George Manville Fenn

"Midnight Webs"

Story One: Smith's Ditty.

Introduction

First Words.

I've waited these many years, expecting some one or another would give a full and true account of it all, but little thinking it would ever come to be my task; for it's not in my way. But seeing how much has been said about other parts and other people's sufferings, while ours never so much as came in for a line of newspaper, I can't think it's fair; and as fairness is what I always did like, I set to, very much against my will; while, on account of my empty sleeve, the paper keeps slipping and sliding about, so that I can only hold it quiet by putting the lead inkstand on one corner, and my tobacco-jar on the other. You see, I'm not much at home at this sort of thing; and though, if you put a pipe and a glass of something before me, I could tell you all about it, taking my time like, it seems that won't do. I said: "Why don't you write it down as I tell it, so as other people could read all about it?" But "No," he says; "I could do it in my fashion; but I want it to be in your simple unadorned style; so set to and do it."

I daresay a good many of you know me—seen me often in Bond-street, at Facet's door—Facet's, you know, the great jeweller's, where I stand and open carriages, or take messages, or small parcels with no end of valuables in them; for I'm trusted. Smith, my name is—Isaac Smith; and I'm that tallish grisly fellow with the seam down one side of his face, his left sleeve looped up to the button, and not a speck to be seen on that "commissionnaire's" uniform, upon whose breast there are three medals.

I was standing one day, waiting patiently for something to do, when a tallish gentleman came up, nodded as if he knew me well; and I saluted.

"Lose that limb in the Crimea, my man?"

"No, sir; Mutiny," I said, standing as stiff as use had made nature with me.

And then he asked me a heap more questions; and I answered him; and the end of it was, that one evening I went to his house, and he had me in, and did what was wanted to set me off. I'd had a little bit of an itching to try something of the kind, I must own, for long enough; but his words started me; and in consequence I got a quire of the best foolscap paper, and a pen'orth of pens; and here's my story.

Story 1--Chapter I.

Dub-dub-dub-dub-dub-dub. Just one soft beat given by the boys in front—the light sharp tap upon their drums, to mark the time for the march—and in heavy order there we were, Her Majesty's 156th regiment of Light Infantry, making our way over the dusty roads with the hot morning sun beating down upon our heads. We were marching very loosely, though; for the men were tired, and we were longing for the halt to be called, so that we might rest during the heat of the day, and then go on again. Tents, baggage-wagons, women, children, elephants—all were there; and we were getting over the ground at the rate of about twenty miles a day, on our way up to the station, where we were to relieve a regiment going home.

I don't know what we should have done if it hadn't been for Harry Lant, the weather being very trying—almost as trying as our hot red coats and heavy knapsacks and flower-pot busbies, with a round white ball like a child's plaything on the top; but no matter how tired he was, Harry Lant had always something to say or do; and even if the

colonel was close by, he'd say or do it. Now, there happened to be an elephant walking along by our side, with the captain of our company, one of the lieutenants, and a couple of women in the howdah; while a black nigger fellow, in clean white calico clothes, and not much of 'em, and a muslin turban, and a good deal of it, was striddling on the creature's neck, rolling his eyes about, and flourishing an iron toasting-fork sort of thing, with which he drove the great flap-eared patient beast. The men were beginning to grumble gently, and shifting their guns from side to side, and sneezing, and coughing, and choking in the kicked-up dust, like a flock of sheep, when Captain Dyer scrambles down off the elephant, and takes his place alongside us, crying out cheerily: "Only another mile, my lads, and then breakfast."

We gave him a cheer, and another half-mile was got over; when once more the boys began to flag terribly, and even Harry Lant was silent, which, seeing what Harry Lant was, means a wonderful deal more respecting the weather than any number of degrees on a thermometer, I can tell you. But I looked round at him, and he knew what I meant; and, slipping out, he goes up to the elephant. "Carry your trunk, sir," he says; and taking gently hold of the great beast's soft nose, he laid it upon his shoulder, and marched on like that, with the men roaring with laughter.

"Pulla-wulla. Ma-pa-na," shouted the nigger who was driving, or something that sounded like it; for of all the rum lingoes ever spoke, theirs is about the rummest, and always put me in mind of the fal-lal-la or tol-de-rol chorus of a song.

"All right. I'll take care!" sings out Harry; and on he marched, with the great soft-footed beast lifting its round pats and putting them down gently, so as not to hurt Harry; and, trifling as that act was, it meant a great deal, as you'll see if you read on, while just then it got our poor fellows over the last half-mile without one falling out. And then the halt was called; men wheeled into line; we were dismissed; and soon after we were lounging about, under such shade as we could manage to get in the thin topes of trees.

Story 1--Chapter II.

That's a pretty busy time, that first half-hour after a halt: what with setting loosely up a few tents, and getting a fire lighted, and fetching water; but in spite of our being tired, we soon had things right. There was the colonel's tent, Colonel Maine—a little stout man, that we all used to laugh at, because he was such a pudgy, round, good-tempered chap, who never troubled about anything; for we hadn't learned then what was lying asleep in his brave little body, waiting to be brought out. Then there was the mess-tent for the officers, and the hospital-tent for those on the sick-list, beside our bell-tents, that we shouldn't have set up at all, only to act as sunshades. But, of course, the principal tent was the colonel's.

Well, there they were, the colonel and his lady, Mrs Maine—a nice, kindly-spoken, youngish woman: twenty years younger than he, she was; but for all that, a happier couple never breathed; and they two used to seem as if the regiment, and India, and all the natives were made on purpose to fall down and worship the two little golden idols they'd set up—a little girl and a little boy, you know. Cock Robin and Jenny Wren, we chaps used to call them, though Jenny Wren was about a year and a half the oldest. And I believe it was from living in France a bit that the colonel's wife had got the notion of dressing them so; but it would have done your heart good to see those two children—the boy with his little red tunic and his sword, and the girl with her red jacket and belt, and a little canteen of wine and water, and a tiny tin mug; and them little things driving the old black ayah half wild with the way they used to dodge away from her to get amongst the men, who took no end of delight in bamboozling the fat old woman when she was hunting for them, sending her here and there and everywhere, till she'd turn round and make signs with her hands, and spit on the ground, which was her way of cursing us. For I must say that we English were very, very careless about what we did or said to the natives. Officers and men, all alike, seemed to look upon them as something very little better than beasts, and talked to them as if they had no feelings at all, little thinking what fierce masters the trampled slaves could turn out, if ever they had their day—the day that the old proverb says is sure to come for every dog; and there was not a soul among us then that had the least bit of suspicion that the dog—by which, you know, I mean the Indian generally—was going mad, and sharpening those teeth of his ready to bite.

Well, as a matter of course, there were other people in our regiment that I ought to mention: Captain Dyer I did name; but there was a lieutenant, a very good-looking young fellow, who was a great favourite with the Colonel and Mrs Maine; and he dined a deal with them at times, besides being a great chum of Captain Dyer's—they two shooting together, and being like brothers, though there was a something in Lieutenant Leigh that I never seemed to take to. Then there was the doctor—a Welshman he was, and he used to make it his boast that our regiment was about the healthiest anywhere; and I tell you what it is, if you were ill once, and in hospital, as we call it—though, you know, with a marching regiment that only means anywhere till you get well—I say, if you were ill once, and under his hands, you'd think twice before you made up your mind to be ill again, and be very bad too before you went to him. Pestle, we used to call him, though his name was Hughes; and how we men did hate him, mortally, till we found put his real character, when we were lying cut to pieces almost, and him ready to cry over us at times as he tried to bring us round. "Hold up, my lads," he'd say, "only another hour, and you'll be round the corner!" when what there was left of us did him justice. Then, of course, there were other officers, and some away with the major, and another battalion of our regiment at Wallahbad; but they've nothing to do with my story.

I don't think I can do better now than introduce you to our mess on the very morning of this halt, when, after cooling myself with a pipe, just the same as I should have warmed myself with a pipe if it had been in Canady or Nova Scotia, I walked up to find all ready for breakfast, and Mrs Bantem making the tea.

Some of the men didn't fail to laugh at us who took our tea for breakfast; but all the same I liked it, for it always took me home, tea did—and to the days when my poor old mother used to say that there never was such a boy for bread-and-butter as I was; not as there was ever so much butter that she need have grumbled, whatever I cost for bread; and though Mrs Bantem wasn't a bit like my mother, she brought up the homely thoughts. Mrs Bantem was, I should say, about the biggest and ugliest woman I ever saw in my life. She stood five feet eleven and a half in her stockings,

for Joe Bantem got Sergeant Buller to take her under the standard one day. She'd got a face nearly as dark as a black's; she'd got a moustache, and a good one too; and a great coarse look about her altogether. Measles—I'll tell you who he was directly—Measles used to say she was a horse godmother; and they didn't seem to like one another; but Joe Bantem was as proud of that woman as she was of him; and if any one hinted about her looks, he used to laugh, and say that was only the outside rind, and talk about the juice. But all the same, though, no one couldn't be long with that woman without knowing her flavour. It was a sight to see her and Joe together, for he was just a nice middle size—five feet seven and a half—and as pretty a pink-and-white, brown-whiskered, open-faced man as ever you saw. We all got tanned and coppered over and over again, but Joe kept as nice and fresh and fair as on the day we embarked from Gosport years before; and the standing joke was that Mrs Bantem had a preparation for keeping his complexion all square.

Joe Bantem knew what he was about, though, for one day when a nasty remark had been made by the men of another regiment, he got talking to me in confidence over our pipes, and he swore that there wasn't a better woman living; and he was right, for I'm ready now at this present moment to take the Book in my hand, and swear the same thing before all the judges in Old England. For you see, we're such duffers, we men: show us a pretty bit of pink-and-white, and we run mad after it; while all the time we're running away from no end of what's solid and good and true, and such as'll wear well, and show fast colours, long after your pink-and-white's got faded and grimy. Not as I've much room to talk. But present company you know, and setra. What, though, as a rule, does your pretty pink-and-white know about buttons, or darning, or cooking? Why, we had the very best of cooking; not boiled tag and rag, but nice stews and roasts and hashes, when other men were growling over a dog's-meat dinner. We had the sweetest of clean shirts, and never a button off; our stockings were darned; and only let one of us—Measles, say—take a drop more than he ought, just see how Mrs Bantem would drop on to him, that's all. If his head didn't ache before, it would ache then; and I can see as plain now as if it was only this minute, instead of years ago, her boxing Measles' ears, and threatening to turn him out to another mess if he didn't keep sober. And she would have turned him over too, only, as she said to Joe, and Joe told me, it might have been the poor fellow's ruin, seeing how weak he was, and easily led away. The long and short of it is, Mrs Bantem was a good motherly woman of forty; and those who had anything to say against her, said it out of jealousy, and all I have to say now is what I've said before: she only had one fault, and that is, she never had any little Bantems to make wives for honest soldiers to come; and wherever she is, my wish is that she may live happy and venerable to a hundred.

That brings me to Measles. Bigley his name was; but he'd had the small-pox very bad when a child, through not being vaccinated; and his face was all picked out in holes, so round and smooth that you might have stood peas in them all over his cheeks and forehead, and they wouldn't have fallen off; so we called him Measles. If any of you pay "Why?" I don't know no more than I have said.

He was a sour-tempered sort of fellow was Measles, who 'listed because his sweetheart laughed at him; not that he cared for her, but he didn't like to be laughed at, so he 'listed out of spite, as he said, and that made him spiteful. He was always grumbling about not getting his promotion, and sneering at everything and everybody, and quarrelling with Harry Lant, him, you know, as carried the elephant's trunk; while Harry was never happy without he was teasing him, so that sometimes there was a deal of hot water spilled in our mess.

And now I think I've only got to name three of the drum-boys, that Mrs Bantem ruled like a rod of iron, though all for their good, and then I've done.

Well, we had our breakfast, and thoroughly enjoyed it, sitting out there in the shade. Measles grumbled about the water, just because it happened to be better than usual; for sometimes we soldiers out there in India used to drink water that was terrible lively before it had been cooked in the kettle; for though water-insects out there can stand a deal of heat, they couldn't stand a fire. Mrs Bantem was washing up the things afterwards, and talking about dinner; Harry Lant was picking up all the odds and ends to carry off to the great elephant, standing just then in the best bit of shade he could find, flapping his great ears about, blinking his little pig's eyes, and turning his trunk and his tail into two pendulums, swinging them backwards and forwards as regular as clockwork, and all the time watching Harry, when Measles says all at once: "Here come some lunatics!"

Story 1--Chapter III.

Now, after what I've told you about Measles 'listing for spite, you will easily understand that the fact of his calling any one a lunatic did not prove a want of common reason in the person spoken about; but what he meant was, that the people coming up were half mad for travelling when the sun was so high, and had got so much power.

I looked up and saw, about a mile off, coming over the long straight level plain, what seemed to be an elephant, and a man or two on horseback; and before I had been looking above a minute, I saw Captain Dyer cross over to the colonel's tent, and then point in the direction of the coming elephant. The next minute, he crossed over to where we were. "Seen Lieutenant Leigh?" he says in his quick way.

"No, sir; not since breakfast."

"Send him after me if he comes in sight. Tell him Miss Ross and party are yonder, and I've ridden on to meet them."

The next minute he had gone, taken a horse from a sycee, and in spite of the heat, cantered off to meet the party with the elephant, the air being that clear that I could see him go right up, turn his horse round, and ride gently back by the elephant's side.

I did not see anything of the lieutenant, and, to tell the truth, I forgot all about him, as I was thinking about the party coming, for I had somehow heard a little about Mrs Maine's sister coming out from the old country to stay with her. If I recollect right, the black nurse told Mrs Bantem, and she mentioned it. This party, then, I supposed, contained the

lady herself; and it was as I thought. We had had to leave Patna unexpectedly to relieve the regiment ordered home; and the lady, according to orders, had followed us, for this was only our second day's march.

I suppose it was my pipe made me settle down to watch the coming party, and wonder what sort of a body Miss Ross would be, and whether anything like her sister. Then I wondered who would marry her, for, as you know, ladies are not very long out in India without picking up a husband. "Perhaps," I said to myself, "it will be the lieutenant;" but ten minutes after, as the elephant shambled up, I altered my mind, for Captain Dyer was ambling along beside the great beast, and his was the hand that helped the lady down—a tall, handsome, self-possessed girl, who seemed quite to take the lead, and kiss and soothe the sister, when she ran out of the tent to throw her arms round the new-comer's neck.

"At last, then, Elsie," Mrs Colonel said out aloud. "You've had a long dreary ride."

"Not during the last ten minutes," Miss Ross said, laughing in a bright, merry, free-hearted way. "Lieutenant Leigh has been welcoming me most cordially."

"Who?" exclaimed Mrs Colonel, staring from one to the other.

"Lieutenant Leigh," said Miss Ross.

"I'm afraid I am to blame for not announcing myself," said Captain Dyer, lifting his muslin-covered cap. "Your sister, Miss Ross, asked me to ride to meet you, in Lieutenant Leigh's absence."

"You, then—"

"I am only Lawrence Dyer, his friend," said the captain smiling.

It's a singular thing that just then, as I saw the young lady blush deeply, and Mrs Colonel look annoyed, I muttered to myself, "Something will come of this," because, if there's anything I hate, it's for a man to set himself up for a prophet. But it looked to me as if the captain had been taking Lieutenant Leigh's place, and that Miss Ross, as was really the case, though she had never seen him, had heard him so much talked of by her sister, that she had welcomed him, as she thought, quite as an old friend, when all the time she had been talking to Captain Dyer.

And I was not the only one who thought about it; else why did Mrs Colonel look annoyed, and the colonel, who came paddling out, exclaim loudly: "Why, Leigh, look alive, man! here's Dyer been stealing a march upon you. Why, where have you been?"

I did not hear what the lieutenant said, for my attention was just then taken up by something else, but I saw him go up to Miss Ross, holding out his hand, and the meeting was very formal; but, as I told you, my attention was taken up by something else, and that something was a little dark, bright, eager, earnest face, with a pair of sharp eyes, and a little mocking-looking mouth; and as Captain Dyer had helped Miss Ross down with the steps from the howdah, so did I help down Lizzy Green, her maid; to get, by way of thanks, a half-saucy look, a nod of the head, and the sight of a pretty little tripping pair of ankles going over the hot sandy dust towards the tent.

But the next minute she was back, to ask about some luggage—a bullock-trunk or two—and she was coming up to me, as I eagerly stepped forward to meet her, when she seemed, as it were, to take it into her head to shy at me, going instead to Harry Lant, who had just come up, and who, on hearing what she wanted, placed his hands, with a grave swoop, upon his head, and made her a regular eastern salaam, ending by telling her that her slave would obey her commands. All of which seemed to grit upon me terribly; I didn't know why, then, but I found out afterwards, though not for many days to come.

We had the route given us for Begumbagh, a town that, in the old days, had been rather famous for its grandeur; but, from what I had heard, it was likely to turn out a very hot, dry, dusty, miserable spot; and I used to get reckoning up how long we should be frizzling out there in India before we got the orders for home; and put it at the lowest calculation, I could not make less of it than five years. At all events, we who were soldiers had made our own beds, and had to lie upon them, whether it was at home or abroad; and, as Mrs Bantem used to say to us, "Where was the use of grumbling?" There were troubles in every life, even if it was a civilian's—as we soldiers always called those who didn't wear the Queen's uniform—and it was very doubtful whether we should have been a bit happier, if we had been in any other line. But all the same, Government might have made things a little better for us in the way of suitable clothes, and things proper for the climate.

And so on we went: marching mornings and nights; camping all through the hot day; and it was not long before we found that, in Miss Ross, we men had got something else beside the children to worship.

But I may as well say now, and have it off my mind, that it has always struck me that, during those peaceful days, when our greatest worry was a hot march, we didn't know when we were well off, and that it wanted the troubles to come before we could see what good qualities there were in other people. Little trifling things used to make us sore—things such as we didn't notice afterwards, when great sorrows came. I know I was queer, and spiteful, and jealous; and no great wonder that, for I always was a man with a nastyish temper, and soon put out; but even Mrs Bantem used to show that she wasn't quite perfect, for she quite upset me one day, when Measles got talking at dinner about Lizzy Green, Miss Ross's maid, and, what was a wonderful thing for him, not finding fault. He got saying that she was a nice girl, and would make a soldier as wanted one a good wife; when Mrs Bantem fires up as spiteful as could be—I think, mind you, there'd been something wrong with the cooking that day, which had turned her a little—and she says that Lizzy was very well, but looks weren't everything, and that she was raw as raw, and would want no end of dressing before she would be good for anything; while as to making a soldier's wife, soldiers had no business to have wives till they could buy themselves off and turn civilians. Then, again, she seemed to have taken a sudden spite against Mrs Maine, saying that she was a poor little stuck-up fine lady, and she could never have forgiven her if it had

not been for those two beautiful children; though what Mrs Bantem had got to forgive the colonel's wife, I don't believe she even knew herself.

The old black ayah, too, got very much put out about this time, and all on account of the two new comers; for when Miss Ross hadn't the children with her, they were along with Lizzy, who, like her mistress, was new to the climate, and hadn't got into that doll listless way that comes to people who have been some time up the country. They were all life and fun and energy, and the children were never happy when they were away; and of a morning, more to please Lizzy, I used to think, than the children, Harry Lant used to pick out a shady place, and then drive Chunder Chow, who was the mahout of Nabob, the principal elephant, half wild, by calling out his beast, and playing with him all sorts of antics.

Chunder tried all he could to stop it; but it was of no use, for Harry had got such influence over that animal, that when one day he was coaxing him out to lead him under some trees, and the mahout tried to stop him, Nabob makes no more ado, but lifts his great soft trunk, and rolls Mr Chunder Chow over into the grass, where he lay screeching like a parrot, and chattering like a monkey, rolling his opal eyeballs, and showing his white teeth with fear; for he expected that Nabob was going to put his foot on him and crush him to death, as is the nature of those great beasts. But not he; he only lays his trunk gently on Harry's shoulder, and follows him across the open like a great flesh-mountain, winking his little pig's eyes, whisking his tiny tail, and flapping his great ears; while the children clapped their hands as they stood in the shade with Miss Ross and Lizzy, and Captain Dyer and Lieutenant Leigh close behind.

"There's no call to be afraid, miss," says Harry, saluting as he saw Miss Ross shrink back; and seeing how, when he said a few words in Hindustani, the great animal minded him, they stopped being afraid, and gave Harry fruit and cakes with which to feed the great beast.

You see, out there in that great dull place, people are very glad to have any little trifle to amuse them; so you mustn't be surprised to hear that there used to be quite a crowd to see Harry Lant's performances, as he called them. But all the same, I didn't like his upsetting old Chunder Chow; and it seemed to me, even then, that we'd managed to make another black enemy—the black ayah being the first.

However, Harry used to go on making old Nabob kneel down, or shake hands, or curl up his trunk, or lift him up, finishing off by going up to his head, lifting one great ear, saying they understood one another, whispering a few words, and then shutting the ear up again, so as the words shouldn't be lost before they got into the elephant's brain, as Harry explained, because they'd got a long way to go. Then Harry would lie down, and let the great beast walk backwards and forwards all over him, lifting his great feet so carefully, and setting them down close to Harry, but never touching him, except one day when, just as the great beast was passing his foot over Harry's breast, a voice called out something in Hindustani—and I knew who it was, though I didn't see—when Nabob puts his foot down on Harry's chest, and Lizzy gave a loud scream, and we all thought the poor chap would be crushed; but not he: the great beast was took by surprise, but only for an instant; and in his slow quiet way he steps aside, and then touches Harry all over with his trunk; and there was no more performance that day.

"I've got my knife into Master Chunder for that," says Harry to me; "for I'll swear that was his voice." And I started to find he had known it.

"I wouldn't quarrel with him," I says quietly; "for it strikes me he's got his knife into you."

"You've no idea," says Harry, "what a nip it was. I thought it was all over; but all the same, the poor brute didn't mean it, I'd swear."

Story 1--Chapter IV.

Who could have thought just then that all that nonsense of Harry Lant's with the elephant was shaping itself for our good? But so it was, as you shall by and by hear. The march continued, matters seeming to go on very smoothly; but only seeming, mind you; for let alone that we were all walking upon a volcano, there was ever so much unpleasantry brewing. Let alone my feeling that, somehow or another, Harry Lant was not so good a mate to me as he used to be, there was a good deal wrong between Captain Dyer and Lieutenant Leigh, and it soon seemed plain that there was much more peace and comfort in our camp a week earlier than there was at the time of which I am now writing.

I used to have my turns as sentry here and there; and it was when standing stock-still with my piece, that I used to see and hear so much; for in a camp it seems to be a custom for people to look upon a sentry as a something that can neither see nor hear anything but what might come in the shape of an enemy. They know he must not move from his post, which is to say that he's tied hand and foot; and perhaps from that they think that he's tied as to his senses. At all events, I got to see that when Miss Ross, was seated in the colonel's tent, and Captain Dyer was near her, she seemed to grow gentle and quiet, and her eyes would light up, and her rich red lips part, as she listened to what he was saying; while, when it came to Lieutenant Leigh's turn, and he was beside her talking, she would be merry and chatty, and would laugh and talk as lively as could be. Harry Lant said it was because they were making up matters, and that some day she would be Mrs Leigh; but I didn't look at it in that light, though I said nothing.

I used to like to be sentry at the colonel's tent, on our halting for the night, when the canvas would be looped up, to let in the air, and they'd got their great globe-lamps lit, with the tops to them, to keep out the flies, and the draughts made by the punkahs swinging backwards and forwards. I used to think it quite a pretty sight, with the ladies and the three or four officers, perhaps chatting, perhaps having a little music, for Miss Ross could sing like—like a nightingale, I was going to say; but no nightingale that I ever heard could seem to lay hold of your heart, and almost bring tears into your eyes, as she did. Then she used to sing duets with Captain Dyer, because the colonel wished it, though it was plain to see Mrs Maine didn't like it, any more than did Lieutenant Leigh, who more than once, as I've seen, walked out, looking fierce and angry, to strike off right away from the camp, perhaps not to come back for a couple of

hours.

It was one night when we'd been about a fortnight on the way, for during the past week the colonel had been letting us go on very easily, I was sentry at the tent. There had been some singing, and Lieutenant Leigh had gone off in the middle of a duet. Then the doctor, the colonel, and a couple of subs were busy over a game at whist, and the black nurse had beckoned Mrs Maine out, I suppose to see something about the two children; when Captain Dyer and Miss Ross walked together just outside the tent, she holding by one of the cords, and he standing close beside her.

They did not say much, but stood looking up at the bright silver moon and the twinkling stars; while he said a word now and then about the beauty of the scene, the white tents, the twinkling lights here and there, and the soft peaceful aspect of all around; and then his voice seemed to grow lower and deeper as he spoke from time to time, though I could hardly hear a word, as I stood there like a statue watching Miss Ross's beautiful face, with the great clusters of hair knotted back from her broad white forehead, the moon shining full on it, and seeming to make her eyes flash as they were turned to him.

They must have stood there full half an hour, when she turned as if to go back; but he laid his hand upon hers as it held the tent-cord, and said something very earnestly, when she turned to him again to look him full in the face, and I saw that her hand was not moved.

Then they were silent for a few seconds before he spoke again, loud enough for me to hear.

"I must ask you," he said huskily; "my peace depends upon it. I know that it has always been understood that you were to be introduced to Lieutenant Leigh. I can see now plainly enough what are your sister's wishes; but hearts are ungovernable, Miss Ross; and I tell you earnestly, as a simple truth-speaking man, that you have roused feelings that until now slept quietly in my breast. If I am presumptuous, forgive me—love is bold as well as timid—but at least set me at rest: tell me, is there any engagement between you and Lieutenant Leigh?"

She did not speak for a few moments, but met his gaze, so it seemed to me, without shrinking, before saying a word, so softly, that it was like one of the whispers of the breeze crossing the plain; and that word was "No!"

"God bless you for that answer, Miss Ross—Elsie!" he said deeply; and then his head was bent down for an instant over the hand that rested on the cord, before Miss Ross glided away from him into the tent, and went and stood resting with her hand upon the colonel's shoulder, when he, evidently in high glee, began to show her his cards, laughing and pointing to first one, and then another; for he seemed to be having luck on his side.

But I had no more eyes then for the inside of the tent; for Captain Dyer just seemed to awaken to the fact that I was standing close by him as sentry, and he gave quite a start as he looked at me for a few moments without speaking. Then he took a step forward.

"Who is this? O, thank goodness!" (he said those few words in an undertone, but I happened to hear them). "Smith," he said, "I forgot there was a sentry there. You saw me talking to that lady?"

"Yes, sir," I said.

"You saw everything?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you heard all?"

"No, sir, not all; only what you said last."

Then he was silent again for a few moments, but only to lay his hand directly after on my chest.

"Smith," he said, "I would rather you had not seen this; and if it had been any other man in my company, I should perhaps have offered him money, to ensure that there was no idle chattering at the mess-tables; but you I ask, as a man I can trust, to give me your word of honour as a soldier to let what you have seen and heard be sacred."

"Thank you, captain," I said, speaking thick, for somehow his words seemed to touch me. "You sha'n't repent trusting me."

"I have no fear, Smith," he said, speaking lightly, and as if he felt joyful and proud and happy. "What a glorious night for a cigar!" And he took one out of his case, when we both started; for, as if he had that moment risen out of the ground, Lieutenant Leigh stood there close to us; and even to this day I can't make out how he managed it, but all the same he must have seen and heard as much as I had.

"And pray, is my word of honour as a soldier to be taken, Captain Dyer? or is my silence to be bought with money?—Curse you! come this way, will you!" he hissed; for Captain Dyer had half turned, as if to avoid him, but he stepped back directly, and I saw them walk off together amongst the trees, till they were quite out of sight; and if ever I felt what it was to be tied down to one spot, I felt it then, as I walked sentry up and down by that tent, watching for those two to return.

Story 1--Chapter V.

Now, after giving my word of honour to hold all that sacred, some people may think I'm breaking faith in telling what I saw; but I made that right by asking the colonel's leave—he is a colonel now—and he smiled, and said that I ought to

change the names, and then it would not matter.

I left off my last chapter saying how I felt being tied down to one spot, as I kept guard there; and perhaps everybody don't know that a sentry's duty is to stay in the spot where he has been posted, and that leaving it lightly might, in time of war, mean death.

I should think I watched quite an hour, wondering whether I ought to give any alarm; but I was afraid it might look foolish, for perhaps after all it might only mean a bit of a quarrel, and I could not call to mind any quarrel between officers ending in a duel.

I was glad, too, that I did not say anything, for at last I saw them coming back in the clear moonlight—clear-like as day; and then in the distance they stopped, and in a moment one figure seemed to strike the other a sharp blow, which sent him staggering back, and I could not then see who it was that was hit, till they came nearer, and I made out that it was Captain Dyer; while, if I had any doubts at first, I could have none as they came nearer and nearer, with Lieutenant Leigh talking in a big insolent way at Captain Dyer, who was very quiet, holding his handkerchief to his cheek.

So as to be as near as possible to where they were going to pass, I walked to the end of my tether, and, as they came up, Lieutenant Leigh says, in a nasty spiteful whisper: "I should have thought you would have come into the tent to display the wound received in the lady's cause."

"Leigh," said Captain Dyer, taking down his white handkerchief—and in the bright moonlight I could see that his cheek was cut, and the handkerchief all bloody—"Leigh, that was an unmanly blow. You called me a coward; you struck me; and now you try to poison the wound with your bitter words. I never lift hand against the man who has taken that hand in his as my friend, but the day may come when I can prove to you that you are a liar."

Lieutenant Leigh turned upon him fiercely, as though he would have struck him again; but Captain Dyer paid no heed to him, only walked quietly off to his quarters; while, with a sneering, scornful sort of laugh, the lieutenant went into the colonel's tent; though, if he expected to see Miss Ross, he was disappointed, for so long as I was on guard, she did not show that night.

Off again the next morning, and over a hotter and dustier road than ever; and I must say that I began to wish we were settled down in barracks once more, for everything seemed to grow more and more crooked, and people more and more unpleasant. Why, even Mrs Bantem that morning before starting must show her teeth, and snub Bantem, and then begin going on about the colonel's wife, and the fine madam, her sister, having all sorts of luxuries, while poor hardworking soldiers' wives had to bear all the burden and heat of the day. Then, by way of winding up, she goes to Harry Lant and Measles, who were, as usual, squabbling about something, and boxes both their ears, as if they had been bad boys. I saw them both colour up fierce; but the next minute Harry Lant burst out laughing, and Measles does the same, and then they two did what I should think they never did before—they shook hands; but Mrs Bantem had no sooner turned away with tears in her eyes, because she felt so cross, than the two chaps fell out again about some stupid thing or another, and kept on snarling and snapping at each other all along the march.

But there, bless you! that wasn't all: I saw Mrs Maine talking to her sister in a quick earnest sort of way, and they both seemed out of sorts; and the colonel swore at the tent-men, and bullied the adjutant, and he came round and dropped on to us, finding fault with the men's belts, and that upset the sergeants. Then some of the baggage didn't start right, and Lieutenant Leigh had to be taken to task by Captain Dyer, as in duty bound; while, when at last we were starting, if there wasn't a tremendous outcry, and the young colonel—little Cock Robin, you know—kicking and screaming, and fighting the old black nurse, because he mightn't draw his little sword, and march alongside of Harry Lant!

Now, I'm very particular about putting all this down, because I want you to see how we all were one with the other, and how right through the battalion little things made us out of sorts with one another, and hardly friendly enough to speak, so that the difference may strike you, and you may see in a stronger light the alteration and the behaviour of people when trouble came.

All the same, though, I don't think it's possible for anybody to make a long march in India without getting out of temper. It's my belief that the grit does it, for you do have that terribly, and what with the heat, the dust, the thirst, the government boots, that always seem as if made not to fit anybody, and the grit, I believe even a regiment all chaplains would forget their trade.

Tramp, tramp, tramp, day after day, and nearly always over wide, dreary, dusty plains. Now we'd pass a few muddy paddy-fields, or come upon a river, but not often; and I many a time used to laugh grimly to myself, as I thought what a very different place hot, dusty, dreary India was, to the glorious country I used to picture, all beautiful trees and flowers, and birds with dazzling plumage. There are bright places there, no doubt, but I never came across one, and my recollections of India are none of the most cheery.

But at last came the day when we were crossing a great widespread plain, in the middle of which seemed to be a few houses, with something bright here and there shining in the sun; and as we marched on, the cluster of houses appeared to grow and grow, till we halted at last in a market-square of a good-sized town; and that night we were once more in barracks. But, for my part, I was more gritty than ever; for now we did not see the colonel's lady or her sister, though I may as well own that there was some one with them I wanted to see more than either.

They were all, of course, at the colonel's quarters, a fine old palace of a place, with a courtyard, and a tank in the centre, and trees, and a flat roof, by the side of the great square; while on one side was another great rambling place, separated by a narrowish sort of alley, used for stores and hospital purposes; and on the other side, still going along by the side of the great market-square, was another building, the very fellow to the colonel's quarters, but separated by a narrow footway, some ten feet wide, and this place was occupied by the officers.

Our barracks took up another side of the square; and on the others were mosques and flat-roofed buildings, and a sort of bazaar; while all round stretched away, in narrow streets, were the houses of what we men used to call the niggers. Though, speaking for myself, I used to find them, when well treated, a nice, clean, gentle sort of people. I used to look upon them as a big sort of children, in their white muslin and calico, and their simple ways of playing-like at living; and even now I haven't altered my opinion of them in general, for the great burst of frenzied passion that ran through so many of them was just like a child's uncontrolled rage.

Things were not long in settling down to the regular life: there was a little drill of a morning, and then, the rest of the day, the heat to fight with, which seemed to take all the moisture out of our bodies, and make us long for night.

I did not get put on as sentry once at the colonel's quarters, but I heard a little now and then from Mrs Bantem, who used to wash some of Mrs Maine's fine things, the black women doing everything else; and she'd often have a good grumble about "her fine ladyship," as she called her, and she'd pity her children. She used to pick up a good deal of information, though; and, taking a deal of interest as I did in Miss Ross, I got to know that it seemed to be quite a settled thing between her and Captain Dyer; and Bantem, who got took on now as Lieutenant Leigh's servant, used to tell his wife about how black those two seemed one towards the other.

And so the time went on in a quiet sleepy way, the men getting lazier every day. There was nothing to stir us, only now and then we'd have a good laugh at Measles, who'd get one of his nasty fits on, and swear at all the officers round, saying he was as good as any of them, and that if he had his rights he would have been made an officer before them. Harry Lant, too, used to do his bit to make time pass away a little less dull, singing, telling stories, or getting up to some of his pranks with old Nabob, the elephant, making Chunder, the mahout, more mad than ever; for, no matter what he did or said, only let Harry make a sort of queer noise of his, and, just like a great flesh-mountain, that elephant would come. It didn't matter who was in the way: regiment at drill, officer, rajah, anybody, old Nabob would come straight away to Harry, holding out his trunk for fruit, or putting it in Harry's breast, where he'd find some bread or biscuit; and then the great brute would smooth him all over with his trunk, in a way that used to make Mrs Bantem say, that perhaps, after all, the natives weren't such fools as they looked, and that what they said about dead people going into animal's bodies might be true; for, if that great overgrown beast hadn't a soul of its own, and couldn't think, she didn't know nothing, so now then!

Story 1--Chapter VI.

But it was always the same; and though time was when I could have laughed as merrily as did that little Jenny Wren of the colonel's at Harry's antics, I couldn't laugh now, because it always seemed as if they were made an excuse to get Miss Ross and her maid out with the children.

A party of jugglers, or dancing-girls, or a man or two with pipes and snakes, were all very well; but I've known clever parties come round, and those I've named would hardly come out to look; and my heart, I suppose it was, if it wasn't my mind, got very sore about that time, and I used to get looking as evil at Harry Lant as Lieutenant Leigh did at the captain.

But it was a dreary time that, after all; one from which we were awakened in a sudden way, that startled us to a man.

First of all there came a sort of shadowy rumour that something was wrong with the men of a native regiment, something to do with their caste; and before we had well realised that it was likely to be anything serious, sharp and swift came one bit of news after another, that the British officers in one native regiment had been shot down—here, there, in all directions; and then we understood that what we had taken for the flash of a solitary fire, was the firing of a big train, and that there was a great mutiny in the land. And not, mind, the mutiny or riot of a mob of roughs, but of men drilled and disciplined by British officers, with leaders of their own caste, all well armed and provided with ammunition; and the talk round our mess when we heard all this was, How will it end?

I don't think there were many who did not realise the fact that something awful was coming to pass. Measles grinned, he did, and said that there was going to be an end of British tyranny in India, and that the natives were only going to seize their own again; but the next minute, although it was quite clean, he takes his piece out of the rack, cleans it thoroughly all over again, fixes the bayonet, feels the point, and then stands at the "present!"

"I think we can let 'em know what's what, though, my lads, if they come here," he says, with a grim smile; when Mrs Bantem, whose breath seemed quite taken away before by the way he talked, jumped up quite happy-like, laid her great hand upon his left side, and then, turning to us, she says:

"It's beating strong."

"What is?" says Bantem, looking puzzled.

"Measles' heart," says Mrs Bantem; "and I always knew it was in the right place."

The next minute she gave Measles a slap on the back as echoed through the place, sending him staggering forward; but he only laughed and said:

"Praise the saints, I ain't Bantem."

There was a fine deal of excitement, though, now. The colonel seemed to wake up, and with him every officer, for we expected not only news but orders every moment. Discipline, if I may say so, was buckled up tight with the tongue in the last hole; provisions and water were got in; sentries doubled, and a strange feeling of distrust and fear came upon all, for we soon saw that the people of the place hung away from us, and though, from such an inoffensive-looking lot as we had about us, there didn't seem much to fear, yet there was no knowing what treachery we might

have to encounter, and as he had to think and act for others beside himself, Colonel Maine—God bless him—took every possible precaution against danger, then hidden, but which was likely to spring into sight at any moment.

There were not many English residents at Begumbagh, but what there were came into quarters directly; and the very next morning we learned plainly enough that there was danger threatening our place by the behaviour of the natives, who packed up their few things and filed out of the town as fast as they could, so that at noonday the market-place was deserted, and, save the few we had in quarters, there was not a black face to be seen.

The next morning came without news; and I was orderly, and standing waiting in the outer court close behind the colonel, who was holding a sort of council of war with the officers, when a sentry up in the broiling sun, on the roof, calls out that a horseman was coming; and before very long, covered with sweat and dust, an orderly dragoon dashes up, his horse all panting and blown; and then coming jingling and clanking in with those spurs and that sabre of his, he hands despatches to the colonel.

I hope I may be forgiven for what I thought then; for, as I watched his ruddy face, while he read those despatches, and saw it turn all of a sickly, greeny white, I gave him the credit of being a coward; and I was not the only one who did so. We all knew that, like us, he had never seen a shot fired in anger; and something like an angry feeling of vexation came over me, I know, as I thought of what a fellow he would be to handle and risk the lives of the four hundred men under his charge there at Begumbagh.

“D’yer think I’d look like that?” says a voice close to my ear just then. “D’yer think if I’d been made an officer, I’d ha’ showed the white feather like that?”—And turning round sharp, I saw it was Measles, who was standing sentry by the gateway; and he was so disgusted, that he spat about in all directions, for he was a man who didn’t smoke, like any other Christian, but chewed his tobacco like a sailor.

“Dyer,” says the colonel, the next moment, and they closed up together, but close to where we two stood—“Dyer,” he says, “I never felt before that it would be hard to do my duty as a soldier; but, God help me, I shall have to leave Annie and the children.” There were a couple of tears rolling down the poor fellow’s cheeks as he spoke, and he took Captain Dyer’s hand.

“Look at him! Cuss him!” whispers Measles again; and I kicked out sharp behind, and hit him in the shin. “He’s a pretty sort of a—”

He didn’t say any more just then, for, like me, he was staggered by the change that took place.

I think I’ve said Colonel Maine was a little, easy-going, pudgy man, with a red face; but just then, as he stood holding Captain Dyer’s hand, a change seemed to come over him; he dropped the hand he had held, tightened his sword-belt, and then took a step forward, to stand thoughtful, with despatches in his left hand. It was then that I saw in a moment that I had wronged him, and I felt as if I could have gone down on the ground for him to have walked over me, for whatever he might have been in peace, easy-going, careless, and fond of idleness and good-living—come time for action, there he was with the true British officer flashing out of his face, his lips pinched, his eyes shining, and a stern look upon his countenance that I had never seen before.

“Now then!” I says in a whisper to Measles. I didn’t say anything else, for he knew what I meant. “Now then—now then!”

“Well,” says Measles, then in a whisper, “I s’pose women and children will bring the soft out of a man at a time like this; but, cuss him! what did he mean by humbugging us like that!”

I should think Colonel Maine stood alone thoughtful and still in that courtyard, with the sun beating down upon his muslin-covered forage-cap, while you could slowly, and like a pendulum-beat, count thirty. It was a tremendously hot morning, with the sky a bright clear blue, and the shadows of a deep purply black cast down and cut as sharp as sharp. It was so still, too, that you could hear the whirring, whizzy noise of the cricket things, and now and then the champ, champ of the horse rattling his bit as he stood outside the gateway. It was a strange silence, that seemed to make itself felt; and then the colonel woke into life, stuck those despatches into his sword-belt, gave an order here, an order there, and the next minute—Tantaran—tantaran, *Tantaran—tantaran*, Tantaran-tantaran, *Tantaran-tay*—the bugle was ringing out the assemblée, men were hurrying here and there, there was the trampling of feet, the courtyard was full of busy figures, shadows were passing backwards and forwards, and the news was abroad that our regiment was to form a flying column with another, and that we were off directly.

Ay, but it was exciting, that getting ready, and the time went like magic before we formed a hollow square, and the colonel said a few words to us, mounted as he was now, his voice firm as firm, except once, when I saw him glance at an upper window, and then it trembled, but only for an instant. His words were not many; and to this day, when I think of the scene under that hot blue sky, they come ringing back; for it did not seem to us that our old colonel was speaking, but a new man of a different mettle, though it was only that the right stuff had been sleeping in his breast, ready to be wakened by the bugle.

“My lads,” he said, and to a man we all burst out into a ringing cheer, when he took off his cap, and waved it round—“My lads, this is a sharp call, but I’ve been expecting it, and it has not found us asleep. I thank you for the smart way in which you have answered it, for it shows me that a little easy-going on my part in the piping times of peace has not been taken advantage of. My lads, these are stern times; and this despatch tells me of what will bring the honest British blood into every face, and make every strong hand take a firm gripe of its piece as he longs for the order to charge the mutinous traitors to their Queen, who, taking her pay, sworn to serve her, have turned, and in cold blood butchered their officers, slain women, and hacked to pieces innocent babes. My lads, we are going against a horde of monsters; but I have bad news—you cannot all go—”

There was a murmur here.

“That murmur is not meant,” he continued; “and I know it will be regretted when I explain myself. We have women here and children: mine—yours—and they must be protected,” (it was here that his voice shook). “Captain Dyer’s company will garrison the place till our return, and to those men many of us leave all that is dear to us on earth. I have spoken. God save the Queen!”

How that place echoed with the hearty “Hurray!” that rung out; and then it was, “Fours right, march!” and only our company held firm, while I don’t know whether I felt disappointed or pleased, till I happened to look up at one of the windows, to see Mrs Maine and Miss Ross, with those two poor little innocent children clapping their hands with delight at seeing the soldiers march away; one of them, the little girl, with her white muslin and scarlet sash over her shoulder, being held up by Lizzy Green; and then I did know that I was not disappointed, but glad I was to stay.

But to show you how a man’s heart changes about when it is blown by the hot breath of what you may call love, let me tell you that only half a minute later, I was disappointed again at not going; and dared I have left the ranks, I’d have run after the departing column, for I caught Harry Lant looking up at that window, and I thought a handkerchief was waved to him.

Next minute, Captain Dyer calls out, “Form four—deep. Right face. March!” and he led us to the gateway, but only to halt us there, for Measles, who was sentry, calls out something to him in a wild excited way.

“What do you want, man?” says Captain Dyer.

“O, sir, if you’ll only let me exchange. ’Taint too late. Let me go, captain.”

“How dare you, sir!” says Captain Dyer sternly, though I could see plainly enough it was only for discipline, for he was, I thought, pleased at Measles wanting to be in the thick of it. Then he shouts again to Measles: “’Tention—present arms!” and Measles falls into his right position for a sentry when troops are marching past. “March!” says the captain again; and we marched into the market-place, and—all but those told off for sentries—we were dismissed; and Captain Dyer then stood talking earnestly to Lieutenant Leigh, for it had fallen out that they two, with a short company of eight-and-thirty rank and file, were to have the guarding of the women and children left in quarters at Begumbagh.

Story 1--Chapter VII.

It seemed to me that, for the time being, Lieutenant Leigh was too much of a soldier to let private matters and personal feelings of enmity interfere with duty; and those two stood talking together for a good half-hour, when, having apparently made their plans, fatigue-parties were ordered out; and what I remember then thinking was a wise move, the soldiers’ wives and children in quarters were brought into the old palace, since it was the only likely spot for putting into something like a state of defence.

I have called it a palace, and I suppose that a rajah did once live in it, but, mind you, it was neither a very large nor a very grand place, being only a square of buildings, facing inward to a little courtyard, entered by a gateway, after the fashion of no end of buildings in the east.

Water we had in the tank, but provisions were brought in, and what sheep there were. Fortunately, there was a good supply of hay, and that we got in; but one thing we did not bargain for, and that was the company of the great elephant, Nabob, he having been left behind. And what does he do but come slowly up on those india-rubber cushion feet of his, and walk through the gateway, his back actually brushing against the top; and then, once in, he goes quietly over to where the hay was stacked, and coolly enough begins eating!

The men laughed, and some jokes were made about his taking up a deal of room, and I suppose, really, it was through Harry Lant that the great beast came in; but no more was said then, we all being so busy, and not one of us had the sense to see what a fearful strait that great inoffensive animal might bring us to.

I believe we all forgot about the heat that day as we worked on, slaving away at things that, in an ordinary way, we should have expected to be done by the niggers. Food, ammunition, wood, particularly planks, everything Captain Dyer thought likely to be of use; and soon a breastwork was made inside the gateway; such lower windows as looked outwards carefully nailed up, and loopholed for a shot at the enemy, should any appear; and when night did come at last, peaceful and still, the old palace was turned into a regular little fort.

We all knew that all this might be labour in vain, but all the same it seemed to be our duty to get the place into as good a state of defence as we could, and under orders we did it. But, after all, we knew well enough that if the mutineers should bring up a small field-piece, they could knock the place about our ears in no time. Our hope, though, was that, at all events while our regiment was away, we might be unmolested, for, if the enemy came in any number, what could eight-and-thirty men do, hampered as they were with half-a-dozen children, and twice as many women? Not that all the women were likely to hamper us, for there was Mrs Bantem, busy as a bee, working here, comforting there, helping women to make themselves snag in different rooms; and once, as she came near me, she gave me one of her tremendous slaps on the back, her eyes twinkling with pleasure, and the perspiration streaming down her face the while. “Ike Smith,” she says, “this is something like, isn’t it? But ask Captain Dyer to have that breastwork strengthened—there isn’t half enough of it. Glad Bantem hasn’t gone. But, I say, only think of that poor woman! I saw her just now crying, fit to break her poor heart.”

“What poor woman?” I said, staring hard.

“Why, the colonel’s wife. Poor soul, it’s pitiful to see her; it went through me like a knife.—What! are you there, my pretties?” she cried, flumping down on the stones as the colonel’s two little ones came running out. “Bless your pretty hearts, you’ll come and say a word to old Mother Bantem, won’t you?”

“What’s everybody tying about?” says the little girl, in her prattling way. “I don’t like people to ty. Has my ma been whipped, and Aunt Elsie been naughty?”

“Look, look!” cries the boy excitedly; “dere’s old Nabob!” And toddling off, the next minute he was close to the great beast, his little sister running after him, to catch hold of his hand; and there the little mites stood close to, and staring up at the great elephant, as he kept on amusing himself by twisting up a little hay in his trunk, and then lightly scattering it over his back, to get rid of the flies—for what nature could have been about to give him such a scrap of a tail, I can’t understand. He’d work it, and flip it about hard enough; but as to getting rid of a fly, it’s my belief that if insects can laugh, they laughed at it, as they watched him from where they were buzzing about the stone walls and windows in the hot sunshine.

The next minute, like a chorus, there came a scream from one of the upper windows, one from another, and a sort of howl from Mrs Bantem, and we all stood startled and staring, for what does Jenny Wren do, but, in a staggering way, lift up her little brother for him to touch the elephant’s trunk, and then she stood laughing and clapping her hands with delight, seeing no fear, bless her! as that long, soft trunk was gently curled round the boy’s waist, when he was drawn out of his sister’s arms; and then the great beast stood swinging the child to and fro, now up a little way, now down between his legs, and him crowing and laughing away all the while, as if it was the best fun that could be.

I believe we were all struck motionless; and it was like taking a hand away from my throat to let me breathe once more, when I saw the elephant gently drop the little fellow down on a heap of hay, but only for him to scramble up, and run forward shouting: “Now ’gain, now ’gain;” and, as if Nabob understood his little prattling, half-tied tongue, he takes him up again, and swings him, just as there was a regular rush made, and Mrs Colonel, Miss Ross, Lizzy, and the captain and lieutenant came up.

“For Heaven’s sake, save the child!” cries Mrs Maine.—“Mr Leigh, pray do something.”

Miss Ross did not speak, but she looked at Captain Dyer; and those two young men both went at the elephant directly, to get the child away; but, in an instant, Nabob wheeled round, just the same as a stubborn donkey would at home with a lot of boys teasing it; and then, as they dodged round his great carcass, he trumpeted fiercely, and began to shuffle off round the court.

I went up too, and so did Mrs Bantem, brave as a lion; but the great beast only kept on making his loud snorting noise, and shuffled along, with the boy in his trunk, swinging him backwards and forwards; and it was impossible to help thinking of what would be the consequence if the elephant should drop the little fellow, and then set on him one of his great feet.

It seemed as if nothing could be done, and once the idea—wild enough too—rushed into my head that it would be advisable to get a rifle put to the great beast’s ear, and fire, when Measles shouted out from where he was on guard: “Here’s Chunder coming!” and, directly after, with his opal eyeballs rolling, and his dark, treacherous-looking face seeming to me all wicked and pleased at what was going on, came the mahout, and said a few words to the elephant, which stopped directly, and went down upon its knees. Chunder then tried to take hold of the child, but somehow that seemed to make the great beast furious, and, getting up again, he began to grunt and make a noise after the fashion of a great pig, going on now faster round the court, and sending those who had come to look, and who stood in his way, fleeing in all directions.

Mrs Maine was half fainting, and, catching the little girl to her breast, I saw her go down upon her knees and hide her face, expecting, no doubt, every moment, that the next one would be her boy’s last; and, indeed, we were all alarmed now, for the more we tried to get the little chap away, the fiercer the elephant grew; the only one who did not seem to mind being the boy himself, though his sister now began to cry, and in her little artless way I heard her ask her mother if the naughty elephant would eat Clivey.

I’ve often thought since that if we’d been quiet, and left the beast alone, he would soon have set the child down; and I’ve often thought, too, that Mr Chunder could have got the boy away if he had liked, only he did nothing but tease and irritate the elephant, which was not the best of friends with him. But you will easily understand that there was not much time for thought then.

I had been doing my best along with the others, and then stood thinking what I could be at next, when I caught Lizzy Green’s eye turned to me in an appealing, reproachful sort of way, that seemed to say as plainly as could be: “Can’t you do anything?” when all at once Measles shouts out: “’Arry, ’Arry!” and Harry Lant came up at the double, having been busy carrying arms out of the guardroom rack.

It was at one and the same moment that Harry Lant saw what was wrong, and that a cold dull chill ran through me, for I saw Lizzy clasp her hands together in a sort of thankful way, and it seemed to me then, as Harry ran up to the elephant, that he was always to be put before me, and that I was nobody, and the sooner I was out of the way the better.

All the same, though, I couldn’t help admiring the way Harry ran up to the great brute, and did what none of us could manage. I quite hated him, I know, but yet I was proud of my mate, as he went up and says something to Nabob, and the elephant stands still. “Put him down,” says Harry, pointing to the ground; and the great flesh-mountain puts the little fellow down. “Now then,” says Harry, to the horror of the ladies, “pick him up again;” and in a twinkling the great thing whips the boy up once more. “Now, bring him up to the colonel’s lady.” Well, if you’ll believe me, if the great thing didn’t follow Harry like a lamb, and carry the child up to where, half fainting, knelt poor Mrs Maine. “Now, put him down,” says Harry; and the next moment little Clive Maine—Cock Robin, as we called him—was being hugged to his mother’s breast. “Now, go down on your knees, and beg the lady’s pardon,” says Harry laughing. Down goes the elephant, and stops there, making a queer chuntering noise the while. “Says he’s very sorry, ma’am, and won’t do so no more,” says Harry, serious as a judge; and in a moment, half laughing, half crying, Mrs Maine caught

hold of Harry's hand, and kissed it, and then held it for a moment to her breast, sobbing hysterically as she did so.

"God bless you! You're a good man," she cried; and then she broke down altogether; and Miss Ross, and Mrs Bantem, and Lizzy got round her, and helped her in.

I could see that Harry was touched, for one of his lips shook; but he tried to keep up the fun of the thing; and turning to the elephant, he says out loud: "Now, get up, and go back to the hay; and don't you come no more of those games, that's all."

The elephant got up directly, making a grunting noise as he did so.

"Why not?" says Harry, making-believe that that was what the great beast said. "Because, if you do, I'll smash you. There!"

Officers and men, they all burst out laughing to see little Harry Lant—a chap so little that he wouldn't have been in the regiment only that men were scarce, and the standard was very low when he listed—to see him standing shaking his fist at the great monster, one of whose legs was bigger than Harry altogether—stand shaking his fist in its face, and then take hold of the soft trunk and lead him away.

Perhaps I did, perhaps I didn't, but I thought I caught sight of a glance passing between Lizzy Green, now at one window, and Harry, leading off the elephant; but all the same I felt that jealous of him, and to hate him so, that I could have quarrelled with him about nothing. It seemed as if he was always to come before me in everything.

And I wasn't the only one jealous of Harry, for no sooner was the court pretty well empty, than he came slowly up towards me, in spite of my sour black looks, which he wouldn't notice: but before he could get to me, Chunder Chow, the mahout, goes up to the elephant, muttering and spiteful-like, with his hook-spear thing, that mahouts use to drive with; and being, I suppose, put out and jealous, and annoyed at his authority being taken away, and another man doing what he couldn't, he gives the elephant a kick in the leg, and then hits him viciously with his iron-hook thing.

Lord bless you! it didn't take an instant, and it seemed to me that the elephant only gave that trunk of his a gentle swing against Chunder's side, and he was a couple of yards off, rolling over and over in the scattered hay.

Up he jumps, wild as wild; and the first thing he catches sight of is Harry laughing fit to crack his sides, when Chunder rushes at him like a mad bull.

I suppose he expected to see Harry turn tail and ran; but that being one of those things not included in drill, and a British soldier having a good deal of the machine about him, Harry stands fast, and Chunder pulls up short, grinning, rolling his eyes, and twisting his hands about, just for all the world like as if he was robbing a hen-roost, and wringing all the chickens' necks.

"Didn't hurt much, did it, blacky?" says Harry coolly. But the mahout couldn't speak for rage; but he kept spitting on the ground, and making signs, till really his face was anything but pretty to look at. And there he kept on, till, from laughing, Harry turned a bit nasty, for there was some one looking out of a window; and from being half-amused at what was going on, I once more felt all cold and bitter. But Harry fires up now, and makes towards Mr Chunder, who begins to retreat; and says Harry: "Now I tell you what it is, young man; I never did you any ill turn; and if I choose to have a bit of fun with the elephant, it's government property, and as much mine as yours. But look ye here—if you come cussing, and spitting, and swearing at me again in your nasty heathen dialect, why, if I don't—No," he says, stopping short, and half-turning to me, "I can't black his eyes, Isaac, for they're black enough already; but let him come any more of it, and, jiggermaree, if I don't bung 'em."

Story 1--Chapter VIII.

Chunder didn't like the looks of Harry, I suppose, so he walked off, turning once to spit and cruse, like that turn-coat chap, Shimei, that you read of in the Bible; and we two walked off together towards our quarters.

"I ain't going to stand any of his nonsense," says Harry.

"It's bad making enemies now, Harry," I said gruffly. And just then up comes Measles, who had been relieved, for his spell was up, and another party were on, else he would have had to be in the guardroom.

"There never was such an unlucky beggar as me," says Measles. "If a chance does turn up for earning a bit of promotion, it's always some one else gets it. Come on, lads, and let's see what Mother Bantem's got in the pot."

"You'll perhaps have a chance before long of earning your bit of promotion without going out," I says.

"Ike Smith's turned prophet and croaker in ornary," says Harry, laughing. "I believe he expects we're going to have a new siege of Seringapatam here, only back'ards way on."

"Only wish some of 'em would come this way," says Measles grimly; and he made a sort of offer, and a hit out at some imaginary enemy.

"Here they are," says Joe Bantem, as we walked in. "Curry for dinner, lads—look alive."

"What, my little hero!" says Mrs Bantem, fetching Harry one of her slaps on the back. "My word, you're in fine plume with the colonel's lady."

Slap came her hand down again on Harry's back; and as soon as he could get wind: "O, I say, don't," he says. "Thank

goodness, I ain't a married man. Is she often as affectionate as this with you, Joe?"

Joe Bantem laughed; and soon after we were all making, in spite of threatened trouble and disappointment, an uncommonly hearty dinner, for, if there ever was a woman who could make a good curry, it was Mrs Bantem; and many's the cold winter's day I've stood at Facet's door there in Bond-street, and longed for a plateful. Pearls stewed in sunshine, Harry Lant used to call it; and really to see the beautiful, glistening, white rice, every grain tender as tender, and yet dry and ready to roll away from the others—none of your mosh-posh rice, if Mrs Bantem boiled it—and then the rich golden curry itself: there, I've known that woman turn one of the toughest old native cocks into what you'd have sworn was a delicate young Dorking chick—that is, so long as you didn't get hold of a drumstick, which perhaps would be a bit ropy. That woman was a regular blessing to our mess, and we fellows said so, many a time.

One, two, three days passed without any news, and we in our quarters were quiet as if thousands of miles from the rest of the world. The town kept as deserted as ever, and it seemed almost startling to me when I was posted sentry on the roof, after looking out over the wide, sandy, dusty plain, over which the sunshine was quivering and dancing, to peer down amongst the little ramshackle native huts without a sign of life amongst them, and it took but little thought for me to come to the conclusion that the natives knew of something terrible about to happen, and had made that their reason for going away. Though, all the same, it might have been from dread lest we should seek to visit upon them and theirs the horrors that had elsewhere befallen the British.

I used often to think, too, that Captain Dyer had some such feelings as mine, for he looked very, very serious and anxious, and he'd spend hours on the roof with his glass, Miss Ross often being by his side, while Lieutenant Leigh used to watch them in a strange way, when he thought no one was observing him.

I've often thought that when people get touched with that queer complaint folks call love, they get into a curious half-delirious way, that makes them fancy that people are nearly blind, and have their eyes shut to what they do or say. I fancy there was something of this kind with Miss Ross, and I'm sure there was with me when I used to go hanging about, trying to get a word with Lizzy; and, of course, shut up as we all were then, often having the chance, but getting seldom anything but a few cold answers, and a sort of show of fear of me whenever I was near to her.

But what troubled me as much as anything was the behaviour of the four Indians we had shut up with us—Chunder Chow, the old black nurse, and two more—for they grew more uppish and bounceable every day, refusing to work, until Captain Dyer had one of the men tied up to the triangles and flogged, down in a great cellar or vault-place that there was under the north end of the palace, so that the ladies and women shouldn't hear his cries. He deserved all he got, as I can answer for, and that made the rest a little more civil, but not for long; and, just the day before something happened, I took the liberty of saluting Captain Dyer, after he had been giving me some orders, and seizing that chance of speaking my mind.

"Captain," I says, "I don't think those black folks are to be trusted."

"Neither do I, Smith," he says. "But what have you to tell me?"

"Nothing at all, captain, only that I have my eye on them; and I've been thinking that they must somehow or another have held communication outside; and I don't like it, for those people don't get what we call 'cheeky' without cause."

"Keep both eyes on them then, Smith," says Captain Dyer, smiling; "and, no matter what it is—if it is the most trivial thing in any way connected with them, report it."

"I will, sir," I says; and the very next day, much against the grain, I did have something to report.

Story 1--Chapter IX.

That next morning was hotter, I think, than ever, with no prospect either of rain or change; and, after doing what little work I had to get over, it struck me that I might as well attend to what Captain Dyer advised—give two eyes to Chunder and his friends. So I left Mrs Bantem busy over her cooking, and went down into the court.

All below was as still as death—sunshine here, shadow there; but through one of the windows, open to catch the least breeze that might be on the way, and taking in instead the hot sultry air, came now and then the silvery laughter of the children—that pleasant cheery sound that makes the most rugged old face grow a trifle smoother.

I looked here, and I looked there, but could only see old Nabob amusing himself with the hay, a sentry on the roof to the east, and another on the roof to the west, and one in the gateway, broiling almost, all of them, with the heat.

The ladies and the children were seldom seen now, for they were in trouble; and Mrs Maine was worn almost to skin and bone with anxiety, as she sat waiting for tidings of the expedition.

Not knowing what to do with myself, I sauntered along by where there was a slip of shade, and entered the south side of the palace—an old half-ruinous part; and after going first into one, and then into another of the bare empty rooms, I picked out what seemed to be the coolest corner I could find, sat down with my back propped against the wall, filled and lit my pipe, and then, putting things together in my mind, thoroughly enjoyed a good smoke.

There was something wonderfully soothing in that bit of tobacco, and it appeared to me cooling, comforting, and to make my bit of a love-affair seem not so bad as it was. So, on the strength of that, I refilled, and was about half-way through another pipe, when things began to grow very dim round about me, and I was wandering about in my dreams, and nodding that head of mine in the most curious and wild way you can think of. What I dreamed about most was of getting married to Lizzy Green; and in what must have been a very short space, that event was coming

off at least half-a-dozen times over, only Nabob, the elephant, would come in at an awkward time and put a stop to it. But at last, in my dreamy fashion, it seemed to me that matters were smoothed over, and he consented to put down the child, and, flapping his ears, promised he'd say yes. But in my stupid, confused muddle, I thought that he'd no sooner put down the child with his trunk than he wheeled round and took him up with his tail; and so on, backwards and forwards, when, getting quite out of patience, I caught Lizzy's hand in mine, saying: "Never mind the elephant—let's have it over;" and she gave a sharp scream.

I jumped to my feet, biting off and nearly swallowing a bit of pipe-shank as I did so, and then stood drenched with perspiration, listening to a scuffling noise in the next room; when, shaking off the stupid confused feeling, I ran towards the door just as another scream—not a loud, but a faint excited scream—rang in my ears, and the next moment Lizzy Green was sobbing and crying in my arms, and that black thief Chunder was crawling on his hands and knees to the door, where he got up, holding his fist to his mouth, and then he turned upon me such a look as I have never forgotten.

I don't wonder at the people of old painting devils with black faces; for I don't know anything more devilish-looking than a black's phiz when it is drawn with rage, and the eyes are rolling about, now all black flash, now all white, while the grinning ivories below seem to be grinding and ready to tear you in pieces.

It was after that fashion that Chunder looked at me as he turned at the door; but I was then only thinking of the trembling frightened girl I held in my arms, trying at the same time to whisper a few gentle words, while I had hard work to keep from pressing my lips to her white forehead.

