

Who that has been long a wanderer from home has not gone back in memory to such a scene as now greeted Jack's eyes, especially when hunger has been gnawing or provender coarse? Jack often had, and though he had never grumbled at privations or hardships, he was, notwithstanding, all the more ready to do ample justice to the viands spread out before him. He showed this when, after having helped several of the party from the side-board, he returned with his own well-loaded plate to the table. The guardsman watched him with astonishment, and even his brother, the barrister, thought that Jack had got an enormous appetite. Jack, who was hungry, saw no reason why he should not eat till he was satisfied, and had laid in a store of food to last him till the seven o'clock dinner, for luncheon he eschewed as effeminate and an unnecessary interruption to the business of the day.

Before breakfast was concluded the post-bag was brought in, opened by Sir John, and its contents distributed. An official-looking letter, addressed to Jack, attracted universal attention.

“Who is it from?” asked Mary anxiously.

“About your prize-money, Jack?” inquired his mother. “You are not yet again appointed to a ship, I hope, my dear boy?”

“I am, though!” exclaimed Jack exultingly, for the moment not thinking of his mother's feeling, “and second of a fine new thirty-six gun frigate the *Plantagenet*, commanded by my old friend Hemming. Couldn't wish for anything better. Where there's work to be done he is sure to be sent.”

“But you will not have to go away at once, dear Jack, I trust,” cried Lucy, who loved her sailor brother dearly.

Tom said nothing, and it might have been difficult to decide whether he was about to cry or laugh. He evidently felt as much interested in the announcement as Jack himself.

"Faith, they do work you hard," observed his guardsman brother. "If the purchase-system was allowed in your service I suspect that buyers would be rare."

"I am very glad it doesn't; for now, if a hardworking fellow gets his foot on the ratlines he has a chance of climbing upwards," answered Jack. "However, as the *Plantagenet* has only just been commissioned, I shall be able to enjoy the civilising influences of home for a short time longer. In truth, I am almost ashamed at being pleased with the thoughts of going off again to sea; but after having knocked about all one's life as a midshipman it is satisfactory to feel that one is an officer in reality, with a cabin of one's own."

"Of course, my boy; much more natural than to wish to be dangling after your sisters, or any other of the petticoat tribe who might take it into their heads to patronise you," said Sir John, glancing with all a father's pride at his gallant son. "To what station are you to be sent?"

"As far as I can discover, that remains as yet in the mysterious depths of my Lords Commissioners' minds," answered Jack, glancing over some other letters. "Hemming has an idea that it may be to the West Indies; at least such is the opinion of the Portsmouth tailors, who have generally more correct information on these matters than any one else. Just now, when the world is so peaceably disposed, it is not of much consequence where we go; and as I have never been in those seas I would rather be sent there than anywhere else."

"I trust that it will not be to the West Indies, my dear boy," said Lady Rogers. "I have read such sad accounts of the dreadful yellow fever which kills so many people, and of those terrible hurricanes which send so many ships to the bottom, and devastate whole islands whenever they appear, that I tremble at the thoughts of your going there."

"Pray don't let such an idea trouble you, mother," answered Jack; "the yellow fever only comes once in a way, and hurricanes appear even less frequently; so that we may hope to escape both one and the other, even if we do go there. I have no wish, however, to leave home in a hurry, and should be glad to remain long enough to receive Murray and Adair, whom I invited to come here, but I am afraid when they hear of my appointment that they will write to put off their visit till another time, which may never arrive. It is not likely that we shall be at home together again. They are capital fellows. You remember them, Lucy, when we were all on shore after our first trip to sea, and they came to call on us in London, and afterwards Adair went down with us for a few days into the country."

"Yes, indeed. Mr Adair, I suppose I must now call him, was, I remember, a terrible pickle; while Mr Murray appeared to be a wonderfully sedate, taciturn young Scotchman, a pattern of correctness and propriety," said Lucy.

"Maybe, but as noble and brave a fellow as ever breathed!" exclaimed Jack warmly. "I should like to know what opinion you would form of him now. I must write by to-day's post, and beg him to put off other engagements if he can, and come to us at once."

"And that terrible pickle, as Lucy calls him, your Irish friend, Mr Adair, are we to have the honour of renewing our acquaintance with him before you go away?" asked Mary. "I must protest against having him here unless you are present to restrain his exuberant spirits, and the various eccentricities in which he may take it into his head to indulge."

"Oh, Paddy Adair is as gentle as a pet lamb if you only manage him properly," answered Jack, laughing. "Those various eccentricities are merely his little frolicsome ways, which can be restrained by silken cords. There isn't a quieter fellow breathing in the society of grown-up young ladies, such as you now are. Remember, you were school girls when you saw him last, and he possibly did not think it necessary to treat you with the respect he now would."

"He must indeed be much altered then," observed Lucy. "He had then a curious fancy for standing on his head, jumping out of windows, and climbing in at them too, dressing up the dogs and cats in costume, letting off squibs under horses' noses, putting gunpowder into candles, etcetera, while his tongue kept up a continued rattle from morning till night."

"Avast there, sister," cried Jack, interrupting her; "I beg your pardon; you have made me speak like a sailor on the stage. I assure you that Paddy would not dream of committing any of the atrocities you enumerate; on the contrary, if you ask him what is the chief drawback to his pleasure in society he will tell you that it is an overpowering bashfulness, which prevents him from expressing himself with the fluency he desires, and that his great wish when mixing in society is to receive sympathy and gentle encouragement to enable him to feel at his ease."

"From what I recollect of your friend, Mr Adair, I should have thought it difficult to find a young man more at his ease in any society into which he may be thrown," observed Lady Rogers, who was somewhat matter of fact; "I beg therefore, my dear Jack, that you will not persuade your sisters to give him any of that sympathy and gentle encouragement he wishes for, or I do not know where he will stop short."

"Depend on me, mother, I will be as discreet as a judge," said Jack, who had thus succeeded as he desired in turning the thoughts of Lady Rogers and his sisters from the yellow fever and hurricanes of the West Indies, and the conversation for the remainder of breakfast-time became general.

He wrote immediately to his two old messmates, begging them to come at once, and telling them of his appointment to the *Plantagenet*. Much to his regret, and possibly to that of his sisters, who were curious to see into what sort of persons the young midshipmen had grown, they could neither of them immediately avail themselves of his invitation. They congratulated him on his good luck, and said that as their friends were exerting their interest to get them afloat it was possible that they might ere long meet again, though as they were of the same standing in the service they could not hope all to be appointed to one ship. Alick Murray wrote from Scotland. He had taken under his wing a young orphan cousin, Archy Gordon, who longed to go to sea. Alick said that his great wish was to have the lad with him, should he get a ship, "if not," he added, "I shall be thoroughly satisfied to have him with either you or Adair, as I am sure that you will both stand his friend in case of need, and keep an eye on him at all times."

"Of course I will," said Jack to himself. "Murray's friends must always be my friends, and those he cares for I must care for; however, I hope that he will not be allowed to rust long on shore; little chance of it when once he has made himself known."

Adair was in Ireland. "Things are not quite so bad as I expected to find them in the halls of my ancestors," he wrote. "Although the estate with its thousands of acres of forest and bog was knocked down as I told you, the old castle of Ballymacree, with a few dirty acres surrounding it, was bought back again, and still serves as a residence for my father and mother, and the best part of a score of my brothers and sisters, and the wives and husbands and children of the elder ones—a pretty large party we make, you may fancy. I felt myself quite lost at first among them all, and the noise and confusion which prevailed after the quiet and regularity of a man-of-war quite confounded me; however, I have got accustomed to it now, and can join heartily in the fun and frolic which goes on from morning till night, and considering my bashful and retiring disposition, this will show you that I feel myself at home and perfectly happy."

"I said so," exclaimed Jack triumphantly, showing the letter to his sisters; "I told you what a quiet, sedate fellow Terence has become, and here is proof of it. Let us see what more he says." Jack read on:—

"I confess, however, that the sooner I am away and afloat again, the better for the rest of the family. How they all manage to exist is to me a puzzle. To be sure there are fish in the streams and neighbouring lakes, and game in abundance, which we retain the right of shooting; and sheep on the hills, which, as my father does not attempt any new-fangled plans for improving the condition of the people, are allowed to exist; and there are praties in the fields, and fruit and vegetables in the garden; but there is a scarcity of flour and groceries, and instead of the claret which, in the good old days, flowed freely at table, we are reduced to drink whisky, of which the excise has not always had an opportunity of taking due cognisance. My father does not quite see the matter in the light I do, and was inclined to be offended when I ordered down a cask of the cratur from Dublin, as a salve to my conscience, and a few dozen of claret, as a remembrance of days gone by; but as the latter went in about as many evenings, we shall have to stick to the whisky in future. However, if the house holds together till the *Plantagenet* is paid off, I can promise you plenty of amusement of one sort or another, and the enjoyment of magnificent scenery, if you, my dear Jack, will pay a visit to Ballymacree. You may depend, too, on as hearty a welcome as I am sure I should have received by your family had I been able to avail myself of your invitation. To be sure we muster somewhat stronger than you do, I suspect, and, might possibly exhibit, what with your sedate English ideas you would consider an exuberance of spirits, and I am almost afraid that you would think my five fair young sisters rather hoydenish young ladies, compared to your own. One of them, Kathleen, is looking over my shoulder and exclaims, 'Arrah, now Terence, don't be after saying that same, or Leeftenant Rogers will be thinking us a set of wild Irish girls, with no more civilisation than a family of gipsies;' but I tell her I won't scratch out what I have written, but I'll add that she's not the ugliest of the lot; so, dear Jack, when you do come, you can form your own opinion; I only wish that I had the chance of making some prize-money for their sakes. By-the-bye, the eldest of them, Nora, who, at sixteen, married Gerald Desmond, has got a son called after his father, who has taken it into his head to go to sea, and as nothing I can say will make him alter his mind, I suppose he must have his way. I have written to our cousin, Lord Derrynane, and asked him to try and get Gerald appointed to the *Plantagenet*, as I should like him to be under Hemming and you. He is a 'broth of a boy,' as we say here, and I know for my sake, Jack, that you will look after him. They say that he is very like me, which won't be in his disfavour in your eyes—though I don't think I ever was such a wild youngster as he is; not that there's a grain of harm in him. Mind that, and he'll soon get tamed down in the navy. I don't think I ever wrote so long a letter in my life, and so as it's high time to bring it to an end, farewell, Jack, till we meet, and may that be soon, is the sincere wish of,

"Yours ever faithful and true,

"Terence Adair."

"Of course I will look after his nephew, as I would my own brother. I'll write and tell him so, though he knows it," exclaimed Jack; "and now, Lucy, what do you think of my old shipmate?"

"I cannot exactly say that I admire the style of his epistle, but I have no doubt that he is as kind-hearted and brave as you describe him," answered Lucy.

"I don't mean to say that he is much of a letter-writer," said Jack; "but at all events he writes as he feels and speaks, in the belief that no eye but mine would read what he had written. His mind is like a glass—it can be seen through at a glance; and he has no idea of concealing a single thought from those he trusts, though he is close enough with the world in general; and I can tell you that he is as true as steel, and as brave and high-spirited as he is kind-hearted and generous."

"A perfect hero of romance," observed Lucy, laughing; "I am really sorry that he is not coming here to enable us to judge of him fairly."

Possibly Lucy thought more about Lieutenant Adair than she chose to acknowledge. She could not, however, help reflecting that her mamma would look upon an Irish half-pay naval lieutenant, with a host of penniless brothers and sisters, in no very favourable light, should he come in the character of a suitor, so that after all it was just as well he could not accept Jack's invitation.

Jack made the most of his time while he remained at Halliburton Hall, winning the good-will of everybody in the neighbourhood. He laughed and talked and danced with the fairer portion in the most impartial manner; young and old, pretty and plain, all came in for a due share of his attentions. His sisters were quite vexed with him for not falling in love with one of three or four of their especial friends. They had a preference for a Julia Giffard; but should Jack fail

to lose his heart to Julia, or Julia decline bestowing hers on him, there were at least three others of almost equal attractions and perfections, either of whom they could love as a sister-in-law; and it would be so delightful, while Jack was away, to have some one to whom they might talk about him, and to whom he would write such delightful letters which they, of course, would have the privilege of reading.

Then, some day, when he was a commander or post-captain, he would come home, and marry, and settle down in a pretty little cottage near them, and take to gardening, as many naval officers do, and be so happy. One day they delicately broached the subject to Jack. He burst into a hearty laugh.

"I fall in love with Julia Giffard!" he exclaimed. "My dear girls, what a miserable fate you are suggesting for your friend. Suppose she were to engage herself to me! Away I go for three or four years; back for two months, and off again for a cruise of like duration as the first. In the mean time she meets half-a-dozen more likely fellows than I am, as far as money is concerned at all events, but cannot encourage them on account of her fatal engagement to me; and perhaps, after all, I get knocked on the head and never come home at all, while the best years of her youth have gone by. No, no, girls; young naval officers who intend to follow up their profession have no business to marry; that's my opinion, and I intend to act on it."

Jack's sisters were disappointed, for they saw that he was in earnest, and had sound sense on his side, still they were not inclined to give in.

"Then why were you so anxious to get your two brother officers to come here?" asked Lucy, with considerable *naïveté*.

"Whew! was that running in your head, missie?" cried Jack. "There's no use denying the fact."

What that fact was Jack did not say. Lucy blushed, and said no more about Julia Giffard to her hard-hearted brother. Jack went on as usual, making himself agreeable, to the best of his power, and no one would have suspected who saw them together, that the pretty Julia had been suggested to him as his future wife, least of all the young lady herself. He and every one of the family had soon another matter to engage their attention—Admiral Triton arrived. Tom on seeing him could scarcely conceal his agitation. The crisis of his fate, as he believed, had arrived. The Admiral was diplomatic, however, not knowing how Sir John, or at all events Lady Rogers, would receive his proposal to send off another of their sons as an offering to Neptune. He and Tom had a long talk, first in private. Tom acknowledged that he had serious thoughts of stowing himself away in Jack's chest, not to come out till the ship was well at sea when he could not be landed; or, failing that plan, to run off and enter as a powder-monkey or cabin-boy under a feigned name. Go he would he had determined, in some way or other, for if not, he should certainly fall into a decline, or at all events pine away till he was fit for nothing. As the Admiral looked at his sturdy figure and rosy cheeks he burst into a fit of laughter.

"I don't fear any such result even should you meet with a refusal, Tom," he observed, wishing to try him a little further.

"Oh, Admiral Triton, you don't think that they would wish to make a parson or a lawyer of me surely?" exclaimed Tom, in a tone of alarm.

"I cannot say honestly that I consider you cut out exactly for either profession, though I have no doubt you would do your duty should you be induced to adopt one or the other," was the answer. "However, I will speak to your father and mother, and if they give me leave I will see what can be done for you at the Admiralty, and should there be a vacancy get you appointed to Jack's ship."

Tom thanked the Admiral from the very bottom of his young heart, though he felt a qualm at the thoughts of the sorrow he should cause his mother, even should she consent to part with him her youngest born. It did not, it must be confessed, last very long, and he looked forward anxiously to the result of the Admiral's application on his behalf.

Admiral Triton waited till after dinner, when the party were assembled in the drawing-room to broach the subject. A very short conversation with Sir John showed him that there would be no strong opposition on his part, and he accordingly stumped over to Lady Rogers, by whose side he seated himself on the sofa, sticking out his timber toe and commencing with a warm eulogy on Jack.

"A right gallant fellow is that son of yours. I knew from the first that he would turn out well; has fully equalled my expectations; had the true spirit of a sailor as a boy; we want a succession of such in the service; had I a dozen suits I would send them all to sea, that is to say if they wished to go. Naval men, generally, don't think as I do, perhaps. They fancy that the country doesn't appreciate their services, and, therefore, won't appreciate their sons, and so look out for berths on shore for them; but it's possible, Lady Rogers, that they over-estimate themselves. The case is very different with Jack; he is as modest as a maiden of sixteen, and yet as bold and daring as a lion; a first-rate officer; he's sure to get on; he'll be a commander in three or four years, and be a post-captain not long after. Now, there's your boy, Tom, just such another lad as Jack was—sure to rise in the service; and yet he'd be thrown away in any other profession. If you send him to Oxford or Cambridge he'd expend all his energies in boat-racing, or steeple-chasing and cricket—very good things in their way, but bringing no result; whereas, the same expenditure of energy in the navy would insure him honour and promotion; and depend on it he'll get on just as well as Jack."

"But do you think, Admiral, that Tom really wishes to go to sea?" asked Lady Rogers, in a slightly trembling voice.

"No doubt about it; determined as a young fellow can be, with yours and his father's permission," answered the Admiral; and he gave an account of his conversation with Tom, assuring her ladyship that Sir John had no objection provided she would consent.

Lady Rogers called up Tom, who had been watching her and the Admiral from a distant part of the room, guessing

what was going forward. With genuine feeling he threw his arms round his mother's neck, and while, with tears in his eyes, he confessed that he had set his heart on going to sea, he told her how very sorry he felt at wishing to leave her.

"The news does not come upon me unexpectedly, my dear boy," she answered, holding his hand and looking with all a mother's love into his honest face. "I have long suspected that you wished to go to sea; but, as you did not say so positively, I thought, perhaps, that you might change your mind. However, as Admiral Triton assures me that you are cut out for a sailor, and that he can answer for your becoming as good an officer as your brother Jack is said to be, if your father gives his consent, I will not withhold mine."

"Thank you, mother, thank you!" cried Tom, again throwing his arms round her neck, when something seemed to be choking him, and he could say no more.

"He has the right stuff in him, never fear, never fear, Lady Rogers," said the Admiral, nodding his head approvingly behind Tom's back; "he'll do."

The rest of the evening was spent in discussing several important points connected with Tom's outfit, Jack being called in to the consultation. Admiral Triton confessed that, not expecting a refusal, he had already made all arrangements at the Admiralty for Tom to join the *Plantagenet* with Jack; and Tom, his ardent hopes realised, went to bed to dream of his dashing frigate, of Howe, Nelson, and Collingwood, of the countless adventures in which he expected to engage, and of the heroic exploits he had determined to perform.

Tom got up the next morning, feeling two inches taller, and walked about all day with the full consciousness that he was no longer a schoolboy, but a midshipman in the Royal Navy, with the right to demand due respect from all civilians; indeed the female portion of the establishment, with whom he was a monstrous favourite, were perfectly ready to humour him to his heart's content. He had been the last baby in the family, and it was only a wonder that he had escaped being utterly spoiled. His manners did not escape the notice of the Admiral, who, highly amused, called him to take a turn in the grounds.

"A little advice from an old salt, who has seen no small amount of service, will do you no harm, my boy," he began, after they had walked some way, talking of various matters. "You cannot steer a straight course, either on shore or afloat, without a definite object to guide you. Let yours be Duty. Never mind how disagreeable or how arduous or difficult it may seem, do that which you believe you ought to do, strictly obey the orders you receive, never neglect an opportunity of doing the right thing or of gaining professional knowledge, and never be tempted to do the wrong one. Every officer, remember, and man, too, from the commander-in-chief downwards, is bound to act to the best of his abilities for the good of the service. Whatever you are ordered to do, or however you may be treated by those above you, believe that they are actuated by that principle. If you remember that whatever you may be doomed to bear is for the good of the service, you will be able to endure an immense amount of what you may think hardship without grumbling. You will find a good many persons above you on board ship whom you will be bound to obey—your brother Jack among them. Be as zealous and as ready in obeying him as any one else. Never take offence from superiors or equals; it is the sign of a weak mind. When spoken to or even abused, whether you are in the right or the wrong, don't answer again, and don't be ashamed of expressing regret when anything has gone wrong. Do your best on all occasions—more you cannot do. There, Tom, I have given you a pretty long lecture; log it down in your memory, and act upon it. I repeat—let Duty be your guiding star; do your best for the good of the service, and don't grumble at your superiors or abuse your inferiors. These are golden rules well worth remembering, my boy."

"Thank you very much, Admiral Triton; I will try and not forget them," answered Tom.

"By-the-bye, you'll not find midshipmen of much 'count on board ship," continued the Admiral, with a twinkle in his eye, watching to see how Tom took his remark. "Not only are they inferior in rank to all the commissioned officers, but to the three warrant officers who have risen from before the mast, and even the petty officers and men are inclined to treat them as nurses do the babies under their charge; so you must not be disappointed if you do not meet with the respect you may possibly expect from those whom you may look upon as your inferiors, though they'll obey you readily when you repeat the orders you have received from your superiors."

"I understand, Admiral," said Tom, wincing a little at the remark about the babies, though he laughed as he spoke; "but I suppose, if I set to work to learn my duty and get quickly out of petticoats, I shall be sent away in charge of boats, as Jack used to be, and have opportunities of proving that I am worth something."

"Well said, Tom; it won't be long before you are breeched, depend on that," said the Admiral, laughing and patting him on the back. "Just don't mind asking for information from those able to afford it, and you will soon become a sailor."

The last days at home went rapidly by. Tom enjoyed the satisfaction, shared in by the whole household, of appearing in his new uniform, an old one of Jack's, which exactly fitted him, having been sent to Selby, the Portsmouth tailor, as a pattern. With no little pride also he buckled on a sword to his side, dirks having by that time gone out of fashion. Dreading the Admiral's quizzing glances, he took the opportunity of his absence to exhibit himself, again putting on plain clothes before his return, and only at his mother's request did he venture to resume his uniform at dinner, not again for many a day to appear in mufti.

Admiral Triton insisted on accompanying Jack and Tom to Portsmouth, where he was always glad of an excuse for going. It was a consolation to Lady Rogers to see Tom go off under Jack's wing, as she knew that, as far as one human being can take care of another, Jack would watch over Tom. Jack left Halliburton without having, by word or look, confessed an attachment, even if he felt it, for Julia Giffard, or for any other young lady among his sisters' dear friends. He and Tom were much missed, and certainly Julia Giffard, who came to stay there, took considerable interest in listening to his sisters' accounts of Jack's numerous exploits—so at least these young ladies fancied.

Chapter Two.

Admiral Triton at Portsmouth—The three old messmates meet each other, and their three young relatives become acquainted—The dinner at the “George” with Admiral Triton—Anecdotes—An eccentric commander—The frigate and corvette sail for the West Indies—A philosophical boatswain—Jolly time with fine weather—A heavy gale—Times change—Marines and midshipmen on their beam ends—Men lost—The midshipmen regain their appetites.

The Admiral and his two young friends were soon at Portsmouth. The former took up his quarters at the “George,” while Jack, who had remained at home to the last day allowable, accompanied by Tom, at once went on board the *Plantagenet*, lying alongside a hulk off the dockyard. He was warmly welcomed by Captain Hemming, and, much to his satisfaction, he found that the newly appointed first-lieutenant of the frigate was his old acquaintance Nat Cherry, lately second of the *Dugong* in the China Seas, from whence he had only just arrived. “The authorities give us but little time to enjoy the comforts and quiet of home,” he observed, “but it’s flattering to one’s vanity to discover that one’s services are considered of value; and so when Hemming applied for me I could not decline, on the plea that my health required recruiting after the hard work I went through in China, although my friends declare that I have become as thin as a lath, and have no more colour than a piece of brown leather. I cannot say that of you, Rogers, however.”

“Really, Cherry, you look to me as well filled out and as blooming as ever,” answered Jack, surveying the rotund figure and rosy cheeks of his new messmate; “you and I afford proof that hard work seldom does people harm. Idleness is the greatest foe to health of the two. And who is to be third of the frigate?”

“No one has as yet been appointed. The master and purser have joined—very good fellows in their way—with an assistant-surgeon, and three or four youngsters; among them young Harry Bevan, who was with us in the *Dugong*.”

“I am very glad of that,” said Jack; “Bevan is the style of lad I should wish as a companion for my young brother Tom.”

“Your brother, the youngster who came on board with you. I was sure of it; you are as like as two peas,” said Mr Cherry. “I hope that he’ll imitate you in all respects. It’s a satisfaction to have steady youngsters on board who keep out of scrapes and don’t give trouble.”

Tom—who had already made himself known to Harry Bevan—was called aft, and introduced by Jack to Mr Cherry, and felt very happy and proud as he looked along the deck of the fine frigate to which he belonged. It was no dream; there he was in reality, walking about and talking to Bevan and other fellows dressed like himself in midshipmen’s uniforms; and then he went into the berth, and took his seat among the others at dinner. It was just as Jack had described it; not very large, but, till the rest of the mess had joined, with just sufficient elbow-room. They had plenty of good things, for the caterer, old Higson, was something of an epicure; and Tom tasted grog for the first time, which he thought very nasty stuff, though he did not say so, as he knew that sailors liked it; and besides it would not be polite to express his opinion to Higson, who had evidently no objection to its taste. Altogether Tom was convinced that midshipmen, as he had always supposed, must lead very jolly lives. That very night, too, he was to sleep in a hammock, which he thought would be rare fun. He and his new messmates soon returned on deck, when the men who had been at dinner came tumbling up from below, and set to swaying up yards and hoisting in stores, the boatswain sounding his shrill pipe amidst the hubbub of noises—the officers, from Mr Cherry downwards, shouting at the top of their voices, and the men bawling and rushing in gangs here and there at headlong speed, hauling away at ropes till Tom felt more bewildered than he had ever before been in his life, and narrowly escaped being knocked over several times in spite of the efforts he made to keep out of the way. However, his experiences were only those of midshipmen in general when they first join a ship.

Tom had been advised by Jack to learn all about the masts and rigging as soon as possible, and he accordingly set to work without delay, asking questions of every one whom he for a moment saw standing quiet, and was likely to answer him. Harry Bevan told him a good deal, as did the other midshipmen, no one showing a disposition to humbug him, possibly on Jack’s account, who would have found them out if they had. Before night Tom began to fancy that he really knew something about a ship, though it might be some time before he could consider himself a thorough sailor.

Though the captain lived on shore, the first lieutenant had taken up his quarters on board; Jack finding plenty to do, and being economically inclined followed his example. A fine-looking corvette, the *Tudor*, was fitting out a little way higher up the harbour. Jack scanned her with a seaman’s eye, and thought that had he not been appointed to the frigate he should like to belong to her. It was still uncertain to what station the *Plantagenet* would be sent. No great difficulty, however, was found in getting men to enter for her. Sailors look more to the captain and officers than to the part of the world to which they are to go. One clime to them is much the same as another. They are as ready to go to the North Pole as to the coast of Africa, if they like the ship and the commander. Captain Hemming bore a good character, as did Lieutenants Cherry and Rogers, among those who had ever sailed with them. No persons are more thoroughly discussed than are naval officers by seamen; the wheat is completely sifted from the chaff, the gold from the alloy; and many who pass for very fine fellows on shore are looked upon as arrant pretenders afloat. Jack was making his way towards the shop of Mr Woodward the bookseller, when two seamen in a happy state of indifferentism to all sublunary affairs came rolling out of the street which debouches on the Common Hard near the Dockyard gates.

“I say, Dick, if that bean’t Jack Rogers, say I never broke biscuit!” exclaimed one of the men, pointing ahead with outstretched arm.

“No doubt about it, Ben,” answered his companion, “I’d a known him a mile off, and I see’d last night in the paper that he’s appointed to the *Plantagenet* along with Captain Hemming. (Dick pronounced all the syllables long.) What

say you? my pockets are pretty well cleaned out, and so, I've a notion, are yours. Shall we go and enter at once? It must come to that afore long."

"I'm agreeable, Dick—when a thing's to be done, it's best to do it like men," said Ben, just as they arrived in front of the bookseller's shop, where they waited the reappearance of the lieutenant, Jack soon came out, and at once recognising two former shipmates in the *Dugong*, Dick Needham and Ben Snatchblock asked them if they were willing to join the *Plantagenet*. An affirmative being given, he begged them to pick up any other prime hands they could come across. By the evening, when he returned on board, he had, much to his satisfaction, obtained ten good men.

The next day Jack went on shore for the same purpose, accompanied by Tom, with the intention of calling on Admiral Triton before returning on board. They had just passed through the Dockyard gates when Jack saw approaching from the left, accompanied by a young midshipman, a lieutenant, whom it did not take him many seconds to recognise as his old messmate, Alick Murray. They did not exactly rush into each other's arms as Frenchmen or Spaniards would have done, but they shook hands with honest warmth, and Jack exclaimed, "I thought you were in Scotland. Where have you sprung from, Alick?"

Murray then told him that he had been appointed as second lieutenant to the *Tudor*, Commander Babbicome, with orders to join immediately, which he had done the previous evening but having the outfit of a youngster to look after, and letters to write, he had been unable to get on board the *Plantagenet*. He turned round and introduced his companion, a tall, slight lad, as his cousin Archy Gordon, who had also been appointed to the corvette. Thereon Jack introduced Tom, and the two midshipmen, who had before been eyeing each other askance, shook hands, and of course at once fraternised. Tom felt very proud of being able to speak in an authoritative tone about the frigate to Archy, who had not as yet been on board the corvette, and had not even seen a ship of war except at a distance.

"We do things as smart as lightning aboard our frigate, I can tell you," continued Tom. "Our first lieutenant is a very good fellow, and our second is my brother Jack, and there are not many like him. I've been twice up to the main truck, and ever so often into the mizen-top, and we've a capital mess, and shall be a jolly set when all hands join. Are you going to belong to us?"

"I dinna think so," answered Archy, in a broad Scotch accent. "My cousin, that is my father's sister's son, Alick Murray there, is lieutenant of a ship they call the *Tudor*, and I'm to go along wi' him."

"Oh, that's the small craft fitting out ahead of us. She's a fine little ship of her class though, so my brother Jack says, and so I may congratulate you, but of course she's not to be compared to our frigate. I say, you must come and pay us a visit on board, and I'll put you up to all sorts of things."

Archy expressed himself much obliged, but cautiously refrained from accepting the invitation till he knew what his cousin Alick might say on the subject.

Meantime Jack and Alick Murray were talking eagerly together.

"And where are you bound for?" asked Jack.

"I heard through a friend at the Admiralty that the *Tudor* is to be sent to the same station as the *Plantagenet*, which, as you may suppose, gave me no slight satisfaction," answered Murray.

"That is capital news," cried Jack. "It will be curious if we keep together as lieutenants as much as we did as midshipmen, and go through as many more adventures as we have already fallen in with. I only wish that by some wonderful chance Paddy Adair could be with us."

"And that same wonderful chance has brought him here," exclaimed a voice from behind, and while a hand was placed on the shoulders of each, on looking round they caught sight of the merry countenance of Paddy himself, now smiling into the face of one, now into that of the other.

"It's dropped from the clouds you are after thinking I am now," he continued, laughing, "only they don't as a rule rain such big fish as myself. Well then, to satisfy your curiosity you are indebted for the satisfaction of seeing me here this morning, to a peremptory missive from my Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, directing me to hasten over from Ireland to join the *Plantagenet* as third lieutenant, and I needn't tell you I never obeyed an order with more willing alacrity."

"And I don't think anything next to being made commander-in-chief right off could have given me greater satisfaction," said Jack, who seldom indulged in anything so nearly approaching a sentimental speech.

Murray said something of the same sort.

While the three old school-fellows were carrying on an animated conversation, a third midshipman had joined Tom and Archy.

"Will ye be after telling me, if ye please, who are those two lieutenants my Uncle Terence is talking to?" he said, as he stepped up to them and made them a polite bow with his cap. Archy returned it, but Tom, who had discovered that it was not the fashion for midshipmen to bow to each other, only laughed, and asked as he pointed with his chin at the three lieutenants—

"Do you mean that merry-looking fellow between those two?"

"That same sure," was the answer.

Tom explained who they were, adding, "And who are you, and what ship do you belong to?"

"Sure I don't belong to one at all at all, but my Uncle, Terence Adair, is to be third lieutenant of the *Plantagenet* frigate, and I'm to be a midshipman with him; and in the matter of my name, I'm Gerald Desmond, of Ballymacree Castle, in County Clare, Ireland."

"Well, Mr Gerald Desmond, of Bally—what do you call it, County Clare, Ireland? I have the pleasure of informing you that you are to be a messmate of mine, and as I've heard a good deal of your uncle, Paddy Adair, from my brother Jack, I shall be very happy to welcome you on board and to introduce you to the other fellows."

Gerald expressed himself much obliged to Tom for the intended favour.

"But ye'll not be after calling my Uncle Terence, Paddy, if ye please," he added, his Irish blood rising with the idea that some disrespect was shown to his relative.

"Don't trouble yourself about that, my dear fellow," said Tom, who never wished to quarrel with any one. "My brother Jack always calls him so, and the Paddy slipped out by mistake; but you may be very sure that you'll be Paddy Desmond from the hour you step on board, and for ever after unless there's another Irishman to deprive you of the title, though, probably, there'll then be a brace of Paddies."

"Faith, I'm not ashamed of my country, and I am perfectly happy to be Paddy Desmond if you and the other boys like to call me so," answered Gerald, laughing.

Adair finding that it was not necessary to go on board the frigate immediately, accompanied his two friends into Portsmouth, the three young midshipmen following in their wake, Gerald having first been introduced to Jack and Alick. The youngsters were fast friends from that moment, laughing and rattling away, and playing each other all sorts of tricks. No one would have supposed that they had only just met for the first time in their lives. As they turned into the High Street the lieutenants encountered Admiral Triton stumping along in his flushing coat and weather-beaten hat. He recognised Murray and Adair at once, and invited them and Jack, with Tom and his two friends to dine with him at the "George" at six.

"I shall then hear how you like being a sailor. It isn't too late to give it up," said the Admiral, looking at Tom.

"Wouldn't change if they would make me a judge or Archbishop of York," answered Tom, in a positive tone.

"Just like Jack," observed the Admiral, smiling, "I hope at the end of your cruise you'll have no reason to repent your resolution."

Jack during the day picked up several more men, and returned early on board; when Tom, with no little pride, introduced his new friend to the mess, as Mr Gerald Desmond, of Ballymacree Castle, County Clare, Ireland.

"Mr Gerald Desmond be hanged!" exclaimed old Higson, who had come down tired, after having worked hard all day, and was out of humour. "Call him Paddy Desmond at once. We have no misters in this berth."

"And sure, so I am Paddy Desmond, and if it's to show that I come from old Ireland, I'm proud of the title," said Gerald, taking his seat, and looking about him with an air of unconcern.

"I told you so," whispered Tom. "I knew from the first that they would call you Paddy."

Gerald quickly made himself at home, and took in good part all the quizzing his messmates chose to bestow on him.

The dinner at the "George" went off capitally. The Admiral put his young guests at their ease, and let them talk and laugh away to their hearts' content, telling them all sorts of amusing anecdotes, and though he took good care not to allow them to drink more wine than their heads could carry, they unanimously declared that he was the jolliest old fellow they had ever met. Of course, he did not forget to tell all the company boxy Adair had made him carry his portmanteau, and to chuckle over the story for five minutes at least.

"A pretty pass the service has come to when midshipmen take such liberties with their superiors, eh, Captain Sourcroust?" he exclaimed, giving a poke in the ribs with his elbow to a stiff, old, martinet style of post-captain, who sat next to him, and had looked utterly horrified at his story.

"The world's turned upside down, isn't it? We shall have the youngsters mast-heading us next, if we don't exactly please them, eh?"

Captain Sourcroust, unable to speak from indignation, could only shake his head and frown terribly, at which the midshipmen, as he was not their captain, laughed the more heartily. The Admiral had heard, too, of the trick Jack and his messmates had played with Quirk, the monkey, on Lieutenant Spry, of the marines, and while he told the story as he had received it from Jack, with a few amplifications of his own, the tears ran down his eyes, till Captain Sourcroust, boiling over with indignation, exclaimed:

"The navy has indeed come to a pretty pass when such things are allowed. Instead of being mast-headed, the three midshipmen should have been brought to a court-martial, and dismissed the service."

"But, my dear Captain Sourcroust, the affair happened a good many years ago, remember," interrupted the Admiral, wishing to tranquillise him, "and had not leniency been shown to the culprits, the service would have lost three promising young officers likely to prove ornaments to it. However, I would advise other youngsters not to imitate them. Such tricks don't bear repetition, I'll allow. By-the-bye, Captain Sourcroust, are you acquainted with my old shipmate, Jerry Hazledine? He served under me as a youngster, and I have kept an eye on him ever since. He hailed

from Ireland, and as all his ways and doings savoured strongly of the Emerald Isle, he was known as Paddy throughout the service."

The Admiral went on, without wailing to hear whether Captain Sourcrout was or was not personally acquainted with the officer in question.

"Paddy Hazledine was possessed of prodigious strength, though he seldom put it forth, except in what he considered the side of right and justice. His notions, to be sure, on these points, were occasionally like himself, somewhat eccentric; ha! ha! ha! I remember it as if it were yesterday. Coming up High Street one night, I saw a crowd collected round a lamp-post, not one of your modern iron affairs, but a stout, honest one of timber, with a cross-bar at the top as long as a sloop's cross-jack-yard. Seated with his legs over it was Paddy Hazledine in full rig, cocked hat and sword—he was a lieutenant then as composed as possible, smoking a cigar, which, it appeared, he had got up there for the purpose of lighting at the huge glass lamp, as big as a seventy-four's poop-lantern. While he held on with one hand, in the other he flourished a formidable shillaly, which he usually carried, as he declared, in order to keep the peace when more warlike weapons could not be used. Below him stood half-a-dozen watchmen, who, in angry tones, were ordering him to come down, while he, in eloquent language, was asserting his right to be where he was, and proclaiming his intention of remaining there as long as suited his pleasure. Every now and then the watchmen made a rush at him with their cudgels, the blows from which his faithful shillaly enabled him to ward off, and occasionally to bestow a pretty heavy tap on the heads of the most daring of his assailants.

"'Is it breaking the peace I am, do ye say?' he exclaimed. 'Not at all at all. It's you are doing the same, and running the risk of getting your on heads broken as the consequence. Now be off wid you, and lave a quietly-disposed citizen to his meditations.'

"I kept out of sight to see what would happen next. At length the watchmen lost patience. While three of their number remained at a respectful distance from the heavy end of the shillaly to prevent Paddy from escaping, the others went off, as I supposed, for a ladder and further assistance. Hazledine, fearless of consequences, sat smoking his cigar with perfect composure. Presently a dozen watchmen came trooping up, some armed with sticks and others with crow-bars and pick-axes and spades. Their object was evident. While one party began digging away round the lamp-post, the others defended them by fierce assaults with their sticks on the gallant lieutenant's legs, giving him enough to do for their defence, and thus preventing him from bringing down his weapon on the heads of their comrades. Still he showed every intention of keeping his seat, and notwithstanding the violent shaking which the working party gave the post as they got near the heel, he held on. At length, several stout fellows putting their shoulders to it, up it came, but instead of toppling it over, away they marched, carrying off Paddy in triumph, as they thought, to the watch-house; but they little knew the man they had got hold of. He seemed to enjoy the fun, and sat smoking as before, and occasionally indulging in a quiet laugh. Suddenly uttering a wild Irish shout, he sprang over the heads of his bearers, and with a whirl of his shillaly, scattering those who attempted to stop him, he darted down a narrow lane, the end of which they were passing at the time, and disappeared from sight. As his ship sailed the next morning, the police of Portsmouth searched in vain for the culprit, who, getting undiscovered on board, did not fail to amuse his messmates with a full account of his exploit; ha! ha! ha!"

The Admiral laughed heartily at his story, as, of course, did everybody else, with the exception of Captain Sourcrout, who, grimly smiling, observed—

"I should have brought that harum-scarum lieutenant to a court-martial pretty sharply."

"What for—smoking a cigar on the top of a lamp-post?" asked the Admiral. "It is not against the articles of war."

"No, Admiral Triton, but for conduct unworthy the character of an officer and a gentleman," answered Captain Sourcrout gruffly.

"Well, as to that, people may be allowed to have their opinion. It's not a usual proceeding, I grant you, but the act was beyond the jurisdiction of his captain, and as Paddy was as gallant a fellow as ever stepped and never failed in his duty, I don't think he would have been willing to act as you suggest. We must not forget that we were once upon a time youngsters ourselves, and we may possibly recall to mind some of the tricks we played in those days, ay, and after we had mounted a swab, or maybe two, on our shoulders. You remember the sentry-box which stood at the inner end of the landing-place on the Common Hard, with a comfortable seat inside it, rather tempting, it must be confessed, to a drowsily-disposed sentry to take a quiet snooze. Our fore-fathers had more consideration for the legs and feet of soldiers than the martinets of our times. To be sure, it a sentry was found asleep he ought have been flogged or shot, but he could sit down and rest himself, and if he did so it was at his own risk.

"One night several young commanders, there may have been a post-captain among them, coming down to the Common Hard, after a dinner-party on shore, to go on board their ships, found the sentry fast asleep in his sentry-box. They, of course, were as sober as judges; he, evidently, drunk as a fiddler. They thereon held a consultation, and came to the unanimous conclusion that it was meet and fit that a man guilty of so flagrant an infraction of military discipline should receive condign punishment, and constituting themselves the executioners as well as the judges of the law, forthwith set about carrying out the sentence they had pronounced. Calling up the strongest men of their boats' crews, they ordered them to shoulder the sentry-box and its sentry within, and to carry it down to one of the boats as gently as possible, not to awake the occupant. There, however, was little chance of that. Safe on board,—there being no witnesses but themselves to the operation,—the boat containing it was towed across to the Gosport shore, on which, being carefully landed, it was set up in its proper position, facing the harbour. Great, as may be supposed, was the consternation of the 'Relief' when it arrived at the post, to find sentry-box and sentry gone. The soldier could not have walked off with it as a snail does its shell on its back. A rigid search was instituted, but no sign of sentry or box could be discovered, and the sentry at the Dockyard gates, having also been snoozing at the time, had neither seen nor heard anything unusual. The captain of the guard, unable, even by a conjecture, to solve the mystery, considered it of sufficient importance to report without delay to the major, who, jumping to the conclusion,

as he heard it when awakened from his first sleep, that the French had made their way into the harbour, and were about to assault the town, turned out the guard, ordered the draw-bridge to be hauled up, and, like a wise soldier, took every precaution to avoid surprise. Not till the next morning was his mind set at rest, when a report came from across the harbour that a sentry-box had been found on the Gosport shore, where one had not stood the night before, with a sentry in front of it, who could give no account of how he got there. The sentry, on awaking at daybreak, had in vain looked for the objects he expected to see around him, but deemed it prudent to maintain his post. When questioned, he roundly asserted that he had been broad awake all night, and the only conclusion to which he or any one else could come, was that he had been the victim of some trick of witchcraft."

"Were you, admiral, among those who played it?" asked Captain Sourcroust "because then the less I say on the subject the better."

"A man is not compelled by law to give evidence against himself," answered the admiral, laughing. "I give the tale current at the time, and happened to have been informed of the facts which solved the mystery. I should say that Jerry Hazledine had nothing to do with it, as it was before his day. He has a good many things set down to his account."

"Some of them were true bills, however," observed another post-captain. "I was a midshipman under him when he commanded the old *Turk*. Though good-natured he was somewhat hot-tempered. One of our marines had been bred a barber, and Jerry, discovering this, made the man come in every morning to shave him, the steward following with a jug of warm water. It had just been placed on the table as the barber had finished lathering the captain's face, but instead of being only warm was scalding hot. The marine, not reflecting on this, dipped in his razor, and intending to commence operations on the captain's upper lip, touched the tip of his nose with the back. As Jerry felt the pain, on the impulse of the moment up went his fist, which he planted with a knock-down blow between the eyes of the unfortunate jolly, who rolled over, half-stunned, on the deck. I, at that moment, went into the cabin, having been sent on some duty or other, and heard Jerry shout out in a voice of thunder:—

"'Take that, ye spalpeen, and think yourself fortunate to get it instead of the three dozen you would have had as sure as you're alive for burning your captain's nose.' The captain, in half a minute, sitting down as if nothing had happened, the jolly picked himself up and went on with the operation, taking very good care, you may be certain, not to burn Jerry's nose again. Some time after this, our captain received an intimation from the Admiralty, as did other captains, that flogging was as much as possible to be avoided, and other punishments substituted. On this, Jerry, who was possessed of an inventive turn of mind, set himself to work to devise such as would to a certainty be so hated by the men that they would answer the purpose of maintaining discipline fully as much as flogging. The ship's cook was a one-legged negro, a jolly, fat fellow with a comical expression of countenance, Sambo Lillywhite by name, generally known as Sam Lilly. Sam had a white mate called Tim Dippings, an incorrigibly idle rascal. One day Tim—not for the first time—had neglected to clean the galley, and on being reported, both he and Sam Lilly were put in the black list. Jerry, exercising his inventive genius, ordered Tim to walk the deck the whole of the afternoon watch, with a cauldron slung round his neck half full of slush; while the black cook, with a huge frying-pan held at arm's length in each hand, had to pace up and down for the same period. As each bell struck Tim had to sing out, 'Here am I for not cleaning the galley,' which was responded to by Sambo, in the most dolorous tone, with, 'I here for no see 'um do it,' his peculiar voice and the comical expression of his countenance eliciting roars of laughter from his shipmates. Thus at every half-hour the words went sounding along the deck, 'Here am I for not cleaning the galley!' 'I here for no see 'um do it.' Jerry, however, on another occasion, surpassed even himself, he caught a man smuggling a bottle of rum on board. The opportunity for exhibiting his inventive genius was not to be lost. The bottle was captured and the man put in the black list. The captain, after due consideration, ordered a cock to be fixed in a seven-gallon beaker, into which, being more than half-filled with water, the rum was emptied. It was then secured by a rope yarn round the neck of the culprit, who appeared thus at the commencement of the watch with a tumbler in his hand, and as the bell struck he had to fill his glass and drink the contents, shouting out at the top of his voice each time, 'Here am I, a smuggler bold!' He was never again caught smuggling spirits on board. Some captains with less inventive genius are much more cruel than was our friend Jerry in their black list punishments."

"That is not a subject I wish to bear spoken of," observed Captain Sourcroust, in an angry tone.

"Come, come, we'll change it then, gentlemen," exclaimed the good-natured admiral.

"I forgot," whispered Jack's neighbour to him. "Old Sourcroust is said to have had a man's head shaved, and to have made him carry a kettle of boiling water on the top of it for two hours during every day-watch for a week, but that may be scandal."

"As to the shaving I fancy so, but with regard to the water it is true enough, only it was not boiling," answered Jack. "He got hauled up for it, notwithstanding, and no wonder that he does not like the subject of black-listing spoken of."

Notwithstanding the grumpy remarks Captain Sourcroust occasionally let drop, the party went off very pleasantly, and Desmond and Gordon assured Tom that he had not overpraised the admiral, and that they had no notion there were such jolly old fellows in the navy. He, at all events, was worthy of all the patronage they could bestow.

Murray came on board the frigate the next day to see Jack and Terence. He was pleased with the corvette as far as she herself was concerned.

"She is as fine a little craft as I could wish for, but," he added, "the commander is one of the oddest fish I ever fell in with. He has not been to sea for a number of years, and having, as he says, turned his sword into a ploughshare, has devoted his mind to farming and rural sports. Unwilling to tear himself altogether from his beloved beeves and sheep, and pigs and poultry, he has brought them along with him, and has converted the little ship into a regular Noah's ark. The boats are turned into sheep-pens and hen-coops, and the decks cumbered with ox-stalls and hay-stacks. If the latter, in the meantime, do not catch fire, the admiral, when he comes to inspect us, will order them and the greater

portion of the live-stock to be landed, and we shall probably benefit by the remainder, as they must be killed for want of food, so we have said nothing to him as yet on the subject; but Haultaut, our first, grumbles and looks askance at the beasts every time he goes along the deck, and declares that the ship is more like a Thames barge than a man-of-war, while Grummet, the boatswain, grins ominously at them, and tells the butcher to keep his knife sharp, as he will have work enough on his hands before long. Old Babbicome is afflicted, it seems, with absence of mind. The day after he joined the ship he sang out to a midshipman, 'Let my cab be brought round to the door.' The youngster stared. 'Do you hear? What did I say?' 'You desired to have your cab brought round to the door, sir,' answered the midshipman, trying to stifle his laughter. 'Ah! did I?' exclaimed the commander. 'Well, possibly. It's no easy matter to change one's mode of expression on a sudden. I mean, man my gig; I am going on shore.' The first day he attempted to carry on duty, he threw all the crew into convulsions by shouting out, 'Wo-ho! wo-ho, there! I mean, avast hauling, you lubbers!' and he swore and stamped with rage when he saw the men tittering near him, and wanted to know what they were laughing at."

Probably, we shall hear more of Commander Babbicome. Murray's account highly amused his friends.

"Well, Alick, you may possibly pick up a few wrinkles which may be of use to you when your time comes, and you settle down on the Highland farm you used to talk about," said Jack, laughing.

"I would sacrifice so remote a benefit for the sake of having the ship look rather more like a man-of-war than she does at present," answered Murray.

Two days after this a lighter was seen alongside the corvette, when truss after truss of hay was lowered into her. Then came two fat oxen and lastly, nearly a dozen sheep.

"Any more coming?" asked the master of the lighter.

"No, no," exclaimed the commander, who had been looking on with ruthless countenance, adding, as he turned aft, clenching his fist, and pulling at his hair, "I'd sooner throw up my command than part with them."

The frigate and corvette were ready for sea at the same time, and went out together to Spithead. Still their destination was unknown. The tailors, the Jews, and even the bumboat-women were unable to solve the mystery, the fact being that the Lords of the Admiralty had not decided themselves. Ships were wanted at three different stations, but economy being the order of the day, all three could not be supplied. The West Indies, the South American station and the Pacific were spoken of. At length Captain Hemming announced that he had received orders to proceed to Jamaica, and that the *Tudor* was to accompany the *Plantagenet*. More stores and provisions were received on board, till every locker and cranny in the two ships was filled, as Adair remarked, to bursting.

Admiral Triton came on board the frigate to wish his young friends good-bye.

"I cannot say that I hope you'll come back crowned with glory and your pockets filled with prize-money, for such things are not to be picked up now-a-days," he said, shaking Jack's hand, "but may you enjoy health and happiness and have many a long yarn to spin about your adventures in the West Indies or wherever you may be sent to, and I suspect that your captain has got orders to proceed rather farther than you at present expect."

As the kind old admiral went down the side, the anchor was run up to the bows, to the sound of the merry fife, the topsails were sheeted home, and the two ships glided westward over the smooth waters of the Solent. It was a lovely morning, a few fine weather clouds were to be seen here and there in the sky, but there were not enough of them to obscure the noon-day splendour of the sun. The duck trousers and shirts of the crews looked clean and summerish; the new gold lace on the uniforms of the officers glittered brightly as they paced the deck, or hurried here and there as duty called; the sentries with gleaming arms and white belts; the fresh paint, the light-coloured copper, the snowy canvas, all indicated that the ships were just out of harbour, to many an admiring eye from Ryde pier, and from yachts large and small, as the frigate followed by the corvette, with a leading wind, ran past the shores of the Isle of Wight, towards the Needles passage. Numberless yachts skimmed by them; those fairy-like fabrics which Englishmen alone know how thoroughly to enjoy, varying in size from Lord Yarborough's superb *Falcon*, to the tiny craft whose owner is probably proud of her in inverse ratio to her tonnage. All is not gold that glitters, and the fair admirers of the graceful frigate and corvette would have been somewhat horrified, could they have witnessed the various scenes taking place within the dark recesses of the ships, and had they heard the language, neither refined nor pious, uttered by their sturdy crews, and it must be confessed by some of the officers also—not by Jack Rogers though—for neither oath nor unbecoming phrase ever issued from his honest lips. The mate of the lower deck, with the purser's clerks and assistants, had provisions and articles innumerable to stow away; the gunner, boatswain, and carpenter, their respective stores to look to; indeed, in every department order had to commence its reign, where chaos had hitherto seemed to prevail, operations not to be performed without their due allowance of shouting and swearing. On deck all went smoothly, and under the pleasantest of auspices the two ships ran through the Needles, and stood down channel.

Tom and Paddy Desmond (for, of course he was so called, as Tom said he would be) were as jolly as possible, and laughed at sea-sickness, or any of the ills landsmen are subject to; they were not going to be ill, not they. Already they began to consider themselves first-rate sailors, for they could go aloft and skylark as fearlessly as young monkeys, and box the compass; and had some notion when the helm was a-lee, and the head-sails backed against the mast, that the ship would come about. As yet, to be sure, they had had only light winds and smooth water, but even a heavy gale would make no difference to them, of that they were very sure. Old Higson grinned sarcastically when he heard them say so.

"Oh, of course, sucking Nelsons like you are above such weaknesses; we shall see, though, when the time comes. The proof of the pudding is in the eating."

"Faith, I hope to have some better pudding to eat than this hard duff," answered Paddy, who seldom understood the

meaning of the proverb Higson was in the habit of quoting. The old mate only laughed; though he had a colt, to keep the turbulent in order, he seldom used it, treating the two youngsters with more consideration than he might have done under other circumstances, out of respect to Rogers and Adair, though they were under the impression that it was owing to their own merits, and were apt accordingly to take liberties with him. He behaved to them as a good-natured bear might towards a couple of playful children whom he could munch up in a moment.

"I say, Tom, couldn't we be after playing some trick like that the admiral told us of, which your brother and my uncle Terence played off on Lieutenant Spry, with Quaco, the monkey," said Gerald, one day to his messmate, when they were alone together; "it would be mighty good fun."

"I should like to do something of the sort amazingly, but once when Jack was telling me some of the tricks of his midshipman-days, he gave me a strong hint not to imitate them, as he would certainly be down upon me," answered Tom; "for all he is so good-natured, he can be wonderfully strict, I can tell you. He was saying that tricks are very well in their way if they are original and have fun in them, but that those who play them must look out for the consequences."

"I shouldn't have supposed that of him," said Gerald; "I'm after thinking now that my uncle Terence would be as ready for any fun as he ever was in his life."

"Very likely, but he mightn't approve of our indulging in it notwithstanding," answered Tom; "however, if you can think of anything, I'm willing enough to lend a hand. We can't play Lieutenant Jennings such a trick as they did old Spry, because he's too wide awake and wouldn't stand it; besides, we've no Quaco to dress up in his uniform. By-the-bye, I hope that we shall be able to get a jolly monkey before long, at Jamaica or elsewhere. I don't know if they run wild in the woods there, indeed it might be as well to have a civilised one who knows how to behave himself, and then I think we might manage to play old Scrofton, the boatswain, a trick."

"How?" asked Gerald eagerly.

"Don't you know that he has got a notion in his head that men are descended, or rather, I should say, ascended from apes, which he declares has been proved by a Lord Monboddoo, or some other wiseacre, and if we had a monkey, we might somehow or other put his theory to the test, and, at all events, have some fun with the old fellow."

"Capital; I'll think over what can be done," exclaimed Gerald, rubbing his hands with glee; "do the gunner and carpenter agree with him?"

"No; the three are constantly disputing on the subject. I heard them yesterday, and they are probably at it again to-day. Come below; it will be good fun to hear them."

The midshipmen found the three warrant officers in the boatswain's cabin. He was seated; the others standing at the door, leaning against the bulkheads. They took up a position, so as not to be seen within earshot. The gunner was arguing that if men have grown out of monkeys, there would be none of the latter left, as they would all have turned into men; and the carpenter declared that though he had wandered all the world over, he had never met with one half-way between a man and a monkey, which he should have done if any change does take place.

"Have you ever seen apes without tails?" asked old Scrofton triumphantly.

"Yes," answered Gimlett, "with blue faces and hinder-ends of the same colour, but they moved on all fours, and though we had one aboard, and did our best to teach him to speak, and light a fire, and make himself useful, he could never do anything, and remained as great a beast as ever to the cud of his clays."

"Of course," said Blake, the gunner; "a man's a man, and a beast's a beast; and there are no greater beasts than apes; that's my opinion, whatever Lord What-do-ye-call-him, or any other of your philosophers says to the contrary."

"I tell you it's all down in my book as clear as a pikestaff, and it's my Lord Monboddoo says it," exclaimed Mr Scrofton indignantly. "He, I should think, would know more about the matter than any warrant officer in her Majesty's service, or any captain or commander to boot."

The midshipmen's laughter made the gunner pop his head out, when they, feeling ashamed of acting longer the part of eaves-droppers, moved off.

"Old Scrofton is fair game anyhow," said Desmond. "I wonder a man can be such a fool."

"He is a very good boatswain, notwithstanding, my brother Jack says," observed Tom.

Mr Scrofton was a character, as are many other warrant officers. They must, indeed, besides being sober and steady and good seamen, be somewhat above the average as to intellect to obtain their appointments, while their eccentricities and peculiarities have generally not till then been noticed. Possessing but a limited amount of education, the boatswain of the *Plantagenet* endeavoured, on attaining his present rank, to instruct himself; and having no one to advise him, he had purchased some books at haphazard, the contents of which he respected the more that they were totally beyond his comprehension. The work mentioned was among them, and as he thought that he understood it best it was his chief favourite. He was a short, spare man, with a red face tanned by tropical suns, ferrety eyes, sharp as needles, and huge black whiskers which stuck out like studding-sails on either side of his countenance. Once upon a time it was reported a Russian admiral, on visiting the ship to which he belonged, was much astonished when Scrofton was pointed out to him as the boatswain. "What, so small a fellow as that?" he exclaimed; "we always select our boatswains from men six feet high and upwards, who can use their rattans with good effect." Small as he was the boatswain of the *Plantagenet* had a voice which could be heard amid the loudest strife of the elements; and being a thorough seaman he was respected by the crew in spite of his philosophical

notions, about which they cared nothing. He was extremely loath to get the men punished if he could help it, and never swore at them in the way they called swearing—not that they would have minded it much if he had—though he occasionally seasoned his remarks with expressions gleaned from his books, which had the more force that their meaning was utterly incomprehensible. He entertained a friendly feeling for the two young midshipmen, whom he took great pains to instruct in their nautical duties; and under his tuition they soon gained a fair knowledge of the arts of knotting, splicing, and other practical details of their profession; nor did he entertain a suspicion that they held his philosophical opinions otherwise than in profound respect. Jack and Adair gave them lessons in navigation, so that they had advantages not generally possessed by youngsters in those days who had not been to the Naval College. Tom, having got the start, though only of a few days, kept steadily ahead of his companion. He had had the advantage of better training at school, as far as navigation was concerned. Dick Needham, also, who had been rated as boatswain's-mate, was another of their instructors; and as he was always in good humour, and took the greatest possible pains to teach them all he knew, they gained as much from him as from any one else.

The frigate and corvette sailed forward on their course across the Atlantic, with every stitch of canvas they could carry set slow and aloft. Two or three times they were totally becalmed, when the officers of the two ships paid visits to each other. Murray, with Archy Gordon, had come on board the *Plantagenet*.

"Well, Gordon, how do you get on aboard the corvette?" was the natural question put by Tom.

"Vary weel, but we've much the same sort of thing to do every day; washing and holy-stoning decks in the morning, and exercising at the guns and mail arms in the forenoon, and studying navigation and seamanship, and sic like," answered Archy.

"Faith, that's what we've to do here," said Gerald. "I came to sea to enjoy some fun; but we've not had much of it yet, though, to be sure, we lead a jolly life, take it all in all."

"The fun will come in time," observed Tom. "We never can tell what will turn up—perhaps before long—who knows?"

Murray was with Jack and Terence in the gun-room.

"Well, and how does old Babbicome get on?" asked Jack.

"He is amusing enough, but not altogether satisfactory as a commander," answered Murray. "He and Haultaut are continually disputing, and he never comes on deck without finding fault, at which Haultaut very naturally sets up his back, and generally finishes by going below. The commander seldom attempts to carry on duty, and that only in fine weather, without making some egregious blunder, and he always excuses himself by observing, 'I don't admire the new-fangled ways you young men have of doing things. We managed matters very differently on board the old *Orion*, I can tell you,' or, as he walks up and down the deck examining everything not in existence when he was last at sea, he exclaims, 'We'll change all this presently—it doesn't come up to my notions; never saw thingumbobs fitted in this way before.' We have eaten most of his sheep, as it was necessary to kill them for want of provender; but if the rest live till we reach Madeira, he will, I conclude, lay in a fresh supply. His pigs are, however, his great delight. He gloats over them, and spends an hour every day in currying them as he would a horse. They do him credit, for they are as sleek and fat as poodles. Though he avows that he is fond of pork, I suspect that he will never bring himself to order one of them to be slaughtered. To his credit I must say that he does not swear at the men; he is not, however, liked by them. When a lieutenant he got the name of 'Jib-and-Foresail Jack,' and it sticks to him still. When he had the watch at night he would be always bothering them to alter sails, and it was, they say, 'Up jib,' and 'Down jib,' and 'Up foresail' and 'Down foresail' every minute. He carries on much in the same way at present, and seldom comes on deck without shaking his head as he looks aloft, and shouting out 'Another pull at the lee-braces, Mr Haultaut;—we always trimmed sails properly on board the old *Orion*, sir,' or some such complimentary remark to our much-enduring first. The boatswain has a dog—a favourite with the men—which goes by the no uncommon name of Shakings. The commander detests Shakings, who he unjustly declares worries his sheep. One evening poor Shakings fell overboard. The men were in despair, knowing that the commander would not dream of heaving-to to pick him up. I saw what had occurred, and was going to intercede for the dog when I heard a voice from forward sing out, 'One of the captain's pigs overboard—there he goes astern.' The commander ran to the taffrail. Just then there was a splash, and as I looked over the side I saw one of his sleek pigs swimming as fast it could away from the ship. The commander soon caught sight of his favourite. The ship was hove-to, a boat lowered, and the boatswain, who jumped into her and managed to pick up the dog before he reached the other animal, avowed roundly that Shakings had jumped overboard to save the pig."

Jack and Terence laughed heartily at Murray's account of his commander, given as it was with all the gravity imaginable.

"Well, we bear with him as best we can," he added, "and only hope that he may ere long return to the bosom of his family, and to the congenial pursuits which occupy his thoughts."

A light breeze springing up compelled Murray and his companions to return to their ship. That night during the middle watch Tom and Gerald, who were fast asleep in their hammocks, were aroused by the boatswain's shrill pipe and gruff voice bawling, "All hands on deck—shorten sail!" They turned out with the rest; most of the officers and crew were on deck before they reached it. The frigate, caught in a squall, was heeling over till her lee-scuppers were under water, while dark, foam-crested seas came rolling up, deluging her deck fore and aft. The fore-topgallant-mast had been carried away, and was striking against the fore-topsail, ready to sweep to destruction the hands who were swarming on the yard; the main and mizen-topgallant-sheets had been let fly, and the sails were flapping wildly in the gale; while the wind whistling through the rigging—ropes slashing about—the seas dashing—the bulkheads creaking—the masts and spars groaning, created a perfectly deafening uproar. Then came a clap like thunder—the foretack had parted, and the block striking a seaman had carried him overboard. To attempt to pick him up was useless—he must have been killed instantaneously. For a moment there was confusion; but the voice of the captain,

heard above all other sounds, quickly restored order. While the topmen were clearing away the wreck of the fore-topgallant-mast, the most dangerous task, hauling the main and mizen-topgallant-sails, and reefing topsails, the courses were hauled up, and the frigate righting flew forward on her course. The sudden movement threw Tom and Gerald, who had been holding on to the capstan, off their legs, and the next moment, as she again heeled over to the gale sent them rolling into the lee-scuppers, where they lay sprawling in the mass of water washing across the deck—Gerald striking out with arms and legs under the belief that he was overboard.

“Help! help! Heave us a rope. Where is it you are, Tom? Don’t be after giving up—swim away,” he cried out, as he got his head above the water still rushing round him.

Tom was striking out lustily, as Gerald soon discovered by a kick he received from his foot, of which he caught hold, supposing it to be the end of a rope. Tom struggled the more to release himself, having found out that he was safe on deck.

“Let go, I say, or I shall never get on my legs,” he exclaimed, kicking away with all his might.

“Arrah now, I’ll be drowned entirely,” bawled Gerald, as the water again washed over him. His shouts fortunately at this juncture attracted the attention of Jack, who, setting him and Tom on their legs, told them to go below and turn into their hammocks, as they were not of the slightest use on deck.

Drenched to the skin and crest-fallen, after holding on to each other for half a minute and gazing round them at the dark tumultuous billows, they did as they were bid, glad to strip off their wet clothes and endeavour to get between the blankets.

“Sure I’m after feeling mighty quare,” said Gerald, as he was trying to scramble into his hammock, but it would not remain quiet as it was accustomed to do.

“So do I,” groaned Tom, “I didn’t think anything could upset me, but this is awful.”

“Faith there’s but little fun in it at all at all,” cried Gerald, who had succeeded in getting in and covering himself up. “Will we all be drowned, do you think?”

“I hope not; my brother Jack seems to consider that there’s nothing in it, and of course he’s right—oh!”

The frigate gave a pitch, which made Tom feel as if he was going to be shot feet foremost along the deck.

“Arrah, now, where will we be after going to?” cried Paddy, from his hammock.

“Belay the slack of your jaws, youngsters,” growled out old Higson, who had just turned in after his watch, and being perfectly indifferent to all the rolling and pitching, and the wild uproar of the elements, wanted to go to sleep.

“If you make such a row, my colt and your backs will become acquainted with each other before long.”

“Why, man alive, it isn’t we are making the row, sure it’s the wind and the big waves outside the ship,” exclaimed Paddy.

The midshipmen’s small voices were, however, much more disturbing to the old mate than the sounds of the gale. A threatening growl was the only answer he condescended to make, as he had no intention to take the trouble of turning out of his hammock to execute the vengeance he promised.

Tom also by this time was dropping off to sleep, and Gerald shortly after followed his example. They ought properly to have kept the morning watch, but they were not called till the hammocks were piped up. They had then to turn out, feeling utterly unable to do anything but sit on their chests and languidly clutch their wet clothes. The two marines acting as their servants at length came aft, looking as pale and miserable as they were, and suggested that it would be wiser to get out some dry things. Dressing, after several pauses, was accomplished, and washing having been dispensed with, they managed to reel into the berth. There sat Higson, with coffee-pot in hand, and most of the other oldsters holding on to cups and plates, the biscuit-boat and more substantial viands being secured by puddings on the table.

“I’ve ordered some fat bacon especially for you fellows,” said the former, looking at Tom and Gerald; “it’s the best thing for you.”

“Oh, don’t,” they groaned in chorus. “Horrible!”

“Why don’t? You’ll never become sailors till you’ve eaten half a pound apiece every morning, for at least a week.”

The fat bacon was brought. Tom tried to lift a piece to his mouth at the end of his fork, but his hips curled, he could not have done it to save his life. Gerald essayed to do likewise with the same result.

They were not alone in their misery. The assistant-surgeon, two clerks, and another midshipman looked equally pale and miserable.

“Come, come, youngsters, munch away,” said Hickson; “it’s time to finish breakfast.”

“I wish to be a sailor,” cried Tom, again manfully lifting the piece of pork towards his loathing lips, but though his spirit was high his feelings overcame him, and he bolted out of the berth, followed by Gerald and several others, amid the laughter of the seasoned hands.

Tom's misfortunes did not end here, for the frigate giving a violent roll he butted head foremost right between the legs of Mr Jennings, the tall lieutenant of marines, who not being especially firm on them just then, was upset in a moment. The rest of the party, including McTavish, the assistant-surgeon, escaping from the berth now came tumbling over them, and there the whole lay stretched on the deck, kicking frantically, as if knocked over by a dose of canister fired into their midst.

The prostrate officer, utterly unable to rise, shouted for some time in vain for assistance; at length his cries were heard by the corporal of marines and two of his men, who hurrying aft to his rescue, hauled off the superincumbent midshipmen and McTavish, and set Lieutenant Jennings, foaming with indignation, on his legs.

"Beg pardon, sir, I didn't intend it," cried Tom; "I won't do it again."

But Tom was counting without his host, for at that instant the ship, giving another roll, threw him once more against the luckless lieutenant, who grasping at the corporal, over they all went, McTavish and Gerald, who had been thrown against the other jollies, bringing them again right over Lieutenant Jennings to the deck.

"This is unbearable," he spluttered out, "I'll have you youngsters put under arrest. Marines, can't you keep your legs? Help me up. Get off me, all you, I say."

But as the marines could not help themselves, it could scarcely be expected that they could assist their officer, still less could the medico and the midshipmen. The serjeant, however, hearing the uproar, followed by a couple of his men, with a faint idea that a mutiny of some sort had broken out, hurried aft, and with the assistance of Higson amid the other oldsters who came out of the berth to see what was the matter, quickly got the mass of struggling humanity disentangled and placed in as upright position as circumstances would allow. The lieutenant ought really to have been much obliged to Tom, for his anger completely overcame the nausea from which he had been suffering; but ungrateful, like too many others, as Higson observed, he went back into the gunroom demanding condign punishment on the head of his benefactor and his messmates. He was saved thereby from witnessing the effect of that leveller of mankind, sea-sickness, on nearly half his men, who lay about the deck unable to move, and only wishing that the ship would go down and bring their misery to an end. Jack soon soothed the temper of his brother officer, who was a brave and really a good-natured man, and then went to look after Tom and Gerald. He advised them to lie down with their eyes shut in the berth which was now vacated, the occupants being called off to their respective duties, and the assistant-surgeon having retired into the dispensary to concoct a specific against sea-sickness of his own invention, which made him and those he persuaded to take it ten times worse.

Soon afterwards all hands were piped on deck, and the sea-sick had to appear as well as the rest. The report had been made to the captain that a man had been knocked overboard, but who was the sufferer was uncertain. The frigate was bravely breasting the foaming billows under close-reefed topsails, ever and anon a hissing sea striking her bows and its crest sweeping across the deck, the spray in dense showers coming right aft, and rendering flushing coats and tarpaulins necessary to those who desired dry skins. Overhead the dark clouds flew rapidly by, showing no abatement of the gale. Far astern was the *Tudor* with no fore-topsail set, showing that either the mast or yard had been sprung while it was impossible to say what other damage she might have received, if caught unprepared as the frigate had been. The muster-roll was now called over. A third of the crew had answered to their names. "Richard Jenkins" was called. It was the name of a fine young topman. No Richard Jenkins replied; but he must have been aloft at the time the fore-tack parted, and then two other topmen acknowledged that they had been afraid some one had been knocked from the fore-topsail-yard; but the thick darkness, and the wild flapping of the sail, had made them uncertain. The other names were called over. No one answered to that of Daniel Bacon. He was rated as a landsman, and would have been forward at the time. Two, then, in the darkness of night had been cast unnoticed into their ocean grave. "Poor fellows! poor fellows!" uttered by their messmates, was the only requiem they received—the contents of their bags were sold; the purser wrote D against their names, which before the gale was over had ceased to be mentioned.

The slight excitement and the fresh air on deck had kept the midshipmen up, but on going below they felt more miserable than ever. Utterly unable to stand they threw themselves on their chests, half wishing that they had gone overboard instead of poor Jenkins and Bacon. More than once they were hove off, but they managed to crawl on again, and cling to the lids in a way sick midshipmen alone could have done. Adair, on going round the lower deck, found them in this condition.

"Uncle Terence, dear, when is it all going to be over?" groaned out Gerald. "There's mighty little fun in this same."

"Only the ordinary seasoning youngsters have to go through," answered Adair; "however, we'll see what can be done for you."

Tom, whose head hung over the end of his chest, with a kid which had been brought him under his nose, was past speaking. Adair ordered their hammocks to be slung, and being assisted in, they lay helpless till the gale was over. Let no one despise the two midshipmen, although their messmates might have laughed at them. Their experiences were those of many other brave officers, Nelson included; and they had not a few companions in their misery among those unaccustomed to the tumblings of the ocean. At length, the wind going down, the sea became tolerably smooth, and turning out, they went on deck by Adair's advice to enjoy a few mouthfuls of fresh air. The effect on their appetites was such as to astonish even old Higson by the way in which they devoured the pea-soup and boiled beef and potatoes, a junk of fat pork even not coming amiss, washed down by stiff glasses of grog, which, in consideration of their recent sufferings, he allowed them to take.

"Well, youngsters, you are filling up your lockers with a vengeance," he remarked.

"Faith, it's no wonder when they were cleaned out three days ago, and not a scrap the size of a sixpenny-piece stowed away in them since," answered Gerald, who with Tom was eyeing lovingly a huge suet dumpling just placed

smoking hot on the table.

"Any duff, Rogers?" asked Higson; "I doubt if you've room for much."

"I think I could just manage a slice to begin with, and then I'll try what more I can do," answered Tom.

A huge slice was handed to him, and another to Gerald. "You shall have your next helping from the left side, youngsters," said the caterer, with a wink at the rest, who all thereon begged for plenty. Tom and Gerald applied themselves to the duff, which they found rather appetising than otherwise; but when they looked up expecting to get their second slices, an empty dish with Higson's face grinning beyond it, alone met their view. However, they agreed that they had dined very well considering, and from that moment, though others occasionally knocked up, they were never off duty from sea-sickness.

Chapter Three.

Madeira sighted—Misfortunes of Commander Babbicome—A ride on shore—Naval cavalry charge down a hill and overturn some dignitaries of Church and State—A pleasant visit of apology—Suddenly ordered to sea—An expedition to bring off "wash clothes."

A few days after the storm was over Madeira was made; to the eastward of it, as the frigate sailed on, there came in sight a small island called the Desertas. Tom, wishing to show that he was wide awake, reported a large ship coming round the Desertas. He was, however, only laughed at, for his supposed ship turned out to be a rock of a needle form, rising several hundred feet out of the sea, and would have been as Higson told him, if it had been a ship, bigger than the famed *Mary Dunn*, of Diver, whose flying jibboom swept the weathercock off Calais church steeple, while her spanker-boom end only just shaved clear of the white cliffs of old England. The scenery of Madeira, as they sailed along its shore, was pronounced very grand and beautiful; its lofty cliffs rising perpendicularly out of the blue ocean with a fringe of surf at their base, and vine-clad mountains towering up into the clear sky beyond them; here and there a small bay appearing, forming the mouth of a ravine, its sides covered with orange groves and dotted with whitewashed cottages, and a little church in their midst. Rounding the southern end of the island, the frigate came to an anchor in the bay of Funchal, the town in a thin line of houses stretching along the shore before them, and a wild mountainous region beyond, with country houses or quintas scattered over the lower ground, and high above it the white church of Nossa Senhora do Monte, glistening in the sun.

An important object had attracted Captain Hemming to Madeira. It was to ship a couple of casks of its famed wine for the admiral on the Jamaica station, as well as one for himself, and he took the opportunity of fitting a new topgallant-mast. A few hours afterwards the *Tudor* came in and dropped her anchor close to the frigate. She had evidently suffered severely in the gale. Her fore-topsail-yard was so badly sprung that sail could not be carried on it. Her mizen-topmast was gone, her starboard bulwarks forward stove in, one of her boats carried away; besides which she had received other damages. The sea which had injured her bulwarks had swept along her deck, but everything had been secured, without doing further harm, and fortunately no one had been lost.

Commander Babbicome at once came on board the *Plantagenet* to pay his respects to Captain Hemming. He was a short, stout man, with a red face and thick neck, betokening a plethoric habit. After having been on shore for some years he had been appointed to the *Tudor* through the influence of a relative, who had actively supported the ministry in electioneering matters. Probably never much of a sailor, though he might have been as brave as a lion, such experience as he possessed being that of days gone by, he had an especial horror of all new-fangled notions. He laid all the blame of the disasters his ship had met with to the Dockyard riggers. "They don't do things as they used to do, that's very clear, or I shouldn't have lost my mizen-topmast!" he exclaimed, while pacing the frigate's deck with angry steps; "I doubt whether in this hole of a place we can get our damages repaired."

"I'll send my carpenters on board, so that you may be independent of the natives. How long will it take to set you to rights?"

"Three or four days I should suppose," was the answer.

"Well, I will remain for that time, and we will sail together," said Captain Hemming.

It was quickly known on board both ships that they were not to leave for some days, and parties were made up to go on shore the next morning, and take a ride to the Corral and other places of interest.

A merry set of gun-room officers and midshipmen left the ships soon after breakfast, Jack and Adair, with Lieutenant Jennings leading. Murray could not go, but Archy Gordon got leave; his services, as he told his friends, not being absolutely required. They wisely landed in shore-boats, thus escaping a drenching from the surf, and were hauled up the shingly beach by a number of shouting, bawling, dark-skinned natives, who handed them over to an equally vociferous crowd of muleteers and donkey boys, assembled in readiness with their beasts of high and low degree, to carry travellers up the mountain. Amid the wildest hubbub produced by the shouting, wragging, jabbering of the owners of the beasts, each man praising the qualities of his own animal as he dragged it to the front, the naval party managed to mount; those who could secure them, on horses, the rest on mules; donkeys being despised, though attempts were made to thrust the midshipmen on them. The tall lieutenant of marines had not secured his horse, which he chose for its height, without a desperate struggle. A band of natives rushing on him, one had hoisted his right leg across a mule, another shoving a donkey's rein into his hands, while a third adroitly brought a pony under his left leg, while kicking in the air; but the owner of the high horse saw that his eye had been fixed on it, and being a big fellow came to the rescue, and offering his shoulder as a rest, enabled the lieutenant to spring clear of the mule and other beasts on to the one he had chosen.

"Forward, my lads," he shouted in triumph, as he galloped to the front. Amid an increased chorus of strange-sounding shrieks and cries, the party, shouting and laughing themselves almost as loudly as their attendants, set forward.

"Whooh! whooh!" sung out all the assembled natives in chorus, when the muleteers, catching hold of the tails of their respective animals with their left hands, began to urge them on by digging into their flanks the points of the short goads held in their right hands.

"Arra burra! cara! cara cavache! caval!" screamed out the natives, and on went the steeds, kicking and clattering through the pebble-paved streets, well nigh sending some of their less experienced riders over their heads, and dispersing to the right and left every one they encountered.

"I say, we won't be after having these fellows at our heels all the way," exclaimed Adair.

"Of course not," said Jack; "it would be a horrid bore."

"Be off with ye, now," cried Adair, to the natives; Jack and the rest giving similar orders; but the muleteers, in the first place, did not understand what they said, and, in the second, knew better than to let go, as without the usual tail-pulling and goading, the beasts would not have budged a foot.

"We shall be quit of yer, ye spalpeens, when we get to the lull," cried Adair, at which the swarthy natives grinned, and would have grinned more had they comprehended his remark. Quickly passing through the town, up the steep sides of the mountain, they clattered between high stone walls, crowned by vines, geraniums, and numberless flowering plants, while orange groves were seen here and there through various openings, with pretty quintas nestling amid them; or when they turned their heads glimpses were caught of the town and bay, and the blue ocean.

They had not gone far when they met an Englishman on horse-back, who, pulling up, introduced himself as the merchant about to ship the admiral's wine, and invited them to stop at his quinta, on their way down from the Corral.

"With all the pleasure in life," answered Adair; "and will you have the kindness, sir, to tell these noisy fellows, pulling at our horses' tails, that we can dispense with their company?"

"It would be far from a kindness if I did, for you would find that your beasts would not move ahead without them," said the merchant, laughing, and directing the arrieros to stop at his house on their return, he bade the merry party good morning.

Up and up they went, till Gerald declared that they should reach the moon if they continued on much longer. At length they found themselves on the brink of an enormous chasm, some thousand feet in depth, upwards of two miles in length, and half-a-mile in width, while before them a precipitous wall of rocks towered up towards the blue heavens, broken into numberless craggy pinnacles, amid which the clouds careered rapidly, although far below they lay in thin strata, unmoved by a breeze.

"Grand! magnificent!" and similar exclamations broke from the party. They pushed on to the end of the ravine, where it almost closes; a natural bridge of rocks existing over it to the opposite side; another much broader ravine opening out beyond. Returning by the way they came, the party gazed down upon Funchal and their ships in the harbour.

"Faith, they look for all the world like two fleas floating with their legs in the air," exclaimed Adair; "this is a mighty big mountain, there is no doubt about that."

Their keen appetites and the recollection of the merchant's promised repast made them hurry on their downward way. They were not disappointed either in the substantials, or in the delicacies, oranges, and grapes, with other fruits and wines provided for their entertainment.

"I am expecting your captains and a few grandees and others to dinner, or I would have pressed you to stay," said their kind host, as he wished them good-bye; "I hope you will come to-morrow, though, and remember that my house is at your orders as long as you stay."

Most of the naval heroes had imbibed a sufficient quantity of the merchant's generous liquid to raise their spirits, even somewhat above their usual high level, and Adair took Gerald to task for not having refused the last few glasses offered, though he declared that he himself was as sober as an archbishop.

"And so, faith, am I, Uncle Terence," cried Gerald; "to prove that same I'll race ye down to the bottom of this hit of a hill, and whoever comes in first shall decide the question. Now off we go. 'Wallop ahoo! ahoo! Erin-go-bragh!'" And urging on his steed, of which his arriero had long since let go, as had the others of their animals on descending the mountains, away he started; Adair shouting to him to stop, from the fear that he would break his neck, followed, however, at the same headlong speed, giving vent, in his excitement, to the same shout of "Wallop ahoo! ahoo! Erin-go-bragh!"

The example was infectious, the marine officer even catching it, and off set lieutenants and surgeons, and midshipmen and clerks, as if scampering away from an avalanche to save their lives, instead of running a great risk of losing them. In vain their attendants shouted to them to stop, and went bounding after them. The animals kept well together in a dense mass—a regular stampede—Terence and his nephew keeping the lead. To check themselves had they tried it was impossible, without the certainty of bringing their steeds to the ground, and taking flying leaps over their heads. Suddenly there appeared before them a palanquin—a dignified ecclesiastic seated in it—attended by footmen, while further on were seen several cavaliers, some in military uniforms, with a couple of naval cocked hats rising in their midst. That instant had the cry of "Erin-go-bragh!" escaped from the excited Irishman's throat.

"Avast! haul up for your life, boy," shouted Adair, on beholding the spectacle before him. "Starboard your helm, or you'll be over the padre."

Gerald did try to pull up with might and main, but it was too late, his steed stumbled, shooting him as from a catapult, right on the top—not of a humble padre, but of a bishop of the holy Roman Empire, when his floundering steed upsetting the leading bearer, bishop and midshipman rolled over together, the former shouting for help, the latter apologising. The matter did not stop here. Though Adair managed to clear the bishop, after knocking over one of his lordship's footmen, his steed bolted into the midst of the cavaliers behind, coming full tilt, as ill-luck would have it, against Commander Babbicome of the *Tudor*, who, in spite of his boasted horsemanship, was incontinently capsized, while, before he could recover himself, or his companions rescue him, down came thundering on them the rest of the hilarious cavalcade. Several of the riders, including Tom, attempting to rein in their animals, were sent flying over the prostrate bishop, among the foremost ranks of the party ascending the mountain, while the rest dashing on overthrew the military governor and several other personages of distinction, till Jack, who had from the first reined in his steed, and was behind the rest, could see nothing but a confused mass of kicking legs, and cocked hats, and naval caps, and here and there heads and backs and arms, with a shaven crown in their midst, blocking up the narrow roadway, shouts, cries, shrieks and execrations issuing from among them. The liberated horses had dashed on, leaving their riders to their fate. This contributed considerably to lessen the difficulties of the case. The drivers coming up, Jack dismounted, and giving his horse to one of them ran to assist the bishop and his fallen friends. The midshipmen quickly picked themselves up, very much frightened at what they had done, but not a bit the worse for their tumble. The ecclesiastic was next placed on his legs, with robes somewhat rumpled, but happily without contusions or bones broken, though dreadfully alarmed and inclined to be somewhat angry at the indignity he had suffered. Jack endeavoured to apologise with the few words of Portuguese he could command, Tom and Gerald assisting him to the best of their power, though their united vocabulary failed to convey their sentiments. Meantime, the dismounted cavaliers behind had regained their saddles, as had the gunroom officers and young gentlemen who had tilted against them their feet. Lieutenant Jennings and Terence had scraped clear without losing their seats, but nearly all the rest had been unhorsed. Commander Babbicome was the only one who had suffered damage, and he had received a bloody nose by a blow from his horse's head, but he was infinitely the most irate. "It is a disgrace to the service that such things should be allowed," he exclaimed. "Captain Hemming, I shall demand a court-martial on your officers, or an ample apology. Mine know how to respect their commander." At that moment his eye fell on his own purser and surgeon, with two or three others who were trying to get by close to the wall on either side. "Ah! I see; they shall hear more about it, they may depend on that!"

"Lieutenant Adair will be ready to make you an ample apology, I can answer for that, and you know that naval officers are not always the best of horsemen, of which we have just had an example," said Captain Hemming, who, though annoyed at what had happened, wished to soothe the feelings of the angry commander.

The Portuguese officers ascertaining that the bishop was unhurt took their own overthrow very coolly. "It's the way of those young English naval officers," they observed, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Paciencia!"

With bows and further apologies the two parties separated; the one to partake of the banquet prepared for them, the other to make the best of their way into the town.

"Uncle Terence, you bate me, I'll acknowledge, but if it hadn't been for the fat bishop I'd have won," exclaimed Gerald, as they met Adair not very comfortable in his mind, coming back to look for them.

"We shall all get into a precious row, ye young spalpeen, in consequence of your freak," answered Adair. "Why didn't you pull up at once when I told you?"

"Pull up was it ye say, Uncle Terence?" cried the irrepressible young Irish boy. "Faith now, that's a good joke. Didn't I pull till I thought my arms would be after coming off, but my baste pulled a mighty dale harder."

"Really that nephew of mine will be getting into serious difficulties if he does not learn to restrain the exuberance of his spirits," said Terence quite seriously to Jack, as they rode on together. "When I was a youngster I never went as far as he does."

"As to that, we are apt to forget what we were, and what we did, in the days of our boyhood," answered Jack, laughing heartily.

"You certainly had a wonderful aptitude for getting out of scrapes when you had tumbled into them. However, as it is wiser to keep clear of them altogether, you will do well to give your nephew a lecture on the subject, and I hope that he will benefit by it. I intend to bestow some good advice on Tom on the subject. Many a promising lad injures his future prospects by thoughtlessness. Though we were not always as wise as Solomon, we were invariably sober fellows, or we should probably have come to grief like so many others we have known."

"Faith, yes, it was that last magnum of Madeira floored the bishop and Commander Babbicome, no doubt about it," observed Adair, with a twinkle in his eye.

By this time they had reached the beach, when the arrieros having claimed their horses, not forgetting a liberal payment for their use, the party returned in shore-boats to the ships.

The next morning Commander Babbicome's anger was somewhat cooled down, though to vindicate his outraged dignity, as he could not punish the *Plantagenet's* midshipmen, he stopped all leave from the *Tudor*. Captain Hemming considering that the matter should not be altogether overlooked, took Tom and Gerald on shore to apologise to the bishop, who instead of being angry, laughed heartily, and gave them a basket full of sweet cakes and fruit, for which, though it was a gentle hint that he looked upon them as children, they were very much obliged to him, and voted him a first-rate old fellow.

When the midshipmen of the *Tudor* heard of it they wanted to go and apologise also, but as none of them unfortunately had tumbled over his lordship, they could not find a sufficient excuse for paying him a visit, and though they sent a deputation on board the *Plantagenet* to put in a claim for a share, old Higson declined to entertain it.

Captain Hemming afterwards went on board the *Tudor*, and having told Commander Babbicome of the kind way the bishop had behaved, suggested that it was more Christian-like to forgive than revenge an insult even if premeditated, while that of which he complained certainly was not, and finally induced him to promise that he would say no more about the matter.

The repairs of the *Tudor* were nearly completed.

"A man-of-war steamer coming in from the eastward," reported the signal-midshipman to Mr Cherry.

"She has made her number the *Pluto*," he shortly added.

The *Pluto's* huge paddle-wheels soon brought her into the bay, when the lieutenant commanding her came on board the *Plantagenet*, with despatches for Captain Hemming.

"It was thought possible that we might catch you here as we have had a good deal of calm weather, and our wheels carry us along rather faster than your sails under such circumstances," observed the lieutenant, who knew that his tea-kettle was held in no great respect.

"Ah, yes, steam is useful for despatch-boats," answered the captain, in a slightly sarcastic tone, as he opened the despatches.

He was to direct the *Plantagenet* and *Tudor* to proceed without delay to Trinidad, and thence to go on to Jamaica, calling at the larger Caribbean Islands, belonging to Great Britain, on their way. There was an idea that the blacks were in an unsettled state of mind, and that the appearance of a couple of men-of-war would tend to keep them in order.

Instantly the news became known there was a general bustle on board the frigate. Washed clothes had to be got off and fresh provisions obtained. She was to sail at daylight the next morning, and the *Tudor* was to follow as soon as ready.

"What are we to do for our washed clothes?" exclaimed Higson. "Mother Lobo wasn't to bring them on board till to-morrow evening, and if we send to her the chances are she doesn't get the message or doesn't understand it if she does."

"Sure, the best thing will be to go for them, then," exclaimed Gerald. "Does any one know where she lives?"

"Well thought of, youngster," said Higson; "I know where she hangs out, to the west of the town, beyond the old convent, some way up the hill, but as I can't make her understand a word I say, even if I was to go there, I should not much forward matters."

"But I can talk Portuguese like a native," exclaimed Norris, a midshipman who had been on board a ship stationed at Lisbon for several months, and who, professing to be a great linguist, was always ready to act as interpreter. Whether he understood the replies of the natives or not, he never failed to translate them. It was reported of him that once having accompanied the first lieutenant on shore to get a new topmast made, he asked the Portuguese carpenter at the dockyard,— "In how many dayso will you make a new topmasto for mio fregato?"

"Naö intende," was the answer.

"'Not in ten days,' he says, sir," reported Norris to the lieutenant.

"Why, we can make one on board in less than half that time. Lazy rascals, we will have nothing to do with them," exclaimed the lieutenant, his confidence in the midshipman as a linguist unshaken.

On the present occasion Norris's services were, however, accepted, and all in the berth who could get leave agreed to go. Some of the *Tudor's* midshipmen who were on board the frigate offered to bring on the things if they were not ready.

"No! no! thank ye," answered Higson, cocking his eye, "I've a notion that clean linen would be plentiful aboard the corvette, and by the time it reached us it would be ready again for the laundress."

He, however, accepted their offer to accompany the expedition. As the wind was light and off shore they got leave to take the jolly-boat, being able easily to land in her. Under the guidance of Higson they made their way up the hill to Senhora Lobo's abode. A stream ran near it, on the banks of which half-a-dozen women were kneeling battering away, fine as well as coarse articles of clothing on some rough granite slabs, occasionally rubbing them as a change, with might and main on the hard stones, singing at the same time as they rubbed, or stopping occasionally to laugh and chatter. Among them was discovered Senhora Lobo or Mother Lobo, as Higson designated her, battering away harder than anybody at one of his shirts, as an example to her handmaidens. She rose from her knees, twisting tightly the dripping garment, not to lose time, as she recognised the young gentlemen, when Norris for a wonder made her comprehend more by signs than words, that as the ship was about to sail they must have their clothes immediately.

"Amañãã? to-morrow?" asked Senhora Lobo.

"No, no, 'esta noite,' to-night," answered Norris vehemently.

The washerwoman consulted with her attendants. Piles of wet linen lay on the ground, but a quantity had not yet seen the water. After a considerable amount of jabbering and talking, it was agreed that the task could be accomplished. The sun was hot, and the gentlemen must not be very particular about the ironing. While one half of the damsels set to work again in the stream, the rest, headed by the mistress, began to hang up the washed articles, a young girl being despatched apparently for further assistance. This looked like being in earnest, and the dame assured Norris that the things should be ready by ten o'clock. How to spend the intermediate time was the question, and a ramble into the country was agreed on. Had they been wise they would have secured some mules or donkeys to convey the clothes to the beach. They had, however, undertaken to carry the bags themselves, and were resolved heroically to persevere. They set off on their ramble, Tom and Gerald, and the other youngsters, skylarking as usual. They expected to fall in with some venda, or wine-shop, where they could obtain the refreshment they should require before returning, and Dick Needham was sent back with an order for the boat to come for them at the appointed hour. After rambling to a considerable distance, they began to feel hungry, but in vain they searched for a venda. Fortunately at this juncture they fell in with an Englishman on horseback, to whom they made their wants known.

"Come along with me," he answered; "I will show you a place where you can get some food."

Turning to the right, he led them through a gateway, along a walk bordered by orange-trees, myrtles, geraniums, ever-blossoming rose-trees, and numberless other plants and flowers, up to a bungalow-style of building, from the verandah of which a fine view could be enjoyed over the bay, with the town in the distance, and the hills on either side.

"This looks like a regular first-class boarding-house; we shall have to pay handsomely," whispered Tom to Gerald; "but never mind, we shall enjoy ourselves, and I am terribly sharp-set!"

"Make yourselves at home, gentlemen," said their guide; "supper will soon be on the table."

"Let's have it as soon as possible, that's all, and pray tell the landlord that we shall be perfectly content if we can have a few cold fowls and a ham, or eggs and bacon, and bread and cheese, and some bottles of country wine—we are in no ways particular!" exclaimed Higson, throwing himself on a garden-seat and producing his cigar-case. "Will any of you fellows have a smoke?"

When the case was opened but one cigar remained. Their guide observed it.

"Never mind, I dare say I can find some in the house," he said, and soon returned with a box full. He offered it round.

"What do they cost?" asked Gerald, who indulged in a smoke sometimes, when out of Adair's sight, though his slender purse forbade cigars.

"Never mind," was the answer; "it shall be put down in the bill."

The midshipman took a cigar, when a black servant appearing with a dish of charcoal embers, it was lighted and pronounced excellent. Shortly afterwards several ladies came out of the house and entered into conversation with the young officers, who took them to be guests staying at the inn. The time sped pleasantly by till supper was announced. The ladies accompanied them in, the oldest taking one end of the table, while their guide sat at the other.

"He's mine host after all!" whispered Tom to Gerald. "He knows, however, how to look after his guests properly."

There might not have been quite as many cold chickens on the table as Higson would have desired, but ample amends was made by the variety of other good things and the abundance of fruit, cakes, and wine.

"Capital Madeira, this of yours, landlord! Haven't tasted better anywhere in the island!" exclaimed Higson, smacking his lips. "I'll trouble you to pass the bottle."

"I am glad you approve of it, sir," said mine host, doing as he was requested. "There are several other qualities, but I always put the best before my guests."

Altogether the young gentlemen enjoyed themselves particularly, and talked and laughed away with unrestrained freedom to the ladies, who seemed highly amused by them, and insisted on filling the pockets of the younger midshipmen with cakes and fruit to take to their messmates on board.

"It's myself could manage better with a handkerchief!" exclaimed Paddy Desmond, producing a good big one.

The hint was taken, and some of the oldsters pulling out theirs got them filled likewise, supposing that it was the custom of the country for the guests to carry off the remains of a feast. Coffee was brought in, and a stroll through the grounds was then proposed. The object of the young gentlemen's visit to the shore came out in the course of the evening.

"You must stay here, then, till the time you have appointed, and I will show you a much shorter cut to the shore than by the high road," said mine host.

Higson gladly accepted his offer. Tea and further refreshments were found on the table on their return from the garden, and then one of the younger ladies went to the piano, and another took a harp, and a third a guitar, and the young officers who could sing were asked to do so, which of course they did, Paddy Desmond especially having a capital voice. Thus the evening passed pleasantly away, till it was nearly ten o'clock.

"I had no idea there were such capital houses of public entertainment as yours in the island," said Higson, highly pleased with mine host, who had been very attentive to him. "Whatever Englishmen undertake, however, they

always beat the natives hollow, and now just tell me what's to pay?"

"I am amply repaid by having had the pleasure of entertaining you," answered mine host, laughing. "I must not let you go away under a mistake. The ladies you have seen are my mother and wife, and our sisters and two cousins staying with us. You may have heard my name as one of the principal shippers from the island, and when you come across my brand in the old country you will be able to say a good word for it."

"That I will, sir; but I must beg ten thousand pardons for my stupidity, and that of my shipmates. We ought to have found you out at first—couldn't understand it, I confess."

Mr — soon set Higson and the rest at their ease, and thanks and farewells being uttered, under the guidance of the former they commenced their journey through orange groves and vineyards down the hill.

Senhora Lobo's washing establishment was soon reached, and there stood before her house a long line of bags and bundles, the former containing clothes, the latter tablecloths, sheets, and towels, each weighing twenty or thirty pounds. As time would be lost by sending to the boat for men the young gentlemen agreed to carry their property between them. Their new friend at once declared his intention of assisting. How to fist the bundles was the question. One could be easily carried on the back; but on counting them it was found that each person must carry two. After due discussion it was decided that the only way to do this was to fasten the bags or bundles two and two together, by the strings of the bags or the corners of the bundles, and to sling them thus over their shoulders, one hanging before and one behind. The two younger midshipmen got the lightest for their share, old Higson manfully taking the largest, and saying that he would bring up the rear. Their new friend led to show them the way. There was a high gate near the bottom of the path, but that was sure to be open. Off started the strange procession amid shouts of laughter, to which Senhora Lobo and her hand-maidens added their share. "Adios, adios, senhores!" they shrieked, clapping their hands and bending almost double in their ecstasies. The shouts of the merry damsels could be heard long after they had been lost to sight, as the not less jovial young gentlemen descended the hill. At first the path was tolerably even, but gradually it became steeper and steeper, and the bundles seemed to grow heavier and heavier, and the night darker and darker. They could see that they were passing through a vineyard, formed on terraces, built upon the hillside. The assistant surgeon, who followed next their friend, had slackened his speed, allowing the latter to get ahead of him. Suddenly the medico lost sight of his guide, when stumbling he let his bags slip off his shoulders, and was obliged to stop a minute to adjust them, bringing everybody else behind him to a halt. Then to make up for lost time he pushed on at greater speed than before. He heard their guide cry out something, but what it was he could not tell. "Make haste you in the rear," he exclaimed, but scarcely were the words out of his mouth than he found himself going headforemost from the top of a high wall, when he began to roll over and over, down a steep declivity. He was not alone, for one after the other came his companions, the darkness preventing those behind from discovering what had happened, Higson being the last, till the whole party were rolling away down the hill, struggling and kicking with the bags round their necks, some well-nigh strangled by the cords which held them together.

"Och, it's kilt I am entirely!" exclaimed Paddy Desmond, who was the first to find his voice. "Where are we after going to? Is the say below us, does any one know?"

"Can't some of you fellows ahead stop yourselves?" sung out Higson, who came thundering along with his big bundles about his neck; but the ground had just been cleared, not a root or branch offered a holdfast, and his weight giving a fresh impetus to the rest away they all went again over another terrace wall, shrieks and shouts and groans proceeding from those whose throats were not too tightly pressed by the cords to allow them utterance. Their cries quickly brought their friend to their assistance, when a level spot having fortunately been reached, with his aid, after some hauling and twisting, they were at length got on their legs, and their bundles and bags being replaced on their shoulders they proceeded in the same order as before. One or two groaned, occasionally, from the weight of their burdens or from the pain of their bruises, but most of the party trudged on, laughing heartily at their adventure.

