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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE ISLAND TREASURE ***

John Conroy Hutcheson

"The Island Treasure"

Chapter One.

Off the Tuskar Light.

"All hands take in sail!"

"Stand by y'r tops'l halliards!"

"Let go!"

Sharply shouted out in quick succession came these orders from Captain Snaggs, the hoarse words of command ringing through the ship fore and aft, and making even the ringbolts in the deck jingle—albeit they were uttered in a sort of drawling voice, that had a strong nasal twang, as if the skipper made as much use of his nose as of his mouth in speaking. This impression his thin and, now, tightly compressed lips tended to confirm; while his hard, angular features and long, pointed, sallow face, closely shaven, saving as to the projecting chin, which a sandy-coloured billy-goat beard made project all the more, gave him the appearance of a man who had a will of his own, aye, and a temper of his own, too, should anyone attempt to smooth him down the wrong way, or, in sea parlance, "run foul of his hawse!"

Captain Snaggs did not look particularly amiable at the present moment.

Standing by the break of the poop, with his lean, lanky body half bent over the rail, he was keeping one eye out to windward, whence he had just caught sight in time of the coming squall, looking down below the while at the hands in the waist jumping briskly to their stations and casting off the halliards with a will, almost before the last echo of his shout 'let go!' had ceased to roar in their ears; and yet the captain's gaze seemed to gleam beyond these, over their heads and away forwards, to where Jan Steenbock, the second-mate, a dark-haired Dane, was engaged rousing out the port watch, banging away at the fo'c's'le hatchway and likewise shouting, in feeble imitation of the skipper's roar,

"All ha-and, ahoy! Doomble oop, my mans, and take in ze sail! Doomble oop!"

But the men, who had only been relieved a short time before by the starboard watch, and had gone below for their dinner when 'eight bells' were struck, seemed rather loth at turning out again so soon for duty, the more especially as their caterer had just brought from the cook's galley the mess kid, full of some savoury compound, the appetising odour of which filled the air, and, being wafted upwards from below, made even the swarthy second-mate feel hungry, as he peered down the hatchway and called out to the laggards to come on deck.

"It vas goot, ja," murmured Jan Steenbock to himself, wiping his watering mouth with the back of his jacket sleeve and sniffing up a prolonged sniff of the odorous stew. "It vas goot, ja, and hart to leaf ze groob; but ze sheeps cannot wait, my mans; zo doomble oop dere! Doomble oop!"

Captain Snaggs, however, his watchful weather eye and quick intelligence taking in everything at a glance, liked the second-mate's slowness of speech and action as little as he relished the men's evident reluctance at hurrying up again on deck; for, although barely a second or two had elapsed from his first order to the crew, he grew as angry as if it had been a "month of Sundays," his sallow face flushing with red streaks and his sandy billy-goat beard bristling like wire, every hair on end, just as a cat's tail swells at the sight of a strange dog in its immediate vicinity when it puts up its back.

"Avast thaar, ye durned fule!" he screamed in his passion, dancing about the poop and bringing his fist down with a

resounding thump on the brass rail, as if the inanimate material represented for the nonce the back of the mate, whom he longed to belabour. "Guess one'd think ye wer coaxin' a lot o' wummen folk to come to a prayer-meetin'! Why don't ye go down in the fo'c's'le an' drive 'em up, if they won't come on deck when they're hailed? Below thaar, d'ye haar?—all hands reef tops'ls!"

This shout, which the captain yelled out in a voice of thunder, finally fetched the dawdlers on deck, first one and then another crawling up the hatchway with lingering feet, in that half-hearted, dilatory, aggravating way that sailors—and some shore people, too for that matter—know well how to put on when setting to a task that runs against their grain and which they do not relish; though they can be spry enough, and with ten times the smartness of any landsmen, when cheerfully disposed for the work they have in hand, or in the face of some real emergency or imminent peril, forgetting then their past grievances, and buckling to the job right manfully, in true 'shellback' fashion, as if many-handed, like Briareus, with every hand a dozen fingers on it, and each finger a hook!

So it could be seen now.

The *Denver City*, a ship-rigged vessel of about thirteen hundred tons burthen, bound from Liverpool to San Francisco with a general cargo, had been two days out from the Mersey, battling against bad weather all the way from the start, with a foul wind, that shifted from the west to south-west and back again to the west, dead in her teeth, as she essayed to shape her course down Saint George's Channel to the Atlantic.

First, beating to the westward with the ebb tide, so as to give Great Orme's Head a wide berth, and then making a short board south when she had cleared Anglesey; what with the currents and the thick fog, accompanied with driving rain, that she met on nearing the Welsh coast, she nearly came to grief on the Skerries, the water shoaling rapidly on the lead being hove, shortly before the bright fixed light showing above the red on the Platters rocks loomed close in on the starboard bow. This made it a case of 'bout ship at once, Captain Snaggs thenceforth hugging the Irish side of the channel way and keeping it well on board on the port tack; and so on this second morning after leaving Liverpool, the ship was some six miles south of the Tuskar Light, with a forty-fathom bottom under her and the wind still to the southward and westward, right ahead of her true course, but shifting and veering from one point to another, and with a sudden sharp squall coming every now and then, by way of a change, to increase the labour of the men, already pretty well worn out by forty-eight hours tacking to and fro in the captain's endeavours to beat to windward in the face of the foul weather.

As the *Denver City*, too, reached the more open seaway, the water got rougher, a northern stream setting up the Irish Sea from Scilly meeting the incoming tide round Carnsore Point, and causing a nasty chopping sea; which, save in the sullen green hollows of the waves, was dead and lead-coloured as far as the eye could reach—as leaden, indeed, as the heavy grey sky overhead, where some fleecy floating clouds of lighter wrack, rapidly drifting across the darker background that lined the horizon all round, made the latter of a deeper tone by contrast, besides acting as the *avant courier* of a fresh squall—the wind just then tearing and shrieking through the rigging in short angry gusts and then sighing as it wailed away to leeward, like the spirit of some lost mariner chanting the requiem of those drowned in the remorseless deep!

When the port watch had gone below at 'eight bells,' as mentioned before, to have their dinner, the weather had looked a little brighter, a small patch of blue sky, not quite as big as the Dutchman's proverbial pair of breeches, showing right overhead at the zenith as the ship's bell struck the midday hour, giving a slight promise of better things to come; and so, as Captain Snaggs had been trying to 'carry on' all he could from the time the vessel left the Mersey, working the hands to death, as they imagined, unnecessarily in tacking and beating about in his attempt to make a fair wind out of a foul one, instead of waiting more sensibly for a more favourable breeze, such as might reasonably be expected in another day or two at most—judging by those signs sailors know so well, as do farmers, but which are inexplicable according to any natural meteorological laws—the hands now thought, on being so suddenly summoned again on deck, and forced to leave their untasted meal just as they were in the very act, so to speak, of putting it into their mouths, and with its tantalising taste and smell vexing them all the more, that the 'old man' only roused them out again from sheer malice and devilry, to make another fresh tack or short board, with the object of 'hazing' or driving them, as only slaves and sailors can be driven in these days by a brutal captain and hard taskmaster!

This it was that made them loth to leave their snug and warm fo'c's'le, filled as it was with the grateful odour of the appetising lobsouse which Sam Jedfoot, the negro cook, a great favourite with the crew by reason of his careful attention to their creature comforts, had so thoughtfully compounded for them; and thus it was that they crawled up the hatchway from below so laggardly, in response to the second-mate's pleading order and Captain Snaggs second stentorian hail, as if they were ascending a mountain, and each man had a couple of half-hundred weights tied to his legs, so as to make his movements the slower.

"Hoo-ry oop, mans!" cried the second-mate, in his queer foreign lingo. "Hoo-ry oop, or you vill have ze skipper after yous! He vas look as if he vas comin' down ze poop ladder joost now!"

"Durn the skipper! He ain't got no more feelin' in his old carkiss than a Rock Island clam!" muttered the leading man of the disturbed watch, as he stepped out over the coaming of the hatchway on to the deck, as leisurely as if he were executing a step in the sword dance; but, the next moment, as his eye took in the position of the ship and the scene around, the wind catching him at the moment, and almost knocking him backwards down the hatchway, as it met him full butt, he made a dash for the weather rigging, shouting out to his companions behind, who were coming up out of the fo'c's'le just as slowly as he had done: "Look alive, mates! Ther's a reg'lar screamer blowin' up, an' no mistake. We'll be took aback, if we don't get in our rags in time. Look smart; an' let's show the skipper how spry we ken be when we chooses!"

The captain, or 'skipper', soon supplemented this advice by another of his roaring commands, yelled out at a pitch of voice that defied alike the shriek of the wind, and the noise of the sea, and the slatting of the huge topsails as they

bellied out into balloons one moment and then flapped back again with a bang against the swaying masts, that quivered again and again with the shock, as if the next blow would knock them out of the ship.

“Forrud there! Away aloft, ye lazy skunks!” cried Captain Snaggs, when he saw the watch at last turn out, gripping the brass poop rail in front of him with both hands, so as to steady himself and prevent his taking a header into the waist below, as he seemed to be on the point of doing every minute, in his excitement. “Lay out, thaar, on the yards, ye skulking lubbers! Lay out, thaar, d’ye hear? Thaar’s no time to lose! Sharp’s the word an’ quick the motion!”

The starboard watch, which had been waiting for the others, at once rounded the weather braces, so as to take the wind out of the sails as the men raced aloft, each anxious now to be first out on the yard; and, the reef tackle being hauled out, the spilling lines were clutched hold of, and the heavy folds of the canvas gathered up, the men at the yard-arms seeing to the earring being clear and ready for passing, with the hands facing to leeward, so as to lighten the sail and assist the weather earring being hauled out, as they held the reef-line, and again facing to windward and lightening the sail there in the same fashion, so as to haul out the lee-earring before the signal was given by those out at the end of the yard-arms to “toggle away!”

It was risky work, especially as the ship was rather shorthanded, to attempt reefing the three topsails all at once, but the job was at last accomplished to the captain’s apparent satisfaction, for he sang out for them to come down from aloft; when, the topsail halliards being brought to the capstan, the yards were bowsed again, the slack of the ropes coiled down, and everything made comfortable.

Captain Snaggs, however, had not done with them yet.

“Clew up an’ furl the mainsail!”

“Man the jib down-haul!”

“Brail up the spanker!”

He shouted out these several orders as quickly as he could bawl them, the creaking of the cordage and rattling of the clew-garnet blocks forming a fitting accompaniment to his twangy voice; while the plaintive ‘Yo—ho—hoy—e! Yo—ho—hai—e!’ of the men, as they hauled upon the clewlines and leech and buntlines of the heavy main course, chimed in musically with the wash of the waves as they broke over the bows, dashing high over the yard-arms in a cataract of spray, and wetting to the skin those out on the fo’c’s’le furling the jib—these having the benefit also of a second bath below the surface as well, when the ship dived under as they got on to the footrope of the jib-boom, plunging them into the water up to their middles and more.

“I guess, we’re going to hev it rougher yet,” said the captain presently, when the second-mate came aft, after seeing all snug forward, to ask whether he might now dismiss the port watch to their long delayed dinner. “Thet thaar squall wer a buster, but thaar’s worse comin’, to my reck’nin’. We’d best take another reef in them topsails an’ hev one in the foresail, too.”

“Verra goot, sir!” replied Jan Steenbock, the mate, respectfully, as he made his way forward again to where the men were waiting, anxious to go below to their lobscouse—cold, alas! by now. “Verra goot!”

Captain Snaggs smiled contemptuously after him, and then broke into a laugh, which was shared in by the first-mate, an American like himself, but one of a stouter and coarser stamp and build, albeit he boasted of a more romantic sort of name—Jefferson Flinders, to wit. This worthy now sniggering in sympathy, as he came up the after companion and took his place by the captain’s side, having been roused out before his time by the commotion on deck.

“A rum coon thet, sir,” said he to the captain, in response to his laugh. “He’ll be the death of me some day, I reckon, with that durned ‘verra goot!’ of his’n, you bet, sir!”

“We’ve a rum lot o’ hands altogether aboard, Flinders—chaps ez thinks they hev only come to sea to eat an’ enj’y themselves, an’ don’t want to work fur thaar grub; but, I guess I’ll haze’ ’em, Flinders, I’ll haze’ ’em!” snapped out Captain Snaggs, in reply, his wiry billy-goat beard bristling again as he yelled out in a louder tone,—“Forrud thaar! Mister Steenbock; what air ye about, man—didn’t I tell ye I want another reef taken in them topsails? Away aloft with ye agen; lay out thaar, an’ look spry about it!”

The halliards were therefore again let go, and the same performance gone through as before, with the addition of the men having to go up on the fore yard after they had finished with the topsails, and take a reef as well in the foresail—another piece of touch work.

As the ship was then found not to steer so well close-hauled, without any headsail, on account of the jib being lowered down, the foretopmost staysail was hoisted in its place and the bunt of the spanker loosened, to show a sort of ‘goose-wing’ aft,—this little additional fore and aft sail now giving her just the steadying power she wanted for her helm, and enabling her to lie a bit closer to the wind.

“Thet will do, the port watch!” cried Captain Snaggs at length, and the men were scampering back to the fo’c’s’le in high glee, glad of being released at last, when, as if he’d only been playing with them—as a cat plays with a mouse—he arrested their rush below with another shout,—

“Belay thaar! All hands ’bout ship!”

“Ha! ha!” sniggered Jefferson Flinders, the first-mate, behind him, enjoying the joke amazingly; “guess ye had ’em thaar, cap. Them coons ’ll catch a weasel asleep, I reckon, when they try working a traverse on a man of the grit of yourn!”

"Bully for ye," echoed the captain, grinning and showing his yellow teeth, while his pointed beard wagged out. "Say, Flinders, I'll fix 'em!"

The men, though, did not relish the joke; nor did they think it such an amusing one! It might, certainly, have been necessary to put the ship about, for the leeway she was making, coupled with the set of the cross tides, was causing her to hug the Irish coast too much, so that she was now bearing right on to the Saltee rocks, the vessel having covered the intervening twenty odd miles of water that lay between the Tuskar and this point since the hands had been first called up; but Captain Snaggs could have done this just as well off-hand after the topsails were reefed, without waiting until the men were ready to go below again before giving the fresh order.

It was only part and parcel of his tyrannical nature, that never seemed satisfied unless when giving pain and annoyance to those forced to serve under him.

And so, the men grumbled audibly as they came back once more from the fore hatch, manning the sheets and braces, when the skipper's warning shout was heard,—

"Helm's a-lee!"

"Tacks and sheets!" the next order followed; when the head sails were flattened and the ship brought up to the wind.

Then came,—

"Mainsail haul!" and the ponderous yards were swung round as the *Denver City* payed off handsomely, close-reefed as she was, on the starboard tack, shaping a course at a good right angle to her former one, so as now to weather the Smalls light, off the Pembroke shore, at the entrance to the Bristol Channel—a course that required a stiff lee helm, and plenty of it, as the wind had now fetched round almost due south, well before the beam.

"Thet will do, the watch!" then called out Captain Snaggs once more; but the men were not to be taken in a second time, and waited, grouped about the hatchway, to see whether he would call them back again.

He did not, however.

So, their stopping there made him angry.

"Thet'll do, the watch! D'ye haar?" he shouted a second time. "If ye want to go below fur y'r grub, ye'd better go now, fur, I guess I won't give ye another chance, an' yer spell in the fo'c's'le 'll soon be up. Be off with ye sharp, ye durned skallawags, or I'll send ye up agen to reef tops'ls!"

This started them, and they disappeared down the hatchway in 'a brace of shakes,' the skipper turning round to the first-mate then, as if waiting for him to suggest some further little amusement for the afternoon.

Mr Jefferson Flinders was quite equal to the occasion.

"Didn't you call all hands, cap, jist now?" asked he, with suspicious innocence; "I thought I kinder heerd you."

"Guess so," replied Captain Snaggs. "Why?"

"'Cause I didn't see thet precious nigger rascal, Sam Jedfoot. The stooard an' thet swab of a Britisher boy ye fetched aboard at Liverpool wer thaar, sir, an' every blessed soul on deck but thet lazy nigger."

"'Deed, an' so it wer, I guess," said the captain musingly, as if to himself; and then he slipped back from the binnacle, where he had been talking to the first-mate, to his original position on the break of the poop, when, catching hold of the brass rail as before, he leant over and shouted forward at the pitch of his twangy voice; "Sam Jedfoot, ye durned nigger, ahoy thaar! Show a leg, or ye'll lump it!"

Chapter Two.

"A Gen'leman ob Colour."

"Thet swab of a Britisher boy," so opprobriously designated by the first-mate as having been "fetched aboard at Liverpool" by the captain, as if he were the sweepings of the gutter, was really no less a personage, if I may be allowed to use that term, than myself, the narrator of the following strange story.

I happened, as luck would have it, to be standing just at his elbow when he made the remark, having come up the companion way from the cabin below the poop by the steward's directions to tell Captain Snaggs that his dinner was ready; and, as may be imagined, I was mightily pleased with his complimentary language, although wondering that he gave me the credit of pulling and hauling with the others in taking in sail on 'all hands' being summoned, when every idler on board ship, as I had learnt in a previous voyage to New York and back, is supposed to help the rest of the crew; and so, of course, I lent my little aid too, doing as much as a boy could, as Mr Jefferson Flinders, the captain's toady and fellow bully, although he only played second fiddle in that line when the skipper was on deck, could have seen for himself with half an eye.

Oh, yes, I heard what he said; and I believe he not only called me a 'swab,' but an 'ugly' one as well!

Indeed, I heard everything, pretty nearly everything, that is, and was able to see most of what occurred from the time when we were off the Tuskar Light until Captain Snaggs hailed the cook to come aft; for I was in and out of the

cuddy and under the break of the poop all the while, except now that I went up the companion, and stood by the booby hatch over it, waiting for the captain to turn round, so that I could give him the steward's message.

But the skipper wasn't in any hurry to turn round at first, sticking there grasping the rail tightly, and working himself up into a regular fury because poor Sam didn't jump out of his galley at the sound of his voice and answer his summons; when, if he'd reflected, he would have known that the wind carried away his threatening words to leeward, preventing them from reaching the negro cook's ears, albeit these were as big and broad as the bell-mouth of a speaking trumpet.

The captain, though, did not think of this.

Not he; and, naturally, not recognising the reason for the negro's non-appearance immediately on his calling him, he became all the more angry and excited.

"Sam—Sambo—Sam Jedfoot!" he roared, raising his shrill voice a pitch higher in each case, as he thus successively rang the changes on the cook's name in his queer way, making the first-mate snigger behind him, and even I could not help laughing, the captain spoke so funnily through his nose; while Jan Steenbock, the second-mate, who was standing by the mainmast bits, I could see, had a grim smile on his face. "Sam, ye scoundrel! Come aft hyar at once when I hail, or by thunder I'll keelhaul ye, ez safe ez my name's Ephraim O Snaggs!"

The bathos of this peroration was too much for Jan Steenbock, and he burst into a loud "ho! ho!"

It was the last straw that broke the camel's—I mean the captain's—back, and he got as mad as a hatter.

"Ye durned Dutch skunk!" he flamed out, the red veins cross-hatching his face in his passion. "What the blue blazes d'ye mean by makin' fun o' yer cap'n? Snakes an' alligators, I'll disrate ye—I'll send ye forrud; I'll—I'll—"

"I vas not means no harms, cap'n," apologised the other, on the skipper stopping in his outburst for want of breath, the words appearing to be choking in his mouth, coming out too quick for utterance, so that they all got jumbled together. "I vas hab no bad respect of yous, sare. I vas only lafs mit meinselves."

"Then I'd kinder hev ye ter know, Mister Steenbock, thet ye'd better not laugh with yerself nor nary a body else when I'm on the poop," retorted Captain Snaggs, not believing a word of this lucid explanation, although he did not seemingly like to tell him so, and quarrel right out. "I guess though, as ye're so precious merry, ye might hev a pull taken at thet lee mainbrace. If ye wer anything of a seaman ye'd hev done it without me telling ye!"

Having administered this 'flea in the ear' to the second-mate, the captain turned round abruptly on his heel, with a muttered objurgation, having some reference to Jan Steenbock's eyes; and, as he looked aft, he caught sight of me.

"Jee-rusalem, b'y!" he exclaimed; "what in thunder air ye doin' hyar? The poop ain't no place fur cabin b'ys, I reckon."

"The steward sent me up, sir," I replied, trembling; for he looked as fierce as if he could eat me without salt, his bristly beard sticking out and wagging in the air, as he spoke in that snarling voice of his. "He t-t-old me to tell you, sir, that dinner was ready in the cabin, sir."

The ship at the moment giving a lurch to port, as a fresh blast of wind caught her weather side, sending a big sea over the waist, I rolled up against him as I answered his question.

"Then ye ken skoot right away an' tell him thet I guess I'm boss hyar," cried he, after shoving me back with an oath against the cabin skylight, which I almost tumbled over. "I'm goin' to hev my meals when I chooses, I say, younker, an' not when anybody else likes, stooard or no stooard!"

With this return message, I retreated nimbly down the companion, glad to get out of his reach, he looked so savage when he shoved me; but I had hardly descended two steps, when he called after me with a loud shout, that echoed down the passage way and made my flesh creep.

"B'y!" he yelled, making a jump, as if to grab hold of me. "B'y!"

"Ye-e-e-yes, sir," I stammered, in mortal terror, looking back up the hatchway, though too frightened to return to nearer quarters with him again. "Ye-e-yes, sir."

My alarm amused him. It was a sort of implied compliment to his bullying powers; and he laughed harshly, nodding his head.

"What in thunder air ye afeard on?" he said. "I ain't goin' to kill ye this time, b'y; it's another cuss I'm after, a kinder sort o' skunk of a different colour, I guess. Look hyar, b'y, jest ye make tracks forrud when ye've told the stooard what I've said, an' see whether thet tarnation black nigger's asleep in his galley, or what. Won't I give him fits when I catch him, thet's all—thaar, be off with ye, smart!"

I did not need any second intimation to go, but plunged down the companion stairway as if a wild bull was after me; and, telling the Welshman, Morris Jones, who acted as steward, a poor, cowardly sort of creature, that the captain did not want his dinner yet, hastened through the cuddy, and on to the maindeck beyond, coming out by the sliding door under the break of the poop, which was the 'back entrance,' as it were, to the cabin.

The ship being close-hauled, heeled over so much to leeward that her port side was almost under water, the waves that broke over the fo'c's'le running down in a cataract into the waist and forming a regular river inside the bulwarks, right flush up with the top of the gunwale, which slushed backwards and forwards as the vessel pitched and rose

again, one moment with her bows in the air, and the next diving her nose deep down into the rocking seas; so, I had to scramble along towards the galley on the weather side, holding on to every rope I could clutch to secure my footing, the deck slanting so much from the *Denver City* laying over to the wind, even under the reduced canvas she had spread. To add to my difficulties, also, in getting forwards, the sheets of foam and spindrift were carried along by the fierce gusts—which came now and again between the lulls, when it blew more steadily, cutting off the tops of the billows and hurling the spray over the mainyard—drenched me almost to the skin before I arrived within hail of the fo’c’s’le.

However, I reached the galley all right at last, if dripping; when, as I looked in over the half-door that barred all admittance to the cook’s domain except to a privileged few, what did I see but Sam Jedfoot sitting down quite cosily in front of a blazing fire he had made up under the coppers containing the men’s tea, which would be served out bye and bye at ‘four bells’, enjoying himself as comfortably as you please, and actually playing the banjo—just as if he had nothing else to do, and there was no such person as Captain Snaggs in existence!

He had his back turned to me, and so could not notice that I was there, listening to him as he twanged the strings of the instrument and struck up that ‘tink-a-tink a tong-tong’ accompaniment familiar to all acquainted with the Christy Minstrels, the cook also humming away serenely to himself an old ditty dear to the darkey’s heart, and which I had heard the negroes often sing when I was over in New York, on the previous voyage I had taken a few months before, to which I have already alluded—when I ran away to sea, and shipped as a cabin boy on board one of the Liverpool liners, occupying a similar position to that I now held in the *Denver City*.

This was the song the cook chaunted, with that sad intonation of voice for which, somehow or other, the light-hearted African race always seem to have such a strange predilection. Sam touching the strings of the banjo in harmonious chords to a sort of running arpeggio movement:—

“Oh, down in Alabama, ‘fore I wer sot free,
I lubbed a p’ooty yaller girl, an’ fought dat she lubbed me;
But she am probb unconstant, an’ leff me hyar to tell
How my pore hart am’ breakin’ fo’ croo-el Nancy Bell!”

He wound up with a resounding “twang” at the end of the bar, before giving the chorus—

“Den cheer up, Sam! Don’ let yer sperrits go down;
Dere’s many a gal dat I’se know wal am waitin’ fur you in
de town!”

“I fancy you do want cheering up, Sam,” said I, waiting till he had finished the verse. “The skipper’s in a regular tantrum about you, and says you’re to come aft at once.”

“My golly, sonny!” cried he, turning round, with a grin on his ebony face, that showed all his ivories, and looking in no whit alarmed, as I expected, at the captain’s summons, proceeding to reach up one of his long arms, which were like those of a monkey, and hang the banjo on to a cleat close to the roof of the galley, out of harm’s way. “What am de muss about?”

“Because you didn’t turn out on deck when all hands were called just now to reef topsails,” I explained. “The ‘old man’ is in a fine passion, I can tell you, though he didn’t notice your not being there at first. It was that mean sneak, the first-mate, that told him, on purpose to get you into a row.”

“Ah-ha! Jess so, I sabby,” said Sam, getting up from his seat; although he did not look any the taller for standing, being a little man and having short legs, which, however, were compensated for by his long arms and broad shoulders, denoting great strength. “I’se know what dat mean cuss do it fo’—‘cause I wouldn’t bring no hot coffee to um cabin fo’ him dis mornin’. Me tell him dat lazy stoo’ad’s place do dat; me ship’s cook, not one black niggah slabe!”

“He’s always at me, too,” I chorussed, in sympathy with this complaint. “Mr Flinders is harder on me than even Captain Snaggs, and he’s bad enough, in all conscience.”

“Dat am true,” replied the cook, who had been my only friend since I had been on board, none of the others, officers or men, having a kind word for me, save the carpenter, a sturdy Englishman, named Tom Bullover, and one of the Yankee sailors, Hiram Bangs, who seemed rather good-natured, and told me he came from some place ‘down Chicopee way’—wherever that might be. “But, never yer mind, sonny; needer de cap’n nor dat brute ob a mate ken kill us no nohow.”

“‘Cheer up, Sam! Don’ let your ‘perrits go down—’

“Guess, dough, I’se better go aft at once, or Cap’n Snaggs ‘ll bust his biler!”

And so, humming away still at the refrain of his favourite ditty, he clambered along the bulwarks, making his way to the poop, where the captain, I could see, as I peered round the corner of the galley, was still waiting for him at the top of the ladder on the weather side, holding on to the brass rail with one hand, and clutching hold of a stay with the other.

I pitied the negro; but, of course, I couldn’t help him. All I could do was to look on, by no means an uninterested spectator, though keeping cautiously out of sight of Captain Snaggs’ watchful eye.

The wind was not making such a noise through the shrouds now, for one could distinguish above its moaning whistle the wash of the waves as they broke with a rippling roar and splashed against the side like the measured strokes of a

sledge-hammer on the ship breasting them with her bluff bows, and contemptuously sailing on, spurning them beneath her fore foot; so, I was able to hear and see nearly all that passed, albeit I had to strain my ears occasionally to catch a word here and there.

He had waited so long that perhaps his anger had cooled down a bit by this time, for Captain Snaggs began on Sammy much more quietly than I expected from his outburst against him when I was up on the poop.

He was quite mild, indeed, for him, as I had learnt already, to my cost, during the short acquaintance I had of his temper since we had left the Mersey—as mild as a sucking dove, with a vengeance!

“Ye durned nigger!” he commenced; “what d’ye mean by not answerin’ when I hailed ye?”

“Me no hear yer, mass’ cap’n.”

“Not haar me, by thunder,” screeched the other, raising his voice. “Ye aren’t deaf, air ye?”

“Golly, yeth, massa,” said Sam eagerly. “I’se def as post.”

“Ye ken haar, though, when grog time comes round, I guess!” retorted the captain. “Whar wer ye when ‘all hands’ wer called jest now?”

“Down in de bread room, gettin’ out de men’s grub wid de stooard,” answered the cook, with much coolness; “me no hear ‘all hands’ call.”

“Thet’s a lie,” said Captain Snaggs, furiously. “The stooard wer up hyar on deck, so ye couldn’t hev been down below with him, ye durned nigger! I’ve a tarnation good mind to seize ye up an’ give ye four dozen right away.”

“Me no niggah slabe,” said Sam proudly, drawing himself up and looking up at the captain, as if daring him to do his worst. “I’se one ’spectacle culled gen’leman, sah!”

“Ho! ho! thet’s prime!” laughed out the skipper, astounded at his cheek; while the first-mate sniggered his aggravating “he! he!” behind him. “Oh, ye’re ‘a ’spectable coloured gentleman,’ air ye?”

“Yeth, massa; me free Jamaica born, an’ no slabe,” repeated Sam, courageously, the first-mate’s chuckle having put him on his mettle more than the captain’s sneer. “I’se a free man!”

“Guess ye’ve come to the wrong shop then, my bo,” said Captain Snaggs; “ye’ll find ye ain’t free hyar, fur I’m boss aboard this air ship, an’ want all hands to know it. Ye shipped as cook, hey?”

“Yeth, massa,” replied Sam, as sturdily as ever. “I’se jine as cook fo’ de v’yage to ‘Frisco at ten dollar de month.”

“Then, Master Sam, Sammy, Sambo Clubfoot, ye’ll be kinder good enuff to take yer traps out of the galley an’ go furrud into the fo’c’s’le, as one of the foremast hands. As ye wouldn’t turn out when all hands wer called jist now, ye’ll hev the advantage of doin’ so right through now, watch in an’ watch out all the v’yage! D’ye hear thet, Sam Clubfoot?”

“Dat not my name,” said the other indignantly. “I’se chris’en Sam Jedfoot.”

“Well then, d’ye underconstubble what I’ve sed, Mister Jedfoot, if ye like thet better—thet ye’re cook no longer, an’ will hev to muster with the rest of the crew in the port watch? I’ll put him with ye, Flinders, I know ye hev a hankerin’ arter him,” observed the skipper, in a stage whisper, to the first-mate, who sniggered his approval of this arrangement. “D’ye understand thet, ye durned nigger, or, hev yer ears got frizzed agen, makin’ ye feel kinder deaf?”

“I’se he-ah, cap’n,” replied Sam sullenly, as he turned away from under the break of the poop, and made his way forward again to where I stood watching his now changed face, all the mirth and merriment having gone out of it, making him look quite savage—an ugly customer, I thought, for any one to tackle with whom he might have enmity. “I’se he-ah fo’ suah, an’ won’t forget neider, yer bet!”

Chapter Three.

A Terrible Revenge.

“I’m very sorry for you, Sam,” I said, when he came up again to the galley, making his way forward much more slowly than he had scrambled aft to interview the skipper. “Captain Snaggs is a regular tyrant to treat you so; but, never mind, Sam, we’ll soon have you back in your old place here, for I don’t think there’s any fellow in the ship that knows anything about cooking like you!”

“Dunno spec dere’s am,” he replied, disconsolately, speaking in a melancholy tone of voice, as if overcome at the idea of surrendering his regal post of king of the caboose—the cook’s berth on board a merchant vessel being one of authority, as well as having a good deal of licence attached to it; besides giving the holder thereof an importance in the eyes of the crew, only second to that of the skipper, or his deputy, the first-mate. The next moment, however, the darkey’s face brightened, from some happy thought or other that apparently crossed his mind; and, his mouth gradually opening with a broad grin, that displayed a double row of beautifully even white teeth, which would have aroused the envy of a fashionable dentist, he broke into a huge guffaw, that I was almost afraid the captain would hear away aft on the poop.

"Hoo-hoo! Yah-yah!" he laughed, with all that hearty abandon of his race, bending his body and slapping his hands to his shins, as if to hold himself up. "Golly! me nebber fought ob dat afore! Hoo-hoo! Yah-yah! I'se most ready to die wid laffin! Hoo-hoo!"

"Why, Sam," I cried, "what's the matter now?"

"Hoo-hoo! Cholly," he at last managed to get out between his convulsive fits of laughter. "Yer jess wait till cap'n want um grub; an' den—hoo-hoo!—yer see one fine joke! My gosh! Cholly, I'se one big fool not tink ob dat afore! Guess it'll do prime. Yah-yah! Won't de 'ole man' squirm! Hoo-hoo!"

"Oh, Sam!" I exclaimed, a horrid thought occurring to me all at once. "You wouldn't poison him?"

The little negro drew himself up with a native sort of dignity, that made him appear quite tall.

"I'se hab black 'kin, an no white like yer's, Cholly," said he gravely, wiping away the tears that had run down his cheeks in the exuberance of his recent merriment. "But, b'y, yer may beleeb de troot, dat if I'se hab black 'kin, my hart ain't ob dat colour; an' I wouldn't pizen no man, if he wer de debbel hissself. No, Cholly, I'se fight fair, an' dunno wish to go behint no man's back!"

"I'm sure I beg your pardon," said I, seeing that I had insulted him by my suspicion; "but what are you going to do to pay the skipper out?"

This set him off again with a fresh paroxysm of laughter.

"My golly! Hoo-hoo! I'se goin' hab one fine joke," he spluttered out, his face seemingly all mouth, and his woolly hair crinkling, as if electrified by his inward feelings. "I'se goin'—hoo-hoo!—I'se goin'—yah-yah!—"

But, what he was about to tell me remained for the present a mystery; for, just then, the squalls ceasing and the wind shifting to the northward of west, the captain ordered the lee braces to be slacked off, and we hauled round more to starboard, still keeping on the same tack, though. Our course now was pretty nearly south-west by south, and thus, instead of barely just weathering the Smalls, as we should only have been able to do if it had kept on blowing from the same quarter right in our teeth, we managed to give the Pembrokeshire coast a good wide berth, keeping into the open seaway right across the entrance to the Bristol Channel, the ship heading towards Scilly well out from the land.

She made better weather, too, not rolling or pitching so much, going a bit free, as she did when close-hauled, the wind drawing more abeam as it veered north; and Captain Snaggs was not the last to notice this, you may be sure. He thought he might just as well take advantage of it, as not being one of your soft-hearted sailors, but a 'beggar to carry on when he had the chance,' at least, so said Hiram Bangs, who had sailed with him before.

No sooner, therefore, were the yards braced round than he roared out again to the watch, keeping them busy on their legs—

"Hands, make sail!"

"Let go y'r tops'l halliards!"

"Away aloft thaar, men!" he cried, when the yards came down on the caps; "lay out sharp and shake out them reefs!"

Then, it was all hoist away with the halliards and belay, the mainsail being set again shortly afterwards and the jib rehoisted, with the foretopmast staysail stowed and the reef let out of the foresail.

Later on, the top-gallants were set, as well as the spanker; and the *Denver City*, under a good spread of canvas, began to show us how she could go through the water on a bowline; for, the sea having gone down a bit, besides running the same way we were going, she did not take in so much wet nor heel over half so much as she did an hour before, when beating to windward, while every stitch she had on drew, sending her along a good eight knots or more, with a wake behind her like a mill race.

During the commotion that ensued when we were bracing the yards and letting out reefs and setting more sail, I had lost sight of Sam Jedfoot, the men bustling about so much forward that I retreated under the break of the poop, out of their way; but, from here, I noticed that Sam made himself very busy when the clew-garnet blocks were hauled aft, on the mainsail being dropped, his powerful arms being as good as any two men tailed on to a rope, for there was "plenty of beef" in him, if he were not up to much in the matter of size.

After the bustle, however, I was called in to the cabin by the steward, to help wait at table, as the captain had come down to dinner at last, now that everything was going well with the ship and we were fairly out at sea, the first-mate accompanying him, while Jan Steenbock was left in charge of the deck, with strict orders to keep the same course, west sou'-west, and call Captain Snaggs if any change should take place in the wind.

"I guess the stoopid cuss can't make no durned mistake about thet," I heard the captain say to Mr Flinders, as he came down the companion hatchway, rubbing his hands, as if in anticipation of his dinner; "an', by thunder, I dew feel all powerful hungry!"

"So do I, sir," chimed in the first-mate. "I hope the stooard hez somethin' good for us to eat. I feels raal peckish, I dew!"

"Hope ye ain't too partick'ler," rejoined Captain Snaggs; "fur this 'll be the last dinner thet air conceited darkey, Sam,

'll cook fur ye, Flinders. He goes in the fo'c's'le to-morrow, an' this hyar lout of a stooard shall take his place in the galley."

"'Changey for changey, black dog for white monkey,'" observed the first-mate with a snigger. "Eh, cap?"

"Ye've hit it, Flinders, I reckon," said the other; and, as he gave a look round the cabin before taking his seat, which the Welsh steward stood behind obsequiously, although he could not draw it out, as it was lashed down to the deck and a fixture, the captain added: "Ye'd better see about gettin' the deadlights up to them stern ports, Flinders, afore nightfall. They look kinder shaky, an' if a followin' sea shu'd catch us astern, we'd be all swamped in hyar, I guess."

"Aye, aye, sir!" said the first-mate, seating himself, too; that is, as soon as he noticed that the steward, who had instantly rushed forward to the galley for the dinner, which was keeping hot there, had returned with a smoking dish, which he placed in front of the captain, dexterously removing the cover almost at the same instant—"I'll see to it the first thing when I go on deck again."

"An', Flinders," continued Captain Snaggs, ladling out a good portion of the contents of the dish into a plate, which the steward passed on to the first-mate, "I see a rope's-end hangin' down thaar, too, like a bight of the signal halliards or the boom-sheet, which some lubber hez let tow overboard. Hev it made fast an' shipshape. I hate slovenliness like pizen!"

"So do I, sir, you bet," answered the mate, with his mouth full. "I'll watch it when I go on the poop agen; but, ain't this fowl an' rice jest galumptious, cap?"

"Pretty so so," said Captain Snaggs, who seemed somewhat critical, in spite of his assertion of being ravenous and 'a reg'ler whale on poultry,' as he had observed when Jones took off the dish cover. "Strikes me, thaar's a rum sort o' taste about it thet ain't quite fowlish!"

"M-yum, m-yum; I dew taste somethin' bitterish," agreed Mr Flinders, smacking his lips and deliberating apparently over the flavour of the fowl; "p'raps the critter's gall bladder got busted—hey?"

"P'raps so, Flinders," rejoined the skipper; "but I hope thet durned nigger hasn't be'n meddlin' with it! Them darkeys air awful vengeful, an' when I hed him up jist now, an' told him he'd hev ter go forrud, I heard him mutter sunthin' about 'not forgettin'—guess I did, so."

Captain Snaggs looked so solemn as he said this, with his face bent down into his plate to examine what was on it the more closely, and his billy-goat beard almost touching the gravy, that I had to cough to prevent myself from laughing; for, I was standing just by him, handing round a dish of potatoes at the time.

"Hillo!" he exclaimed, looking up and staring at me so that I flushed up as red as a turkey cock, "what's the matter with ye, b'y?"

"N-n-nothing, sir," I stammered. "I—I couldn't help it, sir; I have got a sort of tickling in my throat."

"Guess a ticklin' on yer back would kinder teach ye better manners when ye're a-waitin' at table," he said, grimly. "Go an' tell the stooard to fetch the rum bottle out of my bunk, with a couple of tumblers, an' then ye can claar out right away. I don't want no b'ys a-hangin' round when I'm feedin'!"

Glad enough was I at thus getting my dismissal without any further questioning; and, after giving Jones the captain's message, I went out from the pantry on to the maindeck, and so forward to the galley, where I expected to find Sam.

He wasn't there, however; but, hearing his voice on the fo'c's'le, I looked up, and saw him there, in the centre of a little knot of men, consisting of Tom Bullover, the carpenter, Hiram Bangs, and another sailor, to whom, as I quickly learnt from a stray word here and there, the darkey cook was laying down the law anent the skipper and his doings.

