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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK OWEN HARTLEY; OR, UPS AND DOWNS: A TALE OF LAND AND SEA ***

William H G Kingston

"Owen Hartley; or, Ups and Downs"

Chapter One.

"Well, boy, what do you want?"

These words were uttered in a no pleasant tone by an old gentleman with a brownish complexion, a yellowish brown scratch wig, somewhat awry, a decidedly brown coat, breeches, and waistcoat, a neckcloth, once white, but now partaking of the sombre hue of his other garments; brown stockings and brownish shoes, ornamented by a pair of silver buckles, the last-mentioned articles being the only part of his costume on which the eye could rest with satisfaction.

On his lap was placed a pocket handkerchief, of a nondescript tint, brown, predominating, in consequence of its frequent application to a longish nose, made the recipient of huge quantities of snuff. Altogether there was a dry, withered-leaf-like look about the old man which was not prepossessing. His little grey eyes were sunk deeply in his head, his sight being aided by a large pair of tortoiseshell spectacles, which he had now shoved up over his forehead.

He was seated on a high stool at a desk in a little back dingy office, powerfully redolent of odours nautical and unsavoury, emanating from coils of rope, casks of salt butter, herrings, Dutch cheese, whale oil, and similar unaromatic articles of commerce. It was in that region made classical by Dibdin—Wapping. The back office in which the old gentleman sat opened out of one of much larger proportions, though equally dull and dingy, full of clerks, old and young, on high stools, busily moving their pens, or rapidly casting up accounts—evidence that no idleness was allowed in the establishment. On one side was a warehouse, in which large quantities of the above named and similar ship's stores were collected. In front was a shop, the ceiling hung with tallow candles, brushes, mats, iron pots, and other things more useful than ornamental. From one end to the other of it ran a long, dark-coloured counter, behind which stood a man in a brown apron, and sleeves tucked up, ready to serve out, in small quantities, tea, sugar, coffee, tallow candles, brushes, twine, tin kettles, and the pots which hung over his head, within reach of a long stick, placed ready for detaching them from the hooks on which they were suspended. In the windows, and on the walls outside, were large placards in red and black letters, announcing the sailing of various ships of wonderful sea qualities, and admirable accommodation for passengers, with a statement that further information would be afforded within.

"Speak, boy; what do you want?" repeated the old gentleman, in a testy and still harsher tone than before, as he turned round on his stool with an angry glance under his spectacles. "Eh?"

The person he addressed was a fair complexioned boy, about twelve years old, with large blue eyes, and brown hair in wavy curls, a broad forehead, and an open, frank, intelligent countenance. He was dressed in a jacket and trousers of black cloth, not over well made perhaps, nor fresh looking, although they did not spoil his figure; his broad shirt collar turned back and fastened by a ribbon showed to advantage his neck and well-set-on head. It would have been difficult to find two people offering a greater contrast than the old man and the boy.

"Please, sir," answered the latter, with considerable hesitation, "Farmer Rowe wished me to come here to see you, as he hopes—"

"And who in the name of wonder is Farmer Rowe, and who are you?" exclaimed the old gentleman, kicking his heels against the leg of the stool.

Before the boy could find words to go on with what he was saying, or could check the choking sensation which rose in his throat, a clerk, the counterpart of his master, in respect of dinginess and snuffiness, entered with a handful of papers which required signing, and a huge folio under his arm. As, in the eyes of the old gentleman, his business was of far more consequence than any matter which could be connected with that pale-faced, gentle boy in the threadbare suit, he turned round to the desk, and applied himself to the papers, as his clerk handed them to him in

succession.

The boy was, in the meantime, left unnoticed to his own reflections. While the old gentleman was absorbed in the folio, the clerk gave a glance round at the young stranger, and the expression conveyed in that glance did not add pleasantness to the lad's feelings, as he stood clutching his crape-bound hat. Leaving the two old men engaged in their books and papers, a fuller account must be given of the boy than he was likely to afford of himself.

Some thirty years before the period at which this history commences a young gentleman, Owen Hartley, who was pursuing his academical course with credit, preparatory to entering the ministry, fell in love during a long vacation with a well-educated young lady of respectable position in life, if not of birth equal to his. She returned his affection, and it was agreed that they should marry when he could obtain a living. Being ordained, he was appointed to a curacy of 50 pounds a year, in which post he faithfully discharged his duty, expecting to obtain the wished-for incumbency. Susan Walford existed on the same hope, but year after year passed by, and she grew pale, and even his spirits sometimes sank, when the realisation of their expectations seemed likely to be indefinitely deferred. At length, however, he obtained a living. It was one no person, except in his circumstances, would have taken. No wonder; it was among the fens of Lincolnshire, and, after certain deductions, scarcely produced a hundred a year. Still it was a living, and a certainty. At the same time Susan received a legacy. It made their hearts very grateful; although the amount was small, yet, in their eyes, it seemed magnificent, a clear 350 pounds. To be sure, 300 pounds would produce only 12 pounds a year when invested, still, that was something added to a hundred.

The extra fifty was retained for furnishing the vicarage. Ten years they had waited patiently, now they were married, and were contented and happy. They did not live for themselves alone, but to be a blessing to all around them. True, they could not give money, but Owen gave Gospel truths, simple and without stint; and she, kind words and sympathy, and a portion of many of their scanty meals. The hale as well as the sick were visited, believers strengthened and encouraged, and inquirers instructed. They reaped a rich harvest of affection from their parishioners. Three years after their marriage a son was born; he was a treasure for which they were grateful, and he was their only one. The little Owen flourished, for he was acclimatised, but the breezes which blow over those Lincolnshire fens are raw and keen, if not generally unhealthy to the natives, and the vicar and his wife began to complain of touches of ague, which became, as time went on, more and more frequent. An income of 112 pounds a year will not allow the happy possessors to indulge in many of the luxuries of life, and certainly not in that of foreign travel. When, therefore, the parish doctor hinted that a change of climate, and more generous diet and port wine, were absolutely necessary for their restoration, Mr Hartley smilingly observed, that as he did not think a better climate would come to them, and as they certainly could not go to it, he did not see how the combination could be brought about; and as to port wine, it had long been a stranger to his palate, and was likely to continue so. Still the doctor urged that he must take it, and sent him some from his own store, and, moreover, spoke so very earnestly to Mrs Hartley, saying that her husband would altogether be incapacitated from performing his duties unless he was supplied with stimulants and more food, that she resolved to do what many have resolved to do before, and will do again under similar circumstances. She did not exactly kill the golden goose, but began to sell out. It was indeed pleasant to have 20 pounds at command. She ordered wine of the best, with beef steaks and mutton chops, such things had rarely before been seen at the vicarage. The butcher wondered, but she paid regularly, and he asked no questions. She, however, only made-believe to eat of them herself, that Owen might have the more; and when he came home to dinner she was sure to have taken a large luncheon while he was out. She thought that his health was improving, and he declared that he felt stronger.

So delighted was she with the result of this new system, that she ordered more port wine, and still more amply supplied the table. Yet the doctor was not satisfied, and urged change of air for a short time—"His life is so valuable," was his remark, and the doctor's observation conquered all scruples. A clergyman to do Owen's duty was to be obtained, no easy matter, and he must be paid. One was found, and the excursion made. Mr Hartley felt wonderfully better, but not many weeks after his return the terrible ague again attacked him. Week after week he was unable to perform his ordinary duty. He staggered to the church, and in a voice which he could with difficulty render audible, preached the glorious Gospel as before.

The parish did not suffer so much as it might have done, for Susan visited the parishioners more frequently than ever. At length the faithful wife herself fell ill.

The disease made more rapid progress in her weak frame than it had done in that of her husband. Owen now compelled her to take the same remedies which she had given to him; both lingered on, striving to do their duty. The vicar was apparently getting better, and Susan revived sufficiently to enable her to assist in the education of the younger Owen. Year after year showed the ravages illness was making on their frames; the doctor shook his head when the parishioners inquired after them. Susan died first, Owen did not mourn as one without hope, although it was evident that he had received a terrible blow. Since his marriage he had placed all worldly concerns in Susan's hands—no child could have known less than he did how to manage them—the consequences were inevitable. The vicar got into debt, not very deeply at first, a few pounds only, but to these few pounds others were gradually added.

The vicar had a faithful servant, Jane Hayes, who, when a girl, had come to him and Mrs Hartley on their marriage, for her food and enough wages to buy clothes. Jane went and went again to the shops for such provisions as she considered the vicar and Master Owen required.

One was too ill, the other too young to make inquiries or consider how they were to be paid for. When by chance any tradesman demurred, Jane was very indignant, asserting confidently that the vicar would pay for whatever he had when his dues came in.

Mr Hartley now no longer rose from his bed. A neighbouring clergyman, not much better off than himself, came over occasionally to perform the duty in the church, getting his own done by a relative who was paying him a visit. Mr Hartley, although ready to depart, clung to existence for the sake of his boy. When he had sufficient strength to speak, he repeated to young Owen the advice and exhortations he had constantly given him when in health. They

came now, however, with greater force than ever from the lips of the dying man, and words which before had been heard unheeded, now sank deeply into the heart of the boy.

Young Owen knew nothing of the world, he had never left home, but he was thus really better prepared to encounter its dangers and difficulties than many who go forth, confident in their own strength and courage. He scarcely had, hitherto, realised the fact that his father was to be taken from him.

"My boy," said the village doctor, as he led him into his father's room, "you must be prepared for the worst."

These words made Owen feel sick at heart.

While the vicar clasped the hand of his boy, and gazed into that beloved young face, his gentle spirit winged its flight to heaven, and Owen knew that he was an orphan. He was not aware, however, how utterly destitute he had been left. The vicar had to the last been under the impression that the larger portion of Susan's fortune, for so he was pleased to call it, still remained, and that it would be sufficient to start Owen in life. He had paid great attention to the education of his boy, who possessed a much larger amount of general knowledge than most lads of his age. The principal people in the parish attended the coffin of their late vicar to the grave. They had not far to go from the vicarage to the churchyard.

Farmer Rowe, who lived near, at Fenside Farm, had been the faithful friend of Mr Hartley from the time of his first coming to the parish, and taking him by the hand, followed as a mourner. Owen bore up during the ceremony, but on returning to his desolate home, at length gave way to the grief which was well-nigh breaking his young heart.

"Don't take on so, Master Owen," cried Jane, leading him to his little room; "he who is gone would not wish you to grieve. He is happy, depend upon it, and he wants you to be happy too. We shall have to leave this, I am afraid, for they will not let you take your father's place, seeing you are somewhat young, otherwise I am sure you could do it. You read so beautiful like, and I would rather hear a sermon from you than any one."

Owen shook his head.

"No, Jane, I should have to go to college first; a person must be regularly ordained before he could come and preach in our church."

Still Jane was not convinced on that point, and she inquired from Farmer Rowe whether he could get Master Owen made vicar in his father's stead.

"That is impossible, Jane," answered the farmer, smiling. "We will, however, do our best for the boy; we must look into the state of his affairs, for I can hear of no kindred of his who are likely to do so."

Owen was allowed to remain at the vicarage longer than might have been expected. It was not easy to find a successor to Mr Hartley. The place had a bad name, few incumbents had lived long there. The tradesmen of Reston, the neighbouring town, however, somewhat hesitated about supplying Jane with provisions.

"But there is the furniture," she answered, "and that will sell for I don't know how much; it is very beautiful and kept carefully."

In Jane's eyes it might have been so, as it was superior to what she had seen in her mother's humble cottage. In the meantime she employed herself in preparing a proper suit of mourning for Owen.

"The dear boy will have to go out among strangers, and he shall be well dressed, at all events," she observed as she stitched away at his garments. She had to work up all sorts of old materials. Her own small wages were due, but of that she thought not; her great desire was that her young master should be properly dressed.

At length, however, the creditors put in their claims; the furniture and all the property of the late vicar had to be sold, but it was insufficient to meet their demands. Farmer Howe, knowing he matters were likely to turn out, took Owen to his house.

The farmer had a large farm of his own, but there had been a bad harvest, and at no time had Fenside Farm been a very profitable one; he therefore could not do as much for the poor lad as his kind heart dictated. His second son David, the scholar of the family, as he called him, who was articled to an attorney in a neighbouring town, happened at the time to be at home.

"David," said Farmer Howe, "surely the vicar and his wife must have had some kith and kin, and we must find out who they are; they may be inclined to do something for the boy, or, if not, they ought to do so."

"The first thing I would suggest, father, is to question Owen, and hear what he knows about the matter," answered David; "we may then see what letters the poor lady or the vicar have left; they may throw some light on the subject."

Owen was forthwith called in. He had seldom heard his parents allude to their relatives, but he held an opinion that his father had several, and from the way in which he had heard them spoken of he fancied that they were some great people, but who they were he could not tell. They certainly, however, had never shown any regard for Mr Hartley, or paid him the slightest attention. Owen knew that his mother had relations, and that her father had been in some public office, but had died without leaving her any fortune; his grandmother had also died a year or two after her marriage. This much Owen knew, but that was very little. "Oh yes," he said, "I remember that her name was Walford."

"Well, that must have been your grandfather's name too. Do you know what your mother's maiden name was?" asked David.

Owen could not tell.

"Perhaps it will be in some of her books," suggested David. "They sometimes help one in such cases as this."

"The books, I am afraid, were sold with the other property," said the farmer.

"Then we must find out who bought them," remarked David; "perhaps Dobbs of our town did. I saw him at the sale. He is not likely to have disposed of them yet; I will get him to let me look over them."

David fulfilled his promise. Mr Dobbs allowed him to look over the library of the late Vicar of Fenside, and at length he came to a volume of "Sturm's Reflections," on the title page of which was written, in a clear mercantile hand, "Given to Susan Fluke, on her marriage with Henry Walford Esquire, by her loving cousin Simon Fluke."

David bought the volume and returned with it in triumph. "I have, at all events, found out the maiden name of the boy's grandmother on his mother's side, so, if we cannot discover his relatives on one side, we may on the other. We have now got three names—Fluke, Walford, and Hartley. The Hartley side will give us most difficulty, for it is clear that the vicar and his father held no communication for many years with any of the relatives they may have possessed. Fluke, however, is not a common name; we will search among the Flukes and Walfords, and see if any persons or person of those names will acknowledge young Owen. Simon Fluke, Simon Fluke—the London and County Directories may help us; if they cannot, we must advertise. It will be hard if we cannot rake up Simon Fluke or his heirs. To be sure, that book may have been given to his grandmother fifty years ago or more, and Simon Fluke may be dead."

David carefully locked up the book. "It may tend to prove your relationship with the said Simon Fluke; and who knows that he may be, or may have been, a rich man, and that you may become his heir," he remarked to Owen.

Owen, although he listened to what the young lawyer said, scarcely understood the full meaning of his observations. Farmer Rowe, ill as he could afford the expense, sent David off next day to London to make inquiries. Both the farmer and his family did their best to amuse the orphan.

Although the hearts of the young are elastic, his loss had been so recent, and his grief so overpowering, that, in spite of all the efforts of his kind friends, he could not recover his spirits. Owen, however, had become calmer when Jane Hayes came to wish him good-bye. She had been offered another situation, which, seeing that he was well taken care of, she had accepted. Owen was in the garden when Jane arrived; the sight of her, as she came to meet him, renewed his grief. They sat down on a bench together, under a tall old tulip-tree, just out of sight of the house. Owen burst into tears.

"That's just what I feel like to do, Master Owen," said the faithful woman, taking his hand; "but it seems to me, from all master used to say when he was down here with us, that up there, where he and missis have gone, there is no crying and no sorrow. So you see, Master Owen, you should not take on so. They had their trials on earth, that I am sure they had, for I seed it often before you was born; but when you came you was a blessing to them. Now they are happy, that is the comfort I have."

"I am not crying for them, Susan," said Owen, trying to stifle his tears, "I am crying for myself; I cannot help it. I know you love me, and you always have ever since I could remember—if you punished me it was kindly done—and now you are going away, and I do not know when I shall see you again. Mr Rowe is very kind and good, and so are Mrs Rowe, and John, and David, and their sisters, but, Jane, it is from pity, for they cannot care much about me, and I feel all alone in the world."

"Well, I will give up the place, Master Owen, and work for you; I cannot tell how I should ever have had the heart to think of going away and leaving you among strangers, although I have known Farmer Rowe and his family all my born days, and good people they are as ever breathed."

Owen took her hand and put his head on her lap, just as he used to do when he was a little child, and thus he remained without speaking. Jane looked down on him with the affection of a mother, and tears dropped slowly from her eyes.

"The Lord bless the boy," she murmured to herself, as she lifted her face towards the blue sky, "and take care of him, and give him strength against all the enemies he will have to meet—the world, the flesh, and the devil." Her plain features—for Jane had little to boast of in regard to good looks—were lighted up with an expression which gave her a beauty many fairer faces do not possess.

Owen lay still for some time; Jane thought that he was sleeping, and was unwilling to arouse him. At length, looking up, he said—

"I never can repay you enough for all you have done for me. I should be acting a cowardly part if I were to let you give up a good place for my sake, and allow you to toil and slave for me, when I am ready enough to work for my own support; you cannot tell how much I can do, and how much I know. I do not say it for the sake of boasting, but my father assured me that I knew enough to teach boys much older than myself. If I was bigger, I could become an usher at a school, or perhaps Mr Orlando Browne, David Howe's employer, would take me as a clerk. So you see, Jane, that I am not afraid of having to work, or afraid of starving; you must therefore go to Mrs Burden's and look after her children, I am sure that they will love you, and then you will be happy. It is the knowing that some one loves us that makes us happy, Jane. I know that you love me, and that makes me happy now."

"Ah, Master Owen, there is One who loves you ten thousand times more than I can do, and if you will always obey Him, you will never cease to be happy too. Master often used to say that to us, you mind. Ah! if you think of his sayings—and he spoke the truth out of the Book—it will be a blessing to you."

"Thank you, Jane, for reminding me," answered Owen, his countenance brightening. "I do, I do; I will try ever to do so."

"That's right, Master Owen, that's right," said Jane; "it makes me very glad to hear you say that."

The shades of evening were coming on; they warned Jane that she ought to be on her way. Unwillingly she told Owen that she must be going. He accompanied her to the gate, for she could not bring herself to go in and say good-bye to the farmer's family. "They will know that it was from no want of respect," said Jane. "God bless you, Master Owen, God bless you."

Owen looked after her until she was lost to sight at the end of the lane. It was some time before he could command himself sufficiently to go back into the house.

Chapter Two.

David Rowe had been a week in London engaged in the search for Owen's relatives. At last a letter came from him, desiring that the trap might be sent over to Reston, as he would be down, God willing, by the coach that day.

His arrival was eagerly looked for by all at Fenside Farm. David's laconic letter had not mentioned anything to satisfy their curiosity.

"Well, lad, what news?" exclaimed the farmer, as David stood while his mother and sister Sarah assisted him off with his great-coat. "Have you found out friends likely to help young Owen?"

"As to that I cannot exactly say," answered David; "I have discovered a relative who ought to help him—the identical Simon Fluke who gave the book to Susan Walford. Simon Fluke must be the boy's cousin, although removed a couple of degrees; but that should make no difference if Simon had any affection for his cousin, for the boy is certainly her only surviving descendant."

"But have you had any communication with Simon Fluke?" inquired the farmer.

"No, I thought that would be imprudent; it would be politic to let the boy introduce himself. I made all inquiries in my power, however, and ascertained that Simon Fluke is a bachelor, reputed to be rich, and has a flourishing business as a ship's chandler. As to his character, all I can learn is, that he is looked upon as a man of honour and credit in his business, although of somewhat eccentric habits. In regard to his private character I could gain no information; he may be as hard-hearted as a rock, or kind and generous. I went to his place of business in the hopes of having the opportunity of forming an opinion for myself, but I failed to see him, and therefore had to come away as wise as I went."

"What step do you advise us to take next?" asked the farmer.

"Send him up at once, and let him present himself at Simon Fluke's—say who he is, that his parents are dead, and that he wishes for employment. Do not let him appear like a beggar asking for alms; he will succeed best by exhibiting an independent spirit, and showing that he is ready to do any work which is given to him. We know he is quick, intelligent, writes a beautiful hand, and has as good a head on his shoulders as many a much older person."

"But surely we cannot send the boy up by himself," urged Mrs Rowe; "and you, I suppose, cannot go again! David?"

"I'll go with him, mother," said John, the eldest son, "and willingly bear the charge, for I should be glad to get a chance of seeing the big city. If Simon Fluke were to refuse to receive young Owen, what would become of the boy? I have heard of dreadful things happening to lads in London, especially when they have no friends to care for them."

And so it was settled. John undertook to start the very next morning, if Owen was willing to go.

Owen, who had been out in the garden making himself useful, now came in. David gave him the information he had obtained, and inquired whether he wished to pay a visit to his supposed relative?

"If he is likely to give me something to do, I am willing to go and ask him," answered Owen.

"There is nothing like trying, and you can lose little by asking for it," observed David.

Susan had prepared Owen's wardrobe to the best of her ability, so that he was ready the next morning to start with John Rowe. They duly reached the great city, and John and Owen managed to find their way to Wapping. They walked about for some time, making inquiries for Paul Kelson, Fluke and Company, whose place of business was at last pointed out to them. They had passed it once before, but the name on the side of the door was so obliterated by time that it was scarcely legible.

"Now, Owen, you go in, and success attend you," said John, shaking him by the hand, as if they were about to separate for an indefinite period. "Do not be afraid, I will not desert you!"

Owen, mustering courage, entered the dingy-looking office. John remained outside while Owen presented himself, as has been already described, to Simon Fluke.

Faithful John walked up and down, keeping a watchful eye on the door, in case Owen might be summarily ejected, and resolved not to quit his post until he had ascertained to a certainty that the boy was likely to be well cared for. "If the old man disowns him, I will take him to some London sights, and then we will go back to Fenside, and let him turn farmer if he likes, and I'll help him; or it may be that David will hear of something more to his advantage, or perhaps

find out some of his other relatives. David is as keen as a ferret, and he'll not let a chance pass of serving the lad." John's patience was seriously tried. He saw seafaring men of various grades pass in and out, corroborating the account of the flourishing business of Paul Kelson, Fluke and Company, and he concluded, while Simon Fluke was engaged with them, that young Owen would have but small chance of being attended to.

"Well, I can but wait until they are about to close the place; then, if Owen does not come out, I must go in and look for him," thought John. He was resolved, however, not to do anything which might interfere with the boy's interests; it took a good deal to put John out of temper.

Meantime Owen's patience was undergoing a severe trial. The two brown-coated old gentlemen appeared to him to be a long time looking over those big books. They had just concluded, when a junior clerk came in to say that Captain Truck wished to see Mr Fluke. Glancing at Owen as he passed, Mr Fluke hurried into his private room, while the old clerk, tucking the big books under his arm, and filling his hands with the papers, left the office. He stopped as he was passing young Owen.

"Sit down there, boy," he said, pointing to a bench near the door; "Mr Fluke will speak to you when he is disengaged."

Several persons came in, however, before Captain Truck had gone away. They were admitted in succession to speak to Mr Fluke; so Owen had to wait and wait on, watching the clerks as they sat at their desks, and observing the visitors as they paced up and down, while waiting their turns to have an interview with the principal of the establishment. This impressed Owen with the idea that the brown, snuffy old gentleman was a far more important personage than he had at first supposed. Several of the clerks who were moving about with papers in their hands frequently passed the young stranger, but no one spoke, or bestowed even an inquiring glance at him. Owen, who was tired with his journey and long walk, was, in spite of his anxiety, nearly dropping asleep, when he heard the words—

"Well, boy, what is it you want? Quick, say your business, I have no time to spare."

The words were spoken by the brown-coated old gentleman. Owen, starting up, followed him into the inner office. Here Mr Fluke, nimbly taking his seat on his high stool with his back to the desk, again asked in a testy tone, "What is it you want?" Owen stood, hat in hand, as he had done nearly two hours before, and began briefly recounting his history.

"Tut, tut, what's all that to me?" exclaimed the old gentleman, pushing up his spectacles, and taking a huge pinch of snuff, as he narrowly scrutinised the boy with his sharp grey eyes. "What more have you got to say for yourself?"

"I did not explain, sir, as I ought to have done at first, that my mother's name was Walford, and that she was the daughter of a Miss Susan Fluke, who married my grandfather, Mr Henry Walford."

The old gentleman had not hitherto ceased kicking his legs against the high stool, a custom which had become habitual. He stopped, however, on hearing this, and looked more keenly than ever at Owen.

"What proof have you got, boy, that your mother was once Susan Fluke?" he asked in a sharp tone.

"David Rowe, who is clerk to Mr Orlando Browne the lawyer, found the name in a book which had once been my grandmother's, and left by her to my mother, called 'Sturm's Reflections.'"



"Mr. Fluke surveyed Owen from head to foot."

"I should like to see the book," said Mr Fluke, in a tone which showed more interest than he had hitherto exhibited.

"David Rowe has the book at Fenside, but I could get it sent to you, sir, if you wish to see it," said Owen.

"I do wish to see it; I want proof of the strange story you tell me," said the old man, taking another pinch of snuff. "And suppose it is true, what do you want of me?"

"I want to find employment, sir, and the means of supporting myself. I don't wish to be a burden on Farmer Rowe, the only friend I have beside Jane Hayes, my old nurse."

Mr Fluke surveyed Owen from head to foot. "What can such a boy as you do, except run errands, or sweep out the office?" he asked in a tone of contempt. "What do you happen to know? Can you write? Have you any knowledge of arithmetic?"

"Yes, sir," said Owen, "I am tolerably well acquainted with quadratic equations; I have gone through the first six books of Euclid, and have begun trigonometry, but have not got very far. I am pretty well up in Latin. I have read Caesar and Virgil, and a little of Horace; and in Greek, the New Testament, Xenophon, and two plays of Aeschylus; and my father considered me well acquainted with English history and geography."

"Umph! a prodigy of learning!" muttered the old gentleman. "Can you do the rule of three and sum up?—that's more to the purpose. What sort of fist do you write? Can you do as well as this?" and he exhibited a crabbed scrawl barely legible.

"I hope that my writing would be more easily read than that, sir," answered Owen. "I could do the rule of three several years ago, and am pretty correct at summing up."

"Umph!" repeated the old gentleman, "if I take you at your word, I must set you down as a genius. I don't know that the learning you boast of will be of much use to you in the world. If, however, I find the account I have just heard correct, I may perhaps give you a trial. I am not to be taken in by impostors, old or young; you will understand, therefore, that I make no promises. I am busy now and cannot spend more time on you, so you must go. I suppose that you did not come up here by yourself?"

"No, sir, John Howe, Farmer Rowe's eldest son, accompanied me, and is waiting outside; if you cannot give me employment, he wants me to go back with him to Fenside."

"Tell him to stay in town until I have seen the book, and have had time to look into the matter," said Mr Fluke. "Where are you stopping, in case I may wish to send to you? But I am not likely to do that. Come again when you have got the book."

"We are stopping at the 'Green Dragon,' Bishopsgate Street, sir," said Owen.

"Well, write down your address and the name of your friend," and Simon Fluke handed a pen to Owen, and placed a piece of paper on the desk before him. "Umph! a clear hand, more like a man's than a boy's," muttered the old gentleman to himself as he examined what Owen had written. "You may go now, and remember what I told you."

Saying this, Mr Fluke turned round on his stool, and applied himself to his work without another parting word to Owen, who, making the best of his way through the office, hastened out at the door. He looked up and down the street, wondering whether John would have got tired and gone away, but John was too faithful a friend to do that. He had merely crossed over the street, keeping his eye on Paul Kelson, Fluke and Company's office. Seeing Owen, John hastened over to meet him.

"Well, what news, Owen?" he asked, without uttering a word of complaint at the time he had been kept waiting.

Owen described his interview with Simon Fluke.

"Not very promising," observed John; "I suspect that Simon Fluke's heart is very like what David thought it might be, hard as a rock, or he would have shown more interest in you when he heard that you were Susan Fluke's grandson. However, we will do as he asks, and send for the book, and in the meantime you and I'll go and see this big city of London. There's the Tower, and Exeter Change, the British Museum, Saint Paul's, and Westminster Abbey, and other places I have heard speak of. The Tower is not far from here—we passed it as we came along; we will go and see that first."

On their way, however, they began to feel very hungry, and were thankful to find an eating-house where they could satisfy their appetites. The fare was not of the most refined character, nor were the people who came in. Two or three, seeing at a glance that John was fresh from the country, offered to show him and his son the way about London.

"Maybe you'd like to take a glass for good fellowship," said one of the men who addressed him.

But John, suspecting the object of the offer, declined it, as he did others subsequently made him, and taking Owen by the hand, he gladly got out of the neighbourhood. They made but a short visit to the Tower, as John was anxious to get back to the "Green Dragon," that he might write to David for the book.

"We will show it to the suspicious old gentleman, but we must take care he does not keep it," said John. "I don't think, Owen, you must raise your hopes too high. If he gives you the cold shoulder, you will not be worse off than you were before, and you shall come back with me. You will not be left without friends while father, David, and I are alive, so cheer up whatever happens."

John, who, although country-born and bred, had his wits about him, managed to see as many of the sights of London as he intended. Owen was much interested by all he saw, and the days passed quickly by. The important volume,

which was, he hoped, to convince Simon Fluke of his relationship, safely arrived one evening, and he and John the following morning set off with it to Wapping. John insisted on remaining outside while Owen had his interview with Simon Fluke, and ascertained whether any employment was to be given him.

"If I find you are comfortably settled, then I shall go home happy in my mind," said John; "if not, as I said before, you shall come back with me; I won't leave you alone in this big city."

Owen entered the office with the book in his hand. Mr Fluke was engaged in his private room. Mr Tarwig, the head clerk, got off his stool to speak to him, and had Owen put a proper value on this piece of condescension, he would have considered it a good sign.

"Sit down, my boy, the master will be out soon, and he has something to say to you," said Mr Tarwig, pointing to a bench, and nodding to Owen, he returned to his seat. In a few minutes the door opened, and a fine-looking seafaring man, evidently the master of a ship, came out. As he passed by he gave a glance at Owen, who heard him addressed by Mr Tarwig as Captain Aggett. "What a pleasant look he has," thought Owen; "I should like to be under him. I wonder if he can give me anything to do?" Mr Fluke put his head out directly afterwards, and seeing Owen, beckoned him in.

"Well, lad, have you got the book?" he asked.

Owen undid the parcel, and handed him the volume. The old man examined it minutely, but Owen could detect no change in his countenance.

"That's my handwriting, there's no doubt about it, written when I gave the book to my cousin Susan, as she was about to marry Henry Walford," muttered Mr Fluke to himself. He was then silent for some time, forgetting, apparently, that any one was in the room. "Have you any books with the name of Walford in them?" he asked, fixing his keen glance on Owen; "that would be more clear proof that you are the person whom you say you are."

"Yes, sir, I remember several of my mother's books which she had before her marriage, and others which had belonged to my grandmother, with their names in them; I do not know, however, whether they can be recovered. A bookseller purchased the whole of them at the sale which took place at the vicarage, but perhaps he has not yet disposed of them."

"Boy, the books must be got at any price," exclaimed the old man, in an authoritative tone, like that of a person not accustomed to be contradicted. "Write to your friends, and tell them to buy them all up; I will send them a cheque for the amount. We must not let them go to the grocer's to wrap up butter and cheese."

"I will do as you desire, sir," said Owen.

"I am inclined to believe the account you give of yourself, boy, and you shall have a trial," said Mr Fluke; his manner was far less abrupt than it had hitherto been, and comparatively gentle. "Go to the outer office, I am busy now; Mr Tarwig will look after you, and tell me what he thinks."

He went to the door, and summoned his head clerk.

"Try him," said Mr Fluke, pointing to Owen.

"Come along with me," said Mr Tarwig, and he made a sign to Owen to get up on a high stool, handing him, at the same time, the draft of a letter. "There, copy that."

Owen transcribed it in a clear, regular hand, correcting two or three errors in spelling.

"Good," said Mr Tarwig, as he glanced over it, perhaps not discovering the improvement in the latter respect. "Now cast up these figures," and he handed him a long account.

Owen performed the work rapidly, and when checked by Mr Tarwig, it was found to be perfectly correct.

"Good," said the head clerk; "you'll do."

He handed him several accounts in succession, and which required considerable calculation.

"Ah me!" exclaimed Mr Tarwig, and taking the papers he actually went across the office to show them to his immediate subordinate, who looked round with a surprised glance at the young stranger.

What "Ah me!" meant Owen could not tell, but he judged that Mr Tarwig was satisfied with his performance. Owen had not forgotten John.

"A friend is waiting for me outside, sir," he said; "if I am not wanted, I must rejoin him."

