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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK TURNED ADRIFT ***

Harry Collingwood

"Turned Adrift"

Chapter One.

The Seizure of the "Zenobia".

The *Zenobia*—A1 at Lloyd's—was a beautiful little clipper barque of 376 tons register, and so exquisitely fine were her lines that her cargo-carrying capacity amounted to but a few tons more than her register tonnage; in fact, the naval architect who designed her had been instructed to ignore altogether the question of cargo capacity, and to give his whole attention to the matter of speed, and most faithfully had he carried out his instructions.

For the *Zenobia* had been designed and built to the order of the firm which owned the famous "Queen" line of sailing clippers trading between London and Natal; and the aim of the Company was to drive off all competitors and secure the monopoly of the passenger trade between London and the Garden Colony. And there was only one way in which that aim could be accomplished, namely, by carrying passengers to and fro in less time and greater comfort than any of the competing lines. The question of cargo did not matter so very much, for at that time—that is to say, about the year 1860—the steam service to South Africa was very different from what it is to-day. The steamers were small, slow, and infrequent; Natal was just then attracting a big influx of well-to-do people from England; passenger rates were high—as also, for that matter, was the freight on such special merchandise as was at that time being carried out to the colony—and those who took credit to themselves for their foresight believed that there was big money to be made in the sailing passenger trade. Needless to say, the competition between the different lines was exceedingly keen: but the owners of the "Queen" line were a very rich corporation; they were prepared to sink money in the effort to secure a monopoly; and the *Zenobia* was the latest outcome of their rather speculative policy.

At the moment when this story opens—namely, about two bells of the middle watch, on the night of 24 January, 1862—or rather in the early morning of 25 January, to be exact—the barque was somewhere about latitude 25 degrees south, and longitude 27 degrees west. I have not the precise figures by me, nor do they very greatly matter. The night was fine, clear, and starlit, with the moon, well advanced in her fourth quarter, hanging a few degrees above the eastern horizon, and shedding just enough light to touch the wave crests immediately beneath her with soft flashes of ruddy golden light. The wind was piping up fresh from the south-east, and the little clipper was roaring through it under all plain sail to her royals, with the yeast slopping in over her starboard rail at every lee roll and her lee scuppers all afloat; for quick passages were the order of the day, quick passages meant "carrying on", and Mr Stephen Bligh, the chief mate and officer of the watch, was living fully up to the traditions of the service. This was the *Zenobia's* second outward voyage. Her first trip had been accomplished in the unprecedentedly brief period of forty-six days; and it was now the ambition of her skipper and his two mates to beat even that brilliant record. And at the moment there seemed an excellent prospect that this laudable ambition might be achieved, for the morrow would only be our twenty-fourth day out. We had been extraordinarily lucky in the matter of crossing the line, having slid across it with a good breeze, which had run us into the south-east Trades without the loss of a moment; and those same south-east Trades—or something remarkably like them—were still piping up fresh, although we were by this time well beyond their ordinary southern limits.

Our ship's company amounted to twenty-four all told, namely, Captain John Roberts, our skipper; Mr Stephen Bligh, our chief mate; Mr Peter Johnson, our second mate; Dr John Morrison, our surgeon—ours being one of the few ships in the trade which at that time carried a doctor—the boatswain, carpenter, sailmaker, cook, two stewards, twelve men—of whom eight were A.B.'s and four only O.S.—and last, but not least—in our own estimation—two apprentices, Tom Bainbridge, in his fifth year of apprenticeship, being one, while I, Mark Temple, just turned seventeen years of age, and in the third year of my apprenticeship, was the other. There was not much love lost between Bainbridge and myself, by the way, for he was of a sullen, sulky temper, and had tried hard to bully me when I first made his acquaintance in the old *Boadicea* before joining the *Zenobia*. But our mutual ill feeling did not greatly matter, for he was in the port watch and I in the starboard, so we very rarely met except when it was a case of "all hands";

consequently we had not very much opportunity to quarrel. And in addition to the above we carried twenty cuddly passengers, of whom six were men, while the remainder consisted of nine ladies and five children. I am afraid the above details are not very interesting, but it is necessary to give them in order that the reader may fully understand what is to follow.

As I have already mentioned, this story may be said to have had its beginning about two bells in the middle watch—or about one o'clock in the morning—on a certain specified date; for until then there had been nothing out of the ordinary to distinguish the voyage from any other. But some five minutes after I had struck two bells, in accordance with the chief mate's instructions, and the lookout on the topgallant forecabin had responded with the usual cry of "All's well!" one of the forecabin hands came slouching along aft, and, ascending the poop ladder with a certain suggestion of haste and trepidation, approached the mate.

"Will ye mind steppin' for'ard a minute, sir?" he enquired. "There's a strong smell o' burnin' down in the fo'c'sle, and —"

"A strong smell of burning?" interrupted Mr Bligh. "The dickens there is! Yes, of course I'll go. Temple," turning to me, "just keep a lookout for a minute or two while I'm gone, will ye?"

"Ay, ay, sir," I replied; and the mate dashed down the poop ladder and went scurrying away forward, regardless of the drenching showers of spray that came flying in over the weather cathead with every mad plunge of the overdriven ship.

For the next five minutes I paced anxiously to and fro along the weather side of the poop, with my ears wide open for any sudden outcry that might confirm the awful suspicion of fire having broken out below; but I heard nothing save the continuous hiss and roar of the sea under the lee bow and along the bends, the heavy slop of water in over the rail with every lee roll of the ship, and the thunder and piping of the wind aloft, and I was beginning to hope that it was no worse than a false alarm, when the man who a few minutes previously had come aft to summon the mate came running—yes, positively running—along the deck again. He stumbled up the poop ladder and came to me, puffing and panting, with every sign of the most extreme agitation, and delivered his message.

"Mr Temple!" he gasped—the skipper always insisted upon the "midshipmen" apprentices being "Mistered" by the foremast hands, upon the ground that we were officers, if only in embryo—"Mr Temple, the mate says will ye please slip below and quietly call Cap'n Roberts without disturbin' the passengers. Ye are to tell him that the ship's afire in the forehold, and that Mr Bligh will be much obliged if he'll come for'ard to the fo'c'sle at once. And when ye've done that, ye're to continue your lookout on the poop until ye're relieved."

"Ay, ay, Mason, I'll do that," I answered. Then, as we turned together to leave the poop, I asked: "Is the matter serious, Mason? Has Mr Bligh actually found the seat of the fire; and is there a chance of our being able to master it?"

"Can't say, as yet," answered the man. "We ain't actually found the fire; but it's there all right."

I shivered involuntarily, although the night was warm, for I happened to know that a good deal of the cargo which we were carrying was of a highly combustible character, such as furniture, pianos, Manchester goods, and the like, to say nothing of several cases of sporting ammunition. I knew that if once the fire happened to get a good hold upon such material as that the chances were all against our being able to master it, especially in such a strong breeze as was then blowing.

And if we should be compelled to leave the ship—!

I thought of those poor helpless women and children peacefully sleeping down below, and of what their plight might be if we were driven to take to the boats out there in the heart of the South Atlantic, hundreds of miles from the nearest land.

Tiptoeing my way to the skipper's cabin, I rapped gently with my knuckles on the panel of the door, and bent my head to listen for a reply. I knew that Captain Roberts was a light sleeper, and judged that it would not take much to awake him. Nor was I mistaken, for immediately following upon my low knock came the quiet reply:

"Hillo! who is there, and what is it?"

"It is I—Temple—sir," I replied. "May I enter?"

For answer I heard the light thud of bare feet inside the cabin as the skipper sprang from his bunk; and the next instant the door quietly opened and Captain Roberts stood before me.

"What is it, Temple?" he demanded. "Anything wrong?"

"Yes, sir, I'm afraid there is," I replied in low tones. "Mr Bligh is down in the forecabin, and he has just sent a message aft to me directing me to call you and say that he is afraid fire has broken out in the fore hold, and that he will be much obliged if you will kindly go to him at once."

"Fire!" ejaculated the skipper. "In the fore hold, you say? Humph! I don't notice any smell of it here," and he started sniffing violently as he stooped for his slippers and put them on. "Who gave the alarm?"

"Mason, sir," I replied. "He came aft, just after two bells, and reported a strong smell of burning down in the forecabin. Mr Bligh went for'ard at once, leaving me to keep a lookout on the poop; and he had been gone about five minutes when Mason again came aft with a message directing me to call you."

"I see," answered the skipper. "Very well," as he emerged from his cabin and quietly closed the door behind him,

"you go back to the poop and keep an eye upon the ship. I shall not be long." And with one bound, as it seemed to me, he was out on deck and running forward. As for me, I returned to my station on the poop, which I anxiously paced backward and forward in momentary expectation of hearing the call for "All hands!"

But when I came to look more closely it appeared that any such formal call would be quite superfluous, for presently a light flashed out from the windows of the small house just abaft the foremast, in which the boatswain, carpenter, sailmaker, cook, and the two stewards were berthed, and by its rather feeble beams I perceived that the fore deck was full of men crouching under the shelter of the topgallant forecastle; I presumed, therefore, that upon the first alarm of fire they had turned out and dressed, and had been sent on deck by the mate to be out of the way while the investigation below was being made. It was about this time that I noticed, with keen satisfaction, the fact that the wind was not blowing quite as strongly as it had been during the earlier part of the watch.

I was beginning to think that the skipper was remaining below rather a long time, and was drawing the most disquieting conclusions from the circumstance, when one of the crew—a man whom I recognised as Owen Lloyd, generally known among his messmates as "Welshy"—came aft and entered the little house abaft the main hatch, where Bainbridge and I had our lodging. A few seconds later a small glimmer from the open door showed that the man was lighting the lamp which illuminated our snugger; and a minute or two afterwards Lloyd emerged again and went forward, while Bainbridge also stepped out on deck and disappeared beneath the break of the poop. He was gone some three or four minutes, then reappeared, accompanied by Mr Johnson, the second mate, whom he had evidently been directed to call, for the pair immediately proceeded forward at a trot. I decided that the matter was assuming a distinctly serious aspect. Some five minutes later Bainbridge came aft, and, ascending to the poop, remarked to me in his usual surly, offhand manner:

"You're wanted at once in the forecastle, Temple, and I'm to keep the lookout in your place."

"Right!" I replied. "How are they getting on for'ard? Have they found the fire yet?"

"Go and look for yourself, sonny, and don't waste valuable time in stopping to ask silly questions," was the ungracious reply I received; and I suppose it was the reflection that it served me right for persisting in my attempts to be civil to the lout that drove out of my head the thought which had flashed into it for an instant, that it was rather queer that the skipper should have sent for me at a moment when Bainbridge was actually on the spot and would serve his purpose quite as well. So, all unsuspectingly, I trundled away forward, and, flinging my legs over the coaming of the fore scuttle, dropped down into the forecastle, noting *en passant* that a dozen or more of the hands were still huddling together under the shelter of the topgallant forecastle. As I was in the very act of swinging myself down off the coaming I thought I caught the sound of a subdued chuckle emanating from somebody among this group; but before I had time to give the matter a thought, or wonder what might be the cause of such ill-timed mirth, my feet reached the deck of the forecastle, and I found myself the centre of a group of some half a dozen of the crew, with the slush lamp swinging violently with the motion of the ship, and darting its feeble rays hither and thither as it hung suspended from a smoky beam overhead. And in that same instant I caught a momentary glimpse of the forms of Captain Roberts, Mr Bligh, and Mr Johnson, bound hand and foot, and with gags in their mouths, huddled up in three of the recently vacated bunks. As for the supposed fire, there was neither sight nor smell of it.

"What the—" I began. But before I could utter another sound I felt my head dragged violently back and a big gag thrust between my jaws, while my arms and legs were at the same instant seized by powerful hands and lashed so securely that I could not have moved either of them by so much as an inch, no, not to save my life. The work was done with the speed and precision that might be expected of men accustomed to the manipulation of ropes and the tying of knots; and then I was lifted off my feet and flung with scant ceremony into one of the unoccupied bunks.

"There! that's the last one; the passengers can be left until to-morrer mornin' to be dealt with," exclaimed a voice which I recognised as that of "Welshy". "And now, lads," the voice continued, "let's go on deck and take some of the 'muslin' off her; there's no use in strainin' the hooker all to pieces, and Bainbridge says as we're quite far enough south a'ready."

Bainbridge! Could it be possible that Bainbridge was mixed up with this vile conspiracy? For conspiracy it was, clearly enough, to obtain possession of the ship without the necessity to fight for her; the bound forms of the skipper and the two mates—to say nothing of myself—proved it beyond a doubt. And a very cunningly devised scheme it was, too, ably planned and most efficiently executed—the enticement of the mate into the forecastle by the suggestion of fire; then, after just the right lapse of time, the fictitious message to the skipper through me, followed by the summons of the second mate, and, finally, the capture of my insignificant self. It was much too subtle a scheme to be evolved by the uninventive brain of the average British shellback, and I fancied that I recognised a certain Bainbridge-like neatness of touch and finish in it all. But perhaps I was prejudiced, for I never liked the fellow. Yet, if he was not in it, why was he still free, instead of being down in the forecastle, a captive, like the rest of us? I remembered now that on several occasions I had seen him fraternising with the men for'ard during the dog-watches; but I had thought nothing of it at the time beyond reflecting that to me it seemed to be rather bad form on his part, and not by any means conducive to good discipline.

As I recalled these occasions to mind, while I lay there in that close, evil-smelling bunk, I idly wondered whether he had used them for the purpose of seducing the men from their duty and allegiance and persuading them to join him in this outrageous act of unprovoked mutiny. For unprovoked it most assuredly was: the owners were most liberal providers, the food was the best obtainable, and the allowance of it far exceeded the Board of Trade scale; the men had grog as well as lime juice served out to them regularly every day; the skipper was easy-going with them to a degree; and neither of the mates could, by the wildest stretch of imagination, be termed a slave-driver, although of course both exacted a certain amount of daily work; and, finally, the afternoon watch below was never called upon except when necessity demanded it; in short, the *Zenobia* was as comfortable a ship as any sailor need wish to go to sea in. No; I was certain that this atrocious seizure of the ship had not originated in discontent on the part of the men, who were neither better nor worse than the average British seaman. They had been played upon by skilful

hands; their baser passions had been so strongly appealed to that their better judgment had been blinded; and I felt morally convinced that there was not a man among the legitimate occupants of the forecabin who possessed the ability to do this thing.

Then, I asked myself, who was the master spirit who had contrived so effectually to blind and mislead those simple-minded men, and so powerfully to influence them that they had eventually permitted themselves to be betrayed into an act that converted them into outlaws, with every man's hand against them? And why had they done it? They had no grievance, real or imaginary, against any of their officers: that fact was patent from the manner in which the seizure of the ship had been effected; there had been none of the brutal violence, the bloodshed, which usually accompanies a mutiny upon the high seas. Then why, I mentally repeated, had the men mutinied at all?

And the answer that came to my mind was—Bainbridge! Yes, prejudice and ill feeling apart, I could think of no other individual in the ship with the will and the disposition to concoct and carry out such a scheme. To begin with, he was the only discontented person, so far as I knew, on the ship. And his discontent was of that dangerous kind which is dissatisfied not with any one particular thing, but with everything. He was poor and—as I understood—practically friendless, except for an uncle who had apprenticed him to the sea in order to get rid of him; he was restive under discipline, his character being strongly imbued with that false pride which chafes at a subordinate position. I had often heard him declare that he was born to be a leader of men, and had laughed at what seemed to me to be his inordinate conceit. He hated work as heartily as he loved trashy, sensational literature; and he displayed a quite childish love of dainty food and showy clothes. And these were not his only faults: he was an unblushing liar; he scoffed at such old-fashioned virtues as honesty and truth and godliness; he sneered at me every time that he found me on my knees offering up my morning and nightly petitions to my Maker; he was cruel when he had the chance to be so; and, in short, he seemed surcharged with gall and bitterness.

He possessed only one redeeming point, so far as I could ever discover, and that was that he was a splendid navigator. He prided himself upon his skill with the sextant, and often used to assert—in that cynical way of his that might be either jest or earnest, one could never tell which—that some day he would become a pirate king and establish himself magnificently on some fair island of the Pacific! Heavens! thought I, could it be possible that the fellow had actually been in earnest, and that this mutiny was the outcome of his evil ambition? It certainly looked very much like it.

Meanwhile, during the time that these thoughts and speculations had been running through my head, the hands on deck had been noisily engaged in shortening sail, and from the time that they took about the job, and the easier, more buoyant movements of the ship, I conjectured that they had taken in not only the royals, but also the topgallantsails, together with, probably, the flying jib and a few of the lighter staysails. Then, when the mutineers had done all that they deemed necessary in the way of shortening sail, four of them came down into the forecabin, and with the aid of a rope, the bight of which was passed round our bodies, the skipper, the mates, and I were hauled up on deck and carried into the fore house, where we found the boatswain, Chips, and Sails as securely trussed up as ourselves. And there, still gagged and bound helplessly hand and foot, we were left to our meditations until, after a very eternity, as it seemed, of extreme discomfort, first came the daylight and finally eight bells of the morning watch, when the sliding door of the house was thrust open and one of the men entered—a fellow named Adams.

After looking at us meditatively for a moment, and carefully examining our lashings to assure himself that they still held firmly, he removed the gags from our mouths—for which I, for one, was profoundly thankful—and informed us that breakfast was about to be brought to us, and that our hands would be loosed to enable us to partake of it. But he warned us that his instructions were to shoot at the slightest sign of an attempt on our part to break out of the house, or the slightest uplifting of our voices, and to give point to the statement he exhibited a fully loaded revolver, which Captain Roberts at once recognised as his own personal property.

“And pray, who gave you those instructions, Adams?” demanded the skipper.

“I ain't allowed to say,” answered the man. “But I was to tell you,” he continued, “that you ain't none of yer permitted to talk to any of us men, or to ask us any questions; and if you persist in doin' so you're to be gagged again.”

“Very well,” agreed the skipper artfully; “then we will not ask you anything that you feel you ought not to tell. But I suppose you will have no objection to tell me, without asking, what has been done with regard to the passengers?”

“The gen'lemen have been lashed up, same as yourselves, and locked away, two in a cabin; while the women folk and the kids is locked up all safe in the other cabins; so there ain't no chancet of none of 'em bein' able to slip for'ard and help yer anyways. And now, don't you ask me nothin' more, because I ain't goin' to answer yer,” replied Adams, with some show of testiness.

“But I suppose you can tell us, if you choose, what your new skipper, Bainbridge, is going to do with us,” I insinuated. “He is not going to keep us cooped up here until a man-o'-war comes along and captures the ship, is he?”

“Now, look 'e here, Mister Temple, don't you go for to try to pump me, or it'll be the worse for yer,” expostulated Adams. “I ain't got nothin' against you, and I don't want to hurt yer if I can help it, but s'help me! I'll have to shove that there gag back into yer mouth if you don't clap a stopper on that tongue of yours. Ah, here comes cooky with the grub!” he announced, with a sigh of relief, as the “Doctor” made his appearance at the door with a well-loaded tray.

The picture which that tray presented was conclusive evidence that, whatever might be the ultimate intentions of the mutineers toward us, they did not mean to starve us to death, for the breakfast that was placed before us consisted of the best that the steward's pantry could produce. And we all did the fullest justice to it, even the skipper making a hearty meal, although I believe it was not so much because he had a good appetite as that he had a very shrewd

suspicion of what lay before him, and was exceedingly doubtful as to when he would next have the opportunity to sit down to a good, well-cooked meal. As for me, I was healthily hungry, and was altogether too young and of too sanguine a temperament to feel very anxious as to what was to be the outcome of the adventure; moreover, I was unburdened by responsibility of any sort, and I therefore ate and drank until I was fully satisfied.

We were still busy with our breakfasts when an alteration in the motion of the ship apprised us all of the fact that the helm had been put up, and that we were now running off with the wind on our port quarter; and the next moment we heard a voice, which I instantly recognised as Bainbridge's, summoning the men to the braces. The yards were trimmed very nearly square, then came an order to loose, sheet home, and hoist away the topgallantsails and royals; next the men who had gone aloft to loose those sails were ordered to rig out the port studdingsail-booms and to set the royal and topgallant studdingsails on their way down; and finally the topmast and lower studdingsails were set, and the *Zenobia* went rolling and wallowing away to the westward under every rag that could be packed upon her.

No remark was made upon this so long as the man Adams remained with us; but when at length we had finished our breakfast, had reluctantly submitted to be trussed up again—because we could not help ourselves, and nothing could be gained by offering an unavailing resistance—and were once more shut in and left to ourselves, the skipper turned to Mr Bligh and remarked:

"Now, what does the scoundrel mean by this shift of helm, think you? We are only about four or five degrees to the southward of Rio at this moment. Can the man be such a fool as to think of running in until he sights the coast and then turning us adrift to get ashore as best we can? Because, if he does, we'll have a British man-o'-war after him in no time."

"I don't believe the boy is quite such an ass as that; indeed, I regard him as being very far from an ass—except in this one particular instance of organising this mutiny," answered Bligh. "I haven't the slightest notion of what he intends to be after, but I think we may be quite certain that Bainbridge won't give us much of a chance to report him until he has had time to get well out of the neighbourhood. What say you, Johnson? He was in your watch, and you should know him a good deal better than I do."

"If you are speaking of Bainbridge," answered the second mate, "I fully agree with you that he is very far from being a fool—quite the other way about, indeed; and from what I know of the young villain I should say that he may be depended upon to give us the smallest possible chance of reporting him quickly. My opinion is this. So far, and up to the moment of shifting her helm, the *Zenobia* has been following the usual ship track to the south'ard and round the Cape; hence we have been liable to fall in at any moment with other ships, which would not exactly suit Bainbridge's book. Therefore he has shifted his helm and is now running off the track far enough to avoid meeting with other ships. In my opinion he will continue so to run until he considers himself quite out of danger; but what he will do afterward, and how he will dispose of us, I'll leave it to a better guesser than myself to imagine. The only thing that I feel at all certain about is that he will not murder us; if he had intended to do that he would not have taken such elaborate pains to get us alive and uninjured into his power."

"Quite so; I fully agree with you there," returned the skipper. "The thing that I can't fathom is the young scoundrel's motive for taking the ship, and what he proposes to do with her now that he has her. By the way, Mr Temple, it was you, I think, who first named Bainbridge as the ringleader of this rascally job; what led you to fix it upon him so pat?"

"Well, sir," said I, "the fact is that after they brought us in here and left us, bound hand and foot and gagged, so that we could neither move nor talk, I endeavoured to beguile the time by asking myself who was responsible for the seizure of the ship, and then trying to find an answer to the question." And forthwith I proceeded to give a résumé of the cogitations which had ultimately led to my fixing the blame for the affair upon Bainbridge's shoulders. In the course of my remarks I happened to mention that at first I had been inclined to suspect the man nicknamed "Welshy", but that I had soon come to the conclusion that the fellow had not the brains necessary to plan such a *coup* and carry it out to a successful conclusion in the masterly manner which had distinguished the actual operation.

"Ah! but 'Welshy' was in it, though," cut in the boatswain. "I know he was; for he and Bainbridge was for ever gettin' away together by theirselves and talkin' by the fathom. 'Welshy' is one of these here Socialist buckos who's got the notion that all hands ought to be on the same level, and that nobody ought to have more of anything than anybody else; he's a rare hand at preachin' about equality and the rights o' man, is 'Welshy', and I wouldn't be a bit surprised if it turned out that 'twas he as first give Mr Bainbridge the idee of seizin' the ship. And even if he wasn't, I know that he is pretty well mixed up in it, for he was everlastin'ly yarnin' about the hardships and wrongs of sailormen, and throwin' out hints, like. I didn't take no notice of 'em at the time—in fac' Chips and I used to argufy with and laugh at him; but now, since this here mutiny job have happened, I seem to see that all his talk had a purpose, and that he was feelin' around, like, with the idee of findin' out how many of us might be depended upon to back up him and Bainbridge in the seizure of the ship."

"And it would appear that he was successful in winning over all hands except you three," remarked the skipper. "Did he ever attempt to sound either of you?"

"Ay, that he did, sir; lots o' times, now that I comes to think of it," answered the boatswain. "But nothin' what you might call definite, you understand. I s'pose he pretty soon saw that Chips and Sails and me weren't likely to have any truck wi' such an idee as mutiny and seizin' the ship, so he soon knocked off talkin' to us about it. I reckon that he used to report to Bainbridge pretty often, tellin' him what he had said, and how we had took it; and I expect it was Mr B. who told him not to say anything more to us about it."

"Yes," agreed the skipper, "I fancy you have got the hang of the thing pretty accurately, bos'n; but it was a pity that it never occurred to either of you to mention the matter to me or Mr Bligh. It would have given us a notion of what was brewing, and put us on our guard."

But Murdock, Parsons, and Simpson all vehemently protested that Lloyd's remarks were of so very general a character, and bore so striking a resemblance to the ordinary "grousing" universally met with in a ship's fore-castle, which really means nothing, that it never occurred to either of them to attach any especial significance to what unfortunately had proved to be an exceptional case. A great deal more was said upon the matter before it was dropped; but the remarks were mostly of a desultory character, and as they have no particular bearing upon the thread of this story it is unnecessary to repeat them.

Chapter Two.

Turned Adrift.

The *Zenobia* continued to run to the westward during the whole of that day before a wind that steadily softened down, hour after hour, until by two bells in the first dog-watch it was little more than a mere breathing, scarcely strong enough to keep the heavy courses filled. And we could tell by the motion of the ship that the sea as well as the wind was going down, for by the time that the above-named hour arrived we were bowing and swaying upon the fast-subsiding swell as easily and gently as though the ship had been a cradle rocked by a mother's hand.

Things had been tolerably quiet out on deck during the forenoon, but later on, when the men had turned-to after their dinner, we heard sounds outside the house which indicated a considerable amount of activity on the part of the mutineers; the booms and planks which were stowed on the roof of our prison were overhauled, and several of them were flung down on deck; then "Welshy" came in and cast loose the carpenter, ordering him to bring his chest of tools outside. This was presently followed by the sounds of sawing and hammering; later on we heard certain orders being given which indicated that the mast and yard tackles were being sent aloft; and finally there was a great commotion and laughing out on deck, intermingled with the alarmed bleatings of some sheep, which were housed in the longboat.

"Ah," ejaculated the skipper as these last-named sounds reached our ears, "I know what that means! They are clearing out the longboat preparatory to getting her over the side, and mean to turn us adrift in her. And not us only, but also the unfortunate passengers; for if they had not intended to send them as well as ourselves away, they would have kept the longboat and given us one of the quarter boats, which would have been amply big enough to have accommodated us seven—or six, if they mean to keep Chips with them."

"He won't stay, sir, you may take my word for that," observed the boatswain. "Parsons is a straight chap—as straight as they make 'em; and you'll find that he's not the sort of man to have no truck wi' mutineers—not he!"

"But they may compel him to stay," objected the skipper. "He would be a very useful sort of man for them to have with them, and they may not give him the choice of going or staying."

"Yes, that's very true," agreed Murdock. "But if they asks him to stay he'll say 'No', and likewise give 'em to understand that if they keep him by force he won't do no work for 'em. And they knows Chips, and understands that if he says a thing like that he'll stick to it, if it's only to spite 'em. No, I don't believe as they'll want to keep any man against his will, because that always means trouble, sooner or later, and Muster Bainbridge is far too 'cute to run the risk of anything of that sort. Besides, there's Joe Caton—he says as he sarved his time in a shipbuilder's yard, and is as good a ship's carpenter as you'll find goin'; he's stoppin' with 'em of his own accord, I reckon, and Bainbridge will be satisfied with him."

"Well, perhaps it may be so; we shall soon know," agreed the skipper. "But," he continued, with a sigh of anxiety, "if they mean to turn the passengers as well as ourselves adrift—and I feel assured that they do—I wish Bainbridge would let me advise him in the matter of fixing up the longboat for the reception of the women and children. They will need many little comforts that an inexperienced lad, such as he is, will never think of; and it will be bad enough for the poor souls, even if everything that is possible is done for their welfare. And the longboat alone will not be big enough to take us all with any degree of safety, to say nothing of comfort."

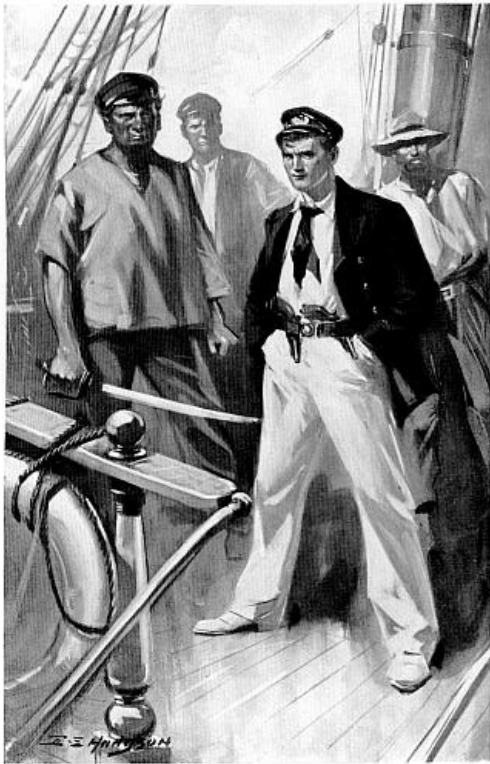
"We must watch for an opportunity, and give him our views upon the matter," said the chief mate. "I wonder whether —"

At that moment the sliding door of the house in which we were confined was thrust back, and Lloyd—otherwise "Welshy"—entered. And behind him, ranged up athwart the deck outside, were to be seen a number of the seamen, each with a rifle in his hand and a cutlass girt about his waist. It was evident that the mutineers had lost no time in hunting up the ship's arm chest—at that time an almost obsolete item of a ship's equipment—and providing themselves with the means of effectually suppressing anything in the nature of resistance on our part, or an attempt to recapture the ship.

"Good a'ternoon, gen'lemen," observed "Welshy", with a grin that might indicate either triumph or an attempt at ingratiation; "splendid weather for a boat trip, ain't it? I'm come to cast yer loose, and I dare say ye'll be much obliged to me—for it can't be very comfortable to sit there, hour a'ter hour, with your feet lashed together and your hands tied behind your backs; but, ye see, we agreed as it was best to take no risks, and then there'd be no call for bloodshed—I dare say you all understands what I means. Yes,"—as he proceeded to cast off the skipper's lashings—"I've come to cast ye all adrift. But let me warn ye all not to dream of attemptin' anything foolish, for we've got the ship and we means to keep her; and them rifles is all loaded with ball cartridge, and the men as carries 'em'll shoot to kill if e'er a one of 'em sees any of you doin' what you didn't ought to do. You understand, Cap'n? And you, Mr Mate? And the rest of yer?"

At these pointed questions we severally intimated that we understood, for indeed we could do nothing else. Whereupon the glowering scoundrel resumed:

"That's all right, and just as it should be. We ain't none of us got nothin' against e'er a one of yer, and we don't want to have no vi'lence, if it can be helped—and there won't be none onless you yourselves brings it about. But if you does—well, stand clear, that's all I got to say. Now, we bein' all agreed that we don't want no vi'lence nor bloodshed nor nothin' in any ways disagreeable, and also bein' agreed that we prefers to have this here ship all to our own selves, it have been decided to send you gents, and the ladies and gen'lemen aft, away in the longboat, to go just exac'ly where you bloomin' well likes. There's twenty-eight of yer, all told, includin' the women and kids; and the longboat'll just comfortably hold yer all, with provisions and water for three weeks. Our new skipper, Cap'n Bainbridge, says that in this weather, and wi' this purty little breeze, you ought to be able to make the South American coast in ten days, easy."



THE MASTER OF THE SITUATION

"Ten days!" exploded the skipper. "Yes, no doubt—if this wind holds and the fine weather lasts. But suppose that it doesn't, what then?" He pulled himself up short, panting and breathless with anger, got a pull upon himself, recovered his self-control, and then said, in a perfectly quiet and steady voice:

"Look here, Lloyd, you are a seaman of experience, and ought to understand—and do understand, I have no doubt—that to send a heavily loaded open boat away upon a ten days' voyage with only three weeks' provisions and water is—well—practically downright murder. I must see your—er—Mr Bainbridge about this, I really must; and you must arrange that I have an opportunity to do so. I cannot and will not undertake the responsibility of such a voyage as that which is proposed, nor, I am sure, will Mr Bligh or Mr Johnson. I shall simply refuse to go in the boat."

"And I too," added the chief mate.

"Ditto," tersely added Johnson.

"You'll refuse to go, eh?" snarled Lloyd. "And suppose we makes yer; suppose—"

"There is no use in supposing anything," interrupted the skipper. "You profess to be anxious to avoid anything in the nature of force or bloodshed. Very well; I tell you that there will be both if you scoundrels persist in turning us all adrift under such circumstances as you have named. No, stand back; don't attempt violence with me, my fine fellow. I am free now, and if you dare to lay your filthy hands upon me I will kill you with this," and he shook his clenched fist savagely in Lloyd's face. "Now," he continued authoritatively, "go aft and tell Bainbridge that I want to see him—that I must and will speak to him before I leave this ship."

To my great surprise the man obediently turned away, and, with a low-spoken word or two to the armed men who remained on guard outside the door, swung round the end of the house and walked aft, as we could tell by the sound of his receding footsteps.

He was absent about a quarter of an hour, during which Captain Roberts quietly cast off the chief mate's lashings, then the pair of them released Mr Johnson and the boatswain, who in turn released the sailmaker and myself, all being done under the eyes of the armed guard before the door, who looked stolidly on without protest by word or deed. We had scarcely done this when we became aware that the ship was being brought to the wind; and presently the order was given to man the braces. There were the usual "Yo-ho! yo-hip! round with her, boys!" and the like cries, which the British merchant seaman deems it necessary to indulge in when he is pulling and hauling; and presently we understood that the ship was hove-to on the starboard tack, with her head to the northward. Then the order was given to man the capstan; and the men were heaving round when Lloyd returned, and, with a grin of comprehension at finding us all released from our bonds, informed the skipper that Bainbridge was willing to see him. Whereupon Captain Roberts left us, and, escorted by "Welshy", went aft.

Meanwhile, we who were left behind in the forward house gathered from the various sounds which reached us that the longboat was now being hoisted out; and presently we heard the heavy splash of her as she was dropped into the water alongside. This was followed by an order to overhaul and unhook the yard tackles; and in the comparative silence that then ensued we occasionally caught the alternate murmur of the skipper's and Bainbridge's voices: but they were speaking in ordinary conversational tones, and the multitudinous sounds of the ship—the faint rustle of canvas aloft, the patter of reef-points, the creaking of the yards and timbers, the wash of water alongside, and the subdued hum of many voices on deck—prevented us from catching a word of what was being said. However, we gathered that Captain Roberts had been protesting against turning so many people adrift in the longboat alone, for presently we heard Bainbridge shout an order to lower away the captain's gig, which, next to the dinghy and jollyboat, was the smallest boat belonging to the ship. But she was roomy enough to accommodate ten people comfortably, without ballast, or seven with provisions and water enough to last her crew for three weeks; and I considered that if Bainbridge was indeed going to give us the gig as well as the longboat, with, of course, an adequate supply of provisions and water, we should be able to manage tolerably well in anything short of a gale.

Presently Lloyd, who appeared to be acting as Bainbridge's lieutenant, came forward again and entered the house. "Now, then, gen'lemen," he remarked, with the grin which he seemed to think it necessary to assume when addressing us, "the longboat's all ready, and the passengers is waitin' to go down into her, so you'd better come along and see to the stowin' of 'em. And Mr Bainbridge have agreed to let you have the gig also; so you ought to be as happy and comfortable as sandboys. But don't forget what I told yer about our not wantin' to have no trouble nor bloodshed. The ship's ours, and we means to keep her, so if you wants to go away with whole skins, what you've got to do is to get from alongside as quick as possible, and without makin' no trouble; for as sure as any of ye attempts to make trouble there'll be bloodshed, and don't you forget it. Mr Bligh, you and Mr Johnson be to go first and see to the stowin' of the passengers; and when the longboat's got her complement the rest of yer can foller."

"You are not taking any chances, Lloyd, are you?" laughed Mr Bligh sarcastically, as he rose to his feet. "Although all hands of you appear to be armed, you are not going to run the risk of having too many of us loose out on deck at once, for fear of what we might do, eh? Well, you are a fine, courageous lot of mutineers, I must say! You wouldn't even chance a fight with a single one of us when you started out to take the ship, but must needs entice us for'ard, one man at a time, upon the pretence that fire had broken out in the hold. Ugh! I don't envy Bainbridge his crew of bold buccaneers—not a little bit!" and with a scornful laugh he swaggered out on deck, followed by the second mate.

A minute later we heard his voice speaking to the passengers and calling upon them by name, one by one, to pass down the side, the women and children first. And it was pitiful to hear the low moaning and sobbing of some of the poor creatures as they reluctantly left the firm, spacious deck of the ship and fearfully clambered down the side ladder into the dancing longboat, which looked so small and dangerous a refuge in comparison with the bulk of the barque. The embarkation of the passengers proceeded slowly, because of the women and children among them, all of whom were frightened, while many of them were weeping bitterly, despite the best efforts of husbands, fathers, brothers, and male friends to encourage them. But at length the last passenger went down over the side and was assigned his place in the longboat, and then Lloyd again came forward and summoned those of us who remained in the house to follow him; and as we passed out on deck and started to walk aft to the gangway, the five armed seamen who had mounted guard over us followed at our heels.

As we cleared the galley, which formed part of the structure in which we had all been confined, the whole of the after part of the ship, from the fore end of the main hatchway, came into view, and we saw that the vessel was indeed, as we had supposed, hove-to on the starboard tack, with her mainyard laid almost square, the mainsail brailed up, and the remainder of her canvas set; and the fabric was full of the sound of a gentle creaking of timbers, trusses, and parrals, and the soft rustling of the white cloths overhead. She had no way on her, but was curtsying and rolling gently on a long, sluggish swell that came creeping up from the eastward. Apart from the swell, the sea was quite smooth, its surface being scarcely wrinkled into a pure, delicate blue tint by the easterly breeze, which had died down to so gentle a zephyr, that the lighter canvas and even the topsails flapped to the masts with every heave and dip of the hull. The sky was cloudless, save away down toward the west, where a great mass of vapour, broken up into small patches, blazed crimson and gold in the rays of the declining sun, and gilded and reddened the sleepy undulations beneath it.

Bainbridge, with his peaked cap thrust aggressively to the back of his head, his brass-buttoned blue serge jacket opening to display his white shirt and flowing black silk necktie, and also, incidentally, a brace of revolvers, suggestively stuck in the broad elastic belt which girt his waist, and with a smile of insolent triumph upon his dark, saturnine, but otherwise rather good-looking face, stood alone at the break of the poop, with both hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets and his white-canvas-shod feet planted wide apart, watchfully regarding the proceedings on the main deck beneath him; while the whole of the crew, with the exception of the cook and the five men who constituted our especial bodyguard, were drawn up athwart the deck and along the face of the poop structure, each man armed with a rifle, and with a sheathed cutlass girt about his waist. Captain Roberts and Mr Bligh stood together at the open lee gangway, through which and above the lee rail could be seen the tossing masts of the longboat.

As our little party approached him the skipper turned, and, after running his eye over us for a moment, said:

"Mr Temple, I shall be obliged to ask you, the carpenter, and Sails to go with Mr Johnson in the gig. The longboat is already pretty well crowded, considering that part of her complement consists of women and children. You will find that the gig already has four breakers of fresh water in her, which will serve for ballast, but you will have to provision her from the longboat, as Bainbridge absolutely refuses to give us so much as another biscuit. You will find Mr Johnson already in her. Just jump down and lend him a hand, if you please."

The gig, with her mast already stepped, was lying outside the longboat, with Mr Johnson in her, while Chips, in the longboat, was overhauling the stock of provisions in the latter and passing a certain portion into the gig according to the second mate's instructions. It was a bit of a job to get to her across the crowded longboat, but I had just stepped into her and was about to address Johnson when I stopped short, for I heard Captain Roberts's voice raised in a final

appeal to the men.

"My lads," he said in a loud, clear voice, "before I quit the ship I want to give you a last chance to undo the evil that you have this day done, and to avert from yourselves the punishment that most surely awaits you if you persist in following the path into which you have been beguiled by a plausible young scoundrel—"

"Meaning me, eh, Skipper?" jeered Bainbridge, with a harsh laugh, from the poop above.

"Even now, men," continued the captain, ignoring Bainbridge's interruption, "at this last moment, it is not too late for you to withdraw from your unholy compact and return to your duty. You are not to blame for what has happened; you have simply been deceived and led astray by one who ought to have known better than to tempt you to a step which can only end in your destruction. I ask you to lay down those arms and place yourselves at my mercy; and I promise you, upon my honour as a seaman and a gentleman, that if you will do so not one of you except your ringleader shall ever hear another word about the matter—"

"Stop! Shut up! Not another word, as you value your life!" yelled Bainbridge, suddenly flying into a fury and whipping a revolver out of his belt. "So that is your little game, is it? You would bribe those men to betray me, to put me into your power! Very well! Now you jump down into that longboat at once; and if you dare to open your mouth again and speak another word of temptation to the men, I'll blow your head off," and he wound up with an oath.

But Captain Roberts was not to be deterred so easily from seizing the only opportunity that had thus far presented itself by which he might make an effort to regain the command of the ship and his ascendancy over her crew, nor was he at all the sort of man to be frightened from his duty by the flourishing of a pistol before his eyes. It was his duty to nullify this mutiny if he could, and therefore he turned to the men again.

"Lads," he said, "bethink yourselves. What sort of a future is to be yours if you persist—?"

Crack! Bainbridge's pistol barked out from the poop, and poor Captain Roberts reeled back, clutching his breast, from which the red blood was spouting, into the arms of Mr Bligh, who was standing close by him. And Bainbridge, startled perhaps at what he had done—for the skipper had always behaved like a father to him—lost the last vestige of his self-control, and became in a moment the very personification of a raving, bloodthirsty maniac. Levelling his still smoking revolver at Bligh, he commanded the latter, with a very tornado of curses, instantly to place the body of the captain in the longboat and shove off from the ship's side forthwith, unless he wished to share the skipper's fate.

Still supporting the swooning body of the captain in his arms, Bligh allowed his gaze to search in turn the face of each of the armed men who now clustered round him, and seeing nothing to justify the hope that a further appeal would meet with the least success, replied:

"All right, my lad, I'm going—worse luck for you! Here, one of you,"—to the crew—"just drop your shooting-iron for a minute, if you're not afraid of me, and lend me a hand to lower the skipper over the side, will ye?" Then, as one of the men mechanically obeyed, the mate murmured in his ear: "I'm sorry for you silly buckos, for this means the hang-man's noose for all hands of you. But there's time for you yet. If you repent before we're out of sight, all you have to do is to bear up in chase of us and run the ensign up to the fore royal-mast-head. I shall know what that means, and you'll have no reason to regret it. Now then," aloud, as the two took the skipper's body between them, "handsomely does it. Below there, boatswain, just ease the captain down, and lay him in the main sheets where the doctor can get to work upon him."

Between them they somehow contrived to get the unfortunate skipper's body down the side and into the sternsheets of the longboat, where Dr Morrison at once proceeded to examine the wound; and the moment that this was done Mr Bligh scrambled down the side ladder, made his way aft among the women and children, who were huddled together, most of them sobbing quietly with their faces buried in their hands, seized the tiller, and, thrusting it hard-over, gave the word to shove off and make sail. The order was promptly obeyed, and five minutes later the longboat, with the gig towing astern, was running off to leeward, with both standing lugs and her jib set; while those of us who were watching the barque saw her head sheets trimmed aft and her mainyard swung as she slowly gathered way and stood to the nor'ard and eastward, close-hauled on the starboard tack.

We had been under way about ten minutes when Mr Bligh hailed Mr Johnson to haul up alongside; and when we had done so he said:

"Mr Johnson, now that Captain Roberts is so seriously hurt I shall want you to come into the longboat with me, because I am the only one at present capable of navigating her, and—you understand me, I'm sure. Temple, you will have to take command of the gig, and do the best you can with her. That young scoundrel has not permitted any of us to bring our sextants with us; he has not even given us a chart, or so much as a boat compass, so we shall have to do the best we can without them. But I have been considering the situation, and have come to the conclusion that our best plan will be to make for Rio, which, according to my rough reckoning, bears about west and by no'th, true; distant, say, twelve hundred miles: and we shall have to shape our course for it, as nearly as we can, by the sun and stars. This plan has the advantage that by continuing to steer a westerly course we are bound to hit the South American coast somewhere, even if we should miss Rio; and we also stand a very good chance of falling in with and being picked up by something bound round the Horn. So much for that part of the business. Next, as we are a bit crowded here, and the boat is rather deeper than I like, you will have to take the boatswain in exchange for Mr Johnson; and—" he paused and ran his eye speculatively over the crowd in the longboat. Then, addressing them generally, he said, "I wonder whether one of you gentlemen would care to go in the gig with Mr Temple? As you can all see and feel for yourselves, we are rather uncomfortably crowded aboard here, and the boat would be all the safer if she were relieved of the weight of even one of you, while there is plenty of room in the gig, and she is just as safe as the longboat. I suppose I need not tell you that Temple is an excellent seaman and navigator, while the gig is the faster boat of the two and will probably arrive at least a couple of days ahead of us."

A pause of a few seconds' duration followed this appeal, and then a Mr Cunningham—who happened to be the only unattached male passenger among the party—arose and said:

"If you consider the change desirable I shall be very pleased to go in the gig; in fact, I am the only male passenger who has no 'encumbrance' with him in the shape of wife or child, therefore it will make no difference at all to me which boat I happen to be in."

"That being the case, we will make the exchange at once, and then you, Temple, had better make sail and get over the ground as fast as you can," said Mr Bligh.

And therewith the gig was hauled up close alongside the longboat and the transfer at once effected, Mr Johnson turning over to the bigger boat while the boatswain and Mr Cunningham joined us in the gig. The transfer was not a lengthy process, for Bainbridge had not permitted any of us to bring away any of our belongings, and at that moment the richest of us had only what he or she happened to be wearing in the way of clothing. Then, as the chief mate cast off our painter and thrust the two boats apart, he said:

"Make sail, Temple, and crack on for all you are worth. And, as soon as you get in, report the mutiny, get the British Consul to send out a tug or something, with provisions and water, to look for us; and see that he reports the matter at once to the nearest naval station within reach, so that the men-o'-war may be dispatched to seek the *Zenobia*, and get hold of her before she has time to do very much mischief. And don't forget that your course is west and by no'th—or, as near as may be, in the eye of the setting sun when he reaches the horizon. Goodbye, and a quick passage to you!"

"Goodbye, sir," I returned; "and the same to you! I trust that the doctor will be able to put the captain on his feet again by the time that you get in. I will remember all your instructions, and lose not a moment in carrying them out directly we arrive. Goodbye, all! Hoist away, bos'n; and, Simpson, boom out the sheet with that boathook."

