

The Project Gutenberg eBook of The Cruise of the "Esmeralda"

This ebook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this ebook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

Title: The Cruise of the "Esmeralda"

Author: Harry Collingwood

Illustrator: William Heysham Overend

Release date: June 17, 2008 [eBook #25817]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Nick Hodson of London, England

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE CRUISE OF THE "ESMERALDA" ***

Harry Collingwood

"The Cruise of the Esmeralda"

Chapter One.

The Story of the Buried Treasure.

Those of my readers who happen to be well acquainted with Weymouth, will also be assuredly acquainted with a certain lane, known as Buxton's Lane, branching off to the right from the high-road at Rodwell, and connecting that suburb with the picturesque little village of Wyke. I make this assertion with the most perfect confidence, because Buxton's Lane happens to afford one of the most charming walks in that charming neighbourhood; and no one can well be a sojourner for any length of time in Weymouth without discovering this fact for him or herself, either through inquiry or by means of personal exploration.

And of those who have enjoyed a saunter through this lane, some there will doubtless be who can remember a substantial stone-built house, standing back a distance of about a hundred yards or so from the roadway, and environed by a quaint old-fashioned garden, the entire demesne being situate on the crest of the rise just before Wyke is reached, and commanding an unparalleled view of the roadstead of Portland, with the open channel as far as Saint Alban's Head to the left, while on the right the West Bay (notorious for its shipwrecks) stretches from the Bill of Portland, far away westward, into the misty distance toward Lyme, and Beer, and Seaton; ay, and even beyond that, down to Berry Head, past Torquay, the headland itself having been distinctly seen from Wyke Nap on a clear day, so it is said, though I cannot remember that I ever saw it myself from that standpoint.

The house to which I refer is (or was, for I believe it no longer exists) known as "The Spaniards," and was built by my ancestor, Hubert Saint Leger, with a portion of the proceeds of the Spanish prize that—having so harried and worried her that she at length became separated from the main body of the Great Armada—he drove into Weymouth Bay, and there, under the eyes of his admiring fellow-townsmen, fought her in his good ship *Golden Rose*, until she was fain to strike her colours and surrender to a craft of considerably less than half her size.

"The Spaniards" had continued in possession of the Saint Leger family from the time of its building down to the date of my story; and under its roof I was born. And to its roof I had returned from an Australian voyage, a day or two previous to the events about to be related, to find my dear mother in the direst of trouble. My father, like all the rest of the male Saint Legers, for as many generations as we could trace back, had been a seaman, and had died abroad, leaving my mother such a moderate provision as would enable her, with care, to end her days in peace and comfort beneath the old roof-tree. It was a lonely life for her, poor soul! for I was her only child, and—being a Saint Leger—took naturally to the sea as a profession. That I should do so was indeed so completely a foregone conclusion, that I was especially educated for it at Greenwich; upon leaving which, I had been bound apprentice to my father. And under him I had faithfully served my time, and had risen to the position of second mate when death claimed him, and he passed away in my arms, commending my mother to my tenderest care with his last breath.

Since that terrible time I had made several voyages to our eastern possessions, and now, when my story opens, was chief mate of a fine clipper-ship, with some hopes of promotion to the rank of "captain" when a suitable vacancy should occur.

The voyage which I had just concluded had been a singularly fortunate one for me, for on our homeward passage, when a short distance to the eastward of the Cape, we had fallen in with a derelict, homeward-bound from the Moluccas and Philippines, with a cargo of almost fabulous value on board; and, having taken possession of her, I had been placed in command, with a crew of four hands, with instructions to take her into Table Bay, there to raise my crew to the full complement, and, having done so, to afterwards navigate her to her destination. This I had successfully accomplished, arriving home only nine days after my own ship. A claim for salvage had been duly made, and I calculated that when the settling day arrived, my own share would fall very little short of three thousand

pounds, if, indeed, it did not fully reach that figure.

I have stated that when, upon the termination of an Australian voyage and the completion of my duties as chief mate, I returned to my ancestral home for the purpose of spending a brief holiday with my mother prior to my departure upon yet another journey to the antipodes, I had found her in dire trouble. This trouble was the natural—and I may say inevitable—result of my father's mistaken idea that he was as good a man of business as he was a seaman. Acting under this impression, he had relied entirely upon his own unaided judgment in the investment of his savings; and, anxious only to secure as generous a provision as possible for my mother, had been tempted to put his hard-earned money into certain projects that, offering, in their inception, a too alluring promise of continuous prosperity and generous dividends, had failed to withstand the test of time and the altered conditions of trade; with the result that, after paying handsome percentages for a more or less lengthened period, they had suddenly collapsed like a pricked balloon, leaving my poor mother penniless. Of course everything had been done that was possible to save something, though it might be ever so little, from the wreck; but there had been nothing to save; every penny was gone; and when I reached home I found the poor soul literally at her wits' end to maintain a supply of the ordinary necessities of life.

My appearance upon the scene of course necessitated the raking up of the whole miserable story once more; but when I had been told everything, I saw at once that nothing more could be done, and that my poor mother would simply have to put up with the loss as best she might.

Then arose the question of what was best to be done under our altered circumstances. The first conclusion at which we arrived was the obvious one that it would be quite impossible for my mother to maintain such an establishment as "The Spaniards" upon my income of ten pounds per month as chief mate; and she therefore suggested that we should let it upon a lease, if a suitable tenant could be found, and that she should retire, with her altered fortunes, into the obscurity of some small cottage. To this, however, I would in no wise consent; and it was while we were discussing the matter in all its bearings, and casting about for an acceptable alternative, that my mother let fall a remark, which, little as we suspected it at the moment, proved to be the key-note of the present story.

"Ah, my son," she ejaculated, with a hopeless sigh, "if we could but find the lost clue to Richard Saint Leger's buried treasure, all might yet be well with us!"

"Ah!" I responded, with a still more hopeless sigh, "if only we could! But I suppose there is about as much chance of that as there is of my becoming Lord High Admiral of Great Britain. The clue must be irretrievably lost, or it would have been discovered long ere now. I suppose every Saint Leger, from my great-great-great-grandfather Hugh, downwards, has taken his turn at hunting for that miserable lost clue; and the fact that they all failed to find it is conclusive evidence to me that it is no longer in existence."

"Well, I really don't know, my boy; I am not prepared to say so much as that," answered my mother. "Your dear father took the same view of the matter that you do, and never, to my knowledge, devoted a single hour to the search. And I have heard him say that it was the same with your grandfather. And if they never searched for the lost clue, how can we know or suppose that *any one* has searched for it since Hugh Saint Leger abandoned the quest? Yet there never appears to have been the slightest shadow of doubt in the minds of any of your ancestors, that when Richard Saint Leger died in the arms of his son Hugh, he held the clue to the secret; indeed, he died in the act of endeavouring to communicate it."

"So I have always understood," answered I, with languidly reviving interest. "But it is so long since I last heard the story—not since I was a little shaver in petticoats—that I have practically forgotten the details. I should like to hear it again, if it is not troubling you too much."

"It is no trouble at all, my dear boy, for it can be told in very few words. Besides, you *ought* to know it," answered my mother. "You are aware, of course, that the Saint Legers have been a race of daring and adventurous seamen, as far back as our family records go; and Richard Saint Leger, who was born in 1689, was perhaps the most daring and adventurous of them all. He was a contemporary of the great Captain (afterwards Lord) Anson; and it was upon his return from a voyage to the West Indies that he first became aware of the rumours, which reached England from time to time, of the fabulous value of the galleon which sailed annually from Acapulco to Manilla laden with the treasure of Peru. These rumours, which were no doubt greatly exaggerated, were well calculated to excite the imagination and stimulate the enterprise of the bold and restless spirits of that period; so much so, indeed, that when the English, in 1739, declared war against Spain, the capture of one of these ships became to the English adventurer what the discovery of the fabled El Dorado had been to his predecessor of Elizabethan times. At length—in the year 1742, I think it was—it became whispered about among those restless spirits that a galleon had actually been captured, and that the captors had returned to England literally laden with wealth. Richard Saint Leger was one of the first to hear the news; and it so fired his imagination—and probably his cupidity—that he never rested until he had traced the rumour to its source, and found it to be true. He then sought out the leader of the fortunate expedition, and having pledged himself to the strictest secrecy, obtained the fullest particulars relating to the adventure. This done, his next step was to organise a company of adventurers, with himself as their head and leader, to sail in search of the next year's galleon. This was in the year 1742. The expedition was a failure, so far as the capture of the galleon was concerned, for she fell into the hands of Commodore Anson. In other respects, however, the voyage proved fairly profitable; for though they missed the great treasure ship, they fell in with and captured another Spanish vessel which had on board sufficient specie to well recompense the captors for the time and trouble devoted to the adventure. And now I come to the part of the story which relates to what has always been spoken of in the family as Richard Saint Leger's buried treasure. It appears that on board the captured Spanish ship of which I have just spoken, certain English prisoners were found, the survivors of the crew of an English ship that had fought with and been destroyed by the Spanish ship only a few days prior to her own capture. These men were of course at once removed to Richard Saint Leger's own ship, where they received every care, and their hurts—for it is said that every man of them was more or less severely wounded—treated with such skill as happened to be available, with the result that a few of them recovered. Many, however, were so sorely hurt that they succumbed to their injuries, the English captain

being among this number. He survived, however, long enough to tell Richard Saint Leger that he had captured the galleon of the previous year, and had determined upon capturing the next also. With this object in view, and not caring to subject their booty to the manifold risks attendant upon a cruise of an entire year, they had sought out a secluded spot, and had there carefully concealed the treasure by burying it in the earth. Now, however, the poor man was dying, and could never hope to enjoy his share of the spoil, or even insure its possession to his relatives. He therefore made a compact with Richard Saint Leger, confiding to him the secret of the hiding-place, upon the condition that, upon the recovery of the treasure, one half of it was to be handed over in certain proportions to the survivors of the crew who had captured it, or, failing them, to their heirs; Richard Saint Leger to take the other half.

“Now, whether it was that Richard Saint Leger was of a secretive disposition, or whether he had some other motive for keeping the matter a secret, I know not; but certain it is that he never made the slightest reference to the matter—even to his son Hugh, who was sailing with him—until some considerable time afterwards. The occasion which led to his taking Hugh into his confidence was the meeting with another enemy, which they promptly proceeded to engage; and it may have been either as a measure of prudence in view of the impending conflict, or perhaps some premonition of his approaching end that led him to adopt the precaution of imparting the secret to a second person. He had deferred the matter too long, however; and he had only advanced far enough in his narrative to communicate the particulars I have just given, when the two ships became so hotly engaged that the father and son were obliged to separate in the prosecution of their duties, and the conclusion of the story had to be deferred until a more convenient season. That season never arrived, for Richard Saint Leger was struck down, severely wounded, early in the fight, and the command of the ship then devolved upon Hugh. Moreover, not only was there a very great disparity of force in favour of the Spaniards, but, contrary to usual experience, they fought with the utmost valour and determination, so that for some time after the ships had become engaged at close quarters the struggle was simply one for bare life on the part of the English, during which Hugh Saint Leger had no leisure to think of treasure or of anything else, save how to save his comrades and himself from the horrors of capture by their cruel enemies.

“Meanwhile, the consciousness gradually forced itself upon Richard Saint Leger that he was wounded unto death, and that time would soon be for him no more. Realising now, no doubt, the grave mistake he had committed in keeping so important a secret as that of the hiding-place of the treasure locked within his own breast, he despatched a messenger to Hugh, enjoining the latter to hasten to the side of his dying father forthwith, at all risks. The messenger, however, was shot dead ere he could reach Hugh Saint Leger’s side, and the urgent message remained undelivered. At length the stubborn courage of the English prevailed, and, despite their vast superiority in numbers, the Spaniards, who had boarded, were first driven back to their own deck and then below, when, further resistance being useless, they flung down their arms and surrendered.

“Hugh now, after giving a few hasty orders as to the disposal of the prisoners, found time to think of his father, whom he remembered seeing in the act of being borne below, wounded, in the early part of the fight. He accordingly hurried away in search of him, finding him in his own cabin, supported in the arms of one of the seamen, and literally at his last breath. It was with difficulty that Hugh succeeded in rendering his father conscious of his presence; and when this was at length accomplished the sufferer only rallied sufficiently to gasp painfully the words, ‘The treasure—buried—on an island—full particulars—concealed in my—’ when a torrent of blood gushed from his mouth and nostrils, and, with a last convulsive struggle, Richard Saint Leger sank back upon his pallet, dead.

“He was buried at sea, that same night, along with the others who had fallen in the fight; and some days afterwards, when Hugh Saint Leger had conquered his grief sufficiently to give his attention to other matters, he set himself to the task of seeking for the particulars relating to the buried treasure. But though he patiently examined every document and scrap of paper contained in his father’s desk, and otherwise searched most carefully and industriously in every conceivable hiding-place he could think of, the quest was unavailing, and *the particulars have never been found, to this day!*”

“It is very curious,” I remarked, when my mother had brought her narrative to a conclusion—“very curious, and very interesting. But what you have related only strengthens my previous conviction, that the document or documents no longer exist. I have very little doubt that, if the truth could only be arrived at, it would be found that Richard Saint Leger kept the papers concealed somewhere about his clothing, and that they were buried with him.”

“No; that was certainly not the case,” rejoined my mother; “for it is distinctly stated that—probably to obviate any such possibility—Hugh Saint Leger carefully preserved every article of clothing which his father wore when he died; and the things exist to this day, carefully preserved, upstairs, together with every other article belonging to Richard Saint Leger which happened to be on board the ship at that time.”

“And have those relics never been examined since my ancestor Hugh abandoned the quest as hopeless?” I inquired.

“They may have been; I cannot say,” answered my mother. “But I do not believe that your dear father—or your grandfather either, for that matter—ever thought it worth while to subject them to a thoroughly exhaustive scrutiny. Your father, I know, always felt convinced, as you do, that the documents had been either irretrievably lost, or destroyed.”

“Then if that be so,” I exclaimed, “they shall have another thorough overhaul from clew to earring before I am a day older. If, as you say, every scrap of property belonging to Richard Saint Leger was carefully collected and removed from the ship when she came home, and still exists, stored away upstairs, why, the papers *must* be there too; and if they are I will find them, let them be hidden ever so carefully. Whereabouts do you say these things are, mother?”

“In the west attic, where they have always been kept,” answered my mother. “Wait a few minutes, my dear boy, until I have found the keys of the boxes, and we will make the search together.”

The Cryptogram.

The west attic was a sort of lumber-room, in which was stored an extensive collection of miscellaneous articles which had survived their era of usefulness, but, either because they happened to be relics of former Saint Legers, or for some other equally sufficient reason, were deemed too valuable to be disposed of. The contents of this chamber could scarcely have proved uninteresting, even to a stranger, for in addition to several handsome pieces of out-of-date furniture—discarded originally in favour of the more modern, substantial mahogany article, and now permitted to remain in seclusion simply because of the *bizarre* appearance they would present in conjunction with that same ponderous product of the nineteenth-century cabinet-makers' taste—there were to be found outlandish weapons, and curiosities of all kinds collected from sundry out-of-the-way spots in all quarters of the globe, to say nothing of the frayed and faded flags of silk or bunting that had been taken from the enemy at various times by one or another of the Saint Legers—each one of which represented some especially hard-fought fight or deed of exceptional daring, a complete romance in itself—and the ponderous pistols with inlaid barrels and elaborately carved stocks, the bell-mouthed blunderbusses, and the business-like hangers, notched and dented of edge, and discoloured to the hilt with dark, sinister stains, that hung here and there upon the walls, relics of dead and gone Saint Legers. To me, the only surviving descendant of that race of sturdy sea-heroes, the room and its contents had of course always proved absorbingly interesting; and never, even in my earliest childhood, had I been so delighted as when, on some fine, warm, summer day, I had succeeded in coaxing my mother up into this room and there extracted from her the legend attached to some flag or weapon. To do her justice she, poor soul, would never of her own free will have opened her lips to me on any such subject; but my father—a Saint Leger to the backbone, despite the fact that his susceptibilities had become refined and sensitive by the more gentle influences of modern teaching—felt none of the scruples that were experienced by his gentle, tender-hearted spouse, and seemed to consider it almost a religious duty that the latest of the Saint Legers should be so trained as to worthily sustain the traditions of his race. Not, it must be understood, that my father preserved the faintest trace of that unscrupulous, buccaneering propensity that was only too probably a strongly marked characteristic of the earlier Saint Legers; far from it; but it had evidently never occurred to him that it was even remotely possible that I should ever adopt any other profession than that of the sea, and, knowing from experience how indispensable to the sailor are the qualities of dauntless courage, patient, unflinching endurance, absolute self-reliance, and unswerving resolution, he had steadily done his utmost to cultivate those qualities in me; and his stories were invariably so narrated as to illustrate the value and desirability of one or another of them.

On the present occasion, however, my thoughts on entering the room were intent upon a subject but remotely connected with the valiant achievements of my ancestors; and I lost no time in collecting together in one corner every article, big or little, that still remained of the possessions of Richard Saint Leger. There were not many of them: his sea-chest, containing a somewhat limited wardrobe, including the clothes in which he died; his writing-desk, a substantial oak-built, brass-bound affair; a roll of charts, still faintly redolent of that peculiar musty odour so characteristic of articles that have been for a long time on shipboard; a few books, equally odoriferous; a brace of pistols; and his sheathed hanger, still attached to its belt.

The writing-desk, as being the most appropriate depository for papers, was, naturally, the object to which I first devoted my attention; and this I completely emptied of its contents, depositing them in a clothes-basket on my right hand, to start with, from which I afterwards removed them, one by one, and after carefully perusing each completely through, tossed them into a similar receptacle on my left. Many of the documents proved to be sufficiently interesting reading, especially those which consisted of notes and memoranda of information relating to the projected or anticipated movements of the enemy's ships, acquired, in some cases, in the most curious way. Then there were bundles of letters retailing scraps of home news, and signed "Your loving wife, Isabella." But, though I allowed no single scrap of paper to pass unexamined, not one of them contained the most remote reference to any such matter as buried treasure.

I next subjected the desk itself to a most rigorous examination, half hoping that I might discover some secret receptacle so cunningly contrived as to have escaped the observation of those who had preceded me in the search. But no; the desk was a plain, simple, honest affair, solidly and substantially constructed in such a manner that secret recesses were simply impossible. Having satisfied myself thus far, I carefully restored all the papers to the several receptacles from which I had taken them, locked the desk, and then turned my attention to the sea-chest.

Here I was equally unfortunate; for, though in the bottom of the chest I actually found the identical log-book relating to the cruise during which Richard Saint Leger was supposed to have acquired his knowledge of the hidden treasure, and though I found duly entered therein the usual brief, pithy, log-book entries of both actions with the Spanish ships, not a word was there which even remotely hinted at the existence of the treasure, or any record relating to it. And—not to spin out this portion of my yarn to an unnecessary length—I may as well say, in so many words, that when I had worked my way steadily through every relic left to us of Richard Saint Leger, until nothing remained to be examined but his hanger and belt, I found myself as destitute of any scrap of the information I sought as I had been at the commencement of the search.

It was not in the least likely that any one would select such an unsuitable place as the sheath of a cutlass in which to conceal an important document; still, that I might never in the future have reason to reproach myself with having passed over even the most unlikely hiding-place, I took down the weapon from the peg on which it hung, and with some difficulty drew the blade from its leather sheath.

There was nothing at all extraordinary about the weapon or its mountings; blade and hilt were alike perfectly plain; but what a story that piece of steel could have told, had it been gifted with the power of speech. It was notched and dented from guard to point, every notch and every dint bearing eloquent evidence of stirring adventure and doughty deeds of valour. But I was not there on that occasion to dream over a notched and rusty cutlass; I therefore laid the weapon aside, and, with the belt across my knees, proceeded to carefully explore the interior of the sheath with the aid of a long wire. And it was while thus engaged that my eye fell upon a portion of the stitching in the belt that had

the appearance of being newer than—or perhaps it would be more correct to say of different workmanship from the rest. The belt, I ought to explain, was a leather band nearly four inches wide, the fastening being an ordinary plain, square, brass buckle. The belt was made of two thicknesses of leather stitched together all along the top and bottom edge; and it was a portion of this stitching along the top edge that struck me as differing somewhat in appearance from the rest.

That I might the better inspect the stitching, I moved toward the window with the belt in my hand; and, as I did so, I ran the thick leather through my fingers. Surely the belt felt a shade thicker in that part than anywhere else! And was it only my fancy, or did I detect a faint sound as of the crackling of paper when I bent the belt at that spot in the act of raising it to the light? Was it possible that Richard Saint Leger had actually chosen so unlikely a spot as the interior of his sword-belt in which to hide the important document? And yet, after all, why unlikely? It would be as safe a place of concealment as any; for he doubtless wore the belt, if not the hanger, habitually; and therefore, by sewing the document up inside it, he would be sure of always having it upon his person, with scarcely a possibility of losing it.

Determined to solve the question forthwith, I whipped out my knife and carefully cut through the suspicious-looking stitches, thus separating the two thicknesses of leather along their upper edges for a length of about six inches; then, forcing the two edges apart, I peered into the pocket-like recess; and there, sure enough, was a small, compactly folded paper, which I at once withdrew and carefully unfolded. The result was the disclosure of the following incomprehensible document:—

“11331829 14443401 64519411 74217411 93613918 21541829 154123 49274519 44384914 27163426 41152923
39154319 44214414 44153317 32 24535184 19492442 17321635 24531739 15261943 24381526 29594354 29
43163543 72164627 38537766 79193423 48132915 19412338 18294865 62 93415619 48233516 31233415
43265524 54193743 58274253 87273819 32 43731941 57761738 43581741 19341645 19484368 27435989
28467691 27 43152644 57284327 52193563 74163951 62184227 43699143 68273844 74 58776387 19361641
18424777 19372041 56894566 15452641 19471526 62 91436226 56689115 34425924 42245417 29264163
93284652 831948



“17465383 17322944 17455369 64892351 44742947 16314462 234854 76133526 51235619 31274218 48558817
32294419 43295216 41154619 49 23414354 19431529 24372543 67865983 27385579 23371449 37521342 65
83445515 37497176 92163553 77193323 34164453 72195117 32164418 51 43611635 24375169 25371641
72844458 52741954 26411842 55852439 16 44152623 47193316 45334428 47557716 47537972 91558518
29849842 61 17461545 21321741 15284459 16412642 15451331 53811429 27422743 18 49164419 41436817
41264338 67154528 53164629 47425718 31295743 58 39547697 39645377 16462843 17323867 17472738
57855769 18437485 29 57193329 47349153 97791438 91728386 73564163 53761619 114301848 53711934
26395785 51666378 17382334 45693751 29511829 15392539 35 49153959 92139445 91635467 53355142
51135213 51747294 722371747 19471227 16271847 16471947 12274567 38570277 38671327 26571328 19
48335827 58588814 32163244 72174239 62629224 42112634 46656617 46 31407196 15313161 23417691
36614961 16311941 12311241 41622452 37 62294221 42.”

This I studied for a few minutes, in complete bewilderment, and then carried it downstairs to my mother, who had been called away upon some household matter some time before.

“See here, mother!” I exclaimed. “I have found *something*; but whether or no it happens to be the long-missing secret of the hidden treasure it is quite impossible for me to determine. If it *is*, there is every prospect of its remaining a secret, so far as I am concerned, for I can make neither head nor tail of it.”

“Let me look at it, my son. Where did you find it?” she exclaimed, stretching out her hand for the paper.

“It was sewn up in Richard Saint Leger’s sword-belt, from which I have just cut it,” I replied. “So, whether or not it will be the secret of the treasure, I think we may safely take it for granted that it is a document of more than ordinary value, or Dick Saint Leger would never have taken the trouble to conceal it so carefully.”

“Yes,” remarked my mother, “there can be no doubt as to its contents being of very considerable importance. It is a cryptogram, you see, and people do not usually take the trouble to write in cipher unless the matter is of such a nature as to render a written record very highly desirable, whilst it is also equally desirable that it should be preserved a secret from all but the parties who possess the key. It is certainly a most unintelligible-looking affair; but I have no doubt that, with a little study, we shall be able to puzzle out the meaning. As a girl I used to be rather good at solving puzzles.”

“So much the better,” I remarked; “for to me it presents a most utterly hopeless appearance. The only thing I can understand about it is the sketch, which, while it bears the most extraordinary resemblance to the profile of a man’s face, is undoubtedly intended to represent an island. And that, to my mind, is a point in favour of its being the long-sought document. And now,” I continued, “if you feel disposed to take a spell at it and see what you can make of it, I think I will walk into the town and attend to one or two little matters of business. Perhaps you will have the whole thing cut and dried by the time that I return.”

My mother laughed.

"I am afraid you are altogether too sanguine, my dear Jack," she replied; "this is no ordinary, commonplace cipher, I feel certain. But run along, my dear boy, the walk will do you good; and while you are gone I will sit down quietly and do my best to plumb the secret."

Dismissing, for the time being, the mysterious document from my mind, I set out along the lane toward Weymouth, giving my thoughts, meanwhile, to the question of what would be the best course for me to pursue under my mother's altered circumstances. She was now absolutely dependent upon me for food and clothing, for the funds requisite to maintain the household—for *everything*, in fact, save the roof that covered her; and it needed no very abstruse calculation to convince us that my wages as chief mate were wholly inadequate to the demands that would now be made upon them. If only I could but obtain a command, all would be well; but I had no interest whatever outside the employ in which I was then engaged; and I had already received a distinct assurance from my owners that I should be appointed to the first suitable vacancy. But—as I had taken the trouble to ascertain immediately upon my arrival home—the prospect of any vacancy, suitable or otherwise, was growing more remote and intangible every day; steamers were cutting out the sailing craft in every direction; freights were low and scarce; and ships were being laid up by the hundred, in every port of any consequence, for want of profitable employment. Still, there were exceptions to this rule; and I had met an old shipmate of mine, only a few days before, in London, who, in command of his own ship, was doing exceedingly well. And, as my meeting with him and our subsequent chat recurred to my memory, the thought suggested itself, "Why should not I, too, command my own ship?"

I had a little money—a legacy of a few hundreds left me by an uncle some years previously; and there was my share of the salvage money: it might be possible to obtain a command by purchasing an interest in a ship! Or, better still, I might be able to acquire the sole ownership of a craft large enough for my purpose by executing a mortgage on the ship for the balance of the purchase-money.

The idea was worth thinking over, and talking over also; and, since there is no time like the present, I determined to call upon an old family friend—a retired solicitor, named Richards—forthwith.

I was fortunate enough to find the old gentleman at home when at length I had made my way over the bridge, up through the town, and along the esplanade, to his comfortable villa on the Dorchester road. He was pottering about in his garden when I was announced; and the smart parlour-maid who took my card to him quickly returned with a message requesting that I would join him there. He seemed genuinely glad to see me; and, like most elderly people who have passed their lives in one place, was full of inquiries as to the spots I had last visited, the incidents of my voyage, and so on. Having satisfied his curiosity in this respect, and indulged in a little desultory chat, I unfolded the special object of my call to him, explaining my position, and asking him what he thought of my plan.

"Well," said he, when I had finished my story, "shipping, and matters connected therewith, are rather out of my line, as you are no doubt aware; but if you can see your way to make the purchase of a ship a paying transaction I should think there ought not to be any very serious difficulty about finding the funds: the money market is said to be tight, just now, it is true; but my experience is that there is always plenty of money to be had when the prospects of a profitable investment are fairly promising. Now, for instance, it is really a most curious coincidence that you should have called upon me just at this time, for it happens that certain mortgages I held have recently been paid off, and I have been casting about for some satisfactory re-investment in which to employ the money. How much do you think it probable you will require?"

I made a rapid calculation, and named the sum which I thought would suffice.

"Coincidence number two!" he exclaimed. "Singularly enough, that happens to be precisely the amount I now have lying idle. Now, Jack, my lad, I have known you from a boy; and, though it is an axiom with us lawyers never to think well of anything or anybody, I would stake my last penny upon your integrity. So far as your honesty is concerned I would not hesitate to advance you any sum you might require that I could spare, upon the mere nominal security of your note of hand. But there are other risks than that of the borrower's dishonesty to be considered, and they must be guarded against. Take, for example, the possibility of your failing to find remunerative employment for your ship. How is that to be guarded against?"

"You would hold a bottomry bond—in other words, a mortgage—upon the ship for the amount of your debt, which would constitute an ample security for its recovery," I replied.

"Um—yes; just so," he commented. "Still, a ship is not a house; the cases are by no means parallel. Then, there is the risk of loss, total or partial. The ship might be stranded, and receive so much damage that it would cost more than she was worth to repair her. Or she might become a total wreck. All such possibilities would have to be provided against by insurance, and, as a business man, I should expect to hold the policy. Would you be willing that I should do that?"

"Certainly," I replied. "Of course, in the event of your deciding to lend me the money I require, I presume that a proper agreement would be drawn up, specifying the amount, terms, and duration of the loan, the mode of repayment, and so on—an agreement, in short, which would equally protect both our interests; and if that were done there could be no objection whatever to your holding the policy; indeed, I should most probably ask you to do so, apart from any stipulation to that effect, as it would be much safer with you than with me."

"That is very true," assented the old gentleman. "The *chief* question, however, is whether you are practically convinced that you would be acting wisely in entering upon this undertaking. Do you honestly believe that there is a reasonable prospect of your being able to make *it pay*? I am asking this question on your own behalf, not mine, my dear boy. I shall be quite safe, for, as a business man, I shall take care to make myself so; but failure would be simply disastrous for *you*. Now, tell me, honestly, have you any doubt at all as to the success of the enterprise?"

"None whatever," I answered confidently. "There is, doubtless, plenty of hard work and anxiety in store for me, but not failure. I am master of my profession, and I have a certain modicum of business ability, as well as common sense. Never fear for me, my dear sir; I shall come out all right."

"Upon my word, I believe you will, Jack," the old gentleman replied. "You are a plucky young fellow, and that is half the battle in these days. However, do not decide upon anything hastily; take a little more time to think the matter over; and if, after doing so, you finally determine upon hazarding the experiment, do not go to a stranger to borrow money; come to me, and you shall be dealt fairly with."

As I wended my way homeward, on that glorious summer afternoon, I once more turned the whole matter over in my mind, with the result that before I reached "The Spaniards" I had fully come to the determination to take the risk, such as it was, and be my own master. There was no blinking the fact that I should have to do *something*; and to purchase a ship and sail in my own employ seemed to be not only the *best* but the *only* thing I could do, under the circumstances.

On reaching home I found that my mother had spent the entire afternoon in a fruitless effort to decipher the cryptogram, much to her disappointment; so, by way of giving her something else to think about, I told her of the idea that had occurred to me during my walk; of the chat I had had with Mr Richards about it, and of his offer to assist me with a loan, if need were. The dear old mater entered upon the subject with enthusiasm, as she always did upon any plan or scheme upon which I had set my heart; and though at first the idea of trusting all my savings to the mercy of the treacherous sea failed to commend itself to her, she came round to my view at length, and dissipated the only scruples I had had by unreservedly assenting to my proposal.

The matter settled thus far, the next thing to be done was to obtain my master's certificate; and this I determined to do forthwith, and to look about me for a ship at the same time. I knew exactly what I wanted, but scarcely expected to get it with the amount at my disposal, even with such assistance as Mr Richards might be able to afford me. Still, I was in no hurry for a month or two; I should have a little time to look about me; and if I could not find precisely what I wanted, I should perhaps succeed in obtaining a reasonably near approach to it.

Accordingly, on the following day I made the few preparations that were necessary; called upon Mr Richards again and acquainted him with my decision, and, on the day afterwards, took an early train to London, and not only settled myself in lodgings in the neighbourhood of Tower Hill, but also arranged with a "coach" to give me the "polishing-up" necessary to obtain my certificate, before night closed down upon the great city.

Chapter Three.

The "Esmeralda."

As I had been sensible enough to make the most of my opportunities at sea, I was both a crack seaman and a first-rate navigator; I needed therefore no very great amount of coaching to enable me to pass my examination; and a month later saw me a full-fledged master, with a certificate in my pocket, which empowered me to take the command of a passenger-ship, if I could obtain it.

Meanwhile, I had been keeping a quiet lookout for such a ship as I had in my mind's eye, and indeed had looked at several, but had hitherto found nothing to suit me. I had also called two or three times at the office of my late owners, to inquire how the matter of the salvage was progressing, and had been informed on the last occasion that there was every prospect of a speedy settlement. This had been a week previous to the obtaining of my certificate. That last week had been a busy as well as a somewhat anxious one for me; but I was now free; my troubles, so far as the examination was concerned, were over; and on the eventful afternoon, when I received the intimation that I had "passed with flying colours," I mentally resolved to pay another visit of inquiry after the salvage the first thing the next morning.

When the next morning came, however, my plans for the day suddenly underwent an alteration; for as I sat in my frowsy lodgings at a rather later breakfast than usual, devouring my doubtful eggs, munching my tough toast, and sipping my cold coffee, with an advertisement page of the *Shipping Gazette* propped up before me on the table, the following advertisement caught my eye.

"For Sale, at Breaking-up Price.—The exceptionally fast and handsome clipper barque *Esmeralda*, 326 tons B.M., A1 at Lloyd's. Substantially built of oak throughout; coppered, and copper-fastened. Only 8 years old, and as sound as on the day that she left the stocks. Very light draught (11 feet, fully loaded), having been designed and built especially for the Natal trade. Can be moved without ballast. Has accommodation for twelve saloon and eight steerage passengers. Unusually full inventory, including three suits of sails (one suit never yet bent), 6 boats, fully equipped; very powerful ground-tackle; hawsers, warps; spare topmasts and other spars, booms, etcetera, etcetera, complete. Ready for sea at once. Extraordinary bargain; owners adopting steam. For further particulars apply to, etcetera, etcetera."

Now, this was exactly the kind of craft I had had in my mind, from the moment when I first thought of purchasing—that is, if the *Esmeralda* only happened to bear a reasonable resemblance to her description. This, unfortunately, did not always happen—at all events, in the case of vessels for sale; my own experience, hitherto, had been that it was the exception, rather than the rule, for I had found that if indeed the advertisement did not contain some gross misstatement, it was almost always so cunningly worded as to convey an impression totally at variance with the reality. In this case, however, I was somewhat more hopeful, for these Natal clippers were not wholly strange to me. The ship to which I had lately belonged had loaded her outward cargo in the same dock with one or another of them on more than one occasion, and I had noticed them as being exceptionally smart-looking little craft; and I had frequently heard them spoken of in highly favourable terms, by men who had sailed in them. I knew, moreover, that, until very

lately, a strong feeling of rivalry had existed between the owners whose ships were in that particular trade—especially those who made a speciality of passenger-carrying—each owner striving his utmost to earn for his own ships the reputation of being the fastest and most comfortable in the trade. I was therefore in hopes that, if the *Esmeralda* had indeed been especially built for a Natal liner, she might not prove so hopelessly unlike her description as had been most of the ships I had taken the trouble to inspect; and I therefore determined to have a look at her forthwith, lest so eligible a craft as she seemed to be—on paper—should slip through my fingers.

The place at which it was necessary to apply for further particulars was in Fenchurch Street; and upon making my way thither, I discovered that it was the office of the owners. I stated my business to one of the clerks, and was immediately turned over to a keen-looking elderly man who at once invited me into his private sanctum, and, as a preliminary, showed me a half-model of the vessel. It was a very plainly got up affair, intended merely to exhibit the general shape and mould of the hull; but I had no sooner taken it into my hands and cast a critical glance or two at the lines of the entrance and run, than I decided conclusively that I had never in my life set eyes upon a more handsome craft. The model showed her to be shallow and very beamy of hull; but her lines were as fine as those of a yacht, and indeed the entire shape of the hull was yacht-like in the extreme. Having expressed, in becomingly moderate terms, my satisfaction, so far, I was next given the specification to look through; and a careful perusal of this document convinced me that, if the craft had been built up to it, she was undoubtedly as staunch a ship as wood and metal could make her.

The next question was that of price; and though, when it was named, a disinterested person might perhaps have been disposed to consider the expression “breaking-up price” as somewhat poetic and imaginative, the figure was still a very decidedly moderate one, if the craft only proved to be in somewhat as good condition as she was represented to be. This also meeting with my carefully qualified approval, it was suggested that, as the craft herself was lying in the East India Docks, I should run down and look at her. My new friend and I accordingly took train, and in due time arrived alongside.

It was hard work to restrain the expressions of admiration and delight that sprang to my lips when my eyes first rested upon her, for she was a little beauty indeed. Dirty as she was, and disordered and lumbered-up as were her decks, it was impossible for the professional eye to overlook her many excellencies; and before I had even stepped on board her I had already mentally determined that if her hull were only sound, the little barkie should be mine, and that in her I would seek for Dick Saint Leger’s long-lost treasure. For she not only came up to but far surpassed in appearance the ideal craft upon which I had set my mind. She was as handsome as a picture; with immensely taunt and lofty spars; and though her hold was absolutely empty, her royal yards were across, and the strong breeze that happened to be blowing at the time made scarcely any perceptible impression upon her. She carried a small topgallant fore-castle forward, just large enough to comfortably house two pig-pens, which in this position were not likely to prove an annoyance to people aft; and the accommodation below for the crew was both roomy and comfortable. Aft the foremast, and between it and the main hatch, stood a deck-house, the fore part of which constituted the berthage for the steerage passengers, while the after-part consisted of a commodious galley fitted with a large and very complete cooking-range. The after-part of the deck was raised some two and a half feet, forming a fine roomy half-poop, pierced only by the saloon companion, the saloon skylight, and two small skylights immediately aft it, which lighted a pair of family cabins situated aft the main saloon. The wheel was a handsomely carved mahogany affair, elaborately adorned with brasswork; the binnacle also was of brass, with a bronze standard representing three dolphins twisted round each other; and the belaying-pins also were of brass, fore and aft. These, and a few other details that caught my eye, seemed to indicate that no expense had been spared in the fitting-out of the ship.

While we were walking round the decks, making a leisurely inspection of such matters as would repay examination in this part of the ship, a very respectable, seaman-like fellow came on board, and was first accosted by my companion and then introduced to me as “Captain Thomson, our late skipper of the *Esmeralda*; now looking after the ship until she finds a purchaser. Mr Saint Leger,” my companion continued explanatorily, “has come on board to inspect the ship, with some idea of buying, if he finds her satisfactory.”

“I am very glad to hear it,” answered Thomson, “for she is altogether too good to be laid up idle. As to her being satisfactory—why, that of course depends upon what Mr Saint Leger wants; the ship may be either too large or too small for him; but I’ll defy any man to find a *fault* in her. She’s a beauty, sir,” he continued, turning to me, “and she’s every bit as good as she looks.”

My unknown friend here pulled out his watch and looked at it anxiously.

“I wonder,” he said, “whether you will consider me very rude if I propose to run away, and leave Captain Thomson to do the honours of the ship in my stead? I should like to remain with you; but the fact is that I have rather an important meeting to attend in the City; and I see that I have no time to lose if I am to be punctual. And Thomson really knows a great deal more about the ship than I do; consequently he will be able to give you more reliable information than I can.”

I of course begged that he would not put himself to the slightest inconvenience on my account, and expressed myself as being perfectly satisfied at being left in the hands of the skipper of the ship; whereupon he turned to Thomson and said—

“Let Mr Saint Leger see everything without reserve, Thomson; and tell him anything he wishes to know, if you please. We have no desire whatever to sell the ship by means of misrepresentation of any sort. Good-bye,” he continued, turning to me, and offering his hand; “I hope we shall see you again, and be able to do business with you.”

He raised his hat, stepped briskly along the gang-plank, and was soon lost sight of in the crowd.

“Who is that gentleman?” I inquired of Thomson, as the figure vanished.

"That is Mr Musgrave, the junior partner of the firm, and as nice a gentleman as ever stepped," was the reply.

"Have you been long in the employ?" was my next question.

"For the last eighteen years—in fact, ever since I first took to the sea—and hope to end my days with them. They are now building a steamer for me; and as soon as this craft is sold I am to go and supervise the work upon her."

"Ah," I remarked, "an excellent arrangement. And now, captain, tell me, as between man and man, have you ever discovered any faults in the *Esmeralda*—anything you would like to have had altered in her, had such alteration been possible? You have commanded her for some time, I suppose?"

"Ever since she was launched," was the reply, "and a sweeter little vessel, in every way, doesn't float. As to faults, she has none, to my thinking. She is not a great cargo-carrier, it is true; in fact, her lines are so fine that the amount of her register tonnage, in dead weight, just puts her down to Plimsoll's mark. Some men would no doubt consider this a serious fault; but I do not, for what she wants in carrying capacity she more than makes up in speed; so that when the whole thing comes to be worked out, putting her earnings against her expenses, she carries her tonnage at a less cost than any other ship I happen to be acquainted with."

"Is she tight?"

I asked.

"Tight as a bottle, sir. Why, she don't make enough water to keep her sweet! And strong!—just look at her copper—not a wrinkle in it; and yet I tell you, sir, that I have habitually driven this little ship so hard that she has made faster passages than any other ship in the trade. Why, we made the run from these same docks to Natal in fifty-five days, on one trip; and we have never taken longer than seventy days to do it. And a prettier sea-boat you never set eyes on. And weatherly—why, she'll weather on craft twice her size. As to speed, I have never yet seen anything beat her. The fact is, sir, she is much too good to be a cargo-carrier; she is good enough in every way to be used as a yacht; and a fine, wholesome, comfortable yacht she would make, too."

This was all exceedingly satisfactory; and so, too, was everything I saw down below. The saloon was beautifully fitted up in white and gold, with a rich carpet on the floor; a handsome mahogany table laid athwartships; revolving chairs; sofa lockers; a beautiful swinging-lamp, aneroid, and tell-tale compass hung in the skylight; pictures were let into the panelling; there was a noble sideboard; and a piano! The berths, too, were lofty and roomy, especially the family cabins abaft, which were lighted not only from above by a skylight, but also by stern-windows. In the hold, too, everything was as I should have wished it; the timbers all perfectly sound; no sign of dry-rot anywhere; in short, and for a wonder, the ship was everything that the advertisement said of her, and more. So thoroughly satisfied was I with her that I did not hesitate to tell the skipper, before I left him, that I should certainly buy her, if the owners and I could come to terms.

"I suppose, sir, you intend to sail her yourself?" he remarked, as I stood on the wharf taking a final look at the little beauty before returning to my lodgings.

I answered that such was my intention.

"Well," he said, "perhaps you'll be wanting a mate. If so, I believe my late mate would give you every satisfaction. He is a thorough seaman, a first-rate navigator, a good disciplinarian, and a most sober, steady, reliable man in every way, I should have liked to keep him for myself; but it will be some months before the new steamer will be ready, and Roberts—that is the man's name—says he can't afford to remain idle for so long. Shall I write to him, sir, and tell him to call on you?"

I said I should be obliged if he would, and gave him an envelope bearing my temporary address; then, shaking hands with him, and thanking him for the readiness he had exhibited in affording me information and assisting me in my inspection of the ship, I bade him good-bye, and made the best of my way back to my lodgings.

On reaching these I found, as luck would have it, a letter from my late owners conveying the gratifying intelligence that the salvage claim had been settled, and that, upon my calling at the office, my share, amounting to two thousand eight hundred and eighty-six pounds, and some odd shillings, would be paid to me. It was still early in the afternoon; I therefore snatched a hurried lunch; and immediately afterwards chartered a cab and drove into the City; duly received my cheque, with congratulations on my good fortune; and still had time to open an account and safely rid myself of the precious paper before the banks closed for the day. I dined in the City, and afterwards made my way westward to Hyde Park, in the most unfrequented part of which I sauntered to and fro until nearly ten o'clock—my pipe my sole companion—carefully reviewing my plans for the last time, and asking myself whether I had omitted from my calculation any probable element at all likely to disastrously affect them. The result of my self-communing was so far satisfactory as to confirm my resolution to become the owner of the *Esmeralda*; and, having conclusively arrived at this determination, I sauntered quietly eastward through the summer night to my lodgings, and turned in.

The following morning saw me once more wending my way Cityward, this time to the office of Messrs Musgrave and Company, where the preliminaries of the purchase of the *Esmeralda* were speedily accomplished, and a cheque for five hundred pounds given to seal the bargain. This done, I spent the remainder of the morning in seeking a freight; and was at length fortunate enough to secure one on advantageous terms for China. My next business was to run down on board my new purchase and take a careful inventory of her stores, with the object of estimating the probable amount of outlay necessary to fit her for the contemplated voyage; and while I was thus engaged a telegram was despatched to Thomson's friend and late chief mate, Roberts, who, in response, promptly presented himself on board. I liked the appearance of this man from the moment that I first set eyes upon him. He was evidently somewhat more highly educated than the generality of his class; without being in the least dandified, he possessed an ease and polish of manner at that time quite exceptional in the mates of such small craft as the

Esmeralda. He was very quiet and unassuming in his behaviour; and altogether he produced so favourable an impression upon me that I unhesitatingly shipped him on the spot, arranging with him to bring his dunnage on board and assume duty on the following day. My overhaul of the stores on board the barque resulted in the satisfactory discovery that the expenditure necessary to complete her for the voyage would be considerably less than I had dared to hope; and, this fact established, I left the ship in Roberts's charge, and ran down home upon a flying visit to my mother, to fully acquaint her with all that I had done, and to make the arrangements necessary for her comfort and maintenance during my contemplated absence. This involved another visit to my friend, Mr Richards, with whose assistance I made a careful yet generous computation of every expense to which I should be in the least likely to be put before drawing any profit from my adventure; the difference between this sum and the amount of my available assets representing the amount of monetary accommodation which I should require from him. This—thanks to the exceptionally favourable terms upon which I had acquired the ownership of the *Esmeralda*—was so very small that I undertook the obligation with a light heart; and, having completed this part of my business to my entire satisfaction, I hastened back to town, my mother accompanying me in order that we might have as much as possible of each other's society during the short interval that was to elapse before the sailing of the ship.

On my return to London, I found that a small portion of our cargo had already come alongside. I therefore lost no time in advertising the ship as "loading for China direct, with excellent accommodation for saloon and steerage passengers;" and then, in a leisurely manner, proceeded to make the necessary purchases of ship's and cabin stores, filling in the time by taking my mother about to such concerts, picture-galleries, and other places of amusement, as accorded with her quiet and refined tastes.

One morning, about a week after my return to town, being on board the ship and down below, superintending a few trifling alterations that I was having made in my own state-room, the mate, who was taking account of the cargo that was being shipped at the moment, came aft and shouted down the companion to the effect that a lady and gentleman had come on board and were inquiring for me. I accordingly went on deck, and there found a very handsome man, in the prime of life, and a very lovely woman of about three and twenty, standing on the main deck, just by the break of the poop, curiously watching the operation of slinging some heavy cases, and lowering them through the main hatchway.

"Captain Saint Leger?" queried the gentleman, bowing and slightly raising his hat in acknowledgment of my salute as I approached him.

"That is my name," I replied. "In what way can I be of service to you?"

"I have come down to inspect your passenger accommodation, in the first place," said he; "and afterwards—in the event of its proving satisfactory—to see whether I can come to an arrangement with you for the whole of it."

"I am sure I shall be very pleased to do everything I possibly can to meet your views," said I. "If you will kindly step below, I will show you the cabins; and although we are rather in a litter everywhere just at present, you will perhaps be able to judge whether the accommodation is likely to meet your requirements. Are you a large party?"

"Myself, my wife, my wife's sister—this young lady—two children, two maids, and a nurse. My wife, I ought to explain, is at present an invalid, and has been ordered a long sea-voyage; but, as her ailment is chiefly of a nervous character, she is greatly averse to the idea of meeting and associating with strangers; hence my desire to secure the whole of your accommodation, should it prove suitable. Ah, a very pretty, airy saloon," he continued, as I threw open the door and stepped aside to permit my visitors to enter. "The whole width of the ship; sidelights that we can throw open in the tropics, and admit the fresh air. A piano, too, by Erard," as he opened the instrument and glanced at the name. "*You* at least would not be likely to find the voyage tedious, Agnes, with an Erard within reach at any moment," turning to the young lady who accompanied him. "And these, I presume, are the state-rooms," opening the doors of one or two of the berths and glancing inside.

"These are *some* of them," I replied. "In addition to what you now see, there are two family cabins." And, as I spoke, I opened the door of one of them, and allowed my visitors to pass in.

"Capital, capital!" exclaimed the visitor, as he entered. "Really, these two cabins are far and away more roomy and pleasant than the ordinary berths, even in the big liners. Now, supposing that I make up my mind to take the whole of your accommodation, captain, would you be willing to have a door fitted in that partition? Because, in that case," he proceeded, again addressing his sister-in-law, "I should propose to have one of the cabins fitted up as a ladies' boudoir, into which you and Emily could retire when so disposed."

"Yes, that would be very nice," assented the lady. "And perhaps Captain Saint Leger would allow the piano to be placed there?"

I replied that I should be happy to do anything and everything in my power to meet their convenience or make them comfortable.

"Very well," said the gentleman. "Now, Agnes, what do you think of these cabins? Do you think Emily would like them, and find them convenient?"

"I am sure she would," answered the young lady, confidently. "They are much prettier than anything we have hitherto seen; and the two large cabins, with those great windows looking directly out on to the sea, are simply delightful."

"So I think," agreed the gentleman. "And now, captain, as to terms?"

I had already made a little mental calculation as to the amount I ought to ask, and had arrived at a sum which, while it was somewhat less than I should have received had the whole of the cabins been separately taken, would pay me

just as well in the long run; and this sum I named.

"There is one little matter I should like to mention," I said. "My mother is now in town with me, and I had promised her that, if all the cabins were not engaged, she should make the trip home to Weymouth in the ship—"

"An arrangement with which I would not dream of interfering," interrupted the gentleman. "Even should we determine to take your cabins, captain, we shall certainly not require them all—at the outset of the voyage, at least—and I am quite sure that your mother's presence, for the few days that she will probably be with us, will be the reverse of disagreeable to my wife. And now I cannot, of course, decide definitely, one way or the other, until I have told my wife what we have seen; but here is my card; and if you will allow me twenty-four hours for consideration, you shall have my definite decision within that time."

As this was the first inquiry I had had from prospective passengers, I thought the proposal was good enough to justify me in according the grace asked. I therefore undertook to hold the cabins at my visitors' disposal until noon next day; and they then left, with a cordial hand-shake from each.

I waited till they were fairly out of sight, and then looked at the card. It bore the name of "Sir Edgar Desmond," with an address in Park Lane, in the corner.

On the following morning, about half-past eleven, the owner of the card again put in an appearance on board, and, greeting me with the utmost cordiality, exclaimed—

"Well, captain, I have hurried down to let you know that the account of our visit to your ship, and the description of her cabins which I was enabled to give my wife last night, proved so thoroughly satisfactory to her that it was definitely determined, in family conclave, that we should secure your cabins upon the terms mentioned by you yesterday. I have accordingly brought you a cheque for half the amount of our passage-money—here it is—in order to properly ratify the arrangement; and now I presume there will be no difficulty about commencing the few alterations in the cabins that I suggested yesterday?"

"None whatever," I replied; "I will get the carpenters on board to-day, if possible; and in any case the work shall be begun as early as possible, so that the paint may be thoroughly dry and the smell passed off before you come on board."

"I shall be greatly obliged to you if you will," said Sir Edgar. "And now there is another little matter upon which I wish to speak to you. My wife being quite an invalid, it will be necessary that she should have many little delicacies that are not included in the ordinary bill of shipboard fare. These I intend to order at once, and will give instructions that they are to be delivered on board here as soon as ready. May I rely upon you to have a careful account taken of them as they come on board, and to see that they are so bestowed that they may be easily got at when required? Among them will be a few cases of wines for Lady Desmond's personal use; but, so far as the rest of us are concerned, I presume you will be able to supply us with whatever we may require?"

"Certainly," I replied. "I have not yet ordered my stock of wines, and if you have a partiality for any particular kind or brand, and will let me know, I shall be pleased to select my stock with especial reference to your taste."

"Oh, thank you. I am sure you are very good," he laughed; "but we are none of us connoisseurs, nor do I think any of us have a weakness for any one particular kind of wine more than another. If you can undertake to give us a good sound claret every day for dinner, with a bottle of decent champagne now and then, we shall be perfectly content. And now, what is the longest possible time you can allow us in which to get together our outfit for the voyage?"

"We are advertised to sail to-morrow three weeks," I replied.

"Very well," he said. "That is rather brief notice for the ladies; but I have no doubt they will be able to manage when once they are given to understand that it *must* be done. As for me, I shall have no difficulty whatever. I shall be obliged, however, if you will give me a hint or two as to the different climates we shall encounter on the voyage, so that we may prepare accordingly."

I did so, Sir Edgar jotting down a few memoranda in his note-book meanwhile; and then, with another hearty shake of the hand, my visitor left me.

The succeeding three weeks passed uneventfully away, the cargo, during the first fortnight, coming alongside very slowly; but there was quite a rush at the last, and on the night before the day on which we were advertised to sail, I had the satisfaction of seeing the hatches put on and battened down over a full hold, with the barque down to within an inch of her load-mark.

Meanwhile, private stores in considerable quantities had come on board, bearing Sir Edgar Desmond's name upon them, and these I had had carefully stowed away by themselves. This had been a busy day for me; for there were the articles to be signed, the ship to clear at the Custom House, bills to pay, and a hundred other little matters to attend to—among them the giving up of my lodgings, and the removal of my mother and myself with our dunnage to the ship—but when I turned in that night, in my own comfortable state-room, it was with the feeling that my business of every kind had been satisfactorily concluded, and that henceforth, until our arrival in Hong Kong, I should only have the ship to look after. Moreover, the whole of my crew, with two exceptions, had faithfully kept their promise to be on board before the dock-gates closed that night, so that I might reasonably hope to go out of dock with a tolerably sober crew in the morning.

We unmoored at seven o'clock next morning, and half an hour later—the two absentees from the fore-castle scrambling on board as we passed out through the gates—were clear of the dock and in the river, with the tug ahead and the first of the ebb to help us on our way. We made a pause of half an hour off Gravesend, to pick up Sir Edgar

Desmond and his party—who had spent the night at an hotel there—and then, pushing on again, found ourselves, about six o'clock that evening, off the North Foreland, with a light northerly air blowing, which, when we had got the barque under all plain sail, fanned us along at a speed of about five knots.

Chapter Four.

In Blue Water.

As the sun declined toward the west, the light breeze which had prevailed throughout the day became still lighter, dwindling away to such an extent that when, about two bells in the first watch (nine o'clock p.m.), we returned to the deck after partaking of our first sea dinner, the water was like glass for the smoothness of it, while our canvas drooped limp and apparently useless from the yards and stays; a faint rustle aloft now and again, with an accompanying rippling patter of reef-points, betraying rather some subtle heave of the glassy sea than any sign that the breeze still lingered. Yet there must have been a light draught of air aloft, for the vane at our main-royal-masthead occasionally fluttered languidly out along the course we were steering, and our royals exhibited an occasional tendency to fill, albeit they as often collapsed again softly rustling to the masts. Moreover, the barque still retained her steerage-way. I remarked upon this to the mate, who had charge of the deck. He laughed.

"Ay," said he, "that is one of the *Esmeralda's* little tricks. I've seen her, before now, sneak up to and right through a large fleet of ships, every one of which, excepting ourselves, was boxing the compass. When this little barkie refuses to steer, you may take your Davy to it, sir, that there ain't enough wind to be of any use to anybody."

It was a glorious evening. We were off Deal, slowly drifting past the town on the ebb tide; our progress made apparent only by the quiet, stealthy way in which the masts of the vessels lying at anchor in the roadstead successively approached, covered, and receded from some prominent object on shore, such as a church spire, a lofty building, a tall chimney, and what not. The sun had sunk behind the land, leaving behind him a clear sky of softest primrose tint, against which the outline of the land cut sharply, the town being steeped in rich dusky shadow, out of which the lights were beginning to twinkle here and there. We were close enough in to catch an occasional faint, indefinite sound from the shore, accentuated at intervals by the sharp, clear note of a railway whistle, or the low, intermittent thunder of a moving train; while, nearer at hand, came the occasional splash of oars in the still water, or their thud in the rowlocks; the strains of a concertina played on the fore-castle-head of one of the craft lying at anchor; a gruff hail; a laugh; or the hoarse rattle of chain through a hawse-pipe as one of the drifting vessels came to an anchor. Our own lads were very quiet, the watch below having turned in, while those on deck, with the exception of the lookout, had arranged themselves in a group about the windlass, and were conversing in suppressed tones well befitting the exceeding quiet of the night. Lady Desmond, well wrapped up in a fur-lined cloak, occupied a large wicker reclining chair placed close to the after skylight, where it was well out of everybody's way, and was languidly listening to the conversation which was passing between her sister and my mother, in which she occasionally joined for a moment; while Sir Edgar was down below, chatting and laughing with the two children during their preparation by the nurse for bed. The two maids were also below, busy in their mistress's cabin.

