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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE ISLAND OF GOLD: A SAILOR'S YARN ***

Gordon Stables

"The Island of Gold"

"A Sailor's Yarn"

Book One—Chapter One.

Two Mitherless Bairns.

Ransey Tansey was up much earlier than usual on this particular morning, because father was coming home, and there was a good deal to do.

As he crawled out of his bed—a kind of big box arrangement at the farther end of the one-roomed cottage—he gave a glance towards the corner where Babs slept in an elongated kind of basket, which by courtesy might have been called a bassinette.

Yes, Babs was sound and fast, and that was something Ransey Tansey had to be thankful for. He bent over her for a few seconds, listening as if to make sure she was alive; for this wee three-year-old was usually awake long before this, her eyes as big as saucers, and carrying on an animated conversation with herself in lieu of any other listener.

The boy gave a kind of satisfied sigh, and drew the coverlet over her bare arm. Then he proceeded to dress; while Bob, a beautiful, tailless English sheep-dog, lay near the low hearth watching his every movement, with his shaggy head cocked a trifle to one side, as if he had his considering cap on.

In summer time—and it was early summer now—dressing did not take Ransey long.

When he opened the door at last to fetch some sticks to light the fire, and stood for a moment shading his brow with his hand against the red light of the newly-risen sun, and gazing eastwards over a landscape of fields and woods, he looked a strange little figure. Moreover, one could understand now why he had taken such a short few minutes to dress.

The fact is, Ransey Tansey hadn't very much to wear just then. Barely eight years of age was Tansey, though, as far as experience of the world went, he might have been called three times as old as that; for, alas, the world had not been over-gentle with the boy.

Ransey wore no cap, just a head of towy hair, which was thick enough, however, to protect him against summer's sun or winter's cold. The upper part of his body was arrayed in a blue serge shirt, very much open at the neck; while below his waist, and extending to within nine inches of his bare feet, where they ended in ragged capes and promontories like a map of Norway, he wore a pair of pants. It would have been difficult, indeed, to have guessed at the original colour of these pants, but they were now a kind of tawny brindle, and that is the nearest I can get to it. They were suspended by one brace, a bright red one, so broad that it must have belonged to his father. I think the boy was rather proud than otherwise of this suspender, although it had a disagreeable trick of sliding down over his shoulder and causing some momentary disarrangement of his attire. But Ransey just hooked it back into its place again with his thumb, and all was right, till the next time.

A rough little tyke you might have called Ransey Tansey, with his sun-burnt face, neck, and bosom. Yet there was something that was rather pleasing than otherwise in his clear eyes and open countenance; and when his red and rather thin lips parted in a smile, which they very often did, he showed a set of teeth as clean and white as those of a six-months-old Saint Bernard puppy, and you cannot better that.

Had this little lad been a town boy, hands and face and feet would have been far from clean; but Ransey lived away down in the cool, green country, in a midland district of Merrie England, and being as often in the water as a duck, he

was just as clean as one.

Away went Ransey Tansey now, and opened a rough old door in a rock which formed part of the hill by the side of which the humble cottage stood. The door opened into a kind of cave, which was a storehouse for all kinds of things.

He was soon back again, and in five minutes' time had lit the fire, swept the hearth as tidily as a girl could have done it, and hung the kettle on a hook and chain. By this time another member of this small family came in, a very large and handsome tabby cat, with a white chest and vandyked face.

Murrams, as he was called, was holding his head very high indeed. In fact he had to, else the nice young leveret he carried would have trailed on the ground. Bob jumped up to meet him, with joy in his brown eyes.

Had Bob possessed a tail of any consequence, he would have wagged it. Bob's tail, however, was a mere stump, and it was quite buried in the rough, shaggy coat that hung over his rump. But though honest Bob had only the fag-end of a tail, so to speak, he agitated this considerably when pleased.

He did so when he saw that leveret.

"Oh, you clever old Murrams!" Bob seemed to say. "What a nice drop of soup that'll make, and all the bones for me!"

Murrams walked gingerly past him, and throwing the leveret on the hearth, proceeded to wash his face and warm his nose at the blaze.

Ransey put away the young hare, patted pussy on his broad, sleek forehead, then took down a long tin can to go for the morning's milk. He left the door open, because he knew that if Babs should awake and scramble out of her cot, she would toddle right out to clutch at wild flowers, beetles, and other things, instead of going towards the fire.

Ransey Tansey happened to look round when he was about thirty yards from the cottage. Why, here was Bob coming softly up behind. Murrams himself couldn't have walked more silently.

His ears disappeared backwards when he was found out, and he looked very guilty indeed.

Ransey Tansey shook his finger at him.

"Back ye goes—back ye goes to look after Babs."

Bob lay down to plead.

"It ain't no go, Bob, I tell ye," continued Ransey Tansey, still shaking his finger. "Back to Babs, Bob—back to Babs. We can't both on us leave the house at the same time."

This latter argument was quite convincing, and back marched Bob, with drooping head and with that fag-end of a tail of his drooping earthwards also.

There grew on the top of the bank a solitary brown-stemmed pine-tree. Very, very tall it was, with not a branch all the way up save a very strong horizontal limb, which was used to hang people from in the happy days of old. The top of this tree was peculiar. It spread straight out on all sides, forming a kind of flat table of darkest green needled foliage. Had you been sketching this tree, then, after doing the stem, you could easily have rubbed in the top of it by dipping your little finger in ink and smudging the paper crosswise.

When not far from this gibbet-tree, as it was generally called, Ransey looked up and hailed,—

"Ship ahoy! Are ye on board, Admiral?"

And now a somewhat strange thing happened. No sooner had the boy hailed than down from a mass of central foliage there suddenly hung what, at first sight, one might have taken for a snake.

It was really a bird's long neck.

"Craik—craik—crik—cr—cr—cray!"

"All right," cried Ransey, as if he understood every word. "Ye mebbe don't see nuthin' o' father, do ye?"

"Tok—tok—tok—cr—cray—ay!"

"Well, ye needn't flop down, Admiral. I'll come up myself."

No lamplighter ever ran quicker up a ladder than did Ransey Tansey swarm up that pine-tree. In little over two minutes he was right out on the green roof, and beside him one of the most graceful and beautiful cranes it is possible to imagine. The boy's father had bought the bird from a sailor somewhere down the country; and, except on very stormy nights, it preferred to roost in this tree. The neck was a greyish blue, as was also the back; the wings were dark, the legs jet black, the tail purple. Around the eyes was a broad patch of crimson; and the bill was as long as a penholder, more or less slender, and slightly curved downwards at the end. (A species of what is popularly known an the dancing crane.)

The Admiral did all he could to express the pleasure he felt at seeing the boy, by a series of movements that I find it difficult to describe. The wings were half extended and quivering with delight, the neck forming a series of beautiful curves, the head at times high in air, and next moment down under Ransey's chin. Then he twisted his neck right round the boy's neck, from left to right, then from right to left, the head being laid lovingly each time against his little

master’s cheek.

“Now then, Admiral, when ye’re quite done cuddlin’ of me, we’ll have a look for father’s barge.”

From his elevated coign of vantage, Ransey Tansey could see for many miles all around him. On this bright, sunny summer morn, it was a landscape of infinite beauty; on undulating, well-wooded, cultivated country, green and beautiful everywhere, except in the west, where a village sheltered itself near the horizon, nestling in a cloudland of trees, from which the grey flat tower of a church looked up.

To the left yonder, and near to the church, was a long strip of silver—the canal. High on a wooded hill stood the lord of the manor’s house, solid, brown, and old, with the blue smoke therefrom trailing lazily along across the tree-tops.

But the house nearest to Ransey’s was some distance across the fields yonder—an old-fashioned brick farm-building with a steading behind it, every bit of it green with age.

“So ye can’t see no signs o’ father, or the barge, eh? Look again, Admiral; your neck’s a bit longer’n mine.”

“Tok—tok—tok—cray!”

“Well, I’m off down. There’s the milk to fetch yet; and if I don’t hurry up, Bob and Babs are sure to make a mess on’t afore I gets back. Mornin’ to ye, Admiral.”

And Ransey Tansey slid down that tree far more quickly even than he had swarmed up it.

Scattering the dew from the grass and the milk-white clover with his naked feet, the lad went trotting on, and very quickly reached the farm. He had to stop once or twice by the way, however. First, Towsey, the short-horned bull, put his great head over a five-barred gate, and Ransey had to pause to scratch it. Then he met the peacock, who insisted on instant recognition, and walked back with him till the two were met by Snap, the curly-coated retriever.

“I don’t like Snap,” said the peacock. “I won’t go a bit further. The ugly brute threatened to snap my head off; that’s the sort of Snap he is.”

The farmer’s wife was fat and jolly looking.

“Well, how’s all the family?”

“Oh, they’re all right, ye know; especially Babs, ’cause she’s asleep. And we kind of expect father to-day. But even the Admiral can’t see ’im, with *his* long neck.”

She filled his can, and took the penny. That was only business; but the kindly soul had slyly slipped two turkey’s eggs into the can before she poured in the milk.

When he got back to his home, the first thing he saw was that crane, half hopping, half flying round and round the gibbet-tree. The fact of the matter is this: the bird did not wish to go far away from the house just yet, as he generally followed his little master to the brook or stream; but, nevertheless, on this particularly fine morning he found himself possessed of an amount of energy that must be expended somehow, so he went hopping round the tree, dangling his head and long neck in the drollest and most ridiculous kind of way imaginable. Ransey Tansey had to place his milk-can on the ground in order to laugh with greater freedom. The most curious part of the business was this: crane though he was, wheeling madly round like this made him dizzy, so every now and then he stopped and danced round the other way.

The Admiral caught flies wherever he saw them; but flies, though all very well in their way, were mere tit-bits. Presently he would have a few frogs for breakfast, and the bird was just as fond of frogs as a Frenchman is.

Ransey Tansey opened the door of the little cottage very quietly, and peeped in. Bob was there by the bassinette. He agitated that fag-end of a tail of his, and looked happy.

Murrams paused in the act of washing his ears, with one paw held aloft. He began to sing, because he knew right well there was milk in that can, and that he would have a share of it.

Babs’s blue eyes had been on the smoke-grimed ceiling, but she lowered them now.

“Oh,” she said, “you’s tome back, has ’oo?”

“And Babs has been so good, hasn’t she?” said Ransey.

“Babs is dood, and Bob is dood, and Murrams is dooder. ’Ift (lift) me up twick, ’Ansey.”

Two plump little arms were extended towards her brother, and presently he was seated near the fire dressing her, as if he had been to the manner born.

There was a little face to wash presently, as well as two tiny hands and arms; but that could be done after they had all had breakfast.

“Oh, my!” cried Ransey Tansey; “look, Babs! Two turkey’s eggs in the bottom of the can!”

“Oh, my! ’Ansey,” echoed the child. “One tu’key’s egg fo’ me, and one fo’ ’oo.”

The door had been left half ajar, and presently about a yard of long neck was thrust round the edge, and the Admiral

looked lovingly at the eggs, first with one roguish eye, then with the other.

This droll crane had a weakness for eggs—strange, perhaps, but true. When he found one, he tossed it high in air, and in descending caught it cleverly. Next second there was an empty egg-shell on the ground, and some kind of a lump sliding slowly down the Admiral's extended gullet. When it was fairly landed, the bird expressed his delight by dancing a double-triple fandango, which was partly jig, partly hornpipe, and all the rest a Highland schottische.

"Get out, Admiral!—get out, I tell ye!" cried the boy. "W'y, ye stoopid, if the door slams, off goes yer head."

The bird seemed to fully appreciate the danger, and at once withdrew.

Ransey placed the two turkey's eggs on a shelf near the little gable window. One pane of glass was broken, and was stuffed with hay.

Well, the Admiral had been watching the boy, and as soon as his back was turned, it didn't take the bird long to pull out that hay.

"O 'Ansey, 'ook! 'ook!" cried Babs.

It was too late, however, for looking to do any good. For the same yard of neck that had, a few minutes before, appeared round the edge of the doorway, was now thrust through the broken pane, and only one turkey's egg was left.

Babs looked very sad. She considered for a bit, then said solemnly,—

"'Oo mus' have the odel (other) tu'key's *egg*. You is dooder nor me."

But Ransey didn't have it. He contented himself with bread and milk.

And so the two mitherless bairns had breakfast.

Book One—Chapter Two.

Life in the Woods.

I trust that, from what he has already seen and heard of Ransey Tansey, the reader will not imagine I desire this little hero of mine to pose as a real saint. Boys should be boys while they have the chance. Alas, they shall grow up into men far too soon, and then they needn't go long journeys to seek for sorrow; they will find it near home.

And now I think, reader, you and I understand each other, to some extent at all events. Though I believe he was always manly and never mean, yet, as his biographer, I am bound to confess that there was just as much monkey-mischief to the square inch about Ransey Tansey, as about any boy to whom I have ever had the honour of being introduced.

It was said of the immortal George Washington that when a boy at school he climbed out of a bedroom window and robbed a wall fruit tree, because the other boys were cowards and afraid to do so. But George refused to eat even a bite of one of these apples himself. I think that Ransey Tansey could have surpassed young Washington; for not only would he have taken the apples, but eaten his own share of them afterwards.

To do him justice, however, I must state that on occasions when his father went in the barge to a distant town on business, as he had been now for over a week, Ransey being left in charge of his tiny sister and the whole establishment, the sense of his great responsibility kept him entirely free from mischief.

Now a very extraordinary thing happened on this particular morning—Ransey Tansey received a letter.

The postman was sulky, to say the least of it.

"Pretty thing," he said, as he flung the letter with scant ceremony in through the open doorway; "pretty thing as I should have to come three-quarters of a mile round to fetch a letter to the likes o' you!"

"Now, look 'ee here," said Ransey, "if ye're good and brings my letters every day, and hangs yer stockin' out at Christmas-time, I may put somethin' in it."

"Gur long, ye ragged young nipper!"

Ransey was dandling Babs upon his knee, but he now put her gently down beside the cat. Then he jumped up.

"I'se got to teach you a lesson," he said to the boorish postman, "on the hadvantages o' civeelity. I ain't agoin' to waste a good pertater on such a sconce as yours, don't be afeard; but 'ere's an old turmut (turnip) as'll meet the requirements o' the occasion."

It was indeed an old turnip, and well aimed too, for it caught the postman on the back of the neck and covered him with slush from head to toe.

The lout yelled with rage, and flew at Ransey stick in hand. Next moment, and before he could deal the boy a blow, he was lying flat on the grass, with Bob standing triumphantly over him growling like a wild wolf.

“Call off yer dog, and I won’t say no more about it.”

“Oh, ye won’t, won’t ye? I calls that wery considerate. But look ’ee here, I ain’t agoin’ to call Bob off, until ye begs my parding in a spirit o’ humility, as t’old parson says. If ye don’t, I’ll hiss Bob on to ye, and ye’ll be a raggeder nipper nor me afore Bob’s finished the job to his own satisfaction.”

Well, discretion is the better part of valour, and after grumbling out an apology, the postman was allowed to sneak off with a whole skin.

Then Ransey kissed Bob’s shaggy head, and opened his letter.

> “Dear Sonnie,—Can’t get home before four days. Look after Babs. Your Loving Father.”

That was all. The writing certainly left something to be desired, but it being the first letter the boy had ever received, he read it twice over to himself and twice over to Babs; then he put it away inside his New Testament.

“Hurrah, Babs!” he cried, picking the child up again, and swinging her to and fro till she laughed and kicked and crowed with delight—“hurrah, Babs! we’ll all away to the woods. Murrams shall keep house, and we’ll take our dinner with us.”

It was a droll procession. First walked Bob, looking extremely solemn and wise, and carrying Ransey’s fishing-rod. Close behind him came the tall and graceful crane, not quite so solemn as Bob; for he was catching flies, and his head and neck were in constant motion, and every now and then he would hop, first on one leg, and then on the other. Ransey Tansey himself brought up the rear, with a small bag slung in front of him, and Babs in a shawl on his back.

Away to the woods? Yes; and there was a grand little stream there, and the boy knew precisely where the biggest fish lay, and meant to have some for supper. The leveret could hang for a few days.

Arrived at his fishing-ground, where the stream swept slowly through the darkling wood, Ransey lowered his back-burden gently on the moss, and lay down on his face in front of her to talk Babs into the best of tempers.

This was not difficult to do, for she was really a good-natured child; so he gave her his big clasp-knife and his whistle, and proceeded to get his rod in order and make a cast. Bob lay down beside the tiny mite to guard her. She could whistle herself, but couldn’t get Bob to do the same, although she rammed the whistle halfway down his throat, and afterwards showed him how she did it.

Well, there are a few accomplishments that dogs cannot attain to, and I believe whistling is one of them.

The fish were very kind to-day, and Ransey was making a very good bag. Whenever he had finished fishing in about forty yards of stream, he threw down his rod and trotted off back for Babs, and placed her down about twenty yards ahead of him, fished another forty yards and changed her position again, Bob always following close at the boy’s heels and lying down beside his charge, and permitting himself to be pulled about, and teased, and cuddled, and kissed one moment, and hammered over the nose with that tin whistle the next. Even when Babs tried to gouge his eye out with a morsel of twig, he only lifted his head and licked her face till, half-blinded, she had to drop the stick and tumble on her back.

“You’s a funny dog, Bob,” she said; “’oor tisses is so lough (rough).”

Of course they were. He meant them to be, for Bob couldn’t afford to lose an eye.

I think the Admiral enjoyed himself quite as much as any one. He chose a bit of the stream for himself where the bank was soft, and there he waded and fished for goodness only knows what—beetles, minnows, tiny frogs, anything alive and easy to swallow.

I don’t think, however, that the Admiral was a very good Judge of his swallowing capabilities. That neck of his was so very, very long, and though distensible enough on the whole, sometimes he encountered difficulties that it was almost impossible to surmount. Tadpoles slid down easily enough, so did flies and other tiny insects; but a too-big frog, if invited to go down head-foremost, often had a disagreeable way of throwing his hind-legs out at right angles to the entrance of the Admiral’s gullet. This placed the Admiral in a somewhat awkward predicament. No bird can look his best with its beak held forcibly agape, and the two legs of a disorderly frog sticking out one at each side.

The crane would hold his head in the air and consider for a bit, then lower his face against the bank and rub one leg in, then change cheeks and rub the other in; but lo! while doing so, leg number one would be kicked out again, and by the time that was replaced out shot leg number two.

It was very annoying and ridiculous. So the Admiral would step cautiously on to the green bank, and stride very humbly down the stream to Ransey Tansey, with his neck extended and his head on a level with his shoulders.

“You see the confounded fix I’m in,” he would say, looking up at his master with one wonderfully wise eye.

Then Ransey would pull out the frog, and the little rascal would hop away, laughing to himself apparently.

“Crok—crok—cray—ay!” the Admiral would cry, and go joyfully back to his fishing-ground.

But sometimes Mr Crane would swallow a big water-beetle, and if this specimen had a will of its own, as beetles generally have, it would catch hold of the side of the gullet and hang on halfway down.

“I ain’t going another step,” the beetle would say; “it isn’t good enough. The road is too long and too dark.”

So this disobliging beetle would just stop there, making a kind of a mump in the poor Admiral’s neck.

When Ransey saw his droll pet stride out of the pool and walk solemnly towards a tree and lean his head against it, and close his eyes, the lad knew pretty well what was the matter.

There is nothing like patience and plenty of it, and presently the beetle would go to sleep, relax its hold, and slip quietly down to regions unknown. There would be no more mump now, and the crane would suddenly take leave of his senses with joy.

“Kaik—kaik—kay—ay?” he would scream, and go madly hopping and dancing round the tree, a most weird and uncanny-looking object, raising one leg at a time as high as he could, and swinging his head and neck fore and aft, low and aloft, from starboard to port, in such a droll way that Ransey Tansey felt impelled to throw himself on his back, so as to laugh without bursting that much-prized solitary suspender of his, while Bob sat up to bark, and Babs clapped her tiny hands and crowed.

Ransey got tired of fishing at last, and made up his rod. There was some sort of silent joy or happiness away down at the bottom of the boy’s heart, and for a moment he couldn’t make out what was causing it. The big haul of fish he had caught? Oh, no; that was a common exploit. Having smashed the postman with a mushy turnip? That was capital, of course, but that wasn’t it. Ah! now he has remembered—father was coming home in four days. Hurrah! he must have some fun on the head of it. Ransey loved to have a good time.

But, duty first. Babs was a good little girl—or a “dood ’ittle dirl,” as she phrased it—but even good girls get hungry sometimes. Babs must be fed. She held her arms straight out towards him.

“Babs is detting tired,” she lisped.

So he took her up, kissed her, and made much of her for a minute, then set her against a tree where the moss was green and soft. With a bit of string and a burdock leaf he made her a beautiful bib; for though Ransey himself was scantily attired, the child was really prettily dressed.

And now the boy produced a pickle bottle from the luncheon bag, likewise a small horn spoon. The pickle bottle contained a pap of bread and milk; and with this he proceeded to feed Babs somewhat after the manner of cramming turkeys, until she shook her head at last, and declared she would *never* eat any more—“Never, never, *never*!”

There was a turnip-field not far off. Now Bob was as fond of raw turnips as his master. He knew where the field was, too.

“Off ye go for a turmut, Bob; and mind ye bring a big ’un. I’ll look after Babs till ye comes back.”

Bob wasn’t long gone. He had obeyed his master’s instructions to the very letter—in fact, he had pulled more than six turnips before he found one to please him. (It is easy to teach a dog this trick, only stupid farmer folks sometimes don’t see the fun of it. Farmer folks are obtuse.—G.S.) That “turmut” made Bob and Ransey an excellent luncheon, and Babs had a slice to amuse herself with.

The day was delightfully warm, and the wind soft and balmy. The sunshine filtered down through a great beech-tree, and wherever it fell the grass was a brighter green or the dead leaves a lighter brown. Now and then a May beetle would go droning past; there were flies of all sorts and sizes, from the gnats that danced in thousands over the bushes to the great rainbow-like dragonfly that darted hither and thither across the stream; grasshoppers green and brown that alighted on a leaf one moment, gave a click the next, and hurled themselves into space; a blackbird making wild melody not far off; the bold lilt of a chaffinch; the insolent mocking notes of a thrush; and the coo-cooing of wood-pigeons sounding mournfully from a thicket beyond the stream.

High up in that beech-tree myriads of bees were humming, though they could not be seen. No wonder that under such sweet drowsy influences Babs began to wink and wink, and blink and blink, till finally her wee head fell forward on her green-bough bib.

Babs was sound asleep.

Book One—Chapter Three.

“O Eedie, I’ve Found a Child.”

Ransey Tansey took his tiny sister tenderly up and spread her, as it were, on the soft moss.

“She’s in for a regular forenooner, Bob,” said the boy, “and I’m not sure I don’t like Babs just as well when she is asleep. Seems so innercent-like, you know.”

Bob looked as if he really did understand, and tried by means of his brown eyes and that fag-end of a tail to let his master know that he too liked Babs best asleep, because then no attempts were made to gouge his eyes out with pieces of stick, or to ram the business end of a tin whistle halfway down his throat.

“Bob!” said Ransey.

“Yes, master,” said Bob, raising his ears.

“Babs is a sailor’s darter, ye know.”

Bob assented.

“Well, she ought’er sleep in a hammock.”

“To be sure. I hadn’t thought of that,” said Bob.

“I can make one in a brace o’ shakes, and that’s sailor langwidge. Now just keep your eyes on me, Bob.”

Ransey Tansey was busy enough for the next five minutes. He took that shepherd-tartan shawl, and by means of some pieces of string, which he never went abroad without, soon fashioned it into a neat little hammock. Two saplings grew near, and by bending a branch downward from each, he slung that hammock so prettily that he was obliged to stand back for a little while to smile and admire it.

When he lifted Babs and put her in it, and fastened the two sides of the hammock across her chest with some more string and a horse-shoe nail, so that she could not fall out, the whole affair was complete.

> “Hush-a-bye, baby, upon the tree-top,
> When the wind blown the cradle will rock.”

Well, the wind did blow, but ever so softly, and the little hammock swayed gently to and fro. And the blackbird’s voice seemed to sound more melodiously now; the thrush went farther away; only the wild pigeons continued to coo, coo, and the bees to hum, high, high up in the green beech-tree.

No wonder that the baby slept.

“Come along now, Bob. We’ve a whole hour at least.”

The boy placed his rod and bag on the branches of a tree.

“A whole hour, Bob, to do as we likes. No good me askin’ that idiot of an Admiral to watch Babs. He’d only begin scray-scrayin’ and hopping around the hammock, and Babs would wake. I’m goin’ to run wild for a bit, are you?”

And off he bounded, with Bob at his heels.

The Admiral, whose feet were getting cold now, hopped out of the stream, stretched out his three-foot neck, and looked after them.

“They think they’re going to leave me behind, do they? Tok—tok—tok,”—which in craneish language means “No—no—no.”

So away *he* went next, with his head and his long neck about a yard in front of him, and his wings expanded. It would have puzzled any one to have told whether the Admiral was running or flying.

If Ransey Tansey climbed one tree he climbed a dozen. Ransey walked through the wood with upturned face, and whenever he saw a nest, whether it belonged to magpie, hawk, or hooded crow, skywards he went to have a look at it.

He liked to look at the eggs best, and sometimes he brought just one down in his mouth if four were left behind, because, he thought, one wouldn’t be missed. But even this was sinful; for although birds are not very good arithmeticians, every one of them can count as far as the number of its eggs—even a partridge or a wren can.

Sometimes the Admiral wanted to investigate the nests, but Ransey sternly forbade him. He might dance round the tree as much as he liked, but he must not fly up.

Bob used to bark at his master as he climbed up and up. Indeed, when perched on the very, *very* top of a tall larch-tree Ransey himself didn’t look much bigger than a rook.

Yet I think the ever-abiding sorrow with Bob was not that he had not a tail worth talking about, but that he could not climb a tree.

Different birds behaved in different ways when Ransey visited their nests. Thus: a linnet or a robin, flying from its sweet, cosy little home in a bush of orange-scented furze, would sit and sing at no great distance in a half-hysterical kind of way, as if it really didn’t know what it was about. A blackbird from a tall thorn-tree or baby spruce, would go scurrying off, and make the woods resound with her cries of “beet, beet, beet,” till other birds, crouching low on their nests, trembled with fear lest their turn might come next. A hooded crow would fly off some distance and perch on a tree, but say nothing: hooded crows are philosophers. A magpie went but a little distance away, and sat nodding and chickering in great distress. A hawk would course round and round in great circles in the air, uttering every now and then a most distressful scream.

But one day, I must tell you, a large hawk played the lad a very mischievous trick. Ransey was high up near the top of a tall, stone-pine-tree, and had hold of a sturdy branch above, being just about to swing himself in through the

needled foliage, when, lo! the stump on which one foot was resting gave way, leaving him suspended betwixt heaven and earth, like Mohammed's coffin—and kicking too, because he could not for some time swing himself into the tree.

Now that hawk needn't have been so precious nasty about it. But he saw his chance, and went for Ransey straight; and the more the boy shouted at the hawk, and cried "Hoosh-oo!" at him, the more that hawk wouldn't leave off. He tore the boy's shirt and back, and cut his suspender right through, so that with the kicking and struggling his poor little pants came off and fluttered down to the ground.

Ransey Tansey was only second best that day, and when—a sadder and a wiser boy—he reached the foot of the tree, he found that Bob had been engaged in funeral rites—obsequies—for some time. In fact, he had scraped a hole beneath a furze bush and buried Ransey's pants.

Whether Bob had thought this was all that remained of his master or not, I cannot say. I only state facts.

But to hark back: after Ransey Tansey had seen all the nests he wanted to see, he and his two companions rushed off to a portion of the wood where, near the bank of the stream, he kept his toy ship under a moss-covered boulder.

He had built this ship, fashioning her out of a pine-log with his knife, and rigged her all complete as well as his somewhat limited nautical knowledge permitted him to do. In Ransey's eyes she was a beauty—without paint.

Before he launched her to-day he looked down at Bob and across at the Admiral, who was quite as tall as the boy.

"We're going on a long and dangerous voyage, Bob," he said. "There's no sayin' wot may happen. We may run among rocks and get smashed; we may get caught-aback-like and flounder,"—he meant founder—"or go down wi' all han's in the Bay o' Biscay—O."

Bob tried to appear as solemn and sad as the occasion demanded, and let his fag-end drop groundwards.

But the crane only said "Tok," which on this occasion meant "All humbug!" for he knew well enough that Ransey Tansey was seldom to be taken seriously.

Never mind, the barque was launched on the fathomless deep, the summer breeze filled her sails—which, by the way, had been made out of a piece of an old shirt of the boy's father's—and she breasted the billows like a thing of life.

Then as those three young inseparables rushed madly and delightedly along the bank to keep abreast of the ship, never surely was such whooping and barking and scray-scraying heard in the woods before.

But disaster followed in the wake of that bonnie barque on this voyage. I suppose the helmsman forgot to put his helm up at an ugly bend of the river, so the wind caught her dead aback. She flew stern-foremost through the water at a furious rate, then her bows rose high in air, she struggled but for a moment ere down she sank to rise no more, and all on board must have perished!

When I say she sank to rise no more I am hardly in alignment with the truth.

The fact is, that although Ransey Tansey could easily have made another ship with that knife of his, he was afraid he could not requisition some more shirt for sails.

"Oh, I ain't agoin' to lose her like that, Bob," said Ransey.

Bob was understood to say that *he* wouldn't either.

"Admiral, ye're considerabul longer nor me in the legs and neck; couldn't ye wade out and make a dive for her?"

The crane only said, "Tok!"

By this time Ransey was undressed.

"Hoop!" he cried, "here goes," and in he dived.

"Wowff!" cried Bob, "here's for after," and in *he* sprang next.

"Kaik—kaik!" shrieked the crane, and followed his leader, but he speedily got out again. The water was deep, and as a swimmer the Admiral was somewhat of a failure.

But the barque was raised all and whole, and after a good swim Ransey and Bob returned to the bank. Bob shook himself, making little rainbows all round him, and the boy rolled in the moss till he was dry, but stained rather green.

Then he dressed himself, and looked at his watch—that is, he looked at the sun.

"Why, Bob," he cried, "it is time to go back to Babs."

It was such a lovely forenoon that day that the elderly Miss Scragley thought a walk in the woods and wilds—as she phrased it—would do her good. So she took her little six-year-old niece Eedie with her, and started.

The butler wanted to know if he would send a groom with her. But she declined the service.

"It is ever so much better," she told Eedie, "going all alone and enjoying things, than having a dressed-up doll of a

flunkey dawdling behind you carrying wraps.”

I think Miss Scragley was right.

The Scragleys were a very old family, and that was their mansion I have already mentioned as standing high up on the hill in a cloudland of glorious trees. But excepting Miss Scragley herself, and this little niece, Miss Eedie Moore, the rest of the Scragleys were all dead and away.

Though the family estates were intact and financially secure, afflictions of all sorts had decimated the Scragleys. No less than two had died on the hunting-field; one, a soldier, had fallen on the field of fame in far Afghanistan; another, a captain in the royal navy, had succumbed to fever at sea; and still another had sailed away in a ship that never returned.

Others had died in peace and at home. So Miss Scragley was indeed a relic of the past, but she was lord of the manor for the time being. Her heart was bound up in little Eedie; and the girl would have to change her name when of age, as she would then be heir to all the Scragley estates. Even if she married, her husband must become a Scragley. It would never do to let the glorious name of Scragley die out.

But Miss Scragley was somewhat antiquated though not very old; somewhat set up and starchy in manner too. She preferred to import good people from London to mixing with the residents around, with the exception of the kindly-faced, white-haired old rector, Captain Weathereye, R.N., and Dr Fairincks.

In bygone ages it was currently believed that this rough old sea-dog of a captain, Weathereye would lead the then graceful Miss Scragley to the altar, and the lady herself still believed that the happy event would yet come off.

And she was quite gay when she thought of it. At Christmas-time, when she imported more good people from London than usual, and turned on the family ghost for the occasion, when she had the special brand of port decanted that old Weathereye so dearly loved, and when Scragley Hall resounded with mirth and laughter, and was lighted up from basement to attics, Miss Scragley nursed the fond hope that the captain was almost sure to pop the question.

Old Captain Weathereye praised the port. But—well, he loved to hear corks popping, only he wouldn’t pop himself.

Poor Miss Scragley!

“I wonder will he *ever*?” she used to remark to herself, when she had finished saying her prayers and was preparing to undress—“ever—*ever*?”

“Never—never,” old Weathereye would have unfeelingly replied had he heard her.

On this particular occasion Miss Scragley extended her walk far into the very wood—forest, she romantically called it—where Ransey Tansey and his pets were enjoying themselves.

She and her niece wandered on and on by the banks of the stream, till they came to the place where little Babs lay, still sound asleep in her hammock, and this was swaying gently to and fro in the summer wind.

“O Eedie!” cried Miss Scragley, “why, I’ve found a child!”

“Oh, the wee darling!” exclaimed Eedie; “mayn’t I kiss it, auntie?”

“If you kissed it,” said the lady, as if she knew all about babies and could write a book about them—“if you kissed it, dear, it would awake, and the creature’s yells would resound through the dark depths of the forest.”

“But there is no one near,” she continued; “it must be deserted by its unfeeling parents, and left here to perish.”

She went a little nearer now and looked down on the sleeping child’s face.

A very pretty face it was, the rosy lips parted, the flush of sleep upon her face; and one wee chubby hand and arm was lying bare on the shawl.

“Oh dear!” cried Miss Scragley, “I feel strangely agitated. I cannot let the tiny angel perish in the silvan gloom. I must—*you* must, Eedie—well, *we* must, dear, carry it home with us.”

“Oh, will ye, though?” The voice was close behind her. “Just you leave Babs alone, and attend to yer own bizness, else Bob will have somethin’ till say to ye.”

Miss Scragley started, as well she might.

“Oh,” she cried, looking round now, “an absurd little gipsy boy!”

“*Yes*,” said Ransey Tansey, touching his forelock, “and I’m sorry for bein’ so absurd. And ashamed all-so. If a rabbit’s hole was handy, I’d soon pop in. But, bless yer beautiful ladyship, if I’d known I was to ’ave the perleasure o’ meetin’ quality, I’d ’ave put on my dress soot, and carried my crush hat under my arm.

“Don’t be afeard, mum,” he continued, as the crane came hopping out of the bush. “That’s only just the Admiral; and this is Bob, as would die for me or Babs.”

“And who is Babs, you droll boy?”

“Babs is my baby, and no one else’s ’cept Bob’s. And Bob and I would make it warm for anybody as tried to take Babs

away. Wouldn’t us, Bob?”

Just then his little sister awoke, all smiles and dimples as usual.

Ransey Tansey went to talk to her, and for a time the boy forgot all the world except Babs.

Book One—Chapter Four.

“Ransey, Fetch Jim; We’re Goin’ On.”

“I’se glad ’oo’s tome back, ’Ansey. Has I been afeep (asleep), ’Ansey?”

“Oh, yes; and now I’m goin’ to feed Babs, and Babs’ll lie and look at the trees till I cook dinner for Bob and me.”

“That wady (lady) won’t take Babs away, ’Ansey?”

“No, Babs, no.”

Ransey Tansey fed Babs once more from the pickle bottle with the horn spoon, much to Miss Scragley’s and little Eedie’s astonishment and delight.

Then he commenced to build a fire at a little distance, and laid out some fish all ready to cook as soon as the blazing wood should die down to red embers.

“You’re a very interesting boy,” said Miss Scragley politely. “May I look on while you cook?”

“Oh, yes, mum. Sorry I ain’t got a chair to offer ye.”

“And oh, please, interesting boy,” begged Eedie, “may I talk to Babs?”

“Cer—tain—lee, pretty missie.—Babsie, sweet,” he added, “talk to this beautiful young lady.”

“There’s no charge for sittin’ on the grass, mum,” said Ransey the next minute.

And down sat Miss Scragley smiling.

The boy proceeded with the preparation of the meal in real gipsy fashion. He cooked fish, and he roasted potatoes. He hadn’t forgotten the salt either, nor a modicum of butter in a piece of paper, nor bread; and as he and Bob made a hearty dinner, he gave every now and then the sweetest of tit-bits to Babs.

Eedie and the child got on beautifully together.

“May I ask you a question or two, you most interesting boy?” said Miss Scragley.

“Oh, yes, if ye’re quite sure ye ain’t the gamekeeper’s wife. The keeper turned me out of the wood once. Bob warn’t there that day.”

“Well, I’m sure I’m not the gamekeeper’s wife. I am Miss Scragley of Scragley Hall.”

The boy was wiping his fingers and his knife with some moss.

“I wish I had a cap on,” he said.

“Why, dear?”

“So as I could take her off and make a bow,” he explained.

“And what is your name, curious boy?”

“Ransey; that’s my front name.”

“But your family name?”

“Ain’t got ne’er a family, ’cepting Babs.”

“But you have a surname—another name, you know.”

“Ransey Tansey all complete. There.”

“And where do you live, my lad?”

“Me and Babs and Bob and Murrams all lives, when we’re to home, at Hangman’s Hall; and father lives there, too, when ’ee’s to home; and the Admiral, yonder, he roosts in the gibbet-tree.”

“And what does father do?”

“Oh, father’s a capting.”

"A captain, dear boy?"

"No, he's not a boy, but a man, and capting of the *Merry Maiden*, a canal barge, mum. An' we all goes to sea sometimes together, 'cepting Murrams, our pussy, and the Admiral. We have such fun; and I ride Jim the canal hoss, and Babs laughs nearly all the time."

"So you're very happy all of you, and always were?"

"Oh, yes—'cepting when father sometimes took too much rum; but that's a hundred years ago, more or less, mum."

"Poor lad! Have you a mother?"

"Oh, yes, we has a mother, but only she's gone dead. The parson said she'd gone to heaven; but I don't know, you know. Wish she'd come back, though," he added with a sigh.

"I'm so sorry," said Miss Scragley, patting his hand.

"Oh, don't ye do that, mum, and don't talk kind to me, else I'll cry. I feels the tears a-comin' now. Nobody ever, ever talks kindly to me and Babs when at home, 'cepting father, in course, 'cause we're on'y common canal folks and outcasts from serciety."

Ransey Tansey was very earnest. Miss Scragley had really a kind heart of her own, only she couldn't help smiling at the boy's language.

"Who told you so?"

"W'y, the man as opens the pews."

"Oh, you've been to church, then?"

"Oh, yes; went the other Sunday. Had nuthin' better to do, and thought I'd give Babs a treat."

"And did you go in those—clothes?"

"Well, mum, I couldn't go with nuthin' on—could I, now? An' the pew-man just turned us both out. But Babs was so good, and didn't cry a bit till she got out. Then I took her away through the woods to hear the birds sing; and mebbe God was there too, 'cause mother said He was everywhere."

"Yes, boy, God is everywhere. And where does your mother sleep, Ransey?"