The sun was by this time within ten minutes of his setting, and glowed, a great, palpitating disk of incandescent red, through a thin veil of innumerable small, closely clustering clouds that stretched in gorgeous tints of gold, crimson, and purple against a background of very pale green, right athwart the horizon ahead, their colours being brilliantly reflected in the softly rippling, slowly moving undulations that came creeping up after us, heaving us gently up on their ample breasts and then sweeping on ahead of us straight toward the sinking luminary. The wind had just strength enough in it to keep the sheet of our single lug from sagging into the water, and the gig was sliding smoothly along, with the small sound of lapping, gurgling water under her, at the rate of about three knots in the hour, leaving behind her a thin, swirling wake of small bubbles and tiny whirlpools that vanished upon the breast of the next on-coming swell. The longboat, under fore and main standing lugs and a small jib, deeply loaded as she was, was doing a knot less than ourselves, and we soon passed and slid ahead of her; while away down in the north-eastern board, broad on our starboard quarter, the topsails and upper canvas of the barque shone primrose-yellow above the ridges of the swell as she stood away from us, heading about nor'-north-east, close-hauled on the starboard tack.

There was every prospect that we were about to have a fine night, almost too fine, in fact, to suit us: for although light winds meant smooth water, which in its turn meant safety for deeply laden open boats, we had a long road before us and not too many provisions or too much water for our sustenance during our journey; and for my own part, if I could have had my choice, I would have preferred a little more wind, provided that it was fair—even although it involved a somewhat heavier sea—to help us on our way.

Chapter Three.

We start our Voyage in the Gig.

The first matter to which I gave consideration, after we were fairly under way, and had parted company with the longboat, was that of food and drink; and I began by taking stock roughly of what we had, and jotting down the items in my pocket-book. To begin with, we had four five-gallon breakers of fresh water—twenty gallons in all. Then we had two sacks of cabin bread, which, by a partial count, I estimated to contain about three hundred biscuits altogether. And in addition to these we had one dozen tins of ox tongue; six small tins of potted meats; four jars of marmalade and two of jam; two bottles of pickles; four bottles of lime juice; one bottle of brandy; and two bottles of rum. When I had jotted everything down I made a few calculations, and then I spoke.

"Shipmates," I said,—“and I include you, Mr Cunningham, in the term, for this misfortune puts us all upon the same footing—you no doubt heard Mr Bligh say, a little while ago, that according to his reckoning we are somewhere about twelve hundred miles from Rio, which is our nearest port. That means a twelve days' voyage, with a fair wind all the time, blowing fresh enough to keep us going, hour after hour, at the rate of five knots. Now, those of us who have used the sea don't need to be told that such a favourable condition of affairs is so exceedingly unlikely that it is scarcely worth talking about. To begin with, we are making a bad start, for instead of doing our five knots we are doing little if anything more than half that, with every prospect of a flat calm within the next three or four hours. Therefore I think it will be wise of us to recognise, at the outset, that our voyage is a good deal more likely to take twenty days than it is to be accomplished in ten.

"Of course, in saying this I am regarding the matter from its most unfavourable point of view. I remember that we have had easterly winds without a break ever since we crossed the line, and it may be that the Trades are extending unusually far south just now, and that we are still on the southerly fringe of them. If this should prove to be the case we shall be all right, for by steering a west and by no'th course we shall be edging to the nor'ard and working our way back into the permanent trade winds. But, on the other hand, this easterly wind may not be the trade wind at all—and my own opinion is that it is not—in which case we may expect a westerly breeze—that is to say, a foul wind—at

any moment; and I think we should only be acting with common prudence to take such a probability into consideration.

“Now, this brings me to the question of food and water. As you have seen, I have been taking stock of what we have, and making a few calculations, with the following result. First, with regard to the fresh water. We have just twenty gallons of it, or one hundred and sixty pints. If we could be certain of making our voyage in ten days that amount of water would afford sixteen pints per day to be equally divided between the five of us, which is a fraction over three pints per day per man, or, say, half a pint at each of three meals and another half-pint at three intervals between meals. Little enough, you will say. Very true; yet I think we must endeavour to do with less. We must try to be satisfied with four half-pints per day of twenty-four hours per man, by which means we shall be able to make our water last sixteen days, and in sixteen days many things may happen: we may end our voyage, if we have luck; or we may be picked up; or we may have rain enough to enable us to replenish our water supply. But since neither of these things may happen, we ought, in common prudence, to determine at the outset not to drink more than four half-pints per man per day; and I think we may be able to manage upon that without any very great hardship. What say you?”

“I think we can manage it, if we set our minds to do it,” at once answered Mr Cunningham, and after a little further talk the boatswain, carpenter, and sailmaker also agreed to make the attempt. In the same way we arrived at a determination to be satisfied with four biscuits per day each, with a suitable proportion of tongue, potted meat, jam, and what not; and we also agreed upon the quantity of spirits which was to constitute each man’s daily allowance, Cunningham being of opinion that a very small allowance of stimulant would be almost a necessity, seeing that our food was to be so restricted in quantity. And then, having settled this important question, we piped to supper, each man receiving the exact quantity of food agreed upon; and when we had finished we were all of the one opinion, namely, that although our appetites were far from being satisfied, it would be quite possible for us to sustain life under such conditions for a fortnight or three weeks without serious deterioration of either health or strength.

By the time supper was over it had fallen dark, and we had lost sight of both the longboat and the barque. It was a magnificent night, the sky a deep indigo cloudless blue, studded with myriads of stars, the water perfectly smooth, save for the long, low undulations of the swell; and the only fault that I had to find with the weather was that there was too little wind, the breeze having died down until we were making scarcely two knots in the hour. Fortunately we had no difficulty in the matter of determining our course, for it happened that Mr Cunningham wore a small compass attached to his watch chain as a charm; and after I had made the necessary allowance for variation we soon managed, with the assistance of this miniature compass and a match, to pick upon a star low down on the horizon by which we could steer a fairly straight course for at least a couple of hours, at the expiration of which it would, of course, be easy to pick another.

Then we arranged the matter of watches. There were four of us in the boat who were sailors, and my first proposal was that each of us should take a watch of three hours; but Mr Cunningham would not hear of this. He was, it appeared, a civil engineer by profession, but he had a natural love of the sea and all matters pertaining to sea life, and was quite an enthusiastic amateur yachtsman, with a sufficient knowledge of the way to handle a boat to justify me fully in entrusting him with temporary charge of the gig, at least in fine weather; and he insisted on taking his fair share of whatever work there might be to do. We therefore decided that he also should be allowed to stand a watch. I undertook to stand the first watch, from six o’clock to nine; and, this being arranged, the boatswain, carpenter, and sailmaker at once disposed themselves for sleep, two upon the thwarts and the third coiled up in the eyes of the boat, while Cunningham, who declared that he had no inclination for sleep, placed himself beside me in the sternsheets and began to chat in a low tone of voice, so that he might not disturb the others.

Naturally the subject uppermost in our minds was the mutiny, and we began to talk about it. I happened to express some surprise that Bainbridge had allowed the doctor to leave the ship, upon which Cunningham gave vent to a low chuckle of amusement.

“My dear chap,” he said, “Bainbridge didn’t dare to keep him. He fully intended to do so at first, and acquainted Morrison with the fact, but the doctor wouldn’t have it at any price—swore that if he were not allowed to leave with the rest of us he would poison all hands within a week! After that, Bainbridge was only too glad to let him go.”

We continued to chat for some time upon the subject, wondering what possible motive Bainbridge could have for proceeding to such an extreme as that of capturing the ship; by what means he had contrived to win the men over; and how he had managed to do it without exciting the slightest suspicion, and so on: and then Cunningham began to speak of himself. He was, it appeared, an orphan, twenty-eight years of age, without a single friend in the world who felt enough interest in him to care what might become of him. He had already explained, a little earlier in the evening, that he was by profession a civil engineer; and he now went on to tell me that, entirely without friends or influence as he was, he had found it so difficult to make headway in England that he had at last determined upon going out to Natal, in which colony, it being comparatively speaking a new country, he had hoped to find some scope for his professional knowledge. “But that,” he added, “is all knocked on the head by that young villain, Bainbridge, who has not only prevented me from reaching Natal, but has actually turned me adrift in an open boat to fetch up who knows where, with only the clothes I stand in. And yet, not exactly that either,” he corrected himself with a quiet chuckle of amusement; “for although my expensive surveying instruments and all my kit are on board the *Zenobia*, I contrived to get at my trunks this morning and extract therefrom a bag containing one hundred and forty sovereigns, as well as my telescope and half a dozen sticks of tobacco, all of which I carefully secreted about my person and have with me now.”

“Well,” returned I, “if that is the case you may call yourself lucky, for you will find a hundred and forty British sovereigns exceedingly useful when we get ashore; as for your telescope, it may prove of the utmost value to us before this trip is over. You are considerably better off than I am, for I was allowed to leave the ship with literally only the clothes that I am wearing. The remainder of my clothes, together with my sextant, nautical and other books, and some sixteen pounds odd in cash, are still in my berth aboard the barque, if that swab has not already seized them.

But of course I am hoping to find a ship at Rio, aboard which I may be able to work my passage home; and once back in London the owners are bound to find me another berth."

"But supposing there shouldn't happen to be a ship at Rio in which you can work your passage home. What will you do in that case?" asked Cunningham.

"Oh," I said, "I should simply have to take the first berth I could find, irrespective of where the vessel might happen to be bound for! Or, in the last resort, I can place myself in the hands of the British Consul, and be sent home as a shipwrecked seaman."

"I see," said Cunningham thoughtfully. "But," he resumed, after a moment's silence, "there is no need for you to adopt either of these courses, you know, old chap. My hundred and forty sovereigns will be quite sufficient to see us both comfortably home from Rio, and you can repay me whenever you happen to be able."

I very heartily thanked the young civil engineer for his exceedingly generous offer, but protested that I could not possibly accept it—that, in fact, there was not the least likelihood that things would turn out so badly in Rio as to compel me to avail myself of his generosity; but nothing would satisfy my companion short of a definite promise that I would accept his help should matters result awkwardly upon our arrival. Eventually I very reluctantly yielded to his importunities and gave him the required promise, and thus began a sincere friendship between us that was only further strengthened by the long series of remarkable adventures that lay ahead of us both, although at that moment we little dreamed that anything out of the ordinary run of events was to befall either of us.

Toward the end of my watch the breeze evinced a slight tendency to freshen, and when at nine o'clock I handed over the charge of the boat to the boatswain, and Cunningham and I disposed ourselves to secure such sleep as might come to us, we were slipping along through the water at the rate of a good honest four knots in the hour.

As may be imagined, my sleep that night was of a somewhat intermittent character, for a boat's thwart is not the most comfortable bed in the world, and I was fully conscious of the responsibility that had been laid upon me to guide the gig, and the lives which had been entrusted to her, over the trackless ocean, without the aid of chart or nautical instruments of any kind save the toy compass attached to Cunningham's watch chain. I was well aware that my only hope of success lay in the keeping of the most accurate account possible of the boat's progress and direction, and, therefore, was up and looking about me at least half a dozen times during the night.

The fine weather continued all through the hours of darkness, and during the boatswain's and carpenter's watches the wind gradually freshened up, until by three o'clock, when Chips called the sailmaker to relieve him, the boat was buzzing merrily along at a speed of between six and seven knots; but after that the wind began to soften rapidly away again, until at length, when the sun swept into view above the eastern horizon, we scarcely had steerage way, and half an hour later it fell a flat calm. We accordingly lowered the sail, and, this done, I directed Simpson, the sailmaker—who was the lightest of us, and therefore the least likely to capsize the boat—to shin up to the masthead and see if he could detect any sign of the longboat or the barque, and incidentally take a good look round the entire horizon upon the off-chance of there being a sail anywhere in sight; but he reported the horizon bare in every direction except in the eastern board, where he fancied he could occasionally detect a faint something that might possibly be the sails of the longboat, although he was by no means sure even as to that, opining that what he had seen, if indeed he had seen anything at all, might be the distant fin of a prowling shark.

The mention of sharks gave me an idea, and I asked my companions whether perchance any of them happened to have any small stuff about them out of which we might contrive to make a fishing line; whereupon Chips, with a smile, requested me to vacate my seat in the sternsheets for a moment, and, opening the locker in the after thwart of the boat, produced an excellent cod line, with hooks and sinker all complete, explaining that as soon as he gathered an inkling of what Bainbridge intended on the previous day, he contrived, while engaged in knocking up a temporary pen for the sheep, to filch the said line out of the cook's galley and to secrete it, afterward seizing an opportunity to transfer it to the gig's locker when he learned that she was about to be turned over to us. There happened to be a piece of dry shrivelled bait still transfixed upon one of the hooks; we therefore dropped it over the side, paid out the line, made fast the inner end to one of the thwarts, and forthwith forgot all about it in the small bustle of getting breakfast.

But while we were still engaged upon the meal we suddenly became aware that our fishing line was being violently agitated, and upon hauling it in found that we had been fortunate enough to hook a young dolphin about two feet long. Now, raw dolphin is not exactly an appetising dish, especially to those who, like ourselves, possessed nothing keener than a really strong, healthy hunger; still, there was the fish, so much to the good as supplementary to our rather meagre breakfast allowance, and—well, in short we—at least the boatswain, carpenter, sailmaker, and myself—managed to eat nearly half of him. Cunningham had not yet arrived at the starvation-point where raw fish could be devoured with a relish, and he declined to share our banquet, for which I did not blame him; but really, after I had succeeded in so far conquering my prejudice against raw food as to nibble cautiously at my portion, I found that it was by no means so repulsive as I had imagined. And although it was certainly not at all inviting it was undoubtedly nutritious; and when at length I finished my breakfast, not only was my hunger completely satisfied, but I felt refreshed and invigorated after my meal.

Breakfast disposed of, Simpson once more shinned aloft and took another look round; but there was still nothing in sight—indeed, how should there be, seeing that there was no wind to fan anything into our ken? He could not now even discern the faint appearance to the eastward which he had imagined might indicate the position of the longboat, but that of course might be due to the fact that, like ourselves, they had lowered their now useless canvas. With not a breath of air stirring it was intensely hot, the rays of the unclouded sun beating down upon us fiercely as the breath of a furnace, and I inwardly execrated that scoundrel Bainbridge and his lawless crew as I thought of the crowded longboat and the hapless women and children—to say nothing of the wounded skipper—pent up in her, with nothing to protect them from the pitiless heat and glare.

"Well, shipmates," I said, "we shall do ourselves no good by lying here idly sweltering. This calm may last for a week, for aught that we can tell; there is not the slightest sign of a breeze springing up, so far as I can see. I propose, therefore, that instead of doing nothing we strike the mast, out oars, and go in search of a wind. There is no need," I continued, seeing signs of a protest on the faces of my companions, "for us to exert ourselves very greatly; and we can scarcely make ourselves hotter than we are, do what we will. I therefore suggest that we throw out the oars and paddle quietly ahead upon our proper course. We ought to be able to get three knots out of the boat with little exertion, and every mile of progress means so much to the good: moreover, I want you all to remember that we cannot afford to lie idly here; our stock of provisions will only last a certain time, and just picture to yourselves what our condition will be if, through suffering ourselves to be delayed by calms, these provisions—and our water—should become exhausted before we reach land or are picked up. My idea is that four of us should pull while the fifth steers, and that at the end of one hour by the watch he who steers should relieve one of us at the oars, so that every four hours each of us will get one hour's rest. Now, what say you, lads? It is Mr Cunningham's watch, therefore let him take the first spell at the yoke lines."

It was easy enough to see that the others did not like the idea of working at the oars in that blistering sun, nor was that to be wondered at; but my reminder to them of the possibilities in store for us should our provisions and water be exhausted before relief in some shape or other came to us had its effect. With many grumblings and imprecations at the inopportune calm, they set to work to strike the mast, ship the rowlocks, and get out the oars; and five minutes later, myself pulling stroke, and Cunningham in the sternsheets with the yoke lines in his hands and his compass charm on the seat beside him, we were moving quietly and easily to the westward at a speed of quite three knots.

Fortunately for us the gig was a particularly good boat of the whaleboat type, built for speed, long and flat on the floor, with beautiful lines; and apart from the low swell, which did not trouble us at all, the water was smooth as oil. When, therefore, we had once got way upon the boat it was an easy matter to keep her going without very much exertion. But hot! Only those who have been exposed in an open boat at sea in a tropical calm can in the least understand or appreciate what we suffered. The sun's rays, striking almost vertically down upon our heads, and reflected upward again from the shining surface of the water, scorched us like fire, and before the first hour had passed my face was so painful that I scarcely dared touch it. And oh, how we perspired! In less than ten minutes my singlet and drawers—which were all that I had on, having like the rest stripped off all the rest of my clothing—were as wet as though I had been overboard. And the natural result of such profuse perspiration was that we soon became intolerably thirsty. I don't know which of us was the first to suffer from this cause, but I know that I had not been at my oar more than twenty minutes when I began to feel that I would willingly give everything I possessed for a good long cooling draught of spring water. However, I clenched my teeth and said nothing, for I knew perfectly well that if the word "thirst" were once mentioned all hands would instantly begin to clamour for water, and I might have the greatest difficulty in restraining the others from making a raid upon the breakers, regardless of consequences.

But, after all, my self-restraint was of little practical value, for presently the carpenter flung the loom of his oar athwart the boat until it rested upon the gunwale, and, tossing his clenched fists above his head, cried in a husky, unnatural tone of voice:

"Great jumpin' Gehosophat, how thirsty I am! Mr Temple, I votes we knock off long enough to have a drink all round. I'm as dry as a limekiln inside; my tongue's beginnin' to rattle again' my teeth, an'—"

"The more reason why you should keep it quiet, Chips," I retorted sharply. "Thirsty! Of course you are; so are we all, for that matter: but there is no reason why we should yelp about it. And as for having a drink, you know as well as I do that, with the small quantity of water which we have in the boat, it has been necessary for us to pledge ourselves solemnly to take no more than a certain quantity daily, and we must wait for our next drink until dinner-time comes along—"

"But, Mr Temple," interrupted the sailmaker, who with the others, myself included, had now cocked his oar, "our proper 'lowance of water is 'alf a pint at each meal, and another 'alf a pint at some other time. Can't we 'ave that there hextry 'alf pint now?"

"No, you certainly cannot," I answered, as well as I was able to speak for the saliva that gathered in my mouth at the mere thought of that nectar-like half-pint of water. "If you did, you would be as thirsty as ever within the next half-hour, and then you would be sorry enough that there was no more water coming to you, except at meal times, for the rest of the day. But I'll tell you what I'll do. It is now," glancing at my watch, "within three minutes of nine o'clock. At ten we will take a spell of ten minutes, and each man shall then have the third part of half a pint of water, with a suspicion of rum in it as a pick-me-up. Then at twelve we shall dine, and each man shall have his half-pint; at three o'clock we will have another third of half a pint; at six we shall have supper; and at nine o'clock, if we find that we really require it, we will have the remaining third of half a pint. Now, that is the best I can do; it is the only thing that we dare do, and we must just make the best of it."

"Yes," agreed Cunningham, "you are quite right, Mr Temple; we must be satisfied with our strict allowance, and ask for no more. But there is one thing we may do to ease our thirst, and it is wonderfully efficacious. Let each man take off his clothes, saturate them with salt water, and put them on again soaking wet. If we do this, say, once every half-hour, we shall find ourselves marvellously refreshed, and quite able to wait for a drink until the proper time for it arrives."

"Ay," said I, "I have heard of that trick before, and a splendid one it is, too, I believe, although I have never had occasion to try it until now. Let us test it at once, lads. I remember once hearing a man say that if shipwrecked people would only keep their clothes thoroughly saturated with salt water, they could practically manage to do without drinking at all." And without further ado I stripped off my singlet and pants, wrung the perspiration out of them, plunged them over the side, and put them on again, my example being immediately followed by the others. Then, the time having arrived for Cunningham to take a spell at the oar, he exchanged places with the sailmaker, and

we again proceeded.

The sensation of coolness imparted by the contact of our wet clothing with our bodies was very refreshing, and as long as it lasted we were able to pull a quick, steady stroke that put us along at the rate of about three knots with little or no fatigue. The worst of it was that it did not last long, for within ten minutes the sun had dried our clothes again, and we began to perspire once more. But we soon found a simple remedy for this by ceasing work just long enough to enable us to pour two or three buckets of water over each other, and then getting to work again; and although these frequent stoppages no doubt had the effect of retarding our progress to some extent, I do not think our actual loss of speed was very great, for the refreshment derived from these often-repeated sousing was such that we were able to put a good deal more life and vigour into our work than would otherwise have been possible. As regards the alleged abatement of thirst, although I did not experience any perceptible relief during the first half-hour of the experiment, I certainly did afterwards, and so did the others; and although at ten o'clock we each avidly took our third of half a pint of water, there were no further complaints of thirst. And here let me mention, for the benefit of any reader who may be so unfortunate as to find himself at any time in a similar predicament, that I then made the important discovery that the most effectual method of assuaging thirst with a very limited quantity of water is not to gulp it down and have done with it, but to sip it slowly, about a teaspoonful at a time, and retain each sip in the mouth at least half a minute before swallowing it. The amount of comfort—not to say enjoyment—relief, and refreshment thus obtainable is nothing short of marvellous.

But, despite every device that we could think of to obtain relief, our sufferings during that day were terrible; for although, by assiduously sousing each other with salt water at frequent intervals, we contrived to avoid the worst torments of thirst, our faces, arms, and hands—in fact all the exposed portions of our bodies, were so frightfully scorched by the sun that even before knocking-off work to take our midday meal we had begun to blister, and by nightfall our faces and arms were covered with blisters. And all through that interminable day we toiled on and on at the oars, with not a shred of cloud to be seen in any direction, the blazing sun scorching us remorselessly, and the sea all round us a polished, shining, gently undulating, colourless plain, unbroken by so much as a solitary ripple, save those created by our oar blades, the passage of the gig through the water, the occasional dash of half a dozen flying-fish out of the sea under the boat's stem, and once or twice the thin wake cut by the dorsal fin of a cruising shark.

But about three-quarters of an hour before sunset the carpenter, who was then steering the boat, shouted: "Hurrah, my bullies, there's a change of some sort comin' at last! See the edge of that there cloud liftin' over the sea line ahead? That means wind, or I'll eat my hat; ay, and p'rhaps rain too. What do you think, Mr Temple?"

With one accord we all cocked our oars, and, standing up, I took a good long look ahead, secretly welcoming, I will confess, the excuse to cease pulling for a minute or two; for my back was by this time aching frightfully, and the skin of my thumbs, just where they joined the hands, was so completely chafed away that the flesh was red, raw, and bleeding. Yes, there was the edge of a cloud, distinct enough, the white, clean-cut, sharp-edged upper portion of a big thunder cloud, unless I was greatly mistaken. And it was rising fast, too, so fast that, even as I stood gazing at it, it fully doubled its area and permitted us a glimpse of the soft, slaty-blue tint merging into the white.

"Yes," I agreed, replying to Parsons' question, "the change is coming all right, and it will not be very long before it is here. Lay in your oars, men. I think, in prospect of what that cloud promises, that we may venture to spare ourselves any further ash-flourishing to-day, for we shall have a breeze before very long, with thunder, lightning, and rain as well, unless I am greatly mistaken. And we will pipe to supper at once, so that we may be able to get our meal in peace and quietness, and have it over and done with before the breeze comes. We are likely enough to have plenty of other matters than eating and drinking to think about and attend to when that happens."

The oars were laid in, willingly enough, for the other four were in just as bad a plight as I was. Cunningham, indeed, was far worse, for, unlike ours, his hands were soft and tender, and when, after the oars had been laid in, he stretched out his hands, palms upwards, and showed them to me, they presented a positively sickening sight. But when I murmured my regret and commiseration he only smiled and expressed the conviction that they would be all right again in a week, for he was one of the pluckiest men I ever met, grit all through, straight as a die, and with not a bad spot anywhere in him; he was, in fact, everything that we are apt to think a typical Briton should be.

We lost no time in getting the meal that we called by courtesy "supper"; and within half an hour had disposed of it, and were waiting patiently for whatever was to come. But while it was still calm and light I had the mast stepped, and sent the sailmaker aloft to take a good, comprehensive look round and see whether he could discover any sign of a sail; and no sooner had he, with much pain and tribulation, climbed to the top of his precarious perch than he sang out that he could just see, in the northern board, what looked like the heads of a ship's royals. Of course he could not tell in which direction she was bound, for, like ourselves, she was becalmed, and slowly "boxing the compass," that is to say, her head was pointing first one way and then another; but while he was aloft, clinging to the boat's masthead, and watching the stranger in the hope of being able to make some further discovery concerning her, her people started to clew up and furl her royals, which circumstance Simpson duly reported. It served as a hint to us in the gig, for if the stranger had detected symptoms that her royals would presently be too much for her, it was high time for us to look after ourselves; and we accordingly proceeded forthwith to close-reef our lug, and otherwise make such preparations as were possible to enable us effectively to meet the onslaught of the threatened squall.

Chapter Four.

At the Mercy of Wind and Sea.

That a squall was indeed brewing was by this time perfectly evident; for while we had been getting our supper the cloud which had made its appearance on the western horizon had rapidly risen, and now hung, an enormous lowering

mass of livid purple vapour, in the western heavens, covering an arc of the horizon of fully a hundred degrees, completely hiding the setting sun, and towering aloft until its upper edge was nearly overhead. Yet so far there was not a breath of wind, and the surface of the sea remained an unbroken, polished mirror, perfectly reflecting the hues of the overhanging cloud to the westward and the deep rich azure of the sky away down toward the east; and when Simpson again climbed the boat's mast to take a final look at the stranger, he reported her naked mastheads as standing up black, sharp, and motionless against the soft primrose tones of the northern sky.

Some ten minutes later, and just as the brief twilight of that region had begun to veil the scene, we saw a faint glimmer of lightning in the heart of the now slowly advancing cloud, and a few seconds after the low mutter of thunder reached our ears. And before the rumble of this had died away there suddenly darted from the bosom of the cloud a long, vivid, baleful, sun-bright flash that seemed to strike into the sea within a quarter of a mile of us, immediately followed by so stupendous a crash that it caused the very timbers of our boat to vibrate and tremble—or so I verily believed. And as though that flash had been a signal, the great cloud seemed suddenly to burst apart, and the next moment we were enveloped in a very deluge of rain, which fairly roared as it threshed the surface of the sea all round us.

"The bread! the bread!" I shouted. "Cover it with the tarpaulin and keep it dry. If we let it get wet it will be spoiled," and immediately we all made a dash for the two bags of biscuits and hastily enveloped them in a small sheet of tarpaulin that Chips had had the forethought to toss into the gig while she was being lowered from the davits.

"Now," said I, as soon as we had taken such precautions as were possible for the preservation of our bread, "spread out the sail, from gunwale to gunwale, right across the boat. This rain is far too precious to be wasted. That's your sort, bos'n, make a good deep sag in the middle of the sail—it will soon fill at this rate; and then we can all drink as much as we please, and put what more we can catch into the broached breaker, filling it until it overflows. Find the pannikin, one of you; there is enough for a drink round already."

The hollow sail filled with the sweet, tepid rainwater faster than we could drink it; and before the rain ceased we had each emptied the pint pannikin twice and had filled the broached breaker right up to the edge of its bung-hole. Then we had another drink all round, after which we bathed our smarting, blistered hands in the cooling liquid before emptying it into the sea. The downpour lasted for perhaps twelve minutes; then it ceased as suddenly as it had begun—as suddenly as though a tap had been turned off up aloft—and we had an opportunity once more to look around us. And, glancing instinctively to the westward in the first instance—for that was where we expected the wind to come from—the first thing we saw, in the fast-deepening twilight, was a broad belt of dark water, flecked here and there with white, about a mile distant, and advancing in our direction.

"Hurrah, lads!" I exclaimed, "here comes the breeze—a foul one it is true, but even a foul wind, so long as there is not too much of it, is better than none at all. Set the lug for a board on the port tack; since we can't go straight to our port I'll make a board to the nor'ard, which will at least be going in the right direction. Yes, bos'n," in reply to a question from that functionary, "keep the sail close-reefed; we shall have all the wind we want, and a little over, before very long, unless I am greatly mistaken."

The wind swooped down upon us in a fierce little flurry that careened the gig to her gunwale, despite the careful tending of the sheet by the boatswain; then, with all hands of us sitting well up to windward, the boat gathered way and darted off upon a course that was as nearly as might be due north-west, lying well down to it, with the spray from the short, choppy seas that the squall instantly whipped up showering in over her sharp weather bow at every plunge, and quickly drenching us to the skin. But there was worse to come, for the wind was freshening every moment and rapidly kicking up a short, steep, choppy sea, the surges of which smothered us with spray as the gig leaped viciously at them under the steadily increasing pressure of the wind upon her close-reefed lugsail; so that within a very few minutes it was taking one hand all his time to keep the boat free of water by continually baling with the bucket, although we eased the craft as much as possible by keeping the weather-leech of the sail ashiver most of the time.

"Just our luck!" growled the boatswain, as he slacked the sheet to a still fiercer puff. "If this had been a fair wind, now, we could have shown whole canvas to it, and would have been reelin' off our seven, or even eight knots as easily as possible. But, as it is, we can't make no headway agin it; and the time ain't far off, in my opinion, when we'll have to up stick and run afore it."

"We'll not do that until we are obliged," said I. "I don't feel at all like losing, in the course of two or three hours, the ground that we have made by the hardest day's work that I ever did in my life. No, Murdock, when we can't face it any longer we will lash the oars together and ride to them as a sea anchor at the full scope of our painter. They will keep the boat head-on to wind and sea, and we shall ride as comfortably that way as any other; while, although our drift will probably amount to as much as three knots every hour, we shall not lose nearly as much ground as we should by scudding before—"

I was interrupted by the sailmaker, who was sitting far enough forward to be able to see some distance past the luff of the sail. Seaman-like, he was instinctively keeping a lookout, and he now suddenly turned and yelled:

"Sail ho! close aboard on the lee bow. Hard up, Mr Temple; hard up, sir, and keep her broad away, or that chap'll run us down."

There was an urgency and imperativeness in the man's tones which made it clear enough that there was no time for investigation. I therefore did the only thing that remained to be done under the circumstances, namely, trusted to the correctness of Sails's judgment and implicitly followed his directions, dragging the tiller hard up, and at the same time calling upon the boatswain to ease off the sheet still further. Under the pressure of her weather helm the boat at once fell broad off; and as she did so I saw, through the rapidly deepening darkness, a great black blotch swing into view past the luff of our sail, which the next instant resolved itself into the shape of a big, hulking brigantine,

wallowing along down toward us with her topsail-yard down on the cap, her reef tackles bowed up, and eight men on her yard busily engaged in reefing her topsail. It was not yet so dark but that those men must have seen us distinctly—in fact one of them paused in his work to flourish his hand at us; yet, but for the sailmaker's watchfulness, the craft would have driven right over us! There could be no doubt of the fact that her crew had seen us, for, in addition to the man who waved to us from the yard, there were two men pacing her monkey poop aft who paused in their march to look at us as we drove past each other; yet, although we yelled to them frantically to heave-to and pick us up, they made no movement to do anything of the sort, and ten minutes later the craft vanished in the darkness. The light was too poor to enable us to read the name on her stern as she swept past us, but she had all the look of a Portuguese-built craft; and, justly or unjustly, the Portuguese have gained rather a sinister reputation for callousness and inhumanity in their behaviour toward people circumstanced as we were at that moment.

"I s'pose they thinks we're out here in a hopen boat for pleasure and the fun o' the thing," was the boatswain's sarcastic comment upon their behaviour, prefaced by a stream of profanity, as the vessel disappeared from our view.

As soon as we realised that the crew of the brigantine had no intention of heaving-to and picking us up we again brought the gig to the wind. But we soon found that this would not do: the wind and sea were both rapidly becoming too much for us, and to continue fighting against them meant the speedy swamping or capsizing of the boat. We therefore adopted the plan which I had been expounding to the boatswain when the brigantine hove into view, securely lashing the four oars of the boat together in a bundle, bending the extreme end of our painter to the middle of the bundle, and launching the whole overboard, at the same time lowering the sail and striking the mast, when the drag of the boat upon the oars brought her head to wind and sea, and enabled her to ride in comparative safety and comfort, although a breaking sea occasionally slopped in over her bows, necessitating the frequent employment of the bucket as a baler.

There was very little sleep for any of us that night, for within an hour it was blowing really hard, with a heavy, steep sea that frequently broke aboard us, causing us intense discomfort as the water rushed aft and surged about our feet and legs to the wild plunging of the boat, and keeping one or another of us constantly busy baling to prevent the boat from being swamped. We were thankful that we had not the added discomfort of cold to contend with, for, hard though it blew, the wind was quite warm; yet, even so, it was unpleasant enough, since we were in the greatest peril every moment of that long, weary night, our utmost efforts being continually required to keep the boat above water. But, notwithstanding everything, it was a fine, exhilarating experience; for, added to the joy of battle with the elements, there was the wild grandeur of the scene, the great masses of black cloud scurrying athwart the sky, with little patches of starlit blue winking in and out between, the roar and swoop of the wind, and the menacing hiss of the phosphorescent foam-caps as they came rushing down upon the boat in endless succession, all combining together to form a picture the like of which, as viewed from a wildly leaping, half-swamped, spray-smothered open boat, it is given to comparatively few men to look upon.

The gale lasted all through the night, breaking at sunrise; but although the sky cleared with the coming of the dawn, the wind continued to blow so strongly that it was not until the sun had crossed the meridian that it again became possible for us to make sail upon the boat: and meanwhile we found that during the night it had hauled round from the north-west, and was therefore still practically dead in our teeth. But the moment that the sea had gone down enough to render sailing once more possible, we got under way and headed westward close-hauled upon the starboard tack, under a double-reefed sail; and I took fresh heart when presently I saw that, even under the exceedingly unfavourable conditions then prevailing—and they were about as unfavourable as they could possibly be—the boat was keeping a good luff, hanging well to windward, thanks to an exceptionally deep keel, and making about four knots of headway every hour.

My hopes rose high that even yet, despite the delays which we had already experienced, we might be able to cover the distance to the coast before our provisions gave out; for if we were doing well under almost the worst conditions that could possibly befall us, what might we not do when those conditions improved? And they certainly did improve as the afternoon wore on, for the wind eventually dropped sufficiently to permit us to shake out our reefs and sail the boat under whole canvas, while with the moderating of the wind the sea also went down and ceased to break, although the swell still ran very high. But it was only the heavily breaking seas that were really dangerous to us; and now that we no longer had them to fear we drove the gig for all that she was worth, luffing her through the fresher puffs, hawsing her up to windward fathom by fathom, and generally handling her as though we were sailing her in a race, as indeed we were in a sense—a race against time.

We continued to do exceedingly well all through that afternoon, and indeed up to about midnight; but the wind was softening all the time, and shortly after midnight our speed began to slacken, until by daylight of the next morning it had once more fallen to less than three knots. Moreover, the weather was by no means satisfactory in appearance; there were no actual clouds to be seen in the sky, but instead of being a clear, deep, rich blue, as it ought to have been, and as it no doubt would have been had there been fine weather in prospect, the entire vault of heaven was veiled in a thick, steamy, colourless haze, through which the sun showed as a feeble, shapeless blotch of white. There was barely enough wind, still dead against us, to fan us along at a bare two knots; but I did not like the look of the sea, which, despite the almost total absence of wind, was in a strange state of unrest, the long heave of the swell being overrun by small, short, choppy miniature seas, which seemed to leap up at brief intervals without visible cause, and then curled over and fell in a casual, sloppy manner that suggested the idea that they would have liked to break but could not summon up the energy to do so.

But whatever else they may have failed to do, these sloppy seas managed to retard the way of the boat through the water very considerably, and to fill our souls with exasperation; for they were distinctly hindering our progress, while we could see no valid reason why they should exist at all. They had the appearance of having sprung up solely to delay us, and for no other purpose whatever. More than once, when I felt exceptionally impatient at our miserably slow rate of progress, I had it on the tip of my tongue to propose that we should again take to the oars; but I did not actually speak the words, for in the first place I doubted whether the gain in speed would be sufficient to justify the expenditure of strength, and in the next place our hands were by this time in such a frightful condition of rawness

that the idea of proposing what would make them very much worse seemed to smack of downright cruelty, unless I could urge some more valid reason than the mere desire to get ahead a little faster. And our situation just then was scarcely desperate enough for that.

It was very shortly after midday, and we were all gathered aft partaking of the meal that we dignified with the name of dinner, when the boatswain, who was sitting on the after thwart, facing me, suddenly paused in the act of conveying a piece of biscuit to his mouth, stared intently over my shoulder for a moment, and then sprang to his feet, shading his eyes with his hand.

"What is it, Murdock?" I asked, turning as I spoke in the direction toward which he was gazing, "do you—?"

"Sail ho!" interrupted the boatswain, pointing eagerly with his hand. "Do ye see her, Mr Temple, sir?"

"Ay, I do," I answered, as I caught sight of a faint pearly gleam afar off on the north-eastern horizon. "Mr Cunningham, will you kindly lend me your telescope for a moment?"

"Certainly, with pleasure," answered Cunningham, producing the instrument from his pocket. It was not a very big affair, being only about six inches long by perhaps an inch and a half in diameter, but it was a three-draw tube, measuring about one foot nine inches long when fully extended, and, for its size, was the most splendid instrument I had ever used. I quickly brought it to bear upon the distant gleam, which the lenses instantly resolved into the heads of the fore and main royals of a craft—either a barque or a brig—standing to the southward. When I had finished with the instrument the boatswain took a squint through it, and after him the carpenter and the sailmaker; and when they had had their turn Cunningham applied it to his eye. As the boatswain passed the telescope over to Chips he turned to me eagerly and looked at me hard with *so* expressive an eye that I instantly read what was in his mind. I shook my head.

"We could never do it, Murdock," I said. "She's too far to the south'ard. Had she borne three, or even a couple of points farther to the nor'ard I might have felt inclined to risk it; but—"

"What are you talking about?" demanded Cunningham. "Is it a question of whether we can or cannot intercept that ship? Because if it is, I am most emphatically in favour of our making the attempt. Mind you, I do not say that we can actually intercept her; but I believe we might manage to get close enough to her to be seen, for she is almost certain to have a man or two aloft at work upon her rigging."

"Yes, ye're right, Mr Cunnin'ham; that's exactly my notion," eagerly agreed the boatswain. "I believe that by runnin' away off in about this here direction," pointing away toward the south—east, "we ought to lift her pretty nigh to her rail by the time that she draws up abreast of us; and if we can do that we stands a very good chance of bein' seen. I haven't no great faith in our prospec's of fetchin' Rio; and if we gets half a chance of bein' picked up by a ship, we ought to take it. Moreover than that, I don't like the look of the weather none too well; and I'd a deal rather spend the comin' nigh aboard that ship than in this here gig."

There was certainly good, sound reason and common sense in Murdock's words, and particularly in what he said about the weather; so I turned to the carpenter, to ascertain his view of the matter.

"What do you say, Chips?" I asked. "Are you of opinion that we shall be justified in losing ten or fifteen miles of ground upon the off-chance of being able to close with yonder craft near enough to be seen?"

"Why, yes, Mr Temple, I certainly am," answered Chips. "I won't go so far as to say that we'll be actually able to manage it; but I think it's our dooty to have a good try for it. I'm like the bos'n, I've got a sort of feelin' that we ain't goin' to fetch Rio this trip—"

"All right, then," I said; "you three constitute the majority, even if Sails happens to think as I do—"

"Ah, but I don't, Mr Temple!" interrupted Simpson. "I agrees with the bos'n—"

"Then round we go," I interrupted in my turn; and, putting the helm hard up, I bore away, the sail jibed over, and off we went almost dead before the wind, heading about south-east, and bringing the stranger about a point and a half abaft our port beam.

Sailing before the wind was a very different matter from plugging to windward with the sheet flattened well in, and although our shift of helm had the effect of making it seem that the wind had suddenly died away almost to nothing, there was no longer that heart-breaking smack-smack of the small seas against our weather bow which had seemed to retard our way in such an exasperating fashion. On the contrary, with the sheet eased well off and the lug boomed out with the boathook so that the yard swung square across the length of the boat, we went sliding smoothly away to leeward with a long, easy, buoyant motion, a pleasant, musical gurgling of water along our bottom planking, and a swift gliding past us of tiny air bubbles and occasional morsels of weed that told us we were now travelling at the rate of quite four knots.

For the first half-hour the stranger did not appreciably alter her bearing relative to the boat, which seemed to indicate that we were practically holding our own with her, and our hopes soared high, especially as within that brief period we had raised her royals and the heads of her topgallantsails above the horizon. But when this latter circumstance enabled us to see that she had her starboard topgallant studdingsails set, my enthusiasm flagged again, for I argued that she must be a slow-coach indeed if, with the breeze then blowing and studdingsails set, she could not do any better than four knots. I held my peace, however, for there was no use in damping the hopes of the others, while there was always the possibility that if any of her hands happened to be employed aloft, the eye of one or another of them might chance upon our sail, which, small though it was, ought to be perfectly visible at a distance of five or six miles, even in that somewhat hazy atmosphere. But by the end of the first hour after we had begun our

chase it became apparent that she had the heels of us, for although we were still steering exactly the same course as at first, she had drawn up square abeam of us. And there it was imperatively necessary that we should keep her if we did not wish her to slip past us, even although the keeping of her there should entail upon us the necessity to edge gradually away, thus bringing our own course ever more nearly parallel to hers, instead of causing the two steadily to converge. Then, about the end of the second hour of the chase, by which time we had lifted the stranger's main topsail-yard above the horizon, and had discovered that she was barque-rigged, the breeze suddenly freshened up sufficiently to add an extra knot and a half to our speed. But this was a misfortune rather than otherwise for us: for although it increased our speed, it also increased that of the stranger, when it reached her, which it did about ten minutes later; and whereas it added only about a knot and a half to our rate of travel, it probably quickened up her pace by more than double that amount, as was painfully apparent from the increased frequency with which we were obliged to edge away to keep her square abeam. And now the anxiety which I had all along felt began to be shared by the others, one or another of whom kept Cunningham's telescope continually bearing upon the barque. They began to fidget where they sat, to mutter and grumble under their breath, and to cast frequent looks at the sky astern, which had not materially altered its aspect since the morning, except that the haze had thickened somewhat. At last the boatswain could restrain himself no longer.

"If this here humbuggin' breeze'd only drop," he grumbled, "we'd out oars and pull to her. But it ain't goin' to drop, that's the worst of it, it's agoin' to freshen still furdur; and that cussed old hooker's goin' to run away from us, that's what she's agoin' to do. Let's have a look at that there glass again, Mr Cunnin'ham," he continued. "I can't make out what they're a-thinkin' about aboard her. It's fine weather, and surely there ought to be some work to be done aloft." Here he got the telescope to bear upon her for at least the tenth time since the chase had begun, and relapsed into temporary silence, while he subjected every visible part of her to a most searching scrutiny. Presently he resumed, with animation: "Ah! I thought it'd be strange if her bos'n couldn't find somethin' that wanted doin' aloft in such fine weather as this. Just you take this here glass, Mr Temple—Chips'll catch hold of the tiller for a minute or two—and see if there ain't a man sittin' astride of her weather main tawps'l-yardarm doin' somethin' or other."

I handed over the tiller to Chips, took the telescope, and raised the eyepiece to my eye. Instantly I had a small but exquisitely clear picture of the three masts of the distant barque, from the level of the second reef-band of her main topsail upward, with every rope and piece of rigging and gear, even to the reef-points of the topsail, rising and falling upon the horizon line with the lift of the ship upon the swell. And there, sure enough, at the point named by the boatswain, but tucked away in the shadow of the weather clew of the topgallantsail, so that it was not very easy to make him out, I saw what I certainly took to be the figure of a man. And that the boatswain and I were not mistaken presently became apparent, for, while I still looked, the fellow leisurely swung himself on to the foot rope and began to lay in along the yard.

"Quick!" I exclaimed, "we must attract his attention somehow, for he has finished his job and is laying in off the yard. Off with your jacket, Sails, and jump up on the thwart and wave it for all you are worth!"

The sailmaker tore off his white canvas jacket, and, grasping it by one arm, sprang up on the mast thwart and waved it furiously, while I kept the telescope focused upon the slowly moving figure of the distant seaman. But the man worked his way steadily in, swung himself off the yard to the topmast rigging, and, with the merchant sailor's usual deliberation, descended until he vanished below the horizon line, seemingly without giving a single glance at the widespreading surface of sea that stretched away for miles on either side of him.

"That will do, Sails," I said; "you may belay your flourishing, and get down off the thwart. That shellback has gone down on deck without so much as a glance in our direction."

"Laid down, have he, without stoppin' so much as to take a look round?" snarled the boatswain savagely, dashing his clenched fist down on the gunwale. "I'll be jiggered if I can understan' what's comin' to the sailorman as sails these here seas. Fust there was that there Portugee, as went past without stoppin' to pick us up, although they see'd us, and must 'ave knowed that we was castaways; and now here's this here bloomin' barque, manned by chaps as don't seem to think it worth while to give a look round while they're aloft, to see whether there's any poor sailormen washin' about in distress. But she ain't British, I'll take my Bible oath o' that; the British shellback don't do that there sort o' thing. Why, when I first went to sea we was never ordered aloft but what the skipper used to say: 'Take a good look round, men, afore you comes down again. We never knows when we may be passin' within sight of some poor unfortunate, perishin' of hunger and thirst, and prayin' to be sighted and picked up!'"

"Well," said I, "I am afraid it is all up with us, so far as that barque is concerned. Nevertheless, we will stick to her as long as she remains in sight. Another hand may be sent aloft aboard her before she disappears; or the wind may drop—although I confess I see no sign of it at present. And in any case it is comforting, in a way, to know that we are in the track of the south-bound ships; we are certain to sight others within the next day or two, and it will be pretty poor luck if we cannot intercept one or another of them."

But although I spoke so confidently I am afraid that I was not very successful in cheering up my companions in misfortune. This second disappointment was producing its effect upon them; they were becoming depressed and pessimistic; and although they all agreed that the proper thing to do was to hang on to the distant barque, in the hope of eventually attracting the attention of somebody aboard her, I could see that we were all fully convinced that the attempt would result in failure.

And so it did. We chased that barque until the sun set and the shades of night hid her from our sight; and although about mid-afternoon we got so close to her that her lower yards showed above the horizon when she lifted on the swell, and kept the telescope bearing upon her all the time, no more hands were sent aloft, and as the afternoon progressed she steadily drew away from us again, until when at length we lost sight of her in the gathering darkness only her royals and the upper halves of her topgallantsails were showing above the horizon. And all this time so absorbed were we in the chase that we were scarcely conscious of the fact that the wind was steadily freshening every minute, the result being that, when at length we were compelled to abandon the hope of being seen and

picked up, we suddenly awoke to the fact that it was blowing quite a strong breeze, and that it had kicked up such a high, steep sea that it was no longer possible for us to round-to and ride to a sea anchor as we had done on the night but one before. We were therefore obliged to scud before the wind all night under whole canvas, to avoid being pooped and swamped by the breaking seas that remorselessly chased us.