The ship having been all day—as she still was—in charge of the pilot, I had had leisure to make the first advances toward an acquaintance with my passengers; and, from what I had thus far seen of them, I had every reason to hope that the association would be a particularly pleasant one.

Sir Edgar was a fine, handsome man, of about thirty-five years of age, standing some five feet nine or ten inches in his stockings, well made, with dark brown hair that covered his head in short wavy curls. He had dark blue eyes, with which he looked one frankly and pleasantly in the face; and his manner, while it possessed all the polish of the perfect gentleman, was particularly frank and genial.

Lady Desmond appeared to be some eight or nine years younger than her husband, and was unquestionably an exceedingly handsome woman. She was perhaps three inches less in height than her husband, but, when standing apart from him, gave one the impression of being the taller of the two, probably because she happened to be very thin and fragile-looking when she first joined the *Esmeralda*. She had evidently only just emerged from a very severe illness, for all her movements were marked by the slowness and languor of one who is still an invalid. She had not a vestige of colour, and her hands, when I saw them ungloved at the dinner table, were attenuated to a degree that was painful to contemplate; but her eyes were magnificent, and her voice, albeit it was weak and low like that of an invalid, was very sweet and sympathetic in tone. I had not been enlightened as to the nature of her illness; but its most marked symptom appeared to be a profound melancholy and depression of spirits which it seemed utterly impossible for her to shake off.

Her sister, Miss Merrivale, was her exact counterpart, except that the latter was the junior by some three or four years, and was, both in form and complexion, the very picture of exuberant health and spirits. She possessed a singularly agreeable and engaging, though high-bred manner; and the patient tenderness with which she studied her invalid sister's whims quickly won my warmest admiration.

Of the two children, the elder was a fine sturdy boy, about seven years old, named after his father; while the other was a sweet little tot of a girl, about five years old, with the prettiest, most lovable, and confiding ways I had ever beheld in a child. They were both very merry, light-hearted, buoyant-spirited children, but exceedingly well-behaved, very tender and affectionate toward each other; and perfect patterns of obedience while they remembered the parental injunctions laid upon them from time to time; but it must be admitted that their memories in this respect were, like those of most children, a little apt to be short-lived.

And, as to the two maids and the nurse, they impressed me as being very quiet, respectable well-behaved representatives of their class, and not at all likely to give me trouble by encouraging any attempts at flirtation on the

part of the men. So that altogether I thought I had every reason to congratulate myself upon my first experience in the command of a passenger-ship.

Then, as to the ship herself. Though it was early yet to form a distinct and definite opinion of her, having had only a few hours' experience of her under sail, and that, too, in a light breeze and smooth water, still her behaviour under those circumstances had been such as led me to feel assured, from past experience, that she was everything a seaman's heart could wish. That she was certain to prove extraordinarily fast I was convinced, even before we had spread a single cloth of canvas, by the ease with which the tug had walked away down the river with her. And after the tug had let go our hawser and left us to our own devices, we had overhauled and passed everything in our company with an ease and rapidity that proved her to be a perfect witch in light breezes; while now, when the rest of the fleet were either drifting helplessly with the tide and heading to all points of the compass, or anchoring to avoid falling foul of something else, we were sneaking along at a good two knots through the water, with the ship under perfect command of her helm.

At length the sounds of the children's happy voices ceased down below: and, a few minutes later, Sir Edgar emerged from the saloon companion. He paused for a moment to address a cheery remark or two to the little party aft, and then joined me near the break of the poop, where I had been standing for some time gazing abstractedly about me in a contented, half-dreamy fashion at our surroundings. He made some conventional remark as to the wonderful calmness and beauty of the evening, and offered me a cigar; upon which, responding to his friendly overtures, I turned, and we proceeded to quietly pace the deck together; the baronet—for such he proved to be—confiding to me, in an easy, chatty manner, the circumstances that had led to the family undertaking the voyage.

At length, when the dusk of evening had fairly merged into the darkness of night, and the illimitable vault above us had become spangled and powdered with stars innumerable of every magnitude, a delicate sheen appeared on the eastern horizon, glowing faintly and softly at first as the tremulous shimmer of summer lightning, but brightening by imperceptible degrees until it revealed a hitherto invisible bank of fleecy vapour lying low along the horizon's margin, the rounded edges of which it daintily touched here and there with glowing silver. Rapidly, yet with the most subtle mutations, the glow increased in strength and splendour, the colour at the same time deepening to a warm orange hue; and presently, above the upper edge of the cloud-bank, the sharp rim of the moon's broad disc soared into view, ruddy as a shield of burning gold, while simultaneously a wavering line of ruddy gold flashed across the gleaming surface of the water almost to the ship's side. Slowly and majestically, as befits the movements of the stately queen of night, the glowing orb rose clear of the cloud-bank, her orange beams flowing softly into the shadows of the night and revealing here and there in clear but delicate outline the forms and details of craft that had before appeared but as black shapeless blots against the starlit heavens; while the hull and canvas of our craft, that had hitherto worn the aspect of a huge black shadow upon sky and water, now glowed faint but clear in the warm light, with rich touches of ruddy gold here and there where the radiance struck and was reflected from the dew-wetted bulwarks, the glistening spars, the taut rigging, or the polished brass and glass about the deck fittings and skylights.

The misty light now revealed to us that we were in the very heart of a fleet numbering some two hundred and fifty sail, most of which were at anchor, many with their canvas more or less snugly stowed; but there were a few—perhaps a dozen in all—on board which the canvas hung in the brails, all ready for sheeting home and hoisting away at a moment's notice. There were also a few—obviously outward-bound, like ourselves—who were—also like ourselves—holding on in the evident hope that with the rising of the moon, or at all events before the turn of the tide, a little breeze might spring up which would obviate the necessity of letting go the mud-hook, with the attendant loss of time and expenditure of labour in getting it again and making sail once more. It was soon evident that this hope was to be realised, for the moon had scarcely been above the horizon half an hour when a narrow dark line appeared stretching along the horizon beneath her, and gradually widening, until at length a very pretty little easterly breeze reached us, under the influence of which, heeling slightly and coquettishly away from it, the saucy *Esmeralda* began to slip along, with scarcely more than a ripple at her sharp bows, at the rate of a good honest seven knots.

Impelled by this most welcome breeze, we were soon round the South Foreland and off Dover, where we hove-to to land the pilot. In executing this manoeuvre we passed close under the stern of a magnificent topsail schooner-yacht, as large as ourselves, with hull painted a brilliant white, which, in the pale moonlight and with her snow-white canvas, made her look like a beautiful phantom craft. She was getting under way, and had just tripped her anchor and was canting to the southward when we rounded to under her stern; and I noticed Mr Roberts, my chief mate, looking long and admiringly at her as she gathered way and, swinging her fore-yard, glided swiftly, yet with a stately movement, out from among the crowd of craft by which she was surrounded. Turning away at last, as if regretfully, from the contemplation of the noble vessel, Roberts stamped his foot impatiently, and, striding up to the pilot, demanded—

"I say, Mr Pilot, is there any chance of those mates of yours catching sight of our signals to-night, think ye, or are they keeping a lookout from between the blankets?"

The pilot, whose perfect calmness and indifference were in ludicrous contrast to the mate's impatience, turned slowly round and eyed his questioner deliberately from top to toe before he deigned to answer.

"They will be alongside in less than a minute, mister. They are shut in behind that billy-boy just now; but—Ah, here they come!"

"Lay aft here, one of you," shouted the mate, "and stand by with a line for that boat."

"You will come below and take a glass of wine or a glass of grog before you go ashore, pilot?"

I asked.

"Thank you, sir; I've no objection," was the response; and we were just turning away toward the saloon companion when the mate stepped quietly up to me and said—

"I suppose we may as well rig out the stu'n'sail-booms all ready for making sail as soon as the pilot has left us? It will be a pity not to make the most of this fair wind while it lasts."

"Certainly," I replied, somewhat unwillingly; for, truth to tell, I thought it would be quite time enough to hurry when my poor mother had gone ashore and we were on the other side of the Bill of Portland.

Roberts, however, evidently regarded the matter from a very different standpoint from that which I occupied—perhaps he was anxious already to show off the ship's pace—for, ere I had time to reach the companion, his voice rang out loud and clear—

"Lay aft here, some of you lads, and rouse out the stu'n'sail gear; the rest of you slip up aloft and cast loose the larboard fore-topmast and topgallant stu'n'sail boom, ready for rigging out. Take a line aloft with you, and send the end down on deck for the gear as soon as you are ready. Look alive, my hearties!" Then, *sotto voce*, "Yon schooner is a beauty, and no mistake; but she is not going to be allowed to run away from this clipper if I can help it!"

So that was the explanation of friend Roberts's impatience! He had been so long in the *Esmeralda*, and had been so accustomed to beating everything that had been fallen in with, that he could not endure with equanimity the sight of even a yacht running away from him. "It is evident," thought I, "that the grass will have very little chance of growing on this ship's copper so long as Roberts is mate of her. But I shall have to keep an eye on the fellow, or perhaps he will be taking the sticks out of her, or laying her on her beam-ends some day in the excitement and enthusiasm of a race with something bigger and more nimble than ourselves."

At length, to Roberts's unconcealed gratification, the pilot went down over the side and shoved off, and we were left to our own resources.

"Up with your helm and let her pay off!" was now the word; "round-in upon the starboard main-braces; now your larboard fore-braces; well there; belay! Now rig out your booms, there, as soon as you are ready, and let's get some muslin on the little beauty." And forthwith the mate put in a pleasant hour decking the ship with her larboard studding-sails, from the royals down. And truly, prepared as I was for a somewhat out-of-the-way performance on the part of the little craft, I was astounded at the ease and rapidity with which she overtook and passed everything near her. The schooner-yacht had managed to slink away to a distance of some three miles from us during our short detention while landing the pilot, and by the time that my passengers had said "good night" and retired to their cabins she was the only craft ahead of us; and we had been gaining on her fast until her people, noticing this fact, had begun to pack sail upon her; and now there she was, straight ahead of us, with her mainsheet eased well off, a gigantic balloon topsail over her huge mainsail, and an immense square-sail set forward, with all her larboard studding-sails spread, skimming away swiftly and easily as a wreath of summer mist over the smooth surface of the Channel waters. I remained on deck until midnight, when, giving the second mate a word of caution not to carry his canvas too long in the event of the breeze freshening—which, however, it gave no indication of doing—I retired below and turned in with the gratifying feeling that I was now my own master; that I was working for myself, and should henceforth reap the direct benefit of my own labour and skill—such as the latter might be; that, in fact, my fortune was in my own hands, to make or mar; as it is in the hands of every young man.

The sound of the scrubbing-brushes, as they were set to work at four bells (six o'clock) next morning, awoke me; and, hastily donning such garments as were indispensable, I went on deck to take a look round. The easterly breeze, though it had proved somewhat fitful, had held with sufficient strength through the night to place us off Selsey Bill, with the high land of Saint Catherine's Point looming faintly ahead of us about two points on the starboard bow; and there, too, hauling up for the inside of the Wight, was our friend the schooner-yacht of the night before, some two miles inshore of us and about the same distance ahead. The mate was very busy with the hose, with which he was liberally sluicing the decks and bulwarks, to say nothing of the bare feet and legs of those of the crew who in their scrubbing operations happened to approach within range of him. Of the yacht's existence he was apparently quite oblivious; at all events, he carefully abstained from directing his glances in her direction.

"Good morning, Mr Roberts," I exclaimed genially. "So you were unable to overtake the flyer yonder, after all."

"Good morning, sir," he responded with equal geniality. "(Now then, you sodgers, stand clear of the hose if you don't want a ducking. Serve you right, Tom; you'll take warning, perhaps, the next time I give it you.) The flyer, sir? Oh, you mean the yacht. Well, of course, they have the pull of us in light weather, such as we've had through the night; but I'll bet my hat that neither yonder schooner nor e'er a yacht that now happens to be away there inside the island could look at us in a good, honest to'gallant breeze. You wait a bit, sir; the little hooker hasn't had a chance yet to show what she can do. But there's a breeze coming by-and-by, if I'm any judge of that sky away there to the east'ard; and then, after we've touched at Weymouth and hauled out again into the wake of that fleet astarn of us, you'll have a chance to judge of the *Esmeralda's* paces when she lays herself out to travel. Now, boys, lay aft here with your squeegees, and give this poop a drying down!"

It was a glorious morning; the sun, already well above the horizon, just taking the keen edge off the air, and rendering the pure easterly breeze soft and balmy without depriving it of any of its bracing and exhilarating qualities; the sky a magnificent, deep, pure blue overhead, softening down in tint to warm tender tones of grey as the eye travelled from the zenith, horizon-ward. Cloud, properly speaking, there was none, save a few faint streaks here and there of the kind known as "mares' tails"; but away to the northward and eastward the sky at the horizon, although it was of a clear pale primrose hue, had that peculiar indescribable "hardness" of tint that, to the experienced eye, is the sure forerunner of a good wholesome breeze. That breeze, however, was yet to come; the wind at the moment being very paltry—little more than sufficient, indeed, to keep the heavier canvas "asleep," and to send the barque along at a speed of about five knots. The water was perfectly smooth, save of course for the ripple caused by the light breeze; but, so far as swell was concerned, there was absolutely none, the ship neither pitching nor rolling perceptibly.

In due course my passengers made their appearance on deck, in high glee at the favourable condition of the weather, and full of compliments as to the comfort of the sleeping cabins. And indeed it was not difficult to judge, by their fresh and cheerful looks, that they had enjoyed a sound and undisturbed night's rest. Even poor Lady Desmond was looking incomparably more bright and cheerful than had been the case with her a short day previously, and was already beginning to speak hopefully of her possible recovery.

As the day wore on, the wind, instead of freshening, as we had expected from the indications at sunrise, grew more and more paltry; so that it was rather late on in the afternoon ere we reached Weymouth. The weather, however, had been undergoing a slow and subtle change all day; and when we at length rounded to and backed the *Esmeralda's* mainyard in the roadstead the sky away to the eastward was overspread by a broad bank of dirty grey vapour reaching almost to the zenith, the mares' tails had increased in number and become more strongly defined, and a thin veil of scarcely perceptible vapour was sweeping steadily athwart the blue. The horizon to the eastward, too, had become overcast—so much so, indeed, as to completely obscure Saint Alban's Head; the wind was beginning to freshen in fitful puffs, and the small surges occasionally combed and broke into a miniature white cap. All of which indicated with sufficient clearness that the long-expected breeze was close at hand, and that, moreover, we should probably have quite as much of it as we wanted. I accordingly lost no time in lowering the gig, and getting my mother and her belongings into her; when we shoved off—leaving the ship in charge of Mr Roberts—and stretched out for the harbour. My mother seemed a good deal cut up, now that the moment of parting had drawn so very near, and—poor soul—spent most of the short time during which we were traversing the space between the ship and the harbour, with her head on my shoulder, crying softly, and fondling my disengaged hand in hers. While, as for me, I was—like most sailors—sadly wanting in eloquence, and could think of nothing better or more encouraging to say than that I was at last really starting out to seek my fortune, and that I fully intended to find it ere I returned to her. Ah me! how little I guessed at the hardship and suffering in store for me, or the anxiety and anguish of mind that my dear mother was to endure before we two should meet again!

Landing at the flight of boat-steps near the inner end of the pier, I put my mother and her baggage into the first fly that presented itself; kissed her a dozen times; said good-bye hurriedly, and tore myself away; springing hastily into the stern-sheets of the gig with a final wave of the hand as the dear soul drove away.

"Give way, men!" I exclaimed huskily; "the breeze is freshening fast, and I care not how soon we are once more on board the *Esmeralda!*"

The breeze was indeed freshening fast; the thick weather had crept down the coast until the high land about the Burning Cliff was only dimly visible; and as we dashed out past the end of the pier, the water in the bay was all flecked with white. The *Esmeralda*, with royals clewed up, was halfway across toward Portland Roads; but Roberts was evidently keeping a sharp lookout, for, judging it to be about time for us to make our appearance, he had already filled on the ship, and as we rounded the buoy marking the extremity of the reef on the south side of the harbour, we saw her fly up into the wind and tack with a rapidity which I had certainly never before witnessed in a square-rigged ship. The little beauty worked "as quick as they could swing the yards," as the stroke oarsman remarked enthusiastically. We paddled gently ahead, leaving to those on board the task of picking us up; and very neatly and smartly was it done too, the barque keeping a rap full, and tearing through the water like a racer, until exactly the right moment, when she flew up head to wind, shooting into the wind's eye in magnificent style, ranging up alongside us in the boat and picking us up while still in stays, then paying off again on the other tack almost before the tackles were hooked on. Another minute and the gig was once more at the davits; and the *Esmeralda*, on a taut bowline, and with her royal yards again mast-headed, was rushing away at a perfectly bewildering pace, on a course that would enable her to just handsomely weather the outer end of Portland breakwater, if the little witch continued to eat into the wind as she was then doing. Roberts was evidently in ecstasies at the ship's behaviour; his flushed cheek, his sparkling eye, and his quick, restless movements told me that; but he would have bitten his tongue out, rather than have suffered himself to be betrayed into any remarks which could possibly be construed into "fishing for a compliment;" and it was truly amusing to watch the heroic efforts he made to simulate a cool and indifferent demeanour. But it was plain enough that he was hungering for a word of praise to the ship that he had learned to love as though she were flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone: so I hastened to gratify the good fellow by eulogising—as indeed I could with the most perfect honesty—the marvellous weatherly qualities and speed of the ship, as also the stiffness with which she stood up under her big spread of canvas. Had I not done so, I verily believe that my reputation as a seaman would have shrunk very materially in my chief mate's estimation, instead of increasing, as it immediately did.

The wind being dead fair for the run out of the Channel, we "took our departure" from the Bill of Portland; and, packing the studding-sails upon the willing little barkie, passed Ushant at four o'clock the next morning—a truly wonderful run; but then our patent log showed that we had been travelling at the rate of a fair, honest fifteen knots from the moment that we dropped that useful machine overboard off the Bill. This magnificent breeze followed us up for the next four days, and carried us into the latitude of Madeira—an almost unprecedented performance; but it must not be forgotten that it was blowing a whole gale from the eastward all this time, or well over our larboard quarter, allowing every thread of canvas to draw to perfection; and, finding that the barque carried her canvas superbly, I simply let Robert have his way with her, although I must admit that never before in my experience had I seen a craft so boldly driven. Then—on the evening of the fifth day out from Weymouth—the wind rapidly dwindled away to nothing, and left us rolling heavily on the steep swell that followed us. I concluded that we had run into the doldrums, or horse latitudes, and that we should now probably have calms, or light baffling airs until we fell in with the trade-winds; but on going below to turn in at midnight, I observed that a very decided fall of the barometer had taken place. I therefore returned to the deck for a moment and cautioned the second mate—whose watch it was—to keep a sharp lookout for any sign of a decided change in the weather; and gave him strict injunctions to call me immediately that any indication of such change should become apparent. I had some thought of remaining on deck an hour or two longer, to personally watch the development of events; but reflecting that I had been out of my berth for the last eighteen hours, and that, if we were to have bad weather, it might be some time before I should have another opportunity to sleep, I decided to go below and get what rest I could, especially as the sky was at that time

perfectly clear, with the stars shining brilliantly.

A sailor soon gets into the habit of falling asleep the moment his head touches his pillow, and I was no exception to the rule, although my newly assumed responsibilities caused me perhaps to sleep more lightly than before; at all events, I had—even in the short time that we had been at sea—acquired the faculty of being cognisant of almost everything that happened on deck, even during the time that I was asleep; and on this particular night it seemed to me that I had not been in my berth more than ten minutes—though the time was actually close upon two hours—when I heard the second mate quietly descending the saloon staircase, and in another moment his knuckles were cautiously tapping at the door of my cabin.

“Ay, ay,” I answered drowsily; “what is it, Mr Forbes?”

“Sorry to disturb you, sir,” was the reply, “but there seems to be something brewing away down there to the south’ard and west’ard. It’s as black as a wolf’s mouth thereaway; and there is a nasty cross swell getting up, as you may feel for yourself, sir.”

“All right,” I returned, rolling reluctantly out of my berth; “I will be on deck in a minute.”

I was as good as my word; and upon popping my head outside the companion I came to the conclusion that I had been called none too soon. There was absolutely not a breath of air stirring save that created by the heavy flapping of the canvas as the ship rolled, with a quick, uneasy motion, almost gunwale-to; and upon interrogating the helmsman I learned that he had lost all command over the vessel for fully an hour. It was, as the second mate had said, intensely dark down in the south-western quarter; and a very brief observation sufficed to demonstrate that the pall of cloud which hid the heavens in that direction was slowly but steadily spreading toward the zenith, star after star being blotted out even as I watched them. The air, too, was close and oppressive as the breath of an oven; while the surface of the sea was unusually agitated, the run seeming to come from all points of the compass at once, and to meet under the ship, causing her to “wallow” so awkwardly that the water tumbled in over her rail in all directions, now forward, now aft, and anon in the waist, and on either side with the utmost impartiality. The water was everywhere of an inky blackness, save along the ship’s bends and where she dipped it in over her rail. This disturbed water looked, at a short distance, as though it had been diluted with milk; but, examined closely, it was found to glow with a faint fire, like the glimmer of summer lightning, with small star-like points of stronger light thickly scattered through it. The most perfect silence reigned outside the ship, but on board there was quite a small Babel of sound storming about us; the creaking of yard-parrels and trusses aloft, mingled with the loud flap of the canvas to the roll of the ship, the “cheep” of block-sheaves, the sharp “slatting” of suddenly tautened gear, and the pattering of reef-points; while on deck there was the monotonous swish of water washing athwart the planks from side to side, with the choking gurgle of the water spouting up through the scuppers, and the heavy splashing sound of the brine as it poured in over the bulwarks; the whole set to a dismal accompaniment of creaking timbers, rattling doors, and breaking crockery below.

“How long has the weather been like this, Mr Forbes?” I asked, as my subordinate stood a few paces apart from me, waiting to hear what I had to say about the aspect of things in general.

“Well, sir,” he replied, “that is not a very easy question to answer. It has been gathering ever since about half an hour after you went below; but the change has been going on so imperceptibly that it scarcely forced itself upon my attention until just before—Ah! did you hear that, sir?”

A low, faint, weird, moaning sound, scarcely perceptible, had floated to the ship, causing the mate to interrupt himself suddenly; and at the same moment a light, evanescent puff of hot air seemed to sweep past us.

“Yes,” said I, “I both heard and felt it. We are going to have a heavy squall, if nothing worse, out of that blackness yonder. Turn the hands up at once, and let them go to work to strip the ship without loss of time. Get in all your light flying kites first of all, and stow them snugly; then brail in your mizzen and stow it; let run your staysail halliards, and haul up your courses. We will leave nothing spread but the two topsails and the fore-topmast-staysail; then, let what will come, we shall be prepared for it.”

Forbes hurried away to execute this order, and next moment there came the sounds of a most unmerciful pounding on the fore-castle-head with a handspike, and the accompanying cry of—

“Hillo there, sleepers; tumble up. All hands shorten sail! Hurry up, my bullies, or we shall have the squall upon us before we are ready for it.”

The response to this summons was almost instantaneous, and in two or three minutes the whole crew were at work, under the orders of Mr Roberts, who had heard, even in his sleep, the distant cry of “All hands,” and had tumbled out without waiting for a more formal summons. This man I now found to be excellent in such an emergency as the present; calm, cool, and collected; not hurrying anybody, yet, as it were, infusing his own energy and vitality into the men by the sharp, incisive tones of his voice, and putting quicksilver into them by—as it seemed—the mere exercise of his will. Under such masterful supervision the work progressed rapidly, and in something over half an hour we had the ship under her fore and main-topsails (which were patent-reefing) and the fore-topmast staysail; every other thread being snugly furled, and the men once more down on deck. The watch was then sent below again for the short time remaining to them, and I composed myself comfortably in a capacious wicker chair to abide the issue of events.

The sky had by this time become entirely overcast, from horizon to horizon, and so intensely dark was it that I was literally unable to see my hand when I raised it before my eyes, by way of experiment; and, but for the dim radiance gleaming through the skylight from the turned-down lamp in the saloon, the faint gleam of light from the binnacle illumining feebly and in a ghostlike manner the head and shoulders of the man who lounged beside the useless wheel, and the pale fires flashing from the water that washed to and fro athwart the deck with the roll of the ship, it would have been utterly impossible to have moved from spot to spot save by the aid of one’s memory of the various

localities about the ship.

A period of perhaps twenty minutes had elapsed since the retirement of the watch below at the conclusion of their labours, and I had stolen on tiptoe to the skylight—doubtless influenced to this stealthy mode of progression by the profound silence of the night—for the purpose of again consulting the barometer that swung therein, when I felt a heavy drop of tepid water fall upon my face. This was followed by another, and another, and another; and then, with the roar of a cataract, down came the rain in a perfect deluge, thrashing the surface of the sea into an expanse of ghostly, lambent, phosphorescent white that quickly spread apparently to the extreme limits of the horizon, and filling our decks so rapidly that it became necessary to open the ports fore and aft in order to free them. This deluge lasted for about five minutes, when it ceased as abruptly as it had begun; but even that short time had sufficed to beat the sea down so smooth that the previous violent rolling of the ship was reduced to a gentle, scarcely perceptible oscillation.

“Now stand by to let run your fore and main-topsail halliards!” I cried—a command which was responded to by a prompt “Ay, ay, sir!” from the fore-castle, the pattering of bare feet upon the deck, and the sound of ropes falling smartly on the planking as the halliard-falls were lifted off their pins and flung to the deck.

“How is her head?” I inquired of the helmsman.

“West-nor’-west, sir,” was the reply.

“Man your starboard fore and main-braces, Mr Forbes,” said I to the second mate, who was standing by the break of the poop, peering anxiously into the impenetrable gloom.

“Ay, ay, sir! Starboard fore and main-braces, lads. Be smart, now, and lay the yards fore and aft before the squall breaks upon us!”

The men, who were evidently uneasy, and anxious to be doing anything rather than spend their time in passive anticipation, sprang to the braces and hauled the yards smartly round to a cheery “Yo heave ho;” flattening in until they could get no more.

“Well there, belay!” commanded Forbes. And as he spoke a sudden, powerful puff of warm air swept athwart the ship and was gone, causing the topsails to flap violently once, and collapse again. This was quickly followed by a second puff, heavier and rather less transient than the last; indeed, it continued long enough to give the ship steerage-way; for which I was deeply thankful, promptly availing myself of it to order the helm hard up and get our bows pointed in a north-easterly direction, so as to place the point in the horizon from which we expected the squall dead astern of us. This was barely done when Forbes cried out, in a voice the tones of which curiously expressed a feeling of mingled alarm and relief—

“Stand by, sir; here it comes at last!”

Chapter Five.

A Wreck and a Rescue.

At the sound of the second mate’s voice I turned, and saw, dead astern, a thin streak of ghostly white, drawn horizontally across the curtain of Stygian darkness in that quarter. The line lengthened and broadened with amazing rapidity; and presently a low moaning sound became audible.

“Let run your topsail halliards, fore and aft,” I cried; and the command was instantly followed by the creaking of the parrels as the yards slid down the well-greased topmasts, and the scream of the block-sheaves as the falls rapidly overhauled themselves.

The moaning sound grew louder as the band of spectral white astern extended and approached; and presently, with a deafening shriek, the hurricane struck us, the line of white foam at the same instant sweeping past us at railway speed. The stroke of the blast was like a blow from something solid, causing the ship to quiver from stem to stern; then she gathered way, and, with bows buried deep in the milk-white water, drove ahead like a frightened sentient thing. I had never witnessed so fierce a squall before in those latitudes; the outfly was indeed as violent as anything I had ever seen in the tropics; and there was nothing for it but to let the ship scud. This she luckily did in splendid style, gathering way quickly, and steering like a little boat, otherwise I firmly believe that the first stroke would have dismasted us. The air was so full of scud-water that, but for the salt taste of it on the lips, one would have thought we were being pursued by a drenching torrent of rain; while the roar and shriek of the wind overhead produced a wild medley of sound that was simply indescribable, and so deafeningly loud that it would have been quite impossible to issue an order in the usual way, had it been ever so necessary, for the simple reason that in that wild turmoil of sound no human voice could have made itself audible. Fortunately, no orders were needed, we had done everything that could be done for the safety of the ship—short of putting her under bare poles—and now all that was left to us was to trust in the mercy of God, and the staunchness of our spars and rigging.

The first mad fury of the squall lasted for only some five minutes; but after that it still continued to blow so fiercely that we were compelled to scud for fully three hours before we dared venture to round-to. Then, having first with great difficulty clewed up and furled the fore-topsail, we watched our opportunity and, taking advantage of a momentary lull, put the helm over, and brought the ship to on the starboard tack. We now, for the first time, had an opportunity of realising the full strength of the wind, which still blew with such violence as to careen the ship gunwale-to, even under the small canvas which remained exposed to the blast. It was still intensely dark overhead; but the surface of the sea, highly phosphorescent, and scourged into foam by the wind, gave forth a pale lambent

light against which the hull of the ship and all her rigging up to the level of the horizon stood out with tolerable distinctness. The swell, meanwhile, was rapidly rising, but there were as yet no waves, the wind instantly catching any inequality in the surface of the water and carrying it away to leeward in the form of spindrift. This lasted until daybreak, when the strength of the gale had so far moderated that—despite the fact of the wind having backed to the southward—I ventured to set the fore-topsail, close-reefed; more, however, for the sake of steadying the ship than for any other advantage that I expected to get from it.

With sunrise the sky cleared; and when my passengers came on deck before breakfast, they had the—to them—novel experience of witnessing a hard gale of wind under a cloudless blue sky, with brilliant sunshine. And, truly, it was a grand and exhilarating scene that met their gaze; for the wind, though it still blew with the force of a whole gale, had so far moderated its fury as to permit the sea to rise; and now the staunch little ship, heeling to her covering-board, was gallantly breasting the huge billows of the mid-Atlantic; each wave a deep blue liquid hill, half as high as our fore-yard, crested with a ridge of snow-white foam that, caught up and blown into spray by the gale, produced an endless procession of mimic rainbows past the ship. And, as the crest of each wave struck our weather-bow and burst into a drenching shower of silvery spray, a rainbow formed there too, overarching the ship in the wake of the foremast and causing the whole forepart of her to glow and glitter with the loveliest prismatic hues.

As the day wore on the gale continued to moderate somewhat, until by noon its fury had become so far spent that I thought we might venture to once more get the courses on the ship; and this was accordingly done when the watch was called. The effect of these large areas of sail upon the craft was tremendous, causing her to heel like a yacht under a heavy press of canvas; ay, and to travel like a yacht, too, notwithstanding the heavy sea that was running. But the little beauty behaved superbly, luffing to each comber as it approached, and taking it in a blinding shower of diamond spray, it is true, but still with an easy, buoyant movement such as I had never experienced before. It was the first opportunity that had been afforded me of testing the barque's behaviour in heavy weather, and I was more than pleased at the result, for she not only proved to be a superb sea-boat, but she also travelled like a racehorse.

By four bells in the afternoon watch the wind and sea had so far moderated that the mate, whose watch it then was, gave orders to take a small pull upon the topsail halliards, to set the jib, and to haul out the mizzen. When the last of these operations were undertaken it was found that something had jammed aloft, so that the head of the sail would not haul out along the gaff; and a hand was sent up to see what was foul, and to clear it. The man had accomplished his task, and was just swinging himself off the gaff into the lower rigging, when he was observed to pause and gaze intently to windward.

"Well, what is the matter, Bill? Do you see anything unusual away there to wind'ard, to set you staring like an owl in an ivy bush?" demanded the mate, somewhat impatiently.

"Yes, sir. There's something away over there," replied the man, pointing with his hand, "that looks like a dismasted ship, or a craft on her beam-ends. Whatever it is, it is very low in the water; and the sea is breaking very heavily over it."

The mate said no more, but swung himself into the mizzen-rigging, and made his way as far aloft as the cross-trees; when he turned and, bracing himself against the masthead, directed his glances toward that part of the horizon indicated by the seaman. Shading his eyes with his hand, he looked steadily for a full minute; then he said something to the man beside him, when the latter nimbly descended the ratlines to the deck, and, explaining that "Mr Roberts wants the glass, sir," went to the companion, where the instrument always hung in beackets, secured it, and took it aloft to the mate. With its assistance a still more prolonged examination was made; and when it was at length completed, the two men returned to the deck together.

"Well, Mr Roberts, what do you make of it?" I inquired, as the mate, having restored the telescope to its accustomed place, joined me near the break of the poop.

"Well, sir, there is *something* away there to windward," was the reply, "but what it is I couldn't very well make out, the sea was breaking so heavy over it. Sometimes it has the look of a dismasted and waterlogged ship; and then again it takes the look of a craft on her beam-ends, with her yardarms just showing above the water; and once or twice I thought I could catch a glimpse of something like an attempt to make a signal by waving a white cloth or something of the sort. But that may have been only the glancing of the flying foam in the sunshine."

"How did she bear when you were aloft?" I inquired.

"Broad on our weather-beam," answered Roberts.

"And how far distant do you judge her to be?"

"About a matter of nine miles, I should say. I suppose you'll be taking a look at her, sir?"

"Most certainly," said I. "We will stand on for a quarter of an hour or so, when we will go about, if you think we should then be able to fetch her. Meanwhile, we may as well run our ensign up to the peak, to let the people on board—if there are any—know that we have seen them."

"Yes, sir," assented Roberts; "I should think that in that time we ought to have head-reached far enough to fetch her. Shall we get a small drag at the topsail halliards? She will bear another inch or two."

"Very well," I agreed; and away trundled the sympathetic Roberts forward to muster the hands.

The extra "inch or two" of topsail that he proposed to give her resolved itself into a liberal two feet of hoist; under which augmented canvas the barque bounded from sea to sea like a mad thing, completely burying her lee rail with every roll, and causing the gale to fairly howl through her rigging when she recovered herself; while a whole acre of

dazzling snow-white foam hissed and stormed and roared out from under her lee bow, and glanced past the side at what looked like railway speed when she stooped to it under the influence of wind and wave together; the spray meanwhile flying over the weather cat-head in such a perfect deluge that the whole fore deck was knee-deep in water, while the foresail was drenched halfway up to the yard, and even the weather clew of the mainsail came in for a liberal share. To leeward the shrouds sagged limp and loose at every roll of the ship, while to windward they were as taut as bars; and it was by no means without apprehension that I contemplated the possibility of a lanyard parting, or a bolt drawing under the tremendous strain to which they were subjected. Truly we were driving the little ship in a most reckless fashion; and, but for the presence of that mysterious object to windward—which was undoubtedly the hull of a ship, to which possibly a helpless crew were clinging in deadly peril—I would have shortened sail forthwith. But, for aught we knew, the question of rescue or no rescue might be a matter of minutes, or even of seconds, with the distressed ones; we therefore “carried on,” and took our chance of everything bearing the strain.

At the expiration of the allotted half-hour the hands were called, and, taking the wheel myself and watching for a “smooth,” we proceeded to ‘bout ship. This manoeuvre was successfully accomplished, though by no means without danger, the ship, while head to wind, taking a green sea over the bows that literally filled her decks fore and aft, washing some of the men off their feet and compelling everybody to cling for life to whatever they could lay hold of until the open ports partially freed her. Strange to say, beyond the flooding of the fore-castle, the deck-house, and the galley, no damage was done; and, the next sea that met us happening to be a moderate one, the nimble little craft was round and away upon the other tack before another could come on board us. Once round and fairly on the move again, upon being relieved at the wheel I took the telescope and myself ascended to the foretop upon a visit of inspection. Yes; there the object was, sure enough, about three points on the lee bow, and, as the mate had said, about nine miles distant. I tried to get a peep at her through the telescope; but, even at the moderate elevation of the foretop, the plunging and rolling motion of the ship was so wild that I found it most difficult. I managed, however, to catch an occasional momentary glimpse of her; and from what I then saw I came to the conclusion that she was a distasted craft, of some five hundred tons or so, floating very deep in the water, with the sea breaking heavily and constantly over her, and that there was a flag of some sort flying from the stump of the mizzenmast—no doubt a signal of distress. She seemed to be a craft with a full poop, the after-part of her standing somewhat higher out of the water than the rest of the hull; and once or twice I caught a glimpse of what had the appearance of a small group of people clinging about the stump of the mizzenmast. More than that I could not just then make out, owing—as I have said—to the exasperatingly wild motion aloft; but I had at least ascertained the important fact that, with careful attention to the helm, we should fetch her on our present tack; and with that I was compelled to be for the nonce satisfied.

We were evidently nearing her very fast, much faster than I had dared to hope, for upon my return to the deck after my somewhat protracted investigation I found that we had risen her from the deck, and all hands were intently watching for a glimpse of her every time that we rose to the crest of a sea, notwithstanding the deluges of spray that flew incessantly in over our weather-bow. My passengers were of course intensely excited and interested and sympathetic at the idea of a real genuine wreck and the possibility of a rescue, even Lady Emily seeming to have utterly forgotten her ailments in her anxiety to see as much as possible. To their credit, however, be it said, they were considerate enough to abstain from tormenting me with ridiculous questions, evidently realising that I had at that moment more important matters occupying my thoughts.

And truly I had; for there was the question of how the people, if any, were to be taken off the wreck. For it must not be forgotten that, hard as we were driving the ship, it was still blowing with the force of quite a strong gale; while the sea was so tremendously heavy that, though a boat, moderately loaded, could undoubtedly live in it if once fairly launched, the task of safely launching her and getting her away from the ship in such weather, and, still more, in getting her alongside, either to ship or to unship people, presented so many difficulties as almost to amount to an impossibility. Fortunately, our boats were all fitted with a most excellent pattern of patent releasing tackle, but for which I should not have felt justified in risking the lives of my men by asking them to undertake such a desperate task. As to the possibility of the wreck being able to lower a boat, the thought presented itself only to be instantly dismissed; for, with the sea breaking so heavily over her as I had seen, it was to the last degree improbable that any of her boats had so far escaped damage as to be capable of floating, even had they escaped total destruction. True, there was a bare possibility that the strait of those on the wreck might not be quite so desperate as it had appeared to me to be—in which case we could stand by them until the weather moderated sufficiently to render the operation of launching a boat a comparatively safe one—but I was very doubtful of this. The wreck had presented all the appearance of being either waterlogged, or absolutely in a sinking condition; and in either case there would be but little time to lose; for, even if the craft were only waterlogged, her people were constantly exposed to the danger of being washed overboard. These points, however, would soon be made plain, for we were rapidly approaching the wreck; and the time had arrived for us to commence our preparations.

Mr Roberts, meanwhile, had been forward, talking to the men; and presently he came aft again to the poop, wearing a very gratified expression of countenance.

“They are a downright good lot—those lads of ours, for’ard,” he began, as he ranged up alongside of me in the wake of the mizzen-rigging. “I’ve just been on the fo’c’s’le to find out what their ideas are about manning a boat; and I’d hardly had a chance to mention the matter when every man Jack of ‘em gave me to understand that they were ready to do anything you choose to ask ‘em, and that I’d only to say who I’d have to go in the boat with me. So I’ve picked Joe Murray and Tom Spearman, Little Dick, and Hairy Bill—as they call him in the fo’c’s’le; and if you’re agreeable, sir, I’ll take the whaleboat gig; she’s as light as a cork, and far and away the prettiest boat for a sea like this. The other gig would hold a man or two more, perhaps, but she’s a much heavier boat; and those flat-starned craft are not half so safe as a double-ended boat when it comes to running before such a sea as this.”

“I fully agree with you, Mr Roberts,” said I; “and I am very much obliged to you for your readiness to take command of the boat. Let two hands lay aft at once and see that everything you require is in her, and get her ready for lowering. The rest of the men can set to work to haul up the courses, take in the jib, and brail in the spanker. I shall heave to, and drop you as close to windward of the wreck as I can with safety; and then shall fill, and round-to again

close under her stern."

"Very good, sir," was the response. And Roberts turned away forthwith to prepare for the work of rescue.

As we rapidly decreased the distance between ourselves and the wreck, it became unmistakably clear that the situation of those on board her was frightfully critical, and that if they were to be saved no time must be wasted. The craft was a wooden, English-built barque of between five hundred and six hundred tons register, with a full poop; and seemed, from the little we could see of her, to be a very fine, handsome vessel. Her three masts, as well as her jib-boom, were gone; and from the stump of her mizzenmast the red ensign was flying, union down; while the wreck of the spars and all the raffle of sails and rigging was floating along her starboard or lee side in a wild swirl of foam. Her bulwarks were swept clean away on both sides, from the catheads as far aft as the poop, only the stump of a staunchion remaining here and there to show where they had been. She had, like ourselves, a short topgallant foremast, under which the windlass was housed, and this structure remained intact; but a deck-house abaft the foremast, and between it and the main hatch, had been swept entirely away, with the exception of the sills, which still remained bolted to the deck. The long-boat, also, which is almost invariably stowed on top of the main hatch, was gone, not even the chocks remaining to show where she had been. In short, the whole of the deck, forward of the poop, had been cleared of everything removable, the only things remaining above the level of the deck being the gallows, the stumps of the main and fore masts, the fife-rails, and the pumps. The front of the poop was stove in, and the poop ladders were gone; there were no boats on the gallows; and while the boat hanging in the lee davits had had her bottom torn out, of that which had hung at the weather davits only the stem and stern-posts remained. She was floating broadside-on to the sea, and was very deep in the water, so deep, indeed, that every wave swept completely over her maindeck in a perfect smother of foam; and she rolled so horribly that I momentarily expected to see her turn bottom up. Moreover, that there was a very considerable quantity of water in her hold was made painfully manifest by the sickening sluggishness of her movements in response to the heave of the sea; there seemed to be scarcely a particle of life left in her, many of the seas running completely over the forepart of her before she could lift herself to them. And, to make matters still worse, she appeared to have a heavy list to starboard, as though her cargo, whatever it might be, had shifted. On the poop, which stood some seven feet higher than the maindeck, matters were not quite so bad, the deck fittings, such as the skylights, etcetera, remaining intact, although much of the glass had been smashed. The wheel remained entire, and as we drew nearer we could see it wildly spinning round, now to port and now to starboard, as the sea acted on the rudder. There were ten men clustered in this part of the wreck, six of whom were crouching under the lee of the skylight, while four had lashed themselves to the stump of the mizzenmast. They were all, of course, drenched to the skin, the sea breaking over them constantly; and some of them were clad only in shirt and trousers, seeming to indicate that they had turned out hurriedly. As we drew close up to this pitiful victim of the relentless power of the wind and sea, we saw a movement of some sort among the figures crouching under the lee of the skylight; and presently, watching their opportunity, they retreated aft, one or two to the wheel grating, one to the standard of the binnacle, and others to positions where they could secure themselves from being washed overboard by grasping ringbolts, bollards, and the like, revealing the whole length of the skylight, on the panelling of which was inscribed in chalk—

"We are fast sinking. For God's sake, take us off quickly!"

I was able to read this distinctly through my own binoculars; and I no sooner made it out than I jumped on to the top of a hen-coop, and, grasping the mizzen-rigging with one hand, waved the other encouragingly to them, their response being a feeble cheer.

At this moment Sir Edgar Desmond, who with the rest of his party had been absorbed spectators of everything that passed, stepped quickly to my side, and, fairly panting with excitement, said—

"Captain, if there is *anything* I can do to assist in this matter, I shall take it as a very especial favour if you will command me."

"Thank you very much, Sir Edgar," I replied. "I do not know that you can help us very materially at present, unless,"—as I saw a look of deep disappointment come into his eyes—"you would kindly produce a bottle or two of your remarkably fine port, and have it warmed ready for those poor fellows when—or rather *if*—we get them on board. They have been exposed for some hours at least to wind and sea, and—"

"Say no more, my dear fellow," he interrupted; "I understand perfectly."

And away he went, highly delighted at finding he had the power of doing something, however little, toward succouring the poor wretches whose pitiable condition was so patent to us all.

Meanwhile sail had been shortened on board the *Esmeralda* to topsails and fore-topmast staysail; the gig had been prepared for lowering, and everybody was at his station.

"Are you all ready for lowering, Mr Roberts?" I asked, as Sir Edgar left me on his charitable errand.

"All ready, sir," was the prompt response.

"In with you, then, into the gig, lads," said I. "I must leave you to act as you think best, Mr Roberts, in the matter of getting alongside the wreck; but there seems to be a small clear space just abaft the mizzen channels, if you can reach it without getting under the counter. If you fail in that, the only alternative that I can see is for you to get as close as you can to the wreck's lee quarter, and let her people jump overboard, when you must look out for them and pick them up."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the mate cheerily; "I have a plan that I think will do. All ready, sir, whenever you are."

We were now within a hundred feet of the wreck, and heading so as to cross her stern at about that distance.

"Back your main-topsail, lads; round-in smartly upon your weather braces," said I. "So! well there; take a turn; but be ready to fill again when I give the word. Now, Mr Forbes, are you ready with the davit tackles?"

"All ready, sir."

"Then, when I give the word, let them run smartly and evenly. Mr Roberts will attend to his share of the work. Now, stand by."

The tackle-falls had some time previously been taken off their proper pins, except for a single half-turn, and carefully laid out along the deck, so as to insure their running out clear, after which they had been placed under contiguous pins in the spider-band of the mizzenmast, and a single turn taken with them, thus enabling the second mate to hold them both in his hands, and sustain the entire weight of the gig and her crew. Now, as I gave him the caution to "stand by," and at the same time stepped on to a hen-coop in the wake of the mizzen-rigging to watch for a favourable opportunity for lowering, he took off half the turn round the belaying-pin, and held the boat by mere main strength and the grip of the rope on the pins. We were by this time fair across the stern of the wreck, and within a hundred feet of her, with not much way on us, and were ready to drop the gig at a moment's notice. A perfect mountain of a sea at this moment came sweeping down upon us, and as our buoyant little craft floated up its steep side, she started upon a heavy lee roll, that I saw would swing the gig well clear of her side, and at the same time dip her almost into the water before the tackles were started. We should scarcely get a more favourable opportunity.

"Lower away."

Prompt, at the word, the second mate allowed the falls to run rapidly out, while the chief, sitting in the stern-sheets, with the yoke-lines in one hand, grasped the releasing line in the other. As the barque careened to her gunwale, the light boat swung far out from her side, and in a moment splashed into the water. At the same instant a smart pull upon the releasing line freed her from the tackles fore and aft; and as the mate sheered her with the rudder toward the wreck, the men tossed out their oars with a cheer and gave way.

"Fill the main-topsail," cried I. "Up with your helm, my man, and let her gather way."

And as the barque drew away diagonally to windward of the wreck, we lost sight of our boat behind the lee quarter of the latter, and began to turn our attention to the problem of getting the people on board our own ship, and of hoisting the gig once more to the davits, if possible, after she had fulfilled her present mission. A sailor's duty constantly brings him face to face with difficult problems, and among them all there are perhaps few more difficult, though, of course, many of infinitely greater importance, than that of successfully picking up and hoisting a boat that has been launched in a very heavy sea, such as was running upon this occasion. So violent was the motion of the *Esmeralda*, that to have brought the boat alongside of and actually in contact with her hull would have simply been to invite the instant destruction of the smaller craft; yet it was of considerable importance that the boat should be recovered, since there was no knowing how soon her services might be required again. The problem was how to do it; and here my previous experience was of no service to me, as I had never before seen a boat launched in anything like such heavy weather as that of the moment. So as we drew off from the wreck, and prepared to tack, I gave the matter a little thought, and soon hit upon a plan that I thought would answer our purpose. A few minutes sufficed to place us in the proper position relative to the wreck for tacking, and having got the ship round, gone to leeward of the wreck, and hove-to again with our mainyard aback, I at once proceeded to put my ideas into practice. A whip from the lee fore and main yardarms, with a standing bowline in the end of that depending from the mainyard, and with a hauling-line attached to it, was all that I required, after which I had the davit tackles overhauled to their extremest limit, with a stout rope's-end bent on to each fall just inside the sheave, so that the tackle blocks should reach quite to the water even when the ship was taking the heaviest weather roll.

Meanwhile, Roberts, in the gig, was faring capitally; he had succeeded in getting up stern on, close under the lee quarter of the wreck, with a line from her to the boat, and down this line the people were passing pretty rapidly, our men keeping the line taut all the while by tugging away steadily at the oars. Occasionally one, a little bolder than his fellows, would leap overboard, when Roberts or one of the boat's crew was always ready to seize him by the collar and drag him into the boat. Everything seemed to be going on with the utmost regularity—one man, whom I took to be the skipper of the wreck, evidently superintending affairs on deck, while Roberts was attending them in the boat—yet it was easy to see that not a moment was being lost, one man being no sooner safe in the boat than another started to follow him. And, indeed, there was evidently the utmost need for haste, for the wreck was visibly settling before our eyes, every sea making a cleaner breach over her than the last, while there were occasions when she was absolutely buried, fore and aft, in a wild smother of white water, nothing of her showing above the turmoil save the stumps of her spars, a small portion of her poop skylight, and the davits with the fragments of the boats hanging from them. On one of these occasions the boat in the starboard davits—that one already mentioned as having had her bottom torn out—was completely demolished, nothing of her remaining when the buried hulk once more rose to the surface. When this was likely to happen the people on board the wreck—warned by their skipper—clung for dear life to whatever they could first lay hold of, while those in the gig, similarly warned, letting go the rope, pulled out of reach of the smother, only to back smartly up again the moment the danger was past.

At length one man only—the skipper—remained on the wreck. I saw him pause for a moment and glance round him at the poor, shattered, labouring relic of the ship that had borne him so proudly out of harbour, probably not very long before, and on board which he had perhaps successfully battled with wind and wave for many years, and then drawing his hand across his eyes—to clear them, maybe, of the brine that had been



WAVING A SIGNAL TO ROBERTS, HE DIVED HEADLONG INTO THE RAGING SEA. Page 95.

dashing into them for the last few eventful hours, or, more probably, to brush away a tear of regret at this dismal ending of a voyage that was no doubt hopefully begun. Finally, waving a signal to Roberts, he placed his hands above his head and, poising himself for an instant, dived headlong into the raging sea. A breathless moment of suspense, and then we saw Roberts lean over the boat's quarter, grasp something, struggle with it, and finally the diver's form appeared on the gunwale and was dragged safely into the boat. At this moment a towering billow reared itself just beyond the labouring hull, sweeping down upon it, green and solid, with a curling crest of hissing, snow-white foam. The men in the gig fortunately saw it too in time, and, with a warning shout to each other, stretched out to their oars for dear life. On swept that hissing mountain of angry water, heaving the wreck up on its steep side until she lay all along upon it, presenting her deck perpendicularly to us; then, as it broke over her in a roaring cataract of foam, we saw the upper side of her deck inclining more and more toward us until over she went altogether, nothing of her showing above the white water save her stern-post and the heel of her rudder. For a fraction of a moment it appeared thus, the copper on it glistening wet and green in the light of the declining sun; then the crest of the wave interposed between it and us, and hid it from our view. When, a few seconds later, the great wave reached us and we soared upward to its crest, *the wreck had vanished*, nothing remaining but a great patch of foam and a curious swirling of the water's surface to show where the good ship had been.

Meanwhile, the gig, now deep in the water, was making the best of her way down to us, and I freely confess that when I saw that huge wave chasing her I gave her up, and everybody in her, as lost. The boat's close proximity to the wreck, however, probably proved her salvation, for its fury seemed to have been spent in completing the destruction of the ship, and before it could gather strength again it had swept harmlessly past the boat and, equally harmlessly, down upon us. A few minutes later, the little craft—oh, what a frail cockleshell she looked in the midst of that mountainous sea!—swept close under our stern and, splendidly handled by Roberts, came to under our lee. The ends of the two whips were smartly hove into the boat and caught, and Roberts, instantly comprehending my intentions, lost not a moment in putting them into effect. The barque, with her main-topsail aback but with her fore-topsail and fore-topmast staysail full, was forging very slowly ahead, just sufficiently so to enable those in the gig to sheer her well away from the ship's side when towed along by the whip from the fore-yardarm; while with the aid of the whip and hauling-line from the main yardarm we were able to get the rescued people quickly and safely out of the boat and in upon our own deck, where—the boat now demanding our most unremitting attention—we turned them over to the willing hands of Sir Edgar Desmond and his party, the women finding themselves impelled by their sympathy to take an active part in the reception of the poor half-drowned fellows. Our own lads worked intelligently and with a will, and, in a shorter time than it takes to tell of it, everybody was safely out of the boat except the chief mate and the two smartest men we had in the ship. We were now ready to make the attempt to hoist in the boat herself. The tackle-falls were accordingly manned by all hands except two, who stood by with the running parts in their hands, ready to drop them into the boat at the proper moment, while I, in the mizzen-rigging, keeping a keen watch upon the seas, superintended the whole. The boat was now sheered as close alongside as it was prudent to bring her; and the two men in her stood by—one forward, the other aft—to catch the blocks and slip the clutches into position, Roberts, meanwhile, attending to nothing but the steering of the boat. At length, as the ship took a terrific weather roll, and the gig seemed to settle in almost under her bottom, I gave the word to heave, and both tackle blocks were dropped handsomely into the hands of the men waiting to catch them. In an instant both clutches were dashed into their sockets—the click of the bolts reaching my ears distinctly—and the two men simultaneously flung up their hands to show that this delicate operation had been successfully accomplished, and that the boat was fast. The ship had by this time recovered herself, and was now nearly upright in the performance of a correspondingly heavy lee roll.

“Round-in upon the tackles, lads, for your lives!” I shouted; and at the words the slack was taken in like lightning, the strain coming upon the tackles exactly at the right moment, namely, when the ship was pausing an instant at the

steepest angle of her lee roll, prior to recovering herself.

“Now, up with her, men, as smartly as you like!” And in an instant the boat, within six feet of the davit-heads, was jerked out of the water, and, before the ship had recovered herself sufficiently to dash the frail craft against her side, was swinging clear of all danger, and in her proper position, to the triumphant shout of “Two blocks” from the men at the falls. To secure the gallant little craft in the gripes was the work of a few minutes only; after which the mainyard was swung, sail was made upon the ship, and we resumed our voyage, deeply thankful that our efforts to rescue our fellow-beings, in their moment of dire extremity, had been crowned with such complete success.

Chapter Six.

The Tragedy on board the “City of Calcutta.”

The men we had just rescued were destitute of everything save the clothes they brought on board us on their backs, and those were, of course, saturated with salt-water; it therefore became necessary to supply them with a new rig from the contents of the ship’s slop chest; but our first business—while the unfortunates were being stripped and vigorously rubbed down under Sir Edgar’s personal superintendence, and afterwards liberally dosed with some of his mulled port—was to clear out the deck-house forward, and get the bunks ready for their reception, they being, naturally, very greatly exhausted by the long hours of exposure that they had been called upon to endure. The baronet, with that warm-hearted kindness and delicate consideration that I had already discovered to be characteristic of him, had, after consulting me, and obtaining my permission, caused one of the spare state-rooms in the saloon to be cleared out and prepared for the captain; and, once warm and snug in their berths, we saw no more of any of the rescued men until the next day.

The next morning, at breakfast, the skipper put in an appearance, introducing himself as Captain Baker, late of the barque *Wanderer*, of London; and as the meal proceeded, he told us the story of the disaster that had befallen him. It appeared that, like ourselves, they had been becalmed on the previous night; and, like myself, Baker had retired at midnight, without, however, having noticed the fall in the mercury that had given us our first warning of the coming blow. On the top of this oversight, the officer of the watch had made the fatal mistake of supposing that the change, when it made itself apparent, meant nothing more serious than the working up of a thunderstorm. He had therefore contented himself with clewing up the royals and hauling down the flying-jib, after which he had awaited the outburst with equanimity. When, therefore, it came, they were utterly unprepared, and the ship was caught aback with topgallantsails upon her, and hove down upon her beam-ends. This was bad enough; but, to make matters worse, she was loaded with iron, and, upon being laid over, the cargo shifted. The watch below, of course, at once sprang on deck, and, under poor Baker’s supervision, everything that was possible was promptly done to get the ship upon her feet again, but all to no purpose; and at length, finding that the craft was shipping a great deal of water, the order was reluctantly given to cut away the masts. This was easily accomplished by cutting through the lanyards of the rigging to windward, when the masts went by their own weight. Thus relieved, the ship partially recovered herself; but she still had a heavy list to starboard, and was floating so deep that the water constantly washed over the deck as far as the lee coamings of the hatchways as she rolled. The pumps were then manned; but after an hour’s hard work it was found that the water was a full foot deeper in the hold than it had been when the pumps were started. It was therefore conjectured that the ship had suffered a very serious strain when thrown upon her beam-ends, or that the violent shifting of the cargo in her hold had started a butt. Still the pumps were kept going, in the hope that the leak might suddenly stop, as leaks have sometimes been known to do without any apparent reason.