"Sleep? Oh, in heaven. Leastways I s'pose so."

"I mean, where was your gentle mother buried?"

"Oh, at sea, mum. Sailor's grave, ye know."

Ransey looked very sad just then.

"You don't mean in the canal, surely?"

"Yes, mum. Father wouldn't have it no other way. I can't forget; 'tain't much more'n a year ago, though it looks like ten. Father, ye know, 'ad been a long time in furrin parts afore he was capting o' the *Merry Maiden*."

The lad had thrown himself down on the grass at a respectable distance from Miss Scragley, and his big blue, eyes grew bigger and sadder as he continued his story.

"'Twere jest like this, mum. Mother'd been bad for weeks and so quiet like, and father *so* kind, 'cause he didn't never touch no rum when mother was sick. We was canal-ing most o' the time; and one night we stopped at the 'Bargee's Chorus'—only a little public-house, mum, as perhaps you wouldn't hardly care to be seen drinkin' at. We stopped here 'cause mother was wuss, and old dad sent for a doctor; and I put Jim into the meadow. Soon's the doctor saw poor mother, he sez, sez he, 'Ye'd better get the parson. No,' he sez, 'I won't charge ye nuthin' for attendance; it's on'y jest her soul as wants seein' to now.'

"Well, mum, the parson came. He'd a nice, kind face like you has, mum, and he told mother lots, and made her happy like. Then he said a prayer. I was kind o' dazed, I dussay; but when mother called us to her, and kissed me and Babs, and told us she was goin' on to a happier land, I broke out and cried awful. And Babs cried too, and said, 'An' me too, ma. Oh, take Babs.'

"Father led us away to the inn, and I jest hear him say to the parson, 'No, no, sir, no. No parish burial for me. She's a sailor's wife; she'll rest in a sailor's grave!'

"I don't know, mum, what happened that night and next day, for me and Babs didn't go on board again.

"Only, the evenin' arter, when the moon and stars was ashinin' over the woods and deep down in the watur, father comes to me.

"'Ransey,' sez father, 'fetch Jim; we're goin' on.' And I goes and fetches Jim, and yokes him to and mounts; and father he put Babs up aside me, 'cause Jim's good and never needs a whip.

"'Go on, Ransey,' sez he, an' steps quietly on board and takes the tiller.

"Away we went—through the meadows and trees, and then through a long, quiet moor.

"Father kep' the barge well out, and she looked sailin' among the stars—which it wasn't the stars, on'y their 'flection, mum. Well, we was halfway through the moor, and Babs was gone sound asleep 'cross my arm, when I gives Jim his head and looks back.

"An', oh, mum, there was old dad standin' holdin' the tiller wi' one hand. The moon was shinin' on his face and on his hair, which is grey kind, and he kep' lookin' up and sayin' somethin'.

"Then there was a plash. Oh, I knew then it was dead mother; and—and—I jest let Jim go on—and—and—"

But Ransey's story stopped right here. He was pursing up his lips and trying to swallow the lump in his throat; and Miss Scragley herself turned her head away to hide the moisture in her eyes.

Grief does not stay long at a time in the hearts of children. It comes there all the same, nevertheless, and is quite as poignant while it does last as it is in the breasts of older folks. Children are like the traditional April day—sunshine and showers.

"I think, mum," said Ransey after a while, "it is time for us to bundle and go."

Miss Scragley watched the lad with considerable interest while he struck his little camp. First he scattered the remains of his fire and ashes carefully, so that there should be no danger to the wood. Then he prepared to hide his ship.

"Did you make that pretty ship?" said Eedie.

"Oh, yes; I can make beautiful ships and boats, 'cause I seed lots on 'em w'en father took me to Southampton. Oh, that seems millions and millions o' years ago. And ye see, miss," he added, "I'm goin' to be a sailor anyhow, and sail all over the wide world, like father did, and by-and-by I'll be rich enough to have a real ship of my own."

"Oh, how nice! And will Babs go with you?"

"As long as Babs is quite little," he answered, "I can't go to sea at all, 'cause Babs would die like dead mother if I went away."

He had Babs in his arms by this time, and it was evident enough that the affection between these two little canal people was very strong indeed.

Seated on his left shoulder, and hugging Ransey's head towards her, Babs evidently thought she was in a position to give a harangue.

She accordingly addressed herself to Eedie:—

"My bloder 'Ansey is doin' to drow a big, big man. As big as dad. My bloder 'Ansey is doin' to be a sailor in s'ips, and Babs is doin'. 'Oo *mufn't* (mustn't) take my bloder away from Babs. 'Oor mudder mufn't, and noboddy mufn't."

Meanwhile her brother was nearly strangled by the vehemence of her affection. But he gently disengaged the little arm and set her on the moss once more. He speedily enveloped her in the shawl, and then hoisted her on his back.

Next he hung his bag in front, and handed the fishing-rod to Bob.

"We must all go now, lady."

"Oh, yes, and we too must go. We have to thank you for a very interesting half-hour."

Ransey wasn't used to such politeness as this little speech indicated. What to say in reply did not readily occur to him.

"Wish," he said awkwardly and shyly, "I could talk as nice like as you and t'other young lady."

Miss Scragley smiled. She rather liked being thought a young lady even by a little canal boy like Ransey.

"Oh, you will some day. Can you read?"

"Ye-es. Mother taught me to read, and by-and-by I'll teach Babs like one o'clock. I can read 'Nick o' the Woods' and the 'Rev'lations o' Saint John;' but Babs likes 'Jack the Giant Killer' better'n the Bible. An' oh," he added, somewhat proudly, "I got a letter to-day, and I could read that; and it was to say as how father was comin' home in four days. And the postman cheeked us, and shook his head, threat'nin' like, and I threw a big turmut and broke it."

"What! broke his head?"

"Oh, no, mum, only jest the turmut. An' Bob went after him, and down went postie. Ye would have larfed, mum."

"I'm afraid you're a bad boy sometimes."

"Yes, I feels all over bad—sometimes."

"I like bad boys best," said Eedie boldly, "they're such fun."

"Babs," said Ransey, "you'll hang me dead if you hold so tight."

"Well, dears, I'm going to come and see you to-morrow, perhaps, or next day, and bring Babs a pretty toy."

"Babs," said the child defiantly, "has dot a dolly-bone, all dlessed and boo'ful." This was simply a ham-bone, on the ball of which Ransey had scratched eyes and a mouth and a nose, and dressed it in green moss and rags. And Babs thought nothing could beat that.

As she rode off triumphantly on Ransey's back, Babs looked back, held one bare arm on high, and shouted, "Hullay!"

"What strange children!" said Miss Scragley to her niece. "They're not at all like our little knights of the gutter down in the village where we visit. This opens up life to me in quite a new phase. I'm sure Captain Weathereye would be much interested. There is good, in those poor canal children, dear, only it wants developing. I wonder how we could befriend them without appearing officious or obtrusive. Consult the captain, did you say?"

"I did not speak at all, aunt."

"Didn't you? However, that *would* be best, as you suggested."

Miss Scragley did not call at Hangman's Hall next day—it looked showery; but about twelve o'clock, while Ransey Tansey was stewing that leveret with potatoes and a morsel of bacon, and Babs was nursing her dolly-bone in the bassinette, where Ransey had placed her to be out of the way, some one knocked sharply and loudly at the door.

The Admiral, swaying aloft in the gibbet-tree, sounded his tocsin, and Bob barked furiously.

"Down, Bob!" cried Ransey, running to the door. He half expected the postman.

He was mistaken, however, for there stood a smart but pale-faced flunkey in a brown coat with gilt buttons.

Now Ransey could never thoroughly appreciate "gentlemen's gentlemen" any more than he could gamekeepers.

The flunkey had a large parcel under his arm, which he appeared to be rather ashamed of.

"Aw!" he began haughtily, "am I right in my conjecture that this is 'Angman's 'All?"

"Your conjecture," replied Ransey, mimicking the flunkey's tone and manner, "is about as neah wight as conjectures gener'ly aw. What may be the naychure of your business?"

"Aw! An' may I enquiah if you are the—the—the waggamuffin who saw Miss Scwagley in the wood yestah-day?"

"I'm the young *gentleman*" said Ransey, hitching up his suspender, "who had the honah of 'alf an hour's convehsation with the lady. I am Ransey Tansey, Esq., eldest and only son of Captain Tansey of the *Mewwy Maiden*. And," he added emphatically, "this is my dog *Bob*."

Bob uttered a low, ominous growl, and walked round behind the flunkey on a tour of inspection.

The only comfort the flunkey had at that moment arose from the fact that his calves were stuffed with hay.

"Aw! Beautiful animal, to be shuah. May I ask if this is the doag that neahly killed the postman fellah?"

"That's the doag," replied Ransey, "who *would* have killed the postman fellah dead out, if I had tipped him the wink."

"Aw! Well, my business is vewy bwief. Heah is a pawcel from Miss Scwagley, of which she begs your acceptance."

"Ah, thank you. Dee—lighted. Pray walk in. Sorry my butler is out at pwesent. But what will you dwink—sherry, port, champagne—wum? Can highly wecommend the wum."

"Oh, thanks. Then I'll have just a spot of wum."

Ransey brought out his father's bottle—a bottle that had lain untouched for a long time indeed—and his father's glass, and the flunkey drank his "spot," and really seemed to enjoy it.

Ransey opened the door for him.

"Convey my best thanks to Miss Scwagley," he said, "and inform her that we will be ree—joiced to receive her, and that Miss Tansey and myself will not fail to return the call at a future day. Good mo'ning."

"Good mawning, I'm shuah."

And the elegant flunkey lifted his hat and bowed.

Ransey ran in, gave the leveret stew just a couple of stirs to keep it from burning, then threw himself into his father's chair, stretched out his legs, and laughed till the very rafters rang.

Book One—Chapter Five.

“Oh, No! I’ll Never Leave ’Ansey till we is Bof Deaded.”

The day had looked showery, but the sun was now shining very brightly, and so Ransey Tansey laid dinner out of doors on the grass.

As far as curiosity went, Babs was quite on an equality with her sex, and the meal finished, and the bones eaten by Bob, she wanted to know at once what the man with the pretty buttons had brought.

Ransey’s eyes, as well as his sister’s, were very large, but they grew bigger when that big parcel was opened.

There was a note from Miss Scragley herself right on the top, and this was worded as delicately, and with apparently as much fear of giving offence, as if Ransey had been the son of a real captain, instead of a canal bargee.

Why, here was a complete outfit: two suits of nice brown serge for Ransey himself, stockings and light shoes, to say nothing of real Baltic shirts, a neck-tie, and sailor’s cap.

“She’s oceans too good to live, that lady is!” exclaimed Ransey, rapturously.

“Me see!—me see! Babs wants pletty tlothes.”

“Yes, dear Babs, look! There’s pretty clothes.”

That crimson frock would match Babs’s rosy cheeks and yellow curly hair “all to little bits,” as Ransey expressed it.

After all the things had been admired over and over again, they were refolded and put carefully away in father’s strong locker.

I think that the Admiral knew there was gladness in the children’s eyes, for he suddenly hopped high up the hill, and did a dance that would have delighted the heart of a Pawnee Indian.

“No,” said Miss Scragley that same day after dinner, as she and her friends sat out in the great veranda, “one doesn’t exactly know, Mr Davies, how to benefit children like these.”

The parson placed the tips of his fingers together meditatively, and looked down at Miss Scragley’s beautiful setter.

“Of course,” he said, slowly and meditatively, “teaching is essential to their bodily as well as to their spiritual welfare.”

“Very prettily put, Mr Davies,” said Miss Scragley; “don’t *you* think so, Dr Fairincks?”

“Certainly, Miss Scragley, certainly; and I was just wondering if they had been vaccinated. I’d get the little one into a home, and the boy sent to a Board school. And the father—drinks rum, eh?—get him into the house. Let him end his days there. What should you propose, Weathereye?”

“Eh? Humph! Do what you like with the little one. Send the boy to school—a school for a year or two where he’ll be flogged twice a day. Hardens ’em. So much for the bodily welfare, parson. As to the spiritual, why, send him to sea. Too young, Miss Scragley? Fiddlesticks! Look at me. Ran away to sea at ten. In at the hawse-hole, in a manner o’ speaking. Just fed the dogs and the ship’s cat at first, and emptied the cook’s slush-bucket. Got buffeted about a bit, I can tell you. When I went aft, steward’s mate kicked me for’ard; when I got for’ard, cook’s mate kicked me aft. No place of quiet and comfort for me except swinging in the foretop with the purser’s monkey. But—it made a man of me. Look at me now, Miss Scragley.”

Miss Scragley looked.

“Staff-commander of the Royal Navy. Three stripes. Present arms from the sentries, and all that sort of thing. Ahem!”

And the bold mariner helped himself to another glass of Miss Scragley’s port.

“But you won’t go to the wars again, Captain Weathereye?” ventured Miss Scragley.

The Captain rounded on her at once—put his helm hard up, so to speak, till he was bows on to his charming hostess.

His face was like a full moon rising red over the city’s haze.

“How do *you* know, madam? Not so very old, am I? War, indeed! Humph!—I’ll be sorry when that’s done,” he added.

“What! the war, Captain Weathereye?” said the lady.

“Fiddlesticks! No, madam, the *port*—if you will have it.”

“As for the father of these children,” he continued, after looking down a little, “if he’s been a sailor, as you say, the house won’t hold him. As well expect an eagle to live with the hens. Rum? Bah! I’ve drunk as much myself as would float the *Majestic*.”

“But I say, you know,” he presently remarked as he took Eedie on his knee; “Little Sweetheart here and I will run over to see the children to-morrow forenoon, and we’ll take the setter with us. Anything for a little excitement, when one can’t hunt or shoot. And we’ll take you as well, madam.”

Miss Scragley said she would be delighted; at the same time she could not help thinking the gallant captain's sentences might have been better worded. He might have put *her* before the setter, to say the least.

Next morning was a very busy one at Hangman's Hall.

Ransey Tansey was up betimes, but he allowed Babs to sleep on until he had lit the fire, hung on the kettle, and run for the milk.

Ransey was only a boy, and boys will be boys, so he could not help telling kind Mrs Farrow, the farmer's wife, of his luck, and how he expected real society people to visit himself and Babs that day, so he must run quickly home to dress.

"Certainly, dear," said Mrs Farrow; "and here are some lovely new-laid eggs. You brought me fish, you know; and really I have so many eggs I don't know what to do with them all. Good-bye, Ransey. Of course you'll run across and tell me all about it to-night, and bring Babs on your back."

Babs was a "dooder dirl" than usual that morning, if that were possible.

Ransey was so glad that the sun was shining; he was sure now that the visit would be paid. But he had Babs to wash and dress, and himself as well. When he had washed Babs and combed her hair, he set her high up on the bank to dry, as he phrased it, and gave her the new doll to play with. Very pretty she looked, too, in that red frock of hers.

Well, away went Ransey to the stream, carrying his bundle. Bob was left to mind Babs.

Ransey was gone quite a long time, and the child grew weary and sighed.

"Bob!" said Babs.

"Yes, Babs," said Bob, or seemed to say.

"Tiss my new dolly."

Bob licked the doll's face. Then he licked Babs's hand. "Master'll soon be back," he tried to tell her.

She was quiet for a time, singing low to her doll.

"Bob!" she said, solemnly now; "does 'oo fink (think) 'Ansey 'as fallen in and dlowned hisself?"

"Oh, look, look, Bob," she cried the next moment, "a stlange man toming here!"

Bob started up and barked most savagely. He was quite prepared to lay down his life for his little charge. But as he rushed forward he quickly changed his tune.

It was Ransey Tansey right enough, but so transformed that it was no wonder that Babs and Bob took him for a stranger.

Even the Admiral must fly down from the gibbet-tree and dance wildly round him. Murrams, the great tom-cat, came out and purred aloud; and Babs clapped her tiny hands and screamed with delight.

"'Oo's a zentleman now," she cried; "and I'se a lady. Hullay!"

Ransey didn't feel quite comfortable after all, especially with shoes on. To go racing through the woods in such a rig as this would be quite out of the question. The only occupation that suggested itself at present was culling wild flowers, and stringing them to put round Bob's neck.

But even gathering wild flowers grew irksome at last, so Ransey got his New Testament, and turning to Revelation, read lots of nice sensational bits therefrom.

Babs was not so well pleased as she might and ought to have been; but when her brother pulled out "Jack the Giant Killer," she set herself to listen at once, and there were many parts she made Ransey read over and over again, frequently interrupting with such questions as,—

"So Jack killed the big ziant, did he? 'Oo's *twite* sure o' zat?"

"And ze axe was all tovered wi' blood and ziant's hair? My! how nice!"

"Six 'oung ladies, all stlung up by ze hair o' zer heads? Boo'ful! 'Oo's *twite* sure zer was six?"

"An' the big ziant was doin' to kill zem all? My! how nice!"

Ransey was just describing a tragedy more ghastly than any he had yet read, when from the foot of the slope came a stentorian hail:—

"Hangman's Hall, ahoy! Turn out the guard!" The guard would have turned out in deadly earnest—Bob, to wit—if Ransey hadn't ordered him to lie down. Then, picking up Babs, he ran down the hill, heels first, lest he should fall, to welcome his visitors.

Miss Scragley was charmed at the change in the lad's personal appearance, and Eedie frankly declared him to be the

prettiest boy she had ever seen.

Captain Weathereye hoisted Babs and called her a beautiful little rogue. Then all sat down on the side of the hill to talk, Babs being perfectly content, for the time being, to sit on the captain's knee and play with his watch and chain.

"And now, my lad," said bold Weathereye, "stand up and let us have a look at you. Attention! That's right. So, what would you like to be? Because the lady here has a heart just brimful of goodness, and if you were made of the right stuff she would help you to get on. A sailor? That's right. The sea would make a man of you, lad. And if you were in a heavy sea-way, with your masts gone by the board, bothered if old Jack Weathereye wouldn't pay out a hawser and give you a helping hand himself. For I like the looks of you. Glad you paid the postman out. Just what I'd have done myself. Ahem!"

Ransey felt rather shy, though, to be thus displayed as it were. It was all owing to the new clothes, I think, and especially to the shoes.

"Now, would you like to go to school?"

"What! and leave Babs? No, capting, no. I'd hate school anyhow; I'd fight the small boys, and bite the big uns, and they'd soon turn me adrift."

"Bravo, boy! I never could endure school myself.—What I say is this, Miss Scragley, teach a youngster to read and write, with a trifle of 'rithmetick, and as he gets older he'll choose all the knowledge himself, and tackle on to it too, that's needed to guide his barque across the great ocean of life. There's no good in schools, Miss Scragley, that I know of, except that the flogging hardens them.—Well, lad, you won't go to school? There! And if you'll get your father to allow you to come up to the Grange, just close by the village and rectory, I'll give you a lesson myself, three times a week."

"Oh, thank you, sir! I'm sure father'll be pleased to let me come when I'm at home and not at sea."

"Eh? at sea? Oh, yes, I know; you mean on the barge, ha, ha, ha! Well, you'll live to face stormier seas yet."

"An' father's comin' to-morrow, sir, and then we're goin' on."

"Going on?"

"He means along the canal," said Miss Scragley.

"To be sure, to be sure. What an old fool I am! And now, lad, let me think what I was going to say. Oh, yes. Don't those shoes pinch a bit?"

"Never wears shoes and stockin's 'cept in winter, sir. I keeps 'em in dad's locker till snow time."

"Now, in you go to your house or hut and take them off."

"Ha!" said Weathereye, when Ransey returned with bare feet and ankles, "that's ship-shape and Bristol fashion. Now, lad, listen. If Miss Scragley here asks you to come and see her—and I'm sure she will, for she's an elderly lady, and likes to be amused,"—Miss Scragley winced a little, but Weathereye held on—"when you're invited to the ancestral home of the Scragleys, then you can wear them togs and your shoes; but when you come to the Grange, it'll be in canvas bags, bare feet, a straw hat, and a blue sweater—and my own village tailor shall rig you out. Ahem!"

Captain Weathereye glanced at Miss Scragley as if he owed her a grudge. The look might have been interpreted thus: "There are other people who can afford to be as generous as you, and have a far better notion of a boy's requirements."

"And now, Babs," he continued, kissing the child's little brown hand, "I've got very fond of you all at once. Will you come and live with me?"

"Tome wiz 'oo and live! Oh, no," she replied, shaking her yellow curls, "I'll never leave 'Ansey till we is bof deaded. Never!"

And she slid off the captain's knee and flew to Ransey with outstretched arms.

The boy knelt on one knee that she might reach his neck. Then he lifted her up, and she looked defiantly back at the captain, with her cheek pressed close to Ransey's.

Weathereye glanced towards Miss Scragley once again, and his voice was a trifle husky when he spoke.

"Miss Scragley," he said, "old people like *you* and me are apt to be faddy. We will both do something for these poor children, but, bless them, there's a bond of union betwixt their little hearts that we dare not sever. The bairns must not be parted."

Book One—Chapter Six.

Chee-Tow, the Red Chief of the Slit-Nosed Indians.

During the time the memorable visit lasted no one took much notice of Ransey Tansey's pets. Yet each one of the three of them was interested, and each showed his interest in his own peculiar way.

The Admiral had flown gracefully down from the gibbet-tree, and alighted on the ground not more than a dozen yards from the group.

"Craik—a-raik—a—r-r-r—a—cray—ay!" he said to himself, which being interpreted seemed to signify, "What do *they* want here, anyhow? That's about the same gang I saw in the woods. Curr-r-r! Well, they haven't guns anyhow, like the beastly biped called a keeper, who tried to shoot my hind-legs off because I was a strange bird. I was only tasting some partridge's eggs, nothing else. Shouldn't I have liked just to have gouged out his ugly eyes, thrown 'em one by one into the air, caught 'em coming down, and swallowed 'em like eggs."

All the time the talking was going on the Admiral stood twisting his body about, sometimes crouching low to the ground, his neck stretched straight out towards them, the head on one side and listening, the next moment erect as a bear pole, and seeming to look surprised and angry at what he heard them saying.

Bob had rushed to see about the setter. He lay down at some distance off, with his nose between his paws, and the setter *set*, and finally *sat*.

"Not a yard nearer, Mr Sportsman, if *you* please," said Bob; "I'm a rough 'un to look at, and a tough 'un to tackle. I suppose you call yourself a gentleman's dog; you live in marble halls, sleep on skins, and drink from a silver saucer. I'm only a poor man's doggie; I sleep where I can, eat what I can get, and drink from bucket or brook. But I love my master maybe more than you love yours. Yonder is my home, and yonder is our cat in the door of it; but my humble home is my master's castle. Just try to come a yard or two nearer, if you're tired of your silly life."

But Dash preferred to stay where he was.

Murrams the cat behaved with the utmost dignity and indifference. He sat in the doorway washing his face, with dreamy, half-shut eyes. To have seen him you would have said that butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, so cool was he; yet if Mr Dash had come round that way, Murrams would have mounted his back and never ceased clawing the dog till he had ridden him half a mile at least from Hangman's Hall.

It wasn't, however, until the visitors had taken their departure that the grand jubilee commenced.

"*They're* gone!" said Bob, running up and licking the pussy's ear. "That's a jolly good job!"

"*They're* gone!" said pussy in reply, as he rubbed shoulders with Bob.

"*They're* gone!" cried the crane, hopping madly round the pair of them.

And as she nestled closer in her brother's arms, Babs sighed and said just the same thing.

"Hurrah!" cried Ransey Tansey; "let's run off to the woods."

"Let's wun off to ze woods at wance," echoed Babs.

Had little Eedie seen Ransey five minutes after this, I question whether she would have pronounced him the prettiest boy she had ever known.

Ransey was himself again, old shirt, ragged pants, and all.

I think that the children and Bob, not to mention the gallant Admiral, enjoyed themselves that afternoon in the woods as much as ever they had done in their young lives.

Babs insisted on taking her ragged old dolly-bone with her, and leaving the new one at home upside down in a corner.

Well, Ransey fished for just an hour, but had glorious luck and a good string to take to Mrs Farrow. This was enough, so he put away his rod, and read some more horrors to Babs from "Nick o' the Woods." The torture scenes and the scalping took her fancy more than anything else.

So Ransey Tansey invented a play on the spot that would have brought down the house in a twopenny theatre if properly put on the stage.

He, Ransey Tansey, was to be a wild Indian, Babs would be the white man, Bob the bear, and the Admiral the spirit of the wild woods and ghost of the haunted cañon.

The play passed off without a hitch. Only Ransey Tansey himself required to dress for his part. This he did to perfection. He retired to a secluded spot by the river's bank for the purpose. He divested himself of his pants and his solitary suspender. These were but the evidences of an effete civilisation. What could such things as these have to do with the red man of the wild West, the solitary scalp-hunter of the boundless prairie? But a spear and a tomahawk he must have, and these were quickly and easily fashioned from the boughs of the neighbouring trees. He tied a piece of cord around his waist, and in this he stuck his knife, open and ready for every emergency. He fuzzed up his rebellious hair, and stuck rooks' feathers in it; he thrust his feet into the darkest and grimiest of mud to represent moccasins, and streaked his face with the same.

When enveloped in his blanket (the big shawl) he stalked into the open in all the ghastliness of his wur-paint, and said "Ugh!" He was Ransey Tansey no longer, but Chee-tow, the Red Chief of the Slit-nosed Indians.

On beholding the warrior, Babs's first impulse was to scream in terror; her next—and this she carried out—was to roll on her back, her two legs pointing skywards, and scream with laughter.

“Oh,” she cried delightedly, “’oo *is* such a boo’ful wallio! (warrior); be twick and tell somefing.”

For the time being Babs was only the audience. When she became an actor in this great forest drama she would have to behave differently.

And now the red chief went prowling around, and presently out from a bush darted a grizzly bear.

The bear was Bob.

Chee-tow uttered his wildest war-cry, and rushed onwards to the charge.

The grizzly held his ground and scorned to fly.

“Then began the deadly conflict,
Hand to hand among the mountains;
From his eerie screamed the eagle (the crane)
...the great war-eagle,
Sat upon the crags around them,
Wheeling, flapped his wings above them.
* * * * *.

“Till the earth shook with the tumult
And confusion of the battle.
And the air was full of shoutings,
And the thunder of the mountains
Starting, answered ‘Baim-wa-wa.’”

This fierce fight with the terrible grizzly was so realistic that the audience sat silent and enthralled, with its thumb in its mouth.

But it ended at last in the victory of the red chief. The bear lay dead, and the first Act came to a close.

In Act Two an Indian maiden has been stolen, and borne away by a white man across the boundless prairie to his wigwam in the golden East. The red chief squats down on the moss with drooping head to bewail the loss of his daughter, during which outburst of grief his streaks of war-paint get rather mixed; but that can’t be helped. Then the spirit of the wild woods appears to him—the ghost of the haunted cañon (that is, between you and me, the Admiral comes hopping up with his neck stretched out, wondering what it is all about)—and whispers to him, and speaks in his ear, and says:—

“Listen to me, brave Chee-tow-wa,
Lie not there upon the meadow;
Stoop not down among the lilies,
Lest the west wind come and harm you.
Follow me across the prairie,
Follow me across the mountains,
I will find the maiden for you,
The maid with hair like sunshine,
Who has vanished from your sight.”

So Chee-tow gets up, seizes his arms, and follows the spirit, who goes hopping on in front of him in a very weird-like manner indeed.

Meanwhile Babs, knowing her part, has hidden herself in a bush, and in due time is led back in triumph as the white man who stole the maiden. He is tied to a tree, scalped, and tortured. Then a fire is lit, and thither the white man is dragged towards it to be burned alive.

But another bear (Bob again) rushes in to his assistance and enables him to escape.

The same fire built to burn the white man (Babs) is being utilised to roast potatoes for supper; only this is a mere detail.

And the play ends by the spirit of the wild woods bringing the maiden back (Babs again) to the camp fire in the forest, and—and by a supper of baked potatoes with salt.

All’s well that ends well. And shortly after the dénouement there may be seen, wending its way in the calm summer gloaming up the little footpath that leads through the green corn, the following procession. First, Bob solemnly carrying the fishing-rod; then Ransey Tansey with a string of red-finned fish in front of him, and Babs on his back, wrapped in the Indian’s blanket; and last, but not least, the Admiral himself, nodding his head not unlike a camel, and lifting his legs very high indeed, because the dew was beginning to fall.

Babs had gone soundly to sleep by the time they reached the farm, but she was lively enough a few minutes after this.

And Mrs Farrow made them stay to supper, every one of them, including even the Admiral, although he said "Tok—tok—tok" several times, out of politeness, perhaps when first invited in.

The kitchen at the farm was in reality a sitting-room, and a very jolly, cosy one it was; nor did the fire seem a bit out of place to-night.

It took Ransey quite a long time to tell all his adventures, and dilate upon the kindness of his visitors, especially rough but kindly Captain Weathereye.

It was almost dark before they got to the little cot at the foot of the hill that they called their home; and here a fresh surprise awaited them, for a light was shining through the little window, and through the half-open door as well.

Babs herself was the first, I believe, to notice this.

"O 'Ansey," she cried, struggling with excitement on the boy's back, "O 'Ansey, look! fazer (father) has tomed! Be twick, 'Ansey, be twick."

And Ransey quickened his pace now, while Bob ran on in front.

"Wowff, wowff," he barked, "wowff—wowff—wow!" But it was in a half-hysterical kind of way, as if there were a tear of joy mixed up with it, joy at the hope of seeing a kind old master again.

Even the crane felt it his bounden duty to indulge in an extra hop or two, and to shout, "Scray—scray—scray—ay—ay!"

It was the Admiral's voice that caused honest Tom Tandy to get up from his chair, lay down his pipe, and hurry to the door.

"Hill—ll—o!" he shouted. "Here we all are, Ransey Tansey, Babs, and Bob, and all. Why, this *is* a merry meeting. Come, Babs. Hoist away, Ransey. Hee—hoy—ip! and there she is safely landed in harbour. So you missed your old father, little lass, did you? Bless it. But we're all going on to-morrow, and the *Merry Maiden* has got a new coat o' paint, and new furniture for the cuddy, and it's no end of a jolly time we'll all have."

Yes, it *was* a merry meeting, and a right happy one. I only wish that both Miss Scragley and Captain Weathereye had seen it.

"Why," the former would have said to herself, "this good fellow could surely never have been a slave to the bottle!"

Mr Tandy had never really been a constant imbiber of that soul-killing curse of our country—drink; but some years gone by, like many another old sailor, he was liable to slide into an occasional "bout," as it is called, and it was with sorrow he thought of this now. But Miss Scragley and many others have yet to learn that it is often the best-hearted and the brightest that fall most easily into temptation.

As for Weathereye, had he been a witness of this little reunion, he too would have given his opinion about the sturdy old sailor.

"Why!" he would have cried frankly to Mr Tandy, (pronounced Tansey only by the children) "why, my good fellow, Miss Scragley, who is faddy and elderly, and myself, old fool that I am at the best, were considering what best we could do for your children. We were to do all kinds of pretty things. The boy was going to a school, the child to a home, and you—ha, ha, ha—you, with your bold face and your sturdy frame, a man of barely forty, were going to be sent to the house. Ha, ha, no wonder I laugh. But tip us your flipper, Tandy, you're a man every inch—a man and a sailor."

That is what Weathereye would have said had he seen Tandy sitting there now.

They are right in saying that those whom animals and children love are possessed of right good hearts of their own.

And here was this old sailor—the word "old" being simply a term of endearment, for none but the sickly are old at forty, and they've been old all the time—sitting erect in his chair, Babs on one knee, the great cat on the other; Ransey on the hearth looking smilingly up at father's bronzed face, silver-sprinkled hair and beard; the Admiral standing on one leg behind the chair; and poor Bob asleep before the fire, with his chin reposing on his old master's boot.

It was a pretty picture.

"Children," says Tandy at last, "it is getting late, and—just kneel down. I think we'll say a bit of a prayer to-night."

Book One—Chapter Seven.

On Silent Highways.

It was early next morning when Ransey Tansey ran off through the fields for a double allowance of milk.

"Double allowance to-day, Mrs Farrow," he shouted. "Oh, yes, father's come; and we're goin' on to-day. Isn't it just too awfully jolly for anything?"

“Well, I’m sorry to lose you and Babs.”

“Back in a month, Mrs Farrow. It’ll soon pass, ye know. But I—I am a kind o’ sorry to leave you too, for ye’ve been so good to Babs and Bob and me.”

There was a tear in Ransey’s eye as he took the milk-can and prepared to depart.

“The Admiral can take care o’ his little self,” he said, “but there’s Murrams.”

“Yes, dear boy, and our nipper shall go over every morning, and put Murrams’s bowl of milk in through the broken pane.”

“Oh, now I’m happy, just downright happy.”

“Well, off you run. Mind never to forget to say your prayers.”

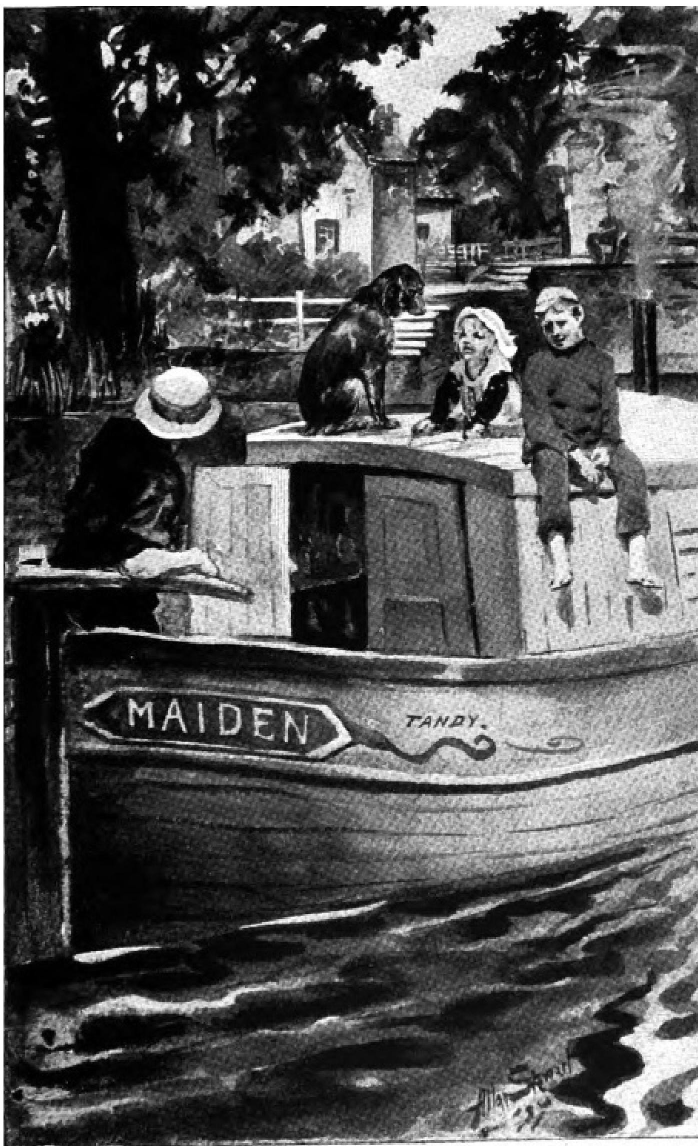
“No; and I’ll pray for Murrams, for the Admiral, for you, and all.”

He waved his hand now, and quickly disappeared.

The world wasn’t a very wide one just yet to these poor children, Ransey and Babs. It was chiefly made up of that little cottage which went by the uncanny name of Hangman’s Hall, and of the carrying barge or canal-boat yclept *Ye Merry Maiden*. But when at home, at the hut, they had all the sweet, green, flowery fields around them, the stream, and the wild woods. These formed the grand seminary in which Ransey studied nature, and moreover, studied it without knowing he was studying anything. To him every creature, whether clad in fur or in feather, was a friend. He knew all their little secrets, and they *knew* that he knew them. Not a bird that sang was there that he did not know by its eggs, its nest, or its notes; not a rabbit, hare, vole, or field-mouse that he could not have told you the life-story of. His was a—

> “Knowledge never learned at schools,
> Of the wild bee’s morning chase.
> Of the wild flowers’ time and place;
> Flight of fowl, and habitude
> Of the tenants of the wood;
> How the tortoise bears his shell;
> How the woodchuck digs his cell,
> And the ground mole makes his well;
> How the robin feeds her young;
> How the oriel’s nest is hung;
> Of the black wasp’s cunning way,
> Mason of his walls of clay;
> And the architectural plans
> Of grey hornet artisans.”

It is true enough that this family was poor in the eyes of the world. I am sure they were not ashamed of it, however.



"'A gallant ship, with a crew as brave
As ever sailed the ocean wave.'"

Page 76

The poverty that goes hand in hand with honesty may hold up its head before the Queen.

"Is there, for honest poverty,
That hangs his head, and a' that?
The coward slave, we pass him by;
We dare be poor for a' that!
For a' that, and a' that,
Our toils obscure, and a' that;
The rank is but the guinea stamp,
The man's the gowd for a' that?"

So sang the immortal Robert Burns.

But could any boy, or girl either, be really poor who had so many friends in field and forest, and by the winding stream? No; and such a one as this, who has been in touch with nature in his or her early days, may grow up, grow old, but never forget the days of youth, and never, never lose faith in Heaven and a happy Beyond.

The cottage and the surrounding country, however, did not constitute all the children's world. There was the ship—as I have said—the barge that went to sea, and in which they so often sailed.

For to them as yet the barge was a brig, and the canal the ocean wide and wild. Well, I might on second thoughts withdraw those "wee wordies," *wide* and *wild*. The canal was not a very wide one, nor was it ever very wild, in summer time at all events.

Never mind, to the imagination of Ransey, Babs, and Bob, the *Merry Maiden* was—

"A gallant ship, with a crew as brave
As ever sailed the ocean wave."

The crew of the *Merry Maiden*, I may tell you at once, was a very small one indeed, and consisted—all told, that is—of the captain himself, who was likewise cook, boatswain, and bedmaker all combined; one sturdy, great boy of sixteen, strong enough to lift almost any weight, Sammy by name, who was first lieutenant, supercargo, and chief engineer, and who often took his trick at the wheel—that is, he took the tiller and relieved his captain, or mounted Jim and relieved Ransey; Ransey himself, who was second engineer—Jim, the stout old bay nag, being the engine itself, the moving power when no fair wind was blowing; and Bob, whose station was at the bows, and his duty to keep a good look-out and hail those aft if any other ship hove in sight or danger was near.

The *Merry Maiden* rejoiced in one mast, which had to be cleverly lowered when a bridge had to be negotiated. The sail was a fore-and-aft one, though very full at times. Picturesquely reddish-brown it was, and looked so pretty sometimes against the green of the trees that, as the craft sailed slowly on in the sunshine, dreamy artists, seated smoking at their out-door easels, often made the *Merry Maiden* part and parcel of the landscape they were painting.

I think that Tandy himself liked being on board. The barge was his own, and carrying light wares or parcels from village to village, or town to town, his trade.