But the next minute she disengaged herself from my grasp, and held out her little white hand to me, thanking me as sweetly as thanks could be given.

"Perhaps you had better not say a word about it," she whispered. "He's come under pretence of seeing the nurse, and been rude to me once or twice before. I came here to sit at that window with my work, and did not see him come behind me."

I started as she spoke about that open window, for it looked out upon the spot where I sometimes stood sentry; but then, Harry Lant sometimes stood just in the same place, and I don't know whether it was a strange impression caused by his coming that made me think of him, but just then there were footsteps, and, with his pipe in his mouth, and fatigue-jacket all unbuttoned, Harry entered the room.

"Beg pardon; didn't know it was engaged," he says lightly, as he stepped back; and then he stopped, for Lizzy called to him by his name.

"Please walk back with me to Mrs Maine's quarters," she said softly; and once more holding her hand out to me, with her eyes cast down, she thanked me; and the question I had been asking myself—Did she love Harry Lant better than me?—was to my mind answered, and I gave a groan as I saw them walk off together, for it struck me then that they had engaged to meet in that room, only Harry Lant was late.

"Never mind," I says to myself; "I've done a comrade a good turn." And then I thought more and more of there being a feeling in the blacks' minds that their day was coming, or that ill-looking scoundrel would never have dared to insult a white woman in open day.

Ten minutes after, I was on my way to Captain Dyer, for, in spite of what Lizzy had said, I felt that, being under orders, it was my duty to report all that occurred with the blacks; for we might at any time have been under siege, and to have had unknown and treacherous enemies in the camp would have been ruin indeed.

"Well, Smith," he said, smiling as I entered and saluted, "what news of the enemy?"

"Not much, sir," I said; what I had to tell going, as I have before hinted, very much against the grain. "I was in one of the empty rooms on the south side, when I heard a scream, and running up, I found it was Miss Ross—"

"What!" he roared, in a voice that would have startled a stronger man than I.

"Miss Ross's maid, sir, with that black fellow Chunder, the mahout, trying to kiss her."

"Well?" he said, with a black angry look overspreading his face.

"Well, sir," I said, feeling quite red as I spoke, "he kissed my fist instead—that's all."

Captain Dyer began to walk up and down, playing with one of the buttons on his breast, as was his way when eager and excited.

"Now, Smith," he said at last, stopping short before me, "what does that mean?"

"Mean, sir?" I said, feeling quite as excited as himself. "Well, sir, if you ask me, I say that if it was in time of peace and quiet, it would only mean that it was a hit of his damned black—I beg your pardon, captain," I says, stopping short, for, you see, it was quite time.

"Go on, Smith," he said quietly.

"His black impudence, sir."

"But, as it is not in time of peace and quiet, Smith?" he said, looking me through and through.

“Well, sir,” I said, “I don’t want to croak, nor for other people to believe what I say; but it seems to me that that black fellow’s kicking out of the ranks means a good deal; and I take it that he is excited with the news that he has somehow got hold of—news that is getting into his head like so much green ’rack. I’ve thought of it some little time now, sir; and it strikes me that if, instead of our short company being Englishmen, they were all Chunder Chows, before to-morrow morning, begging your pardon, Captain Dyer and Lieutenant Leigh would have said ‘Right wheel’ for the last time.”

“And the women and children!” he muttered softly; but I heard him.

He did not speak then for quite half a minute, when he turned to me with a pleasant smile.

“But you see, though, Smith,” he said, “our short company is made up of different stuff; and therefore there’s some hope for us yet; but—Ah, Leigh, did you hear what he said?”

“Yes,” said the lieutenant, who had been standing at the door for a few moments, scowling at as both.

“Well, what do you think?” said Captain Dyer.

“Think?” said Lieutenant Leigh contemptuously, as he turned away—“nothing!”

“But,” said Captain Dyer quietly, “really I think there is much truth in what he, an observant man, says.”

There was a challenge from the roof just then; and we all went out to find that a mounted man was in sight; and on the captain making use of his glass, I heard him tell Lieutenant Leigh that the man was an orderly dragoon.

A few minutes after, the new-comer was plain enough to everybody; and soon, man and horse dead beat, the orderly with a despatch trotted into the court.

It was a sight worth seeing, to look upon Mrs Maine clutching at the letter enclosed for her in Captain Dyer’s despatch. Poor woman! it was a treasure to her—one that made her pant as she hurriedly snatched it from the captain’s hand, for all formality was forgotten in those days; and then she hurried away to where her sister was waiting to hear the news.

Story 1--Chapter X.

The orderly took back a despatch from Captain Dyer, starting at daybreak the next morning; but before then, we all knew that matters were getting to wear a terrible aspect. At first, I had been disposed to think that the orderly was romancing, and giving as a few travellers’ tales; but I soon found out that he was in earnest; and more than once I felt a shiver as he sat with our mess, telling as of how regiment after regiment had mutinied and murdered their officers; how station after station had been plundered, collectors butchered, and their wives and daughters sometimes cut down, sometimes carried off by the wretches, who had made a sport of throwing infants from one to the other on their bayonets.

“I never had any children,” sobbed Mrs Bantem then; “and I never wished to have any; for they’re not right for soldiers’ wives; but only to think—the poor sweet, suffering little things. O, if I’d only been a man, and been there!”

We none of us said anything; but I believe all thought as I did, that if Mrs Bantem had been there, she’d have done as much—ah, perhaps more—than some men would have done. Bless my soul! as I think of it, and recall it from the bygone, there I can see Mother Bantem—though why we called her mother, I don’t know, unless it was because she was like a mother to us—with her great strapping form; and think of the way in which she—

Halt! Retire by fours from the left.

Just in time; for I find handling my pen’s like handling a commander-in-chief’s staff, and that I’ve got letters which make words, which make phrases, which make sentences, which make paragraphs, which make chapters, which make up the whole story; and that is for all the world like the army with its privates made into companies, and battalions, and regiments, and brigades. Well, there you are: if you don’t have discipline, and every private in his right place, where are you? Just so with me; my words were coming out in the wrong places, and in another minute I should have spoiled my story, by letting you know what was coming at the wrong time.

Well, we all felt very deeply the news brought in by that orderly; for soldiers are not such harum-scarum roughs as some people seem to imagine. For the most part, they’re men with the same feelings as civilians; and I don’t think many of us slept very sound that night, feeling as we did what a charge we had, and that we might be attacked at any time; and a good deal of my anxiety was on account of Lizzy Green; for even if she wouldn’t be my wife, but Harry Lant’s, I could not help taking a wonderful deal of interest in her.

But all the same it was a terribly awkward time, as you must own, for falling in love; and I don’t know hardly whom I pitied most, Captain Dyer or myself; but think I had more leanings towards number one, because Captain Dyer was happy; though, perhaps, I might have been; only like lots more hot sighing noodles, I never once thought of asking the girl if she’d have me. As for Lieutenant Leigh, I never even thought of giving him a bit of pity, for I did not think he deserved it.

Well, the trooper started off at daybreak, so as to get well on his journey in the early morning; and about an hour after he was gone, I had a fancy to go into the old ruined room again, where there was the bit of a scene I’ve told you of. My orders from Captain Dyer were, to watch Chunder strictly, both as to seeing that he did not again insult any of the women, and also to see if he had any little game of his own that he was playing on the sly; for though Lieutenant

Leigh, on being told, pooh-poohed it all, and advised a flogging, Captain Dyer had his suspicions—stronger ones, it seemed, than mine; and hence my orders, and my being excused from mounting guard.

It was all very still and cool and quiet as I walked from room to room, slowly and thoughtfully, stopping to pick up my broken pipe, which lay where I had dropped it; and then going on into the next room, where, under the window, lay the bit of cotton cobweb and cat's-cradle work Lizzy had been doing, and had left behind. I gave a bit of a gulp as I picked that up; and I was tucking it inside my jacket, when I stopped short, for I thought I heard a whisper.

I listened, and there it was again—a low, earnest whispering of first one and then another voice in the next room, whose wide broken doorway stood open, for there wasn't a bit of woodwork left.

I have heard about people saying, that in some great surprise or fright, their hearts stood still; but I don't believe it, because it always strikes me that, when a person's heart does stand still, it never goes on again. All the same, though, my heart felt then as if it did stand still with the dead, dull, miserable feeling that came upon me. Only to think that this was only the second time I had come through these ruined rooms, and they were here again! It was plain enough Harry Lant and Lizzy made this their meeting-place, and only they knew how many times they'd met before.

Time back, I could have laughed at the idea of me, a great strapping fellow, feeling as I did; but now I felt very wretched; and as I thought of Harry Lant kissing those bright red lips, and looking into those deep dark eyes, and being let pass his hand over the glossy hair, with the prospect of some day calling it all his own, I did not burn all over with a mad rage and passion, but it was like a great grief coming upon me, so that, if it hadn't been for being a man, I could have sat down and cried.

I should think ten minutes passed, and the whispering still went on, when I said to myself: "Be a man, Isaac: if she likes him better, hasn't she a right to her pick?" But still I felt very miserable as I turned to go away, when a something, said a little louder than the rest, stopped me.

"That ain't English," I says to myself. "What! surely she's not listening to that black scoundrel?"

I was red-hot then in a moment; and as to thinking whether this or that was straightforward, or whether I was playing the spy, or anything of that sort, such an idea never came into my head. Chunder was evidently talking to Lizzy Green in that room; and for a few seconds I felt blind with a sort of jealous savage rage—against her, mind, now; and going on tip-toe, I looked round the doorway, so as to see as well as hear.

I was back in an instant, with a fresh set of sensations busy in my breast. It was Chunder, but he was alone; there was no Lizzy there; and I don't know whether my heart beat then for joy at knowing it, or for shame at myself for having thought such a thing of her.

What did it mean, then?

I did not have to ask myself the question twice, for the answer came—Treachery! And stealing to the slit of window in the room I was in, I peeped cautiously out in time to see Chunder throwing out what looked like a white packet. I could see his arm move as he threw it down to a man in a turban—a dark wiry-looking rascal; and in those few seconds I seemed to read that packet word for word, though no doubt the writing was in one of the native dialects, and my reading of it was, that it was a correct list of the defenders of the place, the women and children, and what arms and ammunition there were stored up.

It was all plain enough, and the villain was sending it by a man who must have brought him tidings of some kind.

What was I to do? That man ought to be stopped at all hazards; and what I ought to have done was to steal back, give the alarm, and let a party go round to try and cut him off.

That's what I ought to have done; but I never did have much judgment.

Now for what I did do.

Slipping back from the window, I went cautiously to the doorway, and entered the old room where Chunder was standing at the window; and I went in so quietly, and he was so intent, that I had crept close, and was in the act of leaping on to him before he turned round and tried to avoid me.

He was too late, though, for with a bound I was on him, pinioning his hands, and holding him down on the window-sill, with his head half out, as, bearing down upon him, I leaned out as far as I could, yelling out,—

"Sentry on the west roof, mark man below. Stop him, or fire!"

The black fellow below drew a long awkward-looking pistol, and aimed at me, but only for a moment. Perhaps he was afraid of killing Chunder, for the next instant he had stuck the pistol back in his calico belt, and, with head stooped, was running as hard as he could run, when I could hardly contain myself for rage, knowing as I did how important it was for him to have been stopped.

"Bang!"

A sharp report from the roof, and the fellow made a bound.

Was he hit?

No: he only seemed to ran the faster.

“Bang!”

Another report as the runner came in sight of the second sentry.

But I saw no more, for all my time was taken up with Chunder; for as the second shot rang out, he gave a heave, and nearly sent me through the open window.

It was by a miracle almost that I saved myself from breaking my neck, for it was a good height from the ground; but I held on to him tightly with a clutch such as he never had on his arms and neck before; and then, with a strength for which I shouldn’t have given him credit, he tussled with me, now tugging to get away, now to throw me from the window, his hot breath beating all the time upon my cheeks, and his teeth grinning, and eyes rolling savagely.

It was only a spurt, though, and I soon got the better of him.

I don’t want to boast, but I suppose our cold northern bone and muscle are tougher and stronger than theirs; and at the end of five minutes, puffing and blown, I was sitting on his chest, taking a paper from inside his calico.

That laid me open; for, like a flash, I saw then that he had a knife in one hand, while before another thought could pass through my mind, it was sticking through my jacket and the skin of my ribs, and my fist was driven down against his mouth for him to kiss for the second time in his life.

Next minute, Captain Dyer and a dozen men were in the room, Chunder was handcuffed and marched off, and the captain was eagerly questioning me.

“But is that fellow shot down or taken—the one outside?” I asked.

“Neither,” said Captain Dyer; “and it is too late now: he has got far enough away.”

Then I told him what I had seen, and he looked at the packet, his brow knitting as he tried to make it out.

“I ought to have come round and given the alarm, captain,” I said bitterly.

“Yes, my good fellow, you ought,” he said; “and I ought to have had that black scoundrel under lock and key days ago. But it is too late now to talk of what ought to have been done; we must talk of what there is to do.—But are you hurt?”

“He sent his knife through my jacket, sir,” I said, “but it’s only a scratch on the skin;” and fortunately that’s what it proved to be, for we had no room for wounded men, since we should have them soon enough.

Story 1--Chapter XI.

An hour of council, and then another—our two leaders not seeming to agree as to the extent of the coming danger. Challenge from the west roof:

“Orderly in sight.”

Sure enough, a man on horseback riding very slowly, and as if his horse was dead beat.

“Surely it isn’t that poor fellow come back, because his horse has failed? He ought to have walked on,” said Captain Dyer.

“Same man,” said Lieutenant Leigh, looking through his glass; and before very long, the poor fellow who had gone away at daybreak rode slowly up to the gate, was admitted, and then had to be helped from his horse, giving a great sobbing groan as it was done.

“In here, quick!” I said, for I thought I heard the ladies’ voices; and we carried him in to where Mrs Bantem was getting ready for dinner, and there we laid him on a mattress.

“Despatches, captain,” he says, holding up the captain’s letter to Colonel Maine. “They didn’t get that. They were too many for me. I dropped one, though, with my pistol, and cut my way through the others.”

As he spoke, I untwisted his leather sword-knot, which was cutting into his wrist, for his hacked and blood-stained sabre was hanging from his hand.

“Wouldn’t go back into the scabbard,” he said faintly; and then with a harsh gasp: “Water—water!”

He revived then a hit; and as Captain Dyer and Mrs Bantem between them were attending to, and binding up his wounds, he told us how he had been set upon some miles off, and had been obliged to fight his way back; and, poor chap, he had fought; for there were no less than ten lance-wounds in his arms, thighs, and chest, from a slight prick up to a horrible gash, deep and long enough, it seemed to me, to let out half-a-dozen poor fellows’ souls.

Just in the middle of it, I saw Captain Dyer start and look strange, for there was a shadow came across where we were kneeling; and the next instant he was standing between Miss Ross and the wounded man.

“Pray, go, dear Elsie; this is no place for you,” I heard him whisper to her.

“Indeed, Lawrence,” she said gently, “am I not a soldier’s daughter? I ought to say this is no place for you. Go, and

make your arrangements for our defence."

I don't think any one but me saw the look of love she gave him as she took sponge and lint from his hand, pressing it as she did so, and then her pale face lit up with a smile as she met his eyes; the next moment she was kneeling by the wounded trooper, and in a quiet firm way helping Mrs Bantem, in a manner that made her, poor woman, stare with astonishment.

"God bless you, my darling," she whispered to her as soon as they had done, and the poor fellow was lying still—a toss-up with him whether it should be death or life; and I saw Mrs Bantem take Miss Ross's soft white hand between her two great rough hard palms, and kiss it just once.

"And I'd always been abusing and running her down for a fine madam, good for nothing but to squeal songs, and be looked at," Mrs Bantem said to me a little while after. "Why, Isaac Smith, we shall be having that little maid showing next that there's something in her."

"And why not?" I said gruffly.

"Ah, to be sure," says she, with a comical look out of one eye; "why not? But, Isaac, my lad," she said sadly, and looking at me very earnestly, "I'm afraid there's sore times coming, and if so, God in heaven help those poor bairns! O, if I'd been a man, and been there!" she cried, as she recollected what the trooper had told us; and she shook her fist fiercely in the air. "It's what I always did say: soldiers' wives have no business to have children; and it's rank cruelty to the poor little things to bring them into the world."

Mrs Bantem then went off to see to her patient, while I walked into the court, wondering what would come next, and whether, in spite of all the little bitternesses and grumbling, everybody, now that the stern realities of life were coming upon us, would show up the bright side of his or her nature; and somehow I got very hopeful about it.

I felt just then that I should have much liked to have a few words with Lizzy Green, but I had no chance, for it was a busy time with us. Captain Dyer felt strongly enough his responsibility, and not a minute did he lose in doing all he could for our defence; so that after an anxious day, with nothing more occurring, when I looked round at what had been done in barricading and so on, it seemed to me, speaking as a soldier, that, as far as I could judge, there was nothing more to be done, though still the feeling would come home to me that it was a great place for forty men to defend, if attacked by any number. Captain Dyer must have seen that, for he had arranged to have a sort of citadel at the north end by the gateway, and this was to be the last refuge, where all the ammunition and food and no end of chatties of water were stowed down in the great vault-place, which went under this part of the building and a good deal of the court. Then the watch was set, trebled this time, on roof and at window, and we waited impatiently for the morning.

Yes, we all of us, I believe, waited impatiently for the morning; when I think, if we had known all that was to come, we should have knelt down and prayed for the darkness to keep on hour after hour, for days, and weeks, and months, sooner than the morning should have broke as it did upon a rabble of black faces, some over white clothes, some over the British uniform that they had disgraced; and as I, who was on the west roof, heard the first hum of their coming, and caught the first glimpse of the ragged column, I gave the alarm, setting my teeth hard as I did so; for, after many years of soldiering, I was now for the first time to see a little war in earnest.

Captain Dyer's first act on the alarm being given was to double the guard over the three blacks, now secured in the strongest room he could find, the black nurse being well looked after by the women. Then, quick almost as thought, every man was at the post already assigned to him; the women and children were brought into the corner rooms by the gates, and then we waited excitedly for what should follow. The captain now ordered me out of the little party under a sergeant, and made me his orderly; and so it happened that always being with or about him, I knew how matters were going on, and was always carrying the orders, now to Lieutenant Leigh, now to this sergeant or that corporal. At the first offset of the defence of the old place, there was a dispute between captain and lieutenant; and I'm afraid it was maintained by the last out of obstinacy, and just at a time when there should have been nothing but pulling together for the sake of all concerned. I must say, though, that there was right on both sides.

Lieutenant Leigh put it forward as his opinion that, short of men as we were, it was folly to keep four enemies under the same roof, who were likely at any time to overpower the one or two sentries placed over them; while, if there was nothing to fear in that way, there was still the shortening of our defensive forces by a couple of valuable men.

"What would you do with them, then?" said Captain Dyer.

"Set them at liberty," said Lieutenant Leigh.

"I grant all you say, in the first place," said the captain; "but our retaining them is a sheer necessity."

"Why?" said Lieutenant Leigh with a sneer. And I must say that at first I held with him.

"Because," said the captain sternly, "if we set them at liberty, we increase our enemies' power, not merely with three men, but with scoundrels who can give them the fullest information of our defences, over and above that of which I am afraid they are already possessed. The matter will not bear farther discussion.—Lieutenant Leigh, go now to your post, and do your duty to the best of your power."

Lieutenant Leigh did not like this, and he frowned; but Captain Dyer was his superior officer, and it was his duty to obey; so of course he did.

Now, our position was such, that, say, a hundred men with a field-piece could have knocked a wing in, and then carried us by assault with ease; but though our enemies were full two hundred and fifty, and many of them drilled

soldiers—pieces, you may say, of a great machine—fortunately for us, there was no one to put that machine together and set it in motion. We soon found that out; for, instead of making the best of things, and taking possession of buildings—sheds and huts—here and there, from which to annoy us, they came up in a mob to the gate, and one fellow on a horse—a native chief, he seemed to be—gave his sword a wave, and half-a-dozen sowars round him did the same, and then they called to us to surrender.

Captain Dyer's orders were to act entirely on the defensive, and to fire no shot till we had orders, leaving them to commence hostilities.

"For," said he, speaking to all the men, "it may be a cowardly policy with such a mutinous set in front of us; but we have the women and children to think of; therefore, our duty is to hold the foe at bay, and when we do fire, to make every shot tell. Beating them off is, I fear, impossible; but we may keep them out till help comes."

"Wouldn't it be advisable, sir, to try and send off another despatch?" I said. "There's the trooper's horse."

"Where?" said Captain Dyer with a smile. "That has already been thought of, Smith; and Sergeant Jones, the only good horseman we have, went off at two o'clock, and by this time is, I hope, out of danger.—Good heavens! what does that mean?" he said, using his glass.

It was curious that I should have thought of such a thing just then, at a time when four sowars led up Sergeant Jones tied by a piece of rope to one of their saddle-bows, while the trooper's horse was behind.

Captain Dyer would not show, though, that he was put out by the failure of that hope; he only passed the word for the men to stand firm, and then sent me with a message to Mrs Colonel Maine, requesting that every one might keep right away from the windows, as the enemy might open fire at any time.

He was quite right; for just as I knocked at Mrs Maine's door, a regular squandering scattering fire began, and you could hear the bullets striking the wall with a sharp pat, bringing down showers of white lime-dust and powdered stone.

I found Mrs Maine seated on the floor with her children, pale and trembling, the little things the while laughing and playing over some pictures. Miss Ross was leaning over her sister, and Lizzy Green was waiting to give the children something else when they were tired of the pictures.

As the rattle of the musketry began, it was soon plain enough to see who had the stoutest hearts; but I seemed to be noticing nothing, though I did a great deal, and listened to Mrs Bantem's voice in the next room, bullying and scolding a woman for crying out loud and upsetting everybody else.

I gave my message; and then Miss Ross asked me if any one was hurt, to which I answered as cheerfully as could be that we were all right as yet; and then, taking myself off, Lizzy Green came with me to the door, and I held out my hand to say good-bye; for I knew it was possible I might never see her again. She gave me her hand, and said "Good bye," in a faltering sort of way, and it seemed to me that she shrank from me. The next instant, though, there was the rattling crash of the firing, and I knew now that our men were answering.

Story 1--Chapter XII.

As I went down into the courtyard, I found the smoke rising in puffs as our men fired over the breastwork at the mob coming at the gate; Captain Dyer in the thick of it the while, going from man to man, warning them to keep themselves out of sight, and to aim low.

"Take care of yourselves, my lads. I value every one of you at a hundred of those black scoundrels. Tut, tut! whose that down?"

"Corporal Bray," says some one.

"Here, Emson, Smith, both of you lend a hand here. We'll make Bantem's quarters hospital.—Now then, look alive, ambulance party!"

We were about lifting the poor fellow, who had sunk down behind the breastwork, all doubled up like, hands and knees, and head hanging; but as we touched him, he straightened himself out, and looked up at Captain Dyer.

"Don't touch me yet," he says in a whisper. "My stripes for some one, captain. Do for Isaac Smith there. Hooray!" he says faintly, and he took off his cap with one hand, gave it a bit of a wave, "God save the Quee—"

"Bear him carefully to the empty ground-floor, south side," says Captain Dyer sternly; "and make haste back, my lads: moments are precious."

"I'll do that with private Manning's wife," says a voice; and, turning as we were going to lift our dead comrade, there was big strapping Mrs Bantem, and another soldier's wife; and she then said a few words to the captain.

"Gone?" says Captain Dyer.

"Quarter of an hour ago, sir," says Mrs Bantem; and then to me: "Poor trooper, Isaac!"

"Another man here," says Captain Dyer.—"No, not you, Smith.—Fill up here, Bantem."

Joe Bantem waved his hand to his wife, and took the dead corporal's place; but not easily, for Measles, who was next

man, was stepping into it, when Captain Dyer ordered him back.

“But there’s such a much better chance of dropping one of them mounted chaps, sir,” says Measles grumbling.

“Hold your tongue, sir, and go back to your own loophole,” says Captain Dyer; and the way that Measles kept on loading and firing, ramming down his cartridges viciously, and then taking long and careful aim—ah, and with good effect, too!—was a sight to see.

All the while we were expecting an assault; but none came; for the mutineers fell fast, and did not seem to dare to make a rush while we kept up such practice.

Then I had to go round and ask Lieutenant Leigh to send six more men to the gate, and to bring news of what was going on round the other sides.

I found the lieutenant standing at the window where I caught Chunder; and there was a man each at all the other four little windows which looked down at the outside—all the others, as I have said, looking in upon the court.

The lieutenant’s men had a shot now and then at any one who approached; but the mutineers seemed to have determined upon forcing the gate, and, so far as I could see, there was very little danger to fear from any other quarter.

I knew Lieutenant Leigh was not a coward; but he seemed very half-hearted over the defence, doing his duty, but in a sullen sort of way; and, of course, that was because he wanted to take the lead now held by Captain Dyer; and perhaps it was misjudging him, but I’m afraid just at that time he’d have been very glad if a shot had dropped his rival, and he could have stepped into his place.

Captain Dyer’s plan to keep the rabble at bay till help could come, was, of course, quite right; and that night it was an understood thing that another attempt should be made to send a messenger to Wallahbad, another of our corporals being selected for the dangerous mission.

The fighting was kept on in an on-and-off way till evening, we losing several men, but a good many falling on the other side, which made them more cautious, and not once did we have a chance of touching a man with the bayonet. Some of our men grumbled a little at this, saying that it was very hard to stand there hour after hour to be shot down; and could they have done as they liked, they’d have made a sally.

Then came the night, and a short consultation between the captain and Lieutenant Leigh. The mutineers had ceased firing at sundown, and we were in hopes that there would be a rest till daylight; but all the same the strictest watch was kept, and only half the men lay down at a time.

Half the night, though, had not passed, when a hand was laid upon my shoulder; and in an instant I was up, piece in hand, to find that it was Captain Dyer.

“Come here,” he said quietly; and following him into the room underneath where the women were placed, he told me to listen; and I did, to hear a low, grating, tearing noise, as of something scraping on stone. “That’s been going on,” he said, “for a good hour, and I can’t make it out, Smith.”

“Prisoners escaping,” I said quietly.

“But they are not so near as that. They were confined in the next room but one,” he said in a whisper.

“Broke through, then,” I said.

Then we went—Captain Dyer and I—quietly up on to the roof, answered the challenge, and then walked to the edge, where, leaning over, we could hear the doll grating noise once more; then a stone seemed to fall out on to the sandy way by the palace walls.

It was all plain enough: they had broken through from one room to another, where there was a window no bigger than a loophole, and they were widening this.

“Quick here, sentry,” says the captain.

The next minute the sentry hurried up, and we had a man posted as nearly over the window as we could guess; and then I had my orders in a minute:

“Take two men and the sentry at their door, rush in, and secure them at once. But if they have got out, join Sergeant Williams, and follow me to act as reserve; for I am going to make a sally by the gate to stop them from the outside.”

I roused Harry Lant and Measles, and they were with me in an instant. We passed a couple of sentries, and gave the countersign, and then mounted to the long stone passage which led to where the prisoners had been placed.

As we three privates neared the door, the sentry there challenged; but when we came up to him and listened, there was not a sound to be heard; neither had he heard anything, he said. The next minute the door was thrown open, and we found an empty room; but a hole in the wall showed us which way the prisoners had gone.

We none of us much liked the idea of going through that hole to be taken at a disadvantage; but duty was duty, and, running forward, I made a bold thrust through with my piece in two or three directions; then I crept through; followed by Harry Lant, and found that room empty too; but they had not gone by the doorway which led into the women’s part, but enlarged the window, and dropped down, leaving a large opening—one that, if we had not detected it then,

would no doubt have done nicely for the entrance of a strong party of enemies.

“Sentry here,” I said; and leaving the man at the window, followed by Harry Lant and Measles, I ran back, got down to the courtyard, crossed to where Sergeant Williams with half a dozen men waited our coming, and then we were passed through the gate, and went along at the double to where we could hear noise and shouting.

We had the narrow alley to go through—the one I have before mentioned as being between the place we had strengthened and the next building; and no sooner were we at the end, than we found we were none too soon; for there, in the dim starlight, we could see Captain Dyer and four men surrounded by a good score, howling and cutting at them like so many demons, and plainly to be seen by their white calico things.

“By your left, my lads, shoulder to shoulder—double!” says the sergeant.

Then we gave a cheer, and with hearts bounding with excitement, down we rushed upon the scoundrels to give them their first taste of the bayonet, cutting Captain Dyer and two more men out, just as the other two went down.

It was as fierce a fight that, as it was short; for we soon found the alarm spread, and enemies running up on all sides. It was bayonet-drill then; and well we showed the practice, till we retired slowly to the entrance of the alley; but the pattering of feet and cries told that there were more coming to meet us that way; when, following Captain Dyer’s orders, we retreated in good form in the other direction, so as to get round to the gate by the alley, on the south side.

And now for the first time we gave them a volley, checking the advance for a few seconds, while we retreated loading, to turn again, and give them another volley, which checked them once more; but only for a few seconds, when they came down upon us like a swarm of bees, right upon our bayonets; and as fast as half-a-dozen fell, half-a-dozen more were leaping upon the steel.

We kept our line, though, one and all, retiring in good order to the mouth of the second court, which ran down by the south side of the palace; when, as if maddened at the idea of losing us, a whole host of them came at us with a rush, breaking our line, and driving us anyhow, mixed up together, down the alley, which was dark as pitch; but not so dark but that we could make out a turban or a calico cloth; and those bayonets of ours were used to some purpose.

Half-a-dozen times over I heard the captain’s voice cheering us on, and shouting, “Gate, gate!” Then I saw the flash of his sword once, and managed to pin a fellow who was making at him, just as we got out at the other end with a fierce rush. Directly after I heard the captain shout “Rally!” and saw him wave his sword; and then I don’t recollect any more; for it was one wild fierce scuffle—stab and thrust in the midst of a surging, howling, maddened mob, forcing us towards the gateway.

I thought it was all over with us, when there came a cheer, and the gate was thrown open, a dozen men formed, and charged down, driving the niggers back like sheep; and then, somehow or another, we were cut out, and, under cover of the new-comers, reached the gate.

A ringing volley was then given into the thick of the mutineers as they came pouring on again; but the next minute all were safely inside, and the gate was thrust to and barred; and, panting and bleeding, we stood, six of us, trying to get our breath.

“This wouldn’t have happened,” says a voice, “if my advice had been taken. I wish the black scoundrels had been shot. Where’s Captain Dyer?”

There was no answer, and a dead chill fell on me as I seemed to realise that things had come now to a bad pass.

“Where’s Sergeant Williams?” said Lieutenant Leigh again; and it seemed to me that he spoke in a husky voice.

“Here!” said some one faintly; and turning, there was the sergeant seated on the ground, and supporting himself against the breastwork.

“Any one know the other men who went out on this mad sally?” says the lieutenant. “Where’s Harry Lant?” I says. There was no answer here either; and this time it was my turn to speak in a queer husky voice, as I said again,—

“Where’s Measles? I mean Sam Bigley.”

“He’s gone too, poor chap,” says some one. “No, he ain’t gone neither,” says a voice behind me; and turning, there was Measles tying a handkerchief round his head, muttering the while about some black devil. “I ain’t gone, nor I ain’t much hurt,” he growled; “and if I don’t take it out of some on ’em for this chop o’ the head, it’s a rum ’un; and that’s all I’ve got to say.”

“Load,” says Lieutenant Leigh shortly; and we loaded again, and then fired two or three volleys at the niggers as they came up towards the gate once more; when some one calls out,—

“Ain’t none of us going to make a sally party, and bring in the captain?”

“Silence, there, in the ranks!” shouts Lieutenant Leigh; and though it had a bad sound coming from him as it did, and situated as he was, no one knew better than I did how that it would have been utter madness to have gone out again; for even if he were alive, instead of bringing in Captain Dyer, now that the whole mob was roused, we should have all been cut to pieces.

It was as if in answer to the lieutenant’s order that silence seemed to fall then, both inside and outside the palace—a silence that was only broken now and then by the half-smothered groan of some poor fellow who had been hurt in the sortie—though the way in which those men of ours did bear wounds, some of them even that were positively

awful, was a something worth a line in history.

Yes, there was a silence fell upon the place for the rest of that night, and I remember thinking of the wounds that had been made in two poor hearts by that bad night's work; and I can say now, faithful and true, that there was not a selfish thought in my heart as I remembered Lizzy Green, any more than there was when Miss Ross came uppermost in my mind; for I knew well enough that they must have soon known of the disaster that had befallen our little party.

Story 1--Chapter XIII.

Whatever those poor women suffered, they took care it should not be seen by us men; and, indeed, we had little time to think of them the next day. We had given ourselves the task to protect them, and we were fighting hard to do it, and that was all we could do then; for the enemy gave us but little peace—not making any savage attack, but harassing us in a cruel way, every man acting like for himself, and all the discipline the sepoys had learned seeming to be forgotten.

As for Lieutenant Leigh, he looked cold and stern; but there was no flinching with him now: he was in command, and he showed it; and though I never liked the man, I must say that he showed himself a brave and clever officer; and but for his skilful arrangement of the few men under his charge, that place would have fallen half-a-dozen times over.

We had taken no prisoners, so that there was no chance of talking of exchange; though I believe to a man all thought that the captain and files missing from our company were dead.

The women now lent us their help, bringing down spare muskets and cartridges, loading too for us; so that when the mutineers made an attack, we were able to keep up a much sharper fire than we should have done under other circumstances.

It was about the middle of the afternoon when, hot and exhausted, we were firing away; for the bullets were coming thick and fast through the gateway, flying across the yard, and making a passage in that direction nearly certain death, when I felt a strange choking feeling, for Measles says to me all at once,—

"Look there, Ike."

I looked, and I could hardly believe it, and rubbed my eyes; for just in the thickest of the firing there was the sound of merry laughter, and those two children of the colonel's came toddling out, right across the line of fire, turned back to look up at some one calling to them from the window, and then stood still laughing and clapping their hands.

I don't know how it was; I only know that it wasn't to look brave; but, dropping my piece, I rushed to catch them, just at the same moment as did Miss Ross and Lizzy Green; while directly after Lieutenant Leigh rushed from where he was, caught Miss Ross round the waist, and dragged her away, as I did Lizzy and the children.

How it happened that we were none of us hit is strange to me, for all the time the bullets were pattering on the wall beyond us. I only know I turned sick and faint as I just said to Lizzy, "Thank God for that!" and she led off the children, Miss Ross shrinking from Lieutenant Leigh with a strange mistrustful look, as if she were afraid of him; and the next minute they were under cover, and we were back at our posts.

"Poor bairns!" says Measles to me; "I ain't often glad of anything, Ike Smith; but I am glad they ain't hurt. Now my soul seemed to run and help them myself, but my legs were just as if they couldn't move. You need not believe it without you like," he added in his sour way.

"But I do believe it, old fellow," I said warmly, as I held out my hand. "Chaff's chaff; but you never knew me make light of a good act done by a true-hearted comrade."

"All right," says Measles gruffly. "Now see me pot that sowar. Missed him, by Jove!" he exclaimed as soon as he had fired. "These pieces ain't true. No—hit him—he's down! That's one bairn-killer the less."

"Sam," I said just then, "what's that coming up between the huts yonder?"

"Looks like a wagin," says Measles. "'Tis a wagin, ain't it?"

"No," I said, feeling that miserable I didn't know what to do; "it isn't a wagon, Sam; but—why, there's another—a couple of field-pieces!"

"Nine-pounders, by all that's unlucky!" said Measles, slapping his thigh. "Then I tell you what it is, Ike Smith—it's about time we said our prayers."

I didn't answer, for the words would not come but it was what had always been my dread, and it seemed now that the end was very near.

Troubles were coming upon us thick; for being relieved a short time after, to go and have some tea that Mrs Bantem had got ready, I saw something that made me stop short and think of where we should be if the water supply was run out; for though we had the chatties down below in the vault under the north end, we wanted what there was in the tank, while there was Nabob, the great elephant, drawing it up in his trunk, and cooling himself by squirting it all over his back.

I went to Lieutenant Leigh, and pointed it out to him; and the great beast was led away; when, there being nothing else for it, we opened a way through our breastwork, watched an opportunity, threw open the gate, and he marched

out right straight in amongst the mutineers, who cheered loudly, after their fashion, as he came up to them.

There was no more firing in that night; and taking it in turns, we some of us had a sleep, I among the rest, all dressed as I was, and with my gun in my hand, ready for use at a moment's notice; and I remember thinking what a deal depended on the sentries, and how thoroughly our lives were in their hands; and then my next thought was of how was it possible for it to be morning, for I had only seemed to close my eyes, and then open them again on the light of day.

But morning it was; and with a dull dead feeling of misery upon me, I got up and gave myself a shake, ran the ramrod down my piece, to see that it was charged all right, looked to the cap, and then once more prepared for the continuation of the struggle, low-spirited and disheartened, but thankful for the bit of refreshing rest I had had.

A couple of hours passed, and there was no movement on the part of the enemy; the ladies never stirred, but we could hear the children laughing and playing about; and how one did seem to envy the little light-hearted thoughtless things! But my thoughts were soon turned into another direction; for Lieutenant Leigh ordered me up into one of the rooms commanding the gateway, and looking out on the square where the guns were standing, and came up with me himself.

"You'll have a good lookout from here, Smith," he said; "and being a good shot—"

He didn't say any more, for he was, like me, taken up with the movement in the square—a lot of the mutineers running the two guns forward in front of the gate, and then closing round them, so that we could not see what was going on; but we knew well enough that they were charging them, and there seemed nothing for it but to let them fire, unless by a bold sally we could get out and spike them.

Just then Lieutenant Leigh looked at me, and I at him; when, touching my cap in salute, I said, "Two good nails, sir, and a tap on each, would do it."

"Yes, Smith," he said grimly; "but who is to drive those two nails home?"

I didn't answer him for a minute, I should say, for I was thinking over matters about life, and about Lizzy; and now that Harry Lant was gone, it seemed to me that there might be a chance for me; but still duty was duty, and if men could not in such a desperate time as this risk something, what was the good of soldiers?

"I'll drive 'em home, sir," I says then quietly, "or they shall drive me home!"

He looked at me for an instant, and then nodded.

"I'll get the men ready," he says; "it's our only chance, and with a bold dash we may do it. I'll send to the armourer's chest for hammers and spikes. I'll spike one, Smith, and you the other; but mind, if I fail, help me, as I will you if you fail; and God help us! Keep a sharp look-out till I come back."

He left the room, and I heard a little movement below, as of the men getting ready for the sally; and all the while I stood watching the crowd in front, which now began hurrahing and cheering; and there was a motion which showed that the guns were being run in nearer, till they stopped about fifty yards from the gate.

"What makes him so long?" I thought, trembling with excitement; "another minute, perhaps, and the gate will be battered down, and that mob rushing in."

Then I thought that we ought, all who escaped from the sortie, in case of failure, to be ready to take to the rooms adjoining where I was, which would be our last hope; and then I almost dropped my piece, my mouth grew dry, and I seemed choked; for with a loud howl the crowd opened out, and I saw a sight that made my blood run cold: those two nine-pounders standing with a man by each breech, smoking linstock in hand; while bound with their backs against the muzzles, and their white faces towards us, were Captain Dyer and Harry Lant!

One spark—one touch of the linstock on the breech—and those two brave fellows would be blown to atoms; and as I expected that every moment such would be the case, my knees knocked together; but the next moment I was down on those shaking knees, my piece made ready, and a good aim taken, so that I could have dropped one of the gunners before he was able to fire.

I hesitated for a moment before I made up my mind which to try and save; and the thought of Lizzy Green came in my mind, and I said to myself, "I love her too well to cause her pain," when, giving up Captain Dyer, I aimed at the gunner by poor Harry Lant.

"Don't fire!" said a voice just then; and turning, there was Lieutenant Leigh. "The black-hearted wretches!" he muttered. "But we are all ready; though now, if we start, it will be the signal for the death of those two. But what does this mean?"

What made him say that was a chief, all in shawls, who rode forward and shouted out in good English that they gave us one hour to surrender; but at the end of that time, if we had not marched out without arms, they would blow their prisoners away from the mouth of the guns.

Then, for fear we had not heard it, he spurred his horse up to within ten yards of the gate, and shouted it out again, so that every one could hear through the place; and though I could have sent a bullet through and through him, I could not help admiring the bold daring fellow, riding up right to the muzzles of our pieces.

But all the admiration I felt was gone the next moment, as I thought of the cruelties practised, and of those bound there to the gun-muzzles.

There was nothing said for a few minutes, for I expected the lieutenant to speak; but as he did not, I turned to him and said,—

“If all was ready, sir, I could drop one gunner; and I’d trust Measles—Sam Bigley—to drop the other, when a bold dash might do it. You see, they’ve retired a good thirty yards, and we should only have twenty more to run than they; while the surprise would give us that start. A good sharp jack-knife would set the prisoners free, and a covering-party would perhaps check the pursuit while we got in.”

“We shall have to try it, Smith,” he said, his breath coming thick and fast with excitement; and then he seemed to turn white, for Miss Ross and Lizzy came into the room.

Story 1--Chapter XIV.

I should think it must have been the devil tempting Lieutenant Leigh, or he would never have done as he did; for, as he looked at Miss Ross, the change that came over him was quite startling. He could read all that was passing in her heart; there was no need for her to lay her hand upon his arm, and point with the other out of the window, as in a voice that I didn’t know for hers she said,—

“Will you leave those two brave men there to die, Lieutenant Leigh?”

He didn’t answer for a moment, but seemed to be straggling with himself; then, speaking as huskily as she did, he said,—

“Send away that girl!” And before I could go to her—for I should have done it then, I know—and whisper a few words of hope, poor Lizzy went out, mourning for Harry Lant, wringing her hands; and I stood at my post, a sentry by my commander’s orders, so that it was no spying on my part if I heard what followed.

I believe Lieutenant Leigh fancied he was speaking in an undertone when he led Miss Ross away to a corner and spoke to her; but this was perhaps the most exciting moment in his life, and his voice rose in spite of himself, so that I heard all; while she, poor thing, I believe, forgot all about my presence; and, as a sentry—a machine almost—placed there, what right had I to speak?

“Will you leave him?” said Miss Ross again. “Will you not try to save him?”

Lieutenant Leigh did not answer for a bit; for he was making his plans; and I felt quite staggered as I saw through them.

“You see how he is placed. What can I do?” said Lieutenant Leigh. “If I go, it is the signal for firing. You see the gunners waiting. And why should I risk the lives of my men, and my own, to save him? He is a soldier, and it is the fortune of war; he must die.”

“Are you a man, or a cur?” said Miss Ross then, angrily.

“No coward,” he said fiercely; “but a poor slighted man, whom you have wronged, jilted, and ill-used; and now you come to me to save your lover’s life—to give mine for it. You have robbed me of all that is pleasant between you; and now you ask more. Is it just?”

“Lieutenant Leigh, you are speaking madly. How can you be so unjust?” she cried, holding tightly by his arm; for he was turning away; while I felt mad with him for torturing the poor girl, when it was decided that the attempt was to be made.

“I am not unjust,” he said. “The hazard is too great. And what should I gain if I succeeded? Pshaw! Why, if he were saved, it would be at the expense of my own life.”

“I would die to save him!” she said hoarsely.

“I know it, Elsie; but you would not give a loving word to save me. You would send me out to my death without compunction—without a care; and yet you know how I have loved you.”

“You—you loved me, and yet stand and see my heart torn—see me suffer like, this!” cried Miss Ross, and there was something half wild in her looks as she spoke.

“Love you!” he cried; “yes, you know how I have loved you.”

His voice sank here; but he was talking in her ear excitedly, saying words that made her shrink from him up to the wall, and look at him as if he were some object of the greatest disgust.

“You can choose,” he said bitterly, as he saw her action; and he turned away from her.

The next moment she was on her knees before him, holding up her hands as if in prayer.

“Promise me,” he said, “and I will do it.”

“O, some other way—some other way!” she cried piteously, her face all drawn the while.

“As you will,” he said coldly.

“But think—O, think! You cannot expect it of me. Have mercy! O, what am I saying?”

“Saying!” he cried, catching her hands in his, and speaking excitedly and fast; “saying things that are sending him to his death. What do I offer you? Love, devotion, all that man can give. He would, if asked now, give up all for his life; and yet you, who profess to love him so dearly, refuse to make that sacrifice for his sake! You cannot love him. If he could hear now, he would implore you to do it. Think. I risk all; most likely my life will be given for his; perhaps we shall both fall. But you refuse. Enough; I must go; I cannot stay. There are many lives here under my charge; they must not be neglected for the sake of one. As I said before, it is the fortune of war; and, poor fellow, he has but a quarter of an hour or so to live, unless help comes.”

“Unless help comes!” groaned Miss Ross frantically, when, as Lieutenant Leigh reached the door, watching me over his shoulder the while, Miss Ross went down on her knees, stretched out her hands towards where Captain Dyer was bound to the gun, and then she rose, cold and hard and stern, and turned to Lieutenant Leigh, holding out her hand. “I promise,” she said hoarsely.

“On your oath, before God?” he exclaimed joyfully, as he caught her in his arms.

“As God is my judge,” she faltered with her eyes upturned; and then, as he held her to his breast, kissing her passionately, she shivered and shuddered, and, as he released her, sank in a heap on the floor.

“Smith,” cried Lieutenant Leigh, “right face—forward!” And as I passed Miss Ross, I heard her sob, in a tone I shall never forget, “O, Lawrence, Lawrence!” and then a groan tore from her breast, and I heard no more.

Story 1--Chapter XV.

“This is contrary to rule. As commandant, I ought to stay in the fort; but I’ve no one to give the leadership to; so I take it myself,” said Lieutenant Leigh. “And now, my lads, make ready—present! That’s well. Are all ready? At the word ‘Fire!’ privates Bigley and Smith fire at the two gunners. If they miss, I cry fire again, and privates Bantem and Grainger try their skill; then, at the double, down on the guns. Smith and I spike them, while Bantem and Grainger cut the cords. Mind this: those guns must be spiked, and those two prisoners brought in; and if the sortie is well managed, it is easy; for they will be taken by surprise. Hush! Confound it, men, no cheering!”

He only spoke in time; for in the excitement the men were about to hurray.

“Now, then, is that gate unbarred?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Is the covering-party ready?”

“Yes, sir.”

My hand trembled as he spoke; but the next instant it was of a piece with my gunstock. There was the hot square, with the sun shining on the two guns that must have been hot behind the poor prisoners; there, too, stood the two gunners in white, with their smoking linstocks, leaning against the wheels; for discipline was slack; and there, thirty or forty yards behind, were the mutineers, lounging about, and smoking many of them. For all firing had ceased; and judging that we should not risk having the prisoners blown away from the guns, the mutineers came boldly up within range, as if defying us; and it was pretty safe practice at some of them now.

I saw all this at a glance, and while it seemed as if the order would never come; but come it did at last.

“Fire!”

Bang! the two rifles going off like one; and the gunner behind Captain Dyer leaped into the air; while the one I aimed at seemed to sink down suddenly beside the wheel he had leaned upon. Then the gate flew open, and with a rush and a cheer we, ten of us, raced down for the guns.

Double-quick time? I tell you it was a hard race; and being without my gun now—only my bayonet stuck in my trousers waistband—I was there first, and had driven my spike into the touch-hole before Lieutenant Leigh reached his; but the next moment his was done, the cords were cut, and the prisoners loose from the guns. But now we had to get back.

The first inkling I had of the difficulty of this was seeing Captain Dyer and Harry Lant stagger and fall forward; but they were saved by the men, and we saw directly that they must be carried.

No sooner thought of than done.

“Hoist Harry on my back,” says Grainger; and he took him like a sack; Bantem acting the same part by Captain Dyer; and those two ran off, while we tried to cover them.

For don’t you imagine that the mutineers were idle all this while; not a bit of it. They were completely taken by surprise, though, at first, and gave us time nearly to get to the guns before they could understand what we meant; but the next moment some shouted and ran at us, and some began firing; while by the time the prisoners were cast loose, they were down upon us in a hand-to-hand fight.

You see in those fierce struggles there is such excitement, that, for my part, I’ve but a very misty recollection of what took place; but I do recollect seeing the prisoners well on the way back, hearing a cheer from our men, and then,

hammer in one hand, bayonet in the other, fighting my way backward along with my comrades. Then all at once a glittering flash came in the air, and I felt a dull cut on the face, followed directly after by another strange numbing blow, which made me drop my bayonet, as my arm fell uselessly to my side; and then with a lurch and a stagger I fell, and was trampled upon twice, when, as I rallied once, a black savage-looking sepoy raised his clubbed musket to knock out my brains; but a voice I well knew cried, “Not this time, my fine fellow. That’s number three, that is, and well home;” and I saw Measles drive his bayonet with a crash through the fellow’s breast-bone, so that he fell across my legs.

“Now, old chap, come along,” he shouts, and an arm was passed under me.

“Run, Measles, run!” I said as well as I could. “It’s all over with me.”

“No, ’taint,” he said; “and don’t be a fool. Let me do as I like, for once in a way.”

I don’t know how he did it, nor how, feeling sick and faint as I did, I managed to get on my legs; but old Measles stuck to me like a true comrade, and brought me in. For one moment I was struggling to my feet; and the next, after what seemed a deal of firing going over my head, I was inside the breastwork, listening to our men cheering and firing away, as the mutineers came howling and raging up almost to the very gates.

“All in?” I heard Lieutenant Leigh ask.

“To a man, sir,” says some one; “but private Bantem is hurt.”

“Hold your tongue, will you!” says Joe Bantem. “I ain’t killed, nor yet half. How would you like your wife frightened if you had one?”

“How’s private Lant?”

“Cut to pieces, sir,” says some one softly.

“I’m thankful that you are not wounded, Captain, Dyer,” then says Lieutenant Leigh.

“God bless you, Leigh!” says the captain faintly. “It was a brave act. I’ve only a scratch or two when I can get over the numbness of my limbs.”

I heard all this in a dim sort of fashion, just as if it was a dream in the early morning; for I was leaning up against the wall, with my face laid open and bleeding, and my left arm smashed by a bullet; and nobody just then took any notice of me, because they were carrying in Captain Dyer and Harry Lant; while the next minute the fire was going on hard and fast; for the mutineers were furious; and I suppose they danced round the guns in a way that showed how mad they were about the spiking.

As for me, I did not seem to be in a great deal of pain; but I got turning over in my mind how well we had done it that morning; and I felt proud of it all, and glad that Captain Dyer and Harry Lant were brought in; but all the same, what I had heard lay like a load upon me; and knowing, as I did, that poor Miss Ross had, as it were, sold herself to save the captain’s life, and that she had, in a way of speaking, been cheated into doing so, I felt that, when the opportunity came, I must tell the captain all I knew. When I had got so far as that with my thoughts, the dull numbness began to leave me, and everything else was driven out of my mind by the thought of my wound; and I got asking myself whether it was going to be very bad; for I fancied it was; so getting up a little, I began to crawl along in the shade towards the ruined south end of the palace, nobody seeming to notice me.

Story 1--Chapter XVI.

I dare say you who read this don’t know what the sensation is of having one arm-bone shivered, and the dead limb swinging helplessly about in your sleeve, whilst a great miserable sensation comes over you that you are of no more use—that you are only a broken pitcher, fit to hold water no more, but only to be smashed up to mend the road with. There were all those women and children wanting my help, and the help of hundreds more such as me; and instead of being of use, I knew that I must be a miserable burden to everybody, and only in the way.

Now, whether man—as some of the great philosophers say—did gradually get developed from the beast of the field, I’m not going to pretend to know; but what I do know is this—that leave him in his natural state, and when he, for some reason or an other, forgets all that has been taught him, he seems very much like an animal, and acts as such.

It was something after this fashion with me then: for feeling like a poor brute out of a herd that has been shot by the hunters, I did just the same as it would—crawled away to find a place where I might hide myself, and lie down and die.

You’ll laugh, I daresay, when I tell you my sensations just then; and I’m ready to laugh at them now myself; for, in the midst of my pain and suffering, it came to me that I felt precisely as I did when I was a young shaver of ten years old. One Sunday afternoon, when everybody but mother and me had gone to church, and she had fallen asleep, I got father’s big clay-pipe, rammed it full of tobacco out of his great lead box, and then took it into the back kitchen, feeling as grand as a churchwarden, and set to and smoked it till I turned giddy and faint, and the place seemed swimming about me.

Now, that was just how I felt when I crawled about in that place, trying not to meet anybody, lest the women should see me all covered with blood; and at last I got, as I thought, into a room where I should be all alone.

I say I crawled; and that's what I did do, on one hand and my knees, the fingers of my broken arm trailing over the white marble floor, with each finger making a horrible red mark, when all at once I stopped, drew myself up stiffly, and leaned trembling and dizzy against the wall, trying hard not to faint; for I found that I wasn't alone, and that in place of getting away—crawling into some hole to lie down and die, I was that low-spirited and weak—I had come to a place where one of the women was, for there, upon her knees, was Lizzy Green, sobbing and crying, and tossing her hands about in the agony of her poor heart.

I was misty and faint and confused, you know; but perhaps it was something like instinct made me crawl to Lizzie's favourite place; for it was not intended. She did not see me, for her back was my way; and I did not mean her to know I was there; for in spite of my giddiness, I seemed to feel that she had learned all the news about our attempt, and that she was crying about poor Harry Lant.

"And he deserves to be cried for, poor chap," I said to myself, for I forgot all about my own pains then; but all the same something very dark and bitter came over me, as I wished that she had been crying instead for poor me.

"But then he was always so bright, and merry, and clever," I thought, "and just the man who would make his way with a woman; while I—Please God, let me die now!" I whispered very softly directly after, "for I'm only a poor, broken, helpless object, in everybody's way!"

It seemed just then as if the hot weak tears that came running out of my eyes made me clearer, and better able to hear all that the sobbing girl said, as I leaned closer and closer to the wall; while, as to the sharp pain every word she said gave me, the doll dead aching of my broken arm was nothing.

"Why—why did they let him go?" the poor girl sobbed; "as if there were not enough to be killed without him; and him so brave, and stout, and handsome, and true. My poor heart's broken! What shall I do?"

Then she sobbed again; and I remember thinking that unless some help came, if poor Harry Lant died of his wounds, she would soon go to join him in that land where there is to be no more suffering and pain.

Then I listened, for she was speaking again.

"If I could only have died for him, or been with, or—O, what have I done, that I should be made to suffer so?"

I remember wondering whether she was suffering more then than I was; for, in spite of my jealous despairing feeling, there was something of sorrow mixed up with it for her.

For she had always seemed to like poor Harry's merry ways, when I never could get a smile from her; and she'd go and sit with Mrs Bantem for long enough when Harry was there, while if by chance I went, it seemed like the signal for her to get up, and say her young lady wanted her, when most likely Harry would walk back with her; and I went and told it all to my pipe.

"If he'd only known how I'd loved him," she sobbed again, "he'd have said one kind word to me before he went, have kissed me, perhaps, once; but no, not a look nor a sign! Oh! Isaac, Isaac! I shall never see you more!"

What—what? What was it choking me? What was it that sent what blood I had left gushing up in a dizzy cloud over my eyes, so that I could only gasp out once the one word "Lizzy!" as I started to my feet, and stood staring at her in a helpless, half-blind fashion; for it seemed as though I had been mistaken, and that it was possible after all that she had been crying for me, believing me to be dead; but the next moment I was shrinking away from her, hiding my wounded face with my hand for fear she should see it, for leaping up, hot and flush-cheeked, and with those eyes of hers flashing at me, she was at my side with a bound.

"You cowardly, cruel, bad fellow!" she half-shrieked; "how dare you stand in that mean deceitful way, listening to my words? O, that I should be such a weak fool, with a stupid, blabbing, chattering tongue, to keep on kneeling and crying there, telling lies, every one of them, and—Get away with you!"

I think it was a smile that was on my face then, as she gave me a fierce thrust on the wounded arm, when I staggered towards her. I know the pain was as if a red-hot hand had grasped me; but I smiled all the same, and then, as I fell, I heard her cry out two words, in a wild agonised way, that went right to my heart, making it leap before all was blank; for I knew that those words meant that, in spite of all my doubts, I was loved.

"O Isaac!" she cried, in a wild frightened way, and then, as I said, all was blank and dark for I don't know how long; but I seemed to wake up to what was to me then like heaven, for my head was resting on Lizzy's breast, and, half mad with fear and grief, she was kissing my pale face again and again.

"Try—try to forgive me for being so cruel, so unfeeling," she sobbed; and then for a moment, as she saw me smile, she was about to fly out again, fierce-like, at having betrayed herself, and let me know how she loved me. Even in those few minutes I could read it all: how her passionate little heart was fighting against discipline, and how angry she was with herself; but I saw it all pass away directly, as she looked down at my bleeding face, and eagerly asked me if I was very much hurt.

I tried to answer, but I could not; for the same deathly feeling of sickness came on again, and I saw nothing.

I suppose, though, it only lasted a few minutes, for I woke like again to hear a panting hard breathing, as of some one using great exertion, and then I felt that I was being moved; but, for the life of me, for a few moments I could not make it out, till I heard the faint buzz of voices, when I found that Lizzy, the little fierce girl, who seemed to be as nothing beside me, was actually, in her excitement, carrying me to where she could get help, struggling along, panting, a few feet at a time, beneath my weight, and me too helpless and weak to say a word.

“Good heavens! look!” I heard some one say the next moment, and I think it was Miss Ross; but it was some hours before I came to myself again enough to find that I was lying with a rolled-up cloak under my head, and Lizzy bathing my lips from time to time, with what I afterwards learned was her share of the water.

But what struck me most now was the way in which she was altered; her sharp, angry way was gone, and she seemed to be changed into a soft gentle woman, without a single flirty way or thought, but always ready to flinch and shrink away until she saw how it troubled me, when she’d creep back to kneel down by my side, and put her little hand in mine; when, to make the same comparison again that I made before, I tell you that there, in that besieged and ruined place, half starred, choked with thirst, and surrounded by a set of demons thirsting for our blood—I tell you that it seemed to me like being in heaven.

Story 1--Chapter XVII.

I don’t know how time passed then; but the next thing I remember is listening to the firing for a while, and then, leaning on Lizzy, being helped to the women’s quarters, where, in spite of all they could do, those children would keep escaping from their mother to get to Harry Lant, who lay close to me, poor fellow, smiling and looking happy whenever they came near him; and I smiled, too, and felt as happy, when Lizzy, after tending me with Mrs Bantem as long as was necessary, got bathing Harry’s forehead with water and moistening his lips.

“Poor fellow,” I thought, “it will do him good;” and I lay watching Lizzy moving about afterwards, and then I think I must have gone to sleep, or have fallen into a dull numb state, from which I was wakened by a voice I knew; and opening my eyes, I saw that Miss Ross, pale and scared-looking, was on her knees by the side of Harry Lant, and that Captain Dyer was there.

“Not one word of welcome,” he said, with a strange drawn look on his face, which deepened, as Miss Ross rose and went close to him.

“Yes,” she said; “thank God you have returned safe.—No, no; don’t touch me,” she cried hoarsely. “Here, take me away—lead me out of this!” she said, for at that moment Lieutenant Leigh came quietly in, and she put her hands in his. “Take me out,” she said again hoarsely; and then, like some one muttering in a dream: “Take me away—take me away.”

I said that drawn strange look on Captain Dyer’s face seemed to deepen as he stood watching whilst those two went out together; then he passed his hand over his eyes, as if to ask himself whether it was a dream; and then, with a groan, he leaned one hand against the wall, feeling his way out from the room, and something seemed to hinder me from calling out to him, and telling him what I knew. For I was reasoning with myself, what ought I to do? and then, sick and faint, I seemed to sleep again.

But this time I was waked up by a loud shrieking, and a rush of feet, and, confused as I was, I knew what it meant: the hole where the blacks escaped—Chunder and his party—had not been properly guarded, and the mutineers had climbed up and made an entrance.

The alarm spread fast enough, but not quick enough to save life; for, with a howl, half-a-dozen sepoys, with their scarlet and white coatees open, dashed in with fixed bayonets, and two women were borne to the ground in an instant, while a couple of wretches made a dash at those two children—Little Cock Robin and Jenny Wren, as we called them—standing there, wondering like, by Harry Lant’s bed on the floor, whilst the golden light of the setting sun filled the room, and lit up their little angels’ faces.

But with a howl, such as I never heard woman give, Mrs Bantem rushed between them and the children, caught a bayonet in each hand, and held them together, letting them pass under one arm, then with a spring forward she threw those great arms of hers round the black fellows’ necks as they hung together, and held them in such a hug as they never suffered from before.

The next moment they were all rolling together on the floor; but that incident saved the lives of those poor children, for there came a cheer now, and Measles and a dozen more were led in by Lieutenant Leigh, and—

There, I am telling you too many horrors. They beat them back step by step, at the point of the bayonet; and a fierce struggle it was—a long fight kept up from room to room, for our men were mad now as the mutineers, and it was a genuine death-struggle; for the broken window being guarded, not a man of about a dozen mutineers who gained entrance lived to go back and relate their want of success.

And can you wonder, when two of those who fought had found their wives bayoneted: Grainger was one of them; and when the fight was over, during which, raging like a demon, he had killed four men, the poor fellow sat down by his dead wife, took her head first in his lap, then to his breast, and rocked himself to and fro, crying like a child, till there was a bugle-call in the courtyard, when he laid her gently in a corner, carrying her like as if she had been a child, kneeled down, and said “Our Father” right through by her side, kissed her lips two or three times, and then covered her face with a bit of an old red handkerchief; and him all the while covered with blood and dust and black of powder. Then, poor fellow, he got up and took his gun, and went out on the tips of his toes, lest he should wake her who would ope her eyes no more in this world.

Perhaps it was weakness, I don’t know, but my eyes were very wet just then, for a soft little hand was laid on my breast, and Lizzy’s head leant over me, and her tears, too, fell very fast on my hot and fevered face.

I felt that I should die, not then, perhaps, but before very long, for I knew that my arm was so shattered that it ought to be amputated just below the elbow, while for want of surgical assistance it would mortify; but somehow I felt very happy, and my state did not give me much pain, only that I wanted to have been up and doing; and at last, Lizzy

helping me, I got up, my arm being bandaged and in a sling, to find that I could walk about a little. So I made my way down into the courtyard, where I got near to Captain Dyer, who, better now, and able to limp about, was talking with Lieutenant Leigh, both officers now, and forgetful apparently of all but the present crisis.

“What wounded are there?” said Captain Dyer, as I walked slowly up.

“Nearly every man to some extent,” said Lieutenant Leigh; “but this man and Lant are the worst.”

“The place ought to be evacuated,” said Captain Dyer; “it is impossible to hold it another day.”

“We might hold out another day,” said Lieutenant Leigh, “but not longer. Why not retreat under cover of the night?”

“It seems the only thing left,” said Captain Dyer. “We might perhaps get to some hiding-place or other before our absence was discovered; but the gate and that back window will be watched of coarse: how are we to get away with two severely wounded men, the women and children?”

“That must be planned,” said Lieutenant Leigh; and then the watch was set for the night, as far as could be done, and another time of darkness set in.

It was that which puzzled me, why a good bold attack was not made by night. Why, the place must have been carried again and again; but no, we were left each night entirely at rest, and the attacks by day were clumsy and bad. There was no support; every man fought for himself, and after his own fashion, and I suppose that every man did look upon himself as an officer, and resented all discipline. At all events, it was our salvation, though at this time it seemed to me that the end must be coming on the next day, and I remember thinking, that if it did come to the end, I should like to keep one cartridge left in my pouch.