That was a harassing, anxious night for all hands of us, for by midnight it was blowing what is generally termed a fresh gale, that is, a breeze strong enough to compel a ship of, say, a thousand tons to reduce canvas to single-reefed topsails; and that, to us, in a small open boat, was about equivalent to what a hurricane would be to the bigger craft. There was no sleep for any of us, for we were in constant, imminent danger, and it taxed the resources of all hands to their utmost limit all through the night to keep the boat from being overwhelmed. The chief danger to an open boat under such circumstances arises from the fact that, lying so low in the water as she does, her sail becomes becalmed every time that she settles into the trough of a sea, and she gradually loses way. Then, as she is hove up on the breast of the next following sea, her sail suddenly fills again, and those in her have to be careful that, in filling, it does not jibe over, for if it did so it would certainly capsize the boat. But in guarding against that danger another of equal magnitude is incurred, for unless the boat is kept dead stern-on to the sea the chances are that she will broach-to and be filled by the breaking head of the sea when it overtakes her. When it comes to be remembered that this twofold peril threatens an open boat about twice a minute hour after hour, as long as the gale continues, some faint idea may be gained of the anxiety and discomfort we were called upon to endure on the occasion which I am now attempting to describe. And while the anxiety of all is sufficiently acute, the man who is most worried is the one who is at the helm, for the behaviour of a craft under such circumstances is in one respect distinctly and harassingly peculiar: at the most perilous moment of all, which is the moment before she is actually overtaken by the breaking crest of the wave, she is apt to refuse to answer her helm, and he who is steering her loses all control over her; she seems to be seized with a perverse determination to take a broad sheer one way or the other, with disastrous results, despite a hard-over helm, and then the only thing to be done to retrieve the situation is to effect a lightning shift of helm against all your past experience and your better judgment. But notwithstanding this, it generally has the desired effect, the reason commonly assigned being that, contrary to what is usually supposed, the body of water constituting the head of a sea actually has a quick forward motion, and when this overtakes a craft, large or small, which is only beginning to gather fresh headway, the result is practically the same as though she were going astern instead of ahead, and the helm must be manipulated accordingly. Whether this is really the true explanation of the curiously awkward phenomenon of which I have spoken I cannot say; but I know that the phenomenon occurs, and that it placed us in the direst peril at least half a hundred times during that never-to-be-forgotten night, a peril from which, it appeared to me, we each time escaped by the very skin of our teeth, and by what seemed to be nothing short of a series of miracles. True, we are told that the days of miracles are long past; but, after all, who knows?

Chapter Five.

The "Martha Brown" of Baltimore.

All through the night, and until nearly noon next day, were we compelled to continue scudding before the gale; and a pretty crew of scarecrows we looked when the morning at length dawned and disclosed us to each other's vision, drenched to the skin with flying spray, haggard and red-eyed with fatigue and the want of sleep, and each wearing that peculiar and indescribable expression of countenance that marks the man who has been face to face for hours with imminent death. But about four bells in the forenoon watch the gale suddenly broke, the sky cleared, and the wind moderated so rapidly that just before noon, by carefully watching our opportunity, we were at length able to round-to and once more ride to our makeshift sea anchor. Then, the boat riding dry—that is to say, shipping no water—we baled her out, and next proceeded to overhaul our stock of provisions, with the object of ascertaining what damage, if any, it had sustained through the constant drenching of the seas to which we had been exposed. Our bread—or biscuit—and water were all that we were really anxious about, the remainder being packed in tins, jars, or bottles, and it was a great relief to us to find that, thanks to the precautions which we had taken, nothing had suffered to any very serious extent.

Then I went to work to calculate our position as nearly as I could, although the roughness of my data rendered it exceedingly difficult to arrive anywhere near the mark; but at length, by patient and careful figuring, I reached the exceedingly unsatisfactory conclusion that not only had we lost all the ground previously gained, but we were somewhere about thirty miles south of the spot where Bainbridge had sent us adrift!

And then our thoughts turned to the longboat, and we began to ask ourselves and each other how she had fared. We were still afloat, it is true, but only because of our long-continued and almost superhuman exertions, while our boat was an exceptionally good one and by no means overloaded. How it would be with our consort, overcrowded with helpless, terror-stricken women and children, and perilously deep in the water, we scarcely dared to think; for, with the recollection of what we had recently passed through still vivid in our minds, we had little difficulty in conjuring up a very graphic picture of what would be the state of affairs aboard the longboat under the same circumstances. Of course there was the possibility that, more fortunate than ourselves, she had been seen and her party rescued by a passing ship; but, failing that, we felt that we dared not entertain the slightest hope that she still survived. No good end, however, was to be served by speculating upon the possibilities of disaster to our friends. We therefore proceeded to get a meal as soon as we had straightened up matters as far as was possible; and while we ate and drank we discussed the important question of what we should do next. Our recent experiences had been of such a character as to convince us that our prospects of reaching Rio before our stock of provisions should be consumed—if ever—were exceedingly slight. On the other hand, we had already had ocular demonstration of the fact that we were not far from the track of south-bound craft; we therefore eventually arrived unanimously at the conclusion that, taking all things into consideration, the best thing we could do was to cruise to the northward, in the hope that within the next few days we should be fortunate enough to fall in with some vessel the skipper of which would be humane enough to pick us up and perhaps land us at the nearest port.

It was so near sunset before the sea moderated sufficiently to enable us again to make sail that we ultimately determined to remain as we were, riding to our sea anchor all night, in order that all hands might have the opportunity to secure a good night's rest before resuming our battle with wind and sea. For after all, now that we had definitely abandoned the idea of attempting to make Rio, or indeed any part of the South American coast, it did not greatly matter whether we were under way or not; a ship was just as likely to come along and find us where we then were as anywhere else. And although we had resolved to take a night's rest before resuming our struggle, we of course intended to keep an anchor watch of one hand, who would look after the weather and the boat and also otherwise maintain a sharp lookout, so that, in the event of a sail heaving in sight, she should not be permitted to slip past us without an effort on our part to intercept her.

The night passed uneventfully, wind and sea gradually moderating all through the hours of darkness, until, by the dawn of the following day, both had so far gone down that we could once more make sail upon the gig with perfect safety. It is true that there was still a rather heavy swell running, but even that was fast diminishing, and there was no sea to speak of, the wind being of the strength known to sailors as a "royal" breeze, that is to say, a wind of so moderate a force that a ship of ordinary size could show her royals to it.

The sailmaker's watch ended a few minutes after sunrise, and when he called the rest of us our first business was to wash the sleep out of our eyes by dipping our heads into a bucket of clear, sparkling salt water, dipped up from over the side; after which we proceeded to perform our toilets as well as our very limited resources permitted, the next thing in order being breakfast. And while this was being prepared—the preparation consisting merely in the apportioning to each individual of his just and proper allowance of food—Simpson shinned up to the masthead to take a look round the horizon, and thus enable us to get the earliest possible intimation of the approach of a ship, should one chance to be in our neighbourhood.

The man had scarcely reached his perch—which, after all, was only about six feet above our heads when we stood up—when he emitted a joyous yell of:

"Sail ho! Hurrah, my bullies, here she comes, pretty nigh straight down for us, if these eyes of mine ain't deceivin' of me!"

"What do you make her out to be, Sails?" I demanded.

"Can't tell yet, sir," answered Simpson. "All as I can see just at present is the head of a—well, it may be a royal, or it may be the head of the to'garns'l of a schooner. And I'm inclined to think it's a schooner, because it looks sharp and clear like, as though it wasn't so very far off. Yes, I reckon that there blessed bit of white ain't much more'n ten mile away."

"And how does she bear?" I asked.

"Dead to wind'ard as ever she can be," was the cheering reply. "And headin' for us just as straight as she can come. Hurrah, my buckos! There's no mistake about it this time; she's boun' to pick us up, unless she happens to be another of them there puddin'-headed Portugees what don't seem to believe in pickin' up pore shipwrecked mariners," Sails ended, with a sudden note of disgust in his voice.

"Portugee or no Portugee, she will pick us up; I'll see to that," said I. "We'll not give her the chance to refuse; we'll just lie doggo where we are until she is within a mile or two of us, and then we'll up lug and run her aboard, whether her people like it or not."

"Ay, ay, that's your sort, Mr Temple," agreed the boatswain. "No more slippin' past and wavin' hands for me; if they don't want to pick us up, we'll just have to make 'em, that's all. I've had enough of boat sailin' to last me for the rest of me bloomin' life, and enough of sleepin' on thwarts, too. I means to sleep in a dry fo'c'sle to-night in spite of all the Portugee swines in creation."

"All right, Simpson," I hailed. "You had better come down now and get your breakfast. By the time that we have finished, yonder craft will be visible to all of us, and then we shall be able to judge what is best to be done."

We made a good hearty breakfast that morning, both eating and drinking a little more than our strict allowance, I am afraid, for we all seemed to be possessed of the same undoubted conviction that, with the appearance of the stranger to windward, our troubles were now all over, and that therefore the necessity to husband our limited resources carefully no longer existed.

The strange sail appeared to be a fairly fast craft, for before we had quite finished our breakfast the head of her canvas appeared above the horizon to us, even though we were still sitting upon the thwarts, and we immediately brought Cunningham's telescope to bear upon her. The first glimpse that I caught of her through the lenses satisfied me that she was a small vessel, the quickness and violence of her movements—for she was rolling heavily—bearing unmistakable evidence of that fact; and ten minutes later we discovered her to be topsail-schooner rigged. She was evidently making the utmost of the fair wind, for she had topmast and lower studdingsails set on both sides; and she was coming dead down the wind direct for us. We waited patiently where we were until she had risen hull-up, revealing herself through the telescope as a very handsome, smart-looking little schooner, with very white sails, which looked as though made of cotton canvas; and then we got our sea anchor inboard, cast the oars adrift in readiness for instant use should we need them, and got under way, working the boat to and fro in short tacks immediately athwart the schooner's hawse, while Simpson stood on a thwart to windward, waving a rag to attract attention, the boatswain meanwhile keeping the telescope steadfastly bearing upon the approaching craft.

We had just tacked for the second time when Murdock, with his eyes still glued to the telescope, shouted:

"They see us! they see us! There's a couple of chaps standin' by her starboard cathead lookin' at us under the sharp

of their hands. And now one of 'em has turned round and is looking aft; he's reportin' of us to the hofficer of the



A CHANCE OF RESCUE

Part 18

Illustration

watch, he is—I can see him

while he p'int's with the other. Yes; and now there's another chap runnin' for'ard to join the first two; he'll be the mate, I reckon—or p'rhaps the skipper. And now the third man's lookin' at us too. Keep on wavin', Sails; don't let there be no mistake about what we wants. The third man's runnin' aft again. He's goin' to call the Old Man, I reckon." A pause of about half a minute ensued, and then the boatswain resumed:

"No, he ain't; he's gone aft to get his glass. Yes, that's it; and now he's bringin' it to bear upon us. Wave, Sails, wave, you skowbank, for all you're worth. Yes; that's—Hurrah! it's all right, bullies, they're not agoin' to leave us behind; they're chaps of the right sort, they are! See that, Mr Temple? There's in stuns'ls; they're agoin' to shorten sail and round-to, to pick us up. But they seem to be thunderin' short-handed. They'll be past us and away to loo'ard long afore they can get them stuns'ls in. Better bear up and run down afore it, hadn't we, sir, so's not to keep 'em waitin'?"

The suggestion was a good one, for they had at least two studdingsails—those set on the starboard side—to take in before they could round-to, and from the rate at which they were getting the first in I could see that, as Murdock had said, the little vessel would run past us before they could get in the other. So I put up the helm and bore away, easing off the sheet, and when we were running off square before the wind I began to edge the boat gradually in toward the line of the schooner's course. By this manoeuvre we gave them a little more time to shorten sail, since we were still about a mile ahead of them and were now travelling in the same direction as themselves, although the schooner was fast overhauling us. But by the time that she was abreast of us, and only about a hundred feet distant, both her starboard studdingsails were in, and she was ready to round-to. Then a man came to the rail and hailed us.

"Boat ahoy!" he shouted. "I guess you're shipwrecked, ain't you, and want to be picked up."

"Ay, ay, sir," I answered; "that is so. May we run alongside?"

"Sure!" he replied heartily. "I'll come to the wind on the starboard tack, when you can pass under my stern and come alongside at the lee gangway."

I waved my hand by way of thanks and to show that I understood, and let run the sheet of the lug to allow him to draw ahead and take room to round-to; and presently he eased down his helm and brought the schooner to the wind, keeping his yards square and hauling his jib sheets over to windward to check the little vessel's way. We were thus afforded an excellent view of the craft, and a little beauty she was, as clean built and finely modelled as a yacht—for which, indeed, she might easily have been mistaken, except for the fact that her sails were not big enough. She was painted all black from her rail to her copper, with the bust of a woman, painted white, for a figurehead, and the name *Martha Brown*, with the word Baltimore—her port of registry—painted in white letters on her stern. She appeared to be in little more than deep-ballast trim, and I began to wonder whither she was bound even before we got alongside her.

The getting alongside required a little management, for there was a fair amount of swell running, and the schooner was rolling heavily; but we managed it all right, and were met at the gangway, upon boarding the little vessel, by the individual who had hailed us. He was a typical Yankee, tall, thin, and somewhat cadaverous-looking as to features, with a clean-shaven upper lip, a short goatee beard, and light hair, slightly touched with grey, worn so long that it came down over the collar of his coat, which was of faded blue cloth, adorned with brass buttons. His trousers were braced up high enough to reveal his ankles, and he wore a pair of ancient red morocco slippers upon his otherwise naked feet. His head was adorned with a peakless cap of what looked like wolfskin, fitted with a pair of flaps to tie down over the ears, but now fastened together at the crown.

Although the man presented a distinctly quaint ensemble, there was a genial, kindly twinkle in his eyes that caused me to take to him on the spot as he extended his hand and said, with a slight drawl and a strong Yankee accent:

"Walcome, strangers, to the *Marthy Brown*. I guess you've been havin' a rough time by the looks of you. How long, now, have ye been knockin' about in that boat?"

"This is our fifth day in her, Mr—er—er—" I answered.

"I reckon you're gropin' around after my name, Mister," he interrupted. "It's Ephraim Brown—very ginerally razeed down to Eph by my friends—and I'm master and owner of this here schooner, named a'ter my old woman away back to Baltimore. I guess your name is—"

"Mark Temple," I hastened to reply. "My companions are respectively Mr Edward Cunningham, late a cuddy passenger aboard the British barque *Zenobia*—of which vessel I was one of the apprentices; William Murdock, boatswain; Joseph Parsons, carpenter; and James Simpson, sailmaker, all of the same ship."

"I'm downright glad to meet you all," replied Mr Ephraim Brown, shaking hands all round again with much cordiality. Then he stepped to the taffrail and looked down at the gig, which had been passed astern.

"I guess that's a very tidy-lookin' boat of yourn, and there don't seem to be nothin' partic'lar the matter with her. I reckon she's quite worth hoistin' in, ain't she, Mister?" he remarked.

"Yes, indeed she is," I replied. "She has brought us safely through some pretty heavy weather, and I should be very sorry to see her cast adrift."

"Cast adrift nothin'! That ain't old Eph Brown's way," retorted the skipper briskly. "Is she very heavy?"

"On the contrary, she is an exceedingly light boat when empty," I replied.

"Ah!" remarked my interlocutor. "Then I guess we'll have all that stuff—your stock of provisions, I reckon—out of her, and then we'll unship the lee gangway and run her inboard fisherman fashion. It'll be quicker than riggin' tackles; and I'm in an almighty big hurry." He faced forward and hailed a couple of his men. "You, Sam and Pete, lay aft here and lend a hand to get the stuff out of this boat."

"But there is no need to trouble your people, Captain," I interrupted. "We will empty her ourselves in a brace of shakes. Murdock and Chips, just jump down into the gig and pass those things out of her. Haul her close up under the counter, and we will pass you down a rope's end over the taffrail to sling them to."

"Yes, I guess that'll do the trick," agreed the skipper. "And you, Sam and Pete," he continued, turning to the two men who still lingered, "turn-to and unship the lee gangway, ready to run the boat inboard when she's cleared. We'll stow her, right side up, alongside of the longboat."

A quarter of an hour later saw the gig hauled inboard and snugly stowed, after which the *Martha Brown* was kept away upon her course and the studdingsails were rehoisted, our boatswain, carpenter, and sailmaker lending a hand, while Cunningham and I remained aft, chatting with our new friend. As the last rope was belayed the skipper stepped to the skylight, peered down through it, and then turned and struck eight bells. Almost immediately afterward a lad emerged from the cabin companion, went forward to the little galley, and presently reappeared bearing a large covered dish in one hand and a capacious coffee-pot in the other.

"Aha!" exclaimed Brown, smacking his lips in anticipation, "breakfast; and I guess it smells good. Now I reckon that you 'uns have been upon pretty short commons this last few days, and'll be in good shape to enj'y a square meal. I guess you two'll have to mess in the cabin along o' me; the hands for'ard'll look a'ter the rest of your crowd."

At the skipper's invitation Cunningham and I forthwith followed him below to an exceeding small but very comfortable cabin, upon the tiny table of which was set out a quite unexpectedly enticing meal, to which Brown helped us both with most hospitable liberality. For a little while we ate and drank in silence; but presently, when we had taken the keen edge off our appetites, our kindly host asked for details of the circumstances under which we had come to be knocking about in mid-ocean in an open boat.

"Waal, I'll be sugared!" he ejaculated, after I had related to him in detail the incidents connected with the seizure of the *Zenobia* by her crew, under the leadership of Bainbridge; "if that don't beat everything! And you say that the skunk means to set up in business as a pirate? But is this here barque of yourn armed? Do she mount any guns? Because, if she don't, how do that crowd of toughs reckon they're goin' to hold up and rob a ship?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "I haven't the slightest notion," I replied; "but, knowing Bainbridge so well as I do, I have no doubt that he has a scheme of some sort in his head."

"Waal," agreed the skipper, "if he's pretty cute he may p'rhaps bluff a skipper or two; but I guess he'll very soon be euchred—a man-o'-war'll nab him afore he can say 'Jack Robinson'. And now," he continued, "about you 'uns. From things said while you was spinnin' that yarn of the mutiny I seemed to get a sort of notion that you'd like me to put ye ashore as soon as possible. Is that the idee?"

"Precisely," I said. "Mr Cunningham, here, naturally wishes to return to England with as little delay as may be; and as for myself, I am equally anxious, because, until I can get into touch with the owners of the *Zenobia*, and be placed by them in another ship, I am losing time."

"I see," commented the skipper meditatively; "yes, I reckon I kinder understand the situation. By the by, did you say, just now, that you was a purty good navigator, or did I only fancy it?"

"I don't remember having exactly said such a thing," I replied; "but possibly I may have implied as much. Anyhow, I think I am justified in saying that I am navigator enough to take a ship from any one part of the world to any other."

"Ah!" returned the skipper; "I had an idea that I'd understood as much. Now, then, just listen to me. I guess I can't put ye ashore until we arrives at Punta Arenas, away down there in the Magellan Straits, because the solid fact is that I'm in a most tarnation, all-fired hurry to get into the Pacific. Of course I'll be very willin' to tranship ye into a homeward-bounder, if we happens to fall in with one—and you really wants to go. But I've been thinkin' matters over a bit while we've been talkin', and I've a proposition to make that maybe'll suit ye just as well as goin' back to the old country. I s'pose you've noticed that I haven't got nary a mate with me?"

"Well," I confessed, "to tell you the truth, I've been wondering how it is that I have not yet seen him."

"You ha'n't seen him because I guess he ain't here to see," remarked the skipper. "I been unfort'nit in the matter o' mates this trip," he continued. "My reg'lar mate what always sails with me is my nevvvy, Abr'am Brown, as slick a youngster as ever I wish to see. But he met with an accident the day before we sailed; trod on a banana peel, fell awk'ardly, broke his right leg, had to go to the hospital, and I had to look round in a hurry for somebody to take his place. Got a chap that looked all right; but we hadn't been to sea above forty-eight hours when he made a bad break—got so tarnation drunk that I couldn't get him out of his bunk for a night and a day. And a'ter that he kept on soakin' on the sly—though where he got the liquor from I couldn't find out to save my life—until things come to such a pass that if it hadn't been that I was in such a tarnation hurry I'd have put in somewhere and fired him. Wisht I had, now. But I didn't; and the end of it was that he went crazy, jumped overboard, and was drowned, one dark night when we'd been out just three weeks.

"Now, my proposition is this. You look real smart, and are a good navigator, while I'm short of a mate. If you care to accept the position I'll sign ye on at the same rate of pay—namely, thirty dollars a month—that the other chap was gettin'. Now, what d'ye say?"

"But I don't even know yet where you are bound for, or what is the probable duration of the voyage," I objected. "Naturally I should like to know these particulars before binding myself."

"Sure," agreed the skipper, in nowise offended at my apparent hesitation. "Well then," he continued, "I'm boun' for a certain spot in the Pacific, for a certain very partic'lar reason: and if you agree to sign on I'll tell ye the reason, and just exactly where the spot is; but if you don't sign on it won't matter to you where I'm goin', or what I'm out after. That's one of the reasons for this here v'yage. T'other is to trade off a lot of truck what I've got down below, for sandalwood. And when I've got a full cargo of the wood I propose to go on to Canton, sell it, and buy tea with the proceeds; said tea to be sold in due course at New York, where the v'yage will end. And I reckon that the trip'll run into all of eight or nine months."

"And a jolly fine trip it will be," remarked Cunningham. "I wish I had your chance, Temple; I would take it like a shot."

"You don't say?" remarked the skipper, eyeing Cunningham earnestly. "But then, you see, you ain't a sailor," he observed.

"No, that is very true," returned Cunningham. "By profession I am a civil engineer. But I am also a keen yachtsman; and I know something more than the rudiments of navigation. But of course," he added hastily, "I have not the qualifications which would fit me for the berth that you are offering to Temple."

"N-o; I reckon not," agreed the skipper meditatively. "Still—p'rhaps I might be able to find a use for ye—if ye cared to come along—upon such terms as I could see my way to offer ye."

"Well," remarked Cunningham, with a laugh, "we can discuss that later on—if Temple accepts your offer."

Meanwhile I had been thinking rapidly. There was no very especial reason why I should return to England at once, for I had no relatives to be anxious over my disappearance, the only individuals who were in the least interested in me being my late father's trustees, to whom I could write from Punta Arenas. Then the voyage of the *Martha Brown*, as sketched by her skipper, rather appealed to me; sandalwood collecting meant a call at several of the South Sea Islands, and the South Sea Islands and romance were synonymous terms with me at that time. Also, the pay was good, exceptionally good for such a berth as that of mate of a ninety-ton schooner; and although I should probably sacrifice my indentures, that was a matter that gave me very little concern. Altogether I felt very strongly disposed to close with Brown's offer, the only really serious obstacle in the way being the fact that I felt I had a duty to perform to the three seamen who had formed part of our little company in the gig. First-rate fellows they were, all three of them, knowing their vocation to its smallest detail, and thoroughly at home aboard a ship in blue water, though ashore they were as guileless and helpless as babes, ready to fall an easy prey to the first land shark that got scent of them. If I could be sure of arranging at Punta Arenas for their conveyance to England, either as shipwrecked seamen or otherwise, and thus discharging my responsibility so far as they were concerned, I would not hesitate for a moment. I decided to put the matter to the skipper, and did so, there and then.

"Ah!" he said, "I was goin' to speak to you about them there men of yourn. D'ye think they'd be inclined to sign on with me for this here v'yage?"

"Really, I do not know in the least," I replied, regarding him with astonishment. "If you like I will—"

"It's like this, you see," he interrupted me, no doubt observing my look of surprise. "There's six hands in this here schooner's fo'c'sle—three to each watch; and when I shipped 'em I reckoned that with me, the mate, the cook, and the cabin boy there'd be plenty of us for all the work we'd have to do. But just when we was startin'—we was actually castin' off the warps at the time—a letter was handed to me that, bein' busy just then, I put into my pocket and forgot all about until a couple of days a'terwards, when we'd cleared Cape Henry and was fairly out to sea. Then,

while I was goin' through my pockets, huntin' for something else, I comes across this here letter, and opened it. And I tell you, Mister, that there was news in it that made me sit up and feel mighty anxious all of a sudden to get away round to the Pacific as quick as possible. And it made me feel, too, that I wisht I had three or four more men along. So if your chaps are willin' to sign on with me I'll be glad to have 'em. Pay—well, they're good men, you tell me—say, twenty a month."

I glanced forward and saw that all three of the men were on deck, smoking, and chatting with the two hands who, with the man at the wheel, constituted the watch.

"They are on deck, I see," said I. "If you like I will mention your proposal to them, and see how they take it."

"I'll take it very kindly if you will, Mister," answered the skipper; and without more ado I beckoned them to join me in the waist, where I laid the skipper's offer before them, while the Old Man himself and Cunningham remained chatting animatedly together close by the companion, where much of the foregoing conversation had taken place upon our adjournment from the breakfast table.

I soon found that, with the careless, happy-go-lucky temperament of the British merchant sailor, all three men were perfectly willing to ship for the voyage—about which they had already heard something from the fore-castle hands with whom they had been fraternising—especially when I told them that I had been offered the position of mate and felt strongly disposed to accept it; and accordingly I led them aft there and then, and informed the skipper that we all accepted his offer, and without further ado we went below and signed articles.

When, after signing, we all returned to the deck, and the three English seamen had gone forward, Cunningham came up to me and said, laughingly:

"You will be interested to learn, Temple, that our worthy friend here, Captain Brown, has also offered me a post, which I have accepted. As nearly as I can define it, the position is that of honorary second mate; it carries with it no pay, but in lieu of that I am to be perfectly free to leave the schooner whenever I please, and am to live in the cabin, receive cabin rations, and obtain, free of cost, an entirely new outfit of clothes from the slop chest. What do you think of my bargain?"

"I consider it a very fair one," said I, "with perhaps a slight advantage in favour of the skipper. For although of course he could doubtless do perfectly well without you, your grub and a new rig-out will not cost him very much; and in return for that he will get—as long as you choose to remain with us—the ability to sleep in all night with a perfectly easy mind: for I can assure the captain," and I here turned to that individual, who was standing by, intently listening to all that was said, "that although you are not a professional seaman you are quite sailor enough to take care of this schooner during your watch. Also you are a man of intellect and education, well-read, musical, and with an inexhaustible fund of intensely interesting conversation, so that I think Captain Brown will find in you a very agreeable companion."

"Ay, ay, you've just hit it, Temple," cut in the skipper. "That's just what I thought when I was listenin' to you two fellers talkin' at breakfast-time. Says I to myself: 'Now, here's two chaps with the speech and manners of gentlefolks, chaps as can hold their own with anybody when it comes to talkin', and yet they're sailors too—at least one of 'em is; and if you, Eph Brown, what have never had no more eddication than what you could pick up, could only persuade them two to jine yer in this here v'yage, you'd have such a chance as you've never had before to learn gentlefolks' manners, to talk proper, and ginerally to comport yourself in such a fashion as'd make your dear old Marthy fit to bust herself with pride to see and hear ye when ye get back home again, 'specially as you hopes to strike it rich this trip.' So there you are, gents: you can call me Cap'n as often as you likes—it sounds good, and makes me feel as though I was some punkins—but otherwise I'd like you to talk to me and behave to me just as if we was all eq'als; and whenever you hear me makin' a bad slip up in the matter of language, I'll take it very kindly of ye if you'll just pull me up with a round turn and p'int out where I've gone wrong."

It was rather an amusing proposal, certainly, for a shipmaster to make to his officers, but the old fellow was so transparently frank in recognising his shortcomings, and so earnestly anxious to have them remedied, that both Cunningham and I entered quite heartily into the spirit of the thing, and readily undertook to do everything that lay in our power to polish up his manners and speech in readiness for the surprise which he proposed to spring upon his "dear old Marthy" upon his return to Baltimore.

Chapter Six.

Skipper Brown relates a Remarkable Story.

"And now, gents," said the skipper, when we had satisfactorily arranged the important and rather delicate matter referring to the improvement of his speech and deportment, "I'm sorter hankerin' to have a talk with you both about that there letter I was tellin' you of a while ago—the letter that was handed to me just as we was makin' a start from Baltimore, and that I forgot all about until we was fairly out to sea.

"This here letter told me— But stop a bit; if I want you to understand the thing properly, and I surely do, I guess I'll have to give you the whole history of it from the very beginnin'. Along about three months ago, just after I'd got home from my last v'yage, I happened to have a bit of business to attend to that called for a trip over to New York; and when I'd got through with what I had to do, the fancy took me to stay over for a day or two and have a look round, me not havin' been in New York for quite a number of years before, you'll understand. And while I was doin' my lookin' around I must needs go nosin', like a fool, down into the Bowery. And down there I runs up agin a ragged skeleton that looks me hard in the face and hails me with: 'Hello, Eph Brown, what cheer? Blamed if you ain't the very chap that I've been most wantin' to see.'

"I guess I was pretty well struck of a heap, for I didn't reckonise the chap from Adam; all I noticed was that he didn't seem to ha' had a bath since his mother give him one as a baby, that he was dressed in clo'es that ought by rights to have belonged to a scarecrow, that he was that thin and cadaverous he might have just escaped from the Morgue, and that his breath was reekin' of cheap whisky.

"'Now, who in Tom Hawkins may you be?' says I; for, you see, the feller knowed my name all right, yet, seein' where we was, and what the man looked like, I sorter suspicioned that he wasn't exactly square, and was tryin' to get at me.

"'What!' he says; 'd'ye mean to say as ye don't remember me—Abe Johnson—what used to play with yer in the old days when we was boys together away in dear old Nantucket?'—Nantucket, you'll understand, gents, bein' the place where I was born.

"'No,' says I, 'I don't, and that's the cold, solid truth. But if you're really Abe Johnson you'll remember the names of a few people in Nantucket, and a few of the things that we done together. Where, f'r instance, did I live when you knew me?'

"Well, he told me where I lived, give me the names of a lot of people that we both used to know, and reminded me of a good many things that we done together that I'd clean forgot all about until he mentioned 'em. Oh yes, he was Abe, sure; and when he see that he'd satisfied me upon that p'int, he told me a real downright pitiful tale, and struck me for ten dollars. He was right away down on his luck, he said; and I guess he was speakin' the truth, if looks went for anything.

"Now, Abe never had amounted to much when I knew him; he was just a low-down, ornery cuss every way that you looked at him. But I was al'ays a bit tender-hearted, and I sorter pitied the feller; so a'ter I passed over the ten-spot to him I took him into a restyrong and filled him up with a good square meal. And while we was eatin' he told me a long yarn about what he'd been doin'; how he'd tried fust one thing and then another, and had finally took to the sea. And it seemed that his bad luck had follered him there, for he'd ended up by bein' shipwrecked upon one of them uncharted reefs that you runs up agin sometimes in the Pacific, he bein' the only survivor out of the whole crowd. If he was tellin' me the truth he must ha' had a pretty rough time on that reef, for he described it as bein' as bare as the back of your hand, with nothin' to eat but birds' eggs and clams, and only a small, tricklin' stream of brackish, scarcely drinkable water to quench his thirst with. And he was on that there reef five solid months afore a whaler comed along and, seein' his signals, took him off, and later transferred him to another ship that brought him home.

"Now when Abe had got this far with his yarn he begun to get mysterious, sunk his voice to a whisper, and asked if he could trust me. I told him that he best knew whether he could or not, and that anyway, if the thing was a secret, I didn't want to hear anything about it.

"'Ah, but,' says he, 'there's a fortune in it—a fortune for both of us, Eph, if I can only trust you.'

"'Well,' I says, 'as I told ye before, that's for you to decide. But if you're agoin' to trust me, get along with your trustin', for I reckon I've had about enough of this 'ere place; I don't like the looks of the folks I sees around me, not a little bit, and I'm growin' sorter keen to get out of it.'

"'All right,' he says, 'let's git.' So we got, and made our way to Central Park, where we found a seat in a quiet, secluded spot, and sat ourselves down. And there, a'ter sayin' as he'd got a secret that he must share with somebody if he was to get any good out of it, and that I was the only reely honest feller he knowed, Abe up and told me how, a'ter he'd built a bit of a raft out of some of the wreckage of the ship, so's he could go off fishin' in her, he one day happened to hit upon a big bed of pearl-oysters, thousan's—millions of 'em! He sorter guessed what they was when he first set eyes on 'em, as he looked down through the clear green water, and tried to get down to 'em by divin'. But that wa'n't no good; the water was too deep—a good five fathom he said there was over 'em—and then there was sharks about too. So he unlaid a bit o' rope from the wreckage, knocked some nails out o' some o' the timber that had druv ashore, and fixed up a sorter small grapple, with which he went gropin' out on this here oyster bed. But the thing wasn't of much account, accordin' to what Abe himself said. First he'd got to git it just so over a oyster afore it'd take holt; and then, when he'd hooked one, as often as not the blamed thing'd let go agin afore he got the oyster up out o' water: consequently it come to this, that with all his gropin' he only managed to land four oysters altogether. But out of them four two had pearls in 'em, one bein' as big as a small marble, while the others was little 'uns—three of 'em—'bout the size of cherry stones.

"Well, he took care of them there pearls, and managed to bring 'em home with him. And then, 'stead of takin' of 'em to a respectable jeweller, he must needs try to trade 'em off to a Chinaman! Of course you can guess what happened. The Chink pertended that he was game to buy, took Abe to his house—leastways the Chink said it was his—doped Abe, stole the pearls, and vamoosed!

"Then, a few days a'terwards, along comes I; and when Abe reckonised me he made up his mind in a minute what he'd do. First of all he offered to sell me the secret of the whereabouts of the oyster bed for fifty thousand dollars! Only fifty thousand, mind yer, and nothin' but his bare word for it that there was so much as a single oyster in the place! I got up to go away and leave him; and then he asked me if I was game to go shares with him—he to give me the secret, I to go out to the Pacific and fish up the pearls, and the two of us to divide equally when I got back home again. Well, that was somethin' more like a business proposition, and after a lot o' talk I agreed; and he give me the latitood and longitood of the place right there, afore I left him, I givin' him a hundred dollars on account, to carry him along a bit until he could get a job. Then I went back home to Baltimore and began to figure upon the best way to work the scheme. I wa'n't rich enough to make the trip purely as a speculation, so at last I hit upon the sandalwood idea, which I reckon'll pay the expenses of the v'yage and return me a profit, even if I don't find nary a pearl, although I've a very good notion that they're where Abe said they was. The next thing I did was to get a few p'int's upon the ins-and-outs of sandalwood tradin'; and when I'd done that I started out to get my stock of notions, overhaul

the schooner and make her ready for the v'yage, and look about for a crew of men that I could be sure wouldn't play no tricks after we'd got hold of the pearls.

"We sailed from Baltimore the day a'ter Christmas, and, as we was castin' off, this here letter that I told ye about was handed aboard. And when I come to open it, what d'ye think was the news in it? Reckon you'll never guess. I've got a cousin 'way over in Nantucket—he's pretty well-to-do—and findin' myself runnin' a bit short o' money when it come to fittin' out the schooner, I went over to him, told him all about Abe and the pearls, and asked him to lend me a thousand dollars to leave with my old Marthy, to keep her goin' while I was away. He knows me, and let me have the dollars straight away. Well, this here letter was from him; and what it said was that he was writin' in a hurry to tell me that he'd just heard, quite by accident, that Abe was dead—died in hospital in New York, havin' been run over and fatally injured by an express wagon two days a'ter I'd left him. And—this is where the trouble comes in—afore he died he sent post-haste for his brother-in-law, Abner Slocum, to go to him to oncet, as he had somethin' most terrible partic'lar to tell him. Abner went; and although my cousin don't know what Abe told him, he guesses it had somethin' to do with the pearls, because when Abner got back after buryin' Abe he went to work in a most tremenjous hurry to get his schooner, the *Kingfisher*, ready for sea, observin' the greatest secrecy about it, and refusin' to say what the hurry was, or where he was boun' to. But he was layin' in such a big stock of provisions and water that people got talkin' about it; and that was how my cousin got to hear what was goin' on. But he didn't get to hear of it until just at the very last, which was on the day that the *Kingfisher* went to sea, which was two days before Christmas! So, you see, this Abner Slocum was in such a tarnation hurry to git away that he wouldn't even wait to spend Christmas with his wife and kiddies. Now, what d'ye make of that yarn?"

"Well," said Cunningham, "I am bound to admit, Captain, that it looks very much as though your friend Abe, finding himself upon his deathbed, had sent for his brother-in-law and divulged to him the secret of the oyster bed. Probably when he found himself dying, and realised that he could derive no personal benefit from his discovery, he wished that the wealth should go to his own family."

"That's how I figure it out," agreed the skipper. "But I reckon that my claim's just as good as Abner's, Abe havin' entered into a business agreement with me. Besides, it isn't as though Abner'd make good use of the money when he'd got it. I know Abner Slocum through and through, and I tell you, gents, that he's out-and-out the very worst character in all Nantucket—a real, downright hard case, and—well, everything that's bad; and if he happens to get any o' them pearls he'll just drink hisself to death in three months, and most likely kill his wife into the bargain."

"Then in that case," said I, "it seems to me that it will be a great deal better that he should not have any of them."

"Well, that's just my view of it too," agreed the skipper. "But I guess he's goin' to do his level best to get hold of 'em," he continued. "I reckon that Abe must ha' told him that he'd parted with his secret to me, and that I was fittin' out to go in search of them there oysters, and that's the reason why he was so all-fired anxious to get to sea before me. And as a matter o' fact he did it; he sailed three clear days ahead of me, and must ha' been just about off Cape Henry when we cleared it. So it's a race between the two schooners which'll get there fust, and, barrin' accidents, I reckon it's goin' to be a neck-and-neck one, for the *Kingfisher's* the smartest schooner sailin' out o' Nantucket; and although Abner Slocum's such a downright 'bad man' I'll say this for him—there ain't a better seaman sailin' under 'Old Glory' than what he is."

"Now, gents, this here is my idee. I'm agoin' to carry on, night and day, to get to that there spot in the Pacific where them pearls be; and when I gets there I'm goin' to scrape up as many oysters as ever I can lay hands on. And when I've got 'em, and have realised upon 'em, I shall look upon half of the proceeds as belongin' to Abe, or—he bein' dead—his heirs. But I mean to take partic'ler care that, let the heirs be who they may, that skunk Abner don't touch a penny of the money. If it turns out that Abner's children is the heirs, then I'm goin' to app'int trustees to look a'ter the money for 'em until a'ter Abner's dead, and then they can have it."

"Bravo, Captain!" exclaimed Cunningham, patting the skipper approvingly on the back. "A most wise and honourable decision to have arrived at, I call it; and, so far as I am concerned, I'll do all I can to help you to carry it out. By the way, how do you propose to obtain the oysters when you arrive at the spot where, according to your friend Abe, they are to be found?"

"How do I intend to get 'em?" repeated the skipper. "Why, with a trawl, of course. I've got some specially strong trawlin' gear aboard, made o' purpose for the job."

"I see," commented Cunningham. "It did not occur to you to get any diving gear, I suppose?"

"Well—no, it didn't, and that's a fact," answered the skipper. "But I guess we'll find that the trawl'll work all right," he added cheerfully.

"Yes, no doubt," agreed Cunningham. "But of course," he added, "the diving system would have worked very much more rapidly, because, you see, if you had happened to possess a set of diving gear you could have anchored the schooner right over the bed, sent your diver down with two large sacks, or nets, and while he filled one you could have hauled up the other and emptied it into the bins or barrels ranged round the decks in readiness to be conveyed ashore and emptied after the day's work on the bed was over. In that manner you could have secured several thousands of oysters daily."

"Ay, I reckon we could. But I guess we'll have to be content to work with the trawl, seein' that we've neither divin' gear nor diver aboard," replied the skipper, rather regretfully.

"Well, I am not quite so sure about that," observed Cunningham thoughtfully. "I have the germ of an idea in my head, and will see if I cannot develop it. Do you happen to have any rubber hose on board?"

"Sure!" replied the skipper. "Got a hundred feet of brand new hose for washin' decks with. It's a bit extravagant, I

know, but I 'low it'll pay in the long run."

"It most certainly will, and very handsomely too, if I can put my idea into shape. Have you used the hose at all yet?" asked Cunningham.

"Used it every mornin' since we left Baltimore," replied the skipper.

"Then let me earnestly beg you not to use it any more, just for the present at least," entreated the engineer.

"Just as you say," answered the skipper cheerfully. "We've got our old canvas hose stowed away somewhere. I'll have it routed out."

"Right," agreed Cunningham. "And while I'm keeping my watch on deck I'll think over this scheme of mine. I should rather like you to get the better of that man—what is his name?—oh yes, Slocum!"

"Yes, that's all right," assented the skipper. "But—look here, if that there scheme of yours has to do with divin', Mister, who's goin' to do the divin'? I don't know nothin' about it."

"But I do," remarked Cunningham cheerfully. "I'll do the diving if I can only work out this idea that has come to me. And I believe I can."

From this point the conversation drifted away into generalities, and finally the skipper went below, leaving me in charge of the deck and of the forenoon watch. Later on Brown informed me that the late mate's cabin was entirely at my service, while Cunningham was inducted into a small spare stateroom which was in use as a sort of extra sail-room, but which the skipper ordered to be cleared out for the engineer's accommodation. Also, it appeared that when the late mate went overboard he left behind him a very fine sextant, which the skipper had purchased at the auction of the effects of the deceased, and this instrument he allowed me to use.

We, the new arrivals aboard the *Martha Brown*, shook down into our positions with a degree of promptitude that excited the liveliest admiration of the skipper. He was a shrewd old fellow, however, and for the first two days after our arrival he remained on deck all day, and was frequently up and down during the night, frankly confessing that he was anxious to observe the manner in which his new officers performed their duties; but after that he announced his intention to sleep in all night, laughingly declaring that as he was now employing two mates he saw no reason why he should not leave them to do the work and take his ease like a gentleman. He was good enough to express his complete satisfaction with my abilities as a navigator, and opened his eyes in astonishment when he saw that I was not content with a mere daily observation of the meridian altitude of the sun, but used as well such comparatively intricate problems as those of the double altitudes, lunars, altitudes of the stars, and Great Circle sailing. But what gratified him most of all, I think, was the fact that before we had been aboard two days I had got Simpson, the sailmaker, at work upon an enormous jack-yard gaff-topsail for use in light winds, the only gaff-topsail that the schooner had hitherto possessed being a trumpery little jib-headed affair which she could carry in quite a strong breeze. I also caused a set of preventer backstays to be fitted, which enabled us to carry an amount of canvas in a breeze that would otherwise have been impossible.

We certainly did carry on in a manner that sometimes made the old man gasp with astonishment, for hitherto he had been in the habit of sailing his schooner in a very jog-trot fashion; but now we handled her as we would have done a racer, and it was surprising to see how, day after day, her mileage increased, and how rapidly her track on the chart stretched southward. The skipper, in his groping, cautious way, had fully intended to make sure of his position by heading for and sighting the Falklands before attempting to make the Straits, but I told him I regarded that as an utterly useless waste of time, and worked out a Great Circle track direct for Cape Virgins, at the entrance to the Straits, to his mingled consternation and delight. "If you don't cast the schooner away between you," he said, "I guess we'll get to that there oyster bank early enough to clean it out before the *Kingfisher* arrives; for, smart seaman as Slocum thinks hisself, I reckon he ain't a patch on you for carryin' on."

For the first three or four days after our arrival on board the *Martha Brown*, Cunningham devoted his energies entirely to the task of qualifying himself to take charge of a watch, looking after the ship, and generally polishing up his somewhat rusty seamanship; but he very quickly settled into his place, and then, whenever he had a spare moment, he got to work with a pencil and paper, making sketches and calculations. Then, one evening in the second dog-watch, he brought to me a sheet of paper on which he had sketched the outline of a human figure; he first showed me this, and then, producing a tape measure, he desired me to measure him very accurately, jotting down upon the diagram the several measurements as I called them out.

Then, a day or two afterwards, I found him busily at work with a quantity of light, thin, iron rod, which he had routed out from among the ship's stores. This rod he cut up into carefully measured lengths, and he welded and riveted these together, with the aid of a portable forge which he had rigged up on the lee side of the fore deck, until, in the course of a week, he had constructed some half a dozen light but strong skeleton frames. Having tried and proved these to his satisfaction, he procured an empty oak barrel, and, taking it carefully to pieces, set the carpenter to work to saw, cut out, and carefully plane up a number of thin strips from the staves. Then, when he had got as many of these strips as he required, he had small holes bored in them in certain positions, and, by means of a quantity of fine wire, proceeded to bind them carefully and strongly to the skeleton frames which he had previously made. And when he had done that, to my amazement he calmly proceeded to induct himself into them, with my assistance, and I then saw that the whole affair constituted a complete body armour of a kind, helmet and all. But, even then, I had no idea of what he was driving at until he condescended to explain.

"This," he said, "is the foundation of my diving suit, which will be complete when I have covered it with a double thickness of well-oiled canvas. The framework of thin rod will keep the water pressure off my body; the battens will support the outer covering of canvas and prevent it from bursting; and you will see that by the arrangement which I have adopted I secure ample flexibility for my purpose. Then, as soon as we arrive at our destination, I intend to have

one of the screw deck-lights bodily removed and temporarily fixed in my helmet, which will enable me to see what I am doing when under water. Of course I shall need weights to hold me down; and my air will come down to me through the rubber deck hose, one end of which will be let into the back of my helmet, while the other will be firmly secured to some portion of the schooner where it will be out of the way. Of course it will be a very rough-and-ready, makeshift affair, but I believe it will prove fairly efficient for the purpose."

Cunningham's next business was to cut out and have sewn together for himself a single garment which combined the functions of stockings, trousers, and shirt. This was made of a double thickness of stout canvas, each thickness being well coated on both sides with two coats of boiled oil. It was a weird-looking garment, as it was intended to fit on outside the armour arrangement which he called his diving suit; but it was merely intended to exclude the water, and when it was finished and fitted I saw that it would serve its purpose perfectly well, and there seemed to be no reason why he should not be able to work in it at the bottom of the sea perfectly well. And he completed the whole affair by firmly attaching one end of the rubber hose pipe to the back of his helmet.

We made Cape Virgins on the day and at the hour, and almost the minute, which I had predicted, to the intense admiration and delight of the skipper; and reached Punta Arenas, in the Strait of Magellan, on the afternoon of the same day. Here we came to an anchor, and Brown, Cunningham, and I went ashore, the skipper's business being to arrange for the refilling of our water tanks and the supply of a quantity of fresh meat, Cunningham's just to take a look round and stretch his long legs a bit, and mine to report the seizure of the *Zenobia* by Bainbridge and the crew, and to post to the owners a letter upon the same subject which I had prepared at my leisure. Our first enquiry was as to whether the *Kingfisher* had passed, and Brown's delight was great when he learned that thus far nothing had been seen of her.