"Hillo, why the gate is locked—never knew that before!" they heard their guide exclaim. "Never mind, we can easily climb it." Saying this he threw his bags over, and climbing to the top safely dropped down on the other side. The rest of the party, with one exception, followed his example. When Higson came to the gate it looked so contemptibly easy that he determined to climb it with his bundles on his back. Telling Tom, who was next him, to go on, he mounted to the top, when just as he had got over his foot slipped, and down he came, having his body on the outer side and his huge bundles still on the inner, his neck being held fast by the cord which fastened them together. A deep groan escaped him. It might have been the last he would ever have uttered, but fortunately Tom heard it, and turning back discovered what had happened.

"Help! help!" he shouted; "here's old Higson hanging himself."

His shout brought the rest to the rescue, accompanied by Dick Needham, who had come up from the boat to see after them. While a couple of the oldsters climbed to the top of the gate Dick raised the old mate with his shoulders, and after much pulling and hauling his neck was cleared from the noose, when he would have fallen to the ground had not Dick caught him.

"I'm much afeered Mr Higson's gone," exclaimed Dick, as he placed his burden gently down.

"Dead! why he was kicking tremendously just now," cried Tom, much concerned, for he had a real regard for his messmate.

"I'm afeered so," repeated Dick, with a sigh.

"Let me see," said McTavish, the assistant-surgeon, and stooping down he undid Higson's handkerchief and rubbed away at his throat, feeling carefully round it. "Neck not dislocated, as I feared; he's all right, and will come round presently," he said, the announcement giving infinite relief to those who stood around.

As McTavish had predicted, Higson soon recovered; and as Dick was there to carry his bundles the adventurers were once more *en route* to the boat. All hands were warm in their expressions of thanks to their hospitable entertainer.

"You'll not forget 'mine host' of the country venda," he said, laughing, as he shook hands for the last time. They gave him three cheers, as the boat shoved off and pulled away for the frigate.

Higson had been silent, while the rest were talking, as if brooding over something; at length he exclaimed, "I say, Rogers, I'll not have you call me old Higson—they were the last words I heard."

"Then you didn't hear me call the other fellows to your assistance," answered Tom promptly. "If I hadn't you wouldn't have been sitting up and talking now. It wouldn't have been pleasant for your friends to have seen a paragraph in the papers, 'John Higson, mate of HMS *Plantagenet*, was hung on the —'"

"Avast there," cried Higson, "or I'll break your head, you—"

"He really was the means of saving your life," said McTavish.

"Then I'm obliged to you, Rogers, and you may call me old Higson as often as you like, provided you do me an equal service every time."

The next morning the frigate stood out of the Bay of Funchal on her way to the West Indies.

Chapter Four.

The Frigate at Trinidad—Magnificent scenery—Midshipmen on shore—Purchase a Spider-Monkey, and take a ride with him into the country—Adair meets some relatives—He and Jack nearly lose their hearts, but don't—Colonel O'Regan and his daughter Stella—A country-house—Visit to a coffee plantation—The Colonel's schemes—The Colonel and his daughter embark on board the *Plantagenet*—The Dragon's mouth—The frigate in danger.

The mists of the early morning hung over the ocean, but not with sufficient density to obscure altogether the outline of the land, as her Majesty's frigate *Plantagenet* was entering the Boca Navios, or ship channel, one of the Dragon's Mouths which lead from the north into the Gulf of Paria, between the island of Trinidad and the mainland of South America. Captain Hemming stood, speaking-trumpet in hand, conning the ship; the crew were at their stations; hands in the chains, ever and anon, as they hove the lead, in deep, sonorous voices shouting out the depth of water; every one was on the alert, for the currents were uncertain and the wind baffling. As the sun rose the silvery mist seemed to be drawn up like a curtain, exposing a magnificent spectacle; islands of fantastic shapes rising from the calm, blue water, clothed to their summits with mighty trees, of varied hues, growing out of the crevices of the rocks. Here, lofty cliffs; there, some deep bay, with plantations and cottages beyond; or a shady valley, the fit abode of peace and contentment, as Adair, who was just then in a sentimental mood, observed; now in a wilder, more open spot were seen the huts of a whaling establishment; and then, further on, open glades and grassy enclosures; while on the port side towered up to the clear, bright sky the lofty ridge-like mountains of Trinidad itself. The breeze freshening, at length the handsome capital of the island, Port of Spain, on the shores of its wide bay, opened out to view; its broad streets running at right angles to each other, and thus allowing every air from the water to blow freely through them. On the other side of the town could be seen the Savannah, a park-like enclosure bordered by pretty villas, with a panorama of superb hills clothed with vegetation, forming the background of the picture; between which, extending right across the island, was discerned the entrance to the fertile valley of Diego Martin; while across the gulf on the mainland rose the majestic mountains of Cumana. Leave was given to all not required on board to go on shore. The captain went to call on the governor, the officers to amuse themselves, according to their respective tastes.

The talents of Norris as interpreter were called into requisition; indeed, he had a good opportunity of practising his Spanish and Portuguese as well as French, the white population being composed of a mixture of most of the nations of Europe. The young gentlemen were wandering about, as midshipmen are wont to do, in a strange town; now stopping to buy fruit in the market-place, now entering a shop to look for something they did not exactly know what; now popping their heads in at a church-door, when they caught sight of a short, broad-faced, yellow-skinned Carib with a monkey perched on his head, one on each shoulder, and a fourth nestling in his arms, standing at the corner of a street.

"Hurra!" cried Tom, "here's the chance we have long been wishing for. Come along, Norris, and try to make the monkey-merchant understand that we are ready to treat for one of his happy family."

"For combien sixpenny pieces voulez-vous sell us one of those rum chapsos, mon amis?" said Norris, with perfect confidence, as if expecting an answer. Though the Carib knew no more French than did the midshipman, guessing what was wanted, he made the three monkeys on his head and shoulders jump down to the ground to exhibit themselves. Having gone through their performances, at a word they sprang back into their former positions, the most active being a long-tailed, long-armed creature, with a body like a lath, who had the post of honour on the Indian's head.

"That's the fellow for us," cried Tom, clapping his hands. "I don't think old Scrofton will ever acknowledge that he had his origin in such a spider-like animal."

"No, but he may be after saying that we are descended from some such creature, if he catches us skylarking aloft," observed Gerald.

"He'll not venture on such an impertinence," answered Tom. "I vote we have him."

Though there were some dissentient voices, the majority were in favour of the spider-monkey. A dollar was asked, a high price for a monkey, considering that hundreds are caught in the woods to be cooked for dinner; but then, as the Carib tried to explain, this one was civilised, and his education had cost something, though he could neither read nor write at present; but he might do so, if the young gentlemen would take the trouble of teaching him. The Indian's arguments prevailed. A dollar was quickly collected, Tom paying twice as much as any one else, that he might have a proportionate interest in the beast; and Master Spider, as he was forthwith called, became the midshipmen's monkey. Poor Master Spider, he little knew the fate awaiting him. Now he was theirs, the question was what to do with him till they returned on board. Should they take him with them into the country, he would to a certainty be off among his native woods, they agreed. They modestly requested several shop-keepers in the neighbourhood to take charge of him, but all declined the trust. They bought, however, of a saddler a chain and strap to assist in securing their captive. At first they were going to put the strap round the monkey's neck; but the Carib hinted that if they did, Master Spider would be throttled, and so it was fastened round his loins, he ungratefully giving Paddy Desmond, who performed the operation, a severe bite in return.

"Ye baste, what do ye mane by that?" exclaimed Paddy, in a voice which made Master Spider spring back as far as his chain would allow to the top of a saddle, where he sat vehemently jabbering away, as if offering a full explanation of his conduct, amid the laughter of the rest of the party. Norris proposed hiring a sitting-room for him at an inn; but a somewhat high price being asked for the accommodation, it was at length determined to take him with them now that he could not escape, each one agreeing to carry him by turns.

"But you fellows are not going to walk about all day, I hope. I vote we have a ride," exclaimed Norris.

The proposal was agreed to. Six procured steeds—rather sorry jades; for the sagacious owners, having some experience of the way naval officers are apt to ride, would not bring out their best horses, but the midshipmen did not care about that. They tossed up who was first to have charge of Spider. Paddy Desmond won, and away they started.

"Look out that you don't run foul of any of the great Dons of the island, or lose your way," shouted their messmates.

"No fear," answered Tom; "we've got Spider as a pilot."

Spider did show the way in a vengeance, for Desmond's horse finding a strange creature clinging to its mane, dashed off at headlong speed through the streets and round the Savannah, followed by the rest, shouting and laughing, till the foot of the mountains was reached. Then up they went, not by the high road, but by a rough pathway, which led they did not know where. That, however, was of small consequence; it must take them to some place or other, and they had little doubt of finding their way back. On they pushed, scrambling along regardless of the hot sun, the dust, the flies, and other stinging creatures, laughing and shouting, and belabouring each other's steeds, Gerald, as at first, with Spider before him, bravely keeping the lead. They had not been unobserved, for Lieutenants Rogers and Adair were riding leisurely along the road round the Savannah as they passed at some distance.

"There goes my young hopeful of a nephew," exclaimed Adair. "I must look sharper after the lad than I have done when he gets on shore, or he'll come to grief, and my good sister, his mother, who doats on him, will break her heart."

"I must keep a taut hand on Tom, too, for whom I feel myself responsible," observed Jack. "I was glad to have him on board the frigate, but I did not reflect on the anxiety he would cause me."

"Mercifully Providence watches over midshipmen, or the race would soon become extinct, and there would be no such promising young officers as you and I to be found," said Adair. "There go a number more of them. Happy fellows! Well, it was not so long since we were like them, Jack."

The two lieutenants continued their ride, bound on a visit which shall be mentioned presently. The midshipmen galloped along till their horses' knees trembled under them. They had left the more cultivated country, and entered a wild region, the forest closing in on every side; birds of gorgeous colours flew by or rose from the thickets; beautiful butterflies fluttered in the glades, and monkeys gambolled in the trees, looking down on them from the branches overhead, chattering loudly as they passed.

"We've paid a pretty high price, I've a notion, for Master Spider, since we might have had a dozen such fellows for the catching," observed Norris, as he watched the monkeys in troops springing from bough to bough.

"But how were we to catch them, I should like to know?" asked Tom. "They can beat any one of us at climbing, there's no doubt about that."

"Ah, well, I suppose they can, as they are at it all day," answered Norris sagaciously.

Meantime Master Spider had been gazing up wistfully at his relations in the trees, every now and then answering their chatterings with a peculiar cry, when, passing under an overhanging bough, some three or four feet above him, suddenly springing on the horse's head, and thence on Gerald's, in a moment, with his long arms extended, he had laid tight hold of it, while Gerald letting go his rein, with equal tenacity grasped the end of the chain, fancying that he could haul him back; but the arms of the monkey were stronger than his. On galloped the horse, leaving him, as a consequence, hanging with one hand to the chain. Instinctively he made a grasp at the monkey's long tail, greatly, it is possible, to the relief of the owner; and there he hung, swinging backwards and forwards between the sky and earth, the monkey jabbering and shrieking with the pain of the strap round its loins, amid a chorus of its relatives, while the other midshipmen gathered round, laughing till they nearly split their sides, without attempting to assist him. Even Tom—hard-hearted fellow—forgot to help his friend.

"Bear a hand, some of ye, and catch hold of my legs, or I'll be carried off by the baste entirely," shouted Gerald. "And

there's my horse galloped off, and I'll have none to ride back on."

"Hold fast, Paddy! hold fast!" shouted his messmates, "it's such fun to see you."

"It's you I want to be holding on to me, for if ye won't haul me down the baste of a monkey will be after hauling me up. He'll be at the top of the tree in another moment, and his friends will be carrying me off among them, and I'll never set eyes again on Ballymacree, shone! shone! but be turned into a spider-legged monkey, I will!" and poor Paddy began to cry with terror as he pictured the fate in store for him. At length Tom's regard for his friend overcame his love of fun, and throwing the reins of his horse to Norris he jumped off, and catching hold of Gerald's legs began hauling away with all his might. Now, though Master Spider could, by his wonderful muscular power, manage to support one midshipman, the weight of two was more than he could bear, and letting go, down came Gerald, and over went Tom, with the monkey struggling and scratching on the top of them, giving a revengeful nip on the most exposed part of his new master's body. Master Spider hadn't long his own way, however, for the reefers picking themselves up, Paddy gave him a box on the ears, which though it made him show his teeth, brought him to order, and the tired steed being found feeding close by, all hands agreed that, unless they wished to be benighted, it was about time to return shipward. Paddy declining the further companionship of Spider, Tom took charge of him, and off they set down the mountain's side, for a wonder reaching the plain without breaking their necks; their steeds happily knowing the way better than they did. Darkness came on while they were still galloping along.

"Och, sure our horses' hoofs are scattering the sparks all around us," cried Paddy. One of the more knowing of the party, however, discovered that the sparks were fire-flies, flitting about above a damp spot through which they were passing.

A good supper at the hotel quickly restored their exhausted spirits, and they got safe on board with Master Spider. It was the last ride on shore they enjoyed for many a long day. They were soon to be engaged in more stirring and dangerous adventures.

We must now accompany the two lieutenants. On landing, having a bill to get cashed, they repaired for that purpose to the establishment of a certain Don Antonio Gomez, who acted as store-keeper and banker, and was, they heard, one of the leading men in the place. He spoke English, they found, remarkably well.

"Are you related to Mr Adair, of Ballymacree, in Ireland?" he asked, on hearing Adair's name.

"I am his son," was the answer.

"Then I am truly delighted to see you, my dear sir," exclaimed the Don. "My mother is the daughter of an uncle of yours—no; let me see—of a great uncle who settled here some forty years ago or more, after the island became a dependency of England. She will be charmed to welcome you as a cousin. My wife, too, is Irish, and we have some guests also who hail from the old country, so that you will be perfectly at home. You will come up at once, and Lieutenant Rogers will, I hope, accompany you."

Adair, of course, said all that could be expected; how enchanted he should be to make the acquaintance of his cousin, of whom, till that moment, however, he had never heard, while Jack gladly accepted the invitation offered him. While they were speaking Don Antonio was summoned on a matter of importance.

"I regret that I cannot accompany you at present," he said, on his return; "I have therefore written to announce your coming, and have ordered horses, with a servant to show you the way. They will be here presently, and in the meantime you must fortify yourselves for the journey with some tiffin."

He led his visitors to a large airy upper room looking out over the gulf. In the centre was a table spread with all sorts of West-Indian delicacies, and wines and spirits, and bottled beer. A person must go to a hot climate to appreciate the latter liquid properly. Several persons looked in, and took their seats at table as if it was a customary thing. Some apparently were resident planters; others skippers of merchantmen, and there were several foreigners, who spoke only Spanish or French.

One of the last comers was a fine military-looking man, with a handsome countenance, a few grey hairs sprinkling his otherwise dark hair and moustache. Don Antonio introduced him to the two lieutenants as Colonel O'Regan. The naval officers rose and bowed, and the Colonel taking his seat opposite to them at once, as a man of the world, entered into conversation.

"Colonel O'Regan has seen a good deal of service in the Peninsula and elsewhere," observed Don Antonio to Adair; "knew your uncle, Major Adair, and was with Sir Ralph Abercromby when this island changed masters, I must confess very much to its advantage."

The colonel heard the last remark. "I was a mere boy at the time, having only just joined my regiment," he observed, with a smile. "It was not a very hazardous expedition, and had there been any fighting the navy would have borne the brunt of it; but the gallant Spanish Admiral Apodaca, whose memory is not held in the highest repute hereabouts, as soon as he saw the British fleet, having landed his men, set fire to four of his ships, and galloped off, that he might be the first to convey the intelligence to the Governor Chacon, who was preparing to defend the city from the expected assault. He entered at the head of a band of priests, piously counting his rosary. 'Burnt your ships, admiral!' exclaimed Chacon, in astonishment. 'Then I fear all is lost.' 'Oh, no, most noble governor, all is not lost, I assure you,' answered the admiral. 'I have saved! only think I have saved the image of Santiago de Compostella, the patron of my ships and myself.'"

"Come, come, you are rather hard on the worthy Apodaca—his ships were only half manned, and Admiral Harvey would have captured them all after giving him a sound drubbing," observed Don Antonio, laughing notwithstanding. "Besides it is a proof that we had pious men among us in those days. Remember that we had not long before been

deprived of the holy Inquisition."

"You did not regret its loss, I presume," said the colonel. "I saw something of what it must have been in Spain when its dungeons were revealed to view."

"As to that I live under the English government, and prefer the English system of managing matters," answered Don Antonio, but wishing to change the subject he asked, "What news from the Main, colonel?"

"Unsatisfactory as usual," was the answer. "Something, however, must be done or the cause will be lost, and I am resolved to be no longer influenced by those half-hearted patriots as they call themselves."

Just then the horses were announced. "You will meet Colonel O'Regan, as he will accompany me by-and-by," said Don Antonio to the lieutenants.

They found two richly caparisoned steeds waiting for them, with a sable attendant in livery, mounted on a third. He would have astonished an English groom. He wore huge spurs strapped to naked feet—a light blue coat richly laced, an enormously high hat with a deep band, and a flaming red waistcoat. He, however, was evidently satisfied with his own appearance, and considered himself a person of no small importance.

"Mr Pedro Padillo show dee way to Massa Lieutenants," he said, bowing after they had mounted. "When say starboard, keep to starboard; when say larboard, keep to port; oderwise make way ahead."

"Thank you, Pedro—you have been at sea, I perceive," said Jack.

"Oh yes, massa. I serve aboard de King's ships, and oder craft many years before turn head groom to Don Antonio," answered the black. "He great man, as you shall see presently."

After rather more than an hour's ride under the steerage of Pedro, Jack and Adair reached the country residence of Don Antonio, magnificently situated on the broad shoulder of a mountain which rose clothed with gigantic trees behind it, while in front lay the blue gulf dotted over with the tiny sails of canoes—a highly cultivated plain stretched out below—hill sides and forests, plantations and villas appearing on either hand.

"Faith, my new cousin is well located. It bates Ballymacree I must confess," said Adair, as they came in front of an extensive bungalow style of building, with a broad verandah running along the front and two sides, with such a garden as the tropics only can present, kept green by a clear stream taught to meander through it, and the source of which could be discerned as in a sparkling cascade it rushed down the mountain side amid the trees. "I am curious to know what sort of person my elder relative will prove, not to speak of the younger females of the family," added Adair.

As he spoke a cloud of white drapery was seen moving in the verandah. It soon resolved itself into a tall, dignified old lady, another of matronly appearance, and a bevy of young ones; two or three of them mere girls; perfect Houris they seemed to Adair, and Jack was much of the same opinion. As Adair threw himself from his horse, the old lady advanced from among the rest, holding out both her hands.

"My young cousin, I am delighted to greet you. It is long, long since I set eyes on one of my kindred from the old country, and you are welcome—doubly welcome as coming direct from dear Ballymacree, the home of my youth," she exclaimed, with a very perceptible Hibernian accent.

Terence made a suitable reply, albeit not much addicted to the utterance of sentimental speeches, and then he was introduced to his younger cousins of the second degree; and Jack, who had modestly hung back, came forward, and went through the same pleasant ceremony. One damsel had kept somewhat behind the rest as if she did not claim to be a relation.

"Irish to the core," thought Jack. "Large grey eyes, rich brown hair—the complexion of the lily tinged with the rose—a figure a sylph might envy."

"Let me make you known, Lieutenant Rogers and Cousin Terence to Miss O'Regan," said the old lady, the others having retired a few paces, thus allowing the officers to advance, which they did bowing, with admiration depicted in their countenances, to the young lady. Courtesying, not very formally, she put out her hand, and said with a laugh—

"I must beg to be considered among the cousinhood, or I shall feel like a stranger in your midst."

The fair cousins gathered round laughing, and said, "Yes! yes! of course!"

Adair took the beautiful little hand, so firm and cool, and felt very much inclined to press it to his lips, but he did not. The same favour was extended to Jack. They were soon as much at home as if they had known each other for months. Donna Katerina, however, as the elder lady was called, monopolised her cousin Terence, naturally eager to hear about Ballymacree, and the various members of his family. She charged him to bring up his nephew the next day; and hearing that Lieutenant Rogers had a brother on board, insisted that he must come also. Jack had thus for some time the young ladies to himself; which were most worthy of admiration he could not decide—they were all so charming; but undoubtedly Miss O'Regan—her friends called her Stella—which sounded more romantic to Jack's ears than her surname—was perfection or near it.

A very pleasant afternoon was spent with music and singing, and conversation, and a stroll in the shade under the lofty trees, between which the breeze found its way, keeping the atmosphere tolerably cool and agreeable. Jack and Terence thought that they should like, if not to spend the rest of their days in so delightful a spot, to come back to it some time or other; but they did not venture to hint at such a thing just then. On returning to the house they found that Don Antonio, with Colonel O'Regan and their own captain, had arrived. The latter seemed as much struck with

Stella as they had been, and they could not help feeling a little jealous of him, though they need not have been so, as he paid her no more attention than he did the other young ladies. He gave them, moreover, leave to remain on shore, as he intended returning on board, and he promised Donna Katerina to send up her young cousin, and Tom Rogers the next morning. Several other gentlemen arrived, and dinner was announced—a magnificent entertainment—plate and crystal and sparkling wines in profusion, and all sorts of tropical delicacies. Then came music and dancing—chiefly waltzes. The young Creoles swam through the dances; Stella moved with more life in her than all of them. Captain Hemming seldom danced. He could not resist the temptation altogether, but he was engaged for the most of the evening in earnest conversation with Colonel O'Regan. He returned to town in the carriage of one of the guests, and soon afterwards the whole party retired to rest.

As the lieutenants slept within earshot of the colonel they were unable to discuss Stella—a great privation. Don Antonio was a planter as well as a merchant, and he had invited his guests to visit his cocoa plantation, of which he was justly proud, three or four miles in the interior. The midshipmen, who had started by daybreak, arrived just as the party were setting off. They looked somewhat blank, when but a slight refreshment only was offered them, but were comforted when they found that they were to breakfast on their return. Gerald was received by Donna Katerina as a kinsman, and he and Tom were taken in charge by the younger of the young ladies. Some of the party went in carriages; others, Stella among them, on horseback, with Terence and Jack as her attendants. She rode like a thorough Irish girl well accustomed to the saddle.

The party proceeded along picturesque lanes, mostly in the shade of umbrageous trees, crossing many a brawling brook, till they reached, on the gentle slope of a hill, the confines of a lofty forest, with a peculiar undergrowth of shrubs from ten to fifteen feet in height of a delicate green tint. These were the cocoa-trees, and the duty of the more lofty ones, whose boughs, interlaced by numberless creepers, formed a thick roof, was to shelter them from the burning rays of the sun. A centre road ran through the plantation, intersected by numerous cross-paths, all lined with dark-leaved coffee bushes covered with jessamine blossoms, giving forth an exquisite perfume, while water in gentle rills conveyed life and fertility to every part. The horses were left at the house of the overseer while the party sauntered through the plantation enjoying the grateful shade, and the cool breeze which fanned their cheeks.

"How delightful!" exclaimed Jack. "I am greatly tempted to come on shore, and turn cocoa planter."

"What, and give up the noble profession to which you belong?" asked the young lady by his side. "I should have expected better of you, Mr Rogers." It was the first time Jack had heard Stella utter an expression which showed her character. "While there are wrongs to be righted, and the defenceless to be protected, I trust that no one engaged in the noble profession of arms will think of sheathing his sword."

"I spoke from the impulse of the moment. I really have no intention of leaving the navy, which I love as much as any man."

"I am glad of it," said Stella, giving him an approving smile.

Jack, who was decidedly matter-of-fact, was wondering what wrongs Stella wished him to redress, when their conversation was interrupted, and he had no opportunity of asking her till they had mounted their horses and were riding homeward. Jack at last put the question.

"In all parts of the world," answered Stella, with some little hesitation. "Look, too, over yonder vast continent." She pointed to the blue mountains of Cumana seen across the gulf. "From north to south wrong and oppression reigns. Even in those states nominally free, one set of tyrants have but been superseded by another as regardless of the rights of the people as the first."

"I have not often met young ladies imbued with sentiments such as yours," observed Jack.

"Few young ladies you have met, probably, have fathers like mine," answered Stella.

She stopped as if she was saying too much. Jack recollected the observations he had heard at Don Antonio's luncheon-room. Probably the colonel is engaged in one of the many revolutionary schemes connected with the late Spanish South American dependencies, he thought. "His daughter very naturally has faith in the justice of the cause he has espoused."

"Yes, I confess that I have adopted my father's sentiments," said Stella, as if she had known what was passing in his mind. "It is but natural, for we are all in all to each other. My mother is dead, and I have no sister or brother. He might have enjoyed a well-won rest at home without dishonour; but he disdained, while possessing health and strength, to remain in idleness, and I entreated that he would not leave me behind, so we came out here some time ago; and while he has made excursions on the continent, I have mostly resided with our friends here, though I have occasionally accompanied him. We have made some long trips by sea, and I have ridden with him several hundred miles on horseback."

Jack, who believed that young ladies were most fitly employed in household affairs, or in practising the accomplishments they might have learned with an occasional attendance at a ball or archery meeting, thought his fair companion an enthusiast, a perfect heroine of romance, though he did not tell her so. She possibly considered him somewhat dull and phlegmatic. Jack's notion of duty was to gain as much professional knowledge as possible; to obey the orders he might receive, and to carry them out to the best of his ability.

The midshipmen had no reason to complain of the breakfast spread before them on their return to the house; meats and sweets and fruits, unknown even by name; and such coffee, and perfectly ambrosial cacao. The young ladies seemed to have nothing to do but to amuse them, and perfectly ready they were to be amused, in a quiet way though, for the heat in the middle of the day was too great for much skylarking.

Don Antonio and the other gentlemen had gone into the town but they returned in the evening with Captain Hemming, who invited all the party to take a cruise to the southern end of the island, as he wished to visit the Pitch Lake and the Indian settlements, and to perform certain official duties. The colonel and his daughter, and Don Antonio and his wife, with most of the young ladies, accepted it, and a very delightful trip they had; and, of course, a dance was got up on board, which was more interesting to the fair damsels and the naval officers than any of the natural curiosities the island could afford. It was whispered in the gunroom that they were to have some of their visitors on board for a much longer time, and it at last came out that the captain had promised a passage to Colonel O'Regan and his daughter to Jamaica. Adair and Gerald rode out to wish their cousins good-bye. The old lady was as cordial as ever, and all of them made much of the midshipmen; but Terence had a slight suspicion that the younger ones were somewhat piqued that he and Jack had not laid their hearts at their feet. They were very pretty, charming girls, he acknowledged, and he was not certain what might have happened had he remained longer. Perhaps they were just a little jealous of Stella. He thought so when his sweet cousin Maria whispered, "No one will deny that she is very beautiful, but she is cold as the snow on Chimborazo, and it is said that while playing havoc with the affections of her admirers, she leaves them to their fate with the most callous indifference."

"Jack Rogers thinks very differently of her," remarked Adair. "He says that she is one of the most enthusiastic creatures he has ever met; but still I don't know that he can exactly make her out."

"No one can," answered Maria. "She seems very affectionate to us, and grateful for the attention we have been able to show her, and yet we do not know her better now than we did at first."

Just then the subject of their conversation approached, and directly afterwards Jack and his brother rode up to pay a short farewell visit, and to escort Stella to the town, where her father was waiting for her to go on board the frigate. The bustle of preparation prevented any further conversation. Donna Katerina assured Terence that he might rely on being welcomed as a relative should he return to Trinidad, and was equally civil to Jack when, in his usual hearty way, he wished his friends good-bye. He was watched narrowly as he handed Stella into the carriage, but the keenest eyes could not detect anything in his manner beyond the ordinary respect due to a lady.

The captain had come to the landing-place to escort his guests on board the frigate. They reached her side just as the sunset gun was fired. Stella gave not the slightest start at the sound, but sat as unmoved as her soldier father. Jack remarked the grace and, at the same time, the confidence with which she stepped up the accommodation-ladder, and walked along the deck as if well accustomed to ascending a ship's side. "I never met a girl better fitted to be a heroine than she is," he thought. "Still my sister Mary and Lucy are of the style I fancy best."

The young lady was followed by her only attendant, a black damsel, carrying her dressing-case, and other articles, which nothing would induce her to commit to the charge of the men who offered to take them. "Missie Stella tell me not lose dem," she answered, with a knowing shake of her head. "No, no, tank yoo."

Stella retired at an early hour to the cabin the captain had fitted up for her, with a small one close to it for the faithful Polly. She wished to be on deck, she said, to see the ship get under weigh in the morning. She and the colonel were pretty freely discussed in the gunroom and midshipmen's berth. All acknowledged that she was handsome, but some thought her proud and haughty, and others that she was rather slow, whilst Gerald was of opinion that his cousins beat her hollow, in which Tom agreed with him heartily.

"Much more jolly girls they are," said Tom. "How they laughed at Spider's antics! I only wish we may find a batch of such cousins in every place we go to with as capital a country-house."

Terence pronounced her a Sphinx. Perhaps he was biassed by the opinion the fair Maria had expressed. Jack did not altogether like to hear her talked about, especially by the master and purser, or the lieutenant of marines, who called her a monstrously fine woman. The colonel was fair game. No one could make out who he was, what brought him out to that part of the world, or why the captain was so polite to him. Perhaps it was for his daughter's sake. He was stiff and donnish, and had scarcely condescended to speak to any one. Jack and Terence defended him on this point, but still he did not appear to have made a favourable impression during the day he had been on board.

With a leading wind and on the brightest of bright mornings, the frigate was standing towards the Boca de Huevos, one of the dragon's mouths, which lead out of the Gulf of Paria into the open ocean. Everything looked brilliant—the ship herself, the sea, the sky, the land. The passage seemed broad enough for a dozen ships to sail out abreast, between the lofty tree-covered crags which formed the shores of the islands on either side. Still every precaution was taken; the lead was kept going, the crew were at their stations. Stella and her father stood on the deck watching the shore as the ship glided rapidly on. Lieutenant Jennings was the only person at liberty to attend to them, and he was doing his best to make himself agreeable; but he found, after a few attempts, that he succeeded better with the colonel than with his daughter. "Grand cliffs those," he observed; "awkward for a ship to run against. No chance of our doing so, however."

"Not so certain of that," answered the colonel. "The wind is scant and has fallen."

The yards were braced sharp up, and the quartermaster was keeping the ship as close to the wind as possible.

"Why we are almost through the passage; a few hundred yards more, and we shall be in the open sea," remarked the lieutenant.

"Without a breeze those few hundred yards will be too much for us," said the colonel.

As he spoke the sails gave a loud flap; now they filled, and the countenance of the captain brightened; now they flapped again, and it soon became evident that the frigate was drifting, stern first, away from the line of the open sea so nearly reached, towards the cliffs on the starboard hand, driven by a fierce current, which set in diagonally from the northward through the passage. Slowly but certainly she floated back. Had it been directly through the passage,

it would not have mattered; but having no steerage way, she was at the mercy of the current, and that was taking her directly towards the cliffs. Many an eye was turned aloft to the canvas on which their safety depended. Just then the most coal-begrimed steamer would not have been despised. The captain gave the order for all the boats to be got ready for lowering; still he had hopes that the breeze would again freshen, but he could not hide from himself the danger the ship was in. All the boats towing ahead could not stem that fierce current. Ever and anon, too, the swell from the sea came rolling in smooth as glass, setting the ship towards the rocks. Not the faintest zephyr filled even the royals. Even should her head be got round to the southward, she would still be drifted bodily to destruction. Stella clearly comprehended the danger, and watched with admiration the cool and calm bearing of the officers. A cable was ranged for letting go as a last resource, but the depth of water where they then were precluded any hope of an anchor holding. Nearer and nearer the ship drew to the towering cliffs.

"Lower the boats," cried the captain.

Their active crews sprang into them, and tow-ropes being passed they began to pull, as English seamen are wont to pull, against the hot current; but all their efforts seemed of no avail in retarding the sternward progress of the frigate. It appeared at length as if in another minute her spanker-boom would be driven against the cliffs, while the outer branches of the tall trees which towered on their summits seemed almost to hang over the mast heads. Smooth as was the water, an angry surf broke against the rocks at the foot of the cliffs, too clearly indicating what must be the fate of the proud frigate should she drive against them. The lead kept going, showed the depth of water still to be great. Suddenly the ship seemed to be brought to a standstill; the lead-line remained up and down. The hand in the chains announced the fact. It was evident that she had got into dead water, but she still felt the influence of the rollers; for although the boat's crews pulled as hard as ever, they could not move her ahead. It would be impossible for them also to continue their exertions much longer, while but a slight puff of wind from the opposite shore would hasten her fate.

"Well, I never thought there could be danger in smooth water and a calm, and the land close to us," said Tom, who observed the anxious faces of those around him.

"There are many things not dreamed of in your philosophy, youngster, which you'll learn in time," answered Higson. "Before many minutes are over we may chance to have the masts come tumbling about our ears, and I would advise you, and the rest not wanted on deck, to get below out of the way in good time."

"What, you don't mean to say that the ship is likely to be wrecked?" said Tom.

"Ay, but I do, if one of two things don't happen," answered Higson. "Let's hope that they may that the anchor may hold, or that a breeze may come from off the cliffs aboard of us."

"Let go," sang out the captain.

"All gone!" shouted Adair from forward.

At that moment Master Spider, having managed to get clear of his chain, seeing the green trees so near him, was off up the rigging with the evident intention of having a ramble among them. Tom and Gerald caught sight of their new pet at the same moment, and forgetting danger or discipline up the shrouds they sprang in chase.

"Might as well try to catch greased lightning as that long-armed beast," observed Higson, who did not, however, attempt to stop them. Spider quickly reached the main-topsail-yard-arm, but finding that the tempting trees were still utterly beyond his reach, up the topping-lift he swarmed, and in another instant was on the royal-yard. Thither the midshipmen followed, but Spider showed an inclination to defend his position, and sat grinning at them from the end of the yard, round which his prehensile tail was firmly curled. He had an advantage they did not possess, being able to hold on tightly, and yet have both his hands at liberty. As Tom, who led the way, put out his hand to catch the creature, he received so severe a bite that he almost let go. Still he was not to be defeated by a monkey. The two midshipmen, now getting out their handkerchiefs, formed nooses, in which they hoped to catch Master Spider's paws, and advanced together, forgetting that snake-like tail of his, with which he could keep at anchor, let them haul ever so hard. Apparently, however, not liking their threatening front, before they could seize him he made a spring over their heads, and was in an instant calmly seated on the main-truck. They were about to follow, when Jack, catching sight of them, called them down instantly.

"What, all three of us, sir?" asked Gerald, unable to resist the joke, which set the men grinning fore-and-aft, in spite of the perilous position of the ship.

"No; the two biggest of you; let the smaller monkey take his own time to come down," answered Jack.

Tom and Gerald descended, looking rather foolish, and the former had to go to the doctor to have his finger dressed, for Spider had given it a severe nip.

The lead-line betokened fifty fathoms where the frigate had cast anchor. The sails hung in the brails. Captain Hemming was on the watch for the slightest flaw of wind which might enable him to get out of his dangerous position. The boats were still kept ahead; the rest of the crew were at their stations, the marines and idlers ready to pull and haul. It was a time of breathless anxiety. No one could tell what might next happen. Spider might have fancied that the eyes turned aloft were directed at him, instead of towards the sluggish royals. Wistfully he gazed at the green branches, but he was too wise a monkey to suppose that he could reach them. Still, with his tail curled under it, he sat on the truck, as comfortably posted as he could desire.

Scarcely a word was uttered only occasionally Stella and her father exchanged observations. The colonel seemed positively to enjoy the anxiety.

"Ah! now we have an example of what strict discipline can accomplish," he said. "Spaniards or Frenchmen would have given way to despair and lost their ship. These fine fellows will save theirs, though they would have been wiser to have taken the wider passage. Would that I had a thousand or two of such: there might be better hope for the regeneration of South America."

"You will succeed in spite of all difficulties," said Stella, looking up into her father's face with a proud, fond glance; "you will conquer them."

Ten, twenty minutes went slowly by, the bright sun beating down fiercely on deck, and on the heads of the people in the boats, till they felt as if their brains were frying. Mr Cherry sent the dingy ahead with a breaker of water to them. It was drained to the last drop. Suddenly the royals were seen slowly to bulge out; the topgallant-sails followed their example.

"Let fall! sheet home!" cried the captain, and on the word the whole crew were set in motion, those on deck tramping along at headlong speed with the sheets in their hands.

"Slip the cable, starboard the helm!" were the next orders. Adair shouted to those in the boats to pull ahead. The chain ran out as the ship slowly gathered way with her head across the channel, and she began to move off from the threatening cliffs. In the course of a few minutes she had gained the centre of the passage, when steering south she re-entered the gulf, and came to anchor. Here she remained, the boats having been sent to recover the anchor, till a favourable breeze carried her through the Boca de Navios, and clear away from the land.

Chapter Five.

Grenada—Fall in with the Tudor—Murray's first meeting with Stella—Master Spider introduced to Mr Scrofton—Arrival at Antigua—Scenery and adventures on shore—Alick Murray in love—A boat excursion—A capsizes—A long swim—Anxiety on board—A search—The missing ones found.

Early the next morning the frigate made that lovely gem of the ocean, Grenada, and just as the fortifications crowning Richmond heights came in view, and the slopes of the surrounding hills, covered with orange groves and palm-trees, plantations, and fields, amid which sparkling streams rushed downward to the sea, a ship was seen standing out of the harbour. She was at once known by her number to be the *Tudor*. The frigate was immediately hove-to, and the corvette having approached, imitated her example. A boat was forthwith lowered from the latter, and Alick Murray, accompanied by Archy Gordon, came on board the *Plantagenet*. Alick having delivered the despatches of which he was the bearer to the captain, was warmly greeted by his old friends, whom he accompanied into the gunroom, while Archy was hurried down into the midshipmen's berth.

Both parties were eager to hear each other's adventures. The corvette had been detained longer than was expected at Madeira, and had been three days in the magnificent harbour of Grenada.

"Oh, it's a braw place, there's ne'er doot about that," said Archy. "They say it's just like Italy, and if so, Italy must be a beautiful country. Hills and dales, covered with plantations, sic fruits and flowers, and a plenty of Scotsmen. It has only one fault; there are no ladies, unless they call the black lassies who gang wi' blue silk parasols and na shoes to their feet so."

Archy's description of the island made all hands eager to visit it, and much disappointment was felt when the sails were filled, and, in company with the *Tudor*, a course was steered for Saint Vincent.

Stella had been on deck, watching the approaching corvette, and she could not help remarking the young and handsome lieutenant who came from her on board the frigate. Alick was not introduced, but he stood for some time talking to Captain Hemming not far off, and occasionally his eyes glanced towards her lovely countenance, while he wondered who she could be. It was one of the first questions he put when he reached the gunroom. Every one had plenty to say about her and her father. He did not express his own opinion; had he admired her less he might have done so. Alick Murray returned on board the corvette with the image of Stella impressed on his heart. Like a wise man he tried to banish it, but go it would not. Again and again that sweet countenance rose up before him, and he longed for an opportunity of meeting her again—of hearing her voice, of ascertaining her opinions, of learning her history.

The ships visited Saint Vincent, Saint Lucia, Dominica, and other islands in succession, the one vying with the other in beauty, though the palm was given to the few first seen. As to the blacks, they all appeared sufficiently quiet, so that only two or three days were spent at each island.

The midshipmen had not forgotten their object in purchasing Spider, and every day they had him into their berth to give him instructions in polite knowledge, as they took care to tell Mr Scrofton. With all the pains they took, however, he made no perceptible progress, though he had no objection to eat the nuts and fruits offered him, provided they were ripe and sweet, or to sit with a stick in his paws, and shoulder it at the word of command. Still he infinitely preferred frolicking about on deck, or swinging by his tail to a horizontal spar, slung for his accommodation. He appeared altogether perfectly reconciled to his lot, except when the ship was in harbour, when he would go aloft and sit on the main-truck, gazing towards the green trees, while he chattered away, evidently, as Gerald said, meditating on the pleasures of his youth, spent amid his native forests.

At last, one day, the midshipmen conducted Spider in due form, dressed in a coat and trousers, with a tarpaulin hat they had manufactured for him, to the boatswain's cabin.

"We have done our best, Mr Scrofton, to bring up this monkey in the way he should go, in order to become a civilised

being," said Tom, with perfect gravity. "Notwithstanding all our pains he doesn't know A from Z; and though we have tried to make him understand how to light the lamp, he can no more use the matches than at first, and puts them in his mouth, or throws them away if given to him; and when it has been lighted he pokes his paws into the flame to see what the curious red thing is just sprung out of the wick."

"I don't expect that you ever will teach him, young gentlemen," answered the boatswain seriously. "It would take centuries to produce the change. After many generations of domestic life that long tail of his, having become useless, would disappear; his hinder paws would take the form of human feet; his forehead would expand; his arms would become shorter, his body stouter—till at length all outward trace of his monkey origin would be lost. That's what my books say, and I believe them."

"Very good; I won't dispute the point," said Tom. "But I want to know boxy the first monkeys who turned into men got their education, by which the change was produced. As long as they had got their tails they never would have thought of leaving their native forests, so well suited to them."

"I haven't quite arrived at that part of the subject," answered the boatswain; "but I'll consult my books and tell you."

"Suppose we teach him seamanship, how long do you think it will be before he's fit to be boatswain of a ten-gun brig, Mr Scrofton?" asked Gerald, in the most innocent tone he could assume.

Just then some one gave Master Spider a sly pinch on the tail, which made him grin and chatter, and of course set all the midshipmen laughing. Mr Scrofton, not perceiving the cause, thought that they were laughing at him, and casting an angry glance from his ferrety eyes at Gerald, he answered, "I'll tell you what, young gentlemen, it would be in my opinion about the same time that it would take to fit you for the post, unless you mend your manners. The boatswain even of a ten-gun brig must be a man of character, and no jackanapes can ever become one; and the boatswain of a frigate, you'll understand, is not to be sneered at with impunity."

"That's the very point at issue!" exclaimed Tom, clapping his hands, and in no ways daunted by the boatswain's anger. "You acknowledge, then, that a monkey never can become a boatswain, and that Lord Monboddoo is altogether in the wrong?"

"I don't acknowledge anything of the sort, because I know nothing about the matter," answered the boatswain, not intending to say what he did. "But let me inform you, if you bring that monkey of yours here again to mock me, I shall be compelled to take measures for putting a stop to such audacious proceedings."

The midshipmen fearing, from the vengeful look Mr Scrofton cast at poor Spider, that their pet's life was in danger, endeavoured to calm his anger by assuring him that they had no intention of being disrespectful, and that they begged he would retain his own opinion, notwithstanding anything they had said on the subject. They had a hearty laugh when they got back to the berth, fully resolved to bait the boatswain again on the first opportunity.

At length the two ships lay snugly moored off the Royal Dockyard, English harbour, in the island of Antigua, the prettiest of all pretty harbours. Their arrival caused no small commotion among the inhabitants, especially of the softer sex, when it was known that they were to remain some time, and that a ball was to be given to the officers at Government House. Colonel O'Regan and his daughter went on shore to stay with their friends, Mr and Mrs Houghton, who had a pretty cottage residence in the neighbourhood. A deputation came soon afterwards to invite them to the ball. At first Stella was disposed to decline the honour, as it involved a drive of eleven miles across the island to Saint John's, the capital; but Lieutenant Murray, who happened to be calling at the house, adding his solicitations, she accepted the invitation. The colonel was much disconcerted by the delay. He had expected to be at Jamaica some time before, where, as he told Captain Hemming, he intended to leave his daughter with some friends while he made an excursion to the Spanish Main. The object he had in view he did not explain. As there was no help for it he was obliged to submit, and the captain assured him that after leaving Antigua his intention was to proceed direct to Jamaica. Antigua, although not so lovely as other islands to the south, possesses a beauty of its own, and several trips to enjoy its scenery were made by the officers into the interior. On two occasions, Alick and Jack accompanied Stella and her father. While Jack took charge of the colonel, Alick rode by Stella's side. Each time he met her the more he was attracted, and yet he could not say that she gave him any encouragement. She was interested in his conversation, for he was better informed and talked better than his brother officers, but had she discovered his devoted admiration? They reached a spot near the coast almost on the summit of one of the lofty cliffs which form ramparts in most parts around the island, and from whence the ground slopes inwards in gradual declivities towards the green and grassy centre. The whole island, which is of a rough circular form, lay in sight. A line of fortifications crowned an opposite height overlooking the sea on one side, and a wide extent of country, consisting of undulating downs and verdant fields, in which countless cattle were feeding, with the numerous houses of the planters embosomed in trees on the other. In the north-west the town of Saint John's was clearly seen; while here and there, some of the many deep creeks and bays which indent the coastline could be distinguished running far inland, several swelling into estuaries and others forming commodious harbours. Isles and islets of all shapes and sizes lay scattered off the shore, and far away towards the west the islands of Guadaloupe, Montserrat, Nevis, and Saint Kitt's, rose out of the blue ocean.

"What a perfect Arcadian scene!" said Alick, as he and his companion gazed over the smiling landscape.

"And the Arcadians are kept in proper order by yonder frowning batteries," remarked Stella, pointing to the line of fortifications. "Until free and enlightened governments are established throughout the globe, we cannot hope to find a true Arcadia. How many a lovely region such as that now spread out before us has suddenly become the scene of rapine and bloodshed!"

"But those batteries are intended to defend not to overawe the inhabitants, and wherever the glorious flag of England waves, there, at all events, we may hope to find true liberty and peace," answered Alick.

"I would, then, that the flag of England were waving now over the whole world," said Stella, with an involuntary sigh; "I long for peace and rest, but since those who have the power are supine or indifferent to the sufferings of their fellow-creatures, it must be left to individuals to attempt the task of redressing the wronged, and restoring freedom to the oppressed."

Alick was puzzled what to answer. He guessed that Stella was alluding to her father's schemes for regenerating the world. As far as he understood them, from the few remarks the colonel had let drop, they were, he considered, utterly hopeless, but he could not tell Stella so. One thing, however, he discovered that though her enthusiasm and love for her father had made her warmly enter into his views, she was a true woman at heart, and as really feminine as he could desire. Alick changed the subject, and soon interested her with a description of his Highland home and the Western islands of Scotland. He fancied as they rode back that her manner had become softer when she addressed him than at first, and that she listened more willingly to him than to any of the other officers. At all events, he enjoyed a happiness in her company he had never before known, though he could not at times forget that in a few days they must be parted, and that the chances of meeting again were very small.

English Harbour is not so much liked by midshipmen as by gunroom officers and captains, the former having shorter leave and smaller purses, not being able to get away so often to amuse themselves in the capital on the other side of the island as their superiors.

Mr Houghton, a friend of Colonel O'Regan, had come on board to take luncheon with the midshipmen, as had Alick Gordon.

"I vote we take a cruise this afternoon," exclaimed Tom. "Mr Houghton, you were saying that you wished to go down to Falmouth Harbour, and Mr Cherry will, I daresay, lend us the pinnace. It is only about two miles to leeward, and we can beat back again in time to land you for your dinner-hour."

Mr Houghton accepted the invitation. Tom forthwith went to the first lieutenant, with whom he was a favourite, to ask for the boat.

"You may have her, youngster," was the answer; "but keep a look-out for squalls; they are apt to come off the shore without warning, and you may be capsized in a moment if you are not on your guard."

"Thank you, sir, we will take great care," answered Tom, returning to the berth to report the success of his mission.

Mr Jennings, the lieutenant of marines, hearing that they were going, begged to accompany them. Desmond, Archy, and Norris, McTavish, the assistant-surgeon, and the captain's clerk, made up the party, with two men to look after the boat while they were on shore.

The wind was light, the sea smooth, and with all sail set before the breeze they ran down the coast. In a short time they arrived at their destination, and, as the weather was hot and they had not much time to spare, they amused themselves on the beach while Mr Houghton went up to pay his visit. He was not long absent, and on his return they at once shoved off and stood to the southward, hoping to find more wind at a distance from the shore. They were a merry party, and as usual stories were told and songs sung. They had made several tacks, but as yet had got not more than half way back to the ship.

"We will go about again," said Norris, who was at the helm. "At all events inshore we shall feel less of the current which drifts us to leeward almost as fast as we beat to windward."

The boat was put about, and once more headed in towards the land, which was about two miles distant.

"Now McTavish, give us one of your Scotch songs," exclaimed Lieutenant Jennings; "the 'Laird of Cockpen,' or something of that sort."

McTavish, who though he had not much of a voice, contrived to make his songs popular by the humour he threw into his tone, had sung about a stave or so, and Norris and the rest of the party, with laughing countenances, while listening to his song, forgot Mr Cherry's caution.

The boat had been gliding smoothly on, when suddenly over she heeled. Norris, putting down the helm, shouted out —

"Let go the halyards!" but before a hand could reach the cleats her gunwale was under water.

"We are going over," cried Norris. "Up to windward all of you." Saying this he sprang to the weather side, and the rest followed his example: though they could not right her, yet she went over so slowly that they all had time to scramble up on her side before her canvas touched the water. The sails being flattened aft assisted to support her, and prevent her from going right over. For the first moment all believed that she would sink and leave them alone on the surface. Fortunately, however, her ballast consisted of breakers of water which, not being secured, floated out.

"Come, at all events we have something to hold on to," said Tom, "and now we must try and right the boat."

"Who has got a knife?"

Every person felt in his pockets, but no knife could be found. The seamen, strange to say, had come away without theirs; they and the midshipmen attempted to cast off the sheets, but the side of the boat to which they were made fast being under water could not be reached. For some time no one spoke; at the distance they were from the ship they could not hope to have been seen.

"Is there no chance of our drifting on shore?" asked Norris at length.

"I am afraid not," answered Mr Houghton. "The current sets away from the land, and we shall be carried farther and farther from it."

They looked anxiously around for a sail, on the chance that she might pass near them. Not one was to be seen standing towards the land. Again a desperate attempt was made to right the boat.

"If we had but a knife we could do it," cried Tom. "I will never again step into a boat without one."

"We shall be fortunate if we have the opportunity," observed McTavish. "There is but little chance of our being picked up, and as to any of us reaching the shore that seems impossible."

No answer was made to his remark. The squall which had capsized the boat was succeeded by others. The weather was evidently changing for the worse, and the boat drifting farther and farther from the land. Their prospects were dreary in the extreme, indeed almost hopeless. The gunwale of the boat on which they were seated was only six inches out of the water, so that should a sea get up they might all quickly be washed away.

Norris felt very unhappy, as he had been at the helm. "I hope that you fellows will forgive me," he said. "I little expected the boat to capsize so suddenly, though I ought to have kept a better look-out."

"Don't talk about it," answered Tom. "It was as much our fault as yours. We have each of us much to ask forgiveness for if we were to count up old scores."

"Mr Jennings, I hope you will forgive me for capsizing you in the gale when we were coming out from England."

"Of course, youngster," he answered gravely; "I have not thought about it since."

"Thank you, sir," said Tom, as if his mind had been relieved of a burden.

"I hope old Scrofton won't be thinking about the tricks we have played him."

"I was just after thinking that I wish he may not ill-treat Spider," cried Desmond; "I don't know what the poor baste will do without us."

"What we have to do is to forgive all others from the bottom of our hearts," remarked Archy. "We need not trouble ourselves what they will think or say of us."

Archy, who was a true Christian, made several other fitting remarks, clearly pointing out to his companions the only way by which they could be prepared for the new existence into which there seemed every probability they would soon have to enter.

"It's a grievous thought, my friends, that we do not all so live that we may be fit at any moment to die," he observed calmly.

Few of those present failed to agree with him, and for the time, at all events, to wish that they were as well prepared as he appeared to be.

Again they were all silent for some minutes.

"Something must be done!" exclaimed Tom, who had been thinking over the matter, and in his own mind had resolved what to do.

"It's too far for any of us to swim to shore," observed Mr Jennings; "I would try it, but I never could keep afloat five minutes together."

"I, too, am a miserable swimmer," sighed Mr Houghton. "Besides which, the sharks would take good care not to allow one of us to reach the shore," he added, in a whisper.

Neither of the seamen could swim, and McTavish, the only other grown man of the party, had had very little practice either.

"Well, then," exclaimed Tom, "I will try it! My brother Jack swam on shore when the *Racer* was wrecked in the Mediterranean, and was the means of saving the lives of many of the people; I am not a much worse swimmer than he was then; I feel sure that I could do it if I had a companion. It's a long way to go alone through the silent water."

"Faith! I would go with you," cried Desmond, "but I am afraid that I should keep you back rather than help you forward."

Archy Gordon, who had sat silent during the discussion, suddenly exclaimed, "I am not so good a swimmer as you are, Tom, but I see no other way of saving our lives, and if I go down I shall at all events be doing my duty."

"Thank you, Archy," said Tom; "I accept your offer, and will do my best to help you along."

Had any other means offered, the rest of the party would not have allowed the young midshipmen to run so fearful a hazard of their lives. Mr Houghton, especially, knew well the danger they would encounter from the sharks, but he said nothing to damp their courage.

Archy at once began to get ready. Taking off his shoes and jacket, he gave them to McTavish, and begged him to preserve them for him.

Tom followed his example, though not, indeed, with the same careful spirit as his friend; he threw his jacket and shoes into the water. They both kept on their socks, which were providentially coloured, as well as the rest of their clothes.

“Good-bye, old fellows,” said Tom; “we must lose no more time.” And he and Archy shook hands with all round. “Now, Archy, we will start, and strike out bravely.” Tom suiting the action to the word slipped into the water, Archy did the same. On they went, keeping alongside each other. Archy found that he could swim better than he had expected, and he and Tom cheered up each other.

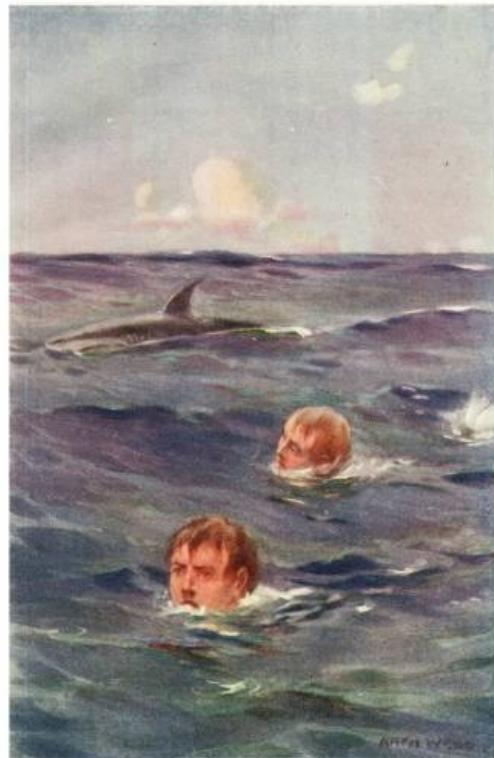
“I wish Gerald had been with us,” said Tom. “Our chances of escape are better than those on the wreck.”

Now and then they turned on their backs, resting for a little; striking out, however, with their arms and legs, so that they still made headway.

Tom, under his brother’s instructions, had become a first-rate swimmer, and for his age was wonderfully muscular; so that he was able to go on steadily without feeling exhausted. Archy, though taller and bigger, from having had less practice, more quickly began to feel fatigued. The shore seemed a long way off; still they had already, they saw, not a considerable distance from the boat, for they could scarcely distinguish her as she floated just above the surface. Tom thought that they must be a mile from the shore. Again they threw themselves on their backs, pushing on with their feet and keeping their arms moving round and round. When Tom looked back, he could no longer see the boat; he did not, however, tell Archy of this, he could not help fearing that she had sunk.

“Are you rested, Archy?” he asked.

“Yes!” was the answer, though not in quite so confident a tone as Tom would have liked.



“WHAT WAS HIS HORROR TO OBSERVE THE FIN AND BACK OF A HUGE SHARK.”

“Well, then, on we go again,” said Tom, and they swam steadily forward as before. Scarcely a minute after this, as Tom cast his eye on one side, what was his horror to observe the fin and back of a huge shark, scarcely more than a fathom from him. The monster shot by. “I only hope it is steering a different course to ours,” thought Tom. Just then he caught sight of the wicked eye of another at the same distance, following in the wake of the first. He did not tell Archy what he had seen, for fear of unnerving him, while he kept striking out with might and main, letting his feet rise higher than he would otherwise have done for the sake of creating a splash, and shouting as he swam on—

“Strike away, Archy. Bravo! We are getting on famously.”

Archy in the meantime was doing his best, though his legs and arms began to ache; still he resolved, as long as his strength would hold out, to persevere. At length he felt that he could do no more.

“Go on, Tom,” said he faintly. “Make the best of your way on shore and get help for the poor fellows, I will follow as fast as I can.”

“No! no!” answered Tom, “I am not going to desert you, come rest your head on my chest. It will help you wonderfully, just consider me a piece of cork, you know I float like one, only keep your legs kicking and your arms moving smartly.”

Tom did not tell Archy why he gave this advice, but he knew very well that if they were to remain quiet for an instant the cowardly sharks would make a dart at them, and that only by splashing vigorously could they keep off the monsters. He himself did so with his legs and one hand, while he placed the other under his friend's back. Archy felt his strength much restored after this rest, and declared himself ready to go on again. On they went once more. Though they were certain that they had made good way, still the shore appeared fearfully far off, as they gazed at it with eyes growing somewhat dim from fatigue.

Archy exerted himself more than he would before have considered possible, but once more a faintness came over him.

"Oh! Tom, I am sinking, don't wait for me, you will soon reach the shore now," he cried out.

Tom, however, approaching with a couple of strokes, seized him, and once more placed his head on his chest, striking furiously with his own feet; for the instant before he had seen another shark, and the monster seemed eyeing him as if about to make a grab at his arms and legs.

"Keep your feet kicking out, as I told you before," he exclaimed. "You will not sink, and it will keep them from getting the cramp. Kick, Archy! Kick!"

Archy could with difficulty do so, still he felt a great relief to his arms, and suddenly his strength again seemed to return.

"I will go on now," he said, turning once more round, and he and Tom swam on together as before, with their eyes fixed on the shore. Each time that Archy felt faint he was aroused by Tom's encouraging cries, and nerved himself to fresh exertions. How anxiously they strained their eyes ahead! the shore grew more and more distinct, and yet it seemed a long way off. At length they could distinguish the sandy beach and the green herbage beyond. Again Archy's strength began to fail him. Near as was the shore, he felt that he might not, after all, be able to reach it. His sensations were those of a person in a dreadful dream. Even Tom began to feel his strength almost exhausted. Archy once more cried out that he was sinking. That moment Tom felt his feet touch something; a horror for an instant seized him. It might be the back of a shark; still on he struck, towing Archy. Again his feet touched something below him; it did not yield. He tried again. Yes, he was, sure; it was firm ground.

"Hurrah, Archy! we are on shore at last," he cried out. "Let your feet fall, and you will find I am right."

"Thank God!" answered Archy, as his feet also touched the sand.

Happily the sea was smooth, and there was no outdrift. Even then Archy felt that he could scarcely reach the beach. Tom gave him his hand, exclaiming—

"Come on; we have not far to go now, at all events."

They waded on. Gradually the water shoaled as they made their way up the shelving sand. Tom felt his strength returning, but Archy could with difficulty make headway. Now the water reached only to their middles; now it was scarcely knee-deep, and they were able to get on faster. Tom breathed more freely, for he expected to see Archy drop every instant. Scarcely, indeed, had they reached the dry sand than down he sank. Tom threw himself by his side.

"Cheer up, Archy; we are safe," he exclaimed. "Don't give way now."

"I shall be better soon," said Archy; "but oh! Tom, let us return thanks to Him who has preserved us. Don't let us fancy it was our own strength. I never otherwise could have done it, I know."

"I am thankful—indeed I am; but we must not forget our companions."

"Go, and try to get a boat, and put off to them; I will follow you as soon as I am able to."

It was already getting dusk, and the gloom was increased by thick clouds gathering in the sky, betokening a blowing night. Tom saw, indeed, that no time was to be lost, and, finding that Archy could not yet move, he unwillingly left him, and hurried off to obtain assistance.

We must now return on board the *Plantagenet*. When Mr Cherry found that the boat did not make her appearance, as it was long past the time the midshipmen promised to be back, he felt somewhat annoyed, and made up his mind that the next time they asked for the boat they should not have her.

He was walking the deck, when the quartermaster announced that a boat had come off from the shore with a black in her, who had something to say about a pinnace, but what it was he could not exactly make out.

"Let him come on deck at once," said Mr Cherry, hurrying to the gangway.

"What is it you have to say, my man?" he asked.

The negro doffed his hat, twisting and wriggling about, apparently either from nervousness at finding himself on board a man-of-war, or from his anxiety to deliver his message properly.

Mr Cherry, however, managed to make out that a boat had been capsized, that two midshipmen had swum on shore, and that they had gone off again in two boats to search for the wreck.

Just then Jack and Terence, who had been on shore, returned, and, on cross-questioning the black, they felt satisfied

that Tom and Archy Gordon were the two midshipmen who had reached the shore, and that those remaining on the wreck were in extreme peril.

The report of what had happened quickly spread through the ship, and every one felt anxious about their shipmates.

Four boats were immediately manned, Jack and Terence each taking command of one, Higson going in a third, and Mr Scrofton having charge of the fourth. The first ready having called alongside the *Tudor* to give the information, two of her boats were immediately despatched to aid in the search. The weather in the meantime, as night advanced, grew worse and worse. Down came a deluge of rain, while vivid lightning darted from the sky; the wind, too, had been rising, and as they got outside the harbour they found a considerable sea running.

Each officer was to take the direction he judged best. Before shoving off the boatswain got the black, who brought the information, into his boat, and pumping him learnt exactly whereabouts the pinnace had capsized, while he also ascertained the direction in which the current ran.

It might seem an easy thing to fall in with a boat which had capsized scarcely a mile off; but some hours had elapsed since the accident had occurred, and during all that time she must have drifted for a considerable distance. The direction in which she had gone also could be calculated only by those who knew exactly the set and rate of the current. Jack and Terence went away fully believing that they should before long fall in with the wreck; their only fear was that those left on it might have been washed off, or, succumbing to fatigue, have dropped into the water. The thunder rattled and the lightning flashed over head. Between the intervals they often fancied they could hear the voices of their shipmates hailing them; sometimes, too, through the gloom they imagined that they could see the boat on her side, with a few still clinging to her; but when they got up to the spot, she was not there. Though Terence hoped to find all the party, he naturally felt most anxious on account of Gerald Desmond.

"I ought to have thought of the risks he would have had to run," he said to himself. "To be sure I got into a good many scrapes and tumbled out of them, and I hope he may. I cannot bear the thoughts of having to write to my poor sister, and to tell her that her boy is lost."

Still the boats continued searching in every direction; the wind blowing fresh, and the foaming seas hissing round them. There was little hope, indeed, that they should find those they were looking for, though the boat herself might by chance be fallen in with some time or other.

Mr Scrofton, meantime, who, though a bad philosopher, was a thorough seaman, had run down at about the distance from the shore he understood the pinnace had been when capsized. He had, however, passed the spot, according to his calculations, some way, no sign of the wreck having been seen, when a hail was heard.

"There they are! hurrah!" cried some of the men.

"No, no; that came from a boat. I see her."

"What boat is that?" asked Mr Scrofton.

"A shore-boat, and I am Tom Rogers," was the answer.

The boats were soon alongside each other. Tom said that as soon as he could procure a boat he had shoved off, and that Archy Gordon had done the same—he was at no great distance in another boat.

"You don't expect to find her hereabouts," said Mr Scrofton. "She will have been carried according to my calculation, four or it may be five miles more to the southward by this time, and it will take us the best part of an hour before we are up to her. My plan is to run down that distance, or more than that, and then to beat back. It's better to go rather beyond her than a little short, and if she is still floating we shall fall in with her."

Tom saw the wisdom of this plan, and the two boats stood on in company, a bright look-out being kept on either side. They had run on for some time when Tom thought that they must have gone far enough, but the boatswain persevered. Tom's boat being manned by blacks he had nothing to do but look out. Fully half-an-hour had passed, when he thought he saw an object ahead. He hailed Mr Scrofton's boat.

"All right!" was the answer, "I see her."

"Let go the halyards," cried the boatswain, and the sails were lowered, but as they approached great was Tom's sorrow to see only five people clinging to the boat. Mr Houghton and Lieutenant Jennings were among them, but he could not distinguish Gerald Desmond.

"Poor fellow, he must have gone," he murmured.

"Where are the rest?" asked Mr Scrofton, as the boat ran alongside, and eager hands were stretched out to lift the sufferers on board, for they could with difficulty help themselves. "We are glad to see you, though."

"They had not left us five minutes before we saw you," answered Mr Jennings; "they cannot as yet be many hundred yards off."

Tom immediately pulled away towards the shore in the direction the swimmers must have taken. He knew that though the time was short they might have all sunk, or that the ravenous sharks might have got hold of them. Nothing but despair, indeed, would have induced them to make the attempt.

Great was his relief on seeing at length four heads above the surface, with their faces directed landward. So intent were they, indeed, that they were not aware of his approach. Each one had lashed himself to an oar with the faint

hope, though they had but little notion, of swimming, of gaining the shore. Tom's shout was the first intimation they had of his escape, for they all had given him and Archy up as lost.

Desmond was the first helped on board, and great was their delight at meeting. Highly satisfied with the success of his expedition, Mr Scrofton received all the party on board, promising the blacks in the shore-boat a further reward if they would tow the pinnace towards the shore. He then, with the rescued party, made the best of his way back to the ship, happily soon afterwards falling in with Archy Gordon; whose boat, while he was taken on board, was sent to assist the other shore-boat.

Captain Hemming, who felt very anxious on their account, was too glad to get them back to find fault. Tom and Archy received the praise which was their due for their gallant act, while Mr Scrofton was properly complimented by the captain for his sagacity and judgment, and the midshipmen resolved never more to attempt to quiz him about his philosophical notions.

Jack and Terence did not get back till daylight, when they found that Tom and Gerald had been snug in their hammocks for several hours. They felt somewhat inclined to quarrel with them for the trouble they had given, though in reality heartily thankful that they had escaped.

Chapter Six.

The cruise of the drogher—Barbuda field-sports—Hospitably entertained—Sail again—Captain Quasho—A drunken crew—Reach Saba—The island explored—The black crew take French leave—Higson and others go in search of them—The three midshipmen and Needham driven off the land by a hurricane—The drogher disappears in the darkness of night.

Although all the gunroom officers who could get leave were anxious to go to the ball, old Higson, who was not a dancing man, and some of the youngsters from both ships declared that it would be a great bore. Notwithstanding the fearful danger so many of them had lately escaped, they took it into their heads that it would be far pleasanter to make a trip somewhere by sea. After due discussion they hired a drogher, a country vessel employed in running between the surrounding islands and islets. She was sloop-rigged, of about thirty tons, with a small cabin aft, a capacious hold, and a fore-castle for the black crew—honest fellows, but not pleasant neighbours in a close atmosphere. Higson went in command. Tom, and Gerald, and Norris, with Archy Gordon, and another midshipman, and a master's-assistant from the corvette, with Dick Needham, formed the party, including, of course, Master Spider, who was taken to make fun. The mids also had their doubts as to the treatment he might receive from Mr Scrofton during their absence.

It was settled that they should first steer for Barbuda, where snipes were to be shot, fish caught, and deer hunted, and that then, wind and weather permitting, they should visit other islands in the neighbourhood. Provisions enough to last them twice the time they were likely to be away were shipped, and liquors in proportion. They fully expected to enjoy themselves amazingly.

After beating out of the harbour, and rounding the east end of the island, under the pilotage of the regular skipper, Captain Quasho, they had a fair wind for Barbuda, where they arrived early in the day, and cast anchor in a small harbour. They were cordially received by the overseer, who happened to be close at hand, and who, with one assistant, constituted the white population of the island. He gave them leave to kill as many birds as they could hit, promised them horses to ride in chase of deer, and, what was more to the purpose, invited them to dinner at his residence, the castle, an ancient fortalice on the shores of a lagoon some distance off. They agreed to shoot till the arrival of the steeds, which the overseer rode back to order.

After a considerable expenditure of powder to little purpose, for Tom, the best shot among them, had only killed one snipe, a troop of horses, led by several black cavaliers, dressed in leathern caps and high hoots, with belts round their waists, and duck-guns slung over their shoulders, and followed by a pack of hounds, made their appearance. Their leader announced that they were the huntsmen, and invited the officers to mount the steeds they had brought. Tom inspected the horses with no favourable eye. They were sorry animals, but the rest of the party were not particular, and all were soon mounted. As to going, that was another thing—four miles an hour was the utmost their riders were likely to get out of them. The midshipmen kicked their heels with might and main, and whacked the poor beasts' backs till their arms ached, but not a foot faster would they move.

"I say, Sambo, how shall we ever run down the deer with these brutes?" asked Higson, perspiring at every pore from his exertions. The black huntsman grinned at the notion of overtaking the deer.

"No, no, massa, we get round dem, and shoot with guns. Surer way to kill dem."

"At all events let's go and see the style of sport," said Higson, and the party set forward. The island is mostly flat, and so covered with high bushes that they could see neither to the right hand nor to the left. They reached a forest of considerable extent, when, after some time, the dogs started a deer, which Sambo's huge duck-gun, loaded with slugs, brought to the ground. Scarcely was the venison bagged than down came such torrents of rain that the party were speedily wet to the skin, and were glad to make the best of their way towards the castle, keeping close together not to lose each other. The wardrobe of their host furnished them with dry clothing—the elders with shirts and trousers, the younger having to dispense with the latter garments, and in somewhat masquerading guise her Majesty's officers sat down to a sumptuous repast of turtle and venison, and several varieties of fish, and land-crabs of exquisite flavour. Bottled beer and wine in abundance made them all very jolly, but there was a drawback. Flights of mosquitoes came buzzing and biting them, unmercifully revelling in the youngster's fresh blood, till some oakum set on fire, with fresh leaves thrown on it, put the miscreant insects to the rout. Cigars and pipes were produced, and the midshipmen thought not of troubles, past or future. Sofas and chairs served them for couches. Old Higson sat up

lustily puffing away at his pipe, and thereby escaped the countless punctures and furious itching, of which every one else complained when they got up in the morning. After breakfast their host sent them across the lagoon in two clumsy fishing-boats to see a seine drawn.

The opposite shore gained, the black fishermen having landed their passengers, plunging into the water, carried out their net in a semicircle, and soon began dragging the ends towards the strand. The mids of course lent a hand, hauling at one end, while some of the negroes took the other, and the rest tumbled about outside, laughing and shouting, and beating the water to frighten their prisoners. In spite of them some fifty or more of the biggest fish, dreading the cauldron or frying-pan, making a bold dash for liberty, fairly leaped over the net, most of them, as they rose three or four feet out of the water, clearing the heads of the negroes, while several sprang right into their faces, capsizing one stout fellow, and making two or three others howl and caper in a way which set the midshipmen roaring with laughter. They had, notwithstanding this, a capital haul, consisting of baracoutas, snappers, gold and silver fish, Spanish mackerel, king-fish, and others. Tom and Gerald, in their eagerness, rushed into the water to catch hold of some of their prey, when a monster gave a grab at Paddy's fingers, which made him spring back with alarm. The blacks directly after hauled out a shark big enough to have bitten off his arm, if not to have swallowed him. The same afternoon the adventurers got back to their drogher, the overseer having liberally supplied them with as much venison and fish as they could possibly consume. The chart was got out, and a consultation held as to the place they should next visit. Captain Quasho was called in.

"Take my 'vice, gent'men; wind fair for Saba—cur'us place—den call at Saint Kitts—fine oranges dere. See Mount Misery—big craig up to de sky, ten tousand feet high," (Quasho was a little over the mark), "and so on to Nevis—lubly isle, and we get back to English Harbour in good time. Yes; I forgot dere one more isle we go see. Me got broder dere. Only one buckra, massa, and him family berry glad see officers; plenty fun, oh yes! Den we stop a day or two and catch fish. Plenty fine fish in dees seas, massa. Great big baracouta and glouper—him fifty pound weight; and mauget, and hedgehog, and jew-fish; him wonderful good to eat, fit for de Queen of England," and Quasho smacked his lips. "Den dere is de snapper and flatfork, and squerrel and parot-fish, wid just all de colours like de bird; and de abacore, almost as big as de glouper; and, let me see, de doctor—him got lance in de tail, and so him called doctor, ho! ho! and den dere is de king-fish, and de wattee, de kind, de comaree, de convalby, de old wife, de cobbler, de ten pounder, de garr, bolalwe, reay, de shew, and me don't saby how many more." Quasho here ceased enumerating for want of breath, declaring that he had not mentioned half the delicious and curious fish the buckra officers were sure to catch if they tried; and that he would undertake to procure hooks and lines should they wish it.

Quasho was not disinterested in giving this advice. The drogher was hired by the day, and the longer she was out the more he pocketed. The midshipmen did not reflect on this, and thought his advice good. Old Higson also was in no hurry to get back to the ship to attend to the unpleasant duties of the mate of the lower deck. He was captain for the nonce, and command is sweet, even over a black crew and a set of boisterous youngsters. The anchor was got up, and sail made accordingly for Saba.

A moonlight night on the Caribbean Sea in fine weather is very enjoyable, provided a person does not go to sleep with his eyes gazing at the pale luminary, for if he escapes being moon-stricken he will certainly get a stiff neck or suffer in some other way. The youngsters enjoyed themselves to their hearts' content, and when tired of skylarking with Spider, piped to supper, after which those not on watch turned in. What were the rats, cockroaches, and centipedes swarming in the little confined cabin, redolent of tobacco smoke and spirits, to them? Not one-thousandth part as bad as the detestable mosquitoes on the shores of the Barbuda lagoon, they agreed. So some occupied the bunks—regular ovens—others the lockers, and Tom took possession of the cabin-table, the least stifling spot, but tenable only—and that by no human being but a midshipman—in moderate weather. Old Higson took the first watch. Timmins, the master's-assistant was far too eloquent just then to be trusted, and Norris was to have the middle watch. He at all events was steady. Quasho, however, had taken more Montserrat rum on board than was good for his intellects such as they were, and Higson suspected that he was as likely to steer north as west, or to box the compass if left in charge. Needham was perfectly sober; he was never otherwise when at sea, for he had a strong head, and took but little liquor. It might be too much to answer for him when the ship was paid off. He preferred sleeping on deck to occupying a locker in the cabin; and of course it would not have done to have sent him to sleep forward with the blacks. He did once put his nose through the fore hatchway, and as quickly withdrew it, coughing and spitting to get rid of the disagreeable odour which ascended from below.

"To my mind, Mr Higson, them niggers are all as drunk as sows," he said, coming aft, and touching his hat as he spoke. "Quasho and the whole lot of them have turned in, and are snoring away like grampusses, except Sambo here at the helm, and he's pretty well two sheets in the wind."

Higson had not observed this when he came on deck after supper, for Sambo, a big, powerful negro, was keeping the vessel's head the right way, and steering a straight course.

"Well, Sambo, how is it with you?" he asked, to ascertain the condition of the man.

"Me sober as judge," answered the helmsman, in a husky voice. "If de oder black fellers for'ard take too mush rum, no fault o' mine. I mate of de *Snapper*, and got character to lose."

"Take care you don't lose it then, my friend," said Higson. "I see how it is. I shall have to put all hands on an allowance, and if you've got any rum stowed away I must have it brought aft or hove overboard. You understand me."

"Yez, massa ossifer, berry right," answered the black, with a grin.

"You can lie down, Needham, and be ready to keep watch with Mr Norris," said Higson. "If there isn't another nigger to relieve Sambo you can take the helm, and as the weather promises to hold fine we shall do very well."

In less than a minute Dick was asleep with a sail over his head, and Higson paced the deck till past midnight. He then roused up Needham, and sent him down to call Norris. Tom also awaking sprang on deck. As soon as Higson had turned in, Sambo declared that he could no longer stand at the helm, and Needham taking it the black dived into the forepeak. A growling and chattering sound ascended, but no one appeared. It was evident that the negroes considered the buckra officers competent to manage the vessel, and had resolved to take their ease. At daylight the occupants of the cabin came on deck well-baked. They talked of heaving-to and bathing, but the fin of a shark appearing above the surface made them change their minds, and they refreshed themselves by heaving buckets of water over each other. The lazy crew had not yet appeared.

"We'll soon make them show themselves," said Higson; and he, Timmins, and Norris, each taking a bucket full to the brim, hove the contents simultaneously down the forepeak. A chorus of shrieks and shouts instantly followed.

"Oh, ki! what happen! Oh lud—oh lud—we all go to be drowned!" exclaimed the blacks, as springing from their berths they tried to make their way on deck. Quasho, with eyes only half-open, bolted right against Higson, sending him sprawling on the deck; the next man capsized Timmins, and would have bolted overboard in his fright had not Tom and Gerald caught him and hauled him back. The head of the big mate next appeared, when those below catching him by the legs pulled him down again, on which he began belabouring them with head and fists and heels till one by one they made their escape, leaving him knocking his skull against the deck, under the belief that he had some of them still under him.

"A pretty set of fellows you are!" exclaimed Higson, rising to his feet. "What would have become of us if we had been caught in a squall and thrown on our beam-ends? No more grog for any of you this cruise—you'll understand that?"

As soon as the big mate, now the most tipsy of the party, had been got on deck, Higson and Timmins went below, but not a bottle of rum could they find. There were a few cocoa-nuts and gourds in the lockers, and other provisions, but that was all. As the place was horribly unsavoury, they were glad to get on deck again.

"Buckra ossifer no find rum—rum all gone!" said Quasho, with a well-feigned sigh. The other negroes grinned, and the big mate looked highly amused, but said nothing. The fire in the caboose having been lighted, the black skipper acting as cook, the midshipmen sat down to breakfast. Everything now went smoothly enough. Spider afforded a fund of amusement. As the wind was aft, it was too hot to do anything else than play with him. The black crew, with the exception of the man at the helm, lay down forward, and were soon fast asleep. When it was time to relieve him, Captain Quasho kicked up one of the sleepers and sent him aft, expediting his movements by a pretty sharp bang on the head with a frying-pan, observing, "Me know how to keep discipline aboard de *Snapper*, I tink." Thus the day wore on—luncheon and dinner occupying a good deal of time, for, in spite of the heat, the midshipmen retained their appetites. The heat increased as the sun rose. If it was hot on deck it was hotter still in the cabin, which the stifling air and the cockroaches rendered almost insupportable. Towards evening they came in sight of the curious island of Saba, having the appearance of a high, barren, conical-shaped rock rising directly out of the ocean. As they got nearer, a few huts were seen at the base of the mountain, and in front a flight of steps hewn out of the solid rock leading to the very summit. They ran in and anchored close to the shore in a little cove. As there was still an hour or more of daylight they agreed to land at once, and explore the place that evening, so that they might sail again next morning. Up the steps they climbed, for it was evident that they must lead somewhere. On reaching the top, what was their surprise to find themselves on the rim of a large circular basin, and looking down on a small town standing in its midst surrounded by vegetable gardens and orchards. The inhabitants received them very cordially not often being troubled by visitors, and offered them the best the island could supply, chiefly vegetables and fish, with the promise of a kid if they would stay till the next day. An unsophisticated race were these Saba islanders. "The world forgetting—by the world forgot." As there would be no little risk of breaking their necks should they attempt to descend the steps at night, the adventurers wished their hospitable entertainers good-bye and returned to the shore. It was hot on the top of the hill, it was hot everywhere; so they agreed that it would be as well to sail at once, so as to have a longer time to spend at Saint Kitts and Nevis.

On hailing the *Snapper*, Needham came on shore in the boat. He was in a state of great indignation. A fishing-boat had come alongside, when Quasho with his mate and crew had gone away in her, carrying with them a number of cocoa-nuts and gourds, which they said were to sell to the people on shore; and they had coolly left word that they should not be back till the next morning. "On this, sir," continued Dick, "I smelt a rat; and on hunting about in the forepeak, I found a cocoa-nut half full of rum. Thinks I to myself, that's just what they're going to fill the others with; and when they come back they'll be as drunk as they were last night, and we shall have to look after the craft instead of them."

"The rascals!" exclaimed Higson. "We'll go and kick them up before they've had time to do that same. What do you say, boys?"

All were ready to accompany him, but Higson insisted that Tom and Gerald and Archy should go on board and wait till he and the rest returned with the runaways. "You can loose the sails and get ready for weighing as the wind is off-shore. We shan't be long, depend on that," he said, as he and the rest turned to make their way towards one of the huts, where they hoped to learn what had become of Quasho and his crew.

Needham and the three youngsters returned on board, and busied themselves as they had been directed. The heat was greater than they had yet experienced since they had been in the West Indies, and they were thankful to see the sun set, albeit, in an unusually ruddy glow, hoping that it would be cooler at night. The wind had dropped completely. There was little prospect of putting to sea that night.

"I don't half like the look of the weather, Mr Rogers," said Needham to Tom, who had remained with him on deck, while Gerald and Archy were making preparations for supper below. "I wish we were in a snugger berth, where we could moor ship—that I do."

"Why the water is as calm as a millpond. I don't see how we can come to any harm," answered Tom. The words were scarcely out of his mouth, when, with the suddenness of a clap of thunder a fearfully loud rushing sound was heard, as if the top of the mountain was hurtling down on their heads. The next instant they were lifted almost off their legs, and had they not clutched the shrouds they would have been carried overboard. The breath of the hurricane was upon them. The loosened canvas blew out and flapped wildly—the little vessel strained desperately at her anchor, while the water hissed and foamed round her bows. Gerald and Archy wondering what had happened, came rushing up from below.

"What's to be done?" they both asked.

"The first thing is to get the mainsail and foresail stowed, and then to strike the topmast," answered Needham.

With their united strength it was no easy matter to secure the mainsail. It was done, however, in a way, when Needham casting his eyes towards the shore, exclaimed—

"The drogher is drifting—we must veer out more cable!"

There were not many fathoms to spare. The fury of the blast, however, had somewhat decreased, and the vessel appeared to be stationary. Needham hurried aloft, and while the midshipmen hauled on the heel-rope of the topmast—the shrouds and stays being slacked—he tugged away at the fid. He had just got it out, when a second blast as furious as the first burst on them—a loud report was heard. Ned slid down like lightning from aloft, and sprang aft to the helm. Tom, who had run forward, exclaimed—

"The cable has parted!"

"I know it," answered Ned. "Hoist a foot of the foresail, Mr Rogers."

The drogher spun round like a top, and off she flew before the hurricane.

"Hadn't we better jump into the boat, and let the vessel go?" asked Archy.

"We could never pull to shore in the teeth of this wind, sir," answered Needham. "We can't get her on board, or tow her either—we must let her go."

Meantime, Tom and Gerald had been busy in stowing the fore-sail and securing the topmast shrouds and stays. As they looked aft for an instant, they could just distinguish some figures on the shore; but amid the wild tumult, no voices could be heard had they shouted ever so loudly. Needham now called Tom and Gerald to take the helm while he tried to find a storm staysail, hoping with a couple of feet of it set to be able to scud before the hurricane.

"It's our only chance," he said, "we've no hope of beating back till it's over—and the wider berth we give the island the better; for if the wind shifts we may be blown right on it, and lose the craft and our own lives too."

The prospect was an appalling one—but the midshipmen did not lose heart. Away flew the drogher amid the roaring seas into the pitchy darkness, which now settled down over the ocean.

Chapter Seven.

A ball at Antigua—A hurricane puts a stop to the dancing—A ride through the storm—Murray's ride with Stella, and a declaration—Colonel O'Regan and his daughter sail in the Sarah Jane.

The inhabitants of Antigua are noted for their hospitality. The officers of the two ships received as many invitations as they could accept, with the loan of horses whenever they chose to ride. They lived on shore in airy barracks—far pleasanter quarters than the close cabins of the ships afforded. The colonel and his daughter were living at a cottage in the neighbourhood. Murray was Stella's constant attendant when she rode, and a frequent visitor at the cottage. If her father remarked the attention paid her by the young lieutenant, he did not consider it necessary to interfere. Perhaps he had ascertained that Murray was well off, and thought it best to let matters take their course; or, perhaps, absorbed in his own schemes, it did not occur to him that his daughter, who seemed so devoted to the cause he advocated, could do so weak a thing as fall in love. At all events, Alick lived in an elysium partly created by his imagination, and did not allow the future to interfere with his present happiness. Jack and Adair still thought Stella very charming, but, observing Alick's devotion to her, they would have considered it a gross breach of friendship to attempt cutting him out. She had other admirers, but she certainly gave them no encouragement. The midshipmen of the frigate thought their captain spoony, and the captain's clerk of the *Tudor* was guilty of a most reprehensible breach of confidence, if he spoke the truth, in whispering that he had one day discovered on the commander's desk a sonnet addressed to Stella's eyebrow. The fact, however, was doubted, as Captain Babbicome had never been suspected of possessing the slightest poetical talent, nor had a book of poetry ever been seen in his cabin.

"Still," insisted the clerk, "love can work wonders. It must have been poetry, for the lines all began with capitals, and were written in the middle of the page."

At length the ball took place. The Antiguan young ladies were full of life and spirit, and danced to perfection, never getting tired, so that the officers had no lack of partners, and voted it great fun. There were many very pretty girls among them, and several with much more of the rose on their cheeks than usually falls to the share of West Indian damsels. Some censorious critic even ventured to hint that it was added by the hand of art. That this was false was evident, for the weather was so hot that had rouge been used it would have inevitably been detected; but the island damsels trusted to their good figures and features, and their lively manners and conversation, rather than to any meretricious charms, to win admiration. Stella was generally considered the most charming of the maidens present,

as undoubtedly she was the most blooming, and she seemed to enjoy the ball as much as any one. She danced with Captain Hemming, and went through a quadrille with Commander Babbicome. He then entreated her to perform a valse with him. Laughing heartily, she advised him not to make the attempt. Even the quiet dance had reduced him to a melting mood.

"Why, you have valsed twice with my second lieutenant," he remarked, his choler rising.

Stella gave him a look which might have shown him that he had better have held his tongue. The ball, which began at a primitively early hour, had been going on for some time, when a fierce blast which shook the building to its very foundations swept over it.

"A hurricane has burst on the island," was the general exclamation. "Will it be a heavy one?"

The increasing tempest gave the response.

The naval captains thought of their ships, the residents of their plantations. Not that there was much risk for the former, as they were snugly moored; but still it was impossible to say what might happen. Preparations were made by all the officers and several of the gentlemen for instant departure; but, of course, the ladies could not face the tempest. Most of them, however, had not much heart for dancing, when, possibly, before morning their houses would be roofless and their fathers' plantations laid low. A few persevered, in spite of the whirlwind raging over their heads, but even they had at length to give up. Their host insisted on all his female guests remaining. Cloaks and shawls were collected, and sofas and chairs brought into the ball-room, which was turned into a dormitory for those who could not be accommodated in the other rooms. Stella wanted to accompany her father, and was with difficulty persuaded to remain. Murray offered to ride back as soon as the gale was over to escort her, and she smiled her consent. The colonel declared that he must go to look after his friends and their cottage, for he had no other excuse to offer. The officers started on horseback, but they could with difficulty sit their steeds or keep their naval cloaks around them as they faced the hurricane. Poor Commander Babbicome had a hard task to perform, as his struggling steed plunged forward in the darkness; and Jack and Adair, who in compassion rode up to his assistance, found him clutching tightly by the animal's mane, as he shouted out—

"Steady, now—steady, you brute! What is the wind about that it cannot let a man sit his horse in quiet?"

It was no easy matter, however, for the best of horsemen to keep their seats, and in the more exposed situations it seemed as if rider and steed would be blown over together. Leaves, dust, stones, branches of trees, and even heavier objects, came rushing through the air in dense clouds, striking the travellers and obscuring their sight, so that it was often impossible to see where they were going. The colonel seemed to revel in the wild uproar of the elements, and led the way through the darkness, shouting to his companions to follow. They were passing along a part of the road with tall trees on either side. The dark branches above their heads could be seen waving wildly to and fro, the tops bending before the blast. Ever and anon huge boughs were torn off, and several fell, sometimes in front, sometimes directly behind them, but no one had been struck. Then there came a fearful crash. A large tree had fallen directly in front of them. Jack thought that the colonel had been crushed; but no, there he was, sitting his horse as upright as ever. He had had a narrow escape, though.

"On, friends, on," he shouted. "It is more hazardous to stop than to push forward."

And he leapt his steed over the trunk. Captain Hemming and Murray followed, their horses scrambling rather than leaping over the impediment. Jack and Adair might have done the same, but they would not desert the commander of the *Tudor*, by this time well-nigh frightened out of his wits. Several of the rest who made the attempt toppled over with their beasts on their heads.

"Leap, my good fellows? I could no more do it than fly!" exclaimed Commander Babbicome, when he came to the tree.

"You had better climb over, and I'll bring your horse after you," said Jack.

"If I get off, I shall never get on again," cried the commander. "Bless my heart, what shall I do?"

"Better try than run the chance of being crushed here," said Jack.

At that moment another of the waving trees came crashing down close behind them, cutting off all retreat had it been contemplated. At the sound off tumbled Commander Babbicome; and in another instant, with more agility than he generally displayed, he had scrambled over the trunk, and pitched right in among the men and horses, struggling to get on their legs on the other side. Happily no one was much hurt, and some of his officers having assisted to place him on his feet, he set off running as fast as his legs could carry him. His steed, relieved of its burden, urged by Jack and Terence, got over better than the rest; and when they at length overtook him, they managed to hoist him again into his saddle. Though he cut a somewhat undignified figure on this occasion they had no inclination to laugh at him, for they believed him to be as brave as most men under ordinary circumstances on the deck of his ship. They were both, too, very anxious about Tom and Gerald, and they could only hope that if the drogher had not returned she was safe in some other port. Battered and bruised, though they had escaped any serious accident, the party at length reached the harbour. The officers who had remained behind and all the men to be found had hurried on board the ships directly the hurricane burst; additional hawsers had been got out; the topmasts had been struck, and everything necessary had been done. It was rather provoking to find that they might have remained on at the ball, but satisfactory to feel that all was right, and that they had done their duty. In almost any other harbour in the West Indies the case might have been very different. They, of course, spent the rest of the night on board.

Nothing had been seen of the drogher, and Jack and Adair agreed that should she not appear in two or three days they would get leave to go in search of her. She might have been wrecked on one of the neighbouring islands, and

the party on board be unable to obtain the means of returning. By noon the next day the hurricane had ceased, and Murray accompanied Colonel O'Regan to Saint John's, followed by a servant leading Stella's horse, and carrying her riding-habit. In every direction the havoc caused by the storm was visible; cottages blown down or unroofed, sugar-canes laid low, fruit-trees upturned or stripped of their fruit; in many places the road was almost impassable; but labourers were at work with saws and axes clearing away the trunks which lay across it. In the evening, when the air was comparatively cool and refreshing, Murray rode back with Stella. The colonel was detained by a person on business just as they were setting off, and begged that they would ride on, saying that he would overtake them. Alick said more than he had ever before ventured to do. Stella turned away her head while he was speaking; then, lifting her eyes to his face with an expression in hers certainly not of annoyance or anger, she answered—

"You have your profession, Mr Murray. You assuredly do not contemplate quitting that, and I am the daughter of one the world calls an adventurer. I cannot desert him while he allows me to bear him company, and I know not in what direction his fate may lead him. Perchance your regard for me may prove but a passing fancy, and you would regret having bound yourself to one whom, after we part on this occasion, you may not meet again for years, when she may be so changed, as everything we see around us changes, that you would not recognise her. I know too well that this has been the case with others—why not with us?"

Her voice trembled as she uttered the last sentences. Murray urged every plea which his honest affection prompted. He had no fears of what she dreaded. He trusted that before long he should obtain his promotion, and then, in these piping times of peace, he might expect to remain for some time on shore, and be able to occupy his Highland home.

"I dare not pledge my troth, but there is no one for whose happiness I can more earnestly pray," said Stella, looking at him with her bright eyes beaming as the most ardent lover could desire. Will that satisfy you?

"Yes, dearest Stella because I know that you would not trifle with one who has given you a true and faithful heart," answered Alick. He had never before uttered such words, and the tone of his voice showed the deep feeling which prompted them.

"I believe you," she said simply.

Alick would rather have had a more demonstrative reply. A rough road strewn with branches, and other impediments to their progress, was not favourable for such a conversation. Still, as Stella had not objected to the terms he had applied to her, he had no reason to complain. They rode on for some time in silence. Stella was the first to break it.

"Mr Murray, you need not feel yourself bound to speak to my father on the subject, indeed I would rather you should not," she said. "He pays me the compliment of putting full confidence in my discretion, and leaves me to act as I consider right. I suspect that his affection prevents him from believing me otherwise than perfect, and he thinks, consequently, that I am incapable of doing anything of which he would not approve."

"In my eyes, too, you are perfect, Stella," said Alick. "That by your own reasoning is the best proof of affection."

"I do not doubt yours, Mr Murray, I am sure of it, and I am more than grateful," answered Stella, looking up at him. "Still affection should not blind us to the faults of those we love, as in time the tinsel must wear off our idols, and disappointment, if not a painful reaction, will be the result."

"But all idols are not tinselled," said Alick. "The spotless Parian marble—"

"I object altogether to idol worship," interrupted Stella. "I desire to be loved for myself, I own, but I would be so with all my faults and failings known. Could I be sure of them I would tell them to you, but I cannot boast of having attained to the height of wisdom, and learnt to know myself. I must leave to you the task of discovering them, and the means for their correction; only let me entreat you to believe that they exist, and perhaps are more numerous than you will think possible."

Of course Alick very sincerely protested that Stella and imperfection could not be named together, except as contrasts, for he truly thought so. She sighed, and then smiled, and the colonel cantering up cut short the interesting conversation—interesting to the two persons concerned, at all events.

"Stella, I find that we must start for Jamaica immediately," he said. "If Captain Hemming cannot proceed there, we shall be compelled to go by another vessel. A brig now in the harbour, I understand, sails for Port Royal to-morrow; and though I would defer our departure for three days longer, unless either of the men-of-war is to sail by the end of that time, we must not lose the present opportunity."

"So soon!" ejaculated Stella. She said no more, for she no more thought of inquiring the motive of her father's actions than of opposing his wishes. Alick watched her countenance. It was graver and more sad than he had ever seen it. Her lip quivered, but with a strong effort she recovered herself, though she did not venture to trust her voice. Alick knew that Captain Hemming would not sail before the return of the drogher with his midshipmen, or should she not appear until he had endeavoured to ascertain their fate. The colonel asked Murray's opinion. Alick gave it, but advised him to apply to Captain Hemming on the possibility of his sending the *Tudor* on to Jamaica before the frigate. His heart beat with hope that this might be done, and Stella's countenance brightened when he spoke of it.

Their friends, the Houghtons, with whom Stella and her father were staying, were much concerned when they heard of his determination.

"But must your daughter accompany you, colonel?" asked Mrs Houghton, a good-natured, motherly dame, whose daughters were all married. "We shall be delighted if Stella will remain with us, and we will find her an escort when the frigate sails; though, for my part, I would not hesitate to send a daughter of mine and a female attendant without one."

Stella did not express her thanks for this proposal with the warmth which might have been expected. The colonel accompanied Murray to the barracks, where they found the two captains. The colonel stated his wishes. Captain Hemming regretted that he could not sail in time to suit his convenience, but if Miss O'Regan would remain with the Houghtons he should be delighted to give her and her attendant a passage, and any lady who might be able to accompany her. He would, however, consult Commander Babbicome and ascertain whether the *Tudor* could be got ready for sea in time. Commander Babbicome was mute. When the colonel had gone, he expressed himself somewhat strongly to his superior.

"He had heard reports concerning Colonel O'Regan's schemes, and he had no wish to commit himself by carrying such a person on board his ship—charming as Miss O'Regan might be considered by some. He did not always go with the herd."

The captain of the frigate could send the *Tudor* to sea, but he could not compel her commander to give up his cabin to passengers, so he did not press the point. It would have been better for Commander Babbicome had he been more courteous, but no more than other mortals could he foresee what the future was to bring forth.

Colonel O'Regan went on board the brig *Sarah Jane*. Though of so unwarlike a name, she was a large rakish craft, evidently very fast, with square yards and taunt masts, well fitted for a blockade-runner or any work of that description; and her skipper, a dark, big-whiskered fellow, looked the man fit to command her. He and the colonel shook hands as if they had before been acquainted, and had a long conversation.

"Under the circumstances, colonel, we'll clear out for Portobello instead of Port Royal," he said, laughing; "for as you know we have a roving commission, and we may find a better market for our goods on the Spanish Main than at a British port. I expect to fall in with the sloop to the westward of Saint Kitt's, when we may get some stores from her and proceed in company."

The colonel having concluded his arrangements, returned to the cottage. Stella evinced no surprise when he communicated his change of plan.

"Am I to accompany you?" she asked in a faltering voice, while her cheek became paler than usual. At one time she would have entreated to be allowed to go without asking whither.

"As the cabins of the brig are commodious, and the frigate is not likely to sail for some time, I shall be glad of your society," answered the colonel, not remarking her increasing agitation.

"Should the state of affairs not be more propitious than of late, I intend returning forthwith to Jamaica, where I will leave you with your relatives, the Bradshaws, while I go back once more to await the course of events. You will thus, probably, reach Jamaica sooner than you would have done had you waited for these laggard men-of-war."

Stella had become calm again while her father uttered the last sentences. She expressed her readiness to do as he wished, and said, truly, that she wished ever to be with him; though she might have added, that she pined for the time when he would be content to abandon his schemes, and settle in some quiet home either in Britain or one of her colonies, as he had at times talked of doing when his restless spirit was for a time quelled by weariness or disappointment.

Kind Mr and Mrs Houghton pressed her to remain with them, and to go on to Jamaica in the frigate. They feared, with good reason, that Stella would be exposed to all sorts of dangers if she accompanied the colonel; they had no confidence in his schemes, and they thought him very wrong in wishing to take her with him, though they did not tell her so.

"I will assist you, my dear, to get over one of your difficulties, for I dare say you do not think it quite the thing to be alone on board the frigate without a chaperone," exclaimed Mrs Houghton, coming into Stella's room. "I have long promised to pay a visit to my daughter Julia and her husband, whose estate is next to the Bradshaws, and I intend to ask Captain Hemming to give me a passage. What do you say, Stella? Your father cannot object to my plan—it is so evidently the right one. Shall I tell him that you agree to it?"