Meanwhile, the sea had been rapidly getting up, and soon began to break heavily over the dismasted ship, which was now rolling so violently that, combined with her heavy list, it became almost impossible to move about the deck, the leeward inclination of which soon grew so steep that the men had to be lashed to the pumps to save them from falling or being washed overboard. At length a tremendously heavy sea swept over the ship, from stem to stern, carrying away the whole of the bulwarks, smashing the deck-house and long-boat to pieces, carrying two boats off the gallows, tearing the booms adrift, staving in the front of the poop cabins, and—worst of all—killing four men who were working at the pumps. Captain Baker now abandoned all hope of saving the ship, and gave orders to prepare the boats for launching. And now the full measure of their disaster became for the first time known; for upon proceeding to investigate, as well as they could in the pitchy darkness, it was found that they absolutely had not a boat left capable of floating. This fact once ascertained, all hands beat a retreat to the cabin, there to consult together, in such shelter as it afforded, regarding the most desirable steps to be taken. It was soon found, however, that the sea surged into the cabin in such overwhelming deluges that they ran the utmost risk of being drowned if they remained there, and they were, therefore, compelled to turn out again and seek for safety on the poop. There the day-dawn found them, shivering with cold, wet to the skin, and drenched every moment by the pelting, pitiless sea, hungry, thirsty, and hopeless—when once they had had an opportunity of seeing the condition of the battered hull that supported them, and were fully able to realise the absolute impossibility of doing *anything* to help themselves. They could not even build a raft for themselves, every scrap of movable timber having been swept away during the darkness of night. True, there was the wreck of the spars still alongside; and if the ship would but remain afloat until the weather moderated, something might possibly be done with them, but not until then. So they could only crouch there on the wet exposed poop, with the sea washing continuously over them, and the raw wind penetrating their saturated clothing, and hope dubiously that some ship might heave in sight in time to save them. And thus they remained until we took them off.

At sundown the gale broke, the wind moderated and came out from the eastward, and by midnight we were once more bowling along upon our course under royals. The next morning, when I went on deck, I found that Roberts had been busy during the whole of his watch getting the studding-sails set; and, in short, it proved that we had now caught the trades, which ran us to within a degree and a half of the Line, and then left us in a glassy calm, sweltering under the scorching rays of the tropical sun.

The breeze left us during the night, and when day broke, a large, full-rigged ship was discovered within about seven miles of us. As soon as it was light enough to see, she hoisted her ensign, but as it drooped in motionless folds from the peak we could only discern that its colour was red, from which circumstance, and the build of the ship, we arrived at the conclusion that she was British. We of course showed our ensign in return; but, as there was no wind to blow out the flags, it was useless to attempt exchanging numbers or otherwise indulging in a little sea conversation. We therefore dismissed all further thought of her *pro tem*.

It was consequently with some little surprise that, shortly after we had seated ourselves at breakfast in the saloon, I received a report from the mate—who happened to be in charge of the deck—that a boat was in sight, about three miles distant, apparently pulling to us from the ship.

Now, when ships happen to be becalmed within close proximity to each other, with a prospect of the calm continuing for some hours, it is not altogether an unusual thing for the master of one ship to board the other, for the purpose of exchanging a little sociable chat, learning the latest news, or perhaps leaving a letter or two to be posted at the first port arrived at. But when ships are becalmed *on the Line*, this is rarely done unless the two craft happen to be fairly close together—say, within half a mile or so; because in this region light, transient airs are liable to spring up with very little warning, and when they come everybody is naturally anxious to avail themselves of them to the utmost as an aid toward escape from a spot in which ships have been known to be imprisoned for as much as a month or six weeks at a time. Then, again, under the influence of the sun's vertical rays, important atmospheric changes sometimes take place with startling rapidity—a squall, for example, working up and bursting from the clouds in a period so astonishingly brief as to afford little more than the bare time necessary to prepare for it. Under these circumstances, therefore, ship-masters are usually very chary about making long boat-excursions when becalmed on the Line.

The novel sensation of an anticipated visit probably caused us to dally less than usual over our morning meal. At all events, when we rose from the table and went on deck the boat was still nearly a mile distant. And a very curious object she looked; for the weather being stark calm, and the water glassy smooth, the line of the horizon was invisible, and the boat had all the appearance of hanging suspended in mid-air. This effect was doubtless heightened by the extremely rarefied condition of the atmosphere, which also gave rise to another effect, familiar enough to me, who had witnessed it often before, but productive of the utmost astonishment to my passengers, who now, it seemed, beheld it for the first time. This effect was the extraordinary apparent distortion of shape and dimensions which the boat underwent. She appeared to stand as high out of the water as a five-hundred-ton ship, while her breadth remained somewhat about what it ought to be, thus assuming very much the appearance of a plank standing on its edge. The men at the oars were similarly distorted, and when, upon going on deck, our eyes first rested upon them, the only indication of their being in active movement consisted in their rapid alternate evanishment and reappearance as they swung forward and backward at the oars. The oars betrayed their presence merely by the flash of the sun upon their wet blades; but a fraction of a second after each flash there appeared on each side of the boat a large square patch of deep ultramarine, which could have been nothing but the broken surface of the water where cut by the oar-blades, for the ripple caused by the boat's progress through the water similarly appeared as a heavy line of blue extending on each side of the boat for a certain distance, when it broke up into a series of ever more widely detached and diminishing blots of blue. The curious atmospheric illusion, of course, grew less marked as the boat approached; and when she had neared us to within about a quarter of a mile, it vanished altogether, the craft resuming her normal everyday aspect.

At length she ranged up alongside of us. One of our lads dropped a line into her, and the man who had been handling the yoke-lines—a grizzled, tanned, and weather-beaten individual, somewhere on the shady side of fifty—came up over the side, the rest of the crew remaining in their boat alongside, from which they engaged with our own men in the usual sailors' chat. The stranger—who, despite the roasting heat, was attired in blue cloth trousers and waistcoat, surmounted by a thick pilot jacket, the whole topped off with a blue cloth navy cap, adorned with a patent-leather peak and two brass anchor buttons—was received by the mate, to whom he intimated his desire to speak with “the cap'n.”

“Well, my man,” said I, stepping forward, “what can I do for you?”

“Well, sir,” he replied, “I'm the bo'sun, you see, of the ship yonder—the *City of Calcutta*, of London, Cap'n Clarke; eighty-six days out from Calcutta, and bound home to the Thames. We're in terrible trouble aboard there, and you bein' the first sail as we've sighted since the trouble took us, I made so bold as to man the gig and pull aboard you—and a precious long pull 'tis, too—to ask if so be as you can help us.”

“That, of course, will depend upon the nature of your trouble,” I replied. “What is wrong on board you?”

“Well, sir, you see, it's this here way,” replied the man, twisting and twirling in his hands the cap he had removed from his head when he began to address me. “Our cap'n is, unfortunately, a little too fond of the rum-bottle, or p'rhaps it would be nearer the mark to say as he's a *precious sight* too fond of it; he's been on the drink, more or less, ever since we lost sight of the land. Well, sir, about a fortnight ago we begins to notice as he seemed a bit queer in his upper story; he took to talkin' to hisself as he walked the poop, and sometimes he'd march up to the man at the wheel and stare hard at him for a minute or so without sayin' a word, and then off he'd go again, a-mutterin' to hisself. The men didn't half like it, and at last one of 'em ups and speaks to the mate about it. The mate—that's poor Mr Talbot, you know, sir—he says, ‘all right, he's got his eye on him;’ and there the matter rests for a few days. All this time, how's'ever, the skipper was gettin' wuss, and at last he takes to comin' on deck along somewheres in the middle watch, and tellin' the first man as he can lay hold of that there was devils and sich in his state-room, and givin' orders as the watch was to be mustered to go below and rouse 'em out. After this had lasted two or three days, the mate summonses Mr Vine—that's the second mate—and me, and Chips, and Sails to a council o' war in his own cabin, to get our ideas upon the advisability of stoppin' the skipper's grog and lockin' him in his own cabin until he got better again; and we agrees as it was the best thing to do—because, you see, sir, when a man gets into that sort o' state there's no knowin' what devilment he mayn't be up to, without givin' of you any warnin'. So we agreed as it

would be the right thing to do for the safety of the ship and all hands; and we promised the mate as we'd back him up in it when we arrived home and he had to answer for himself to the owners. Well, sir, nobody don't know how it come about, but we suspects as the skipper must ha' overheard Mr Talbot and Mr Vine talkin' about this here business a'terwards; anyhow, he gets the two of 'em by some means into his own cabin, and there he shoots 'em both dead with a revolver, killin' the chief mate at the first shot, and woundin' poor young Mr Vine that badly that the poor young feller died only a few minutes after we'd broke open the state-room door, which was locked, and had got him out. And now, sir, we've been obliged to put the cap'n in irons—he bein' stark, ravin' mad, you see—and we've got nobody to navigate the ship. And we thought, mayhap—Chips, and Sails, and I did—that, learnin' of our trouble, you might be able to spare us somebody to navigate the ship home."

"Certainly," said I, "that can be done; for I happen to have on board the captain, mate, and part of the crew of a ship that was foundering when we fell in with her, and I have no doubt they will all be glad of this opportunity to get home. But this is a very dreadful story you have told me, my good fellow, and I hope you have ample proof of its truth; because, if not, it may go hard with you all when you reach home. You may possibly be charged with the murder of your two officers, you know; or with *all* of them, should the captain unfortunately die. When did this dreadful business happen?"

"The shootin', do you mean, sir? Four days ago."

"Well, if you will wait a bit I will speak to Captain Baker, and hear what he says to the idea of taking charge of your ship. I suppose you can find room for his crew? There are ten of them altogether."

"Oh yes, sir; and glad to have 'em. We were short-handed when we left Calcutta; and now—"

"Yes, yes; of course," I interposed hastily. And, with a suggestion that his crew should come on deck and get some breakfast while waiting the progress of negotiations, I stepped aft to the wheel grating, where Captain Baker was busy spinning yarns to the youngsters, and, beckoning him aside, repeated the story I had just heard; winding up by asking him whether he felt disposed to undertake the duty of navigating the ship home.

As might have been expected, he was more than willing to take advantage of so favourable an opportunity to return home; and as neither he nor his crew had anything to pack, or any preparations to make for the contemplated change, they were quite ready to leave us by the time that the *Calcutta's* people had finished their breakfast. Before they left, however, it was privately arranged between Captain Baker and myself that, with the first breeze that came to us, the two craft should close, in order that I might have an opportunity of going on board and adding my signature to a declaration that he proposed to insert in the *City of Calcutta's* log-book relative to the statement made to us by the boatswain, and the circumstances generally under which he was assuming the command of the ship.

The weather was, as I have already said, stark calm, with not a speck of cloud anywhere within the whole visible bounds of the heavens; the sea was like glass; and if I had been asked whether there was any movement in the atmosphere I should unhesitatingly have answered "No;" yet, as Roberts was careful to indicate to me more than once during the morning, the helmsman managed not only to get the *Esmeralda's* head pointed towards the distant ship, but also to keep it pretty steadily in that direction; and it is an unquestionable fact that, this done, we neared her at the rate of about three-quarters of a knot per hour. This state of things lasted during the whole day; and accordingly, when eight bells in the afternoon watch struck, the two ships being at that time about a mile and a half apart, I had the gig lowered, and, after carefully instructing the chief mate how to proceed in the event of a breeze unexpectedly springing up, pulled on board the *City of Calcutta*.

She was a noble ship, of some eighteen hundred tons measurement, built of iron, with a spacious poop aft; the decks as white as snow; fittings of every kind of the very best; double topsail and topgallant yards; in fact, a typical modern clipper. She had accommodation for thirty saloon passengers; but was luckily carrying none, on that voyage at least. The accommodation ladder had been lowered for my convenience, and as the gig dashed alongside and the oars were tossed in, Captain Baker made his appearance at the gangway to welcome me, and at once led me into the saloon.

"Well," said I, "how did you find matters on board here on your arrival?"

"Just as I might have expected to find them after listening to the boatswain's story," was the reply. "The poor skipper is undoubtedly mad—he is in that cabin, there, and I will take you in to see him presently—but within the last two hours a change seems to have come over him. Before that he was dreadfully violent and noisy; but he has now calmed down, and I should not be surprised to find that the worst of the attack is past. I have not the slightest doubt in the world that the story of his having murdered the two mates is perfectly true; all the men—and I have examined each of them separately—tell exactly the same tale, and there is confirmatory evidence of a certain kind; that is to say, there are blood-stains on the deck in the skipper's state-room, proving that the deed was committed there; the door has been broken in, as stated, and is now in the state-room, with the lock still turned and the key in it; the revolver with which the murders were committed has three chambers still loaded, and it is splashed with blood—showing how close the madman was to his victims when he used the weapon; and last, and most convincing evidence of all, there are certain entries in the official log-book, signed 'A. Talbot, Chief Mate,' particularising the captain's eccentricities of behaviour; and one—dated four days ago—recording the consultation held as to the propriety of temporarily confining Captain Clarke to his cabin, and the decision arrived at, duly signed by each of the parties concerned. See, here they are."

Saying which, he opened the closed log-book that I had already noticed lying on the table, and drew my attention to the entries, one after the other, in consecutive order. I looked them all over most carefully, and was bound to admit that they had all the appearance of being genuine. "A most fortunate circumstance for the hands forward that the mate took the precaution to make those entries," I remarked.

"Yes, indeed," agreed Baker. "And now," he continued, opening the book at a fresh page, "this is the entry I made shortly before I saw you pulling on board us. I want you to have the goodness to confirm the statement by appending your signature."

I read the entry, and found it to consist of a brief statement of the facts connected with the loss of his own ship; of his crew and himself having been taken off the sinking wrecks by us; of his brief sojourn on board the *Esmeralda*; of the barque having been boarded by a boat from the *City of Calcutta*, and of all the circumstances that followed. At the foot of this, and under Captain Baker's signature, I added the following note:—

"I hereby certify that the above statement is true in every particular.

"John Saint Leger, Master of the British barque *Esmeralda*."

This done, accompanied by Captain Baker, I entered the cabin where the madman was confined; and there saw a sight which I shall probably not forget to my dying day. It was one of the saloon cabins—the door of the poor fellow's own state-room having been beaten in by the crew in their endeavour to rescue the mates from his clutches—and was a very fine, roomy, airy, well-lighted apartment, containing two berths and a sofa, a folding wash-stand, large mirror, a handsome silver-plated lamp with a ground-glass globe, and a brass pole over the top of the door carrying brass rings, from which depended a crimson curtain. The lower berth was made up, and upon it, lying face downwards, was the form of a stalwart, well-built man, with irons on his legs. I thought for a moment that the poor fellow was asleep; yet, as we stood gazing upon him in silence, I was suddenly impressed by the perfect immobility of the figure, and the oppressive silence that pervaded the cabin. Let a man be sleeping ever so peacefully, you will notice some slight movement due to the inspiration and expiration of his breath; and there will also be the *sound* of his breathing, as a rule; with perhaps an occasional sigh, or faint, inarticulate murmur—*something* to tell you unmistakably that the figure you are gazing upon is that of a living man. But here there was nothing of that sort—a circumstance which seemed to force itself upon the attention of Baker and myself at the same moment, for we suddenly turned and gazed inquiringly into each other's faces, and then, reading there the reflection of our own dreadful suspicions, without a word we simultaneously stepped forward and turned the figure upon its back. The ghastly truth at once became apparent in all its unspeakable horror; the miserable madman had crowned his folly and wickedness by cutting his own throat! It was a sight to turn one sick and faint—at least, it had that effect upon me; and doubtless Baker felt as I did, for when I turned to look at him he was white as chalk to the very lips. For a moment we stood gazing at each other, speechless; then, closely followed by me, Baker staggered out of the berth into the saloon, and thence on deck, shouting for the steward, who happened to be forward at the galley. The fellow hurried aft at once, evidently prepared, by the tone of Baker's voice, to find that something was wrong.

"Steward," inquired Baker, "how long has Captain Clarke been left to himself?"

"About a quarter of an hour, sir," was the answer. "Dennis has been looking after him, sir; but, finding the captain quite quiet, he went forward to get his supper with the rest, asking me to keep an eye on him meanwhile. And I did, sir, for the minute or two before this gentleman,"—indicating me—"came aboard; then, when you both went into the saloon, I took the opportunity to step forward to arrange with the doctor," (the cook) "about the supper for the saloon. I hope nothing has gone wrong, sir."

"Captain Clarke has cut his throat, and is stone dead," said Baker. "Call Dennis aft at once."

The steward hurried away; and in less than a minute the man Dennis made his appearance, followed as far aft as the mainmast by all hands. He was at once rigorously examined by Baker as to the condition and behaviour of his charge; and his replies went to show that when he went on watch at eight bells he found the patient perfectly quiet, but evidently—so at least he judged—quite unaware of his situation and surroundings. The captain, he said, was then seated on the sofa in the cabin, with his hands clasped before him, his elbows resting on his knees, his body inclined forward, and his eyes fixed upon the carpet at his feet; in that attitude he had remained continuously, and in that attitude he had been when he (Dennis) left him. This was all that was to be got out of the man, except protestations that when he left the captain alone he believed he might do so with perfect safety, and expressions of the deepest regret at the dreadful thing that had happened.

A few of the men—Captain Baker's two mates, the boatswain, carpenter, and sailmaker of the ship, and one of the able seamen—were then conducted into the cabin to view the body and have explained to them its position when we entered, and so on; and then another entry in the official log, detailing the tragedy, became necessary; which entry I also attested.

By this time it was getting dark, and one of the men came to the saloon door to report that a small air of wind was coming down from the eastward; as therefore my business on board the *City of Calcutta* was concluded, I prepared to leave the ship. Nothing now remained to be done but to hand Baker some letters from the *Esmeralda* to post on his arrival home—a matter I had almost forgotten in the excitement induced by the dreadful discovery in which I had participated—and to bid good-bye to my late guests; which done, I hurried down over the side and stepped into my gig, glad to be out of a craft on board which such horrible tragedies had so recently been enacted.

The ship presented a noble picture as we left her there in the swift gathering dusk of the calm tropical night, her long shapely hull, taunt spars, and milk-white canvas reflected upon the glassy surface of the sleeping wave upon which she oscillated ponderously to the long heave of the almost imperceptible swell; and it was grievous to think that the man—quite a young man, too, with all his best years apparently before him—who had been deemed worthy the trust and charge of so fine a fabric, and of all the costly merchandise that she contained, should have been so miserably, contemptibly weak as to have allowed himself to be conquered by the vile demon of drink, and his life brought to so disastrous and shameful a close. Ah, me! the pity of it; the pity of it!

The breeze had reached the *Esmeralda* by the time that the gig arrived alongside, and the dainty little barque was

lying to with her mainyard aback, waiting for us. She seemed very small in comparison with the *City of Calcutta*, coming so directly as I had done from the spacious decks and cabins of the latter; but it was a relief to get away from the big ship, and the tragedy of which she was the scene; and I was more than thankful that the breeze had come so opportunely to enable us to part company with her. The wind—which, after all, was the merest zephyr—was very light and partial, playing about the surface of the water around us in occasional cat's-paws, and failing to reach the barque altogether so long as the fast-fading twilight permitted us to see her, while, a quarter of a mile to windward and right out to the horizon, the water was quite blue with ripples. We accordingly braced sharp up and luffed our way to the spot where the breeze was steady, and then bore away upon our course, rejoicing; the nimble little barque getting off her five knots per hour with ease, although the wind had scarcely weight enough in it to lift the heavy cloths of her courses. As the night closed down upon us, however, the breeze acquired a little more life, and we increased our pace until, at four bells in the first watch, we were reeling off our eight knots by the log. About midnight we passed through quite a large fleet of craft, homeward-bound; and when day dawned, some seven or eight vessels were in sight ahead of us, steering to the southward.

At eight o'clock that morning we crossed the Line, by my reckoning; and, the breeze holding bravely, we had an opportunity to test our sailing powers against the craft ahead of us; a most exhilarating race resulting, in which, to the intense satisfaction of all hands on board the *Esmeralda*, that tidy little barque eventually proved the victor.

Now, it must not be supposed that, because I have abstained from any mention of the cryptogram since the outset of the voyage, I had forgotten all about it; on the contrary, it occupied nearly all the attention I could spare from the ordinary business of the ship, and the claims of my passengers upon it. But, so far, without the slightest useful result. When we crossed the Line I was just as far from its interpretation as I had been when I first abstracted it from its place of concealment in the sword-belt of my respected ancestor. Many an hour had I spent in the privacy of my own cabin, with the precious document outspread upon the little folding-table secured to the bulkhead, framing tables of letters corresponding with the figures of the cryptogram, and trying every possible combination I could think of, but not a particle of sense could I make of it; indeed, I had failed to get any result that bore even the most remote resemblance to anything like a language. I even at last went to the length of telling Sir Edgar and Lady Desmond and Miss Merrivale of my difficulty; and, acting upon the laughing suggestion of the latter that the attempt to solve the puzzle would be a welcome recreation, made three copies of the first line of the document, and handed one to each of them, in order that they might have an opportunity of trying their wits upon it. This was on the day that we crossed the equator; and, during the whole of that day, when their attention was not diverted by the overtaking of one or another of the craft in company, and the frequent exchange of signals—and, indeed, for many days afterwards—they devoted themselves with great earnestness and gravity to the matter, but ineffectually; and at length they gave it up as a bad job, and declared the cypher to be untranslatable.

Chapter Seven.

The Strange Fate of the "Northern Queen."

The welcome breeze that wafted us out of the neighbourhood of the ill-starred *City of Calcutta* held good, and, gradually freshening and working round more from the southward, eventually resolved itself into the south-east trade, under the beneficent influence of which, with our larboard tacks on board and our yards braced flat up against the starboard rigging, we merrily wended our way to the southward.

One morning, when we were about in the latitude of the islands of Martin Vaz and Trinidad, we discovered, at daybreak, a large ship broad on our weather-bow, the topsails of which were just clear of the horizon. The trades were at this time blowing fresh, and the barque was thrashing along under her main-topgallantsail, with the flying-jib stowed. No sooner, however, did Roberts come on deck and espy the stranger—which was steering the same way as ourselves—than he must needs give orders to loose and set the fore-topgallantsail and flying-jib; and while I was in the saloon at breakfast, I heard him give orders to set the two royals. Under this additional canvas, which caused the little hooker to bury her lee side to her covering-boards, and to plunge to her hawse-pipes into the long ridges of swell that came rolling up from the southward and eastward, while she sent an acre of milk-white foam roaring and hissing away from under her lee bow, we rapidly overhauled the strange sail until we had brought her square abeam. Then, having allowed us to reach this position, her people gallantly responded to our obvious challenge, and made sail until they showed precisely the same canvas to the breeze that we did. The stranger, ship-rigged, was at this time about eight miles away from us, broad on our weather-beam, her hull just showing above the horizon when she rose upon the crest of a sea; and, after taking a good look at her through our glasses, we came to the conclusion that she must be a vessel of about twelve hundred tons. That she was a remarkably smart craft under her canvas soon became evident, for though we were going eleven and a half knots by the log, we found it impossible to gain an inch upon her after she had got her additional canvas fairly set and trimmed; indeed, there were times when it seemed impossible to resist the conviction that she was, if anything, gaining the merest trifle upon us. If so, however, it was only when the breeze came down with a little extra strength; for so surely as it softened at all we immediately appeared to recover the trifle that we seemed to have previously lost.

But though we were unable to forereach upon our big neighbour, it became evident, as the morning now wore on, that the two craft were very gradually nearing each other, the extraordinary weatherly qualities of the *Esmeralda* coming conspicuously into notice in this thrash to windward on a taut bowline, now that we had the opportunity of comparing them with those of another vessel. At noon the stranger showed her colours, British, and, upon our responding, exhibited her number; from which and other signals we learned that she was the *Northern Queen*, of Glasgow, bound to Cape Town. Then followed an exchange of latitude and longitude, ours and hers agreeing within a mile or two; and before the signal flags were finally hauled down and stowed away we had accomplished quite a long conversation, to the intense delight of my passengers, especially the fairer members, to whom this sort of thing was still quite a novelty.

Thus the day wore on, the bright and pleasant hours being whiled away in a friendly trial of speed that, though we guessed it not, was hurrying our companion onward to a strange, sudden, and awful doom.

At length the sun went down in a bewildering blaze of gold and crimson and purple splendour; and almost simultaneously the full-orbed moon rose majestically above the eastern horizon, flooding the sea that way with liquid silver, and showing our friend, the *Northern Queen*, hull up in the very heart of the dazzle, the entire fabric, hull, spars, and canvas, standing out black as an ebony silhouette against the soft blue-grey and ivory of the cloud-dappled sky. She was at this time square upon our weather-beam; but with the rising of the moon the breeze acquired new life, as it often does, and came down upon us with a weight sufficient to render it advisable to clew up and furl our royals—which we did; the *Northern Queen* continuing to carry hers, as of course she could, being a much bigger craft than ourselves, and fitted with much stouter spars. She was thus enabled to draw gradually ahead of us, much to the chagrin of our worthy chief mate, who asserted, with quite unnecessary vehemence, that it was absolutely the first time that the *Esmeralda* had ever been beaten by *anything* in moderate weather. It thus came to pass that at midnight our companion was dead to windward of us, and about seven miles distant.

My lady passengers had retired to their berths about an hour before; but Sir Edgar, tempted by the beauty and cool freshness of the night, lingered on deck, and—both of us being shod with rubber-soled shoes in order that we might not disturb the repose of the sleepers below—was pacing the weather side of the poop with me, and relating some of his former adventures as a traveller, before he had settled down as a sober, steady, respectable Benedict—as he laughingly put it. Suddenly, as we turned in our walk, within arm's length of the binnacle, we became conscious of a vivid increase of light, and at the same moment an indescribable, deep, hurtling roar smote upon our ears above the startled cry of the helmsman, the loud hum of the wind in our rigging, and the sobbing wash of the sea. The sound and the light so obviously came from overhead that we both involuntarily halted and directed our gaze aloft, when we became aware of an enormous meteor, fully four times the apparent diameter of the moon, and of such dazzling effulgence that our eyes could scarcely endure the brightness of it, while the whole ship, with every minutest detail of spars, rigging, and equipment, was as brilliantly illuminated as at noonday. It was passing, at no very great apparent speed, immediately over our mastheads, in a south-easterly direction, leaving a long trail of evanescent sparks behind it, and as we watched we could see that it was falling toward the sea.

“God of mercy—the ship, the *ship!*” gasped Sir Edgar, clutching my arm in a grip that left its mark on the skin for days afterward; and, as he spoke, the huge incandescent mass fell full upon the hull of the *Northern Queen*. There was a flash like that of a bursting shell on board her, and ere we could draw a breath the stately fabric of her spars and sails collapsed and vanished into the deep before our eyes!

For some seconds we were all, fore and aft, so paralysed with horror and dismay that not a sound escaped our lips. Even the weird night music of the wind and sea appeared to be hushed for the moment, or our startled senses failed to note it, and presently there came floating down to us upon the pinions of the breeze a muffled, booming *crash*, as confirmatory evidence of the appalling disaster.

“Gone—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye!” ejaculated Sir Edgar, with quivering, ashen lips, as he strained his eyes toward the point so recently occupied by our companion. “Oh, captain, can *nothing* be done? Is there *no* hope that out there some few survivors at least may be floating on a scrap or two of wreckage? You will go there and see, will you not?”

“Assuredly I will,” said I. “I will tack the moment that I think we can fetch the spot where the ship disappeared. Meanwhile,” continued I, to the second mate, who had charge of the deck, “get up three rockets and fire them, as a signal to the possible survivors that we have observed the disaster, and intend to look for them. They will, no doubt, understand what we mean.”

The rockets were brought on deck and fired; by which time I judged that we had gone far enough to justify us in tacking ship. We accordingly went about, and two hands were then stationed on the fore-topsail yard to keep a lookout for wreckage, while a third laid out as far as the flying-jib-boom end for the same purpose.

We had been on the starboard tack some three-quarters of an hour, and I had just hailed the lookouts, warning them to be especially vigilant, as we must now be near the scene of the catastrophe, when the man on the flying-jib-boom end cried out with startling suddenness—

“There’s something floating out there to wind’ard, sir; broad on the starboard bow!”

“Yes, yes,” added both the men aloft, with one consent. “It looks like something alive—like a man, sir, waving his arm!”

“Don’t take your eyes off it for an instant, either of you, on any account,” I answered, with a strange thrill in my voice at the idea of our being perhaps close to one or more survivors of that awful visitation of God that we had witnessed. “Back your main-topsail, Mr Forbes, and then man and lower the port quarter-boat.”

“Ay, ay,” was the brisk response. “Man the weather main-braces, my lads; lively, now. Cast off to leeward; round-in to windward. Well there; belay. Shall I take charge of the boat, sir?”

“Certainly,” I said; “it is your turn this time, Mr Forbes, and I hope you will be as successful as Mr Roberts was when we last had occasion to lower a boat. You will probably not be able to see the man when you are in the boat and under way, so I will stand on the wheel grating abaft, where you will be able to distinctly see me, and will indicate to you how to steer in accordance with the directions which I may receive from the hands aloft. If you can only manage to pick up the man they have seen, he will, perhaps, if he is still sensible, be able to direct you how to prosecute your further search. Now, if you are ready, go; and God speed you.”

The boat pushed off, and in less than ten minutes had picked up the man, who was found to be floating comfortably

enough in a life-buoy. Questioned as to whether he thought there were any more survivors, he replied that he feared not, as, feeling sure that the catastrophe had been observed by us, and that we should make for the scene as promptly as possible—which assurance had been quickly confirmed by the sight of our rockets—he had simply clung to the life-buoy without making the slightest effort to shorten the distance between himself and us, believing that his best hope of deliverance consisted in remaining as near as possible to the scene of the disaster; and that, if there were any other survivors, they would most probably act in the same way, in which case he would almost certainly have seen or heard something of them in the interim; which had not been the case. Forbes, however, very properly pulled about the spot for more than an hour, the boat's crew shouting at intervals, and then lying on their oars and listening for a reply. But it was all of no avail; for, though he fell in with and picked up two buckets marked with the name of the *Northern Queen*, and passed through a few small fragments of floating wreckage, clearly indicating that he was prosecuting his search in precisely the right spot, nothing more was found, and he was at length reluctantly constrained to abandon further efforts.

The rescued man—who, when brought on board, appeared not an atom the worse for his terrible adventure—gave his name as Joe Martin, and informed us that he had held the rating of carpenter on board the ill-fated *Northern Queen*. He gave us full particulars concerning the port of registry of the ship; the port from which she had sailed; the number of days out; the number of the crew, and their names, so far as he knew them—in short, all the information necessary to the identification of the ship and those on board her; and then he described the catastrophe as it had impressed itself upon him. He said that at midnight the deck had been relieved in the usual manner; and that, it being his trick at the wheel, he had arrived aft just in time to hear the “old man” (the captain) bid the mate good night, after laughingly enjoining him not to go to sleep and allow the little barque to leeward to slip past him. The night being fine and the breeze steady, the watch on deck, with the exception of the lookout, had quickly found snug corners for themselves, in which they had coiled themselves away for a quiet cat-nap; the mate had lighted his pipe and established himself in the skipper's wicker armchair; and perfect peace and quiet reigned throughout the ship. Suddenly the whole sky seemed to brighten, and, glancing involuntarily over his right shoulder—from which direction the light appeared to emanate—Martin saw the meteorite in the sky immediately over our mastheads, and at the same moment became conscious of the screaming roar of its passage through the air.

“The moment I set eyes on it,” said he, “I knew—I felt *certain*, somehow—as the thing meant to strike us; and I shouted to the mate, to warn him; and then—not knowin' why I did it—I let go the wheel and makes a spring for the life-buoy hangin' at the taffr'l, whippin' the knife out of my sheath at the same time. I'd got hold of the buoy, and the edge of my knife was on the seizin', when it seemed to me as if the sun hisself was a-bearin' down on us, the light and the heat got that dreadful fierce; then there came a most fearful smash as the thing struck us fair atween the fore and main masts, cuttin' the ship clean in two, if you'll believe me, gentlemen; and as my knife went through the seizin' by which the buoy was lashed to the iron rail, I felt the poor old hooker double herself up together, just as if she was writhin' with the pain of her death-wound; and with that, holdin' the buoy in my hand, I makes a single spring overboard; and the next thing I knows, I finds myself bein' sucked down with the wreck. If you'll believe me, gen'lemen, it seemed *years* afore I felt that dreadful suction let go of me, and found myself risin' to the top of the water again; and when I got there at last and caught my breath once more, it seemed to me as if another single second 'd ha' done for me. I remembers congratlatin' myself as the water was so warm and pleasant, and the breeze the same, as I settled myself comfortable in the middle of the buoy; and then, when I'd cleared the water out of my eyes, and slipped my knife back into his sheath, I set to work to look round and see if there was anybody else that had escaped besides myself. But I couldn't see nobody; and while I was peerin' round here and there into the black hollows between the seas, I catches sight of another flash in the sky, and looks up fully expectin' to see another o' them awful fire-balls. But it was only one o' your rockets burstin' up aloft; and lookin' underneath the place when I floated up to the top of a sea, there I sees your to'ga'nts'ls and the upper half of your taups'ls; and I understood in a minute as you'd obsarved what had happened and meant to come and see if there was any of us left. Then I began hailin', in hopes of hearin' a reply from some of the lads; but there weren't a sound come to me exceptin' the moan of the wind and the hiss of the sea round about; so at last I knew that all hands exceptin' myself had gone to the bottom with the good ship, leavin' me alone to tell the tale.”

“What an extraordinary class of men sailors are!” remarked Sir Edgar, as the man Martin, having brought his narrative to a conclusion, and being dismissed by me, turned and shambled away forward with the usual careless, leisurely gait affected by fore-castle Jack. “Here is a man who has just escaped—and is, moreover, the only survivor of—a catastrophe absolutely unique, I should say, in naval history, yet he is as unconcerned and undemonstrative over it as though the destruction of a ship by a meteorite were quite an everyday occurrence. Is such extraordinary *sang-froid* usual, or is this an exceptional example?”

“Oh dear, no,” I laughingly replied; “there is nothing in the least unusual in Martin's demeanour, which, however, is doubtless partly assumed. It is not regarded as quite correct form to exhibit any excitement whatever over an adventure of which one's self has been the hero; but, apart from that, sailors are so accustomed to carry their lives in their hands, and become so hardened to danger by being constantly brought face to face with it—often without a second's warning, and sometimes in the most unexpected shapes—moreover, they witness from time to time such startling and inexplicable phenomena, that it is really difficult to provoke anything like a display of genuine, unmitigated surprise or excitement on their part. Whatever happens—unless it be something very distinctly suggestive of the supernatural—Jack is always prepared for it.”

“So it would appear,” assented the baronet. “But candidly now, captain, is not this present voyage of ours rather an eventful one?”

“Undoubtedly it is,” replied I. “Singularly so, thus far. A man might follow the sea all his life without witnessing so many casualties as have come under our notice since we sailed. Yet such casualties are constantly occurring in some part of the world. The only remarkable thing about those of which we have become cognisant is that so many should have occurred in so short a time, and within an area so small as to have permitted of our being in the vicinity of each just when it happened. Even the dreadful occurrence that we witnessed to-night, though it is the first case of the kind that I ever heard of, may be after all nothing very unusual in kind, and may possibly explain the loss of many of the

craft that disappear and leave no sign behind them. For instance, it is safe to say that the only human eyes that witnessed the destruction of the *Northern Queen* are on board this ship, and if we had not seen it the chances are a hundred to one that her fate would never have been known. Martin's prospects of escape would certainly have been remarkably small; for although, in this fine weather, he might have remained afloat for some time, he might have been passed unnoticed by a ship within a very short distance. Then, after exposure in the water for a certain number of hours, his strength would rapidly fail him, and he would die miserably of starvation, if he did not lose his hold upon the buoy and sink, or be dragged out of it by some hungry shark."

"Upon my word, you would be an uncommonly cheerful companion for a nervous man," remarked Sir Edgar, half jestingly, half in earnest. "I declare I shall never in future be able to look at that man without recalling the grim picture you have sketched of him floating helplessly in his life-buoy. You sailors certainly ought to be exceptionally religious men, for it seems to me that not one of you—not one of *any* of those who go down to the sea in ships—can count with certainty upon his life from one minute to another. Just look around you now, for instance. How gentle and peaceful is the whole aspect of nature at this moment, and how absolutely *safe* we seem to be! It was just as peaceful—just as apparently safe—three hours ago; yet in the interim a noble ship and her whole crew save one has perished; and what has befallen her may befall us or any other ship that floats, or ever will float, quite as suddenly, quite as unexpectedly. I hope that what we have witnessed to-night will enable us to realise more fully and vividly than ever, how completely we are in the hands of God, and how absolutely dependent upon His mercy. Good night, captain!"

I returned the salutation; and, as the baronet slowly and thoughtfully descended the companion, I mechanically turned away and began to pace the deck, with my thoughts busy upon the solemn words I had just heard, and the occasion that had given rise to them. And, as I did so, albeit I am perhaps no worse than the average man, the carelessness and indifference of my own conduct in the past rose up in judgment against me and condemned me of the grossest ingratitude for countless past mercies; the most shameful disobedience; the most criminal neglect to render to my Creator that honour and glory which is His due. And I there and then registered a solemn vow that from that moment I would lead a new and a better life; a vow that, I grieve to say, was afterwards far too frequently forgotten.

On the following day, after breakfast, Mr Roberts informed me that Martin had asked to be put into a watch; and he wished to know whether I was willing that such an arrangement should be made. I, of course, had no objection whatever to the proposal, as I by no means believe in idle people in the fore-castle. So I told Mr Roberts to arrange the matter, and at the same time to keep an eye on the man; it being my intention to regularly ship him, if he proved worth having and should be willing to sign articles; the second mate's being one hand weaker than the larboard watch.

About a week after this, little Edgar Desmond came up to me and, slipping his hand into mine, as was his wont when he desired to have a chat with me, began, in the straightforward way usual with children—

"Captain, where do you think will be a good place for me to sail my boat, when she is finished?"

"Your boat?" said I. "I didn't know that you are making one."

"Oh no," said the child; "I am not making one; it is that new man, Martin, who is making it for me. And he is making it *so* nicely; just like a *real* boat. Come and see it, will you?"

Willing to humour the child, I walked forward with him; and on reaching the fore-castle found Martin busy about some ordinary job connected with the usual routine work of the ship. As we halted before him he touched his forehead with his forefinger, in the usual style of the fore-castle hand, and paused in his work to hear what we had to say to him.

"Good morning, Martin," began Master Edgar. "I have brought the captain to see my boat. Will you show it him, please?"

"Well, you see, sir," remonstrated Martin, obviously embarrassed by my presence, "'tain't hardly fair to ask me to exhibit the boat until she's finished. There ain't much of her yet, and what there is, is all in the rough. It's a little job, sir," he continued, turning in an explanatory way to me, "as I've undertook to do for this young gentleman in my afternoon watch below; and, as I said, she's all in the rough at present—what there is of her."

"Never mind that, Martin," said I, seeing a shade of disappointment resting upon the child's features; "bring her up, and let us have a look at her."

Thereupon, the man dived below into the fore-castle, and presently reappeared, bearing in his hand the skeleton of a miniature yacht, about two and a half feet long, half planked down. My first sensation, when I set eyes on the model, was surprise at the dainty, delicate character of the workmanship exhibited in it, which was greatly increased when, upon taking it into my hands and more closely inspecting it, I had an opportunity of examining its lines. They were as nearly perfect as anything I had ever seen; in short, it was evident that, when finished, the model would be a faithful miniature reproduction of a crack racing yacht of the most approved form.

"Why, Martin," said I, greatly pleased at this example of his skill, "this is excellent. Where in the world did you learn to model lines like these?"

"Well, sir," explained Martin, "you see, I was five years in the yard of the Fifes at Fairlie, yacht buildin', before I shipped in the *Northern Queen*; and before that again I was more than three years with Summers and Payne, of Southampton; so I ought to know a little about the shape of a yacht, didn't I, sir?"

"Assuredly you ought," said I; "and evidently you *do*, if one may judge by this." And I replaced the model in his hand, fully determined to regularly ship him if I could, now that I had seen what a handy, clever fellow he promised to be.

For I may here tell the reader, in strict confidence, that there is nothing I more thoroughly enjoy than boat-sailing, and very few things that I more highly appreciate than a good model of a ship or boat. A few days after this I made the proposition to Martin that he should ship for the remainder of the voyage, offering him the same pay that I was giving our own carpenter; and he at once gladly assented. This arrangement, as will be *seen* later on, was destined to lead to more important results than either of us at the moment anticipated.

At length, after a phenomenally good passage as far south as the twenty-eighth parallel, we lost the trades, and immediately picked up a strong westerly wind, before which we bore away, under every rag we could spread, to round the Cape. When off Agulhas the wind southed upon us, and we fell in with the tremendous swell that is almost invariably met with about this spot. I had passed over the same ground ten times already—five times outward-bound, and five times on the homeward passage—and had *always* found a heavy swell running, but on this last occasion it was far heavier than I had ever before beheld it. To convey some idea of the enormous bulk and height of these liquid hills I may mention that while off the Agulhas Bank—where the swell was by no means at its highest—we overhauled and passed a barque of about our own size, at a distance of less than a cable's length, yet so high was the swell that, when we both settled into the trough, she was completely hidden from us, to her topmast-heads!

In longitude 26 degrees East, with a moderate breeze from south-east, we bore away for the Straits of Sunda; and a few days afterwards met with a piece of exceptional good fortune. It was during the forenoon watch, the weather being beautifully fine, and a very gentle breeze blowing, under the influence of which we were slipping through the water at a speed of about five knots. The watch were busy, in a deliberate fashion, about various odd jobs on deck and aloft; and the occupants of the poop were lounging in their deck-chairs, amusing themselves according to their several fancies. As for me, I was engaged—as was indeed often the case—in a severe mental effort to find the key to Dick Saint Leger's cryptogram. The gentle motion, the warm, genial sunshine, and the soft splash of the water along the bends, with the absence of any hurried movement on board or sharply spoken orders, seemed to have wrought in the entire ship, fore and aft, a condition of half-dreamy, blissful listlessness, from which we were suddenly startled by a man crying out, from halfway up the lee fore-rigging—

“Luff! luff hard! down with your helm, or you'll be into it!”

“Into what?” shouted I, springing to my feet and running forward.

“I don't know, sir, what it is, but it is something floating. Here you are, sir; it is just coming abreast of us now.”

As the ship shot up into the wind, with all her canvas flapping and rustling, I sprang upon the lee rail, and saw a mass of dirty greyish-white substance, mottled and streaked like marble, floating slowly past at a distance of some half a dozen yards from the ship's side. Of course everybody else on deck must needs, in the excitement of the moment, rush to the lee rail, to gaze upon the cause of the sudden alarm; and, among them, the boatswain, an old whaler, who no sooner set eyes on the object than he exclaimed—

“Why, sir, that's a lump of ambergrease, worth more'n a hundred pound, I'll be bound. That's worth pickin' up, that is!”

I had never before seen a piece of ambergris, but had, of course, often heard of it, and knew it to be valuable; I accordingly ordered the mainyard to be laid aback, and sent the boatswain away with a crew in the gig to pick up the piece of “flotsam.” In about a quarter of an hour they returned to the ship with their prize, which proved to be a large lump—much larger than it had appeared to be when floating past—of hard, fatty matter, of a light, dirty grey colour, veined and mottled somewhat like marble, and giving off a peculiar sweet, earthy odour. Its weight seemed to be, as nearly as we could estimate it, about one hundred and fifty pounds; and the boatswain—who claimed to be an authority—confidently asserted that I should have no difficulty in getting a sovereign per pound for it at Hong Kong. Ambergris—I may as well mention, for the information of those who do not know—is said to be a secretion formed in the intestines of the sperm whale, as a result of disease. It is greatly in demand in the East generally, for a variety of purposes—medicinal, among others—but its chief use seems to be in the manufacture of perfumes. It is not often found, and, the supply being very limited, it commands a high price in the market. Strangely enough, we fell in with and secured a second and still larger piece a few days later; the total quantity amounting to no less than three hundred and twenty-seven pounds, which I afterwards disposed of without difficulty at twenty-five shillings per pound, remitting the proceeds home to my old friend, Mr Richards, in part liquidation of my debt to him.

Chapter Eight.

The Chief Mate has a Presentiment.

Nothing further of importance occurred during our passage across the Indian Ocean, which was accomplished under exceptionally pleasant circumstances; the weather being gloriously fine, and the wind, if not absolutely fair, always favourable enough to permit of our laying our course.

Java Head was made just before sunset, under a clear sky, with a light air breathing out from the north-west—so light an air, indeed, that when the sun rose next morning the headland was still on our starboard bow. Some two hours later, however, we got a strong breeze out from the north-east, under the influence of which we worked up toward the mouth of the straits in fine style, until noon—by which time we were fairly within the straits—when the wind softened down, finally dwindling away to nothing about an hour before sunset.

We had sighted several sail during the day, three of them being European, bound to the westward, while the rest were country craft—small coasters and fishing vessels for the most part. The Malays have probably, next to the Chinese, the worst reputation in the world for honesty; but it is only just to say that, with one solitary exception, all the native craft we had that day fallen in with had behaved in a manner that left no room whatever for suspicion. The

exception was in the case of a large proa that had passed us closely, running out before the wind toward the mouth of the straits during the forenoon, but which, having run to leeward of us for a distance of some six miles, had then hauled her wind and stretched in toward the southern shore, on reaching which she had lowered her canvas, thrown out her sweeps, and made her way to windward with the aid of the latter alone. It was not so much this circumstance, however, though it had a somewhat incomprehensible look about it, as the fact that she pulled twelve sweeps of a side—proving her to be heavily manned—that caused us to regard her and her movements with a certain amount of doubt and suspicion. We were now in waters that, from the numerous acts of piracy that have been committed within them, have acquired a more sinister reputation than is borne by any other spot of ocean of similar area in the whole world; and it was therefore only natural that the fact of our being becalmed in such a spot should have been productive of a certain uneasiness and disquiet of mind throughout the ship.

At sunset, and for an hour or two afterwards, there was every prospect of a fine clear night; but at about two bells in the first watch a thin veil of vapour began to gather in the sky, gradually thickening and blotting out the stars until they were all completely hidden, when the darkness became profound. At this time—or rather, when we had last had an opportunity of distinguishing distant objects—there were only some eight or ten craft, all native, in sight, the nearest of which was fully four miles distant; and they all, without exception, presented an appearance of perfect honesty. Three or four of them were, like ourselves, drifting idly, with their heads pointing in as many different directions; the others had rigged out a sweep, or in some cases a pair, and were slowly making their way inshore.

The baronet and I were reclining in contiguous chairs, placidly smoking our post-prandial cigars; the ladies were below, Miss Merrivale being seated at the piano, accompanying her sister, who—having by this time quite recovered her health and spirits—was singing some quaint, old-fashioned ballad in a full, rich contralto voice that could be distinctly heard from one end of the ship to the other, and probably far beyond. As for the chief mate, he was pacing the deck thoughtfully and steadily to and fro with an energy that, taking the heat and closeness of the night into consideration, seemed to bespeak an uneasy mind. After a while he halted alongside the binnacle, gazed abstractedly into it for about half a minute, and then, turning to the nodding helmsman, inquired whether he knew where he was running the ship to.

“She hasn’t had steerage-way on her since I came aft, at eight bells, sir,” was the reply.

“She hasn’t, eh?” remarked Roberts. “Well, if that’s the case, the compass isn’t of much use to you, is it? So,” pulling off his jacket, “as it’s hardly worth while to proclaim our exact whereabouts to everybody, we’ll just mask the light until a breeze springs up.”

Saying which, he laid his jacket very carefully over the hood of the binnacle, completely obscuring the not very brilliant light that shone therefrom.

“What is Roberts’ idea in hiding the binnacle light in that fashion?” asked Sir Edgar, turning to me, as the mate again walked forward, pausing for some minutes near the head of the short poop ladder, and apparently peering anxiously round him into the obscurity.

“Well,” said I, “I think he perhaps feels a little uneasy at our being becalmed just here, and in such an intensely dark night, too. The Malays have the name of being born pirates, you know, and should they happen to take it into their heads to attack us just now, it would be rather awkward, since we could do absolutely nothing to avoid them while this calm lasts.”

“Do *you* think there is any danger of such an occurrence, captain?” he asked, with manifest anxiety.

“Not very much,” I replied. “There were no suspicious craft visible at nightfall. Still, an attack is by no means an impossibility, especially on such a dark night. The circumstances are precisely those which I imagine would be deemed highly favourable by people piratically inclined.”

“Then why, in Heaven’s name, my good sir, do you not make preparation for such an eventuality?” exclaimed my companion, excitedly.

“For the simple reason,” I replied, “that all the preparation possible could be made in five minutes; and, as a matter of fact, I was only waiting until you had all retired, when I intended at once making them. Two slashes of a sharp knife would suffice to release those boarding-pikes from the boom; and you can easily calculate for yourself the length of time it would take to serve out a brace of revolvers and a cutlass to each of our small crew.”

“Um!” ejaculated the baronet. “And have you no rifles on board?”

“I have one,” said I; “but of what use would it be on such a dark night as this?”

“True; too true,” muttered Sir Edgar. “Nevertheless, I think I will go down and put my Winchester together, upon the off chance of work being found for it. Confound this calm, say I. If it were not for the fact of my wife and bairns being on board there is nothing I should enjoy more than a brush with the rascals—for my feeling is that pirates deserve no mercy—but, as it is—” An expressive shrug eloquently concluded the sentence; and the baronet at once rose and went below.

A minute or two later the piano became silent, and I heard the sound of the instrument being closed, as Sir Edgar remarked, laughingly—

“Thank you, Emily. If you go on at this rate you will soon recover your old form. I thought, just now, as I sat on deck listening to your singing, that your voice had never sounded sweeter. But, as your chief medical adviser, I really must forbid your using it any more to-night; we must progress gradually, you know, and not overtax nature at the outset (is not that the correct professional jargon?) Joking apart, however, I think you have done enough for to-night; and—

ah, there goes four bells—ten o'clock—take my advice, 'turn in,' both of you, and get a good long night's rest."

"I think I will," replied Lady Emily; "this hot weather makes me feel very languid and tired. And you, Edgar—what are you going to do? You will not remain on deck very late, will you?"

"Well," hesitated Sir Edgar, "that depends on circumstances. I shall not turn in until I feel that there is some chance of getting to sleep. And if this calm continues I think I shall sleep on deck; it is too insufferably hot altogether for one down here, just at present. Leave the ports open in your cabins, both of you, so that if there is any air stirring you will get the benefit of it. And now I think I will say good night to you both. Good night, sweetheart, and pleasant dreams. Good night, Agnes."

I heard the click of the latches of the cabin-doors as the two ladies retired, and presently Sir Edgar came on deck again, with a fresh cigar in his mouth, and seated himself once more beside me, remarking—

"There! I have packed my womankind off to bed, and have laid my rifle, with a good supply of cartridges, in my own bunk—an act which has somewhat relieved my mind. So now, captain, as the coast is clear down below, there is nothing to prevent your making your preparations as soon as you please."

"Very good," said I; "then I will set about them at once. And, by way of a start, I think we will 'blind' the skylights; as I fully agree with Roberts that there is no especial advantage in revealing four whereabouts to anybody to-night. Nothing but a steamer could run us down in this weather; and, should there happen to be one coming along, we should see her lights in ample time to give her warning of our position."

The mate was still promenading to and fro between the break of the poop and the binnacle; so when he next passed I requested him to have the canvas covers put over the skylights, also to direct the steward to turn down the lamps in the saloon and my own cabin, and to carefully draw the curtains before all the sidelights, so that no treacherous ray might gleam forth from the ship's side and betray our locality. This was soon done; and the noiseless movements of the mate as he went forward and gave the necessary orders in a whisper, instead of issuing them in stentorian tones from the break of the poop, sufficiently indicated his conviction of the existence of a lurking peril in our immediate vicinity.

The one thing that we had to fear, above all others—and to guard against—in the event of an attack, was the presence of the pirates on our own decks. Should they succeed in boarding us, it would certainly be in such overwhelming numbers as to render an effective resistance impossible; our small party would be quickly overpowered, and then the fate of everybody on board would be sealed. Our safety depended upon our keeping the foe at arm's length. Half a dozen fathoms of water would suffice; but the problem was how to accomplish this very desirable end. I had been giving a good deal of thought to this, even while chatting disconnectedly with Sir Edgar in the earlier part of the evening, and had at length hit upon a plan that I thought might be successful. We had on board a small fire engine, mounted on wheels, with a hose and jet attached, and a tank capable of containing some fifty gallons. This engine I now ordered to be uncovered, and prepared for action by securely lashing a small loose mop-head of oakum round the nozzle of the hose, taking especial care that the aperture of the jet should be left perfectly free. Roberts, who seemed at once to divine and understand my plan even before I had explained it to him, undertook this part of the work in person; and in about ten minutes he reported that all was ready, and invited me to inspect his workmanship.

It was by this time "five bells;" and the night was, without exception, the darkest, I think, that I had ever experienced. So dark, indeed, was it, that, well as we knew the ship, we had to feel our way along the deck with hands and feet, for it was absolutely impossible to see anything a foot beyond the end of one's nose. With such intense darkness as this it was evident that the heavens must be obscured by exceptionally heavy masses of cloud; which, with the hot, breathless condition of the atmosphere, led me to anticipate and hope for a thunderstorm, which would at least afford us sufficient light to inspect our surroundings, and so put an end to a state of suspense that was growing wearisome. And not only was the night intensely dark; it was also oppressively silent; for, the water being perfectly smooth, there was no life or motion in the ship to give rise to those sounds—such as the flapping of canvas, the creaking of timbers and bulkheads, etcetera, etcetera—that usually make a calm so irritating to people who happen to be troubled with nerves. All was silent as death itself; our own movements being hushed, in harmony with the prevailing stillness, so that we spoke under our breath, and moved about on tiptoe.

In this silent, groping way I followed Roberts forward to inspect the fire engine; and it was while thus engaged with the aid of a carefully shielded lantern, that the mate exclaimed, in a hoarse whisper, as he held up his hand, and bent his head in a listening attitude—

"Hark! did you hear that, sir?"

"No," said I, "I heard nothing. What was it?"

"Why," answered Roberts, "it sounded to me like the noise of an oar, or a sweep, creaking in a rowlock; and it seemed to come from away yonder,"—pointing, as he spoke, in the direction of the larboard bow.

We both listened intently, for fully a minute, without detecting any sound whatever confirmatory of Roberts' evident suspicions; and at length I said, turning once more to the examination of the fire engine—

"Tush, man, you were mistaken; you heard nothing. The fact is, Mr Roberts, you are not quite yourself to-night. You seem nervous, and fidgety, and anxious. The heat of to-day has upset you; and I think you had better let me give you a good stiff dose of quinine when you go below, at eight bells."

"Thank you, sir, no," answered Roberts; "I don't need any quinine, or anything else in the shape of medicine to brace me up. There's nothing the matter with me, bodily; but, to be perfectly candid, I do feel a little bit off my mental

balance, as it were, to-night. The fact is—I know you'll laugh at me, sir, but I can't help that, and it don't matter, but I've got the feeling strong upon me that something's going to happen to me to-night. For three nights running—that is to say, last night, and the night before, and the night before that again—I've started up out of a sound sleep with the idea that my dear wife was calling me; ay, and with the very sound and tone of her sweet voice in my ears. Now, sir, do you think that is only a coincidence, as they say ashore; or isn't it more likely to be a sign that something is going to happen to me?"

"Why, what nonsense is this for a sensible, educated man like yourself to be talking!" I exclaimed half angrily. "Let me feel your pulse."

He held out his hand to me, and I laid my fingers upon his wrist. Contrary to what I had expected, I found the skin to be cool and moist, and the pulse beneath it beating with the steadiness and regularity of a machine.

"Umph! there doesn't seem to be very much wrong there," I admitted. "But I didn't know you were a married man, Roberts; I understood you once to say that you were quite alone in the world—not a soul belonging to you."