We left Punta Arenas shortly after noon on the day following that of our arrival, still with no sign of the *Kingfisher*, and, being lucky enough to get a fine little slant of wind, safely accomplished the dangerous passage and entered the Pacific on the evening of the succeeding day. The slant of wind held long enough to enable us to gain an offing of a trifle over a hundred miles, and then it died away and left us becalmed and rolling gunwale under on the long Pacific swell.

Yes, there could be no doubt that the *Martha Brown* knew how to roll; it was my first experience of her in a flat calm and a heavy swell, and had we not hastily rigged rolling tackles I verily believe that she would have rolled the masts out of her. Even the skipper, proud as he was of her, felt obliged to make some sort of apology for her, which he wound up by saying: "But some day a smarty'll come along and invent some way of turnin' this here rollin' to account as a means of propulsion, and then you'll see that builders'll fashion all ships upon the model of the *Marthy*."

"Eh? What's that? Just say that again, Captain," remarked Cunningham, who, it being the second dog-watch, happened to be on deck.

The skipper said it again.

"Y-e-es," agreed Cunningham, thoughtfully, "y-e-es, I shouldn't wonder;" and he walked away contemplatively.

"Now I wouldn't be so very powerful surprised if he was to turn out to be the smarty that I just mentioned," observed the skipper, jerking his thumb toward where Cunningham stood gazing abstractedly over the taffrail, with his feet wide apart and his hands locked behind him, balancing himself to the violent movements of the little vessel.

"Possibly," I agreed. "Cunningham is of a very inventive turn of mind. But to convert the rolling motion of a ship into a forward movement is a pretty tall order, and would probably require exceedingly complicated machinery. The idea is by no means new, and I believe several inventors have had a turn at it; but nothing practical seems to have come of it as yet."

Nothing further was said upon the subject just then; but, the calm continuing all night and all the next day, I several times caught Cunningham with paper before him and a pencil in his hand, sketching and calculating. And when the next day also proved calm, and our observations showed that we had not progressed a couple of miles upon our journey, the skipper again addressed Cunningham upon the subject, asking him half-jestingly if he had not yet been able to devise some scheme to turn the eternal rolling to account.

"Oh yes!" answered Cunningham; "I dare say I could rig up some sort of an arrangement, if it were worth while. But it would be rather a cumbersome contrivance to ship and unship, and I would not recommend it unless there is likely to be much of this sort of thing between here and our destination."

"Well," said the skipper, "I reckon we may depend pretty certainly upon at least a fortnight of ca'ms afore we arrive at that there oyster bed; and it'd be worth a whole lot to me to get there a fortnight ahead of the *Kingfisher*. What's the thing like that you've invented, Mister, and could we knock it up out o' the stuff as we've got aboard?"

"Oh yes!" answered Cunningham, "I have kept strictly in mind our capabilities in the preparation of my sketch. I could easily devise a much better and more efficient concern, I am sure; but that would be quite useless to you, because we have neither the materials nor the skilled labour aboard to produce it. But," he continued, producing a pencil and paper and beginning to sketch rapidly, "I think we might manage to knock together a contrivance of this sort. There would be two of them, you understand, one on each side of the ship. This represents a stout timber frame, which would be secured in place by short lengths of chain bowed taut by tackles, so that it would remain rigidly in position. It would reach from the rail down to about three feet below the surface of the water. This outrigger arrangement, which should be about nine feet long, will serve as the attachment for what we may call a fin, made of flexible planking securely fixed at its fore end to the outrigger, but quite free to move at the other end. Now this fin, being submerged when the frame is fixed in place, will be acted upon by the pressure of the water as the ship rolls, and will bend alternately upward and downward at an angle, the effect being that every time the ship rolls the bent fin will force backward a considerable quantity of water, or, what is the same thing, will have a tendency to thrust the

ship forward at a rate which I estimate at—well, say about three knots per hour.”

“Three knots an hour,” repeated the skipper. “‘Tain’t very much, is it? I thought, maybe, that you’d be able to fix up somethin’ that ‘d shove her along at about ten or twelve knots.”

Cunningham laughed as he shook his head. “Come, come, Captain!” he protested, “be reasonable. To get ten or twelve knots out of this schooner you would require a steam engine of some eighty to a hundred horse power.”

“Ay,” admitted the skipper, rather unwillingly, “I s’pose I should. Three knots an hour. That’s, in round figures, seventy miles from noon to noon. And that, for, say, fourteen days, is—how much?”

“Nine hundred and eighty miles; call it a thousand,” answered Cunningham.

“A thousand miles. Jings! It mounts up when you come to look at it that way,” averred the skipper. “Look here, Mister,” he continued, after thinking for a minute, “how long do you reckon it would take you to fix up that concern of yours?”

“Oh, not very long,” answered Cunningham. “The very roughest of workmanship would do, so long as it was strong. I dare say Chips and I could put it together in—well—say four days.”

“Four days,” repeated the skipper; “four days. Then I reckon you better go ahead straight away; and turn it out as quick as ever you can, for this here ca’m looks as though it meant to last a goodish while yet. The glass is high an’ steady, with an upward tendency, if anything, and I don’t see no sign of wind anywheres about.”

Within an hour Cunningham and Chips were hard at work upon the contrivance for circumventing the “ca’ms”, and before knocking-off time they had got on deck all the timber they required, and some of it sawn to its proper length. The next day saw the completion of the cutting, sawing, and planing; and then came a fresh westerly breeze which enabled us to lay up within about two points of our course for the next five days, during which Cunningham completed his work, all but the bolting on of the fins, which could be done in about ten minutes. Then the wind gradually veered until we were not only enabled to lay our course, but had it a couple of points free, when, the wind being light, our big jack-yard gaff-topsail came into play with magnificent effect, pushing the little hooker along at about six knots, when but for it she would scarcely have done four. And finally it fell calm again, and the schooner lost steerage way altogether. There was again every sign that the calm was likely to be prolonged—in fact, we were in the latitudes of the “Doldrums”, or calms that occur just to the north and south of the Trade winds, where, as on the Line, the calms sometimes last for weeks at a stretch. It was therefore an excellent opportunity to test Cunningham’s contrivance, and we accordingly proceeded to bolt it up and fix it in position. It was rather an awkward and cumbersome arrangement, demanding the united strength of all hands to get it over the side, and it took us a full hour to get both parts fixed firmly and to Cunningham’s satisfaction. But it had not been in position five minutes before we saw that it was going to prove a success; for not only did it serve to steady the little vessel, and ease her rolling to a considerable extent, but she immediately began to gather way, and within half an hour was slipping along through the water at the rate of a shade over four knots by the log. The skipper was enchanted. “Furl everything, Mr Temple,” he said, “and head her due no’th. We’ll just meander along now under bare poles until we runs into the south-east Trades; and when once we hits them we’ll be all right, and needn’t start tack nor sheet again until we reaches our oyster bed.”

Chapter Seven.

The Pearl-oyster Bed.

We caught the south-east Trade winds the next day, very light at first, but gradually freshening as we ran farther into them; and then, as soon as we found ourselves fairly in the grip of the true breeze, with the water rippling blue and crisply all about us, we got the schooner under canvas once more, hoisted our “fins” inboard, and bore away upon a nor-west course, with starboard studdingsails and big gaff-topsail set and dragging like a team of cart horses. A week of this sort of thing carried us to the calm belt under the Line; and here we once more brought our “fins” into action, using them for three whole days and a trifle over before we touched the southernmost fringe of the north-east Trades, when we again went bowling along under all plain sail, that being as much as we could conveniently show to a beam wind. Finally, on a certain morning immediately after breakfast, I climbed to the topgallant yard, armed with Cunningham’s telescope, which I had borrowed for the occasion, and, looking straight ahead, saw—just where I had expected to see it, namely, some fifteen miles beyond our jibboom end—a patch of white water, some three miles in length, stretching north and south right athwart the schooner’s hawse. It was the coral reef upon which, if the skipper’s friend Abe Johnson had spoken truth, that worthy had suffered shipwreck, followed by all the horrors of complete solitude for five solid months; and some two miles beyond which lay—according to Abe—the rich pearl-oyster bed that was the real object of the *Martha Brown’s* visit to this lonesome spot in the heart of the Pacific.

“See anything, Mr Temple?” hailed the skipper from the quarterdeck, in a voice tense with excitement.

“Ay, ay, sir,” I replied. “It is there, right enough, as plain as mud in a wine-glass, about fifteen miles off, and stretching right athwart our hawse. You had better luff a point, sir, and go round its northern extremity.”

“Luff a p’int it is,” answered the skipper, directing the helmsman. Then, as the schooner came to her new course, “How’s that, Mr Temple?”

“Excellent, sir,” I replied; “we shall just nicely clear the northern end of the reef if she is kept at that.”

“D’ye see anything else besides the reef, Mr Temple?” asked the skipper,—“anything, I mean, in the shape of another

schooner, for instance?"

"Nothing at all, sir," I answered.

"That's all right, then," answered the skipper in a tone of exuberant satisfaction. "I guess you don't need to stay up there no longer, do ye?"

I slung the telescope round my neck by its strap, and then, swinging off the yard, slid down to the deck hand over hand by way of the topgallant backstay, walking aft and joining the skipper and Cunningham as soon as my feet touched the planks.

"So the reefs there, all right, is it?" remarked Brown, as I joined the pair and returned the telescope with thanks to its lawful owner. "There ain't no chance of a mistake, I s'pose?"

"No chance at all," I replied confidently. "It is there as plain as the nose on one's face. If you remember, I told you yesterday that, provided the breeze held, we should be at anchor in the lagoon by noon to-day; and so we shall."

"Ay, ay," answered Brown. "I remember your sayin' so. And I didn't doubt your word, not for a second, for you're an A1 navigator, and no mistake. Never knowed a better. But I was just a little bit afeard that Abe might ha' been playin' it on me, or else that his riggers might ha' got a bit mixed. But I reckon it's a square deal, since you say that the reefs there. What do it look like?"

"From aloft it presents the precise appearance that you described to me," I said. "A bare reef, almost awash, with not a thing upon it, except a few birds which I could just make out circling in the air above it."

"Ay, that'll be it, sure enough," agreed Brown. "I remember Abe speakin' about them birds. Their eggs, some clams that he knocked off the rocks, and a fish or two that he managed to catch later on was all that the pore feller had to eat for five everlastin' months—and raw at that."

It was just five bells when we weathered the northern extremity of the reef and bore away to look for the entrance to the lagoon. I was then aloft again, for the sake of the more extended view obtainable from the height of the topgallant yard; and as we swept past the reef, and I looked down upon it, I thought I had never seen a more ghastly place for a solitary human being to be cast away upon. It was composed, apparently, of nothing but coral, upon which the everlasting surf was gradually casting up a deposit of sand, which, when dry, the wind was as gradually distributing over its surface. Here and there I observed dark patches which I took to be seaweed, partly buried in the sand; and there was a tolerably well defined tide-mark, consisting apparently of more seaweed, and flotsam of various kinds cast up by the surf.

But the most remarkable thing about the island was the multitude of birds, gulls principally. There were thousands of them in the air about the reef, and many more thousands of them sitting on the reef itself. The time was no doubt coming when the guano of these birds, their dead bodies, and the refuse of their food, mingling and agglomerating with the sand and rotting seaweed, would form an extraordinarily rich soil, upon which a few coconuts, drifting across the illimitable ocean, would be cast up by the surf, and, becoming buried, would sprout, throw out roots and shoots, and become trees, as has happened in the case of so many others of the Pacific islands. But at that moment there was not a green thing upon it.

The atoll, as a whole, was almost perfectly circular in shape, having a diameter of about four miles; and for purposes of description it may be spoken of as consisting of three parts, namely, the island, the lagoon, and the encircling reef. The island, which, being dry, was of course the highest part of the atoll, measured about three and a quarter miles long, and was crescent-shaped, being about three-eighths of a mile wide in the middle, tapering off north and south in the form of the cusps of the crescent moon; and from the extremities of the two cusps there swept away the encircling reef which enclosed the lagoon in a very perfect natural breakwater, having the inevitable opening as nearly as might be in its middle, just opposite the widest part of the island. But although I have spoken of the island as being the highest part, it must not be supposed that even this rose any considerable height above the level of the ocean, its highest point, as we subsequently ascertained, being only a bare six feet above the water's surface.

I was fortunate enough to catch a glimpse of the passage through the reef almost immediately after going aloft; we therefore had no difficulty in hitting it off, and, conning the schooner from the crosstrees, I took her through without a hitch, our anchor plunging into the placid waters of the lagoon a few minutes after the skipper had struck six bells.

"Well, gents," Brown remarked, rubbing his hands, as, having been forward to supervise the mooring of the ship in my absence aloft, he came aft and joined Cunningham and myself, while the crew took to the rigging and went aloft to furl the canvas, "here we are at last; and ne'er a sign of the *Kingfisher* anywhere about. Did ye happen to notice anything at all like a h'yster bank anywhere near while you was aloft, Mr Temple?"

"Yes, sir, I did," answered I. "I took a good look round while we were coming in, and I noticed a distinct discoloration of the water about a mile out, as dead to leeward of the island as it can possibly be. I have no doubt we shall find that to be the shoal of which your friend spoke. And there was another thing I noticed while I was aloft, and which I will take this opportunity of mentioning. The island is literally covered with birds, sir, and, unfortunate as is the necessity, I am afraid that our very first task must be to kill every one of them."

"Kill off them birds, Mr Temple?" echoed the skipper, in a tone of mingled surprise and indignation. "Why, what harm are they adoin'?"

"None at all at present, sir. But—by the way, how do you propose to obtain the pearls which you hope to procure from the oysters in yonder bed?"

"Well," answered the skipper, "I had it in my mind to take the schooner out to the bed every mornin' and anchor her right on top of it. Then I thought of lowerin' the boats, and, as the oysters comes up, dischargin' 'em into the boats, one boat at a time, until we've got a fair cargo, a'ter which that boat'll be sent ashore in charge of, say, two men; and Number 2 boat'll be loadin' while Number 1 is goin' ashore and comin' back. And when the oysters is took ashore, my plan is to spread 'em out on the island and let 'em rot in the sun, an'—ah yes! now I see what you means about them blamed birds. They'll just go for them rottin' oysters an' play the very Ole Gooseberry with 'em—is that what you mean?"

"Precisely," I said. "They will attack the decaying oysters, and you will probably lose about three-fourths of your pearls."

"Ay, I see; I see," murmured the "Old Man". "It seems a most tarnation pity," he continued regretfully, "but I guess we'll have to do it—or lose most o' them pearls."

"It will be an endless job, too—to say nothing of the pity of it—to kill off all those thousands of birds," remarked Cunningham. "But perhaps, after all, it may not be necessary to resort to such extreme measures as that. Have you any firearms on board, Captain?"

"You bet I have, and ammunition too," answered the skipper, with a grin. "You don't catch old Eph Brown venturin' his property on an expedition like this here—among savages, too, when we gets away down among the islands a'ter that there sandalwood—without bringin' along the means to defend it. I got a dozen muskets and six shot guns down below; and I reckon I can get the lot out in ten minutes."

"Then," said Cunningham, "I'll tell you what we will do, Captain, if you are agreeable. Let Temple and me have a couple of those shot guns, with a moderate quantity of ammunition, and we will go ashore and shoot a sufficient number of those birds to make them thoroughly afraid of anything resembling the human figure. Then, when we have done that, we will rig up a scarecrow on the leeward extremity of the island, where I suppose you will deposit your oysters to undergo the process of decay, and see how that acts before we attempt anything in the nature of actual wholesale slaughter."

"Yes," assented the skipper eagerly, "I guess that plan's well worth tryin', and I'm much obliged to ye for thinkin' of it. I don't want the death of any more o' them birds laid to my door than what there's actooal need for, for they're purty creeturs, and, when all's said and done, God made 'em, same's He made you and me. But I'm afeard that a few of 'em'll have to die, so the job might as well be done at once. I'll go down below and get them shot guns, and you and Mr Temple might as well go ashore directly after dinner."

Accordingly, as soon as our midday dinner was over, the gig—our gig—was hoisted out, and Cunningham and I, with two hands for a crew, and with a shot gun each, together with a double pocketful of cartridges, went ashore to perform the exceedingly unpleasant but necessary task of frightening the birds so effectually that they would not be likely to interfere to any very great extent with our pearling operations. At the last moment, just before shoving off from the schooner's side, Cunningham shouted to the cook to pass down into the boat the biggest basket that he could find, and this the "Doctor" did, with the result that when we landed on the island we carried with us a basket capable of holding quite one hundred gulls' eggs.

We had already decided that the southern extremity of the island was the proper place upon which to deposit our oysters, when obtained, because by placing them there the exceedingly offensive odour which would be generated by the process of decay would be carried away by the wind over the open sea, while by anchoring the schooner as far to windward as possible we might hope to escape in a very great measure, if not altogether, the annoyance of the smell; therefore, upon landing, we started operations at the south end of the island by driving the birds away from there.

But our task was by no means so easy as we had anticipated; for so extraordinarily tame were the birds that they positively refused to rise at our approach, actually permitting themselves to be caught and their necks to be wrung rather than take the trouble to get out of our way. Certainly they resisted actual capture most vigorously, fighting us with beak and wing, and many a sharp peck and severe blow did we receive within the first ten minutes of our operations; but they would not take to flight, or make the slightest attempt of any kind to avoid us. Consequently at length, and very much against our will, we were obliged to open fire upon them, and it was not until the creatures saw the struggles and heard the piteous cries of the wounded among them that they at length began to grasp the



A PERILOUS POSITION

fact that we were enemies, and dangerous. And even then it was not until we had killed some three hundred of them that they seemed to have fully learned their lesson, and took to flight at our approach. While this wretched work of slaughter was proceeding the two men with the basket followed in our footsteps and collected the eggs from the abandoned nests, choosing the cleanest as being most likely to be fresh; so that, upon our return to the schooner that night, the cook got to work, and all hands supped sumptuously upon boiled and fried gulls' eggs, while we in the cabin regaled ourselves upon savoury omelette, followed by pancakes.

After supper Cunningham and I, with an old, discarded suit of clothes belonging to the skipper, rigged up a most realistic scarecrow, ready for transportation to the shore the first thing next morning.

We were all astir at daybreak next day; and while the hands, under the skipper's supervision, hoisted out the longboat and jollyboat and passed them astern ready for towing, and then proceeded to wash down the decks, Cunningham and I took the gig, and, carefully depositing our scarecrow in the sternsheets, pulled ashore and set up the figure, the birds taking to the air with loud, plaintive cries the moment that we stepped ashore. Then, having set up the figure, which represented a man carrying a gun, we returned to the schooner, observing with satisfaction, as we did so, that the birds seemed indisposed to settle again, but, after wheeling in the air over the island for some time, winged their way out to sea.

By the time that we got back to the schooner breakfast was ready, and all hands were at once piped to the meal, regardless of the hour, the word at the same time being passed that everybody would be expected on deck again within twenty minutes. But no such warning was needed, for the fore-castle hands by this time knew as well as the after-guard what we had come to this lonesome spot for, and were as eager as ourselves not only to see how the adventure would "pan out"—to use their own expression—but also to gain the utmost possible advantage over the *Kingfisher* and her people, whom they regarded as would-be lawless poachers upon our own private property; therefore when we of the cabin returned to the deck after a hasty meal, which we had bolted in less than a quarter of an hour, all hands were on deck, ready and waiting for orders. Accordingly no sooner did the skipper poke his head out of the companion and bellow the order to loose all fore-and-aft canvas than the group on the fore-castle split itself up into sections, one section actually running aft to cast loose the mainsail, while a second attacked the foresail, a third laid out to loose the jibs, and the fourth and last proceeded to fix the levers of the patent windlass and to heave in the slack of the cable.

A quarter of an hour sufficed us to get the canvas set and the anchor broken out of the sand; and then, as the schooner paid off and filled, Cunningham proceeded to get his diving gear on deck and to make ready for the great experiment, while I sprang into the fore rigging and made my way aloft to the topsail-yard, from which to con the schooner out through the reef in the first place, and afterwards to look out for the oyster bed. We could not possibly have had a finer day for the beginning of our operations, for the sky was a clear, rich, deep blue, dappled here and there at intervals with small patches of Trade-cloud, which looked like bits of cotton wool, drifting solemnly athwart the azure, while the Trade wind was blowing very moderately, and there was no sea to speak of.

I had scarcely got myself comfortably settled upon the topsail-yard when the skipper hailed me from where he stood aft close alongside the helmsman.

"Tawps'-l-yard, there!" he shouted. "I s'pose you don't happen to see nothin' of that there blamed *Kingfisher* anywhere about, do ye, Mr Temple?"

I sent my gaze slowly and searchingly right round the entire rim of the horizon. The air was so crystal-clear that no glass was needed to aid the eye. Had there been as much as three or four feet of a royal-masthead showing above the horizon I could not have failed to detect it, but there was nothing; the horizon was absolutely bare in every

direction, and I so reported it. The skipper waved his hand by way of reply, and I forthwith turned my attention to the business in hand, which was that of conning the schooner through the passage in the reef.

Twenty minutes later we were outside, rising and falling easily upon the long Pacific swell; and the moment that it was prudent for us to do so we starboarded our helm a trifle and kept away for the slightly discoloured patch of water that seemed to mark the position of the shoal upon which we expected to find the boundless wealth of the extensive bed of pearl-oysters spoken of by the departed Abe. Ten minutes sufficed us to run down to it, and the moment that we reached it I saw that we had not come upon a wild-goose chase. The oysters were there, all right, thousands, millions of them, showing up as a light-brown patch, nearly ten acres in extent, clearly distinguishable through the crystal-clear water. I allowed the schooner to run to about the very centre of the patch, and then shouted for the anchor to be let go.

Meanwhile all halyards had been let run two or three minutes earlier, and the canvas was rolled up anyhow, everybody, from the skipper to the cabin boy, seeming to be suddenly seized with a perfect delirium of excitement. As for me, I went down on deck by way of the backstays, and at once proceeded to lend Cunningham a hand to get into his makeshift diving rig, which he was very carefully overhauling. And while this was doing, four of the hands came along with a twenty-five-foot ladder, heavily weighted at the bottom with pigs of iron ballast, which Cunningham had caused to be constructed; and this they launched over the side, allowing it to hang plumb up and down, well secured, just abaft the main rigging. This was for Cunningham to descend by; and upon looking over the side I saw that it reached to within about four feet of the surface of the oyster bed. The getting of Cunningham into his suit, and the arranging of all the preliminaries, such as the rigging of a derrick wherewith to hoist to the surface the nets of oysters after Cunningham had filled them, the hauling of the longboat alongside to receive the first load, and so on, kept us busy for a full half-hour, during which the skipper paced to and fro, urging us to hurry, and gnawing his finger nails to the quick in his excitement and impatience.

But at length everything was ready, even to the shovel which Cunningham was to use for shovelling the oysters into the nets; and with the upper end of the air hose securely made fast to the main rigging, close to where I stood with the signal line coiled in my hands ready for paying out, and with a stout sword bayonet girt about his waist as a defence against the possible attack of prowling sharks, the amateur diver was assisted to climb the rail and get his feet upon the topmost rung of the ladder, after which he was left to his own devices. We had taken the precaution to send a good man aloft in a boatswain's chair, bent to the end of the gaff-topsail halyards, to keep a lookout for sharks, and he had reported none in sight; we therefore hoped that we should not suffer any very serious interruption from them, and Cunningham went over the side with the utmost confidence, I keeping my eye on him as he cautiously descended the ladder rung by rung, and paying out the signal line in such a manner as always to maintain a very light strain upon it.

At length I saw him step off the bottom rung of the ladder and gingerly lower himself to the surface of the oyster bed, having reached which he gave a single tug of his signal line to indicate that he was all right. Then, after pausing for a moment, apparently to take a good look round, he cast off the shovel from the end of the line by which it had been lowered, and proceeded methodically to shovel the oysters, just as they came, into one of the nets, which had also been lowered within his reach. Ten minutes of steady work now ensued, at the end of which he gave the signal to hoist away, and up came our first spoils, probably about five hundred oysters, which were swung over the longboat and emptied into her, the second net having meanwhile been lowered down to the diver.

And now there occurred a somewhat diverting episode; for no sooner was the first net-load of oysters discharged into the longboat than the skipper, unable any longer to endure the suspense, scrambled over the side, armed with a formidable jack knife, and, leaping down into the boat, seized an oyster and proceeded to force it open with the blade of his knife, no doubt fully expecting to find at least one pearl of price in it. But, alas! the poor man was doomed to disappointment, for there was no sign or vestige of pearl in the fish, save the lovely iridescent lining of the two shells. A second attempt fared no better, and the disappointed seeker flung the shells far from him with a muttered something that sounded not unlike an imprecation. But the good man was not to be so easily put off. A third oyster was seized and savagely wrenched open, and this time three diminutive seed pearls rewarded his perseverance. Yet still he was not satisfied. A fourth oyster was opened, and proved a blank; a fifth was seized, and as the two shells were forced apart a magnificent pearl was revealed, together with some six or eight much smaller ones. A shout of triumph apprised us all of the fact that at last the search had proved successful; and the next moment up came the skipper, his face aflame with delight and excitement, to show all and sundry what a pearl looked like when fresh taken from the parent fish.

Meanwhile the process of filling, hoisting, and emptying the nets went steadily on for the best part of an hour, and then Cunningham signalled that he was coming to the surface, some three thousand oysters having by that time been secured. When Cunningham presently appeared, and the glass of his helmet was unscrewed, he informed us that his makeshift suit was perfectly watertight, and answered its purpose even better than he had dared to expect, and that he had come up simply because he felt fatigued with his unaccustomed work and needed a little rest. The skipper thought this a good opportunity to change boats, so he sent away the longboat with her load in charge of a couple of men, giving them instructions how to dispose of the oysters; and the gig was hauled up alongside in her place. Then the boatswain, who had all along manifested the utmost interest in the diving question, volunteered to change places with Cunningham and do a spell of shovelling: but the engineer explained that he could take another turn below quite easily, and proposed, as an amendment, that the boatswain should take on the afternoon shift; and, this being arranged, he again descended and resumed operations.

Then in due course there came a brief respite while everybody went to dinner, half an hour being allowed for the meal, at the expiration of which time operations went on uninterruptedly until about half an hour before sunset, when we were perforce obliged to cease work, in order to get the schooner back into the lagoon before nightfall. But we had done not at all badly; for I had kept a rough—a very rough—account of the number of oysters that had been brought to the surface that day, not counting them, of course, but just estimating the number that had come up in each net, and when I came to total up I found that, unless my calculations were a long way out, we must have

secured at least twenty-five thousand oysters as a reward for our day's work.

But this by no means ended with the mooring of the schooner in the lagoon, for when that was done there still remained the oysters to be laid out in rows upon the southern extremity of the island; and we soon found that the landing and laying of them out was a much more lengthy process than the getting of them up from the sea bottom. Very fortunately for us, we had arrived at the island when the moon was four days old, and in that exquisitely clear atmosphere a moon of even that age affords a very useful amount of light, of which we availed ourselves to empty the boats and make all ready for the next day before finally knocking-off work.

The next day was, with a rather notable exception, just a repetition of the day which had preceded it. The weather was as fine, and matters worked even more smoothly, for almost every hour revealed to us some little improvement that might be made in our methods of work, which we promptly adopted. Thus, for example, the boatswain having proved himself to be quite an expert diver, it was arranged that Cunningham and he should work spell and spell about, each man working two hours and then taking two hours' complete rest. On this, our second day upon the bank, Cunningham and the boatswain had each been down once, the dinner hour had arrived and passed, and Cunningham was down again, working with tremendous energy—for a friendly rivalry had already arisen between him and the boatswain as to who could send up the most oysters—while I stood in the main chains, tending the signal line and intently watching the toiling figure diligently shovelling oysters away down below in the cool green shadow of the schooner's hull. As on the previous day, we had a man aloft for the express purpose of keeping a lookout for sharks, but every time we hailed him his reply was that there were no sharks in sight.

Suddenly, as I stood watching Cunningham, a great greyish-brown object slid lazily along beneath me, and paused immediately above the toiling diver. A single glance sufficed me to identify it as a shark, full twenty feet in length; and I instantly sent down the pre-arranged danger signal, while the man at the masthead yelled: "Shark ho! right over the diver!" I sang out to the two men who were in the boat receiving the oysters as they came up to seize a couple of oars and violently splash the surface of the water with them, in the hope that the sound would drive the brute away—for, after all, the shark, voracious as it is, is a timid creature, easily frightened by any sudden or unaccustomed noise. And the attempt met with at least partial success, for the shark instantly darted away a few yards; but it as suddenly turned, and, apparently quite undismayed by the splashing, slowly came back.

Meanwhile, however, Cunningham had dropped his shovel, and, having drawn the sword bayonet with which he was armed, stood quite quietly on the defensive, alertly on the watch. Evidently the shark did not quite know what to make of the strange creature on the sea bottom, for he now began to swim rapidly to and fro, making short tacks each way of a few yards only, eyeing Cunningham intently all the while. Then, before we could do anything in the nature of intervention, the brute suddenly wheeled and made a dash straight for the engineer. So lightning swift was the onslaught that the only thing I distinctly saw was the quick whisk of the creature's tail as it turned, and the sudden dart of the great body, followed by an equally sudden writhing movement; then in an instant the great fish appeared to be enveloped in a cloud of red, in which it almost disappeared; and the next thing I distinctly realised was that it was gone, while, the red cloud slowly dissipating, Cunningham was presently revealed in the very act of recovering his shovel for the purpose of resuming work. I signalled to him to come up at once, but he replied with a vigorous negative, and the next moment he was hard at work again.

A minute or two later the man aloft hailed: "I guess Mr Cunningham have give that there shark his gruel; for there he is, away out there on the starboard quarter, in his dyin' flurry!" And, sure enough, there the brute was, on the surface, about a hundred and fifty yards away, twisting and splashing in the midst of a boil of pink foam; and a few minutes later the struggles ceased altogether, and the monster floated quiescent and awash, dead, one of its great pectoral fins and a narrow strip of its white belly just showing above the surface. I was terribly afraid that the smell of blood, and of the dead carcass, would attract other sharks to the neighbourhood, and so further imperil Cunningham's safety—for sharks are reputed to possess an extraordinarily keen scent; but nothing of the kind happened. The dead shark slowly drifted away and was finally lost sight of, and we finished our day's work without further interruption.

Thus matters went steadily on for a fortnight, by which time we had accumulated some three hundred and eighty thousand oysters, and had laid them out upon the island to undergo the process of decay in the scorching rays of the sun. And that they were undergoing that process at a very rapid rate our olfactory nerves soon informed us; for the odour of them became perceptible as early as the fourth day, while by the end of the fortnight it was so strong as to be scarcely endurable even on the oyster bank itself, which was about a mile to leeward of the island, although, by berthing the schooner every night right up in the weather corner of the lagoon, we managed to avoid getting more than an occasional whiff of it during the hours devoted to rest.

By the end of the fortnight, however, we discovered that even the accumulation of wealth by scooping up pearl-oysters from the bottom of the sea may become monotonous after a while, especially when the accumulation is for somebody else's benefit; therefore, with one accord, we petitioned "Old Man" Brown to give us a change of occupation by allowing us to amuse ourselves searching for pearls among the rotting fish, which now covered a considerable portion of the leeward half of the island. And Brown gladly jumped at the proposal; for he was every day growing more anxious lest the *Kingfisher* and her crew of "toughs" should heave in sight and become troublesome, and was more than willing to make sure of such spoil as we had already accumulated. Therefore, on a certain morning, instead of getting the schooner under way and proceeding to the oyster bank, as usual, the longboat was hauled alongside, and, attired in our very oldest clothes, armed with a ship's bucket each, and provided with a plentiful supply of disinfectant cloths to fasten over our mouths and nostrils upon reaching the field of action, all hands of us, except the cook and the cabin boy, got into her and pulled away for the shore.

The air was literally darkened by the immense numbers of birds that had returned to the island, attracted by the odour, after having been driven off, and we soon saw that a few of the bolder of them had summoned up courage to settle among our oysters, despite the scarecrow which we had set up; but they took to flight immediately upon our approach, and hovered over us all day, uttering their melancholy cries with such persistency, and creating such a

volume of sound, that we could scarcely hear our own voices.

However, we were there not to talk but to work. Upon stepping ashore the first thing we did, after securing the boat, was to fill our buckets with clean salt water, in which to wash and deposit any pearls that we might find; next we swathed our mouths and nostrils with the disinfecting cloths; and then, told off by the skipper, each of us took a row of the decaying fish and proceeded to search carefully the putrid matter for what many people regard as the most lovely gems in the world.

There is no need for me to dilate upon the disagreeable, not to say disgusting nature of the task upon which we now found ourselves engaged; it may safely be left to the imagination of the reader, and I will content myself with merely placing upon record the fact that it was infinitely worse than even Cunningham or I had anticipated—and we believed that we had gauged the objectionable character of the work pretty accurately. But, so far at least as I was concerned, I soon forgot the sickeningly offensive nature of my work in the interest attaching to it, for I had not been five minutes engaged upon it when I came upon a most superb pearl, perfectly globular in shape, with the exquisite sheeny lustre peculiar to gems of what are termed the first water, and, as nearly as might be, an inch in diameter. Such a find as this was more than enough to make me forget all the disagreeableness of the work upon which I was engaged, and to stimulate my curiosity to its highest pitch. Accordingly I proceeded with zest, and within an hour had secured a round dozen of good-sized pearls—although none of them approached the first in size—together with a sufficient quantity of smaller pearls to fill about one-third of an ordinary half-pint tumbler. Nor was this first hour of mine an exceptionally fortunate one, for when we knocked off work at the end of the day my total find amounted to no less than one hundred and seven pearls, ranging in size from half an inch in diameter up to a monster that measured just over an inch and a quarter, while of smaller gems I had more than sufficient to fill two tumblers. And when we all came to compare notes together upon our return on board I found that I was by no means the most fortunate one of the party, the skipper's total and those of three of the fore-castle hands considerably exceeding mine in quantity.

Chapter Eight.

The "Kingfisher" of Nantucket.

It was on the third day of our repulsive work among the decaying oysters that the expected happened. We were all assiduously at work as usual, groping with our fingers among the rotting fish for the sudden sensation of hardness which proclaimed the presence of the gems, when one of the party, straightening himself up for a moment to take the kinks out of his backbone, let out a sudden yell of: "Sail ho!"

"Where away?" demanded the skipper, starting to his feet and staring about him; and in a moment all hands of us were standing up and following the "Old Man's" example. There was no need for a reply to the skipper's question, for we had but to look to see the stranger instantly—a topsail-schooner, about five miles distant, coming up from the southward, close-hauled, under a press of sail.

Brown stood staring intently at her for a full minute or more; then he shouted:

"Yes, that's the gol-darned *Kingfisher*, right enough, ne'er a doubt of it! All hands to the boat, and let's get off to the *Martha*. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if that Slocum and his crowd tries to make trouble when they find us here before 'em."

"Why do you think so, Captain?" demanded Cunningham. "Surely there are enough oysters here for both of us, aren't there?"

"Well, yes, I reckon there are," agreed Brown, somewhat doubtfully. "But I guess Slocum won't think so; he'll want the whole blamed lot."

I thought this rather good, remembering, as I did, that previous to our arrival, and before we knew how extensive was the bed, the skipper had been straining every nerve to reach the island before his rival, with the avowed intention of sweeping the shoal clean if he could before the arrival of the *Kingfisher*. I said nothing, however, but, seizing the bucket containing the pearls which I had gathered during the morning, hastened away with the others toward where the longboat was moored. The moment that the last man was in we cast off, threw out our oars, and gave way for our own vessel, for the stranger was coming up hand over fist, and Brown was very anxious to be on board before the arrival of the *Kingfisher*, in order that he might be fully prepared for all eventualities.

We reached the *Martha* a few minutes before the stranger hove in stays to fetch the passage through the reef; and Brown at once went below, taking with him a couple of hands, routed out the arms and ammunition chests, and served out to each man a gun, a brace of Colt revolvers, and a cutlass, together with a liberal supply of ammunition for the firearms, at the same time instructing us to load our weapons and have them ready for instant use, but to keep them out of sight until it became apparent that they would be required.

By the time that our preparations were complete, the stranger—now identifiable beyond all question as the *Kingfisher*, since she carried her name legibly painted in white letters upon her head-boards—had passed through the reef and, taking in her canvas as she came, was steering for a berth about a cable's length from where the *Martha* lay; and a few minutes later she put down her helm, came head to wind, and presently let go her anchor. Meanwhile the skipper, Cunningham, and I had been diligently taking stock of her through our glasses, with the object of ascertaining how many hands she carried, and we agreed that there were but eight in sight, which, counting also the cook and steward, gave her a complement of ten all told against fourteen of us, which fact caused our skipper to chuckle with satisfaction.

That we were not to be kept long in suspense with regard to the intentions of the newcomers soon became sufficiently evident, for the *Kingfisher* had scarcely swung to her anchor when a dory was launched, and, with three people in her, two at the oars and the third sitting in the sternsheets, came pulling toward the *Martha Brown*.

Five minutes later the little craft swept up alongside, one of our people hospitably dropped a rope's end into her to hang on by, and the man in the sternsheets—a long, angular, big-boned individual, about six feet three inches in height, apparently about thirty-four years of age, with a thick thatch of reddish-brown hair, and an equally thick beard and moustache of the same colour, and attired, despite the intense heat, in a heavy pilot cloth jacket and trousers, a blue worsted jersey, a fur cap, and sea-boots reaching above his knees—uncoiling his long limbs, rose in the boat, and, with a nimbleness strangely at variance with his ungainly appearance, climbed the side, swung himself in over our low rail, and flung a quick, enquiring glance round the deck.

"Mornin'!" he remarked briefly in a surly tone of voice to the skipper, Cunningham, and myself, as we stepped forward to meet him. "I see this here schooner's the *Marthy Brown* o' Baltimore. Which o' you 'uns is the cap'n of her?"

"I am," answered our "Old Man," stepping forward. "Name of Ephraim Brown. This here is my first officer, Mr Mark Temple, and this is Mr Cunnin'ham, my second officer."

"Jerushy! First and second officers, eh?" exclaimed the stranger in a fine tone of irony. "My, but you air puttin' on style, Cap'n, and no mistake! I'm plain Abner Slocum, cap'n and owner of the schooner *Kingfisher*, sailin' out o' Nantucket; and my first, second, third, and fourth mate is all rolled into one under the name o' Dan'l Greene. That's him—the red-headed feller in the Scotch cap helpin' t'other 'un to roll up my schooner's mains'l. Well, Cap'n Brown, I've took the liberty to come aboard your ship to ask what you happens to be doin' here, if I ain't presumin' too much."

"May I ask what business that is of your'n, Cap'n—eh—um—Slocum?" demanded Brown blandly.

"Cert'nly you may," retorted Slocum, with elaborate politeness, which, however, vanished the next instant. "An' it won't take me half a second to answer ye," he continued truculently. "It's business o' mine because this 'ere island, and everything in the sea for three mile round it, happens to belong to me—left me by my deceased brother-in-law, Abr'am Johnson. And I don't want, and won't have—you hear me!—won't have nobody trespassin' on my property. So the sooner you 'uns gits, the better it'll be for all parties. And now I hopes you understan's. And there's another thing. By the all-fired smell o' that island I reckon that you've been poachin' on my pearl-'yster bank. Now, I dunno whether you knows it or not, but by the laws of the United States of Ameriky pearl poachin' is felony, and the poacher is liable to be put away for ten years or so in Sing Sing. But I don't want to be hard upon nobody; so if you'll just hand over to me the pearls that you've poached, I'm agreeable to let ye all go free, and say nothin' more about it."

"You don't say!" ejaculated Brown, apparently overwhelmed by such royal clemency. "Well, then, I guess— But stop a minute; I sure was very near forgettin' something. You say that this here island's yours, eh? Well, then, I s'pose you've got your title deeds and all that to prove it, eh?"

"Title deeds be—" began Slocum, with an ugly snarl. Then he pulled himself up sharp. "I sure have, to hum," he answered. "But natchrally I didn't bring sich vallyable papers along with me, for fear of losin' 'em. And then again I didn't expect to find nobody here to dispute my title. See?"

"No," said Brown, "I don't see; and that's a solid fact. What I do see is somethin' like this here. I'm cruisin' in the Pacific in this here schooner o' mine, and one day we sights this here island, and comes in to have a look at it. We lowers a boat and pulls ashore, and what do we find? We finds that the place is uninhabited, with nary a sign that anybody's ever set eyes on it before. Anyway, it's uninhabited, and it's miles and miles away from any other land; therefore it don't belong to nobody, and accordin'ly I takes possession of it. So you see, Cap'n, you're all wrong about it bein' your'n. It's mine; and if I was measly and cantankerous I'd prob'ly order you to take your schooner outer my harbour at once. But I ain't that sorter man: I'm lib'ral and free-handed to a fault; I ain't no greedy grab-all, not by a long chalk, so you may stay in this here harbour o' mine so long as you've a mind to. But, you understan', you ain't none of yer to go ashore without my leave; an'—"

"Oh, shucks!" interrupted Slocum in sudden fury. "What d'ye mean by givin' me that sort o' mush? I tell ye that this island is mine, and I means to have it. And I means to have all the pearls that you've poached, too; and look 'e here, Mister, if you ain't out o' sight before nightfall, I'll—I'll—"

"Yes; you'll—what?" demanded the skipper calmly, seeing that the other hesitated.

"Why, I'll—I'll blow you and your blamed schooner and all hands of you to blazes!" exploded Slocum.

"You will, eh?" retorted Brown, slipping his right hand casually into his jacket pocket. "Then—hands up, you skunk! hands up; and look spry about it, or by the living Jingo I'll shoot! Up with 'em, I say. Ah! that's better, a good deal!" as Slocum slowly and reluctantly raised his hands above his head in response to our skipper's command, emphasised by a levelled revolver which the "Old Man" had produced so rapidly that it was quite like a conjuring trick.

"Now, Mr Temple," continued Brown, addressing me but keeping his eye unwaveringly upon his prisoner, "just you go to the rail and persuade them two in the dory to come up on deck; persuade 'em with yer gun if you can't do it any other way. I guess we'll have to go on usin' force, now that this cantankerous cuss have obliged us to begin. And you, Mr Cunnin'ham, be good enough to pass the word for the carpenter to lay aft wi' three sets of irons."

"Here, I say, you monkey-faced old pirate, whatcher givin' us? Whatcher mean by callin' for irons? You don't mean ter say you're goin' to make a prisoner of me, do yer?" demanded Slocum, dropping his hands in his fury.

"Hands up!" snapped the skipper, quick as lightning. Then, as Slocum threw them up again, he replied:

"Not goin' to make a prisoner of ye, eh? You bet I sure am, then, you and the hull of your crowd, since you've come here spoilin' for trouble. But I don't want no trouble myself, I ain't that sorter man; so I'm goin' to keep you 'uns safe in irons until I've finished my business here, a'ter which I'll release ye, and you can do what yer like."

"The fust thing I'll do when you release me is to blow the blamed head off your shoulders, ye all-fired pirate," snapped Slocum viciously.

"Put this man in irons," ordered Brown, as the carpenter came along, and the next minute Slocum was fettered and Chips was overhauling him to make sure that he had no concealed weapons about him. Meanwhile I had succeeded in "persuading" the two men who constituted the crew of the dory to leave their boat and come up on deck, and they, too, were promptly clapped in irons. Thus we already had in our power three of the *Kingfisher's* complement of ten men all told, leaving seven, as opposed to our own fourteen.

"Take 'em away and confine 'em below in the fore peak," ordered Brown. And when this was done, "I guess there's no sense in makin' two bites at a cherry," observed the skipper. "We can't spare the time to fool around watchin' those fellers; so have the longboat hauled alongside, and let all hands except the cook and the cabin boy take their guns and cutlasses and get down into her. We'll just meander across and take that there *Kingfisher* right away, so savin' a heap o' trouble in the long run. And while we're doing that, 'the Doctor' and the boy'll stay here and keep an eye on the chaps down below."

So said, so done; we secured possession of the *Kingfisher* without any difficulty, for although her crew guessed our errand the moment that they saw us coming, they could not very well help themselves, such weapons as the Nantucket craft was provided with being stowed away and locked up in Slocum's own cabin, where the crew could not get at them except by breaking down the door. But apart from that, they had no stomach for fighting in the absence of Slocum, and they surrendered immediately upon being ordered to do so, although, it must be confessed, with not too good a grace. Having thus secured possession of the *Kingfisher*, the next thing that we did was to give her another fifty fathoms of cable, so that she would ride easily and without being watched in any weather that we were likely to have; after which her crew, having previously been searched and deprived of everything that could by any chance be utilised as a weapon, were ordered down into the longboat, taken aboard the *Martha*, clapped in irons, and put down below into the fore peak along with Slocum and the two men out of the dory, one of our own men being detailed each day afterwards to mount guard over them while the rest of us resumed operations ashore.

It cost us three weeks of strenuous work to complete the examination of, and extract the pearls from the oysters that it had taken us a fortnight to fish up from the bottom of the sea, and when we had finished even the skipper confessed himself satisfied, so great had been our success. Yet, although Brown was so far satisfied that he was content to leave the remainder of the oysters to Slocum, he could not bring himself to leave behind the empty shells from which we had extracted the pearls; pearl shell, he informed us, was worth so many dollars—I forget how many—per ton in New York, and it would pay him well to take in all that we had—discarding an equal weight of ballast—and carry it there. The task of cleaning, carrying on board, and storing this shell—including the turning out of cargo and the discharge of ballast to make room for it—occupied us another fortnight; consequently by the time that all was done and we were ready to sail again we had been close upon two months at the island. Then, upon a certain lovely morning, we loosed and set our canvas and hove short; after which the crew of the *Kingfisher*, Slocum included, were brought up on deck, ordered over the side into the longboat, and transferred to their own vessel, one man being released from his irons as soon as the transfer had been effected, in order that he in turn might release the others. And while this was being done the longboat returned to the *Martha Brown* and was hoisted in; after which we tripped our anchor, hove it up to the bows, and stood out to sea.

The ensuing three months were more or less pleasantly and uneventfully spent in cruising hither and thither among the various groups of islands, seeking sandalwood, some of the natives proving exceedingly friendly and agreeable to deal with, while others were very much the reverse. By the end of that time we had accumulated a very fair quantity of the wood, and Brown had arrived at the conclusion that one more call would about suffice to complete our cargo. The question which then arose was, where should that call be made? for we had pretty well completed the round of the islands and exhausted their capabilities of supply, sandalwood happening to be rather scarce that year, while the demand for it had been unusually brisk, a frequent experience of ours being that other traders had been beforehand with us and had taken all that the islanders had for disposal. Finally, while ashore one day on the island of Tahiti, the skipper happened to overhear two men discussing sandalwood together, one of whom remarked to the other that there was still some wood to be obtained at the island of Roua Poua, one of the Marquesas group; and two hours later we were under weigh, bound for that same island.