It was a severe trial for Stella, but she was resolute in doing what she believed to be her duty. She thanked Mrs Houghton warmly for her kindness. She was, however, under orders. As a soldier's daughter she had learnt obedience. Unless her father commanded her to remain at Antigua, she must embark in the brig. What effect the arguments of Alick Murray might have produced, it is impossible to say. He, unfortunately, was detained by duty on board the corvette, and did not reach the cottage till late in the evening, not aware of Colonel O'Regan's altered plans. He was thunderstruck when he heard of them, and very much inclined to quarrel with the colonel, who did not seem to be aware that he was inducing his daughter to make any unusual sacrifice.

Thanks to Mrs Houghton's management, Alick and Stella were alone for a short time. She did not disguise from him how much the parting cost her, but entreated him to keep up his spirits in the hope that they might soon again meet in Jamaica. Alick, with Rogers and Adair, accompanied Stella and the colonel on board the brig the next morning. The two latter knew that they were not intruding on their friend. They warmly entered into his feelings, though they might have doubted that Stella's affection for him was as deep as he supposed, especially when they observed her tearless eye and calm manner when she parted from him. Their boat remained alongside till the brig was well out of the harbour. As long as any one could be discerned on board, a figure was seen standing at the stern watching them as they pulled back. Alick did not speak. All seemed a dream to him; but yesterday, he thought himself the happiest of mortals. Now Stella was gone, and to what fearful dangers might she not be exposed! Rogers and Adair wished to divert his thoughts, and began to talk of the missing midshipmen. "The captain gives them three days more, and if the drogher does not appear at the end of that time, he intends to send the *Tudor* to look for them," said Jack. "I regret allowing Tom to go, for when a number of youngsters are together they are sure to get into mischief."

"We found it so occasionally in our younger days to be sure," observed Adair. "I, too, am sorry I let Gerald go; however, Higson is a steady fellow, and I hope has taken good care of them."

"When Houghton heard that we were becoming anxious about the youngsters, he offered to send his schooner, the *Swordfish*, to look for them," observed Murray, rousing himself up. "If I can get leave from Babbicome, and I am sure he will give it to escape having to take the *Tudor* to sea, I will go in the schooner. She is far better fitted for cruising among the islands than the corvette, and will be more likely to find the drogher."

"A good idea of yours, Alick, and I will go with you, as I am sure to get leave," said Jack.

Adair wished that he could go also, but he and Rogers could not be away from the ship together for any length of time. Jack and Terence, like true friends, stuck close to Alick for the remainder of the day, doing their utmost to keep him from brooding over his unhappiness. His feelings, they knew, were too deep to allow them to banter him, as they would probably have done under ordinary circumstances.

Chapter Eight.

Cruise in the schooner in search of the missing midshipmen—Call at Saba and find Higson—Discover the wreck of the drogher deserted—Return unsuccessful—The midshipmen mourned as lost—The frigate and corvette sail for Jamaica—A boy overboard—A hurricane at sea—The corvette dismasted—Man lost—Dangerous position of corvette—The frigate prepared weathers the hurricane—Anxiety about the corvette—The frigate's search for her.

The next day and the next passed—the drogher did not appear, and the two captains became as anxious as were the three lieutenants to ascertain the fate of their midshipmen.

"If you wish to go I will spare you for a few days," said Captain Hemming to Adair.

Accordingly all three sailed in the *Swordfish*. Having ascertained that the midshipmen intended visiting Barbuda, they first steered for that island. There was a good stiff breeze, and as the *Swordfish* was a fast craft, she rapidly ran over the thirty miles of water which intervenes between Antigua and its small dependency. It was not, however, all plain sailing, as numerous shoals, reefs, and rocks surround the island mostly below the surface, some only showing their black pates, while from its slight elevation above the ocean at the distance of less than four miles it was scarcely visible. A negro standing on the bowsprit end, and holding on by the stay, piloted the schooner, giving his directions to the man at the helm in a sharp, loud voice—

"Lub ou may—all ou can! steady! starboard. Keep her away! steady! lub, lub, lub, for ou life!" he screamed out, waving his hand to enforce his orders. The schooner just scraped clear of a rock, round which the water hissed and bubbled, and the pilot once more subsided into his ordinary calmness.

"Not a pleasant spot to find under one's lee in a gale of wind on a dark night," observed Terence. "It proves, however, that the crew of the drogher must have been sober, or they could not have found their way clear of it."

The schooner at length came to an anchor, and a messenger was sent off to the overseer, who kindly came down at once and told them that he had seen the drogher outside the reefs, and standing to the westward. He pressed them to remain and partake of such hospitality as he could offer; but eager to pursue their search they declined his invitation, and the schooner was quickly again threading her way amid the shoals out to sea. It was a question whether the drogher had continued her course due west, or had steered northward to Saint Barts, or southward to Saint Eustatia, or Saint Kitts. They finally decided after examining the chart, to stand to the westward, and call off Saba. As they approached the island a fishing-boat was seen standing out towards the schooner, which was therefore hove to, to let her come alongside.

"I see Higson, and some of the others, but all I fear are not there," said Jack, who had been watching the boat through his glass, in a tone which showed his anxiety. Higson was soon on board. He gave a full account of what had happened.

"I would sooner have lost my own life than allowed any harm to happen to the youngsters," he added. "Still I have hopes that they may have escaped. Needham is a prime seaman, and he will have done what was possible to keep the drogher afloat, though they were sadly short-handed, I own. Still if the craft has not foundered, as they had plenty of provisions and water aboard we may expect to see them again, not the worse for their cruise. We have all been on the look-out, hoping to see her beating up to the island. You'll not blame me, Mr Rogers, more than I deserve, and I couldn't help it, you may depend on that."

The old mate as he spoke well-nigh burst into tears. Jack and the other lieutenants assured him that they did not see how he could be blamed, and they then set to work to consider what was best to be done. They first compared notes, and agreed as to the course of the hurricane, and calculated the direction in which the drogher must have been driven, and the distance she had probably gone, recollecting that as she had been carried with the wind she must have been exposed to its fury for a much longer time than those on shore.

"If it had not been for that they ought to have made their way back long before this," observed Jack.

"Perhaps they have gone to Saint Eustatia or Saint Kitts," remarked Murray.

"I am very sure, sir, that for our sakes they would have done their best to make Saba," said Higson. "If they could have helped it they would not have deserted us."

Jack, as senior officer, had to decide, and he determined, therefore, to steer to the south-west for a couple of days, keeping a bright look-out on either hand, and then to beat back to Antigua, thus going over a wide extent of sea. It would occupy them a week or more, but Captain Hemming they knew would not object to the delay. Captain Quasho and his crew as a punishment were left to find their way back as best they could, and the schooner stood away in the direction proposed. During the day Higson or one of the midshipmen was at the masthead, keeping a look-out on every side. At night sail was shortened, and the schooner stood backwards and forwards, now to the northward, now to the southward, so that no risk might be run of passing the drogher in the dark. Three or four vessels were fallen in with, but the same answer was received from all. They had seen nothing of the missing craft. Under other circumstances they would have been very jolly, for they had a good supply of West Indian delicacies, put on board by the owner of the vessel, and had nothing to do but to eat and smoke when they felt inclined; but they were much too anxious to enjoy themselves.

For another whole day they stood on. Still not a sign of the drogher. Jack felt greatly inclined to continue the search for a third day. He reflected, however, on the risk of doing so. It would take very much longer beating back, and should light winds prevail they might run short of water and provisions; and though he was ready to undergo any dangers himself, with the prospect of recovering his brother, he had no right, he felt, to expose others to them. There was also the possibility of having to encounter another hurricane, which might try the schooner, capital sea-boat as she appeared to be. The weather had again become threatening—dark clouds collected overhead—the wind fell, and as the little vessel lay roiling her sides under the glass, like swell, down came the rain, not a mere sprinkling, like that of northern latitudes, but in a perfect deluge, the huge drops leaping up as they fell, and flooding the deck. Those who could took refuge below; the rest were wet to the skin before they could get on their great coats. Just before sunset a breeze sprang up, and the clouds clearing away left the horizon more defined and distinct even than usual. Jack himself went aloft to take a look round, and consider whether he should haul up at once, and commence the long beat to Antigua, or stand on for a few hours longer. He had already swept his glass round on every side when, as he turned it once more towards the south-west, just clear of the setting sun, his eye fell on a dark object almost on the very verge of the horizon. It seemed a mere speck, though it might, he thought, be a dead whale, or a piece of wreck, or only a mass of floating seaweed. His directions to the man at the helm to steer for it called all hands on deck, and several came aloft—various opinions were expressed. Old Higson was positive that it was part of a wreck of some unfortunate vessel lost in the late hurricane, or the whole hull of a small craft dismasted. The breeze freshened, and hopes were entertained that they might get up to it before darkness settled down over the deep. It could soon be seen from the deck.

“I knew that I was right, and I wish from my soul I wasn’t,” exclaimed Higson, as he looked steadily through his glass. “That’s a small craft on her beam ends, and it’s my belief that she’s the *Snapper!*”

“I trust not,” said Rogers, who overheard him. “If she is the *Snapper*, what has become of the poor youngsters?”

“Perhaps they are still clinging to her, sir,” answered Higson. “I have known men hold out on board a craft in as bad a position as she is in.”

“But they are boys, and must have succumbed to hunger and thirst, even if they escaped being washed overboard when the craft capsized,” observed Murray, who was not inclined just then to take a hopeful view of matters.

“I’d trust to my nephew holding out as long as any youngster ever did,” said Adair. “The others have not less pluck in them.”

“I see no signal, and as they must have made us out long ago if they were aboard I fear they are gone,” sighed Jack.

“Faith, it’s likely enough they have nothing to make one with,” observed Adair. “I’ll not believe they are lost.”

Every glass on board was continually kept turned towards the object ahead. As the schooner approached, however, no one could be discovered on board. It was nearly dark by the time she got up with it. Several voices on board the schooner hailed, but no reply came. She hove to, and a boat was lowered. Jack, Terence, and Higson jumped into her.

“Hand a lantern here,” cried Higson, as they were shoving off. They were quickly alongside the hapless craft. It was then seen that she had been capsized with her sails set, which, with the mast and rigging, assisted to keep her in her present position. Probably also her ballast having shifted contributed to do so, as she was only partially filled with water. Not a human being, however, was visible. Higson, seizing the lantern, leaped on board, and climbed up to the companion hatch. Jack and Adair were about to follow, but they, observing that even his weight made the water flow over the bulwarks, saw that it would be more prudent to let him search alone. They waited for him anxiously. He quickly put his head up the hatchway.

“She’s the *Snapper*—no doubt about that; but there’s not a soul aft,” he exclaimed. “At all events, however, they were not starved, for there are plenty of provisions in the locker.”

Having let himself down into the hold, holding on to the coaming with one hand, he stretched out the other with the lantern, so as to let its light fall on every side. No one was there. He then made his way into the fore-peak. It seemed to Jack that he was a long time absent, though in reality scarcely a minute passed before he scrambled out again.

“What has become of the youngsters I can’t say, but on board this craft they are not; nor is their monkey Spider, who with his long tail to hold on by was not likely to be washed overboard,” he exclaimed, as he sprang back into the boat. “The sooner we shove off the better, for she is filling fast, and may go to the bottom at any moment.”

“I can’t bear to leave her though without having a look round,” said Jack, taking the lantern from Higson.

He made his way into the little cabin, and was soon convinced that Higson was right. Not a trace of the midshipmen could he see. He searched the hold and the fore-peak. They were not there, dead or alive. Jack came back to the boat

and sat down, feeling very sorrowful.

"Let me go in again," said the old mate, as he took the lantern.

He was back very soon with three small carpet-bags in his hand.

"Be sharp," cried Adair. "She is going down!"

He spoke truly. Higson made a leap into the boat, which shoved off just as the drogher, giving a slight roll, sank from sight. The crew pulled away from her.

"I could only find my own and two other fellows' bags," said Higson. "The others must have slipped down into the water."

The boat at once returned to the schooner with the sad intelligence. Norris and the master's-assistant were very glad to get back their carpet-bags. Their recovery, it is possible, somewhat consoled them for the loss of their young messmates. They, at all events, congratulated themselves that they had not been on board the drogher when she was blown away from Saba.

Jack, who loved his brother dearly, was very much grieved at his loss; so was Terence for Gerald, though he thought most of the sorrow his sister would suffer when she heard of her boy's death.

"Arrah now; I wish that I'd let him stay at home and turn farmer; but then, to be sure, he might have been after breaking his neck out hunting, so it comes to the same thing in the end," he exclaimed, with as near an approach to a sigh as he ever uttered. "Och, ahone, poor Nora, the sweet cratur! and I not able to bring her back the boy."

Murray was less demonstrative, but he knew that young Archy would be truly mourned for in his distant highland home.

The schooner now commenced her long beat back to Antigua. There was every prospect of its being a tedious business; but there was a fresh breeze, and by carrying on, though the top-masts bent like willow-wands, English Harbour was gained at length. Captain Hemming felt the loss of his midshipmen; but when the matter was explained to him, he acquitted old Higson of all blame.

"Only I will never, as long as I command a ship, allow my midshipmen to go away for their amusement by themselves," he observed. "They run risks enough as it is in the course of duty."

This being reported in the berth made Norris and others very angry, and they were much inclined to abuse poor Tom and Gerald for getting drowned, and thus being the cause of the restriction likely to be placed on their liberty.

The two ships were now ready for sea. Murray went to pay a farewell visit to the Houghtons. Kind Mrs Houghton—who, for Stella's sake as well as his own, took a warm interest in him, for she having keener eyes than the colonel, knew perfectly well that they were engaged—had letters of introduction ready to her daughter Mrs Raven, to the Bradshaws, Stella's relatives, and to other friends.

"You'll receive a hearty welcome, and I have just hinted how matters stand. They agree with us that the colonel has no right to be dragging his daughter about in the way he does, and will be thankful to see her placed under the guardianship of one who will take better care of her than, in my humble opinion, her father does."

Alick was duly grateful, and said all that was proper, though he wished that his friend had not mentioned the matter she alluded to, as he felt somewhat nervous at the thought of appearing before strangers in the character of a melancholy lover.

"However, if there are any young ladies among them, they'll not expect me to pay them attentions," he thought.

The frigate and corvette were at sea, with the prospect of a quick run to Port Royal. During his quiet night-watches Alick's thoughts were ever occupied with Stella. Hitherto the weather since she sailed had been unusually fine, and she might, he hoped, have escaped the dangers of the sea; but there were others to which she was too likely to be exposed on board a vessel engaged, as he understood the brig was, in landing arms and ammunition, and in running contraband goods. The colonel himself, Murray fully believed, had nothing to do with such proceedings; but he would, notwithstanding, be placed in a dangerous position should the vessel be captured while so employed, and then to what a fearful risk might not Stella be exposed. He shuddered at the thought. Again and again it occurred to him. The two ships had got to the southward of Saint Domingo.

In those piping times of peace there was very little excitement at sea—no enemy to be encountered, no vessels to be chased, except perhaps a slaver from the coast of Africa. There had, however, been a steady breeze, all sail being carried, and the officers were congratulating themselves on making a quick passage, when about noon it suddenly fell calm. The sun struck down from the cloudless sky with intense heat, making the pitch in the seams of the deck bubble up and run over the white planks, while every particle of iron or brass felt as hot as if just come out of a furnace. The chips from the carpenter's bench floated alongside, and the slush from the cook's pots scarcely mingled with the clear water, till a huge mouth rising to the surface swallowed the mass down with a gulp, creating a ripple which extended far away from the ship's side. The atmosphere was sultry and oppressive in the extreme, for air there was none. It was a question whether it was hotter on deck in the shade or below. In the sun there was not much doubt about the matter. The sails hung motionless against the masts; even the dog-vanes refused to move. The smoke ascending from the galley fire rose in a thin column, till, gradually spreading out, it hung like a canopy above the ship. The men moved sluggishly about their duties, with no elasticity in their steps; and even Jack and Adair, the briskest of the brisk, felt scarcely able to drag their feet after them. The ocean was like a sheet of burnished silver, so

dazzling that it pained the eye to gaze at it. Ever and anon its polished surface would be broken by a covey of flying-fish rising into the air in a vain effort to escape some hungry foe. A nautilus, or Portuguese-man-of-war, would glide by, proving that the wind had nothing to do with its movement; or the dark, triangular fin of a shark might be seen, as the monster, with savage eye, moved slowly round the ship, watching for anything hove overboard.

Woe betide the careless seaman who might lose his balance aloft, and drop within reach of the creature's jaws. In spite of the heat several of the ship's boys, rather than remain stewing below or roasting on deck, were sky-larking in the fore-rigging, chasing each other into the top or up to the cross-trees and along the yards, now swarming up by a lift, now sliding down a stay. The most active of the boys, and generally their leader, though one of the smallest, was Jerry Nott. He had been over the mast-head several times, keeping well before the rest, when he made his way out to the end of the starboard fore-yard-arm. At that moment Mr Scrofton, the boatswain, coming on deck, and reflecting probably that having been deprived of their tails, they were not as fit as their ancestral monkeys to amuse themselves as they were doing, and might come to grief, called the youngsters down. Jerry, startled by the boatswain's voice, cast his eye on deck, instead of fixing it on the topping-lift. A small body was seen falling, and a splash was heard.

"Man overboard!" shouted numerous voices.

"Lower the starboard quarter boat!" cried Jack Rogers, who was officer of the watch, and having given the order he rushed forward and had sprung into the main-chains, intending to jump overboard and support the boy till the boat could pick them up; when he saw the youngster throw up his arms—a piercing shriek rent the air. That bright face a moment before turned towards him had disappeared, a ruddy circle marking the spot where it had been. With difficulty he restrained the impulse which had prompted him to leap into the water, to which had he given way, he knew that he would probably have shared the fate of the poor boy. The boat, notwithstanding, was lowered, and the men rowed round and round the spot hoping to get a blow at their foe with the boat-hook and an axe with which one of them had armed himself; but neither the shark nor his hapless victim again appeared. The only thing which came to the surface was Jerry's straw hat—crushed and blood-stained.

The heat increased—the sun itself seemed to grow larger—the sky became of a metallic tint, the sea lost its silvery brilliancy, and gradually assumed the hue of molten lead. The captain, having several times examined his barometer, came on deck. "All hands, shorten sail!" he shouted out, and while the boatswain was turning up the crew he ordered a signal to be made to the corvette to follow his example.

The topmen swarmed on the yards, the idlers were at their stations.

"Be smart about it, lads!" he shouted. In a few minutes every sail was furled, with the exception of a closely-reefed fore-topsail, braced sharp up. Royal and top-gallant yards were sent down, and the masts struck.

The captain made another signal to the corvette to hasten her proceedings, but her commander showed but little disposition to do so.

"What's Hemming making such a fuss about?" he was reported to have said. "Why, the sea is as smooth as a mill-pond, and if a strong breeze does spring up on a sudden, which I have my doubts about, we shall have plenty of time to trim sails I should think. I ought to know how to take care of my own ship, and don't require to be dictated to by a young fellow who wore long clothes when I was a lieutenant."

Captain Hemming, in the meantime, as he walked the deck of the frigate, ever and anon cast a vexed glance at the corvette.

"Babbicome will be having his sticks about his ears if he does not look sharp," he muttered. "Obstinate old donkey, were it not for those with him I should be glad to see him receive the lesson he'll get to a certainty."

Still, not a breath of air stirred the dog-vanes—the ocean remained as glass-like as before, but thick clouds appeared in the north, and in a short time rain began to fall. It soon ceased, and a stillness like death succeeded the pattering sound of the falling drops. On a sudden the dark clouds seen before in the distance covered the sky, except in the zenith, where an obscure circle of imperfect light was visible, while a dismal darkness gathered round the ships. The midshipmen of the frigate, and several others, had begun to think the captain over-cautious.

"One would suppose that he had changed places with old Babbicome," observed Norris. "See, they are letting all stand on board the corvette."

"No; they are not, though. See! there's hands aloft, shorten sail!" exclaimed Higson. "Good reason, too—they must be smart about it. Look there!" He pointed to the north-east, where a long, white line was seen sweeping on towards the ship, and rapidly increasing in height and thickness, while a roar like that of distant thunder was heard—yet more shrill than thunder—the sound every instant becoming louder and shriller, till it seemed like that of countless voices screaming at their highest pitch. On came the breath of the mighty hurricane, not seen except by its effect on the ocean, which now began to leap and foam, rising into huge rolling billows, sweeping along in threatening array; the foam which flew from them forming one vast sheet covering the ocean, while vivid lightning bursting from the clouds flashed in all directions with dazzling brilliancy. The furious wind struck the frigate on her broadside. In a moment over she heeled, and the close-reefed fore-topsail, blown out of the bolt-ropes, fluttered wildly in shreds, which speedily lashed and twisted themselves round the yard. The helm was put up. After a struggle the frigate answered to it, and off she flew before the wind, passing close under the stern of the corvette, which lay with her masts gone, on her beam-ends, the sheets of foam sweeping over her, almost concealing her from sight. The crew of the corvette had been swarming aloft, and some had already laid out on the yards when the hurricane struck her. Over she heeled—the tall masts bending like willow-wands. The sheets were let fly, but it was too late. The men called down by the officers endeavoured to spring back into the tops, and those who could descended on deck, but many had no time to escape. In one instant, it seemed, the three masts, with a fearful crash, went by the board, carrying all on them into

the seething ocean; and the lately trim corvette lay a helpless meek, exposed to the fury of the raging—which dashed with relentless fury over her. Efforts were made by those on deck to rescue their drowning shipmates, whose piercing shrieks for help rose even above the loud uproar of the tempest, whose shrill voice seemed to mock their cries. Some few were hauled on board, but many were swept away before aid could be rendered to them. The masts, also, were thundering with terrific force against the side, threatening every moment to stave in the stout planks, and to send the ship and all on board to the bottom. To clear the wreck was the first imperative work to be performed. Murray, followed by a party of men armed with axes, sprang into the main-chains to cut away the main rigging, while other officers were similarly engaged on that of the fore and mizen masts. He saw at that instant the captain of the maintop, a fine young seaman, who was at his station when the mast went, still clinging to it. A cask with a line was hove into the sea, in the hopes that it might reach him, but this the mass of spars and sails rendered impossible. Murray shouted to him to try and make his way along the mast.

“No, no!” he answered in return, knowing that he would be washed off should he venture on the attempt. “Cut—cut!”

The reiterated blows of the butt-ends of the masts allowed of no alternative. The bright axes gleamed while the seamen rapidly cut the ropes. As the last shroud was severed the gallant topman waved his hand a farewell to his shipmates, and a faint cheer reached their ears as the tangled mass of spars, rigging, and sails, floated away clear of the ship. They had already, however, committed fearful damage. The carpenter sounded the well; he reported six feet of water. The pumps were rigged, and the hands set to work to try and overcome the leak, while he and his mates went below to ascertain the locality of the injury the ship had received. Meantime the hatches were battened down to prevent the water from the seas, which broke on board, increasing the mischief.

Before long the carpenter returned, his countenance showing the anxiety he vainly endeavoured to conceal.

“There are more leaks than one, sir, through which the water is rushing in like a mill-sluice; and it’s more than man can do to stop them from within-board,” he said, coming aft to the commander. “You’ll pardon me, sir, but it’s my duty to say that unless we heave the guns overboard, with everything else to lighten the ship, and can get a thrummed sail under her bottom, she’ll founder before the world is many minutes older.”

“Very well, Mr Auger, I’ll consider what you say,” answered Commander Babbicome; who, though obstinate and irritable under ordinary circumstances, was cool enough in moments of danger. Murray, who had been below, confirmed the carpenter’s report. The boatswain was ordered to get a sail up and prepare it as proposed, while the drummer beat to quarters. Gladly would the crew have mustered had it been to meet an enemy, but it was to perform a task the most painful of all to a man-of-war’s man, and one of no small danger.

“Heave the guns overboard!” shouted the commander. “Watch the right time now.”

As the dismayed ship rolled in the foaming seas raging around her, first the guns on one side were allowed to slip through the ports, then those on the other went plunging into the deep. The anchors were next cut away from the bows, and now the attempt was made to get the thrummed sail under the ship’s bottom. It seemed well-nigh hopeless, with the ship rolling and the heavy seas breaking over her. Murray and the other officers laboured as hard as any one, setting an example, by their energy and courage, to the men dispirited by the loss of so many of their shipmates. Two hawsers were at length got under the ship’s bottom, when the sail filled with oakum was hauled over the part where the worst leaks were supposed to exist. Still the water rushed in. The efforts of the hands at the pumps were redoubled, and anxious eyes were turned towards the frigate, which could still be dimly seen to leeward, but too far off to render them any assistance should the sea overcome all their efforts, and carry the ship to the bottom. That this would be her fate before long seemed too probable; the bulwarks in many places had been crushed in—the boats stove or carried away, scarcely a spare spar remained—everything on deck had been swept off it; indeed, it seemed a wonder that she should still be afloat.

A short jury-mast was got up, fixed to the stump of the fore-mast, and a spare royal was bent to a yard and hoisted in the hopes of getting the ship before the wind; but scarcely had the sail been sheeted home, before it had produced the slightest effect, than away went the canvas, mast, and spar to leeward. A second attempt to set a sail was made with similar want of success, and now not an available spar remained on which another could be hoisted.

“Spell, ho!” was cried more frequently than at first, as the exhausted hands at the pumps summoned their shipmates to relieve them, when they staggered to the stumps of the masts or the remaining stanchions and bulwarks, to which they clung to save themselves from being borne away by the wild surges as they broke on board. Thus the disastrous day wore on, to be followed by a still more fearful night. Even the most hopeful had no expectation of seeing another sunrise, as the increasing darkness told them that it had sunk into the storm-tossed ocean.

Alick Murray had endeavoured to maintain that calmness of mind, one of the characteristics for which he was noted. Thought, however, was busy. He, like the rest, believed that ere long the fierce waves would sweep over the foundering ship, and his life, with the lives of all on board, would be brought to a close; for who could hope to escape with not a boat remaining uninjured, and scarcely a spar to afford support? One thought, however, afforded him consolation; the brig, with his beloved Stella on board, had long ere this got well to the southward of the latitude the hurricane was likely to reach, and she, at all events, would escape its fury. Earnestly he prayed that she might be protected from the many dangers she might have to encounter, and though he knew she would mourn his loss, that she might find comfort and he restored in time to happiness.

The rage of the hurricane was unabated—a dreadful darkness settled down over the deep; the only objects to be seen beyond the deck of the labouring ship being the black mountainous seas, crested with hissing foam, which rose up on either beam, threatening every instant to overwhelm her.

In the meantime the frigate, well prepared as she had been to encounter the first onslaught of the hurricane, flew before it unharmed. As she passed the corvette, Captain Hemming, seeing her perilous condition, hailed, promising

to heave-to if possible, and lay by her, but the wild uproar of the elements drowned his voice. To bring the ship to the wind under the full force of the hurricane was, indeed, a difficult and dangerous operation, which only the urgent necessity of the case rendered allowable. The captain of the *Plantagenet* was not the man to desert a consort in distress, and notwithstanding the risk to be run he determined to make the attempt. Still some time elapsed before the trysails could be set, and during it the frigate had run considerably to leeward of the corvette. The ports were closed, the hatches secured, preventer stays set up; every device, indeed, which good seamanship could suggest, was adopted to provide for the safety of the ship. The boats were secured by additional lashings, as was everything that could be washed away on deck. Relieving tackles were also rove, and four of the best hands were sent to the helm. The crew were at their stations, ready to carry out the intended operation. All was ready, but it was necessary to wait for an opportunity to avoid the fury of the mountain foam-crested billows, rolling in quick succession across the ocean, one of which, striking her bows as she came up to the wind, would have treated the proud frigate with little less ceremony than they would a mere cock-boat. Even during the fiercest gale there are spots on the surface of the sea which are less agitated than elsewhere, while at times there comes a lull of the wind, often the precursor, however, of a more furious blast. For such a lull the captain waited. It came.

"Helm's a lee!" he shouted.

With a mighty struggle the frigate came to the wind, the main and mizen trysails were sheeted home, the fore-topsail was braced sharp up. Every one looked with anxiety towards the next huge sea which came roaring towards the frigate, to observe how she would behave. Most gallantly she breasted it, though its hissing crest burst over the bulwarks, and came rushing furiously aft along the deck, but the lee ports being opened, the water made its way out again, without committing any serious damage. To bring the ship to the wind and heave-to was one thing, to beat her up to her hapless consort was another, and that it was found impossible to do without the certainty of meeting with serious disaster. In the attempt she would probably have missed stays, and making a stern board would have gone down into the yawning gulf which the next passing sea would have left. As it was, though she rose buoyantly over most of the seas, ever and anon the summit of one broke on board, and all hands had to hold on fast to save themselves from being carried into the lee-scuppers, or washed overboard, while at the same time it was evident that she must be making very considerable leeway, and thus be drifting farther and farther from her consort. Jack and Adair could not help feeling very anxious about the corvette, for the sake, of course, of all on board, but more especially on account of Murray. They had last seen her through a dense mass of spray, with her masts gone, and many of her crew struggling in the waves, while the savage seas were breaking completely over her. Commander Babbicome was very naturally not spoken of, either by them or any one else, in the most complimentary manner.

"His stupid obstinacy has got his ship into this mess, and, as far as he is concerned, he richly deserves it," observed Jack, trying to catch a glimpse through his glass of the wreck, as she rose, in the far distance, on the summit of a billow, quickly again to disappear. "It's a sad fate for those poor fellows who have lost their lives, and I am very much afraid that they will not be the only ones. It's a question whether the corvette will weather out the hurricane."

"I am very much afraid that she will not," said Adair. "If there was a prospect of a boat living I would volunteer to board her, and try and save some of the people."

"The best-manned boat wouldn't live a minute in such a sea as this, so there's no use thinking about it," answered Jack. "I have tried to persuade myself that it might be possible, but I know it is not. All we can hope is that should she go down, poor Alick may manage to get hold of a plank or spar, or into one of the boats, and that when the gale moderates we may pick him up. There is but a poor chance of that, I own."

"I'll hope that the corvette won't go down," said Adair. "She is a new ship, and, unless abominably managed, she ought to weather out the hurricane."

"She ought to have been put before the wind by this time, and have followed us; and see, she has not altered her position since she was dismasted," said Jack, with a sigh. "Poor Alick!"

"Poor Alick! and poor Stella," echoed Adair.

Night came on. Few of the watch below—officers or men—turned in, for every one knew that at any moment all hands might be piped on deck to save ship.

The hurricane continued to rage with unabated fury. Hour after hour went by without a sign of its ceasing. The vivid lightning darted around; the whole upper regions of the sky being illuminated by incessant flashes, while darts of electric fire exploded with surpassing brilliancy in every direction, threatening each instant the destruction of the ship. Jack and Terence were standing together, holding on to a stanchion, when the latter gave a loud cry, and some heavy object fell at their feet.

"Hillo! what's that?" exclaimed Paddy, as he put up his hand to his cap. "Faith, I thought a round shot had taken my head off. Catch it, Jack, or it will be away."

"What, your head, Terence?" asked Jack, unable to restrain a joke even then.

"No, but that big bird there; see it's scuttling away along the deck."

Jack sprang forward and caught the bird, which proved to be a large sea-fowl, but he had not the heart to injure it. Presently another dropped on the deck near them, and in a short time a flash of lightning, spreading a bright glare around, showed that the launch and booms, and all the more sheltered spots, were tenanted by sea-birds, which, unable to breast the storm, could find no other resting-place for their weary wings. Some unfortunate ones were caught and carried captives below, but the men generally showed compassion to the strangers, and allowed them to enjoy such shelter as they could find undisturbed.

"Well, I do hope that the hurricane is at its height," observed Jack, as six bells in the middle watch were struck. "I doubt if the canvas will stand much more."

"If it isn't it will be after blowing the ship herself clean out of the water," answered Adair. "We ought to be thankful that our sticks are sound, and the rigging well set up."

"Yes; Cherry deserves full credit, and we should give old Scrofton his due, for, though his theories are nonsensical, he is an excellent boatswain," observed Jack. "I am convinced that every accident on board a ship occurs from the carelessness, and often from the culpable neglect, of some one concerned in fitting her out, or from bad seamanship."

While they were speaking there came a sudden lull of the wind, and the lightning ceased, leaving the ship enveloped in a blackness which could be felt. The two lieutenants, though close together, could not even distinguish the outlines of each other's figures.

"This is awful," exclaimed Adair.

Jack felt that it was so, but said nothing. Suddenly the whole heavens appeared ablaze with fiery meteors, which fell in showers on every side.

"Look look! mercy—what can that be?" cried Adair.

A mass of fire, of a globular form and deep red hue, appeared high up in the sky, when downward it fell, perpendicularly, not a cable's length from the ship, it seemed, assuming an elongated shape of dazzling whiteness ere it plunged, hissing, into the ocean.

"We may be thankful that ball did not strike us," observed Jack. "It would have sent us to the bottom more certainly than Fulton's torpedo, or any similar invention, could have done."

"I hope that there are no others like it ready to fall on us," said Terence.

Scarcely a minute had elapsed when the wind fell almost to a calm, its strength being scarcely sufficient to steady the ship. At the same moment the heavens seemed to open and shower down fire, so numberless and rapid were the flashes of the most vivid lightning which played between the clouds and ocean, filling the whole atmosphere with their brilliancy. The captain had put his hand to his mouth to order more sail to be set, when again the hurricane burst forth with renewed fury, howling and shrieking, as Terence declared, like ten legions of demons in the rigging, while the mountain seas, as they clashed with each other, created a roar which almost overpowered the yelling voice of the hurricane. For nearly an hour the hideous uproar continued, until, as if wearied by its last mighty effort, the storm began evidently to abate, although the darkness was even denser than before, while the seas continued tumbling and rolling in so confused a manner that any attempt to steer the ship, so as to avoid them, would have been impossible. Daylight was looked for with anxiety by all on board, to ascertain the fate of the corvette, the captain eagerly waiting for the moment when he could venture to make sail, that he might stand towards her. Just as the cold grey dawn broke over the leaden-tinted, still tumbling ocean, the wind shifted to the southward. The light increased. The eyes of all on deck were turned towards the spot where it was supposed the corvette would be seen. In vain they looked. She was nowhere visible. A groan of disappointment escaped their breasts. Jack and Adair hurried aloft with their glasses, still in the hopes of discovering her. They swept the whole horizon to the northward from east to west, and every intermediate space, but not a speck on the troubled waters could they discover which might prove to be the hull of the corvette. "Poor Alick! poor Alick!" they both again ejaculated, and descended with sad hearts on deck.

The captain now gave the order to make sail, and under her topsails and courses the frigate began to force her way amid the still rolling billows to the northward. Mr Cherry, and several of the other officers, were speaking of the loss of the corvette as a certainty. Jack, who could not bear the thought that Murray was indeed gone, declared that he still had some hopes of finding her above water.

"I agree with Rogers," said the captain, joining them. "We have made scarcely sufficient allowance for the distance the frigate has drifted during the hurricane. Though I allow that the corvette will have had a hard struggle for it, and that it is too probable she has foundered; yet, as I think that there is a possibility of her being still afloat, I intend to pass over every part of the sea to which she can have been driven, or any boats or rafts escaping from her can have reached."

The remarks made by the captain considerably raised the spirits of Jack and Terence. A look-out was sent to the masthead, and they themselves frequently went aloft with their telescopes, in the hopes of catching sight of the missing ship. As the day advanced the light increased, and the wind gradually fell to a moderate breeze. The captain and Mr Cherry, having been on deck during the whole night, had turned in, as had all who could do so. Jack had charge of the watch, and Terence remained with him.

"A lump of something floating away on the starboard bow," cried the look-out from aloft.

Jack kept the ship towards it. In a short time the object seen was discovered to be a tangled mass of spars and rigging, evidently belonging to the corvette. As the frigate passed close to it the figure of a seaman was perceived in its midst floating, partly in the water and partly supported by a spar, with his face turned upwards, as if gazing at her. Several on board shouted, but no voice replied, no sign was made. Jack, notwithstanding, was about to shorten sail and heave the ship to, that a boat might be lowered to rescue the man, when the corpse—for such it was—turned slowly round and disappeared beneath the waves.

"There goes poor Bill Dawson. He was captain of the main-top aboard the *Tudor*," observed one of the men. "I

knowned him well, and a better fellow never stepped!"

Jack's heart sank as he saw the wreck of the corvette's masts.

"Surely they could not have floated to any distance from her, and as she is not in sight she must have gone down," he thought.

The sea was still too rough to attempt taking any of the spars on board, so the frigate stood on as the captain had directed. Ten minutes or more passed by, when again the look-out hailed the deck in a cheery voice,—“A sail on the port bow!”

The announcement raised the spirits of every one. Terence hurried aloft, and a midshipman was sent to call the captain, who quickly appeared.

“I thought so,” he exclaimed. “Depend on it, that is the *Tudor*.”

Some time passed before Terence returned on deck. His report confirmed the captain's opinion. He could clearly make out the hull with a small sail set forward. The last reef was shaken out of the topsails, the starboard studding-sails were set, and the frigate dashed after the corvette. The news spread below, the sleepers were awakened, and all hands turned out. The frigate speedily came up with the lately trim little ship, now reduced to a mere battered hulk. From her appearance it was surprising that she should be still afloat. A mast and yard, composed of numerous pieces, had been rigged forward with a royal or some other small sail set on it. The whole of the bulwarks on one side were stove in; not a gun remained, the boats were gone. Many of the crew lay about the deck exhausted with fatigue, and scarcely able to raise themselves, and utter a faint cheer, as the frigate, now shortening sail, approached, while the remainder were labouring hard at the pumps; and by the gush of water flowing from the scuppers, it was evident that they found it a hard matter to keep the ship afloat.

“Shorten sail, Commander Babbicome, and I'll send you assistance, for I see you require it,” shouted Captain Hemming, with a touch of irony in his tone, as the frigate ranged up alongside.

A hawser had been got ready and passed aft; a long line secured to the end was hove on board the corvette, and those who just before seemed scarcely able to stand on their feet hauling on it with right good will; the hawser was passed forward, and quickly secured. In the meantime two boats had been lowered, and fifty fresh hands sent from the frigate relieved the worn-out crew of the corvette. Adair had gone in charge of the men, and Murray was the first person he greeted on deck.

“We had given you up for lost, but, thank Heaven, you are safe!” exclaimed Terence, as he warmly wrung his friend's hand.

“It isn't the first time either that we've had cause to be frightened about each other's safety; and for my part I intend in future, should you or Jack disappear, never to despair of seeing you turn up again alive somewhere or other.”

“We have indeed been very mercifully preserved,” answered Murray, gravely. “But, my dear Adair, unless we take the greatest care, I very much doubt that the ship can be kept afloat till we reach Port Royal.”

And he briefly told Terence all that had occurred. There was but little time, however, for conversation. While most of the fresh hands went to the pumps the rest got up another sail, which, having been thrummed like the first, was passed under the ship's bottom. The result was satisfactory. Though the frigate was towing the corvette at the rate of four knots an hour, instead of the leak increasing, as had been feared would be the case, the pumps rapidly gained on it. Higson, with additional hands, came on board; the hatches were taken off, and buckets being brought into play, passed rapidly up from below by a line of men, the depth of water in the hold was sensibly decreased, the corvette in consequence towing the lighter. Poor Commander Babbicome, who looked as unhappy as a man could do, went to his cabin; and even Murray, with most of the officers, was glad to turn in and leave the ship in charge of Adair and Fligson. Happily the wind remained fair and moderate, and in three days the frigate and her battered consort came safely to an anchor in the magnificent harbour of Port Royal. Their arrival was officially notified to the admiral, living at the Pen above Kingston, and he, shortly after coming down in his barge, having inspected the ships, ordered the corvette into dock to be repaired, while he gave a gentle hint to Commander Babbicome that, as he was not a good subject for resisting an attack of yellow fever, it would be wise in him to return by the first opportunity to England.

Chapter Nine.

Jamaica—Murray appointed to the Supplejack brig—Pull up to Kingston—Port Royal Jack—Johnny Ferong's store—Visit to the Bradshaws—Kind reception—Return—The Supplejack sails for the southward.

Jamaica, a hundred and sixty miles long, by forty-five broad, is, as everybody knows, a very magnificent island; but, alas! its ancient glory has departed for a time, though it is to be hoped that one of the many panaceas proposed for its renovation may, ere long, restore it to its pristine state of prosperity. Port Royal, or Kingston Harbour, capable of holding a thousand tall ships, lies on its southern side, towards its eastern end. The harbour has for its sea boundary a low, narrow, sandy strip of land, several miles in length, called the Palisades, running from the east towards the west; at which end is seen the town of Port Royal standing a few feet above the water, and looking complacently down on its predecessor, buried eight fathoms below the surface by the earthquake of 1692. Here, too, is the Royal Naval Yard, hospital, barracks, and the works of Fort Charles defending the entrance, which is rendered still more difficult of access to an enemy by the Apostles' Battery erected on the opposite side, with a fine range of mountains rising directly above it. Kingston, that not over delectable of sea-ports, stands on the northern shore of the harbour towards its eastern end, and is thus a considerable distance from Port Royal; the only communication between the

two places being by water, except by a circuitous route along the burning sands of the Palisades, which adventurous minds and juvenile subs, have alone of mortals been known to attempt on horseback. The land rises rapidly beyond the flat on which Kingston stands, the Admiral's Pen being some way above it, while Up Hill Barracks appear beautifully situated very much higher up the mountain.

The frigate lay at anchor off Port Royal, the crippled corvette had just been towed into dock. Jack and Terence were walking the deck under the awning, having got ready to go on shore.

"Faith, now, this is a fine place!" exclaimed Terence, as he gazed over the wide expanse of the harbour, the plain of Liguania covered with plantations, and dotted with white farm-houses quivering in the beams of a tropical sun. Beyond it rose the magnificent amphitheatre of the Blue Mountains, one piled upon another, reaching to the clouds, and intersected by numerous deep, irregular valleys; one of their spurs, with Rock Fort at its base, appearing directly over the ship's port-quarter; while before the beam was seen, at the end of a narrow spit of sand, Fort Augusta, its guns ready to sweep to destruction any hostile fleet which might attempt to enter; and over the bow in the far distance could dimly be distinguished the town of Kingston, at the head of the lagoon.

"Not equal to Trinidad, though," observed Jack. "I don't know what your fair cousin Maria would say if she heard you expatiate so warmly on its beauties."

"I'd just invite her to come with me, and judge for herself," answered Terence. "But why did you speak of her now? I was beginning to fancy that I was getting the sweet creature out of my head, for it's bothering me she has been ever since we left the island. Oh, Jack! you're a hardhearted fellow. I thought that you would have fallen head over ears in love with Stella."

"I saw that Miss O'Regan was not likely to fall in love with me, and, besides, for other reasons, when I found how completely Murray was captivated by her, I soon conquered the admiration I felt," said Jack. "I wish for his sake that they had never met. Dragged about as she is by her enthusiast of a father into all sorts of dangers, it is impossible to say what may be her fate; and it would go nigh to break his heart should her life be lost, or any other misfortune happen to her. Here comes a shore-boat—we'll secure her to take us to Kingston."

Jack going to the gangway met the very person they had just been speaking of.

"Why, Murray, my dear fellow, we expected to meet you on shore!" he exclaimed. "What brings you back?"

"To look after my traps, settle my mess accounts, bid farewell to my late shipmates, and take command of HM Brig *Supplejack*, fitting out at the Dockyard, and nearly ready for sea, I am told," answered Murray. "I don't know whether to ask you to congratulate me or not. I had hoped to make the acquaintance of some families on shore to whom I have letters of introduction, but as they live some way from Kingston I fear that I shall not have time to call on them. One family, the Ravens, are related to my Antigua friends, the Houghtons; and another, the Bradshaws, to Colonel O'Regan and his daughter, of whom I hoped to hear from them. I feel anxious on the subject, I confess, for there are rumours on shore about the character of the brig they sailed in, which I do not like. I wish that she was safe back again."

"The brig, or the young lady!" exclaimed Terence. "Ah, yes, I understand; the brig with the young lady aboard. I'd like to give her a royal salute as she comes in, which I dare say will be before long; and as to hearing about her, Jack and I will make a pilgrimage to the Ravens and Bradshaws, and bring you back all the intelligence we can collect, if you haven't time to go yourself."

"You may depend on us for that," said Jack. "But I say, Alick, you haven't told us by what good fortune you have been appointed to the *Supplejack*; for good fortune, I call it, to get an independent command, whatever you may think."

"By no unusual means; through what I suspect the invidious will call Nepotism. When I went to pay my respects to the admiral, he at once hailed me as a cousin, told me he was glad to make my acquaintance, expressed his regret at the loss of poor Archy, who was also related to him, and wound up by saying that he should be very happy to forward my interests. I was taking my leave, wishing to get on to the Bradshaws, when he stopped me, inviting me to dinner, and observing that he should by that time have something to say to me; and wished, besides, to hear about old friends in bonnie Scotland. This, of course, was equivalent to a royal command; so I wrote to Mrs Bradshaw, enclosing my letter of introduction, and expressing my intention of calling on her and Mrs Raven as soon as I was at liberty. You and Terence will, I have no doubt, be welcomed if you can ride over to Saint David's. You can explain more clearly than I could by letter how I am situated, and you will not fail to inquire what has been heard about the O'Regans. After dinner, the admiral, who spoke in the kindest way possible, said that Macleod, who he had intended should have command of the *Supplejack* having been invalidated, as the corvette could not be refitted under three or four months, he had appointed me in his stead, and that he intended to transfer thirty of the corvette's crew to the brig, with any officers I might name. Though I must consider my command but temporary, I may possibly, he hinted, be confirmed in it."

"Congratulate you! Of course I do, and though I'm not jealous, it's just the sort of command I should jump at," exclaimed Terence.

"I am not quite so certain; it is said that if a lieutenant is placed in command of a small craft, he is never likely to get anything better," observed Jack. "However, in your case it is different, as the admiral will look after your interests. Did he tell you how and where you are to be employed?"

"My duty will be chiefly to look after slaves and pirates, of whom a few occasionally appear sailing under the flags of some of the smaller South American States; he mentioned also, that I might probably be sent to the Spanish Main to protect British interests on that coast. My thoughts at once, I confess, flew to Colonel O'Regan and his daughter, and the possibility of meeting them; though I trust that they may have returned safely to Jamaica before I can get to the

coast."

"Who knows! By my faith, I should be after wishing the contrary!" exclaimed Terence. "What a romantic incident it would be now some morning just as day breaks, to make out away to leeward a brig which you have no doubt is the *Sarah Jane*, with a black, rakish, wicked-looking schooner close to, just opening fire. The brig fights bravely; she had, I think, a couple of two or three-pounders on board, but she will to a certainty be captured. You make all sail to her assistance, for the pirate, supposing you to be a merchantman, doesn't up stick and run for it—but the wind drops, you take to your boats, the black schooner has ranged up alongside the brig, you arrive at the moment the brig's crew have been overpowered—the colonel brought to the deck, and the pirate-captain, a huge ugly negro, is bearing off a fair lady in his arms. You cut him down, rescue the lady, drive the pirates overboard, place the colonel on his legs, blow up the schooner, and are duly rewarded for your gallantry."

"Avast, Terence, with your nonsense!" exclaimed Murray, who had before been vainly endeavouring to stop the imaginative Irishman. "You make me miserable in suggesting the bare possibility of such an occurrence. The brig may be attacked, but I might not arrive in time to save my friends."

"Now, Alick dear, you remind me mightily of Tim Doolan, the cowboy at Ballymacree," said Terence. "I found Tim, one bright morning, looking as unhappy as his twinkling eyes and cocked-up nose would let him. 'Tim, my beauty—what's the matter?' I asked.

"'It's a throubled drame, Mr Terence, that I have had,' answered Tim, twisting his nose and mouth about in a curious manner, and giving a peculiar wink with his right eye.

"'What is it, man?' I asked. 'Out with your dream.'

"'Well, your honour, it was just this. I dreamt that I went to pay a visit to his holiness the Pope, and a civil old gentleman he was, for he axed me if I'd take some whisky and water, and on course I said yes. "Hot or cold, Tim?" asked the Pope. "Hot, your reverence," says I, and bad luck to me, for by dad, while the Pope went down to the kitchen to get the kettle I awoke; and now, if I'd said cold, I'd have had time to toss off a noggin-full at laste, and it's that troubles me.'

"Now it strikes me, Alick, that your waking imagination is as vivid as Tim's; but don't let it run away with you in this instance. You'll see the *Sarah Jane* come safe into harbour before you leave it, and have time to wish the young lady the top of the morning, at all events."

"You are incorrigible, Paddy," answered Murray, laughing in spite of himself. "As I have stood all your bantering, I have the right to insist on your coming with me to inspect the *Supplejack* before you go up to Kingston."

His two friends of course agreed to the proposal, and their carpet-bags being put into Murray's boat they pulled for the Dockyard at Port Royal. The *Supplejack* had her lower yards across, and most of her stores on board. In three or four days she might, by an efficient crew, be got ready for sea. Though Murray would gladly have had a longer delay, duty with him was paramount to every other consideration, and he resolved to use every exertion to expedite her outfit. She was not much of a beauty, they were of opinion; but she looked like a good sea-boat, and Jack thought that she would prove a fast craft, which was of the most consequence. Though rated as a six-gun brig she carried only two carronades, and a third long heavy gun amidships, which they agreed, under some circumstances, would be of more avail than the four short guns it had replaced. Terence advised Alick to ask for two more carronades.

"I might not get them if I did ask, so I will make good use, if I have the chance, of those on board," was the answer.

Captain Hemming had been requested to spare Murray five hands from the frigate. He chose Ben Snatchblock, the boatswain's-mate, to act as boatswain, a great promotion for Ben, and four others; these, with a dozen hands before belonging to the brig, the rest having died of yellow fever, sent home invalided, or deserted, made up his complement. He had applied for, and obtained old Higson, a former shipmate who had so taken to heart the loss of the three midshipmen that he was anxious for more stirring employment than he could find on board the frigate, likely to be detained for some time at Jamaica, or not to go much farther than Cuba. The other officers were selected from the corvette. The old mate was highly pleased. He had the duty of a first lieutenant, and was one in all respects, except in name, though not to be sure over a very large ship's company. Hard drinker and careless as he had been sometimes on shore, Murray knew that he could trust him thoroughly when responsibility was thrown on his shoulders, and hoped that by being raised in his own estimation he might altogether be weaned of his bad habits.

Jack and Terence sailed up to Kingston with a fresh sea breeze a-beam blowing over the sandy shore of the Palisades.

"Take care you don't capsize us," said Jack to the black skipper, who carried on till the boat's gunwale was almost under water.

"Neber tink I do dat, massa leutenant. Not pleasant place to take swim," answered the man, with a broad grin on his ebon features, showing his white teeth.

"I think not, indeed," exclaimed Terence. "Look there."

He pointed to a huge shark, its triangular fin just above the surface, keeping two or three fathoms off, even with the boat, at which the monster every now and then, as he declared, gave a wicked leer.

"What do you call that fellow?"

"Dat, massa, dat is Port Royal Jack," answered the negro. "He keep watch ober de harbour—case buckra sailors swim ashore. He no come up much fader when he find out we boat from de shore. See he go away now."

The shark gave a whisk with his tail, and disappeared in an instant. The young officers breathed more freely when their ill-omened companion had gone. Almost immediately afterwards a boat belonging to a large merchantman, lying at the mouth of the harbour, ready for sea, passed them under all sail. Her crew of eight hands had evidently taken a parting glass with their friends.

“Dey carry too much canvas wid de grog dey hab aboard,” observed the black. “Better look out for squalls.”

He hailed, but received only a taunting jeer in return, and the boat sped on her course. Not a minute had passed when Jack and Terence heard the negro mate, who was watching the boat, sing out—

“Dere dey go, Jack shark get dem now—eh?”

Looking in the direction the black’s chin was pointing, to their horror they saw that the boat had capsized, her masts and sails appearing for an instant as she rapidly went to the bottom, while the people were writhing and struggling on the surface, shrieking out loudly for help. Jack and Terence ordered the black to put the boat about instantly, and go to their rescue. Nearly two minutes passed before they reached the spot. Five men only were floating. The ensanguined hue of the water told too plainly what had been the fate of the others.

“Help! help. For God’s sake, help!” shrieked out a man near them, in an agony of fear. At that instant a white object was seen rising, it seemed, from the bottom. The hapless man threw up his arms, and, uttering a piercing shriek, disappeared beneath the water.

The other four men could swim, but almost paralysed with fear kept crying out for help, without making any effort to save themselves, striking out wildly, round and round, as if they did not see the approaching boat. First one was hauled on board, then another and another. Jack had got hold of the fourth, and was dragging him in when a shark rose from the bottom. The negro boatman’s quick eye had espied the monster. He darted down his boat-hook into the open mouth of the shark, which, closing its jaws, bit off the iron and a part of the stock, while, by a violent effort, Jack and Terence jerked the man inboard, thus saving his legs, and probably his life.

They were now directly over the spot where the boat went down, and so clear was the water, the ruddy stains having disappeared, that they could see her as she lay at the bottom. Jack was standing up, when he exclaimed—

“There is a poor fellow entangled in the rigging—he seems alive. I think that I could bring him up.”

Influenced by a generous impulse, and forgetting the fearful monsters in the neighbourhood, he was on the point of leaping overboard, when the black boatman seized his arm, crying out—

“No, no, massa, dat one shark, hissself.”

Jack looked again, and the object he had mistaken for a seaman’s white shirt resolved itself into the white belly of a shark, the creature being employed in gnawing the throat of its victim.

“Dat is what dey always do,” observed the black coolly. “Dey drag down by de feet, and den dey begin to eat at de trote.”

Probably because the throat is the part of the body most exposed. Jack and Terence carried the survivors up to Kingston. Except that they uttered a few expressions of regret at the sad fate of their shipmates, the men seemed very little concerned, or grateful to Heaven for their own preservation; and immediately on landing they went into a grog-shop, where they probably soon forgot all about the matter. Such is the force of habit. Jack and Terence were not enchanted with the silent, half-deserted streets of Kingston, through which, having lost their way, they paraded for half an hour or more; but after eating a pink-coloured shaddock, and half-a-dozen juicy oranges, obtained from a smiling-faced negress market-woman, their spirits rose.

“Things begin to wear a more roseate hue, maybe tinged with the juice of the fruit we’ve swallowed,” said Terence, laughing, “and here’s Johnny Ferong’s store we were looking for, I’ve no doubt.”

They entered, and received a hearty welcome from that most loquacious and facetious of Frenchmen, who offered to supply them with every possible article they could require in any quantity, from a needle to an anchor. They wanted something—it was information—how best to get out to Saint David’s, not a profitable article to supply them with, but Johnny Ferong afforded it, with apparently infinite pleasure, and further assisted to raise their spirits, and confirm their resolution of becoming customers, by handing them each a glass of cool, sparkling champagne, and immediately replenishing it when empty.

“And you want to pay visit to Madame Bradsaw? Charmante lady—den I vill order one voiture for vous, vich vill take vous dere, let me see, in two hours and one half; and vous stay dere, and come back in de cool of de morning, or in de evening, or de next day as vous please,” said Mr Ferong, bowing, and smiling, as he spoke, in the mode habitual to him.

“It will never do to take people by storm in that fashion,” exclaimed Jack. “Unless we can get back to-night we had better put off our visit till to-morrow morning.”

Terence, who was modesty itself in such a case, agreed with him. Mr Ferong, however, laughed at their scruples, assuring them that Mr and Mrs Bradshaw would be delighted to see them, whether strangers or not, that he would be answerable for all consequences, and settled the matter by sending off a black boy to order the carriage forthwith, and to fetch their carpet-bags from the inn, where they had been deposited on landing. In the meantime Jack and Terence found several acquaintances among the visitors, chiefly naval and military officers, assembled in Johnny Ferong’s reception-room, forming the lower storey of his store or warehouse. There were also a few merchant-

skippers, and civilian agents of estates, clerics and others. Countless glass cases, exhibiting wares of all sorts, and goods of every description in bales, packages, boxes, and casks, were piled up, or scattered about the place, serving for seats for the guests, most of whom were smoking and sipping sangaree. While Jack was talking to an old shipmate he unexpectedly met, a skipper and a merchant were engaged in an earnest conversation near him, and he could not help overhearing some of the remarks which dropped from them.

"If Captain Crowhurst can manage to run his cargo before the brig's character is suspected it will be an easy affair for him, but if not he will find it a difficult job. They have got half-a-dozen armed craft, which will watch her pretty sharply, and I know those mongrel Spaniards well. If they catch her they'll not scruple to sink her, and shoot every man on board."

These remarks were made by the skipper.

"But the *Sarah Jane* is a fast craft, and will, I should hope, be able to keep out of their way," said the merchant, in an anxious voice. "We should be unable to recover her insurance should she be sunk, I fear."

"As certainly as the poor fellows who may be shot would be unable to come to life again," observed the skipper dryly. "To my mind it's not fair to send men on such an adventure."

"They are aware of what they are about, and know the risk they run," said the merchant.

"The captain and supercargo may, but not the rest of the people, and that's what I find fault with," observed the skipper.

Jack heartily agreed with the last speaker, and was on the point of turning round to make inquiries about the *Sarah Jane*, when the merchant, suspecting that they must have been overheard, drew his companion aside and left the store. Jack asked Mr Ferong if he could give him the information he desired; but the Frenchman, shrugging his shoulders, replied that he knew nothing of the affairs of his customers; his business was to obtain "his littel wares of de best quality and to sell dem at de lowest price possible."

In a shore time the carriage appeared, with their carpet-bags strapped on behind, and covered with a tarpaulin. It was a species of gig, with a seat in front for the driver, and had two horses, one in the shafts and the other prancing in comparative freedom, secured by traces to an outrigger. Away they started at furious speed, and before long were ascending the side of the magnificent Liguania mountains; now proceeding along a romantic valley, with a babbling stream on one side; now passing over a height; now along a level, or but slightly sloping spot for half a mile or so, but gradually getting higher and higher above the plain. Sometimes, when exposed to the sun's rays, they found it hot enough; but frequently they travelled under the long shadow of some gigantic cotton tree, shooting up into the blue heavens; or beneath a grove of graceful palms, the tendrils of the yam and granadillos climbing up them, with fences on either side, covered by numberless creepers, passion-flowers of varied sizes, and convolvuli of countless descriptions. The whole country seemed like an assemblage of orchards, composed of orange-trees in fruit and flower, lemon and citron trees, glossy-leaved star apples; the avocada, with its huge pear, and the bread fruit-tree bearing still vaster fruit, and leaves of proportionate size; while beneath them were seen in abundance the unfailling food of man in tropical climes, the ever cool, fresh, green plantain; indeed, the strangers felt bewildered amid the variety of trees, shrubs, and plants which surrounded them.

"A perfect paradise, this," exclaimed Jack, who was not much addicted, however, thus to express his feelings. "See, the vegetation reaches to the very summit of the highest mountains."

"Inhabited by no small number of ebon-hued Adams and Eves," observed Terence, pointing to several palm-thatched, white-washed huts, a little way off, before which was collected a group of negroes, men, and women, and children, laughing, shouting, and talking, looking wonderfully happy; the former all neatly habited, and though the smaller members of the community were not overburdened with clothing, they looked as plump and jolly as need be. "I only wish that our peasantry in old Ireland were as well off as these people seem to be."

"And those of England, also," said Jack. "Still slavery is an abomination, and I pray that it may some day cease throughout the world."

The lieutenants scarcely believed that the time they expected to be on the road had elapsed, when their driver pointed to a wide-spreading, low mansion, with verandahs all round it, and extensive outbuildings, and said—

"Dere, dat Saint David's."

Somehow or other they had expected to see only a Mr and Mrs Bradshaw. Their surprise was considerable when they met with a reception not unlike that at Trinidad, from a matronly dame and a number of young damsels; except that they did not claim Adair as a relation.

"We were expecting Mr Murray, and regret not seeing him, but his brother officers are most welcome," said Mrs Bradshaw, when she had glanced at Alick's letter.

She then introduced the two lieutenants by name to her eldest daughter Fanny, and to her three little girls, as she called them, but though the youngest was barely thirteen, they all looked like grown women. Adair was quickly at home with them, answering the questions they showered on him. Jack remained talking to Mrs Bradshaw and Fanny. He mentioned Murray's anxiety about the O'Regans.

"I fear that he has good reason to be anxious," answered Mrs Bradshaw. "The colonel promised to bring his daughter here long ago, and we were expecting to see her, when we heard that he had carried her off on another of his wild expeditions. He wrote word from Antigua that he intended to be but a short time away, so that they may possibly

arrive in a day or two. We long to have her safe with us, for though Fanny is the only one who knows her, as they were at a finishing school together in England, from the account she gives we are all prepared to love her."

"Yes, indeed," exclaimed Fanny. "She was a delightful creature, the pet and darling of the school, one of the youngest among us; and I should never have supposed that she would have been able to go through what she has done since."

While they were speaking Mr Bradshaw arrived—a stout, bald-headed, middle-aged gentleman, with ruddy countenance, dressed in nankin trousers, white jacket, and broad-brimmed straw hat, which he doffed as he approached the strangers, glancing from one to the other; and then, having settled in his mind that Jack Rogers was Alick Murray, shook his hand, which he grasped with the greatest warmth.

"Happy to welcome you to Saint David's, my dear sir; only wish that our expected friends were here also. A great disappointment to us, and to you likewise, I feel sure, eh!" and he gave a facetious look at Jack, as much as to say. "I know all about it."

"My dear, this gentleman is Lieutenant Rogers. Mr Murray has been unable to come up," said Mrs Bradshaw; and she explained how matters stood.

Jack thought that he ought to speak of going back. Mr Bradshaw laughed at the notion.

"Utterly out of the question. Stay a week, or as long as you have leave. Send your shanredan back to-morrow morning, and I'll drive you down in my buggy when you have to go."

Thus pressed, Jack confessed that he and Adair had brought their carpet-bags, not knowing where they might have to put up, and accepted the invitation for the night; but said that, on Murray's account, they must return the next day to see him before he sailed, and to tell him what they had heard respecting Colonel and Miss O'Regan.

"You may assure your friend that he will ever be welcome here, and I hope that we shall have the young lady with us when he returns," answered Mr Bradshaw. "I will not say the same with regard to her impracticable father, for, between you and I, the farther he is away from her the better. I am no admirer of his wild, harum-scarum schemes, though he is individually a brave and honourable man; and had he not foolishly quarrelled with the authorities at home, he would never have lacked employment under the flag of England, instead of knocking his head against stone walls in quarrels not his own."

These remarks of the worthy planter explained Colonel O'Regan's character to Jack more clearly than anything he had before heard. He had before entertained some unpleasant suspicions on the subject. They were confirmed, and he now only hoped that Murray would not, should he marry Stella, be induced to join any of her father's schemes. Of that, however, if cautioned, he did not think there was much risk. Had Terence been the favoured lover the case would have been different, for, enthusiastic himself, he might easily have been won over by the colonel's persuasive powers. Dinner was soon announced. Jack and Terence, who were very hungry, did ample justice to the solids as well as to the numerous West Indian delicacies and rich fruits pressed on them by their fair hostesses—the shaddocks, the mangos, and, above all, the granadillos, which were pronounced like strawberries and cream, but superior to any such mixture ever tasted in Europe. They enjoyed, too, a most pleasant evening, several friends having come in, among them Mr and Mrs Raven, nice young people, full of life and spirits. Mrs Raven was glad, she said, to make the acquaintance of Lieutenant Murray's brother officers, of whom she had heard from her mother, Mrs Houghton, and only regretted that he himself was unable to come.

"However," she added, "we may hope to see him frequently by-and-by, on his return from his cruise."

They had dancing, of course, as young people never think of meeting in the West Indies without it; and some delightful music, for the younger girls had been taught by Fanny, who was highly accomplished. Mr Bradshaw observed that they did pretty well considering that they had not the advantages of their elder sister. Times were changed in Jamaica, and he could not afford to pay three hundred a year for the education of each of them, as he had done for her.

"No; but they are better housekeepers, and understand far more about preserving and pickling than she does, and there is not a bird or a flower on the estate, or, indeed, in any part of the island, with which they are not acquainted," remarked Mrs Bradshaw, with motherly pride. "Thanks to Fanny, too, they are really, considering their ages, not so very much behind her in book knowledge. We need not regret having kept them with us."

"I agree in all you say, Mrs B," rejoined her husband, rubbing his hands and laughing; "and as I am eighteen hundred pounds the richer, or, let me see, in three years, with the addition of their voyages and dress, the cost of sending them home would have amounted to three thousand or more. I do not complain, I assure you."

The young officers listened with surprise, and not a little amusement, at this eulogium on the young ladies, and the accompanying remarks—uttered they believed correctly without any ulterior object. It gave them some idea of the expense to which West Indian parents were put for the education of their girls, of which they before had no conception.

"Faith! more than double a lieutenant's pay," ejaculated Terence, as he was turning in at night. "If he would make that allowance to Fanny, the eldest of the three, I'd do my best to win her before the ship sails. I can't stand it, Jack. I must either stay aboard and do duty for Cherry, or never set eyes on these houris again, or knock under to one or the other."

"There's luck in odd numbers, says Rory O'More," answered Jack, from his side of the room. "You divided your attention very fairly among the young ladies, and depend on it they will as easily forget us as we shall get them out

of our heads, by the time we have been a few days at sea; so don't bother yourself about the matter, Paddy, but go to sleep."

Whether or not Terence followed his advice Jack could not tell, for he himself very soon went off into a sound slumber. The house was astir at daybreak, and not long after the white dresses and broad-brimmed straw hats of the young ladies were seen in the garden amid the fragrant flowers, with glittering humming-birds and gorgeous butterflies, flitting about in all directions. The lieutenants speedily joined them. Jack's wise resolutions were almost overcome. He had made up his mind to take leave after breakfast. They looked so bright and happy; the air was so fresh, the flowers so sweet. He and Terence could not fail to spend a pleasant day, but then he remembered Murray, who would be anxiously looking for their return.

"Then you'll come again soon, Mr Adair, if Mr Rogers thinks you must go now," said Fanny, with a strong emphasis on the must, and a gentle sigh.

"You will always be welcome at Saint David's," added Mr Bradshaw. "And tell Lieutenant Murray that I will let him know should I hear anything about the *Sarah Jane*. I may possibly get information which might not reach him."

Their own vehicle not having started they returned to Kingston in it, well baked by the burning rays of the sun. With a case of champagne, and a few other articles obtained of Johnny Ferong, as presents to Murray, they returned in the evening to Port Royal. Alick thanked them heartily. He had so zealously pushed forward the brig's equipment that she would be ready for sea the next day. That very evening he received orders from the admiral to sail immediately he could. A despatch had just arrived from the British consul at Carthage, stating that disturbances had broken out in the country, and requesting to have a man-of-war sent immediately, for the protection of British subjects residing there, and elsewhere along the coast.

Captain Hemming had been directed to send fifty hands from the frigate, and with the assistance of Rogers and Adair, by working all night, the sails were bent, and early next morning the brig glided out into the harbour.

The land-wind still blew strong, smelling of the hot earth, albeit mixed with spicy odours. Murray was eager to be away. His duty required him to use all speed. He had also a feeling that he might be of service to those in whom he was so deeply interested. He spoke of it to his friends.

"Second-sight, eh, Alick!" said Rogers. "I have no great faith in that, but I am very sure that whatever has to be done you will do it thoroughly."

"I wish that I could accompany you," exclaimed Adair. "If Hemming would spare me I'd have my traps on board in a jiffy."

"I should be glad of your company; the admiral, however, in a private note, says that he shall probably despatch the frigate in a few days, but he remarks that the brig will be of greater service, by being able to enter the rivers and harbours, which she cannot," answered Murray.

Rogers and Adair watched the *Supplejack* as she glided out of the harbour under all sail to the southward before the wind, till she met the sea breeze, when, hauling her tacks aboard, she heeled over to it, and stood away to the south-west, her canvas gradually disappearing below the horizon.

Jack and Terence spent their time pleasantly enough on shore, Johnny Ferong's store being one of their favourite places of resort, as it was of officers of all ranks. Captain Hemming had made a rule that his midshipmen, when they returned on board after leave, should send in a written statement of the places and people they had visited. He was much amused at the frequency of such entries as the following:—

"Called on J Ferong's, Esquire;" "spent the evening at J Ferong's, Esquire," music and a hop sometimes added; "lunched at J Ferong's, Esquire." In those days Jamaica flourished, but alas! her time came, and so did that of the well-known highly-esteemed Johnny Ferong. As the island went down he ceased to flourish, and at length Kingston knew him no more, except as one of her departed worthies.

Chapter Ten.

Cruise of the *Supplejack*—Calms and heat—A shark caught—Exercising at the guns—A boat seen—Needham and one of the missing midshipmen found, nearly dying from thirst—They bring alarming information.

The *Supplejack* was making the best of her way across the Caribbean sea. Murray, or one of his subordinates, Higson, or Jos Green usually so called, the second master of the corvette, was ever on deck, with watchful eyes on the bending topmasts, carrying on as much sail as the brig could bear. Gallantly she slashed through the blue, heaving seas, a mass of white foam rising up round her bows, and sheets of sparkling spray flying over her fore-castle. A bright look-out was kept on every side, not in the expectation of meeting either with a slaver or pirate; but the young commander could not help secretly hoping that he might fall in with the *Sarah Jane*, and be relieved of his chief cause of anxiety. His patience, however, on several occasions was sorely tried when the wind fell light. One day, too, a perfect calm came on, and the brig lay, her sides lapping the glassy sea, as she rolled in the slowly-heaving, sluggish swell, and her sails flapped lazily against the masts. In vain old Higson whistled for a wind till his cheeks were ready to crack; not that he really believed the proceeding would produce a breeze, or that he had any notion of the origin of the custom; but he had always done so when there was a calm; and he wanted a wind, and the wind, if he whistled long enough, always came. The heat was oppressive, as it always is under such circumstances in those latitudes; the spirits of all fell, except those of Jos Green, who was ever merry, blow high or blow low, in sunshine or cold. The grumblers grumbled, of course, but in lower tones than usual, like the mutterings of distant thunder; the phlegmatic

became more supine; the quarrelsome had not the energy to dispute; the talkative were silent; and even Pat Blathermouth, who could usually spin a yarn which lasted from the beginning to eight bells in a watch, and then wasn't half finished, could scarcely draw out an oft-told tale, which was wont to make his hearers burst their sides with laughter, but now only sent them to sleep.

"Of course it's hot," answered jolly Jos to a remark of Higson's. "What else would you have it here in the tropics, with the bright sun striking down from the cloudless sky? It has its advantages, and it is better than cold, and saves one the trouble of putting on more clothing than decency requires."

"But it may be the harbinger of another hurricane, and that wouldn't be pleasant," observed Fligson.

"No fear of a hurricane. They seldom reach so far south," answered Jos. "Wait patiently, and we shall get the breeze before long. If not, what's the odds? we are very happy as we are."

"You're a salamander, or you wouldn't say that," growled Higson.

"Just the very thing of all others it's most convenient to be just now," answered jolly Jos, laughing. "It really isn't hotter than it has been often before, only there are fewer hands to divide it amongst, eh? Just do your turn in, Hig, and forget your troubles in sleep."

"I shall be stewed if I do," moaned Higson. "I've a great mind to have a swim."

"It will be the last you'll ever take, old fellow, depend on that," said Green. "Look there!"

He pointed to the black fin of a huge shark, which the next instant, turning up its white belly, opened its huge mouth to swallow the contents of the cook's slush bucket.

"See, Jack has had his soup, and will be ready for the next course, which you proposed offering him."

"Thank you, Jos; I've changed my mind," said Higson. "But I should not object to catch the fellow, and take a slice out of him instead."

A stout hook, with a bit of chain to the end of a strong line, and baited with a piece of pork, was quickly got ready. Even the most apathetic of the seamen were aroused with the hopes of capturing their hated foe. A couple of running bowlines were prepared. Higson dropped the tempting morsel, and let it sink down deep, then rapidly drew it up again. Quick as lightning the shark darted at it, and down his throat it went, his jaws closing with a snap which made Higson draw up his leg. The monster's sharp teeth, however, could not bite through the chain.

"Haul away, lads!" cried the old mate.

While Ben Snatchblock slipped a running bowline over the creature's head, its tail coming to the surface, he dexterously got another round it, and, in spite of its violent struggles, it was hoisted on board.

"Stand clear of him, lads," shouted Higson, though the men did not need the warning.

The crew seizing axes, capstan-bars, and boarding pikes, attacked the captive monster, as it lay writhing on deck, lashing out furiously with its tail, and every now and then opening its huge jaws, as if even then it had hopes of catching one of its assailants. It showed what it could do by biting off the head of a boarding-pike, which Ben thrust into its mouth. With wild shouts the men sprang round it, rushing in, every now and then, to give it a blow with an axe or capstan-bar, and leaping back again to avoid its tail; for even though its head was nearly smashed in, that continued striking out, and lashing the deck as furiously as at first, till Higson came down on it with a well-aimed blow of his axe, which instantly paralysed it, and it lay motionless.

"We'll make sure, lads, he don't come to life again," exclaimed Ben, as he set to work to chop off the tail.

The head was treated in the same way; and a number of slices being cut off the body, the remainder was thrown overboard. Murray, wondering what the hubbub was about, had come on deck, and was an amused spectator of the scene. The men no longer thought of the heat, and, in spite of it, regaled themselves heartily on shark-steaks at dinner. The capture of the shark, too, brought them good luck, they declared; for a favourable breeze shortly afterwards sprang up, and held till the northern coast of the South American continent was sighted. Before, however, Carthagena, the port at which Murray had been directed to call, first could be made, it again fell calm. He felt the delay very trying. He had been eagerly hoping to get in by the evening, to ascertain if anything had been heard of the *Sarah Jane*, and now another whole day or more might pass before he could gain any information. The coast lay in sight, its ranges of light-blue mountains looking like clouds, rising above the horizon but proving that they were mountains by never altering their shape or position. Higson whistled as energetically as usual, but not a catspaw played over the surface of the mirror-like sea, and not an inch nearer the shore did the brig move during the day. The night passed by, and the hot sun rose once more out of the still slumbering ocean. The day wore on, but no breeze came. The men, of course, were not idle. Murray had from the first exercised them at their guns, and especially in the use of the long one. He remembered the advice Admiral Triton had given to Jack Rogers, and which Jack had repeated to him—

"Don't mind throwing a few rounds of shot away; you'll make the better use of those you have remaining."

He, accordingly, had a floating target rigged and carried out to a distance, and each day during a calm he exercised the men at it for some hours, till they learnt to handle their long gun with as much ease as the carronades.

"Though we miss that mark sometimes, we shall manage to hit a larger one without fail if it comes in our way, my lads!" he sang out, to encourage the crew as they were working away at it during the morning.

After dinner the men were allowed some time to rest, and all was quiet. An observation showed that the brig's position had not altered since the previous noon.

"What do you make that out to be, Green?" asked Higson, the officer of the watch, who had been looking through his telescope towards the shore. Green turned his glass in the same direction.

"A boat! and she must be coming towards us," he answered, after the delay of a minute or so.

Higson sent him to report the circumstance to the commander, who at once came on deck. Various were the surmises as to what could bring the boat off to them.

"She must have had a long pull of it, at all events," observed Higson.

"Perhaps she had the land wind, which we don't feel out here?" said Green.

"Little doubt about that. She must have some urgent cause for coming out thus far to us," remarked Murray. "Lower the gig, Mr Higson, and go and meet her," he added immediately afterwards. "The people in the boat are evidently tired with their long pull, and make but slow progress."

The gig's crew called away—she was lowered, and Higson pulled off towards the approaching boat. Meantime, Murray walked the deck with impatient steps. Several times he stopped, and raised his glass to his eye, watching her eagerly. At length he saw that the gig had reached her. The two boats were alongside each other for a minute, and then the gig came rowing rapidly back, leaving the other behind. Murray watched her.

"There must be something of importance to make Higson hurry back at that rate," he said to himself. "He has brought the people from the boat, I see."

As the gig drew nearer, he saw Higson stand up and wave his handkerchief. In a few minutes more she was near enough for him to distinguish those in her.

"Is it possible, or do my eyes deceive me?" he exclaimed. "There's a lad in a midshipman's uniform. If he is not Gerald Desmond, he is wonderfully like him."

"There can be little doubt who he is, sir," said Green, who was standing near his commander. "If that is not Desmond I'm a Dutchman, and the man sitting just abaft the stroke-oar is Dick Needham, who went with the youngsters in the drogher. As they are safe, it is to be hoped the rest escaped, too. I've often heard that midshipmen have as many lives as cats."

"I trust, indeed, that all have been saved," said Murray, in a grave tone. He felt too anxious to joke with Jos just then.

The gig was soon alongside, and Gerald Desmond, looking pale and exhausted, was lifted on deck; Needham, with some help, managing to follow him.

"I am truly thankful to see you, Desmond," said Murray, as he took the hand of the young midshipman, who was being carried aft in the arms of two of the sailors. "Have Tom and Archy also been saved?"

Gerald tried to reply, but no sound came from his parched throat. He had barely strength to point with a finger to his lips. Needham was in but little better plight, though he managed to murmur, "water—water." Several cans-full were instantly brought by eager hands.

"Stop, lads, you'll suffocate the poor fellows if you pour all that water down their throats!" exclaimed McTavish, the Assistant Surgeon of the corvette, who had been lent to the *Supplejack*. "Just a wine-glassful at a time, with a few drops of brandy in it, will be the best thing for them."

While the surgeon was attending to his patients, Higson made his report to the commander. He had found them both still trying to pull, but so exhausted that they could scarcely move their oars. No sooner did he get alongside than Desmond sank down in the bottom of the boat, unable to speak. Needham, however, had had strength sufficient to tell him that both the other midshipmen were alive, but prisoners on shore; though how they got into prison he had not said.

"From what I could make out, sir, I am afraid they are not the only English in the hands of the Spaniards, or Carthagenans, or whatever the rascals call themselves," continued Higson. "I caught the words, 'the colonel and a young lady—and no time to be lost!' but what he wished to say more I couldn't make out, only I cannot help thinking that he must have alluded to the colonel and his daughter, who sailed the other day in the brig from Antigua."

"I fear that there is no doubt about it!" exclaimed Murray, greatly agitated. "When Needham has sufficiently recovered to speak we shall learn more about the matter, and be able to decide what to do. Stay. That no time may be lost, let the boats be got ready with water-casks and provisions, and see that the crews have their cutlasses sharpened and pistols in order. Should the calm continue I will lead an expedition on shore, and insist on the liberation of the prisoners. The sight of the British flag will probably put the Dons on their good behaviour, and, if not, we must try what force can do. I will leave you, Higson, in charge of the brig with twenty hands, and as soon as a breeze springs up you will stand in after me, and act according to circumstances."

"I am afraid, sir, that if the Carthagenans, or whatever they call themselves, are threatened with force, they will retaliate on their prisoners," observed Higson.

"Mongrels as they are, if they have a drop of Spanish blood running in their veins, they would not surely injure a lady!" exclaimed Murray.

“Not so sure of that. Whether whole or half-blooded, Spaniards are savage fellows when their temper’s up,” answered Higson. “However, let us hope for the best. All I can make out is that our friends are prisoners, but the why and the wherefore I don’t understand; only as Desmond and Needham were evidently in a great hurry to get off to us, I’m afraid that they must be in some danger.”

Higson’s remarks contributed to make Murray feel more anxious even than at first. The forebodings which had oppressed him since Stella and her father left Antigua had, too, probably been realised. While Higson issued the orders he had just received, Murray went up to where the young midshipman and Needham had been placed under an awning, attended by the surgeon. The cook had, meantime, been preparing some broth, a few spoonfuls of which as soon as they could swallow them, were poured down their throats. This treatment had an almost magical effect. Needham was soon able to sit up and speak, and even Gerald, though his strength had been more completely prostrated, recovered sufficiently soon afterwards to give a clear account of the way they had been saved, and of what had afterwards happened. In consequence, however, of Murray’s anxiety, they narrated the latter part of their adventures first; though they will be better understood if they are described in their proper sequence.

Chapter Eleven.

Needham’s Narrative—The drogher driven off from Saba—Capsized—The midshipmen save themselves on her side—Taken off by the Sarah Jane—Steer for Carthagena—The Colonel on shore—Look out for his return.

“You remember that night at Saba, Mr Higson, when the three young gentlemen and I were left aboard the drogher, and you and the other gentlemen went ashore to look after Captain Quasho, as he called himself, and his rascally black crew,” began Needham, who having recovered his voice, was inclined to make good use of it by spinning a long yarn.

“I should think I did, indeed,” said Higson; “but go ahead, Dick: we want to hear how you and they were saved, for I had little hope that you would be, when I saw the drogher driven away from her anchorage by the hurricane.”

“Nor had I, sir, I can tell you; but I’ve always held that there’s nothing like trying to do one’s best, in however bad a way one may seem to be,” continued Needham. “I saw that there was only one thing we could do, and that was to run before the wind, and to try and keep the craft above water. As to beating back, I knew that the old drogher would either have capsized, or been driven on the rocks, if we had made the attempt so I took the helm, got a foot of the foresail hoisted, the hatches battened down, told the young gentlemen to lash themselves to the rigging, if they didn’t wish to be washed overboard, and let the craft scud. It was precious dark, except every now and then, when the flashes of lightning darted from the clouds and went zigzagging along on either side of us, casting a red glare on the tops of the black seas, from which the foam was blown off just for all the world as if a huge white sheet had been drawn over them. The spoo-drift, too, came straight along our deck, over the taffrail, as if it would cut our legs off; for, though we flew at a pretty good rate, it flew faster. As every now and then I turned my head I couldn’t help thinking that one of thy big seas which came roaring on astern just for all the world like one of the savage monsters I’ve heard tell of, eager to swallow us up, would break down on the deck, and send us in a jiffy to the bottom. I didn’t care so much about it for myself as for the brave young lads, likely to be admirals one of these days; but not a cry nor a word of complaint did I hear from them. Mr Rogers, maybe, was the most plucky, as he seemed to feel that it was his duty to set an example to his messmates; and I could hear his voice every now and then, as they all stood close together, lashed to the starboard rigging, and when the lightning flashed I could just get a glimpse of their faces, looking pale as death—not from fear, though, but contrasted, as it were, with the darkness around. I had made myself fast you may be sure; for I shouldn’t have been long on the deck if I hadn’t, as not once, but many a time a sea came tumbling over first one quarter, then the other; and, though it was but just the top of it, we should all of us have been swept overboard, and if the hatches hadn’t been battened down, the old drogher would have gone to the bottom. We had managed to light the binnacle lamp before we got from under the land, and I saw by the compass that we were driving about south-east, so that I had no fear of being cast on the shore of any other island, and I hoped, if we could weather out the gale, that we might beat back to Saba. On we ran hour after hour. It seemed to me the longest night I’d ever passed since I came to sea. The wonder was that the drogher still kept afloat; but she was tight and light as a cork—now she was on the top of one sea, now climbing up the side of another. One comfort was that the longest night must come to an end, and that the hurricane could not last for ever. We were, I judged, too, on the skirts of it, and that if we stood on we should in time get beyond its power. It required pretty careful steering to keep the wind right aft, for if I had brought it ever so little abeam the vessel would have gone clean over in a moment. I was thankful, you may be sure, when daylight came at last—not that the prospect round us was a pleasant one. The big seas were rolling and leaping, and tumbling about like mad, on every side hissing and roaring, and knocking their white heads together, as if they didn’t know what they would be at. It was a hard job to steer clear of the worst; it was often Dobson’s choice, and many came with such a plump down on the deck that I thought after all we should be sent to Davy Jones’s locker; but the lively little craft managed to run her nose up the next mountain sea, and to shake herself clear of the water, just as a Newfoundland dog does when he gets ashore after a swim. The only pleasant sight was to see the young gentlemen standing where they had been all night, and keeping up their spirits.

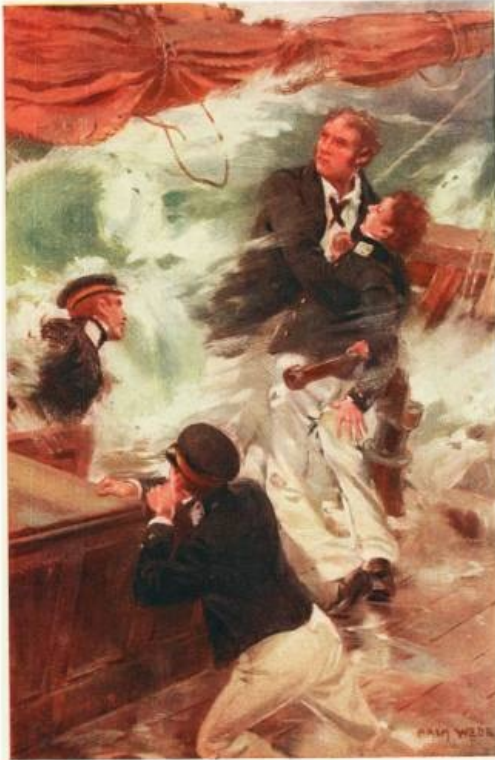
“‘We are getting precious hungry, Dick,’ sung out Mr Rogers, ‘I’m thinking of going below to find some grub.’”

“‘No, no; just stay safe where you are, sir,’ I answered. ‘If you let go your hold, maybe that moment we shall have a sea come aboard us and carry you away with it, or if the companion hatch is lifted it may make its way below and swamp us.’”

“‘All right, Dick; we can manage to hold out for a few hours more,’ cried the other two. ‘Don’t think of going, Tom; we wouldn’t have you run the risk for our sakes.’”

"From the gnawings in my own stomach I knew that the poor youngsters must be very sharp set. However, it seemed to me that the wind was somewhat less than it had been, and I hoped that in a few hours more the hurricane would be over, or that we should be out of it. I told them so, and I soon heard them laughing and talking as if nothing particular out of the way was happening. Well, in a couple of hours or so the wind fell, and I saw that we must have the foresail set, or run the chance of being pooped. I told them what I wanted, and casting off their lashings they all sprang together to the halyards, and soon had the sail hoisted and the sheet belayed. They then made their way aft.

"'Now I think we've earned our breakfasts,' says Mr Rogers, and slipping off the companion hatch he dived below, while the other two stood ready to draw it over again, in case a sea should come aboard us. He quickly returned with some bread, meat, a bottle of wine, and a basket of fruit. They wouldn't touch anything till they had fed me, for they said I had had the hardest work, and saved their lives. My hands, you see, had still enough to do in working the tiller, and my eyes, too, for that matter, in keeping a watch on the seas; so all I could do was just to open my mouth and let them put the food into it. All I wanted was enough to keep body and soul together, and I then advised them



"'I HAD MR. TOM SAFE ENOUGH.'"

to get back to the shrouds, and to make themselves fast as before, as there was no saying what might happen while the sea was tumbling about in its present fashion. 'You must take a swig of the wine first,' says Mr Rogers, in his cheery way, just like the lieutenant, his brother, holding the bottle to my mouth. I'd got a gulp or two of the liquor, keeping my weather eye open all the time, when I saw an ugly big sea come rolling up on our quarter. I sung out to the other two to hold fast to the companion hatch for their lives, while I got a grip of Mr Tom between one of my arms and the tiller. I couldn't avoid the sea. Right over us it came, pouring down the still open hatchway, and sweeping across the deck. I had Mr Tom safe enough, though the breath was half squeezed out of his body; but I was afraid the others would have been torn from their hold. Like brave-hearted youngsters as they are they had held fast, though over head and ears in water. 'Och, but the venison has gone on a cruise,' sung out Mr Desmond, as soon as the sea had passed clear of us, 'and some big brute of a shark will be making his breakfast of it.'

"'Better that he should eat that than us, Paddy,' said Mr Rogers; 'don't let's fret about it, for, to say the truth, it was rather too high to be pleasant.' He was right as to that; for the bits he put into my mouth had a very curious taste; but it wasn't a time to be particular, so I had taken what was given me, and said nothing. I was thankful when I saw that the three lads had safely lashed themselves to the starboard shrouds as before. The day was wearing on, and I was beginning to feel that I'd rather not have to stand on my legs much longer, though the hope that the hurricane would quickly blow itself out kept me up. At last, I calculated about seven bells in the afternoon watch, it fell almost a dead calm, though we happily kept steerage way on the craft, for the sea tumbled about almost as madly as before, and it was a difficult job to prevent its breaking aboard. However we managed to set the mainsail, and I hoped we should soon have smoother water.

"One never can tell what tricks the wind will play. Suddenly, as you may see sometimes a hulking giant knock down a little chap with a blow of his fist, a sea struck the drogher on the starboard beam; and before a sheet could be let fly over she went. It was a mercy that the three young gentlemen were holding on at the time to the weather rigging. They all scrambled in a moment on to the chains, where I, making my way along the bulwarks, quickly joined them. I can't say that they were frightened exactly, but they didn't like it, which was but natural; no more did I.

"'What's going to happen next?' asked Mr Rogers quite calmly.

"'The hatches being on, the craft won't fill, and maybe when the squall has passed over another sea may right her,' I answered, as I saw that there was a chance of that happening.

"The squall didn't last ten minutes, and directly afterwards there was a flat calm, and the sea went down wonderfully fast. Still the drogher lay over on her side and gave no signs of righting. Mr Desmond proposed cutting away the mast.

"That mightn't help us,' I answered; 'I've an idea that the ballast has shifted over to port, and that with the water in her keeps the craft down. We must wait till the sea is smooth, and then we'll get the companion hatch off and have a look below; we may be able to bale the water out, and shift enough of the ballast to right her; but as long as the sea is running it's safer to trust to Providence, and to hold on with hands and teeth where we are, and—

"Poor Spider, I'm afraid he'll have an uncomfortable time of it, left all alone in the dark below, and not knowing what can have happened to the vessel,' said Mr Rogers, as if he thought the monkey more to be pitied than himself or us.

"The poor brute had been made fast below, to keep him out of mischief, when they went on shore, and had remained there since. I had an idea that he was very likely drowned if he was over on the lee side, but I didn't say so for fear of grieving his young masters. Thinks I to myself, if we are hard up for grub, whether dead or alive, he'll serve us for a meal or two at all events.

"Having no longer the steering of the craft to attend to, as evening drew on I began to feel very drowsy, and it made me fear that the youngsters, who would be getting sleepy, likewise, to a certainty might drop off into the water and be drowned, or be grabbed by a shark. The thought had no sooner come into my head than I saw one of the brutes swimming by and casting his two wicked eyes up at us. I roused myself up in a moment, and getting hold of some lashings, pointed him out to the young gentlemen. When I told them what I feared, they did not object to my making them all fast to the chains with their legs along the shrouds. I afterwards secured myself close to them on the bulwarks. I hadn't been there many minutes before I went off into a sort of sleep, though it wasn't exactly sleep, because I knew where I was, and never forgot what had happened. I could hear, too, the voices of my young companions, trying by talking to keep each other awake, though it was a hard job for them, poor lads. The seas, do ye see, had been washing over us all the time, and even now, though they broke less heavily than before, pretty often nearly smothered us, but even they could not make me keep my eyes open. Darkness soon came down upon the ocean, but it was growing calmer and calmer, and I could feel that the vessel was no longer tossed and tumbled about, while the voices of the midshipmen ceased to sound in my ears. I tried to rouse myself up. That was, however, more than I could do, and at last I dropped off into a real sound sleep. When I awoke the vessel lay as quietly as in a mill-pond, and not a sound was to be heard except the soft lap of the water against the hull. I couldn't even hear the breathing of the midshipmen, and for a moment the dreadful thought came to me that they were dead, or had got loose somehow or other, and had slipped into the sea. I lifted myself up so that I could reach the shrouds. There they were safe enough, and all as fast asleep as they could have been in their hammocks. I wouldn't awake them, as I thought the sleep would do them good. I myself had no wish to go to sleep again, so I sat up watching the bright stars shining out of the clear sky, and thinking whether it would be possible to get the vessel righted; and if not, what chance there was if we could form a raft of reaching one of the islands, or falling in with a passing vessel. To my mind a man's a coward who cries die while there's life in him, and I determined, with the help of Him who I knew right well looks after poor Jack, to do my best to save myself and the young midshipmen. These things gave me enough to think about for the rest of that long night. At last the light of day came back, the stars grew dim, and presently the sun, like a huge ball of fire, with a blaze of red all around him over the sky, rose out of the glass-like sea. I knew that it was going to be blazing hot, and that we should feel it terribly. The midshipmen awaking, were much surprised to find that it was light again already, and couldn't believe that they had slept through the night. Having cast off their lashings they began to move about to stretch their cramped limbs, not that there was much space for that.

"Now, messmates,' said Mr Rogers, 'there's one thing we ought to do before we think of anything else, and that is, to thank God for having preserved us through the night, and to pray to Him to protect us, and to take us ashore in safety. Needham, you'll join us, I know.'

"Of course, I will, sir,' says I, and well pleased I was to hear the youngster speak in that way without any shamefacedness. It was just what I'd been thinking, for if a man dare not ask God to help him, he must be in a bad way indeed.

"Without another word we all knelt on the side of the vessel, and a right good honest prayer did Mr Rogers offer up. No parson or bishop either could have prayed a better, though he might have put more words into it. The young gentleman, do ye see, knew exactly what we all wanted, and that's just what he asked God to give us, and no more.

"And now, Needham, what do you consider is the first thing we ought to do?' said Mr Rogers, as soon as he had finished.

"Let us try and get some water,' sang out Mr Desmond. 'I'm terribly thirsty, I could drink a bucketful if I had it.

"So could I, for my thrapple is as dry as a dustbin,' added Mr Gordon.

"As to that, I am not better than either of you,' says Mr Rogers, 'but I thought that I'd try to hold out as long as I could.'

"Well,' says I, 'I'll make my way below and see what I can bring up. Water will be better than wine or spirits, and if I can find any you shall have it.'

"No, no, Needham, you stay where you are,' says Mr Rogers. 'Just pass a rope aft and I'll make it fast round my waist till I can get the hatch off. The water is pretty well up to the coamings already, and my weight won't make the difference which yours might.'

"He seemed to think that there was more danger than I did—that the weight of a single man might capsize the craft altogether. I believed that if we had all gone below together it wouldn't have mattered. However, I did as he ordered

me. It was a sliding-hatch, you remember, and he soon got it off far enough to let himself down into the cabin. We all sat watching for him to come back again. At last I heard his voice singing out to me to hoist away. Looking down I saw him seated on the companion hatch with Master Spider, the monkey clinging to his neck while he was making fast the end of the rope to a basket full of all sorts of things which he had collected below. I hauled it up, and he followed with Spider.

“‘Water! water!’ cried the others.

“‘I couldn’t find a drop,’ he answered, ‘but I’ve brought some oranges and a bottle of wine. It’s the last in the locker, so we must take care how we use it.’ There was just one orange apiece, and for my part I’d have given a five-pound note for mine rather than go without it. As to the wine we couldn’t touch it, though we were glad of some before long. The only solid food we had was biscuit, for the fish and venison had gone bad, and we were not sharp set enough to eat it; but then we had, besides the oranges, several sorts of fruit; their outlandish names I never can remember. Though they didn’t put much strength into us they were what we wanted, seeing that we had no water to moisten our throats. Still, while they and the biscuits lasted, and the monkey Spider to fall back on, I wasn’t afraid of starving, though I didn’t say anything to the young gentlemen about him, as I knew they wouldn’t like the thoughts of feeding on their pet. When we had finished our breakfasts we began to talk of what we had best do. We had the choice of three things, to try and right the drogher, to make a raft out of her spars and upper works, or to sit quietly where we were till some vessel should come by and take us off. At last I got leave from Mr Rogers to go below, and judge what chance there was of righting the craft. I soon saw that without buckets we should never be able to bale her out. There wasn’t one to be found, nor would the pump work, while, as I had guessed, the ballast had shifted over to the port side, so till we could free her of water we couldn’t reach that; besides, it would have been a difficult matter to get it back to its place. As I was groping about in the hold I came upon two water-casks. Here is a prize I thought, but the bungs were out, and the only water in them was salt. At last I went back with my report.

“‘Then we must set to and build a raft,’ said Mr Rogers, nothing daunted.

“‘How are we to cut away the spars and bulwarks without axes?’ asked Mr Gordon. ‘It would be a hard job to do it with our knives and hands.’

“‘You are right, my boy, and faith, the only thing we can do that I can see is to sit quiet, and wait till Providence sends us help,’ says Mr Desmond, quite calmly. ‘We should be thankful that the old tub keeps above water.’

“We were all agreed as to this. When I came to think of it, I saw that without a single axe or tool of any sort there was no hope of making a raft fit to carry tins, though it had seemed possible to me in the night-time, when I was half asleep. The midshipman was right, all we could do was to sit quiet, and look out for a sail. I made another trip below, and got up some more biscuit and fruit and three pots of preserves, which were very welcome, and some nuts for Spider. These we put into the basket, which was secured to the rigging. I then shut to the companion hatch, and sat down on the bulwarks. The sun soon dried out clothes, but we shouldn’t have minded having them wet to have escaped the heat. As the sun rose in the sky it grew hotter and hotter, but not a word of complaint did the young gentlemen utter. All day long they sat talking to each other, or amusing themselves with Spider. They kept him fast by his chain for fear of his slipping off the vessel’s side. If he had done so he would have been down the throat of a shark in an instant, for the brutes had found us out, and I saw half a score at a time cruising round the wreck as if they expected a feast before long. It wasn’t pleasant, and I couldn’t help sometimes thinking that they would not be disappointed. I kept my eye turning round the horizon in the hopes of seeing the signs of a breeze which might bring up a vessel to our help. I looked in vain. The ocean shone like a sheet of glass—not a cat’s-paw even for a moment played over its surface. We ate but little, even the fruit did not take away our thirst. It was water we wanted, and without it the rum, of which we had plenty, was of no use. It tasted like fire when we put it to our lips, so the young gentlemen would not touch it.

“The scorching day came to an end at last. The night gave us some relief, and then Mr Rogers served out half a glass of wine to each of us with our biscuit and fruit. We made ourselves fast to the rigging as we had done the night before, and the midshipmen went to sleep with Spider nestling down among them, just as if they had been accustomed to it all their lives. Before I could close my eyes I made certain that they were secure—I don’t mean to say that they slept all the night through. I several times heard them talking, and even joking, trying to keep up each other’s spirits, and then they would get drowsy and go to sleep, and then rouse up again and have another yarn. I couldn’t sleep many minutes together, for I couldn’t help thinking of what might befall the poor young gentlemen if the calm was to continue, for the fruit was spoiling, we had only an orange apiece for the next morning, and the wine and dry biscuit without water wouldn’t keep life in them many hours, while another day’s sun was striking down on their heads—I might hold out long after they were gone. This was the thing that troubled me. I couldn’t lie quiet, and I was every ten minutes getting up and looking round, though I knew well enough that without wind no vessel could come near us. Towards morning I fell asleep for a longer spell. I was awake by the sun coming into my eyes, and looking round what should I see but Master Spider sitting close to the basket of provisions, sucking away at an orange in his paws. I shouted out to the rascal, who only looked up and grinned and chattered as much as to say, ‘I want my breakfast as much as you do.’ My voice awoke his masters, who starting up, saw what their friend was about. The rascal had already eaten two of our precious oranges, and had just begun a third. When Mr Rogers took it from him, Master Spider seemed to think he was very hardly treated, and grinned, and chattered, and tried to get hold of it again.