"De ole man's a hard row to hoe, yer bet," I heard him say, "but he don't get over dis chile nohow! I'se heer tell ob him afore I ship't as how he wer the hardest cap'n as sailed out ob Libberpool."

"Then, why did you jine?" asked Hiram Bangs; "good cooks ain't so common as you couldn't git another vessel."

"Why did yer jine, Mass' Hiram, sin' yer sailed wid him afore, an' knowed he was de bery debble?"

"'Cause I wants ter go to 'Frisco," replied the other; "an', 'sides, I ain't afeared of the old skunk. He's more jaw nor actin', an' a good sailor, too, an' no mistake, spite of his bad temper an' hard words."

"Golly, Hiram, nor ain't I'se funky ob him, neider! My fader in Jamaiky he one big fetish man; an' I not 'fraid ob Captain Snaggs, or de debbel, or any odder man; an' I wants ter go ter 'Frisco, too, an' dat's de reason I'se hyar."

Presently, when I had the chance of speaking to him, I told him of the captain's suspicions; but he only laughed when I begged him to tell me if he had put anything into the cabin dinner, and what it was.

"Yah-yah, sonny! I'se tole yer so, I'se tole yer so—hoo-hoo!" he cried, doubling himself up and yelling with mirth. "I'se tole yer, 'jess wait till bymeby, an' yer see one big joke;' but, chile, yer'd better not know nuffin 'bout it; fo', den yer ken tell de troot if de cap'n ax, an' say yer knows nuffin."

This was no doubt sound advice; still, it did not satisfy my curiosity, and I was rather indignant at his not confiding in me. Of course, I was not going to tell the captain or anybody, for I wasn't a sneak, at all events, if I was only a cabin boy!

Vexed at his not confiding in me, I turned to look over the side at the scene around.

The sun had not long set, and a bit of the afterglow yet lingered over the western horizon, warming up that portion of the sky; but, above, although the leaden clouds had all disappeared, being driven away to leeward long since, the shades of evening were gradually creeping up, and the sea and everything was covered with a purple haze, save where the racing waves rushed over each other in a mass of seething foam, that scintillated out coruscations of light—little oases of brightness in the desert of the deep.

As for the ship, she was a beauty, and sailed on, behaving like a clipper, rising and falling with a gentle rocking motion, when she met and passed the rollers that she overtook in her course, as they raced before her, trying to outvie her speed, and tossing up a shower of spray occasionally over her weather bow, which the fading gleams of crimson and gold of the sunset touched up and turned into so many little rainbows, that hovered over the water in front for a moment and then disappeared, as the vessel crushed them out of life with her cutwater.

The wind still whistled through the rigging, but, now, it was more like the musical sound of an Aeolian harp, whose chords vibrated rhythmically with the breeze; while the big sails bellying out from the yards above emitted a gentle hum, as that of bees in the distance, from the rushing air that expanded their folds, which, coupled with the wash and 'Break, break, break!' of the sea, sounded like a sad lullaby.

All was quietness on deck: some of the late hands having their tea below, where one or two had already turned in to gain a few winks of sleep before being called on duty to keep the first watch. Others again, as I've already said, where chatting and yarning on the fo'c's'le, as sailors love to chat and yarn of an evening, when the ship is sailing free with a fair wind, and there's nothing much doing, save to mind the helm and take an occasional pull at the braces to keep her "full and by."

All was quiet; but, not for long!

It was just beginning to grow dark, although still light enough to see everything that was going on fore and aft, when Captain Snaggs staggered out from the cuddy, coming through the doorway underneath the break of the poop, and not going up the companion hatch, as was his usual habit when he came out on deck.

He looked as if he had been drinking pretty heavily from the bottle of rum the steward had brought in as I left the cabin, an impression which his thick speech confirmed, when, after fetching up against the mainmast bitts, in a vain attempt to work to windward and reach the poop ladder, he began to roar out my name.

"B'y! I wants thet b'y, Chawley Hills! Hillo, Chaw-ley! Chawley Hills!—Hills!—Hills! On deck thaar! Where are ye? By thunder! I'll spif-spif-splicate ye, b'y, when I catch ye! Come hyar!"

I was rather terrified at this summons, the more especially from his being drunk, but, I went all the same towards him.

He clutched hold of me the moment I came near.

"Ye d-d-durned young reptile!" he roared, more soberly than he had spoken before; and, from a sort of agonised look in his face, I could see that something more than mere drink affected him, for I had noticed him before under the influence of intoxicating liquors. "Tell me wha-at thet infarnal nigger put into the grub? Ye know ye knows all about it, fur ye looked guilty when the mate an' I wer talkin' about it at table; an' he's been pizened, an' so am I; an' he sez ye knows all about it, an' so does I; an' what is more, b'y, I'll squeeze the life out of ye if yer don't tell!"

"Oh, please, sir," I cried out; as well as the pressure of his hands on my throat would permit, "I don't know. I don't know anything."

"Cuss ye, b'y. Ye dew know; an', if chokin' won't get it out of ye, we'll try what larrupin' will do!"

So saying, he ordered a couple of the hands standing by to seize me up to the weather rigging; and taking hold of a thick piece of rope, which he had brought with him out of the cabin, he proceeded to deliver blows about my back and shoulders that made me howl again, the strokes seeming to tear the flesh from my bones.

"Won't ye tell, hey?" he exclaimed between each stroke of the improvised cat, which lashed as well, I can answer, as if it had nine tails; "won't ye tell, hey?"

At the third stroke, however, he himself fell upon the deck, putting his hands to his stomach and rolling about doubled up almost in two in his agony; although, when the paroxysm of pain had ceased for the moment, he got up on his feet once more and began lashing away at me again.

But, my deliverer was at hand.

Just as he raised his arm to deliver a fourth stripe across my back, and I shrank back in expectation of it, I heard Sam Jedfoot's voice,—

"Top dat, massa cap?" he called out. "What fur yer lick dat b'y fur?"

"Oh, it's ye, is it?" roared the skipper, turning on him with a snarl. "I wer comin' fur ye presently, ye durned cuss! But, ez ye air hyar, why, ye scoundrel, what did ye make thet b'y do to the dinner? Me an' the mate is both pizened."

"De b'y didn't do nuffin, an' yer ain't pizened, nor Mass' Flinders, neider," said Sam calmly, interrupting the captain before he could scream out another word; "I'se dun it alone. I'se put jalap in the fowl a puppose!"

"Ye did, did ye!" yelled the captain fiercely; and there was a savage vindictiveness in his voice that I had not noticed previously, as he turned round to address the second-mate and a number of the men, who had gathered round at the noise made by the altercation, those that had turned in turning out, and even the look-out coming from off the fo'c's'le away aft to see what was going on. "Men, ye've heard this tarnation villain confess that he's tried to pizen Mr Flinders an' myself. Now ye'll see me punish him!"

With these words, which he spoke quite calmly, without a trace of passion, he drew out a revolver from the pocket of his jacket, cocking it with a click that struck a cold chill to my heart, and made me shudder more convulsively than even the brute's lashes had done the moment before.



"Bress de Lor! don' shoot me, cap'n!" cried poor Sam, edging away from the fatal weapon, as Captain Snaggs raised it; "don't shoot, fo' de Lor's sake!"

"I'm going to kill ye like a dog!" rejoined the other, taking aim; but Sam, quick as lightning darted into the weather rigging, making his way forward along the channels, the captain jumping after him and repeating,—"It's no use. Ye won't escape me, I tell ye, darkey; ye won't escape me! I'll kill ye ez dead ez a dog! Like a dog, d'ye haar?"

As he uttered the last words a second time, as if the repetition of the phrase pleased his cruel ear, there was another 'click,' followed by a bright flash and a sharp report; and then, uttering a wild, despairing cry, which was echoed by the men standing around, poor Sam dropped into the sea alongside, his body splashing up the water right inboard into my face as it fell!

Chapter Four.

Frightened to Death!

"That's murder—murder in cold blood!"

The voice uttering this exclamation, which I at once recognised as that of Tom Bullover, the carpenter, came from amidst a mass of the men, who, attracted by the noise of the row, had gathered from forward, and were clustered together—as I could see sideways from my position there, spread-eagled in the rigging. They were standing by the long-boat, just abaft of poor Sam Jedfoot's now tenantless galley, and immediately under the bellying folds of the mainsail, that rustled and swelled out over their heads, tugging at the boltropes and rattling the clew-garnet blocks, as it was jerked by the wind, which ever and anon blew with eddying gusts as it veered and shifted.

"Who's the mutinous rascal thet spoke then?" cried Captain Snaggs, wheeling round on the instant, quick as lightning, and cocking his revolver with another ominous click, as he faced the group, aiming at the nearest man to him. "Jest ye give me another word of yer jaw, an' I'll sarve ye the same as I sarved thet durned nigger—I will so, by thunder!"

A hoarse murmur, partly of rage and partly expressive of fear, arose from the crew as they shuffled uneasily about the deck, one trying to get behind another; but neither Tom Bullover nor anyone else stepped out to answer the captain, who, seeing that he had cowed them, lowered his awkward looking weapon.

"Ye're a pack of durned skallywags, with nary a one the pluck of a skunk in the lot!" he exclaimed contemptuously, in his snarling Yankee voice; but, just then, the head sails flapping, from the helmsman letting the ship nearly broach to, forgetting to attend to his duties in his eagerness to hear all that was going on, the captain's wrath was directed towards those aft, and he wheeled round and swore at the second-mate, who was on the poop, leaning over the rail, bawling out louder than before:—"What the infernal dickens are ye about thaar, Mister Steenbock? Snakes an' alligators! why, ye'll have us all aback in another minute! Ease her off, ease her off gently; an' hev thet lubber at the

wheel relieved; d'ye haar? Ha ain't worth a cuss! Get a man that ken steer in his place. Jerusalem! Up with the helm at once!"

Fortunately, the jib only gybed, while the fore-topsail slatted a bit against the mast; and all the other sails remaining full and drawing, a slight shift of the helm sufficed to put the ship on her proper course. Still, the captain, now his blood was up, could not afford to lose such a good opportunity both for rating the second-mate for his carelessness in conning the ship and not making the helmsman keep her steady on her course, and also in giving a little extra work to the hands who had dared to murmur at his fearful vengeance on the cook for drugging his food. So he made them bustle about the deck in style, slacking off the lee braces and hauling upon these on the weather side, until we had brought the wind almost over the stern, with the yards pretty nearly square. We were now running before it, rolling from port to starboard and back again from starboard to port, almost gunwales under, with the sail we had on us now, for it was blowing a good ten-knot breeze from the nor'-nor'-west, the breeze having shifted again since sunset, right astern, instead of being dead ahead, as previously, of our proper tract for the open sea.

When Captain Snaggs had seen everything braced round, and the boom-sheet of the spanker likewise eased off, he turned to where I was still lashed up against the main shrouds, in dread expectancy every moment of his renewing the thrashing he had commenced, and which poor Sam's plucky intervention on my behalf had for the time interrupted.

"Well, ye young cuss!" said the skipper, who had been giving all his orders from the lower deck, which he had not left since he had rolled out from the cuddy under the poop in the paroxysm of passion and pain that led to such a dread catastrophe—all that had happened, although it takes a long time to describe, having occurred within a very brief interval of his first outburst on me. "What hev ye got to say for y'rself thet I shouldn't give ye a thunderin' hidin', sich ez I hanker arter, hey? I'm jiggered, too, if I don't, ye young whelp! Fur I guess ye wer kinder in truck with thet durned nigger when he tried to pizen me an' Mister Flinders. I'll skin ye alive, though ye aren't bigger nor a spritsail sheet knot, my joker, fur ye hev'n't got half enuff yet, I reckon!"

So saying, he picked up the rope's-end that he had dropped when he took out his revolver, and was evidently about to lay it on my poor trembling back again, when another groan came from the men forward, who still hung about the windlass bits, instead of going below after squaring the yards. Tom Bullover's voice, I could hear, again taking the lead, as they advanced in a body aft, in a much more demonstrative manner than previously.

"Stow that now, and leave the boy alone," I heard him say. "You've wallopped him already; and there's been enough murder done in the ship!"

Captain Snaggs let fall the cat he had taken in his hand to thrash me with, and once more pulled out from his pocket the revolver; but, in the half-light that lingered now after the sunset glow had faded out of the sky, I noticed, as I screwed my neck round, looking to see what he was doing, that his hand trembled. The next moment he dropped the revolver on the deck as he had done the rope's-end.

"Who's talkin' of murder? Thet's an ugly word," he stammered out, evidently frightened at the result of his rage against poor Sam, and the way in which the crew regarded it. "I—I only shot thet nigger because he pizened me an' the first-mate."

"You should have put him in ze irons," interposed the second-mate, Jan Steenbock, speaking in his deep, solemn tones from the poop above. "Ze mans vas murdert in ze cold blood!"

I could see Captain Snaggs shiver—all his coarse, bullying manner and braggadocio deserting him, as Jan Steenbock's accents rang through the ship, like those of an accusing judge; the index finger of the second-mate's right hand pointing at him, as he leant over the poop rail, like the finger of Fate!

"I did not mean to shoot the coon like to kill him, I only meant to kinder frighten the life out of him, thet's all," he began, in an exculpatory tone, regaining his usual confidence as he proceeded. "The durned cuss brought it on hissself, I reckon; fur, if he hedn't climb'd into the riggin' he wouldn't hev dropped overboard!"

"But, you vas shoot him ze first," said Jan Steenbock, in reply to this, the men on the other side of the captain giving a murmuring assent to the accusation, "you vas shoot him ze first!"

"Aye, thet's so; but I didn't mean fur to hit him, only to skear him. Guess I don't think I did, fur the ship rolled as I fired, an' the bullet must hev gone over his woolly head, an' he let go from sheer frit!"

"Dat might be," answered the second-mate, whom the men left to do all the talking; "but ze—"

"Besides," continued the captain, interrupting him, and seeing he had gained a point, "the darkey pizened my grub. He sea he put jalap in it. Ye heerd him say so y'rselfs, didn't ye?"

"Aye, aye," chorussed the group of men in front of him, with true sailor's justice, "we did. We heard him say so."

"Well, then," argued Captain Snaggs, triumphantly, "ye knows what a delicate matter it is fur to meddle with a chap's grub; ye wouldn't like it y'rselfs?"

"No," came from the men unanimously, "we wouldn't."

"All right, then; I see ye're with me," said the skipper, wagging his beard about as he lay down the law. "I confess I didn't like it. The nigger sed he hocussed our grub; but seeing ez how I an' the first-mate wer took so bad, I believed he'd pizened us, an' it rizzed my dander, an' so I went fur him."

"Aye, aye," sang out the men, as if endorsing this free and rather one-sided version of the affair, Hiram Bangs the

captain's countryman, chiming in with a "Right you air, boss!"

"But you need not have shoot him," insisted Jan Steenbock, perceiving that the skipper was getting the men to take a more lenient view of the transaction than he did. "Ze mans not go aways. You could put him in ze irons!"

"So I could, me joker; though I can't see ez how it's yer place to top the officer over me, Mister Steenbock," retorted the skipper, with some of his old heat. "Ye've hed yer say, an' the men hev hed their'n; an' now I'll hev mine, I reckon! The nigger wer in fault in the fust place, an' I'm sorry I wer tew hard on him; but, now he's gone overboard, thaar's nuthin' more to be done, fur all the talkin' in the world won't bring him back agen! I'll tell ye what I'll do, though."

"What?" shouted out Tom Bullover. "What will you do?"

Captain Snaggs recognised his voice now, in spite of its being nearly dark, and he uttered an expressive sort of snorting grunt.

"Ha! ye're the coon, are ye, thet cried murder, hey?" I heard him mutter under his breath menacingly; and then, speaking out louder he said, that all could hear, "I tell ye what I'll do: I am willin' to go ashore at the first available port we ken stop at an' lay the whole of the circumstances before the British or American consul, an' take the consequences—fur you all ken give evidence against me if ye like! I can't say fairer nor thet men, can I?"

"No, cap," they chorussed, as if perfectly satisfied with this promise, "nothing can be fairer nor that!"

"All right; thet 'll do, the watch, then."

"But, thet b'y thaar?" called out Hiram Bangs, as they were all shuffling forward again, now that the palaver was over and the subject thoroughly discussed, as they thought, in all its bearings; "yer won't leather him no more? The little cuss warn't to blame; the nigger said so, hisself!"

"No, I won't thrash him agen, since he's a friend o' yer's," replied the skipper, jocularly, evidently glad that the affair was now hushed up. "Ye ken cut him down if ye like, an' take him forrud with ye."

"Right ye air, cap, so we will," said Hiram, producing his clasp knife in a jiffey and severing the lashings that bound me to the rigging, "Come along, Cholly; an' we'll warm ye up in the fo'c's'le arter yer warmin' up aft from the skipper!"

The hands responded with a laugh to this witticism, apparently forgetting all about the terrible scene that had so lately taken place, as they escorted me in triumph towards the fore part of the ship; while the captain went up on the poop and relieved Jan Steenbock, speaking to him very surlily, and telling him to go down into the cabin and see what had become of the first-mate, Mr Flinders, and if he was any better, and fit to come on duty. As for himself, he had now quite recovered from the effects of whatever the unfortunate cook had put into the stew he had eaten, and which had alarmed him with the fear of being poisoned.

I, however, could not so readily put the fearful scene I had been such an unwilling witness of so quickly out of my remembrance; and, as I went forward with the kind-hearted but thoughtless fellows who had saved me from a further thrashing, I felt quite sick with horror. A dread weight, as of something more horrible still, that was about to happen, filled my mind.

Nor did the conversation I heard in the fo'c's'le tend to soothe my startled nerves and make me feel more comfortable.

The men's tea was still in the coppers, poor Sam having made up a great fire in the galley before going off on his last journey, and this was now served out piping hot all round, the men helping themselves, for no one had yet been elected to fill the darkey's vacant place. No one, indeed, seemed anxious to remain longer than could be helped within the precincts of the cook's domain, each man hurrying out again from the old caboose as quickly as he filled his pannikin from the bubbling coppers with the decoction of sloe leaves, molasses and water, which, when duly boiled together does duty with sailor-folk for tea!

Then—sitting round the fo'c's'le, some on the edge of the hatch-coaming, some dangling their legs over the windlass bitts, and others bringing themselves to an anchor on a coil of the bower hawser, that had not been stowed away properly below, but remained lumbering the deck—all began to yarn about the events of the day. Their talk gradually veered round to a superstitious turn on the second dog-watch drawing to a close; and, as the shades of night deepened over our heads, so that I could hardly now distinguish a face in the gloom, the voices of the men sank down imperceptibly to a mere whisper, thus making what they said sound more weird and mysterious, all in keeping with the scene and its surroundings.

Of course, Sam formed the principal subject of their theme; and, after speaking of what a capital cook and good chum he was, 'fur a darkey,' as Hiram Bangs put it, having some scruples on the subject of colour, from being an American, Tom Bullover alluded to the negro's skill at the banjo.

"Aye, bo, he could give us a toon when he liked, fur he wer mighty powerful a-fingerin' them strings. He made the durned thing a'most speak, I reckon," observed Hiram Bangs; adding reflectively,— "An' the curiousest thing about him wer thet he wer the only nigger I ever come athwart of ez warn't afeard of sperrits."

"Sperrits, Hiram?" interposed one of the other hands; "what does you mean?—ghostesses?"

"Aye. Sam sed as how his father, a darkey too, in course, wer a fetish man; an' I rec'll'ects when I wer to hum, down Chicopee way, ther' wer an ole nigger thaar thet usest to say thet same, an' the ole cuss wud go of a night into the

graveyard, which wer more'n nary a white man would ha' done, ye bet!"

"You wouldn't catch me at it," agreed another sailor, giving himself a shake, that sent a cold shiver through me in sympathy. "I'd face any danger in daylight that a Christian ain't afeard on; but, as for huntin' for ghostesses in a churchyard of a dark night, not for me!"

"Aye, nor me," put in another. "I shouldn't like old Sammy to come back and haunt the galley, as I've heard tell me. By jingo! I wouldn't like to go into it now that it's dark, arter the way the poor beggar got shot an' drowned—leastways, not without a light, or a lantern, or somethin' or t'other; for, they sez of folks that come by any onnateral sort o' death, that their sperrits can't rest quiet, and that then they goes back to where they was murdered, and you ken see 'em wanderin' around twixt midnight an' mornin', though they wanishes agen at the first streak of daylight."

"I've heerd tell the same," chimed in Hiram Bangs, in a sepulchral voice, that made my heart go down to my toes; "but Sam, he usest to say, sez he, ez how none o' them sperrits could never touch he, cos he hed a charm agen 'em 'cause of his father bein' jest in the ring, an' one of the same sorter cusses—his 'fadder' he called him, poor old darkey! Sam told me now, only last night ez never was, how he'd of'en in Jamaiky talked with ghostesses, thet would come an' tote round his plantation! He sed, sez he, ez how he'd got a spell to call 'em by whenever he liked; thet's what he told me, by thunder!"

"Aye, bo," said Tom Bullover; "and, before poor Sam went aft this very evening, I heard him tell this younker, Charlie Hills, how thet he weren't afraid of that brute of a bullying skipper, and if he came by any harm he'd haunt him—didn't he, Charlie?"

"Ye-es," I replied, trembling, feeling horribly frightened now with all their queer talk, coming after what I had gone through before; "but, I didn't hear him say anything of haunting the ship. I'm awfully sorry for him, Tom; but I hope he won't come back again, as Hiram Bangs says."

"He will, ye bet yer bottom dollar on thet, Cholly, if he ain't made comfable down below in Davy Jones' locker, whar the poor old cuss air now," said the American sailor in his deep voice, increasing my superstitious fears by the very way in which he spoke. "Guess I wouldn't mind shakin' fins with the nigger agen if he'd come aboard in daylight, but I'm durned if I'd like to see him hyar 'fore mornin'! I'd feel kinder skeart if I did, b'y, I reckon."

I had no time to reply; for, the captain's voice hailing us from the poop at the moment made us all jump—I, for one, believing that it was Sam Jedfoot already come back to life, or his ghost!

The next instant, however, I was reassured by a hoarse chuckle passing round amongst the men; while Hiram Bangs called out, "I'm jiggered, messmates, if it ain't the old man up on deck agen!"

Like him, I then caught the sound of Captain Snaggs' nasal twang, although he spoke rather thickly, as if he had been drinking again.

"Fo'c's'le, ahoy!" he shouted; "wake up thaar an' show a leg! Let one of the hands strike eight bells, an' come aft, all ye starbow-lines, to take the first watch."

"Aye, aye, sir!" answered Tom Bullover, leading the way towards the skipper; while Hiram Bangs seized hold of the rope attached to the clapper of the bell, hanging under the break of the fo'c's'le, and struck the hour, then following in Tom's footsteps with a "Here I am, sonny, arter ye!"

I did not remain behind, you may be sure, not caring to stop in the vicinity of Sam's galley after all that talk about him. Besides this, I felt tired out, and my bunk being on a locker outside the steward's pantry, and just within the door leading into the cuddy under the poop, I was anxious to sneak in there without being seen again by the captain, so as to have a lie down, or 'turn in'—if it can be called turning in, with all my clothes on, ready to turn out at a minute's notice!

I managed to get inside, luckily unperceived by the skipper's eagle eye and was furthermore assured of a quiet 'caulk' by hearing him sing out presently to the steward to bring him up some grog, as he was going to remain on deck till the middle watch. I knew from this that I would be undisturbed by his coming below for a good four hours' spell at least; and I soon sank off to sleep, the last thing that I heard being the tramping about on deck of the men when Captain Snaggs roared out some order about making more sail, and the sluicing of the water washing from side to side, as the *Denver City* rolled and pitched, staggering along under a cloud of canvas, with everything set now, right before the wind.

The next thing I heard was a heavy crash of glass, and I woke up just in time to catch the tail end of a combing wave, that dashed in through one of the stern ports, washing the cabin fore and aft. The ship had evidently been pooped by a heavy following sea, that travelled through the water faster than she did before the stiff northward breeze, although we were carrying on, too, at a good rate, as I've said.

Aroused by this, I scrambled to my feet, and recognised Captain Snaggs' voice coming down the companion way; but I did not fear his seeing me, as the swinging lamp over the cuddy table had been put out, and all was in darkness below, save when a sudden bright gleam from the moon, which had risen since I had sought my bunk, shot down through the skylight as the ship rolled over to port—making it all the darker again as she listed to starboard, for her next roll the reverse way necessarily shut out the moonlight again.

Captain Snaggs, I could hear, was not only very drunk, but, as usual, in a very bad temper, as he stumbled about the foot of the companion way in the water that washed about the cabin door.

"Durn thet fool of a Flinders—hic!" he exclaimed, steadying himself before making a plunge towards his berth, which

was on the left, as I knew from the sound of his voice in the distance. "I t-t-old him them ports would git stove in, an'—an'—order'd him to fix the deadlights; but the durned fool ain't done nary a thing, an' there ye air, streenger, thaar ye air!"

He then staggered a bit and flopped about the water; and then, all at once, as I listened, he gave vent to a queer gurgling cry of horror, that seemed to freeze my blood.

"Jerusalem!" he exclaimed, gasping as if choking for breath. "Thaar! thaar!"

A gleam shone down from the moon at the moment through the skylight; and, wonderful to relate, I saw the captain's outstretched hand pointing to—

Something!

It was standing by the cabin door leading out on to the maindeck.

The Something was the figure of poor Sam Jedfoot, apparently all dripping wet, as if he had just emerged from his grave in the sea.

His face, turned towards me, looked quite white in the moonlight, as it became visible for a second and then instantaneously disappeared, melting back again, into darkness as the moon withdrew her light, obscured by the angle of the vessel's side, as the ship made another roll in the contrary direction.

I was almost paralysed with fear, being too much frightened to utter a sound; and there I remained spellbound, staring still towards the spot where I had seen the apparition—half-sitting, half-standing on the locker, having drawn up my feet, so as to be out of the rush of the water as it washed to and fro on the floor.

As for Captain Snaggs, the sight of his victim seemed to affect him even more—at least, so I fancied, from his frenzied cry; for, of course, I could no longer see him.

"Save me! save me!" he called out, in almost as despairing and terror-stricken a tone as that of poor Sam, when he was shot and fell into the sea; and then I heard a heavy splash, as if the captain had tumbled down on his face in the pool slushing about the deck. "Save me! Take him away! The darned nigger hez got me at last!"

Chapter Five.

On Fire in the Hold.

I think I must have swooned away with fright, for the next thing I recollect on coming to myself was the steward, Morris Jones, shaking me.

"Rouse up, you lazy lubber!" he roared in my ears. "Rouse up and help me with the cap'en; he's fell down in a fit, or something!"

Then, I noticed that Jones had a ship's lantern in his hand, by the dim light of which the cabin was only faintly illuminated; but I could see the water washing about the floor, with a lot of things floating about that had been carried away by the big wave coming in through the broken port in the stern sheets, that was also plainly discernible from the phosphorescent glow of the sea without, which every moment welled up almost on a level with the deck above, as if it were going to fetch inboard again and vamp us altogether.

"Wha—what's the matter?" I stammered out, half confused at the way in which the steward shook me; and then, recollecting all that had happened, as the fearful sight both the captain and I had seen flashed all at once on my mind, I put my hands before my face shudderingly, exclaiming, "Oh, the ghost! the ghost!"

"The ghost your grandmother!" ejaculated Jones, giving me another rough hustle. "Why, boy, you ain't awake yet. I'll douse you in the water, and give you a taste of 'cold pig,' if you don't get up and help me in a minute!"

"But I saw it," I cried, starting to my feet and looking wildly around to see if the apparition were still there. "I saw it with my own eyes; and so did Captain Snaggs, too!"

"Saw what?"

"The ghost of poor Sam Jedfoot."

Morris Jones laughed scornfully.

"You confounded fool, you're dreaming still!" he said, shaking me again, to give emphasis to his words. "I should like to know what the nigger cook's ghost were doin' in here. Where did you see his ugly phiz agen, do you say?"

"There!" I answered boldly, pointing to the corner by the cabin door, where, as the steward flashed his lantern in the direction, I could still see something black and hazy waving to and fro. "Why, there it is still, if you don't believe me!"

"Well, I'm blowed!" he exclaimed, going over to the place and catching hold of the object that had again alarmed me. "You are a frightened feller to be skeared by an old coat! Why, it's that Dutch second-mate of ourn's oilskin a-hangin' up outside his bunk that you thought were Sam's sperrit when the light shone on it, I s'pose. You ain't got the pluck of a flea, Cholly Hills, to lose your head over sich a trifle. There's no ghostesses now-a-days; and if there was, I don't think as how the cook's sperrit would come in here, specially arter the way the skipper settled him. Man or ghost,

he'd be too much afeard to come nigh the 'old man' agen, with him carryin' on like that, and in sich a tantrum. I wonder Sam hadn't more sense than to cross his hawse as he did. I were too wary, and kep' close in my pantry all the time the row were on, I did. I wern't born yesterday!"

"But the cap'en saw it, too, I tell you," I persisted. "He yelled out that Sam was there before he tumbled down; and that was how I came to look and notice the awful thing. You can believe it or not, but I tell you I saw Sam Jedfoot there as plain as life—either him or his ghost!"

"Rubbish!" cried Jones, who meanwhile had put the lantern he carried on the cabin table, and was proceeding to lift up the captain's head and drag him into a sitting posture against the side of one of the settles that ran down the cuddy fore and aft. "Just you light up one of them swinging lamps, and then come and help me carry the skipper to his bunk. He's dead drunk, that's what he is; and I wonder he ain't drowned, too, lying with his nose in all thafe water sluicing round. As for the ghost he saw, that were rum, his favour-rite sperrit. He ought to 'ave seed two Sams from the lot he's drunk to-night—two bottles as I'm a living sinner, barrin' a glass or two the first-mate had, and a drop I squeezed out for myself, when I took him up some grog on deck at the end of the second dog-watch!"

"Two bottles of rum!" I exclaimed in astonishment. "Really?"

"Aye; do you think me lying?" snapped out Jones in answer; "that is, pretty nigh on, nearly. I wonder he ain't dead with it all. I 'ave knowed him manage a bottle afore of a night all to hisself, but never two, lor the matter o' that. It ought to kill him. Guess he's got a lit of 'plexy now, an' will wake up with the jim-jams!"

"What's that?" I asked, as the two of us lifted the captain, who was breathing stertorously, as if snoring; "anything more serious?"

"Only a fit of the horrors," said Jones nonchalantly, as if the matter were an every-day circumstance, and nothing out of the common; "but if he does get 'em, we must hide his blessed revolver, or else he'll be goin' round the ship lettin' fly at every man Jack of us in turn! I'll tell Mr Flinders to be on his guard when he comes-to, so that some one 'll look arter him."

As he spoke, the steward slung the body of the unconscious man into his cot, I staggering as I lifted the captain's legs, which, although they were very thin and spindleshanky, wore bony and heavy, while I was slim and weak for my age. Besides which, the thrashing I had received the evening previously had pretty well taken all the strength out of me, combined with my subsequent fright from the ghost, which I could not help believing in, despite all Jones's sneers and assertions to the contrary. Of course, though, there was no use arguing the point with him; he was so obstinate—like all Welshmen!

However, between the two of us, we got Captain Snaggs laid in his bed, where he certainly would be more comfortable than wallowing about in the water on the cabin floor. Then, Jones and I left him, just propping up his head with the pillows, so that he should not suffocate himself. He could not well tumble out, the cot having high sides, and swinging besides with the motion of the ship, being hung from the deck above on a sort of gimbal joint, that worked in a ball and socket and gave all ways.

The steward then went back again into his bunk adjoining the pantry to have his sleep out; but I felt too excited to lie down again.

I did not like to remain there alone in the cabin after what had passed, listening to the thuds of the waves against the sides of the ship, and the weird creaking of the timbers, as if the vessel were groaning with pain, and the heavy breathing of the captain in his cot, that rose above all these sounds, for he was snoring and snorting away at a fine rate; so, I proceeded out on to the lower deck, experiencing a chill shudder as I made my exit by the door where I had seen Sam Jedfoot's spectre in the moonlight.

I almost fancied it was still there!

When I got out under the break of the poop, I found all quiet, with the port watch on duty, for Mr Flinders, the first-mate, was in charge, he having relieved the second-mate, with whom the captain had remained until he left the deck at midnight; and, an Tom Bullover and Hiram Bangs, my only friends amongst the crew, had gone below with Mr Steenbock and the rest of the starboard hands, there was nobody whom I could speak to and tell all that I had seen.

I felt very lonesome in consequence; and, although I was not a bit sleepy, having managed to get a good four hours' rest before I was awakened by Captain Snaggs coming stumbling down the companion way, as well as by the noise made by the sea smashing into the cabin at the same time, yet I was tired enough still not to be averse to stowing myself away under the lee of the long-boat. I took the precaution, however, to cuddle up in a piece of old tarpaulin that was lying about, so that the first-mate should not see me from the poop, and set me on at once to some task or other below, in his usual malicious way—Mr Flinders, like Captain Snaggs, never seeming to be happy unless he was tormenting somebody, and setting them on some work for which there wasn't the least necessity!

The moon was now shining brightly and lots of stars twinkling in the heaven, which was clear of clouds, the bracing nor'-westerly wind having blown them all away; and the *Denver City* was bounding along with all plain sail set before the breeze, that was right astern, rolling now and again with a stiff lurch to port and then to starboard, and diving her nose down one moment with her stern lifting, only to rise again buoyantly the next instant and shake the spray off her jib-boom as she pointed it upwards, trying to poke a hole in the sky!

What with the whistling of the wind through the cordage, and the wash of the waves as they raced over each other and broke with a seething 'whish' into masses of foam, and the motion of the ship gently rocking to and fro like a pendulum as she lurched this way and that with rhythmical regularity, my eyes presently began to close. So, cuddling myself up in the tarpaulin, for the air fresh from the north felt rather chilly, I dropped off into a sound nap, not waking

again until one of the men forward struck 'six bells,' just when the day was beginning to dawn. This was in spite of my being 'not a bit sleepy,' as I said.

I roused up with a start, not; knowing where I was at first; but it was not long before the fact was made patent to me that I was aboard ship, and a cabin boy as well to boot—a sort of 'Handy Billy,' for every one to send on errands and odd jobs—the slave of the cuddy and fo'c's'le alike!

Before he had imbibed so much rum, and just prior to his going on the poop that time when he startled us all so much in the fo'c's'le by his hail for Tom Bullover and the rest of the starboard hands to come aft and relieve the port watch, Captain Snaggs, as I afterwards learnt, had spoken to the steward, telling him that he was to take over poor Sam Jedfoot's duties for awhile, until the men selected a new cook from amongst themselves. Jones was told to commence work in the galley the next evening, with especial injunctions to be up early enough to light the fire under the coppers, so that the crew could have their hot coffee at 'eight bells,' when the watches were changed—this indulgence being always allowed now in all decent merchant vessels; for Captain Snaggs, if he did haze and bully the hands under him, took care to get on their weather side by looking after their grub, a point they recollected, it may be remembered, when he appealed to them in reference to his treatment of poor Sam.

Now, Morris Jones did not relish the job; but, as the first-mate had been present when the captain gave his orders, albeit Mr Flinders was rather limp at the time, from the physicking he, like the skipper, had had from the jalap in the stew, the steward knew that he would recollect all about it, even if the rum should have made the captain forget. So, much against his inclination, he turned out of his bunk at daybreak to see to lighting the galley fire; when, whom should he chance to come right up against on his way forward but me, just as I had wriggled myself out of the tarpaulin and sat up on the deck, rubbing my half-opened eyes.

Jones was delighted at the opportunity for 'passing on' the obnoxious duty.

"Here, you young swab!" he cried, giving me a kick to waken me up more thoroughly, and then catching hold of me by the scruff of the neck and pulling me up on my feet, "stir your stumps a bit and just you come forrard along o' me. I'm blessed if I'm going to do cook an' stooard's work single-handed, an' you lazy rascallion a caulkin' all over the ship! First I finds yer snug down snoozin' in the cabin, an' now here, with the sun ready to scorch yer eyes out. Why, yer ought ter be right down 'shamed o' yerself. I'm blessed if I ever see sich a b'y for coilin' hisself away an' caulkin' all hours of the day and night!"

Jones was fond of hearing himself talk, as well as pleased to have some one he was able to bully in turn as the skipper bullied him; and so, he kept jawing and grumbling away all the while we were getting up to the galley, although that did not take very long—not by any means so long as his tongue was and the stream of words that flowed from it when he had once begun, as if he would really never end!

"Now, you young beggar," said he, opening the half-door of the cook's caboose and shoving me inside, "let us see how soon you can light a fire an' make the water in the coppers boil. I'll fill 'em for you while you're putting the sticks in; so heave ahead, an' I'll fetch a bucket or two from the scuttle butt!"

He spoke of this as if he were conferring a favour on me, instead of only doing his own work; but I didn't answer him, going on to make a good fire with some wood and shavings, which Sam used to get from the carpenter and kept handy in the corner of the galley, ready to hand when wanted. I knew by this time, from practical experience, that words on board ship, where cabin boys are concerned at all events, generally lead to 'more kicks than ha'pence,' as the saying goes!

Soon, I had a good blaze up, and the steward on his part filling the coppers, they were both shortly at boiling-point; when, going aft to his pantry, Jones fetched out a pound of coffee, which he chucked into the starboard copper, which held about four gallons, and was not quite filled to the brim. He evidently had determined to propitiate the crew at the start by giving them good coffee for once and plenty of it; as there were only eighteen hands in the fo'c's'le, now that Sam had gone, besides himself and me—leaving out the captain and mates, who belonged to the cabin, and of course did not count in, but who made our total complement in the ship twenty-three souls all told.

Jones, too, dowsed into the copper a tidy lot of molasses, to sweeten the coffee; and so, when it was presently served out promptly at 'eight bells,' he won golden opinions in this his first essay at cooking, the men all declaring it prime stuff. I think, though, I ought to have had some of the credit of it, having lighted the fire and seen to everything save chucking in the coffee and molasses, which anybody else could have done quite so well as the steward!

Jones kept me too busy in the galley to allow me time to speak to Tom Bullover and Hiram Bangs, when they turned out to relieve the port watch; but, later on, when the decks had been washed down, and the sun was getting well up in the eastern horizon, flooding the ocean with the rosy light of morning, I had an opportunity of telling my friend the carpenter of what I had seen in the cabin.

Much to my disgust, however, he laughed at my account of Sam Jedfoot's ghost having appeared, declaring that I had been dreaming and imagined it all.

"No, Charley, I wouldn't believe it if you went down on your bended knees an' swore it, not save I seed Sam with my own eyes, an' even then I'd have a doubt," said Tom, grinning in the most exasperating way. "Why, look there, now, at the skipper on the poop, as right as ninepence! If he'd been in the state you say, an' were so orfully frightened, an' had seed Sam's sperrit, as you wants to make me swallow, do you think he'd look so perky this mornin'?"

I could hardly believe my eyes.

Yes, there was Captain Snaggs, braced up against the poop rail in his usual place, with one eye scanning the horizon to windward and the other inspecting the sails aloft, and his billy-goat beard sticking out as it always did. He looked

as hearty as if nothing had happened, the only sign that I could see of his drunken fit of the night before being a cut across the bridge of his long hooked nose, and a slight discolouration of his eye on the port side, the result, no doubt, of his fall on the cabin floor.

Tom Bullover could read my doubts in my face.

“You must have dreamed it, Charley, I s’pose, on account of all that talkin’ we had in the fo’c’s’le about ghostesses afore you went aft an’ turned in, an’ that’s what’s the matter,” he repeated, giving me a nudge in the ribs, while he added more earnestly: “And, if I was you, my boy, I wouldn’t mention a word of it to another soul, or the hands ’ll chaff the life out of you, an’ you’ll wish you were a ghost yerself!”

Tom moved off as he uttered these last words with a chuckle, and accompanied by an expressive wink, that spoke volumes; so, seeing his advice was sound, I determined to act upon it, although the fear struck me that Jones, the steward, would mention it even if I didn’t, just to make me the laughing-stock of the crew.