"Quite right, sir; that's the exact truth," returned the mate. "But I had a wife once, sir; as sweet, true, and tender-hearted a little woman as you ever met, I'll be bound. And pretty, she was, too. My little Nellie—I only had her six months, sir.

"We were spliced early in the spring; and I stayed ashore and spent the whole summer and well into the autumn with her; six months—six blessed, happy, joyous months with the sweetest woman that ever lived. We were all by ourselves, excepting for one servant maid, in a pretty little house on the outskirts of Teignmouth. Ah! that was a time for a man to look back upon for the rest of his life. Then by-and-by, when the autumn days began to grow short, the cash began to grow short, too; and I had to go to sea again to earn more. I'm not a particularly soft-hearted man, as a rule, Captain Saint Leger, but I tell you, sir, that that parting from Nellie was just as much as I could stand up against: to be obliged to untwine her loving, clinging arms from about my neck, and to deliberately turn away and leave her standing there by the gate, crying her dear eyes out, was cruel work, sir; it was like tearing my very heartstrings asunder. But it had to be done.

"Of course when we arrived at Durban—for it was while I was in the Natal trade, in this same little barque—there were a couple of letters waiting for me that had passed us on the road out; and every mail that arrived while we were lying in the harbour brought me another, each more cheerful than the last, because the time was passing away and bringing our reunion nearer.

"And when at last I got home again, sir, all that they had to show me was my darling's new-made grave. She had taken typhoid fever, died, and was carried out of the house in her coffin at the moment that the telegram announcing my arrival in England was handed in."

Something very like a sob seemed to rise in Roberts's throat and choke him at this point in his story; but before I had time to frame and arrange the words of sympathy that struggled to my lips—for I am not a quick man with my tongue—he resumed—

"I hope, Captain Saint Leger, that if my manner has seemed to you a little curious to-night, you will not put it down to timorousness, or faintheartedness, or anything of that sort. I *do* feel very queer, I admit; not ill, you understand, but *strange*; a kind of—well, it's more than a presentiment; I might say it's an absolute certainty that I'm going to die to-night, coupled with another absolute certainty that those treacherous fiends of Malays are gathering round us out there in the darkness. But if my presentiment should prove true, and it comes to a fight, have no fears on my account. I'll not fail you, sir, in the moment of need and danger. Danger has long ceased to be an enemy of mine, and Death lost all his terrors for me when I stood for the first time beside my Nellie's grave. I am quite ready to die whenever it may please the Almighty to call me; and if I can do so in defence of those dear, helpless women and children down below, it will suit me well enough."

"Thank you, Roberts; thank you, my friend," said I, grasping the hand he held out to me. "Yours is a very sad, pathetic story, and you have my hearty sympathy. As to doubting your courage, my good fellow, no such thought ever entered my head. But I am certain, despite all you say to the contrary, that you are not quite yourself to-night. Therefore, if you will not take any medicine, at least go below and try to get a little sleep; that perhaps will do you as much good as anything. I will keep the remainder of your watch for you; and should anything occur to confirm your suspicions as to the Malays, you may reckon on my calling you in good time."

The man was, however, obstinate—or, at least, so he seemed to me to be—resolutely declining to accede to either of my suggestions; so, leaving him to complete the few remaining preparations I deemed necessary to meet an attack, should anything of the sort be attempted, I returned aft to the poop, somewhat vexed that so thoroughly sensible a man as Roberts had hitherto proved should suffer himself to be so completely mastered, as I had seen him to be, by a morbid feeling of melancholy that was doubtless due in part to overmuch dwelling of late upon the death of his wife but which I firmly believed was to be still more directly traced to some slight derangement of the system that could easily be put right by the administration of a dose of medicine, could the fellow but be induced to take it. No doubt, too, the fact of our being becalmed, and therefore to a great extent helpless, in a spot notoriously haunted by a people, every mother's son of whom was but too ready to participate in any act of piracy that seemed to offer a reasonable prospect of success, had a large influence in producing the presentiment of death in the mate's mind; but that, I felt sure, would pass away with the impenetrable and oppressive darkness by which we were enveloped, or with the advent of a breeze of wind. While, therefore, I sincerely pitied the poor fellow for his disagreeable state of mind, I thought that perhaps it would be wisest to treat it as a matter of no importance, and to leave him to himself until the fit of depression should have passed away.

On groping my way back to the chair I had previously occupied, I found that Sir Edgar was still occupying the chair

beside my own, meditatively pulling away at a cigar, the glowing spark of which would probably have still further increased Roberts's perturbation, had he seen it. As I seated myself beside him the baronet made a half-jesting inquiry as to whether our preparations had had the effect of reassuring the mate; so, to while away the time, and for want of something more interesting to talk about, I told him Roberts's story, and also described to him the peculiar state of mind under which the poor fellow was labouring. Sir Edgar fully agreed with me that the latter was simply the result of some slight and probably temporary derangement, and was proceeding to discuss the subject of presentiments in general, and the extreme rarity of really well-authenticated cases of verification, when the atmosphere became for an instant faintly luminous with the evanescent, quivering glimmer of the silent, summer lightning. The flash trembled but for a moment in the sky, and was gone again; but in that moment I saw that the firmament was packed with vast masses of dense, heavy, threatening, highly, charged electric cloud, the weird, contorted shapes of which clearly indicated that they were being powerfully acted upon by the mighty antagonistic forces that they carried within their bosoms, and gave unmistakable warning that an elemental strife was impending, for which it would be well to prepare. Beneath this louring canopy the surface of the water shone with the unwrinkled smoothness of polished glass, faithfully reflecting every detail, even to the most minute, of form and colour exhibited by the writhing cloud-shapes that overhung it; and also faithfully reflecting the shapes of four large proas that, in a somewhat scattered fleet, were revealed at a distance of some three miles to the northward and eastward of the spot occupied by ourselves. The barque happened at the moment to be lying with her head pointing about south-east; these proas were therefore broad upon our larboard beam, and they were the first objects that met my sight. Some, if not all, of these craft were working their sweeps; for, with the momentary quiver of the lightning, I had caught the glint of reflected light from wet oar-blades projecting from the dark, shadowy mass of the hull; and they were all heading up or down the straits—I could not tell which in the unexpected glimpse I had caught of them—for they all showed end-on, or nearly so, to us.

Meanwhile, Roberts had completed his task, and was in the act of mounting to the poop—for I caught sight of his figure out of the corner of my eye—when the flash came. As the opaque darkness once more enveloped us I heard his voice exclaiming sharply, and, as it seemed to me, with a note of exultation in it, as though proud at the prospect of at least one half of his presentiment being verified—

"Did you see that, sir?"

I rose from my chair and joined him, so that our voices might not disturb the sleepers below in the saloon, near the open skylight of which I had been seated.

"You mean the proas, I suppose," said I. "Yes, I saw them. But there are only four of them, thank goodness. And we are not sure that they are not heading *up* the straits, instead of toward us. If so, it was no doubt from one of them that the sound emanated that startled you a little while ago, as they must have passed us at no great distance."

"*Four* of them?" exclaimed Roberts; "I only saw *three*; and two of them were heading the same way as ourselves. They were all close together; not more than—"

At this moment the tremulous greenish glare of the sheet lightning once more lit up the scene, this time much more strongly than on the first occasion, and in the midst of the quivering radiance there was a single sudden, vivid gleam, like the instantaneous flash of a gigantic lantern behind the dense masses of cloud lying piled along the western horizon, the light being so brilliant as to be quite dazzling after the Cimmerian darkness to which our eyes had become accustomed. But, despite the dazzling brilliancy of the sudden illumination, the retina of my eyes caught and retained the vision of three large proas broad on our *starboard quarter*, about two miles distant, situated precisely as Roberts had described them; and that this vision was no illusion of my senses was instantly demonstrated by the mate, who interrupted himself to quickly exclaim—

"There they are again, sir."

"Yes, I saw them," said I. "And there are four more about three miles up the straits, on our port beam. That makes seven craft in our neighbourhood that were certainly not there when the darkness closed down upon us. Now, in order to get where they are they must have been using their sweeps; which, I must confess, has, to my mind, rather a bad look; as, from what I have heard of the Malays, they are not so fond of hard work as to resort to it for mere pastime. However, we shall soon know what they are after; if they are looking for us, that last flash has most probably enabled them to discover our whereabouts; and if they mean mischief they will all be heading for us when next we see them. Meanwhile, Mr Roberts, it is evident that we are about to be treated to a heavy thunderstorm; and as it may bring a violent wind-squall with it, we will make provision for the possibility by stowing all our light canvas. Ah!"—as another and still brighter flash burst forth, followed this time by the low muttering of distant thunder—"there they come; the rascals are certainly after us! Call all hands at once, if you please, Mr Roberts; there will be time to shorten sail, and to prepare a reception for the Malays before they can get alongside."

"All hands shorten sail!" shouted the mate, scrambling off the poop, and groping his way forward. "Clew up and furl the royals and to'ga'n'ts'ls; and see that you stow them in such a way that they won't blow adrift if a squall happens to strike us. Let go the main-royal and to'gallant and the mizzen-topmast staysail halliards, and man the downhauls; then you can stow the sails, as you work your way down. Is that you, Mr Forbes? Just see that the main and fore tops'l-halliards are all clear for letting run, will ye? And when your lads come on deck we will haul down and stow the flying-jib and get in the gaff-tops'l and mizzen. That's your sort, my bullies; now, away aloft and stow everything as quickly as you can."

The men, fearful that the anticipated squall might burst upon the ship before we were prepared for it, worked with a will, their efforts being greatly facilitated by the lightning that was now quivering and flashing all round the horizon with momentarily increasing splendour, and at such brief intervals that the illumination might almost be said to be continuous; while the deep, hollow rumble of the thunder might very well have been mistaken for the booming of a distant cannonade. The effect of the incessant flicker of the lightning was very weird; the tremulous greenish-blue

glare illuminating the ponderous masses and contorted shapes of the black clouds overhead, the surface of the ink-black sea around us, the distant proas, and the hull, spars, sails, and rigging of the barque, with the moving figures aloft and at the jib-boom end, and suffusing everything with so baleful and unearthly a light that only the slightest effort of the imagination was needed to fancy ourselves a phantom ship, manned by ghosts of the unquiet dead, floating upon the sooty flood of the Styx, with the adamantine foundations of the world arching ponderously and menacingly over our heads and reflecting from their rugged surfaces the flashing of the flames of Phlegethon.

Chapter Nine.

An Eventful Night.

The storm was approaching us rapidly; the rumble of the thunder grew momentarily louder, and soon became continuous; and presently a vivid flash of chain lightning streamed from the clouds low down upon the northern horizon, followed, in about half a minute, by a smart peal of thunder, much louder than any that we had yet heard. This was quickly succeeded by a second flash, perceptibly nearer than the first—for the interval between it and the resulting clap of thunder was noticeably shorter, while the volume of sound was much greater and sharper. And still the sheet lightning continued to play vividly and with scarcely a second's intermission among the Titanic cloud-masses around and above us, lighting up the entire scene from horizon to horizon; so that we now had no difficulty whatever in following the movements of the various proas in sight, the whole fleet of which were obviously converging upon us as upon a common centre.

It was evident, from the uneasy glances cast by the men from time to time upon these craft, that they fully shared my own and the chief mate's suspicions regarding them, and I have no doubt that the sight of the seven proas unmistakably sweeping down toward us had as much as the quickly gathering storm to do with the acceleration of their movements; at any rate, I had never seen men work more smartly; and the nearest proa was still fully three-quarters of a mile distant when the last man reached the deck—which he did by way of the main-topmast backstay—and our task of shortening sail was complete.

I thought it was now time to say a word or two to the hands. I therefore requested Mr Roberts to call everybody aft; and at the word they came shambling along the deck, bare-footed, and grouped themselves on the port side, between the main rigging and the capstan, while the two mates joined me upon the poop. I waited a moment until they were silent, and then said—

“My lads, the glances you have been casting at intervals in the direction of those proas assures me that not only have you all observed them, but also that, like myself, you have very grave doubts as to the honesty of their intentions. I may as well say at once that, so far as I am concerned, doubt has given place to certainty—the certainty that they mean mischief towards us. I believe that the large proa that passed us this morning, running out to seaward, and afterwards sweeping up the straits again, under the land, was simply bound upon a reconnoitring cruise; and that, on seeing us, her people arrived at the conclusion that we should prove a very suitable object for attack, should opportunity present itself; and that the presence of those seven proas is the result.

“Now, I need not waste time by telling you what sort of character the Malays bear, because you all know it. They are, almost to a man, born pirates, and a cruel, bloodthirsty set of rascals are they into the bargain. We may therefore be certain that if those fellows are once allowed to gain full possession of our decks, not a soul of us on board here will be left alive five minutes afterwards. Unfortunately, we mount no guns, so I fear there is little chance of our being able to keep them at a distance; but there is an arm-chest below containing a sufficient supply of cutlasses and revolvers for all hands, and these, with ammunition, shall be served out to you. I may tell you that Mr Roberts and I have been concocting a little plan by which we hope to prevent the rascals from actually boarding us; but, as I have never yet tried it, I am by no means certain that it will succeed. Should it fail, we shall undoubtedly be boarded, in which case we must fall back upon cold lead and cold steel, serving out both to the enemy with such zeal and good will that they shall be anxious only to get back on board their own craft with the utmost possible expedition. You will all fight, and fight well, I know—I never yet met with a Briton who would *not* fight—but it may perhaps put a little extra vigour into your arms if I remind you that you will be fighting, not only for yourselves, but also for the helpless women and children who are sleeping below. Now muster yourselves, the port watch on the port side of the deck, and the starboard watch on the starboard side, and Mr Roberts and Mr Forbes will serve out the arms to you. After which you will hold yourselves ready to promptly execute such orders as you may receive.” The fellows raised a cheer as I finished speaking, and ranged themselves on either side of the deck with a steadiness and alacrity of movement that was very encouraging to me, as indicating a cool and undaunted frame of mind on their part; and the two mates at once dived below to bring up the arms and ammunition.

Meanwhile, I walked aft to Sir Edgar, who still retained his chair, puffing placidly at his cigar, but clearly evincing, by the way he had slued himself in his seat, and in his observant, listening attitude, the lively interest he was taking in the proceedings.

As I joined him he rose from his chair and, pitching the glowing stump of his cigar over the side, said—

“I am going below for my rifle now, captain. And I think that while I am there I had better awaken my wife and Miss Merrivale, and just give them a hint of what is impending. The firing is certain to awake them, if the thunder has not done so already, and I think it will be best that they should have a clear idea of what is about to happen, or when we begin firing we may have them rushing on deck in alarm to see what is the matter. Do not you agree with me?”

“Yes, certainly,” said I. “I was about to suggest such a course to you. But there is every probability of there being some exceedingly warm work going on here on deck very shortly, and if you will allow me to express an opinion, it is that it would be decidedly more prudent for you to remain below and do what you can to encourage the ladies. An

unlucky shot, you know, might—”

“Thanks,” interrupted the baronet, “I think I can guess exactly what you would say, captain; but not another word, if you please. What? Would you have me skulk below while brave men are imperilling their lives in defence of those who are dearer to me than my own life? I could not possibly do it. Besides, if I am not greatly mistaken, you will need all the force you can muster before the end of the affair is reached. I shall be back again within five minutes, and I have to request that, from then until the fight is over, you will be pleased to consider me as completely under your orders as any other man in the ship.”

So saying, Sir Edgar turned toward the companion and made his way below with a composure as imperturbable as though he had just bade me “good night” and were about to turn in, instead of looking forward to active participation in a struggle which there was only too much reason to expect would be of the most sanguinary and desperate character, and the result of which might well be anticipated with anxiety.

The baronet’s head had scarcely vanished beneath the companion-slide when there came a flash and a puff of smoke, followed by a sharp, ringing report from the nearest proa—now directly astern of us, the barque having swung with her head once more pointing fair up the straits—and then the surface of the water was torn and lashed into momentary foam, some eight or ten fathoms away on our port beam, by the spattering of a heavy shower of bullets or slugs of some sort that had evidently formed the charge of the gun.

“That was well meant, at any rate,” remarked Roberts, as he crossed the deck and placed himself at my side. “By the report of it I judge that it is a brass gun they are using, and they’ve got our range to a nicety, for a wonder.”

“Yes,” said I; “the men had better get under cover, Mr Roberts, for, if the next charge should happen to fall on board us, somebody may be hurt, and there are so few of us that we cannot afford to have any casualties before coming to close quarters. Be good enough to see to this, if you please, and while you are forward get one of the men to open and start a drum of petroleum into the tank of the fire engine, and put the nozzle of the hose into the tank to soak, so that our wick arrangement round the jet may get thoroughly saturated with oil against the time that we shall want to use it. At the same time you had better tell off two of the most reliable hands to attend exclusively to the working of the engine. And be pleased to remember that you and Mr Forbes are included among those who are to keep carefully under cover until otherwise required.”

“All hands under cover,” shouted the mate, as he made his way forward. “Stow yourselves away where no shot can get at you, my lads, but hold yourselves ready to answer smartly to a call. Harry, I want you and Joe Martin to—”

I heard no more, being by this time halfway down the companion-ladder in quest of my rifle, for the time was now at hand when it would be needed. As I entered my own state-room I heard Sir Edgar’s voice speaking in reassuring tones in his wife’s cabin, and as I emerged again with my rifle in my hand, a cutlass girt about my waist, and a pair of revolvers in my belt, he came into the saloon and from thence followed me on deck. As I placed my foot on the bottom step of the companion-ladder I heard the report of another discharge from the proa mingling sharply with the deep, volleying roll of the thunder overhead, but as there was no accompanying patter of shot on the deck I concluded that they had again missed us.

I was heartily glad that the Malays had unmistakably declared their intentions by opening fire upon us, for, to be perfectly candid, I had been in some perplexity as to how I ought to act towards them, should they make no hostile demonstration towards us while approaching. For while, on the one hand, there had scarcely been a shadow of doubt in my mind, from the moment when my eye first fell upon them, that the proas were piratical craft, with sinister designs upon the barque, there remained, on the other hand, a bare possibility—until they absolutely declared themselves to be otherwise—that they might be perfectly honest traders bound upon their own lawful business, and we should hardly be justified in taking the initiative and opening fire upon them as they approached, merely because their movements happened to present to us a suspicious appearance, and because their respective courses happened to be in our direction. But now that one of them—the craft nearest us—had actually assumed the offensive, we need entertain no further scruples, so far at least as she was concerned; and as for the others, now that the engagement might be said to have begun, we should soon discover, by their behaviour, what their intentions were.

“How is your rifle sighted?” asked Sir Edgar, as we stood together near the wheel, watching the approach of our antagonist.

“Up to a thousand yards,” answered I. “And as that proa is now within half that distance, I shall take a shot at her without further ceremony. When you fire, Sir Edgar, aim at her bows, and as near the level of her rail as possible; there is doubtless a crowd of the villains grouped forward there about their gun, and in the eyes of her, watching us, and it is to that part of her, therefore, that we must direct our attention at first. Here goes for the first shot.”

I levelled my weapon carefully, but had to wait for what seemed quite a long time to get a good aim; two or three very vivid flashes of lightning just then following each other in quick succession, and so effectually dazzling my eyes that I could see absolutely nothing for some few seconds afterwards. Then I fired, but there was no answering sign or sound on board the proa to tell that my shot had been effective.

“What distance were you sighted for?” inquired the baronet.

“Five hundred yards,” answered I; “but I believe she is nearer than that.”

“I think so, too,” agreed Sir Edgar. “You fired too high, captain. I shall sight for three hundred,”—going to the binnacle, and uncovering the hood for a moment to do so. He waited perhaps a minute; then raised the rifle to his shoulder, paused a second or two, and, taking advantage of a strong and prolonged gleam of sheet lightning, fired. A shrill scream from the proa told us that his bullet had found a mark, and almost immediately afterwards she fired her gun again, the shot this time striking somewhere aloft, for we distinctly heard the thud of the bullets against the

spars.

“We score first blood, at all events,” composedly remarked Sir Edgar. “As for the enemy, it is evident that they have not altered the elevation of their piece since they first fired, and it is fervently to be hoped that they will still forget to do so. If that last shower of bullets had fallen on deck, captain, I am afraid it would have been bad for both of us.”

“Very possibly,” I agreed. “Still, those small, short guns, such as she appears to carry, scatter tremendously, and we might have the lead flying thick all round us, and still not be hit. Now, I wonder whether I shall have better luck this time.”

I certainly had, for the sharp report of my weapon was instantly answered by quite an outcry on board the proa—a kind of compound yell made up of several distinct sounds, leading to the conclusion that my bullet had fallen in the thick of a group, and wounded several.

“Why, captain, you are improving,” observed my companion approvingly. “If I could but manage to do the same, now —”

Crack! went his rifle, and the sound was followed by two distinct cries—a scream and a howl—manifestly uttered by different voices, and we thought we heard the sound of a heavy fall on the deck, but a sharp peal of thunder at the same moment prevented our being sure of this. While we were reloading they fired their brass gun once more, and again the charge flew high overhead—luckily for us, for the bullets seemed to be flying closer together this time. Then they began pelting at us with their *gingals*, first treating us to quite a respectable fusillade, and then blazing away, every man for himself, as fast as they could load and fire; some of their bullets singing past us so closely that I inwardly congratulated myself upon my wisdom in ordering everybody under cover.

And new, one after another, the remaining proas opened fire upon us with their brass guns, although certainly not more than two of the entire fleet were yet within range; while the vivid lightning flashed and tore athwart the heavens in continuous coruscations, and the thunder crashed and rattled and rolled and boomed overhead and all round the horizon in such terrific detonations that they absolutely caused the ship to perceptibly tremble and vibrate with the tremendous volume of sound.

At length the proa that had initiated the attack upon us closed to within a hundred yards, steering for our port quarter, with the evident intention of sheering alongside us somewhere about our mizzen-rigging. They were working ten sweeps on board her—five of a side—and calculating that each sweep required at least four men to handle it (for they were very long and heavy), I concluded that she would have, all told, at least sixty men on her deck, a formidable number to oppose with our small force on board the barque. I was not much afraid of them so long as we could keep a few fathoms of water between them and ourselves, but should they once succeed in gaining a footing upon our decks, a very few casualties on our side would suffice to determine the issue against us.

It was, accordingly, to prevent this that I had set my wits to work in conjunction with those of the mate, when we had first seen reason to anticipate an attack, my plan being to utilise our fire engine as a means of defence, and I had given instructions to have it prepared in a manner that I hoped would convert it into a really formidable weapon. The time had now arrived, or at least was close at hand, when an opportunity would be afforded us to test its efficacy; I therefore ordered it to be run aft as far as the capstan, and cautioned the two men, who had been told off to work it, to stand by the brake-handles. I had already fully explained my idea to the mate, and he now took in his hand the long brass nozzle—the tow attachment round the jet of which was by this time thoroughly saturated with oil—and prepared to act as circumstances might demand. Meanwhile the pirates had ceased to fire their brass gun, and the fusillade from their *gingals* had slackened considerably, thanks, no doubt, to the indefatigable manner in which the baronet and I had plied our rifles upon them.

The craft was now so near that, by the continuous flashing of the lightning, we could distinguish every detail, even to the most minute, of her hull and rigging, and we could see, too, that her deck was crowded with men, many of whom appeared to have tailed on, as extra hands, to the sweeps, which were now being worked with furious energy; for they lashed the water into a perfect swirl of luminous, phosphorescent foam, while quite a respectable little curl of luminous froth buzzed away on each side from her sharp bows. It was clear that they were giving her “way” enough to shoot alongside, prior to laying in the sweeps, in order that every man they had might be available for boarding purposes.

“Now, Sir Edgar,” I exclaimed, “we will give her one more shot apiece; and then we must stand by with our cutlasses in case our fire engine fails.”

“There is a tall fellow standing at the helm who offers a very decent mark; shall I see whether I can pick him off?” inquired the baronet.

“By no means,” I answered hurriedly. “Take especial pains to shoot wide of him, if you please. I look to him to afford us very effectual help presently.”

My companion turned and stared inquiringly at me for a moment, apparently doubting whether I was in earnest; when, seeing that I evidently was so, he muttered—

“Oh, very well,” and, taking aim, fired simultaneously with me; and I saw two pairs of arms tossed into the air as their owners went down.

At the same moment, in obedience to a command that we distinctly heard given, the sweeps were very smartly laid in and thrown clattering on to the deck, while every man on board, save the helmsman, sank under cover behind the proa’s low bulwark.

"Now, Mr Roberts, stand by with your hose, and give them the benefit of it the moment they show themselves," I cried.

"Pump, boys, and fill the hose," exclaimed the mate, plunging the nozzle into the flame of a lighted lantern that he had brought aft with him for the purpose. The tow band instantly burst into a fierce flame, casting a broad yellow glare on everything within its influence, and dripping burning drops into a bucket of water with which Roberts had taken the precaution of providing himself.

While this was doing, the proa's helm had been ported, and she now came driving along toward our port quarter, as I had expected. When within fifty feet of us another order was given on board her, in response to which her crew—some eighty in number, at the very least, and as fierce and relentless looking a set of cut-throats as I ever desire to see—rose to their feet, with their naked creeses grasped in their hands—the yellow glare falling strongly upon their keen steel and fierce gleaming eyeballs—and lined her rail in readiness to spring on board us on the instant that the sides of the two craft should touch.

"Now is your time, Mr Roberts; let them have it, fore and aft!" I shouted.

"Pump *hard!*" cried Roberts to the men, excitedly. The handles clanked smartly; the



FOURED IN A FLOOD OF FIRE ACROSS THE INTERVENING SPACE OF WATER.
Frontispiece. Page 169.

mate turned the tap of the jet; and in an instant a long thin stream of oil, ignited by its passage through the flame blazing round the orifice of the jet, poured in a flood of fire across the intervening space of water, and struck the proa fairly in the bows. To raise the nozzle sufficiently to touch the men was an action quick as thought, when it was so manipulated as to cause the stream to travel deliberately right along the entire length of the vessel's rail, from the eyes of her to the taffrail. The effect surpassed my most sanguine expectations; that stream of fire, thin as it was, could not be withstood; and in less time than it takes to tell of it the deck of the proa was full of shrieking men, who, with clothes ablaze, and suffering Heaven only knows what extremity of torture wherever the fiery spray had touched them, were plunging headlong below out of the way of the dreadful missile. The helmsman had, as I expected, instinctively put his helm hard a starboard the instant that the jet began to play, with the result that the proa, instead of touching us, forged slowly past us to port, and so ahead, with little tongues of flame creeping here and there about her hull wherever the flaming oil had fallen; Roberts keeping the jet remorselessly playing upon her until she had shot quite beyond its reach.

"Thank God, we are well rid of that danger!" I ejaculated; "and, unless I am greatly mistaken, we shall get a breeze before any of the others are near enough to attempt the same trick."

"Ay; and here it comes with a vengeance, too! Look there, sir, on our starboard beam," cried Roberts. "Avast pumping there, you two, and run the engine away for'ard, out of the way. Stand by the braces fore and—"

A terrific blaze of lightning at this moment enveloped the ship in a sheet of living flame, which was accompanied by a simultaneous crash of thunder that was indescribably dreadful and terrifying by reason of its awful intensity of sound. It literally stunned me for a few seconds, so completely that I knew not where I was; and when I recovered my senses I discovered that the tremendous shock of sound had rendered me stone deaf, so that I was utterly incapable of hearing anything. Fortunately for us all, this deafness passed off again in a few minutes; but while it lasted I found it exceedingly inconvenient and unpleasant.

My first act, on coming to my senses, was to glance instinctively in the direction indicated by the mate, when a complete transformation in the appearance of the heavens in that quarter met my anxious gaze. The heaped-up masses of cloud had there been rent asunder by the power of the imprisoned wind, revealing a large and rapidly widening patch of clear sky, with the stars brilliantly shining in the blue-black space; while beneath it the water was

all white with the foam of the approaching squall.

“Man the port fore-braces!” I shouted at the top of my voice—though not the slightest sound reached my ear—“round-in smartly, men; well there; belay! Stand by your topsail halliards, fore and main! Why, what is this?” as in moving I stumbled over something on the deck that felt like a human body. I stooped to feel for the object—for the lightning had entirely ceased since that last baleful flash—and found that it *was* indeed a body. Had some one been struck by a bullet without our having noticed it? I hurriedly called for a lantern; but before it could be brought the squall burst upon us in all its fury; and though I could still hear absolutely nothing, I know that the Babel of sound must have been terrific, for the wind smote me as though it had been a solid body, jamming me hard against the larboard mizzen-rigging, while the staunch little barque bowed before it until her larboard rail was buried in the sea and her maindeck all afloat as far up as the coamings of the hatchways. I shouted an order to let go the topsail halliards, and signed to the man at the wheel to put the helm hard up; but he appeared to have already done so, for—the coat that had masked the binnacle light having gone to leeward upon the wings of the squall—I could see him to windward of the wheel, holding the spokes in his grasp and bearing against it with all his strength. Catching my eye, the fellow pointed ahead and said something—at least, I saw his lips move—and, looking in the direction toward which he pointed, I saw the proa that had engaged us driving away to leeward, broadside-on, with tongues of fire clinging to her bulwarks and deck here and there, which, even as I looked, were fanned into a devouring flame by the furious strength of the blast that swept over her. It was evident that Roberts’s flaming jet had set her on fire.

But the barque was paying off rapidly, and had risen to an even keel by the time that we had brought the blazing proa well on our starboard bow, when away she flew like a frightened seabird before the gale, leaving the unfortunate Malays to a fate that, however dreadful, they had certainly brought upon themselves. Meanwhile, the topsail halliards having been let go, the yards had slid down upon the caps, while the topsails—being patent-reefing—had close-reefed themselves; so that, running, as we were, dead before the squall, we were snug enough for the moment; although there was a lee-shore at no very great distance, the existence of which occasioned me considerable anxiety.

The first danger over, I again called for a lantern, which was quickly brought; and its first rays revealed the shocking fact that it was the body of the chief mate that lay at my feet. Stooping hastily, I turned him over on his back to search for the wound that had laid him low; but, to my great surprise, was unable to find one, or to discover the slightest trace of blood. The features were perfectly placid and composed, with just the ghost of a smile upon them, giving him the appearance of having fallen suddenly into a pleasant sleep. I laid my fingers quickly upon his wrist fearing I knew not what, and failed to detect any movement of the pulse. Sir Edgar, meanwhile, had joined me, and now thrust his hand inside the waistcoat, over the region of the heart. He held it there a moment or two, and then started up, horror-stricken. “Good God!” he ejaculated, “the man is *dead!*”

It was so. There could be no doubt about it. Roberts’s presentiment had actually been a true one; he had indeed been doomed to die that night. But it was no mortal bullet that slew him; God Himself had launched the bolt that had severed the thread of this staunch and faithful sailor’s broken life. It was that last terrible flash of lightning that had killed him; and the poor fellow had died so instantaneously that he could scarcely have been conscious of the momentous change; certainly it must have been impossible that he could have experienced the least sensation of pain.

I was inexpressibly shocked and grieved at this terribly sudden death of my chief mate; not so much on account of the death itself—for, after hearing the poor fellow’s sad story in the earlier part of the night, I could not for an instant doubt that death would be regarded by him as a thrice welcome friend—but it was the awful suddenness and unexpected character of it that appalled me. However, I had no time to dwell upon the matter just then, for, though perfectly safe at the moment, every fathom that the ship travelled carried her more nearly to a position of awful jeopardy. I therefore gave orders that the body should be taken below to Roberts’s own state-room, and begged Sir Edgar to go below and see whether he could by any means restore vitality to it; hurriedly explaining the situation to him, and pointing out the impossibility of my leaving the deck until the safety of the ship should be assured. The kind-hearted fellow at once consented, and followed the men below, leaving me alone in the darkness and the turmoil of the storm to reflect on the words he had spoken on the night that witnessed the destruction of the *Northern Queen*: “How completely are we in the hands of God, and how absolutely dependent upon His Mercy!”

Our present situation was a further exemplification of this great truth, if indeed such were needed; for there was no sign whatever of any abatement of the strength of the gale; indeed, contrary to all my previous experience, the wind appeared to be increasing in violence with every fathom that we sped to leeward. True, the sky was clear away to windward and overhead, which was a good sign; but then I had before now known it to blow heavily for many hours on end out of a perfectly clear sky; while away to leeward, somewhere down in the thick blackness toward which the barque’s bows were pointing, and in the direction toward which she was hurrying, lay the land—a rock-bound coast, for aught that I knew to the contrary, but, at all events, *land*—to touch which, under the circumstances, would certainly mean the loss of the ship, and, most probably, of all hands as well.

While I was meditating upon this, and debating within myself the possibility of bringing the ship to the wind without losing the masts, a cry arose forward—a shout of horror raised by many voices, as it seemed to me, but if any words were uttered I failed to catch them, so terrific was the uproar of the wind in the maze of rigging overhead. I sprang toward the break of the poop, crying out at the same time to know what was the matter, when, as I did so, I caught a glimpse of a darker shadow against the blackness of the sky ahead, lying right athwart our hawse; there was another cry from our fore-castle; and as I turned my head to shout an order to the helmsman to put the wheel hard over I felt a shock—not a very severe one by any means, but as though we had touched the ground for a moment—a loud scream arose out of the dark shadow beneath our bows, and a grating, grinding sensation thrilled along the whole ship from her bows to her stern-post, as though she were forcing her way over something solid. I sprang to the rail and looked over the side into the water; and there, sliding swiftly past the ship, and prone upon the glittering, phosphorescent, milk-white foam, lay distinctly limned the black outline of a mast with a long, tapering latteen yard and a strand or two of rigging attached to it; while here and there, dotted upon the hissing froth, I caught a

momentary vision of certain round black objects that I knew were the heads of drowning men, intermingled with fragments of wreckage, tossing arms, and writhing bodies.

Even as I gazed, horror-stricken, at this picture of sudden, swift destruction, it drifted astern and was quickly lost to view; but I had seen enough to know exactly what had happened. We had unwittingly run down one of the proas that had essayed to attack us.

Chapter Ten.

On a Lee-Shore.

It was useless to think of heaving the ship to, or otherwise attempting to save the lives of the unfortunate Malays whose craft we had just destroyed; the thing was an absolute impossibility, and any such attempt would only have resulted in our own destruction; we had no option but to continue our headlong flight to leeward, leaving our enemies to save themselves, if they could, by clinging to the wreckage.

Immediately after the collision the carpenter came aft, and, without waiting for orders, carefully sounded the pumps. The result was a report that the hold was dry; we had therefore apparently sustained no serious damage to our hull; while, so far as spars and rigging were concerned, we did not appear to have parted a rope-yarn.

For fully half an hour the squall raged as madly as at the moment when it first burst upon us; all this while the ship was scudding helplessly before it, drawing nearer every moment to that deadly lee-shore that I knew must be close at hand, and which I every instant expected would bring us up all standing. At length, however, to my intense relief, the gale slightly but perceptibly moderated its headlong fury; and determining to at once avail myself of this opportunity, I called the hands to the braces, and prepared to bring the ship to the wind on the starboard tack. The moment that everything was ready I signed to the man at the wheel to put the helm gently over; when, as I was turning away again to give my orders to the men at the braces, one of them startled me with the cry of—

“Land ho! ahead and on the port bow!” I caught sight of it at the same instant, the air having momentarily cleared somewhat of the spindrift and scud-water that had hitherto circumscribed our horizon and obscured our view. Yes, there it was, a low, dark shadow against the now clear, starlit sky right ahead and stretching away to port and starboard on either bow. It could not be more than three miles distant from us—if so much—for the air, though somewhat clearer than it had been, was still thick, yet the loom of the land through it was clear enough; altogether too much so, indeed, for my liking. What it was like to the eastward I could not distinguish, for in that direction it faded quickly into the thick atmosphere that lay that way; but westward it terminated in a low point that already bore well out upon our larboard beam—a sight that caused me to most heartily congratulate myself that I had determined upon rounding-to on the starboard tack; for had I done so with the ship’s head to the westward, without seeing this point, we could not possibly have weathered it, and must have taken our choice—when we *did* discover it—of going ashore upon it, or upon the land to leeward, should we attempt to wear the ship; for she would never have tacked in such a sea as was now running, with such a small amount of canvas as we were showing.

As the ship came to the wind we, for the first time since the outburst of the gale, gained something like a just idea of its tremendous strength and violence. With nothing on her but the two close-reefed topsails and the fore-topmast staysail, the poor little *Esmeralda* bowed beneath the fury of the blast until her lee rail was awash and her lee scuppers more than waist-deep in water. The howling and hooting of the gale aloft, as it tore furiously through the maze of spars and rigging opposed to it, produced a wild medley of sound that utterly baffles all attempt at description; while the savage plunges of the ship into the short, steep sea and the horrible way in which she careened during her lee rolls almost sickened me with anxiety lest the masts should go over the side and leave us to drive ashore, a helpless hulk. True, in such a case we might have attempted to anchor, but I had very grave doubts whether our ground-tackle, good though it was, would have brought us up in such weather. The masts stood well, however—they were magnificent sticks, both of them, while our standing rigging was of wire throughout—and, as to our canvas, had I not seen it, I could not have believed that any fabric woven by mortal hands would have withstood such a terrific strain. It did, however, and moreover dragged the ship along at a speed of which I should never have believed the little craft capable, under such very short canvas, and close-hauled, had I not been present to witness her performance. With her steeply heeling decks, her taunt masts and their intricacy of standing and running rigging taut and rigid as iron bars to windward, while to leeward they streamed away in deep, symmetrical curving bights, her braced-up yards, and the straining canvas of the close-reefed topsails and fore-topmast staysail all swaying wildly aslant athwart the blue-black expanse of star-spangled sky; with her lee rail awash; her decks a tumultuous sea in miniature with the water that came pouring in whole cataracts over her upturned weather-bow as her keen stem plunged headlong into and clove irresistibly through the heart of wave after wave, flinging a blinding deluge of spray right aft as far as the poop, and ploughing up a whole acre of boiling, luminous foam, to pour, hissing and roaring, far out from under her lee bow and flash glancing past in a bewildering swirl of buzzing, gleaming froth, while the din of the wild gale raved aloft, and its furious buffeting almost distracted one’s senses, the gallant little barque thus fighting for her life would have presented an exhilarating spectacle to any one; while a seaman’s appreciative heart would have thrilled with exultation at her bearing in the strife. But though travelling fast through the water, the poor little ship was at the same time sagging most frightfully to leeward, the staysail seeming to drag her head two or three points off the wind at every send, and bringing her almost broadside-on to the sea. And although we were heading fairly well out toward the open water, I could not conceal from myself the awkward truth that our excessive leeway was reducing our course to one practically parallel with the trend of the coast; and sometimes I even thought that we were slowly but surely setting in toward the land. The fact was that the ship needed more after-sail to enable her to hold a good luff; yet it seemed to me that it would be impossible for her to bear any more. She was indeed rather over-pressed than otherwise, as it was, and had I had plenty of sea-room I would have endeavoured to relieve her of the fore-topsail at once, even at the risk of losing the sail in the attempt to hand it. But with that relentless lee-shore in plain view I dared not do it; it was imperative that she should carry every thread we were then showing, and

more if possible. While I was still inwardly debating the question it was settled by the lookout reporting land ahead! I staggered over to windward at the cry, and at the expense of a thorough drenching, despite the oilskins I had donned some time before, made it out, a bold lofty headland, jutting far out to seaward, and lying dead ahead of us. The ship was embayed! The land ahead was certainly not more than three miles distant, and the ship was setting bodily down toward it at every plunge. The time for hesitation was past; something had to be done, and done promptly, too, or another half-hour would see the last of the poor little *Esmeralda*. Our main trysail happened to be a nearly new sail, bent for the first time when starting on this voyage; it was made of good stout canvas, and was beautifully cut. I therefore determined to attempt the experiment of setting it, though I scarcely hoped it would endure the tremendous strain to which it would be exposed long enough to drag us clear of that terrible point. Mustering the hands, therefore, we got the sheet aft and the block hooked on to the eye-bolt; then, all hands tailing on to the fall, the lower brails were eased gently away, the sheet being dragged upon at the same time; and in this way we managed to get the foot of the sail extended without splitting it. The hauling out of the head was a much simpler matter; and in less than five minutes I had the satisfaction of seeing the entire sail extended without having parted a thread. The effect of this added canvas was tremendous; the lee rail was completely buried, and the deck was now so steeply inclined that during the lee rolls it was impossible to maintain one's footing without holding on to something. But we no longer sagged to leeward as before; the ship now held her luff, and the threatening headland was brought to bear nearly three points on our lee bow; if the trysail would only hold out long enough we might yet hope to scrape clear. But would it? Involuntarily I held my breath every time that the ship rolled to windward; for then the strain on canvas and spar and rigging was at its heaviest, and it really seemed to me as though nothing made by mortal hands could withstand it. Minute after minute passed, however, and still the good sail stood, while hope every moment grew stronger within my breast.

We had reached to within half a mile of the point, and I was already congratulating myself upon the certainty that we should clear it, when I happened to catch a momentary glimpse, through the driving spray, of something peculiar in the appearance of the water just off the point. Surely it could not be—fate would not be so cruel—and yet—

“Breakers on the lee bow!” simultaneously reported the two men on the lookout.

Then I was *not* mistaken; it *was* broken water I had seen. Yes; there could not be a doubt about it, for while I strained my gaze in an effort to pierce the darkness a ghostly white gleam shot into the air, such as is caused by the water breaking heavily upon rocks.

“Ay, ay; I see them,” I answered; then, to the man at the wheel—“Watch your helm carefully, now, my man. Keep her clean full, and let her go through the water; but do not let her go off a hair's breadth more than is necessary. You must weather that reef if you have any wish to see to-morrow's sun rise.”

“I'll do my best, sir,” answered the fellow, earnestly; and I saw him brace himself afresh as he fixed his eye more intently upon the weather leach of the main-topsail.

We were *flying* through the water—it could scarcely be called sailing—for the poor little ship was being so bitterly pressed that she scarcely rose at all to the seas now; she simply drove her sharp bows straight into the body of every sea as it came at her and ploughed her way through it, shipping at every plunge tons of water that poured in a continuous cataract over her forecastle and down into the seething swirl to leeward under which her lee rail was buried. She must have been travelling very fast, or she would not have behaved in this fashion; yet in the agony of my suspense she scarcely seemed to move at all. Despite this feeling it was sufficiently apparent that we were nearing that awful reef at headlong speed; and with every desperate forward plunge of the ship the frightful amount of lee drift we were making became also more unmistakable, momentarily increasing the doubt as to the possibility of our escape. We were now, and had been for some time, so close to the land that any attempt to wear the ship round must have inevitably resulted in her destruction; and, as to staying, that was equally out of the question under such short canvas in such a heavy sea—for the outer line of breakers was now close aboard of us; we dared not attempt to anchor in the face of that wild fury of wind and wave; and we had therefore absolutely no alternative but to keep on as we were going.

Our situation, in short, had become so critical that I felt it my duty to acquaint Sir Edgar with it forthwith; and I was on my way toward the companion in search of him when he emerged from it and joined me, the two seamen who had conveyed the inanimate body of the mate below following him and making their way forward, dodging the seas as best they might during the journey.

“I have been all this time in the mate's cabin,” said the baronet, “using my utmost endeavours to restore animation, but, I keenly regret to say, without success. Captain, the poor fellow is dead!”

“I never thought otherwise from the first,” said I, with a keen pang at this confirmation of my worst forebodings. “It is more than kind of you, Sir Edgar, to have taken so much trouble in the matter, and I am deeply grateful to you, the more so that it has been impossible for me to do anything for the poor fellow myself, the ship having demanded my whole attention from the moment when the squall first struck us. Well, he is at rest; his troubles are over; I believe he was a true and devout Christian, though he never made any ostentatious parade of his religion; and God will surely be gracious to him and accept his service of faithfully discharged duty and gentleness and blamelessness of life.”

“Yes,” said Sir Edgar, “assuredly He will. After the story you told me of his trouble in the earlier hours of this eventful night I cannot help thinking that the very manner of the poor fellow's death was an evidence of God's mercy. It was His hand that struck him down; and I feel sure that the stroke was dealt in pity rather than in anger. One has only to look upon the dead man's face and observe the perfect tranquillity of its expression to be convinced that death was absolutely painless; he must have passed the dread portal without knowing it. Meanwhile, how are we faring, captain? It seems to be blowing more furiously than ever; and are we not dangerously near the land?”

“I was seeking you to speak to you on the matter when you came on deck,” said I. “It is my painful duty to inform

you, Sir Edgar, that the ship is in a situation of extreme peril and the time has arrived for us to prepare for the worst. I must ask you, therefore, to go below, arouse your family, bid them don a life-belt each—which they will find on a shelf at the head of their berths—wrap themselves in whatever they can lay hands on as a protection from the weather, and come on deck without delay. There is a formidable reef ahead of us; and, unless we can contrive to weather it, the ship will be on it and breaking-up within the next quarter of an hour!”

With an ejaculation of dismay Sir Edgar darted from my side and rushed to the cabin; and as he did so I gave the order to call the watch below. The outer extremity of the reef—so far as we could trace it—now bore barely a point on our lee bow; and every sea that met us seemed to be sending us a good two fathoms to leeward. The hoarse voice of the seaman forward who was calling the watch reached me brokenly through the deep bellowing of the gale and the loud seething of the boiling sea; and presently I could see, by the increased bulk of the group of crouching figures under the lee of the deck-house, that everybody was now out of the fore-castle. The saloon party were scarcely less expeditious; for in a few minutes they, too, appeared on deck, wrapped in rugs and blankets snatched hastily from the beds upon which they had been sleeping; and I at once disposed them as comfortably as I could on the deck, under the lee of the companion and skylight, where they would be in a measure sheltered from the flying spray.

Then, calling Mr Forbes, I bade him take two hands below to collect and bring on deck all the life-belts we could muster, and serve one out to each man. This was soon done; the life-buoys were cut loose and piled in a safe and convenient position on the poop; and we were ready for any emergency. Nor were we any too soon; for we were now close upon the reef, while we had settled so far to leeward that it had become apparent to everybody that nothing short of a miracle could save us.

It was a bitter thought to me that, having brought the ship so far on her voyage, safely and prosperously, I was now about to lose her through what appeared to be nothing less than a cruel and malicious stroke of fortune. For if the gale had broken upon us during the hours of daylight, instead of in the darkness of night, we should undoubtedly have discovered the hazard of our position in time to have avoided running, as we had, blindly into this horrible death-trap. And not only should I lose the ship—a loss, it is true, that was to a great extent covered by insurance—but every scrap of property that any of us possessed on board her would also undoubtedly become the prey of the devouring sea—for there was no hope of saving anything out of the ship if she once touched that reef—and, worst of all, there was only too great a probability that many precious lives would be lost; it seemed, indeed, very questionable whether *any* of us could hope to escape the fury of that raging surf.

It was, however, no time for repining; still less for any yielding on my part to a feeling of despondency. I therefore called the hands under the lee of the long-boat, and in a few brief words stated to them our position, exhorted them with all the earnestness of which I was master to be cool and self-possessed at the critical moment, and to put their trust in the mercy of God; impressing upon them that only by such self-possession, coupled with promptest obedience to orders, could there be any hope of saving their lives; and I wound up by reminding them that there were women and children on board whose only hope of preservation lay in the courage and obedience which I now exhorted them to exercise.

As I completed my brief address the deep, thunderous boom of the sea upon the reef broke for the first time upon our ears, as though to warn us that the moment of trial was at hand; and, looking anxiously ahead, I saw that the outer extremity of the white water was already dead ahead of us, and that the ship was doomed!

“We shall never weather it, lads,” I shouted; “we cannot possibly do it. Stand by the braces, fore and main, and be ready to square the yards when I give the word to bear up. We shall have to run her in upon the beach, and take our chance of its being softer ground than the reef. As soon as you have squared the yards and caught a turn with the braces, come up on the poop, all of you, and group yourselves well aft; it will be the safest part of the ship when she broaches to, and you will be out of the way of the falling masts. Take a firm grip of the most solid thing you can lay hold of, or the first sea that breaks over us will wash you overboard.”

So saying, I sprang aft and stationed myself close to the little group of cowering women and children who were huddled together under the lee of the skylight, in readiness to afford such protection and help to them as might be possible in the impending desperate and almost hopeless struggle for life.

The final moment had now arrived; the white water was almost under the bows of the ship; another plunge or two would put the poor little craft plump upon the reef; and with a heavy heart I turned to the helmsman to give him the fatal sign. As I did so, a loud flap overhead and the simultaneous righting of the ship caused me to glance aloft in amazement and wonder as to what was happening. Could it be? By Heaven, yes! The wind had dropped, as if by magic, or a miracle, and for the moment there was a breathless calm, leaving us within fifty fathoms of the reef and, with the momentum of our rapid progress through the water, rushing straight at it. Instinctively I bounded with one mad spring to the wheel, and, shouting to the bewildered man who held it, “*Hard down*, for your life!” I grasped the spokes, throwing the momentary strength of ten men into a frantic effort that sent the wheel whirling over at lightning speed. The noble little ship quickly and gallantly answered to the impulse, and, though pitching so desperately that she completely smothered herself as far aft as the foremast, her bows gradually swept round until they pointed straight out to seaward and away from the boiling surf that actually swirled and seethed about her cutwater, as though the poor little overdriven craft had suddenly realised her awful peril and had swerved from it like a sentient thing.

“Man the braces, fore and main!” I shouted with frenzied eagerness. “Round-in upon the starboard main and topsail braces, for your lives, men; shift over the trysail-sheet like lightning! Hurrah, lads! over with it before the gale strikes us again! Well there with the starboard main-braces; haul taut and make fast to port; swing your head-yards; and get the starboard staysail sheet aft. Here comes the wind again; but, thank God, *we are saved!*”

No one but a sailor—and probably no sailor but he who has passed through such an unique experience as I have just been endeavouring to describe—can possibly understand the startling suddenness and the astounding rapidity with

which such an utterly un hoped-for and unexpected change had been wrought in our situation. The whole thing had happened with the breathless rapidity characteristic of the headlong rush of succeeding events in a dream. At the very moment when I was about to give the order which would have sent the ship flying before wind and sea towards the beach, and insured her destruction, there had occurred one of those sudden and unaccountable "breaks," or total cessations of wind, that occasionally, though very rarely, occur for a few brief moments in the midst of a raging tempest, and which are sometimes succeeded by a total change in the direction of the wind when it recommences to blow. These "breaks" are very similar in their character and duration to the passage of "the eye" of a cyclone, with which phenomenon, indeed, they are often confounded; and it was during that brief lull that the helm had been put down, and the ship, by God's mercy—though plunging so wildly in the seas that met her that I fully expected to see her masts go over the bows—had been got round on the other tack, with her head pointing to seaward before the recurrence of the gale.

In the ecstasy of my delight and gratitude at such a sudden and unlooked-for change in our situation I had cried aloud that we were saved; without waiting to see from what point the gale would come when it again struck us. Had it happened to have veered two or three points we should, as a matter of fact, have been just as badly off as before, for in that case the other headland or horn of the bay would soon have brought us up. Fortunately, however, the wind came away a trifle more free for us than it had hitherto been, so that when it again struck us the ship headed fairly well for the open sea. That sudden break, however, proved to be the beginning of the end; for though for perhaps a quarter of an hour it blew as furiously as ever, it then began to moderate rapidly; and the glorious, unclouded sun rose upon us as we were once more mast-heading our topsail-yards after loosing and setting the courses.

The safety of the ship once assured, I went below and entered the chief mate's cabin, to view the body and assure myself, beyond all possibility of doubt, of the fact of dissolution. A single look sufficed for this; for although only some six hours had elapsed since the poor fellow had been alive and hearty, there was already a distinct discolouration of the skin, to say nothing of other unmistakable signs that death had really taken place. Sailors are not, as a rule, given to much sentimentalism; they are so constantly being brought face to face with death that in a comparatively short time it loses much of that impressiveness with which it affects the landsman; but this man had been a true friend and comrade as well as a faithful servant to me, and I am not ashamed to acknowledge that the tears sprang to my eyes as I knelt by the side of the body and offered up a short prayer ere I looked my last upon him. This done, I returned to the deck and gave the necessary orders to have the body sewn in a hammock, and made ready for burial with all expedition.

I was by this time feeling somewhat fagged, having been on deck for fully twenty-four hours, one-third of which time had been passed in a state of great anxiety; having therefore answered for the present every call upon my attention, and satisfied myself that I could very well be spared for a few hours, I retired to my cabin, giving the steward orders to call me at four bells, at which hour I had arranged for the burial of poor Roberts having long before acquired the sailor's habit of falling asleep at a moment's notice, my head no sooner pressed the pillow than I sank into a sound and dreamless slumber.

At the appointed hour the steward awoke me; and on reaching the deck I was much moved and gratified to observe that not only were all hands on deck, "cleaned and shifted" in anticipation of the mournful ceremony that lay before us, but also that Sir Edgar and his whole family intended to pay the last tribute of respect to the dead man, they having mustered upon the poop in the nearest approach to mourning attire that their resources permitted. It is not my intention to here enter into a long and detailed description of the solemn and impressive rite that quickly followed; it has been done more than once or twice by far abler pens than mine, and is to be found in books that are read the wide world over. There is therefore no need for me to attempt to inform my readers upon a subject with which they are doubtless already sufficiently well acquainted; suffice it to say that no form or detail was omitted which could in any wise testify to our respect and esteem for our lost comrade and friend, or add to the decency and solemnity with which we consigned his body to its last resting-place *in* the depths of the illimitable ocean. This done, I promoted Forbes to the position of chief mate; raised the boatswain to the dignity of "second officer;" and so brought the incident of poor Roberts's tragic fate to a close.

Chapter Eleven.

A Ghastly Waif of the Sea.

Our voyage had, thus far, proved to be an unusually eventful one; yet it was to be made the more notable ere its close by the addition of still one more incident, and that, too, of a sufficiently ghastly character, to the catalogue of those already recorded. It occurred on the tenth day after our brush with the Malays in the Straits of Sunda, and when we were about midway across the China Sea.

Since that wild night on which we had so nearly laid the bones of the *Esmeralda*—and possibly our own as well—to rest on the shores of Sumatra, we had met with uninterrupted bright sunshine and light, favourable breezes. The day on which the incident occurred was no exception to the rule. The weather was gloriously fine, with a rich, softly mottled sky of blue and white overhead, out of the midst of which the afternoon sun blazed fiercely down upon a smooth, sparkling sea, gently ruffling under the faint, warm breeze to a surface of pale, glowing sapphire, along which the barque, wooing the soft zephyr with studding-sails spread on both sides, from the royals down, swam with a sleepy, rhythmical swaying of her taunt spars, at a speed of some five knots in the hour.

It was close upon eight bells of the afternoon watch, and the saloon party were all on deck, grouped under the shadow of the awning; the elders lounging in easy, unconventional attitudes in capacious basket-chairs, the women, attired in snowy white, beguiling the time by making a pretence at working at some embroidery, or fancy sewing of some kind, as they fitfully conversed upon such topics as occurred to them; while Sir Edgar, clothed in flannels, with a Panama hat tilted well forward over his eyes, smoked and read with an air of placid enjoyment; the youngsters,

apparently less affected than the rest of us by the languorous heat of the weather, meanwhile indulging in a game at hide-and-seek about the decks with the ship's cat.

Of the hands forward, some of the watch were aloft, working at odd jobs about the rigging, while the drowsy clinking of a spunyarn winch somewhere on the forecastle, in the shadow of the head sails, accounted for the remainder. Most of the watch below were invisible; but two or three industrious ones had grouped themselves on the foredeck, in situations which secured at once a sufficiency of shadow and a maximum of breeze, and were smoking and chatting as they washed or repaired their clothing.

As for me, I was indulging in a brief spell of perfect bodily idleness, and had established myself in my own particular wicker chair, near the break of the poop, and, with hands crossed behind my head and cigar in mouth, was lazily watching a man on the main-royal yard who was reeving a new set of signal halliards, while my mind was busy upon the apparently insoluble problem of finding the key to the cipher relating to Richard Saint Leger's buried treasure.

The signal halliards had just been successfully rove when eight bells were struck, and the man who had been reeving them—now off duty—was preparing leisurely to descend to the deck, when, as nine out of every ten sailors will, he paused to take a last, long, comprehensive look round the horizon. There was not a sail of any sort in sight from the deck, not even so much as the glancing of a bird's wing against the warm, tender, grey tones of the horizon to arrest one's wandering glances; but this was apparently not the case from the superior altitude of the main-royal yard, for presently I observed a change in the attitude of the man up there from that of listless indifference to awakened curiosity and interest. His gaze grew earnest and attentive; then he shaded his eyes with his hand, and his body assumed an attitude and expression of alertness. Long and steadily he maintained his gaze in one fixed direction; then he glanced down on deck, and, catching sight of me with my face upturned toward him, he hailed—

"On deck, there! There's something away out here on the starboard bow, sir, as has the look of a boat adrift."