“‘There’s no use punishing the poor brute,’ said the young gentleman; ‘he only acted according to his nature, and of course he thinks that he has as much right to the fruit as we have, only he ought not to have taken more than his proper share.’

“Those two oranges, with some biscuit, served us for breakfast, and after that, except the remainder of the wine and some rum, we hadn’t a drop of liquid to drink. The sea was as calm and the sun as hot as the day before, and we all soon became fearfully thirsty. Unable to bear it longer I again went below to have another search for water. I looked

into every locker; I hunted through the hold, and examined every hole and corner in the forepeak, but to no purpose. I discovered, however, what made me more uneasy than ever—that the water was leaking in through the deck. It came in very slowly, but I had marked a line when I was down before, and I found since then that it had risen nearly half an inch. I couldn't hide from myself that the vessel was sinking. I said nothing about it to the young gentlemen when, having shut the hatch, I climbed back to my place. It went to my heart to hear them still joking and laughing, in spite of their hunger and thirst, when I thought that in two or three days at furthest their merry voices would be silenced by death. They didn't keep up their joking long, for as the sun got higher the heat became greater, and roasted out their spirits, as it were, poor fellows, in spite of what each one in turn did to keep them up. Spider was the only one of the party who was as merry as ever, for the heat didn't hurt him, and he kept frisking about to the end of his chain, trying, when he thought he was not watched, to get at the basket to see if there were any more oranges or any other fruit to his taste in it.

“Well, Needham, don't you think matters will mend soon?’ says Mr Rogers to me, seeing that I had been sitting silent and downcast for a long time. ‘We surely shall have a breeze before the evening, and some craft or other coming to look for us.’ For the life of me I couldn't say ‘yes.’ I shook my head—I was beginning to lose all hope. At noon Mr Rogers served out half a glass of wine to each of us and some biscuit. This put a little more life into me, and I again took to thinking whether we could form a raft with the bulkheads and lining of the cabin, which we might tear away by main strength, and the two empty water-casks, and the hatches, and the gaff and boom. The job would be to lash them together; for though we might stand on the bulwarks which were under water, there would be no small danger of being carried off by the sharks swarming round us. At all events, if the craft was to sink, as I made no doubt she would, we should have a struggle for life, instead of going down with her and being eaten up by the sharks. It cost me a good deal to say it, but at last I told the young gentlemen that I was sure the vessel wouldn't float much longer, and what I proposed doing.

“Don't let us lose any time about doing it, then,’ says Mr Rogers, jumping up as brisk as possible; ‘we'll get the two casks from below, and lash the stoutest pieces of board we can tear from the bulkheads on the top of them. This will make a small raft, and I will go out on it and cut away the gaff and get out the topmast.’

“While he was speaking I saw him turn his eye to the eastward.

“See! see there comes the breeze; and look—yes, I am sure of it—a sail! a sail!’

“He was right. Just rising above the dark blue line which marked the coming breeze were the royals of a vessel, standing directly towards us; her topgallant-sails quickly appeared, and in a short time we could see half-way down her topsails. We were so eagerly watching her that we forgot all about the raft we had intended putting together. The young gentlemen made no doubt that the stranger would pass close to us, but I had my fears that, low down as we were, we might not be seen. This made me sorry that we had not built the small raft, that one of us might paddle off to the stranger should she seem as if about to pass at any moderate distance from us. As there was still time I made my way below to bring up the casks. As I was feeling for them in the hold my legs struck against a pretty long spar. I hauled it out and handed it up to the midshipmen. ‘This will serve as a signal-staff,’ I said; ‘it will give us a good chance of being seen by the stranger, and I'll try to find a flag.’ The drogher's ensign was in an after-locker. We soon made it fast to the spar, which we then set up. By this time we could see that the stranger was a brig, and unless she altered her course that she would not pass very far from us. On she quickly came; cat's-paws were already playing over the smooth water; presently the breeze itself struck our cheeks. How cool and pleasant it felt; hunger and thirst were forgotten. The midshipmen tried to shout—their hollow voices showed how much they had suffered. I wasn't quite so happy as they were, for it seemed to me that the brig would pass not much short of a mile from us, and that we might not after all be seen. I couldn't help saying so.

“Sooner than that I'll swim off to her,’ says Mr Rogers.

“You forget the sharks, sir,’ I answered.

“Just then the brig, altering her course, stood directly for us. We were seen; of that there could be no doubt. We all stood up, and waved and shouted at the top of our voices; even Spider, who sprang up on the shoulders of Mr Rogers, seemed to understand that there was something in the wind, and chattered and grinned with delight.

“The brig was a large, rakish craft, with a black hull, and as I looked at her I had some doubts about her character. It struck me, indeed, that she was the same wicked-looking vessel I had seen come into English Harbour the day we sailed in the drogher. However, we couldn't be worse off aboard her than we were, and I couldn't suppose that any human beings would leave us to perish. Before long she let fly her topgallant-sails and royals, clewed up her topsails and courses, and a boat was lowered, which pulled towards us.

“We must not leave our change of clothes behind us,’ says Mr Gordon. ‘My carpet-bag is in the starboard berth.’

“I'll get the bags for you, young gentlemen,’ says I, for I did not like to trust any of them below again, for fear of accidents. I jumped down as I said this, and by the time, after groping about for them, I had got hold of the three bags, the boat was alongside.

“Jump in, my lads,’ sung out the mate in charge of her; ‘we have no time to stop.’

“The young gentlemen and Master Spider had scrambled down into her. ‘We are not going without Needham, though,’ they all sang out together, just as I got my head up the companion hatch.

“What, is there another of you?’ said the mate. ‘Be smart, my man, or I must leave you behind.’

“Thank you, sir, but I would rather go,’ says I, as I made a leap into the boat, with the carpet-bags, just as the bowman was shoving off. While we were pulling for the brig the mate asked how we came to be there. Mr Rogers told him

in a few words.

“I heard say in English Harbour that you were supposed to be lost,’ he observed.

“I was then sure that the brig was the craft I had seen there. We were soon alongside. Who should we see as we stepped on deck but the old colonel and his daughter, and the little black girl Polly, who came with us from Trinidad. They seemed mightily pleased at finding that we were not drowned; especially the young lady, who told the midshipmen how anxious every one on board the frigate had been about them. Mr Rogers had to go over the whole story again.

“‘It’s pleasant to find that we are of some account in the world,’ says Mr Desmond, in his offhand Irish way; ‘but if you please, Miss O’Regan, we are as hungry as hounds, and as thirsty as hippopotami, and I’m sure you’ll say a good word to get us something to eat and drink.’

“‘Bless my heart,’ exclaimed the colonel, ‘I forgot, my boys, that you had been hanging on to the drogher’s bottom for the last three days, on short allowance.’

“‘Yes, sir,’ says I, thinking it was as well to speak on my own account, for he didn’t seem to understand that I had been with them; ‘the young gentlemen and I had nothing to stow away in our insides all that time but hard tack and rotten fruit.’

“‘You shall have supper, then, this moment, my lads,’ says the colonel, and having shouted to the steward to put some food on the table, he invited the midshipmen to go below.

“‘And I hope this poor man, who has suffered as much as they have, may come too,’ says the young lady, and I blessed her sweet face as she spoke.

“‘Of course,’ says the colonel, ‘he might fare but badly forward.’

“The skipper, a dark-looking chap, who had been walking the deck all the time, scarcely stopping to welcome us aboard, looked daggers at me, but I didn’t mind him.

“‘Come along, Needham, you saved our lives, and should be the first attended to,’ says Mr Rogers kindly to me; I, of course, know my place, and that it isn’t for the likes of me to sit down to table with my betters; but just then, if the Queen herself had asked me to take a snack with her, I’d have said, ‘Yes, marm, please your ladyship, with the greatest pleasure in the world.’

“The steward soon had all sorts of good things on the table, but there was one above all others I wanted most, and that was a big jug of water; I could have put it to my mouth and drained it dry. The young gentlemen filled up their tumblers, and passed on the jug to me.

“‘Stop,’ says the colonel, ‘you shall temper the water with claret.’ But before he could finish speaking, the glasses were drained dry. We held them out again, however, and the colonel and the young lady filled them up, half-and-half, with wine and water. This brought back our appetites, and we turned to with a will, the colonel’s daughter filling up our plates with a smile, to watch how we ate. When I’d had enough I got up and made my bow, and the colonel told the steward to get me a berth somewhere, as he was sure I should be glad to turn in and take a snooze. He was right, for my eyes were winking, and the young gentlemen were pretty nigh asleep in their chairs. There were two spare cabins, and they were in them, with their eyes shut, before I had made my last scrape and bow at the cuddy-door. The steward told me to turn into his cot, and it didn’t take me long before I was as sound asleep as I ever was in my life. When I turned out the next morning, I found that the young gentlemen were still snoozing away. They didn’t turn out till noon, and even then they kept rubbing their eyes as if they hadn’t had enough sleep yet. Otherwise, they seemed in no way the worse for what they had gone through. In the meantime, the young lady had sent for me aft, and asked all sorts of questions about our cruise, which Mr Rogers hadn’t told her, and spoke ever so kindly to me. I thought as she was talking that there wasn’t anything in the world I wouldn’t do for her. The colonel also had his say, and after telling me that he was sure I was a brave, trustworthy fellow, asked me should I like to go ashore with him, and assist him in an adventure he had in hand. I answered, that though I liked a spree on shore as well as others, that it was my duty to stick by the three young gentlemen to look after them, and to see them safe aboard the frigate again by the first opportunity. He seemed somewhat taken aback, and said nothing more.

“The dark-looking skipper, Captain Crowhurst they called him, hadn’t as much as spoken to me, nor had the mate, and it’s my belief that if it hadn’t been for the colonel and his daughter they would have left us to perish on the wreck. There was something I didn’t like in either of them, and I made sure that they were about no good. After I had spoken my mind to the colonel, he didn’t seem quite as friendly as at first, though his daughter was just the same. The young gentlemen made themselves happy, as they were sure to do, with plenty of grub, and no watch to keep. The skipper, however, told me that as I couldn’t be kept for nothing, I must go forward and do duty. Of course I said, ‘Yes, sir; it’s what I’m always ready for.’ I managed to make friends with the ship’s company, though they were a rough lot of blacks, browns, and whites, and while I remained aboard I worked as hard as any of them.

“We had fine weather, with light winds, and in about a fortnight we sighted this here coast. All the time we hadn’t fallen in with any vessel bound for Jamaica, or indeed any English craft. Instead of steering for Carthagena, or one of the larger places, we put into a small harbour, called Sapote, some miles away from the chief town. I forgot to say that the day after we were taken off the wreck we had fallen in with a sloop, the *Billy*, which kept company with us, and now anchored astern of the brig. The skipper of the *Billy* came aboard, and from the way he and the colonel and Captain Crowhurst talked, I guessed that there was something in the wind. As soon as it was dark, a boat from the shore came off, bringing an officer-like looking Spaniard, who shook hands with the colonel as if they were old friends. The colonel introduced the skipper to the stranger, and after another long talk we were ordered to get up a number of cases from the hold, and to lower them into the boat alongside. Two of our boats, with one from the sloop,

were then got ready, with their crews all armed. The colonel and the stranger went in one of them, and the two skippers in the other, leaving the mate in charge. Just as they were ready to shove off, the colonel and his daughter came on deck, followed by the three midshipmen."

"'Oh, father, may Heaven protect you, but I cannot help trembling for the danger you run,' I heard the young lady say.

"'No danger at all,' he answered, in a cheery tone; 'and I am sure that my three young friends here will take very good care of you.'

"'That we will, that we will;' they all cried out together, and thinks I to myself, 'and so will I as long as I've an arm to strike with, or a head to think what to do.'

"Away the boats pulled into the darkness; there wasn't a light to be seen on shore; indeed, there didn't appear to be many houses thereabouts. Mr Rogers came on deck again after the young lady and they had gone below.

"'I am sorry to find the brig engaged in this sort of work,' he said; 'there is to be a rebellion or something of that sort on shore, and if the colonel is caught it will be a serious matter for him, and, what is worse still, for his daughter. What do you think of it, Needham?'

"'What you do, sir,' says I; 'I wish that he was safe aboard again, and that we were on our way back to Jamaica; but I don't think the skipper is likely to steer northward, till he has landed the whole of his cargo, and a good portion of it consists of arms and warlike stores.'

"While we were talking the mate came aft, and asked Mr Rogers, somewhat rudely, if he was going to take charge of the deck, while he ordered me forward.

"'I shall be very happy, if you wish it,' said Mr Rogers.

"'Maybe if you do the ship will run away with you, my lad,' said the mate, with a sneer.

"I didn't hear more, but I saw Mr Rogers walking the deck quite as if he didn't mind what the mate had said, and was officer of the watch. It was my opinion, from the way the skipper and first mate behaved to the young gentlemen and me, that they wanted us to leave the ship, so that we might not be spies on their actions. I waited till I saw the first mate go below and the second mate come on deck. He was a quiet sort of young man, and he and Mr Rogers were on friendly terms. I then went aft. They seemed anxious, from what they were saying, about the colonel not coming back by that time. While they were talking, the young lady, with Polly, came on deck, and heard some of their remarks before they knew she was near them.

"'Oh, Mr Rogers, do you really think the people on shore will interfere with my father?' she asked. 'He surely ought to have returned by this time.'

"'We are expecting him every moment, Miss O'Regan,' answered Mr Rogers, putting her off as it were, and not wishing to say what he thought. 'All seems perfectly quiet on shore.'

"The other young gentlemen had followed her on deck, and they all three tried to persuade her to go below again, telling her that they were afraid she might suffer from the night air. Still she stood looking out towards the shore; but no lights were seen, and no sound of oars could we hear. At last Mr Rogers said, just as if he was a grown man,—'You know, Miss O'Regan, that the colonel put you under our charge, and we must respectfully insist on your going below. You may suffer from the night air coming off the shore, and you cannot hasten the colonel's return by remaining on deck. We will let you know immediately he appears or that we can get tidings of him.'

"If it had been Lieutenant Rogers or the captain himself saying this, neither of them could have spoken more firmly.

"'I will do as you advise, and trust to your promise,' said the young lady, and she and her maid went below, helped down the companion ladder by Mr Gordon and Mr Desmond.

"After this one or the other was constantly coming on deck, sent by Miss O'Regan, to learn if the boats were returning. I felt somehow as if all was not right, and I could not bring myself to leave Mr Rogers, who didn't go below all night, except for a few minutes to get supper."

Chapter Twelve.

Needham's Narrative (continued)—The Sarah Jane captured by Carthagenan fleet—The Colonel and his daughter, with the midshipmen, conveyed on board the enemy's corvette—Carried to prison in Carthage—The Colonel separated from his daughter—Stella, and the midshipmen, with Needham, placed in an upper room—The gaoler's wife—Plans for escaping—Desmond and Needham get out—Reach the Consulate—Alarm in the household—Obtain a boat, and go in search of the Consul—Driven out to sea.

"The night I was speaking of seemed almost as long as those we spent on the wreck. Just at dawn the first mate came on deck.

"'No sign of the boats yet?' he asked, in an anxious tone.

"'Yes, I hear them!' exclaimed Mr Rogers, and after listening for a minute or so to be sure that he was right, he went below to tell Miss O'Regan. She and the three midshipmen were presently on deck.

“The boats are pulling very fast; you’ll soon have the colonel on board,” said Mr Rogers to the young lady, as she stood eagerly looking towards the shore, where we could as yet see nothing on account of the mist which still hung over it.

“Good reason they have for coming fast, I suspect,” suddenly cried the first mate, who was turning an eye to the offing. The darkness of night had then pretty nearly rolled away. “What do any of you fancy those craft are out there?”

“Why,” says I, “I make out a ship, and a brig, and a couple of schooners. The first are men-of-war, I judge, by the squareness of their yards, and they are standing for the harbour. They have been creeping along shore with the land-wind during the night, or they wouldn’t be where they are.”

“The second mate agreed with me.

“I don’t see what cause we have to fear them, seeing that England is at peace with all the world,” says I to him.

“I do though, if they belong to the Carthagenan government,” he answered. “I wish we were well out of the harbour, that I do.”

“While we were watching the strangers, Captain Crowhurst came alongside in his gig, and almost before he was on deck he shouted out,—‘Hands aloft! Loose sails! Stand by to slip the cable!’

“No time for weighing!

“Oh, where is my father?” I heard the young lady ask him. “He’ll be here soon, I suppose,” he answered gruffly, and turning away, he muttered, “If it hadn’t been for his obstinacy we should have been well out at sea by this time.”

“The few hands sprang aloft to loose sails, the skipper went to the helm, and the mates stood ready to unshackle the cable, while the gig’s crew hoisted up their boat. I really thought that Captain Crowhurst was going to sail without waiting for the colonel. I heard him order the midshipmen, who were talking together, to lend a hand in getting the ship under weigh if they didn’t wish to be run up to the yard-arm. The poor young lady was in a state of great agitation at seeing what was happening.

“We’ll not touch a rope till the colonel is on board,” says Mr Rogers; “he is our friend, and we’ll not allow him to be basely deserted. We are not under your command either, if it comes to that.”

“At this the skipper swore fearfully, and, seizing a rope’s end, seemed as if he would have given a taste of it to the midshipmen all round, when the young lady, stepping before him, told him that he was a coward, and dared him to strike them. He went back to the wheel without answering. I had been keeping a look-out for the boats. Daylight was increasing, and I now saw them coming off, the men bending to their oars as if they were in chase of an enemy. They soon dashed up alongside, and the colonel came on deck, looking as cool as if nothing particular had happened, though by the way the men sprang on board and hauled away at the falls, and then turned to at loosing sails, I judged that they knew there was no time to be lost. The cable was let run out, the sails were sheeted home, and, with a light breeze off the land, we stood out of the harbour, followed by the sloop. I saw the colonel talking to his daughter, who seemed terribly alarmed; but he laughed and looked at the strangers about two miles off on the starboard bow, and then he pointed ahead as if he expected to get out of the harbour before they were up to us; I had my doubts, however, whether we should. The midshipmen then came up to him, as I supposed, to say how glad they were that he had got safe on board. He answered them very shortly, and taking the young lady by the hand led her below. Soon afterwards Mr Rogers came for’ard to where I was standing.

“I suspect, Needham, that the colonel has got into some scrape on shore,” said he. “It is clear from that officer coming off to her that the brig was expected on the coast, and probably those men-of-war are sent to overhaul her. Do you think that we shall get out to sea before they come up with us? and if we don’t, can we beat them off?”

“To be honest with you, Mr Rogers, I don’t think that there’s much chance of our escaping them, and as to beating them off, even if the fellows aboard here would fight, we couldn’t do it, unless they take fright at the sound of our pop-guns,” I answered.

“We must try to frighten them, at all events,” he said. “It won’t do to let a band of ruffians come aboard and frighten Miss O’Regan, and perhaps carry off the colonel, if they have any accusation against him.”

“I told him that must depend on what the Spaniards knew about the brig. It wasn’t likely that two men-of-war could be frightened off by a merchantman, though we had four guns and might put a bold face on the matter.

“The other midshipmen now came forward, and stood with us watching the strangers. There was a chance, but only just a chance, that we should escape them. The skipper and the mates seemed to be in a great taking. The corvette was coming up fast, and the brig of war not far astern of her, carrying all the sail they could set.

“The breeze still held, the corvette by this time was about a mile and a half away on our starboard bow; the skipper began to look as if we should do it, and I thought so too, when, just then, our sails began to hang down, and presently flapped loudly against the masts; the skipper gave a stamp with his foot on the deck, and swore a loud oath. There we lay becalmed, while the corvette and brig still felt the wind off the land.

“It’s all up with us, I’m afraid,” said I to Mr Rogers.

“It’s high time to show our teeth,” he answered.

“Captain Crowhurst, you’ll fight those fellows if they attempt to board us, won’t you?” he said, going up to the

skipper. 'If you will run all the guns over to starboard we can give them a broadside which ten to one will make them sheer off rather than get a further taste of our quality.'

"The skipper smiled grimly. 'But suppose they don't sheer off; depend on it they will cut the throats of every one of us when they come aboard. What do you say to that, my young gentleman?'

"'I'd run the risk rather than let the ruffians take the vessel from us,' answered Mr Rogers, turning away to speak to the colonel, who had that moment come on deck. He looked up at the canvas hanging idly down against the masts, and then at the strangers still creeping up towards us.

"The wind was leaving them as it had us, and he saw in a moment how matters stood.

"Mr Rogers told him that he and the other midshipmen were ready to fight and defend the brig to the last.

"'You're brave lads,' he answered. 'I thank you heartily. If Captain Crowhurst thinks there's a chance of beating them off we'll risk it, but otherwise, for the sake of my daughter, it would be dangerous to make the attempt.'

"'It's for her sake, sir, that we are anxious to fight,' answered Mr Rogers.

"'Captain Crowhurst, will your crew support you?' asked the colonel of the skipper, who had just gone up to him.

"'I doubt it,' he answered. 'The fellows are brave enough, but the odds are fearfully against us. I'll speak to them, and learn what humour they are in.'

"You'll understand I'd gone aft with the midshipmen. The skipper went forward, and we saw him speaking to the crew, who were clustered together, talking among each other.

"In my opinion the skipper himself hadn't much fighting in him, bold and blustering as he seemed. While he was forward the young lady came on deck. She judged by the midshipmen's countenances that something was wrong, though her father looked as stern and determined as usual.

"'I fear that you will be put to some inconvenience,' he said; 'those men-of-war I suspect are sent to overhaul the brig, and, becalmed as we are, we cannot escape them, but I am very sure that our young friends here will defend you from insult, and our enemies may be satisfied if they can get hold of the captain and me.'

"'That we will,' said all the midshipmen together.

"'Oh, my father, do not let me be separated from you. Where you go I will accompany you,' said Miss O'Regan.

"'But I hope that the colonel will not have to go anywhere,' exclaimed Mr Rogers. 'We must drive the fellows off if they attempt to board the brig.'

"'I thank you for your zeal and courage, young gentlemen,' said the colonel. 'You see, Stella, that you have brave defenders. I wish you to go below, and rest assured that we will do all that possibly can be done to secure your safety.'

"'But I am thinking about your safety, father,' said Miss O'Regan.

"'I have been too often in danger to be anxious about that,' he answered. 'Go below, and we'll let you know as soon as possible what is likely to happen.'

"Without saying another word the young lady did as the colonel told her. I had been watching the men forward, and I soon saw by their looks that there was no fighting in them; presently three or four of them slipped below, the others, after saying a few more words to the skipper, followed, and I then knew that they had made up their minds not to fight; they had gone to put on their best clothes, and to stow their money away in their pockets, guessing that if the Spaniards boarded us they would to a certainty plunder the vessel.

"The skipper came aft, looking very downcast. 'The men won't fight, and we must make the best of a bad bargain,' he said to the colonel. 'There's no chance of a breeze, and see, the corvette and brig are lowering their boats, and we shall have the fellows aboard us in a few minutes.'

"The sloop lay becalmed close to us; her skipper, Captain Judson, came aboard, and walked about the deck like a madman.

"'Those fellows will hang every mother's son of us!' he cried out, pulling off his hat, and tearing away at his hair. 'What a fool I was to engage in this sort of work! Colonel O'Regan, can't you advise us what we are to do?'

"'You knew the risk, and you and I must take the consequences,' answered the colonel quite coolly. 'I can only advise you to act like brave men, whatever our enemies chance to do with us; don't let them have cause to treat us with contempt.'

"As neither the young gentlemen nor I had more clothes than those on our backs, we weren't troubled at what we should lose; but for the colonel and the skipper and mates, it was a very different matter. They might not only lose their property and the cargo, but their lives were in no little danger, I guessed, from what I heard them say.

"The boats came towards us, five from the corvette and three from the brig. As they got near I saw that the men were laying on their oars, as if they expected we should fight—you see we had the English flag flying at our peak, and they knew pretty well that Englishmen are not inclined to give in without striking a blow—I thought that the colonel

and the skipper would have acted very differently; but they knew that they were not altogether right, and that made them knock under in the way they would not otherwise have done. When the boats came within musket-shot, the men lay on their oars as if they expected should they come nearer that we should fire on them—the officers seemed to be consulting together—and then they made up their minds to attack us, and came on altogether in a line. If our crew had consented to fight it would have been pretty tough work, I must own that, and maybe we should have got the worst of it. In a few minutes the boats were alongside, and their crews were clambering up on deck, some on our quarters and some amidships and for'ard, shouting and jabbering, and waving their cutlasses as if we had been defending ourselves, whereas there was not a man among us had a weapon in his hand. I thought, in truth, they were going to cut down every one of us; so they would have done if the colonel hadn't shouted out in their own lingo, and told them if they came as friends they should be received as friends, and that we did not wish to oppose them.

“One of the officers who had been longer getting up the side than the rest (seeing that he was too fat to move quickly) now stepped up to the colonel and told him to give up his sword, and consider himself a prisoner. The colonel answered that he didn't wear a sword at sea, that he was an Englishman sailing aboard an English vessel, and that if they took him or any one else prisoners they must stand the consequence. The Spaniard stamped and swore, and looked very big, and called him a pirate, and then pointed at the midshipmen, and told him that he was bringing up young pirates, and that they should all be hung together; the colonel, instead of getting into a rage, was very polite, and said that he was mistaken, that the midshipmen belonged to a British man-of-war, had been picked up off a wreck, and that if any harm was done to them, their ships would come and punish him and all concerned. I was told this afterwards, for though the Spanish officer spoke a little English, I didn't understand all they were talking about.

“The officer, however, didn't mind what the colonel said; but calling his men, they made a rush at him, and taking him unawares, seized him and held him fast. Others in the meantime had got hold of the skipper and mates, as you see the enemy were five to one of us, but still it's my opinion, if our men had been staunch, we could have beat them off. They didn't touch either of the midshipmen or me, for they believed what the colonel had told them. Having got the colonel down, they lashed his arms behind him and made him sit upon the deck. He took things very calmly, and calling Mr Rogers to him, he said, 'I'll thank you now to go and look after my daughter; I know that I can trust you, my young friend. Don't alarm her more than is necessary, and beg her to remain below until you think she will be safe on deck.'

“‘Ay, ay, sir,’ said Mr Rogers, and he and his messmates dived into the cabin. I remained on deck for a few minutes longer to see what was likely to happen.

“The people who boarded us were of all colours, Spaniards, mulattoes, and blacks and browns of every hue, though they spoke the same lingo, and were as savage-looking villains as I ever set eyes on, with their sharp knives stuck in their belts, which they seemed only too eager to use. Finding themselves masters of the brig, they made their way below, and laid hands on everything to which they took a fancy.

“Thinking that I might help the young gentlemen, I slipped down the companion hatch and found them standing before Miss O'Regan's cabin; they had armed themselves with pistols and cutlasses. ‘Glad to see you, Needham,’ said Mr Rogers; ‘you'll find a brace of pistols in the captain's cabin, and here's a cutlass; we have made up our minds to fight as long as there's fight in us, if the ruffians attempt to hurt the young lady.’

“‘I'm one with you, young gentlemen,’ said I, and I went and got the pistols. Miss O'Regan heard what he said and opened the door, begging them not to fight, as there would be no use in doing so. Scarcely had she spoken when down came a gang of rough-looking villains with those long knives of theirs in their hands looking very ferocious, and ready to kill any who might dare to stop them. Mr Rogers had just time to push the young lady back into the cabin, and shut the door before the fellows could see her. They didn't take much notice of the midshipmen, but set about hunting through the other cabins. At last, they came to the one in which Miss O'Regan and Polly were.

“‘No! no! my fine fellows, you're not to go in there,’ said Mr Rogers, standing in front of the door, and holding his pistols ready to fire. The other midshipmen did the same, and I held a firm grip of my cutlass, determined to cut down the first of the ruffians who attempted to pass, should the midshipmen's pistols miss fire.

“The Spaniards flourished their long knives and swore all sorts of strange oaths in their own lingo, but didn't like to advance a step, knowing that two or three of them would get a bullet through their heads; we had the best of it as long as we had pistols and they had only knives. Three or four fellows who had been hunting in the other cabins, now, however, came up with pistols in their belts, and drawing them swore that they would shoot us if we didn't drop our arms. It would have gone hard with us, as there were but three boys and one grown man opposed to a dozen or more of the Spaniards, when just at that moment down came the fat officer who commanded the boats. We had heard him, as I said, speak a little English to the colonel, and so Mr Rogers told him that we were only wishing to protect the young lady from insult.

“‘I appeal to your honour, sir, as a Spaniard and an officer, to assist us in defending her, and I feel sure, sir, that you will do so,’ said he.

“‘You are not mistaken, young sir,’ answered the officer. ‘I will take care that the lady is not insulted if she will remain in her cabin.’

“He then turned to the men and ordered them on deck. They went after a little grumbling, each fellow laden with as much booty as he could carry. He then told Mr Rogers to inform the young lady to prepare with the rest of the passengers to go on board the corvette, as the brig and sloop were to be sent back into the harbour.

“‘Pray tell the officer, that if my father is to go I will gladly accompany him,’ she answered.

“In a few minutes Miss O'Regan and her black servant-girl, Polly, had got ready and packed up a few things they thought they would be allowed to carry.

"In a short time the officer who had gone on deck returned, and, making a polite bow, said that he was sorry to inconvenience her, but that the boats were manned and about to shove off for the corvette, then turning to the midshipmen and me, ordered us to follow him on deck. We found that the colonel had already been lowered into one of the boats with the two skippers and mates; the officer handed Miss O'Regan and Polly down into the boat, and placed her alongside her father, we kept close to them; the Spanish crew, who were now in charge of the vessel, turned no very friendly glances at us, and I saw several of the villains clutch their knives as if they would like to stick them into our backs as we passed. In a few minutes we were alongside the corvette.

"The commanding officer, who seemed to consider himself a very great man indeed, received us on the quarter-deck. He bowed politely to the young lady, but spoke roughly to the colonel and the rest of us. After hearing the account the fat officer gave of the midshipmen, he told us we might remain with Miss O'Regan if we pleased, but the rest of the party were made to sit down between the guns with a guard over them. The boats now brought the crews of the brig and sloop on board with their arms lashed behind their backs. The men growled and grumbled as may be supposed, but the Spaniards showed them the points of their knives, and told them to keep silent.

"Poor Miss O'Regan looked very downcast, though the midshipmen did their best to keep up her spirits by telling her that they were sure the Spaniards would not dare to hurt her or any of us, let them bluster and threaten as they might.

"The Spanish officers were polite enough, and begged her to go into the cabin and take some refreshment, but she refused to leave the deck unless her father was allowed to accompany her; they, however, brought her a chair which she was thankful to sit down on, while the midshipmen, who looked upon themselves as her guard, stood around her.

"As soon as the sea-breeze set in, sail was made, and the corvette, followed by the brig and schooners, stood away for the harbour of Carthagena, while the *Sarah Jane* and sloop put back into the bay.

"We reached Carthagena in the afternoon, and brought up before the town. As soon as the anchor was dropped, the commodore went on shore to communicate with the government, and to learn what he was to do with his prisoners; some time before nightfall he came back, and he gave orders that we were all to be landed forthwith and marched up to the common gaol; so I made this out from what the fat officer said to the young gentlemen.

"No one was allowed to speak to the colonel, not even his own daughter; as soon as she found that her father was to be taken on shore, she begged to accompany him, and the midshipmen said they would go too. Of course I went with them.

"The brig and schooners in the meantime had run higher up the harbour. The boats were at once manned, the fat officer, who was, I have a notion, the first lieutenant of the corvette, took charge of the young lady and us. She begged so hard that the colonel might come in the same boat, that our friend, who wasn't a bad sort of chap after all, said he would speak to the commodore: he pressed the point, and the colonel was placed in our boat. He didn't speak much; in truth, I suspect he had but little to say that was likely to comfort his daughter, while he knew that the officer was listening all the time. She asked him in a trembling voice if he thought that his life was in danger, and said that she would go and plead for him with General Carmona, who commanded the troops in the city.

"'On no account,' answered the colonel, 'it would be useless, and you would only be exposing yourself to insult.'

"Speaking very low, so that he could not be overheard, he told her to get one of the midshipmen to escape if possible to the British Consul, as he would be better able than any one else to help him.

"As soon as we landed we were marched up together to the prison, the young lady being compelled to walk with the midshipmen and me alongside her; the colonel and skippers followed, and then came the crew, while the people rushed out of their houses and gathered in the streets to stare at us, some shouting and abusing us, and calling us pirates and all sorts of names in their lingo. I didn't care what they said, but walked along with my head upright, looking on every side as if I was there for my own pleasure.

"The prison was a dirty tumbled-down-looking sort of a place, and says I, 'I hope they are not going to put the young lady in there;' but they were, though they allowed her a room to herself, with one close to it for the midshipmen and me. I was allowed to be with them, because they said I was their attendant and that they required my services, though not exactly as the Spaniard fancied. The colonel, though they saw he was a thorough gentleman, was thrust in with the skippers and the crew into a low dirty room paved with stone, with stout iron bars to the small windows. There were already a score or more of rough-looking ruffians in it; this we saw as we passed by before we were taken to our own room in an upper story. As many as could get to the windows, which looked out into the street, hung out old caps or baskets at the end of sticks, to receive money or food which the people outside might give them. The window of our room was strongly barred, and so was that of Miss O'Regan; but there was a door between the two, which we found we could open, and so she and the young gentlemen were able to consult what to do. The furniture of our room hadn't much to boast of. Our beds were only heaps of straw, with bits of sacking on the top; there was no table, and only some rough benches to sit on. Miss O'Regan was very little better off. She had a sort of bed and chair, and a heap of straw for Polly; but after a time the gaoler's wife, I suppose she was, brought her a basin of water and a few other things; but that was all the Spaniards' boasted politeness made them think of providing her. She tried to interest the old woman to see if anything could be done for the colonel; but the dame said that it was as much as her place was worth to interfere, and she couldn't say a word to give the young lady any hope that he would be better treated.

"When it was light we made an examination of the bars in the windows to see if we could by any means get through them. Those in our room were too strongly fixed to be moved in a hurry, though we might have done it in time. Miss O'Regan found one in hers which was looser than the rest, and Mr Rogers and I on examining it discovered that it was so eaten away with rust, that by hauling at it together we might wrench it out. What we wanted was to get free, and

to go and find the British consul. The window looked into a yard surrounded by a high wall; but what was behind we couldn't tell. The bar once out we could, we thought, lower ourselves into the yard; the wall we might easily scale, as it was full of big holes worn by time, and it would not cost us much to climb over it.

"'I have a file in my knife,' said Mr Gordon; 'it's a small one, but if we use it carefully it will cut through the bar in time.'

"The lower part of the bar we found was almost eaten away with rust. We agreed that the first thing was to scrape it clear of the rust with the blades of our knives and let the file do the rest. We were afraid, however, to begin till all in the prison was quiet. We could hear the warders walking about and talking loudly, and one now and then passed our door, so that we could not tell if one was going to look in on us or not. At last a fellow came bringing a jug of water and a bowl of greasy rice with some bits of meat in it, and a loaf of brown bread; he made us understand that it was for us.

"'I hope you're going to give the young lady something better than this,' said Mr Rogers, pointing to Miss O'Regan's room.

"You'll understand that when we heard him coming we had got back into our own room and had shut the door. 'Si! Si!' he said, nodding his head, and so we hoped that it was all right. Though the food was coarse we were not sorry to get it, as we had had nothing to eat all day, and at first we thought they were going to starve us outright. There was only one wooden spoon for all of us; the young gentlemen laughed, and said that didn't matter, as it was given us so that we might each get our fair allowance.

"We heard the old woman come back into the young lady's room, and when she was gone Mr Rogers knocked and asked if he might come in, and he found, when Polly opened the door, that the dame had brought them some pastry and fruit, and some white bread and a bottle of wine, and we knew from that that they were not going to ill-treat them at all events.

"In the meantime we talked over what was to be done; at last it was agreed that Mr Desmond should go with me, and that we should try to find our way to the British Consul's the first night we could get out. We concluded that it would take some time to file through the bar, and we did not expect to get free for at least several nights to come. The young lady told us that she and Polly would keep watch, and would let us know when we might come in to do the work. In the meantime we lay down on our beds of straw, for as we hadn't been to sleep the night before we could with difficulty keep our eyes open. Nor had she for that matter; but her anxiety on account of her father made her wakeful. At last she knocked at the door, and I stood up and awoke Mr Rogers. We went in as softly as we could and began working away at the bar, Polly and Miss O'Regan watching at the door to listen if any one was coming. We soon got the rust off; but Mr Gordon's file made very slow progress. We worked while they watched. When daylight came at last we found that we had not got through more than the tenth of an inch; still that was something. To prevent what we had been doing being discovered we covered the marks of the file with rust, stuck on by some grease which we got from our bowl. I must cut my yarn short. One day was much like another; still we could not learn anything about the poor colonel and the rest of the prisoners, except that they were kept shut up below. What the Carthagenians were going to do with them and us we could not tell. There was one advantage in the delay, for if we had got away the first night the guard would have been on the look-out, and we should have probably been caught. It was bad enough for us, but much worse for the poor young lady. We worked on and on, night after night, till at last we had got almost through the bar, and I felt sure that with a good haul I could wrench it on one side wide enough to get through.

"The old woman, who came up every day to see Miss O'Regan, spoke more kindly than usual to her, and called her a poor girl in her own lingo, and seemed to pity her. This made the young lady ask her why she spoke thus, and at last she confessed that she was afraid that General Carmona was going to shoot some of the English prisoners, and very likely the old colonel among them. This made the young lady cry out, and we could hear her speaking in such woeful tones that at last Mr Rogers went in and asked what was the matter; he then learnt all what I have just told you.

"'Oh! can nothing be done to save my father?' she exclaimed, as she clasped her hands together.

"The old woman then said that the only way would be to send a letter to the British consul, but it would be dangerous for her to do so as it might cost her her life, or at all events her husband his place, if it was discovered that she had carried it. At last she agreed to try and let Polly out, and at the same time told her which way she was to take to find the consul's house—it was not more than ten minutes' walk from the prison—first she was to turn to the right, and then cross a large square, and to turn down the first street on the left, at the end of which was the house; she was to look for the arms of England painted over the door.

"'At all events, if Polly does not find it, we shall; the old woman has helped us more than she thinks,' observed Mr Rogers.

"Polly was ready to run every risk to serve her mistress, the difficulty was to get a letter written as we had no paper, pens, nor ink; but I have a pocket-book, said Mr Gordon, and a few words on a leaf explained our situation. We of course didn't tell the old woman our own plan, and we thought that by letting her do as she proposed that we might throw her husband off his guard. At last she went away, saying that she would try and see what she could do. Polly got ready to start; after some time the old woman came back saying that her husband would not consent to anything of the sort. We all pretended on this to be very downcast, Miss O'Regan was really so, as she thought the old woman's plan was the safest. At last all was quiet; Polly, as usual, took her post at the door. Mr Rogers and I worked away at the bar: 'Now one strong pull and we'll have it out,' I whispered; and hauling away with all my strength, I broke it off at the bottom and wrenched it on one side. We made a rope of the rugs which covered our beds long enough to let me lower myself into the yard. Mr Desmond was down directly after me, and I caught him in my arms and bolted away to the opposite side of the wall as quick as lightning, then I lifted him on my shoulders and he soon

scrambled on to the top of the wall; it was a harder job for me to follow, seeing that he put his hands and feet into holes which were not big enough for mine. We had hit the very place we should have chosen, for just below us was a heap of rubbish which came some way up the wall, and we were now on the outside of the prison. Mr Desmond scrambled down in the same way that he got up. 'Keep still,' he said in a low voice, 'don't drop? don't drop! there are broken pots and pans of all sorts, you may cut yourself.' He spoke just in time, for it would have been a queer place to fall on. The night was pretty dark, and no one was about. We stopped to listen, and not a sound was to be heard, so we crept along the wall till we turned the corner, and found ourselves in front of the prison. If there was a sentry, he was fast asleep in his box, for we were not challenged. We soon had crossed the square the old woman had told us of, then we ran on as fast as our legs could carry us till we reached the consul's house, which we knew by a big board over the door, though we couldn't see the arms. Mr Desmond went up to the door and pulled the bell. 'It's no time to stand on ceremony, though it's not the hour that the consul generally receives visitors, I fancy,' he said, with a laugh. He pulled and pulled again. 'I must climb in at the window if we can't awake them any other way, though maybe I shall be shot if I do,' he added, looking up to see if there was one he could reach. 'Do you, Needham, just lift me up on your shoulders, and I am sure I can reach that balcony, and it will be hard if I don't get a window open, and once in the house I'll go round and knock at all the doors till I rouse up some one.' No sooner said than done; the midshipman disappeared over my head, and I was left standing below wondering what next would happen. I knew from the sounds which reached me that he was trying one window after another, at last I heard a loud crash, which showed that he had got through some way or other. Again all was silent. Presently there came cries, and squealing, and shouts, through the lattice which there always is in Spanish doors, so that the people from within may talk to any one outside without opening them; then there came a man's gruff voice, and Mr Desmond's, talking away as fast as his tongue could move, trying to explain what it all meant. This went on for some time, till the gruff voice grew calmer, and Mr Desmond began to talk slower, and I heard women's and girls' voices uttering all sorts of exclamations. Says I to myself, 'It's all right now.'

"At last the door opened, and Mr Desmond told me to come in, that he was thankful to say that the vice-consul would do all he could, and that the consul himself had gone away to a place a mile or two along the coast. 'Then the best thing we can do is to go after him,' said Mr Desmond. 'Can you find us a boat and crew, sir?' he asked of the vice-consul.

"'That will be a difficult thing, young sir,' he answered. 'A boat may be found, but no crew would go without the permission of the general.'

"'Well, then, if you will find us a boat we will go alone,' said Mr Desmond; 'and if the place is only a mile or two off, and you'll instruct us how to find it, we can have no difficulty in doing so.'

"This idea seemed to please the vice-consul, who, though he spoke English, was not an Englishman; he would have acted, I've a notion, very differently if he had been. His wife and the young ladies, his daughters, whose voices I had heard when Mr Desmond roused them out of their sleep, seemed much interested at hearing about Miss O'Regan, and they all urged the old gentleman to help us, and told him that he must go in the morning and see what could be done for the young lady at least. He called up a black servant somewhere from the bottom of the house, and told him to lead us down to the harbour and show us a boat we might take.

"The old lady pressed us to stop and have some supper, but Mr Desmond was in a hurry to get off, and the vice-consul, I have a notion, wanted to be rid of us.

"'Why, my dears,' he exclaimed, 'I wonder you like to be seen by the young officer and the sailor, such figures as you are.'

"In truth, both the old lady and the young ones, as well as two or three black girls, were dressed, I must say, in a funny fashion, with such things as they had clapped on when Mr Desmond roused them up. The old gentleman had put on his breeches hind part before, while she had got into his dress-coat with the tails in front, and little else on beside her night-gown, and a big shawl over her shoulders. I won't say how the young ladies looked, only I couldn't help remarking that they were not over-dressed, so that when their father made this remark, away they all scuttled in a desperate hurry, each trying not to be last, and I've a notion that they had forgotten what might be thought of them. We could hear them giggling and laughing at each other as they reached their rooms. We were, you may suppose, not much in a mood to laugh just then, and, as soon as the old black was ready we started off. He seemed in a desperate fright, expecting every moment that he should be seen, and carried off to prison. We met no one, however, and soon reached the water's edge. The black who was sent with us, I forgot to say because he could speak English, showed us a boat hauled up on a slip, and, going to a shed near, brought out a pair of oars, a mast and sail.

"'Dare; you steer for de point up dare,' he said. 'When you round it, pull on for about three miles, when you come to anoder harbour, then you pull up it, and in de biggest house in de place you find de consul.'

"'Why,' says Mr Desmond, 'the vice-consul told us it was not more than a mile or so away.'

"'Massa not know, den,' answered the old black, as soon as he had helped us to launch the boat; and without stopping a moment to watch us while we shoved off, he ran away as fast as his old legs could carry him. We had to pull along-shore some distance to keep clear of the corvette, then the night-breeze freshening we stepped our mast and made sail, steering as the black had told us to do.

"The boat was somewhat crank, and I had to keep my weather-eye open, and to hold the sheet in my hand to escape being capsized. However, the boat sailed fast, and soon weathering the point we found our way at last into the harbour. We hauled up the boat on the beach, and ran along till we came to the big house the vice-consul had told us of.

"'This must be the place,' said Mr Desmond, giving a pull at the door-bell.

“Again we had to ring and shout as before. No one coming to the door, Mr Desmond proposed trying the old dodge, and getting in at the window. We went round the house, and knocked at all the windows we could reach. At last an old gentleman poked out his head from an upper window, and threatened in Spanish to blow out our brains with a blunderbuss, if we didn’t take ourselves off. Mr Desmond understood what he said, and that he meant it was clear, for I caught sight of the muzzle of his piece resting on the window-sill.

“‘Don’t do that same, if you please, sir,’ answered Mr Desmond. ‘I am an officer of her Majesty’s sloop of war, the *Tudor*, and my companion is one of her crew, and we have come to get the assistance of the consul, who, I presume, you are.’

“I can’t say that he looked much like one in his white night-cap. The old gentleman then asked a number of questions of Mr Desmond, who told him all about what had happened, and at last, having taken some time, however, to dress himself, he came down and let us in. He was polite enough then, for he showed us into a room and begged us to sit down, while he listened to what Mr Desmond had further to say to him.

“He told us in reply that he had but little influence with General Carmona, and that he had, therefore, some time back written to Jamaica, begging that a ship of war might be sent to protect the English on the coast, as their position was far from pleasant. He promised, however, to return to Carthagena the next morning, and to try what he could do to save the colonel’s life, and obtain the liberation of the other prisoners. He advised us to wait till the morning, but Mr Desmond was in a hurry to go back and report to Miss O’Regan and his messmates what we had done; he thought that we could get into the prison before daylight by the way we had come. The consul seemed very much astonished at his determination, but he was firm, and I was ready to do whatever he proposed.

“‘After all you may be right, if you manage to do so without being discovered,’ answered the old gentleman. ‘It will save me also from being accused of assisting in the escape of the prisoners.’

“Having wished the consul good-bye we hastened back to the boat, and once more making sail, stood out of the harbour. The wind, however, shifting shortly afterwards, we made a stretch out to sea, thinking to fetch Carthagena the next tack, when, suddenly, it again shifted, and blew directly off the land; not a foot would the boat sail to windward, and as to pulling against it, that was more than we could do. When daylight broke, we found ourselves five or six miles off the shore, and drifting farther and farther away. Mr Desmond was in a great taking at not getting back to the shore; we lowered our sail, and I took to the oars, but it was all of no use. There was a good deal of sea on, and we did not even hold our own. The sea-breeze was longer than usual coming, and it was pretty well mid-day already. We had nothing to eat or drink since our supper in the prison. All we could hope was that the consul would get back and help our friends. At last it fell a dead calm; we then got the oars out again, and were about to pull back when we heard guns in the offing, and I guessed that they must be fired by the ship of war the consul had told us of. Mr Desmond thought I was right, and we agreed that we should serve our friends better by pulling off towards her. We had a long pull as you know, sir, and I am thankful that I was right; and I am certain it won’t be Mr Murray’s fault if he don’t give the Dons a lesson which will teach them not to play tricks with Englishmen in future.”

Chapter Thirteen.

Prepared for action—A message sent to the Carthagenan Commodore—His contemptuous reply—The *Supplejack* brings the corvette to action and takes her—Sinks a brig and captures three schooners—Murray visits the Carthagenan General, and demands the liberation of the prisoners—An ominous reply.

The boats were manned, and every preparation made for the intended expedition. The danger was great, but Lieutenant Murray determined to risk everything for the sake of the object. Even had he not been deeply interested, he would not have allowed the insult to the British flag to pass unquestioned. His small crew were in high spirits, determined to dare and do everything to rescue the young lady and the midshipmen. They, at all events, the Carthagenans had no right to detain whatever might have been the case with regard to the colonel, and the officers and the crews of the merchant vessels.

Just then some cat’s-paws were seen playing over the mirror-like surface of the ocean, the sails bulged out, and the *Supplejack* began to slip through the water. She soon reached the boat, which was picked up, and then, making all sail, she sped onwards towards Carthagena. The glory of Carthagena, like that of many another place in those regions, has departed, though in appearance picturesque as in days of yore, situated on several islets, with green trees rising amid its towers and spires—backed by its citadel and curiously-shaped hill, with the Popa convent like the high stern of a ship on the top. The town itself is surrounded by walls and batteries which look not a little formidable at a distance. Formidable though they might be, Murray resolved that they should not prevent him from carrying out his intentions.

In a short time the corvette was seen at anchor in the outer harbour. Desmond and Needham had completely recovered, and begged to be allowed to land and act as guides, should the boats be sent on shore.

“I scarcely think that they will attempt to interfere with us,” said Lieutenant Murray, “but it is as well to be ready. Have all clear for action, Mr Higson.”

“Ay, ay, sir!” answered Higson, giving the necessary orders with no little satisfaction. “I only hope that they will dare to set up their backs; we’ll show them what our long gun and two short bull-dogs can do,” he said, as he went along the deck. The men were eager for a fight, as British sailors always are, though they mustered all told only sixty men, officers and crew included.

The breeze was somewhat light, but sufficient to give the brig good steerage way. Before, however, attempting to use force, Lieutenant Murray determined to try pacific measures. He accordingly hove the brig to outside the mouth

of the harbour, a boat was lowered and manned, and he directed Higson, accompanied by Desmond, to go on board the corvette, and demand of the Carthagenan commodore the instant liberation of the prisoners. "Should he refuse, you are to go on shore and communicate with the consul, and then return on board as soon as possible," he added. Higson replied that he perfectly understood his instructions, and with no small satisfaction at the prospect of something to do, shoved off from the brig's side. Needham, who went as one of the crew, had described how they had been treated; and it was the general belief that the commodore would give them an opportunity of teaching him and his countrymen better manners. "The commodore seems a mighty proud sort of fellow, and when he sees only our small brig he'll not be inclined to accede to Mr Murray's demand, I've a notion," said Desmond.

"Then I'll just give him a hint, my boy, that he may chance to receive a visit from the rest of the squadron," answered Higson. "Those sort of fellows are apt to bluster and boast, and, like mongrels, bark loud enough when they see another cur run from them, but they seldom dare to bite when they are attacked."

"The corvette, however, carries sixteen guns, though I cannot say how she is manned," observed Desmond.

"She may carry twenty guns for what I care," answered Higson, laughing. "The question is, how will they be fought? Our Long Tom will be a match for all of them, depend on that. We shall do our best to get ahead or astern of her, where her shot will find it difficult to reach us."

"But then there is the brig, and there are two or three schooners in addition," observed Desmond. "Though we don't see them as they are some way up the harbour, they're sure to come down to help their consort."

"We must settle her first, and then tackle them," said Higson. "It is probable, however, that the commodore will knock under, and not give us the opportunity of showing what we can do."

"I would rather see Miss O'Regan, and Rogers, and Gordon, with the old colonel safe first," said Desmond. "I am afraid that the commodore will be ill-treating them in revenge should we give his vessels a drubbing. The consul seems somewhat of a slow coach, or he would have found out what had happened long ago, and applied for our liberation." The breeze carried the boat which was standing in under sail swiftly on.

"She's a fine craft, and has eight guns on a side," observed Higson, as they got close to the corvette.

The sail was lowered, and a voice hailed in Spanish to know what they wanted. Higson, who guessed the meaning of the hail, standing up, pointed to the British ensign astern, and said that he had despatches to deliver. No rope was however hove to them, nor was the side manned; so, followed by Desmond and Needham in no very dignified fashion, he scrambled on board.

"There's the commodore," said Desmond, pointing to a middle-aged, gaunt-looking Don who was walking the deck with his cocked hat stuck ferociously on one side, "and that fat officer is our friend the first lieutenant. If they don't know how to be civil, we'll show them," and stepping aft, he made them both a profound bow, and introduced Higson. The Dons instinctively took off their hats, unable to withstand the influence of the young midshipman's politeness. Higson handed his despatches to the commodore who opened the envelope, but, unable to read English, he turned to his first lieutenant, and asked him the meaning of the paper. The latter confessed his inability to make it out; for though he spoke a little English he was unable to read it, as was possibly the case with regard to his own language. Higson therefore explained that the despatches came from the commander of the man-of-war outside the harbour, who requested that the British subjects now held in captivity by the Carthagenans might at once be delivered up to him. The commodore, to whom the lieutenant interpreted what Higson said, replied that he could not give an immediate reply; that the despatch being written in English he could not comprehend it; and as to delivering up the prisoners, that was a matter on which his Government must decide.—He had therefore no reply to make to the English officer, who must take the consequences should he venture into the harbour. This was the sum total of the answer given by the commodore, through his first lieutenant, though it took a considerable time to deliver.

"Tell the commodore, then," said Higson, "that as this is a friendly port my commander will certainly come into it as he wishes to communicate with our consul, to whom he intends rendering assistance in obtaining the liberation of the prisoners."

"What does he mean by that?" exclaimed the commodore, when the answer was interpreted to him. "If he attempts to use force, he will find that the honour of those in whose veins flows the pure blood of Castille is not to be trifled with;" and the Don stamped, and fumed, and strutted about the deck, drawing his sword and flourishing it over his head as if his ship was about that moment to be boarded by the English.

Desmond, reckless of the consequences which might have ensued, burst into a fit of laughter.

"What does the boy mean?" exclaimed the commodore, advancing with threatening gestures towards him.

"Just tell your captain that my companion is an Irish midshipman. It's a curious habit he's got of laughing at anything which tickles his fancy, and he cannot mean to be disrespectful to so great a hero."

The first lieutenant explained what Higson had said, and possibly saved the midshipman from being then and there run through the body by the irate Don.

"Then I am to understand that this is the message I am to carry back to my commander," said Higson, to the fat officer.

"Yes, and I hope your commander is a wise man, and will not venture into the harbour," was the reply.

"I'll answer that he will though," exclaimed Higson, making a profound bow; "so good morning, Don Whiskerandos!"

As the commodore, turning his back, strutted aft, fuming as before, Higson, shaking hands with the first lieutenant, exclaimed—

“I wish that we may have the chance of meeting as friends another time; for you’re a good fellow, that you are.”

He and Desmond then beat a retreat to the gangway. The lieutenant was so pleased with the last remark, that he ordered side-ropes to be shipped and the side to be manned, and the English officers took their departure in a rather more dignified manner than they had arrived.

“There seems a good chance of our having a brush with the Dons,” observed Desmond, as soon as they had shoved off and were pulling for the shore.

“Perhaps the consul will settle matters, but if not I’m very certain that Mr Murray will stand no nonsense,” answered Higson.

No opposition was made to their landing, and Desmond and Needham easily found their way to the British consulate. For some reason the consul had not returned, and their friend, the vice-consul, said that he had used every effort to obtain the liberation of the prisoners, but in vain. He was evidently in a great state of alarm, and confessed that he feared the worst. He had, however, been assured that the young lady and the two midshipmen should be properly treated, although the authorities were very angry at hearing of the escape of Desmond and his companion, and he advised them to get back to the boat as fast as possible, feeling assured that if recognised they would be recaptured.

“The fellows had better not attempt it with the English flag over their heads,” exclaimed Higson; “however, we will get back and make our report to our commander. If you can manage the matter, and let them know that we are in earnest, he may possibly draw in his horns.”

The vice-consul shrugged his shoulders, and Higson and his party got back to the boat and pulled out as fast as the crew could bend to their oars towards the *Supplejack*. Higson was anxious to be on board, for he was very sure that no time was to be lost.

Murray, on hearing his report, was not long in determining what to do.

“We must go in and insist on the liberation of our friends,” he said. “I’m sure, my lads, you’ll stand by me.”

A cheer from the crew showed that they were in the right spirit to dare and do anything that he might require. The head-yards were braced round, the helm put up, and the brig stood boldly into the harbour. Murray intended to pass the corvette, and bring up as near the town as the water would allow.

The corvette in the meantime had got a spring on her cable, her ports were open and her guns run out.

The little *Supplejack* stood on, nothing daunted.

“I don’t think that Don Whiskerandos will dare to stop us, though he boasted so much when we were on board,” observed Desmond to Higson.

“You’re mistaken, my boy.”

Higson had just time to reply when a broadside from the corvette came hissing through the air; one shot only, however, struck the brig and shot away her forestay.

“We must not allow this to pass unnoticed,” exclaimed Murray. “Reserve your fire, however, my lads, till I give the order.”

The long gun was pointed at the corvette, the port carronade was run over to the starboard side. Murray waited till the brig had got directly ahead of the enemy.

“Blaze away, now, my lads,” he shouted, and a raking fire from his three guns was poured into the corvette, sweeping her deck fore and aft.

The wind being light and the brig’s courses being clewed up, she glided slowly through the water, and the guns were again loaded and fired into the bows of the corvette before the latter could return another shot. The brig had just way enough on her to go about. The long gun was slewed round, and the others run over to the port side, and fired, greatly to the astonishment of the corvette’s crew, before they had managed to bring their guns to bear on her; when they did their shot flew wide or through her rigging, and not one hit her. The brig was now almost stationary, her crew working with a will, fired all their guns twice before the Spaniards had returned another shot.

“Well done, my lads,” cried Higson, “we have given them as many shots as they have sent at us.”

Such was the case, and every shot from the brig had told with good effect.

“A few more as well aimed, and the Dons, depend on it, will cry, ‘peccavi,’” he added.

The crew, stripped to the waist, were indeed working their guns with right good will. All hands on board were employed, some loading and firing, others bringing up powder and shot from below, and the rest attending to the sails. The smoke, which there was scarcely sufficient air to blow away, enveloped the combatants, and prevented those at a distance from being able to discern which was likely to be the victor. Murray and his crew, however, very well knew how matters went. The splinters which flew from the corvette’s side, and the shrieks and cries which came from her deck showed the fearful effect their fire was producing on their antagonist. At last one gun was silent, and

then another, and then only three replied to them.

Murray cheered on his men, who although perspiring at every pore, ran their guns in and out with as good a will as at first. By this time the brig had drifted still closer to her foe.

Once more Long Tom was fired, loaded with langrage, which swept with fearful effect across the deck of the corvette. Not a shot came from her in return. The brig's guns were, however, again loaded; but just before the triggers were pulled, down came the corvette's ensign! A loud cheer burst from the throats of the British crew. Murray was on the point of anchoring, intending to send a boat on board to take possession, when a brig was seen dropping down the harbour, and followed by three schooners, favoured by a light breeze off shore.

"See, my lads, here come more of them!" he cried, in a cheery voice. "We will settle them, however, as we have done the corvette!"

"Ay, ay, sir, that we will!" shouted the voices of his gallant fellows.

"You wouldn't say so if you didn't intend it," he answered.

"Well, try and see how quickly we can finish them off."

The brig was some way ahead of the schooners, and Murray, anxious to engage her before their arrival, put the brig about, assisted by the light breeze, which just then filled her sails. Her commander, not aware that the corvette had struck her colours, was little prepared for the reception he was to meet with. As soon as Murray had got this fresh foe within range of his long gun he opened fire. The shot, well aimed, went crashing through her side; the second shot was fired before she got near enough for the carronades to reach her. The belief that the English brig had only one long gun prevented the Carthagenians from attempting to escape. The next time Long Tom was fired, his shot was attended by two from the carronades. The enemy replied with her broadside, but most of her shot went flying over the *Supplejack*, while others fell ahead or astern of her, wide of their mark. Not one of Long Tom's shot missed, most of them striking between wind and water; and as she drew nearer they told with still greater effect. At last the enemy put about and attempted to run up the harbour. Vain were her efforts to escape; the last shot striking her gave her her death-blow. With her canvas all set and colours flying, gradually she sank till the water washed over her decks, and her crew were seen scrambling aloft, leaving the wounded to their fate. Within ten minutes of the time she got into action her topmasts alone appeared above the surface. Just before this the three schooners had come up and had opened their fire, but none of their shot had struck the *Supplejack*; and their commanders, seeing the fate of their consorts, came to the conclusion that discretion was the better part of valour, and hauled down their flags amid the cheers of the British crew. Murray lowered his boats and sent them to pick up any of the brig's crew who might have been unable to escape aloft. The lives of several were thus saved. The schooners also sent their boats and took off the men from the rigging. The *Supplejack* then stood back for the corvette. Murray directed Higson and Desmond to take possession. Their fat friend, the first lieutenant, received them at the gangway, with his hat in one hand and his sword in the other. There was no bluster in him now.

"Where is the commodore?" asked Higson, looking round the deck, which was strewn with dead men.

"There!" answered the lieutenant, pointing to the mangled form of a man which lay on the quarter-deck, his uniform alone showing that it was that of the commodore. He had been almost cut in two by a shot from Long Tom.

"How many men have you lost?" asked Higson.

"Twenty-five," answered the lieutenant. "Our crew declared that they were fighting with devils and not men, and refused to fire another shot."

"If they had handled their guns as our fellows did theirs, we shouldn't have taken you so easily," answered Higson. "You deserve a better ship's company."

"Many thanks for your compliment," answered the crestfallen lieutenant. "It is the fortune of war."

The schooners being brought up close to the corvette, the *Supplejack* anchored near them, with Long Tom so trained that, should the Carthagenians attempt to recapture their vessels, they might quickly be sent to the bottom. The brig's boarding-nettings were also triced up, a vigilant watch was kept, and pistols, pikes, and cutlasses placed in readiness for immediate use to resist any attack which might be made on her.

Murray, while he thus kept watch over the captured vessels, felt himself in a delicate and trying position. The Carthagenan government had hostages in their hands on whom they might wreak their vengeance. Had they, indeed, known how dear one of the prisoners was to the young commander, they would probably have made use of the advantage they possessed. He felt sure that a bold course was the only safe one. He might have led his crew on shore and endeavoured to rescue the captives, but the attempt he knew would have been sheer madness, as a piece of artillery at the end of one of the streets might have sent him and his men to destruction. Murray, like a wise man, had retired to his cabin to consider what was best to be done. He speedily made up his mind, and sent for his second in command.

"Higson," he said, "I have resolved to go on shore myself, and demand the release of the prisoners. I leave you in charge of the brig. Keep an eye on the corvette and schooners, and sink them rather than allow them to escape."

"You may depend on it that we will, sir," was the answer. "I only wish that we could get our friends on board, that we might stand in and batter their town about the ears of the rascals."

"They have had a pretty severe lesson already," said Murray, "and I have hopes that they will not refuse to accede to

my demands. Get the gig ready, with an ensign and a flag of truce. There's no time to be lost."

Higson went on deck, and the gig's crew were piped away.

"I say, Higson, do ask the captain if I may accompany him, there's a good fellow!" said Desmond. "Perhaps I may be of some use in getting Miss O'Regan and our fellows out of the prison."

"I don't know how you'll do that," answered Higson.

"Nor do I," said Desmond; "but at all events I know the way into it, and I think, if Mr Murray will take Needham as well, he and I would manage somehow or other to get our friends out, if they are still in the room in which we left them."

Murray, to Gerald's great satisfaction, consented to take him and Needham. He had borrowed a new uniform from one of the midshipmen on board, and no one was likely to recognise him, so different did he look from what he had done in the dirty worn-out clothes in which he had escaped from the prison.

Murray steered directly for the landing-place, and boldly stepped on shore, regardless of the crowd collected to gaze at the commander of the dare-devil Englishmen, who had so quickly beaten their fleet. They, however, treated him with respect, drawing back on either side to allow him a free passage, as he marched with his flag and attendants towards the consul's house. He found that functionary and the vice-consul in a state of great agitation.

"You have indeed, captain, taught the Government here a lesson which they will not easily forget, but I'm afraid that you have overdone it. General Carmona sent to warn me that on the first shot fired he would shoot all his prisoners, and I greatly fear that he has carried out his threat."

"Surely he would not dare to murder Colonel O'Regan and his daughter, and the English midshipmen," exclaimed Murray, his voice trembling with agitation.

"I scarcely dare to say what he may have done," answered the consul; "he is a villain of the first water, and would shoot his own father and mother if they offended him."

Murray could scarcely speak for some time, so overpowering were his feelings. By a great effort he recovered himself, and said, "I must beg you to accompany me at once to the general, and I will insist on seeing him."

It was evident that neither the consul nor vice-consul liked the duty imposed on them, but they could not refuse to comply with the young commander's request.

The ladies of the latter's family evidently thought that he was going on a dangerous expedition, as they clung round him, weeping, as if they were parting from him for ever.

"Pray don't be alarmed," exclaimed Paddy Desmond, who did not see anything so very hazardous in the undertaking; "depend on it, your respected papa will come back with a whole skin, and if not, we shall have the satisfaction of knocking the city down over the ears of its inhabitants."

The young ladies, who had not before recognised Paddy, now knew him by the sound of his voice.

"What!" they all cried out together; "are you the young officer who got out of prison in such a wonderful way? The people affirmed that you got out with the help of a magician, as they have never discovered how you made your escape; and the gaoler, who declares that you were safely shut up when he last visited you, swears that it is impossible you should have done so, either by the door or windows."

"How we escaped I'll tell you by-and-by, but pray excuse me for the present, as your papa and the consul are ready to start," answered Gerald.

This conversation took place while the vice-consul was putting on his uniform coat, and, with the aid of his wife, buckling his sword-belt round the wide circuit of his waist.

Murray and the two officials then set forth, Desmond carrying the flag of truce, and Needham the British ensign, that flag which every nation of the earth has learnt to respect, though some may regard it with no very friendly feelings. After a walk of about twenty minutes they reached General Carmona's residence. In front of the building was drawn up a guard of soldiers, who cast scowling glances at the party as they advanced. In a short time an officer appeared, who promised to announce their arrival to the general. They were then conducted into a courtyard, and told to wait. The officer soon returned and led the way to a large hall, with a long table in the centre, at the end of which sat a personage in military uniform, with several officers collected round him, some seated, and others standing about talking eagerly together.

"To what cause am I indebted for the honour of this visit?" asked the general, who rose with his officers as Murray and the consuls entered.

"This officer, the commander of the British man-of-war, now in the harbour, comes to demand the liberation of certain subjects of the Queen of England, detained by your government as prisoners," answered the consul, introducing Lieutenant Murray.

The general, a tall, cadaverous personage, with long moustaches sticking out on either side of his face, tried to look very fierce and important, but ill succeeded in concealing his trepidation and annoyance.

"I might rather ask why the English brig-of-war has sunk one of my vessels, and captured the remainder of my fleet;

though it seems a miracle to me how it should have happened.”

“Tell him,” said Murray, as this answer was interpreted, “that as his corvette fired into the Queen of England’s brig, it was my duty to punish her for her audacity, and that if my demands are not complied with, I intend to blow up the remainder of his squadron, and then to bombard the town.”

As the consul interpreted this speech, the general and his officers exhibited the most unfeigned astonishment at the bold threat which the commander of the three-gun brig had made.

“Tell him that I mean what I say,” added Murray, observing the evident consternation of the mongrel Spaniards, and seeing that now was the time to carry matters with a high hand.

“What prisoners are they you wish us to liberate?” asked the general.

“All the British subjects you lately captured on board two merchantmen in the harbour of Sapote, two of them being officers of the Queen of England’s navy, with other passengers, the rest being officers and crews of the two vessels.”

“The vessels were captured while engaged in illegal practices, and some of the prisoners you speak of it is beyond my power to deliver into your hands,” answered General Carmona; “the vessels and those on board them were legally condemned.”

“We must settle about the equity of their seizure afterwards,” said Murray; “my duty, in the meantime, is to obtain the restoration of the vessels, and the liberation of those of whom I have spoken.”

“I regret to inform you that some of them have met the fate they deserve, of traitors and rebels, and have been shot,” answered the general, mustering up his courage to make this announcement.

“Shot!” exclaimed Murray, in a tone of deep anxiety, as the consul interpreted the general’s last remark; “inquire who they are that have been thus treated,” said Murray.

“The officers and others found on board the two vessels. The common seamen were not worth the powder and shot, or they would have met the same fate,” answered the general, with as much *sang-froid* as he could command.

Murray could hardly restrain his indignation on hearing this, for he could not doubt that Colonel O’Regan was among the sufferers; he thought, especially, of the grief into which Stella would be plunged, and he was more than ever resolved to carry matters with a high hand.

“Tell the general that his ships are under the guns of my brig, and that I have left orders with the officers in command to blow them up should I not return with the prisoners within two hours.”

“You speak very boldly, sir!” exclaimed the general; “suppose I were to treat you as I have done your countrymen—shoot you.”

“Then my countrymen would very soon arrive with their ships of war, and not only knock your town about your ears, but hang up you and every officer they may catch at their yard-arms,” answered Murray.

The Spaniards, so they may be called, pulled their moustaches, and the remark had, evidently, its due effect.

“I must insist, also, that the two vessels captured by your squadron be brought into this harbour and anchored astern of my brig before to-morrow evening. I give you until then as the winds are light, but there must be no delay. Now, general, I must have your answer, as time is passing, or, before long, we shall have your vessels blown into the air. I require the immediate liberation of all the prisoners still alive. With regard to the rest, my government will settle with you by-and-by,” and Murray took out his watch, and carelessly held it up, so that the general and his officers might see the time.

The action had an electric effect on all present; the general held a brief consultation with his officers, and, though he attempted to bluster a little, they agreed forthwith to give up the prisoners.

“You have got on admirably, captain,” observed the consul, as he and his companions left the hall. “Your mode of proceeding will always be successful when practised on people like those with whom we have at present to deal, and on a larger scale, probably, with most of the nations of the earth.”

Chapter Fourteen.

Tom and Archy in prison—Their trick on the gaoler—Soldiers appear—Taken from prison—Meet Colonel O’Regan—Marched through the town—Prisoners going to execution—Distant cannonading heard—The firing-party—Death of Colonel O’Regan—The midshipmen try to help him—Carried back to prison—They and Stella liberated by Murray.

We must return to the night when Gerald Desmond and Needham made their escape from the prison.

As soon as they were gone, Tom Rogers and Archy Gordon set to work on the bar, and by hauling and pulling gradually worked it back into its former position. They then stuck on the rust as before, and swept the windows clear of the filings and remaining bits of rust, which might have betrayed them.

“Now, Miss O’Regan, do lie down and take some rest,” said Tom, ever thoughtful of others. “You need it much

already, and you cannot tell what fatigue you may have shortly to go through. I have hopes that before long we shall get out of prison, and in the meantime it will puzzle the gaoler to know how our friends have escaped, unless he happens to hit upon this bar, and that I hope he will not do."

Tom and Archy returned to their own room.

"The longer the gaolers remain ignorant of the escape of Desmond and Needham the better," observed Tom. "I think that I can contrive to rig up two figures which may help to do so. Fortunately, Needham has left his red handkerchief behind him, that must serve as his night-cap. I will make the head of straw, and cover it with my handkerchief, the body we must form by heaping up the straw and then throwing a rug over it. Now, Archy, your handkerchief must serve as Desmond's head, and we will put your cap on the top of it."

Gordon, of course, agreed to the proposal. They set to work at once and as far as the pale light of the moon, which came through the windows, could enable them to judge, they were well satisfied with their performance. They then laid down to sleep with clear consciences, on their own somewhat diminished heaps of straw.

The gaoler who brought their breakfast seldom did more than put it in at the door, being satisfied with a glance round the room at its four inmates. He looked in, as was his custom, the following morning, and seeing two figures in the dark corners of the room, supposed that the seaman and one of the midshipmen were indulging in a longer sleep than usual. Tom and Archy put their hands to their heads, and shook them, as much as to say that their friends were suffering from head-ache. This seemed to satisfy the gaoler, who departed, much to the satisfaction of the midshipmen, without making a closer inspection.

"At all events, it shows that our friends have not been caught, or we should have had the room searched," observed Tom. "I hope that they have found the Consulate, and if so, we shall probably be liberated before the day is over. I wish, however, we could hear something about the colonel, for the sake of his poor daughter."

The midshipmen naturally had got very weary at being so long shut up. Their spirits, however, now rose at the thoughts of their speedy liberation, and they made a hearty meal off their somewhat coarse fare.

A couple of hours or more passed, when Polly knocked at the door, and said that Miss O'Regan would be glad to see them.

"I have been thinking more than ever about my poor father," she said, "and I cannot help fearing from the remarks let drop by the gaoler's wife, that he must be very ill. I have in vain begged her to let me go and see him—can you think of any plan by which I may do so? If the old lady would take me down into the common cell, I would gladly consent to be shut up with him."

"Perhaps by putting our heads together we may hit upon some plan for getting the colonel up here to see you," answered Tom. "That would be much better, for you can have no idea of the set of ruffians you would have to meet in the lower prison, and I am very sure that the colonel would not allow you to be among them."

All sorts of schemes were discussed. The chief hope was that they might work on the feelings of the gaoler's wife, who was evidently well disposed towards them. They had been talking for some time when, hearing footsteps coming along the passage, the midshipmen hurried back to their own room. Instead of the gaoler, however, as the door opened, a party of soldiers with fixed bayonets appeared.

"What can these fellows want?" exclaimed Archy.

The soldiers forthwith marched into the room, and, without speaking, began to fasten the midshipmen's arms behind them.

"This doesn't look pleasant," cried Tom. "I say, you fellows, what are you about?"

The soldiers made no reply, but continued lashing their aims.

Four, in the meantime, had walked up to the corner where they expected to find the other prisoners; their astonishment was very great when they found instead only some heaps of straw. They talked for a minute together, casting looks at Tom and Archy which betokened no good-will. One of them having gone out came back with the gaoler, who began questioning them, though, as they scarcely understood a word he said, they were not very well able to give lucid replies. They, of course, guessed, however, that he was making inquiries as to what had become of their companions.

"They will be back soon, I dare say," said Tom. "If you will let us wait till then we shall be much obliged to you."

"Non intende," answered the gaoler.

"Not in ten days!" exclaimed Tom, even at that moment unable to refrain from a joke.

The gaoler, not being a bit the wiser for Tom's reply, began to stamp and rave, and then repeated his questions in a louder voice, expecting that by so doing he should elicit an answer. At last, he and four of the soldiers went into Miss O'Regan's room, and while two of them cross-questioned her and Polly as to what had become of the missing prisoners, the others searched the room in the hopes of discovering them. Their answers did not satisfy the men, for, like true women, having determined that they would not say what had become of their friends, nothing could induce them to acknowledge that they knew anything about the matter. Fortunately, the soldiers did not think of examining the bars, as it did not occur to them that the fugitives had escaped by the window; at last they came back, looking very disheartened. Four of the soldiers, roughly dragging the midshipmen into the passage, led them downstairs. They were then conducted into a courtyard, where a number of other prisoners were collected, some heavily-

manacled, and others with their arms secured as theirs were, by ropes. They looked round, and, before long, recognised Colonel O'Regan, as also the masters, mates, and men of the two merchantmen. There were, besides, a number of prisoners in military uniform, whose countenances all wore an agitated and anxious expression, though some tried to hold up their heads and to look indifferent as to the fate awaiting them. All the Englishmen were manacled, as though their captors supposed that they would make an attempt to escape. The midshipmen would scarcely have known Colonel O'Regan had it not been for his dress and his tall, commanding figure, so pale and haggard had he become; their guards not stopping them, they made their way up to him. He recognised them with a smile of satisfaction.

"What are they going to do with us, Colonel O'Regan?" asked Tom, naturally beginning to feel more nervous than at first.

"To murder us, I fear," answered the colonel, in a low voice; "for myself, I care not, but for her and for you my heart bleeds. Tell me, young gentlemen, where is she? How does she bear up against the cruel fate which has overtaken her? I have been unable to learn anything about her since I was shut up in that horrid den with these ruffians."

The poor colonel was somewhat relieved at hearing that his daughter was not ill-treated, and that her black maid was allowed to remain with her. Tom told him also of the kindness of the gaoler's wife.

"She is not ungrateful, then, for a slight service I once did her, little thinking at the time how it would be repaid," he remarked. "Poor girl, these barbarians would not allow me even a last parting farewell with her."

"But do you really suppose that there is no hope for us, Colonel O'Regan?" exclaimed Tom. "Surely they will not dare to shoot us!"

"For myself I certainly expect no mercy," answered the colonel, gloomily. "I have, however, hopes that though they may not be influenced by pity for you and your companion, they will hesitate before they injure those clad in the uniform of the British navy. I do not, therefore, despair of your lives; and though I cannot plead for myself I will for you."

Their conversation was cut short by the arrival of an officer, who gave orders to the guard to conduct the prisoners to the *Campo* outside the town.

Tom rejoined Archy Gordon and they followed the colonel, who was marched out with Captain Crowhurst as his companion. They were joined by several priests with crucifixes in their hands, who, addressing the prisoners as they walked alongside them, offered to afford them the consolations of their religion.

"We want none of their mummerly," exclaimed Captain Crowhurst, in a tone of indignant contempt. "Do tell the fellows, colonel, to let us alone."

The colonel, instead of interpreting this speech, mildly addressed the priests, and assured them that he and his companions did not require their services, as they differed in creed. The friars now came to Tom and Archy, but soon finding that they did not understand a word they said they fell back to those in the rear. The master of the sloop and the mates spoke much in the same tone as Captain Crowhurst had done, and the priests observing that they were heretics devoted their attention to their own countrymen. Two of the priests, more persevering than the rest, returned again to the colonel; he motioned them aside with the same courteousness as before. Still they addressed him.

"My friends," he said at length, "I give you full credit for the honesty of your intentions, but as I have lived so I hope to die, protesting against the false system and erroneous doctrines in which you appear to believe. I have no faith in them, and, therefore, you only interrupt a person who would ask strength from One in whose presence he is about shortly to appear, that he may go through the severe trial he is called upon to endure."

The calm and dignified manner of the brave colonel rebuked the officious priests, and they returned without venturing to utter any of the contemptuous remarks which they had bestowed on his less polished fellow-sufferers.

Crowds collected in the streets to see the mournful procession pass: most of the Englishmen walked boldly on, with heads erect and undismayed countenances; many of them, indeed, scarcely believed that the government would venture to put them to death; the natives, on the contrary, fully aware of the sanguinary disposition of their countrymen, expected no mercy, but marched on with trembling knees and downcast countenances, expecting the fate which awaited them. They had been captured in open rebellion, attempting to overthrow the government, and were conscious how they themselves would have treated their enemies had they exchanged places.

The crowd gathered rapidly, eager to indulge themselves of the spectacle which was about to take place. Suddenly there came a booming sound of a gun across the harbour followed by the thunder of several others, one at short intervals much louder than the rest. The colonel and Captain Crowhurst turned their heads.

"Those guns come from vessels in action," said Tom; "perhaps one is an English ship; if so she is sure to give the Dons a drubbing."

Some of the crowd hastened to the harbour to see what had taken place. The soldiers advanced with their prisoners at a more rapid rate than before; they quickly reached an open place just outside the town. Here they stopped, and presently several officers came on the field. The prisoners were marched a short distance to the front of the troops, who extended their line on either side of them. An officer of rank with his staff now rode up. Colonel O'Regan on seeing him stepped forward.

"General Carmona," he said, "I have been your enemy, and have no hope of mercy at our hands. I, therefore, do not

ask it for myself; I speak for these men, who if they have broken your laws did so in ignorance; still more earnestly do I entreat you not to injure these two young English officers, who, as I informed your commodore, are entirely guiltless. They were saved at sea from a wreck by the brig on board which I was a passenger, and if you put them to death you will bring the vengeance of their countrymen on your head; you may have some excuse for shooting me, but you will have none if you murder them, for murder it will be, whatever you may call it."

This address seemed to have some effect on the general, who, however, issued no counter-orders to the officers charged with the execution of the prisoners. The colonel, with the two masters and their four mates, together with the principal natives (all of whom appeared to be of the rank of officers) were placed in a row, when several soldiers came behind them for the purpose of binding handkerchiefs over their eyes. The colonel turned round to the men who were about to perform that office for him with a calm smile.

"I desire to gaze my last on the blue sky above us," he said gently. "Let me at least die like a soldier—it is the only favour I ask."

His companions followed the colonel's example, and begged to be allowed to die with eyes unbound. The general now ordered the officer in command of the firing-party to hurry his preparations.

"As you have so many to dispose of, it would have made shorter work had you placed them all together," he shouted out.

The rest of the prisoners had, in the meantime, been led on one side to await their turn. The firing-party now advanced—the doomed men gazed at them with pale, though undaunted countenances. The commanding officer, in a loud, harsh voice, gave the usual order, "Make ready," "Present," then came the fatal word—"Fire!" Some fell forward, shot dead; others were struggling and writhing on the ground; Colonel O'Regan alone was standing upright. It was but for a moment; he was seen to stagger forward, then to fall heavily on his face. Regardless of the danger they ran from the firing-party, who advanced to plunge their bayonets into the bodies of those who still had life in them, Tom and Archy dashed forward with the idea of helping their unfortunate friend. They attempted to raise him, but the expression of his countenance, and the blood oozing from a wound in his breast, told them but too truly that all was over; and had not their guards, who were alarmed on their own account at having allowed them to escape, dragged them back they would probably have been bayoneted on the spot. Just then an officer, who came galloping up with looks of consternation on his countenance, informed the general that his corvette, the chief vessel of his navy with which he believed that he could defy the world, had struck her flag to a British brig-of-war, and that his brig had been sent to the bottom. The news produced an electric effect on him and his officers. He at once gave orders that the surviving English prisoners should be conducted back to gaol under charge of a small body of troops, while the rest were marched off to the batteries.

"We have had a narrow escape," said Tom to Archy, not at the time aware to what cause they were indebted for their preservation. "We ought indeed to be thankful; but I would have given anything to have saved the colonel. Poor Miss O'Regan, what will she do with no one to look after her?"

"But we will do our best!" answered Archy; "and as I have a notion that she will some day be my cousin, I have a sort of right, you know, to watch over her."

"But in the meantime what shall we say to that poor young lady?" asked Tom.

"I haven't the heart to tell her that her father has been shot," answered Archy, "though, of course, something must be said; we must not tell her a falsehood, that's certain."

"Then we must just say that we were marched out into the country, when firing was heard which we have no doubt came from an English ship of war, and then we were marched back again," said Tom. "If she asks any further questions we need not say anything more, and perhaps before long we shall all be on board, when she will be better able to bear her misfortune than she would be shut up in prison."

Much to their satisfaction the midshipmen were taken back to the room they had before occupied. The great drawback, however, was the fear they felt of being cross-questioned by Miss O'Regan. They had not been there long before they heard the gaoler's wife go into her room; and they guessed that she would tell the poor girl more than they themselves could venture to do.

There was a great deal of talking, and after some time the old woman went away. Scarcely had she gone than Miss O'Regan opened their door.

"I have important news for you," she exclaimed, in an animated tone: and she gave them the information she had just heard, that an English brig-of-war had captured the whole of the Carthagenan fleet, and that the authorities as well as the people were in a state of the greatest possible alarm and agitation.

"We may expect therefore to be speedily liberated," she added. "My poor father must also be set free."

She had been so interested in describing what she had heard that she did not make the inquiries they expected, and the midshipmen were saved the pain of informing her of her father's death.

They passed the next two hours in a state of great anxiety; at last footsteps were heard, and voices coming towards their room. Their door was thrown open and there stood Lieutenant Murray, Gerald Desmond, Needham, and several strangers, one of whom was in the consular uniform. The former giving them a smile of recognition, hurried into Miss O'Regan's room, and Paddy Desmond, after warmly shaking hands, began recounting to them the adventures he and Needham had gone through. They in return had a sad tale to tell of the events which had lately occurred. It was cut short by the reappearance of Murray with Miss O'Regan leaning on his arm, followed by Polly carrying the box with

her mistress's wardrobe.

"Now, young gentlemen," said the consul, "we have come to conduct you to my house, where no one will dare to molest you, and I daresay that you will be glad to get out of the prison."

"Yes, indeed we shall, sir," answered Tom, "but I should like to wish the gaoler's wife good-bye."

"I am sorry to tell you that she and her husband have been dismissed from their post, and are now themselves confined in one of the cells in which they have been accustomed to lock up others. However, I will do my best for them, and in a short time there will be another change of government, when they will probably be reinstated. They are accused of having connived at the escape of your companions, and I can probably help them by explaining how it occurred."

Murray had thought it better not to tell Stella of her father's death. Her suspicions, however, had been aroused, and she pathetically begged that she might see him.

"It is impossible," answered Murray. "Let me entreat you not to inquire further at present, and you shall be informed of all that has happened as soon as we reach the consul's house."

Stella was silent. The dreadful truth began to dawn on her. She dare not ask another question.

With no small satisfaction the party found themselves outside the prison walls. They were not interfered with by the populace, who regarded the conqueror of their fleet rather with awe and respect than any vindictive feelings. The vice-consul's Spanish wife received the young English lady with a kind welcome, and did her best to prepare her for the afflicting intelligence she was to hear. Murray undertook the task. Her grief was too great for tears.

"I was prepared for it," she said, at length. "A fearful foreboding of evil has oppressed me since we sailed from Antigua. I cannot help thinking that he himself felt that such might too probably be his fate, yet he braved it under the belief that he was engaged in the cause of humanity."

The consolation Murray offered was not without its due effect.

"There is one, at all events, who will take your father's place, and joyfully devote his life to your service and to watching over you with the tenderest love," he said, taking her hand.

"I know it," she answered, "and my father often expressed his satisfaction at the thought that I might some day become your wife."

Stella had another trial to undergo when receiving from Tom and Archy the last message which her father sent her.

Although the consul promised to protect her, and the ladies of the family treated her with the greatest sympathy and kindness, she was naturally anxious to join her friends in Jamaica, and Murray was also unwilling that she should remain longer on shore than possible.

There were few places at that time more disorganised and disturbed than Carthagena. The consul himself and his family, indeed, were frightened, and gladly accepted Murray's invitation to take up their quarters on board the *Supplejack*, till matters were in a more settled state on shore. The consul's boat was in readiness, and the whole party were soon assembled on the deck of the brig. Their departure showed the government that the commander intended to carry out his threat of sending for a fleet to bombard their town should his demands not be complied with. Another messenger was therefore despatched to hasten the departure of the captured merchantmen, which, the wind being favourable, within the time allowed were seen entering the harbour.

As his duty would not allow Murray to leave Carthagena until he had received instructions from the admiral, he determined forthwith to send the *Sarah Jane* with an account of the event which had occurred, and to ask for instructions.

As soon as she came to an anchor, Higson, Tom, and Archy, with a boat's crew were sent on board. Great was the midshipmen's delight when they stepped on deck to see "Master Spider" on the top of the caboose, apparently on excellent terms with his new associates; he knew his old friends, however, at once, and came hopping down to greet them with every demonstration of pleasure.

The brig was in a terribly dirty condition, and the furniture of the cabin was considerably damaged, while the greater part of her cargo and every article of value had been carried off.

The native crew was sent on shore, and Murray picked out the most respectable of her former ship's company, with two or three of the best men out of the sloop to man her, promising them a handsome reward if they behaved well.

Though he could ill spare Higson, there was no one else to whom he could entrust the command of her.

He felt bound also to send the three midshipmen back to their ships, and the confidence he had in Needham made him resolve to send him, and in addition he picked out four good men from the *Supplejack*.

"I hope we have made up a tolerable ship's company for you, Higson," he said; "keep a watchful eye over them, and do not trust them too much; they have ample inducement to behave well, but they have been so long, I suspect, engaged in lawless pursuits, that it is impossible to say what tricks they may take it into their heads to play."

Murray was constantly on board the *Sarah Jane*, endeavouring to restore her cabin to its former state of comfort. He felt that Stella could not stay on board the *Supplejack* with him, and painful as it was to part with her, his only course

was to send her at once to her friends in Jamaica.

She herself saw the propriety of this, and made no demur. "I can trust you confidently to the care of Mr Higson and your former young protectors," he said, as he made the proposal. "As soon as duty will allow me I hope to return to Jamaica, and then I trust that nothing will occur to prevent me from making you mine, and giving me the right to protect and watch over you."

Scarcely half an hour had elapsed after this before Stella was once more on board the *Sarah Jane*. Sail was made, the anchor lifted, and the brig with a fair wind glided out of the harbour.

Murray continued on board her as far as he could venture to sea, but as he dared not be long absent from the *Supplejack*, he was at length compelled to return.

Chapter Fifteen.

Stella and the Midshipmen sail for Jamaica in the Sarah Jane—Voyage—Arrival—Jack's delight at recovering Tom—Stella goes to the Bradshaws—Higson promoted—The Plantagenet and Tudor sail for Carthage—They quickly settle all difficulties—Proceed to the Mosquito shore—Boat expedition up the San Juan de Nicaragua—Night encampment—Visit of a puma—A chase—Scenery of the river—Birds and monkeys—Voyage continued—An unpleasant bed on an anthill—Approaching the enemy—A sad accident—Alarm—The captain attempts to rescue the drowning men—Does not return.

The *Sarah Jane* meeting with fine weather and a fair wind glided rapidly across the Caribbean Sea. Higson felt proud of his first command, and soon gained that self-confidence which long years spent in a subordinate position had made him doubt that he possessed. The midshipmen supported him well, and Needham, who acted as boatswain,—and a more thorough man-of-war's-man never stepped,—assisted to keep the rest of the crew in good order. Tom Rogers was declared "First Lieutenant," and he walked the deck with all the air and consequence of one. He had already become a fair navigator, and Higson could depend on his calculations. Gordon was dubbed the "Master," and it was voted that Desmond should be "Second Lieutenant."

"I say," exclaimed Tom, "we ought to have a doctor, and so I propose that we give Master Spider the rating, since we haven't got a better one to fill the post; he at all events won't drench his patients with physic, and if he has to bleed them he will do it artistically with his teeth." So Spider was dubbed "Doctor" from henceforth. Higson appointed Archy Gordon also to do the duties of "Purser," so that he had plenty of occupation.

It was impossible to be more attentive to poor Miss O'Regan than were the young midshipmen, or more thoughtful in all they did. Although she still looked pale, she endeavoured to show her gratitude whenever she came on deck by her cheerful conversation and her smile, which Desmond declared beat everything in the way of sunshine. The midshipmen enjoyed the voyage and quickly regained their strength, somewhat lost during their imprisonment; as to their spirits they were of too buoyant a nature to be kept down the moment the pressure was removed.

At length the Blue Mountains beyond the harbour of Port Royal appeared in sight, the sea breeze, which still blew fresh, wafting the brig rapidly towards the shore.

Miss O'Regan, with her faithful attendant by her side, seated on deck, watched with much interest the magnificent view which gradually rose before her eyes. The three midshipmen were standing near her.

"I cannot help hoping that the frigate and corvette have been sent to sea; if not, Higson will have pretty soon to give up his command, and we three, degraded from our rank, shall be ignominiously sent back into the midshipman's berth," said Tom, with a laughable grimace.

"Then the sooner we make up our minds to sink into insignificance the better," observed Desmond, who had a telescope to his eye. "I make out clearly enough the frigate and corvette at anchor; however, we shall have a jolly time of it giving the other fellows an account of our adventures. I vote that we make old Scrofton believe that 'Master Spider' played a gallant part in the capture of the Carthagenan fleet, and led the boarders when we took the corvette."

"But we didn't board at all, in the first place," said Tom, "so that won't be true to begin with."

"No, but when one's about spinning a yarn it's as well to spin a good one," answered Desmond.

"To my mind a joke's a joke, and a lie's a lie," observed Tom. "Although it would be very good fun to quiz old Scrofton, we certainly should not tell him what is not the truth, and I won't vote for anything of the sort."

"Nor will I," observed Gordon, "and after all the adventures we have been preserved from, it's time that we should knock off our midshipmen's tricks. Where should we have been if my cousin Murray hadn't come in at the moment he did, and so bravely captured the fleet? We should to a certainty have been shot, as was the poor colonel."

"Hush!" said Tom, pointing to Miss O'Regan, "she may hear us." Paddy Desmond looked rather vexed. "I don't consider humbugging an old bo'sun telling a lie, as you choose to call it," he said, turning away.

"Truth is truth, Paddy, though," answered Tom; "I didn't mean to offend you, and I dare say we shall get a rise out of old Scrofton without descending to falsehood." Paddy's anger was as usual quickly appeased, and he joined in the hearty laughter which "Master Spider" produced, as at that moment he came hopping aft rigged in a white shirt with blue turn-down collar, white trousers, a straw hat secured to the top of his head, and a wooden cutlass made fast to one of his paws, and which, in his efforts to free himself from it, he appeared to be flourishing about as if engaged in

mortal combat.

"There!" exclaimed Paddy, "if he didn't board the Dons he shows that he would have done so if we had run them alongside, and he would precious soon have driven them overboard."

Even Stella could not help indulging in a smile such as had not for a long time lighted up her countenance, while Polly clapped her hands, and shrieked with laughter.

Gradually the fortifications and buildings of Port Royal and the long line of the Palisades appeared in sight, and the brig passing close round the works of Fort Charles steered in and anchored a short distance from the frigate. Blue Peter was flying from the mastheads of both ships, a signal that they were about to put to sea, so there was no time to be lost. Higson ordered a boat to be lowered, and leaving the brig in charge of Needham, accompanied by the three midshipmen, pulled alongside the frigate. Stella naturally preferred remaining on board the brig until she could be conveyed to Kingston.

Captain Hemming was on shore, but Mr Cherry and Jack Rogers were on board, while Adair was seen walking the deck of the corvette.

"A boat coming alongside, sir," sang out Norris, addressing Jack, who was officer of the watch, "and if I can believe my eyes, there's Higson, with your brother, and Gordon, and Paddy Desmond in her." The announcement produced no small excitement on board, all who heard it hurrying to have a look at the three long-lost midshipmen.

Jack, his warm heart beating with joy, rushed to the gangway. He was soon shaking hands with Tom and his companions, who were warmly welcomed by their other shipmates. Spider, who had accompanied them, made his own way up the side, and seated on the hammock nettings, holding on by a backstay, was received with shouts of laughter by his old friends, he chattering away, seemingly as glad to see them as they were to greet him. Singling old Ben Snatchblock, with whom he had been a favourite, he sprang on his shoulders and was quickly carried in triumph forward, where he was lost to sight among the crew, who gathered round him as school girls are wont to do round a small child introduced amongst them.

Higson and the midshipmen were in the meantime relating their adventures as rapidly as their tongues could wag; as soon as they had given a brief outline of them, they inquired what had occurred during their absence. The corvette had been repaired. Commander Babbicome, though still as much afraid of the West India climate as at first, had not resigned, as it was thought he would do. Her complement had been made up of the crew of two merchant vessels wrecked on the coast, with other volunteers, and a few hands from the frigate, and they were now only waiting the return of Captain Hemming to proceed to the southward, application having been made by her Britannic Majesty's consul at Bluefields on the Mosquito shore for the assistance of some ships of war, to protect British interests in that part of the world. A variety of outrages and insults of which he complained having been offered to Englishmen, work of some sort it was expected would be cut out for them, and all hands were delighted at the thoughts of having something in the way of fighting to do.

"Then the sooner I get up to Kingston the better," exclaimed Higson. "It won't do to be left behind. I can't go, however, without delivering my despatches to the admiral."

He accordingly hurried back with the three midshipmen to the brig, where Jack and Adair, who were anxious to pay their respects to Miss O'Regan, presently followed. They said all that was proper to her regarding her father's death, and expressed their hopes that Murray would soon return to Jamaica and receive his well-earned honours.

"He is sure to be promoted," said Jack. "When he is, I have great hopes that the admiral will appoint him to the command of the corvette, should Captain Babbicome resign her, as I think he is very likely to do, for he evidently wishes himself looking after his cows and pigs at home."

Miss O'Regan and her attendant, with Higson and the three midshipmen, proceeded up at once to Kingston. Fortunately, on landing, they met the admiral, who was delighted to hear of Murray's success. "I knew the lad would do something if he had the opportunity," he exclaimed, rubbing his hands, "and very well he has done it, that all must allow. He will obtain his promotion, and you, Mr Higson, may depend on receiving yours."

On being introduced to Miss O'Regan the old admiral exclaimed, "You must come up to the Pen, my dear young lady, and remain there till you can communicate with your friends. Mrs and Miss McAlpine will be delighted to see you on your own account, and also that of my kinsman Lieutenant Murray. He is an officer in whose welfare I am much interested, and I can assure you that he has not disappointed my expectations." Then turning to the midshipmen, he added, "And you youngsters must come up too; the ladies will want you to spin them a yarn about your adventures, and I'll take care that the frigate does not sail without you."

Though Stella would have gladly set off at once for her relations the Bradshaws, she could not refuse the admiral's kind invitation. He drove her up to the Pen, where Higson and the midshipmen followed.

Stella was kindly received, and as little as possible was said to recall the painful scenes she had gone through. The admiral, with Murray's despatches before him, questioned Higson as to further particulars, and then made the midshipmen recount their adventures to his wife and daughters, being especially amused at the way Desmond roused up the vice-consul and his household.

Tom ever afterwards declared that he was the most jolly old officer he had ever met with—excepting, of course, Admiral Triton.

"I see, Mr Higson, that Lieutenant Murray speaks in the highest terms of your bravery and courage in this affair," said the admiral. "I have great pleasure, therefore, in giving you an acting order as Third Lieutenant of the *Plantagenet*;

and I have no doubt that when the affair is known at the Admiralty, it will be confirmed; and I can congratulate you on the step, which has been entirely gained by your own merits."

Higson felt his heart jump nearly into his mouth; for often before as he had expected promotion he had been disappointed, and he had almost given up hopes of obtaining it.

He thanked the admiral warmly. "Say no more about it, mon," he answered. "I wish that I could reward every one on board the *Supplejack* as they deserved. You may possibly before long have an opportunity of distinguishing yourself, and I am very sure that I shall hear a good account of you."

Captain Hemming soon afterwards went up to the Pen, when he received fresh instruction as to his course of proceeding. Instead of going direct to Nicaragua as he had before been ordered to do, he was to touch Carthagena to settle the affair of the capture of the Carthagenan fleet, and the recapture of the merchantman; it being considered that a visit of two or three ships of war might somewhat assist in bringing the diplomatic part of the transaction to a satisfactory conclusion.

When the midshipmen went to wish goodbye to Stella, she had a letter for Murray, which she entrusted to Archy Gordon. "You may depend on me for delivering it safely; for I should otherwise never be able to look my cousin in the face," he answered.