Now at that time the Marquesas natives bore a somewhat shady character, it being said of them that they were rather inclined to be treacherous when the opportunity to be so was afforded them; therefore when, on our fourth day out from Tahiti, we sighted Roua Poua, we approached the island with all due precaution, every man of us being fully armed, with orders to use his weapons freely upon the slightest provocation. It was dusk when we arrived and let go our anchor under the lee of the island, and by the skipper's order the sails were merely hauled down or brailed up, as the case might be, all ready for setting again at a moment's notice, while the twenty-five fathom shackle of the cable was kept just inside the hawse pipe, with the pin loosened and ready to be knocked out instantly, in case it should become necessary to slip.

The anchor had scarcely splashed into the placid waters of the bay when, as in the case of most of the other islands visited, the schooner was surrounded by a round dozen or more canoes, manned by from two to five men, all anxious to be allowed to come alongside and barter the fruit or fish which they had brought off from the shore. They appeared to be fine stalwart fellows, and were unarmed, so far as we could see; but the skipper would not allow any of them to come alongside that night, and they returned good-humouredly enough to the shore after they had received permission to come off again the next morning. A strict anchor watch was maintained that night, but no

canoes came near us, nor did anything occur to lead us to suppose that the natives meditated treachery toward us.

When they again came off at daylight on the following morning, although there were something like thirty canoes surrounding the schooner, each manned, as before, by from two to five men, they made no attempt to force their way alongside, but lay off at a distance of two or three fathoms, the men holding up their wares for our inspection and shouting their merits in that singular "pidgin" which passes for English among the Polynesians. And when at length Brown selected a particular canoe, the assortment of fruit in which appeared to be of a temptingly varied character, and ordered her owner to come alongside, the rest, instead of exhibiting anger or jealousy, simply pelted the fortunate competitor with good-natured chaff, and, taking to their paddles, headed for the shore, well knowing that the crew of so small a craft as the *Martha Brown* would have no custom to spare for more than one well-laden canoe. And even when the selected canoe came alongside, only two out of her crew of four offered to board us, the other two remaining in the canoe to pass up, as ordered by the owner, the various commodities which he had for sale. These commodities, by the way, consisted of fruits of various descriptions, eggs, chickens of astounding skinniness, and a half-grown porker, and the prices demanded, in what the skipper termed "truck", were so ridiculously low that in the course of an hour's lively bargaining we completely emptied the canoe of her contents.

When at length the bargaining was concluded, and the savage salesman was about to depart, he turned to the skipper and asked, in particularly good English:

"You stop it here long, Cap'n?"

"What business is that of your'n, sonny?" retorted Brown, his suspicions suddenly awakened again.

"Name it me Oahika, not 'sonny', Cap'n," returned the savage. "If schooner stop it here, Oahika like it come off every day, bring it plenty fine fruit fresh fis' chicken-an-egg."

"Oh, that's your game, is it?" observed Brown, reassured. "Want the app'intment of bumboat man in or'nary to this here schooner, eh?"

Oahika's reply consisted merely of a good-humoured grin, which exhibited a remarkably fine set of teeth, deeply stained with betel nut. Probably his comprehension of "Old Man" Brown's question was of the slenderest. The skipper, however, accepted the grin as an affirmative, and graciously remarked:

"Very well, then; you can come off again to-morrow, and see if we wants anything else. And say, the next time that you brings off chickens, let 'em be chickens, not livin' skelintons. You sabby?"

Again Oahika smiled, the smile of the man who wishes to convey the impression that he "sabbys" perfectly, while in reality he does nothing of the kind.

"That's all right, then," continued Brown. "Now you can git away ashore agin as fast as you like, for we're goin' to be busy here."

The native, who probably comprehended the skipper's gestures better than he did his words, at once turned and made toward the rail, but was recalled by Brown, who enquired, in an offhand, casual sort of way:

"Say, you, Oah—what's-your-name—you don't happen to have no sandalwood ashore there, I s'pose?"

"Sandalwood!" repeated the savage. "I think it some mans got a leetle. You want it sandalwood, Cap'n?"

"Well, I guess I could do with a little, if there was any goin' cheap," returned the skipper.

"You like it me ask them mans come see you, Cap'n?" demanded Oahika.

"Well, yes, I guess you may," replied the skipper. "Ask 'em to come off to-morrow mornin', bringin' the wood with 'em, and tell 'em that if they're willin' to let it go cheap I'll buy it off 'em."

The savage intimated in his own peculiar fashion that it would afford him much pleasure to perform this trifling service for his esteemed friend and patron, and then took his leave, grinning with apparent satisfaction at the result of his morning's work. The skipper stood watching the progress of the canoe until she had nearly reached the shore, and then he turned to me and remarked:

"I guess there's been a mistake somewhere about these here Marquesas natives. They don't seem to me to be so very partic'lar treacherous. How do they strike you?"

"Why," said I, "I have been amusing myself by very closely watching those two who were aboard, and I am bound to admit that their behaviour seemed quite unexceptionable. I mean," I continued, noticing a slightly puzzled look on my companion's face, "they seemed to behave pretty much like the natives of most of the other islands which we have visited, except that they did not attempt to steal anything."

"Yep, I guess I noticed that too," observed the skipper. "Well," he continued, "we'll just go on keepin' our eyes open for a bit, but I don't reckon upon our findin' ourselves up agin anything so very serious in this here island."

Brown had given our chocolate-coloured visitors to understand that we were to have a busy day aboard the schooner; but as a matter of fact that statement was merely an attempt to "bluff" the natives, "bluffing" having latterly become almost an instinctive act with the skipper. However, although we had nothing very particular to do we at least made a show of great industry, easing up and overhauling rigging, renewing chafing mats, and so on, Brown's notion being to convey to the natives the idea that we had called in to overhaul and refit, rather than that we were in quest of sandalwood; by which ruse I think he hoped to get the wood at a somewhat cheaper rate than usual.

On the following morning Oahika and his crew came off to us again, bringing more fruit, a small quantity of vegetables, about a dozen eggs, and two animated barn-door skeletons which the skipper positively refused to purchase at any price. And with them came four other canoes, each of which had some eight or ten sticks of sandalwood in her.

“Hullo!” exclaimed the skipper, when he saw this display, “what in the nation do they mean by bringin’ off them scraps? Is it to show us the sort o’ stuff that they have to sell, I wonder? Hi, you!”—to Oahika—“what have them fellers brought off that wood for?”

“Sandalwood, that,” explained the savage. “They want it sell dem wood you.”

“Sell!” ejaculated the skipper; “sell! Why, there ain’t enough wood there to light a fire with. Is that all that they’ve got?—because there ain’t enough there to make it worth my while to open out my ‘truck’. I wouldn’t give one bandanner handkercher for the whole measly lot!”

Oahika conferred with his friends for a while, and then turned to the skipper.

“Mans say,” he explained, “that dem wood all it got cut. Plenty more yonder,” pointing generally toward the shore. “They say s’pose you want it more wood, you go ‘shore and show it dem how much you want, and mans cut it for you.”

“Well, I’m jiggered!” exclaimed the skipper explosively. “If I’d ha’ knowed that them few twigs was all that the lazy skunks had got cut, d’ye think I’d ha’ brought the *Marthy* all this way out of her road to buy it? No, sirree, not by a jugful! But,” he continued, his wrath subsiding as rapidly as it had blazed up, “seein’ that we’re here I s’pose the best thing for me to do’ll be to go ashore, have a look at that there wood, and see if I kin strike a bargain on it. ‘T all events, if I do that I’ll be able to choose the best wood they have, ‘nstead of buyin’ just any blamed stuff that they like to bring off to me.”

“Do you think it will be wise to trust yourself ashore alone with those fellows?” I asked. “You must remember that we have seen very little of them, thus far; and it will be well to keep in mind, too, the fact that they have rather an unenviable reputation for treachery. Why not order so many canoe-loads of wood from them, and let it go at that?”

“Well—no—I guess not,” answered the skipper. “If I do that they’ll work off all their worst stuff on me, and I’ll just have to take it or go without. No; I reckon I’ll go ashore and pick my own wood: then I shall know that I’m gettin’ full vally for my money. But I won’t go alone; I guess I’ll take two hands with me, and we’ll go fully armed. I don’t believe in takin’ no unnecessary risks.”

“No,” I agreed; “there is no sense in that sort of thing. Who will you take with you? Would you care to have Mr Cunningham and myself with you?”

“No, I guess not,” answered Brown with decision. “I’ll take Mr Cunnin’ham and one o’ the foremast hands with me; but you’ll stay here, Mr Temple, and look a’ter the ship. And I guess I’ll go right now; then we shall be able to get back in time for dinner. Now, let’s see; I’ll have Mr Cunnin’ham for one, as I said, and—yes, Joe Maybury’ll do very well for t’other. Just give them two their instructions, Mr Temple, will ye. I’ll be ready to go in ten minutes; and I guess we’ll go in the jollyboat.”

I found Cunningham and explained the situation to him, and he was, naturally, delighted at the idea of having a run ashore; but I warned him to keep his weather eye lifting, and to take a couple of fully loaded revolvers with him, as well as plenty of cartridges, and a cutlass. Then I found Maybury, and gave him similar instructions, winding up by telling off three more men to go in the jollyboat and bring her back as soon as she had landed her passengers. Ten minutes later the little expedition started, and I stood and watched them as they pulled away for the beach, accompanied by the five canoes which had come off to us half an hour earlier.

As they drew in toward the shore I perceived, with a momentary qualm of uneasiness, that quite a considerable number of natives was turning out to meet them; but upon bringing the ship’s telescope to bear upon the beach my uneasiness was to a considerable extent dissipated, for I then saw that the crowd was largely composed of women and children, while, so far as I could see, none of the men carried anything resembling a weapon. Also I was unable to detect any sign of hostility or excitement on the faces of the natives; on the contrary, they all appeared to be smiling with the utmost good humour, and as Cunningham stepped out of the boat I saw one *café au lait* coloured young minx dart forward and laughingly throw a garland of gay-tinted flowers round his neck. The screech of delight with which this achievement was greeted reached my ears even where I was, a good half mile from the beach. The laughing, shouting crowd then closed in upon the newcomers, and once again I became a trifle anxious; but presently I caught a glimpse of Cunningham’s smiling countenance in the midst of the crowd, and a minute or two later the skipper and his bodyguard emerged, and, accompanied by the sandalwood merchants, walked off up a footpath that vanished among the trees within fifty yards of the shore.

Then, to my annoyance, the natives gathered round the boat, and the crew, instead of returning forthwith, as I had instructed them to do, laid in their oars, stepped out of her on to the sand, and proceeded interestedly to inspect various articles which the savages seemed to be urging them to purchase. As I continued to watch them through the glass I saw first one of our men and then another emerge from the crowd, go to the boat, and carefully deposit something—probably a “curio” of some kind—in her sternsheets, and then rejoin the laughing, gesticulating throng. This went on for something like twenty minutes, by the end of which time my patience was quite exhausted; and I directed one of the hands to get out the ensign and bend it on to the main signal halyards while I went below to get a gun, intending to hoist the ensign and at the same time fire the gun in the air as a signal of recall to the recalcitrant boat’s crew. But when I returned on deck with the loaded weapon I was just in time to see the entire crowd retiring up the pathway, leaving the boat abandoned on the shore, with about a foot of her forefoot hauled up on the beach and her painter made fast to one of her stretchers, which had been thrust like a peg for about half its length into the

sand!

The man who was standing by to hoist the ensign grinned as he caught my eye. "I guess them three jokers have toddled off up to the village," he said.

But I had my doubts, and did not like the appearance of things at all; my former suspicions rushed back with redoubled force, and—

"Hoist away that ensign," I said curtly; and as the man began to pull upon the halyards I lifted the gun to my shoulder, and, pointing it well out to seaward, pulled the trigger. By the time that the smoke cleared away not a native was to be seen!

Chapter Nine.

Treachery!

My first feeling was one of simple annoyance with the three men who constituted the boat's crew, because they had permitted themselves to be cajoled into visiting the village and leaving the boat unprotected upon the beach, instead of returning to the ship immediately after landing the skipper, as I had instructed them to do. But when a full hour had elapsed, with no sign of the return of the truants, my annoyance began to give place to a feeling of rapidly growing anxiety; and when that hour grew to two, with still no sign of the absentees, my anxiety merged into a feeling of downright alarm—nay, more than alarm, into a conviction that something very serious had happened.

And now I found myself in an exceedingly awkward predicament; for while I felt that something ought to be done, I could not, for the life of me, decide what that something should be. Two alternatives suggested themselves, one being to arm all hands to the teeth, launch the gig, and go ashore to investigate; while the other was to remain aboard and prepare the schooner in every possible way to repel an attack, and at the same time to have everything ready for flight at a moment's notice, if need be. The former was undoubtedly the proper thing to do, if one were to act upon the assumption that the natives had seized the white men who had landed, and were holding them as prisoners; but such an assumption was scarcely justified by the reputation which the Marquesas natives had earned for themselves, the story in circulation with regard to them being to the effect that it was their custom promptly to kill and eat any unfortunate whites who chanced to fall into their hands. If the six men who had been decoyed ashore that morning were already dead, nothing was to be gained by landing the remainder of the *Martha's* crew, except the infliction upon the natives of a sharp punishment—at a considerable amount of risk to ourselves of further loss in the pitched battle which would assuredly ensue.

Also there was the possibility—nay, more, the very strong probability—that while we were busily engaged on shore in the attempt to administer salutary chastisement for the betrayal of our shipmates, a party of natives might board the unprotected schooner, slip her cable, and run her ashore; and then where should we be, with no means of retreat excepting our boats, which would doubtless also be seized? If we could only get hold of a native and ascertain from him what had become of the absentees we should know what to do: for if the missing men were merely prisoners we should be fully justified in taking the risk of attempting to rescue them; but if, on the other hand, they were already dead, the question of punishment might very well be left until a more fitting moment. But now there was not a solitary native to be seen anywhere, which, in my opinion, was a decidedly bad sign.

The arrival of noon—by which hour the skipper fully expected to be back aboard the ship, but was not—found me still undecided upon the question of landing; but I had so far made up my mind that I had determined to arm all hands and put the schooner into as efficient a state of defence as possible. Accordingly I gave orders to have the arms and ammunition chests brought on deck, and instructed each man—there were only eight of us, all told, now—to arm himself with a cutlass and a brace of fully loaded revolvers, and also to have a loaded gun where he could put his hand upon it at a moment's notice. Next I caused all fore-and-aft canvas to be loosed, all downhauls cast off, and all halyards ready for hoisting away at a moment's notice; and when these orders had been duly executed it seemed to me that we had done everything that was possible.

Yet the schooner was still in a very defenceless condition, so far as resisting the simultaneous attack of several hundred determined natives was concerned: we might empty our firearms upon them, and if every shot told—which was most unlikely, in the excitement attendant upon an attack—we should kill or wound precisely fifty-six of them; after which the eight of us would be fighting, hand to hand, with the remainder, who would outnumber us by at least twenty to one, and probably twice that number! What chance would we have under such conditions as those? Absolutely none at all. If, now, it were possible to raise the schooner's bulwarks, or to render them unclimbable in some way!

As I considered this the thought of the trawl net which the skipper had brought along for the purpose of dredging up the pearl-oysters occurred to me, and I instantly decided that it might, with a little ingenuity, be converted into an excellent boarding netting. It was made of extra stout hemp line, to resist the cutting action of the oyster shells over which it was proposed to be dragged, and also to bring up a good heavy load without bursting, and I at once recognised that if there was enough of it to trice up all round the schooner—and I believed there was—it might serve to keep the natives off our decks long enough to enable us to give them so severe a punishing as to cool their ardour effectually and ultimately beat them off. The idea was too good not to be utilised at once; and I gave instructions to have the net immediately routed out and brought on deck. It was a big, heavy affair, and it took the eight of us the best part of half an hour to clear it out of the sail-room and get it on deck; but when at length we had done so I at once saw that, with a certain amount of cutting and contriving, it might be made to serve its new purpose very excellently: and forthwith all hands of us fell upon it, and by eight bells in the afternoon watch had converted it into an exceedingly efficient boarding net. Then we triced it up, and felt that at last we were ready for whatever the fates

—and the natives—might have in store for us.

Meanwhile the jollyboat still lay abandoned upon the beach, and no sign of her crew or of the skipper and his two companions had been seen; nor had the strictest scrutiny, with the aid of the ship's telescope, revealed any indication of natives ashore: in fact, so far as appearances alone were concerned, the island might have been uninhabited. But the continued absence of our shipmates, now prolonged far beyond all reasonable limits, left no doubt in any of our minds that something very seriously wrong had happened to them; and but for the circumstance that we were in complete ignorance as to what that happening really was, and the hope that some of them at least might still be alive, I would at once have got the schooner under way and gone to sea. But to do that was impossible while their fate was still in doubt; for not even to ensure our own safety against the attack that we were all convinced was impending could we do that which would amount to the abandonment of possibly living white men to the mercy of the savages.

With the tricing up and securing of the boarding netting our preparations for the defence of the schooner were completed to the best of our ability; and now all that remained was for us to sit down and passively await events, which, in the present case, meant an attack by the savages at any moment after darkness had fallen sufficiently to conceal their movements. But, that we might be as fully prepared as possible, I gave instructions for the advancement of the supper hour, so that we might partake of that meal while there was still light enough to enable us to see our surroundings; and after that we busied ourselves about a general straightening up of the decks and the removal of all unnecessary hamper, in order that, if fight we must, we might at least fight with clear decks.

Fortunately for us the night fell fine and clear, with brilliant starlight which enabled us to see all round the ship for a distance of about a couple of hundred yards; but inshore of us the shadow of the island lay jet-black upon the surface of the water, completely hiding all evidence of movement in that direction, even when I attempted to probe the blackness with the night glass. Therefore we were obliged to trust quite as much to our ears as to our eyes for warning of the approach of an enemy; but even they did not help us much, for the island was but a small one, and the thunder of the surf upon its weather shore, borne to us with almost startling distinctness, mingled with the sough of the wind among the trees and the lap of the ripples alongside, making with these a combination of sound that effectually screened any such movement as the launching of a canoe or the distant dip of paddles. I foresaw that this was likely to be a wakeful night for me, for with such a heavy load of responsibility upon my young shoulders I could not possibly have slept, even upon a bed of down. I therefore instructed the men to bring their beds on deck and snatch such rest as might come to them, while I kept a lookout. Also I made a point of striking the ship's bell regularly every half-hour, in the faint hope that if the savages could be brought to realise that we were upon the alert they might, after all, decide not to risk an attack.

With incredible slowness the laggard moments passed; the second dog-watch came to an end; and then, still more slowly, as it seemed to my impatience, first one, then two, three, four, and so on up to eight bells of the first watch were tolled out, and still there were no signs of the enemy. And all this while I was continuously padding round the decks in a pair of old felt-soled slippers, which effectually silenced my footsteps upon the planking, pausing for a moment at every half-dozen steps to peer anxiously but in vain into the shadow of the island for some indication of movement. Finally four bells of the middle watch arrived, and their passage was duly recorded by the strokes of the ship's bell. Meanwhile the stress of the day's anxiety, combined with my continuous and monotonous perambulation of the deck, and no doubt assisted by the soft coolness of the offshore breeze, laden with the odours of earth and vegetation, and the constant booming sound of the distant surf, was beginning to tell upon me; my jarred nerves had become steady, my breathing had become deep and regular, my limbs were growing weary, and my eyelids began occasionally to droop; in short, I was beginning to feel fatigued and in need of sleep.

This, then, was evidently the moment at which to attempt to snatch a little rest, and I was debating within myself which of the men I should call to relieve me, or rather which of them I could best trust to keep an alert lookout, when I fancied I caught, just for an instant out of the corner of my eye, a faint, silvery gleam, as of the phosphorescence of disturbed water, deep in the heart of the darkest shadow in the direction of the beach. I looked more closely, and presently saw again, this time quite distinctly, the rippling, moon-like gleam of water disturbed as it might be by the launching of a boat or a canoe. Yes, there was no mistake about it, there was undoubtedly a movement of some sort in there; and even as I came to this conclusion I saw the thing repeated twice, thrice, five or six times, with spaces of a few yards between. That was enough; at last the savages were on the move, and in a moment my fatigue fell from me like a garment, and I was once again the incarnation of alertness. Without making a sound I glided along the deck in my old soft slippers, and, laying my hand lightly upon each sleeper's shoulder, murmured in his ear: "The enemy is under way! Go to your station as noiselessly as possible, taking your gun with you; and do not fire until I give the word."

By the time that I had awakened my little band, and had seen each man at his proper station, it had become perfectly apparent that eight canoes were stealing slowly out toward us from the beach; for although they were still enveloped in deep shadow, and were being paddled so cautiously that not the faintest suspicion of a sound could be heard, it was possible for us to see distinctly, in the midst of the blackness, eight separate points of disturbance, each indicated by short, wavering lines of phosphorescent light, marking the slight ripple created by the gentle passage of some object through the water, in addition to which an occasional small luminous swirl indicated the stealthy dip of a paddle in the water at infrequent intervals. The excessive caution with which they were making their approach seemed to suggest an intention on the part of the savages to get as near as possible to the schooner unobserved, with probably a quick dash at the end to cover the last hundred feet or so of water.

Crouching low behind the bulwarks, and levelling the ship's night glass over the rail, I kept the instrument slowly sweeping athwart the advancing line of craft, and at length saw eight large canoes gradually take shape as they drew imperceptibly out of the heart of the deepest shadow. I endeavoured to count the number of occupants, but soon found this to be impossible in the dim light. I made a rough guess, however, and came to the conclusion that there were at least twenty in each canoe; it was evident therefore that, despite our superiority in the matter of weapons, there was a desperate struggle in store for us. I waited patiently until the canoes had approached us near enough to

enable us to distinguish the loom of them with the unaided eye, and then, springing up on the wheel grating, I suddenly hailed:

“Canoes ahoy! Keep off there! If you attempt to come any nearer I will open fire upon you.”

A complete cessation of paddling immediately followed my hail. Possibly the savages were a trifle chagrined to discover that we were on the alert, or perhaps they did not fully understand what I had said—although I did not believe that, for most of the South Sea natives knew enough of English to enable an Englishman to make himself understood. Be that as it may, they paused long enough to enable me to call to the little band of defenders a final instruction.

“Don’t fire, lads,” I said, “until you can see your mark distinctly. Then aim carefully, and make every shot tell. Much will depend upon the effect of our first volley, which we must therefore make as deadly as possible.”

A low murmur of comprehension arose from the scanty crew ranged at wide intervals along the schooner’s port rail, that being the side which the natives were approaching. But before anything more could be said, a loud shout—in a voice the tones of which seemed somehow familiar to me—arose from one of the canoes, and was instantly answered by a yell that, from its volume of sound, must have emanated from the throats of nearly or quite two hundred savages; and then, without further attempt at concealment, a whole host of paddles suddenly dashed into the water, lashing it into long, swirling lines of luminous foam, and, with loud cries of mutual encouragement from the occupants, the eight big canoes surged forward and came rushing through the water at the schooner.

“Keep cool, men,” I shouted above the din: “pick your mark; aim into the thick of them; and load and fire as many times as you can before they can get alongside.” And forthwith I led off with a shot aimed straight at the centre of the dark mass which represented the nearest canoe, at that moment distant about two hundred and fifty yards. My aim was true, and my bullet must have found a double mark, for two distinct shrieks responded a bare moment before a ragged volley of seven shots rang out from the rest of the defenders. More shrieks followed this discharge, but it did not stop the rush of the canoes, which now came sweeping toward us like so many steamers. Meanwhile I was busily engaged in slipping another cartridge into the breach of my piece, calculating upon being able to get in two more shots before the savages arrived alongside. And so, as a matter of fact, I did, as also did some of the others, with disastrous results for the savages, if the shrieks that followed upon each discharge were to be accepted as any criterion; and, apart from that, there was a noticeable wavering and hesitation on the part of the crews of two or three of the canoes after that third discharge. But the hesitation was only momentary; then the rascals gripped their courage afresh and drove their canoes alongside, four dashing up on our port side, and the remaining four essaying to board us to starboard. And when the canoes were within about four or five fathoms of the schooner’s side, with good way upon them, the savages suddenly laid in their paddles and, rising to their feet, hurled a heavy shower of spears at us, every one of which flew harmlessly over our heads, luckily for us.

Then the heavy night air suddenly became vibrant with a medley of harsh, discordant sounds, compounded of the yells and shrieks of the savages, the fierce ejaculations of our own people, the quick, snapping explosions of revolvers, and the gasping groans of the wounded, as the natives swarmed up our low sides and suddenly found themselves confronted by the barrier of our improvised boarding net, through the meshes of which our lads pointed their revolvers and thrust furiously with their cutlasses, while the savages unavailingly strove to tear the stout strands apart and make an opening through which to pass, or thrust at us in their turn with their spears. Suddenly, in the dim starlight, as I was busily reloading my revolver, I saw the cook emerge from the galley with what looked like a bucket in his hand. With a quick twirl he seemed to throw the contents of this bucket through the net just where the savages were crowding thickest on the other side of it, and the next instant there arose a more than usually piercing chorus of shrieks, while the great bulk of the savages at that particular point appeared to melt away suddenly, and I heard the heavy impact of a number of bodies falling headlong into the canoes alongside.

The “Doctor” paused a moment, apparently to note the effect of his experiment, and then he hastily returned to the galley, presently emerging again and repeating his former tactics with similar results. I subsequently learned that, when it became known that an attack of the savages might be certainly looked for, the cook had lighted a rousing fire in his galley, filled his coppers with a mixture of slush and salt water, and brought the whole to the boil, so arranging the matter that the mixture was in a state of furious ebullition by the time the savages arrived alongside. And wherever the blacks pressed thickest and most determinedly, there Cooky intervened with a bucketful of his scalding stuff, which he very effectively distributed over the naked bodies of a round dozen or so of our assailants by giving the bucket a neat twirl at the instant of discharge.

But despite the effective aid thus rendered, matters were, on the whole, going rather badly for us, for two American fore-castle hands were by this time down, transfixed by spears which pinned them to the deck, while the sailmaker and I were each punctured and bleeding freely, Sails having received a bad prick in his left shoulder, while a spear had passed completely through the fleshy part of my right thigh; in addition to which a party of savages, by concentrating their efforts upon one particular spot, had contrived to make a hole in the net, which they were rapidly enlarging. Of this last fact I was happily unaware, as indeed I was of the critical character of our situation generally, for it was forward, where Murdock, the ex-boatswain of the *Zenobia*, was in charge, that matters were going so badly, while aft, where I was, we were doing pretty well.

But Murdock was not the sort of man to be discouraged because for the moment he happened to be getting the worst of it; on the contrary, it was just that state of things that stirred him to extra effort, and it did so now. Perceiving that, unless something were done to prevent them effectively, the savages would soon force their way through the net—and thereafter make short work of all hands of us—Murdock sets his wits going, and presently thought out a plan which he immediately proceeded to put into operation. Seizing a half-empty case of revolver ammunition, he broke open about a dozen cartridges and arranged the powder in a little heap at the bottom of the case, burying one end of a length of extemporised fuse in the heap. Then he piled the cartridges on the top of the heap, placed the case on the windlass bits, ignited the free end of the fuse, and rushed aft, yelling to us to throw ourselves flat upon our faces

as he did so.

So urgent was his call that we all instinctively obeyed it; and there we lay for perhaps ten or fifteen seconds, while the savages, seeing the weak point suddenly deserted, swarmed about it in greatly augmented numbers, finally enlarging the hole in the net to such an extent that at length it was big enough to permit the passage of a man, when one after another they began to force their way through. It was at this precise moment that the spark of the burning fuse reached the powder, which of course instantly blew up, igniting the hundred or so of cartridges that remained in the case, and scattering the bullets in them in all directions. There was a quick flash of the ignited powder, immediately followed by the cracker-like reports of the exploding cartridges, a horrible chorus of yells and shrieks of wounded men, and then—sudden, complete silence, for the space of perhaps half a dozen breaths. Then came renewed groans and outcries, as the injured men felt the first smart of their wounds, followed by a sudden wailing cry, and with one accord the panic-stricken savages flung themselves back into their canoes, seized their paddles, and headed for the shore in frantic haste, being presently sped upon their way by the bullets which we poured into their midst as long as they remained in sight.

Then, and not until then, we laid aside our weapons, mopped the perspiration and powder grime from our streaming brows, bound up each other's wounds, and went forward to inspect the results of Murdock's little experiment. It had been exceedingly effective, for scattered round the spot where the explosion had occurred we found no less than nineteen savages, of whom eleven were dead, five were more or less severely wounded, and three appeared to be only stunned. These three we promptly proceeded to bind hand and foot, during which operation we discovered that one of the trio was none other than friend Oahika, our "bumboat man in or'nary", as the skipper had styled him. I was especially glad that this particular rascal had fallen into our hands, for during the progress of the fight I had frequently caught sight of him, by the light afforded by the flash of our revolvers, and had noticed that he was taking an exceptionally prominent part in the proceedings; while one or two circumstances which I had also noticed led me to suspect that he might possibly be a person of some importance among the natives of Roua Poua.

And now, as with the assistance of three lanterns we proceeded with our investigations, the really desperate character of the struggle in which we had so recently been engaged began to be borne in upon us; for, in addition to the nineteen who had fallen victims to the boatswain's contrivance, we found scattered about the ship twenty-six dead, and thirty-three more or less wounded natives; while others—with whom the sharks were already busy—were floating in the water near the ship. As for ourselves, we had lost two foremast hands, both of them Americans, while the remainder of us, with the solitary exception of the cook, had each his scratch to show, my own and the sailmaker's being, fortunately, the only wounds that could be reasonably termed serious, while even they were of comparatively little moment, provided that gangrene did not supervene.

And now, the natives having been beaten off, our next task was to straighten up after the fight, and a beginning was made by throwing all the dead—except our own two—overboard, where the sharks might be safely trusted to see to their speedy disposal. Then we overhauled the wounded savages: and such of them as had received only trifling hurts, and might therefore perhaps yet give us trouble if we were not careful, we bound securely; while the others we laid out on deck, and then proceeded to doctor up as well as our means and our very limited surgical knowledge permitted.

It was while we were all thus busily engaged that the boatswain, happening to straighten his back for a moment and cast an alert glance across the water toward the shore, suddenly stood rigid and staring, and then remarked to me, in a low tone of voice:

"Just look over there for a minute, Mr Temple. Ain't that a canoe or somethin' headin' this way?"

I looked in the direction indicated, and at once sighted a small, shapeless blot of deeper blackness in the shadow that enshrouded the whole of the west side of the island. But if it was a canoe it was certainly a very small craft; moreover, it was not coming from the direction of the beach, but from a point apparently about a mile to the north of it. We stood watching it for a full minute, or more, and then I caught the now familiar phosphorescent gleam of water which indicated the presence of a moving object.

"Yes," I said, "it certainly is a canoe, Murdock; but she seems to be only a very small affair, such as need give us no very serious amount of anxiety. We will keep an eye upon her for a minute or two and see what she is after. Perhaps it is a messenger from the natives coming off to treat with us for the surrender of the wounded. I hope it may be, because then we shall perhaps learn what has become of the skipper and the rest of the missing men."

As the canoe continued to approach, we observed a certain eccentricity in her behaviour, for instead of progressing in a straight line her course was a decided *zigzag*, now heading one way and now another, to the extent of about four points of the compass; still it looked as though she was aiming for the schooner, for her general direction of approach was toward us. I procured the night glass and brought it to bear upon her, and was then able to distinguish that she was indeed an exceedingly diminutive craft, containing only one figure, who seemed to be sitting in her stern, and was paddling somewhat awkwardly, first on one side of her and then on the other, which probably accounted for her eccentricity of movement. Furthermore, as I continued to watch, a certain suggestion of familiarity grew upon me in connection with the appearance and actions of the paddling figure; and finally, when the canoe had approached to within about a hundred fathoms of the schooner, I put down the glass and hailed:

"Canoe ahoy! what canoe is that?"

"Hillo! is that you, Temple?" came the reply in Cunningham's well-known voice.

"Ay, ay," I replied, "it is I, right enough. And glad I am to see that you are all right. Do you happen to know anything about the skipper?"

"Got him here, in the bottom of the canoe," was the reply. "The poor old chap is rather badly hurt, I'm afraid. Con-

found this canoe! Why won't the wretched thing go straight?"

"It is because you don't understand how to handle her, I expect," replied I. "Do you know anything about the three men who took you ashore yesterday?"

"No," answered Cunningham. "Didn't they return to the ship?"

"They did not; and I am very much afraid that we shall never set eyes upon them again."

"Phew!" whistled Cunningham; "that's bad news, although I'm not very greatly surprised to hear it after the way that the beggars ashore behaved—Hillo! what's this? Why—I say, Temple, there's a dead native floating about out here. What's the meaning of that?"

"It means that a determined attempt to capture the schooner was made, about two hours ago, and was very near being successful," said I. "Do you mean to say that you did not hear the rumpus?"

"Not a sound of it," answered Cunningham. "But of course that may be accounted for by—but one can talk about that later. Just heave me a rope's end, there's a good chap, and—I say, how are we going to get the skipper up on deck? He's rather badly hurt, and can't manage without assistance, I'm afraid."

The canoe was by this time close aboard of us, and a few seconds later she was brought alongside with the aid of the line which I hove to Cunningham. Then I dropped lightly over the side into her, to see what could be done to help Brown, who all this time had remained perfectly silent. I found him propped up in the eyes of the little craft, and when I stooped over him I saw that his eyes were closed, as though he slept. But according to Cunningham it was not sleep, it was insensibility, resulting from a blow on the head with a heavy club. In any case the poor old fellow was obviously quite unable to help himself. I therefore took the rope's end which I had thrown to Cunningham, made a standing bowline in the end of it, passed it under the skipper's arms, and then sang out to those on deck to hoist away gently, while Cunningham and I helped by lifting. Thus presently we managed to get Brown first on deck and then down into his own stateroom, where Cunningham, who claimed to possess a certain amateurish skill and knowledge in medicine and surgery, at once took him in hand, while I returned to the deck and assisted the others in the task of straightening up generally.

By the time we had finished the young dawn was paling the eastern sky, and the island, from being a mere shapeless black shadow, had changed to a deep neutral-tinted—almost black—silhouette, as clear and sharp of outline as though it had been cut out of paper, its equally dark reflection trembling on the surface of the water, and coming and going almost as far out as where the schooner lay at anchor. Then, even as I stood watching, the pallor brightened to a clear, pale tint of purest primrose, which presently flushed into a warm, delicate orange hue; a long shaft of white light shot straight up toward the zenith, and an instant later the topmast branches of the trees that crowned the island became edged with a thin hair-line of burning gold, which spread with marvellous rapidity north and south until every limb and trunk glowed with it. Finally a level beam of golden light flashed through a dense clump of foliage that crowned the highest point of the island, and the next instant that same clump became swallowed up and lost in a great, dazzling, palpitating blaze of golden light, which was the body of the rising sun; the colour of the island changed from neutral tint to deep sepia, and from that to innumerable subtle tones of olive and green, as the light grew stronger, and the masses of foliage separated themselves from each other and became distinct, until the shape of each became perfectly defined and took its proper place in the picture. And while these magical colour changes were in progress the deep shadow which marked the junction of land and water dissolved until the beach once more emerged into view, with the jollyboat still hauled up on it where she had been left on the previous day, and round about her, to left and right, eight big canoes, undoubtedly those which had been used in the attack upon the schooner a few hours earlier.

While I still stood gazing, entranced, at the beauty of the new day, Cunningham emerged from the companion way and joined me.

"Well," he said, "you will be glad to hear that I think we shall pull the poor old skipper through, after all. I started to give him a thorough overhaul as soon as you left me; and I found that those murdering thieves of natives had literally cracked the poor old chap's skull for him. I also found that a tiny splinter of bone had been driven inward upon the brain by the force of the blow; and this splinter I succeeded in extracting, with the result that he emerged from his state of coma, and, after I had properly dressed his wound, went to sleep."

Chapter Ten.

We lose the Skipper.

"I am delighted to hear it," I said, "for we have paid dearly enough already for our folly in coming to this island, without being called upon to pay the additional penalty of that poor old chap's life. We have lost two of our number in the attack upon the ship, while the three hands who took you ashore yesterday are missing—and, by the by, where is Maybury?"

"Dead, poor chap, I am sorry to say—murdered by those treacherous scoundrels of natives," answered Cunningham. "The way of it was this. When we landed we were immediately surrounded by a mob of blacks; and just for a moment I had a shadowy suspicion that things were not quite all that they ought to be. But as I looked round I saw that the natives were all unarmed; and, moreover, they were all smiling and apparently in the best of tempers—indeed, one of them, a girl, flung a garland of flowers round my neck, either as a joke or a sign of goodwill, I didn't quite know which—so I took it for granted that they were friendly disposed, and we all got laughing and joking together. Then the skipper, Maybury, and I gradually worked our way through the crowd, and, accompanied by the men who had wood

to sell, walked up through the village, which seemed to be inhabited chiefly by naked little piccaninnies, playing in the sand with the dogs, and women.

“The village is about a quarter of a mile in length, and beyond it there are about twenty acres of cleared ground, planted with manioc, cassava, corn, and fruit trees—principally bananas, beyond which is the virgin forest. Toward this we made our way, and, entering it, followed a bush path for about a quarter of a mile, until we reached a small open space. We had scarcely entered this when the three pretended sandalwood merchants simultaneously turned upon us, and, uttering a terrific yell, seized each of us by the arms, which they tried to confine behind our backs. Taken unawares though I was, I struggled fiercely to throw off my particular assailant, but the beggar was a big sinewy chap, with muscles like steel, and ere I could wrench myself clear about a dozen other blacks sprang into the enclosure, evidently in response to the shout raised by our captors; and before I well knew what was happening I found myself upon the ground, with three or four savages sitting upon me, while others were binding me hand and foot. While I was still struggling I heard the pop of a revolver twice, the reports being so close together that I knew at once they must have come from different weapons; and the next instant I heard a dull crack, a groan, and the fall of two heavy bodies upon the dry leaves and twigs which carpeted the floor of the open space where the struggle had taken place. Then, when my captors had effectually secured my limbs, they raised me to my feet, and I saw the skipper lying, face downward, about a yard away, with his head bare, a small stream of blood trickling from it and clotting among his grey hair; while close to him lay Maybury on his back, quite dead, with a long spear driven right through his heart.

“The blacks turned the skipper over, examined him closely, and then, finding that he was not dead, held some sort of consultation in their own language, the purport of which of course I could not gather; but the end of it was that they hoisted both of us upon their shoulders, carried us back to the village, and thrust us into one of the huts, where we lay untended for the remainder of the day and practically the whole of last night. Then some time—about the small hours I think it must have been—a girl, who proved to be the same who had flung the garland of flowers round my neck, stole into the hut as silently as a ghost, laid her finger upon my lips—to indicate, I suppose, that I was not to talk—and deftly proceeded to cast adrift my bonds; after which she proceeded vigorously to chafe my ankles and wrists, in order to restore the circulation, which had been practically suspended by the tightness with which the ligatures had been bound. And look here, Temple, if you should ever chance to have an enemy, and have a fancy to torture him, just bind his wrists and ankles tightly together and leave him for a few hours—that’s all!

“Well, when the feeling had come back into my limbs a bit, and I could move them without screaming, the girl produced some food and drink, and, although I don’t in the least know what they were, I ate and drank freely. Then, in the curious ‘pidgin’ lingo that these people use when conversing with white men, the girl gave me to understand that my life and that of the skipper was in the greatest jeopardy, and that if I did not want particularly to die I must buck up and save myself and the skipper. Then, taking command, she bade me lift the old man by the shoulders while she took his feet; and in this fashion we slipped out of the hut, seeing nobody, and made our way slowly through the wood until we emerged upon a little beach just on the other side of that headland. Then she drew out from among the bushes a small canoe, in the bottom of which she helped me to place the skipper; after which, with a warning to me to be exceedingly careful and to make no noise, she handed me a paddle, thrust the canoe afloat, and vanished. And—and—well, that’s all! And now you may as well pitch me the yarn of your share of the night’s doings. If one may venture to judge by appearances you seem to have had a fairly lively time out here.”

“We have, I can assure you,” said I; and then I proceeded to give Cunningham a detailed account of all that had happened during the absence of himself and the skipper. I had scarcely finished when the cabin boy came up with the intimation that breakfast was ready in the cabin, and we accordingly went below, seated ourselves, and fell to. We did not dally long over the meal, for there was still plenty to be done and thought about; but before returning to the deck I remarked to Cunningham that I should like to look in and see how the skipper was getting on, and we both entered the stateroom together. To my surprise we found that the old chap was awake and seemingly feeling not very much the worse for the hard knock on the head which he had received; indeed, he wanted to turn out and dress and go on deck. But Cunningham, who had assumed the rôle of surgeon, would not hear of such a thing—would not even permit Brown to leave his bunk; so, as a compromise, I just had to sit down and spin the whole yarn of our adventure over again to him. The poor old fellow seemed very much cut up when he learned that we had lost six men—all of them compatriots of his, too—and bitterly reproached himself for having come to the island at all. Of course we comforted him as well as we could by pointing out to him that the happening was due not so much to want of precaution on his part as to the exceeding guile of the natives; and then I led the conversation round to the prisoners, and asked what he proposed to do with them. Cunningham was for taking the law into our own hands and inflicting upon them a salutary lesson by hanging one of them at the yardarm for each of our people who had been murdered; but Brown would not hear of this, and we were all three still discussing the matter when the cabin boy came down with a message from Murdock to say that a large canoe had just been launched from the beach and was heading for the schooner, and would I be pleased to go on deck.

Of course I instantly obeyed the call, for my first idea was that another attack was possibly impending; but when I got on deck I found that the canoe, although a large one, was manned by only four natives, who were approaching us very slowly, and apparently with a considerable amount of trepidation, and that a large palm-leaf was conspicuously displayed in the bows of the craft, the latter being, as I interpreted it, intended to serve the purpose of a flag of truce. Naturally we at once assumed our weapons, and saw that our firearms were fully loaded and placed handy for use, lest further treachery should be contemplated; and then I hailed the canoe and informed her occupants that if they had anything to say to us they might approach within easy speaking distance, but that they were not to attempt to come alongside without permission, and that if any such attempt were made they would at once be fired upon. And that there might be no misunderstanding upon this point I flourished a loaded gun in their sight, to show that we were quite prepared to carry out our threat.

Slowly and hesitatingly the canoe continued to approach the schooner until she had arrived within about twenty fathoms of us, and then her crew backed water and brought their craft to a standstill. A short consultation among them next followed, and then one of their number rose to his feet and hailed.

"Master," he shouted, "we got it three mans ashore belong you. You any mans got it belong we?"

"Yes," replied I. "We have eight of your people on board here. Are the white men unhurt?"

"No," was the answer. "They all get it hurt leettle bit, not much. Black mans along you not hurt, eh?"

"Three of them are unhurt; the others are wounded so they no can walk. What for you not bring it off those white mans with you?" I demanded, adopting their peculiar mode of speech under the mistaken impression that I could thus make myself the better understood.

"Those white mans no can walk too," answered my interlocutor. "Suppose you want it them, we bring them off, and you give it us those eight black fellows belong we, eh?"

So it was an exchange of prisoners that they had come off to negotiate, it appeared. Well, I was more than willing to make the exchange, but I did not care to appear too eager; so I temporised by enquiring as to the nature and extent of the white men's hurts. But they either could not or would not reply in a manner that was perfectly intelligible to me, and matters seemed to be approaching a deadlock when one of the canoe men started to his feet, and in an eager, impatient manner, asked:

"Master, suppose you no got it Oahika aboard, eh?" which enquiry went a good way toward confirming my opinion that the rascal was a person of some importance.

"Yes," I replied, "we got it Oahika, all right, not hurt one little bit." Then, with some vague idea of trying the effect of a "bluff", I continued: "He great blackguard scoundrel! He attack schooner last night, kill it two white mans! By and by we hang Oahika up there until he go dead!" and I pointed to the schooner's lower yardarm.

A yell of anguish immediately followed this announcement of mine, fully confirming me in the belief that Oahika was likely to prove a valuable asset if properly manipulated. The next moment, however, one of the men jumped up and shouted:

"Mine no believe you got it Oahika. Suppose yes, you show it him, eh?"

"Murdock, Simpson," I shouted, "just hoist that swab Oahika up on his feet and take him to the rail, so that those fellows in the canoe may see him."

This was done; and the moment that the fellow's head and shoulders appeared above the top of the schooner's low bulwark another loud howl arose from the crew of the canoe, who incontinently flung themselves down on their knees and began to kow-tow energetically. But they were quickly interrupted by Oahika, who shouted angrily at them, and then, as soon as he had secured their attention, proceeded to gabble to them a long string of what seemed to be instructions, in a language quite unintelligible to me. When he had finished, the occupants of the canoe waved their hands, as if to indicate that they understood, then seized their paddles and began to sweep the canoe's head round toward the shore. This sudden change of front rather puzzled me. I did not quite know what to make of it; it might mean anything, I thought, and among other things it might mean that Oahika had given instructions to muster every available fighting man in the village—or the island—and renew the attack upon the schooner. So I hailed the hastily departing canoe:

"Hillo, there, canoe ahoy! Where are you going, and what are you about to do?"

The men ceased paddling for a moment, and one of them flourished his hand toward the island.

"We get it back along ashore plenty quick and bring it them three mans belong you. Then you give it us Oahika, eh?" he announced.

"You bring the three white mans, and then we'll see," I retorted. "And—listen you—if you bring any more of your own men with you I shall shoot Oahika dead! Sabby?"

This threat, uttered upon the spur of the moment, seemed to disconcert them very decidedly, for they remained inactive, staring each other in the face. It also seemed to disconcert Oahika; for no sooner had I finished speaking than he began to shout a long string of further directions, to which the canoe men replied from time to time by waving their hands. Finally Oahika brought his communication to an end with a few words which, from the intonation of his voice, might have been an injunction to the men to hurry up; and away the canoe sped toward the shore.

As soon as it had gone I went down below and reported to the skipper, who now seemed to be not quite so well as he had been half an hour earlier. He was, naturally, very pleased to learn that the three men whom we had all believed to be dead were still alive; and he instructed me to make the best terms I could for their ransom, and, as soon as I had secured possession of them and the boat, to get the schooner under way and proceed to sea without further delay.

The canoe had been gone about three-quarters of an hour when, watching the shore through the ship's telescope, I perceived a slight stir upon the beach, and presently became aware that a small party of natives had gathered about the jollyboat, which they pushed off from the beach, making fast her painter to the stern of the canoe. Then other natives appeared, bearing in grass hammocks the three missing seamen, who were laid in the sternsheets of the jollyboat; and finally the canoe was manned, apparently by the same four natives who had previously come off in her, and headed for the schooner, whereupon I gave orders for the windlass to be manned and the cable to be hove short, all ready for tripping the anchor at a moment's notice. This was done; and by the time the canoe was once more within hailing distance the cable was so taut up and down that a single additional revolution of the windlass barrel would break out the anchor and free us from the ground.