"How does it bear, and how far off is it?" I inquired.

"About two points on the starboard bow, and a matter of eight or ten mile off, I should say, sir," was the reply.

"Mr Forbes," said I to the mate, who, the watch having just been called, at this moment came on deck from his cabin, "take the glass aloft, and see what you can make of this new wonder, if you please."

Forbes went to the companion, took the telescope out of the becket, slung it over his shoulders, and leisurely ascended the fore-rigging until he reached the topmast cross-trees, in which he comfortably settled himself preparatory to a careful inspection of the object. Meanwhile, the other man maintained his position on the main-royal yard.

"Now then, Joe, where do you say this precious 'something' of yours is?" inquired the mate as he unslung the telescope and proceeded to adjust it for use.

"There it is, sir," answered the man, pointing; "about a couple of points on the starboard bow. I don't know as you'll be able to see it from down there, Mr Forbes, but it's plain enough—"

"All right; I see it," interrupted Forbes; and he forthwith raised the telescope to his eye, taking a prolonged and exhaustive look through it. At length, lowering the instrument, he turned in his seat, and, looking down upon me where I now stood, just forward of the mainmast, hailed—

"Joe is quite right, sir. There certainly *is* something out there, but it is fully twelve miles away, and it looks uncommonly like a boat with a mast stepped and a sail hoisted, or a signal flying.—I can't quite make out which—and I even fancy I can catch an occasional glimpse of people moving about in her; but she wavers so much in the glass that I can't be at all sure about it."

"Very well; just keep your eye on her for a moment," I answered back, "and let me know when she bears straight ahead. It will not take us much out of our way to give her an overhaul, and it is as well to make quite sure in such cases as this. Man your braces, fore and aft, the starboard watch; larboard watch, go to work and get in the larboard stu'n'sails. Port your helm a trifle,"—to the man at the wheel. "Round-in a foot or two upon the larboard braces!"

As these manoeuvres were executed, the barque's bows slowly inclined to the eastward, and presently Forbes hailed from his lofty perch—

"S-o, stead-y! Whatever she may be, she is now dead on end to a hair's breadth."

"How is her head?" I shouted to the man at the wheel.

The fellow peered into the binnacle, and answered—

"North-east-and-by-east, three-quarters east."

"Is the boat—or whatever it is—still straight ahead, Mr Forbes?" I inquired.

"Straight to a hair, sir," came the reply.

"Then keep her at that," I called to the helmsman. "Well there with the braces; belay! Overhaul the main clew-garnets and get the sheet aft. Roll up the awning aft here, some of you, and haul out the mizzen; then jump aloft, one hand, and loose the gaff-topsail."

The ship was by this time astir and in a little flutter of excitement, fore and aft, at the prospect of another break in

the monotony of our existence. Forecastle Jack is not, as a rule, very demonstrative; it appears to be regarded as "bad form" to exhibit excitement under any circumstances, or undue animation unless when confronted with some great and sudden crisis. Then, indeed, his movements are as active and springy as those of a cat; but, unless there is some pressing necessity for nimbleness, Jack regards it as the correct thing and a duty he owes to his own dignity to be deliberate of action. And, above all, whatever the circumstances, there must be no exhibition of vulgar curiosity, no eagerness, no enthusiasm, no astonishment while one of ocean's countless mysteries is unfolding itself before his eyes; he must exhibit an air of semi-contemptuous indifference, as who should say, "I am a seasoned hand—a shell-back, and none of your beach-combers. I have long been familiar with all the strange sights and sounds and vicissitudes to be met with upon the broad ocean; for me the tale of them is exhausted; so far as I am concerned there is nothing new under the sun, nothing so strange or unexpected as to be capable of arousing my interest, nothing that can astonish or disconcert me." The effect of this unspoken tradition was apparent in the studied carelessness of the one or two inquiries that were addressed to the man Joe, when at length he descended from aloft and rejoined his mates on the fore-castle-head. But the indifference was only assumed; and as Joe—who, in his character of first discoverer, was entitled to the privilege of unrestrained loquacity—stated not only what he had seen, but also what he *now fancied* he had seen—his imagination rapidly supplying him with fresh details even as he talked—his group of listeners gradually closed in round him; questions were asked, conjecture was indulged in, and every now and then the little conclave temporarily lost control of itself, and, yielding to the sympathy and excitement that was quickening its pulses, began to discuss eagerly the chances for and against some possibility that had been advanced by one of its number. As for my passengers, they were the slaves of no such code as that which influenced the lads forward; they yielded at once and without restraint to the feeling of solicitude and sympathy that was awakened within them at the news of the waif ahead, with its possible freight of physical suffering or still worse torment of mental anxiety, apprehension, and hope deferred "that maketh the heart sick" and breaks down all but the most stubborn courage, and fairly swamped me with eager questions and suggestions that, while they exhibited very effectively the goodness of heart of the speakers, were not of much practical value.

I succeeded at length in effecting my escape from these good people, and, arming myself with the ship's glass, set out for Forbes' coign of vantage—the fore-topmast cross-trees—to see what news the lapse of an hour might enable me to discover. I found, however, that there was no need for me to travel so far, for before I had mounted halfway up the lower rigging I caught sight of the object of my quest quivering in the hot air, upon the verge of the horizon straight ahead. I therefore settled myself comfortably in the top, from which convenient platform I made a minute and prolonged inspection of her.

It needed not a second glance through the powerful instrument I wielded to assure me that the object ahead was indeed a boat, and that she carried a spar of some sort on end with something fluttering from it—whether sail or signal I could not tell, for the rarefied air through which I viewed her so distorted her shape and proportions that it bore as much resemblance to the one as to the other; but, if a sail, it was certainly doing no good, for I could see by the peculiar lift and flap of it that both tack and sheet were adrift. As to whether she had any occupants or not, I could not for the life of me determine; for although I remained aloft there in the top for a good half-hour, with my eye glued to the telescope all the while, only once did I detect what had the appearance of something moving on board her; but the sight was so transitory and unsatisfactory that I might easily have been mistaken. However, we had by this time neared her to within some five miles; so, as another hour would decide the question, I determined to possess my soul in patience until then, and accordingly closed the telescope, slung it over my shoulder, and returned to the deck. As I wended my way down the ratlines I noticed two of the men—who were now supposed to be busily engaged in clearing up the decks after the work of the day—standing halfway up the topgallant fore-castle ladder, and staring so intently ahead that they were altogether oblivious of my close proximity, from which I concluded that the boat must be already visible to them. As I swung myself out of the rigging on to the deck I heard one of them exclaim to the other—

"There, did ye see that? I swear I saw somebody get up and wave his hand, and then fall back again into the bottom of the boat!"

This description answered so accurately to what I thought I also had seen through the glass, that the doubts I had hitherto entertained as to the presence of people on board the boat now began to yield to the belief that there were, especially as the man who had just spoken bore the reputation of being the keenest-sighted man in the ship. I held my peace, however, and made my way aft to the poop, where Sir Edgar and his party—himself and the two ladies armed with binoculars—were still assembled, eagerly scanning the horizon ahead.

"Oh, captain," exclaimed Lady Emily, as I joined the little group, "is it really true that there are shipwrecked people in that little boat? You have been up there watching it for so long through your telescope that you will be able to tell us for certain."

"I am afraid I cannot do anything of the kind," answered I. "It is true that for a single moment I thought I detected a movement of some kind on board her; but, if so, it was not repeated, and I therefore scarcely know what to think. However, we shall soon know now. Of one thing I feel sure, and that is that, if there are any people in that boat, they must be in the last stage of exhaustion, or a better lookout would have been maintained, our proximity discovered, and some effort made ere now, either to reach us or to attract our attention."

"Do you mean that you think it possible there are people actually *dying* in that boat?"

"If she really contains any human beings it would not in the least surprise me were we to find them in that condition; dying, too, one of the most dreadful deaths that man can be called upon to endure, a slow, lingering agony—the indescribable, maddening torment of long-continued hunger and thirst," said I.

"Oh, what an awful possibility to contemplate!" murmured her ladyship, her face blanching at the picture my words had conjured up. "Poor creatures! how frightful to think that—"

"By Heaven, there *is* at least one living being in that boat!" interrupted Sir Edgar, excitedly, as he lowered his binoculars and turned to me. "See, captain,"—looking again toward the boat—"you can distinguish him with the naked eye."

At the same moment Forbes hailed from the topgallant forecastle—

"There's a man in that boat, sir! Do you see him waving to us?"

"Yes," I answered, as I caught a momentary glimpse of an upright figure that seemed to give a single wave with its arm and then collapse into the bottom of the boat. "Let go your fore-royal halliards, Mr Forbes, and run the ensign up to the royal-masthead. That will give them to understand that we have seen them."

This was done, and after an interval that seemed quite long, but was probably less than half a minute from the hoisting of our signal, I again saw—this time through the telescope—a figure rise up in the boat, wave its arm, and sink down again.

"That man is in the very last stage of exhaustion," said I to the Desmond party generally; "I am sure of it, or he would not act as he does. His sail, you see, is all adrift; yet he makes no effort whatever to secure it and head the boat toward us, nor does he attempt to get out an oar to lessen his distance from us. Unless I am altogether mistaken, the unfortunate creature has been driven clean out of his senses by the tortures of thirst and exposure, and does not know what he is doing; the little strength he has left being due entirely to the raging fever in his veins."

"I am afraid you are right, captain," agreed Sir Edgar, whose binoculars were again glued to his eyes.

Lady Emily audibly sobbed as she clasped her beautiful white hands convulsively together, and pressed them tightly to her breast; the tears sprang to her eyes, and she stamped her foot impatiently on the deck as she exclaimed—

"Oh, mercy! shall we never, *never* reach them?"

Miss Merrivale exhibited her sympathy in a totally different and far more practical way than her sister. Her cheeks glowed, and her eyes flashed with excitement as she laid her hand upon my arm, and said—

"Captain, be pleased to understand that you may count upon me to assist you in the treatment of those unfortunate people, as soon as you have got them safely on board here. I know exactly what to do, for, singularly enough, I was reading only this morning an account of a very similar rescue to this, effected by a British man-o'-war, some years ago. The narrative fully describes the measures adopted by the ship's doctor in the treatment of his patients; I have, therefore, all the information at my fingers' ends, and you may confidently trust me not to forget anything. I shall go below now, and make my preparations at once."

"Thank you, most heartily," said I. "Such assistance as you proffer will be of priceless value, and may indeed be the means of saving many lives. I accept it cordially, and with the deepest gratitude."

"I will go with you, Agnes," exclaimed Lady Emily; "I am sure I, too, can help, if you will only tell me what to do."

And, to my unspeakable relief, the two charming women retired to the saloon, taking the nurses with them.

"I am heartily glad that the ladies have left the deck," said I to Sir Edgar, as his eyes followed his wife's form to the companion, "and I fervently hope that they will remain below until this business is over; for, to speak plainly, I am beginning to fear that when that boat is brought alongside she will present such a sight as no delicate, susceptible woman could endure to look upon without sustaining a terrible and long-enduring shock."

"Say you so?" ejaculated Sir Edgar. "Then I will go at once and tell them that they are on no account to come on deck until they have your permission. I am greatly obliged to you for the hint, captain."

Every eye in the ship was by this time riveted upon the boat ahead, which was now distinctly visible; but no further movement had been observed on board her, and I began to dread the possibility that, after all, our appearance upon the scene might prove to be too late. So anxious, indeed, did I now feel that, although Forbes several times looked aft at me, and then meaningly aloft at the studding-sails, I would not give the order to start tack or sheet, but held on with everything to the very last moment, feeling pretty confident that, in such light weather, we might safely round-to all standing.

At length, after what seemed an interminable interval, we arrived within half a mile of the boat; and now the barque was kept slightly away, in order that we might have room to round-to and shoot up alongside the small craft without giving her occupants the trouble to out oars and pull to us. This brought her out clear of our starboard bow, and afforded us on the poop a better opportunity than we had yet enjoyed of scrutinising her from that position; of which Sir Edgar, who had again joined me, took the fullest advantage, keeping his binoculars levelled upon her without a moment's intermission. Yet all this time no further movement had been observed on board her, although she was now so close to us that, had such been made, it could not possibly have escaped our notice. She was a ship's gig, about twenty-four feet long, painted green, and she floated too light in the water to have many people in her. She was rigged with a single short mast, stepped well forward, upon which an old and well-worn lugsail was set—or, rather, *hoisted*—for the tack had parted, the sheet was adrift, and the yard hung nearly up and down the mast, the foot of the sail hanging over the port side and trailing in the water. Her rudder was shipped, and swayed idly from side to side as the boat rocked gently upon the low swell and the small ripples that followed her in her slow drift before the dying breeze. Her paint looked faded and sea-washed in the ruddy glow of the setting sun; her bottom, along the water-line, showed a grey coating of incipient barnacles, and there were many other indications about her that to a sailor's eye was proof conclusive of the fact that she had been in the water for several days.

As I noted these particulars through the telescope, while we were approaching her, my attention was arrested by a movement and occasional swirl in the water round about her; and, looking more intently, I presently descried the triangular dorsal fin of a shark in close proximity to the boat's side. Looking more closely still, I saw another, and another, and yet another, and still others; so that, as I looked, the boat seemed to be surrounded by sharks, hemmed in and fairly beset by them. The water all about her was literally alive with them; its surface all a-swirl with their eager, restless movements as they swam to and fro and darted hither and thither, circling round the little craft and away from her, only to turn sharply, with a whisk of the tail that left a white foam-fleck and a miniature whirlpool on the gleaming surface of the water, and force their way back to her side through the jostling crowd of their companions.

"Do you see that swarm of sharks crowding round the boat, Sir Edgar?" said I. "Take my word for it, there is a corpse—perhaps several—in her, and I am glad that the ladies are not on deck. Lay aft here, lads, to the main-braces, and back the mainyard. Ease your helm down, and steer up alongside her,"—to the man at the wheel. "Stand by, one hand, to jump down into the boat with a rope's-end and make fast."

We were now so close to the little craft that, with the small air there was abroad, my voice, as I addressed the men, could have been distinctly heard at a considerable distance beyond her; and there is no doubt that it and the answering cries of the crew reached the ears of the castaway whom we had already seen; for as, in obedience to her helm, the bows of the barque swept slowly round towards the boat, a figure—a ghastly figure, with scarce a semblance of humanity remaining to it—rose up in the stern-sheets and looked at us. I shall never forget the sight, to my dying day. It was a man, clad in the remains of a shirt, and a pair of once blue cloth trousers that had become a dirty, colourless grey by long exposure to the sun and frequent saturation with salt-water. The head was bare, and thatched with a thick shock of grey, matted hair that still retained a streak of brown in it here and there to tell what



HE HALF SPRANG, HALF TUMBLED OVER THE SIDE OF THE BOAT INTO THE WATER. Page 208.

its original colour had been; and the face was shrouded in a dense growth of matted grey beard and whisker; the skin, where exposed, was scorched to a deep purple red by the fierce rays of the sun. All this, however, was as nothing compared with the gauntness and emaciation of the man. The face, or at least that portion of it which was not hidden by the jungle of beard, was that of a death's head, a fleshless skull with a skin of blistered parchment strained so tightly over it that the cheek-bones seemed to be on the point of breaking through; while the eyes, but for the sparkle of the fever in them, would have been invisible, so deeply were they sunk within their sockets. The rest of his frame was evidently in like condition; his bare arms and exposed shanks seeming literally to be nothing but skin and bone, without a particle of flesh upon them.

For a space of, perhaps, ten seconds, this grisly phantom stood motionless in the boat, staring blankly at us; then, when the ship was within some twenty fathoms of him, he threw his gaunt, bony arms above his head, and with a wild, eldritch yell, such as I had never heard before, and hope never to hear again, he half sprang, half tumbled over the side of the boat into the water, and, with a frenzied energy such as few sound, strong men could have exhibited, struck out for the ship.

A wild cry of dismay arose from our decks, fore and aft, at this unlooked-for act of madness; and then, with one accord, all hands, myself included, dashed to the starboard quarter-boat and, while the first comers flung the coiled-up falls off the pins and cut the gripes adrift, Forbes and four others scrambled into her and, with wild eagerness, thrust the rowlocks into their sockets, slashed the oars adrift, and made ready to unhook and give way on the instant that she should touch the water.

But of what avail was it all? Even while working with the others at the boat I never for an instant lost sight of the maniac swimmer. I noted the splash of his plunge into the water, and saw the white swirl raised by the startled sharks as he precipitated himself into their midst; I saw, too, the vigour with which he swam, and my ears tingled

with the wild, horrible cry he uttered at every stroke. For a brief space, perhaps ten or fifteen seconds, not a solitary shark's fin was to be seen; the surface of the water was unbroken, save by the madman's long and eager strokes. Then, all round about him the golden sheen was darkened into blue and churned to hissing white by the simultaneous rush of that horde of sea-tigers, and, with a single faint, hoarse, bubbling cry, the swimmer was gone!

"Too late! too late! hold on with the boat," I cried. "The poor wretch is gone; torn to pieces by the sharks! Now let us see if there is anybody else—faugh! What on earth is the meaning of this?"

The exclamation was forced from me by an overpowering effluvia that at the moment swept on board us from the drifting boat, which was now on our weather-bow, and close aboard of us. As she dropped alongside, in the wake of the fore chains, all hands crowded to the rail to look down into her; while one smart fellow, with a rope's-end in his hand, was already over the side, clinging to a channel-iron, with one foot upon its bolt-head, ready to drop into her and make fast. But the odour that arose from the little craft and assailed our nostrils was so unendurable, and the sight that her interior revealed was so dreadful and revolting, that we recoiled as one man, and allowed the boat with her awful freight to scrape slowly along the ship's side from the fore chains to the taffrail, without an effort to secure her. To do so would indeed have been utterly useless, for that first glance down into her amply sufficed to assure us all that the forms lying prone there were dead and rotting corpses. They were those of two men, a lad of sixteen or seventeen, a woman, and a child of some eight or ten years old; the clothing of the two last mentioned being of so fine a texture and make as to suggest that the wearers must have been people of some consequence.

A small breaker, with the bung out, and obviously empty, stood at the foot of the mast, with a tin dipper beside it; while the lower half of a sailor's sea boot, with the sole only of its fellow, lying in the stern-sheets, in company with a sailor's sheath-knife, told only too plainly of the terrible straits to which the poor creatures had been driven to quell the craving torments of hunger. The words "*La Belle Amelie, Marseille,*" deeply carved in the transom, gave us the name and nationality of the ship to which this dreadful waif had once belonged, and completed the details of the entry which I that same evening made in my official log-book.

The barque still having way upon her, the boat slowly scraped along our side until she reached our starboard quarter; and there—the halliard of the sail, which served also as a mast shroud, fouling our main-brace bumpkin—she hung, and refused to drag clear. Seeing this, and anxious to rid the ship of such hideous companionship, the mate whipped out his knife and, getting down upon the bumpkin, cut through the halliard, thus releasing the boat and, at the same time, letting the sail down by the run and sending the extremity of the yard crashing through her bottom. She now drifted clear; and, our mainyard being at the same time filled and the helm put hard up, we paid off and began to draw away from her, noting, meanwhile, that she was gradually filling with water. The sharks still stuck pertinaciously to her; and as she settled lower in the water it was horrible to see with what increasing eagerness and determination they crowded round and strove to overturn her. At length, when her gunwale was almost flush with the water's edge, they apparently succeeded; for we saw her mast begin to rock and sway, and then, while the blue of the water all about her with the surge of their struggling bodies was frothed into creamy white and spurting spray by their fierce plunges, the spar heeled suddenly over and disappeared. Happily we were by this time too far away to note the details in this final scene of the ghastly drama; but, taking a last look through the telescope, a few minutes later, I was able to make out the hull of the boat floating bottom up. The swarm of sharks had vanished.

On the fifth day following, we arrived, without further incident, in the Canton river; and Sir Edgar and his party went ashore and took up their quarters in the best hotel in Hong Kong, while we went to work with all expedition to discharge our cargo.

Chapter Twelve.

The Solution of the Cryptogram.

I was at this time no nearer to the unriddling of Richard Saint Leger's cryptogram than I had been at the moment when I held it in my hand for the first time; but now that I was so far on my way toward the spot where the treasure was supposed to still lie hidden, I resolved that I would not return until I had succeeded in deciphering the document and testing the truth of whatever statement it might be found to contain. I had a shrewd suspicion that the hiding-place of the treasure would prove to be in one of the thousand islets of the vast Pacific; and I accordingly determined to confine my operations to those waters until I had some good reason for going elsewhere. Our hatches were consequently no sooner off than I set about inquiring for freights to one or another of the Pacific ports. I speedily discovered that the most advantageous freights offering were for Australia; and, it having leaked out that the little *Esmeralda* was something of a clipper, I succeeded, ere we had been in the river a week, in obtaining an excellent freight for Sydney, with the promise of quick despatch.

This matter arranged to my satisfaction, I had a little leisure on my hands; and the first use I made of it was to call upon the Desmonds at their hotel, in fulfilment of a promise extracted from me by them when they were leaving the ship. I found them just about to sit down to luncheon, at which meal they insisted that I should join them; and we had no sooner settled ourselves at the table than I was pelted with questions as to what I had been doing with myself since our parting; why had I not called before? had I decided upon my future movements? etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. I replied by enumerating a few of the infinitude of business matters that a shipmaster usually has to attend to immediately upon his arrival in port—especially if that port be a foreign one—and, in conclusion, told them that, having resolved to remain in Eastern waters until I should have either discovered the interpretation of my ancestor's cryptogram, or should be driven to abandon all hope of ever solving the riddle, I had accepted a freight for Sydney, New South Wales; jestingly adding that they had better make up their minds to take passage with me.

As I said this I observed a quick interchange of glances between Sir Edgar, his wife, and Miss Merrivale; and then the former remarked—

"Well now, captain, it is very singular, but it is nevertheless a fact, that no longer ago than this morning at breakfast we practically made up our minds that, before returning home, we would go on to Australia, and see something of that wonderful country. An old friend and college chum of mine has settled there and gone in for sheep-farming upon a large scale, and, our conversation happening to turn upon him a few days ago, my wife made the curious discovery that he is the man who married the bosom friend and companion of her boarding-school days; the result being that a half jocular proposal of mine that we should extend our wanderings to Australia and beat up the quarters of these good folk has crystallised into the serious resolution to do so, provided that suitable passenger accommodation to take us there can be met with. This accident of your having accepted a freight for Sydney settles that part of the question, of course, for we will go with you—that is, if you are willing to have us again."

I protested, heartily and truthfully, that no proposal could give me greater pleasure. Whereupon it was then and there arranged that the party should have the whole of the saloon accommodation as before; and ere I left them that afternoon, Sir Edgar—asking me to roughly calculate for him the probable date of our arrival—sat down and wrote to his friend, apprising him of the determination arrived at, and naming the approximate date at which the party might be looked for.

This arrangement was a most agreeable, as well as a most advantageous one for me; for it at once insured me the disposal of all my saloon accommodation for the passage, and, at the same time, the continued society of those who had already not only proved themselves to be most agreeable, companionable people, but whom I had by this time learned to regard as staunch personal friends.

Nothing worthy of mention occurred to mark our sojourn in the Canton river; I need, therefore, only state that, having duly discharged our inward cargo, and received our outward freight, we sailed for Sydney on the day three weeks following the date of the arrangement come to by Sir Edgar and his party to take passage in the *Esmeralda*.

The passage proved as uneventful as the previous one had been the reverse; only two incidents occurring during its progress of sufficient moment to demand especial mention. At the time of their occurrence I considered only one of them worth the distinction of an entry in my diary; but subsequent events proved that they were both destined to exercise almost equally important influences upon my fortunes and those of my friends the Desmond party.

The first—and what seemed to me infinitely the most important—of these was nothing less than my discovery of the long-sought key to Richard Saint Leger's secret cipher; and it was brought about in a manner so singular and unexpected that I must leave the explanation of the matter to the psychological student, it being altogether beyond the comprehension of such a simple, matter-of-fact, unlearned seaman as myself.

It happened thus. I fully realised that it would be impossible for me to continue cruising to and fro in those Eastern waters for an indefinite period; I knew that a moment must sooner or later arrive when the force of circumstances would compel me to shape a course once more for England; and it already appeared to me highly probable that the arrival of that moment would prove to be coincident with that of the arrival of the ship in Sydney Harbour. I consequently became increasingly anxious to discover the interpretation of the cryptogram before the conclusion of the passage upon which we were then engaged. No sooner, therefore, were we fairly at sea than I devoted myself in grim and serious earnest to my quest for the key that was to unlock the secrets of the exasperating cipher. The document consisted, as the reader will remember, entirely of long, unbroken rows of figures—with the exception of a rather singular sketch in the midst of the text, which I took to be a representation of the island whereon the treasure was said to have been secreted, as viewed from certain bearings—and I knew that these figures must stand in lieu of a certain arrangement of the letters of the alphabet, forming words. I had early noted the somewhat curious fact that there was but one solitary nought throughout the document; but that only helped me so far as to render me morally certain that the letters of the text could scarcely be represented by units; and, taking this as my initial theory, I attempted every other combination of numbers that either my ingenuity or my fancy could suggest. In vain; I could hit upon no arrangement of numbers that, when transposed into letters, would give me a single intelligible word, either in English or any other language with which I had the slightest acquaintance. I at length grew so thoroughly worried over the matter that my nerves became sensibly affected; I turned irritable, and began to suffer from repeated attacks of extreme anxiety and depression; my appetite failed me, and I became a victim to the torment of insomnia.

In this condition of mind and body I one night retired to my cabin after a day of petty worries, in which everything and everybody seemed to have been at cross-purposes with me, and—utterly worn out with the prolonged tension upon my nerves—ultimately subsided into a fitful, restless, nightmare kind of slumber, during which I continued in my dreams the researches upon which my thoughts had now been for nearly three weeks concentrated. Over and over again did I seem to arrange upon paper an experimental system of numbering the alphabet, in the hope of obtaining some intelligible result; and at length, to my great astonishment and inexpressible delight, methought I found one. In feverish haste I—still in my dream—set to work upon the translation of the document, and was progressing swimmingly, when a sharp rapping upon my state-room door, and the steward's voice announcing, "Six bells, sir," (the time at which I was regularly called every morning), awoke me; and in that same instant I lost all recollection of every particular of my dream, remembering only that in it I really seemed to have at last found the solution of the hitherto inexplicable enigma.

Seriously annoyed at so inopportune an interruption to a dream that I quite regarded as a revelation, and vexed at my inability to recollect any more of the process of translation which I had followed than that it was an entirely novel one, I took my usual salt-water bath, dressed, and in due course sat down to breakfast, all the while striving desperately but unsuccessfully to recall the lost clue. My passengers observed my preoccupation, and endeavoured—for some time unavailingly—to withdraw me from it; at length, however, the consciousness dawned upon me that my peculiar behaviour must appear to them decidedly discourteous. I therefore aroused myself, threw off my abstraction, and apologised; explaining that I had been endeavouring to recall the details of a dream in which I seemed to have discovered the long-sought key to the secret of my hidden treasure.

"A dream!" exclaimed Miss Merrivale, delighted. "Oh, captain, *pray* tell us all about it; it may help you to remember."

I had no such hope, having already racked my brain until it seemed to reel, and all to no purpose; but it would have been childish to have refused the request. I therefore began by telling them how that I had retired on the preceding night with my mind full of the subject; how I had lain tossing restlessly, hour after hour, striving to think out some arrangement or system that I had not yet tried; and how eventually I had sunk into a feverish, nightmare slumber in which my brain continued its arduous, painful search for the key of the problem.

"At length," continued I, "an idea came to me; and, taking a sheet of paper, I—I—Why, by all that is wonderful, *I have it again!*"

And, springing from my chair, to the no small consternation of my companions, who evidently thought I had suddenly gone demented, I rushed away to my state-room and, seizing a sheet of paper, jotted down the system that had just recurred to my memory. Then, heedless of my unfinished breakfast and everything else, I drew out the precious document itself, and, using the key that had come to me in such an extraordinary manner, soon discovered, to my inexpressible delight, that I really was at last upon the right track. I met with a few difficulties, it was true; but, braced-up and encouraged by what I had already achieved, I speedily surmounted them, and, after somewhat more than an hour's patient labour, succeeded in evolving the following:—

"Latitude 3 degrees 40 minutes South; longitude 139 degrees 18 minutes West. Approached from the south-west the island, at a distance of fifteen leagues, bears the exact likeness of the face of a man floating on the water. Steer for the hollow between mouth and chin, and ye shall find a river, which boldly enter, and sail up it a distance of three furlongs to the creek on starboard hand; pass into the creek and land on the island. The treasure lies buried at a spot one thousand feet due south from the base of the obelisk rock."

I was so elated at this discovery, the mental relief and exhilaration were so great that, in the exuberance of my delight, I felt constrained to acquaint my friends with my success; and rushing up on the poop with the cryptogram and its rough translation in my hand, I sat down by the open skylight, close to which Sir Edgar and Lady Emily were seated, and presenting the baronet with the documents, said—

"There, Sir Edgar, read that; and never hereafter dare to assert that there is nothing in dreams!"

"I do not remember that I have ever yet made the assertion," he retorted laughingly. "But do you really mean to say that you have at length mastered the secret of the cipher?" as he took the paper from me, and forthwith read it aloud for the benefit of his wife and Miss Merrivale, the latter having joined us at her sister's call.

"Well," exclaimed Lady Emily, when her husband had finished, "it is really wonderful! quite the kind of thing that one reads of in books but does not believe, because one seldom or never meets with anything like it in real life. But so many strange things have happened during this eventful voyage of ours, that I shall never again be incredulous of anything."

"Quite so, my dear," agreed Sir Edgar. "Never commit yourself to the statement that you disbelieve anything. To refuse credence simply because one cannot understand, or because to our limited understanding the occurrence seems unlikely or impossible, is an infallible indication of ignorance. The wider our experience, and the deeper our knowledge, the more ready are we to admit that there may be many wonders that have never come within the limits of our ken, and about which we know nothing. But, about the key to the cryptogram, what is it? You must tell us that, you know, Saint Leger, in consideration of our own unsuccessful efforts to help you. Besides, the knowledge of such a difficult cipher as that is really worth having; who can say how soon, or under what circumstances, it might be found useful for purposes of secret communication?"

"Oh, it is ridiculously simple, when you know it," said I. "All you have to do is to number each letter of the alphabet consecutively, beginning with A and calling it eleven. Then, with the cryptogram before you, you divide the figures into series of four, each four figures representing a letter. Subtract the first pair of figures from the second, and the remainder gives you the number of the letter as you have it in your key. For example: the first four figures in the document are 1133; that is to say, eleven and thirty-three. The difference between them is twenty-two, which, you see, represents the letter L in the key. Then take the next four figures, treating them in the same way, and so on throughout the document. One great advantage of such an arrangement appears to me to be that, however many times the same letter occurs in a document, it need never be represented twice in exactly the same way, which certainly must greatly tend to preserve the secrecy of the cipher. There are no spaces, you observe, to mark the divisions between the several words; but that offers no difficulty whatever when one possesses the key; while—to my cost I know it—it adds tremendously to the difficulty when one does not. Then, again, the figures of the latitude and longitude are given just as they would be in an ordinary document, which brought me completely to a standstill for a little while, until I happily guessed at the explanation; but after passing these stumbling-blocks, the rest was perfectly plain sailing."

"Quite so," acquiesced Sir Edgar. "It is simple enough when it has been explained; but a sufficiently ingenious thing for all that, in proof of which we have the fact that it has completely puzzled us all for months; and I really believe, Saint Leger, that, but for your wonderful dream, it would have continued to puzzle you to the end of time. I congratulate you heartily upon your good fortune."

"And I;" "And I," simultaneously exclaimed Lady Emily and her sister.

"And now," continued the baronet, "what are your plans with regard to the matter? Will you still go on to Sydney, and discharge your cargo before attempting to secure your treasure, or will you make a détour, and prosecute your search for it forthwith?"

"Oh, of course I must fulfil my present obligations before I attempt to do anything toward recovering the treasure,"

said I. "When I have done that—when I have safely landed you all on the wharf at Sydney, and have discharged my cargo, I shall well ballast the ship and clear for the Pacific in search of a cargo of sandal-wood. I shall of course make it my first business to secure the treasure; but, in order to keep up appearances, I shall also collect what sandal-wood I can find without very much trouble, and proceed with it to China, from whence I shall take home a cargo of tea, if I can secure one."

"And how long do you expect to remain in Sydney?" inquired Sir Edgar.

"Oh, about a fortnight, or three weeks at the utmost," said I.

"Upon my word, I should very much like to go with you," remarked Sir Edgar, reflectively. "I confess I feel curious to see the end of your adventure; but if you are not likely to lie in port longer than the time you have named, I am afraid it can scarcely be managed. However, we shall see."

And with that the subject was dismissed for the moment, although it was afterwards frequently touched upon again before our arrival in Sydney.

The other affair, to which I have referred as ultimately proving to be intimately associated with my fortunes and those of my friends the Desmonds, was one in which the ship's steward became the most conspicuous figure.

I had never liked the man, from the moment that I first came into contact with him upon the occasion of the crew signing articles. He had a sly, shifty expression of eye that aroused my instant antipathy; but he held such unexceptionable testimonials that I had no excuse for refusing to engage him, apart from the manifest injustice it would have been to deny him employment simply on account of a feeling of prejudice that, for aught I could tell, might disappear upon a further acquaintance. It did not, however; on the contrary, it rather increased, for he had not been with us long ere I discovered that he had a quiet, stealthy, cat-like way of moving about that would have been irreproachable had it not happened that frequently, when writing a letter, making up my accounts, or otherwise engaged upon work of a strictly private character, I was disconcerted to suddenly discover him behind my chair—without knowing how he came, or how long he had been there—in a position and attitude that irresistibly suggested the idea that he had been peering over my shoulder. Or again, when conversing more or less confidentially with others, it was no uncommon thing to make, by the merest accident, the annoying discovery that the man had been well within earshot all the while. And it did not in the least lessen my annoyance that, on all such occasions, the fellow seemed to be exactly where he ought to be, and engaged in the performance of perfectly legitimate duties.

This, however, was the extent of his offence—if such it can be called—until we were within twenty-four hours of arriving in Sydney Harbour, when he was detected in an act that all but resulted in the destruction of the ship, while it seriously imperilled the lives of all hands.

The ship's lazarette, or storeroom, was situated—as is usually the case—underneath the cabin. But whereas it is the fashion in most ships to have a small hatch in the cabin floor by which access is gained to the lazarette, in the *Esmeralda* there was a much more convenient arrangement, consisting of a step-ladder leading down through a hatchway beneath the saloon staircase, whereby stores could be brought up for use without the necessity of shifting the saloon table and dragging everything through the saloon itself. The hatchway giving access to the lazarette was enclosed by a partition which formed quite a roomy little apartment, wherein the steward was wont to unpack the barrels and cases containing the cabin stores; the work being thus done in such complete seclusion that it could not possibly prove a source of annoyance to any one, however fastidious. This arrangement also enabled the steward to enter the lazarette at his own sweet will and without any one being the wiser—which constituted my sole objection to it.

We were, as I have said, within twenty-four hours' sail of our port, the time being evening, about three bells in the first watch, when one of the nursemaids came rushing on deck with a scared face and the intelligence that there was a strong smell of burning in the saloon, which, moreover, was full of smoke. I of course sprang below at once, and found it to be indeed as the maid had stated; there was a most unmistakable smell of fire, and a haze of light-blue smoke in the cabin that seemed to have made its way there from the lazarette, for the companion-way and the space between the foot of the companion-ladder and the saloon bulkhead was thick with it. Guessing at once that the fire was in the lazarette, I threw open the door leading to the hatchway, and found the latter open, with a cloud of bluish-white smoke issuing from it, through which I dimly caught the flicker of flames. To drop through the hatchway was the work of an instant, when I at once saw what was the matter. A large packing-case that had evidently been nearly full of straw was all in a blaze, and beside it, with an idiotic, drunken grin upon his face, stood the steward, unsteadily pointing with wavering finger to the open lazarette lantern, which could just be descried in the midst of the blazing mass. In his other hand the fellow held a filled but unlighted pipe, which, with a tumbler that still contained a small quantity of wine, and a half-empty bottle of the same generous stimulant, explained at a glance the whole history of the incident. The rascal had evidently gone down into the lazarette and helped himself to a bottle of wine, upon the contents of which he had become so nearly intoxicated that at length, forgetful or reckless of the extreme danger of such a proceeding where he was, he had determined to further solace himself with a smoke, and, opening the lantern in order to light his pipe at the candle, had dropped it into the packing-case and set its contents on fire. The fellow was too stupidly drunk even to raise an alarm, and in another five minutes the whole lazarette would have been in a blaze. As it happened, however, I arrived upon the scene just in the nick of time to prevent this by seizing the blazing case and dragging it and its contents bodily up on deck—at the expense of a pair of severely scorched hands—and heaving it overboard. I then went below again, and took an exhaustive look round to assure myself beyond all question that no smouldering spark had been left behind; and, having completely satisfied myself upon that point, wound up the affair by ordering the steward to be put in irons and locked up in the deck-house forward. We arrived at Sydney next day, and within half an hour of mooring the ship I paid the man his wages and turned him adrift.

The Desmond party got clear of the ship in time to dine ashore that evening; and, on the day but one following our arrival, they started upon their up-country journey, after bidding me a most cordial farewell, accompanied by the

hope that they might find me still in port upon their return. I felt exceedingly sorry to part with them, and told them so; adding that I could not entertain the hope of seeing them again, on that side of the world at least, since they expected to be absent from Sydney for at least a month, by the end of which time I hoped to be some distance on my way to the treasure island. But I gave them a faithful promise to write to them on my return to England, acquainting them with the issue of my adventure, even should I find myself unable to accept the pressing invitation they gave me to visit them at their place in Devonshire.

Sydney, as everybody knows, is a fairly busy port, and can always make a goodly display of shipping; at least, that is my experience of the place, and I had been there thrice prior to the period of this story; but, knowing—as I thought I did—something about the annual amount of tonnage using the harbour, I was astounded at the vast fleet of craft of all rigs and sizes that met my gaze when I beheld the noble city for the fourth time. The anchorage seemed literally packed with them; and it required some very delicate manoeuvring on the part of our pilot to take us to our berth without running foul of something. Fortunately for us—and possibly also for some of the other craft—there was a nice working breeze blowing at the time; and, the *Esmeralda* happening moreover to be an exceptionally smart and handy vessel under canvas, we managed to thread our way in and out among the fleet without hurting ourselves or anybody else. The pilot observed the wondering glances I cast around me as we made our way up the harbour, and remarked, with a smile, and in a semi-confidential tone of voice—

“Curious sight, isn’t it, sir?”

“Very,” I agreed. “And the most curious part of it, to my mind, is the *deserted* look of the craft, everywhere. Most of them appear to be loaded and apparently ready for sea, yet in scarcely any of them is more than a single person to be seen; while many of them appear to have absolutely nobody at all on board.”

“That’s just how it is with them, sir. There’s upwards of a hundred sail of vessels at anchor round about us at this present minute, without a soul aboard to look after ’em. Deserted by all hands, from the skipper to the cabin-boy, and left to take care of themselves while their crews are away making their fortunes—or trying to make them—at the new gold-fields. And those that aren’t absolutely deserted are left with only the cap’n aboard to look after ’em. *Your* crew’ll be leaving you before twenty-four hours are passed over their heads—unless they’re an unusually steady lot—mark my words if they don’t.”

“And how long has this state of things existed?” I inquired.

“Oh, ever since the discovery of the new gold-field; and that’s—let me see—why, about five months,” was the reply. “See that full-rigged ship over there—painted green, with white ports—that’s the *Sophie Ellesmere*, of Liverpool. Her crew was the first to desert; and it was only last Thursday that I heard her cap’n saying that he had been ready for sea exactly five months on that day. He has written home to his owners to send him out a crew, and he’s expecting ’em by the next steamer; the arrangement being that they’re to go straight aboard from the steamer, and up anchor and away. But, bless you, sir, they’ll never do it; they’ll insist upon having a fling ashore, for a few days, after their trip out here; and so sure as they get leave to do that, they’ll be off, like all the rest.”

“And are there no men to be obtained here in place of the deserters?” I asked.

“Lord bless your soul, no, sir! Why, it’s a difficult matter to muster hands enough even to unload or load a ship, with labourer’s wages up to a pound a day; and the men who are willing to work even at that figure are either the few long-headed ones who prefer a moderate certainty to the chance of ill luck at the gold-fields, or such poor delicate chaps as can’t stand the hardships of camp life. But, as to *sailors*, bless you, sir, there ain’t *one* to be had for love or money. Even those who deserted from the *Sophie Ellesmere* haven’t been up there long enough yet to get tired of the life and to want a change.”

“Then I suppose this new gold-field is proving pretty rich?” I hazarded.

“Well, if you are to believe all that the newspapers say about it, there must be gold to be had for the trouble of picking it up, almost,” was the reply. “And it is certain that at least one man—a sailor he was, too—managed to scrape together ten thousand pounds’ worth of gold in the three months. He and three of his mates worked a claim together, and struck it downright rich when they got down to the gravel; one nugget alone that they brought up weighed fourteen hundred and ninety-seven ounces; and though that was the biggest of the lot, it was only one of many big ones. Of course, a ‘find’ like that goes the rounds of the newspapers, and is made much of and talked about to that degree that people simply go mad with the gold-fever, and rush off to the fields, absolutely certain that they, too, will be equally lucky.”

This was serious news indeed; for, as I was then situated, I could ill afford to have the ship lying idle a single day, to say nothing of such a length of time as five or six months. Should I eventually succeed in recovering the treasure, of course even a year or more of enforced idleness would matter nothing; but it was still quite an open question with me whether I should ever see that treasure or not. I had not a shadow of doubt as to the *bona fides* of the cryptogram. I felt certain that when that document was penned, the treasure was reposing peacefully in the hiding-place described therein; but how was I to know that it lay there still? The writer of the document may not have been the only person acquainted with the secret of the hiding-place; and, in such a case, the probabilities were in favour of the treasure having been unearthed years before either I or my father opened our eyes upon this world. Or it might even have been stumbled upon accidentally. In short, the prospect of its falling into my hands appeared so uncertain, even now that I had gained the clue to its place of concealment, that I felt it would be impossible for me to regard myself or to act otherwise than as a poor man until I should actually find the treasure in my possession. And then, too, I was naturally anxious and eager to settle the question as to whether the treasure still remained hidden or not. If it did, well and good; if not—if it was not to be found on the spot indicated in the cryptogram, it certainly would not be found at all; and all that would then remain for me to do would be to dismiss the matter from my mind, as I would a feverish dream, and devote myself, heart and soul, to my profession.

The problem which now presented itself to my mind was, how to induce my crew to remain with me? For *inducement* it would certainly have to be; I could scarcely have them locked up, or put them in irons during our stay in Sydney in order to insure myself against their desertion! I thought the matter over very carefully, both on that first evening of our arrival in Sydney Harbour, and during the subsequent day, after a visit to my consignees had assured me that the pilot's story in nowise exaggerated the astounding state of things then prevailing in the port, and at length came to the conclusion that I could do nothing. If they chose to remain, well and good; if they elected to go, I had no power to prevent them.

To my astonishment and gratification, however, they took their leave time after time, and always punctually turned up on board again when it had expired; until, when we had been in the harbour nearly a month, and our cargo was almost out, I began to hope that the fellows really meant to stay by me. Then, getting leave to spend Sunday ashore, as usual, every mother's son of them—save the mate and Joe Martin—left me. I, of course, at once communicated with the police authorities, acquainting them with the fact of the desertion; and I also offered a substantial reward for the recovery of the men. But it was of no avail; the rascals had gone clean off; and there I found myself, in the same plight as many another shipmaster, locked up in Sydney Harbour for an indefinite period, with no hope whatever of getting away so long as the rush to the gold-fields lasted.

Chapter Thirteen.

The New Crew.

I had been in this unpleasant plight about three weeks, during which the remainder of the cargo had been discharged, the ship ballasted down to her very best sailing trim, and everything made ready for my trip to the Pacific, when one day, as I was wandering aimlessly about the streets, I encountered Sir Edgar and Lady Desmond, who—after a much longer sojourn up-country than they had intended—had returned to Sydney, and were beginning to think seriously of finding their way back to England. They were palpably and unfeignedly delighted to see me again, although they of course sympathised with me in my misfortune, and insisted upon my dining with them that evening, and afterwards accompanying them to the theatre. I suppose they saw that I needed a little cheering up; and I got it, too; for they were more than kind—their genial frankness of behaviour to me was more that of a brother and sister than of mere acquaintances, or even of the usual run of friends; and when I left them next morning after breakfast—for they insisted on my acceptance of their hospitality for the night—I felt more cheerful than I had done since the desertion of my crew. As I shook hands with Sir Edgar on the hotel steps, he said—

“Now, Saint Leger, we are in no hurry to start for a month or two, you know; and we are all quite as eager as ever we were to see the end of this adventure of yours; so if you should succeed in scraping together a crew within, say, the next two months, you may reckon upon us as passengers again—that is, if you would care to have us.”

“You are more than kind, Sir Edgar,” said I, “and I should be delighted to have you; but you appear to have forgotten that my plans include another visit to China before I point the barque's nose for home, even should I succeed in securing the treasure.”

“That does not matter a bit, my dear fellow,” he laughed. “As I have already told you, we are in no hurry whatever; and, to tell you the truth, Lady Emily seems to enjoy so much better health when at sea than she does when on shore, that I should welcome any excuse plausible enough to keep her on shipboard for two or three months longer. So, if you should succeed in picking up a crew, let me know at once.”

It really seemed as though the reappearance of the Desmonds upon the scene had brought good fortune to me; for when I reached the ship and went on board, Forbes met me at the gangway with quite an unwonted expression of delight upon his face, and said—

“I am glad you have come on board so early, sir; for I have actually had a gang of eleven men alongside, who say they are looking for berths.”

“Eleven men! *looking for berths!*” I ejaculated, scarcely crediting my ears. “Where are they?”

“They went off up-town again, unfortunately, when I told them you were not on board,” replied Forbes. “But I have the address of the boarding-house at which they are staying, and I told them I would let them know when you could see them.”

“My dear fellow,” I exclaimed, “be off at once, and say that I shall be on board for the remainder of the day, and can see them at any time. Or, stay—perhaps I had better look in upon them myself; I can manage to drop in upon them in a casual sort of way, that will have less appearance of eagerness and anxiety than would sending especially for them. What did they look like?”

“Well,” admitted Forbes, “they *looked* as rowdy a set of ruffians as I ever wish to set eyes on; but their manners and mode of speaking were those of fairly decent, respectable men. They said that they had been at the gold-fields for the last seven months, and had scarcely made enough to keep themselves; they were consequently tired of their shore life, and had determined to go to sea again if they could meet with a ship and officers to their liking. They were mightily taken with the barque—as of course any man who knew a ship from a washing-tub would be—swore she was the sweetest-looking craft in the harbour; and, when I mentioned your name, said they had heard of you and wouldn't wish to go to sea under a better man. Altogether, if they are only in earnest as to their desire to go to sea again, I do not think you should find much difficulty in securing them, sir.”

“Give me their address,” said I, “and I will be off after them at once. This is not a time for fencing and feigning indifference; the fellows know, as well as you or I do, what a haul they will prove to the man who is lucky enough to

secure them, so I will not run any risk of losing them by pretending otherwise. If I can persuade them to ship, I will sail to-morrow, short-handed though we should be. I can take the starboard watch myself; and, for the rest, we shall just have to keep an extra sharp eye upon the barometer and the weather, and be careful to snug down if need be in good time, until we again reach China, when we shall probably be able to get another man or two." So saying, I took the address from Forbes, and forthwith started in search of the men. I found them at length, after a somewhat tedious quest, in a most disreputable-looking boarding-house, situate in the most disreputable part of the town. And I am bound to admit that my first impression of the men was that their appearance was in perfect accord with their surroundings. They most undoubtedly were, as Forbes had said, as rowdy-looking a set of ruffians as one would care to meet. Tough, sinewy desperadoes, swarthy as mulattoes by long exposure to the fierce southern sun, with long, dense, tangled thatches of hair mingling with a thick, neglected growth of beard and whisker that permitted scarcely a feature, save the nose and eyes, to be seen, clad in the remains of the inevitable flannel shirt, cord trousers, and knee-boots, with belts about their waists, in which each man carried his revolver and a formidable bowie-knife; the whole topped off with a soft, broad-brimmed, battered felt hat dashed on to the head in a fashion eloquently suggestive of the utmost extreme of recklessness,—I think I never saw a party of men who, under ordinary circumstances, I would have been less willing to ship as a crew than these. Yet, when I spoke to them, they answered me respectfully, and there was scarcely more than the merest tinge of that defiant independence of manner that their appearance had prepared me to expect. They told me, as they had told Forbes, that they had been working for something like seven months at the gold-fields, and had met with so little success that they were now almost penniless, a result which they attributed to their lack of experience as miners. One of the party remarked grimly that the life of a miner was even worse than that of a sailor; inasmuch as that, with an equal amount of exposure and harder work, it was no unusual thing for them to be reduced to starvation rations. Seven months' experience of this kind, they said, had satisfied them that they were never intended for gold-miners; and they had accordingly left the fields in a body, and tramped to Sydney, determined to revert to their original occupation of seamen, and agreeing to ship together for home in the first craft that took their fancy.

"But," said I, "I am not going directly to England. I am bound to the Pacific for a cargo of sandal-wood, and thence to China, before seeking a freight to England."

"Oh, well," said the fellow who had constituted himself the spokesman of the party, "that won't make any great difference. The voyage 'll be so much the longer, and we shall have the more money to take up at the end of it. The chief thing with us is to find a comfortable ship and a good skipper, and we're of opinion that if we ship with you, we shall have both. Ain't that so, mates?"

"Ay, ay, judge; that's so, my bully. Them's our sentiments. Right you are, as usual."

In these and similar terse sentences, the men confirmed the remarks of their companion.

The question of wages was then raised, in respect of which I found their demands far more moderate than I had dared to hope; namely, five pounds ten per month for the seamen and the man who undertook to perform the duties of steward, and six pounds ten per month for the cook; each man to receive an Advance of *two* months' wages upon signing articles. To this I agreed without demur, and then, anxious to strike while the iron appeared to be hot, I suggested that they should sign articles forthwith. A short consultation among themselves followed this proposal, at the end of which they declared themselves quite willing, but stipulated that they should have twenty-four hours clear after signing, in which to provide themselves with an outfit for the voyage. To this I also assented, and we then separated, they to make their way to the shipping-office, and I to hurry down to the barque for the necessary papers and cash prior to joining them there.

It was just noon when, the work of signing the articles and paying the advances having been completed, I jumped into a cab to drive to the hotel at which the Desmonds were staying, to acquaint those good people with my latest stroke of luck. They were out, however, as I felt morally certain they would be; so I left a note for Sir Edgar, and then set about the transaction of such small items of business as were necessary prior to going to sea. This, however, amounted to very little, as I had practically completed all my preparations long before; so by five o' clock in the evening I had cleared everything off my hands, and was once more alongside the ship. Here I found a note from Sir Edgar Desmond awaiting me, in which he acknowledged the receipt of my own epistle, and enjoined me to dine with them without fail that evening. This I did; and the upshot of it all was that they decided to complete the trip with me, despite the poor account I felt constrained to give them of my crew, and announced their intention of joining the ship immediately after lunch on the following day.

As I stretched myself out in my bunk that night, and reflected with a sigh of satisfaction that, if all went well, we should be once more at sea in less than twenty-four hours, the disagreeable suspicion for the first time obtruded itself upon my mind that possibly it might prove after all that I had been the victim of a clever swindle, and that I should never see anything more of any of the men to whom I had handed over two months' advance so confidingly. However, about eleven o'clock the next morning, the first of them—William Rogers, the man whom I had shipped as boatswain—put in an appearance alongside, neatly dressed in a new suit of blue cloth, with cap, shirt, and shoes to match; also a brand-new chest and bundle of bedding; and coming on board, quietly went below and proceeded to arrange his belongings for the voyage. I was agreeably surprised at this man's appearance; for whereas when I had shipped him on the previous day, he was ragged, dirty, and unkempt, he was now well-dressed, clean, and palpably fresh from the hands of the barber. Close upon his heels came Jacob Simpson, the cook, who had likewise undergone a renovating process that materially improved his appearance, although as I looked at the man there was a something about him that I did not quite like. For one thing, he seemed to remind me vaguely of somebody else—though who, I could not for the life of me say—who had left an unpleasant impression upon my mind; and, added to this, he was afflicted with an affection of the voice—the result of bush-fever, he informed me—which permitted him to speak only in a hoarse whisper. Next came Peter Gale, the man who had undertaken to perform the functions of steward, though he frankly admitted that he knew little or nothing about the duties of the post. But, since a steward we must have, and this man impressed me as being the most quiet and likely man for the berth, I had chosen him, since he had professed his readiness to try his hand and do his best. From this man I learned the pleasing

intelligence that the remainder of the men were following him, and would be on board in about a quarter of an hour; so I introduced him to the lazarette, and directed him to obtain the cook's assistance to break out a fresh barrel of beef, and get a dinner under way for the crew forthwith. About the time named by the steward, the main body made their appearance and came quietly on board. There were eight of them, namely, Hiram Barr and James Mckinley, Americans; Michael O'Connor, an Irishman; François Bourdonnais, a Frenchman; Carl Strauss, a German; Christian Christianssen, a Swede; Pedro Villar, a Portuguese; and James Nicholson (nicknamed "San Domingo," from the island in which he was born), a full-blooded negro. They constituted a distinctly scratch crew, I was compelled to admit, as I watched them coming on board; but they all understood and spoke English; and although, with all their sprucing up, a few of them still wore a somewhat sinister appearance, every man of them was, for a wonder, perfectly sober, and they all bore themselves in a remarkably decent and orderly manner. Moreover, the eight last enumerated had all shipped as able seamen. In short, while perhaps they were not a crew that I would have selected from choice, I considered myself marvellously lucky in getting even them, and was more than content.

As soon as they were all aboard and had gone below, I sent word for'ard by the steward that they were to employ the interval until dinner-time in "shaking down," and that after dinner we should proceed to rig out the jib-boom and unmoor the ship preparatory to going to sea. Then, leaving Forbes in charge, I went ashore and cleared the ship for the Pacific, paid the harbour and other dues, wrote and posted a few letters, and took lunch. Then down on board again, overtaking the Desmond party on the way; when, having shipped them and their somewhat multitudinous belongings, the windlass was manned, the cable hove short, the topsails sheeted home and mast-headed, the anchor tripped, and we were off, reaching the open sea just in time to see the sun disappear behind the land as we squared away upon a north-easterly course for Dick Saint Leger's treasure island.

For a time all went merry as a marriage bell; the weather was simply perfect, with blue skies, brilliant sunshine, and gentle breezes, with charming glimpses of lovely tropical islands, day after day, when we reached the Fiji and Friendly Archipelagos and threaded our way through them. To add to the enjoyment of this time, the men were doing their duty in a manner that ought to have satisfied the most exacting of officers, and behaving with a quietness and steadiness of demeanour that was absolutely unexceptionable. They seemed always willing, and always *content*—a phenomenon that I had never hitherto met with on shipboard for longer than the first week after leaving a port.

I was consequently very much astonished when, one dark night, in the middle watch, when we had been at sea rather over a fortnight, Joe Martin, who was at the wheel, took advantage of a momentary pause I made beside him, to address me in the following terms:—

"Beg pardon, cap'n, but could you make it convenient to pitch into me, and give me a most tremenjious blowin' up, and call me a lot of hard names afore all hands, to-morrow, some time in the second dog-watch, if I was to give you an excuse for so doin'?"

"Blow you up? abuse you? before all hands?" I ejaculated, as soon as my astonishment would allow me to speak. "Why, what in the name of all that is extraordinary do you mean, Martin?"

"Just exactly what I says, sir," was the reply. "The fact is, there's something brewin' in the fo'c's'le, and I want to get to the bottom of it. But I can't, because the men have got the notion into their heads that I'm a bit of a favourite of yours, and they won't trust me. So I want you to pitch into me, hot and heavy, before all hands, to-morrow; and then I'll turn sulky, and start a good growl, and perhaps then they'll say something to me."