After an early dinner the admiral dismissed them. Higson wished to get several things in Kingston before they returned on board; he had also to deliver over the brig to the agent, who had to find a fresh crew in lieu of the men-of-war's men, and some of the others who volunteered for the frigate. It was thus past midnight when they got on board.

Higson received the hearty congratulation of his old messmates as well as those of the midshipmen whose berth he was leaving.

"Pardon me, Mr Higson, I'm right glad that you've got this step," exclaimed Dick Needham, "you deserve it, that you do; though it's not always those who are most deserving that gets their due."

By daybreak next morning the *Plantagenet* and *Tudor* sailed with the land breeze for the southward. About the usual length of time was occupied in the run across the Caribbean Sea to Carthagena. The *Plantagenet* hove-to outside, while Captain Hemming went on board the *Tudor*, which stood into the harbour. There lay the little *Supplejack*, like a bull-dog watching his charge, with Long Tom still pointed at her prize, while her young commander, ever vigilant, walked her deck.

Very great, as may be supposed, was his delight when he saw the corvette glide up to an anchorage, and when Captain Hemming came on board.

"Since the *Sarah Jane* sailed, I have not once set foot on shore," said Murray, after the first greetings were over; "I acted, as I thought, for the best, and I hope that the admiral was not inclined to find fault with me for what I have done."

"Find fault with you! On the contrary, my dear fellow, he is delighted," answered Captain Hemming. "He also told me in confidence that you may depend on your promotion. By the bye, your young relative Gordon is the bearer of a despatch which will give you further information. I'll leave you to read it while I have a talk with the consul who, I see, has just come off."

The despatch which Archy delivered to his cousin need not be made public, though it afforded him intense satisfaction.

The consul, after a brief conversation with Captain Hemming, returned on shore to communicate with General Carmona. It was reported on board that the general had offered, as he could not restore the British subjects he had shot to life, to give up an equal number of natives to be dealt with in the same manner, should the English commander be so disposed.

Although he talked a little big about being compelled to give up the two merchant vessels which had been legally captured, he was glad enough to drop the subject on condition that his corvette and schooners were restored to him, while he promised in future never to shoot, hang, or imprison any British subject without a legal trial; thus the matter being settled, "Long Tom" was once more housed, and the *Supplejack* sailed out of the harbour.

Murray, not supposing that anything of consequence was likely to take place, was much disappointed when, instead of proceeding to Jamaica, he was ordered to join the other ships on their way to Nicaragua.

Both the three lieutenants and the three midshipmen, though on the same service, were now separated, Gordon having remained on board the frigate, Desmond having joined the corvette, while Tom continued with his brother.

Various were the surmises as to the sort of service in which they were to be engaged. All they knew was that the President of an insignificant republic having ventured to "beard the English," he was to be punished accordingly, and brought to reason. How this was to be done was the question, as the ships could not get near enough to the shore to batter down any of his towns.

Captain Hemming had, however, received sufficient information regarding the interior of the country to be enabled to form his plans.

The ships having reached the neighbourhood of Bluefields on the Mosquito shore, a pilot-vessel from one of the numerous keys situated off that dangerous coast came out. The pilot being taken on board, they proceeded with the

lead going, to the anchorage off the town, which is situated on the border of a wide extending plain, out of which several volcanoes could be seen continually puffing forth smoke.

The British consul at once came on board, and expressed his satisfaction at their arrival.

“There will be some work for you to do, Captain Hemming,” he observed. “A certain Colonel Salas, belonging to the precious Republic of Nicaragua, who is at the head of a band of ruffians, has carried off two persons from San Juan, falsely accused of breaking the laws of the country, and he has, besides, offered numerous other insults to the British flag.”

A short time only was spent in making the necessary preparations, the consul, Mr Wilmot, being a man of action, was eager himself to proceed with the expedition, accompanied by a spirited young man, Mr Halliday, who also begged leave to join the party. They offered the use of their own boat, manned by natives, which was at once accepted.

The following morning the vessels got under weigh, and proceeded towards the mouth of the San Juan river. Bluefields, it should be understood, is one of the chief towns belonging to the dark-skinned monarchs of the Mosquito shore, and Graytown, at the entrance of the last-mentioned river, is the capital.

At noon-time the following day the expedition arrived off that not over-delightful spot. It contains about 2000 inhabitants, and is situated on perfectly level ground, so completely closed in by impassable forests or water, that a walk in any direction is impossible, unless along the sea-beach. The inhabitants consist of a few Englishmen, and a greater number of Germans and Americans, employed in the engrossing work of dollar-getting.

The grog-shops, however, drive a most flourishing trade. But few natives live in the town, and from the colour of those seen paddling about in their canoes, it is evident that they are a mixture of the mulatto and Indian. They came alongside the ships, eager to dispose of the turtle which they are chiefly engaged in catching, and to sell a few eggs and chickens.

They were merry fellows, most of them speaking English; as they were ready to take any price offered, they soon got rid of their merchandise. The Consul advised Captain Hemming to be prepared for hostilities, and as he was too wise an officer to despise a foe, he ordered all the boats of the squadron to be got ready for the expedition. No one was allowed to go on shore; indeed, scarcely a place on the face of the globe can have fewer attractions than Graytown.

The seamen were busily employed in sharpening cutlasses and examining their pistols, and the soldiers in furbishing up their arms ready for active service.

Not a breath of wind stirred the glass-like surface of the water; the sun came down with intense heat, making the pitch in the seams of the decks bubble and squeak, so Paddy Desmond declared; even those most inured to tropical suns felt the heat, which even the awnings stretched over the quarterdeck could scarcely mitigate. Poor Captain Babbicome was seen pacing up and down with a large bandanna in his hand, puffing and blowing, and wiping the perspiration from his brow. He received but little consolation when he heard Terence remark that it would be hotter still up the river.

“Oh, dear! oh, dear! what shall I do?” he exclaimed; “if this continues I shall be reduced to a skeleton.”

The doctor strongly advised him to remain on board. “A sunstroke would finish you, sir,” he observed, “and you would be a loss to the service.”

Still Commander Babbicome was too brave a man to give in willingly. Even when Captain Hemming directed him to remain in charge of the squadron during his absence, he begged to be allowed, should he feel better, to proceed up the river.

“Act as you think best. Should you recover sufficiently to stand the fatigue, of course I shall be glad to have your assistance,” answered his superior officer.

Murray, in the meantime, took his place as second in command. Twelve boats were prepared for the expedition, consisting of the ships’ launches and barges, the consul’s boat, a spare pinnace, and the captains’ gigs.

The next morning at daybreak the boats shoved off from the ships’ sides, saluted with loud cheers by those who remained on board. Captain Hemming and Murray went in their respective gigs, and Jack, who had command of the pinnace, took Tom with him, while Desmond accompanied Adair in one of the barges; the soldiers and the marines were distributed among the boats. The whole, including officers, bluejackets and soldiers, mustered upwards of 250 men. The two gigs, accompanied by the consul’s boat, went ahead. They had not proceeded far before they felt the strength of the current, for although the river was wide it was shallow, and so great was the mass of water coming down that it ran with the rapidity of a mill-stream. The men had to bend to their oars with might and main, and even then, the heavier boats in several places scarcely seemed, at times, to go ahead. Though the sun struck down with intense heat, the gallant bluejackets took no notice of it, nor relaxed their efforts, but hour after hour pulled on, encouraged by their officers. In some places, the water was so shallow that the boats could with difficulty move along, and frequently they had to shove off till another channel was found; undaunted, however, they laboured on till midday, when they landed at the most convenient spot to be found on the banks of the river to dine and recruit their exhausted strength.

An hour only was allowed for rest, and once more they embarked and toiled on as before.

The forest on both sides of the river came close down to the water’s edge, the lofty trees towering high above their heads, shutting out everything behind. Here and there a few clearings were seen, with huts and other buildings, tenanted by settlers, and now and then a native in his light canoe paddled by, but few inhabitants were seen; the

views as they proceeded consisted chiefly of the tumbling waters and the forests as the hand of nature had left them. At length night approached; the captain gave the order to land, and the hardy crews, their strength taxed to the uttermost, pulled in quickly to a somewhat more open spot than was usually seen on the banks, where they might find room to bivouac for the night.

The boats were made fast, and all hands leaped on shore and began with their axes to cut away the underwood. A space sufficient for their object was soon cleared. The campfires were lighted, pots and pans brought on shore, and the men, told off to act as cooks, set to work to boil the coffee and cocoa and warm up the messes of turtle which had been prepared.

The only spots where they could rest with anything like comfort was round the fires, the thick clouds of smoke rising from which helped to keep off the myriads of mosquitoes which forthwith commenced an onslaught on them. The officers assembled in the neighbourhood of one of the fires, while the soldiers and sailors gathered round the others.

A person ignorant of the cause might have supposed that every man of the party had been seized with Saint Vitus' dance—not a man could retain his seat or keep his hands quiet for a moment, for while he tried with one hand to get his food or a cup to his mouth, the other was employed in slapping right and left, now at his cheek, now at his other hand or at his feet, in vain endeavours to destroy his persevering foes; for the instant a wreath of smoke blew to one side, a whole host of ferocious insects darted forward to assail their victims on the other. Cigars and pipes were quickly lighted, in the hopes of driving off the pests, but in vain; the fumes of tobacco had but little effect, for if a puff drove them off a man's nose, in an instant they attacked some other part of his body.

In spite of this inconvenience, Murray had again to give the account of his recent exploit, while the midshipmen recounted for the twentieth time their adventures and imprisonment in Carthage.

No sooner had night closed down on the camp than cries of all descriptions came forth from the forest—the croaking of frogs, the chirping of crickets, the howling of monkeys, mingled with strange groans and shrieks, which made the seamen draw closer together, some, even among the stoutest-hearted, declaring that without doubt the place was haunted, while many a brave tar cast a glance over his shoulder, expecting to see some fierce creature stalk out from among the trees. At last Captain Hemming gave the order for all hands to turn in, with such shelter as they had provided, and to get some sleep to prepare themselves for the work of the next day. Some went on board the boats, hoping to be free of the bites of the mosquitoes, though hopeless were their efforts to escape from their tormentors.

The three lieutenants seated themselves side by side, while their young relatives, the three midshipmen, had collected not far off.

“Well, I suppose we must go to sleep,” said Tom Rogers, stretching himself out. He had rolled up his flushing coat to serve as a pillow, and prepared to enjoy as much comfort as circumstances would allow.

“Faith, we have music at all events to lull us to sleep,” exclaimed Gerald Desmond; “but I wish those beasts would put a stopper to their singing, though!”

“They may sing as long as they like, provided they don't bite,” remarked Gordon, following his companions' example.

In a short time the whole camp was at rest, with the exception of the few sentries, the only sounds being the mysterious ones which came at intervals from the forest, and the loud snoring of some of the soldiers and seamen. The fires still kept blazing, casting a lurid glare over the foaming waters as they rushed past, on the tall trees of the dark forest on the other side, and on the figures of the officers and men stretched in various attitudes on the ground.

Tom Rogers suddenly awoke; a mosquito had fixed its sharp proboscis in his nose. He had dreamed that a serpent had got hold of it. Starting up, he saw, between the trees near which he and his companions lay, a pair of bright eyes glaring at him. They were contained in the head of a creature which appeared crouching down, as if about to make a spring towards him. He knew it at once to be a puma, the so-called lion of South America. Leaping to his feet, he shouted to his companions to be on their guard; the next instant it seemed that the animal would be upon them. His voice awoke the lieutenants and the other officers who had been sleeping near at hand, and quickly brought a sentry to the spot. The man, catching sight of the puma, fired his musket; the report, of course, aroused the whole camp. “A lion! a lion!” shouted several voices, and in an instant the greater part of the bluejackets were in hot chase after the animal, which, of course, rapidly bounded away far out of sight.

They would have quickly lost themselves in the forest had not the captain and officers called them back, and ordered them to lie down and go to sleep again. The sentries were, in consequence of the visit they had received, doubled and cautioned to keep a better lookout, not only for human foes, but for any of the savage denizens of the forest which might attempt to pay them another visit. At early dawn the camp was again astir, and as Tom and the other midshipmen opened their eyes, they saw grinning at them from among the branches a number of little hairy faces chattering and grinning. They belonged to troops of monkeys who had come, attracted by curiosity, to look at the strangers invading their domains. As soon, however, as the men began to move about they took fright and scrambled off to a safer distance. Just then loud caws were heard, and several flights of magnificent-coloured macaws flew across the stream. Cocoa and other beverages having been served out and rapidly swallowed, the party embarked, and once more the toils of the day began. It was harder work than ever. The boats had frequently to pass right up rapids and among rocks and sandbanks; thus it was only by the greatest exertion that the heavier boats could be forced along.

Except that the toil was greater and the heat more intense, there was but little variation from the events of the preceding day. Whenever they neared the banks troops of monkeys appeared in the branches of the lofty trees, chattering and shaking their heads, or screaming in anger at this invasion of their territory; flights of macaws and other birds of gorgeous plumage flew overhead, generally in pairs; and here and there, perched on the lower branches, were seen huge white ducks, which nodded their heads and gabbled as the boats passed slowly by them.

Among the monkeys, of which various species were seen, were several little Congo apes, who, in their anger, attempted to roar like lions, affording infinite amusement to the crews.

"I say, Paddy," cried Tom Rogers to Desmond, their boats being at that time close to each other, "we must catch one of those fellows; he would make a good playmate to Spider. I suspect that old Scrofton will declare that he is embryo lion. I wonder how many thousand years it will take before he will turn into one?"

"Nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine, young gentlemen!" cried the boatswain, who was in charge of one of the launches with troops, and, being at the time close astern, overheard the question. "In my opinion, howsomedever, it doesn't take half that time for a spider-tail to turn into a powder-monkey; but I'll see what my book says about it when we get back to the ship."

There was, of course, a general laugh among the boats' crews. Jack did not think it necessary to interfere, though he suspected that had they not been on duty the boatswain would have used the word "midshipman" in lieu of "powder-monkey."

Every now and then the boats grated against a snag, which reminded them of the danger which they would have to encounter when returning. The rocks and snags could not, as they were then steering, do them much injury, but it would be a very different matter when coming down.

Even the gigs' crews found it trying work at best. Sometimes it appeared as if it would be impossible to get up the heavier boats unless they could be warped; still by the determination and perseverance of the crews all difficulties were overcome, and after an hour's rest for dinner, under the shade of the trees, they pulled on again much in the same fashion till near nightfall. They then landed at a deserted clearing, and congratulated themselves at finding a place so well suited for their encampment. As they were getting nearer the territory of the enemy sentries were placed at the edge of the forest, and cautioned to be vigilant to prevent a surprise.

Jack and Terence, who had landed with their fowling-pieces, were fortunate in shooting a capybara, a rodent animal as large as a middling-sized pig. Soon afterwards they knocked over a couple of little peccaries, which furnished a welcome addition to the supper to all hands. The officers and men collected as before round their respective fires; the mosquitoes were somewhat less troublesome, or perhaps the people were more inured to their attacks. It was, however, necessary to sit within the limits of the clouds of smoke to enjoy any comfort.

Songs were sung, stories told, and all hands were apparently enjoying themselves. Mr Wilmot made himself very agreeable, and his companion became a great favourite, from his fund of humour and his frank and unassuming manners.

"Do you really think that this colonel and his men will give us anything to do?" asked Jack of Mr Wilmot.

"The fellows are ferocious enough when they fight among themselves, and brave as such fellows generally are, though, they would not venture to resist us with double our forces if they were on equal terms, but if they thought that they could take us at an advantage, they would probably hold out and afford us some trouble," answered the consul.

"I some time ago visited the fort of Serapaqui, in which the colonel and his troops are posted, and it is a remarkably strong place, standing on a point of land about fifty feet in height, which projects directly into the river, while behind the fort is a dense forest, which completely defends the rear. In front is an abattis formed of large trees, with their trunks fixed in the ground, and their branches projecting into the river, so that it would be impossible for boats to reach the bank, or for men to land exposed to fire. The defences of the fort consist of six angular stockaded entrenchments, formed of exceedingly hard wood. They are eight feet high, and four feet thick; one side of each stockade looking towards the river, and the other down the reach. The only landing-place is commanded by the principal stockade, and guns have also been placed on it. This landing-place you will understand is above the stockades, and as the current there runs nearly five knots an hour, we shall have to pass the stockades, exposed all the time to the fire from the batteries, before we can descend to the landing-place. The reach, at the head of which the fort is situated, is about a mile and a half long, while the forest comes down on either side, close to the water, and affords an almost impenetrable shelter to a concealed foe. I tell you this that you may know what we have to encounter, but at the same time I am sure that the gallantry of British officers and men will overcome difficulties of far greater magnitude. Why I wished to accompany you was that I might render all the services in my power."

Captain Hemming thanked the consul for his bold determination, adding, "I trust that we shall not disappoint you, Mr Wilmot, and that you will live to share such laurels as we may gain."

"I hope so too, captain, but I do not shut my eyes to the dangers which we may have to meet," was the answer.

"That consul is a brave fellow," whispered Tom to Archy; "I look upon those as the bravest who know the full extent of the danger they may have to encounter, and with calm determination go into it."

Mr Wilmot had an awning rigged to his boat, and had brought mattresses and pillows, so that he and his friend made it their sleeping-place. The other boats contained also a few occupants, but the larger number of the party preferred sleeping on shore, where they could stretch their limbs, they having discovered that the mosquitoes annoyed them as much on board the boats as on the banks of the river.

Tom and his companions had noticed a mound of no great height, at a little distance from their camp fire, and they agreed that the ground at its base would afford them a comfortable sleeping-place. As soon, therefore, as the order was given to cease talking and singing, and go to sleep, they carried their coats and blankets to the spot, and rolled themselves up, expecting to pass a quiet night.

As they could not be overheard they talked on for some time, as midshipmen are accustomed to do under similar circumstances, then first one and then the other began to feel drowsy, and lying down forgot all sublunary matters.

Tom had not, however, been long asleep before he dreamed that he was attacked by a host of stag-beetles, assailing every part of his body, and that though he slashed at them with his cutlass they came on in greater numbers than ever, till he felt ready to turn tail and bolt. Suddenly he awoke, and finding that the sensation he had experienced in his dreams were a dreadful reality, began to jump and beat himself furiously. His companions, just then, started up from the same cause, and also began jumping, twisting, turning, and striking their bodies and legs with their hands as if they had gone mad.

"I'll be eaten up entirely if I don't get rid of these beasts," exclaimed Paddy Desmond, jumping and beating himself more violently than before.

Their cries awoke their nearest neighbours, while the sentries rushed forward, expecting to find that a band of Indians had secretly introduced themselves into the camp.

Jack and Terence were really alarmed, believing that the youngsters had been bitten by a snake, or attacked by another puma. Nothing, however, could be found on them till some brands brought from the fire threw a light on the subject, when it was discovered that they had chosen the neighbourhood of a nest of ants, of a species addicted to nocturnal rambles.

When they first lay down the ants were quiet in their abode, and remained so till their usual time for sallying forth in search of prey.

The first objects they had met with were the bodies of the three midshipmen, on whom they would have undoubtedly feasted till they had consumed them to their bones, had not their sharp pincers aroused their victims.

The midshipmen found it no easy job to rid themselves of the fearful little pests, even with the assistance of their friends, and they had literally to strip off their clothes, and capture each creature singly, and throw it into the fire, before they were got rid of.

One of the surgeons, taking compassion on them, produced some ointment, which allayed the irritation from which they were suffering.

They were not the only people whom the ants had attacked, and complaints, piteous and loud, came from all parts of the camp, of the attacks made by the fiery little pests. Many of the men, however, appeared bite proof, and only growled and swore at having their slumbers disturbed.

"We have, however, learnt a lesson, and I vote that in future we look out for ants' nests, before settling on our camping-ground," observed Archy Gordon, with his usual gravity, as they once more lay down on the other side of the fire, at a respectful distance from their former resting-place.

"I'd sooner face an electric eel, or a boa-constrictor, than an army of those diabolical little pests," exclaimed Desmond, who had suffered even more than his companions; "you may tackle them, but I defy any one except perhaps Spider, to defeat their attacks, and he would have to keep his paws pretty active to catch them."

"I wish that we had him with us," groaned Tom; "I am still itching and smarting all over, and they are at me again, I am sure of it."

"A big ant-eater would help us more effectually," observed Gordon. "He is a curious creature, with a thick bushy tail and a pointed snout, in which he has a long tongue, to enable him to lick up an army of ants and swallow them down at a gulp."

"I wonder that the ants are such fools as to come out of their castles, then," remarked Desmond.

"The ant-eater does not wait for them to do that, for he has got powerful claws with which he pulls down their castles, and when they come out to repair the breaches, he sticks out his tongue and captures a whole army at once," answered Gordon.

"Faith, then, I wish that we could have a few such creatures to inspect our camp in future before we lie down to rest," said Desmond.

"Silence there, you youngsters," cried an officer; "if you can't go to sleep, take a round turn of your tongues."

The hint was not neglected, and notwithstanding the irritation they were suffering, the midshipmen were very soon snoozing away as soundly as any one.

Every night similar scenes occurred; and during the day, except when stopping for dinner, the boats' crews pulled on with as much vigour and resolution as at first.

At length, after a pull of not less than seventy-two hours, the boats' crews had the satisfaction of hearing that they were only two or three miles from the fort in which the Nicaraguan forces were posted.

A somewhat limited space only could be found on the shore for their encampment, so that a greater number than usual took up their quarters in the boats.

As may be supposed, a careful search was made for ants' nests, rattle-snakes' holes, and the abodes of any other creatures likely to disturb them. A larger number of sentries than usual were also posted round the camp and

directed to keep a vigilant watch, while one of the gigs under charge of Higson, with Needham as coxswain, was sent on some way ahead to keep a lookout for the enemy, should they take it into their heads to descend the stream, and make a night attack on the camp.

A pleasant supper was made on shore, though singing and loud talking were forbidden, lest any stragglers from the fort might hear them and give notice of their approach. The thick forest, however, effectually screened their fires, and the smoke could not be seen at night.

Mr Wilmot spoke hopefully of the work before them. He had little doubt that the Nicaraguan commander would yield immediately he saw the force brought against him, though he probably at present did not believe that such heavy boats as theirs could be forced up the stream. Mr Halliday was more silent than was his wont. Some of his friends inquired what was the matter. "I have felt the heat very great during the day," he answered; "but I dare say that when our work is accomplished, and we are pulling down the stream, I shall recover my spirits."

Mr Wilmot had kindly invited the three midshipmen to take up their quarters on board his boat, having fitted up a place amidships for them; here, at all events, they might be free from the ants; and as to the mosquitoes, they were nearly inured to them.

At an earlier hour than usual all hands not on the watch went to sleep, with the exception of those in Mr Wilmot's boat. He and his friend sat up some time talking together, but what they said neither Tom nor his companions could hear, as they themselves were soon lulled to sleep by the loud rushing of the strong current which swept by the boat.

Tom was suddenly awakened by a loud cry and an exclamation from Mr Wilmot, "Where is Halliday?" and the next instant he exclaimed, "Good heavens! he is overboard! I must save him!" and before he could have had time for thought, he himself plunged into the boiling waters, and swam towards his friend, who was being carried rapidly down by the current. The midshipmen being aroused, Tom, who saw what had happened, was about to plunge into the stream to try and assist the consul, when Gordon, more prudent, held him back, exclaiming, "You will be drowned, my dear fellow, if you do." Tom had happily thus more time than Mr Wilmot had taken, to reflect on the fearful danger he would run. Their cries awoke Captain Hemming, who, immediately arousing his men, slipped his cable and pulled down the river, in the hope of rescuing his drowning friends.

The whole camp and those in the boats were now awake, and on learning what had happened looked anxiously out for the return of the captain's gig, the only hope being that he might discover and pick up the two gentlemen before the waters had overwhelmed them.

The time went by, and every one felt that their gallant leader and his crew were running great danger in venturing down the stream at night. Several of the officers indeed expressed their fears that his boat might strike against a snag, or be dashed on the rocks, and all on board lose their lives. Among those on shore several endeavoured to make their way along the bank, but were soon stopped by the impenetrable jungle, and compelled to return. No other boat could venture to slip her moorings. Adair had command of the sternmost one of the squadron. His old shipmate, Ben Snatchblock, who was with him, roused by the shouts of those ahead, as he sprung up caught sight of a person rapidly carried astern of the boat. "I'll try and save him whoever he is," he exclaimed; and before Adair could warn him of his danger, he plunged overboard into the boiling water. Though a powerful man and a bold swimmer, he in vain attempted to overtake the person he had seen passing and struggling for life. Whoever it might be it was the same to him. On he went, and just as he fancied that he was about to succeed, the person he had gone to save sank, drawn down by an eddy, which very nearly sucked him also into its vortex. "He's gone, poor fellow, be's gone!" his voice was heard exclaiming, though he could not be seen.

Directly afterwards the captain's gig passed Adair's boat. She was also soon lost to sight. Adair hailed and told them to look out for Ben; but whether or no they had succeeded in picking up the gallant fellow he could not tell, and with the rest was long left in doubt as to what had happened.

The accident had caused all caution to be forgotten, and Murray and the other officers expected that their cries and shouts must have been heard by any scouts which might have been sent out from the fort. He therefore warned the sentries to be on the alert, and ordered the men to keep their arms ready for immediate action.

The unaccountable and sad accident threw a gloom over the spirits both of officers and men, and but few went again to sleep during the remainder of the night. The next day they would probably be engaged with the enemy, and who could tell whose fate it might be to fall? To pass slowly up against the rapid stream with both its banks affording an almost impenetrable shelter to a concealed foe was likely to cost them many lives, and from the account they had heard of the strong position of the fort they were aware that it would give them severe work to capture. Still it was to be done, and no one doubted that it would be done, whatever might be the sacrifice. The more reflective had their minds fully occupied, and all were in a state of anxiety on account of their captain, and the persons he had risked his own safety to rescue from destruction. Adair, who heard what Ben had cried out, had little hopes that he would succeed, and was afraid also that his old shipmate had lost his life.

At dawn Murray had all hands roused up that they might get ready to start. Should the captain unfortunately have lost his life the command would devolve on him, and he resolved to do his best to secure the success of the expedition.

Chapter Sixteen.

The captain's return—Boats approach the fort—Assailed on all sides—Hot fire—Passing the fort—Archy wounded—The landing—Fort attacked—Needham hauls down the flag—Enemy put to flight—The pursuit—Fall of Commander Babbicome—Prisoners captured—Fort destroyed—Re-embark—Passage down the river—

Sail for Jamaica—Death of Commander Babbicome—Funeral—Murray promoted—Hastens to Saint David's.

Alick Murray felt the full responsibility of the duty imposed on him, but he knew that he had trustworthy supporters in Jack and Terence, and that full reliance could be placed on the military officers and on the gallant marines and soldiers of the regiment.

As soon as day broke Higson dropped down the stream to rejoin the main body. He had heard the shouts and cries, and fancying that they had been caused by the appearance of another puma or jaguar in the camp, he had not thought it his duty to quit his post. As soon as he arrived, Murray, informing him of what had happened, ordered him to proceed down the river and ascertain, if possible, what had become of the captain and the two unfortunate gentlemen who had been carried away by the current. In the meantime every preparation was made for starting. The soldiers had re-embarked, the expedition was about to proceed, when two boats were seen rounding a point some way down the river. The seamen cheered heartily when they discovered that their captain's gig was taking the lead: she having at length got near, Terence, who was looking out, with great satisfaction saw that his old shipmate, Ben Snatchblock was on board; as the gig came up alongside he inquired for the consul and his friend.

"They are lost," answered the captain, "not a trace could we discover of them. They must both, poor fellows, have been drowned before they had been many minutes in the water, and this brave fellow here was nearly lost also in his attempt to save them. I cannot bear to think of their sad fate, while we shall much miss their assistance. We have, however, an unexpected addition to our force. I had gone some way down when I saw a fire on the shore, and putting in, found Commander Babbicome and his boat's crew encamped, he having recovered sufficiently to enable him to come up and join us."

"How was Snatchblock saved?" asked Terence.

"By catching hold of a big tree which rose out of the water when I was pretty nigh done for," answered Ben. "Thanks also to Commander Babbicome and his boat's crew, who hearing my shouts came and took me off."

The corvette's gig, with her perspiring commander (as Terence called him), soon afterwards came up. He was full of fight and valour, and burning with eagerness, as he said, to have a brush with the enemy. He looked but little able to undergo any exertion, and Captain Hemming, who thought him unfit for the work, regretted that he had joined the expedition, though he complimented him on his zeal and determination.

"I couldn't bear the thought of being left behind, and though I knew that I should be reduced to a pancake, and bitten into one mass of blisters, I determined to follow you," he answered, "but it has been trying work, I can assure you. I have lost three stone already, so Dick Spurling, my coxswain, who is a good judge of weight, declares, and I have made him hoist me up on his back every morning to try. And then those abominably greedy mosquitoes! I should have thought after feasting on the hides of two hundred fellows or more, they might have had the conscience to let me alone, the gluttons! I had to tell the men off into watches to wave branches over me at night, or there wouldn't have been an ounce of blood left in the morning, even if they hadn't carried me off bodily, and really, considering the size of their wings and the strength of their proboscises, I thought that more than probable. Now after all I have gone through, I only hope that the enemy will hold out and give us something to do."

As Captain Hemming was unwilling to displace Murray, he directed the sorely-tried commander to take charge of the heavier boats, while he and the lieutenant proceeded on ahead with the lighter ones, to endeavour, before commencing hostilities, to try and settle matters by pacific measures. The order was now given to move ahead.

"Faith, it's easy enough to say that same," exclaimed Adair, "but it's much harder to do it. However, give way, my lads; we shall see the noses of the Dons before long, if they stop to show them, and if not, we shall chance to get sight of their coat-tails."

A hearty laugh from his boat's crew, as they bent lustily to their oars, followed this sally.

As the crews of the heavier boats laboured with all their strength they made good way, and for some time kept the two light gigs in sight. They now entered a reach of a mile and a half in length, at the head of which, according to the consul's description, the fort would be found.

The captain and Murray pulled on for some distance, though the mist which still hung over the river hid them from sight of the fort. Not a breath of air stirred the leaves of the forest; the monkeys, as before, chattered among the branches, and bright-coloured macaws flew screaming overhead. At length, far in the distance, on the summit of a bold point projecting into the river, the stockade they might have to attack came into sight.

The rays of the rising sun shining on the fort brought it into bold relief against the dark woods, and above the deep shadows cast across the stream.

No flag waved over it, and no sign of life appeared, not a canoe floated on the water, no sound was heard. Captain Hemming thought that had he not wished first to try pacific measures, he might have managed to surprise its garrison without resistance, but, like many another gallant man, he had no wish to fight if it could be avoided, and he only hoped to induce the Nicaraguans to yield without being compelled to resort to force.

The gigs proceeded but slowly as the current here ran even faster than in any part of the river. Still no notice was taken of the boats, and Murray, who shared his captain's sentiments, had begun really to think that the matter would be settled without bloodshed, when two wreaths of smoke issued from the stockades, and a couple of shots whistled near them. At the same moment up went the flag of the Nicaraguan republic, and the next instant volleys of musketry came rattling by them from either side of the river.

"Colonel Salas evidently does not intend to receive us as friends," observed Captain Hemming. "Order up the other

boats, Murray, the sooner we give him and his followers the lesson they require the better. We will at once make a dash at the fort; it will not do to stop here and be shot down like dogs."

As Dick Needham saw the flag run up he exclaimed—

"We'll have that bit of bunting down before long, lads, and it won't be my fault if I don't get hold of the halliards."

The crews cheered and pulled on with renewed vigour. Their strength, however, was taxed to the utmost, for the banks of the river closing in at this point, the water rushed down like a mill-stream, and at times the boats remained almost stationary. It was no easy task to urge even the light boats ahead. Though showers of shot came rattling about them from numerous concealed foes on either side, it would have been useless to return their fire, for not an enemy showed himself.

The marines and soldiers, however, got their muskets ready to pick off any more adventurous foes who might for an instant appear among the trees, but the enemy were too well accustomed to this sort of warfare to expose themselves, and kept well under cover. It was trying in the extreme, but their gallant leader had resolved not to be defeated in his object, and all hands willingly followed him. He and Murray took the lead in their respective gigs. Jack Rogers, with his brother Tom in the pinnace, which carried the lieutenant of the marines and a party of his men, were close astern. The frigate's and corvette's barges, with a detachment of the regiment and their captain, were not far off; the other boats were making the best of their way, but found it impossible to keep up with the lighter-built ones. Considering the showers of bullets which kept whizzing by them, it seemed wonderful that as yet no one had been wounded. They were not allowed, however, to proceed much farther with impunity. The boats had been repeatedly hit, and some of the oars had almost been cut in two. As the headmost boats neared the fort the fire became hotter.

The bowman of the pinnace was seen to relax his efforts, but still he pulled on, a red stream issuing from his breast showed that he had been hit; presently the oar slipped from his hands, and he sank down into the bottom of the boat. A marine immediately took his place. Directly afterwards another man was hit. Not a groan escaped him. Grasping his oar he attempted to make another stroke, but his eyes gazed wildly, blood issued from his mouth, the oar escaped from his hands, and he fell back on the thwart a lifeless corpse. Another man sprang to his place and with little ceremony, shoving the body aside, pulled lustily away. The crews of the other boats were treated in the same manner. Nothing daunted, other men took the places of those who were wounded; the gigs offering a smaller mark were less frequently hit, but the white splinters which flew from their gunwales and oars showed that the bullets of the enemy had found them out; one of the captain's crew was hit, and directly afterwards Murray had another man hurt. It was a severe trial for the courage and patience of all, for eager as they were to get at the foe, they could do nothing but sit still and be fired at.

Short as the distance was, an hour passed by before they reached the fort. At length the leading gigs got up to it. As they did so the river appeared to decrease in width, while the stream, consequently, ran still faster, and the fire became even hotter than before. The gigs and pinnace, which kept well up with them, had now got close to the fort, the stockades rising on the projecting point, high above their heads. The marines, in the last-mentioned boat, took aim at any of the enemy who were seen for a moment on the fortifications, while the soldiers in the other boats did their best to clear the banks of their persevering foes. Still, however, they were exposed to a galling fire from all directions; from foes on the starboard hand, and other concealed enemies on the bows and quarter. Several more men were hit, but as long as they could pull a stroke they refused to quit their oars. The boats were almost riddled with shot; the gigs were struck several times between wind and water, the holes being filled up with handkerchiefs, or whatever first came to hand. Archy Gordon was employed in stopping one with his handkerchief, when Murray, to his dismay, saw him fall forward; steering with one hand he lifted the lad up with the other.

"Don't mind me," said Archy, in a faint voice, looking very pale; "a sharp blow made me topple over, but I don't think that I am much hurt."

"I trust not, my boy; but we will get a doctor to look to you as soon as possible," answered Murray, placing him into the stern sheets by his side, so as to cover him as much as possible. Again and again the boats were hit, and half the oars were cut through. Some breaking off, others were immediately got out to supply their places.

The boats all this time were slowly working their way along against the stream. This was the most trying part of the whole voyage. Upwards of an hour they had been under fire, and for nearly forty minutes more they were passing the stockades exposed to it. At length the extreme point was neared; this they had to round, and then to pull some distance up the river, so as to be able to descend rapidly to the landing-place, which was on the other side of the point. The crews renewed their efforts, and the remainder of the flotilla now appeared, coming slowly up. As the leading gig at length rounded the point, her crew uttered a cheer; and as the river became wider, and the current ran with less force, they were able to make better way, and soon getting beyond the fire of the fort, they were exposed only occasionally to a shot from some of the more persevering of the enemy who had made their way along the banks.

Murray was thankful when he could at length examine poor Archy's wound. The lad had fainted from loss of blood; the bullet, it appeared, had lodged in his side. McTavish, the assistant-surgeon, was fortunately in the pinnace, and when she came up he took the midshipman under his charge, as well as several other poor fellows severely wounded. Tom held him in his arms while the doctor probed his wound, and at length succeeded in extracting the bullet.

"He'll not die, I hope," said Tom, feeling very sick and sad.

"Not this time, I trust. He has a good constitution, and that's everything in his favour," answered McTavish.

There was no time, however, for sorrow or sentiment.

Most of the boats had now got up, and Captain Hemming not waiting for the rearmost ones, which he calculated would arrive in time to land the men after the first part had gained a footing on the banks, gave the order to attack.

With true British cheers the crews gave way, and the stream now being in their favour, the boats, still exposed to a warm fire, rapidly approached the landing-place.

In front of them was the principal stockade, guarding the landing-place, a gun on which opened fire. As the boats kept in line it did no damage, for missing one it missed all. Pulling quickly on, the leading boats of the flotilla soon reached the landing-place, when the captain, with Jack and Terence, were the first to leap on shore. Tom and Gerald, with Needham, came close behind them. The marines, led by their tall commander, followed, and formed quickly up. The bluejackets and soldiers immediately afterwards landed, and the captain, with his companions, again giving forth hearty cheers, rushed towards the stockade in which the gun was posted. The Nicaraguans, dark, stalwart fellows, stood their ground bravely, till they saw the cutlasses of the seamen waving about their heads, and the bayonets of the soldiers pointed at their breasts, when a well-directed volley of musketry laid many low, and as the seamen climbed over the stockade, the survivors abandoning their gun, fled for shelter within the fort. Here, rallied by their officers, they made another stand, but the English sailors, rushing forward, were soon climbing over the defences in spite of the showers of bullets which were flying past them.

The bluejackets and redcoats vied with each other as to who should be first over, and as they sprang down into the fort, the former began slashing and hewing away with their cutlasses, while the latter, forming as they got over, brought their weapons to the charge, and dashed forward against the main body of the enemy, who stood their ground.

Needham had not forgotten his resolve to haul down the Nicaraguan flag. Accompanied by the midshipmen and several men, having seen that it was flying at the further angle of the fort, he made a dash towards it. A dozen or twenty of the enemy, led by an officer, seeing him coming, and guessing his object, threw themselves in his way to cut him off. With a cheer, he and his companions dashed forward to the attack. The enemy withstood them for a few seconds, but a small party of marines made so vigorous a charge that they took to flight. Others of the garrison had, however, rallied in the neighbourhood of the flagstaff.

Still the dauntless seamen dashed on, and so well used their cutlasses that they forced their way through them, and Dick, with a loud shout, sprang up to the flagstaff. In another moment he had the halliards in his hand, and down came the Nicaraguan colours. Having tucked them under his arm, he again, with cutlass in hand, made a rush at the enemy. The fight, in the meantime, had been raging in all parts of the fort. Its issue was never for a moment doubtful, though the enemy, mustering nearly 200 strong, showed a bold front; but they could not withstand the charge now made by the gallant soldiers and bluejackets. Turning tail, off they scampered as fast as their legs could carry them, through the outlets in the rear of the fort.

"On lads! on!" was the cry, and after them dashed the whole body of their assailants uttering a ringing cheer which tended to increase the rapidity of their flight. Jack and Terence, and the other officers led the sailors. Captain Babbicome, though undoubtedly not as active as the rest, had managed to scramble into the fort, and now puffing and blowing was well in advance.

As soon as they gained the shelter of the wood, many of the fugitives turned and fired, but again fled as their pursuers came up with them. Tom and Gerald having assisted to capture the flag were somewhat behind the rest. As they ran on they saw the obese, though gallant, commander just before them, flourishing his sword and shouting, "On, lads, on! Tally ho! tally ho! We'll have their brushes before long. Make mincemeat of the rascals! Tally ho, boys tally ho!"

His voice grew hoarser and hoarser. Some of the fugitives stopped, turned round, and fired. Suddenly, down he went on his face, his sword flying out of his hand.

"There's old Babbicome knocked over," cried Tom and Gerald in the same breath.

Though they would have preferred seeing the end of the "fun," as they called it, they felt that it was their duty to stop and assist him. Having summoned some of the men near them to their aid, they lifted him up, but no wound could they discover.

"I'm done for," he groaned out.

"Where are you hit, sir?" asked Tom.

"Nowhere that I know of, but I'm shaken to death. Running doesn't suit my constitution. Carry me back to my boat."

His groans and sighs showed that he was much hurt. His own men coming up obeyed his orders, and Tom and his companions continued the pursuit.

A Nicaraguan officer and several men had already been taken prisoners and sent down to the landing-place. Every now and then the pursuers caught sight of the enemy among the trees, who, as soon as they saw them coming, again darted off, easily finding concealment in the dense forest.

"I wish that Archy was here," cried Gerald, "he would have enjoyed the fun."

Needham, with several other sailors, were with the midshipmen. Just then they caught sight of a person trying to conceal himself behind a tree. By his uniform they knew that he was an officer.

"We must have that fellow," cried Tom, dashing forward.

The officer, who had a sword in his hand, made a cut at Tom, which he parried with his cutlass. The Nicaraguan then seeing several of his enemies approaching, cried out for "quarter," and presented the hilt of his sword.

"Come along," cried Tom, highly delighted, "you're my prisoner; no one shall hurt you now;" and he and Gerald, who was close at hand, grasping him by the arm, shouted to Needham and the rest to come and take charge of him.

Just at that moment the bugle echoing through the forest, sounded the "recall." The summons was heard by the fugitives with more satisfaction probably than by the pursuers. The latter obeyed it, and bluejackets, marines, and soldiers began to assemble from all directions in which the flying enemy had led them.

Few prisoners only besides the officers had been taken, for the thickness of the forest favoured the flight of the Nicaraguans. Here and there the dead body of one of them was seen, shot in the pursuit, or who had fallen down after being wounded in the fort.

The midshipmen were excessively proud of their capture, and Needham not the less so at having the Nicaraguan flag to show as a trophy. At length the greater number of the pursuers returned to the fort. The remaining stragglers, who had been led by their ardour farther than the rest, came in soon afterwards, and the whole being mustered, it was found that not a man had been killed on shore and five only wounded.

Tom and Gerald now came up to the captain with their prisoner, and received due commendation for their zeal. Needham followed with the flag, which he had kept fast under his arm, and which



he now produced in due form; the captain having heard the particulars, did not fail to promise that he should receive a reward for his bravery.

He then addressed the men, and expressed his satisfaction at the gallantry and good discipline they had displayed. "We have still some work to do, my lads, however, and the more quickly we set about it the sooner we shall get out of this broiling spot, and have our wounded men properly cared for on board ship," he said. "We have to make the place untenable for some time to come by the rascals you have so soundly thrashed."

All hands then set to work to spike the guns, to break the trunnions, and to gather together all the muskets and ammunition which the fugitives had left behind them. With many a cheer the sailors, who enjoyed the fun, then rolled the guns down the steep bank into the river. While one party was thus engaged, the other was employed in pulling up the posts of the stockades, and piling them in great heaps, with the muskets on the top. The heaps were then set on fire, and the place which a few hours before presented so formidable an appearance, was utterly destroyed.

The order was now given to embark. Murray had been directed by the captain to go over the ground and ascertain the number of the killed. Twenty dead bodies were found; several more having been seen in the forest, it was computed that twice that number had been wounded; the larger proportion of these had, however, been assisted off by their companions. Some of the prisoners proved to be boatmen, pressed into the service. Twelve of these were taken to act as pilots, a hint being given them that should they attempt to play tricks they would be forthwith shot.

The two officers looked very crestfallen. Jack had one of them in his boat, and Terence took charge of the other. They were not very attractive gentlemen, and did little else than bemoan their hard fate and smoke their cigarettes, which they assiduously employed themselves in rolling up. Jack's prisoner, for most of the time, gave vent to his ill-humour by abusing the commandant who had been the cause of their misfortune. Jack knew but little of Spanish, but still he was able to make out what was said.

"What regular daredevils you English are, nothing can stop you," cried the officer.

"You are right, my friend; trifles don't hinder us when we have an object in view; and as we were going up with purely pacific intentions, merely to inquire why your colonel had carried off two of our countrymen, it was not pleasant to find ourselves fired at by you and your people, though you might have thought it good fun. We have made you pay pretty dearly, however, old fellow, for your amusement."

"Yes, you have indeed," replied the Don; "but you have not recovered the men you came to search for."

"No; but still you are not likely to regain your liberty till you find them for us."

"Then we shall be prisoners for ever," sighed the Don.

"Why, what have become of the men?" asked Jack.

"They are 'gastados,' 'expended,'" answered the Don.

"What would you say if we were to expend you and your brother officer, by running you up to the yardarm of one of our ships?" asked Jack.

The remark made the Don shake in his shoes.

The expedition remained for the night at the spot from which they had started in the morning. The wounded were as well cared for as circumstances would allow. Great anxiety was felt by all hands for Archy Gordon, the surgeon being unable to give a satisfactory report of his state. His two friends begged leave to assist in attending on him; he was frequently insensible, and when he returned to consciousness the groans which he uttered showed how severely he was suffering. The next morning the expedition got under way and, piloted by the boatmen, rapidly proceeded down the stream, performing the distance in a few hours which had taken them so many days of hard toil to accomplish in their ascent. Several men were also on the sick list from fatigue and exposure to the hot sun by day and the damps of night. None of the officers had suffered much except Commander Babbicome, who had remained unconscious from the time he had been carried on board his gig. The surgeon announced his case to be one of sunstroke; Captain Hemming, therefore, sent him down in his gig ahead that he might sooner obtain the assistance of his own doctor.

Archy Gordon was at once taken on board the frigate, that he might be under the care of the surgeon, who expressed great anxiety about him. Tom and Needham were his constant attendants; Tom, indeed, watched over him, when off duty, with the affection of a brother.

"Never fear, Rogers," said the surgeon, observing how unhappy Tom looked, "Gordon will pull through if he keeps quiet, and is watched over with the care which you show him."

Tom was somewhat consoled on hearing this; he sent off a despatch to Gerald, by the first opportunity, with a bulletin of their friend's state.

The report from the corvette was not so favourable. The surgeon expressed his fears that the commander would not reach Jamaica alive.

For the sake of his wounded men Captain Hemming was anxious to return as soon as possible to Jamaica. Murray was walking the deck of the *Supplejack*, when a boat from the frigate came alongside, and Lieutenant Rogers stepped on board.

"Good news, Alick!" he exclaimed. "We are to get under weigh immediately the wind will allow us, and proceed at once to Jamaica, where the captain is anxious to land the sick and wounded. I knew you would be glad to hear this; you will receive, I hope on arrival, a due reward for your gallant deeds, for every one says that you are sure to be promoted."

"I shall certainly prize that for many reasons," answered Murray, "and thanks to you for cheering me up. Our energies have been taxed pretty severely for the last few days, and I feel more out of spirits than usual. What account do you bring me of poor Archy?"

"The doctor is more hopeful about him than at first. Young Highlander as he is, he thinks that there is every prospect of his getting round again in time by careful nursing, and I dare say your friends at Saint David's will be happy to take charge of him when we get to Jamaica. He will afford an object of interest to Miss O'Regan, and draw her off from the thoughts of her own loss."

"I trust that such may be the case," said Murray. "But, my dear Jack, I have been oppressed with all sorts of evil forebodings about her. I cannot help dreading that she has been attacked by fever, or that she has met with some accident, or that—"

"Nonsense, Alick, that's not like you," interrupted Jack. "You say that your energies have been severely taxed: that alone is the cause of your forebodings of evil. After we have been at sea a day or two you will laugh at them. Good-bye, I must be off."

Jack pulled on for the corvette, and delivered the welcome order to prepare for sea. The surgeon gave him a bad account of the commander. His mind was wandering, and he was every day becoming weaker. He was continually talking of his beloved beeves and his pigs, his orchard and his cabbage-garden, and sometimes he fancied that he was striding his trusty cob, setting off to market, and he would shout out to his old housekeeper, Martha, to have his dinner ready at his return.

"Poor fellow, he would have been wiser had he continued cultivating his little farm in Bedfordshire, instead of tempting again the treacherous deep," thought Jack. "However, probably Alick will get the vacancy, so it's all right."

A short time afterwards a light breeze came off the land. The sails were let fall, and, the frigate leading the way, the small squadron shaped a course for Jamaica.

The *Supplejack* proved herself to be a fast craft, being well able to keep up with the frigate and corvette, so Murray considered that he could report favourably of her to the admiral.

When within about a day's sail of Jamaica the corvette, which had separated during the night from her consort, was again seen approaching, with her flag halfmast high. The flags of the other two ships were lowered in compliment, and inquiries by signal were made as to when the melancholy event had occurred. The reply was, on the previous evening, and that the commander's last request had been that he might be buried on shore.

The next day the squadron came to an anchor in Port Royal harbour.

Eager as Captain Hemming knew that Murray would be to proceed to Kingston, his first duty was to attend to the funeral of the late commander of the corvette, which could not be delayed.

The boats of the squadron being manned, followed the *Tudor's* barge, which contained the coffin. On landing it was borne by a party of seamen to the burying ground of Port Royal, where the garrison chaplain performed the service, and the marines having fired a volley over the grave, the party returned on board.

The ceremony being over, the flags were hoisted up, and it must be confessed that very little more was thought of or said about poor Commander Babbicome and his eccentricities. Captain Hemming and Murray then proceeded up to Kingston, where they were received with warm congratulations and highly complimented by the admiral.

"I have already sent your despatch home," he said, turning to Alick, "and I have secured your promotion, I hope. In the meantime I intend to give you an acting order to take command of the corvette, and I shall be glad, Captain Hemming, to appoint any officer you can recommend to the *Supplejack*." The captain at once named Lieutenant Rogers. "I should have been glad to have suggested my first lieutenant, Mr Cherry, but I am unwilling to spare him, and I believe that he would rather continue as at present on board the frigate."

On hearing that his young cousin was wounded, the admiral at once desired Murray to have him brought up to the Pen, if the doctor thought he could be moved, "and you, I suspect, will not object to a day or two's leave to enjoy a trip into the country," he added; "I shall be happy to see you on your return."

Alick thanked the admiral, who advised him to set out forthwith, while he invited Captain Hemming to dinner. The boats were sent back, with directions that the wounded midshipman should be brought to the Pen the next day; and Murray, taking the admiral's advice, set off for Saint David's, hoping to arrive there before nightfall.

Chapter Seventeen.

Jack Rogers in command of the *Supplejack*—Alick's letter to Jack—The Caymans—Shoal of turtle—Dolphins—Chases a slaver—Havannah—Scenes on shore—Slavers in harbour—Polite invitation from a slave-dealer—Jack accepts it—The *Venus* slips out of harbour.

Sometime after the events related in the last chapter, Jack Rogers walked the deck of the *Supplejack* as her commander, he having superseded Murray, who had been promoted, as every one acknowledged—a just reward for his gallantry at Carthage.

Higson had been made a lieutenant, and appointed to the *Tudor*, while Terence Adair had rejoined the *Plantagenet*. The commander who had been appointed to the corvette in the place of poor Captain Babbicome had fallen sick, and as there was every probability of his having to return to England, Jack had hopes that the admiral would appoint Murray to the command.

"If I hadn't the *Supplejack* I should have been delighted to serve under him," said Jack to Adair, who had come on board to see him.

"I have no idea of a fellow being jealous of another's good fortune, for no one deserved his more than Alick Murray. I only wish that I may get the chance of doing something in the *Supplejack*; I won't throw it away if I can help it."

"You will have more opportunity than I shall have aboard the frigate," answered Terence; "and I only wish that I could be with you or Murray, if he gets the command of the *Tudor*."

"I'm sure, at all events, to fall in with a slaver or two, or perhaps have some such work as that of Saint Juan cut out for me," said Jack. "I am now, I believe, to be ordered to Havannah, so Johnny Ferong assured me yesterday, and as he is certain to be well informed, I expect every hour to receive my despatches from the admiral."

While Jack was speaking, a boat was seen coming down the harbour, and in a short time he received from the officer who came in her an order to proceed at once to Havannah, and on his way to keep a sharp lookout for slavers, of which it was known there were a good many on the coast. He at the same time got a letter from Murray, who had been residing with his friends at Saint David's since he gave up the command of the *Supplejack*. We may take a glance at its contents, which thus ran:—

"Dear Jack,—Since I cannot tear myself away from this Eden, though had I a pair of wings I would do so for

a brief space, to see how you are getting on on board the little brig, I must beg you to be content with the few lines I have the time to write, before our sable 'Mercury' starts for Kingston. I am, as you may suspect, supremely happy. Stella has recovered her spirits, and every day becomes more attractive. It is beautiful to see her watch over my young kinsman Archy, who is slowly recovering from his dangerous wound. The doctor says that had it not been for her watchful care he would have succumbed to the fever, which attacked him after his arrival here.

"You ask me when our marriage is to take place. Stella will not hear of it; her father's death is too recent; and she will not tempt me away from my duty, for she thinks that if I became a married man I shall wish to remain on shore; and I cannot help acknowledging that, in that respect, she is right. She wants me, at all events, to serve as a commander till I obtain a post-rank; and her kind friends here offer her a home till she has one of her own.

"I long for the time, however, when I may take her to Scotland as my bride and present her to my family. In truth, though I have often fancied that nothing would make me wish to leave the navy, I have begun to meditate doing so rather than be separated from her. Perhaps, however, I may be able to persuade her to yield to my wishes, and as the *Tudor* will probably remain on the station, I shall constantly be returning to port and be able to enjoy her society.

"I am sure, you say, to get command of the corvette, provided Grafton goes home; and the doctors say that there is no chance of his recovering out here.

"Stella desires to be kindly remembered to you, as do all your friends at Saint David's. You have won their hearts, I assure you, and they will be happy to see you whenever you return to Jamaica.

"They press me to remain here till I am ordered to join the ship; and as you may suppose, I am perfectly happy to accept their hospitality.

"My cousin Archy desires to be remembered to those young reefers, your brother Tom and Desmond. I hope some day to be among them and assist in keeping them out of mischief. Give my kind regards to Terence, and believe me,

"Your very affectionate friend,

"Alexander Murray."

Jack had no time to answer this letter, as, the breeze proving favourable, he was obliged to put to sea according to his instructions. During his run westward he kept a bright lookout for slavers in all directions. It was just daylight; a mist lay on the surface of the ocean, which completely shut out any object at a distance; while a light breeze from the South-east filled the brig's sails and impelled her at the rate of two or three knots an hour through the water. Harry Bevan, who had joined from the frigate, was officer of the watch. The men, with trowsers tucked up and buckets in hand, were about to commence the operation of washing decks.

"I say," exclaimed Tom, who had been sent forward on some duty, "I never believed in the great sea serpent, but, as sure as I'm alive, that must be the fellow right ahead, wriggling along at a tremendous rate! If you listen you'll hear the noise he's making!"

"Broken water ahead!" shouted the lookout forward.

"That I'm sure it cannot be!" said Bevan.

He, however, as a precaution, brought the brig to the wind, and directed Tom to call the commander. Jack was quickly on deck.

"Keep her away again!" he exclaimed, after he had examined the object which had so astonished Tom. "That is neither the head nor tail of the big sea serpent, but a shoal of turtles, which having come from the Bay of Honduras, are bound for the Cayman Islands, where they are going to lay their eggs?" he said, laughing heartily at Tom's notion.

The brig was soon in the midst of them, their columns dividing to get out of her way. It was wonderful the noise they made, as their fins rapidly struck the water in their onward course. Soon afterwards the mist lifted, and the lofty trees which grew on the great Cayman could be seen rising out of the water some fifteen miles off, appearing like a grove of masts emerging from the ocean. Directly afterwards the mist, which still hung in the west, was swept away, exposing to view the sails of a square topsail schooner shining in the rays of the sun with snowy whiteness. Jack immediately ordered the brig to be kept away, and made all sail in chase. The schooner held her course for some time, but at length discovering that the brig had kept away, set also every stitch of canvas she could carry. This at once betrayed her character, for had she been an honest trader, she would have had no reason to run from an English brig.

The crew felt as eager to overtake her as did the commander. It was the first of this sort of work they had had, and they indulged with immense satisfaction in the idea of carrying back a prize full of slaves to Port Royal.

Long Tom was got ready for action, as it was not likely that the slaver, if such she was, would yield without making every effort to escape. The chase showed that she had a remarkably nimble pair of heels, for fast as the *Supplejack* was, after a couple of hours had passed by, she appeared to have gained little or nothing on her.

"Do you think we shall take her?" asked Tom of Needham, who had been appointed as gunner of the *Supplejack*.

"If the wind freshens, and we have the first of it before it reaches her, we may get her within range of Long Tom, and it then won't be my fault if we don't bring down some of her spars; but if night comes on before our shot can reach her, she may manage to slip out of our hands in the dark."

"But we have most of the day before us, and we surely shall get up with her before then," observed Tom.

"You see, we have run on already two hours, and are no nearer than at first," said Needham. "If we were to chase her round the world, and she was to sail twelve knots to our ten, she would soon be out of sight, so I don't feel very certain that we shall have her ladyship; but if we miss her this time we may fall in with her another."

At the time the men were piped to dinner, the *Supplejack* had not gained more than at first on the chase. Still Jack persevered, trusting that something might happen to favour him.

The men in their eagerness to watch the chase hurried up on deck, and the officers remained below as short a time as possible. Every expedient that could be thought of was adopted to increase the speed of the brig. Every variation of the breeze was carefully watched by Jack's vigilant eyes. Now he ordered a pull at the starboard, now at the larboard braces, while every inch of canvas that could be set was kept thoroughly wetted so that not a thimbleful of the precious wind could escape till it had done its duty.

The day wore on; it was tantalising in the extreme to see the stranger still keeping so far ahead. The breeze, however, at length freshened, and the stronger it blew the faster the brig sailed. She was evidently nearing the chase, but the sun, casting a ruddy glow over the western sky and across the laughing sea, was sinking rapidly towards the horizon, turning the sails of the schooner, which had hitherto appeared of snowy whiteness, into deep shadow. "Long Tom will reach her now, I've a hope, sir," said Needham, "and if we can knock away some of her flying kites, she may be ours before the day is over."

"Try, at all events," answered Jack, and Needham, giving a friendly slap on the breech of the gun, while he cast his eye along the sight, brought it to a proper elevation, and the brig yawing slightly, he pulled the trigger. The shot flew straight for the chase, but as Jack watched its course, he saw that it fell into the water short of the mark.

"It was not far off, though, sir," said Needham, "and if we hold on at the rate we are going, we shall soon have her within range."

The gun was again loaded, and after another few minutes Jack ordered it once more to be fired, but with no better success than at first, and, as he saw, it would be useless to fire till he had gained still more on the chase.

The lower limb of the sun had now, however, reached the horizon, below which the glowing orb rapidly sank, and the shades of night came creeping over the ocean.

Still the shadowy outline of the schooner, like a dark phantom stalking over the deep, could be discerned ahead. A vigilant lookout was kept, but hour after hour went by and the brig appeared to have got no nearer to her than at first. Jack and most of his officers remained on deck. Towards morning the distance seemed somewhat lessened. He had his eyes on the chase, and could not help hoping that by daylight they might be near enough to try what Long Tom could do, when the sails of the schooner began to grow less and less distinct. He had a moment before seen her; he rubbed his eyes; she had disappeared! It was very provoking, still he could but hope that in the morning they would again get sight of her. Ordering the same course to be kept, he at length turned in, desiring to be immediately called should she be again seen.

When morning broke, a mist, similar to that which had risen the previous day, obscured all distant objects. A lookout was sent aloft, but he could see nothing; and when the sun rose in the sky, and the mist dispersed, the chase was nowhere visible.

"Better luck next time," observed Jack, when he came on deck, and he ordered the brig to be kept on her proper course for Saint Antonio, the westernmost point of Cuba. Several vessels were sighted during the day, but they were too far off to make it worth while, Jack considered, to go out of his course to speak them.

The midshipmen employed themselves in a variety of ways. Tom had, of course, brought Spider, who assisted them to idle away many a spare hour.

Tom and Desmond one day amused themselves by making a target of a piece of canvas. It was painted in circles of different colours, with a yellow bull's-eye in the usual fashion. This was suspended by a line at the end of a spar, rigged from the fore yardarm, on about a level with the bulwarks, and well answered the purpose intended. With half-a-dozen ship's pistols they began blazing away, sometimes hitting the mark, though as often, it must be confessed, missing it. Tom proved himself decidedly the best shot. Desmond declared that his pistol somehow or other shot crooked whenever he failed to hit the target. They thus passed away many an hour in calm weather, and Jack considered that the powder was well expended, as it taught them how to handle their weapons.

McTavish and the purser in the meantime got out lines and hooks baited simply with pieces of canvas, the former wishing to obtain some dolphins for examination, which had been seen darting through the water on either side of the brig.

"Hurrah!" exclaimed McTavish, "I have got hold of a big fellow at last. Lend a hand to haul him in, Norris." In another minute a good-sized fish was hauled on deck.

"Do you call that a dolphin?" said Tom. "I thought a dolphin was a fellow with a big head and large fins, of all the colours of the rainbow."

"It is undoubtedly a dolphin," answered McTavish. "If you haul it out of the shade of the bulwarks, you will see that it is of cerulean hue. There, it won't retain that colour long; it's changing already. Now it is purple, and before long, as its life ebbs, it will become black. But hurrah! I have another bite."

Three other dolphins were hauled up in quick succession, and taken forward to be anatomised by the surgeon.

Several spectators watched the operation. "Hallo!" cried McTavish, as he cut open one of the fish. "This fellow has swallowed something very hard;" and to the astonishment of all, he pulled out two bullets. In another were found three, and inside a third a similar number. There could be no doubt that they had swallowed the bullets which fell into the water from the midshipmen's pistols. The fact proved the rapidity with which dolphins are capable of swimming, as it could not be supposed that they had all been close to the spot where the bullets fell, nor could they have seen them till they reached the surface. As, however, many of the bullets had *ricocheted* for a considerable distance, the fish had probably caught sight of them as they first struck the water, and darting after them, caught them as they began to sink.

The brig continued her course, and having rounded Cape Saint Antonio sailed eastward for Havannah; keeping, however, at a respectful distance from the numerous low sandy islands, or keys as they are called, which lie off the northern shore of the island, and have brought many a tall ship to destruction. At length the irregular outline of the hills above the magnificent harbour of Havannah appeared in sight.

A fair and fresh breeze filled the sails of the brig, and carried her rapidly towards the mouth of the harbour. Presently a lateen-rigged craft, a pilot vessel, came sweeping out from behind the high, threatening rocks, on the summit of which the massive fortifications guarding the entrance of the port were now discernible.

The pilot vessel was soon close on board, but Jack waved her off, being very well able he considered to take in his small brig without assistance. The brig was now running through a channel between three or four hundred yards broad, and half a mile in length, which leads into the magnificent landlocked harbour.

High on the starboard side rose the massive fortress of El Moro and on the port, that of La Ponta extending from either side of which could be seen the encircling line of fortifications which protect the city and harbour.

The brig, passing through the narrow entrance, the whole panorama of the magnificent landlocked bay with its fleet of vessels, some at anchor, others moored with their heads to the quay, its numberless boats with lateen sails and hulls painted, some of a bright blue, others of a scarlet hue, and others again striped with green and white, darting about in all directions; its great square stone warehouses fronting the water; its many mansions, the residences of nobles and merchants; its beautiful-looking villas, and groves of palm-trees; the high-peaked roofs of its convents, and tall grey towers of its churches rising above the whole, now appeared in full view. The brig appeared in a complete lake, the fort of La Ponta high above, near which she had passed, completely shutting out the entrance of the harbour. On the shores around were seen numberless hamlets of every hue, the rich foliage of the tropical trees and shrubs, giving a cheerful aspect to the surrounding barren slopes, as did the bright green jealousies of most of the residences, and the flowering trees which rose among them, to the city. In every open space visible were seen slaves hurrying here and there with heavy loads, seamen of all nations strolling along intermixed with the far-famed volantes, brilliant with burnished metal, rolling in and out of gateways, the steed which drew it, bestrode by a postillion, six or eight feet from the body of the vehicle.

The brig was quickly surrounded by boats bringing off vegetables, fruit, and fish, some of them containing those persevering personages ever present in foreign ports, washerwomen and washermen, their laudable object being to solicit the honour of cleansing the dirty linen of the officers and crew.

Jack hoped to find some amusement on shore. Before, however, ordering his gig to be got ready, he was engaged for some time, not in examining the beauties of the harbour, but in casting searching glances around to discover such rakish, wicked-looking craft as were likely to be engaged in the slave-trade. He marked several of suspicious appearance.

"We must have some of these fellows, Bevan," he observed, "keep a bright lookout on their movements; if we are off watch they will take the opportunity, depend on it, to slip out of the harbour; I have no doubt that the fellows cursed us in their hearts when they saw the little brig enter the harbour."

Among the commercial cities of the western hemisphere, Havannah ranks next to New York; the harbour is the best in the West Indies, and is unequalled in beauty by any in the world. It is nearly three miles long, and a mile and a half in width. While completely sheltered from every wind by the surrounding heights, so great is the depth of water that the largest ships can come close up to the quays.

The city stands on the western shore of the bay. The streets of the old part within the walls are narrow and far from clean, but those of the suburbs, which cover a much larger space than the city itself, are broad and well laid out, many of them being handsome and tolerably free from dirt. Besides the two strong fortresses at the entrance, batteries run along both shores, while fortifications frown from all the surrounding heights.

The houses, which are in the Moorish style, have excessively thick walls, and are mostly of one storey. The windows, however, are unglazed, and, on account of the heat of the climate, always kept open.

The object of most interest in the city is the cathedral, not on account of its beauty, but because it contains the bones of Columbus, which were removed here from the church of Santa Domingo, in Hispaniola, at the end of the last century.

The chief attractions of the place are its paseos or public drives, of which it possesses three, two inside, and one outside the walls. Some of them are ornamented with statues of royal personages, more or less ugly, with rows of

poplars on either side, and with fountains and gardens. Here, in the afternoon, the world of fashion resort, and they are thronged with young creoles in evening dress and round hats, employed in casting admiring glances at the fair dames, who drive slowly up and down the carriage-road in their wide and open volantes, their heads adorned as if for a ballroom, with natural flowers, and generally arrayed in costumes of all the colours of the rainbow.

Jack felt, at first, somewhat indignant as he observed the impudent glances, so he considered them, cast by the youths at the young ladies; but soon came to the conclusion that they had no objection to be so looked at, and would indeed have felt injured had they not received this style of homage from the opposite sex. As he passed through the streets, he could look with ease through the large open windows into the drawing-rooms of the houses, where in the evening, when not abroad, the ladies of the family are wont to assemble; the older dames seated in rocking-chairs, the younger in front of the iron bars, by which alone ingress from without is prevented. Here they can see every one passing and be seen in return.

The volante is as worthy of a description as the gondola of Venice. The dames of Cuba delight in it, for it is not only picturesque, but luxurious in the extreme. It is made to contain two sitters with comfort, but when a duenna is in attendance, she is seated on a middle seat between her charges. It has two enormous wheels, strong and thick; the body is supported on the axle-tree, and swings forward from it on springs; it is somewhat low down, and affords abundance of room for the feet, which are supported by a brightly polished metal bar, which runs across the footboard. It is most remarkable for the shafts, which are fourteen feet in length, the extreme ends resting on the saddle of the horse, who has thus entirely to support the whole weight of the vehicle; there is thus between the horse's tail and the carriage a space of nearly seven feet. The postillion is generally a very heavy negro, who rides the unfortunate horse. Those used by people of fashion are drawn by two horses, one outside the shafts, on which the postillion sits. He is as remarkable an object as the vehicle itself. He wears a huge pair of footless boots, the top rising ten inches or so above his knees, so that they nearly touch his elbows, while, to the bottom are secured huge iron spurs, his breeches are white, and his jacket red, ornamented with gilt lace, while a broad-brimmed hat covering his woolly pate completes his costume. Still barbarous and awkward as the affair appears, it looks perfectly suitable to surrounding objects; the fair occupants seem also in their proper places, with their gaily-coloured costumes, and their dark hair fastened by a high comb, and ornamented generally with natural flowers. Jack did not consider their beauty so surpassing as he had been led to expect, while he thought the older dames perfectly hideous; but then the recollection of the lily and rose in the cheeks of his fair countrywomen was too recent to allow him to admire them as he might otherwise have done. He was highly amused at seeing in some of the dining-halls one of those silver ornamented vehicles placed at the farther end, its usual position when not in use.

As far as he could judge, the male portion of the population passed their evenings in smoking cigars and playing billiards, when not engaged in dancing or listening to music. Every evening, before the captain-general's house in the Plaza, a military band played for an hour, when the men collected by hundreds, but a few ladies, however, appearing among them.

Gambling, in one form or another, appeared to be the occupation of all orders, encouraged considerably by the government, who had public lotteries, tickets and minute portions of tickets being daily vended in the streets.

Jack and his officers were overwhelmed with invitations, not only from English and Americans, but from Spaniards, some of whom, he was warned, might possibly have a motive in wishing to make their stay on shore agreeable, they being owners, or in some way interested in the rakish-looking craft in the harbour, and on which it was his special duty to keep an eye.

Picturesque and attractive as Havannah is in many respects, Jack came to the opinion that it would undoubtedly become a much finer place were it in the hands of the English or Americans.

Once upon a time it did become a British possession. When in the year 1762 the Spaniards and English went to war, as soon as hostilities had broken out, the British government despatched a fleet under Sir George Pocock, with an army of 1600 men, commanded by the Earl of Albemarle.

The fleet consisted of twenty-two sail of the line, four ships of fifty guns, ten frigates, and seventeen small vessels. That so powerful a force was sent out, showed the belief of the English in the strength of the fortifications. The Spaniards, however, had but little stomach for the fight.

While the fleet threatened them on the sea side, the troops landed to the east and west of the city, and attacking it in the rear quickly made themselves masters of the renowned fortifications. On the return of peace, a few months afterwards, it was once more placed under the fearful mismanagement of the Spaniards, and now only awaits a favourable opportunity to be taken possession of by the Yankees.

Whatever may be said of Havannah, Jack found it a very pleasant place, but he took good care never to sleep on shore, or indeed at any time to remain longer away from his ship than possible. He made several excursions round the harbour, not so much to enjoy its beauties, as to examine the before-mentioned rakish-looking craft which lay moored to the quays, apparently for the purpose of taking in cargo; he could never, however, observe anything going forward on board them during the daytime. Needham had, however, several times in the evening, taken a pull in the dinghy among the vessels. He reported that there was some bustle on board one of them in particular, and that he could hear the sound of hammering going on within her.

"It is my idea, sir, that they are fitting up slave-decks. Depend on it, before long some of them will be trying to get out, if they have the chance, without our seeing them. I marked a craft called the *Venus* which came in at sunset, when you were on shore, and if she is not the very schooner we chased, she is wonderfully like her. She is large, and to my mind faster than any of them; but if she can get whatever she wants, and her cargo shipped, we may be sure it won't be long before she tries to slip out unknown to us."

Jack thought that Needham was probably right in his conjectures, but one thing was certain, that while the commander of the *Venus* knew that he was watched and likely to be followed, he would not attempt to put to sea. Jack waited patiently. He knew that, at all events, he was of some service in thus locking up these traders in human flesh. If he could not catch them, he could, at all events, prevent them from doing harm. He had accepted several invitations, and had been seen at both English and Spaniards' houses; at one of the latter, he had met a Spaniard, Don Matteo, who spoke English well, and paid him great attention. On inquiry, he found that he was a slave-merchant, the owner of a number of vessels employed in making frequent trips to the coast of Africa and back.

Jack had hitherto refused his invitations, though his parties were among the most brilliant, and his daughters the most attractive of the black-eyed damsels of Cuba. Jack, however, as every British officer engaged in the suppression of the slave-trade ought to be, was wide awake; and when Don Matteo, notwithstanding his former refusals, again invited him and as many of his officers as he could bring, to attend a dance to be given at his house the following evening, he accepted the invitation, and promised to bring all that could be spared from the ship; on making inquiries he found, as he suspected, that the Don was the owner of the *Venus*.

"He goes by the name of Don Matteo at present, but he was long known on the coast of Africa by that of Pepé the pirate," added his informant. "Innumerable are the atrocities of which, there is not the slightest doubt, the fellow was guilty; but he managed to escape hanging, and having realised a large fortune, got whitewashed by the authorities, whom he still keeps in his pay, changed his name, and settled down in Havannah as a respectable merchant and shipowner; though to avoid the risk of personal inconvenience, he no more goes to sea, as was his wont formerly. He has a fleet of a dozen vessels or more employed in the middle passage. As he bribes the government officials, the captain of the port, and others, as well as the commanders of the Spanish ships of war, his vessels find no difficulty in getting in and out of harbour, even though completely fitted for the slave-trade, and the latter frequently convoy them till they are free from the risk of capture by the English cruisers on this station. On the other side of the Atlantic, they have to look after themselves, but they get pretty correct information, and three in four escape capture, so that his adventures pay him handsomely. Having, as I said, grown honest, he deals at present exclusively in blacks, but he is known to have committed not a few acts of piracy in his younger days, and the deaths of two or three British officers, and the crews of several merchantmen, are placed to his account."

"The scoundrel!" exclaimed Jack. "I do not fancy partaking of his hospitality."

"As you please, Mr Rogers; but I would advise you to put your feelings in your pocket," was the answer. "Remember that you do not go to the fellow's house for your own amusement, but for the good of the service in which you are engaged."

"Yes, I see that you are right," said Jack. "I will do my best to catch one of his craft, at all events."

Accordingly, on his arrival on board, he sent Needham in the dinghy, as before, to take a quiet pull among the ships. The gunner came back about midnight, and reported that the people were as busy as bees on board the schooner, that the sails were being bent, and, according to his opinion, she was getting ready for sea.

"Then she intends to sail tomorrow night, while I am on shore," observed Jack. "I'll go, however, and try if we can play as good a game as she can."

"That's it, sir; you will have plenty of time to get on board after she slips out, and we can soon be after her."

Jack accordingly ordered a boat to be in waiting for him and his officers, at one of the less-frequented landing-places, a couple of hours after dark, intending to remain at the party till that time, and then to return on board. He also gave directions to Needham to have the cable hove short, and everything to be ready for getting under weigh at a moment's notice. He then told Bevan and the other officers who were to accompany him that they were to leave Don Matteo's house, if possible, without being noticed, and that he himself would follow at the time he had fixed on.

It was still daylight when he and his officers, including three midshipmen in full rig, pulled on shore to attend the ball.

The sun was just setting as they arrived at the wide entrance of Don Matteo's handsome mansion, to which numerous volantes, in rapid succession, were bringing up the fair dancers, while gentlemen were arriving either in various conveyances or on foot.

Passing through a courtyard, they were ushered upstairs into a spacious and well-lighted saloon, with enormous windows looking on one side into a courtyard, in the midst of which a fountain threw up jets of cooling water, and on the other, into a garden fragrant with sweet-scented flowers.

The dancing soon began. No people could be more polite and attentive than their host and hostess, to whose lovely daughters the English officers were immediately introduced. At first Jack found it somewhat difficult to get through the contradanza, the dance for which Havannah is especially celebrated, but his partner smiled graciously, and assured him that he performed it to perfection. When, however, he contrasted his own performance with that of the active-toed Spaniards, he could not help feeling that he was receiving undue flattery. As to his companions they soon had to give it up as a bad job, though they did their best to make themselves agreeable by tucking their partners' arms under theirs, and chattering away in execrable Spanish. Tom noticed that their host and his spouse kept a bright lookout on them, and no sooner was a dance finished than they were taken up and introduced to other partners, who were quite ready to forgive their mistakes; the midshipmen, at all events, thought it very good fun, and Tom, on looking at his watch, felt very sorry that the hour was approaching at which Jack had directed them to leave; however, his orders were not to be disobeyed, so, giving a hint to Desmond and Morris, they made their way to the door, when, followed by Bevan, they slipped downstairs.

Jack, who watched them, hoped that their departure had not been observed, but Don Matteo begged to know why the midshipmen were gone. Jack replied that he considered early hours the best for such youngsters, as they had their

duty to attend to in the morning, and that the elder one had gone to take care of them.

Soon afterwards the surgeon and purser made their bow: the former remarked that he must go on board and attend to his patients. Jack and Jos Green were the only officers remaining. The latter had very little notion of dancing, but that did not deter him from hauling his reluctant partner, shrieking with laughter, through the mazes of the dance; at length, losing his equilibrium, as might have been expected, down he came, dragging the lady with him. He managed, however, to save her from injury, though he himself was somewhat severely hurt. Jack, hastening up, apologised, explaining that the officer was but little accustomed to this sort of amusement, and, pretending to be very angry, ordered him forthwith to return on board. Green, who had received his instructions, putting on a sulky look, obeyed, and joined the surgeon and purser, who had been waiting for him outside.

Jack, who was in a hurry to be off, walked up to his host and hostess, and thanked them for their hospitality, observing that he felt it his duty to go and look after his officers. In vain Don Matteo pressed him to remain, and offered to send an escort with him to the harbour.

"It may be safer for you not to go alone, my dear friend," observed the Don, with a bland smile. "There are villains of all sorts about in the streets at night, and you know that you English are not held in much love by those slaving gentry to whose business you are attempting to put a stop. They would not scruple to stick a knife into your back if they found you walking alone."

"I am much obliged to you for the warning, and coming from you, who must be well acquainted with the proceedings of the rascals, it is of value; but I am not afraid of them," answered Jack, laughing. "We are prepared for all the tricks they may attempt to play us. Good night, Don Matteo."

Donna Isabella, the Don's buxom wife, joined her solicitations to those of her husband and their fair daughters, who gathered round Jack, resolved to prevent him from leaving, but he was as determined as they were, and, making his best bow, hurried out of the room.

He found his officers, as had been agreed on, a short distance from the house, and, keeping their swords ready for defence should they be attacked, an event they were aware not at all unlikely to happen, they made their way down to the landing-place as quickly as possible. Bevan and the midshipmen had already reached the boat, and, jumping in, they pulled rapidly towards the *Supplejack*. As they did so, they caught sight of a vessel gliding across the harbour, which, having passed the brig, was soon lost to sight.

"She has slipped by us, sir, and is standing out to sea," exclaimed Needham, as soon as they stepped on board. "She is the *Venus*, sir, I know, for I was not far from her in the dinghy as she began to haul out from the quay. I went away soon after dark to watch her, as I felt sure we were right in thinking that she was about to put to sea."

The breeze was very light, and the schooner could still be discerned from the deck of the *Supplejack*. Jack waited till she had disappeared behind the rocks of the Moro: the anchor was then hove up, and sail being made on the brig, she slowly glided out of the harbour, the magnificent lighthouse on the west enabling her without difficulty to find her way through the narrow channel. The schooner could be dimly seen ahead, but it was doubtful whether she herself was aware that she was followed.

Chapter Eighteen.

Chase of the Venus—A tornado—Jack again sights her—Captures her and two more—Sails for Port Royal—A suspicious stranger—A prize despatched for assistance—Attacked—Hard pressed—Prisoners break loose—The corvette appears in the nick of time—Fall in with the frigate—Adair's account of the way the slavers had done them.

The *Supplejack*, long after the chase had got out to sea, remained concealed under the dark shadow cast by the castle across the entrance. It then fell a dead calm, and the schooner was completely lost to sight. Boats were now sent ahead to tow. This was necessary, indeed, in order to keep the brig off the rocks. It was slow work, however, and Jack could only hope that with the rising sun the breeze would freshen, so that he might make chase after the schooner. The way in which she had crept out convinced him that she was a slaver; had he before entertained any doubt as to Don Matteo's reasons for inviting him and his officers to the ball, they now completely vanished. It was evident that the old villain wanted to keep him and his officers on shore, that the slaver might take the opportunity of putting to sea and getting a good start, before it was discovered that she had gone. She must have got away, also, Jack very well knew with the connivance of the captain of the port, who had, of course, been bribed by her owner, as had likewise the officer in command at the Moro, who would not otherwise have allowed her to pass. Jack expected every instant to receive a shot from the castle, but probably the last-mentioned personage thought it prudent not to fire, lest he might have been asked why he allowed the schooner to pass.

When daylight returned, as Jack and Bevan swept their glasses round in every direction, several sail were seen dotting the horizon.

Jack handed his glass to Needham. "Which of them do you think is the *Venus*?" he asked.

"The centre one of those three vessels in the north-east, sir," answered Needham promptly. "No doubt about that; I know her by the whiteness of her canvas. She must have had a pretty tidy breeze to get out so far while we lay becalmed."

"You are right," said Jack. "That is the one I take to be the *Venus*."

"So do I," observed Bevan. "Hurrah! here comes a breeze. We shall soon have the pleasure of making her better acquaintance, I hope!"

The boats were hoisted up, and every stitch of sail the brig could carry was packed on her. The breeze freshened, and away she flew over the blue ocean, leaving the white walls of the Moro far astern.

The question was whether the slaver would run for the Gulf of Florida, or attempt to make her way through the Bahama Channel.

"We must try, at all events, to get hold of her before nightfall," observed Jack, "or she will be playing us another trick, and give us the go-bye in the dark."

"We'll try and do that same, sir," said Needham; "if the wind holds with us as it does now, it won't be a difficult job. She doesn't seem to have much of it out there, and we are getting up fast with her."

The *Supplejack*, indeed, was gaining rapidly on the schooner, but the treacherous wind soon gave indications of not being inclined to favour the British brig. Dark clouds gathering in the sky came sweeping rapidly over it.

"All hands, shorten sail," shouted Jack, with startling energy; "be smart about it, lads."

Every one saw that not a moment was to be lost. Royals and topgallant-sails were handed, two reefs taken in the topsails, the courses were clewed up, not an instant too soon, either—for over heeled the brig till the sills of her lee ports dipped into the water. One of those tornados, so frequent in the West Indies, had struck her, though on coming up to the wind she faced it bravely. Down came the rain, a real tropical torrent, the drops as they fell being of the size of marbles, leaping up again with a loud rattle, like that of hail, and literally deluging the deck.

In vain the sharpest eyes of those on the lookout endeavoured to pierce the watery veil. The rain completely hid the slaver and all the surrounding vessels. It was feared that she, taking advantage of the chance offered her, would do her best to escape. The question was, in what direction would she fly? She would have a clear passage through the Gulf of Florida, but then she well knew that she would be followed by the nimble *Supplejack*. Rogers, therefore, came to the conclusion that she would steer for the Bahama Channel, where, if she could not escape herself, she might hope to lead her pursuer to destruction. Needham was firmly of opinion that she would take that direction. Night was coming on, and she would have a long start, but Jack determined to chance it, and persevere.

"With the chart to help us, a bright look out, and the lead going, we may disappoint her ladyship," he observed, laughing.

"It's an ugly place, I'll allow, sir," said Needham; "but we must not be afraid of ugly places, or we shall not do much in catching these slaving gentry. It can't be much worse than we have seen in the China Seas, and off the coast of Africa."

The tornado having passed over, the brig's head was again put to the south-west, and a bright lookout being of course kept, all hoped to fall in once more with the *Venus*. The night was an anxious one; the watch below turned in ready to spring on deck at a moment's notice.

Neither Jack, Bevan, nor Needham lay down, the former constantly sweeping the horizon with their night-glasses, in the hopes of catching a glimpse of the schooner. As the first streaks of dawn tinged the eastern sky, all hands were roused up to make sail, and just as the orb of day, like a mountain of fire appeared above the horizon, the sails of the schooner were discerned on the port bow, standing, as was conjectured, for one of the numerous intricate passages among the dangerous Bahama shoals. Every stitch of canvas the brig could carry was immediately packed on her.

"Keep her away a couple of points," cried Rogers; "that will do. We must get hold of Madam Venus before the day is many hours older. Fortunately there is still a good space of clear water before she can get in among the shoals, and once up with the lady, it won't be long before she is ours."

The wind held steady, and the *Supplejack*, as Tom declared, skipped along more nimbly than she had ever yet moved. Long Tom was got ready for action, although the schooner was not likely to show much fight; still he might be useful in bringing down her spars, and so prevent her from getting in among the shoals before she could be captured.

Though a fresh breeze was blowing, the sea was tolerably smooth, but on the north and eastward a line of white breakers, and here and there an interval of blue water which marked the channels between them could be seen. Farther to the eastward were two suspicious-looking schooners, evidently bent on making their way through one or other of the before-named channels.

"We must have the big one first, and then get hold of the other two," said Jack to Bevan, who stood by his side.

The lead was kept going, and showed that the water was rapidly shoaling.

"Try her with Long Tom, Needham," cried out Jack; "he may chance to reach her."

"It's as much as Long Tom will do, sir, but we'll see," answered Needham, bringing the gun to bear on the chase.

Away sped the shot, but, though well aimed, it fell short of its mark.

"We must have her at all cost," cried Jack eagerly, "or in less than five minutes she will be among the breakers; and we shall be on shore. Give Long Tom a larger charge of powder, and see what that will do."

Needham did as he was ordered, though it occurred to him that the dose he rammed down might chance to be too

much for Long Tom's strength; if so it would have the effect of blowing him and not a few of his shipmates out of the world; still, as he had faith in the gun's power of endurance, he risked it without remark, and taking good aim once more fired. Never had he made a better shot. The missile swept the deck of the schooner, carrying off the heads of three of her crew, and killing and wounding others—though this was unknown at the time. The instant effect was to make her skipper haul down his colours and put the schooner about with her head off the bank, and in a short time she was hove-to near the brig-of-war, which had also gone about. Jack, jumping into a boat, which was instantly lowered with a well-armed crew, pulled on board.

The Spanish captain, whom he recognised as Don Lopez, a polished-looking gentleman he had met soon after his arrival at Havannah, at the house of Don Matteo, made a polite bow, and asked with an injured air why the English man-of-war had chased and fired at him.

"I shall be able to give you an answer by and by, my friend," answered Jack. "In the meantime, Don Lopez, I am anxious to get hold of those two schooners before they make their way through the channels to the north-east; and as I do not wish to run the risk of casting away my brig, I must trouble you to stand where you are and take me up alongside them."

As Jack spoke he presented a double-barrelled pistol at the Don's head, as a sign that he was not to trifle with.

"You will not shoot me, surely!" exclaimed the Don.

"Not if you obey me," answered Jack; "but you will understand that I am in earnest. Now, order the helmsman to keep the vessel away; your men will do what you tell them, I am very certain."

The Don saw that there was no help for it, and directed his motley and somewhat ruffian-like crew to do as Jack told them.

"We will have the nearest first; and understand, if she escapes us, I intend to blow out your brains. I shall regret it, but necessity has no law."

The breeze was freshening. Away dashed the *Venus*, sending the water bubbling up around her bows, while the brig stood rather more to the southward, keeping in deeper water to be ready to cut off either of the schooners which might attempt to escape in that direction. At first they probably fancied that the *Venus* had by some lucky chance got away from the brig-of-war; but they were very soon mistaken, when the British ensign which Tom, who had accompanied Jack, found on board flew out at her peak.

Jack ordered a gun to be run through the bow port, and one well directed shot from it made the first schooner haul down her colours. The second, on seeing what had happened, having no stomach for a fight, followed her example, and in half an hour Jack had his three prizes standing out from the dangerous vicinity of the shoals. He then ordered them all to heave to, that he might examine them at leisure.

Don Lopez showed some anxiety to go into his cabin.

"No, no, my friend," said Jack quietly, "you will allow me to accompany you. I am sorry to be so uncourteous, but I must have an examination of your papers."

He had ordered Bevan and Norris, who had gone on board the other vessels, not to allow anything to be thrown overboard or destroyed.

Don Lopez pulled his moustaches and accompanied his captor into the cabin, where he most unwillingly produced his writing-case. In it were found several documents, one of them from no less a person than Don Matteo Laguna, directing him how to proceed on his arrival on the coast of Africa. There were several other papers very clearly implicating two or three persons of wealth in Havannah. It was pretty clearly shown how these gentlemen obtained the fortunes which enabled them to hold so distinguished a place among the rank and fashion of that far-famed city. On board, also, was found a large assortment of swords, muskets, and slave-irons, while a slave-deck had been fitted up, ready to receive the expected cargo of human beings.

Jack took possession of the papers. "Ah, my friend, here is another," he observed, as Don Lopez was endeavouring to shuffle back a document which had at first been overlooked. Jack examined it.

"Ah! I see that fine large black brig, which lay in shore near us, was to join you shortly with the dollars, and provisions you would require. What is her name? I should like to know all about her."

"The *Caterina*," answered Don Lopez. "She is to sail under American colours, and will have American papers; a regular charter-party, the ship's roll, and instructions from her reputed owners. Ten of her crew are American seamen, the other twenty-five, who are Spaniards, will be called passengers. She has obtained all her papers from the American vice-consul, and I very much doubt that any of you men-of-war would have ventured to interfere with her, unless," and Don Lopez smiled, "it had been for the information I so freely give you. I hope you will take this into consideration in your further dealings with me."

"I shall see about that," answered Jack, despising the Don, who had been so ready to betray his associates in the nefarious traffic. "At present you will please to accompany me on board my brig, as we are bound for Jamaica."

The Don, with a grimace, stepped into the brig-of-war's boat followed by his officers. Jack afterwards conveyed also the greater part of the crew to the brig, where they were less likely to play tricks than if left on board their own vessel; he sent also for the greater portion of the crews and all the officers of the other schooners.

The difficulty now, however, was how to man his prizes. He gave the command of the *Venus* to Bevan, with Tom as

his mate, and six hands. Norris, and another midshipman, had charge of one of the other schooners, with five hands; and Jos Green, with Desmond to assist him, had charge of the third, with the same number of men.

He could ill spare so many hands, but he hoped by vigilance to keep the Spaniards in awe, and to navigate the *Supplejack*.

These arrangements being completed, he made sail for Port Royal. Should the weather continue fine, the task might be an easy one; but should it come on to blow, shorthanded as he was, he would have no little difficulty in working the brig and looking after his numerous prisoners, many of whom were desperate ruffians, and might possibly try to capture the brig, and cut the throats of every one on board. His only alternative, therefore, to avoid the risk of this would be to treat them as they intended to treat the slaves—clap them in irons, and shut them down under hatches, or to place a sentry with orders to shoot the first who might attempt to regain his liberty.

Needham highly approved of this plan. "It would serve them right, sir, if we were to do it at once, it would save us a great deal of trouble in looking after the beggars," he observed.

"But Don Lopez considers himself a perfect gentleman, and will complain that he was barbarously treated if we were to do so without sufficient cause," remarked Jack.

"I'd let him complain then, sir," answered Needham. "He may consider himself fortunate that we don't heave him and his villainous crew overboard."

Jack only hoped that the necessity would not arise, and as neither the officers nor men had arms of any sort—for the knives even of the latter had been taken from them—he had no fears about the matter.

He resolved to keep a bright look out for the *Caterina*, which he thought would probably slip out of the harbour soon after him, her captain not suspecting the fate of her consorts. The wind was however, light and contrary, and he was much longer in making Cape Saint Antonio than he had hoped. The necessity for treating the prisoners as Needham had suggested came, however, sooner than Jack expected. He had allowed Don Lopez and his companions to enjoy as much fresh air and exercise as they wished for every day, though he took the precaution to have a sentry on the quarterdeck, who had received instructions to keep a watchful eye on the prisoners. Evening was coming on, a fresh breeze was blowing, and the little squadron, under easy sail, was standing to the westward. Just at that time a sail was sighted on the weather-bow; she was soon made out to be a large brig standing towards the little fleet. Jack observed that the prisoners were talking eagerly together, and were evidently much interested in the appearance of the stranger. On she came, and though she was near enough for her colours to be seen she showed none.

"What do you make her out to be?" asked Jack of Needham.

"I should have taken her to be a Spanish man-of-war; but if she is she ought to have showed her bunting by this time," he answered. "You'll pardon me, sir," he continued, "but I don't like the looks of the Dons, and I shouldn't be surprised if that craft is the *Caterina* herself; if so, she will be trying to take some of our prizes; and may be have a slap at us, and I think it will be best to get these gentlemen out of the way, as quickly as possible."

Jack agreed with Needham, and going up to Don Lopez he observed—

"I am sorry to inconvenience you, but I have to request that you and your companions will go below, and not return on deck till you receive my permission."

The Don and his friends looked somewhat angry at hearing this, and seemed inclined to disobey, but a dozen stout seamen coming aft showed them that Jack was in earnest, and they, uttering maledictions on his head, were hurried below.

The sun had now reached the horizon, when the stranger came within gunshot, still without showing her colours. Jack had ordered the three schooners to keep close together under his stern. He now fired a gun ahead of the stranger of which she took no notice, but continued her course, intending apparently to get to windward, so as to be able to bear down at any time she might think fit on the captured slavers.

"She has guessed what has happened, sir," observed Needham, "and hopes during the night to have a chance of cutting off one of the prizes or all of them; but she can't quite make up her mind to attempt it in daylight."

"We must keep a bright lookout and prevent her doing that same," answered Jack. "Give her another shot from Long Tom, and we will see if that has a better effect than the first."

The stranger took no notice further than "hauling her wind," so as to increase her distance from the brig-of-war. Jack guessed that her intention was to draw him away, if possible, from his prizes, so that she might have a better chance of taking off one of them during the night; he had no fears of the result of a fight should she venture to attack him; at the same time, under the circumstances, he doubted whether it would be wise for him to become the assailant.

As the sun went down the stranger was still seen holding her former position on the weatherbow of the *Supplejack*. It was very provoking to be thus bearded, and he earnestly wished for daylight that he might have a better chance of success in attacking the daring craft, for he had at length made up his mind to bring her to action, and of course to capture her. His greatest difficulty, however, would be, should he succeed, in manning her, as she would require as many hands as the *Supplejack*, and he could ill spare any of his own crew; he thought the matter over, and called Needham aft to consult with him.

"Well, sir, I was thinking that it would be a good plan to send the *Venus* on to Jamaica, to get the assistance of the corvette. She wouldn't be long in joining us, and we might keep the stranger in play till then, or if any accident was to

happen to us she might come up in time to take her; not that I doubt, for a moment, that if we can get her within range of our guns, we should soon make her our prize. It's rather a tough job I'll allow, as the chase has forty hands or more on board, and six or eight guns, though it's not likely they are very heavy metal."

"I like your plan," said Jack; "I was considering that it might otherwise be necessary to sink one or two of our prizes rather than run the risk of losing the *Caterina*, for I make sure that that brig out there is her."

Jack gave the matter a few more minutes' consideration, and, signalling to the three schooners to heave to, he sent the purser on board the *Venus*, with directions to Bevan at once to clap on all sail for Port Royal, and to beg on his arrival there that the corvette, or some other man-of-war, might be immediately despatched to his assistance. As the night was dark he hoped that the stranger would not discover that the *Venus* had parted company till daylight, when she would have very little chance of overtaking her.

To prevent the risk of her doing so he hauled up close to the wind, believing that he should thus soon again get sight of the stranger. He was not mistaken, for in little more than half an hour he sighted her, standing the same course as before, but rather more abeam. Keeping away again, he shortened sail, but she held the same course as before. Thus the night passed, the stranger could be seen to the southward, while the coast of Cuba lay broad on the lee-beam, though undistinguishable in the darkness of night. At length, however, the stranger disappeared, but Jack felt satisfied that she had not gone in chase of the *Venus*, and he still hoped to see her again at daylight.

He and the two schooners kept on their course, under easy sail. The officers in command of the latter were as eager as Jack to bring the strange brig to action, hoping to take part in the light. Each vessel had a couple of six-pounders on board, which though not very heavy guns, might do good service, could they get near enough to the enemy to use them.

Thus the night passed slowly away. Dawn at length returned and as the first rays of the rising sun glanced across the ocean they fell on the sails of the stranger, about three miles off, broad on the beam of the *Supplejack*, whose commander at once resolved to bring her to action, while she on her part showed no disinclination for the fight.

"She must have plenty of hands on board, and pretty heavy metal, or she would long ago have been off," observed Needham; "however, we will see what Long Tom can do."

"We will give him every opportunity of showing his qualities," said Jack, "and not let the slaver get too near us till we have knocked away some of his spars."

The stranger now kept edging down towards the "brig-of-war," which stood on under her topsails, mainsail, and headsails.

Jack calculated that he should have time to throw three or four shots into her from Long Tom, and then by making more sail, give her a raking fire from his carronades. He hailed the schooners, and ordered Norris and the master not to expose themselves more than necessary, and only to fire when they had a good opportunity, while by all means they were to avoid allowing the slaver brig to run aboard them.

The stranger, which had again hauled her wind, was still far beyond the range of Long Tom.

"I don't think, sir, that they have got much stomach for the fight, after all," observed Needham.

"Perhaps not," answered Jack; "but I suspected from the fellow's manoeuvres that he still hopes to cut off our prizes, and is only waiting the opportunity for doing so. We must also look out, not to let him run us aboard, for if he has plenty of men that is what he will try to do, and it will be his best chance too, though I doubt not that we shall beat them off, no matter how many there are."

"No doubt about that, sir, whether they are Americans, Spaniards, or Negroes," answered Needham, in a confident tone.

Nearly half an hour passed, and the relative positions of the vessels were not changed. At length the slaver's crew, mustering up courage, more sail was made on her, and she came edging down boldly towards the "brig-of-war."

"Now see what Long Tom can do," cried Jack.

He had not miscalculated the distance this time. Needham pulled the trigger, and the shot was seen to strike the stranger's bulwarks. She fired in return, but without effect. Long Tom was quickly loaded; two shots crashed into the slaver, and three went over her. She replied with a broadside of four guns, but one shot only struck the *Supplejack*, knocking away one of the after-stanchions.

Jack now ordered more sail to be set, and shooting across the bows of the enemy, his two carronades and Long Tom were fired simultaneously. This raking fire threw the slaver's crew into considerable confusion, and before they had recovered from it, he again kept away. In the meantime the two schooners ranged up on the larboard quarter of the enemy, had begun blazing away with their popguns. Thus far, Jack had evidently the best of it, and he would have been wise had he kept at a distance, and fired away with Long Tom.

The slaver's crew, encouraged by their officers, returned to their guns, and began blazing away with far greater effect than at first, but as they fired high, no one on deck was hurt. Their shot began to inflict considerable damage on the rigging, and at length the slings of the fore-topsail-yard being shot away, down came the topsail, while the other headsails were completely riddled. In vain Needham did his best to retaliate on the enemy. Jack saw him binding a handkerchief round his arm, though still working his gun. Three other men were wounded by shot or splinters, and one poor fellow sank on the deck to rise no more. Matters were indeed looking somewhat serious. Just

then the slaver put up her helm; Jack saw what she was about, but was unable to avoid her.

“Repel boarders!” he sang out, and in another minute the bows of the black brig crashed against the side of the *Supplejack*, the flukes of the enemy’s anchors catching in the fore-rigging of the latter. Her crew, however, had just time to fire their carronades, sending several of the enemy to their last account, when nearly thirty fierce-looking ruffians, with cutlass in hand, came crowding to the bows of the brig, ready to spring on board. Jack and most of his people ran forward to repel them. The Spanish captain fought bravely, although driven back, again leading on his men, he made another desperate effort to get on board the *Supplejack*.