"Stay and hear what Mr Fluke has got to say to you," answered Mr Tarwig; "or go out and call your friend in, perhaps the master may have a word to say to him."

Owen gladly did as he desired.

"I think they are pleased with me," he said to John; "and I understand that Mr Fluke wants to speak to you, I suppose it is about getting back my mother's books," and Owen related what had occurred.

"A good sign," said John. "Things look brighter than I expected they would, but we must not raise our hopes too high."

Owen ushered John into the office, feeling almost at home there already. In a short time Owen and John were summoned into Mr Fluke's room. John was not prepossessed by that worthy's manner.

"You are John Rowe, I understand," he began. "Believing this boy's account of himself I am going to give him a trial; if he behaves well, he will rise in this office, for there is no doubt that he possesses the talents he boasts of. He shall come and stop at my house. Go and get his things and bring them here, for I shall take him home with me. Now listen, Mr John Rowe, I want you to perform a commission for me. Here is a cheque, you can get it cashed in the country. Buy up all the books with the name of Walford in them which were sold at the Fenside Vicarage sale."

As he spoke, he handed a cheque for 10 pounds to John, adding, "Do not tell the bookseller why you want them, or he will raise the price. Buy them in your own name. If this sum is not sufficient, let me know; should it be more than you require, take it to defray the expenses you have been at on the boy's account."

John thanked Mr Fluke, and promised to carry out his wishes, highly pleased at what he considered Owen's good fortune.

Owen, however, felt somewhat disappointed at not being able to spend another evening with his friend.

From Mr Fluke's manner, John saw that it was time to take his departure, and Owen followed him to the door. John had to return with Owen's box of clothes, but there probably would not then be time for any conversation.

Owen sent many grateful messages to Fenside Farm. "I hope that Mr Fluke will let me go down and see you sometimes," he added, "for I never can forget all the kindness you, your father, and David have shown me, and your mother and sisters."

"Well, if you are not happy here, mind you must tell us so, and you shall ever be welcome at Fenside," said John, as they parted.

Chapter Three.

John Rowe brought Owen's little trunk all the way from the "Green Dragon" on his own broad shoulders, and deposited it at Paul Kelson, Fluke and Company's office. Having done so he hurried off, not wishing to be thanked, and considering there was not much advantage to be gained by another parting with his young friend. Owen, however, was disappointed, when he found that his box had arrived, that he had missed seeing John.

The instant five o'clock struck, Simon Fluke came out of his office, and directing one of his porters to bring along the boy's trunk, took Owen by the hand, and having tucked a thick cotton umbrella under his other arm, led him out. They trudged along through numerous dirty streets and alleys, teeming with a ragged and unkempt population, and redolent of unsavoury odours, until they emerged into a wide thoroughfare.

"Call a coach, boy!" said Mr Fluke, the first words he had spoken since he had left the office. "How am I to do that, sir?" asked Owen.

"Shout 'Coach,' and make a sign with your hand to the first you see."

"Will the coach come up, sir, if I call it?" asked Owen.

"Of course, if the driver hears you," answered Mr Fluke in a sharp tone. "The boy may be a good arithmetician, but he knows nothing of London life," he muttered to himself. "To be sure, how should he? But he must learn—he will in time, I suppose; I once knew no more than he does."

Owen saw several coaches passing, and he shouted to them at the top of his voice, but no one took the slightest notice of him. At length the driver of a tumble-down looking vehicle, with a superb coat of arms on the panel, made a signal in return and drew up near the pavement.

"You will know how to call a coach in future," said Mr Fluke. "Step in."

The porter, who had been watching proceedings, not having ventured to interfere by assisting Owen, put the box in, after Mr Fluke had taken his seat, and then told the coachman where to drive to. The latter, applying his whip to the flanks of his horses, made them trot off, for a few minutes, at a much faster rate than they were accustomed to move at. They soon, however, resumed their usual slow pace, and not until Mr Fluke put his head out of the window, and shouted, "Are you going to sleep, man?" did he again make use of his whip.

"You must learn to find your way on foot, boy," said Mr Fluke. "I do not take a coach every day; it would be setting a bad example. I never yet drove up to the counting-house, nor drove away in one, since I became a partner of old Paul Kelson, and he, it is my belief, never got into one in his life, until he was taken home in a fit just before his death."

Owen thought he should have great difficulty in finding his way through all those streets, but he made no remark on the subject, determining to note the turnings as carefully as he could, should he accompany Mr Fluke the next morning back to Wapping.

The coach drove on and on; Mr Fluke was evidently not given to loquacity, and Owen had plenty of time to indulge in his own reflections. He wondered what sort of place his newly found relative was taking him to. He had not been prepossessed with the appearance of the office, and he concluded that Mr Fluke's dwelling-house would somewhat resemble it. The coach at last emerged from the crowded streets into a region of trees and hedge-rows, and in a

short time stopped in front of an old-fashioned red brick house, with a high wall apparently surrounding a garden behind it. At that moment the door of the house opened, and a tall thin female in a mob cap appeared.

"Bless me!" she exclaimed, as she advanced across the narrow space between the gate and the doorway; "and so he has come!"

She eyed Owen narrowly as she spoke. Simon Fluke declining her help as he stepped out, pointed to Owen's box, which the coachman, who had got down from his seat, handed to her. Mr Fluke having paid the fare, about which there was no demur, he knowing the distance to an inch, led the way into the house, followed by Owen, the old woman, carrying his box, bringing up the rear.

"I have brought him, Kezia, as I said I possibly might. Do you look after him; let us have supper in a quarter of an hour, for I am hungry, and the boy I am sure is."

The house wore a greater air of comfort than Owen expected to find. In the oak panelled parlour into which Mr Fluke led him a cheerful fire burned brightly, although the spring was well advanced, while a white cloth was spread ready for supper.

"Now come into the garden," said his host, who had entered the room, apparently merely to deposit his umbrella. A glass door opened out on some steps which led down into a large garden, laid out in beds in which bloomed a number of beautiful flowers, such as Owen had never before seen in his life, and on one side, extending along the wall, was a large greenhouse.

"Do you know what those are, boy?" asked Mr Fluke. "Every one of those flowers are worth a hundred times its weight in gold. They are all choice and rare tulips, I may say the choicest and rarest in the kingdom. I prize them above precious stones, for what ruby or sapphire can be compared to them for beauty and elegance? You will learn in time to appreciate them, whatever you do now."

"I am sure I shall, and I think they are very beautiful!" said Owen.

Mr Fluke made up for his former silence by expatiating on the perfections of his favourites. While the old gentleman was going the round of his flower beds, stooping down with his hands behind him, to admire, as if to avoid the temptation of touching the rich blossoms, a person approached, who, from his green apron, his general costume, and the wheelbarrow he trundled full of tools before him, was easily recognised as the gardener. He could not have been much younger than his master, but was still strong and hearty.

"They are doing well, Joseph; we shall have some more in bloom in a day or two," observed Mr Fluke.

"Yes, praise the Lord, the weather has been propitious and rewarded the care we have bestowed on His handiworks," answered the old gardener. "I am in hopes that the last bulbs the Dutch skipper Captain Van Tronk brought over will soon be above ground, and they will not be long after that coming into bloom."

Mr Fluke, having had some confidential conversation with his gardener on the subject of his bulbs, and given him various directions, it by that time growing dusk, summoned Owen to return to the house.

"A pretty long quarter of an hour you've been," exclaimed Kezia to her master, as he re-entered; "it's always so when you get talking to my man Joseph Crump about the tulips. If the rump steak is over-done it's not my fault."

Mr Fluke made no reply, except by humbly asking for his slippers, which Kezia having brought, she assisted him in taking off his shoes.

"There, go in both of you, and you shall have supper soon," she exclaimed in an authoritative tone, and Mr Fluke shuffled into his parlour.

Owen remarked, that though Mr Fluke ruled supreme in his counting-house, there was another here to whom he seemed to yield implicit obedience. Not a word of remonstrance did he utter at whatever Kezia told him to do; it was, however, pretty evident that whatever she did order, was to his advantage. Probably, had she not assumed so determined a manner, she would have failed to possess the influence she exerted over her master. He made a sign to Owen to take a seat opposite him on one side of the fire. Mrs Kezia Crump, as she was generally designated outside the house, placed an ample supper on the board—in later days it would have been called a dinner—two basins of soup, some excellently cooked rump steak, and an apple tart of goodly proportions.

"I know boys like apple tart, and you may help him as often as he asks for it," she remarked as she put the latter dish on the table.

A single glass of ale was placed by Mr Fluke's side. Owen declined taking any, for he had never drank anything stronger than water.

"Very right and wise, boy," observed his host in an approving tone. "You are the better without what you don't require. I never drank a glass of ale till I was fifty, and might have refrained ten years longer with advantage, but Kezia insisted that I should take a glass at supper, and for the sake of quiet I did so. Kezia is not a person who will stand contradiction. She is sensible though. Could not have endured her if she were not. But she is not equal to her husband Joseph. The one rules supreme in the house, the other in the garden. You've seen what Joseph Crump has done there. What do you think of my tulips? I am indebted to Joseph for them. Beautiful! glorious! magnificent! Are they not?"

Owen nodded his head in assent.

"Their worth cannot be told. Once upon a time one of those splendid bulbs would have fetched thousands. That was nearly two centuries ago, that events repeat themselves, and, for what we can tell, that time may come round again, then, Owen, I shall be the richest man in England. No one possesses tulips equal to mine."

"Indeed," said Owen; and he thought to himself, when at Wapping this old man's whole soul seems to be absorbed in business, while out here all his thoughts appear to be occupied in the cultivation of tulips. How could he have been first led to admire them? Before many minutes were over Mr Fluke answered the question himself.

"Twenty years ago I scarcely knew that such a flower as a tulip existed, when one day going on board a Dutch vessel I saw a flower growing in a pot in the cabin. I was struck by the beauty of its form—its brilliant colours. I learned its name. I was seized with the desire to possess it. I bought it of the skipper. The next voyage he brought me over a number of bulbs. I wanted something to engage my thoughts, and from that day forward I became fonder and fonder of tulips."

The evening was passed more pleasantly than Owen had anticipated. Mr Fluke, indeed, appeared to be an altogether different person to what he had seemed at his first interview with his young relative.

"Boys want more sleep than old men," said Mr Fluke, pulling out his turnip-like watch.

"Here, Kezia!" he shouted, "come and take him off to bed. She will look after you," he added, nodding to Owen; "you must do as she bids you though."

The old man did not even put out a finger as Owen advanced to take his hand to wish him good night, but said, pointing to Kezia, who just then entered the room, "There she is; go with her."

"How impatient you are, Mr Fluke, this evening," exclaimed the dame. "In half a minute more I should have been here, and saved you from bawling yourself hoarse. I know how the time goes, I should think, at my age."

Her master made no reply, but merely attempted to whistle, while Kezia, turning to Owen, said, "Come along, my child." She led him up an oaken staircase into a room of fair proportions, in which, although the furniture was of a sombre description, there stood a neat dimity-curtained bed.

"There, say your prayers and go to bed," said Kezia. "I will come in presently to tuck you up, and to take away your candle."

"Thank you," said Owen; "you are indeed very kind."

"No, I ain't kind, I just do what I think right," answered the dame, who, if she did not pride herself on being an original, evidently was one. "The old man told me that you had lost your parents, and you'll feel the want of some one to look after you. I once had a little boy myself. He grew to be bigger than you are, but he was never strong or hearty. He used to go to the office every day of his life, hot or cold, rain or sunshine, wet through or dry; he died from over work. It was more my fault than the old man's though, so I don't blame him, for I ought to have kept the poor boy in bed instead of letting him go out and get wet through and through as he did time after time; but I'll take care that it is not your fate," and Mrs Kezia sighed. "I must not stand prating here though."

She came in according to her promise. Having carefully tucked him up, she stooped down and kissed his brow.

"Thank you, thank you," said Owen. The tears rose to his eyes, and he felt more happy than he could have supposed possible.

"Have you said your prayers?" asked Kezia.

"Yes, I never forget to do that," answered Owen.

"Good night, my child," she said; "the Lord watch over you and keep you." Taking the light she left him.

His slumbers were peaceful. Kezia took care to call him betimes in the morning.

"The old man is off early, and he would not be pleased if you were not ready to start with him," she said.

When Owen came down he saw Mr Fluke in the garden, holding a conference with Joseph. He presently came in to breakfast, which was as ample a meal as the supper had been.

Kezia put a small paper parcel into Owen's pocket.

"That will be for your dinner," she said; "you'll want something before you come back, and you'll get nothing there fit to eat. It's as bad to let growing boys starve as to leave plants without water, as Joseph Crump says," and she looked hard at her master.

"Kezia's a wonderful woman," remarked Mr Fluke, after she had left the room. "I have a great respect for her, as you see. She is worth her weight in gold; she keeps everything in order, her husband and me to boot. Years ago, before she came to me, I had a large black tom cat; he was somewhat of a pet, and as I kept him in order, he always behaved properly in my presence. He had, however, a great hatred of all strangers, especially of the woman kind, and no female beggar ever came to the door but he went out and arched his back, and spat and screeched and hissed at her until she took her departure. When I engaged Kezia and Joseph Crump, I thought Tom would understand that they were inmates of the house, and behave properly. But the very first time Kezia went upstairs, after she and her husband had installed themselves in their room below, there was Tom standing on the landing with his back up lashing his tail, and making a most hideous noise. Most women would have turned round and run down again, or

perhaps tumbled over and broken their necks; but Kezia advanced, keeping her eye on Tom, and as he sprang at her, she guessing that he would do so, seized him by the neck and held him at arm's length until every particle of breath was squeezed out of his body. 'There,' she exclaimed, as she threw him over the banisters, 'two cannot rule in one house,' and she went upstairs and commenced her work. When I arrived at home, and saw Tom lying dead on the floor, I asked who had killed the cat. 'I killed him,' answered Kezia, and she then told me how it had happened. 'If you think I was wrong, and don't like it, give me a month's warning; I am ready to go,' she said. I didn't say a word in reply, and I tell you I have a greater respect for that woman than for any of her sex, and maybe I have more fear of her than I ever had of old Tom, who, once or twice, until I taught him better manners, had shown his evil disposition even to me."

"Mrs Kezia is a very kind, good woman," observed Owen; "I am sure of that."

"She's a wise woman," answered Mr Fluke; "if she were not, she could not manage my house. Now, boy, finish your breakfast, and be prepared to start with me in ten minutes."

Owen lost no time in getting ready.

"Come along," he heard Mr Fluke shout; and hurrying out of the room where he was waiting, he found that gentleman descending the steps.

"Stay, you have forgotten your umbrella. What are you thinking about, Mr Fluke, this morning?" exclaimed Kezia, handing it to him as she spoke.

Mr Fluke tucked it under his arm, and taking Owen by the hand they set off.

"Do not dawdle on the way back, and take the coach if it rains hard," cried Kezia, shouting after them.

They walked the whole distance at a fair pace, which Owen could easily maintain. He was glad of the exercise, although he did not like passing through the narrow and dirty streets at the further end of his walk, where squalor and wretchedness appeared on every side. Mr Fluke being so used to it, was not moved by what they beheld.

"Surely something ought to be done for these poor people," thought Owen. "If my father had been here, he would have spent every hour of the day in visiting among them, and trying to relieve their distress." Owen was not aware that much of the misery he witnessed arose from the drunken and dissipated habits of the husbands, and but too often of the wives also.

On their arrival at the office, which had just before been opened, Mr Fluke handed Owen over to Mr Tarwig, who at once set him to work. There was plenty to do. Two clerks had recently left; their places had not been supplied. Owen was therefore kept hard at work the greater part of the day, and a short time only allowed him for eating the dinner which Kezia Crump had provided. He was better off, however, than most of the clerks, who had only a piece of bread to eat if they remained in the office, or if they went out, had to take a very hurried, ill-dressed meal at a cookshop. Some, indeed, were tempted to imbibe instead a glass of rum or gin, thus commencing a bad habit, which increased on those who indulged in it.

The weather was fine, and Owen walked backwards and forwards every day with Mr Fluke. One day a box arrived marked private, and addressed to S. Fluke, Esquire. On glancing at the contents, Mr Fluke had it again closed, and that evening he went away earlier than usual, a porter carrying the box to the nearest coach-stand. Owen was saved his long walk, which, as the weather grew warmer, was sometimes fatiguing. The box, which had been carried into the parlour was again opened by Kezia and Owen, who begged leave to help her. After supper Mr Fluke, who appeared for the time to have forgotten his tulips, employed himself in examining the contents, which proved to be the books he had directed John Rowe to purchase for him.

"Your friend has performed his commission well," he said, as he looked over book after book. "I recognise Susan's handwriting—your grandmother, I mean; it must seem a long time ago to you, but to me it is as yesterday. I had not from the first moment any doubt as to your being Susan Fluke's grandchild, but I am now convinced of it. You will find more interesting reading in these books than in any I possess, and you are welcome to make use of them."

Owen accepted the offer, and for many an evening afterwards pored over in succession most of the well-remembered volumes.

Mr Fluke, the next morning, on his way to the office, called at an upholsterer's, and purchased a dark oak bookcase, which he ordered to be sent home immediately. On his return home, with evident satisfaction he arranged the books within it.

Owen had every reason to be thankful for the kind treatment he received, but the life he spent was a dull one. In reply to letters he wrote to his friends at Fenside they warmly congratulated him on his good fortune.

Day after day he went to the office, where he was kept hard at work from the moment of his arrival until the closing hour, for, as it was found that he was more exact in his calculations than any one else, and as he wrote a hand equal to the best, he had always plenty to do, a few minutes only were allowed him to take his frugal dinner. Frequently also he was unable to enjoy even a few mouthfuls of such fresh air as Wapping could afford.

Generally he walked in and out with Mr Fluke, but he sometimes had to go alone. He was soon able to find his way without difficulty, but he never had an opportunity of going in other directions, so that all he knew of London was the little he saw of it while visiting the sights with John Rowe. Whatever the weather, he had to trudge to and fro. Several times he got wet through, and had to sit all day in his damp clothes.

Kezia suggested to Mr Fluke that the boy required a fresh suit—"His own is threadbare, and would be in holes if I did not darn it up at nights," she observed.

"It's good enough for the office, and what more does he want?" answered Mr Fluke. "Why, I have worn my suit well-nigh ten years, and it is as good as ever. Who finds fault with my coat, I should like to know?"

"The boy wants a thick overcoat, at all events," continued Kezia, who had no intention of letting the matter drop. "If you don't get him one, I will. He will catch his death of cold one of these days. He is not looking half as well as he did when he came, although he has grown wonderfully; he will, indeed, soon be too big for his jacket and trousers, if they do not come to pieces first."

"Do as you choose, Kezia," said Mr Fluke. "You always will have your own way, so there's no use contradicting you."

"Then I'll get him a fresh suit and a topcoat before many hours are over, and not a day too soon either," answered Kezia, rubbing her hands in the way she always did when well satisfied with herself or with things in general.

"No! no!" almost shrieked Mr Fluke. "If he gets a topcoat that will hide the threadbare jacket you talk of, and that will serve well enough in the office for a year to come, or more."

"You said, Mr Fluke, that I was to do as I chose," exclaimed Kezia, looking her master in the face. "You are a man of your word, and always have been from your youth upwards, and I, for one, will not let you break it in your old age. I choose to get Owen a new suit and a topcoat, so say no more about the matter."

The next morning Kezia appeared in her bonnet and shawl as Owen was about to start.

"Let the old man go on first, I am going with you," she said.

Mr Fluke was never a moment behind time in starting from home, and he knew that Owen could easily overtake him.

Kezia accompanied Owen to Mr Snipton's, a respectable tailor in the City, where she ordered an entire suit and a thoroughly comfortable topcoat.

"Take his measure," she said, "and allow for his growing; remember Simon Fluke will pay for the things."

Mr Snipton did as he was directed, and while Owen hurried on to overtake Mr Fluke before he reached the office, Kezia returned home. Owen had, however, to wear his threadbare jacket for some days longer. During this period he was returning one evening, and was crossing Bishopsgate Street, when a hooded gig, or cab, as it was called, containing two young gentlemen—one of whom, dressed in a naval uniform, was driving—came dashing along at a rapid rate. It was in a narrow part of the street, of which a waggon and some other vehicles occupied a considerable portion. In attempting to pass between the waggon and pavement the cab was driven against the hinder wheel of the ponderous waggon, which was going in the same direction that it was—towards the Bank. The natural consequence ensued—the horse came down, and both the young gentlemen were thrown out, one narrowly escaping falling under the wheel of the waggon, while the tiger behind, whose head struck against the hood, fell off stunned. Owen ran forward to render what assistance he could.

"Go to the horse's head, boy!" exclaimed the elder of the gentlemen, addressing Owen in an imperious tone, while he was picking himself up. "Reginald, are you hurt?"

"Not much," was the answer of the younger, who began swearing in no measured terms at the waggoner for not keeping out of the way, and ordering him to stop. The latter, however, taking no notice of this, went on. "They got the worst of it this time," he muttered. "Better that than to have run over an old woman, as I see'd just such a pair as they do not long ago."

A fresh volley of abuse uttered by the young naval officer followed the retreating waggoner.

"Come, Reginald, don't waste your breath on the rascal," cried the elder gentleman. "I'll help the boy to hold down the horse, while you undo the traces. What's become of Cato?"

"Here I, my Lord," said the black tiger, who, having partially recovered, now came hobbling up.

Owen, in the meantime, had been using every exertion to keep down the spirited horse, until the harness, detached from the cab, would allow the animal to rise without injuring itself. Several persons, mostly idle men and women, instead of coming forward to assist, stood by, amused at the disaster which had occurred to the gentlemen.

"Had but the young cove kept a decent tongue in his head plenty would have been ready to help him," remarked one of the bystanders.

The black boy seemed somewhat afraid of the horse, and having scarcely recovered was of no use. The gentlemen, therefore, had to depend on their own exertions, aided by Owen.

The one called Reginald, when once he set to work, quickly got the harness unstrapped.

"Here, Arlingford, you take the horse's head, and let him get up. Out of the way, boy, or he'll be over you," he shouted to Owen.

The horse, hitherto held down by Owen, rose to its feet. It took some time before the eldest of the young men, by patting its neck and speaking soothingly, could quiet the animal sufficiently to be again put into the cab. Owen assisted in buckling up the harness, while the black tiger, now recovered, came and held the horse.

"Have you got a coin about you of some kind, Arlingford?" asked the naval officer. "If you have, chuck it to the young fellow."

Owen did not hear this remark.

"Here, boy," cried the elder, putting half-a-crown into Owen's hand; "just take this."

"No, thank you, sir," answered Owen, returning the money. "I am happy to have been of any service. I did not think of a reward."

"Take it, stupid boy," said Reginald.

Owen persisted in declining, and turned away.

"A proud young jackanapes! What is he thinking about?" exclaimed Reginald, who spoke loud enough for Owen to hear him.

"Here, I say, boy, don't be a fool, take this," and Reginald pitched the coin at Owen, who, however, not stopping to pick it up, walked on. As may be supposed, a scramble immediately ensued among the mob to obtain possession of the coin, until, shoving at each other, three or four rolled over against the horse. The effect of this was to make the animal set off at a rate which it required the utmost exertions of the driver to control. Indeed the cab nearly met with another accident before it had proceeded many yards.

Owen had remarked a coronet on the cab. "Can those possibly be young noblemen who made use of such coarse language, and who appear to be so utterly devoid of right feeling?" he thought to himself. "I hope that I shall not meet them again; but I think I should remember them, especially the youngest, who had on a naval uniform. His being a sailor will account for the activity he showed in unbuckling the harness."

Owen gave an account of the incident to Mrs Kezia.

"That is like you, Owen," she said. "Do what is right without hope of fee or reward. I am afraid that the old man does not give you much of either. What salary are you getting?"

"I have received nothing as yet; nor has Mr Fluke promised me a salary," answered Owen. "I conclude that he considers it sufficient to afford me board and lodging, and to teach me the business. I should not think of asking for more."

"And you'll not get it until you do," observed Mrs Kezia. "I'll see about that one of these days."

"Pray do not speak to Mr Fluke," exclaimed Owen, earnestly; "I am perfectly content, and I am sure that I ought not to think of asking for a salary. If he is good enough to pay for the clothes you have ordered, I shall be more than satisfied, even were I to work even harder than I do."

Mr Fluke, however, grumbled, and looked quite angry at Owen, when he appeared in his new suit. Mrs Kezia had been insisting, in her usual style, that the boy required new shoes, a hat, and underclothing.

"You'll be the ruin of me with your extravagant notions, Kezia," exclaimed Mr Fluke; "you'll spoil the boy. How can you ever expect him to learn economy?"

He, notwithstanding, gave Mrs Kezia the sum she demanded.

Had it not been for her, Owen would probably have had to wear his clothes into rags. Mr Fluke would certainly not have remarked their tattered condition.

Notwithstanding all Kezia's care, however, Owen's health did not mend. Months went by, he was kept as hard at work as ever.

Kezia expostulated. At last Mr Fluke agreed to give him some work in the open air.

"I'll send him on board the ships in the river; that will do him good perhaps."

The very next day Owen was despatched with a letter on business to Captain Aggett of the ship "Druid," then discharging cargo in the Thames.

Owen had seen Captain Aggett at the office; he was a tall, fine-looking man, with a pleasant expression of countenance. He recognised Owen as he came on board.

"Stop and have some dinner, my boy," he said; "the steward is just going to bring it in."

Owen, being very hungry, was glad to accept the invitation, and Captain Aggett himself declared that he could not write an answer until he had had something to eat. Possibly he said this that Owen might have a legitimate excuse for his delay. The captain had a good deal of conversation with Owen, with whom he seemed highly pleased. He took him over the ship, and showed him his nautical instruments, which Owen said he had never seen, although he had read about them, and knew their use.

"What! have you learned navigation?" asked Captain Aggett.

"I am acquainted with the principles, and could very soon learn it, I believe, if I had a book especially explaining the subject," answered Owen.

Captain Aggett handed one to him, telling him to take it home and study it.

"Is this the first time you have been on board a ship?" asked the captain.

"Yes, sir; for since I came to London I never have had time, having always had work to do in the office," answered Owen.

"How long have you been there?" asked the captain, who remarked that Owen had a cough, and looked very pale.

"Rather more than a year, sir."

"Not a very healthy life for a lad accustomed to the country. A sea trip would do you good. Would you like to make one?"

"Very much, if Mr Fluke would allow me," answered Owen. "I should not wish to do anything of which he might not approve."

"I'll see about it, youngster," said Captain Aggett.

Although Owen was sent on several trips of the same description to other vessels, he was still kept too constantly at work in the office to benefit much by them.

He naturally told Kezia of his visit to Captain Aggett, and of the invitation he had received.

"Although I should be very sorry to have you go away from here, Owen, I am sure that the captain is right. It is just what you want; a sea voyage would set you up, and make a man of you, and if you remain in the office you'll grow into just such another withered thing as the old man. I'll speak to him, and tell him, if he wants to keep you alive and well, he must let you take a voyage with the good captain. I have heard of him, and Mr Fluke has a great respect for him, I know."

Mrs Kezia did not fail to introduce the subject in her usual manner. Mr Fluke would not hear of it.

"Nonsense," he answered, "the boy does very well; he can walk to and from the office, and eats his meals."

"He does not eat one-half what he used to do," answered Kezia; "he is growing paler and paler every day. He has a nasty cough, and you will have him in his grave before long if you don't take care."

"Pooh! pooh!" answered Mr Fluke. "Boys don't die so easily as that." He turned away his head to avoid Kezia's glance.

She did not let the matter drop, however. A fortnight or more had passed by. Mr Fluke had missed one of his favourite tulips, which grew in a flower-pot.

On inquiring for it of Joseph: "It's all safe," was the answer, "I'm trying an experiment with it."

Whenever Mr Fluke asked about the tulip, he always received the same reply: "We shall see how it gets on in a few days." At length one afternoon when he came home, somewhat to his surprise, Kezia appeared in the garden.

"What about that tulip, Joseph, which master was asking for?" she said.

"Should you like to see it, sir?" asked Joseph.

"Of course I should," answered Mr Fluke, expecting to see the flower greatly improved in size and beauty.

"I told Joseph to put it in the tool-house, just to see how it looks after being shut up in the dark without air," said Kezia in her most determined manner.

"In the tool-house!" exclaimed Mr Fluke. "What in the world made you put it there, Joseph?"

"Kezia bade me, sir, and you know I dare not disobey her," answered Joseph, demurely.

"And I bade him just for the reason I said," exclaimed Kezia.

"Let us see it by all means," cried Mr Fluke, hastening in the direction of the tool-house, which was in a corner of the garden on the north side, out of sight.

Kezia stalked on before her master and her husband. She entered first, and came out with a flower-pot in her hand. The tulip, instead of having gained in size and beauty, looked withered, and its once proud head hung down, its colours sadly faded.

"There," she exclaimed; "that's just like our Owen. You shut him up in your dark office, and expect him to grow up strong and healthy, with the same bright complexion he had when he came to us. Some natures will stand it, but his, it is very certain, cannot. Maybe, if we put this tulip in the sun and give it air and water, it will recover; and so may he, if you allow him to enjoy the fresh breezes, and the pure air of the sea. Otherwise, as I have told you, all your kindness and the good intentions you talk of to advance him in life will come to nothing. I repeat it, Mr Fluke, Owen Hartley will be in his grave before another year is out if he has to breathe for eight hours or more every day the close atmosphere of Kelson, Fluke and Company's office."

Mr Fluke walked away without answering Kezia, and kept pacing up and down the garden in a state of perturbation

very unusual for him.

Owen had been kept at the office, and did not get home until late. He observed that Mr Fluke was watching him narrowly.

"Yes, you do look somewhat pale," said the old gentleman; "I see it now. How do you feel, boy?"

"Very well, sir," answered Owen, naturally enough; "only a little tired now and then. It is my own fault, I suppose, that I do not sleep so soundly as I used to do, and do not care much about my food."

The next day, although without any preconcerted arrangement, Captain Aggett called at Mr Fluke's office, and desired to see him on private business.

The captain had been a regular customer for many years, and Mr Fluke held him in great respect.

"I have taken a fancy to that boy of yours, a relative I understand. I have observed how ill he looks, very different from what he was when I saw him first on my last voyage. If you will let me take him a trip I will bring him back safe and sound, the dangers of the sea excepted, and better able by far than he is now to attend to your interests."

Mr Fluke declined to give a positive answer. He would see if the boy could be spared; he was very useful in the office, and it would be difficult to get any one to supply his place.

"I will come for a reply to-morrow," said Captain Aggett, as he took his departure.

"Well, are you going to let our Owen make a voyage?" asked Kezia when Mr Fluke came home. "There are plenty of captains who would be ready to take the boy. He would be able to make himself as useful to them as he is to you, and you would be at no cost."

Mr Fluke, however, only gave Kezia the same reply he had to Captain Aggett.

"I tell you, before long he'll leave the place vacant whether you like it or not," observed Kezia in a firm voice, looking sternly at her master.

"You must have your own way, Kezia," answered Mr Fluke, turning his head aside to avoid her gaze, as a dog does when scolded. "If the boy wishes to go, he may go, but I'll not send him off against his will."

Owen was called in and told of Captain Aggett's offer. He acknowledged that he wished to accept it.

"You have been very kind to me, sir," he said, "and I do not wish to leave you, but I should like to make a voyage and see something of the world, and I feel as if it would set me up. When I come back I hope to be of more use to you than ever."

So it was settled. Mr Fluke never drew back when he had once made a promise, and next day, when Captain Aggett called, Mr Fluke told him that he might take Owen, and that he himself would defray any expenses to which he might be put on the boy's account.

Owen wrote immediately to his friends at Fenside.

John, who replied, expressed their anxiety for the dangers to which he would be exposed on a long voyage, but if it was considered to be for his good, they would not urge him to remain on shore, and would pray earnestly that he might be preserved from all the perils of the deep.

Kezia desired him to ascertain from Captain Aggett what articles were required for his outfit; and immediately on obtaining a list, set to work to prepare all that lay within her province.

Chapter Four.

The day arrived for Owen to go on board the "Druid." She was bound for the East Indian seas. How far off that was Kezia had no exact notion, but she knew it must be a long way, and many months, at all events, must pass by before Owen could come back. She embraced him with an affection which made him think of his old nurse, Jane Hayes. "May God, who rules both sea and land, protect you from the many dangers you have to encounter. I don't hide them from myself, and I don't want you to shut your eyes to them, but trust in Him, and be prepared for whatever may happen. I'll pray for you, Owen, and He will hear the prayers even of such an obstinate, self-opiniated old woman as I am."