However, I had no time then for reflection; Captain Snaggs, as if to show that he had all his wits about him still, calling out for the hands forward to overhaul the studding-sail gear and rig out the booms; and, by breakfast time, when the steward and I had to busy ourselves again in the galley, the *Denver City* was covered with, a regular pyramid of canvas, that seemed to extend from the truck to the deck, while she was racing through the water at a rate of ten knots or more, with a clear sky above and a moderate sea below, and a steady nor-nor-west wind after us.

At noon, when the captain took the sun and told us forward to “make it eight bells,” we learnt that we were in longitude 8 degrees 15 minutes West, and latitude 49 degrees 20 minutes North, or well to the westward of the Scilly Islands, and so really out at sea and entered on our long voyage to California.

This fact appeared to give no little satisfaction to the crew, who raised a chorus whenever a rope had to be pulled or a brace taughtened, the fine weather and brighter surroundings making the sailors apparently forget, with that sort of happy knack for which seafaring folk are generally distinguished, all the rough time we had coming down Saint George’s Channel, when off the Tuskar, and the terrible events of the preceding day.

That very afternoon, indeed, the last act that was to blot out poor Sam Jedfoot’s memory from the minds of all the hands took place, the skipper ordering the usual auction of the dead man’s effects to be held on the fo’c’s’le; when, such is the comedy of life, the very men who were so indignant about the captain shooting him a few hours before now cut jokes about the poverty of the darkey’s kit, when his sea-chest was opened and its contents put up for sale to the highest bidder!

Sam’s banjo led to a spirited competition, Hiram Bangs finally succeeding in becoming its purchaser for five dollars, which Captain Snaggs was authorised to deduct from the American sailor’s wages—crediting it to the cook’s account, should the dead man’s heirs or assigns apply for any balance due to the poor darkey when the ship arrived in port.

The rest of the things only fetched a trifle; and, with the disposal of his goods and chattels, all recollection of the light-hearted Sam, who was once the life of the fo’c’s’le, passed out of everyone’s mind. Hiram stowed the banjo away in his box, for he could not play it, and had only bought it from its association with its late owner, who used to make him, he said, merry and sad, ‘jest as the durned nigger liked,’ with the melody he drew from the now silent strings.

And yet, somehow or other, it seemed destined that Sam should not be so soon forgotten, at least by me; for, in the evening, when I took in the cabin dinner and remained to wait at table, in lieu of the steward, who was too much occupied in cooking to come aft, Captain Snaggs brought up the subject again.

He was in high spirits at the manner in which the ship was travelling along, appearing to have quite recovered from his drinking bout; and when I uncovered the dish that I placed before him, he made a joke about it to the first-mate, who, according to custom, shared meals with the skipper in the cuddy and always sat down the same time that he did, the second-mate having to shift by himself, and eat when he had the chance between watches.

“Guess thaar ain’t no jalap in this lot, Flinders, hey?” said the captain, with a snigger; “thet thaar cuss of a stoard would be too skeart of my fixin’ him same ez I done thet durned nigger to try on any games, ye bet!”

“I reckon so, boss,” replied the other, with his mouth full, stuffing away in his usual fashion. “Ye potted the coon nicely, ye did; an’ sarved him right, too, fur meddlin’ with the grub. I thought I wer pizened sure!”

“An’ so did I, by thunder!” echoed Captain Snaggs, bringing his fist down with a bang on the table, that almost made Mr Flinders’ plate leap out of the ‘fiddle’ in which it was placed, to prevent it from spilling its contents as the ship rolled. “I did so, by thunder! I sw’ar, or else I wouldn’t a’ shot the cuss. Them hands furrud thinks I’m going to be sich a durned fool ez to call in at Bahia or Rio, an’ make a statement of the case, telling how the nigger got overboard; but ye catch me stoppin’ at any a port ’fore I drops anchor in ‘Frisco. Ye knows better ner thet, Flinders, hey?”

The first-mate sniggered sympathetically at this, expressing by a wink his confidence in the skipper’s promise to the men; and the two laughed with much heartiness and fellow feeling over the credulity of those who had been so easily satisfied, and gone back to their work, confidently trusting in Captain Snaggs’ word and honour.

A little later on, when the rum bottle was produced, the captain alluded to his excess of the night before in the same jocular vein:—

“Must keep a kinder stiffer helm this evenin’, Flinders,” he observed, helping himself to a tumblerful, and then passing on the bottle to the mate; “guess I wer a bit sprung yesterday?”

"Aye, cap, ye hed y'r load," replied Mr Flinders, with a grin; adding, however, in fear of the skipper taking offence: "Not mor'n ye could carry, though. Ye scooted down the companion all right at eight bells."

"Thet's so," said the other; "but, d'ye know, Flinders, I wer flummuxed up inter a heap when I got below, an' saw snakes terrible. I guess I seed, too, thet air durned nigger, an' hed a notion he wer come back agen to haunt me—I did so, Flinders, by thunder!"

"Ye must take keer, cap," responded the first-mate to this confession. "If ye don't draw in a bit ye'll be hevin' the shakes, an' thet 'd never do, I reckon."

"I guess not; but last night I wer kinder overcome with all the muss, an' might jist hev swallerd a drop or so too much, I reckon. Good rum can't hurt nary a one—thet is, in moderation, Flinders, strictly in moderation."

So saying, Captain Snaggs helped himself to another stiff tumblerful; and how many more glasses he had afterwards I could not say, as he dismissed me just then, telling me I could go forwards when I had cleared away the things—which I did in a jiffy, glad to quit the cabin and its occupants.

On reaching the fo'c's'le, I found that the steward had, as I perceived, told the men of my fright, and so I got finely chaffed about 'Sam's ghost.' The next day I was revenged, though; for, Jones spoiled the crew's dinner, and got so mauled by the indignant sailors that he had to beat a retreat back to the cabin, giving up thus ingloriously his brief tenancy of the galley.

Hiram Bangs was then elected cook in his place by the hands, with whom the captain left the matter, to settle it as they pleased; and, as the good-natured Yankee selected me to be his 'mate' or assistant, by this means I was relieved of any further association with the Welshman, and released from his tyranny, taking up my quarters thenceforth with the crew forward.

The nor'-westerly wind lasted us right across the Bay of Biscay and down to the Western Islands; and, we were only becalmed for a day or so, with light, variable breezes between the Azores and Madeira, when we picked up the nor'-east trades, which rattled us onward past the Canaries and Cape Verde.

From thence, all went well on board, nothing eventful happening until we were close up with the Equator, in latitude 7 degrees North, and longitude about 28 degrees West, when, late in the evening of our thirtieth day out, just as the man at the wheel had been relieved, and the port watch, under charge of the first-mate, come on duty at 'eight bells,' I smelt something burning in the forepeak.

Looking to see what was the matter, I noticed a thin column of smoke coming up from the small hatch under the fo'c's'le.

Of course, I went aft at once and told Mr Flinders, who would not believe me at first; but, as one of the other hands followed me up, bringing the same report, he was at length induced to descend the poop ladder and go forward to judge for himself whether we had told the truth or not, muttering the while, though, that it was "all a pack o' durned nonsense!"

He did not think this long, however, for hardly had he got beyond the long-boat, when the smoke, which had got much denser while he had been wasting time palavering without taking action, blowing into his face convinced him that the matter was really serious.

All his nonchalance was gone in a moment, as well as his discretion; for, without pausing to consider the effect that any sudden disclosure of the danger might have on the crew by destroying their coolness and pluck, he roared out at the pitch of his voice, as he banged away with the heel of his boot on the deck:

"All hands ahoy! Tumble up thaar! Tumble up! The shep's on fire in the hold!"

Chapter Six.

Cape Horn Weather.

"Je-rusalem!" exclaimed Captain Snaggs, rushing out from the cabin in his night-shirt, having just turned in, and not stopping to dress—as the fluttering white garment and his thin legs showing beneath plainly demonstrated. This I noticed when the mass of heavy clouds with which the sky was covered overhead shifted for a moment, allowing a stray gleam from the watery moon to light up the deck, and saw the skipper hurrying up to the scene of action, where he was the first to arrive. "What's all this durned muss about?"

Jan Steenbock answered him. He had not gone below when his watch was relieved, and being attracted by the row, was now preparing for emergencies by rigging a hose on to the head-pump, so that this could be at once passed down into the hold if necessary—the first-mate being too frightened to do anything, even to reply to the captain when he spoke. Indeed, he seemed perfectly paralysed with fear.

"Dere vas shmoke come out vrom ze forepeak," said the second-mate, in his deep guttural tones; "and I zinks dere vas one fire in ze holt. Mishter Vlinders vas give ze alarm and cal't all hands."

"Guess I heerd thet; an', I reckon, Mr Flinders hed better hev comed an' told me quietly, instead of skearin' everybody into a blue funk!" snapped out Captain Snaggs, dancing about on his spindleshank legs like a pea on a hot griddle, and dodging the smoke as it puffed in his face, while peering forward to see whence it came. "Hev any of yer chaps ben down below to prospect whaar the durned thing is?"

"It vas in ze forepeak, cap'n," said Jan Steenbock, in response to this question. "I vas zee it meinselvs."

"Is the hose ready?"

"Aye, aye, sir!" shouted back a score of voices, all hands being now on deck and every one forward, save the helmsman and steward—the latter, no doubt, snoozing away comfortably in his bunk, and not troubling himself about the disturbance, thinking, if he thought at all, that the call of the first-mate was only probably to shorten sail, in which case he might just as well remain where he was. "The hose is rigged and the head-pump manned, sir."

"Then let her rip!" shouted the skipper. "Go it, my hearties, an' flood it out. I've hed nary a fire aboard my ship afore; an' I don't want to be burnt out now, I reckon, with all them dry goods an' notions below, by thunder! Put your back into it, ye lubbers, an' let her rip, I tell ye; she's all oak!"

One party of men attended to the pump, Jan Steenbock directing the end of the hose down the half-opened hatch, the lid having been partly slipped off by some one. The captain ranged the rest along the gangway, passing the buckets; and these a couple of others standing in the forechains dipped in the sea, hauling them up when full and handing them to those nearest, the skipper clutching hold when they reached him and chucking their contents down below.

The smoke in a minute or two perceptibly diminished in volume; and, presently, only a thin spiral wreath faintly stole up, in lieu of the thick clouds that had previously almost stifled us.

A wild hurrah of triumph burst from the crew; and the second-mate was just about descending into the forepeak, to get nearer the fire and see whether it had been thoroughly put out, when the entire cover of the hatchway was suddenly thrown violently off, and the dripping head and shoulders of a man appearing right under his very nose startled Jan Steenbock so much that he tumbled backward on the deck, although, impassive as usual, he did not utter a cry.

The captain did though.

"By the jumping Jehosophat!" he yelled out, also hopping back precipitately, with his night-shirt streaming out in the wind, which must have made his legs feel rather chilly, I thought, "who in thunder's thaar?"

"Me," replied a husky voice, the owner whereof coughed, as if he were pretty well suffocated with the smoke and water. "It's all right; it's only me."

"Jee-rusalem!" ejaculated Captain Snaggs, rather puzzled. "Who's 'me' I'd like ter know, I guess?"

"Tom Bullover," answered my friend the carpenter, now lifting himself out of the forepeak, when shaking himself like a big Newfoundland dog, he scattered a regular shower bath around. "It's all right below, and there's no fire there no longer."

"An' what in the name of thunder wer ye a-doin' on down thaar, hey?" asked the skipper, quite flabbergasted at his unexpected appearance, Tom looking like a veritable imp from the lower regions, all blackened and begrimed, for the moon escaping from the veil of vapour that now nearly concealed the entire vault of the heavens just then shone down on us again, throwing a sickly light on the scene. "How kern ye to be down in the forepeak at all, my joker?"

"I went down just afore my watch was up to look up a spare old tops'l we stowed away there, me and Hiram, the week afore last, to see whether it wouldn't do in place o' that main to'gallant we carried away yesterday," replied Tom, rather sheepishly; "an' I s'pose I fell asleep, for it was only the water you kept a-pouring down as woke me up, an' I was most drowned afore I could reach the ladder an' catch hold of the coamin' of the hatch to climb up."

"An' sarve ye right, too, if we hed drowned ye, by thunder!" roared Captain Snaggs, thoroughly incensed, "ye durned addle-headed lubber! I guess ye hed a lantern with ye, hey?"

"Yes," confessed the delinquent; "in course I took a light down to see what I was a-doin' of."

"'In course'!" repeated the captain, in savage mimicry of Tom's way of speaking; "an' yer durned lantern got upsot, or kicked over, or sunthin', an' so, I guess ye sot fire to the sails, hey?"

"No, sir, there's nothing hurt to mention," replied Tom, more coolly; "it was only some old rags and greasy waste that the cook shoved down there that caught, which were the reason it made such a big smoke."

The skipper snorted indignantly at this explanation; and then, craning his long neck over the hatchway, he sniffed about, as if trying to detect some special smell.

"'Big smoke,' hey!" he cried, as he stood upright again, and shook his fist in Tom's face. "I guess theft's jest the ticket, ye thunderin' liar! Ye've been shamming Abraham in yer watch, an' sneaked down thaar to hev a pipe on the sly, when ye should hev bin mindin' yer dooty, thet's what's the matter, sirree; but, I'll make ye pay for it, ye skulkin' rascallion. I'll stop ye a month's wages fur the damage done to the ship—if not by the fire, by the water we've hove in to put it out, an' ye ken tote it up, if ye like, yerself!"

Captain Snaggs then ordered the second-mate to go down and see if all danger were really over, and nothing left smouldering, not trusting to Tom's assurance to that effect; and, presently, when Jan Steenbock came up again with a satisfactory report, the skipper, who was now shivering with the wet and exposure in such a light and airy costume, returned back to his cabin to finish his sleep in peace—not, however, without giving a rating to Mr Flinders, for his behaviour, which he said was as bad as that of the carpenter.

The starboard watch were then told that they might go below, though it was getting on for midnight, when they would have to turn out again, and keep the deck till the morning.

I don't know how it was, but, from that night, everything went wrong with the ship.

The very next afternoon, a tremendous thunderstorm broke over us, and a nasty blue, zigzagging streak of lightning struck our mizzen-royal mast, splintering the spar and sending the tye-block down on the poop, nearly killing the second-mate.

If it had been Mr Flinders it wouldn't have mattered so much, but Jan Steenbock was a decent fellow and a good seaman, being much liked by all hands, barring the skipper, who, of course, disliked him because he took the men's part and let them have easy times of it in his watch.

This was the beginning of a fourteen days' spell we had of rolling about in the sweltering calms of the Doldrums; and then, when we at last managed to drift cross the Line, we had another fortnight's stagnation before we met the south-east trades, only a couple of degrees or so below the Equator.

By this time, every man on board was heartily sick of the ship and tired of his company, for the captain was continually grumbling with the mates and hazing the crew, and the hands as constantly falling out among themselves. Only my two friends, Tom Bullover and Hiram, the Yankee sailor, really remained chummy or contented out of the whole lot. The rest seemed thoroughly dissatisfied, complaining of their grub and everything.

Some of them declared, too, that the vessel was unlucky and under a curse, saying that they heard strange noises at night in the hold, though I did not think much of this, Tom and Hiram between them having nearly succeeded in chaffing me out of my belief in having seen Sam Jedfoot's ghost.

On getting a fair wind again, the ship, which had lost almost a lunar month through bad weather and calms and no weather at all, began to travel once more southward, steering almost west-sou'-west on the port tack; but as we reached down the South American coast-line towards Cape Horn, we nearly came to grief on the Abralhos, the *Denver City* just escaping laying her bones there by the 'skin of her teeth,' to use Tom Bullover's expression to me next morning, as I was serving out the coffee—the peril having been met in the middle watch, when I was asleep, and knew nothing about it until it was over and we were sailing on serenely once more.

Then, again, off the mouth of the La Plata, when nearly opposite Buenos Ayres, although, of course, some five hundred miles or more from the land, we suddenly encountered a terrific 'pampero,' as the storms of that region are styled; and, if Captain Snaggs hadn't smelt this coming in time, we should have been dismasted and probably gone to the bottom with all hands.

As it was, we only managed to furl the upper sails and clew up the courses before the wind caught us, heeling the vessel over almost broadside on to the sea; and then everything had to be let go by the run, the ship scudding away right before the gale, as if towed by wild horses, with the sheets and halliards and everything flying—for, at first, the hail that accompanied the wind beat down on us so fearfully that no one was able to face it and go aloft.

That night, one of the hands who came up to the galley to light his pipe, and who had previously spoken of the noises he had noticed, as he said, about the deck during the still hours of the early morning, when all sounds seem so much louder than in the daytime, both aboard ship and ashore, declared that during the height of the pampero he had heard Sam Jedfoot's voice distinctly singing that old negro ballad of which he used to be so fond when in life, chanting it almost regularly every evening on the fo'c's'le to the accompaniment of his banjo:—

“Oh, down in Alabama, 'fore I wer sot free,
I lubbed a p'ooty yaller gal, an' fought dat she lubbed me!”

Of course, Hiram Bangs and Tom Bullover, who were smoking inside the galley at the time, laughed at the man for his folly; but he persisted in his statement, and went away at last quite huffed because they would not believe him.

This was not the end of it all, however, as events will show.

Chapter Seven.

A Haunted Ship.

A week later, Captain Snaggs, after drinking heavily during the evening, was seized with a fit of delirium similar to the one he had that night when he frightened me so terribly, for he rushed out of the cuddy, screaming that 'thet durned nigger Sam' was after him again.

He made my flesh creep; and I wouldn't have gone afterwards into the stern of the ship at night, without a light, for a good deal, nor would any of the fo'c's'le hands either, excepting, perhaps, Tom Bullover. I am certain Hiram Bangs would have been even more reluctant than myself to have ventured within the presumptive quarters of the ghost.

But, it was when we were off Cape Horn itself, though, that we encountered our greatest peril.

The *Denver City* had got down well below the latitude of the stormy headland that is to mariners like the 'Hill Difficulty' mentioned in the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' carrying with her up to then the light, favourable breezes we had encountered after leaving the south-east trades which had previously wafted her so well on her way; when, all at once, without hardly a warning, the sea began to grow choppy and sullen, and the air thick and heavy. The sky, too, which had been for days and days nearly cloudless, became overcast all round, heavy masses of vapour piling

themselves upwards from the horizon towards the zenith, to the southward and westward, gradually enveloping ship and ocean alike in a mantle of mist.

“Cape Horn weather,” observed Tom Bullover meaningly, as he squinted to windward; “we’ll have a taste of it presently!”

“Aye, bo,” said Hiram, from the door of the galley opposite, where the carpenter was holding on to the weather rigging; “I wonder what the skipper’s about, keepin’ all thet hamper aloft an’ a gale like thet a-comin’! I reckon he’d better look smart, or we’ll be caught nappin’, hey?”

Captain Snaggs, however, was also on the look-out; and, almost ere Hiram had finished his sentence, he shouted out for all hands to take in sail.

“Way aloft thaar!” he cried; “lay out on the yards, men, an’ close reef the tops’ls. We’re going to hev a blow!”

And we did have a blow.

The men were just ready to haul in the weather earring of the mizzen-topsail, the last they were handing, the fore and main having been already made snug, when a storm of wind and hail and snow struck us which in a few minutes coated the deck and rigging and every portion of the upper works of the ship with thick ice. At the same time, the sea, rolling in enormous waves, broke over our counter, throwing sheets of water aboard, which seemed to freeze in the air before it fell.

I was standing on the poop, lending a hand at the mizzen halliards with the rest of the ‘idlers’—as those who are not regular sailors are called, although I was fast trying to become a real salt under the apt tuition of Hiram Bangs and the carpenter—when this fierce blast came.

Goodness gracious! It pinned us all down to the deck, as if we were skittle-pegs, making our faces smart again with the bitter downpour.

Next, followed a short lull, during which the reef tackle was hauled out and the halliards manned, the yard being swayed up again; and then, those aloft were able to come down and find a more comfortable shelter below than the rigging afforded.

But, now, occurred a curious circumstance.

As the hands who had been up on the mizzen-yard reefing the topsail stepped from the ratlines on to the deck of the poop before getting down to the waist below, one of the men, Jim Chowder, the same who had said that he had heard Sam Jedfoot’s voice in the ship since he had been lost overboard, whispered to me as he passed:—

“Listen!” he said.

That was all—

“Listen!”

The wind had suddenly died away for a moment, although the sea was like an ocean of mountains lumbering over each other; and as I ‘listened’, as Jim the sailor had told me, I heard a musical sound that I instantly recognised. It was that of the negro cook’s banjo, and Sam’s voice, too, most unmistakably, singing the same old air I knew so well:

“Oh, down in Alabama, ‘fore I wer sot free.”

The instrument seemed to give out a double twang at this point, as if all the strings were twitched at once, and I noticed that Captain Snaggs, who stood near me, turned as white as a sheet.

“Thunder!” he exclaimed, his eyes almost starting out of his head. “The Lord hev mercy on us! What air thet?”

As if in answer to his question, the same wild, ghostly melody was repeated, the sound seeming to hover in the air and yet to come from underneath the deck under our feet, the tune swelling in intensity as we all listened, so that every man on board must have heard it as well as the captain and myself.

And then, just as the last bar was struck with another resounding twang, a fiercer blast than the first caught the ship on her port quarter, and she heeled over to starboard until her deck was almost upright, while at the same time a terrible wave washed over us fore and aft, sweeping everything movable overboard.

I held on to the weather rigging like ‘grim Death,’ amidst a mass of seething foam, that flowed over the poop as if it were the open sea, with the roar of rushing waters around me and the whistling and shrieking of the wind as it tore through the shrouds and howled and wailed, sweeping onward away to leeward.

The spirit of the storm seemed to have broken loose; its black cloud-wings covering the heavens and fanning up the waves into fury, and then hurling them at the *Denver City*, which, poor, stricken thing, quailed before the onslaught of the cruel blast and remorseless rolling billows which followed each other in swift succession. These bore her down, and down, and down, until she was almost on her beam-ends, labouring heavily and groaning and creaking in every timber, and looking as if she were going to capsize every instant.

Not a man on board but thought his last hour had come.

The noise of the raging elements, however, in this mad commotion at once drowned the sound of the weird,

mysterious music that had previously filled the air, affecting us all so strangely, especially Captain Snaggs, who seemed to be stricken by a spell as long as the sad strain echoed in our ears. But, the moment that we ceased to hear the phantom chaunt, the skipper recovered himself, his sailor instincts getting the better of his superstitious fears and sudden fright.

Fortunately, he had clutched hold of the poop rail as the fierce gust caught the vessel, or, otherwise, he would have been carried over the side, and be struggling for dear life half a mile, at least, astern, where the hen-coops and casks that had been washed overboard were now bobbing about, as they sank slowly out of sight on the crest of the wave that had cleared our decks.

A thorough seaman, in spite of his malevolent disposition and bullying manner, which, I suppose, he could not help, he knew at once what was best to be done under the circumstances—what, indeed, was the only thing that would save the ship, and which, if it could be done, had to be done quickly.

Still grasping the rail with one hand, he made a motion with the other to Jan Steenbock to put the helm up, for the second-mate, being on the poop, had immediately jumped to the wheel to the assistance of the man there, who had as much as he could do single-handed to keep down the spokes, the ship steering wildly in such a heavy, tumbling sea as was boiling around us. The captain the next moment clambered to the mizzen-topsail sheets and halliards, and let them go by the run, an example that was instantly followed by those on the deck below, Tom Bullover, who was in charge there, anticipating the skipper's intention, although he could not catch the order he bawled out at the same time that he lifted his hand to warn the helmsman—the terrible din kept up by the waves and wind alike preventing a word from reaching any one standing a yard beyond Captain Snaggs, had he spoken through a speaking trumpet and been possessed of lungs of brass!

At first, it looked as if these measures had been adopted too late, the vessel lay so helplessly over on her side; but, in a little while, although it seemed a century to us, with our lives trembling in the balance, during the interval of a brief lull she slowly righted again. Then, paying off from the wind, she plunged onward, pitching and rolling and careering before the gale as it listed, yawing to port and starboard and staggering along; throwing tons of water over her fo'c's'le as she dived and then taking in whole seas over her quarter as she rolled on, the following waves overtaking her—just like a high mettled steed that had thrown its rider and was rejoicing in its temporary freedom.

The canvas aloft was ballooning out, and the ropes slatting and cracking, with blocks banging against the spars, all making a regular pandemonium of noise, in conjunction with the hoarse shriek of the sou'-wester and the clashing of the billows when they broke, buffeting the *Denver City* as if they would smash in her topsides at every blow!

Mr Flinders, the first-mate, who had got his arm hurt shortly before the first blast struck us and had gone below to have it bound up by the steward, now crawled up the companion and approached the skipper, shouting something in his ear that, of course, I could not catch.

Captain Snaggs, however, apparently understood what he said, and approved of his suggestion, for he nodded in answer; and, thereupon, the first-mate, working his way down again through the cabin on to the deck below, the poop ladder being unsafe with his injured arm, spoke to the men, who were holding on as well as they could in a group by the mainmast bitts, and they began to bestir themselves.

Something was evidently going to be done to relieve the ship of all the loose top hamper flying about aloft, which threatened every moment to drag the masts out of her, for everything was swaying to and fro, and the topsails jerking terribly as they swelled out, the clews fouling the reef points as the wind threw them up, and all getting mixed in irretrievable confusion from the continual slatting of the canvas—for the whole of the running gear, having been let go, was now dangling about in all directions and knotting itself up in the standing rigging, round which the wind whipped the ropes, lashing them into a series of bowlines and half-hitches that it would have puzzled a fisherman to unbend.

When the storm had burst so suddenly on us, the ship had been braced up on the port tack, beating to windward as well as she could, to weather Cape Horn; but now, of course, we were running right before the gale, retracing at headlong speed every knot we had previously gained on our true course.

A few hours at this rate, as anyone with half an eye could see—even if everything stood the strain, which was very questionable—would place us on the chart pretty well where we were the day before; and, then, we should have all our work to do over again, without having a cable's length to boast of to the good so far as our onward progress was concerned into the Pacific Ocean—most aptly named by the Spaniards, from the marked contrast its placid bosom offered, no doubt, to the rough sea these early voyagers met with on this side of the Land of Fire and of the Stormy Cape.

But still, although we were scudding with everything flying aloft, the leebraces had not yet been let go, all that I have taken so long to describe having occurred, so to speak, within the compass of a minute. These, up to now, had remained fast, just as when we were close-hauled on the port tack the moment before; for, it was as much as our few hands could do at first to cast off the sheets and halliards, without minding the braces, especially as the ropes had got jammed at the bitts with the loose gear washing about the deck. However—'better late than never'—they were now quickly let go, and the braces on the weather side being manned, the yards were squared. It was a job of some difficulty, although accomplished at length, the ship showing herself all the better for the operation by running easier and not staggering and yawing so much as she raced along.

This was the first step.

The next was to stop the uproar aloft, and create a little order amidst the chaos that there reigned, which was a much harder and far more ticklish task, it being perilous in the extreme, and almost useless, for any of the hands to venture up the rigging; for the wind was blowing with such terrific force that they could not have possibly lain out on

the yards, even if they succeeded in reaching the futtock shrouds.

It was no good shouting to the men.

As I said before, they could not hear a word spoken, had it been bawled in the loudest tone; so, Mr Flinders managed to explain his purpose by signs, or some other means that I could not at the moment guess, for Tom Bullover and the rest of the crew at once commenced hauling on the maintopsail sheets.

The effect of this was almost instantaneous.

Puckering up into a bag where, as I mentioned, the clew had fouled the reef points, the sail burst 'bang' out of the boltropes with a noise like thunder; and, then, carried forwards by the gale, it floated away ahead, fortunately just clearing the foretopmast, which might have been broken by the extra strain—the fluttering mass of canvas finally disappearing, like a white kite, in the distance in the water ahead of the ship.

Getting rid of this sail was even a greater relief to the over-driven vessel than squaring the yards had been, a consequence which the first-mate and carpenter had fully anticipated when the sheets were manned; so, a similar procedure was adopted with the fore-topsail, and a like happy result followed, the ship still driving on before the wind, very nearly at as great a rate as she had done before, although under bare poles almost.

But she now steered more easily, not taking in such a lot of water aboard when she rolled, while the spars ceased to sway about, and it looked as if we should save them, which had seemed impossible a short time previously, from the ugly way in which the shrouds tightened, and the after-stays sung, as if they were stretched to the last limit, showing that the slightest increase of the strain on them would snap them like pack-thread.

The mizzen-topsail was by this time our only rag left remaining, and the captain, evidently wishing to save this, so as to use it by-and-by when the gale lulled, to help in bringing the vessel round again to the wind, started off by himself hauling on the buntlines and clewlines, being quickly aided by Jan Steenbock and little me—we being all the 'hands' on the poop except the helmsman, whom the second-mate was able at last to leave for a minute or so unassisted, from the fact of the ship having become more tractable since she had lost all that lot of loose top hamper flapping about aloft.

The three of us took 'a long pull and a strong pull, and a pull all together,' according to the old sailor phrase, I tugging my best with the others; and, possibly the ounce or two of 'beef' I was able to put into the rope so far assisted as just to turn the scale. At all events, we ultimately succeeded in clewing up the topsail pretty fairly; although, of course, it could not be properly stowed until some of the hands were able to get up on the yard and snug it comfortably by passing the sea-gaskets.

So far, everything had been accomplished satisfactorily, and the ship was running free before the gale at the rate of ten or twelve knots, or more, without a stitch of canvas set beyond the bunt of the mizzen-topsail, which bagged and bulged out a bit still, in spite of our efforts to clew it up tight.

But, now, a new danger arose.

We were bowling along before the wind, it is true; but, the heavy rolling sea that had been worked up in a brief space of time was travelling at a much faster rate, and there was every fear that one of the monster billows which each moment curled up threateningly in our wake would hurl itself on board, thus pooping the vessel and rendering her altogether unmanageable, if not a hopeless wreck—such a mass of water as the big waves carried in their frowning crests being more than sufficient to swamp us instanter, and, mayhap, bury the poor *Denver City* deep in the depths below at one fell blow.

Captain Snaggs saw this sooner than any one; and, although all his previous orders had been carried out in dumb show, from our now having the wind with us to waft his voice forward, he once more managed to make himself heard.

"Ahoy!" he shouted, putting his hands on either side of his mouth, to carry the words well clear of his goatee beard, which was blown all over his face. "On deck, thaar!"

Tom Bullover raised his right fist, to show that he caught the hail; but it was impossible for him to answer back in the very teeth of the gale.

"We must try an' lay her to," continued the skipper. "Hev ye got a tarpaulin, or airy sort o' rag ye ken stick in the fore-riggin'?" Tom nodded his head, understanding what the captain meant in a jiffey; and, with the help of two or three others, a piece of fearnought, that lay in the bottom of the long-boat, was quickly bundled out on the deck and dragged forwards, the men bending on a rope's-end to a cringle worked in one corner of the stuff, so as to hoist it up by.

"Over to port! Over to port!" roared the skipper, seeing them making for the lee side of the ship. "I'm goin' to try an' bring her to on thet tack, d'ye haar?"

Another nod from the carpenter showed that he heard and appreciated the command, he and the group with him by great exertions tricing up the piece of fearnought into the fore-shrouds on the side indicated, spreading the cloth out and lashing it outside the rigging.

"Now, men," cried Captain Snaggs, "some o' ye aft hyar! Look sharp an' man the cro'jack braces."

"Dat vas goot," I heard Mr Jan Steenbock say behind me, his voice coming right into my ear; "dat vas ze very tings!"

The skipper heard him, too.

"I guess ye're worth yer salt, an' knows what's what!" he screamed back, with his face shoved into that of the second-mate, so that he should catch the words. "Stand by to cast off the clewlines agen, an' slack out the weather sheet, if we wants it!"

"Aye, aye!" roared Jan Steenbock, in answer, jumping to the belaying pins, to cast off the ropes as ordered. "I vas dere!"

And so was I, too, following his example, ready to bear a hand when the necessity arose.

"Send another hand or two hyar aft, to the wheel!" now yelled out the captain, on seeing that Tom Bullover had marshalled the watch on the deck below at the crossjack braces, ready to ease off on the weather side, and haul in gradually to leeward—so that the yard should not be jerked round suddenly, and risk carrying away the mizzen-top mast and all its hamper with the shock; and, finally, with a motion of his arm, which those at the wheel readily understood, he ordered the helm to be put down.

It was a critical moment.

The ship seemed a trifle stubborn, and would not obey the rudder, lying sluggishly in the trough of the sea for a while, but the tail end of a big wave then catching her on the quarter, she slewed round a bit; and, the crossjack yard being braced up sharply in the nick of time, she swung with her head to the wind, breasting the billows full butt the next instant, instead of drifting on at their will as before.

Jan Steenbock at once let go the clewlines; and the sheets of the mizzen-topsail, which had already been close-reefed, being hauled home, and the piece of fearnought in the fore-rigging acting as well as a sail there would have done, the vessel was brought to lay-to at last, riding safely enough, considering the heavy sea that was running, and thus showing herself a staunch boat under very trying circumstances.

"We've seen the worst of it now," shouted the skipper, trying to rub his hands together, in token of his satisfaction, but having to leave off and grasp the poop rail to steady himself again from the ship pitching so much, as she met the big waves tumbling in on her bows, and rose to them buoyantly. "The gale is moderating so the watch ken pipe down, I guess, an' all hands splice the mainbrace!"

The men couldn't hear him clearly, but the gesture which he made, of lifting his fist to his mouth, was sufficiently explanatory to all; and, when he presently dived down the companion and appeared at the cabin door under the break of the poop, with the steward behind him, holding a bottle of rum in one hand and a pannikin in the other, the men who had so gallantly exerted themselves were to be seen standing by, ready to receive the customary grog always served out on each occasions, fresh hands being sent up to relieve those at the wheel, so that these should not lose the advantage of the skipper's generosity—which was somewhat unexpected from one of his temper!

Later on, there was a glorious sunset, the black clouds all clearing away, and the heavens glowing with red and gold, as the orb of day sank below the horizon.

This showed that we were going to have the chance of a finer spell than we had been having; and, the wind soon afterwards shifting to the westward, the foretop-mast-staysail was hoisted, followed shortly by the reefed-foresail and main-trysail, the skipper setting all the fore and aft sail he could to make up for the loss of our topsails, which, it may be remembered, were blown away.

The ship was then brought round on the starboard tack, and put on her proper course again, for us to make another attempt to weather Cape Horn.

By the time all this was done it was quite dark, and getting on close to 'six bells' in the second dog-watch, the sun sinking to rest early in those latitudes; so, as none of the men had got their tea yet, or thought of it, for that matter, although they'd had nothing since their dinner at midday, Hiram Bangs, calling me to follow him, started for the galley, to see about the coppers.

We found, however, that the seas we had taken aboard had washed the fire out and made a regular wreck of the place, everything being turned topsy-turvy and mixed up into a sort of "hurrah's nest."

Indeed, the only wonder was, that the galley itself had not been carried incontinently over the side, when the ship had canted over on her beam-ends; and, it would have been, no doubt, but for its being so securely lashed down to the ringbolts in the deck—a precaution which had saved it when everything else had been swept to leeward.

At all events, there it was still, but in a pretty pickle; and Hiram and I had a hard job to light up the fire again under the coppers, all the wood and coal that had not been fetched away by the sea being, of course, wet and soddened by the water.

"I guess," said Hiram, after one or two failures to get the fuel to ignite, in spite of his pouring a lot of oil on it, so as to neutralise the effect of the damp, "I'll burn that durned old kiver of my chest ez got busted t'other day in the fo'c's'le; fur it ain't no airthly good, ez I sees, fur to kip pryin' folk from priggin' airy o' my duds they fancies!"

With this, Hiram started off for the fo'c's'le, taking one of the ship's lanterns with him, to see what he was about.

He returned a minute or two after, looking quite scared.

"Say, Cholly," he exclaimed—addressing me as all the rest in the fo'c's'le always styled me, following the mode, in which poor Sam Jedfoot had pronounced my name, instead of calling me "Charley," properly, all darkeys having a

happy facility for abbreviation, as I quite forgot to mention before—"Say, Cholly, guess I'll kinder make yer haar riz! What d'yer reckon hez happened, b'y, hey?"

"What, Hiram?" replied I, negligently, not paying any particular attention to his words, having started to work at once, chopping up the box cover, which he had thrown down on the deck at my feet. "What has happened, Hiram—whatever is the matter now?"

"Thar's matter enuff, I reckon, younker," said he solemnly, in his deep, impressive tones. "Guess this air shep's sperrit-haunted, thet's all, my b'y, an' the whole bilin' of us coons aboard air all doomed men!"

Chapter Eight.

Mad Drunk!

"Good gracious, Hiram!" I exclaimed, dropping the wood and rising to my feet, greatly alarmed at his mysterious manner of speaking, as well as by the change in his voice and demeanour. "What d'you mean by talking like that?"

Instead of answering my question directly, however, he asked another.

"D'yer rec'leck, Cholly, thet air banjo belongin' to Sam Jedfoot ez I bought when the poor darkey's traps wer' sold at auction in the fo'c's'le the day arter he wer lost overboard?"

"Ye-es," I stammered breathlessly, as the remembrance came back to me all at once of the strange chaunt we had heard in the air around, just before the storm had burst over us in all its fury; our subsequent bustling about having banished its recollection for the moment, "Wha—wha—what about Sam's banjo, Hiram?"

"It's clean gone, skedaddled right away, b'y, that's all!" he replied, in the same impressive way in which he had first spoken. "When I bought the durned thin', I stowed it atop o' my chest thaar, in the fo'c's'le; an' thaar it wer ez right ez a five-cent piece up to this very mornin', ez I wer overhaulin' my duds, to see if I could rig up another pair o' pants, an' seed it. But, b'y, it ain't thaar now, I reckon!"

"Perhaps some one took it out, and forgot to put it back when the gale burst over us," I suggested, more to reassure myself than because I believed it, for I felt horribly frightened at the thoughts that rapidly surged up in me. "You—you remember, Hiram, we heard the sound of some one playing it just before?"

"D'yer think, b'y, airy of the hands w'u'd hev ben foolin' round with thet blessid banjo, an' the ship a'most took aback an' on her beam-ends?" he retorted indignantly. "No, Cholly, thet wer no mortal fingers ez we heerd a-playin' thet thaar banjo!"

"And you—you—think—?"

"It wer Sam Jedfoot's ghost; nary a doubt on it," he said solemnly, finishing my uncompleted sentence; "thet air, if sperrits walk agen on the airth an' sea, arter the folk's ownin' them is dead an' drowned!"

I shivered at his words; while, as if to further endorse Hiram's opinion, the steward, Morris Jones, just then came forward from the cabin to look after the captain's dinner, although he did not seem in a hurry about it, as usual—a fortunate circumstance, as the fire in the galley under Hiram's expert manipulation was only now at last beginning to burn up.

"There's summut wrong 'bout this barquey," observed the Welshman, opening the conversation in a wonderfully civil way for him, and addressing Hiram, who did not like the man, hardly ever exchanging a word with him if he could help it. "I larfed at that b'y Cholly for saying he seed that nigger cook agen in the cabin arter he went overboard, time the skipper had that row with the fool and shot him; but sperrit or wot it was, I believe the b'y's right, for I've seed it, too!"

"Jehosophat!" exclaimed Hiram; "this air gettin' darned streenge an' cur'ous. Whar did ye see the sperrit, mister?"

"Not a minute or so agone," replied the steward, whose face I could see, by the light of the ship's lantern in the galley, as well as from the gleams of the now brightly burning fire, looked awe-stricken, as if he had actually seen what he attested. "It was a'most dark, and I was coming out of my pantry when I seed it. Aye, I did, all black, and shiny, and wet, as if he were jist come out o' the water. I swear it were the nigger cook, or I'm a Dutchman!"

The two men looked fixedly at each other, without uttering another word for a minute or more, I staring at them both in dread expectancy of what they would next say, fancying each instant something more wonderful still would happen. At last, Hiram broke the silence, which had become well-nigh unbearable from a sort of nervous tension, that made me feel creepy and shivery all over.

"I tolled yer jest now, Cholly," said the Yankee sailor in his 'Down-East' drawl, which became all the more emphasised from his slow and solemn mode o' speaking below his breath—"thet this air shep wer doomed, an' I sez it now agen, since the stooard hyar hez seed the same ez we all hev seed afore. Thaar's no denying b'ys, ez how poor Sam's ghostess walks abroad this hyar ship, an' thet means sunthin', or it don't! I specs thet air darkey's sperrit ain't comfyable like, an' ye ken bet y'r bottom dollar he won't rest quiet till he feels slick; fur ye sees ez how the poor cuss didn't come by his death rightful like, in lawful fashion."