Bevan and the master, in the meantime, were not idle, but as they could bring one of their guns to bear without running the risk of hitting the *Supplejack*, they kept firing into the enemy. The effect of their fire was to lessen the number of the boarders, several of the slaver’s crew being occupied in working their after-guns, with the object of keeping the two schooners at bay. McTavish and the purser had, however, managed to run out one of the carronades from the aftermost port of the *Supplejack*, and having loaded it with grape, fired it directly at the men working at the guns. Had it been at a greater distance it might have done more damage; as it was it hit one of the Spaniards, blowing him almost to atoms, and wounding two others.

“Well done!” cried McTavish, whose Highland blood was up, “we’ll give them another dose.”

The gun was run in and loaded as before. The Spaniards, who had deserted their gun at the first discharge of the carronade, now returned to it, and brought it to bear on the *Supplejack*.

The boarding-party were, in the meantime, making desperate efforts to gain her decks, but were met by that determined courage which British seamen never fail to exhibit.

His brave crew well led by Jack and the boatswain, every time the Spaniards attempted to gain a footing on the fore-castle of the English brig, those who succeeded were cut down, while the rest were driven back.

“Now, my lads! follow me, and we’ll board them,” cried Jack.

His proposal was replied to with a loud cheer, and he and Needham were on the point of leaping on to the brig’s fore-castle, when a shout from aft made him turn his head, and he caught sight of Don Lopez and seven or eight of his companions, who had just made their way on deck by the companion-hatch. The Don had a musket in his hand with which he was fiercely attacking the surgeon, who had, however, the moment before seized one, and was warding off the blows aimed at him. Jack singing out to Needham to defend the fore-castle, sprang aft with several of his men to the assistance of McTavish. Just then the bows of the slaver separated from the *Supplejack*, and at the same moment one of the officers of the former, who had been looking eagerly to windward, shouted to the captain. He instantly ran aft to the helm, which had been deserted; but instead of attempting to regain his former position, put it up, and allowing his vessel to shoot ahead as soon as she had gathered way, went about and stood off to the northward. Don Lopez and his companions, seeing themselves deserted, threw down their arms and hurried below again as fast as they had come up. Needham’s first impulse was to rush back to Long Tom, with which he began to pepper the retreating slaver as rapidly as the gun could be loaded, while the two carronades were worked with equal quickness.

Jack had been so busily employed in defending the brig, that he had had no time to attend to anything else. He now, for a moment, turned his glance to windward, when he immediately discovered the cause of the slaver’s flight.

Standing towards him and coming on at a rapid rate was a ship carrying a press of sail, and a schooner which was quickly recognised as the *Venus*, by the cut of her sails, as well as by their snowy whiteness. He could scarcely doubt that the large vessel was the corvette, yet it would have been impossible for the *Venus* to have gone to Port Royal, and to have returned in so short a time.

The slaver, without firing a shot, was doing her best to escape, by setting all the sail she could carry; her crew being actively employed in knotting and splicing the rigging, which Needham’s shot had already somewhat damaged.

“Try one more,” exclaimed Jack, “and good luck go with it.”

Needham took good aim: the shot, passing through the maintopsail, struck the foretopmast, which fell over the side. A loud cheer burst from the throats of the English crew, and all hands redoubled their efforts in repairing their own damages. They were soon able to set the foretop-sail and jib, and get the brig about, and away they went in hot chase after their antagonist. The latter had not hitherto shown her colours; she now hoisted an American ensign, but that did not save her from another iron missile, thrown from Long Tom. She, on this, quickly exchanged the American colours for those of Spain, which, however, were treated in the same way, and finding at length that she had no chance of escaping from her active pursuer, she hauled them down and hove to.

Jack ordered a boat to be lowered, and directed Needham and the only midshipman remaining with him to board the prize; his other officers, the doctor and purser, being busily engaged with the wounded men. Needham was quickly alongside, and stepping on board he found that out of her crew of forty hands, six had been killed and eight or ten severely wounded, while her bulwarks and the companion-hatch had been considerably knocked about. Among the killed was her first officer, whilst the captain and several others were wounded.

Needham, as directed, inquired for her papers—

“And what is the name of this craft of yours?” he asked, when they were given to him.

“The *Black Swan*,” was the answer.

“Well now, I shouldn’t be surprised if you called her the *Caterina*, you would be somewhere nearer the truth.”

The captain started, but made no reply.

"Come, I am to take you on board our brig," continued Needham, making a sign to the captain to get into the boat.

Jack, as soon as he could possibly be spared off the deck, went below to ascertain how Don Lopez and his companions had made their escape from the cabin. It was very evident that they had broken open the door, that the sentry had been surprised and overpowered before he could use his musket. Instead of murdering him, which it was a wonder they had not done, they had gagged and put him into the irons from which they had released one of their companions. He still sat in a corner of the gunroom, looking very much alarmed, and not a little ashamed of himself.

In a short time the schooner and corvette, brought up by the freshening breeze, were close to, and Murray at once came on board the *Supplejack*.

"I heartily congratulate you on having captured the brig before I came up," he exclaimed, as he and Jack shook hands; "I should have been sorry to have deprived you of the honour which is your due."

"Thank you," answered Jack; "but I suspect that we should not have found it so easy a matter to capture her, had you not made your appearance in the nick of time. We were hard pressed I can assure you, for the Dons fought well, and it was all we could do to drive them back when they attempted to board us; besides which, our prisoners broke loose, and would have given us a good deal of trouble, before we had knocked them on the head. But how came you to arrive so opportunely?"

"I was sent by the admiral in quest of you, to direct you to return to Port Royal, from whence we are to sail immediately in company for Trinidad. We are not likely to remain there long, and are afterwards, the admiral tells me, not a usual proceeding, to be placed under the orders of the admiral on the South American station."

"For your sake I am sorry that you are to leave the West Indies, though I shall not be sorry to visit fresh scenes, and get a little cooling after a two years broiling in these seas," said Jack; "but how did you leave your friends at Saint David's?"

Murray looked grave as he answered—

"Miss O'Regan has not recovered as rapidly as I trusted she would, from the trials she has gone through, and I think it probable that she will accompany some of her relatives to England, so that I cannot hope to meet her again till we return home; indeed, she is firm in her determination not to marry, at all events, till I pay off the corvette, and I suppose she is right, although I would rather make her mine at once. Archy Gordon, I am thankful to say, under her and her friends' care, is gradually recovering, and will, I hope, in a few weeks, join the frigate. However, you must not forget your prize. Here comes your boat with her skipper."

The Spanish captain now stepped on board, and protested loudly against the legality of his capture, and declared that the English brig-of-war had fired into him without provocation, and that he had been obliged to board her, as the only means of saving his vessel.

"Very probably," answered Jack, "and you expected to take us and our prizes into the bargain. As to the legality of the affair, that will be decided when we arrive at Jamaica. In the meantime, as I am overcrowded, you and your officers will go on board the corvette, where your wounds will be attended to."

Murray had agreed to relieve Jack of some of his prisoners, and to send a prize-crew on board the *Caterina*. All arrangements having been made, the two men-of-war and four prizes made sail for Port Royal.

Scarcely had they got their tacks aboard than a large ship was sighted from the masthead of the *Tudor*, standing off the land. She was soon made out to be the *Plantagenet*, which had sailed from Port Royal ten days before her. The frigate made the signal to close, and the small squadron was soon hove to at a short distance from her. As directly afterwards it fell calm, visits were exchanged between the officers of the different ships. Murray and Jack went on board the *Plantagenet* to make their report to Captain Hemming.

"You have had better fortune than we can boast of, Rogers," he said, laughing in a tone which showed his vexation; "those rascally slave-dealers have contrived to do us, though, as we are up to their tricks, I hope that we shall turn the tables on them another time."

When Jack went into the gunroom, Adair gave him an account of the circumstance to which the captain alluded.

"We were on our way from Jamaica to Havannah, to look after you, Jack, and to prevent you from getting into mischief or catching a Tartar, as it seems you nearly did, when the captain thought fit to stand into the Bay of Guantimo; it's away there on the southern coast of Cuba, towards the east end. The admiral had received information that Don Pepé, the very rascal whose acquaintance we made on the coast of Africa, and who is now settled at Havannah, was fitting out a large and powerful craft, calculated to give a little pigmy, like you, some trouble.

"We came off Guantimo just before dark. It is, I should say, a beautiful and deep bay, with numerous small harbours in it, in which slavers may hide securely without any risk of being seen by our cruisers, unless expressly looked for. As we were standing in, intending to run up the bay, we made out a large brig at anchor with sails loose, ready for sea. She had a suspicious look about her, unusually square yards, taunt and raking masts, and low black hull. Though she might be well armed and disposed to show fight, had you for instance attempted to question her, she would not, of course, dare to resist the frigate; and as she could not escape us, we felt pretty sure that, should she be what we suspected, she would soon become our prize.

"We had got some little way up the bay, and within half a mile of her, when the wind fell. We were by this time more

certain than ever, from her appearance, that she was a slaver, and the captain therefore ordered a shot to be fired close ahead of her, that we might see how she would take it. She made no reply, neither hoisted colours, nor attempted to get under weigh.

“‘At all events we will see what she is,’ said the captain. He then ordered me and Norris to take the pinnace and jollyboat, and board her. The men had just time to buckle on their cutlasses before they tumbled into the boats. I was sorry after we had shoved off that they were not better armed, for the Spaniards might very possibly try to play us some trick or other, such as heaving cold shot into our boat and knocking us on the head as we got alongside, though they were much more likely to blow up their vessel or to run her on shore and make their escape. As we pulled on, we observed numerous boats passing from the brig to the shore, and we felt pretty certain that the fellows were landing the unfortunate slaves, so that we should not be in time to rescue them. I ordered our men to give way, in the hopes of saving some of the poor wretches, and a single slave remaining on board would, of course, be enough to condemn her. It was now nearly dark, though we could still make out the brig with her white canvas loose, not far ahead. I was somewhat surprised as we approached to observe no sign of life aboard her; not a man could I make out on her deck, no boat alongside. We had got almost up to her when we observed a large schooner lying close in shore on the farther side of a high point which had hitherto concealed her from us. Almost at the same instant a shot came flying from the schooner towards us, so well aimed that, as it struck the surface, it threw the water right over us. The splash of our oars must have shown the schooner’s people where we were, for, although we could see her, they could not have made out in the dark such small objects as our boats.

“The first shot was followed by a second, which very nearly did for the jollyboat, as, after striking the water, it bounded over her, smashing one of her oars, and knocking in her gunwale, happily hitting no one. Not wishing to be exposed to this sort of peppering, as shot after shot came in quick succession, giving us not a most agreeable kind of shower-bath, we at once dashed at the brig, I boarding on the starboard side, and Norris on the port. We fully expected to have some hot work, but on reaching the deck, not a soul appeared, and we found ourselves masters and, as we supposed, possessors of as fine a brig as I have ever seen engaged in the slave-trade.

“I could not help feeling, however, a little uncomfortable on recollecting the tricks the rascals are apt to play, and I half expected to find myself and my men hoisted into the air by the explosion of the magazine, when, as I was about to send below to examine the vessel, I heard voices in the after-cabin, and presently a Spanish officer in full rig appeared, followed by half a dozen men-of-war’s men. He announced himself as a midshipman belonging to the Spanish man-of-war schooner which lay at anchor in shore, the same craft which had fired at us, and said that he had been put in charge of the brig, which had been captured by his vessel.

“‘And pray, then, why did your schooner fire at our boats?’ I asked, eyeing the young fellow narrowly, for I much doubted that he was really a midshipman.

“‘Your boats were seen approaching our prize under suspicious circumstances in the dusk of evening, and you probably were taken for pirates,’ he answered, quite coolly.

“‘There was light enough when we were first seen to make out our ensign,’ I answered. ‘If that schooner is a man-of-war, her commander shall be made to apologise for the insult he has offered to the British flag.’

“‘Of course he will, and if you choose to send on board you will find that what I have told you is the case,’ he answered, biting his lips, as if, so I supposed, he disliked having his honour doubted.

“‘Well, you will remain here, and I will send one of my boats on board the schooner. Should any treacherous trick be played, I shall make you answerable,’ I said, eyeing him sternly. He did not quail, and I was pretty well satisfied that he spoke the truth. I accordingly ordered Norris to go on board the schooner and ascertain the facts of the case, and to tell the captain that I wished to see him immediately on board the brig; after he was gone, I felt no little anxiety as to the reception he might meet with. The Spanish midshipman, however, appeared at his ease, and accompanied me over the brig; I found that she was a brand-new vessel, having never before been to sea; she was laden with cotton goods, and had the planking for a slave-deck, with leaguers, and a large cauldron for boiling farina; indeed, she was in every way fitted for a slaver, and would, I felt sure, if we could not stop her career, bring back some seven or eight hundred slaves in her capacious hold.

“‘She is a slaver, you will allow?’ I said, turning to the midshipman.

“‘A slaver!’ he said, ‘worse than that. She is a regular pirate; as such we captured her.’

“Notwithstanding what he said, I was convinced that she was simply a slaver, though the Spaniards are generally in no hurry to take such vessels. We returned on deck, and I kept my eye on my friend and his men.

“The brig’s crew had all been removed, he told me.

“‘We shall see them, then, hanging at your yardarm tomorrow morning,’ I observed.

“‘Oh no! we do not treat our prisoners in so summary a manner,’ he answered.

“We paced the deck for some time together, while I turned a somewhat anxious eye towards the schooner, hoping soon to see Norris return.

“Norris, as I afterwards learnt, as he got near the Spanish schooner observed her guns pointed down at his boat, ready to sink her in a moment. Undaunted, however, he pulled alongside. No opposition was offered to his coming on board. When he got on deck he found the fighting-lanterns ranged along it, sixty marines drawn up with muskets in their hands and swords by their sides, and fully two hundred men at their quarters. At the gangway stood the captain, a thin, short, wizen-faced man, with an immense moustache, who, as Norris appeared, began stamping with

his feet, and swearing roundly in Spanish—

“‘Who are you? How dared you go on board yonder brig?’ he asked.

“‘I am an officer of her Britannic Majesty’s frigate *Plantagenet*,’ answered Norris, having a good notion of the proper way to meet such a fellow. ‘I obey the orders of my captain. He supposes her to be a slaver, and if she is not, all I can say is, she is very much like one.’

“‘She is not a slaver, but a pirate, and I have captured her under the same treaty that you English take slavers, and she is therefore mine and under my charge, and no one shall interfere with her.’

“‘In that case, why did you fire at us, I beg to know?’ asked Norris.

“‘Because it was dark, and I could not see your flag,’ answered the little Don.

“‘You could have seen our frigate, and you must have known perfectly well all the time that the boats you were firing at were English,’ replied Norris. ‘My superior officer, who has taken possession of the brig, wishes to see you on board her immediately.’

“While Norris was carrying on this conversation, the Spanish crew looked so bent on mischief, and the moustaches of the marines curled so fiercely that he expected every moment to be attacked, and he saw his own men put their hands on the hilts of their cutlasses as if they thought the same. They would have had to contend with fearful odds, but I have not the slightest doubt that they would have made a good fight of it, and perhaps have got off scot free, though they had not a pistol among them.

“The Spanish captain considered a moment, and Norris heard him order his gig to be manned.

“‘Well, remember that my superior officer expects you,’ he said, and having no inclination to remain longer on board than was necessary, ordering his men into the jollyboat, he came back as fast as they could pull to the brig.

“He had just time to give me an account of what had occurred, when we made out a Spanish boat coming towards us.

“I should have said by-the-bye that alongside the captain was an Englishman, or a man who spoke English perfectly, and interpreted for Norris—or at all events, helped him out with the conversation.

“I stood with my men ranged behind me, their shirt-sleeves tucked up and their cutlasses in their hands, ready to receive my visitor. I determined to show him that I was not to be trifled with. After his impudent behaviour, he had no right to expect any courtesy from me, so I let him find his own way on deck.

“‘Well, señor,’ I asked when he appeared, followed by his interpreter, ‘how did you dare to fire at my boats?’

“Instead of stamping and swearing as he had done when on board his own vessel, he was in a moment an altered being. Taking off his hat, he stood before me humbly bowing, and with his hand on his heart, declared that he much regretted what had occurred.

“‘Indeed, señor, I had no notion that the boats I fired at were English, and took you for pirates, about to attempt the recapture of the brig.’ This was said by means of the interpreter.

“‘That’s as big a bouncer as ever was spoken,’ I heard some one behind me growl out. I don’t know whether the interpreter thought fit to explain the polite remark to his superior.

“‘As to that I have no means of judging, but how comes it that I find one of your officers on board this vessel? She is evidently fitted for the slave-trade, and as such she will most certainly be condemned,’ I observed.

“‘Of course! no doubt about it,’ answered the Spanish captain, quite coolly, ‘she is not only a slaver but a pirate, and discovering such to be the case I captured her, and I give you my word of honour that I am about to take her into Saint Jago da Cuba for adjudication.’

“‘Of course I cannot doubt the word of honour of a Spanish officer,’ I replied. ‘I must consequently leave you in possession, and I only hope you will take care that she is condemned and her piratical career stopped.’

“‘Oh, of course, señor. I will take good care of that,’ he answered, again bowing, and putting his hand to his heart.

“I fancied that by the light of the lantern which fell on his countenance, I could see a twinkle in his eyes as he said this, and I felt strongly tempted to pitch him and his crew into their boat, cut the brig’s cable and make sail. However, as I was compelled to take his word for the truth of what he asserted, I had nothing to do but to trundle with my men into our boats, and pull back to the frigate. Hemming approved of what I had done, though he agreed with me that it was all humbug, and that the Spanish captain pretended to have captured the brig for the sake of saving her from our claws. He determined therefore to watch the two vessels, and we accordingly hove-to to see what they would do.

“It was not till nearly dawn that the breeze came off the land, when we saw the brig stealing out, followed by the man-of-war schooner. The latter, by the bye, was a magnificent vessel, one of the largest schooners I have come across, requiring the numerous crew she carried to handle her enormous canvas. We at once made sail and followed them into Saint Jago, which is about thirty miles west of Guantimo. We there found that the Spanish captain had actually brought the brig to trial as a pirate, though, as he well knew, there was not the slightest proof that she was one. As the trial was likely to last some weeks, or, at all events, till we were out of the port, Hemming considered that it would be useless to remain, so we sailed again, and were on our passage round to Havannah when we sighted

you.”

Such was Adair’s account of his adventure.

A breeze soon afterwards springing up, the *Plantagenet* proceeded on to her destination, while the corvette and brig, with the prizes, continued their course to Jamaica. It was not till the return of the *Plantagenet* to Port Royal, that Jack heard of the full rascality of the Spanish captain. On the arrival of the frigate at Havannah Captain Hemming laid a complaint before the Admiralty Court for the adjudication of slavers. He then discovered that the brig belonged to Pepé, or, as he was now called, Don Matteo, who had bribed the Spanish captain to keep by his vessel and to pretend to have captured her should an English man-of-war appear. On the acquittal of the brig for piracy at Saint Jago, the Spanish captain who had pledged his honour on the subject escorted her through the windward passage as far as seventy degrees of longitude, when she was out of the range of West India cruisers. Jack afterwards heard an account of her from a friend on the African station. She had then really become a pirate. She used to watch for the slavers after they had run the gauntlet of the British cruisers, and would then capture them, take their slaves out, and give them her cargo of coloured cottons in exchange. When she did not manage to fall in with slavers she occasionally took a run in on her own account, and her captain being well informed of the movements of the blockading squadron, she invariably managed to pick up a fresh cargo and get clear off again. Being, however, in no ways particular, if she had no cargo of coloured cloths, she would sink the slavers she took, with their crews, so as to leave no trace of the transaction behind.

Being armed with a long gun amidships and six long nines, not a slaver had a chance with her. It was not till long afterwards that Jack became acquainted with the last-mentioned particulars. She at length disappeared from the coast, and he could never hear what ultimately became of her. She was probably either burnt, or driven on shore, or, still more likely, she was capsized and went down with her living freight of eight hundred human beings.

Chapter Nineteen.

The Tudor and Supplejack at Trinidad—Jack’s account of his trip up the Orinoco—The vice-consul and his belongings—A knowing pilot—Tom bit by a turtle—Tortoises—The brig among the trees—Spider’s attempt to escape—The midshipmen go in chase and lose themselves—Boarded by ants—Nearly take the brig—Search for the midshipmen in the forest—A native habitation—Angostura and its people—Land the consul and his better half—Return.

The *Tudor* once more came to an anchor off Port of Spain, in the beautiful island of Trinidad. Terence Adair had been appointed to her as first lieutenant, and Higson as second; she was accompanied by the Supplejack, of which Rogers still retained the command, with Bevan as his senior officer, Jos Green as master, and Needham as boatswain.

The old shipmates were thus, much to their satisfaction, still employed together. As soon as the sails were furled, Murray went on shore, accompanied by Jack and Terence, taking with them Tom and Gerald. Higson had insisted on doing Adair’s duty.

“Of course you will want to go and call on your fair cousins, and I never have been nor ever shall be a lady’s man, so they would not be well pleased to see me in your stead,” he said as he made the offer which Terence very readily accepted.

After Murray had delivered his despatches to the governor, he rejoined the two lieutenants, who had in the meantime gone to pay a visit to Antonio Gomez. They found the Don just starting out for his country house, and he, as they expected, at once ordered horses, and insisted that they should accompany him.

“Donna Caterina and her daughters will be delighted to see you, and would not pardon me if I did not bring you along with me,” he said in a warm, hearty tone. “They will be anxious to hear all about their sweet friend Stella, and what you have been doing since you were here last. We some time ago received an account of Colonel O’Regan’s death. Well! well! poor man, I confess it was only what I expected, he seemed determined to court such a fate; and I could never make out why a person who could honourably live at his ease at home should be so eager to knock his head against stone walls—however, the tastes of people differ.”

The horses having arrived, the philosophical Don led the way, with Murray by his side.

The party received a hearty welcome, as before, from Donna Caterina and her fair daughters, and Terence as usual had a long conversation with the old lady about Ballymacree; he had, however, not much news to tell her; he had only occasionally heard from home, and the letters he had received were brief, stating simply that things went on as usual; Gerald, however, pleased her much by showing her the letter from his mother, in which she expressed her gratitude for the kindness he had received from his West India cousins.

Though they had not been informed of Murray’s engagement to Stella, they very quickly guessed the truth, and by adroitly questioning the midshipman, ascertained all particulars as far as they were known.

Jack and Terence very nearly lost their hearts, as the young ladies were thus able to concentrate all those efforts to attract them, which might have been expended in vain on the young commander, but as they returned to their ships early the next morning they quickly recovered their usual serenity of mind.

“I am afraid they would be very miserable at Halliburton, and I somewhat doubt whether Mary and Lucy would quite like them as sisters-in-law,” observed Jack to Terence while they were freely discussing the young ladies.

“May be, the dear creatures wouldn’t be quite as happy as I should wish them to be at Ballymacree, seeing that they

mightn't take altogether to our ways," said Terence. "So I don't think that I'll make the promise I was meditating, of coming back some day or other, when I am a commander for instance, and carrying one of them over to Ireland with me."

On returning to town Murray again called on the governor, who told him that he had received a communication from a certain Senhor Bernado Guedes, acting as British consul at Angostura, up the Orinoco, complaining of outrages inflicted on certain British subjects as well as on himself, and requesting that a man-of-war might be sent to punish the offenders.

"As the navigation of the river is, however, very difficult, I doubt whether a ship of any size could get up it, though, perhaps, the smallest of your vessels would be able to do so," he added.

Murray, of course, said that he should be happy to send the *Supplejack* up, should her draft of water not be too great, and that he could perfectly trust her commander, Lieutenant Rogers, to act with discretion in the matter. Senhor Bernardo soon afterwards made his appearance. He had not only come himself to make his complaint, but had brought his wife with him, without whom, he observed, he never moved from home.

He was not a very favourable specimen of a British consul, and it was difficult to say how he had attained the post. He was a short, dark-skinned personage, with apparently a mixture of negro blood in his veins. With considerable volubility, though in somewhat broken English, he repeated all his complaints, and finished up, requesting that he might be conveyed, with his wife, back to his home.

"But as we are not acquainted with the navigation, it would be impossible for the brig to go up without a pilot," observed Murray.

"Oh! dat sir, I will provide," he answered. "I will obtain the services of Anselmo; he knows ebery inch of de way up to Angostura, each sandbank and ebery snag, I might almost say."

"You saw the brig-of-war in the harbour, do you think she will be able to get up so far?" asked Murray.

"Oh yes, captain; your big ship even would get up as the waters are rising at present, sure. She might, to be sure, stick coming down, though," answered the consul.

"Thank you, I should prefer then not attempting to take her up," said Murray, laughing.

"Well, Captain Murray, I will leave you to make arrangements with the consul, and I conclude that Lieutenant Rogers will be ready to give this gentleman and his wife a passage?" observed the governor.

"I can answer for that," answered Murray, as he took his leave, accompanied by Senhor Guedes.

He returned to the quay.

"I conclude, Mr Consul, that you and your lady will be ready to go on board the brig this evening, as she will sail tomorrow morning by daylight," said Murray. "Where is Senhora Guedes residing?"

"She, my wife, is on board that schooner dere, the mail-packet, in which we came from Angostura. I left her locked up in the cabin," answered the consul.

"Locked up in the cabin!" exclaimed Murray, with no little surprise, beginning to suspect that Rogers would have curious passengers on board the *Supplejack*.

"Oh yes, sare, I always lock up my wife when I do go out, for she is young, you see, and it is the safest plan; she can then no run away herself, and no one can run off with her—that what I always fear. It make my life miserable at Angostura;" and this curious representative of the "majesty of England" shrugged his shoulders and made a grimace which showed the intensity of his feelings.

"Well, go and get your wife and your traps, and I will inform Lieutenant Rogers of the governor's wishes, that he should afford you and your wife a passage home."

"Thank you, sare," answered Senhor Guedes, bowing low as he strutted off to a boat, and returned on board the schooner, which lay at a short distance from the shore.

Murray had invited Rogers to dine on board the *Tudor*, and a very pleasant party the three old messmates had. They talked of times gone by, and enjoyed a hearty laugh at the description Murray gave of the consul and his fair partner.

"I shall be happy to give up my cabin to the lady, but I hope her husband won't lock her in it during the whole voyage; at all events, he cannot be afraid of any one running away with her while we are at sea."

"I wish you may at all events enjoy the company of your passengers," said Adair, laughing; "I want you to write me a full account of what occurs, or the chances are that by the time you rejoin us you will have forgotten all about it."

Jack, promising to comply with Adair's request, returned to the *Supplejack* somewhat earlier than he would otherwise have done, that he might be on board to receive his expected guests. He at once gave orders to his steward to clear out his cabin and prepare it for the reception of the consul's lady; however, as Jack faithfully fulfilled his promise to Adair, we have the opportunity of giving an account of the expedition in his own words:—

"I had been walking the deck for some time, thinking now of one thing, now of another, when a boat with two persons in the sternsheets came alongside, and answered to the quarter-master's hail—

“‘Her Majesty’s British Consul of Angostura and his family.’

“The accommodation-ladder had already been rigged in preparation for the arrival of these important personages. The sides being manned, the next instant a stout gentleman who must be, I knew, the consul, began to ascend, shoving up before him a veiled female figure. She, I rightly guessed, was his wife. I advanced to meet them, and was about to address the lady, when her husband informed me that ‘She no speak English—and, as she is very tired, she wishes at once to go to her cabin.’

“I accordingly conducted the veiled lady below. From her figure, and a glimpse I caught of her countenance as the light from the lamp fell on it (as by chance, of course, her veil fell on one side), I saw that she was young and undoubtedly pretty, thus accounting for the jealousy displayed by her ‘lord and master.’

“The old gentleman followed and remained for a short time in the cabin. When he came out I observed that he examined the door, and seemed rather nonplussed on discovering that there was no key with which he could follow his usual custom of locking up his better half. I invited him to walk the deck with me, that he might give me a fuller account of the circumstances which had occurred at Angostura, requiring the visit of a British man-of-war.

“He told me a long rigmarole tale of an attack which had been made on his house by a party of brigands, as he called them, from Venezuela, the chief object of which, as he suspected, was to carry off his wife; however, they, or some one else, had pulled down the consular flagstaff. A half-caste, who claimed to be a British subject, belonging to Trinidad, had been killed, and two or three others had been made prisoners. All the time he was speaking he was in a state of agitation, and soon hurried back into the cabin, to ascertain (as he said), whether his wife wanted anything.

“He supped with us in the gunroom, and though he played a very good knife and fork, he exhibited the same uneasiness, jumping up two or three times during the meal, to pay his spouse a visit.

“McTavish, who had not suspected the cause of his anxiety, remarked, ‘that he had never seen more devoted affection displayed, and that he could not help admiring the old gentleman,’ though he owned that he possessed very few other likeable qualities.

“For my own part, I did not anticipate much pleasure in the society of my guests.

“By break of day we got under weigh and stood for the ‘Boca de Huevos,’ or the Umbrella Passage. Till I consulted our sailing directions I had fancied that we might have made a short cut to the southward through one of the Serpent’s Mouths, but the hot current which sets into the Gulf of Paria, caused by the immense mass of water flowing out of the Orinoco, would have effectually prevented us from gaining our object. The longest way round, therefore, was the shortest to our destination.

“A fresh breeze on our quarter enabled us to get out into the open sea sooner than I expected, when we stood along the northern shore of Trinidad to the eastward. We carried the breeze with us till we rounded the point of Galera. I should not have supposed that Trinidad is the fertile place it really is, from the appearance of its northern shore, which is that of an immense ridge of barren rocks. Not, indeed, till we were running down the eastern coast, did its rich and smiling valleys again appear in view.

“I had good reason to be glad that we had not attempted the Serpent’s Mouth; for when standing across from the southern end of Trinidad towards the Orinoco the wind fell light, and we were nearly swept by the current back again into the Gulf.

“Even before we came in sight of the mainland, we found ourselves sailing through the brown waters of the mighty stream, which as we got nearer its many mouths, became almost the consistency of pea-soup, and we had to keep a lookout to avoid the huge trunks of trees swept out by the current, the ends of some of which, broken off by lightning or the wind, might have made an ugly hole in our bows. We stood for the centre and broadest entrance of the river, the only one through which we could make our way up against the current, and hove-to off the far from attractive looking town of Cangrayos—here we were to find, the consul informed me, the trustworthy pilot Anselmo.

“A signal having been made for a pilot, a canoe speedily put off from the shore, bringing on board a big mulatto, dressed in an excessively dirty white jacket and trowsers, with a broad-brimmed straw hat which had seen better days, on his head. He greeted the consul with a profound bow, and introduced himself to me as ‘de pilot of de Orinoco,’ who ‘knowed ebery part of de river from one end to de other, and take up all de English ships which come dare.’

“‘Well, Senhor Anselmo, do you think you can pilot this brig and carry her back again, without leaving her high and dry on a sandbank?’ I asked.

“‘Oh yes, sare, if she twice the size, I take her up all de same,’ he answered with a scornful laugh at the supposition that he might not fulfil his engagement.

“‘Senhor Guedes assured me that you were the best pilot to be found for the river,’ I remarked. At his request we hoisted up his canoe, which contained a hammock and several articles which he had brought off to administer to his creature comforts. The only fresh provisions that we were able to procure at the place were three turtles, one of which was immediately put to death; the others were slung in hammocks, and secured to temporary stanchions fixed to the bulwarks; we kept the reptiles alive by covering them with damped swabs which were continually wetted as the heat absorbed the water. We had to wait till the next morning, when the sea-breeze set up the river, to enable us to stem the muddy current. The shores on either side, as far as the eye could reach, were covered with dense masses of mangrove trees which rose up out of the water, no firm ground being visible on either side; the scenery, indeed, was not attractive, though we supposed that in time we should come to something more interesting. It was satisfactory to find that we did make headway, though slowly.

"I have said nothing about Senhor Guedes and his better half. He allowed her to come out to meals; but he sat opposite to her at table, and fixed a glance at her all the time, and frowned savagely if he saw her for a moment turn her eyes towards me. Had I not suggested, for the sake of her health, that she should be allowed to come on deck, I believe he would have kept her shut up in the cabin for the whole voyage. When she did appear she was closely veiled, and he stood by her the whole time, looking expressively angry when any of the officers approached her, though as she did not speak English, few of them could exchange a word with her. Before we got into the river, he had some reason for keeping her in her cabin; for the poor lady was very ill. Several times I heard her Bluebeard of a husband scolding her fearfully, and I felt strongly inclined to pitch him overboard. She recovered rapidly when she got into the river, and was able to hold her own, and prove that she could scold as well as he could.

"I won't bother you with an account of our daily progress, which was as I have said, dreadfully slow. I had expected to witness grand and majestic views on the Orinoco, the second river in point of size in South America; but its very width is a drawback from any beauty it might possess; and although aware that the trees on either side are of great height, they are so far off as to appear like mere bulrushes growing out of the water, while the mountains of which we caught sight were at such a distance as to produce but little effect in the landscape. When the breeze was fresh we made tolerable way through the water, but directly it fell we were compelled to anchor, or we should have speedily been swept down, and lost all the distance we had gained.

"We had to bring up every night and for some hours during the day, so you will understand what toilsome work it was.

"I suggested one evening to Anselmo, that as he knew the river so well we might run on when the breeze favoured us during the night: he shook his head, answering, 'Oh no, sare, that is not to be done; we get into mischief; I only pilot for the day.' As the rascal was paid by the day he was in no hurry; nothing I could say would induce him to take charge by night. I tried what threatening would do, but he only smiled, as he well knew that he had us in his power.

"Having gone on deck some time after sunset one evening, and found a steady breeze blowing up the stream, I thought I would again try to overcome his resolution. I sent the quartermaster of the watch to look for him, but he was nowhere to be found. 'Anselmo!' was called along the lower deck; no answer came. At last, turning my eyes aloft I observed something unusual in the rigging, and there between the main and foremast was slung a hammock, in which the rogue had stowed himself. After he had been repeatedly hailed, he looked out of his eyrie, and getting into the main rigging came down. I asked him why he had taken up his berth aloft.

"'Because, sare, it dare cool and pleasant; no mosquito; plenty air.'

"He certainly was not likely to have been interrupted as long as the sails were furled, though had he suddenly awoke he would have run a great risk of toppling down on deck. Habit, however, is second nature, and he, I dare say, recollected, even in his sleep, where he was.

"Had I at the time known one of his peculiarities I should have kept a stricter watch on him than I had done hitherto. I soon, however, found it out. We were brought up one day for want of a breeze, when an American schooner loaded with hides came rapidly gliding down the stream. Anselmo begged to have his canoe lowered, as he said that he had friends on board whom he wished to see. I gave him permission, and after a brief visit to her he returned singing merrily as he got alongside, and his canoe again at his request was hoisted up. It did not occur to me to send any one to look into her, or to look myself. Soon afterwards the schooner was out of sight. After waiting for some time a breeze sprang up, and as we had not anchored in any great depth of water we soon got the anchor to the bows and made sail. Anselmo was more loquacious than usual. We had gone up a mile or two when I felt the vessel touch the ground. As the breeze freshened, however, she glided on, stirring up the thick mud at the bottom.

"I rated our pilot soundly, but he only laughed, observing, 'Oh, senhor capitan, that is noting.' I happened to remark that he made frequent visits to his canoe, and in a short time after I went below. When I returned on deck I found that he was completely drunk, and not willing to trust the brig any longer to his charge, as the wind also was falling, I brought up; of this fact, however, Anselmo did not appear to be aware, for he stood at his usual post conning her with the gravity of a post-captain who has royalty on board his ship. 'Starboard now,' 'steady,' 'port,' he sung out every now and then, while holding on by a stanchion to support himself, notwithstanding which he occasionally surged forward, and I thought would have tumbled over on his nose, while, of course, he afforded infinite amusement to the midshipmen and crew. We were unable to move again during the day. Notwithstanding his condition he managed to climb into his hammock and sleep away the fumes of liquor.

"Next morning he seemed greatly surprised to find that the brig had not made better way, and declared that she had dragged her anchor, as to his certain knowledge we had sailed on three or four hours after we had left the spot where we were now brought up.

"We had eaten another of our turtles. I had ordered the last to be killed, and was standing aft watching a large cow-fish which came sweeping by on our quarter, its snout and shining body rising just above the surface, when I heard a loud cry from Tom, and I saw him with one hand in the turtle's hammock dancing up and down, and crying lustily, 'Quick, quick! if you don't, he will have my thumb off.'

"I ran forward to his assistance, and found that having forgotten at which end the animal's head lay, he had intended, as he said, to give its tail a pull, when to his dismay the creature's mouth caught his thumb. With a boathook, fortunately at hand, I managed to wrench open the turtle's mouth and extract Tom's thumb. Had the creature been in full strength it would undoubtedly have bitten it off; even as it was, though at its last gasp, it had given him an ugly gripe, which necessitated his being under the care of McTavish for several days.

"Of animal life we saw but little, though birds of gay plumage flew across the stream, and cow-fish, porpoises, and other creatures gambolled in the waters. We met, also, several floating islands, composed of trunks of trees bound

together by their branches, and interwoven by sipos or long vines. Sometimes they were even covered with grass, and on one of them was a jaguar still feeding on its prey, and not aware of the fate which to a certainty awaited it. The animal had probably leaped on the island to seize a deer which had taken refuge there, when the victim and its destroyer had been together swept away, the latter being afraid to venture into the rushing stream to make its escape. It was too far off to shoot; indeed, I had no rifle ready. When passing near the trees which grew in the water—for land was nowhere visible—I caught sight of flocks of herons resting on the branches.

“I went on one occasion, when we had brought up, in Anselmo’s canoe, and in an hour killed a sufficient number of them to serve all hands for breakfast.

“Having consumed our last turtle we became badly off for fresh provisions, as we generally anchored too far from the trees to get a shot at a bird, or to catch any of the animals which inhabited them.

“Occasionally, however, we were visited by the canoes of the natives, who supplied us with bananas, coconuts, and the dried flesh of some large fish. The most welcome provisions they brought us were a number of small land-tortoises, a foot and a half or two feet in length, which were as delicate as anything I could wish to eat. As we got higher up, the river became somewhat narrower, and we thus frequently had to pass close to the trees.

“We had been making good way one morning with a fresh breeze, when as the day advanced the wind began to fall: still Anselmo encouraged us with the hope that it would get up again, and we continued our course under all the sail we could spread.

“As he appeared to be perfectly sober at the time, I had not, as I generally did, kept an eye on him, and therefore did not bring up as I should have done. Finding, however, that we were going astern I ordered the anchor to be dropped, and sent the hands to furl sails. The topsails and topgallant-sails had fortunately been handed, and the men were coming down from aloft when the brig swung right in among the trees, and the end of a thick bough which had been shivered by lightning, or broken off by a storm, ran through the head of the mainsail just under the gaff. There we lay with our fore-topgallant and topsail yards caught in the branches, and our mainsail securely locked.

“‘A pretty job it will be to get clear,’ I thought. Though at present the brig had suffered no great damage, she was in a position in which it would not have been satisfactory to remain long, and I therefore ordered a boat to be lowered to carry out a kedge. As it was necessary, however, first to clear our mainsail and yards, I sent some hands aloft with axes to chop away the network of vines, the nooses of which nearly caught two or three fellows and swung them off the yards into the trees.

“The most excited person on board was the midshipmen’s pet, Master Spider. Seeing the green foliage overhead, he became inspired with the idea of visiting the haunts of his childhood. The owners, not thinking of this, had allowed him to be loose: up the rigging he sprang, with Tom and Gerald after him. They were very nearly as nimble as he was. He had reached the fore-topgallant-yard, close to which temptingly hung a mass of vines just such as one might suppose he had been accustomed to swing in, in his early days: into it he sprang, and began to climb one of the many widespreading branches to which the vines were attached. Tom and Gerald, afraid of losing him, followed and were soon lost to sight among the dense foliage. I did not myself see this, but supposed them still to be among the men on the yards, for I was busy at the moment in getting the boat lowered, and pointing out the direction in which the kedge was to be carried. Calling the men down, I ordered them to haul away on the warp to get the head of the brig out again into the stream. While, however, the branch was fixed in the mainsail, this could not be done. Needham, who saw what was necessary, called for the assistance of the pilot, who was a wonderfully strong man, and having lowered the peak, the two put their shoulders under the boom, and by a wonderful exertion of strength lifted it out of the crutch and let it run forward. At that moment a large mass fell from the branch on deck: I turned round to ascertain what it was, when I saw issuing from the fragments myriads of large ants, which went crawling all over the deck.

“‘Oh! they will bite us to death,’ exclaimed Anselmo, making a bolt up the rigging. Needham, who had already had his feet attacked, followed his example; the consul, who had been sitting on deck with his wife, well knowing the biting powers of the creatures, seized her round the waist and attempted to carry her down the companion-hatchway, but in his terror he let her go by the run, and she lay shrieking at the bottom, for she was much hurt, while he pitched down headforemost after her, a whole army of ants following. The deck literally swarmed with them; the creatures came creeping forward, attacking our shoeless feet and biting in a most frightful manner. For the instant I thought that they would have driven me and my crew overboard; the men at the warp quickly recovering hauled away as before, though they were unable to withstand stamping and leaping in their vain efforts to free themselves of the fiery pests. We had managed to get the brig free of the boughs, when I bethought me of attacking the creatures with water, and ordering all the buckets to be filled, we immediately began deluging the decks, the ants which still remained on it being quickly swept through the scuppers. Numbers having, however, already gained the hammock-nettings and rigging, it was no easy matter to dislodge them. Bevan, with the boat’s crew, who had gone off with the kedge, fortunately for themselves, escaped; and he told me afterwards, that not knowing what had happened, he fancied for a moment that we were all gone mad, from the curious way in which, I setting the example, every one on board had begun suddenly to leap and skip about. A gouty gentleman, subjected to the discipline we went through, would quickly have been cured of his complaint. Our next puzzle was to get rid of the creatures in the rigging. I partly accomplished the task by sending hands into the tops with buckets, who dashed the water down in every direction. To clear the cabin of them, however, was a more difficult task; as soon as the deck was somewhat free, I went down below, where, from the conversation I heard, with occasional cries which proceeded from the cabin, I guessed that the consul and his wife were employed in freeing their persons from the pests. Senhor Guedes presently afterwards appeared with a basin, in which were floating countless numbers of the slain; still I saw them crawling about the cabin in every direction, and it struck me that the youngsters might be usefully employed in catching them. I accordingly sent for them, when, to my dismay, I was told that they were nowhere to be found. At last one of the topmen said that he had seen them chasing Master Spider among the boughs of the forest. A vision of jaguars, venomous sea snakes and other reptiles, rose up before me, and I began to fear that they might have met

with some accident. We looked towards the forest, but they could nowhere be seen. We shouted to them to show themselves, but no answer came to our repeated hails. I immediately ordered Anselmo's canoe to be lowered, and as soon as the brig had been brought safely to an anchor at a distance from the trees, I paddled off to look for them. I was quickly under the boughs, but as far as my eye could reach water alone was to be seen, with huge trees apparently growing out of it. By sounding I found that the depth, even some way in, was fully six feet. Again and again I shouted, but got no answer, and as for seeing anything above my head, that was impossible, from the mass of sipos, as Anselmo called them, or vines, which hung in festoons from the branches of the trees, uniting them in one vast network. I began to fear that the youngsters had, in their hurry to overtake Spider, slipped from aloft and fallen into the water, where they might have stuck in the mud, or been carried off by some voracious alligator watching for his prey. Going a little farther, I again shouted, when a cry came from among the branches above my head: I looked up, expecting to see the lads, but could not make them out. At last I distinctly heard Tom's voice, exclaiming, 'Here we are, sir, but Spider will hold on by the boughs with his tail, and we cannot get him along.'

"'But that is nothing, sir,' added Gerald. 'We are surrounded by hundreds of monkeys, and are afraid that they will carry him off if we let him go again.'

"'Wring his neck and pitch him down, and then come down yourselves,' I shouted out, losing temper.

"'That's not so easily done, sir,' cried Gerald. 'The monkeys may take it into their heads to carry us off.'

"'No fear of that,' I shouted out; 'tie Spider's tail over his head and you will easily bring him down by some of these vines. If you happen to fall into the water I will pick you up.' The youngsters did as I directed them, though Spider showed fight and bit Gerald while he was trying to perform the operation. Tom, however, very wisely thought of tying his handkerchief over the monkey's head, and now dragging him along they began to make their way down to the lower branches. Not being able, however, to ascertain how near the vines reached to the water, they came down by some which hung eight or ten feet from the surface. This was too great a height to drop from into the canoe. Supposing that I was losing patience, and that I might punish them for their freak, they let go, and monkey and midshipmen came down by the run into the water, where the three adventurers cut a ludicrous figure, splashing, spluttering, and kicking till I got up to them. The latter were not much the worse for their ducking, but the monkey was very nearly drowned before I had helped him out. 'We have got Spider anyhow,' sung out Tom, not holding me in much awe, but Gerald took matters more seriously.

"'Faith, sir. We could not help it,' he exclaimed, 'the baste of a monkey would set off to join his brothers in the bush, and if we had not gone after him they would have made a hathen of him to a certainty.'

"'I suppose, then, Master Gerald, you consider that he has become a Christian under your instruction?'

"'Well, sir,' answered Gerald, looking up with a comical expression, which reminded me of an old shipmate of mine, 'he is as good a Christian, any how, as many who call themselves so, and considering that he has got a tail he is a remarkable civilised baste.'

"'Well, I will overlook your offence of quitting the ship without permission,' I said, trying to keep from laughing. 'You were not aware probably that you were to be left among the tops of the trees when we hauled off from them? I don't accuse you of intending to desert.'

"'Thank you, sir. We will promise not to go monkey-hunting again, without your leave,' answered the two midshipmen in chorus.

"As I was in no hurry to get on board, and the youngsters were not likely to suffer from sitting in their wet clothes, I paddled away for some distance among the trees. The greatest number were palms, but there were others of all descriptions, of which I am unable even to give the names. After going a little way we came to a somewhat more open space, when we heard a peculiar chattering overhead, while showers of sticks came pattering down on our heads. On looking up to ascertain the cause, we saw, high above up, among the tops of the tallest trees a whole clan of large bushy-tailed monkeys; there must have been a hundred or more, some old, and some young, gambolling about and playing all sorts of pranks. No sooner did they catch sight of us than they stopped, and scampered off helter-skelter, the old ones catching hold of the young ones in their arms, all equally anxious to make their escape. Some took prodigious leaps, catching the branches with their long tails, and after a swing or two throwing themselves to another branch, and so made their way amid the boughs till the whole of them were quickly lost to sight. They, however, had not gone far, when Tom's quick eyes detected several bushy faces grinning out from among the boughs where they had concealed themselves. We paddled on a short distance and then remained quiet, when in a few minutes, first one bolder than the rest came out from his hiding-place, and then another, and another, uttering sharp cries; presently the whole troop came back, and began amusing themselves as before, the spot for some reason or other suiting their tastes. It was great fun, I confess, and Tom and Gerald enjoyed it immensely. They declared that the monkeys were the same fellows who came to look at them and had threatened, as they supposed, to make them prisoners. I had paddled for some distance into the forest when I considered that it was time to turn back, for the sun was getting low; it was just possible that I might lose my way, and I suspected it would be no easy matter to find it in the dark. How far the water might extend over the country I could not tell, probably for miles and miles. I had begun, as I believed, to direct the head of the canoe towards the brig, steering by the rays of the sun, which still came across the forest and struck the topmost boughs of the trees, of which I occasionally caught a glimpse, when presently Tom caught sight of some tempting fruit like plums, which hung from the branches almost within our reach. I tried to get at them with my paddle by standing up in the canoe. On finding this impossible, Tom and Gerald volunteered to climb along the branch, when they managed to get hold of a good number, which they threw into the canoe, though, by-the-bye, they very nearly toppled down head foremost into the water when making the attempt. I tried the plums and found them excellent. Knowing how welcome they would be on board, we took as many as the canoe would hold: no one enjoyed them more than Spider, who munched away at them with amazing gusto, till his masters declared that he would burst if he took any more. Some time was occupied in gathering and

eating the plums. We had turned about so often that when I began to paddle back, on my life I could not tell which direction to take; not a gleam of sunlight could I see on any of the trees, and before we had gone far the gloom of night began to settle down among the tall trunks. I did not wish to spend a night in the forest, with a chance of being capsized by an alligator, or cow-fish, or grabbed by an anaconda.

“Well, at all events, we shall not starve,” said Tom; “these plums are very pleasant after the salt pork and dried fish we have had between our teeth for the last few days.”

“You forget the turtle soup and the tortoises.”

“We did not have a very large share of the former in the gunroom,” answered Gerald, “and the tortoises were such ugly looking beasts that we did not take to them kindly.”

“That was your own fault then,” I remarked; “I should advise you to try the next you get sent in, and you will find it superior to fish, flesh, or fowl, dressed according to a receipt Senhor Guedes gave the cook.”

“On going round the spot where we fell in with the plums, I discovered the branch on which we had first seen them, and recollecting its position, I was able to pull on in the direction we were then taking. Thinking that we might be possibly near enough to the ship to be heard, the midshipmen and I shouted at the top of our voices, but no reply came; indeed, among those huge trunks, sounds penetrate to no great distance. Still hoping to reach the brig, I persevered, as far as I could judge, in the same direction. I felt that with all the scientific knowledge possessed by the white man, how helpless he is in one of those mighty forests, while a native would have found the way without the slightest difficulty.

“Monkeys poked out their heads from the boughs on which they nestled and chattered at us; macaws, parrots, toucans, and other strange birds, screamed at us, and Gerald and Tom declared that they saw huge snakes wriggling along the branches, and about to drop down and attack us, but I suspected they were merely sapos, which, seen in the uncertain light, as we went along, appeared to be moving. At last I began to fear that we should not find the brig till daylight, and should have to pass the night in the forest. The canoe, laden as she was with plums, not allowing us space to lie down, I proposed, if we failed, after a further attempt to find the brig, that we should look out for a tree with widespreading branches, into which we could climb, and remain till daylight.

“But pray don’t think of such a thing,” cried Tom; “we should have a whole troop of monkeys down upon us, and be carried off in our sleep by an army of anacondas.”

“I laughed at his fears, though I thought that we should very likely be attacked by ants, such as had almost taken the brig from us. I never like to be beaten in an object should it seem possible of attainment, and so I persevered, and again we all shouted, but with the same want of success as before. I thought that very possibly by this time we might be two or three miles away from the brig, just as likely as near her, for I confess I was extremely doubtful as to the direction we had taken.

“Well, youngsters, I am afraid there is no help for it,” I remarked; “if you do not like to sleep among the branches, we must run the risk of turning our plums into jam. We will make the canoe fast to a tree, and try to get some rest. One at a time, however, must keep watch, though I don’t think we run much risk of being attacked by human or savage foes.”

“I was looking out for a branch to which to make the painter fast, when Tom declared that he saw a light far off between the tall trunks. By moving a little on one side, I also caught sight of it, and at once paddled away in that direction. It grew brighter as we advanced, and appeared to be elevated some little distance above the water. I was very certain that it could not proceed from the brig; it seemed, indeed, to be produced by a fire, but how a fire could exist in such a place, it was puzzling to say, unless it was on the bank of the river, or on an island elevated some height above the surface of the water. At all events, we were likely to meet with human beings, who, if natives, would probably be able to pilot us back to the brig.

“I told the youngsters to keep silent, and paddled cautiously on. It was necessary, indeed, to be very careful, for fear of capsizing the canoe against a floating log or projecting branch, unseen in the darkness. After going on for some distance, what was our surprise to find directly ahead a large platform, secured to the trunks of several lofty palms, elevated about six feet above the water. A fire was burning in the centre, round which were seated a number of dark-skinned natives, with scarcely a particle of clothing on their bodies. Above the platform was a roof of palm leaves, below which were hung a number of hammocks, of various sizes, the small ones containing children, and under them were a variety of other articles, while two canoes were made fast to the crossbeams which afforded support to the structure. The flames from the fire lighted up the figures of the natives, and cast a ruddy glare on the trunks of the trees, the dark foliage, the surrounding water, and on our canoe. As we approached, the men perceiving us, started up and seized their lances. Guessing that they understood Spanish, I shouted ‘Amigo! amigo!’ and paddling on towards them, they were soon satisfied that we came with no hostile intent; and as Tom made fast the canoe to a ladder which rested against the platform, they stretched out their hands to assist us up. Though unable to speak any language but their own, they seemed to comprehend that we were officers; and when I uttered the word ‘navio,’ they nodded to show us that they knew we had come from a ship out in the river, and that we wished to return to her. As I had no wish to pass the night among them, I tried to explain to them that I would reward them well, if they would at once pilot us back. After some time I got them, as I supposed, to understand my meaning, for they again nodded their heads, and pointed in the direction from which we had come, showing me, that when I fancied I had been paddling out towards the stream, I had in reality been directing my course inland.

“They offered us some of their meal, consisting of broiled fish and cakes, made, I suspect, from the flour, or pith of the very palm-trees on which the platform was erected. They gave us also some palm-wine; we did not ask how it was made, but it tasted very well. Indeed, our hosts showed every wish to be friendly. The flooring of this strange

habitation was, I found on examination, composed of the split trunks of small palms; the hearth consisted of a mass of clay thick enough to prevent the heat from injuring the wood below. The people I afterwards found from the consul, belonged to a tribe of the Guarinis, who are the only inhabitants of this submerged region of the Orinoco. When the waters subside, they take up their abode on shore. Their only vegetable food is what they obtain from the palm-trees, and they subsist generally on turtle, tortoises, and the flesh of the manatee or cowfish, and other fish, which they spear or take with nets. Some of the young women were pretty good-looking, and wore scant petticoats made of the cabbage palm leaves, but the men had on little more than a belt round the waist with a few leaves hung from it.

“As I was afraid that my people would be going in search of us, and very likely lose themselves, I made the natives understand that I should be glad to take my departure; they nodded, and two of them got into the smallest of their canoes and paddled a little way, to show that they were ready to pilot us. Shaking hands with all round, the youngsters and I got into our canoe and followed our guides. I had to exert myself, however, to keep up with them, but as I knew that where they went my canoe could pass, we made good way. We had gone some distance when the sound of a gun reached us echoing from trunk to trunk throughout the forest, but it was not easy to ascertain from what direction it came, and had I been alone, it would scarcely have served to guide me. The natives, however, paddled on in their former course, showing me that they knew perfectly well what they were about. We soon came out into an open part of the river, a short distance above where the brig lay, and I at once made out her spars rising against the sky.

“Our absence had caused some anxiety to Bevan and the rest. He had just lowered a boat and was about to send Norris and Needham to look for us. The natives were well satisfied with the reward I bestowed on them, not so Anselmo at seeing it given.

“‘One bullet through the head or poke with a pike, good enough for dem,’ observed the rascal.

“I resolved the next time I went plum-picking to carry a compass, and to get back before the sun should sink below the tops of the trees.

“By-the-bye, the sun is often not to be obtained as a guide, for I afterwards visited parts of the forest where even his rays could not penetrate.

“We got under weigh the next morning as soon as the sea-breeze reached us, but again Señor Anselmo managed to get drunk as a fiddler, and after we had nearly been run on shore, I was obliged to bring up, a fact of which he was totally unaware. There he stood at his usual post, shouting out to the helmsman, ‘Starboard! port! steady!’ and at last, as grave as a judge, he observed to me—

“‘It’s time to bring up, captain; us no make headway, I see.’

“‘I should think not, mate,’ said Needham, ‘vessels don’t often go ahead with the anchor down. We are not going astern either, as we did yesterday, eh?’

“It would have been useless to flog the fellow or to put him in the black-list, for he would probably have slipped into his canoe, and left us to find our way as best we could; besides, when he was sober, he was as good a pilot as could be desired. I determined therefore to bear with him and to keep liquor out of his way. I was fortunate in finding his calabash, which I hove overboard, and gave notice that I would flog any man who supplied him with liquor beyond his portion. This had a good effect, and Anselmo kept sober for some time afterwards.

“I made frequent trips in the canoe, taking the youngsters, and always returned with a good supply of plums. We fell in with several families of the wild natives I have described. They seemed quiet and well-disposed, though somewhat low in the scale of humanity.

“I should like to give you an idea of the sort of scenery we met with. Starting from the ship, we began to force our way under the branches and amongst dense bushes, till we got into a part where the trees were much loftier, and the lower branches were level with the surface of the water, most of them covered with flowers. Besides the plums we found bunches of delicious fruit growing on the branches of a smaller species of palm. Frequently we heard the rattle of leaves overhead and caught sight of troops of monkeys peeping down among the thick foliage. Paddling on among the lofty trunks which rose like columns out of the water, presently down came a shower of leaves, and on looking up, we discovered a flock of parrots or a family of trogons, large gaily-coloured birds, with clamorous voices and heavy flight, who made the branches shake as they alighted to seize the fruit pendent from them. Palm-trees of various species prevailed; there was no underwood, or it had been destroyed by water, but the sipos or vines hung in dense masses among the upper branches. I wish that I could describe the wonderful birds we saw, one perfectly black, with a headdress like an umbrella, while some lovely specimens of the feathered tribe had white wings and claret-coloured plumage. Flowers were of all hues, and of immense size; some of the more lofty trees were literally covered with clusters of rich golden flowers. On the decayed trunks we caught sight of crabs of every variety of tint and size, watching for their prey, while butterflies and dragonflies of gorgeous hues flitted amid the more open spots wherever the sunlight found its way, some of the latter with crimson bodies and black heads and burnished wings, others with green and blue bodies. A fine region this for frogs, but many of them live in trees, finding, I suppose, that they are likely to be gobbled up, if they keep, as frogs in northern countries do, in the water. As night drew on, we heard them ‘hoo-hooing, quack-quacking,’ keeping up the strangest concert imaginable; indeed, had not the consul assured me that frogs produced the noises, I should have supposed that they were caused by some species of nightbird; however, I am, I confess, no great hand at description, nor had we a naturalist on board, or I might have given you a better account of the various trees and curious things we met with. Now and then we caught sight of an alligator, but the monsters generally betake themselves to pools and quiet places, while the waters are, as at present, at their height. By-the-bye, we did pass a town, which was seen in the distance. I did not touch at it, but Anselmo informed me that the inhabitants were engaged in a little civil war of their own, murdering each other to

their hearts' content. Had we had time, I dare say we might have supplied ourselves with monkey and sloth-flesh, opossums, snakes, crabs, and a variety of birds, but I doubt whether the crew would have appreciated the exertions of the sportsman. At last Anselmo informed me, much to my satisfaction, that we were drawing near to the termination of our voyage. The trees receded to a distance, and on either side of us appeared fields of grass, I should think, nearly a mile in width. Though web-footed birds here and there stalked over it, not an animal was to be seen; the reason of this was that the grass floated on the calm surface of the water. I should think we must have sailed through at least fifteen miles of it. At last we came to off the town of Angostura. Though not a place possessed of many attractions, I never dropped anchor with more satisfaction.

"I was not sorry to get the jealous consul and his veiled lady out of the ship, for, as you may suppose, I wanted to be back among more stirring scenes, and escorted him and his wife on shore at the head of a score of bluejackets and five marines, to make as imposing an appearance as I could. Having seen him reinstated in his abode, and the consular flagstaff set up again with the flag of old England flying from it, I delivered my despatches from the Governor of Trinidad to the chief authority in the place, and informed him that the Majesty of England must not be insulted in the person of one of her consuls.

"'But Senhor Guedes is very jealous of his wife, and that is all about it,' answered the governor of Angostura, who, I found to my surprise, was able to converse pretty freely in English. Such, I had suspected, was the case, and I could not help feeling that I had been sent up on a fool's errand.

"From the appearance of Angostura, I fancied that it must have been a place of some importance in the past days of Spanish glory, but like every other former dependency of that unhappy country, it everywhere shows marks of decay. There are churches and priests, but the best thing it can boast of is a very good market, in which being able to supply all our wants, we revelled luxuriously on fresh provisions during our stay. The town also can boast of the very fattest negress I ever set eyes on; she would make her fortune in an exhibition in England or America. The midshipmen asked Needham if he would like to marry her.

"'Bless my heart, no, young gentlemen; she's big enough to be the wife of six men, twice my size,' he answered.

"I can think of nothing else to tell you about this remote city. It has some commerce, for there were three or four American vessels in the harbour loading with hides.

"Having paid farewell to the obnoxious consul, who, shedding a flood of tears, gave me a hug which nearly drove the breath out of my body, I returned on board, and ordering the anchor to be weighed, directed Anselmo to pilot us back the way we had come, and 'mark me, my friend,' I added, 'if you get drunk, and run us on shore, I will give you three dozen as sure as you are a living man.'

"'But, cap'n, I would no' do that same, on no account,' he answered, with a bland smile; however, I had given Needham instructions to keep a watch on him, and to throw overboard any liquor he might have stowed away. Three or four cocoanuts full of rum were discovered among his traps, the contents of which were started, and water substituted. It was amusing to see Anselmo's face, when he found out the trick that had been played him.

"'Never mind, pilot, it's better to go without your grog than have a taste of the cat,' observed Needham, patting him on the shoulder, 'when you get home you shall have enough to keep you drunk for a week; at least, you will then be ready to pilot another of her Majesty's ships up the river, if one of them ever comes this way.'

"As we could now sail or drift on all day by sending the boats ahead occasionally to tow us off the trees, we made good progress, and soon reached the mouth of the river.

"Though our trip was not destitute of interest, I can only hope that I shall never be sent up the Orinoco again."

Terence thanked Jack for this description of his trip when they next met, which they did off Georgetown, the capital of British Guiana, at the mouth of the Demerara river. Its gaily painted wooden houses, with broad verandahs, raised on supports some feet above the ground, its canals and dykes, and numerous windmills, might make it easily mistaken for a Dutch town, were it not for the tall palm-trees which rise in its midst and the rich tropical scenery around. Here the corvette and brig remained for some days, and then sailed to join the squadron ordered to rendezvous at Rio.

A bright lookout was kept for slavers, which, notwithstanding the treaty lately made by the Brazilian Government with England, were known to swarm on the coast; the local authorities, like those of Havannah, encouraging the nefarious traffic, which put thousands of dollars into their purses.

Chapter Twenty.

The corvette and brig part company—The former chases a suspicious sail—Captures a full slaver—Adair in charge—Takes prize to Bahia—An important warning—Preparations for an attack—Anecdote of Lieutenant Wasey—The slave-dealers attempt to retake the prize—Gallant defence—Enemy defeated—The Supplejack appears in good time.

The *Tudor* and *Supplejack* had crossed the line, and had got some way to the southward, when a heavy gale came on, such as is not often experienced in those latitudes. It blew with especial fury during the night. Murray hove the corvette to, and believed that Jack would have done the same, but when morning broke, and the brig was nowhere to be seen from the deck of the corvette, he could not help feeling somewhat anxious on the subject. During the day the weather moderated, and a lookout was kept for her from aloft. Two days passed, however, and she did not appear. The wind was from the north-east, and he hoped by a quick run to Rio to have his anxiety soon brought to an end by finding that the *Supplejack* had arrived before him.

Morning had just dawned, the breeze was fresh, the tops of the seas sparkled in the rays of the rising sun, when the lookout from aloft shouted, "A sail on the lee bow!"

"What is she?" asked Adair, who was officer of the watch.

"A brig, sir," was the answer.

"Is she like the *Supplejack*?" he inquired.

"Can't say, sir. She is anyhow running to the westward, and the *Supplejack* would be steering to the south."

"You are right. Call the commander," said Adair to Desmond. The youngster had rejoined the ship at Georgetown. He himself then went aloft with his glass, to have a look at the stranger. By the time he came down Murray was on deck.

"She is certainly not the *Supplejack*, and, as she is running in for some Brazilian port far to the northward of Rio, she may possibly be a slaver."

"We will overhaul her, at all events," said Murray, and the corvette, bearing up in chase, made all sail she could set.

The stranger did not at first discover that she was pursued, and by the time that she did so the corvette had gained considerably on her. She was then seen to be a large brigantine, and by her square yards and white canvas, lighted up by the rays of the sun, Murray was more than ever convinced that she was a slaver.

The chase had set all the sail she could carry, and still kept well ahead of the corvette. The weather, as the day advanced, gave signs of changing, dark clouds gathered in the sky, and squalls, not very strong at first, but sufficient to make the commander look with anxious eyes at his spars, swept across the ocean—the dark clouds as they rushed along changing the hitherto blue, laughing waves to a leaden hue. Still the corvette persevered. The crew were at their stations, ready to shorten sail the moment it became absolutely necessary. The eagerness of the chase to escape made it still more probable that she was a slaver. She was dead before the wind, carrying topgallant-sails and royals, and studding-sails on either side. A dark cloud passing over her threw her into shade; on it went, and once more the bright rays of the sun falling on her canvas brought her more clearly into view; another squall swept by, making the corvette's studding-sail-booms crack and bend as if they were about to break away from the braces.

"Hold on, good sticks!" cried Murray, apostrophising them, "the toughest spars will win the day."

The crew cast their eyes aloft, fully expecting to see them carried away, but they held on, and the trim corvette went dashing forward amid the dancing seas, which rose up, foam-crested, on either side.

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Terence, "she is ours!" At that moment the squall had reached the chase, and away flew her studding-sails, the booms breaking off at the irons. Still she held on her course. The corvette was now rapidly gaining on her; the attempt was made to rig another lower studding-sail, but that also was carried away almost as soon as set, and in less than half an hour the corvette had got her well within range of her long guns; but Murray refrained from firing as long as he found that he was gaining on her.

"It is useless to run the risk of injuring her spars," he observed to Adair; "she will haul down her colours when she finds that she has no hope of getting away."

"Those fellows are up to all sorts of dodges, and will make every effort to escape," said Terence.

"We will take in the studding-sails at all events, and be ready for him should he haul his wind," said Murray. The light canvas was taken in with a rapidity, which must have astonished the crew of the slaver. Just, however, as the operation was about to be commenced, she had put her helm to port, and braced her yards sharp up on the starboard tack; but a couple of shot from the corvette, one of which struck her starboard quarter, showed her that she was too late; and fearing that other iron missiles might overtake her, she immediately hauled down her colours. The corvette's topgallant sails and royals having been handed, she also was brought to the wind and hove-to on the weather beam of the prize. Murray now directed Adair to go on board the brigantine with a midshipman and ten hands, and to carry her to Rio, unless, from a scarcity of provisions or want of water, he should find it necessary to put in to Bahia, or any other neighbouring port on the Brazilian coast.

Adair and Desmond were quickly ready with their carpet-bags, as were Snatchblock and nine other men with their bundles, and the boat which had, meantime, been lowered, pulled off for the prize, although there was some sea on; yet as she was low in the water, she was easily boarded. She proved to be the *Donna Maria*, a noted Brazilian slaver which had often before escaped capture. According to Murray's directions, Adair sent back the captain and officers and some of her ill-looking crew, who were likely to prove troublesome if left in her.

He found that, though only measuring a hundred and fifty tons she had nearly five hundred slaves on board, stowed away as thick as they could be packed between decks.

Having had a remarkably quick run from the coast of Africa, the captain informed him that he had not lost more than twenty people. As he looked down the main hatchway, the haggard countenances of the mass of human beings packed close together—as Desmond observed, like herrings in a cask—showed him that had the voyage continued much longer, the number of deaths would have been greatly increased.

Although there was food enough and water for the slaves, either the crew had hove overboard some of their own provisions, or had brought but a small supply, so that Adair found but a scant allowance for himself and his men; he therefore sent on board the corvette for such articles as he thought would be required. Just as all arrangements had been completed, and he had put the brigantine on her course, he saw the corvette haul her wind, and stand away to the eastward. As she did so, Murray signalled that a strange sail, which he hoped to overhaul, had hove in sight in

that direction.

A sufficient number of the slaver's crew had been kept on board to attend to the unfortunate blacks, and carry them their provisions and water. Adair himself went round among them, and endeavoured to make them understand that he was their friend, and that as soon as possible they should be sent back to Africa. At first they looked on the Englishmen with an expression of terror in their countenances, many of them believing that they would be taken on shore to be killed and eaten, or to be offered up to the white man's Fetish. Fortunately one of the seamen, who had been long on the coast, could make himself understood by some of them; and, by his means and kind treatment, Terence succeeded at length in banishing their fears. One of the Brazilians also spoke a little English, and so was able to act as interpreter. Pedro was a better-looking fellow than most of his companions, and by the kind way he treated the blacks Terence was inclined to trust him. He declared that poverty alone, and a wish to support his family, had induced him to ship on board the slaver, and that it was the last voyage he would ever make.

"These countrymen of mine are great rascals," he observed; "you take care what they do, or they play you one great trick."

Pedro then told Adair that the brigantine was somewhat leaky, and that it had been necessary to pump her out at every watch.

He at once ordered the bell to be sounded, and Snatchblock reported "two feet of water in the hold;" he accordingly ordered the pumps to be rigged, and set some of his own people to work them. Pedro again came aft, and assured him that he felt certain he could pick out a score or more of blacks who could be trusted on deck, and that they would willingly take the duty, glad to escape from the confinement of the hold.

"We will try them," said Terence, and in a short time Pedro sent up the number he had mentioned, all of them well-made, stalwart negroes. The scant clothing they wore exhibited, however, how much they had suffered by confinement, even during their comparatively short run across the Atlantic. Half of them quickly understanding what was required set to work with a will, being relieved by their companions. By their exertions the brigantine was at length almost freed from water. During the night it had, however, again gained on the pumps, and the weather coming on worse soon after daybreak Terence judged it prudent to bear up for Bahia.

He was thankful to believe that he would soon be in smooth water, for the poor slaves suffered dreadfully by the way the vessel tumbled about in the heavy seas, and several of the weak ones were found to have died during the night. The Brazilians hauled them out, without the slightest exhibition of feeling, and hove the bodies overboard as if they had been so many dead sheep. The heat and effluvia which arose from below were almost unbearable, the instant the hatches, which had necessarily been closed during the night, were taken off.

It was the first full slaver Desmond had ever been aboard.

"I have always heard the African coast abused, but I can only say that I should be ready to go and serve there, for the sake of catching some of these rascally slavers before they have had the opportunity of making the poor blacks suffer so horribly, as they must do during the middle passage," he exclaimed, as he warmed with indignation at what he witnessed.

At last, a short time before nightfall, the brigantine entered the harbour of Bahia, which is easy of access, and came to an anchor at some distance from the town. Scarcely had she brought up than the weather moderated, and Terence began to regret that he had not continued his course for Rio; still he hoped that Murray, judging by the weather, would take it for granted that he had put in there, and would come and look for him.

It was too late that evening to communicate with the authorities; several boats, however, came alongside, though as no officer appeared among the people in them, Adair would not allow any one to come on board, with the exception of an official who was sent, he said, by the captain of the port to make inquiries about the vessel. At last all the boats took their departure. There was no moon, though the stars shone forth brightly overhead, reflected on the calm surface of the water. It was rather dark all around where the brig lay; here and there only, distant lights glimmering from the shore. The watch, of which Ben Snatchblock had charge, was set, and Adair and Desmond retired into a small cabin on one side of the deck to take supper.

"Well, I hope these poor fellows may be sent back safely to their homes," said Desmond. "I am afraid a good many more will die before they get there, if they are not placed in some healthy spot and allowed to take exercise first."

"Not one of them will ever get back to their homes," answered Terence. "They are all brought some hundreds of miles from the interior, and would be quickly seized and carried back into slavery were the attempt to be made. They will be sent to Sierra Leone, or some of them may find their way to Liberia, a colony established some years ago for liberated blacks from the North American States."

Adair was giving Desmond further information on the subject when Pedro put his head in at the door.

"Senhor Capitan, I want to have one word with you," he said, putting his finger to his mouth. "You be on the watch; I heard things said by the people in de boats, and I make sure they come off and take all de slaves away, and knock you and your people on de head. Hist! hist! Don't let my comrades know I tell you, or dey cut my throat as sure as I now a living man. No time to lose."

Adair asked Pedro further questions, but he could elicit no more information. Pedro was evidently in a hurry to be gone, and again making a sign to show that caution was necessary he stole forward, keeping close under the bulwarks, as if afraid of being observed.

"The information Pedro has given us must not be neglected," observed Adair. "He may be mistaken, but if the

Brazilians think that they can get hold of the slaves they will try to do so without scruple, and will cut the throats of every one of us should they find it necessary to carry out their object. Go and turn out our people, and I will have a talk with Snatchblock on the subject."

Desmond, making his way forward, roused up the prize crew, cautiously awaking each man separately, so that the slaver's people should not hear them.

Adair followed him on deck, and told Snatchblock what he had heard.

"Well, sir, to my mind the first thing we have to do is to secure the Brazilian fellows we have on board, for if we are attacked by their friends from the shore, as Pedro thinks likely, we shall have them, may be, playing us some trick," answered Ben. "Either they will let the slaves loose and set them up to murdering us; or if they can get hold of arms they will set on us themselves, should they see a chance of helping our enemies."

Adair thought Ben's advice good, and told him to get a sufficient number of lengths of rope to secure the fellows. This was quickly done, and Adair and his men went into the berth, and soon had all the Brazilians secured, almost before they were awake. He had Pedro lashed like the rest; Adair whispered, however, into his ear that he did so for his own sake, as should he be suspected of having given the Englishmen information he probably would be murdered by his countrymen. Pedro, indeed, seemed perfectly satisfied to be so treated.

"They no countrymen of mine, though," he answered, in a low voice, "they Brazilians, I true-born Portuguese."

"Well, whatever you are, I am much obliged to you, and hope to reward you some day for the assistance you have given us," answered Adair.

"I should have taken the fellow to have a larger share of negro than white blood in him by his looks," observed Adair to Desmond as they went aft; "however, I really believe that he is honest, and we should not despise his warning."

He had all the arms and ammunition to be found on board collected, each of his crew being provided with a musket and a brace of pistols, in addition to their cutlasses; he and Desmond also armed themselves. A dozen spare muskets which he had carefully looked to and loaded were arranged, some aft, others midships and forward. There were also two small brass guns, used for signals rather than defence. No shot, however, could be found for them, so he sent a couple of men to collect all the nails and scraps of iron they could find in the carpenter's store-room.

"These will make cruel wounds, but it will be the fellows' own fault if they venture to attack us, should some of them stick in their bodies," he observed, as the guns were loaded. A dozen boarding-pikes were also found and served out to the men.

"I rather suspect that these weapons will prove more serviceable in the hands of our stout fellows than muskets or pistols, which take time to load," observed Adair. "They may serve us in good stead, should the Brazilians attempt to climb up the side."

These arrangements being made, Adair and Desmond returned to the cabin to finish their supper, which they had just begun when Pedro came to them.

"Don't you think after all that that Portuguese fellow may have been trying to frighten us for some object of his own, perhaps to ingratiate himself into your favour?" asked Desmond.

"No! no, I think not," answered Adair, "the Brazilians have played similar tricks on captured vessels before, in this very port, and they are capable of any atrocity. There was an old friend of mine named Wasey, a capital fellow, kind-hearted and brave, as true a man as I ever met with. We were shipmates for a short time on the coast of Africa; Rogers and Murray knew him well, and liked him as much as I did. He was one of those quite unpretending characters who don't know what is in them, except to those with whom they are intimate.

"We chased and captured a small schooner with a hundred and fifty slaves on board. He was put in charge of her with ten hands, and directed to take her to Sierra Leone, we having received on board her former crew, that he might not be troubled with them. Soon after he parted company from us a heavy gale sprang up from the eastward, and he was blown off the land. The schooner, one of those slightly put together craft, built expressly for slavers, sprang a leak, and the water gained so fast on them, that it was as much as the crew, with a few of the blacks who were to be trusted, could do to keep her afloat. His only chance of saving the lives of his crew, and himself, as well as of the blacks, was to run for the Brazilian coast. The schooner was also short of provisions and water, and had he attempted to beat up for Sierra Leone, he knew that most of the blacks must perish, even if he contrived to keep her afloat. The weather in no way moderated, and though he set an example to his men by taking his turn at the pumps, all hands working with a will, he scarcely expected to get across the Atlantic. Still, by attending to the unfortunate blacks, and by allowing a few to come on deck at a time, he managed to keep them alive. At length when he was about a week's run from Bahia, he fell in with an American brig. He having hoisted a signal of distress, the American hove to, and he went on board her. He explained his condition to the master, who seemed to be a well-disposed, kind-hearted man.

"'Well, I have no objection to receive you and your white crew on board my vessel,' said the master, 'but as to the blacks, I can have nothing to do with them, they must sink or swim if they can.'

"What! you don't suppose that I would desert the unfortunate wretches?" exclaimed Wasey indignantly.

"'Well, they are but negroes, and it is a fate which befalls many of them. They seem born to it,' answered the master coolly.

"'I am much obliged to you for your offer to receive me and my people, though I cannot accept it. If we are lost, our

deaths will be at your door; that won't be a pleasant recollection for you,' said Wasey.

"'Cannot help it, Mister Lieutenant,' answered the skipper. 'The blacks, as I say, must take their chance; and it seems to me that if you and your men refuse to come aboard my brig, when I offer to receive you, that your deaths will be at your own door.'

"'I would rather die than desert the unhappy blacks, and I believe that my men will stick by me,' answered Wasey. 'Now, captain, I'll tell you what I will do. I have a fortune of 7000 pounds, and on the word of a British officer—and you will take that I hope—I will put it in black and white, that I will pay over every farthing, if you will receive the blacks on board, and carry them to the nearest port you can make. Come, that is a better freight than you have every day for your brig, I suspect?'

"The skipper thought a minute, then shook his head. 'No, if you were to give me 20,000 pounds down on the nail, I could not take the negroes aboard my brig. They would pollute her, we should probably have a fever break out, or if we escaped that every man of my crew would leave her directly we entered port.'

"In vain Wasey endeavoured to persuade the skipper to alter his resolution; he was determined not to take the negroes on board.

"At length Wasey saw there was no use in pressing him further. Perhaps the skipper thought that he might never touch the 7000 pounds, but I can answer for it, and so would every one who knew Wasey, that he would have religiously paid it to the last farthing.

"'You have made up your mind not to receive the blacks, and I have made up mine not to desert them,' said Wasey, wishing him good-bye. 'A prosperous voyage to you, and I can only say that I hope for your sake as well as ours, that we may manage to get the schooner into Bahia. I should not wish to have my conscience troubled as yours will be if you hear that we are lost.' Having purchased all the provisions and water the American could spare, Wasey returned to the schooner and made sail for the westward, while the American vessel stood away on her course. He divided the water and most of the provisions he had obtained among the starving blacks, and their strength renewed, they were able to assist better at the pumps than they were before. Still the powers of all on board were taxed to the uttermost; every one, however, knew that their lives depended on their exertions, and worked away till they were ready to drop. They could just keep the schooner afloat, and that was all. The wind continued fair, and by the time the last drop of water was expended and the farina and other food for the blacks was used up, they made this port of Bahia.

"Wasey now hoped that his chief troubles were over. The blacks had got to trust him, and so, when the schooner was brought to an anchor, they willingly laboured as before to keep her afloat. Believing that all was right he went on shore to communicate with the authorities, leaving the quarter-master in charge of the schooner. The officials detained him for some time, and sent him first to one person and then to another, thus keeping him employed till nightfall. At last he pulled off to the schooner; there she lay all right, and he hoped to be able to get the leaks stopped, and to carry the poor blacks to Sierra Leone, where they could be set free. When he stepped on board, he inquired if all had gone well during his absence.

"'Yes, sir,' was the quarter-master's answer. 'Some Brazilian officers came off in a number of boats, and told me that they had been sent to land the blacks. As all seemed right, I did not prevent them from coming on board. At once ordering the blacks up, they made every one of them get into the boats, which at once pulled away up the harbour. The officers were very polite, and seemed to be doing everything regular, though I was just a little suspicious when I saw three large boats full of men, with a good number of muskets among them close to us, watching, as it were, how matters were going. When the boats with the blacks on board pulled away, they followed, and no one since then has come near us. I hope it's all right, sir?'

"'Right!' exclaimed Wasey, feeling confident that he had been duped, 'I am afraid that it's very wrong. I have made every arrangement with the authorities to have the blacks housed on shore while the schooner is under repair, and to receive them back whenever I may wish, and I cannot understand how any Government officers should venture to take them off till my return.'

"Next morning he went on shore, when the authorities declared that they knew nothing of the matter. He then found that some fellows, dressed up as officers, had been sent off by slave-dealers, to play the trick, and get possession of the unfortunate negroes.

"In vain he endeavoured to regain them, not a particle of information could he obtain as to where they had been carried, except that they had probably been immediately disposed of over the country. Thus, after his noble self-sacrifice and the exertions he had made to save the lives of his black-skinned fellow-creatures he had the mortification to find that they had been carried off into slavery, and that he had nothing but the bare hull of the schooner for his pains. Yes, by-the-bye, he had more than that, he had the satisfaction of his own conscience, and that was worth having. I did not hear the account from himself, but I got it from one of the men who was with him. I am pretty sure that I am right in all particulars. Now let us go on deck and hear what report Snatchblock has to make. Perhaps after all Pedro may be mistaken, and we shall not receive a friendly visit as he expects from the slavers. However, we will take care not to be the victims of a trick like that played on Wasey."

"Anything stirring, Snatchblock?" asked Adair, as he and Desmond went on deck.

"Nothing that I can make out, sir, except that a little time back a small boat pulled across our bows and returned to the shore. We were all at the time as quiet as mice when the cat is about, and maybe the fellows in her thought that we were keeping no watch aboard the brigantine."

"We will show them that we are wide awake enough if they come off to play us any trick," answered Adair, laughing.

He found his men sitting down with their arms by their sides ready for action, and felt satisfied that they would do their best to beat off any enemies who might attempt to take the vessel.

The night continued perfectly calm, while a light mist somewhat obscured the shore and distant objects. He knew that sounds, though from a considerable distance, could be heard, and that he should thus have timely intimation of the approach of boats, even should they come off with muffled oars.

The captured slaver, with four hundred human beings stowed away in her hold, has not yet been described.

The slave-deck was divided into two parts: in the larger portion the men were packed away; in the smaller, the hapless women and children. When the slaves were first received on board on the African coast, the largest men had been picked out to act as head men or overseers of the rest, and having been threatened with punishment should they refuse to obey orders, they had not unwillingly taken the office imposed on them. They at first divided the slaves into gangs of about twenty men each, for whose good behaviour they were answerable; their first duty had been to stow away the slaves. The slave-deck was about four feet in height, with beams and bars running from side to side; on these beams the slaves were compelled to sit with their heads thrust between their knees, so close together that when one moved the whole mass had to move also. Care had been taken to place the largest slaves the farthest from the ship's side, or from any position in which their strength might avail them to secure a larger space than their neighbours. One portion of the deck was much lower, being scarcely twenty inches in height, and in this the children were stowed away.

When the slaver was captured the hatches were found closed and all the larger men heavily ironed, and it may be imagined, had the chase continued long, what would have been the suffering of the unfortunate wretches.

The slaves were fed twice a day, and in order to give room, one half were allowed at a time to come on deck, the only opportunity they had to stretch their limbs. At meal-times they were arranged into messes, and when all was ready, at a signal from the head man, they commenced eating.

Their food consisted of rice, or farina, which is flour made from the cassada, a species of potato boiled, or calabancies, a kind of bean; occasionally a small quantity of salt beef, fish, or chillies, was served out to them as a relish. After each meal they were made to sing, not for their amusement, but to enable them, it was supposed, better to digest their food. Each black after this received about a pint of water, the whole allowance for the day.

Below the slave-deck were stowed the leaguers, which are huge water-casks, together with the provisions, wood for firing, etcetera. The upper deck was kept perfectly clear, to enable the crew to work the sweeps during calms. There was no poop, but on either side were two cabins, six or eight feet long, and three or four wide, to serve as sleeping places for the captain and officers; the crew lived forward, under the topgallant forecastle. The vessel had but one small boat, carried amidships, in which articles of all sorts were stowed, so that if a man had fallen overboard it would have been next to impossible to pick him up. This is a description of most slaving-vessels, though steamers have of late years been largely employed.

Adair and Desmond paced the deck for an hour or more, stopping every now and then to listen. No sound could be heard coming from any direction, and the town was too far off for the hum of its human hive to reach them.

It was now nearly ten o'clock. Adair had ordered Snatchblock not to strike the bell, as it might show the slavers,



should

any be meditating an attack, that those on board the prize

were on the alert, and make them approach more cautiously than they might otherwise be inclined to do.

Adair had brought a stool from the cabin, and sat down, leaning against the outside.

“Go in and get some sleep,” he said to Desmond, “I will call you if you are wanted.”

“I am not tired, and if you will allow me I will go forward and try if I can hear anything. I fancied just now that I caught the sound of several splashes in the water, as if fish were leaping in the distance,” answered Desmond.

He made his way to the topgallant-forecastle, lay down and listened. The sound he had heard became more regular, though still very faint; he was certain, however, that it was the dip of oars in the water. He waited, however, before informing Adair, knowing that there would be time enough when the boats came in sight, as all hands were prepared for action.

“Perhaps, after all, they are not coming this way,” he thought; “yes, they must be, though,” he said to himself; “the sounds are much more distinct than when I first heard them.”

At length he made out several dark objects emerging from the mist. He at once hurried aft with the information.

“Be ready, lads!” said Adair; “the fellows I was warned would attack us are probably coming. Five of you remain on the starboard side, and five on the port side. Snatchblock and I will work the guns. Keep under shelter, and don’t fire till I give the word; then blaze away with muskets and pistols, and use your pikes as you may find necessary. Don’t let them discover that we are prepared till the last moment. I will call you where you may be most wanted; I know you will do your duty, and we shall beat them off, never fear that. Silence now, and go to your stations.”

Adair spoke in a low voice to the men gathered around him. He had arranged them at equal distances along the bulwarks, where they crouched down, with their muskets in their hands, and their pikes by their sides. He had lighted a couple of slow matches, and put them into tubs near the guns, ready for use.

Desmond remained by him and prepared to get whatever might be required. He and Snatchblock kept a lookout, one on either side, to watch for the boats. The sound of the oars was now distinctly heard, and in a short time they clearly made out six large boats, evidently pulling towards the brigantine. As they approached they closed with each other, and came up on the port side; they were still at a short distance from the vessel, when Adair hailed, in the best Portuguese he could command, and told them to keep off.

“We allow no boats from the shore to visit the vessel at night, and if you come nearer we shall fire into you,” he shouted.

Some loud chattering ensued, and in spite of the warning they had received, the Brazilians dashed up alongside. There must have been five and twenty men in each boat; a considerable force to be opposed by Adair’s small crew.

The Brazilians came on with threatening shouts and cries, evidently intended to intimidate the British seamen.

“Keep off,” again cried Adair, but his warning was unheeded. He sent Desmond to call all the men over the port side.

“Take the consequences, then,” he answered; “fire, lads.”

The bullets which came flying into their midst for a moment seemed to damp the courage of the Brazilians, but recovering themselves they let fly a volley in return. Adair wisely bobbed, and several bullets flew over his head. All attempt of concealment was now useless. The Brazilians dashed up alongside and attempted to get on board, but were met by the boarding pikes of the English crew; some using those weapons, others spare muskets, with which they blazed away, though there was no time to reload them. It was sharp work to attempt driving back one hundred and fifty men, at least, who were endeavouring to climb up the side, armed with cutlasses and pistols. The strongest party of the pirates were making a vigorous attempt to get on board on the quarter. Adair calling to Snatchblock, ran out one of the guns, and Desmond being ready with a match, fired right into their midst. The piercing groans and cries which followed showed the terrible effect produced. The boat drifted away, not having been hooked on, and the crew having deserted their oars. Another boat immediately took her place, and a big fellow, with cutlass in hand, springing to the side, and shouting to his companions to follow, attempted to climb on deck. Before Adair could defend himself, he had received an ugly cut on the head from the fellow, who was about to follow up the blow, when Desmond, seizing a pike, rushed at him with such good will, that the point entering the Brazilian’s breast, he fell backwards into the boat.

Adair, though hurt, was able to make good play with his cutlass. Snatchblock was keeping a dozen fellows at bay, while the rest of the crew were employed in a similar manner; bullets were flying and blows were rapidly given and taken. Though several of the Englishmen were wounded, and some very severely, not a man had been killed.

They could see that the Brazilians had suffered much more severely. Some had been knocked overboard into the water; others lay dead or dying at the bottom of the boats. Again, and again, however, the pirates came on, as if determined, at all costs, to take the prize with her five hundred blacks on board. Again Terence was wounded, and another big Brazilian, apparently the leader of the pirates, was levelling a pistol scarcely two feet from his breast, when Snatchblock, seeing the danger of his young commander, brought his cutlass with such force down on the fellow’s head, that he clove it in two, and sent him tumbling back into the boat out of which he had sprung.

The pirates, though they had met with a much warmer reception than they expected, were unwilling to abandon their object, and encouraged by their leaders, some twenty or more made a dash together at the fore-rigging. Several gained a footing on the chains, others caught hold of the shrouds and back-stays. Adair saw that a desperate effort must be made, or the enemy would after all gain the deck.

"Keep them off the after-part of the vessel, Snatchblock, whatever you do," he shouted, and calling Desmond they together dragged over the other still loaded gun and ran it through the foremost port, with its muzzle pointed towards the mass of their assailants, who were prepared to follow those already climbing up the side. Desmond fired, springing out of the way of the gun as it ran back. The deadly missiles with which it was loaded, scattering among their assailants, knocked over several howling with pain, two at least dropping dead, when the British seamen with their cutlasses quickly cleared the rigging and sides of the remainder.

The tones in which the shouts and loud jabbering of the pirates were uttered showed that they were beginning to think that they had had enough of it. Adair and Snatchblock, with several of the men, set to work and reloaded the muskets, and just as the most daring of their assailants were about to make a fresh attack they let fly a volley. The pirates did not stop to receive another, but getting out their oars began to pull off, each boat seeming to be the most eager to get away from the daring little band who had so obstinately refused to have their throats cut, and the blacks in their charge taken from them.

The seamen, though bleeding and sore from many a cut and thrust, gave vent to their satisfaction in a triumphant cheer.

"I think we are clear of them for the present, sir," said Snatchblock, "and I doubt whether they will be in a hurry to come back again."

"We will be prepared at all events," said Adair. "Get the guns and small arms reloaded and placed ready for action, and then see who is most hurt. It won't do to let our blood flow till we grow weak."

"Ay! ay! sir," answered Ben. "I believe most of us have got a scratch or two, but I hope you are not hurt, sir."

"As to that, I believe that I have not escaped scot free," said Adair; "but I want to overhaul those who have suffered most, and bind up their wounds. You may release Pedro, and get his assistance, though it won't do to cast the others loose just yet."

Adair as he spoke felt very faint, and had not Snatchblock caught him he would have fallen on the deck. Desmond ran to his assistance, and while he sat on the stool outside the cabin brought a glass of strong grog, which quickly revived him; the men were in the meantime binding up each other's hurts as well as they could, with their handkerchiefs, after having reloaded their arms.

Snatchblock released Pedro, who seemed pleased at the successful termination of the contest. His shipmates, he said, suspected him—the pirates would have undoubtedly cut his throat had they got on board. He helped Desmond very scientifically in dressing Adair's wounds.

"Beg pardon, sir," said Snatchblock, "if you will just lie down and get some rest, Mr Desmond and I will keep a look out, and call you if we get sight of our friends coming back to us. I am not much the worse for my scratches, and so five or six of those most hurt among us can turn in and try and get back their strength, in case we have more work to do to-night."

Adair agreed to Ben's proposal, and having ordered grog to be served out to the men, he himself lay down to obtain the rest he so greatly needed.

Except here and there where white marks in the bulwarks showed the spots the bullets had struck, and the cutlasses had hewn out notches, scarcely a sign of the late desperate struggle was visible. All was silent on deck. Desmond alone paced up and down turning his watchful eye on either side, while Snatchblock took a seat on the booms. Notwithstanding his assertion, that he had only received a few scratches, he felt, however, considerably the worse for them. For the rest of the watch he lay down, trying, however, to keep awake, and be ready to start up at a moment's notice.

Pedro suspecting that food would benefit all hands, lighted the galley-fire, and began to prepare some broth. He had before this gone below, and quieted the blacks, who had naturally been alarmed at the noise of the firing, not knowing what was happening. He now sat down in a corner of the caboose with his arms folded, and fell asleep while watching the soup boiling.

The night grew on, and morning was approaching. A breeze had sprung up from the eastward with sufficient strength to disperse the mist, and to keep back the usual land wind, which blows from the opposite direction, while it ruffled the surface of the harbour into waves.

Just after the first streaks of dawn had appeared above the horizon, Desmond caught sight of a number of boats collected up the harbour. They appeared to be pulling towards the brigantine, but as the wind was against them, and the current was setting in, they made but slow progress. Desmond awoke Snatchblock, who had fallen asleep, and told him what he had seen.

"Maybe the same fellows as before are coming to pay us a visit," he answered. "If they are we will treat them the same as the last time."

"Don't call Mr Adair, he wants rest, and there will be time enough when the boats get nearer." Ben, however, got up to have a lookout, and then called the rest of the crew. He found Pedro still asleep in the caboose with the soup boiling over; he asked him what he would wish to do.

"Get the soup ready first," said Pedro. "Then you lash me up as before, I no wish fight."

The soup being ready, Desmond called Adair, who, as well as his crew, found it very welcome.

"I doubt much whether those fellows will venture to attack us, though it's as well to be prepared," he observed. "If they do, though there may be twice as many as at first, we must beat them off."

Adair and the rest had been so engaged in watching the approaching boats, that no one thought of looking eastward with the exception of Desmond.

"There is a sail in the offing, and she is standing in for the harbour, as far as I can make out," he exclaimed, as he held the glass still raised through which he had been looking. Adair took it from him, and eagerly watched the approaching vessel.

"You are right, my boy," he answered. "She seems to me a brig about the size of the *Supplejack*, but we shall make her out more clearly in a short time; if she is a friend those slaving rascals will not dare to attack us."

"But she may be a slaver herself, and then she will assist them," whispered Desmond.

"And then we shall have to fight her as well, that is all I can say about it," answered Adair.

"What do you make her out to be?" he asked of Ben, who just then came aft.

"She is scarcely large enough for the corvette, or I should have expected her to come in and look for us. That craft is a brig, and as like to be the *Supplejack* as any other," said Ben. "I don't think the people in the boats have made her out yet, or they would save themselves the trouble of a long pull against wind and tide."

Some time elapsed before the matter could be decided. The boats made but slow progress, but the stranger standing on under all sail rapidly approached the mouth of the harbour. Still the former would be alongside, and if the Brazilians had sufficient determination, they might cut the cable and tow the brigantine up the harbour, before the brig could come to her assistance.

The Brazilians must have seen the stranger by this time, but probably they did not believe that she was a man-of-war. They had now come within musket-shot. Terence, on looking through the glass, saw that there were several officers in uniform in the boats, and began to suspect that they were really official characters, sent by the government to inquire into the cause of the firing in the early part of the night; he did not, therefore, wish to commence hostilities till he had ascertained, if possible, their real character.

The stranger had now slightly to alter her course, when the English flag blew out, and Adair had no longer any doubt that she was the *Supplejack*.

The flag at the same time had been seen by the people in the boats. Whatever were their intentions, they ceased pulling, apparently holding a consultation; then putting about they made the best of their way up the harbour. Terence felt very much inclined to let fly a volley at them, but mercy, or prudence, prevailed, though if they were the pirates they deserved any punishment he might inflict on them.

As the *Supplejack* rounded to under the stern of the brigantine, Adair hailed and said what had happened, when Rogers, accompanied by Tom and McTavish, instantly came on board.

"You always come in the nick of time, Jack," exclaimed Adair, as they shook hands; "we had a hard tussle last night, and we might have had a harder this morning if you had not made your appearance, but how is it that you have come in here?"

Jack replied that after the gale he had chased a slaver, which had led him a long way out of his course, and having fallen in with the *Tudor*, Murray directed him to look for the prize, and then to escort her to Rio, whence she was to be sent to Sierra Leone.

McTavish doctored the wounded men, and Adair declared that he felt well enough to go on shore with Rogers to lay his complaint before the Government regarding the outrage which had been attempted in a friendly port.

The Governor, Senhor José da Silva Souza, declared that he knew nothing whatever about it; he had been astonished at hearing firing, and had sent the captain of the port, with his attendant officials, to ascertain the cause.

"They came in pretty strong force then, and I should have certainly fired at them had they attempted to come on board. What redress can you make us?" asked Adair.

"I will direct that the fellows be looked for, and if we catch them they shall be tried and hung immediately."

"That will not be much satisfaction to us," observed Adair.

The Governor shrugged his shoulders, and Terence observed that he should lay the matter before the admiral at Rio, who would certainly not allow it to pass unnoticed.

The British consul, of course, said he would have the matter looked into, but as there appeared to be no use in waiting longer, as soon as Adair could obtain provisions and water, he and Rogers got up anchor and sailed for Rio.

The only information the admiral was able to gain on the subject was, that the attack had been made by a party of slave-dealers, who hoped to surprise the brigantine, cut the throats of the prize-crew, and then make sail to another port, and land the slaves, trusting of course to the effects of bribery to escape detection.

Chapter Twenty One.

Rio—Expedition up the harbour—Yarns spun—Higson and the midshipmen captured by slave-dealers—Imprisoned—Tried—A friend in need—Sent back to prison—Escape—Pursued—Jack as usual appears—Again at sea—Chase a slaver—Run over her at night.

Every one knows that Rio de Janeiro is one of the most magnificent harbours in the world, with its Organ mountains in the distance, its surrounding heights covered with the richest foliage, its curiously-shaped rocks at the entrance, and its stately city scattered along its shores.

On entering, Jack and Terence, much to their satisfaction, found not only the corvette but the frigate also at anchor. Having gone on board the admiral's ship to report their arrival and the occurrence which had taken place at Bahia, they paid a visit to Murray. Of course, Terence gained great credit for having beaten off the pirates. He was glad to find that he was to be relieved of the charge of the slaver, which he had been afraid he might have to carry over to Sierra Leone.

In the harbour lay a considerable squadron of steamers and sailing-vessels, for which a variety of work had been cut out.

The Brazilian Government had at last united with the English in the determination of putting a stop to the importation of slaves into the country, though they acknowledged that their own men-of-war could do little or nothing; the fact being that the Brazilian officers were more or less interested in supporting the abominable traffic.

Two or three other ships were in the harbour, taking in water and provisions before going for a long cruise in the Pacific, and an expedition was also to be sent to the Parana against General Rosas, who, setting all treaties at defiance, had stopped up the navigation of the river. As neither the corvette nor brig were likely to sail for some days, the officers made excursions on shore. Tom and Desmond were delighted to find that Archy Gordon had so greatly recovered that he was able to go to sea in the frigate—he was now nearly as well as ever, but still was not allowed to take exercise on shore.