And now came the really difficult part of my negotiation with the savages; for, being themselves superlatively unscrupulous and deceitful, they naturally suspected us of being the same, and would not come alongside, or render up possession of the jollyboat and the three wounded seamen whom she carried, until we on our part had released Oahika. And this I flatly refused to do, feeling that, as likely as not, they would play us some scurvy trick as soon as they had recovered possession of the man who, I now very strongly suspected, was the paramount chief of the island, or, if not that, at least a chief of very considerable importance. We argued, stipulated, and made counter stipulations, all to no purpose, and finally once more arrived at a deadlock. Of course I might very easily have settled the matter by shooting the four natives in the canoe; but that would have been an act of the very blackest treachery, and I was strongly of opinion that it was just such treacherous conduct on the part of certain unscrupulous white men that had made the natives of some of the Polynesian islands the cruel, treacherous wretches that they had become.

I therefore once more resorted to "bluff", by hailing them and saying that unless they came alongside at once and surrendered possession of the boat and those in her, I would get the schooner under way and proceed to sea, taking Oahika and the rest of our prisoners with me; and to make my threat the more effective I turned away and gave the order to man the windlass. This was enough; with the first clank of the windlass pawls, Oahika, who had thus far taken no part in our second palaver, let out a yell at the men in the canoe which caused them to surrender instantly at discretion and rush their craft up alongside the schooner.

And now I determined upon a bold thing. These Roua Poua savages had caused us a vast amount of trouble and loss; through them we were short-handed to the extent of no less than six men; and I felt that for the sake of my own satisfaction and self-respect I must get something, though it were ever so little, back out of them. Therefore, since we white men were all armed, and therefore in a position to take good care of ourselves, as soon as the tackles were hooked into the jollyboat's ringbolts I ordered the four savages in the canoe to leave her and come on deck to help to hoist in the boat; and this they did in a state of the most abject fear and trembling. Then I sent them forward to the windlass to assist in breaking out the anchor; and it was not until the schooner was actually adrift that I permitted them to begin the transfer of their wounded from the *Martha's* deck to the canoe. They displayed remarkably little consideration for the comfort and wellbeing of their comrades in the performance of this duty; and indeed I have always been of opinion that had I been foolish enough to liberate Oahika before the others had been transhipped, he and his canoemen would have incontinently made off at top speed for the shore, leaving the others, sound and wounded alike, upon our hands and at our mercy. But I was careful to keep Oahika until the last, and it was not until the schooner was fairly under way and heading out to sea that I cast him adrift and permitted him to go over the side, which he did in a splutter of mingled wrath and fear, pouring out a long string of what were probably native curses as he seized the steering paddle and violently thrust the canoe off the schooner's side.

By midday we were bowling merrily away to the westward under every rag that we could set, and Roua Poua had sunk out of sight beneath the eastern horizon. Long before this, however—in fact, the moment that they were safely aboard and comfortably bestowed in their bunks—Cunningham had taken the three wounded seamen in hand; and when he had done all that he could for them he came up on deck and reported to me.

"I am afraid," he said, "that there is not much hope for those three," with a jerk of his thumb in the direction of the forecastle. "Sullivan and Halpin have had their skulls cracked by blows inflicted with a war club, and their cases are very similar to that of the skipper, but worse; while poor Glenn has no less than eleven spear wounds in his body, and though none of them is very serious in itself this heat makes me terribly afraid of gangrene. However, I have done all that I can for them at present, and we must just hope for the best. Glenn tells me that after the skipper and I had left them the natives came swarming round them, exciting their curiosity by exhibiting curios of various kinds for sale, or barter, rather, at ridiculously cheap prices, and so enticing them away from the beach toward the village, where, they were informed, some really valuable articles might be seen. And then, when they arrived at the village, they were suddenly set upon before they had time to draw their weapons, overpowered, and confined in a hut, where they were left all day yesterday and all last night without food or water, and with their injuries untended. I am afraid there is not much hope for them, poor fellows!"

This was bad news—so very bad, indeed, that I felt it my duty to go forthwith to the skipper, report the matter to him, and ask for instructions; my own idea being that we ought to head for the Samoa or Tonga group, and procure properly qualified medical assistance with as little delay as possible.

But when I got down below and began to talk to the Old Man I soon found that he was, for some inscrutable reason, utterly opposed to any such idea. He would not give his reasons, but he positively forbade me to do as I had suggested, instructing me instead to work out a Great Circle track to Canton, and to get the ship upon her proper course at once. And as he seemed to be in full possession of all his faculties, and to know quite well what he was talking about, I had no alternative but to obey. And indeed, so far as saving the three men in the forecastle was concerned, we might as well have been heading for Canton as anywhere else; for Halpin and Glenn died within a couple of hours of each other that same night, while Sullivan lingered only some twenty-six hours longer.

I looked forward to a speedy and pleasant run to Canton, for I reckoned upon carrying the Trades with us practically all the way. But we were unfortunate; for after a fine run of nine days to the northward and westward we ran into the belt of equatorial calms in latitude 4 degrees South, and for fully three weeks thereafter encountered such extraordinary weather that we dared not ship our fins, from fear of having them carried away, or of badly straining the schooner. For instead of the long spell of calms which one usually expects in those latitudes the quiet weather generally lasted but an hour or two, and then was succeeded by such furious squalls that, for the most part, we could do nothing but run before them under bare poles; and perhaps the most exasperating part of it all was that these squalls blew mostly from the westward, or nearly dead in our teeth, so that it was only toward the tail end of them, just when they were dying out, that we were able to bring the little hooker to the wind for half an hour or so, and make a few miles of northing. And when it was not blowing with hurricane strength it was usually just the opposite: a flat calm, with a black, lowering, overcast sky, moist, steamy, overpowering heat, heavy storms of thunder and lightning, torrential downpours of tepid rain—which, by the way, enabled us to re-fill all our water tanks and casks—and waterspouts *ad libitum* constantly threatening us with destruction.

It was a month, to a day, from the date of our departure from Roua Poua when we at length cleared the calm belt and got the first breath of the north-east Trades in latitude 3 degrees 47 minutes North, and longitude 158 degrees 55 minutes West, having been driven back almost as far east as Christmas Island by the baffling winds and furious squalls with which we had been obliged to contend; and this brought the dangerous Marshall group right athwart our track. Therefore, the poor old skipper being still unwell, and quite unfit for duty, I decided to make a good stretch to the northward—say as far as latitude 10 degrees North—before bearing up for Canton; by doing which I should have a clear sea before me for the remainder of the trip.

I have spoken of the skipper as being unwell and quite unfit for duty; but that scarcely conveys a correct impression of his condition. The fact was that he was well enough to be up and about on deck, but he was constantly worried with headache of the most distracting kind, and, what was still worse, his intellect seemed to be failing him: he suffered from frequent total lapses of memory, stopping short in the midst of a conversation simply because he forgot in a moment what he was talking about; and he was subject, from time to time, to hallucinations, when he would assure us, with the utmost gravity, that he was the King of England taking a holiday “incognito”, the re-incarnation of Morgan the pirate, or something else equally ridiculous, while at other times he would be perfectly rational. For the first two or three weeks, while these symptoms were in process of development, he caused Cunningham and me a very considerable amount of anxiety, for we were constantly dreading some new departure which would render him dangerous either to himself or to others; but at length, as we were unable to detect any such tendency, we grew easier in our minds, just allowing him to wander about the ship at his own sweet will, and amuse himself by giving the most extraordinary orders, which nobody ever even pretended to carry out. We came to the conclusion that he was suffering from some obscure form of concussion of the brain, from which we hoped he might be relieved upon our arrival at Hong-Kong, where we expected to obtain efficient surgical assistance; but that, meanwhile, he was in no very serious danger. As the event proved, however, we were all woefully mistaken. We had made as much northing as I deemed necessary, and were bowling along upon a west-nor'-west course, reeling off our ten knots per hour, with all our flying kites abroad and a fine north-east breeze over our starboard quarter, when, about four bells in the first; watch, the skipper came up on deck complaining that he found it impossible to sleep in consequence of the extreme heat of his cabin. The night was brilliantly starlit, and the air so clear that we could have easily distinguished a sail at a distance of two miles, had there been one to see; but the light was not strong enough to enable me clearly to distinguish Brown's features, even when he was standing beside me, while the cabin lamp was turned low, so that there was not much light coming through the skylight. But when the old fellow fell into step by my side, and began to talk quite rationally about the heat below, the impossibility of sleeping, and his gratification at the fine breeze which we had fallen in with, and so on, I was completely thrown off my guard; for he appeared to be in precisely the condition that I had often previously seen him in, when he had talked rationally enough for a time, taken a little walk—as he was doing at that moment—and then, suddenly forgetting what he was conversing about, gone below and slept for several hours.

All at once, as we were walking to and fro between the main rigging and the wheel grating, the old fellow halted, pulled off his cap, extracted a big bandana handkerchief from it, and proceeded to mop his head and face, from which—as in my own case—the perspiration was freely pouring.

“Great snakes,” he ejaculated, “but it is hot, and no mistake! The sweat's pourin' out o' me like water outen a sponge. I guess that's what's makin' me so all-fired thirsty. Where's the water cask? I'm boun' to have a drink. My tongue's so dry it's rattlin' agin my teeth! Can't ye hear it? Where's that there scuttle butt, I say?”

“Better not drink direct from the cask, sir,” I said, for Cunningham had strongly urged us all to drink nothing but filtered water, and even that with a dash of lime juice in it, during the extreme heat. “The filter stands on the sideboard, and there is an opened bottle of lime juice in the rack above it; you will find that very much cooler and more refreshing than the water from the scuttle butt. That stuff is really not fit to drink.”

“But I'm so tarnation thirsty that I must have a drink,” he insisted, “and I'd rather drink outen the cask than go below. Why, man alive, that there cabin is like a oven!”

“Oh,” said I, glancing hastily round and noting that the weather seemed fine and settled, “if that is all I'll very soon slip down and fetch you up a drink! Bring yourself to an anchor here on the wheel grating, sir, while I go below. I'll be back in a brace of shakes. Just keep your eye on him, Chips,” I whispered to the carpenter, who was at the wheel. “I'll not be gone more than half a minute.”

“Right you are, sir,” responded the carpenter, turning his quid in his mouth as the skipper obediently seated himself on the wheel grating, while I made a rush for the companion. I turned up the cabin lamp, procured a tumbler, and was in the act of measuring out a liberal dose of lime juice when I heard the carpenter's voice suddenly upraised in accents of panic.

“Man overboard! Man overboard!!” he shouted. “Mr Temple, come on deck, sir; the skipper's been and throwed hisself over the lee rail!”

Flinging down the tumbler and bottle of lime juice, I mounted the companion ladder in two jumps, nearly dashing my brains out against the slide in my haste, and stared stupidly about me for a moment, being more than half-stunned. Then, as I pulled myself together, I heard Chips repeating, parrot-wise:

“He just laid his han's upon the rail and swung hisself clean overboard, like a boy jumpin' a gate.”

“Down helm, man; down helm and round her to!” I roared. And rushing to the main rigging I let go the lee braces and began to drag frantically upon the weather ones in an ineffectual effort to back the topsail. Then I remembered that the weather studdingsails were set, being reminded thereof, in fact, by the snapping of the topmast studdingsail-boom, as the schooner, with her helm hard a-lee, rushed furiously up into the wind, and her topgallantsail, topsail, and squaresail flew aback, and the broken spar began to thresh spitefully against the fore rigging in the fresh breeze.

I saw at once that I had made a mess of things to no purpose, and also stood to make a far worse mess of them if I was not careful; for the amount of sail which the schooner could carry while running off the wind was altogether too much for her when brought to, and she was now lying over with her lee rail buried, with the possibility that her masts might go over the side at any moment if she were not relieved in one way or another. As for saving the skipper, that was impossible: for—as I had forgotten for the moment—we were now, owing to the loss of six of our foremast men, short-handed, and we could not possibly launch a boat until the schooner was snugged down; and by the time we had done that we should be miles away from the spot where the skipper had gone overboard, without any certain, definite knowledge as to the precise direction in which to look for him. Therefore, all these circumstances coming to my mind in a flash, I jumped to the wheel and helped Chips to put it hard up again, luckily managing to get the little hooker before the wind once more with no further damage than the loss of a studdingsail-boom and the splitting of the lower studdingsail.

Chapter Eleven.

The Wreck of the “Martha Brown”.

This last fatality had the rather curious result that of the entire crew who left Baltimore in the *Martha Brown* only the cook and the cabin boy now survived, the remainder of the existing crew consisting of Cunningham, myself, and the boatswain, carpenter, and sailmaker of the *Zenobia*; it also resulted in the destinies of the ship and those aboard her, and the interests of poor old Ephraim Brown’s widow, suddenly falling into my inexperienced hands. This being the case, I decided to consult with Cunningham at once as to the proper steps to be taken under the circumstances, although my own view of the matter was perfectly clear and decided. And that view, stated briefly, amounted to this: that my obvious duty was to do the very best I possibly could for Mrs Brown, and that, knowing quite clearly what the skipper’s intentions were, I could not do better than carry them out in their entirety. It was in this form that I laid the matter before Cunningham, asking him to give me his opinion upon it, and requesting him to suggest a better course if he could think of one; but he fully agreed with me that, the schooner being practically full of sandalwood, and being also within three weeks’ sail of Canton, we could not do better than proceed to our destination, dispose of our cargo, invest the proceeds in tea, and then be guided by circumstances—or, rather, the state of the market—as to whether we should take the tea to Europe or America, ultimately returning to Baltimore, and there rendering an account of our stewardship. And upon this understanding being arrived at, the voyage to Canton was continued.

It was on the afternoon of the third day following the suicide of the skipper that the Trade wind, which up to then had been blowing with its usual steadiness, began to weaken, and upon consulting the barometer I found that the mercury was falling rather rapidly. At the same time I became aware that the aspect of the firmament was undergoing a subtle change, the clear, brilliant blue of the sky gradually fading to a colourless pallor, as though a succession of veils of white gauze was being drawn across it, while the clouds, sailing up out of the north-east, paused in their flight and began to bank up in the south-west quarter. These changes continued throughout the afternoon, the result being that the sun gradually became blotted out, and was entirely obscured about an hour and a half before the time of sunset. And with the disappearance of the sun the wind sank until it died away altogether and the schooner lost steerage way, while the heavens assumed a dark, lowering appearance, and the atmosphere became close, suffocating, and so oppressively hot that even the thinnest and lightest of clothing was an almost unendurable burden, and every article was dispensed with that could be discarded without outraging decency. But although the wind had completely died away, the swell did not diminish; on the contrary, it seemed if anything to increase, for the schooner rolled and plunged most outrageously, shipping water over her rails, her bows, and even her taffrail, the water seeming to heap itself up suddenly and fall aboard her in the most extraordinary and unexpected manner. It was evident that a change of weather was impending, and, as the mercury clearly indicated that the change would be for the worse, I caused the schooner to be stripped just before darkness set in, leaving only the reefed foresail and fore staysail set, under which short canvas I believed she could not come to much harm, let the impending weather be what it might.

A quarter of an hour after the time of sunset the darkness was so intense that for all practical purposes we might as well have been blind, for at a distance of ten or twelve feet from the illuminated cabin skylight it was literally impossible to see one’s hand when held close before one’s eyes; while between the darkness and the violently uneasy motions of the little hooker it was positively dangerous to attempt to move about the decks. As for staying below, it was out of the question, for the cabins were like so many ovens; therefore, after supper was over, Cunningham and I both returned to the deck, and, seating ourselves on the wheel grating beside the lashed wheel, chatted together while the engineer smoked pipe after pipe.

It happened to be my eight hours in, that night; therefore, since it was hopeless to think of sleeping in my bunk on such a hot, breathless night, I stretched myself out on the wheel grating, shortly after eight bells of the second dog-watch, and was soon fast asleep, despite the hardness of my bed, while Cunningham sat near me, keeping such a lookout as was possible under the circumstances.

It was seven bells, or within half an hour of midnight, when Cunningham awoke me.

“Sorry to disturb you before your time, old chap,” he apologised. “I have been hoping that it might not be necessary to awake you until eight bells, but—just look at that sky! What on earth does it mean; and what is going to happen?”

I had started up, broad awake, the instant that Cunningham’s hand touched my shoulder, and had at once become conscious of the very extraordinary and portentous aspect of the sky; it was therefore quite unnecessary for me to ask what he meant. When, soon after the expiration of the second dog-watch, I had stretched myself out and fallen asleep on the wheel grating, the darkness had been as opaque as that of Egypt when Moses stretched forth his hand and there was a thick darkness in all the land for the space of three days, during which the Egyptians saw not one another, neither rose any from his place; but now, the moment that I opened my eyes, I saw that the plunging

schooner, the restless, heaving surface of the ocean, and the overarching dome of the sky, packed with enormous masses of slowly working cloud, were all suffused with ruddy light, such as might be emitted by a volcano in furious eruption. Yet no flaming crater was anywhere visible, nor did the light flicker or wax and wane, as it would have done had it issued from such a source; it was perfectly steady, and after I had gazed upon it for a time I could come to no other conclusion than that it emanated from the clouds themselves, which glowed with the colour of iron heated to a low red-heat. I had never before beheld such a weird, awe-inspiring spectacle, but as I gazed upon it the memory came to me that I had somewhere read of something similar, and I also remembered that it had been described as the precursor of a hurricane, or some similar atmospheric convulsion.

"I am afraid it means a heavy blow, a hurricane—or typhoon as they call it in these seas," said I: "and I am very glad that you called me, for I will take the hint and have the schooner battened down forthwith; also this is the first time I have ever witnessed such a phenomenon, and I would not have missed it on any account. You might as well turn in now, if you care to do so," I added, "for I see it is not far off eight bells, and I shall not attempt to sleep again."

"Thanks, no—not if I know it!" answered Cunningham. "Like yourself, I have never seen anything of this kind before, and I intend to see all that I can of it now that I have the opportunity. It began more than half an hour ago, the ruddy glare growing out of the inky blackness so subtly and imperceptibly that it is difficult to say precisely when it began, but I became conscious of it when I got up to strike six bells. Then it brightened so rapidly, and seemed so altogether unnatural, that at length I began to feel jumpy about it, and decided that the time had arrived when you ought to be called."

"Quite right," I agreed. "Well, if you won't turn in, perhaps you will be good enough to keep a lookout here while I go for'ard and see to the battening down. There is not much to be done, but the little that needs doing might as well be done at once." And therewith I left him and staggered along the squirming deck to the forecabin head, where Chips and Sails were perched upon the windlass bits, out of the way of the water that was constantly slopping in over one bow or the other, talking together in a low-pitched murmur, and staring awestruck at the incandescent sky.

"Well, Chips," said I, "have you ever seen anything like this before?"

"Ay, sir, I seen the same thing once before, when I was in the *Tenedos*, one of the China tea clippers," answered the carpenter. "We was in the Injin Hocean at the time, homeward-bound. The skipper—Cap'n Bowers, his name was—was down with dysentery at the time, and the mate was one o' these here chaps that thinks they knows everything. He 'lowed that the weather signs didn't mean nothin' partic'lar, and wouldn't so much as take in the skysails—because, d'ye see, we was racin' home with another ship, and Mister Mate reckoned he wasn't goin' to be scared into shortenin' down just because the weather looked a bit unusual. Consequence was that we was on our beam-ends about a hour a'terwards, with all three masts over the side and the ship threatenin' to go down under us. A nice busy twenty-four hours we had of it a'ter that, I can tell ye, Mr Temple, and it ended up in our crawlin' into Table Bay under jury-masts, and lyin' there five solid months before the new spars comed out to us and we re-rigged the old barkie!"

"How did it come down upon you then—in the shape of a sudden squall?" I demanded.

"Well, no, not exactly that," answered the carpenter. "It began wi' little whiffin' gusts that comed up from nowhere partic'lar, and was gone again afore you could say Jack Robinson. They comed moanin' along, filled the canvas with a smack, and—there was an end o' that one. Then another'd come along same way, do the same thing, and go floatin' away down to loo'ard. It happened 'bout half a dozen times, and then, afore we knowed where we was, away come the hurricane, screamin' and yellin' like Billy-oh. 'Halyards and sheets let go, fore an' aft!' yells my noble Mr Mate—Bryce his name was; but, Lor' bless you, sir, afore we could cast off the turns from the belayin' pins the gale had hit us, and there we was, on our beam-ends, wi' the deck standin' up like the side of a 'ouse."

"Well," said I, "that can scarcely happen to us, I think, with the small spread of canvas that we are showing. But it will be bad enough when it comes, I doubt not; so go below and call Murdock, the cook, and the cabin boy, and say I want them to come on deck, as I am about to batten down the fore scuttle. And when eight bells comes, you will have to go aft and stretch yourselves out on the cabin lockers, for the forecabin will be closed until this breeze is over."

It took us but a few minutes to batten down the forecabin hatch securely, for there was a good tarpaulin cover that had been specially made to fit it; and when that was done I set our scanty crew to work—myself lending a hand—to secure the galley and the boats with extra lashings, so that they might not be washed away: and when we had finished, the cook entered his galley and shut himself in, to finish the night there.

As it happened, we were none too soon in the completion of our preparations; for scarcely had we finished when the ruddy glow in the sky began to die out again, and as it did so the first of those scuffling puffs of which Chips had spoken came whining and moaning across the surface of the ocean from the south-west, filling our scanty spread of canvas with a resounding clap and then passing away toward the north-east, its track across the glistening surface of the ocean being marked by a dimming blur like a catspaw, which swept down toward us, touched us for an instant, and was gone again. This occurred some seven or eight times at decreasing intervals, each succeeding rush of air being of a few seconds' longer duration than the preceding one, and coming with greater strength and spite, thus enabling us at last to get steerage way upon the schooner and partially turn her stern toward the point from which we expected the outfly to come. And when presently it came roaring and howling and screaming down upon us, with such a medley of sound as might be expected from a legion of unchained furies, our port quarter was turned towards it, with the schooner in motion and paying off before it. Yet, even so, it swooped down upon us with such appalling violence that the little vessel careened until her lee sheer-poles were buried and the water was up to the coaming of the main hatch. But with way on her, her helm hard up, no after canvas set, and the hurricane dragging at her stout foresail, she could not help paying off, and after a long minute of heart-racking suspense, during which we momentarily expected her to keel-up with us, she suddenly righted and went flying away dead before the wind, with the water boiling under her bows up to the level of her head-boards.

One of the *Martha Brown's* good points was that she steered as handily as a little boat. I therefore had no difficulty in keeping her dead before the wind without assistance, although Cunningham stood by to lend me a hand should I chance to need any help. Also the water, apart from the boiling foam into which its surface was scourged by the hurricane, was perfectly smooth, the smallest suggestion of a wave crest being instantly seized by the wind and swept away to leeward in the form of fine, salt rain; indeed, the air was so full of spindrift and scudwater that I believed, even had it been daylight, we could not have seen farther than about two, or at most three, lengths from the ship. As it was, with the outfly of the hurricane that weird, unnatural, ruddy light of which I have spoken almost immediately died out from the sky, leaving the night as pitch-dark as before, save for the ghostly gleam of phosphorescent light which arose from the storm-swept ocean, and which gave the water, as far as it could be seen, the appearance as if moonlight were shining up through it.

When we had been scudding for a full quarter of an hour before that raving, screaming, howling fury of wind I began momentarily to expect and look for some indication that the worst was over, and to hope that the wind would moderate sufficiently to allow us to heave the schooner to before the sea should acquire height and weight enough to render the operation dangerous, for now every mile that we ran was carrying us just so much farther from our destination. But as time went on the gale, instead of moderating, seemed to increase in strength, until I began to wonder how much longer hemp and pine and canvas could endure the terrific strain to which our foremast, its rigging, and the reefed foresail were exposed. Still, although the mast was bowed forward in a curve that seemed to have approached perilously near to breaking-point, and although the shrouds and backstays were strained until they were hard as iron bars, everything was, so far, holding splendidly, and the schooner was rushing along at a speed which I was firmly persuaded she had never before approached.

At length, after I had been at the wheel nearly three hours, Cunningham insisted on relieving me: and, to speak truth, I was more than glad to accept his offer, for notwithstanding that it was by that time blowing harder than ever, and that the wind continued to scoop up the water in such vast quantities that the air was thick with salt rain, a high and unpleasantly steep sea had gradually risen, chasing the schooner and constantly threatening to poop her, or broach her to, so that at length, in order to escape the one fate or the other, it became necessary to keep the wheel perpetually in motion, now to port and anon to starboard; and a couple of hours of that kind of work, combined with the heavy strain upon one's nerves, is enough pretty well to tire out the strongest—moreover, I was drenched to the skin. Therefore I gladly made way for Cunningham, and, having first gone forward and directed Murdock to go aft and stand by the wheel, so that he might be at hand in the event of Cunningham needing any assistance, I returned aft—finding it necessary, by the way, to go down on my hands and knees and literally crawl along the deck, in order to make headway against the buffeting of the wind—and went below to my cabin, where I proceeded to strip off my wet clothes and subject myself to a vigorous towelling preparatory to donning a dry rig and my mackintosh.

Taking my time over the operation, I had proceeded so far as to have donned a dry undervest and a pair of thin duck trousers; and, having rolled the legs of these up to my knees, was in the act of unhooking my long mackintosh coat from its peg, when a terrific shock hurled me violently against the cabin bulkhead, and the next instant a deafening medley of sounds, compounded chiefly of the crash of breaking spars, the wild yells of Cunningham and Murdock, the seething smash of a perfect mountain of water on the deck, the splintering of the glass in the cabin skylight and the pouring of a deluge of water down into the cabin, smote upon my ears.

Partially stunned by the violence with which I had been dashed against the bulkhead, I made no immediate effort to rise, but remained passively where I had fallen, stupidly striving to realise what had happened, until a tremendous upheaval of the schooner's hull, by which she was hove completely over on her beam-ends, and a rush of water that half-filled my cabin awoke me to the consciousness that a catastrophe of some sort had overtaken us, and I scrambled awkwardly and with difficulty to my feet, pulling myself up by means of the knobs of the drawers under my standing bedplace, when another furious shock again upset me, and I fell squatting into the water violently surging to and fro athwart my cabin. By this time, however, full consciousness of the serious character of the situation had come to me, and as the schooner was again hove up and almost on to her opposite beam-ends, I let go my hold of the drawer-knobs and went swirling out through my stateroom door, lifted fairly off my feet by the rush of water, and found myself swimming for my life in the main cabin, in the midst of a squadron of cushions that had floated or been flung off the top of the cabin lockers. Then another mountainous sea swooped down upon and overwhelmed the hapless schooner, another deluge poured into her cabin through the smashed skylight and the companion, and had not a backwash of water just then swept me into the companion way and stranded me on the ladder, so that I could grasp the handrail, I should certainly have been drowned, for that second downpour filled the cabin to the level of the beams.

As I pulled myself up and secured a footing on the companion ladder I felt the hull of schooner again soaring aloft, up, up, until it seemed to my excited imagination as though the little craft was being hove right up among the clouds and at the same time being capsized. Then came the thundering crash of another mountain of water upon her deck, accompanied by the sound of rending woodwork as the companion cover parted company and was swept away; a whole Niagara of water poured down through the opening upon my devoted head, and as I clung to the handrail with the grip of a drowning man the schooner struck a third time, with such terrific violence that I fully expected the hull to go to pieces about my ears. But no, the stanchly built little hooker still held together, although I knew that her bottom must be stove in like a cracked egg-shell; and presently, when I felt that I could not hold my breath for another second, I found my head once more above water, and saw dimly, close above me, the hole in the deck where the companion cover had once been. Another moment and I had again found footing on the ladder, and, bruised all over and aching in every joint of my body, I crawled out on deck.

Whether it was that my eyes had at last adjusted themselves to the darkness, or that the darkness was less profound than it had been, I know not, but as I emerged from the companion way and secured a footing on deck I became aware that I could dimly perceive my immediate surroundings. The first object to catch my eye was the stump of the mainmast within a few feet of the spot where I was standing, and the instinct of self-preservation at once prompted me to make a dash at it and fling my arms round it, in order that I might not be swept away by the next sea which should break aboard. And as I stood there gasping for breath and staring about me I discovered that I could not only



“AS I SPOKE A FIGURE UPHOVE ITSELF”

dimly perceive my immediate surroundings, but that the entire hull of the schooner was visible as an all but shapeless black patch in the midst of a madly leaping chaos of swirling foam, which gleamed ghostly white in the light of its own phosphorescence. It was still blowing as furiously as ever, and the air was thick with spindrift and scudwater, which blotted out everything outside the radius of some thirty fathoms on every side; but the schooner now seemed to be in comparatively smooth water, and I was not long in guessing at the reason, for, glancing to windward, I could dimly see, a few fathoms away, a great wall of spouting, leaping white breakers, evidently marking the position of the reef upon which we had struck so violently, and over which we now seemed to have beaten, for there were no further shocks. But imperfectly as I could distinguish objects in the darkness, I could still see enough to convince me that the schooner was a complete wreck and full of water, for both masts were over the starboard side, still attached to the hull by the rigging, while every scrap of bulwark, boats, galley, in fact everything above the level of the deck, was swept away.

A single glance sufficed me to grasp these details, and then I turned my gaze inboard again, wondering whether any of the others had survived that awful passage across the reef. And as I did so the sound of someone vomiting close at hand reached my ears.

“Who is that?” I demanded, looking in the direction from which the sound proceeded, and as I spoke a figure uphove itself from among the raffle of the port main rigging, which lay athwart the deck, and a voice which I recognised as Cunningham’s responded.

“That you, Temple?” it asked. “Ugh! Ouch! Ow! By the Piper, this is awful! I seem to have swallowed half the Pacific Ocean! Ow! Ugh! I—Aw! I say, old chap—auch!—where the dickens are we, and what has happened, eh?”

“Where we are I’ll be hanged if I know,” I responded, “for all about here should be open water, according to the chart. But it isn’t, for we’ve just beaten over a reef and in all probability smashed the bottom of the poor little hooker to matchwood in the process. And now the best we can hope is that there is land of some sort close under our lee, for if there isn’t we are in a very pretty pickle. Have you seen anything of the others?”

“Yes,” answered Cunningham, “Murdock is here; but I’m afraid he is badly hurt, poor chap, if not killed outright. When the schooner struck, he and I were swept for’ard by the first sea that broke aboard, and the next thing I knew, when the water had gone, was that I was clinging to this rigging here with one hand, and that I had hold of somebody’s leg with the other, that somebody being Murdock. But he was—and still is—insensible, and I am afraid he must have been violently dashed against some of the wreckage, so I lost no time in making him fast to the first loose rope’s end I could find. But I say, if the schooner’s bottom is stove, as you say, I suppose she’ll sink in a few minutes, won’t she?”

“Sink! With her hold full of sandalwood? Not much!” I retorted. “Still, I hope there is land not far away, for I have no fancy for washing about the Pacific on a crazy, waterlogged hulk, and that is the condition of the *Martha Brown* at this moment. But where are Chips and Sails and the boy? I’m afraid we shall never again set eyes upon poor cooky, for he was in the galley, and that, I see, is gone, together with everything else that was on deck.”

“Yes,” said Cunningham, “it went, I think, with the first sea that broke aboard us when we struck the reef. And I don’t know what has become of the others. I seem to remember having seen two figures emerge from the companion way while I was busy with Murdock here, but I don’t know what became of them. I wonder whether we could do anything for the boatswain—the sea is no longer breaking aboard, and—”

“Yes, of course,” said I. “Where is he? We can at least discover whether or not he is alive.”

“Here he is, among all this raffle,” answered Cunningham. “The first thing, I suppose, will be to get him clear of it,

and then—”

“Well, I am afraid that is about all that we can do for him at present,” said I, as I moved across the sluggishly rolling deck toward Cunningham. I stooped beside him, and at his direction lifted the tangle of rigging beneath which the boatswain was lying, while he proceeded to cast off the lashings that had saved the inert body from being washed overboard. Then between us we dragged the man out to a clear spot on the deck, where Cunningham knelt, supporting the head and shoulders, while I tore open the front of the thin vest and laid my hand upon the broad, hairy chest. The heart was beating, although but feebly; yet as Cunningham continued to support the man in a sitting position the beats gradually became stronger, and presently, with a groan, consciousness returned, and, heaving himself over on his side, with an ejaculation, poor Murdock began to vomit violently, as Cunningham had done, having evidently, like him, swallowed a great quantity of salt water. For perhaps five minutes the paroxysm continued with severity; then, having rid himself of most of the salt water, the man, between groans, began to ask where he was, and then, as memory returned, informed us that he had received a violent blow on the top of the head which had knocked the senses out of him. Fortunately there was no wound; and after a while the boatswain was able to sit up unassisted, with his back against the stump of the mainmast. And then, having placed him in a tolerably comfortable position, we were free again to take cognisance of things in general, when we became aware of the fact that the schooner, although still rolling heavily with the movement of the water about her, had taken the ground; and upon looking away to leeward I thought I could perceive, through the flying spindrift and against the darkness of the sky, a darker shadow which could scarcely be anything else than land.

When next we turned to Murdock, to enquire whether there was anything more that we could do for him, we found that he had fallen asleep, which was perhaps the best thing that could have happened to him. We therefore left him to finish his nap and fell to pacing the weather side of the deck, between the main rigging and the taffrail, comparing notes as to our experiences; and while we were still thus engaged we became aware of two things. The first of these was that the gale was breaking, while the second was that the dawn was at hand, for far away to leeward of us the sky was paling, down to a certain point, beneath which the shadow lay as dark as ever, but was assuming, even as we stood, a certain definiteness of shape, ultimately resolving itself into the outline of what seemed a distant hill, with deeper shadows between ourselves and it, which, in turn, developed into a low, bush-crowned cliff, out of the base of which a sandy beach presently grew as the light gathered strength.

Then, quite suddenly, the clouds to windward and overhead broke up into detached masses, between which a few stars twinkled transiently before they vanished in the fast-growing light of the new day; and the cloud masses drove away to leeward and disappeared, revealing a sky of the deepest, richest ultramarine, softening away down in the eastern quarter to a tone of the palest and most delicate primrose, against which the outline of the distant hill stood out, sharp as though cut out of paper, so deeply purple as to be almost black. Then, the light coming so swiftly that the eye scarcely found time to note the multitudinous changes of tint accompanying it, the sky behind the hill flushed from palest primrose to rich, glowing amber; a few evanescent shreds of cloud midway between horizon and zenith blushed rosy red at being caught unawares by the sun's first rays, then vanished; a pencil dipped in burning gold outlined the crest of the distant hill for a few seconds, and then the upper edge of the sun's disk, palpitating with living light, floated up into view beyond the ridge of the hill, and in an instant the whole scene, save the beach, which still lay in the shadow of the cliff, became a picture of brilliant, dazzling light and colour. To seaward, about two miles distant, was the creaming surf, sparkling diamond-like as it plunged down upon the reef over which we had driven and then leaped and spouted thirty feet high into the clear air before the wind caught it and tore it into mist; while shoreward there stretched a line of curving sandy beach, about a mile in length, forming part of the shore of a shallow bay into which we had driven and wherein the schooner now lay stranded. The beach was distant about half a cable's length from us, and was backed by a rocky cliff averaging about fifty feet in height, crowned by a growth of low scrub, over the top of which appeared what now seemed to be a low, flat-topped hill, distant perhaps three miles inland.

The beach immediately to leeward of the schooner was strewn with fragments of wreckage, among which we recognised the galley and some fragments of the boats; but what gave us the greatest satisfaction of all was to see two apparently inanimate figures—those of the carpenter and the sailmaker—rise slowly to their feet, walk down to the water's edge, stare intently in our direction under the sharp of their hands, and then wave their hands frantically in response to our waving, as they recognised the fact that we were aboard the wreck, and for the present, at all events, safe. Then they put their hands trumpet-wise to their mouths and evidently hailed us; but the roar and the crash of the surf on the reef were so deafening that it was impossible for us to catch a word of what they said, and, recognising this, they presently turned and walked up the sand until they came to a dry spot, where they sat down, with the obvious intention of awaiting events. As for Cunningham and myself, we could do nothing but abide in patience where we were until the surf upon the beach should moderate sufficiently to render it safe for us to swim ashore, the wreck being swept so clean that, without breaking up the deck, there was not a fragment of timber left out of which to construct a raft.

Chapter Twelve.

The Island.

By the time the sun had been risen about an hour, Cunningham and I became aware that it needed something more than a mere shipwreck to rob us of our appetite, for we found ourselves rapidly developing a good, wholesome hunger; but, alas! there were no means of appeasing it, for the schooner was full of water and everything in the nature of provisions was quite un-get-at-able: we should therefore be obliged to wait for a meal until we could get ashore, which, we decided, could scarcely be until the afternoon, if even then. And we soon came to the conclusion that our companions ashore were in like case with ourselves, so far at least as hunger was concerned, for about half an hour later we saw them rise to their feet, point first to their mouths and then to the top of the cliff, and presently proceed to the cliff foot, evidently in search of a spot at which it might be climbed. And although, viewed from the

wreck, the cliff appeared to be quite vertical, they soon found such a spot; for, as we watched, they began to ascend the cliff, zigzagging to right and left and apparently following something that by courtesy might be called a path, for they walked rather than climbed it, reaching the top in about five minutes. Then, with a wave of the hand to us, they turned into the bushes and disappeared, returning about an hour afterwards with what, as they held it up for us to see, looked like a small bunch of bananas.

Meanwhile, the gale having broken, the wind rapidly dropped, until about midday it fell stark calm. But it was not until nearly sunset that the surf on the beach had abated sufficiently to render it at all safe for us to attempt the swim from the wreck to the shore, by which time we were both so ravenously hungry that we were prepared to take quite an appreciable amount of risk, if by doing so we could procure the wherewithal to appease our craving for food. And while waiting for the sea to go down we employed our time usefully in cutting adrift the rigging by which the broken masts remained attached to the wreck, thus giving the wreckage a chance to drive ashore upon the beach, where we should eventually want it.

At length, however, when the sun had dropped to within some fifteen degrees of the western horizon, and was shining full into the bay where the wreck lay, the sea had so far gone down and the surf on the beach had so far abated as to render it possible for us to land without incurring much risk of injury to our limbs; we therefore awoke Murdock—who had passed most of the day in sleep—and, finding him in pretty good form after his long rest, forthwith proceeded to make the attempt. The distance which we had to traverse was a mere trifle of about fifty fathoms or thereabouts, and we did perfectly well until we reached the inner line of breakers; but there, as luck would have it, something went wrong with the boatswain, and without saying a word to either of us he suddenly flung up his hands and disappeared, at the precise moment when the comber had us in its grip and was about to fling us up on the beach, and when, consequently, it was most necessary that each of us should be perfectly free to look after himself. Fortunately, however, we were all swimming close together, and as Murdock disappeared, Cunningham and I with one accord dived and made a grab at him, catching him just as the breaker curled over and broke, hurling us all forward in a smothering swirl of foam; and the next instant we were all being rolled over and over upon the sand. Then, as we came to rest, I dug my toes and the fingers of my disengaged hand deep into the sand, ready for the backwash, while, as it afterward appeared, Cunningham did the same; and after a severe struggle of a few seconds' duration the water receded, leaving us stranded and gasping for breath, when Chips and Sails, who had been on the watch, rushed down into the water, and, in obedience to a gasped request from me, seized the boatswain's insensible body and dragged it up out of reach of the next breaker, while Cunningham and I scrambled to our feet and staggered after them.

Once ashore the boatswain soon recovered from his fainting fit, or whatever it had been, whereupon we all seated ourselves in a circle upon the sand and feasted upon bananas, afterwards slaking our thirst at a little runnel of deliciously cool, sweet water that the carpenter had discovered, earlier in the day, trickling out of the cliff at no great distance from the point at which the wreck had come ashore. And while we were eating, the carpenter informed us that he and the sailmaker had been stretched out upon the schooner's cabin lockers, fast asleep, when she struck upon the reef for the first time; and that, awakened by the violence of the shock and the crash of the falling masts, they had leaped to their feet, and, scarcely knowing what they did, rushed up on deck, only to be swept overboard the next instant by a heavy sea which broke over the ship. Neither of them knew, at the moment, what had befallen the other; but from what they told us it was evident that the same sea which washed them overboard swept the schooner's deck of everything and carried away her bulwarks: for when, fighting for breath, they rose to the surface, each of them found himself close to a mass of floating wreckage, to which he clung desperately, and so was eventually flung up on the beach, with the life so nearly battered out of him that it was just as much as either of them could do to crawl far enough up the beach to get beyond the reach of the deadly backwash, when they both collapsed, and so lay senseless until they were revived by the rays of the morning sun.

There were, however, two still missing, namely, the cook and the cabin boy. The former of these we found, quite dead, shut up in the stranded galley; but exactly what became of the cabin boy we never knew, for we never found a trace of him, alive or dead. We buried the body of the cook that same evening in the sand, using fragments of splintered planking wherewith to dig the grave, after which we flung ourselves down upon the dry sand above high-water mark, and, completely worn out, slept soundly until the following morning.

We awoke shortly after sunrise, to find the weather gloriously fine, the Trade wind again blowing briskly, and, to our very great surprise, the wreck but a few yards from the shore, in very little over two feet of water. But a single glance around us at the greatly altered appearance of the beach, as compared with what we had seen of it on the previous day, sufficed to explain the apparent mystery. The tide had something to do with it, of course, for it chanced that the schooner had come ashore on the very top of the highest spring tide: but it was perfectly evident that, apart from this, the water in the bay had been piled up to quite an unusual height by the gale; hence when the storm had subsided and the ocean had once more found its normal level the wreck was left little short of high and dry. This was quite a stroke of good luck for us; for we subsequently discovered that the range of tide in that particular part of the ocean was so exceedingly small that, even at high-water, we were able to wade right out to the wreck, while the wreckage which had been cast ashore on the previous day was now lying high and dry far up the beach, and quite beyond the reach of the ordinary tides. We were thus saved a vast amount of trouble, for although, when we began salvage operations, it was still necessary to do a certain amount of rafting in order to convey heavy articles ashore, light articles, such as we could carry, could be taken thither by the simple process of lowering them over the side to one of our companions, who then carried them ashore in his arms or on his shoulders.

But there were one or two matters demanding our immediate attention, the first being breakfast, while the next was the settlement of the very important question whether or not the island happened to possess other inhabitants than ourselves, and, incidentally, if so, what would be their attitude toward us. And this last was a matter of the most vital importance to us; for our experience, gained during the collection of our cargo of sandalwood, was that while the natives of certain of the islands were gentle, kindly disposed toward strangers, and perfectly harmless, those of others were exceedingly jealous and suspicious, fierce, treacherous, bloodthirsty, and in some cases actually cannibals. Of course if it should so chance that we had been cast away upon an island inhabited by natives

possessing the last-named characteristics, our prospects of ultimate escape with our lives were what poor old Skipper Brown would have designated as "purty slim", and until the point could be determined it behoved us to be exceedingly careful. Therefore, after discussing the matter at a sort of council of war, it was decided that, important as it might be to explore the island and ascertain its capabilities and limitations without delay, it was still more important and urgent to provide ourselves with the means of self-defence. Accordingly, while Chips and Sails again undertook to climb the cliff and procure some bananas for breakfast, Cunningham and I, accompanied by the boatswain—who seemed, after a good night's rest, to be little the worse for the happenings of the previous day—agreed to wade off and board the wreck, with the view of securing such weapons and ammunition as were come-at-able, and had not been spoiled by sea water.

The arms chest, although actually under water, was secured without difficulty and carried ashore, together with several bottles of oil which we were able to rescue from the lazarette; and, this done, Cunningham and I set to work, immediately after breakfast, thoroughly to dry, clean, and oil all the weapons and put them in perfect working order, although such ammunition as we had been able to find was completely ruined by sea water. But I seemed to remember having heard our late skipper say that there was a reserve stock, packed in waterproof zinc-lined cases, stowed away somewhere in the ship; therefore, while Cunningham and I were engaged upon the task of cleaning the arms, the other three men went aboard the wreck and proceeded systematically to salve the entire contents of the lazarette, with the result that, before the day's work was ended, they had found cases yielding no less than one thousand rounds of gun ammunition and two thousand revolver cartridges, all of which proved to be in perfect condition. We were thus pretty well provided with the means of self-defence, and, given something in the nature of a fairly strong defensive position, ought to be able to render a reasonably good account of ourselves.

The next thing to be done was to find that defensive position; the following day was therefore devoted to a thorough exploration of the island by the entire party, the expedition setting out immediately after breakfast, each of us being armed with cutlass, gun, and a brace of revolvers, with a good supply of cartridges in our pockets. Thus far we had observed nothing indicating that the island was inhabited by others than ourselves: but it must be remembered that the schooner had been wrecked in a bay hemmed in on the land side by cliffs, and that hitherto our farthest excursion had been to the top of the cliffs and just the few yards inland which were necessary to enable us to procure bananas from the trees growing right up to the cliff edge; the remainder of the island was therefore, so far, a *terra incognita* to us all, and might, for aught that we could tell to the contrary, be swarming with savages. We therefore decided to proceed with caution, all keeping close together.

To scale the cliff proved a very easy matter, for the carpenter and sailmaker had, on their first day ashore, found what might be termed a sort of natural stairway zigzagging up it, consisting of a series of rock projections, or ledges, up and down which it was possible to pass with little or no difficulty, and which served our purpose admirably.

Having climbed this stairway, we found ourselves at the top of the cliff and confronted by a dense undergrowth of jungle, consisting for the most part of an inextricable tangle of tough creepers, interspersed with shrubs and trees of various kinds, many of which seemed to be fruit bearers. Among these we recognised the plantain, banana, custard-apple, loquat, granadilla, guava, pawpaw, and some others with which none of us were acquainted; the fruit, however, was neither very plentiful nor very fine, most of the trees being so completely smothered with creepers that they could get neither sun, air, nor room enough to grow properly. We pushed through this brake for about a mile, working steadily uphill all the time, and frequently being compelled to cut a way for ourselves with our cutlasses, finally emerging upon a kind of ridge, bare of scrub, but richly carpeted with guinea grass, with a few tall trees of various kinds scattered here and there about it. But although this ridge, or plateau, was comparatively open, our view was still exceedingly circumscribed, for we were hemmed in on every hand by the bush belt, which seemed completely to cover the entire island, except the plateau upon which we stood and the bald summit of the curious-looking hill or mountain about two miles distant. The summit of this hill, which appeared to be flat, and which we estimated to be about three thousand feet higher than the ridge upon which we were then standing, promised to afford us a perfect view of the whole island; therefore, as the day was still young, we at once decided to make our way to and survey our domain from it.

The crest of the ridge upon which we stood appeared to lead straight toward the mountain, moreover it was not nearly so densely overgrown as was the lower ground; our progress, therefore, was tolerably rapid, and in the course of an hour we found ourselves clear of the bush and standing upon the lower slopes of the mountain. And then we knew that the towering mass in front of us could be nothing else than a volcano, either dormant or extinct, for there was no sign of smoke rising from its summit, although the nature of the soil around us, consisting as it did of pumice stone, scoriae, and ancient lava, left no doubt as to the character of the mountain.

And now began the really difficult part of our task. Although the ground was entirely bare of vegetation the surface was so exceedingly rough and broken, and so loose, that progress was very slow, becoming more so with every forward step; for while the lower slopes of the mountain were of quite an easy grade, they rapidly steepened as we advanced, until the last five hundred feet or so approached so nearly to the perpendicular that at length further progress seemed to be all but impossible, and we could only advance a yard or two at a time, climbing upon hands and knees, with short spells of rest between the spurts.