Then my mind went off wandering in a misty way upon a plan to get away by night, and I tried to make one, taking into consideration, that the quarters on the north side of us now, and only separated by ten feet of alley, were in the hands of the mutineers, who camped in them, the same being the case in the quarters on the south side, separated again by the ten feet of alley through which we returned when Captain Dyer and Harry Lant were taken. On the east was the market plain or square, and on the west a wilderness of open country with hats and sheds. I felt, do you know, that a good plan of escape at this time was just what I ought to make, every one else being busy with duty, and me not able to either fight or stand sentry, so I worked on hard at it that night, trying to be useful in some way; and after a fashion, I at last worked one out.

But I have not told you what I meant to do with that last cartridge in my pouch; I meant that to be pressed to my lips once before I contrived with one hand to load my rifle, and then if the worst came to the very worst, and when I had waited to the last to see if help would come, then, when it seemed that there was no hope, I meant to do what I told myself it would be my duty, as a man and a soldier, to do, if I loved Lizzy Green—do what more than one man did, during the mutiny, by the woman for whom he had been shedding his heart’s best blood; and in the dead of that night I did load that gun, after kissing the bullet; and a deal of pain that gave me, mental as well as bodily, but I don’t think that I need to tell you what that last cartridge was for.

Story 1--Chapter XVIII.

I think by this time you pretty well understand the situation of our palace, and how our stronghold was on the north side, close to which was the gate, so hardly fought for: if you don’t, I’m afraid it is my fault, and not yours.

At all events, being at liberty, I went over it here and there, and from floor to roof, as I tried to make out which would be the best way for trying to escape; but somehow I couldn’t see it perfect. To go out from the gate was impossible; and the same related to the broken-out window, as both places were thoroughly watched.

As for the other windows about the place, they were such slips, that without they were widened, any escaping by them was impossible. To have let ourselves down, one by one, from the flat roof by a rope, might have done, but it was a clumsy unsuitable way, with all those children and women, so I gave that up, and then sat down as I was by a little window looking out on to the north alley.

Wearied out at last, I suppose that a sort of stupor came over me, from which I did not wake till morning, to find myself suffering a dull numb pain; but when I opened my eyes I forgot that, because of her who was kneeling beside me, driving away the flies that were buzzing about, as if they knew that I was soon to be for them to rest on, without a hand to sweep them away.

At last, though, as I lay there wondering what could be done to save us, the thought came all at once, and struggling to my feet, I held Lizzy to my heart a minute, and then went off to find Captain Dyer.

It quite took me aback to see his poor haggard face, and the way in which he took the trouble, for it was plain enough to see how he was cut to the heart by Miss Ross’s treatment of him. But for all that, he was the officer and the gentleman; he had his duty to do, and he was doing it; so that, if even now, after losing so many men, and with so many more half disabled, the enemy had made a bold assault, they would have won the place dearly, though win it they must.

That did not seem their way, though they wanted the place for the sake of the great store of arms and ammunition it contained. They wanted to buy it cheap.

I found Captain Dyer ready enough to listen to my plan, though he shook his head, and said it was desperate. But after a little thought, he said:

“There are some hours now between this and night—help may come before then; if not, Smith, we must try it. My hands are full, so I leave the preparations with you: let every one carry food and a bottle of water—nothing more—all we want now is to save life.”

I promised I’d see to it; and I went and spoke cheerfully to the women, but Mrs Maine seemed quite hysterical. Miss Ross listened to what I had to say in a hard strange way; and really, if it had not been for Mrs Bantem putting a shoulder first to one wheel and then the other, nothing would have been done.

The next person I went to was Measles, who, during a cessation of the firing, was sitting, black and blood-smeared, with his head tied up, wiping out his gun with pieces he tore spitefully off the sleeves of his shirt.

“Well, Ikey, mate,” he says, “not dead yet, you see. If we get out of this, I mean to have my promotion; but I don’t see how we’re going to manage it. What bothers me most is, letting these black devils get all this powder and stuff we have here. Blow my rags if we shall ever use it all! I’ve been firing away till my old Bess has been so hot that I’ve been afraid to charge her; and I’ll swear I’ve used twice as many cartridges as any other man. But I say, Ikey, old man, do you think it’s wrong to pot these niggers?”

“No,” I said; “not in a case like this.”

“Glad of it,” he says earnestly; “because, do you know, old man, I’ve polished off such a thundering lot, that I’ve got to be quite nervous about getting killed myself. Only think, having forty or fifty black-looking beggars rising up against you in kingdom come, and pointing at you and saying: ‘That’s the chap as shot me!’”

“I don’t think any soldier, acting under orders, who does his duty in defence of women and children, need fear to lie down and die,” I said.

I never saw Measles look soft but that once, as, laying down his ramrod, he took my hand in his, and looked in my face for a bit; then he shook my hand softly, and nodded his head several times.

“How’s Harry Lant?” he says at last.

“Very bad,” I said.

“Poor old chap. But tell him I’ve paid some of the beggars out for it. Mind you tell him; it’ll make him feel comfortable like, and ease his mind.”

I nodded, and then told him about the plan.

“Well,” he said, as he slowly and thoughtfully polished his gun-barrel, “it might do, and it mightn’t. Seems a rum dodge; but, anyhow, we might try.”

“I shall want you to help make the bridge,” I says.

“All right, matey; but I don’t, somehow, like leaving the beggars all that ammunition.”

And then he loaded his rifle very thoughtfully, but only to rouse up directly after, for the mutineers began firing again; and Captain Dyer giving the order, our men replied swift and fast at every black face that showed itself for an instant.

That was a day: hot, so that everything you went near seemed burning. The walls even sent forth a heat of their own; and if it hadn’t been for the chatties down below, we should have had to give up, for the tank was now completely dried, and the flies buzzing about its mud-caked bottom. But the women went round from man to man with water and biscuit, so that no one left his post; and every time the black scoundrels tried to make a lodgment near the gate, half were shot down, and the rest glad enough to get back into shelter.

Towards that weary slow-coming evening, though, after we had beaten them back—or, rather, after my brave comrades had beaten them back half a score of times—I saw that something was up; and as soon as I saw what that something was, I knew that it was all over, for our men were too much cut up and disheartened for any more gallant sorties.

I’ve not said any more about the guns, only that we spiked them, and left them standing in the market plain, about fifty yards from the gates. I may tell you now, though, that the next morning they were gone, and we forgot all about them till the night I’m talking about, when they were dragged out again, with a lot of noise and shouting, from a building in the far corner of the square.

We didn’t want telling what that meant.

It was plain enough to all of us that the scoundrels had drilled out the touch-holes again, and that during the night they would be planted, and the first discharge would drive down all our defences, and leave us open to a rush.

“We must try your plan, Smith,” says Captain Dyer, with a quiet stern look. “It is time now to evacuate the place.”

Then he knelt down and took a look at the guns with his glass, and I knew he must have been thinking of how he stood tied to the muzzle of one of them, for he gave a sort of shudder as he closed his glass with a snap.

Just then, Miss Ross came round with Lizzy and Mrs Bantem, carrying wine and water, and I saw a sort of quiet triumph in Lieutenant Leigh’s face, as, avoiding Captain Dyer, Miss Ross went up to him, when he half-beckoned to her, and stood by him like a slave, giving him bottle and glass, and then standing by his side with her eyes fixed and

strange-looking; while, though he fought against it bravely, and tried to be unmoved, Captain Dyer could not bear it, but walked away.

I was just then drinking some water given me by Lizzy, whose pale troubled little face looked up so lovingly in mine that I felt half-ashamed for me, a poor private, to be so happy—for I forgot my wounds then—while my captain was in pain and suffering. And then it was that it struck me that Captain Dyer was just in that state in which men feel despairing, and go and do desperate things. For of course he felt that as soon as he was out of the way, Miss Ross and the lieutenant had made up matters. I felt that I ought before now to have told him all about what I had heard, but I was in hopes that things would right themselves, and always came to the conclusion that it was Miss Ross's duty to have given the captain some explanation of her treatment; anyhow, it did not seem to be mine; but when I saw the poor smitten fellow go off like he did, I followed him softly till I came up with him, my heart beating with fear.

There was nothing to fear, though: he had only gone up to the roof, and when I came up with him he was evidently calculating about our escape, for he finished off by pulling out his telescope, and looking right across the plain, towards where there was a tank and a small station.

"I think that ought to be our way, Smith," he said. "We could stay there for half an hour's rest, and then on again towards Wallahbad, sending a couple of the stoutest men on for help. By the way, we'll try and start a man off to-night, as soon as it's dark. But who will you have to help you?"

"I should like to have Bigley, sir," I said.

"Will one be sufficient?"

"Quite, sir," I said; for I thought Measles and I could manage it between us.

Half an hour after, Measles was busy at work, fetching up muskets, with bayonets fixed, from down in the vault, and laying them in order on the flat roof, taking care the while to keep out of sight; and I went to the room where the women were, under Mrs Bantem's management, getting ready for what was to come, for they had been told that we might leave the place all at once.

Story 1--Chapter XIX.

I suppose it was my wound made me do things in a sluggish dreamy way, and made me feel ready to stop and look at any little thing which took my attention. Anyhow, that's the way I acted; and going inside that room, I stopped short just within the place, for there were those two little children of the colonel's sitting on the floor, with a whole heap of those numbers of the Bible—those that people take in shilling parts—and with two or three large pictures in each. Some one had given them the parts to amuse themselves with; and, as grand and old-fashioned as could be, they were showing these pictures to the soldiers' children.

As I went in, they'd got a picture open of Jacob lying asleep, with his dream spread before you, of the great flight of steps leading up into heaven, and the angels going up and down.

"There," says little Jenny Wren to a boy half as old again as herself; "those are angels, and they're coming down from heaven, and they've got beautiful wings like birds."

"O," says little Cock Robin thoughtfully, and he leaned over the picture. Then he says quite seriously: "If they've dot wings, why don't they fly down?"

That was a poser; but Jenny Wren was ready with her answer, old-fashioned as could be, and she says:

"I should think it's toz they were moulting."

I remember wishing that the poor little innocents had wings of their own, for it seemed to me that they would be a sad trouble to us to get away that night, just at the time when a child's most likely to be cross and fretful.

Night at last, dark as dark, save only a light twinkling here and there, in different parts where the enemy had made their quarters. There was a buzzing in the camp where the guns were, and as we looked over, once there came the grinding noise of a wheel, but only once.

We made sure that the gate and the broken window opening were well watched, for there was the white calico of the sentries to be seen; but soon the darkness hid them, and we should not have known that they were there but for the faint spark now and then which showed that they were smoking, and once I heard, quite plain in the dead stillness, the sound made by a "hubble-bubble" pipe.

We waited one hour, and then, with six of as on the roof, the plan I made began to be put into operation.

My idea was that if we could manage to cross the north alley, which as I told you was about ten feet wide, we might then go over the roof of the quarters where the mutineers were; then on to the next roof, which was a few feet lower; and from there get down on to some sheds, from which it would be easy to reach the ground, when the way would be open to us to escape, with perhaps some hours before we were missed.

The plan was, I know, desperate, but it seemed our only chance, and, as you well know, desperate ventures will sometimes succeed when the most carefully arranged plots fail. At all events, Captain Dyer took it up, and then, under my directions, a couple of muskets were taken at a time, and putting them muzzle to muzzle, the bayonet of each was thrust down the other's barrel, which saved lashing them together, and gave us a sort of spar about ten

feet long, and this was done with about fifty.

I told you that there was a tree grew up in the centre of the alley,—a stunty, short-boughed tree, and to this Measles laid one of the double muskets, feeling for a bough to rest it on in the darkness, after listening whether there was any one below; then he laid more and more, till, with a mattress laid upon them, he formed a bridge, over which he boldly crept to the tree, where, with the lashings he had taken, he bound a couple more muskets horizontal, and then shifted the others. He arranged them all so that the butts of one end rested on the roof of the palace; the butts at the other end were across those he had bound pretty level in the tree. Then more and more were laid across, and a couple of thin straw mattresses on them; and though it took a tremendously long time through Measles fumbling in the dark, it was surprising what a firm bridge that made as far as the tree.

The other half was made in just the same fashion, and much more easily. Mattresses were laid on it; and there, thirty feet above the ground, we had a tolerably firm bridge, one that, though very irregular, a man could cross with ease, creeping on his hands and knees; but then there were the women, children, and poor Harry Lant.

Captain Dyer thought it would be better to say nothing to them about it, but to bring them all quietly up at the last minute, so as to give them no time for thought and fear; and then, the last preparation being made, and a rough short ladder, eight feet long, Measles and I had contrived, being carried over and planted at the end of the other quarters, reaching well down to the next roof, we prepared for a start.

Measles and Captain Dyer went over with the ladder, and reported no sentries visible, the bridge pretty firm, and nothing apparently to fear, when it was decided that Harry Lant should be taken over first—Measles volunteering to take him on his back and crawl over—then the women and children were to be got over, and we were to follow.

I know it was hard work for him, but Harry Lant never gave a groan, but let them lash his hands together with a handkerchief, so that Measles put his head through the poor fellow’s arms, for there was no trusting to Harry’s feeble hold.

“Now then, in silence,” says Captain Dyer; “and you, Lieutenant Leigh, get up the women and children. But each child is to be taken by a man, who is to be ready to gag the little thing if it utters a sound. Recollect, the lives of all depend on silence. Now, Bigley, forward!”

“Wait till I spit in my hands, captain,” says Measles, though what he wanted to spit in his hands for, I don’t know, without it was from use, being such a spitting man.

But spit in his hands he did, and then, with Harry on his back, he was down on his hands and knees, crawling on to the mattress very slowly, and you could hear the bayonets creaking and gritting, as they played in and out of the musket-barrels; but they held firm, and the next minute Measles was as far as the tree, but only to get his load hitched somehow in a ragged branch, when there was a loud crack as of dead wood snapping, a struggle, and Measles growled out an oath—he would swear, that fellow would, in spite of all Mrs Bantem said, so you mustn’t be surprised at his doing it then.

We all stopped and crouched there, with our hearts beating horribly; for it seemed that the next moment we should hear a dull, heavy crash; but instead, there came the sharp fall of a dead branch, and at the same moment there were voices at the end of the alley.

If Captain Dyer dared to have spoken, he would have called “Halt!” but he was silent; but Measles must have heard the voices, for he never moved, while we listened minute after minute, our necks just over the edge of the roof, till what appeared to be three of the enemy crept cautiously along through the alley, till one tripped and fell over the dead bough that must have been lying right in their way.

Then there was a horrible silence, during which we felt that it was all over with the plan—that the enemy must look up and see the bridge, and bring down those who would attack us with renewed fury.

But the next minute there came a soft whisper or two, a light rustling, and, directly after, we knew that the alley was empty.

It seemed useless to go on now; but after five minutes’ interval, Captain Dyer determined to pursue the plan, just as Measles came back panting to announce Harry Lant as lying on the roof beyond the officers’ quarters.

“And you’ve no idea what a weight the little chap is,” says Measles to me. “Now, who’s next?”

No one answered; and Lieutenant Leigh stepped forward leading Miss Ross. He was about to carry her over; but she thrust him back, and after scanning the bridge for a few moments, she asked for one of the children, and so as to have no time lost, the little boy, fast asleep, bless him! was put in her arms, when brave as brave, if she did not step boldly on to the trembling way, and walk slowly across.

Then Joe Bantem was sent—though he hung back for his wife, till she ordered him on—to go over with a soldier’s child on his back; and he was followed by a couple more.

Next came Mrs Bantem, with Mrs Colonel Maine, and the stout-hearted woman stood as if hesitating for a minute as to how to go, when catching up the colonel’s wife, as if she had been a child, she stepped on to the bridge, and two or three men held the butts of the muskets, for it seemed as if they could not bear the strain.

But though my heart seemed in my mouth, and the creaking was terrible, she passed safely over, and it was wonderful what an effect that had on the rest.

“If it’ll bear that, it’ll bear anything,” says some one close to me; and they went on, one after the other, for the most

part crawling, till it came to me and Lizzy Green.

“You’ll go now,” I said; but she would not leave me, and we crept on together, till a bough of the tree hindered us, when I made her go first, and a minute after we were hand-in-hand upon the roof of the officers’ quarters.

The others followed, Captain Dyer coming last, when, seeing me, he whispered: “Where’s Bigley?” of course meaning Measles.

I looked round, but it was too dark to distinguish one face from another. I had not seen him for the last quarter of an hour—not since he had asked me if I had any matches, and I had passed him half-a-dozen from my tobacco-pouch.

I asked first one, and then another, but nobody had seen Measles; and under the impression that he must have joined Harry Lant, we cautiously walked along the roof, right over the heads of our enemies; for from time to time we could hear beneath our feet the low buzzing sound of voices, and more than once came a terrible catching of the breath, as one of the children whispered or spoke.

It seemed impossible, even now, that we could escape, and I was for proposing to Captain Dyer to risk the noise, and have the bridge taken down, so as to hold the top of the building we were on as a last retreat; but I was stopped from that by Measles coming up to me, when I told him Captain Dyer wanted him, and he crept away once more.

We got down the short ladder in safety, and then crossed a low building, to pass down the ladder on to another, which fortunately for us was empty; and then, with a little contriving and climbing, we dropped into a deserted street of the place, and all stood huddled together, while Captain Dyer and Lieutenant Leigh arranged the order of march.

And that was no light matter; but a litter was made of the short ladder, and Harry Lant laid upon it; the women and children placed in the middle; the men were divided; and the order was given in a low tone to march, and we began to walk right away into the darkness, down the straggling street; but only for the advance guard to come back directly, and announce that they had stumbled upon an elephant picketed with a couple of camels.

“Any one with them?” said Captain Dyer.

“Could not see a soul, sir,” said Joe Bantem, for he was one of the men.

“Grenadiers, half-left,” said Captain Dyer; “forward!” and once more we were in motion, tramp, tramp, tramp, but quite softly; Lieutenant Leigh at the rear of the first party, so as to be with Miss Ross, and Captain Dyer in the rear of all, hiding, poor fellow, all he must have felt, and seeming to give up every thought to the escape, and that only.

Story 1--Chapter XX.

I could just make out the great looming figure of an elephant, as we marched slowly on, when I was startled by a low sort of wimmering noise, followed directly after by a granting on my right.

“What’s that?” says Captain Dyer. Then in an instant: “Threes right!” he cried to the men, and they faced round, so as to cover the women and children.

There was no farther alarm, though, and all seemed as silent as could be; so once more under orders, the march was continued till we were out from amidst the houses, and travelling over the sandy dusty plain; when there was another alarm—we were followed—so said the men in the rear; and sure enough, looming up against the darkness—a mass of darkness itself—we could see an elephant.

The men were faced round, and a score of pieces were directed at the great brute; but when within three or four yards, it was plain enough that it was alone, and Measles says aloud: “Blest if it isn’t old Nabob!”

The old elephant it was; and passing through, he went up to where Harry Lant was calling him softly, knelt down to order; and then, climbing and clinging on as well as they could, the great brute’s back was covered with women and children—the broad shallow howdah pretty well taking the lot—while the great beast seemed as pleased as possible to get back amongst his old friends, rubbing his trunk first on this one and then on that; and thankful we were for the help he gave us, for how else we should have got over that desert plain I can’t say.

I should think we had gone a good eight miles, when Measles ranges up close aside me as I walked by the elephant, looking up at the riding-party from time to time, and trying to make out which was Lizzy, and pitying them too, for the children were fretful, and it was a sad time they had of it.

“They’ll have it hot there sometime to-morrow morning, Ike,” says Measles to me.

“Where?” I said faintly, for I was nearly done for, and I did not take much interest in anything.

“Begumbagh,” he says. And when I asked him what he meant, he said: “How much powder do you think there was down in that vault?”

“A good five hundredweight,” I said.

“All that,” says Measles. “They’ll have it hot, some of ’em.”

“What do you mean?” I said, getting interested.

“O, nothing pertickler, mate; only been arranging for promotion for some of ’em, since I can’t get it myself. I took the

head out of one keg, and emptied it by the others, and made a train to where I've set a candle burning; and when that candle's burnt out, it will set light to another; and that will have to burn out, when some wooden chips will catch fire, and they'll blaze a good deal, and one way and another there'll be enough to burn to last till, say, eight o'clock this morning, by which time the beauties will have got into the place; and then let 'em look out for promotion, for there's enough powder there to startle two or three of 'em."

"That's what you wanted the matches for, then?" I said.

"That's it, matey; and what do you think of it, eh?"

"You've done wrong, my lad, I'm afraid, and,"—I didn't finish; for just then, behind us, there was a bright flashing light, followed by a dull thud; and looking back, we could see what looked like a little firework; and though plenty was said just then, no one but Measles and I knew what that flash meant.

"That's a dead failure," growled Measles to me as we went on. "I believe I am the unluckiest beggar that ever breathed. That oughtn't to have gone off for hours yet, and now it'll let 'em know we're gone, and that's all."

I did not say anything, for I was too weak and troubled, and how I kept up as I did, I don't know to this day.

The morning broke at last with the knowledge that we were three miles to the right of the tank Captain Dyer had meant to reach. For a few minutes, in a quiet stern way, he consulted with Lieutenant Leigh as to what should be done—whether to turn off to the tank, or to press on. The help received from old Nabob made them determine to press on; and after a short rest, and a better arrangement for those who were to ride on the elephant, we went on in the direction of Wallahbad, I, for my part, never expecting to reach it alive. Many a look back did I give to see if we were followed, but it was not until we were within sight of a temple by the roadside, that there was the news spread that there were enemies behind; and though I was ready enough to lay the blame upon Measles, all the same they must have soon found out our flight, and pursued us.

The sun could never have been hotter, nor the ground more parched and dusty than it was now. We were struggling on to reach that temple, which we might perhaps be able to hold till help came; for two men had been sent on to get assistance; though of all those sent, one and all were waylaid and cut down, long before they could reach our friends. But we did not know that then; and in the full hope that before long we should have help, we crawled on to the temple, but only to find it so wide and exposed, that in our weak condition it was little better than being in the open. There was a building, though, about a hundred yards farther on, and towards that we made, every one rousing himself for what was really the last struggle, for not a quarter of a mile off, there was a yelling crowd of blood-hounds in eager pursuit.

It was with a panting rush that we reached the place, to find it must have been the house of the collector of the district; but it was all one rack and ruin—glass, tables, and chairs smashed; hangings and carpets burnt or ragged to pieces, and in one or two places, blood-stains on the white floor told a terrible tale of what had taken place not many days before.

The elephant stopped and knelt, and the women and children were passed in as quickly as possible; but before all could be got in, about a dozen of the foremost mutineers were down upon us with a savage rush—I say *us*, but I was helpless, and only looking on from inside—two of our fellows were cut down in an instant, and the others borne back by the fierce charge. Then followed a desperate struggle, ending in the black fellows dragging off Miss Ross and one of the children that she held.

They had not gone many yards, though, before Captain Dyer and Lieutenant Leigh seemed to see the peril together, and shouting to our men, sword in hand they went at the black fiends, well supported by half a dozen of our poor wounded chaps.

There was a rush, and a cloud of dust; then there was the noise of yells and cheers, and Captain Dyer shouting to the men to come on; and it all acted like something intoxicating on me, for, catching up a musket, I was making for the door, when I felt an arm holding me back, and I did what I must have done as soon as I got outside—reeled and fainted dead away.

Story 1--Chapter XXI.

It was a couple of hours after when I came to, and became sufficiently sensible to know that I was lying with my head in Lizzy's lap, and Harry Lant close beside me. It was very dim, and the heat seemed stifling, so that I asked Lizzy where we were, and she told me in the cellar of the house—a large wide vault, where the women, children, and wounded had been placed for safety, while the noise and firing above told of what was going on.

I was going to ask about Miss Ross, but just then I caught sight of her trying to support her sister, and to keep the children quiet.

As I got more used to the gloom, I made out that there was a small iron grating on one side, through which came what little light and air we got; on the other, a flight of stone steps leading up to where the struggle was in full swing. There was a strong wooden door at the top of this, and twice that door was opened for a wounded man to be brought down; when, coolly as if she were in barracks, there was that noble woman, Mrs Bantem, tying up and binding sword-cuts and bayonet-thrusts as she talked cheerily to the men.

The struggle was very fierce still, the men who brought down the wounded hurrying away, for there was no sign of flinching; but soon they were back with another poor fellow, who was now whimpering, now muttering fiercely:

“If I’d only have had—curse them!—if I’d only had another cartridge or two, I wouldn’t have cared,” he said as they laid him down close by me; “but I always was the unluckiest beggar on the face of the earth. They’ve most done for me, Ike, and no wonder, for it’s all fifty to one up there, and I don’t believe a man of ours has a shot left.”

Again the door closed on the two men who had brought down poor Measles, hacked almost to pieces; and again it was opened, to bring down another wounded man, and this one was Lieutenant Leigh. They laid him down, and were off back up the steps, when there was a yelling, like as if all the devils in hell had broken loose, and as the door was opened, Captain Dyer and half a dozen more were beaten back, and I thought they would have been followed down—but no; they stood fast in that doorway, Captain Dyer and the six with him, while the two fellows who had been down leaped up the stairs to support them, so that, in that narrow opening, there were eight sharp British bayonets and the captain’s sword, making such a steel hedge as the mutineers could not pass.

They could not contrive either to fire at our party, on account of the wall in front, and every attempt at an entrance was thwarted; but we all knew that it was only a question of time, for it was impossible for man to do more.

There seemed now to be a lull, and only a buzzing of voices above us, mingled with a groan and a dying cry now and then, when I quite forget my pain once more on hearing poor Harry Lant, who had for some time been quite off his head, and raving, commence talking in a quiet sort of way.

“Where’s Ike Smith?” he said. “It’s all dark here; and I want to say good-bye to him.”

I was kneeling by his side the next minute, holding his hand.

“God bless you, Ike,” he said; “and God bless her. I’m going, old mate; kiss her for me, and tell her that if she hadn’t been made for you, I could have loved her very dearly.”

What could I do or say, when the next minute Lizzy was kneeling on his other side, holding his hand?

“God bless you both,” he whispered. “You’ll get out of the trouble after all; and don’t forget me.”

We promised him we would not, as well as we could, for we were both choked with sorrow; and then he said, talking quickly:

“Give poor old Sam Measles my ’bacco-box, Ike, the brass one, and shake hands with him for me; and now I want Mother Bantem.”

She was by his side directly, to lift him gently in her arms, calling him her poor gallant boy, her brave lad, and no end of fond expressions.

“I never had a bairn, Harry,” she sobbed; “but if I could have had one, I’d have liked him to be like you, my own gallant, light-hearted, soldier boy; and you were always to me as a son.”

“Was I?” says Harry softly. “I’m glad of it, for I never knew what it was to have a mother.”

He seemed to fall off to sleep after that, when, no one noticing them, those two children came up, and the first I heard of it was little Clive crying:

“Ally Lant, Ally Lant, open eyes, and come and play wis elfant.”

I started, and looked up to see one of those little innocents, his face smeared, and his little hands all dabbled with blood, trying to open poor Harry Lant’s eyes with his tiny fingers.

“Why don’t Ally Lant come and play with us?” says the other; and just then he opened his eyes, and looked at them with a smile, when in a moment I saw what was happening, for that poor fellow’s last act was to get those two children’s hands in his, as if he felt that he should like to let his last grasp in this world be upon something innocent; and then there was a deepening of that smile into a stern look, his lips moved, and all was over; while I was too far off to hear his last words.

But there was one there who did hear them, and she told me afterwards, sobbing as though her heart would break.

“Poor Harry, poor light-hearted Harry,” Mother Bantem said. “And did you see the happy smile upon his face as he passed away, clasping those two poor children’s hands—so peaceful, so quiet, after all his suffering; forgetting all then, but what seemed like two angels’ faces by his dying pillow, for he said, Ike, he said—”

Poor Mother Bantem broke down here, and I thought about what Harry’s dying pillow had been—her faithful, old, motherly breast. But she forced back her sobs, and wiped the tears from her rough, plain face, as she said in low, reverent tones: “Poor Harry! His last words: ‘Of such is the kingdom of heaven.’”

Death was very busy amongst our poor company, and one—two—three more passed away there, for they were riddled with wounds; and then I saw that, in spite of all that could be done, Lieutenant Leigh would be the next. He had received his death wound, and he knew it too; and now he lay very still, holding tightly by Miss Ross’s hand, while she knelt beside him.

Captain Dyer, with his eight men, all left, were still keeping the door; but of late they had not been interfered with, and the poor fellows were able to do one another a good turn in binding up wounds. But what all were now suffering for want of was water; and beyond a few drops in one or two of the bottles carried by the women, there was none to be had.

As for me, I could only lie there helpless, and in a half-dreamy way see and listen to all that was going on. The spirit in me was good to help; but think of my state—going for days with that cut on the face, and a broken arm, and in that climate. I was puzzling myself about this time as to what was going to happen next, for I could not understand why the rebels were so quiet; but the next minute I was watching Lieutenant Leigh, and thinking about the morning when we saw Captain Dyer bound to the muzzle of the nine-pounder.

Could he have been thinking about the same thing? I say *yes*, for all at once he sat right up, looking wild and excited. He had hold of Miss Ross's hand; but he threw it from him, as he called out, "Now, my lads, a bold race, and a short one. We must bring them in. Spike the guns, out the cords! Now, then—Elsie or death! Are you ready there? Forward!"

That last word rang through the vault we were in, and Captain Dyer ran down the steps, his hacked sword hanging from his wrist by the knot. But he was too late to take his messmate's hand in his, and say *farewell*, if that had been his intention, for Lieutenant Leigh had fallen back; and that senseless figure by his side was to all appearance as dead, when, with a quivering lip, Captain Dyer gently lifted her, and bore her to where, half stupefied, Mrs Colonel Maine was sitting.

Story 1--Chapter XXII.

I got rather confused, and am to this day, about how the time went; things that only took a few minutes seeming to be hours in happening, and what really did take a long time gliding away as if by magic. I think I was very often in a half-delirious state; but I can well remember what was the cause at the silence above.

Captain Dyer was the first to see, and taking a rifle in his hand, he whispered an order or two; and then he, with two more, rushed into the passage, and got the door drawn towards us, for it opened outwards; but in so doing, he slipped on the floor, and fell with a bayonet-thrust through his shoulder, when, with a yell of rage—it was no cheer this time—our men dashed forward, and dragged him in; the door was pulled to, and held close; and then those poor wounded fellows—heroes I call 'em—stood muttering angrily.

I think I got more excited over that scene than over any part of the straggle, and all because I was lying there helpless; but it was of no use to fret, though I lay there with the weak tears running down my cheeks, as that brave man was brought down and laid near the grating, with Mother Bantem at work directly to tear off his coat, and begin to bandage, as if she had been brought up in a hospital.

The door was forsaken, for there was a new guard there, that no one would try to pass, and the silence was explained to us all: first, there was a loud yelling and shrieking outside; and then there was a little thin blue wreath of smoke beginning to curl under the door, crawling along the top step, and collecting like so much blue water, to spread very slowly; for the fiends had been carrying out their wounded and dead, and were now going to burn us where we lay.

I can recollect all that; for now a maddening sense of horror seemed to come upon me, to think that those few poor souls left were to be slain in such a barbarous way, after all the gallant struggle for life; but what surprised me was the calm, quiet manner in which all seemed to take it.

Once, indeed, the men had a talk together, and asked the women to join them in a rush through the passage; but they gave up the thought directly, for they knew that if they could get by the flames, there were more cruel foes outside, waiting to thrust them back.

So they all sat down in a quiet, resigned fashion, listening to the crackle outside the door, watching the thin smoke filter through the crevices, and form in clouds, or pools, according to where it came through.

And you'd have wondered to see those poor fellows, how they acted: why, Joe Bantem rubbed his face with his handkerchief, smoothed his hair and whiskers, and then got his belts square, as if off out on parade, before going and sitting quietly down by his wife.

Measles lay very still, gently humming over the old child's hymn, "O! that'll be joyful," but only to burst out again into a fit of grumbling.

Another went and knelt down in a corner, where he stayed; the rest shook hands all round, and then, seeing Captain Dyer sitting up, and sensible, they went and saluted, and asked leave to shake hands with him, quite upsetting him, poor fellow, as he called them, in a faint voice, his "brave lads," and asked their pardon, if he'd ever been too harsh with them.

"God bless you! no, sir," says Joe Bantem, jumping up, and shaking the hand himself, "which *that* you've never been, but always a good officer as your company loved. Keep a brave heart, my boys, it'll soon be over. We've stood in front of death too many times now to show the white feather. Hurray for Captain Dyer, and may he be a colonel in the tother land, and we be some of his men!"

Joe Bantem gave a bit of a reel as he said this, and then he'd have fallen if it hadn't been for his wife; and though his was rather strong language, you see it must be excused, for, leave alone his wounds, and the mad feeling they'd bring on, there was a wild excitement on the men then, brought about by the fighting, which made them, as you may say, half-drunk.

We must all have been choked over and over again, but for that grating; for the hotter the fire grew above, the finer current of air swept in. The mutineers could not have known of it, or one of their first acts must have been to seal it up. But it was half-covered by some creeping flower, which made it invisible to them, and so we were able to breathe.

And now it may seem a curious thing, but I'm going to say a little more about love. A strange time, you'll perhaps say, when those poor people were crouching together in that horrible vault, expecting their death moment by moment. But that's why it was, and not from any want of retiring modesty. I believe that those poor souls wished to show those they loved how true was that feeling; and therefore it was that wife crept to husband's side, and Lizzy Green, forgetting all else now, placed her arms round my neck, and her lips to mine, and kissed me again and again.

It was no time for scruples; and thus it was that, being close to them, I heard Miss Ross, kneeling by the side of Captain Dyer, ask him—sobbing bitterly the while—ask him to forgive her, while he looked almost cold and strange at her, till she whispered to him long and earnestly, when I knew that she must be telling him all about the events of that morning. It must have been, for with a cry of joy I saw him bend towards her, when she threw her arms round him, and clasped his poor bleeding form to her breast.

They were so when I last looked upon them, and every one seemed lost in his or her own suffering, all save those two children, one of whom was asleep on Mrs Maine's lap, and the other playing with the gold knot of Captain Dyer's sword.

Then came a time of misty smoke and heat, and the crackling of woodwork; but all the while there was a stream of hot pure air rushing in at that grating to give us life.

We could hear the black fiends running round and round the burning building, yelling, and no doubt ready to thrust back any one who tried to get out. But there seemed then to come another misty time, from which I was roused by Lizzy whispering to me, "Is it very near now?"

"What?" I said faintly.

"Death," she whispered, with her lips close to my ear. "If it is, pray God that He will never let us part again in the land where all is peace!"

I tried to answer her, but I could not, for the hot, stifling, blinding smoke was now in my throat. Just then the yelling outside seemed to increase. There was a swift rushing sound; the trampling of horses; the jingling of cavalry sabres; a loud English hurray; and a crash; and I knew that there was a charge of horse sweeping by. Then came the hurried beating of feet, the ring of platoon after platoon of musketry, a rapid, squandering, skirmishing fire; more yelling, and more English cheers; the rush, again, of galloping horses; and, by slow degrees, the sound of a fierce skirmish, growing more and more distant, till there came another rapid beating of hoofs, a sudden halt, the jingle and rattle of harness, and a moment after, bim—bom—bom—bom! at regular intervals; and I waved my hand, and gave a faint cheer, for I could mentally see it all: a troop of light-horse had charged twice; the infantry had come up at the double; and now here were the horse-artillery, with their light six-pounders, playing upon the retreating rebels where the cavalry were not cutting them up.

That faint cheer of mine brought out some more; and then there was a terrible silence, for the relief seemed to have come too late; but a couple of our men crawled to the grating, where the air reviving them, they gave another "Hurray!" which was answered directly.

And then there was a loud shout, the excited buzz of voices, the crashing of a pioneer's axe against the framework of the grating; and after a hard fight, from which our friends were beaten back again and again, we poor wretches, nearly all insensible, were dragged out about a quarter of an hour before the burning house fell with a crash. Then there was a raging whirlwind of flame, and smoke, and sparks, and the cellar was choked up with the burning ruin.

Story 1--Chapter XXIII.

How well I remember coming to myself as I lay there on the grass, with our old surgeon, Mr Hughes, kneeling by my side; for it was our own men that formed the infantry of the column, with a troop of lancers, and one of horse-artillery. There was Colonel Maine kneeling by his wife, who, poor soul, was recovering fast, and him turning from her to the children, and back again; while it was hard work to keep our men from following up the pursuit, now kept up by the lancers and horse-artillery, so mad and excited were they to find only eight wounded men out of the company they had left.

But, one way and another, the mutineers paid dear for what suffering they caused us. I can undertake to say that, for every life they took, half-a-dozen of their own side fell—the explosion swept away, I suppose, quite fifty, just as they had attempted a surprise, and came over from the south side in a night-attack; while the way in which they were cut up in the engagement was something awful.

For, anxious beyond measure at not hearing news of the party left in Begumbagh, Colonel Maine had at length obtained permission to go round by that station, reinforce the troops, and then join the general by another route.

They were making forced marches, when they caught sight of the rebels yelling round the burning building, fully a couple of hundred being outside; when, not knowing of the sore strait of those within, they had charged down, driving the murderous black scoundrels before them like so much chaff.

But you, must not think that our pains were at an end. Is it not told in the pages of history how for long enough it was a hard fight for a standing in India, and how our troops were in many places sore put to it; while home after home was made desolate by the most cruel outrages? It was many a long week before we could be said to be in safety; but I don't know that I suffered much beyond the pains of that arm, or rather that stump, for our surgeon, Mr Hughes, when I grumbled a little at his taking it off, told me I might be very thankful that I had escaped with life, for he had never known of such a case before. But it was rather hard lying alone there in the temporary hospital, missing the tender hands that one loved.

And yet I have no right to say quite alone, for poor old Measles was on one side, and Joe Bantem on the other, with Mrs Bantem doing all she could for us three, as well as five more of our poor fellows.

More than once I heard Mr Hughes talk about the men's wounds, and say it was wonderful how they could live through them; but to live they all seemed disposed, except poor Measles, who was terrible bad and delirious, till one day, when he could hardly speak above a whisper, he says to me—being quite in his right mind:

"I daresay some of you chaps think that I'm going to take my discharge; but all the same, you're wrong, for I mean to go in now for promotion!"

He said "now;" but what he did then was to go in for sleep—and sleep he did for a good four-and-twenty hours, when he woke up grumbling, and calling himself the most unlucky beggar that ever breathed.

Time went on; and one by one we poor fellows got out of hospital cured; but I was the last; and it was many months after, that, at his wish, I called upon Captain—then Major—Dyer, at his house in London. For, during those many months, the mutiny had been suppressed, and our regiment had been ordered home.

I was very weak and pale, and I hadn't got used to this empty sleeve, and things looked very gloomy ahead; but, somehow, that day when I called at Major Dyer's seemed the turning-point; for to a poor soldier there was something very soothing for your old officer to jump up, with both hands outstretched to catch yours, and to greet you as warmly as did his handsome, bonny wife.

They seemed as if they could hardly make enough of me; but the sight of their happiness made me feel low-spirited; and I felt no better when Mrs Dyer—God bless her!—took my hand in hers, and led me to the next room, where she said there was an old friend wanted to see me.

I felt that soft jewelled hand holding mine, and I heard the door close as Mrs Dyer went out again, and then I stood seeing nothing—hearing nothing—feeling nothing, but a pair of clinging arms round my neck, and a tear-wet face pressed to mine.

And did that make me feel happy?

No! I can say it with truth. For as the mist cleared away from my eyes, and I looked down on, to me, the brightest, truest face the sun ever shone on, there was a great sorrow in my heart, as I told myself that it was a sin and a wrong for me, a poor invalided soldier, to think of taking advantage of that fine handsome girl, and tying her down to one who was maimed for life.

And at last, with the weak tears running down my cheeks, I told her of how it could not be; that I should be wronging her, and that she must think no more of me, only as a dear friend; when there is that amount of folly in this world, that my heart swelled, and a great ball seemed rising in my throat, and I choked again and again, as those arms clung tighter and tighter round my neck, and Lizzy called me her hero, and her brave lad who had saved her life again and again; and asked me to take her to my heart, and keep her there, for her to try and be to me a worthy loving wife—one that would never say a bitter word to me as long as she lived.

I said that there was so much folly in this world, so how can you wonder at me catching it of her, when she was so close that I could feel her breath upon my cheeks, my hair, my eyes, as once more, forgetting all in her love, she kissed me again and again. How, then, could I help, but with that one hand press her to my heart, and go the way that weak heart of mine wished.

I know it was wrong; but how can one always fight against weakness? And, to tell you the truth, I had fought long enough—so long that I wished for peace. And I must say this, too, you must not be hard on Lizzy, and think that it would have been better for her to have let me do a little more of the courting: there are exceptional cases, and this was one.

I had a true friend in Major Dyer, and to him I owe my present position—not a very grand one; but speaking honestly as a man, I don't believe, if I had been a general, some one at home could think more of me; while, as to this empty sleeve, she's proud of it, and says that all the country is the same.

Wandering about as a regiment is, one does not often have a chance to see one's old messmates; but Sergeant and Mrs Bantem and Sergeant Measles did have tea and supper with us one night here in London, Mrs Bantem saying that Measles was as proud of his promotion as a dog with two tails, though Measles did say he was an unlucky beggar, or he'd have been a captain. And, my! what a night we did have of that, without one drawback, only Measles would spit on my wife's Brussels carpet; and so we did have a night last year when the old regiment was stationed at Edinburgh, and the wife and me had a holiday, and went down and saw Colonel and Mrs Maine, and those children grown up a'most into a man and woman. But Colonel Dyer had exchanged into another regiment, and they say he is going to retire on half-pay, on account of his wound troubling him.

We fought our old battles over again on those nights; and we did not forget the past and gone; for Mrs Bantem stood up after supper, with her stiff glass of grog in her hand—a glass into which I saw a couple of tears fall, as she spoke of the dead—the brave men who fell in defence of the defenceless and innocent, hoping that the earth lay lightly on the grave of Lieutenant Leigh, while she proposed the memory of brave Harry Lant.

We drank that toast in silence; and more than one eye was wet as the old scenes came back—scenes such as I hope may never fall to the lot of men again to witness; for if there is ever a fervent prayer sent up to the Maker of All by me, an old soldier, who has much to answer for, it is contained in those words, so familiar to you all:

“Peace on Earth!” *Amen*.

Story Two: Aboard the Sea-Mew.

Story 2--Chapter I.

I shipped aboard the Sea-mew, full-rigged, trading from the port of London to New Zealand. Two more old shipmates of mine entered along with me; and we were just beginning to feel the breeze that would send us down Channel in less than no time. The skipper came aboard at Gravesend, and the rest of the passengers, and among ’em we had one poor chap who had to be whipped up in a chair, looking the while like as if he’d come aboard to find a hammock and a sailor’s funeral. There was some petticoats, too, about him, and they had to be whipped up too, but I didn’t take much notice, being hurried about here and ordered there, and the passengers all seeming to have an idea, that now they’d come aboard, all there was to do was to get in everybody’s way, and stand wiping their eyes. They would get in your way and aggravate, and when they moved, go and stand somewhere wuss, till it was enough to make a saint swear; and I’m blest if I don’t think that, being a man used to the sea, and a quick-tempered sort of a fellow, Peter hisself would have gone on ’most as bad as I did. What does a great fat fellow of two-and-forty want to go walloping down where the mate had told you to coil forty fathom o’ rope, and then begin blubbering like a great gal? And what do people as have done nothing but grumble and cuss at the old country, go waving their handkerchiefs at it for, and then fall into one another’s arms a-kissing and a-hugging, and just, too, when the deck’s in such a litter that the skipper and the mate are ’most raving mad?

It’s a nice place, deck of a ship just before sailing, what with the lumber, and the crew being all raw, and half of ’em three parts, or quite drunk. We’d a nice lot, we had, aboard the Sea-mew; for it seemed to me, as soon as I saw them together, that the skipper had been having the pick of the docks, and choosing all them as nobody else wouldn’t take aboard a ship. But it was in this way: there’d been a sort of an upset about pay, and half the merchant-sailors were on strike; and as the owners of the Sea-mew had advertised her to sail at a certain time, and it was ten days past that time, the skipper had been obliged to sign articles with any one he could get. They were all fresh ones to us; six-and-twenty of ’em, but mostly seemed to know one another, and how to handle a rope.

We’d a mixed freight—live-stock mostly, going out emigrating, and more live-stock to feed ’em with, and a young doctor to see as they was all well, and had their salts-and-senny reg’lar; and a great big chap as couldn’t stand up down below, but was always chipping his head, and taking the shape out of his hat against what he called the ceiling. They said he was a nat’ralist, though he was about the longest, okkardest, corner-shaped, unnat’ral fellow I ever did see; and he’d got more live-stock in no end of great cages—cock-sparrows and tom-tits, and blackbirds and starnels, and all sorts o’ little twittering things to introduce amongst the New Zealanders. Then there was Brummagem and Manchester and Sheffield goods, and plants and seeds in cases; and the deck that full, that, as I said before, it was enough to make any one swear, let alone a sailor.

’Tain’t a nice time, the first week at sea; for, to begin with, it takes all that time to get the longshore goings-on shook out of the men, and them fit to work well together; then, if it happens to blow a bit, as it mostly does in the Channel, there’s all the passengers badly, cabin and steerage, and their heads chock-full of shipwrecks; and when they ain’t frightened of going to the bottom, calling the doctor a brute for not attending to ’em. Sea-sickness is bad enough, while it lasts, but folks needn’t be so disagreeable about it, and every one think his case ten hundred times worse than anybody else’s; but they will do it; and as for the fat chap as cried so about going away, he quite upset the young doctor, as they called Mr Ward; and if I’d been him, and been bothered as he was, I’d have give Mr Fatsides such a dose o’ Daffy as would have sent him to sleep for a week.

Story 2--Chapter II.

“You’ve put your foot in it, Sam Brown,” I says to my old shipmet when things was about knocked together, and we were bowling along well out of sight of land. We’d been putting that and that together, and found out that for some months to come, let alone wind and weather, we’d got our work cut out, the skipper being one of your reg’lar slave-drivers, that nothing can’t satisfy, and the mate a sneak, as would do anything to please the captain. So “You’ve put your foot in it, Sam Brown,” I says; but he only grunted. Bill Spragg, though—my other mate—turns a bit rusty, and says it was me as got them to sign the articles, and it was all my fault; for he was a bit sore, owing to a row he’d been in that day.

But it was no use to growl, and say the ship was a bad one; we were in the ship, and bad captain, bad mate, bad crew, and bad victualling, there it all was, and there was no getting away from it.

“Never mind, lads; ’tain’t bad pay,” I says.

“Pay!” says Bill Spragg. “I’d forfeit to-morrow to be out of it, and—Look ye there, Tom.”

I turned to look; and it was the passenger I’ve spoken of before, him that was whipped up on deck, and now he was out for the first time for a walk, being a bright sunshiny time; while the petticoat as came on board with him was leading him about the deck.

“Looks bad,” I says.

“Yes,” says Bill. “But I meant the lass. Just look at her.”

“What for?” I says.

“Fine lines,” growls Sam Brown, squinting at her, for he was a chap that could squint awful, and when he looked partic’lar at anything his eyes used to get close together, and he had to turn his head first on one side and then on the other. He was such a quiet chap, and spoke so little, that I used to think his eyes tried to turn round and look inside his head, to see what he was thinking about. “Fine lines,” he says, and then he shuts one eye up, and holds it close, while he has another look.

“Beautiful! ain’t she?” says Bill.

“Gammon,” I says. “Wax-doll. She’d better not get wet, or she’d melt. I wish they wouldn’t have no women aboard.”

“Why?” says some one close behind me. And looking round, there was the young doctor and Tomtit, as we called him—the long chap as had all the birds.

“Why?” I says gruffly; “because they’re in the way, and ain’t no good, and consooms the ship’s stores. Would my deck be littered here with hens and cocks singing out eight bells when ’tain’t nothing of the kind; and a couple of cows as is always lowing to be milked, and then giving some thin stuff like scupper-washings; and a goat and sheep till the place only wants an old turkey-cock and jackass or two to be a reg’lar farmyard, ’stead o’ a ship’s deck—would there be all these things there if it warn’t for the women? Bother the women! I wish there wasn’t a woman on the face of the earth.”

“He was crossed in love when he was a young un, sir,” says Bill Spragg with a grin.

“Women’s right enough ashore,” says Sam Brown, and he squinted towards where the sick patient was along with the petticoat, till both his eyes went out of sight behind his nose, which was rather long in the bridge, and then he sighed, and we sprinkled the sea with a little baccy-juice before coming back to the job we were at—scraping the chain-cable.

“One of our protectors wants to pay his regards to you, Miss Bell,” says Mr Ward, the young doctor, you know, for just then she was passing close with the poor thin sick chap, who was her husband, and I saw her just bend her head as the doctor and Tomtit took off their hats to her.

“Sarvant, miss,” I says gruffly, getting my legs straight too, for there was something about her that seemed to compel one to be civil like, being such a bright-eyed girl, with red and white in her face and a set o’ teeth as couldn’t have known what it was to want to be pulled out in their lives. “Sarvant, Miss,” I says, making a scrape, and not a bit took aback. “I was only a-saying as worn—ladies ain’t no business aboard ships.”

“And why not?” she said quietly.

“’Cause all’s rough and ready, and folk’s tongues gets running too free afore them,” I says. And then to myself: “That’s one for you, Mr Jalap;” and then I turned towards the sick young man, whose sunken eyes looked brighter, and angry, and jealous like, as he held tight by his sister’s arm, and he says: “Come, lady, let’s go below. The sailor is right. Drink my health, my man;” and he threw me a shilling.

“That I will, sir,” I says, as he turned away, though I thought to myself it would want drinking a many times before I could do him any good.

The doctor looked rather black at me; but I wouldn’t see it, and got down cross-legged at my work, while Tomtit and he lit their cigars, and began walking up and down the deck.

Story 2--Chapter III.

What a wonderful deal a sailor can get to know if he only keeps his eyes and ears open! Of course, I mean aboard ship, where everything is, as you may say, close to your hand. Now, acting after this way, and being a rough, blunt sort of an old fellow—for I always looked old from the time I was forty—people would come and make friends with me, in a fashion, so that I got to know a deal. The doctor would have his chat on things in general, and give me cigars, and by degrees work round to the sick passenger and his case; and I soon could see that though he didn’t care a damp about the sick passenger, he took a deal of interest in his case, and I could guess pretty well why. Then Tomtit would come and fold his back, so that he could lean his elbers on the bulwarks, and he’d chatter about his birds, all the while smoothing his hair, and arranging his tie and collar, and brushing specks off his coat, as he kept looking towards the cabin-stairs, to see if some one was coming up; and when—being a thoroughly good-hearted, weak, soft-Tommy sort of a chap—he’d heave a great sigh, I used to shake my head at him, and say as I could see what was the matter with he, it was wonderful how friendly he’d get.

“I wouldn’t care if I had a few canaries on board,” he’d say. “They are such nice birds if you want to make a present to a lady.”

“Why not try a couple o’ doves?” I says.

He looked at me as if he meant to do it through and through, but I don’t think he got far below the outside rind—mine being rather a thick skin, and I didn’t let a single wrinkle squeeze up to look like a smile; so he says, after a minute’s thought: “You’re right, Roberts,” he says; and that night, hang me, if he didn’t send me to the cabin with a note, and a cage with a couple of turtle-doves in. He gave me half-a-crown for taking it, and he’d been busy all the afternoon touching up the cage with a bit of ship’s paint, that wasn’t half dry when I took it; but I brought it back again with me, with Mr and Miss Bell’s compliments and thanks, but Mr Bell’s health would not bear the noise of the birds.

The poor chap—Butterwell, his name was—looked awfully down when he saw me come back, but he wouldn’t show it

more than he could help; he only said something about wishing he'd had canaries, and turning his back to me, began to whistle, and feed his other birds, of which he'd got quite five hundred in a place fitted up on purpose, though there was nearly always one or two dead of a morning, specially if the night had been rough.

Well, somehow, I got to see that Miss Bell was not without her admirers; while her brother, poor chap, clinging to her as the only being he had to love on earth, seemed to hate for a soul to speak to her, and whenever I saw him, he used to watch her every look. Not that he had any need, for she seemed almost to worship him; leading him about; reading to him for hours, till I've heard her husky and hoarse, and have gone and fetched a glass of lime-juice and water from the steward, to get a pleasant smile from her, and a nod from the sick man for what I had done.

"You're a lucky man, Roberts," Mr Ward says to me one day when he had seen me fetch it, and the pay I got for my trouble.

"What for?" I says gruffly, for it wasn't no business of his. "P'raps you'd like to change places, sir, eh?" But he only laughed, and the more rough I was, the better friends we kept.

There were many more passengers, of course, but I never saw that they were any different to other cargoes of emigrants as I had helped to take over: there was two or three of those young chaps that always go out to make fortunes, packed off by their friends because they don't know what to do with them at home; some young farmers, and labourers, and mechanics—some with wife and children, some without; children there was plenty of—always is where there's women; and one way and another there was enough to make the ship uncomfortable, without a skipper who was a brute, and a mate a cowardly sneak. The crew were as bad a lot as ever ran round a capstan, but that was no reason why they were to be treated like dogs. If they'd been as good men as ever stepped, it would have been the same, for Bill Smith and Sam were A1 foremast-men; and while there was a sheet to haul taut, a sail to furl, or a bit of deck to holy-stone, I was ready to take my turn; but it was all the same, and I've seen the men bullied till they've gone scowling down below, and more than once I've said to Sam: "There'll be foul weather yet, my lad, afore we get this voyage to an end."

Story 2--Chapter IV.

Now, as to ordinary weather, that was all as a sailor could wish for—bright skies, fine starn winds, and the ship bowling along her nine or ten knots an hour. We got into the warm belts, shoved up the awnings, and had our bits of fishing as chances come up; but for all that, I wasn't easy in my mind. I'd been so long at sea, and knocked about amongst so many sorts of people, and in such different weather, that appearances that would not have been noticed by some folks made a bit of an impression on me, and not without reason, as you'll say by and by. For instance, it didn't look well, so I thought, for a chap to out knife and threaten the captain for hitting him on the head with a speaking-trumpet, though it might be only in a bit of a passion, still it didn't seem right; nor yet for the skipper to be always harassing the men when there was no need—piping all hands up to make or shorten sail, when the watch could have done it very well themselves, and then making the men do it again and again, because it wasn't what he called smart enough. You see, men don't take much notice of that sort of thing once, nor yet twice, but if it's kept up, they grumble, 'specially when they know they've been doing their best. Then the provisions were horrible, and enough to make any man discontented; water wasn't served out in sufficient quantity, and things got so bad at last that the men had meetings, right forward of a night, about the way they were served.

I knew a good deal and heard a good deal, but it didn't seem to be my place to go and tell tales, and besides, I never thought there'd be much the matter, more than a row, and perhaps a man or two put in irons, to be kept there till we got into port. I said so, in fact, to my mates Bill and Sam, "and what's more," I says, "irons won't do for me, my lads, so let's make the best of things, and get a better ship as soon as we can." Sam grunts, and Bill Smith said it was all right; so we went on with what was set us to do, and made as little trouble of it as we could.

But there was one chap aboard as the captain seemed quite to hate, and used to put upon him shameful. He was a thin wiry fellow, as yellow as a guinea, and looked as if he'd black blood in his veins; but he always swore as he had not. He'd got a Dutch sort of name, Van Haigh, but hailed somewhere out of one of the West Indy Islands, and had knocked about almost everywhere. Curious-looking chap he was, looked as if he'd always got his parlour window-blinds half pulled down, and he'd peep at you sideways from underneath them in a queer catlike sort of way. He was quite a swell fellow in his way, only dirty as dirty, and that didn't do nothing towards setting off the big silver rings he had in his ears, and was uncommon proud of. We mostly used to call him "Van" for short; and against this chap the skipper always seemed to have a spite, bullying him about more than all the rest put together, till you might have thought his life would have been miserable—but not it; he always showed his white teeth and grinned, pocketing all that the skipper and the mate gave him, till them pockets of his must have been full and nigh unto bursting. Once the captain knocked him down with a marlinespike, but he never drew no knives, not even when the mate kicked him, and told him to get up. He only grinned, but it was a queer sort of grin, and I didn't like the look of it.

These sort of rows used generally to take place when the passengers had gone down of a night, or before they came on deck of a morning. While before the cabin lot, Captain Harness was quite the gentleman, and it seemed to me that he had a sort of hankering after Miss Bell, like some more of them, or else he wouldn't have been so wonderfully civil about having Mr Bell's chair moved here and there, and wanting him to take wine, and things that Mr Ward said he was better without.

As to the fore-cabin passengers, they went on just about the same as fore-passengers mostly do: asked every day whether we were nearly there, played ship's billiards, and a bit or two of music; smoked a deal, and slept a deal more, and only did just so much work as they was obliged to. No doubt there was their little bits of squabbling, and courting, and so on, going on; but my eyes were turned in another direction; and, soon after we'd crossed the line, I couldn't help thinking how very sixy-and-seveny matters had growed. Instead of being friendly, there was quite an unpleasantness between Mr Ward and the Bells, for the sick man was as jealous as could be, and it was plain enough

that he downright hated the doctor. As for Miss Bell, as far as I could see, she never even bowed to him, and he and Tomtit used to walk up and down the deck together, as if they were the fastest of friends. “And why don’t they bow to one another as they used?” I says to myself, as I lay in my hammock. “Why don’t you mind your own business and go to sleep?” says Common-sense; and as I was too tired to argufy, I made no answer, but went off sound.

Story 2--Chapter V.

Now, if what I’m going to tell you had happened a week sooner, I should have been on the look-out for it, or if it had come off a week later; but, like many more such things, it came when it wasn’t expected, and my sails were took aback as much as anybody’s.

Things had been going on more peaceably than usual—weather having been hot, with light steady wind, which just took us easily through the water with stunsails set alow and aloft. The heat had made the captain sleepy, and he showed precious little on deck, while the mate, who always took his tone from the skipper, used just to give an order or two, and then make himself as comfortable as he could.

It was my watch one night with Sam Brown, Bill Smith, and a couple more. Hot! it was one of the hottest nights I ever knew, and we were lolling about over the sides, looking at the golden green water as it gently washed by the bows as we just parted it, making only way enough for the ship to answer her helm. Bill Smith had gone to take his trick at the wheel, and, looking along the deck, you could just make out his face by the binnacle-light shining up and around him. There was a faint glow, too, up from the cabin skylights, and from where the ship’s lanterns flashed on the water, else it was a thick darkness everywhere, and us sailing through it, and seeming to get nearer and nearer to some great black heat, that made the perspiration stream out of you at every pore.

“’Nuff to bake ’em down below, Sam,” I says, after we’d been quiet for a good hour. “I fancy if I was there, I should be for coming up and lying on the deck, where it’s cooler.”

“Cooler!” says one of them with us, “why, the planks are hot yet.”

“But you can breathe,” I says.

“Well, yes,” says the other; “you *can* get your breath.”

Then we were quite still again for a piece, when Sam gives me a shove, to call my attention to something.

“Well, what now?” I says.

“They’re a-coming on deck,” says Sam.

“They’re in the right of it,” I says; “and if—”

I got no more out, for there was a hand clapped over my mouth, and the next moment I was at it in an up-and-down struggle with some one, but not so hard but that I heard Sam Brown go down like a bullock upon the deck; and then I shook myself free, ran to the mizen-shrouds, and sprang up them like a cat; and, as soon as I was out of reach, leaned down and listened.

There was no mistake about it: the ship had been taken with hardly so much as a scuffle, and though I could not see more than a figure trot quickly by one of the skylights, I could hear that the hatches were being secured, and men posted there; and for a minute I felt sure that we had been boarded in the darkness, and that I, one of the principal men in the watch, had kept a bad lookout. Directly after, though, there came a bit more scuffling and an oath or two, and I heard a voice that I knew for Bill Smith’s, and another that I could tell was Van’s; and then, like a light, it all came upon me that while we had been watching out-board, there was an enemy in the ship, and the men had risen.

I wouldn’t have it for a bit, feeling sure that I must have known of it; but I was obliged to give in, for I heard next in the darkness a hammering at the cabin doors, and the skipper’s voice shouting to be let out; and then came the mate’s backing him up; then a pistol-shot or two, and the shivering of glass, like as if the cabin skylight had been broken; and then came Van’s shrill voice, giving orders, and threatening; and from the way the man spoke, I knew in a minute that there had been a chained devil amongst us, and that he had broken loose.

As soon as I could pull myself together a bit, and get to think, I got out my box, opens it and my knife, cuts a fresh bit of baccy, and then, taking a good hold of the stay I was on, began to wonder what I’d better do next. Staying where I was did very well for the present; but it would not be such a great while before daybreak, and then I knew they would see me, and, if I didn’t come down, shoot me like a dog. I felt sure that they had done for my two poor mates, for I could not hear a sound of them; and seeing that joining the enemy below was out of the question, what I had to do was to get to them in the cabin. But how?

There I was, perched up close to the top, with the yard swinging gently to and fro; and between me and those I wanted to join, there was the enemy. I felt puzzled; and in the midst of my thought, listening the while as I was to the muttering of voices I heard below, I snapped-to the lid of the steel box I had in my hand, and in the still night it sounded quite sharp and clear.

“What a fool!” I said to myself, and crept in closer to the mast, for the voices below ceased, and two pistol-bullets came whistling through the rigging. Then there was a sharp whispering, and a couple more shots were fired; but I did not move, for it would have been like directing them where to aim. Then came Van’s voice, as he shouted: “Fetch him down!” And I knew from the way in which the rigging trembled, that some of the enemy were coming up the shrouds to leeward and windward too.

“Hunt him overboard, if he won’t give in,” shouted Van, and I set my teeth as I heard him; but there was no time to spare, and feeling about for a sheet, I got hold of it, meaning to swing myself out clear, and hang quite still, while they passed aloft, and then try for some hiding-place where I could gain the deck. I held on tight for a moment, and listened; and then in the darkness I could hear some one coming nearer and nearer, when, letting go with my feet, I swung gently off, and the next instant brushed up against something, when my heart gave a great bound, for I had found the way to get down to them in the cabin.

Story 2--Chapter VI.

“It may come to a fight though, after all, and a prick will keep some of them at a distance,” I says to myself, and getting my legs well round the sheet, I got hold of my knife, and opened it with my teeth, before making use of the chance that had shown itself.

Perhaps it isn’t every one who knows what a wind-sail is, so I’ll tell you; it’s a contrivance like a great canvas stocking, six or seven feet round, and twenty or thirty long and by letting one end of this hang down through the cabin-hatch or skylight, and having the other bowsed up in the rigging, you have like a great open pipe bringing you down a reg’lar stream of cool air in the hot weather.

Now it was just against the top end of this that I had brushed; and as it seemed to me all I had to do was to slip in, check myself all I could, and then go down with a run amongst friends, where, if not safe, I should certainly share their fate, whatever it might be, besides, perhaps, being of some use.

Fortunately, I had the rope, and hauling myself up a bit, after two or three tries, I got my legs in, lowered away quickly, and came down pretty smartly, not, as I meant, in the chief cabin, but upon the deck, where I was now struggling to get loose, like a monkey in a biscuit-bag, for they had done what I had not reckoned upon, dragged up the end of the wind-sail, and shut down the cabin skylight, most likely when I heard the shots and breaking glass.