They proposed making a trip up the harbour, and Higson got permission to take the corvette's pinnace.

"You must take care of the youngsters better than you did once upon a time," said Adair. "Don't expend any of them if you can help it."

"No fear," answered Higson, "I will watch over them as carefully as a hen does her chickens, or a nurserymaid the half-dozen small children committed to her care."

A good store of provisions in the way of substantial, with a proportionate amount of liquor, cigars, and tobacco, was laid in; fish and fruit might easily be obtained. Their uniform jackets being stowed away in their carpet-bags, all hands were dressed in white flannel jackets, white trousers, and straw hats or caps; while their only weapons were a couple of ships' muskets, the same number of boarding-pikes, and a brace of pistols. Not that they expected to require them for their defence, but for the slaughter of any game they might meet.

The party mustered eight in all, including Snatchblock and Tim Brady, an Irishman, who was taken to act as cook. Tim's only qualification for the post was that he professed to be able to boil praties with any man in the service. The midshipmen had forgotten that no potatoes were among their stores; but then Tim told a good story and sang a song in first-rate style, which made ample amends for his deficiency of knowledge in the culinary art.

Soon after daybreak Higson shoved off from the side of the corvette, calling on board the brig for the remainder of the party. Then making sail, they stood away up the harbour. The city was soon left astern as they glided over the calm waters. In the far distance could be seen the curiously-shaped Organ mountains, while on either hand rose conical hills amidst forests of lofty trees of every variety. Cocoa-nuts and orange groves, palms, and mangroves, and others, bearing a variety of nuts or blossoms of gorgeous hue, scarlet, orange, yellow, pink, and white. Gaily-plumaged birds, and beautifully-tinted butterflies, of wonderful size, flitted through the air. The party, though well accustomed to the rich vegetation of the West Indies, agreed that few scenes in the tropics could surpass this in beauty.

Curiously-rigged boats came floating by, some loaded with fruit and vegetables, others like haystacks gone adrift, and others of considerable size carrying cattle to the market at Rio. Several picturesque islets were passed, covered like the main land with rich vegetation and numberless flowers of various hues.

"Well, I think we shall have a jolly trip of it," exclaimed Tom. "There is no necessity to bother ourselves by taking observations or keeping a dead reckoning, but, like the navigators of old, we shall never lose sight of land."

"No; but we must stand by to lower the sail pretty sharply if a squall comes off one of those pointed hills there," observed Higson, "and that is not at all unlikely to happen."

"Who is after getting hungry?" sung out Desmond. "I suspect it must be past eight bells, and so I vote we land, and look out for a pleasant place to take our dinner."

"There is one," said Higson, pointing to a spot where the landing appeared easy, and there was a tolerably wide space of open ground backed by an orange grove, on the branches of which golden and green fruit, with white and pink blossoms, all hung together.

All hands were soon on shore, with such provisions as they required, and the greater number employed themselves in collecting wood for their proposed fire, which was soon blazing away. From the sparkling stream which rushed down from the mountains, they obtained a supply of water. The dark green leaves of the orange-trees overhead afforded sufficient shade, and they were soon all seated round a substantial repast, to which they were well inclined

to do full justice.

"We have not far to go for our dessert," said Tom, as he eyed the oranges hanging temptingly above his head. Archy Gordon was of opinion, however, that as they were not growing wild they must belong to somebody; and that unless the owner would consent to part with his fruit, they would not be right to take them. As may be supposed, however, he was in the minority, though Higson acknowledged that if the owner could be found he was entitled to payment should he demand it. In the meantime Snatchblock and his companion, who were not troubled with any scruples on the subject, collected their hats full and emptied them out on the ground by the side of the officers. On this all hands, including Archy himself, were soon employed in discussing the delicious fruit to their hearts' content.

"I doubt whether I ever did eat such delicious oranges," exclaimed Desmond, sucking away at orange after orange. "All the pips grow on the outside. What a convenient arrangement for a person in a hurry! I have seen many a black fellow with a mouth big enough to take in a whole one, though such a bolus would be apt to stick in his gullet if he were to swallow one before putting his teeth into it."

"Well, youngsters, if we are to get far up the harbour before dark we must be off," said Higson. "Come, let us pack up our traps, and take care not to leave any pots or pans on shore."

The party soon got once more in the boat, but the wind failing them they had to depend on their oars in making headway. Wishing to go as far as they could before nightfall they pulled on cheerfully, amusing themselves, now by singing many a merry song, now shouting, now spinning yarns, some of them, it must be owned, oft-repeated tales. The scenery appeared as beautiful as at first. At length as evening was approaching, and Higson began to feel hungry, he once more put in for the shore at a spot somewhat resembling that on which they had landed for dinner. Here, too, was running water, a grove of orange-trees, and not far off several gigantic mangroves, with figs and grapes in abundance.

"Faith! we are in a regular paradise," observed Desmond.

"We may revel in fruits, at all events," said Higson.

They agreed, as no houses were to be seen, and as they were not likely to be interrupted, that they would bring up here for the night, and get a bathe in the morning before starting. The fire was lighted as usual; cocoa and coffee put on and made, while the provisions they had brought were spread on the ground. Not intending to proceed farther they were in no hurry, and fully enjoyed their meal, finishing off with an extra glass of grog or two, which naturally produced the usual songs and yarns, till they all declared that they felt remarkably happy. Snatchblock and Tim Brady presented them with a liberal supply of fruit, which was generous on the part of the two men, considering that it had cost them nothing. It was eaten, however, with not the less relish.

As the merry party smoked their cigars or pipes, sucked oranges, and sipped their grog, many a yarn of bygone days was told. Snatchblock and Tim Brady took their part. On such expeditions as these, steady men are permitted a familiarity not allowable on board. Higson had already told two or three stories, and had just described an amusing scene on the coast of Africa, when Ben Snatchblock chimed in.

"Do you mind, Mr Higson, when we were aboard the *Corsair* together on the coast? We saw many curious sights among the niggers; they seem altogether a different sort of people to those over here. You know, young gentlemen, we always ship a dozen or more black fellows aboard, to do the hard work, wooding, and watering, and such like, which would pretty nigh kill white men if they were to attempt it in the hot sun of the coast. The blacks we got were called Kroomen; they altogether beat any other niggers I have ever fallen in with in these parts—fine, big, active fellows, and strong as any Englishman, and stronger than most, and as brave as need be; in fact, we could not get on without them. The slavers never come near the Kroomen's country. In the first place they are very hard to catch, as they fight desperately, and not one of them would ever consent to be turned into a slave. Most of those along the coast, who have served on board men-of-war or merchantmen, speak a little English; some speak it pretty well. They are neat and clean in their persons, and their houses are far better furnished than those of the blacks in general, with chairs, tables, looking-glasses, and china, and all sorts of things, just like civilised Christians. When a gang is engaged for a ship they always have a head man, with a mate under him, who is called his favourite man. You will remember, Mr Higson, sir, the fellow we had aboard the *Corsair*, who was called Dan Ropeyarn; a great big fellow he was, too—stood six feet six without his shoes, seeing he never wore such things. He could lift up me and Tim Brady here—and we are not chickens—one in each hand. Dan was a good-natured fellow, which was fortunate, for it would not have done to offend him. He was not what is called a beauty though; he had a mouth so wide that we used to declare he somehow or other managed to shift his ears farther back when he had a mind to grin, and show his white teeth. Dan's mate or favourite man was called Tom Saucepan. He was a pretty strong fellow, but he was not equal to Dan, and in point of good looks there wasn't much to make one jealous of the other, though maybe the black damsels of their own country have a different opinion from ours on the subject. One evening we were going down the Sheba river, which was pretty broad you mind, sir. The wind was light, and the water as smooth as glass. We had been on somewhat short commons for a month or two, for the slave-dealers prevented the people when they could from bringing off fresh provisions. Suddenly the lookout from the masthead, who had been in a South Sea whaler, shouted out—

"'A turtle, floating down stream, sir.'

"The commander asked Dan Ropeyarn if he could catch the turtle.

"'Oh, yes, sare; I do dat same,' he answered, and calling Tom Saucepan he lowered his canoe, when taking a harpoon and a long line they shoved off. Dan, as Tom paddled him along, made the end of the line fast to the harpoon, but not to the canoe, for he knew well enough that if the turtle was to give but one pull, unless the line was directly over the bows, the canoe would be capsized in a moment. Away he went, and we all watched him eagerly from the deck, our

mouths watering with the thoughts of the turtle soup we hoped to get for dinner next day.

“Dan was too wise to let the turtle know that he was coming, so he made Tom paddle up cautiously astern of the creature, while he stood in the bows with his harpoon raised in his hand, ready to strike. Not one of us could have stood upright in such a cranky sort of concern as she was; if we had tried it, we should have gone over in a moment; still, as we looked at Dan, so steadily he stood, we might have fancied that his feet were planted on firm ground. Some of us thought he would miss the turtle after all, but we were wrong. Away flew the harpoon right into the creature’s back. It did not stop quiet after this, but off it started, running out the line, which Dan had coiled away at the bottom of the canoe, like lightning. Somehow or other, however, the line caught Dan’s leg, and in an instant whisked him overboard and capsized the canoe. Away he was dragged, leaving the canoe astern; he did not let go of the rope though, not he, but catching the end he took it in his teeth, grinning tremendously, passing it as he did so between his legs. He must have found that wet rope a pretty hard saddle, I have a notion, as he had nothing on in the way of trowsers. Now up the stream he paddled with his hands, just as composedly as if he was taking a swim for his own amusement. Now and then, the turtle in its agony would dive or dash off at a great rate, and he would be drawn back, but the line was too long to let him be dragged under the water.

“Tom Saucepan had, in the meantime, caught hold of the stern of the canoe, and, seizing her by both hands, he gave her a violent rock, and in an instant righted her; another rock, and he had freed her of water; then in he sprang, legs first, over the stern, and began baling away with his hat. He had kept the paddle in his mouth all the time.

“The commander had ordered a boat to be lowered to assist Dan, but before even she reached the water Tom had not only righted the canoe, but had got up to Dan and taken him on board, and there was the nearly done-for turtle towing them quietly through the water. In a few minutes the turtle had lost its strength, and, instead of the turtle towing the canoe, the canoe was towing the turtle. We hoisted it on board, and I mind that it weighed two hundred pounds.

“I shall not forget that turtle, Mr Higson, for you and the other officers sent us three bottles of wine to mix with the soup. It was a rare good stuff, that it was,” and Ben smacked his lips at the recollection of the feast, which an alderman would not have despised.

“I shall not forget Dan’s face, as I saw it through the glass, while he held the rope in his mouth, paddling away up the river, with the turtle’s stern to his, or the wonderfully rapid way in which Tom Saucepan righted his canoe,” said Higson, laughing.

“We saw some curious sights aboard the old brig, sir,” observed Ben. “Do you remember the capsizing the commander got one day?”

“I am not quite certain, but I think that you, Ben, were the very man who did the deed.”

“Oh no, sir, it wasn’t me,” answered Ben; “it was Billy Blazes, as we used to call him.”

“What was it, Mr Higson?” asked Tom and Desmond.

“Well, you see, youngsters, we carried pretty taunt masts and square yards; and as several sister brigs of ours had been lost, with all hands, the commander considered it as well to be cautious, so that we might not go and keep them company. It became therefore necessary to make the men sharp when all hands were turned up to shorten sail; and he let it be understood that he intended on such occasions to punish the last man off the lower deck. He was a tall, thin man—so tall that he found his height very inconvenient in a ten-gun brig, and he used to put his looking-glass on deck and his head through the cabin skylight when he wanted to shave in the morning. Billy Blazes, who was a quartermaster, was about as short and stout as the commander was tall and thin. One day, just as the commander came on deck, and was standing near the companion hatchway, seeing a squall coming along the water, he shouted pretty sharply—

“‘All hands, shorten sail!’

“Now Billy—as I take it for granted that Snatchblock is right in saying it was he—was below, doing something or other, and guessing that he would be late if he came up the main hatchway, he bolted through the gunroom passage, thinking that no one would see him, and up he sprang by the companion hatchway. At that moment the commander turned round, and, receiving Billy’s head in the pit of his stomach, was doubled up, and sent sprawling over on the deck, the pain preventing him from seeing who had done the deed. Billy did not, you may be sure, stop to apologise; but up the rigging he sprang, before the commander or any of the officers knew who it was, and you may depend upon it he did not inform them. His messmates kept his secret, and it was not till the brig was paid off that the truth slipped out.”

“I remember the same system as that you speak of being carried on in a ship I once served in,” observed Norris. “The first lieutenant used to put down the name of the last man off the lower deck on a slip of paper, and at the end of three months he took out the slip, and counted who had been most frequently guilty, and they were invariably punished. However, as several good men got punished, the system became very unpopular, and as many deserted in consequence it was given up.”

On this Tom told some of the stories about black-listing which he had heard from Admiral Triton.

“I once served under a captain in that respect like Jerry Hawthorne,” said Higson. “Not that he was in general severe, I must own; but he used to come down pretty sharply on us midshipmen occasionally. We were in the Mediterranean, and brought up in Malta harbour. I and two other youngsters were greatly addicted to fishing. This the captain did not approve of, as he said that the bait and lines dirtied the ship’s side, and so he issued an order against it. Still fish we would, whenever we had a chance, and we three, knowing that the captain had gone on shore, were thus engaged

one day, when he unexpectedly returned on board, and found us hauling up fish after fish, which left their scales sticking to the frigate's polished sides. He sent for us aft.

"'I will show you, my lads, how to fish,' he said, with a bland smile, and thereon he ordered three boarding-pikes to be brought, to each of which he had about four feet of rope yarn secured, with a hand-lead at the end. 'Now, come along, lads, and you shall begin your fishing,' he said, with a quiet chuckle, and he then made each of us hold a boarding-pike straight out over the taffrail, at arm's length, during the whole of the watch, telling the first lieutenant to keep an eye on us. You may be sure our arms ached; and when the lieutenant turned another way, we took the liberty of letting the pikes rest on the rail. Every now and then the captain would come up, and with that bland smile of his ask us in a cheerful voice—

"'Have you caught any fish, my lads?' and when we said 'No, sir,' he would answer—

"'Try a little longer; you will have better luck by-and-by.'

"I can tell you, it was about as aggravating a punishment as I ever endured. It cured us, for the time at least, of our love of fishing."

"You must have seen some wonderful things in the course of your career, Mr Higson," observed Tom.

"I have indeed, youngster," answered the lieutenant. "One of the most wonderful was in that brig we were speaking of, and Snatchblock was the man who played the most important part in the drama. It was a very short one, though.

"We were shortening sail when a young midshipman, very small for his age, fell from the fore-topgallant-yard. You must have thought that he must, to a certainty, have been dashed to pieces: so he would have been, but Snatchblock, who was on the fore-topsail-yard caught him as he fell in a vice-like grasp, and placed him on the yard, thus saving his life."

"I cannot tell you how I did it, sir," said Snatchblock. "All I can fancy is, I heard him coming, for it was but a moment after he let go his hold that I had him tight enough."

"Do you mind, sir, Pat O'connor falling from aloft? He and another man were in the main-topmast-crosstrees when they took to quarrelling. What it was about I don't know; but Pat said something which made the other hit him, and over went Pat, striking, as he fell, the mainsail with his head, which took the skin right off his face, and down he came on deck, his face all gory, and his shirt and trousers covered with blood. We ran to him, thinking that every bone in his body must have been broken, and expecting to find him dead, when up he jumped, and doubling his fists began swearing terribly at the other,—I don't think I ever heard a fellow swear more,—telling him to come down, and he would fight him then and there. He was just as if he had gone mad, and he didn't seem to think for a moment of the fearful danger he had escaped. I have known a man killed just falling a few feet, and others, like those we have been speaking about, falling from aloft, and yet not the worse for it. I remember once going round the Horn when a man fell from the fore-topsail-yard. The ship was running eight knots or so before a strong breeze, over a long, heavy swell, though the sea was not breaking. It was some time before she could be rounded to; but the man was a strong swimmer, and struck out bravely. While we were watching the poor fellow an immense albatross came sweeping down towards him. Several of us cried out that he would be killed. Those birds with their strong bills can drill a hole in a man's skull in a moment. We shouted at the top of our voices, but the man could not hear us. Fortunately he saw the bird coming, and whipping off his shoe he held it in his hand to defend himself. Down swooped the albatross, when seizing the shoe in its beak off it flew again, and did not drop it for a minute or more. A boat was lowered, and the man picked up not much the worse; and the surgeon of the ship, who had got his rifle ready, shot the same albatross some minutes after. It measured, I mind, fourteen feet and a few inches from tip to tip of its wings."

Yarn after yarn of a similar character was spun, till some of the party got up saying, that they must stretch their legs, and off they strolled along the shore to collect anything to be found, leaving Higson, Archy, and Tom, and Desmond still at the supper table.

While the rest were absent, Higson, who was leaning back enjoying his cigar, happening to look round, observed several men coming out of the orange grove.

"Hillo! what can those fellows want?" he said, sitting up.

"They seem friendly enough, but there are a good many others behind the trees," observed Tom.

The strangers approached nearer. They appeared by their costumes to be country people, and except the long sticks they carried in their hands no weapons were observed among them. Stopping a few yards off they stood staring at the young officers without addressing them, though they made remarks to each other. Norris was the only one of the party who pretended to speak Portuguese.

"You must be our interpreter. Ask what they want," said Higson.

Norris did his best to put the question, but the natives did not seem to understand him, as they made no reply. Seeing only the young lieutenant and his four companions the rest of the party being still at a distance, the strangers became more familiar. While some gathered close round them others went to the boat: one stooping down picked up a musket, while another got hold of a boarding-pike, which lay on the grass at a little distance, and began examining them.

"I don't quite like the way these fellows are behaving," said Higson. "Hang it all! I have left my pistols in the boat, or I would make them keep their distance."

"Tell them, Norris, that we beg they will stand a little way off, and explain their object in paying us a visit."

Norris thereon addressed the natives in the best Portuguese he could muster, but they did not apparently choose to understand him. Presently the men who had gone down to the boat scrambled into her, and shouting to the others shoved off, and began to make their way towards another landing-place some distance along the shore.

"Hillo! you fellows! come back. What are you about?" shouted Higson, darting forward.

Directly he did so four of the natives threw themselves upon him, and though he knocked over one, and gave another a black eye, they succeeded in tripping him up, and before he could strike another blow they had his arms fast behind his back. Norris and the three midshipmen were rushing to his assistance when they were treated in the same manner, two or three of the natives seizing each one of them, and quickly securing their arms.

"Well, you fellows, what are you going to do with us, I should like to know?" exclaimed Higson, feeling naturally very indignant. "We are British officers, and I can tell you that if you don't set us at liberty, and bring back our boat, you will have to pay for it. Tell them what I say, Norris."

The only reply made by the natives was, "Piratas! piratas!"

"They say we are pirates!" exclaimed Norris.

"I only hope they won't take it into their heads to hang us before they find out their mistake, and from the rough way they are handling us, I should not be surprised if they do," cried Desmond. "Set our arms free, you fellows. If you want us to go along with you, we will walk quietly enough, since we can't help ourselves."

The Brazilians, of course, not understanding this, only grinned, and having collected various articles scattered about on the grass, they prepared to leave the waterside. Just then, Snatchblock and the rest of the party from different directions, appeared, very much astonished at seeing the way in which their companions were being treated, and that their boat was carried off. Before they could unite, several more natives coming to the spot, rushed down on them and made them prisoners. Snatchblock showed fight, and two or three of his assailants bit the ground before they succeeded in capturing him. The whole naval party were then marched up the hill towards a village which appeared in the distance, their captors being joined on the way by several more people, who abused and threatened them with violent gestures.

"I can't make out whom they take us for," said Higson to Norris, who was dragged along near him. "Try and ascertain. There is surely some mistake."

Norris expostulated as well as he could, but received the same reply as before, "Piratas! piratas!" while their captors pointed with significant gestures to some horizontal branches of trees which stretched across the path, intimating, as they all supposed, that the branches would be convenient for hanging them on.

"I say, Gerald, I don't like this at all at all!" cried Desmond; "if the people are giving to practising Lynch law hereabouts, they may hang us up as they threaten to do without ceremony."

"I don't think they will dare to do that, for they must guess who we really are," answered Tom.

"Whatever they may think, they call us 'pirates,'" said Desmond. "Arrah, now, you unmannerly brutes, just behave properly to a gentleman!" he exclaimed, turning round to the Brazilians, who were roughly hauling him on away from Tom. Snatchblock and his messmate walked along, abusing their captors for their own gratification, knowing pretty well that not a word they uttered could be understood.

At last they arrived in front of a building, with a door and a couple of strongly-barred windows on either side. The door being opened by an official-looking personage, who produced a huge key from his pocket, they were all unceremoniously thrust in one by one. Again Higson protested against the treatment they were receiving, but the Brazilians were utterly indifferent to what he or any of his companions said. Snatchblock, who had till then been walking on quietly, suddenly got his arms loose, and knocking aside, with some well-directed blows from his iron fists, two or three of the persons nearest to him, shouted out—

"Now is the time to get our liberty! We will soon send the fellows to the right about. Come on, Mr Higson, the coast is clear."

The lieutenant and midshipmen having their arms lashed behind them could not quite so easily follow his advice, and the next instant the Brazilians making a rush together threw themselves on the brave sailor and brought him to the ground, when he was quickly bundled in after the rest, and the door shut. As, however, his arms were at liberty, he at once released his companions.

"This is very provoking," exclaimed Higson, after they had somewhat recovered from the rough handling they had received. "We can soon set ourselves to rights, though, if we could manage to send on board one of our ships."

"Easy enough, but we must get out first," observed Desmond.

"Perhaps we might contrive to get through the roof, I have heard of such things being done," said Tom. "The door and windows are evidently strong, and there is no chance of getting out through them."

The building, which was about twenty-five feet long and fourteen wide, was carefully examined, but they soon discovered that the roof was strong and heavy, and there was but little prospect of making their way through it. Even should they get outside, how were they to reach Rio was the question, unless they could find their boat; and over that their captors would probably keep a strict watch.

There were some rough wooden benches fixed to the walls round the room, but no table or any place on which they could rest. The floor, which was excessively dirty, being strewed with the remains of the meals of other prisoners, they had no wish to lie down on it.

At last, Higson, seating himself on a bench, said, "Well, all we can do at present is to practise patience, and see what turns up next."

It was now quite dark. Fortunately, having enjoyed a good supper just before they were captured, they were not hungry. The rest of the party followed the lieutenant's example, and lay down on the benches. No one came into the prison, but they could hear voices outside and a great number of people apparently passing up and down before the door. Thus they passed the night.

Next morning, some time after daylight, they heard a number of people collecting outside. Presently the door opened, and a couple of men appeared with trays containing basins of broth, and some dark-looking loaves of Indian corn. Without speaking the men put the viands on the ground and hurried out of the room, afraid, apparently, the prisoners might set upon them.

"Come, at all events, they don't intend to starve us; though I can't say that this stuff looks very tempting," remarked Higson.

However, as all hands were very hungry, they ate up the food. Fortunately, several of them having cigars or pipes in their pockets, they sat down to console themselves with a smoke.

An hour or two passed away, and they saw through their windows a larger crowd than before assembled, among whom were a number of armed men, though they were too irregularly dressed to be taken for soldiers.

"We shall get more kicks than ha'pence if we resist should they be come to take us anywhere, so it will be wiser to go quietly," observed Higson. "I don't suppose that they really intend to injure us."

As he spoke the door opened, and the armed men entering, the whole party were dragged out and marched up, each of them between a couple of guards, through the village to a building which appeared to be a sort of courthouse. That it was so was evident on their entering, when they found themselves placed together on one side of a large room, at the end of which sat a burly-looking personage before a table, and two men on either hand, with paper and pens before them. Several persons whom they recognised as the leaders among their captors of the previous evening, now came forward and addressed the judge, or district magistrate, he might have been more properly called the *Juiz da Fora*, violently gesticulating, and occasionally pointing at the prisoners. What they said was put down on paper, the judge nodding and trying to look very wise, and sometimes frowning as he glanced towards the accused. At last their captors came to an end of what they had to say. The judge turned towards the Englishmen to hear what reply they had to make in their defence. Now arose a considerable difficulty. As Higson had not understood a word of the accusation brought against him and his companions, he was excessively bothered how to form a reply.

"Well, Norris, what did the fellows say?" he asked. "I must get you to be our spokesman."

"As to what they said, I have not the slightest conception," answered Norris; "but I will try and make the judge understand who we are, and that is the thing of most importance."

With such Portuguese as he could command, Norris then tried to explain to the judge that they were a party of English officers on a pleasure excursion, that they had no intention of committing any illegal act; and that while he and his companions were quietly sitting on the ground they had been attacked by a number of people, who had carried them up to prison and made off with their boat.

The judge gave Norris to understand, that though he had caught a word here and there, he could not comprehend what had been said, except as to their being English officers, and that their very appearance contradicted such an assertion.

Norris fortunately understood this remark, and at once said that if their uniform jackets, which were on board the boat, were restored to them they would put them on.

"Very likely you may have the uniforms of British officers, which you may have stolen, perhaps after putting their owners to death," observed the judge, an assertion which appeared to highly please their captors.

In vain Norris asserted that he spoke the truth. The judge evidently sided with their accusers, and he was about to order that they should be taken back to prison, when a negro from the farther end of the court made his way up to them.

"Me Sangaree Jack, understand all you say, sare; once serve on board English man-of-war. These here fellows say dey hang you up on de trees tomorrow if you no show who you are."

"Well, Sangaree Jack, that is pleasant information," observed Higson, "but how can you help us?"

"Me go down to English man-of-war, and tell all dat you say, and dey den send up armed boats to make dese fellows let you go," answered the negro.

"I shall be very glad to accept your offer," said Higson, "and the sooner you start the better."

"All right, massa lieutenant, but me no go for nothing, you sabbe," answered Sangaree Jack, with a knowing look.

"Well, then, we will give you ten dollars, that will be handsome, won't it?" said Higson.

Sangaree Jack grinned till his mouth almost pushed back his ears to allow it full expansion, as he answered—

“Ten dollars! oh no! massa, dat not enough.”

“Then suppose we double it,” said Higson.

“Oh no! massa, twenty dollars not enough.”

At last, after a little more bargaining, Sangaree Jack agreed for thirty dollars to go down and carry information as to what had happened, on board the corvette.

“Well, massa lieutenant, where de dollars, though?” asked the black, with a cunning leer.

“The dollars! You will get them when we are set free, my friend,” said Higson.

“I neber do anyting of dat sort on trust, sare,” answered the negro, grinning.

“But suppose we have not got the dollars, you will lose them, and we shall remain in the prison?” observed Higson.

“Oh, Buccra officers always carry dollars,” answered the black. “Just try what the young gentlemens got in dare pockets.”

“Possibly we may have some of the money among us,” said Higson, not willing to trust the fellow altogether. “Suppose you take fifteen dollars, and then we will pay the remainder when the boats come up—come, fair play is a jewel.”

“Massa lieutenant know how to manage tings,” grinned blackie. “Come, I take fifteen dollars, and you see I true man. Honour bright among teves, you know; you trust me and I trust you—he! he! he!” and blackie grinned at his own wit.

The dollars were with some difficulty collected among them.

“Don’t let de people see what you give me,” said blackie, putting his fingers to his thick lips, and looking very wise. “I tell dese rascals that I got a little money to buy some wine, and oder tings. I tell dem too, dat I know you English officers, and dat dey better take care what dey do.”

The money was conveyed into Sangaree Jack’s large paws, without any remark being made by the people in court. Sangaree Jack then addressed the court, and though Norris could not make out exactly what he said, it had some effect, as the judge bowed to them as they left the court, and they were afterwards treated with more respect. Their new friend then hurried off, assuring them that he would lose no time in getting down the harbour.

The party were now marched back to prison amidst the cries and hooting of the populace.

“At all events they don’t intend to lynch us,” said Tom. “That’s one comfort.”

“If each of us had a good shillelah in our hands, we would be after making them sing a different tune,” exclaimed Desmond, turning round every now and then, and casting a contemptuous look on the mob. Higson and Archy Gordon walked on, however, in an unconcerned manner, thinking it more dignified to take no notice of the ill-feeling shown by the people.

They were thankful when at last they got back to their prison. Messes somewhat similar to those they had in the morning were again brought to them. Norris asked the man if they could not purchase something better, and offered a dollar if he would bring them some fruit.

“Stop a little, and I will see what can be done,” he answered in Portuguese.

An hour or two more passed, by which time the people had gone away, when the same man again appeared at the window, and bringing a large basket of oranges and other fruit, he asked for the dollar.

“You shall have it when you have given us its value in fruit, but not until then, my friend,” answered Norris, holding it up.

The man, knowing that they could not run away, thought that he might trust them, and threw the oranges, and limes, and grapes, and other fruit through the bars of the window, when they were eagerly caught by the thirsty prisoners.

The fruit was not worth a quarter the sum the man received, so he was well contented, and signified that he would bring some more next day.

For a second night they were shut up; they could only hope that Sangaree Jack would prove faithful, and inform their friends of the treatment they had received.

“But suppose he does not?” said Desmond; “we may be kept here till we starve.”

“No great fear of that,” said Higson. “Rogers and several others know that we were going up the harbour; and if we don’t appear, boats will be sent to look for us before long.”

The following morning better provisions were sent to them, and not long afterwards they were again marched up to the court-house. The same farce as on the previous day was gone through, and no interpreter appearing, the judge and his assistants left the court as wise as they entered it, while the prisoners were unable to make out of what crime they were accused. It was just possible that they might have been sent out and shot, had not the judge entertained

some strong suspicions that their account of themselves was true, and that if they were ill-treated, he and the inhabitants of his village would be made seriously to suffer. However, once more they were sent back to prison, very naturally considerably indignant at the scandalous way in which they were being treated. Some of the party, indeed, began to entertain doubts whether Sangaree Jack would prove faithful. Perhaps being a cunning fellow, he might be contented with the fifteen dollars, and avoid the risk he might run of being punished by the Brazilians, should they discover that he had carried information to the English ships of what had taken place. Even Higson began to fear that they had been duped.

"I think that it's high time that we should try and set ourselves free, at all events," he said, after sitting silent for some time. "Though we may be unable to escape either through the window or roof, perhaps we may make our way under the walls, and, if we are once outside, we may get hold of the sentry's arms, and manage to reach our boat."

All agreed to Higson's proposal. Archy Gordon and Desmond were stationed at the window to give notice should any one attempt to look in, while the rest carefully examined the ground round the walls. A soft spot was found, and they agreed that it would be easy to excavate it with their knives and pieces of the bench which had been easily wrenched off. Believing nobody would come in for the remainder of the day, they at once set to work, and before long had dug a tunnel through which Snatchblock could creep, and he declared that he could easily force the ground up on the outside. The earth, as they took it out, they rammed under the benches. They had observed that the hut in which they were confined stood in an open space by the side of a road, so that people only passed in front of it. This greatly assisted them, and prevented the risk of discovery, for the ground above their tunnel was so thin that any one stepping on it would have inevitably fallen through. The whole work was completed soon after nightfall. They then waited anxiously till the sounds in the village should have ceased.

"Now the sooner we are off the better," said Higson. "Snatchblock and I will creep out first and seize the sentry, and the rest of you follow directly you find that we have got hold of him."

"Let me go first, sir," said Snatchblock; "my shoulders are best fitted for shoving up the earth."

Higson agreed to this, and they crept into their tunnel. Snatchblock had taken a piece of board which he put on his shoulders, and, giving a hearty shove, up flew the earth, and out he came into the open air. Higson and the rest followed. While the two first crept cautiously round the hut, the remainder crouched down. Snatchblock waited till the sentry came close to the end of the wall, then, making a spring, he clapped his hands over the man's mouth, while Higson seized his musket. They then dragged him back, and, putting a piece of wood, to serve as a gag, into his mouth, they secured his hands and feet with their handkerchiefs, and pulled him through the tunnel into the hut.

"Now," said Desmond, "we have got a musket, some pieces of wood, and our fists; and, as we shall probably find some thick sticks as we go along, it ought to take a good many Brazilians to recapture us."

On going to the courthouse, they had observed the water of the harbour shining in the distance, and they therefore knew the direction to take.

Keeping outside the village, they were making their way to the brow of the hill on which it stood, when they came suddenly on a large farmhouse, out of which several dogs rushed, barking furiously; the animals, however, contented themselves with making a noise, without venturing to attack the strangers, but the noise was what they had to dread. Lights were soon seen in the windows, and directly afterwards a party of men appeared at the door, armed with blunderbusses and pistols. Higson, knowing that if they ran, both dogs and men would follow, halted, and, presenting his musket, told Norris to order the men to stand back or that he would fire. They appeared to understand what they said, for they all hurried back into the house; but as they did so, two of them let fly with their blunderbusses. Fortunately no one was hit, but the slugs came whizzing over their heads.

"Now we must run for it," cried Higson. "Whatever we do, though, keep together."

The noise of the blunderbusses aroused the inhabitants of several neighbouring houses, some of whom came out, while others discharged their firearms from their windows. This of course aroused the whole village, and it soon became known that the English pirates had escaped. Higson and his party were in the meantime making the best of their way down the hill, though, as they were unacquainted with the road, they were uncertain whether they were directing their course for the landing-place. They could tell by the sounds that a large body of men were collecting in their rear. Higson regretted that they had not waited till a later hour in the night, when all the inhabitants would have retired to rest. The road was extremely rough and uneven, such as it would have been difficult to traverse rapidly even in the daytime. Tom had a severe tumble, and then down came Gerald, while poor Archy Gordon found it very difficult to get along. Their pursuers, who knew the road, were gaining on them.

"It won't do to be taken running," said Higson.

At length they reached an open space on one side of the road. Higson called a halt, and facing about said—

"I will see if I can't make the fellows keep their distance."

The Brazilians in considerable force, some with firearms in their hands and others with pikes or ox-goads, were seen not a hundred yards off, coming towards them.

At that moment the tramp of feet was heard in the rear.

"We are surrounded, I am afraid," said Higson, "but we won't give in notwithstanding."

The party from the opposite side came rapidly on, and to Higson's surprise the Brazilians suddenly halted, amid began to talk in excited voices to each other. The tramp of feet grew louder and louder, when, by the light of the

moon, which, by-the-bye, it should have been said, was shining brightly, Higson and his companions, as they looked along the road, saw a dozen bluejackets and as many marines coming towards them, with an officer at their head, who was quickly recognised as Jack Rogers. He and the rest were soon shaking hands, when Jack told them that as soon as notice was brought on board of what had happened, Murray had sent him and his party off in a couple of boats, and that on landing and hearing the firing he had hurried up, thinking it possible that his assistance might be required.

"Then Sangaree Jack proved faithful, and told you the position in which we have been placed," said Higson.

"Yes, massa, and he well gained de oder fifteen dollars," exclaimed the black, coming out from among the bluejackets, behind whom he had concealed himself.

No sooner did the Brazilians perceive the English party than away they scampered as fast as their legs could carry them. Jack determined at once to go to the judge's house, and to demand satisfaction for the insult which had been offered to the majesty of England in the persons of some of her naval defenders, and his black namesake undertook to guide him there.

The magistrate, aroused out of his first sleep by hearing his door-bell ringing violently, was naturally in a great fright, and stood trembling and bowing as Jack walked into the house. He excused himself on the plea that he had no notion the prisoners were English officers, fully believing that they were pirates, as the people who had captured them had asserted. He acknowledged, however, that most of the said officious personages were connected with slave-dealers, and that he had little doubt they had committed the outrage to revenge themselves for the number of vessels which had been captured by the English ships of war. Jack and his party, with the rescued prisoners, declined accepting the magistrate's offered hospitality, and having received all the apologies he could make, went back to the boats, which some of the natives had even ventured to approach.

Having lighted fires to serve the double purpose of cooking their provisions and keeping off the mosquitoes, they passed the night seated round them.

Next morning the magistrate, attended by several of the principal people in the place, trembling in their shoes, came down, and again tendered the most abject apologies for what had occurred. The captured boat was soon afterwards seen coming round the point, and being brought alongside by a black crew, who had been placed in her by the Brazilians, she was found not only to contain all the arms, and other articles which had been taken, but six fat pigs, several dozen ducks and fowls, with heaps of oranges and other fruit, which the magistrate begged the English officers would accept as a peace-offering.

Again he declared that what had happened had been from no fault of his; that the rascally slave-dealers had sworn that the people they had captured were pirates, and he had only acted according to his duty in judging the case brought before him. He took great credit to himself for allowing the negro, Sangaree Jack, to go down to the ships of war, and hoped that this would prove the honesty of his intentions.

Rogers having received instructions not to push matters to extremities, accepted the old gentleman's apology.

"He would have shown his disinterestedness had he sent down himself, without allowing our friend Sangaree here the opportunity of doing us out of our thirty dollars," observed Higson. "Ah, blackie, how many is the old fellow to get of them?"

Sangaree Jack gave one of his broadest grins.

"One half, massa lieutenant, as I a gentleman. He bigger rascal than all the rest—he one slave-dealer hisself. Ah! ah! ah!" and the negro chuckled with delight, rubbed his hands, and twisted and wriggled about, till he set the boat's crew all laughing.

Whether the fellow's description of the magistrate was correct or not, Rogers felt that he could take no further steps in the matter, no one having fortunately really suffered damage or hurt, beyond the inconvenience of being shut up in a dirty hut for a couple of nights.

A pleasant breeze blowing down the harbour the boats made sail, and in a few hours reached the ships. The next day the *Tudor* and *Supplejack* were again at sea, having received orders to cruise along the Brazilian coast in search of slavers. The ships got some way to the northward of Rio when Murray directed Jack to keep in shore as close as he could venture, while he himself stood off the land; they might thus hope to fall in, either with vessels fitted for the slave-trade about to cross to the African coast, or with full slavers attempting to make a Brazilian port. The latter class it was of course the most desirable to capture, though should the former be taken it would materially assist to put a stop to the traffic, and save a certain number of blacks from undergoing, for a time, at all events, the horrors of a middle passage.

The *Tudor* shortly after daybreak was standing in under easy sail for the land, when from the masthead a schooner was observed, beating up against the breeze, which then blew off the shore, the rays of the rising sun striking her canvas bringing her clearly into view. Murray ordered all sail to be made, and hoped to gain on the chase before the corvette was observed by her. As the *Supplejack* was likely to be inside of her, there was every probability of her being caught by one or the other. It was soon evident, however, that she had made out the corvette, as she was seen to set all sail, and to stand away to the northward: as the *Tudor* was a long way to leeward, the chase would probably be a long one. From the appearance and movements of the schooner Murray was convinced that she was a slaver with a cargo on board, and he determined therefore to persevere till he could come up with her, and ascertain her real character. The land was barely visible, and the *Supplejack* might therefore be a long way off in shore, and not yet have caught sight of the chase.

The day wore on, and the *Tudor* had gained considerably on her, when about six bells in the forenoon the sails gave some ominous flaps against the masts, and the wind dropping more and more, the corvette lay almost becalmed, with only just steerage way. As the schooner was, however, likewise almost becalmed she did not gain any advantage from this circumstance. A light wind, in a short time, again filled the corvette's sails; but as it was continually shifting, all hands were on deck employed in hauling on the braces, as necessity required. Now the corvette gained slightly on the chase, now the schooner's sails felt the breeze, and she once more glided along through the smooth water.

"She seems to be heaving something overboard, sir," said Desmond to Higson, who was standing on the forecaskle with him.

"Yes, indeed," said Higson, looking through his telescope. "There goes one of her boats! now she has lowered another. The fellows are determined to make their escape if they can, she is heaving overboard cask after cask, and plank and spare spars—she must have a full cargo, or she would not do that—we shall catch her though, notwithstanding."

"I hope they won't heave any of the poor negroes overboard. That is what I have heard the slavers do when hard pressed," observed Desmond.

"The fellows would do it fast enough if they thought that we should stop to pick up the unfortunate creatures, and give them a better chance of getting off," answered Higson.

"But our commander won't let the poor wretches drown, surely," remarked Desmond.

"No, I should think not, indeed," said Higson. "I have never actually seen that done, but I have heard from others of half-a-dozen negroes being hove overboard, and if they were not carried off by sharks, picked up by a British cruiser, and the scoundrel slaver captured, notwithstanding."

"I hope we shall catch that fellow, then, at all events," said Desmond.

"There is many a slip between the cup and the lip, youngster," observed Higson. "Depend on it, however, that we will do our best as long as we can keep the schooner in sight."

By this time every possible article had been hove overboard from the schooner, and it was thought that even the water from her leaguers had been pumped out, and the stores and provisions from her hold thrown into the sea. As the corvette got up to the spot where she had been at the time, casks and spars were seen floating on every side, together with the boats, hencoops, and other articles. She benefited by the proceeding, for she now once more drew considerably ahead of the corvette. Both vessels were, however, soon afterwards becalmed, and Murray began to consider the advisability of sending the boats in chase. Adair begged leave to command them, and Desmond and the rest were delighted at the thoughts of a hand-to-hand tussle with the slaver screw; when, just as the men were coming aft to lower the boats, the sails were once more filled and a fresh breeze from the eastward sprang up, the schooner felt it at the same moment, when, keeping before the wind she rigged out her studding-sails, and lightened as she was, she skimmed like a bird over the blue ocean.

Murray ordered studding-sails and royals to be set, and kept the *Tudor* away towards the chase, which, however, it was soon evident gained on her. Both vessels were now rising the land.

"Sail on the port bow," cried the lookout from aloft.

"That must be Rogers," exclaimed Murray; and before long the *Supplejack* was made out standing to the northward, so as it was hoped to cut off the chase. No sooner did the schooner discover her, than taking in her studding-sails she hauled to the wind. The corvette did the same, and had now to depend on her own speed more than on the assistance she could obtain from the *Supplejack*.

The chase now became more exciting than ever, the breeze freshened, and both vessels tore along through the water; their bows, as they clove their way through it, throwing up masses of sparkling foam, while they left a long white line in their wake.

The wind after some time again shifting to the southward, both the schooner and her pursuer once more set studding-sails, the former somewhat edging in towards the land, behind which the bright sun was rapidly sinking.

"I would give a half-year's pay if we could but catch her," exclaimed Snatchblock to some of his messmates. "If night comes on before we are up to her, she may give us the go-by after all."

The wind, which had been variable all day, still continued so, and now once more came from the eastward. The chase immediately took advantage of it to alter her course. The corvette had now gained greatly on her.

"I think our bow-chasers will reach her," said Murray. "Try them, Adair; we will see if we can knock away some of her spars."

The excitement on board increased, and every one now felt as if the chase was already within their grasp. The gun was run out. Murray gave the word, "Fire!" Scarcely had its loud report rung through the air, than his voice again was heard—

"All hands, shorten sail! In studding-sails and royals. Let fly tacks and sheets."

The corvette had been taken aback, but every man was at his station, and the sails came in without the loss of a royal or studding-sail-boom. As soon as the sails were handed, and the ship wearing round was put before the wind,

the chase was eagerly looked for; she was seen running before the wind for the northeast. Her bearings being taken, the corvette steered directly for her, but darkness, which had been rapidly coming on, now hid her from sight, and even the most sanguine gave up all hopes of finding her again. Still Murray determined to keep after her as light as she was; he was convinced that with a strong wind blowing she would continue before it.

The first watch was set, the watch below turned in, and many a grumble was heard at their ill success. Adair, who was officer of the watch, was walking the deck, with Desmond by his side. The wind still blowing fresh, he had his eye aloft on the spars, ready to shorten sail should it increase. The sea, however, was tolerably smooth; a few stars only could be seen among the clouds which passed rapidly across the sky. The night was therefore rather darker than usual. The wind whistled shrilly in the rigging, and Desmond declared that he could hear strange sounds coming across the waters. A sharp lookout was, of course, kept ahead, and hopes were still entertained that the chase might possibly be again sighted. Snatchblock, who was on the forecastle, hailed in a loud, sharp voice, "Sail ahead! the chase! the chase! That's her! No doubt about it."

Adair and Desmond hurried forward, but by the time they reached the forecastle no sail was to be seen. Snatchblock, however, was positive that he had not been mistaken. He rubbed his eyes in vain, and peered into the gloom. She was certainly not visible. Adair, who had returned aft, was pacing the deck, when suddenly a tremendous shock was felt. He and others on deck were nearly thrown off their legs, and a cry arose of "We are on shore! we are on shore!" The watch below came tumbling up on deck, fully believing that the ship had struck. One of the hands seizing a leadline, sprang into the chains and hove it.

"What induced you to do that?" asked Adair.

"I thought we had struck on a rock, sir," was the answer.

"You found no bottom?"

"No, sir."

"We must have run over the chase! Heaven be merciful to the poor creatures!" exclaimed Murray, who unperceived had just come on deck. "She must have attempted to haul her wind, to alter her course, and, being too much lightened, capsized."

Desmond and several others who had run aft declared they saw several objects, like the heads of human beings, floating for an instant on the surface, but when they looked again they had disappeared. Not a cry, not a sound of any sort had been heard. At that instant probably some four or five hundred human beings chained in the hold of the slave-ship, with their white captors, had been carried into eternity.

Next morning the *Tudor* spoke the *Supplejack*, which, however, had seen nothing of the chase. No manner of doubt remained that she had been capsized, and that the *Tudor* had run over her during the night.

Chapter Twenty Two.

An American skipper gives important information—Jack leads a boat attack on a slaver in the Rio Frio—Capture—Slaver blown up—The Supplejack exposed to a hot fire—The corvette and brig in the harbour of Paragua—Slavers attacked—Several prizes made—Fired at from the shore—Engagement with a fort—Prizes destroyed—Carry one off—A man overboard—Picked up—His hair turns white.

The corvette and brig had been cruising for some days in company, having chased several vessels, some of which got away, while others were found to be honest traders. They were some way to the southward of Cape Frio, when land just being in sight, a brig was made out, standing towards them. She hoisted American colours, and as she approached, passing close to the corvette, a man, who appeared to be her skipper, standing on the poop-deck, hailed.

"If you will heave to I will come aboard you, as I have information to give."

The corvette was immediately brought to the wind, her foretopsail backed, the brig performing the same movement, when a boat was lowered, and a stout florid man, a Yankee in appearance from truck to kelson, dressed in Quaker costume, came alongside in her. Quickly climbing on deck, without making the usual salutation performed by visitors to a man-of-war, he advanced towards Murray, and introduced himself as Captain Aaron Sturge, of the brig *Good Hope* bound for Boston.

"This ship, I guess, friend, is one of the cruisers engaged in putting down the slave-trade," he said.

Murray replied in the affirmative, and inquired what information he had to give.

"It is this, friend; I have just come out of the Rio Frio, where I left a wicked-looking craft, called the *Rival*, nearly ready for sea, which will carry, I guess, six hundred slaves at least. She is a vessel I heard that the British cruisers have been long looking after; so if thou dost wish to catch her, now is thy time, and I would advise thee to stand in at once, and thou mayest cut her off as she comes out, or, what would be more certain, catch her before she puts to sea."

Murray thanked the Yankee skipper for his information, and invited him below.

"No, friend, I thank thee. The sooner thou art on thy way toward the coast and I on mine northward, the better. Thou will do thy best to take this vessel?"

Murray assured him that he would, and would lose not a moment in standing in for the land.

The honest skipper then shaking hands, swung himself down the side into his boat, and returned to the brig, which stood away to the southward, while the *Tudor* and *Supplejack*, hauling their wind, stood towards the coast. Murray hoped to be off the mouth of the harbour some time after dark. He hailed Jack, and told him what he intended to do.

His plan was to send the brig in with the boats and capture the slaver, before she got under weigh, or, should she sail that evening, catch her as she was coming out. As the vessels drew near the land, a sharp lookout was kept, on the chance of the slaver having put to sea, but no sail appeared in sight, and some time after nightfall, having got well in with the land, they hove to, to wait for daybreak.

Just before dawn Murray despatched two of his boats, one under charge of Higson, and the other of the master, with directions to Jack to stand in directly there was light enough to see his way. Jack, having a good chart, felt confident of being able to take the brig in without a pilot.

Directly the first streaks of dawn appeared in the sky, he put the brig's head towards the harbour. The sea breeze set in sooner than usual, and, having a leading wind, he rapidly stood on towing the boats.

He was soon passing through the narrow entrance.

"I see a number of fellows coming along the beach, some of them with arms in their hands. They probably suspect us, and will give us some trouble when we are coming out again," said Bevan.

"I shall care very little for that, provided we get hold of the slaver. I only hope that she has not given us the slip," answered Jack.

"There she is, sir, high up the harbour," cried Bevan. "Her topsails are loose, and had the wind held she would probably have been under weigh by this time."

"We have her safe enough now, however," said Jack.

The brig stood on for some way, but the wind fell light, the current was running out, and the channel here was far more intricate than the part already passed through. Jack determined, therefore, to bring up, and to board the slaver with the boats. Those selected for the expedition eagerly leaped into them. Jack took command of the whole, five in number, leaving Bevan in charge of the brig.

"It is possible that the Brazilians may imitate the example of those fellows at Bahia, and attempt to attack you," said Jack to Bevan; "you will therefore keep a good lookout, and allow no boat to approach under any pretence whatever. Order them to keep off, and fire a musket-shot or two ahead of them, as a sign that you are in earnest. If they still come on, fire the carronades into them, and drive them back as you best can."

The boats shoved off and made good way towards the slaver. Jack observed a horseman or two galloping along the shore, but no attempt was made to molest the English, though they passed round a couple of points within musket-shot. At last the slaver was seen at anchor right ahead. The expected prize before them, the boats' crews gave way with a will, Jack's boat leading.

He had ordered Higson to board on the port side, while he attacked on the starboard. The schooner's sails, though they had been loose when first seen, had in the meantime been furled. One man only was visible on board her, he was composedly walking the quarterdeck with a glass under his arm, through which he had been watching the approaching boats. As they got close he hailed in broken English, and ordered them to keep off.

"No, no; we intend to come aboard and examine that schooner," cried Jack.

"And I say you shall not," answered the man; "if you attempt it you must stand by the consequences."

"We intend to do so. Give way, lads," shouted Jack. As he spoke, the schooner's ports were opened. Her hitherto silent decks appeared crowded with men, while the next instant, four guns, run out on either side, let fly a shower of grape and canister, while twenty or thirty men opened fire with muskets. Happily the guns did no damage, for the boats were already close up to the schooner's sides, though two or three men were slightly wounded by the bullets which came in sharp thuds against the gunwales.

"Board her, my lads," shouted Jack; and he and his followers threw themselves quickly on deck. The slaver's crew stood their ground for a few seconds only; then, throwing down their cutlasses and muskets, they sprang overboard, and attempted to make their way to the not distant bank. A few had been cut down at the first onslaught; half-a-dozen yielded themselves prisoners, and two had tumbled into the boats, making eight in all captured. The others, in shoals, were swimming for their lives. The seamen, irritated at the opposition they had met with, would have shot them down, but Jack ordered them to desist.

"These fellows are not to be treated as enemies, now that they have abandoned their vessel. It was their duty to defend her," he shouted out, knocking up their muskets. "We must now get her out of this before their friends collect on the shore, or we shall find it rather a hot berth, I suspect."

The cable was cut, and the boats, taking the prize in tow, began to make way down the harbour. They had not, however, got far from the spot, before several shots struck the schooner, fired from some men who had already collected on the shore. No one was hurt, and she was soon beyond the range of the muskets. As the breeze increased it became very hard work, towing the schooner against it; still Jack determined, if possible, to carry her off. As they approached one of the points which they had to round, they observed a number of armed men collecting on it. To avoid them the schooner was kept over to the opposite side. Just then a squall struck her and drove her on a bank.

The Brazilians, encouraged by this, opened a hot fire, and though at some distance, several of their shot struck the schooner. In spite of it, Jack ordered warps to be got out, and endeavoured to haul her off. Two of his men had been hit and he in vain endeavoured to get the prize into deep water. Ahead was a bank over which he found it impossible to haul her; she had driven, indeed, into a bay, shoal water being found ahead, astern, and on her port side.

"It must be done, though I am sorry to lose so fine a craft; we must blow her up," he said to Higson.

Several casks of powder were found on board. They were placed in her hold, surrounded by such combustible materials as could be quickly gathered together. All hands were then ordered into the boats; Jack, with Higson and Needham, set her on fire simultaneously amidships and fore and aft. They then jumped into the boats, and Jack, anxious to have his men safe from further risk of being shot, gave the order to pull down the river as fast as they could lay their backs to the oars.

The Brazilians probably fancied that they had taken to flight, and three boats, which had been concealed behind the point, were now seen shoving off for the schooner. They had got more than half way towards her when the flames burst out through all the hatchways; still they pulled on, hoping to extinguish them. The people in the leading boat were on the point of jumping on board, when the flames catching the gunpowder, up she went, her masts and spars shooting towards the sky, with fragments of her decks, while her sides split in all directions. Whether any of the Brazilians were injured could not be discovered; two of their boats pulled away in hot haste, the third following far more slowly. It was the general opinion that the people in her must have suffered severely, as they were close to the side of the vessel when she blew up.

Jack fearing that his vessel might be attacked, made the best of his way on board. On the arrival of the boats alongside, Bevan reported that he had not been molested, but that he had seen a considerable number of boats pulling along the shore, towards a spot further down, where people were collected in crowds. Though Jack felt perfectly confident that even should they venture to attack him he should beat them off, being anxious to avoid bloodshed, he resolved to get under weigh as soon as possible. The breeze, however, still blowing up the harbour, he had to wait till it died away, and the land breeze reassumed its power.

It was an anxious time, for without a pilot he dare not attempt to heat out of the harbour.

"At all events, if they do show their noses, we can give them a taste of Long Tom, sir," said Needham; "it's my opinion they will not come nearer if they hear him bark."

The brig lay with her sails loose and her cable hove short: still not a breath of air stirred the glass-like surface of the harbour.

Jack did not wish to risk the loss of his vessel by attempting to cross the bar without a leading wind, besides which from the example the Brazilians had given of their disposition they might take the opportunity of attacking her while passing along the narrow channel he would have to traverse.

He hoped to get out before nightfall. At length the pennant which long had hung up and down the mast, began to move. Again it dropped, but at length out it blew steadily, while here and there gentle ripples appeared on the surface of the water.

"Hands, up anchor and make sail," shouted Jack.

The boats quickly towed the brig round, the canvas was let drop, and away she glided. As she increased her speed, the boats were dropped astern, and now with a fair breeze the gallant little brig under all sail stood towards the mouth of the harbour. As she neared the narrowest part of the channel a number of people were seen collecting on the beach. On her approach they ran behind the high bank, sheltered by which they opened a hot fire with muskets and rifles, the bullets whizzing over the brig. Jack on this ordered all hands to lie down, with the exception of the helmsman, the man in the chains, and the lookout forward, while he himself stood at his post, conning the vessel.

The wind held fair, and after having been peppered for about ten minutes with a few stray shots sticking into her sides and hammocks, and a splinter or two torn off the masts, the *Supplejack* bounded gaily out to sea, having performed her duty, and being able to laugh at her opponents. None of the men struck had been much hurt, so the affair was altogether satisfactory. Just as it was getting dark, she met the corvette, which had stood in as close as was safe, to meet her.

The two vessels now stood to the southward, for the purpose of looking into the harbour of Paranagua, a notorious slave-mart, about three hundred miles from Rio. They came off the bay or gulf, as it may probably be called, soon after dawn on the third day after leaving the scene of their last exploit.

On one side of the somewhat narrow entrance lay a fort in which they could count fourteen or fifteen guns frowning down upon them.

"We might have some hot work if we were entering an enemy port," observed Murray. "The Brazilian officer in command will, however, scarcely dare to molest us, even though he may be favourably disposed to the slave-traders."

As a precautionary measure, however, the crews were sent to quarters, and, the corvette leading, the two vessels stood into the harbour. As he approached, Murray dipped his flag, the salute being duly returned from the fort. He accordingly stood on, intending to run up the harbour till he came in sight of the vessels he expected to find there. Jack, following his leader, did the same, and passed unmolested.

The two men-of-war proceeded on for some distance, but no vessels appeared, and Murray began to fear that the

slavers had had some intimation that the port was likely to be visited by British cruisers, and had slipped away in time. Ahead lay an island with buildings on it. Some were dwelling-houses, others were long sheds of a suspicious character. As the water was still deep, and the channel tolerably wide, he stood on, when rounding a point he saw several large vessels lying at anchor, which from their appearance, as well as from the sheds and leaguers, or huge casks for holding water, which lay on the shore, together with planking for slave-decks, and other articles easily distinguishable through the telescope, he had no doubt were slavers. As the channel at this point became very narrow and intricate he thought it prudent not to stand on farther, and dropping his anchor, he ordered Jack to do the same. He then got a spring on his cable, so as to be able to bring his broadside to bear on the vessels, and to cover the boats which he intended to send forthwith to attack them.

"There is a stir among the vessels," observed Adair, "and two of them have got under weigh, and are standing out towards us."

Murray accordingly ordered him and Higson to board them, and ascertain their character. One carried the British and the other the American flag. The boats were lowered and the two vessels in a short time coming up were boarded. Neither of them made any resistance. Their papers were found to be correct—they were honest traders.

"As soon as we saw you approaching, we two agreed to stand out from among the black sheep. The rest of the craft in there are one and all slavers, and if you take or destroy them they will only get their due," said the American master.

He then gave a description of the vessels, and the number of guns and men they carried. Terence thanked him for the information, and the two vessels were allowed to continue their course down the river.

Murray now ordered five boats under the command of Jack to board and overhaul all the vessels lying at anchor off the island.

One was a large ship, two were brigs, and a fourth a wicked-looking schooner, evidently a slaver. The question was whether they would offer resistance. The ship was seen getting a spring on her cable, which looked something like it; Jack was therefore prepared for all contingencies.

"We will take the smallest ones in detail, and that big fellow will then see that he has no chance of assistance," he said to Higson.

Further off lay another large ship with the Brazilian colours flying, and two barques, one an American, the other a Portuguese, with a brigantine, which, as Needham remarked, from truck to kelson had the cut of a slaver.

"We will take them all, lads, never fear. They have got into a net, and it will be a hard matter for them to make their way out again. The truth is, they thought we should never find our way up here; but they have discovered their mistake, and have made their last voyages with blackies aboard, I hope."

The boats were pulling on steadily towards the first brig, a beautiful vessel, with sharp bows and clean run; she would be a prize worth having, Jack knew, as she would give no end of trouble to the British cruisers engaged in the suppression of the slave-trade. A number of men were seen on board, but, as the flotilla approached, they jumped into their boats and pulled for the shore. The brig was immediately boarded, when not a soul was found in her, though she had her cargo on board; she was completely fitted for the slave-trade. Jack, suspecting treachery, had her thoroughly examined.

"All's right, sir," said Needham. "The crew were in too great a fright to think of anything but saving themselves, or they might, to be sure, have laid a slow match to the magazine, and tried to blow us up. The only pity is that she has no sails on board. It will be a job to know what to do with her."

Jack had, in the meantime, sent the other boats to take possession of the second brig. This also was abandoned by her crew. She, too, was found fully fitted for the slave-trade. They now headed the boats towards the ship, the broadside of which having been brought to bear on them, she was apparently prepared for a determined resistance. Ordering Adair to pull for her stern and Higson for the bows, Jack and Needham dashed up alongside. As they approached the ship opened fire with round, grapeshot, and musketry, but, as is often the case, when men fight in a bad cause, the slaver's crew took uncertain aim, and no one was hurt in either of the boats. The Brazilians had soon cause to repent of their folly in attempting to defend themselves; the English seamen quickly climbing up the side, they at once gave way, and rushing across the deck sprang overboard, and attempted to swim towards the shore. Some of the seamen, enraged at the opposition they had made, picked up the muskets from the decks, and would have fired after their retreating foe, had not Jack, as on a previous occasion, stopped them.

"Let the wretches, though they deserve punishment, have a chance for their lives," he said.

Several boats putting off from the shore picked up most of the swimmers, though some were seen to go down before they were rescued.

The ship was a remarkably fine one, called the *Andorinha*. On examining her she was found to be American built, while the flag of the United States was discovered on board. Another discovery was also made. Her stern was covered by a piece of painted canvas, on ripping off which there appeared the name of the *Mary Jane*, of Greenport, in large letters, and as she carried two whale-boats on her quarters, the most vigilant of British cruisers might have passed her without the slightest suspicion of her real character.

Leaving the crew of one of the boats on board the ship under the command of Tom, who was vastly proud of the confidence placed in him, Jack pulled on for the other large Brazilian ship. The captain received him on board with a smiling countenance, for the fellow well knew that though evidently a slaver, she could not be touched. All the slave

fittings had been landed, and lay abreast of her along the shore. The American brig, which was next boarded, was as clearly intended for the same nefarious traffic, but as she had not yet been fitted up with slave-decks, though they also were discovered close to her ready to be shipped, with her leaguers and other fittings.

The day's work was not yet over; a brigantine lay temptingly near, inviting a visit. The boats soon surrounded her, she was found to be the *Stella*, a vessel which had long eluded the vigilance of British cruisers.

Though some of her fittings had been landed, a sufficient quantity remained to condemn her. Jack, however, having to secure his other prizes, was obliged to leave her, intending to visit her the next day; he therefore pulled back to the brigs, and commenced towing and warping them towards the corvette.

The channel through which they had to pass was excessively narrow, and, unfortunately, Jack, forgetting that the boats might pass in a direct line where the vessels could not follow, they both took the ground. Now came the task of hauling them off; it was accomplished, however, and they were brought at length to an anchor between the two men-of-war. He next pulled back to the ship, and reached her just as darkness came on. He found Tom and his crew on the alert; he had seen a number of boats coming off from the shore, with the intention, he fully believed, of attacking him.

"But we would have treated them just as Mr Adair did the slave-dealers at Bahia," he exclaimed. "We had all our arms loaded, and if they had come near us, we should have given them a pretty warm reception, you may depend upon that."

Jack felt very sure that Tom would have done so, though he was glad he had not been exposed to the danger he would have had to run.

Sounding as he went, Jack got the ship safely under the guns of the corvette at a late hour of the night. The skulking crews of the slavers, eager as they might have been to regain the vessels taken from them, dared not attack them, and the night passed off quietly. Next morning by daybreak the boats again put off; the most important vessel to capture was the brigantine, and they at once pulled for her. As they approached, they made out several boats pulling backwards and forwards between her and the shore. Jack regretted that he had not left a prize crew on board, though he had acted, as he thought at the time, for the best.

"Give way, my lads, those fellows are after some mischief, we must put a stop to it," he shouted.

The brigantine lay floating on the calm water, her taunt, raking masts, and the tracery of her spars and rigging reflected in its surface. She was just the style of craft to please a seaman's eye. The men gave way, in a few minutes they hoped to be aboard her. Suddenly her masts moved to starboard, then over they heeled to port, when, gradually, her bows sank, and down she glided, head foremost, beneath the surface of the water.

"What a pity!" broke from the lips of those in the stern sheets of the boats, who had observed what had taken place; the look of astonishment in the countenances of the men at the oars, when, turning their heads, they found the brigantine had disappeared, was almost ludicrous. Had they got hold of any of the Brazilians they would have made them pay dearly for their trick. It was very evident that the vessel had been scuttled during the night, to prevent her from falling into the hands of the English, while the crew had landed every article of value from her. Jack was thus compelled to be contented with his three prizes, none of the other vessels could be touched. It now coming on to blow hard, it was impossible to get under weigh. The time, however, was employed in fitting the ship for sea; Higson and a prize crew had charge of her. Murray intended to tow one of the brigs, while Jack was to tow the other. All hands on board both vessels were hard at work till sunset.

The next morning, the wind coming down the harbour, they got under weigh, and proceeded down the gulf. In a short time, the squadron got abreast of the fort, the commandant of which was well aware that the English had, in accordance with the wishes of his own government, performed their duty in capturing the slavers, and Murray therefore expected to pass without molestation. He saluted as usual, and was standing on, when a gun was fired at the corvette.

"What are the fellows about!" he exclaimed.

"It may have been let off by mistake," observed Adair.

"That was not let off by mistake, though," exclaimed Murray, as a shot from a second gun whistled close under the stern, followed immediately by another, which, however, passed ahead.

"Beat to quarters," cried Murray, "the fellows mean mischief."

Scarcely had the first roll of the drum sounded than the eager crew sprang to their guns.

Jack imitated his example; both vessels opened their broadsides, firing shot and shell as fast as their guns could be brought to bear.

The fort, meantime, fired showers of grape, canister, and round shot.

"This is hotter work than we met with up the Saint Juan; I did not expect such fun," exclaimed Desmond.

"We had only muskets, and we have now got big guns to pay back the compliments we receive," observed Archy, who was standing near him.

"Yes, but the enemy have stone walls, instead of timber stockades to protect them," said Desmond; "it's very good fun, though."

"I don't call that fun," cried Archy, as a round shot struck a seaman at one of the guns near them on the breast, and laid him dead on the deck, before he had time to utter a groan. A grape shot, the next moment, hit another man on the shoulder, and he was carried below. Two others were shortly afterwards wounded.

Fortunately the wind held, or the men-of-war might have suffered much more than they did. The object of the Brazilians was probably to compel them to abandon their prizes, which would have undoubtedly been immediately taken possession of.

Murray signalled Higson to keep further off the fort, to escape the risk of damage.

The English ships, having passed the front of the battery, had their sterns exposed to a raking fire from the sea face of it, which they were unable to return, in consequence of the vessels in tow. One of the after guns of the *Tudor*, was, however, fitted for throwing shells, and as Murray could bring it to bear, when the openings between the vessels astern would allow of it, he occasionally fired one into the fort. Long Tom did his duty, and Jack had the satisfaction of believing that his shot produced as much effect as those of the corvette.

"On my word I should like to land and storm that fort, to punish the rascals," he exclaimed.

"I am afraid that as it is on a friendly territory, that would be unlawful," observed Bevan.

"Then people on friendly territory should not attack those engaged in the performance of their duty," answered Jack; "give them a parting shot, Needham; we shall soon be out of range of their guns, if the breeze holds."

"I will do my best to make it tell," said Dick; training Long Tom aft as far as possible. He fired—the effect of the shot was to silence the gun which had for some minutes annoyed them the most, and it was conjectured, therefore, that it must have either killed several of the gunners, or injured the carriage. The next shot which came from the fort, fell short of the brig. As soon as the vessels were completely out of range, Murray ordered the anchors to be dropped.

A heavy sea setting over the bar at the entrance he considered it unwise to attempt crossing till the top of high water. The place in which he had brought up was not however altogether free from danger. On either hand were wild rugged rocks, while a line of foaming surf stretched across the mouth of the harbour. As it would be impossible to cross with the two prize-brigs, Murray determined at once to destroy them. The two cutters and the *Supplejack's* jollyboat were directed to perform this service. Tom and Desmond agreed to go and see the fun, and just as the brig's boat was shoving off they jumped into her, unobserved by Jack. The boats having taken charge of the brigs, towed them half-a-mile from the ships. They were then set on fire, and were soon in a blaze fore and aft, when the wind, having more power than the tide, rapidly carried them towards the foaming breakers. The corvette's two boats were returning, when Jack, looking round to ascertain what had become of his boat, caught sight of her close to one of the blazing vessels, on the point of being driven among the dangerous breakers. Having discovered that the two youngsters had gone in her, he naturally felt doubly anxious on their account, and suspected that some accident must have happened to prevent her return. Instantly jumping into the pinnace with the best hands he could collect, he pulled away for the boat, the crew of which were labouring desperately to head her off the breakers. He had gone but a short distance when he caught sight of the two brigs, like huge floating bonfires, gliding into the midst of the foaming waters, which danced up wildly around them, as if greedy for their prey. A few seconds the vessels struggled with the wild breakers, then their keels grated on the sharp rocks, they rose and fell a few seconds more, when, the waters leaping triumphantly over them, they were shattered into a thousand fragments, which were scattered on every side.

Jack's interest was, however, centred on the boat which was already awfully near the breakers, and once in them her fate would be that of the slavers. His men strained every muscle to reach her. Already scarcely half a cable's length existed between her and the inner line of breakers, a foaming sea had burst close astern. Jack dashing forward shouted to the bowman to have a rope ready. It was hove on board as he swept round, and securing it he steered away from the dangerous spot.

Two of her oars had been lost alongside the burning brig, and another had been sprung; and had not assistance come, the boat and all on board would in another minute to a certainty have been engulfed. As Jack made his way back to the brig he was received with loud cheers from the corvette and prize.

He was thankful when he at length reached the deck of the *Supplejack*, feeling that he ought to punish the two youngsters for their misconduct, though very unwilling to do so. He contented himself with giving them a severe lecture, and pointing out to them the fearful risk they had run of losing their lives.

"When duty calls you, it is quite a different matter," he observed: "then never be daunted by danger. Your duty was to remain on board. Had you been lost I should have had double cause to mourn for you, as you would have uselessly thrown your lives away."

"That's just what Admiral Triton said to me," observed Tom to Desmond. "Jack is right—no doubt about that."

By this time the tide had sufficiently risen to allow a passage over the bar, and Murray being unwilling to lose a favourable wind by a longer delay, the anchors were hove up, sail was made, and the two men-of-war, with the captured slaver, leaving the fort astern, dashed proudly out to sea. They had, however, to keep their pumps going, in consequence of the large amount of water which had rushed into them before the shot-holes they had received could be thoroughly plugged. Murray then gave Higson directions to carry the slaver to Saint Helena, and, after delivering her up, to return to Rio by the first opportunity.

The midshipmen were sorry to lose him, for he never forgot that he had been their messmate, and, notwithstanding his few eccentricities, he was always kind and considerate.

While he steered to the eastward, the corvette and brig shaped a course for Rio. The result of the expedition had been the destruction of three noted slavers, and the capture of a fourth, while their owners had learnt an important lesson, that the risks of the trade in which they were engaged were considerably increased, and that it might possibly be wiser to abandon it.

Next night, during Adair's watch, a pampeiro, a squall off the Pampas so called, suddenly struck the ship; the boatswain's shrill whistle summoned all hands to shorten sail; happily, the tacks and sheets were let fly before its full force was felt.

Ned Somers, a foretop-man, on the lee yardarm, with the earring in hand, was struck by the wild, flapping sail, and overboard he fell. Murray, who had now come on deck, saw the accident, and the instant the ship could be brought to the wind, ordering a boat to be lowered, he cried out for volunteers to man her. Adair sprang into her, and Snatchblock took the bow oar. Other hands followed. The man's cries directed them, as they believed, towards where he was floating. Away the boat dashed through the foaming waters, but when they reached the spot the man was nowhere to be seen. They pulled round and round it, shouting to him, but no answer came. Unwillingly, at length Adair put the boat's head towards the ship. The men had not pulled many strokes when Snatchblock felt a blow on the bow of the boat, and by a sudden impulse (there was no time for thought) stretching himself over the gunwale, he plunged down his arm and got hold of the missing man, whom eager hands assisted him to haul on board. Somers was immediately passed aft, and, as fast as the crew could pull, the boat returned to the ship.

The man, who still breathed, was hoisted on deck, and placed under the surgeon's hands.

Strange to say, he seemed next morning to outward appearance not much the worse for his accident.

From that day, however, he was in reality a changed man. Once among the most high-spirited and joyous of the crew, he became melancholy and silent, though he went through his duty as usual. About a month afterwards, as Adair was going forward, he saw a whitehaired man sitting on the coamings of the fore-hatchway.

"Where did that old man come from?" he asked of Snatchblock.

"I never saw so strange a thing in all my life, sir," was the answer. "Last night when he turned in his hair was as black as mine, and this morning, when the hammocks were piped up, it was as you see it. *That man, sir, is Ned Somers!*"

Adair could scarcely believe what he heard till he spoke to poor Ned, who, however, not having a looking-glass, did not seem to be aware of the change. After this he grew weaker and weaker; his nervous system, when he fell overboard, had received a shock which was too much for him. Murray had resolved to send him home, when the surgeon reported that the poor fellow had not many hours to live. Before night he breathed his last, and was buried in the seaman's wide sepulchre, the Ocean. He survived the accident scarcely three months.

Chapter Twenty Three.

Up the Parana—Murray's forebodings—Battle of Punta Obligado—Attacked by fireships—Schooner blows up—Jack and Murray perform a gallant exploit—Murray wounded—The batteries stormed—Tom and Gerald carried off by Gauchos.

"Hurrah! my boy, there is a prospect of more glorious or, at all events, more exciting work than slave-hunting," exclaimed Adair, as he came on board the *Supplejack* from the *Tudor*, both vessels then lying in Rio harbour.

"When? where?" asked Jack.

"Up the Parana, and immediately, as far as I can make out. Murray has just received his orders, and you will get yours before the day is many hours longer. I conclude that small vessels are wanted for the work, so you are certain to be sent."

"Has Murray heard what we are to do when we get there?" asked Jack.

"Yes, to force our way up the river, which a certain General Rosas, calling himself President of Buenos Ayres, has taken it into his head no one shall do; and so, of course, he will attempt to stop us."

"Who is the fellow? I don't think I have ever heard of him before," said Jack.

"Nor did I till Murray told me, and, as he reads everything, he, of course, knew all about the matter. You have an atlas, just get it out, and I will try and impart the information Murray gave me.

"The river Parana, you see, runs a course of many miles nearly north and south before it runs into the river Plate. On the east side are the provinces of Paraguay, Entre Rios, and Banda Oriental, and on the west and south those of Santa Fé and Buenos Ayres, comprised under the general name of La Plata. General Rosas wants to unite these provinces under one confederation, and to make himself dictator or emperor.

"Another party calling themselves Unitarios want to unite them into one state, and have, for this slight difference of opinion, for several years done their best to knock each other on the head. His troops having blockaded Monte Video and captured some French merchantmen, the French have, therefore, sent a squadron to take satisfaction, and open up the commerce of the river Plate.

"We are going to join them, as the Buenos Ayrians have treated some of our merchantmen in the same way, and Rosas dares us to do our worst, and declares that up the river we shall not go.

"By an old treaty it appears that the English and French governments having guaranteed the integrity of the Banda Oriental, Rosas was ordered to withdraw his troops from the territory, and as he refused to do so, his squadron besieging Monte Video has been taken from him, while the province of Paraguay, and that of Corrientes, have combined to overthrow his power. In revenge for this, he has closed the outlets of their rivers, so as to put an effectual stop to their foreign commerce.

"The Parana, though it looks of no great size on the map, is broad and deep, and even large vessels may make their way some four or five hundred miles up it.

"The French squadron and some English ships are already off Monte Video, and as soon as we and the other vessels join them we are to begin the ascent of the river. Here is Monte Video, on the northern shore of this wide river of La Plata, which, however, looks more like a huge gulf than what we call a river in Europe, and here, some way up on the southern bank, is Buenos Ayres. There was a fearful ruffian, called Oribe, who got the upper hand in some of these provinces, and murdered all his opponents who fell into his power; he therefore got the appropriate name of the 'butcher.'

"Don Rosas, with a devoted army of gauchos, the wild horsemen of the Pampas, united with him, and the two mild-mannered gentlemen together endeavoured to get possession of Monte Video, but, being defeated, Rosas has since wisely kept to his own side of the river.

"Besides the horsemen, he has managed to get together a good supply of heavy guns and flying artillery, with which he expects to send us to the right about, and our business will be to show him that he is mistaken.

"That is all I know of the matter, and I hope I have made it as clear to your mind as Murray did to mine."

Jack duly received his orders, and the next morning by daybreak the corvette and brig, in company with a few other vessels, sailed out of the harbour. They had a quick run to Monte Video, where they fell in with the English and French squadron, consisting of several steamers and sailing-vessels.

Soon after their arrival, the ships were ordered to proceed up at once to Guassu, one of the mouths of the Parana; a heavy gale, however, coming on, drove the ships back. The midshipmen were, of course, as eager as any one for the fun, as they called it, which they expected to meet with, and were much disappointed at the delay which occurred. The steamers could have gone ahead without them, but as there were only four in the whole squadron, two English and two French, such a force would not have been sufficient for the object.

Day after day they had to beat backwards and forwards, a strong westerly wind blowing in their teeth, giving General Rosas time to complete his defences.

"Well, there is one satisfaction," exclaimed Desmond. "If we had gone up at first we might have caught the enemy unprepared, and lost all the honour and glory we shall now reap in thrashing him."

"As to that, considering that he and his followers are half savages, as the commodore says, I don't see that there is much honour and glory to be obtained," observed Tom.

"Faith, now it seems to me that it does not much matter what kind of people the enemy are, provided they have got arms in their hands, and don't run away," answered Desmond. "These fellows fight fiercely enough among themselves, and they are not likely to change when they have got foreign foes to deal with."

Paddy was not far wrong after all. At length the weather moderated, the steamers got up their steam and the sailing-vessels hauled their wind and stood for the westward.

They had proceeded some distance, when down came another pampeiro upon them, and they were once more disappointed. Still the work was to be done, and the English and French commodores were not men to be beaten by a difficulty. Days and nights together the ships kept at it, doing their uttermost to reach the rendezvous off the mouth of the river.

At length they all met, and the flag of England flying from the peaks of some, and that of France from others, in friendly proximity, with a fair breeze they commenced their ascent of the mighty stream.

As they watched the distant shore on either hand it was difficult to persuade themselves that they were at a considerable distance above the mouth of the river. Still, on and on they sailed. With their glasses they could occasionally see horsemen galloping along apparently watching them, although no opposition was offered, indeed they were generally too far out of the range of field-pieces, even should the enemy have possessed any.

As the current was strong and the wind light, it was slow work, and often they did not make ten miles a day. They had got about a hundred miles up when the commodore gave the signal for the squadron to anchor, and they found that they were within three miles of a place called Punta Obligado, on the right bank of the river, where General Rosas had thrown up some strong defences to oppose their further progress.

All hands were in high spirits at the thoughts of the fight, which they expected would take place the next morning. Murray and the more reflective officers, could not help thinking that fighting was a serious matter, and that if a report that they had heard was correct, before another day was over, many enjoying high health and spirits might be laid low.

Jack, who brought up close to the *Tudor*, came on board with Tom to pay their friends a visit. Their chief regret was that Higson was not there to take part in the expected achievements of the following day.

"We never know what may happen to us when we go into battle," said Murray, as Jack sat with him in his cabin. "In

case I should fall, I must get you to take this packet to Stella. She is ever in my thoughts, and I am anxious to make arrangements for her future comfort and support, for I doubt that she is as well provided for as she supposes. Her father spent most of his fortune in the wild schemes in which he took part, and careless as I heard he was about his own pecuniary affairs, he probably neglected to make due provision for his daughter. Had she married me, she would, at all events, have enjoyed a pension as my widow, and as those who would otherwise obtain it can do very well without any addition to their incomes, I have left all the property I possess to be enjoyed by her for her life; and you, Jack, must undertake to see that my intentions are carried out."

"Of course I will, my dear Murray," answered Jack. "But you must not suppose that you are to be knocked on the head. I hold to the belief that no man knows beforehand what is to happen to him, though, of course, when he goes into battle, he may be killed, but his thinking that he will or will not will make no difference."

"It may be true," answered Murray, with a sigh, "but there is something within me which says that I ought to be prepared."

"Of course, and I hope you are, my dear Alick," said Jack gravely. "A truly religious man like you always is prepared, and I suspect that the weather, together with the fatigue you have gone through, and your state of health, have something to do with your forebodings. If you won't think me frivolous, let me ask you what you had for dinner yesterday?"

Murray at first did not answer, at last, faintly smiling, he answered—

"Well, perhaps you are right, and I dare say tomorrow morning I shall see things in a different light. However, in case I should fall, you will see my wishes carried out."

Jack again promised that he would do anything and everything that Murray wished. Terence joined them shortly afterwards, and the old shipmates spent a pleasant evening, as did Tom with his friends in the midshipmen's berth. They did not trouble themselves with forebodings of evil, and all talked eagerly of the fun they hoped to see before long.

A sharp lookout was kept during the night. The steamers had their fires banked up, as it was thought probable that the enemy might have prepared fireships to send down among them. As soon, therefore, as it was dark, the boats were sent ahead to row guard, and to tow them out of the way, so that they might drop down clear of the squadron. The night, however, passed away without any occurrence of the sort, and at daybreak the two commodores proceeded up the river in their gigs to reconnoitre the position of the enemy. A dense fog which hung over the water enabled them to approach unobserved. Their return was anxiously waited for. They quickly acquainted themselves with all they desired to know, and, immediately they got back, the commanders of all the vessels were directed to repair on board the flagship to receive instructions. They then learned that Rosas had thrown up strong fortifications about three miles from where they then lay. They consisted of four batteries, two on heights sixty feet above the surface of the river, and two in an intervening valley. The batteries mounted altogether twenty-two guns, some long thirty-two pounders, and others of smaller calibre. Opposite the point was an island, which occupied a considerable portion of the breadth of the river, so that vessels going up must of necessity pass close to the batteries. Yet, further to strengthen the position, three heavy chains, supported by twenty-four vessels, extended across the river from the main land to the island, one end being defended by a man-of-war schooner, mounting six guns, while close to the chains, ready to be let loose at any moment, lay ten fireships. A force of nearly four thousand men, artillery, cavalry, and infantry, was collected, so the commodores learnt from their spies, to man the forts, and to oppose any force that might be sent on shore to attack them.

The sailing-vessels were now formed in two divisions, while the steamers formed a third, to take up a position as soon as they had disposed of the fireships. All on board the ships waited eagerly for the signal to weigh.

The hands had been piped to breakfast. The meal was over, still the fog prevailed. Suddenly a light breeze sprang up from the southward, when the fog cleared, and at a quarter to nine the signal was given for the leading division to weigh. With eager alacrity the men sprang aloft to loose sails, and in a few minutes the two divisions of sailing-vessels were gliding up the stream; the one to attack the northern, and the other the southern batteries, with directions to anchor about seven hundred yards from them. With all sail set to stem the current, they approached the batteries, which immediately opened fire on the headmost vessels. They returned the compliment with interest, as soon as they could bring their guns to bear, the thunder of the artillery breaking the silence which had hitherto reigned over the scene, the loud roaring increasing as ship after ship got into action.

The wild gauchos fought their guns well, and showered down on their assailants round shot, grape, canister, shells, and rockets, which the ships returned with similar missiles, French and English vying with each other as to who should load and fire their guns the fastest. The roar of the guns, the crashing of the shot as they struck the ships, and the shouts of the men, increasing every instant, became perfectly deafening.

About an hour from the time the gallant little *Philomel* got under fire, the action became general. Several of the vessels were suffering severely; on board the French commodore's brig especially the men were falling fast, while numberless shots struck her between wind and water.

The effect of the terrific cannonading going on was to make the wind fall light, and some of the ships, therefore, were unable to reach the exact stations assigned to them; the consequence was, that they were exposed, more than would otherwise have been the case, to the fire of the batteries.

Murray had carried his vessel as close as he could, and Jack did not fail to follow his example. Round shot and grape came sweeping over their decks, some of the missiles striking the hulls of the vessels, others going through their sails and cutting up the rigging; but the hotter the fire became, the more the British seamen seemed to enjoy the fun, tossing about their guns with right good will, and sending shot after shot, well aimed, into the batteries.

"I say, this is pretty hot work, Archy," observed Desmond; "I wonder how long it is going to last?"

"I suppose till we drive the enemy from their guns and take possession of their fort, unless they blow themselves up, and finish the batteries in that way," answered Gordon.

"But, I say! look there! what are those craft about?"

Archy, as he spoke, pointed ahead, where about a dozen vessels were seen bearing down on the squadron from the upper part of the river. Presently, first one, and then another, burst into flames.

"They are fireships!" cried Desmond, "and if they come aboard they will blow us all into smithereens."

"The steamers won't let them do that," observed Gordon; "see, they are paddling towards them, and will sink or tow them out of the way before they touch us, I hope."

Still the danger was imminent. It was evident that the steamers could not take all of them in tow at once, and while some were got hold of, others might continue their course.



The commanders of the men-of-war made preparations for the reception of the fireships, and got their boats ready to tow them away, should they threaten to drift closer than was safe. On came the burning masses; the steamers had got hold of some of them.

"That fellow will be down upon us before long, sir," said Needham, "if we cannot manage to get her out of the way."

Jack, on this, ordered a boat to be lowered; Needham, followed by Tom, jumped into her, and rapidly pulled for the fireship. The difficulty was to secure the towrope, while there was no time to be lost if the brig was to be saved. Many of the shot, intended for the vessels, came flying over the boat; no one was hit in her, however, and Needham managed to hook on the towrope to her stern. The crew gave way, and, aided by the current, just got her clear of the brig, when, the flames rapidly increasing, Needham saw it was high time to cast off, and get out of her neighbourhood.

The crew had not given many strokes when up she blew, and the fragments of her deck and bulwarks came rattling down over them.

For a moment it seemed that all in the boat must be destroyed. Jack, who had anxiously cast his eyes in that direction, as had also the two midshipmen of the corvette who were looking on, thought that every one in the boat must perish. Jack regretted that he had allowed Tom to go in her; his anxiety, however, was soon relieved when he saw them emerging from the shower and returning to the brig.

The other fire-vessels passing clear of the squadron, either drove on shore or went floating harmlessly down the broad stream, till they blew up and sank.

The battle still continued raging as at first, for the Spaniards fought their guns with desperation, and no sooner had one set of men been swept away than they were replaced by others. A body of cavalry was also seen hovering about

in the wood which backed the fort, and when any of the artillerymen, as some did, could no longer stand it, and took to flight, they were driven back, and compelled to fight till they were killed or wounded.

The action had continued with unmitigated fury for a couple of hours, and there appeared no prospect of its cessation as long as the enemy's ammunition held out. Although the gunners were continually swept away, fresh men, as at first, were driven up to take their places. The number of casualties on board the squadron had greatly increased; two or three officers and several men had already been killed, and many wounded. Suddenly a still louder roar than the thunder of the guns was heard.

"Hurrah! there goes their magazine," cried Desmond.

"No! see the schooner guarding the chains has blown up," answered Gordon, pointing in the direction of the barrier placed across the river.

For a few seconds the enemy, astounded by the occurrence, ceased firing, but the English gave them no respite, and both parties immediately again set to work, battering away at each other. Shot after shot struck the *Tudor*, but the crew kept up their fire with unabated vigour. Murray had forgotten all about his forebodings of the previous evening; no sooner had the schooner blown up, than he saw that the chain being left unprotected it might easily be cut through, and the steamers would thus be able to pass up the stream, and open a flanking fire on the fort.

The same idea had occurred to Jack, and he sent Tom on board the commodore's ship, offering to make the attempt. Murray had, in the meantime, sent Archy Gordon with a similar offer. Both being accepted, they pulled away in their gigs towards the chains. Though several shot came flying by them, and they were exposed to a hot fire of musketry, they succeeded in reaching the chains. Had the schooner remained, the attempt would have been hopeless, as her guns with an ample crew had full command of the spot; but the guns were at the bottom of the river, and most of her crew had either been blown into the air, or drowned. Still it was no easy matter to cut through heavy chains. With cold iron, axes, and hammers, Murray and Jack set to work, and although bullets were whizzing over them, and every now and then pattered against the boats, they worked dauntlessly away.

"There is one cut through, at all events," cried Jack, as he succeeded at length in severing one of the thick links. Murray had unshackled another; the third, however, still remained; they both worked away at it, knowing that before it could be cut through the enemy might bring down some of their flying artillery, and render their position still more dangerous; besides which, the sooner the ships could get up the more quickly would the victory be won.

"A few more blows, and we shall do it," cried Murray. He was raising his arm to strike, when he fell back into the hands of Snatchblock, who was assisting him.

"Go on, Jack," he exclaimed. "Don't mind me; you will have it through in another minute."

Jack, though his heart felt very sad at the thoughts of Murray being badly wounded, or perhaps killed, laboured away with all his might, assisted by Needham.

"We will do it in a few minutes more," cried Jack, bringing down his axe with tremendous force.

The chain was at length cut; the boats' crews uttering a loud cheer at their success, while the vessels which supported it swung to the current, floating down towards the opposite bank.

"Give way, now, lads," cried Jack, and the two boats proceeded as fast as the men could bend to their oars back to the ships. Jack saw Murray lifted on board and carried below—the surgeon expressed a hope that his wound was not dangerous, though he had fainted from loss of blood. Jack had, however, to hasten on board the commodore's ship, to report what had been done.

The steamers were immediately ordered to proceed up the river and flank the batteries. Jack's anxiety was increased by the knowledge that his ship was greatly exposed, several of her people having fallen, and the purser having been killed while assisting the surgeon below.

The French commodore's brig, however, was suffering much more severely, a shot cutting her cable she dropped astern before another could be ranged, with upwards of an hundred shot-holes through her sides, ten or twelve of her people killed, and forty, or more, wounded. The French and English vessels were now ordered up to place themselves within musket-shot of the battery, that they might assist the flanking fire of the steamers. This they did in a most dashing way, receiving a hot fire in return, when one of the lieutenants of an English vessel was killed. At length, however, the well-served guns of the squadron produced their effect; the fire from the batteries began to slacken, some of the guns being dismounted and the gunners driven from others. The engagement had now lasted six hours.

At length, only an occasional shot came from the shore, but still the enemy's flag continued flying, and the commodore made a signal for the boats of the squadron to rendezvous alongside his ship, with marines and bluejackets prepared for landing, to storm the batteries.

The ships were brought in as close as the water would allow to cover the landing. The English forces, consisting of an hundred and eighty bluejackets, and one hundred and forty-five marines were the first on shore; here they quickly formed. Terence, with two boats' crews from the *Tudor*, were among them. Desmond had accompanied his uncle; they were soon afterwards joined by Bevan and Tom with the men from the *Supplejack*.

"So we are to have some campaigning," said Tom. "I was afraid my brother would not let me come, at first, but he thought, as I had escaped the round and grape shot of the enemy which came rattling on board, that I should not get into much harm on shore, and I was very anxious to see the fun."

While the boats were disembarking the men destined for the attack, the ships kept up a hot fire over their heads, to prevent the enemy from rushing down to interrupt them.

"I suppose the ships will cease firing when we storm the hill, or they may chance to knock our heads off instead of the enemy," said Desmond.

"No fear about that," answered Tom. "See, they have knocked off already. The commodore will give us the signal to advance before long, depend on that."

On the crest of the hill a strong force was drawn up to oppose them. Without waiting for the French the word to advance was given, and uttering three hearty British cheers, the marines with fixed bayonets charged up the hill, the bluejackets on their flank.

They were received with a hot fire of musketry, but the gauchos, brave as they were, could not stand the bayonets of the marines. As they saw them coming they took to flight. On one side was a wood in which a body of the enemy were posted. This was at once attacked by a light company of seamen, and in a few minutes it was carried; the French landing, rushed up to the attack of the forts, while the bluejackets pursued the flying enemy, who now and then, when they found themselves in sufficient force to make a stand, turned round and fired at their pursuers. Bodies also of gauchos, who had been hovering in the rear during the action, came sweeping down, endeavouring to cut off any of their assailants whom they might find unprepared to receive them.

Terence, accompanied by the two midshipmen and a small party of seamen, carried away by their ardour, after having assisted to clear the wood, were considerably in advance of the main body. The marines were at the same time in the act of charging a large body of the enemy, who were again attempting to stand their ground.

"Halloa! who are these fellows?" cried Tom, pointing in the direction in which he had seen a large body of the gauchos flourishing their long lances, as they galloped fiercely forward.

"They intend to try and cut us down, and so they will if we don't drive them back with a warm volley," cried Terence. "Prepare to receive cavalry!" The seamen had been drilled to act as light infantry, and being armed with muskets and bayonets were well able to use them. On came the wild horsemen firing their carbines, when, with lances at rest, they charged full down on the body of seamen. Several saddles were emptied, but not till they had got close up to the bayonets did they wheel round, apparently with the intention of retreating. Believing that they were doing so, the bluejackets rose from their knees, and imperfectly disciplined as they were for fighting on shore, without waiting for their officer's orders, rushed forward in pursuit of the apparently flying enemy. Tom and Gerald, carried away by their ardour, took the lead, and having only their swords in their hands, got ahead of the rest. At that moment the horsemen, once more wheeling, charged with desperate fury against the partly broken square.

The seamen, however; again rapidly forming, fired a volley which prevented the gauchos from cutting their way through them. Two of the gauchos, however, as they came up, threw their lassos over Tom and Gerald, who were at that moment in the act of springing back to gain the protection of the bayonets, and greatly to their horror and dismay they found themselves dragged up on the saddles of the horsemen, who with their companions galloped off amid the showers of bullets which the bluejackets sent after them. Among the few who, amid the smoke from the muskets and the confusion, had seen the midshipmen spirited away, was Snatchblock.

"We must get the young reefers back, lads! It won't do to lose them," he shouted out, and followed by a dozen of the *Supplejack's* crew, less accustomed to discipline than the rest, he started off in pursuit. Terence seeing them going, and not knowing the cause, called them back, but not hearing him they ran on, hoping to overtake the fleet horsemen. The gauchos, discovering from the flight of their party in other directions that the day was lost, continued their flight: had they turned back, they would probably have cut down the whole of their pursuers.

Snatchblock, compelled at length to return, told Adair what had happened.

"Rogers and my nephew carried off?" exclaimed Adair. "How did you fellows come to allow that?"

"We couldn't help it, sir! indeed we couldn't!" answered Snatchblock. "There isn't a man among us who wouldn't have given his own life rather than have let the young gentlemen be carried off by the savages, to be killed and eaten for what we know, but their horsemen came down upon us like lightning, and spirited them off before any of us saw what they were about."

"Well, well, I am ready to believe that none of you could help it, and I am sure, Snatchblock, that you would have risked your life to save the youngsters," said Adair, his rising anger appeased. "They have themselves alone to blame. We must now see what we can do to get them back, for the gauchos will look upon them as prizes of too much value to kill, and though they are savage enough, from all accounts, they are not addicted to eating men or boys either."

"That's a comfort, at all events, for I couldn't tell what those wild chaps might do with the young gentlemen," observed the honest sailor. "If we might go off in chase, maybe we should come up with them before long."

"Without cavalry we shall have no chance of overtaking the gauchos, and I can only hope that they will not treat their prisoners ill. The lads have their wits about them; if they have the chance, they will make their escape," answered Adair.

"You may trust the young gentlemen for that, sir," said Snatchblock. The recall being sounded, Adair with his party was compelled to rejoin the main body; indeed, he saw too clearly that any attempt to rescue the youngsters would be useless. The only task now to be accomplished by the seamen and marines was to spike the guns and destroy the batteries, which being quickly accomplished, they re-embarked.

The crews of the vessels which had been most severely treated had work enough to do in stopping shot-holes and refitting the rigging, which had been considerably cut up.

Adair on his return having to pass close to the *Supplejack*, went on board to tell Rogers of the unfortunate loss of the two midshipmen, and to offer him all the consolation he could.

"I would rather that anything had happened than that," exclaimed Jack. "You don't suppose that the gauchos have killed the poor lads?"

Adair said he hoped from what he had heard that they had not injured them, and probably supposed that they had made a valuable prize in a couple of officers. They questioned Snatchblock further as to what he knew of the affair.

"I would have given my right hand rather than have had the young gentleman carried off, sir," he answered. "You see, sir, we did not expect those horse-fellows would attack us on that side, and we were not standing in shipshape fashion like the sodgers. Somehow or other also the young gentlemen were where they should not have been, I'll allow, and just then down the gauchos pounced upon us, and all in a moment, before we could sing out, a couple of them whipped their lassos over the lads' shoulders and hoisted them up on their saddles. You may be sure, sir, we made all sail after them as fast as we could carry on, but it was all of no use. The horses' four legs were better than our two, and we were afraid of firing for fear of hitting the young gentlemen. Maybe the fellows carried them off to save their own hides."

Poor Jack felt very unhappy, and at once pulled off to the commodore, to consult him and some of the other captains as to what was best to be done.

"It is only to be hoped that Rosas will not treat them as he is said to have treated some of his prisoners, and cut off their ears," was the remark made when Jack told his story. "Of course every effort must be made to recover the youngsters; and as soon as we can hold any communication with Rosas, we will send to demand their release, and will offer to exchange any of his followers who may fall into our hands for them. In the meantime such private means as are available must be employed, and you and Mr Adair shall have every possible opportunity given you of carrying them out. We will think over the matter, and decide what steps, under the circumstances, it is best to take. The general, however, has shown no inclination whatever to come to terms; and not withstanding his defeat, it is evident that he intends to fight out the quarrel to the bitter end." This was poor consolation to Jack and Terence, who felt more cut up than they had ever been in their lives.

Jack had not, however, forgotten Murray, and as soon as duty would allow him, he went on board the *Tudor*. He found his old friend able to sit up at table in his cabin, though looking pale and ill from loss of blood, and certainly more fit to be in his cot.

"You see, Jack, that my forebodings are partly realised," he said, as his old shipmate entered; "at all events, had the bullet struck me the sixteenth of an inch on either side my wound would have been fatal. I am afraid, from what the doctor says, that it may be some time before I am fit for active duty, and he advises me to apply to be superseded, and to go home."

Jack of course hoped that the doctor was wrong, and that Murray would be able to remain out till the affair on which they had been sent had been brought to a satisfactory issue.

"But you look unusually grave, Rogers; has anything happened?"

Jack told him all about Tom and Gerald's loss. Murray of course heartily sympathised with him, and expressed his fears, as his other friends had done, that it would be a hard matter to get the youngsters back. He suggested, however, that Jack should try and get hold of some natives, who might communicate with them, and perhaps assist them to escape.

The suggestion gave him some consolation, as offering a means of recovering the lads.

"Don't be cramped in your efforts for want of money," said Murray. "Bribery with these fellows will go a long way, and you know that my purse is always at your service, and never more so than on this occasion."

"I know it, Alick," answered Jack. "Depend on it, if I can fall in with any natives, I will try what bribery can do with them; and if my own means are insufficient, I will come to you."

Chapter Twenty Four.

Efforts made to recover the midshipmen—Murray sails for England—An offer from a native to recover the midshipmen—The fleet ascends the Parana—The *Supplejack* sent in search of the enemy's vessels—Chases a schooner up a river—Needham caught in a trap—Boat expedition—Schooner blows up, and Jack is blown up with her—Return—No news of the midshipmen—The *Supplejack* commences voyage up the Parana.

Jack keenly felt the loss of his brother Tom. What might be his and Desmond's fate it was impossible to say, though he could not suppose that the gauchos, savage as they were supposed to be, would put the two young midshipmen to death. He and Adair had for several days made vain attempts to gain information about them.

Their captors might by this time be hundreds of miles away. All they could learn was that the troops of Rosas, having entirely abandoned Fort Obligado, had retreated to a distance. Jack, too, heard that Murray was certainly to be sent home in the *Tudor*, and for the sake of his friend he was glad of this, but he then should lose the assistance of Adair in his endeavours to recover Tom and Desmond.