But when at length, about midday, we finally reached the summit, it was unanimously agreed that our toil was amply rewarded, for the entire island lay stretched out at our feet like a map, with mile after mile of the blue, foam-flecked ocean reaching far away to the horizon on every hand, while away in the south-western quarter, a hundred miles distant perhaps, there appeared a faint film of misty blue which indicated the presence of other land. But this last was much too distant to interest us in any way; it was our own particular domain that absorbed all our attention, and the first thing that we observed about it was that its length ran practically east and west. It was of very irregular shape, the most graphic way of describing it being, perhaps, to say that in general outline it somewhat resembled a rather acute-angled triangle, with two large pieces bitten out of it near the base, one bite having been taken out of the north side, while the other and larger had removed the south-west angle and formed the bay in which lay the wreck. The acute angle pointed toward the east, and the sides of the triangle were much twisted and broken. The

mountain, upon the summit of which we stood, occupied the middle of the eastern half of the island, and proved to be, as we had anticipated, the crater of an apparently extinct volcano. The interior of the crater was elliptical in shape, about a mile long by half a mile wide, and was a funnel-like opening about five thousand feet deep, with practically perpendicular sides. It resembled, as much as anything, an enormous well, for there was water at the bottom of it, though probably of no great depth. Also at the bottom, all round the edge of the water and for some distance up the sides, there were enormous quantities of what we judged to be sulphur.

The top edge of the crater, which from below presented the appearance of a flat-topped hill, was about thirty feet wide and tolerably level; we therefore had no difficulty in walking right round it, and so obtaining a complete view of the entire island, which was everywhere covered with verdure, save immediately round the base of the volcano. But although the outline of the island was very irregular, there were only two indentations worthy of the name of bays in it, namely, the one in which the wreck lay, and which we at once decided to name South-west Bay, and another at the north-west extremity of the island, which we named North Bay. These two bays were the only portions of the coastline possessing anything in the nature of a beach; and, that fact once established, we knew that if natives existed anywhere on the island, we should find traces of them on one or the other of the bays. But we had already learned that there were none on the shore of South-west Bay; and now, carefully examining the other bay, we could see no trace of canoes on its beach, or huts along its margin, neither could we detect the slightest sign of a smoke wreath in any direction. We therefore finally came to the conclusion that, excepting ourselves, the island was without inhabitants, and one source of anxiety was thereupon removed from our minds.

Standing upon the edge of the crater and looking westward, we obtained a perfect view of the whole of the western half of the island, including both bays; and, looking down upon the land below us from a great height, as we now did, we were able to form a very accurate idea of its origin, which we at once judged to be volcanic. The entire island, in fact, was evidently the summit of a volcano projecting above the surface of the ocean, the two bays above referred to having evidently been at one time two craters or vents for the internal fires, since both were encircled by reefs which had all the appearance of having been at one time part of the lip of the respective craters.

As we stood up there, studying the conformation and general appearance of the island, we fell to discussing our future prospects, and soon arrived at the conclusion that, situated just where the island happened to be, far away from all the regular ship tracks, its very existence apparently unknown—since it was not marked upon the chart—it might be months, or even years, before we should be rescued by being taken off by a ship; and that therefore our wisest course would be, first, to save everything possible from the wreck, and then carefully break her up, using her timber to build some sort of a craft to convey us back to civilisation. This would at all events keep us busy and our minds occupied, giving us an object in life—something to strive for, think about, and achieve—and thus preserve us all from falling into a low and despondent frame of mind; and if in the end a ship should happen to appear and take us off, why, so much the better, while if nothing of the kind occurred we should in due time be able to effect our own escape. Cunningham was particularly enthusiastic over the scheme; yacht designing, it appeared, was a hobby of his, and he promised us that if we would only give him a free hand he would design us something which would not only be fairly easy to build, but would also be safe and comfortable, and quite capable of conveying us all to any part of the world we might choose as our destination. This struck me as a far too ambitious project for five men to undertake; but when, later on, we again discussed the matter, with a chart of the Pacific before us, and I discovered that the Sandwich Islands, the nearest civilised land, lay some fourteen hundred miles distant, I changed my opinion. I had already done one ocean trip in an open boat, and had no desire to attempt another.

On our way back to the beach abreast the wreck, which now constituted our temporary home, we took a look at North Bay. With this, as a place of residence, we instantly became violently enamoured: because, in the first place, it was open to the north-east Trade wind, and was therefore far cooler and more pleasant than the beach of South-west Bay, shut in as the latter was under the lee of high cliffs, and opposed to the afternoon sun; next, there was a little stream of delicious fresh water falling over a low cliff into a small rock basin, affording an ideal freshwater bath; next, we discovered a fine large, perfectly dry cave, close to the shore, with an entrance so narrow that it constituted of itself a perfect rock fortress; and, lastly, a large and varied assortment of very fine fruit trees was discovered growing quite close to the beach, only needing to be cleared of the undergrowth to make a splendid orchard. The one drawback to the bay was that it was about two miles distant from the wreck, near which we should of necessity be obliged to establish our shipyard; but its many advantages so far outweighed this that we took possession of the cave there and then, and slept in it that night.

And now ensued a particularly busy time for us all; for when we came to consider the situation we found that there were several matters demanding our attention, and they were all of so urgent a character that it was rather difficult for us to determine offhand which should be the first to receive it. For, to begin with, we were all agreed that unless something quite unforeseen and unexpected, in the nature of a call at the island by a ship, should occur in the meantime, we must be prepared for a sojourn of at least a year in our present quarters; and that, of course, meant that we should be obliged to give serious consideration to the question of the maintenance of our health, which, in its turn, meant that we must carefully regulate our diet, and alter it as much as possible, not depending too much upon fruit, but varying it by a frequent change to fish, our only possible alternative.

But we soon discovered that in order to catch fish, as well as for many other purposes, it was not only very desirable, but also almost imperatively necessary *that* we should have something in the nature of a boat, which, of course, remained to be built. Then there was the salvage of everything contained in the wreck of the schooner, including the timber and metal of which she was built; to say nothing of certain gardening operations projected by Murdock, with the object of improving the quality of the fruit growing in the immediate vicinity of our cave, the cultivation of certain vegetables, and sundry other schemes having for their object the betterment of our condition during the period of our sojourn upon the island—Murdock's hobby happening to be gardening, as Cunningham's happened to be yacht designing (and, as often happens when men take up some useful occupation as an amusement, both soon proved themselves to be exceptionally skilful in all matters relating to their respective hobbies). Therefore, while Chips, Sails, and I went strenuously to work upon the operation of salvaging everything that we could find aboard the wreck, the boatswain, with the assistance of poor Cooky's fire shovel, and a few other iron implements which he converted into

tools, devoted himself to the production of a fruit and vegetable garden in the immediate neighbourhood of our cave dwelling, clearing away all the scrub which grew around and choked some two dozen fruit trees, digging and hoeing up the soil, and planting therein every potato, onion, and bean that we could find for him among the cook's stores aboard the ship. And while he and we were busy in the manner described, Cunningham rescued a few sheets of paper and some lead pencils from the skipper's cabin, carefully dried the former, sharpened the latter, and, with an empty packing case for table, and a scale constructed with the assistance of the carpenter's two-foot rule, assiduously devoted himself to the task of designing what he called a "catamaran" for immediate use, and then a small schooner by means of which we were eventually to make our escape from the island and return to civilisation.

The catamaran struck me as being a particularly simple and ingenious affair, some of its many merits consisting in the facts that it needed no moulds for its construction, that it could be built of any fragments of wreckage that were too short and too much splintered and damaged to be of use in the construction of the schooner, and that it needed no very elaborate working or shaping. It consisted essentially of two oblong tanks or boxes, each thirty feet long by two feet wide by two feet six inches deep. These boxes were not unlike a Thames fishing punt in shape, although they were, proportionately, much narrower and deeper. The bottom of each was perfectly flat transversely, and also longitudinally, except at the ends, where it curved up gradually in a semi-parabola until it met the gunwale. These two boxes, or punts, having been decked over and made perfectly watertight, were then joined together—with a space of eight feet between them—by stout beams, over the after part of which was laid the schooner's wheel grating, to serve the purpose of a deck; a broad-bladed steering paddle was fitted securely into a grommet attached to the aftermost beam; the punts were simply rigged with an enormous lateen sail made out of the schooner's tattered foresail, and there we had a nondescript kind of craft, thirty feet long by twelve feet beam, drawing only about eight inches of water when light and on an even keel, buoyant, unsinkable, and uncapsizable, which, when we came to try her, developed a speed under sail that was positively astounding, and went to windward like a racing cutter.

She was wet, of course, particularly when driven hard to windward, but in such a climate as we now enjoyed, to be drenched with salt water was a pleasure rather than otherwise, and, regarded as a drawback, was not worth a moment's consideration. It took us a month almost to a day to build and rig her complete; and after our first trial of her we almost invariably used her to go to and fro between the two bays, although the trip by water was about seven miles in length, as compared with the short cut of two miles overland. Yet we did it either way in a little over half an hour, while the sail home in the evening, after a hard day's work, was much the more exhilarating mode of travelling of the two. And what, perhaps, gratified us as much as anything in connection with the construction of this exceedingly useful craft was that in building her we had not been obliged to touch the schooner at all, but had drawn for our material entirely upon the loose wreckage of bulwarks and so on that we had found strewn about the beach on the day after the wreck, together with four stout saplings which we cut down to serve as beams, and which we found to be exceedingly tough and in many respects to resemble elm.

And while the carpenter, the boatswain, Sails, and I had been strenuously at work upon the construction of the catamaran, Cunningham had been quite as industriously employed upon his design for the proposed schooner, working alone, day after day, in our cave dwelling round at North Bay, evolving his half-breadth and body plans, his midship section, buttock lines, water lines, diagonals, and all the rest of it; ruling in, rubbing out again, calculating, altering, modifying, and patiently labouring to get his several drawings to agree accurately with each other, and resolutely refusing to be satisfied until he had got everything exactly to his liking; and at length he was able to display to us, not altogether without pride, the completed draught of as pretty a little ship as I think I ever set eyes upon. He had taken, as the foundation of his design, the shape of the *Zenobia's* gig, in which we had made our memorable Atlantic voyage, and out of which we had been taken by poor old Skipper Brown, that fine little craft having produced a profound impression upon him, in consequence of the splendid qualities as a sea boat which she had exhibited. But the new craft was of course to be much bigger than the gig, for she was not only to be completely decked from stem to stern, but was to be sufficiently roomy in her interior to enable us to perform a voyage of over a thousand miles with a very fair measure of comfort. Her principal dimensions, therefore, were forty feet on the water line by ten feet beam; and, in order to provide a reasonable amount of headroom below, as also to make her weatherly, she was considerably deeper in proportion than the gig, and much sharper in the floor, this providing her with plenty of power for her size, by means of which she would be enabled to make good way even in a heavy head sea. Her bow was an almost exact reproduction of that of the gig, rather long and overhanging, with plenty of "flare" to lift her over a head sea, and she was provided with an even longer counter, which gave her after-body a remarkably smooth and easy delivery; while, for the rest, her water lines were almost those of a racing yacht, so that I concluded she would be exceedingly nimble under her canvas. Altogether we were immensely pleased with, and not a little impressed by Cunningham's effort; but I could not help reminding the others that it was one thing to draught a smart little vessel on paper, and quite another to build her with such resources as we had at our disposal. Chips, however, who of course knew—or should have known—more about such matters than any of the rest of us, while not exactly pooh-poohing my reminder, was confident that—as he expressed it—we were men enough to bring the scheme to fruition; and with that assertion I was obliged, by no means unwillingly, to rest satisfied.

Meanwhile, however, a great deal still remained to be done before we could start work upon the new schooner; for although we had by this time salvaged everything from the wreck—and it was astonishing how much and what a wide variety of things we found in her—she still remained to be broken up; and we agreed that that should be our next job.

Chapter Thirteen.

Two important Events occur.

It may be thought that there is little or nothing of interest to be found in the operation of breaking up the wreck of a ship, but I, who have assisted in such an operation, can testify most strongly to the contrary; for when the work is undertaken as we undertook to break up the wreck of the *Martha Brown*—that is to say, carefully, taking her apart

plank by plank and beam by beam, exactly reversing, in fact, the several processes by which she was put together—there is plenty of both interest and instruction to be found in observing the numberless ingenious devices which have been resorted to by the shipwright to join together the several members of the hull in such a manner as to ensure the maximum of strength, so that, when once joined together, no strain short of that involving the absolute destruction of the material should be capable of pulling them apart again. We who had been aboard the schooner during the time of her passage across the reef, and had experienced in our own persons the terrific violence of the shocks to which she had then been subjected, were amazed that she had not been shattered like an *egg* shell; but when, later on, we came to dismember her, we were still more amazed to find how little damage, comparatively speaking, she had sustained while passing through that fearful ordeal on the reef, and what extraordinary exertions were needed to wrench her several parts asunder. But a detailed description of the varied schemes to which we were obliged to resort in order to effect our purpose would be of no interest to the general reader; I will therefore content myself with the bare statement that it cost us six weeks of the hardest labour I ever performed in my life to reduce the *Martha Brown* to her component parts, and to stack the materials upon the beach in readiness for use in the construction of the new schooner.

In fairness to ourselves, however, it must be said that during part of that time there were only four of us engaged upon the work, Cunningham being busy upon calculations of stability, the relative positions of the centre of gravity and the metacentre of the new schooner, and I know not what beside, in connection with the determination of the amount of ballast that would be needed, the position of the masts, and the area and proportions of the several sails—for now that the engineer was fairly mounted upon his new hobby there was no possibility of dragging him out of the saddle. He had several novel theories which he was anxious to test, and he was resolutely determined that the new schooner should be as nearly perfect as his skill could make her; he therefore simply scoffed at us when we pointed out that time was flying, indignantly demanded to be told what mattered a few days more or less in comparison with the importance of the matters with which he was dealing, and returned to his figures with renewed zest.

But all things come to an end sooner or later, and the day at length arrived when Cunningham completed his final calculation, drew his last line, and carefully rolled up his completed drawings, to await the moment when they would be called for upon the beginning of the important task of laying the keel of the new schooner.

Now, if I have succeeded in portraying anything like a true picture of our life upon the island, the reader will have gathered the impression that, after the first day following the wreck, we were constantly in a condition of breathless activity, due to the fact that there were so many matters, each of apparently paramount importance, all clamouring for our instant attention, and that, at the beginning at least, we strove to attend to all these several matters at the same time, doing first a little to this, and then a little to that or the other, according to what we believed at the moment to be most pressing. And this state of affairs prevailed with us until we had salvaged everything possible from the wreck, and until we had built our catamaran; after which we felt that we might with advantage adopt some sort of system in the arrangement of our work.

Now among a number of the things that we desired to do, but had postponed in favour of other matters, which had seemed more pressingly urgent, was the exploration of our cave. This cave was situated only some thirty yards from the beach, in North Bay, in the heart of a steeply rising acclivity which gradually merged itself in the plateau constituting the western extremity of the island. It was only by the merest accident that we had discovered the existence of the cavern on that day when we undertook the exploration of the island—although there is no doubt that we should have found it sooner or later—for the entrance was so small that only one person could pass through at a time, and even then only in a crouching position; and it was this latter circumstance which at first so strongly commended the place to us as a residence, for it was in fact quite a stronghold in its way, being capable of defence for a practically unlimited period by a single armed man. Once past that low and narrow opening, however, one found oneself in quite a spacious chamber of roughly circular shape, some thirty feet in diameter by about twelve feet high, with a perfectly smooth, dry, sandy floor, rendering the cave a most comfortable place of abode, as we discovered when we had taken up our quarters in it.

Thereafter we had all been so strenuously busy that, with the exception of Cunningham, we had used the cave merely as a sleeping place; while the engineer, absorbed in his drawings and calculations, had never thought of exploring the cave and examining its extent, resting satisfied with the knowledge that the place was amply large enough for all our requirements, while the situation of the island rendered the presence of wild animals or noxious reptiles within it an impossibility. And so, absorbed in our various occupations, we had allowed the matter to go on from day to day, recognising, in an abstract sort of fashion, the fact that it would be no more than an act of common prudence to examine the cavern, but daily postponing the examination until a more convenient season. Thus the matter had been allowed to slide until the day finally arrived when Cunningham reached the end of his labours—rather earlier than he had anticipated—and, having put away his papers, suddenly bethought him that here at last was his opportunity to give the interior of the cavern a thorough overhaul. He accordingly provided himself with an abundant supply of dry branches, to serve as torches, lighted one of them, and proceeded forthwith to investigate, with the result that about an hour later he startled us all by unexpectedly emerging from behind a thick clump of bushes on the beach of South-west Bay and frantically waving a lighted torch in his hand, under the influence of such violent excitement that when we dropped work, and ran to him to learn what was the matter, we found him to all intents and purposes incoherent for the moment.

“Hurrah, you chaps, hurrah!” he yelled, waving the flaming torch above his head as he advanced to meet us. “Aren’t we a lot of lucky dogs, eh? Cheer, you beggars, cheer, and split your throats! Who wouldn’t be shipwrecked, if they could meet with such a slice of luck as ours? By George!—I say, Temple, kick me, old chap, will ye, just to convince me that I’m awake.”

“Steady, man, steady!” I returned, seizing him by the shoulder and giving him a good shaking. “What in the world is the matter with you, and what is all the excitement about? You don’t mean to say that there’s a ship in sight, standing in for the island, do you?”

"Ship!" he retorted, in accents of ineffable contempt; "not much, there isn't. No, it is something infinitely better than that. It is this, my son, that when we leave this island we do so as a little bunch of bloated plutocrats—millionaires, my boy, millionaires!"

"Millionaires!" I ejaculated. "What on earth does the man mean? What are you driving at, Cunningham? Can't you pull yourself together and tell us in plain English what has happened?"

"I know," exclaimed Parsons, with sudden illumination. "He've found a buried treasure! Ain't that it, Mr Cunnin'ham?"

"Ay," answered Cunningham, "you are right, in a way, Chips, certainly. But it is no pirates' hoard that I have found—no chests heaped high with cups and candlesticks of gold and silver and jewelled weapons, and overflowing with necklaces, bracelets, and rings torn from the persons of shrieking women; it is something far better than that. It is a gold mine, in the heart of yonder hill."

"A gold mine!" I returned, in accents of deep disappointment. "Surely that is nothing to get into such a tremendous state of excitement about. We have no tools with which to work it, and—"

"Tools!" repeated Cunningham with withering scorn; "we have all the tools we shall need. See this," and he produced from his pocket a nodule of a dull, reddish-yellow colour, of irregular shape, and about the size of a small egg. "I picked this out of the soil with my fingers. And there is plenty more where this came from."

I took the nugget in my hand and examined it curiously. There was nothing very remarkable about it excepting its weight, which was very great for an object of its size. But it was gold, without a doubt; I had seen and examined gold nuggets before, and could not be deceived.

"Where did you find this?" I asked, as I passed the thing on to Murdock for his inspection.

"In our cave—or rather in a passage leading from it to this beach," answered Cunningham, who had by this time regained his composure. "You see," he continued, "the way of it was this. I have finished my calculations and drawings—finished them rather earlier to-day than I expected; and I thought that, as I had an hour or two to spare, I might as well employ the time in giving the cavern a thorough overhaul. Accordingly I provided myself with some dry branches to serve as torches, lighted up, and proceeded to look round. Then I found that, as I have more than once suspected, there was an opening at the back end of the cavern, giving access to another chamber almost as large as the one which we occupy; while beyond that again there are other passages and chambers—seven of the latter in all—communicating with each other, and ending in a long, tortuous cleft forming a passage which leads out there, behind those bushes. But it is the last chamber of all, the one nearest in this direction, that is the marvel. Unlike the others—all rock chambers—the one about which I am now speaking is a great hollow in what appears to be a 'fault' of stiff clay; and, man alive, that clay is as thick with gold nuggets as a pudding is thick with plums! There must be more than a hundredweight of nuggets actually in sight, protruding from the walls and floor of that chamber, every one of which may be picked out with no other tools than a man's fingers; so what there is hidden, and just waiting to be dug out, heaven only knows, but there must be tons upon tons of it! Come and see for yourselves. Never mind about your work for the rest of the day, come and look at your fortunes; it is not every day that you will see such a sight, I give you my word."

Well, of course, you will guess that we did not need a second invitation. There were we, five men cast away upon an uncharted island in mid-Pacific, far from all the usual ship tracks; our hopes of rescue consisting in the possibility that we might be taken off, sooner or later, by a stray whaler, or, failing that, of effecting our escape eventually in a craft to be built by ourselves—provided that we should prove possessed of the requisite skill to build her out of the materials at our disposal. At that moment, and under those circumstances, gold was just about as valueless to us as the pebbles on the beach; yet such is the magic of the word that no sooner was gold mentioned than we all incontinently dropped our tools, and, quite forgetting that it might be our fate never to escape at all from the island, eagerly followed Cunningham, consumed with impatience to view this wonderful find of his.

And wonderful, in truth, it was. The way to it was through what Cunningham had aptly described as a cleft, the outer extremity of which was in the face of the cliff, so completely concealed from the beach by a clump of bushes that it might never have been discovered, except by the merest accident. The cleft was exceedingly tortuous as to direction, narrow, so low that in places it was necessary to go down upon hands and knees to effect a passage, full of awkward and unexpected projections, rough and uneven of floor, with here and there little pools of water which had dripped from the roof and sides. We traversed about a mile of this, and then suddenly emerged into a great, shapeless hollow in what appeared to be a wide stratum of stiff brown clay, sandwiched between two almost vertical layers of sandstone, which seemed to have been turned over during some tremendous natural convulsion, perhaps when the island was hove up above the surface of the sea. And what Cunningham had said respecting the abundance of gold was strictly and literally true: the nuggets were as thickly arranged, proportionately, as raisins in a Christmas pudding; there were hundreds of them in sight, singly, at distances apart of not much more than a foot, and in little groups of half a dozen or more, almost touching each other. Within two minutes I dug out, with my fingers only, a nugget shaped somewhat like a potato and as big as an orange, and the dislodging of that revealed another sticking in the clay behind it. Naturally we all with one accord went to work picking out nuggets, some using our bare fingers only, while those who happened to have knives about them used them. In the course of half an hour we had each picked out as many nuggets as we could dispose about our persons, and then the lessening number of torches warned us that it was high time to beat a retreat; but our labours seemed to have produced no visible effect, for where we had removed one nugget we had, as a rule, disclosed another. I estimated that, during that short half-hour, each of us had collected an average of about seven pounds weight of gold.

Now, for a day or two after this discovery, it threatened to be a most serious misfortune; for the ability to acquire large quantities of gold at the mere cost of the exertion necessary to pick it out of the soil appealed so strongly to the boatswain, carpenter, and sailmaker that during the two days immediately following Cunningham's sensational

announcement they absolutely refused to do any work whatever except dig out nuggets of gold, and the more they gathered the more eager did they appear to be to gather more. But at the end of that time, the fact that Cunningham and I had steadfastly refrained from the display of any anxiety to share in their good fortune, having, on the contrary, pursued the task of breaking up the wreck, together with our reiterated insistence on the greater importance of the work upon which we were engaged, steadied them a bit; and by the end of the second day we detected signs that the sharp edge of their enthusiasm had worn off, and that they were once more beginning to think. Then Cunningham and I proceeded to remind them of a fact to which, at the outset, they stubbornly refused to listen, namely, that we knew where the gold was, and could get it at any time; but the matter which most vitally concerned us was to get the schooner built and in the water as quickly as possible, so that, should it become necessary for us to quit the island in haste, we might have the means to do so. The three recalcitrants came to see this at last, persuaded thereto, perhaps, by a rather exaggerated attitude of indifference to the gold on the part of Cunningham and myself, and an equally exaggerated anxiety to push on with the schooner; with the ultimate result that on the morning of the third day they rather shamefacedly announced their readiness to turn-to again, and accompanied us to South-west Bay. But what put the finishing touch to the matter was Cunningham's audacious proposal to ballast the schooner entirely with gold, and sail in her direct home to England. This idea very strongly appealed to their somewhat crude imaginations, especially when the engineer took a sheet of paper and proved to them by figures that if we could obtain gold enough to carry out this plan, the value of it, equally divided among the five of us, would enable each to bank upward of half a million; which, if judiciously invested, would provide us with an income of somewhere about two thousand pounds sterling per month! Such figures as these naturally appealed to men whose incomes hitherto had amounted to about five pounds per month, and they were immediately all on fire to build the Schooner, if only to see how much gold she could be induced to carry as ballast.

Had there been a shipwright in our party he would probably have been intensely amused at the lightheartedness and assured confidence with which we approached the task of building a schooner, small, certainly, but complete in every respect, out of the timbers and planking of the dismembered *Martha Brown*. I do not believe that anyone excepting myself had the slightest suspicion of the difficulties that we were so cheerfully facing; but by the time that we had got the keel blocks laid, and were preparing to shape and put together the keel, it began to dawn upon us that we had undertaken a distinctly formidable task, and one in which we might very easily fail should we once permit ourselves to become discouraged. Indeed, the getting out of the keel was in itself a work of such difficulty that Chips more than once threw down his tools and pronounced the task impossible, demanding the revision and simplification of the design.

But Cunningham was deeply in love with the design which he had worked out with so much care—and so indeed was I; therefore we resolutely resisted Parsons' demands, and insisted that all that was needed was patience and the resolution to take the necessary pains, and in the end we got our own way and the work proceeded. But it proceeded with what, to me, was painful slowness, there being days occasionally on which the embryo ship presented precisely the same appearance when we knocked off work in the evening that she had done when we started in the morning, the whole day having been consumed in cutting out and putting together the several pieces of timber which were subsequently to be worked into her hull. Nevertheless, patience and perseverance worked wonders, and by and by, after we had been steadily at work for close upon six months, a day came when we were able to stand and gaze admiringly at the completed skeleton of as smart a little vessel as I ever set eyes upon. If she possessed a fault in my eyes it was that she presented altogether too smart an appearance, being, in model, nothing less than an exceedingly beautiful little yacht; and according to my merchant seaman's view of the matter a forty-foot yacht was not precisely the kind of craft best adapted to navigate the thousands of miles of ocean that lay between ourselves and home. Yet when Cunningham challenged me to point out what I regarded as faults, I was met at every turn by arguments which seemed quite unanswerable, so that at last I was driven to take refuge in the adage that the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and to acknowledge that if the vessel only behaved half as well as her designer asserted she would, I should be more than satisfied.

Now, although there were five of us—all young and in the very pink of condition—engaged upon the work of building the schooner, there were times when the united strength of all hands scarcely sufficed to accomplish some particular task, such as the setting up of a pair of frames, or the bending and fastening of a stringer; consequently we welcomed, almost literally with open arms, the arrival of two able-bodied assistants, who came to us under somewhat singular circumstances.

From the day of the wreck, when we found ourselves castaways, up to the moment when, as I have said above, we were able to gaze upon the complete skeleton of our new schooner, we had enjoyed an uninterrupted continuance of perfect weather; but a few days after the date referred to the Trade wind died away, and all the indications pointed toward the approach of another hurricane. And indeed we were allowed barely sufficient time to make everything about the shipyard secure when our anticipations were realised by the outburst of a hurricane which, if it was not as violent as the one that had shipwrecked us, was more than sufficiently so to compel us completely to suspend our building operations for two whole days. These we spent in the cavern diligently and systematically digging for gold, under the direction and supervision of Cunningham; and I may as well mention here that the results of the two days' labours demonstrated that we had been lucky enough to stumble upon what is probably the most fabulously rich "pocket" of gold nuggets that has ever been discovered by man.

The gale broke some time during the night of the second day, and when we awoke and turned out on the following morning the weather had reverted to its normal delightful conditions, and only a heavy south-westerly sea remained as evidence of what had been. I think I have already mentioned that it was our habit to proceed to and fro between North and South-west Bays in the catamaran, in preference to tramping two miles overland in the tropical heat; but on this particular day we walked, being of opinion that it was hardly desirable to expose the catamaran to the strain of a trip round the end of the island in so steep and heavy a sea. Knocking-off work at the usual time, we climbed the cliffs and proceeded to walk back to North Bay across the plateau, the boatswain, carpenter, and sailmaker leading the way, while Cunningham and I followed, about a hundred yards behind, a distance which was more than sufficient to allow the trio to get out of sight ahead of us. And as Cunningham and I sauntered along very slowly we had no

expectation of seeing anything more of Murdock and his companions until our arrival at the cave; consequently we were a little surprised, upon our emerging from the jungle, to find the three seamen standing in the open, upon the highest point of the plateau, all gazing intently to seaward.

"What is it, Murdock?" I shouted, as we hastened our steps to join them. "Anything in sight?"

"Why, yes, Mr Temple," answered the boatswain, facing round toward us. "There's something floatin', about a couple o' mile off there, that looks like a boat with people in her."

"A boat!" I ejaculated. "Where away? Show me!"

"Come here, sir, and stand where I am," replied Murdock. Then, as I took up a position on the spot indicated, the man placed himself behind me, and proceeded to point over my shoulder.

"See that there low bush, yonder, Mr Temple, just in line with my finger?" he demanded. "Very well, then. Just run your eye along about a p'int, or maybe a little more, to the west'ard, and—there! d'ye see her, sir? Ah, now she's vanished again in the trough. But you keep your eye gazin' in that direction and you'll—there she is again! See her, sir?"

"Ay, I do," said I, as I caught a momentary glimpse of a small dark object which appeared for a moment, hovering on the crest of a sea, and then sank out of sight again. And, as Murdock had said, it certainly presented very much the appearance of a small boat drifting slowly away toward the south-west before the freshening Trade wind. Moreover, although the glimpse I had caught had been but momentary, I thought I had detected the appearance of what might very well be a crouching human figure sitting in her. Presently I got another sight of the thing, and my impression that it was indeed a boat—or possibly a canoe—with one or more persons in her was so greatly strengthened that I determined there and then to investigate.

"I really believe you are right, Murdock," said I. "At all events it looks so much like a boat—with people in her—that we certainly ought to satisfy ourselves. So, come along, one of you; we'll take the catamaran and go off to her. If it really is a boat, and there are people in her, it is very evident that they are too utterly exhausted to make the island, and if they miss it they will inevitably perish. Come along; we have not a moment to waste if we are to save the daylight."

With one accord each of my companions stepped forward, eager to accompany me the moment that there was a question of saving life; but I needed only one man, and I chose Murdock, as being the smartest seaman and the strongest man among them: and without further ado we took to our heels and raced to the beach, I shouting over my shoulder to Cunningham to stay where he was and guide us by signalling with his hands the direction in which we should steer.

As I had said, we had not a moment to waste, for the sun's disk was even then within a finger's breadth of the horizon, and darkness followed sunset with amazing swiftness in that latitude. Murdock and I therefore ran at our utmost speed to the beach, cast adrift the catamaran, sprang aboard her, thrust her head offshore, and then threw ourselves upon the halyards and mast-headed the yard, when I seized the steering paddle and headed the craft for an opening between the breakers on the reef, while Murdock stationed himself beside me, with his hand shielding his eyes as he stared seaward, anxiously watching for the first glimpse of the object of which we were in pursuit.

For the moment, however, his efforts were useless, as he and I both knew, for the object had been so far to the westward when last seen that we could not hope to sight her until we were fairly beyond the limits of the bay; and when this at length happened the upper edge of the sun's disk was just visible above the western horizon, sinking beneath it at the precise moment when the catamaran shot through the opening between two formidable walls of breakers, which were dashing themselves into spray thirty feet high as they hurled themselves upon the lava reef.

The boat, or whatever it was, ought now to be within the range of our vision, and Murdock intently scrutinised the darkening sea ahead for some sign of it, but in vain. Then he turned his glances shoreward and saw Cunningham standing on the verge of the bluff, vigorously waving us to keep away.

"Put up your hellum a bit, sir," he admonished me, with his eye still upon Cunningham; then—"Steady!" as he saw the engineer fling both hands above his head, and almost at the same instant I caught the faintest glimpse imaginable of a small dark spot appearing for a moment in ghostly fashion against the creaming head of a distant breaker, just clear of the lower end of our lateen yard.

"There she is!" I exclaimed, and as I spoke a star glimmered out of the deepening blue almost immediately above the spot where the object had appeared.

"Where away, sir?" demanded the boatswain, again peering ahead under the sharp of his hand.

"Do you see that star?" I responded, pointing with my disengaged hand. "Well, she is about half a point to the westward—there she is again, straight ahead!"

"I see her, sir; I see her," answered Murdock. "Steady as you go, Mr Temple, and we're bound to pick her up."

I thought so too, although the darkness was falling about us with the rapidity of a sea fog gathering. Still, the star was a splendid guide, and steering by it we caught two or three additional glimpses of the object before the darkness completely enveloped us. Moreover, the catamaran was slashing along at racing speed, smothering us with spray every time she hit the crest of a wave; and now my chief fear was that this same spray might so effectually conceal our surroundings at the precise moment when we most needed to see, namely, when we were surmounting a comber, that we might unwittingly overshoot our mark. Therefore at very brief intervals I admonished Murdock to

“keep his eyes skinned”, at the same time myself keeping as sharp a lookout as I could. I estimated that, with the breeze then blowing, we ought to cover the distance between the object and ourselves in about six or seven minutes after clearing the reef, but I had no means of judging the time, except by guesswork, out there in the darkness, and I was on tenterhooks lest we should miss the thing and stand too far out, when the chances would be all against our picking her up on the return journey. Therefore at last, feeling that we must be pretty close to the object of our quest, I sent Murdock forward, believing that he would have a better chance of picking her up from there than by standing alongside me, although his figure would greatly obscure my own view.

Accordingly the boatswain went right forward into the very eyes of the catamaran, where he would be clear of the heaviest of the flying spray; and he had scarcely taken his station when, without looking round, he suddenly shouted:

“There she is, sir! Keep her away or you’ll be on to her; hard up, sir! So, steady! Now, hard down and shake her. That’ll do, sir; keep her at that. Luff a bit yet, sir. So, steady!” and, dashing aft, the boatswain snatched up a small coil of line that we had made ready for the purpose, and hurled himself recklessly at a dark mass that at that moment came sliding close past what had been our lee side before I luffed the catamaran into the wind. I heard the splashing clatter of his boots as he landed upon certain objects that sounded like loose paddles lying washing about in the bottom of the canoe—for such I now saw the craft to be; saw him stoop, as though making fast the rope he had taken with him; and then he shouted: “All fast, sir; let her go off!” I put up the helm of the catamaran, and as she fell off and began to gather fresh way Murdock hauled his prize up alongside and scrambled out of her, snubbing the towline to a length of about two fathoms.

“It’s a canoe, sir,” he reported as he rose to his feet beside me, “and there’s people aboard her—natives—four or five, I sh’d say, though I didn’t stop to count ’em; and I’m blest if I know whether they’re alive or dead, but I think there must be life in one of ’em at least, for when I jumped into her I stumbled over one, and I thought I heard a groan.”

“Well,” said I, “I hope we have been in time to save the poor beggars. I suspect that they belong to the island that is visible from the crater, about a hundred miles to the south-west of us, and that they were caught in the gale and blown out to sea. If so, they have been at sea three whole nights and two days, drenched all the time with the flying spray, buffeted with the wind, and labouring hard all the while to keep their cockleshell of a craft afloat. And these islanders are not very tough when it comes to facing prolonged exposure of that kind.”

We got the catamaran round and headed her for the island, with the canoe in tow, the carpenter having been thoughtful enough to light a fire on the beach to serve as a guide to us; and a quarter of an hour later we were ashore again, with Cunningham, Chips, and Sails tenderly lifting five natives out of the half-swamped canoe and laying them on the sand, close to the fire, while Murdock and I secured the catamaran. By the time that we had done this, Cunningham had got to work upon the new arrivals, in two of whom he found signs of life, while the other three he pronounced doubtful. Then, under his directions, we each took a body, which we proceeded vigorously to chafe and slap with our bare hands, varying the treatment with occasional attempts to administer a little stimulant, with the object of restoring the suspended circulation of the blood; and eventually—not to dwell at unnecessary length upon this episode—we succeeded in restoring two of them, but the remaining three defied our utmost efforts, although we worked at them until late into the night. Then, having bountifully fed the two survivors, we left them to dispose of themselves as they would for the night, and retired to our cavern.

Chapter Fourteen.

Mokalua and Vati.

When we turned out on the following morning our two resuscitated savages were nowhere to be seen, and the bodies of the three dead had also vanished; but a glance in the direction of the beach showed that they were still somewhere on the island, for their canoe lay hauled up on the sand, alongside the catamaran, where we had left her on the previous night, and the prints of their naked feet on the sand indicated that they had made some three or four journeys to the eastern extremity of the bay. We therefore concluded that the two were performing the obsequies of their departed companions, and made no endeavour to discover their whereabouts, taking it for granted that they would reappear when they had disposed of their dead to their satisfaction. While we were partaking of breakfast a big cloud of smoke arose from the woods situated at the eastern extremity of the bay, causing us to surmise that the dead were at that moment undergoing the process of cremation; but we made no attempt to investigate, leaving the savages to their own devices for that day, and proceeding to the shipyard as usual immediately after breakfast.

Shortly after midday our two savages hove in sight, making their way down the cliff path to the shipyard, having evidently followed the path over the plateau which we had beaten in our frequent passages to and fro between the two bays. They displayed no fear of us, approaching us without the slightest hesitation, but exhibiting more curiosity than any natives with whom I had thus far been brought into contact. They seemed to be filled with astonishment at the whiteness of our skins when, following our usual custom, we discarded our scanty clothing and plunged into the sea for a few minutes before partaking of our midday meal; and did not appear to be able to understand how it was that, while our faces, necks, hands, and arms were almost as dark as their own skins, the remaining portions of our bodies, ordinarily protected from the sun by our clothing, should be so very much lighter. They were not oppressed by any feeling of false modesty or bashfulness, but examined us minutely at close quarters, jabbering together with the utmost animation all the while and lightly running their fingers over our arms and necks, with the apparent purpose of finding the join in the differently coloured portions of our skin.

This was all very well, of course, and sufficiently amusing to all concerned; but now that these two savages had come to us we quite intended to make use of them, and allow them to work for their living. Therefore, as soon as we had resumed our clothing, Murdock undertook the task of making known our intentions and wishes to our dusky friends.

And the way he did it was amusing enough. In common with others of his kind he had repeatedly been brought into contact with foreigners of various nationalities, both civilised and savage, but he had one simple method of communicating with them all, a method which he was firmly convinced must be efficacious in exact proportion to the measure of intelligence possessed by the persons with whom he desired to communicate; and that method was to speak to the stranger in broken English! For example, he proposed to set these two natives to the task of collecting fuel for the purpose of cooking the fish which Chips and Sails were about to catch for our midday meal by going offshore a short distance in the catamaran; and the way he did it was something like this.

Turning to the two natives, he poked first one and then the other on the naked chest with his forefinger, to secure their attention, and then proceeded to remark, with much flourishing of his hands:

“Now then, Johnnie, and you, Jim, come along wi’ me and gather firewood. Savvy?”

To this the natives naturally responded with a blank stare of non-comprehension, gradually merging into a broad smile. Then, seeing that his first attempt had not been exactly a success, the boatswain proceeded upon his usual lines. Assuming an aspect of intense earnestness, and holding his forefinger up before them, he continued:

“Now, lookee here, you coffee-coloured sweeps, me wantee you come alonga me and catchee plenty wood for makee fire cookee fis’ that them two men are goin’ for catchee. Now, then, d’ye savvy that?”

The intonation of his concluding words no doubt conveyed to the minds of his hearers the idea that he was asking a question, for the two savages turned to each other and exchanged a few words. Then the elder, with a broad smile, pointed first to himself and uttered the word “Mokalua”—which we easily understood must be his name—and then to his companion, pronouncing the word “Vati”, which was as certainly the name of the other. So evident was this that even Murdock understood it, and, proud of his quick comprehension, hastened to display his cleverness by prodding the first native in the chest and remarking:

“Ay, ay; that’s easy enough to understand: your name’s Mokalua, and yours,”—turning to the other—“is Vati. That’s all right; I can see that we’ll soon get to understand each other. Now then, Mokalua and Vati, let’s have another try. Me wantee plenty much firewood, so you two come and helpy me gatheree it. Comprenny?”

Further blank looks from the natives, at which the boatswain lost his patience; and, clutching Mokalua by the wrist, while he seized the unhappy Vati by the shoulder and violently swung him round with his face toward the cliffs, he exclaimed savagely:

“Here, come along o’ me, you two! You’re like the monkeys; you can understand, but you won’t, for fear o’ bein’ put to work! But you don’t get over me quite so easily as that, my sons; I’ve had that trick tried on me before, but it didn’t come off, and it ain’t comin’ off now. You’ve got to work for your livin’ while you’re on this here hisland, and don’t you forget it. Can’t understand my language, can’t ye? Well, I can speak another language with my boot—”

I saw that the time had arrived for me to interfere. Murdock was rapidly working himself up into a rage, and when he was angry he was a little apt to be violent; also he was an exceptionally powerful man, while the two natives whom he held in his grasp were still weak from semi-starvation and long exposure, and were beginning to look rather frightened. Now I did not want them to be frightened, I wanted to win their confidence, so I stepped forward and gently removed the boatswain’s grasp from the persons of his prisoners, saying:

“There, that will do, Murdock; don’t get excited, man, because these two bronze images cannot understand you. You cannot understand them, you know, so you are quits. We shall just have to be patient with them, and treat them kindly; and I have no doubt that in due time they will learn to understand what we want them to do.” Then, turning to the two wide-eyed savages, and trusting that they would at least understand the intonation of my voice, I patted them both good-naturedly on the shoulder and said, in English of course:

“That’s all right. Don’t you be afraid of him, he’ll not hurt you; he’s quite a good-natured chap. But he wants you to go with him to the woods yonder; so run along,” and I first pointed to the jungle, then to Murdock, patted them encouragingly on the back, and finally waved my hand toward the cliffs.

That I was tolerably successful in a general sort of way was at once evident, for the expression of mingled fear and savagery on Mokalua’s features at once vanished, giving place to a smile; he nodded his head, pointed to Murdock, himself, and Vati, waved his hand toward the woods, said a few quick words to his companion, and at once set off at a brisk walk toward the cliff path, accompanied by the two others, the trio returning about twenty minutes later with an abundant supply of dry twigs and branches, with which they at once proceeded to build the constituents of a fire. But it was evident, from their actions and their quick, earnest interchange of remarks, that the two were exceedingly curious as to how we were going to set light to the wood, now that we had it; and they looked on with the most absorbed interest while Cunningham took a little dry moss in his hand and focused the sun’s rays upon it with a burning-glass, afterwards fanning it into a flame by gently whirling it in the air; and I shall not readily forget their amazement when the moss burst into flame and Cunningham thrust it into the heart of the heap of sticks. When Cunningham made to return the lens to his pocket, Mokalua held out his hand and said something which we readily understood to be a request that he might be permitted to look at it: and when the engineer handed it over to him the native first examined it with wondering eyes, turning it about in his hands, holding it up, and becoming quite eloquent in the expression of his amazement when his quick eye detected the inverted image of the landscape seen through it; then, after one or two futile attempts, he succeeded in focusing the rays of the sun upon his naked arm, giving a little yelp as he felt the sting of the heat. Finally, with a laugh, he handed the lens back to Cunningham; but there was a covetous look in his eyes as he did so which caused me to utter a word of warning to the engineer lest he should awake some fine morning and discover that his burning-glass had mysteriously vanished.

In such manner, and to the accompaniment of quite a number of amusing little incidents, did Mokalua and Vati become members of our small community. And glad enough were we all to have them, for the awkwardness and

inconvenience arising from our inability to understand each other's speech soon passed away, the two savages manifesting an extraordinary aptitude to adapt themselves to the situation, and an equally extraordinary facility in the comprehension of what was required of them; so that they rapidly became of very material value to us, catching more fish than the party could consume, gathering our firewood for us, teaching us new methods of cooking, and assisting us in the more laborious portions of our shipyard work. Thus by the time they had been with us some three or four months we began to wonder how we had ever contrived to rub along at all without them.

Their one fault was an ineradicable propensity to steal anything and everything that they could lay their hands upon, especially nails—which, it will be understood, were of very considerable value to us, situated as we then were. But their most serious peccadillo, and the one which had the most disastrous results, was their theft of a brace of revolvers and a number of cartridges. We had no occasion to make use of our firearms until the two savages had been with us about five months; then on a certain day we made the disagreeable discovery that South-west Bay had been invaded by a school of some seven or eight orcas, or killer whales, the most voracious and ferocious creatures that swim the seas, being even more terrible than the white shark, although not quite so big as he is. When we first became aware of the presence of these tigers of the sea in our bay we were not greatly concerned, being under the impression that theirs was only a flying visit, and that they would disappear in the course of an hour or so, and be no more seen. But when on the following day they were seen to be still present, and when, further, they chose to amuse themselves by snatching the fish off the hooks, we came to the conclusion that it was time to declare war upon those orcas, for so long as they remained in the bay we might not dare to bathe.

Accordingly we armed ourselves with revolvers, put a boarding pike and cutlass into the hand of each of the savages, and went out in the catamaran to attack and drive away the orcas. And a very fierce and desperate battle we had with them too, for they proved to be full of fight, charging the catamaran with the evident intention of destroying it; and during the two hours that the fight raged we experienced several exceedingly narrow escapes from destruction by the wounded cetaceans, though we drove them off at last, after killing all but two, while the survivors were so desperately wounded that they no doubt died very shortly after reaching the open ocean.

The most important point, however, in connection with this incident was that the two savages then saw revolvers used for the first time; and the flash, the report, and, above all, the undoubted fact that in some mysterious fashion they were able to wound and even to kill at the distance of a spear-cast, absolutely fascinated them. Nothing would satisfy them but that they must possess a revolver apiece, and the very next day they stole a brace, together with some fifty cartridges; and having watched us intently, and thus acquired a smattering of knowledge of how to use the weapons, took to the woods, where, later on, we heard them popping away in the most reckless fashion. That, of course, was an offence which it would never do to overlook; therefore we sallied forth, captured the culprits, took the revolvers and the half-dozen or so remaining cartridges from them, and having first read them a severe lecture—one of many such—upon the heinousness of stealing, endeavoured to create a lasting impression upon their minds by inflicting upon each a severe rope's-ending. Four days later we found that they and their canoe, together with several small articles—Cunningham's burning-glass among the number—had vanished.

Now this was likely enough to prove a very serious matter for us, for several important reasons. In the first place, Mokalua and Vati had proved to be individuals possessed of quite a considerable amount of intelligence, for savages. They had spent five months with us, during which they had come to know the island intimately; and doubtless they had perceived, among other things, that it was capable of supporting some five hundred fellow savages in what, to them, would be a condition of ease and affluence. Also, they knew that there were but five of us, possessing several things which to them represented such incalculable wealth that no effort on their part to acquire it would be regarded as too great. Therefore we at once jumped to the conclusion that, animated by a deep sense of resentment at the indignity which we had inflicted upon them by flogging them, and possibly also spurred on by an overpowering cupidity, they had determined to risk their very lives in an attempt to return to their own island, there to report all that they had seen and learned during their sojourn with us, with the object of stirring up their fellow islanders to organise an expedition against us.