"Aye, and I've heard tell that folks as been murdered 'll haunt the place where they've been put away onlawfully," chimed in Morris Jones. "Not as I've ever believed in sperrits and ghostesses till now; but, seein' is believin', an' I

can't go agen my own eyesight. I'd take my davy 'twere Sam Jedfoot I seed jest now; and though I'm no coward, mates, I don't mind saying I'm mortal feared o' going nigh the cuddy agen!"

"Never ye fear, old hoss," replied Hiram encouragingly; albeit, at any other time he would have laughed at the steward's declaration that he was 'no coward,' when he was well known to be the most arrant one in the ship. "It ain't ye thet the ghost air arter, ye bet. It's the skipper. Ye remember ez how he promised us all he'd call in at the nearest port an' hev all the circumferences overhauled, ez he sed?"

"Aye," responded the Welshman, "that he did. He took his solemn davy, afore the second-mate, an' Tom Bullover, an' the lot o' you, on the maindeck, that time he shot the cook. I heard him from under the break o' the poop, where I were standin'."

"Yes, I seed ye keepin' well to looard!" said Hiram drily. "But, ez I wer a sayin', the skipper agrees to call in at the fust port we fetches, an' we've b'en close in to Bahia, when we near ran ashore, an' Rio an' Buenos Ayres; an' he's never put into no port yet!"

"No, nor doesn't mean to, neither," chorussed the steward. "I hear him, t'other day, a jokin' with that brute of a fust-mate about it; an' both was a sniggerin': an' he says as he'll see you all to old Nick afore he stops anywhere afore he gets to 'Frisco!"

"I reckon, then, sunthin' bad 'll come of it," said Hiram, shaking his head gravely, "Thet nigger's sperrit don't haunt this ship fur nothin', an' we ain't see the wuss yet, ye bet! Soon arter Cholly hyar seed Sam's ghost, ye remembers, we hed thet fire aboard in the forepeak?"

"Aye," agreed Morris Jones; "an' the next time—"

"Wer the banjo we heered a-playin', afore we were caught in thet buster of a gale, an' the ship wer a'most capsized on her beam-ends," continued the American, full of his theme. "An' now, I guess—"

"What?" cried I eagerly, anxiously drinking in every word, deeply impressed with the conversation. "What do you think will happen?"

"Ructions, thet's all, b'y," replied Hiram, hitching up the waistband of his overalls coolly, in the most matter-of-fact way, as if he were only mentioning an ordinary circumstances. "Thet is, if the skipper don't touch at Callao or Valparaiso. Fur my part, sonny, I guess this hyar ship air doomed, ez I sed afore, an' I don't spec, for one, as ever she'll reach 'Frisco this v'yage; an' so thinks old Chips, Tom Bullover, thet is, too."

"Hullo!" exclaimed the carpenter at that moment, poking his head within the galley door, and making me and the Welshman jump with fright, thinking he was Sam's ghost again. "Who's hailing me? What's the row?—anything up?"

"No, bo," said Hiram. "I wer only tellin' the stooard hyar an' Cholly ez how yo agreed with me ez this wer a durned onlocky craft, an' bound to meet with misfortun' arter all thet's come an' gone aboard."

"That's so," acquiesced Tom; though he did not look much alarmed at the prospect. "The 'old man,' though, seems turnin' round into a better sort—treating us all to grog and sich like."

"He'd kinder ought to," growled the other, as he stirred the tea in the coppers, which were just boiling by now; and he then proceeded to tell Tom about the mysterious disappearance of the banjo, and the fact of Morris Jones having seen the apparition again in the cabin aft, winding up with the query—"An' what d'ye think o' thet now, Chips?"

"Think?" echoed Tom Bullover, laughing; "why, that you're kicking up a dust about nothing, my hearty! Missed the banjo out of y'r chest, eh—where are y'r eyes, bo? There it are, hanging right over y'r heads in the galley, on the same cleat where poor Sam Jedfoot left it afore he met his fate! Why, where are y'r peepers—old stick in the mud, hey?"

As he said this, Tom Bullover reached up his hand overhead by the door of the galley, above the spot where he was standing, and as our eyes followed his motions we all could see now Sam's banjo hanging on the cleat where it always used to be when the negro cook occupied the caboose, the instrument swinging to and fro as Tom touched it.

"Wa-all, I'm jiggered!" cried Hiram, taking up the lantern that he had placed on the deck when he returned from the fo'c's'le and flashing it on the suspended object, to make assurance doubly sure. "Thaar it air, sure enuff; an' all I ken say is, I'm jiggered! It jest licks creation, thet it dew!"

"Lor' bless you, mate! you could ha' seed it afore if you'd only used your eyes," replied Tom to this exordium, laughing again; "but, let's stow all such flummery now about ghostesses an' sich like, for it's all moonshine when you looks into the matter; an' you, an' Charley, an' the stooard here, have been all busy rigging up 'duppies,' as poor Sam used to call 'em, out o' your heads, when we poor beggars forrud are dyin' for our tea. Ain't it ready yet?"

"Aye, bo, in a brace o' shakes," said Hiram, rousing himself and polling up the fire. "I dessay I'm a doggoned fool to be skeart like thet, but I'd hev taken my davy I put the durned thing in my chest a month ago—I would so; an' then the stooard comed in with his yarn on top o' what Cholly sed o' seein' Sam's ghost t'other day, an'—an' I'm a durned fool; thet's all I sez!"

"You're none the worse for that, bo," observed Tom, with a grin at the American's rather shamefaced apology foe his superstitious fears; and Hiram presently joined in the laugh against himself, as he busied himself in stirring the coppers and tasting the tea, to see whether it was all right yet. I, also, began to feel more comfortable in my mind; while a little colour crept into Morris Jones' pale face, which had become as white as a sheet before Tom's advent on the scene, the steward looking as if he were going to faint from fright.

It is wonderful what an effect the courage of one man has in restoring the confidence of others under such circumstances!

Bustling about the galley, ladling out the contents of the coppers as the men came up one by one with their pannikins for their tea, I quickly forgot my scare of a minute or so ago. So, too, apparently, did the steward, who commenced preparing the captain's dinner, as soon as the fire had burnt up and he could get space enough to use his frying-pan; while, as for Hiram, he was singing away in fine style at his work, dishing up some lobsouse for the men's supper, in friendly rivalry of Morris Jones, whom he could 'give points to' and easily beat in the cooking line, none of us troubling ourselves any longer with any recollection of poor Sam Jedfoot or his ghost.

The gale continued to ease down, and the heavy, rolling sea gradually subsided as night sped on; but, the wind veering round in the middle watch more to the northwards of west, we had to come about on the port tack, steering west-nor'-west, more in towards the Cape. We had plenty of sea room to do this, though, from the good offing we had previously made, being at least five or six degrees well to the southward of the stormy headland at our last reckoning, before the gale came on.

All next day the men were busy getting up a couple of old topsails out of the forepeak and patching them up to take the place of those that had been blown away; and these when got up were close-reefed beforehand, prior to being set, as the wind was freshening again and the weather looked squally.

At the beginning of the second dog-watch the same afternoon, just when we had got everything snug aloft, it came on to blow again, although not quite so fiercely as the previous evening; and it was a case of clew up and furl with all the lighter canvas, the ship being kept under close-reefed topsails and storm staysails, heading out again to sea on the starboard tack.

Thus it continued all that night, squalls of rain and hail, with snow and sleet at intervals for variety sake, sweeping over us, and the ship having her decks washed frequently fore and aft by the heavy Southern Ocean rollers. The next morning, though, it lightened again, and we had a brief spell of fine weather until noon, when we had another buster of it. This occurred just as Captain Snaggs was getting ready to take the sun, and sent the first-mate down in the cabin to look at the chronometer, and 'stand by' in order to note the time when he sung out 'Stop!' so as to calculate our proper longitude.

The skipper could not get his observation of the sun, however, for the sky, which a moment before had been bright and clear, clouded over again in an instant; and the next minute we were all on board battling again with another specimen of "Cape Horn weather," too busy to think even where we might be or what latitude or longitude we had fetched. We might, indeed, have been anywhere, for the heavens were black as night, though it was midday, and sky and sea met each other in one vast turmoil, so that it was impossible to see half a cable's length off the ship!

So it went on for four days, the gale blowing for short periods in angry gusts and then easing down for the space of a watch perhaps, the squalls alternating with spells of fine weather; until, on the fifth morning, we sailed into a comparatively calm sea, running free, with a full sheet on the starboard tack, before a bright, cheery nor'-westerly breeze.

At noon, when the skipper was able at last to take the sun for the first time for six days, he found, on working out our reckoning, that we were in latitude 58 degrees 5 minutes South, and longitude 82 degrees 10 minutes West. In other words, we were considerably to the westwards of the Horn, and fairly on the bosom of the placid Pacific, as indeed its smooth waters already testified.

"Hooray, b'ys; we've doubled the durned Cape at last, I guess!" shouted out Captain Snaggs from the break of the poop, whither he had rushed up from below as soon as he had finished his calculation on the log slate, dancing about the deck with excitement; and, then he banged his fist down on the brass rail with a thump that almost doubled it in two, while his wiry billy-goat beard bristled out and wagged to and fro. "Brace up yer yards sharp, an' keep them bowlin's taut! Lay her ez near due north ez she'll fetch, an' we'll fix her on a bee-line fur 'Frisco. An', say, Flinders!"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"Send up y'r to'gallants an' r'yals, ez soon ez ye ken; an' let her rip!"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"An', main deck, below thaar!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" shouted back Jan Steenbock, who was on duty here, and was already seeing about getting abaft the upper spars for spreading more sail, having overheard his order to the first-mate—"I vas here, sir!"

"Call all hands to liquor up, sirree. It ain't every day, I reckon, we gits round the Horn!"

A wild cheer burst from the men, who had clustered in the waist in response to this summons; and the good news of getting round the Cape and having a double allowance of grog proving too much for the majority, the rest of the day was spent in a sort of a grand jollification, the skipper and first-mate 'carrying on' in the cabin, while the crew made themselves merry in the fo'c's'le, whither an extra bottle or two of rum had been smuggled, having been got out of the steward by the expeditive of a little 'palm oil' and wheedling in about equal proportions.

I think I may say, without exaggeration, that, with the exception of Jan Steenbock, the second-mate, who showed himself a regular steady fellow all through the voyage, Tom Bullover, and lastly, though by no means least, myself, there was not a single sober man on board the ship that evening, all being more or less under the influence of liquor, from the steward Morris Jones—who, mean Welshman that he was, seemed never loth to drink at any one else's

expense—up to Captain Snaggs, who, from being ‘jolly’ at ‘eight bells,’ became still more excited from renewed applications of rum by midnight; until, at length, early in the middle watch, he rushed out on deck from the cuddy absolutely mad drunk.

He was in a state of wild delirium, and his revolver, ready cocked, was in his hand.

“Snakes an’ alligators!” he yelled out, levelling the weapon at the mainmast, which he mistook for a figure in the half-light of morning, which was just then beginning to break. “I’ve got ye at last, ye durned nigger. Take thet, an’ thet!”

Quick as lightning one report followed another, the bullets coming whistling by the galley where I was standing.

Jan Steenbock, who was on the poop, hearing the crack of a revolver, called out something; whereupon Captain Snaggs turned round and aimed his next shot at him, although, fortunately, it missed the second-mate, on account of Jan dodging behind the companion hatchway just in the nick of time.

The captain then made a bound at the poop ladder, and rushed up the steps swearing awfully; and, first firing at the man at the wheel, whose arm the bullet penetrated, as soon as he gained the poop, he dived down the companion in pursuit of Jan Steenbock, who had disappeared below the booby hatch.

For the next five minutes or more, the ship was in a state of the wildest confusion, the skipper chasing everyone he could see, and all trying to get out of his way, as he dashed after them in his frenzy, rushing, in a sort of desperate game of ‘catch who catch can,’ from the cabin out on to the maindeck, and then up the poop ladder and down the companion into the cuddy again, the second-mate, the steward, and first-mate alike being assailed in turn, and each flying for life before the frantic madman. At last, just as the captain emerged from the cabin for the third time, in hot haste after the steward, the other two having succeeded in concealing themselves, Morris Jones stumbled against a coil of rope by the mainmast bitts, and, his toe at the same time catching in a ring bolt, he sprawled his length on the deck.

“Good Lord!” cried the unfortunate steward, panting out the words with his failing breath. “I’m a dead man! I’m a dead man!”

“By thunder, ye air, ye durned black nigger! Ye air, ez sure ez snakes!” screamed the skipper, in his delirious rage, mistaking the Welshman, as he had the others as well, for poor Sam, the recollection of whom seemed strangely to haunt him the moment the rum got possession of his senses. “I’ve swan I’d shoot ye; so, hyar goes, me joker; y’r last hour hez come, ye bet!”

With these words he pointed his revolver down at Morris Jones, as he lay rolling on the deck at his feet, and fired.

Chapter Nine.

Wrecked!

Although they had not been called yet, for it was only ‘six bells,’ the watch below had been roused out by the commotion and wild cries and yells that rang about the deck. Every man Jack had tumbled up from below, and they were all grouped about the fo’c’s’le, hiding behind the galley like myself, and watching the weird scene going on aft, which, but for the maniacal rage of the captain and his murderous fury, would have been almost comical in its main incidents.

It was a regular steeplechase: the frenzied man hunted those he was after in and out of the cabin, and up the poop ladder, and down the companion stairs, in turn, to begin again anew the same strange game, that was amusing enough save to those personally concerned!

One of the hands, though, had his wits at work besides watching what was going on; and this was Tom Bullover, my friend the carpenter.

He recollected what the steward had said on a former occasion of the captain having had a fit of the horrors from excessive drinking; and, although it was too late now to take away the skipper’s revolver before he could effect any mischief with it, there was still time to prevent his doing any further harm.

So, Tom, with a coil of rope over his arm, stealthily made his way aft, and just as Captain Snaggs aimed at the prostrate body of the steward the carpenter threw a running bowline he had made in the rope round the captain’s shoulders, jerking him backwards at the very moment he fired the revolver. This caused the bullet to be diverted from its aim, for it passed through the bulwarks, instead of perforating Morris Jones’ somewhat corpulent person.

The next instant, two or three more of the men going to Tom’s assistance, Captain Snaggs was dragged down on the deck, raging and foaming at the mouth; when, binding him securely hand and foot, they lifted him up and carried him into his cabin, where they strapped him down in his cot, powerless to do any more injury to himself or anyone else, until his delirium should be over.

As for the steward, he fainted dead away from fright; and it required a good deal of shaking and rubbing on the part of Tom Bullover and Jan Steenbock to bring him back to life again—the latter now coming out of the cabin, holding a slip noose similar to that used by the carpenter in snaring the skipper with, and evidently intended for the same purpose, although a trifle too late to be of service then.

Captain Snaggs himself recovered his consciousness about noon the same day, but did not have the slightest

recollection of his mad orgy, the only actual sufferers from which were Morris Jones, who really had been more frightened than hurt, and the helmsman, Jim Chowder, who, in lieu of having his arm broken, as he had at first cried out, had only a slight bullet graze through the fleshy part of it; so, considering the skipper fired off no less than five shots out of the six which his revolver contained, it was a wonder more were not grievously wounded, if not killed, when he ran a-muck like that!

When Hiram Bangs and I met in the galley, shortly after the row was over, we both compared notes, the American saying that he'd been roused up from sleep, not by the noise of the shooting or rampaging about the deck, but by the sound of Sam's voice singing in the hold, and he knew at once that some mischief was going to happen, "ez it allers did when he heerd the durned ghostess afore!"

I declare he made me feel more alarmed by this remark than all that had previously occurred, and I had to raise my eyes to assure myself that Sam's banjo was yet hanging in its accustomed place over the door of the galley, before I could go on with my task of getting the men's early coffee ready, to serve out as soon as the watch was changed, 'eight bells' having been struck shortly before.

Tom Bullover, though, when presently he lounged up forward, and I told him what Hiram said, only laughed.

"It's all stuff and nonsense, Charley," he chuckled out; "you an' Hiram 'll be the death of me some day, with your yarns o' ghostesses an' such like. The skipper didn't see no sperrit as you thinks when he got mad this mornin'; it's all that cussed rum he took because he got round Cape Horn. Guess, as our mate here says, the rum 'got round' him!"

Hiram laughed, too, at this.

"Heave ahead an' carry on, old hoss," he said; "I reckon ye won't riz my dander, fur what I tells Cholly I knows for true, an' nuthin' 'll turn me agen it. Why, Tom, when I wer down Chicopee way—"

"Avast there, mate, an' give us some coffee," cried Tom, interrupting him at this point, and some others of the crew coming up at the moment, the conversation was not renewed, which I was not sorry for, Hiram's talk about ghosts not being very cheerful.

During the day, as I've said, Captain Snaggs got better, and came on deck again, looking like himself, but very pale. His face, however, seemed to have become wonderfully thinner in such a short space of time, so thin indeed that he appeared to be all nose and beard, the two meeting each other in the middle, like a pair of nut-crackers!

He was much quieter, too, for he did not swear a bit, as he would have done before, at the man at the wheel, who, startled by his coming softly up the companion without previous notice, when he fancied he was lying in his cot, let the ship fall off so that she almost broached-to, in such a way as almost to carry her spars by the board!

No, he did not utter a single harsh word.

"Steady thaar!" was all he called out; "kip her full an' by, an' steer ez naar north ez ye ken!"

This was about the beginning of July, and we had from then bright weather, with westerly and nor'-west winds all the way up the Pacific, past the island of Juan Fernandez, which we saw like a haze of green in the distance.

After this, making to cross the Equator for the second time—our first time being in the Atlantic Doldrums—somewhere between the meridians 100 degrees to 102 degrees, we proceeded on steadily northward, picking up the south-east trade-winds in about latitude 20 degrees South, when nearly opposite Arica on the chart, although, of course, out of sight of land, being more than a couple of hundred leagues away from the nearest part of the coast.

In about twenty days' time we got near the Equator, when we met with variable winds and calms, while a strong indraught sucked us out of our course into the Bay of Panama.

The temperature just then grew very hot, and the captain, taking to drinking again, soon recovered his spirits and his temper, which had latterly grown so smooth and equable that we hardly knew him for the same man.

In a short space, however, the rum fully restored him to his old quarrelsome self, and he and the first-mate, Mr Flinders, had an awful row one night, when the skipper threatened to send the mate forward and promote Jan Steenbock in his place. Captain Snaggs had never forgiven him for the cowardice and want of sailorly instinct he displayed at the time of the alarm of fire in the forepeak; and the fact also of Mr Flinders having lain for two days drunk in his bunk after their jollification on rounding Cape Horn, did not tend to impress the skipper any the more strongly in his favour.

I remember the evening well.

It was on the 28th July.

We were becalmed, I recollect; but, in spite of this, a strong set of tide, or some unknown current, was carrying us, in a west-nor'-west direction, away out of the Bay of Panama, at the mouth of which we had been rolling and roasting in the broiling tropical sun for a couple of days, without apparently advancing an inch on our way northwards towards San Francisco, our destination, which we were now comparatively near, so to speak, but still separated by a broad belt of latitude of between eighteen hundred and two thousand miles—a goodish stretch of water!

I also remember well that Captain Snaggs roared so loudly to the mate and the mate back to him during their altercation in the cuddy that we on deck could hear every word they said; for, the night was hot and close, with never a breath of wind stirring, and the air had that oppressive and sulphurous feel which it always has when there is

thunder about or some great atmospherical change impending.

The skipper and Mr Flinders were arguing about the ship's course, the former declaring it to be right, and the latter as vehemently to be altogether wrong.

The mate, so opposite were their opinions, said that if we sailed on much longer in the same direction towards which the ship had been heading before being becalmed, she would be landed high and dry ashore at Guayaquil; while the skipper, as strongly, protested that we were already considerably to the northward of the Galapagos Islands.

"Ye're a durned fule, an' a thunderin' pig-headed fule ez well," we heard the captain say to the other, as he came up the companion, roaring back behind him; "but, jest to show ye how thunderin' big a fule ye air, I'll jest let ye hev y'r own way—though, mind ye, if the ship comes to grief, ye'll hev to bear all the muss."

"I don't mind that, nary a red cent," boasted the other in his sneering way. "Guess I've a big enuff pile to hum, out Chicago way, to buy up ship an' cargy ez well!"

"Guess ye shall hev y'r way, bo!" then yelled out the skipper, calling at the same time to the helmsman to ease the helm off, as well as to the watch to brace round the yards; and the light land breeze, just then coming off from shore, made the *Denver City* head off at right angles to her previous course, the wash of water swishing pleasantly past her bows, as her sails bellied out for a brief spell.

But, not for long.

Within the next half-hour or so the heavens, which had previously been bright with myriads of stars overhead, became obscured with a thick darkness, while the slight land breeze slowly died away.

Then, a hoarse, rumbling sound was heard under the sea, and the ship was violently heaved up and down in a sort of quick, violent rocking motion, unlike any thing I had ever felt, even in the heaviest storm.

"An airthquake, I guess," said Captain Snaggs, nonchalantly; "thet is, if thaar's sich a thing ez an airthquake at sea!"

He sniggered over this joke; but, just then, I heard the same strange, weird music, like Sam's banjo, played gently in the distance, similarly to what we heard before the burst of the storm off Cape Horn.

"Lord, save us!" cried the captain, in hoarse accents of terror. "Thaar it air agen!"

Even as he spoke, however, the ship seemed to be lifted aloft on a huge rolling wave, that came up astern of us without breaking; and, then, after being carried forwards with wonderful swiftness, she was hurled bodily on the shore of some unknown land near, whose outlines we could not distinguish through the impenetrable darkness that now surrounded us like a veil.

We knew we were ashore, however, for we could feel a harsh, grating noise under the vessel's keel.

Still, beyond and above this noise, I seemed yet to hear the wild, sad chaunt that haunted us.

There was a light hung in the galley, and I looked in again to see if the negro's banjo was in its accustomed place, so as to judge whether the sound was due to my imagination or not.

Holding up the lantern, I flashed its light across the roof of the galley.

I could hardly believe my eyes.

Sam's banjo was no longer there!

Chapter Ten.

Abingdon Island.

After the first grating, grinding shock of going ashore, the ship did not bump again; but, listing over to port, she settled down quietly, soon working a sort of cradle bed for herself in the sand at the spot where she stranded.

This, at least, was our conclusion, from the absence of any subsequent motion or movement on board, the deck being as steady now as any platform on dry land, although rather downhill on one side, from the vessel heeling as she took the ground.

However, it was all guess work, as we could see nothing, not even our own faces, save when brought immediately under the light of the galley lantern, around which all the hands forward were closely huddled together, like a drove of frightened sheep; for, the darkness could be almost felt, as it hung over the ill-fated *Denver City*, a thick, impenetrable, black pall, that seemed ominous of evil and further disaster.

This continued for nearly an hour; the men near me only speaking in hushed whispers, as if afraid of hearing their own voices.

The fact of not being able to see any fresh peril or danger that might be impending over us, and so face it manfully, in the manner customary with sailor-folk with any grit in them, took away the last lingering remnant of courage even of the bravest amongst us; and I'm confident there was not a single foremast hand there of the lot grouped by the galley and under the break of the fo'c's'le, not excepting either Tom Bullover or the American sailor, Hiram, plucky as

both were in ordinary circumstances, but was as panic-stricken, could their inmost feelings be disclosed and the truth out-told, as myself—although I was too dazed with terror to think of this then.

And so we remained, awaiting we knew not what, coming from we knew not where, in terrible uncertainty and dread expectancy.

Anything might happen now, we thought, still more awful than what had already occurred; for the gloomy stillness and mysterious mantle of darkness that had descended on us increased our fears and suggested every weird possibility, until the prolonged suspense became well-nigh maddening.

"I'm durned if I ken stand this much longer," I heard Hiram whisper hoarsely, as if uttering his thoughts aloud, for he addressed no one in particular. "Guess I'll jump overboard an' drown myself, fur the devil's in the shep, an' thaar's a cuss hangin' over her!"

A shuffling sound of feet moving on the deck followed, as if the poor, distraught fellow was about to carry his senseless and wicked design into execution; and then I caught the tones of Tom Bullover's voice also coming out from amidst the surrounding gloom.

"Hush, avast there!" cried the latter solemnly. "Is this a time for running in the face of your Maker, when in another minute or two we may all be mustered afore Him in eternity? Besides, bo, what's the use o' jumping overboard, when you couldn't get drowned? for the ship's hard and fast ashore!"

Before Hiram could reply to this, or make any further movement, a shout rang out from the poop aft, where previously all had been as still as with us forwards, wrapped in the same impenetrable darkness and deathly silence.

I recognised Jan Steenbock at once as the person hailing us.

"Land, ho!" he exclaimed; "I sees him! It vas lighten oop, and I sees him on ze port bow!"

As the second-mate spoke, there was a perceptible movement of the heavy, close atmosphere, which had hitherto been still and sultry, like what it generally is during a thunderstorm, or when some electrical disturbance is impending in the air. Then, the land breeze sprang up again, the wind, first coming in little puffs and subsequently settling down into a steady breeze off shore, and the heavy curtain of black vapour that had previously enveloped us began to drift away to leeward, enabling us after a bit to see the ship's position and our surroundings—albeit all was yet wrapped in the semi-darkness of night, as it was close on eleven o'clock.

The frowning outlines of a big mountain towered up above the vessel's masts on our left or port bow, hazy and dark and grim, and on the starboard hand a jutting point of land, evidently a spur of the same cliff, projected past the *Denver City* a long way astern, for we could distinguish the white wash of the sea on the sand at its base; while, right in front, nearly touching our bowsprit, was a mass of trees, whose dusky skeleton branches were waved to and fro by the tropical night breeze, making them appear as if alive, their mournful whishing as they swayed bearing out this impression.

It seemed, at first glance, that the ship had been driven ashore into a small land-locked bay, no outlet being to be seen save the narrow opening between the cliffs astern through which she had been carried by the wave that stranded us—fortunately, without dashing us on the rocks on either hand.

As we gazed around in startled wonder, striving to take in all the details of the strange scene, the misty, brooding vapour lifted still further, and a patch of sky cleared overhead. Through this opening the pale moon shone down, illuminating the landscape with her sickly green light; but she also threw such deep shadows that everything looked weird and unreal, the perspective being dwarfed here and magnified there to so great an extent that the ship's masts appeared to touch the stars, while the men on the fo'c's'le were transformed into giants, their forms being for the moment out of all proportion to their natural size, as they craned their necks over the head rail.

Jan Steenbock's voice from the poop at this juncture recalled my wandering and wondering imagination to the more prosaic and practical realities of our situation, which quickly put to flight the ghostly fancies that had previously crowded thick and fast on my mind.

"Vo'c's'le ahoy!" shouted the second-mate, his deep, manly tones at once putting fresh courage into all of us, and making the men pull themselves together and start up eager for action, abandoning all their craven fears. "How vas it mit yous vorvarts! Ze sheep, I zink, vas in ze deep vater astern."

"I'll soon tell you, sir," cried Tom Bullover in answer, jumping to the side in a jiffey, with a coil of the lead line, which he took from the main chains, where it was fastened. "I'll heave the lead, and you shall have our soundings in a brace of shakes, sir!"

With that he clambered into the rigging, preparatory to carrying out his intention; but he had no sooner got into the shrouds than he discovered his task was useless.

"There's no need to sound, sir," he sang out; "the ship's high and dry ashore up to the foremast, and there ain't more than a foot or two of water aft of that, as far as I can see."

"Thunder!" roared out the skipper, who had in the meantime come up again on the poop from the cuddy, where he and the first-mate had no doubt been drowning their fright during the darkness with their favourite panacea, rum, leaving the entire control of the ship after she struck to Jan Steenbock. "Air thet so?"

"I says what I sees," replied Tom Bullover brusquely, he, like most of the hands, being pretty sick by now of the captain's drunken ways, and pusillanimous behaviour in leaving the deck when the vessel and all on board were in

such deadly peril; "and if you don't believe me, why, you can look over the side and judge where the ship is for yourself!"

Captain Snaggs made no retort; but, moving to the port bulwarks from the companion hatchway, where he had been standing, followed Tom's suggestion of looking over the side, which indeed all of us, impelled by a similar curiosity, at once did.

It was as my friend the carpenter had said.

The *Denver City* was for more than two-thirds of her length high and dry ashore on a sandy beach, that looked of a brownish yellow in the moonlight, with her forefoot resting between two hillocks covered with some sort of scrub. This prevented her from falling over broadside on, as she was shored up just as if she had been put into dry dock for caulking purposes; although, unfortunately, she was by no means in such a comfortable position, nor were we on board either, as if she had been in a shipbuilder's yard, with more civilised surroundings than were to be found on a desert shore like this!

Her bilge abaft under the mizzen-chains was just awash; and, the water, deepening from here, as the shore shelved somewhat abruptly, was about the depth of four fathoms or thereabouts by the rudder post, where the bottom could be seen, of soft, shining white sand, without a rock in sight—so far, at least, as we were able to notice in the pale greenish moonlight, by which we made our observations as well as we could, and with some little difficulty, too.

"Guess we're in a pretty tight fix," said Captain Snaggs, after peering up and down alongside for some time, Tom Bullover in the interim taking the hand lead with him on to the poop and sounding over the taffrail at the deepest part. "We can't do nuthin', though, I reckon, till daylight, an' ez we're hard an' fast, an' not likely to float off, I'll go below an' turn in till then. Mister Steenbock, ye'd better pipe the hands down an' do ditto, I guess, fur thaar's no use, I ken see, in stoppin' up hyar an' doin' nuthin'."

"Yous can go below; I vill keep ze vatch," replied the second-mate, with ill-concealed contempt, as the skipper shuffled off down the companion way again, back to his orgy with the equally drunken Flinders, who had not once appeared on deck, after perilling the ship through his obstinacy in putting her on the course that had led to our being driven ashore.

The very first shock of the earthquake, indeed, which we felt before the tidal wave caught us, had been sufficient to frighten him from the poop even before the darkness enveloped us and the final catastrophe came!

As for Jan Steenbock, he remained walking up and down the deck as composedly as if the poor *Denver City* was still at sea, instead of being cooped up now, veritably, like a fish out of water, on dry land.

He did not abandon his post, at any rate!

After a while, though, he acted on the skipper's cowardly advice so far as to tell the starboard watch to turn in, which none of the men were loth to do, for the moon was presently obscured by a thick black cloud, and a torrent of heavy tropical rain quickly descending made most of us seek shelter in the fo'c's'le.

Here I soon fell asleep, utterly wearied out, not only from standing about so long, having been on my legs ever since the early morning when I lit the galley fire, but also quite overcome with all the excitement I had gone through.

I awoke with a start.

The sun was shining brightly through the open scuttle of the fo'c's'le and it was broad daylight.

It was not this that had roused me, though; for, habituated as I now was to the ways of sailor-folk, it made little difference to me whether I slept by day or night so long as I had a favourable opportunity for a comfortable caulk. Indeed, my eyes might have been 'scorched out,' as the saying is, without awaking me.

It was something else that aroused me,—an unaccustomed sound which I had not heard since I left home and ran away to sea.

It was the cooing of doves in the distance.

"Roo-coo-coo! Roo-coo-coo! Coo-coo! Roo-c-o-o!"

I heard it as plainly as possible, just as the plaintive sound used to catch my ear from the wood at the back of the vicarage garden in the old times, when I loved to listen to the bird's love call—those old times that seemed so far off in the perspective of the past, and yet were only two years at most agone!

Why, I must be dreaming, I thought.

But, no; there came the soft, sweet cooing of the doves again.

"Roo-coo-coo! Roo-coo-coo! Coo-coo! Roo-c-o-o!"

Thoroughly roused at last, I jumped out of the bunk I occupied next Hiram, who was still fast asleep, with a lot of the other sailors round him snoring in the fo'c's'le; and rubbing my eyes with both knuckles, to further convince myself of being wide awake, I crawled out from the fore-hatchway on to the open deck.

But, almost as soon as I stepped on my feet, I was startled, for all the starboard side, which was higher than the other, from the list the ship had to port, was covered, where the rain had not washed it away, with a thick deposit of

brown, sandy loam, like snuff; while the scuppers aft, where everything had been washed by the deluge that had descended on the decks, were choked up with a muddy mass of the same stuff, forming a big heap over a foot high. I could see, too, that the snuffy dust had penetrated everywhere, hanging on the ropes, and in places where the rain had not wetted it, like powdery snow, although of a very different colour.

Recollecting the earthquake of the previous evening, and all that I had heard and read of similar phenomena, I ascribed this brown, dusty deposit to some volcanic eruption in the near neighbourhood.

This, I thought, likewise, was probably the cause, as well, of the unaccountable darkness that enveloped the ship at the time we experienced the shock; but, just then, I caught, a sight of the land over the lee bulwarks, and every other consideration was banished by this outlook on the strange scene amidst which we were so wonderfully placed.

If our surroundings appeared curious by the spectral light of the moon last night, they seemed doubly so now.

The glaring tropical sun was blazing already high up in the heavens, whose bright blue vault was unflecked by a scrap of cloud to temper the solar rays, while a brisk breeze, blowing in from the south-west, gave a feeling of freshness to the air and raised a little wave of surf, that broke on the beach with a rippling splash far astern; the cooing of the doves in the distance chiming in musically with the lisp of the surge's lullaby.

But, the land!

It was stranger than any I had ever seen.

The high mountain on our left, looked quite as lofty by day as it had done the night before, two thousand feet or more of it towering up into the sky.

It was evidently the crater peak of an old extinct volcano; for, it was shaped like a hollow vase, with the side next the sea washed away by the south-west gales, which, as I subsequently learnt, blew during the rainy season in the vicinity of this equatorial region.

At the base of the cliff was a mound of lava, interspersed with tufts of tufa and grass, that spread out to where the sloping, sandy beach met it; and this was laved further down by the transparent water of the little sheltered harbour formed by the outer edge of the peak and the other lower projecting cliff that extended out into the sea on the starboard side of the ship—the two making a semicircle and almost meeting by the lava mound at the base of the broken crater, there not being more than a couple of cables length between them.

Most wonderful to me was the fact of the ship having been carried so providentially through such a narrow opening, without coming to grief on the Scylla on the one hand, or being dashed to pieces against the Charybdis on the other.

More wonderful still, though, was the sight the shore presented, as I moved closer to the gangway, and, looking down over the bulwarks, inspected the foreground below.

It was like a stray vista of some antediluvian world.

Near the edge of the white sand—on which the ship was lying like a stranded whale, with her prow propped up between two dunes, or hillocks, that wore up to the level of her catheads—was a row of stunted trees without a leaf on them, only bare, skeleton branches; while on the other side of these was a wide expanse of barren brown earth, or lava, utterly destitute of any sign of vegetation.

Then came a grove of huge cacti, whose fleshy, spiked branches had the look of so many wooden hands, or glove stretchers, set up on end; and beyond these again were the more naturally-wooded heights, leading up to the summit of the mountain peak.

The trees, I noticed, grew more luxuriantly and freely here, appearing to be of much larger size, as they increased their distance from the sterile expanse of the lower plain; until, at the top of the ascent, they formed a regular green crest covering the upper edge of the crater and sloping side of the outstretching arm of cliff on our right, whose mantle of verdure and emerald tone contrasted pleasantly with the bright blue of the sky overhead and the equally blue sea below, the latter fringed with a line of white surf and coral sand along the curve of the shore.

This outer aspect of the scene, however, was not all.

Right under my eyes, waddling along the beach, and rearing themselves on their hind legs to feed on the leaves of the cactus, which they nibbled off in huge mouthfuls, were a lot of enormous tortoises, or land turtles, of the terrapin tribe, that were really the most hideous monsters I had ever seen in my life. Several large lizards also were crawling about on the lava and basking in the sun, and a number of insects and queer little birds of a kind I never heard of.

All was strange; for, although I could still catch the cooing of the doves away in the woods in the distance, there was nothing familiar to my sight near.

While I was reflecting on all these wonders, and puzzling my brains as to where we could possibly be, the second-mate, whom I had noticed still on the poop when I came out from the fo'c's'le, as if he had remained up there on watch all night, came to my side and addressed me.

"Everyzing's sdrange, leedel boys, hey?"

"Yes, sir," said I. "I was wondering what part of the world we could be in."

"Ze Galapagos," he replied laconically, answering my question off-hand, in his solemn fashion and deep voice. "It vas

call't ze Galapagos vrom ze Spanish vort dat mean ze big toordles, zame dat yous zee dere."

"Then Captain Snaggs was right after all, sir, about the ship's course yesterday, when he said that Mr Flinders would run us ashore if it was altered?"

"Yase, dat vas zo," said Jan Steenbock. "Dat voorst-mate one big vool, and he vas loose ze sheep! Dis vas ze Abingdon Islants, leedel boys—one of ze Galapagos groups. I vas recollects him. I vas here befores. It vas Abingdon Islants; and ze voorst-mate is von big vool!"

As Jan Steenbock made this observation, a trifle louder than before, I could see the face of Mr Flinders, all livid with passion, as he came up the companion hatch behind the Dane.

"Who's thet durned cuss a-calling o' me names? I guess, I'll spifflicate him when I sees him!" he yelled out at the pitch of his voice; and then pretending to recognise Jan Steenbock for the first time as his detractor, he added, still more significantly, "Oh, it air you, me joker, air it?"

Chapter Eleven.

Settling Matters.

"Yase, it vas me," said Jan Steenbock, at once turning round and confronting the other, not in the least discomposed by his sudden appearance, and speaking in his usual slow, deliberate way. "I zays to ze leedel boys here you's von big vool, and zo you vas!"

"Tarnation!" exclaimed Mr Flinders, stepping out on to the deck over the coaming of the booby hatch, and advancing in a threatening manner towards the Dane, who faced him still imperturbably. "Ye jest say thet agen, mister, an' I'll —"

The second-mate did not wait for him to finish his sentence.

"I zays you's von big vool, the biggest vool of all ze vools I vas know," he cried in his deep tones. Every word sounded distinctly and trenchantly, with a sort of sledge-hammer effect, that made the Yankee mate writhe again. "But, my vren', you vas badder dan dat, vor you vas a droonken vool, and vas peril ze sheep and ze lifes of ze men aboard mit your voolness and ze rhum you vas trink below, mitout minting your duty. Oh, yase, you vas more bad dan one vool, Mister Vlinders; I vas vatch yous ze whole of ze voyage, and I spik vat I zink and vat I zees!"

"Jee-rusalem, ye white-livered Dutchman!" screamed out the other, now white with rage, and with his eyes glaring like those of a tiger, as he threw out his arms and rushed at Jan Steenbock, "I'll give ye goss fur ev'ry lyin' word ye hev sed agen me, ye bet. I'm a raal Down-East alligator, I am, ye durned furrin reptyle! Ye'll wish ye wer never rizzed or came athwart my hawse, my hearty, afore I've plugged ye out an' done with ye, bo, I guess; for I'm a regular screamer from Chicago, I am, an' I'll wipe the side-walk with ye, I will!"

This was 'tall talk,' as Hiram remarked, he and several others of the crew having turned out from their bunks by this time, roused by the altercation, all gathering together in the waist, full of interest and expectancy at witnessing such an unwonted treat as a free fight between their officers. But, the first-mate's brave words, mouth them out as he did with great vehemence and force of expression, did not frighten the stalwart Dane, self-possessed and cool to the last, one whit.

No, not a bit of it.

Quietly putting himself into an easy position of defence, with his right arm guarding his face and body, Jan Steenbock, throwing out his left fist with a rapidity of movement quite unexpected in one of his slow, methodical demeanour, caught the blustering Yankee, as he advanced on him with hostile thoughts intent, full butt between the eyes, the blow being delivered straight from the shoulder and having sufficient momentum to have felled an ox.

At all events, it was enough for Mr Flinders.

Whack!

It resounded through the ship; and, uttering a half-stifled cry, the mate measured his length along the deck, the back of his head knocking against the planks with a sound that seemed to be the echo of the blow that brought him low, though softer and more like a thud—tempered and toned down, no doubt, by the subduing effect of distance!