Things had gone backwards with Tandy as long as he looked upon the rum when it was red; he had got into debt. But now he was comfortable, jolly once more, because his keel was clear, as he phrased it; and as he reclined to-day on the top of the cuddy, or poop, with the tiller in his hand, Babs nestling near him, with the greenery of the woods, the fields, and little round knolls floating dreamily past him in the silvery haze of the sunshine, he looked a picture of health, happiness, and contentment.

Ransey and Babs took their canal life very easily. They never knew or cared where they were going to, nor thought of what they might see. Even the boy's knowledge of the geography of his own country was very limited indeed.

He had some notion that his father's canal—he grandly termed it so occasionally—was somewhere away down in the midlands. And he was right. He hadn't learned to box the compass, however; and even had he possessed the knowledge, there wasn't a compass on board the *Merry Maiden* to box or be boxed. Besides, the ship's head was seldom a whole hour in any one particular direction. The canal was a very winding one, its chief desire seeming to be to visit all the villages it could reach without being bothered with locks. These last were few and far between, because the country was rather a level one on the whole.

Nevertheless the fact of their not knowing exactly where they were going to, or what they would see next, lent an additional charm to the children's canal life. It was like the game children play on moonlight nights in Scotland. This is a very simple one, but has a great fascination for tiny dwellers in the country, and, besides, it gives excellent scope for the imagination. One child blindfolds another, and leads him here, there, and everywhere, without going far away from home—round the stackyards, over the fields by the edge of the woods, or across bridges, the blindfolded wondering all the time where he is, but feeling as if he were in fairyland, till at last his eyes are free, and he finds himself—well, in the very last place he could have dreamt of being.

There is no reason why canal life in England should not be most pleasant, and canal people just as happy as was the crew, all told, on board the *Merry Maiden*.

The saloon of the *Maiden*, as Tandy grandly called it, was by no means very large. It was simply a dear little morsel of a doll's-house, but the taste of the owner was shown in many different ways. By day the beds were folded up and were prettily draped with bright curtains. There were a lounge, an easy-chair, a swing-lamp, a beautiful brass stove, and racks above and at both sides of it for plates and mugs and clear, clean tin cooking utensils; there were tiny cupboards and brackets and mirrors, and in almost every corner stood vases of wild flowers, culled by Babs and Ransey whenever they had a chance. And this was often enough, for really Jim was so wise a horse that he never required any urging to do his duty. He was never known to make either break or stumble. But when sail was on the ship, Jim had nothing to do except to walk after her and look about him. Sometimes the oats or the wheat grew close to the path, and then, although a very honest horse, Jim never failed to treat himself to a pluck. So he was as sleek and fat as any nag need be.

The weather was not always fine, of course, but on wet days Babs could be sent below, with Bob to mind her, to play with her picture-books, her lady doll, and her dolly-bone.

Ransey's father had made him discard now, for ever and ay, his ragged garments, although the boy had not done so without a sigh of regret—they were so free and easy.

His best clothes, presented by Miss Scragley, were stowed away for high days and holidays, and the suit his father bought him and brought him was simply neat and somewhat nautical.

Let us take a little cruise in the *Merry Maiden*. Shall we, reader?

It will be a cruise in imagination certainly, but very real for all that, because it is from the life.

It is very early, then, in the joyous month of June, and the *Merry Maiden* is lying alongside a green bank. There is no pier here. It is a country place. Yonder on the right is a pretty little canal-side inn, the "Jolly Tapsters." You can read its name on the sign that is swinging to and fro beneath a wide-spreading elm-tree. Under this tree is a seat, and a table also; and on fine evenings, after their day's work is done, honest labourers, dressed in smocks, who have been haymaking all day, come here to smoke long clays, to talk to their neighbours, and now and then beat the table with their pewters to ask for "another pint, landlord, if *you* please."

Tandy lay in here last night and left a whole lot of parcels and things at that cosy hostelry; for the country all about is an agricultural one, beautifully wooded with rolling hills, with many a smiling mansion peeping grey or red above the trees, and many a well-tilled farm. The parcels will all be called for in due time.

The barge-master is up before even Ransey is stirring. He has lit the fire and made ready for breakfast. Before going on shore by the little gangway, he stirs Sammy up. Sammy, the sixteen-year-old boy, has been sleeping among the cargo with a morsel of tarpaulin for a blanket. He rubs his eyes, and in a few seconds pulls himself up, and begins, lazily enough, to sort and arrange the parcels and make notes for the next stop in a small black book, with a very thick pencil that he sticks in his mouth about once every three seconds to make it write more easily.

"What a lovely morning!" thinks Tandy, and Bob, who has come bounding after him, thinks so too. The sun is already up, however. From every copse and plantation comes the melody of birds. Flocks of rooks are flying heavily and silently away to the distant river, where among the reeds they will find plenty to eat. Swimming about in the canal yonder are half a score of beautiful ducks. No, not wild; wild birds seldom build on a busy canal side. They are the innkeeper's Rouens, and that splendid drake is very proud indeed. He lifts himself high out of the water and claps his wings in defiance as Bob passes.

Yonder is a lark lilting loudly and sweetly high above the green corn. There are linnets and greenfinches in the hedges, and warblers among the snow-white blossoms of the may.

There is a wealth of wild flowers everywhere—blue-eyed speedwells, the yellow celandine, the crimson of clover, the ragged robin, and ox-eye daisies weeping dew.

So balmy is the air and fresh that the barge-master has wandered further than he had intended. Hunger warns him to beat a retreat. Canal people, like caravan folks, have excellent appetites.

But here he is on board again. Ransey has already cooked and laid the breakfast, dressed Babs, and folded up the beds. With the ports all open the tiny saloon is sweet and clean.

"For what we are about to receive," the father begins, and little Ransey's head is bent and Babs's hands are clasped till grace is said.

Those eggs are fresh. The fish was caught but yesterday. Butter and beautiful bread are always to be had cheap all along the canal.

Sammy's breakfast and Bob's are duly handed up the companion-way, and in half an hour after this the horse is yoked, the landlord has wished them all good luck, and they have gone on.

But the wind, though slight, is dead ahead for miles, and Jim has a heavy drag. Jim doesn't mind that a bit. He jingles his light harness, strains nobly to his work, and jogs right merrily on.

Gradually the country wakens up to newness of life. Smoke comes curling up from many a humble cottage; cocks are crowing here and there; and busy workman-like dogs are hurrying to and fro as they drive cattle or sheep to distant pasture lands.

There are houses dotted about everywhere, some very close to the canal side, from the doors of which half-dressed children rush out to wave naked arms and "hooray" as the barge goes slowly floating past. To these Babs must needs wave her wee hands and give back cheer for cheer.

Many of those cots, humble though they be, have the neatest of gardens, with flowers already blooming in beds and borders, in tubs and in boxes; neat little walks all sanded and yellow; and strings along the walls, up which, when summer is further advanced, climbers will find their way and trail in their loveliness over porch and windows.

There are orchards behind many of these, the gnarled trees snowed over with bloom, many clad in pink or crimson. All this brings to one's mind snatches from Mrs Hemans:—

> "The cottage homes of England,
>   By thousands on her plains,
> They are smiling o'er the silvery brooks,
>   And round the hamlet-fanes.
> Through glowing orchards forth they peep,
>   Each from its nook of leaves,
> And fearless there the lowly sleep
>   As the bird beneath their eaves."

The sun climbs higher and higher, and the mists have disappeared from the far-off hills, and now you can tell it is school time.

Well-dressed children, in groups, are wending their way all in one direction. But they find time to cull wild flowers for teacher; and see, a bold, bright-faced lad comes near to the edge of the canal. Perhaps he is charmed by the innocent beauty of little Babs. Who can tell? One thing we *are* sure of—he has learned a little French, and is proud to air it.

"*Bon voyage*," he shouts.

And next moment a bonnie bunch of flowers falls right into the child's lap.

"Kiss your hand to him, dear," says father.

Babs smilingly does as she is told. No actress could do so more naturally.

Then the boy runs off, looking happy, and the barge floats on.

Book One—Chapter Eight.

“Poor Mary! She has Gone On.”

The barge floats on, and soon the village appears in sight. Yes, thoroughly English, and therefore pretty: the old grey houses only half seen in the midst of the foliage; the wreaths of blue smoke; the broad, squat steeple; wooded hills behind, and amongst these latter here and there a tall Elizabethan house sheltering itself in a hollow, for wildly in winter do the winds sweep through the leafless oaks and elms now clad in all the glory of summer’s green.

The canal makes a sweep just before it comes up to the village, as if it had entertained some thoughts of going past without calling. But it hasn’t the heart to do so, and presently the barge is close alongside a kind of wooden platform which is dignified by the name of wharf.

Ransey dismounts to water his horse and slip on the nose-bag. Then, while Sammy is busy with his note-book, handing out cargo and taking fresh orders, he takes delighted Babs and Bob on shore to look at the shops. These visits to villages are much appreciated by her tiny ladyship, but if the streets are steep Ransey Tansey must take her on his back, and thus the two go on.

No fear of the “ship” leaving without them; and why, here is father himself, his hands deep in the pockets of his pilot jacket, and smoking.

A penny to Ransey and a halfpenny to Babs secure them additional happiness; but in less than an hour the anchor is weighed, and the *Merry Maiden* is once more going on.

The wind changes, or the canal, or something; anyhow sail can now be set, and Jim thinks himself about the happiest horse in all creation.

On and on through the quiet country, by the most silent of all thoroughfares, goes the barge. Babs is getting drowsy; father makes her a bed with a bundle of sacks, shading her face from the sun; and soon she is in the land of forgetfulness.

Were it not for the breeze that blows freshly over the meadows, the day would be a warm and drowsy one. No fear of Sammy falling asleep, however, for as the canal winds in and out he has to tighten or loosen the sheet according to the shift.

Just at present the sounds that are wafted towards the barge are all lulling and dreamy: the far-off singing of birds; the sound of the woodman’s axe in the distant wood; the rattle of a cart or carriage on a road that is nowhere visible; the jangle of church bells from a village that may be in the sky for anything any one can tell; and now the merry laughter of young men and maidens making hay, and these last come in sight just round the next green bend.

It suddenly occurs to Jim that a dance wouldn’t be at all a bad idea. Ransey is some distance behind his horse, when he sees him lower his head and fling his heels high in air. This is merely preparatory; next minute he is off at a gallop, making straight for that meadow of fragrant hay, the wind catching mane and tail and blowing it straight out fore and aft.

When tired of galloping round the field, Jim bears right down upon the haymakers themselves.

“That stuff,” he says, with distended nostrils, “smells uncommonly nice. Give us a tuft.”

He is fed handsomely by both lads and lasses gay. But they get gayer than ever when Jim throws himself down on his back, regardless of the confused entanglement of bridle and traces. But Jim knows better than to roll on the bare ground. He has thrown down a hay-cock for himself, and it is as good as a play to witness the girls bury him up till there is nothing to be seen of him except his four legs kicking skywards.

He gets up at last, and looks very sober and solemn. One girl kisses him on the muzzle; another is busy doing something that Ransey cannot make out, but a minute or two after this, when Jim comes thundering back, there is a huge collar of hay around his neck. Ransey mounts him bareback, and, waving his hand to the haymakers, goes galloping off to overtake the barge, and throw the hay on board. A nice little snack it will make for Jim some time later on!

To-day Mr Tandy has bought a newspaper. He had meant to read it, but he is too fond of country sights and sounds to bother about it now. In the evening, perhaps, over a pipe.

On, ever on. There are locks to get through now, several of them, and lockmen are seldom, if ever, more than half awake; but everybody knows Tandy, and has a kindly word to say to Ransey Tansey, and perhaps a kiss to blow to Babs, who has just awakened, with eyes that shine, and lips and cheeks as red as the dog-roses that trail so sweetly over a hedge near by.

The country here is higher—a bit of Wales in the midlands, one might almost say. And so it continues for some time.

Sammy takes his trick at the wheel, and prefers to steer by lying on his back and touching the tiller with one bare foot. Sammy is always original and funny, and now tells Babs wonderful stories about fairies and water-babies that he met with a long time ago when he used to dwell deep down beneath the sea.

Babs has never seen the real sea, except in pictures, and is rather hazy about it. Nevertheless, Sammy's stories are very wonderful, and doubtless very graphic. The sail is lowered at last, and the saucy *Merry Maiden* moored to a green bank.

The dinner is served, and all hands, including Jim, do justice to it.

I said the barge was "moored" here. Literal enough, for a wide, wild moor stretches all around. Sheep are feeding not far off, and some droll-looking ponies that Jim would like to engage in conversation. There are patches of heath also, and stunted but prettily-feathered larch-trees now hung with points of crimson. Great patches of golden gorse hug the ground and scent the air for yards around. Linnets are singing there, and now and then the eye is gladdened by the sight of a wood-lark. Sometimes he runs along the ground, singing more sweetly even than his brother musician who loves to soar as high as the clouds.

Here is a cock-robin, looking very independent and lilting defiance at everybody. Robins do not always live close to civilisation. This robin comes close enough to pick up the crumbs which Ransey throws towards him. He wants Ransey to believe that all the country for miles and miles around belongs to him—Cock-Robin—and that no bird save him has any real business here.

There are pine-trees waving on the hills yonder, and down below, a town much bigger than any they yet have arrived at.

But see, there is a storm coming up astern, so, speedily now, the *Merry Maiden* is once more under way.

Babs is bundled down below, and Bob goes with her.

Presently the air is chilly enough to make one shiver. A puff of high wind, a squall we may call it, brings up an army of clouds and darkness. Thunder rolls, and the swift lightning flashes—red, bright, intense—then down come the rain and the big white hailstones. These rattle so loudly on the poop deck, and on the great tarpaulin that covers the cargo, that for a time the thunder itself can scarcely be heard.

But in twenty minutes' time the sun is once more shining, the clouds have rolled far to leeward, the deck is dry, and but for the pools of water that lie in the hollows of the hard tarpaulin, no evidence is left that a summer storm had been raging.

But away with the storm has gone the wind itself, and Jim is once more called into requisition. Then onwards floats the barge.

Through many a bridge and lock, past many a hamlet, past woodlands and orchards, and fields of waving wheat, stopping only now and then at a village, till at last, and just as the sun is westering, the distant town is reached.

Oh, a most unsavoury sort of a place, a most objectionable kind of a wharf, at which to pass a night.

Tandy sends Babs and Bob below again; for a language is spoken here he does not wish the child to listen to, sights may be seen he would not that her eyes should dwell upon. Yonder is an ugly public-house with broken windows in it, and a bloated-faced, bare-armed woman, the landlady, standing with arms akimbo defiantly in the doorway. Ah! there was a time when Tandy used to spend hours in that very house. He shudders to think of it now.

There is one dead tree at the gable of this inn, which—half a century ago, perhaps—may have been a country hostelry surrounded by meadows and hedges. That tree would then be green, the air fresh and sweet around it, the mavis singing in its leafy shade. Now the sky is lurid, the air is tainted, and there is smoke everywhere. Not even the bark is left on the ghastly tree. It looks as if it had died of leprosy.

But the work is hurried through, and in a comparatively short time the *Merry Maiden* is away out in the green quiet country.

What a blessed change from the awful town they have just left!

The sun has already gone down in such a glory of crimson, bronze, and orange, as we in this country seldom see.

This soon fades away, however, as everything that is beautiful to behold must fade.

The stars come out now in the east, and just as gloaming is merging into night the boat draws near to a little canal-side inn, and Jim, the horse, who is wiser far than many a professed Christian, stops of his own accord.

For Ransey had gone to sleep—oh, he often rode thus and never fell. He awakes now, however, with a start, and gazes wonderingly around him. His eyes fall upon the sign. And there, in large white letters, the boy can read easily enough though the light is fading—the "Bargee's Chorus."

And not only could he read, but he could remember: it was here they lay that sad, sad night—what a long time ago it seemed—when mother died.

Here was the landlord himself with his big apron on, a burly fellow with a kindly face, and as Tandy stepped on shore he was welcomed with a hearty handshake.

"Ah: Cap'en Tandy, and 'ow's you. And here is Ransey Tansey, bright and bobbish, and little Babs, and Bob, and everybody. How nice you all look! But la!" he added, "it do seem such a long, long time since you were here before."

"I've not had the heart to come much this way, Mr Shirley. I've been trading at the southern end o' the canal."

“And ye’ve never been here once since you put up the bit of marble slab to mark the spot where *she* lies?”

Ransey knew his mother was referred to, and turned aside to hide the tears.

“Never since,” says Tandy.

“Ah, cap’en, many’s the one as asks me about that slab. And the old squire himself stopped here one day and got all the story from me. And when I’d finished, never a word he said. He just heaved a biggish sort of a sigh, and went trotting on.

“But come in, Ransey, Babs, and Bob, and all. The night’s going to be chilly, and an air of the fire will do the children good.

“Sammy, just take the horse round to the stable. We’ll have a bit o’ frost to-night, I thinks.”

Ransey runs on board for a few minutes to touch up the fire, put on the guard, and make down the beds; then he joins the group around the cosy parlour fire.

The kindly landlady, as plump and rosy as her husband, makes very much of the children, and the supper she places before them is a right hearty one, nor is Bob himself forgotten.

A very quiet and pleasant evening is spent, then good-nights are said, and the seafaring folks, as they humorously call themselves, go on board to bed.

Sammy is already sound asleep beneath the tarpaulin, and Ransey takes his little sister below to bed at once.

But father stops on deck a little while, to think and muse.

How still the night is! Not a breath of wind now; not a sound save the distant melancholy hooting of an owl as he flies low across the fields, the champ-champing of the horse in the stable, and an occasional plash in the canal as some great frog leaps off the bank.

Nothing more.

But high above shine God’s holy stars. There may be melancholy in the old sailor’s heart as he gazes skywards, but there is hope as well, for these little points of dazzling light bear his thoughts away to better worlds than this.

It is early morning again, and soon the barge is well on its way.

But when it is stopped in the middle of a somewhat lonesome moor, and Tandy takes his children on shore, the boy knows right well where they are going, though innocent little Babs doesn’t.

“Father,” he says presently, as they are near to a clump of tall trees, “isn’t it just *here* where mother was laid?”

The rough weather-beaten old sailor uncovers his head.

He points to a spot of the canal that is gleaming bright in the rays of the morning sun.

“Just down there, dear boy,” he says. “The coffin was leaded; it could never rise.”

The last words are spoken apparently to himself, as he turns sadly away towards the trees.

Still holding Ransey’s hand, and with Babs in his arms, he points to the tallest, strongest tree of all. It is a beautiful beech.

And there, about eight feet from the ground, and evidently let deeply into the tree, is a small and lettered slab of marble.

The bark has begun to curl in a rough lip over its edge all round as if to hold it more firmly in its place.

> POOR MARY.
> She has gone on.
> *Feby. 19th—82*.

The letters were not over-well formed. Perhaps they were cut by Tandy’s own hand. What mattered it? The little tablet was meant but for *his* eyes. Simplicity is best.

“Poor Mary! She has gone on.”

And the words are written not only there upon the marble, but upon the honest sailor’s heart.

End of Book One.

Book Two—Chapter One.

“Just Three Years Since Ransey Went to Sea.”

“O father,” said Babs one autumn evening, “aren’t *you* frightened at the roaring of the sea?”

Tandy and his child were sitting together, that autumn evening, in the best parlour. They were waiting for the postman to come round the corner; and as the waves were making a clean breach over the black, smooth rocks down yonder, and the spray was dashing high over the road and rattling like hail upon the panes of glass in the little cottage window, the postman would be wearing his waterproof cape to-night to keep the letters dry.

Babs had been watching for a man in a glittering oilskin, very anxiously, too, with her little face close to the glass, when a bigger wave than any she had yet seen rolled green and spumy and swiftly across the boulders, till meeting the resistance offered by the cliff it rose into the air for twenty feet at least, then broke like a waterfall on the asphalt path which was dignified by the name of esplanade.

No wonder she rushed back from the window, and now stood trembling by her father’s side.

He took her gently on his knee.

Though five years have elapsed since the night they had visited mother’s tree, and she is now eight years of age, she is but a little thing. Ay, and fragile.

As she sits there, with one arm about his neck, he looks at her, and talks to her tenderly. She has her mother’s eyes.

But how lonely he would be, he cannot help thinking, if anything happened to his little Nelda—to Babs. The thought causes him to shiver as he sits there in his easy-chair by the fire, for chill is the breeze that blows from off the sea to-night.

“Daddy!”

“Yes, dear.”

“To-morrow, when it comes, will make it just three years since Ransey went to sea.”

“Three years? Yes, Babs, so it will. Oh, how quickly the time has flown! And how good your memory is, darling!”

“Flown quickly, father? Oh, I think every one of those years has been much, much longer than the other. And I think,” she added, “lazy postie will never come to-night. But I dreamt, daddy, we would have a letter from Ransey, and it is sure to come.”

Three years. Yes, and years do fly fast away when men or women get elderly.

Those years though—ay, and the whole five—had been very busy ones with Ransey Tansey, very eventful, I might almost say.

Old Captain Weathereye had proved a right good friend to Ransey. Nor did he take the least degree of credit to himself for being so.

“The boy has got the grit in him,” he told Miss Scragley, “and just a spice of the devil; and without that, I can assure you, madam, no boy is going to get well on in this world.”

Miss Scragley didn’t care to swallow this doctrine quite; but Eedie, whom Ransey looked upon as a kind of fairy, or goddess, immeasurably better than himself, took the captain’s view of the matter.

“Oh, yes,” she astonished Miss Scragley by exclaiming, “the devil is everywhere, auntie. Mr Smith himself said so in the church. He is in roaring lions and in lambs when they lie down together, and in little boys, and then they are best and funniest.”

Miss Scragley sighed.

“It is a world of sin and sorrow,” she murmured.

“A world of fiddlesticks, madam!” cried Weathereye. “I tell you, it is a splendid world, a grand old world; but you’ve got to learn how to take your own part in it. Take my word for it, Miss Scragley, the world wasn’t made for fools. Fools have got to take a back seat, and just look on, while men of grit do the work and enjoy the reward. Ahem!”

“I’ve got to make a man of that lad,” he went on, “and, what’s more, I’m doing it. He needs holy-stoning—I’m holy-stoning him. He may want a little polishing after, but rubbing against the world will do that.”

“You’re very good, Captain Weathereye; you will be rewarded, if not in this world, in the next—”

“Tut—tut—tut,” cried the old sailor impatiently, and it must be admitted somewhat brusquely, “women folks will talk, especially when they don’t know what to say; but pray keep such sentiments and platitudes as these for your next Dorcas meeting, madam. Reward, indeed! Next world, forsooth! I tell you that I’m having it in *this*. I live my own early days over again in the boy’s youth. It is moral meat and drink for the old—well, the middle-aged, like myself, ahem!—to mingle with the young and get interested, not so much in their pursuits, because one’s joints are too stiff for that, but in their hopes and aspirations for the future which is all before them. Ever hear these lines, Miss Scragley?

"'In the lexicon of youth
That fate reserves for a bright manhood,
There is no such word as fail.'

"I'd have them printed on the front page of every copybook laid before a child in school, and I'd have him to learn them as soon as he can lisp."

Well, right happy years these had been for Ransey Tansey, and little Babs as well, to say nothing of gentle Eedie. As the world began to smile upon Tandy himself, he tried to do all he could for his children's comfort. Even the little cottage at the foot of the hill was made more ship-shape, and furnished with many a comfort it had previously lacked.

Tandy was a man of a speculative turn of mind, and moreover inventive. His speculations, however, did not succeed so well as he could have wished. I am never sorry for the downfall of speculators; for, after all, what is speculation but a species of gambling—gambling for high stakes? And supposing that a man wins, which once in a way he may; supposing even that he is strong enough in pocket to establish a "corner," as it is called in Yankee-land, to buy up the whole of some great commodity, and shut it up until the people are starving for it and glad to pay for it at three times the original value, well, the corner knight becomes a millionaire. Yes; and very often a miser, and miserable at that. Can a millionaire enjoy sport or play any better than you or I, reader? No, nor so much.

Has he a better appetite from the fact that he can afford to coax it with every costly dainty that cash can purchase? More likely a worse.

Is he more healthy? That were impossible.

Is he more happy? Ah, here we come to the test question. Well, he can have a larger and a finer house than most people, and it may be furnished like a palace. Pictures of the old masters may adorn its walls; musical instruments of rare value, works of art and vertu, may meet the eye at every turn; the gardens, and rose lawns, and conservatories may be more gorgeous than the dream of an Eastern prince. But can he live in more than one room at a time, or enjoy anything around him a bit better than the friends do whom he invites to his home that they may admire everything and envy *him*?

But even the millionaire tires of home. He is satiated with the good things his gold has brought him; and if he travels abroad he will not find half the enjoyment in those beauties of nature—which even the millionaire's gold cannot deprive the poorest man of—that the poet or the naturalist does.

I think there is one thing that most of us have to be thankful for—namely, that we are not over-ambitious, and have no desire to become millionaires.

Yes, but Tandy's ambition was not a morbid one; it was not selfish. He felt that he could die contentedly enough, could he make as sure as any one can be sure that his boy and girl would not become waifs and strays on the great highway of life.

How to make sure? That had been the question he had tried to answer many and many a time as he lay on the poop of his little craft and sailed slowly through the meadows and moors.

I have said he was inventive. His inventive faculties, however, took him far too high at first, like a badly ballasted balloon. He thought of ministering to governments of nations—of putting into their hands instruments for the destruction of his fellow mortals that should render war impossible, and many other equally airy speculations.

He failed, and had to come down a piece. There is no use in soaring too high above the clouds if one would be a useful inventor and a benefactor to mankind. Darning-needles are of more service to the general public than dynamite guns, and they are more easily manufactured. So Tandy failed in all his big things. That balloon of his was still soaring too high.

"I guess," he said to himself, "I'll have to come a little lower still before I find out just what the world wants, and what *all* the world wants."

Food? Physic? Fire?

Ha! he had it. Fire, of course. How many a poor wretch starves to death in a garret just because coals are too dear to purchase. "And why?" he asked himself; and the answer came fast enough, "Because coals are wasted by the rich."

Then Tandy set his brains on to simmer, and invented one of the simplest contrivances in the world for saving waste.

Yes, he had it at last, and in two years' time he began to gain a competence, which was gradually increasing.

This little cottage down by the sad, sad sea, as sentimental old maids call it, was his own. He and Babs—or little Nelda, as we may now call her—had only been here for six months. The place was by no means a fashionable one, although many people came here in summer to seek for health on the glorious sands and rocks, and among the fields and woods that stretched northwards into the interior.

As for Ransey Tansey, Captain Weathereye had really done his best to secure the welfare of this half-wild lad, just as Miss Scragley tried to assist his wee sister.

Impressionable children learn very quickly, and in a year's time Ransey was so much improved in manners that Miss

Scragley rather encouraged his visits to the Hall than otherwise, especially when the Admiral and Bob came along with him.

Grand old lawns and shrubberies surrounded the Hall, and these ended in woods. There were artificial lakes and islands in them too. These islands were the especial property of many beautiful ducks; but one was so large, and surrounded by such a big stretch of water, that the only thing to make it perfect—so Ransey thought—was a boat or skiff. Eedie was of the same opinion; so was Babs and Bob.

"Isn't it possible to build one?" thought Ransey. He felt sure it was; so did Eedie.

Before two months had passed, that skiff, with the assistance of Weathereye, was a *fait accompli*; and the old captain was just as proud of it as the children themselves.

The ducks didn't have it all their own way now on the island. For here a wigwam was built, and almost every fine day —that is, when Ransey was not at his lessons—the children played at Crusoes and wild Indians, and I don't know what all.

There was no end to Tansey's imagination, no end to his daring, no end to his tricks, and in these last, I fear, Eedie encouraged him.

She was but two years younger than Ransey, but she was four years older as far as worldly wisdom was concerned; and with her assistance the dramas, or theatrical performances, carried out on the island were at times startling in the extreme.

When Eedie brought children friends of hers to see these plays, Ransey would have felt very shy indeed had he not had, figuratively speaking, Eedie's wing to shelter under. Encouraged by her, he soon found out that real talent can make its own way, and be appreciated, however humble its possessor may be.

When Tandy first met Captain Weathereye, he wanted to be profuse in his thanks to this kindly staff-commander. But the latter would have none of this.

"Tandy," he said, "I know by your every action that you are a true sailor, like—ahem!—myself. Perhaps what you call kindness to your boy is only a fad of mine, and therefore selfishness after all."

"No, no."

"But I can say 'Yo, yo,' to your 'No, no.' Besides, we are all of us sailing over the sea of life for goodness knows where, and we are in duty bound to help even little boats we may sight, if we see they're in distress."

Tandy and Weathereye had soon became good friends, and smoked many a pipe together; nor did Tandy hesitate to tell the navy sailor about all his inventions and little speculations, to which account the latter listened delightedly enough.

"I say," he said to Tandy one day, "your lad is now over ten, and we should send him right away to sea. I tell you straight, Tandy, I'd get him into the Royal Navy if it were worth while. But he'd never be a sailor, never learn seamanship."

"Confound their old tin-kettles," he added, bringing his fist down on the table with a force that made the glasses jingle, "there isn't a sailor on board one of them; only gunners and greasers. (Greaser, a disparaging name for an engineer in the Royal Navy.) Let Ransey rough it, Mr Tandy, and you'll make a man of him."

An apprenticeship in a Dundee trader, owned in Belfast, and sailing from Cardiff, this was secured; though what use a lad not yet eleven might be put to on board such a craft, I confess I hardly know. But this I *do* know, that the sooner a boy who is to be a British sailor goes to sea the better.

Babs ventured back to the window at last, and glanced once more out into the now gathering gloom. Far away beyond Selsea Bill the sun had set behind lurid coppery clouds, that boded little good for ships that were toiling up the Channel.

"O daddy, here is postie at long, long last, and he's all, all dressed in oilskins! He is coming to the door! Oh!"

She could not say another word for a few moments, but flew toward her father.

"It is—it is—O daddy! *it's Ransey*!"

Book Two—Chapter Two.

"Ship-Shape and Seaman-Fashion."

There wasn't a doubt about that, and no lad surely ever got a happier welcome home.

Bob and Murrams knew him, and the Admiral too, who danced for joy in the back-garden when Ransey Tansey went to see him.

Everybody, with the exception of the father, seemed to walk on air that night. Mr Tandy was simply quietly happy.

Ransey was quite a man, Babs told him, and she felt sure he would soon have a moustache. Indeed, she brought a small magnifying-glass to strengthen her convictions on this point.

What a lot lads have to tell when they return from sea for the first time! and their friends cannot give them greater pleasure than by listening to all their adventures and "hairbreadth scapes;" sympathising with them in sorrows past and gone, and dangers encountered, and thanking Providence that they have been spared to come safely home from off the stormy ocean.

Ransey had gone to the old cottage first, not knowing anything about the change. He had found strangers there, and his heart had sunk to zero.

"Perhaps," he thought, "they are dead and gone."

No Bob to meet him! no Babs! no dancing crane!

He hadn't had the heart to go in; he just ran right away to Captain Weathereye's, and he told him all.

Ransey had had to sling his hammock here the first night, and visit Miss Scragley's next day.

And Eedie was now ten years of age, and shy, but welcomed Ransey with a soft handshake and a bonnie blush, and in her little secret morsel of a heart admired him.

"Didn't I tell you I'd make a man of him, Miss Scragley? See how tall he is. Look at those bold blue eyes of his, and the sea-tan on his cheeks," said the captain.

No wonder that it was Ransey's turn to blush.

"Tell your father, dear boy, that in four or five days I'm coming down to B— to see him. A breath of the briny will do an old barnacle like me a power of good."

"That I will," the boy had replied.

Then, after saying good-bye, Ransey went off to see Mrs Farrow; and that good lady was indeed pleased, for she had always had an idea that those who went to sea hardly ever returned.

She had to put the corner of her apron to her eyes now; but, if she did shed a tear, it was one of joy and nothing else.

Well, it would have done your heart good to have witnessed the happiness of Ransey and Babs, as they wandered hand in hand along the golden sands. Bob, too, was so elated that he hardly knew what to do with himself at first. This joy, however, settled down into a watchful kind of care and love for his young master; and he used to walk steadily behind him on the beach as if afraid that, if he once let him out of sight, he might be spirited away and never be seen again.

The Admiral was quite a seafarer now, and wonderful and sweet were the morsels he found or dug up for himself on the wet stretches of sand. The sea-gulls at first had taken him for something uncanny; but they now took him for granted, and walked about quite close to him, although at times, when this marvellous bird took it into his long head that a dance would do him good and increase his circulation, they were scared indeed, and flew screaming seawards.

But the Admiral didn't mind that a bit; he just kept dancing away till there really didn't seem to be a bit more dance left in him. Then he desisted, and went in for serious eating once more.

One beautiful day, while the dancing crane was holding a levée of sea-gulls, with a sprinkling of rooks, far seawards on the wet sands, while Mr Tandy was seated, smoking as usual, on a bench with his children near him, Bob uttered a defiant kind of a growl, and stood up with his hair on end from ears to rump. A gentleman dressed in blue, with sailor's cap on his head, and reading a newspaper, was approaching the seat, on which there was plenty of room for one more.

But it was not at him that Bob was growling. No, but at a beautiful Scottish collie which was walking by his side.

Bob rushed forward at once, and the two met face to face and heads up.

Scottie carried his tail defiantly high.

Young England would have done the same with his, had he had anything to show.

The conversation seemed to be somewhat as follows:—

"You and I are about the same size, aren't we?" said Bob.

"There isn't much to figure on between us, I think," replied Scottie.

"Lower your flag, then, or I'll shake you out of your skin."

"Scotland never lowered flag to a foreigner yet. Why don't you raise your standard? Why, because you haven't got one to raise. Ha, ha! what a fright you are! I only wonder your master lets you go about like that."

"Yah—ah—r-r—r-r—r-r!"

“Waugh—r-r—r-r—r-r—r!”

And there *was* war next second.

Tandy rushed to the scene of action.

“I’m very sorry, sir,” he said. “Which dog, do you think, began the fight?”

“I think they both began it,” said the newcomer, laughing.

Scotland and England were having a terrible tulzie, as Scotland and England have often had in days long, long gone by.

They were rolling over each other, sometimes Bob above, sometimes Bob below, and the yellow sands were soon stained with blood.

Little Nelda was in tears, and the Admiral scray-scraying and dancing with joy.

“I think,” said the stranger, “they’ve both had enough of it, and my proposal is this—I’ll pull my dog off by the tail, and you do the same by yours.”

“I’d gladly do so,” said Tandy, laughing, “but, my dear sir, the fact is that my dog is like Tam o’ Shanter’s mare after she escaped from the witches—

> “‘The ne’er a tail has he to shake.’”

Dogs are just like men, however, and these two, seemingly satisfied that neither could kill the other, soon made it up, and presently they went galloping off together to the sea to wash the sand out of their shaggy jackets.

Down sat the stranger between Ransey and his father. He rolled up his paper and lit his pipe, and soon the two were engaged in a very animated conversation.

Sailors all three. No wonder that the acquaintance thus brought about by their honest dogs ripened into friendship in a few days.

Captain Halcott—for so this new friend was named—had, some months before this, reached England after a very long and strangely adventurous cruise.

“Are you like me, I wonder?” he said to Tandy, as they sat smoking the calumet of peace together on a breezy cliff-top, while Ransey and his sister were fishing for curios in the pools of water left among the rocks by the receding tide. “Are you like me, I wonder? for I am no sooner safely arrived in Merrie England than I begin once more to long for life on the heaving billows.”

“You’re a free man, Captain Halcott; I’ve got a little family; and you’re a somewhat younger man, as well.”

“Yes, yes; granted. But, before going further, tell me what is your Christian name?”

“Dick.”

“Well, and mine’s Charlie. We’re both seafarers; don’t let us ‘Mr’ each other, or ‘captain’ each other either. You’re Tandy or you’re Dick, I’m Halcott or I’m Charlie, just as, for the time being, the humour may suit us. Is that right?”

“That’s right—ship-shape and seaman-fashion.” Two brown fists met and were shaken—no mincing landlubber’s shake, but a firm and hearty grip and wholesome pressure; a grip that seemed to speak and to say,—“Thine, lad, thine! Thine in peace or war; in calm or tempest, thine!”

How is it that sailors so often resemble one another? I cannot answer the question. But it is none the less true.

Tandy and Halcott appeared to have been cast in the same mould; the same open, bronzed, and weather-beaten faces, the same eyes—eyes that could twinkle with merriment one moment and be filled with pity the next.

Even Captain Weathereye himself, although older than either, and somewhat lighter in complexion, might easily have passed as brother to both.

“Well,” said Halcott, “I daresay you have a story to tell.”

“I’ve had strange experiences in life, and some were sad enough. For the sake of that dear boy and girl, I thank God I am no longer in the grip of poverty; but, my friend, I’ve seen worse days.”

“Tell us, Tandy.”

Tandy told him, sitting there, all the reader already knows and much more, receiving silent but heartfelt sympathy.

“So you’ve sold the *Merry Maiden*!”

“Yes; although some of the happiest years of my life were spent on board of her, and in the little cottage. Heigho! I wish I could bring back the past; but if I live to be able to afford it, I shall build a house where the old cot stands, and

will just end my days there, you know. And now for your story.”

“Oh, that is a strange and a sad one; but as your friend is coming down to-morrow, I propose postponing it. This Captain Weathereye must, from all you say, be a real jolly fellow.”

This was agreed to; and next morning Tandy met bluff old Weathereye at the little railway station.

“I’ll stay a week, Tandy, a whole week. Yes, my hearty, I’ll gladly make your house my home, and shall rejoice to see your friend, and hear the yarn he has got to spin.”

Book Two—Chapter Three.

A Quarterdeck Dream.

“Once a sailor, gentlemen,” began Halcott, as he filled his pipe, gazing thoughtfully over the sea, “always a sailor.

“That’s a truism, I believe. Why, the very sight of the waves out yonder, with the evening sunlight dancing and playing on their surface, makes me even at this moment long to tread the deck again.

“And there are, perhaps, few seafarers who have more inducements to stay at home than I, Charlie Halcott, have.

“I have a beautiful house of my own, and some day soon, I hope, you will both come and see it, and judge for yourselves.

“My house has a tower to it. Many a night, while walking the quarterdeck keeping my watch, with no companions save the silver-shining stars, I have said to myself—‘Charlie Halcott,’ I have said, ‘if ever you leave off ploughing the ocean wave, and settle down on shore, you must have a house with a tower to it.’

“And now I’ve got it.

“A large, square, old-fashioned tower it is, with a mullioned window on each side of it; and up the walls the dense green ivy climbs, with just enough Virginia creeper to cast a glamour of crimson over it in autumn, like the last red rays of the setting sun.