Strongly impressed with the conviction that this was really what had happened, Simpson, the sailmaker, and I hastened to stock the catamaran with provisions and water enough to last us for four days, and forthwith proceeded to sea, heading in the direction of the island which lay to leeward of us, in the hope of overtaking the two savages before they could arrive at their destination, and inducing them, either by persuasion or by force, to return with us. And we were fully justified in hoping that we should be successful, for the catamaran was a wonderfully speedy craft, especially before the wind; we calculated that the savages would scarcely average more than four knots per hour paddling in the open sea, even with the wind in their favour, while the catamaran would do ten easily. Consequently we should cover in ten hours a distance which they would need twenty-five hours to traverse; and, since they would probably not have more than nine hours' start of us, we ought to catch them long before they could arrive at their island.

It was about eight o'clock in the morning when we started, and the moment that we were clear of the reef I bore up dead before the wind; and thereafter all that was necessary was to keep the catamaran running straight before it. We took it for granted that the fugitives, like ourselves, would avail themselves of the direction of the wind as a guide, consequently we assumed that they were somewhere—probably about thirty-six miles—directly ahead of us when we bore away, and a very simple calculation enabled us to determine that, if all our data happened to be correct, we ought to overtake the canoe about two o'clock in the afternoon. Therefore for the first four hours of our pursuit we troubled ourselves only to maintain as straight a course as possible. At the end of that time, however, or about midday—by which time our own island was out of sight astern, while the other had not yet hove up above the horizon—I deemed it advisable to take a look round. Accordingly, turning over the steering paddle to Simpson, I shinned up to the catamaran's masthead, and remained there for fully five minutes, intently scrutinising the surface of the sea in every direction, my range of vision at that elevation covering a circle of about nine miles radius. But there was nothing in sight, at which I was in nowise surprised, as I estimated that the canoe was still about twelve miles ahead of us. I calculated, however, that we were gaining upon her at the rate of about six miles an hour, in which case she ought to be on the horizon's verge in the course of another half-hour; therefore at the expiration of that time I again

went aloft, and was just a trifle disappointed to find the horizon still bare. However, I was quite certain that a run of another half-hour would suffice to bring her into view, therefore at one o'clock I again ascended to the masthead, quite prepared to see her directly ahead. But again I was disappointed, for the horizon was bare in every direction, save for the fact that, as straight ahead of us as though we had seen and been steering for it all the while, there was a delicate blue shape, which I instantly recognised as the upper part of the island that we had seen from the lip of the crater on our own island.

I was decidedly nonplussed at the fact that the fugitives were still invisible, and knew not how to account for it. True, the sea was a trifle heavy for navigation in so frail a craft as a small canoe, yet the two savages were experts in the handling of such craft, and it was therefore scarcely likely that they had met with a mishap of any description—indeed, all that was needed to ensure their perfect safety was to keep the canoe dead before the sea, and she would go along without shipping a drop of water; even I, comparatively inexpert as I was, would not have hesitated to undertake such a voyage, under the influence of so powerful an inducement as that which we suspected to animate the two natives. There was one other possible explanation, of which I thought as I stood up there on the swaying yard, and that was that the fugitives might have secured a piece of canvas, or material of some kind, out of which they had manufactured a sail; in which case their speed would no doubt be considerably higher than that which we had estimated, and all our calculations would need revision. Considerably perturbed at the thought, I descended to the deck and mentioned the matter to Simpson, who agreed with me that it was quite possible our dark friends might have taken the precaution to provide themselves with a sail when they had made up their minds to return to their own island—for we had not allowed ourselves time before our departure to overhaul our belongings in detail, and ascertain the precise extent of their depredations.

Even if they had not stolen any of our canvas, they were past masters of the art of mat making, and might easily have plaited for themselves a sail of fine grass, which would answer their purpose almost as well as one made of canvas. And if they had done that, what would their speed probably be? The canoe was only a small craft of about twenty-four feet long by about four feet beam, and with two men in her she would probably run before wind and sea at a speed of about six and a half knots. Then, still allowing her to have had nine hours' start of us, we came to the disconcerting conclusion that at the precise moment when we were discussing the question she must be within ten miles of her destination, while we still had a run of some fifty miles before us. In that case, of course, it was hopeless for us to dream of overtaking her: nevertheless I did not intend to abandon the chase until I had fully satisfied myself that the fugitives had made good their escape; therefore we continued to stand on, hour after hour, until, by the time that the sun was within half an hour of his setting, we had brought the strange island "hull-up" on the horizon ahead, and had satisfied ourselves that there was no canoe between it and us.

It was a considerably more extensive island than our own, being about twenty miles long from north to south, somewhat rugged of surface, with plenty of trees dotted about here and there, and wide patches of cleared ground in between, upon which crops of various kinds seemed to be growing. It rose rather steeply from the water's surface to a height of some fifty or sixty feet, and then went sweeping grandly away to right and left in a constantly steepening slope, which culminated in a lofty, isolated peak occupying practically the centre of the island.

When we had run in close enough to note all these details I brought the wind over the catamaran's port quarter and headed her so as to pass to the southward of the island, being determined, now that I had come so far, to sail right round it and see as much as I could of it.

The sun was just dipping beneath the horizon when, having brought the most southerly extremity of the island square upon our starboard beam, some two miles distant, we shifted our helm, and, jibing over, brought the wind on our starboard quarter, hauling up to the northward and westward to skirt the lee side of the island. This course soon brought us in under the lee of the land and into smooth water, when, maintaining an offing of about two miles, that we might not be becalmed and so invite the risk of capture by a dash of canoes from the shore, we quietly coasted along the lee side of the island, which we now discovered to be roughly crescent-shaped in plan, with a deep indentation on the west side protected by a barrier reef, and thus forming a magnificent natural harbour, some eight miles long from north to south by about six miles wide from east to west. A fine sandy beach skirted the whole margin of this indentation, scattered along which, at brief intervals, we caught sight of some ten or twelve little villages of palm-leaf huts nestling in the midst of luxuriant coconut groves, the land behind them soaring steeply away to the summit of the cone. And abreast of each village the beach was dotted with canoes, some of which were big enough to carry forty or fifty men. But nowhere did we see a sign of the canoe of which we were in pursuit; and ultimately we were driven to the conclusion that she had made the run across under sail, and had secured a sufficiently long start to enable her to make good her escape.

It was about four bells in the first watch when we ran out from under the lee of the island and once more felt the full strength of the Trade wind, which in the interim had freshened up until it was now blowing a single-reefed topsail breeze; and at once the catamaran began to deluge us with spray as we brought her close to the wind and started on our long beat back to our own island. And now it became necessary for me to use a little discretion, lest I should miss the island altogether; for it was far below the horizon, and I had neither chronometer nor sextant to help me to find it again, all I knew as to its position being that it lay about a hundred miles dead to windward. Therefore I held on upon the starboard tack until midnight, and thereafter tacked every four hours, knowing that by following this plan we should be certain to pick it up sooner or later. And so we did, catching our first glimpse of it shortly after nine o'clock the next morning, when it hove into view above the horizon broad on our port bow, rising a little higher as we brought it abeam, and then gradually sinking again as it swung aft to our port quarter. As soon as it sank out of sight we hove the catamaran about, when it quickly reappeared, rising steadily above the horizon, and this time showing much higher and more clearly before it began to sink again. Finally, about six o'clock, just before sunset, we slid into North Bay once more and beached the catamaran, much to the relief of our companions, who were beginning to grow somewhat anxious as to how our queer-shaped craft would stand the continuous strain of beating to windward for many hours at a stretch against the strong wind and heavy sea.

Now that the pursuit was over and had failed, and we were all together again, we began to realise, as we discussed

the incident, just what the flight of those two natives meant to us. It meant several things: and each one of them spelt d-a-n-g-e-r to us in big black letters; danger of the most imminent and deadly kind; danger which was liable now to swoop down upon us at any moment, and, if it caught us unprepared, simply to wipe us out of existence. In a word, it meant that if those two fugitives had succeeded in reaching their own island—as we had only too much reason to believe was the case—we were liable at any moment to an invasion in force from their fellow islanders; and if we could not repel that invasion, or, better still, effect our own escape before it happened, we could hope for nothing short of annihilation. Long and anxiously we discussed the question that night; and the decision at which we finally arrived was that if Mokalua and Vati had indeed reached their own island it would probably take them at least a week to gain the ear of the chiefs, tell the story of their own sojourn with us, and stir them up to such a condition of cupidity as would induce them to undertake an expedition against us. And when they had accomplished so much it would probably take them another week to organise the expedition and get across to us, possibly even longer, if the Trade wind continued to blow strongly. We considered, therefore, that we had about a fortnight in which to complete our preparations; and the question then arose whether these preparations should be of a defensive character, or whether, by working hard, we could complete the schooner, ballast her, get her into the water, and leave the island before the expected invasion took place.

Common sense pointed to the latter alternative as by far the wiser of the two; the only difficulty was that we were by no means sure that we could accomplish it. Fortunately for us, although we had put the most implicit faith in the fidelity of Mokalua and Vati, we had never allowed them to become aware of the existence of the subterranean passage from our dwelling cave to South-west Bay: therefore, if the worst should come to the worst, and we were attacked before we were ready to leave the island, we might no doubt barricade ourselves into our cavern and make a good stand there, and perhaps even defend the schooner from destruction, so long as our cartridges held out; but if the invaders should once succeed in effecting a landing upon the island, they could, almost to a dead certainty, prevent us from completing our preparations, launching the schooner, and getting away in her. Finally, the matter seemed to resolve itself into a fight against time, our aim being to complete the schooner and sail in her for home before the savages should arrive upon the scene. In accordance with this arrangement, then, we proceeded with our several labours, commencing work each day the moment that there was light enough to see what we were about, and working steadily on until we could see no longer, encouraged by the thought that although our calculations seemed to indicate the possibility of attack within about a fortnight of the flight of the two natives, the force of circumstances might perhaps afford us a still longer time in which to complete our task.

And with the passage of the days we began to realise that, work as hard as we might, we should need nearly double the time which we believed we had at our disposal if we were to finish our work as it ought to be finished. For while the schooner's hull was complete her deck was only partially laid, and that task had to be completed, together with all deck fittings, such as the companion way and fore scuttle; the seams must be properly caulked and paid, the masts stepped and rigged, the sails finished and bent, the interior fittings, such as bunks, lockers, shelves, and so on, fixed, the water casks stowed and filled, the ballast stowed, provisions collected and put on board, and the little craft generally completed in readiness for sea. True, many of the jobs were trivial and did not need much time to attend to them, but in the aggregate they presented quite a formidable appearance; and lastly, and most formidable of all, there remained the launching ways to finish, the cradle to build, and the wedging up to be done. Taken altogether, the task seemed to be an impossible one, and our only hope lay in the chance that our savage neighbours would so far resemble Mokalua and Vati in character that they would proceed with their preparations for the invasion which we regarded as inevitable with the same placid deliberation and absence of haste that had been such strongly marked characteristics of the two fugitives.

Yet it would not do to count upon this; therefore as soon as we fully realised the impossibility of completing the schooner and getting away in her within the fortnight, we so far modified our plans as to devote a certain amount of time to the putting of our cavern into a condition of defence. Fortunately for us, this was a very simple matter; for the savages knew of only one entrance to the cavern, namely, that in North Bay, and that was so exceedingly small that it might easily be blocked from the inside with a few large stones. And, as luck would have it, stones admirably adapted for the purpose existed in the cavern itself, and only needed moving forward close to the entrance, after which—as we tested by experiments—five minutes' work would suffice to block the opening so effectually that nothing less than a powder charge would ever clear it. Accordingly we divided our weapons and ammunition into two equal parts, one of which parts we put aboard the schooner, while the other we deposited in the mouth of our cavern. Then, having secured ourselves as far as was possible against attack, we returned to our work upon the schooner with redoubled energy.

Dawn of the twenty-third day after the flight of Mokalua and Vati found us in high feather; for the strenuous labour of the preceding three weeks had brought us to the point that a few hours' further work would see the completion of our task, the further work required being that needed to finish the cradle and wedge up, preparatory to launching. We had been working systematically, attending first to those matters which were most urgent, with the result that the schooner was now finished and ready for sea, with ballast—consisting entirely of as much gold in nuggets as Cunningham's calculations showed she could possibly carry—properly stowed, the water casks stowed and filled, provisions on board, masts stepped and rigged, sails bent—in short, everything completed except the fitting and equipment of the cabin, and that, we decided, could be done as easily after our little ship had been launched as while she remained on the stocks. On this particular morning, then, we were, as I have said, all in high feather, for we awoke with the comfortable assurance that, barring accidents, the schooner would be safely afloat before we again lay down to rest.

Now, although we had been working so strenuously during the past three weeks, we had not omitted to take proper precautions against a surprise on the part of the natives, the most important of these precautions consisting in the visit of one of us to the summit of the crater the first thing every morning, from which commanding elevation the sea to the south-west was carefully scanned, with the aid of Cunningham's telescope, in search of the expected flotilla of canoes. The same precaution was observed the last thing before nightfall; and we decided that, should the sea prove to be clear on these occasions, there was not much risk of our being surprised during either of the intervals between.

On the particular morning before referred to it chanced to be my turn to make the journey up the mountain; therefore, taking the telescope in its case from the rock projection in the cavern which was its recognised resting-place, and bidding my companions au revoir, I started out on my three-and-a-half mile walk to the summit, while the others hurried down to the beach, and, getting aboard the catamaran, made sail for South-west Bay, where our shipyard was situated.

Now the whole distance from our cavern to the summit of the crater was uphill, and the day, in addition to being brilliantly fine, was excessively hot, for the Trade wind had softened down on the preceding day, and was now blowing only a very moderate breeze; therefore I did not greatly hurry myself, for my way lay, practically for the whole distance to the foot of the crater, through jungle, where, although I was sheltered to a great extent from the rays of the sun, I was also shielded from the wind, and before I had travelled a mile I was perspiring profusely. But, hot as it was while walking through the jungle, it was hotter still when at length I emerged from its shelter upon the bare hillside; and I had no sooner climbed above the level of the vegetation, and was able to look over the top of it, than I flung myself down upon a big block of lava, took off my hat, and proceeded to wipe away the perspiration which was by this time streaming down my forehead into my eyes and half-blinding me. And it was while I was thus engaged that I happened to allow my gaze to wander away out over the surface of the water in a south-westerly direction; and then I saw a sight which caused me to spring to my feet with a smothered exclamation. For, far out upon the sun-flecked blue of the gently ruffled ocean, I caught a glimpse of first one and then another and another small dark dot, each of which emitted frequent sparkling flashes which I instantly identified as the sunlight striking upon the wet blades of swiftly wielded paddles. With anxious haste I gripped the telescope case, swung it round, withdrew the telescope, raised it to my eyes, and focused it; and there, magnified into unmistakable distinctness by the powerful lenses, I saw no less than ten canoes paddling straight for our island, and only some eight miles distant from West Point, as we had named the headland which projected into the ocean between North and South-west Bays. They were head-on to me, therefore I could not very well judge what size they might be; but I knew that they must be fairly big craft, each carrying a considerable number of men, judging by the multitudinous number of flashes that sparkled from their paddles as they swung rhythmically into and out of the water: and they were all keeping line too, for the whole ten swung up into view together on the crest of a sea, and then disappeared again in the trough, with almost mathematical regularity and precision. Without a doubt the anticipated invasion of our island by the savages was about to take place; and, equally without a doubt too, the invaders must gain a footing upon our territory before we were prepared to quit it, unless a plan could be devised whereby their advance might be delayed for some two or three hours. As these thoughts flashed through my mind I anxiously scanned the surface of the ocean for other canoes, but could find only the ten which I had originally counted. Then, without wasting time in ascending to the summit of the crater, I set off at a run and raced at my utmost speed all the way back to our cavern.

It was downhill all the way, and despite the intense heat I do not think I was more than twenty minutes in covering the distance. Once inside the cavern I provided myself with a sufficient number of torches for my purpose, lighted half a dozen of them to enable me to see what I was about, and then proceeded to block the entrance securely from the inside with the stones which we had already provided for that express purpose. This done, I opened the case of ammunition which we kept stored in the cavern, loaded a gun and a brace of revolvers, thrust the latter in my belt, crammed my pockets and the bosom of my shirt with cartridges, and, seizing a torch, hurried away through the tunnel to the shipyard in South-west Bay, where I found my companions strenuously at work upon the completion of the cradle, blissfully ignorant of the fact that the savages were at that moment within half a dozen miles of us.

They glanced at me with a somewhat startled expression as I dashed down the beach toward them with the gun in my hand and the revolvers in my belt, and my face streaming with perspiration; and Cunningham shouted:

“Hillo, old chap, you’re hot, and look as though you had been hurrying. What’s up? You surely don’t mean to say that —”

“The savages are coming?” I interrupted. “That’s just what I do mean to say, then. They are within half a dozen miles of us at this moment—ten big canoe-loads of them, and they’ll be ashore here and about our ears in two hours from now, unless we can devise some means of preventing them. How are you getting on, Chips? How long will it be before you are ready to wedge up?”

“Not for three or four hours yet, I’m afraid,” answered the carpenter, pausing in his work to consider the matter. “You see, we’ve a good deal to do yet afore we can finish this here cradle, and the wood, bein’ nothin’ but odds and ends like, is comin’ a bit awk’ard—”

“Just so, I quite understand,” I cut in upon his explanation. “Well, carry on, man; don’t stop an instant; we can’t afford to waste so much as a single second just now. Do the best you can with the resources at your command, and work as you never worked before. As for me, I’m going to take out the catamaran to meet those beggars, and see if I can’t hamper them a bit and prevent them from landing here in this bay. I’ve blocked the cavern entrance at the other end, so it won’t matter much where they land so long as they don’t come ashore here. That must be prevented at all costs. I shall want one hand with me to sail the catamaran while I do the fighting. Now, who can best be spared?”

“Why, I think I am the most useless member of the party—” began Cunningham.

“No,” I interrupted him emphatically; “your engineering knowledge should come in very usefully in helping Chips to use up those odds and ends of timber to the best advantage in completing the cradle. You are the man for me, Simpson, so jump now. Get aboard the schooner, open a box of ammunition, and bring me as many cartridges as you can carry, also another gun, in case anything goes wrong with this one. Then join me aboard the catamaran. And now, so long, you chaps; I’m off. Do your level best to finish off and wedge up as soon as possible; and I’ll do what I can to hinder the savages and keep them from landing here. Goodbye!” and, so saying, I turned and ran toward the spot where the catamaran lay with her bows hauled up on the beach.

Chapter Fifteen.

We escape by the Skin of our Teeth.

In a few minutes Sails joined me, with the extra gun and a biscuit tin full of cartridges; and between us we got the catamaran afloat, swung her round with her bows pointing seaward, and both jumped aboard. Then, while I seized the steering paddle, Simpson sprang to the main halyards and hoisted the big lateen sail, which at once filled, when we gathered headway and began to draw away from the shore, heading about south-west out of the bay; and as soon as the sail was fully set and the halyards belayed, Sails came aft and took the helm, while I gave the spare gun an overhaul before loading it.

As we drew out from under the lee of the island and began to feel the true breeze it became apparent that it was fast freshening up again, for we could see the heads of the seas bursting into little patches of white froth here and there, at which I was profoundly grateful; for I felt that a fresh breeze, dead in their teeth, was likely to hamper the progress of the savages quite as much as I could hope to do, and every minute of delay now was worth a gold mine to us. And that the advance of the savages was indeed being retarded by the rapidly freshening breeze soon became apparent, for we were fully three miles offshore when we at length made out the canoes, about two miles to leeward of us, heading straight in for the island.

Running rapidly down toward them, we soon neared them sufficiently to enable us to see that they were big, lumping craft, about sixty feet long by six or seven feet beam, each canoe being manned by about fifty savages, every mother's son of whom was wielding a short, broad-bladed paddle as though his life depended upon it. Yet the canoes were not making very much headway, for they were unwieldy—looking craft, with long, high-peaked, overhanging bows, and sterns which seemed to catch and hold a good deal of wind, making the paddling of them to windward, especially against a heavy head sea, exceedingly hard work.

To do anything really effective with these craft, and especially to make good shooting in the heavy sea that was running, it was necessary to get to close quarters with them; I therefore directed Simpson to haul up two or three points to the northward, my intention being to pass the flotilla on their port beam, come to the wind as soon as we had passed them, cross their sterns, raking them as we passed, and then follow them, maintaining a steady fire all the way, and crowding them up to the northward as much as possible, so that they might not land in South-west Bay.

Our approach was greeted with yells of defiance from the crowded canoes, many of the occupants of which dropped their paddles, sprang to their feet, and hurled their long spears at us as we swept past them at a distance of some two hundred yards from the nearest canoe. They were experts in the hurling of spears, those savages; but it was no part of my plan to run the risk of getting either Simpson or myself hurt—two of us against some five hundred left no room for quixotic displays of daring; and we were careful to keep beyond the range of their spears, every one of which dropped harmlessly into the water at varying distances from us, the nearest of them all falling short by about thirty or forty fathoms. But if I was anxious that neither of us should be hurt, I was also anxious to avoid hurting the savages, as far as might be, my object being not so much to destroy them as to prevent them from landing on our island, if possible; and I thought that this might perhaps be done, and the savages compelled to retreat, by drilling their canoes so full of bullet holes that at least some of them would sink, when the remainder would become so crowded that it would be found impossible to continue paddling to windward—for I took it for granted that if one or two of their canoes sank, their crews would be picked up by the rest. Of course there was the risk that, in endeavouring to sink their canoes, I might wound or even kill a few savages; but that was their lookout, not mine.

Therefore, when our antagonists opened the ball by casting spears at us, I retaliated by seizing my gun and aiming at the water line of the nearest canoe, expecting the bullet to pass right through her, leaving two holes which would admit quite a quantity of water, unless the savages happened to possess the means to plug them. My shot went true, for as the smoke blew away I saw a small white puncture show in the bottom of the canoe for an instant before it was hidden by the roll of the craft. A loud yell of astonishment greeted my first essay, showing that these particular savages had never before had experience of firearms; but the yell was not wholly the result of astonishment either, for I saw a native clap his hand to his leg, and shrewdly guessed that the bullet had punctured him as well as the canoe. I had time to drop the discharged gun, seize the loaded one, and fire a second shot before we were fairly past that particular craft; but that second shot was less successful than the first, for it missed the canoe. However, it caught a native, who sprang convulsively to his feet, his hands clutching his head, as, wheeling half-round, he staggered backward and tumbled head over heels into the sea. I naturally expected that his friends would stop and endeavour to pick him up, but not a bit of it; they merely uttered another yell, apparently of encouragement to each other, and drove their paddles into the water with increased energy.

Both guns being now empty, I signed Simpson to come to the wind and luff athwart the sterns of the flotilla, while I busied myself upon the recharging of the pieces. By the time that this was done we were on the starboard quarter of the most southerly of the canoes, and I immediately proceeded to test my skill upon her. Making short tacks across her stern, I fired half a dozen bullets into her, every one of which hit, five out of the six wounding and disabling one or more of her occupants as well as drilling a hole in the canoe herself, with the result that she began to drop astern of the others, the crews of which were exerting themselves to their very utmost, having apparently come to the conclusion that the sooner they could reach the island the better it would be for them. Wherefore I attacked the next canoe in like manner: but now I was less careful than before in the matter of hurting her occupants, for it began to dawn upon me that these savages had no notion of standing by to help a disabled consort, and that, do what I would, I could not possibly prevent some of them at least from effecting a landing; therefore my business must be to see that as few of them as possible should set foot on the island. Incidentally, I found that by persistently attacking the southernmost canoe I was slowly but surely effecting one part of my purpose, by causing the whole flotilla to edge slowly away to the northward, thus diverting them from any purpose that they might have had of landing in South-west Bay.

Then another plan suggested itself to me. I saw that the savages were either destitute of means to plug the bullet holes in their canoes or had not wit enough to make use of them; but each canoe appeared to carry several large calabash bowls, which were used as balers: my plan, therefore, was to shoot promptly at any man whom I saw attempting to bale a leaky canoe, with the result that the particular canoe which I happened to be attacking gradually filled and ultimately swamped, leaving her crew to cling helplessly to her as she floated full to her gunwale, or to strike out for the island, now some three miles distant. And since the fellows swam like seals there was no doubt that they would ultimately reach it—unless a shark happened to encounter them on the way; but I did not allow the probability of their ultimate arrival on the island to worry me much, for I felt tolerably certain that, before that could happen, we should have made good our escape, if indeed we were going to escape at all.

Our effective antagonists were now reduced to eight canoes and their crews, who were all hanging together as much as possible for mutual protection, but were making poor headway against the steadily increasing wind and sea. If I could hinder them still further, so much the better; and the most obvious way to do that was to weaken their crews by wounding as many as possible: therefore I now resumed my original tactics of tacking to and fro athwart their sterns, and raking them as we passed. And this, I soon found, was a very excellent plan, for it not infrequently happened that by this mode of attack I was able to make one bullet do double, and in some cases even treble duty; the result being that by the time that we all drew up abreast of the island the entire fleet was in such difficulties that they were scarcely able to make any headway at all, two of the canoes indeed being so seriously crippled that at last, notwithstanding their close proximity to the island, they were actually compelled to bear up and run away to leeward again, while another of them was swamped, leaving five out of the original ten still to contend with.

And now my trouble began in earnest, for so desperate were the savages rendered by the merciless persecution to which they had compelled me, in self-defence, to subject them, that they made the most strenuous efforts to get into South-west Bay; and, indeed, it was not until I bore up and took the extreme risk of running down one canoe that I was finally able to turn them from their purpose. But ultimately, after a running fight—if so one-sided an affair could be so called—four of them contrived to weather North-west Cape and effect a landing in North Bay. Then, after chasing them right into the bay, and keeping up a brisk fire upon them until they landed, to the number of about one hundred and twenty, and vanished into the woods, we in the catamaran bore up, headed out to sea again, and made the best of our way back to South-west Bay and the shipyard, hoping that upon our arrival we should find the schooner afloat; for we had been gone fully four hours.

But to my intense disappointment, when we entered the bay there was the schooner still high and dry upon the stocks, with Chips, the boatswain, and Cunningham all busily engaged in turning over the small pile of lumber that still remained from the dismembered wreck of the *Martha*. Presently one of them looked up, saw us coming, and apparently reported the fact to the others, for Cunningham at once straightened himself up and came down to the water's edge to meet us.

"Well, Temple," he exclaimed, as the catamaran grounded and I stepped ashore, "how have things gone with you? Have you managed to beat off our friends the enemy?"

"I have not," I answered, just a trifle sourly, I am afraid. "A hundred or more of them have landed round there in North Bay; and we may confidently expect a visit from them within the next half-hour. But what the mischief have you fellows been up to all this time? I fully expected to find the schooner afloat, under way, and only awaiting our return to be off! What have you been doing? Playing poker, or what?"

"Now, my dear chap, don't you go and turn rusty as well as the rest of us, or there's no knowing what may happen; for, let me tell you, we're all just as savage as bears with sore heads," remonstrated Cunningham. "No," he continued, "we've not been playing poker, or hunt the slipper, or even kiss in the ring; to put it plainly, we've been trying to do the impossible. The long and the short of it is, Temple, that we have used up our last scrap of available timber, and there still remains a good half-hour's work to be done on the cradle before we dare start to wedge up. We have been nailing and plugging bits together, and working them in to the best of our ability, until our last nail is expended; and now we seem to be at a standstill. I'll be shot if I know how we're going to get over the difficulty."

"What! do you mean to tell me that after getting as far as that we are brought to a standstill for the sake of a few pieces of timber?" I demanded. "How much do you require?"

"Oh, very little," was the answer. "A few feet—ten or fifteen feet of three-inch stuff would serve—but the mischief of it is that we haven't got it. Even the remains of the wreck will not yield us another inch."

"Then," said I, "all that remains is to break into the catamaran, and take out of her as much as is required. She has served her turn; we shall not require her any more if we can get the schooner into the water; and—"

"Kick me; kick me hard!" shouted Cunningham in an ecstasy of delight, as he smote me a blow between the shoulders that made me stagger. "The catamaran!" he continued. "Of course. Oh, what a lot of fools we were not to have thought of that before! But," suddenly bethinking himself, "if we had, it would have been of no use, for you had her. She is available now, however, and in ten minutes we'll rip enough stuff out of her to finish our job. I know exactly where to find the kind of stuff we want. Chips ahoy! bring your tools down to the catamaran, my son; we're going to break her up!"

The carpenter flung his hand aloft in joyous intimation that he understood, and at once made a dash for his tools, while Simpson and I wended our way to the schooner, to see how things looked in that direction, and also to forage for a morsel of food, for we had eaten nothing since breakfast, and were feeling pretty hungry.

A single glance at the cradle, which, when wedged up, would lift the schooner off the keel blocks and throw her weight upon the launching ways, sufficed to reveal the pitiful straits to which Chips had latterly been reduced; for worked into it there were scraps of wood less than a foot in length, fastened to other pieces of similar size with nails

or plugs, and presenting a most flimsy and unsatisfactory appearance. But when I came to look more closely I saw that the only unsatisfactory part of the work was its appearance; it was not nearly so flimsy as at first sight it had appeared to be. Chips had evidently fully realised his responsibility, and had taken care that, let the material be what it might, there should be nothing faulty about his workmanship. And I saw also that, given the necessary amount of material, he would be able to finish his work in a very short time.

The boatswain routed out some food for us, and while Simpson and I sat down to eat and drink, Murdock, upon my instructions, went down to the catamaran—which the carpenter and Cunningham had already attacked—and brought away from her the two guns and the ammunition that remained from our engagement with the savages. And when he had performed this errand I bade him get aboard the schooner, rout out a few extra guns and a further supply of ammunition, load the weapons, and then station himself in the bows as a lookout, with special instructions to keep a wary eye upon the neighbouring cliffs and report the very first indication of the approach of an enemy.

The boatswain had scarcely been on the lookout a matter of twenty minutes when he hailed me.

“Mr Temple,” he shouted, “I wish you’d come up here, sir, for a minute, and bring that there glass of Mr Cunnin’ham’s along with ye. There’s some’at up there on top o’ them cliffs that I can’t rightly make out, and I’d like you to come and have a look at it.”

Accordingly up I went, with Cunningham’s telescope still slung over my shoulders, and joined Murdock where he stood right in the eyes of the schooner, peering intently at a particular spot on the top of the cliffs.

“Now then,” said I, withdrawing the telescope from its case, “where is this mysterious something that you can’t make out?”

“Ye see that there big tree with the thick, knobbly-lookin’ trunk, up there, sir?” he demanded, pointing. “Well, just to the nor’ard of it there’s a bush with a lot of white flowers upon it. See that?”

I replied that I did.

“Very well,” continued my companion. “Two or three times I’ve seemed to see somethin’ movin’ among them there white flowers, but I can’t be quite—”

“Yes, you are right, I see it; there is something—somebody—there,” I interrupted, having brought the glass to bear upon the spot while Murdock was speaking. “Ah! now I have lost it again,” I continued, “but I am certain I saw a dark face peering through the branches. Here! let me have your gun. If there is really anybody there we’ll give him a scare, if nothing worse.”

So saying, I took the loaded gun, and, keeping my eyes firmly fixed on the spot, stretched myself prone on the deck, with the barrel of the weapon resting upon the rail of the schooner’s very low bulwark. Sighting the piece carefully, I brought it to bear immediately on the spot where I thought I had seen the face, and then waited patiently for its reappearance. But minute after minute passed and nothing appeared; and presently Cunningham and the carpenter came up the beach staggering under a load of timber that promised to be amply sufficient for all our needs. I began to think that I must have been mistaken, and was about to lay aside the gun and descend to the beach again, when the boatswain, who had taken the glass from me and had been intently peering through it, murmured:

“There ’tis again, Mr Temple—no, stop a minute, it’s gone—no ’tain’t! Have ye got your piece bearin’ dead upon that spot, sir?”

I answered that I had.

“Then stand by, and when I gives the word just you press the trigger, sir, please. Wait a bit; I don’t— Ah! there he is—fire!”

On the instant I pressed the trigger, and as the smoke cleared away I thought I saw a slight momentary disturbance of the foliage about the spot at which I had aimed, and then all was still again.

“You got him, sir, as sure as eggs is young chickens!” exclaimed Murdock, still peering through the glass. “Or, if you didn’t actooaly get him,” he amended, “you give him a scare that he won’t forget in a blue moon. Shall I just slip up there, Mr Temple, and see if I can find anything?”

“Certainly not,” I replied severely. “We cannot afford to take any risks. Besides, what does it matter? No, you remain here, reload that gun, keep the glass, maintain a bright lookout, and if you see any savages attempting to sneak down upon the beach, shoot without hesitation. What I am chiefly afraid of is that they will muster up there in force, and attempt to overwhelm us with a rush. I am going below to lend the others a hand.”

I found Cunningham, Parsons, and Simpson all working at high pressure under the bows; for they had of course heard the shot, and did not need to be told that it indicated the presence of the enemy, though whether in force or only in the form of a scout none of us could tell. But the fact that even one of the savages had already made his way across to our side of the island was spur enough to our energies, and now we worked as probably none of us had ever worked before, in an endeavour to complete the cradle, wedge up, and launch the schooner before the enemy should muster courage enough to charge home upon us. If such a thing as that last should happen—and it would only mean the loss of a few lives by the savages—nothing could possibly save us.

I had been down on the beach about five minutes when a slight hissing sound reached my ear, and the next moment a long, triple-barbed, and exceedingly formidable-looking spear struck the sand and remained quivering there within about ten feet of us, and at the same instant Murdock shouted from above:

"Mr Temple—Mr Temple, sir, I wish you'd come up here and take my place. They're musterin' up there on top o' the cliff—I can see 'em movin' about among the bushes—and I ain't ne'er a good enough shot for the job you've told me off for. If I shoots and misses once or twice they'll rush us, as sure as you'm alive, sir; while if two or three of 'em was bowled over it might hold 'em back a bit and give us more time. Come quick, sir, if you please; I believe they'm gettin' ready for a rush!"

There was sound sense in what the boatswain said: he was not a good enough shot, or quite cool enough in the handling of firearms, to stop a rush, and I therefore determined to act on his suggestion. Only Cunningham was quite as good a shot as myself, if not better; therefore I turned to him.

"Cunningham," said I, "you hear what Murdock says; and he is right. But you are the crack shot of the party, so please go up and relieve him at once. But before he comes down get him to bring up every gun from below, and our entire stock of cartridges, and make him load every weapon and place it handy for you. Go at once, please; and remember you must shoot to kill."

"But, my dear chap—" began Cunningham, and then I cut him short.

"Go at once, sir," I exclaimed sharply. "This is no time for arguing; and please remember that I command here."

"Right you are, old chap; I understand," he replied, and went without further ado. And, as he turned to leave, another spear came whizzing through the air and stuck in the sand exactly where he had been standing a second earlier. Matters were beginning to look serious, for if the savages had among them—as they certainly had—men capable of hurling a spear from the top of the cliff as far as the schooner, one or the other of us might be hurt or even killed at any moment.

A couple of minutes passed, and I heard the voices of Cunningham and Murdock as they talked together overhead, showing that the engineer had taken up his post. Simpson and I were holding a piece of timber in position, while Parsons secured it, when I suddenly saw a tall savage step boldly out from among the bushes on top of the cliff, poising a long spear in his hand. He gave the weapon a preliminary jerk, as though to test its balance, and then flung it high above his head in the act of casting. I was about to shout to Cunningham, calling his attention to the fellow, when a gun cracked sharply out overhead, and the savage spun round upon his heel, staggered backward, and fell crashing in among the bushes.

"Good shot!" I shouted. "I say, Cunningham, keep Murdock up there with you to reload; we can do very well without him down here."

"All right," came the answer; "I will, if you are sure that you don't need him. Ah, by Jove! there's another of them!"

Cunningham's shot took that fellow in the leg, for we saw him clap his hand to his right one, just above the knee, and go limping away out of sight. Apparently the savages believed that the discharge of the weapon left us temporarily harmless, for another man instantly sprang into view and hurriedly poised his spear; but Cunningham was too quick for him, for he, too, dropped and lay still. Then they lay *perdu* for a few minutes, during which we, at work upon the cradle, put in some splendid work.

Suddenly, with a final tap of his hammer, Chips sprang back and tossed the tool in the air, cleverly catching it by the handle as it fell. "Finished!" he yelled, on a note of exultation. "Now, Mr Temple and Simpson, get the mauls, and let's wedge up. It'll have to be a rather rough-and-ready job, I'm afraid; but once the weight of her is off the blocks and on to the ways we needn't trouble much. And now, if Mr Cunnin'ham can spare the bo'sun, he'll be useful to us. Come along, Sails, you and I'll take the starboard side, while Mr Temple and Murdock takes the port, and we'll see which gets finished first."

I hailed Cunningham, asking if he could spare Murdock, and he replied that they were at that moment reloading the whole battery of guns, after which he would send him down. And presently Murdock came.

"Now then, boatswain," said I, "'wedge up' is the word, so take that maul and strike with me. Chips and his mate think they can beat us; but we'll show them a thing or two. Now then, strike!"

Forthwith the air began to resound with the blows of iron on wood, as, with more or less dexterous strokes, we drove the wedges home, one pair after another; and in about ten minutes we all met under the little vessel's counter, our work completed. But the savages evidently suspected that matters were approaching a crisis; possibly the idea was suggested to them by the carpenter's triumphant yell of "Finished!" upon the completion of the cradle, for during that momentous ten minutes several of them had made desperate efforts to transfix us with their spears, and as they had now adopted the plan of making the attempt in groups of half a dozen or more—to all of whom it was manifestly impossible for Cunningham to attend at the same moment—we four at work under the schooner's bottom had had two or three exceedingly narrow escapes.

"Now, Mr Temple," exclaimed the carpenter excitedly, "I'll just take a look fore and aft under her bottom, to make sure that she's clear everywhere; and when I sing out 'All clear!' will you and the rest please jump aboard and stand by to cover me with your rifles and protect me from a rush while I knock away the spur shores and launch the little hooker? And you might drop a few ropes' ends over the sides, and especially over the bows, for me to swing aboard by as soon as she starts to run down the ways. And if them bronze-coloured skowbanks up on the cliffs there tries to run in upon me with their spears while I'm down under, give 'em toko; for if I'm hurted afore them spur shores is knocked away, we may have a lot of trouble yet. Ah! blest if I didn't think so," as Cunningham's shots cracked out thrice, and two natives tumbled headlong down the face of the cliff, while a third hurriedly scrambled back to cover; "they're guessin' that if they don't look sharp we'll get away from 'em a'ter all, so please keep a keen eye on 'em, sir."

"Ay, ay, Chips, we will," answered I. "Now, get along with your inspection, man, as lively as you please, for I see signs of a movement among them up there. Simpson," to the sailmaker, "jump aboard and lend Mr Cunningham a hand to reload those guns; and when you have done that, drop a few ropes' ends over the sides for Chips to climb aboard by."

By the time I had finished speaking the carpenter had crept in under the schooner's bottom and was hastily yet carefully assuring himself that the vessel's keel had been everywhere lifted clear of the keel blocks. Less than three minutes sufficed him to complete his examination, when he shouted the signal "All clear!" and immediately began to pound upon the heels of the spur shores with his maul, while Murdock and I made a dash for the ladder which afforded access to the schooner's deck. But it was clear that the savages had by this time gained a tolerably accurate conception of what we were about, and had begun to realise that unless they acted at once we were likely to slip through their hands after all; for no sooner did the boatswain and I jump for the ladder than they set up a fierce yell, and about a hundred of them broke cover and began to scramble down the cliff face, shouting encouragement to each other as they swung or sprang from one projection to another, tossing their spears and war clubs down to the beach beneath, in order that they might have the use of both hands during their hurried descent. I naturally expected that Cunningham would open fire upon them forthwith; but he did not, for he was at the moment busily reloading the discharged weapons—moreover, it appeared that he had a better plan.

At that moment the savages were moving so rapidly and so erratically as they swung down the cliff face that accurate shooting would have been exceedingly difficult; but the instant that the first native reached the beach and paused for a second to seize a club and a handful of spears from those which had been cast down from the summit of the cliff, the engineer, lying prone on the deck, with his weapon resting on the low rail of the schooner's bulwarks, covered him, and the next instant the shot rang out and the man toppled over, mortally hit. Then Cunningham passed the empty weapon back to Simpson, receiving a loaded one in its stead, and in like manner bowled over the second and third of the savages who reached the beach. But this could not last long, as I could easily see upon reaching his side, for the savages were now swarming down the cliff so rapidly and in such numbers that it was impossible to load the guns quickly enough to cope with them. As Murdock and I dashed forward and joined the other two in the eyes of the schooner I saw that about a dozen of the savages had reached the beach unhurt, and were at that instant gathering themselves together to make a combined rush.

"Now, lads," said I, "this is where our revolvers are going to come in useful. Wait until they arrive within twenty yards of us, and then open upon them with the 'barkers'; but don't get excited and fire wild, whatever you do—we must make every shot tell. And—Hurrah, my hearties, there go the spur shores!" as I heard them clatter down and felt a sudden tremor thrill through the schooner. "Now, look out, here they come! Watch for the men who pause to hurl their spears, and do your best to bowl them over. She's moving, lads, she's moving! Hurrah! Another minute and we shall be afloat. Now, look out, and give 'em beans! Here they come!"

Yes; they were coming with a vengeance, not only the dozen who formed as it were the vanguard of the rush, but some twenty or thirty more, who in the course of a few seconds had flung themselves down from the rocks to the soft, yielding sand below, while others were following down the cliff face at breakneck speed. They came running and leaping down the beach in pursuit of the now fast-moving schooner, each man grasping a single spear in his right hand and three or four more and a war club in his left, the whole of them yelling like demons. At that moment Chips appeared under the bows, and the sight of him was greeted by the savages with a howl of exultation, for they seemed to think that since he was down on the sand they had him in their power. But the carpenter knew perfectly well what he was about, and as the stem of the gliding schooner slid past him he made a spring at her wire bobstay, caught it first with one hand, then with the other, pulled himself up and flung his legs over it, and then rapidly hauled himself up it to the bowsprit end, which he reached just as the schooner plunged into the water, swung himself astride the spar, and so worked his way inboard. But it was touch and go with him, for the moment he showed himself about a dozen of the leading natives pulled up short and prepared to hurl their spears at him, and I am convinced that but for the hot revolver fire which we instantly opened upon the daring savages, bowling three of them over and so seriously disconcerting the aim of the others that they missed, Master Chips would, even at the last moment, have lost the number of his mess. But with the plunge of the schooner into the water all danger was over, for the little craft held her way in the most wonderful fashion, making so long a stern board into the waters of the bay that she shot far beyond the extreme range of the savages' spears before she finally came to rest.

Meanwhile her canvas was all loose and ready for setting; therefore the moment I felt her to be water borne I dashed aft to the tiller, at the same time shouting to the others to man the foresail and fore staysail halyards and hoist away; and by the time the foresail was hoisted the vessel was beginning to lose sternway, whereupon I jammed her tiller hard-over to port, and thus canted her with her head to the northward. This caused her head sails to fill, whereupon she quickly gathered headway, when, putting the helm hard up, I headed her out to sea, while the others proceeded to set the jib and mainsail; and within ten minutes of her first plunge into the water the little *Nautilus*—as we named her—was clear of the reef and fairly in the open sea.

There were several trifling jobs that we would have preferred to finish off before proceeding to sea, several articles that we would fain have carried away from the island with us, had we been afforded the opportunity; but the presence of the savages of course precluded this, and therefore the moment that we were under way and clear of the western extremity of the island we flattened in our sheets, fore and aft, and proceeded to the northward, close-hauled on the starboard tack on our way to Honolulu, which was to be our first port of call.

Naturally the first and most engrossing question claiming our attention was that of the behaviour of our little ship, and we had not been under way a quarter of an hour before we were all agreed that she far exceeded our most sanguine expectations; she was a magnificent little sea boat, riding the long Pacific surges as buoyantly as a gull, very stiff under her canvas, and extraordinarily fast and weatherly. The only thing that caused us any concern was that we found she was leaking to a somewhat alarming extent; but we were quite prepared for that, as she had been standing so long on the hot beach that her planks had shrunk somewhat, opening her seams. She "took up" however during the course of the night, after keeping us busy at the pump for the first three or four hours of our voyage, and

after that we had no further trouble with her.

The island was a mere faint blue smudge on the horizon astern when the sun when down on the evening of that eventful day, and on the ninth morning following we safely arrived at Honolulu. Here, thanks to Cunningham's hundred and forty sovereigns, which he had contrived to hold on to through all our vicissitudes of fortune, we found ourselves possessed of money enough to carry us round the Horn and as far as Baltimore, where we had decided to call on our way home.

We remained in Honolulu four days, making arrangements for our long and adventurous voyage round the southern extremity of the great American continent, and then gaily started, disregarding the strenuous warnings of the many friends made by us during our brief stay. And adventures enough and to spare we had, enough to fill another book of this size; but that, as a certain writer has remarked, is another story. It must suffice me now to say that we reached Punta Arenas, in the Strait of Magellan, fifty-three days after leaving Honolulu, stayed there two days, and safely arrived in Baltimore harbour two months, to the day, after leaving Punta Arenas.

We had a little difficulty in finding "Marthy", the relict of the late lamented Captain Ephraim Brown, but we found her at last, introduced ourselves, broke to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death, and then unfolded to her the story of the pearls. What between the news of her loss, and that of the enormous wealth coming to her through her late husband's good fortune, the poor old soul was driven nearly crazy for a time; but she was a woman of strong common sense and a wonderfully practical turn of mind, and in the course of three or four days she rallied her faculties sufficiently to decide that she would put the whole of her affairs in the hands of a firm of lawyers of undoubted integrity, which, we agreed with her, was about the wisest thing she could do. Accordingly we handed over the pearls to them, leaving them to arrange the complicated question of duty, etcetera, and left Baltimore for England after a stay of just a fortnight. During our sojourn in Baltimore a heavy easterly gale had swept the Atlantic for a full week; then came a spell of fine weather and moderate westerly winds, which carried us clean across the "Pond" in twenty-two days, our arrival at Southampton, "all well", occurring on 27 August, 1864.

Of course I was now a rich man, and did not need to trouble myself about completing my indentures, or obtaining another berth; but I nevertheless made a point of reporting myself at the offices in London of the owners of the *Zenobia*, where I was very cordially received. And here I had the satisfaction of learning, first, that the *Zenobia's* longboat had been picked up within twelve hours by a homeward-bound ship from Calcutta, thanks to which fortunate circumstance Captain Roberts's life had been saved—as well as those of all the other occupants of the boat; and he was now as well as ever, and again in command of his ship, which had been captured some seven weeks after the occurrence of the mutiny, following upon an unsuccessful attempt to "hold up" an Australian clipper, in which attempt Bainbridge, the instigator of the mutiny, had been shot dead.

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