This second assault on his thick skull, however, instead of stunning him, as might have been imagined, appeared to bring the mate back to consciousness, and roused him indeed to further action; for, scrambling up from his recumbent position, with his face showing unmistakable marks of the fray already, and his eyes not glaring quite so much, for they were beginning to close up, he got on his feet again, and squared up to Jan Steenbock, with his arms swinging round like those of a windmill.

He might just as well have tried to batter down a stone wall, under the circumstances, as endeavour to break down the other's guard by any such feeble attempt, although both were pretty well matched as to size and strength.

Jan paid no attention to his roundabout and random onslaught, fending off his ill-directed blows easily enough with his right arm, which was well balanced, a little forward across his chest, protecting him from every effort of his enemy.

He just played with him for a minute, during which the Yankee mate, frothing with fury and uttering all sorts of terrible threats, that were as powerless to hurt Jan as his pointless attack, danced round his watchful antagonist like a pea on a hot griddle; and then, the Dane, tired at length of the fun, advancing his left, delivered another terrific drive from the shoulder that tumbled Mr Flinders backwards under the hood of the booby hatch, where he nearly floored Captain Snaggs, on his way up from the cuddy—the skipper having been also aroused by the tumult, the scene of the battle being almost immediately over his swinging cot, and the concussion of the first-mate's head against the deck having awakened him before his time, which naturally did not tend to improve his temper.

“Hillo, ye durned Cape Cod sculpin!” he gasped out, Mr Flinders' falling body having caught him full in the stomach and knocked all the wind out of him. “Thet's a kinder pretty sorter way to come tumblin' down the companion, like a mad bull in fly time! What's all this infarnal muss about, hey?”

So shouting, between his pauses to take breath, the skipper shoved the mate before him out of the hatchway, repeating his question again when both had emerged on the poop. “Now, what's this infarnal muss about, hey?”

Taken thus in front and rear Mr Flinders hardly knew what to say, especially as Jan Steenbock's fist had landed on his mouth, loosening his teeth and making the blood flow, his countenance now presenting a pitiable spectacle, all battered and bleeding.

“The—the—thet durned skallawag thaar hit me, sirree,” he stammered and stuttered, spitting out a mouthful of blood and a couple of his front teeth, which had been driven down his throat almost by Jan Steenbock's powerful blow. “He—he tried to—to take my life. He did so, cap. But, I guess I'll be even with him, by thunder!—I'll soon rip my bowie inter him, an' settle the coon; I will so, you bet!”

Mr Flinders fumbled at his waistbelt as he spoke, trying to pull out the villainous-looking, dagger-hilted knife he always carried there, fixed in a sheath stuck inside the back of his trousers; but his rage and excitement making his hand tremble with nervous trepidation, Captain Snaggs was able to catch his arm in time and prevent his drawing the ugly weapon.

“No ye don't, mister; no ye don't, by thunder! so long's I'm boss hyar,” cried the skipper. “Ef ye fits aboard my shep, I reckon ye'll hev to fit fair, or else reckon up with Ephraim O Snaggs; yes, so, mister, thet's so. I'll hev no knifing aboard my ship!”

The captain appeared strangely forgetful of his own revolver practice in the case of poor Sam Jedfoot, and also of his having ran a-muck and nearly killed the helmsman and Morris Jones, the steward, thinking he was still in pursuit of the negro cook—which showed the murderous proclivities of his own mind, drunk or sober. However, all the same, he stopped the first-mate now from trying to use his knife; although the latter would probably have come off the worst if he had made another rush at Jan Steenbock, who stood on the defence, prepared for all emergencies.

“No, ye don't. Stow it, I tell ye, or I'll throttle ye, by thunder!” said the skipper, shaking Mr Flinders in his wiry grasp like a terrier would a rat; while, turning to Jan, he asked: “An' what hev ye ter say about this darned muss—I s'pose it's six o' one an' half-dozen o' t'other, hey?”

“Misther Vlinders vas roosh to sthrike me, and I vas knock hims down,” said Jan Steenbock, in his laconic fashion. “He vas get oop and roosh at me vonce mores, and I vas knock hims down on ze deck again; and zen, you vas coom oop ze hatchway, and dat vas all.”

“But, confound ye!” cried the other, putting in his spoke, “you called me a fule fust!”

“So ye air a fule,” said Captain Snaggs, “an' a tarnation fule, too, I reckon—the durndest fule I ever seed; fur the old barquey wouldn't be lyin' hyar whaar she is, I guess, but fur yer durned pigheadedness!”

“Zo I vas zay,” interposed Jan Steenbock. “I das tell hims it vas all bekos he vas one troonken vool dat we ras wreck, zir.”

“Ye never sed a truer word, mister,” replied the skipper, showing but little sympathy for Mr Flinders, whom he ordered to go below and wash his dirty face, now the ‘little unpleasantness’ between himself and his brother mate was over. “Still, hyar we air, I guess, an' the best thing we ken do is ter try an' get her off. Whaar d'yer reckon us to be, Mister Steenbock, hey?”

“On ze Galapagos,” answered the second-mate modestly, in no ways puffed up by his victory over the other or this appeal to his opinion by Captain Snaggs, who, like a good many more people in the world, worshipped success, and was the first to turn his back on his own champion when defeated. “I zink ze sheep vas shtruck on Abingdon Island. I vas know ze place, cap'n; oh, yase, joost zo!”

“Snakes an' alligators, mister! Ye doan't mean ter say ye hev been hyar afore, hey?”

“Ja zo, cap'n,” replied Jan Steenbock, in his slow and matter-of-fact way, taking the other's expression literally; “but dere vas no shnake, dat I vas zee, and no alligator. Dere vas nozings but ze terrapin tortoise and ze lizards on ze rocks! I vas here one, doo, dree zummers ago, mit a drading schgooner vrom Guayaquil after a cargo of ze orchilla weed, dat fetch goot price in Equador. I vas sure it vas Abingdon Islant vrom dat tall big peak of montane on ze port side dat vas cal't Cape Chalmers; vor, we vas anchor't to looard ven we vas hunting for ze weed orchilla and ze toordles.”

“Oh, indeed,” said the skipper. “I'll look at the chart an' take the sun at noon, so to kalkerlate our bearin's; but I guess ye're not fur out, ez I telled thet dodrotted fule of a Flinders we'd be safe ter run foul o' the cussed Galapagos if we kept thet course ez he steered! Howsomedever, let's do sunthin', an' not stan' idling hyar no longer. Forrad,

thaar, ye lot o' star-gazin', fly-catchin' lazy lubbers! make it eight bells an' call the watch to sluice down decks! Ye doan't think, me jokers, I'm goin' to let ye strike work an' break articles 'cause the shep's aground, do ye? Not if I knows it, by thunder! Stir yer stumps an' look smart, or some o' ye'll know the reason why!"

This made Tom Bullover and the other hands bustle about on the fo'c's'le, although buckets had to be lowered over the side aft to wash down the decks with, so as to clear away all the volcano dust that was still lying about, for the head-pump could not be used as usual on account of the forepart of the ship being high and dry.

Meanwhile, Hiram and I busied ourselves in the galley, blowing up the fire and getting the coffee ready for breakfast, so that ere long things began to look better.

The sun by this time was more than half-way up overhead, but as a steady south-west breeze was blowing in still from the sea right across our quarter, for the ship was lying on the sand with her bowsprit pointing north by west, the temperature was by no means so hot as might have been expected from the fact of our being so close to the Equator; and so, after our morning meal was over, the skipper had all hands piped to lighten the vessel, in order to prepare her for our going afloat again.

Captain Snaggs took the precaution, however, of getting out anchors ahead and astern, so as to secure her in her present position, so that no sudden shift of wind or rise of the tide might jeopardise matters before everything was ready for heaving her off, the sheet and starboard bower being laid out in seven-fathom water, some fifty yards aft of the rudder post, in a direct line with the keel, so that there should be as little difficulty as possible in kedging her. These anchors were carried out to sea by a gang of men in the jolly-boat, which was let down amidships just where we were awash, by a whip and tackle rigged up between the main and crossjack yards for the purpose.

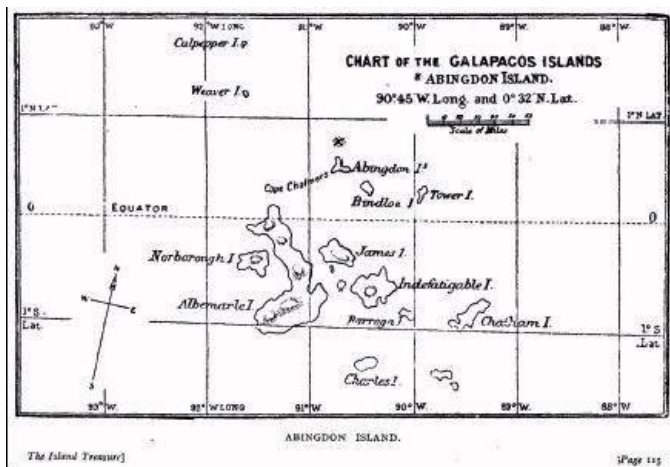
By the time this was done, from the absence of any shadow cast by the sun, which was high over our mastheads, it was evidently close on to noon; so, the skipper brought his sextant and a big chart he had of the Pacific on deck, spreading the latter over the cuddy skylight, while he yelled out to the dilapidated Mr Flinders, who was repairing damages below, to watch the chronometer and mark the hour when he sang out.

Captain Snaggs squinted through the eye-glass of his instrument for a bit with the sextant raised aloft, as if he were trying to stare old Sol out of countenance.

"Stop!" he sang out in a voice of thunder. "Stop!"

Then he took another observation, followed by a second stentorian shout of "Stop!"

A pause ensued, and then he roared below to Mr Flinders, asking him what he made it, the feeble voice of the first-mate giving him in return the Greenwich time as certified by the chronometer; when after a longish calculation and measuring of distances on the chart, with a pair of compasses and the parallel ruler, Captain Snaggs gave his decision in an oracular manner, with much wagging of his goatee beard.



"I guess yo're about right this journey, Mister Steenbock," he said, holding up the chart for the other's inspection. "I kalkelate we're jest in latitood 0 degrees 32 minutes north, an' longitood 90 degrees 45 minutes west—pretty nigh hyar, ye see, whaar my finger is on this durned spec, due north'ard of the Galapagos group on the Equator. This chart o' mine, though, don't give no further perticklers, so I reckon it must be Abingdon Island, ez ye says, ez thet's the furthest north, barrin' Culpepper Island, which is marked hyar, I see, to the nor'-west, an' must be more'n fifty leagues, I guess, away."

"Joost zo," replied Jan Steenbock, mildly complacent at his triumph. "I vas zink zo, and I zays vat I zink!"

The point being thus satisfactorily settled, the men had their dinner, which Hiram and I had cooked in the galley while the anchors were being got out and the skipper was taking his observation of the sun; and then, after seeing that everything was snug in the caboose, I was just about sneaking over the side to explore the strange island and inspect more closely the curious animals I had noticed, when Captain Snaggs saw me from the poop and put the stopper on my little excursion.

"None o' y'r skulking my loblolly b'y!" he shouted out. "Jest ye lay aloft an' send down the mizzen-royal. This air no time fur skylarkin' an' jerymanderin'. We wants all hands at work."

With that, I had, instead of enjoying myself ashore as I had hoped, to mount up the rigging and help the starboard

watch in unbending the sails, which, when they reached the deck, were rolled up by the other watch on duty below, and lowered to the beach over the side, where they were stowed in a heap on the sand above high-water mark.

The lighter spars were next sent down, and then the upper and lower yards by the aid of strong purchases, all being similarly placed ashore, with the ropes coiled up as they were loosed from their blocks and fastenings aloft; so, by the time sunset came the ship was almost a sheer hulk, only her masts and standing rigging remaining.

Poor old thing, she was utterly transformed, lying high and dry there, with all her top hamper gone, and shorn of all her fair proportions!

I noticed this when I came down from aloft, the *Denver City* looking so queer from the deck, with her bare poles sticking up, like monuments erected to her past greatness; but, although I was tired enough with all the jobs I had been on, unreeling ropes, and knotting, and splicing, and hauling, till I hardly knew whether I stood on my head or my heels, I was not too tired to take advantage of the kind offer Hiram made me when I went into the galley to help get the men's tea ready.

"Ye ken skip, Cholly, an' hev a lark ashore, ef ye hev a mind to," said he; "I'll look arter the coppers."

Didn't I 'skip,' that's all.

I was down the sides in a brace of shakes, and soon wandering at my own sweet will about the beach, wondering at everything I saw—the lava bed above the sand, the tall, many-armed cactus plants, with their fleshy fingers and spikes at the ends, like long tenpenny nails, the giant tortoises, which hissed like snakes as they waddled out of my path—wondering, aye, wondering at everything!

Hearing the cooing of doves again, as I had done in the morning, I followed the sound, and presently came to a small grove of trees on an incline above the flat lava expanse, to the right of the head of the little bay where the ship was stranded.

Here grass and a species of fern were growing abundantly around a pool of water, fed from a tiny rivulet that trickled down from the cliff above; and I had no sooner got under the shelter of the leafy branches than I was surrounded by a flock of the pretty grey doves whose gentle cooing I had heard.

They were so tame that they came hopping on my head and outstretched hand, and I was sorry I had not brought some biscuit in my pocket, so that I might feed them.

It was so calm and still in the mossy glade that I threw myself down on the grass, remaining until it got nearly dark, when I thought it about time to return to the ship, though loth to leave the doves, who cooed a soft farewell after me, which I continued to hear long after I lost sight of them.

I got back to the shore safely without further adventure, until I was close under the ship, when I had a fearful fright from a huge tortoise that I ran against, and which seemed to spit in my face, it hissed at me so viciously.

It must have been four feet high at least, and what its circumference was goodness only knows, for I could have laid down on its back with ease, as it was as broad as a table.

I did not attempt to do this, however, but scrambled up the ship's side as quickly as I could, and made my way to the galley, in order to get my tea, which Hiram had promised to keep hot for me.

Outside the galley, though, I met the American, who frightened me even more than the big tortoise had done the minute before.

"Say, Cholly," he cried, his voice trembling with terror, "thet ghost of the nigger cook air hauntin' us still; I seed him thaar jest now, a-sottin' in the corner of the caboose an' a-playin' on his banjo, ez true ez I'm a livin' sinner!"

Chapter Twelve.

The Golden Madonna.

"My goodness! you don't mean that, Hiram?" I exclaimed, seeing from his earnest manner that he was not trying to hoax me, but stating what he really believed to be a fact. "When was it that you saw the ghost?"

"Jest on sundown, Cholly, arter the men hed thaar tea an' cleared out, the whole bilin' ov 'em, skipper an' all, goin' ashore, like ez ye did, sonny, afore 'em, to prospect the country an' look at the big turtle an' other streenge varmint. Thaar warn't a soul left aboard but thet brute Flinders an' myself; an' he wer so basted by the lickin' ez Jan Steenbock giv him thet he wer lyin' down in the cabin an' pizenin' hisself with rum to mend matters. But, I wer thet dead beat, with shiftin' gear an' sendin' down yards, thet I wer fit fur nuthin' but ter lean over the gangway an' smoke a pipe afore turnin' in, fur I wer mighty tired out, I wer!"

"You must have been, Hiram," said I, "for, I'm sure I was, and am so still."

"Yes, I wer dead beat, an' thaar I rested agen the gangway, smokin' an' lookin' at the chaps that wer a-skylarkin' with a big turtle they had capsized on ter his back, so ez he couldn't make tracks; when all at oncest I thort o' the galley fire a-goin' out an' yer tea, Cholly, ez I promist to keep bilin', an' so I made back fur the caboose. It wer then close on dark, an' a sorter fog beginnin' to spring from seaward afore the land breeze riz an' blew it orf."

"And then," I put in, on his pausing at this point, hanging on his words intently, "what happened then?"

"Lord sakes! Cholly, it kinder makes the creeps come over me to tell you," he replied, with a shudder, while his voice fell impressively. "I wer jest nigh the galley when I heerd a twang on the banjo, same ez poor old Sam used ter giv' the durned thin' afore he began a-playin' on it—a sorter loudish twang, as if he gripped all the strings at oncet; an' then, ther' come a softer sort o' toonfal 'pink-a-pink-a-pong, pong,' an' I guess I heerd a wheezy cough, ez if the blessed old nigger wer clarin' his throat fur to sing—I did, so!"

"Goodness gracious, Hiram!" I ejaculated, breathless with expectation, "you must have been frightened!"

"I wer so," he replied—"I wer so skeart that I didn't know what ter dew; but, thinks I, let's see if anythin's thaar; an' so I jest look't round the corner o' the galley through the half-door, an', b'y, thaar I seed Sam a-sottin', ez I sed, an' a-playin' his banjo ez nat'rel ez ever wer!"

"But the banjo wasn't there last night," I interposed here. "I looked for it almost as soon as we heard the sound of it being played at the time of the earthquake, and I couldn't see it hanging up over the door where Tom Bullover, you remember, pointed it out to us."

"Wa-all, all I ken say is thet I seed the ghostess with the durned thin' thaar in his grip. I didn't wait fur to see no more, I can tell ye, Cholly!"

"What did you do?"

"I jest made tracks for the fo'c's'le, an' turned inter my bunk, I wer so skeart, till the skipper an' the rest o' the hands came aboard ag'in, when I comed out an' stood hyar a-waitin' fur ye. I ain't seed Tom Bullover yet; so ye're the fust I hev told o' the sperrit hauntin' us agen, Cholly."

"Do you think it's gone yet?" I asked; "perhaps it is still there."

"I dunno," he replied. "P'raps ye'd best go fur to see. I'm jiggered if I will!"

I hesitated at this challenge; it was more than I bargained for.

"It's all dark now," I said, glancing towards the galley, from which no gleam came, as usual, across the deck, as was generally the case at night-time; "I suppose the fire has gone out?"

"'S'pose it air," answered Hiram; "guess it's about time it wer, b'y, considerin' I wer jest a-going fur to make it up when I seed Sam. I reckon, though, if ye hev a mind fur to look in, ye can get a lantern aft from the stoard. I seed him a-buzzin' round the poop jest now, fur he hailed me ez he poked his long jib-boom of a nose up the companion; but, I didn't take no notice o' the cuss, fur I wer outer sorts like, feelin' right down chawed up!"

"All right," said I, anxious to display my courage before Hiram, his fright somehow or other emboldening me. "I will get a lantern at once and go into the galley."

So saying, I went along the deck aft, passing into the cuddy by the door under the break of the poop, and there I found Morris Jones, the steward, in the pantry.

He was putting a decanter and glass on a tray for the captain, who was sitting in the cabin, preparing for a jollification after his exertions of the day; for he had returned in high glee from his inspection of the ship's position with Jan Steenbock, whom he took with him to explain the different points of land and the anchorage.

Jan Steenbock was just leaving the skipper as I entered, refusing, as I surmised from the conversation, his pressing invitation to have a parting drink—a sign of great cordiality with him.

"Wa-all, hev yer own way, but a drop o' good rum hurts nary a one, ez I ken see," I heard Captain Snaggs say. "Good-night, Mister Steenbock. I guess we'll set to work in airnest ter-morrer, an' see about gettin' the cargy out to lighten her; an' then, I reckon, mister, we'll try y'r dodge o' diggin' a dock under her."

"Yase, dat vas goot," said the Dane, in his deep voice, in answer. "We will dig oop the zand vrom her kil: an' zen, she vill vloat, if dere vas no leaks an' she vas not hoort her back by taking ze ground."

"Jest so," replied the skipper; and Morris Jones having gone into the cabin with the glasses and water on his tray, I heard a gurgling sound, as if Captain Snaggs was pouring out some of his favourite liquor and gulping it down. "Ah, I feel right chunky arter thet, I guess! Yes, Mister Steenbock, we'll float her right off; fur, I don't think she's started a plank in her; an' if we shore her up properly we ken dig the sand from under her, ez ye sez, an' then she'll go off ez right ez a clam, when we brings a warp round the capstan from the ankers astern."

"Ja zo," agreed Jan Steenbock. "We vill wait and zee."

"Guess not," retorted the skipper. "We'll dew better, we'll work and try, me joker, an' dew thet right away smart ter-morrer!"

Captain Snaggs sniggered at this, as if he thought it a joke; and then, I could hear Jan Steenbock wish him good-night, leaving him to his rum and the companionship of Mr Flinders—who must have smelt the liquor, for I caught his voice muttering something about being 'durned dry,' but I did not listen any longer, looking out for the steward, who presently followed Jan Steenbock out of the cabin.

"Well, younker, what d'ye want?" Morris Jones asked me, when he came up to where I was still standing alongside his

pantry. "I didn't have time to speak to ye afore. What is it?"

"I want a lantern," said I. "The galley fire's gone out."

"All right, here you are, you can take this," he replied, handing me one he had lit. "Any more ghostesses about forrud? That blessed nigger's sperrit oughter go ashore, now we've come to this outlandish place, and leave us alone!"

"You'd better not joke about it," I said solemnly. "Hiram has seen something awful to-night."

"What d'ye mean?" he cried, turning white in a moment, as I could see by the light of the lantern, and all his braggadocio vanishing. "What d'ye mean?"

"Only not to halloo too loud till you're out of the wood," said I, going off forwards. "Hiram has seen Sam's ghost again, that's all!"

I felt all the more encouraged by this little passage of arms with the funky Welshman; so, I marched up to the galley door as brave as brass, holding out, though, the lantern in front of me, to light up the place, Hiram, ashamed of his own fears, coming up close behind, and looking in over my shoulder.

Neither of us, though, saw any cause for alarm, for there was no one there; and I was inclined to believe that Hiram had fallen asleep and dreamt the yarn he told me, the more especially as there was a strong smell of tobacco about the place, as if some one had been there recently smoking.

The American, however, was indignant at the bare suggestion of this.

"What d'yer take me fur, Cholly," he said. "I tell ye I seed him a-sottin' down thaar in thet corner, an' heerd the banjo ez plain ez if it wer a-playin' now! Look at the fire, too; ain't that streenge? It wer jest a-staggerin' out when I comed hyar fur to put on some more wood to make it burn up, an' thaar it air now, ez if some one hez jest been a-lightin' on it!"

It was as he said. The fire seemed to have been fresh lit, for there was even a piece of smouldering paper in the stoke hole.

It was certainly most mysterious, if Hiram had not done it, which he angrily asserted he had not, quite annoyed at my doubting his word.

While I was debating the point with him, Tom Bullover appeared at the door, with his usual cheerful grin.

"Hullo!" cried he; "what's the row between you two?"

Thereupon Hiram and I both spoke at once, he telling his version of the story and I mine.

"Well, don't let such foolish nonsense make you ill friends," said Tom, grinning. "I dare say you're both right, if matters could only be explained—Hiram, in thinking he saw Sam's ghost, and you, Charley, in believing he dreamt it all out of his head. As for the fire burning up, I can tell you all about that, for seeing it just at the last gasp, I stuck in a bit of paper and wood to light it, so as to be more cheerful. I likewise lit my own pipe arterwards, which fully accounts for what you fellows couldn't understand."

"Thaar!" exclaimed Hiram triumphantly; "I tolled you so, Cholly."

"All right," I retorted. "It's just as I said, and there's nothing mysterious about it."

Each of us remained of his own opinion, but Tom Bullover chaffed us out of all further argument, and we presently followed the example of the other hands, who were asleep snoring in the fo'c's'le, and turned into our bunks; while Tom went aft to relieve Jan Steenbock as look-out, there being no necessity for all of the watch to be on deck, the ship being ashore, and safer even than if she had been at anchor.

In the morning, I was roused up by the cooing doves again, and the very first man I met after turning out was Morris Jones, who looked seedy and tired out, as if he had been awake all night.

"What's the matter?" I asked him, as he came into the galley, where I was busy at my morning duty, getting the coppers filled for the men's coffee, and poking up the fire, which still smouldered, for I had banked it, so as to keep it alight after I turned in. "Anything happened?"

"You were right, Cholly, in tellin' me not to holler till I was out of the wood last night," he said solemnly. "I seed thet arterwards the same as Hiram!"

"Saw what?"

"The nigger's ghost."

"Nonsense!" I cried, bursting out into a laugh, his face looked so woe-begone, while his body seemed shrunk, giving him the most dilapidated appearance. "You must have been taking some of the cap'en's rum."

"None o' your imperence, master Cholly," said he, aiming a blow at my head, which I dexterously avoided. "I never touches none o' the skipper's ruin; I wouldn't taste the nasty stuff now, after all I've seen it's done. No, I tell you straight, b'y, I ain't lying. I see Sam Jedfoot last night as ever was, jest soon arter you went away from the cuddy with the lantern."

"You did?"

"Yes, I'll take my davy on it. He comed right through the cabin, and walked past my pantry, stepping over the deck jest as if he was alive; and then I saw something like a flash o' light'ing, and when I looked agen, being blinded at first, there he were a-floating in the air, going out o' sight over the side."

"Did you go to see what had become of him?" I said jokingly, on hearing this. "Where did he make for when he got over the side?"

"I didn't look no more," answered the steward, taking my inquiry in earnest. "I were too frightened."

"What did you do, then?"

"I just stopped up there in my pantry all night, locking the door, so as to prevent no one from getting in. Aye, I kep' two lights burning, to scare the ghost if he should come again; and theer I stop't till daylight, when I heard you stirring, and comed here to speak to you, glad to see a human face agen, if only a beast of a b'y like you—far them sperrits do make a chap feel quar all over! Besides, too, the fear o' seeing the blamed thing agen, I thought the skipper, who was drinking awful arter Jan Steenbock left, he and Flinders having a regular go in at the rum, might have another fit o' the horrors, and bust out on me with his revolver. Lor, I 'ave 'ad a night on it, I can tell you!"

"Poor fellow! wait and have a pan of coffee," said I sympathisingly, pitying his condition and not minding his polite allusion to me as a 'beast of a boy,' which no doubt my manner provoked. "It will soon be ready."

"I will," he replied, thoroughly beaten and speaking to me civilly for the first time. "Thank ye, kindly, Cholly!"

By-and-by the crew turned out; and, after having their coffee, began again the same work they had been at the previous day of lightening the ship, Captain Snaggs superintending operations, and not looking a bit the worse for his drinking bout in which Morris Jones said he had spent the night with his kindred spirit, Mr Flinders.



"The scene on the beach all that day and the next was a busy one." (Page 150.)
The Island Treasure! (Frontispiece)

The scene on the beach all that day and the next was a busy one, all hands hard at it unloading the *Denver City*, preparatory to our trying to restore her to her native element, the sea—which latter rippled up along her dry timbers forward, as far as the mizzen-chains, the furthest point where she was aground, with a lispng sound, it seemed to me, as if wooing her to come back and float on its bosom again once more, as of yore!

A great deal more had to be effected, however, before this could be accomplished, for a sort of dock, or trench, had to be dug out beneath the vessel's keel, so as to bring the water beneath her and help to lift her off the sandbank where she was stranded; and this could not be done in a day, work we our hardest, despite the men taking shifts turn and turn about by watches at the task.

Fortunately, while unloading the cargo, a lot of pickaxes were found amongst the miscellaneous assortment of 'notions' stowed in the main-hold; and these now came in handy, the hands learning to wield them just as if they had been born navvies, after a bit, under the experienced direction of Captain Snaggs, who said he had been a Californian miner during a spell he had ashore at one period of his life.

On the third day of this labour, the dock was becoming perceptibly deep amidships and the water beginning to ooze through the sand; when, all at once, Tom Bullover, who was wielding a pick like the rest, struck the point of it against something which gave out a clear metallic ring.

After a dig or two more, he excavated the object, which, preserved in the lava that lay beneath the sand and shells on the beach, was found to be an image of the Virgin, such as you see in Roman Catholic countries abroad. It was of a bright yellow colour and shining, as if just turned out of a jeweller's shop.

It was a golden Madonna!

Chapter Thirteen.

Jan Steenbock gets Confidential.

"My stars, Chips!" exclaimed Hiram, who was standing near by when Tom Bullover held up his treasure-trove to view. "What hev ye got thaar, ship met?"

"Sorry o' me knows," returned the other, examining the object closely. "Seems like one o' them blessed saints they has in the cathedral at Lima, which I went over one day last v'y'ge I took this side, when I sailed from Shields to Valparaiso, and arterwards come up the coast, our skipper looking out for a cary, instead o' going back home in ballast. It seems a pretty sort o' himage, too, bo, and I'm hanged if I don't think it's gold, for it's precious heavy for its size, I can tell you!"

"Chuck it over hyar an' let's see what it's like," said Hiram, his curiosity at once roused. "I'll soon tell ye if it's hunkydory ez soon ez I hev the handlin' on it; fur I ken smell the reel sort, I guess, an' knows it likewise by the feel it kinder hez about it."

"Right you are, bo," sang out Tom Bullover, pitching it towards him. "Catch!"

"Bully far yer!" cried Hiram, putting up his hands and clutching hold of the figure as, well thrown by the other, it came tumbling into his ready grasp. "I'll soon tell ye what it's made on, I reckon!"

He thereupon proceeded to inspect the object carefully, giving it a lick of his tongue and rough polish with his palms, to remove the dirt and dust with which it was partly encrusted, sniffing at it and handling it as if it were a piece of putty.

"Well, bo," asked Tom at length, tired of waiting and eager to learn the result of the other's examination; "is it all right?"

"You bet," responded Hiram, tossing up the image in the air and catching it again, and raising a triumphant shout that at once attracted the attention of the other hands, who dropped their pickaxes and shovels instanter and came clustering round. "I'm jiggered if it ain't gold, an' durned good metal, too, with nary a bit o' bogus stuff about it. Hooray!"

"Hooray!" yelled out the rest of the men in sympathy, the precious figure being passed round from one to another, so that each could see it in turn and judge for himself. "Hooray!"

"Hillo!" cried Captain Snaggs, noticing the commotion and coming bustling up, with his wiry goatee beard bristling and his pointed nose and keen eyes all attention. "What d'ye mean droppin' work an loafin' up hyar in a crowd, makin' all that muss fur, hey?"

"We've just found this here figger, sir," explained Tom Bullover; "and Hiram says it's made o' gold."

"Thet's so, cap," corroborated the American sailor. "It air all thet; an' goold of good grit, I reckon, too, or I'll swaller the durned lump, I will, without sass!"

"Humph!" snorted the skipper, holding out his hand for it; "give us holt, an' I'll prospect it fur ye, if ye like. They usest to tell me I warn't a bad judge when I wer at the Carraboo diggin's an' went in fur minin'."

The little image of the Madonna was accordingly handed to him, and the skipper's nose wrinkled up, and twitched and jerked sideways, while his billy-goat beard bristled out like a porcupine's quills, as he sniffed and examined the figure, turning it over and over in his hands and feeling it, the same as Hiram had done. He even went so far as to pinch it.

"Jee-rusalem!" he at length exclaimed; "it's gold, sure enuff!"

"Hooray!" again burst from the men around. "Hooray!"

"I don't see nothin' to holler fur," said Captain Snaggs, in response to this, bringing them up, as the saying goes, 'with a round turn,' as he turned round angrily. "Guess ye won't find no more o' the same sort skatin' round the ranche!"

But, just then, Jan Steenbock came on the scene.

He had been busily engaged overseeing the construction of a species of coffer-dam across the shore at right angles and up to the keel of the ship at the point where the tide came up to, just by the mizzen-chains; so that the water should not get down into the excavation that the men were digging until this should be deep enough to float the vessel, or, at all events, assist in easing her off the beach—for, if flooded prematurely, the labour would be doubled.

The hands helping him having, however, deserted for the nonce and joined the rest of the crowd around Tom Bullover and Hiram, he came up, also, to the spot where all of us were standing, with the object of coaxing his gang back to their task. The sound of the men's wild shout and the skipper's voice, raised in anger, as he thought, hastened his footsteps, too, for he feared that some mischief was brewing, and that the crew had mutinied at the least.

The moment he got near, though, he could perceive, from the grinning faces and expression of those close by, that nothing very desperate was in the wind; and, he was just on the point of asking what the row was about, when, all at once, he caught sight of the image.

“Mein Gott!” he ejaculated, looking the picture of astonishment, and more excited than I had ever seen him, from the first day I stepped on board the ship until now,—“it vas ze Madonna of ze golt. Ze Madonna of ze golt!”

We all stared at him, filled with wonder at his apparent recognition of the figure. The skipper, however, at once interrogated him on the point.

“Jehosophat, mister!” cried Captain Snaggs, with mixed curiosity and impatience—“what d’ye mean? Hev ye ever seed this hyar figger afore?”

“Yase,” said the Dane, in his deep voice; “yase, I vas zee him one long time before I vas know him ver’ well!”

“Thunder, ye don’t mean it! What, this durned identical image?”

“Yase, mitout doubt. I vas know dat zame idenzigal vigure,” replied the other imperturbably, his passing fit of excitement having cooled, leaving him as calm and impassive as usual. “It vas ze Madonna of ze golt dat we vas loose overboart from ze schgooners, one, doo, dree year ago.”

The skipper looked at him, without speaking further for a second or more, Jan Steenbock confronting him as steadfastly and placidly as a periwinkle might have been under the circumstances; while all of us around gazed at them both, open-mouthed with expectancy.

“What d’ye mean?” presently said Captain Snaggs, breaking the silence; “what schooner air ye talkin’ on?”

“Ze schgooners dat I vas zail in vrom Guayaquil dat time as I tell yous, vor to gatoh ze orchillas veeds.”

“But, mister, say, what hez thet stuff, which in coorse I knows on, to do with this durned old image hyar?” again interrogated the skipper, in an incredulous tone. “I guess ye air gettin’ a bit kinder mixed up, an’ yer yarn don’t hitch on an’ run smooth like!”

“Joost zo,” returned the imperturbable second-mate, in no way disturbed by this impeachment of his veracity. “You joost vait; I vas hab zometing vor to zay. Joost vait and I vas tell yous.”

“Carry on then,” said Captain Snaggs impatiently. “By thunder! ye air ez long gettin’ under way, I guess, ez a Cape Cod pilot. Fire away, an’ be durned to ye, an’ tell us the hull bilin’, mister!”

Jan Steenbock, however, would not allow himself to be hurried in this fashion. Quite unmoved by the skipper’s impatience, he went on in his slow, deliberate way, all of us listening with the keenest attention and steadying ourselves for a good yarn.

“It vas dree year ago dat I vas meet mit Cap’en Shackzon, of ze schgooners *Mariposa*, at Guayaquil,” he began sententiously, clearing his throat, and seeming to speak in deeper and deeper tones as he proceeded with his narrative. “He vas go, he tells me, vor a drading voy’ge to ze Galapagos Islants, and vas vant a zeccond-mate, and vas ask me vor to come mit hims.”

“An’ ye wanted,” interrupted the skipper—“hey?”

“Yase, I vas go! Cap’en Shackzon zays, zays he, bevore we sdart, dat ze schgooners vas to zail vor Jarls Islant, call’t by ze Sbaniards ‘Vloreana,’ vere dere vas a lot of beeples vrom Equador dat collect ze orchilla veeds, and vas drade likewise to ze mainland mit ze hides and zalt veesh, and ozer tings.”

“I reckon all thet don’t consarn us, mister,” said the skipper, arresting any further enumeration of the exports from Charles Island; “an’ so, ye went thaar to trade, hey?”

“Nein,” came Jan Steenbock’s unexpected answer; “ze schgooners vas not go to Jarls Islant.”

“Jee-rusalem!” exclaimed the skipper, taken aback by this naïve announcement. “Then, whaar in thunder did ye go?”

“Vait, and I vas tell yous,” said the other calmly, going on with his story in his own way. “Ven we vas zail vrom Guayaquil and vas at zee zome days, Cap’en Shackzon zays to me, zays he, ‘I vas engage yous’—dat vas me—‘vor and bekos I vas vant a man dat I can droost, mit all dis crew of gut-throat Sbaniards around me. Can yous be zeegret and keep in ze gonfidence vat I tells you?’ In ze course, I vas zay to Cap’en Shackzon ‘yase;’ and, den—”

“What happened?” eagerly asked Captain Snaggs; “what happened?”

“We zails to ze norzard,” continued Jan, provokingly, refraining from disclosing at the moment the confidential communication he mentioned having been made to him. “We vas zail vor dree more day, and den we vas zee dat cap dere, dat Cap’en Shackzon vas zay is Cape Chalmers, and dat ze lant vas Abingdon Islant vere we vas now vas; and den he vas tell me his zeegret.”

“An’ thet wer what, eh, mister?” said the skipper, while all of us hung on his words, breathless now with excitement, our curiosity being aroused to the highest pitch. “Don’t kep us a-waitin’, thaar’s a friendly coon, fur I guess we air amost bustin’ to haar what thet air secret wer!”

“I beliefs zere vas no harms vor to tell?” observed the Dane reflectively, as if cogitating the matter over in his own

mind and anxious to have another opinion to say whether or no his narration of the circumstances would be any breach of the trust reposed in him. "Cap'en Shackzon was det, and ze crew vas det, and zere vas nobozy dat vas aboart ze schgooners dat vas alifes but meinselfs."

"Nary a bit o' harm at all, mister, ez I ken see," said Captain Snaggs decisively; "not where ther' ain't no folk alive to complain o' ye tellin' on it. Nary a bit o' harm, I reckon!"

"Yase, I do not zee no harms," continued Jan Steenbock, as if he had now made up his mind on the point; "and zo I vas tell yous. Ze zeegret dat Cap'en Shackzon tell to me vas dat he hat discovert von dreasure in a cave in ze islant von day dat he vas plown into ze bay in a squall; and ven he vas go back to Guayaquil, he vas charter ze schgooners to zail back to ze islant again. He vas tell ze beeples dere dat he vas go vor ze orchilla veeds and ze toordle; but, he vas mean to dig oop ze dreasure and take hims back zogreetly in ze schgooners to ze mainland, as if he vas only hab ze orchilla veeds and ze toordle on boart. He zays to me, zays Cap'en Shackzon, 'ze Sbaniards in Equador is von bat lot, and vill murter a mans like one mosquito vor a tollar,' and he vas know dat zey vas kill hims if zey vas zink he vas hab ze dreasure on boart; and, dat vas ze reason dat he vas vant von man dat he coot droost, joost like meinselfs, mit hims!"

"A treasure hyar, mister," said the skipper, with his eyes aglow and his goatee beard bristling up, all agog at such news—"a treasure o' gold, hey?"

"Yase, yase," replied the other affirmatively; "oh, yase!"

"How come it hyar?"

"It vas burit by ze boocaneer in ze olt time—one, doo, dree huntert year ago," explained Jan. "Cap'en Shackzon vas zee it writ in von book dat he vas zee at Guayaquil; and den, ven he vas zail here, he vas come to de zame blace dat ze boocaneer spoke of in ze book and hat burit ze golt. It vas ze ploonder of ze churches of ze coast, dat ze boocaneers hat collect in von big heep and zegreet in ze cave till zey coot take hims away mit dem, and dere it vas remain till Cap'en Shackzon vound it."

"He found it, hey?"

"Yase, he vind it von day, as I zays. His voot vas sdoomble in ze hole, and dat give vays; and den, he doombles into ze cave, and zee all ze dreasure of golt and silber and ozer tings."

"An' did ye see it, too, mister?" inquired Captain Snaggs anxiously. "Pyaps thet air coon wer only bamboozlin' ye, an' made up the yarn!"

"No, he vas not make it oop," replied Jan. "I vas zee dat Madonna of golt dere and ozer tings dat he vas bring back vrom ze cave ven we vas coom here in ze schgooners, and anchor't in ze bay dere as ze sheep vas now lay. But, Cap'en Shackzon vas von sdrange mans!"

"Thunder!" ejaculated the skipper, on the other pausing at this point, as if waiting for the question to be put. "How wer he streenge, mister, hey?"

"He vas like to keep zings to himselfs," said Jan Steenbock meaningly. "He vas not let me go to ze cave at all, and ze schgooner vas anchor't here in ze bay more dan a veek!"

"I s'pose he didn't want the crew—them rascally Spaniards ye spoke on—smellin' a rat an' spilin' his game, I reckon," suggested the skipper; "but how did he manage, hey?"