"But I don't understand you, Joe," I protested. "The men are the most quiet, willing, contented, well-behaved set of fellows it has ever been my pleasure to sail with; and do you mean to tell me that they are plotting mischief among themselves?"

"Well, sir, they're plottin' *something*, that's certain; and if it ain't mischief, why do they keep me out of it?" argued Joe.

"How do you know—or rather, what makes you suppose they are plotting?" I asked.

"Why, they're everlastin'ly whispering together," was the reply. "If you'll only take notice, sir, you'll see that there's never a minute, day nor night, but what two or three of 'em has got their heads together, palaverin'. And if ever I goes near and makes a show of chimin' in, the talk's stopped at once and changed to something else. And away along in the first dog-watch, for an hour or so, the steward 'll come for'ard, and then they'll all be as thick as thieves together, instead of turnin' in and gettin' their sleep, as honest men should. If it's our eight hours out, our chaps slinks off down into the fo'c's'le out o' my way; and if it's our eight hours *in*, the whole watch except me 'll be on deck until pretty nigh on to four bells. Pretends, they do, that the fo'c's'le's so hot they can't sleep. / don't find it too hot to sleep."

"And how do they behave to you?" I asked.

"Oh, as to that," conceded Joe, "I haven't got no fault to find. They're all civil and friendly enough, exceptin' cookie; *he* won't have a word to say to me, or come anigh me if he can help it; and, whatever it is, it's my belief that he's at the bottom of it. But the rest of 'em are all right, only they won't have me in with 'em durin' their confabs."

"Pshaw! my good fellow," I exclaimed, "you have found a mare's nest. Their 'confabs,' as you call them, relate to nothing worse than their past experiences at the mines, I'll be bound. And the reason why they will not speak about them to you is, most probably, because they think you would not be interested in them."

"Well, sir, maybe you're right," remarked Joe, "but I don't believe you are, all the same, if you'll excuse my sayin' so. There's too much secrecy for everything to be quite right. And, if you don't mind, I should like to try that little experiment I spoke about just now; if there's nothing wrong it won't matter, and if there is, perhaps they'll be inclined to have me in with 'em, if they think I've fallen out of your favour."

"Very well, Joe," said I; "have your own way, if you like. I'll not spare you if you do anything to vex me; only remember, my good fellow, that whatever I may say will only be said to humour you."

"That's all right, sir; and thank ye kindly. There's just one thing more I'd like to say, sir, and then we'd better stop talkin'. It's just this. Don't you try to have any talk with me on the quiet like. You leave everything to me, sir, and as soon as I've found out anything I'll make a chance to let you know, somehow."

And so this remarkable conversation ended. Could there possibly be anything in Joe's idea? The men seemed to be perfectly comfortable and contented; they appeared to desire nothing in the way of food or accommodation, beyond what they already possessed; they had not grumbled or made any complaint; what could they be plotting to obtain? I asked myself this question over and over again, and could find no answer to it; notwithstanding which, Joe's communication made me feel exceedingly uneasy and anxious; so much so that, when I turned in, I found it quite impossible to get to sleep.

It may be readily imagined that when next I had an opportunity to observe the men I watched them, individually and collectively, most closely; yet, beyond the trivial circumstance that conversation always ceased if I happened to approach, I could detect nothing in the men's demeanour to lend the slightest colour to Joe's supposition. True, two or three of them—the Frenchman, the Portuguese, and the German, for instance—now impressed me as being scarcely so civil in their behaviour as they had been when they first joined the ship; but that, after all, might be only my fancy; and, if it were not, one hardly looks for such good behaviour from foreigners as one is wont to receive from Englishmen.

As for Joe Martin, he began his operations bright and early on the morning following his conversation with me. He was now the ship's carpenter, and in that capacity he had received orders on the previous day to fit a new set of stern-sheets in the port quarter-boat. This job he began the first thing in the morning, swinging her inboard and lowering her to the deck for his greater convenience during the progress of the work. This simple matter he managed so clumsily that he contrived to bilge the boat, necessitating the renewal of three timbers and a plank. I was on deck at the time of the accident, and, forgetting for the moment his scheme to provoke a seeming quarrel with me, I cautioned him about the awkward, lubberly way in which he was proceeding, and recommended him to get more help. He replied, in an offhand, careless way, that he was quite man enough to *do such* a job as that without anybody's help; and, as he spoke, down came the boat with a crash, and the damage was done. The whole thing seemed such a piece of pig-headed stupidity that I was thoroughly exasperated with the fellow, and gave him a good sound rating; much, apparently, to the amusement of the other men. Joe said nothing by way of excuse—indeed, any attempt to excuse himself would have been so wholly out of place as only to have increased his offence—but he slouched away forward, muttering to himself, and I noticed him stop and say a word or two to a couple of men who were at work upon the forecastle. *Then* I remembered his proposal, and bethought me that this might be his way of carrying out his plan; if so, I could not help admiring his ingenuity, albeit still decidedly annoyed with him for the powerful realism with which he was playing his little comedy.

The boat lay as she had fallen for fully an hour; meanwhile Joe had vanished. This cool behaviour on his part nettled me still more; and at length I directed the boatswain to pass the word for Joe to come aft. Upon which Joe made his appearance, obviously from the forecastle, wearing that sulky, sullen look that always exasperated me more thoroughly than anything else, whenever I met with it in a man (I am afraid I am rather a short-tempered individual at times); and I gave him such a wiggling as four hours earlier I would not have believed possible; ordering him not to waste any more time, but to set to work at once to repair the damage occasioned by his clumsiness. Whether or no Joe began to guess from my manner that he had gone a trifle too far, I know not; but he at once went to work as I had ordered him, and worked, moreover, with such a will that by eight bells in the afternoon watch the damage was repaired and the boat as good as ever she was, save for a lick of paint over the new work. This want Joe now proceeded, with a great show of zeal, to supply, procuring a pot of paint and a brush, with which he came bustling aft. Now, if there is one thing upon which I pride myself more than another, it is the scrupulous cleanliness of my decks; conceive, therefore, if you can, the extremity of my disgust and annoyance when I saw Joe catch the naked toes of his right foot in the corner of a hen-coop, and, in his agony, drop the pot of paint upon my beautifully clean poop, of course spilling the whole contents. It is true that, forgetting his pain the next moment, he dropped upon his knees and contrived, by scooping up the spilled paint in the palms of his hands, to replace a considerable proportion of it in the pot; but after he had done his best with canvas and turpentine a horrible unsightly blotch still remained to mar the hitherto immaculate purity of the planks, and it is therefore not to be wondered at if I again administered a sound and hearty rating to the culprit, this time in the presence and hearing of all hands. It was all the more vexatious to me that, instead of expressing any contrition for his carelessness, Joe persistently maintained the surly demeanour he had exhibited more or less throughout the day.

My anger, however, was short-lived, and by the time that I had had an hour or two for reflection I could not help feeling that I had been decidedly harsh and severe with the fellow for what was practically his first offence; moreover, he had always hitherto behaved so exceedingly well, and had proved himself such a splendid workman, that he had become a great favourite with me. When, therefore, during dinner, Sir Edgar made some half-jesting remark about Joe's misdeeds, I was far more disposed to make excuses for the man than to maintain a semblance of that annoyance I had so conspicuously exhibited during the day: nevertheless, I deemed it politic to do the latter, particularly while the steward was about; as I felt that, if the rest of the men were indeed traitors, the steward was probably the same, and would, in any case, be pretty certain to repeat in the forecastle whatever might be said in the cabin as to Joe's misdemeanours.

It was Joe's trick at the wheel that night for the first half of the first watch; but, as the passengers were about the deck during the whole time, I made no attempt to enter into confidential communication with him, and I had no other opportunity that night. On the following day his misdeeds were not quite so egregious, but he still contrived to behave like a man who considered himself aggrieved; and when his trick at the wheel came round again, during the first half of the afternoon watch, he steered so carelessly, and ran the ship off her course so abominably, that I had at last to send him away from the wheel, and summon another man in his place; taking the fullest advantage, at the

same time, of the opportunity thus afforded to give him another good rating, hot and heavy, as I felt that he intended I should.

His turn to "grind water" came round again at the latter half of the middle watch, and when he came aft at four bells to relieve the wheel I took care to be at hand with a reminder of his shortcomings during the previous afternoon, and the stern expression of a hope that he would give me no further cause to complain of him. And, not content with that, I took up a position near him with an air that was intended to convey to the retiring helmsman my determination to keep a strict eye upon Master Joe's conduct during the remainder of the watch.

Joe waited a minute or two, to allow the other man to get fairly out of hearing forward, and then remarked—

"I'm afraid, sir, I rather overdone the thing yesterday, a-stavin' in the gig, and then capsizin' the paint. If I did, I hope you'll forgive me, sir, and remember as I done it for the best."

"Overdid it? Did it for the best?" I ejaculated. "Why, confound you, man, do you mean to tell me that you did those things *intentionally*?"

"Of course I did, sir," answered Joe, in much lower tones than my own, obviously with the intention of putting me on my guard. "You see, sir, them chaps for'ard are pretty cute; they're too old birds to be caught with chaff; and I knew that if I was to get on the blind side of 'em, it'd have to be by means of throwin' you into a genuine, downright passion with me. Besides, if you'll excuse me for sayin' of it, Captain Saint Leger, you ain't much of a hactor, sir; you're altogether too fair, and straightfor'ard, and aboveboard to be able to deceive, or fight on equal terms with a lot of sharp, sly, underhand, sneakin' beggars like them in the fo'c's'le. So says I to myself, 'Joe,' says I, 'if *you* wants that crowd to believe as you're out of the skipper's favour, and are ready to join 'em in any mischief they may be hatchin', you've got to do somethin' to make the cap'n real downright savage with yer.' And that's why I done it, sir. I'm boun' to allow that the capsizin' of that there paint was perhaps a-comin' of it a *leetle* too strong; but—"

"Oh, that's all right, Joe," I interrupted. "There is no doubt about the fact that you succeeded in making me genuinely angry with you; the important question now is, has it had the effect that you anticipated? Have the other men shown any disposition to take you into their confidence and make you a participator in the plot or whatever it is that you suppose them to be hatching?"

"Well, no, sir, not exactly," Joe admitted. "But I'm in hopes that they will afore long, if this here unpleasantness between me and you goes on. At present, you see, they don't know but what it may be a temp'ry thing as'll soon blow over; but if they finds that you've got a sort of spite again' me, and are always down upon me and drivin' me to desperation, as you may say, they'll be pretty certain to have a try to get me over on their side. You see, sir, I'm about as strong as e'er a man aboard here, and if them chaps are up to mischief they'll nat'rally prefer to have me with 'em instead of again' 'em."

"Undoubtedly they will," I agreed. "But, Joe, you have not yet told me exactly what it is that you suspect. If they were dissatisfied with their food, or their treatment, or their accommodation, would they not come aft and make a complaint, and endeavour to get the matter rectified in that way? But they never have done so; and indeed I cannot imagine what they have to be dissatisfied with: their food is all of the very best description it was possible to obtain; the forecabin is as roomy and comfortable a place as you will meet with in any ship of this size; and, as to work, I do not think they have much to complain of on that score."

"No, sir, no; it ain't nothing of that sort," asserted Joe. "It's my belief, sir, as they've somehow got wind of *the treasure*, and that it's that they're after."

"The treasure?" I exclaimed in blank astonishment. "What treasure?"

"Why, the treasure as you expects to find on this here island as we're bound for. Lor' bless you, sir," continued Joe, noting the consternation that his unexpected communication had occasioned me, "we all knowed about it in the fo'c's'le—the old hands, I mean—afore the ship arrived in Sydney Harbour. It was the steward as brought the news for'ard to us one night. He was a curious chap, he was, as inquisitive as a monkey; he always wanted to know the ins and outs of everything that was goin' on, and he'd noticed you porin' and puzzlin' over a paper with a lot of figures wrote on it, and a drorin' in the middle; and he used to come for'ard and tell us that you'd been havin' another try to find out what them figures meant. And one night—it was when we was gettin' well on toward Sydney—he comes for'ard in great excitement, and he says, says he, 'I'm blowed if the skipper haven't been and found out at last the meanin' of that paper that he's been puzzlin' over durin' the whole of this blessed voyage; and what do you suppose it is?' says he.

"Well, in course we said we didn't know; and some of us said we didn't care either, seein' that it wasn't any business of ours.

"'Oh, ain't it?' says he. 'P'r'aps you won't say it ain't no business of yours when you know what it is,' he says.

"'Well,' says one of the men—it were Bill Longman—if you thinks as it concerns us, why don't you up and tell us what it is, instead of hangin' in the wind like a ship in irons?' says he.

"So then the steward he tells us as how, that mornin' whilst you was all at breakfast in the saloon, he'd heard you tellin' about a dream you'd had the night before; and how you started up in the middle of the meal and rushed off to your state-room, and stayed there a goodish while, and then went up on deck and told Sir Edgar as you'd discovered the meanin' of the paper, which was all about how to find a treasure that was buried on a desert island somewhere; and that you intended to go on to Sydney and discharge your cargo, and then take in ballast and sail for the Pacific to find this here island and get the treasure.

"Of course when he'd finished tellin' us about it there was a great palaver about buried treasure, and pretty nigh every man in the fo'c's'le pretended to have heard of a similar case; and we all agreed as you was a lucky man, and we hoped as how you'd find the island, and the treasure too. And by-and-by, after there had been a good deal of talk of that sort, Bill Longman up and says, 'But, George,' he says to the steward, 'you haven't told us yet how this here affair concerns us?'

"'Oh, well,' says George, with a curious kind of a laugh, 'if you don't see as how it concerns us, why of course there ain't no more to be said.' And that was all we could get out of the steward that night.

"But a night or two afterwards, Master George brings up the subject again by sayin' that he don't suppose it's likely as you'll offer to share this here treasure with all hands, supposin' that you find it. And then he goes on to say that, for his part, he don't see as the treasure is yours any more than it's anybody else's, and that, in his opinion, if it's ever found, all hands ought to share and share alike. And some of the chaps seemed to think he was right, and others they didn't, and Bill up and says—

"'Look here, George,' he says, 'supposin' when we gets ashore at Sydney you was to find a bag of sovereigns in the street, would you share 'em with us?'

"George said that 'd be a different thing altogether from findin' a treasure on a desert island; and we all had a long argyment about it, and couldn't agree; and, after that, the steward talked a good deal more about all sharin' alike in the treasure, and that if we was all of one mind it could be done, and a lot more stuff of the same kind. But we all laughed at him; and then came the arrival of the ship in Sydney, and George bein' paid off, and after that I heard nothin' more about the treasure."

"And what makes you imagine that the new men have got hold of the story?" I asked.

"Well, sir," said Joe, "it's just one or two little things I've overheard said. The first thing as ever made me suspect that there was somethin' up was the mention of the word 'treasure.' Cookie is the man as seems to know most about it—he's everlastin'ly talkin' about it—and I fancy he must have fallen in with the steward somewheres ashore and heard the whole story from him."

"And what has the cook to say about it?" I inquired.

"Ah, that's just what I wants to find out," answered Joe. "They won't say anything to me about it, but just sits whisperin' with their heads together away for'ard in the far end of the fo'c's'le, and I notices as it's always the cook as has most to say. He and Rogers seems to be the leadin' spirits in the job, whatever it is."

"So your little scheme of yesterday has borne no fruit, thus far?" I suggested.

"Well, not much," said Joe. "But then, I don't expect 'em to take me into their secrets right off the reel, the first time that I misbehave myself. But I believe they'll have a try to get me in with 'em before they tries to carry out their plans. Last night, when I was sittin' on my chest, grumblin' and growlin' at the way I'd been treated durin' the day,"—here Joe laughed softly as the peculiar humour of the situation seemed to present itself to him—"the cook wanted to know whether I wouldn't rather be a rich man than have to go to sea for the rest of my days; but Rogers stopped him with a look, and said, 'Now, doctor, you leave Joe alone, and don't go puttin' no nonsensical notions into his head. You leave him to me; perhaps I may have somethin' to say to him myself by-and-by, and I don't want nobody to interfere at all in this here matter.' And that's how the thing stands at present."

"Very well," said I. "You have told me enough to satisfy me that your conjectures are by no means as groundless as I supposed them to be, and you must do your best, Joe, to find out what you can. But you will have to be *very* careful what you are about: it is clear enough that, if they meditate treachery of any kind, they are not yet at all disposed to trust you; and if they at all contemplate the possibility of winning you over to join them, they will set all manner of traps for you, and test you in every conceivable way before making up their minds to trust you."

"Yes," assented Joe, "I expects they will. But I'm all ready for 'em, whenever they likes; I've got my course all marked out, clear and straight; and, if Rogers or any of the others comes soundin' me, they'll be surprised to find what a downright bad character I am, and how ready I am to take a hand in any mischief that's brewin'."

Chapter Fourteen.

Plot and Counterplot.

This secret conversation between Joe and myself—secret by reason of the intense darkness of the night, and by the precautions I had deemed it expedient to take, at an early stage of the conversation, to conceal my precise whereabouts from any prying eyes among the starboard watch—at first produced within me a feeling of the keenest uneasiness and anxiety. For Joe's revelation as to the discovery by the late steward of my secret relating to the concealed treasure furnished me with what had previously been lacking, namely, *a motive* for that secret plotting of the existence of which Joe was so firmly convinced. The story to which I had that night listened left no room for doubt in my mind that my own want of caution and the late steward's inquisitive propensities had placed within the knowledge of the latter the two important facts that I possessed the secret of a concealed treasure, and that it was my intention, on leaving Sydney, to proceed in search of it. Moreover, it was clear enough that the fellow had no sooner acquired this knowledge than he concocted a plan for the eventual acquisition of the treasure, and made some effort to secure the assistance of the crew in the carrying out of this plan, whatever it might happen to have been. Failing in this, might he not, out of sheer malice, have communicated the secret to some one else—our present cook, for instance—and instigated the man to take some such steps as himself had contemplated? Such a proceeding

would at once account satisfactorily for the curious fact that I had succeeded in obtaining a crew when no other shipmaster within the port could do so. The only weak element of such a supposition consisted in my inability to reconcile myself to the belief that such a man as our late steward would ever, under any provocation, be weak enough to part with a secret that might, even under the most unlikely combination of circumstances and in the most distant future, possibly be of some advantage to himself. Yet this man, Martin, whose life I had saved, and who had impressed me as being a thoroughly honest, straightforward, trustworthy fellow, roundly asserted that something of a secret and mysterious character was going on among the newly shipped men—something from which he, on account of his assumed integrity, had been quietly yet consistently excluded; and he had heard the word “treasure” mentioned by these presumable conspirators. Then I argued with myself that, after all, when one came to reflect upon it, the exclusive ways of these ex-gold-miners and the mere mention of the word “treasure” seemed rather slender threads from which to weave so portentous a suspicion as that which Joe’s communication had suggested. For aught that I knew, the late steward’s discourses upon the subject of the treasure might have been of such a character as to suggest to the minds of his hearers an absurdly exaggerated idea of its value, leaving upon honest Joe’s mind the impression that it must be fabulously rich, and altogether the kind of thing to obtain possession of which men would hesitate at no crime, however monstrous. And, having had experience of one attempt to gain possession of it by means of treachery, was it not natural that the simple fellow, discovering, or believing that he had discovered, something in the nature of a secret understanding among his shipmates, should at once leap to the conclusion that it was nothing less than a second attempt upon the treasure that was being planned? As to the cook’s inquiry whether Joe would not rather be a rich man than be obliged to follow the sea for the remainder of his life, I thought nothing of that; sailors—like everybody else—are possessed of a rooted conviction that wealth is the panacea of all evils. By the time that I had reached this point in my mental argument it was eight bells, and, Forbes coming on deck to relieve me, I went to my cabin more than half convinced that Joe had, after all, discovered a mare’s nest; and having thus argued myself into a more comfortable frame of mind, I lay down and slept soundly until I was called by the steward at my usual hour of rising.

I will do Joe the justice to say that, having settled in his mind the part that he would play in the drama that he believed was evolving itself on board the barque, he thenceforth played it to the life, and with a skill so consummate as to deceive the most suspicious. He assumed the rôle of a man who, if let alone, would be willing enough to do his duty honestly, and to the best of his ability, but who could not and would not tolerate the smallest measure of injustice. And he gave himself all the airs of an aggrieved person—of one who has been harshly treated for a trivial fault; his whole manner was the very impersonation of sullen resentment, and the careless, slovenly way in which he performed his duties was a constant source of provocation to me, even though I knew—or thought I knew—that it was all assumed. So exasperating was he that sometimes I even doubted whether his behaviour really was assumption—whether, after all, I had not been deceived in the man; whether it was not rather his former good behaviour that was assumed, while his present delinquencies were the result of an outbreak of irrepressible evil in him. There were even times when I asked myself whether he might not be a ringleader in the very plot he professed to be so anxious to discover, and whether his anxiety to enlighten me might not be assumed for the purpose of blinding and misleading me the more effectually. Never in all my life had I witnessed so thorough and radical a change in any one as seemed to have come over Joe Martin. But a quiet word or two with him, or a glance into his honest eyes when no one was near enough at hand to read their expression, always sufficed to reassure me as to his absolute fidelity. Since it was possible for him to make me doubt him, despite the many evidences he had afforded me of his honesty, it is not to be wondered at that Sir Edgar and Lady Emily were completely deceived by him; and often did they, in the comparative privacy of the saloon, deplore Joe’s lamentable fall from his original virtuous condition. On such occasions I always assumed a tone of righteous indignation and severity, giving as free vent as possible to the very real annoyance that the fellow’s pranks frequently occasioned me; inwardly resolving at the same time that, if he emerged with unblemished reputation from the perplexingly contradictory rôle he was then enacting, I would do him the most lavish justice when the proper time arrived.

The number of men we now had on board the barque, and the constitution of the watches, were such that one of Joe’s “tricks” at the wheel always occurred from two to four o’clock on every alternate morning; and these were the only opportunities when it was possible for us to exchange confidences with any degree of safety from the possibility of discovery. Consequently, after having had a chat with Joe, I always had to wait forty-eight hours before I could learn what discoveries—if any—he had made in the interim. After the last-recorded long chat that we had had together, two such opportunities had passed without the occurrence of anything in the fore-castle of a sufficiently definite character to furnish Joe with matter for a report; though he insisted that the frequent brief, hurried consultations, and the increased caution of the conspirators, convinced him that something very momentous must be impending. Such a statement naturally reawakened all my anxiety; which was not lessened by the fact that we now had a moon, in her second quarter, affording a sufficient amount of light to render our confidential communications at night almost impossible without detection; while, to add to my embarrassment, I expected to sight the island within the next forty hours.

I thought the time had now arrived when I ought to take the mate into my confidence, and I did so during the progress of the following afternoon watch; taking care that our conversation should be as brief as possible, and that it should be conducted out of earshot of all eavesdroppers. As I had anticipated, Forbes seemed very much disposed to make light of the matter, and to regard it as a hallucination of Joe’s; protesting that, so far from having observed any symptoms of revolt or insubordination, he had been simply astonished at such orderly behaviour on the part of men who had lived the comparatively lawless life of diggers on a new gold-field. In short, we were both thoroughly puzzled. But we eventually agreed that, under the circumstances, it would be prudent to keep our eyes open, and to adopt precisely such precautionary measures as we should resort to if we were expecting the men to break into open mutiny. I also undertook to find or make an opportunity to instruct Joe that, in the event of his making any fresh discoveries, he was at once to acquaint the mate with them, if he experienced any difficulty in communicating with me.

On that same evening, during the first watch, when—the ladies having retired as usual about four bells—Sir Edgar joined me, according to custom, to smoke a final cigar and indulge in a desultory chat before retiring to his own cabin

for the night, I availed myself of the opportunity to explain the situation to him also; first cautioning him not to exhibit any astonishment or other emotion that might excite the suspicions of the helmsman, who would doubtless have his eyes upon us. He was, of course, and naturally enough, very much discomposed at such startling intelligence; the more so that I was unable to give him any definite information as to the character of the danger with which we were threatened; but he maintained the same enviable coolness and composure of manner that I had so greatly admired on the memorable night of our adventure in the Straits of Sunda, and assured me that I might rely upon him to be ready for action in any emergency, however sudden.

It was my middle watch below that night, and I had been in my berth about an hour, tossing restlessly from side to side, and striving to devise plans to meet every contingency I could possibly think of, when I heard a sound of muffled footsteps outside my state-room door, followed by a very gentle cautious tap upon the panelling.

"Yes," I answered, in a low cautious tone; "who is there?"

"It's Joe, sir," was the reply, in an equally subdued tone of voice. "I've got some news for you at last, with a vengeance!"

I opened the door; and, sure enough, there stood Joe, glancing anxiously over his shoulder, as though he every moment expected to be followed and dragged on deck before he could make his communication.

Signing to him to enter the cabin, I noiselessly closed the door behind him, and, pointing toward the locker, said—

"Now, Joe, heave ahead, my man, and tell me your story in your own way. But, first of all, how did you manage to get here without being seen by any of the men?"

"Well, sir," said Joe, "it wasn't very easy, and that's a fact. I wanted to have a word with you durin' the first watch, but you was talking with Sir Edgar; and, if you hadn't been, it'd ha' been all the same, because I couldn't ha' left the forecastle without bein' missed. So I had to wait until our watch was relieved and had gone below; and then I had to wait again until they was all asleep, when I slips out of my bunk, careless-like, leavin' the blankets all heaped-up so that they'd look, in the dim light, as if I was still there. Then I creeps up on deck, very quiet, but ready primed with a hexcuse in case any o' the watch wanted to know what I was doin' on deck in my watch below. But the lookout was comfortably perched between the knight-heads, smokin', with his back to the deck, so he didn't see me; and, as for the other two, I expects they was in the galley, takin' a snooze, for I didn't see anything of 'em. So I slips aft, in the shadder of the long-boat, and dodges round abaft the mainmast until I got the companion between me and the man at the wheel, when I climbs up on the poop, and crawls along the deck on all-fours to the companion-way; then down I comes, without even Mr Forbes seein' me."

"All right, Joe," said I. "But I shall have to go on deck and let the mate know, when you are ready to go for'ard again, or he might catch sight of you and pounce upon you without knowing who you are; which would simply ruin everything. However, we can arrange that presently. Now, let me know what it is that you have to tell me."

"Well, sir, it's just this," returned Joe. "These here carryin's on of mine, and the way that you've been down upon me of late, has done the trick; and, to-night, durin' the second dog-watch, the bosun tackled me, and, after a good deal of box-haulin' about, told me what their little game is, and asked me if I'd jine 'em."

"Go on, Joe," said I; "tell me everything that passed, as nearly as you can."

"Well," continued Joe—who, it may be well to explain, had, as usual, been behaving most outrageously all day—"I'm boun' to confess that I laid it on pretty thick to-day; and so did you, sir,"—with a quiet chuckle—"but not no thicker than what I deserved. So, along in the second dog-watch, Rogers comes up to me where I was smokin', sulky-like, under the lee of the long-boat, away from everybody else, but where anybody could see me that wanted to, and he says—

"'Hullo, Joe, old shipmate,' says he, 'what's the matter? You looks as if the hazin' that the skipper's been givin' of you to-day has give you a fit of the blues!'

"'Blues?' says I. 'Blues ain't no name for it! I'm sick and tired of the ship, and everybody in her. I haven't been given no peace nor rest,' says I, 'since the day when I was clumsy enough to smash the gig. Of course I was sorry I done it,' I says, 'and I'd ha' said so if the skipper had only treated me properly; but I ain't sorry *now*, and I means to take it out of him for the rest of the v'yage by doin' every blessed thing I can think of to vex him. He's made it pretty hot for me lately, and I means to make it hot for *him*,' I says; 'and you may go aft and tell him so if you like,' says I.

"'No, Joey,' says he, 'I'm not the man to tell tales upon a shipmate; nor there ain't nobody else in the fo'c's'le as'll do such a dirty trick. But what's come over ye, man? You're that changed as your own mother wouldn't know ye. I'm surprised at you,' he says—'a man that used to be such a tremenjous favourite with the skipper and the rest of 'em aft. What's the meanin' of it all?'

"'Look here, Bill Rogers,' says I, turnin' upon him as savage as you please, 'just you drop that—d'ye hear? I gets hectorin' and hazin' enough from the quarter-deck; I won't have none of it from *you*, nor from any other man what's in this ship's fo'c's'le; so now I hopes you understand,' I says.

"'All right, mate,' he says; 'you needn't lose your temper with me; there's no occasion for it. Besides, I'm a short-tempered man myself, and if it comes to—but that's neither here nor there. I don't want to quarrel with you, Joe; I'd a deal rather we was all fast friends in the fo'c's'le. We foremast men ought to stick to one another, and back one another up; don't you think so?'

"'Yes, I do,' says I; 'but how much have any of you chaps stuck to me, or backed me up? You've been as thick as

thieves together,' I says; 'but—because, I s'pose, I haven't been to the gold-fields—you've made me feel like a houtsider, from the very commencement of the v'yage,' I says.

“Well, if we did,' says he, 'it was because we didn't know you so well as we do now.'

“After that he stood pullin' away at his pipe, and cogitatin' like, for a minute or two; and then he looks up in my face, and says—

“Look here, Joe Martin, you've been on the growl for more'n a week now; but I s'pose if I was to give you the chance to get back into the skipper's favour by tellin' him somethin' he'd very much like to know, you wouldn't be above doin' it, would you?'

“I don't want no chance to get back into the skipper's favour,' I says. 'If you knows anything that he'd like to know, go and tell him yourself,' says I.

“Why, Joe,' he says, laughin', 'you've regular got your knife into the old man,'—beggin' your pardon, Cap'n Saint Leger, but them was his words, sir.”

“All right, Joe,” I whispered, anxiously; “what happened next?”

“I says, 'I haven't got my knife into him any more'n he's got his into me, I suppose. But if a man does me a hinjury, I ain't goin' to rest until I've got even with him.'

“Then says Bill, 'Now, I wonder what you'd say if anybody was to offer you a chance to get even with the skipper, and do a good thing for yourself at the same time?'

“You wouldn't have to wonder very long,' says I, 'if so be as anybody aboard this ship had such a chance to offer me. But them sort of chances don't come to a man away out here in mid-ocean.'

“Oh, don't they?' he says. 'Well, I believes they do—sometimes. Just you stop here a minute, Joe,' he says; 'I'll be back in a brace of shakes.'

“So off he goes, and presently I hears him talkin' to the cook in the galley, very earnest. By-and-by he comes out again, and he says—

“Joe,' says he, 'do you know what the skipper's pokin' the ship away up here into this outlandish part of the Pacific for?'

“Well,' I says, 'I've been told as he wants to get a cargo of sandal-wood for the China market.'

“Nothin' else?' says he.

“He never told me as he was after anythin' else,' I says, lookin' very knowin'.

“No,' he says, 'I don't suppose he ever did; but somebody else might, mightn't they?'

“Says I, 'What's the use of all this backin' and fillin'? I see you knows somethin' as I thought nobody in the fo'c's'le knowed anything about but myself. Now, if you've got anything to say about it, out with it; and if you haven't, let's talk about somethin' else.'

“Says he, 'Did you ever know anybody by the name of George Moore?'

“Yes,' says I, 'I did.' And I had it on the tip of my tongue to say, 'And a more worthless scamp I never wishes to meet with.' But I didn't, because it come to me to remember, just in time, that if these here chaps knowed anything about the treasure, 'twas most likely through George that they'd come to know it. So I says, 'He was steward aboard here until the skipper sacked him in Sydney.'

“I s'pose you'd know him again if you was to see him?' he says; and he looked at me in a curious sort of way that makes me think, 'Now, what the mischief are you a-drivin' at? It's my belief, Joe,' thinks I, 'that this chap's layin' a trap for you; and if you don't keep your weather eye liftin', you'll fall into it, my lad,' thinks I. So I just says, careless-like—

“Oh yes, in course I should.'

“When did you see him last?' says Rogers.

“The last time I seen him,' says I, 'was the day we arrived in Sydney, when the skipper paid him off and he left the ship.'

“Quite sure?' says Bill.

“Certain,' says I.

“Then he laughed, and he says, 'Well, Joe, you're a more simple sort of a feller than I give you credit for bein'. Come into the galley,' he says, 'and let me introjuce you to an old friend.'

“So we went into the galley together, and there was cookie busy amongst his pots and pans. When he sees us come in, he looks hard at Bill, and he says—

“Well?”

“I tell you, Cap’n Saint Leger, you might ha’ knocked me down with a rope-yarn, I was that astonished—for the voice was the voice of *George Moore*, and no other.

“Hows’ever, all this backin’ and fillin’ of Bill’s had put me on my guard. I began to understand that, after all my play-actin’, they didn’t even then feel altogether sure of me—they was tryin’ me still; and that made me brace up and pull myself together; for I says to myself, ‘Now, if I makes a single mistake it’s all up with everybody abaft the mainmast, and me, too.’ So I looks cookie hard in the face, and I says—

“Now I knows you, George, spite of your black hair and all your beard and mustachers. What’s the meanin’ of this here maskeradin’? Tip us your flipper, old shipmate,’ I says, hearty like, and as if I was downright glad to see him.

“Well, sir, I can tell you George looked considerable nonplussed; while Bill, he just laughed; and he says to George, ‘Jacob, my son, you’ve been and let the cat out of the bag!’ Then he turns to me and says—

“Now, Joe, there you are! Now’s your chance to get back the skipper’s favour by goin’ aft and tellin’ him as his old steward, George Moore, is aboard here, sailin’ under false colours.’

“If he does,’ says George, ‘he’d better look out for hisself!’

“All right, George, old man,’ I says; ‘don’t you worry. Did I tell the skipper anything about the way you used to talk to us about the treasure—and, by the livin’ Jingo,’ I says, ‘that’s what you’re after now, ain’t it, mate?’

“Supposin’ we was,’ says he, ‘would you take a hand in the game? You didn’t seem nowadays eager about it when ’twas last mentioned.’

“What was the use?’ says I. ‘None of the others ’d have nothin’ to do with it, and we couldn’t manage the thing by our two selves. But if that’s your game,’ says I, ‘I’m in with you—if it’s share and share alike; not otherwise,’ I says.

“Well, it amounts pretty much to that,’ George says, ‘only I’m to have two shares instead of one, seein’ that I was the man that found out all about it. That’s the arrangement, ain’t it, Bill?’

“That’s the arrangement,’ says Bill, ‘and a fair one it is, too, / I think. What’s *your* opinion, Joe?’

“Yes,’ I says, reluctant like, ‘I s’pose it’s fair. But how will it work out? will there be enough to make it worth the risk?’

“Oh yes,’ says George. ‘I don’t know how much there is of it, but there’s sure to be a goodish pile, or the skipper wouldn’t take the trouble to come all this way to get it.’

“Well, but,’ I says, ‘how’s the thing goin’ to be worked? I hope there ain’t goin’ to be no murder!’

“Murder be hanged!’ says Bill. ‘What should there be any murder for? No; the whole thing’s very simple. We’re all goin’ to be perfectly quiet and do exactly as we’re told until the treasure’s found and put aboard the ship; and then, when the order’s give to up anchor and make sail from the island, we’re just goin’ to seize the skipper, the mate, and the passengers, unawares; clap the mate in irons; put the rest ashore; and off we goes.’

“Well,’ I says, ‘and afterwards?’

“Afterwards,’ says Bill, ‘we shall divide the treasure fairly amongst us; make the mate navigate the ship to some place where she can be comfortably cast away; and we poor shipwrecked mariners will land, with our swag snugly stowed away amongst our dunnage, and every man will then look after hisself.’

“Well,’ I says, ‘that seems to be all plain sailin’ enough.’ It wasn’t my business to point out to ’em that they’d prob’ly find Mr Forbes a hard nut to crack, you see, sir; so I makes out to be quite satisfied with their plans, and to be quite ready to join in with ’em; and then I was took into the fo’c’s’le and introjuced to the rest as havin’ joined ’em, and everybody said how glad they was to have me, and that now there’d be no bother or trouble at all about the job. And—and—well, I think that’s about all, sir.”

“Thank you, Joe,” said I, grasping the honest fellow’s hand. “It is a long story, but you have managed to make everything perfectly clear to me; and I fancy I shall not have much difficulty in circumventing the rascals. Now, if the men should make any alterations in their plans, you must let me know, if you possibly can; but be careful, above all things, that the men shall have no cause whatever to suspect your fidelity to them. And, remember, whatever orders I may give you, execute them to the letter, and promptly. Now, I will go on deck and have a word or two with Mr Forbes, during which you must get away for’ard again, as best you can.”

I accordingly left Joe in my cabin, and sauntered up on deck, as was often my habit, even in my watch below, ostensibly to take a look at the weather, but in reality to caution Forbes against taking any notice of Joe, should he catch sight of that individual moving about the deck.

It was by this time nearly seven bells in the middle watch; the moon hung low in the western sky over our port quarter, and a mottling of fine-weather cloud had gradually gathered in the heavens, which, while it allowed a few of the larger stars to gleam dimly through it here and there, intercepted a large proportion of the starlight, and rendered the night dark enough to make Joe’s escape forward a comparatively easy matter.

The mate was pacing the poop slowly, fore and aft, as I emerged from the companion; but, catching sight of me, he came to my side and remarked—

"The night continues fine, sir, but the wind seems inclined to drop. We were only going four and half when I hove the log at four bells, and now we seem to be scarcely going four."

"Yes," said I, "it has dropped perceptibly since I went below; but if it will only last at this we shall be at anchor by sunset to-morrow." Then, in a lower tone, I added, "If you see Joe Martin creeping away for'ard from the saloon, don't take any notice of him, or make any sign that you are aware of his presence. I have much to tell you; but we must wait for a more favourable opportunity."

At this moment Joe's head emerged from the darkness of the companion; so I walked aft, glanced into the binnacle, and then abstractedly placed myself before the helmsman in such a position as to obstruct his view of that part of the maindeck which Joe would have to traverse before reaching the concealing shadow of the long-boat. I stood thus, apparently sunk in reflection, until I observed Joe glide across the exposed space and disappear; when I went back to my cabin and fully dressed myself, in readiness to go on deck again at eight bells.

Chapter Fifteen.

We arrive at the Treasure Island.

During the succeeding watch, I had leisure to take a careful mental review of Joe's story, and the conclusion at which I arrived was that the man Moore, having failed in his endeavour to seduce the original crew of the *Esmeralda* from their duty, had, on his arrival at Sydney, no sooner recognised the probability of their desertion—which, for aught I knew to the contrary, he might very possibly have contributed to bring about—than he must have devoted himself to the task of collecting the party of men whose wiles I had now to circumvent. What a patient, crafty fellow the man had proved himself to be! It really appeared as though he must have had, almost from the outset of the voyage, some suspicion as to the character of the cryptogram over which he had seen me puzzling so often—or might he not have gathered its nature from a chance word or two overheard while I had been discussing the subject with Sir Edgar?—for he no sooner became aware in a general way of its contents than he was ready with a plan by which to turn the adventure to his own advantage. He was persevering, too; for that plan had no sooner failed than he must have gone to work to formulate another, so skilfully devised, and so carefully carried through that, but for Joe's devoted fidelity, it must have infallibly succeeded. Indeed, I felt by no means satisfied that they would not succeed, even now. True, their designs, as revealed to Joe, might be very easily frustrated; but there was an unpleasant doubt in my mind as to the *bona fides* of that revelation. I could scarcely believe that men who had already exhibited such indisputable proof of extreme caution and steadfast self-control could be so easily imposed upon as they appeared to have been by Joe! What if they had seen through his devices, and had suspected his intentions? Would they not, in that case, have realised that our suspicions were aroused? and might they not have merely *feigned* to have fallen into Joe's trap, and have confided to him a purely fictitious statement of their plans, concocted for the express purpose of throwing us off our guard and leading us astray? Taking into account the deep guile that had prompted them to adopt and consistently maintain a course of the most orderly and irreproachable behaviour as the most likely means of blinding me to and averting the faintest suspicion of their nefarious designs, I could not help feeling that such a line of action on their part was only too probable; and, in casting about in my mind for some effectual method of subverting their plans, I fully realised that I should have to take this contingency into consideration, while preparing also a counterplot to that revealed by the man Rogers to Joe. Of one thing, and one thing only, could I be certain, which was that *nobody*—not even myself—knew the amount of the treasure; and it appeared to me that upon this fact must I base my plans. These reflections, given above in a very condensed form, fully occupied my mind during the first hour and a half of my watch, and were only interrupted by the appearance in the eastern quarter of that first faint paling of the darkness which heralded the dawn of a new day. This temporarily diverted my thoughts into a new channel; for, upon solving the enigma of the cryptogram, my first act had been to consult a chart of the Pacific, with the resulting discovery that no such island as that referred to in the Saint Leger document was to be found upon it. Now, the ship's position on the previous noon, and her run since then, were such that if the morning happened to break clear, the island ought to be just visible, right ahead, at daybreak, provided, of course, that the man who secreted the treasure had made no mistake in his calculations. On the one hand, I thought it probable that, considering the important issues at stake, the utmost care would be taken to verify the position of the island beyond all possibility of error; while, on the other, was the curious fact that no such island—not even a rock, or indeed shoal water—appeared on the chart in the position indicated. This circumstance, coupled with my knowledge of the imperfect character of the instruments in use by navigators of the period at which the cryptogram had been written, caused me now to experience no little curiosity and anxiety as to what the approaching daylight might reveal.

I was not to be left long in suspense. We were in the tropics, where the light comes and goes with a rush, a few minutes only intervening between broad day and deepest night. The first faint streak of scarcely perceptible pallor along the verge of the eastern horizon on our starboard bow lengthened and widened, and grew more pronounced, even as I gazed upon it, until it became a broad segment of cold, colourless light, insensibly melting out of the circumscribing darkness. Then a faint, delicate tone of softest primrose began to steal through it, quickly strengthening and brightening as the light spread upward and right and left, paling the stars one by one, until they dwindled away and vanished in the soft, rich blue that was swiftly chasing the darkness across the sky. Anon, a warm, rich, rosy flush began to pervade the primrose tones of the eastern horizon, against which the level line of the ocean's marge cut sharply in tones of deepest indigo; while, overhead, the brightening blue was delicately mottled with a whole archipelago of thin, fleecy cloudlets, pink tinged, and bordered along their lower edges with purest gold, that were mysteriously floating into view, apparently from illimitable space. Then from that point on the horizon where the deepening rose colour glowed most brilliantly, up shot a single white ray perpendicularly toward the zenith, narrow and well defined where it sprang from the horizon, and broadening as it soared aloft until it became lost among the lowest tier of clouds, now deeply tinged with dyes of richest crimson. This single ray had scarcely made itself apparent ere it was followed by others radiating fan-wise from the same spot; and in another instant a spark of golden flame flashed across the sea from the horizon, at the point of junction of the rays, tingeing the small wave-crests in its wake with ruddy gold that deepened first into a line and then into a broad path of shimmering

golden radiance, as the burning rim of the sun soared slowly out of the purple sea.

At the same instant, the man who had the lookout, and who had stationed himself on the topgallant forecastle, right in the eyes of the ship, turned sharply round, facing the poop, and reported—

“Land ho! right ahead.”

I had been so completely absorbed in contemplation of the magnificent spectacle of the sunrise that, for the moment, I had entirely forgotten the island, and everything connected with it; but the cry of the lookout brought it back to my mind with a flash, and, moving to the mizzen-rigging, and springing upon a hen-coop, I directed my gaze straight ahead, with my hand over my eyes to shield them from the dazzle of the sun.

Yes, there it was, undoubtedly; a faint, pinkish-grey shape, right over the starboard cat-head, as I then stood; a low hummock on the left, with a hill next it, the outline of which, even at that distance, bore a striking resemblance to a man's nose, the upper lip on the right of it showing just clear of the horizon. Yes; there was the treasure island, beyond all question! The next point to be determined was, whether the treasure still lay buried there; and if so, how was I to obtain and retain possession of it?

Of one thing I felt morally certain, which was that, as soon as the men felt assured that the whole of the treasure was on board, they would take the ship from me, either by force or guile, if they could. It was of course open to me to make a fight for it, if I chose; but, even assuming that I could reckon upon Sir Edgar's assistance—as I felt sure I could—that would make only four of us to oppose eleven men, who, I had no manner of doubt, would prove as resolute and determined in a stand-up fight as they had already shown themselves to be in the pursuit of their organised plans. The odds were nearly three to one against us. Opposed to these, with, for our antagonists, resolute men, whose knowledge of the consequences that must inevitably follow upon an unsuccessful attempt at piracy would nerve them to desperation—men who were unquestionably full of brute courage, and who, moreover, were doubtless as well armed as ourselves—was I justified in entertaining the slightest hope of success in the event of my submitting the matter to the arbitrament of battle? The answer to this question was an unqualified “No!”

If, then, it was hopeless to expect that a resort to force would enable me to retain my property, my freedom, and the freedom and property, ay, perhaps even the lives of those who, in such a crisis as this, would naturally look to me for the preservation of both, I must resort to guile. I mortally hate anything that in the slightest degree savours of deception, either in words or conduct, and have made it an invariable rule never to engage in any transaction needing the one or the other for its successful accomplishment; but here was a case in which I had no choice but to meet guile with guile. How was it to be done? Possibly, if the treasure happened to be in a compact form, and easily accessible, Forbes, Joe, and myself might be able to secure it and convey it on board the ship, unknown to the men, while they were busily engaged in digging for it elsewhere—for, now that they were aware of its existence, it seemed to me that my best chance of success lay in employing them in the search, while taking care that none of them should find it. This would naturally lead them to the conclusion that, if my document were not an ingenious hoax, the treasure had already been discovered and secured by somebody else.

This plan rather took my fancy. It was simple, feasible, and demanded no elaborate system of deception; the men would simply be set to dig upon a certain spot, and, failing, after a sufficiently exhaustive search, to find anything, the digging would be abandoned, and they would be sent to various more or less distant parts of the island to cut sandal-wood. The more I thought of it, the better I liked it; and when, later on, during the forenoon, I found an opportunity to talk it over with Sir Edgar and Forbes—having previously related to them the substance of Joe's communication made to me during the middle watch—they agreed with me that, failing a better scheme, they saw no reason why it should not be successful. Sir Edgar, as I had anticipated, declared himself ready to act in any way that I might suggest, at a moment's notice; and, now that he had had time to think over my former communication to him, and to grow accustomed to the idea of a coming contest, either of strength or wits, with the men, was as eager for the fray as a schoolboy is for the great cricket-match of the year.

Meanwhile, the wind had slightly freshened with the rising of the sun, and the ship was gliding along upon a taut bowline, under all plain sail, at a speed of about six knots, heading up about a point and a half to windward of the northern extremity of the island. We were approaching it from the south-west—the direction mentioned in my ancestor's cryptogram—and as we gradually rose it above the horizon it was curious to note how exact a resemblance its outline bore to the profile of an upturned human face lying prone along the water. It was so striking that even the children remarked upon it; while, as for the men, they could scarcely remove their eyes from it, though *their* interest in the place was doubtless founded more upon the wealth they hoped to find upon it than upon its very singular appearance. I noted this morning, without appearing to do so, that there was a great deal of animated conversation going on upon the forecastle, accompanied by many stealthy glances toward the poop; while the late steward—now sweltering in the heat of the galley, and of his hirsute disguise—was being continually appealed to. Now that I knew this man's secret I was filled with astonishment that I had not immediately penetrated it; for, disguise his features as he might, he could not divest himself of the sly, stealthy way in which he used his eyes, nor of the noiseless, treacherous way in which he moved. I had noted these characteristics in him as far back as the day on which he had signed articles at Sydney; yet, strange to say, familiar as they were to me, I had never for a moment suspected his identity, probably because, when I happened to think of him at all, I assumed as a matter of course that he would naturally make the best of his way to the gold-fields. Of course, since we had been at sea, his avocation as cook had confined him so closely to the galley that I had rarely seen him; and upon the rare occasions when he had been obliged to present himself in full view my thoughts had usually been so busy upon other matters that I had taken little or no notice of him. Indeed, I shrewdly suspected that it was the comparative privacy of the galley that had led him to choose the disagreeable functions of ship's cook.

All that day, until three o'clock in the afternoon, we glided gently along over a smooth, sparkling sea, toward the island, noting with keen interest its various features as they imperceptibly resolved themselves out of the hazy blue tint that it had worn in the distance. The first marked change that occurred in its appearance was the breaking-up of

the flat silhouette into a series of softly shadowed markings which indicated the shapes of the hills and valleys, the slopes and ravines into which its surface was broken. Then, as the sun swept over it and round toward its western side, the light fell more strongly upon its hillsides; its shadows grew deeper, and an all-pervading tone of green gave evidence of its exceeding fertility. Later still, the green became broken up into an infinite variety of shades; while the swelling rounded outlines that stood out from and yet indicated these multitudinous tints, revealed the fact that the island was densely wooded to its very summit. By six bells in the afternoon we had neared it to within three miles, and were enabled to see that its northern extremity was bold and precipitous, with naked, rocky cliffs, against the base of which the white surf chafed and roared with a ceaseless thunder that reached our ears even at that distance. The south-western extremity, while as bold as the northern, and almost as precipitous, was wooded right down to the water's edge; while from the lofty hill, that in the distance had borne the appearance of a gigantic human nose, there was an irregular but general slope toward the south-western shore; the entrance to the river mentioned in the cryptogram being clearly indicated by a low projecting point stretching southward from the bold cliffs marking the northern boundary of the island.

Having satisfactorily made out the mouth of the river, I caused the helm to be shifted, and we bore away for our anchorage, which was reached about an hour later, in a small estuary situate at the southern extremity of the island, affording perfect shelter from all winds from south-west round by north and east to south-east.

By the time that the hands had got the canvas stowed, yards squared, running gear hauled taut and coiled down, and decks cleared up generally, it was five o'clock in the evening; and the shadows were already beginning to deepen on the western side of the ravine along which the river flowed, while its eastern slopes were glowing brilliantly in the warm orange tones of the evening sunlight. It chanced that we had dropped our anchor at the precise spot which afforded us a clear view up the gently winding river for a distance of something like a quarter of a mile, and never in all my life had I looked upon a more lovely scene than the one that then delighted our eyes. The so-called "river" was really a small arm of the sea formed by a beautiful ravine—the bottom of which lay below the sea level—dividing the southern portion of the island into two unequal parts; and as the western side of this ravine was high and steep, while the eastern side sloped gently but unevenly up from the water until it merged in the high ground beyond, the whole surface of the island being finely broken and densely wooded, the contrasting effects of brilliant sunshine and soft purple shadow, with the multitudinous tints and endless varieties of foliage, vividly marked in the foreground and insensibly merging into a delicious, soft, misty grey over the distant heights, combined to form a picture the charming, fairy-like beauty of which it is as impossible to describe as it was entrancing to look upon.

So lovely indeed was it that I found it hard to resist the entreaties of Lady Emily and her sister that I would lower a boat and take them for a short pull up the river before sunset. It was necessary, however, that our first visit to this lovely island paradise should be made with all due circumspection; for although no sign or trace of inhabitants had as yet been discovered, the place might for all that be peopled, and peopled, too, with cruel, bloodthirsty savages, for aught we could tell to the contrary. While, therefore, I was exceedingly anxious, for reasons of my own, to get a nearer peep at the place without a moment's unnecessary delay, I felt bound to point out to the ladies the absolute necessity for determining the question whether or not there were any inhabitants on the island before exposing them to the possible risk of a landing.

The objections to an immediate landing on the part of the ladies did not, however, apply with equal force in the case of us of the sterner sex; I therefore ordered the gig to be lowered, and, arming myself and each of the crew with a brace of loaded revolvers, prepared to make a preliminary trip as far as the creek referred to in the cryptogram. Upon hearing me give the order to get the boat ready, Sir Edgar asked permission to accompany me; and a few minutes later we shoved off, and headed up the river.

The waterway, as far up as we could see, maintained a tolerably even width of some two hundred yards, the deepest water being close alongside the western shore, which was very steep, and wooded clear down to the water's edge. Here, with the assistance of the hand-lead, I found a minimum depth of two fathoms; but the bottom was very uneven, and in a few places I found as much as five fathoms of water. From these depths the bottom seemed to slope pretty uniformly upward towards the opposite or eastern bank, the slope of which was much more gentle, a narrow margin of very fine white sand intervening between the water and the deep, rich, chocolate-coloured soil. The varieties of trees and shrubs were countless, ranging all the way from the smallest and most delicate flowering plants to magnificent forest giants, some of which must have towered at least a hundred and fifty feet above the surface of the ground. Cocoa-nut palms formed a continuous fringe along the inner margin of the sandy beach; and beyond them were to be seen every imaginable species of tropical plant and tree, with foliage ranging in tint from the palest, most delicate green to deepest olive or purple black. The waving fronds of the delicate feathery bamboo were everywhere visible, while creepers in endless variety trailed their long cordlike stems and gaudy blossoms in all directions. The still, evening air vibrated with the continuous hissing buzz of countless millions of insects, and a few birds flitted noiselessly hither and thither among the gathering shadows; but no sign of a human form, not even the imprint of a footstep on the soft white sand, anywhere met my searching gaze.

At a distance of about half a mile, or perhaps a little less, from the mouth of the river, the shore on our starboard hand merged into a low wooded point, round which we swept, out of the main channel, into a charming basin, some two miles wide, surrounded on every side by high land, sloping gently backward from the water's edge, and magnificently broken by deep, precipitous ravines, some of which could be traced from the heart of the surrounding hills clear down to the water's edge. The centre of the basin was occupied by an islet, roughly circular in shape, and about half a mile in diameter, as we discovered by pulling round it. This islet was the hiding-place of the treasure, if the cryptogram was to be believed; and I accordingly inspected it as narrowly as the swiftly gathering darkness would permit, so that I might carry a tolerably distinct impression of it in my mind's eye, as an aid to the plan that I must now definitely form and arrange before the next sunrise. As may be supposed, I had by this time got the words of the cryptogram off by heart—and, indeed, had destroyed the translation, lest it should fall into other hands—I therefore knew exactly what I had to look for as a mark to guide me to the hiding-place of the treasure, and accordingly kept a very sharp lookout for "the obelisk rock." There was only one rock to be seen on the islet that at all answered to this description, and that, so far as I could distinguish in the gloom, was a pointed, needle-like mass,

forming the summit of a steep cliff that rose precipitously from the water's edge and constituted the northern extremity of the islet. But on getting round to the other side I was vexed and chagrined to find that the whole surface of the islet on the southern side of this curious cliff was densely overgrown with trees and scrub, which would certainly have to be cut deeply into in order to arrive at the spot where the treasure was said to be buried. This condition of affairs, natural enough though it was, had somehow never occurred to me; I had fully expected to find the hiding-place located in an open space that might be conveniently traversed in any and every direction, enabling the situation of the treasure to be determined by the simple process of measuring off a thousand feet in a direction due south from the base of the obelisk rock. Possibly that might have been the condition of the islet at the period when the treasure was buried—indeed, it very probably was—but there had been ample time for the ground to have become overgrown since then; and now it was so densely covered with vegetation that it would be hopeless to think of getting at the hiding-place without the assistance of the men. And that meant the absolute overthrow of my plan to keep the recovery of the treasure a secret from them!

What was to be done? I racked my brains during the whole of the long, hot, breathless night in a fruitless endeavour to devise some satisfactory way out of the difficulty, and arose from my sleepless bunk next morning with a splitting headache, and nothing in the shape of a settled plan beyond the determination to find a good long job for the men, the execution of which should afford me further time for reflection, and perhaps allow events to develop themselves.

Acting, then, upon this resolution, I caused the gig to be brought alongside immediately after breakfast; and ordered the axes and shovels to be passed into her, at the same time issuing instructions for all hands except the cook and steward to get into her and go on shore with me. The men bustled about, nothing loth—for were they not going to get a change from the monotony of sea life, and, at the same time, provide themselves with the means of unlimited indulgence in more or less vicious enjoyment for the remainder of their lives?—and I noticed, with impotent anger, that, having at length arrived, as they supposed, at the goal of their villainous schemes, with the wealth which was to be the reward of their treachery all but within their grasp, as they believed, the restraint which they had hitherto so rigorously imposed upon themselves was in a measure laid aside, and they began to reveal themselves, both in speech and in action, as the unscrupulous scoundrels that they were.

I paid no attention, however, to anything I saw or heard, leaving them to believe, if they pleased, that I regarded their behaviour as a simple ebullition of high spirits at the prospect of a little recreation ashore; and passing my sextant and other paraphernalia carefully down into the boat, quickly followed them and gave the order to shove off.