It was lucky for me that it was dark, for though the noise I made brought them round me, I had time first to slit the canvas and slip out, panting, and not knowing which way to turn. I knew they dare not fire, for fear of hitting one another, and starting off, I ran them once right round the deck, keeping as much as I could under the bulwarks. The second time round I came right against one fellow, and sent him down head over heels; but I knew it couldn’t last, and that in spite of doubling they must have me. I could hear panting and voices all round, and on leaving off running, and creeping cautiously about, more than once I felt some one pass close by me—regularly felt them, they were so close. Once I thought of getting into the chains, but I knew if I did they would see me as soon as it was daybreak. Then I thought I might just as well jump overboard, and make an end of it, as be pitched over; directly after, I fancied I could crawl under the spare sail that covered the long-boat, and lie there. Last of all, I made for the poop, meaning to try and climb down to one of the cabin windows, but I stopped half-way, on account of the binnacle-light, and crept back towards the fore-part, to see if I could get down to the fore-cabin passengers. But it was of no use, and the only wonder was that I did not run right into some one’s arms; but the chances, perhaps, were not, after all, so very much against me, and I kept clear till they grew savage, and I could hear that they were cutting about at me with either knives or cutlasses; and in spite of my trouble then, I could not help wondering how they had come by their arms, for, of course, I could not know then how Van had stolen them from the cabin while the skipper was asleep.

“I may as well knock under,” I said to myself, and I was about to give up, meaning first to give ’em one more round, when I stumbled. Twice over I had felt my bare feet, slip upon the deck, in what seemed blood, and had shuddered as I thought of how I should leave my footmarks all over the clean white boards; but this time I stumbled over what seemed to be a body, and should have fallen, if I had not gathered up my strength for a jump, and thrown myself forward, when, as if in one and the same moment, there was a crash as of breaking glass, a heavy fall, and then a foot was upon my throat, and a pistol held to my head.

Story 2--Chapter VII.

I was that shaken and confused by my fall, that for a moment I could not speak, and when I could say a few words, I did not know who I was speaking to, expecting that it was Van, till a voice I seemed to know whispered: “If you attempt to move, I fire.”

“I ain’t going to move, Mr Ward,” I says at last: “it’s been too hard work to get here; but if you’ll pynt your pistol up at the skylight, it’ll be better, or some one else will be tumbling down after me. Only wish Sam Brown would.”

“Pitched me down more’n half a hour ago,” growled a voice I knew.

“What’s come of Bill Smith?” I says.

“Lyin’ on the deck with his head split,” says Sam, “if they ain’t pitched him overboard.”

Then I heard a whispering consultation going on, which seemed to be about whether I was to be trusted, when Mr Ward seemed to be taking my part, and then the skipper whispers to me: “If you’ll be faithful to us, Roberts, you shall be well rewarded; but if you play fast and loose, mind, we are well armed, and there will be no mercy for you.”

“Who’s playing fast and loose?” I says gruffly as old Sam. “Ain’t I been cut at, and shot at, and then pitched neck and crop through the cabin skylight! If that’s your fast and loose, give me slow and tight for a game,” I says; “but mind you, it’s my opinion that there’s something else to do but play, for them beggars mean mischief.”

“I’ll be answerable for him, Captain Harness,” says Mr Ward; and though all this went on in whispers, there wasn’t a face to be seen, every light having been put out. “You may trust him, he’s no spy.”

“Spy be hanged,” I says. “Who’s going to play spy down here, in a place as is dark as an empty pitch-kettle in a ship’s hold! Don’t I tell you I’ve had to cut and run for my life, and what more do you want?”

“Nothing, my man,” says Mr Ward; “only your help as a good and true British sailor, for here are women and children for us to protect.”

“However shall I get to my birds?” some one says from out of the darkness.

“Birds!” I says: “you won’t want no more birds, sir, for it’s my impression as we’re going to be kept caged up ourselves now.”

Just then I seemed to catch just a faint glimpse of a face from out of the darkness, then it was gone again, and half a minute after I got another glimpse, and then another, when it was plain enough that the day was breaking; and then quickly the pale light stole down through the skylight, till the anxious faces of all the passengers, with the two officers and Sam Brown, was plain enough to see; and strange, and haggard, and queer they looked; but for all that, there was an air of determination amongst them, that showed they meant mischief; and I soon gathered from Mr Ward’s words that he was spurring the captain on to try and retake the ship.

“I’m afraid it would only be a sacrifice of life, if I did,” said the skipper.

“It would be a sacrifice of duty, if you did not, sir,” says Mr Ward warmly.

“Perhaps you’d better retake her yourself, sir,” says the skipper sulkily.

“I certainly shall try, sir, if you do not do your duty, to protect these helpless women. But we have a right to demand your assistance, and we do; while I have the word of every man present that he will fight to the last gasp for those who need our protection.”

“I cannot fight, but I can load for you,” said a voice from behind; and looking round, as many of us did, there stood Mr Bell, pale as a ghost, but quite calm, and leaning upon his sister’s arm; while, if I could have seen anything in a woman to admire, I should have said she looked beautiful just then—being quite pale and calm—like the sea of a still morning before the sun rises.

“There’s something to fight for there,” says Sam in my ear.

“Why didn’t they all stop at home?” I says. “Just look what a mess they’ve got themselves in through being aboard ship, which is the last place as they should be in.”

What Mr Ward had said seemed to have warmed the captain up; for sooner than see another take his place, he set to, and began to hunt out what arms he could find, after placing Mr Ward to guard the broken skylight, which he did with a revolver and a thin skewer of a thing out of a walking-stick, and it put me in mind of what I have read about some one being put in the fore-front of the battle; but the young man never said a word; and then, after a bit of a rummage, the captain came back to serve out what arms he could get told of, but that wasn’t many, for the enemy had pretty well emptied the locker where they were kept. A precious poor lot there was left for us to defend ourselves and a whole tribe of women and children; my share being an empty pistol, which didn’t seem to be so much use as a fellow’s fist, that being a handy sort of weapon in a tussle.

Everything was done quiet as could be, so as not to let them on deck know what we were doing; but as soon as the arming part was finished, and I looked round, I could see that the game was up, for two more pistols, two cutlashes, and a couple of guns—sporting-guns, that two of the passengers had used to shoot sea-birds with—was all we could muster.

As is always the case when it’s wanted, neither of these passengers had any more powder; and when Mr Ward’s little pistol-flask had been passed round once, there was not another charge left; but the captain had gone to get more, and we were expecting him back, piling up hammocks and bedding the while, to keep the mutineers off, and to have something to fight from behind. I was doing all I could, after shoving a good charge of powder and a whole handful of small-shot into my pistol, when Mr Ward beckons to me and whispers: “Go and see why he don’t come back; it’s time to be on the alert, for they are moving on deck.”

I stepped lightly off—my feet being bare, making no noise on the planks—when coming upon the captain quickly, I saw him just putting down a water-can, and he turned round to me, looking pale as a sheet, as he says: “It’s no use, my lad; resistance would be vain, for they’ve contrived to wet what powder we had. Look at it.”

He pointed to the little keg and a small case of cartridges, and sure enough they were all dripping wet, while it seemed rather surprising that the wetting looked so fresh. But I did not say so, only that Mr Ward hoped he’d make haste.

“Curse Mr Ward!” he muttered; and then he went on first, and I followed with my cheeks blown out, as if I was going to whistle, but I didn’t make a sound for all that.

“I fear that we must give up, Mr Ward,” says the skipper, “for the powder is all wet.”

There was a regular groan of dismay at the news, and one woman gave a sort of sob, else they were still as mice, and the children too behaving wonderful.

“Who talks of giving up?” says Mr Bell, his pale face flushing up as he spoke, and him holding one hand to his side. “Do you call yourselves men to hint at such a thing? I am no man now, only a broken, wasted shadow of a man, or, by the God who made me, Captain Harness, I’d strike you down! Look at these women, men! think of their fate if those scoundrels get the upper hand—completely—Mr Ward—you—as a gentleman—my sister—God help—”

The poor young fellow staggered, and would have fallen, for the blood was trickling down upon his shirt-front—gushing from his lips; but Mr Ward saved him, springing forward as a cry burst from Miss Bell; and he was laid upon a mattress in one of the cabins fainting—dying, it seemed to me.

Then there was a murmur among the passengers, of such a nature that Captain Harness found he must make some show of a fight, or it would be done without him; and accordingly he took hold of a very blunt cutlash, looking precious pale, but making-believe to tuck up the wristband of his shirt, to have free play for killing six or seven of the mutineers.

As for the passengers, all mustered, there was about eighteen of them; and had they been well armed, numbers being about equal, I don’t think we should have had much the worst of it; but ever so many of them had no arms at all, and I began to turn over in my mind what was to be done. I had a pretty good jack-knife; and not having much faith in the pistol, I was about to trust to the bit of steel, same as Sam Brown, who had one with a spring-back and a good seven-inch blade, so I says to Tomtit: “P’r’aps you’d like the pistol, sir;” and he took it quietly and earnestly, tapping the back, to make sure the powder was up the nipple, and I thought to myself, that’s in the right hands, anyhow.

“Are you ready?” says the skipper; for they were evidently collecting up above, and some one fired a pistol down the skylight, but none of us was hit.

“Not quite, sir,” I says. “Steward, suppose you hand out some of them knives o’ yours; and I’ll trouble you for the big beef-carver, as I spoke first.”

Mr Ward turned round and smiled at me; and I gave him a nod, turned up my sleeve too, and then laid hold of the big carver, which did not make such a bad weapon, being new, sharp-pointed, and stiff; while my idea had put a knife into a dozen hands that before had nothing to show.

“Pile more mattresses and hammocks up,” said Mr Ward; for it was plain that neither the skipper nor Mr Wallace meant to do much towards what was going to take place; and then I saw the doctor give one look towards where Mr Bell was lying, and run across, as if to see how he was; but he hurriedly caught hold of Miss Bell’s hand, and I could see that he spoke, while, as she drew her hand hastily away, she gave a strange frightened sort of look at him. Next moment he was back at my side, just as the cabin-hatch was flung open, and the shuffling of feet told that the mutineers meant to make their rush.

Story 2--Chapter VIII.

It was a rush, and no mistake; for they had been priming themselves up with rum, I should think, for the last hour or two, till they were nearly mad; and with Van at their head, they came on, yelling like so many devils, more than Englishmen, though certainly half of them were from all parts of the world. There was no time then for thinking, and before you knew where you were, it was give and take.

We fired as they came on; but I did not see that much harm was done, only one chap falling; while, as they returned it, Mr Wallace gave a cry, and clapped his hand to his shoulder, dropping at the same time his cutlash, which Tomtit laid hold of, for he had just shied his pistol, after firing it, right at Van’s head, only missing him by half an inch or so.

Van dashed right at the skipper like a cat, and with one cut sent him down, when he turned upon me, to serve me the same; but I was too quick for him, and as I jumped aside, his cutlash hit the bulkhead and snapped in two. I believe it would have gone hard with him then, for that carver was sharp, and my old blood was up, but in the struggle I was driven back; and the next thing I saw was Mr Ward drive that skewer of his right through one fellow’s shoulder, and then starting back, he fired three shots from his revolver, but with what effect I never saw, for two of the piratical rascals were at me, and it was all I could do to keep them at a distance. I fetched one a chop across the back of the hand at last, though, and sent him off howling and cursing; and then managing to avoid a cut, and sending my arm out, I caught the other right in the chest, and down he went like a stone; when, to my surprise, I found it was only the buckhorn handle I had hit him with, the blade having flown out, and gone goodness knows where.

There was no time to choose who should be your next enemy, for two or three were at you directly, and there I was at last, fighting best way I could with my fists, driven here and there, with the planks slippery with blood, and men, some wounded, some only stunned, lying about for you to fall over.

I kept casting an eye at Mr Ward, and could see that he was fighting like a hero; but all at once I made a jump to get at him, for I saw Van creep up behind, while he was defending himself from a big fellow with a cutlash, and though I shouted to him, it was of no use, for the poor young fellow was cut down just as I turned dizzy from being fetched to the deck with a crack from a marlinespike.

Story 2--Chapter IX.

When I came to again, my head was aching awfully, and I found myself lying upon the deck, with old Sam Brown dabbing my forehead with a wet swab. Close beside me was Bill Smith, and the sight of him alive did me so much good that I jumped up into a sitting position, and gave his hand a good shake. But, there, it was for all the world like

having boiling lead poured from one side to the other of your head, and I was glad to lean against the bulkhead again.

There were half-a-dozen of the crew keeping watch over us, while Sam whispered to me that six bodies had been shoved out of the port—three being passengers; as to the rest on our side, Mr Ward's seemed the worst wound, but he, poor fellow, was sitting up pale and anxious, with his handkerchief tied round his head, and evidently, like me, wondering what was to happen next.

I could not help noticing soon after how well the women bore it all; hushing and chattering to the children to keep them quiet, and doing all they could to keep them from noticing our wild and wounded faces. They were all huddled together in the big cabin, while, with the exception of the men on guard, the mutineers were on deck. From the slight rolling of the ship, it seemed that they had altered her course; but my head was too much worried and confused for me to notice much, and that day slipped by, and the night came—such a night as, I pray God, I may never again pass; for the cabin-hatches were closed upon us, and none of the men stayed down, but after serving round some biscuit and water, and some rank bad butter at the bottom of one of the little tubs, they went on deck, though we soon found that a couple of them kept watch.

It was a sad night and a bitter, for as soon as darkness came down upon us, the poor women, who had held up so well all day, broke down, and you could hear the smothered sobbing and wailing, till it went through you like a knife. I believe they tried all they could to keep it in, poor things; but then 'tain't in 'em, you know, to keep up long; and then when the children broke out too, and wanted all sorts of things that they couldn't have, why, it was awful. We had no lights, for they wouldn't give us any, so we all had to set to, to try and make the best of everything; but we couldn't, you see, not even second best, try how we would.

"Only a bit of a cut, sir," I says to Mr Ward, who was going round and doing what he could in the dark for we chaps as had got knocked about. "I sha'n't hurt. See to Bill Smith here. Tell you what it is though, sir—you won't catch me at sea again in such a Noah's Ark as this here."

"Hush, my man," he says, "and try all you can to help." "In course I will, sir," I says; and then, hearing a growl on my right, I says: "That ain't Bill, sir, that's Sam. He's all right: nobody can't hurt him, his blessed head's too thick." Directly after the doctor felt his way to Bill Smith, and tied up his head a bit, while I was wondering what to do for the best, listening all the time to women wailing, and little ones letting go, as if with the full belief that they'd got the whole of the trouble in the ship on their precious little heads. What seemed the best thing to do was to quiet some of them; and if it had been daylight, a sight or two of my phiz would have frightened 'em into peace; but how to do it now, I didn't know. "Howsoever, here goes for a try," I says; and I groped my way along as well as I could, expecting every moment to be deafened, when I turned half mad with rage, for some one yells down the skylight: "Stop that noise!" and at the same moment there was a pistol fired right into the wailing crowd; then there was a sharp clear shriek, and directly after a stillness that was awful.

"It was a cruel cowardly act," I heard some one say then close to me; "but, Miss Bell,"—And then directly came the young lady's voice saying: "It is almost as cowardly, sir, to speak to me in this way, when I am so unprotected."

"By your leave," I says gruffly, and I felt a little hand laid on my arm.

"Is that you, Mr Roberts?" says Miss Bell, and I could feel her soft breath on my cheek.

"It's old Tom Roberts, without the Mister, ma'am," I says, "and at your sarvice. What shall I do?"

What could I do? Rum question, wasn't it? When, if she didn't put a little toddling thing into my arms—a bit of a two-year-older, as was just beginning to cry again, after the fright of the pistol; but I turned myself into a sort of cradle, got rocking about, and if the soft round little thing didn't go off fast asleep, and breathe as reg'lar as so much clockwork!

"Well done you, Tom Roberts," I says, after listening to it for about half an hour; and do you know, I did feel a bit proud of what I'd done, being the first time, you see, that I'd ever tried to do such a thing; and so through the night I sat there with my back to the bulkhead, and with my head all worried like, for now it was me groaning, and now it seemed that I was crying like a child, and then people were telling me to be quiet, only I wouldn't, for I had mutinied, and was going to kill Mr Ward, and marry Miss Bell, and things were all mixed together, and strange and misty, and then thicker still, and at last all was blank, and I must have gone off to sleep, in spite of my trouble, for when I opened my eyes, it was broad daylight again, and then the first thing they lit on was a little chubby, curly-headed thing in my lap, watching me as serious as could be, and twisting its little hand in my beard.

I hadn't eyes for anything else for a little while, but as soon as I did take a look round, all the troubles seemed to come back with a jump, for most of the party were asleep; there they all were, first-class passengers and steerage passengers, all huddled together, no distinctions now. Old Sam was snoring away close alongside of the skipper and Mr Wallace, and strange and bad they looked, poor fellows; while up at the far end sat Miss Bell, bending over her brother, who lay on a locker; but whether she was asleep or not, I couldn't tell.

But there was something else took my attention, and that was, that though all the other berths seemed empty, one had some one lying in it, and that berth I could not keep my eyes off, for it got to be somehow mixed up with the firing of that pistol down the skylight and the sharp cry I had heard; and so from thinking about it all, I got it put together in a shape which Mr Ward afterwards told me was quite right, for a little lad of nine years old was killed by that cowardly bullet, and it was him as I saw lying there so still.

By degrees, first one and then another of our miserable party roused up with a sigh, and then sat staring about in a most hopeless way; all but Mr Ward, who went round to those who had been wounded, saying a cheering word or two, as well as seeing to their bandages; but it was quite by force that he had to do the skipper's, for his wound had

made him light-headed, and he took it into his poor cloudy brain that Mr Ward was Van, and wanted to make an end of him.

People soon got whispering together and wondering what was to be done next, for they seemed to be busy on deck, and of course we were all very anxious to know; but when Sam Brown got a tub on one of the tables, and then hauled himself up, to have a look through the skylight, he came down again rubbing his knuckles and swearing, for one of the watch had given him a tap with a marlinespike; and after that, of course no one tried to look out.

I, for one, expected that they would have taken advantage of having their own way to have a reg'lar turn at the spirits; but no: they certainly got some up, but Van seemed to be driving them all with a tightish hand, so that they were going on very quietly and reg'larly, as we found, for by and by they serves out biscuit and butter and fresh water again; and not very long after, Van sung out down the hatchway for me to come up; and knowing that if I didn't go he'd send and fetch me, I went up, and sat down on the deck, where he pointed to with a pistol. Then he ordered up Sam and Bill, and four sailors who were on our side (lads only), and the skipper and Mr Wallace, one at a time, till we were all set in a row, with them guarding us; when, with his teeth glistening, Van walks up to the skipper, and hits him on the head with the butt-end of his pistol, so that the poor fellow fell back on the deck.

"Set him up again," says Van savagely; and a couple of the mutineers did so, but only for Van to knock him down once more; and he did that four times over, till, when they set the poor captain up again the last time, he fell back upon the deck of himself, being stunned like. It was enough to make any fellow burst with rage; but what can you do when there's half a score standing over you with loaded pistols? and, besides, trouble makes people very selfish, while we all knew how Van was having his bit of revenge, cowardly as it was, for the way the captain had treated him.

Last of all, Van goes and puts his foot on the skipper's neck, and I made as though to get up, for I thought he was going to blow his brains out; and bad and cowardly as the captain had been, I couldn't a-bear to see him hit when he was down without trying to help him; but it was of no use, for I was pulled back directly, and all I could do was to sit and look on.

All at once, Van turns a breaker on its end, jumps on it, and, sticking his arms a-kimbo like a fishwoman, he begins to spout at us; and fine and fierce no doubt he thought he looked in his red nightcap, and belt stuck full of pistols. "Now, my lads," he says, "we're going to have some of the good old times over again: take possession of one of the beautiful isles in the Pacific, and sail where we like under the black flag, free as the day, with none of your cursed tyrants to make men sweat blood and work like dogs, but all free and equal. We've done the work, and captured the ship, and you've acted like thieves and curs, and sided with them as will be ready to kick you for your pains. As for you, Wallace, curse you! you have always been a cur and a tool; but we shall want help, and you can come if you like; while, you others, we'll look over what's gone by, for you did fight like men. So, what do you say?—will you join us, or take your chance to reach land in one of the boats with the lot below?"

The young lads all looked at me, to see what I'd say, for no one took much notice of Mr Wallace. Bill Smith, too, who was much better, he looks at me; and I s'pose old Sam meant to do the same, but when I turned to him, all I could make out was the whites of his eyes, till he turned his head on one side, and I got a sight of one eye, when he turned his head t'other way, and then I see t'other.

It was very plain that they meant me to be spokesman; and seeing that was to be the case, and that, after a fashion, they left me to decide, I just turns it over in my own mind for a hit, and seeing as I should be wanted in the boats to help make the land somewhere, as they was to be loaded with a set of the helplessest beings as ever breathed—why, I says: "T'others can do as they like; as for me, you never asked me at first; and as you've done without me so far, why, you can do without me now—till you gets to the gallows," I added, but so as they couldn't hear me. And, though I hardly expected it from the lads, they said they'd do as I did; while, as for Bill and Sam, they always was a pair of the helplessest babbies as ever breathed, and left me to think for 'em ever since we first sailed together—indeed, I don't fancy as Sam ever had any thinking machinery at all. Howsoever, they said as they'd stick by me; and Van gave a curse and a swear, and a blow or two at us; and then, after a bit of 'scussion, in which women was named two or three times, and Van and another party was quite at loggerheads for a time, he gave his orders, big and bounceable like, and telling us to lend a hand, he made ready to lower down one of the boats.

Story 2--Chapter X.

Two boats were lowered down, and my two mates and me and the four sailors was to man 'em. They let down Captain Harness, wounded and half mad as he was, into one boat, and Mr Wallace the mate into the other; and then a couple of compasses, and some breakers of water, a bag or two of biscuit, and a tub of butter were shoved in. Then came the job of getting the passengers over the side. The men were ordered up first, and, some wounded, some savage, some weak and disheartened, they were made to take their places, six of the mutineers keeping guard with cocked pistols and drawn cutlashes. I believe, though, in spite of their weapons, that a little English pluck was all that was needed to save the ship; but no attempt was made, and, trembling and frightened, the women and children were ordered up, and then the boats were loaded.

"Now, then, down with you, and shove off," says Van Haigh, showing his cursed white teeth, and pricking at poor Sam Brown with his cutlash, just out of malice like. And you should have seen Sam's eyes that time! He never spoke, but it's my opinion if he'd had the chance, he'd have shaken Van's precious body until the silver rings he was so proud of had dropped out of his yellow ears. But, as I said before, Sam didn't speak; he only lays hold of the side rope, and lowers himself into the boat, already too full; Bill Smith dropping into the other, in spite of his wound.

"Now you!" roars Van to me, for I was standing hesitating, and I don't mind saying that a cold chill ran all through me, for just then I heard the click of his pistol cock, and I knew he was taking aim at my head. But I mastered myself,

and wouldn't turn round; for it was an important time, and there was much to think about. There was poor Mr Ward, with his head bound up, held by two of the mutineers; and poor Tomtit, with his knees to his chin as he sat upon the deck; and of course they weren't going, for the boats wouldn't hold any more. And there was the fat passenger, as cried when we left home; and last of all, Miss Bell and her brother below.

It didn't take me long to make up my mind, for it seemed to me as it would never do for me and my mates to go and leave them in their trouble, for maybe they'd be sent afloat in a little boat next, and wouldn't know how to work her; so, half-expecting every moment to drop with a bullet through me, I says: "I'm blest, my lads, if I ain't had about enough of it. While the old skipper was aboard, I did my duty by him and them as was under him; but now there's a new skipper, I don't see what call there is for me to go afloat with a set o' lubbers in a crazy boat. You, Bill Smith, and you, squinty Brown, can do as you like. Captain Van," I says, turning to him, "if you'll shove that pistol away, I'll stop aboard."

"Hooray!" shouts half a dozen of the fellows; and I could see Van looking me through and through with them dark eyes of his; but I don't think he got much below the skin either, and besides, he was a bit tickled by me calling him "captain;" so he puts the pistol in his belt, and the next minute Bill and Sam was aboard again, looking half-puzzled like. Then the mutineers gave a bit of a cheer, and the passengers groaned at us; and, to make matters right with them on board, I jumps on the taffrail and groans again, and calls the poor beggars "swabs"—God forgive me!—for shoving off in so lubberly a way, with their oars dipping anyhow, nohow, one after the other in the water, and the boats not trimmed. It was a cruel trick, but I meant it all for the best; while, what to do about old Sam, I didn't know, for he was growling and swearing to himself like some old tiger-cat, and I was afraid he'd show his teeth and claws every moment; but he kept quiet. As for poor Bill, he seemed misty and dazed, never speaking, but sitting down on the deck to lean his head against the side. Then Van seemed more at rest, for, giving his orders, the men uncocked their pistols, after making-believe to blow the fat passenger's brains out, and making the perspiration run down his face, mixed up with tears, for he began to pipe his eye terribly.

"Lower 'em below," says Van; and the fat passenger saved 'em the trouble; while, when they were letting down Tomtit, whose hands were tied, and they were going to let go, they found his legs was already at the bottom, and then his head disappeared, but only to pop up again the next moment like a Jack-in-the-box, to see what was going to be done to the doctor.

"Ain't he a rum beggar?" I says to one of the blood-thirsty devils at my side, all to make friends, you see; and he laughed, and so did two or three more, for another of 'em made a cut at the poor chap's head with his cutlash, to make him bob down the hatchway again, which he did, though only to come up again, till, finding it wasn't safe, he kept down, and we didn't see him no more just then. The poor doctor was the next to take their attention; and, seeing how cut up the poor fellow was, I'd have given something to have gone and shaken hands with him, and told him what I felt, and at first I hardly dare look him in the face.

They lashed Mr Ward's hands behind him, and I saw his lips quiver as he kept on casting an eye at the cabin-stairs. I knew well enough what he was thinking about, only I daren't look at him much, for there were plenty watching me suspiciously enough, and, let alone not wanting to be knocked on the head, I felt that to do any good for the passengers, I must throw them as had the upper hand off the scent.

I was leaning against the bulwarks, making-believe to look on, cool as could be, and screwing my old mahogany phizog into what I meant to be a grin of delight at our freedom, but I know it must have been about the sort of screw that a fellow would give when lashed to a gun for a round dozen.

Mr Ward saw me grinning, and sent such a look at me as made my face grow as long as a spoon; but that wouldn't do, and I daren't give him any signal, so I laughed it off, and, pulling out my box and opening my knife, I goes up to him, and I says in a free-and-easy way, "Have a chaw, mate?" and made-believe to cut him one.

"You infernal traitorous scoundrel!" he shouted, and in spite of his lashings he made at me; while, making-believe to have my monkey up, I up with my knife and made a stroke at him, sending it through his pilot-coat and into one of the side-pockets, dragging at it, to get it out again, and keeping it hitched the while, till some of them laid hold of me by the arm, when, struggling and swearing, I hit out with my left hand, and caught Mr Ward upon the chest, sending him down upon the deck, when I tried again to get at him, but they held me fast.

"I'll let him know," I spluttered out; and then Brassey, Van's right-hand man, gives the order, and three of his mates drags Mr Ward down the hatchway; when I pretended to be better, and only kept on muttering and scowling about like a dog that's lost his bone, till ten minutes after, when I got a pannikin of grog, and sat looking at what was going on.

Story 2--Chapter XI.

I don't think I'd any plans made; my only idea was, that when they sent the three or four others off, me and my mates might seize another boat, and row after them, the same night, for they wouldn't get very far, as I knew, unless a fresh breeze sprung up, and took us away. Certainly the two boats that had gone were loaded deep, but they were not making a mile an hour; and it seemed plain enough to me that unless they could answer for its being calm till the poor wretches were picked up, if they ever were, the brutes on board had murdered 'em one and all, men, women, and children, by a slow kind of torture.

"Not very smart crews, matey," I says, pointing with my knife over my shoulder to where the boats were slowly rising and falling, and then I fished out a piece of chicken from a tin case of the skipper's, and went on eating away as if I hadn't a care on my mind. "Peg away, my lads," I says to Bill and Sam; but Bill couldn't touch a snap. Sam made up for it, though; and after plenty of hard work and fighting, and two days on biscuit and water, and that rank yellow

grease sailors get for butter, one's teeth do get rather sharp. "Now, if you'll just sarve another tot o' grog round, cap'n," I says to Van, as I wiped my knife on the leg of my trousers, "I shall be about done and ready for work."

Some of the fellows laughed, and Van said something about my not being such a bad sort after all; but I could see as he did not trust me, which, I must say, was quite right, and the only right thing as I ever saw in the blackguard's character.

I soon found that though they'd all doubled the Cape a good many times, there wasn't a man with navigation enough in him to tell where we were, or how to carry the ship on her course; while, though I don't believe I could have worked a reckoning right, yet, somehow or other, I fancy I could have shoved that old ship's nose into the harbour for which we were bound. Their plan seemed to be to crack on due south till we'd got high enough, and then to steer west, and get into the Pacific best way we could. I give them my bit of advice when it was asked, for I thought that the more we were in the track of ships, the more likely we were to be overhauled; but they would not have it my way; and Van giving his orders, a lot of us sprung up to make sail. When lying out on the main-royal yard, I run my eye round and quite jumped again, for, bearing down towards where the boats were crawling along, there was a bark with every stitch of canvas set.

Sam saw it too, for he grunted; but I give him a kick, and down we came, our vessel feeling the breeze now, and careening over as the water began to rattle under her bows.

I felt more comfortable after that, for though I did not for a moment think that the ship I had seen would overhaul us, still I felt pretty sure that she'd pick up those poor creatures in the boats, and save them from a horrible death. There was no doubt about having seen the bark, but from the deck never a glimpse was got of it; and we went bowling along in capital style, just, in fact, as if we had been a honest ship on a good cruise.

Having nothing particular to do, I went below, and the first place I came to was the cabin that had been fitted up for Mr Butterwell's birds; and on getting to 'em, there they were, poor little things, fluttering and chirping about with their feathers all rough, for they'd got no water and seed. Quite a score of 'em were lying dead in the bottom amongst the sand; and after giving the pretty little things water, and seed, and paste, I fished out the dead ones in a quiet, methodical sort of way, turning over something in my mind that I couldn't get to fit, when I feels a hand on my shoulder.

"Going to wring their necks?" says Van, for it was him come down to watch me.

"Not I," I says. "They'll do first-rate to turn out on the island we stops at. Sing like fun."

"Look ye here, Roberts," he says, "we're playing a dangerous game, and you've joined us in it. Don't play any tricks, or—" He didn't say any more, but looked hard at me.

"Tricks!" I grumbled out; "I'm not for playing anything. I'm for real earnest, and no favour to nobody."

"I only said don't," says Van; and he went up again.

"A suspicious hound," I says to myself; and then I began to turn over in my own mind what I had been thinking of before; and then having, as I thought, hit upon a bright idea, I hugged it up, and began to rub it a little more shiny.

You see what I wanted to do was to get a word with Mr Ward, and how to do it was the question. I knew well enough that I should be watched pretty closely, and any attempt at speaking would be put an end to most likely with a bullet.

I rubbed that thought about no end, and next morning I goes to one particular cage where there was a linnet that I had seen Mr Butterwell play all sorts of tricks with; and instead of feeding it, I quietly took out the panting little thing, carried it on deck, got up in a corner under the bulwarks, and waited my time, watching the while to see if any one had an eye on me. Then I let the bird go; and it flitted here and flitted there with a tiny bit of paper fastened under its wing, till, as I had hoped, there came from out of the cabin skylight a particular sort of chirrup, when the bird settled on the glass for a moment, and then dropped through the opening where it had been broken.

Now, on that bit of paper I had printed what I knew wouldn't hurt me if the bird was seen by the mutineers, for I was afraid to say much the first time; and as I had written on it, "Let him go again," so sure enough up he came ten minutes after, and watching my chance, I followed him about till I caught him, and took him back to his cage, and gave him plenty of seed.

Van had taken possession of the cabin next to where his prisoners were, and the skylight being partly over his place, a word with Mr Ward was out of the question; while such a little messenger as I had found would go to his master when called, perhaps without calling, specially after him being fortunate enough to catch sight of the bird the first time I tried.

All that day matters went on as usual, a strict watch being kept over the prisoners, and more than one as I fancied having an eye to me. On and on we sailed due south, and the weather kept wonderful all the time; but there seemed no sign of starting the rest of the passengers off in a boat, and I began to feel worried and troubled about their fate, and more anxious to get on with the plans I was contriving.

Story 2--Chapter XII.

Now, not being a scholar, I had a deal of trouble over the note I got ready for the next morning, for, you see, I wanted to say very much in a very little room, and in a way that shouldn't betray me if it was to fall into the wrong hands. It was meant for Mr Ward, but I knew Tomtit would get it; but that didn't matter, as they were fellow-prisoners, and

what I wanted was to put the doctor on his guard, and also to let him know that all I'd done was so as to be alongside of him and Miss Bell. So I says in the note:

"Honoured Sir,—Keep a bright look-out ahead, and haul every sheet taut. Them as you thought was sharks a showing their teeth warn't only shams. Take all you gets, and clap 'em under hatches, and, whatever you do, don't be deceived by false colours, nor hail ships as seems enemies."

"There," I says to myself, when I'd got that printed out careful, "if he can't make that out, he can't understand nothing;" for, I put it to you, what could I have said clearer, and yet made so as no one else could understand? It seemed to me that I'd just hit the mark, and the next thing was to get it to him.

Who'd ever have thought, I says, that that long doubling-up chap, as we all made such fun of with his little birds, would have turned in so useful; and then I got what you big people call moralising about everybody having their use on earth, without it was mutineers, whose only use seemed to me to be finding work for the hangman.

I got no chance to send my note that day, through people being about; next day, too, nothing came of it; but early the next morning, soon after daybreak, I got my little messenger out, tied the paper to his wing with a bit of worsted out of my kit, and then going on deck, I let him fly, but so as not to take the attention of the chap at the wheel, I started him from up in the main-top, where I made-believe to have gone to have a smoke.

There was a watch of three forward, but they were all half asleep; while as for him taking his trick at the wheel, he kept on nodding over his job, and letting the ship yaw about till she went anyhow.

Bless the pretty little thing! When I first opened my hand, it only sat there looking at me with its bright beady eyes, and then it was so tame, it hopped upon my shoulder, to stay a few seconds, before flitting from rope to sheet and shroud, lower and lower, till it perched upon the cabin skylight, and rattled out a few clear crisp notes, like a challenge to its master, who, I felt sure, would be asleep. My only hope was that the little thing would flit through the big hole I made, and stay in the cabin till Tomtit was up.

But I was wrong, for the bird had no sooner sung its sweet note, putting one in mind of old boyish days when we used to go bird-nesting, than I saw a hand thrust up through the broken light, and after a little fluttering, the bird let itself be caught, when, knowing that my job was done, I came slowly down, and walking aft, stood and talked to the chap at the wheel.

"Hollo!" I says, all at once, "there's one o' my birds got loose;" and running forward, and making a good deal of fuss, I captured the little linnet, for it never flew far at a time, having been tamed and petted by Mr Butterwell till it was almost like a little Christian.

That day I watched my chance, and got hold of what powder I could, making a little packet of it in my silk neckercher; and when it was dark, I managed to drop that through the skylight as I went whistling along the deck. Next thing to be done was to get some weepuns, for it seemed strange to me if we six true men couldn't somehow make one chance and turn the tables on the rascals who had taken the ship. Counting them up, I found there was about seventeen—long odds enough, unless we could trap half of 'em, and fight 'em a part at a time. Then I thought the odds would be fair, for fighting with right on our side, I considered that we were quite as strong as eight of the others.

But the job was to get hold of weepuns, for they never let neither me, nor Sam, nor Bill Smith have neither cutlash nor pistol, only take our turn at the wheel, or trim sails, otherwise we were treated right enough. Some of the chaps grumbled, saying, that now Van had made hisself captain, times were as hard as they were before; but that wasn't the case, though now he'd got the ship, he didn't mean to lose her again if he could help it, and seemed to me to be always on the watch for everything. As to trusting either of we three to go down below to the prisoners with rations, that was out of the question, either he or Brassey attending to that, and more than once I heard high words, and Mr Bell talking in a threatening way when Van was below.

Now, if it had been at any other time, we should not have sailed a hundred miles without being boarded by some one; while, if a Queen's ship would only have overhauled us now, it would have been salvation for us: but no; day after day slipped by, and not a sail came near. All I had managed to drop more into the cabin was only a couple of table-knives; when one dark evening, as I lay under the bulwark, hid by a bit of sail, I saw Van come out of his cabin, go and talk to the chap at the wheel, see to the course of the ship, and then go forward. I heard him talk to the watch for a minute, and then he went below forward, when, running upon all-fours, I was at the cabin-hatch and down below in a jiffy.

As I expected, there were plenty of pistols and cutlashes there, where he had had them put for safety; and if I could have opened the big cabin door, I might have pitched half a score in before any one could have said "Jack Robinson;" but there was something to stop me, for I had crossed the cabin and had my hand on a cutlash before I knew that Brassey was in the cabin with his head down upon the table, and seemingly fast asleep.

I should think I stood there with my hand stretched out for a full minute, not daring to move, expecting every moment that Van would come back, or else that Brassey would wake up.

That minute seemed to be stretched out into quite an hour; and then, feeling that it was now or never, I shoved one after the other six pistols inside my shirt, when taking another step to reach where some cutlashes stood together in a corner, I knocked one down, when I threw myself on my hands and knees, so that, if Brassey started up, he would not see me at first. Then as I stooped there trembling with anxiety, I heard him yawn, push the lamp a little farther on the table, and a minute after, he was snoring loud.

I waited as long as I dared, and then rising lightly, I got hold of one cutlash, and then of five more, out of a good twenty as stood there; staffed as many cartridges out of the arm-chest into my pockets as they would hold; and then,

after doing all this by fits and starts, expecting every moment that Brassey would hear me, I turned to go.

I'd crept across the cabin, and reached the door, when I heard a step on the deck, and drew back; but the next moment it had gone, and after waiting for a minute, with the cutlashes tightly held under my arm, I made another start, when my heart seemed to sink, for I heard a sort of husky cough I well knew, and Van had his foot upon the stairs.

There was only one way for safety, and that I snatched at, for in another few seconds Van would have had me by the throat, and all would have been over; but, darting back, I laid hold of the lamp, dashed it down upon the sleeping man's head, and then leaped aside.

Story 2--Chapter XIII.

That trap took just as I expected. Brassey leaped up like a wounded tiger; and, cutlash in hand, Van bounded down the stairs, when the two men were locked in a sharp tussle in an instant, leaving the way clear for me to slip up, gain the mizzen shrouds, and make my way up into the top, where I laid my treasures; went hand over hand by the stay, and got down to the deck again in the dark by the main shrouds, without being seen, and joined the party that was being collected by the noise and shouting in the cabin.

"Curse you! bring a lantern. Help here, or he'll end me!" roared Van in a smothered voice; but not a man dared go down till I offered; and, making-believe to be afraid to venture without a cutlash, one of the chaps handed me one; and with the lantern in my other hand, I went cautiously down, chuckling to myself to find that Van and Brassey had been mauling one another awfully; and if it had not been for my coming, there'd no doubt have been an end of one of the scoundrels; for, woke up wild and savage from a drunken sleep, Brassey had attacked Van fiercely, and when I got to them, had him down and half-throttled.

There wasn't a man that didn't grin as Van cursed and raged at Brassey for a drunken fool, starting up and knocking the lamp over; while Brassey swore that Van struck him first, showing his bleeding head as a witness; but after such an up-and-down fight as they had had in the dark, no one took much notice of what he said, every one, themselves included, taking it for a false alarm; and we all separated, leaving Van and Brassey sore and savage as could be.

Knowing how frightened some of the prisoners would be, I says out loud to one of the chaps as we passed the broken panes:

"Don't s'pose the captain thought there was so much muscle in old Brass."

"Hold your tongue," says the other; "he'll hear you."

And then we both laughed and walked forward, me wishing the while that those below could have known of my luck, but satisfied that they would feel that there was nothing particular the matter.

Feeling pretty sure that Van would not be on deck again that night, I waited about three hours all in a tremble, as I lay in my hammock, for fear I should go to sleep, and forget to fetch the weapons; and even then, spite of all my pains, lying there and trying to keep awake, if I did not drop off, and dream that they were missed from the cabin, and that Van was going to shoot Mr Ward for stealing them. Then I awoke with a start; and it seemed to me that I had been asleep for hours and hours; and I slipped out of my hammock to find, from the men talking on deck, that I couldn't have been more than five minutes. So I crept down again and into my hammock; and once more I dropped off, do all I would to stop it; and this time I dreamed that the wind had changed, and all hands had been piped to shorten sail, when they came across the arms in the top. Then I awoke again with a start, to find that I could hear the buzzing of voices still upon the deck. But I wouldn't risk it any more, though I feel sure I shouldn't have slept above half an hour at a stretch; and sitting down by my hammock-head, I took a bit of baccy, and sat listening to old Sam snoring, till it seemed as if it would never grow late enough to go. At last, I felt that if I meant to act, it must be at once, or there would perhaps be a change in the watch, and I might lose my chance; so I crept up on deck, taking with me a handful of lashing; and as soon as I felt the breeze, I knew that I was not a minute too soon; for with a good mate or captain, orders would have been given directly to shorten sail.

The watch were well forward, and, as usual, the one at the wheel was half asleep, or, being now much lighter, he must have seen me going up or coming down from the mizzen-top where I had left the arms; but no; I got them safe down; and then, crawling like a cat along the deck, I threaded the lanyard I had through the trigger-guards of the pistols, and lowered them one at a time, all six, and was just drawing the lanyard back after loosing one end, when I felt a warm hand from below grasp mine, and on drawing it away I was able to pass the cartridge and six cutlashes down one after the other, to have them taken from my hand.

I'd hardly done before I heard a step on the deck behind me, and, dropping flat down, I gave a half-roll over, so that I lay close under the combing, but not daring to move, for it was the watch coming to the man at the wheel.

Story 2--Chapter XIV.

Every morning reg'lar Van used to take two of the chaps down below to Mr Ward, and he used to doctor their wounds for them, as I used to hear; for, seeing that they never felt disposed to trust me near the prisoners, I used to hang away, and never attempt to go near; but I kept on sending a line now and then by the little bird, telling them that I was making my plans, and that they were to wait a bit. I used to tell them too to feed the linnet; and it got to be so at last, that if I wanted it to take a message, all I had to do was to take away its seed and water over-night, and let it loose at daybreak, and it would go as straight as possible to the broken skylight, flit down, and come back in about

ten minutes.

I know it must have been a disappointment often to them below; but then I daren't often be sending notes, for fear of being noticed. Then, too, I was puzzled a deal about things: I wanted to know what Van meant by keeping his five prisoners, and what I ought to do for the best. Try and seize a boat, and get them aboard, or to get the upper hand when there was only the watch on deck.

This last seemed the most likely way; for going afloat in an open boat, with the chance of being picked up, is queer work, and the sort of thing that, when a man has tried once, he is well satisfied not to try again. So being, as it were, head man, I settled that we'd seize the ship; and after talking it over, the first chance I had, with Sam and Bill Smith, they quite agreed, thinking about salvage, you see; and then I began to reckon up the stuff I'd got to work with.

To begin with, there was Mr Ward, who was as good as two; so I put him down in my own mind two.

Then, going on with my best men, there was Sam, who was also good for two, if he was only put in the right way.

Then Bill Smith, who hadn't quite got his strength again; so I put him at one and a half.

Next came Tomtit, who was right enough, no doubt, in his way; only being so long and wankle, ((Lincolnshire dialect), weak, sickly) I couldn't help thinking he'd be like a knife I used to have—out and out bit of stuff, but weak in the spring; and just when you were going to use it for something particular, it would shut up, or else double backwards. That's just what I expected Tomtit would do—double up somewhere; so I dursn't only put him down at half a one.

Then there was the fat passenger who cried. He showed fight a bit in the scrimmage; but I hadn't much faith in him; there was too much water in him for strength; so I dursn't put him down neither for more than half. While as for Mr Bell, poor chap, and his sister, they were worse than noughts, being like in one's way. So you see that altogether I had to depend on two and two was four, and one and a half was five and a half, and a half made six; and another half, which I put to balance the two noughts to the bad, making, all told, what I reckoned as six, and myself thrown into the bargain.

And now came the question: How was we good men and true to get the better of seventeen of they? I turned it over all sorts of ways. Once I thought I'd get the doctor to poison the lot, only it seemed so un-English like, even if the others were mutineers and pirates, while most likely they wouldn't have taken the poison if we'd wanted them to. Poison 'em with rum, so that they couldn't move, might be managed, perhaps, with some of 'em, if the stuff was laid in their way; and that might answer, if a better plan couldn't be thought of. To go right at them without a stratagem would have been, of course, madness, though Sam Brown was for that when I talked to him, saying, thinking wasn't no use, and all we had to do was to get first fire at 'em twice, and shoot twelve, when we could polish off the other five easy. Now, that sounded all very nice; but I was afraid it wouldn't work; so I gave it up, and asked Bill Smith his opinion; but he said he hadn't none.

I'd have given something to have had a long palaver with Mr Ward; for I think we might have knocked up something between us that would have kep' out water; but a talk with him being out of the question, I had to think it out myself; and all I could come at was, that the best thing would be to leave a bottle or two of rum where the watch could find it; and then, if we could shut down the hatches on the others, we might do some good. That seemed the simplest dodge I could get hold of; for it looked to me as if the more one tried to work out something fresh, the more one couldn't.

I watched my chance, and wrote out all my plan, and started it to Mr Ward; and this time, I contrived, when no one was looking, to drop my letter down the skylight, telling him that he was to send me an answer by the bird, writ big, so as I shouldn't make no mistakes in the reading of it. Next morning, as soon as I was on deck, I found that I was too late; for Van and a couple of the chaps were hunting the linnet about; while, as it flitted from side to side of the deck, you could see a bit of white paper tied under its wing, and it must have been that as set them on after it.

I knew well enough that if the bird was caught, it would be all over with my scheme, and p'r'aps with me; so I went at it with the others, trying to catch the little thing, contriving, though, to frighten it all I could, so that it flew up into the rigging; and being nearest at the time, I followed it out on to the main-yard.

"Be careful, Roberts," says Van, as I went cautiously out till I was right over the water, the linnet going right off to the end; but I got my feet in the stirrups and followed on, expecting to see it flit off to another part of the rigging. I'd made up my mind what to do if I could get at it; for, though I liked the pretty little thing, there was a wonderful deal depending on whether it was caught or not; while all the time I was abusing myself for not being on deck sooner. I'd let the bird's cage be open the night before, ready for it to get out; and now it was plain that it had been down to the cabin, and Mr Ward had sent me an answer.

But it was no use to grumble; there was the bird before me, and if it would only keep still for another half-minute, I thought I saw my way clear. Plenty were now watching me from below; and, fortunately for me, instead of flitting off, the little bird crouched down upon the yardarm; so that, creeping nearer and nearer, I got quite within reach, when, making a dash as it were to catch it, I knocked the poor little thing stunned into the sea, making a sham slip at the same time, and hanging by my hands.

"Yah-h-h! you clumsy lubber!" roared Van; and then to one or two about him: "Lower the dinghy, and pick up that bird."

"Lost, after all," I growled to myself; but we were going pretty fast through the water; and by the time we had heaved-to, and let down the boat, the little thing was out of sight, and I felt that for this time we were safe.

Story 2--Chapter XV.

Our every-day life on board the Sea-mew had not much in it to talk about. Of course the ship was badly handled, and there was a deal of drunkenness aboard, though hardly ever before night. In the daytime they just did what little making or shortening sail there was, and then smoked and ate and drank just as they liked. After the first few days, they had the fat passenger up, and made him cook; and hang me if one day I didn't see him crying into the soup he was making! But I always kept at a distance, never speaking to him, only kept watching my chance. From what the others said, I learned that Mr Bell was only just alive; while some of them used to talk about his poor sister in a way that made me set to work more than ever to get my plans right.

I got to think at last, that if I waited much longer, I should never do anything; so one day, when I had a chance, I pitched a bullet down into the cabin, wrapped in a piece of paper, and on that piece of paper was written "To-night!"

"Now, if he's the man I take him for, all them pistols will be loaded, and the cutlashes ready for action," I says to myself; and leaving that to Mr Ward for his part, I warned Sam and Bill, and then set to do mine.

I'd been saving up on purpose; and as soon as it was dark that night, and just before they set the watch, I put two good big bottles of rum where I thought they would find them, and then waited to see.

All things turned out just as I could have wished; for going by an hour after, I could tell from the chatter going on that the three chaps were at the rum, which they supposed to have been left by mistake by those who had the watch the night before. Some of the chaps were carousing in the fore-cuddy, where they could easily be boxed up; and the others were with Van and Brassey, all card-playing in the skipper's cabin.

It seemed almost a hopeless case, now it was come to the point; but I felt that making up one's mind was half the battle, and I was up now, and meant to do or die.

Bill and Sam were on deck, and knew their parts well enough: Bill to manage the chap at the wheel; Sam to shut up the party in the fore-cuddy; I meaning to secure the cabin-hatch; and then I thought if that was done, we should have time to settle and lash the watch, who ought to be half-drunk, leaving our hands free to keep those quiet who would be trying to get out of the cabin.

You see my plan was to get Mr Ward up through the hole I made in my fall, if I could get the fellow away who was stationed there; and now it was that I trusted to the rum; for before now Van had been content to have a chap at the cabin door, leaving the watch to make sure the prisoners did not get on deck.

I was about right; for we three had not been squatting long under the bulwarks before one of the watch calls out "Harry!" and the sentry fellow goes to where they were busy with the rum. The next moment I was at the broken skylight, and whispered down the one word "Tools;" for I was afraid them playing in the other cabin might hear.

Mr Ward was ready; and the next minute I was under the bulwark again with the arms the doctor had passed up; and we three had each a pistol in our belts and a cutlash in our hands before the sentry chap came back.

The night was not so dark as I could have wished; but it was dark enough for us, and, as I expected, the sentry couldn't resist the smell of that rum, and in a very few minutes he was along with the others again, and did not seem disposed to come back. So now seeming to be my time, I said the word. Sam crept off one way, Bill the other, with their orders that there was to be no bloodshed, only as a last resource; then I went to the skylight, keeping the side nearest to the cabin-hatch, when I turned cold all over; for I heard Van's cough, and he came up the stairs as if to look out.

There was nothing else for it: I knew that if he missed the sentry, he would most likely spoil my plan; so, at the risk of being seen by the watch, I stood boldly up in the sentry's place, took a step this way and that way, and then began to whistle softly to myself like.

It was a bold trick, but Van was taken in; he could see some one was on guard; he could hear the watch; and the face of the man at the wheel was plain enough by the binnacle-light, so that all seemed well.

"If Bill only makes his attempt now we're undone," I thought. But all kept still aft, and then I shuddered like for fear Van should speak to me, but he did not say a word, only turned to go down again, and my breath came freer, as I felt for the lashings I had got ready for the prisoners I hoped to make; while I'm afraid if Van had come up to me then I should have been his death, and then have secured the cabin-hatch.

As I said before, I breathed freer, and turned my attention to where the four men were at the rum; but the next moment I was taken all aback again, for Van came up once more, stood still as if listening, and then saying to me: "Keep a sharp lookout," he turned once more to go.

"Right," I mumbles out, as if my mouth was full of baccy, and the next minute I could hear his voice quite plain through the other half of the skylight.

"Now or never," I says to myself, in dread lest that watchful cur should spoil my chance; and, going down on hands and knees, I leaned through the hole.

"With a will! Mr Ward," I says, and grasping my arms, next moment he was through and lying on the deck aside me, just as we could hear the scrooping noise of Sam closing the hatch of the fore-cuddy.

"Quick, Mr Butterwell," I says, and Tomtit had hold of my arms, but just as I expected, he shut up when he was wanted, for there was a slight scuffle by the wheel as I gave a heave, the watch stopped their chatter to listen, and

as I rose up like to hoist Mr Butterwell out, he went back into the cabin with a crash, falling against the bulkhead which separated it from the cabin where Van was, and if I had not darted to the hatch, he would have been up with the three hell-hounds at his back. But he was too late; I had the hatch over, and then turned to help Sam, who, like a brick as he was, had gone at the watch.

I need hardly tell you that Mr Ward was already in the thick of it; and Bill coming up, having silenced his man with a tap on the head, it was even odds, four against four; but the fellows fought savagely, and it was not until the sentry was cut down, and another had a bullet through him, that the other two were lashed fast neck and heels together.

Now all this time they had been thundering and battering away at both hatches, but I was in hopes that they would hold fast till our hands were at liberty, when a crash told us that something had given way, and running aft, we heard two pistol-shots fired quickly, one after the other, and could see the flashes and a figure standing by the hatch.

My hand was raised to fire, but I dropped the pistol, for I remembered that it was empty; and sword in hand, with my blood up, I dashed at whoever it might be, but only to miss my aim, for he darted aside and caught my cutlash with his in an instant.

It was cleanly done, that guard; and I shouldn't have thought he had it in him, for it was no other than Tomtit, who had climbed out well armed, and sent a couple of shots through the hole Van and his party had battered through the hatch. He was a friend in need, and a friend in deed that time, for if he hadn't come up as he had, it would perhaps have gone precious hard with us.

But there was no time to be lost, for I expected every moment that they would find their way up on deck from one of the cabin windows; and now, in place of wishing for darkness, we prayed for light, so as to be able to see our enemies, and from which side we should next be attacked.

I wanted Mr Ward to take the lead, but he would not—only asked to be set his work, so I set him at the cabin-hatch; Bill I planted on the poop, to cut down the first man who should try to climb on deck; Mr Tomtit over the two bound men of the watch, and the wounded; and Sam over the hatch of the forksel, for, though we'd got the upper hand, there was no knowing for how long it would be, and besides, we all knew well that if once the savages below got us under, there would be no mercy for us now.

What a night that was, and how long the day seemed coming! I was going about from place to place to see if I could make out danger anywhere, when Mr Ward called to me, and made a communication, whose end was that, with Mr Tomtit's help, we drew the two prisoners to the cabin-hatch, and left him to guard them and the cabin, while Mr Ward and I dropped through the skylight quick as thought. But they heard us through the bulkhead, and directly after we heard a hand on the door, and the key move, to which I answered with a shot, crashing through the panel, and whoever it was dropped, while for reply another bullet was sent back.

Mr Ward had darted to the inner cabin, while I kept guard, and now appeared with Mr Bell and his sister, she holding him up on one side, Mr Ward on the other.

"Quick as you can, sir," I whispered, "for there's some devilment 'most ready;" when mounting the table himself, Mr Ward put a chair ready, and helped Mr Bell and his sister up beside him. He then drew up the chair, planted it firmly, and was through the skylight in an instant. He then asked Miss Bell to mount, but she would not until after her brother; and with the doctor's help, the poor feeble young fellow was dragged up. Then I heard a sound as startled me, and running to the table, I caught Miss Bell in my arms, and dragged her down and to one side, just before three or four pistol-shots came tearing through the bulkhead, making the splinters fly in all directions.

"Now, up, quick," I said; and leaping on to the table, I dragged her on, lifted her in my arms to Mr Ward, and the next minute she was in safety, when, expecting another firing, I jumped down again, and went on my hands and knees.

Just as I expected, they fired again; but being dark, their shots did not tell; and before they could reload, I had jumped upon the table and climbed out to the rest.

"It's a wonder almost that they did not try to make them safe before," I said, panting; and then, having made Mr Bell and his sister comfortable under the bulwarks, we began to take steps for making ourselves a little surer. For instance, we laid a tarpaulin on the cabin skylight, and a spare sail over, that, and then again on the sail we coiled all the rope and cable we could. The cabin and forksel hatches we served in the same fashion, so that it was quite impossible for any one to get up that way; while just about daybreak, when a head appeared over the rail close to the wheel, the chop Bill Smith gave it sent it back again in a moment, so that there did not seem much to fear at present.

Daylight, and then glorious sunrise—a big word that for a common sailor, but sailors, as a rule, think a deal of the bright sunshine and the dancing waters. And a bright morning that was, cheering us up all, so that with a grin I went up to Mr Ward and axed his pardon for hitting him; axing too, at the same time, how he found himself after the stab I put in his pocket. But there, instead of laughing, if he didn't turn almost like the fat passenger, for his lip went all of a tremble, and his voice turned husky as he shook me by both hands and says: "God bless you, Roberts, and forgive me for ever doubting so true a man."

"Don't you be in a hurry, sir, with your thanks. Maybe we ain't half-done yet. We've divided the ship, and got the deck and a breaker of water, and there's what rum them four didn't finish; but they've got the below-decks and all the prog, unless we can find some anywhere else. We've got the upper hand, but now the question is, can we keep it?"

"No, you can't," shouts one of the fellows lying tied on the deck; "so—"

He didn't say any more, for Mr Tomtit fetched him a slap on the face with the flat of his cutlash, and then the fellow

lay and muttered most savagely.

We had a bit of a refresher in the shape of some cold water, with a dash of rum in it; when Mr Ward said that there were some provisions in their cabin below, and volunteered to get them if I stood at the skylight opening with two loaded pistols, to command the door that Van had kept on the outside.

I did not much like running any more risks than we could help; but food I knew we should be obliged to have, and if we could get it without attacking Van and his party, so much the better; for though I knew that it must come to that, I wanted to put it off as long as I could, and I was just making ready to go to the skylight with Mr Ward, when there was a shout from Mr Tomtit, and at the same moment a bullet struck the bulwark close to where Miss Bell was sitting.

Story 2--Chapter XVI.

Mr Ward sprang like a tiger towards the cabin skylight, where, through a slit in the sailcloth and tarpaulin, you could see a hand holding a pistol twisting about to get back again; but, though it had most likely come through easy enough, the edges of the stiff tarpaulin now closed round the wrist, and though the owner seemed to struggle hard, and having a peephole somewhere, shrieked out as Mr Ward came on, there was no saving the hand, upon which the young doctor's cutlash came down like a streak of lightning, cutting it to the bone, when it was at last dragged through, leaving the pistol upon the deck.

Now, this came from the side of the skylight over the mutineers' cabin, for so far they did not seem to have got into the one where Mr Ward and his friends had been; and seeing this, Mr Ward again volunteered to go down, after we had moved Mr Bell and his sister for safety under the port bulwarks, thrown another sail or two over the skylight, and then bowsed up a bit of an awning, for the sun came out, and beat heavily upon the poor sick man.

But having been made a big man of now, and being consulted on all points, I give in against anybody going down, for, says I: "You're too vallable a man to be spared, Mr Ward, sir, and one can only go down after that there prog when we're reg'lar dead beat. Let's hoist a signal of distress, in case we're seen by any other ship, keeping on ourselves steady like, watching well, and taking things coolly as we can."

My advice was taken, though if it hadn't been, I don't know as I should have gone and hanged myself; and there we sat, listening to the movements of the mutineers below, and wondering what devilry they were planning, till all was still as still, the wind falling calm, and the sea turning like glass; while the only sound we could hear was the twitter, twitter of Mr Tomtit's birds down below, which, by good luck, had got plenty of water and seeds, for, knowing as the little things had sense enough only to eat just as much as is good for them, I had well filled their boxes the day before.

"D'ye hear the birds, Roberts?" says Mr Tomtit to me, just as if there was nothing else in the world but birds, and I do believe as he thought they was the most important things living, save only for a bit when he was thinking of Miss Bell, and perhaps, after all, he thought her only a kind of sweet song-bird as he would like to have along with the others. However, "D'ye hear the birds, Roberts?" he says.

"Yes, sir, I do," I says. "I was just a-thinking about 'em when you spoke."

"Were you?" he says, brightening up, and laying down his pistol.

"Yes, I was," I says, "but don't you lay down that there bullet-iron, for you never know how soon you may want it, sir. While we're like this, sir, you'll have to sleep with both eyes open, and you a-nussin' a pistol; while as to what you gets to eat, you must pick that up on the point of your cutlash."

"But about the birds," he says eagerly. "How many are there left?"

"Well, sir," I says, "I can't rightly say; but I was a-thinking that if we could get 'em up on deck by shoving a hole through the wires with a boat-oar, there'd be enough of 'em, with 'conomy, to last us all for eight days."

"What?" he says, staring.

"Why," I says, "'lowancing ourselves to one big bird apiece, or two little uns, we could keep ourselves alive for a bit."

He didn't say a word, but looked just for all the world as if he thought it would ha' been a deal more like the right thing to do to cut one of us up small to feed his little cock-sparrows and things, if they ran short of food. So, just out of a bit of spite like, I says to him dryly: "You might try Miss Bell with them two doves now, sir," I says.

"Hold your tongue!" he says quite fierce, and looking to see if Mr Ward had heard.

"Wouldn't make a bad roast, sir, and this here sun's hot enough to cook bullock."

"Will you be quiet?" he says.

"And she'd pick them bones, and thoroughly enjoy—"

"Roberts," says Mr Ward, just then in a whisper, "what's that?"

I'd heard the sound at the same moment as he did, and for a moment it didn't strike me as to what it might be; but the next instant I was at the side with a cocked pistol in my hand, an example followed by all the others, for, through our bad watching, two men out of the fore-cabin had dropped softly overboard, and were making for the poop, when I hailed them to stop, covering one with a pistol the while.

He saw that it was of no use, so he asked for a rope directly, and heaving him one, we had him aboard lashed and lying down upon the deck beside his mates in less than no time; but the other one swam on and on, diving down every moment so that I shouldn't hit him. But I could have done it, if I'd liked, though I did not want to shed more blood, so we let him swim on till he began to paddle behind and shout to Van for a rope, when we could hear the cabin windows opening.

"Here, this won't do, sir," I says; and "Hi! here, you, Sam," I shouts, "don't you leave that fore-hatch," for he was coming away and leaving it unprotected. So he went back; and getting hold of a line, I makes a running noose, and going right aft, I tries to drop it over the fellow's head; but he kept dodging and ducking under, till at last I made a feint, and the water being clear as glass, just as he was coming up again I dropped the noose over his head and one arm, drawing it tight in a moment, and there he was struggling like a harpooned porpoise.

I thought I'd lost him once, for a stroke was made at the line with a cutlash out of one of the cabin lights, but I soon towed him out of reach, when Bill Smith threw him the end of a rope, and we had him aboard too.

Now, what with two wounded men and four prisoners, we had our hands more than full, so after a short bit of consideration, it was decided to risk the opening of the fore-cabin-hatch, and make the four men go down one at a time; we, for humanity's sake, keeping the prisoners who were wounded.

So we took the four with their hands lashed, and then, with Mr Tomtit only on guard, we four stood ready; and Mr Ward giving the signal, Sam raised the hatch, when one fellow leaped up savage, but I had a capstan-bar ready, and down he went again quicker than he came up. Then another tried, but I served him the same, when they stopped that game, and began to fire up the hatch, till I sang out that we were going to send down their mates.

But sending down was one thing, and making them go was another; for the first fellow turned rusty and wouldn't stir; till, seeing that half measures were no good, I nodded to Mr Ward, and he put a pistol to the fellow's ear, and at the same time I gave him just a tap on the head with a marlinespike, when he went down sharp, and the others followed.

Sam clapped the hatch down so quickly that the last chap's head must have felt it; but that put a stop to their firing up at us; and this being done, we felt safer, though none the less compelled to keep a strict watch.

And so the day wore away—not a long day at all—for rather dreading the night as I did, it seemed to come on quickly, and this was the time I felt sure the mutineers would make their attack, perhaps to get the better of us.

At one time I was for taking to the biggest of the two boats left, and leaving them to it; but without provisions, it was like running to meet death, and I was obliged to give up that idea, for, after all, it would only have been to get away till such time as they could overtake us and run us down.