"He vas keep ze mans all day hunting for ze orchilla veeds up ze montane dere," replied Jan; "and den, ven ze night vas coom, he vas tell me to shtop on ze vatch, and den he vas go ashore to look for ze cave mit himselfs."

"He didn't spot it at once agen then?"

"Nein. He vas look in vain vor dree nights, and vas near give oop ze hoont in despair; but on ze ozer night he vas come back to ze schgooners in goot sbirrits, and zays to me, zays he, 'I vas vind ze cave at last.' He vas zo glat he vas laf mit joy and I vas laf, too!"

"I guess ye hed sunthin' to snigger over, hey?"

"Yase, joost zo! I vas laf mit him; and den, he vas bring oot dat Madonna dere, dat he vas hab stow away in his shirt, and vas show it to me, and ze vigure vas shin in ze moonlight. Ah, dat vas bat; vor, von of ze Sbaniards of ze crew vas zee it shin in ze light and show ze golt, and he vas tell ze ozers—a pack of raskels—and ze whole game was oop vor us and ze dreasure!"

"How's thet, mister?" inquired the skipper, as Jan paused again here, his voice dropping. "Did the varmint spile ye?"

"Humph!" growled the other. "Dey vas spile zemselves! In ze mittle of ze night ze raskels go down into ze cabin vere Cap'en Shackzon vas ashleep and shtab him mit dere knives. Den, zey shtole ze golt Madonna and brings it oop on ze deck; and den, zey get vighting vor ze vigure, and shtab von ze ozers, and dey vas vake me oop mit ze row, vor I vas turet and vas ashleep in ze boate over ze taffrail."

"An' how did ye come off with a hull skin?" asked Captain Snaggs. "I guess ye wer in a durned tight corner."

"Zee goot Gott vatch overs me!" replied Jan Steenbock gravely, raising his eyes reverently upward as he uttered the word, "vor, in ze mittle of ze row, ven ze raskels vas all of zem murtering each ozers and ze deck vas rolling in bloot,

a sudden gale vas spring oop; and ze schgooner vas dash on ze rocks dere to port, and she vas go down in ze deep vater, mit ze crew still vighting on ze deck to ze last. One—doo—dree—vore—mens vas already kil't, besides Cap'en Schackzon—ze lifing and ze det going down zogeder into de zee, mit ze golt Madonna dat you vas now vind!"

"An' how did ye scrape through, hey?"

"I vas schvim ashore," answered Jan Steenbock, in reply to this question from the skipper, who followed his recital carefully, with his inquisitive long nose twitching every now and then, and his billy-goat beard wagging as he nodded his head, watching apparently to catch the other tripping in his story. "I vas schvim ashore and go to landt all raite."

"What became o' ye then?"

"I vas shtop heres till I vas pick oop by a passing sheep."

"Her name, mister?" again interrogated Captain Snaggs, with keen pertinacity. "Thet is if ye reck'lects."

"Oh, yase, I vas remembers very well," rejoined the other, equal to the occasion. "She vas ze whaling barque *Jemima Greens*, of Bostone, I zinks."

"Thet's right; I knows her," interrupted the skipper, quite satisfied. "Joe Davis master, hey?"

"Yase, joost zo," replied the other, "dat vas ze name of ze cap'en, I remembers."

"An' how long did ye remain aboard her?"

"Vor more dan vore months. She vas veeshing vor ze whale ven she pick me oop vrom here; and I vas hab to vait till she vas load up mit ze oils, ven she vas go zouth, and landt me at Valparaizo. Vrom dat port I vas vork mein passage back to England ze next zommer—and dat vas dree year ago."

"Waal, thet's a tall yarn, anyhow," said the skipper, when Jan Steenbock had thus concluded his strange history; "but, dew ye mean ter say ez how ye hev never ben nigh this place hyar agen sin' thet time?"

"Nein," replied the other frankly, "nevaire!"

"What! d'ye mean ter say ez how ye hed no kinder sort o' curiosity like to find thet thaar cave, with the rest o' thet gold an' treasure what them old buccaneers stowed away so snug, 'specially arter seein' it wer' reel?"

"No, cap'en," said Jan Steenbock firmly, as if he had previously well considered all the bearings of the case and arrived at his final decision. "I vas nevaire likes vor to zee dat blace nor ze golt again—no, nevaire!"

"But, why, mister?" asked the skipper, with insatiable curiosity, winking to the hands round, to call their attention to the fact that he was about to take a rise out of the simple-hearted Dane, and 'trot him out,' as it were, for their mutual amusement. "Why shouldn't ye hanker arter seein' the gold agen, mister? I guess ye didn't hev too much on it afore; an', I'm durned if ye hev got much of a pile now, ez fur ez I ken see!"

Jan Steenbock's answer, however, completely staggered him, banishing all his merriment and facetiousness in an instant.

"It vas curst," said the Dane solemnly. "Ze golt and ze islandt and everyting vas shtink mit ze black man's bloot!"

Chapter Fourteen.

We Discover the Cave.

"What d'ye mean?" Captain Snaggs managed to stammer out after a bit, his long face perceptibly longer and his rubicund complexion turned to an ashy grey. He was conscience-stricken and thoroughly frightened at the second-mate thus bringing up again, as he thought, his cruel murder of the negro cook; for, Jan Steenbock spoke in the same tone of voice, and pointed his finger at him like an accusing judge, in almost the same precise way he had done on that eventful day when we were off Scilly, three months before. "What in thunder d'ye mean, man?—what d'ye mean?"

"I vas mean vat I zays," answered the other calmly: "ze dreazure of ze boocaneer vas shtain mit ze bloot of von schlave."

"Oh," exclaimed the skipper, somewhat relieved by his not mentioning again Sam Jedfoot's name, as he and all of us believed the second-mate intended doing, imagining his remark to refer to none other than the poor darkey. "I don't kinder foller ye, mister, nohow, an it strikes me, it dew, ez if ye air gettin' sorter mixed up, same ez jest now! What d'ye mean a-talkin' o' durned nigger slaves an' sichlike? Thaar ain't none now, I reckon, under the Stars and Stripes this side, nor yit fur thet matter in the hull o' the land, from Maine to Californy, sin' the war busted up the great southern 'institooshun,' ez they call'd it in Virginny. Thaar ain't no slaves, sirree, now, I guess, on this hyar free an' almighty continent! What d'yer mean, hey?"

The men gave out another loud hooray at this stump speech, which the skipper, quite relieved of his fears anent any allusion to Sam Jedfoot, delivered with much unction, as if he were holding forth from a platform at election time, his billy-goat beard wagging while he threw his arms about in the excitement of his oratory.

Jan Steenbock, for the moment, seemed puzzled how to reply; for, he stood silently facing the other in the pause that

ensued after he had finished his harangue.

At length, however, he spoke, the wild cheer of the hands spurring him up and giving an impulse to the slow current of his thoughts and words—the Dane not being prone, like Captain Snaggs, to talking for the mere pleasure of hearing his own voice.

“I vill egshblain vat I means,” he began, in his deliberate way, answering the skipper’s question, but speaking as if addressing all of us collectively, his deep tones getting deeper and increasing in volume as he proceeded, so that all could hear. “I vas shpeak vat I reat in ze book dat Cap’en Shackzon vas bringt mit him vrom Guayaquil in ze schgooners dat time. I vas likewise rec’lect vat I zees here ven we vas arrife, an’ Cap’en Shackzon’s vas murter’t, and ze mans vas kill ze ozers, and dere vas nuzzing but bloot and murter; vor, ze schgooners vas go down, mit only meinselfs dat vas eshgape mit mein lifes—and zo I zays to meinselfs, dere vas a curse on ze golt and ze dreazure of ze boocaneer vrom ze bloot of ze schlave dat vas murter’t!”

“Guess I don’t foller ye yet, mister,” said the skipper. “Who kil’t thet air darkey ye air a-talkin’ on, hey?”

“Ze boocaneer,” promptly replied Jan. “Dey vas burit ze schlave vere dey vas burit ze dreazure.”

“An’ what did the cusses dew thet fur?”

“It vas to make ze Sbaniards and ze ozer beebles not vor to dig oop ze dreazure, or vor to go vere it vas burit. Zey vas zink dat ze sbirit of ze black man vas harmt dem and vork mizcheef, ze zame as vas done to hims, bekos he vas murter’t vor ze dreazure. ‘Bloot vor bloot’ vas ze law of ze boocaneer, and dey vas zink dat ze black mans vas hab ze bloot of ze ozer mans dat coom vere his sbirit vas!”

“Oh, thet’s the yarn ye hev got holt on!” exclaimed Captain Snaggs, with a grin on his face, winking round to us. “Guess ye ain’t sich a durned fule ez ter swaller all thet bunkum, hey?”

“I doos belief it, vor it vas droo,” answered Jan Steenbock very impressively. “Oh, yase, I vas zee it meinselfs. It vas droo as droo!”

“Wa-al,” drawled out the skipper, with a snigger, which raised a sympathetic laugh from some of the men standing by, “thet beats ev’rythin’ I ever know’d, it dew! Jest ter think of a straight up-an-down coon like ye, mister, with raal grit in ye, a-believin’ in sich a yarn ez thet!”

“I beliefs it, vor it vas droo,” repeated the Dane, in no way discomposed by the other’s ridicule. “I vas hab ze cause to beliefs!”

“What! Thet a durned nigger buried two hunder’ year ago, or thaarabouts, hez the power to kinder hurt airy a livin’ soul now?”

“I beliefs it,” returned Jan, doggedly; adding, much to the skipper’s discomfiture and banishing his merriment in a moment. “Dere vas sdrange zings habben zometimes. I vas hear ze mans zay dat ze ghost of ze cook dat you shoots vas hoont dees very sheeps!”

Captain Snaggs made no reply to this crushing rejoinder: but a sort of murmur of assent came from the others, while I caught Hiram’s voice saying, “Thet’s so; right enuff!”

“And zo, cap’en,” went on the Dane, perceiving that he had scored a point, and that the laugh was no longer against him, “I van hab nuzzing vor to do mit ze dreazure of ze boocaneer, and I vas hopes not vor to zee it a gains. It vas accurst, as I vas zay, vor ze boocaneer zemselves vas not able vor to vind it after zay vas burit it; and den, ven Cap’en Shackzon vinds it, he vas also murter’t, as the schlave vas, and his crew vas murter’t zemselves! Ze boocaneer dreazure vas accurst and bringt goot to no beebles. And zo, cap’en, I zays; zays I, let us not mindt it at all, mit its bat look, but go on vor to dig oot ze dock for ze sheep. We vas vaste ze time for nuzzin’, if we hoonts vor ze dreazure; and if we vinds it, we vas nevaire get no goot vrom it—nevaire, nozzing but bat!”

“Wa-all, thet’s good advice, anyhow,” said the skipper, thinking the palaver had lasted long enough. “Guess ye chaps bed better sot to work agen, ez Mister Steenbock sez. If we shu’d light on this air treesor, well enuff, but our fust job, I reckon, ’s to get the shep afloat agen; an’ we won’t do thet, ye bet, by standin’ hyar listenin’ to ghost yarns an’ sichlike! Now, ye jokers, let me see ye handlin’ them picks agen. P’r’aps ye’ll dig up another gold figger o’ two; who knows?”

This set all hands busy, the men excavating the sand and hard lava from under the bilge of the vessel with an alacrity they had not displayed before; and, each man putting his heart to the job, the broad trench in which they were working was soon dug down considerably deeper than the level of the sea. To prevent the encroach of this latter all the stuff taken out was thrown up alongside, forming a sort of steep embankment on either hand, so that the *Denver City* looked by-and-by as if she had run her head into a railroad cutting, the coffer-dam fixed across the beach, right under her keel, by the mizzen-chains, where the water just came up to, blocking the entrance to our dock effectually. The ship herself aided us in this respect, by settling down more in the sand there as it became loosened, and we only had to take care now that the slight rise and fall of the tide should not cause too great a leakage into the trench between the keel below and the upper strakes of her timbers above, at the height to which the dam reached; and, after a while, although a little water did trickle through the wall of sand and lava forming the side of the excavation towards the sea, there was not a sufficient quantity of it to interfere with the labour of digging to any material extent, nor to arrest our efforts.

The men, indeed, wielded their picks as if anxious to make up for the half-hour or so that had been wasted since Tom Bullover found the golden Madonna.

Nor did they content themselves merely with digging.

A keen watch was kept, in case something else might turn up, and every piece of hard substance disinterred was carefully scrutinised; but, alas! no more golden images or nuggets of the precious metal gladdened our eyes! Nothing came in view but sand and lava, lava and sand, varied occasionally by the sight of some fragment of half-fossilised tortoise-shell, or the chalky bones of cuttlefish and similar débris of the deep, washed up by the sea, and buried a fathom deep and more amid the strata of the shore.

This was disappointing; still, the men comforted themselves with the reflection that they were really digging for something else beyond the mere chance of picking up stray finds, such as that of Tom, who was thought a right good fellow for declaring he didn't consider the Madonna his own special property, but would sell the figure, and go shares with all, when they got the ship afloat again, and reached San Francisco. My friend the carpenter thus artfully 'pointed his moral,' in order to make us work the harder at the novel navy work at which we were engaged—strange, at least, to us sailor-folk.

Of course, though, while toiling like this, digging and splashing about in the insidious water that percolated through the beach, and which gradually accumulated until it was now almost knee-deep in the bottom of the trench, we were by no means silent, for a lot of talk went on in reference to the buccaneers' buried treasure that Jan Steenbock had spoken of. So, in spite of the second-mate's warning as to the 'curse' which he declared was associated with the hidden hoard, and would attach itself to any one discovering or touching the same, I heard more than one of the men give expression to a resolve to hunt for Captain Jackson's cave as soon as he should have an opportunity, when his spell of work was over, or, at all events, on the completion of the dock and the floating of the ship—a halcyon period most devoutly prayed for by all of us as we slaved at our unaccustomed task.

Amongst those who had thus made up their minds to go after the treasure was myself; and I got full of the subject, though keeping my own council the while, and not informing any one of my intention.

Presently, at 'eight bells,' the skipper told me I might leave off work in the trench, and go with Hiram on board the ship to prepare tea for the hands. Morris Jones was ordered to accompany us, at the same time, to get the captain's dinner ready; for, although we were ashore on a desert island, our ordinary routine as to meals and other matters was adhered to as regularly as if we had been at sea—the only exception being that no particular watch was kept, and that we all turned in together of a night and out likewise in the morning without distinction, all at the same time. Throughout the day we worked at digging out the trench, or 'dock' as Jan Steenbock persisted in calling it, under the ship, in gangs, in similar fashion to the mode that had been employed when unloading her, so as to get the task accomplished as quickly as possible; and, to facilitate this, the hands were divided into two batches, each having a spell of navy's work and a rest off between whiles, turn and turn about.

"Thet wer a mighty rum yarn the Dutchman spun jest now, I guess," observed Hiram, as soon as we had got on board and reached the galley, Morris Jones leaving us awhile to ourselves, and going aft to fetch the skipper's grub out of the pantry, where it was stowed. "I'm jiggered if I ever heerd tell o' sich a yarn afore!"

"Don't you think it true?" I said. "Mr Steenbock isn't given to cramming, from all I have seen of him."

"No; he air a straight up-an'-down coon, I reckon," replied Hiram, proceeding to cut off a piece of tobacco from a plug he produced from his pocket, and placing a 'chaw' in his jaw. "Still, b'y, jest think o' buccaneer tree-sors, an' all sorts o' gold an' silver a-waitin' fur us to dig 'em up! Why, it beats Californy an' all I've heerd tell o' the diggin' days, when thaar wer the first rush, an' the folks ez got in time made their pile!"

"But you heard what he said of the spirit protecting the treasure," I remarked, "Don't you think he's right about the curse hanging over it? I believe it would be unlucky to touch it."

"B'y, thaar's allars a cuss tied on to gold an' greenbacks, sich ez we used ter hev a little time back," said Hiram sententiously. "But, I reckon, the harm don't lie in the durned stuff itself: it's in the way some folks kinder handles it—thet's whaar the pizen is! Guess I ain't afeard o' no cuss, once I comes across thet cave the Dutch mate wer a-speakin' on!"

"And the ghost?"

"Oh, durn the sperrit, Cholly!" said he, with a laugh. "I ain't afeard."

"Recollect though, Hiram," I remarked, in answer to this, "how frightened we all have been on board by Sam, and the way you were in only a couple of days ago, when you said you saw him again here."

He looked serious again in a moment.

"Guess I don't want ter run down thet air ghostess," said he apologetically. "Fur I reckon a man can't go agen a thin' he sees right afore his eyes."

"And how about the other one that Mr Steenbock spoke of?"

"Oh, thet's different, Cholly. A chap ye sees a-sottin' down an' a-playin' a banjo aint like a coon thet's ben buried two or three hundred year, an' thet no one hez seed, ez I knows on, fur Jan Steenbock never sed ez how he seed it hisself. No, b'y, I guess I'll hev a hunt fur thet thaar tree-sor ez he spoke on, ez soon ez ever I hev the chance."

"Suppose we go this evening, when we strike off work?" said I—"that is, Hiram, if you don't mind my coming with you?"

"Nary a bit, Cholly," he replied good-heartedly to this tentative question of mine; "glad to hev ye along o' me, seeing

as how we both hev ben a-prospectin' the line o' country already."

"All right," I exclaimed joyfully. "We'll have a good hunt for the cave. I wouldn't be surprised if we find it near the place where I saw the doves, by the pool between the hills over there."

"Most like, b'y," said he, bustling about the galley and going on with his culinary work; "but hyar comes the stooard. Don't ye tell him nuthin' o' what we hev ben talkin' on, or I guess the coon 'll be wantin' to jine company, an' I don't wants him, I doesn't. He's a won'erful slimy sort o' cuss, an' since he's ben skeart by Sam Jedfoot's ghostess he hez ben a durned sight too mealy-mouthed fur me!"

"I won't speak a word to him," said I. "He's a queer sort of man, and I don't like him either."

The entrance of the Welshman thus stopped our further conversation; for, although Morris Jones seemed anxious to talk, Hiram only spoke in monosyllables, giving curt answers, so that the steward in, the end became silent too, busying himself in cooking the skipper's dinner at one, fireplace, while the American attended to the men's tea at the other—filling the copper with the proper ingredients, as mentioned before, and diligently stirring its contents till it boiled.

At 'two bells,' later on, in the first dog-watch, work was abandoned for the day, all hands coming aboard to have their tea, Tom Bullover amongst them.

"May I tell him?" I said to Hiram, when I saw the carpenter coming forward, after slinging himself over the bulwarks; "may I tell Tom where we are going, and ask him to come too?"

"I don't mind, I guess," replied Hiram—"the more the merrier!"

Tom was perfectly willing; and so, half an hour later, the three of us started on our expedition, getting over the side of the ship while the rest of the crew were still busy with their pannikins and beef and biscuit, so departing unobserved.

"Now we're off, I guess," said Hiram, when he had crossed over a plank that served for a bridge over the trench alongside, which was getting pretty deep by now. "Let us go straight fur thet buccaneers' tree-sor, shepmates!"

"And here's for the black man's ghost as the second-mate spoke on," replied Tom Bullover, with a grin. "I specs we'll as soon find one as t'other!"

"Durned ef I kear," said Hiram defiantly; "ghostess or no ghostess, I'm bound fur thet pile, I am, if we ken sorter light on it!"

"I only hope we will, I'm sure," I chimed in, as the three of us made our way across the beach and then traversed the sterile lava plain, shaping a course for the cluster of trees between the hills, on the right of the bay, which I had first investigated.

The doves we found as tame as ever, coo-coo-cooing away with great uncton on our approach, and beside the borders of the pool were a lot of tortoises crawling about; but, there was no cave near, concealed in the brushwood, although we searched through it all carefully—so we resumed our way up the hills.

As we ascended, the scenery became wilder and wilder, the trees increasing so greatly in size that some of the trunks of them, which apparently belonged to the oak species, were over four feet in diameter, growing, too, to a great height.

Nor was the scenery only wild.

About half a mile up a steep ravine, a drove of wild hogs rushed by us, nearly knocking Hiram down, he being in advance of the exploring party.

"Jehosophat, mate!" he exclaimed to Tom, laughing as he stumbled over him; "thaar's y'r black man's ghost, I guess."

"Carry on," replied Tom grinning; "we ain't come to him yet. You just wait and see!"

Further up, we came to a beautiful plain of some extent between the hills, which had been at some former time planted for cultivation, for bananas, sweet potatoes, yucca palms, and many other sorts of tropical fruits were growing about in the wildest profusion.

There were the remains, too, of old buildings and broken mill machinery, such as used in the West Indies for crushing the sugar cane, a lot of which was planted in the vicinity; but these were of giant proportions from not having been cut possibly for years, for, stump sprang up on top of stump, until the root clusters covered many square yards—the canes themselves being over twenty-five feet in height and more than fifteen inches in circumference, of a size that would have made a sugar-planter's mouth water.

"Guess some cuss hez ben a-cultivatin' hyar," observed Hiram, looking critically round. "When I wer to hum down Chicopee way—"

"Stow that, bo," said Tom Bullover, interrupting him, being always afraid of letting the other sail off on the tack of his home recollections, as he was doomed ever to hear the same old yarn, so that he was sick of its repetition. "I don't think you'll find your cave here; them old buccaneers wouldn't be sich fools to lug all their booty up this long way, when they could bury it more comf'able near the shore, and likewise come upon it the easier again when they

wanted it.”

“Specs ye air about right, bo,” answered Hiram, taking the interruption kindly, and no ways hurt at having his Chicopee remembrances once more nipped in the bud. “What shall we dew?”

“Why, go down again,” replied Tom. “Here’s a fresh track down to the beach on this side which leads to another bay, I fancy. Let’s make for it and see where it leads to.”

“Fire away; I’m arter ye, bo,” said the other, the two now changing places, and Tom Bullover showing the way. “‘Foller my leader’—thet’s the game, I reckon!”

All of us laughed at this, stepping gingerly in single file after Tom, who found some difficulty at first in pushing through the branches of the trees, which were thickly interwoven overhead and across the path; but the latter was distinctly marked out, being well trodden as if it had been a regular pathway of communication at some previous time.

The bay below, to which this road led, was on the other side of the point of land that stretched past the ship; and as we descended the hill we could see the blue sea peeping through the trees.

Half-way down, the pathway abruptly terminated in front of what seemed a mound of earth, although this was now overgrown with trees, covered with orchilla weed, that enveloped their trunks and gave them quite a venerable aspect.

“Hillo!” cried Hiram, “hyar’s enuff o’ thet orchilla weed thet they vall’ys so in ‘Frisco to make airy a nan’s fortin’ ez could carry it thaar, I guess!”

“Is that the orchilla?” I asked. “I was wondering what Mr Steenbock meant when he spoke of it.”

“Aye,” replied Hiram, dragging off a great bunch of it from what looked like the decayed trunk of one of the oak trees, hollowed out by age and exposure to the heavy tropical rains of the region, “thet’s what they calls the orchilla weed, I guess. Hillo! though, what’s this?”

“What?” exclaimed Tom Bullover and I, pressing up to where he was stooping, scraping away at the timber; “what is it?”

“I’m durned ef it air a tree at all,” said Hiram, all excitement, and his voice thick with emotion and eager exultation. “It’s a door o’ some sort or t’other.”

“Really,” I said, as eager as he, helping him to pull away the fungus growth from the now partly-exposed woodwork which, certainly, looked like a door, as he said, “do you think so?”

“Aye, Cholly. I’m jiggered if we ain’t found the cave at last!”

Chapter Fifteen.

Rival Apparitions.

“By Jingo!” said Tom, with a deep breath, bending down and helping Hiram to clear away the weeds and débris from the rotten old door, now clearly disclosed to view. “Jest fancy our lighting on it like this!”

“Perhaps it isn’t a cave at all,” said I, likewise breathless with excitement, but not wishing to place my hopes too high, lest I should be disappointed; “it’s too far from the sea, I think.”

“Nary a bit,” retorted Hiram, doggedly. “I’ll bet my bottom dollar it’s the place sure enuff. Hyar goes, anyhow, fur a try.”

So saying, rising from his stooping posture, he administered a thumping kick with his heavy seamen’s boot against the rotten woodwork.

This instantly gave way, a thick cloud of dust rolling up; and then, a hollow dark cavity appeared right in the centre of the mound, which we could now see was heaped up over the wooden framework, so as to conceal it from the notice of any one passing by.

“Hooray!” shouted Tom Bullover, waving his hat and jumping up in the air to further express his emotion. “We’ve found the buccaneers’ blessed treasure. Look out for the ghost, Hiram!”

“Durn the ghost!” retorted the other; “not twenty on ’em wu’d kep me back now, I guess!”

At the same moment, he made a dive to enter the opening, but Tom put his hand on his shoulder and half pulled him back.

“Stop, bo,” he said. “There might be foul air in it, ’cause of its being so long closed up. Let’s wait and see.”

“How ken ye tell thet?” asked Hiram; “guess it don’t matter a red cent if ther air.”

“You just wait,” insisted Tom. “I’ll find out in a jiffey; and then, if it’s safe, we can venture in. The cave ain’t a-goin’ to run away from us, and you know the old saying, ‘more haste less speed!’ We’re going to do things in proper

shipshape fashion, bo, so none o your rushing matters; it'll all come right in time!"

With these words, Tom, who was a sensible, matter-of-fact fellow, with his head screwed on straight and all his wits about him, took out a box of matches from the inside lining of his hat, where he always kept his pipe and tobacco and such things that he did not wish to get wet; and, lighting one of the matches, he proceeded to hold it within the dark cavity.

The flame flickered and then suddenly went out, although there wasn't a breath of air stirring, the trees around preventing the sea-breeze from reaching the spot where we stood—a sort of little hollow between the hills.

"There you are, bo," said Tom; "see that?"

"Guess I don't underconstubble," answered Hiram, staring at him in perplexity. "What d'ye mean, hey?"

"Didn't you watch the match go out?" returned Tom. "Lord, I never did see such a feller!"

"Wa-al, what ef the durned match did fiz out?"

"Don't yer know what it means?"

"Guess not."

"It shows as how there's foul air there, bo—that's what the match's going out means. It tells us not to go in!"

Tom said this with a chuckle, for which Hiram gave him a dig in the ribs.

"Hev yer own way, Chips, fur a bit," he said; "but I'm jiggered if ye air a-going to kep me from prospectin' thet thaar hole."

"Nobody wants to," retorted Tom. "Only just wait a bit till the wentilation gets better and blows out all the gas. It would a-pizened you if I'd let you go in at first, as you wanted."

"Wa-al, go ahead, an' hev another try fur to see ef it's right now."

In reply, Tom lit a second match, and held it in the opening of the cave as before.

This time it did not flicker so much, burning for a longer time, before the faint flame finally expired.

"Better," said Tom; "but it ain't quite safe yet."

"Hurry up," replied Hiram. "I'm bustin' to see thet boocaneer tree-sor ez the mate wer talkin' on!"

After an interval of another quarter of an hour or so, while we all waited on the tenter-hooks of suspense, an inquisitive land tortoise waddling up to see what we were about, Tom lit a third match.

This time it burnt bravely with a clear light, which showed us something of the interior of the cavern. It did not show us much, though, the darkness being too great for such a feeble illuminant to penetrate far into it.

"Now, boys," said Tom, "I think we may venture in, as the foul air must be pretty well spent by this time; but we'll have to get a torch or something to see our way by, or else we shall be breaking our necks or smashing our heads against the roof."

"Guess one o' them port fires we hev aboard would lighten it up to rights."

"So it would," replied Tom; "but we ain't got it now, and must try and find somethin' else to make a flare up."

"Hyar's some o' the old wood," observed the other, taking up a fragment of the broken door, which was crumbly with age. "Strike another match, will ye. I think this timber 'll burn long enuff fur us to git inside an' prospect a few."

"Right you are, my hearty," returned the other, carrying out this suggestion; and the next minute, the piece of old oak was in a blaze, when, holding it up in one hand, Hiram stooped down once more and stepped within the cave.

There was nothing there, however.

Nothing!

"Wa-all," exclaimed Hiram, after bending here and there, and searching in every direction. "I calls this a durned sell, I dew!"

"Hold the light up again," said Tom; "a little more to the right, bo, so as to throw it on that dark corner there."

But nothing was to be seen save the rocky walls of the cave, which was of peculiar shape, and more like a sort of fissure in the rock, riven open possibly by some volcanic shock, than if made by man. The roof was formed of lava, it seemed to me by the light of our impromptu torch, similar to the same substance we noticed on the arid plain near the shore of the bay, and again below the sand at high-water mark.

There were queer fragments of rock also, placed round the hard floor of the cavern like seats, with regular intervals between them; while apparently in the middle, as near as we could approximate, was a raised portion of the understratum of rock shaped like a pulpit.

"Guess if thaar's airy tree-sor hyar, b'ys," observed Hiram, pointing to this, "it's thaar!"

"No, bo," replied Tom, laughing, "that's the black man's pulpit, where he preaches a Sunday, same as our 'Holy Joes' do when they're ashore!"

Hiram paid no attention to this remark, but continued poking about the place, stamping with his feet and trying in every way to see whether the treasure we were in search of might not be buried in some spot or other; but his trouble was all in vain.

Presently, the piece of blazing wood began to give forth a more feeble light, being almost burnt out; and, then, all at once Hiram and I noticed another spark of light like a round hole, at the opposite end of the cave.

"Hillo!" shouted Hiram, "I guess thaar's another end to the durned hole, an' we hev taken the wrong track!"

Making our way slowly, so as not to extinguish the torch, we advanced in the direction of the new light, which got bigger and bigger as we approached nearer to it.

There was no doubt it was another entrance to the cave, and a far more convenient one, too, for it opened out on to a little spur of the hill that ran down a somewhat steep declivity to the seashore below.

"It must be the buccaneers' cave," said Tom. "It's just the sort o' place men that were sailors would choose. I misdoubted it at first, from being so far inland, as I thought; but now I see it's near the sea."

"But there ain't nary a tree-sor thaar!"

"Don't you be too cocksure o' that," returned Tom, looking about him well, to make certain of his direction. "Howsomdever, we ain't got the time to search the place properly now, as it'll be dark soon, and we ought to be aboard."

"Durned if I likes givin' it up like this."

"Never mind, bo; there'll be plenty of time for us to look the cave over to-morrer arternoon, and I'll bring one o' them port fires you spoke on to light up the place."

"Guess thet'll jest about do, Chips," replied Hiram, turning round, as if about to go back within the entrance, loth to leave without finding the buccaneers' hoard, repeating his previous exclamation: "I'm durned, though, if I likes givin' it up like this!"

"Come along, my hearty!" cried Tom. "Come along, Charley. But, mind, neither on you be telling the hands what we've found out! There wouldn't be a chance for us if the skipper or that drunken cur Flinders knowed on it."

"Not me," replied Hiram, following Tom along the curve of the shore towards a little group of trees, which I recognised now as immediately above the pool frequented by the doves. "I won't tell nary a soul, an' I reckon we ken both on us anser fur Cholly?"

"Certainly," said I, replying to his implied question, as I came up behind the two, and we started off retracing our way at once to the ship, on the fo'c's'le of which we could see several of the men already gathered together. "I'm sure I won't tell anybody, for I have nobody to tell except you, Tom, and Hiram—you're my only friends on board."

"Wait till you get hold of the buccaneers' gold, Charley," said Tom dryly. "You'll get plenty o' chums then, for money makes friends!"

Nothing further was said by either of us, and we presently found ourselves once more on board, when I turned in at once, for we had walked a goodish distance, and I was tired out.

The next afternoon, when work was ended and Hiram and I were ready to start on another excursion to the cave, we could not find Tom.

"Nary mind thet, Cholly," said Hiram. "I guess we ken go 'long, an' Chips 'll pick us up by-an'-by."

Passing the grove and pool of the doves, we made our way over the brow of the little hill beyond, and sighted the second bay; when, just as the opening to the cave became visible, both of us heard the familiar sound of Sam Jedfoot's banjo.

It was passing strange!

The same old air was being played upon it that we had heard immediately before the ship struck—and, indeed, almost always prior to every catastrophe and mischance that had happened throughout our eventful voyage.

Hiram turned pale.

"Jee-rusalem, Cholly!" he exclaimed, at once arresting his footsteps; "what on airth air thet?"

I was almost equally frightened.

"It—it—it—sounds like poor Sam's banjo," I stammered out. "I—I—hope he ha—ha—hasn't come to haunt us again!"

"Seems like," said he; and then, plucking up his courage, he started once more for the mouth of the cave, I following close, like his shadow, afraid to leave him now, because then I would be there by myself. "Durned, though, if Sam's

ghostess or any other cuss 'll kep me back now. Come on, Cholly!"

But, when we got up to the entrance, we saw a sight that stopped us at once, Hiram dropping to the ground as if he had been shot.

There, sitting on the very rock at the back which Tom Bullover had joked about on the previous day as being the 'ghost's pulpit' was the dim apparition of a man, the very image of our whilom negro cook, leaning back and playing the banjo, just as Sam used to do on board the *Denver City*.

But, stranger still, even as I looked, a queer supernatural sort of light suddenly illumined the interior of the cavern, and I saw another apparition rise, as it were, out of the darkness, immediately behind the one on the rock, the last spectral form raising its hand threateningly.

I stood there at the mouth of the cave, almost paralysed with terror, watching the weird scene that was being enacted within, the wonderful electrical glare making every detail come out in strong relief and lighting up the whole place, so that it was as bright as day.

Not the slightest incident escaped my notice.

As the second apparition rose from behind the rock at the back of the cavern, the first figure, which I had believed up to now really to be the negro cook's ghost or spirit, permitted for some occult purpose or other to revisit the earth, also jumped up out of the corner, dropping the banjo incontinently.

Not only this, the original ghost, spirit, or what you will, displayed an abject fright that was too real for any inhabitant of the other world to assume; for the face of the ghost in an instant grew as long as my arm, while its woolly hair crinkled up on top of its head until it became erect and stiff as a wire brush.

At the same time, the eyes of this first 'ghost,' distended with fear, rolled round and round, the white eyeballs contrasting with the darker skin of the face, which, however, appeared to have become of an ashy grey colour, instead of black—though whether this was from the effects of fear or owing to the peculiar light that shone full upon it I could not tell, nor, indeed, puzzled my mind at the time to inquire.

The two figures thus confronted each other for about the space of a second, the headless apparition rising and rising till it seemed to touch the roof of the cave, when it extended its wide arms and made a clutch at the other, and now trembling, figure in front.

This was too much for the banjo-playing spectre.

Uttering a wild yell that only a human throat could have emitted, and with his mouth open as wide as the mouth of the cave towards which he rushed, Sam Jedfoot—for it was his own substantial self, I saw, and no ghost at all, as I was now convinced—cleared in two bounds the intervening space that lay between him and the entrance to the cavern, seeking to get away as far as possible from his terrible visitant. Apparently, he must have thought the other to be the 'genuine Simon Pure,' come to punish him for his false pretences in making believe to be a denizen of the spirit world whilst he was yet in the flesh, and so poaching unlawfully on what was by right and title the proper domain of the ghostal tribe!

In his hurry and haste, however, to avoid this avenging spectre, poor Sam, naturally, did not see me standing in front of the cave blocking the entrance, nor had I time to get out of his way, so as to avoid the impetuous rush he made for the opening.

The consequences may be readily surmised.

He came against me full butt, and we both tumbled to the ground headlong together all of a heap.

Sam thereupon imagined the terrible apparition to be clutching him, and that his last hour had come.

"Oh, golly! De debbel's got me, de debbel's got me fo' suah!" he roared out in an agony of terror, clawing at my clothes and nearly tearing the shirt off my back in his attempts to regain his feet, as we rolled over and over together down the decline towards the shore. "Lor', a mussy! Do forgib me dis time, Massa Duppy, fo' play-actin' at ghostesses, an' I promises nebber do so no moah! O Lor'! O Lor'! I'se a gone niggah! Bress de Lor', fo' ebbah an' ebbah! Amen!"

Chapter Sixteen.

Sam Jedfoot's Yarn.

"Ho-ho-ho! I shall die a-laughing!" exclaimed another voice at this juncture, interrupting Sam's terrified appeal to the spiritual powers. "Ho-ho-ho! I shall die a-laughing!"

The voice sounded like that of Tom Bullover; but, before I could look up to see if it were really he, Sam and I, the negro cook still clutching me tightly in his frantic grasp as we rolled down the little declivity on to the beach below the entrance to the cave, fetched up against Hiram; who, only just recovering from the shock he had received, was then in the act of rising from the ground, where he had dropped at the sight of Sam and his banjo—still dazed with the fright, and hardly yet knowing where he was or what had happened.

"My golly!" cried Sam, thinking him another ghost. "Lor' sakes! Massa Duppy, do forgib me! I'll nebbah do so moah,

I'se swarr I'll nebbah do so no moah!"

"Wa-all, I'm jiggered!" ejaculated Hiram, on the two of us coming against him with a thump, nearly knocking him again off his legs, as we scrambled to ours. "What in thunder dew this air muss mean? Jee-rusalem—it beats creation, it dew!"

Neither Sam nor I could get out a word; but, while we all stared, out of breath and speechless with astonishment, at each other, another wild shout of laughter came right over our heads from within the cave above, and I heard Tom's voice exclaiming, as before—

"Ho-ho-ho! you'll be the death o' me sure, sonnies! I never seed sich a go in my life! Hang it all—Charley and Hiram, and you, Sambo—why, it's only me! Ho-ho-ho! I shall bust meself, if you go staring round and wool-gathering like that any longer! Ho-ho-ho! this is a game, and no mistake!"

With that, the three of us looked up, and now saw Tom Bullover standing on top of the plateau in front of the cave, with a sort of long white sheet like a piece of sailcloth round him, and Sam's banjo in one hand.

Then, the real facts of the case flashed on my mind in a moment, and I could not help joining in the carpenter's hearty merriment at the way in which he had humbugged us all.

"Oh, Tom!" I cried; "so it was you, after all?"

"Yes; ho-ho! Charley; yes, my lad. Ho-ho-ho!"

"Guess I don't see nuthin' to snigger over!" growled Hiram, shamefaced at being so readily imposed on; but he was too good a sailor to mind a joke against himself, and the comicality of the situation striking him, too, like me, he was soon laughing as loudly as Tom and I.

Sam only needed this further secession likewise to set him off, his negro nature possessing the hysterical features of his race, and going readily from one extreme to the other.

A second before he had been paralysed with fright; now he was as instantly convulsed with glee.

"My gosh!" he yelled, showing his ivories as his whole face expanded into one big guffaw that utterly eclipsed all our attempts at merriment. "Hoo-hoo, yah-yah! Dat am prime, Cholly—black ghost fo' whitey! Hoo-hoo, yah-yah! I'se die a-laffin', like Tom! Black ghost fo' whitey!—Hoo-hoo, yah-yah, hoo-hoo! Golly! Dat am prime, fo' suah!"

Sam's negro abandon and queer gestures, as he danced about and doubled himself up in his wild convulsions of mirth, were absolutely irresistible; and so we all roared in concert, like a party of lunatics, laughing until the tears actually ran down our cheeks.

"An' how did yer fix the hull thing so smartly?" inquired the American, presently when he was able to speak. "Ye took me in finely, I guess; ye did thet so!"

"Lor', old ship! that were easy enough, when you comes to think of it."

"But, how?" persisted Hiram, as Tom broke off his explanation to indulge in another laugh. "Hyar's Sam, what was ded, alive agen an' kickin', ez my shins ken tell, I reckon! How about his hauntin' the shep, an' all thet?"

"Yes, Tom," I put in here; "how was it that he wasn't killed?"

"Oh, Sam 'll explain all about his bizness," replied Tom, laughing again, the ridiculous nature of the whole thing appealing strongly to his risible faculties. "I've got enough to do to tell you about my own ghost—the sperrit, that is, of the black man that our second-mate spun that yarn about yesterday arternoon!"

"A-ah!" drawled out Hiram; "I begins to smell a rat, I dew."

"But, suah dat 'perrit wasn't reel, hey, Mass' Tom?" interposed Sam, his eyeballs starting again out of his head, as he recollected all the mysterious occurrences in the cave. "Dat 'perrit wasn't reel, hey? I'se take um fo' duppy, suah?"