“One window looks up the valley of the Thames, where not far off is a little Niagara, a snow-white weir: I can hear the drowsy monotone of its foaming waters by night and by day, and its song is ever the same. Another window looks away down the valley, and the river here goes winding in and out among the meadows and the green and daisied leas, till, finally, it takes the appearance of a silver string, and loses itself, or is lost to me, amidst the distant trees. A third window, from which I dearly like to look early on a summer’s morning, while the blackbirds are yet in fullest, softest song, shows an English landscape that to me is the sweetest of the sweet. As far as eye can reach, till bounded by the grey horizon’s haze, are woods and wilds and meadows green, with the red gables or the roofs of many a stately farm peeping up through the rolling cloudland of foliage; and many a streamlet too, seen here and there in the sunbeams, as it goes speeding on towards the silent river.

“But though this house of mine has a tower to it, it is not a castle by any means, apart from the fact that every Englishman’s house is his castle. I have a tower, but no donjon keep. My castle is a villa—‘a handsome modern-built villa,’ the agent described it when I commenced correspondence with a view to its purchase. It is indeed a beautiful villa, and it is situated high up on the brow of a hill, all among the dreamy woods.

“Though I have been but a short spell on shore, my town friends already call me the ‘Sailor hermit,’ because I stick to my castle and its woods and gardens. Not for a single day can they prevail upon me to exchange it for the bustle and din of hideous London. But I retaliated on my city friends by bringing them down to my ‘castle’ in spring time, when the early flowers were opening their petals in the warm sunshine, and the very tulips seemed panting in the heat, and when there was such a gush of bird-melody coming from grove and copse and hedgerow that every leaf seemed to hide a feathered songster. And I rejoiced to see those friends of mine struck dumb by the wealth of beauty they beheld around them. For Philomel was making day melodious with a strange, unearthly music.

“All through the darkness the bird sang to his mate, and all through the day as well. No bolder birds than our nightingales live. They sing at our side, at our feet; they sing as they fly, sing as they alight, sing *to* us, ay and *at* us defiantly. No wonder we all love this sweet bird, this sweet spirit of the spring.

“So my quarterdeck dream has become a dear reality.

“Strange to say, it is always at night that I think most of the ocean. And on nights of storm—then it is that I lie awake listening to the wind roaring through the stately elms, with a sound like the sough of gale-tossed waves. It is then I long to tread once more the deck of my own bonnie barque, and feel her move beneath me like a veritable thing of life and reason. My house with the ivied tower is well away among the midlands; and yet on nights of tempest, sea-birds—the gull, and the tern, and the light-winged kittywake—often fly around the house and the trees. I can hear their voices rising shrill and high above the roar of the wind.

“‘Kaye—kay—ay—ay,’ they scream. ‘Come away—come away—ay,’ they seem to cry. ‘Why have you left us? why have you left the seas? We miss you. Come away—come away—ay—ay.’

“Never into my quarterdeck dreams, gentlemen, had there come, strange to say, a companion fair of womankind. My house with the tower to it should be just as it is to-day, just what—following out my dreams—I have made it. Its gardens all should bloom surpassing fair, my woods and trees be green; the rose lawns should look like velvet; my

ribboned flower-beds like curves of coloured light; the nightingales in spring should bathe in the spray of my fountains,—there should be joy and loveliness and bird-song everywhere, but a wife?—well, I had somehow never dreamt of that. If any of the officers—for I was captain and part owner of the good barque *Sea Flower*—had been bold enough to suggest such a thing—I mean such a *person*, I should have laughed at him where he stood. ‘Who,’ I should have said, ‘would many a simple sailor like me, over thirty, brown-red in face, and hard in hands. Who indeed?’

“But into my quarterdeck dreams companions had come. Should I not have jolly farmers and solid-looking red-faced squires to dine with me, and to smoke with me out of doors in the cool of midsummer evenings, or in the cosy red parlour around the fire in the long forenights of winter, and listen to my yarns of the dark blue sea, or talk to me of the delights of rural life? Well, it was a pretty dream, it must be admitted.

“But it never struck me then, as it does now, that all the joys of life are tame indeed, unless shared by some one you love more than all things bright and fair.

“A pretty dream—and a beautiful dream. A piece of ice itself is beautiful at times; but perhaps, as we stand and admire it, the sunshine may steal down and melt it. Then we find that we love the sunshine even more than we loved the ice.

“It is not every sailor who has the luck to be captain, or, to speak more correctly, master, of so fine a sailing craft as the *Sea Flower*, at the age of twenty-six. But such had been my fortune; and I had sailed the seas in her for six long years, and, with the exception of the few accidents inseparable from a life at sea, I had never had a serious mishap. Many a wild gale had we weathered in her, my mate and I; many a dark and tempestuous night had we staggered along under bare poles; more than once had we sprung a leak, and twice had we been on fire.

“But all ended well, and during our brief spells on shore, either in England or in some foreign port, though James and I always managed to enjoy ourselves in our own quiet way, yet neither he nor I was sorry when we got back home again to our bonnie barque, and were once more afloat on the heaving sea.

“James was perhaps more of a sailor than I. Well, he was some years my senior, and he was browner and harder by far, and every inch a man. And though a very shy one, as far as female society is concerned, he was a very bold one nevertheless. But for his courageous example on the night of our last fire, the *Sea Flower* would have helped to swell the list of those ships that go to sea and are heard of no more.

“When we were taken aback in a white squall in the Indian Ocean, and it verily seemed that we had but a few minutes to float, James was here, there, and everywhere, his manly voice, calm and collected, ringing high above the roaring of the wind and the surging of the terrible seas. The very fire of his bravery on that occasion affected the men, and they worked as only bold men can work in face of death and danger, till our craft was once more righted and tearing along before the wind.

“And just as brave on shore as afloat was sturdy James Malone.

“When our steward was attacked by fifty spear-armed savages on shore at the Looboo Island, my mate seized a club that a gorilla could hardly have wielded, and fought his way through the black and vengeful crowd, till he reached and saved our faithful steward.

“And, that day, it was not until he had almost reached the ship that he told me, with that half-shy and quiet smile of his, that he believed he was slightly wounded. Then he fainted dead away.

“I nursed poor James back to health. Yes, but more than once, both before and after that event, he nursed me, and I doubt if even a brother could have been half so kind as my mate James.

“For many a long year, then, James and I had sailed the salt seas together. Without James sitting opposite me at the table at breakfast or at dinner, the neatly painted and varnished saloon, with all its glittering odds and ends, wouldn’t have seemed the same. Without James sitting near me on the quarterdeck on black-dark evenings in the tropics, I should have felt very strange and lonesome indeed.

“But James and I didn’t agree on every subject on which we conversed. Had we done so, conversation would have lost its special charm. No, he aired his opinions and I shook out mine. There were times when I convinced James; there were times when James convinced me; there were times when neither convinced the other, and then we agreed to differ.

“‘Very well, sir,’ James would say, ‘you has your ’pinions, and I has mine. You keeps to your ’pinions, and I sticks to mine.’

“It will be noted that James’s ordinary English would scarcely have passed muster in the first families of Europe. But, like many of his class, James could talk correctly enough when he set himself the task. But there was no better sailor afloat for all that, and on the stormiest night or squalliest day I always felt safe when my first mate trod the planks.

“James could tell a good story too, and I used to keep him at it of an evening—any evening save Sunday. On Sunday, James did nothing in the intervals of duty except read the Bible—the ‘Good Book,’ as he called it. This New Testament was one of those large type editions which very old people use.

“His mother—dead and gone—had left him that Book, and also her gold-rimmed specs, and it was interesting, on a Sunday afternoon, to see James sitting solemnly down to the Book, and shipping those specs athwart his nose.

“‘What on earth,’ I said once to him, ‘do you use the specs for, my friend?’

“When James looked up at me, half-upbraidingly, those eyes of his, seen through the powerful lenses, looked as big and wild and round as a catamount’s. It was unearthly.

“‘My mother bade me. Would you disobey your mother?’

“This was a bombshell, and I said no more.

“But there was one subject on which James and I never disagreed—namely, ‘the ladies,’ as he called women folks. ‘They are deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked,’ James would say, ‘and I means to steer clear on ’em.’ And James always did.

“There was one pleasure James and I had in common—namely, witnessing a good tragedy on the boards of Liverpool theatre. You see this was our port of destination on our return from the far, far south. Mind, we wouldn’t go to see a drama, because there might be too much nonsensical love business in it, and too many of ‘the frivolous antics of women’—James’s own words. But in a tragedy the women often came to grief, which James thought was only natural.

“So we chose tragedy.

“Now, one night at this same theatre, I had one of the strangest experiences of my life; and never yet have I found any one who could explain it.

“James and I had gone early that evening, because there was something specially tragic on, and we desired to secure good seats. We sat in the front row, and at the left end of the row, because we wished to leave the theatre between each act to enjoy a few whiffs of tobacco.

“The play was well begun, and my eyes were riveted on the stage. There was a momentary silence, and during this time I was sensible, from a slight rustling noise, that the private box behind and above me was being occupied.

“Did you ever hear psychologists mention the term or feeling ‘ecstasy’? That was what stole over me now. For a few minutes I saw nothing on the stage; only a feeling of intense happiness, such as I have seldom experienced since that night, stole over me, occupying, bathing, I may say, my whole soul and mind.

“I turned at last, and my eyes met those of a young lady in that private box. Never before had I seen such radiant beauty. Never had I been impressed with beauty of any kind before. My heart almost stood still. It was really an awful moment—that is, if intense happiness can ever be awful.

“Well, if it is possible for a sailor, with a face as brown as the back of a fiddle, to blush, I blushed. She, too, I think, coloured just a little.

“What was it? What could it mean?

“I know not how I sat out the act. When I rose with James to go out, I dared one other glance towards the box. The lady had gone, and a feeling of coldness crept round my heart. I felt as depressed now as I had recently felt happy.

“‘James,’ I said, ‘take me home, I—I believe I’m ill.’

“‘Why,’ said James, ‘you look as though you had seen a ghost.’

“I got home. Something, I knew not what, was going to happen; but all that night dream after dream haunted my pillow, and of every dream, the sweet young face I had seen in the private box was the only thing I could remember when daylight broke athwart the eastern sky.”

Book Two—Chapter Four.

“Dear, Unselfish, but Somewhat Silly Fellow.”

“I never had a secret from James Malone; no, not so much as one. Had I known what was the matter with me on the evening before, I should have told James manfully and in a moment.

“But when he came to my rooms in the morning, to share my humble breakfast, and consult about the duties of the day, we being just then fitting out for sea,—

“‘James,’ I began—

“And then—well, then I told him all the story, even down to my strange dreams and the sweet young face that had haunted them.

“‘Why, James,’ I concluded, ‘I have only to close my eyes now to see her once again, and I can neither read nor write without thinking of her.’

“James sat silently beholding me for fully a minute. His face was clouded, and pity and anxiety were in every lineament of his manly features.

“‘I’m taken aback,’ he stammered at last. ‘White squalls is nothin’ to it. Charlie Halcott, you’re *in love*. It’s an awful, fearful thing. No surgical operation can do anything for you. It’s worse by far than I thought. A mild touch of the cholera would be mere moonshine to this. A brush wi’ Yellow Jack wouldn’t be a circumstance to it. O Halcott, Halcott!

O Charlie! what *am* I to do with you?'

"'James,' I interrupted, 'light your pipe. Did *you* see the beautiful vision—the lovely child?'

"'I followed your eyes.'

"'And what saw you, James?' I asked, leaning eagerly towards him.

"'I saw what appeared to be—a woman. Nothin' more and nothin' less.'

"'James, did you not notice her blue and heavenly eyes, that seemed to swim in ether; her delicately pencilled eyebrows; the long lashes that swept the rounded rosy cheeks; her golden hair like sunset's glow; her little mouth; her lips like the blossom of the blueberry, and the delicate play of her mobile countenance?'

"'Delicate play of a mobile marling-spike!' cried James, jumping up. He rammed a piece of paper into his pipe and thrust it into his pocket.

"'Charles Halcott, I'm off,' he cried.

"'Off, James?'

"'Yes, off. Every man Jack shall be on board the *Sea Flower* to-day, bag and baggage. We'll drop down stream to-morrow morning early, ship a pilot, and get away to sea without more ado.'

"He was at the door by the time he had finished but he stopped a moment with a look of wondrous pity on his handsome face, then came straight back and clasped my hand in brotherly affection, and so, without another word, walked out and away.

"Now, I was master of the *Sea Flower*, but in the matter of sailing next day—three or four whole days before I had intended—I should no more have thought of gainsaying honest James Malone than of disobeying my father had he been alive. James was acting towards me with true brotherly affection, quite disinterestedly in my behalf, and—*quien sabe*?—probably saving me from a lifetime's misery.

"I would be advised by James.

"So after he had left, and I had smoked in solitary sadness for about an hour, I rose with a sigh, and commenced throwing my things together in the great mahogany sea-chest that while afloat stood in my state-room, and which on shore I never travelled without.

"For the whole of that forenoon I wandered about the streets of Liverpool, looking chiefly at the photographers' windows. I was bewitched, and possessed some faint hope of seeing a photograph of her who had bewitched me. I even entered the shops under pretence of bargaining for a likeness of my sailor-self, and looked over their books of specimens.

"Had I come across her picture, the temptation to purchase it would, I fear, have proved irresistible.

"Suddenly I pulled myself taut up with a round turn, and planked myself, so to speak, on my mental quarterdeck before Commander Conscience.

"'What are you doing, or trying to do, Charles Halcott?' said Commander Conscience.

"'Only trying,' replied Charles Halcott, 'to procure a photograph of the loveliest young lady on earth, whose eyes shine like stars in beauty's night.'

"'Don't be a fool, Charles Halcott. Are you not wise enough to know that, even if you procure this photograph, you will have to keep it a secret from honest James Malone? His friendship is better far than love of womankind. Besides,' added Commander Conscience, 'you need no photograph. Is not the image of the lady who has bewitched you indelibly photographed upon your soul? Charles Halcott, I am ashamed of you!'

"I stood at a window for a few minutes, looking sheepish enough; then I threw temptation to the winds, put about, and sailed right away back to my chambers, studding-sails set low and aloft.

"I finished packing, saw my owners in the afternoon, and when James came off to the ship he found me quietly smoking my biggest pipe in the saloon of the *Sea Flower*.

"He smiled now.

"'Better already,' he said; 'His name be praised!'

"James was a strange man in some ways. This was one: he thanked Heaven for every comfort, even the slightest, and did nothing without, in a word or two, asking a blessing thereon.

"In three days' time we were staggering southwards, and away across Biscay's blue bay, with every inch of canvas set. And a pretty sight we were—our white sails flowing in the sunshine—the sea as blue as the sky, and the waves sparkling around us as if every drop of water contained a diamond.

"All the way to the Cape, and farther, James treated me as tenderly and compassionately as if I had been an invalid brother. He never contradicted me even once. He used to keep me talking and yarning on the quarterdeck, when he wasn't on watch, for whole hours at a stretch; and in the evenings, when tired spinning me yarns, he would take his

banjo and sing to me old sea-songs in his bold and thrilling voice. And James could sing too; there were the brine, and the breeze, and the billows' roll in every bar of the grand old songs he sang, and indeed I was never tired of listening to them. Sometimes I closed my eyes as I sat in my easy-chair; then James's banjo notes grew softer and softer, and ever so much farther away like, till at last it was ghostly music, and I was in the land of dreams.

"When I awoke, perhaps it would be four bells or even six, and there would be James, with his specs athwart his great jibboom of a nose, poring earnestly over his mother's Bible.

"'You've had a nice little nap,' he would say cheerfully. 'Now you'll toddle off to your bunk, and when you're safe between the sheets I'll bring you a tiny little drop of rum and treacle.'

"Poor James! Rum and treacle was his panacea for every ill; and yet I don't believe any one in the wide world ever saw James the worse of even rum and treacle.

"When we got as far as to Madeira, he proposed we should anchor here for a few days and dispose of some of our notions. Notions formed our cargo; and notions must be understood to mean, Captain Weathereye, all kinds of jewellery and knick-knacks, including table-knives and forks, watches, strings of bright beads, cotton cloths, parasols, and guns. Now I knew very well that we could easily dispose of all our cargo at the Cape and other parts; but I also knew very well that James's main object in stopping at Madeira was to give me a few delightful days on shore.

"This was part of the cure, and I had to submit with the best grace I could.

"We had, at that time, as handy and good a second mate as any one could wish on the weather side of a quarterdeck. So it was easy enough for myself and James to leave the ship both at the same time, though this had very seldom been our custom, except when in dock or in harbour.

"To put it in plain language, James did not seem to know how good to be to me, nor how much to amuse me. The honest, simple soul kept talking and yarning to me all the while, and pointing out this, that, and the other strange thing to me, until I was obliged to laugh in his face. But James was not offended; not he. He was working according to some plan he had formulated in his own mind, and nothing was going to turn him aside from his purpose.

"About midday we entered the veranda of a cool and delightful hotel, and seating ourselves at a little marble table, James called for cigars and iced drinks. Then he proposed we should luncheon. No, he would pay, he said; it was not often he had the honour or pleasure of lunching with his captain, in a marble palace like this. So he pulled out an old sock tied round with a morsel of blue ribbon, and thrusting his big brown paw into it, brought forth money in abundance.

"'Never been here before?' he asked me quietly.

"'No,' I said; 'strange to say I've touched at nearly every port in the world except this place.'

"'Well, I have,' said James, 'and I'm going to put you up to the ropes.'

"'Now,' he continued, when we stood once more under the greenery of the trees that bordered the broad pavement, 'will you have a hammock or a horse?'

"Not knowing quite what he meant, I replied that I would leave it to him.

"'Well,' he said, 'this must be considered a kind of picnic, them's my notions, and as you're far from well yet, I'll have a horse and you a hammock.'

"Both horse and hammock were soon brought round to the door. The hammock was borne by two perspiring half-caste Portuguese, and was attached to a pole, and on board I swung, while James got on board the horse. The saddle was a hard and horrid contrivance of leather and wood, the stirrups a pair of old slippers, and the horse himself—well, he was a beautiful study in equine osteology, and I really did not know which to pity most, James or his Rosinante. But in my hammock I felt comfortably, dreamily happy.

"We passed through the quaint old town of Funchal, then upwards, and away towards the mountains. The day was warm and delightful—hot indeed James must have found it, for he soon divested himself of coat and waistcoat, and even then he had to pause at times to wipe his streaming brow. The peeps at the beautiful gardens I caught while being carried along were charming in the extreme; the verandaed and trellised villas, canopied with flowers of every hue and shape, the bright green lawns where fairy-like children played, and the flowering trees—the whole forming ever-changing scenes of enchantment—I shall never forget. Then the soft and balmy air was laden with perfume.

"'How nice,' I thought, 'to be an invalid! How kind of James to treat me as one! And he jogging along there on that bony horse's back, with the boy holding fast by the tail! Dear, unselfish, but somewhat silly fellow!'

"Upwards still, steeper and steeper the hill. And now we seemed to have mounted into the very sky itself, and were far away from the tropics and tropical flora.

"We came at last to a table-land. For the life of me I could not help thinking of the story of 'Jack and the Bean-stalk.' Here gorgeous heaths and heather bloomed and grew; here birds of sweet song flitted hither and thither among the scented and the yellow-tasselled broom; and here solemn weird-like pine-trees waved dark against the far-off ocean's blue.

"Under some of these trees, and close to the cliff, we disembarked to rest. We were fully half a mile above the level of the sea. Yet not a stone's throw from where we sat was the edge of the awful cliff that led downwards without a break to that white line far beneath where the waves frothed and fumed against the rocks.

“But far as the eye could reach, till lost in distance and merged into the blue of the sky, lay the azure sea, with here and there a sail, the largest of which looked no bigger than a white butterfly with folded wings.

“A delicious sense of happiness stole over me, and for the first time, perhaps, since leaving England I forgot the sweet young face that had so completely bewitched me.

“I think I must have fallen asleep, for the next thing I was sensible of was James tuning a broad guitar.

“Then his voice was raised in song, and I closed my eyes again, the better to listen.

“Poor James, he played and sang for over an hour; no wild, wailing sea-songs this time, however, but verses sweet and plaintive, and far more in harmony with the notes of the sad guitar. The romance of our situation, the stillness of our surroundings, unbroken save in the intervals of song by the flitting of a wild bird among the broom, and the low whisper of the wind through the pine-trees overhead, with the balmy ozonic air from the blue ocean, continued to instil into my soul a feeling of calm and perfect joy to which I had hitherto been a stranger.

“Just as the sun was sinking like a great blood orange through a purple haze that lay along the western horizon, James laughingly handed the guitar to the boy who had carried it. Then laughing still—he was so strange and good this James of mine—he pulled out a silver-mounted flask and poured me out a portion of its contents.

“It was a little rum and treacle.

“‘The dews of night isn’t going to harm you after that,’ said James.

“Lights were glimmering here and there on the hills like glow-worms, and far beneath us in the town, long before we reached the streets of Funchal.

“We went straight to the hotel and discharged both horse and hammock.

“Then we dined.

“I thought I should be allowed to go on board after this. Not that there was the slightest hurry.

“However, I was mistaken for once. James had not yet done with me for the night. I had still another prescription of his to use; and as I knew it was part and parcel of James’s love cure, I could not demur. He had given me so much pleasure on that day already, that when he asked me to get up and follow him I did so as obediently as the little lamb followed Mary.

“But that he, James Malone, who feared womankind, if he did not positively hate them, should lead me to a Portuguese ballroom of all places in the world, surprised me more than anything.

“I could hear the tinkling of guitars, the shuffling of feet, and the music of merry, laughing voices, long before we came near the door.

“I stopped short.

“‘James,’ I said, ‘haven’t you made some mistake?’

“His only answer was a roguish laugh.

“I repeated the question.

“‘Not a bit of it,’ he answered gaily.

“‘Charlie Halcott,’ he added, ‘if you were simply suffering from Yellow Jack I’d hand you over to a doctor, but, Charles Halcott, it takes a *man* to cure love. And you’ve been sorely hit.’

“This had been a day of surprises, but when I entered that ballroom there came the greatest surprise of all. Those here assembled were not so-called gentle-folks. They were the sons and daughters of the ordinary working classes; but the taste displayed, the banks of flowers around the orchestra, the gay bouquets and coloured lights along the walls, the polished and not overcrowded floor, the romantic dresses of the gallants that transported one back to the middle ages, the snow-white costumes of the ladies, and, above all, their innocent, ravishing beauty, formed a scene that reminded me strongly of stories I had read in the Arabian Nights’ Entertainments.

“I was almost ashamed of my humble attire, but the courtesy of the master of ceremonies was charming. Would the strangers dance? Surely the stranger sailors would dance? He would get us, as partners, the loveliest señoritas in all the room.

“So he did.

“I forgot everything in that soft, dreamy waltz—everything save the thrilling music and the sylph-like form of my dark-eyed partner, who floated with me through the perfumed air, for surely our feet never touched the floor.

“But the drollest thing of all was this—James was dancing too. James with his—well, I must not say aversion to, but fear and shyness of womankind, was dancing; and I knew he was only doing so to encourage me. A handsome fellow he looked, too, almost head and shoulders taller than any man there, and broad and well-knit in proportion. The master of ceremonies had got him a partner ‘for to match,’ as he expressed it; certainly a beautiful girl, with a wealth of raven hair that I had never seen equalled, far less surpassed. I daresay she could dance lightly; but James’s waltzing was of a very solid brand indeed, and he swung his pretty partner round the room in a way that seemed to

indicate business rather than pleasure. Several couples cannoned off James and went ricochetting to the farther end of the room, and one went down. James swung past me a moment after, apparently under a heavy press of canvas, and as he did so I heard him say to his partner, referring to the couple he had brought to deck,—

"'They should keep out o' the way, then, when people are dancing.'

"The hours sped quickly by, as they always do in a ballroom, and by the time James and I got on board the *Sea Flower* four bells in the middle-watch were ringing out through the still, dark night. But all was safe and quiet on board.

"I took a turn on deck to enjoy a cigar before going below, just by way of cooling my brow. When I went down at last, why, there was James seated at the table, his mother's Bible before him, and, as usual, the awful specs across his nose.

"Poor James, he was a strange man, but a sincere friend, as the sequel will show."

Book Two—Chapter Five.

"Till the Sea Gives up its Dead."

From Madeira, where we stayed for many days, going on shore every forenoon to sell some of our cargo to the shopkeepers, and every afternoon for a long ride—horse and hammock—over some part or other of this island of enchantment, sometimes finishing up with a dance—from all this pleasure and delight, I say, we sailed away at last.

"South and away we sailed, and in due time we reached and anchored off Saint James's Town, Saint Helena.

"Now, Saint Helena had not figured in our programme when we left Merry England. But here we were, and a most delightful place I found it. Hills and dells, mountains and glens; wild flowers everywhere; and the blue eternal sea dotted with many a snow-white sail, engirdling all. This, then, was the 'lonely sterile rock in the midst of the wild tempestuous ocean,' to which Napoleon had been banished.

"James had been here before, although I had not, so everything was of interest to me, and everything new. And my good mate determined to make it as pleasant for me as possible. He seemed to know every one, and every one appeared delighted to see him. Such remarks as the following fell upon our ears at every corner:—

"'Well, you've got back again, James?'

"'What! here you are once more, James, and welcome.'

"'Dee—lighted to see you, certain—lee!'

"'Ah! Jeames,'—this from a very aged crone, who was seated on a stone dais near her door, basking in the warm, white sunshine—'ah! Jeames, and sure the Lord is good to me. And my old eyes are blessed once more wi' a sight o' your kindly face!'

"'Glad to see you alive, Frilda. And look, I have got a pound of tea for you. And I'll come to-night and read a bit out of my mother's Good Book to you.'

"'Bless you, Jeames—bless you, my boy.'

"We went rambling all over the island that day. We visited the fort, where James had many friends; then we went up a beautiful glen, and on reaching the top we struck straight off at right angles, and a walk of about half a mile took us to one of the most pleasantly situated farms I have ever seen. It was owned by the farmer, a Scotsman of the name of MacDonald. Nothing flimsy about this fine house. The walls were built of sturdy stone, and must have been some feet thick, so that indoors in the cheerful parlour it was cool and delightful, especially so with the odour of orange blossom blowing through the open window and pervading the whole room.

"'Man, James, I'm so pleased. Here! Hi! Mrs Mac, where are you? Here's James Malone, the honest, simple sumph come back again. Jamie, man, ye must stop all night and give us a song.'

"'We—ll—I—'

"'No *wells* nor *I's* about it. And your friend here too.'

"Mrs Mac was a very little body, with rosy cheeks, a merry voice, and blue eyes that looked you through and through.

"A little girl and boy came running in, and James soon had one on each knee; and while I and MacDonald talked in the window recess, he was deep in the mysteries of a mermaid story, his tiny audience listening with wondering eyes and rosy lips apart.

"Mrs Mac had gone bustling away to send in a dram of hollands, cunningly flavoured with seeds and fruit rind. She disappeared immediately again, to send orders down to James's Town for fish and fowl.

"Of course we would stay all night?

"'Well,' I said, 'the ship is safe, unless a tornado blows.'

"'There will be no tornado, sir,' said Farmer Mac.

"'I'll send off, then, and tell the second mate.'

"'My henchman is at your service, Captain Halcott.'

"'And look, see,' cried James, 'just tell your henchman to bring my Good Book and specs. I haven't the heart to disappoint old Mother Banks.'

"'And the guitar,' I added.

"'Well—well, yes.'

"The children clapped their hands with glee, and Maggie, the girl, pulled James's face towards her by the whiskers and kissed him.

"We started next for Longwood and Napoleon's tomb. Maggie and Jack—ten and nine years old respectively—came with us, and a right pleasant day we spent. There were bright-winged birds flitting hither and thither in the dazzling sunshine, and singing sweet and low in trees of darkest green; but the happy voices of the children made sweeter music far to my ears, and I'm sure to James's too.

"All along the roadsides at some parts grew the tall cacti; they were one mass of gorgeous crimson bloom, and here and there between, the ground was carpeted with trailing blossoms white and blue; yet, in my opinion, the laughing rosebud lips of Maggie and Jack's saucy eyes of blue were prettier far than the flowers.

"And here, on the top of the dingle or glen, and overlooking the sea, were Napoleon's house and garden.

"'Why, James,' I cried, 'this isn't a dungeon any more than Saint Helena is a rock. It strikes me—a simple sailor—that Nap must have had fine times of it.'

"'No, sir, no,' said James, shaking his head. 'Plenty to eat and drink, plenty o' good clothes to wear, but ah! Charles Halcott, he wasn't free, and there burned inside him an unquenchable fire. When in action, on the field, or on the march, he had little time to think; but here, in this solitude, the seared conscience regained its softness, and in his thoughts by day and in his dreams at the dead hours o' night, Charles Halcott, rose visions of the terrible misery he brought on Europe, and the black and awful deeds he did in Egypt. O sir, if you want to punish a man, leave him alone to his conscience!'

"James Malone was in fine form that evening at Farmer Mac's. He sang and he yarned time about—the songs for the children, the yarns for us. Parodying Tam o' Shanter, I might say:—

> "'The nicht drave on wi' sangs and clatter,
> Wi' childish glee, wi' bairnies' patter;
> The sailor tauld his queerest stories,
> The farmer's laugh was ready chorus;
> Till, hark! the clock strikes in the hall
> The wee short oor ayont the twal.'

"Before dinner that evening simple James had gone to see old Mother Banks, and he spent a whole hour with her.

"'Good-bye, dear laddie,' she said, when he rose to leave; 'I'll pray for ye on the ragin' sea, but I know the Lord will never let me behold ye again.'

"And simple James's eyes were wet with tears as he held her skinny hand for a moment, then dropped it and bore away up the street, never once looking back, so full was his heart.

"When the clock struck one, James shyly proposed a few moments' devotion. Then he mounted the awful specs and opened the Good Book.

"Half an hour after this, all in the great house were asleep, and not a sound could I hear—for I lay long awake thinking—save the sighing of the wind in the trees above my open jalousies, to me a very sweet and soothing sound.

"'Heigho!' I murmured to myself. 'Will I *ever* have a home on the green earth, I wonder, or shall I die on the blue sea?'

"Then I began to doze, and mingling with my waking thoughts came dreams which proved that poor James's prescriptions had not yet been entirely successful.

"Just three weeks after this we were far away in the centre of the South Atlantic Ocean, and bearing up for Rio de Janeiro. The sea around us was of the darkest blue, but sparkling in the sunshine, and there was just sufficient wind to gladden the heart of a sailor.

"What induced James and me to change our plans and sail west instead of south and east, I never could tell, though I have often thought about it. A friend of mine says it was Fate, and that Fate often rules the destinies of men, despite all that can be done to alter her plans and intentions. This line of reasoning may be right; my friend is so often right that I daresay it must be.

“But one thing now occurred to me that at times rendered me rather uneasy, and which, when I tried to describe it to James, caused that honest sailor some anxiety also. I have spoken of it more than once to so-called psychologists and even to so-called mediums; but their attempted explanations, although seemingly satisfactory enough to themselves, sounded to me like a mere chaos of words, the meaning of which as a whole I never could fathom. But the mystery with me was this: I seemed at times to be possessed of a second self, or rather, a second soul.

“I struggled against the feeling all I could, but in vain. James read his mother’s Bible to me, and otherwise, not in a spiritual way, he did all he could to cheer me up, as he phrased it. But—and here comes in the most curious part of it—I did not feel that I wanted any cheering up. I was happy enough in the companionship of my second self. This was not always present. Sometimes absent for days indeed, and never as yet did it talk to me in my dreams. At other times it came, and would be with me for hours; and it spoke to my mind as it were, I being compelled to carry on a conversation, in thought, of course, but never once did I have any notion beforehand as to what the remarks made were to be. They were simple in the extreme, and usually had reference to the working or guidance of the ship, the setting or shortening of sail, and making the good barque snug for the night.

“We called at Rio. The harbour here could contain all the war fleets in the world; grand old hills; a city as romantic as Edinburgh—that is, when seen from the sea—quaintness of streets, a wealth and beauty of vegetation, of treescape and flowerscape, that I have never seen equalled anywhere, and a quaintly dressed, quiet, and indolent people.

“We landed much stores here and filled up with others. On the whole, James and I were not sorry we had come, we drove such excellent bargains.

“Again, at Buenos Ayres, with its fine streets and public buildings, and its miles upon miles of shallow sea all in front, we did trade enough to please us.

“‘When I retire from sailing the salt seas, sir,’ said James, ‘it’s ’ere and nowhere else I’m goin’ to make my ’ome; and I only wish the old lady were livin’, for then I’d retire after the very next voyage.’

“Shortly after resuming our voyage southwards towards the stormy Cape Horn, we encountered gale after gale of wind that taxed all the strength of our brave barque, as well as the skill of the officers and seamen. Again and again had we to lie to for long dark days and nights; and when we ventured to run before the storm, we had literally to stagger along under bare poles.

“But when we reached the Cape at last, and stood away to the west around the bleak and inhospitable shores of Tierra del Fuego, or the Land of Fire, never before in all the years I had been to sea had I encountered weather so fearful or waves so high and dangerous. So stormy, indeed, did it continue, that hardly did either James or I dare to hope we should ever double the Cape. But we both had a sailor’s aversion to turning back, and so struggled on and on.

“The danger seemed to culminate and the crisis come in earnest, when one weird moonlight midnight we suddenly found ourselves bows on to a huge iceberg, or rather one vast island of ice that appeared to have no horizon either towards the north or towards the south. The barrier presented seemed impassable. We could only try, so we put about on the port tack, the wind blowing there with great violence from the west and north.

“This course took us well off the great ice island. It took us southwards, moreover.

“‘But why not steer northwards?’ said James. ‘We’d have to tack a bit, it is true, only we’d be lessening our danger; leastways that’s my opinion. This berg may be twenty or thirty miles long, and every mile brings us closer to great bergs that, down yonder, float in dozens. Before now, Charles Halcott, I’ve seen a ship sunk in the twinkling of a marling-spike by a—’

“‘By striking against a berg, James?’ I interrupted. ‘So have I.’

“‘No, sir, no; you’re on the wrong tack. Wherever big bergs are there are small ones too—little, hard, green lumps of ice, not bigger than the wheel-house, that to hit bows on would scarcely spill your tea. But, friend, it is different where there are mountain seas on. These little green bergs are caught by a wave-top and hurled against the ship’s side with the strength of a thousand Titans. And—the ship goes down.’

“There was something almost solemn in the manner James brought out the last four words. It kept me silent for minutes; and shading my eyes with my hand, I kept peering southwards into the weird-like moonshine, the ice away on the right, a strange white haze to leeward, and far ahead the foam-tipped waves, wild-maned horses of the ocean, careering along on their awful course.

“‘James,’ I said at last, ‘danger or not danger, southwards I steer. Something tells me to do so; everything bids me. “Steer south—steer south,” chimes the bell when it strikes; “steer south,” ticks the clock. James Malone, my very heart’s pulse repeats the words; and I hear them mournfully sung by the very waves themselves, and by the wind that goes moaning through the rigging. And—I’m going to obey.’

“For nights I had hardly slept a wink, but now I felt as if slumber would soon visit my pillow if I but threw myself on the bed. The moon, a full round one, was already declining in the west when I went below and turned in all standing, and in three minutes’ time I had sunk into a deep and dreamless sleep.

“James told me afterwards that it had taken him one long minute of solid shaking and shouting to arouse me, but he succeeded at last.

“‘Anything wrong, James?’ I said anxiously, as I sat up in my cot.

"'Can't say as there's anything radically wrong, sir,' he replied slowly. 'Leastways, our ship's all right. Wind and sea have both gone down. We've doubled the berg at last, and a good forty mile she was, and now we're nearing another. But the strange thing is this, sir. There is men on it, a-waving their coats and things, and makin' signs. I can just raise 'em with our Mons Meg glass.'

"'Some natives of Tierra del Fuego, perhaps,' I said. 'Anyhow, James,' I added, 'keep bearing up towards them.'

"'Ay, ay, sir.'

"In ten minutes' time I was on deck, glass in hand.

"It was a grey uncertain morning, the sun just rising astern of us, and tingeing the wave-tops with a yellow glare.

"I could see the people on the ice with the naked eye. But I steadied Mons Meg on the bulwark, and had a look through that.

"'Mercy on us, James!' I cried, 'these are no savages, but our own countrymen or Americans. I can count five alive, and oh, James, three lie at some little distance stretched out dark and stiff. Shake another reef out—those people want us. A sad story will be theirs to tell.'

"We got them all on board at last, though with difficulty, for the surf was beating high above the snow-clad ice, and twice our boat was dashed against the hard, green edge of the monster berg, her timbers cracking ominously. We brought off the dead too, and buried them in a Christian way, James himself reading over them the beautiful service of the English Church. Though they were strangers to us, yet, as their bodies dropped down into the darkling sea, many a tear was shed that our fellows scarce took pains to hide.

"'And there they'll sleep,' said a voice behind me, 'till the sea gives up its dead.'

"I turned slowly round, and the eyes of the speaker met mine. Hitherto I had paid most attention to the lifeless, and scarce had noticed the living.

"But now a strange thrill went through me as this man, who was the skipper of the lost ship, advanced with a sad kind of smile on his face and held out his hand.

"'We have met before,' he said.

"'We seem to have met before,' I answered falteringly, 'but where I cannot tell. Perhaps you—'

"'Yes, I can; I have seen you in a dream. We must both have dreamt.'

"I staggered as if shot, and pressed my hand to my brow.

"'You seem puzzled,' he continued, 'yet I am not. I am a man who has studied science somewhat. I am often called a visionary on account of my theories, yet I am convinced that there are times when, in answer to prayer, the mind during sleep may be permitted to leave the body. You, sir, have saved the few poor fellows of my ship's crew who have escaped death, and I thank you. Think nothing strange, sir, in this world simply because you do not understand it. But you have an errand of mercy yet to perform. Heaven grant you may be as successful in that as you have been in taking our poor helpless men from off the ice.'

"'Come below,' I said, 'Captain—a—'

"'Smithson,' he put in.

"'Come below, Captain Smithson, and tell your story. James, will you bear us company?'

"I and James sat on one side of the table, our guest, with his thin, worn face and dark eyes that seemed to pierce us with their very earnestness, on the other. He told his story rapidly—ran over it, as it were, as a school-boy does something he has learned by heart.

"'It is but little more than five weeks since the good yacht *Windward* cleared away from San Francisco—'

"'James,' I said, interrupting him, 'how long have we been at sea?'

"'Wellnigh four months, sir.'

"'How the time has flown! Pray, sir, proceed.'

"'I have never known a quicker passage than we had. The wind was fair all the way, and our little craft appeared to fly with it. But it fell dead calm about the latitude of 20 degrees south of the line. My only passengers—in fact, it was they who had chartered the *Windward* to take them to Monte Video—a lady and her daughter, began to be very uneasy now. They had heard so much about the fleetness of the *Windward* that they never expected a hitch. No wonder they were uneasy. Their business in Monte Video was a matter of life or death. The doctor there had assured them that if they were not out by a certain time, the husband and father would never again be seen by them alive.