There were twelve of us, all told, in the boat; she was therefore pretty deep in the water. Notwithstanding which, so eager were the men to get at the treasure, that in less than ten minutes from the time of leaving the ship we were once more in the creek, and pulling toward its head or north-eastern corner, at which point I had noticed on the preceding evening that the timber appeared to be growing more thickly and heavily than elsewhere, and where, consequently, the task of penetrating it for any distance would involve the greatest labour and consume the most time.

As we drew near the shore at this point I observed—what had escaped my notice on the preceding evening—that a small stream of beautifully clear, crystal water came brawling down through a steep, narrow ravine, and discharged itself into the creek exactly at the spot for which we were heading, and I at once resolved to avail myself of its presence as a means of deluding the men into the belief that they were working at the right spot.

Accordingly, when the boat grounded upon the beach, I ordered everybody out of her, with the picks and shovels, and set all hands to work cutting pegs and long slender rods, under the direction of the boatswain, retaining Forbes and San Domingo, the negro, as assistants in my own especial part of the work. Within ten minutes, the fellows had cut all the pegs and rods I could possibly require; and then, looking carefully and anxiously about me, I at length fixed a stout peg, with the nicest accuracy, in the sand at its junction with the grass, and exactly at the edge of the stream. Then I sent men here and there with long wands, which I made them hold exactly perpendicular on the ground, adjusting their positions with the most finicking precision, until I had wrought them all firmly into the belief that the whole of this labour was gone through for the purpose of finding the exact spot where the treasure lay buried. Finally, I set out by compass, and indicated, by means of two long slender rods stuck upright into the sand, a line that would take them straight into the bush where it was thickest and most impenetrable, and told them to cut a straight line in that direction, exactly two thousand yards in length from a peg which I had driven at the margin of the bush.

This task I entrusted to Rogers and the six other men, who struck me as being the blackest sheep of the flock; while, with Forbes, Joe Martin, Barr, Mckinley, Christianssen, and San Domingo, I took the boat, with a sufficient supply of axes and shovels, and made the best of my way to the southern side of the small islet upon which the treasure was said to be hidden.

Upon our arrival at the desired spot, my impression of the preceding evening that it was entirely overgrown was fully confirmed, it proving to be literally impossible to find a place where a landing could be effected without first clearing away the scrub. There was this difference, however, between the growth on the islet and that at the spot where I had left the boatswain and his party at work, that whereas the latter consisted almost exclusively of huge trees, the former was composed largely of scrub, with only a few trees here and there, so that it would not be nearly so difficult to penetrate as the other. It was evident indeed to me at a glance, now that I had the full light of day to aid me in my inspection, that the growth upon the islet was of much more recent date than that upon any part of the main island in sight from that spot; a fact which tended to confirm my previous suspicion that at the time of the burial of the treasure the soil of the islet had been bare, or nearly so, of arboreal growth.

The growth, however, was there now, and it constituted a very formidable difficulty, for how was I to identify a point exactly one thousand feet south of the obelisk rock, unless I could move freely over the ground for the purpose of obtaining my precise bearing and distance?

Suddenly a brilliant idea struck me. Immediately opposite the point on the islet at which I wished to land, there was a

broad strip of sandy beach, constituting indeed part of the margin of the basin, of which the islet formed the centre. Would it be possible to make my measurements from that point? There could be no harm in trying, at all events, and we accordingly pulled across the water, landing at a part of the beach that looked eminently promising. The first thing was to determine the direction of a line running due south from the topmost pinnacle of the obelisk rock, and after a few trials with the compass, I got this. My next act was to erect a line perpendicular to this along the sandy margin of the basin, which I accomplished with the aid of my sextant, taking care to make this second line as long as the nature of the ground would allow. Then, driving a peg into the sand at the intersection of these two lines, and another at the farther extremity of my second line, I had a right-angled triangle, whereof the two pegs and the obelisk rock marked the angles. I had now only to measure very carefully my second line, which I did by means of a surveyor's tape measure, bought at Sydney for the purpose, and to take the angle between the perpendicular and the hypotenuse of my triangle, when I had the means of calculating all or any of the elements of the triangle that I desired. In this way, then, I ascertained that the pinnacle of the obelisk rock was exactly six thousand four hundred and seventy-seven feet due north of the peg I had driven into the sand to mark the intersection of my two lines. Then, returning to this same peg, I sent Forbes away to the islet in the boat, with instructions to set up one of the oars, with a white pocket-handkerchief attached to it, on the shore of the islet at the precise spot I should indicate to him by signal. This spot I arranged to be exactly in line with the peg and the obelisk rock; all three points, therefore, were in one straight line, the bearing of which was due north and south, while its northern extremity was the obelisk rock. My next task was to take an angle to the oar from the peg at which I had taken the angle to the obelisk rock, which enabled me to determine that the oar was three thousand eight hundred and two feet from the intersecting peg, and consequently two thousand six hundred and seventy-five feet from the obelisk rock. This completed all the data I required; for I had now only to drive a bold, conspicuous staff into the sand in place of my intersecting peg, and another into the ground on the islet where the oar now stood, and by cutting back into the scrub for a distance of one thousand six hundred and seventy-five feet toward the obelisk rock, using these two staves as guides to keep their line straight, the workers would reach a spot exactly a thousand feet south from the obelisk rock; or, in other words, the hiding-place of the treasure. The two guiding-staves were soon fixed, and then, leaving Forbes to superintend the operations of Joe, Barr, and Mckinley, I replaced my instruments in the boat and, with Christianssen and San Domingo at the oars, paddled on board the barque for the purpose of bringing Sir Edgar and the whole of his party on shore, in order that they might indulge in a run on the beautiful sandy strand of the basin, and enjoy a nearer view of the entrancing loveliness of this exquisite gem of the Pacific.

Chapter Sixteen.

The Finding of the Treasure: and what followed.

Knowing that there was work enough to occupy the party on the islet for probably the next two days, I did not consider it necessary to keep a watch upon their labours, but left them with Forbes in charge, and joined the Desmond party in a ramble over the island. This, by following the ravines, the bottoms of which were comparatively free from undergrowth, we found less difficult of accomplishment than we had anticipated; and although the toil of clambering up the steep acclivities, and over the smooth boulders that in many places encumbered the way, proved rather trying to our unaccustomed limbs, we nevertheless managed to make our way to the summit of "the Nose," as we called it, from whence we obtained a superb panoramic view of the entire island. That the place was uninhabited we could now no longer doubt; for although from our lofty standpoint we had the whole surface of the island spread out like a map beneath us, there was nowhere any break whatever in the dense vegetation which flourished so luxuriantly on the rich soil; nothing whatever to indicate the existence of cleared and cultivated patches, as there certainly would have been, had the island been inhabited. Nor did we observe any sign or trace whatever of animals of any sort; birds seemed to be the only living creatures inhabiting this lovely spot, and they appeared to swarm in thousands wherever we happened to come upon a comparatively open space. Fruits of several kinds abounded on the island, among the most abundant being bananas, mangoes, breadfruit, and cocoa-nuts. We were also fortunate enough to come upon several granadilla vines, the product of which was just ripe, and we accordingly loaded ourselves with as many of these delicious fruits as we could carry.

Our return journey was effected by a somewhat shorter route than that which we had followed on our outward way, and eventually we hit upon a ravine down which brawled a small stream of deliciously sweet crystal-clear water, following which we came out upon the margin of the basin at the point where Rogers and his party were working. Despite the intense heat and a perfect plague of mosquitoes the fellows were toiling as if for life, and had already succeeded in clearing a line of fully a hundred feet in length. I critically examined their work, pronounced it all right, and we then went on to the islet, Sir Edgar and I discussing by the way the distracting question of how the crew were to be dealt with in the event of our finding the treasure. The question seemed to resolve itself into this—that the men must either be taken away in the ship, or left on the island; and if the former, they would certainly have to be taken as prisoners, since, if free, they would assuredly seize the ship, even if they had to murder me in order to accomplish their purpose. As prisoners, however, they would be worse than useless; they would be a continual menace and source of anxiety. Sir Edgar consequently agreed with me that I should be fully justified in leaving them—or, at all events, the worst of them—behind; and this I at length determined to do; watching my opportunity to divide them up into small parties, upon some pretext, and making prisoners of them in detail; thus minimising the risk of a fight and its too probable accompaniment, loss of life. There would be no likelihood whatever of the rascals starving in such a land of plenty as the island had proved to be; they could not possibly suffer any very serious discomfort in so genial a climate; and, the treasure once secured, it would be no difficult matter to arrange for their speedy rescue. This matter settled, I felt somewhat easier in my mind, and now only required an opportunity to discuss and arrange the details with Forbes and Joe.

On reaching the islet we found that here, too, wonderful progress had been made, the party under Forbes having already cleared a line through the scrub of very nearly four hundred feet in length. This was due to the fact that they had hitherto encountered no trees in the actual line of their work, though several had been very narrowly missed. It was apparent, however, that on the morrow they would be less fortunate; for which I was by no means sorry, as it

would lengthen the duration of the work, and afford me a better opportunity for completing my plans. That same evening, after dinner, Forbes, Sir Edgar, and I discussed the matter in detail, and finally completed certain arrangements that appeared to us to promise a fairly satisfactory solution of the whole difficulty. On the following day I found an opportunity to communicate to Joe the pith of these arrangements—which were to be put into operation as soon as ever the treasure, if found, should be safely placed on board the barque—and he cheerfully undertook to maintain a constant watch for my signals, and to be ready for action whenever I should make them.

The next three days passed uneventfully away, the men working perhaps not quite so hard as they had at the outset, but still making fairly good progress. The party on the islet had reached to within eighty feet of their goal when they knocked off that night; and now, for the first time, I think, I began to fully realise the momentous character of the issues that were probably to be decided within the next twenty-four hours. Would the treasure be found? Hitherto it had never occurred to me to seriously reflect that there might possibly be an unfavourable reply to this question; but now that only a few short hours lay between me and certainty, I suddenly began to comprehend how much depended upon whether that reply should prove to be Yea or Nay; and an almost uncontrollable impatience to have the matter definitely decided took possession of me, rendering sleep that night an impossibility. But, even with the impatient, though time may lag upon leaden wings, he passes at last; and the morning at length dawned upon me with my nerves quieted and steadied by exhaustion and the reaction from the night's intolerable excitement.

As it was confidently expected that, if the treasure really existed, and still reposed in its alleged hiding-place, it would that day be found, the ladies determined to go on shore to witness its disinterment, taking the nursemaids and children with them in order that the latter might enjoy what would probably prove to be their last opportunity for a ramble on the lovely island. Accordingly, the party being a large one, both gigs were manned, and all hands of us, even to the cook and steward, went ashore, leaving the ship to take care of herself; the wind being a gentle breeze from the eastward, or somewhat off the land, with a fine, settled look about the weather. Rogers and his party resumed their usual work at the head of the basin; and Forbes, with his gang, vigorously attacked the narrow belt of scrub that still interposed between them and their goal.

It happened, however, that this bit of scrub was more thickly dotted with trees than any other portion that they had yet met with, so that it was four o'clock in the afternoon before a very careful final measurement assured us that the most laborious part of our task had come to an end. The ground, however, was still covered with *débris*, which had to be cleared away before the actual digging operations could be commenced, and this occupied fully another hour. By this time the evening shadows had begun to climb up the hillsides; nevertheless the men seized their picks and shovels, and, with renewed energy, began to turn up the ground.

They toiled thus for an hour, by which time they had excavated a hole some three feet deep in the centre, and I had actually, with great reluctance, given the word to knock off, when Barr, driving his pick deep into the ground, where he intended to leave it that night, struck upon something harder than soil.

“Hurrah, boys,” he exclaimed, “here's something at last! Stick to it, and let's see what it is before we leave it.”

At it again they accordingly went, with such desperate vigour that the perspiration literally poured *off* their arms and down their necks, and in a few minutes they succeeded in laying bare the top of a solid timber chest, strongly bound with iron. They were very anxious to get this chest out of the ground, there and then; but on attempting to clear the earth away from round about it, it was found that the chest was only one of several others all packed closely together, so that it would be necessary to reach one of the outer chests before any of them could be conveniently moved. We were consequently compelled to content ourselves that night with the knowledge that we had found *something*, and to wait until the next morning to ascertain the value of our discovery.

The following sunrise found us once more *en route* for the shore, this time provided with a couple of spare studding-sail booms to act as sheers for the more convenient hoisting out of the chests, together with such rope, blocks, etcetera, as we should require for the purpose. The size of the chests, however, was such as would probably tax the strength of the entire party to handle them, and I was therefore reluctantly compelled to call in the assistance of Rogers and his party.

Even thus reinforced, it soon became apparent that a heavy task lay before us, and it was not until the boatswain was piping to breakfast that the first chest was successfully broken out and raised to the surface.

Breakfast was soon over that morning, and then the question arose, how were such ponderous chests to be conveyed to the ship? They measured, roughly, about two and a half feet square, and were so heavy that eight men—all who could conveniently get round one of them—could not raise the weight from the ground, much less carry it along a narrow path cumbered with stumps and prostrate trunks of trees. Greatly as I disliked such a proceeding, it seemed



AT LENGTH, HOWEVER, THE FIRST CHEST WAS BROKEN OPEN. Page 301.

that there was no alternative but to break open each chest, and contents piecemeal to the boats; and this course was therefore performed.

convey its

The task of merely breaking open the chests proved to be one of no ordinary difficulty; for they were constructed of solid oak, nearly three inches thick, so well made, and so strongly bound with iron, that I could not help surmising that they must have been the chests in which the Spaniards had originally stowed the treasure, and specially made for the purpose. They were black with age; but the timber was perfectly sound, while the iron bands, though more than half eaten away with rust, were still stout enough to give us an immense amount of trouble.

At length, however, the first chest was broken open, and was found to contain sixty-four bricks or ingots of solid silver! They were arranged in four tiers of sixteen bricks each, exactly fitting the chest, and each brick weighed about a quarter of a hundredweight. Each chest, therefore, if all contained the same precious metal, would represent the value of sixteen hundredweight of silver. How many chests there were we did not yet know; but it was evident that there were several. Some said there were eight or nine, but I thought there must be more, judging by the way in which they were arranged in the ground.

The men were now divided into two working parties, one of which, under my supervision, carried the silver to one of the boats, while the other, under Forbes, proceeded to break out and open another chest. The contents of one chest I considered a sufficient load for the gig, and accordingly, as soon as this amount had been placed in her, we shoved off for the ship; my crew consisting of Joe, the Norwegian, the negro, and an American named Barr. On arriving alongside the silver was simply passed up the side and pitched down the after-hatchway upon the ballast, for the present.

The ladies, who had elected to remain on board this day on account of the heat, were so filled with excitement and delight at the sight of the silver and the news of our find, that they could no longer remain quietly where they were; they must needs go ashore once more and see all this wealth brought out of the ground; and accordingly, upon our return passage, they went with us, taking the maids and children with them.

On our arrival at the islet we found the second gig awaiting us, with her cargo in her, which the other party had just finished loading; so we left the one boat, and took the other, treating this cargo as we had the last; and so the work went merrily on until the men's dinner-time, by which time we had raised and transported eight boxes of silver. And it had by this time been ascertained that there were eight more still to be dealt with!

A hurried meal was snatched, and the work was resumed, three more of the chests being disposed of by three o'clock in the afternoon. Then another surprise met us. The next chest contained *gold* instead of silver; the ingots being only nine in number, somewhat larger than the silver ingots, and weighing, as nearly as we could estimate, about one hundredweight each. Each of these gold ingots was neatly wrapped and sewn into a covering of hide. On our return from the ship, after conveying this precious cargo on board, we were met with the news that two other chests, since opened, also contained gold; and, not to detain the reader necessarily, it eventually proved that the remaining cases, two in number, likewise contained the same precious metal. The total find thus consisted of eleven chests containing seven hundred and four ingots of silver, and five chests containing one hundred and thirty-five ingots of gold.

All through the long, hot afternoon the work went on with unremitting energy, for it soon became apparent that darkness would be upon us before the last of the treasure could be moved. I was just completing the transfer of the third chest of gold to the ship when the sun sank in a perfect blaze of splendour below the horizon, and a few of the brighter stars were already twinkling in the zenith when we ranged up alongside the other boat at the landing-place upon the islet.

As I stepped out of the light boat into the loaded one, and directed my crew to follow, one of the men—an Irishman, named O'Connor—touched his forehead in the approved shell-back style, and observed—

“Av ye please, sor, Misther Forbes was sayin’ would ye be so kind as to sthep along to the houle afore ye makes your next thrip to the ship? He’s afther wantin’ to shpake to ye.”

“Oh, very good,” said I; and, stepping ashore, I directed Joe to go across to the other side of the basin to fetch the ladies and children, who had crossed earlier in the afternoon, and now stood waiting to be conveyed back to the ship, and then went groping my way along the dark, uneven path toward the hole. The man O'Connor and somebody else—who it was I could not distinguish in the gloom—were stumbling along in front of me, and making very poor headway, I thought, for I quickly overtook them. They were in my way, working along as they were, two abreast, for the path was very narrow; so I said to them—“Here, let me pass, you two; I am in a hurry!” They stepped aside without a word, one to one side of the pathway and one to the other; and as I passed between them one of them cried, “Now!” and, before I could even so much as think, they both flung themselves upon me and bore me to the ground, one of them springing upon me from behind, with his arms round my neck and his knee into the small of my back, while the other dashed himself upon his knees on my chest, and gripped me by the throat by one hand, as he pressed the cold muzzle of a revolver to my temple with the other.

“A single worrud or a movement, and I’ll pull the thrigger on ye, as sure as death!” ejaculated O'Connor, between his set teeth, as he tightened his grip upon my throat. “Now, Bill, feel ov his pockets and take his barkers away, av he has anny, while I hould him. Now, listen to what I’m tellin’ ye. The others—that’s Misther Forbes and the gintleman—is already tuk, so ye needn’t be expectin’ any help from thim; and as we’ve got such a hape of goold and silver out ov this houle, we’re goin’ to be contint wid it, and intind to take the thriflin’ liberty of borryin’ the ship to carry it away wid us; you can have the rest yourselves, and much good may it do ye. Ah, that’s right, Bill,” as the latter extracted a brace of loaded revolvers from my jacket pocket; “just feel, while ye’re about it, av he has a knife, and take that from him, too. Now, are ye sure that’s all?” as the other man—who now proved to be Rogers—took my knife away also. “Very well. Now, captin dear, ye may get upon your feet; but—understand me—av ye attimpts to lay hands upon either ov us, the other’ll shoot ye through the head widout waitin’ to say, ‘By your lave.’ Arrah, now, it’s kilt he is, I do belave!” as the fellow rose from my prostrate body and saw that I made no movement—for all this time he had kept so tight a hold upon my throat that he fairly strangled me, and, though I still, in a dreamy way, heard him speaking, my strength had entirely left me, and I was scarcely conscious of my surroundings.

“I’ll fire a shot to let the others know that it’s all right, and then we’ll have to carry him as far as the boats,” remarked Rogers. “Perhaps a dip in the water may bring him round.”

Such extreme measures, however, proved unnecessary; for, my throat once released, my senses began to come back to me, and by the time that we had reached the shore of the islet I was once more able to stand.

Arrived here, I was compelled to enter the empty gig, and was carried across to the opposite shore of the creek, where the ladies still remained; my order to bring them across having been countermanded in a whisper by one of the men, the moment that I had turned my back. On reaching the other side I was ordered out of the boat, a loaded revolver being exhibited as a hint to me to hasten my movements; but, as I stumbled forward over the thwarts, Joe offered me the support of his arm, murmuring in my ear, as I stepped out on the sand—

“Cheer up, cap’n! This here’s a most unexpected move, and no mistake; but the ship ain’t gone yet; and, from what I heard passin’ among the others, just now, afore you come up, I ain’t by no means sure as they’ll leave to-night. Some of ‘em is that greedy that they wants to stop and have a shy at the other treasure; and if they does, there’s no knowin’ what may happen betwixt now and then. And if they makes up their minds to go, / don’t go with ‘em. I’ll slip overboard, and swim ashore, if there’s no other way of joinin’ you.”

I had only time to murmur a word of thanks for this expression of sympathy, when he left me and returned to the boat, which immediately shoved off for the islet.

The ladies—who, with the nursemaids and children, still stood waiting to be conveyed to the ship—saw, by the actions of the men, that there was something amiss, and now approached me, inquiring anxiously what was the matter. Of course, I had no alternative but to explain to them that the men had risen in mutiny, and had seized the ship; and, although I made as light of it as I could, it was a sorry tale at best that I had to tell them. I was still in the midst of my story when the phosphorescent flash of oars became visible in the black shadow of the islet, and presently the outline of the boat, telling dark upon the starlit surface of the still water, was seen approaching. As she drew near, the voice of Rogers came pealing across the water—

“Shore ahoy! just walk a bit farther back from the water’s edge, there, or we shall be obliged to fire. We’re about to land Sir Edgar; and if there’s any sign of a rush at the boat, we shall shoot to kill. So if you don’t want to be hurt, you’d better stand well back.”

“Hold on there a moment,” I answered back, disregarding the threat. “Surely, men, you do not intend to abandon us here, unarmed; without a shelter from the weather, and with only the clothes we stand up in?”

“Oh, you’ll do well enough, I don’t doubt,” replied Rogers, brutally. “You don’t want arms, because there’s nobody nor nothing here that’ll hurt you; you don’t need clothes, because the climate’s so warm that you can do without ‘em; and, as to a shelter, why, we’ve left all the axes and shovels ashore; you’re welcome to them, and if you can’t build a house with such tools as that, you deserves to go without. There’s plenty of fruit, and plenty of good water, so you won’t starve; and, lastly, there’s a chance for you to get all the treasure that’s in that other hole—if we decides that we don’t want it ourselves.”

“What?” I exclaimed, indignantly, “after stealing my ship and my treasure from me, will you not go to the small trouble of passing the ladies’ and children’s clothing into a boat, and sending it—”

"Well, if you *won't* stand back, take that!" interrupted Rogers; and as the word left his lips there was a flash, a sharp report, and a bullet went singing close past my ear.

At the same moment I felt my arm seized by a white figure that unexpectedly appeared at my side, and Miss Merrivale's voice, rendered almost inarticulate by scorn and anger, exclaimed—

"Leave the cowardly brutes alone. You *shall not* humiliate yourself further by stooping to ask a favour from them, even on our behalf; nor shall you wantonly expose yourself to the risk of being murdered in cold blood. I will not have it!"

With which, she dragged me unresistingly to the spot where her sister and the children stood, and then, without a word of warning, flung herself prone upon the sand and burst into a perfect passion of tears.

"Nay, do not give way thus, I pray you," I said, as I knelt beside her and raised her prostrate form in my arms. "Our plight is bad enough, I grant you, though not so bad that it might not easily be very much worse. And if you will only try to be brave and patient we will soon arrange matters so that you shall not be altogether destitute of comfort and —"

"Do you think I care for my own comfort?" she interrupted me, passionately. "No! as that wretch said, we are not likely to starve; and I suppose you and Edgar will be able to build such a shelter as will suffice to protect us from the sun and rain. It is not that; it is—oh, the base, ungrateful, contemptible creatures, to treat you like this! I am *sure* they will be punished for it."

"Ay, that they will!" exclaimed Sir Edgar, cheerily, as he joined the group. "Well, Emmie darling—and you, chicks—will it be a very dreadful hardship for you all to sleep on this beautiful, soft, white sand to-night? To-morrow we shall have light enough to work by, and I have no doubt that before the end of the day Saint Leger and I will have contrived to stick up a hut or something to cover you. Why, children, this is a regular genuine picnic, in which we shall have everything to do for ourselves, and you will be able to help, too. It will be glorious fun for you, will it not?"

And so on. Never in all my life before had I seen a man take a heavy, bitter blow so bravely as this gallant gentleman did. He knew—for he had already had time to fully realise it—all that so cruel an abandonment meant to him and his; yet his courage never faltered for a moment; not the faintest glimpse did he allow to appear of the anguish that must have at that moment been wringing his heart. No; his voice, his manner, and his whole bearing were inflexibly dominated by the determination to cheer and encourage the dear ones who were now absolutely dependent upon him, and him alone, for support and encouragement to meet and face this sudden, dreadful reverse of fortune. As I looked at and listened to him in astonishment and admiration I felt ashamed at my own despondency—at the condition—temporary only though I believed it to be—of complete helplessness to which the blow had reduced me; and in contemplating such indomitable courage I not only learned a lesson that I trust has benefited and toned my whole life since then, but I also gathered fresh courage and resolution to face the responsibilities and demands of the immediate present.

Chapter Seventeen.

The Recapture of the Barque.

Under the soothing influence of her brother-in-law's admirable manner, Miss Merrivale soon recovered her wonted serenity of manner; while Lady Emily seemed never to have lost hers, so absolute was her trust and confidence in her husband, and his power to strengthen and reassure her. In less than half an hour, therefore, after the departure of the boat we were all sitting in a circle upon the sandy beach of the basin, regaling ourselves upon some of the fruit that the ladies had gathered earlier in the day, and discussing, meanwhile, the possibilities of our situation.

Notwithstanding the brutally callous behaviour of Rogers, I still hoped, and Sir Edgar fully believed, that a majority of the men on board would be sufficiently swayed by motives of humanity to insist upon bringing us ashore our clothing, and at least a few of the more obvious necessities of life, such as a spare sail, a coil or two of line, a few nails, a hammer, a saw, a trifle of crockery, some cooking utensils, and, above all, our fowling-pieces and some ammunition. Miss Merrivale, however, was positive that they would not; and as the time dragged slowly by without any sign of the reappearance of the boat, I began at last to fear that she would prove to be right.

A brightening in the sky to the eastward, over the crest of the lofty heights that towered above us in that direction, at length announced the rising of the moon, and, at the same time, made us aware that some four hours had elapsed since sunset. As the mild radiance of the silver luminary met my gaze I started to my feet, and said—

"There is the moon rising, and we shall soon have light enough to make our final dispositions for the night. Meanwhile, as you are all perfectly safe here, I will endeavour to make my way round to the beach abreast of the ship, and see what they are about on board. If they intend to go to sea to-night they will soon be making a move to get under way; and if they do *not*, there may yet be a chance for us to do something, with Martin's assistance."

"What!" exclaimed Sir Edgar, "do you still believe in that fellow's fidelity?"

"Yes," said I, stoutly. "Do not you?"

"Well," answered Sir Edgar, "I *did*, most implicitly. But since the shameful business of this evening I must confess that I have begun to entertain doubts of him. All your plans and precautions, you see, have been framed upon the information with which he has supplied you; and if he really were in the men's confidence, and anxious to serve you, how came it that he was not aware of the *coup* which the men have so successfully executed, or, if aware of their

intentions, why did he not make an opportunity to warn us? I confess that, to me, it appears very much as though the men had all along feared some suspicion on your part, and had employed him to throw you off your guard."

"No," said I, meditatively, "no; I cannot think that. There are certainly one or two circumstances connected with his behaviour that I cannot at present fully understand, and perhaps we shall now never know whether he was really faithful or not; but I still believe him to be so, and I feel confident that, if he cannot help us in any other way, he and Forbes between them will devise some means for procuring our speedy rescue. Now, I am off for the beach. You, I suppose, will remain here; you can scarcely do better to-night, and it is desirable that I should know exactly where to find you again without difficulty, should any unforeseen contingency arise."

While I was speaking, Miss Merrivale had risen to her feet impetuously, with all the eager, determined look in her face of one who is about to say or do something of a very decisive character; but if such was her intention she checked herself, seemingly, at the moment when the words were about to escape her lips, and contented herself by saying instead—

"Pray be *very* careful what you do, captain; remember that we are all now utterly dependent upon *you!*"

I assured her that she might depend absolutely upon my discretion—smiling, rather bitterly, meanwhile, at the reflection that, throughout this business at least, my discretion had been by no means brilliantly conspicuous—and so, with a bow, left the little party clustered together upon the white sand; a curious, yet pretty, picture to any one who could have been suddenly transported from the surroundings of civilisation to that lonely island of the Pacific.

Making my way rapidly along the margin of the basin, close to the water's edge, where the sand was firm and the walking consequently easy, I soon reached the projecting point that marked the junction of the creek with the river, and bent my steps along the narrow beach toward the estuary. For some distance in this direction the only sound to break the silence of the night was the loud, continuous, indescribable *chirr* of the countless myriads of insects that haunted the recesses of the jungle; but at length, on rounding a bend in the river, I caught sight of the barque, still at anchor, and at the same moment became conscious of a new sound that, as I progressed toward the mouth of the river, gradually resolved itself into the tones of human voices uplifted in an attempt at melody. The thought that struck me, as this sound first met my ear, was that the men had decided to go to sea forthwith, and were now heaving short the cable—an impression that at once determined me to push on and watch the departure of the sweet little craft. But as I worked my way cautiously along toward the open beach, keeping well within the shadow of the trees, in order that my movements might not attract attention—for the moon, somewhat past the full, now rode high enough in the cloudless sky to render the most minute objects distinctly visible—I bethought me that the mutineers could not be getting their anchor, or I should by this time hear the sharp clank of the windlass pawls mingling with their song; moreover, I was now near enough to distinguish that the singing was not the wailing, monotonous chant and rousing chorus of a "shanty," but a confused medley of sound, as though all hands were singing at once, and every man a different tune; and I at once came to the conclusion that the fellows had secured some liquor and were indulging in a carouse. Should this be indeed the case—and I fervently hoped that it was—they would probably not desist until every man had become helplessly intoxicated, as they had doubtless secured Forbes so effectually that there would be no possibility of his recovering his freedom until some one chose to release him; while they would scarcely deign to give a thought to us on shore, with the knowledge that the ship was distant at least half a mile from the nearest point of the beach, and that both gigs were securely swinging at the davits.

As this conviction dawned upon me a feeling of renewed hope and fierce exultation leapt up in my heart, and my brain at once became busy with plans for the recovery of the ship. For one of my few accomplishments was that I was a fast and tireless swimmer, and—provided that there were no sharks in the neighbourhood—the half-mile of water that intervened between me and the *Esmeralda* was no more formidable an obstacle than had it consisted of firm, level roadway. Judging, however, by the present vigorous character of the singing that came pealing across to me from the ship, the opportune moment for such an attempt as I meditated was yet a good hour distant, and I therefore determined to stroll leisurely back to the party at the creek, and acquaint them with the new phase of affairs.

When at length I rejoined the group, I found that during my absence Sir Edgar had so far completed his arrangements for the night that the maids and the children were comfortably bestowed upon the warm, yielding sand, fast asleep, with their heads and faces well shielded from the rays of the moon by a small tent-like structure, consisting of a shawl stretched over an arrangement of sticks cunningly bound together with tough, pliant monkey-rope, while Lady Emily slumbered peacefully by her husband's side, with his arm about her waist, while her head rested upon his shoulder. Miss Merrivale, however, and Sir Edgar *were* still awake, and as I approached them the former started to her feet and, with her finger upon her lips as she pointed to the little group of sleepers, murmured softly—

"How long you have been! And what an eager, glad look there is in your face! What has happened? I am sure you have good news to tell us."

"Good, thus far," I admitted, "that the ship has not yet gone to sea; and I believe that she will not now go until tomorrow. The men appear to have obtained possession of some liquor, and are indulging in a royal carouse—if one may judge by the singing and noise that I heard going on aboard when I was down at the beach—and I am not without the hope that ere the night be much older the fellows will have drunk themselves into a helpless state of intoxication. Now, if upon my return presently to my late post of observation I should have reason to believe that such a thing has happened, I shall swim quietly off to the ship, and endeavour to get on board her without disturbing anybody; and should I be able to manage this, my next task will be to discover and liberate the mate. This once accomplished, it shall go hard with us if we do not succeed in retaking the ship from the drunken rascals, and repaying them in their own coin."

"By Jove, Saint Leger, you are 'grit all through,' as the Yankees say. It is a bold scheme, and I believe you will succeed," exclaimed Sir Edgar, admiringly. "I would that I could accompany you," he added wistfully, "for in such an

undertaking every additional man on your side is of incalculable value. But, unfortunately, my swimming powers are not equal to anything like such a stretch of water as that between the shore and the ship, and I should only be an embarrassment instead of a help to you, unless, indeed, I could contrive to do the distance with the aid of a log to float me."

"No," said I; "I am infinitely grateful to you, Sir Edgar, for your readiness to assist in this undertaking; but it is not to be thought of. Your place is manifestly here, by the side of your family, so that, should events turn out awkwardly, they may not be left on the island without a defender. We will not, however, contemplate any such unfortunate ending as that to the adventure; on the contrary, let us rather look forward hopefully to the prospect of your all breakfasting on board as usual, to-morrow morning. You understand, of course, that should I succeed, my first act, after securing the mutineers, will be to come ashore in a boat for you."

"Do you suppose we do not know that?" exclaimed Miss Merrivale, impetuously. "But it is a desperately dangerous enterprise; and if—oh, *why* is it that women are such shamefully useless creatures in crises like these? If our strength were only equal to our courage—"

"You could not, even then, be more absolutely irresistible than you now are," I interrupted, with a low bow, and a poor attempt at gallantry. "Your turn will come, however, be assured of that," I continued; "for, whichever way this project of mine turns, you will have ample opportunity for the display of both courage and helpfulness. Should we ever succeed in recapturing the ship it is more than probable that I shall sometimes be compelled to call upon you all to afford help in such matters as the steering of her, and so on. But it is full early yet to talk like this."

"So far as I am concerned, your call shall not be in vain!" exclaimed the spirited girl, with a flash of her eyes that thrilled through me like an electric shock. "If I have not the physical strength of a man, I have at least as resolute a will, which is no mean substitute for it. And now, good-bye; for I see that you are longing to get away. You will be careful, though, will you not? and not run any unnecessary risks?"

I took the hand that was so frankly extended to me, and gave it a hearty squeeze; gazed for an instant into the eyes that dwelt so anxiously upon mine; and, immeasurably cheered and encouraged by the interest and sympathy that I read there, turned away quickly and stepped briskly out toward the mouth of the creek once more.

The time I had taken to walk to and from the basin appeared to have sufficed the carousers to drink themselves well on toward a condition of oblivion; for when I again reached the beach opposite the ship, the singing had subsided into an occasional maudlin howl that, in its turn, soon afterwards yielded to the stupefying effects of the liquor, and a dead silence fell upon the ship.

I did not wait, however, for this final stage of insensibility to arrive among the mutineers; but kicked off my shoes, and laying them, with my hat and jacket, upon the sand, immediately upon my arrival at my former post of observation, at once entered the water and started to swim with long, steady, deliberate strokes toward the ship. The water was perfectly calm and smooth, as well as deliciously warm; so that, despite the leisurely character of my exertions, I made excellent progress, and, in a shorter time than I had thought possible, found myself within the deep shadow of the ship's hull. Everything was by this time as silent as death on board, save for the slight jerk of the wheel-chains and the sob of the water along the bends and about the rudder as the ship swung gently upon the long, low ground-swell, the edge of which just caught her as it crept up from the westward across the mouth of the small estuary where she lay at anchor. So still and silent was the breathless night that the volume of sound raised by the insects on shore rang in my ears almost as distinctly out here as it had done when I stood upon the beach; it was, however, so far mellowed and softened by the intervening distance that it was possible to hear other sounds distinctly *through* it, even when they were so faint as the slight, almost imperceptible creak of the yard-parrels aloft, and the light *flap* of a coiled-up rope striking against the bulwarks with the slight, easy roll of the ship. I was therefore particularly careful not to make the faintest splash, as I drew up alongside, lest the unaccustomed sound should reach the ear of and startle some individual not yet completely overpowered by the drink he had swallowed. Fortunately for me, the gangway ladder had not been hauled up, and I was consequently free to board the ship well aft, thus greatly lessening the risk of detection; I had, therefore, only to wait until the roll of the ship brought the ladder within my grasp, seize it, and draw myself noiselessly out of the water. This was precisely the course that I followed; and I had already drawn myself up clear of the water when there occurred a rush and swirl immediately beneath me, and I received so smart a blow that I narrowly escaped being knocked off the ladder, as a large shark sprang half his length out of the water after me and fell back with a terrific splash, loud enough, I am sure, to have been distinctly heard on shore, had there been any one on the beach to hear it. The brute had evidently been lurking under the ship's bottom—attracted there, doubtless, by the refuse thrown overboard from time to time by the cook—and had only become aware of my presence just in time to make a rapid, ill-directed rush that had very narrowly missed me. Oh, how fervently I thanked Heaven, as I sprang up the side beyond the reach of a possible second rush, that the necessity for a cautious approach to the ship had rendered my movements so noiseless that the great fish had not discovered me until too late!

That the sudden and violent disturbance alongside had, however, not passed unnoticed on deck was immediately apparent by the appearance of a human head over the rail by the fore-rigging, only to disappear instantly, however, and make its reappearance at the gangway. As it did so, a voice that I instantly recognised as Joe's murmured, in low, cautious tones—

"Is that you, cap'n?"

"Yes, *Joe*," I replied, with equal caution, as I paused with my eyes on a level with the rail. "How is it on board? Have the rascals drunk themselves stupid?"

"Ay! that's just exactly what they *have* done," answered Joe; "and I was just creepin' quietly aft to cast Mr Forbes loose, by way of a start, when I heard the row alongside. How did it happen, sir? Did you slip and fall back'ards?"

"No," I returned; "it was a shark that rose at me from under the ship's bottom, and a narrow escape I have had of it; the brute struck me with his snout, as he sprang out of the water, and all but knocked me off the ladder."

"A shark?" ejaculated Joe, in dismay. "My word, sir, you *have* had a narrer squeak, and no mistake! You stop where you are, sir, out of sight, for a minute, while I goes for'ard and just sees whether the rumpus have roused any of 'em. I'll be back in a brace of shakes."

So saying, Joe sauntered carelessly away forward again; loitered aimlessly about the foredeck for a few minutes; sauntered quietly aft again past the larboard gangway, and so round abaft the mainmast and capstan until he rejoined me again.

"All right, sir," he whispered. "They ain't all asleep; but every mother's son of 'em is that helplessly drunk we can do anything we likes with 'em. Now, sir," as I stepped in on deck, "if you likes to go to your cabin and shift into dry clothes, I'll go and cut poor Mr Forbes adrift. I am afraid he ain't none too comfortable, for it seemed to me as the beggars was passin' the seizings pretty taut when they lashed him up to-night."

"Is that so?" said I, indignantly. "Then we will go and cut him adrift before doing anything else, Joe. He may be enduring cruel torments all this time. Where is he?"

"Locked in his own berth, sir," answered Joe. "And that reminds me, I don't know who's got the key."

"They may have left it in the door," I hazarded. "Who locked him in?"

"Rogers and Moore, sir. They are the two ringleaders in this here business."

We had by this time reached the mate's cabin; but found the door locked, and the key missing. As I tried the door-handle I thought I heard a groan from the interior; so, without wasting time to search about for the key, I set my back against the bulkhead of the passage and my foot against the door by the lock, and the next moment we had the door open. A shapeless object upon the floor of the cabin, indistinctly seen in the semi-darkness which pervaded the place, proved to be the mate, lying just as he had been carelessly flung in there, hours before, with his wrists and heels lashed together behind his back. The poor fellow was in a dreadful state, having lain there all those hours in excruciating agony from the cruel pressure of the lashings about his limbs, which, with brutal carelessness, had been drawn so tight as to have completely stopped the circulation of the blood in his extremities. His limbs were now swollen almost out of recognition; he had bitten his lower lip right through in the extremity of his torment; his beard was drenched with bloody foam; and our efforts to release him occasioned him such exquisite agony that he fainted under our hands. A sharp knife, however, speedily freed him from his bonds, after which Joe and I gently chafed his swollen wrists and ankles until the circulation of the blood was restored; but it was nearly an hour before the poor fellow was able to move with any degree of freedom.

At length, however, he pronounced himself ready for action; when, going on deck, and arming ourselves with a heavy brass belaying-pin each, the three of us proceeded forward, resolutely determined to stand no nonsense whatever from anybody who should presume to interfere with us.

It was, therefore, a distinctly unfortunate circumstance for Rogers that he should, a moment or two previously, have awakened from his drunken sleep and staggered to his feet with, apparently, some confused notion of taking a look round the ship and assuring himself that all was right; for, coming face to face with Forbes and *Joe* as they rounded the corner of the galley, he was promptly felled by the latter with a blow from a belaying-pin that must have caused him discomfort for many a day afterwards, while its immediate effect was to stretch him out upon the deck senseless and bleeding. The sound of his fall disturbed one or two of the rest—all of whom were sprawled out inertly upon the foredeck, in the midst of empty and overturned bottles and pannikins—just sufficiently to cause them to raise their heads and grumble out a few unintelligible words; but we had no difficulty whatever with them, and in less than half an hour we had the whole of them securely bound, hand and foot, and lying at our mercy. Having reduced them to this condition, and disarmed them, we distributed them about the deck fore and aft, lashing each man separately to a ringbolt, cleat, or other convenient mooring in such a way that no man might be within another's reach—for I had heard before now of men releasing each other by working at the lashings with their teeth—and then left them to recover their sober senses at their leisure, while we busied ourselves about other matters.

Our first act was to lower the port quarter-boat, get into her, and pull ashore to the creek, where we found Sir Edgar and his party pretty much as I had left them; he and Miss Merrivale being the only two still awake. Our arrival was greeted with a shout of delight from the baronet that effectually awoke the sleepers; and the whole party quickly tumbled into the boat, Sir Edgar and Lady Emily vying with each other in the heartiness of their congratulations at our success and the eagerness with which they asked for details of the adventure. Miss Merrivale, on the contrary, was strangely silent, contenting herself with a warm clasp of the hand at the moment of our reunion; and presently, when we had shoved off again for the ship, I noticed that she was furtively crying. I concluded that the reaction from the long hours of suspense that she had just passed through had proved rather too much for her nerves, and so prudently appeared to take no notice whatever of her little break-down. We soon reached the ship, and, upon my solemn assurance that they might do so with absolute safety, the rescued party at once retired below to their respective cabins; Miss Merrivale only lingering behind for a moment to say—

"I have no words to express how glad and thankful I am that you have been successful in your hazardous enterprise. You are a brave man, as well as a—But,"—with a sudden, merry smile, "I will not say more, lest I make you vain. Good night!"

I was beginning to feel a bit puzzled at this young lady's manner, which seemed to have undergone a subtle, indescribable change within the last twelve hours that was as incomprehensible as it was pleasant. It was just then, however, scarcely a suitable moment for speculation upon such an inscrutable subject as the department of a lovely and charming woman to a simple sailor like myself; so I dismissed the matter from my mind and turned to the

consideration of other subjects, less agreeable, but calling more imperatively for my immediate attention.

The first thing was to summon Forbes and Joe to a council of war for discussion of the question what was to be done with the mutineers. There were some of them that it would be obviously impossible to retain on board the ship with the least chance of safety to ourselves; but I scarcely believed they could all be equally bad, and I was in hopes that, upon consultation with Joe, I should learn that we might trust a sufficient number of them to enable us to make the voyage to Valparaiso in safety, where I thought it probable I might be able to pick up an entire new crew, without very much difficulty. On submitting the question to him, however, Joe gave it as his very decided opinion that there were only three out of the eleven mutineers whom it would be in the least degree prudent to trust; those three being the negro, the Swede, and Barr, one of the Americans. These three we accordingly gave the benefit of the doubt, for the moment; and, that point settled, we next proceeded to draw up a list of such articles as we deemed absolutely necessary to the welfare of the men whose conduct had rendered it imperative that we should maroon them.

After some consideration, the contents of this list resolved themselves into: each man's personal effects in their entirety, including weapons and ammunition, the latter, however, to be securely screwed up in a stout wooden case, so that it might not be got at and used against us whilst effecting the transfer of the mutineers to the shore; a saw, hammer, chisel, and an assortment of nails; half a dozen barrels of beef, and the same of bread; a half-chest of tea, a few pounds of coffee, and some sugar; a cock and three hens; some cooking utensils; a little crockery; matches; and an old main-course; which, with the axes, shovels, picks, rope, blocks, and spars used in securing the treasure, and which still remained on shore, ought, we considered, to furnish them with the means to make themselves fairly comfortable until they should be taken off. This important matter decided, the next thing was to get everything up and passed into the boat—a task which fully occupied us until daylight; by which time the effects of the carouse showed signs of passing off, and the men began to awake in a measure to a consciousness of their situation. A few of them—Rogers, Moore, and O'Connor especially—gave vent to their indignation and disgust in a continuous flood of the vilest language, mingled with blood-curdling threats of the vengeance that they would wreak upon us some time in the future; but the rest accepted their impending fate with sullen stoicism. We, meanwhile, comfortably conscious that, for the present at least, they were utterly powerless to fulfil any of their threats, or otherwise work us any evil, went composedly on with our work; first conveying to and landing all the baggage on the sandy beach of the creek, and then ferrying the marooned men ashore, with their hands securely lashed behind them. We had determined to land only eight of them; and when this had been done, and we were all ready to leave them, we cut the bonds of the last man ashore, and left him to free his companions at leisure, thus effectually insuring ourselves against any trouble from the marooned party at the last moment. Then, having shouted to them a parting promise that we would make known the fact of their presence on the island to the first British man-o'-war we met with, together with the cause of their being left there, we paddled quietly on board again, and set to work to provide ourselves with a much-needed breakfast.

Chapter Eighteen.

A Pacific Hurricane.

Our meal over, the three remaining prisoners were released, and offered their choice between being landed on the island to join the other men, and returning to duty. I reminded them that their conduct in having aided and abetted the more active among the mutineers to seize the ship rendered them guilty of the crime of piracy—a crime punishable with death—and that it still remained with me to clap them in irons, if I pleased, and keep them prisoners until an opportunity should arrive to hand them over to justice, charged with that offence. I added that as it appeared, however, that they, the three men in question, seemed only to have passively consented to the deed of the others, I had no desire to be severe with them; I was anxious rather to give them an opportunity of retrieving their character; and would willingly do so could I but feel assured that, separated as they would be from their more guilty comrades, they would henceforward serve me faithfully, I said that if they were prepared to do this, I, on my part, was willing to forgive them their share in the mutiny, and to treat them as though the incident had never occurred. I warned them, however, that unless they were fully prepared, not only to solemnly pledge themselves to fidelity, but also to faithfully fulfil that pledge, it would be infinitely better for them to elect to be landed on the island to take their chance with the rest; for I assured them that, should they take the pledge of fidelity, and afterwards break it, I would, upon the first symptom of insubordination, clap them in irons and hand them over to the authorities, as pirates, at the first port we might happen to touch. This address had precisely the effect upon the fellows that I desired; the mention of the word "piracy," and the reminder of the penalty due to that crime, thoroughly frightened them; while my promise, on the other hand, of forgiveness as the reward for faithful service in the future, had all the reassuring influence that I intended it to have; and upon the conclusion of my lecture, they with one accord begged my pardon for what had already happened, and most fervently promised that I should have no cause of complaint against them in the future.

This important matter settled thus far to my satisfaction, I sent Barr and Christianssen aloft to loose the fore-topsail and topgallantsail, while Joe and the negro performed a similar duty on the mainmast, both parties receiving instructions to cast off the lashings from the staysails on their way down. While this was doing, Forbes lay out upon the jib-boom and loosed the jib and fore-topmast staysail, I busying myself, meanwhile, in casting loose the mizzen. Presently, Joe hailed from aloft that the men on shore had made their appearance on the beach; and, upon looking in that direction, I saw the whole party of them gathered there, close to the water's edge, intently watching our movements. Just then Sir Edgar made his appearance on deck, and, with a cheery "good morning," laughingly declared that he intended to ship for the voyage to the nearest port as an "honorary seaman," and was ready to enter upon his duties at once. I, of course, thanked him for this kind proffer of his services, assuring him that, short-handed as we were, it would be in his power to render us invaluable assistance; and, the hands at that moment coming down from aloft, we sheeted home the topsails, and got the yards to the mastheads.

Nothing now remained but to loose our hold upon the ground, and make a start. This we could, of course, at once do

by simply slipping the cable; but an anchor is altogether too useful an article to be needlessly thrown away. Many a good ship has driven ashore and gone to pieces for want of an anchor that has been slipped and not replaced; I was, therefore, very much averse to slipping in the present instance without at least *trying* to get the anchor. On putting the question to the others, Forbes had no doubt of our ability to do it, while the rest expressed their perfect readiness to try; we accordingly manned the windlass, and—San Domingo starting a lively “shanty”—walked the barque up to her anchor almost without an effort. Having got the cable “up and down,” we next ran up the fore-topmast staysail, and then went to the fore-braces and trimmed the head-yards for casting the ship to starboard. Just then, and in the very nick of time, Miss Merrivale came on deck, looking as bright and radiant as the morning itself; and I at once impressed her as helmswoman, stationing her at the wheel, and briefly explaining how she was to act upon the receipt of certain signals from me. She seemed quite proud at the idea that she could be really useful, and took her station at the wheel with a heightened colour and sparkling eyes, which, with her spotless white dress, trimmed with dainty lace and light-blue ribbons, her broad-brimmed hat set jauntily upon the heavy coils of her dusky golden hair, and casting a delicate shadow upon her lovely face, her hands and arms encased in long loose gloves, and her delicate feet shod in small brown shoes, made her, to my mind, the sweetest, loveliest picture that my eyes had ever rested upon. So irresistibly charming, indeed, did she look, that I with difficulty forebore from telling her so, plump and plain; and so, to avoid the committal of such an impertinence, was constrained to rush for’ard and add my weight to that of the others at the windlass handles in their efforts to break out the anchor. Fortunately for us, our windlass was an exceptionally good and powerful one; but, on the other hand, the holding-ground proved to be exceptionally tenacious; and, for a long five minutes, the cable stood straight up and down, rigid as a solid bar, defying our utmost efforts to get so much as a single additional pawl. Then an opportune puff, with a little more weight in it than the soft breathing off the land that had hitherto reached us, struck the broad expanses of our topsails, and, with a sudden jerk, the ground broke away and the anchor came home.

“Hurrah, lads! she’s away; heave, for your lives; heave, and raise the dead!” vociferated Forbes.

The windlass pawls clanked merrily, the chain came rattling in through the hawse-pipe, and the ship, gathering sternway, began to pay off with her head to seaward. At the right moment I signed to Miss Merrivale to put the wheel hard up, while Forbes and I sprang aft to the braces and swung the yards; the ship halted, hung stationary for a moment, and then, gathering headway, gradually swept round until we had brought the island upon our starboard beam and were gliding along under the lee of its western shore. Our new voyage had begun.

The marooned men had all this time been intently watching our movements from the beach; and, from their excited actions and the way in which they closed up in a circle when they saw our canvas drop from the yards, it was apparent that they were engaged in a heated discussion of some kind. Presently, when they saw us man the windlass and heard the clink of its pawls, I observed O’Connor break from the conclave, dash his cap down upon the sand, and somewhat hesitatingly enter the water, as though about attempting to swim off to us. Whereupon, I sprang upon the rail, and, putting the whole power of my lungs into the shout, hailed him to go back, as there were sharks in the bay. I had to repeat this warning two or three times, however, before he seemed willing to heed it; and it was not in fact until the anchor was broken out of the ground and the ship was seen to be canting to seaward that he turned back and rejoined his companions. When we last saw them they were still standing upon the beach, watching our departure, and shouting to us with gestures that were eloquent of threats and curses, though we were too far distant to catch the words that they hurled after us.

Meanwhile, during the progress of these operations I had been taking counsel with myself as to the most desirable course to pursue under the circumstances in which we found ourselves. My original intention had been to proceed to Valparaiso in quest of a crew, but that intention had been arrived at under the impression that it would be necessary only to leave three or four men behind us on the island. Joe’s opinion upon the matter had, however, altered all this, and had necessitated our going to sea with a crew of only seven men, including Sir Edgar, whose assistance I felt we could only claim under circumstances of exceptional necessity. This reduced us to two watches of three men each, who might indeed suffice to handle the ship under easy canvas and during fine weather, but who could do very little with her should we happen to fall in with a heavy gale, or, still worse, a downright Pacific hurricane. Then, too, the prevailing winds in that part of the world are easterly; which placed Valparaiso well to windward, and rendered it even more difficult to fetch than San Francisco. The latter port, however, I had no desire whatever to visit under the circumstances, with such a precious cargo on board, and three men at least whose tongues it would be impossible to bridle. By the time, therefore, that the ship was fairly under way, I had come to the conclusion that my best plan would be to make for the Sandwich Islands, which were only some sixteen hundred and fifty miles distant, in a north-westerly direction, and might therefore be easily reached in a fortnight, if all went well with us. An important advantage attaching to this plan was that Honolulu, if it did not lie directly in my road to China, was nearer it than any other port, and I still considered it very essential that, in order to avoid inconvenient questions, I should take home a cargo of some sort, which might as well be tea as anything else; and although I had never visited the Sandwich Islands, I thought it probable I should there be able to pick up at least a sufficient number of men to carry us comfortably to the Canton river. As soon, therefore, as we were fairly clear of the island I set the course for the island of Oahu; the wind being at the time a four-knot breeze, well over the starboard quarter. This done, I relieved Miss Merrivale at the wheel, leaving Forbes and the other four men to continue at leisure the operation of making sail.

Meanwhile the question had arisen, “How was the cooking to be done?” and the natural reply to this seemed to be, “Set the darkie to do it.” This would have been all very well but for my passengers, who, it occurred to me, might possibly have a prejudice against having their food handled by a black man. I therefore laid the matter before Sir Edgar, who immediately consulted with his wife; and the ultimate result was that one of the maids very good-naturedly undertook the work, with San Domingo as cook’s mate, to do all the dirty work, while the other maid volunteered as steward. I was greatly distressed in my mind lest all these inconveniences should prove a serious annoyance to my good friends in the saloon; but on mentioning the matter to Lady Emily, she quickly and kindly reassured me by declaring that they looked upon the whole thing in the light of an adventure or experience of a novel kind to be made the most of.

"Besides," she added, "a little inconvenience and privation will do us good by teaching us to appreciate our comforts more nearly at their proper value when we get them again."

The weather looked fine, and the barometer stood high; I therefore had no hesitation whatever about packing sail upon the ship; and as everybody worked with a will, it came to pass that by noon we had not only got our anchor secured, but had also clothed the ship with every stitch of plain sail, from the royals down. Forbes was not satisfied even with that, and would have gone on to studding-sails; but I considered enough to be as good as a feast. Studding-sails are rather ungainly things to handle in a quickly freshening breeze, if one happens to be at all short-handed. I therefore determined to have nothing to do with them—the more resolutely that, as we drew away from the island, the breeze strengthened until we were reeling off our nine knots by the log.

This exceedingly satisfactory state of affairs prevailed for exactly forty hours from noon of the day upon which we left the island; the breeze remaining so steady and true that we were not called upon to touch tack, sheet, or halliard during the whole time. There was nothing, in fact, to do but simply to steer the ship; and we were already beginning to flatter ourselves that we were not only to be favoured with a pleasant passage, but that we were going to accomplish it in about half the time that I had allotted to it. Such a magnificent opportunity was not to be wasted; and I accordingly took advantage of it to have the ballast cleared away right in midships, and the gold and silver stowed there equally on each side of the keelson, and carefully concealed with matting and a quantity of dunnage; after which the ballast was trimmed back over it and everything left shipshape against the time of our arrival in port.

In hoping for a sufficiently long continuance of fine weather to carry us without break or interruption to Honolulu, however, we were reckoning without our host; for about four o'clock in the morning of our second day out, the wind began to fail us, and by eight o'clock it had fallen to a stark, glassy calm. There had been but a moderate amount of sea running, and this soon went down, leaving only a long, oily swell, upon which the ship rolled with a quick, jerky, uneasy movement. The sun rose clear and brilliant, with every promise of a fine and scorchingly hot day; but when I went on deck after breakfast to take my sights for the longitude, I noticed that the sky had lost much of its brilliant colouring, while the sun hung in it a white, shapeless blotch, instead of the dazzling orb that had risen a few hours before. This, of course, might mean nothing worse than heat; but when I went below shortly afterwards to work out my sights, I saw that the mercury had fallen a little. This, too, might only mean heat, with possibly a smart thunderstorm a little later on in the day; but, short-handed as we were, I deemed it best to be on the safe side; and accordingly, having worked out my sights, I returned to the deck, and all hands of us went to work upon the canvas, clewing up and hauling down all our lighter sails, until we had stripped the ship to topsails, courses, fore-topmast staysail, jib, and mizzen. At this stage of the proceedings another glance at the barometer showed that the mercury was still shrinking in the tube, while the atmosphere had assumed a hazy appearance that rendered it difficult to distinguish the horizon. There could no longer be any doubt that a change of weather was impending, although there was nothing at present to indicate very precisely what the character of the change was to be. We therefore went aloft, three of us on the foremast, and three on the main, and beginning with the royals and working downward, snugly stowed everything that we had previously hauled down. It was whilst we were thus engaged that an increasing uneasiness in the motion of the ship first became apparent; and looking about us for the cause, we became aware of the fact that a cross swell had begun to gather, and was slowly creeping down to us from the north-west—the sure precursor, Forbes affirmed, of a stiff blow from that quarter. In this opinion I fully agreed; still there was at that moment nothing of a menacing character in the aspect of the sky, beyond an increasing thickness of the atmosphere; and I was therefore hopeful that we should have a sufficiency of time given us to complete our preparations for the worst that could happen, before it came upon us.