She had insisted that Joseph should go on board with Owen, in order to bring her back a last account of the boy. She would have gone herself, but she had to take care of the house.

Owen and Joseph drove off. They were to call at the office at Wapping before they took boat to proceed down the river.

Owen hurried in. Mr Fluke received him in his private room, and, putting a purse into his hand, said, "Take care of that. Spend its contents as you may find necessary, but do not be swindled out of it. I am not given to words, Owen, but understand that I am pleased with you, and proud of acknowledging you as a relative; and when you come back, strong and well, as I hope, I shall be glad to see you and stand your friend."

The old man got up and placed his hand on Owen's shoulder, and then turned away to conceal some very unusual feelings which agitated him.

Mr Tarwig, who had been his chief task-master, shook him warmly by the hand, and said more kind words than he had ever before been known to utter. The rest of the clerks imitated his example; and Owen, with a heart grateful for all the kindness he had received, rejoined Joseph in the coach. They were soon at that well-known locality "Wapping old stairs," from whence they embarked and pulled down the river to where the "Druid" was lying.

Joseph was able to report that Owen had a small berth to himself opening from the main cabin; that Captain Aggett had received him with great kindness, and expressed his pleasure that he had been allowed to come.

The river pilot was soon on board, the sails were loosened, the anchor hove up, and the "Druid," with a fair wind, glided down the stream.

"Although you may not take to the sea, you'll like to learn as much seamanship and navigation as you can while you are on board," observed Captain Aggett.

"Indeed I should, sir," answered Owen; "but I want to make myself useful to you also, if you can show me how."

"Certainly you can," said the captain; "you shall act as my clerk, and you will be of great assistance to me."

Fine weather continued, and the "Druid" had a quick passage down channel. Owen, from the first set to work to learn the names of all the sails and ropes, indeed of everything onboard.

There were several other boys—apprentices—of whom two were called midshipmen, although they had to do the same duty as the rest. Captain Aggett had entered Owen as an apprentice, but he was looked upon as the captain's guest, and only mixed with the others when on duty. He was busy from morning until night, always learning something, when not engaged in writing for the captain in the cabin. He quickly mastered all the simpler details of seamanship, while the captain in the meantime, according to his promise, gave him instruction in navigation; so that he was shortly able not only to take meridional observations correctly (or to shoot the sun, as midshipmen call it), and to work a day's work as well as anyone, but to use the chronometer and to take a lunar.

Owen was not a prodigy; any lad of intelligence; who possesses a sufficient knowledge of mathematics, may do the same. He learned to steer, beginning first in fine weather, and he soon could go aloft and reef with any of the lads in the ship, some of whom had already made two or three voyages. The rapid proficiency he acquired, and the favour bestowed upon him by the captain, created some jealousy in the breasts of several of his younger shipmates. Strange to say, the first mate, Jonas Scoones, imbibed an ill-feeling for Owen, without any other reason, as far as could be known, except that he was the captain's favourite.

Mr Scoones was a first-rate seaman, but a poor navigator, for he was almost destitute of education; indeed he was as rough-looking in appearance and manners as any of the men before the mast. How Captain Aggett had consented to his becoming first mate it was difficult to say; perhaps he thought that his excellence as a seaman would make up for his imperfect knowledge of navigation. He was also a good disciplinarian, and, by mixing freely with the men, while still maintaining his own position, he was well able to manage them. The second mate, Ralph Grey, was a great contrast to Jonas Scoones. He was a young man of good manners and disposition, well-educated, and was an especially expert navigator, so that he was well able to assist the captain.

Scoones overawed him, however, by his blustering, dictatorial manners, so that Grey never ventured to dispute a point with the first mate, however obviously wrong the latter might be.

Ralph Grey liked Owen, and was always ready to assist him with any information he required, and was never tired of explaining the why and the wherefore of everything. The third mate was a young man, a fair seaman, but without anything particular about him worthy of notice.

The captain was certainly not aware of his first mate's propensity to drink hard when the opportunity occurred. Scoones generally avoided doing so when there was any duty to be performed, but he spent most of his time on shore in a state of intoxication, which had certainly contributed to weaken his mental faculties.

The "Druid" was a large ship of nearly nine hundred tons, and was chartered by the British Government to carry out stores to the squadron then engaged in operations against the Dutch East Indian islands, which had been taken possession of by the French. She carried sixteen guns and a numerous crew, in order that she might protect herself, not only against any French cruisers, but might be able to beat off the piratical Malay proas which swarmed in those seas. Her duty, however, was not to fight, but simply to defend herself if attacked. That she might be able to do so, Captain Aggett, as soon as the ship was fairly at sea, exercised the men daily at the guns, by which means he gave them plenty of employment, the best plan for keeping a ship's company in good order.

Owen took a pleasure in learning the gun exercise, as he did in acquiring a knowledge of all the other duties of a sailor. Every day he rapidly gained health and strength, while the colour returned to his cheeks, which were getting well-browned by the hot sun and sea air.

"Your friends at Wapping would not know you again," observed Captain Aggett, after they had been at sea a few weeks. "When we get back they will declare I have exchanged you for some one else. I don't know how you will like returning to your high desk in Mr Fluke's dingy office."

"If it is my duty to go back, I shall be ready to do so, sir," answered Owen; "but I confess that I should prefer a life at sea, as far as my experience goes."

"You are right, Owen; as to doing what duty demands, stick to that principle, and you will never go wrong!" observed the captain. "But you must remember we do not always enjoy the fine weather we have hitherto had. You must take the rough with the smooth; we may chance to meet with a typhoon in the eastern seas, or heavy gales off the Cape,

and things won't be as pleasant as they are now."

"I am aware of that, sir," said Owen. "When I came to sea I was fully prepared to meet with bad as well as fair weather. I should be most sorry not to meet with a gale of wind during the voyage."

"You are not likely to be disappointed in that respect, although I have been out and home without having had to lift tack or sheet for weeks together," observed the captain.

"I was going to ask you, sir, if I might be placed in a watch, should you think me sufficiently competent to do the duty."

"O yes, I will trust you for that; and as you wish it, you shall be in the first mate's watch."

"And so, youngster, you want to turn sailor?" said Mr Scoones, the first night on which Owen was in his watch.

"As I am at sea I wish to learn all I can," answered Owen.

"You'll have a chance of picking up a smattering before we get home again; but I never knew any 'cabin young gentlemen' turn out sailors," answered the mate, with a sneer. "A man is not worth anything unless he comes in at the 'hawse holes,' to my mind."

"I will do my best while I am on board, and get all the knowledge I can," said Owen.

"Well, you'll have to obey me pretty smartly, or look out for squalls," growled the mate, turning away.

Owen did not like these remarks, but of course he made no reply. He soon found that the first mate acted up to his threats. Among the boys was a young lad, Nat Midge by name, who was constantly the victim of the mate's tyranny. Nat had come to sea for the first time, and, although intelligent and fairly educated, did not always understand what he was to do. He also was in the first mate's watch. When he did not appear to comprehend the orders he received Owen explained them, taking every opportunity of instructing him. Nat was grateful, and conceived a warm friendship for his instructor.

Owen told him how he himself had learned so rapidly, and advised him to follow the same plan.

"Among so many men you will find several good natured enough to explain matters to you, and never fail to ask the why and the wherefore of anything you see done," he said. "Do not be disheartened should you receive a rebuff. If you ask me, and I don't know, I'll try and get information from some one."

Nat followed this advice, and improved rapidly. The first mate had now no legitimate excuse for ill-treating him, but it seemed, notwithstanding that his ill-feeling towards the lad had increased, so that even on the most trivial pretexts he would give him a taste of the rope's end. Midge, although he keenly felt the ill-treatment he received, did not resent it. Of course the example set by the mate was followed by the badly disposed among the crew, who unmercifully bullied poor Nat.

Owen, observing this, was highly indignant.

"You should complain to the captain. I am sure that he would not allow it," observed Owen.

"If I do I shall only be worse off than ever, for the mate will bring proof that I deserve all I get," answered Nat.

"But I can bear evidence in your favour," said Owen.

"The mate will prove that you know nothing about the matter, that you do not see how I behave, and I shall be treated ten times as badly as before," said poor Nat. "Tom Dicker, who has made two voyages, says that he had to go through as much as I have, and advised me to grin and bear it. Sometimes it is more than I feel I can do, and I am like to jump overboard."

"Don't allow so dreadful a thought to enter your mind," exclaimed Owen.

"O no, no! I don't really think of doing it," answered Nat. "I should miss the object for which I came to sea. I have a number of brothers and sisters, and no father or mother. I want to become a sailor, and make money and help to support them, for there is only our old grandmother left, and it is a hard matter for her to feed and clothe them."

Owen, on hearing this, became more resolved than ever to protect Nat. He thought over various plans, and at last decided that the next time he saw the boy punished unjustly he would speak privately but boldly to the mate, and try to talk him out of such conduct, but that if he did not succeed, he would tell the captain and clearly explain how matters stood. Nat might be somewhat saved by being removed into the second mate's watch, although he would still of course be subjected to ill-treatment in the day-time when all hands were on deck. He had not long to wait. A paint pot had been upset. The mate came forward, and Nat was, by some of his enemies, pointed out as the culprit, whereupon Mr Scoones, calling him up, gave him a severe rope's ending. Nat knew that it was owing to the carelessness of one of the men, but dared not accuse him. Owen at that moment came forward, but he of course could not interfere. When the mate returned aft he went up to him and explained that Nat was innocent, and went on to say that he had very often seen him punished without any just cause.

"It is sufficient, sir, to make the boy grow weary of life, and what a heavy responsibility would rest on those who drove him to commit an act of desperation."

"What's all that you are talking about, boy?" exclaimed Mr Scoones, in an angry tone. "Mind your own business;

you'll soon be fancying yourself captain of this ship, I suppose."

"I know my position," answered Owen, "but I cannot stand by and see any one so cruelly ill-treated as Nat Midge is. I do not wish to appear as his champion in public, but I felt it my duty to speak to you."

"You'll find it your duty to hold your tongue, youngster," answered the mate, with an oath. "Look out, or I'll treat you as I treat the other boys; I would advise you in future to attend to your own business."

Owen feared that he had done no good by speaking to Mr Scoones. He determined therefore to mention the matter to the captain, although well aware that he should thus bring upon himself the vengeance of the mate.

He carried out his intention the first time that he found himself alone with the captain in the cabin.

"Such things will occur on board ship," answered Captain Aggett, "but I did not suppose that the first mate would have been guilty of such tyranny as you describe; I always fancied that he was a favourite with the men."

"He may be with some of them, sir," observed Owen, "but he certainly is not with others, and I could not bear longer to see a helpless boy ill-treated, as young Midge has been for many weeks past."

"I'll see to the matter," said Captain Aggett. "Take care not to let the mate discover that you have spoken to me; it will place you in a disagreeable position with him, and, if he is capable of acting as you have described, he may do you some injury."

"I'll run the risk of that rather than let the boy be bullied," said Owen.

Several days passed by, and, as far as Owen could judge, Nat was better treated than formerly; he hoped, therefore, that his remarks to the mate had produced some effect. The mate's manner, however, was distant and surly, showing that he had no good feeling towards him. When crossing the line the usual ceremonies were gone through, the captain not considering it necessary to forbid them. Neptune, with his wife and Tritons, came on board, accompanied by the barber and doctor—the characters who invariably take part in the drama. The arrangements had been made under the superintendence of the first mate, who had selected the seamen he chiefly favoured.

A sail triced up was filled with water to serve as a bath. The barber carried a piece of rusty hoop instead of a razor, and a pot of grease for lather, while the doctor, with a huge pill box and a knife, which he called his lancet, stood by to prescribe the treatment each patient was to receive. When Neptune and Amphitrite had taken their places, those who had not crossed the line were summoned to appear before them, and were interrogated as to their birth-place and parentage, how long they had been at sea, and the voyages they had made. Those who could not give proof that they were freemen of the ocean were instantly seized, and after being shaved in order to get the hay seeds from their hair, were doused in the bath to wash the dust off their feet. No one had a chance of escape, for, if he attempted to fly and hide himself, he was chased and brought back by the Tritons. Owen and Nat Midge were among the chief sufferers. The barber covered their faces and heads with lather, and when they attempted to cry out dabbed the brush into their mouths; then he applied the iron hoop, and scraped away, pretending to shave off their hair, while the doctor felt their pulses, declaring that they must be bled and blistered, and take a dozen of his pills. Fortunately, before he could administer his remedies the Tritons carried them off to plunge them in the bath. After undergoing this disagreeable process for some time till they were almost drowned, they with difficulty scrambled out, and made their way below. The first mate stood by grinning as he saw the youngsters undergoing this ordeal. Owen made no resistance, nor did he cry out; but as soon as possible he got away to his berth, to cleanse himself from the filth with which he had been covered. Some of the other lads and young men resisted lustily, and suffered in consequence far more even than had either Owen or Nat. The crew having amused themselves for some time, the captain ordered the mate to pipe to quarters. The bath was emptied, Neptune and his gang speedily doffed their theatrical costume and appeared in their proper dresses, each man hurrying to his station at the guns ready to meet an enemy should one have been in sight.

"You behaved wisely, Owen," observed Captain Aggett the next day. "I saw that you were pretty



severely treated, but it would not have done for me to have interfered; depend upon it, the men will respect you the more for not having complained."

Owen found that the captain was right. A day or two afterwards one of the men, as usual, was ill-treating Nat. Owen, who was on deck, went forward.

"If you had a younger brother, or a nephew, how would you like to see him rope's ended and treated as you do that orphan boy, who has no friends to protect him?" he exclaimed.

"Are you an officer of this ship?" asked the man. "If not, what right have you to command me?"

"I do not command you," said Owen, "I am merely asking you a simple question."

"The young gentleman's right," observed several of the men. "Let him alone, Dan; the little chap has had hard lines since he came aboard here, from you and others, and we won't stand by and see him ill-used any longer."

Dan dropped the rope he held in his hand, and turned away, while Owen, hoping that he had gained friends for poor Nat, walked aft.

"He'll make a smart officer one of these days," observed one of the men.

"Ah, that he will, Ned," said another. "He is as handy already as many who have been at sea ten times as long."

The ship had now got well to the southward, and the influence of the trade-winds began to be felt. With yards squared she stood for the Cape.

Owen had just come on deck, when, looking forward, he saw a figure falling into the water. Instantly there was a cry of "man overboard." He ran on to the poop. The first mate, who was the officer of the watch, instantly gave the necessary orders to clew up the courses, put the helm down, to brace the yards to starboard, and bring the ship on a wind. At the same time preparations were made to lower a boat.

Owen, who saw that the person, whoever he was, unless a good swimmer, would be drowned before a boat could be lowered, seized a grating, and hove it overboard, then throwing off his jacket, plunged after it. He, though little accustomed to salt water had been from his earliest days in the habit of swimming in a large pond not far from Fenside, and his pride had been to swim round it several times without resting. He now brought his experience into practice; pushing the grating before him, he made towards the drowning person, who, from the wild way in which he threw his arms about in attempting to keep afloat, was evidently no swimmer. The sea was tolerably smooth, so that Owen made good way, and in a short time he saw that the person was no other than his friend Nat Midge.

"Cheer up, Nat," he shouted. "Do not exhaust yourself; keep your hands quiet and tread water."

Nat heard him, and did his best to obey his injunctions. The ship appeared to be getting further and further from them, but the grating would be sufficient to support both if Owen once got it up to Nat. It was very clear, however, that Nat could not swim to it.

Owen struck out with all his might. He would have got on faster without the grating, but, in case Nat should get frightened, it might be dangerous to approach him. "It must be done, though," thought Owen; "he will sink if I do not get up to him quickly." Leaving the grating, therefore, he struck out rapidly for the boy, and had just time to seize him before, exhausted by his fruitless exertions, he was disappearing beneath the surface. Owen held him up. Happily the drowning lad retained his senses.

"Put your hand on my shoulders," said Owen, "and I will tow you up to the grating; just float, and do not attempt to

help yourself.”

Nat did as he was bid, and at length Owen had the satisfaction of reaching the grating, which Nat at once grasped.

“Hold on tight, and do not struggle so as to exhaust yourself. The boat will soon come to pick us up. If you can keep your head above water that is all that is necessary,” said Owen.

But Nat had scarcely sufficient strength even to hold on. Owen, therefore, taking one of his hands assisted him to retain his hold beside him. The grating enabled them to keep their heads well out of the water, and Owen found that he could raise himself high enough up to look about him. Where was the ship? She appeared far away to leeward, but, as she had hove to, he felt sure that a boat was being lowered. Still it seemed a long time to wait; the wind was increasing and the sea was getting up. It would be a hard matter to hold on to the grating, over which the sea frequently washed.

“They won’t leave us, Mr Hartley?” said Nat; “it would be hard for you to have to die with me.”

“No fear of that,” answered Owen. “Do not give way; and see, there’s the boat coming.”

He was right. The boat which had been lowered on the lee side at that moment appeared from under the stern of the vessel, and pulled rapidly towards them.

Owen undid his handkerchief and waved it above his head. He had thrown off his cap before he had jumped overboard.

The boat, which was commanded by the second mate, was soon up to them.

“You did that well and bravely, Hartley,” said Mr Grey, as Owen was seated by his side supporting poor Nat, who was in a very exhausted state. “I did not know even that you could swim, and you are the only one who thought of jumping overboard to the poor lad.”

Loud cheers greeted them as they came alongside, and Owen received the compliments of the captain and the officers; even Mr Scoones condescended to acknowledge that he had done a brave thing.

Nat, under the care of the doctor, soon recovered.

“You have saved my life, Mr Hartley, and you have stood my friend ever since I came on board this ship,” exclaimed Nat, the tears bursting from his eyes. “I wish I could show what I feel, but I cannot, and I never can thank you as much as I ought to do, that I know!”

“I don’t see that I did anything out of the way,” said Owen. “I saw somebody drowning, and I just acted as I judged best to save him; any tolerable swimmer could have done the same.”

“That may be, sir,” answered Nat, “but no one thought of doing it, and if you had not I should have been drowned, so I have good reason to thank you.”

Captain Aggett had been for some time unwell, although he had come on deck as usual. He now grew worse, and for days together was confined to his cabin. Owen endeavoured to repay the kindness he had received by being unremitting in his attentions. He sat by his bedside smoothing the pillow which supported his fevered head. He read to him whenever he was able to listen, and was always at hand to give him a cooling mixture with which to moisten his parched lips. Although he talked of going ashore at the Cape, he had so much recovered by the time the ship reached Table Bay that he resolved to continue the voyage.

The ship therefore only remained sufficient time to take in water and fresh provisions, and to have some slight repairs made which could not be done at sea, when she again sailed.

Owen had been very regular in taking observations, which Mr Grey always found to be correct, although they differed frequently from those of the first mate.

“The truth is that he is wrong, and you are right,” observed Mr Grey. “If the captain falls ill again I do not know which of us two is to navigate the ship. If we go by his calculations, the chances are that we shall run her bows on some rock or other.”

“I sincerely hope that the captain will not fall ill,” said Owen. “If he does, I am afraid that Mr Scoones will not acknowledge that he himself is ever out in his calculations.”

Unhappily the captain’s fever returned, and he became utterly unable to leave his berth. The doctor shook his head when speaking about him, and expressed a fear that his illness would prove fatal.

Chapter Five.

The “Druid” had run more than half across the Indian Ocean. She had encountered a heavy gale, and had been driven somewhat out of her course, but the weather moderated, and she was now steering for the Straits of Sunda. Unfortunately she received considerable damage. One of her boats had been lost, her bulwarks stove in, and her fore-yard sprung.

The captain, who had been on deck during the continuance of the gale, had over-exerted himself, and was now again confined to his cot. For several days, owing to a cloudy sky, no observation had been taken. Owen had one evening

entered the cabin shortly before the time for taking a lunar observation, in order to ascertain the longitude. Mr Grey had just before gone on deck with his sextant.

"Is the weather clear?" asked Captain Aggett.

"Yes, sir. There are but few clouds, and I think we shall get a good observation."

"I must go on deck and take one," said the captain, attempting to rise. He sank back, however, before he could get out of his cot. Owen endeavoured to assist him, but his strength was insufficient. Again the captain endeavoured to rise. "I am weaker than I fancied," he murmured. He lay quiet for a few minutes.

"Owen," he said at length, "I am afraid that my days are numbered. I should have been thankful had I lived to carry the ship into port, but God may will it otherwise. If I die, when you get home, see my poor widow, and deliver to her such property as I possess. She will not be left as well off as I should wish. I have not been as prudent as I ought to have been."

"You may trust that to me, sir, and I will do the best I can," answered Owen; "but perhaps you are not so ill as you suppose. Let me call the doctor, and he may give you something to restore your strength."

"Yes, call him; but I doubt if anything he can give me will do that," answered the captain.

The doctor had turned in, but immediately rose on being summoned by Owen. He brought some medicine with him, which he at once gave to the captain on feeling his pulse.

"You are a brave man, Captain Aggett," he said, "I will not disguise the truth from you. You are sinking. Any worldly matters you have to arrange should be settled without delay."

"I have done that already, doctor," answered the captain, in a weak voice. "Who has the watch, Owen?"

"The third mate, sir," he answered.

"I will see the first and second mates then, as soon as they have finished their observations. Go and call them, Owen," said the captain.

Owen hurried on deck. The second mate, with the assistance of the third, had just taken a satisfactory observation.

Owen told Mr Grey that the captain wished to see him, but Mr Scoones had not made his appearance on deck. Owen found him in his berth, and gave him the captain's message.

"Dying, is he? That's the lot of all men," observed the mate in an indifferent tone.

Owen saw that, although not tipsy, he had been drinking, but hoped that the captain's last words would have a good effect. He therefore said—

"Come, sir, quickly, or I fear that Captain Aggett may be dead before you get to him."

Unwilling to be absent longer than possible, he then hastened back to the cabin. The second mate was with the captain, who was weaker than before, although perfectly composed. He had been bidding Mr Grey farewell, and had been sending a few parting words to the officers and crew. The first mate soon appeared.

"I wish to say good-bye, Mr Scoones," said the captain. "I am anxious about one point, and you will pardon me if I tell you what it is. I know you to be a first-rate seaman; you are one of those who never order a man to do what you are not ready to do yourself; but you are not a good navigator, for I have several times found that you have made mistakes in your calculations. I wish, therefore, when you take command of this ship that you should trust to Mr Grey's and Owen Hartley's calculations. Owen has had the advantage of a careful training, so that you have no cause to be jealous of him."

"They may be the best calculators in the world for what I care," answered the first mate, roughly; "but I will back Jonas Scoones to take a ship round the world with any man alive, so do not trouble yourself on that point, Captain Aggett. You and I have never had a tiff while we have sailed together, and I do not want to have one now, so I'll say no more about the matter."

This unsatisfactory answer evidently pained the captain, but he was too weak to reply. He put out his hand.

"I wish you would listen to reason," he said. "The consequences may be serious if you do not."

The first mate turned away, for he was not a man who liked to be at a death-bed; it made him think of what might happen to himself.

The captain being anxious to know the exact position of the ship, the second mate went into the main cabin to make his calculations.

Owen and the doctor remained with the captain. He did not rally, and just before daybreak, as he himself believed would be the case, he breathed his last.

The doctor, as was his duty, reported the event to the first mate.

"We shall see who is going to be captain now," exclaimed the latter—"Mr Grey, that youngster, or I. From the way Captain Aggett talked, one would have supposed that he fancied young Hartley was as well able to take charge of the

ship as a man who has been to sea all his life. The youngster will soon find out his mistake.”

Owen knew that Mr Scoones had now the power to treat him in any way he might please—to confine him to his cabin, or even to put him in irons; at all events, that his own position in the ship would be greatly altered. Scarcely, indeed, had the captain’s body been committed to its ocean grave than Mr Scoones turned him out of the cabin and made him take up his berth with the apprentices amidships. Owen bore his change of circumstances without complaining. He considered that there would be no use in expostulating with Mr Scoones; indeed, that by so doing he might make matters worse.

The first mate, or rather the captain, for so he insisted on being called, ordered him about as he did the other apprentices, and made him perform the roughest style of work.

“You want to be a sailor, my lad, and I never knew one who did not dip his hand in the tar bucket, and you will now have to put yours in very often,” he exclaimed. He then ordered Owen to black down some of the rigging.

It was a seaman’s duty, and Owen was ready to perform it. Mr Scoones, seeing that he obeyed willingly, was resolved to try him yet further, and ordered him aft to sweep out the cabin and to wait upon him at table. The doctor, who was a kind man, on discovering this, advised Owen to decline obeying the order.

“He now commands the ship, and as long as he does not direct me to do anything which will injure any one, I am bound, I consider, to obey,” answered Owen. “It is not pleasant, but I do not thus really disgrace myself.”

Owen had been accustomed to take an observation with the captain and mates. As soon as he appeared, Mr Scoones ordered him off the poop, exclaiming, in an angry tone—

“We don’t want any boys fresh from school here with their new-fangled notions. If I see that sextant again I will break it to pieces. The mates and I can look after the navigation of the ship, I expect, without your assistance.”

Owen went below and stowed away his sextant, which was one given him by Captain Aggett, and which he highly prized. The other officers were indignant at the way in which Owen was treated, and no one was more so than Nat Midge. He almost cried with rage when Owen came below and told him what had occurred.

“I don’t care for what he says,” observed Owen, “but I am vexed at not being allowed to improve myself in navigation. I hope that we may get a new captain when we reach Batavia.”

“I am sure so do I,” said Nat. “If it were not for you, I’d run from the ship. I should not like to leave you, and I wish you would come with me.”

Owen laughed. “I do not think we should improve matters by that,” he said. “It would only be like falling out of the frying pan into the fire.”

“I could not be worse off than I am on board this ship, for I have led a dog’s life ever since our kind captain died,” answered Nat. “It was bad enough before, but I have been far worse treated since by the first mate and some of the men.”

Owen endeavoured to comfort Nat. “When things get to the worst they are sure to change for the better,” he remarked. He ultimately persuaded Nat to bear patiently any ill-treatment he might receive.

Several days passed by without any event of importance occurring, Owen all the time performing sailor boy’s duty. The second and third mates’ observations did not agree with those of the new commander, who, insisting that he was right, would not attend to theirs, but kept the ship on the course he had marked out. The weather had been tolerably fine since the first gale, but signs of a change now appeared. Mr Scoones, however, declared that the wind would not be down upon them for some hours to come, and kept all the canvas standing as before. Suddenly the wind dropped, and the sails flapped loudly against the masts. It was Mr Grey’s watch; he had just relieved the third mate. Casting his eye to the northward, he shouted—

“All hands on deck; shorten sail! Be smart, my lads, or we shall have the masts whipped over the sides.”

The crew who were on deck flew aloft; the watch below came tumbling up and hastened to join the rest, some laying out on the fore and main-topsail yards, while others handed the royals and topgallant sails. Owen, with the other boys, lay out on the mizen-topsail yard.

“What’s all this about?” exclaimed Mr Scoones, who had been in his cabin. His face was flushed and manner excited. “Why don’t you wait until I order you to shorten sail?” he added, turning to the second mate.

“Because there would not have been time to save the ship’s masts and spars,” answered Mr Grey, in a firmer tone than he had hitherto assumed.

“Shake out the reefs and make sail again,” shouted the captain.

“Go on, and carry out the orders I gave you!” cried Mr Grey. “While I remain second officer of this ship, I will not stand by and let her come to harm if I can help it.”

“Mutiny! mutiny!” shouted Mr Scoones; but the men, who saw as clearly as the second mate the importance of shortening sail, continued their work. Even the boys, although holding him in dread, instigated by Owen and Nat, remained aloft, until they had handed the mizen-royal and topgallant sail, and close reefed the topsail. Scoones, completely beside himself, was hurrying off the deck, apparently for the purpose, from the words he let drop, of getting his pistols, when a long thin line of hissing foam was seen rushing across the ocean.

"Down, my lads, down, quick," cried the mate.

The boys rapidly descended from the mizen-yard. Then the voice of the hurricane was heard, and a fierce wind struck the ship. In an instant she heeled over, and the close reefed mizen-topsail was blown from the bolt ropes. The helm being put up, she, however, righted, and away she flew before the hissing and foaming sea, which now rose up on either side as if eager to overwhelm her.

"We must furl the main-topsail," exclaimed Mr Grey, as soon as the yards were squared.

Scarcely were the words uttered, than with a clap like thunder the sail was blown away, and flying out in tatters was quickly whisked round and round the yard. Whatever had been the intentions of the first mate, he now returned perfectly sobered, and taking the command, issued every subsequent order with coolness. He did not however, condescend to praise Mr Grey, by whose promptness the ship had been saved.

For two days the ship ran on under a close reefed fore topsail. The fore-yard had been so well fished that it stood the immense strain put upon it, although most of the crew expected every instant to see it go. Once more the wind moderating, the sorely battered "Druid" hauled up again on her course. The sky, however, was obscured, and the weather thick, and no observation could be taken. Mr Grey had carefully kept the reckoning, and knew, as he believed, more or less, her position; but he found, on comparing notes, that the calculations made by Mr Scoones placed her at a considerable distance from where he supposed she was; he was therefore eagerly looking out for a glimpse of the sun by day or a star by night to ascertain which was correct. The wind was again favourable, and for some days they had been making good progress.

It was night, and the ship was running along with a pretty stiff breeze and a moderate sea under whole topsails and topgallant sails. Mr Scoones, although acting as captain, found it necessary to keep his watch, in which Owen and Nat remained as before. The sky was cloudy, and as there was no moon it was very dark. A good look-out was kept forward, although the keenest pair of eyes could not have pierced the gloom many fathoms ahead. Mr Scoones paced the deck, every now and then, shouting to the men forward. Some care seemed to oppress him. He might not have had the full confidence in his own reckoning which he professed to have. Still, as the proud ship went scudding on across the broad ocean, no one would have supposed that danger was near.

Owen was on the quarter-deck, when a startling cry came from forward.

"Breakers ahead! breakers on the starboard bow!"

"Down with the helm," shouted the first mate, rushing to assist the man at the wheel; but ere he reached him an ominous grating noise was heard, the ship trembled through her whole frame, but she surged on.

"We may yet scrape free," cried some of the men, as they sprang to the braces.

The next instant, however, there came a fearful crash; the tall masts tottered, the fore and main topmasts fell over the side, still leaving, however, the lower yards standing; the mizen mast at the same instant went by the board. The wheel spun round, casting the helmsman to the deck. A huge sea striking the devoted ship swept him and several others overboard.

Owen found Nat Midge close to him.

"Let us hold on to the stanchions until daylight, and we shall then see where we are," said Owen. "There is no use in attempting to do anything now, and it is dangerous to move about, as we may be washed overboard."

In the meantime the rest of the officers and the watch had rushed on deck, and a cry arose of "Clear away the boats!" Several of the crew attempted to perform this difficult operation, but the fore-part of the first boat as she was being lowered hung in the falls, and the men who jumped into her were swept out, while she, driven against the side of the ship, was immediately knocked to pieces. An attempt was made to launch another boat on the same side, and although she reached the water, so many sprang into her that she filled before she could be shoved off. A few got on board by the falls, but the rest were drowned.

"We will hoist out the long-boat," cried Mr Scoones. "We shall have to cut away the masts, and we must get her into the water before that."

He issued the orders to rig the necessary tackles. As this boat was to be got into the water on the lee side, there was a greater probability of her swimming, provided she did not encounter any rocks.

"Hadn't we better try to get in her?" said Nat to Owen.

"She is not in the water yet," answered Owen, "and if she were, I doubt if Mr Scoones would let us; besides, she will run a great risk of being thrown on the rocks, or swamped during the darkness. The ship does not give signs of going to pieces yet; perhaps the wind may abate before morning, we shall then be able to get ashore on a raft, if any shore is near, and there is one boat left which nobody seems to have thought of launching."

"I'll do as you advise, but perhaps we may get off in the boat by-and-by," said Nat.

They eagerly watched the operation of launching the long-boat. The seas, which had battered in a portion of the bulwarks, swept across the fore-part of the deck, and rendered it very difficult. Two or three of the men who neglected to secure themselves were carried overboard. One saved himself by a rope, but the shrieks of the others were heard as they struggled vainly in the seething ocean.

What had become of the doctor, and the other officers and apprentices, Owen could not tell. Mr Scoones he could

hear issuing his orders, but he had reason to fear that some of the others had been washed overboard, or perhaps killed by the falling blocks and spars. Still a good many men remained, the greater number of whom were engaged in lowering the boat on which they believed their safety depended. At length she was launched over the side, and five or six men got into her, and shouted out far oars.

A search was made for them, but only three could be found; without more she would be almost helpless in the raging sea. She was now held by a warp, floating clear of the ship, which was working fearfully on the rocks.