"No, ye durned fule!" exclaimed Hiram, quite indignantly; "don't ye know thet?"

"Some people weren't so wise just now," said Tom Bullover dryly; "eh, Hiram?"

"Nary mind 'bout thet," growled the American, giving Tom a dig in the ribs playfully. "Heave ahead with yer yarn, or we'll never git in the slack of it 'fore nightfall!"

"Well then, here's the long and short of it," said Tom, sitting down on the top of the little cliff-mound, so as to make himself as comfortable as possible, while we stood grouped around him. "You see, now, our Dutch mate's story about the nigger that the buccaneers used to bury with their treasure put me up to taking a rise out of our friend Sambo here, who, though he was artful enough to play at being a ghost and haunt the ship, as you fellows thought all through the v'yage, was yet mortal 'fraid of them same ghostesses hisself, as I well knowed!"

"Oh, Lor', Mass' Tom, dunno say dat," interrupted Sam reproachfully. "Speak fo' true, an' shame de debble!"

"That's just what I'm doing, darkey. You know I'm speaking the truth; and I'm sure Charley and Hiram here can judge for theirselves, from what they saw not long ago!"

"Bully for ye!" cried Hiram, confirming Tom Bullover's reference to himself. "Why, ye durned nigger, ye wer a'most

yeller with frit jest now, when ye kinder thought ye seed one o' them blessed ghostesses thet Tom wer a-talkin' on!"

This effectually shut up Sam; and my friend the carpenter then went on with his account of the phenomenon we had seen.

"I knew," said he, "that the darkey would be up here this arternoon, for I showed him the cave myself this mornin', afore any of you beggars aboard the ship were up or stirring. I thought it would be just a good place for him to hide in, besides preventing the skipper and that brute Flinders, or any of the other hands, from coming spying round and interfering with our diskevery, which, as you know—I means you Charley and Hiram—we wished for to keep to ourselves."

"Ay, bo," assented Hiram approvingly; "true enuff; ye acted rightly, shipmet."

"So I tells Sam to rig hissself up here as comf'ably as he could; and if he should hear any footsteps comin' nigh the place he was to strike up a tune on his banjo and frighten them away, makin' any inquisitive folk think the place was haunted by the same old ghost they knew aboard the ship."

"What a capital idea!" said I; "how did you come to think of it?"

"I thought of more than that, Charley," replied Tom, with a broad grin. "It wasn't long arter I brought Sam here that I thought of makin' the second ghost out of the proper black man belonging to the cave, that Jan Steenbock had told us on, and which you, Hiram, said you wouldn't be frightened at nohow."

"Stow thet," growled Hiram, shaking his fist at Tom. "Carry on with yer yarn, an' don't mind me, old stick-in-the-mud!"

"I'm carryin' on, if you'll only let a feller tell his story in his own way. You know we agreed to come up here together this arternoon, and make a reg'ler up-and-down search for the buried treasure; and you told me, you rec'lect, to bring a port fire, such as we had aboard, for to light up the place."

"Thet's right enuff," said Hiram, "thet's right enuff; but, durn it all, heave ahead, bo! Heave ahead!"

"Well then," continued Tom, "I gets this blessed jigmaree of a port fire from the ship; and, having done my spell at digging out the dock, my gang finishing work at four bells, I com'd up here afore you and Charley. It were then that I thinks of having a bit of a game with old Sam, while I was waitin' for you two to join company and look for the treasure together, as we agreed atween us when we first diskivered the place."

"And you didn't intend to frighten us, Tom?" I asked him at this point; "mind, really?"

"No, I'll take my davy I didn't—that is, not at first," replied he, grinning in his usual way. "Arterwards, in course, I couldn't help it, when you and our Chickopee friend here took the bait so finely."

"Ah! I'll pay you out, bo, for it," cried Hiram, interrupting Tom, as I had done, "never you fear. I'll pay you out, my hearty, 'fore this time to-morrow come-never—both me and Cholly will tew, I guess, sirree!"

"Threaten'd men live long," observed Tom with a dry chuckle. "Still, that ain't got nothin' to do with this here yarn. I com'd up, as I were sayin', a good half-hour afore you; and, to spin out the time, I goes round to the cave by the way where we first lighted on it t'other day, and gets inside by the hole through the broken old door where we entered it afore our reaching this end."

"And then?" I asked, on Tom's pausing for a moment in his narrative—"and then?"

"Why, then I saw poor Sam, with his back turned towards me, a-sittin' down on that rock as we called 'the ghost's pulpit,' and playin' his blessed old banjo as sweetly as you please, without thinkin' that I or any one else were within miles of him! So, seein' this were a good chance for finding whether Master Sammy, as was thought a ghost hissself aboard, liked ghosts as he didn't know of, I catches up a bit o' sailcloth that was lying on the ground, which he'd taken up there to sarve for his bed, and, I claps this over my head and shoulders, like a picter my mother had in the parlour at home of 'Samuel and the Witch of Endor.' Then, I lights the port fire and gives a yell to rouse up the darkey, and arter that—ho-ho! my hearties, you knows what happened. Ho-ho! it was as good as a play!"

"Golly! Me taut yer one duppy, fo' suah, Massa Tom!" said Sam, after another chorus of laughter from all of us all round. "Me taut yer was de debble!"

"Not quite so bad as that, my hearty," mildly suggested Tom, grinning at the compliment. "Still, I don't think I made such a bad ghost altogether for a green hand!"

"Don't ye kinder think ye frit me, bo!" declaimed Hiram vehemently. "It wer the sight o' thet durned nigger thaar, a-sottin' an playin' his banjo—him ez we all thought ez ded ez a coffin nail, an' buried fathoms below the sea, an' which all on us hed b'leeved ter hev haunted the shep fur the hull v'y'ge. Ay, thet it wer, streenger, what ez frit me an' made me fall all of a heap, an' thaar I lies till Cholly an' the durned nigger riz me up agen by tumblin' athwart my hawse!"

"I think I was the most frightened of all," I now frankly confessed, on Hiram thus bravely acknowledging his own terror. "I really for the moment believed that I was actually looking at two real, distinct ghosts, or spirits—the one that of Sam, which you, Tom and Hiram, know I already thought I had seen before on board the ship; and the second apparition that of the negro slave which Mr Steenbock told us of. But, how is it that Sam is here at all—how did he escape?"

"Let him tell his yarn in his own way, the same as I have done mine," replied Tom. "Ax him."

"Now Sam," said I, "tell us all about it."

"Ay, dew," chimed in Hiram; "fire away, ye old black son of a gun!"

"All right, Mass' Hiram an' yer, too, Cholly. I'se tell you de trute, de hole trute, an' nuffin' but de trute, s'help me!"

"Carry on, you blooming old crocodile, carry on!"

Taking Tom Bullover's words in the sense in which they were meant, as a sort of friendly encouragement to proceed, Sam, nothing loath to air his long-silent tongue, soon satisfied the eager curiosity of Hiram and myself—giving us a full account of his adventures from the time that we saw him drop from the rigging, when all the crew, with the solitary exception of his ally the carpenter, believed him to have been murdered and his body lost overboard.

"I'se specks," he commenced, "dat yer all 'members when de cap'en shake him billy-goat beard, an' shoot dis pore niggah in de tumjon, an' I'se drop inter de bottom ob de sea, hey?"

"Yes," replied Hiram; while I added: "But, how on earth did you manage to save your life and get on board again?"

"Dis chile cleberer dan yer tinks," replied Sam proudly. "When de cap'en shoot, I'se jump one side like de Bobolink bird, an' de bullet, dat he tink go troo my tumjon, go in de air. I'se make one big miscalckerfation, dough, fo' my han' mis de riggin' when I'se stretch up to catch him, an' I'se tumble inter de water."

"Poor Sam!" said I. "Your heart must have come right into your mouth, eh?"

"Inter my mout, sonny?" he repeated after me. "Bress yer, it come up inter my mout, an' I'se swaller it agen, an' him go right down to de pit ob my tumjon! Lor', Cholly, I'se tink I wer drown, fo' suah, an' nebbah come up no moah, fo' de wave come ober my head an' ebberyting! Den, jest as I'se scrape along de side ob de ship an' wash away aft in de wake astern, I'se catch holt ob de end ob de boom-sheet, dat was tow oberboard."

"Ye hev got thet durned lubber Jim Chowder to thank fur thet," said Hiram, interrupting him to explain this fortunate circumstance, which I now recollected Captain Snaggs alluding to when I was waiting at table in the cabin the same evening, before the tragic occurrence happened. "It's the fust time I ever recomembers ez how an unsailorlike act like thet ever did good to airy a soul!"

"Nebbah yer min' dat, Mas' Hiram," rejoined Sam, with much heartiness. "I'se allers tink afore dat Jim Chowder one pore cuss, but now I'se pray fo' him ebbery day ob my life!"

"Ay, bo," said Tom, with affected gravity; "and for me to, eh?"

"I will, suah," answered Sam, in the same serious way in which he had previously spoken, not wishing to joke about the matter. "But, Jim Chowder or no Jim Chowder, who ebbah let dat rope tow oberboard was sabe my life! I'se catch holt ob him an' climb on ter de rudder chain, where I'se hang wid my head out ob de water till it was come dark, an' de night grow ober de sea. Den, when I'se tink de cap'en drink nuff rum to get drunk, an' not fo' see me come on board agen, I'se let my ole leg wash up wid de wave to de sill ob de stern port; an' den, when I'se look an see dere was nobody in de cabin, I'se smash de glass ob de window an' climb inside."

"And then it was, I suppose," said I, taking up the burden of his story, "that I took your real self, as you crept through the cabin, for your ghost?"

"Dat troo, Cholly. Yer see me, dough, by de light ob de moon, fo' I'se take care blow out de swing lamp in cabin, dat nobody might see nuffin. I'se reel glad, dough, dat I'se able friten de cap'en an' make him tink see um duppy!"

"Wa-all, I guess ye come out o' that smart enuff," said Hiram, with a hearty thump of approval that doubled up poor Sam, more effectually than his convulsions of laughter had previously done. "But, whaar did ye manage ter stow yerself when ye comed out o' the cabin?"

"I'se creep along de deck, keepin' under de lee ob de moonlight; an' den when nobody was lookin' I'se go forwards an' crawl down into the forepeak. Den, it was dat Mass' Tom hyar see me."

"And a pretty fine fright you gave me too!" said that worthy, bursting out into another laugh at the recollection. "It was the next mornin', as I went down into the sail room under the forepeak, to fetch up a spare tops'le, when I comes across my joker here. I caught hold at first of his frizzy head, thinking it were a mop one of the hands had forgotten below; but when I turned my lantern there I seed Sam, who I thought miles astern, safe and snug in old Davy Jones' locker. Lord! shipmates, you could ha' knocked me down with a feather and club-hauled me for a nincompoop!"

"Wer ye ez frit ez I wer jest now?" asked Hiram quizzingly. "Mind, quite ez much ez I wer?"

"Ay, bo," replied Tom, "I dessay I were, if the truth be told."

This pleased Hiram immensely.

"Then, I guess I don't see whaar yer crow comes in, my joker!" he exclaimed, giving Tom a similar thump on the back to that which he had a short time before bestowed on Sam—a slight token of affection by no means to be sneezed at. "Why, ye wer cacklin' like a durned old hen with one egg, 'bout Cholly an' I bein' frit jest now, thinkin' we seed Sam's ghostess, when hyar, ye sez now, ye wer frit yerself the same at the fust sight ye seed of him!"

"Ay, bo; but I wern't going to tell you that, nor 'bout another fright I next had, when the darkey and I were a-smoking down in the forepeak and nearly set the ship a-fire," said Tom knowingly, with a shrewd, expressive wink to each of us respectively in turn, before he resumed his story. "But, to go on properly with my yarn from the beginning, when I found Sam's head wasn't a mop, but belonged to his real darkey self, and that he wasn't drowned after all, why, I made him as snug as I could down below, thinking it were best for him to keep hid, for if the skipper saw him on dock and knew he were alive he would soon be shooting him again, or else ill-treating him in the way he had already done. Sam agreed to act by my advice on my promising to take him down grub and all he might want into the forepeak; but, bless you, the contrary darkey wouldn't act up to this arrangement arter a day or two."

"Dat was 'cause yer hab forget to bring de grub," interposed Sam, to explain this apparent breach of contract on his part. "I'se cook, an' not used fo' ter go widout my vittles fo' nobody!"

"How could I get below to you when we had bad weather and the hatches were battened down?" retorted Tom Bullover, in his turn. "Howsomdever, to stop arguefying, Master Sammy, finding himself hungry and knowing something of the stowage below from having been in the ship on a previous voyage, he manages to work a passage through the hold to the after part right under the cuddy; and from there my gentleman, if you please, makes his way on deck again through the hatchway in the captain's cabin, not forgetting to rummage the steward's pantry for provisions when he goes by!"

"An' mighty little grub was dere, suah," put in the negro cook, with great dignity. "I'se feel mean as a pore white if yer was ebbah come to my galley an' fin' sich a scrubby lot tings! Dere was nuffin' fit fo' a decent culler'd pusson ter eat—dat feller Morris Jones one big skunk!"

"I guess ye air 'bout right," agreed Hiram; while Tom and I signified our assent likewise by nodding our heads with great unction. "He's the biggest skunk I ever wer shipmets with afore!"

"Let him slide, for he don't consarn us now," said Tom, continuing the narrative of Sam's story. "Well, you must know, our darkey friend here, having taken first to prowling about the ship for grub, keeps it up arterwards for plesure and devarshun, thinking it a jolly lark to make the hands believe the old barquey was haunted. Then, one day he gets hold of his banjo from out of Hiram's chest in the fo'c's'le, where old Chicopee really did stow it away arter he bought it at the auction o' Sam's traps, as he thought he did, although I persuaded him and you Charley, too, if you remember, that the banjo had been left hanging up still in the galley in the place where Sam used to keep it. Once, indeed, when Sam forgot to put it back arter playing on it in the hold, where he had taken it, I brought it up and hung it on its old peg in the galley right afore your very eyes, Hiram!"

"I recollect, Tom," said I; "and so, Sam used to play on it in the hold below, then, when we heard the mysterious music coming from we knew not where?"

"Yes, that's so," replied he. "At first, Sam touched the strings only now and then, 'specially when the wind was blowing high, and he thought that nobody would hear the sound from the rattling of the ship's timbers and all; but, when I noticed how you above on deck could distinguish, not only the notes of the banjo, but also the very air that Sam played, and how the skipper was terrified and almost frightened out of his boots when he recognised the tune, which he had heard Sam chaunt often and often in the galley of an evening, why, then, I puts up the darkey to keep on the rig, so as to punish our brute of a skipper for his cold-blooded attempt at murdering poor Sam—which, but for the interposition of Providence, would have succeeded!"

Before Tom could proceed any further, however, consternation fell upon us all, as if a bombshell had burst in our midst; for, Sam, who was looking the opposite way to us and could see over our heads, suddenly sprang upon his feet, his mouth open from ear to ear and his teeth chattering with fear, while his short, woolly hair seemed literally to crinkle up and stand on end.

"O Lor'! O Lor'!" he exclaimed. "Look dere! Look dere!"

And there, right before us, stood the skipper himself, snorting and sniffing and foaming with rage, his keen, ferrety eyes piercing us through and through—so close, that his long nose almost touched me, and his billy-goat beard seemed to bristle right into my face, I being the nearest to him.

I felt a cold shiver run through me that froze the very marrow of my bones!

Captain Snaggs had, no doubt, overheard all our conversation, listening quietly, hidden behind the bushes that grew up close to the entrance to the cave, until Tom's last words proved too much for his equanimity, when his indignation forced him to come out from his retreat. He was certainly in an awful rage, for he was so angry that he could hardly speak at first, but fairly sputtered with wrath; and, if a look would have annihilated us, we mast all have been killed on the spot.

He was a terrible sight!

"Oh, thet's yer little game, my jokers!" he yelled out convulsively, as soon as he could articulate his words, glaring at us each in turn. "So, thet durned nigger ain't dead, arter all, hey? Snakes an' alligators! Why, it's a reg'ler con-spiracy all round—rank mutiny, by thunder! I guess I'll hev ye all hung at the yard-arm, ev'ry man Jack of ye, fur it, ez sure ez my name's Ephraim O Snaggs!"

His passion was so intense that we were spellbound for the moment, not one of us venturing to speak or reply to his threats—he staring at us as if he could 'eat us without salt,' as the saying goes, while we remained stock-still and silent before him.

As for Sam, he wallowed on the ground in terror, for the captain looked and acted like a madman.

Hiram Bangs alone had the pluck to open his mouth and confront the skipper.

Chapter Seventeen.

Mr Flinders in a Fix.

Before relating what next occurred, however, I must break off at this point and make a slight bend in my yarn here, in order to mention something that happened immediately before, and which, although I did not come to hear of it until afterwards, had to do with bringing the skipper so suddenly down upon us. Something, indeed, that tended to infuriate him all the more, with Tom Bullover and Sam; for, from his hearing, by their own confession, that they had planned and kept up the delusion about the cook's ghost on purpose to deceive him, he was led to believe that these two had got the better of him in another matter, even more important still in his estimation.

And so, as I am only a youngster and a poor hand at telling a story, though I find somehow or other I'm getting to the end of my yarn sooner than I expected when I first set to work writing it, I think I had best pat down everything that happened in its proper place and order, 'in regular shipshape Bristol fashion,' so that no hitch may occur by-and-by that might 'bring me up with a round turn,' when, perhaps, I could sail on with a free sheet and a fair wind to what you landfolk and longshoremen would call my 'dénouement'—a sad one, though, it be, as you'll learn later on, all in good time, as I spin my yarn in my free and easy way!

Well, to go back a bit now, you must know that ever since the thrashing he got from our second-mate, Mr Flinders had kept himself very quiet; not interfering in any way with the work of dismantling and unloading the ship, but leaving the charge of all this in the hands of Jan Steenbock and Tom Bullover—under, of course, the immediate supervision of Captain Snaggs, who, was here, there, and everywhere, pretending to do an awful lot, although really only occupying his time when he wasn't drinking in bullying those of the men, who being tame-spirited, put up with his bad language.

It must be said, though, for the skipper, that he generally left the old hands alone, for they returned his choicest epithets in kind, always giving him quite as good in the rude vernacular as he gave—discipline being rather slack now the vessel was ashore, as in the merchant service a wreck is supposed by the crew to dissolve all contracts and annul whatever articles may have been signed. Such, at least, is my experience of the sea.

During this interregnum of duty, the first-mate hardly ever left his bunk on board the ship save to go into the cabin and partake of what meals Morris Jones, the steward, provided him with just when that lazy beggar of a Welshman liked.

Here he remained for over a week, nursing his damaged eyes and general injuries and, no doubt, brooding over the revenge which he contemplated taking at some future period on his late successful antagonist; for, his jealousy had been keenly aroused by the marked partiality Captain Snaggs had shown in favour of Jan Steenbock, although previously he had always chummed with him—and, indeed, even now, in spite of all that had passed, the captain still occasionally invited him to a friendly orgy in the cabin, when both, as usual, of course, got royally drunk together as of yore!

But, since the finding of the golden Madonna and the development of the treasure-hunting craze amongst us, Mr Flinders had begun to come out from his temporary obscurity, while not at first actually pushing himself forward, or taking any prominent part in our daily routine.

This modest diffidence was due to the fact that the men used to make audible remarks in reference to his 'lovely black eyes,' but as soon as the tint of these gradually merged from green to yellow and then buck to their normal tone, the first-mate grew bumptious and endeavoured to resume his old position of chief officer in the absence of the skipper, when the latter frequently went off alone, as it was his habit now, in solitary search of the buccaneers' buried hoard like all the rest of us—notwithstanding that in public he utterly pooh-poohed its problematical existence and urged on the crew in digging out the dock under the ship, so as to get her afloat again, the only good, as he said, that we could expect from the island being the hope of leaving it behind us as quickly as possible.

He was an artful hand, was Captain Snaggs!

He thought that if he dissuaded the men from looking for the treasure he might have the greater chance of coming across it himself.

Such being the case, the skipper would sometimes sneak off in the middle of the day when work used to grow rather slack at our excavating task, in consequence of the greater heat at that time; for, the sea-breeze which we used to have with us from the early morning then gradually died away, while the light airs that blew off the land during the afternoon and night-time did not usually spring up until nearly sunset.

Then it was that Mr Flinders saw his opportunity; and, as regularly as the skipper would disappear in the distance over the lava field fronting the beach, saying, as he always did, that he was going up the cliff on our port hand 'to see if he could sight any passing vessel'—although the sharpest eyes amongst our lookouts had never yet seen the captain's lean and angular form on top of the said cliff—so, regularly, did the first-mate stealthily descend the side ladder that led from the poop of the ship down to the beach.

Once arrived here, his delight was to overlook the men as they lazily dug out the concrete-like sand and shingle at the bottom of the trench, filling baskets with the débris below which their fellows above hoisted up none the more energetically; and the first-mate could not help noticing that while Jan Steenbock purred them on now and then for a brief spell, he let them, as a rule, take things easily; at this heated period of the day, for Jan was wise enough to see

that by not overworking them then he got more labour out of his gang when the temperature grew cooler, and the men could dig with greater "go."

For a while, Mr Flinders did not interfere with Jan's method of procedure, seeing, as any sensible man would, that the second-mate's plan answered its purpose of getting the most out of the hands without making them grumble unduly at their unwonted task; but, soon his love of carping at others asserted itself, and this feeling, coupled with the desire to assert such petty authority as he still had, overcame his sense of prudence, as well as all recollection of the sharp lesson he had received from Jan not so very long before.

The difference between the skipper and Mr Flinders was, that, although the former was essentially cruel and a bully of the first water, he was yet physically brave and a cute, cautious man, who, when sober, knew how far he might venture in his harsh treatment of those under him; while the first-mate, on the contrary, was an utter coward at heart, and of as malicious and spiteful a disposition as he was fond of tyrannising over such as he thought he could ill-treat with impunity.

It never takes long for sailors to 'reckon up' their officers; so, it need hardly be said to which of the two the hands paid the most attention when he gave an order. As to liking either, that was out of the case; but where the men feared Captain Snaggs, the only feeling they had for Mr Flinders was one of contempt—paying back all his snarlings and bullyings in a way that the hands, well knew how to drive home to one of his temperament, as sensitive as it was mean!

Consequently, when, after a bit, he commenced finding fault with this one and that, the men would shove their tongues in their cheek and shrug their shoulders. They did not pay the slightest regard to anything he said; while the more bolder spirits, perhaps, of the stamp of Jim Chowder, winked openly the one to the other, expressing an opinion in a sufficiently loud enough tone for him to hear that 'if he didn't look out,' he would soon become possessed of a pair of eyes "blacker than he'd had afore!"

Then, naturally, there would be a snigger all round, when Mr Flinders had to turn away with a scowl on his unpleasant, cross-grained face. He hated Jan Steenbock all the more, because when the jeering crew displayed their insubordination more strongly than usual, Jan would very properly recall them to their duty—an order which on being given by the second-mate was promptly obeyed, whilst they utterly disregarded even the most trivial command from him, just as they mocked at his reprimands.

This was only noticeable at first, though; for, after a few days' experience of this 'playing second fiddle,' Mr Flinders, waxing stronger as his injuries improved and the discoloration of his 'lovely black eyes' became less apparent, seemed to resolve on trying a fresh tack. Taking higher ground, instead of idly endeavouring to get the men to treat him with respect, he once more tackled his subordinate superior Jan, who, he thought, from his treating him civilly, was sorry for the 'little misunderstanding' that had occurred between them, and would readily 'knuckle under' now, the moment he assumed his legitimate rôle and 'topped the officer' over him.

Mr Flinders never made a greater mistake in his life than in thus attempting to act up to the axiom of the old Latin adage, which teaches us that "necessity makes even cowards brave."

He had far better have remained content with his titular dignity; for, in seeking to resume the reins of power which he had once let fall, he only received another lesson from Jan Steenbock, teaching him that a placid man was not necessarily one who would quietly put up with insult and rough treatment, and proving that the tables of life are frequently turned in fact as they sometimes are in figure of speech!

This is a long palaver; but I will soon come to the point of it all, and tell what subsequently happened.

You must recollect, though, that I was not on the spot myself, and am only indebted to Jim Chowder for hearing of it—being indeed, at that very time, on my way with Hiram to the cave and the wonderful surprise that awaited us there, an account of which I have just related.

Hiram and I had not long left the shore, said Jim, when the mate, who had his dinner rather late that day, on account of having been up with the skipper drinking all through the previous night, came down the ship's side, looking very seedy and ill-tempered from the effects of his carouse, and with his face all blotchy and his nose red.

He had already been swearing at the steward for keeping him waiting for his grub, and this appeared to have 'got his hand in,' for he had no sooner come up to where Jan Steenbock was at work with the port watch digging in the trench, the second-mate setting the men a good example by wielding a pick as manfully as the best of them, than Mr Flinders began at Jan in his old abusive fashion, such as all on board the ship had been familiar with before the wreck and prior to his thrashing, which certainly had quieted him down for a time.

"Ye durned lop-handled coon!" cried out the cantankerous bully, looking down on Jan from the top of the plank that crossed the trench, and served as a sort of gangway between the foot of the side ladder and the firm ground beyond the excavation. "Why don't ye put yer back into it? Ye're a nice sort o' skallywag to hev charge of a gang—ye're only a-playin' at workin', ye an' the hull pack on yer; fur the durned dock ain't nary a sight deeper than it wer at four bells yester arternoon, I reckon!"

Jan Steenbock was in no wise disturbed by this exordium.

Dropping his pick, he looked up at the mate; while the rest of the men likewise stopped working, waiting to see what would happen, and grinning and nudging each other.

"Mine goot mans," said he in his deep voice, with unruffled composure, "vas you sbeak to mees?"

Mr Flinders jumped up and down on the plank gangway, making it sway to and fro with his excitement.

“Vas I sbeak to ye?” he screamed, mimicking in his shrill treble the Dane’s pronunciation. “Who else sh’ud I speak to, ye Dutch son of a gun? Stir yer stumps, d’ye haar, an’ let us see ye airnin’ yer keep, ye lazy hound!”

“Mistaire Vlinders!”

“Aye, thet’s me; I’m glad ye reck’lect I’ve a handle to my name.”

“Mistaire Vlinders,” repeated Jan, paying no attention to the other’s interruption. “If you vas sbeak to me, you vas best be zee-vil.”

“What d’ye mean?” cried the mate. “Durn yer imperence; what d’ye mean?”

“I mean vat I zays,” returned Jan; “and eef you vas not zee-vil, I vas make yous.”

“Make me!” shouted out Mr Flinders, dancing with rage on the plank, so that it swung about more than ever. “Make me, hey? I’d like to see ye, my hearty!”

But, while the plank was yet oscillating beneath his feet, one of the men in the trench below, by a dexterous drive of his pick, loosened the earth on the side of the excavation; and, hardly had Mr Flinders got out his defiant words than he and the plank on which he was standing came tumbling down, the bully going plump into the pool of water that had accumulated at the open end of the trench forming a little lake over four feet deep.

Of course, the hands all shouted with laughter, their mirth growing all the merrier when the mate presently emerged from his impromptu bath, all dripping and plastered over with mud.

He was in a terrible rage, Jim Chowder said; and as Jan Steenbock came up to help him, he aimed a blow at him with a spade which he clutched hold of from one of the hands, almost splitting Jan’s head open, for the thick felt hat he wore only saved his life.

“Thaar, ye durned Dutch dog!” he yelled out. “Take thet fur yer sass!”

Jan fell to the bottom of the trench; whereupon, the men, thinking Mr Flinders had murdered him, at once rushed upon the mate in a body, thrusting him backwards into the water again and rolling him over in the mud and refuse, until he was pretty well battered about and nearly drowned.

Indeed, he would, probably, have been settled altogether, but for Jan rising up, little the worse for the blow that he had received, saving that some blood was trickling down his face.

“Shtop, my mans, shtop!” he exclaimed. “Let hims get oop, he vas not hoort me, aftaire all; and I vas vorgif hims, vor he vas not know vat he vas do!”

But the hands were too much incensed to let the bully off so easily, for they hated him as much as they liked Jan and were indignant at the unprovoked assault Mr Flinders had made upon him. As luck would have it, while they were debating how they should pay him out properly, and whether to give him another ducking in the muddy water or no, a happy means presented itself to them for punishing him in a much more ignominious manner, and one which was as original as it was amusing.

The big tortoises that inhabited the island used to come backwards and forwards past the beach on their passage up to the hills, utterly regardless of the ship and the men working, especially towards the evening, as now; and just as the fracas happened, one of these huge creatures waddled by the trench, making for its usual course inland.

“Hullo, mates!” sung out the leading wag of the crew, “let’s give our friend a ride for to dry hisself; here’s a cock hoss handy!”

This was thought a capital lark; and, the suggestion being acted upon immediately, the tortoise was summarily arrested in its onward career and Mr Flinders lashed across its shelly back, like Mazeppa was strapped upon the desert steed—the hands all roaring with laughter, Jim said, while the mate struggled in vain with his captors and the giant tortoise hissed its objections at the liberty taken with it in thus converting it into a beast of burden without leave or license!

It must have been a comical sight according to Jim Chowder’s account.

Even Jan Steenbock, he said, could not help grinning; for, although Mr Flinders screamed and yelled as if he were being murdered, Jan saw that the men were not really hurting him, and he thought there was no call for his interference, especially after the manner in which the mate had acted towards him previously—indeed, all along, arrant bully that he was.

Consequently, he let matters take their course, his smile breaking into the general laugh that arose presently when, one of the men giving the tortoise a dig with his boot as soon as the mate was securely mounted, the unwieldy reptile waddled off into the bush with Mr Flinders, bawling, spread-eagled on its back and brandishing his arms and legs about, trying to free himself from his lashings.

“Durn ye all for a pack o’ cowards, ten ag’in one!” screamed out the mate as he was lost to sight in the cactus grove, the prickles from which no doubt tore his legs, thus heightening the unpleasantness of his situation. “I’ll pay ye out for this, ye scallywags, I will, by thunder, when I get loose.”

"All right," shouted back the men between their bursts of laughter as he disappeared from view, howling and shrieking and swearing away to the end; the tortoise plodding on regardless of his struggles, which, indeed, accelerated its pace onwards to its retreat in the hills. "You can carry on, old flick, when you finds yourself free!"

And, then, they raised one of their old sailor choruses with much spirit—

"Oh, he'll never come back no more, boys,
He'll never come back no more;
For he's sailed away to Botany Bay,
And 'll never come back no more!"

While they were in the middle of this—Jim Chowder singing the solo of the shanty, and the others joining in with full lung power in the refrain—who should appear from the opposite direction to that in which the mate had disappeared on his strange steed, but, Captain Snaggs!

The skipper looked very strange and excited.

"Hillo, my jokers!" he exclaimed as soon as he got near enough to hail the men, "whaar's Mister Flinders? I wants him at oncest."

Chapter Eighteen.

"Skeleton Valley."

"This wer a reg'ler sockdollager!" said Jim Chowder, when narrating the circumstances to us; for on this unexpected enquiry after the mate coming so suddenly after the men had treated him in so ignominious a fashion, they were "knocked all aback!"

So, for the moment, no one answered the skipper's question.

Of course, this did not tend to allay his excitement. "Can't nary a one o' ye speak?" he cried angrily. "Whaar's the fust-mate—ye ain't made away with the coon, hev ye?"

"He's out fur a ride, cap," at last said the wag of the party, whereat there was another outburst of laughter. "Mr Flinders wer a bit out o' sorts an' hez gone up theer fur a hairin'."

"Thaar!" echoed the skipper, looking to where the man pointed with his hand. "Whaar?"

"Up in the hills," replied the other grinning hugely at Captain Snaggs' puzzled expression. "He's gone fur a ride a-tortoise-back."

"Ye're a durned fule!" shouted the skipper, thinking he was 'taking a rise' out of him. "Don't ye try on bamboozlin' me. What d'ye mean by his goin' a-ridin', an' sich nonsense?"

"He vas shbeak ze drooth, cap'en," put in Jan Steenbock, who was still wiping the blood from his face as he got up to answer him. "I vas zee Mistaire Vlinders zail avays oop dere on ze back of von beeg toordle joost now."

"By thunder, ye're all makin' game of me, I guess!" yelled the skipper, seeing that Jan was grinning like the rest, "I s'pose ye've been hevin' a muss ag'en. Now, I ain't a-goin' to stand no more bunkum. What hev ye done with Mr Flinders, I axes fur the last time?"

"I vas not do nuzzin," replied Jan quietly, continuing to wipe his face. "Ze mate vas shtrike me, but I vas not touch him meinselvs, I vas not lay von hand upon hims."

"Then what in thunder air becom' of him?"

"He wer gone a-ridin', cap," said the man who had previously spoken, proceeding to explain what had occurred. "He came down drunk out of the ship and went abusin' Mr Steenbock as never sed a word to him, and then struck him with a spade, nigh killing him. So we tumbles him over in the water theer to stop his doin' any more mischief, for he wer that mad as he looked to murder the lot of us."

"And then, boss," went on Jim Chowder, as he told up, taking up the story, "ez he were pretty well wet with his ducking, we lashed him on to the back of a tortoise ez come by, an' sent him up in the hills, fur to dry hissself, 'ridin' a cock horse to Banbury Cross' like!"

At this the hands laughed again, and the skipper, whom they now surmised must have been drinking again when away on his prospecting tour, became perfectly furious; for he turned quite white, while his billy-goat beard bristled up, as it always did when he was angry.

"This air rank mutiny!" he shouted, drawing his revolver and pointing it at Jim Chowder; "but I'll soon teach ye a lesson, ye skunks. Hyar goes fur one o' ye!"

Jan Steenbock, as on a previous occasion, however, was too quick for him; for he knocked the weapon out of his fist, and then gripping him in a tight grasp, threw his arms round the captain's body.

The skipper foamed at the mouth, and swore even worse than Mr Flinders had done just before; but, presently he calmed down a bit, and sat down on the ground—shaking all over, as soon as Jan had removed his grip, though

keeping close to him, to be on the watch for his next move, as he expected him to have one of his old fits again.

But the convulsions seemed to pass off very quickly; and the captain, looking like himself again after a few moments, jumped to his feet.

He then stared round about him, as if searching for something or some one, evidently forgetting all that had just happened.

Suddenly his eyes brightened.

“Thaar he is!” he cried, “thaar he is!”

“Who, sir?” asked Jan, seeing his gaze fixed in the direction of the cactus grove, behind which the mate had vanished on his tortoise—“Mistaire Vlinders?”

“No, man, no,” impatiently cried the skipper; “I wanted him to come with me, but ez he’s not hyar, ye’ll do ez wa-all, I reckon. It’s the black buccaneer cap’en I mean, thet I met jest now, over thaar in the vall’y.”

“Ze boocaneer cap’en,” repeated Jan, utterly flabbergasted—“ze boocaneer cap’en?”

“Aye, ye durned fule; don’t ye reck’lect the coon ez ye told me ez burrit the treesure? Come on quick, or I guess we’ll lose him!”

“And yous have zeen hims?”

“Aye, I hev seed him, sure enuff,” replied Captain Snaggs, seizing Jan, and trying to drag him with him; “an’, what’s more, he an’ I’ve been drinkin’ together, me joker. We’ve hed a reg’ler high old time in the vall’y thaar, this arternoon, ye bet!”

“In ze valleys?”

“By thunder! ye’re that slow ye’d anger a saint, which I ain’t one,” returned Captain Snaggs, indignantly. “I mean the vall’y whaar the skeletons is crawlin’ about an’ the skulls grinning—thet air one belongin’ to the buccaneer cuss is a prime one, I ken tell ye. It beats creation, it dew, with the lizards a-creepin’ through the sockets, an’ a big snake in his teeth. Jeehosophat! how he did swaller down the lick!”

Up to now the men could not understand that anything out of the common was the matter with the skipper beyond being drunk, perhaps, and in a passion—no, not even Jan; but, as soon as he got talking on this tack about snakes and skulls, then all saw what was the matter.

So, now, on his darting off towards the hills in his delirium, Jan Steenbock and Jim Chowder, with a couple of the other hands, quickly followed in pursuit of the demented man.

He had got a good minute’s start, however, before they recovered from their astonishment at his incoherent speech and were able to grasp the situation; so, he was almost out of sight by the time they went after him.

It was a long chase, Jim said, for they went in and out between the thorny fleshy-handed cactus trees and over the lava field, tumbling into holes here and tearing themselves to pieces with the thorns there—the skipper all the while maintaining his lead in front and running along as freely and smoothly as if the track were an even path, instead of being through a desert waste like that they raced over.

After a bit, they passed over all the intervening lava field and struck amongst the grass and trees; and then they came up to Mr Flinders, who was still lashed on the back of his tortoise, which had ‘brought up all standing’ by the side of a little water-spring, and was greedily gulping down long draughts of the limpid stream that rippled through the glade beneath the shade of a number of dwarf oaks and zafrau trees which had orchilla moss growing in profusion on their trunks—some of these being nearly three feet in diameter, and bigger, Jim said, than any trees he had previously seen on the island.

Those in pursuit of the skipper thought he would have stopped on thus meeting the first-mate.

But, no. He did not halt for an instant.

“Come on, Flinders,” he only called out. “Come on, Flinders, we air arter the buccaneer cap’en an’ the treasure!”

Then, plunging down the side of the hill he made for a bare space further down beyond the trees, waving his arms over his head and shouting and screaming at the pitch of his voice, like the raging madman that he had become.

Arrived at the bottom of the declivity, the captain abruptly paused; and Jim Chowder and Jan, who were close behind, came up with him.

There was no need to stop him; for the skipper flung himself on the ground at a spot where, to their wonder, they now observed three skeletons sitting up and arranged in a circle; while in the centre of the terrible group of bony figures was a cask on end, whose odour at once betrayed its contents.

Rum!

A pannikin was on the ground beside the hand of one of the remnants of mortality, and this the skipper took up, drawing a spigot from out of the cask and filling it.

"Hyar's to ye, my brave buccaneers!" he cried, tossing it off as if it had been water. "Hyar's to ye all an' the gold!"

He was going to fill another pannikin and drain that; but Jan Steenbock kicked over the cask, preventing him.

Captain Snaggs at once sprung to his feet again.

As before, he took no notice of Jan's action.

It appeared as if his mind were suddenly bent on something else and that he now forgot everything anterior to the one thought that possessed him.

"Come on now, my brave buccaneers, an' show us the gold," he cried. "Lead on, my beauties, an' I'll foller, by thunder, to the devil himself!"

So saying, back he climbed up the hill, and down a little pathway along the top till he came to the entrance to the cave which Tom Bullover and Hiram and I had first discovered; and then, suddenly, before Jan Steenbock and Jim Chowder could see where he had gone, he disappeared within the opening.

Jan and Jim alone had continued the pursuit, the other hands having remained behind to release the first-mate from his uncomfortable billet on board the tortoise; and Jim Chowder giving up the hunt at this point, and returning to rejoin his comrades, Jan Steenbock only remained, the latter telling us later on, when we all compared notes, that, after looking for the skipper over the cliff, where he at first believed him to have fallen, he finally traced him into the cave.

Chapter Nineteen.

A Warning Shock.

"Wa-all, I'm jiggered!" ejaculated Hiram, having recourse to his usual favourite expression when startled or surprised at anything, as the skipper, after evading Jan Steenbock's pursuit, darted out of the cave and appeared on the scene, destroying the harmony of our happy meeting with Sam. "Keep yer haar on, cap, an' don't make a muss about nuthin'!"

Captain Snaggs, in response to this, made a gesture as if he were going to strike him.

"Ye durned rep-tile!" he yelled out. "I'll soon knock the sass out o' ye; I will so, by thunder!"

"No, ye don't, cap; no, ye don't," said Hiram good-humouredly, putting up his fists to guard himself, but not doing so offensively. "I guess two ken play at thet game, I reckon, an' ye'd best let me bide; fur, I'm a quiet coon when ye stroke me down the right way, but a reg'lar screamer when I'm riled, an' mighty risky to handle, sirree, ez ye ken bet yer bottom dollar!"