The night turned out bright and starlight; and after making the best arrangements we could for the watch, we patiently waited for any new dangers that might befall us. Even Mr Bell, sick as he was, insisted upon taking his turn at watching, and having now plenty of arms, he sat with his sister by him to guard the fore-hatch, Miss Bell going from time to time to the side, and keeping an eye to the cabin window. Two or three times, too, she came to me, and talked about our position, in whispers; and somehow or another she seemed to grow upon one, until I swore to myself that I'd die sooner than the poor lass should be left to the tender mercies of the scoundrels who had seized the ship.

We had two or three false alarms during the night, but that was all; and the next day broke, finding us all half-famished; and now it seemed that either we must attack Van's party in the after-cabin, or one of us must go down and try for some provisions.

Mr Ward said he would go, and he turned towards Miss Bell, as if expecting her to say something, but she never looked his way at all; so after making our arrangements, we lifted the tarpaulin, Mr Ward dropped through, and in a short time handed up to me several tins of preserved meat, some biscuit, and a couple of bottles of wine.

He made four journeys before I heard even a movement in the next cabin, and then there came a muttering as of some one waking from a drunken sleep, and we all made up our minds that, having plenty of rum below, the cabin party had had a drinking night of it.

I never expected to see him up on deck without a few shots being exchanged; but there he was safe; and after dropping the tarpaulin, the provisions in moderation were served out, and no meal was ever more welcome. As for the fellows in the fore-cabin, they were evidently well provided, for we heard nothing of them all that day.

Though we swept the horizon again and again, not a sail appeared in sight, so that I was not much surprised to see Miss Bell having a good cry all to herself, when she thought no one could see her; but I did, though I would not let her know that I was looking.

Story 2--Chapter XVII.

Now you might have thought that, under all circumstances, these four passengers would have been as thick as possible together; but no; Mr Bell seemed to have an idea of what Mr Ward's feelings were, and though polite and pleasant, that was all; and though Miss Bell never showed a sign of giving him a friendly look, I couldn't help thinking that she did not quite dislike the young doctor.

That evening we had an ambassador from the fore-cabin in the shape of the fat passenger, who brought a message to say that they wanted water below. We let him come up after they had knocked at the hatch for some time, but all we could do was to pass him on with the message to Van, who swore out something, but would give no farther answer; while as to going back, the messenger would not think of that. And our force was strengthened, so Mr Ward

said, but I only thought of the meat tins and biscuit.

Night again, and we set our watch, wondering whether we should get through it alive, for it was like living over one of those volcanoes, I thought. There might be an explosion at any time; and though I didn't make any show of my trouble, I was a good deal worried; and as for them as had been wounded, they seemed suffering as much as me.

Mr Ward had the first watch, with Bill Smith and Mr Tomtit; and when he woke me up, it was from a pleasant dream of home. But he reported all right; and with Sam Brown and Mr Bell for my mates, we began the second watch.

I said Mr Bell, but really it was his sister, for the poor chap seemed to me to be sinking, though, with the bravest of hearts, he fought against all of it, and held up to the last.

I'd been talking cheerfully to Miss Bell about there being safe to be a vessel cross our course next day, when suddenly she seized my hand, held it tightly, and pointed to something rising slowly up from the cabin skylight. Sam Brown must have seen it at the same moment, for he left the wheel, and the vessel fell off before the wind.

"What's that?" whispered Miss Bell; and do you think I could speak? Not a word; for there, slowly making itself known, was an enemy which I had never counted upon seeing, and I couldn't help giving a groan, as I felt that now we should be beaten indeed.

Accident, or done on purpose, I could not tell, but the ship was on fire, and the smoke in a steady column rolling slowly up, while I had hardly roused up the sleeping men, before, with a shout, Van, closely followed by Brassey and the other two, came over the poop on to the deck.

Fighting seemed no good, after what was taking place before us;—our enmity seeming quite small now before this trouble,—and besides, what was the use of having a struggle for what would probably be burned to the water's edge in the course of an hour or two; so giving way, we slowly backed up under the bulwarks, leaving the mutineers free to act as they pleased.

It was a bad plan, for the first thing they did was to loosen the men in the forksel, when out they came yelling and savage, but only to stand and stare for a few moments at the smoke rolling up through the tarpaulin, which now began to blaze.

That it was an accident, was now plain enough, for, taking no notice of us, they began, in a hurried sort of way, to draw buckets of water and throw over it; then two men got to one of the pumps, but what they did seemed a mere nothing. Then a panic seemed to seize them, and throwing down the buckets, they began busily to get one of the boats ready, throwing in a compass and anything they could lay hands on, some fetching rum and biscuit up out of the cabin, and all in a hurried frightened way, as if not a moment was to be lost, and they might expect the ship to blow up any minute.

All at once Mr Ward darts forward, shouting, "Lend a hand here, and we shall save her yet!" and for the next quarter of an hour no one would have thought there had been a mutiny, for we were all working away side by side against what was an enemy to both parties; and bucket after bucket was poured into the burning hole, but with no more effect than if the buckets had been thimbles.

The fire and smoke came rolling up, and rising higher and higher, while, as if to fan the flames, a sharp wind blew seemingly from all four quarters at once, making the flames roar again; and first one and then another threw his bucket into the fire, and began running below for provisions to put in the two boats.

I think Mr Ward was the last man to drop his bucket; and that was when the flames had risen and risen in a column of fire to lick the rigging, and then began leaping from rope to rope, and sail to sail, till the mizen was one blaze of light, brightening the sea far and wide, till it looked like so much golden oil, without a ripple upon it anywhere.

They soon had one boat lowered, and were busy over the other, getting in everything that they thought would be useful, we all helping; and it was in this boat that Van seemed to intend going; for, letting Brassey take charge of the other, and telling him to push off and lay-to, he kept back four of his party, and helped with a will.

All at once I missed Mr Tomtit; but he appeared directly after; and I knew what he had been doing—letting loose his birds; and there were the poor little things fluttering about, and uttering strange cries, as they circled round and round the flames, some only to scorch themselves and fall in; but, as he said, it was better to set them free, than leave them there in their cages to be burned.

At last the boat seemed to contain all that could be put in, and Van's four men were waiting, when the fat passenger, who was all in a tremble, stepped forward to get down; but Van shoved him back, saying, "Ladies first;" and, crossing to where Miss Bell was kneeling beside her brother, he caught her roughly round the waist, lifted her, and made towards the side, when she shrieked out to me to save her.

"Best go in the boat, miss," I had half said, when, like as I supposed she did, I seemed to see through Van's designs, and stepping forward, there was a short scuffle, and I had the panting bird tight in my arms; while, before any one could take a step to stay him, Van slipped over the side into the boat, and stood up in her, shaking his fist at us, and laughing, like a demon as he was, as he told us to "burn and be damned."

It was hard to realise it at first; but there were both boats rowing slowly away, plainly to be seen in the golden light shed by the flames; and we eight souls, one a fair delicate woman, left to burn upon that roaring furnace of a ship.

Story 2--Chapter XVIII.

I don’t care who the man may be, but it is a hard struggle for any one to see two roads open to him, the first leading to life, and the second to a horrible death, and for him to force himself to take the last one. I’m not going to blame Sam, nor I ain’t a-going to blame Bill Smith. It was only natur’s first law, when Sam says to me just one word, and give his head a nod seaward. “Hot!” says he; and he took a header off the ship’s side, and strikes out towards the last boat. Then, “Come along, matey,” says Bill; and he takes his header, and swims arter the boat—and that was two gone. As for Mr Tomtit, he was so taken up with his poor birds, that he didn’t seem to care a bit about hisself, till I goes up to him and says:

“Hadn’t you better try and make the last boat, sir?”

“Make the boat, my man?” he says in a puzzled sort of way. “No; I don’t think I could make a boat.”

“Swim arter it, then,” I says.

“No,” he says mournfully; “I can’t swim a stroke.”

“More shame for you,” I says. And then I felt so savage, that I goes up to the fat passenger as was sitting crying on the deck of course, and I says, says I, giving him a sharp kick:

“Get up,” I says, “will you! You’re always a-crying.”

“O, Mr Roberts,” he says, blubbering like a calf—“O, Mr Roberts, to come to this!”

“Go overboard, then,” I says savagely; “for now you’ve pumped all that hot water out of your hold, you can’t sink.”

Now all this time the fire was roaring away, and sending a glow in all directions for far enough round, while the sparks kept on dropping like a shower. It was a beautiful sight in spite of the horror; and I couldn’t help looking at it a minute, till I turned round and saw Mr Ward standing quite still, looking down upon Miss Bell, who was on her knees by her brother’s side. But as I was looking, she got up pale and quiet, and looked first at me, and then at Mr Ward, and then she says quickly:

“Why do you both waste time? Why do you not swim after the boat?”

“And you?” said Mr Ward in a slow husky way.

She did not answer, only turned for a moment towards where her brother lay with his head on a cushion, and pointed to him with a sad smile, and then, holding out her hand to me as she sank upon her knees again by her brother’s side, she said:

“God bless you, Mr Roberts! Good-bye.”

I took her pretty little white hand, and kissed it, and then stood back; for she held out her hand to Mr Ward; and he took it and kissed it, and then sank on his knees by her side, holding her hand tightly; and when she said once more, “Go!” he only smiled and kissed her hand again.

It was so still, in spite of the fluttering roar of the flames, that I could hear every word he said, as he almost whispered to her: “Eady, darling, I’ll never leave you.”

The next moment her face was down in her other hand, and I could see that she was sobbing, so, feeling all wet-eyed myself, I turned away, when if there wasn’t that fat passenger blubbering away more than ever!

“Get up, will you,” I says; “I never did see such a thundering swab in my life as you are.” But all he says was: “O, Mr Roberts!”

All at once I heard Miss Bell give a great cry; and, turning round, I saw that Mr Bell had started up, and she was clinging to him: then he held out his hand to Mr Ward; but before he could take it, the poor fellow fell back. He was free of his trouble.

Now you know I wouldn’t have cared if that there fat passenger would only have kept out of my way; but there, the more trouble one was in, and the more he was wanted out of the way, the more he piped his eye, and got just where you didn’t want him. He always was a nuisance from the day he first came on board, and to make it more aggravating, he would look just as if he was made on purpose to kick.

“Why won’t you get out of the way?” I says; for all this time I’d been turning over in my own mind a way to get out of the burning, if we could, and there was that great fat chap a-sitting on a hencoop that I wanted.

“O, Mr Roberts!” he whines again. And he cries: “O, look there!”

And I did look, when, if there wasn’t my two poor mates just coming up to the last boat—we could see it plainly; and if one brute didn’t fire at ’em, and another stand up with the boat-hook in his hand, ready to shore the first one under.

“God help ’em,” I says, “for I can’t;” and then, Mr Ward helping me, we got a couple of loose spars overboard, and some rope to lash with, and a couple of hencoops; and as fast as Mr Ward, and Tomtit, and the fat passenger, who seemed to have been warmed into life by the fire—as fast as they lowered the stuff down, I, who was over the side, lashed it together, to make something like a raft.

I couldn’t do much; there wasn’t time, for the fire gained upon us; and now there was no one at the helm, the ship

had swung round so that the smoke and flame all came our way. I felt, too, that it was only to make life last another day or two, for there was no getting at any prog, as there wasn't a scrap of anything in the forksel; for I went down to see when I first thought of the raft. However, I shouted to them to lower down the water-breaker by the foremast, and they did, and then Mr Tomtit came over the side, and the fat passenger rolled down somehow, and I shook my head, for the raft went low on his side. And now there was only Mr Ward and Miss Bell to come, and partly by coaxing, partly by dragging, he had got the poor girl to the side, when she turned her head to take another look, as I thought, of the poor fellow lying dead there; and as Mr Ward stood there holding her, the pair showing out well in the bright light of the burning ship, I could not help thinking what a noble-looking couple they made, and then I shouts: "Lower away, sir;" when, as if startled by my words, Miss Bell darted away from Mr Ward, when in a moment there came a roar as of thunder, the raft heaved and cracked under us, and beat against the side of the ship, while something seemed to strike me down, so that I lay half-stunned upon the grinding coops and spars.

But I contrived to get on my knees, struggling from under some heavy weight, and then, every moment getting clearer, I understood that the ship had blown up, and that Mr Ward must have been dashed from the gangway, and fallen on to me.

And Miss Bell?

I dursn't ask myself the question again, but shoved the raft away, and began to paddle with a piece of board, so as not to be drawn down when the vessel sank. In place of being all bright light, it was now pitch darkness, except just here and there, where pieces of burning wood floated on the water, and then hissed and went out. From being so near, I suppose it was, we escaped anything falling upon us; and feeling pretty safe at last from being drawn down, I was trying to make out the lines of the ship by the smouldering hull beginning again to show a flame here and there, when a husky voice close by shouts out: "Help! help!"

"Here," I cries, hailing; and the next moment we were lower still in the water, with Bill Smith aboard, and he says, says he: "Tom, I was about done."

"It's only put off another hour or two, Billee," I says. "And where's old Squintums?"

"On your weather-bow," says a gruff voice, and then we went down another two inches with Sam aboard.

Well, there was some comfort in doing one's best to the last; and I began to feel Mr Ward about a bit; but he was coming to fast, and the first thing he wanted to do was to paddle back to the ship; and, thinking that we might pick up some pieces to lash to our raft, I gave way, dangerous as it was, though a very small sight worse than our present position. So we paddled up to the smoking mass, that I expected would settle down every moment, and then, getting hold of the side rope, Mr Ward and I got on deck.

It was not dark, for there was a little flame here and there, and in some places there was the glow of a lot of sparks, but we hadn't come to look for that; and, as we stood there forward amongst the smoke, I felt my heart heave, as, with a groan that seemed to tear out of his chest, Mr Ward threw himself down by the figure he was looking for.

She seemed to have ran back to throw herself upon her brother's body, and there she was, with her arms round him, and though pieces of burning wood lay all about, she did not seem to have been touched.

It was a sad sight, and in spite of all our troubles, I had a little corner left for the young fellow, who had clasped her in his arms, when he started up with a cry of joy.

"Here—water, Roberts, quick!" he cried; and almost as he spoke, Miss Bell gave a great sigh, and we gently lowered her on to the raft, when, getting hold of a bit of burning bulwark floating near, I squenched it out, and managed to lash it to us, so as to ease one side. Then we paddled slowly away, and lay by waiting for the morning, to get together more fragments, and make a better raft.

Story 2--Chapter XIX.

Morning came bright as ever, and I gave a bit of a laugh as I saw Mr Ward and Miss Bell sitting tight hold of hands; for, in place of seeming to fear him, she was now looking up to him as if for protection. Sam and Bill, poor chaps, were in a queer state, for when they had reached the boat, Van had struck at them with the boat-hook, till they had turned and swum back; and now they lay on the raft with their poor heads seeming to ask Mr Ward to come and help them; and, with Miss Bell to assist him, he did all he could for them.

The boats were nowhere in sight; but just about a quarter of a mile from us lay the ship, smoking and burning just a little, her poop and midships a deal shattered, main and mizzen gone, and lying alongside, but foremast standing with nearly all the rigging. As to the fore-part, it did not seem much damaged; and, as she hadn't sunk so far, it struck me as she wouldn't sink at all while it kept calm; so, Mr Ward being of my opinion, we paddled our raft back once more. We two got aboard with Mr Tomtit; and what with one of the pumps left rigged, and a bucket or two, we found we got out pretty well every spark and bit of flame we could find; made our examination amongst the black steaming ruin, and found that the powder on board, or whatever it was, must have taken an upward direction, and blown a good half of the deck off. Still, so far as we could see, there was no fear of her sinking; so, clearing a spot forward, we began to think of getting the others aboard.

But, first of all, we got a bit of sailcloth, and laid it over the poor gentleman as lay there stiff and stark, so as not to distress his sister.

Now the fat passenger had offered to help us, and no doubt would have done his best; but hang me if he could any more mount the side of the Sea-mew than fly. He panted and puffed for a bit, but that was all, and then he sat down

again on the raft, puffing and talking to Miss Bell when he could get her to speak, which wasn't often. As for Bill and Sam, poor chaps, they couldn't hold a head up; and I was very glad when we'd got a bit of an awning rigged up, and Miss Bell on board and underneath it.

Next thing to be done was to find some biscuit and water, Mr Ward said, for they'd finished what was in the breaker, the two poor chaps being that thirsty they kept asking for it, and Miss Bell not having the heart to refuse. So Mr Ward said water; but, speaking for myself, I said rum. After a long hunt, we found, just where we should never have thought to see it, a tin of preserved meat, and had a hard fight to open it, but we managed that; and then I was in luck soon after, and turned up a bag of biscuits, half burned and smoked, half sound; while a little hard work laid bare a water-cask, and I filled the breaker.

It was quite warm, that water was, but in our state every drop was so much bottled joy, and after a good hearty draught, I was ready for any amount more work.

So, after forgetting them for some time, I goes up the foremast, and had a good look out for the two boats; but not a sight of them could I see, after a good half-hour's watch; when I came down, and helped Mr Ward and Mr Tomtit to get all the burned wood overboard.

Now, done up as we were, it wasn't reasonable to expect a vast deal of work done; but we kept steadily on till it was dark, when we finished the tin of meat, had a biscuit and some water apiece, settled that I was to keep the first watch; and then, without a mutineer within reach, the others lay down to rest, for we had settled, Mr Ward and me, that Mr Bell should be buried at daybreak.

Well, I took my place, and helped myself to a quid, leaned over the bulwark, and watched the clear bright stars, now in the sky, now as I saw them shining in the water, and then I got asking myself questions about how it was all to end, when I thought I should be more comfortable sitting down. So, picking out a spot, I began to reckon up how long it would be before I must call Mr Ward to relieve me; and then I thought that he'd feel as bad as I did, and want Mr Tomtit to relieve him, and then he'd watch till daybreak, when he'd relieve the birds, and Mr Ward would put a piece of fresh bandage round the turtle-dove's head, and if the fire broke out again, the fat passenger would cry upon it till Miss Bell boxed his ears, when he'd relieve me, and I should—no, I shouldn't—yes, I should—

I started, saying to myself "I was nearly asleep," when I took a fresh turn at my quid, and Mr Ward asked me if I'd marry him and Miss Bell, and the fat passenger could give them away, and then go and sit on the raft with me, and sink it down, and down, and down, and always going down, and lower and lower; and instead of its getting darker and darker, it got lighter and lighter, and there seemed a warm glow as from the sun, only it was the water so far down seemed to choke; and I told Mr Ward I didn't think it quite proper, but I'd marry them if the fat passenger would not give them away, but get out of the way—and—avast, then—avast, then—yes, what?—all right—

"The fire has burst out again!" cried Miss Bell.

And that just while I closed my eyes for half a minute.

Story 2--Chapter XX.

You see there's that in a fire, that it never knows when it is beaten: you drive it down in one place, and it comes up in another, just where you least expect it; while, after such a shock as we had had, there was nothing surprising in our feeling as most people do when there's a fire in a ship with a mixed cargo—afraid of an explosion. There were the flames towering up again quite fiercely and always in the most savage way, just out of our reach.

But if the flames could be savage, I felt that I could too, for, you see, I looked upon it as my fault, for sleeping at my post, when I ought to have seen the first flash out. So I got down amongst the smoke and steam, and as they handed me buckets of water, I placed them well, and by degrees we got the fire under again. It was just about daybreak as we turned all the glow and flame into blackness, half hidden by steam; but even then we daren't leave off, for another such outbreak would have made an end of us. Even now, most of the cargo seemed destroyed, and it was cruel work, for everything fought against us except the weather, which certainly did keep clear and calm, or we must have gone to the bottom. But, as I said, it did seem such cruel work to have things, that we were ready to die for the want of, destroyed before our eyes.

We were all worn out; but sooner than run any more risks, we kept on pouring water here and there, till it seemed quite impossible for fire to break out again; and there we were at last with the ship our own, what there was of it; but though there was a good-sized piece of the fore-deck left, and a little round the wheel, the only way to get from stem to starn was by climbing down amongst the burned rubbish, and then making your way through it till you reached the poop.

By means of a little hunting about, though, we managed to get at some provisions, and among other things a cask of pork, with the top part regularly cooked. We got at water, too, and some rum; and then it didn't seem to matter, danger or no danger, fire breaking out or mutineers coming back, sleep would have its way, and one after the other we dropped off, the fat passenger in a corner, and Mr Tomtit with his legs dangling down over the burned hold.

I talked to Miss Bell and Mr Ward afterwards about my having neglected my duty, but they would hardly hear a word about it; and now I found that though we had all slept, Miss Bell had been awake and watching; but now she went into the sort of tent we had rigged her up; and Mr Ward having the same thing in his head as I had, we went and had a talk together, and an hour afterwards we had poor Mr Bell neatly wrapped in a piece of sailcloth, with some iron stanchions and bolts at the feet, and lying decently waiting for Miss Bell to wake again.

She came out of her tent at sundown, looking pale and haggard; and as soon as she saw what we had been about,

the tears began to roll down her cheeks, and she came and knelt down by her brother's head and joined her hands.

I did not want the sign Mr Ward made me to do as him and Mr Tomtit did, and there we knelt for some time on that calm, solemn sort of evening, with the ship just gently rolling on what seemed a sea of orange. There wasn't a breath of wind stirring, but all was quiet and peaceful, with only Miss Bell's sobs and the twittering of birds to break the stillness.

I don't think I said so before, but there were a many of the birds escaped the fire, and perched about on the deck and the rigging of the foremast; and when Mr Ward and I had gently lifted the body of the poor gentleman on to a hatch by the side, we drew back, and knelt down again, thinking Miss Bell might like to say a prayer aloud before we gave the body a sailor's funeral, when one of Mr Butterwell's robin-redbreasts hopped down upon the deck, and then giving a flit, perched right upon the dead man's breast, and burst out into its little sad mournful song, making even my poor old battered heart swell and swell, till I was 'most as bad as the fat passenger, whose complaint I must have caught. I can't tell you how much there seemed in that little bird's sad song, but it was as if it took you back into the far past, and then again into the future; and weak as the little thing was, it had a strange power over all of us there present.

As if that robin had started them, the sparrows began to twitter just as though at home in the eaves; a thrush, far up on the fore-to'gallant yard, piped out a few notes; and a lark flew up and out over the glorious sea, and fluttered and rose a little way, singing as it went, just as if it were joining with the others in a sort of evening hymn. And now it was that Mr Ward made a sign to me, just as he'd told me he would; and I got up and went softly to raise the head of the hatch, to let the burden it had on it slowly slip into the golden water. But with a faint cry, Miss Bell started forward, seeing what I meant, and half throwing herself upon the long uncouth canvas-wrapping, she sobbed and cried fit to break her heart.

It was a sad sight, and there was not a man there who did not feel for the poor girl. I felt it so much myself that I was glad to turn away; and there we all waited till the sun dipped down below the waves, lower and lower, till he was gone, and a deep rich purple darkness began to steal over the sea. From golden orange the sky too turned from red to a deep blue, with almost every colour of the rainbow staying where the sun had gone down. Then it grew darker and darker, with star after star peeping down at us, and the smooth sea here and there rippled by a soft breeze that came sighing by.

And now it was that Miss Bell's sobs seemed to have stopped, and, leaning over her, I saw that she had gently slipped away, so that only her poor white arm lay across the body, and when Mr Ward gently lifted it, her head sank lower and lower, and we knew that her grief had been too strong for her, and she had swooned away.

I've been at more than one sailor's funeral, which has a certain sadness about it that seems greater than what, you know ashore, but this seemed to me the worst I had ever had to do with. Trouble seemed to have been heaped upon trouble, and though in the heat and excitement of a storm or a fight you often go very near death, yet you don't seem to fear it as you do at a time like this was, when, as I stood over that bit of canvas, it seemed to me that I was nearer to my end than I had ever felt in all the dangers I had been through before.

It was growing darker and darker; the birds had all stopped their twittering, and I was thinking and thinking, when in a slow sad way Mr Tomtit got up, and came and stood over the corpse, and tried to speak, but his voice seemed choked. He went on after a minute or two, though, and said, in a quiet deep voice, a short and earnest prayer, one that I had never seen in a book, nor heard before or since; and in it he prayed the great God of all people, who had seen the sufferings of this our poor brother, to take him to Himself, even as we committed his poor decaying body to the great deep—the Almighty's great ocean, upon which we poor helpless ones now floated—thanking Him for His preservation of us so far, and praying that His protection might be with us evermore. And he prayed too that as it had pleased God to bereave the sorrowing sister, might it please Him to put it into the heart of every man present to be a new brother and protector to the weeping one, even, were it necessary, unto death.

And then there was a great silence fell upon us all; then came a slow grating sound, a soft rustle as I raised the hatch, and a heavy splash in the water, which broke up into little waves and flashes of light, to die away again into darkness.

There was more than one deep sob heard there that night from out of the darkness; and though dark, it was not so black but we could see Miss Bell at Mr Tomtit's feet, holding his hand as he bent over her, and she seeming to be kissing and crying over it.

No one seemed to care to move for a long, long time, but at last Miss Bell's dress rustled softly as she glided away to her tent, and then Mr Tomtit went and leaned over the side. And mind, I do not call him by that name from any disrespect, for, though we had all been ready to laugh at him for his looks and ways, there was not a man there but would have gone and gladly shaken the hand which Miss Bell had kissed; and I felt vexed myself for not feeling before how good a heart the man must have who had so great a love for all of God's creatures, that he would risk his life even for his birds.

That was a sad, sad night, though the ship seemed lighter now that there was no longer death on board; and I was in such a low miserable state, that I did what seemed to me to be the only thing I could do that night,—I went and sat down beside the fat passenger.

Story 2--Chapter XXI.

We had no time for sadness and sorrow; there was too much to be done. I would not fly a signal at the mast-head, for fear of its bringing back the mutineers; for, though it did not seem likely that it would, I did not wish to run any risk.

But with the help of Mr Ward and the others, I set to, and we made a good strong raft, and provisioned it, in case of a change of weather, for, though keeping us up well now, I felt sure that a fresh wind must send the ship to the bottom. All I thought would be of use to us I got on the raft; and I spent a many days lashing on a cask here and a spar there, and even rigged up a little mast with a lug-sail, and had an oar or two for steering. I couldn't get myself away from that raft, feeling to want to make it perfect, which it wasn't at all. But there it was, and the best I could make; and day after day we rolled about in the long gentle swell of the great ocean, looking for something to heave in sight.

There was very little to occupy us beyond looking out, for sailing the ship was out of the question, since, if she had careened over, the water would have come pouring in at one of the rents in her side; so we waited on day after day, during which time it seemed to me that a sort of jealous feeling was springing up between Mr Ward and Mr Tomtit, for Miss Bell used to keep away all she could from the young doctor, and sit and talk hour after hour with Mr Tomtit about his birds. But Mr Tomtit, though he used to look pleased, only looked so in a quiet, sad sort of way, and I used to think that he felt it did not mean anything for him; and he'd go and feed his birds afterwards, and sigh as he did it, and always try to be good friends, as far as he could, with Mr Ward.

It was a fine thing for us that we had a doctor on board, for I believe he saved both Bill Smith's and Sam's lives, poor chaps, for they had been sadly mauled about by the mutineers, and for days and days all they could do was to lie still and talk wildly about things. Sam in particular would rouse us all of a night, by shouting out that Van was striking him. But they both got better by degrees.

Last of all, what I was afraid of happened—the wind changed, and it came on to blow a little. It was nothing more than a pleasant fresh breeze, but enough to make the sea dance a bit, and the old Sea-mew to roll and pitch, so that I was obliged to have a man at the wheel, and a bit of sail set, to keep her out of the trough; but handle her how I would, I couldn't keep the water out, and the question got to be, how long could we wait without taking to the raft? And another question was, too, how long could we keep to the raft without being washed off? Thinking of this made me rig lines round it, and give an extra lashing here and there just where I could.

The next day, there was not a doubt about what our duty was; and getting the raft round to the lee quarter, we lowered Miss Bell down, and then made ready to join her; when, more from use than anything, I ran up the rigging to take a sweep round, when—I could hardly believe my eyes—there was a brig bearing down under easy canvas, and not three miles off! We were so busy, or we must have seen her before. Howsoever, my first act now was to hoist a signal; and then, there being no time to lose, I got aboard the raft, being last man to leave the vessel; and we hoisted a bit of sail, and made towards the brig.

We had not left the Mew a minute too soon, for just as we had got about two hundred yards away, a squall took her, and she bent right over, righted, careened again, and then settled rapidly down, and was gone.

We were all so taken up with the sight, that, for a moment, we forgot the brig, and when we turned to her again, she was bearing away. I thought that she had seen our ship, when we hoisted the signal; but, from her acts, this could not have been the case, and now every second she was increasing her distance. We shouted, we yelled, and hoisted a handkercher, on the end of a boat-hook; but she did not see us; and gradually we saw sail after sail dip down out of sight, and we were once more all alone on the great ocean.

If we had seen no ship, I should not have cared; but this seemed such tantalising, despairing work, and but for Miss Bell, I should have been about ready to give up.

That night I was sitting steering our lubberly craft, when Miss Bell came and sat beside me, and, after being silent for some time, she points out seaward, and asks me if what she saw was a star.

I looked at it for a few minutes, for I hardly dared to answer at first; but I felt sure directly after, as I told her it was, and a bright one for us, being a ship's lantern.

Story 2--Chapter XXII.

Soon after sunrise next morning, we were laughing, crying, and acting as bad as that there fat passenger, for we were aboard a large ship, whose light had shone out like a star of hope for us; and when they picked us up, I found that the vessel was bound for Sydney.

But our pleasure did not last long, for what with the exposure and excitement, Miss Bell broke down, and next day she was so far from being in safety that she was in a raging fever.

Perhaps I may be right, perhaps wrong; but measuring things as I saw them, it has always struck me that, true-hearted man as he was, Mr Ward would never have won his wife after all, if it had not been for that fever; but it must have been a fine thing for him, being the only doctor within reach, to have to tend on her, and most likely save her life.

It was in after-years that I saw them happily settled in Wellington; and as they had me seated there between them, they seemed to treat me quite as an old friend, as we went over together the old days, and Mr Ward told me laughingly how hard a fight he had had to win his wife.

We talked long over our old troubles; and I had news for them of some of the mutineers—of how I had learned that one boat had been picked up, with the crew's story written on their faces, for they had suffered horribly before they were saved from certain death. As for the other boat, it was never heard of more.

I had news for them, too, of Mr Tomtit, whom I had seen in the street just before I left England on that cruise. He had shaken me heartily by the hand, just as if I was his equal, and taken me home to show me the collection of birds he

was about to ship, with a lot of what he called baby-salmon, for Sydney. He was still a bachelor, and pressed me hard to go and see him again, and wanted me to stay dinner then; but my time was short, and I had to say good-bye, though not till I had asked if he had seen any more of the fat passenger. Mr Tomtit then told me that he had been to England, and called to see him, and shed tears when he said good-bye. I said it myself now; but he made me stop for a glass of grog, and a half-hour's chat about our perils aboard the Sea-mew.

Story Three: Under the Tree-Ferns.

Story 3--Chapter I.

Port Caroline.

A few notes of preparation, a few words of command, and, grouped together in the fore-part of a large barque, bearing the unromantic title of the Sarah Ann, the sailors stood ready to let go the emblem of Hope—the anchor that had held them fast in many a stormy night of peril. The sails flapped and fluttered in that gentle gale; the tall masts swayed here and there as the graceful vessel rose with the grand swell of the Southern Ocean; and then there was a loud rattle as the chain-cable rushed out, while the great anchor plunged down fathoms deep in the bright blue waters; then, down lower and lower, to where bright-scaled fish of rainbow-tinted armour darted over the golden sands of the sunny South. Not the sunny South sung by poets; but the far-off land, where it is midday at our midnight, and the settlers—with many a thought, though, of the old home—shear their sheep, and gather in their harvest, while we sit round the cheery winter's fire.

After a long and tedious voyage, the vessel had arrived in safety at her destination. There was the bright land, the beautiful bay dotted with vessels at anchor, and the brilliant sun. Ah, who need have felt the heartache at leaving England on a dark and misty morning, when so bright a country was ready to receive him? But it was not *home*.

There was bustle and excitement amongst the passengers to get ashore; so that it was hard work for Edward Murray, first mate, to have all made snug and shipshape, after the fashion taught in the navy, which he had left to enter the merchant-service. But, by degrees, the hurry gave place to comparative calm, and men leisurely coiled down ropes, and reduced the deck to something like order.

The captain had been rowed ashore almost before they dropped anchor; and at last there was nothing left for the mate to do but patiently await his return, before making arrangements for having the vessel towed closer up into the harbour of Port Caroline.

He leaned over the bulwarks—a handsome ruddy young Englishman of eight-and-twenty; and as he quietly puffed at his cigar, he watched the boats going and coming; noticed the pleasant villas of the merchants, dotted about the high ground behind the bay; gave an eye to the trim sloop-of-war on his right, and then to the blank-looking buildings of the convict station, from whose stony-looking wharves a large cutter was just being rowed out towards the sloop. There was the flash of a bayonet now and then in the stern-sheets, and the white belts and red coats of more than one soldier was plainly observable to the mate, as he gazed on the boat with some display of interest.

As he still leaned over the bulwarks, the boat was seen to reach the sloop-of-war, to stay alongside awhile, and then to return, heavily laden, towards the shore.

"Nice freight that, Ned," said the second mate. "Old England ought to grow clean in time, sending out such cargoes as she does. I wonder how many they have here. Can't say I should like to have them for neighbours."

"Not pleasant, certainly," said the other; "but here's the skipper back."

"I shall not go ashore again till to-morrow morning," said the captain, coming on deck; "and if either of you want a few hours, settle it between yourselves who's to go; and the other can see the rest of the passengers' traps ashore. I shall sail to-morrow evening. We can do the rest of our business when we come back from the bay."

The captain then went below; and after a short consultation, Edward Murray undertook two or three commissions, stepped into the boat, and was rowed ashore.

Any place looks pleasant after months on shipboard; but in reality, though charming enough from the deck of a ship, there was little to be seen fifty years ago at Port Caroline beyond the houses of a straggling little town, built without regard to regularity, but according to the fancy of the owner of each plot of land. It was busy enough, so far as it went; but there was a grim cold look about the place, made worse by the principal buildings—those connected with the Government convict works; and after making a few purchases, Edward Murray strolled out along the shore to where the white breakers came foaming in to dash upon the sands.

The sloop had apparently discharged her convict freight; and the young man stood and looked at her for a while in deep thought.

He was thinking he should like to command a vessel like that. "But then," he sighed to himself, "how about Katie?" And he walked on, musing in no unhappy way.

"Now, boys—heel and toe!" shouted a rough voice.

"Hooroar! heel and toe!" was sounded in chorus; and from a turn in the cliff came slowly into sight about five-and-twenty of as ill-looking ruffians as ever walked the face of the earth. They were marching slowly, in a single line, and at the veriest snail's pace.

There was every description of crime-marked aspect—sullen despair, with boisterous and singing men; but as the slow march continued, one struck up a kind of chant, in which all joined, greatly to the annoyance of a sergeant of foot, who, with four privates, with fixed bayonets, formed the escort.

“It’s all right, sojer!” shouted one. “Heel and toe!”

“Hullo, sailor!” shouted another. “Here, mates; here’s a chap out of that barque. How’s mother country, old ’un?”

“Come; get on, men,” said the sergeant, keeping a sharp look-out for evaders.

The mate did not answer the fellow, but coolly stopped to watch the strange procession pass; for he rightly judged it to be a gang of convicts returning from work.

“I’d give two days and a half for that half cigar you’re smoking, guv’ner,” said one of the convicts to the young sailor.

And then, as the gang moved on, a dark sun-browned fellow came abreast, and observed quietly, as one gentleman might to another:

“Have you another cigar about you, sir?”

Edward Murray started, and then turned on his heel, and walked beside the speaker.

“I really have not another,” he said hastily; “but here’s some tobacco;” and he thrust a large packet he had but an hour before bought into the man’s hand.

“Thanks—thanks!” said the convict. “You can’t think what a treat it will be. I may be able to do you a good turn for it some day, Ned Murray.”

The young man started, and would have spoken to the convict; but the sergeant laid his hand upon his arm.

“Won’t do, sir; I should get into trouble. We wink at a good deal; but we must draw the line somewhere. Now, men, forward!”

Edward Murray drew back, and nodded his acquiescence in the sergeant’s remarks as the gang slowly passed on along the beach; then trying in vain to call to mind who could be the speaker who so well knew his name, he turned to go on board.

“I’ll give it up,” said the young man at last; “it’s beyond me. I’ve a friend more, though, in the world than I thought for. Friend? Hum! Not much cause to be proud of him. Well, it’s better than for a black-looking rascal to say he’ll owe you a grudge. Well,” he continued, as he mounted the side, “I’ll give it up; but I shall most likely know some day.”

And like many another unconscious thinker, Edward Murray was, for the time being, amongst the prophets.

Story 3--Chapter II.

Night at a Convict Station.

“Hullo! What’s wrong?” exclaimed Edward Murray, leaping out of his cot; for he had been awakened by a heavy sound like thunder; and directly after he heard the second mate’s voice calling to him.

“Here, come on deck; there’s a row ashore. Convicts broke loose, or something.”

The young man hastened on deck, as did the captain and the rest of the crew, to find that the night was intensely dark, but that there was a bright display of lights on shore, conspicuous amongst which was a dull heavy glimmer, which, however, soon increased to a glow, and then flames mounted higher and higher, and it became evident that some good-sized building was on fire.

At this moment there was a sudden flash, and the heavy thud of a gun from the sloop, followed by loud cries and shoutings on the beach.

“Hadn’t we better man a boat and go ashore?” said Edward Murray eagerly. “There’s a bad fire, and we might be of some use.”

“Better stay aboard,” said the captain. “That’s part of the prison on fire. Those fiends of convicts have fired the place, and they’re escaping, safe. There, I told you so. That’s not the sort of thing used for putting out fires.”

As he spoke, there came the loud sharp rattle of musketry, and, from the lights on board the sloop, it was evident that the men had been beat to quarters, ready for any emergency. The ports were open, showing the lights within; and a faint glimpse was obtained of a boat being lowered; but soon the noise and shouting ceased, the musketry was heard no more, and only a dull murmuring sound as from a busy crowd came floating across the bay.

But the light of the burning building still shone out strong and lurid, and by means of a night-glass it could be seen that men were busily endeavouring to extinguish the flames. When they shone in a ruddy path across the bay, a boat, too, could now and then be seen for a moment or two, as if some eager party were rowing ashore. Then an hour passed with the lurid flare settling slowly into a bright golden glow, the satiated flames sinking lower and lower, till, the excitement having worn away, first one and then another of the crew slipped down to his hammock, and Edward Murray was about to follow, when a faint sound off the port quarter arrested his steps.

Save where there was still the bright glow from the burning embers, all around was now intensely dark.

“Wasn’t that the rattle of a thole-pin?” said Murray to his companion.

“Didn’t hear it, for my part,” was the brusque reply.

“Then what’s that? Did you hear it then?”

“Yes, I heard that,” was the answer.

And then the two young men crossed the deck and leaned over the side, peering out into the darkness; but seeing nothing for all that, though there was the faint sound of oars dipping slowly, and it was evident that some boat was nearing them.

“Do they mean to board us?” said Murray. “Depend upon it, the man-of-war has boats on the lookout, and they’re rowing with muffled oars, ready to overhaul the escaping party; that is, if any of them have got loose.”

“That’s it, depend upon it,” said the mate. “They’ll hail us directly. They must see our lights.”

There was silence then for a few moments, during which two or three of the crew, attracted also by the noise they had heard, came over to their side. Then came the plash of an oar; and, starting into activity, as if moved by some sudden impulse, Murray shouted:

“Boat ahoy!”

“Ahoy, there!” was the answer.

And then the rowing was heard plainly, as if those who handled the oars had thrown off the secrecy of their movements.

“It’s the man-of-war’s boat,” said the second mate.

“What ship’s that?” was now asked from the darkness, but in anything but the loud hearty hail of a sailor.

“Sarah Ann, port of London,” answered the mate. “Are you from the sloop?”

“Ay, ay,” was the reply.

“Bring a lantern here, and swing over the side,” said Murray uneasily; and one of the anchor-lights was brought, and sent a feeble ray, cutting as it were the dense curtain that hung around. Then the bows of a boat were seen swiftly advancing, and for a moment Murray gazed at its occupants with a mixture of astonishment and terror; but the next instant he had seized one of the capstan-bars, and stood ready.

“Here, Smith, Norris, Jackson, be smart!” he shouted, “or we shall lose the ship. Convicts!”

That last word seemed to electrify the men into action; and as the boat grated against the side of the heavily-laden vessel, just beneath the fore-chains, man after man armed himself with the capstan-bars, and stood ready by the first mate.

The lantern was dashed out directly; and it was evident that men were climbing up the side by means of boat-hooks hitched into the fore-chains. Now followed a struggle—short, sharp, but decisive; for first one and then another convict was knocked back into the boat as he tried to gain a foothold. There was a little shouting, a few oaths; and then, apparently satisfied that the reception was too warm, and that they were fighting against odds, the occupants of the boat shoved off, just as the ship’s crew was reinforced by the captain and men who had gone below.

“That was a narrow escape,” said the captain. “Mr Murray, I sha’n’t forget to mention this to the owners.”

“Suppose we keep a sharp look-out for the rest of the night? They may come back, unless they find some other vessel less on the alert.”

“Oars again,” whispered one of the men.

They listened attentively, and once more could plainly make out the soft smothered dip of oars floating across the water.

Ten minutes passed, and then, as the crew stood with beating hearts waiting for the next assault, there came another hail out of the darkness.

“What ship’s that?”

“Never you mind!” answered the captain roughly. “What boat’s that?”

“First cutter—his Majesty’s ship Theseus,” was the reply. “Heard or seen anything of a boat, or boats, this way?”

“Nearly boarded by one, only we beat them off,” said the captain. “Convicts, weren’t they?”

“Hold hard a minute, and I’ll come on board,” was the answer. “Bows there—in oars, men!” and the boat was heard to thump against the vessel’s counter.

“Keep down there,” shouted the captain, cocking a pistol, “or I fire!”

“Confound you! don’t I tell you we’re friends?” said the same voice.

“Yes, you tell me,” muttered the captain. “Bring a lantern here.”

A light was brought, and swung down, to show the blue shirts of the crew, and the red uniforms of half-a-dozen marines in the stern-sheets; when, apparently satisfied, the captain grumbled an apology.

“All right, my man!” was the laughing response; and a young lieutenant sprang up the side. “And so they nearly took you, did they? Lucky for you that you had so good a look-out. Can’t tell me where they steered for, I suppose? But of course not—too dark. Confound the rascals! They say there’s about half a hundred of them got away—killed a couple of warders, and done the deuce knows what mischief. Good-night!” and he sprang down the side. “If you see any more of them, just burn a blue light, and you shall have a boat’s crew aboard in no time. Give way, my men.”

The oars fell plashing into the sea; and then, save the low regular dip, all was once more silent. The crew, as they kept a sharp look-out, fancied they once heard a loud splash and a faint cry; but there was no repetition of the sounds, though the men listened attentively. The glow by the town faded slowly away, a breeze sprung up, and the stars came peering out, one after another, till, as the sky brightened, the spars and rigging of the sloop-of-war could be dimly seen, her lights just beginning to swing to and fro as the breeze ruffled the waters. But no farther alarm disturbed the Sarah Ann, though one and all the crew kept on deck, in case of another attack.

“Wasn’t there a small schooner off there, about a quarter of a mile?” said the captain suddenly, as he lowered the night-glass, with which he had been carefully searching for enemies.

“To be sure!” said Murray. “Isn’t it there now?”

“Try for yourself,” was the reply.

And the young man carefully swept the offing.

“I can’t make her out,” he said; “but we may see her as day breaks. Perhaps she moved in more under the land.”

“More like those fellows boarded her, and that noise was the captain sent overboard. Well, all I can say, Murray, is, that if they’d got possession here, the best thing they could have done would have been to throw me over; for I could never have faced the owners again.”

Morning broke, but there was no schooner in sight; whereupon the sloop immediately weighed in chase, for the convicts had seized her, cut the cable, and made sail, running none knew whither.

Towards afternoon the captain of the Sarah Ann came on board, after concluding his business with the agents.

“Good luck to you, Murray; make sail, and let’s be off, for I sha’n’t feel as if the old Sally is safe till we’ve left this beautiful spot a hundred knots astern. The poor skipper of that schooner’s ashore there, and he’s half mad, and no wonder.”

The captain made his way below, the anchor was weighed, sail after sail dropped down, and then, with a pleasant breeze astern, the old barque slowly began to force her way through the bright and transparent waters, making the sunlit windows of Port Caroline grow more and more distant, while Edward Murray’s heart gladdened within him, as he thought of the prolonged stay for discharging and loading that would be made in Kaitaka Bay, New Zealand.

Story 3--Chapter III.

Golden Gap.

“‘And I said, if there’s peace in this world to be found’—Go on, Joey, will you?—‘The—he heart that is humble might welcome it here,’” sang and said a sturdy-looking, hard-faced man, with cleanly-shaven chin and upper lip, and a pair of well-trimmed grizzly whiskers. He was somewhat sun-browned, but wore a broad-brimmed straw hat, and in addition, as he strode a very weedy, meditative-looking pony, he carried up a large gingham umbrella.

“Well, Joey!” he continued, apostrophising the pony, which had come to a full stop; “you’re a sensible beast, and it *is* a beautiful spot, and ‘the heart that is humble’ might truly ‘welcome it here.’ What a paradise! They may well call it Golden Gap! Golden, indeed! A heavenly gilding—no dross here! No more like Battersea Fields than I’m like an archangel. Well, Joey, suppose we meditate, then, for half an hour. You shall chew your herb, and I’ll smoke mine, even if it be not canonical. I don’t like good things to be wasted, as my old mother used to say. Savages smoke, so why should not a parson?”

Slowly dismounting, he closed his umbrella, unbuckled the pony’s bridle, that he might graze, and then, seating himself beneath a huge tree-fern, he filled and lit his pipe, and began to enjoy its fragrance.

For he was seated far up on the side of a mountain, whose exact similitude was on the other side of the valley, so that it seemed as if, in some wild convulsion, Nature had divided one vast eminence, and then clothed the jagged and rugged sides from the point where the glittering, snow-tipped summits peered forth, down to the lovely stream in the valley, with the riches of her wondrous arboretum. The fattest of pastures by the little river, and deepest of arable rich soil; and then, as step by step the mountain rose, everywhere shone forth the glory of the New Zealand foliage, with its fern and palm-like fronds, parasite and creeper, of the most golden greens, and here and there

blushing with blossom; while in scores of places tiny silver threads could be seen dashing, plashing, and flashing in the sun-rays, as they descended from the never-exhausted storehouses of ice and snow far above, which glowed in turn, like some wondrous collection of gold and gems.

Some three miles away there shone the sparkling waters of a tiny bay, whose shores, at that distance, could be seen framed in emerald green, as the forest trees grew right down to where the sea could almost lave their roots, and goodly ships have made fast cable or hawser to their trunks. And yet, in all the length and breadth of the glorious vale, stood but one house, sheltered in another tiny valley, running off at right angles; while right up and up, higher and higher, tree, crag, and mossy bank were piled with a profuseness of grandeur that displayed novel beauties at every glance.

"'And I said, if there's peace,'—I don't believe any place could be more lovely, even in this land of beauty," muttered the traveller, tapping the ashes out of his smoked pipe on to a mossy boulder, and then blowing them carefully away. "Here am I, too, defiling Nature's beauties with my vile nicotine. But beauty is beauty, Joey; and it only satisfies the eye; and man has a stomach, and bones that ache if they don't have a bed; so, my gallant steed, we'll finish our journey to the Moa's Nest, and see what friend Lee will say to us, and whether he will bestow on thy master, damper, tea, and bacon, and on thee some corn."

The gallant steed did not even sniff at the prospect of the feed of corn, but submitted, like the well-broken animal he was, to the replacing of his bit; when, arranging his bridle, his master mounted, put up his umbrella again, and then, leaving the pony to pick his way, slowly descended the zigzag track which led to old Martin Lee's station, known far and wide, from an old Maori tradition, as the Moa's Nest.

The distance seemed nothing from where he had been seated; but the track wound and doubled so much, from the steepness of the descent, that it was getting towards sundown before the traveller rode up to the long, straggling, wooden building, that had evidently been erected at various times, as the prosperity of its occupant had called for farther increase; when, slowly dismounting, he closed the great umbrella, hung his bridle upon a hook, and stalked in to where the family were at tea, if the substantial meal spread out could be so called.

"God bless all here!" he said heartily, as he brought down the umbrella with a thump; "How's friend Lee?"

"Right well am I, parson, thank you!" exclaimed a bluff, sturdy-looking farmer. "Won't you draw up to the log fire?"

There was a merry laugh at these words; for it was midsummer, and the Gap was famed for its hot days and nights.

"And how is the good wife, and my little queen, too?" continued the new-comer, shaking hands with Mrs Lee, a sharp, eager little woman; and then taking their daughter's blooming face between his hands, to kiss her lovingly, as if she had been his own child. "All well? That's right! Yours obediently, sir," he continued, to a tall, dark man of about thirty, who had risen from the table with the others.

"A neighbour of ours, Mr Meadows," said Mrs Lee; "Mr Anthony Bray."

"Your servant, sir," said the new-comer stiffly. "A neighbour, eh? Lives close by—six or eight miles off, I suppose?" And then he muttered to himself, "I know what's your business."

"Well, I think you've made a pretty good guess at the distance," said the other; "it *is* seven miles."

"Great blessing sometimes, but it makes one's parish too extended to be pleasant. I find it a long journey to visit all my people in the nooks and corners—"

"And Moas' Nests."

"Ay, and Moas' Nests, they get into. Well, I've come to ask a bed and a meal, if you'll give them to me, friend Lee."

"Always welcome, parson, so long as you don't come begging," said the head of the family.

"But I have come begging," he said, standing with one hand upon his umbrella, and the other stuck under his grey frock coat. "I want a subscription towards our new church; so, if we are not welcome, Joey and I will have to—There, bless me, child, don't take away my umbrella!" he exclaimed, to the pretty daughter of the household, who, in true patriarchal fashion, was divesting him of his sunshade and hat, and placing him in a chair.

"There, sit down, do!" exclaimed the settler, laughing; "it's quite a treat to see a fresh face—and I daresay I can buy you off with a crooked sixpence or so. Fall to, man; you look hot and worn."

"Little overdone, perhaps," said the visitor. "Phew! bother the flies! How they always seem to settle on you, when a little out of sorts! Scent sickness, I suppose. Thank you, my child; nothing like a cup of tea for refreshment. Why, our Katie looks more blooming than ever, Mrs Lee."

"Ay, she grows," said the father; "and we begin to want to see her married and settled, eh, Mr Bray?"

Kate Lee's face crimsoned, and she darted an appealing look to her mother, one not misinterpreted by the other visitor, who assumed not to have heard his host's remark.

But farther remark was checked by a boisterous "Hillo!" a horse cantered up to the door, and Edward Murray, flushed and heated, sprang to the ground, to fold Kate Lee in his arms in an instant, and then heartily salute the rest of the family.

"Couldn't overtake you, Mr Meadows," said the young sailor, "though I saw your old umbrella bobbing down the

valley like a travelling mushroom."

"There, parson, there's no best bed for you to-night," said the settler. "The woman-kind worship this fellow, and you'll only come off second best."

"I can be happy anywhere," said Mr Meadows. "Don't incommode yourselves for me."

Meanwhile it needed no interpreter to tell of the intimacy between Edward Murray and Kate Lee. A love the growth of years—the love that had induced him to quit the navy; for he had felt unable to settle when old Lee had left his native town, driven by misfortunes to settle in one of the colonies, New Zealand being his choice, where now, after some years' hard fight with difficulties, he was living a wealthy, patriarchal life in this pleasant valley.

So Edward Murray had found no difficulty in getting appointed to a trader, which, however little in accordance with his tastes, took him at least once a year to where he could visit the Lees in their new home.

At first, old Lee did not evince much pleasure at the sight of the young man, for he had seen Anthony Bray's dark visage grow more dark as he tugged at his handkerchief, and then, after a vain attempt at showing his nonchalance, he rose hastily and quitted the place, followed by the eyes of Mr Meadows, who generally contrived to see all, and to interpret things pretty correctly.

And he made few mistakes in the conclusions he had that evening arrived at; for, but that very afternoon, Anthony Bray had, after months of unsuccessful wooing, asked the maiden to be his wife, but only to meet with an unconditional refusal; for Katie Lee possessed a faith not shared by both her parents, and it was with a triumphant joy in her bright eyes that she took her place quietly by Edward Murray's side, as he told of his long and stormy travels since he met them a year ago.

"And when did you get into the bay?" inquired old Lee.

"Only last night," said the young man.

"Then you have lost little time," said Mr Meadows.

"Well, no," said the other simply. "I wanted to get here, and see what I've been thinking about for the last twelve months;" and he turned to Katie, whose eyes met his for an instant, and then fell as her colour heightened.

"Ah! it's all plain enough what it means, Mr Meadows," said Mrs Lee. "Martin, there, used to tell me, years ago, that now I was a wife, I must stay at home, and cry 'clack, clack,' to the chickens; and now it seems that I'm going to cry 'clack, clack' in vain; for one's chick is going to ran away, when she might be happily settled down here close by, where we could see her."

Katie's wandering and troubled look fell upon Mr Meadows, who smiled grimly, as he said, "I'm afraid, ma'am, that your poor mother would have to cry 'cluck, cluck' very loudly before you would hear her all these thousand miles away. It's nature, ma'am, nature. As the old birds mated in the pleasant spring of life, so will the young ones; and God bless them, say I, and may they be happy!"

"Amen!" said old Martin; "there's no getting over that, wife. All I want is to see some one happy; and I'm afraid it's rather a mistake when old folks try to manufacture the youngsters' future. That's about the best sermon I ever heard from you, Parson Meadows; it was short, and to the point. I've been wrong, I know; but then she talked me into it." And he nodded towards his wife, who rose and left the room, while Kate crept to her father's side, Edward following Mrs Lee out into the garden, where the long, conversation that ensued must have terminated favourably; for when Kate, who had been anxiously watching for their return, at length followed them out into the bright moonlit space in front of the house, she was encountered by her mother, who whispered two or three words, and then hurried in, having owned herself defeated.

"And where are the young folks?" said old Lee, as she entered.

Mrs Lee made a motion with her hand, and then bustled away to superintend the arrangements for the night, besides receiving deputations of shepherds and stockmen, and acting as her husband's prime minister, so that he might be left at liberty to entertain his visitors.

"It's hard to manage matters, parson, when two children want the same apple," he said.

"Yes, yes," said the minister; "all you have to do is to give it to the most deserving. There's a simple straightforwardness about the young sailor I like, though he did compare me to a mushroom."

"Yes, I like him," said old Lee; "but then the wife was set on this Bray, because he's close at hand here. But I think she's come round, though I know she did hope that time and the long journeys would tire out the other; but he's true as—"

"The needle to the pole, as he'd say," laughed the other; "and if he's that, what more would you have?"

"Who? I? Nothing, nothing. I only want to see the little lass happy. I'm sorry for Bray, though. I suppose he could not bear to see it, for he has gone."

"Yes, he went long enough ago, scowling furiously. I hope, friend Lee, there will be no unpleasantry between them."

"O, nonsense!" ejaculated the old settler; and farther converse was stopped by the entrance of the young people.

Story 3--Chapter IV.

Anthony's Home.

Martin Lee was right; for, half-choked with rage, his neighbour, Anthony Bray, had hurried out into the open, glad to get away from a scene of happiness that tortured and cut him to the heart. What was this sailor—this mate of a ship—that he should be preferred? Kate Lee had never looked on him like that, in spite of all his pleading; her face had never worn those kind smiles, nor been suffused with those rosy blushes at his approach; and it was cruel work for him to have all his hopes dashed to the ground in an instant; now hopeful—the next moment, by the entry of one stranger, plunged into misery and despair.

He hurried away to get his horse, and ride homeward; but after reaching the shed, he felt that it would look strange and unneighbourly to hurry away; so he determined to walk on a little until he grew calmer, then to return and stay till his customary hour, and go, as if nothing unusual were the matter.

"Fine evening, sir," said a shepherd, returning with his charge.

But Bray heard him not, for the passion he sought to calm down grew hotter as he proceeded; and when at length he turned to retrace his steps, he knew that it would be madness on his part to go back to the house, unless he wished to provoke a quarrel.

The moon was high as he made his way back to where all was peace; the sunset rays still gilding the snowy tops of the mountains right and left; and, save for the occasional tinkle of a sheep-bell, or low of some beast, all was still.

Turning, by preference, from the moonlit turf, he threaded his way slowly amidst the tree-ferns and undergrowth by the pasture-side, till he once more approached the house in time to see Mrs Lee leave Katie and Edward together, when he stood, with burning cheek and knit brow, watching them, and torturing himself for a full hour, when they slowly strolled towards where he stood; and then, with a net-work of rays over them, he gazed upon a picture which seemed to madden him, till, from being cast down, Katie's face was lifted, so that the moonbeams bathed it for a moment ere Edward Murray's was bent down, slowly, tenderly, to press a long, loving kiss upon lips that did not shrink from the caress.

He could bear no more; but flinching backwards, as if, like some wild animal, he were preparing himself for a spring, he placed more and more distance between them; and then, forgetting his horse, he turned and fled furiously down the Gap to the little bay, where lay a small schooner. But Bray scarcely heeded the strange visitor, but turning the bend, made his way along the sands for about a mile, where another valley opened, along which he tore, panting and fierce, mile after mile, heedless of the intricacies of the path, till he reached his own dwelling. He took, mechanically, his accustomed round to see that all was safe; listened to the remarks of his men in a dumb, listless fashion; and then, throwing himself into a chair, sat, hour after hour, thinking: now, determining to be revenged—now to act with manly forbearance and fortitude, trying to crush down the misery in his heart—but all in vain, he could only recall, again and again, that moonlit scene; and as the memory of the embrace came upon him, he writhed in his chair, the veins upon his forehead growing knotted and hard, and his face black with passion.

His men had long before retired to their quarters; so that when, late in the night, there was an unusual disturbance amongst the dogs, it should have fallen to his lot to quiet them had he heard them baying; but he heard nothing, saw nothing, till a broad palm was laid upon his mouth, and his chair was dragged fiercely round, so that he was face to face with half a score of fierce, ruffianly-looking fellows, one of whom struck him back as he tried to rise to his feet.

"Keep where you are!" cried the ruffian, with an oath; "and tell us where you keep your powder and things?"

Bray, half-stunned and confused, did not reply to the demand.

"Speak, will you?" cried the fellow, blaspheming furiously as he seized the young man by the throat.

"I have hardly any," gasped Bray, who was half-suffocated; and then, trembling for his life, he pointed out the few guns and rifles belonging to himself and men, noticing, as he did so, that some of his assailants were well armed, and some provided merely with a knife or axe.

They seized the weapons with almost a savage joy, and took possession of every scrap of lead and powder they could find, using the most horrible threats against Bray and his trembling men, whom they had bound, and dragged into the central room of the hut, if they dared to keep back any portion of their store. Then, after ransacking the place, they took every little thing that possessed value in their eyes, before consulting as to what should be done with their prisoners.

Bray's heart sank, as he listened to their conference, and he could not for a moment doubt their readiness to perform any deed of blood. He felt that his last hour must be come, for all chance of escape seemed cut off; and, sinking into a sullen, despairing state, he was listening to the muttered appeals of his men, when a thought flashed across him which sent a gleam of ferocious joy into his eyes. The ruffians had come up this valley first, evidently from the schooner he had seen in the bay; their next foray would be up Golden Gap, when the Moa's Nest must fall into their hands, and he would be revenged for the treatment he had received.

And Katie? He shuddered as his heart asked him that question, and he battled with himself, trying to harden, to steel his feelings against pity. He would be murdered, no doubt; and in his present state of mind he hardly wished to live—but Katie? Heavens! what a fate! He must warn them—put them on their defence. He could have slain Edward Murray—crushed his heel down upon his open English face; but Katie?—the woman? Was he a savage, that he had harboured such thoughts?

He bit his lips fiercely, and his eyes wandered eagerly round the rough-walled room in search of some means of escape; but there were none. And now, one by one, he saw his four men dragged out, the first two to go quietly, but the next moment uttering hoarse cries, shrieks for pity, for help, as if in despair at the fate awaiting them. Then, as a party of the ruffians seized the remaining two, they had taken the alarm, and begun to plead for mercy, promising anything—to show the convicts where there were richer stations—to join them—anything, if their lives were spared; for the strange silence that now prevailed outside the house, told that something dread had been enacted.

"Say a word for as, master; try and get us off! We've been good men to you, master—Not yet! give us a minute!" cried one poor wretch; and he struggled so fiercely, that the two men who were holding Bray hurriedly crossed the room, to kick, and help drag the unfortunate man towards the door.

It was for life; it was a moment not to be lost, and, with one bound, Bray reached the door leading into another room; dashed at it, so that it fell from its slight hinges; and then, as the report of a gun rang out, he leaped through the casement, shivering glass and leadwork to atoms, and falling heavily on the other side; but he was up in an instant, gave one glance round to see two of his men swinging in the moonlight from one of the trees, and then, followed by another shot, he rushed into the wood in front, and threaded his way rapidly through the trees, closely followed by his pursuers.

He knew that his only chance of safety was in concealment; for if he trusted to the open, they would run him down, or shoot him like a dog; or he might have made his way round by the shore, and then up Golden Gap, to warn them of the coming danger at the Moa's Nest. He could only hide himself till the danger was over, and then— He shuddered; for once more he thought of Katie, as he hurried panting along, tripping over roots and creepers, climbing blocks of stone, till the shouts behind ceased, and he paused to take breath, resting upon a fragment of rock, and drawing heavily his laboured breath as the perspiration streamed down his face.

What could he do? How could he warn them? He felt that he must try, even if he did not succeed; though his heart told him that he would be too late, while the moon would show him as an easy mark for his pursuers. He must go, he felt, even if he laid down his life; and he turned to retrace his steps towards the track down the valley, when he stopped short.

Why could he not climb the mountain, and descend into the valley on the other side? It would be a long and arduous task; but then it would be free from enemies. He had never heard of such a feat being done; for it was the custom always to follow the track to the shore, skirt the end of the spur, and then ascend the Gap; but why could not this be possible? He would try, if he died in the attempt; and then, with panting breath, he began slowly to climb the face of the thickly-wooded mountain, finding it grow more steep and difficult as he passed every twenty yards, but fighting his way on—now finding a level spot, now a descent into a little stream-sheltering rift, which glistened in the moonbeams; but ever rising higher, till, having reached a crag by means of a long pendulous vine, he paused to breathe and listen; for a wild shriek, as from some dying despairing soul, had risen to his ear. He shuddered as it was repeated; and then shrank back into the black shade cast by a mass of lava which overhung his head, and listened again; but all was still.

He could not see his homestead from where he rested; for the view was shut out by the trees below him; but he started, for a vivid flash suddenly shot up, and then sank; but only to burst out again. And he ground his teeth, as he knew that they had fired the place, most probably just before leaving it; and in his mind's eye he could see the wretches filing off, booty-laden, to make their way down the valley to the little bay at the end of the Gap.

There was no time to lose. His was not a fourth of the distance to travel; but the road was fearful, and a cold chilling feeling of despair fell upon him as, in making a spring upwards, he trod upon some loose stones, lost his footing, and fell heavily, rolling down some twenty feet into a rift, where, as he slowly gathered himself together and began to climb once more, the sobs of anguish forced themselves from his breast, and tears of weak misery coursed down his cheeks.