"She will go to pieces if we do not cut away the masts," shouted Mr Scoones. "Axes! axes!"

They were brought, and the boat being veered off to a safe distance, the two remaining masts were, with a few strokes, cut away, and falling over on the lee side, were allowed to float clear of the wreck.

Nothing more could now be done until morning, for which all hands eagerly waited.

"The boat won't hold half of us. Let us form a raft, lads," shouted Mr Fidd, the boatswain.

This was no easy matter in the dark. The brave boatswain setting the example, a portion of the crew began to collect such spars as they could find on board, and to drag them to the after part of the deck, which was more protected than the other parts of the ship, over which the sea continually broke, carrying away everything before it.

"We ought to be assisting," cried Owen, who with Nat had hitherto retained their tolerably secure places. "We are better off here," answered Nat. "It's our duty to help our shipmates," answered Owen, and he, followed by Nat, joined the working party.

They found great difficulty in keeping on their feet. The deck was wet and slippery, and inclined over towards the lee side. The bulwarks on that side had been gradually torn away, so that every instant the risk increased of their being carried overboard. Still, Owen and his companions persevered. One only of the apprentices had joined them. "Where are the others?" asked Owen.

"They are gone, I am afraid. I saw them standing together trying to lower a boat, when a sea took the whole of them off their legs. I was nearly gone too, but got hold of a rope just in time to save myself," was the answer.

It would have been better if Mr Scoones had endeavoured to keep all the men employed. As soon as he had declared that nothing more could be done until daylight, several of them stole away instead of joining those working at the raft. Some time had passed, when Owen heard voices coming out of the captain's cabin, some singing sea ditties, others shouting loudly in discordant tones.

"The rascals have gone in and got drunk," cried the boatswain, who heard them also. He made his way into the cabin, intending to turn them out. His efforts were in vain, they jeered and laughed at him.

"If the ship goes down, we intend to go down with her," cried one of his own mates. "A short life and a merry one. Oh! come and join us, old Fidd."

The boatswain finding remonstrance useless, and unwilling to waste time returned to his labours. Just at that moment there came a fearful crash, the stout timbers and beams were rent, as if composed of mere touchwood. The ship broke in two. The sea, rushing through the stern ports, swept every one out of the cabin, and the ribald songs and jests of those within were in a moment changed for cries of help and mercy.

Owen and Nat regained their former position, where they were partially protected by the only portion of the bulwarks remaining above water. The survivors of the crew on the after part of the ship here joined them. The raft, still incomplete, remained on deck. What had become of the boat they could not tell, but shouts were heard amid the roaring of the sea, which came either from her, or from some of the men who had gained the other part of the wreck. No one having seen Mr Scoones, it was supposed that he had shared the fate of the other officers.

Never had a night appeared so long to Owen. Eagerly he and his companions in misfortune looked out for the first streaks of dawn in the eastern horizon. They appeared at last, and a faint cheer burst from the seamen.

"A sail! a sail!" cried Mike Coffey, an Irish seaman. All eyes were at once turned in the direction he pointed, but, as the light increased, disappointment took the place of the hopes which had been raised, and the jagged point of a rock, whitened by the sea-birds perched upon it, was seen rising above the troubled waters. The remnant of the shipwrecked crew now looked out in the opposite direction, in the hope of discovering land.

A line of rocks rising a few feet out of the water were alone visible at the distance of eighty or a hundred fathoms from the ship.

The long-boat, on which their hopes of safety depended, had been carried away when the ship parted, and was nowhere to be seen. By the increasing light, however, some people were observed on the rock. Those on the wreck waved to them. The signal was returned. Some of their shipmates had thus reached a place of comparative safety. As daylight increased the wind considerably lessened, but still the heavy surges continued beating against the wreck.

"Come, lads," cried the boatswain, "we will finish the raft, and get away from this before the old ship goes to pieces completely."

A second invitation was not required, and all hands set to work with a will. It was soon finished and launched, but how to guide it to the rocks was a difficult question.

"Before we shove off we must try and get some provisions and water," said Owen, more thoughtful than his

companions.

"You are right, youngster," answered Mr Fidd. A cask of water which had washed up was fortunately secured, as was a tub of butter, a barrel of salt beef, and another of flour, and some cases containing cheese, dried fruit, and biscuits.

Here was sufficient food to support the crew for a few days, should they reach the rocks in safety. There seethed, however, a greet likelihood of their not doing that, as the raft must inevitably be turned over by the surf as it reached the rocks, and dashed against them.

"We must find a warp, lads, and then we will do it," cried the boatswain.

A search was made, and a rope of sufficient length and strength was discovered. One end was secured to the firmest part of the wreck, the rest of the coil being thrown on the raft.

"Now, lads, steady," cried the boatswain; "let each man take his place—four to the paddles, and the rest to stand by the warp to pay it out as I direct."

The raft was all this time surging up and down, so that the men had no little difficulty in seating themselves on it. Had there been any scrambling, many probably would have been washed off. The boatswain culling them by name, they sprang on to the raft two at a time, and secured themselves as he directed. Owen and Nat had not been summoned.

"Are we to be left behind?" cried Nat.

"Not if we can help it," said Owen.

Some of the men on the raft were shouting out, "Shove off! shove off!" Those nearest the wreck got out their knives and cut the ropes which held it. Owen and Nat rushed across the deck, and were about to spring on board, when the men who had charge of the warp paid it out, and a heavy sea sweeping round, carried the raft to a considerable distance.

"Haul in again, lads, we must not leave those boys behind," shouted the boatswain.

But the men did not appear to heed him. They scarcely, indeed, had the power to do as he ordered. The raft went tossing up and down, and was carried farther and farther from the wreck.

"Oh! they have deserted us," cried Nat.

"Never mind, we must make a raft for ourselves," answered Owen; "the lighter the better, and the more the sea goes down, the more easily we shall get a landing on the rocks." They found a couple of gratings, and two small spars. These they lashed together.

"We must secure some lanyards to hold on by," said Owen.

There was still plenty of small rope which had become entangled in the shattered bulwarks, and their raft was soon completed. They had hitherto not had time to watch the progress of the large raft. Just as they were about to launch their own they looked out for it. At that moment they saw a sea strike it; the warp parted, or was carried out of the men's hands, and the raft was turned completely over, the next instant to be dashed violently against the rocks, every soul being washed off. Owen saw that many of the men were striking out, and were helped up by their companions on the rocks.

"The same thing may happen to our small raft," said Nat.

"I hope not," said Owen; "we will make a couple of paddles, and we shall then be able to guide it."

They returned for this purpose. The tools, fortunately for them, had been left behind. The paddles were soon made.

"In case we get on shore safely, these tools may be useful. You go first, Nat, and I will hand them to you," said Owen.

Nat sprang on to the raft. Owen then handed down a bag of nails, a hammer and saw, some gimlets and chisels, which Nat secured, as he was directed by Owen, who leapt down after him. As it was dangerous to remain alongside the wreck among the masses of timbers, they immediately cast off the ropes and began paddling away.

Their slight raft was several times nearly struck by pieces of floating wreck. Shoving away from them with their paddles, they, however, floated clear. Owen observed an opening between two of the higher rocks.

"If we can pass through there we may get round the lee side, and land without difficulty," he said.

They exerted all their strength to reach the opening. Again they were in great danger from a piece of wreck which came surging up and down close to them. They, however, scraped clear of it. "We shall get through now," cried Owen; "paddle away, Nat."

In a few minutes more they reached the opening, which was just wide enough to allow their small raft to pass through.

"Hurrah! we have done it," cried Nat, as they saw the white surf breaking astern of them. The current, however, threatened to carry them out to sea, but by great exertion they kept close to the rocks, and paddled on. At length they reached the rock where their shipmates were collected. As they scrambled up on the rock the first person they saw was Mr Scoones.

"Well, youngsters, you little expected to find me here, I've an opinion," he said; "you'll have to look out, and do as I order you."

Owen had expected a more friendly greeting from those who had escaped. Neither he nor Nat made any reply. They at once carried up the tools which they had brought for safety to the top of the rock. Several of the men who had reached the rock congratulated them on their escape. Owen inquired for Mr Grey and the other officers. No one had seen them, and it was feared that they had been washed away by the seas which broke over the ship when she first struck. The long-boat had been driven against the rocks and dashed to pieces, although those in her had managed to reach the rock. Owen was grieved also to hear that the boatswain had been lost, with several of the men, when the raft turned over. The only officer, indeed, who had escaped was Mr Scoones.

The position of the sufferers, numbering altogether twenty persons, was still dangerous in the extreme, as at any moment the sea might rise and sweep them all away. As the morning mists cleared off and the sun burst forth, they saw, a couple of miles to the eastward and southward, a sand-bank, which rose apparently some feet above the water. The intervening space appeared to be filled up with rocks and sand, so that it might be passed by wading, and perhaps occasionally swimming to get over it. Mr Scoones pointed out to the men that their only chance of safety was at once to get to the sand-bank, which was of considerable extent.

"The youngsters raft will assist us to carry across the things which have been saved," he observed.

Fortunately most of the casks which had been brought by the large raft had been picked up, as well as a good many others. Those which would not float of themselves were now placed on the small raft, and the mate, taking a long spar in his hand, set out to lead the way. Four of the men took charge of the raft, while others dragged after them casks of beef and water and two of beer. Owen was thankful that no spirits had been picked up. He knew too well what would have been the consequence.

"I am afraid, Owen, that I shall not be able to get across if there are any deep places," said Nat, "as you know I cannot swim."

"Then you keep close to the raft, and I will get the men to let you hold on to it."

The two lads had taken two of the casks of water, which was as much as they could drag. The men who had charge of the raft, fortunately, were amongst the best of the crew, and at once acceded to Owen's request; indeed they looked upon him as an officer, and were willing to obey him as such. Mr Scoones, who was a powerful man, aided by his long pole, made great progress. Every now and then, when he got to a distance from the men, he turned round and shouted to them to come faster.

"It's all very well for him to cry out come faster when he has got nothing to carry," grumbled some of the men.

Presently, as he was shouting out, he was seen suddenly to sink down; he had stepped without feeling his way into deep water. He, however, at once struck out; in a short time he again rose, and pressed on as before. When the raft reached the deep water Owen made Nat hold on to it, and he swimming they soon got across. Several of the men, however, who could not swim had to be assisted by their shipmates and dragged over by ropes, which the best swimmers carried across. As they went along they found several articles floating about, and these were added to those they were dragging with them.

They were crossing a narrow channel, in which the water reached up to their middles, when one of the men cried out, "A big fish; he will serve us for dinner." The fish swam up the channel where the water was shallower. Chase was made, and before it could escape it was overtaken by two of the men, who had provided themselves with broken spars as walking sticks. Having stunned it by the heavy blows they inflicted, they towed it back in triumph.

"Why, you have got a young shark!" exclaimed Mike Coffey; "surely he'll be eating us up, for he's only half kilt." Whereupon the Irishman, taking out his knife, nearly severed its head from its body. "He'll not be after doing us any harm now," he said, laughing, as he secured the prize.

At length the sand-bank was reached. It was found to be much higher out of the water than at first supposed, and of considerable extent; but not a tree grew upon it, nor was it probable that a spring of water would be found there. They might exist for a short time, exposed to the burning rays of the sun by day and the dews by night. When Owen looked at the two small casks of water, he reflected that it could not last more than five or six days, even with the greatest economy. The raft being hauled up on the beach, the various articles they had brought were placed together.

"Men," said Mr Scoones, "we have got provisions enough here to keep body and soul together for ten days or more; in the meantime we must see what can be done to make our escape. Perhaps one of the boats may be driven on shore, or, if not, we must build a raft and make our way to Java, or maybe some ship may appear and take us off. It won't do for at to be down-hearted."

"Can you tell about where we are?" asked Owen.

"What's that to you, youngster?" answered the mate, who in reality had been utterly ignorant of the position of the ship when she struck.

Owen walked away: he saw that the less communication he had with Mr Scoones the better.

He proposed to Mike Coffey and two other men that they should make an excursion along the beach, in the hopes of picking up any articles which might be washed ashore from the wreck.

"Shure, we will have our dinner first off the shark," observed Mike, "or there will be but poor picking for us when we come back."

Among the things saved was a tinder box and matches; the latter were perfectly wet, and it was supposed that they were spoiled. Owen, however, undertook to dry them.

"If you will pick up the fuel, we will soon have a fire burning," he observed.

By exposing the matches to the hot sun they quickly dried. From portions of the wreck driven on shore during the night and old drift wood, a sufficient amount of fuel was collected to form a good fire. After some trouble one of the matches was lighted. The men cheered as they saw it blaze up, and bits of paper were produced to catch the welcome flame. In a short time a good fire was burning, at which the shark, cut up in pieces, was placed to cook.

Owen saw the beer barrel broached with considerable uneasiness. However, he could not interfere. All hands obtained a good meal from the roasted shark and some sopped biscuit, which Mr Scoones served out to them. Owen and his companions then set out, and were fortunate enough in finding several casks, cases, and bales of goods; and what was of still greater value, the main topmast, with its spars, rigging and canvas, although apparently in inextricable entanglement. They immediately set to work, however, and, by using their knives, succeeded in dragging up a topsail and topgallant sail.

"This will assist us in forming a tent," said Owen; "and if we can find another sail or two we may have shelter enough for all hands."

Two of the men volunteered to tow the heavier articles they had found along the beach, while Owen, with Nat and Mike, dragged the sails to where they had left their companions.

"Shure," said Mike, "it would be wiser to camp where we are, or maybe, when we get the tent up, Mr Scoones will be after turnin' us out."

"I hope he won't act so unjustly," said Owen; "and we must not set the example of selfishness for fear of his doing so."

The spars they had brought served as a tent pole, and as there were plenty of lengths of small rope, in a short time a tent was put up of sufficient size to accommodate the whole party. As they were all very weary, they gladly lay down to rest, and thus commenced their first night on this truly desert island.

Chapter Six.

Owen was awakened by a kick in the side.

"Rouse out, there, you lazy young rascal. Light the fire, and get the breakfast ready," said the person who had thus rudely disturbed his slumbers.

Glancing up, he saw the first mate standing over him. He sprang to his feet, looking, as he felt, much astonished at the treatment he had received.

"Call the other boy to help you," continued Mr Scoones. "Be sharp about it."

Owen made no reply. He knew that to do so would be useless, and would probably increase the mate's ill-temper. He shook Nat, who was sleeping near him, by the shoulder, and told him what the mate had ordered them to do. The rest of the men were still sleeping. As Owen and Nat went out of the tent they saw the mate take a bottle from a case which he had kept close to where he had slept, and fill up a tin cup. It was probably not the first draught he had taken that morning. Owen and Nat collected all the wood they could find, and piled it up a short distance from the tent. A light was struck, but it was some time before they could produce a flame.

"Be quick there, boys, or you shall have a taste of the rope's end," shouted the mate from within the tent.

"He seems in a terribly bad humour this morning," said Nat.

"I am afraid his temper will not improve if he continues to drink as he has begun to do," answered Owen. "What I fear is, that the men will follow his example, and that nothing will be done to preserve our lives. However, it becomes the more necessary that we should exert ourselves, and use the sense God has given us."

"It seems strange that Mr Grey and the other officers should have been lost, and this one have been saved," observed Nat.

"We do not understand God's ways; all we know is that He orders everything for the best," answered Owen. "He may have allowed them to be drowned to save them from greater suffering."

They spoke in low whispers so that the mate could not hear them. By this time the sun had risen above the horizon. As the sky was unclouded its rays struck with great force on their bare heads, for they had lost their hats.

"We must make some covering for our heads, or we shall be suffering from sun-stroke," observed Owen. "What I dread most, however, is the want of water; we must search for it. I have heard that even on such sandy islands as this springs have been found. If we can discover one, it may be the means of saving our lives. Blow away, Nat, we shall soon have a blaze."

In a short time a brisk fire was burning. The other men now began to rouse up. The mate ordered Mike Coffey to act as cook. Among the articles saved was a large iron fish-kettle. The provisions were now turned over to discover what was most suitable for breakfast.

"Shure the best way to cook the food will be to boil all together," observed Mike. Having filled the kettle half full of water, he cut up whatever was brought to him; some beef, biscuits, a tin of preserved vegetables, a drowned fowl, and some handfuls of split peas. He had fixed over the fire a tripod of three poles, to which he hung his kettle, which Owen and Nat were told to watch in order to prevent the poles burning through.

The mate sat in the tent, apparently with no intention of exerting himself, while the rest of the men wandered about in twos and threes along the shore, in search of anything that might have been cast up. It was possible, also, that they may have been discussing together the mate's conduct, as every now and then one of them looked back at the tent to see if he was coming out. He sat still, evidently considering that the others were bound to obey him. By the time the seamen came back Mike's porridge, as he called it, was ready. The lid of the kettle served as a dish, into which he baled it with a tin cup. How it was afterwards to be divided was the difficulty, as there were only three cup among the whole party.

"I saw some big shells on the beach," said Nat; "they will serve us for plates."

He and Owen went down and soon collected enough for all hands. The mate claimed his share first, and ordered a shell as well as his cup to be filled. The men looked at each other, but said nothing.

Mike's porridge was pronounced excellent.

"Shure, mates, you shall have the same for dinner," he said; "but there is one thing I've got to ask—how long is it to last? We have made a good hole in the beef cask already; we shall make a bigger one at dinner-time."

The men, however, did not listen to the Irishman's remark, but as soon as the meal was over lay down, some in the shade of the tent, whilst others, indifferent to the heat of the sun, stretched themselves on the sand, exposed to its full force. Some had saved their pipes, others their tobacco, and the pipes being filled, were passed round. Precious time was thus lost which should have been employed in searching for provisions which might have been cast on shore.

"Although others are idle it is no reason why we should be so," observed Owen to Nat and Mike. "Come along, let us see what we can find."

Mike, though an Irishman, was a very steady fellow, and at once agreed to what Owen proposed. Nat was always ready, and they set out. They had not gone far when they found several casks and bales which had been washed out of the wreck.

They dragged them up on the beach to wait an examination at a future time. They opened only one bale, which contained muslin.

"Very little use this to us," observed Nat. "On the contrary, it will be of the greatest service," answered Owen. "We can make coverings with it for our heads, which will afford greater protection against the heat than any hats we could manufacture. My head has begun to ache already."

"Mr Hartley is right," said Mike. "The Indian fellows out here always wear things of this sort on their heads."

Owen had no great notion how to form a turban, but he had seen pictures of Orientals, and was aware that their headdress consisted of long twists of muslin turned round and round. He immediately set to work, and fitted one to Nat's head.

"Shure you look like an illegint hathin," said Mike. "Now, Mr Hartley, just plase to fit me with one like it."

Owen succeeded better even than he had in Nat's case. He then made one for himself, and they all laughed heartily as they looked at each other.

"If any Indians come this way they'll be afther taking us for countrymen, and be friendly at once," said Mike.

"I don't think there is much chance of that, but we shall save ourselves from sun-stroke, and I hope the rest of the men will follow our example," answered Owen.

"Shure there is some big black thing out there on the beach," exclaimed Mike, pointing ahead. "What can it be?"

"Can it be a big fish?" asked Nat.

"It looks to me more like a piece of wreck," said Owen.

They hurried on, eager to ascertain what object it was.

"Hurrah! it's a boat," cried Owen, who had kept ahead. On examination the boat was discovered to be the second cutter. The falls had been let go when no one was in her, and she had washed clear of the rocks right up to the sand-bank; she was, therefore, but little damaged.

The carpenter had been drowned, but the carpenter's mate had escaped, and was a good workman, and he might easily repair her and fit her for sea. She would not carry the whole of the party, but some might make their way to Batavia and get a vessel to return and take off the rest. Who, however, would have the command?

The only person who was capable of navigating the boat, besides the first mate, was Owen himself. He had had but little experience of navigation, and still less of the management of a boat in a heavy sea. The first mate therefore was undoubtedly the proper person to go; but would he undertake the adventure?

These thoughts passed through Owen's mind as he and his companions were endeavouring to haul up the boat. Their strength was only sufficient to get her a short way up the beach, so that there would be no risk of her being washed off again. They continued their search, tempted onwards by seeing objects floating in the surf. The most valuable, undoubtedly, were three casks of water. They also found some kegs of spirits, the heads of which they knocked in, for Owen felt convinced that should the men get hold of them, they would attack the contents until they had lost their senses. Although a considerable quantity of provisions of various sorts had come ashore, some had been damaged by the sea water. Still, when all had been secured there was enough, with due economy, to last for several months, and, providing water could be found, they might live. But the precious fluid which had been saved would, even with a very short allowance to each man, soon be exhausted. Owen now proposed that they should go back and get some of the men to secure their prizes.

On approaching the camp, however, they heard shouts and wild shrieks of laughter. It was evident that they had been following the example set them by the mate. They had got hold of a cask of spirits, which they had broached, as well as one of the beer casks. When Owen and his companions got up to the camp, their appearance elicited loud shouts of laughter, and cries of "Who are these young Turks? Where do you come from?" The men having amused themselves for some time, invited Owen, Nat, and Mike to sit down and drink with them.

"We have no time to do that," answered Owen; "but we want you to come and help us secure a number of articles we have found."

"Have you got any spirits or beer?" asked the men.

"No," said Owen; "but we have found some casks of water, which are of far more value."

This remark created a further laugh, and all united in inviting Mike to join them.

"Do not you be persuaded," said Owen. "In a short time, when the liquor is gone, they will be sorry that they exhausted it so soon."

The mate had not spoken, indeed he lay on the ground inside the tent in a worse condition than the men.

"It will be impossible to remain with these people," said Owen. "I propose, therefore, that we go to some distance, out of their sight, and make a tent for ourselves. We shall find sufficient materials from the bales of cotton cloth which have been washed up."

Mike and Nat agreed. "But, shure, they've got the iron kettle, and how are we to cook our mate without that?" exclaimed Mike.

"We must roast our meat, and make use of shells for cups," answered Owen; "anything would be better than remaining with them."

When the men saw that the two lads and Mike were going away, they shouted after them to stop, but finding that they were resolute, began to abuse them, Mike coming in for the largest share of vituperation. This made his temper rise.

"Arrah! but I'll be afther paying thim off for this," he exclaimed.

"Keep quiet, Mike," said Owen, taking his arm; "you were doing what was right, and must not mind them."

Mike was at last pacified, and they went on, until they reached a part of the bank considerably higher than that where they had left their companions.

By means of some spars they set up a framework which was easily covered by several folds of cotton cloth, so that in a short time they had a very comfortable tent. They then collected wood for a fire, rolled up one of the casks of water, and got together some of the provisions they had just discovered.

Mike, however, continued to sigh for the fish-kettle.

"We must manage to do without it, at all events for the present," said Owen; "perhaps to-morrow you will find something which will answer the purpose. Here we shall have to remain until the men have drunk up all the spirits and beer, and then perhaps they will regain their senses, and steps may be taken to enable us to escape."

They could just distinguish the top of their shipmates' tent, but their own being low, would not, they hoped, be observed, and they should thus escape molestation from any of the tipsy crew. That their fire might not be seen at night, Owen proposed to put it out.

"We'll not do chat, Mr Hartley," said Mike. "We'll just scrape the ashes into a hole, and put a little wood on them, and the fire will keep in until to-morrow morning, and so it will be ready for lighting, and save our matches."

As long as there was sufficient light they continued their search along the beach, and were rewarded by discovering a case which contained, among other articles, fish-hooks and lines. This was indeed a prize, for undoubtedly fish swarmed along the shore, and they might catch enough to supply themselves with food for an indefinite period. Still, Owen recollected that unless water was found they must perish.

There was little chance of rain falling at that season of the year, and if it did, they had but scanty means for securing it. Still he endeavoured to overcome any gloomy anticipations about the future, and endeavoured to be prepared for all contingencies. Thus several days passed by. The party at the large tent continued their revels, as Owen discovered when going in that direction by hearing their voices singing and shouting; occasionally, too, from the noises which reached him, he suspected that they were quarrelling and fighting.

At last Nat proposed that they should launch the boat, and try and make their escape from the island.

"There are several reasons against our so doing," answered Owen. "In the first place, the boat requires repairs; she has neither mast, nor sails, nor oars, and none of us three is well acquainted with the management of a boat. Wait patiently; when the liquor is gone we may perhaps get the boat repaired, and a crew to sail in her. The first thing I propose to do is to rig up a flagstaff, so that we may have a better chance of attracting a passing vessel; and as we have plenty of fuel, we ought to keep a good blaze during the night. This would have been done at first had the mate kept sober."

Owen and his two companions immediately set to work to carry out his suggestion. An ensign, although somewhat torn, had been washed on shore, and spars of various sizes lay on the beach. These they dragged to the highest part of the bank. By lashing them together they got a flagstaff nearly forty feet long. They found sufficient rope only for two stays, and having fixed one of the stays securely to the sand by the aid of stakes driven deep into it, the butt end was placed in the ground. Owen and Nat then going over to the opposite side hauled away, while Mike assisted to lift up the flagstaff, which was thus in a short time set up. Provided the wind remained moderate, they had no doubt that it would stand.

"Should a vessel pass within four or five miles of the sand-bank it will, I hope, be seen," observed Owen, "and it may be visible even further off, if the weather is clear."

Owen had at first entertained some fears that Mike would join the other party, but the Irishman remained faithful, and did with alacrity everything he advised.

For a whole day or more none of the men had been seen, nor had any sound come from the direction of the camp. Owen began to fear that something might have happened to them. Mike offered towards night to go and ascertain how matters stood.

"Just keep up a bit of a fire to light me back," he said. "I'll soon find out if they are sleeping all this time."

He set off, and Owen and Nat waited some time expecting his return. Still he did not come back. They began to fear that an accident had happened to him, or that he might have remained, notwithstanding his good intentions, with his drunken shipmates.

At last they heard some one approaching.

"All right!" cried Mike; "I've got the fish-kettle into the bargain. Every man alive of them is fast asleep, for they have drunk out the last drop of their liquor. I sounded each cask, and made sure it was empty. They will for a good reason be sober enough now."

"Now we have got the fish-kettle we will make use of it; but I wish, Mike, you would return it, as they will otherwise justly accuse us of stealing it."

"Shure, we have as good a right to it as they have," answered Mike; "it will be a mighty long time before they want it, and, seeing that their fire has gone out, even if they get the kettle they can't use it at all at all."

"When they want fire, we must, however, give it to them," observed Owen; "because some of them have behaved ill to us, we must not refuse to help them."

"If they find out that we have got a store of water, they will be coming to drink it all up, and we shall be left without any," said Mike.

"Still we must try to help them when they require assistance," observed Owen.

"Would it not be wise to hide our casks of water in the sand?" suggested Nat; "then if they come and ask for it, we can give them a little at a time, and they will value it the more."

"A very good idea," said Owen.

Nat's suggestion was forthwith acted upon; and with some staves of one of the broken casks they dug holes in the higher part of the sand-bank, in which they concealed two casks of the precious fluid, covering them carefully over again, so that they were not likely to be discovered. The water was thus kept cooler than it would have been if left exposed to the hot sun. This being done, Mike lost no time in cooking a supply of "his porridge," as he called it, sufficient for their supper and for the next day.

They all felt the better for the comfortable meal, and lay down to rest, grateful for the protection hitherto afforded them.

Mike had volunteered to get up every two or three hours to see if the beacon-fire which they had lit was blazing up.

Owen and Nat had been sleeping for a couple of hours or more, when they were aroused by Mike's voice.

"Bedad! but the weather has changed entirely, and our beautiful fire has gone flying away right over the island," he

exclaimed.

Owen and Nat started up. A fierce gale was raging, threatening every instant to carry away their tent; while the sea, which had hitherto only lapped the edge of the sand-bank, now came foaming up against it in heavy billows.

"The boat, the boat!" cried Owen. "Our first care must be to secure her, if she is not knocked to pieces already. She is of more importance than the tent or anything else." They hurried off to where the boat lay, some little distance from their tent. They were but just in time, as already the sea had driven her broadside to the beach and had begun to break into her. She was already nearly half full of water, and, being thus very heavy, they could only drag her up a foot or two. Fortunately there came a lull.

"If we had anything to bale her out with we might succeed," observed Owen.

"The lid of the kettle will be the thing," cried Mike. "Nat, run and get it!"

Nat was not a couple of minutes away, and, jumping into the boat, he baled away with all his might, while Mike and Owen endeavoured to drag her up. The greater part of the water having been baled out of her they succeeded better than at first, and at length got her, as they hoped, beyond the reach of the seas. The stake to which she was secured was then carried up as far as the painter would allow, and then fixed as deeply as possible into the sand. The tent had withstood the wind, and they further secured it by placing the casks and bales on the lower part of the cloth, so that, although it might be torn, it was not likely to be carried bodily away. They were thus engaged when they heard shouts and cries coming from the direction of the camp. The cause was too evident. The sea, driven by the wind, had risen considerably, and was rolling much further up the higher part of the bank than it had hitherto done. Too probably, therefore, it was sweeping over the lower end, on which their shipmates had remained.

"The sea must have caught them while they were still asleep, and they have only just discovered their danger," exclaimed Owen. "They won't know in which direction to run, and they are not aware of this higher spot on which they might take refuge."

"Thin the best way will be to light up a bit of fire to show them the way," said Mike. "There are a few embers up there still burning."

Mike and Nat quickly collected some of the burning pieces of wood, and a small fire was soon blazing up. It required constant watchfulness, however, to prevent it from being blown away. In the meantime Owen and his companions shouted together at the top of their voices.

Again and again cries were heard. Owen proposed starting off to guide them to the only spot where safety could be found, but Mike and Nat entreated him not to make the attempt. Indeed it was evident that he would run great risk of being lost. Already the white foam could be seen through the darkness like masses of snow sweeping over the intermediate space between them and the camp, where the ground was apparently of a somewhat lower level.

Although possibly their companions were on somewhat higher ground, yet at any moment the sea might sweep over it. The three shouted and shouted again. At last they heard voices crying out in reply, but it was too dark to enable them to distinguish any one. All this time the boat, their tent, and the flagstaff were running great risk of being carried away. But the preservation of their fellow-creatures was of more consequence than anything else. At length they caught sight of a figure emerging from the gloom, rushing through the seething water which swept by him. The party on the sand-bank shouted to encourage him. Now he stopped, afraid of being carried off his legs.

"On, on!" shouted Owen, who had brought from the tent a long line of tolerable thickness.

"Hold on to this," he cried to Mike and Nat. "I will fasten it round my waist, and should any of the men be knocked down, I will try and save them."

Such appeared very likely to happen to the person they saw approaching them. Already he seemed half covered with foam. Again, however, the sea receded, and taking courage he rushed forward, and Owen, catching him in his arms, dragged him up. He proved to be the carpenter's mate. Just then two more people appeared, making their way towards the beacon-fire. They were followed by a third, who quickly overtook them, and pushing on without hesitation soon reached the bank. Owen recognised Mr Scoones.

"I am glad you are safe, sir," said Owen.

"No thanks to these fellows, for no one roused me when they saw the sea breaking close up to their feet."

Of the two other men who were making their way, one hesitated, while the other, following the example of the mate, rushed boldly forward. He was within a few yards of the bank, when the sea, sweeping by as it receded, rose up to his middle. He vainly attempted to stem it; he was lifted off his feet, and was being hurried out among the breakers when Owen, springing forward into the receding water as it swept round the sand-bank, caught him by the arm, and they were both pulled up by their companions.

"Thank you, sir," said the man, whose name was Bill Pratt, generally called Bill, and who was a well-conducted fellow when sober. "I owe you a good turn for this, Mr Hartley."

The mate and the other men had thrown themselves down, overcome by their exertions. The fourth man was yet some distance off, and as another sea came rolling up, he was lifted off his feet. He shrieked wildly for help, but had he been even a good swimmer no strength of arm could have saved him.

In an instant the foaming waters closed over his head, and although Owen stood ready to plunge in and attempt to save him, he could nowhere be seen. His was probably the fate of the rest. Three or four other figures were seen for

an instant making their way towards the fire; then they suddenly disappeared. Owen waited a short time, but no one else came.

“Stay by the fire, Nat,” he said; “we must now look after the boat.”

He hurriedly told the mate that the boat had been washed on shore, and begged him and the two other men to assist in securing her, as he was afraid every instant that she would be lost. Although scarcely yet recovered from his debauch, the mate was sufficiently alive to the importance of this object not to hesitate. Leaving Nat to watch the beacon-fire, the whole party set off to where the boat had been left. They found her in even a worse condition than she had been before. The sea was beating against her with great force, and would in a few minutes have rendered her a complete wreck.