"Jee-rusalem—this air rank mutiny!" exclaimed the skipper, starting back. "Would ye hit me, yer own cap'en?"

"No, cap; I don't mean fur to go ez fur ez thet,"—replied the other, lowering his fists, but keeping his eye steadily on Captain Snaggs, the two looking at each other straight up and down—"not if yer doesn't lay hands on me; but, if yer dew, why, I reckon I'll hev to take my own part, fur I ain't a-goin' to be knocked about by no man, cap'en or no cap'en, ez we're now ashore an' this air a free country!"

"Snakes an' alligators, this air a rum state o' things!" cried the skipper, sobering down a bit at this reply, as well as awed by Hiram's steadfast manner. "But, I don't kinder wish to be at loggerheads with ye, my man, fur ye hev ben a good seaman right through the vy'ge, an I ken pass over yer sass, ez I don't think ye means any disrespect."

"Nary a cent, cap," agreed Hiram to this; "nary a cent o' thet."

"But ez fur thet durned nigger thaar," continued the skipper, foaming up with passion again on seeing Sam and Tom grinning together at his backing down so mildly before Hiram's resolute attitude, neither of them, nor any of us indeed, recognising that he was in a state of delirium, "I'll hev him an' thet scoundrel of a carpenter in irons, an' tried fur conspi-racy, I guess, when we git back to some civilised port."

"Better wait till ye fetch thaar, boss," said Hiram drily. "I guess we air hard an' fast aground jest now; an' it ain't no good a-talkin' till ye ken do ez ye sez; threat'nin's air all bunkum!"

"I'll soon show ye the rights o' thet," shouted Captain Snaggs, making a rush past Hiram to reach Sam, who drew away behind Tom, just beyond his grasp. "Only let me catch holt on thet durned nigger, an' I'll skin him alive. I'll ghost him, I will!"

Hiram, however, protected the darkey with his outstretched arm, thus barring the skipper's advance; while Tom Bullover also stood up in front, further shielding Sam, who now spoke up for himself from his safe position in the rear, whither I too retreated out of harm's way.

"Golly! Massa Cap'en," said Sam, with a native dignity and eloquence which I had not previously believed him to possess, "what fur am yer wish ter injure a pore black man like me, dat nebbah done yer no harm? But fur der impersition ob der good God abobe us all, yer'd a-murd'ed me, as yer taut yer hab dat time dat yer shoots me, an' I tumbles inter de sea?"

"Harm, cuss ye?" retorted Captain Snaggs. "Didn't ye try to pizen me afore I went fur ye? It wer arter thet I drew a bead on ye with my six-shooter!"

"No, Mass' Snaggs," answered the negro solemnly; "I'se swan I nebbah done dat ting! I'se nebbah pizen yer, nor no man. I'se only put one lilly bit jalap in de grub, fo' joke, 'cause yer turn me out ob de galley fo' nuffin'. I'se only done it fo' joke, I swan!"

"A durned fine joke thet, I reckon," sneered the skipper, snorting and fuming with rage at the recollection. "Why, me an' Flinders hed the mullygrabs fur a week arterwards; an' I guess I don't feel all right yet! I ain't half paid ye fur it, by thunder! But, thet ain't the wust by a durned sight; fur, by yer dodrotted tomfoolery, an' carryin' on with thet scoundrel yer accomplice thaar—thet British hound, Bullover, I mean—ye hev so fuddled every one aboard thet ye hev caused the loss of the shep an' cargy on this air outlandish island. I'll make ye answer fur it, though—I will by the jumpin' Jeehosophet!"

"Ye air wrong thaar, cap," put in Hiram here; "ye air wrong thaar!"

"Wrong! Who sez I'm wrong?"

"I dew," replied the other, in his sturdy fashion, in no ways abashed by the question—"I sez ye air wrong. It warn't Sam ez lost the ship, or 'cashion'd the wrack in airy a way, nor yet yerself, cap, neither. It wer summat else."

"Thunder!" exclaimed the skipper, puzzled by this. "What dew ye make it out fur to be?"

"Rum, an' not 'thunder,' mister," at once responded Hiram, equally laconically. "I guess if ye hedn't took to raisin' yer elber thet powerful ez to see snakes, an' hev the jim-jams, we'd all be now, slick ez clams, safe in port at 'Frisco!"

This home truth silenced the captain for the moment, but the next instant he startled us all with an utterly inconsequent question, having no reference to what he had before been speaking of.

"Where hev ye stowed it?"

Hiram stared at him.

"I don't mean ye," said the skipper, dropping his eyes as if he could not stand being gazed at; and I could see his face twitching about in a queer manner, and his hands trembling, as he turned and twisted the fingers together. "I mean the nigger an' thet other skunk thaar—the white man thet's got a blacker heart inside his carkiss than the nigger hez. Whaar hev they stowed it?"

"Stowed what, cap?" inquired Hiram, humouring him, as he now noticed, for the first time, in what an excited state he was. "I don't kinder underconstubble 'zactly what yer means."

"The chest o' gold," snorted out the skipper. "Ye know durned well what I means!"

"Chest o' goold?" repeated Hiram, astonished. "I hev'n't seed no chests o' goold about hyar. No such luck!"

"Ye lie!" roared the captain, springing on him like a tiger, and throwing him down by his sudden attack, he clutched poor Hiram's throat so tightly as almost to strangle him. "I saw the nigger makin' off with it, an' thet scoundrel the carpenter; fur the buccaneers told me jest now. Lord, thaar's the skull rollin' after me, with its wild eyes flashin' fire out of the sockets, an' its grinnin' teeth—oh, save me! Save me!"

With that, he took to crying and sobbing like mad; and it was only then we realised the fact that the skipper was suffering from another of his fits of delirium, though it was a far worse one than any we had seen him labouring under during the voyage.

Tom Bullover and Sam had the greatest difficulty in unclenching his hands from Hiram's neck and then restraining him from doing further violence, our unfortunate shipmate being quite black in the face and speechless for some minutes after our releasing him.

As for Captain Snaggs, he afterwards went on like a raging madman; and it was as much as Tom and Sam could do, with my help, to tie his hands and legs so as to keep him quiet, for he struggled furiously all the while with the strength of ten men!

In the middle of this, we heard a strange rumbling noise under our feet, the ground beginning to oscillate violently, as if we were on board ship in a heavy sea; while, at the same time, a lot of earth and pieces of rock were thrown down on us from the heights above the little plateau where the cave was situated. The air, also, grew thick and heavy and dark, similarly to what is generally noticed when a severe thunderstorm is impending.

"Oh, Tom!" I cried in alarm, "what has happened?"

"It's an earthquake, I think," he replied, looking frightened too. "We'd better get under shelter as quickly as we can, for these stones are tumbling down too plentifully for pleasure!"

"Where can we go?" said I—"the ship's too far off. Oh dear, something has just hit me on the head, and it hurts!"

"Come in here to the cave; we'll be safe inside, if the bottom can stand all this shaking. At all events, it'll be better than being out in the open, to stand the chance of having one's head smashed by a boulder from aloft!"

So saying, Tom disappeared within the mouth of the cavern, dragging after him the prostrate form of the skipper,

who appeared to have fallen asleep, overcome by the violent paroxysms of his fit, for he was snoring stertorously.

Sam and I quickly followed Tom, and the rear was brought up by Hiram—now pretty well recovered from the mauling he had received at the hands of our unconscious skipper, the shock of the earthquake having roused up our shipmate effectually, while the continual dropping of the falling earth and stones, which now began to rain down like hail, hastened his retreat.

“I guess this air more comf’able,” said he, as soon as he was well within our place of shelter, now so dark and gloomy that we could barely see each other, and Sam’s colour was quite indistinguishable. “Talk o’ rainin’ cats an’ dogs! Why, the airth seems topsides down, an’ brickbats an’ pavin’ stones air a reg’ler caution to it!”

Hardly, however, had he got out these words than there came a tremendous crash of thunder, a vivid sheet of forked lightning simultaneously illuminating the whole interior of the cavern; and, to our great surprise, we perceived by the bright electric glare the figure of another man besides our own party—the stranger standing at the upper end of the cave, near the block of stone in the centre, where Sam had been seated when I had seen him playing the banjo, and Tom gave him such a fright by pretending to be a ghost.

Sam, now, like the rest of us, saw this figure advancing in our direction, and believed he was going to be treated to another visitation from the apparition which had terrified him previously, and which he was still only half convinced was but the creation of Tom’s erratic fancy.

“O Lor’, Cholly!” he exclaimed, in great fright, clutching hold of my hand, as I stood near him at the entrance to the cave. “Dere’s anudder duppy come, fo’ suah! My golly! What am dat?”

But, before I could say anything, much to our great relief—for I felt almost as much terrified as he—the voice of Jan Steenbock sounded from out from the gloomy interior in answer to his question.

“It vas mees, mein frents—it vas mees!”

“Goodness gracious, Mister Steenbock!” sang out Tom Bullover, looking towards him, as the hazy figure advanced nearer and became more distinct, although we could not yet actually see the second-mate’s face. “How did you get here?”

“I vas hoont aftaire ze cap’en,” replied Jan, coming up close to us now. “He vas get troonk, and go mat again in ze valleys beyont ze sheep, and I vas run aftaire hims, as he vas run avays, and den he vas go out of zight in one big hole at ze top of ze hill. I vas vollow aftaire hims, but den I loose hims, and ze erdquake vas come and ze toonder and lightning, and I vas zee yous and here I vas!”

“Oh, we’ve got the skipper all right,” said Tom. “He nearly killed Hiram jest now in his frenzy; but we’ve tied him up with a lashing round his arms and legs, so that he can’t get away and come to no harm till he’s all serene again. I’m a-sitting on him now to keep him down; as, though he’s sleepin’, he tries to start up on us every minute. By Jingo! there he goes again!”

“He vas bat mans,” observed Jan Steenbock, helping to hold down the struggling skipper, whose fits of delirium still came back every now and again. “He vas vool of mischiefs and ze rhood! Joost now, he vas dink dat he vas talk to ze boocaneer cap’en, and dat he vas show him dat dreazure dat vas accurst, and he vas dink he vinds it, and dat I vas shteah hims away.”

“I’m jiggered!” ejaculated Hiram, in surprise. “Why, he comed up hyar an’ goes fur me to throttle me, sayin’ ez how I hed took the durned treesor, tew. I guess I only wish we could sot eyes on it!”

“Bettaire not, mine vrents, bettaire not zee it no mores,” said Jan, solemnly shaking his head in the dim light. “It vas accurst, as I vas tell yous, by ze bloot of ze schlabe dat vas kilt by ze Sbaniards. It vas only bringt bat look to ze beeples dat vas touch hims. Bettaire not, mein frent, nevaire!”

“I ain’t got no skear ’bout thet,” replied Hiram, with a defiant laugh. “Guess, we air all on us pretty wa-al season’d to them ghostesses by this time, both aboard ship an’ ashore, an’ I don’t care a cuss fur the hull bilin’ on them, I reckon!”

“Shtop!—listen!”—whispered Jan Steenbock, in his deep, impressive voice, as another vivid flash of lightning lit up the cave for a brief instant, making it all the darker afterwards. This was followed by a second crashing peal of thunder, as if the very heavens were coming down and were rattling about our ears; while the ground heaved up beneath our feet violently, with its former jerky motion.—“Ze sbirrits of eefel vas valk abroat in ze shtorm.”

Even as he spoke, his solemn tones sending a thrill through my heart, there came a still more violent shock of earthquake, which was succeeded by a tremendous grinding, thumping noise from the back of the cave; and then, all of a sudden, a large black body bounded past us through the entrance close to where we stood. The rush of air knocked us all down flat on our backs, as this object, whatever it was, made its way out, and, finally, we could hear it, a second later, plunged into the sea below at the foot of the declivity.

“Bress de Lor’!” ejaculated Sam, in greater terror than ever. “Dere’s de duppy, fo’ suah! Hole on ter me, Cholly! Hole on! I’se mighty ’fraid! Hole on ter me, for de Lor’s sake, sonny!”

Chapter Twenty.

The Judgment of Fate.

We were all speechless, and could see nothing as we scrambled to our feet in the darkness, for the cave was now filled with a thick dust, that nearly suffocated us as well as blinded us—filling our eyes, and mouths, and nostrils.

Presently, the dust settled down; and, then, we found that the cavern was no longer dark, for the crash which had so startled us at first was occasioned by a portion of the roof breaking away, which let in the daylight from above, right immediately over the big rock in the centre that Tom had called “the pulpit.”

The rock, however, had disappeared, and this was, doubtless, the mysterious body that had rushed by us through the mouth of the cave, so frightening Sam.

But something more surprising still had happened.

The earthquake, in rending the rock, had upheaved all the earth around it, and there, beneath, in a large cavity, was a collection of old oaken chests, bound round, apparently, with heavy clamps of iron, similar to those used by our forefathers a couple of centuries ago for the storage of their goods and chattels—boxes that could defy alike the ravages of age and the ordinary wear and tear of time, the carpenters and builders of bygone days making things to last, and not merely to sell, as in modern years!

“Hooray!” cried Hiram, springing towards one of the chests, which had been crushed open by a piece of detached rock from the roof of the cave, thus disclosing to view a lot of glittering ingots of gold, with a crucifix and some little images of the same precious metal, like the Madonna figure we had first discovered. “Hyar’s the boocaneer tresor, I guess, at last!”



“Hyar’s boocaneer tresor, I guess at last!”
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“I vas mooch sorry,” said Jan Steenbock, shaking his head solemnly, as we gathered round the hole and eagerly inspected its contents, noticing that there were seven or eight of the large chests within the cavity, besides the broken one and a number of smaller ones, along with pieces of armour and a collection of old guns and pistols, all heaped up together. “I vas mooch sorry. It vas bringt us bat look, like it did to ze schgooners, and Cap’en Shackzon, and all ze crew of zo sheep I vas zail in befores!”

“Why, old hoss,” asked Hiram, all excitement, “I guess we air all friends hyar, an’ ’ll go share an’ share alike; so thaar’s no fear on a muss happenin’ atween us, like thaar wer with ye an’ them durned cut-throat Spaniards. Why shu’d it bring us bad luck, hey?”

“I vas avraid of ze curse,” replied the other. “It vas hoonted mit bloot, and vas bringt harm to every ones! I vill not touch it meinselvs—no, nevaire!”

“Guess I will, though,” retorted Hiram. “I ain’t afeard o’ no nigger ez was buried two hundred year ago; no, nor on his ghostess neither. What say ye, Sam, consarnin’ this brother darkey o’ yourn?”

“Golly, Massa Hiram!” said Sam, grinning from ear to ear at the sight of the gold. “I’se tink I’se hab claim to de lot, if it am belong to de nigger family. Ho-ho-ho!”

With that we all laughed; whereupon the skipper, whom we had forgotten for the moment, made a movement where he still lay on the floor of the cave by the entrance, opening his eyes and trying to get up, which, of course, he was unable to do, from our having tied his legs together.

“Hillo!” he called out. “Whaar am I?”

His voice now seemed quite rational, and on Tom going up to him, he found that the delirium had left him, and that he was quite sober and in his senses again, so he unloosed him, helping him on to his feet.

Strange to say, Captain Snaggs did not utter a word about finding himself tied, nor did he seem in any way surprised

at being there amongst us. He was not angry either a bit now!

He simply walked up to where we stood and, looking down at the hole with the chests piled up in it, as if following out a concentrated train of thought which had been simmering in his brain before his fit, exclaimed—

“Thaar it air, jest ez I told ye, an’ ez the buccaneer cap’n told me. Thaar it air all right, I reckon; an’ now we must see about gettin’ it down to the shep.”

This staggered us somewhat; but Tom Bullover thought it best to humour him.

“How would you like it took down to the shore, cap’en?” he asked, deferentially. “Shall I go and fetch some of the hands, sir?”

“Yes, I guess thet’ll be the best plan,” replied Captain Snaggs, as easy as you please, and as if only talking about some ordinary thing, and he were giving his usual orders. “Wait a minnit, though. I guess I’ll come with ye ez soon as I’ve toted up the hull lot, fur thaar ain’t no fear of any coon walkin’ off with the plunder while we’re away, an’ I want to see how the shep’s gettin’ on. I reckon she ought to be pretty near afloat by now.”

There seemed a method in his madness, even if he were yet mad, for he carefully jotted down the number of chests in his pocket-book; and then, turning away as composedly as possible, he made his way down to the beach by our old path, just as if he had been in the habit of going that way every day of his life and it was quite familiar to him.

“Come on, men!” cried he. “Follow me!”

So, down we all tramped after him in single file to the shore, where we found a stranger thing had happened since our long absence, which, long as it seemed from the series of occurrences that had happened, the one succeeding the other in rapid succession, was not long in reality.

However, it appeared months since we had left the ship; for, in the short space of time, comparatively speaking, that we had been away, all around her had been altered, and she more than anything.

Instead of her being high and dry ashore, with her bows up in the air between the two hillocks where they had been wedged, there she was now afloat, placidly riding on the smooth waters of the harbour by her anchors, which had been laid out, it may be remembered, the morning after she stranded.

This was a far more providential circumstance than our finding the treasure; for even Mr Steenbock, sanguine as he had been at first when he suggested digging the dock under her, had begun to have fears of our eventually getting her off again into her native element—the operation taking longer than he had expected, for the water at the last had penetrated through the coffer-dam, thus preventing the men from digging out the after part of the trench under the keel piece, between the main and mizzen-chains.

Now, through the effects of the earthquake, we were fortunately saved all farther trouble on this score.

The skipper did not appear the least surprised at what had happened, displaying the same nonchalance as he did when gazing down into the cavity where the buccaneers’ gold was stowed—as if he had dreamt it all beforehand and everything was turning out exactly according to the sequence of his dream!

As we got nearer, we saw that a number of the men were grouped about the shore, collecting a lot of stray gear, which they were taking off to the ship in the jolly-boat; so, calling to these, Captain Snaggs asked where Mr Flinders was.

“He’s gone aboard bad,” said one of the hands, with a snigger, whereat they all laughed. “He don’t feel all right this artnoon, sir, an’ he went into his cabin afore the ship floated.”

“I guess, then, we’d better go aboard, too,” replied the skipper, quite quiet like. “It’s gettin’ late now, an’ we’ll break off work till to-morrow. We’ll then set about gettin’ the sticks up on her agen, my men, as well as hoist the stores aboard; fur, I means to sail out of this hyar harbour afore the end of the week!”

The hands gave a hearty hurrah at this, as if the idea pleased them, for they must have been quite sick of the place by this time; and the skipper therefore ordered Jan Steenbock and Tom, with Hiram, Sam, and I, to come off with him in the boat, telling us when we presently got aboard not to mention about the treasure to any one yet, as it might prevent the men working and rigging the ship, getting her ready for sea.

This we promised to do, keeping our word easily enough, as we did not find it difficult to hold our tongues in the matter, considering the lot there was for all hands to talk about concerning Sam’s restoration to life, after being supposed dead so long. Several of the hands, though, persisted that they knew of the deception all along, and had not been taken in by the ghost business; but this was all brag on their part, for I am sure they thoroughly believed in it at the time, just the same as Morris Jones and Hiram and I did—only Tom being in the secret from first to last!

In the course of the next four days, all the hands working with a will, even more energetically than they had done when dismantling her, the *Denver City* had her rigging up all ataunto again, while her graceful yards were crossed, and most of her cargo got aboard, all ready to sail.

During this time, the skipper had said not a word about the treasure, nor did he speak of sending up any one to fetch it; and so, as none of us had been back to the cave since quitting it with the captain, after the earthquake and our discovery of the hoard, Hiram and Tom, with Sam and I, stole away late on the afternoon of the fourth day to see whether the boxes were all right—Jan Steenbock being the only one of the original party present when it was found who did not accompany us; but he said he knew it would be unlucky, for him, at all events, and so he preferred

stopping away.

So it was that only we four went, though Jan came with us part of the way from the ship, sitting down by the spring which had been the haunt of the doves, to await our return.

Jan did not have to remain there long alone.

No sooner had we got to the cave than we found that the treacherous skipper had anticipated and out-reached us; for, from the hurried look we took, we could see that every single chest and box had been removed, and that all were now probably stored in the captain's own cabin. No doubt, too, by-and-by, he would swear that we had no hand in finding them, whence, of course, it must follow from his reasoning, we were not entitled to any share in the proceeds from the treasure!

This was a pretty state of things, each and all of us thought; and, boiling with indignation, we rushed back to Jan to tell him the news.

But, we met with but sorry sympathy from him.

"You vas mooch bettaire off," he said stolidly—"mooch bettaire off mitout ze accursed stoof! It vas bringt harm to Cap'en Shackzon, and ze crew of ze schooners dat I vas in; and, markt mine vorts, it vas bringt harms to Cap'en Schnaggs, as zertain as I vas here and dere!"

"I'm durned, though, if I don't make him suffer fur it, if he don't shell out!" cried Hiram hotly, as we all resumed the path back to the shore, much more quickly than we had gone up to the cave. "I'll give him goss!"

"He vill meet his vate vrom elsevere," said Jan Steenbock solemnly, hurrying after us, for Hiram and Tom seemed all eagerness to tackle the skipper at once, and I trotted close after them. "Ze sbirrit ob ze dreazure vill hoont him, and poonish him in ze end!"

And, incredible as my story may seem, quite unwittingly, Jan became a true prophet, as what occurred subsequently will show.

When we got to the shore, we found that the ship had her boats hoisted in, and her anchor weighed; while the topsails were cast loose, showing that she was ready to sail at a moment's notice.

What concerned us most, though, was that we could see no means for getting on board; for the dinghy by which we had landed was towing astern by its painter, and thus all communication was cut off with the shore.

"*Denver City*, ahoy!" shouted out Hiram, putting his hands to his mouth as an improvised speaking trumpet. "Send a boat to take us off!"

Captain Snaggs at once jumped up on the taffrail on our hailing her.

"Not one o' ye durned cusses comes aboard my shep agen, if I knows it!" he yelled back loudly. "Ye went ashore o' yer own accord, an' thaar ye shell stop, by thunder!"

"Ye durned thief!" cried Hiram, mad with rage at the villain for thus cheating us, and abandoning us to our fate there on that lone desert isle. "Whaar's our treesor?"

"Guess ye're ravin', man," bawled Captain Snaggs; and then, as if this ended the colloquy, he sang out to the hands forward to "Hoist away!"

We then noticed a slight commotion on board, as if some of our shipmates rebelled at the idea of leaving us behind, while they sailed homeward; but this intervention on our behalf was futile, for the skipper brandished his revolver, as we could easily see from the top of the cliff, to which we had now climbed, in order to make our voices better heard on board, and after a momentary pause the sails were let drop and hauled out, and the vessel began to make her way out of the bay.

The captain then called out to us, as if in bragging malice, "I've got every durned chest aboard! D'ye haar? Flinders an' I brought 'em down to the beach last night when ye wer all caulkin'; an' I guess ye air pretty well chiselled at last! —Thet's quits fur the nigger's ghost, an' yer mutiny, an' all! I reckon I've paid ye all out in full, ye durned skellywags!"

Those were the last words, in all human probability, that Captain Snaggs ever uttered in this mortal life.

There had been slight rumblings underground all the morning of that day, as if nature were warning us of further volcanic disturbance throughout the Galapagian archipelago; and now, of a sudden, an immense tidal wave, that seemed sixty feet high at the least, rolled into the little harbour like a huge wall, filling up the opening between the cliffs on either hand up to the very tops of these, as it came sweeping inward from the outside sea.

The next instant, the *Denver City*, with all on board her, disappeared, the wave sweeping back outwards with its prey, leaving the bottom of the harbour bare for over a mile, where all previously had been deep water.

The sea came back once more, though the tidal wave was not so high as before.

And still once again—ebb and flow, ebb and flow.

It was awful!

Chapter Twenty One.

Rescued.

We five—Jan Steenbock, Tom Bullover, Hiram, Sam Jedfoot, and lastly, though by no means least, myself—sole, solitary survivors of the awful catastrophe that had swallowed up our comrades, stood on the cliff above the yawning chasm, watching the tidal wave that still ebbed and flowed in diminishing volume at each reflux.

This it continued to do for a full half-hour afterwards, when the sea returned to its normal state, welling up tranquilly on the beach, and quickly washing away all traces of the recent convulsion of nature, as if nothing had happened—a sort of sobbing moan, only, seemed afterwards to come from the water every now and then at spasmodic intervals, as if the spirits of the deep were lamenting over the mischief and destruction they had wrought!

Scarcely could we believe our eyes; for, while not a single plank or piece of timber was cast ashore of the ship, which must have been taken down bodily by the remorseless wave that had hurried our cruel captain and no less cruel mate, and the rest of the crew, nineteen souls in all, into eternity, without the slightest forewarning of their doom, the little bay now looked as quiet and peaceful as of yore, with its outstretching capes on either hand, and everything still the same—equally wild, desolate, deserted, as when we first beheld it!

Most wonderful of all, though, was the fact that we alone were saved.

We were saved!

That thought appeared to flash through all our minds at once simultaneously; and, falling on our knees, there, on the summit of the headland, whence we had witnessed the terrible tragedy and now gazed down on the once more placid, treacherous sea, we each and all thanked God for our deliverance from the peril of the waters, as He had already delivered us from the cruelty of man—in the person of that treacherous, drunken demon who had abandoned us there to the solitude and the misery of exile and sailed off to enjoy, as he thought, the ill-gotten treasure of which he had robbed us. But he had met even a worse fate than he had meted out to us; for, what could have been worse for him than to die and be called to account for his misdeeds at the very moment of the realisation of his devilish design?

However, peace to his evil spirit, One greater than us poor marooned sailors would be his Judge!

That feeling was uppermost in my mind, and I'm sure it was reciprocated by the others, after we had returned thanks to the watchful Providence that had saved us while snatching Captain Snaggs away in the middle of his sins; but his name was not mentioned by any there at that moment, nor did either of us utter a word afterwards, to each other at least, so far as I can remember, about his treatment of us—not even Sam, to whom throughout he had behaved the most cruelly of all.

Sailor-folk, as a rule, are not revengeful, and death we held, had blotted out the past; so we, too, buried the skipper's misdeeds in oblivion!

We stopped there on the cliff without speaking until it was close on sunset.

Our hearts were too full to express the various thoughts that coursed through our minds; and there we remained, silent and still, as if we five were dumb.

All we did was to stare out solemnly on the vast ocean that spread out from beneath our feet to the golden west in the far distance, where sky and sea met on the hazy horizon—with never a sail to break its wide expanse, with never a sound to break our solitude, save the sullen murmuring wash of the surf as it rippled up on the beach, and the heavy, deep-drawn sigh of the water as it rolled back to its parent ocean, taking its weary load of pebbles and sand below, as if sick of the monotonous task, which it was doomed to continue on without cessation, with ever and for ever the same motion, now that its wild, brief orgy was o'er, and its regular routine of duty had to be again resumed!

Tom Bullover was the first to break the silence.

"Come boys," he said, when the sun's lower limb was just dipping into the sea, leaving a solitary pathway of light across the main, while all the rest of the sea became gradually darker, as well as the heavens overhead, telling us that the evening was beginning to close in. "Come, Mr Steenbock and you fellows, we'd best go back to the cave for the night, so as to be out of the damp air. Besides, it won't be so lonesome like as it is here!"

"Ay, bo," acquiesced Hiram. "Thaar's Sam's old sail thaar, which 'll sarve us fur a bed anyhow."

"Dat so," chimed in the darkey. "I'se belly comf'able dere till Mass' Tom friten me wid duppy. I'se got some grub dere, too; an' we can light fire an' boil coffee in pannikin, which I'se bring ashore wid me from ship."

"Bully for ye!" cried Hiram, waking up again to the practical realities of life at the thought of eating, and realising that he was hungry, not having, like, indeed, all of us, tasted anything since the morning, the events of the day having made us forget our ordinary meal-time, "I guess I could pick a bit if I'd any thin' to fix atween my teeth!"

"Golly! don't yer fret, massa," said Sam cheerfully, in response to this hint, leading the way towards his whilom retreat. "I'se hab a good hunk ob salt pork stow away dere, an' hard tack, too!"

"Why, what made you think of getting provisions up there?" observed I, laughing, being rather surprised at his precaution, when everyone else had been taken up with the treasure, and believed that we were on the point of

leaving the island for good and all. "Were you going to give a party, Sam?"

"I'se make de preparations fo' 'mergencies, Cholly," he replied gravely. "Nobuddy know what happen, an' dere's nuffin' like bein' suah ob de grub!"

"Thet's true enuff, an' good sound doctrine. Don't ye kinder think so, mister?"

Jan Steenbock, to whom this question was addressed, made no reply; but, as he got up and followed Sam, Hiram took this for his answer, and went after him, the five of us entering the cave in single file.

Here, we found that, from its position on the higher ground, the tidal wave had not effected any damage, the only alteration being that made by the first shock of earthquake, causing the crack across the upper end, which had dislodged the stone in the centre, and disclosed the buccaneers' treasure. So, then, on Sam's producing a good big piece of salt junk, with some ship's biscuit, which he had wrapped up in a yellow bandana handkerchief and stowed away in one corner under his sailcloth, we all imitated the American, and 'put our teeth through' the unexpected food, finding ourselves, now that we had something to eat before us, with better appetites than might have been thought possible after what we had gone through.

Sailors, though, do not trouble themselves much over things that have happened, looking out more for those to come!

The next day, it seemed very strange to wake up and find ourselves alone there, especially after the stirring time we had recently, with the discovery of the treasure, and getting the ship afloat, and all; so, when we crawled out of the cave and went down to the beach, we five forlorn fellows felt more melancholy than can be readily imagined at seeing this bare and desolate, and hearing no sound but that of our own sad voices.

Even the coo of the doves was now unnoticeable, the birds having deserted their haunt in the grove after the earthquake shock, as I believe I have mentioned before. Lucky it was for them that their instinct warned them to do this in time; for the tidal wave had swept completely over the place, and the little dell was now all covered with black and white sand, like the rest of the shore—the sloping strand running up to the very base of the cliff, and trees and all traces of vegetation having been washed away by the sudden inrush of the water.

Jan Steenbock, whose place it was naturally to be our leader, but who had been so superstitiously impressed by the belief that our calamity was entirely owing to our having anything to do with the buccaneers' buried treasure, which he supposed, in accordance with the old Spanish legend, to be accursed, now once more reinstated himself in our good opinion, showing himself to be the sensible man that he always was, despite the fact of his having hitherto, from the cause stated, been more despondent than any of us.

"My mans," said he bravely, turning his back on the beach and away from the treacherous, smiling sea, "we moost not give vays to bat thoughts and tings! Let us go inlants and do zometing dat vill make us dink of zometing else! We vill go oop to dat blace vere ze grond vas blanted mit tings between ze hills, and zee if we can zee any bodatoes or bananes vot to eat; vor, as mein frent Sambo here zays, it vas goot to look after ze grub, vor we hab no sheeps now to zupply us mit provisions!"

This was sound advice, which we immediately acted on, our little quintet abandoning the shore, and following our leader again up the cliff to the old deserted plantation. This, it may be remembered, Tom and Hiram and I had first lighted on in our quest for the treasure before we discovered the cave, but we now found out that Jan Steenbock had been previously acquainted with it from being formerly on the island.

Here we made a camp, bringing Sam's sailcloth from the cave, with a tin pot and other mess gear he had stowed away for his own use when in hiding there, and no one knew save Tom Bullover that he was anything but a ghost; and here, thenceforward, by the help of the tortoises, whose flesh we fared on, with an occasional wild hog, when we were lucky enough to catch one, our meat diet being varied with the various tropical vegetables which we found in the valley in profusion, we lived until the rainy season came on, when we went back again to the cave for shelter.

It must not be thought, though, that our time was entirely spent in eating, or in devices how we should procure food, notwithstanding that this was the principal care of our solitary desert island life, like as in the case of most shipwrecked mariners.

No, we had a greater purpose than this.

It was the hope of escaping from our dismal exile, through the help of some coasting vessel bound up or down the Pacific, or to ports within the Gulf of Panama; and, in order to observe such passing craft we erected a signal station on the top of Mount Chalmers, and took it in turns to keep watch there throughout the day, with a bonfire hard by, ready to be kindled the moment a sail was sighted.

Alas, our watch for weeks was in vain!

Sometimes we would see a ship in the distance, but she was generally too far off to notice us; and our hearts would sink again to utter despondency when this occurred, more than when we never noticed any sail at all, on our seeing her gradually melting away, until she would be finally lost in the mists of the sea and air.

At last, however, one morning, about six months or so after the loss of the *Denver City*—I'm sure I cannot tell the precise date, for we began then to forget even the passage of time—Tom Bullover, who was on the look-out, came rushing down the sloping side of the cliff like a madman, covering yards with each leap and bound he took in his rapid descent, looking as if he were flying.

"A sail! a sail!" he shouted, as soon as he got near. "There's a ship in sight, and she's just entering the bay!"

"Vere?—vere?" cried Jan Steenbock, equally excited, running to meet him. "A sheep? You vas mat, mein pore vellow, —you vas mat!"

"Jee-rusalem—no, he ain't!" exclaimed Hiram, who, standing on the summit of the little mound by the entrance to the cave, could see further out to sea than Jan from below. "Tom's all right. Hooray! It's a shep sure enuff, an' she's now tarnin' the p'int on the starboard side over thaar!"

With that we all looked now in this direction; and, oh, the blessed sight! There, as Hiram said, was a vessel under full sail rounding the opposite cliff and coming into the bay!

"My golly! I shell bust—I'se so glad!" cried poor Sam, dancing, and shouting, and laughing, and crying, all in one breath. "Bress de Lor'! Bress de Lor'!"

What I and the rest did to express our joy under the circumstances it would be impossible to tell; but I'm pretty sure we were quite as extravagant in our actions and demeanour as the negro,—if not so hearty in our recognition of the all-wise Providence that had sent this ship to our rescue!

There is little more to add.

The vessel soon cast anchor in the bay; and on her lowering a boat and reaching the beach where, as may be supposed, we eagerly awaited its coming, we found out that she was a whaler, full of oil, and homeward bound to San Francisco, her captain putting in at Abingdon Island for fresh water and vegetables, as some of his crew were suffering from scurvy, and they had run short of all tinned meat on board, having only salt provisions left.

We were thus enabled to mutually accommodate each other, Hiram, and Sam, and Tom Bullover, soon fetching a big store of green stuff from our plantation in the valley, besides securing a batch of tortoises for the men in the boat to kill and take on board; while Jan Steenbock and I went with the whaler's captain to point out our water-spring near the cave, where the doves' grove used to be, the stream from the hills still finding its way down there to the sea below, although the little lake, or pool, had become dried up by the accumulation of sand and the trees all disappeared.

In return for these welcome supplies, the captain of the whaler gladly agreed to give us all a free passage to "Frisco"; although as I need hardly tell, he would have willingly done this without any such consideration at all, after hearing our story and being made acquainted with the strange and awful catastrophe that had befallen our ill-fated ship.

But we were not altogether destitute.

Our good fortune, if long in coming, smiled on us at the last; for, the very morning of our departure from the island, a week after the whaler's arrival, the captain remaining a few days longer than he first intended in order to allow his sick hands to recover, Hiram, while routing out a few traps left in the cave to take on board with us, found, much to Jan Steenbock's regret,—the second-mate saying it would bring us ill-luck again—one of the little chests containing the buccaneers' treasure, which Captain Snaggs had left unwittingly behind him when he and Mr Flinders cleared off with the rest, which they thought the entire lot.

The box contained a number of gold ingots and silver dollars, which the whaler captain said were worth 'a heap of money,' as he expressed it, though he would not take a penny of it for himself.

The whaler skipper was an honest man, for he told Hiram Bangs and Tom, who tried to press a certain portion of the treasure on him as his due, that it all rightfully belonged to us, and that he should consider himself a pitiful scoundrel if he took advantage of our misfortunes!

There—could anything be nobler than that?

"Guess not," said Hiram; and, so we all agreed!

We had a capital voyage to San Francisco from the island, which we were glad enough to lose sight of, with its lava cliffs and cactus plants, and other strange belongings in the animal and vegetable world, and, above all, its sad memories and associations in other ways to us; and no more happy sailors ever landed from board ship than we five did who set foot ashore in the 'Golden State,' as California is called, some three odd summers ago.

The whaler captain sold our treasure for us; and the share of each of us came to a good round sum—I, though only a boy, being given by the others a fourth share, just as if I had been a man, for Jan Steenbock refused to touch any.

My portion, when realised, amounted to over 400 pounds, a sum which, if not quite enough to set one up in life and enable one to stop working, was still 'not to be sneezed at,' as Tom Bullover remarked to me confidentially, when we made our way eastwards from San Francisco towards New York, by the Union Pacific line, a month or so afterwards.

Hiram remained behind in California, saying he had gone through enough sailing, and intended trying something in the farming or mining line. But Tom, and Jan Steenbock, and I, with our old friend Sam, stuck together to the end, taking a ship at New York for Liverpool, where we touched English ground again, just a year almost to a day from the time we started on our ill-starred voyage in the poor *Denver City*.

All of us still see each other now and again, even Hiram meeting us sometimes, when he ships in a liner and comes 'across the herring pond,' having soon got tired of a life ashore.

Our general rendezvous is a little shop kept by Sam Jedfoot, who has married a wife, and supplies goods in the ship-

chandlering line to vessels outward bound; for the darkey has a large acquaintance amongst stewards and such gentry who have the purchasing of the same, and being a general favourite with all this class of men—save and excepting Welshmen, whom he detests most heartily, somehow or other!

I am now a grown-up sailor, too, like Tom Bullover, and he and I always sail together in the same ship.

We are called the ‘two inseparables’ by the brokers, for one of us will never sign articles for a new vessel unless the other goes; and, when we come off a voyage and land at Liverpool old town, as frequently is the case, no sooner do we step ashore, at the Prince’s Landing Stage or in the docks, as may happen, than we ‘make tracks,’ to use Hiram Bang’s Yankee lingo, for Sam Jedfoot’s all-sorts shop, hard by in Water Street.

Here, ‘you may bet your bottom dollar,’ adopting Hiram’s favourite phrase again, we are always warmly welcomed by our old friend, the whilom darkey cook of the lost *Denver City*, whose wife also greets us cordially whenever we drop in to visit her ‘good man,’ as she calls him.

They are a happy couple, and much attached, though opposed in colour; and, here, of an evening, after the hearty spread which Sam invariably insists on preparing for our enjoyment, to show us that he has not lost practice in his culinary profession, I believe, as well as from his innate sense of hospitality, the ex-cook will—as regularly as he was accustomed to do on board ship in his caboose, towards the end of the second dog-watch, when, you may recollect, the hands were allowed to skylark and divert themselves—take up his banjo, which is the identical same one that he brought home with him from Abingdon Island.

The tune he always plays, the song he always sings, is that well-remembered one which none of us, his shipmates, can ever forget, bringing back as it does, with its plaintive refrain, every incident of our memorable passage across the Atlantic and round Cape Horn—aye, and all the way up the Pacific to the Galapagos Isles.

It is full of our past life, so pregnant with its strange perils and weird surroundings, and which ended in such a terrible catastrophe:—

“Oh, down in Alabama, ‘fore I wer sot free,
I lubbed a p’ooty yaller gal, an’ fought dat she lubbed me,
But she am prob unconstant, an’ leff me hyar to tell
How my pore hart am breakin’ far dat croo-el Nancy Bell!”

Sam’s wife, too, although she isn’t a ‘yaller girl,’ but, on the contrary, as white as he is black, and Tom Bullover and I, with Hiram and Jan Steenbock—should either or both happen likewise to be ashore in Liverpool, and with us, of course, at the time—all, as regularly and unfailingly on such occasions join in the same old chorus.

Don’t you recollect it?

“Den, cheer up, Sam! don’t let your sperrits go down;
Dere’s many a gal dat I knows wal am waitin’ fur you in de town!”

The ditty always winds up invariably, as in the old days at sea, with the self-same sharp twang of the chords of the banjo at the end of the last bar, that Sam used to give when sitting in the galley of the poor *Denver City*.

“Ponk-a-tink-a-tong-tang. P-lang!”

I can hear it now.

Bless you, I can never forget that tune—no, never—brimful as it is with the memory of our ill-fated ship.

The End.

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