"'But the calm was not of long duration. Worse was to come—a tornado burst upon us with awful fury, and all but sunk us. We were carried far to the west out of our course. Fierce gales succeeded the tempest; and when the wind once more sank to rest we found ourselves surrounded by a group of islands that, although I have sailed the South Pacific for many a long year, I had never seen before.

"'That the natives of the largest and most beautiful of these islands are savages and man-hunters I have not the slightest doubt. The king himself came off, evincing not the slightest fear of us; but both he and his people remained so strangely pacific that it excited our suspicions for a time. We were glad, however, to be able here to repair damages and to take on board fresh water; and the kindness of the natives was so marked that our suspicions were entirely lulled, and for days we lived almost among them, even going on shore unarmed in the most friendly way.

"'I must tell you, sir, that, owing to the heat and closeness of the atmosphere, a screen-berth or tent had been rigged for the ladies close to the bulwark on the port side, and almost abreast of the main-mast. The first part of the night of the tenth was exceedingly dark, and it was also hot and sultry. The ladies had retired early, for a thunderstorm that had been threatening about sunset broke over us with tropical fury about ten by the clock, or four bells—the first watch.

"'And now, sir, comes the mystery. The moon rose at twelve and silvered all the sea, shedding its earth light upon the green-wooded hills of the mainland till everything looked ethereal. Not a sound was to be heard, except now and then the plaintive cry of a sea bird, and the dull, low moan of the breakers on the coral sand.

"'As was her custom just before turning in, the ladies' maid drew aside their curtain to see if they wanted anything, and to say good-night.

"'I was walking the quarterdeck smoking, when pale and scared she rushed toward me.

"'Oh!' she almost screamed, 'they are gone! The ladies have gone!'

"'No one thought of turning in that dreadful night; and when in the morning the sun, red and flaming, leapt out of the sea, arming a boat as well as I could, I rowed on shore and demanded audience of the king.

"'But we were not allowed to land. The savages had assumed a very different attitude now, and a shower of spears was our welcome. One poor fellow was killed outright, another died of his wounds only an hour afterwards. In fact, we were beaten off; and in an hour's time, observing a whole fleet of boats coming off to attack our vessel, we were forced to hoist sail and fly.

"'That is my story, and a sad one it is. I was on my way to the nearest town to seek assistance, when our vessel was crushed in the ice and sank in less than twenty minutes, with all on board except those you have seen.'

"Smithson was silent now. With his chin resting on his hand he sat there looking downwards at the deck, but apparently seeing nothing. For many minutes not a word was spoken by any one. The vessel rose and fell on the long, rolling seas; there was the creak of the rudder chains; there was occasionally the flapping of a sail; all else was still.

"James Malone was the first to speak.

"'Charles Halcott,' he said—and I think I hear the earnest, manly tones of his voice at this moment—'Charles Halcott, we have a duty to perform, and it leads us to the northward and west.'

"I stood up now, and our hands met and clasped.

"'James Malone,' I replied, 'Heaven helping us, we will perform that duty faithfully and well.'

"'Amen, sir! Amen!'"

Book Two—Chapter Six.

"O my Friend, my Brother," I Cry.

"That same forenoon," continued Halcott, "the wind went veering round to the southward and east. The sea was darkly, intensely blue all day. The sky was intensely blue at night, and the stars so big and bright and near they seemed almost to touch the topmasts. But here and there in the darkness, on every side of us, loomed white icebergs like sheeted ghosts, and every now and then there rolled along our beam—thudding against the timbers as they swept aft—the smaller bergs or 'bilts' we could not avoid.

"James was on deck, and determined to remain there till morning, in order, as he said, to give me the quiet and rest my health so much required.

"In two days' time we had weathered the stormy Cape, bidden farewell to the ice, and, with every stitch of canvas set which it was possible to carry safely, were sailing westward and north, away towards the distant islands of the South Pacific.

"In a few days we got into higher latitudes, and the weather became delightfully warm and pleasant. The sky was more than Italian in its clear and cloudless azure; the rippling waves were all a-sparkle with light; they kissed the bows of our bonnie barque, and came lapping and laughing aft along our counter, their merry voices seeming to talk to us and bid us welcome to these sunny seas.

"Birds, too, came wheeling around our ship—strange, swift gulls, the lonesome frigate-bird, and the wondrous albatross, king of storms, great eagle of the ocean wave.

"Had we not been upon the strange mission on which we were now bound, and the outcome of which we could not

even guess, both James and I would have enjoyed this delightful cruise; for, like myself, he was every inch a sailor, and loved his ship as a landsman may love his bride.

"'In five days' time,' said Captain Smithson to me one forenoon, 'if it holds like this, we ought to reach the Unfortunate Islands.'

"'Is that what you call them, captain?' I said, smiling; 'well, my first mate and I mean to change their name.'

"'Heaven grant you may,' he answered. 'O sir, the loss of this yacht, clipper though she was, and a beauty to boot, is nothing to mourn for—she was well insured; even the death of my poor men is but an accident that we sailors are liable to at any moment; but the fate of those two innocent ladies—the mother so good and gentle, the daughter so childlike and beautiful—is one that, if it is to remain a mystery, will cloud my whole life. Think of it, sir. The savages must have crept on board in the midst of the thick darkness and the storm, crept on board like wet and slimy snakes, gagged their poor victims, and borne them silently away—to what?'

"'It is all very terrible,' I said.

"'Well, now,' said James, 'it strikes me talkin' about it isn't goin' to help us. Charles Halcott, I served on board a man-o'-war for seven years.'

"'Yes, James.'

"'Well, sir, I know what they'd do now in a case like this.'

"'Yes, James.'

"'They'd muster their forces, and prepare for 'ventualities.'

"'You see, gentlemen,' he added, 'we may have a bit o' good, solid fightin' to do. Heaven knows that, if it would do any good, I'd gird up my loins and go all unarmed, save with the Word o' God—my mother's Bible—among those poor, benighted heathens, and try to bring 'em to their senses. But I fear that would do but little good. When we go among the more humble and simple savages of lonely islands in the sea, or on the mainland of Africa itself, our work o' conversion is easy, because the creatures have no form o' religion to place against the gospel. But these head-hunters—and I know them of old—have their own ghastly, blood-stained rites and sacrifices—I cannot call it religion, sir—and these they set up as an awful barrier against the glad tidings we fain would bring to their doors, to their lives.

"'No, gentlemen, we may have to crack skulls before we get the Word in. But to save those helpless ladies Is a duty, a sacred duty we owe to our own white race, as well as to our own consciences, for we'd ne'er be happy if we didn't try.'

"'Heaven grant,' I said, 'they may still be alive!'

"'That we must find out,' said James. 'Now, sir, shall we call all hands, and see to rifles and ammunition?'

"James's suggestion was at once acted upon.

"The *Sea Flower* was a very large barque, and once had been a full-rigged ship. And our hands were more numerous than are generally carried, for many were working their voyage out, and might have been called passengers.

"So now forty bold fellows, including two strong and sturdy black men, and the negro boy we called the cook's mate, put in an appearance, and drew shyly aft. There were, in addition to these, Captain Smithson and his four men.

"But these latter we determined the savages must not see, else their suspicions would at once be raised, and, instead of our being able to act peacefully and by strategy, we should have at once to declare red-eyed war.

"'Will you speak first?' I said to Captain Smithson.

"Without a word he strode forward, and, when he held up his hand, the men came crowding round him.

"'Men of the *Sea Flower*!' he began, 'I am going to tell you a story. It is short and simple, but also a very sad one. Maybe you know most of the outs and ins and particulars of it already. My men must have told you all about our voyage and our lady passengers.'

"'Repeat, repeat!' cried the men; 'we would have it all again from your own lips, sir.'

"Briefly and pathetically Smithson did so, relating to them all the particulars we already know.

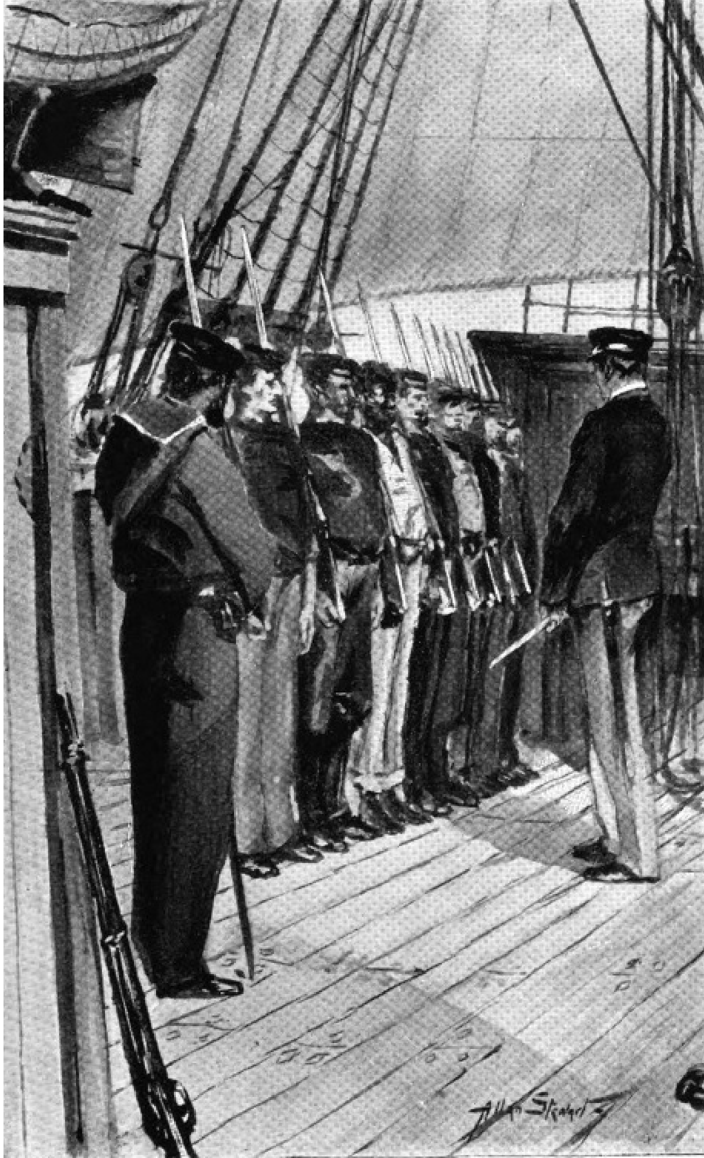
"'Men,' he continued, 'you are Christians, and you are Englishmen. It is on this latter fact I rely chiefly, in case we have to fight with the savages of those Unfortunate Islands. The elder of the two ladies we are going to try to save is English, though she married an American, though her home was on the Pacific slope, and her innocent and beautiful daughter was born in San Francisco. They are your country-people, then, as much as ours. But, apart from that, when I say they are women in bondage and distress, I have said enough, I know, to appeal to the brave heart of every Englishman who now stands before me.'

"A wild, heroic shout was the only reply.

"'Thank you,' said Smithson, 'for that expression of feeling! and I will only add that these ladies, especially the younger, were, all the way out, the light and life of our poor, lost yacht, and that, by their winning ways, they made

themselves beloved both fore and aft.’

“‘Now, lads,’ cried James, and as he spoke he seemed a head taller than I had ever seen him, ‘if we’ve got to fight, why, then, we’ll fight. But against these terrible savages we can’t fight with porridge-sticks. Luckily, in our cargo we have a hundred good rifles, and that is two for each of us; and we have revolvers, too, and plenty of ammunition. All good, mind you; for I chose the whole cargo myself. So now, bo’s’n, pipe up the guns; and this afternoon, men, and every day till we touch at the Unfortunate Islands, I’ll put you through your drill—which, bein’ an old navy man, I fancy I’m capable of doing. Are you all willing?’



“*The drilling was commenced.*”
Page 158.

“The cheer that shook the ship from stem to stern was a truly British one. It was their only answer, and the only answer needed or required.

“So the drilling was commenced, and entered into with great spirit. After all, this drill was merely preparation for ‘possible ’ventualities,’ as honest James called it, for fighting would be our very last resort, and we earnestly prayed that we might not be driven to it.

“At last, and early one morning, just as the sun was beginning to pencil the feathery clouds with gold and green and crimson, land was discovered on the lee bow.

“I brought the big telescope which James had named Mons Meg to bear upon it. Then I handed Meg to Smithson. He looked at the land long and earnestly, and glanced up at me with beaming face.

“‘That’s the principal island, Captain Halcott,’ he said; ‘the king’s own. How well we have hit it!’

“That same forenoon we cast anchor in Treachery Bay, close to the spot where the yacht had lain not many weeks before.

“Our sails were furled in quite a business-like way. We wanted to show the savages that we were not one whit afraid of them, that we had come to stay for a short spell, and hadn’t the remotest intention of running away.

“That you may better understand the shape or configuration of this strange island, gentlemen, here I show you a rough sketch-map. This will enable you also to follow more easily our subsequent adventures in the fastnesses of these terrible savages.

“Rude and simple though this plan is, a word or two will suffice to explain it. The island trends west and east, and is not more than sixteen miles long by about ten to twelve in width. It is divided into two almost equal parts by a very rapid and dark-rolling river, which rushes through rocky gorges with inconceivable speed, forming many a thundering cataract as it fights its way to the sea. It is fed from the waters that flow from the mountains, and, probably, by subterranean springs. The whole western portion of the island, with the exception of some green woods around the bay, is pretty low, but covered throughout with the remains of a black and burned forest. This forest is supposed by the natives to be inhabited by fearsome demons and witches, and is never visited, except for the purpose of sorcery by the medicine-men of the tribe, and to bury the dead. In the centre of the eastern portion of the island, which is beautifully clad with woodlands, and rugged and wild in the extreme, is a lake with one small, lonely isle; and around this the mountains tower their highest, but are clad to their very summits with forest trees, many of them bearing the most luscious of fruits, and all draped with wild flowers, and sweetly haunted by bird and bee.

“The only things else in the map I wish to draw your attention to, gentlemen, are the parallel lines. These mark the spot where was the only bridge leading into the fastnesses of these savages, and the only mode of communication with the lower land and bay, without walking round by the head of the river, or following its course to the sea and crossing in a boat.

“This bridge was primitive in the extreme, consisting merely of three straight tree stems, and a rude life-line composed of the twisted withes of a kind of willow.

“I have sad reason to remember that bridge, and shall not forget it while life lasts.

“I have said nothing in my story yet about Lord Augustus Fitzmantle. But it is time to do so. Lord Augustus was our cook’s mate. It is well to give a nigger boy a high-sounding name, and, if possible, a title. He always tries to act up to it. Lord Augustus was very, very black. The other niggers were black enough certainly, but they looked brown beside his merry, laughing little lordship. Yes, always laughing, always showing those white teeth of his and rolling his expressive eyes, and good-tempered all day long. Even a kick from the cook only made him rub a little and laugh the more. Lord Augustus wore a string of sky-blue beads about his neck, and on warm days he wore very little else. But if Lord Augustus was black, he was also bright. The sunshine glittered and glanced on his rounded arms and cheeks, and he had sunshine in his heart as well. It goes without saying he was the pet of the *Sea Flower* and everybody’s friend, and though all hands teased as well as petted him, he took it all in good part.

“So long as Lord Fitzmantle kept his mouth shut, and didn’t show those flashing teeth of his, he was as invisible as Jack the Giant Killer on a dark night.

“Seeing our independence, the savages for hours held aloof. At last a white-headed, fearful-looking old man paddled alongside in a dug-out. From the fact that he had a huge snake coiled around his chest and neck, I took him to be the medicine-man, or sorcerer, of the tribe, and I was not mistaken.

“He was certainly no beauty as he sat there grinning in his dark dug-out. His face was covered with scars in circles and figures, so, too, was his chest; his eyes were the colour of brass; his teeth crimson, and filed into the form of triangles. But he climbed boldly on board when beckoned to, and we loaded him with gifts of pretty beads, and engirdled his loins with red cloth, then sent him grinning away.

“This treatment had the desired effect, and in half an hour’s time the bay was alive with the boats and canoes of the head-hunters. Each of their tall, gondola-like prows bore a grinning skull, the cheek bones daubed with a kind of crimson clay, and the sockets filled with awful clay eyes—not a pretty sight.

“Presently the king himself came off, and we received him with great ceremony, and gave him many gifts. To show our strength, James drew up his men in battle array, and to the terror of all in the boats, they fired their guns, taking aim at some brown and ugly kites that flew around. When several of these fell dead, the alarm of the king knew no bounds. But he soon recovered; and when, a little later on, I with a dozen of my best men went on shore, the king placed a poor slave girl on the beach and made signs for us to shoot. I would sooner have shot the king himself.

“Lord Augustus came with us, and we soon found that he understood much that the king said, and could therefore act as our interpreter.

“It is needless to say that the men of the lost yacht were kept out of sight.

“Our walk that day was but a brief one. The king did not seem to want us ever to cross the bridge. On climbing a hill, however, I could see all over the wild and beautiful country. I pointed to the lake and little island, and was given to understand that the medicine-men dwelt there. But from the shiftiness of the savage’s eyes, I concluded at once that, if they were alive, that was the prison isle of the unhappy ladies. The king dined with us next day, and we considered it policy to let him have a modicum of fire-water. His heart warmed, and not only did he permit our party to cross the bridge, but to visit his palace. The sights of horror around it I will not dare to depict, but, much to my joy, I noticed from the king’s veranda the flutter of white dresses on the little prison isle.

“My mind was made up, and that night I dispatched Lord Augustus on shore with a note. It was a most hazardous expedition, and none save the boy could have undertaken it with any hope of success. In my letter I had told the ladies to be of good cheer; there would be a glimmer of moonlight in a week’s time, and that then we should attempt their rescue; anyhow they were to be prepared.

“Three whole days elapsed, and yet no Lord Augustus appeared, but on the night of the fourth, when we had given him up for lost, he swam off to the ship. Poor boy, he had hardly eaten food, save fruit, since he had left, and his adventure had been a thrilling one. Yet he was laughing all over just the same.

“Yes, he had managed to give the note, and had brought back a message. The ladies had not, strange to say, been subjected to either insult or injury by the king. They were well fed on fruit and milk and cooked fowls, but were guarded day and night by priests.

“The most startling portion of the message, however, was this: in a fortnight’s time a great feast and sacrifice were to take place, and during that they knew not what might occur. They begged that the boy might be sent again, and with him a sleeping-powder, which they might administer to the priests on the night of the attempted rescue. I confess my heart beat high with anxiety when the boy told us all this, for not one word of his message had he forgotten.

“I consulted now with James and Smithson. Would it not be as well, I advanced, to attempt to rescue the ladies by force?

“This was at once vetoed. Both James and the captain of the yacht knew more of savage nature than I did, and they most strongly affirmed that any show of force would assuredly result in the putting to death of the two unhappy ladies we had come to rescue.

“So it was finally agreed that stratagem, not force, must be resorted to, in the first place, at all events. So a night was chosen, and on the previous evening faithful Lord Fitzmantle was dispatched once more, taking with him a powder for the medicine-men, or priests.

“To our great joy and relief, the messenger returned before daylight with the news that all would be ready, and that they, the ladies, would be found at midnight in a cave by the banks of the lake, if they were successful in escaping in a canoe from the island.

“‘And you know this cave, Fitz?’ I asked.

“Fitz’s eyes snapped and twinkled right merrily.

“‘I done know him, him foh true, sah!’ he said, which signified that he had a perfect knowledge of the position of the cave.

“As I speak to you even now, gentlemen, a portion of the anxiety I felt on that terrible night when, with muffled oars, our boat left the ship, comes stealing over my senses. I could not tell then why my feelings should be worked up to so high a pitch, for I’d been in many a danger and difficulty before. But so it was.

“The king had dined with us, and we sent home with him a supply of fire-water, which has worked such ruin among many savage races. But surely on this occasion we were partially justified in doing so. We knew, therefore, that the king and some of his principal officers were safe enough for one night.

“The largest boat was cautiously lowered about an hour before midnight, when everything was still as the grave on the island; a long and plaintive howl, however, being borne on the gentle breeze towards us every now and then, telling us that sentries were here and there in the woods.

“We were fifteen men in all, including James and myself, and excluding our little black guide, Lord Fitzmantle. During the nights of terror he had spent in hill and forest he had surveyed the country well, and so we could safely trust to him.

“We rowed with muffled oars to the beach near the haunted forest, and drew up our boat under some banana-trees; then, silent as the red men of the North American forests, we made our way towards the bridge.

“The moon was about five days old, and served to give us all the light we desired. We took advantage of every bush and thicket, and finally, when within seventy yards of the river—the hustling and roaring of which we could distinctly hear—we dispatched little Fitz to reconnoitre.

“He returned in a few minutes and reported all safe, and no one on watch upon the bridge.

“We marched now in Indian file, taking care not even to snap a twig, lest we should arouse the slumbering foe. I do not know how long we took to reach the cave. To me, in my terror and anxiety, it seemed a year. They were there, and safe.

“We waited not a moment to speak. I lifted the young lady in my arms. How light she was! James escorted the elder, sometimes carrying her, sometimes permitting her to walk.

“Then the journey back was commenced.

“But in the open a glimmer of moonlight fell on the face of the beautiful burden I bore. She had fainted. That I could see at a glance.

“But something more I saw, and, seeing, tottered and nearly fell; for hers was the same lovely and childlike face I had seen that evening, which now appeared so long ago, in the Liverpool theatre.

“I felt now as if walking in the air. But I cannot describe or express my feelings, being only a sailor, and so must not attempt to.

“We might have still been a hundred yards from the bridge and river, when suddenly there rang out behind and on each side of us the most awful yells I had ever listened to, while the beating of tom-toms, or war-drums, sounded all over the eastern part of the island.

"'On, men, on to the bridge!' shouted brave James. No need for concealment now.

"It was a short but fearful race, but now we are on it, on the bridge!

"On and over!

"All but James!

"Where is he? The moon escapes from behind a cloud and shines full upon his sturdy form, still on the other side, and at the same time we can hear the sharp ring of his revolver. Then, oh! we see him tearing up the planks of the bridge, and dropping them one by one into the gulf beneath. We pour in a volley to keep the savages back.

"'Fly for your lives!' shouts brave James. 'Save the ladies; I'll swim.'

"Next minute he dives into the chasm! For one brief moment we see his face and form in the pale moonlight. Then he disappears. He is gone.

"'O my friend, my brother!' I cry, stretching out my arms as if I would plunge madly into the pool that lies far beneath yonder, part in shade and part in shine.

"But they dragged me away by main force. They led me to the boat. The savages could not follow. But I seemed to see nothing now, to know nothing, to feel nothing, except that I had lost the dearest friend on earth. He had sacrificed himself to save us!"

Book Two—Chapter Seven.

"I Think You're Going on a Wild-Goose Chase."

Halcott paused, and gazed seawards over the great stretch of wet beach.

So wet was it that the sun's parting rays lit it up in great stripes of crimson chequered with gold.

And yonder are the children coming slowly home across these painted sands.

A strange group, most certainly, but united in one bond of union—oh, would that all the world were so!—the bond of love.

The brother's arm is placed gently around his sister's waist; the Admiral is stepping drolly by Ransey's side, with his head and neck thrust through the lad's arm.

Something seems to tell the bird that fate, which took away his master before, might take him once again.

Bob brings up the rear. His head is low towards the sands, but he feels very happy and satisfied with his afternoon's outing.

Halcott once more lit his pipe.

The two others were silent, and Mr Tandy nodded when Halcott smiled and looked towards him.

"Yes," he said, "there is a little more of my story yet untold; there is a portion of it still in the future, I trust. With this, however, destiny alone has to do. Suffice it to say, that as far as Doris and myself—my simple sailor-self—are concerned, we shall be married when I return from my next cruise, if all goes well, and, like two vessels leaving the harbour on just such a beautiful night as this, sail away to begin our voyage of life on just such a beautiful sea.

"You must both know Doris before I start. But where, think you, do I mean to sail to next? No, do not answer till I tell you one thing. Neither Doris nor her mother received, while in that little lake island, the slightest injury or insult."

"Then there is some good in the breast of even the wildest savage," put in Weathereye. "I always thought so; bother me if I didn't. Ahem!"

"Ah, wait, Captain Weathereye, wait! I fear my experience is different from yours. Those fiendish savages on that Isle of Misfortune were reserving my dear Doris and her mother for a fate far more terrible than anything ever described in books of imagination.

"We rescued them, by God's mercy, just in time. They were then under the protection of the awful priests, or medicine-men, and were being fed on fruits and on the petals of rare and beautiful flowers. Their hut itself was composed of flowers and foliage.

"The king, no, not even he, could come near them, until the medicine-men had propitiated the demons that live, according to their belief, in every wood and in every ravine and gully in the island.

"Then, at the full of the moon, on that tiny islet I have marked on the map, the king and his warriors would assemble at midnight, and the awful orgies would commence.

"I shudder even now when I think of it. I happily cannot describe to you the tortures these poor ladies would have been put to before the final, fearful act. But the king would drink 'white blood.' He would then be invulnerable. No foe could any more prevail against him.

"While the blood was still flowing, the stake-fires would-be lit, and—

"But I'll say no more; a cannibal feast would have concluded the ceremonies."

"You mean to say," cried Weathereye, bringing his fist, and a good-sized one it was, down with a bang on the sill of the open window by which he sat—"do you mean to tell me that these devils incarnate would have burned the poor dear ladies alive, then? Oh, horrible!"

"I said that they meant to; but look at this!"

He handed Weathereye a small yellow dagger.

"What a strange little knife! But why, I say, Halcott, Tandy, this knife is made of gold—solid, hammered gold!"

"Yes," said Halcott; "and it is this dagger of hammered gold that would have saved my poor Doris and her mother from the torture and the stake.

"But," he added, "not this dagger only, but every implement in the cave of those fearsome priests was fashioned from the purest gold."

"This is indeed a strange story," said Tandy.

"And now, gentlemen," added Halcott, "can you guess to what seas my barque shall sail next?"

Tandy rose from his seat and took two or three turns up and down the floor.

He was a man who made up his mind quickly enough, and it is such men as these, and only such, who get well on in the world.

Weathereye and Halcott both kept silence. They were watching Tandy.

"Halcott," said the latter, approaching the captain of the *Sea Flower*—"Halcott, have you kept your secret?"

"Secret?"

"Yes. I mean, do many save yourself know of the existence of gold on that island of blood?"

"None save me. No one has even seen the knife but myself and you."

"Good. You love the *Sea Flower*?"

"I love the *Sea Flower* as every sailor loves, or ought to love, his ship. I wish I could afford to buy her out and out."

"The other shares are in the market then?"

Tandy was seated now cross-legged on a chair, and leaning over the back of it, bending towards Halcott with an earnest light, in his eyes, such as few had ever seen therein.

"The other shares *are* for sale," said Halcott.

It was just at this moment that Ransey Tansey and little Nelda came, or rather burst into the room. Both were breathless, both were rosy; and Bob, who came in behind them, was panting, with half a yard of tongue—well, perhaps, not *quite* so much—hanging red over his alabaster teeth.

"O daddy," cried Babs, as father still called her, "we've had such fun! And the 'Ral," (a pet name that the crane had somehow obtained possession of) "dug up plenty of pretty things for us, and he wanted Bob to eat a big white worm, only Bob wouldn't."

One of his children stood on each side of him, and he had placed one arm round each.

Thus Tandy faced Halcott once more, smiling, perhaps, a little sadly now.

"*I* can buy those shares, Halcott. Do not think me ambitious. A money-grabber I never was. But, you see these little tots. Ransey here can make his way in the world.—Can't you, Ransey?"

"Rather, father," said Ransey.

"But, Halcott, though I am not in the flower of my youth, I'm in the prime of my manhood, and I'd do everything I know to build up a shelter for my little Babs against the cold winds of adversity before I—But I must not speak of anything sad before the child."

"You have a long life before you, I trust," said Weathereye.

Tandy seemed to hear him not.

"I'd go as your mate."

The two sailors shook hands.

"You'll go as my friend, and keep watch if you choose."

"Agreed!"

"Bravo!" cried Weathereye. "Shiver my jib, as sailors say in books, if I wouldn't like to go along with both of you!"

"Why not, Captain Weathereye?"

The staff-commander laughed. "Not this cruise, lads, though I'm not afraid for my life, or the little that may be left of it, and you must take care of yours. I think myself you are going on a kind of wild-goose chase, and that the goose—that is, the gold—will have the best of it, by keeping out of your way. Well, anyhow, I'll come and see you both over the bar. Where do you sail from?"

"Southampton."

"Good! and the last person you'll see as you drop out to sea will be old Weathereye in a boat waving his red bandana to wish you luck. Good-night!

"Good-night, little Babs! How provokingly pretty she is, Tandy! better leave her at Scragley Hall, and the crane too. She'll be well looked after, you may figure upon that. Come and give the old man a kiss, dear."

But Nelda hung her head.

"Not if you say that, Captain Weathereye. Wherever *ever* daddy goes, I go with him. I'm *not* going to let my brother run away to sea and leave me again."

"And you won't give me Bob?" said Weathereye.

"Oh, *no*!"

"Nor the Admiral?"

Nelda looked up in the old captain's face now.

"I'm just real sorry for you," she said; "but the Hal's going and all—*you* may figure on that."

Weathereye laughed heartily.

Then he drew the child gently towards him and kissed her little sun-browned hand.

"May God be with you, darling, where'er on earth you roam! And with you all. Good-night again."

And away went honest Captain Weathereye.

Book Two—Chapter Eight.

At Sea—Mermaids and Mermen.

So long as the wind blew free, even though it did not always blow fair, there was joy, and jollity, too, in every heart that beat on board the saucy *Sea Flower*, fore as well as aft.

She looked a bonnie barque now, in every sense of the word.

Tandy and Halcott had spared neither expense nor pains in rigging her well out. Had not her timbers been stanch and sound they certainly would not have done so.

She had new sails, a new jibboom, and several new spars; and before she got clear and away out of the English Channel the crew of many a homeward-bound ship manned their riggings and gave her a hearty cheer.

Halcott had left the whole rig-out of the *Sea Flower* to Mr Tandy, and had not come near her for six long weeks.

He was better employed, perhaps, and more happy on shore. But pleased enough he was on his return.

"Why, Tandy, my dear fellow, this isn't a ship any more; it's a yacht?"

"A pot of paint and a bucket of tar go a long way," Tandy replied smiling.

"Ah! there's a good deal more than tar here; but how you've managed to get her decks and spars so white and beautiful, bother me if I can tell. And her ebony is ebony no longer, it is polished jet, while her brass work is gold."

Down below the two had now gone together.

Tandy could not have made the cabin a bit bigger if he had tried, but he had removed every morsel of her lumbering old lockers and tables, and refurnished it with all he could think of that was graceful and beautiful.

Mirrors, too, were everywhere along the bulk-heads, and these made the saloon look larger. The only wonder is that, in a lit of absent-mindedness, some one did not walk right through a mirror.

Hanging tables, beautiful crystal, brackets, and artificial flowers gave a look that was both lightsome and gay.

On the port side, when you touched a knob, a mirrored door opened into the captain's cabin—small but pretty, and lighted by an airy port that could be carried open in good weather, and all along in the trades.

The other state-room was larger. This Halcott had insisted upon Tandy taking; and it contained not only his own bunk, but a lower one for Nelda, and was better decorated and furnished than even the captain's.

"Oh, gaily goes the ship when the wind blows free."

And right gaily she had gone too, as yet.

Halcott was a splendid sailor and navigator. It might have been thought, however, that Tandy, from his long residence on shore, had turned a little rusty in his seamanship.

If he had, the rust had not taken long to rub off; and as he trod the ivory-white quarterdeck in his duck trousers, neat cap, and jacket of navy blue, he really looked ten years younger than in the days when he sailed the *Merry Maiden* up and down the canal.

The crew were well-dressed, and looked happy and jolly enough for anything.

I need hardly say that Nelda was the pet of the *Sea Flower*, fore and aft. There was no keeping the child to any one part of the ship. In fine weather—and, with the exception of a "howther" in the Bay, it had up till now been mostly fine—she was here, there, and everywhere: in the men's quarters; down below in the forecastle; at the forecastle-head itself, when the men leaned over the bows there, smoking, yarning, and laughing; and in the cook's galley, helping to make the soup. But she ventured even further than this, and more than once her father started to find her in the foretop, and standing beside her that tall, imperturbable Admiral.

The bird was pet number two; but Bob made an equal second.

At first the 'Ral was inclined to mope. Perhaps he was sea-sick. It is a well-known fact that if a Cape pigeon, as a certain gull is called, is taken on board, it can fly no more, but walks slowly and stupidly round the deck.

Sea-sickness had not troubled Bob in the slightest. When he saw the 'Ral standing in the lee-scuppers, with his neck hitched right round till the head lay right on the top of his tail, Bob looked at him comically with *his* head cocked funnily to one side.

Then he seemed to laugh right away down both sides, so to speak. Bob was a droll dog.

"My eyes, Admiral," he said, "what a ridiculous figure you do cut, to be sure! Why, at first I couldn't tell which was the one end of you and which was the other."

"I don't care what becomes of me," the Admiral replied, talking over his tail. "It is a very ordinary world. I'll never dance again."

But, nevertheless, in three days' time the Hal did dance, and so droll and comical were his capers on the heaving deck that the crew lay aft in a body and laughed till they nearly burst their belts. The Admiral took kindly to his meal-worms after that, and didn't despise potted salmon and morsels of mutton.

Now it must not be supposed that the *Sea Flower* was going out in ballast, on the mere chance of filling up with gold. They might never see the Isle of Misfortune, and all their dreams of gold might yet turn out as dreams so often do.

Halcott and Tandy were good sailors, and but little likely to trust overmuch to blind chance. They took out with them, therefore, a good-paying cargo of knick-knacks and notions to barter with the natives along the coast of Africa. Having made a good voyage—and they knew they should—and having filled up with copal, nutmegs, arrowroot, spices, ivory, and perhaps even gold-dust and ostrich feathers from the far interior, they would stretch away out and over the broad Atlantic, and rounding the Horn, make search for the Isle of Misfortune, which they hoped to find an island of gold.

If unsuccessful, they should then bear up for the northern Pacific Islands, taking their chance of doing something with pearls or mother-of-pearl, and so on and away to San Francisco, where they were sure of a market, even if they wished to sell the *Sea Flower* herself.

But the best of sailors get disheartened far sooner in calms than even in tempests.

In the latter, one has all the excitement of a battle with the elements; in the former, one can but wait and think and long for the winds to blow.

> "The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
> The furrow followed free."

Yes; but although in the region of calms some ships seem to have luck, the *Sea Flower* had none.

> "Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down,

’Twas sad as sad could be;
And they did speak only to break
The silence of the sea.”

A week, a fortnight, nearly three weary weeks went past like this.

There was no singing now forward among the men. Even little Fitz the nigger, who generally *was* trolling a song, at times high over the roar of the wind, was silent now. So, too, was Ransey Tansey. He and Nelda had been before the life of the good ship. It seemed as if they should never be so again. Bob took to lying beside the man at the wheel. As far as the latter was concerned, there might just as well have been no man there at all. The sea all round was a sea of heaving oil. The waves were houses high—not long rollers, but a series of hills and valleys, in which the *Sea Flower* wallowed and tumbled; while the fierce heat of the sun caused the pitch to melt and bubble where the decks were not protected by an awning.

The motion of the good ship was far indeed from agreeable. Any seaman can walk easily even when half a gale of wind is roaring through the rigging. There is a method in the motion of a ship in such a sea-way. There is no method in the motion of a vessel in the doldrums; and when one puts one’s foot down on the quarterdeck, or, rather, where it seemed to be a second before, it finds but empty space. The body lurches forward, and the deck swings up to receive it. A grasp at a stay or sheet alone can avert a fall.

In such a sea-way there is no longer any leeward or windward. The sails go flapping to and fro, however: they are making wind for themselves as the vessel rolls and tumbles; and if this wind carries her forward a few yards one minute, it hurls her back again the next.

No wonder Nelda often asked her father if the wind would never, never blow again, or whether it would be always, always like this.

No birds either, save now and then a migrant gull that floated lazily on a wave to rest, or perched on the fin of a basking shark.

So day after day passed wearily on, and you could not have told one day from the other. But when, at six o’clock, the sun hurriedly capped the great heaving waves with crimson, leaving the hollows in deepest purple shade, and soon after sank, then, in the gloaming that for a brief spell hung over the ocean, the stars came out; and very brightly did they shine, so that night was even more pleasant than day.

Banks of clouds sometimes lay along the horizon. By day they appeared like far-off, snow-capped, serrated mountains; at night they were dark, but lit up every few moments by flashes of lightning, which spread out behind them and revealed their form and shape.

No thunder ever followed this lightning; it brought no wind; nor did the clouds ever rise or bring a drop of rain.

Phantom lightning; phantom clouds!

There were times on nights like these when Ransey took his sister on deck to look at the sky, and wonder at the lightning and that strange mountain-range of clouds.

She was not afraid when Ransey was with her. But she would not have gone “upstairs,” as she called it, with even the stewardess herself.

Ransey, I may mention, lived in the saloon with his father and the captain, the second and third mates having comfortable quarters in the midship decks.

A stewardess only was carried on the *Sea Flower*, and she acted in another capacity—that of maid to Nelda. A black girl she was, but clean, smart, and tidy and trim, full of merriment and good-nature. Her assistant was Fitz, and with him alone she deemed it her duty to be a little harsh now and then. Because Fitz wouldn’t keep his place, so she said.

Poor Janeira, she always forgot she was a nigger herself, seeing so many white faces all around her. But when she looked into the little mirror that hung in her pantry, she used to go into fits of laughter at her face therein displayed. She was a funny girl.

Ransey used to take Nelda up on these nights, and hoist her on to the grating abaft the quarterdeck, and she would cling to his arm, while he held on to the bulwark.

Thus they would stand, silent and awed, for long minutes at a time.

Was there nothing to break the dread stillness? There was occasionally the flap of a sail, or a footstep forward; but no song from the men, no loud talking—they hardly cared to speak above a whisper. But more than once a plash was heard, and a great dark head would appear from the side of a billow, seen distinctly enough in the gleam of the starlight, then sink and disappear.

“Oh, the awful beast, ’Ansey! Can it climb up and swallow us?”

“No, dear silly, no.”

But older people than Nelda have been frightened by such dread spectres appearing close to a ship at night while in the doldrums, and wiser heads than hers have been puzzled to account for them.

Are they sharks? No, no. Five times as large are they as any shark ever seen. Whales? No, again. A whale lives not under the water but on it.

In the ocean wild and wide, reader, we sailors find many a strange mystery, see many a fearsome sight at night we can neither describe nor explain. And if we talk of these when we come on shore, you landsmen look incredulous.

But after a time the child became accustomed to scenes like these. Indeed the sea by night appeared to have a kind of fascination for her.

In beholding it, she appeared to be looking through it into some strange land, the abode of the fairies and elves and mermaids with which her imagination had peopled it.