Owen, who had thoughtfully brought the lid of the kettle with him, jumped in and baled her out, while the rest, uniting their strength, got her head round, and by great exertions Mike and Bill, putting their shoulders under her, managed to drag her up early to the highest part of the bank.

“If the sea does her any harm here, it won’t much matter, for we shall all be swept away at the same time,” observed the mate.

As they were returning to the tent, a crash was heard; the flagstaff had gone. It was useless attempting to put it up that night, and they returned to the tent, where the mate, throwing himself down, declared that he was too much fatigued to work any more.

Owen, still hoping that more men might be saved, joined Nat to watch at the beacon-fire. Should any one be seen they would be ready to give them help. But after watching for some time in vain, they returned together to the tent with hearts saddened at the thought that so many of their shipmates had lost their lives mainly through their own folly. The condition of the survivors was still perilous in the extreme. The sea, as far as they could judge, was still rising, and might at any moment overwhelm them. The gale raged as fiercely as at first. The rain, so unusual in that latitude, came down in torrents. Had they prepared anything for catching it, it would have proved of the greatest benefit. Owen recollected the bale of cotton cloth. He called Nat and Mike to undo it. They cut off a couple of lengths, which they held over the empty fish-kettle, and by stretching it tightly the rain ran off it into the fish-kettle, which was quickly filled. Two of the casks, out of which Owen had emptied the spirits they had contained, lay near the tent. He immediately brought one of them and filled it with the precious fluid which had been obtained.

“Quick—quick,” he cried, as he replaced the fish kettle; “let us have the other cask, not a drop of water must be lost if we can help it.” Bill Pratt, the carpenter’s mate, who, seeing what they were about? had joined them, rolled up the cask, and that also was nearly filled when the rain ceased.

“That cask has had better stuff in it than water not long ago,” observed Bill, putting his nose to the bung-hole.

“It was the stuff which caused the death of so many of our poor shipmates, and has brought thousands and tens of thousands of others to ruin and death,” answered Owen. “Before long, you would thankfully exchange a dozen casks of spirits, if you had them, for one cup of such pure water as we have just obtained. If we are wise we shall collect all the empty casks we can find, and be ready to fill them should another shower fall.”

“Ah, sir, I believe you are right; and I wish that others had had as little love for liquor as you have, and we shouldn’t have been where we now are, with our stout ship knocked to pieces,” said Bill, glancing at the mate who lay asleep in the tent.

“We have now to do our best, and pray to God for deliverance,” observed Owen. “Perhaps we shall be blessed with another shower, and be able to fill up this cask, and any others we can find.”

Although the rain had ceased, the wind blew as hard as ever. Still the water rose until the white foam reached almost close up to the spot on which their tent stood. A few minutes more might decide their fate. Owen felt deeply the awfulness of their situation. Ere long he and his companions might be standing in the presence of their Maker.

Throughout that live-long night the shipwrecked group sat beneath their tent on that narrow strip of sand. Its length they had not ascertained, but its width, as far as they could judge, was now scarcely fifty yards across. They waited on, knowing that, should the tide rise high, a single wave might sweep them all off. Mike proposed getting into the boat, there to await their fate.

“She would not live ten minutes with such a sea running outside. Without oars to steer her, we should be worse off than we are now,” answered Bill Pratt.

And thus they sat on and on, anxiously watching for daylight.

Chapter Seven.

Dawn at last appeared, and as the light increased, Owen and his companions on looking out discovered, to their joy, that the water had gone down considerably, and that other parts of the sand-bank were appearing above the hissing foam, although the water at intervals still swept around them. The wind, also, had abated. Their first care was to look after the boat. She lay broadside to the beach, proving that she had been in no small danger of being carried off, but happily she had escaped any serious damage. Small as she was, she would carry their now diminished company.

They all agreed that it was important that they should get away with as little delay as possible from the sand-bank, and either reach some higher island or make their way to Batavia. There was a possibility also of their being picked

up by some passing vessel. Owen, who knew that the distance to the Straits of Sunda could not be much less than 800 miles, and perhaps very much more, earnestly hoped that they might be fortunate enough to meet with a vessel.

Although the mate talked of going to Batavia he seemed far less confident in his manner than usual; indeed he appeared greatly out of spirits.

“Do you think, sir, that we could make Batavia?” asked Owen, finding himself alone with the mate.

“Yes, and we might go twice as far in our boat; but you have got a head on your shoulders, as you have lately shown, and should recollect that we cannot make a voyage of five or six days without water, and we may be twice as long as that. Why, those small casks you have will be exhausted before the boat can be got ready.”

The mate’s spirits rose considerably when Owen in reply told him that there were two other casks concealed in the sand. “Oh, then we need not stint ourselves as we have been doing,” he answered. “We shall probably get another shower before long, only I wish that we had some good liquor to mix with it.”

“But we may not get a shower, and the small supply we possess can only, with the greatest economy, last us two or three weeks,” remarked Owen.

The mate did not reply, but shortly afterwards, going to one of the casks, took a large draught of water. His thirst seemed insatiable—again and again he applied his mouth to the cask—had it contained spirits he would have done the same, and would speedily have become as tipsy as before. Owen was thankful that such was not the case, but regretted having told the mate, who had thus exhibited his utter selfishness, of the two casks concealed in the sand. He resolved at length to appeal to the men, and to advise them to insist that an equal and limited allowance of water should be served out to each person, a measure absolutely necessary for the preservation of their lives. Bill Pratt, to whom he first spoke, agreed to this, as did the rest, and Bill undertook to be the spokesman. The mate was overawed, and having drunk as much water as he just then required, sulkily agreed to the proposal.

Happily, in a short time, another large cloud was seen coming up with the wind, the last, apparently, of the vast mass which had lately overhung the sand-bank; the casks were got ready, the cloth stretched out. Anxiously the shipwrecked seamen gazed at the approaching cloud. The rain was seen falling into the sea. Would it cease before it reached them? On it slowly came. They could hear the precious rain as it reached the ocean. In another instant down it came upon them. The casks were filled. With proper economy they would have enough water to last them for many a day. How to repair the boat was the next question. The tools and nails which Owen and Nat had saved had been left at the camp, and, too probably, had been washed away. Unless they could find some more tools in one of the chests thrown up they could scarcely hope to fit the boat for sea. There were spars and planks enough, but they could not shape them with their knives alone for the purpose. They searched in vain, however, and found only a few nails sticking in some of the planks, but not a tool of any description. Nat had set out to look along the beach, while the rest of the party were consulting about the boat. He made his way in the direction of the camp.

As the tide had now fallen to its usual level, the intermediate ground was perfectly dry. He had been absent for some time. The mate directed the rest of the party to collect all the spars, planks, and cordage they could find.

“We might live on here for months, lads,” said Mr Scoones, “but should another gale spring up somewhat rougher than the last, we may all be swept away; so depend upon it, the sooner we get off this sand-bank the better. Where there’s a will there’s a way; and as we have no other tools we must do the best we can with our knives. It will be a long business, and we must take care not to break them. The first thing we have to do is to stop the leaks in the boat; we must then form some oars from the spars we have got and the staves of the casks. They won’t be very shapely, but they will serve to move the boat along, and the ends of the ropes will afford us oakum. We have cotton enough to make a suit of sails, although they might not be fit to stand a strong wind. We have also spars for masts and yards.”

The mate having got over his drunken fit, was now completely himself again, and, although he was occasionally surly and overhearing, Owen was thankful that he had been saved. He was certainly better able to carry out the proposed plans than any one else.

Owen suggested that while they were repairing the boat they should not lose the chance of being seen by any passing vessel. The flagstaff was therefore again erected near where it had before stood, and the drift wood collected to dry in the sun in order that it might serve to form a beacon-fire at night. The first thing to be done was to caulk the boat. Mr Scoones and the carpenter’s mate undertook to do this and to nail such planks as had been started, which was no easy matter, as not a stone could be found, and they had only the handles of their knives. But patience and perseverance had overcome greater difficulties than theirs. The carpenter’s mate looked grave as he surveyed the boat.

“If it keeps calm she will swim, sir; but if it comes on to blow, heavily loaded as she will be, my idea is that she will swamp to a certainty. Had we the tools, I should have raised her a streak all round and put a bit of a deck on her fore and aft.”

“No use to talk about that,” said Mr Scoones, with a sigh; “it is beyond our power.”

While they were thus employed Nat’s voice was heard in the distance, and he was seen running from the direction of the old camp. He was holding aloft what they soon discovered to be a saw.

“Hurrah! I have found this and many things more,” he exclaimed, as he drew near.

On coming up to the party, he explained he had found that the sea had barely washed over the higher part of the bank, on which the tent had stood.

This latter, though knocked over, still remained, with a quantity of cordage and other heavy articles, besides some provisions. On hearing this, Mr Scoones took possession of the tools and nails, with which he and the carpenter's mate worked away at the boat, while he despatched the rest of the party to bring up the other articles. It was heavy work toiling over the sand, but Owen, setting the example, the rest cheerfully obeyed. It took several days to fit the boat for sea. The tools were blunt, and no means existed to sharpen them.

Every day at sunrise the flag was hoisted, and every night the beacon-fire lighted, but the signals were observed by no passing vessel. While Mr Scoones and the carpenter's mate were working at the boat, the rest of the party were engaged in arranging the provisions, repairing two of the water casks which leaked, in picking oakum, or in other work. No one could afford to be idle.

"It would be a fine thing now if we could only pick up a keg of spirits," said Bill Pratt to Mike, as they were working at the water casks.

"Do you think so, mate?" observed Mike. "Shure wasn't it the spirits cost all the rest of the poor fellows their lives, and well-nigh your own? I am thinking that it would be a good thing if there was never another drop of the crathur brewed in the world. How was it that the ship came to be cast away, I should like to know? Look at the mate there; he is steady enough now, but let him get liquor to his lips we don't know what mad freak he would play. No, no; if we find a keg, the best thing we can do will be to knock in the head at once, before any one is tempted to touch it."

Fortunately no keg of spirits was found, for the force of the gale had dashed everything which came out of the wreck to pieces, and had not the shipwrecked party secured a sufficient supply of provisions at first, they would have run great chance of starving. The hull of the boat was now complete. The flagstaff had to be taken down to be cut up into masts, spars, and oars. Mr Scoones, partly with the canvas which had served for a tent, and partly with cotton cloth, had fitted a suit of sails.

At length all was ready; the boat was launched, and appeared to be tolerably seaworthy. Her cargo was piled up on the beach. The men had to wade up to their middles to carry it on board. When everything was in her she was somewhat heavily laden, but with the prospect of a long voyage before them they were unwilling to leave either water or provisions behind.

All climbed on board. The sand-bag which served as her anchor was hauled up, the oars got out, and they pulled away to the northward, clear of the reefs. The sails were then hoisted. They consisted of three lugs and a foresail, for, from the light materials of which they were formed, it was considered more prudent to have several small sails than two large ones. The wind blew from the northward, and was thus abeam, and her course was about E.N.E.

The wind soon increased, and it became necessary to close reef all the sails, while the quick motion of the boat, as she danced lightly over the seas, made every one, with the exception of Mr Scoones and Owen, very ill. The mate abused them for giving way.

"Shure it's not for pleasure, sir," exclaimed Mike. "As soon as the sea chooses to be quiet, we will be quiet too."

His remark produced a laugh, even among those who appeared the worst. In a short time they got better. The night as it approached threatened to be stormy, and some of the party expressed a wish that they were safe back again on the sand-bank.

"Suppose such another gale as we had before were to drive the water over it, where should we be?" asked Mr Scoones. "Depend upon it we are better off in a tight boat, with twice as much sea as we have running here."

Owen thought the mate was right. He did his best to keep up the spirits of his companions. The wind increasing, the sea got up more and more. It was necessary to keep the boat's head close to the wind, sometimes indeed to put the helm hard down so that she might ride over the seas, which otherwise would have broken on board and swamped her. As it was, in spite of the additional streak, the water constantly fell on board, and two hands were kept continually baling it out. The least carelessness in steering would inevitably have caused the destruction of the boat. It seemed surprising, small as she was, that she could live. All night long the wind continued to blow as hard as ever, and no progress was made. There was a fear, indeed, that they might drive back on the sand-bank. When morning broke Owen looked out anxiously to the southward, expecting to see it under their lee. He was, however, thankful to find, as the light increased, that they were out of sight of the dreaded bank.

For two days the same weather continued. Some of the people began to lose heart.

Owen did his best to cheer them up. "Depend upon it we shall have clear skies and a smooth sea before long; we shall then run along famously, and make up for lost time," he observed.

Mr Scoones kept up his character as a good seaman. For hours together he sat at the helm, and only gave it up to Bill Pratt, who was the next best hand to him. At last, as Owen had predicted, the wind fell, and the sea went down. Once more the boat was put on her course to the eastward. During the day they steered by the sun, and at night by the stars, which shone forth with great brilliancy. Although Owen had often gazed before at the Southern Cross and the other beautiful constellations of that hemisphere, he now watched them with greater interest than ever. With the fine weather the spirits of the party rose. Owen proposed that each man should recount his adventures, tell a story, or sing a song. His proposal was adopted; it served to beguile the time, and prevented the men from thinking of the dangers which might be in store for them. Mr Scoones did not interfere. He sat silent and gloomy, as usual. He might possibly have reflected that it was through his own obstinacy that the ship had been cast away, and the lives of so many of her crew sacrificed. Fishing lines were also constantly kept out, and several fish were caught. The only means of cooking them was on a fire of chips on the lid of the fish-kettle. They proved a valuable addition to their fare, and assisted, with the dried fruit which had been saved, in warding off scurvy. The wind was, however, very light, and but slow progress was made. At length it became perfectly calm.

Mr Scoones immediately ordered the men to get out the oars. Owen set the example, and Nat and Mike obeyed, but the others grumbled, asserting that the advantage to be gained was so slight that it was not worth while to exert themselves.

Mr Scoones became very angry, and standing up with the tiller in his hand, declared that he would knock the first man overboard who refused to obey his orders.

"You'd better not try it," answered the carpenter's mate, a powerful-looking man, seizing the hammer which lay near him. "Having three or four hundred miles to sail, as I understand, we can do little good in tiring ourselves out by pulling along at the rate of two knots an hour in this blazing sun. Let those boys and the Irishman put in their oars. They will only kill themselves if they keep at it."

Mr Scoones saw by this how slight was his authority over the men, and wisely gave up the attempt. After a time the calm became more difficult to endure than had been the gale. Owen and his two friends had their heads protected by the turbans which they had at first manufactured, but the others had taken no similar precautions. The straw hats they wore, which had been washed ashore, afforded but a slight resistance against the penetrating rays of the sun. Night brought them all some relief.

Then all hands, excepting one who remained on the watch, lay down to sleep. When it was Owen's watch he saw the mate several times get up and look about him as if his slumbers were light and troubled. For upwards of four days the calm continued. Provisions were served out regularly, but Mr Scoones, believing that they would reach Batavia in ten days or so, had not put the people on an allowance of water; the consequence was that they drank away at the water casks without stint, as they had done at the spirit kegs. One of the casks was soon emptied. Without telling Mr Scoones, they began upon a second. Even Owen was not aware how rapidly the water was being exhausted, until Nat told him that he was afraid they were half-way through the second cask. Owen at once informed Mr Scoones, who on this occasion had good cause for his anger.

"If you wish to live, you fellows must consent to be put on short allowance. We have not made good more than thirty miles of the distance we have to run, and for what we know, we may chance to meet with contrary winds and more calms, and if so, we shall soon all die of thirst. Being without water is, as you will find, worse than being without food."

These remarks brought the men to reason. The remainder of the kegs, including those which had been washed up upon the island, were therefore brought and kept aft by Mr Scoones, who served out half a cupful at a time twice a day to each man.

Owen, as before, tried to animate his companions.

"Here comes a breeze," he exclaimed, as a light blue ripple was seen advancing over the mirror-like surface of the ocean. The sails were trimmed, and the boat once more glided on at the rate of three or four knots an hour. Even should the breeze continue, however it would take them many days to reach Batavia. The wind lasted but a few hours, when they were again becalmed. Thus they lay, making no progress for another two days. Once more a breeze sprung up, but it was directly in their teeth. The boat was hauled on the wind and stood to the northward.

"We may have a long beat of it, but it cannot be helped," said Mr Scoones to Owen.

It was trying work; now they tacked to the south-east, now to the north-east. The imperfect observations they were able to take showed them, however, that they had gained some ground. Owen cheered the men by reminding them that they were in the course of homeward and outward bound vessels, and that they might hope to fall in with one or the other.

Still day by day went by, and they were yet a long way from land. Once more the weather changed, and the wind shifted to the northward.

Night came on; Mr Scoones, unwilling to lose advantage of the breeze, continued to carry all sail, and it was evidently as much as the boat could bear. During the darkness a squall struck her. Before the sheets could be let go, the whole of the lighter canvas was blown away. Had not this happened, the boat would have been upset. She had now but her fore lug and foresail, so that she could no longer keep close to the wind without an after oar kept constantly going. The night, however, passed away without any farther accident. It was not until noon, when the weather moderated, that all hands turned to and tried to repair the tattered sails. This operation was almost beyond their power. They managed, however, to patch up a mizen, which enabled the boat once more to stand on her proper course.

Several days passed by; no land appeared in sight. Their provisions were almost exhausted. They had been on short allowance for some time; but a few pints of water remained in their last cask. Again the boat lay becalmed. The three men who had escaped with the mate from the camp—their strength previously weakened by drinking—had given in and lay at the bottom of the boat, or leaned against the side, unable to exert themselves.

Mr Scoones, strong and hardy as he had been, was utterly exhausted. Owen, Nat, and Mike, though feeling weak, were by far the most active of the crew.

Another day passed by; the carpenter's mate was the first to die, the other two quickly followed. Owen had endeavoured to restore them by moistening their parched lips with water; but it was of no avail. He felt himself imbued with a strength which surprised him. The dead bodies were lifted over board. No funeral ceremony was possible.

Owen then went aft to attend to the first mate, who lay in the stern sheets unable to move. Owen brought him some water; he drank it eagerly, and opened his eyes.

"Is there much more?" he asked.

"Very little, sir; but we will take only what will keep us alive, you can have the rest."

Owen, faithful to his promise, continued to give the apparently dying man a few thimblefuls at a time.

"Were a breeze to spring up we might yet be saved," said the mate. "Do you see any signs of one?"

"Not as yet, sir," answered Owen, after he had looked round the horizon; "but cheer up, sir, God may still think fit to preserve us, although we do not see how it is to be. I'll get you a little more water."

All day long Owen continued, as at first, to attend on the mate. Mike and Nat sat still, their spirits were too low to talk; but they were perfectly satisfied that the mate should have the water, though their own share was thus much diminished. They all ate sparingly of the provisions which remained. Fortunately among them was some of the dried fruit, which assisted to assuage their thirst. The mate did not appear to grow worse, and Owen hoped that during the cool hours of the night he might revive. The sun went down in a cloudless sky, and the stars shone out brightly above their heads. Still no breeze came. The first mate occasionally spoke and inquired how the weather looked, but Owen could only give the answer as before. Morning was approaching.

"If we do not make the land, Hartley," said Mr Scoones, "or do not get picked up to-day, I shall not see another sun set."

"I hope you will hold out, sir," answered Owen; "we have still a little water, and our provisions are not quite exhausted. I trust you will not get worse."

He said this, though scarcely a couple of pints of water remained, while the provisions he spoke of consisted of a small piece of dry salt beef and half a dozen figs. Owen, feeling that he could hold out some time longer, was anxious to give the mate as large a share as possible, for he evidently required it more than any one.

Owen spoke to Nat and Mike, and they agreed that he should have a double allowance. The night air had revived him considerably. Owen gave him a few drops of water, after which he managed to chew some beef and eat a fig. Owen then gave him a further allowance of the precious fluid. He asked for more. "You shall have it, sir, but we are running very short," said Owen.

"How many gallons have you?" asked the mate.

"Gallons, sir! we have not more than a pint."

"Good heavens! a pint only, and that among four people, with such a sun as we shall have scorching down upon our heads before long," exclaimed the mate. "I feel my inside burning already."

"I would give you another draught, but you will want it more by-and-by than you do now, sir," said Owen. "Perhaps when the sun rises we may get a breeze and make the run you expect."

Although the mate kept crying out for more water, Owen was firm. The sun rose on a sky undimmed by a single cloud. The sea shone like a sheet of burnished gold, not a ripple played over it, excepting when, here and there, a fish rose to the surface, or leapt out of the water, sending far around a circle of tiny wavelets. Occasionally, too, a sea-fowl winged its flight through the blue ether, and ever and anon would plunge down to seize its prey from the ocean. The appearance of birds showed that land could not be far off, but not the faintest outline could as yet be discovered. The mate, dragging himself up to the side of the boat, gazed round with aching eyes, then sank down with a groan to his former position. Owen felt himself growing weaker and weaker. Poor Nat and Mike could scarcely raise their voices above a whisper.

"Water! water!" groaned the mate; "give me some if you would save my life."

The other two pointed to their lips, and gazed eagerly at the casks. Owen dragged himself towards them. He could have drunk the whole of the water himself, and yet not have been satisfied. He poured out a small quantity and took it to the mate.

"Sip it slowly, sir," he said, "we have very little more remaining."

To his dismay, as he again went to pour some in the cup, he found there was scarcely sufficient left to fill it. He took what he believed to be his own share, and then carried the remainder to Nat and Mike. He put it to the lips of the first, who seized it with both his hands, and would have drained it to the bottom.

"Let go," cried Owen, "this is Mike's share as well as yours." With some difficulty he rescued it, and handed the cup to the Irishman, who swallowed it eagerly. Owen had not the heart to tell them there was no more. Before long they again cried out for water. Owen made no reply.

"Water! water!" groaned the mate. Owen shook his head. He had scarcely strength enough to crawl back and show that it was exhausted. The mate at last understood him.

"Is there none in any of the other casks?" he asked.

Owen knew that they had been emptied to the last drop. He crawled to where they were stowed, and tried one after the other. They were perfectly dry. Without water to moisten their lips, no one would be able to masticate the last remnants of food.

"I knew it would be so," groaned the mate. "Any sign of a breeze?"

"None that I can perceive, sir," answered Owen. He dragged himself up by the mast so as to obtain a wider range of observation. Unable to stand long he soon sat down again. After a lapse of some time the mate again asked in a faint voice, "Any sign of a breeze?"

Owen once more looked out. He was about to sink down on the thwart, when his eye fell on a white spot in the horizon. He gazed at it without speaking; it might be only a sea-bird's wing. Again and again he looked with straining eyes.

"A sail! a sail!" he exclaimed. His voice sounded hollow and strange; he fancied some one else was speaking.

"Are you mocking us?" asked the mate.

"No, sir, I am certain it is a sail," answered Owen.

His voice aroused Nat and Mike, who turned round and looked over the side. The mate, who just before appeared to have entirely lost his strength, dragged himself up and took Owen's place at the mast.

With what sounded like an hysterical laugh, "Yes," he cried out, "a sail! no doubt about it; she is bringing up a breeze, and standing this way. We are saved! we are saved!"

He kept his post, grasping the mast tightly, and watching the approaching sail. Owen returned to his seat, from whence he could well observe the stranger. A long time must pass before she could be up to them, and before then she might alter her course. They wore but a speck on the water, and might be passed unperceived. Still the mate kept his post, waving his hand and trying to shout out, as if at that distance he could be either seen or heard. By his behaviour Owen thought he must have lost his senses. Nat and Mike every now and then uttered strange exclamations, showing that they were much in the same condition. The stranger's royals had first been seen, then her topgallant sails, and now the heads of her topsails appeared above the horizon. She was evidently a large ship, and, as her courses came in sight, the mate pronounced that she was a man-of-war, a frigate, or perhaps a line-of-battle ship. She stood steadily on, as if steering for the boat, which, however, could scarcely yet have been discovered. As the expectation of being saved grew stronger, Owen felt his energies—which he had hitherto by great effort maintained, when the lives of his companions seemed to depend on his retaining his senses—giving way.

He saw the hull of the ship rise above the water, he could count her guns, he knew that she was a frigate; he was certain that the boat was discovered, and then he lost all consciousness.

Chapter Eight.

When Owen regained his senses he found himself in a hammock in the sick bay of the frigate, with Mike and Nat close alongside of him.

"How do you feel, Mike?" asked Nat, who had not observed that Owen was awake.

"Mighty quare, but not sorry to find myself here. I hope Mr Hartley will come to soon. They seem to treat him as one of us."

"He ought to be with the officers aft," said Nat. "The mate is with them, I suppose, but I have not seen him."

"Shure he'll not fail to make himself out to be a big man somehow or other," said Mike. "He'll be after swaring he was the captain of the ship, although he will forget to say that it was through him that she was cast away."

The conversation was cut short by the appearance of the surgeon, who observed, as he glanced over the hammocks

"I am glad to see you are coming round again, lads."

He stopped by Owen's side.

"Well, boy, how do you feel?" he inquired, in a kind tone.

"Very weak, sir," said Owen; "but all I want is food and water."

"You shall have an ample supply by-and-by, but in your present state you must take only a little at a time."

One of the sick bay attendants brought in three small basins of broth, from one of which the doctor fed Owen.

"Thank you, sir," said Owen, "though I think I might save you that trouble."

"You shall be welcome to do so next time," answered the doctor, smiling.

"What rating did you hold on board the ship you belonged to?" asked the surgeon.

"I was a passenger, although I did duty as a midshipman."

"Why, the captain described you as a ship's boy," observed the doctor.

"Arrah, shure, he'd not the captain at all, at all," exclaimed Mike, lifting up his head; "he was first mate until the raal

capt'n died. But maybe he didn't say how the ship came to be cast away."

The doctor made no reply to the Irishman's remark. "I must see about this," he said to himself.

Owen and his companions remained in their hammocks for a couple of days, when they all declared themselves strong enough to get up. A large tub was brought them to wash in, and they were supplied by the purser with a seaman's suit apiece. Owen was thankful to put on clean clothing, as the garments he had on when wrecked were worn completely into rags. Thus habited, although in the dress of a common seaman, he certainly did not look like an ordinary ship's boy. Still, he was allowed to remain forward with his two companions. As yet they had seen nothing of Mr Scoones, who was, they understood, occupying one of the officers' cabins aft.

Owen found that they were on board the "Sylvia," a thirty-six gun frigate, commanded by Captain Stanhope, on her way to Batavia. He had reason to suspect that the sand-bank on which they had been wrecked was further to the westward than Mr Scoones had supposed, and that had they not been picked up they would have perished long before reaching Java.

Having now sufficiently recovered to do duty, they were placed in a watch under the command of the second lieutenant, Mr Leigh. Owen concluded that this was as it should be. It did not occur to him that it would be of any use to explain who he was, and to endeavour to obtain a better position on board. He thought it but natural that he should be expected to work, and he was ready to do duty in any station in which he was placed. He supposed that his friend the doctor had forgotten him, or had not thought fit to carry out his intentions. Owen, who had been accustomed to go aloft while on board the "Druid," soon attracted the attention of Lieutenant Leigh by the activity and diligence with which he performed all his duties. The lieutenant at length spoke to him.

"If you go on as you have begun, you will become a smart seaman," he said, in a kind tone.

"Thank you, sir," answered Owen, touching his hat; "I will do my best."

"What is your name?" asked the lieutenant.

"Owen Hartley, sir."

"Owen Hartley!" repeated a tall midshipman, who was in Mr Leigh's watch, and who was standing near. He looked hard at Owen, but said no more.

It struck Owen, as he glanced at the midshipman, that he had seen him somewhere before, but he could not at first recollect where it was.

He puzzled his brains for some time. At last he inquired the midshipman's name of one of the men, pointing him out as he walked the deck.

"That is Mr Ashurst, a sprig of nobility of some sort," was the answer. "Take care you don't get foul of him. He carries on with a pretty high hand when he has the chance, especially if you go away with him in a boat, or he is in command on any occasion."

Shortly afterwards a squall was seen coming up, and the various necessary orders were issued for the shortening of sail. The midshipmen hurried to their posts, repeating the orders they had received. Mr Ashurst came forward, shouting out, as he did so, to the men.

"Yes, those are the very same tones," thought Owen, and he recognised the naval officer who, with his brother, had been thrown out of their carriage, and whom he had assisted in getting to rights again. "His brother called him Reginald. If this midshipman's name is the same I shall have no doubt about the matter."

Owen had not hitherto been stationed aloft, but one of the other boys was on the sick list.

"What are you doing on deck here, you idle young rascal?" exclaimed Mr Ashurst. "Quick, up the rigging and help to hand the fore royal."

Owen obeyed, and flew up aloft. The lighter sails were quickly handed. The topsails were reefed, and the crew called down; the frigate stood on her proper course. The way Mr Ashurst addressed Owen convinced him that he was the person he supposed.

"I will take care not to give him any cause of offence, for he is evidently not an amiable person," thought Owen.

A few minutes afterwards the look-out at the masthead shouted—

"A sail on the weather bow!"

One of the officers immediately went aloft. On his return the bearings of the stranger were taken. She was a large ship, standing in for the land.

The frigate was immediately put about. The squall having blown over, all sail was made in chase. Many surmises were expressed as to what she was, but it was a general opinion that she was a French frigate.

"If she is, we shall have a fight, and take her too," cried one of the men near whom Owen was standing.

"Little doubt about that, mates," observed another.

Such were the expressions uttered by the crew. Owen felt as eager as any one. He had not come to sea to fight, but

he knew that even on board the "Druid" they might have fallen in with an enemy and have had to defend themselves.

"Is there any chance of her getting away, Mr Hartley?" asked Nat, who never forgot their relative positions, though Owen treated him as a friend.

"No," replied Owen; "for this frigate sails very fast, and from what I hear, Captain Stanhope is not likely to let an enemy escape him if he can help it."

"I feel somewhat strange at the thoughts of having round shot and bullets flying about our ears," said Nat.

"We must run our chance along with the rest," answered Owen.

Mr Scoones, who had only come on deck that day for the first time, on seeing that there was a prospect of a sharp engagement, seemed to wish that he had kept below. After pacing up and down several times, he spoke to the first lieutenant.

"As I have had some experience in dressing wounds, although, of course, I should wish to see the fight on deck, I may be of assistance to the doctor. With your leave I will go into the cock-pit and offer to help him."

The first lieutenant looked at him hard, suspecting the reasons.

"You are a passenger, and we do not expect you to fight, so do as you please," he answered.

Mr Scoones immediately dived below. The doctor, who had been arranging the various instruments and dressings which he expected would be required, received Mr Scoones coldly.

"You have not thought of bringing the two boys and the seaman saved with you. They might like to escape the risk of being shot."

"They have entered as part of the ship's company, and must run their chance," answered Mr Scoones.

"I thought as much," remarked the doctor, and continued his preparations without further accepting the offer made him.

The "Sylvia" showed herself to be a fast craft as she rapidly gained on the chase. As yet, however, the colours of the latter had not been shown. It was possible, after all, that she might prove to be a friend. All hands were on deck watching the chase. A loud cheer rose from the crew as the French flag flew out from the stranger's peak. She had tacked several times to keep the weather gauge, which it was Captain Stanhope's wish to obtain. She was seen to be a frigate of the same size as the "Sylvia," if not larger. The decks were now cleared for action, and the drum beat to quarters. Owen found that he and the other boys were to be employed in bringing up powder from the magazines in flannel bags placed in buckets. They had then to sit on them until the powder was wanted for loading the guns.

He would rather have been employed on some other duty, as he would thus have seen what was going forward. Still he did not for a moment think of trying to avoid what he was ordered to do. It was a satisfaction to find that Nat was near him.

"I don't half like it," said Nat; "but there is no one to care for me if I'm killed, except my old grandmother, and my brothers and sisters. You'll tell them all about me, and take them my love, won't you, Mr Hartley?"

"Yes, I will not forget your message, and I assure you, Nat, that I should care very much indeed if you were to be killed," answered Owen. "But do not be down-hearted; it will be a great thing to have been in a fight, although we may have taken no very active part in it."

Owen and Nat were stationed on the main deck, and had just brought up their powder from below.

"Hold your tongues, youngsters," said a midshipman, who just then passed. Owen recognised Mr Ashurst; he looked pale, but whether this was from the thoughts of the coming fight, or from some other cause, Owen could not tell. He was stationed at the guns which it was Owen's duty to keep supplied.

The second lieutenant passed along the deck, speaking an encouraging word to the men at each of the guns, while he gave the orders in regard to their mode of firing.

He then turned to the boys, and addressed a few kind remarks to them.

During this time the French frigate had shortened sail, showing that she had no intention of avoiding an action.

Owen could only get a glimpse of her through the port. The "Sylvia" had tacked several times. Again Mr Leigh came along the deck.

"In another minute we shall pass under the enemy's stern, and every gun from forward is to be fired in succession," he cried.