And now, grown more cautious—and knowing that, would he reach the summit, it could only be by husbanding his strength—he climbed on and on, every minute finding the way more arduous, and tangled with the majestic luxuriant growth of the country. Far up to the left he could see the moonbeams glittering on the snowy peaks, while to his right again towered a high mass. Could he but keep to the path that should lead him to the rift between, he might be in time—might warn them; but despair whispered "No" the next moment, as difficulty after difficulty met him at every step.

Rock, loose stone, thorny undergrowth, which tore his clothes and flesh; huge ferns, whose old frond stumps tripped him up again and again; creepers with snake-like branches: all had to be encountered; but the moon gave him a friendly light, and he was enabled to win his way, now faster, now slower, till, leaning again to rest upon a moonlit crag, whence he could look down upon his burning home, he started and shrank back into the darkness; for a faint noise below struck his ear, was repeated again and again, and he knew that he was followed.

His breath came thickly, as he felt how unavailing had been his efforts: but a moment before he had thought that he should win his way to the top, even if he should only be in time to witness a similar destruction to that going on at his feet; but now he felt that he was to be shot down, perhaps dashed into some rift, and stones hurled upon him; and maddened with despair, he sought for a weapon of defence.

Crash! there was the sound of a piece of rock loosened; and then again the rustling sound, plainly borne on the night air, as some one forced his way higher and higher.

What should he do? Wait and close with his adversary unarmed, trying to take him at some disadvantage, or should he toil on and try to outstrip him? The last he felt would be folly; for sooner or later, while passing over some moonlit spot, he would only become a plainer mark for his foe. He would stay and meet him there, beat him back with one of

the masses of lava at his feet, if he were seen, or else let him pass on, and then seek out some other way.

The rustling came higher and higher, completely in his track—not loudly, but gently, as if the one who followed were light and active; but there was a sadden flash as from the barrel of a gun; and kneeling down at the edge of a crag, below which the pursuer must come, Bray waited with a couple of large masses ready at his hand, prepared to hurl them down when the opportunity should offer; for after deciding to proceed, he had given up the attempt as vain, and crouched there waiting for his foe.

He knelt in the shade; but the moonbeams lit up all around, and gave a distinctness to every object that was almost equal to that of day.

Nearer and nearer came the sounds; the great fronds were being parted here and there; a long fine stem that had lent him its aid shook and rattled as it was clasped from beneath. In another instant his foe would be within reach; and he raised one of the heavy fragments, poised it, and, as he saw a figure dart beneath, he hurled it down; but only for it to go crashing below, wakening the echoes in the rifts and chasms. The next instant he was dashed back, and a strong hand was upon his throat, a knee upon his chest, and a weapon raised to slay him; when, with a wild cry of despair, Bray forced his feet energetically against the rock, and thrust himself away, so that he held his foe half suspended over the edge of the yawning precipice.

Story 3--Chapter V.

At the Farm.

Mrs Lee was a very unimportant-looking little woman; yet she ruled at home even as Martin Lee ruled abroad; and after the supper that night, when Katie had occasion to attend to sundry maternal orders, there was plenty of free open discussion, in which Parson Meadows was invited to join.

“I’ve no objection to you at all, Edward,” said Mrs Lee, “only that you will go away for a twelvemonth at a time; and if we let you have Katie, you will either carry her off, or else be making her a widow till you return again; and that’s why I have set my face against it.”

“Why can’t you settle down here, my lad?” said old Lee, puffing leisurely at his pipe.

“Ay, and plough the land instead of the ocean,” put in Mr Meadows.

“You are all hard upon me,” said Edward, laughing. “Didn’t I give up the navy?”

“Let him alone,” said old Lee; “he’ll come round in time.”

“To be sure,” said Mr Meadows. “And, after all, my young friend, it’s a pleasant patriarchal life you would lead here—at peace with the world, nature smiling upon you, a glorious climate, and sickness a thing hardly known. Truly, yours would be a pleasant prospect. No need here to lock or bar your doors to keep out the thieves who break through and steal. Indeed, I should envy you if I were a young man—young as he who went out.”

“Ah, poor Bray! I’m afraid he’ll be rather nettled about your coming, Ned. I know Katie gave him no encouragement; but the old lady there took a fancy to him; and now she has turned her coat. Fickle ever!”

Just then Katie returned to take her place in the circle, seating herself by Edward Murray, with the innocent air of one who sought protection at the side of the stronger.

The night was wearing on, and early hours were the rule at the Moa’s Nest; so old Lee slowly rose, pipe in hand, and made his customary round, stopping here and there for a few whiffs, till he was satisfied that sheep and cattle were well folded, horses bedded down, dogs loose and watchful; though no enemies were ever dreaded there—the old settler being on the best of terms with neighbour and native.

On returning, he encountered Mr Meadows a few yards from the door.

“The young folks seemed as though they could well spare me, friend Lee,” he said; “so I strolled out to finish my pipe with you. Youth lasts but a while: let them enjoy the happy season. We are getting older than when we first met, ten years ago, friend Lee; and things have prospered with you.”

“Ay,” said the settler; “thank Providence, they have; for it’s a sore job to work early and late, and see the toil all wasted. I’ve prospered well here, parson; and if things go on so, I shall die a rich man. I wish they prospered as well with you.”

“They prosper well enough, Martin Lee. I’ve my own little home, and the people in my district are kind and hospitable when I visit them; and, somehow, this half-civilised sort of existence suits me better than the life at the old home. I have never regretted my large town curacy, and I hope I never shall.”

They stood silent for a few moments.

“Your bonnie English bud is breaking into a fair and sweet-scented rose, Martin Lee,” said Mr Meadows at last.

“What—Katie? Yes, yes, God bless her! But it gets to be a worrying time, parson, when the lads come wooing; and, though I took no heed to it, that young fellow Bray went out looking as if he’d like to make an end of us all.”

“Be charitable, friend Lee—be charitable. The young man was hot and bitter and disappointed; and no wonder. A night’s rest will do him much good, poor lad. Let’s pity, and not condemn.”

“Very well,” said old Lee, smiling; “and now let’s go in.”

They re-entered the house just as Edward Murray exclaimed:

“There, I have it! Been trying to call to mind who he was for days past; but I have it now.”

“And pray, who was he?” said Mr Meadows dryly.

“The head-clerk at Elderby’s; don’t you remember, Mr Lee? He was transported for life for forging a will—John Grant.”

“And what about him?” asked the settler.

“Why, I met him at Port Caroline a few days ago, in a gang of men returning from work, I suppose; and he spoke to me by name. Strange we should meet again.”

“Well, a little, perhaps,” said Mr Meadows. “I remember his case now you name it. But the world is not big enough to hide yourself anywhere. You are sure to encounter some one who knows you, or your relatives. Good-night, and heaven protect you all!”

Story 3--Chapter VI.

The Alarm.

We must now return to the struggle on the brink of the precipice. With the energy of despair, Anthony Bray sought to grapple with his enemy, when the threatening weapon was withdrawn, and a harsh voice, with surprise in its tones, gave utterance to his name.

“What, Wahika!” exclaimed Bray joyfully; and he gazed with wonder in the blue-tinted tattooed face of one of the natives, who had often been upon his premises.

“Thought killed. Men come from sea kill all, and come kill him again for kill you.”

“You thought I was one of the men?”

The New Zealander nodded.

“Where go to now? Come back pah?”

“No, no!” exclaimed Bray, as a bright thought struck him. “I want to go over the hill to the Moa’s Nest. You can show me the best way.”

“Much hard work; but Wahika show;” and, without another word, he plunged down again, with Bray following for a little distance; but, under the impression that the native had misunderstood him in his imperfect knowledge of the tongue, he called to him to stop, and pointed upwards.

The savage smiled at his eagerness, and shook his head, and pointed downward, then drew an imaginary line to the right, and then another, which led in the direction of the hill-top.

Bray nodded, and followed without another word; when, after a few turns and doublings, the guide hit upon the bed of a good-sized stream, and, first on one side, then on the other, led his companion up and up, at a rate which inspired him with the hope that he might even yet be in time. Higher and higher they climbed now, passing in among the trees at the side, and anon climbing over some huge block which arrested their progress, when the guide would stretch out a helping hand, or in some other way assist his less active and panting companion.

The journey was performed in absolute silence, till suddenly the native stopped short, and, facing round, he exclaimed, as if he had at length found out the object in view:

“You go tell at Moa’s Nest men come?”

Bray nodded.

“You think they come Moa’s Nest?” queried the savage.

Bray nodded again.

“Wahika fetch tribe—go to pah;” and he made a movement as if to return.

But Bray pointed forward; and, in obedience, the man led on.

Twice over Bray stopped, panting, thinking that they had reached the summit of the ridge; but there were still higher crags to climb; and on they slowly made their way, often along the edges of dangerous chasms—places where in calmer moments he dare not have set his foot; but, with thoughts concentrated upon his object, he pressed on.

If he could but save Katie, he would be content; and then thought after thought crowded through his brain—thoughts

that at another time he would have shuddered at; but now, in this time of temptation, they found a home.

“Hah!” ejaculated the guide suddenly, as he helped his companion to the top of a huge mass of vine-clad rock.

And, looking in the direction pointed out by the savage, he could see, far below them, the home of Martin Lee bathed in the peaceful moonlight, and with nothing to indicate impending danger.

“In time, so far,” exclaimed Bray; and, pointing to the long low buildings that glistened beneath them, the native nodded, and they began rapidly to descend.

What Bray wanted in agility, he tried to supply by daring, and he boldly followed his guide, now leaping, now swinging down by hanging rope-like creeper, and more than once falling heavily; but he was up and on again directly.

And there was need of haste; for slowly and cautiously a band of some thirty men were making their way up towards the peaceful home. Their progress was necessarily slow, from their ignorance of the locality; and they more than once lost ground by searching for a settlement up some pleasant-looking ravine, or it would have been impossible for the warning to have arrived in time to prevent a surprise.

The Moa’s Nest at last, though; and half-a-dozen fierce dogs ran out, raging round Anthony Bray, and hardly kept at bay by Wahika’s club; so that it needed no summons to rouse Martin Lee from his bed, and to bring him to the window.

“What!” he exclaimed, as Anthony Bray told his tale; “a piratical party hanging, burning? Nonsense, man; you have been dreaming!”

“As you will,” cried Bray fiercely; and, stepping back a few steps, he picked up a stone and flung it through Katie’s window.

“Here, Kate!—Miss Lee! wake up! Quick! there’s danger!” he exclaimed.

“He’s mad!” cried old Lee. “Here, stop him! What are you doing? But who’s that? Wahika?”

“Yes; Wahika,” answered the savage. “White men come ship—kill and burn. Open door—here directly!”

“Here, stop, Bray! I beg pardon!” exclaimed the old man excitedly; and in another minute he had opened the door and admitted the new-comers.

Men were aroused, and the dogs called in; and then a hasty council of war was held.

“Sure they are not natives?” said Murray to Bray.

But the latter stood knitting his brow without giving any reply.

“Did you not say, friend Murray, that there were convicts escaped from Port Caroline, and that a schooner had been seized?” said the calm voice of Mr Meadows.

“Yes; but surely they cannot have sailed all round here,” exclaimed Murray.

“Why not, if your vessel could anchor two days since in Kaitaka Bay? I see no impossibility. There could be no other marauding party here, my friend. I don’t like bloodshed; so you must make a show of being prepared with such arms as you have, and then we will parley with them. I will be the ambassador of peace. Perhaps a little tea and tobacco will make them take their departure.”

“They’ll take their departure when they have slain all here, and turned your home into a heap of ashes, as they have mine!” exclaimed Bray fiercely. “If you have any respect for your women and your own lives, you will at once try to put the place in a state of defence.”

Meanwhile Wahika had glided out of the door, and getting into the shadow cast by the trees, made his way quickly down the valley; but not for far. In a short time he returned to announce the coming of the enemy.

Murray had proposed flight as the safest plan; but this had been objected to by old Lee, who vowed that as long as he could lift hand no convict should cross his threshold, or lay finger upon the property he had so hardly earned.

“What should we run to the woods for, Ned Murray? I should have thought a young fellow like you would have been no coward.”

Murray knit his brows; for just then he caught sight of a sneer upon the countenance of Bray.

“I’ve not fought much with men, sir,” he said coolly; “but I have had more than one battle with storms. Perhaps I can play my part here; at least, I shall try.”

“Fighting! No; we must have no fighting, friend Lee,” said Mr Meadows. “I will go out and reason with these beasts of Ephesus, and see what can be done. But I should be prepared; I should be prepared.”

“I mean to be,” said the old man sternly; and he hurriedly took down rifle and fowling-piece from the slings upon the wall, there being sufficient to arm only about half the party; but, fortunately, there was plenty of ammunition; and this was hastily distributed, the one light extinguished, and a heavy chest or two planted against the door.

The party within the building now consisted of twelve; namely, eight men and four women—four of the men being the

settler's shepherds, and two of the trembling women their wives. To make the most of the place, the two doors at the rear were hastily barricaded, the women shut in an inner chamber, and the mattresses and beds dragged out to put in front of the windows.

"Are they well armed, Mr Bray?" said Murray.

But there was no answer until Mr Meadows repeated the question.

"They took what arms there were in my place; several guns and rifles. What they had before, I did not notice. You are surely not going out to them, sir?"

"Indeed I should be much wanting in duty if I refrained at such a time of need," said Mr Meadows. "I hope my words will have some effect upon them; but at least I will try. Friend Lee, draw back those chests, and let me go."

"And get knocked on the head," grumbled the old man grimly, as he forced a bullet down upon the powder in his rifle. "No, parson, stop here; and I think, if what friend Bray tells us be true, you had better take to war this time instead of peace."

"Take away those chests," said Mr Meadows peremptorily, to one of the shepherds; and the man drew them away, when stepping out into the moonlight, he walked hastily forward to the advancing party, and was seen, by the friends who were anxiously watching him, to enter the little cluster and disappear.

Story 3--Chapter VII.

Besieged.

A quarter of an hour elapsed, during which no time was lost, but everything possible done to make the place a little less insecure; and then, impatient at Mr Meadow's non-return, Murray proposed that they should fetch him in.

"How, young man?" said old Lee sternly.

"Try fair means first; and if not so, by force."

Bray laughed, and Murray turned upon him angrily; but their attention was suddenly taken up by a loud shouting in the direction of the enemy, and they could distinctly see that a struggle was taking place. Directly after, Mr Meadows was seen running towards them.

"Throw open the door!" exclaimed the settler; and it was done just as a shot rang out, and its report went echoing up the sides of the valley, while Mr Meadows was seen to fall.

Without an instant's pause, Murray bounded out, gun in hand, closely followed by Wahika, who had now returned, just as, with a shout, the convicts came running towards them. But as they reached Mr Meadows, he had risen to his knees, and begun to limp towards the house.

"Not much hurt; but never mind me; get back."

As he spoke, a couple of shots were fired at the little group, but without effect; and, by being supported on either side, Mr Meadows was enabled to reach the house; the door was rapidly closed, and barricaded; and then he sank into a chair; while, this being different from a surprise, the convicts were seen to pause, and to consult as to the plan of their operations.

"Are you much hurt, parson?" said old Lee gravely.

"No, not much, friend Lee," was the reply. "I don't believe the bullet struck me, only some stones driven up when it hit the ground; but it lamed me for the time. There!" he said, as he finished binding his handkerchief round his leg; "I'm ready now, and we must try the strong hand with them. They made me prisoner, but I knocked down my keepers, and escaped. Thanks, friend Murray!" he continued, taking the gun and its appurtenances offered by the young man. "I'm rather out of practice, but I think I can leg and wing a few of the rascals."

"I think you had better body them!" said old Lee fiercely.

"I don't," said Mr Meadows, priming his piece. "But don't let me interfere with you. Suppose you open the windows on either side the door, my men?" And this being done, he placed a featherbed upon a table, so that it half filled the window, when, resting his piece upon it, he stood ready, his example being followed by the others.

The next instant he took rapid aim, and fired, when a convict, who had been reconnoitring, was seen to drop, and then try to drag himself back to his comrades, who sent a volley at the house in reply.

"There!" said Mr Meadows, coolly reloading; "that was as good as a body-shot, friend Lee. Think I'd aim low, if I were you."

The old man nodded doubtfully, and smiled; when Murray, observing that the men were dividing into two parties, made towards the back of the house, so as to be on the look-out for an attack in that quarter; and it was well he did so, for six men were creeping up under the shade of the trees.

He fired, and one dropped, leaped up, but fell again, to lie motionless; and the young man felt a cold chill run through him as he knew that he had, for the first time, taken a human life.

On turning to reload, he found himself face to face with Kate; and dark as it was, he could make out the agitation depicted in her countenance.

“Go back,” he said; “go back, darling!” And, for a moment, he pressed her in his arms, when, yielding to his entreaties, she returned to the inner room, just as half a dozen more shots came whistling through door and window.

“Keep watch here,” Murray whispered to one of the shepherds. And the man took his place, while he went to the front, to find that several shots had been exchanged, and that one of the shepherds was bleeding upon the floor.

Just then a tall, burly ruffian rushed forward recklessly, and, shouting to the occupants of the house to give up, if they wished to save their lives, fired another shot, and then turned to join his companions.

“I believe that’s the rascal who wounded our poor friend here,” exclaimed Mr Meadows, firing as he spoke. “No; I’ve missed him! Legs *are* hard to hit as they run. Fire low, my friends.”

Several of the convicts had fallen, for the besieged kept up a well-sustained fire; and this made the assailants cautious, for they took shelter behind trees and sheds, firing almost at random, but not without effect; for another shepherd was badly hit, and a groan from the inner room told that mischief was done there. And it was so; for, after a few minutes, Mrs Lee, Katie, and one woman came calmly out, Mrs Lee whispering something to her husband; and then, in answer to entreaties that they would go back, they replied that they were as safe in the front room as elsewhere; and, tearing up some linen, proceeded to bandage the wounds of those who were hurt.

Suddenly, a cry made Murray dart to the back, to find the shepherd struggling with a convict, who had forced his way in, thus giving time for a couple more to enter, when a fierce struggle ensued, ending in two of the men being struck down, and the other beating a retreat; but this episode had been fatal, the besieged having been drawn off just as a daring assault was made upon the front.

It was in vain that Mr Meadows fired, and then knocked down two who were rushing in over the broken door. The struggle was short, but very fierce, and one after the other the defenders were beaten down, or back from room to room, till, turning for a moment, on hearing a loud cry for help, Murray saw Bray in the act of passing through a door, and bounding after him, he was in time to see him drag Katie through the window, and disappear.

The next instant he had followed, but receiving a tremendous blow upon the head, he fell heavily to the ground.

That blow was given by what should have been a friend’s hand, but it had an effect that Anthony Bray had not intended. The minute before he had been dragging a timid, yielding girl after him. But now, as in the dim light she saw the dastardly act, a feeling of rage filled Katie’s soul; and, tearing herself away, she flung herself upon her knees, lifting the head of Murray gently, and with her handkerchief binding up a severe wound the young man had received.

The place they were in was a sort of outhouse, which had been added to the side of the building, but without the window being filled up; and as Murray climbed out, the casement had swung to again; and it was well for the moment, for having beaten down the little remaining resistance, the convicts spread through the place, seizing the arms and ransacking cupboard and drawer; while old Lee, beaten down, wounded, looked on with agonised countenance; but not alone, for his wife clung to him, turning a defiant face upon the destroyers of her home.

Two men rushed into the chamber, through which Bray had dragged Katie, and concluding that those of whom they were in search had passed through a door on the other side, they hurried through that, and disappeared, but only to make their way back into the central room.

Meanwhile, overcoming his surprise at the fierce way in which Katie resisted him, Bray caught her in his arms, and drew her towards the outhouse door.

“Foolish girl! it’s for life and liberty! There, I’m stronger than you,” he cried, “and if I must use force, I will. Come quietly, Katie—come. We can reach the horses—mine is there yet—and fly to safety, away from this scene!”

But she struggled fiercely, although the weaker, while he forced her step by step towards the door.

“Little fool!” he hoarsely said. “Would you have us both killed?”

“Yes, yes, coward,” she cried. “Loose me, or I’ll call for help! Edward! Ned! help me!” she cried loudly; and as he lay just beneath the chamber window, he half raised himself, but only to sink back again with exhaustion.

“You’ll have the ruffians upon us, Kate,” hissed Bray; and mad with rage, he tried to lift her from the ground, when she again called out, “Ned! Ned! help me! O, help!”

Startled by this sudden outburst, Bray relaxed his hold sufficiently for Katie to tear herself away, and throw herself upon Murray’s prostrate body, to which she clung.

But Bray was at her side in an instant, trying again to drag her away, but in vain; when, seizing his rival by the throat, he fiercely whispered in the poor girl’s ear, “Come on, or it will be his death!”

“You have killed him now, coward!” cried the girl, vainly tearing at the hand so ruthlessly grasping her lover; when again seizing the opportunity Bray lifted her once more from the floor, and bore her towards the door, but only for there to be a repetition of the fierce struggle; the light, active girl writhing herself free again, calling upon Ned for the help he was powerless to give, he, poor fellow, responding with a groan, as in the shadowy place he could mistily make out what was going on.

Tearing herself away, Katie was again by the side of Murray, when the casement above her head was suddenly

thrown open, a couple of streams of flame flashed across the place, and, with a loud cry, Bray sprang through the door at the other end. The moonbeams shone in for an instant, showing the wreaths of smoke curling slowly upward, and all was once more darkness, while Katie knelt, hardly daring to breathe; her hand, too, pressed upon Murray's lips, lest he should moan, and so betray their whereabouts.

But the next moment her breath was drawn with a sob, for the window swung-to again, and from the rapid beat of footsteps, it was evident that the men who fired had gone round in pursuit of Bray; but apparently in vain, for they soon returned, stopped before the outhouse door, and looked in; but coming from the outer brightness, they saw nothing but the wreathing smoke; and, closing the door violently, hurried on towards the front of the house, where loud talking, and more than once a weak cry for help, fell upon the ears of the poor girl.

Murray had attempted to speak, and then seemed to become inanimate. In her grief, Katie clung to him, calling upon him, in whispers, to speak to her, if but a word, for she felt that he must be dying; and then, forgetful of all but her love, she clasped him fondly, bathing his face with her tears, and kissing him again and again. Then suddenly she started up with affright, for, just above her head, she heard the grating of the casement, as it slowly opened. Then there was a dread pause, broken by the loud talking and quarrelling of the convicts, but a few yards away.

Involuntarily she turned her face towards the open window, trying to pierce the darkness—for the moon had sunk behind the shoulder of the mountain, and in the last few minutes all had become black as night. But she could see nothing, only hear the sound of hard breathing, as some one leaned out into the place where she crouched, cold and paralysed, but with her mind in a state of fearful activity.

But was it fancy? Had her over-wrought imagination conjured up this new terror? No; it was no fancy, for the window was thrust farther back, and the dread seemed greater than she could bear, as just above her she could feel, as it were, that there was a face stretched out towards her.

Story 3--Chapter VIII.

Tried by Fire.

It might have been but for a few seconds, but the suspense was agonising. Katie felt no fear for herself then: her fear was lest he should be discovered who had been ready to die in her defence—who had been so cruelly smitten down—he to whom, but a few hours before, she had plighted herself, owning to her love, and, for the first time, daring to respond to his kisses. But was it a few hours ago? Was it not years since, or at some time far back in the past, that those happy moments were? Or was this some wild dream—that he, the young, the bright, the true, who had treasured her love for years, and come these thousands of miles to see her—to claim her—was dying in her arms?

The stillness around them was awful; the darkness more and more intense. Cold as marble, gazing upwards ever at this invisible terror that she knew was there, would it not be better almost to cry out, she thought, and bring down others, so as to end the harrowing suspense that seemed to madden her?

But poor Ned—poor, helpless Ned! If he were not already dead—if he had not even now escaped from the arms that held him so tightly, they would slay him without mercy. No; she must remain silent. Would he move, or even mutter? Her heart gave a bound, for at that moment there was a slight motion in the form she clasped, and this made her turn her head from its strained, unnatural position, so that her cheek fell gently upon Murray's, and then she clung to him cold and motionless, but with strained ears, as she felt that the time for discovery had come. The casement shook a little; there was a rustling noise, as of some one slowly climbing out; a heavy foot was placed upon her soft, yielding arm, then another, and the pain was sharp, but almost welcome, for it seemed to numb her mental agony. Yet no sigh escaped her lips; she only felt that the time to die had come, and a simple old prayer was being mentally repeated for pardon for those who, if not already cruelly slain, were in deadly peril—for herself and for him she so dearly loved.

Then the pressure was removed, there was a staggering step, such as might be that of a wounded man. With closed eyes, and a heavily throbbing heart, she heard a hand run along the wall, the wooden click, the door open and softly close, and then all was silent in the shed.

Silence there, but noise and confusion in the house: shouting, and more than one attempt apparently to obtain order, but all heard in a confused way, for a strange, deathly feeling of sickness had come upon the poor girl, her senses were reeling, there was a loud singing noise at her ears, and, though her name seemed to be uttered again and again, yet she could not respond, and soon all was blank.

How long that time of utter nothingness lasted, she could not tell; but she woke again to a strange feeling of oppression and misery; her breath came thick and short, and she could not recall where she was. It was as if her intellect had received some fearful stroke which had robbed her of her reflective powers. But thought came suddenly, and she knew all.

A bitter sob rose to her lips, and she could have cried for help, but in dread she checked that cry, and her heart beat triumphantly, for a voice, whose breath touched her cheek, whispered her name, and she knew that he lived.

"Katie, darling, Katie," was whispered again—"water!"

Water! How could she get it? The spring was on the other side of the house, and the men were in the front; she could hear them still talking loudly over their plunder. If she went, they would seize her. If she appealed to them for help, they would rob *him* of what little life remained. What could she do? She could do nothing, she told herself despairingly—nothing but wait, and perhaps the wretches would go.

But it was not dark now. A dull light seemed to play through the window above their heads, as turning, she knew that it was smoke that she could see; and, starting to her feet, she found that, at the height of her lips, it was so dense that she could not breathe.

Was there to be no end to the perils of that fearful night? Was death to come in another and more terrible form? After escaping massacre at the hand of their ruthless enemies, were they to meet death by the lingering torture of fire?

The dread of this new alternative roused Katie into action. This was a peril that could be battled with, and they could escape if the men in front would but go. She whispered a few words to Murray, and he answered calmly and sensibly. She told him not to fear.

“Only for you,” he murmured; and for a brief moment all was still.

Then, starting once more into action, Katie asked him if he could rise, and he tried to do so, but only to fall back despairingly, when, creeping to the door, she softly lifted the latch, and pushed it a little open, so as to breathe once more the pure night air. She dared not open it far, for the voices were loud, and close at hand; but though she could not see the speakers, she could make out the reflection of their work in the bright glow lighting up the palm-like foliage around. And now a fierce, low, crackling noise fell upon her ears, and she crept back hastily to where Murray lay, seized him in her arms, and tried to drag him towards the door, but in vain. She could only move him a few inches at a time, so perfectly helpless was he.

“It is of no use, darling,” he whispered. “Go, glide out of the door, and make for the woods; you may escape. I cannot move; pray go; for my sake—for my sake, love!”

“Go—go—where?” murmured the trembling girl, as she still tried to move him.

“To the woods—hide somewhere—the place is on fire!” he gasped; “and God in heaven give me strength, for I cannot help her!”

“Hush, Ned, hush!” she whispered; “we shall be heard. Now try—try once more;” and she dragged at him with all her strength, so that he lay in the middle of the shed.

“No, no; I shall only draw you back to destruction,” he faintly said. “Never mind me. Escape, darling. You know the paths, and can hide, or make your way to where you can get help. Don’t stay. Look, look!” he whispered.

“I see,” she murmured.

And as she spoke, a bright tongue of flame began to lick the shingles of the roof, gilding them with its fierce fiery slaver, till first one and then another began to glow; and sparks and flakes fell from them, illumining the interior of the shed; while soon an opening appeared, through which the flames rushed careering out, the heat the while becoming insupportable.

“Katie, dear,” sighed the wounded man, “would you add torture to my death?”

“No, no,” she sobbed, as she dragged him nearer the door. “Are we not one?” And she sank exhausted by his side, to lay her face upon his arm. “Ned, my own Ned! pray—pray to heaven that our death may come quickly, and that we may wake soon where there is peace. I can do no more.”

As her simple words fell upon his ear, a loud demoniac drunken shout rose from outside, apparently close by the door; and from the trampling, mingled with the roar of the flames, it was evident that the ruffians were taking their departure.

Nerving himself for a last effort, Murray half lifted himself into a sitting position, fell back, struggled up again; and Katie rose to her knees.

“Try again—again,” he gasped; for he felt that she would not leave him; and together they struggled almost to the door, when, half-suffocated, the young man fell back once more. “Now go; leave me. You can escape yet, Katie,” he gasped. “O, if I had strength!”

But for answer he felt the two soft clinging arms round his neck, and a choking voice breathed two words in his ear:

“Forever!”

But the dread of the impending death seemed to give strength—the strength he had prayed for; and straggling a few inches at a time, with the red-hot embers gathering where they had lain but a few minutes before, and the flames crawling and dancing round the side of the house, Murray, now hardly aided by the fainting girl, contrived to reach the door, with one hand to thrust it back, so that a rush of air darted in, driving from them the smoke, as he uttered a loud cry for help.

The cry was heard; and they were seen for an instant ere the cloud of smoke wrapped them again in its folds. Two men darted forward to seize the prize, one of them, however, being daunted by the threatening roof, which, ruddy and golden, seemed ready to fall; while the other seized Katie’s dress in his hands to drag her out; but so tightly did she cling to Murray, that he was drawn forward and half raised before sinking back into the cloud of falling sparks and smoke.

Story 3--Chapter IX.

Cutting off the Retreat.

Old Martin Lee saw with anxious solicitude Edward Murray rush after Bray; then the closing door hid them from his sight; and with renewed energy he clutched his gun, and struck fiercely at the first assailant that presented himself, shivering the stock to pieces, and laying the man motionless at his feet. But the barrel made no insignificant weapon; and he fought, as did Mr Meadows, fiercely, though in vain; the odds were too great, even though they were ably seconded by the shepherds. Through the beaten-down door the convicts rushed; and in a few moments the defenders were trampled under foot, and lay on the now deeply-crimsoned floor, the women being dragged out of the house into the front.

Then followed the scene of ruin and confusion previously enacted in the next valley. Food was obtained, the shepherd's weeping wife being compelled to provide it, and then it was devoured by the red-handed crew. Wine, spirits, all were seized, and a mad debauch ensued; the ruffians, for the most part, having been deprived of such indulgences for years. But, soon satiated, the eager search for arms and ammunition was continued; men loading themselves, too, with much more plunder than they could bear away.

As for the dead, they lay unnoticed, the wounded receiving but little better treatment, till at last the moon slowly dipped behind the western ridge of hills, causing a deep shadow to creep along the Gap, and up the opposite slope, when, with an oath at the coming darkness, one ruffian thrust a light against some curtains, which caught fire in an instant. The flame ran up to the dry, boarded ceiling, and in a few minutes it became plain that the settler's pleasant home must become a heap of ruins.

"What are you doing of?" shouted one convict to another, who, regardless of the flames, dragged out two bodies, in which there seemed to be some trace of life. But the man did not answer, and when the other attempted to hinder him, struck the ruffian to the ground in an instant.

But the next moment he was on his feet, knife in hand, and sprang at his assailant; but only to go down again, as if the fist that struck the blow had been so much lead.

He lay for a few moments, half-stunned, and then rose, slowly muttering, and shaking his head, while the other, in answer, apparently, to the mute appeals of the women, half-dragged, half-carried the wounded men out of reach of the rapidly increasing flames.

The man did it, though, in a coarse, rough, brutal way, as if afraid that he might lose caste in the eyes of his companions; and then, after bestowing a contemptuous kick on each, he rejoined his party, loaded himself with such booty as he had secured, and the motley group began to make preparations for returning down the valley.

"Here, carry this!" exclaimed a fellow, seizing one of the women by the arm; but she broke from him to dart to one of the prostrate forms, and lift its head into her lap. The ruffian was at her side the next instant, though, trying to drag her away; but as she resisted, he struck her to the ground, and hurried to join the others.

Poor Mrs Lee sank to the earth, with a wail of misery, and remained motionless; but the other woman, the shepherd's wife, took the load pointed out to her, and followed her captors, trembling, and apparently half beside herself.

The flames had by this time wrapped the greater part of the house; and the convicts were passing the lean-to, shingle-roofed outbuilding at the end, when there rang forth a wild, despairing cry; and, dropping his load, as his companions were arrested, the same man who had dragged out the wounded, sprang forward and caught Katie in his arms, and bore her senseless from the flames, just as, with a fierce rush, the wind came careering up the valley, and dark clouds began to gather over head, as if betokening a storm.

"Now, then; we've more than we can carry now!" shouted the one who seemed to be the leader; and then, burdened as they were with plunder and three wounded men who could not walk without assistance, they slowly made their way to the bright little bay where they had left the schooner moored, to find her struggling, as it were, with the wind; and as they came well in sight they saw her break away, and in spite of the efforts of those left on board she ran on the bar at the mouth of the little harbour, where, it being now low water, a tremendous surf was running, the huge waves leaping over her and sweeping the decks in an instant. Twice she seemed lifted as if to be borne clear of the sands, but only to be dashed down again, the masts going at the second shock; and then, as if lightened, she lifted again, seemed to shake herself, and plunged, stern forward, farther on to the sand-bars, to lie rolling and wallowing in the midst of the fierce waters—a hopeless wreck.

Ten minutes had been sufficient time to effect the ruin; when seeing their retreat cut off so suddenly, the convicts stood upon the shore, with their ill-gotten booty, staring at one another, and apparently bewildered, till the one who had assumed the leadership promptly gave his orders, which the men sullenly obeyed, and followed him back towards the Moa's Nest.

Story 3--Chapter X.

Amid the Ashes.

Edward Murray sank back exhausted, as Katie was snatched from his arms; but the desire for life was yet strong in him, and he tried to force his way along, just as the fierce wind sweeping up the valley drove back the flame and smoke from the doorway, giving him again the breath of life, as he was on the point of suffocation. But he was now scorching; and the little sense left told him that his last moments were at hand, when he felt his extended arms seized, and he was forced from the flaming building, to lie almost insensible for a while, till his eyes unclosed upon the tattooed face of Wahika, the savage lying beside him, until the convicts had turned a ridge of the gap. Then,

lifting him in his arms, the native bore the young man a hundred yards into the shade of the trees behind the desolated farm, and scooping water in a broad leaf, poured the cold grateful fluid over his scorched face, and gave him some to drink.

Then he disappeared, but to return after a short time with the body of the poor old settler—Mrs Lee helping him with his burden—which they laid reverently down; when Wahika again took his departure, to help in one of the shepherds who was much injured, but able to lend some aid.

The savage was apparently unhurt, and he busied himself in the dark shadowy dell, where they lay concealed watching the reflection of the fire, by applying cooling leaves to wound and bruise, and bandaging them after the rude surgical fashion of his tribe. He did all, too, in a quiet fashion, with hands as soft and gentle as a woman's, while the sufferers lay in a stunned, helpless state, hardly seeming to realise the horrors of the past night. For the dawn was fast approaching, and as the glow from the burning building slowly sank, far above their heads upon the icy summit of the mountain appeared the first gilding of the rising sun, making the snowy pinnacles to flash and sparkle in the glorious light of another day.

The savage can live where the European would starve; and Wahika soon contrived some food for the three who were in his charge; but when, feeling somewhat revived, Murray would have sought the ruins, Wahika restrained him, laying his hand upon his arm, and listening with bent head and distended nostrils, before gliding silently away to return before many minutes had elapsed, to whisper in his broken English the words, "Come back."

At the same time he pointed down the valley, before helping the wounded shepherd farther back into the little ravine in which they lay, to where the concealment was better; then going forward, once more he crept from tree to tree, till he could peer down from behind a crag, and see the ruffianly crew, trooping back from the bay to the farm, stand in consultation for a few minutes, when one of their number pointing higher up the valley, they resumed their irregular march.

But there was a stoppage directly, and some confusion, and the sharp-eyed savage saw that one of the women, whom he soon made out to be Katie, had fallen, and that some arrangements were being made to carry her, when a fresh start was made, the poor girl having sunk down, partly from exhaustion, partly overcome by emotion at the sight which greeted her.

Wahika started then, for a few yards below him he heard an agonising exclamation, and he leaped down just in time to throw himself upon Murray, as he was rising to hurry to what must have been instant death.

"No good—no good! Stop; and Wahika get tribe to come and—"

He stopped; but there was a strange look in his eye as he brandished his club, and then held the young man back amongst the leaves, for his strength was but feeble as compared with that of the savage.

"Wahika friend—tribe friends," he said after awhile, during which they had watched the convicts till they disappeared; and they were then about to return to the little ravine, when a low cry, as of some one in distress, smote upon their ears, apparently from the direction of the smouldering house, for they could not see it from where they stood.

There being apparently now no reason for concealment, the convicts being far up in a bend of the Gap, Murray slowly followed the savage down till they could peer through the leaves, when the former uttered a hearty "Thank heaven!" for, kneeling amongst the ashes, his face buried in his hands, and his whole frame shaken by the sobs which burst from his breast, was Mr Meadows, weeping like a child, and uttering disjointed words, as he mourned for the destruction that had come upon this peaceful home.

He did not hear their approach, for he was praying so fervently for those whom he had every reason to suppose dead, that Murray had stiffly knelt by his side and touched him ere he started to his feet; but only to kneel again and embrace his wounded companion as though he had been a son.

"Thank heaven! thank heaven!" he exclaimed fervently; "I thought you were there,"—and he pointed to the smouldering heap close by. "Has any one else escaped? Two of the women are there,"—and he pointed up the valley.

"And one is poor;"—Murray was too weak to overcome his emotion; he could not utter the name.

"I feared so—I feared so," sighed Mr Meadows. "And her mother? Safe? Thank Providence! but let us get away from here; they may come back, and then there will be no mercy. Heaven bless you, my son!" he exclaimed fervently and gratefully to Wahika; for, seeing a gaping wound still bleeding upon the old man's forehead, he had soaked a piece of native mat in the spring hard by, and begun tenderly to bind it up. "And you are a savage!" muttered Mr Meadows half to himself. "How can I preach to such as you, to leave your simple faith, when your white brethren do such deeds as these? No, no!" he cried; "not brethren, but the outcasts of our civilisation, let loose to raven and destroy. Thanks, thanks, my son; heaven bless you! Let us go now, friend Murray, and see those who are saved."

The distance was but short; but, in pain from their injuries, they proceeded but slowly, Wahika stopping and looking back from time to time till they came up to him.

They had to pass the body of poor old Martin Lee; and here Mr Meadows paused, knelt down, took one stiffened hand, kissed it, and then softly replaced it by the old man's side.

"Cut down like the wheat, and gathered into the heavenly garner. A true, blunt, honest Englishman, and a dear friend, Edward Murray."

A tear or two fell upon the face of the inanimate form, as the old minister bent his head over him for a few moments, and then he rose.

“He looks at peace, friend Edward. Would that we could have saved him! I am weak now,” he said, wiping his eyes in a simple undisguised fashion; “but I do not see why I should feel ashamed. Let us go on.”

It was a sad meeting between the widow and the clergyman; but there seemed no time for tears. Katie was in the hands of the convicts, and how was she to be saved?

There was little said that the savage could not comprehend, though he was not so ready at expressing himself; but he said simply, and with an earnestness which bespoke his feeling.

“Wahika go fetch bright flower back; but Wahika only one—men kill, and bright flower of Moa’s Nest not saved.”

“Yes,” said Mr Meadows, “it would be madness to go alone; we must have help and strength. You, Edward Murray, must seek friends in one direction; and, with heaven’s help, I will see poor Lee’s wife into safety, and bring friends from elsewhere to fall upon the rear of these Philistines. Perhaps, too, our dark friend can bring up some aid. Which way will you go, Murray?”

The young man gazed almost reproachfully in his face for a few moments; and then pointed up the valley, in the direction taken by the convicts.

Mr Meadows then turned to Wahika.

“And which way go you, friend?”

“Wahika go with white friend here,” was the reply.

“Almost too daring to be of any avail,” mused Mr Meadows. “Then it is to me alone falls the task of bringing up help.”

They stayed that day in the little ravine, trying to recruit their strength. There was but little difficulty in securing some provisions, for the convicts had been prodigal in the midst of plenty, and there were tokens of their waste in all directions. There were the lowing unmilked kine too, asking to be relieved of their abundance, and eggs in plenty. A little search also placed weapons in the hands of Murray; but Mr Meadows declined to accept the gun offered him by Wahika.

“No,” he said; “I dropped mine when I climbed through the window, and escaped through the outhouse, and I trust I may never have to take one again in hand. I shall not need it—at least, at present, for my duty is to retreat and summon aid.”

That night a grave, hastily scooped out by Wahika, received the body of poor old Martin Lee; and an hour afterwards Mrs Lee was mounted upon Joey, who came from the field where he was grazing at his master’s call, and accompanied by the savage and Edward Murray, Mr Meadows took hold of the bridle and led the way.

At the end of a few hundred yards, the track began to ascend the side of the valley, and Murray stopped.

“Send help as soon as you can, sir,” he said; “and heaven speed you!”

“Heaven speed you too!” said the old man fervently. “It is a desperate hazard you go upon; but I dare not say stay. Break a branch once and again to show your track, and remember that you can do no more now than watch the enemy. You are weak and unable to cope with one, even; so bear in mind that your best way of helping her we love is by stratagem.”

Murray took the cold hand of Mrs Lee, and tried in choking tones to say a word or two of comfort; but she rested the other hand upon his shoulder, and whispered the one word, “Katie!”

“Or death!” muttered Murray in an undertone, and they parted.

Story 3--Chapter XI.

In Pursuit.

Edward Murray knew well enough the truth of the old clergyman’s remarks as he slowly followed Wahika back to the ruined farm, where the savage filled his pouch with such necessaries as he had collected together, intimating his wish that Murray should do the same; and then, once more, they started.

Wahika led, always smoothing the way for his companion; and he pounced from time to time, with every demonstration of satisfaction, upon some object of utility or provision that had been cast aside by the convicts on their march. Such as he could, he carried; the unnecessary things he concealed by the side of the track, taking every step forward with caution, lest too great a display of precipitancy should bring them suddenly upon the halting-place of their enemy.

At last Murray stumbled, and then fell heavily, for exhausted nature could do no more.

Wahika assisted him to a place that he had selected as secure; and then, in spite of Katie’s peril, Nature would have her way, and for some hours, Edward Murray slept, to wake stiff and sore, but refreshed. The wound on his head, too, was not so painful; and he lay for a while in the darkness wondering how he should proceed. The only thing he could

decide upon was that they should endeavour to find out the convicts' plan, and then try, by stratagem, to deliver their prisoners.

He touched the savage upon the shoulder, and he was upon his feet in a moment, bringing food from his pouch, and milk from a bottle; and then, feeling stronger and more fit to encounter the dangers before him, the young man examined, and, for the first time, loaded his gun, the savage nodding approval.

He would then have proceeded, but for the more wary guide, who lifted his finger towards the dark tops of the mountains, above which the stars still glistened, and in his broken English pointed out the advisability of waiting for day.

And it was well that they waited; for within a mile of them, high up in an almost inaccessible rift in the mountain side, the convicts had made their camp, two of their number being left below to act as sentinels; and had Murray proceeded, the chances were that he must have fallen in with them, and perhaps have been taken by surprise.

But as day broke, the native led the way cautiously, till from certain signs he felt convinced that the enemy was near; and motioning Murray to wait, he glided on silently, returning in a short time to conduct the young man with the utmost caution to the side of a rift, when he started, for within fifty yards of him, coolly smoking and talking, sat a couple of the convicts.

His start did not pass unheard, and the men glanced in their direction; but Wahika had chosen a well-sheltered spot, and after a few minutes' anxious peering about, they were apparently satisfied, and resumed their seats upon a block of stone.

A motion of the savage's hand made Murray draw back behind a dense mass of foliage; and then, from his knowledge of the country, intuitively guessing where the party would be, he led his companion for some distance back, and began climbing slowly up and up a way that seemed almost impracticable; the savage uttering more than one half-suppressed exclamation of surprise on finding that the vines and rope-like creepers were, in more than one place, broken away, as though some one had lately passed in that direction; for he did not recall that, a few hours before, he had given an invaluable lesson to another in the art of scaling these natural fortresses. The marks though were unnoticed by Murray, who climbed on and on, till compelled to rest; and then once more on till they reached a point where they could creep to the edge of a precipice; and peering between the fern-leaves, gazed down into a cuplike chasm, where, to the number of twenty or so, the convicts were gathered, some eating, some smoking and drinking, and so near that their voices could be plainly heard.

The savage laughed his satisfaction at the success of his quest; and then, clutching his companion by the shoulder, drew him back behind a screen of foliage; for his quick ear had caught the sound of rustling branches, then a slip as of some one descending from above; a stone fell too, struck the shelf where they had stood but a moment before, rebounded, and plunged down into the leafy sea far beneath.

The savage grasped his club, and his eyes glistened, while the click-click of Murray's gunlock told that he too was prepared; but club and gun were lowered when, the next moment, the pale and scared face of Anthony Bray cautiously appeared from amidst the leaves, which he parted with the barrel of the gun he carried; and then, apparently knowing of the proximity of the convicts, he crawled to the edge of the precipice, and lay there watching them, till he uttered a cry of terror as Wahika glided to his side, and laid his hand upon his arm.

The next instant he had caught sight of Murray, and as the young men's eyes met, Bray read in the stern glance that his treachery was known. Their greeting was sullen. There was no brotherly grasp of the hand, as between two men meeting after being engaged in the same cause, and escaping from a fearful death. But they knew that this was no time for personal enmity, and Murray was the first to speak.

"We are bound on the same mission, Mr Bray, and cannot afford to slight each other's aid; but, by heaven, if I see the slightest offer of treachery again, I will shoot you as I would a dog. Your purpose here makes me forget the past; but look well to the future."

Bray muttered a few words, and then Murray crept once more to the edge of the precipice, and looked down. He was so near that he could have thrown a stone amongst the party; and his heart beat tumultuously as he saw Katie sitting, clinging tightly to a woman by her side, and apparently weeping bitterly. He was so near that it seemed quite possible, as a last resource, that they might lie there in concealment, and with careful aim shoot down the wretches one by one; but his better feelings revolted against such a plan. No, they must use stratagem, and that too as soon as the night fell; for it seemed that it would be practicable to elude the convicts' vigilance, and to take the prisoners from amongst them.

He crept back to Bray and Wahika, and told them his conclusions; when the former seemed almost to resent the proposal, as if it would afford him no pleasure should success attend their efforts; but Wahika muttered "Good," and beckoning to them to follow, led them by a steep and rugged path amongst the ferns, over the next shoulder of the hill, and round to where they could look down into the chasm from the other side.

So dense was the undergrowth, and so precipitous were the rocks, that the convicts appeared to consider themselves in complete safety; for save at the foot of the ravine, no watch was kept, and the young men followed the savage carefully from crag to crag, until they lay in a chasm where they could even overhear the conversation of the ruffians; while more than once a stifled sob from the women made Murray's heart to burn within him.

They were now so close that it seemed almost impossible for them not to be discovered; but hour after hour wore on, during which long consultations were held amongst the more earnest of the men, though the greater part seemed to give themselves wholly up to the riot and drunkenness they considered themselves to have earned. But it seemed that they were of divided counsels; some being for making the present their stronghold, and setting pursuit at

defiance, while they made raids in different directions; others being for proceeding along the coast until they could seize another vessel, and cruise from place to place.

At this juncture, Bray saw Murray's hands playing with the lock of his gun, with whose barrel he covered one of the men whom he saw go up to Katie where she sat; but his aspect of rage gave place to one of surprise as he recognised the face of the convict, and saw that his object was only to press food upon her, which, however, she waved away.

Had they, then, one friend in the camp? It seemed so; for upon a couple of others approaching the poor girl, the first man sturdily bade them go back, and on their refusal, placed himself before them, laughing at their threats, whereupon they drew back; but a cold shudder ran through Murray's frame as one of the ruffians coarsely told the poor girl's defender to wait until night.

Story 3--Chapter XII.

Rescue.

"To wait until night!" Those words kept repeating themselves, as Murray lay there concealed, within but a few yards of Katie, and yet unable to warn her of help being so near.

From time to time Wahika pressed upon him food, and he took it mechanically; for he knew his dire need of strength, and trembled for his weakness when the time should come for the struggle which he knew must be impending.

The sun passed down behind the opposite ridge and still the men lay about, drinking and smoking. Apparently trusting entirely to the security of their position, no guard was now kept, for Murray had recognised the two men from the entrance of the ravine, who had rejoined the party below early in the evening, and at length the darkness came on, for this night the moon was clouded. But the light dresses of Katie and her companion were still discernible, and hour after hour wore on, the only change being that Wahika had glided down like a serpent, after divesting himself of his blanket; and then, slowly and cautiously, each in his inmost heart dreading some foul blow, Murray and Bray followed, till they lay crouching beneath the leaves, so close that not a whisper could have been uttered unheard. Inch by inch they had lowered themselves, trembling as each leaf rustled, and moving only when the conversation was at its loudest.

Could they have stood erect, half a dozen steps would have placed them beside Katie, who, stupefied with grief, still clung to her fellow-captive, save at such times as a rough voice summoned the woman away to bear spirits or a light from one to the other; and at last, when she was returning from such an errand, her progress was arrested, and Murray and Wahika rose to their knees, for they felt that the time for action had come.

The night was dark, but figures crossing the chasm could be distinctly made out, and there was no need for Wahika's pointing finger, for Murray had already made out two men gently creeping towards the sitting figure in her light garments, and another making his way from an opposite direction. Enemies all, they seemed; but it was not so, for the next moment there was the sound of cursing, and a fierce straggle, in the midst of which Katie felt herself roughly clasped, and half carried towards the dense foliage on one side, and before she could check herself, gave vent to a sharp cry.

The cry was nearly proving fatal; for though, at first sight, the three new-comers had been mistaken in the darkness for a portion of their own party, the convicts had now taken the alarm, and with furious shouts they sought each man his weapon.

As they sprang forward, Bray had furiously thrust Murray back, so that he tripped and fell; but recovering himself quickly, he leaped to Katie's side, and his voice reassured her.

"This way," he whispered; but it seemed too late. On three sides there were enemies; but Wahika seized the poor girl's arm, and forced her towards the unthreatened side, dashing the foliage apart; and, more from the boldness of the act than the force of their attack, the young men were left free to follow, Katie's dress guiding them, as the savage drew her rapidly after him, while to the convicts the escape seemed almost incredible. Had they pursued, all efforts on the part of the fugitives would have been vain; but feeling assured that they were attacked by a strong party, they were content for a while to fire at random in the direction taken by their enemies, who were thus enabled to make some little progress before pursuit was attempted.

Using almost superhuman exertions, Murray at last reached Katie's side, panted out a few words of encouragement, and tried to hurry her on; but now the savage stopped short, listened attentively for a few moments, and then turned in another direction, choosing a more arduous upward path, helping to drag the half-fainting girl from crag to crag, but not for far, since it was evident now that the convicts had recovered from their surprise, and were spreading in all directions in pursuit, encouraging each other with shouts as they pressed on.

Twice the fleeing party had to double back, for it seemed that they were being headed; but Wahika was inexhaustible in his knowledge of the ground; and at last he reached once more one of the many little mountain streams, trickling down a steep chasm, whose sides were too precipitous to be scaled; and telling Murray to go first with the trembling girl, he laid his hand on Bray's arm.

"They go—we stop fight," he whispered; but Bray refused.

"Why should not Mr Murray stay, and fight for his lady-love?" he said bitterly.

“No, no, no! Keep with me,” whispered Katie, clinging to Murray’s arm.

Smothering his resentment, Murray slowly, and hardly able to press on himself, helped his tottering charge up the gully. Slow, cruel work, with Bray lingering behind, so as to keep them in sight, and the faithful savage covering their retreat. So far, the convicts had not hit upon the gully; and if they did find out their route, it was a place that two determined men could have held against a score. But though Murray made every effort he was but human; his wound had been a tremendous drain upon his system; and at the end of half a mile of incessant climbing, he sank at Katie’s feet with a groan, saying, “I can go no farther.”

“Mr Bray,” he said huskily, “I am dead beat. You must take my place; but while power is left me to lift my gun, no one shall pass here!”

Bray leaped to Katie’s side in an instant; but she held out her hands to keep him at bay. Murray pressed the poor girl hard to leave him.

“Wahika would protect you,” he said earnestly; “and after a while I could follow.”

“Would you leave *me*?” she whispered.

Murray did not respond; and they waited, listening to the distant shouts—now nearer, and echoing, as if close at hand, then growing more and more faint, when the hearts of the pursued would rise; but only for their spirits to be again damped; for once more it was evident that the enemy were nearing.

It was an agonising time as they sat there, feeling, as it were, that Death, with black and outspread wings, was swooping here and there—now nearer, so that they could almost feel the dull flap of his wings; now farther away. Murray implored his companion to escape.

The answer was ever the same:

“No;” and the question repeated, “Would he go?”—a question that he could not answer. And once more they relapsed into silence, save when the savage mattered a few words, or stole gently down a little way towards the mouth of the gully.

Once Wahika was gone for so long a time, that Katie glanced uneasily at Bray, who followed the savage down, returned, followed him again, and again returned, to stand thoughtfully listening; while Edward Murray seemed to read his thoughts respecting his helplessness, and the little difficulty he would have in ridding himself of a rival.

Could he but tear Katie away, and flee with her higher up the gully, the convicts, upon reaching the spot where they now were, would find the wounded and half-helpless man; and once there were no Edward Murray, Katie might relent—that was, if they escaped.

The young man sighed to himself as he pretty correctly rendered the thoughts of Anthony Bray; and he could not help feeling that he would rather see her free and the wife of Bray, than that she should again fall into the hands of their merciless enemies.

Twice over some movement on the part of Bray made the poor girl cling closer to Murray—more in the character of protector than protected; for a terrible fear came over her that Bray would slay the almost helpless foe to his desires, and then compel her to follow him; and she told herself that she would die first.

“Why does he not return?” she muttered, as she tried to pierce the obscurity below, in her efforts to catch sight of the savage. But fully an hour passed, during which time they could still hear the occasional shout or response of the convicts, as they vainly sought the fugitives. The more eagerly, too, that the freedom from attack had taught them the weakness of the rescuing party.

Suddenly Bray started, and raised his piece; for a figure was seen to rise from some bushes just below them. But a second glance told him that it was Wahika, who had been watching at the mouth of the golly.

“Morning soon—then find,” he said curtly. “Now try get up higher.”

Drinking deeply of the limpid water near at hand, Murray rose to his feet, and, assisted by the others, he managed to scale the rocky barrier. The darkness was intense; but cautiously leading, the savage pressed back the branches, removed heavy stones, and pioneered the way, until he stopped short almost in a cavern, so shut in was the gorge; and then, helping Katie to a place where the trickling water did not reach, he whispered them to sit and rest, setting them the example himself, but without giving any explanation.

As the day approached, for a time the darkness seemed to increase; and they sat on, with strained ears, listening for the signs that should tell of pursuit. Twice only a faint cry came echoing up the chasm; otherwise all was silent.

Murray, as he lay on the stones, was filled with despair, as he thought of his weakness, and the distrust existing in their little camp; and as he tried in vain to look assuringly at Katie, he more than once asked himself how it would end.

Story 3--Chapter XIII.

Wahika’s Stronghold.

The reason for Wahika's last halt was plainly enough marked now that day had dawned. They were in a *cul-de-sac*—a natural fortress, which it must now be their aim to defend against attack. Assault could come but from below, along the narrow winding way of the bed of the stream, up which their assailants, should they trace the little party, would have to climb slowly and arduously, exposed to their fire; and would their ammunition but hold out, Murray felt that those would indeed be daring foes who would force their way up, step by step, along the narrow path.

Could Bray have been trusted, Murray would have felt comparatively safe; but he could not avoid recalling the night of the fire, the cruel blow so treacherously dealt; and it was but rarely that the eyes of the young men met.

Bray, too, had his thoughts upon their position. In spite of his rage, he knew that he would fight to the death in Katie's defence; but it was gall and bitterness to him to see the gentle care she bestowed upon his rival; and more than once, with a vengeful curse, he turned from them to make his way lower down the gully, and sit there brooding over his wrongs.

No sunshine fell where the fugitives sat; but the heights around grew radiant; and poor Katie shuddered as they reminded her of her bright and peaceful home, over which so fearful a change had been brought.

Feeling the impossibility of making farther progress, Murray was surprised to see Wahika, after a little reconnoitring, begin to climb the face of the precipice, finding foothold in tiny crevices, and grasping at tufts of grass, till he had surmounted an almost perpendicular portion of the face of the rock. But his object soon became plain: some thirty feet up there appeared to be a shelf and a dark opening, but so full of verdure that it was impossible to make out its extent; and here, it seemed, that the savage intended to make his stronghold, for, having reached the shelf, he drew out his knife, and, in a very short time, from the hanging creepers had woven a kind of rough rope, sufficiently strong to bear the weight of his companions; and this he at length let down.

Katie shrank from it at first; but a whisper from Murray sufficed. The loop made was passed over her, so that she was seated within it; a couple of handkerchiefs bound her securely, lest her courage should fail; and then the young men watched her, trembling, as Wahika stood striding on the crag above, his brow knit, and the muscles upon his arms standing out like knotted cords, as he, by sheer strength, hand-over-hand, drew up the frightened girl.

Twice Murray, his heart beating rapidly, stood with outstretched hands to break her fall; for it seemed that Wahika had over-rated his powers, and that he must be drawn over the edge. But slowly and steadily he hauled up his rough cord, Katie swinging to and fro, and clinging with closed eyes the while, till by an effort the savage drew her to the edge; and the next instant she was in safety.

In a few minutes the rope was lowered; and Murray tied to it the guns and such provisions as still remained; and when, once more, the rope descended, Bray seized it, and half drawn, half climbing, reached the top, just as a shout from below told that not only had the gully been discovered, but that he had been seen.

The next instant a bullet flattened itself against the stone, a little below the edge, and fell at Murray's feet, while the rocks above echoed and re-echoed the report with a roll as of thunder.

Wahika would have lowered the line again; but Bray held to it, and kept him back; for the temptation was strong upon him to leave Murray to his fate. They had there, where he was, the arms and provisions; and it was impossible for the convicts to reach them. Help must come sooner or later; and then there was the future. Should he not be successful in winning Katie, he would be revenged, and he would not have the agony of seeing her in his rival's arms. The temptation was strong, and he yielded to it. Murray might die. But Wahika, too, was strong, and heedless of a couple more shots fired, he struggled hard for the rope, sending Bray back upon the precipice, so that it seemed that both must fall; but by an effort Bray recovered himself, and the savage was forced back; when, with a harsh cry, he loosened his hold of the rope, and darted to Katie, whose agitation had alarmed him, for she had seemed as if about to leap down to her lover.

But if such had been her intention, Wahika restrained her, pulling her down into shelter; and, seizing his gun, he took rapid aim, fired; and one of the convicts who was about to fire at Murray bounded into the air, and then fell into the little trickling stream.

Imitating his example, Bray too fired; and another man sank into a sitting posture, and then crawled into the shelter of the rocks; while half-a-dozen shots fired at the defenders of the gully flattened themselves on the rock, or dislodged little clouds of dust and stones.

Knowing his peril, Murray sank at the first discharge, and behind a mass of rock crouched with anxious heart, waiting for the coming of his executioners. For it seemed to him that, sooner or later, they would dash on, ignorant of the inaccessible mass of rock, and then, in their rage and disappointment, kill him upon the spot.

He smiled bitterly as he thought of this new act of treachery; and as he watched the barrels protruded above his head, he would have felt little surprise had that of Bray covered him; and a thrill of rage ran through him as he thought of his helpless position—weak and unarmed, and waiting for his end.

But would not aid come? The news of such an outrage, as spread by Mr Meadows, must bring the settlers of the whole district down to the destruction of the villainous crew. But would the aid come in time to save Katie?

As for Bray, he lay there watching the coming on of the convicts, as they now grew more cautious, and darted from stone to stone for protection. Twice he withheld his hand when he might have slain an enemy; for he told himself savagely that it was not for him to stay them from reaching his rival. And then as to Wahika—what was he, that he should oppose his will? There was his home in ruins; but he could build another; his cattle and sheep were uninjured; and here, miles away from another station, and with her friends cut off, Katie must gladly accept of his protection and become his wife; and the past would soon be forgotten. He knew nothing of Mrs Lee's escape, nor of the sought-for

aid; and silent and thoughtful he lay there, almost a spectator of the little siege.

Twice his barrel covered Murray, and he took deadly aim at the young man; but the blenching was not on the sailor's side. He saw his peril; but he trembled not, but gazed full up at his rival with a calm untroubled mien, almost a smile of contempt upon his lip, when the fierce eyes of his enemy were withdrawn, the barrel of the gun pointed in another direction, and Bray's conscience told him that he dared not fire.

Meanwhile precipice and crag sent thundering back the echoes of the discharged guns; for every time Wahika, from his more exposed position, showed hand or head, bullet after bullet was sent whistling through the air; but except being struck and bleeding from the rocky splinters, he was but little injured. Not so, though, his enemies; for more than one poor wretch, on rising to fire, from what he conceived to be a place of safety, received his death wound, and staggered down the gully, to fall with a crash over some fragment of rock, and then dye the streamlet with his heart's blood. Now the strife would seem to cease, and attacker and defender would remain in concealment; but only for the convicts to renew their assault, coming in their rage nearer and nearer, until, but for Wahika's well-plied gun, they must have reached the spot where Murray lay sheltered by the rock.

He did not want for food; for there was a portion of the provision dropped at his feet; but while the stream trickled close by where he sat, and he could quench his thirst and lave his heated brow, those above him on the rock suffered severely from want of water, as the sun beat down upon their heads, and the stone grew hotter and hotter, till the verdure around them flagged and drooped.

The times of cessation were, if possible, more trying than those of the active firing; for when the enemy was invisible, the dread was always great that they had scaled the sides of the gorge, and would before long reach them by some side-path, or, climbing far above where they lay hid, would hurl down huge stones and crush them as they sought in vain to avoid each ponderous mass. But no such thoughts seemed to trouble Wahika, who, with his gun-barrel commanding the pass, lay there watchful and patient, the barrel at times growing so hot that it seemed within the range of probability that the charge might explode. In his rough way he comprehended to a great extent the cause of the enmity between the young men, and placing Katie in a rift, half chasm, half cavern, behind where he knelt, he kept a double watch, and waited patiently for the help that he, too, felt must soon come. As the heat grew more intense, reflected back as it was from the rocks, but never reaching the hollow where Murray was concealed, the savage picked and chewed leaves to allay his thirst, offering some, too, to the trembling girl behind him.

The shades of evening began at last to fall, and to Murray it was an anxious time, for he rightly guessed that the convicts would take advantage of the obscurity to close up and attack their enemies hand to hand; for since daylight had enabled them to discover the gully by which the fugitives had escaped, every check received had tended to madden them and make them reckless of consequences. Not that they dreaded attack themselves—the country had seemed too sparsely inhabited; therefore as each man fell, his comrades had sworn the most binding oath each to avenge him; and as soon as darkness closed in, they began to creep cautiously from rock to rock, higher up the gully. In spite of their caution, though, they had not made much progress, when a heavy stone was dislodged, and, as if in consequence, a gun was seen to send forth its messenger of death, and the convicts once more halted.

Story 3--Chapter XIV.

Attack and Defence.