“Deep, deep down among the rocks,” she would say to Ransey, “who lives there? Tell us, tell us.”

Ransey had therefore to become the story-teller whether he would or not.

He spoke to her then of mermaid-land deep down below the dark, heaving ocean.

“Deep, deep, *deep* down, ’Ansey?”

“Very, very deep. You see only a glimmer of light below you as you sink and sink; and this light is greenish and clear, and the farther down you get the brighter and more beautiful does it become.”

“And you’re not drowned?”

“No! oh, no! not if you’re good. Well, then you come to—oh, ever so beautiful a country! The trees are all of sea-weed, and underneath them is the yellow, yellow sand; but here and there are beautiful rockeries, and beds of such bright and lovely flowers that they would dazzle your eyes to look upon. And the strange thing about these flowers is this, Babs, they are all alive.”

“All alive? My! and can they talk to you?”

“Yes, and sing too. A sailor man who had been there told me. And he said their voices were so low and sweet that you had to put your ear quite close down before you could hear and understand; for at a little distance, he said, it was just like the tinkling of tiny silver bells. The danger is in stopping too long, and being enchanted or slain.”

“Enchanted? Whatever is that, ’Ansey?”

“Oh, you stay so long listening that you feel like in a dream, and before you know what has happened you are a flower yourself; and then, though you can see and hear everything that goes on around you, you cannot move away from the rock you are growing on, and you never get back again out of the water.”

“Never, never, ’Ansey?”

“Never, never, Babs.”

“But in the deep, dark, beautiful woods that you come to and enter there is many a terrible monster living—horned, shelly, warty monsters. And they are all waiting to catch you.”

“Terrible, ’Ansey!”

“Are you afraid, dear?”

“Oh, no, ’Ansey! Be terrible some more.”

“Well, there is danger all around you now, for some of these monsters are quite hidden among the sand, with only one eye protruding, and this looks like a flower because it grows on a stalk. But when you go to look at it, suddenly the sandy ground gives way under you. You are caught and killed, and know no more.

“Some of these monsters, Nelda, live in caves, and if you go too near the entrance a great, long, skinny arm is thrust out, and you are dragged into the dark and devoured.”

“But I would turn quickly away out of that terrible wood, ’Ansey,” said Nelda.

“Yes, that is just what the sailor did.”

“And then he was saved?”

“Not yet. He came to a lovely wide patch of clear, hard sand, and he was looking down to admire it. He had taken up some to examine, and was pouring it from one hand into the other—for the sand was pure gold mixed with pearls and rubies—when all at once it began to get dark, and looking up he saw a creature that was nearly all one horrible, cruel, grinning head, with eight long arms round it. It stopped high up, just hovering, Nelda, like a hawk over a field. The sailor man was spell-bound. He could only stare up at it with starting eyes and utter a long, low, frightened moan. But from the creature above a tent was lowered, just like a huge bell, and he knew it would soon fall over him and he would be sucked up to the sea-demon’s body and slowly eaten alive.

“But at that very moment, sissie, the creature uttered a terribly wild and mournful cry, and darted off through the water, which was all just like ink now.”

“And the sailor was dead?”

“No; a voice that sounded like the sweetest music ever he had heard in his life was heard, and a hand grasped his.

“‘Quick, quick,’ she cried, for it was a mermaid, ‘I will lead you into safety. Stay but another moment here and you are doomed.’

“‘I’ll follow you to the end of the world, miss,’ said the gallant sailor.

“It did seem queer to call a mermaid miss, but Jack Reid couldn’t help it.

“‘You won’t have to follow so far,’ she said, with a sweet smile that put Jack’s heart all in a flutter.

“And in five minutes’ time they were out of danger, and there was Jack with his hat in his hand, which he had taken off for politeness’ sake, being led along by the most charming young lady he had ever clapped eyes on.

“‘Her beauty,’ he said to me, ‘was radiant, and her long yellow hair floated behind her in the water till I was ravished; on’y the wust of it was, that all below the waist wasn’t lady at all, but ling or some other kind of fish.’

“But Jack wouldn’t look at the ling part at all, only just at the mermaid’s face and hair and hands.

“However dark it might have been, you could have seen to read by the light of the diamonds around her brow and neck.

“They soon came to a rock of quartz and porphyry, and next minute Jack found himself in a hall of such dazzling delight that he had to rub his eyes and pinch himself hard to make sure he was not in a dream. This was the mermaids’ and sea-fairies’ great ballroom.

“Tier upon tier of galleries rose up towards the beautiful, star-studded ceiling, and every gallery was filled with beautiful ladies. Jack knew that they all ended in ling, but the tails could not be seen.

“There was light and loveliness everywhere, and flowers everywhere—”

“Go on, ’Ansey. Your story is better than the Revelations, better even than ‘Jack the Giant Killer.’”

“I must stop, siss, because even *I* don’t know much more, only that the music was so ravishing that Jack himself danced till he couldn’t dance a bit more.”

“And did he sit down?”

“No; he thought he would like a smoke, so he floated away down to the entrance to a cave at the far, far end.

“‘That must be the smoking-room,’ he thought to himself, so he pushed aside the curtain and floated boldly in.

“But lo and behold, this inner cave was filled with little shrivelled-up old men, uglier far in the face than toads.

“These, sissie, were the mermen, and they were all sitting on rough blocks of coral, which must have hurt them dreadful, nursing their tails. These mermen sat there swaying their yellow, wrinkled bodies back and fore, to and fro, but taking not the slightest notice of Jack. The sailor stood staring at them; and well he might, for whatever motion one made the others all made the same. If one lifted a skeleton hand to rub its bald head, every hand was raised, every bald head was rubbed; whichever way one swayed all the rest swayed; sometimes every blear eye was directed to the ceiling, or lowered towards their tails, as the case might be; and when one gaped and yawned they all gaped and yawned, and Jack told me that he had never seen such a set of ugly, toothless mouths in his life before.

“But as *they* wouldn’t speak, Jack Reid himself—and he was a very brave sailor, sissie—did speak.

“‘Ahoy, maties!’ he cried, ‘ye don’t seem an over-lively lot here, I must say, but has e’er a one o’ ye got sich a thing as a bit o’ baccy?’

“Jack told me, Babs, that when he made this speech he got a fearful fright. Every merman stood up straight on its stool, its skinny arms and claw-like hands held straight above its head, and a yell rang through the hall that Jack says is ringing in his ears till this day.

“‘Oh!’ he cried, ‘if that’s your little game, here’s for off.’

“Jack must have been glad enough to get back to the ballroom, but this was now deserted. No one was there at all except the lovely mermaid who had saved him from being devoured by the terrible devil-fish.

“She smiled upon him as sweetly as ever.

“‘I’m going to guide you,’ she said, ‘to the nursery grotto; it is time that all sailor boys went to by-by.’

“‘Go on, missie,’ Jack said, ‘go on, yer woice is sweeter far than the song of—of a Mother Carey’s chicken. Wot a lovely lady ye’d be, miss, if ye didn’t end in ling!’

“She smiled, and combed her hair with her long white fairy fingers as she glided on.

“‘Going to by-by am I? Well, the mum did used to call it that like, miss, but we grown-up sailor lads calls it a bunk or an ’ammock. Ain’t got ne’er a bit o’ baccy about ye, has ye, miss?’

“But the fairy mermaid only smiled.

“So soft and downy was the bed that Jack fell asleep singing low to himself—

> “‘All in the downs the fleet was moored.’

“And that is the end of the story, siss.”

“Oh, no! What did he see when he woke up again?”

“Well, when he awoke in the morning, much to his amazement, he found himself in his own bed in his mother’s little cottage at home.

“He rubbed his eyes twice before he spoke.

“‘What! mother?’ he cried.

“‘Yes, it is your own old mother, dearie, and I’ve been sittin’ up with you, and sich nonsense you has been a-talkin’, surely.’

“‘I’m not a merman, or anything, am I, mother? I don’t end in ling, do I, mother?’

“‘No, Jack Reid, you end in two good strong legs; but strong as they are, my boy, they weren’t strong enough to keep you from tumbling down last night. O Jack, Jack!’”

Book Two—Chapter Nine.

Wonderful Adventures of the Dancing Crane.

Hardly had Ransey finished his story ere a bright flash of lightning lit up the ship from stem to stern—a flash that seemed to strike the top of every rolling wave and hiss in the hollows between; a flash that left the barque in Cimmerian though only momentary darkness, for hardly had the thunder that followed—deep, loud, and awful—commenced, ere flash succeeded flash, and the sea all around seemed an ocean of fire.

For a time little Nelda could not be prevailed upon to go below. She was indeed a child of the wilds, and a thunderstorm was one of her chief delights.

Ah! but this was going to be somewhat more than a thunderstorm.

“Hands, shorten sail! All hands on deck!” It was Tandy’s voice sounding through the speaking trumpet—ringing through it, I might say, and yet it scarce could be heard above the incessant crashing of the thunder.

The men came tumbling up, looking scared and frightened in the blue glare of the lightning.

“Away aloft! Bear a hand, my hearties! Get her snug, and we’ll splice the main-brace. Hurrah, lads! Nimbly does it!”

Swaying high up on the top-gallant yards they looked no bigger than rooks, and with every uncertain lurch and roll the yard-ends seemed almost to touch the water.

It was at this moment that the stewardess came staggering aft.

“Don’t go, ’Ansey—don’t go,” cried Nelda.

“Duty’s duty, dear, and it’s ‘all hands’ now.”

He saw her safely down the companion-way, and next minute he was swarming up the ratlines to his station. But he had to pause every few seconds and hang on to the rigging, with his back right over the water—hang on for dear life.

The sails were reefed, and some were got in, and not till the men had got down from aloft did the rain come on. For higher and higher had the clouds on the northern horizon banked up, till they covered all the sky.

So awful was the rain, and so blinding, that it was impossible to see ten yards ahead, or even to guess from which direction the storm would actually come.

The wind was already whirling in little eddies from end to end of the deck, but hardly yet did it affect the motion of the ship, or give her way in any one direction.

The men were ordered below in batches, to get into their oilskins, for right well Tandy knew that a fearful night had to be faced.

The men received their grog now, and well did they deserve it.

Another hand was put to the wheel (two men in all), and near them stood the bold mate Tandy, ready to give orders by signal or even by touch, should they fail to hear his voice. All around the deck the men were clinging to bulwark or stay.

Waiting for the inevitable!

Ah! now it came. The rain had ceased for a time. So heavy had it been that the waves themselves were levelled, and Tandy could now see a long line of white coming steadily up astern.

He thanked the God who rules on sea as well as on dry land that the squall was coming from that direction. Had it taken the good ship suddenly aback she might have gone down stern-foremost, even with the now limited spread of canvas that was on her.

As it was, the first mountain wave that hit the good barque sent her flying through the sea as if she had been but an empty match-box. That wave burst on board, however—pooped her, in fact—and went roaring forward, a sea of solid foaming water.

The good vessel shivered from stem to stern like a creature in the throes of death. For a few minutes only. Next minute she had shaken herself free, and was dashing through the water at a pace that only a yacht could have beaten.

The thunder now went rolling down to leeward, and the rain ceased, but the gale increased in force, and in a short time she had to be eased again, and now she was scudding along almost under bare poles. It would be hours before mate Tandy could get below; but Ransey's watch was now off deck, so he went down to ask Janeira, the stewardess, if Nelda was in bed.

She was in bed most certainly, but through the half-open doorway she could hear Ransey's voice, and shouted to him.

"I fink, sah," Janeira said, "she am just one leetle bit afraid."

There was no doubt about that, and the questions with which she plied her brother, when he took a seat by her bunk to comfort her, were peculiar, to say the least.

"Daddy won't be down for a long, long time?"—that was one.

"The poor men, though, how many is drownded?"—another.

"The ship did go to the bottom though, didn't it, 'cause I heard the water all rush down?"—a third.

"You are quite, quite sure father isn't drownded? And you are sure no awful beasts have come up with long arms? Well, tell us some stories."

Nolens volens, Ransey had to. But Babs got drowsy at last, the white eyelids drooped and drooped till they finally closed; then Ransey went quietly away and turned into his hammock.

Young though he was, the heaviest sea-way could not frighten him, nor the stormiest wind that could blow. The sound of the wind as it went roaring through the rigging could only make him drowsy, and the ship herself would rock him to sleep. The barque was snug, too, and it was happiness itself to hear his father's footsteps, as he walked the quarterdeck, pausing now and then to give an order to the men at the wheel.

"Behaved like an angel all through, Halcott!" That was what Tandy told the skipper next morning at breakfast.

"I knew she would, Tandy. I'm proud of our *Sea Flower*, and, my friend, I'm just as proud of you. I'd have stopped on deck to lend a hand, but that wouldn't have done any good.

"Jane," he cried. Jane was the contraction for "Janeira."

"Iss, sah; I'se not fah off."

"Is there no toast this morning?"

"No, sah; Lord Fitzmantle he done go hab one incident dis mawnin'. He blingin' de toast along, w'en all same one big wave struckee he and down he tumble, smash de plate, and lose all de toast foh true."

"Oh, the naughty boy!" said Nelda, who was hurrying through her breakfast to go on deck to "see the sea," as she expressed it.

"No, leetle Meess Tandy, Lord Fitzmantle he good boy neahly all de time. It was poorly an incident, meesie, for de big sea cut his legs clean off, and down he come."

"Well, I'm sorry for Fitz," said Nelda with a sigh; "I suppose it was only his sea-legs though. And I'm going to have mine to-day. I asked the carpenter, and he said he would make me some soon, and it wouldn't be a bit sore putting them on."

With varying fortunes the good ship *Sea Flower* sailed south and away, till at last the Cape of Good Hope was reached and rounded.

Here they experienced very heavy weather indeed, with terrible storms of thunder and lightning, and bigger seas than Tandy himself had ever seen before.

But by this time little Nelda was quite a sailor, and a greater favourite fore and aft than ever.

Sea-legs had, figuratively speaking, been served out to all the green hands. Nelda had a capital pair, and could use them well. Fitz had to make his old ones do another time; but Bob had received two pairs from Neptune, when he came aboard that starry still night when crossing the line. As for the Hal, it must be confessed that there wasn't a pair in Neptune's boat long enough to fit him. However, in ordinary weather he managed to run along the deck pretty easily, his jibboom, as the sailors called his neck, held straight out in front of him, and helping himself along with his wings.

Sometimes on the quarterdeck it would suddenly occur to the 'Ral that a step or two of a Highland schottische would help to make time pass more quickly and pleasantly. The 'Ral wasn't a bird to spoil a good intention, so, with just one or two preliminary "scray—scrays" he would start.

Bother the deck though, and bother the heaving sea, for do what he would the bird could no longer dance with ease and grace; so he would soon give it up, and go and lean his chin wearily over the lee bulwark, and thus, with his drooping wings, he did cut rather a ridiculous figure as seen from behind. He looked for all the world like some scraggy-legged little old man, who had got up in the morning and put nothing on except a ragged swallow-tailed coat.

The men liked the 'Ral though. He made them laugh, and was better than an extra glass of rum to them. So, as the bird seemed always rather wretched in dirty weather, the carpenter was solicited to make him some sort of shelter.

The carpenter consulted the sailmaker. The carpenter and sailmaker put their heads together. Something was sure to come of that.

"He's sich an awkward shape, ye see," said old Canvas.

"That's true," said Chips; "and he won't truss hisself, as ye might call it."

"No; if he'd on'y jest double up his legs, Chips, and close reef that jibboom o' his, we might manage some'ow."

"A kind o' sentry-box would just be *the* thing, old Can."

"Humph! yes. I wonder why the skipper didn't bring a grandfather's clock with 'im; that would suit the 'Ral all to pieces."

But a sort of sentry-box, with a tarpaulin in front of it, was finally rigged up for the 'Ral, and placed just abaft the main-mast, to which it was lashed.

The 'Ral didn't take to it quite kindly at first, but after studying it fore and aft he finally thought it would fit him nicely.

It would be protection from the sun on hot days, and when it blew a bit the men would draw down the tarpaulin, and he would be snug enough.

But in sunny weather it must be confessed that, solemnly standing there in his sentry-box, the Admiral did look a droll sight.

The 'Ral was a very early riser. He always turned out in time to go splashing about while the hands were washing decks, and although they often turned the hose on him he didn't mind it a bit.

One very hot day, the poor 'Ral was observed standing pensively up against the capstan. His head was out of sight, thrust into one of the holes.

This was unusual, but the bird did so many droll things that, for an hour or more, nobody took much notice; but Ransey came round at last, carrying Babs, who was riding on his shoulders.

"Hillo!" cried Babs, "here's the 'Ral with his head buried in a hole."

"Which he stowed hisself away there, missie, more'n an hour ago," said a seaman. "Afraid o' gettin' sunstroke, that's my opinion."

"Poor Hallie," cried Babs, sympathisingly, "does your headie ache?"

The Admiral drew out his head, and looked at the child very mournfully indeed.

"He's got some silent sorrow hevidently, I should say," remarked another of the crew.

There was quite a little circle now around the capstan.

"Cheer up," cried Ransey Tansey. "Come along and have a dance, 'Rallie."

"I don't feel like dancing to-day," the crane replied, or appeared to reply. "Fact is, I don't feel like moving at all."

No wonder, poor bird; the truth is, he was glued to the deck with melted pitch.

What a job it was getting him clear too—or "easing him off," as Chips called it.

But with the help of putty knives the 'Ral got free at last, though it took a deal of orange-peel to clean his poor feet. Then they were found to be so red and swollen that a hammock was slung for him forthwith atween decks, and the

Admiral was laid at full length in it—his head on a pillow at one end, his feet away down at the other, his body covered with the carpenter’s lightest jacket.

Very funny he did appear stretched like that, but he himself appreciated, not the joke, but the comfort. He lay there for days, only getting up a little in the cool of the evening, if there was any cool in it.

Ransey fed him, and attended to his feet twice a day, so he was soon on deck again, as right as a trivet.

But the Admiral had learned a lesson, and ever after this, on hot days, to have seen the bird coming along the deck, you would have sworn he was playing at hop-Scotch, so careful was he to hop over the seams where the pitch was soft, his long neck bent down, and one eye curiously examining the planks.

Yes, the ’Ral was a caution, as old Canvas said.

But one of the bird’s drollest adventures occurred one day when the ship was lying becalmed in the Indian Ocean, or rather in the Mozambique Channel.

The *Sea Flower* was within a measurable distance of land; for though none was in sight, birds of the gull species flew around the ship, tack and half-tack, or floated lazily on the smooth surface of the sea.

The ’Ral slowly left his sentry-box, stretched his wings a bit, uttered a mild scray—scray—ay or two, then did a hop-Scotch till he got abreast of the man at the wheel. This particular sailor was somewhat of a dandy, and had a morsel of red silk handkerchief peeping prettily out from his jacket pocket.

The ’Ral eyed it curiously for a moment, then cleverly plucked it out and jumped away with it. He dropped it on a portion of the quarterdeck where the pitch was oozing, kicked it about with his feet to spread it out, as a man does with a handful of straw, and stood upon it.

“Well, I do call that cheek! My best silk handkerchief, too,” cried the man at the wheel.

The crane only looked at him wonderingly with one eye.

“You’ve no idea,” he told this man, “how soft and nice it feels. I—I—yes, I verily believe I shall dance. Craik—craik—cray—ay—y!”

And dance he did, Nelda and half the crew at least clapping their hands and cheering with delight.

The ’Ral was just in the very midst of his merriment, when the man, after giving the wheel an angry turn or two to port, made a dart to recover his favourite bandana. With such a rush did he come that the ’Ral took fright, and flew to the top of the bulwark. There was some oiled canvas here, and this was so hot that the bird had to keep lifting one foot and putting down the other all the time, just like a hen on a hot griddle.

“How delightfully sweet it must be up there,” he said to himself, gazing at the gulls that were screaming with joy as they swept round and round in the blue sky. “I think I’ll have a fly myself. Scray—ay!”

And greatly to every one’s astonishment away he flew high into the air.

Alarmed at first, the gulls soon regained courage, and made a daring attack on the ’Ral. But he speedily vanquished the foe, and one or two fell bleeding into the water.

A gull was perched on the back fin of a shark. The ’Ral flew down.

“It’s nice and snug *you* look,” said the ’Ral. “Get off at once, the king’s come. Get off, I say, or I’ll dig both your impudent eyes out.”

And next moment the Admiral was perched there, as coolly as if he had been used to riding on sharks ever since his babyhood.

But Nelda was in tears. She would never see the ’Ral again, and the awful beast would eat him, sea-legs and all. So a boat was called away to save him.

None too soon either. For the ’Ral had commenced to investigate that fin with his long beak. No respectable basking shark could be expected to stand that, so down he dived, leaving the bird screaming and swaying and scrambling on the top of the water. “Scray—scray—craik—craik—cray!”

But for the timely aid of the boat, the Admiral would have met with a terrible fate, for his screaming and struggling brought around him three sharks at least, all eager to find out what a long-legged bird like this tasted like.

Every fine day the crane now indulged himself in the pleasure of flight, but he never evinced the slightest inclination to perch again on the back of a basking shark. It wasn’t good enough, he would have told you, had you asked him. “As regards the backs of basking sharks,” he might have said, “I’m going to be a total abstainer.”

Up the east coast of Africa went the bonnie barque *Sea Flower*.

Tandy knew almost every yard of the ground he was now covering, and could pilot the vessel into creeks and over sand-banks or bars with very little danger indeed.

But still the coast here is so treacherous, and the sands and bottom change so frequently, that, night and day, men had to be in the chains heaving the lead.

The natives, also, across the line in Somaliland, are as treacherous as the coral rocks that guard their clay-built towns, and more treacherous than either are the semi-white, slave-dealing Arabs.

Book Two—Chapter Ten.

A Brush with the Somalis—the Derelict.

All along the Somali coast was Tandy's "chief market ground," as he called it. Here he knew he could drive precisely the kind of bargains he wished to make; and as for the Somalis, with their shields, spears, ugly broad knives, and grinning sinister faces, this bold seaman did not care anything. Nor for the Arabs either. He soon gave both to understand that he was a man of the wide, wide world, and was not afraid of any one.

He had come to trade and barter, he told the Arabs, and not to study their slave-hunting habits; so if they would deal, they had only to trot out their wares—*he* was ready. And if they didn't want to deal, there was no harm done. He even took Ransey with him sometimes, and once he took Nelda as well.

The savages just here were a bad, bloodthirsty lot, and he knew it, but he had with him five trusty men. Not armed—that is, not visibly so.

But on this particular day there was blood in those natives' eyes. Tall, lithe, and black-brown were they, their skins oiled and shining in the sun. But smiling. Oh, yes, these fiends will smile while they cut a white man's throat.

Every eye was fixed hungrily on the beautiful child. What a present she would be for a great chief who dwelt far away in the interior and high among the mountains!

The bartering went on as usual, but Tandy kept his weather eye lifting.

Leopards' skins, lions' skins and heads, ostrich feathers, gum-copal, ivory tusks, and gold-dust. The boat was already well filled, Nelda was on board, so was Tandy himself, and his crew, all save one man, who was just shoving her off when the rush was made. The prow of the boat was instantly seized, and the man thrown down.

Pop—pop—pop—pop—rang Tandy's revolver, and the yelling crowd grew thinner, and finally fled.

A spear or two was thrown, but these went wide of the mark.

Human blood looks ghastly on white coral sands, but was Tandy to blame?

Nelda was safe, and in his arms.

"O daddy," she cried, kissing his weather-beaten face, "are we safe?"

"Yes, darling; but I mustn't land here again."

Salook was the village king here, a big, burly brute of an Arab, with a white, gilded turban and a yellow, greasy face beneath it. Tandy had known some of his tricks and manners in days gone by.

At sunset that very same evening Salook was surrounded by his warriors.

"Everything yonder," he said in Swahili, as he pointed to the *Sea Flower*, "is yours. The little maiden shall be my slave. Get ready your boats, and sharpen your spears. Even were the ship a British man-of-war I'd board her."

At sunset that evening Tandy was surrounded by *his* men, and pistols and cutlasses were served out to all.

"We'll have trouble to-night, men," he said, "as soon as the moon rises. If there was a breath of wind off-shore I'd slip. We can't slip—but we'll fight."

A cheer rose from the seamen, which Tandy quickly suppressed.

"Hush! Let us make them believe we suspect no treachery. But get up steam in the donkey engine, and connect the pipes."

This is a plan of defence that acts splendidly and effectively against all kinds and conditions of savages.

Boiling water on bare skins causes squirming, so Tandy felt safe.

The ship carried but one big gun, and this was now loaded with grape.

There wasn't a sound of life to be heard on board the barque, when about seven bells that night a flood of moonlight, shining softly o'er the sea, revealed the dark boats of the Somalis speeding out to the attack.

But every man on board was at his station.

This was to be a fight to the very death, and all hands knew it.

Nearer and nearer they come—those demon boats. The biggest boat of all is leading, and, sword in hand, Salook stands in the prow. It is crowded with savages, their spear-heads glittering in the moonbeams. On this boat the gun is trained.

The rocks re-echo the crash five seconds after, but the echo is mingled with the yelling of the wounded and the drowning.

Ah! a right merry feast for the sharks, and Salook goes down with the bottomless boat.

The fight does not end with this advantage. Those Somalis are like fiends incarnate. Not even the rifles and revolvers can repel their attack. See, they swarm on the bulwarks round the bows, for the ship has swung head on to the shore with the out-flowing tide.

“Give it to them. The water now, boys. Warm them well!”

Oh, horror! The shrieking is too terrible to be described.

In their boats the unwounded try to reach the shore; but the rifles play on these, and they are quickly abandoned, for the Somalis can swim like eels.

“Now for loot, lads,” cries Tandy. “They began the row. Man and arm the boats.”

When the *Sea Flower’s* men landed on the white sands, led on by Tandy and Ransey, the conquest was easy. A few volleys secured victory, and the savages were driven to their crags and hills.

“Let us spoil the Egyptians,” said Tandy, “then we shall return and splice the main-brace.”

The loot obtained was far more valuable than the cargoes they had obtained by barter, and I need hardly say that the main-brace *was* spliced.

Towards morning the wind came puffing off the land. It ought to have died away at sunrise, but did not. So the *Sea Flower* soon made good her offing, and before long the land lay like a long blue cloud far away on the weather-beam.

The ship was reprovisioned at Zanzibar, and one or two sick hands were allowed to land to be attended to at the French hospital.

In less than a fortnight she once more set sail, and in two months’ time, everything having gone well and cheerily, despite a storm or two, the *Sea Flower* was very far at sea indeed, steering south-west, and away towards the wild and stormy Cape Horn.

On going on deck one morning, Halcott found Tandy forward, glass in hand, steadying himself against the foremast, while he swept the sea ahead.

“Hallo! Tandy. Land, eh?”

“No, it isn’t land, Halcott. A precious small island it would be. But we’re a long way to the west’ard of the Tristan da Cunha, and won’t see land again till we hail the Falklands. Have a squint, sir.”

“What do you make of her, sir?” asked Tandy.

“Why, a ship; but she’s a hulk, Tandy, a mere hulk or derelict.”

“There might be some poor soul alive there notwithstanding.”

“I agree with you. Suppose we overhaul her,” said Halcott, “and set her on fire. She’s a danger to commerce, anyhow, and I’ll go myself, I think.”

So the whaler was called away, and in a few minutes the boat was speeding over the water towards the dismantled ship, while the *Sea Flower*, with her foreyard aback, lay floating idly on the heaving sea.

It was early summer just than, in these regions—that is, December was well advanced, and the crew were looking forward to having a real good time of it when Christmas came.

Alas! little did they know what was before them, or how sad and terrible their Christmas would be.

“Pull easy for a bit, men,” cried Halcott; “she is a floating horror! Easy, starboard! give way, port! We’ll get the weather gauge on her, for she doesn’t smell sweet.”

Not a living creature was there to answer the hail given by Halcott. Abandoned she evidently had been by the survivors of her crew, for the starboard boats still hung from her davits, while the ports were gone, and at this side a rope ladder depended.

The boat-hook caught on; with strange misgivings Halcott scrambled on board followed by two men.

He staggered and almost fell against the bulwark, and no wonder, for the sight that met his eyes was indeed a fearful one.

On the lower deck was a great pile of wood, and near it stood a big can of petroleum. It was evident that the crew had intended firing the ship before leaving her, but had for some reason or other abandoned the idea.

Halcott, however, felt that he had a duty to perform, so he gave orders for the paraffin to be emptied over the pile and over the deck. As soon as this was done lighted matches were thrown down, and hardly had they time to regain

the boat and push off, ere columns of dark smoke came spewing up the hatchways, followed high into the air by tongues and streams of fire.

Before noon the derelict sank spluttering into the summer sea, and only a few blackened timbers were left to mark the spot where she had gone down.

A few days after this the wind fell and fell, until it was a dead calm.

Once more the sea was like molten lead, and its surface glazed and glassy, but never a bird was to be seen, and for more than a week not a cloud was in the sky as big as a man's hand. Nor was the motion of the ship appreciable. By day the sun shone warm enough, but at night the stars far in the southern sky shone green and yellow through a strange, dry haze.

On Saturday night Tandy as usual gave orders to splice the main-brace. He, and Halcott also, loved the real old Saturday nights at sea, of the poet Dibdin's days. And hitherto, in fair weather or in foul, these had been kept up with truly British mirth and glee.

There was no rejoicing, however, on this particular evening, for two of the hands lay prostrate on deck. Halcott himself ministered to them, sailor fashion. First he got them placed in hammocks swung under a screen-berth on deck. This was for the sake of the fresh air, and herein he showed his wisdom.

Then he took a camp-stool and sat down near them to consider their symptoms. But these puzzled him; for while one complained of fierce heat, with headache, and his eyes were glazed and sparkling, the other was shivering and blue with cold. He had no pain except cramps in his legs and back, which caused him an agony so acute that he screamed aloud every time they came on.

Halcott went aft to study. He studied best when walking on his quarterdeck. Hardly knowing what he did, he picked up a bone that honest Bob had been dining off, and threw it into the sea. There was still light enough to see, and the man at the wheel looked languidly astern. When three monster sharks dived, nose on, towards the bone, he looked up into the captain's face.

"Seen them before?" said Halcott, who was himself superstitious.

"Bless ye, yes, sir. It's just four days since they began to keep watch, and there they be again. Ah, sir! it ain't ham-bones they's a-lookin' arter. They'll soon get the kind o' meat they likes best."

"What mean you, Durdley?"

"I means the chaps you 'as in the 'ammocks. Listen, sir. There's no deceivin' Jim Durdley. We've got the plague aboard! I've been shipmate with she afore to-day."

Halcott staggered as if shot.

"Heaven forbid!" he exclaimed.

No one on board cared much for this man Durdley. Nor is this to be wondered at. In his own mess he was quarrelsome to a degree. Poor little Fitz fled when he came near him, and many a brutal blow he received, which at times caused fierce fights, for every one fore and aft loved the nigger boy.

Durdley was almost always boding ill. His only friends were the foreigners of the crew, men that to make a complement of five-and-twenty Tandy had hired in a hurry.

Mostly Finns they were, and bad at that, and if there was ever any grumbling to be done on board the *Sea Flower* these were the fellows to begin it.

Halcott recovered himself quickly, gave just one glance at Durdley's dark, forbidding countenance—the man was really ugly enough to stop a church clock—and went below.

He met Tandy at the saloon door, and told him his worst fears.

Alas! these fears were fated to be realised all too soon.

The men now stricken down were those who had boarded the derelict with Halcott. One died next evening, and was lashed in his hammock and dropped over the bows a few hours afterwards.

No doubt, seeing his fellow taken away, the other, who was one of the best of the crew, lost heart.

"I'm dying, sir," he told Halcott. "No use swallowing physic, the others'll want it soon."

By-and-by he began to rave. He was on board ship no longer, but walking through the meadows and fields far away in England with his sister by his side.

"I'll help you over the old-fashioned stile," Fitz, who was nursing him, heard him say—"yes, the old-fashioned stile, Lizzie. Oh, don't I love it! And we'll walk up and away through the corn-field, by the little, winding path, to the churchyard where mother sleeps. Look, look at the crimson poppies, dear siss. How bonnie they are among the green. Ah-h!"

That was a scream which frightened poor Fitz.

"Go not there, sister. See, see, the monster has killed her! Ah, me!"

Fitz rushed aft to seek for assistance, for the captain had told him to call him if Corrie got worse.

Alas! when the two returned together, Corrie's hammock was empty.

No one had heard even a plash, so gently had he lowered himself over the side, and sunk to rise no more.

Book Two—Chapter Eleven.

Mutiny on Board—Far to the South'ard.

"Nothing certain at sea except the unexpected." The truth of this was sadly exemplified by the terrible calamity which had befallen the *Sea Flower*—and befallen her so suddenly, too!

Only one week ago she was sailing over a rippling sea on the wings of a favouring breeze, every wavelet dancing joyously in the sunlight. On board, whether fore or aft, there was nothing but hope, happiness, and contentment. Till —

> "The angel of death spread his wings on the blast."

Now all is terror and gloom—a gloom and a terror that have struck deep into the heart of every one who knows what death and sorrow mean.

A breeze has sprung up at last, and both Halcott and Tandy have reluctantly come to the conclusion that it will be better to steer for colder weather. So southward the *Sea Flower* flies, under every stitch of canvas, with studding-sails low and aloft. Shall the plague be stayed? Heaven alone can tell!

As it is, the depression hangs like a dark, foreboding cloud over the ship.

No one cares to talk much by day or by night. The men sit silently at their meals, with lowered brows and frightened looks. They eye each other askance; they know not who may be the next. They even avoid each other as much as possible while walking the decks. Hardly will a man volunteer to nurse the sick. The hammocks containing these hang on the lee side, and the crew keep far away indeed.

But they smoke from morn till night.

Halcott himself and little Fitz are the only nurses, and both are worn out for want of rest. With their own hands they sew up the hammock of the dead, unhook it, lift the gruesome burden on to the top of the bulwark, and, while the captain with uncovered head raises his eyes to heaven and utters a prayer, the body is committed to the deep, to be torn in pieces next minute by the tigers of the sea.

Poor little Nelda! She is as merry as ever, playing with Bob or the 'Ral on the quarterdeck, and it is strange, in this ship of death, to hear her musical voice raised in song or laughter in the midst of silence and gloom!

No wonder that, hearing this, the delirious or the dying fancy themselves back once more in their village homes in England.

Nelda wonders why the captain, who used to romp and play with her, tries all he can now to avoid her; and why little Fitz, the curious, round-faced, laughing, black boy, with the two rows of alabaster teeth, never comes aft.

Halcott himself never goes below either. He insists upon taking his meals on deck. Nor will he permit Tandy or Ransey to come forward. If *he* can, he means to confine the awful plague to the fore part of the ship.

They say that in a case of this kind it is always the good who go first. In this instance the adage spoke truly.

Terrible to say, in less than a fortnight no less than thirteen fell victims to the scourge. But still more, more awful, the crew now became mutinous.

Luckily, all arms, and ammunition as well, were safely stored aft.

Durdley was chief mutineer—chief scoundrel! Out of the fourteen men left alive, only four were true to the captain, the others were ready to follow Durdley.

This fellow became a demon now—a demon in command of demons; for they had found some grog which had been in charge of the second mate—who was dead—and excited themselves into fury with it.

Durdley, the dark and ugly man, rushed to the screen-berth where Halcott was trying to ease the sufferings of a poor dying man.

He was as white as a ghost; even his lips were pale.

Beware of men, reader, who get white when angry. They are dangerous!

"Here, Halcott," cried Durdley, "drop your confounded mummery, and listen to *me*. Lay aft here, my merry men, lay

aft.”

Nine men, chiefly Finns and other foreigners, armed with ugly knives and iron marline-spikes, quickly stationed themselves behind him.

“Now, Halcott, your game’s up. You brought this plague into the ship yourself. By rights you should die. But I depose you. I am captain now, and my brave boys will obey me, and me alone.

“You *hear*?” he shouted, for Halcott stood a few paces from him, calmly looking him in the face.

“I *hear*.”

“Then, cusses on you, why don’t ye speak? You’ll be allowed to live, I say, both you and Tandy, on one condition.”

“And that is—?”

“That you alter your course, and steer straight away to the nearest land—the Falkland Isles—at once.”

“I refuse. Back, you mutinous dog! back! I say. Would you dare to stab your captain? Your blood be,”—here the captain’s revolver rang sharp and clear, and Durdley fell to the deck—“on your own cowardly head.”

There was a wild yell and a rush now, and though the captain fired again and again, he was speedily overpowered.

The revolver was snatched from his hand, and he was borne down by force of numbers.

But assistance was at hand.

“Now, lads, give it to them! Hurrah!”

It was Tandy himself, with the four good men and true, who had run aft between decks to inform the mate of the mutiny.

All were armed with rifles, but these they only clubbed. So fiercely did they fight, that the mutineers speedily dropped their knives and iron marline-spikes, and were driven below, yelling for mercy like the cowards they were.

The captain, though bruised, was otherwise intact. Nor was Durdley dead, though he had lost much blood from a wound—the revolver bullet having crashed through the arm above the elbow, and through the outside of the chest as well. But two Finns lay stark and stiff beside the winch.

Even to tragedy there is always a ridiculous side or aspect, and on the present occasion this was afforded by the strange behaviour of Bob and the Admiral during the terrible *mêlée*. It is not to be supposed that Bob would be far away from his master when danger threatened him.

Seeing Ransey Tansey, rifle in hand, follow his father to join in repelling the mutineers, it occurred to him at once that two might be of some assistance. It did not take the faithful tyke a moment to make up his mind, but he thought he might be of more use behind the mutineers than in front of them. So he outflanked the whole fighting party, and the attack he made upon the rear of Durdley’s following was very effective.

The ’Ral could not fight, it is true, but his excitement during the battle was extreme. Round and round the deck he ran or flew, with his head and neck straight out in front of him, and his screams of terror and anger added considerably to the clamour and din going on forward. The poor bird really seemed to know that men were being killed, and seeing his master engaged, he would fain have helped him had he been able.

Of the ten men then who had mutinied three were wounded, including the ringleader, two were dead, and the remaining five were now taken on deck and roped securely alongside the winch to await their sentence. The deck was quickly cleared of the dead, and all evidences of the recent struggle were removed.

Durdley resembled nothing more nearly than a captured bird of prey. He was stern, silent, grim, and vindictive. Had he not been utterly prostrate and powerless, he would have sprung like a catamount at the throats of the very men who were dressing his wounds, and these were Tandy and Halcott himself.

Yet it was evident that he was not receiving the treatment he had expected, nor that which he would have dealt out to Halcott had he fallen into his hands.

“Why don’t you throw me overboard?” he growled at last, with a fearful oath. “Sharks are the best surgeons; their work is soon over. I’d have served you so, if my lily-livered scoundrels had only fought a trifle better, hang them!

“Ay, and you too, Mr Tandy, with your solemn face, if you hadn’t consented to take us straight to land!”