Just as he spoke, loud roars were heard, and several of the Frenchmen's shot struck the frigate's upper works, none penetrating to the main deck.

Owen peered out eagerly to try and get a glimpse of the enemy; then their own guns began firing, the crew cheering as their shot told with considerable effect. The French frigate, however, which had immediately luffed up, though too late to avoid being raked, returned the fire with her other broadside. The two frigates ran on together to the

eastward, exchanging broadsides as fast as the guns could be run in and loaded.

"I wonder when she's going to give in?" said Nat to Owen as they returned from below with a fresh supply of powder.

"Before long, if we continue pounding her as we have hitherto done," said Owen, who after the first shots had been fired felt as cool as he had ever done in his life. Nat, too, recovered his self-possession, and seemed to have lost all his fears. Still, it was a trying time for youngsters who had never before been in battle. Round shot at times struck the ship in quick succession. Three or four men had been killed on the main deck, and others had been carried below badly wounded. Owen had observed Mr Ashurst constantly moving about, evidently in no very happy frame of mind.

"I say," observed Nat, "I rather think he doesn't half like it," pointing at the midshipman as he spoke.

"You have no right to think that," answered Owen. At that moment a shot struck the cill of the port nearest to the spot where Owen was seated, killing one man and wounding another, then flying across the deck close to Mr Ashurst, it committed further havoc on the other side, laying low another of the crew.

The midshipman gave a spring and fell over near Owen, who was at that moment supplying his gun with powder. As soon as he was at liberty, Owen endeavoured to help the midshipman.

"Are you hurt, sir?" he asked.

"I don't know—I thought I was," answered Mr Ashurst, getting on his feet.

His reply produced a laugh from several of the men who heard him. He walked away without uttering a word of thanks to Owen for his good intentions. Another broadside was fired, when a loud cheer burst forth from the crew on the upper deck, and was echoed by those on the main deck.

"She has struck! she has struck!"

The English frigate had been a good deal cut up. The Frenchman had lost her foremast and main topmast, while her hull was severely battered. The "Sylvia" was hove to, and Mr Leigh, with a boat's crew, sent to take possession of the prize. She proved to be the "Venus," forty-four guns. Her captain having been killed, the first lieutenant presented his sword to Mr Leigh; as he did so he pointed to a number of dead and dying men about the decks, observing with a sigh—

"We did not yield until we had no hope of success. It is the fortune of war."

"You have fought bravely, monsieur, and you and your crew will be treated as brave men," answered Mr Leigh.

He then ordered that the dead should be hove overboard, and the wounded carried below, to be attended to by the surgeon. He also directed the French officers and most of the crew to prepare for going on board the English frigate, though a few were retained for attending to the sick. The remainder of the "Sylvia's" boats which had escaped damage now came alongside with fresh hands to form the prize crew and to carry off the Frenchmen. Mr Leigh, leaving the prize in charge of the master's mate, who had accompanied him, returned on board the frigate to deliver the swords he had received, and report the state of the prize.

"I intend you to have charge of the prize, and you can take any hands you choose with you," said Captain Stanhope.

Mr Leigh having selected two or three more men, observed—

"I will take the lads we picked up the other day; they are sharp fellows, especially one of them, and may be useful."

Owen and Nat were summoned and ordered to get into the boat with the other men, among whom was Mike Coffey. Owen was well pleased to have been selected by Mr Leigh.

"We shall be out of the way, too, of that midshipman Mr Ashurst," observed Nat. "He is a regular bully when he has the chance."

On reaching the deck of the prize, however, what was their disappointment to find that Mr Ashurst had gone on board her in one of the other boats. He looked hard at Owen as he came up the side.

"Who sent you here, boy?" he asked.

"I was ordered to come," answered Owen, touching his hat.

"Well, look out, and see that you behave yourself," said the midshipman, as he walked away.

Owen felt a sickening sensation as he looked along the decks of the prize. Those of the "Sylvia" had been bad enough. These, although the dead and wounded had been removed, were still covered in every direction with blood, while they were thickly strewn with shattered spars, fragments of bulwarks, blocks, pieces of rope, and torn sails, while from below came up cries and groans of the wounded, either waiting to have their hurts dressed or already in the surgeon's hands. As the frigates were at the time not far from the coast of Celebes, every effort was made to repair the more serious damages, in order to enable them to haul off the shore before nightfall. The first thing to be done was to get up a fore jury mast. Rather more than a third of the French crew still remained on board the prize; but as all hands were required for this work, Mr Leigh waited to send them away until it had been accomplished. Most of them, indeed, appeared willing to lend their help. It was nightfall, however, before sail could once more be made on the frigate. By that time it came on to blow very hard, and the sea getting up, made it dangerous for the boats to pass to and fro. Captain Stanhope, therefore, sent word to Mr Leigh to retain the remainder of the prisoners, and

should the frigates get parted, to steer for Marrack, the nearest port on the Java coast where shelter could be found. The fort protecting the harbour had a short time before been captured by Lieutenant Lyons with two boats' crews. The captain's last directions to Lieutenant Leigh were to keep a sharp look-out on his prisoners. The wind increased, and the night became very dark. The English crew remained on deck, but most of the Frenchmen went below. All the sail the frigate could carry was set, but it soon became evident that she was making little or no way off the shore.

Captain Stanhope had directed Mr Leigh to keep the lead going, and to anchor should the prize drift into shoal water. He accordingly ordered the cables to be ranged ready for that emergency. Owen had been actively engaged the whole day, and Mr Leigh had employed him to carry orders to the different parties at work. Soon after nightfall the "Sylvia" was lost sight of; as, for her own safety, she had been compelled to get a good offing, Captain Stanhope not being willing to run the risk of anchoring on a lee shore. His intention was, however, to stand in the next morning and rejoin the prize. Had the wind been but moderate, the "Venus" would have run but little risk. Blowing, however, heavily, as it now did, Mr Leigh could not help acknowledging that they were in considerable danger. Though under reduced sail, she fortunately stayed very easily. The lieutenant, therefore, did not hesitate to go about as often as he considered necessary. A look-out was kept for the land, and every time she tacked the lead was hove, but as no bottom had yet been found, it was hoped she might yet be a considerable distance from it. The French crew had remained quietly below, one or two only occasionally coming on deck, apparently to ascertain the position of the ship.

Strange that even at this time of peril Mr Ashurst should have treated Owen in his usual tyrannical manner. He never met him without uttering a word of abuse. Two or three times he took up a rope's end and struck him, declaring that he was idling or not obeying orders. At last Owen could bear it no longer.

"You are perfectly well aware, Mr Ashurst, that you have no right to treat me thus," he said in a firm voice. "You are placing yourself in my power, for were I to complain of you, you would be punished. I have no wish to do that, but I must beg that you will desist."

"Who are you, to speak like this to me?" exclaimed the midshipman, apparently astonished at Owen's language and manner.

"Were I your inferior in birth and education I should have a perfect right to expostulate," said Owen.

"In birth—in birth and education! You, a contemptible ship's boy, put yourself on an equality with a nobleman's son!" exclaimed Ashurst.

"I am not placing myself on an equality, for I am not a nobleman's son, but I am the son of a gentleman, and have received a gentleman's education, and have, I hope, the feelings of one," answered Owen, his temper rising in a way he found it difficult to quell; "all, however, I insist on is that you should not strike or abuse me, for by so doing, as you well know, you are acting contrary to the articles of war."

"A young sea lawyer, are you!" cried Ashurst. "Look out for squalls when we get on board the frigate again."

"Has it occurred to you, Mr Ashurst, that if this gale continues we may never get there?" asked Owen, feeling suddenly prompted to put the question. "We have a wild rocky coast under our lee, and should the anchors fail to hold, we may, before morning, be cast on it with little hope of any one on board escaping."

"Who told you that?" asked Ashurst, in a changed tone.

"My own sense and observation," answered Owen. "When Mr Leigh sent me into the cabin this afternoon, I examined the Frenchman's chart, which lay open on the table, and I saw the sort of coast we are off. I do not wish to alarm you, nor any one else, but I only tell you what I know to be the state of the case."

"Does Mr Leigh think the same?" inquired Ashurst, in the same tone he would have used to an equal.

"I have no doubt he does, but of course he would not tell the crew until it was absolutely necessary to do so; unless he had foreseen that we should probably have to anchor he would not have ordered the cables to be ranged."

"I hope things are not so bad as you think, Hartley," observed Ashurst, although, at the same time, his voice belied his words. Without apologising to Owen, he walked away in a very different manner to that he had just before assumed.

"It is a great shame that that midshipman should treat you as he does," said Nat. "Although he is civil enough now, he will be as bad as ever before long, and I have made up my mind what to do."

"You'd better not interfere, Nat," said Owen. "The officers probably would not listen to you, and you would only get yourself into bad odour."

Nat did not exactly understand what that meant, but he did not mind doing anything which might benefit Owen. By midnight the gale had increased considerably, and the English crew, in addition to their previous exertions—having to work hard at the pumps—were almost worn-out. It was difficult, therefore, to spare hands to keep a proper look-out on the French prisoners.

Mr Leigh, calling Owen, sent him below to ascertain what they were about.

"I must get the fellows to take their spell at the pumps, if not, their lives will be sacrificed as well as ours."

This last remark Owen did not hear, although the same idea had occurred to him.

Supposing him to be an ordinary ship's boy, who had come among them for curiosity, the prisoners took little notice of him. The greater number were collected together in the fore-part of the lower deck. Some were playing cards, others with dice or dominoes. Some were lying down, others singing snatches of songs, talking and laughing, appearing to have forgotten altogether that they were prisoners. One group, composed chiefly, it seemed, of petty officers and able seamen, were standing together, engaged in more earnest conversation.

Owen, as he had been directed to do, stood by, counting their numbers, concealed by the foremast from the last-mentioned group. Taking no notice of Owen the Frenchmen continued their conversation. He was on the point of going away to report that the prisoners seemed very quiet, when he caught some words which made him listen with more attention. Although not accustomed to hear French spoken by Frenchmen, he had frequently read and talked French with his mother, and was well acquainted with the ordinary phrases in use. The Frenchmen went on. They spoke of the danger the ship was in. That before long she must anchor, when probably half the crew would lie down to rest, while the other half would be kept at the pumps. They appeared to know the coast; there were several islands abreast where they then were, with channels between them. Their intention was to master the English crew, cut the cables, and, making sail by dawn, to run through one of these channels, where the "Venus" might lie completely concealed. They would then have time to repair damages, and as soon as the English frigate had gone away, supposing her prize to be lost, they might make their escape. Only two French officers, however, remained on board who understood navigation, and they must be gained over. This the French boatswain undertook to do. Some thought their officers would not agree to the plan.

"Then they must be forced to do so," answered the boatswain; "we will make them prisoners as well as the English, or heave them all overboard together."

"That would be dangerous," remarked another, "for should we be retaken, they would hang us."

"The fortune of war, my friend," answered the boatswain; "remain where you are, that the English may see that you are amusing yourselves, while I pay a visit to our lieutenant and the young Aspirante. They surely will not refuse to enter into our plan."

Owen waited some time longer, but finding that he was not likely to gain any further information he stole away, concealed by the darkness, from where he had been standing, unperceived, as he hoped, by any of the prisoners. The boatswain, he believed, had not yet gone aft, he therefore hastened to report what he had heard to Mr Leigh.

"This is important information you have brought me," observed Lieutenant Leigh. "We can easily thwart the Frenchmen's plot, and I doubt whether their two officers would agree to it. I had no idea you understood French. The first thing to be done is to send a gang of these fellows to the pumps. They shall work whether they like it or not."

Calling Mr Stewart, the master's mate, who had accompanied him, Mr Leigh directed him to take a dozen armed men and to bring up thirty of the French crew. "If they refuse, let them understand that they will be placed in irons. Hartley, accompany Mr Stewart, and tell the Frenchmen why they are wanted."

The order was speedily put into execution. The Frenchmen grumbled, but as they had been deprived of all their weapons they could make no resistance, and the number required were marched up to the main deck. The French boatswain and several of his companions were greatly astonished, shortly afterwards, to find themselves handcuffed by another party of English seamen accompanied by their officers.

"You deserve it, you rascals," said the French lieutenant. "Did you suppose we should break our word of honour, and join you in your villainous plot?"

The greater number of the prisoners were now kept at the pumps, with the exception of those in irons and attending to the sick. In vain they expostulated. They could not deny that they intended to try and recapture the ship. The English crew were thus greatly relieved, and a portion were enabled to lie down and obtain the rest they so much required.

Thus night wore on, and as yet no sign of land had been discovered. Again the lead was hove. It gave twenty fathoms, shortly afterwards fifteen; and at the same moment, during a lull in the gale, the roar of breakers on a rocky shore could be heard.

Mr Leigh instantly gave the order to prepare for anchoring. The canvas was quickly taken in and the anchor let go. This was the moment the Frenchmen had intended to carry their plot into execution. The English officers, with a party of men, well armed, kept watch on them, and deprived of their leaders they dared not make the attempt. It was now a question whether the anchor would hold. A second had been got ready to let go if necessary, and the French lieutenant undertook, should they part from that, to pilot the frigate through one of the channels of which the boatswain had spoken, where she could remain in safety until the gale was over.

"I will trust you," said Mr Leigh, shaking him by the hand. "You have proved yourself a man of honour."

Notwithstanding the promised assistance of the French lieutenant, Mr Leigh felt considerable anxiety as to what might be the fate of the frigate. The French crew might still rise and attempt to retake the prize should they find themselves at a distance from the "Sylvia." The coast, too, was dangerous in the extreme, and it might be found impossible to reach the channel through which it was proposed to pass. Before sail could be made the frigate might be driven on the rocks under her lee, or the sails, if set, might be blown to tatters before she could again be brought to an anchor. With forebodings of evil, Lieutenant Leigh paced the deck. The night passed slowly away; when morning dawned the "Sylvia" was nowhere to be seen. The gale blew as furiously as ever. Captain Stanhope, in the crippled state to which his ship had been reduced by the action, although she had suffered much less than her opponent, had evidently considered it his duty to keep off the shore. "I should have done the same," thought Mr Leigh. "He would have risked the 'Sylvia's' safety by coming to our assistance. It was right to leave us to our fate."

Although a long scope of cable had been run out, the "Venus" rode uneasily over the heavy seas which came rolling in. Now she rose, now she pitched into them, as they passed under her, while the spray in thick showers broke over her bows.

Still the stout cable held, although the lieutenant cast many an anxious look astern, where little more than a quarter of a mile away the breakers burst with a continual roar on the rock-bound coast. They could distinguish the entrance to the passage some distance to the northward, but even had all the masts of the "Venus" been standing, and a strong crew been ready to make sail, the difficulty of gaining it would have been very great. Should the French prisoners have succeeded in carrying out their design, the frigate would have been cast away. The fate of the wounded would have been certain, and few of those on board would have escaped.

Ashurst still continued his ill-treatment of Owen. Nat saw him again strike him.

"It is the last time he shall do that," exclaimed Nat, who was a witness of what took place.

Without speaking to Owen, he hurried aft to where Mr Leigh was standing.

"Please, sir, I've something to say to you," said Nat, touching his hat.

"What is it, boy?" asked the lieutenant, concluding that Nat had to give him some information regarding the conduct of the French prisoners. "Are the fellows down below inclined to be mutinous?"

"I don't think so, sir," answered Nat; "but what I want to say is about Mr Owen Hartley, who first found out their plot and saved us all from having our throats cut. He is a gentleman, sir, and came out with us as a passenger on board the 'Druid,' and I think, sir, if this had been known, he would not have been sent forward amongst us boys. Mr Scoones, our first mate, who pretended to be the captain, knows it as well as I do, but he had a spite against Mr Hartley, and so declared that he was a ship's boy, and allowed him to be rated as such on board the 'Sylvia.' Mike Coffey, who belonged to the old ship, will tell you, sir, that what I say is true."

"I am ready to believe what you say, and when we return on board the frigate I will speak to the captain on the subject. But what makes you come up now to say this? I wish that you had given me the information before."

"Please, sir, Mr Hartley didn't wish me to do that," answered Nat, "but I could stand it no longer when I saw, every hour in the day, Mr Ashurst knocking him about and abusing him as if he were a dog. He won't complain himself, so I made up my mind to complain for him, for I was sure you would not allow Mr Ashurst to behave in that way if you knew it."

"Certainly not, my lad," answered the lieutenant, who, not standing on his dignity or resenting the unusual conduct of a boy for presuming to bring a complaint against a midshipman, respected Nat for his boldness and eagerness to protect his friend. "Send Mr Hartley aft to me, but do not let Mr Ashurst discover that you have complained of him."

Nat hurried forward. As soon as he could find Owen, without saying what he had done, he told him that Mr Leigh wished to speak with him. Owen went aft, not knowing what the lieutenant could have to say.

"Hartley," said Mr Leigh, "you appear to be superior to the other boys. In what capacity were you serving on board the ship in which you were cast away?"

Owen told him that he had come out as a passenger, but that, understanding mathematics and the principles of navigation, he had endeavoured to perfect himself in the science, as also to gain a knowledge of seamanship, although he had no intention of becoming a sailor, considering himself bound to return to the office in which he had been employed. Mr Leigh then questioned him, and learned more about his history.

"Had Captain Stanhope known this he would, I think, very likely, had you wished to enter the navy, have placed you on the quarter-deck. I cannot, of course, alter your rating now, but I will appoint you to act as my clerk, and I will let Mr Stewart and Mr Ashurst know that you are to mess with us, and that they are to treat you as a brother officer."

Owen could scarcely believe his senses when he heard this. How would Ashurst now behave to him? He himself would not of course refer to the treatment he had received from the hands of the midshipman, but would act as if nothing unpleasant had occurred between them. Mr Stewart, the master's mate, who was an amiable young man, had always treated him kindly, and would, he was sure, do so now.

It was nearly the dinner hour. "You will come at once into the cabin," said Mr Leigh; "there is no reason for delay."

Owen made his way forward, and told Nat what had happened.

Nat, who pretended to look very much surprised, said he was very glad to hear of Owen's good fortune. "But it's only your due," he added, "and please for the future remember that you are now in the midshipmen's berth, and a gentleman, that I am only a ship's boy, and treat me accordingly."

"I hope, Nat, I shall always treat you as a true friend, for such you have been to me," said Owen.

There was no time to lose. Owen managed to wash his hands and brush his hair, so that he might appear as neat as possible.

Mr Stewart had the watch, but Ashurst was in the cabin. He looked hard at Owen as he entered, supposing that he had come to receive some orders, or to wait at table. The two French officers were about to take their seats.

"I am glad to see you, Hartley," said Mr Leigh, when he came in.

Ashurst stared, and the colour rose to his brow.

"Messieurs," said Mr Leigh, turning to the French officers, "I beg to introduce this young gentleman to you. Ashurst, I now make him known to you as I intend to employ him as my clerk, and he will soon become your messmate, for I have little doubt, if he wishes it, when we return to the frigate, that Captain Stanhope will place him as a midshipman on the quarter-deck."

The first impulse of Ashurst on hearing this was to get up from the table, but he sat down again and fixed his eyes on Owen without saying a word. Owen, who at first felt somewhat strange at being thus suddenly introduced into the society of gentlemen, soon recovered himself, and behaved as might have been expected. He addressed Mr Leigh with freedom but perfect propriety, and spoke to the French officers in their own language. Although the eldest understood a little English, yet he expressed himself with difficulty in it.

Whenever Ashurst looked at him it was with a frown on his brow. He did not once speak to him, even though Mr Leigh attempted to make him do so. The dinner was got over rapidly, for it was not a time when the commanding officer could be long absent from the deck. The weather continued as before. So great was the strain on the cable that it appeared every instant ready to part. Hands were stationed at the stoppers of the second, ready to let it go should the first fail.

Owen had been sent into the cabin to make out some lists from notes which Mr Leigh gave him, the French lieutenant having supplied him with writing materials for the purpose.

Mr Leigh called Ashurst, who was on deck, to come to him.

"I am surprised at your conduct to young Hartley," he said. "I have myself observed it, and I should have supposed, now that I have thought fit to place him on the quarter-deck, that you would have welcomed him as a messmate. He is gentlemanly and well-informed, and I have no doubt that he is, as he states, a gentleman by birth."

"Pretenders often assume good manners when they have an object in doing so," answered Ashurst, in a scornful tone; "he appeared as a ship's boy, and I treated him as such, and made him do his duty."

"You may have bullied others, but you have shown a special ill-feeling towards this lad," answered Mr Leigh, feeling annoyed at the manner in which the midshipman spoke. "In future I beg that you will treat him as an equal."

"An equal, indeed! Do you forget, Mr Leigh, that I am the son of a nobleman, and that he is or was till a few minutes ago, merely a ship's boy!" exclaimed the midshipman, in a voice which made Mr Leigh almost smile.

"Had you said that in your berth, you would have been laughed at by all your messmates," observed Mr Leigh, "Come, come, I cannot listen to such nonsense. While you remain on board the prize, treat him as I desire, and when we rejoin the 'Sylvia' Captain Stanhope will see to it." Ashurst walked away, muttering something which Mr Leigh did not hear. All day long the weather continued the same as before, and night came on without any signs of an abatement of the gale. The British crew were well-nigh worn-out. Although the Frenchmen were now compelled to labour at the pumps, the English took a spell. They had, besides, to watch the prisoners, and be always on deck ready to let go the anchor and make sail. Not until morning did the wind begin to fall, although the sea appeared as heavy as ever. It burst forth again and blew with greater fury than before. Suddenly the cry arose—

"The cable has parted!"

"Let go the best bower," cried Lieutenant Leigh.

In an instant the stoppers were cut, and the cable ran at a rapid rate, setting the hawse hole on fire. The danger had been seen, and men stood ready with buckets of water to heave over it. The cable ran out to its full range.

"Does the anchor hold, Stewart?" asked the lieutenant.

"Yes, sir, it holds," answered the master's mate.

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculated Mr Leigh.

Before the fresh anchor brought up the ship, she had drifted much nearer the rocks. Should this cable part her destruction was inevitable.

The gale seemed to have exhausted itself by its last effort, and the wind now rapidly fell. Still the breakers burst with the same fury as before under the stern. More anxiously than ever every one on board waited for daylight.

As soon as it came, the lieutenant ordered all hands to get fresh stays on the jury mast preparatory to making sail, his intention being, should the wind come off the shore, to stand away from the coast, in hopes of falling in with the "Sylvia," and not finding her, at once to steer a course for Murrack.

At length a light wind began to blow off the land, but it was not sufficiently strong to make it prudent to cut the cable. Gradually it increased.

"All hands make sail!" shouted Mr Leigh.

The Frenchmen were as eager as the English crew to hoist away. The cable was cut and the prize stood off from the dangerous coast.

Chapter Nine.

The French crew, when all immediate danger was over, again began to show a mutinous disposition, some refusing to take their spell at the pumps, others forming groups and talking eagerly together. Owen ascertained, from what they were saying, that they believed the "Sylvia" to have gone down, so that if they could retake the frigate they might be able to make off with her. Some of them, having got hold of a cask of spirits, were becoming every instant more and more unruly.

"We shall have to clap the whole of them in irons, or lash them into their hammocks," observed Lieutenant Leigh to Mr Stewart.

Just then Owen, who had been sent to the mizen topmast head by Mr Leigh to take a look-out, shouted—

"A sail to the north-west, she is standing this way and close hauled."

On hearing this Mr Stewart went aloft with his spy-glass. After waiting some time he shouted—

"She is the frigate, sir, coming to look for us—no doubt about that."

The "Venus," by this time having got sufficiently far from the coast, was hove to. The Frenchmen, finding that they were out in their calculations, changed their conduct and became very submissive.

Before long the "Sylvia" was up to the prize. A boat came off from her, and Mr Leigh in return sent a report, written at his dictation by Owen, of what had occurred, with the request that the more troublesome of the prisoners might be removed. This occupied time, when the "Sylvia" shortening sail to keep company with the prize, the two frigates stood for the Bay of Murrumbidgee.

Here the French crew were sent on shore, the officers receiving permission, on giving their parole, to reside in the neighbouring village. Every effort was now made to repair the "Sylvia's" damages, and to fit the prize for going round to Batavia, where, it was hoped, a sufficient number of men would be found to man her, as she would prove a valuable addition to the British squadron in those seas. As soon as Mr Leigh was able he went on board the "Sylvia," taking Owen with him.

"Young Hartley has behaved admirably, sir," he said to Captain Stanhope. "Through his intelligence we were saved from being set upon by the Frenchmen, who had formed a plot to attempt the recapture of the prize."

He then gave the particulars with which he was acquainted of Owen's history.

"I believe I am right, am I not?" he continued, turning to Owen.

"Yes, sir," was the answer.

Captain Stanhope then put numerous questions to Owen, which he answered in an apparently satisfactory way.

"As my clerk—poor Jones—in our action with the 'Venus' was wounded and has since died, I will give you his berth at once," said the captain, "as I understand you are fully capable of filling it, and I may perhaps, if you wish it, place you on the quarter-deck as a midshipman, unless you would rather take any opportunity which may occur of returning to your friends. If you stick to the service you may rise in it."

"Thank you, sir," said Owen; "I wish to do as you think best. I am very willing to act as your clerk, and hope that I may give you satisfaction. I had not thought of entering the navy or remaining at sea in the merchant service."

"At all events, I will at once give you a rating as my clerk; you will then be on the quarter-deck and mess in the midshipmen's berth. In regard to your entering the service I will leave it to your further consideration."

"If poor Jones' things have not yet been sold I shall be happy to purchase them for Mr Hartley," said Mr Leigh.

The second lieutenant was a young man of good means.

"You shall do as you wish," said the captain. "At all events I will speak to the purser, and see that Hartley gets a proper outfit. The tailor will soon put a patch on his jacket should he become a midshipman."

Owen felt very grateful to the captain and his kind friend the second lieutenant. He did not hesitate for a moment about acting as the captain's clerk while he remained on board, but he asked himself the question whether it was not his duty, should he find the opportunity, to return to Mr Fluke's counting-house, from which he had not been formally dismissed. He had come only for a holiday to regain his health, and he considered that he was bound to go back again. He found, however, that, having once entered, he could not leave the ship without the captain's leave until she returned home and was paid off. There was now no help for it. Captain Stanhope was evidently a kind man, and would, should a favourable opportunity occur, allow him to go home. Still, Owen saw that the present was no time to talk about that. He at once set to work on his new duties, and he soon found, from the approval expressed by the captain, that he performed them satisfactorily.

Mr Scoones, who had not left the ship, wishing to go round in her to Batavia, looked very much astonished when he saw Owen in an officer's dress on the quarter-deck. He had himself, however, so completely lost credit with the officers from his conduct in the action that few of them spoke to him. He was glad therefore for some one to speak to. Going up to Owen, he addressed him with a patronising air—

"Glad to see that your talents have been discovered, my young friend," he said; "had I felt justified, I should have

recommended you to the captain from the first, but as you thought fit to associate with the ship's boys and men, I could not do so with any propriety."

"I do not know with whom else I could have associated, Mr Scoones," answered Owen, laughing. "You certainly showed no inclination for my society, and unhappily all the other officers were lost. Had it not been for the ship's boy you speak of, and the only man who remained sober, we none of us should have escaped."

"Well, well," answered Mr Scoones, "let bygones be bygones. If I get home first I will report your good fortune—that you are as strong and hearty as your friends could wish you to be. You will not, I suppose, send home an account of the shipwreck, for you and I may differ in our statements. Mine of course is the one which will be accredited, as no one at home will fancy that you can know anything about the matter."

"I should not wish to say anything to incriminate you," answered Owen; "but the lives of a great number of our fellow-creatures are at stake when an officer loses his senses, and I therefore hope that you will either give up drinking or quit the sea."

"Then you intend to accuse me of casting away the ship through drunkenness?" exclaimed Mr Scoones, looking as though he could eat Owen up.

"Whatever I say or do will be from a sense of duty," answered Owen.

A part of this conversation had been overheard by the first lieutenant, who held Mr Scoones in most supreme contempt, fully believing, from what he knew of him, that it was through his drunkenness that the ship had been lost.

"Mr Scoones," he said, addressing that person, "it has been decided that you should go on shore at once. If you are in a hurry to reach Batavia, you can, without difficulty, find your way overland."

A boat was just then about to shove off. The first mate of the hapless "Druid" having no traps to get ready, stepped into her, and was conveyed on shore.

"Hartley," said the first lieutenant, turning to Owen, "I wish you to draw up an exact account of the shipwreck, and state, to the best of your belief, how it occurred, and if corroborated by your two surviving shipmates, they shall sign it, and it shall be sent home. That fellow ought never to get the command of a ship, or sail again even as a mate."

Owen was sorry to leave Mr Leigh, who remained in command of the prize; at the same time he was glad to escape from Ashurst, who showed, during a short visit he paid to the frigate to get some of his traps, that he retained the ill-feeling he had all along manifested towards him.

Mike and Nat managed to come on board the "Sylvia" for a few moments to congratulate Owen, they having heard of what they called his good fortune.

"You are in your proper place now, Mr Hartley," exclaimed Nat; "one good thing is, that Mr Ashurst won't venture to hit you with the rope's end."

"Shure I'm mighty plased to see you made an officer, Mr Hartley," said Mike; "when you are a commander, as you will be sartain one of these days, I'd be proud to be your coxswain."

"I'm not a midshipman yet," answered Owen, laughing, "though I truly thank you for your good wishes."

Owen drew up a faithful report of the loss of the "Druid," which, meeting with the approbation of Captain Stanhope, was forwarded by the first opportunity. The repairs to the frigate and her prize having been made, they sailed to Batavia, where several other men-of-war were found at anchor.

Not without some, difficulty a crew was collected to man the "Venus," partly from the seamen of merchant vessels in port, as also from some who had been shipwrecked, with a few men-of-war's men from the "Sylvia" and other ships. Mr Hawkins, the first lieutenant of the "Sylvia," who had just been promoted to the rank of commander, received an acting order as captain of the "Venus," and Mr Leigh returned to the "Sylvia" as her first lieutenant. Owen was very glad to have Mr Leigh on board, as he had shown him so much kindness, and equally well pleased that Ashurst remained in the "Venus."

Ahurst, however, paid two or three visits to the "Sylvia," during which he made disparaging remarks about Owen in the mess.

Although several of the things were said in his presence, Owen took no notice of them. He trusted that he might win the regard of his new messmates by his uniform good conduct and gentlemanly bearing towards them. Still, he found that he had much to put up with. Ashurst possessed considerable influence in the berth, and there is an old saying, that "dirt cannot be thrown without some of it sticking." Owen was often treated in a contemptuous manner by several of the mates and midshipmen. He heard himself called a wretched young quill-driver, Cheeseeparings, junior—Cheeseeparings being the name gived to the purser—the captain's spy, or licenced talebearer, with many similar uncomplimentary epithets. He made no complaint even when Mr Leigh once kindly asked him if he was happy in the berth, nor did he reply in a way to excite the anger of those who were endeavouring to annoy him.

He knew that it could not last long. He had written to Mr Fluke, stating the position in which he was on board the "Sylvia," and asking whether it was his wish that he should return home and resume his duties in the counting-house. He dispatched a much longer letter to his friends at Fenside, giving a full account of his adventures. He did not forget either to write to Mrs Aggett, describing her husband's peaceful death, feeling that a knowledge of this would be far more consolatory to the widow, than should she suppose that he had been lost during the horrors of a shipwreck, which otherwise she would very naturally have concluded to have been the case. He was greatly puzzled whenever

he thought the matter over, to account for Ashurst's manner. As far as Owen could judge, Ashurst did not treat any of his other young messmates in the same way, although he might have been somewhat supercilious in his manner towards them, as if he considered himself a being of a superior order. Captain Stanhope was anxious, as soon as possible, to get away from Batavia, there being much sickness in the place, as is usually the case in that unhealthy town. He hoped, however, that the ships would escape, as he allowed none of the officers or men to visit the shore oftener than could be helped. Owen, however, on one occasion accompanied the captain, who had business to transact. They were returning to the harbour to embark when they met a party of natives, carrying a person on a stretcher, followed by several Dutchmen, and two or three English sailors. The bearers stopped on seeing the captain, supposing that he was some one in authority, and placed the stretcher on the ground.

"Please, sir," said one of the seamen, "we have just picked up this Englishman; can you tell us where we are to take him to?"

"To the public hospital of course," answered Captain Stanhope, "if the man is alive. But are you sure of that?" he asked, looking down.

Owen just then recognised the countenance of the first mate of the "Druid," as did also Captain Stanhope.

"I suspect that he is a subject for the dead-house rather than the hospital," observed the captain.

"Why, so I believe," cried the seaman, placing his hand on the mate's heart, and then lifting up his arm, it fell motionless by his side.