It was bitter work sitting there beneath the shelter of that stone, striving with his thoughts; and Edward Murray's heart sank as the darkness increased, and he reflected on his situation. Yet, in spite of his anxiety of mind, that day's rest had not been without its good effects. The stiffness had to some extent worn off, and at last, when the night had quite closed in, and the darkness rendered such a proceeding safe, Murray rose, and began to search along the side and face of the precipice for a spot whence he might contrive to scale the crag, and reach the shelf where his companions were concealed.

He moved cautiously, for it struck him that he had heard the sound of approaching enemies in the gully below, though the darkness was too profound for anything to be seen; but though he tried all along to find the spot where Wahika has ascended, it was in vain, and he turned to regain the spot where he had lain, when, almost simultaneously, he heard the rolling down of a dislodged stone, and the sharp crack of a rifle, when a bullet whizzed by his ear, and seemed to strike the spot where he had so lately rested, the loose stones flying in all directions, and then pattering down.

A pang shot through Murray's breast, as he thought of whose hand must have fired that shot; and then listening for a while for sounds from below, he stepped back to the face of the precipice, eager now to confront the treacherous villain who thus again sought to take his life, after having threatened it twice before during the day. He passed along the face of the rock, stumbling heavily amidst the loose stones; and then his hand encountered something that made his heart leap, and seizing it with both hands, he climbed slowly and painfully, higher and higher, till his feet rested on a loftier ledge; and he stopped, panting, and wondering whose was the hand that had let down the rope. Was it Wahika? or was it a fresh act of treachery on the part of Bray? Was he to climb nearly to the top, and then feel his support suddenly slacken, that he might fall a heavy, helpless mass upon the cruel rocks beneath? He could not help it; he feared that it was so, and for a few moments felt disposed to slide down again. But no! only a few feet above him he knew that Katie needed his protection. He would persevere at all hazards; and once more the rough rope quivered beneath his weight, as slowly he clambered higher and higher, till with a violent effort he got one knee upon the edge, and grasped a tuft of herbage; when, just as a hand was gliding down his arm—that of the savage—there rang from beneath a loud shout—six or eight shots were fired from close at hand—and then, with the aid suddenly withdrawn, Murray's knee slipped from the edge, and he had only time to loose the slackened rope, and force his bleeding fingers into the crevices of the rock, to save himself from falling.

The darkness was awful; the tension upon his weakened arms such as he could hardly bear; but finding some slight support for his feet, he continued to hang on until he had somewhat recovered from the shock, and then made another effort to save himself. He dared not call for aid, lest he should point out his position to the convicts. But his faint whisper was heard in the dead silence, and in an instant he felt himself clutched, just as his hands were slipping over the stone, and he felt that he must fall.

That grasp stayed him; but, at the same moment, a heavy foot struck at his hands, and it seemed that in the darkness a struggle was going forward upon the ledge. The fragments lying loose were thrown down, and then came a couple more shots, a loud shriek, and then a heavy, sickening fall upon the rocks beneath.

A strange, deathly feeling crept over Edward Murray—a feeling of horror and weakness. His hands seemed to relax, his arms to become powerless; and though a voice he well knew whispered to him in anguished tones to try once more, his attempt was without success. He seemed only to sink lower; one foot slipped from the tuft upon which it had rested, and though he tried hard to regain the hold, it was in vain. He knew that it was Katie who pressed down his hands into the chink where they now rested; but it seemed to him that he was drawing her over with him in his vain efforts; and that in a few more moments, she, as well as himself, would be crushed on the points beneath.

Her encouraging whisper came, close to his ear, to try again. But he was exhausted and helpless, till he felt his arm seized, dragged almost out of the socket, and then he lay motionless upon the ledge, with a hand grasping his on one side, and the sound as of some one panting hard from exertion on the other.

Twice again came the crash and rattle of bullets striking above their heads; but they were too well-sheltered for harm to befall them, now that their enemies were close beneath, evidently trying hard to find some means of ascent, while Katie’s hand trembled as she listened to the corses and threats which defiled the quiet of the night.

As he lay, each moment recovering strength, Murray tried in vain to interpret the meaning of what had taken place in the darkness, for he had not seen the tussle between Wahika and Bray as the latter had furiously sought to thrust his rival from his hold. The intense darkness had prevented his making out the meaning of the sounds he had heard; but when he crept forward, and found out that Murray had nearly reached the ledge, his rage knew no bounds, and, but for Wahika’s devotion, the clinging hold would have been destroyed. The volley from below did the rest; and there, close beneath the cliffs, lay the body of Bray, shot through the heart, and insensible to the farther cruelties practised by the convicts now in revenge for their losses.

The silence upon the ledge, though, soon lent support to Murray’s suspicions; but he said nothing, except whispering to Wahika an inquiry as to the possibility of an escape, but only to learn that there was none.

Another rattling volley startled them; but apparently feeling now that their efforts only ended in waste of ammunition, the convicts ceased firing, and, for the rest of the night, save an occasional whisper, the silence was oppressive. But there was not the agony of spirit Murray had before suffered. Two soft hands were now clasping his; and when all hope of relief was gone, he thought, as they sat there waiting for the day, that they could still die together.

But he was hopeful yet. There was the prospect of help coming through Mr Meadows; and he told his thoughts to the trembling girl.

“But would they find this gully?” was the response, to which he could only speak hopefully.

The sound of Wahika reloading a gun made the young man ask for a piece, which, with the much-lightened horn and pouch, was pushed into his hands, and, with knitted brow, he sat still, waiting for the light, feeling stronger each hour, and determined to give a good account of more than one assailant, before finger should be laid upon the sleeping form at his side.

For now, completely worn out, and feeling herself in comparative security, the poor girl’s head had sunk lower and lower, until it had rested upon her breast, and she slept.

At last, morning again, bright and glowing. Murray felt that if they could only hold the convicts at bay, that would be sufficient. The help must come soon; and if they could avoid farther bloodshed, he should be thankful. But he knew that all must depend upon the actions of their assailants, and he looked about anxiously now, to see the state in which they, the besieged, would be.

Wahika had told him that man could not climb the sides of the gully; but the savage had not allowed for the possibility of one or two daring spirits climbing to a height wherefrom they could command their place of refuge, and render it untenable for any length of time; and it was with no little anxiety that Murray saw that, from the first, faint light, the convicts had been carefully trying the sides, and that now a couple of men were slowly crawling up from crag to crag to a projection similar to that on which the besieged rested, and from which, while finding shelter themselves, they would be able to fire down upon those at the end of the gully.

There was no time for consideration—it was life for life; and having turned to see whether the savage had made out the new danger, Murray took careful aim, fired, and had the mortification of seeing a puff of dust close by one of the convicts’ heads as the bullet struck the stone, while the shot sent by Wahika had no better effect.

A loud shout of derision greeted their failure; and as hands were raised in loading, shot after shot was discharged at the ledge, but also without effect. Wahika was first ready to fire again. Murray’s hand trembled so from excitement that he was long in preparing; and then they took aim again at the uppermost convict, who they found, to their dismay, had gained the shelf, and was reaching down to help his companion, who was toiling patiently after him. Two steps, a strong drawing up of the hands, and he was within reach, so that he could grasp the other, and in another minute destruction would have been certain for the fugitives, when simultaneously Murray and Wahika discharged

their pieces, and Katie hid her face in her hands, for there was a strange surging movement in the higher convict, who pulled his companion upward for a few inches, and then seemed to bow forward, gliding over the edge of the precipice, the two falling from crag to crag, full sixty feet, to roll over at last, crushed and helpless, among the ferns and long grass.

A cry of rage followed this defeat; and darting from behind a stone, another man began fiercely to scale the side, climbing actively till he had nearly reached the same height as his companions, and then, escaping a couple of bullets, taking a leap which landed him upon a jutting mass, behind which he glided; but the next moment his gun-barrel was raised, with his cap thereon, by way of signal to his companions, who greeted it with a cheer. Then Murray saw it withdrawn, and an ominous silence followed.

But the suspense was not of long duration; for before Murray or the savage could see sufficient of their enemy to take an aim, a puff of smoke seemed to jet out from the rock, and Murray was conscious of a sharp twinge on the shoulder, a bullet having passed through his coat and grazed the skin. He remained motionless though, his eye glancing along the barrel of his gun, as he waited for a good opportunity for delivering his shot, but in vain. Twice or thrice he saw the motion of a lifted arm, as of one loading his piece, and then again came a shot, and the puff of smoke, only visible as it darted outward, and then gently floated up on the still morning air.

This bullet was wider of the mark, but a dull feeling of despair seized upon Murray, as, leaving his gun, he glided back to where Katie crouched, telling himself that he could not die with her so close at hand, without a farewell.

No words, though, were uttered, as he took the weeping girl to his heart; and then, softly unclasping the arms that tightened round his neck, he left her, whispering the words, “Pray for us!”

As Murray retook his place, another bullet almost instantly struck up the splinters of stone, blinding him for a few minutes, and compelling him to wipe the blood from his face.

It seemed that Wahika was not within sight of their enemy, for no shot had been aimed at him; and now, with a low-muttered exclamation of resentment, he crawled to his companion’s side, and with him watched in vain for an opportunity to fire. They could see again the raised arm above the rock as the ramrod was driven into the piece; then came the puff of smoke, there was a dull thud by Murray’s side, and, springing up with a cry of rage, the savage shook his piece fiercely for an instant in the direction of his foe, and then fell, rolling to the back of the ledge, bleeding profusely.

In spite of his efforts, a despairing groan burst from Murray’s breast as he saw his faithful ally gasping upon the rock, his teeth set with anguish, and the tide of life welling from a wound in his shoulder. But, after the first cry of rage and pain, no sound escaped the savage, and he lay passive; while, between them, Murray and the girl did what they could to stop the effusion of blood, for the bullet had passed completely through his shoulder.

Cheer after cheer had greeted this success, and half-a-dozen shots were fired in a volley at the face of the rock, but only to bring down a shower of stones; and on turning once more to regain his place, to his horror, Murray made out that the convict, elated by his victory, and missing both of his enemies, had climbed a little higher, so as to better command the ledge, forgetful that he was exposing himself to his enemy’s aim.

Just then Murray once more appeared in sight, when the startled wretch dropped to his former position, but not quite in so secure a fashion, for his fall swept down a portion of the foliage that had before concealed him; and as two reports rang out almost as one, Murray had the satisfaction of seeing a hand thrown up, and the convict’s gun fall clattering down into the gully.

Murray loaded again as expeditiously as possible; but seeing that his antagonist was helpless, he refrained from firing another shot, reserving it for the next who should attempt to scale the gully-side, and it was not long before he had an opportunity; but his aim was bad, and he had the misery of seeing another daring fellow climb to the rock, and then coolly shelter himself behind his comrade’s body.

Watching attentively his enemy’s movements, Murray prepared to recharge his piece; but once more his heart sank, for he had sent his last bullet winging its way; and on turning to Wahika, he found that the charge in the savage’s gun was the last that he, too, possessed.

There was nothing for it but to withdraw into such shelter as he could reach—little enough; for the fresh man, more energetic even than his disabled fellow, kept on firing furiously, but without effect; while terribly unnerved by this enforced inactivity, the horrors of thirst now attacked afresh the occupants of the ledge, the wounded savage’s sufferings seeming to be intense, as he turned his dull eyes from one to the other, as if asking the help they could not give.

The sun rose higher and higher; and, save the occasional shout of directions to the man on the rock, the convicts preserved an almost unbroken silence. But, suddenly, Murray saw three or four begin to dart from stone to stone, as if in retreat, and descend the gully; but too unguarded an exposure of himself brought a bullet whizzing by his ear, and he felt, with justice, that those who had gone had probably departed on a foraging expedition, while they were to lie there and die.

“Would no help come? Had there not now been ample time?” he asked himself, as he gazed at poor Katie’s parched white lips. Their thirst was terrible, while their sufferings were like those of Tantalus; for, in full view, they could see the cold water trickle from stone to stone, and drop plashing into the rocky basin beneath their feet.

What should he do? Should he leave her to fall alive into the hands of the convicts, or should he—

He covered his face with his hands and groaned, as the bright scene of the happy home—the rifled nest—came

flashing through his memory.

“Don’t heed me, Katie,” he whispered, as he felt his hands drawn away from his face, to be kissed and pressed to a tender throbbing heart. “Don’t heed me. I’m weak and childish with my wounds, and it unmans me to see you in such peril.”

“Hush, hush,” whispered the poor girl; “do not grieve. It cannot be very hard to die—not very. See there, how poor Wahika, who has fought so nobly, seems to bear his fate; for he is going, Ned,” she continued; and she pointed to the glazing eyes and motionless form at their side. “If that poor savage can die so peacefully, cannot we, who have received so much greater light, pass away even as gently as he?”

The young man sighed heavily, as he pressed her again and again to his breast, but he could not speak.

“Will they kill us quickly, Ned?” she went on. “I hope so now; for things seem strange, darling, and I want you to hold me tightly—O, so tightly; for it is as though I were being dragged away; and I can see dear father beckoning to me, and—Yes, yes; I’m coming!” Looking up suddenly in Murray’s face, she kissed him tenderly. “Good-night, father dear!” she murmured; “it was a dream, a troubled dream; and my head, my head—”

The heat had now grown insufferable, and the silence down the gully that of death—so complete, that when, as Katie lay there with her head upon Murray’s breast, she started and laughed a little happy-sounding laugh, it seemed to be repeated from the mountain side.

“There, there!” she muttered gently; “I can sleep now; but it was terrible—yes, it was terrible—such dreams are bad. Poor Ned! his face all crimsoned, and his hands blackened with powder. But he was fighting for me—for me whom he loves—and—Yet did they not kill him?—did they not leave him in the burning—Ned!” she added, starting, as it were, into sensibility again, and gazing at him with terror-stricken eyes, “what was it? What did it mean? Was it real?”

Then she trailed off again into a broken incoherent murmur, now lifting her parched lips to his, then hiding her face in her hands; but these fits of delirium were succeeded by moments of calm.

Hour after hour, Murray crouched there—alone now, he told himself, for poor Katie’s mind seemed to have passed away. She had borne up bravely, but her sufferings had been greater than she could bear; and Murray knew that if the prayed-for help came not soon, there would be nothing for him to do but to meet the bullets ready for his breast, for all would be over, and the tragedy of Golden Gap complete.

Story 3--Chapter XV.

Seeking Aid.

Slowly up the sheep-track toiled the minister’s pony with its sad burden.

Seeing how painful was any attempt at consolation to the stricken woman, Mr Meadows dropped behind, thoughtfully gazing around from time to time, and whenever from a turn of the road there was a view of the rifled hut, pausing to take a long and sorrowful look at the ruins of the once happy home. But not once did he draw the attention of Mrs Lee to the scene.

How he thought of the quiet Eden-like aspect of the place as he had descended that toilsome way; the picturesque house, with its sheep and cattle dotted about; but now, though the scene was the same, and a clump of trees often hid from view the ruined house, yet how changed all seemed to his weary gaze!

Catching the pony’s bridle, when he had regained his place by its side, he began to try and hurry its pace, but without effect. Making, therefore, a virtue of necessity, they trudged slowly on until, with a sigh of relief, the ravine which led over the summit was reached, the view of Golden Gap shut out, and the next valley beginning to open before them.

What should he do? Go from station to station, telling the terrible news, and summoning the settlers to take arms for the purpose of crushing an enemy that might assault each farm in turn, or hurry on to the settlement at Kaitaka Bay, and there spread the alarm?

His reason told him that this latter would be the slower process, while if he trusted to the settlers in these far-off regions, the news would set them aflame, and they would muster readily. There would be no cumbrous arrangements for the expedition, but each man would seize his piece and mount horse, ready to join the little levy, and help to drive the invader from the neighbourhood of his home—the home which each had won for himself from the wilderness, and which was now in danger from these marauders.

He halted for a while by the side of one of the many streams, pressing upon his companion food and rest beneath the shady foliage, and watched her in the hope that sleep would visit the weeping woman—a short halt being absolutely necessary, on account of the ruggedness of their path, the excessive heat in the ravines, and the distance they had to travel.

Seeing, however, that Mrs Lee’s thoughts were wholly upon bringing rescue to her child, they were soon again upon their way, and before many hours were over, receiving the hearty welcome of a bluff settler, who with his wife and child stood at his door to receive the travellers.

“Glad to see you, Mrs Lee,” he exclaimed. “And where’s Martin? Parson Meadows, too! But what’s wrong? Why, you’ve got a cut on the head there, and—what does it all mean?”

Mr Meadows led him aside, wondering, as he saw Mrs Lee throwing herself sobbing into his wife's arms. The business was soon explained, and the settler's hearty English face grew stern and overcast.

"Heaven preserve us!" he muttered. "Poor Martin Lee! and it might have been here first! But are you in earnest, parson? Convicts?—landed? What should they come here for?"

"Spoil!—plunder!—desolation!" replied Mr Meadows.

The settler drew his guest into the house, forced him into a chair, and then dashed out of the room, shouting to a couple of his men. Ten minutes after, two stout well-mounted fellows galloped off in different directions.

"Mr Meadows," said the settler, returning to where he had left his visitor, "I couldn't go myself and leave them, or I'd have been one of those to gallop off; but the news will spread fast, and by morning we shall have a gathering here, I hope, that shall crush out these blood-thirsty locusts. Don't think me unneighbourly that I did not go myself."

"A man's first worldly duty is to his wife and children, friend Lawler," said Mr Meadows. "I blame you not, for we may perchance even yet have to fight for them before help comes."

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed the settler; but he took down with nervousness fowling-piece and rifle, and began to wipe and oil them ready for service.

"I'd almost ask you to help in a time of need like this," he continued, "but for your cloth."

"Help, friend Lawler! Yes, I'll help; for I have already turned man of war in defence of the Moa's Nest, and am afraid that I did some mischief amongst these men you call locusts; but they deserved it all, I fear."

"Fear, parson!" exclaimed the other. "I would that you had had the scoundrels in a row, so that one bullet would have killed the lot! It would have been the best message of peace you ever sent through the district."

"But had I not better ride in some other direction to summon help? If you could lend me another horse, I would gladly go: Joey, my pony, is slow, and not suited to the work."

The settler mused for a few moments.

"You might ride to Black Rock!" he returned. "It will be a dark journey, and a long one; but the Allens would come to a man, and all stanch fellows, who can use a rifle."

"Put on the saddle, and give me a morsel of bread; for no time should be lost. You will be kind to our poor afflicted sister."

"Kind!" was the reply, in such a tone that the clergyman smiled gently, and pressed the rough hand extended to him.

Half-an-hour after, he was in the saddle and galloping in the direction of Black Rock.

He was no mean horseman, and mile after mile was left behind, till the darkness and the increasing difficulties of the road compelled him to go more slowly—at a rate, indeed, that but ill accorded with the impatience of his spirit, now that he was in some degree rested and refreshed. For, during the early part of his journey from the Moa's Nest, he had suffered from a strange feeling of oppression, due to his late sufferings; but this was fast wearing off. And now, troubled in mind about the fate of those he sought to save, he once more pushed on, till the broken ground again compelled him to draw rein.

Long residence, and occasional visits from station to station, had made him pretty familiar with the roads; and as the horse picked its way along the stony part they were passing, he began to calculate how many men could be mustered; how long it would be before help could be afforded; and whether that help would be in time.

He pressed his horse forward as these last thoughts came, until he was again progressing at a long swinging gallop. He had been some three or four times to Black Rock, but not by this road, which was not familiar to him; but, keeping to the track, he pressed on till it seemed to end in a stony wilderness, when he once more had to draw rein; for the rugged path required careful riding. Here the track seemed almost lost; but just in front two valleys opened out, and in his directions his host had told him to take the left—no, the right—no, the left. Was it to the left? His head must be weak and confused, he told himself; for the settler had explained exactly and carefully the route he should follow.

He grew excited as he recalled the importance of his making speed, and at last drew up, pained and troubled. He essayed to go a little way along the valley to the right, but in a doubtful fashion; and, drawing rein at the end of a mile, he rode hastily back, feeling assured that he was wrong; and on reaching the headland that separated the valleys, he urged his steed onward, peering eagerly in advance the while, in search of some tokens of civilised man.

He was angry with himself for the mistake he had made—wasting minutes that might prove to have been of inestimable value; but he felt that he must soon reach the settlement now, since it was situated in the bottom of the valley, and could not be missed even by a traveller by night.

On past long park-like sweeps of rich land, varied by portions where the valley closed in till huge nestling crags, crowned with glorious vegetation, made darker the way he traversed, and seemed threatening to topple over upon the traveller; but still no signs of civilisation: no shepherd's hut, no folding hurdles, no cattle—all solitary and grand. Twice the idea occurred to him that he must, after all, be wrong; but he rejected or crushed down the thought, and hurried his horse along; for it had begun to show signs of fatigue.

Then Mr Meadows allowed the reins to fall upon the poor beast's neck, while he tried to think out the best course to

pursue.

But little reflection sufficed to make him understand his position—he had been mistaken in the route he was to have pursued. He sighed heavily as he acknowledged his failing; for it was but too true. With Katie Lee in the hands of the convicts, and that young man awaiting the succour he was to bring, he had wandered from the right path, and travelled miles upon miles out of his way.

Story 3--Chapter XVI.

Collecting the Levy.

John Lawler barricaded his place as strongly as he could for the night; and then, with loaded gun and rifle by his side, he awaited the return of the messengers. He felt that there was not much cause for fear; but he determined to watch and wait.

Soon after reaching the hospitable place, Mrs Lee had sunk back in her chair, faint and exhausted.

It was anxious work for the master of the house, watching alone, with the knowledge that a terrible danger might at any time come upon his home. As the darkness came on, sounds, heretofore passed unnoticed, seemed to have an ominous import. Each time a dog barked the watcher started, and tried to pierce the distant gloom, seeing in every tree an enemy, and a lurker behind every bush.

After a while, watching in the silence, he started; for his wife had stolen to his side, begging to be allowed to stay with him, since Mrs Lee slept heavily, and she feared to be alone.

John Lawler tried to persuade her to go; but not energetically. And then the couple watched on, shivering at every sound, until there came, from a distance, the tramp of a horse, at a slow weary pace; and at last one of the settler’s own beasts made its way into the yard, and then into the familiar stable by the side.

Lawler went out, to find that the animal was saddled and bridled; but on leading it into the yard, he found that it halted on one of its forelegs.

“Must have fallen lame,” he muttered; “and Sam has gone on, thinking the poor brute would find its way back.”

Another hour’s watching, and then came again the slow pacing of a horse; but this time there was a man leading it; and upon his coming up, Lawler heard that the horse had stumbled in the dark, fallen, and thrown his rider heavily, the poor fellow having been hardly able to make his way back to the station.

Then came more watching, hour after hour, till daylight began to chase away the dim shadows of night.

John Lawler’s spirits rose as the sun sent its warm rays once more over the brightened earth; but he shuddered as he thought that perhaps that night the home that he had been years in winning from the wilderness might become a blackened ruin.

Hour after hour passed but no gathering party of neighbours clustered round; and though Lawler climbed from time to time the hill behind his house, there was no sign of Sam.

After all these hours, surely, he thought, some neighbours might have come down to his help. Supposing that his place had been attacked, it would have been by this time a heap of blood-stained ashes. His brow knit as he watched, here for enemies, there for friends, with none to meet his eye, and the lines on his brow told the inquietude of his mind. At last, maddened with anxiety, he summoned his wife, had the two lamed beasts and Mr Meadow’s pony brought out, and prepared to mount the two women, and flee farther inland, to where there were friends.

“I’d stop and fight to the last gasp for my bit of property, Nell,” said Lawler to his wife, “if it wasn’t for you and the child.”

“No, no; let’s go,” she replied, as if fearing that he might stay.

The few arrangements being made, the little caravan had prepared to start, when a cheery shout from the men made Lawler shade his eyes, and his heart leapt up as he saw two mounted men, each carrying a gun, come cantering up.

“Hallo!” exclaimed one. “Just off out—pilgrimage to Egypt, eh? And Mrs Lee, too! How are you all? Bad job, though; for we wanted a rest and feed for the horses. S’pose we can have that all the same?”

John Lawler laid his hand upon the saddle of the speaker, and looking wonderingly in his face, he said:

“What! didn’t the news reach you last night?”

“News?” echoed the other.

Lawler drew him down, and whispered in his ear, so that the drooping woman upon the horse should not hear again of the horrors that had devastated her home.

“Good God!” exclaimed the new-comer. “But have you sent out for help?”

“Yes,” said Lawler; “three messengers. One miscarried; and I’ve had no news yet of the others.”

A short conference was held as the new-comers, with darkened brows, learned more fully the state of affairs, and discussed it with John Lawler—earnestly, too, since each had a stake in the district, and knew full well that his might be the next turn to suffer as had suffered the family of Martin Lee.

Five minutes after, Lawler's wife was clinging to him, begging that, for the child's sake, he would accompany her to a place of safety; but although torn to the heart, the settler held firm. In a short consultation, it had been decided to let the women proceed, accompanied by Lawler's crippled man, while the three remained to garrison the little farm, and cover the retreat of the fugitives, agreeing that, if hard pressed, they could but follow them.

"We must stay and help one another," said Lawler gloomily. "You attend to poor Lee's wife; we'll see if we cannot save his child."

"But could not he stay?" said his wife piteously, as she pointed to the man.

"Would you have your husband turn coward, Nell?" Lawler said gently. "Should we not say that man was contemptible who kept back from us in time of need? Be a woman! There will be help soon; and it would never do now for neighbours to come at my asking, and find me gone. Half an hour ago it was different, and there was good excuse; now there is none."

Mrs Lawler uttered no complaint; only one sob rose from her breast as she hung on her husband's neck; and then, with the man leading the horses, the party passed slowly out of sight.

"Heaven be praised!" said one of the new-comers. "One seems free to act now."

After a little consideration, it was determined that nothing better could be done than for one of the party in turn to act as scout, and watch the ravine leading towards the Gap, the only way by which danger could approach; while the others patiently waited the succour that was expected.

Story 3--Chapter XVII.

The Start.

Hour after hour the little rescuing party waited for further assistance; for sooner or later they well knew that there would be a strong gathering; but night was fast approaching before two horsemen were seen; and of these one, Mr Meadows, had to be lifted from his horse, and then supported into the house.

"Better soon, friends all," he said feebly. "I've been hard tried lately." And then he sank into a chair, and would have fainted, but for some brandy. "I've proved a sorry messenger, friend Lawler," he said after a pause. "You see, I was a good deal knocked about at the Nest, and I took the wrong track, and was lost; and, but for my horse, I fear there would have been no help through me. I was confused and weak, and not myself; but don't be hard upon me."

"I came on with him directly," said the fresh arrival; "and I've sent round in all directions; but it will be some hours before more help can come."

But still this was a reinforcement; for the settler was well armed, and loaded with ammunition; while, just as it grew dark, there came the sharp "thud, thud" of horses' hoofs, and Lawler's first messenger hastily came up with three neighbours, armed, and eager to assist.

"The mare fell lame," said the man, "before we'd gone three miles; so I turned her loose, and tramped it."

"And I was cattle-driving," said one. "And I at the sheep-station," said another. While the third had been ill in bed; but forgot his pains when the dire news was brought.

Again there was a council of war; and it was decided that nothing better could be done than to wait for daylight and farther reinforcements.

"Don't you think so, Lawler?" said one of his friends, noticing that the settler looked gloomy and discontented.

"Yes, I think so," he said. "It's quite right—quite right; but I could not help thinking of those poor creatures waiting for our help, and wondering, hour after hour, why no aid comes. But we have done our best, neighbours, and I must agree that it would be folly to go on now in the dark, and weak-handed; for I suppose they would still outnumber us, according to Mr Meadows's account."

"It's giving them a few more hours to live," said one of the last arrivals grimly; "for I'm afraid they will not meet with much mercy."

"Nor give much," said another. And then he made a motion to the rest to preserve silence; for Mr Meadows was listening, half shuddering, to the remarks made.

"What do you advise, parson?" said one, who had not yet spoken. "You know most about this sad business. Should we go or stay?"

"Friend Laing," said Mr Meadows feebly, "I would that you had not asked me that question. With the thoughts of that poor lamb in the clutches of those ravening wolves, my heart says, Go—go at once, and strike to save her. But then reason saith, Would you send these men—fathers of children, dear husbands of loving and anxious wives—to encounter useless peril, and come to ruin and death, for want of a little care? But I think this: the miles are long

between this and the Moa's Nest. Suppose that we proceeded with caution during the dark cool hours, so as to be ready to pursue the task at daybreak? One of your number could stay here, ready to bring on the rest of our friends when they arrive; while, without proceeding to attack, we might draw off the attention of the convicts, as well as succour Edward Murray and the brave savage, who must be faint and weary long ere this—if they still live," he muttered to himself.

The advice was received with general tokens of satisfaction; but when it came to the question who should stay behind, no man displayed his willingness to undertake that tame part of the duty. One suggested that Mr Meadows would be unable to accompany them; but he did not know the stanch spirit of the old man, who sturdily declared his intention of following.

"This food and rest were all I required," he said; "and I shall be no hindrance to you. My pony will bear me; and if I should be left behind for a while, I daresay I can overtake you."

Seeing his determination, lots were drawn as to who should stay; for there was a certain feeling of respect shown by all towards their common friend.

The preparations were soon made, each man carrying a supply of provisions; and then they filed cautiously along the track, keeping ever on the alert, for each man knew that at any time a volley from behind some clump of trees or rocks far overhead, might perhaps empty half the saddles of the little party.

Story 3--Chapter XVIII.

The Avengers' Way.

Daylight found them standing, dark of face, around the barely cold ashes of the Moa's Nest; and the stern determination of the party might have been read in their compressed lips and fierce looks, as more than one man mentally registered an oath of the stern vengeance he would take for this cruel desolation of a peaceful home.

A short interval of rest and refreshment, and the horses were stabled in one of the sheds yet standing; arms were examined, and the party began to ascend the Gap, slowly and cautiously, for they knew that unless the convicts had made their way round by the sea, they must be somewhere higher up, amongst these natural fortresses.

It was a very slow rate at which they progressed, for they anxiously searched for and examined every trace left by the convicts, though these were comparatively few, Wahika having previously picked up and hidden the greater part as he followed the ruffianly crew.

But soon these tokens disappeared, and they pressed on higher and higher, watching eagerly for farther signs of their enemy.

Once the foremost man halted, holding up his hand as a sign to those who followed, for there was the distant sound as of a gun; but it reached their ears in a strange, muffled way, as if discharged on the other side of the mountains; and another, which followed soon after, was even less distinct.

"They must be farther up, round the bend," said one; and on they proceeded, taking advantage of every inequality for concealment. Every man's rifle was ready to reply to the shot which was expected at any instant; but on they still went, without encountering a foe.

Hour after hour had passed; and at length, heated and wearied, a halt was called by the side of a rapid, babbling stream. Provisions were brought out, and then, for the first time, it was seen that one of the party was missing.

"Where's the parson?" exclaimed the one who first made the discovery; when, upon comparing notes, it was found that he had not been noticed by any one for some hours.

"Poor old fellow, he could not keep up," said Lawler. "We shall find him under a tree, resting, when we go back. He was not without food, fortunately, for I saw that he had it, or he would have gone without."

"I hope no mischief will befall him," said another; and then they fell to consulting, in cautious tones, as to the next best proceeding; whether to press on farther, or to retrace their steps, and examine some of the ravines, so as to join the strength they hoped by that time to meet approaching from the lower part of the Gap, while, at the same time, they would pick up Mr Meadows.

"I should be for going on," said Lawler, "only that I think the last plan is the better; for I can't help thinking they have never come up here. Let's go back: we're losing time."

Following out his suggestion, the men rose, and began, with the same precautions, to retrace their steps, by this time spreading out in a more extended line; while, about the same time, a party of a dozen friends commenced the ascent of the Gap, following the plainly-marked track left by the first detachment.

Story 3--Chapter XIX.

Mr Meadows's Weakness.

Mr Meadows struggled on, hour after hour, with his companions, only enabled to keep up with them by their

exceedingly slow progress; for, from time to time, he would sit for a few minutes while they passed on for some little distance, and then, following the track, he would overtake them at their slow, watchful pace.

He pressed on; sometimes tottering, sometimes resting so long that he had to strive hard to reach the last man. The heat seemed to overcome him; and at last, seating himself by the bright stream, upon whose banks he was, he let five, ten, twenty minutes, an hour slip away, heedless of all save the exhaustion that had enervated him.

Gradually a delicious sleep stole upon him, and then for a while all was blank.

But at length the weary man awoke, and started in pursuit of his companions, reproaching himself for his cruelty in sleeping at an hour like this; though, at the time, his forward progress was but a weary totter from tree to tree, against whose trunks he was often glad to lean his hands.

“It is of no use,” he groaned. “I’m worn out; and until Nature has done her part of restoration, I am helpless as a child.”

He sat down, and rested again, and then rose; for the distant report of a gun fell upon his ear; repeated, too, once or twice; and turning from his companions’ track, he faced towards that side of the Gap from amidst whose craggy fastnesses the sound seemed to proceed.

“I have no strength,” muttered Mr Meadows feebly; “but I have still my eyesight, and I may be able to play the spy. Why are they not here? They have gone on too far; but if they hear the firing, they will soon return.”

He passed through the dense undergrowth, and then stopped short, for he had hit upon a well-marked track, which looked as if the grass had been trampled down by footprints to and fro.

“Strange,” he said, “that it should fall to the weakest of the party to discover this. I’ll go on; but not in the guise of warfare;” and he leaned his gun against a tree, and toiled patiently along the track. No easy task, for it led up and up, along the valley side, higher and higher; each few steps giving a view over the tops of the trees just passed.

“Not the way taken by the gallant young man,” he muttered, “for not one of the branches he was to have broken, has met my eye. It is plain that I have not struck upon his track; but I may be able to report good news to our friends on my return.”

Once more came the faint, muffled sound of a gun; and collecting his fast-flagging energies, Mr Meadows pushed on, until breathless, and with bleeding hands and knees, he stood looking down with astonishment into a little rocky amphitheatre, strewn with provisions and the plunder taken by the convicts from the Moa’s Nest.

He stepped down, for the place appeared to be quite forsaken, and vainly tried to make out the cause of its being untenanted, when, looking round, he started with dismay; for half-seated, half-lying, with his back to the rocks, was the form of a human being, but so disfigured, that it seemed impossible for life to exist in such a ruin. But life was there; for, to the clergyman’s horror, he saw that the man was engaged with a knife in his left hand, slowly and deliberately trying to back off his right at the wrist.

For a few moments, Mr Meadows could not speak; then, hurrying up, he arrested the man, exclaiming, “Surely, friend, that operation cannot be necessary?”

“Let it be—let it be,” was the answer, in a strange, muttering voice, which came from the mutilated face. “It’s a vile hand—a bad hand, stained with crime.”

It required but little effort to wrest the knife from the convict’s hand; and then, binding a handkerchief round the bleeding wrist, Mr Meadows gazed, shuddering, in the man’s face, as his head fell back, and he fainted.

“He cannot live through those injuries,” muttered the clergyman. And leaning forward, he dropped a little brandy from the flask he carried between the man’s lips, when, after a few minutes, he revived, and spoke in a more collected way.

“Is any one there?” he asked.

“Yes; there is one here,” was the reply.

“Come back to finish your work, I suppose?” said the man hoarsely; and he raised his arms, as if to protect his head, but only to drop them directly.

“Where are your companions?”

“Companions—companions?” said the wounded man inquiringly. “Who, then, are you?”

“One of those whom you so much injured.”

“Injured—injured? What does it mean? What’s this red blind over my eyes? Where are we—in the valley? Or—I can’t see—can’t see with my eyes, nor yet with my understanding!” he gasped, apparently struggling hard with his misty, clouded intellect. “Yes, I can—I know now. Where is the girl?”

“Yes; where is the poor girl?” repeated Mr Meadows anxiously; and he again poured a few drops between the poor wretch’s lips.

“Girl! Yes, yes; I saved her. I told young Murray I’d pay him. Lee’s girl, the other woman told me. I knew the Lees

once, at home. Yes, at home; and I saved her twice, and *they* saved her."

He trailed off into a wild, incoherent string; and in spite of all Mr Meadows's efforts and anxiety, no farther information could he obtain. He was about to turn and leave the dreadful spectacle, when he felt a light touch upon his arm; and starting round, he saw, standing pale and trembling by his side, a woman whom he hardly recognised as one of the shepherds' wives he had more than once seen at the Moa's Nest.

He elicited that she had lain concealed amidst the ferns for many hours past, so overcome with dread, that, though provisions in abundance had been almost within sight, she had not dared to crawl out until she heard a voice she knew to be friendly.

She told, too, how the miserable man at their side had twice acted in defence of Katie and herself; and how, in the midst of a wild struggle and confusion, Katie had been snatched away: when, availing herself of the absence of the convicts in pursuit, the woman had crawled amongst the ferns, and lain there, not daring to more. Then, some time after, she heard the oaths and raging of the men on their return, and the murderous way in which they had set upon their companion, whom they accused of betraying them, leaving him at last, probably for dead.

"And I did not dare to move, sir," she sobbed; "but had to lie there, listening to his groans, hour after hour, till I prayed that he might die out of his misery, as I felt that I must, or else be driven mad."

"But where do you think they are now?" said Mr Meadows.

"Somewhere up the valley that runs beside here, sir; and that's where Miss Katie must have been taken, if they've not killed her, for there's been shooting ever since."

"Did you not see who snatched her away?"

"No, sir, no; it was all in the night-time, when she was clinging tightly to me, and I was struck down at the same moment."

"Let us descend from here, my child," he said; "for there are friends below in the valley, seeking for us."

He turned to lead his new companion away, but she suddenly exclaimed, "They're coming again! O, sir, save me—save me!"—and she clung to Mr Meadows, who heard far down below him the rustling and snapping of the trees, as if several people were forcing their way through them. "That's the way they went," sobbed the woman; "and they're coming again."

Mr Meadows had no doubt as to the truth of what she said; and glancing round, he tried to make out the part of the rocky wall around by which he had descended, but for a while his efforts were fruitless; and he could not leave the woman to search for his path, since at the least effort to unclasp her hands, she clung to him the tighter, imploring him in whispers not to leave her—not to go away.

"No, no; we will go together. Quick! the wretches are upon us, and we shall be taken. Heaven give me strength! What shall I do?"

His tones were anguished, for the crashing through the leaves seemed now to be close at hand; while, as he spoke, the woman fell from him, quite inanimate.

"Must I leave her?" he murmured to himself; and then he stooped and tried to lift her, but it was beyond his strength, and in his despair it seemed to him that he must be already seen. An hour sooner, he would not have cared so much; but, with the information he had gained and the care of this poor creature upon his hands, he felt that he would give anything to escape; for might not this snatching away of Katie mean an act of daring performed by Murray or the savage, and the shots fired, a conflict still going on between them?

The leaves and boughs crashed together, and whoever they were, either friends or foes, were coming ever nearer and nearer.

(Twelve lines of the scan are not readable here.)

The trees could be plainly seen moving now, and Mr Meadows caught a glimpse of an approaching figure. It was only a shadowy glimpse, but exerting his little remaining strength he dragged his companion on her side, forced her down amongst the waving undergrowth, and then crouched himself, gazing with swimming eyes between the strands down into the amphitheatre, and wondering whether, after all, his efforts had not been in vain.

Story 3--Chapter XX.

Friends in Need.

It seemed almost impossible for the convicts not to have seen them, as now, to the number of five, they leaped down and seized the provisions that lay scattered about, hunting out such bottles as remained, and more than once coming so near to Mr Meadows that he hardly dared to breathe. Then they went farther away, first one and then another, contemptuously kicking the body of their late associate.

But it was after they had gathered and tied up a portion of the food that the danger of the hiding couple culminated; for once more drawing near, a convict said:

“Now then, down into the valley once, just for a look about for squalls, and then back again.”

“After breakfast and a bit of ’bacca,” said another, coolly seating himself, when his companions laughed and followed his example.

Mr Meadows shuddered. They were so near, that he felt that they must hear them if they moved; and still he knew that in another few minutes they would trample upon him and the woman in their downward progress. It must be done; the attempt must be made; and after turning and gazing at the convicts, he bent down towards the pale face at his side.

He had no occasion to speak; for he read in her looks that she had heard every sound. He dared not trust himself to state his wishes, but pointed along the track so plainly marked through the long grass, here abundant; and slowly the woman rose to her knees, then, with a slight rustling, to her feet, and began to glide gently away.

Mr Meadows could not watch her, but dared only to keep his eyes fixed upon those of one of the seated convicts, just seen through the leaves; when, to his consternation, he saw him shift his position so as to gaze, as it were, right in his watcher’s face, till, trembling with dread, Mr Meadows’s eyelids sunk, and he knelt there motionless.

When he again unclosed his eyes, the man had ceased to look in his direction; and then, calling up his strength, he slowly backed, inch by inch, upon his hands and knees, till the descending nature of the ground took him below the edge which overhung the depression where the convicts were seated. Then, and then only, he raised himself gradually into a stooping position, listened attentively, and, with beating heart, began softly, step by step, to follow the woman, whose own retreat he tried vainly to hear.

Gradually he set down each foot, lest a sound should follow, holding his breath, and pressing a hand upon his heart to stay its throbbings; when, accelerating his pace, he strode on to overtake the woman, whom he could now see hurrying down from stone to stone, or along the well-marked grassy track, with fear-given wings.

He trembled lest she should miss the track in her fright; but no, she kept to it without deviating, until she reached the spot where Mr Meadows left his gun; and there he overtook her.

What was to be his course? Should they proceed farther up the Gap, or down towards the ruins? Friends should be coming from either way, unless they had returned, and passed downwards, giving up the search so far, until joined by the expected reinforcements.

He was woodman enough, though, from his long residence in the colony, to be able, in a short time, to determine whether his companions had returned. Though the upward tracks were easy to find, no descending footprints could he discover; but a joyful cry was half uttered as twice he came upon a broken twig, which told him of the promise of Edward Murray, and showed that he had passed in that direction.

There needed now but little reflection for Mr Meadows to decide what course would be the best. Up the valley there were certainly friends; down the valley there might be; but it was uncertain.

Turning then to the woman, who had followed him step by step, he pointed upwards; and in silence they moved towards the higher portion of the Gap. But they had hardly traversed a quarter of a mile before she halted, exclaiming:

“I can’t go any farther, sir;” and, without another word, she sank fainting upon the grass.

“Then we must sit and rest, my child, until our friends come,” he said in encouraging tones, which did much towards soothing the woman; and then, opening the wallet slung by his side, he forced her to partake of some refreshment.

They waited patiently as the afternoon wore on, listening for some token of coming friends. Once voices were heard approaching, evidently those of the convicts; but they soon passed away again; and at last came the rustling sound of cautiously advancing footsteps, to right of them, to left of them, and in front, and ever coming nearer and nearer.

“Friends, my child, friends,” said the old man cheerfully.

But the woman looked at him with a troubled anxious gaze, not doubting his word, but distrusting his ability to tell; until, rising suddenly from where they sat, he called loudly, and, from close at hand, the cry was responded to.

“No news, sir—not a bit,” said Lawler; for it was he. “We did not miss you till we got to the top; but perhaps it was as well you stopped behind, and saved yourself fatigue that you could scarcely have borne.”

“Quite as well, John Lawler,” said Mr Meadows, smiling faintly; “but I have not been idle;” and he pointed to the trembling woman behind him.

Lawler gave a low whistle, which was responded to from different quarters; and in a few minutes the party of settlers had collected round, listening eagerly to Mr Meadows’s narration; when it was immediately decided to make their way at once to the track, leaving one of their party to watch for the hoped-for aid, and then proceed to the convicts’ lair, following their trail to where it was evident that some conflict must be going on.

But they had no occasion to weaken their little force. Before they reached the path that led upwards, it was plain that some one was approaching; and, after due precautions, a joyful encounter took place; when, eager and forgetful of fatigue, the now tolerably strong company filed up the track.

It was now so plainly beaten that it was followed quickly; Mr Meadows, who declared himself sufficiently rested, insisting upon being one of the party, lest they should fail for want of guidance; while one of the new-comers was

intrusted with the care of the shepherd's wife.

Well armed and determined, and now outnumbering the enemy, though they knew it not, there seemed every prospect of Justice laying her sword upon the outlaws' heads.

The depression was reached at last; and men's brows darkened as they looked upon the scattered plunder; but they paused not; and half-an-hour's climbing and toiling brought the party to the entrance of the narrow gorge, where they halted to look inquiringly at Mr Meadows.

Marks on grass and mossy stone were plain enough to be seen, though, after a short inspection; and a careful advance was made over the rugged ground, until the leader stopped short, to point out something he had discovered.

Only a trifle; but enough to convince them that they were on the right track; for upon a thorny bush hung a shred, evidently fresh torn from a woman's dress—a significant fact, when found in one of the wilds far away from a civilised home.

Then, satisfied of the near approach of the conflict, each man looked to his piece, and eagerly scanning every rock and stone in advance, they pressed on, until suddenly the foremost man raised his hand, and pointed to where, far in advance, and high above them, they could see perched up a figure, upon whose bright gun-barrel the sunbeams played and flashed, as, resting upon a stone, he seemed intently gazing at something in advance.

Lawler was acting the part of leader; and he appointed two of the party to watch this one man.

"If he turns to fire, bring him down," he said sternly.

The attention of the rest of the party was directed to what seemed the end of the gorge; for, right in front, they could now see the upper part of the vast scarped rock, from whose ledge so gallant a defence had been kept up; but it was not until they had advanced another hundred yards, so as to surmount a broad ridge of stone, that they could see the ledge, up which, with their companions eagerly watching their progress, and covering them with their guns, two of the convicts had clambered.

These two had just reached the shelf, so that, in another minute, they would have stood upon it, when the sharp echoing crack of a rifle was heard, almost accompanied by two more; for the man upon the rock high up had suddenly turned, caught sight of the coming danger, and fired. His aim, however, was too rapid to be effectual; while, in answer to the double shot from below, the convict started to his feet, dropped his piece, clutched at the air for a few moments, and then leaped upwards, to fall heavily into the gorge.

The two men who had scaled the rock slipped back, hung by their hands; and then one fell; while the other, with catlike activity, managed to descend unhurt; but only to fall, the next instant, under the volley sent in answer to that of the enemy, who, roused to action by their fellow's shot, had faced round and fired at their assailants.

Then followed a rapid exchange of firing for some five minutes; but the advantage was all on the side of the settlers, who had the greater part of the cover; and upon a sharp dash being made with clubbed guns, after the convicts had fired, and before they had time to reload, a fierce hand-to-hand struggle ensued, in which more than one settler fell beneath the outlaws' knives; for they fought desperately, like rats at bay, till, one by one, they were beaten down; till the remainder sullenly threw away their arms, and suffered themselves to be bound.

Story 3--Chapter XXI.

Just in Time.

Immediately after the victory over the convicts, all attention was drawn to the ledge; but not before the wounded had received the needful attention, careful arrangements being made to prevent farther danger.

But there was a manifest repugnance exhibited amongst those present to attempt to mount the ledge, whose silence terrified the men who had but a few minutes before faced death by rifle and knife; but at last, stern and rugged of brow, John Lawler laid down his gun, and, with much difficulty, made his way up to stand upon the ledge, peering forward into the rift for a few moments, and then, stifling the sob which rose from his breast, he turned sorrowfully, and pointed to the rough green rope yet lying by; and, upon its being thrown up, he held one end, while a couple of his companions climbed to his side.

"The savage isn't dead," said one, kneeling by Wahika's side, and laying a hand upon his breast.

Carefully making the rough rope fast round him, they lowered the savage down; when, with the tears dimming their eyes, the three stout-hearted men stood gazing upon the couple before them, till they were reverently lowered down in the same way, to be received in the arms of Mr Meadows, who then knelt anxiously, rose hastily to fetch water and dash it in their faces, and afterwards tried to force some between their teeth.

"No hope, sir," whispered Lawler sorrowfully, as he watched his proceedings.

"Mr Lawler," was the stern reply, "it is our duty on this earth never to be too soon disheartened. I have hope here; and I pray heaven that that hope may not be vain."

In spite of his weakness, Mr Meadows was now unceasing in his efforts to restore animation to those who had been found upon the rocky ledge. For a time, though, all his toil seemed vain. It was a hard battle, too; for he who

ministered was more fit to receive ministrations.

At last, though, there was a faint sigh from Katie's lips; and, soon after, a few muttered, unmeaning words from Murray told that the flame of life still burned feebly.

Wahika, too, with the hardihood of the savage, had, sooner even than his fellow-sufferers, shown that he was ready to fight for the last few sparks of life faintly burning in his breast; though had the rough, surgical aid of the old clergyman been much longer delayed, those sparks must have died out.

"Little flower of Moa's Nest?" he said at last, in an inquiring whisper, as his eager eyes gazed from face to face.

"Safe, I hope, friend savage," said Mr Meadows, as he laid a cool, wet hand upon the New Zealander's fevered brow, when a quiet, satisfied smile flitted over the tattooed face; and he closed his eyes, to wait patiently, as became a warrior, for the fate that was to be his.

"Thank heaven, friend Lawler!" said Mr Meadows, at the end of an hour; "matters are even looking hopeful. I was ready to despair myself at one time; but providentially, I was able to conquer the weakness. Prompt action, John Lawler—prompt action has gained us the day. And now, good men and true, prepare something in the shape of a litter, and let us bear these poor sufferers gently down from this dreadful place before the night falls."

"Mind! Take care! Here, lean on me, sir," cried Lawler eagerly; for Mr Meadows had turned deadly pale, and now reeled, and would have fallen but for the friendly arm.

"Thanks. Lawler, thanks," said Mr Meadows. "I'm afraid that I am very weak. I feel unstrung by what we have gone through; and it only wanted the sight of that poor fellow Bray, carried down—but a few hours ago a strong, healthy man—now so much clay—it only wanted that to completely overcome me."

In a few minutes, though, Mr Meadows's brave heart sustained him again; and in spite of all advice to the contrary, he insisted upon superintending the removal of the sufferers, himself adjusting their heads, that the rough journey might not add fresh pangs.

Story 3--Chapter XXII.

The Old Story.

Busy hands and strong soon provided a shelter from the ruins of the Moa's Nest—the fragments of the schooner playing no inconsiderable part in the rough erection that was prepared for the sufferers; Mr Meadows declaring that it would be madness to yield to the wish of John Lawler, and convey them to his home.

And here, forgetting his own sufferings, the old clergyman fought a long and arduous fight with the fever that had seized his patients, but to be triumphant in the end—"Even though I am no doctor," he said with a smile.

The hardy savage was the first to recover, and then to follow Mr Meadows about like a dog, never seeming weary of watching to do his bidding, in return for the life he had saved.

But months of weary weakness, and mourning for the father who was slain, succeeded before Katie Lee was again the bright-eyed maiden of old, though she struggled hard to be the stay and solace of her widowed mother.

At last came a day, an eventful day in the lives of two of the characters in this short narrative, when they knelt before Mr Meadows, to listen to his quaint but earnest voice repeating those words addressed to all who, in God's name, are joined together; while, as they rose, it was for him to gaze at them with bent head and moistened eyes; and the words of fatherly benediction spoken were husky and low.

"But these are no days for tears, my children," he said, at last; for, indeed, the time had glided swiftly away. And under the management of him who had just reaped the reward of his patient forbearance, the Moa's Nest, rebuilt, stood once more homelike and prosperous in the smiling valley, with the Gap, more golden and glorious, shining around rich in tokens of harvest, and the flocks and herds so carefully supervised by that stern-looking, tattooed chief, half savage, half-civilised man.

For Wahika clung to Edward Murray, who, tempting the sea no more, had settled in the old pleasant vale, for the dread of so dire an invasion occurring a second time troubled him not; though for long years to come the story was told in the settlers' homes, through the length and breadth of the three islands, of the gallant defence, the cruel slaughter, and the brave way in which the prisoners had been rescued, and the invaders put to the rout, their ringleaders expiating their crimes at Port Caroline, the residue, few indeed, ending their career in Van Diemen's Land.

Such is the old story—a story of fifty years since, but fresh yet in the memory of grey-haired men, who listen to the chime of the church-bell, and walk the streets of the busy port that now stands at the mouth of Golden Gap. But a few minutes' walk will take you to the farm at the foot of the mighty volcanic cliffs, clothed nearly to their icy tops with gorgeous verdure; and, as you gaze upon the scene of peace, the heart seems to say it is impossible that such deeds of violence could have occurred to blur the beauty of the verdant vale, till memory recalls in new settlements scores of scenes as tragical as that at the rifling of the Moa's Nest.

Story Four: Violets in the Snow.

Story 4--Chapter I.

On one side there was a square, with trees that tried to look green in summer, but in winter time stuck in scraggy form out of the soot-peppered snow, with a beadle who wore a gold band round his hat and lived in a lodge, out of which he issued every morning with a thin rattan cane to keep away the boys; on the other side there was a row of goodly mansions, with a mews for the horses and carriages of the grandees who inhabited those mansions; and down between square and mansions, hidden behind the mews, as if it was a brick-and-mortar snake, there was Gutter-alley.

People said, how could such a dirty, squalid, unhealthy, beggar-inhabited place get there between the mansions of the rich. People said so to the parish officers, and the parish officers shook their heads; not so much as to say that they did not know, but to imply thereby, a great deal, as if the wickedness of the inhabitants had something to do with it. Then people said so to the dwellers in Gutter-alley in an ill-used fashion, to which Gutter-alley very reasonably replied that it must get somewhere, which was perfectly true; that it squeezed itself up as much out of the way as it could, which was also quite true; that it—to wit, Gutter-alley—did not get between the square and the row of mansions, but that the square came and sat upon it on one side, and the row of mansions came and sat upon it on the other, which was true again; and lastly, Gutter-alley said, where was it to go, for it must have living room? Then people who knew its squalor said that it was all very shocking, and that a meeting ought to be held. And it was very shocking, but a meeting was not held; and Gutter-alley stood where it had stood before, in the year of our Lord 1862, when there was a very great exhibition building very close at hand; and Gutter-alley remained an exhibition itself, staying as it did where, without much effort, it could have thrown a stone into the grounds of a palace.

Story 4--Chapter II.

Now, whether in summer or winter, poor people can patronise as well as rich; and so it fell out that the custom in poverty-stricken, hunger-pinched Gutter-alley was for the poor folk there to speak condescendingly to old Dick Bradds, when he stood at the door of Number 5, with his poor old head on one side as he looked up the court; head on the other side as he looked down. “Dickey” he was generally called, and more than one stout costermonger—they did a deal in costering in Gutter-alley, and if you penetrated into the rooms of the human rabbit-warren, fish could be found mingled with furniture, turnips amongst the wash-tubs, and a good full bucket of mussels often formed the seat of the father of a family while he helped his wife to make up ropes of onions for the morrow’s sale—well, many a stout costermonger told his wife in confidence that old Dickey Bradds always put him in mind of a moulting thrush. No inapt simile, and doubtless taken from the life, for there were always plenty of feathered captives to be seen in Gutter-alley.

It was quite true Dick—old Dickey Bradds—did look very much like some aged and shabby bird, lame of one leg; and when he stood on a cold winter’s morning peering up and down through the fog that loved to hang about the court, no one would have felt at all surprised to have seen the old man begin to peck, or to whet his long sharp old nose against the door-post.

Not that Dick did do anything of this kind—he only gave two or three keen one-sided bird-like looks about before slowly hopping up-stairs to his room on the second floor—the front room—to wait for Jenny.

A keen old blade though was Dick—a piece of that right good true steel so often to be found in the humblest implements, while your finely-polished, gaily-handled, ornamental upper-ten-thousand cutlery is so often inferior, dull of edge, and given to shut up just when they are wanted the most. Dick was not human hurried up, but a piece of fine old charcoal-made steel. Toil and hard usage had ground and ground Dick till there was little left of him but the haft, and seventy years of existence rubbing away through the world—that hard grindstone to some of us—had made that haft very rickety of rivet and springs. Certainly there was blade enough left to cut in one direction, but you could not trust Dick for fear of his giving way, or perhaps closing upon the hand that employed him.

It was so with poor old Dick when he left the great auction-rooms, where he had been kept as long as was possible; and, being proud, Dick would not believe in Nature when she told him that he had grown to be an old man, and that the time had gone by when he was lusty and strong, and able to lift great weights; and when Dick’s fellow-porters told him that a piece of furniture was too heavy for him to lift, he only felt annoyed, and grew angry and stubborn.

The fact was that Dick knew from old experience how hard a matter it was for even an industrious man to get a living in the great city; and for him, whose livelihood depended entirely upon his muscles, to turn weak and helpless meant misery, privation, and perhaps the workhouse for his old age.

That was what Dick thought, and therefore he fought hard against even the very semblance of weakness, making a point always at the auction-rooms of doing far more than he need, rushing at heavy pieces of furniture, tiring himself with extra work, and making himself an object of sport to the thoughtless, of pity to his older fellow-servants of the firm.

The consequence was that poor old Dickey Bradds had to go one day to the hospital, to lie there for many weary weeks, and come out at last lame and uncured, for at threescore and ten there is not much chance of a man building up new tissue, piling on fresh muscle and strength, and renewing the waste of so many years.

Poor old Dick left the hospital a confirmed cripple, but hopeful ever of regaining his strength and activity—at least he said so, whether merely to cheer up his grandchild or to mask his sufferings, that was known only to his own heart.

Story 4--Chapter III.

Now this was how old Dick became a cripple.

It was early in winter, and there was a heavy sale on at the rooms, for the furniture of a noble mansion had been sent up from the country, and bargain-hunters and Jew brokers were there that day in force, chaffering, running down the value of the goods they coveted, and turning the crowded room into a Babel of confusion.

The sale was progressing, and under the superintendence of one Joseph Brown, the head porter, the lots had been submitted to competition with ease and facility. Old Dick had as usual been working very hard, but, not content to show the others his power, he sought to do more.

“You can’t take that there chist o’ drawers down,” said the head porter, a man most careful in the way in which he looked after the corners and polish of pieces of furniture, saving them from scratch and chip. So careful, in fact, was Brown that he had never had time to look after the polish and corners of her Majesty’s English, which he chipped and scratched most terribly. So “you can’t take that there chist o’ drawers down,” said Brown, “it’s too much for you;” and he meant it kindly, though his words were rough.

“You wouldn’t ha’ talked to me like that ten year ago, Joe Brown!” quavered Dick, turning angrily upon the porter, for he was hurt and annoyed at being spoken to before the other men.

“I didn’t mean to hurt the poor old chap,” said Brown at home to his wife that night, “for I like old Dick, who’s as honest and true-hearted an old chap as ever stepped. All the years we’ve been together I never knew Dick do a man an ill turn; while the way he turns out o’ Sundays to take that there granchile of his to a place o’ wasshup ought to be a patten for some on us.

“In course I wouldn’t ha’ spoke to him in that way ten years ago: for why? ’cos he could ha’ carried the chist o’ drawers easily; but ’stead o’ actin’ sensible, he was that proud, bless you, that he wriggled hisself under ’em like a young cuckoo with a hegg, hystes hisself up slowly by taking hold of the bannisters, and then begins to stagger downstairs.

“‘Now then: lot ’underd and two, waitin’ for lot ’underd and two,’ they calls out below. ‘Comin’—comin’—comin’,’ pants out Dick; and I see as it was too much for the poor old chap, who felt touched at being thought past his work, though the governors only expected him to take down the light things. So seeing how matters stood, I steps forrard to help him, when if he didn’t seem to shut up all at once like; and that there chist o’ handsome French-polished mahogany drawers, ’underd and two in the catalogue, went downstairs a deal too fast for its constitution.

“Poor old Dick! he never groaned nor made no fuss when we got him down to the cab to take him to the ’orsepittle, although his poor old leg was broke, through his coming down a whole flight arter that there chist o’ handsome French-polished mahogany drawers; but his lips was shaking, and his face drored as he gets hold of my button and pulls me to him, and says, says he, ‘This’ll be a sad upset for my Jenny, but don’t let ’em frighten her, Joe Brown, don’t please. You’re a married man and got feeling, though I spoke nasty to you just now. Please go and tell her gently, yourself. O, Joe, I shan’t be able to help in many more sales.’

“Poor old chap, how the tears did run down his cheeks as he whispered me again—

“‘Don’t say it’s much, Joe; tell her it’s a bit of a scratch, and she isn’t to fidget about me. Tell her gently, Joe; good bye, Joe; I shall be over again to-morrow or next day, Joe; and, Joe,’ he calls out in his weak piping way, as the keb begins to move, ‘Joe,’ he says, ‘just take my apern and give the lookin’-glass in the big wardrobe a bit of a rub before it comes down; and don’t forget about Jenny.’

“Poor old Dickey: got his ’art in his work, he had; and somehow as he went off, and I knew as we shouldn’t never see him again at work, if we ever see him at all, my nose wanted blowing to that degree that nothing couldn’t be like it; and it’s my belief, Sarah, if I hadn’t been roused up by a call for the next lot, that I should have turned soft; for you see, says I to myself, I says, suppose as that had been me.

“But he told me to tell Jenny gently, and I did.”

Story 4--Chapter IV.

Old Dick went no more to porter at the rooms when he came out of the hospital; his smoothly-shaven face did not peer out of windows where he was hanging out hearthrugs with, pinned upon them, the bills announcing the capital modern household furniture for sale; but when he returned to Gutter-alley, Dick would always be clean-shaven of a morning, spending an hour over the process, pulling out wrinkles to get at the silver stubble lurking in the bottoms of the furrows, and stopping at times, when his hands grew tremulous, to rest. Many was the time that his grandchild, Jenny, would have to run down in haste to fetch a bit of cobweb from the cellar to stay the bleeding when that tremulous old hand did make a slip, for the nap upon Dick’s Sunday hat was too scarce to be used up in so wanton a way.

But at last Dick would strop and put away his razor and shaving-brush, hang up the little glass, and then tie on a clean white apron, take his round carpet-cap down from a nail and carefully put it on so as not to disarrange his grey locks, and then sit patiently nursing his porter’s knot and waiting, as he used to tell Jenny, for a job.

“Strong, my little lass? Strong as ever,” he’d say. “If I could only get this leg right;” and then Jenny would drop her work, take his old face between her plump little hands, kiss him tenderly, and tell him to wait a little.

So old Dick Bradds used to wait on, day after day, waiting for the jobs that never came, and the injured leg did not get right. The old man’s strength sufficed to carry him down to the front door and back again. Down he would go

slowly, holding tightly by the balustrade, one leg always first, till he reached the bottom, where the mat should have been, only they could not afford mats in Gutter-alley, and then as regularly as possible the old man, in his thankfulness at being able to walk so far, would take off the old carpet-cap and say softly, when there was no one by, “Thank God!” and the same again when, after a visit to the front door and a glance up and down the court, he had slowly and painfully made his way up to his own room.

Jenny would have helped him; but no: the old man could not shake off the belief that he was in a state to do heavy work and to help his child. There was too much determination left yet in the old piece of steel, and heedless of rust and weakness Dick struggled up and down.

People used to say that Sharpnesses, the great auctioneers, ought to have pensioned old Bradds, but they were people who made money fast, and knew its value in too worldly a way to pension worn-out servants, so old Dick had to live as he could.

Jenny was Dick’s support—Jenny, his grandchild—Jenny Blossom, as they called her in Gutter-alley. She was the last of the family—father, mother, and another child had died in Gutter-alley, where fevers used to practise and get themselves into full strength before issuing out to ravage the districts where sanitary arrangements were so perfect.

The place was very foul, but somehow Jenny grew brighter day by day, and the old crones of the alley used to chuckle and say no wonder, for flowers always throve in the dirt. At all events, the foul odours did not take the bloom from her cheek, and when fever or cholera held high revel, Jenny had passed scatheless through trials when scores had fallen around.