He was seated in his cabin one evening after the work of the day was over, with his head resting on his hands—a very unusual position for him—when Lieutenant Adair was announced.

“Beg him to come below,” answered Jack, and Adair entered the cabin.

“I am glad to say, my dear Jack, that I am to remain out here instead of taking the corvette home, which, for Murray’s sake as well as my own, I should have naturally wished to do; but besides wishing to see the end of this affair with Rosas, I should have been excessively unwilling to leave the country till we can get back our young scapegraces. I wish we could see Murray looking as if he was in a fair way to recover. Still the doctors say he will do well, and the thought of again meeting with his lady-love will, I hope, assist to bring him round. He expects to find her in England, though I fancy that he has not heard from her since we came out here.”

“I am indeed glad that you are to remain,” said Jack. “What ship are you to join?”

“I am appointed to the commodore’s ship, but I have received directions to serve under your orders on board the *Supplejack*, which I assure you gives me infinite satisfaction, as I have hopes that you and I, by putting our heads together, may devise some plan for the recovery of the youngsters.”

Jack of course said how glad he was.

“When does the *Tudor* sail?” he asked.

“As soon as the wind will allow her,” said Adair.

“At all events, I will go on board early to-morrow morning to see Murray,” said Jack. “The worst of it is that I must, of course, send a letter by him; and yet I scarcely like to write home with the unsatisfactory intelligence I have to give. However, they will be more anxious and alarmed if they do not hear, so I must tell the whole truth, and express my hopes that we shall recover the youngsters before long.”

“I must write the same to my poor sister Nora,” observed Terence. “I was half inclined to say nothing at all about the matter; but as it is certain to get into the papers, the poor woman will see it and be troubling herself about her boy, and fancying that she is never to see him again. For my part, I feel sure, however, that the youngsters will turn up somewhere or other; as it is my firm conviction, from experience, that a midshipman has as many lives as a cat, or, considering the immense trouble most youngsters take to expend themselves, there would be no superior officers in the service.”

“What is the squadron to do next? have you heard?” asked Jack.

“To proceed up the Parana to Santa Fé de Baxadar, and to convoy down a fleet of merchantmen which Rosas has shut up there,” answered Adair. “Whether or not he will let us pass peaceably up is the question. He has still got plenty of light artillery, which will prove excessively troublesome to us, as they can fire from the top of the cliffs right down on our decks, and, as we may probably be peppered pretty severely for the greater part of the way, it will not be altogether an amusing expedition, though we may get plenty ‘of the bubble reputation, e’en at the cannon’s mouth.’ Anything, however, is better than idleness.”

“We are not likely out here to meet with much besides fighting to amuse us,” observed Jack. “However, I am thankful to find that you are to join the brig, and am much obliged to the commodore for it.”

The two old shipmates sat talking for some time, and as soon as Terence returned to the corvette, Jack took out his writing materials and indited his letter for home. He made as light of Tom’s capture as possible, and spoke as if it was certain that he and Desmond would find their way back again before many days were over. He begged that his father would find out Murray through Admiral Triton, and from him learn where the Bradshaws, with Miss O’Regan, were staying, that his family might pay them any attention in their power; he expressed a hope that, after the Parana business was over, he himself should be sent home, and bring back Tom safe and sound.

He tried to make his letter appear cheerful, but in reality he never in his life before felt so much out of spirits.

Next morning he took it on board the *Tudor* and wished Murray farewell.

“You will do well, depend on it, Alick,” he said. “You already look better, and we shall meet again before long in old England.”

Murray smiled faintly; his wound was painful, though the surgeon assured him that it was going on favourably. The officer who was to supersede Adair having come on board the corvette, the latter accompanied Jack back to the brig.

He received an order directly afterwards to proceed in search of a schooner, supposed to be in one of the numerous passages which carries the waters of the Parana into the River Plate.

“It is very well to say go, but we must get a breeze first,” said Jack.

A breeze soon afterwards got up, but it came from the wrong direction; it was, however, favourable for the *Tudor*, and Jack and Terence watched her as her sails were let fall, and she glided away down the river. They would for many reasons have liked to have been on board her. Few men, after having spent several years on a foreign station, can look without concern on a homeward-bound ship, which carries away friends and acquaintances, while they themselves are left behind.

Their chief regret was, however, that Tom and Gerald had not been recovered before she sailed.

Previous to this, numerous merchantmen had been for some time collecting at the mouth of the river, awaiting the convoy of the men-of-war up the Parana. They now lay at anchor together, forming a large fleet, with the flags of all nations flying from their peaks, while fresh arrivals came gliding up to an anchorage, and boats were pulling about in all directions.

Jack and Terence employed the interval in visiting the shore, for the purpose of finding some one who would undertake to search for the midshipmen, and endeavour to obtain their liberation or assist them to escape.

They could not, however, be long absent from the brig, as a breeze might spring up, and not a moment was to be lost in looking after the Buenos Ayrian schooner.

They ran some risk in going on shore of being cut off by the enemy, who might possibly pounce upon them. The country people, however, very frequently came down to the beach with their provisions, for which they were sure to obtain a good price, and the two lieutenants hoped that through their means they might find some person willing to undertake the task about which they were so anxious.

At length, one evening after the market-people had taken their departure, just as they were about to step into their boat, a dark-skinned man, with a coloured poncho over his shoulder, leathern leggings, and a broad-brimmed hat, made his appearance from behind a bank, and fearlessly came up to them. Though both Jack and Terence by this time spoke a little Spanish, they could not clearly understand him; they made out, however, that he wished to accompany them on board the ship, and that he had some information of importance to give.

"Well, step in, my friend," said Jack. "We will hear what you have got to say as we pull on board."

By degrees they made out that he had heard of their inquiries about the two young midshipmen, and that he was willing to try and recover them, provided he was sufficiently rewarded; he confessed that he had lost his last real in gambling, and, being a ruined man, he set but little value on his life, or that he certainly would not have offered to undertake the task. As he only demanded a hundred dollars, they very willingly promised him the sum.

"And who have we the honour of addressing?" asked Jack.

"José Gonzalves, an hidalgo of pure blood," answered the fellow, drawing himself up with an attempted exhibition of dignity. "Circumstances have brought me into my present condition."

"Your purity of blood does not much matter to us, Don José Gonzalves, provided you bring back these young officers," answered Jack. "What means have you for carrying out your plan?"

"My own talent and perseverance," replied the Don, in a self-satisfied tone.

"Well, we must trust to that," remarked Jack. "How soon can you commence the undertaking?"

"When I can be landed at a spot some miles higher up the river. I must depend on you for carrying me there."

This was a disappointment to Jack and Terence, who thought that the man would at once have set out; but he explained that General Rosas had moved away to the northward, and that the young officers would have certainly been carried in that direction.

Just as they reached the deck of the brig, the long-wished-for breeze setting in, Jack gave the order to make sail.

The anchor had not left the ground, when a boat from the commodore's ship came alongside, with a despatch for him. His directions were to hunt down any of the enemy's vessels he could hear of, and then to follow the squadron, which was on the point of proceeding up the river.

The signal for the fleet to weigh was already flying from the commodore's masthead, the steamers were getting up their steam, dense volumes of smoke issuing from their funnels, from the yards of the sailing-vessels folds upon folds of snowy canvas were being let fall in all directions, while the boats which had been absent were hurrying back to their respective ships. Two or three men-of-war alone were left at the mouth of the river, to prevent any of the enemy's vessels from escaping, and to keep up the communication with the admiral at Monte Video.

"Come, this is something like work; I wish we were among them," exclaimed Terence; "they will have rare fun going up the river."

"Our turn will come, depend on that," answered Jack; "Rosas is not likely to let us pass without giving us a taste of his flying artillery."

The *Supplejack* was some hours in reaching the mouth of the river, in which it was reported that one of the enemy's vessels, a schooner, had taken refuge. Darkness soon coming on, Jack was obliged to anchor, and await for daylight to proceed up it. A sharp lookout was kept, however, to prevent any vessel from passing down during the night, without his knowledge.

Two boats were in the water alongside, and their crews, with cutlasses in their hands, and pistols in their belts, were ready to start at a moment's notice. The night was calm and clear, and the shores on either hand could be distinguished with the dark line of the forest, which extended down to the water. Silence reigned over the scene, though it was occasionally broken by strange cries which came out from among the tall trees, probably the death-shriek of some animal, seized by a prowling jaguar or puma.

Jack and Terence got all the information they could out of José Gonzalves, who had been frequently up the river, and felt pretty certain as to the locality where the schooner was likely to be found.

The brig was brought up in a bay or bend of the river, a point running out ahead, and concealing her from any vessel coming down the stream till close upon her. This was a disadvantage in one respect, as an approaching enemy could not, for the same cause, be seen from the *Supplejack*, and only a short time, therefore, could be allowed for getting under weigh. Jack had given orders that the bell should not be struck, lest, should the schooner, or any other vessel, attempt to slip out, it might give notice of the vicinity of the brig.

Jack and Terence had turned in just about the commencement of the morning watch. Needham, who was on the lookout, observed beyond the point above the trees a white spot, on which the light of the moon, just then emerging from behind a cloud, shone brightly. Guessing at once, that it was the head of the schooner's fore-topgallant-sail, he sent to call the commander. Jack and Terence were on deck in an instant; the latter jumped into one of the boats and pulled across the stream to intercept the stranger, while Jack ordered the anchor to be got up, and sail to be made. The wind came off from the shore on the starboard side, so that though the schooner might manage to get out, the brig could also make her way up the stream.

"We shall catch her now, at all events—she is trapped," said Jack to Needham. The schooner's jib was seen coming round the point, which she was compelled to hug closely. Jack might have done better by remaining at anchor, as the schooner would not have so soon discovered the foe lying in wait for her. Directly the brig was perceived she put up her helm, and, quickly easing off her mainsheet, ran again up the river with the wind on her starboard quarter. Jack had to wait some time to pick up his boat, when making all sail, he stood after the schooner, with no little risk of getting on shore, though José Gonzalves affirmed that he knew every inch of ground. The lead, however, was kept going, and Jack hoped by keeping as much as possible in the middle of the stream to avoid such a catastrophe.

The chase had had a good start, and now getting into a reach where the wind blew right aft, she was able to set studding-sails, when being very light, she ran through the water even faster than before. She was too directly ahead to enable Jack to fire "Long Tom" at her, unless he yawed considerably. He got, however, at last to the end of a reach, which brought the schooner on his port bow. Needham had been eagerly on the watch for the opportunity. The shot flew through the lower sails of the chase, but no spars were carried away, and she stood on, rapidly increasing her distance from her pursuer.

There was great risk, however, that at any moment the brig might take the ground. Still Jack felt that it would not do to let the prize, almost within his grasp, escape; the wind might draw ahead or drop, and he might take her with the boats. But instead of falling, the breeze rather freshened and continued to favour the chase.

Dawn at length appeared, and as the light increased, the dangers of the navigation somewhat lessened. Three more shots were fired from "Long Tom." The first struck the chase, but what damage it did could not be ascertained, while the second scarcely touched her, and the third fell considerably short. It was evidently of no use to fire again. Still as long as the chase could be kept in sight Jack had hopes of coming up with her, or at all events of discovering into what creek or passage she might run. Having the advantage of being able to make short cuts by channels through which the brig could not venture, she got farther and farther ahead, till she could only just be discerned in the far distance up the river, the dark trees appearing almost to close her in. As the sun rose the wind began to die away, the channel became narrower and narrower. At last it became perfectly calm, the brig was brought to an anchor.

"We must not let her escape," cried Jack. "Out boats, and as the wind will no longer help her we shall find her before long."

Three boats were at once manned, Jack, Terence, and Needham going in them while Bevan remained in charge of the brig.

José Gonzalves declined accompanying the expedition, on the plea that should a reverse be met with, he would be knocked on the head by his countrymen, which would have undoubtedly been the case, so Jack was obliged to dispense with his services. The men gave way with a will, hoping soon to overtake the chase. They pulled on, however, for some time without again catching sight of her.

Although the shore offered abundant shelter to an enemy they were allowed to pass without opposition, and concluded therefore that no force of armed men was in the neighbourhood. A sharp lookout was kept on either hand for any opening into which the schooner might have made her way.

At last they reached the mouth of a narrow channel which, perhaps, connected the river they were on with some other stream, or it might, they thought, possibly be a river falling into the first. It was a question whether the schooner had gone up it, and on the chance of her having done so, Needham volunteered to explore it, while the other two boats pulled up the main stream. Jack was at first unwilling to let him go, lest he might be overpowered. At last, however, he consented, ordering him not to attack the schooner, but should he catch sight of her to return immediately and follow the other boats with the information. Jack and Terence accordingly continued their course, while Needham pulled up the channel.

Jack did not believe that the schooner would have ventured into so narrow a place, and he fully hoped before long to catch sight of her. The two boats pulled on for nearly half an hour; the channel, as they advanced, narrowing, till the lieutenants became convinced that the schooner could not without wind have got so far ahead. They accordingly pulled round, being now satisfied that she must have gone up the channel into which Needham had entered. They had almost reached the mouth of it when distant shots were heard; the next instant there came the sound of regular volleys, fired in quick succession.

"Needham must have fallen into a trap, I fear," said Jack, "we must hurry to his assistance. Give way, my lads!"

The men needed no urging, and in a few minutes they were entering the channel. Though narrower at the mouth, after they had gone some way up it widened, and on sounding, they found that there was water enough for a far larger vessel than the schooner. The sound of the firing now became more distinct; then it ceased. It was too

probable that Needham had been cut off, and he and his boat's crew destroyed.

Still Jack and Terence, though they might be exposed to a similar danger, felt it was their duty to go on and ascertain the fact. Jack was standing up in the sternsheets, so that he might obtain as far a view as possible up the river, when he caught sight of a boat in the distance.

On she came towards them.

"Hurrah! that must be Needham," he said.

"No doubt about it," answered Terence.

In a short time Needham's boat reached them. The splintered oars, and the white marks along the gunwales and sides, showed the danger to which they had been exposed; though of all her crew, only two had been wounded. Needham said that he had pulled on, not meeting with a human being, and had begun to doubt that the schooner had gone up the channel, when he suddenly saw her, her sails furled, and close in with the shore, apparently being towed, either by men or horses, along the bank. He had gone on some little way further to ascertain this, when several shots were fired at him, and as there was no object to gain by going farther, he had pulled round and began to make the best of his way down the river. Immediately he did so, a whole volley was fired at him from one side, and directly after a second came peppering him from the other. He now discovered that he had been caught in an ambush, but as yet, no one having been killed, he hoped to get out of it. The men at the oars pulled away lustily, while the others returned the fire, and, as they believed, knocked over several fellows who incautiously showed themselves. After running the gauntlet for five or six minutes, they got out of range of the enemy's muskets, and had since been unmolested, neither had they seen any one on the banks. Jack and Terence were unwilling to lose the chase, now that she appeared almost within their grasp, and yet they felt that it would be imprudent to expose their men and themselves to the fire of the numerous enemies posted under cover.

"It will not do to give her up, though!" exclaimed Terence; "let us ask Needham what he thinks." Jack put the question.

"Well, sir, to my mind, we may have her, and yet run no risk," was the answer. "I know the way up the river, and it's not likely that she has got very far from where I saw her. Now, if we wait till dark, we may pull up with muffled oars, and as I do not think the enemy will expect us, we may be up to her before they find us out. The moon won't rise for the next four hours, and we shall have time to board, and get her under weigh before then. The breeze, you see, is setting down the channel, and if it holds as at present, we shall have an easy job, or if she should take the ground, and we find that we cannot get her off, we can but set her on fire, and so have done with her."

Jack and Terence thought Needham's plan a good one, and resolved to carry it out, trusting to his sagacity to pilot them up to where they hoped to find the schooner.

A short distance off was a high bank which projected some way into the channel. As the trees which grew on it hung over the water it would afford shelter to the boats, and the men while there might take some refreshment, and snatch a couple of hours' sleep. They accordingly pulled in, and found that the place fully answered their expectations. Jack was too wise, however, not to take precaution against surprise. He and Terence having landed, fixed on four spots at which they posted sentries, armed with muskets and cutlasses, leaving orders with them to fire should the enemy appear, and then to retreat to the boats. They had been so carefully concealed among the boughs, that even should any one pass up or down the channel, Jack felt sure that they were not likely to be discovered. Biscuit and beef, with grog, having been served out, the rest of the men lay down along the thwarts or at the bottom of the boats, to enjoy such rest as could be found. Jack and Terence, however, sat up; they were too anxious about the success of the expedition to sleep, indeed they rather doubted whether they were wise in venturing up the narrow channel, through which they might possibly have to run the gauntlet on their return, between two fires from a vastly superior number of foes.

"We have often had to encounter far greater dangers," observed Terence.

"Yes, but then we did not knowingly run into them," said Jack, "and that makes all the difference."

Still neither of them liked to abandon the enterprise, they calculated that half an hour would carry them up to the schooner, and little more than that time, supposing the breeze should hold, would enable them to get clear of the channel.

"It won't take us many minutes to capture her, so we need not allow much time for that," observed Jack. "We may give the men, at all events, nearly three hours' rest."

Three hours went slowly by; at last they roused up the crew, called in the sentries, and shoved off. The oars were muffled as proposed, and by keeping in the centre of the channel they hoped not to be heard by the enemy, though, of course, they ran the risk of being seen should any one be on the lookout. No lights were, however, observed on the shore, or anything to indicate that the banks were inhabited; indeed, the brushwood came close down to the water. Needham, acting as pilot, led the way, Jack's boat came next, and Terence brought up the rear.

Except the usual cry of the nightbirds and the quacking of frogs, which issued from the forest, no sound broke the silence which brooded over the water. The current was very slight, and scarcely impeded their progress. Never did a half-hour appear so long. Jack strained his eyes, hoping every instant to catch sight of the schooner, but Needham pulled on steadily, as if he knew that she was still some way ahead. At length Jack observed that his oars ceased to move, and he accordingly pulled up alongside his boat.

"There she is, sir," he whispered. "I can just catch sight of her fore-topgallant-mast against the sky, over the trees."

Jack communicated the information to Terence, and then, silently as before, they pulled on. Were the crew of the schooner asleep, or had they abandoned her? In either case her capture would be easy. Closer and closer they got, till they could all see her with perfect distinctness, her yards across, and her sails bent. For a moment or two Jack expected to receive her broadside, or to have a volley of musketry opened on the boats. No movement, however, was perceived on board. He now took the lead, directing Adair to pull for the bow, and Needham for the quarter, while he intended to board her by the main chains.

It was evident that they were not expected. The boats' crews gave way altogether. Jack was the first alongside; he quickly sprang on deck, followed by his men; Adair and Needham were a few seconds behind him. Scarcely had he gained the deck, than, looking down the main hatchway, he observed a bright light, a stiling column of smoke issuing immediately afterwards.

"Back, all of you! Back to the boats!" he shouted, and was in the act of springing after his men, who were jumping over the sides, when he felt his feet lifted up, and an instant afterwards he found himself in the water, amid fragments of wreck, several fathoms from the vessel, from every part of which bright flames were fiercely bursting forth. A few strokes carried him alongside his boat, and, his voice being heard by his men, he was speedily hauled on board.

"Is any one hurt?" was his first question.

"No, sir, only a little scratch or two," was the satisfactory answer.

The part of the deck blown up had fortunately been carried right over the boat. The explosion had probably been produced by a small quantity of gunpowder. "Had there been more of it my career would have been cut short," thought Jack. He heard Adair and Needham inquiring for him.

"All right," he answered. "The rascals intended to play us a scurvy trick; but they have been disappointed, though we shall lose our prize."

The schooner was now burning fiercely from stem to stern; the flames wreathing like snakes round her masts, having already reached her spars, compelled the boats to pull to a distance to avoid the risk of being crushed by them should they fall.

The instant they got beyond the shelter of the vessel, a volley of musketry was fired at them from the shore, the flames casting a bright light around, exposing them to view; the glare, however, at the same time, showing them their enemies, standing on an open space at the top of a bank, they apparently forgetting that they could be seen as well as see.

Jack's boat, which carried a six-pounder in her bow, pulling round, he fired with good effect into their midst, while the other boats opened with musketry. Several of the enemy were knocked over, and the rest scampered off under cover, a few of them firing, however, as soon as they could reload from behind their shelter.

"There is very little honour or glory to be obtained by stopping to be peppered by these fellows," observed Adair.

Jack agreed with him, and, giving the order to pull round, he setting the example, away went the boats down the channel. A few shots whistled by them as long as they remained within the glare of the blazing vessel. As she was already so much burnt, that even had the Spaniards succeeded in putting out the flames she would have been utterly useless, Jack did not think it worth while to remain to see what became of her. Even after they had got a considerable way down the passage they could see a bright glare in the sky, which showed them that she was still burning, and must inevitably be destroyed.

Adair congratulated his messmate on his escape. "Faith! my dear Jack, I thought for a moment that you had been shot into the other world, and that I should have had to take command of the *Supplejack*," he exclaimed. "Believe me, however, it would have been the most unsatisfactory event in my life."

"I am very sure of that," answered Jack. "It's a mercy, however, that no one was killed, though some of the men, I fear, have been severely hurt."

"Yes, two or three were struck by splinters when the schooner blew up, and twice as many have been wounded by the bullets," said Adair. "The sooner the poor fellows' hurts can be looked to the better."

Jack agreed with him, and the boats were accordingly steered for the bank under which they had before brought up.

Jack, recollecting that he was in an enemy's country, did not neglect to place sentries on shore as before. The lanterns were then lit, and the hurts of the people as carefully bound up as circumstances would allow. Two men in Needham's boat were suffering from wounds, while four in Jack's had been more or less hurt. One man had his hat carried off and his hair singed by the explosion, though he had otherwise escaped.

As it was important to get back to the brig as soon as possible after provisions and grog had been served out, the boats recommenced their downward passage. The current being in their favour, and daylight soon appearing, the work was much easier, as they had no difficulty in finding their way. Jack, however, could not help feeling some anxiety lest the brig, left with so few hands on board, might have been attacked during his absence, though he was very sure, should such have been the case, that Bevan would make a good fight of it. His mind was relieved when he came in sight of her, and saw the British ensign flying at her peak; the boats were soon alongside, and the wounded placed under the care of McTavish.

Bevan informed him that José Gonzalves had gone on shore to obtain information, and that he expected him off every

instant. This provoked Jack not a little, as the wind was fair, and though pretty well knocked up, he was anxious to get under weigh immediately. He was unwilling, however, to go without the man, as he hoped that he might be of use in recovering Tom and Gerald, though he sometimes doubted how far he could carry out his promises; indeed, he had his suspicions that Mr José might be a spy, and was as likely to carry information to Rosas as to help the midshipmen to escape.

"If we lose the breeze, we cannot tell how long we may be detained here," he exclaimed, as he impatiently walked the deck. "We will give him another hour, however; if he does not then appear we must sail without him."

The cable, in the meantime, was hove short, the topsails loosed and every preparation made for getting under weigh.

The hour had nearly passed, when Bevan exclaimed, "I see him, sir, at the end of the point. He is waving his handkerchief, as agreed on."

A boat was accordingly despatched, and José came on board.

He excused himself by saying that he had fallen in with some people whom he took to be enemies, and that he had to conceal himself till they passed by.

"And what information do you bring us?" asked Jack.

"That another schooner and two gunboats have been destroyed, to prevent them from falling into the hands of your countrymen, and that not another vessel belonging to General Rosas remains afloat," answered Jose.

This was satisfactory news, as Jack now considered that he might carry out the second part of his instructions and proceed up the Parana, to rejoin the squadron already some way ahead, searching for Tom and Gerald as he went along. The anchor was hove up, sail was made, and with a fair breeze he ran out of the river. He had not got far when he fell in with her Majesty's sloop of war, *Dashaway*, which had just come from Monte Video, and from her he received despatches from the commodore.

He was still some distance below the place where José had desired to be put on shore. His patience was to be tried still further. After he had run on about twenty miles it fell calm, and he was compelled to bring up not far from Punta Obligado.

Completely knocked up, he and Terence at last turned in, desiring to be called should the wind change, or any occurrence of importance take place.

"At all events, Rosas must have had fighting enough for the present, and his people will not venture to attack us," observed Terence, as they went below. "If they do, we must let Long Tom speak to them in return," answered Jack, as he threw himself on his bed. In half a minute he was fast asleep.

Chapter Twenty Five.

The Supplejack proceeds up the Parana—Fired at from the shore—Meet with friendly natives—José goes in search of the midshipmen—Returns with tidings of them—José left behind—The brig sails on—Fired at from the shore—Passing batteries under a heavy fire—The brig frequently struck—Several people killed and wounded—Gets clear at last.

The night was calm, the brig lay on the Entre Rios shore, the inhabitants of which were friendly. Tall trees clothed the bank, towering high above her masts, while on the southern shore scarcely a tree was to be seen. A mist hung over the water, and, though the stars shone brightly from the sky overhead, partly obscured that side of the river, and rendered the night darker than usual. Jack and Terence had enjoyed a couple of hours of sound sleep, "not idling their time over it," as Adair observed, when the sound of a gun made them both leap out of their berths. It was followed by another and another. The next moment Bevan came down.

"They are firing at us, sir, from the shore," he said. "Shall we return it?"

"Not till the shots come unpleasantly near," answered Jack. "The flash of our guns might show them the proper range, which at present they do not appear to have got. Turn up the hands, but show no lights."

Meantime the enemy continued firing, the shot occasionally passing close ahead or astern. At last one cut the fore-topmast-stay, a second whistled between the masts, two others followed at a short distance ahead.

"They have got the range now," cried Jack; "it is time to reply to them."

Long Tom was brought to bear on the spot whence the flashes proceeded, for the guns themselves could not be seen. His first bark, as Needham called it, was replied to by several shots, but they did no damage.

"Depress the gun slightly; that shot went over them," said Jack.

Long Tom gave a second bark; no reply came; a third and fourth followed. It was evident that the shot had told with considerable effect, and that the enemy had thought it wiser to beat a retreat.

"We have done with them at present," observed Jack; "but we shall probably have a good deal of this sort of work going up the river. The rockets with which we have been supplied will come into play, I suspect."

"At all events the trip is not likely to be a dull one," observed Adair; "I only wish that we had the youngsters on board."

As there appeared no probability of the brig being again attacked, the guns were secured, and the watch below turned in. Of course, every possible care was kept to prevent surprise, should the enemy venture to make another attack; which was not, however, at all likely to occur.

The next morning the wind again set up the river, and the *Supplejack* continued her course. No enemy appeared, but occasionally a few country people were seen on the banks, who seemed, simply from curiosity, to be watching the brig as she glided by.

A vigilant lookout was kept, on the bare possibility that the midshipmen might have made their escape, and gained the bank, in the hopes of being taken off by any passing vessel. José, however, was still confident that they had been carried off to the north, and were not likely to be found in that part of the country.

The current being strong, and the wind light, the *Supplejack* made but slow progress. At last she reached a place at which José had desired to be landed; he had friends in the neighbourhood, he said, and felt confident that he should gain tidings of the midshipmen.

The river was here wide, and as she kept close on the opposite shore, even should the enemy appear their field-pieces were not likely to do much harm to the brig. The wind had again fallen, and the delay, indeed, had there not been an important object to be obtained, could not have been avoided. Farther on, where the river narrowed at Rosario, José told them that they might expect to meet with considerable opposition. Perhaps that was his reason for not desiring to accompany them further. As soon as the brig had brought up, a boat was lowered, and Adair conveyed their very doubtful friend to the shore. He took ten men, armed with muskets, beside the crew, in case the boat should be attacked.

"Set your mind at ease on that point," said José "they are my friends hereabouts, and bear no enmity to the English."

As the boat approached, several country people were seen coming down the steep bank with fowls and vegetables, which they were perfectly ready to sell. José was recognised by several persons, who seemed surprised at seeing him, but he had a talk with them, after which they became thoroughly friendly and willing to communicate information. Terence learnt from them that the squadron had passed up, and had already got considerably higher than Rosario, where José had told Jack that he might expect to be attacked.

"Probably Rosas, after the lesson he received at Obligado, is unwilling again to interfere with us," thought Terence. "Perhaps, however, he expects by allowing us to pass up, to catch us all in a net, and so prevent our return. If he does that same he will find that he is mistaken, and that he has not yet learnt what British seamen are made of."

Terence, with his stock of fresh provisions, was heartily welcomed on board. He and Jack only hoped that they might be detained for want of wind where they were till the return of José, with any information he might collect; they had agreed at all events to wait for him till the following morning. He was, he had said, certain that Rosas must have passed either through the village, or at no great distance from the river, and he hoped to hear that the young midshipmen had been seen with his troops.

Next morning at daybreak, Terence taking the same precaution as before, returned to the shore. He had not been there long before several country people appeared, but nothing was seen of José Gonzalves. Adair, after waiting some time, began to fear that he had either been captured, or was playing them false. He was about to return on board, to let the men have their breakfasts, when the spy was seen, his horse, in a foam, galloping down the hill towards the boat.

"Any news of the young officers?" asked Adair, eagerly.

"Yes, señor, important news. They were alive a week ago, and though I don't know what the general might have done with them, had his anger been aroused, they were not ill-treated, but I find that they made their escape at the time I mention, and have not since been heard of. I am afraid, therefore," and José shook his head, "that they may have been overtaken by some of the gaucho cavalry, who would not scruple to run them through with their lances, or they may have been seized by a jaguar, and we have not a few man-eaters in these parts, fierce creatures, who would quickly put an end to a couple of lads. Not long since one leaped on board a vessel moored to the banks, and carried off a man asleep on the deck; there is no telling what they will not do, or, if the young officers have escaped the gauchos and jaguars, they may have wandered far away from any habitation, and have been starved to death. The country people would not hurt them, and would provide them with food, but as I say, I have been unable to obtain any further tidings of them, which makes me fear the worst."

"Well, come on board, and give your information to the commander; we will then consult what is to be done," said Adair; "you have taken a great deal of trouble without having gained your reward."

José shrugged his shoulders. "Paciencia, señor, I am an unfortunate man, I know, but if you will excuse me, I will continue the search; it is possible, that none of the accidents I have mentioned may have happened to the young officers, and perhaps they are hiding in some rancho, or have managed to find subsistence by themselves. You Englishmen do wondrous things, only as they have no guns, and cannot, I conclude, use a lasso, even if they have one, they will have been unable to catch game, or obtain any other food."

Terence, after due consideration, seeing that there would be no great use in taking José with him, and that he might be of more service by remaining on shore, returned on board with the unsatisfactory information, as he believed it, which he had obtained.

"As to its being unsatisfactory, I am not so sure of that," observed Jack. "As the lads escaped being killed at first, and were not, as José said, ill-treated, we may hope that they have found the means of supporting themselves in their wanderings, and that they have either made their way back to Obligado, or have reached the banks of the river. As they decidedly have their wits about them, they may have found subsistence where others might have starved. Indeed, as I think of it, though you have to share my anxiety, I cannot help feeling glad that Desmond was with Tom; had he been alone, the case would have been different. Youngsters may occasionally lead one another into scrapes, but they are as sure to help each other out of them."

The calm still continued, and thus a longer time was given to José to continue his search for the midshipmen. In the afternoon smoke was seen in the distance, up the river; Jack guessing that it proceeded from the funnel of a steamer, sent Terence in a boat to intercept her and learn the news.

She brought the satisfactory intelligence that the squadron had reached Baxadar de Santa Fé without molestation, with their convoy of merchantmen, of which there were upwards of one hundred sail, collected off the place.

The commodore had gone up the river some hundred miles farther, to Corrientes, the capital of the province of that name, to communicate with the government on diplomatic matters. The town is situated near the spot where the river Paraguay falls into the Parna.

"At first it was believed that Rosas, after the lesson which had just been given him at Obligado, would not venture to interfere with us again, and would be ready to sue for peace," observed the commander of the steamer. "But he has made us no overtures, and from the information we have gained he seems as determined as at first to hold out."

"I suppose there is but little chance of our being molested, however, as we go up?" said Adair.

"I am not quite so certain of that," was the answer. "Rosas thinks he has got us in a trap; and as I passed the cliffs of San Lorenzo I observed a large number of men assembled, who quickly got out of the way as I came within shot of them; they were evidently at work throwing up batteries, and had their guns been ready, depend on it they would not have allowed me to pass so easily; I can promise that you will not get up without some warm work, here and there."

"Well, we must be prepared for them," said Adair; "we have a good supply of rockets, and our carronades will pepper them with grape and canister, while Long Tom will play his part as he always does."

"I would advise you not to expose your men more than you can help," observed the commander of the steamer; "a sailing vessel would have but a poor chance when going up the river, should the wind fail her under a battery."

"We must run it at all events," and wishing his friend goodbye, Adair returned on board with the information he had gained.

The calm still continued; but as a breeze might at any moment spring up, Jack and he anxiously looked out for José. They were indeed in a hurry to recommence the ascent of the river, for the longer they delayed, the greater risk they ran of being attacked.

The sun set, and still José had not made his appearance. Jack was just going below when Needham came aft. No one had showed more anxiety about the midshipmen than he had.

"It has come into my mind, sir, that if the young gentlemen are anywhere hereabouts they may have caught sight of the brig, and will be trying to make their way down to the shore abreast of us. If you will give me leave to take the jollyboat, I will pull in and have a look for them; and even if they don't come, José may be wishing to get off, with any information he has picked up, though I have no great hopes that he will do much."

"I am afraid not either," said Jack, "but by all means take the boat and remain as long as it continues calm. Should a breeze spring up, you must, whether successful or not, return on board. It is my duty to proceed up the river as fast as I can, and my anxiety to recover my brother and Mr Desmond must not make me neglect that."

Needham found no difficulty in obtaining volunteers for his expedition. They went well-armed in case any hostile natives might appear, though the country people in general showed a friendly disposition.

Jack and Terence while at their frugal supper of corn beef and biscuit, talked over a plan for protecting the men, should they be fired at as they ascended. They arranged to build a barricade of hammocks and bags to defend the helmsman on the port side while the crew were sent below, they of course intending to remain on deck.

"The fellows have not shown themselves to be good shots, and if the breeze holds we may run by them without much damage," observed Jack.

"But if the wind should fall or blow down the river?" suggested Terence.

"Then we must go about and wait for a better opportunity for running up," answered Jack. "We may try it at night and may slip by the more dangerous places without observation."

They both talked hopefully of recovering the midshipmen, and yet they could not help occasionally feeling that the youngsters might after all have lost their lives.

At last they turned in, Bevan having the watch. Though very gallant British officers, they were not heroes of romance, and therefore required sleep as much as anybody else. Jack had left directions to be called should a breeze spring up or Needham return on board. It had gone two bells in the morning watch when Norris came into the cabin and awoke Jack.

"There is a light air from the south'ard, and it has been getting stronger for the last few minutes, but the boat has not come off yet," he said.

Jack sprang up.

"We will make sail and stand over to the other shore to pick her up," he answered; "we must not delay a moment."

The anchor was hove up, and sail quickly made, the breeze rapidly increasing. She had got halfway across to the western shore when the boat was observed approaching and was soon alongside.

"We have seen nothing of the young gentlemen, sir, nor has the spy shown his face," said Needham. "I waited till the last moment, hoping that some one would appear. I fancied I saw people moving about on the bank, and now and then heard voices close down to the boat. We pulled some way down the river and then back again as high up as we had gone down, every now and then shouting out the young gentlemen's names, so that if they had been anywhere hereabouts they must have heard us."

Jack agreed with Needham that Tom and Gerald were not likely to be in the neighbourhood, and the boat being dropped astern, to be in readiness should they or the spy appear, the *Supplejack* continued her course up the river. The increasing daylight enabled Jack to see his way, and of course a sharp lookout was kept on the shore.

The brig continued on for some distance, neither cavalry nor artillery being seen. A few foot soldiers were observed trudging along, and occasionally country people appeared on the high ground, but none of them came down to the beach.

The appearance of the banks varied considerably in different places; in some they were sloping and were covered with trees and shrubs, in others they consisted of high earthy cliffs with the open plains of the Pampas reaching to the edge of their summits. Frequently the telescope revealed projecting from the cliffs the bones of the megatherion, mastodon, milodon, and other huge antediluvian animals, of which, however, neither Jack nor Terence knew the names. Sometimes they were so distinct that they were remarked by the men, who wondered how such strange animals could have found their way there.

"They cannot have gone and buried themselves," sagaciously observed Bill Lizard, the boatswain's mate.

"For my part, howsoever, I cannot think that anybody would have taken the trouble to bury them," answered Needham. "It's a pity we have not got Mr Scrofton on board; he would have told us all about it, no doubt."

The ship's company, however, had soon other matters to engage their attention. The brig was now approaching that part of the river where the deep channel runs under the lofty and perpendicular cliffs of San Lorenzo. The bed is as wide as in other places, but on the eastern side is a line of islands extending for several miles, and forcing the current over to the west. It was still doubtful, however, whether the enemy had observed the brig, or would venture to attack her if they had.

Terence had gone aloft to be able to get a better view over the plain, when he made out several horsemen, and what he at first took for carts in the far distance, but which as they emerged from a cloud of dust partially concealing them he discovered were field-pieces. There could be little doubt that the *Supplejack* would not escape without being fired at. Fortunately there was a good stiff breeze, and under all sail she stood boldly up the clearly defined channel. The ensign was flying at the peak, and Jack ordered one to be hoisted at each masthead, to show the enemy that he intended to fight as long as the masts stood, or his vessel remained above water.

The brig had not got far, however, when six field-pieces, dragged by horses, with a considerable body of men, were seen some way ahead approaching the edge of the cliffs. Jack was not left long in doubt as to their object, for bringing their guns to bear on the brig, the Spaniards opened fire, their shot whizzing over the brig, a few only passing through her sails.

Needham had got his beloved Long Tom elevated as much as possible, the two carronades loaded with canister, and the rockets were ready in their stands.

"Let them learn what Long Tom can do," said Jack. Needham fired but the shot flew over the heads of the enemy; the gun was quickly again loaded. After the next shot two or three of the horses were seen plunging wildly, and one of the guns appeared to have received some damage—the distance was too great to ascertain what it was. The brig made rapid way, the next shot buried itself in the cliff; it was evident that Long Tom could do no more for the present. The carronades were now fired, and a flight of rockets sent the horsemen galloping out of the way, while the gunners scampered off or threw themselves on the ground; a second flight of rockets and another dose of canister kept them from returning till the brig had neared the cliffs; so close indeed was she that her mainyard almost touched them, while the enemy, who by this time had returned, could not sufficiently depress their guns to send a shot down on her decks, neither did the riflemen approach sufficiently near the edge to fire into her; probably having a wholesome dread of the rockets or bullets which might be sent in return from the daring little vessel.

As yet no one had been hit on board the brig, and Jack was beginning to hope that she might pass without damage beyond the dangerous point, when farther on appeared a line of batteries, and he had just reason to fear that they would cause him greater injury than he had hitherto received. He pointed them out to Terence.

"I would advise you to send the hands below while you and I and the helmsman remain on deck," said Terence coolly. "We shall save the men, and should a few shots go through the ship's side we shall have time to stop the holes before much water gets in; there would be no use replying to the batteries, and we must do our best to get by them as fast as possible."

The order, which the men unwillingly obeyed, was given. Snatchblock came aft to the helm, and Terence walked forward, while Jack stood at his usual post to con the brig. Needham gave a fond look at Long Tom as he went below.

"I only wish, old fellow, that I could stop on deck and let you send a shot or two into those batteries ahead," he exclaimed, apostrophising his gun.

Jack and Terence felt something like men leading a forlorn hope, but felt that they must of necessity expose themselves to the round shot and bullets of the enemy. They had not long to wait before the guns from the battery opened fire; the first shot struck the starboard bulwarks and went through them, the next plunged right down on the deck, and others followed in quick succession. The enemy now opened with grape and canister, numerous shots passing through the sails, and several others striking the deck and bulwarks. Had the crew not gone below many must have been killed or wounded; Jack and Terence, now the only two exposed, were still unhurt, though several missiles whistled close to their ears, and half a dozen lodged in the barricade erected for the protection of Snatchblock. All Jack's attention was required for conning the brig, so that he could attend to nothing else. After a shot had gone through the deck, he heard cries proceeding up the hatchway as if some one had been hurt below, but he had no time to inquire who was the sufferer. Though from his natural temperament he took a pleasure in being under fire, still he never so heartily wished himself out of it as he did at present. It would have been a different matter had he been able to defend his ship instead of being compelled to glide slowly by and be peppered at without returning a shot. It was, indeed, extremely trying, and it seemed a wonder, considering the number of shots fired down into her, that she was not sent to the bottom. At length the brig had to stand farther out from the cliffs, in a direction where fewer guns could reach her, and Jack determined to try if he could not silence those likely to annoy him with a few rockets and a dose of canister from the carronades. Calling Needham and a dozen of hands on deck, he gave the order. Never did men spring up with greater alacrity. Terence directed the rockets, which pitched right into the fort, while the canister coming directly after, must have driven the Spaniards from their guns, for not a shot was returned till the brig was pretty well out of their reach.

The rest of the crew now came on deck, and gave a loud cheer at the success of their exploit; they had not, however, escaped altogether, one had been killed and two wounded below, a shot entering the gunroom had also killed the clerk in charge, and slightly wounded Jos Green.

Though the brig had passed the partly-formed batteries, she was not altogether free from danger. Troops of flying artillery were observed moving along at the top of the cliffs, accompanied by a body of infantry. Though the brig had a strong breeze, as the current was against her, she advanced but at a comparatively slow rate, the troops above getting along almost as fast as she did. A shower of grape from the carronades and a couple of rockets sent into their midst made them, however, sheer off to a respectful distance, and the gallant little *Supplejack* continued her course without being further molested.

The dead were sewn up in their hammocks with shot at their feet, and lowered into the deep stream, as there was no prospect of being able to bury them on shore. Jos Green made light of his wound, as he did of every other trouble in life, and Jack felt thankful, considering the hot fire to which the brig had been exposed, that more casualties had not occurred.

Chapter Twenty Six.

The midshipmen seen on the shore—A boat sent from the brig—The enemy appear on the cliffs and open fire—The brig returns it—The midshipmen rescued—The brig gets clear of the enemy—Tom recounts his and Gerald's adventures.

Evening was approaching, all hands had been busy repairing damages, the carpenters below stopping shot-holes, the rest of the crew on deck knotting and splicing the rigging. Some way ahead was seen a lofty bluff with a range of cliffs, which, the chart showed, extended far along the shore; a shoal ran off it, so the brig had of necessity to steer some distance over to the opposite bank.

As had been done all along, a vigilant lookout was kept for any object moving on the western side. Needham's keen eye was employed in the service; he felt a sincere affection for the youngsters, and longed to recover them almost as much as did their relatives. Just abreast of the brig appeared a shallow valley with a stream in the middle, and trees growing on either side, reaching down to the edge of the water; Needham was examining the spot with even more than his usual care.

"I am sure of it!" he exclaimed suddenly. "One of them is waving his handkerchief, or a bit of rag of some sort. It must be the young gentlemen!"

Jack and Terence brought their glasses to bear on the spot. The pinnace towing astern was hauled up alongside. Terence and Needham jumped into her with a ready crew. Just as she was shoving off a party of artillery and a body of infantry appeared on the cliffs above.

"Take six small-arm men, in case the enemy should see the lads and attempt to stop them," exclaimed Jack; "the muskets will probably keep the Spaniards at a distance while they get on board."

The men who had been called away having received their ammunition, were in a few seconds in the boat, which now pulled as fast as the crew could bend to their oars towards the shore.

The enemy must have been surprised at seeing her; for not having discovered the midshipmen, they probably did not conceive for what object she was approaching the shore. In the meantime the carronades had been turned towards the cliff, and the rockets got ready. Until fired on, however, Jack had determined not to fire; indeed his shot, at the

distance he then was from the cliffs, could not have told with much effect. As it would have been unwise to heave to in so dangerous a position, the topsails were lowered on the caps, and topgallant sails and royals let fly, so as not to leave the boat behind. The midshipmen, for there was no doubt that it was they who were seen, in their eagerness to get on board the boat, came out from beneath the overhanging shrubs which had hitherto concealed them from the view of those on the cliffs, to the end of a point. The enemy caught sight of them, and now understanding the object of the boat, instantly began firing at her, while a party of men hurried down to try and cut them off.

"We must put a stop to that," cried Jack, giving orders to open fire with Long Tom and the carronades. The enemy replied with their field-pieces. The brig, having edged over as close as she could venture, opened on them with rockets.

The boat by this time had scarcely got half way to the shore, while the two midshipmen, seeing the party coming to intercept them, threw themselves into the water and swam off to the boat, regardless of the bullets flying about their heads. They struck out boldly, the boat's crew pulling with all their might to reach them, while the small-arm men kept up a sharp fire on the enemy at the top of the cliffs, which prevented them from taking so accurate an aim as they would otherwise have done.

Jack watched them with the deepest anxiety; he saw the shot splashing into the smooth water and bounding over them. One better aimed might send either of the lads to the bottom. He had not, however, forgotten that he had charge of the brig, and was obliged to turn his eyes away from them to look after her.

Tom being a better swimmer than Gerald might quickly have been on board, but in spite of the bullets which came flying around his head, he was seen to stop and support his companion.

"Just like him!" exclaimed Needham, "I would give every year I have to live to save the lads."

Just then one of the small-arm men in the boat was hit, and dropping his musket he sank down across the thwarts. Needham seized it, and catching sight of a Spaniard aiming at the lads, he fired; the man dropped his piece, which went off in the air. A few more strokes and the boat was up to the midshipmen. Eager hands were stretched out to haul them on board.

"Take him first," cried Tom, and Terence, grasping his nephew's hands, lifted him on board; Needham hauled in Tom, and after the boat had been put round the crew pulled away for the brig. Several round shot were fired at her, but fell fortunately either ahead or astern; the musketry was most annoying, but as the summit of the cliff offered no shelter to the Spaniards, they were exposed to a sharp fire kept up by the small-arm men in the boat, and were obliged to retreat in order to reload their pieces every time they fired. They could thus as they ran forward to the edge take but an unsteady aim.

As soon as the midshipmen were in the boat, Needham gave up the helm to Terence, and, reloading his musket, continued to fire at every Spaniard who appeared.

Eager as Terence was to learn how the midshipmen escaped, there was no time just then to ask them questions. The boat was quickly alongside; Tom and Gerald managed to climb on deck without much assistance. Jack only gave Tom a short and hearty greeting; he then ordered him and Desmond at once to go below and stow themselves away.

"We must not have you hit now we have got you," he said. "We will hear all about your adventures when we are out of fire, and that will be, I hope, before long."

Though several shot had struck the brig no one was killed, and two men only slightly wounded, while, as far as could be seen from her deck, it was believed that the enemy had suffered pretty severely. The flying artillery continued along the edge of the cliffs and occasionally fired a shot, but at last, the ground sloping, and being rough and uneven, and covered with trees, they were unable to make way, and wheeling round, disappeared, a shot from Long Tom, which had been brought to bear on them, making them gallop off at the top of their speed.

As it was now growing dusk and the wind had fallen, the *Supplejack* came to an anchor. Tom and Gerald had, in the meantime, got a change of clothes and enjoyed a hearty meal, which they acknowledged they greatly wanted. Jack had desired them to go to his cabin, and by the time he could leave the deck he found them sitting there, laughing and talking if nothing very particular had occurred.

"Well, my boys, you don't seem much the worse for your adventures," he said, as he took his seat at the table.

"No, sir," answered Gerald. "The swim was the worst part of them; indeed, had it not been for Tom, I believe I should have sunk before the boat could have picked us up."

"I want you to tell me all that happened to you; how you escaped from the gauchos who, we heard, carried you off, and how you managed to make your way to the river, which we, by the bye, always thought that you would do if you could."

"Are we to begin from the first?" asked Tom.

"Yes," answered Jack. "I should like to hear all about it, and how the gauchos did not kill you at first."

"I am sure I thought that they would when I found one of their long lassos round my waist, and myself hauled along till the breath was nearly squeezed out of my body. The fellow who caught hold of me, however, dragged me quickly upon his saddle, and galloped away like the wind. I saw that Gerald was treated in the same manner, and though I was sorry for him, I must confess that I was glad to have a companion in my misfortune. I fancy that the fellows thought they had got hold of two very important personages. Away we went for some twenty miles or so without

drawing rein, when we found that we had reached the camp of General Rosas. Had he been at Obligado, I suspect that his troops would not have run away so soon. Our captors carried us at once into his presence, and were somewhat disappointed by finding that we were only a couple of midshipmen, and not the important personages they supposed.

"The general, however, told them to take care of us, and bring us along with him, as he was marching with the chief part of his army to the northward. I must say that our captors were not bad-tempered fellows, and we soon got into their good graces by talking and laughing, though they could not understand much more of what we said than we could of their language. They got us each a horse, which was much pleasanter than riding behind them, and at night we lay down to sleep with a horse-rug over us, and our saddles for pillows. We asked them to teach us how to use the lasso whenever there was a halt, and they were surprised to find how well we soon learnt to use it, though of course we could not equal them.

"Whenever we encamped, they and a good many others used to go out foraging in all directions, and as there was game of all sorts we never came back without a supply.

"Their mode of catching partridges is very curious. Each man supplies himself with a long thin stick, at the end of which a loop is attached; he rides on till he sees a covey of birds on the ground, and then, instead of darting at them, he circles round and round, the birds not attempting to fly, do nothing but run along the ground; the gaucho keeps narrowing his circle till he gets within reach of a bird, when he drops the loop over its head and whips it up a prisoner on his saddle. They used to catch a number of birds in this way, and in an hour or so a fellow would have a dozen or more hanging to his saddle. We imitated them, and after a little practice we also managed to catch a good many, though we did not equal them, of course. From the first we determined to make our escape, and we agreed that if we could catch birds in this way we might supply ourselves with food. In the wilder places we found a number of animals very much like rabbits, only with longer tails and larger teeth, which live in burrows close together. Before camping in an evening we saw hundreds of the creatures, sitting on their haunches in front of their burrows; they would look at us for some time, as if wondering who we were, and would then scamper off and pitch down head foremost into their holes, giving a curious flourish with their hind legs and tails before they disappeared. They are much more difficult to catch than the partridges, though we still hoped to get hold of some of them, should we be hard pressed for food.

"When the day's march was over the gauchos amused themselves by horse-racing, gambling, either with cards, dominoes, or coin, a sort of pitch and toss game, and they would frequently make bets on the strength of their horses. To settle the point their plan was to fasten the two horses stern to stern by a short lasso, secured to the saddle, or girth of either animal, at a short distance from each other. The gauchos having mounted their respective horses, one being placed on one side of a line, drawn on the ground, and the other on the other side, then set to work to lash and spur their steeds in opposite directions until the strongest drew the weaker over the line, the former being thus declared the victor. Their custom of racing gave Desmond and me the idea that we might manage some evening to make our escape. We appeared always to watch their performances with great interest, and, at last, we proposed to race any of them who would like to try with us. None of the grown men would condescend to do so, but two lads came forward and agreed to start. Away we went to the westward, taking good care to let our competitors win. Next evening we had another race, when we were again beaten hollow. We complained that it was the fault of our horses, and that if they would give us better ones they should see that Englishmen were able to ride as well as they could. They agreed to this, and we started in the same direction as before. Gerald's horse was the best, and reached the tree which was to be our goal before either of the young gauchos, who, however, got in before me. I had as long as I was in sight of the camp belaboured and spurred my steed, but as soon as our competitors got ahead of me I let the animal go at the pace he chose.

"We had now, we hoped, gained the confidence of our captors, and Gerald and I agreed that the next evening we would propose racing together.

"We had each of us some reals and smaller pieces of money in our pockets. We pulled several of them out as stakes, which, to assist in disarming suspicion, we gave to one of the gauchos to hold for us.

"This evening we were fortunately on the right of the camp, that is to say on the side nearest the river. We fixed on a tree which appeared on the outskirts of a wood in the south-east as our goal. We both pretended to be much interested in the race, and jabbered away in the same fashion as they do. We felt anxious enough, as you may suppose, about the result, though not in the way our captors fancied.

"We had managed to get hold of some line which we stowed in our pockets, as well as enough food to last us for a couple of days, at all events. The gauchos seemed to think it very good fun, not in the slightest degree suspecting our intentions. Having furnished us with whips, and fastened huge spurs to our feet, they assisted us to mount our somewhat fiery steeds. When once in our saddles we stuck on like wax, though the animals did their best to get rid of us. Our only fear was that some of the gauchos might take it into their heads to accompany us, which would have effectually prevented the success of our undertaking. We rode backwards and forwards several times among the men, and talked away to each other in the style they were accustomed to do, our object being to put off starting as long as possible, till darkness was approaching, that we might have a better chance of escaping. At last we could delay no longer, so riding up side by side to the natives we begged them to start us fairly, when off we set digging our spurs into our horses' flanks and whacking the unfortunate beasts with our whips. The tree, towards which we were directing our course, was fully half a mile off, and as the border of the wood was in shadow, we hoped that we should be able to get into it, and pass through on the other side before our flight was discovered. We dared not turn our heads to see if we were followed, but keeping close together urged on our steeds till the wood was reached.

"A narrow opening which we had not before perceived was before us. We dashed into it and to our satisfaction found that we were not compelled even to pull rein, but galloped on as fast as at first.

"We were now sorry that we had not started earlier, as we should have had more daylight to see our way. Another

wide extent of open ground was before us; we urged on our steeds across it, their feet narrowly escaping the rabbit-holes, which existed in one or two parts. We escaped them, however, and reached a copse, through which we, in vain, tried to find a passage for our horses.

"Afraid at last of losing time, and being overtaken, we agreed to abandon them, and make our way on foot towards the river, which we thought must be at no great distance. Desmond proposed that we should fasten our silver spurs and whips to the saddles, to show the owners that we did not wish to steal their property. No sooner, however, had we dismounted, than having incautiously let go our reins, while we were unstrapping our spurs, our steeds galloped off and prevented us from putting our laudable intentions into execution. It was well that we did not do as we proposed, we agreed, because should our steeds return, the gauchos would know that we had intentionally made our escape, whereas now they might suppose we had tumbled off, and broken our necks, or, at all events, have been unable to remount.

"In either case the fellows will probably come to look for us," observed Desmond, "for they will not like to lose their spurs, on which they set high value."

"Well then, we will fasten them and our whips on this branch, which will show them the honesty of our intentions, if they come to look for us," I said; "we shall have, at all events, several hours' start, as they cannot get through the copse on horseback better than we can."

"We did as I proposed, and then plunging into the copse tried to make our way through it. We tore our clothes and nearly scratched our eyes out, however, but still we made way, our chief fear being that we might fall in with a jaguar; but as we had heard that they are cowardly beasts, and will not attack two people together, we were not much troubled on the subject. Before it grew quite dark, therefore, we cut two sticks to defend ourselves, and two long wands, such as the gauchos use for catching birds; the thick sticks helped us also to make our way through the bushes.

"The stars soon came out brightly, and enabled us to keep a tolerably direct course towards the east, still we could not help wishing to get out of the wood as soon as possible. I had heard about jaguars tracking people; the unpleasant thought came across me, that one might at any moment pounce down upon us. I did not tell Desmond, not wishing to make him as uncomfortable as myself on the subject. I was afraid, had we shouted, which would have been the best means of keeping these creatures off, that we might be heard by the gauchos or any other enemies who might pursue us, and as that was the greatest risk of the two, I thought it would be wiser to make our way in silence. At last we again got into open ground, and fancied that we were going to make good progress, when suddenly we ran against an object which made us start back, with several severe pricks in our legs and hands; had we not had our sticks before us we should have been regularly impaled. On examination we found that they were those prickly plants which we used to call 'puzzle monkeys' in the West Indies, only these grew like so many swordblades, with thorns on both sides, sticking out of the ground. It was impossible to get through this bristling barrier, so we had to turn on one side, and run along it, hoping, at length, to double round the end.

"The hedge might, for what we knew, extend for miles, and we were almost in despair; for should the gauchos follow us we should lose all chance of escaping.

"At last, however, we came to a dip; our hopes revived; it was, we felt sure, the head of a valley, for we saw the ground rising on the other side, and that it must lead us down to the Parana itself, or to some stream running into it. Trees, instead of those abominable prickly pears, thinly covered the banks, and on reaching the bottom we found a rivulet, from which we thankfully quenched our thirst. We agreed that things were beginning to look brighter, the horsemen were not likely to find us, and we should have no difficulty in making our way either in the water, or along the edge of the stream. Gerald reminded me that Bruce, or some other Scotch hero of ancient days, when pressed by his enemies, had escaped from them by wading along the bed of a stream, so that all traces of his footsteps were lost. The only question was, whether our enemies would take the trouble to hunt us so far, and if they did not, we should have had all our pains for nothing. However, as it was the safest plan, we stepped into the stream; on we went down it, feeling with our sticks, for fear of tumbling into a hole. The water was fortunately shallow, and the bed tolerably smooth, so we got on better than we should have done on dry ground.

"At last the water, which had been growing deeper and deeper, came almost up to our hips, and we agreed that it would be safer to land and try and make our way through the bushes, or near the stream, which would serve as a guide. I cannot tell you how delighted we were after we had gone on in this way for a couple of hours to see before us, with the stars reflected on its smooth surface, the broad channel of the river; we could scarcely believe that we had reached it in so short a time. We forgot, indeed, how far we had galloped, and the distance we had come on foot. We at once began to look along the shore for a spot where we might hide ourselves while we rested, for, as you may suppose, we were very tired. For fear that the smoke would betray us we dared not light a fire, which we should have liked to do, to dry our wet clothes. However, we sat down and emptied our shoes of water, which we had been afraid of taking off for fear of hurting our feet, and wrung out our socks and trousers.

"Our hopes of ultimately escaping depended, we believed, on our being seen by some vessel going up or down the river, but before one should appear, we might, we knew full well, be overtaken by the gauchos. Sleepy as we both were, we agreed that one of us must be ever on the watch, while the other slept.

"We tossed up who should keep the first watch. It came to my lot, so Desmond lay down, and I sat by his side, trying hard to keep awake, and I must confess that it was about the most difficult job I ever had in my life. I winked at the stars till they all seemed winking at me, I pinched myself black and blue, I rubbed my hands, I kicked my feet, but all to no purpose; I kept blinking and nodding as much as ever. I should have been off in another moment, so I jumped up and took several short turns along the shore. The thought that a jaguar might spring on Gerald prevented me from going far. As I got to the farther end of the beat I had marked out for myself I stopped, for I fancied that I heard some curious squeaking and grunting, not unlike that made by a litter of very young pigs. I listened attentively, and crept

silently towards the spot. The sounds came from beneath the roots of an old tree. I suspected that they must be produced by a litter of capybaras, or water-hogs, which creatures, as you know, frequent these shores in great numbers. I marked the spot so as not to mistake it. Should we not be able to catch the old animals we might secure the young ones if hard pressed for food. This raised my spirits, and I was able to keep awake, thinking of the best way to trap them.

"When my watch was over, I awoke Desmond, and told him what I had discovered; he agreed with me that we need have no fear of starving.

"'Capital!' he answered, 'and I dare say that we shall find some roots and nuts.'

"'I am afraid, however, that we shall have to eat our meat raw,' I observed.

"'That will be better than having no meat to eat, and I dare say a young capybara will be very tender.'

"Desmond let me sleep on till daylight, or, rather, he fell asleep, and neither of us awoke till the rising sun struck in our eyes. We then discovered that the spot where we lay was exposed to the view of any one coming up or down the river. To our left, rising directly out of the river, were some high cliffs, but we were concealed by the overhanging bushes from any one standing on their summit; while on our right, down the river beyond the mouth of the valley, the ground was broken, and covered with trees and shrubs. We could see no plantations or cottages, or any sign that the country was inhabited. We had, therefore, hopes that we should be able to conceal ourselves till we could get on board some passing vessel, provided we could, in the meantime, obtain food, but on that score we were not much troubled. Having hung up our shoes and trousers to dry in the sun, we had a bathe, which was very refreshing, and then sat down and breakfasted on the dried meat and biscuit we brought with us. The next most important thing we had to do was to find a secure hiding-place. After hunting about we found a regular cave, large enough to conceal half a dozen persons. The mouth was very narrow, which was all the better; it was formed partly by the roots of a large tree, the earth from beneath which had been washed away. There was a hole between the roots which would serve as a chimney, and we agreed, that though it might be dangerous to light a fire in the daytime, when the smoke would betray us, we might venture to do so at night. To hide the light we tore off a number of branches which we stuck into the ground in front of our cave. Having swept out and, levelled the ground, we considered that we had got a very comfortable abode. We did not forget the old capybara and the young ones. We had fitted nooses at the end of our wands, and armed with these we crept close to the tree I had marked. The squeaking was still going on within, so we knew that Dame Capybara and her family were at home. Before long, however, out she came, followed by five or six young ones in line. We should have liked to try and noose her, but she would have broken away from us, so we waited for the last small one of her progeny. I threw my noose over its head, and whipped it up in a moment, when Gerald, seizing hold of it, quickly stopped its cries. The old capybara turned round, but we having got behind a tree, she did not see us, and she, being unacquainted with arithmetic, did not discover that one of her young ones was missing. Feeling pretty sure that we should be able to capture the others in the same way, and perhaps catch her, we returned to our cave. Here we amused ourselves by skinning and preparing the young capybara for the spit. When it was ready we hung it up on a stick stuck in the wall. We then set to work and formed a fireplace of earth, and, as soon as it was finished, we went out again and collected a supply of firewood. When this was done, we were greatly tempted to light a fire and roast our capybara, but prudence prevailed. Instead of that we hunted about, and were rewarded by finding some berries and small plums, which were very ripe, and, as we saw the birds eating them, we had no doubt that they were wholesome.

"'We need have no fear of starving now, faith,' observed Gerald; 'I am not certain but that I would rather live this Robinson Crusoe sort of life for a few weeks than go on board and have to keep watch.'

"Come, come, you ought not to tell the commander that, Tom," exclaimed Gerald, interrupting Tom when he said this. "You know you agreed with me that it would be very jolly fun if it was not for the chance of being caught."

"Yes, I know I did," answered Tom, "but remember I added, if it were not for the anxiety we were causing my brother and Lieutenant Adair."

"Well, youngsters," observed Jack, "it was very natural, though you would have soon got tired of the life; but how did you get on for the remainder of the time?"

"Very well, considering all things," continued Tom; "it was fortunate, however, that we did not light the fire, for as I went down to the river to get some water in my shoe, having nothing else to carry it in, as I looked up towards the cliff I caught sight of several people standing on the top. As their eyes were, however, directed further up the stream, I hoped that they had not caught sight of me, though I could not be sure. At all events, I quickly drew back and hurried to the cave to warn Desmond of the danger we were in. We at once went inside and covered up the entrance as well as we could with the boughs, so that even should any one come to look for us and pass the spot we might escape discovery."

"We lay down anxiously listening for any sound, but none was heard, and at last we both dropped off to sleep.

"'This must not happen again, though,' I said to Gerald, when at length we awoke. 'Perhaps a vessel may have passed down the river while we were snoozing, and we have lost our chance of getting on board. Those fellows were probably looking out for her.'

"This thought made us feel quite unhappy."

"You certainly did lose your chance," observed Jack, "for a steamer which I spoke came down about that time, and you might probably have got on board her."

"I told you so, Gerald," exclaimed Tom, "I was—"

"But it does not matter now," answered Gerald, "all's well that ends well."

"You are right, but it might not have been so had we been shot by those fellows as we were swimming off to the *Supplejack's* boat," observed Tom. "Well, I suppose you want me to cut my yarn short. As soon as it was dark we lighted our fire, which we should have been puzzled to do, had not Gerald had some fusees in his pocket, which he carries, you will understand, to give a light to any one who wants to smoke a cigar."

"I understand," observed Jack, laughing. "You, of course, Mr Desmond, never dream of smoking one yourself?"

"Only occasionally, sir, and Tom and I had finished all I had when we were captured by the gauchos."

"Our fires burned well," continued Tom, "and we roasted our young capybara to perfection; we only wanted salt and pepper, and an onion or two to make it delicious. As it was, with the addition of a little brown bread we had remaining, we made a good meal, and slept like tops till daylight. One of us, you will understand, regularly kept watch on the river while the other searched for provisions, except when we wanted to catch another young capybara, when we had to assist each other. We captured the second in the same way we had the first, with our long wands and nooses; we also caught several birds after dark, roosting on the branches of the trees; we were afraid, however, to venture out as far as the plain above to look for partridges, lest we might have been seen by any of the country people or soldiers who might have been on their way to the cliff I spoke of; we found, indeed, that men were constantly on the watch for passing vessels, and we should to a certainty have been discovered.

"Our chief exploit was catching the big capybara, which we attempted when we had eaten nearly all her young ones. We were afraid if we took the last, that she might suspect that something was wrong and make off. We accordingly got up at night, when we thought that she would be asleep, and placed a couple of nooses at the mouth of her hole, securing the end to a part of the root of the tree which rose above the ground. We then went back to our cave, and roasted the last of the young ones we had caught. As usual, we kept watch by turns: we had become somewhat anxious at night, for we could not help thinking that the smell of our roast pig might attract some keen-scented jaguar to the spot, and I can tell you that the thought of being snatched up at any moment by one of those beasts made us keep our eyes about us, and prevented us from going to sleep. I know it did me, and I am pretty sure that Gerald was not more comfortable in his mind on the subject than I was.

"It was my morning watch, and as soon as daylight returned I called Gerald, and we crept carefully up to the capybara's hole.

"We had not long to wait before we heard her barking, for strange to say, though she was like a pig she did not grunt. She was calling to her solitary young one to get up, I suppose. Presently we felt a pull on one of our lines, and directly afterwards the other was drawn taut. We gave each of them a jerk, and then springing forward with our sticks, we were just in time before the capybara drew back into her hole to give her a couple of stunning blows on the head. We quickly had her out, and a few more blows deprived her of life. It occurred to us that if we dragged her up to our cave, the track might lead any passer-by to it. We therefore fastened her legs together, and carried her on one of our



"THE NEXT INSTANT WE CAUGHT SIGHT OF THE SAVAGE-LOOKING HEAD OF ONE OF THE MONSTERS."

sticks, the little one following, wondering, I dare say, why its mother had taken to move in so curious a fashion, and not seeming to notice us. Desmond proposed that we should tame it, but as we could not manage to find it food, we were obliged to kill it. Not being expert butchers, we were employed most of the day in skinning and cutting up the beasts. Our chief puzzle was to know what to do with the offal. At last we put it into the skin, and carrying it down at night threw it into the river. In the meantime our cave had

the not over-pleasant odour of a butcher's shop in hot weather, while we were in the constant apprehension of a visit from a jaguar. Our regret was that though we had a superabundance of meat we should soon be reduced to short commons, as it was not likely to keep, even when cooked, for more than a couple of days. We had just returned from the river, having accomplished the task I spoke of, and had lighted our fire, when we heard a rustling of the leaves at the entrance, the flames just then blazing up brightly; the next instant we caught sight of the savage-looking head of one of the monsters we dreaded, which had poked its way between the boughs, and was apparently about to spring on us. Desmond instinctively laid hold of the first thing which came to hand. This happened to be one of the capybara's legs which we were about to spit.

"We then seized our sticks to fight for our lives; but the jaguar having caught the tempting morsel, either satisfied with it, or frightened by the bright flames and our sticks, which we flourished in his face, sprang back and bounded away with the meat in his mouth.

"Having repaired our fence, and made it, as we hoped, more secure, we returned to cook and eat our supper. I confess that neither of us felt very comfortable on watch that night, lest the jaguar should come back for a further supply of capybara.

"That was only last night; we little thought at the time how soon our Robinson Crusoe life was coming to an end. Though pleasant in some respects, it was not, as you see, without its drawbacks. Directly the *Supplejack* hove in sight we recognised her; but having seen the enemy on the top of the cliffs, we were in great doubt whether we should succeed in getting off—it seems, indeed, a wonder to me that we were not killed, and I only hope we feel sufficiently grateful for our preservation."

"I am afraid, Tom, that we are not, and never can be, sufficiently grateful for the mercies shown to us," observed Jack gravely. "If we had not been watched over and taken care of, we should none of us be here at the present moment. Now, as you and Desmond look somewhat sleepy, go and turn in."

Gerald was half asleep already, and Tom having given one or two significant yawns, they were both very glad to obey Jack's order.

Chapter Twenty Seven.

The *Supplejack* reaches Baxada de Santa Fé—Plans for the protection of the fleet when returning—A night expedition to survey an island—Alarm—Magnificent exploit—Rocket battery peppers the batteries of San Lorenzo to some effect—Squadron passes unharmed—Escape of the boat—Monte Video reached.

The *Supplejack* continued her course up the river, and the following day got beyond the reach of Rosas' flying artillery. Tom and Gerald, having been well fed during their adventures, were not much the worse for them, and after a good night's sleep were well able to return to their duty. They of course had to repeat their adventures to their own messmates, and Needham and Snatchblock were also eager to hear all about them.

At last the brig reached Baxadar de Santa Fé, a town of some size, built partly at the foot and partly on the side of a lofty hill, which rises above the river. It is surrounded by corrals, or cattle-farms, where thousands of animals are slaughtered for the sake of their hides and tallow alone, which are shipped from the port. As there are not human mouths sufficient to consume the enormous quantities of beef, it is thrown away and carried off by vast flocks of gallinasos, caracaras, carrion crows, and other birds of prey, which hover over the country, their appearance and the odour arising from the putrefying flesh making the place far from agreeable. Here the *Supplejack* found a large fleet of merchantmen, which had been further increased by others which had come down the river. The question was how they all were to get back again to the sea. Two or three steamers, which came up after the *Supplejack* had suffered by a hot fire, opened on them from the batteries, newly thrown up by Rosas, several officers and men having been killed and wounded. The most formidable batteries were those at San Lorenzo, which were now completed, and it could not be expected that the fleet would be allowed to repass them without a strong opposition. Several plans were thought of, the bluejackets and marines might land and storm the batteries, but such an undertaking could only be carried out with great loss of life, as the troops of Rosas were not to be despised, and as the batteries were open in the rear they could not be held without a strong force.

Some weeks were spent at this most undelectable of places, so that everybody was eager to return. No one, however, knew what plan of operation had been determined on. At length the long-looked-for signal was hoisted, and the fleet of men-of-war and merchant-vessels got under weigh and proceeded down the stream. They presented a truly beautiful spectacle, as their clouds of white canvas covered the entire breadth of the river, and certainly never before had so many vessels floated together on its waters.

On the 31st of May they came to an anchor on the Entre Rios shore, about four miles above the formidable batteries of San Lorenzo. Still, no one besides the commander and a few officers entrusted with the secret knew what plan had been determined on. All that the rest were certain of was that a plan had been formed, and should it prove successful that the fleet might escape a severe handling, but otherwise that the guns of San Lorenzo, if well served, might sink or damage every ship in the squadron. Indeed, the deep-water channel, down which the ships must pass, was only about three hundred yards from the guns of the enemy, and which from their elevation could send a plunging fire directly down on their decks.

In front of the batteries, about twelve hundred yards from them, was one of an archipelago of islands, extending for some miles along the eastern or Entre Rios shore of the river, covered with trees, brushwood, and reeds. The passages between these islands and the eastern shore were much too shallow for the navigation of vessels of any size. Of necessity, therefore, the whole fleet had to pass under the high cliff of San Lorenzo, crowned by its formidable batteries. The skippers of the merchantmen were quaking in their shoes, believing that the men-of-war

must be sent to the bottom and effectually block up the channel, so that they would be caught in a trap and fall into the hands of the tyrant Rosas.

All sorts of reports were flying about; some said that one hundred heavy guns were planted on the top of the cliffs, and that red-hot shot and missiles of all sorts would be showered down on them, but still the commodore kept the plan he proposed to adopt secret. The officers of the men-of-war, however, felt confident that whatever it was, it would most likely succeed.

Terence had returned to his ship: Jack was now alone. He was seated in his cabin, when a lieutenant from one of the steamers came on board:—

“Come, Rogers, you are wanted by the commodore, as you are not only to be let into the secret of the plan, but to assist in carrying it out.”

Jack, highly delighted, jumped up, and buckling on his sword accompanied his brother officer on board the flagship.

The expedition was immediately to start to examine the island in front of the batteries. The plan was simple in the extreme, should shelter be found on the island, it was proposed to plant a rocket battery behind it, and as the ships came down to throw up showers of rockets into the fort, so as to drive the Spaniards from their guns till the whole fleet had passed.

Evening was drawing on, the boat was ready, the English and French commodores, Lieutenant Mackinnon, the designer of the scheme, Jack, and several other officers went in her. The oars were muffled, nothing was said above a whisper, and with just sufficient light for them to see their way, they pulled through the narrow passages between the islands, completely hidden from the western shore, till they had reached the large one directly opposite the batteries, the dim outline of which they could discern between the trees. Just as the boat's bows touched the oozy bank a loud rustling was heard, and they fully expected that a jaguar was about to spring upon them. The officers drew their swords to defend themselves, for had they ventured to fire a musket or pistol they would have been betrayed. They looked anxiously, not knowing on whom the animal might spring, when greatly to their relief they saw, not a jaguar, but a harmless capybara or water-hog, which plunged into the water and swam to the opposite bank.

The officers now landed, the seniors first stepping on shore, and made their way over swampy ground, through brushwood, to the opposite or western shore of the island, directly under the batteries. They proceeded in silence, crouching down for fear of being perceived, their object being to ascertain what shelter was to be found for the rocket battery which it was proposed to plant.

Greatly to their satisfaction, they discovered that nature, or rather the river itself, when swollen by the rains, had constructed a bank, in every possible way suited for the object in view; indeed it was such, that one hundred men, working for a week, could not have thrown up one to equal it. Everything being thus found as they could wish, they returned to complete the necessary arrangements. Still, of course, not a word of the plan was made known on board the fleet, lest by any means spies might carry it to the ears of Rosas.

The wind was now blowing up the river, so that, even had everything been ready, the fleet of sailing-vessels could not move.

The next night the rocket party, under the command of Lieutenant Mackinnon, the originator of the plan, took their departure in the paddle-box boat of the steamer to which he belonged, consisting of twelve men of the marine artillery, the same number of seamen, and four officers.

Jack, though well inured to danger, could not conceal from himself the risk that must be run, a pistol going off, or the slightest want of caution of the party, might betray them to the enemy, when boats would be sent across to attack them. Though they might make a good fight with their rockets, they would in all probability be cut to pieces before assistance could reach them. In perfect silence the boat left the ship, few, with the exception of those immediately engaged, being aware where she was going. With muffled oars they pulled along the narrow channel amid the reed-covered islands, keeping a lookout lest any of the enemy's boats might be on the watch. Rosas, however, did not suspect their design, and at length, without accident, they reached the spot at the back of the island, which had been fixed on for effecting a landing. It was a little bay, formed by a point of land on one side of it, running out some twenty feet or more into the stream. Close to this point a large willow-tree had fallen into the river; the boat was run in between the branches, which assisted to conceal her; a number of boughs were also cut and stuck into the shore by her side, some being laid across her, so that she was completely hidden from any passer-by.

As soon as this was done, the party commenced landing the rocket-stands and rockets. The men found it very fatiguing, as they had first to cross a swamp, into which they sank up to their knees, and they then had a considerable distance to go over rough and uneven ground, among thick roots and brushwood, till they reached the bank where the rocket-stands were to be planted. All hands, however, worked without a murmur, and soon had the rocket-stands placed and so directed that the rockets might, as they hoped, just clear the top of the batteries, and fall in among the men at the guns.

The work being accomplished, the men, pretty well knocked up, returned to the boat, where, however, a glass of grog apiece, and some pork and biscuit, soon set them right again. An officer and two men being left to watch the stands and rockets, the rest turned in under a tarpaulin spread over the boat, where they went to sleep. The wind, however, continued blowing up the river, and the fleet could not move. They found that even in daylight they could walk in safety across the island, by crouching down under the bushes till they gained the shelter of the bank. The guards could thus be relieved at stated intervals.

Twenty-eight embrasures, with heavy guns in them, were counted in the forts at the top of the cliffs, instead of the

hundred which had been talked of. These, however, if well served, were sufficient to produce fearful damage among the fleet, if not to destroy it entirely. So near were the batteries, that with pocket telescopes the party could distinguish the faces of the people in them. Among others, they discerned General Moncellia, a brother-in-law of Rosas, who drove up in his carriage with four horses and inspected the troops and guns, little suspecting that his enemies were crouching down so near him. The men had, of course, received strict instructions not on any account to show themselves. The second night, while Lieutenant Mackinnon was watching the batteries through his telescope, he observed the sentry suddenly stop and narrowly eye the bank. What was his dismay to find that one of his men had incautiously stepped forward into a spot where he could be seen.

"Hold fast," whispered the Lieutenant, "do not move as you value your life."

The man obeyed, and to his infinite relief the sentry at last moved on. A few more days passed. The officers spent most of the time under the bank while the men lay concealed in the boat. At length, when dawn broke on the morning of the fourth day, to the satisfaction of every one, a fresh steady breeze was blowing down the river. The men were roused up, and eagerly made their way, crouching as before, among the brushwood to the bank. Here they lay down at the foot of the rocket-stands, ready at a preconcerted signal to start up and open their fire. At any moment, had they been discovered, the guns from the battery might have opened on them and blown them to atoms; but, fortunately, the eyes of the enemy were turned up the stream towards the point from whence the ships were expected to appear. Two guns fired from the flagship was to be the signal that the fleet had got under weigh. About nine AM, the welcome sound reached their ears, a long pole with the flag of Old England fastened at the end was to be planted on the top of the bank, at the elevation of which the first discharge of rockets was to take place. With eager eyes they watched for the appearance of the squadron; the ships of war were at length seen, the steamers leading, followed by a line of merchantmen, one coming after the other till the sternmost was lost in the distance. It was a grand sight as they came silently gliding on till the leading ships got within range of the batteries. The instant they did so they commenced firing their shells with admirable precision. At length the leading ships reached the channel, which lay between the cliffs and the island; the long-looked-for moment had arrived; the commander of the expedition waved his cap, when Jack, who had charge of the flagstaff, leapt boldly up on the bank and planted it in the ground. The ensign flew out to the breeze: it was the signal for the first discharge of rockets. Up, hissing loudly, they flew, while Jack, taking off his cap, made a polite bow to the enemy, and quickly leapt off the bank under shelter. The rockets curving over the heads of the ships, two of them pitched into the very centre of the most crowded part of the batteries, completely driving the gunners from their guns, two went over their heads, and two stuck in the cliffs beneath them. The elevation of the rocket-stands which had been wrongly pointed being quickly rectified, they were once more charged, and as soon as the enemy had returned to their guns and were looking along the sights to take aim at the steamers, Lieutenant Mackinnon jumped up on the embankment, thoughtless of how he was exposing himself, and sung out—

"Pepper, lads! pepper! pepper pepper!"

Up flew the rockets with admirable aim, scattering destruction among the men thickly crowded in the batteries.

Those who were not killed deserted their guns. The slaughter among the troops of Rosas must have been terrific. In one minute forty rockets were poured in among them. A still louder sound was then heard, and smoke and flames were seen ascending from the batteries, a rocket had penetrated an ammunition cart, which had blown up, increasing the confusion. All this time the fleet of merchantmen had been gradually approaching. The men-of-war having already passed, had taken up a position from which they could throw their shells into the batteries; so what with the shells from the ships' guns, and the flights of rockets, the gunners, even though driven back again and again to their guns, were unable to take aim at the ships. While the batteries were shrouded by the smoke from the ammunition waggon, the grass under the bank catching fire, the rocket party were surrounded by so dense an atmosphere that it was impossible for some moments to see what was going forward. The wind, however, soon blew the murky veil aside, when the white sails of the merchantmen, the sun shining brightly on them, were seen gliding by, flights of rockets being sent up the whole time in rapid succession, till the sternmost ship of the squadron was well out of range of the batteries.

The enemy now directed their fire at the island, aiming at the flagstaff, which, however, was some distance from the rocket party. Though the shot came plunging down on either side, the flag still waved defiantly in their faces, while the rockets continued to be sent up; but at length the enemy, discovering the point from whence they came, turned their guns in the right direction. The shot, however, either buried themselves in the bank, or flying over the heads of the gallant little band, went bounding away across the island. The signal of recall was now seen flying from the flagship, and the order for decamping was given, the people being directed to scatter as widely as possible, and to make their way as rapidly as they could, without exposing themselves more than was necessary, to the boat.

The men shouldered the rocket-stands, the remaining rockets, and everything belonging to them.

"We must not leave the flagstaff behind," cried Jack; springing to the top of the bank, he hauled it out of the ground, and waving it in the faces of the enemy, leapt down again, just in time to escape a shot which came flying over his head.

"Now, lads, run for it!" cried the officer in command; and at the word the whole party set off, scampering along through the brushwood towards the boat, while the shot came whistling after them, clipping off the branches of the trees on either side, or plunging into the ground behind them, or whistling over their heads; but thick as had been the shower of iron missiles, when they reached the boat, to their mutual satisfaction, not a single man had been hit. The boat was quickly cleared of the willows which concealed her, and shoved out into the stream.

"Out, oars!" was the word, and away she flew down the river to join the squadron. As they passed the large island, to the south of the one they had occupied, they observed three merchant men which had got on shore, from keeping too much over to the east side. The boats of the squadron had just come up, and were engaged in hauling them off;

two were got free, but the third being immovable, was set on fire to prevent the enemy from benefiting by her cargo. No other vessel was lost, but slight damage was suffered by even those most exposed to the enemy's guns, and not a man was hit.

The flames of the burning vessel cast a lurid glare from bank to bank, as the fleet with flying colours proceeded down the broad stream on their voyage to Monte Video.

Rosas made no further attempt to molest them; he had received a lesson which he was not likely to forget; his power was broken, and he soon afterwards had to fly the country.

The British and French squadron, on their arrival at Monte Video, found, however, that there was still work to be done. Some of the allies of Rosas had been engaged in attempting its capture, but they were quickly put to flight, and a body of marines and bluejackets were sent on shore, to assist the inhabitants in placing the city in a better position of defence.

Chapter Twenty Eight.

Letter from Murray—Jack's reply—The Supplejack ordered home—The voyage—A gale—Long Tom's burial—A wreck seen and boarded—Stella and her friends rescued—Arrival in England—Murray's anxiety relieved—The fate of the Supplejack—Murray's wedding—Jack awakes from his dream—A visit to Ballymacree—Jack caught at last—Conclusion.

Jack found letters from England at Monte Video for him, and among them was one from Murray; he wrote much out of spirits. Mr Bradshaw had deferred his departure from Jamaica, and Stella, who had waited for his escort, was not likely to arrive in England for some time, wrote Murray—

"I would have gone out myself to escort her home, but as she and her friends may sail any day, I might, possibly, on my arrival, find that they had left the island. I must remain, therefore, in England, till I hear something more definite of their intentions. I have received orders to pay off the *Tudor*, so that I shall shortly be a free man. I have not heard whether the *Carib*, the ship for which Mr Bradshaw is waiting, is bound for London or Liverpool, and I am, therefore, at a loss where to take up my quarters to await her arrival. Of course, I am very anxious to be on the spot to meet Stella. I trust that as I am not likely to be employed again for some time, she will not consider it necessary longer to defer our marriage, and I sincerely hope, my dear Jack, that you will be at home to act as my best man."

Jack wrote a reply by Terence, whose ship was on the point of sailing for England.

"Nothing I can wish for would give me greater pleasure than to take care of you on the awful occasion to which you allude. Keep up your spirits, my dear Alick, for I feel very sure that if you are not already spliced by the time I arrive in England, that I shall have the satisfaction, not long afterwards, of attending you as you propose.

"I cannot believe that so sensible a girl as Miss O'Regan is, will longer defer your happiness. Should she contemplate so cruel a proceeding, I must get my sisters, Mary and Lucy, to argue the point with her, and depend upon it they will bring her round. I have promised Terence to pay him a visit to Ballymacree, but I told him that I cannot go till I see you settled. Should you find your fair one's obdurate heart soften before I arrive, he will be delighted to undertake the post you offer me, and I cannot wish for a better substitute. He begs me to say this, and you well know that next to me you have not a truer friend. He has promised to come and stay with us at Halliburton, after he has paid a flying visit to his own home, and we hope to meet you and Mrs Murray there, as my father and mother propose asking you to take it in your way to the north, where we conclude you will wish to introduce your bride to the Highland home you have so often described to us."

Jack said a good deal more, indeed his letter was one of the longest he had ever indited. He, of course, also wrote home, begging Sir John to invite Murray to stay at Halliburton till the arrival of the *Carib*. Terence promised to post the letters as soon as he got on shore, or to deliver Murray's, which was directed to his agent, should he by chance be at Portsmouth.

"Good-bye," said Terence, as they parted, "we shall meet again before long, depend upon that, for I hear that your brig is to be sent home as soon as a steamer comes from England to relieve you; they have an idea that such vessels are more likely to prove efficient slaver-hunters than such small craft as yours."

Jack took an active part in the work going forward at Monte Video, and when it was over he began eagerly to look out for the expected orders to return home.

Two steamers at last arrived, the second came to relieve the *Supplejack*. Without an hour's delay, having already received on board fuel and fresh provisions, the anchor was hove up, and under all sail a course was steered for Old England. Her crew gave three hearty cheers, as she glided out from among the ships destined to remain behind. Desmond had continued on board her, as Terence considered that the longer he remained afloat the better, as it might not be so easy to get him another ship.

Except a pampairo, which, had not Jack been wideawake, might have taken the masts out of the brig, or sent her—where many a vessel of her class has gone—to the bottom, nothing of consequence occurred, until she had got considerably to the north of the line. She had reached about the latitude of Madeira, when a heavy gale sprang up.

For three days she lay exposed to its fury, so severely tried that Jack entertained serious thoughts of heaving Long Tom overboard. Needham gazed at his old friend with sorrowful eye, as Jack suggested that such might be necessary.

"He has done good service, and she has carried him a good many thousand miles without complaining, sir, and, unless it comes on worse than it is at present, she will carry him home safe enough, I hope."

It, however, did come on worse; and, moreover, a leak was sprung, which required half the watch constantly at the pumps. Long Tom was doomed. Jack tried to comfort Needham by saying—

"From what I hear, when the ship is paid off, he will only be looked on as so much old iron, or laid up in the gun-wharf never to bark again, so we shall do him more honour by lowering him into an ocean grave."

The order was given, and, as the brig rolled, Long Tom sent over the side into the foaming waters. The brig evidently floated more buoyantly on being relieved of his weight.

At length the gale broke, and sail being made, the *Supplejack* once more stood on her course.

Evening was coming on; dark, leaden seas, still foam-topped, were rising up sullenly around her as she made her way amidst them, now on the summit of one, now sinking into the valley below, when the lookout shouted—

"The hull of a ship, either dismasted or on her beam-ends away on the lee-bow, sir."

Jack went aloft with his telescope.

"She is a dismasted vessel, there is little doubt about that," he observed to Bevan, as he returned on deck. "Keep the brig away for her."

Evening was approaching, but Jack hoped to be up with the stranger before dark. As the brig drew near her, she was seen to be a large ship, her three masts gone, while no attempt apparently had been made to rig jury-masts. So deep was she, that as she rolled in the heavy seas, the water came rushing over her decks, and gushing out through the scuppers on the opposite side.

Jack felt thankful that he had seen her, as, in all probability, her fate during the night would have been sealed. The brig was steered to pass just under her stern, Jack intending to heave-to to leeward. Just as she got up to her, Tom exclaimed—

"I see her name—it is the *Carib*, the very ship in which Mr Bradshaw intended to come to England."

The eyes of all on board were turned towards the wreck. No one was seen on the deck.

"She must have been abandoned, but I trust that her passengers have been taken off by some other vessel, for should they have left in the boats, their chance of escaping in the heavy sea which has been running would have been small indeed," said Jack, feeling very anxious as he thought of Stella and Murray.

"Possibly the boats may have not long left her," observed Bevan.

"You may be right," said Jack. "Send a couple of men with the sharpest eyes to look out, in case they may be still in sight."

Just then a person was seen emerging from the companion-hatch, who no sooner discovered the brig, than he waved his hands and appeared to be frantically imploring assistance.

"It is Mr Bradshaw himself!" exclaimed Jack, who had been looking through his telescope. He immediately ordered a boat to be lowered, and sung out for volunteers.

"I will go myself, Bevan," he said. "Take charge of the brig."

Needham was the first to step in, others quickly followed, and Jack, with some of his best men, pulled away through the heavy seas towards the ship. It was no easy task to get alongside without the risk of having the boat knocked to pieces. Jack watched his opportunity, and, followed by Needham and Tim Mullens, one of the men, sprang on board. As he did so, he ordered the boat to keep off till he called her.

"Thank Heaven you have come!" exclaimed Mr Bradshaw, as he grasped his hand.

"Quick! quick! the ladies are in the cabin. I charged them not to come on deck for fear of being washed overboard, but from the heavy way the ship is rolling, I suspect that she has not much longer to swim."

"Indeed she has not, I fear," exclaimed Jack, rushing into the cabin. Stella was seated on a sofa, supporting Miss Bradshaw, who, overcome with alarm or illness, appeared to have fainted, while Polly was kneeling by her side, helping her mistress. Miss O'Regan looked amazed at seeing Jack. He, without waiting to utter an exclamation, seized her in his arms, and carried her on deck. Needham took up Miss Bradshaw, while Tim, who had accompanied him, tucked Polly under his arm.

"If you have nerve to leap at the proper time as the boat comes alongside, do so," said Jack to Mr Bradshaw. "If not, wait and I will come back for you."

Jack shouted to the men in the boat to return, and waiting till she was close to, let himself down into her, holding Stella firmly with one arm. Needham and Tim dropped safely with their burdens at the same time. Mr Bradshaw still remained on board.

"Let me go, sir," cried Needham, "I will help him;" and the next moment he was again on deck. Seizing Mr Bradshaw by the hand, he watched the proper opportunity and dragged him down into the boat, both falling, though being

caught by the men they were not much hurt. Jack then sheered the boat off from the wreck, and ordered his men to pull away towards the brig. Scarcely had they got clear than the ship's stern was seen to lift, and her bows plunging into the next sea which came rolling up, it rushed over her deck foaming and hissing, she in a few seconds disappearing beneath the surface, the boat having only just got beyond the influence of the vortex she created. There was no time to ask questions. Jack, being at the helm, could with difficulty attend to the two ladies, who lay in the stern sheets, Stella still attending on her friend. The boat was quickly again alongside the brig, and Jack and Needham lifted the two ladies safely on board. Mr Bradshaw was then helped up the side by the seamen, and the boat being hoisted in, the brig again made sail and stood on her proper course. The ladies were at once conveyed to Jack's cabin, and McTavish being sent for, his appliances soon restored Miss Bradshaw to consciousness.

So much taken up had Stella been in attending her friend, that she had had no time to thank her preserver, or to speak a word on any other subject. Jack had also been too fully occupied to ask questions. Mr Bradshaw now told him that the *Carib* had been struck suddenly by the gale, and her masts carried away. At the same time the captain and his mates, with several of the crew, had either been washed or struck overboard, or killed by the falling masts; and that the rest of the crew, left without officers, had, when they believed the ship to be sinking, taken the only boat which remained. As they had previously broken open the spirit-room, they were probably, before long, overwhelmed by the heavy sea. "We would not have gone with them, had they invited us to do so, for we did not then believe that the ship was about to founder," continued Mr Bradshaw. "When we discovered the awful truth, having no means of escaping, we gave ourselves up as lost, and when you appeared we were awaiting the event which we knew must soon occur."

Jack, of course, said how thankful he was that he had been providentially directed to the spot in time to save their lives; he then mentioned Alick Murray, and asked Stella when she had last heard from him, telling her of the letter he himself had received.

Hers was of about the same date.

"Poor fellow," added Jack, "he seems dreadfully out of spirits; and I trust, Miss O'Regan, that you will do your best to restore them."

Stella said nothing, but Fanny Bradshaw told Jack that she did not think her friend would longer be obdurate.

"I hope not," he answered, "I have promised to be his best man, and I wish to fulfil that engagement before I pay a visit to my old friend, Adair, at Ballymacree. You, of course, will be one of the bridesmaids?"

Fanny said that she had little doubt about that, and changed the subject by making inquiries respecting Ballymacree. Jack, of course, gave the description he had received from Terence.

"And your friend has a number of pretty Irish sisters?" asked Fanny.

"Irish of course they are, and as to their beauty Terence has not said much about that, except that his sister Kathleen is an attractive girl, and observed that I should be able to form an opinion myself on the matter."

Fanny did not ask many more questions about Ballymacree.

Jack at first feared that it might be necessary to put into Funchal, but the weather becoming fine, the leaks were kept under by dint of constant pumping, and at last the *Supplejack* reached soundings in the chops of the Channel. The wind held fair, and she was not long in running up it. Her leaky condition was a sufficient excuse for going at once into Portsmouth harbour, without waiting for orders.

Jack immediately went on shore to report his arrival to the admiral. He was again hurrying on board to escort the ladies and Mr Bradshaw to an hotel, when who should he meet but Admiral Triton, looking scarcely a day older than when he last saw him.

"Jack, my boy, I am rejoiced to see you," exclaimed the old man, "and the more so, as I want your assistance in consoling a heartbroken friend of yours, Alick Murray. He has just received intelligence that the ship in which the young lady he expected to marry was coming home was seen by a vessel just arrived, dismasted in mid-Atlantic, and as the gale continued for several days afterwards, great fears are entertained for her safety."

"My task will be an easy one, then, admiral," cried Jack, "for I have all her passengers safe on board my brig; and if you can tell me where he is to be found, the sooner I relieve his mind the better."

"Let us jump into a hackney coach, and we shall soon be there," exclaimed the admiral.

Jack brought the joyful intelligence to Murray, whom he found almost prostrated. It quickly had the effect of reviving him, and accompanied by the admiral they were soon on board the *Supplejack*.

Whether or not Murray asked Stella the question on that occasion does not matter, but very shortly afterwards, Fanny told Jack that all was settled, and that she had promised to become his soon after their arrival in London, where her father intended to remain for some weeks.

Alick escorted the ladies and Mr Bradshaw to town the next day, after they had somewhat recovered their fatigue by a night's rest.

Jack had to remain at Portsmouth to pay off the brig, though he would rather have accompanied his friends. Admiral Triton stopped also, as he said, to look after Tom and Desmond, but in reality to hear the yarns which he made the youngsters spin about their adventures.

It did not take long to pay off the poor little *Supplejack*, which was then towed up the harbour and placed on the mud, never again to float on blue water.

Needham heaved a deep sigh as he heard the report of her destined fate. It was too true, he found. She was to become a target for the guns of the *Excellent*.

"Well, well," he said, "she has done good service in her day. It is better to be of use to the last than to be broken up, as is the lot of many a once stout ship, for firewood."

Through the interest of Admiral Triton, Needham got charge of a ship in ordinary, where he hoped to remain till he should get appointed to one on active service.

Jack immediately on his arrival wrote to Terence, who had gone to Ballymacree; he had invited Desmond to accompany Tom to Halliburton. In reply, Terence begged him to come over to Ireland as soon as he could tear himself away from home. "Nora is of course anxious to see her boy," he added, "so I beg you will bring him over, and Tom also, if his mother and sisters can spare him." Jack, however, was very doubtful about going to Ballymacree at all; he had been greatly attracted by the person and manners of Fanny Bradshaw, though, to be sure, she had not said anything to make him suppose that she regarded him in any other light than that of a friend, who had rendered her and her father an essential service.

"Well, I will try it, however," thought Jack. "Perhaps at Murray's wedding, I shall be able to judge better how she feels towards me."

Admiral Triton accompanied his young friends up to London, where they remained a couple of days, he taking them to see every sight that could by any possibility be inspected during the time, while Jack spent most of his time with Murray at the Bradshaws'. When he bade farewell, after having promised Alick to return in a couple of weeks, he felt quite as uncertain as at first as to Fanny's feelings towards him.

Of course every one was delighted to see him at Halliburton. Tom and Desmond were as happy as the day was long, they only wished that Archy Gordon, who had gone back to his friends in Scotland, could have been with them. Gerald Desmond behaved with wonderful discretion and propriety.

"Really, Jack, if Lieutenant Adair is as quiet and steady as his nephew appears to be, we need no longer fear, should he come here, that he will play the tricks we once supposed he would," observed Lucy.

"I always told you that Terence is as well conducted a young Irishman as one can wish to meet with," answered Jack. "I will ask him to come over and pay us his long-promised visit before I go to Ballymacree, and he then can attend Murray's wedding with me."

Jack wrote, and Terence accepted the invitation and came. Lucy confessed that she thought Lieutenant Adair was the most pleasing, right-minded gentleman she had ever met.

"Of course he is," said Jack. "But then, remember that he is a half-pay navy lieutenant, and that his paternal estate is in the Encumbered Estate Court."

The day before Murray's wedding, Jack and Terence went up to London, and at once called at his lodgings. They found a gentlemanly-looking man, with the cut of a lawyer, seated with him. He significantly introduced his friend as Mr Stapleton, "who is to undergo the same fate for which I am destined tomorrow."

After some lively conversation, Mr Stapleton took his departure.

"Who is he?" asked Jack. "He seems a very happy fellow."

"He is the destined husband of Fanny Bradshaw," answered Alick. "Matters, for certain reasons, were not settled till after you left town, and therefore Mr Bradshaw did not inform you of the cause of his coming to England. It has been a long engagement; and as Stapleton could not go out to the West Indies, Fanny wisely consented to come to England, and she and Stella arranged, if possible, to marry the same day."

Jack said nothing, he was suddenly awakened from his dream, and he very soon began to doubt whether he had been as desperately in love with Fanny as he had supposed after all. At all events he could earnestly wish her and her husband every happiness.

The wedding took place, and he appeared with as serene a countenance as Terence, who, at the breakfast made a capital speech, and was the life of the party.

The same evening Jack, with Terence and the two midshipmen, set off by the Holyhead mail bound for Ballymacree. Jack did not lose his heart at first sight, but he, at all events, thought Kathleen Adair more charming than her West Indian cousins, or any of the young ladies he had met in the neighbourhood of Halliburton, or, indeed than Fanny Bradshaw herself. He could not help it, whether wisely or not, telling her so one day, and as she forthwith accepted him, he had to write home and inform his father of the fact.

Sir John, in reply, promised his sanction and blessing, provided the young lady would wait till he was a commander. Kathleen said that she would wait till he was an admiral, if he wished, but observed that, for her part, she could not see why a lieutenant should not make as good a husband as a captain. It was a wonder that the two midshipmen did not break their necks out hunting, or finish themselves off in some other way, but happily, while still sound in limb, both they, Jack, and Terence received orders to join a ship fitting out for the East Indies, the arrangement having been made, at Sir John's instigation, by their old friend Admiral Triton.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE THREE LIEUTENANTS ***

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