“Keep your mind easy,” said Halcott, quietly. “I’ll get rid of you as soon as possible, you may be well sure.”

“Do your worst—I defy you. But if that worst isn’t death, I’ll bide my time. I’d rather die three times over than lie here like a half-stuck pig.”

During the fight little Nelda was in terrible distress, and, but for Janeira, she would doubtless have rushed forward, as she wanted to do, in order to “help daddy and ’Ansey.”

Bob was the first to bring her tidings of the victory.

He came aft at full gallop, almost threw himself down the companion-way, and next moment was licking the child's tear-bedewed cheeks.

She could see joy in the poor dog's face. He was full of it, and trying as much as ever dog did try to talk. Perhaps he never fully realised till now how awkward it is for a doggie to want a tail. But he did what he could, nevertheless, with the morsel of fag-end he had.

"Don't cry, little mistress," he was trying hard to say, "don't cry. It's all right now. And it was such fun to see them fighting, and I fought too. Oh, didn't I bite and tear the rascals just."

Even the 'Ral seemed to know that the danger was past and gone for a time, and nothing would suffice to allay his feelings save executing a kind of wild jig right on the top of the skylight—a thing he had never done before.

But although quieted now, Nelda was not quite content, till down rushed Ransey Tansey himself. With a joyful cry she flew to his arms, and he did all he could to reassure her; so successfully, too, that presently she was her happy little self once more, playing with Bob on the quarterdeck, as if nothing had happened. Blissful childhood.

The condition of affairs, after the ship had penetrated into the regions of ice and snow, was not an enviable one, although there was now a rent in the dark cloud that hovered over the *Sea Flower*—a lull in the terrible storm.

Durdley was progressing favourably, and making so rapid a recovery that, in case he might cause more mischief, he was put in irons. But the other wounded men, probably owing to their weak condition, had died.

The five others were allowed to go on duty. Halcott refused to accept their offered promise to behave leal and true. What is a promise, even on oath, from such bloodthirsty villains as these?

"I do not wish either promise or apology," he told them plainly. "Your conduct from this date will in some measure determine what your future punishment may be. Remember this, we do not trust you. The four good Englishmen, who fought for myself and mate, are all armed, and have orders to shoot you down without one moment's grace if they observe a suspicious movement on your part, or hear one single mutinous word. There! go."

The ship's course was altered now, and all sail made to round Cape Horn.

No doubt the cold had been the means of eradicating the dreadful plague. Yet Halcott was a man whom no half-measures would satisfy.

There was plenty of clothing on board, so a new suit was served out to every seaman, the old being thrown overboard. Then the bedding and hammocks were scoured, and when dry fumigated. Sulphur was burned between decks, and hatches battened down for a whole day. Every portion of the woodwork was afterwards scrubbed, and even the masts were scraped. This work was given to the mutineers, and a cold job it was. The men sat each one in the bight of a rope, and were lowered up or down when they gave the signal.

Halcott was very far indeed from being vindictive, but long experience had taught him that mutinous intentions are seldom carried out if active occupation be found for body and mind.

"I breathe more freely now," said the captain, as Tandy and he walked briskly up and down the quarterdeck.

"Heigho!" said Tandy, "we no doubt have sinned—we certainly have suffered. But," he added, "I thank God, Halcott, from my inmost soul, first that you are spared, and secondly, that my little innocent child here and my brave boy Ransey Tansey are still alive and happy."

"Amen! And now, Tandy, we've got to pray for fine weather. We are rather underhanded—those wretched Finns may break out again at any moment. They will, too, if not carefully watched."

"You have a kinder heart than I have, Halcott, else you'd have made that scoundrel Durdley walk the plank, and hanged the rest at the yardarm, one by one."

"The worst use you can put a man to is to hang him," said Halcott, laughing.

"But will you care to land on the island we are in search of, with these fellows?" asked Tandy. "Mind," he added, before Halcott could answer, "I take no small blame to myself for having engaged such scoundrels. Want of time was no excuse for me. Better to have sacrificed a month than sail as shipmates with such demons as these."

"Keep your mind easy, my dear friend; I'll get rid of them, by hook or by crook, before we reach our island."

"It relieves me to hear you say so, but indeed, Halcott, 'twixt hook and crook, if I had my way, I should choose the crook. I'd give the beggars a bag of biscuit and a barrel of pork, and maroon them on the first desert island we come in sight of."

I do not know that Halcott paid much attention to the latter part of Tandy's speech. He was at this moment looking uneasily at a bank of dark, rock-like clouds that was rising slowly up to the north and east.

"Have you noticed the glass lately, Tandy?" he said quietly.

"I'll jump down and see it now."

"Why," he said, on returning, "it is going tumbling down. I'll shorten sail at once. We're going to have it out of that

quarter.”

There was little time to lose, for the wind was already blowing over the cold, dark sea in little uncertain puffs and squalls. Between each there was a lull; yet each, when it did come, lasted longer and blew stronger than those that had preceded it.

The barque was snug at last. Very little sail indeed was left on her; only just enough to steer by and a bit over, lest a sail or two should be carried away.

Of the four trustworthy men, one was Chips the carpenter, the other old Canvas the sailmaker. The latter kept a watch, the former had been placed in Tandy’s.

It was hard times now with all. Watch and watch is bad enough in temperate zones, but here, with the temperature far below freezing-point, and dropping lower and lower every hour, with darkness and storm coming down upon them, and the dangers of the ice to be encountered, it was doubly, trebly hard.

It takes a deal to damp the courage of a true British sailor, however, and strange as it may seem, that very courage seems to rise to the occasion, be that occasion what it may. But now, to quote the wondrous words of Coleridge’s “Ancient Mariner—”

> ... “The storm-blast came, and he
> Was tyrannous and strong;
> He struck with his o’ertaking wings,
> And chased us south along.
>
> “With sloping masts and dipping prow.
> As who pursued with yell and blow
> Still treads the shadow of his foe,
> And forward bends his head.
> The ship drove fast, loud roared the blast,
> And southward ay we fled.
>
> “And now there came both mist and snow,
> And it grew wondrous cold;
> And ice, mast-high, came floating by,
> As green as emerald.
>
> “And through the drifts the snowy clifts
> Did send a dismal sheen:
> * * * * *.
>
> “The ice was here, the ice was there,
> The ice was all around:
> It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
> Like noises in a swound!”

Yes, the good barque *Sea Flower* was driven far, far to the southward, far, far from her course; but happily, before they reached the icy barrier, the wind had gone down, so that the terrible noises in the main pack which the poet so graphically describes had few terrors for them.

The wind fell, and went veering round, till it blew fair from the east. A very gentle wind, however, and hardly did the barque make five knots an hour on her backward track.

Others might be impatient, but there was no such thing as impatience about Nelda, and little about Ransey Tansey either. Everything they saw or passed was as fresh and new to them as if they were sailing through a sea of enchantment.

The cold affected neither. They were dressed to withstand it. The keen, frosty air was bracing rather than otherwise, and warm blood circulated more quickly through every vein as they trod the decks together. How strange, how weird-like at times were the snow-clad icebergs they often saw, their sides glittering and gleaming in the sunshine with every colour of the rainbow, and how black was the sea that lay between!

The smaller pieces through which the ship had often to steer were of every shape and size, all white, and some of them acting as rafts for seals asleep thereon—seals that were drifting, drifting away they knew not, cared not whither.

Sometimes a great sea-elephant would raise his noble head and gaze curiously at the passing barque, then dive and be seen no more. Shoals of whales of a small species afforded our little seafarers great delight to watch. But these went slowly on their way, dipping and ploughing, and looking neither to the right hand nor to the left. The porpoises were still more interesting, for they seemed to live but to romp and play and chase each other, sometimes jumping right out of the water, so that it is no wonder Nelda imagined they were playing at leap-frog. Nelda, when told that these were schools of porpoises, said,—

“Oh, well, and school is just let out, I suppose; no wonder they are happy. And the big whales are their mothers! They are not happy because they are all going to church, quiet and ’spectable like.”

The myriads of birds seen everywhere it would be impossible here to describe. Suffice it to say that they afforded Nelda great delight.

Bob was as merry as ever; but when one day the ’Ral walked solemnly aft wearing a pair of canvas stockings right up as far as his thighs, both Tandy and Halcott joined with the youngsters in a roar of hearty laughter. There was no more dance in that droll bird, and wouldn’t be for many a long day. “A sail in sight, sah! A steamer, sah!” It was little Fritz who reported it from the mast-head one morning, some time after the *Sea Flower* had regained her course, had doubled the Cape, and was steering north-west by west.

The stranger lay to on observing a flag of distress hoisted, and soon a boat was seen coming rapidly on towards the *Sea Flower*.

The steamer was the *Dun Avon*, homeward-bound from San Francisco, with passengers and cargo.

The captain himself boarded her with one of his men, and to him was related the whole sad story as we know it. “We have a clean bill of health now though,” added Halcott; “but we are short-handed—one man in irons, and five more that we cannot trust.”

“Well,” said the steamer captain, “I cannot relieve you of your black hats, but I’ll tell you what I can do: I shall let you have four good hands if they’ll volunteer, and if you’ll pay them well. And I should advise you to set your mutineers on shore at the entrance to the Strait of Magellan, and let them take their chance. You’re not compelled to voyage with mutineers, and risk the safety of yourselves and your ship. Now write your letters home, for my time is rather short.”

The four new hands were four hearties, as hard as a mainstay, as brown as bricks, and with merry faces that did one’s heart good to behold.

Was it marooning, I wonder? Well, it doesn’t matter a great deal, but just ten days after this the mutineers were landed, bag and baggage, on the north cape of Desolation Island, not far from the route through the far-famed strait. With them were left provisions for six weeks, guns, ammunition, and tools.

I never heard what became of them. If they were picked up by some passing ship, it was more than they deserved.

“At last,” said Halcott, when the boat returned—“at last, friend Tandy, an incubus is lifted off my mind, and now let us make—

“All Sail for the Island of Gold.”

End of Book Two.

Book Three—Chapter One.

“A Sight I shall Remember till my Dying Day.”

Captain Halcott sat on the skylight, and near him sat Tandy his mate, while between them—tacked down with pins to the painted canvas, so that the wind might not catch it—lay a chart of a portion of the South Pacific Ocean.

At one particular spot was a blue cross.

“I marked it myself,” said Halcott; “and here, on this piece of cardboard, is the island, which I’ve shown you before—every creek and bay, every river and hill, so far as I know them, distinctly depicted.”

“The exact longitude and latitude?” said Tandy.

“As near as I could make them, my friend.”

“And yet we don’t seem to be able to discover this island. Strange things happen in these seas, Halcott; islands shift and islands sink, but one so large as this could do neither. Come, Halcott, we’ll work out the reckoning again. It will be twelve o’clock in ten minutes.”

“Everything correct,” said Halcott, when they had finished, “as written down by me. Here we are on the very spot where the Island of Misfortune should be, and—the island is gone!”

There was a gentle breeze blowing, and the sky was clear, save here and there a few fleecy clouds lying low on a hazy horizon.

Nothing in sight! nor had there been for days and days; for the isle they were in search of lies far out of the track of outward or homeward-bound ships.

“Below there!”

It was a shout from one of the new hands, who was stationed at the fore-topgallant cross-trees.

“Hallo, Wilson!” cried Tandy running forward. “Here we are!”

“Something I can’t make out on the lee bow, sir.”

“Well, shall I come up and bring a bigger glass?”

“One minute, sir!”

“It’s a steamer, I believe,” he hailed now; “but I can’t just raise her hull, only just the long trail of smoke along the horizon.”

Tandy was beside the man in a few minutes’ time. “This will raise it,” he said, “if I can focus aright. Why!” he cried next minute, “that is no steamer, Tom Wilson, but the smoke from a volcanic mountain or hill.”

Down went Tandy quickly now.

“Had your island of gold a chimney to it?” he said, laughing. He could afford to laugh, for he felt convinced this was *the* island and none other. “There wasn’t a coal mine or a factory of any kind on it, was there? If not, we will soon be in sight of the land of gold. Volcanic, Halcott—volcanic!”

“Keep her away a point or two,” he said to the man at the wheel.

“There were hills on the Island of Misfortune, but no signs of a volcano.”

“Not then; but in this mystery of an ocean, Halcott, we know not what a day or an hour may bring forth.

“Let me see,” he continued, glancing at the cardboard map; “we are on the east side of the island, or we will be soon. Why, we ought soon to reach your Treachery Bay. Ominous name, though, Halcott; we must change it.”

Nearer and nearer to the land sailed the *Sea Flower*. The hills came in sight; then dark, wild cliffs o’ertopped with green, with a few waving palm-trees and a fringe of banana here and there; and all between as blue a sea as ever sun shone on.

“It is strangely like my island,” said Halcott; “but that hill, far to the west yonder, from which the smoke is rising, I cannot recognise.”

“It may not have been there before.”

“True,” said Halcott. But still he looked puzzled.

Then, after bearing round to the north side of the island, past the mouth of a dark gully, and past a rocky promontory, the land all at once began to recede. In other words, they had opened out the bay.

“But all the land in yonder used to be burned forest, Tandy.”

Tandy quietly handed him the glass.

The forest he now looked upon was not composed of living trees, but of skeletons, their weird shapes now covered entirely by a wealth of trailing parasites and flowery climbing plants.

“I am satisfied now, and I think we may drop nearer shore, and let go the anchor.”

In an hour’s time the *Sea Flower* lay within two hundred yards of the beach.

This position was by no means a safe one were a heavy storm to blow from either the north or the west. There would be nothing for it then but to get up anchor and put out to sea, or probably lie to under the shelter of rocks and cliffs to the southward of the island.

The bay itself was a somewhat curious one. The dark blue which was its colour showed that it was deep, and the depth continued till within seventy yards of the shore, when it rapidly shoaled, ending in a snow-white semicircle of coral sands. Then at the head of the bay, only on the east side, stretching seawards to that bold promontory, was a line of high, black, beetling cliffs, the home of those wheeling sea-birds. These cliffs were of solid rock of an igneous formation chiefly, but marked here and there with veins of what appeared to be quartz. They were, moreover, indented with many a cave: some of these, it was found out afterwards, were floored with stalagmites, while huge icicle-like stalactites depended from their roofs.

Rising to the height of at least eight hundred feet above these cliffs was one solitary conical hill, green-wooded almost to its summit.

The western side of the bay, and, indeed, all this end of the island, was low, and fringed with green to the water’s edge; but southwards, if one turned his eye, a range of high hills was to be seen, adding materially to the beauty of the landscape.

The whole island—which was probably not more than sixteen miles in length, by from eight to nine in width—was divided by the river mentioned in Captain Halcott’s narrative into highlands and lowlands.

The day was far advanced when the *Sea Flower* dropped anchor in this lovely bay, and it was determined therefore not to attempt a landing that night. Halcott considered it rather an ominous sign that no savages were visible, and that not a single outrigger boat was drawn up on the beach.

Experience teaches fools, and it teaches savages also. Just a little inland from the head of the bay the cover was very dense indeed; and though, even with the aid of their glasses, neither Halcott nor Tandy could discover a sign of human life, still, for all they could tell to the contrary, that green entanglement of bush might be peopled by wild men who knew the *Sea Flower* all too well, and would not dare to venture forth.

The wind went down with the sun, and for a time scarce a sound was to be heard. The stars were very bright, and seemed very near, the Southern Cross sparkling like a diamond pendant in the sky.

By-and-by a yellow glare shone above the shoulder of the adjacent hill, and a great round moon uprose and sailed up the firmament as clear and bright as a pearl.

It was just after this that strange noises began to be heard coming from the woods apparently. They were intermittent, however. There would be a chorus of plaintive cries and shrieks, dying away into a low, murmuring moan, which caused Nelda, who was on deck, to shiver with fear and cling close to her brother's arm.

"What on earth can it be?" said Tandy. "Can the place be haunted?"

"Haunted by birds of prey, doubtless. These are not the cries that savages utter, even during an orgie. But, strangely enough—whatever your experience may be, Tandy—I have seldom found birds of prey on the inhabited islands of the South Pacific."

"Nor I," said Tandy. "Look yonder!" he added, pointing to a balloon-shaped cloud of smoke that hovered over a distant hill-top, lit up every now and then by just such gleams of light as one sees at night penetrating the smoke from some village blacksmith's forge. But yonder was Vulcan's forge, and Jupiter was his chief employer.

"Yes, Tandy, that is the volcano. But I can assure you there was no such fire-mountain, as savages say, when I was here last."

"To-morrow," said the mate, "will, I trust, make every thing more plain to us."

"To-morrow? Yes, I trust so, too," said Halcott, musingly. "Shall we go below and talk a little?"

"I confess, my friend," Halcott continued, after he had lit his pipe and smoked some time in silence—"I confess, Tandy, that I don't quite like the look of that hill. Have you ever experienced the effects of a volcanic eruption in any of these islands?"

"I have not had that pleasure, if pleasure it be," replied the mate.

"Pleasure, Tandy! I do not know of anything more hideous, more awful, in this world.

"When I say 'any of these islands,' I refer to any one of the whole vast colony of them that stud the South Pacific, and hundreds of these have never yet been visited by white men.

"Years ago," he continued, "I was first mate of the *Sky-Raker*, as bonnie a brig as you could have clapped eyes upon. It afterwards foundered with all hands in a gale off the coast of Australia. When I trod her decks, second in command, I was a bold young fellow of twenty, or thereabouts; and I may tell you at once we were engaged in the Queensland black labour trade. And black, indeed, and bloody, too, it might often be called.

"We used to go cruising to the nor'ard and east, visiting islands here and islands there, to engage hands for working in the far interior. We arranged to pay every man well who would volunteer to go with us, and to land them again back home on their own islands, if they *did* wish to return.

"On these expeditions we invariably employed 'call-crows.'"

"What may a 'call-crow' be, Halcott?"

"Well, you know what gamblers mean on shore by a 'call-bird' or 'decoy-duck.' Your 'call-crow' is the same, only he is a black who has lived and laboured in Queensland, who can talk 'island,' who can spin a good yarn in an off-hand way, and tell as many lies as a recruiting-sergeant.

"These are the lures.

"No matter how unfriendly the blackamoors among whom we may land may be, our 'call-rooks' nearly always make peace. Then bartering begins, and after a few days we get volunteers enough."

"But they do attack you at times, these natives?"

"That's so, Tandy; and I believe I was a braver man in those days than I am now, else I'd hardly have cared to make myself a target for poisoned arrows, or poisoned spears, so coolly as I used to do then."

Nelda, who had come quietly down the companion-way with her brother, seated herself as closely to Captain Halcott as she could. She dearly loved a story, especially one of thrilling adventure.

"Go on, cap'n," she said, eagerly. "Never mind me. 'Poisoned spears,'—that is the prompt-word."

"These black fellows were not of great height, Tandy," resumed Halcott.

"Savages," said Nelda. "Please say savages."

"Well, dear, savages I suppose I must call them. They were almost naked, and many of the elder warriors were tattooed on cheeks, chest, and arms. All had bushy heads of hair, and were armed with bows and arrows, spears and clubs, and tomahawks.

"But," he added, "it was generally with the natives of those islands from which we had already obtained volunteers that we had the greatest trouble. The ship I used to sail in, Tandy, was as honest as it is possible for such a ship to be, and I never saw natives ill-treated by any of our crew, though more than once we had to fight in self-defence. The reason was this. Many ships that had agreed to bring the blacks back home, broke their promise, which, perhaps, they had never intended to keep. When they returned to the islands, therefore, to obtain more recruits, bloodshed was almost certain to ensue. If one white man was killed, then the revenge taken was fearful. At a safe distance the whites would bring their rifles and guns to bear upon the poor savages, and the slaughter would be too dreadful to contemplate. If the unhappy wretches took shelter in their woods or jungles, these would be set on fire, till at last a hundred or more of them would fling their arms away, hold up the palms of their hands in token of submission, or as on appeal for mercy, and huddle together in a corner like fowls, and just as helpless. The whites could then pick and choose volunteers as they pleased, and it is needless to tell you there was nothing given in exchange.

"Our trouble took place when we returned to an island, having found it impossible to bring the natives we had taken off back with us. This they looked upon as cheating, and they would rush to arms, compelling us to fire upon them in self-defence.

"Well, we were constantly on the search for new islands. The natives on these might threaten us for a time, but the 'call-crows' soon pacified them. The beads and presents we distributed, coupled with the glowing accounts of life in Queensland which the 'crows' gave these poor heathen, did all the rest, and we soon had a cargo."

"And this species of trade was, or is, called black-birding, I think," said Tandy.

"It was, and *is* now, *sub rosa*.

"But I was going to tell you of a volcanic eruption. Before I do so, however, I propose that we order the main-brace to be spliced. For this is an auspicious night, you know, and I have not heard a jovial song on board the *Sea Flower* for many and many a day.

"Janeira!"

"Yes, sah. I'se not fah away, sah."

And Janeira entered, smiling as usual, and as daintily dressed as a stage waiting-maid.

"Pass the word for Fitz, Janeira, like a good girl."

"Oh, he's neah too, sah. At you' service, sah!"

Fitz had been in the pantry eating plum-duff, or whatever else came handy. The pantry was a favourite resort with Lord Fitzmantle, and Janeira never failed to put after-dinner tit-bits away in a corner for his especial delectation.

"Now, Jane, you shall draw some rum, and, Fitz, you must take it for'ard. Here is the key, Jane; and, Fitz, just tell them for'ard to drink the healths of those aft, and sing as much as they choose to-night."

"Far away then, Tandy and Nelda," said Halcott, resuming his narrative, "to the west of this island, farther away almost than the imagination can grasp, so solitary and wide is this great ocean, there used to be a small island called Saint Queeba. Who first found it out, or named it, I cannot tell you, Tandy, but I believe our own brig was the first that ever visited it in a black-birding expedition.

"The population seemed to be about three thousand, and of these we took away at least one hundred and fifty. The poor creatures appeared to have no fear of white men, and so we concealed our revolvers and entered into friendly intercourse with them.

"The island was a long way from any other, and this probably accounted for its never having been black-birded before.

"We returned from Australia almost immediately again after landing our recruits, and I for one felt sure the natives would welcome us.

"So we brought extra-showy cloth and the brightest beads we could procure.

"They did welcome us, and we soon had about half a cargo of real volunteers.

"We were only waiting for others to come from the interior; for the wind was fair just then, and we were all anxious to proceed to sea.

"The very evening before the arrival of the blacks, however, the wind went suddenly down, although, strangely enough, at a great altitude we could see scores of small black clouds scurrying across the sky. Finally, some of these circled round and round, and combined to form a dark blue canopy that gradually lowered itself towards the island.

"Soon the sun went down, a blood-red ball in the west, and darkness quickly followed. It was just then that we observed a fitful gleam arise from the one and only mountain the island possessed. Over this a ball of cloud had hung all day long, but we had taken little notice of it.

“‘I’ve never seen the like of that before, mate,’ said the skipper to me, pointing at the slowly descending pall of cumulus.

“‘Nor I either, captain,’ I replied.

“I couldn’t keep my eyes off it, do what I would, for dark though the night was that strange cloud was darker. It seemed now to be sending downwards from its centre a whirling tail, or pillar, which the gleams that began to rise higher and higher from the developing volcano lit up, and tongues of fire appeared to touch.

“‘It’s going to be a storm of some kind, Halcott,’ said my skipper. ‘Oh, for a puff of wind, for, Heaven help us, lad! we are far too near the shore.’

“‘I have it,’ he cried next minute. ‘Lower the boats and heave up the anchor.’

“I never saw men work more willingly in my life before. Even the blacks we had on board lent a hand, and no sooner was the anchor apeak than away went the boats, and the ship moved slowly out to sea.

“We had got about three knots off-shore, when, happening to look back, I saw a sight which I shall remember to my dying day.

“The black and awful whirling cloud had burst. If one ton of water came down like an avalanche, a million must have fallen, with a deafening roar like a thousand thunders.

“It seemed as if heaven and earth had gone to war and the first terrific shot had been fired.

“For a time the mountain was entirely enveloped in darkness; then up through this blackness rose high, high into the air a huge pillar of steam. This continued to rise for over an hour, with incessant thunder and lightning around the base of the hill. Rain, almost boiling hot, fell on our decks, and hissed and spluttered on the still water around the ship, compelling us to fly below or seek the shelter of tarpaulins.

“This ceased at last, and now we could see that the volcanic fire had gained the mastery; for the flames, with huge pieces of stones and rocks, were hurled five hundred feet at least into the starry sky.

“For many hours the thunderings and the lightnings over that devoted island and around the hill were such, Tandy, as I pray God I may never see or hear again. There were earthquakes, too; that was evident enough from the strange commotion in the water around us, and this was communicated to the ship. The best sailors on our brig could scarcely stand, far less walk. Towards morning it had partially cleared, although the lightning still continued to play, fork and sheet, above the base of the volcanic hill. We could now see streams of molten lava pouring down the mountain’s side, green, crimson, and violet.

“Very lovely indeed they were. But ah! then I knew the fate of those unhappy inhabitants was to be a terrible one. It would be a choice of deaths, for in less than half an hour the isle was one vast conflagration. We saw but little more of it even next day, for the lava was now pouring into the sea and a cloud of steam enveloped the scene of tragedy.

“Our decks were covered with dust and scoriae, and this fell steadily all that day.

“We had managed by means of the boats to work off and away fully fifteen miles. This was undoubtedly our salvation; for presently we were struck by a terrible tornado, and it required all our skill to keep out of the vortex.

“While it was still raging around us, an explosion away on our port quarter, where the island would be just then, seemed to rend the whole earth in pieces. Many of our crew were struck deaf, and remained so for days. Our ship shook, Tandy, fore and aft, quivering like a dying rat. She seemed to have no more stability in her then than an old orange box.

“An immense wave, such as I had never seen before, rose in the sea and swept on towards us. The marvel is that it did not swamp us.

“As it was we were carried sky-high, and our masts cracked as if they were about to go by the board. Smaller waves followed, and the gale that brought up the rear drove us far away from the scene of the terrible tragedy before the sun rose, redder than ever I had seen it before, for it was shining through the dust and débris of that broken up island.

“I left the trade soon after this, Tandy. I was tired and sick of black-birding.

“But in my own ship, two years after this, I visited the spot. The island was gone; but for more than a mile in circumference the sea was strangely rippled, and gases were constantly escaping that we were glad enough to work to windward of.

“But listen! our good little crew is singing. Well, there is something like hope in that—and in the sweet notes of Tom Wilson’s violin. He’s a good man that, Tandy, but he has a history, else I’m a Hottentot.

“Well, just one look at the sky, and then I’ll turn in, my friend. We don’t know what may be in store for us to-morrow.”

And away up the companion-way went Captain Halcott.

Book Three—Chapter Two.

"I See a Beach of Coral Sand, Dark Figures Moving to and fro."

Next morning broke bright and fair. Not a cloud in all the heaven's blue; not a ripple on the water, just a gentle swell that broke in long lines of snow-white foam on the crescent shore—a gentle swell with sea-birds afloat on it. Ah! what would the ocean be to a sailor were there no birds. The sea-gulls are the last to leave him, long after all other friends are gone, and the land, like a pale blue cloud far away on the horizon, is fading from his view.

"Adieu! adieu! away! away?" they shriek or sing, and as the shades of evening are merging into darkness they disappear. But these same birds are the first to welcome the mariner back, and even should there be no land in sight, or should clouds envelop it, the sight of a single gull flying tack and half-tack around the ship sends a thrill of hope and joy to the sailor's heart. On the deep, lone sea, too, Jack has ay a friend, should it be but in the stormy petrel, the frigate-bird, or that marvellous eagle of the ocean, the albatross itself.

Those birds floating here around the *Sea Flower* so quietly on the swell of the sea looked as happy as they were pure and lovely. No whiteness, hardly even snow itself, could rival the whiteness of their chests, while under them their pink legs and feet looked like little twigs of coral.

The morning was warm, the sun was bright; they were moving gently with the tide, careless, happy. As he stood there gazing seawards and astern—for the ship had swung to the outgoing tide—Halcott could not help envying them.

"Ah!" he said half aloud, "you are at home, sweet birds; never a care to look forward to, contentment in your breasts, beauty all around you."

Then his thoughts went somehow wandering homewards to his beautiful house, his house with a tower to it, and his lovely gardens. They would not be neglected though. It was autumn here. It would be spring time in England, with its buds, its tender green leaves, its early flowers, and its music of birds. Then he thought of his dog. Fain would he have brought him to sea. The honest collie had placed his muzzle in his master's hand on that last sad evening of parting, and glanced with loving, pleading eyes up into his face.

"Take me," he seemed to say, "and take *her*."

Her was Doris. His—Halcott's—own Doris; the lovely girl for whom he had risked so much, for whom he would lay down his life; the girl that would be his own fair bride, he told himself, if ever he returned. Ah! those weary "ifs!"

But he had looked into the dog's bonnie brown eyes.

"Friend," he had said, "you will stay with Doris. You will never leave her side till I come back. You will watch her for me."

And he remembered now how Doris had at that moment thrown herself into his arms, and strained him to her breast in a fit of convulsive weeping.

And this had been the parting.

"What, Halcott," cried Tandy's cheerful voice, "up already! and—and—why, Halcott, old man, there is moisture in your eyes!"

"I—I was thinking of home, and—well, I was thinking of my dog."

"And your Doris. Heigho! I have no Doris, no beautiful face to welcome me home. But look yonder," he added, taking Halcott's arm.

Little Nelda stood at the top of the companion-way, the sunlight playing on her yellow hair, one hand held up to screen her face, delicate, pink, yet so shyly sweet, and her blue eyes brimful of happiness.

Just one look she gave, then, with arms outstretched, rushed gleefully towards her father. Next moment she was poised upon his shoulder, and Tandy had forgotten that there was any such thing as danger or sorrow in the world.

The two men walked and talked together now for quite an hour. Indeed, there was very much to talk about, for although they had made the island at last, they had no idea as yet how they should set about looking for the gold which they were certain existed there.

They had not made up their minds as to what they should do, when Janeira rang the bell for breakfast, and with Fitz was seen staggering aft with the covered dish.

"Jane, you look happier than ever this morning. What is the matter? Has some beautiful bird brought you a letter from home?"

"De bootiful bird, sah, is Lawd Fitzmantle, and see, sah, dat is de letter from home."

She lifted the dish cover as she spoke. Beautiful broiled fish caught only that morning over the stern, but oh, the delicious odour would have revived the heart of a dying epicure!

"Babs is going to be very good to-day," said Tandy to his little daughter after breakfast.

"Better than ever, daddy?"

"Yes, much, because I'm going on shore with Captain Halcott here and two men."

"And *me*?"

"No, not to-day, dear. We're going to climb that high hill and look all round us, and perhaps put up a flag; and Ransey will let you look through a spyglass to see us, and we'll wave our hands to you. Now will you be better than usual?"

"Ye-es, I think I'll try. And oh, I'll make the Admiral look through the spyglass too, and when you see him looking through, you must wave your hand and fire your gun. Then we'll all—all be happy and nicer than anything in the whole world."

It was not without a feeling of misgiving that Halcott and Tandy left the boat that had taken them on shore, and took their way cautiously towards the bush. There was hard work before them and the two sturdy fellows, Chips and Tom Wilson, whom they had brought with them—hard work to penetrate through the jungle and to effect an ascent of the hill they had already named the Observatory—hard work and danger combined.

The crew of the boat stood gun in hand until they saw the party safe into the bush, then, more easy in their minds now, rowed slowly back to the ship. For if savages had been hiding under cover, the attack would have been made just as the party was stepping on shore.

The exploring party kept to the extreme edge of the bush after penetrating and searching hither and thither for a time, but neither track nor trail of savages could they find. But they came across several little pathways that led here and there through the jungle, and at first they could not make out what these were. They learned before long, however; for Bob, who had gone on ahead a little way, came suddenly and excitedly rushing out from a thicket. In his mouth he held something that Tandy imagined was a rat, but the shrieking and yelling behind the dog soon undeceived him, and, lo! there now rushed into the open a beautiful little boar and a sow. The former flashed his tusks in the sunlight. He wanted the baby back. It was his, *his*, he said, and his wife's. He felt full of fight, and big enough to wage war against the whole world for that baby.

Tandy made Bob drop it, which he did, and it ran squealing back to its mother. The boar, or king pig, said he accepted the apology, and would now withdraw his forces. And he accordingly did so by scuttling off again into the bush. These wild dwarf-pigs and a species of rock-rabbit were, they found afterwards, about the only animals of any size the island contained.

After this trifling adventure they fought their way through a terrible entanglement of bush, till they reached the foot of the hill.

The men had brought saws and axes with them, and were thus enabled by cutting here and whacking there to make a tolerably good road. When they reached the hill they found themselves in a woodland of beautiful trees. Walking was now easy enough, and in about an hour's time they reached the summit of the hill and sat down to luncheon.

Eager eyes were watching their progress from the ship, for the upper part of this mount was covered only with stunted grass and beautiful heaths, among which they noticed many a charmingly-coloured lizard—green with crimson markings, or pale blue and orange—but they saw no snakes.

Tandy turned his glass now upon the barque, and there sure enough was Nelda with the Admiral by her side. He waved his coat, and twice he fired his gun. From the hill on which they stood the view was lovely beyond compare. They could see well into the highland part of the island, with its rolling woods, on which the fingers of autumn had already traced beauty tints; its bosky glens; its rugged rocks and hills; its streaks of silvery streams; the lake lying down yonder in the hollow, with something like a floating garden in its centre; and afar off the vast expanse of ocean.

Look which way they would, that sea was all before them, only dotted here and there far to the northward with islands much smaller than the one on which they stood.

High up on the top of the volcanic hill a white cloud was resting, and its dark sides were seamed with many a waving line, the channels down which lava must have run during some recent eruption.

"Ha!" said Halcott presently, "now I can understand the mystery of the burned forest. At first, when we landed here, we believed that the black-birders had been ahead of us; but no, Tandy, no, it was nothing but the lava that fired the forest."

But strangely enough, however, not a sign of human life was anywhere visible.

Was there any way of accounting for this? "What is your theory, Halcott?" said Tandy. Halcott was lying on the green turf, fanning himself with his broad hat.

But he now lit his pipe. Like most sailors, he was capable of calmer and more concentrated thought when smoking.

"Tandy," he said slowly, after a few whiffs of the too seductive weed—"Tandy, we have luck on our side. Those blackamoors have fled helter-skelter at the first signs of the eruption. Nothing in the world strikes greater terror to the mind of the ordinary savage—and precious ordinary most of them are—than a sudden convulsion of nature."

Another whiff or two.

"What think you, men," he said, looking round him, "came up with the fire and the smoke from the throat of that volcanic hill?"

“Stones and ashes,” ventured Chips.

“Stones and ashes? Yes, no doubt, but demons as well—so the dusky rascals who inhabited this island would believe—demons with fire-fierce eyes, tusks for teeth, and blood-red lolling tongues; only the kind of demons that at home nurses try to frighten children with, but more dreadful to those natives than either falling stones or boiling rain.

“That is it, Tandy; they have fled. Heaven grant they may not come back. But if they do, we must try to give them a warm reception, unless they are extra civil. Meanwhile, I think that old Vulcan, at his forge in yonder hill, has not let out his fires. They are merely banked, and he is ready to get up steam at a moment’s notice.

“Why, Tandy, what see you?”

The mate of the *Sea Flower* was lying flat on the green hill-top, with his telescope resting on Bob’s back.

“I see—I—see,” he said, without taking his eye from the glass, “a little island far away, a level island it is.”

“Yes. Go on.”

“I see a beach of coral sand, dark canoes like tree-trunks are lying here and there, and I see dark figures moving to and fro, and many more around a fire. The beach is banked behind by waving plantain or banana-trees, and cocoa palms are nodding in the air.”

“Then,” said Halcott, “I was right, and those savages you see, Tandy, are the natives of this Island of Gold—for we shall call it the Isle of Misfortune never again—the very natives, Tandy, who fled from this place when Vulcan’s thunders began to shake the earth.”

Slowly homewards now they took their way, and just as the sun was westering stood once more upon the coral beach. The boat was speedily sent for them, and they were not sorry to find themselves once more on board.

Fine weather continued, with scarcely ever a breath of wind, for a whole week. But this could not always be so. The ocean that stretches from the shores of South America far across to New Zealand and Australia is Pacific by name, but not always pacific by nature, and terrible indeed are the gales and circular storms that sometimes sweep over its surface.

So, knowing this, Halcott and Tandy determined to seek, if possible, a safer anchorage or harbour.

It was with this view that they extended their explorations, and made little boat excursions round the rocky coast. These last Nelda, much to her joy, was permitted to join. Looking over the boat’s gunwale, far down into the depths of the clear, transparent water, she could see marine gardens more lovely than any she had ever dreamt of.

“Oh,” she cried, “look, daddy, look! That is fairyland. Oh, I *should* like to go down and see a mermaids’ ball.”

After rounding the promontory, with its bold, bluff cliffs frowning darkly over the deep, they came to the entrance to the river.

This river was fed by springs that rose far inland, and so wide was it at its mouth that the mariners hoped it would make a most excellent shelter and harbour for the *Sea Flower*. Alas, greatly to their disappointment, they found it barred across.

And no other spot could be found around the island coast.

By paying out the anchors; however, which, getting a firm hold of the coralline bottom, were almost bound to hold, Halcott believed the *Sea Flower* could weather almost any storm.

In this he was sadly mistaken, as the sequel will show.

It was determined now to penetrate into the highland part of the isle itself, and make their first grand plunge for gold. If this could be found in sufficient quantities, their stay on the island need be but very brief.

Book Three—Chapter Three.

“We Shall Always be Brothers Now—Always, Always.”

“Just there, Tandy,” said Halcott, as the two stood together a day or two after on the brink of a rocky chasm, at the bottom of which the river swept slowly along, dark and deep, because confined by the wet and perpendicular rocks—“just there it was where my friend, my almost brother, plunged over. He had torn up the bridge, as I told you, to save us from the black men’s axes, and so doing sacrificed his life. Ah, James! poor James!

“See,” he added, “the bridge has never yet been repaired.”

Then they went slowly and sadly away, for Tandy felt sorry indeed to witness the grief of his companion.

“How he must have loved him!” he thought. But he remained silent. Grief is sometimes far too deep for sympathy.

They saw many little pigs to-day and rabbits also, as well as a species of pole-cat. But having still plenty of provisions on board they did not hamper themselves by making a bag.

Higher up the stream now they went, and after a time found a place that could be easily forded, the river meandering through a green and pleasant valley, studded here and there with fragrant shrubs and carpeted with wild flowers.

Monster butterflies darted from bloom to bloom—as big as painted fans they were, and radiantly beautiful; but still more beautiful were the many birds seen here and there, especially the kingfishers. So tame were these that they scarce moved even when the travellers came within a yard of them. Asleep you might have believed them to be till one after another, with a half-suppressed scream of excitement, they left their perches to dive into a pool, so quickly too that they looked like tiny strips of rainbow.