Captain Stanhope ascertained that the man had been seen to fall down, apparently in a drunken fit and had not since uttered a word.

"Take him to the hospital, and you will soon learn whether he is dead, or if there is any hope of his recovering," said the captain.

The bearers taking up the dead body—for dead he was, there could be no doubt—hurried on to the hospital as directed. Such was the ending of the first mate of the "Druid," and such has been that of countless numbers of seamen who have given way to the terrible vice of drunkenness.

Owen returned on board with the captain. It was his last visit to the shore. Indeed, attractive as the country is in appearance, few would wish to visit that pestiferous region. The two frigates having been refitted, sailed together for a cruise through the Indian seas.

Captain Stanhope's orders were to visit Amboyna, several of the Molucca islands, Banda Neira, and other places which had been lately captured from the Dutch. The castle of Belgica, the chief fort of Banda Neira, had been taken in an especially gallant manner the year before by Captain Cole, of the frigate "Caroline," and Captain Kenah, of the "Barracouta" sloop. Landing at night, during a violent storm, accompanied by Lieutenant Lyons and several other officers, they made their way to the rear of the citadel. Though discovered, scrambling up by means of scaling ladders, they forced their way in, and in a few minutes became masters of the castle.

Very naturally the officers and crew of the "Sylvia" regretted that they had not been there to share in the honour of the achievement.

Some months passed away in a satisfactory manner to Owen, as numerous places of interest were visited, especially the spice-producing islands, where he had an opportunity of seeing numberless objects of natural history. Birds of rare plumage, shells of magnificent size, tinted with the most beautiful colours, as well as curious animals, such as were to be seen in no other region. Owen, who was a fair swimmer, took every opportunity, when the ships were at anchor and bathing was possible, to improve himself in the art. Although others bathed with him, very few took as much pains as he did. His frequent companion on such occasions was John Langton, a master's mate, who, being older, was a superior swimmer, and seemed to take much pleasure in giving him instruction. They did their best to induce others to join them, but very few would take the trouble to learn to swim.

"We never can tell what may happen," remarked Langton. "A time may come when you may earnestly wish that you had learnt to swim. A person who can do so may be the means of saving not only his own life but that of others."

It was necessary, however, to be very careful, as many places in these seas swarmed with sharks and other marine creatures. They had always to select some lagoon, cut off from the ocean, or to keep a bright look-out when swimming along the shore, and never to venture far out. Owen, though still inferior to Langton, soon became an expert swimmer.

Two mails had come out from England, which, according to Owen's calculations, might have brought him letters, but none arrived, and he began to fear those he had written home had been lost. Not that he was very anxious to leave the ship, as he had already succeeded in overcoming the prejudices of his messmates, and even the most ill-natured had to acknowledge that he was not a bad fellow, although he might be somewhat mean-spirited. John Langton had from the first stood his friend in a judicious way. He had not defended him in his presence when attacked, seeing how wisely Owen was conducting himself, but he had taken good care to speak in his favour when he was not present.

Langton was a quiet-mannered, somewhat silent young man, but those who knew him best were very sure that he was capable of daring and doing, should an opportunity occur, as much as any man, and Owen was naturally drawn towards him. For some time he was the only person in the mess with whom he had much conversation. By degrees Owen's messmates forgot that he had been a boy before the mast, and treated him as one of themselves. He thus found the position as pleasant as he could desire, until one day while the frigates were in harbour Reginald Ashurst made his appearance on board.

"I'm come to take up my berth among you again," he said to Langton. "I should be very well pleased if it were not for having that little upstart Hartley in our mess. I expected that he would have been sent home before this. I wonder why the captain was induced to retain him?"

"I should think because he finds him very well qualified for the duties he has to perform," answered Langton. "If you had seen as much of him as we have, I think that you would have no reason to find fault with him."

"Birds of a feather flock together," muttered Ashurst, as he turned away.

Langton heard the remark, but took no notice of it. Owen had again a good deal to endure from Ashurst, and his temper was sorely tried. Often a retort rose to his lips, though he refrained from uttering it. A month or more went by. The two frigates had come round to the northern end of Celebes.

Captain Stanhope sent the "Venus" on to Batavia, while the "Sylvia" stood in for the port of Gorontello in the Bay of Tomonie, which place had been taken from the Dutch, and which was governed by a native prince who had declared his attachment to the British Government. Captain Stanhope's object was to communicate with the sultan, and to present him with some presents in order to retain his friendship. The frigate, however, had got within eight or ten miles from the port when it came on a perfect calm. Bringing the ship to an anchor the captain resolved to go on shore in the pinnace. He took with him Langton, Ashurst, and Owen, as also the purser, who went to purchase fresh provisions.

A small party of marines accompanied him to act as a guard of honour. The frigate being to the southward of the port, the boat after a long pull reached Gorontello. The visit to the sultan was paid, and passed off satisfactorily, although the ceremonies occupied a longer time than the captain had expected. The purser had purchased his stores, and got them on board. Some other delays occurred, so that it was late before the boat started to return to the frigate. A light wind was, however, blowing; sometimes it came from the northward and at others from off the land.

"If this wind holds we shall get down to the frigate in little more than an hour," observed Captain Stanhope to Langton.

Darkness in those latitudes, as is well-known, comes on very rapidly. The sun had set, the boat was carrying all sail, when the wind came off the land, from which she was then about two miles distant. Whether the coxswain had indulged in a glass of arrack on shore, or from some other cause, neither he nor any one else was keeping an eye to windward, as should have been done. Suddenly a squall struck the boat, and before the helm could be put down, or a sheet let go, over she heeled, and being already heavily laden with the fresh provisions, the water rushed in on the lee side, and she capsized. Providentially most of the provisions fell out of her, and her ballast consisting of water casks, instead of sinking, she floated keel upwards. The officers had previously taken off their swords, the marines let go their muskets, and nearly all hands, disentangling themselves from the rigging, got hold of the boat.

The captain, setting the example, climbed up on the keel, calling on his men to follow. All who could, did so. Two unfortunate marines, however, encumbered with their accoutrements, had remained under her. Their cries for help were almost immediately stifled. Owen found himself seated next to Langton.

"Help! help!" cried a voice close astern. "I cannot swim, and am sinking."

"It is Ashurst," exclaimed Owen; "come and help him."

Owen and Langton immediately slipped into the water, and striking out quickly got up to where Ashurst was struggling.

"Keep quiet, and trust to us," said Langton, seizing him by one arm. Owen grasped the other, and thus preventing him from clutching them, they towed him back to the boat; then telling him to hold fast while they climbed again on the keel, they hauled him up.

He was too much exhausted to speak, but he certainly made no attempt to express his thanks. A boat-hook and a couple of oars had been found floating close to the boat, and the men had placed them on the bottom. Langton proposed to Owen to swim round and pick up others. They succeeded in finding three more, but the rest by that time had drifted out of sight. They returned with those they had regained, and resumed their seats.

The captain, on calling over the names of the crew, found that, besides the two marines who had been drowned under the boat, two of the men were missing. The position of those on the boat was now perilous in the extreme. The wind was increasing, and was drifting her further and further from the shore. Although it was possible that she might be seen in the morning by the frigate, before that time all on her, in all probability, would be washed off.

"We might get help from Gorontello, as there are several boats in the harbour," observed the captain; "but it is not likely that the accident was observed there, unless any one by chance has been watching us through a spy-glass."

"I am afraid there is very little hope of that," answered Langton.

"We must endeavour to hold on until the morning, when the frigate may discover us," said the captain. "Cheer up, my lads, many men have been in a worse condition than we are and have escaped."

The seamen cheered, to show that they were not down-hearted, and were ready as ever to obey their captain.

"If we had but some food, we might fare better," observed the purser. "I think I see something floating near us now."

"I'll get it," cried Owen, slipping into the water and swimming towards it. The object proved to be a covered basket of

fruit, which he towed back in triumph. It was hauled up and secured. The men cried out for some at once.

"Stay, my lads," said the captain, "none of you can be very hungry or thirsty as yet. By-and-by I will serve out a share to each man." The sailors acquiesced without a word. "I fear that we shall drift out to sea," observed Captain Stanhope, after a silence of some minutes. "Although when we are missed Mr Leigh will certainly send boats in search of us, they will not know where to look. Could we by any means communicate with the shore, word might be sent along the coast, and those who are acquainted with the set of the current would easily know in what direction to pull."

"I might be able to swim to the shore, sir," said Langton, "but it is a long distance to go alone. Are any of you men good swimmers?"

No one answered. There was not a man who felt capable of accomplishing the feat.

"If I may go with Langton I will, sir," exclaimed Owen. "I never have swum as much as two miles, but I know that I can keep in the water a long time, and I think I can do it."

The captain hesitated. "I accept Langton's offer, but I would rather that an older person than you are should go. Since I was wounded I have been unable to make any violent exertion, and I am very sure that I should be unable to accomplish half the distance."

"I would gladly have Hartley accompany me," said Langton. "I have often seen him take a long swim, and come in as fresh as he was at starting. Every instant increases our distance from the shore."

"If you both feel confident that you can swim as far, I will no longer object," said the captain. "Before you go, however, take some of the fruit; it will refresh you, although it will not add much to your strength."

"Thank you, sir," exclaimed Owen, as if an especial favour had been granted him.

He and Langton each ate a small portion of the fruit, both offering up in the meantime an earnest prayer for protection.

"May Heaven preserve you, my lads," said the captain, as he shook their hands.

Having taken off their outer clothes, retaining only their drawers, socks, and shirts, they both together slipped into the water and struck out for the shore, which could still be dimly seen. Their companions cheered as they swam from the boat.

"We must not over-exert ourselves at first," said Langton, as Owen, putting forth all his strength, was shooting past him. "We shall both do it, please Heaven, but we must not be down-hearted although we appear to make but little way."

Owen, taking the advice, kept pace with Langton, who maintained a slow, steady stroke. They could hear the voices of their companions, who every now and then raised a cheer to encourage them. For some time the cheers sounded almost as distinct as those at first uttered.

"We can have got but a very short distance," remarked Owen.

"The sound travels further than you suppose," answered Langton. "We have made good way already."

On they went, every now and then speaking a word of encouragement to each other.

"I am thankful you came with me," said Langton; "it would have been far more trying had I been alone."

On and on they went, still the dark outline of the shore appeared as far off as ever. Now and then Langton proposed that they should turn on their backs. They could not venture to make way for any length of time in that position for fear of getting out of their proper course. Owen had somewhat overrated his strength. He began to feel his arms and legs ache, but he would not tell Langton of his sensations. At last he was compelled to propose that they should float for a short time. Langton guessed the cause, and willingly agreed.

In a minute Owen felt rested, and once more they proceeded. He was again about to propose taking another rest, and was turning on his back, when he saw rising above the water, a few feet from him, a triangular fin. Though certain that it was that of a huge shark, he resolved not to tell his companion. Dreadful were his feelings. At any moment the monster might discover them. As yet it had not apparently done so. The dark fin glided on, but another and another came into sight. There might be many more astern. Not one, however, deviated from its course, and the creatures at length disappeared. Not until then did Owen utter an exclamation.

"What was it?" asked Langton.

Owen confessed that he had seen the sharks.

"A good sign," said Langton, "it shows that they are not given to attack human beings in these waters. Don't let us trouble our heads about them."

This Owen found it was not so easy to do. It appeared to him that they had been hours in the water. The courage of the two swimmers was greatly tried, for still the land seemed as far off as ever.

More than once Owen felt that he could go no further. He prayed that strength might be given him, and again struck

out bravely. The sight of the sharks made him unwilling to rest even for a moment, for he knew as long as he kept his arms and legs moving there was less danger of being seized. At last a feeling came over him that he must give in.

"Push on ahead, Langton," he said, in a faint voice, "I will follow slowly; but I only detain you now."

"No, no, Hartley," answered Langton. "I will not desert you; cheer up, cheer up."

Just at that moment Langton felt his feet strike the ground. For an instant he feared that it was a shark, or some other monster fish, but, again putting down his foot he felt the hard, soft sand.

"Thank Heaven, Owen, it's all right, here's the bottom!" he exclaimed.

Both swimming on a few strokes more, Owen found that his feet also could touch the sand, and that he could stand up with his head out of water.

They waded on; the depth decreased but slowly, but still it did decrease. Langton's shoulders rose above the surface, he could now assist Owen. Exerting all their strength they made rapid way, and in a few minutes more found themselves standing on the dry beach.

Both offered up their thanks to Heaven for their preservation, when, Owen's strength failing, he sank down on the sand. Langton was the first to recover.

"Do not wait for me," said Owen. "I suppose you'll make the best of your way along, the shore until you get abreast of the ship, unless you can find a native boat before then to take you off to her?"

"That's what I propose doing," answered Langton; "but I will not leave you until you regain your strength."

In a few minutes Owen declared himself able to walk.

"Before we start let us try to find out whether any natives are near; they may be able to help us," said Langton.

They shouted at the top of their voices, but no reply was heard. They did so, believing that all the natives were friendly in that region.

"We must get help without delay," said Langton. "That we may have a double chance, I suggest, Owen, that you try to make your way back to Gorontello, which cannot be more than three or four miles off, while I go down towards the ship. If I fall in with a native boat, I will go off at once; if not, I will make a signal from the shore with a big bonfire, and Mr Leigh is pretty sure to send in a boat to learn the cause. You must, in the meantime, endeavour to obtain a boat. You are certain to find some one to interpret for you; promise a handsome reward to those who succeed in discovering the captain and the rest."

The plan was no sooner arranged than acted on. Owen, as fast as his legs could carry him, started along the shore in one direction, and Langton in the other. Sometimes Owen found the sand smooth enough, but at others he came to rough rocks, over which he had to climb. Now and then he saw a light on his left twinkling in the distance, but he passed no human habitation. Again and again, however, he shouted, hoping that some fisherman's boat might be concealed among the rocks. No one came near him, and he concluded that the people had retired for the night to their homes. Often, overcome by fatigue, he felt inclined to stop, but remembering that the lives of his captain and shipmates were at stake, he pushed on, now running at full speed along the sand, and now climbing over the rough ground.

At length, greatly to his joy, he saw some lights ahead, they showed that he was approaching the town. "I hope that all the people have not gone to bed. It will be a hard matter to rouse them up," he thought. "The lights show that some are up at all events." At length he got among the houses, or rather huts, for few of the buildings deserved a grander name. Some of the natives came out and stared at him, but he could not make them understand what he wanted. They did not, probably, recognise him as one of the smartly dressed officers who had paid a visit to the sultan in the morning. They saw, however, that he was a stranger. At last one made signs to him that he would show him where a person lived who could understand what he said; so Owen fancied was the meaning of the native's gesticulations. "Yes, quick," answered Owen.

The native led the way along several rows of huts, until they reached the door of a building of superior pretensions with a broad verandah overlooking the harbour. Owen at once called out—



“‘Vat you want?’ exclaimed Mynheer.

“Does any one understand English here? If so, I want their assistance without delay. I can promise a handsome reward to all who give it.”

“Come in, come in,” said a voice in a foreign accent. A native appeared at the door with a light in his hand. “Mynheer Van Wijk will see you,” said he, as he conducted Owen into a room where a white man was reclining in a hammock, with a huge pipe in his mouth, whom he supposed to be Mynheer Van Wijk, the owner of the mansion.

“Vat you want?” exclaimed Mynheer, gazing at Owen, as he stood, shoeless and hatless, in his still damp shirt and trousers.

Owen, in as few words as possible, explained who he was, and the accident which had happened.

“Donder en bliksem, dat is bad,” exclaimed the Dutchman, tumbling out of his hammock and putting on his coat and shoes. “Dare is no time to lose; we must go off at once. And you, young gentleman, want food and clothing. You’ll be getting fever if we don’t look after you. Mine young son’s clothes will fit you; you must put them on.”

He shouted, when a servant appeared, to whom he gave some orders. In a few minutes the servant returned with a bundle of clothes and a towel.

Owen thankfully exchanged his wet garments for the young Dutchman’s dress, although he was conscious that he cut a somewhat unusual appearance in it. He had scarcely time to finish his toilet before another servant came in with several dishes of food.

“Fall to,” said Mynheer Van Wijk; “we have no time to lose I have sent down to ze harbour to order two boats to be got ready. You and I will go in one, and my friend Jacob Leefkens will take charge of ze other. He known ze set of ze tides about here as well as any native.”

Owen quickly finished his repast, of which he stood greatly in need.

“My captain and the men with him have no provisions, and I should be thankful to take a supply if you will enable me to procure them,” said Owen.

“Of course we will carry food and water and scheidam for ze poor fellows,” said the Dutchman.

Owen accompanied Mynheer Van Wijk down to the harbour, where they found two boats, each manned by eight powerful-looking natives. Jacob Leefkens was evidently a seafaring man by the way in which he received Mynheer Van Wijk’s directions. Owen was thankful when he found himself thus far successful in commencing the search for his shipmates. He had described as minutely as he could the position of the boat when she was upset, and the two Dutchmen arranged their courses accordingly. The boats pulled on and on. Owen thought that they ought to have got up to the spot where he had left his shipmates. He shouted several times as loudly as he could, aided by Mynheer Van Wijk. The wind had risen considerably, and the further they pulled out the higher the sea was running. Owen began to fear that the people might have been washed off the boat, or that perhaps righting, she had filled and gone down. He thought, too, of Langton, and the dangers he might have to encounter. On speaking on the subject to Mynheer Van Wijk the reply was—

“They are not good people down there; they are too fond of cutting off heads, and a white man himself would be looked upon as a prize.”

“I trust such has not been the fate of my friend,” said Owen.

"The natives have probably gone to their huts, and his safety will depend on his not falling in with them," observed Mynheer Van Wijk.

From time to time Owen continued to shout, so that they should not pass the boat without being discovered. Jacob Leefkens at last rejoined them.

"I am afraid she's gone to the bottom," he observed.

"Do not say that, Jacob," answered Mynheer Van Wijk. "We will search for them until to-morrow night, if we do not find them before."

This last remark was consolatory to Owen, and thankful he was that he had fallen in with the honest Dutchman. Now the boats rowed further off shore, now pulled along parallel with it. Owen saw that it would have been impossible for Langton to have found the boat, and, having righted her, to have towed her back to the ship.

Again Jacob, shouting from his boat, declared that the boat must have gone down, as not a sign of her appeared.

"Perhaps I mistook her position," suggested Owen.

"Well, we will push on further," said Mynheer Van Wijk. "Let us give one more hearty shout together."

All three, joined by the natives, raised their voices.

Just then a faint sound came from the southward.

"There they are! there they are!" cried Owen. "They heard us, and are holloaing in return."

The natives were ordered to give way, and in a few minutes more a louder "holloa" was heard.

They were evidently nearing the boat.

Owen, eager to know how they had fared, stood up and hailed them as he approached.

"Are all safe?"

"Ay, ay," was the answer.

In a short time Mynheer Van Wijk's boat was alongside the pinnace. One by one the people were taken off her, Captain Stanhope remaining until the last. Several of them were greatly exhausted, especially Ashurst, who could scarcely speak. Captain Stanhope grasped Owen by the hand. His first question was for Langton. He felt satisfied when Owen told him that, after landing safely, he had gone in the direction of the ship along the shore.

As the captain was unwilling to lose the boat, he accepted Jacob Leefken's offer to right her, and to tow her back to the frigate. He was specially anxious that this should be done, as they would probably fall in with Langton on the way, and save him from a vain search.

Captain Stanhope was also very glad to accept Mynheer Van Wijk's invitation to his house, as it was a long pull back to the frigate.

"Hartley," said the captain, "you have acted nobly in risking your life for the sake of saving those of your shipmates. I shall never forget it, and I will not fail to make known your conduct to those in authority, who will still better than I am be able to promote your interests. I before told you that I should be ready to rate you as a midshipman, and immediately on our return to the frigate I will do so. You may depend upon rising in the service while I live and possess any influence."

On hearing Mynheer Van Wijk's report of the natives the captain became very anxious about Langton. Owen at once volunteered, if Mynheer Van Wijk would provide a boat, to pull along the shore, and ascertain whether he had succeeded or not in getting off to the frigate. Several of the boat's crew offered to accompany him.

The rest, including the captain, were too much exhausted to make the attempt. Ashurst declared that he should not be fit for duty for a month to come, he felt so thoroughly done up.

The Dutchman promised the boat at daybreak, observing that it was of no use to start before then.

Owen, for the sake of his friend, was eager to be off, and, in spite of the fatigue he had gone through, he was up at dawn. He aroused those who were to accompany him, and Mynheer Van Wijk leading the way, they hurried down to the harbour. The latter did not offer to go with them, "as he must," he observed, "attend to the captain and other guests on shore," but he sent a competent interpreter, who would enable Owen to communicate with the natives.

As the boat pulled out of the harbour, it was found that the wind had changed to the southward. No sooner did the sun rise than his rays struck the white canvas of the frigate, which was seen under all sail standing for them. Owen steered towards her, in order to ascertain whether Langton had got on board. Shortly afterwards he caught sight of two men-of-war boats, one under sail, the other pulling.

"Hurrah! Langton must have escaped then," he exclaimed. In a few minutes he was up to the nearest, and Langton himself answered his hail. He had got on board with less difficulty than he had expected in a native boat, and seemed but little the worse for his exertions.

In a short time they were on board, and having answered the numerous questions put to them, were both thankful to

turn into their hammocks and get the rest they so much required.

In the evening the captain and the rest of the people returned on board, and a substantial acknowledgment having been made to the worthy Dutchman, next day the frigate sailed for Batavia.

Chapter Ten.

Owen found himself in a very different position to what he had ever before been on board. He at once received the rating of a midshipman, and donned his new uniform. No one was inclined to snub him, and even Ashurst treated him with respect, though at the same time with marked coldness.

"I wonder that you do not show more gratitude to Hartley, who was undoubtedly the means of saving your life," remarked Langton to Ashurst one day.

"He save my life!" answered Ashurst. "You had an equal share in that important act. My heart is not big enough to be grateful to both. I am very much obliged to you, I can assure you."

"I consider that Hartley had the largest share," answered Langton, laughing; "his courage inspired me, and it was he, at all events, who rescued you with the captain when you were on the boat's bottom."

"Well, some day I may prove that I am grateful," said Ashurst, turning away, evidently unwilling to continue the subject.

The frigate remained some time at Batavia. During that period several of the men who had formerly belonged to the "Sylvia" were transferred from the "Venus" to her, among whom were Mike Coffey and Nat Midge. Owen was very glad to see his old friends again. He had now an opportunity of showing them occasionally little acts of kindness in return for the regard which they had always exhibited towards him.

"Didn't I say, Mr Hartley, that you'd be a captain some day, and so I'm shure you will if you stick to the sarvice," said Mike. "And shure a fine captain you'll be afther making. When you want a crew you'll only have to hold up your hand, and the men will flock on board, I'll stake my davy."

Nat, although he had been so intimate with Owen never presumed in consequence, but ever showed an eagerness to obey him on duty.

The "Sylvia" again sailed on a cruise in one direction, while the "Venus" went in another.

Owen rapidly gained a knowledge of his new duties, and became one of the smartest midshipmen on board. The captain showed him unusual favour, frequently inviting him to dine in the cabin, and treating him as if he were his son.

"I am not afraid of spoiling Hartley," he remarked to Mr Leigh; "he remains as modest as at first, and would evidently not think of presuming on the service he has rendered me and his other shipmates. I, of course, do not forget Langton, and will take good care that he obtains his promotion on our return home. In my last report to the admiral I specially mentioned his gallant conduct. I received a pretty strong hint to favour Ashurst, but he has managed never to do anything which would allow me to say a word to his advantage."

The frigate was chiefly engaged in capturing Malay and other piratical craft, which at that time swarmed in those seas. She had just taken a large proa, with a villainous crew, and lay at anchor in a channel between Mindano and one of the Sooloo islands. The prize was anchored a short distance astern, most of her crew having been removed, while a guard was placed over the remainder. It was a calm and lovely night. The moon shed a pale light over the smooth surface of the sea, while the land appeared on either hand covered with graceful trees coming down to the very edge of the water. Here and there fantastic rocks rose above the surface. It was the middle watch, which Owen was keeping under Langton, who now did lieutenant's duty. Owen was walking the deck, gazing on the calm sea, now on one side then on the other, now going forward to ascertain that the ship was not by chance dragging her anchors.

The first stroke of four bells was just sounding when, having just reached the forecastle, he suddenly saw a bright light astern, followed by a loud roar, which he knew alone could proceed from the Malay proa. She had blown up. He heard Langton's voice ordering a boat to be lowered, and was on the point of running aft when he felt the deck beneath his feet tremble. A roar far greater than that which had just been heard sounded in the midnight air. For a moment the ship appeared to be enveloped in flame. He experienced the sensation of being lifted up, when he lost all consciousness. How long he continued senseless he could not tell. On recovering he found himself in the water, amid a mass of spars and rigging and fragments of timber, and he caught a glimpse of the upper works of the frigate descending beneath the waves. Here and there, scattered over the surface, were struggling human forms. Arms held up, and hands clasped together. One by one they speedily disappeared. Although almost overcome with horror, he struck out towards a spar of a size which promised to afford him support. As he got nearer, he saw that two other persons had just reached the spar, and were in the act of climbing up to place themselves on it.

"I'll swim on and find another position on the wreck to support me!" Owen cried out.

"Hurrah! 'shure it's Mr Hartley. No, no, sir; come here. Bedad there's room enough for you, and half a dozen more of your weight!" cried out Mike Coffey, who was one of the persons, and Nat was the other. "I'd sooner swim off myself, Mr Hartley."

Owen accordingly complied, and found that the spar would support them all.

"What has been and happened?" asked Nat, still not recovered from the terror.

"The frigate has blown up by accident, or through treachery, of that there is no doubt," answered Owen. "It is dreadful, most dreadful, and I fear that the greater number of our shipmates have been lost; still a few may have escaped, and we must try to help them. Hark! I heard some one cry out not far off. If we cut away the rigging from this spar, we may be able to move it through the water." They got out their knives and worked away. Again the voice was heard. "Help! help!"

"I'll swim off and see if I can render any assistance," said Owen. He swam towards a mass of wreck. On getting near it he saw that a person was hanging on with his body in the water, without apparently strength enough to climb up and secure himself. Owen immediately clambered on to the wreck, and was then able to drag up the other person.

"Ashurst, is it you?" he asked, recognising his messmate.

"Yes, but I am fearfully hurt in the side and leg, and have no strength left to help myself."

Ashurst continued to groan. He had not yet discovered that it was Owen who had assisted him.

The first impulse of Owen was to stand up and try and ascertain whether any other persons were floating near whom he and Mike might help. He listened. A few faint cries, apparently from a distance, reached his ear, but he could not tell from which direction they proceeded; he could only hope that others had succeeded in getting on portions of the wreck.

In a short time Mike and Nat managed to get up to him. Owen proposed that they should form a raft with the spars and smaller pieces of timber floating about, on which they might be able to make their way to the land. The large piece of wreck on to which Mike and Nat had now climbed seemed to be stationary. They were therefore able to move about it, and began to form the proposed raft from the spars which they secured alongside.

Scarcely had they commenced the work, when a voice was heard at no great distance.

"Who is that?" shouted Owen. "Do you want help?"

"Langton," was the answer. "I thought I heard voices. Do not move, I will be with you presently."

In a short time Langton swam up. Owen and his two companions greeted him warmly. Ashurst lay still, occasionally uttering a groan.

"I am indeed thankful that you have escaped," said Owen to Langton. "We were doing our best for poor Ashurst; he wants assistance, and I should have been much troubled how to act. Do you think any one else has escaped?"

"I hope a few have," replied Langton; "but the greater number of our shipmates are, I fear, lost."

"Although our lives have been saved for the present, we are still surrounded by dangers. We must do our duty and trust to God. I'll now turn to and help you to build the raft. It is the first thing we have to do, that is certain."

Langton's assistance was of great value, as he was experienced, and very active. Having lashed all the spars they could find of about the same length side by side, they crossed them with others of a smaller size, and pieces of plank, placing a sort of platform in the centre, the whole being lashed together with ropes which they cut off the spars. It was, of course, roughly formed, but was large enough to support, not only themselves, but any other people they were likely to pick up. By the time it was finished, Ashurst had somewhat recovered, and Langton and Owen carried him and placed him on the platform where he could be out of the wet. They had kept two of the lighter spars for a mast and yard, and they picked up a royal unburnt, which would serve as a sail.

Dawn broke just as they were ready to shove off from the wreck.

"Where are we going?" asked Ashurst, in a faint voice.

"To the nearest shore we can reach," answered Langton; "when there we must consider what next to do."

"Can't you give me some water, or some fruit? I am very thirsty," said Ashurst.

"I am sorry we have nothing to give you," answered Langton; "we may possibly pick up something when we have daylight."

"I've a chaw of baccy, sir," said Mike; "it's me last, but it's at yir sarvice."

Poor Ashurst uttered an expression of disgust. Just then Owen thankfully recollected that he had put a couple of small limes, some of which he had been eating late on the previous evening, into his pocket. He immediately skinned one of the refreshing fruit, and handed it in small pieces to Ashurst.

"This from you, Hartley?" he said, as he swallowed it eagerly.

"I have another which will be at your service when you want it," said Owen, not noticing the remark, and feeling intense pleasure at thus being able to help his suffering messmate. Every thought of the ill-treatment he had received vanished from his mind. Langton and Owen now examined Ashurst's hurts. They found that his left arm had either been dislocated or broken, and that a splinter had torn his side and severely wounded him.

"He is in a bad way," whispered Langton to Owen; "had one of the surgeons been with us, he might have been doctored, but as it is, I do not think he will weather out what we shall have to endure. I ought to tell him so if he gets

worse, but we will do our best for him.”

As daylight increased, they saw other masses of wreck floating about, while a portion of the shattered upper works of the frigate appeared above the water with several men clinging to them. A current, however, was running from the wreck, slowly drifting the raft away. Who the people were it was impossible to say at that distance.

“Unless a breeze springs up to blow us back we cannot get up to them,” said Langton; “we will rig our sail, however, in case it should come.”

While engaged in setting up the mast, Mike and Nat especially were keeping an eye on the water around them, in the hopes of picking up something that might be floating by.

Without giving notice of what he was about to do, Mike suddenly sprang off the raft and swam out towards an object of which he had just caught sight.

“This will serve us for mate and drink too,” he exclaimed, as he swam back, pushing before him a couple of melon-like fruit. He handed them up to Nat, and without getting on the raft, swam off to the other side, where he saw a small barrel, which proved to contain biscuits. This was but a small supply of food; but the fact that they had found it made them hope that more might be obtained. The water remained perfectly smooth, which was an advantage.

As the sun rose the heat became intense. Poor Ashurst suffered greatly, even though Owen gave him piece by piece the remainder of the lime, and then supplied him with small bits of the melon.

At Langton’s suggestion they attempted to get up to the wreck, but as they had only pieces of plank to row with, and the raft was heavy, they made no progress against the current. They saw, however, that their shipmates were endeavouring to imitate their example, and were engaged in making another raft; but several, it was too evident from the way they clung to the wreck, were severely injured and unable to exert themselves. As far as Owen and his companions could make out, the people they saw had on only their shirts and trousers. It was impossible to ascertain, therefore, whether any were officers. Langton feared not.

The land appeared on either side of them, and another island stretched away to the southward, closing the channel, so that they might hope, in the course of a few hours at most, should a breeze spring up from the east or west, to reach the shore. Still hour after hour went by, the raft driving further and farther to the southward, and away from the wreck, until the people moving about on it could no longer be distinguished.

In the meantime they had been unsuccessful in obtaining any further provisions. Owen regretted that they had not secured another piece of canvas with which to form some sort of shelter above poor Ashurst. All they could do was to hoist up the sail, so as to throw a shadow over his head. Langton, who had had a long swim, felt much fatigued, and charging Owen to call him should any change take place, he lay down to obtain the rest he so much needed.

Owen, meanwhile, was seated by Ashurst’s side. The latter was continually speaking, though Owen thought that he occasionally rambled.

“Hartley,” he said at last, “do you think that I’m dying?”

“You are evidently very ill; but I hope, if we can get you on shore, that you may yet pull through it.”

“Do you wish me to recover?” asked Ashurst.

“Of course I do,” answered Owen; “and I have been praying to God that you may.”

“You do not know what you have been praying for then,” murmured Ashurst. “I have ill-treated you, and have shown in every way I could the hatred I felt.”

“Pray do not talk of that,” said Owen. “I never hated you.”

“You had infinitely more cause to do so than I had to hate you,” answered Ashurst.