Every one spoke well of Jenny; untidy women with bare arms and rough hair always had for her a pleasant look; great hulking market-attending men, with hoarse voices, would always stand aside for Jenny to pass; and the slatternly girls of the alley, though they occasionally glanced at her with envious eyes, displayed no open jealousy. Away from Gutter-alley it was different, but in the forty houses of the court, and their four or five hundred inhabitants, there was not one who did not look up to Jenny Blossom.

And no unsuitable title was that—Jenny Blossom; for whether taken in connection with her young and blooming face, or her trade, the name seemed equally adapted. Ask for her as Jane Bradds, and people would have shaken their heads; though the mention of Jenny Blossom brought a bright look into perhaps a scowling face; and Number 5 in the court was indicated directly.

Story 4--Chapter V.

Number 5 in the court! Come up the four flights of creaking stairs to the only bright thing in the crowded place—the only bright thing likely to meet the eye, where squalor, misery, poverty, wretchedness, filth, and sickness ran riot. Breakfast is over, and, so that Jenny’s needle shall not be stayed, Dick has himself washed and put away the two cups and saucers, and now sits by the fire drying the splashes upon his white apron. His carpet-cap is upon his head, and his porter’s knot rests against his chair. The only sound in the room is the click of Jenny’s thimble, as it sends the sharp needle flying through the hard slop-work upon which she is busy.

Pretty? Well, yes, there is the beauty in her face of youth. No Grecian-cut lines or finely chiselled features, but the simple bright countenance of an English girl, as she bends over her work.

Jenny’s face was never pale, spite of the mephytic gases of Gutter-alley; but the rosy flush upon it deepened as a step was heard upon the stairs, followed by a tap at the door.

A querulous “Come in!” from old Dick, and then a tall, stout young fellow entered, bearing a basket of violets, whose sweet fragrance filled the room.

“Oh, it’s you, is it, Harry?” said the old man. “Had you got money enough?”

“O yes, plenty; but I spent it all,” was the reply. “The flowers are rare and fresh this morning.”

“That’s right, Harry—that’s right,” quavered the old man. “Set ’em down—set ’em down. And now what’s to pay?”

“Pay? What for?” was the rather gruff response, as the new-comer looked hard the while at Jenny.

“For your trouble, Harry. You ought to take something for your trouble.”

“’Tisn’t trouble!” said the young man, more gently, still looking hard at Jenny, who never raised her eyes from her work. “When I’m at market, as I’ve often said before, it isn’t much to bring home a few bunches of flowers. I should like to bring them every morning, if I may.”

He still glanced at Jenny, as if he hoped that the permission might come from her; but she made no sign, and old Dick himself broke the awkward silence by thanking the young man once more, and he then took his departure with a disappointed aspect.

The flower-bearer slowly descended the stairs, nettled at the calm, patronising manner adopted by the old man.

“Poor old chap,” he muttered; “I wonder what he really does think.”

He said no more, for at the foot of the stairs he encountered a smartly-dressed youth, apparently a junior clerk in some city office.

The look which passed between the young men was of no very friendly character; but, directly after, each went upon his way, thinking of his rival—the violet-bearer to his little half stall, half shop, where he, in a very humble fashion, contrived to make a good living—the other, smiling with contempt, ascending to old Dick Bradds' abode.

For be it known that fair young Jenny Blossom was not without suitors, who were both at this time anything but peaceful at heart, since there was plenty of jealousy and annoyance at Jenny's coldness. They called it coldness, though hardly with justice, for the visits were none of Jenny's seeking, since she, poor girl, loved her grandfather, and though she confessed to herself that it was kind of Harry Smith to bring the violets, and to save her from going to the wet, cold market so early in the morning, yet she would very much rather that both—well, that Mr John Wilson, Sharpnesses' clerk, would stay away.

But John Wilson was quite a favourite with the old man, and the intimacy had arisen when at several times the former had been the bearer of various small gratuities from the great auction firm to their old porter, while he was weak from his accident. Dick admired the young fellow's appearance and his smart way of dressing, so different from the fustian of Harry Smith, and upon more than one occasion he proved that years had not made him perfect, for said he, "Only think what a good thing it would be for you, my pet," referring, of course, to John Wilson's attentions; "what would become of you if I were taken away?"

Jenny said nothing, and the old man talked on under the impression that affairs were as they were years before, and quite oblivious of the fact that Jenny had been for some time past his sole stay and support; and that if the young girl, with her busy fingers morning and evening, and the sale of her violets in the cold streets in the afternoon, could supply sustenance for both, her fate would not have been so very hard had he been taken away.

But there were other feelings animating the breast of old Dick Bradds, and he would have liked to see that the young girl had some one to take his place as protector before the great change came, about which he never attempted self-deceit.

Story 4--Chapter VI.

Gutter-alley was certainly a gloomy home, but somehow time glided on as swiftly there as in more favoured spots. A year soon sped. The attentions of the young men had been incessant, but they had made no progress in their suits, for the love of Jenny continued to be centred in her grandfather, and if she had any to spare it was devoted to the row of flowers in her window, sickly plants which, sheltered though they were from the cold weather without, grew long of stalk and leaf as they strained and struggled to reach the light. But Jenny's patience was vain; the flowers always ended by drooping, turning yellow, and slowly withering away, even as drooped the wretched birds, supposed to be fowls, which pecked about in the alley, dropping a feather here and a feather there in their perpetual moult and raggedness, but about which fowls there was a legend known to every child in the court, in which it was related that the feathery scarecrow known as "the hen" had once laid an egg—a real genuine egg like those labelled at the cheesemonger's as "Sixteen a shilling," though no one had ever been found, from the owner of the fowls to the youngest inhabitant, who could conscientiously declare that he or she had seen that egg in its new-laid form.

For, as has been before hinted at, Gutter-alley had an atmosphere of its own, where not only flowers had their life dried out of them, but human beings grew more sickly day by day. The children became pale and stunted of growth; their elders unwholesome of mien and habit. It was one of Death's London strongholds, and the visits of parish surgeon and undertaker were frequent here. The close crowded court was one of the spots where typhus lived till it was tired, surfeited with the ill it had done, when for a time it slept.

It was summer, and there was much meeting of women in the court, where they would stand together after their fashion, with apron-wrapped arms, to gossip and compare notes. Now there was a funeral, and that had to be discussed, being considered a decent berryin, wherein all took deep interest, for most likely the majority had subscribed their mites to assist the neighbour in trouble. No matter how poor the sufferers, a decent funeral must be had; and it was no uncommon thing for the undertaker to be called upon to take off the bare, wretched, poverty-stricken aspect of the parish shell by decking it with a few rows of black nails, and a breast-plate and set of handles.

Now the doctor had been seen to go into Number 8. Where would he go next? How was Mrs Rose? Was Banks's child better? Would Widow Robinson and the five little ones have to go to the workhouse? Plenty of such questions were discussed in those days; and it happened that as four of the women were watching for the return of the doctor from one house, that, laden as usual, Harry Smith came up the road, set down his basket, and then, taking out almost an armful of moss roses, he was about to enter the door of Number 5, when one of the women partly covered her face with her apron, and then whispered something to the young man, which made him hesitate for a moment. Directly after he smiled, shook his head, and entered the house, to return in a few minutes without the roses.

The next morning he found that there was still a discussion going on in the court, and on approaching the door of Number 5 it was shut, and entrance was denied.

He could not see any one, a parish nurse said, for the fever was very bad in the house, as at many more in the court; and the young man sighed as he went away to encounter John Wilson at the end of the alley, glancing down it for a moment before passing on again.

For the fever was bad indeed, and once and twice a day shabby funeral processions left the place. Now that the trouble had come, parish meetings were held, and timid men made some little paltry attempts at battling and staying the progress of the distemper. But in spite of all they could do, the fever still raged; and at last, when he came one morning, Harry Smith learned from the women of the court that Jenny Blossom lay a-dying.

No one now saw the blooming girl, basket in hand, go out to sell her fragrant flowers, and Number 5 was shunned as

the blackest plague spot in the court.

But still, day by day, came Harry Smith to the door, where he was never admitted. Not laden now with heavy bunches of flowers, but bearing a few sweet buds, to send by the hands of the nurse to the sick girl's room. Twice over though had Hany to stop shuddering, to let the bearers of something pass. Shuddering from no selfish fear, but lest *some one* might have been suddenly snatched away. For in those times he knew that it was not long before the cold harshly-shaped coffin was called into requisition, and his dread was great until the woman at the house set him at rest.

Then came Harry's turn: one morning he tried to rise for his market trip, but only to find that he had been stricken down by the enemy, and he was soon fighting hard with the fever that had fastened on him.

It was a long hard fight that, but Harry was young and hopeful, he had much to live for, and he won the victory, but only to be left weak as a little child, and unable to stir from his humble bed.

As soon as he could crawl about, by the help of a stick, Harry's steps were directed to Gutter-alley, where, after a long and painful walk, he stood leaning against a wall for support, feeling deadly faint, for there was another funeral at Number 5.

"From which room?" he asked huskily, for there was one of the court women at his side.

"Second floor front," was the reply, and the young man groaned, impotent to ask further questions.

"Is it—is it?" he could say no more; but the woman divined his thoughts.

"No, no!" she answered eagerly, "the poor darling has been spared. It is the old man who is gone to his long home. Jenny has been about this fortnight now, and nursed the old man through it all."

"Was it fever?" asked Harry, more for the sake of speaking than from curiosity, for he wanted to conceal his weakness as far as he could.

"Some say it was; but I don't think so," she replied. "But you ought to be at home, with the rain falling like this. Why, you look fit to be in your bed and nowhere else."

"Yes, yes," said Harry, "I'll go soon."

"He was very old," said the woman; "I knew him years ago, when I lived over there, before he broke his leg. I've been to see Jenny, God bless her! She's half brokenhearted, and has now no one to look up to."

Harry Smith, in spite of the inclement, wintry weather, stopped by the mouth of the court awaiting the coming of the funeral, and a faint flush came into his hollow cheeks as he thought of the woman's last words, and wondered whether Jenny would now choose a protector, and whether that protector would be John Wilson.

Story 4--Chapter VII.

Harry Smith, the very shadow of his former self, waited until the procession neared, and then stood aside to let the one sad woman pass to the shabby funeral carriage, after which he made his way back into the court, to listen to the narrative of the sad havoc worked by the disease while he had been tossing in delirium upon his own pallet. But he went home sad and yet happy, as he pondered upon some information he had gained from the neighbours; for he learned for certain that no one whose visits he had dreaded had passed up the court to Number 5.

The days glided on. It was the depth of winter, and the snow lay thickly upon the house-tops. It was churned up into a black mud sometimes in the streets; but, in spite of powdering blacks, it still struggled to lie white and pure upon the ledges and window-sills. The storm came again and again, and Jenny's window-sill was covered, and somehow in the morning, when she rose, there lay a tiny bunch of sweet violets in amongst the snow. From whence did the offering come? There was but one explanation—it must have been thrown across from a neighbour's window; and morning after morning the flowers were there, and as Jenny took each bunch and placed it in water she thought of the market and its floral treasures even at that season of the year, and a blush burned hotly in her cheek, for she remembered who had brought roses during the illness, and wondered why he had ceased to come.

There was much for Harry to ponder upon, though, in the long hours during which, for want of strength, he was compelled to remain idle; he thought of his own rough ways and garb, as compared with the bearing and dress of his favoured rival; telling himself that he was mad and foolish to expect that Jenny could prefer him to the man chosen by her grandfather. If she could only read his heart aright, he thought that there might be hope for him; but how could he expect that!

And time still sped on, giving to Harry Smith once more muscle and vigour, but little peace of mind, since now Jenny declined to let him bring her flowers, for she kept entirely to her needlework, lodging with an old widow on the opposite side of the court. But the flowers once more began their struggle for life in Jenny's window, and with better success, for there was quite an hour's more sun on that side of the way, so that the once bare window-sill grew gay with bright-hued blossoms.

But as Jenny grew brighter with her flowers, day by day, Harry Smith's heart grew sad within, for with her consent or not—how could he tell?—John Wilson, the fair-weather friend, was frequently to be seen by the young girl's side, as she was going to and from the warehouse whence she obtained the work which made sore her little fingers. Harry knew not that poor Jenny was pestered sadly, and went to the warehouse at different hours each day, so as to avoid

a meeting. Harry judged only from what he saw, and grew daily more disheartened and sad. He did not rail against her, he only blamed his own folly, and at last made up his mind to leave the country—his attention having been taken by the inducements held out by emigration placards.

But this was not until nearly a year had passed, and now that his mind was fully made up, he watched for an evening when he could see Jenny alone, and tell her—he thought he would like to tell her how he had loved her—before he went.

Harry's words were nearly left unsaid; for it happened that one evening he saw Jenny hurrying through the busy streets laden with the work she was taking home, and at a short distance behind he could make out John Wilson following rapidly in her steps.

The sight made the young man's heart sink within his breast, and he was about to turn back when he saw that the young girl was panting beneath her burden, and half angrily he hastened up, and asked if he might carry it, determined for this time not to be driven away.

And it came to pass that evening that as they stepped into the quieter streets the bells of one of the old churches began to peal up joyfully for a practice, and it may be they inspired the young man with hope to declare his intentions, and then to his own surprise he grew warm and eloquent, reproaching his companion even for her conduct towards one who had loved her long and well.

"O Jenny!" he exclaimed, "I have always looked upon you as a violet growing therein—"

"A violet in the snow," she said archly, as she gazed in his face; and—well, the street was very dark—he held her for a moment in his arms.

She shrank from him startled and angry, and he felt hurt once more.

"Ah!" he said bitterly, as they reached the door in the alley, "fine feathers make fine birds, and perhaps Jenny Blossom likes such birds to watch for her, and follow her about."

"Can I help it, Harry?" said Jenny softly, as she laid one little work-scarred hand upon his. "I have no one to protect me," and before he could speak again she had hurried up-stairs.

There must have been something more than the ordinary interpretation of those words, so effectually to drive away Harry Smith's anger. Perhaps it arose from the way in which they were said. At all events John Wilson must have imagined that a fresh plague had broken out in the court, for he came near no more; and at one regular hour every evening Harry was to be seen accompanying the dainty little maiden to the warehouse, turning himself into a regular pack-horse with parcels, and all to the great hindrance of the emigrating scheme.

And so weeks—months passed, and then something more must have been said; for one day Harry Smith was seen busily carrying Jenny's flower-pots from her lodging to his own home, which could have been from no other reason than that Jenny had at last consented to tend them there, and send brightness to the honest young fellow's home. And so it passed, for from that time Jenny Blossom's name faded out of the chronicles of Gutter-alley. Year after year, though, when tiny little blue-eyed children were born to Harry in the cold wintry season, there was a fancy of his which may be recorded. It was only the fancy of a rough, honest worker—a soldier in the fight for life; but all the same, the idea had its tinge of poetry. The idea was this—to say that the tiny blossoms that came to find this world in its wintry garment of purity were like Violets in the Snow.

Story Five: Nil Des.

Story 5--Chapter I.

John Richards' Housekeeper.

"Git along, do, with such clat."

"But, Keziah—dear—only listen to me! Here's winter coming on fast, and what could be a better time for getting it over? What's cold got to do with it, Keziah, when there's a warm and manly heart beating away for you at such a rate as to keep you warm and itself too? Say yes, Keziah!"

"I won't."

"Only think of how happy we should be, with you at your housekeeping, and me with my tallers!"

"And smelling ten times worse of burnt mutton-chops than you do now when you come."

"Smell, Keziah! Oh, what's smell when him as smells loves you? Ah, Keziah! I did think you'd got a heart that I could melt like good quality fat; but it's a stringy and gristly heart, Keziah, one as is full of pride. On my bended knees I ask you to say yes."

"Git up, do, with your clat. The idee of going down on the carpet like that, just for all the world like a man in a stage-play. Such stuff indeed. If you don't get up directly I'll run out of the room, that I will. Do you take me for a silly girl? at my time of life too."

“No, Keziah,” said the man of bended knees, rising slowly to stand once more, a fat, podgy little fellow, whose anxious face grew more ludicrous each moment. “No, Keziah, I only take you for a very hard-hearted woman.”

“Don’t be a noodles, Peter,” exclaimed Keziah. “Didn’t I always tell you, when I gave consent for you to come and see me, that I’d never think of marrying till Miss May was settled?”

“Yes, you did,” said Peter, “but she’s such a long time over it.”

“Stuff!” said Keziah.

“But she is indeed,” cried Peter, trying to catch one of the lady’s hands in his. “You see she’s only nineteen, and can afford to wait a few years. But you see, dear, I’m forty, and you are—”

“Yes, I know, I’m forty, too, and I’m not ashamed of it, so you needn’t twit me with that,” said Keziah snappishly. “I’m in no hurry to change my name into Pash—Pash indeed. I’m sure Bay’s ever so much better.”

“It is! I know it is,” said Peter, “and I didn’t twit you about your years. Ain’t I always said that you were just growing into your prime? But I see how it is: it’s pride—it’s the pride of the composites, Keziah, and you’re trying to throw me over after I’ve been a true lover all these years.”

“Are you going to talk sense; or am I to leave you to chatter that sickly twaddle to the cat?—true lover indeed!”

“Go it!” cried Peter, “it’s pride! I can see through it all. Why don’t you be open with me? But, mark my words, Keziah, there’s more sterling substance in a short six, or even a height, than in all your grand composites, as set themselves up for sparm or wax. I’m tallow, I am, and I respect tallow. I like people not to be ashamed of their position. We can’t all be wax, nor yet sparm, so why not be content as a good honest dip, or a mould! Why, even your twelve or fourteen has a honesty about it that your sham, make-believe imitation wax don’t possess—things as won’t stand so much as a draught of air without flaring, and guttering down, and spattering all over your carpets. It’s pride, Keziah, and that’s all about it.”

“No, it ain’t,” said Keziah quietly.

“To throw me over like this,” continued Mr Pash in injured tones, “and after all my attentions and presents.”

“Presents, indeed!” exclaimed the lady, “attentions!—very delicate attentions. Kidneys, that you got out of the nasty fat that you buy of the butchers.”

“But I never brought one as was the least tainted,” said Peter, “and you always said there was nothing nicer for supper.”

“And, pray, who always ate a good half?” retorted Keziah angrily.

“But I never should have touched ’em if they hadn’t been so gloriously cooked—such brown—such gravy! O, Keziah, don’t be hard on me,” sighed Peter.

“Peter Pash!” exclaimed the lady indignantly, “you’re a great goose; and if I didn’t know that you’d been sitting here three hours without nothing stronger than small beer before you, I should say you’d been drinking. Now, once for all, you can come if you like, or you can stay away if you like. I’m not going even to think about getting married till Miss May’s settled, and that won’t be well, never mind that. Now go home.”

“Yes, my dear,” said Peter in a resigned way, and taking his hat off the sideboard he began to brush the nap round and round very carefully. “But you’re very hard on me, Keziah.”

“Didn’t I tell you to go?” said the lady.

Peter Pash sighed and drew the back of his hand across his mouth, but then his heart failed him, and he shook hands and said “good-night”—words which seemed thrown back at him by the lady of his heart; directly after he withdrew in accordance with the line in italics which appeared at the bottom of his tallow-chandler’s trade card—“N.B. Orders punctually executed!” leaving Keziah Bay, cook and housekeeper to John Richards, the old money-lender, of Walbrook, nipping her lips together, beating one foot upon the fender, and frowning very fiercely at the fire.

For this had been a very exciting affair for Mrs Keziah Bay, since, heretofore, Peter Pash’s custom had been to come three times a week to Walbrook, where he would sit in the half kitchen, half sitting-room, of the dingy old mansion—a house built in the days when merchants condescended to live over their offices, with bedrooms looking down upon warehouse or yard—sit and smoke a pipe while Keziah darned her master’s stockings; stare at her very hard, sup, and say “good-night,” and then go. That was the extent of Peter Pash’s courting. He had certainly once before said something respecting wedding, and been snubbed into silence; but only that once; hence, then, this had been rather an exciting time at Walbrook, and for more reasons than that one.

Mrs Keziah Bay had not been thoughtfully tapping the old-fashioned brass fender with her foot for more than five minutes before the door softly opened and a slight girlish figure entered, to steal quietly to the comely dame’s side, kneel down, and clasp two little white hands round her waist.

“That means trouble, I know,” said Keziah sharply, but all the same one of her hands was passed caressingly over the soft brown hair, and her lips were pressed to the white upturned forehead. “That means trouble, and worry, and upsets, or you wouldn’t come to me. Now, what is it? But there: I know: you’ve been thinking about Frank Marr; haven’t you?”

A sigh was taken for an affirmative answer, and Keziah continued:

“What’s Mr Brough been here for to-night?”

“Don’t talk about it—don’t ask me!” cried the kneeling girl, who now burst out into a passion of weeping. “O, ’Ziah, what shall I do, what shall I do?”

“Why, tell me all about what you’re crying for, to be sure,” cried Keziah sharply; but all the same with a motherly attempt or two at soothing. “Surely master hasn’t been at you again about Mr Frank, has he?”

“O, yes—yes,” sobbed the girl; “and it does seem so cruel and hard. O, ’Ziah, I’ve no one to talk to but you—no one to ask for help. He talks as if Frank could help being poor, and not prospering in his business, when, poor fellow, he strove so hard.”

“But what did he bring all that up for?” cried Keziah. “Mr Frank hasn’t been here these two months, I’ll swear. Did you say anything?”

“No, no!” sobbed the girl, bursting into a fresh paroxysm of weeping.

“Then some one must have brought it up. There, I see plain as plain. Bless him! He ought to be boiled in his own sugar, that he ought! He’s a nice fellow, he is, for a sugar-baker, to come here tattling and setting people against other people.”

“What do you mean?” sobbed May Richards, gazing wonderingly at her comforter.

“Mean? Why, that that old Tom Brough ought to be ashamed of himself to come tattling to master about Mr Frank. That was it, wasn’t it?”

“No, no!” sobbed the poor girl wearily.

“Then what did he come for?” said Keziah.

There was a pause, during which May wept bitterly.

“I shall go and ask master myself,” said Keziah authoritatively, as she half rose. “I’m not going to have my child upset like this for nothing.”

“No, no, no!” sobbed May. “Pray stay, ’Ziah—dear ’Ziah, don’t be angry, and I’ll tell you all.”

“Then what is it?” said Keziah.

“Mr Brough—”

“Well?”

“Mr Brough has been to talk to papa.”

“Well, go on, child, for goodness’ sake, and do wipe your eyes. He’s been to talk to master, and what about, pray?”

“About me,” sobbed May.

“Well, and pray what about you?”

“He came to propose, and papa gave him leave.”

“To propose what?” said Keziah. “There, for goodness gracious in heaven sake, child, speak out and do not keep on riddle-me-riddle-me-reeing in that way. What did he want? Why!” she exclaimed, as a sudden light seemed to break upon her, “he ain’t broke, and come after money? Not he though, he’s as rich as a Jew. What does it all mean?”

“He came to propose, and papa ordered me to accept him,” sobbed Mary; “and when I told papa that I considered myself engaged to poor Frank, he was ready to strike me, and he cursed him, and called him horrible names, and said he would sooner see me dead than married to such a beggar, and that I was to accept Mr Brough’s offer.”

“What!” exclaimed Keziah, her eyes dilating as she caught May by the shoulders, and seemed to look her through and through. “Do you mean to tell me that old Tom Brough, the sugar-baker, wants to marry you, and that master said he should?”

“Yes, yes,” sobbed May. “O, ’Ziah, I’m half brokenhearted. What shall I do?”

“Do!” cried Keziah fiercely; “I’d have knocked their heads together. Old Tom Brough! An old villain! An old rascal! He’s sixty, if he’s an hour. It’s a good job for him he’s gone. Sneaking out as he did, and giving me five shillings when he went. Ah! if I’d have known when he was with me there in the passage, I’d have given it him!”

May clung to her, sobbing more than ever. “I’d—I’d—I’d have wrung his neck,” cried Keziah furiously; and then she burst out into a contemptuous laugh, as she strove to comfort the weeping girl, kissing her, wiping her eyes, and holding her to her breast. “There—there,” she said, “let it be now, and I’ll talk to them both. I’ll let them see that money is not going to do everything. Tom Brough, indeed! A carneying old rascal, with his smooth tongue and pleasant ways; an old deceiver. I thought better things of him. But I haven’t done with them all yet; I don’t believe there’s a man under the sun good for anything. But there goes the bell.”

Keziah Bay rose to leave the room, but May clung to her imploringly.

“You will not say a word?” she said pleadingly.

“And why not, pray?” Then seeing the agitation and fear in the poor girl’s face she continued, “Then I won’t—not to him; for it would be like trying to turn a rushing bull;—but I’m not married yet, Peter Pash,” she muttered as she left the room, “nor she isn’t married yet, John Richards and Thomas Brough, alderman and big man as you are. We’re a poor weak, helpless lot, that we are, and it’s my belief that men are born with but one idea, and that is that they ought to persecute us women.”

Story 5--Chapter II.

Under Temptation.

There is, and there always was, about Walbrook something of an exasperating nature. I don’t care whether you journey upon wheels, or by means of your nature-given supports, you shall always find an obstruction. The pathways are as narrow and awkward as the road; and while there is always a perky, impudent-looking, heavily-laden truck, with its handle either cocked up in defiance, or pointed down insultingly, as it obstructs the horse-drawn traffic, there is sure to be some one carrying a box of stationery, or a bale of paper-hangings, or something or another with hard, harsh corners, to come in contact with your front or your back, to injure your hat, or tear your coat with a ragged nail, or jostle you off into the gutter. It don’t matter when you go down Walbrook, passing by the sombre Mansion House, and seeking to be at peace in the quiet shades of Budge-row, or Watling, you shall certainly have your feathers ruffled, mentally of course; therefore, it was not surprising that Frank Marr, a sturdy young fellow of goodly aspect, and some eight-and-twenty years, should look angry and frowning as he sought the house of old John Richards.

Not that it was at all surprising for people either going to or coming from John Richards’ office to look lowering of brow, for interviews with that gentleman were none of the most pleasant; they had too much to do with interest, and renewing, and bill stamps, and too little to do with hard cash—unless it were for repayments—to be gratifying to any one.

But Frank Marr’s business, as he thought, did not relate to money; and without hanging about the passage in the hope of catching sight of May Richards, his old playmate and boyhood’s love, he asked to be, and was shown at once into the presence of old John Richards,—“Grab-all,”—“Grind-’em,”—“Screw-bones,”—“Publican,”—for by all these pleasant sobriquets was the money-lender known.

But Frank Marr, merchant, who had just passed through the Bankruptcy Court, after five years’ hard struggle with unforeseen difficulties, and paid ten shillings in the pound, after all the expenses had come out of his estate—Frank Marr knew that he had chosen a bad morning for his visit. John Richards’ enemy had him by the leg; and swathed and bandaged, suffering terribly from gout, but transacting business all the same, as many a trembling client knew to his cost, he sat with a curious smile upon his face as the young man entered.

“Now for a fierce volley of rage and curses,” thought Frank; “he shall hear me, though, all the same!” But to his great surprise the old man greeted him most civilly.

“Well, Mr Marr, what’s in the wind, eh? Little accommodation bill, eh? Whose names?”

“No, Mr Richards,” said Frank, dashing at once into the subject nearest his heart, “I have not come about money.”

“Indeed!” said the money-lender, grinning with pain, but still speaking suavely. “Pray what is it, then?”

“I have had news this morning, Mr Richards.”

“Good, I hope. An opening, perhaps, for business?”

“No, sir! Bad news—vile news—cruel news!” cried the young man excitedly.

“Sorry, very sorry,” said Richards, quietly. “Pray what is it, then?”

“It is the news of slave-dealing in this city, sir,” said Frank. “Of a father making a contract with a rich purchaser for the sale and delivery of his only child, as if she were so much merchandise, and I come, old man, to tell you to your face that it is cruel, and a scandal to our civilisation. But I beg pardon, Mr Richards; I am hot and excited. I am deeply moved. You know I love May, that we have loved from childhood, and that we are promised to one another. Don’t interrupt me, please.”

“I’m not going to,” said the old man, still quietly, to the other’s intense astonishment.

“I know what you would say to me if I were to advance my pretensions now. But look here, Mr Richards—I am young yet, May is young. I have been very unfortunate. I have had to buy experience, in spite of my endeavours, in a very dear school; but there is time for me to retrieve my position. I shall get on—I feel assured. For heaven’s sake, then, let this cruel affair be set aside: give me a few years to recover myself, and all will yet be well, I am sure. You will break her heart if you force her to marry this old man.”

“Who told you of this?” said John Richards, still calmly.

“I cannot tell you,” said Frank.

“Did May write to you?”

“No,” said Frank warmly; “she promised you, sir, that she would not. I, too, promised you that while my affairs were in such a state I would not hold communication with her. We have kept our words, sir, even as we intend to keep those upon another point. I have neither spoken to nor heard from May for months.”

“Only gone to church to sit and stare at her,” said John Richards quietly.

“It were hard indeed, sir, if that poor gratification were not afforded me,” said Frank. “But now, sir, pray hear me—pray listen to me. Think of the misery you would inflict.”

“Stop now, and hear me,” said the old money-lender quietly, though his lips quivered with pain. “Your name is Frank; now be frank with me. You are at the present time penniless, are you not?”

Frank had hard work to suppress a groan as he bowed his head and thought of how, had he been given time, he could have paid every creditor in full, and had to spare, instead of his poor assets being more than half swallowed up in costs.

“You came here expecting a stormy interview, did you not?”

“I did!” said Frank.

“To be sure! and now I am going to show you that old Grab-all is not so black a devil as he is painted.”

“Good heavens, sir!” cried Frank joyfully.

“Stop a bit—stop a bit—don’t be rash, young man; for perhaps I am not going to favour you in the way you may expect, though I do feel disposed to help you. Now look here: I suppose five hundred pounds would be a great help to you just now?”

“It would start me in life again, sir,” said Frank, sadly; “but I should not feel justified in commencing upon borrowed capital at high interest.”

“Did I say a word about borrowed capital or high interest?”

“No, sir, but—”

“Yes, yes—of course—I know—old Grind-’em will have sixty per cent, they say, eh? But look here, suppose I were to *give* you five hundred pounds to start with!”

“Give! give! Give me five hundred pounds in hard cash, sir! Mr Richards, why do you play with my feelings?”

“Play, young man?” said the money-lender quietly. “I am not playing—I am in earnest. I tell you that I will give you, now, this minute, five hundred pounds. There,” he said, “give me that cheque book,” and he pointed to a safe in the wall. “I’ll write you one now this instant; and with five hundred pounds you have the key to a fortune. You may die rich as I am, Frank Marr.”

“But you have a condition: you wish to buy something with this five hundred pounds, Mr Richards,” said Frank sternly.

“I only want five minutes of your time,” said the old man.

“What to do?”

“To write half a dozen lines at my dictation.”

“And to whom?”

“To my daughter.”

“Their purport?”

“That you break with her, and set her free, now and for ever.”

“If I do,” cried Frank fiercely, “may God in heaven bring down—”

“Stop, stop, you rash, mad fool!” cried the old man excitedly. “Look here, Frank Marr: you have not a penny; your mother is almost starving; you are living together in a beggarly second-floor room at a tallow-chandler’s. You see I know all! You are suffering the poor old lady’s murmurs day by day, and she reproaches you for wasting her little all in your business. Look here: be a man, and not a love-sick boy. I’ll be frank with you. Mr Brough has proposed, and I approve of him for a son-in-law. He is elderly, but a better-hearted man does not exist; and you will have the satisfaction of knowing that May has gone to a good home; while you have the chance, and at once, of doing your duty by your old mother. She wants change of air, Frank, and more nourishment. Five hundred pounds clear, Frank, to start with, and on your obtaining one name, one respectable name, beside your own, I’ll advance you five hundred more—at five per cent, Frank, my good fellow—at five per cent.—a thing I never before did in my life. I’ll do it at once, this very hour, and you can pay the cheque into a banker’s, start a new account, and a prosperous one. There, I’ll find you a name—your uncle, Benjamin Marr; I’ll take him; he’s a respectable man, and good for five hundred pounds. He’ll do that for you. Now, my good lad, sit down and accept my offer.”

“Does the devil tempt men still in human form?” gasped Frank, as with veins starting he stood panting for breath before the old man.

“Pooh! nonsense! absurd! Now, how can you talk such silly book-trash, Frank Marr? I thought five years with me as clerk would have made another man of you. You ought never to have left me. Throw all that folly aside, and look the matter in the face like a man. Now you see how calm and how lenient I am. I might play the tyrant, and say that May shall be Mr Brough’s wife, and all that sort of thing; but I want to spare everybody’s feelings. I don’t want any scenes. Come, now: you give her up; you will write to her, eh?”

Frank Marr’s voice was hoarse as he spoke; for he had felt the old man’s words burning as it were into his brain, as scene after scene presented itself to his imagination. There on one side wealth, prosperity, comfort for the old and ailing woman whom he had, as he told himself, in an evil hour robbed of the comforts of her declining years; a new career, and the means to pay off that other ten shillings in the pound, so that he could once more hold up his head amongst his fellow-men. On the other side, the sweet, loving face of May Richards, whom he thought he loved as man never yet loved. He told himself that without a moment’s hesitation he should defy the temptation to gain a hold; but for all that he temporised, and John Richards saw it, and stretched out his hand to take a pen.

“But you will give me time to recover myself?” said Frank.

“What for? I don’t understand,” said Richards.

“For May’s sake,” pleaded Frank.

“Stop! Not another word!” cried the old man, now speaking fiercely. “I told her last night that I’d sooner see her dead than your wife. I tell you the same. But I will not be angry, nor yet harsh—I was put out last night. Now, once more look here: Five hundred pounds in cash—a free gift, mind—and five hundred more as an easy business loan, renewable year after year during my life, so long as the interest is punctually paid. Nothing can be easier for you. Think now, to give up a boy’s milk-and-water love I offer you what to a man in your present position is a fortune—a thousand pounds. And you will take it?”

Frank tried to speak, but he seemed to be choking.

“A thousand pounds, which means future prosperity—which means, as well, a score of rich and beautiful women to choose from.”

Frank had not heard a door open behind them; he had not seen May, pale as ashes, standing motionless listening to every word; he could only hear the words of the tempter, and the scratch, scratch of a cruel pen, sharp as a needle, dipped apparently in some subtle venom, writing the words *one thousand pounds* on his heart at the same time as in that little slip-book, while the poison was coursing through his veins, making them to beat and throb.

“One thousand pounds, John Richards; payable to Frank Marr, Esquire, or his order,” said the old man aloud, but as if speaking to himself; “and all for giving up a boy-and-girl love affair. Pish! I am getting into my dotage. Look here, Mr Marr,” he said, speaking up, “I only want you to write the few lines I dictate, and to get that name to the bill, and here is the cheque ready. You’ll get on, now, I feel sure,” he said, in cool, business-like tones, but watching his victim like a cat the while. “Bought wit is better than taught wit. Shall I order you a gloss of wine?”

“God help me!” groaned Frank Marr as, making an effort to speak, he tore at his throat for an instant, snatched at his hat, and then rushed out of the house.

“Expensive, but safe!” said John Richards, with a bitter smile, as he pinned the cheque to its duplicate. “What, you here?”

“Father!” cried May, coming forward and speaking in tones that should have pierced even his heart, had it not been stony to the very core; “O, father, what have you done?”

“Spent hundreds of my hard-earned pounds to free you from a bankrupt lover—a scoundrel whose every thought was on my cash, whose every calculation was as to how many years I should be before I died; upon a man who had not the heart to stand up for you, who valued you at less than five hundred pounds; and yet you reproached me with wishing to sell you to a rich husband, when he is a pure, sterling, true-hearted man, the only one I know that I could trust—a man you have known from a child, and one who has long loved you. Suppose he is grey-headed, what then? You can trust in his experience and—eh? What? Why? What the deuce! talk of the—How are you, Brough? glad to see you. Got the gout awful this morning. Don’t stop; I’m bothered and sick with pain. Take May up-stairs. My dear, give Mr Brough some lunch.”

Then, in an undertone, he spoke to the new-comer:

“I’ve done it for you, Brough; smoothed the way, and the day’s your own. Bought him off for five hundred.”

“And has he taken it?” said the new-comer, a handsome, florid, elderly man.

“As good as taken it. It’s all right, I tell you. She knows it too. Go and comfort her up, Brough; comfort her up.”

“Poor child, poor child,” muttered Mr Brough, taking a cold stony hand in his; and the tears rose to his eyes as he read in the despairing look directed at him the truth of the old money-lender’s words. The next minute he had led May Richards up-stairs and was seated by her on one of the sofas, gazing pityingly at her, for with her face covered by her hands the poor girl wept as though her heart would break.

Story 5--Chapter III.

Tom Brough.

For a good quarter of an hour no word was spoken; then again taking one of the unresisting hands in his, May's new courtier talked long and earnestly, telling of how, with no ardent passion, but with the chastened love of one who had known a bitter disappointment, he had long watched her and waited.

"And now, at last, May, I ask you to be an old man's wife," he said. "Yours shall be no life of slavery; but there, you have known me long, and for some time past," he said tenderly; "I have not been without hope that you loved me in return."

"Mr Brough," sobbed May, throwing herself on her knees at his feet, "I do love you, I have loved you ever since I was a child—loved you as one should love a dear father. Have I not often come to you with my girlish troubles; but you surely never can mean this—you cannot wish what you say? How can I be your wife, when you know how long—how long—O, Frank, Frank, Frank!" she cried, with a wail of despair that seemed to thrill through her suitor's heart, and raising her in his arms he kissed her tenderly—as lovingly as might a father—and placed her on a sofa at his side, drawing her nearer to him in spite of a slight resistance, as he tried to whisper a few words in his endeavour to soothe the fierce burst of despair that shook the poor girl's frame.

"There, May—my child," he said at last, "try and command yourself," when a thought seemed to strike him, and, though evidently troubled and reluctant, he rose to go, tenderly taking leave of the weeping girl.

But before he could reach the door, May had him by the hand.

"Dear Mr Brough," she said beseechingly, "I cannot think that you would wish to make me unhappy for life."

"Indeed, no," he said gently, as he held both her hands in his. "I would devote my life to making you happy."

"But you know—for some time—Mr Frank Marr—"

Then the recollection of what she had heard and seen that morning seemed to flash across her brain, scathing her as it passed, and with a wild look she sought to withdraw her hands, but they were fist held.

"Nay, my child," said Mr Brough tenderly, "I love you too well to wish to give you pain. I would sooner suffer myself than cause a pang to your gentle little heart. Show me that Frank Marr is worthy of you—that is, that your father's words which he told me were either untrue, or that he had been deceived; tell me, in fact, that by waiving my claims I can give you happiness, and I will do so, and at once, even though—" His voice trembled as he spoke, and then he added hastily: "But you are much agitated; I will go. Only one question before a painful subject is buried for ever—Are you aware that Frank Marr was with your father this morning?"

May bowed her head, for the words would not come.

"And you know of the offer made and accepted? Good God, what a brute I am!" he exclaimed, as he had just time to catch May in his arms, and save her from falling.

"That's just what you are!" exclaimed a harsh voice, and the visitor became aware of the presence of Keziah Bay, who indignantly caught the fainting girl from him, and apparently without much effort bore her from the room.

It was with a quiet, thoughtful face that Tom Brough, the well-known wealthy, charitable sugar-baker, made his way to one of the City chop-houses, and sat down in a dark box to think for quite an hour, with a newspaper before his face, a newspaper that the impatient waiter swooped down at a good half-dozen times, but never asked for on account of its being in the hands of so excellent a customer. But never a word read Tom Brough; it was only a blind behind which he wished to think on that eventful morning; and he thought till his countenance lightened, for it seemed to him that his way ahead was very clear, and in that way ahead he saw himself a happy man, cheered by May's smiles, in spite of his years, and playing with her children; and at last, his own eyes dewy and twinkling, his bright grey hair glistening, and the ruddy hues of his open countenance ruddier than ever, he laid aside the paper just at a moment when, unable to bear it any longer, the waiter was swooping down with the fell intent of striking and bearing off the sheet. But just as he stooped to seize it, the paper was dropped, and he was standing face to face with the old and regular attendant at the place.

"Charles," said Mr Brough, "I think I'll take a chop."

"And hysters, sir?" said Charles.

"And oysters," said Tom Brough.

"Port *or* sherry, sir?" said Charles respectfully.

"Pint of port—yellow seal," said Tom Brough with a sigh of content, and then he leaned back and looked up at the dingy soot-darkened skylight, till the hissing hot chop was brought, moistening his lips from time to time with the glass of tawny astringent wine, seeing, though, no yellow glass, no floating blacks, nothing but a bright future; and then he ate—ate like a man who enjoyed it, finished his fifth glass of port, and walked to his office, brisk, bustling, and happy.

"Gentleman been waiting to see you two hours, sir," said a clerk.

“Bless my soul, how tiresome!” he muttered. “I wanted to do as little as possible to-day; and if news came that the sugar crops were a failure to a cane, I believe I’m so selfish that I shouldn’t care a—”

But, whatever might have been the proper finish of that sentence, it was never uttered; for, bustling forward with an easy elastic step, the pleasant countenance suddenly became grave as opening the door of his inner office Tom Brough stood face to face with pale, stern-looking Frank Marr.

Story 5--Chapter IV.

Hopeless.

If there is anything obstinate in this life it is Time, whom poets and painters are so fond of depicting as a goose-winged, forelocked, bald-headed, scraggy old gentleman, exceedingly hard up for clothes, but bearing an old, overgrown egg-boiler, and a scythe with a shaft that, however well adapted for mowing in his own particular fields, would, for want of proper bend and handles, if he were set to cut grass in some Essex or Sussex mead, make that old back of his double down in a grander curve than ever, and give him such a fit of lumbago as was never suffered by any stalk of the human corn he delights to level. Just want the hours, weeks, and months to seem extended, and they shrink like fourteen-shilling trouser legs. Just want the days to glide by so that some blissful moment may be swift to arrive, and one might almost swear that the ancient hay-maker had been putting his lips to some barrel, and was lying down behind a hedge for a long nap. He had been busy enough though at Walbrook, as many a defaulting bill acceptor knew to his cost, and small mercy was meted to him by John Richards. The time, too, with May seemed to speed by, as evening after evening it brought her December, in the shape of Tom Brough—always pleasant, cheerful, and apparently happy, if he gained one sad pleasant smile.

For there was a sadness in May Richards’ face that was even at times painful; but she seemed to bear her cares patiently. Only once had she sought to talk to her father, to find him even gentle.

“You had better throw it all aside,” he said. “Take my advice, child, you will find it better.”

“But I must see those papers, father,” she said hoarsely.

She had followed the old man into his office, and stood facing him as he laid one hand upon his great iron safe.

He did not seem to heed her for a few minutes; but at last he spoke.

“You will not destroy them?” he said. “No.”

The next minute the great iron door opened with a groan, and he had placed a cancelled cheque bearing frank Marr’s name on the back, and a couple of other documents before her.

She stood there and read them through, word for word, twice, and then they dropped from her hand, and gazing straight before her she slowly left the place.

He had sold her, then. He had preferred worldly prosperity to her love, and she had been deceived in him as hundreds of others were every day deceived by those in whom they trusted. But one document she held to still—the one in her desk, the little desk that stood by her bed’s head, and that letter she had read night after night, and wept over when there was none to see, till the blistering tears had all but obliterated the words on the paper. But no tears could wash them out from her heart, where they were burned in by anguish—those few cold formal words dictated by her father—that he, Frank Marr, feeling it to be his duty, then and there released her from all promises, and retained to himself the right without prejudice to enter into any new engagement.

She had been asked to indite a few lines herself, setting him free on her part, but she could not do it; and now, after the first month of agony, she was striving hard to prepare herself for what she felt to be her fate.

But all seemed in vain, and one day, almost beside herself with the long strain, Keziah found her pacing the room and wringing her thin hands.

“You sha’n’t marry him, and that’s an end of it!” cried Keziah fiercely. “I’ll go over and see him to-night and talk to him; and if I can’t win him round my name isn’t Bay. I’ll marry him myself if it can’t be done any other how, that I will. Cheer up, then, my darling. Don’t cry, please, it almost breaks my heart to see you. He’s a good old fellow, that he is; and I’m sure when he comes to know how you dread it all he’ll give it up. If I only had that Mr Frank—What? Don’t, my little one? Then I won’t; only it does seems so hard. Married on the shortest day, indeed! I daresay he’d like to be. There’s no day so short nor so long ever been made that shall see you Tom Brough’s wife, so I tell him. Now, only promise me that you’ll hold up.”

“Don’t talk to me, please. I shall be better soon,” sobbed May; and then after an interval of weeping, “’Ziah, I know you love me: when I’m dead, will you think gently of me, and try to forgive all my little pettish ways?”

“When you’re what?” cried Keziah.

“When I’m dead; for I feel that it can’t be long first. I used to smile about broken hearts and sorrow of that kind, but, except when I’m asleep and some bright dream comes, all seems here so black and gloomy that I could almost feel glad to sleep always—always, never to wake again.”

“O, O, O!” cried Keziah, bursting into a wail of misery, but only to stop short and dash away a tear right and left with the opposite corners of her apron. “There, I won’t have it, and if you talk to me again like that, I’ll—I’ll—I’ll go to Mr

Brough at once. No, my child, I'm not going to sit still and see you murdered before my very eyes if I know it. But though I don't want to be cruel I must tell you that your poor affections really were misplaced; for that Frank Marr is as well off now and as happy as can be. He lodges, you know, at Pash's, and they've got all the best furnished rooms that he got ready for me; not that I was going to leave you, my pet; and he's making money, and taking his mother out of town, and all sorts, I can tell you."

It did not escape Keziah's eye how every word was eagerly drunk in, and feeling at last that she was but feeding and fanning a flame that scorched and seared the young life before her, she forbore, and soon after left the room.

"But if I don't see Mr Tom Brough, and put a stop to this marriage, and his preparations, and new house, and furnishing," she cried, "my name isn't Keziah Bay?"

And Keziah kept her word.

Story 5--Chapter V.

Mr Pash Looks Green.

Keziah Bay had made up her mind to go to Mr Tom Brough, and, attended by Peter Pash as her faithful squire, she started, loading him to begin with in case of rain, for on one arm Peter carried a large scarlet shawl, and under the other a vast blue-faded gingham umbrella, with a great staghorn beak and a grand ornamental brass ferule.

But Peter Pash looked proud at the confidence placed in him, and, following rather than walking by the side of his lady, he accompanied her to Finsbury-square, in one corner of which place lived Tom Brough.

All the same, though, Peter Pash was not comfortable, for he did not know the object of Keziah's mission. What was she going to Mr Brough's for? It was not because she was sent—she had declared that before starting, and when pressed for her reason she said that she was "going because she was going," and Peter did not feel satisfied. In fact, before they were half-way to Finsbury, Peter was fiercely jealous, and telling himself that he was being made a fool of.

"You'd better let me carry that umbrella if you are going to bring it down thump at every step like that," said Keziah.

"No, thank you, I can manage it," said Peter, as, tucking it once more beneath his arm, he trotted on by her side, trying to make up his mind how he should find out the truth of his suspicions.

"It only wants a little looking into," said Peter to himself, "and then you can find out anything. I can see it all now. And do they think they are going to deceive me? No, I've boiled down and purified too much not to be able to separate the wrong from the right. She's going to ask him if he means to marry her instead of Miss Richards, and if he don't, she'll fall back on me. But she won't, for I don't mean to be fallen on, and so I tell her."

"Here we are," said Keziah, stopping short in front of Mr Brough's house.

"Yes, here we are," said Peter, with what he meant for a searching look.

"Now, look here, Peter," said Keziah, "I'm going to see Mr Brough, and you'll wait outside till I come back."

"But what are you going for?" said Peter.

There was no reply save what was conveyed in a hitch of Keziah's shawl, and then, her summons being responded to, she entered, leaving Peter perspiring on the door-step, brandishing the great umbrella and peering at the door with eyes that threatened to pierce the wood—varnish, paint, and all.

Meanwhile, Keziah was ushered into the room where Tom Brough was seated, rosy and hearty, over his decanter and glass.

"Well, Keziah," he said, "and how are all at home? Take a chair."

The visitor did not condescend to reply until the door was shut, when, folding her arms, she stood looking at him with a fierce uncompromising aspect.

"I've come about that poor girl," she said at last.

"About what poor girl?" said Tom Brough.

"That poor girl whose heart's being broken up into tiny bits by you and him—her father," cried Keziah, fiercely, "and I've come to know if you ain't ashamed of yourself. There, hold your tongue, and listen to what I've got to say; I haven't said anything to him at home, because it's like talking to stone and marbles. But I've come to talk to you."

"Talk away, then," said Tom Brough, pleasantly.

"I'm going to," said Keziah, angrily, "and don't you think, Mr Brough, that you're going to get rid of me like that, because you are not, so now then. This marriage can't go on."

"Why not?" said Tom Brough, offering a glass of wine, which was refused.

"Because I'm not going to see my darling that I've nursed and tended ever since she was a baby driven into her

grave to please you. There, keep off—gracious, if the man isn't mad!"

Keziah half shrieked the last words, for, leaping from his seat, Tom Brough made a rush at her, chased her round the table with an activity hardly to have been expected from one of his years, followed her out on to the landing as she hastily beat a retreat, down the stairs, along the passage, and caught her on the door-mat, where, after a sharp scuffle, he succeeded in imprinting a couple of sounding kisses upon her cheek before she got the door open, and, panting and tumbled, rushed out nearly to the oversetting of Peter Pash, who, with his eye to the keyhole, had seen the chase in part, heard the scuffle in full, and now stood gazing grandly at the panting object of his affections.

"Keziah!" he exclaimed at length, "I thought better of you."

"What do you mean by that?" exclaimed the irate dame.

"I thought you had been a woman as could be trusted," he said, sadly.

"Trusted, indeed!" cried Keziah. "Why, he's a madman, that's what he is. He's off his head because of this wedding: see if he ain't."

"Keziah!" said Peter, loftily, "I've done with you."

"Give me that umbrella," cried Keziah, snatching the great gingham from his hand. "Now just you speak to me again like that, young man, and I'll talk to you."

"I'll see you home. I won't be mean," said Peter. "But you've broken a true and trusting heart, Keziah."

"Hold your tongue, do," she cried; "just as if I hadn't enough to bother me without your silly clat. I did think he'd be open to reason," she added half aloud.

Peter did not answer, but walked by Keziah's side till they turned down by the Mansion House and entered Walbrook, when with a start the latter caught Peter by the arm and pointed down the deserted way to where a light figure was seen to hurriedly leave John Richards' door, and then to flit beneath lamp after lamp in the direction of Cannon-street.

"Where's she going?" exclaimed Keziah, hoarsely. "What is she out for to-night?"

"Who is it?" said Peter, though it was for the sake of speaking, for he knew.

"She's mad, too, and we're all mad, I believe," cried Keziah. "O, Peter, if you love me as you say, hold by me now, for there's something going wrong; don't lose sight of her for an instant, if you value me. Make haste, man, and come on."

"That's cool!" said Peter, "and after me seeing some one else kissing and hugging you."

"Quick, quick!" cried Keziah, excitedly catching Peter's hand in hers; and then together they passed down Walbrook and across the street at the bottom, both too fat and heavy to keep the light figure in sight without great exertion.

Down one of the hilly lanes and into Thames-street they panted, with the light drapery now lost sight of, now seen again at some corner, and then to disappear down one of the dark fog-dimmed openings, up which came the faint odour of the river and the low lapping noise of its waters against the slimy steps below.

"Quick, quick!" said Keziah hoarsely, "or we shall be too late."

Her earnest manner more than her words seemed to impress Peter Pash, and hurrying along he was the first to catch sight of the light figure they chased now standing motionless on the edge of a wharf, while the wind came mournfully sighing off the river, in whose inky breast, all blurred and half-washed-out, shone the light of star and Keziah's breath seemed drawn in deep groans, as for a few minutes she stood, as it were, paralysed. Then recovering herself, and motioning Peter back, she advanced quickly, and just as the light figure gave a start and seemed about to step forward, she threw her arms round it and held it tightly, sobbing hysterically the while.

But only for a few seconds.

"Here, Peter, quick," she cried, "that shawl. And were you looking for me, my pet? We've been walking. But never mind, we've found you now, and I won't leave you again. Don't talk—don't say anything, only come home quickly!"

Without a word, without resistance, May Richards suffered herself to be led homeward, merely gazing from time to time at her old servant in a half-dazed way as if she could not understand the meaning of it all, nor yet why she was being led with Keziah's arm so tightly holding hers.

And so they walked back to find the door in Walbrook ajar, with Tom Brough standing in the entry.

"Go back now, Peter," whispered Keziah, "and not a word of this to a soul."

"But what's he here for?" said Peter, in the same tone.

"You miserable jealous pate," whispered the old servant fiercely, "if you don't be off—"

She said no more, for Peter *was* off, and then she turned to Mr Brough.

"You may well look," she whispered to him, as he said a few unnoticed words to May. "All your doing—all your doing.

Another minute, and the poor lamb would have been sleeping in the river."

Tom Brough started, and then caught May in his arms, and bore her up-stairs, where for quite an hour she sat in a dazed, heedless way that troubled Keziah more than would a passionate outburst.

"If she'd only cry," she whispered at last to Mr Brough, "But you won't press for it now, Mr Brough; you won't, sir, I'm sure. People say you're a good man, and that you're kind and charitable. Look at the poor thing; her heart's broke—it is indeed."

"I'm going now," said Mr Brough in answer, and then when Keziah accompanied him down to the door, "Do not leave her for an instant, if you love the poor child; and, look here, Keziah, the wedding must take place, and it is for her good—*mark me*, for her good. I love her too well to make her unhappy, and if you do your duty you will help me all you can."

Keziah closed the door without a word, and a minute after she was kneeling beside and crying over the heartbroken girl.

Story 5--Chapter VI.

Hard-Hearted.

Time glided on.

"You've come again, then?" said Keziah Bay.

"Yes, I've come again," said Mr Peter Pash. "Trade's very brisk, Keziah."

"Is it?" said that lady, in the most indifferent of tones.

"Yes, things are looking up well," said Mr Pash, "and my lodger has dropped dips and taken to composites. You know what that means, of course."

"Not I," said Keziah indifferently. "I don't trouble my head about such things."

"You're always a-snubbing me, Keziah," said the little man dolefully. "It's no good for me to try and please you."

"Not a bit," said Keziah with a smile. "You ought to know better than to come wherrittin' me when there's so much trouble in the house."

"But it ain't our trouble," said Peter Pash. "Why, if I was to make myself unhappy about other folks' candles, where should I be? Now, I say, Keziah dear, when's it to be?"

"Once for all, I tell you," said Keziah, "that until I see poor Miss May happily settled, I won't bother about that nonsense; so you may hold your tongue, for I can see what you mean."

Peter Pash gave a great groan of despair, but the next minute he was patiently submitting to a severe cross-examination concerning the habits and customs of his lodger Frank Marr.

"He's no good, Peter," said Keziah at last, "and the sooner you get rid of him the better."

"But he pays his rent very regular," said Peter, "and that's a consideration, you know. And he's a good son, and pays no end of attention to his mother. And I say, Keziah, dear, I've seen Mr Brough, and I ain't a bit jealous now."

Keziah snorted.

"He's been to my place twice to see Mr Marr, and they're the best of friends, and he tells me it was only his fun, and Mr Marr don't seem to mind a bit. And I say, Keziah dear, now that Miss May is really going to get married and settled, sha'n't we make it right now?"

"Now I tell you what it is, young man," said Keziah fiercely, "I hate the very name of marrying, and if you say another word to me about it I'll never have you at all. When I want to be married I'll ask you, and not before, so now be off."

"But will you want to some day?" said Peter pitifully.

"Perhaps I shall, and perhaps I sha'n't; I'm seeing enough of it to satisfy me, so I tell you."

Peter groaned.

"Now don't make that noise here," cried Keziah snappishly. "If you can't behave yourself, you'd better go."

"I won't do so any more, dear," said Peter softly. "How's poor dear Miss May?"

"O, don't ask me—poor lamb!" cried Keziah.

"It is to be, isn't it?" said Peter.

"To be! Yes. They've talked her into it, now that your fine Mr Marr has proved himself such a good-for-nothing. It's to

be, sure enough, and I wish them all joy of what they've done. They're killing her between them, and then they'll be happy. Get married! There, don't drive me wild, Peter Pash, but be off out of my sight, for I hate the very sound of the word, and don't you come here any more till I ask you."

Peter Pash groaned; and then rising he departed in a very disconsolate state of mind, for he considered himself to be far more worthy of pity than May Richards.

Story 5--Chapter VII.

May's Marriage.

The wedding day, and for once in a way a crisp, bright, hearty, frosty time—cold but inspiriting; and at ten o'clock, pale and trembling, but nerved for her trial, May Richards stood suffering Keziah to give the finishing touches to her dress before starting for the church. There was to be no form; May had stipulated for that. The wedding was to be at an old City church hard by, and in place of meeting her there Tom Brough had arrived, and was in the dining-room talking to old Richards bound to an easy-chair with gout, and too ill to think of going to the church.

As May entered at last, led in by Keziah, defiant and snorting, Tom Brough, active as a young man, hurried to meet the trembling girl, caught her in his arms, and kissed her fondly, heedless of the sigh she gave.

"Don't look like that, my darling," he whispered. "I'm going to make you happy as the day is long."

May's only reply was a look so full of misery and despair, that Keziah put her apron to her eyes and ran out of the room.

For a moment there was a shade as of uneasiness crossed old Richards' face—it might have been a twinge of gout—but it passed on the instant.

"Don't look like that, May!" he exclaimed angrily. "If you don't know what is for your good you must be taught. Now, Brough, time's going—get it over, man. She'll be happier as soon as you have her away."

"Yes, yes," said Tom Brough tenderly. "Come May, my child, have you not one look for me?"

May placed her hands in his, and looked up in his face with the faintest dawning of a smile upon her lip, and this time she did not shrink back when he kissed her forehead, but hung upon his arm as if resigned to her fate; the sound of wheels was heard in the narrow street; the friends ready to accompany them were summoned from the room below—two old friends of Mr Brough's, for old Richards had, as he often boasted, no friends; May was led out, the door was heard to close, wheels rattled away, and then, for a wonder, there fell a dead silence upon Walbrook, one which seemed to affect old Richards, even as he sat there looking haggard and drawn of feature, thinking of the past, and of the day he wed his own wife long before gold had become his care—almost his god. For the first time remorse had seized upon him, and it wanted not the words of Keziah Bay, who now entered the room, for reproach to be heaped upon his head.

But Keziah's words were not fierce now, only the words of sorrow; and at last she sank down sobbing before him, and said:

"O, Master Richards—Master Richards—what have you done?"

He did not turn round fiercely to bid her begone, but shrank from her, farther and farther, into his great roomy chair, and at that moment, could he have done so, he would have arrested the farther progress of the ceremony, for remorse was beating strongly at his heart.

But the time was passed now, and with him action was impossible. He sat there motionless, listening to the sobs of his old servant till nearly an hour had passed, when suddenly Keziah rose, wiping her eyes, and saying,—

"I hadn't the heart to go and see it, and now it is too late!"

"Yes, yes," said old Richards softly; "it is now too late!"

The next moment Keziah was hurrying from the room, for there was the sound of wheels and a heavy knocking at the door, which she opened to admit old Tom Brough, red and excited, and his first act upon the door being closed was to catch Keziah round the waist, to hug her and give her a sounding kiss before waltzing her down the passage, she struggling the while till she got free, and stood panting, trembling, and boiling over with ire.

"It's all right, 'Ziah!" he exclaimed, "the knot's tied."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, that you ought," panted Keziah, darting away to avoid another embrace. "And pray where's Miss May?"

Tom Brough did not answer, he only hurried into the drawing-room, where old Richards sat upright, holding on by the arms of his chair.

"Where's May?" he gasped, looking ashy pale; "why have you not brought her back?"

"Because she was not mine to bring," said Tom Brough coolly. "Flunk Marr waylaid me, and he's carried her off and married her."

“Brough! this is a plot, and you are in it,” exclaimed old Richards fiercely, as he saw the serio-comic smile upon his friend’s countenance.

“Well, yes, I had a little to do with it,” Brough said quietly.

“And is dear Miss May really married to Mr Frank?” cried Keziah.

“Silence, woman,” roared old Richards. “Brough, I’ll never forgive you. You’ve planned all this with that beggar, and he’s swindled me out of a thousand pounds, and robbed me of my child! A rascally, lying beggar.”

“Gently, gently, my dear Richards,” said Tom Brough, coolly. “I don’t think that now I have taken him into partnership he is quite the beggar you imagine. What with that and your thousand, and what we—*we*, friend Richards—will leave them when we die, I don’t think there will be many men hold up their heads much higher in the City than Frank Marr. On the whole, I think your child has done well.”

“Brough, Brough,” exclaimed old Richards excitedly, “what does this all mean? In God’s name tell me, or I shall have a fit.”

“In God’s name,” said Tom Brough, slowly and reverently, “it means that I, blessed as I have been with wealth, could not commit the grievous sin you wished against that sweet child I loved her too well to condemn her to such a fate, and Frank Marr found me more open to appeal than he did his father-in-law. I told him to come again to your office when he had been to me, and at my wish he accepted all your terms, though not without a deal of forcing on my part. He’s a fine, noble-hearted young fellow, Richards, and listening to me I tried to make matters work for the good of us all.”

He looked at old Richards as he spoke, but the old man was scowling at the wall.

“Would you have murdered your child, Richards?” said Tom Brough. “I tell you, man, that had your will been law the poor girl would not have lived a year, while now, with the husband she loves, she is waiting to ask your forgiveness for that for which I am solely to blame.”

“Keziah,” said Mr Brough softly, after a pause, and he whispered a few words in her ear—words whose effect was to send her from the room, but only to return in ten minutes, followed by Frank Marr, leading in his trembling wife.

Story 5--Chapter VIII.

Can’t it be To-Morrow?

There will doubtless be those ready to say that such things do not happen in real life—that rich men do not take poor men into partnership, nor yet give up handsome young wives on their wedding morn; but in spite of all that cynics may declare, there are men with hearts so large still to be found in this business-like world of ours—men who are ready to do any good to benefit another. And there are times when people do perform very eccentric acts, in proof of which must be related what took place in Walbrook that same evening, at a time when there was a merry party in the drawing-room, and old Richards’ face wore an expression that it had not worn for years. There came a ring at the door bell—a sneaking under-handed sort of ring; and on Keziah opening the door—behold Peter Pash!

“May I come in?” he said, modestly.

“Come in? yes, man,” cried Keziah, catching him by the coat, and giving him a snatch so that he was pulled into the passage, and the door banged behind him.

The next moment, to Peter’s utter astonishment—for he was ignorant of the morning’s changes—Keziah’s arms were round his neck.

“Peter dear, can’t it be to-morrow?”

“What! will you have me, then?” cried the little man in ecstasies, and the next moment there was the sound of such a kiss heard in that passage that it rolled along, vibrating from floorcloth to ceiling, and actually echoed; not that one would have recorded the fact, only this was such a tremendously big kiss, and one that echoes is really worthy of mention.

It could not “be to-morrow,” but it happened very soon after, and Tom Brough gave away the bride, while, talk about illuminations, Peter Pash’s house was a sight that drew together twelve small boys and an old woman, who stayed till the last dip went out and smelt unpleasant in the best room window; but it is not every man that can have an illumination at his own expense and of his own manufacture.

The gout proved too much for old Richards before another twelvemonths passed; but every one said that during the last year of his life he was another man.

The End.

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