The furling of the light canvas was neither a very long nor a very laborious job, and in less than an hour we were all once more on deck. The north-westerly swell had by this time gathered sufficient weight to render itself distinctly perceptible even to the eye, and, the ship having swung round broadside-on to it, she was rolling in a fashion that set all the trusses, parrels, and bulkheads creaking, the yards jerking, the patent block-sheaves squeaking, the heavy canvas flapping, the reef-points pattering, the cabin-doors rattling, and the wheel-chains clanking, so that, with the heavy wash of water along the bends and under the counter, and an occasional clatter of crockery in the pantry, quite a small Babel of sound was raised about us. The motion of the ship, however, though more violent, was not so awkward and uncomfortable as it had been, doubtless in consequence of the young swell killing the old; and still there was no sign whatever of an immediate breeze. But another look at the barometer showed that the mercury was still falling, and now at a more rapid rate. Fully convinced, therefore, that something rather more serious than a mere thunder-squall was brewing, we now went to work with a will, and, having first furled the mizzen, hauled up the courses and stowed them, leaving the ship with nothing showing but her two topsails and the fore-topmast staysail, which—as our topsails were patent-reefing—left us practically prepared for almost anything that might happen.

The haze had by this time thickened overhead to such an extent that the sun showed in it as a mere white, rayless disc, the light of which seemed to be gradually dying out; and by the time that noon had arrived the atmosphere had become so obscure that the horizon was no longer distinguishable, and I, therefore, lost my observation for the latitude. At one o'clock, when our neat stewardess summoned me below to luncheon, the mercury was still sinking, which, with the slow progress of the change that was taking place, assured me that when the outburst came, it would be something a little out of the common. Luckily, we had plenty of sea-room, and a thoroughly staunch little ship under our feet; I therefore looked forward to the impending conflict with tolerable equanimity.

At length, just as I had completed my hasty lunch, there occurred a sudden but perceptible darkening of the atmosphere which seemed to indicate that the expected change was now imminent, and, springing up the companion-way to the deck, I found a most extraordinary scene awaiting me. The thickness that had hitherto pervaded the atmosphere had vanished, as if by magic, leaving the air astonishingly clear and transparent right to the boundary of the horizon, and revealing a vast expanse of dense, livid, purple-grey cloud, which had overspread the north-western half of the heavens, and was at the precise moment passing over and shutting out the sun from view. The edge of the cloud was as straight and sharply defined as though it had been trimmed with a knife, and it divided the firmament into two almost equal portions, the larger of which was a beautiful expanse of clear, serene, unclouded blue; while the other hung livid and threatening above us, with the promise of a raving tornado lurking

within its black bosom. Immediately overhead the colour of this immense cloud curtain was a cold, slaty blue, from whence, as the eye travelled down its expanse toward the north-western horizon, the hue became darker until where it met the water it was as black as night; while, underneath it, the sea undulated restlessly, with the writhings of an angry serpent, showing a surface as lustreless and of the same colour as molten lead. Low down in the bosom of the cloud could be seen occasional palpitating quiverings, as though the fires within it were striving to burst their way through, and presently, quite at the horizon, a flash of lightning sparked vividly out of it.

"Are the topsail halliards all ready for running, Mr Forbes?" said I.

"All ready, sir," was the reply; and, turning away, the mate walked quietly forward, throwing the falls off the pins on his way.

A minute later I heard him telling Joe to stand by the fore-topsail halliards, and the rest of the men to lay aft to the braces, following them along the deck and stationing himself at the main-topsail halliards in readiness to let them run. At this moment Sir Edgar, with the two ladies and the children, came on deck and looked round with startled eyes upon the portentous scene; but, upon my earnest recommendation, the youngsters were at once sent below again, the ladies holding themselves in readiness to follow at a moment's notice. Sir Edgar, however, announced his determination to remain on deck, upon the chance of his becoming useful; upon which, Lady Emily, without saying a word, went below and brought up on deck not only her husband's, but also my own mackintosh coat—a little piece of thoughtful consideration for which I was deeply grateful, since the aspect of the weather was now such that I dared not leave the deck for a single instant.

Slowly the great cloud worked its insidious way athwart the heavens until nearly three-fourths of the firmament was obscured, yet still there was not air enough to have extinguished a burning match. Then, while the barque was lying helpless, with her head pointing directly toward the quarter from which we expected the outfly, a white mist suddenly appeared ahead, sweeping down upon us with the speed of an express train, its course along the water indicated by a long line of continuous white.

"Here comes the rain, at last!" exclaimed Forbes, turning to me and pointing ahead with one hand, as he grasped the fall of the main-topsail halliards with the other.

"Ay, and the wind with it," I answered him, as I sprang to the wheel and whirled it hard over.

"Let go your topsail halliards! Away below, ladies, for your lives; the gale will be upon us in less than a minute. Lay aft here, some of you, and round-in upon the larboard fore-braces! Mr Forbes, get the starboard fore-topmast staysail sheets aft and well belayed, if you please. Whew! here it is; hold on, everybody!"

The rain seemed to reach us a single instant ahead of the wind, dashing vertically down upon us, for just that brief period, not in drops, but in an overwhelming deluge that I verily believe must have drowned us had it lasted; then, as the hurricane reached us in a deafening medley of sound, the sheets of water were caught and swept horizontally along with a force that it was literally impossible to face without the risk of being blinded, while the barque gathered stern-way until the water was piled up level with her taffrail, and for a few breathless seconds I was firmly convinced that it would end in our foundering, stern-foremost. The good little ship was paying off all the time, however, and presently she had swept round until we had it fairly abeam, when she laid down to it until her lee lower yardarms were dipping in the water. Then, signing to the men at the braces to haul round the head-yards, I waited until she had lost her stern-way, when I shifted the helm, putting it hard up, and she began to draw slowly ahead. The danger was now practically over, for the ship continued to pay off, and presently she righted with a sudden jerk, and went foaming away before it, with the white froth level with her hawse-pipes.

The rain was by this time over, and while all was still thick as a hedge ahead and to leeward of us, the atmosphere astern was clear, save for the spindrift and scud-water with which it was heavily loaded along the water surface. The first mad fury of the outfly was past; but, even so, it was blowing harder than I had ever seen it blow before; so hard, indeed, that I wondered at the brave way in which the close-reefed topsails withstood the tremendous strain and drag of the ship upon them. So great was this strain that I began to entertain very serious fears for the masts; and, now that it was too late, deeply regretted that I had not stripped the ship entirely bare and faced the outfly under bare poles; and it would have been a positive relief to me to have seen both topsails go flying out of the boltropes. They still held on, however; and a little later, when Forbes, having at my request gone the round of the chain-plates, and subjected them to a careful examination, reported that he could see no sign of any of the bolts drawing, I began to hope that, after all, we might pull through without any very serious damage, especially as Joe almost immediately afterwards sounded the pumps and reported that everything was right below.

We had been scudding for about an hour when the sea began to rise, and by five o'clock in the afternoon there was a very high, steep sea following us, which I foresaw would soon become dangerous. I therefore determined to watch for an opportunity, and, if possible, heave the ship to before dark. As a preliminary to this manoeuvre. I ordered the fore-topmast staysail to be hauled down; and this having been accomplished without damage to the sail, two of the men—Barr and the Swede—lay out upon the bowsprit to stow it, under the direction of the mate. This, at the moment that the order was given, seemed a perfectly simple affair, and entirely free from danger; it unfortunately happened, however—just at the moment when the sail had been made secure and the men were on the point of laying in again, as Forbes subsequently informed me—that an unusually heavy sea overtook us and, catching the barque under her counter, raised her stern high in the air, slightly pooping us, while it buried her bows and bowsprit deep in the water. Standing at the wheel, I saw what was about to happen, and was in the very act of shouting a warning to the men to hold on, when the sea curled in over the taffrail, completely burying me for the moment; and when, a few seconds later, I was able to clear my eyes of water, both men *had vanished*, and Forbes was running aft, crying out to me that they were overboard. I looked astern, but could see nothing of either of them; nor, in the increasingly perilous situation of the ship, dared I leave the wheel even for the brief space of time requisite to cut adrift and throw overboard a life-buoy. Forbes, however, dashed aft and did this with most commendable promptitude; after which he,

with the assistance of Joe and San Domingo, lost not a moment in counter-bracing the yards, when we successfully brought the ship to on the larboard tack, with her fore-topsail aback. This done, and with Joe at the wheel, Forbes and I clambered into the maintop and peered long into the fast gathering gloom, in the faint hope that even yet we might catch sight of one or both of the missing men, and be able to do something to save them; but we never saw either of them again.

Chapter Nineteen.

In Dire Extremity.

The sudden loss of these two men was not only a terrible shock to us all, it was also a cruel misfortune; for, exclusive of Sir Edgar, it left only four of us to handle the ship. It is true that we were now as snug as it was possible to be, and in a condition to face almost anything that might befall us in the shape of weather; but when it again came to a question of making sail, or, still worse, being obliged to once more shorten sail, perhaps in a hurry, there would be a good deal of heavy labour, all to be done by four, or at most five men. It was, however, one of those deplorable accidents that are incidental to the life of a seaman; and, having in the mean time done all that was possible for the safety of the ship, it was useless to meet our troubles half way, and I therefore arranged that during the continuance of the gale, while there would be really nothing to do but to keep an eye upon the ship, the regular watches should be taken by the four of us in rotation, one at a time, which would thus allow the others plenty of time for rest against the moment when the utmost exertions of all would be once more demanded.

It was now drawing on toward six o'clock, and the aspect of the coming night was very threatening. The sky was completely overspread with a vast unbroken curtain of inky cloud, torn and shredded into a countless host of ragged, fantastic shapes that came rushing up from the northward and westward at headlong speed before the breath of the raving gale, while the air was thick and salt with the ceaseless pelting of the brine torn from the wave-crests, and swept along in a drenching, pitiless rain by the mad fury of the wind. The sea was rising fast, and already presented a formidable and threatening aspect as the towering liquid hills swept successively down upon the ship, froth-laced, and each capped by a hissing, roaring crest of milky foam that reared itself nearly to the height of our foretop over the weather-bow—so steep was it—ere the barque rose to and surmounted it in a smothering deluge of spray. Yet we were doing well; for although, under the tremendous pressure of the wind upon her two close-reefed topsails, the ship was heeled to her covering-board, while in some of her wild lee rolls she careened until her topgallant rail was awash and it became impossible to maintain one's footing on the deck without holding on to something, she looked well up into the wind, and rode the boiling fury of the sea as buoyantly as a cork. Her foredeck, it is true, from the knight-heads to well abaft the galley, was streaming with the water that incessantly poured over her weather-bow in a torrent of spray; but abaft that the decks would have been dry but for the drenching spindrift.

The darkness fell upon us with a suddenness that was almost startling. I had been for some time—ever since we had hove-to, *in fact*—narrowly watching the ship to see how she met the seas; but at length, finding that she was taking care of herself, I ordered Joe to lash the wheel, and gave him permission to go below and join the others at supper in the forecabin. Before finally releasing him, however, and assuming my solitary watch, I thought I would have another look at the mercury. I accordingly went below into the saloon, where the lamps were already lighted, glanced at the barometer and saw that the mercury was now stationary, chatted for a minute or two with the occupants of the apartment, and then went on deck again. When I left the deck a few minutes before, the horizon and the forms of the flying clouds were clearly distinguishable; but now, when I returned to it again, the blackness of impenetrable darkness was all round about me, relieved only by the ghostly light of the pale sea-fire in the foaming wave-crests, and in the tiny stars of phosphorescent light that went careering to leeward across the deck with every lee roll of the ship. It was a weird and awe-inspiring sensation to stand there in the blackness upon the wildly heaving deck, and watch the irresistible, menacing onrush upon the ship of those furious mountain surges, capped with ghostly green fire, with the deafening shriek and din of the gale in the unseen rigging overhead resounding in one's ears—a sensation well calculated to bring home to a man his own nothingness in presence of the power and majesty of Him Who causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; Who maketh lightnings for the rain; Who bringeth forth the wind out of His treasuries; Who hath His way in the whirlwind and the storm; Who holdeth the sea in the hollow of His hand. And this feeling was in nowise lessened—nay, it was rather intensified—by the thrill of exultation I experienced at the reflection that man, puny as is his strength compared with the mighty forces of Nature, has been endowed by his Creator with an intellect capable of devising and framing a structure so subtly moulded and so strongly put together, that it is able to face and triumphantly survive such a mad fury of wind and sea as then raged around me.

Throughout the greater part of that night the gale continued to blow with unabated fury; but about three o'clock on the following morning a rapid rise of the barometer commenced, and some two hours later a single star twinkling brightly for a moment through a small rift in the hitherto unbroken cloud-rack overhead gave welcome assurance that the worst of the weather was now over—an assurance which was shortly afterward strengthened by a slight but unmistakable decrease in the violence of the wind. Then a few more stars beamed mildly down upon us for brief but lengthening intervals; and finally, about half an hour before the time of sunrise, the great pall of cloud broke up into squadrons of tattered streamers speeding swiftly athwart the sky, which, away down in the eastern quarter, was rapidly paling before the dawn. Anon the pallor became tinged with a chilly hue of yellow, against which the mountainous sea reared itself in vast sharply defined ridges of blackest indigo, paling, as the eye travelled round the horizon toward the western quarter, into a deep blue-grey, capped with lofty, curling crests of pallid foam. Quickly the cold yellow along the eastern horizon became flushed with streaks of angry red; the flying squadrons of rent grey cloud became fringed along their lower edges with dyes of purple and crimson; and presently the upper rim of the sun's disc, copper-hued and fiery, gleamed through the flying rack low down upon the horizon, flashing a cheerless ray of angry orange across the mountain waste of waters, changing it into a heaving, turbulent surface of sickly olive-green.

It was as dreary, cheerless a sunrise, I think, as I had ever seen. The air, still full of spindrift, was, despite our position only a few degrees north of the Line, chill enough to set one shuddering; the maindeck was all awash with the water that flew incessantly over the weather-bow and poured aft with the heaving of the ship, breaking into miniature cascades among the booms lashed in the waist, and over the lengths of cable stretched along the decks from the windlass to the chain-locker, swirling round the pumps and the foot of the mainmast, and gurgling and sobbing in the lee scuppers; the weather bulwarks were streaming with water; even the topsails were dark with wet: miniature showers were blowing away to leeward off the top of the galley and forward deck-house; and the few dry spots that were to be found here and there about the decks in sheltered places were white with encrusted salt. It was still blowing heavily; the ship was plunging furiously, and rolling so wildly that it was impossible to maintain one's footing without clinging to something; the continuous raving of the wind among the maze of spars and rigging, especially when the ship rolled to windward, was most depressing to listen to; and the appalling proportions of the vast liquid mountain ranges that, with dreary, persistent, remorseless monotony, came sweeping down upon us from the northward and westward, piling their hissing crests high around us, completed a picture which, for dreary sublimity, I had never seen equalled.

I was tired, and wet, and cold; for, notwithstanding our arrangement of the watches, I had been on deck, off and on, the whole night. I was not sorry, therefore, when Forbes came on deck to relieve me at eight o'clock, thus affording me an opportunity to shift into dry clothes before sitting down to breakfast. We were rather a small company that morning, Sir Edgar and Miss Merrivale being the only members of the saloon party who felt equal to the putting in of an appearance; and after breakfast I was obliged—rather unwillingly, I confess—to go on deck again to secure an observation of the sun, which observation, when worked out, showed that we were nearly thirty miles to the eastward of our proper position. This ascertained, I retired to my cabin, and, flinging myself upon the bunk, "all standing," instantly sank into a dreamless, refreshing sleep.

It appeared to me that I had not been in my berth more than five minutes when, about a quarter of an hour before noon, Forbes called me in order that we might together take the meridian altitude of the sun; and I was no sooner on my feet than it became apparent that the ship's motion was by no means so violent as it had been when I lay down; which was sufficiently accounted for by the information imparted to me by the mate that the gale had broken, and that in another hour or two the weather would probably have moderated sufficiently to permit of our filling away upon our course. This news was fully confirmed by the general aspect of affairs when I reached the deck; for the sun was now shining brilliantly in a cloudless sky, and the air was genially warm; while the wind, though still blowing heavily enough to justify us in retaining the close reefs in the topsails, had abated its violence so far that it now blew steadily, instead of beating upon the ship in gusts of headlong fury. The sea, moreover, though it still seemed to run as high as ever, was no longer so steep as it had been; the great mountains of water moving more slowly, and carrying a good wholesome slope on their lee sides, that enabled the ship to ride them easily and comfortably without the provocation of a constantly recurring feeling that each great menacing wall of water was about to overwhelm her.

We had taken the sun, and made it eight bells, and I was on the point of leaving the deck again to work out the sights in my own cabin, when, while exchanging some remarks with Forbes, I thought I caught a momentary glimpse of *something*—what, I knew not—as the ship hung poised for an instant upon the crest of an unusually heavy wave. It was but the barest, most fleeting glimpse; for before I could direct Forbes's attention to it by so much as a word, we were plunging headlong down the weather slope of the wave, with our horizon on either hand bounded by a hissing crest that was rearing itself as high as our maintop, and the barque taking a weather roll of such portentous extent that both of us instinctively made a dash for the mizzen shrouds and clung to them for dear life in anticipation of the coming—and correspondingly abnormal—lee roll; while the roar of the bow wave and the wind aloft created such a din that I could not have made myself heard even had I been foolish enough to have attempted it. But I was confident that I had seen something; and when the ship reached the bottom of the abyss, where we on deck were becalmed, and the roar of the surge under our bows had died away, I mentioned the matter to the mate; so that when we were swung aloft again both of us were eagerly on the lookout for the object. As almost invariably happens, however, after the passage of an usually heavy wave, the two or three that now succeeded were only of moderate height, and higher crests each time intervened between us and the spot where the object was last seen; it was also probable enough that the object, whatever it might be, would be sunk in the trough of the sea just at the moment when we happened to be hanging on a wave-crest; and it thus happened that several minutes elapsed without my again catching sight of it. To cut the matter short, therefore, I handed Forbes my sextant to hold; and, seizing a favourable opportunity, sprang into the weather main rigging and swarmed aloft as far as the maintop, from which elevation I knew that I should soon sight it if it were still above water.

It was not until I was halfway up the shrouds that I fully realised how heavily it was still blowing, or how violent still was the motion of the ship. With every lee roll that we took I was involuntarily forced to cling with all my strength to the rigging, for it seemed to me that unless I did so I should infallibly be pitched head-foremost into the top; while when the ship rolled to windward the pressure of the air upon my body was so great that I was literally jammed hard and fast against the rigging, unable to move hand or foot. This was even more apparent when I reached the futtock-shrouds and was surmounting the edge of the top, the wind sustaining me so completely that I am confident I might have relaxed my hand-grasp for several seconds without the slightest danger of falling. However, I gained my lofty perch at last, and, lying prone in the top in order that I might see under the foot of the fore-topsail, soon again caught sight of the object.

It was distant about seven miles from the ship, bearing about north-north-east by compass, and floated very low in the water; a circumstance which, from the thick mist still overspreading the surface of the water, rendered it impossible at that distance to determine precisely what it was. It looked as much like a dead whale as anything else, and had I felt quite certain that it was really this, I should of course have troubled no more about it. But there were moments when, probably from some slight change in its position with regard to us, the resemblance I have mentioned ceased, and the conviction forced itself upon me that, whatever it might be, it was *not* a whale, living or dead; and at length, to set the matter at rest, I determined to fill upon the ship and get a nearer look at it. I

accordingly descended to the deck, and, Forbes rousing out Joe and San Domingo, we all went to work, and, with some difficulty, succeeded in setting the fore-topmast staysail without splitting it, after which we filled the fore-topsail and headed the ship for the mysterious object.

We were now close-hauled upon the larboard tack, with the object a bare three points upon the lee bow, and it soon became apparent that, as we were making fully that amount of leeway, it would require some rather fine steering to fetch it without breaking tacks—an operation which I was particularly anxious to avoid, short-handed as we were. Forbes, however, was at the wheel, and as he was a splendid helmsman, it was pretty certain that if the thing could be done he would do it.

When luncheon was announced we had drawn up to within about four miles of the object; but so heavily was the sea still running that, even at that distance, it was only occasionally that we could catch sight of it, presenting now, as looked at through the ship's telescope, the appearance of a large fragment of floating wreck.

The news which I took to the luncheon table, that a mysterious floating something of considerable size had been sighted ahead, and that we were making for it, had a very stimulating effect upon the occupants of the saloon, who, enveloping themselves in mackintoshes, followed me on deck when I rose from the table, with an eagerness born of the longing for some occurrence to break the monotony of and make them forget for a time the wearisome pitching and rolling of the ship, the monotonous, unceasing clank and jar of the cabin-doors on their hooks, the continuous creaking of the bulkheads, the thump of the wheel-chains on the deck, the never-ending wash of the water, and the howling of the wind in the rigging. And, despite the merciless buffeting of the wind, and the ceaseless drenching showers of spray that flew over us, the change from the saloon to the deck was unanimously voted an improvement; for it involved a transition from a close, oppressive atmosphere to an exhilarating breeze, redolent of the strong salt odour of the brine, and bracing by reason of its very violence; while the brilliant sunshine, sparkling upon the deep, windy blue of the vast mountain surges that surrounded us, and converting every spray-shower, into a gorgeous rainbow, constituted an ever-changing picture of rich and splendid colour and wild, tumultuous movement that was not to be easily forgotten. I thought Miss Merrivale had never looked so lovely as she did then, enveloped in a thin, soft, silky-looking mackintosh, with a dainty little, close-fitting hat upon her head, her beautiful hair all blown adrift and streaming, a long golden web of ringlets, in the fiery breeze, her cheeks flushed to a delicate pink with the rude buffeting of wind and sea, and her eyes fairly blazing with excitement and exhilaration at the wild scene around her.

Our first glances were naturally directed ahead in search of the mysterious object for which we were steering, and it was quickly discovered about two miles distant, and a good point on the lee bow. To the unaided eye its character still remained uncertain, but a single glance through the ship's telescope now sufficed to satisfy us that it was a wreck, or a portion of one. It had all the appearance of a small craft, capsized; for the telescope enabled one to see a small strip of wet, black side showing above water, with a considerably greater expanse of copper-sheathed planking. But, even now that we had so greatly decreased the distance between us and it, there was still great difficulty in determining its precise character; for it was only when we and it happened to be upon the top of a sea at the same moment that it came within our ken, and those moments were comparatively rare.

As we continued to close, however, our glimpses of it became increasingly frequent; and at length, when we had approached to within half a mile, the heave of the sea having meanwhile flung it round into a more favourable position, it became apparent that it was a small craft of some sort—seemingly a brig—that had capsized, and now lay with her masts prone along the water, for we could now and then catch a glimpse of the spars, with the canvas still set, lifting a foot or two out of the water with the heave of the sea, only to settle back again the next moment, however. What interested us most keenly of all, however, and excited our profoundest astonishment, was the fact that a dark patch in her main rigging—for which I could not at first account—soon afterwards proved to be a group of men! for we presently saw one of them scramble along the shrouds until he reached the vessel's upturned side, and then—despite the heavy masses of water that were continually breaking over the hull—rise to his feet and wave something that looked like a man's jacket, by way of a signal, in answer to which I immediately ran our ensign up to the gaff-end.

The excitement of the fairer occupants of our poop was now intense, especially that of Miss Merrivale, who, in the extremity and oblivion of her enthusiasm, not only addressed me as "Jack," but also volunteered to do all sorts of impossible things by way of assisting in the rescue that she took for granted. But how was such a thing to be achieved? We were only five men on board the *Esmeralda*, all told, and what could our united efforts accomplish? We certainly could not launch a boat, even had we dared to hope that so small a craft would live in such a wild and fearful sea; for the lightest of our gigs—the only boat it would have been possible to launch, under the circumstances—would need at least four men to do anything with her in such weather, which would leave only one man on board to look after and handle the ship during the process of rescue—which amounted to a physical impossibility.

I was, however, determined to save the men, if it could be done; we therefore steered the barque as close up under the lee of the wreck as we dared, and backed our mainyard, with the brig's royal-mastheads showing just awash not ten feet to windward of us. It was an extraordinary and appalling picture that we now looked upon. The vessel—a brig of about one hundred and eighty tons—had been thrown over on her starboard side, and now lay submerged to about halfway up her hatchways, with her masts prone along the water, into and out of which they dipped and rose two or three feet with the wash of the sea and the roll of the hull. She was a wooden vessel, apparently American built, and was under whole topsails, foresail, spanker, and jib, which sufficiently accounted for her present predicament if, as seemed probable, she had been caught under that canvas in the outburst of the previous day. She had no quarter davits, and the chocks over the main hatchway—where the long-boat, and sometimes the jolly-boat as well, is usually stowed—were missing; but the gripes were still there, showing that the boat or boats that had been stowed there had evidently been washed away. There was, moreover, the remains of what had once been a gig on her gallows. She appeared to have been generously fitted up; for, as she rose and fell, we caught the flash of brass work about her skylight and companion, and when her stern lifted high enough out of the water a handsome brass binnacle, securely bolted to the deck, became exposed to our view. Lastly, huddled in her weather main rigging, about twelve or fifteen feet from the rail—where they were tolerably clear of the seas that constantly broke over the

vessel's upturned side—was a group of nine men, most of them bareheaded, clad in garments that clung to their bodies with the tenacity of clothing that has been soaked for many consecutive hours in water.

They were in a miserable and most precarious plight, indeed; and I could not help wondering how they had possibly managed to cling for so many hours to so insecure a refuge—assuming, of course, that the brig had capsized on the previous afternoon, as I surmised.

The first thing was to communicate with them; and this I first attempted by means of the speaking trumpet. But the roar of the wind and the wash of the sea, together with our drift—which was, of course, much more rapid than that of the wreck—rendered my voice inaudible; so it became necessary to resort to other methods. There happened to be a “bull-board” kicking about the poop; and setting this up on the skylight, where it could be distinctly seen, with its black face towards the wreck, I got a piece of chalk, and hastily wrote upon it the following words, one after the other, receiving a wave of the hand from those on the wreck in token that they had deciphered each word before I obliterated it and wrote the next:—

“Only—four—men—on—board—so—cannot—send—boat—Will—stand—by—and—take—you—off—if—possible.”

By the time that the last word of this communication had been written and acknowledged we were some distance to leeward of the wreck, and it became necessary to fill upon the ship once more. This done, the next matter for determination was the means whereby we were to get the people away from the wreck, and safe on board the barque—a problem which, had we been fully manned, would have proved sufficiently puzzling; while, circumstanced as we were, it seemed all but impossible.

At length, however, I hit upon a scheme that I thought might be worth trying; and we proceeded forthwith to put it into practical shape without more ado, since the unfortunate people on the wreck were in a perilously exposed situation, and evidently in such a terribly exhausted state that they might relax their hold, and be washed away at any moment.

There were, as I have already mentioned, nine men to be rescued. Now, the *Esmeralda* having been, ever since she was launched, a passenger-ship, was well found in life-saving appliances, life-buoys among the number, of which we carried no less than twelve; eight being stowed away in one of the cutters on the gallows, while the remainder were distributed about the poop, ready for immediate use.

The first thing done was to get up on deck two good stout warps, and bend them end to end, so that we might have plenty of length to work with; and the inner end of this long line was then made fast inboard at the fore-rigging. To the other end nine life-buoys were next securely bent, in the form of a chain, with a length of about a fathom between the buoys; and, finally, a long light heaving-line was bent on to the extreme outer end of the warp. The warp was then carefully coiled down on deck, ready for paying out; the buoys piled on the top of it; and the spare part of the heaving-line carried out to the flying-jib-boom end, where it was snugly coiled and stopped, ready for use.

Our preparations were now complete; and, having meanwhile been plying to windward, the helm was put up, and we wore round to return to the wreck. This operation provided work for us all, including Sir Edgar; and when at length we got the ship round upon the starboard tack we found, to our extreme vexation, that the circle we had made was so large that we should be unable to fetch the wreck. This was terribly annoying at a time when every minute lost might mean a human life; but we could do nothing to rectify the matter except stand on far enough upon the new tack to insure that when we next wore we should not again under-shoot our mark. And if it was vexatious for us, what must it have been for the poor fellows who, standing as it were within the very jaws of death, were anxiously watching our every movement?

To our eagerness and anxiety the minutes seemed hours; but at length we felt that we had reached far enough to justify another attempt; and upon getting the ship round again we had the satisfaction of seeing that we had measured our distance just right, and should be about able to fetch the wreck, with little or nothing to spare. As we approached the brig, the negro—who, now that he was separated from his late companions, proved himself to be not only a first-rate seaman, but also a very willing, good-natured fellow—most earnestly besought me to entrust to him the task of manipulating the heaving-line, vehemently asserting his ability to cast it further and straighter than any of the rest of us; and I accordingly deputed that duty to him, whereupon he laid out to the flying-jib-boom end and, placing himself astride the spar, outside the royal stay, clinched himself there in the most extraordinary manner by means of his feet and legs, and then calmly took the coil of heaving-line in his hand and held himself ready for a cast. The ease with which the fellow clung to the bare end of that dancing spar was a revelation to me; for the motion out there was, proportionately, as violent as it would have been in the maintop; yet there he sat, as composedly as though he had been in an easy-chair, while most white men would have found it difficult enough to maintain such a position with the aid of hands as well as feet, leaving out of the question any possibility of executing such a manoeuvre as that of throwing a line to windward against a whole gale of wind.

San Domingo thus safely established at his station, Joe and Sir Edgar placed themselves at the braces, standing by to back the main-topsail at the instant that I should give the word; while I climbed into the weather fore-rigging, as the best position from which to con the ship; and in this order we edged gradually and warily down toward the wreck.

Chapter Twenty.

The End of the Adventure.

Our situation, now, was everything that could be desired for the execution of the delicate manoeuvre that I contemplated, and only a few minutes elapsed from the time of my stationing myself in the fore-rigging when the critical moment arrived for us to attempt it. I accordingly signed to Forbes to put the helm down; which he instantly

did, lashing it fast; when he and I sprang simultaneously to the weather main-braces, to assist Sir Edgar and Joe in backing the main-topsail. This proved to be a tough drag for four men; but we managed to get the yards round far enough to lay the sail aback, when I once more darted forward into the fore-rigging to superintend the remainder of the work; Forbes returning to his station at the wheel, while Sir Edgar and Joe stood by the warp, in readiness to pay it out quickly, and to throw the life-buoys over clear of the rail.

Everything now depended upon the strength and skill of San Domingo.

The wreck, when I reached my post of observation in the rigging, was on our weather-bow, not more than twice our own length from us; and the barque, with her way already somewhat retarded by the backing of the main-topsail and the putting down of the helm, was slowly forging up to it, with her bows inclining toward the exact spot where the nine men were still huddled together in the main rigging, anxiously watching our approach and wondering what we were about to do. They saw that San Domingo was preparing to heave them a rope's-end; but that did not very greatly enlighten them until Joe and Sir Edgar each raised a life-buoy to the rail, and prepared to throw it overboard. Then they got an inkling of our intent; and a feeble shout went up from among them.

Slowly, and more slowly still, the barque continued to forge ahead; and I began to fear that, in my anxiety to avoid an actual collision with the wreck, I had backed my topsail a second or two too soon, and that we should not, after all, get near enough to her to accomplish the rescue. Still, we had not wholly lost our way; and foot by foot—or rather, inch by inch—we continued to creep nearer and nearer to the wreck, until the negro, on the end of his spar, was soaring and swooping wildly within some fifty feet of the group of half-drowned men; and then our way stopped. This was the moment that San Domingo had been waiting for. Watching his opportunity, he seized upon the instant when the wreck and ourselves were both sunk in the trough of a sea, and therefore comparatively sheltered from the wind, when, with a single powerful swing of the coil round his head, he sent it whizzing straight and fair in among the group who were anxiously waiting for it.

“Get as far aft as you can, and then haul away upon the line!” I shouted.

One of them waved his hand to signify that he understood what I wanted; and then they all took hold of the line, and, with it grasped firmly in their hands, made their way cautiously in toward the hull, we watching their movements, meanwhile, in a state of the most intense anxiety and suspense. For now that we were within a biscuit-toss of them the appalling precariousness and peril of their situation became fully apparent to us; more completely so, indeed, than it probably was to the unfortunate fellows themselves. For, huddled together as they were in the rigging, they were sheltered to some extent by the hull of the brig, and were thus unable to clearly see and measure the stupendous proportions of the vast roaring mountains of foam-capped water that came hissing and swooping down upon them from to windward, each huge comber seemingly sentient with a full determination to overwhelm and engulf the already stricken and helpless fabric that lay prone and waterlogged at their mercy; while we, from the superior elevation of our buoyant deck, could look over and beyond the nearly submerged hull, and watch with breathless anxiety the swoop of every giant wave as it surged down upon the wreck and buried her in a blinding smother of seething, milk-white foam. But, beaten down, inert, and waterlogged as was the brig, her cargo was evidently of such a character as to impart a considerable measure of buoyancy to her; for though every sea that broke over her completely buried her for the moment, she invariably reappeared on the hinder slope of the baffled comber, apparently little or none the worse for her momentary submergence. Her triumphant survival, indeed, of these continuous and overwhelming onslaughts soon convinced me that her crew had little to fear from the prospect of her speedy foundering; their danger lay not in any such probability, but consisted in the likelihood of their being torn from their precarious hold in the rigging by every sea that swept and raged over them.

This danger was, of course, greatly increased when the men began to move inward toward the hull, thus more fully exposing themselves to the fury of every surge that swept over it. And of this fact we soon had a most painful and melancholy illustration; for as the group, after waiting for two or three minutes for a favourable opportunity, essayed to scramble out of the rigging, and make their way aft along the brig's upturned side to her quarter—where they would be clear of the gear and rigging when they took to the water—a small and comparatively innocuous sea broke over the hull, which, harmless as it was compared with most of its predecessors, had still enough of weight and spite in it to sweep one of the poor fellows from his precarious foothold into the seething, hissing swirl to leeward. The man tossed his arms over his head, with a wild shriek for help, as the smother carried him along in its suffocating embrace, and Joe promptly made a spring for a spare *life-buoy* that we had provided for such an emergency; but before it could be thrown the unfortunate wretch was hurled over the brig's mainyard as it lifted out of the water, and the next instant he disappeared beneath the foot of the main-topsail, the wide spaces of which immediately shut down upon and buried him as the roll of the hull once more submerged her spars. We never saw the poor fellow again, and there is no doubt that, caught and entangled beneath the cloths of the topsail, he was drowned there.

Meanwhile, we were drifting rapidly away to leeward, and the full length of our warps was almost paid out; it was therefore imperative that the men on the wreck should act quickly. I shouted to them to this effect, and, awaking from the momentary stupefaction produced by the painfully sudden loss of their comrade, the remaining eight men made a dash for the brig's quarter, and succeeded in reaching it just as the vessel was uphove upon the crest of another tremendous sea. We saw them slip the string of life-buoys over their heads, and the next instant they were buried in the vast volume of water that broke, roaring and hissing, over the fabric that they stood upon. To our anxious minds it seemed an endless time before they reappeared; but at length we saw the string of life-buoys floating in the midst of the lacework of foam, some ten fathoms to leeward of the wreck, well clear of the heaving spars and snake-like coils of loose and unrove gear, eight out of the nine buoys having each a man in it.

“Hurrah!” I shouted, swinging myself on deck out of the rigging. “We have them! Haul away gently upon the line, and let us get them alongside.”

As I spoke I saw that San Domingo was laying in from the jib-boom end, he having, like myself, seen that we had got hold of the men; and presently he ranged up alongside me and, following my example, industriously set to work to

throw the coils of braces, halliards, clewlines, and so on off the pins, and bend the ends of them into bowlines in readiness for hauling the rescued men up the side.

The task of getting the poor fellows safely inboard was soon accomplished, when, administering to each man a pannikin of scalding hot coffee that had meanwhile been prepared in the galley, I sent them below into the forecabin with instructions to strip, rub each other well down, and turn in until a good meal could be prepared for them; when, the rescued crew being thus temporarily disposed of, we filled upon the ship and resumed our voyage.

A good substantial meal of beef, potatoes, and ship's bread, backed up with a few hours' sleep, and a shift into dry clothes, sufficed to set the rescued men upon their pins again, little or nothing the worse for the hardship and exposure they had so recently undergone; and that same evening I obtained from the mate of the brig, a man named Cooper, the particulars of their adventure.

From this man's story it appeared that the brig, a vessel of one hundred and seventy-four tons register, named the *Golden Gate*, hailed from San Francisco, from which port she had sailed in search of a cargo of sandal-wood. The quest had been successful, a full cargo had been obtained, and all had gone well with the craft up to the afternoon of the preceding day, when her crew, like us, had found themselves becalmed. Unlike myself, however, the skipper of the *Golden Gate*—who proved to be the man who had unfortunately been swept away and lost during the process of rescue—had obstinately refused to believe that the threatening aspect of the weather meant anything worse than a sharp thunderstorm, and had declined to accede to the suggestion of his mate that sail should be shortened, averring that all the wind they were likely to get they would need to help them out of the region of the equatorial calms. The result had been that when the hurricane burst upon them the ship was hove over upon her beam-ends, with her sails flat upon the water, in which position she had gradually filled, her cargo only preventing the waterlogged hull from sinking under the feet of her crew. Fortunately for all hands, they had entertained sufficiently serious doubts of their skipper's judgment to determine them to remain on deck and see the matter out; hence, when the brig went over, they were in a measure prepared for the catastrophe, and lost no time in clambering on to the vessel's upturned side. From this position the sea, breaking heavily over the hull, soon drove them into the rigging, where they had remained, constantly drenched with spray and frequently submerged beneath the vast volumes of water that poured over the wreck, until rescued by us.

In exchange for his story I briefly informed the rescued mate that I had sailed from Sydney, in ballast, for the Canton river, intending to cut a cargo of sandal-wood on the way; but that the bulk of my crew, a gang of desperadoes from the gold-diggings, had frustrated my purpose by attempting to take my ship away from me, and that I had therefore been compelled to leave them on an island; and further, that when I sighted the *Golden Gate*, we were on our way to the Sandwich Islands, hoping to there obtain men enough to navigate the barque to China. I said that, if he and his men wished it, I would still go on to Honolulu, and land them there, from whence they would doubtless soon find an opportunity to return to San Francisco; or, if they preferred it, I would ship them all, at the current rate of wages, for the voyage to China, and, if they gave me satisfaction, thence home to England. He said he would lay my offer before the men, and acquaint me with their decision forthwith; and at once retired to the forecabin. Whereupon I at once called Joe and San Domingo to me, and laid the strictest injunctions upon them both that under no circumstances whatever were they to make the slightest allusion to the treasure in the hold; hinting pretty strongly that, if they did, their own share of it would probably fall very far short of what it would be should the secret be well kept. The caution I believed to be quite needless, so far as Joe was concerned; but its necessity, as regarded the negro, was made quite apparent by his remark when I had finished speaking—

“Golly, sar; it just as well you tole me dat in time, odderwise I dead sure to hab said someting about it de fust time I had a chance. But now dat you has warned me, sar, you may depend abs'lutely upon my discredshun. I wants all de dollars I can git; and I doan' feel inclined to share dem wid men dat has had no hand in de saving of dem.”

The mate soon returned to the deck with the decision of his crew. He informed me that the men were quite unanimous in their desire to leave the ship at Honolulu, and make the best of their way back to San Francisco with as little delay as possible, if such an arrangement would accord with my convenience; but that, in the mean time, they would gladly turn to and assist me to work the ship so far, without pay, in acknowledgment of my having saved their lives.

The weather, meanwhile, was fast moderating; so much so that during the second dog-watch we took a good drag upon the topsail halliards, and set the foresail and mizzen; the wind gradually hauling round further from the northward and breaking us off until we headed north-east by compass. The mercury was rising almost as rapidly as it had fallen, and there was every prospect of a fine night. Cooper, the late mate of the *Golden Gate*, offered to do duty as second mate, while the cook of the craft expressed his desire to continue the functions of his office; the remainder of the men declared their readiness to go to work forthwith; and that night, accordingly, we once more kept two watches, each consisting of an officer and four men, while I, who had been on deck almost continuously for thirty hours, turned in and, with a mind intensely relieved by the acquisition of so much valuable help, slept like a log until seven o'clock the next morning.

I awoke of my own accord, and had no sooner opened my eyes than I knew, without any need of telling, exactly how we were situated. The ship was rolling, with a long, steady, even swing, from side to side, with an occasional heave and settlement of her quarter as the swell took her; the canvas was alternately flapping out with rifle-like reports, and thundering against her masts as she rolled; the bulkheads were creaking and groaning; the cabin-doors were rattling upon their hooks; the wheel-chains were clanking as the rudder kicked to the wash and swirl under the counter; and there was a gurgling, dripping wash of water along the bends, without any seething sound in it, that told me, apart from the other noises of the ship, that we were again becalmed. The sun was streaming brilliantly in through the porthole of my cabin, flooding the little apartment with warmth and golden light; and the swishing and scrubbing sounds overhead told me that the hands were busy at the job of washing decks. It was a welcome, joyous sound, as evidence of the fact that we once more had a crew on board us; and I thrust my feet into my slippers and went on deck to get my morning bath with a feeling of gaiety and blithesomeness that taught me, for the first time,

how heavy had been the load of anxiety that I had lately borne, and that had slipped from my shoulders with the arrival of the *Golden Gates* crew on board.

It was a glorious morning, with a clear, brilliantly blue, cloudless sky overhead, out of which the sun, though only an hour high, already blazed with an ardour that gave promise of a scorching day; the sea was oil-smooth, with a glittering sheen like that of quicksilver in the wake of the sun, while away to the westward of us it flashed and gleamed in hues of the softest, purest, opalescent blue to the side of the ship with the running of the swell. There was not a breath of wind, nor the remotest sign of any; so I ordered the lighter canvas and the courses to be hauled down and clewed up, to save them from thrashing themselves to rags; and, having revelled in the luxury of a shower-bath of cool, sparkling brine from the hose, left the ship under the topsails and fore-topmast staysail, and went below to dress for breakfast.

The calm that had now fallen upon us lasted unbroken for five full days, during which we sweltered, day and night, in the melting heat of the tropics, with the blazing sun right overhead every day at noon, and a waning moon soaring into the heavens later and still later each night to render the hours of darkness magical with the witchery of her beauty and mystery. And during the whole of this time we never shifted our position by so much as a single mile a day. At length, however, on the sixth day, a few cat's-paws came playing at intervals over the surface of the glass-smooth water, momentarily ruffling it into little evanescent patches of tender blue, and causing a transient ripple to play over the stagnant cloths of our canvas. As the day wore on the cat's-paws increased in frequency, in area, and in strength; and shortly before sundown a gentle, dainty little air of wind came stealing softly up from the eastward, to woo which we joyfully spread every rag of canvas we could show to it: and oh! how ineffably pleasant and delightful was the sound of the first faint liquid tinkling ripple that broke from our cutwater, and gushed gently past the bends in a stream of tiny bursting air-bells, as the beautifully moulded hull yielded to the faint impulse of the soft breathing and began to move under it with the languorous motion of a sleeping swan! Then, as the soft, warm, star-spangled darkness of the tropics closed down upon us and wrapped us within its impalpable folds, the breeze gathered strength and weight by imperceptible degrees, until the scarcely audible tinkle under the bows merged into the sound of a knife shearing through a tautly stretched silken web, with a musical fountain-like plashing at the cutwater and a crisp, gushing curl of the glassy wave under the lee bow as it broke and hurried past into our wake in a lacework of creamy swirling froth, gemmed with countless glittering foam-bubbles; while the log told us that the ship was slipping her way through the small wrinklings of the brine at a speed of fully six knots in the hour.

By-and-by the moon—her orb now reduced to less than half its full dimensions—stole ghostlike above the horizon; and by her wan light we saw that a host of soft, fleecy clouds—shaped like the smoke belched from the mouth of a cannon upon a windless day—were mustering their squadrons in the eastern quarter; and we knew them for the welcome trade-cloud, the sure indication that the breeze we now had would be a lasting one.

And so it proved; for the fleecy masses soared upward until they overspread the whole of the visible sky; and as they soared so the breeze hardened, until at length, by the time that the middle watch drew toward its close, the saucy *Esmeralda*, with the wind well over her starboard quarter, and everything packed upon her, from the royal studding-sails down, was storming through it at a pace nearer to sixteen than to fifteen knots in the hour, while the wild weird melody of a hundred harps singing through the taut mazes of her rigging aloft mingled with the roar of the wind out of the great spaces of her straining canvas, and the deep, continuous thunder of the bow wave, raising a concert of such mad, soul-stirring harmony as causes the sailor's heart to leap and bound within him in ecstatic exultation to the swift, buoyant leaps and plunges of the good ship beneath him.

This truly royal breeze continued to blow with scarcely diminished strength, enabling us to reel off our fifteen knots per hour for hours at a time, while our speed seldom sank below twelve; the result of which was that a little before midnight of the fifth day from its first reaching us we glided into the roadstead of Honolulu, and came to an anchor.

On the following morning, immediately after breakfast, I went ashore, taking with me my passengers and Cooper, the mate of the *Golden Gate*; and while Sir Edgar with his party made their way to the best hotel in the place, preparatory to the planning of an expedition which would permit of their seeing as much as possible of the beauties of the island during our stay there, Cooper and I sought out our respective consuls. Neither of them were difficult to find; and while I partook of a second breakfast with our hospitable British representative, I learnt from him—after telling him as much of my story as I deemed needful—that an Aberdeen ship had unfortunately driven ashore and gone to pieces there only a fortnight previously, and that her crew were then awaiting an opportunity to work their way home, the master and chief mate having already left for England *via* San Francisco, in a steamer. Upon further inquiry I found that there were thirteen of the crew in all, namely, the second mate, steward, cook, and ten seamen. This suited me exactly; for, although there were more men than I really needed, we had accommodation for an even greater number in the *Esmeralda's* roomy fore-castle and deck-house. Moreover, I had had all that I wanted of such an unpleasant experience as that of being short-handed. I therefore determined to ship them all, if they were willing, and recompense myself for my recent hardships by enjoying the luxury of a fully manned ship. The men were easily found—were indeed on the lookout for me, having learned early in the morning that an English barque had arrived in the roadstead some time during the night—and upon interviewing them I learned that they were, one and all, most anxious to make a start for home. They were as quiet, sober, and steady-looking a crew as I could possibly desire to meet with, or have under me; I therefore shipped the whole of them, on the spot, and directed them to hold themselves in readiness to join the ship as soon as they should receive instructions from me to that effect.

Meanwhile, Cooper had had an interview with his consul, the result of which was an arrangement that the crew of the *Golden Gate* should land forthwith, as there were several American vessels in the port, and, consequently, ample facilities for despatching the men home. As a consequence of this the Americans left the *Esmeralda* that same afternoon, while the new crew went on board and took up their quarters on the following morning.

The luncheon hour had arrived by the time that all these arrangements were completed, and I therefore hastened away to Sir Edgar's hotel for the double purpose of satisfying a certain inward craving that had already begun to make itself felt, and of acquainting the baronet with the character of the business upon which I had been engaged

during the morning. The several members of the party were, naturally enough, much pleased to learn that there was to be no undue detention among the lovely Sandwich Islands; but, on the other hand, they expressed so earnest a desire to see something of Oahu, now that they were actually upon it, that I cheerfully consented to delay my departure until the evening of the third day. A tour of the island was thereupon arranged, in which I was very cordially invited to join, and a most delightful excursion was the result; but as this is not a guide-book, and nothing out of the ordinary way occurred during its progress, I will not inflict the details of it upon the indulgent reader. Upon our return to the ship we found that Forbes, following my instructions, had re-watered her, and laid in a generous supply of fruit, pigs, poultry, and other necessaries; our crew were all on board, and there was nothing to detain us longer in this Pacific paradise; we therefore got our anchor forthwith, and stood out of the roadstead in the crimson wake of the setting sun just as that luminary sank magnificently beneath the horizon, painting the whole western sky with the flaming hues of his dying effulgence.

There is but little more to tell, for the rescue of the *Golden Gates* crew proved to be the last adventure that befell us on this extraordinarily eventful voyage. We made a very rapid run across to the China coast, and were detained but a short time in the Canton river, freights happening to be rather high and tonnage somewhat scarce—for a wonder—about the time of our arrival; I therefore met with no difficulty in obtaining a freight, with quick despatch, and within three weeks of our arrival we were once more at sea, this time Homeward-Bound! I must not forget to mention, by the way, that almost my first act, upon arriving at Hong Kong, was to write home two somewhat lengthy letters—one to my mother, acquainting her with the successful result of my quest, together with a full and detailed narrative of my adventures since leaving Sydney; and the other to my old and trusty friend, Mr Richards, acquainting him also with my success, and requesting him to undertake certain rather delicate negotiations for me, as well as to make certain preparations against the time of the *Esmeralda's* arrival in the English Channel. Our homeward passage was as prosperous as it was uneventful. We were no sooner clear of our moorings than we caught a favourable breeze that followed us all the way until we had rounded the Cape of Good Hope and had caught the south-east trades, which in their turn carried us right up to, and indeed a few miles to the north of, the Line. Here we met with the usual light baffling airs, with plenty of rain and perhaps rather more than the average allowance of thunder and lightning. But this weather lasted only a trifle over forty-eight hours, when a small easterly air came to our rescue and fanned us along to the northward until we finally fell in with the north-east trades, the beneficent influence of which carried us as far north as the parallel of twenty-eight degrees. Here again kind Fortune favoured us; for when at length the trade-winds failed us, the wind gradually hauled round from the southward, and thence from the westward and north-west, hardening all the time, until at length it blew quite a fresh gale, which sent us bowling and staggering away to the northward and eastward under single-reefed topsails with topgallant sails over them, reeling off our fourteen knots hour after hour, and enabling us to hold our own for a whole day with one of the West Indian mail-boats, homeward-bound, much, no doubt, to the chagrin and astonishment of her officers. The breeze continued to freshen, however, and the sea to rise, necessitating first the handing of our topgallant sails, and, a little later on, the further reefing down of our topsails, when the great steamer gradually drew away from us, and by next morning was out of sight. This slant lasted us for four days, when the wind gradually softened into a moderate sailing breeze, veering all the time until it finally worked round from the southward once more, bringing with it mild, genial, sunshiny weather, that carried us right up the Channel to Portland Roads, which we entered on a lovely summer evening, nine months, almost to a day, from the date upon which we had quitted it, at the commencement of the voyage.

I was of course careful to have the ship's number and burgee conspicuously displayed as we entered the roadstead, and I also observed the precaution of standing far enough over towards the Weymouth side of the bay to permit of the flags being distinctly made out before bringing the ship to an anchor; the result of which was that, before the canvas was well clewed up, a small steam launch emerged from Weymouth Harbour, and in due time deposited my dear mother and my very good friend Mr Richards upon the *Esmeralda's* deck.

Of the joyous meeting that ensued—of my dear mother's smiles and tears and caresses and ejaculations of gratitude at my safe return—and of Mr Richards' hearty congratulations at my successful achievement—I will say nothing; the picture may very well be left to the vivid imagination of the reader. I need only state that, after the first bustle and excitement of the meeting had passed over, Mr Richards drew me carefully aside and remarked—

"It is all right, my dear boy; everything is arranged. I have put the whole affair into the hands of Tom White—a man whom I would trust with my very life—and he will come off to you with half a dozen 'lerrets' and a strong gang of thoroughly reliable men at two o'clock to-morrow morning. Hand over your cases of treasure to him without hesitation, and he will take care of them for you. He knows exactly how to manage the business, trust him, for he was a smuggler in his youth, when smuggling was still a paying business, as were his forbears for generations before him; so it is in the man's blood, you see."

And as Mr Richards had said, so it proved. The night was, luckily, *very* dark, and therefore exactly suited to our purpose; and promptly at two o'clock, the man White, with his fleet of "lerrets," came gliding noiselessly alongside out of the darkness, and in less than half an hour every ounce of the treasure was out of the ship, with nobody a bit the wiser. The next morning a man came alongside offering crabs for sale, and before leaving the ship, he slipped a crumpled, dirty piece of note-paper, smelling strongly of fish, into my hand; upon opening which I, with some difficulty, deciphered the following communication:—

"Deer Sur the boxis be awl rite yours to command T. White."

Is there anything else to tell? Well, yes; there is just one further item of information that may interest some at least of my readers. I remember remarking, in the course of my narrative, that toward the latter part of my acquaintance with Miss Merrivale—dating particularly from the capture and recapture of the ship at the treasure island—that very charming young lady's demeanour toward me underwent a certain subtle, indefinable, puzzling, but exceedingly agreeable change; and after we had left China and were on our homeward voyage—when, in short, I had leisure to give a proper amount of thought and attention to so important a matter—I determined to ascertain what it meant.

Now, this is not a love story, so I will not enter into the particulars of how I first of all fell to questioning myself as to

why this change of manner should have proved so agreeable to me; nor will I describe the mental process by which I quickly arrived at the conclusion that it was because Agnes Merrivale was, beyond all question, the sweetest and most lovable, as well as the most charming and lovely woman it had ever been my good fortune to encounter. Nor will I attempt to describe the devious methods and the complicated stratagems by which—having arrived at this conclusion—I painfully sought to obtain some slight inkling or clue to the sweet girl’s sentiments toward myself. Let it suffice to say that they were all signally, *miserably*, unsuccessful. *You*, my dear reader, would of course have managed infinitely better; I am well aware of that. But remember, if you please, that I was only a plain, unpolished sailor; a man who, maybe, could handle a ship fairly well, take care of her in a gale of wind, and navigate her successfully from port to port, but who had until now had no experience of women and their ways. Moreover, I would have cut off my right hand rather than have said or done anything to offend one of the sex worthy the name of woman. So, for the first time in my life, I was fairly nonplussed and unhappy; knowing full well what I wanted, but not knowing what steps I ought to take in order to insure to myself a fair chance of obtaining it. Such a state of mind, however, is not likely to be long tolerated by a sailor; my good sense came to my aid, and whispered that if my love loved me, I had only to give her the opportunity to say so, and all would be well. So one night—how well I remember it! it was pitch-dark, and we were just clear of the Straits of Sunda, rolling merrily along before a fresh easterly breeze under every rag that we could pack upon the ship—I got the dear girl to myself for a while upon the poop, and told her in simple, sailorly language exactly what were my feelings and hopes. We were promenading the poop together, arm in arm, while I spoke, and she heard me to the end without a word. Then she stopped, and placing both her hands in mine, said, with an unmistakable quiver of emotion in her voice—

“Thank you, Jack, for the most priceless gift a man can offer a woman—the gift of a loyal, loving heart. I accept it gratefully, dear, and will do my best to make you happy; for I believe I have loved you from the very first, my darling.”

The End.

[Chapter 1](#) | [Chapter 2](#) | [Chapter 3](#) | [Chapter 4](#) | [Chapter 5](#) | [Chapter 6](#) | [Chapter 7](#) | [Chapter 8](#) | [Chapter 9](#) | [Chapter 10](#) | [Chapter 11](#) | [Chapter 12](#) | [Chapter 13](#) | [Chapter 14](#) | [Chapter 15](#) | [Chapter 16](#) | [Chapter 17](#) | [Chapter 18](#) | [Chapter 19](#) | [Chapter 20](#) |

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE CRUISE OF THE "ESMERALDA" ***

Updated editions will replace the previous one—the old editions will be renamed.

Creating the works from print editions not protected by U.S. copyright law means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG™ concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for an eBook, except by following the terms of the trademark license, including paying royalties for use of the Project Gutenberg trademark. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the trademark license is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. Project Gutenberg eBooks may be modified and printed and given away—you may do practically ANYTHING in the United States with eBooks not protected by U.S. copyright law. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

START: FULL LICENSE
THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE
PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase “Project Gutenberg”), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg™ License available with this file or online at www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg™ electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. “Project Gutenberg” is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the

public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”
- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.
- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.

- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you ‘AS-IS’, WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™’s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation’s EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state’s laws.

The Foundation’s business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation’s website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations (\$1 to \$5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.