He was silent for a minute or more; then he exclaimed suddenly—

“Hartley, did it ever occur to you that we are relatives? My family name was Hartley until we changed it for Ashurst. Do you know why we changed it? Because it was asserted that the elder branch of the family was extinct, although my father and my elder brother—who is now Lord Arlingford—knew that such is not the case. My brother has no children, and when I last heard from home he was very ill. In case of his death I should succeed to the title, though as well aware as he is that I have no just right to it. There seems to me but little prospect that either you or I will escape, but I feel that I must unburden my mind. When I first saw you on board and heard your name, I immediately thought that you must belong to our family. Upon making further inquiries I was convinced of it. I hated you, not that you had done anything to offend me, but because my family had kept you out of your just rights. You have returned only good for evil. But can you now forgive me for the great wrong which I have done you?”

“Indeed I can do so most heartily,” answered Owen; “but I confess that I do not understand all you have been telling me, nor how your family can have injured mine. I know that we had relations of noble birth, and I should think that my father, had he possessed any claim to the Arlingford title and estates, would not have failed to assert it.”

“He was not aware, perhaps, that several of the intermediate heirs had died in rapid succession, and that my father had been tempted successfully to make his claim.”

Ashurst as he spoke was evidently becoming weaker and weaker, and although Owen would gladly have obtained

more information from him, yet he had not the heart to do so. He had very little hope indeed that Ashurst would recover, but still was unwilling to tell him how ill he was, lest it should lower his spirits and do harm.

The raft all this time was floating on the calm sea, drifting slowly down the channel; but as there was not a breath of wind, with only the pieces of board, it could scarcely be urged through the water.

Mike and Nat sat watching for anything likely to be of use which might appear on the surface of the water. Owen devoted all his attention to Ashurst, who was constantly complaining of the pain the wound in his side caused him, and of the thirst he was enduring.

At last Owen asked him if he thought that he should recover?

"I dare not think about it," answered Ashurst. "I have lived a careless life. I have done much evil, and no good that I can bring to my remembrance. I can only now look forward to a few hours of suffering before I quit the world. I wish that I had perished with the other poor fellows. I do not know why I was saved, except as a punishment for my sins."

"No, no, that could not have been," answered Owen. "You were preserved because God loves you, and still to the last moment offers you salvation. Turn to Him through Christ. He has said that although your sins might be as scarlet, they may become as white as snow. God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. Believe in His glorious promises."

"I find it a hard matter to do so," groaned Ashurst, "but I will try."

Owen offered to pray with him, and knelt down by his side. Ashurst's lips continued to move, but his voice grew weaker and weaker. At length Langton awoke. No sooner did he cast his eyes on Ashurst than he gave a look at Owen and whispered, "He is going."

He took his messmate's hand, who returned the pressure he gave, but gradually the fingers relaxed. Langton and Owen bent over him; ere another minute had passed he was dead.

"Poor fellow!" said Langton. "Although he was no favourite of mine, I am truly sorry."

"So am I," said Owen; "and I heartily forgive him for the way in which he used to treat me. He has been making a strange confession to me, and has been telling me that, I am the rightful heir to the title and property his brother at present possesses. I do not think he was wandering, as he seemed so very certain about the matter; but I should have been glad if you had been awake to hear him."

"He may or may not have spoken the truth," said Langton; "but before you can benefit by the information you have received, we must get home. It seems more than doubtful whether we shall ever reach the shore."

Langton and Owen were unwilling to throw their messmate overboard, for they had nothing to sink the body.

"We must try and carry it to the shore and give it burial," said Langton.

Owen was perfectly ready to do this, though when they should reach the shore was a question.

Hour after hour the calm continued. Often they could scarcely bear the heat. Langton, who took the command, served out a small piece of melon at a time, which somewhat alleviated their thirst, while the biscuits—though wetted by the water, which had got into the cask—satisfied their hunger.

At length, towards evening, a breeze from the northward sprang up. The sail was hoisted, and by means of a paddle on either side they managed to steer the raft.

"We are making nearly two knots an hour," said Owen, as the breeze freshened. "During the night we shall, I hope, reach the island to the southward."

"That depends on what currents we encounter, or whether the wind continues," answered Langton; "I would rather get up to the shore at daylight when we may choose a place for landing."

The raft required all their attention, for the sail being large it might in a moment have been upset. Nat was stationed at the halyards, and Mike at the sheet, while Langton and Owen steered. Darkness came on, but the breeze continued. They appeared to have made good progress. The fear was that the wind might increase still more. Langton thought it prudent to reef the sail. Scarcely had they done so than a squall came over the water, and sent the raft flying along at a far more rapid rate than it had hitherto moved. The wind, however, soon again dropped, and the raft moved on as slowly as before. The night became unusually dark, the sky was obscured, and it was impossible to ascertain in what direction the raft was drifting. The party on it could only hope that it was continuing on the same course as before, still it was possible that it might be drifting out through either of the channels to the right or left, and that they might miss the island which they had hoped to reach. Mike and Nat kept up their spirits.

"If it was not for poor Mr Ashurst I'd be afther singing yer a stave to prevent you from getting down-hearted," exclaimed Mike, "though it would not do just now, lest the poor young gentleman might be thinking we were afther wakin' him."

"No, pray do not sing," said Owen; "it would be more sensible to pray for assistance, for we must admit it is very little we can do to help ourselves."

During the night they satisfied their hunger with the biscuits, reserving the fruit for the time when the hot sun would increase their thirst. Langton persuaded Owen, who had hitherto not slept, to lie down and take some rest. He was glad to do this, indeed at times he could scarcely keep his eyes open. He was awakened by an exclamation from Mike

—
“Arrah! now, how’s the land got out there?”

He started up, as did Langton, who had also fallen asleep, and on looking to the eastward he saw two islands, between which the raft must have drifted some distance astern, a strong current having carried them through the passage at a faster rate than they had supposed possible. It was a bitter disappointment. Unless the wind should come from the west they could not hope to make either of the islands, as they would, at all events, have the current against them.

“What do you recommend, Langton?” asked Owen.

“We must wait and see what will next happen,” answered Langton. “In case we should be kept out much longer we must economise our provisions. I have no other fear for the present, unless the weather should change.”

“We can put our trust in God; we know that He orders everything for the best,” said Owen.

They ate a little more biscuit, which was divided in equal shares. Each took a small portion of fruit. Owen and Langton were looking towards Ashurst’s body.

“We shall not get in in time to bury it after all,” observed Langton; “we must give him a sailor’s grave.” It was time, indeed, to do so. “Before we launch the poor fellow overboard let us see what things he has about him,” said Langton.

He took a ring off Ashurst’s finger as he spoke. His watch and several smaller articles were found in his pockets.

“Here, Hartley, you had better take care of these,” he said, “as they may be of value to you in some way or other, or you can return them to his nearest kin, whom you are more likely to meet than I am. Come, Coffey, lend a hand here,” continued Langton, and between them, taking up the body of the young officer, they allowed it to slip overboard. Greatly to Owen’s satisfaction it sank immediately.

“Poor fellow,” said Langton again, “I should have been truly thankful had he lived.”

Almost immediately after this a breeze sprang up, but it came off the land and drove the raft further and further away. They were all silent for some minutes, their position was becoming truly critical. Langton at length got up and looked about him.

“I see land away to the west. I believe that we shall reach it much sooner than we can hope to do that to the eastward if we hoist our sail and take advantage of the breeze.”

To this proposal Owen agreed, and the sail being set the raft glided rapidly over the water. Still, after going some distance, only the dim outline of the land towards which they were steering could be distinguished. All that they knew about it was that it must be one of the Sooloo Archipelago, and that most of those islands were inhabited by a savage race addicted to piracy.

These might, however, treat them kindly, though it was more possible that they would keep them in slavery. As they were running before the breeze the wind assisted but little to temper the rays of the sun which beat down on their heads. Their thirst increased, it was with difficulty that they could refrain from consuming the last remnants of their fruit. Langton, however, gave out only a very small piece at a time, which helped to moisten their throats and tongues, though it did little more. At the rate they were going, even should the breeze continue, it would take nearly the whole of the day to reach the land. Since the morning they had, however, undoubtedly neared it.

“We must hope for a bright night,” said Owen, “and we shall then be able to steer by the stars, although we may not see the land.”

When the sun went down Langton calculated that they were still nearly fifteen miles off. By this time their thirst became excessive. They had a little biscuit remaining, but the last piece of fruit had been divided among them. They hoped by next morning, at all events, to have got in close to the land, should the breeze not fail. They scarcely dared to contemplate their position should they be exposed another day to the hot sun on the raft without water.

Owen and Langton agreed to keep watch and watch, the former taking Mike and the latter Nat. For two or three hours after sunset the breeze continued to blow steadily, and the cool night air greatly restored their strength. The sky was clear and the stars shone brightly. They had taken the bearings of the land, and had no fear of not keeping to their proper course.

It was Owen’s watch, the raft had been gliding on briskly, when suddenly the sail gave a flap against the mast, and then hung down motionless.

“Let go the halyards!” he sang out. Before this could be done the sail was taken aback. Owen sprang forward to assist Mike in lowering it. Greatly was he disappointed to find the wind blow directly from the shore, and all hope of further progress, unless it should again change, denied them. He called up Langton, who at a glance perceived what had happened.

“We must get out the paddles and work away during the cool of the night,” he said. “Perhaps some current may be setting towards the shore and assist us.”

The proposal was at once adopted. All night they paddled on until their arms ached. Though sure that they were on their right course the land could not be seen. Morning again came, when bitter was their disappointment to find

themselves still a long way from it.

A sigh escaped Langton. "It cannot be helped; it is God's will, we must submit," he said. "Perhaps a breeze will again spring up." There was nothing to be done; not a particle of fruit, not a biscuit remained. Langton did not express his apprehensions to his younger companions, but the dreadful thought forced itself upon him that they would all perish. He knew that they could not without water endure another day exposed to the rays of the sun. Hour after hour passed, the land within five or six miles of them, and yet without the means of reaching it.

Evidently a current, instead of setting them towards the land, was sweeping them away from it. In vain they tried to paddle against the current, they had at length to give up the contest.

Collected around the platform in various attitudes they waited on. Mike and Nat had thrown themselves down at full length. Owen, unwilling to succumb, still sat upright, occasionally getting on his feet to look about, but as the fever in his veins increased he felt his strength diminish. Langton sat near him with his arms folded, resigned to his fate; he



"A breeze from the eastward!"

had done his utmost, he felt he could do no more. The day wore on. Owen cast his eyes around the horizon in the hopes that some help would come. Even a Malay proa, manned by pirates, would have been welcomed. Savage as they might be they would scarcely allow four human beings to perish thus miserably.

Owen had been sitting for some time without moving. He felt that he scarcely had strength to rise again.

"I must get another look-out," he said to Langton. He stood up on the platform, holding by the mast. He had not been there many seconds when he exclaimed—

"A breeze from the eastward!"

A dark line was seen suddenly advancing over the shining ocean, it increased in width, the whole surface became rippled with tiny wavelets. The sail blew out, the raft glided on more rapidly than it had hitherto done. The comparatively fresh air restored strength to the almost exhausted occupants of the raft. The shore rose before them, and their eyes were gladdened by a bright cascade falling over the rocks, and in a bubbling stream making its way to the ocean. How intensely they longed to reach the land! A small bay opened out before them, towards which Langton steered the raft, until at last it grounded on the smooth sandy beach.

Langton and Owen, who were the strongest, assisted their companions to land. They could do no more. While Mike and Nat sank down on the ground, unable to move further, they crawled rather than walked on towards the waterfall. In a few minutes, though it seemed a long time to them, the stream came in sight. Even then, with difficulty, they could reach it. Stretching themselves out, with their hands in the cool water, they eagerly drank the refreshing fluid, which seemed to put new life into them. They rose to their feet. They had not forgotten their companions. How was the water to be carried? They had neither hats nor shoes. On the beach lay several large shells. They selected two, which appeared perfectly clean, and filling them with water hurried back to where they had left Mike and Nat.

The former was making signals, and pointing to the boy, who appeared to be unconscious. Owen put the water to his lips, and sprinkled his face. He opened his eyes, and as the water trickled down his throat he began to revive. In a few minutes he seemed himself again and could sit up. Their thirst satisfied, they were assailed by the pangs of hunger. As there was abundance of shell-fish they had no fear of starving, while the woods they hoped would afford them fruit of some sort. They soon found on some rocks on one side of the bay an ample supply of shell-fish. Mike at once began to eat them raw.

"Stay!" exclaimed Langton. "Let us refrain until we have cooked them, when they are less likely to do us harm."

"But how are we to get a fire?" asked Owen.

"I have a burning glass in my pocket," said Langton.

Dry sticks were soon collected, and some moss, which ignited almost immediately the glass was held over it. A bright fire was kindled. The shell-fish were cooked, Langton having selected those which appeared to him most likely to prove wholesome.

"We are better off here than we were on the sand-bank," observed Mike. "We escaped from that, and we'll be after getting away from this before long."

While he was speaking Owen happened to turn his eyes to the southward.

"A sail! a sail!" he exclaimed.

Just rounding a point of the island which had hitherto hid her from sight appeared a large ship, the heads of her courses already rising above the horizon.

"We must make a signal or she may pass us," exclaimed Langton. "The mast and yard of our raft will serve as a flag."

Mike possessed a coloured handkerchief, which he had hitherto worn round his waist. Other handkerchiefs were produced. Nat contributed his shirt, so that a flag of good size was formed.

The fire having been first made up so as to emit a large amount of smoke, they hastened with their flagstaff to the end of the point, where it was speedily erected. As no other means of attracting the attention of those on board could be devised, they sat down, anxiously waiting the result. With some small line, which they got from the raft, they drew out the flag so as to present a broad surface to the approaching ship. Her hull soon rose above the water.

"Thank Heaven! She is a British sloop-of-war, and is sure to keep a bright look-out," said Langton. "She will pass within a mile of the island, and cannot fail to see us."

The wind had by this time shifted to the southward. The corvette—for such she was—came on before it, under easy sail, with the lead going.

The party watched her with intense eagerness. Every moment they feared that she might haul off the shore, but the water was deep, and she continued on her course. Already she was abreast of the spot where the signal was flying.

"She takes no notice of us; she is standing on as before," exclaimed Owen.

"No, no; see, she is heaving to," cried Langton.

The courses were hauled up, the ship's head was turned off shore, the main-topsail was backed, and she remained stationary.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" cried Mike. "We are seen." The rest echoed the cheer. A boat was lowered, and came pulling towards the point. As she approached, the party on shore unshipped the flagstaff and hurried with it to the bay to guide her in; she soon reached the beach. Langton explained to the officer in command in a few words what had occurred. They were helped on board, and the boat immediately pulled back to the corvette.

She proved to be the "Kestrel," of 18 guns, Commander Holmes. Directly the commander heard of the loss of the "Sylvia," he steered for the spot where the ill-fated vessel had gone down, in the hopes of rescuing any more of her crew who might have escaped.

Mike and Nat were placed under the doctor's charge, but Langton and Owen, though still feeling very weak, were anxious to remain on deck while the corvette was searching for their shipmates.

Owen learned, with satisfaction, that, after her cruise among the islands, she was at once to return home. He was naturally anxious to ascertain the truth of the account given him by Reginald Ashurst. Sometimes he thought the imagination of his dying shipmate might have been excited, and that the story he had told was without foundation. Langton, when he talked the matter over, did not give him much encouragement.

"He was always fond of romancing. Sometimes I do not think he knew himself whether he was speaking the truth or falsehood," he observed.

"He knew that he was dying, and would scarcely have invented a tale to deceive me," answered Owen; "but at the same time I am not ambitious, nor shall I be much disappointed if I find you are right."

A calm at nightfall compelled the corvette to come to an anchor just inside the island, where blue lights were burned and rockets discharged to attract the attention of any who had escaped, and might have the means of reaching her; the boats were also manned and sent off, some to visit the scene of the disaster and others to search for any rafts or floating pieces of wreck on which the people might have sought refuge.

The doctor would not allow Langton or Owen to go in the boats, anxious as they were to ascertain the fate of their shipmates.

The night passed away; the boats had not returned. It was not until late the next day that they appeared.

"Hurrah! they have a number of people on board; some of the poor fellows have escaped then!" was uttered by those on the look-out.

On the boat coming alongside, fourteen people were handed up on deck, all in a weak state, some dreadfully burned and otherwise injured by the explosion. Among them was Mr Leigh, who, though weak, was but slightly hurt. Owen was for many reasons rejoiced to see him. By his exertions a raft had been constructed, on which the survivors had reached the shore. They were there seized by a party of natives, who were on the point of carrying them off into captivity when the boats had arrived and they had been rescued. These, with the four already on board the corvette, had alone escaped of all the frigate's gallant crew, several men having died on the wreck. The other incidents of the "Kestrel's" cruise need not be described. A loud cheer was uttered as she bade farewell to the Indian seas, and her course was shaped for the Cape on her way to England.

Chapter Eleven.

Owen did duty as a midshipman on the voyage home. He confided to Mr Leigh the strange account which Ashurst had related just before his death. Mr Leigh was more inclined to believe it than Langton had been.

"At all events, Hartley," he said, "it is a matter which must be looked into immediately on our arrival in England. I am glad you have mentioned it to no one else, and as Lord Arlingford is not aware that his brother had confessed the truth to you, he will be the less prepared to resist your claim. If you can find an honest lawyer I would advise you to put the matter into his hands Langton and your other companions on the raft can prove Ashurst's death, and I can give evidence of the extraordinary animosity he always exhibited towards you."

"I hope that it will not be necessary to mention that subject," said Owen. "I would rather not have to refer to the poor fellow's ill-treatment of me. In regard to a lawyer, I know of one in whom I have thorough confidence. He will by this time, I hope, have set up for himself, and I could not place the matter in better hands."

Owen had frequent conversations with Mr Leigh and Langton, but no one else on board had any idea that the apparently friendless young midshipman was the claimant to a title and handsome estate. Owen maintained his usual demeanour, and endeavoured to think as little about the subject as possible. Should he be disappointed he would place himself under Mr Fluke again and return to the counting-house, or remain in the service, trusting to his own good conduct to make his way in it, which he hoped to do, although he had lost the promised patronage of Captain Stanhope.

The "Kestrel" met with much heavy weather. She encountered a gale off the Cape, and another in the Bay of Biscay, when she was "hove to" for several days. The voyage home thus occupied a much longer time than usual. At last, however, the white cliffs of old England were sighted, to the joy of all on board. As she had been fitted out at Portsmouth, she returned to that port, where she was immediately paid off.

Mike's mother was living at Gosport, and he took Nat to stay with him until they should get another ship, as both had made up their minds to remain in the navy. Owen having obtained from Nat his grandmother's address, thoughtfully wrote to tell her of her grandson's safety, promising, as soon as he had the means, to send him down to see her. Mike promised not to go to sea again without communicating with Owen.

Mr Leigh and Langton accompanied Owen up to town, where they intended to remain for some time. Leaving them at the lodgings they had taken, he set off to Wapping. He arrived at Messrs Kelson, Fluke and Company's office a short time before the usual closing hour. Owen still wore his midshipman's uniform. During the three years he had been absent he had grown into a tall young man, his handsome countenance well bronzed by tropical suns. He stood at the entrance for some seconds without advancing. No one seemed to know him. Looking round he saw many of the old familiar faces still there.

Mr Tarwig was at his desk. Several of the clerks glanced up at him, but supposing that he was a stranger, went on with their work. He advanced to where the head clerk was sitting, and putting out his hand—

"I suspect you do not know me, sir?" he said.

"What is your business?" asked Mr Tarwig, putting the usual question to a stranger.

"I have come to see Mr Fluke, and to resume my duties in this office if he wishes it," answered Owen.

Mr Tarwig opened his eyes wider than he had ever opened them before. Then starting up, in his eagerness kicking over his stool, and very nearly toppling down on his nose, which he would have done had not Owen caught him by the hand, he exclaimed—

"Bless my heart! Can you be Owen Hartley? We had given you up for lost long ago. But are you really yourself? Yes, I see you are, only double as big, and a naval officer to boot. Well, it will put new life into the old man, for he grieved sorely for you. Well, I am glad, that I am."

Here Mr Tarwig wrung Owen's hand in a way very unwonted with him when greeting a fellow-mortal.

"Mr Fluke will be pleased," he continued; "but he went home to-day an hour earlier than usual. He did not feel quite well, and he wanted Kezia Crump to give him something to do him good."

"I will follow him at once then," said Owen. "I can easily get to his house before dark, and I should not like to let another day pass without seeing him."

Owen, however, found it difficult to get away before he had answered the numerous questions which Mr Tarwig put to him. None of his letters had been received, and it was therefore supposed that he had been lost in the "Druid," which ship had never been heard of since she had sailed.

"You may depend upon having your old berth here as soon as you like," said Mr Tarwig; "but I am afraid, Mr Owen, seeing you have become an officer in the navy, that you will not be so willing as formerly to take it, though your hand, I'll warrant, has not lost its cunning."

"I intend to act as Mr Fluke wishes, and therefore cannot say what I may do," answered Owen, feeling, however, that he should be very unwilling to go back to his old occupation.

For once in a way all the clerks in the office were idle, as Owen went round to shake hands with them. He then hurried off, and walked at a quick pace through the well-known streets. As he passed the spot where he had first met Reginald Ashurst the whole scene came vividly before his mind, he could even picture the countenance of the elder brother, whom he now knew to have been Lord Arlingford.

On reaching Mr Fluke's house he hesitated for a moment to consider whether his unexpected appearance might not injuriously agitate his old friend. "I must leave it to Kezia to tell him. I can safely do that," he thought. "She is a strong-minded woman, and glad as she will be to see me, she, at all events, will not go into hysterics."

He rapped at the door, hoping that Kezia would answer the summons herself. He was not mistaken. She opened it and stood gazing at him, looking exactly as she had done when he last saw her.

"Speak, speak, who are you?" she at length exclaimed.

Scarcely had Owen opened his lips to pronounce his name, than she threw her arms around his neck.

"I knew, I knew it!" she cried out, and burst forth into an uncontrollable fit of crying, followed by one of laughter, as she hugged him again and again to her bosom. Strong-minded as Mrs Kezia was, she possessed a woman's affectionate heart, and if she had never been in hysterics before, she was undoubtedly on this occasion. She very soon gained the mastery over herself, however.

"What a fool I am; but you will not tell him of it, Owen," she said, "or he will be putting his back up at me."

Looking out into the garden, where Mr Fluke was in earnest confabulation with Joseph, Owen promised Kezia to say nothing about the demonstrative way in which she had received him.

"I should be very ungrateful if I did," he added. "And how is Mr Fluke? Shall I go to him, or will you tell him I have arrived?"

"I will go to him," she answered, "for though he has got a heart of some sort, it may be like his outside, a little withered. He took on sadly when he thought you were lost, and as he has been rather shaky lately, it might upset him if he were to see you suddenly."

"Do, then, my dear Mrs Kezia, tell him that I have come, and am the same Owen Hartley that was when I went away, although I have got some strange things to talk to him about," said Owen.

"Well, then, go into the parlour, and wait until I fetch him," said Mrs Kezia, and she hurried out into the garden, nearly falling down the steps in her eagerness.

Owen would have liked to watch her while she communicated the news of his arrival. He had some time to wait before he heard her voice calling him. He at once went out; Mr Fluke was at the further end of the garden.

"I got him down there before I told him that a young gentleman had come to see him, and that although he was a good deal bigger than Owen, and dressed in a naval uniform, that to my mind he was no one else. Even now he is not quite certain whether or not he is to see you."

"You have acted prudently, as you always do, Mrs Kezia," said Owen.

Mr Fluke looked at Owen, and then began to walk towards him, increasing his pace until he broke almost into a run. His limbs refused to obey the impulse of his feelings.

"Can it be? No! It is impossible! But yet, I don't know. Yes! It is Owen Hartley. It must be! Owen, my boy, are you really come back?"

These expressions burst from the old man's lips as he hurried forward. He grasped Owen's hands, gazing



"Are you yourself? Don't mock me, Owen."

up into his face. Owen was now upwards of a head taller.

"Are you yourself? Don't mock me, Owen."

"I am indeed myself," answered Owen, smiling as he spoke. "Most grateful I am for the kind way in which you have received me, after I had played truant so many long years; but I could not have come back before, unless you had sent for me, and I have received no letters since I left home."

For a few minutes they stood talking, when, after Owen had exchanged greetings with Joseph Crump, he accompanied Mr Fluke into the parlour, where Kezia was busily employed in preparing supper.

"You need not be afraid of depriving him of his supper by not eating as much as you want," she said, nodding her head to Owen. "I've got plenty for both of you." Then turning to Mr Fluke, she added, "You must get off your boots, here are your slippers, and then Owen will tell you all about himself, and I'll warrant there will be something worth listening to."

Kezia was as good as her word, an ample supper being placed on the table. Mr Fluke ate but sparingly. Owen saw that he was eager to hear his adventures. He ran over them as rapidly as he could, dwelling only on the more important points. Occasionally Mr Fluke stopped him to ask a question, then said, "Go on, go on."

When Owen got to the account of the confession made by Reginald Ashurst and his death, Mr Fluke paid the greatest attention.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "there is something in that. Lord Arlingford; yes, I remember there was some doubt as to who was the rightful heir, and that the name of the family was originally Hartley. How your grandfather or father never came to put in a claim, I don't know. It is just possible that they never heard about the matter. They were poor, and the other Hartleys had money at command. That makes all the difference. We shall now see what another generation can do; although possession is nine parts of the law, yet the chances are that the present Lord Arlingford has not much at command to dispute your claims, should he not have a right to the title and estates."

As Kezia had supposed, Mr Fluke continued talking or listening until it was far later than he was accustomed to retire for the night. She at length came in.

"I have given you an hour's grace," she exclaimed. "You will be fit for nothing to-morrow if you don't go up to bed."

"She knows best," said Mr Fluke, looking at Owen, and taking the candle which Kezia handed to him; "every one obeys her in this house."

After Mr Fluke had gone to his room, Owen gratified Kezia's curiosity by giving her an outline of his adventures. When he told her of the possibility of his inheriting the Arlingford estates she almost gasped for breath.

"You, Owen, you become a lord!" she exclaimed. "It may be pleasant, and will be pleasant, if you do succeed; but have you thought, my boy, of the disappointment should you fail? I cannot say that I am the happier for what you tell me, except that I shall be glad for you not to have to go back to the office or to follow a sea life; but, Owen, whatever happens, you will not forget Kezia Crump?"

"Indeed I will not," said Owen, taking her hand; "you have ever been a true friend to me, and the way you received me to-day proves your affection, which I shall never forget."

The next morning Mr Fluke announced his intention of staying at home that he might have time to discuss matters with his young friend.

Owen's first task was to write to David Rowe, requesting that he would come up at once to London at Mr Fluke's desire. Owen also wrote to John, giving him a sketch of his adventures, though he did not mention the object for which he wished to see David. In spite of slow coaches, within three days David Rowe appeared at Mr Fluke's office, where Owen had gone to meet him.

"You'll want money to carry out this undertaking," said Mr Fluke, turning to David; "draw on me for all you require. From the report of your friend here I will trust you, and that's more than Simon Fluke would say to every man."

"If our friend Owen has the right, we shall succeed, for right and might in this case go together, as you, Mr Fluke, supply the might," said David, slapping his pockets.

David having received his instructions, set about the necessary preliminaries without a moment's delay.

Owen begged for leave of absence for one day to fulfil his promise to Captain Aggett, by visiting his widow, who lived some way from London.

"I am thankful, most thankful for what you tell me, Mr Hartley," she exclaimed, "that he died in peace as a Christian. Though I shall see him no more on earth, we shall, I know, meet in heaven." It was a satisfaction to Owen to feel that his visit had brought comfort to the heart of his kind friend's widow, to whom he was afterwards able to render the material assistance her husband had expressed his anxiety to afford her.

Mr Fluke returned every day at an unusually early hour from the office that he might have more of Owen's society.

Owen had mentioned his two naval friends. "Bring them here to dinner," said Mr Fluke. "Kezia shall prepare a feast, for they deserve it, and I'll show them my tulips."

Owen found both Lieutenant Leigh and Langton, who had received his promotion, at their lodgings. They willingly accepted his invitation, when he explained who Mr Fluke was, and how much depended on him. Kezia took care to have a handsome dinner, and a man-servant to wait, and had, moreover, induced her master to put on a new suit and wig, so that when Owen came in he scarcely knew him. The two officers undertook to remain within call in case their evidence should be required at the trial.

They had just taken their places at dinner when David Rowe was announced. Having paid his respects to the master of the house, shaking hands with Owen, and made his bow to the other guests, he took his seat.

"I do not want to spoil anybody's appetite, and I hope good news won't do that," he said, "for good news, and wonderful news, I have to communicate. Have I your leave to make it known in the presence of these gentlemen, Mr Fluke?"

"Certainly, certainly, if you think fit, Mr Rowe," was the answer.

"Then allow me to congratulate Lord Arlingford on his accession to his family title and estates, but I hope, as I do so, that he will not object to take the name of Ashurst. We have made quick work of it. From information I received, I was induced to go down and see the *ci-devant* Lord Arlingford. I found him very ill and without a particle of combativeness, so I told him of all the information I possessed, and gave him his choice to contest the point, assuring him that we had unlimited supplies at command, or to yield at once, and save a family scandal. As he appeared inclined to take my advice, I promised him an annuity of a thousand a year, knowing from his circumstances that he was not likely to enjoy even so much as that should he retain his title. He immediately accepted my offer, acknowledging that your claim *pro forma*, legally to settle the point, but it will prove a very short one."

It was some little time before Owen could recover his equanimity sufficiently to eat his dinner; but fortunately midshipmen are not given, under any circumstances, to loss of appetite, and he was very soon himself again.

Little more need be said. Mr Fluke bore all the expenses of the trial, which proved without doubt that Owen Hartley was the rightful possessor of the Arlingford title and estates. Indeed, on the death of his cousin, which occurred while the trial was going forward, no other claimant appearing, Owen immediately came into peaceful possession.

Mr Fluke insisted on paying off all the mortgages, so that Owen might commence his new career free of incumbrances.

"Begin, my dear boy, out of debt, and never get into it," said the old man; "you'll never regret following that rule, whatever else you may be sorry for."

Owen's first care was to appoint a good man of business to look after the estate, and, as may be supposed, he selected David Rowe, whose brother John became his head bailiff. His old shipmates, Captain Leigh and Lieutenant Langton, were his frequent guests whenever they came on shore.

On the death of his kind relative, Simon Fluke, Mrs Kezia and Joseph Crump came down, the one to become his housekeeper and the other his head gardener.

"I hope you will find no tom cat to kill at Arlingford, Mrs Kezia!" said Owen, laughing, as she made her appearance.

"Please your lordship, I don't think there'll be any need," she answered.

Indeed Owen had never the slightest cause to complain of presumption, nor had Lady Arlingford—for by this time Owen was possessed of a fair young wife, who ruled as mistress of Arlingford Hall.

He placed his old nurse, Jane Hayes, who had lately married, in a pretty cottage, which he had built expressly for her. He did not forget Nat Midge. One of his first journeys was to visit Nat's grandmother. He found the old lady in great poverty, struggling to maintain her grand-children. "You will, I hope, see Nat in a couple of days," said Owen; "and though he may not have come back with his pockets full of gold, he has gained a sincere friend, who can afford to support you and his brothers and sisters till he is able to do so himself."

Nat arrived, and escorted his family to Arlingford, where Owen had ordered a cottage, which had been vacant, to be got ready for their reception.

Nat, who had had enough of the sea, was apprenticed to a carpenter employed on the estate, whose duties he ultimately was able to undertake.

Mike Coffey continued in the service until he lost a leg, when he retired on a pension. His mother having died, he came, at Owen's invitation, to Arlingford.

"I'm afther thinkin', my lord, of gettin' a wherry and settin' up as a boatman at Portsmouth," answered Mike to Owen's question as to the way he intended to employ himself.

"How would you like to become my commodore?" asked Owen, pointing to a miniature frigate which floated on the lake near the house, and to a couple of boats drawn up on the bank.

"With the greatest delight in the world, your honour—your lordship I mane," answered Mike. "The frigate wants re-fitting, and the boats will be better for a coat of paint. I had a look at them as I came along this mornin'. Thinks I to meself, shure the young master hasn't had time to see afther his fleet, so I was just goin' to offer to do the work, to show me love to your lordship."

"I have no doubt that I shall find other work for you when that is finished, so I appoint you to the berth, and you can take up your abode with Widow Midge until you set up a home of your own."

Owen, although he still retained his love for the sea, retired from the service and devoted himself—as is the bounden duty of every proprietor—to the improvement of his estate and to advancing the moral and spiritual welfare of his tenants.

The End.

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