Dinner was partaken of by the side of the stream, and after a time they crossed the ford.

The country was rough and rolling and well-wooded, though few of the birds that flitted from bough to bough had any song; they made love in silence.

The beauty of the colours is doubtless granted them for sake of the preservation of species, for there are lizards large enough here to prey upon them, did the birds not resemble the flowers. Their want of song, too, is a provision of nature for the same purpose.

They found the country through which they passed on their way to the lake so covered with jungle, here and there, that they had to climb hills to save themselves from being lost, having brought no compass with them.

“Ha! yonder is the lake,” cried Halcott; “and now we shall see the place where my dear girl and her mother were imprisoned; and, Tandy,” he added, “we may find gold.”

Close here, by the green banks of the little lake, and in a grove, much to their astonishment, they found a canoe.

To all appearance it had been recently used, for there were the marks of feet on the grass, and in the canoe—a black dug-out—were a native tomahawk, a kind of spear or trident, and fishing-hooks of bone, most curiously formed, and evidently only recently used.

“Look to your guns now, lads,” said Halcott, “and keep out of sight; that island is inhabited.”

Just at that moment, as if in proof of what he said, a slight wreath of smoke came curling up through the foliage of a large-leaved banana grove on the tiny island.

A council of war was immediately held. The question to be debated was: should two of their number enter the canoe and row boldly off to the grass hut, the top of which could be seen peeping grey over the green of the trees?

This had been Tom Wilson’s proposition. He and Chips, he said, would run the risk. There could not be many savages on the island. With revolvers in their hands they need not fear to advance under cover of the rifles of Captain Halcott and Mr Tandy.

“Poisoned arrows,” said Halcott, shaking his head, “speed swiftly from a bush. Spears, too, fly fast, and the touch of either means death!

“No, my good fellows, we must think of some other plan. I cannot afford to have you slain. If one or two savages would but appear, we could make signs of peace, or hold them up with our rifles.”

From his position at this moment Halcott alone commanded a view of the islet, which was barely seventy yards away. The three others were sitting on the edge of the canoe.

“Oh!”

This was a sudden exclamation of half-frightened surprise, and when Tandy looked up, behold! there stood Halcott in a position which seemed to indicate a sudden attack of catalepsy. Halcott’s shoulders were shrugged, his clenched fists held somewhat in advance, his head bent forward, eyes staring, brows lowered, and lips parted.

Halcott was a brave man, and Tandy right well knew it. The sight of a score of spear-armed savages could not have affected him thus; he might be face to face with a tiger or a python, yet feel no fear.

Thinking his friend was about to fall, Tandy sprang up and seized his arm.

Halcott recovered almost at once, and a smile stole over his bold, handsome, sailor face.

But he spoke not. He could not just then. He only pointed over the bush towards the island, and Tandy looked in the same direction.

Slowly from out the plantain thicket tottered, rather than walked, the tall figure of a white man. His long hair flowed unkempt over his shoulders; he was clothed in rags, and leaned upon a long, strong spear.

He stood there for a moment on a patch of greensward, and, shading his eyes from the sunlight, gazed across the lake, and as if listening.

"It was the long-lost James Malone."
Page 258.

Then he knelt just there, with his right hand still clutching the spear, as if engaged in prayer.

And Tandy knew then without being told that the man kneeling yonder on the patch of greensward was the long-lost James Malone himself. But no one moved, no one spoke, until at last the Crusoe staggered to his feet. This he did with difficulty, moving as one does who has aged before his time with illness or sorrow, or with both combined.

James had turned to go, when, with a happy cry, Halcott sprang out from his hiding-place, dragging with him the small canoe and her paddles.

"Ship ahoy! James! James!" he shouted, "your prayers are heard. I'm here—your old shipmate, Halcott. You are saved!"

The captain sprang into the canoe as he spoke, and soon shoved her off.

They could see now, in a bright glint of sunshine, that James's hair was long and had a silvery sheen. He gazed once more across, but shook his head. It was evident he would not credit his senses. Then he turned round and moved slowly and painfully back into the bush.

Tandy had not attempted to go with Halcott, though the canoe could easily have held two.

"That meeting," he said to himself, "will be a sacred one. I shall not dare to intrude."

It was quite a long time after he reached the island and disappeared in the grove before anything more was seen of Halcott.

Tandy had thrown himself on the beach in a careless attitude, just as he used to lounge on summer days on the poop of the *Merry Maiden* while slowly moving along the canal, and smoking now as he used to smoke then—smoking and thinking.

But see, Halcott is coming at last. He is leading James by the hand and helping him towards the boat, and in a few minutes' time both are over and standing on the bank of the lake.

"Tandy, this is James. But you know the strange story, and this is the strangest part of all."

Tandy took the hand that was offered to him. How cold and thin it felt!

“God sent you here,” said James slowly, and speaking apparently with some difficulty. “*His* name be praised. It was for this happy meeting I was kept living on and on, though I did not know it. It has been a weary, terrible time. It is ended now, I trust.” Here a happy smile spread over his sadly-worn face, and once more he extended his hand to Halcott. “Heaven bless you, friend—nay, *brother*!”

“Yes, James, and we shall always be brothers now—always, always.”

Book Three—Chapter Four.

Prisoner among Savages—Shipwreck.

Not a word about gold was spoken that night. To Halcott had been restored that which is better far than much fine gold—the friendship of a true and honest heart.

For many days James Malone was far too weak to talk much, and he told them his story only by slow degrees as he reclined on the couch in the *Sea Flower’s* cabin, as often as not with little Nelda seated on a camp-stool beside him, her little hand in his. She had quite taken to James, and the child’s gentle voice and winning manners appeared to soothe him.

His story was one of suffering, it is true, but of suffering nobly borne.

Hope had flown away at last, however. He found himself too ill to find his own living. At the very time Halcott spied him, he had come forth expecting to look his last at sun and sky, just to pray, and then creep back into the cooler gloom of his hut to die.

How he had been saved from the savages, in the first instance, is soon told. He had leaped, after he had seen every one safely over the bridge, into the deep pool with the intention of swimming down stream, hoping thus to avoid the natives, and, gaining the beach, make his way along the coast or across the promontory to join his friends on the other side.

He had got almost a mile on, and was feeling somewhat exhausted, when the river suddenly narrowed again, and before he could do anything to help himself, he was caught in the rapids and hurried along at a fearful rate.

Sick and giddy, at last, and stunned by repeated blows received by contact with stones or boulders, he suddenly lost consciousness.

“Darkness, dearie,” he said, as if addressing Nelda only, “darkness came over me all at once, and many and many a day after that I lived to wonder why it had not been the darkness of death.

“When I recovered consciousness—when I got a little better, I mean, dearie—and opened my eyes, I found myself lying in a clearing of the forest, pained, and bruised, and bleeding.

“Pained I well might be, for feet and hands were tightly bound with a species of willow. But I was alone. I thanked God for that. I had no idea how long I had lain there, but it was night, and the stars that brightly shone above me were, for a time, my only companions. They gave me hope—oh, not for this world, but for the next. I felt my time would soon come, and that, baulked in their designs on the ladies, the savages would torture and sacrifice me. In spite of my sores and sufferings, some influence seemed to steal down from those holy stars to calm me, and I fell fast asleep once more. It could not have been for long, though. I had a rude awakening. All around me, but some distance off, was a circle of dusky warriors, spear-armed. I could see their eyes and teeth gleaming white in the starlight, as they danced exultingly round and round me, brandishing their weapons and uttering their wild yells, their savage battle-cries.

“But every now and then the circle would be suddenly narrowed, as a dozen or more of the fiercest and most demon-like rushed upon me with levelled spears, and it was then I thought my time had come. But the bitterness of death was past, and now, as if mad myself, I defied them, laughed at them, spat at them. My voice sounded far-off. I could hardly believe it was my own.

“But, as if by magic, suddenly every warrior disappeared, and into the clearing stalked a savage taller than any I had yet seen. His spear was like a weaver’s beam, as says the Bible. With hair adorned with feathers, with face, chest, and arms disfigured by tattooing—the scars in many places hardly yet healed—with awful mouth, and gleaming, vindictive eyes, he looked indeed a fearsome figure.

“At each side of him marched three men carrying torches, and close behind two savages bearing a litter, or rude hammock, of branches. On to this I was roughly lifted, and borne away through the dark woods.

“But whither? I hardly dared guess at the answer to that question. To death, I felt certain—death by torture and the stake. The chief would yet, he doubtless believed, have ‘white blood’ to drink, and that blood should be mine.

“It was to the small lake island, however, on which you found me, that I was carried, more dead than alive, and here I was to be kept a prisoner until the full of another moon.

“I need not tell you how I gradually ingratiated myself into favour, first with the medicine-man, and afterwards with the king himself, whom I taught much that was of use to him in the arts of peace, till he came to consider me far more useful alive than dead. Nor am I willing to speak before this dear child of the awful rites, the mummeries, and

fearful human sacrifices that my eyes have witnessed. The wonder is, that instead of living on as I did—though life has been in reality but a living death—I did not become insane, and wander raving through the woods and forests.

“But the savages have been driven from the island at last, terrorised by the demons of the burning mountain, and I do not think that they are likely to return during the few weeks we shall be here.

“They fled in their canoes precipitately on the first signs of eruption. The boats were terribly overcrowded, and although they lightened them by throwing women and children overboard to the sharks, at least three great war-canoes were sunk before my eyes.

“It was a fearful sight! May no one here ever live to have such experiences as I have passed through.”

As soon as he could bear to listen to it, Halcott told James all his own story and that of the *Sea Flower* since she left the shores of England.

“Like myself,” said James, “you have been mercifully preserved.

“As to gold,” he continued, “I am fully aware that the medicine-man had many utensils of the purest beaten gold. They were used for sacrificial purposes; and, at one time, when the king and his warriors returned from utterly wiping out the inhabitants of an island to the nor’ard of this, and brought with them a crowd of prisoners, these golden utensils were filled over and over again with the blood of the victims, and drunk by the excited warriors. After this I never troubled myself about gold in any shape or form; but just before the exodus, I believe these vessels were hurriedly buried on the little island. If not, they have been thrown into the lake.”

“Is it in your power to tell us, James, where these vessels of gold were made, or where the gold was obtained?”

“They were fashioned, dear brother, by the spear-makers, with chisels and hammers of hard wood and stone.

“Even the medicine-man himself knew nothing of the value of the metal. It was easy to work, that was all, else iron itself would have been preferred. You ask me whence the gold was obtained. I can only inform you that the secret lay and lies with the magician himself, and that the mine is a cave at the foot of the burning mountain, probably now entirely filled up with lava. Once, and once only, was I permitted to accompany this awful wretch to the grove near which this cave is situated. I was not allowed to go further. Here I waited for a whole hour, during which time I now and then heard muffled shrieks and yells of pain and agony that made me shudder.”

“What could these have been, think you, James?”

“Can you not guess? At least, you may, when I tell you that a poor boy was forced to enter the cave with the medicine-man, but never again saw the light of day.

“I had learned by this time to talk the language of these savages, and all the information I received, when I questioned the monster, was that the demons of the fiery hill had to be propitiated.

“But he brought back with him two huge nuggets that I could see were gold.

“This was the price, he told me, that he had been paid for the *kee-wääee*. (youth).

“I never saw those nuggets again, but believe they were fashioned into spear-heads for the king.”

While Halcott and James were talking quietly down below, Tandy was walking the deck with considerable uneasiness. There was a strange appearance far away in the north that he did not like. No banks of clouds were rising, only just a curious black, or rather purple, haze. It had been so very clear all round up till an hour ago, that danger would have been the last thing Tandy would have thought about.

He looked towards the distant island through his glass at three o’clock, and it was then visible; but now, though the dog-watch had only just begun, it was wiped out, swallowed up in the mysterious haze.

But when a bigger wave than usual rolled in, and others and others followed, and when the surface became wrinkled here and there with cat’s-paws, he hesitated no longer.

“All hands on deck!” he shouted, stamping loudly on the planks to arouse those below. “Hands loosen sail! Man the winch, lads! It must be up anchors, and off!”

There was wind enough shortly to work to windward till they were quite clear of the bay, then they kept the barque away on the starboard tack, until well clear of the island.

They now worked northwards as far as possible, till the wind got too strong, when they were obliged to lie to, almost under bare poles.

Neither Tandy, Halcott, nor James could remember having encountered so terrible a storm before. No one thought of turning in that night, for, being so short-handed, every man was needed on deck.

About midnight this fearful gale was evidently at its worst. The sea was then making a clean breach over the ship from fore to aft. The darkness was intense; hardly any light was there at all from the sky, save now and then a bright gleam of lightning that lit up mast, rigging, and shrouds, and the pale faces of the men as they clung in desperation

to bulwark or stay.

Each lightning flash was followed by a peal of thunder that sounded high above even the incessant roaring of the wind.

Surely it was every one for himself now, and God for all who put their trust in Him.

It was probably about five bells in the middle-watch, the hatches being firmly battened down, when Ransey Tansey crept under the tarpaulin that covered the after companion, and lowered himself down as well as the terrible motion of the ship permitted him. He staggered into the saloon.

A light was burning in his father’s state-room, the light of a candle hung in gimbals.

Towards the door he groped his way, hoping against hope that he would find his little sister asleep and well.

“O Jane, are you here?” he said; “so glad.”

Janeira rose as he entered, clinging to the edge of the upper bunk in the endeavour to steady herself.

“Iss, I’se heah, sah. Been praying heah all de night to de good Lawd to deliber us. Been one big night ob feah, sah. But de sweet child, she go to sleep at last.”

“Did she cry much?”

“No; she much too flighten’d to weep.”

Ransey bent low over his sister, and felt relieved when certain that she was breathing and alive, for she slept almost like one in a trance.

Ransey had long since become “sea-fast,” as sailors call it. No waves, however rough, could affect him, no ship’s motion however erratic.

But just at that moment his head suddenly swam; he felt, as he afterwards expressed it, that he was being lifted into the clouds; next moment a crash came that extinguished the light and hurled him to the deck.

For a moment he felt stunned and unable to move; and now, high above the shrieking of the storm-wind, came the sound of falling and breaking timber, and Ransey knew the ship was doomed.

Book Three—Chapter Five.

Fortifying the Encampment.

The sound was that of falling masts. A sailor of less experience than Ransey could have told that.

The barque had been dashed stern-foremost upon the rocks. She had been lifted by one of those mighty waves, or “bores,” that during a storm like this sometimes rise to the height of fifty feet or more, and hurrying onwards sweep over islands, and pass, leaving in their wake only death and destruction.

After the masts had gone clean by the board, there were loud grating noises for a short time, then the motion of the ship ceased—and ceased for ever and ay.

Nelda’s voice, calling for her father, brought the boy to himself.

“I’m here, dear,” he sang out. “It is all right; I’ll go and get a light; lie still.”

“Oh, don’t leave me. Tell me, tell me,” wept the wee lass, “is the ship at the bottom? And are we all drowned?”

Luckily, Janeira now managed to strike a light, and poor Nelda’s mind was calm once more.

Bob had slept on the sofa cushions all throughout this dreadful night; but Ransey was now very much astonished, indeed, to see the stately ’Ral walk solemnly in at the door, and gently lower his head and long neck over Nelda, that she might scratch his chin.

“Oh, you dear, droll ’Rallie,” cried the child, smiling through her tears, “and so you’re not drowned?”

But no one could tell where the ’Ral had spent the night.

Under the influence of great terror, the Admiral was in the habit of “trussing” himself, as the sailors called it—that is, he close-reefed his long neck till his head was on a level with his wings, and his long bill lying downwards along his crop. Then he drew up his thighs, and lowered himself down over his legs. He was a comical sight thus trussed, and seemed sitting on his tail, and no taller than a barn-door fowl. It was convenient for him, however, for he could thus stow himself away into any corner, and be in nobody’s way.

Daylight came at last, and it was now found that the *Sea Flower* had been lifted by the mighty wave, and after being dashed into a gully in the barrier of rocks that stretched along the eastern side of Treachery Bay, had been left there high and dry.

The marvel is that, although several of the hands had been more or less shaken and bruised, no one was killed.

The position of the wrecked barque was indeed a strange one. Luckily for her the sea had risen when the tide was highest, so that she now lay on an even keel upon the shelf of rocks, twenty feet above the bay at low water.

The monster wave seemed to have made a clean breach of the lowland part of the island, and gone surging in through the dead forest, smashing thousands of the blackened trees to the ground, and quite denuding all that were left of their beautiful drapery of foliage, climbing flowers, and floral parasites.

At each side of the gully the black rocks towered like walls above the hulk, but landwards, a green bank, of easy ascent, sloped up to the well-wooded table-land above.

As speedily as possible the main part of the wreckage was cleared away. This consisted of a terrible entanglement of ropes and rigging. But the spars were sawn up into lengths that could be easily moved, and so, in a few hours' time, the unfortunate *Sea Flower* was simply a dismantled hulk.

When the work was finally accomplished, the men were permitted to go below, to cook breakfast, and sleep if they had a mind to.

But not till prayers were said, and thanks, fervent and heartfelt, offered up to the God who, although He had seen fit to wreck the ship, had so mercifully spared the lives of all.

Strange, indeed, was now the position of these shipwrecked mariners, and it was difficult for Halcott, Tandy, and James Malone to review it with even forced calmness.

The three men walked up together to the table-land to hold a council, taking no one with them.

The storm had gone down almost as quickly as it had arisen, and sea and sky were blue and beautiful once again.

Said James, as they all sat smoking there,—

"Brother Halcott, my first words are these—and I'm an older man than either of you—We must not despair!"

"We must not despair!" repeated both his shipmates.

But they did not smile, and their voices sounded almost hollow, or as if they came up out of a phonograph.

James laid his hand on his friend's knee.

"Our prospects are bad, I allow," he said, "the future looks dark and drear. We are far, far beyond the ordinary track of ships; ships seldom, if ever, come this way, unless driven out of their course by stress of weather. I think, then, brother, that we may dismiss from our minds, as useless, all hope from that direction. But dangers loom ahead that we must not, dare not, try to minimise. We are here with but limited supplies of food and ammunition, and these can hardly last for ever. The nearest land is hundreds and hundreds of miles away, the wild, inhospitable shores of Northern Patagonia. We are but eleven all told, excluding the boys Ransey and Fitz, the dear child, and Janeira—eleven working hands. Could we expect or dare, as a last resource, to reach the far-off land in two open boats? Did we attempt this, we should have to reckon, at the outset, upon opposition from the wild natives of that north island; then on the dangers of the elements during this long, forlorn cruise. Worst of all, if not an-hungered, we might perish from thirst. Tandy, you would go mad were you to see the anxious, fevered face and dry, parched lips of your child upturned to the sky, weak and weary, and praying for the drop of water you could not find to give her."

"Hush, James, hush!" cried Tandy; "sooner far we should all die where we are."

"I do not mention these matters to worry you, men, but that, knowing our dangers, we may be prepared to face them.

"Then," he continued, "there is the king of this island and his warriors to be thought about. Fools, indeed, were we did we not reckon on these, for they constitute the danger that presses most, now that we are wrecked—the danger, probably, first to be faced."

"You think, then, they will return?"

James Malone pointed to the far-off volcanic hill, which was once more belching forth smoke.

"They will return," he said, "when yonder cloud rests no longer on the mountain top.

"Yes, brother, it might be possible to make friends of them. But I doubt it. Treachery is written on every lineament of their black and fearsome faces. I should never, never trust them.

"And now, men," he continued, after a thoughtful pause, "I have painted our situation in its darkest colours. Let us see, then, where the light comes in. The light and the hope."

As he spoke he took from his bosom a little Bible and those big horn "specs" that Halcott mentioned in his story. These last he mounted on his nose, and turning over the leaves read solemnly as follows:—

"'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

"'Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the

sea.

"'The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved; He uttered his voice, the earth melted.

"'The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Amen!'

"In these words," said James closing the book, "and in many such promises, do I place my hope and confidence. God heard *my* prayers before, gentlemen. He will hear *ours* now. I think our deliverance will come about in some strange way. Just let us trust."

But James Malone's religion was of a very practical kind. "Trust in God, and keep your powder dry," are words that have been attributed to Cromwell. They are to the point.

"*Fortuna favet fortibus*," (fortune favours the brave), you know, reader; and it is wrong to expect God to help us to do that which He has given us the power to do for ourselves.

"And now, gentlemen," said James, rising to his feet, "let us work."

"The first thing to be considered, then," said Halcott, "is, I think you will agree with me, James, our defence."

"That is so," said James quietly. "The savages will come sooner or later, I fear, and it is but little likely they will come prepared to shake us by the hand and make friends with us. Even if they did, I should be prepared to fight them, for you never know what might happen."

"Right, James, right. We may be thankful anyhow that as yet we are all spared and well. Now, you just have the hands lay aft, and tell them, brother, in your convincing way, how matters stand. Speak to them as you spoke to us."

James answered never a word, but went straight down the green declivity and boarded the vessel. He did not ask the men to come to the quarterdeck—James was non-demonstrative in all his methods. He would have no "laying aft" business. This was too much man-of-war fashion for him, so he simply went forward to the forecastle and beckoned the few hands around him.

A minute or two after this Halcott and Tandy, still lying at ease on the brow of the embankment, heard a lusty cheer. From their position they could command a view of the deck, and now, on looking down, behold! the brave little crew were taking off their jackets and tightening their waist-belts, and a mere tyro could have told that that meant business.

Halcott got up now; he plucked a pinch of moss, and after plugging his pipe therewith he placed it carefully away in his jacket pocket.

That meant business also.

"Come, Tandy," he said, and both descended.

The position, it must be admitted, was one which it would be rather difficult for so small a garrison to defend successfully.

The vessel, as I have already said, had been dashed stern on to the rocks and into the gully, and the jibboom hung over a black, slippery precipice that descended sheer down into the sea. This cliff, however, was not so slippery but that it might afford foothold for naked savages. It must be included, therefore, in the plan of defence.

But from the cliffs that rose on each side of the ship an enemy could attack her, and the deck below would then be quite at the mercy of their poisoned spears and their clouds of arrows, while the bank astern which sloped upwards to the table-land could easily be rushed by a determined foe.

An outer line of defence was therefore imperative; in fact this would be of as much service to these Crusoes as the Channel Fleet is to the British Islands.

This part of the work was therefore the first to be commenced, and merrily indeed the men set to work. They began by clearing away the bush all round the gully where the *Sea Flower* lay, to the extent of forty yards, being determined to leave not a single shrub behind which a savage might conceal himself. Everything cut down was hauled to the top of the cliff and trundled into the sea. To have lit a fire and burned it would have invited the attention of the natives on that far-off island, and a visit of curiosity on their part would have ended disastrously for the shipwrecked party.

It took days to clear the bush away, and not only the men but the officers as well bore a hand and slaved away right cheerfully.

No one was left on board except Ransey Tansey himself, the nigger boy, and Janeira. Nelda insisted on going on shore with the working party, the marvellous crane flew down from the hulk, and Bob was always lowered gently over the side. These three were the superintendents, as Halcott called them; they had nothing to do but play about, it is true, but their very happiness inspired the men and made the work more easy. The other three—those left on board—had work to do, for on them devolved the duty of preparing the meals for all hands; and in this duty they never failed.

Well, the jungle was cleared at last, and this clearance, it was determined, should be extended and made double the width at least.

And now began the hard labour and toil of erecting the stockade, and in this strength was of very great importance. But it was not everything. The wooden wall must be built on scientific principles, so that a volley could be fired on an enemy attacking from any direction.

The building of this fortification, with its strong-barred gate, took our Crusoes quite a month. No one can marvel at this, if they bear in mind that the trees had to be cut down in the woods, and dragged all the way to the cliff before they could be fashioned and put into place; that the rain sometimes put a stop to work entirely, so heavy and incessant was it; and, moreover, that the men suffered a good deal from the bites of poisonous and loathsome insects, such as centipedes and scorpions. The wounds made by either of these had to be cauterised at once, else serious results would have followed.

At last the palisade and gate were finished, loopholed, and plentifully studded with sharp nails and spikes outside.

After this the little garrison breathed more freely. There was much to be done yet, however, before they could sleep in security.

Book Three—Chapter Six.

An Awful Secret of the Sea.

Having finished the first line of defence, attention was turned to the inner works.

How best could the Crusoes repel boarders if the palisade were carried, and a rush made down the embankment with the view of attacking the ship?

It was some time before this question could be answered with any degree of satisfaction.

I think that the plan finally adopted was the best under the circumstances.

During such an attack, not only would the defenders have to do all they could to stop a rush down the sloping bank, but protect themselves also from the spears that would be hurled at them from the cliffs above.

An inner palisade was therefore erected, not so strong as the other; and right over the after part of the quarterdeck, and round a portion of its bulwarks, a shed was erected, under which the men could work their rifles and the great gun with comparative safety.

If the outer line should be broken through, the savages would no doubt attack in their fullest force, and a gun loaded with grape-shot would play awful havoc in their ranks; and boiling water from the donkey engine would in all probability suggest to the enemy the advisability of a quick retreat.

Nevertheless, the outlook, even should they be thus repelled, would be a black one, and a state of siege could only have one sad ending.

But let me not be "too previous," as humourists say.

So quickly does time slip away when a person is busy that when, one morning at breakfast, James Malone said quietly, "Men, we have been here for just two months to-day," Halcott could scarcely credit it.

But a reference to the log, which was still most carefully kept, revealed the truth of what James had said.

Two months! Yes; and as yet the weather and the work had prevented them from penetrating inland in search of nature's hidden treasures.

But the rain ceased at last; and though clouds still hung around, and mists often obscured the sea for days at a time, the glorious spring time had come again, and the island was soon a veritable land of flowers.

The first visit inland was made to the Lake of the Lonely Isle, as it was called. But a bridge had to be built over the chasm, to replace that torn up by the hands of brave James Malone. This was easily formed of trees, with a rail at each side, and this bridge shortened the distance to the little lake by several miles.

The working party carried picks and spades and axes, for it was determined to thoroughly overhaul the island in search of the utensils used by the priests during their awful human sacrifices.

The isle was a very small one, but, nevertheless, it took three whole days to thoroughly search it. And every evening they returned to the ship unsuccessful, but certainly not disheartened.

Halcott told his brave fellows that if more gold were found than simply enough to pay the expenses of the voyage, not including the loss of the ship, for that was insured, they would have a good percentage thereof, and something handsome to take home to wives and sweethearts. So, although they knew in their hearts that they might never live to get home, they worked as willingly and as merrily as British sailors ever did "for England, home, and beauty," as the dear old song has it.

I may as well mention here, and be done with it, that Lord Fitzmantle, the nigger boy, very much to his delight, was appointed signalman-in-chief to the forces. Observatory Hill was not a difficult climb for Fitz, and here a flag-staff had been erected. An ensign hoisted on this point could be seen not only over all the island but over a considerable

portion of the sea as well. But Fitz received strict orders not to hoist it unless he saw a passing ship.

Bob was allowed to accompany the boy every day. Dinner was therefore carried for two, and Fitz, who could read well, never went without a book.

One day, while James and Halcott were wandering, somewhat aimlessly it must be confessed, in a wood not far from the lake, they came upon a clearing, in the midst of which stood a solitary, strange, weird-looking dead tree. It was a tree of considerable dimensions, and one side of it was much charred by fire.

“It was just here,” said James quietly, pointing to the spot, “where I should have been burned, had not Providence mercifully intervened to save my somewhat worthless life.”

Both walked slowly toward that tree, and acting like a man in deep thought, Halcott carelessly kicked it.

It may sound like a sentence read out of a fairy book when I say that a little door in that part of the tree suddenly flew open inwards; but it is nevertheless true.

“The treasure must be hidden here!” said Halcott. He was just about to plunge his hand into the hole when James restrained him.

“Stay, for Heaven’s sake, stay!” he cried excitedly. “The treasure, brother, may be there. I never thought of this before; but,” he added, “if the treasure is there, something else is there also, and we have that to deal with first.”

As he spoke, he took from his pocket a small piece of flint and some touch-paper. Then he gathered a handful of withered grass, struck fire with the back of his knife against the flint—James was very old-fashioned—placed the smoking paper in the grass, shook it, and soon had it in fire.

Then he thrust this into the hole, and ran quickly back a few yards.

“Keep well away,” he cried to his companion.

Next minute the head and neck of a huge crimson snake was protruded—hissing.

James fired at once.

It was an ugly sight to see that headless serpent wriggling and leaping on the clearing.

“That,” said James, as he seized it by the tail and flung it far into the bush, “was the chief medicine-man’s familiar. There are no snakes on the island, so where he procured it was always a mystery to me. But its possession gave the man great power over even the king himself, all believing it to be an evil spirit. And no wonder, for this ‘red devil,’ as the natives called it, although the medicine-man could handle it safely enough, was often permitted to bite a boy or a girl in the king’s presence, and the child invariably died in convulsions.”

“Horrible!” said Halcott. “Was there only one?”

“There was only one, and—it will never bite again.”

They walked back now towards the lake, and soon returned in company with Chips and Wilson armed with axes.

It was hard work, and an hour of it, too, cutting through that tree; but it fell with a crash at last—“carried away close by the board,” as Halcott phrased it.

“Now, men,” said James, “search among the débris in the hollow stump and see what you can find.”

"The men pulled out bowl after bowl of beaten gold."

James and Halcott stood quietly by leaning on their rifles.

But they laughed with very joy as the men pulled out bowl after bowl of beaten gold, to the number of seven in all. These were far from artistic, but they were large and heavy.

Inside they were black with blood.

Chips stood up and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"My eye and Betty Martin! Captain Halcott, here's a go. Why, we'll be all as rich as water-cresses."

And he joyfully tossed his hat in the air, and kicked it up again as it descended.

Chips was a queer chap.

But having now relieved his feelings, the search was proceeded with.

And when it was all over, and nothing further to be found, the inventory of the treasure now exposed to view, every article of purest gold, was as follows:—

A. Seven bowls, weighing about twelve pounds each.

B. Thirty-five spear-heads, solid and very heavy.

C. Fifteen gold daggers, similar to that brought away from the island by Doris herself.

D. Fifteen larger and curiously shaped knives.

E. One hundred or more fish-hooks.

F. Nineteen nuggets of gold of various sizes—one immense nugget weighed 149 pounds!

(The largest nugget ever found weighed over 180 pounds. It was dug up, I believe, at Ballarat.—G.S.)

No wonder these two men were excited.

"I say, sir," said Chips, "I guess you'll splice the main-brace to-night."

"That we will with pleasure," replied Halcott.

"And," cried Tom Wilson, "I'll fiddle as I've never fiddled before. I'll make all hands laugh one minute, and I'll have them all crying the next."

Poor Wilson! It was noted that this man never touched rum himself, but invariably gave his share to another.

The main-brace *was* spliced that night, and that, too, twice over. It happened to be Saturday night.

It could not be called Saturday-night-at-sea, but it was Saturday night on board a ship; and despite the fact that the vessel was but a wreck and a hulk, it was spent in the good old fashion.

An awning was always kept spread over the fore part of the ship, and it was under this that the crew smoked and yarned in the evenings.

To-night the officers had gone forward to hear Tom Wilson play.

He did make them laugh. I do not know that his pathetic pieces caused many tears to flow, beautifully executed though they were, but late in the evening—and ten o'clock was considered late on board the hulk—when Halcott asked for a favourite air of his, Tom hesitated for a moment, then took up the violin.

There was a beauty of expression and sadness about Tom's interpretation of this beautiful melody that held everybody spell-bound; but when at last the poor fellow laid his instrument on the table, and with bent head burst into tears, the astonishment of every one there was great indeed.

Jack, however, is ever in sympathy with sorrow, and Chips, rough old Chips, got up and went round behind Tom Wilson.

"Come, matie," he said, patting him gently on the shoulder. "What is it, old heart? Music been too much for you? Eh? Come, come, don't give way."

Tom Wilson threw back his head and lifted his face now.

"Thank you, Chips; thank you, lad, and bless you. Nay, nay, I will not tell you to-night the reason of my stupid tears. I'm not the man to sadden a Saturday night. Come, lads, clear the decks. I'll play you the grandest hornpipe you ever listened to."

And play he did. Every note, every tone was thrilling. A dance was soon got up, and never before, not even in a man-of-war, did men foot the deck more merrily than those shipwrecked Crusoes did now.

But the queerest group there was just amidships, where Janeira herself and Fitz—all white eyes and flashing teeth—were madly tripping it on the light fantastic toe; while little Nelda and that droll old crane danced a fandango, that caused all hands, including even Tom himself, to shout with laughter when they beheld it.

The very solemnity of the crane as he curved his neck, hopped, and pirouetted, was the funniest part of the performance.

But next day all hands knew Tom's pathetic story.

"That air I played," he told them, "was my little daughter Fanny's favourite. Fanny is dead. Georgie too. He was my boy. I was rich once, but drink ruined me, and—oh, may God forgive me!—led indirectly to the graveyard gate, where wife and children all lie buried!"

Two long months more had gone by, during which the exploring party had been busy enough almost every day at the distant hill, prospecting, excavating here and there, and searching in every likely nook for the cave of gold.

But all in vain.

During all the time they had now been on the island—more than six months—never a ship had been seen, nor had any boat or canoe ventured near the place.

"Surely, surely," they thought, "some day some ship will find us out and rescue us."

One day as they were returning earlier in the afternoon than usual, for it was very hot, and they were all somewhat weary and disheartened, they went suddenly almost delirious with joy to see, on looking towards the hill-top, that the ensign was hoisted upside down on the pole, and little Fitz dancing wildly round it, and pointing seaward.

Tired though they all were, there was no talk now of returning to the wreck. But straight to the hill they went instead.

To their infinite joy, when they reached the top at last, they could see a brig, with all available sail set, standing in for the island.

I say all available sail, for her fore-topmast was gone, she was cruelly punished about the bulwarks, and had evidently been blown out of her course during the gale that had raged with considerable violence a few days before.

Every heart beat high now with hope and joy, and as the vessel drew nearer and nearer, they shook hands with each other, and with tears in their eyes some even talked of their far-off cottage homes in England.

Nearer and nearer!

A flag was flying at her stern, but to what country she belonged could not yet be made out. But they could now, by aid of the glass, see the hands moving about the deck, and some leaning over the bows pointing towards the island.

But, "Oh, cruel! cruel!" cried the poor men, and grief took the place of joy, when the vessel altered its course and went slowly away on the other tack.

So great was the revulsion of feeling now that some of the Crusoes threw themselves on the ground in an agony of grief and disappointment.

They watched the ship sail away and away, hoping against hope that she might even yet return.

They watched until the stars shone out and darkness brooded over the deep, and then a strange thing happened: a great gleam of light was seen on the distant horizon, and above it clouds of rolling smoke through which tongues and jets of flame were flashing.

The brig was on fire and burning fiercely!

Her very masts and rigging were seen for a time, darkling through the blaze.

No one thought of leaving the hill now; they would see the last of that mysterious ship.

Yes, and the last came within an hour.

An immense fountain of fire rose high into the air, lighting the sea up in one broad crimson bar from horizon to shore—then darkness.

Nothing more.

Nor were any signs of that unfortunate brig seen next day. No boat floated towards the island, nor was a single spar ever picked up along the beach.

It would be impossible to describe the feelings of the Crusoes as they went slowly homeward through the jungle, guided by Fitz and Bob.

"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." That was all the remark that James Malone made.

And the mystery of that unhappy brig none can ever unravel.

To the end of time it must remain one of the awful secrets of the sea.

Book Three—Chapter Seven.

Strange Adventures in a Crystalline Cave.

Ten months more, and not another ship was seen.

It was now two years and over since the beautiful barque *Sea Flower* had sailed away from Southampton. Not a very long time, it may be said. No; and yet it seemed a century to look back upon, so many strange events and adventures had been crowded into those four-and-twenty months, and so much sorrow and suffering too.

"Hope deferred maketh the heart sick."

Ah! the hearts of all were sad and sick enough by this time.

"Some day, some day a ship will come!"

Every one fore and aft was weary with repeating these words.

They went not now so often to the foot of Fire Hill, as the volcano had come to be called, in search of the buried cave.

A buried cave it doubtless was, covered entirely by the flow of lava from the crater, and lost, it would seem, for ever.

But whole days would be spent in rambling about in search of the only kind of game the lonely island afforded, those small black pigs and the rock-rabbits, or in fishing by stream or at sea.

When I say "at sea," it must not be imagined that they fished in Treachery Bay. No; for to have done so would doubtless have invited the attention of the savages, and they might have paid the island a visit that would have been very little relished. Natives of those South Pacific islands have keen eyesight.

But the dinghy boat had been hauled right across the island and launched in a little bay there. A cave was found, and this formed a capital boat-house, for it rose so high behind that the tide could not reach it.

The time had come when fishing was very necessary indeed, for well "found" though the *Sea Flower* had been,

especially with all kinds of tinned provisions and biscuits, these had been nearly all consumed, and for some months back the Crusoes had depended for their support almost entirely on rod and gun. I say *almost* advisedly; for many kinds of vegetables and roots grew wild in this lonely island, not to mention fruits, the most wholesome and delicious that any one could desire.

Ah, reader, do not imagine that because you have eaten bananas, or even guavas, which you have purchased in this country, that you can form a perfect idea of the flavour and lusciousness of those fruits when gathered from the trees in their native wilds. Moreover, there are fruits in the woods of the Pacific islands so tender that they could not be carried by sea, nor kept for even a day in the tropics; and these are the best of all. So that on Misfortune Island there was no danger of starvation, unless indeed the Crusoes should have the misfortune to be surrounded by the savages and placed in a state of siege.

It was against such an eventuality that the last of the tinned meats was so carefully reserved: and the last of the coals too, because these latter would be needed for the donkey engine, to make steam to be condensed and used as drinking water.

Three times a week, at least in good weather, did a little band set out for the fishing cove, and this consisted of Ransey Tansey himself, Nelda, and little Fitz, to say nothing of Bob.

Now the cove was quite six miles away. Six miles going and six coming back would have been too long a journey for Nelda; but as the child liked to accompany the boys, and they were delighted to have her company, the two lads consulted together and concluded they must carry her at least half the way.

This was a capital plan for Nelda, and quite romantic, for the *modus portandi* was a grass hammock suspended from a long bamboo pole, one end resting on Ransey's shoulder, the other on Fitz's.

Nelda would be talking or singing all the way. But on the return journey she got down more often, because she never went back without a basket well filled with fruit and flowers.

Bob used to trot on in front always. This he deemed it his duty to do. Was he not a guard?

On rare occasions the Admiral also formed part of the expedition, but he preferred not going to sea in that wobbly boat.

When invited to embark, he would simply look at Babs or Ransey with one wise red eye, and say, "No, thank you, dear. A sea life doesn't quite suit my constitution; and if it is all the same to you, I'll just hop about the beach here until you all return."

It did not take a very long time for the children, as I may still call them, to find all the fish they could conveniently carry. Then they returned to the beach, entered the cave, and cooked their dinner.

They invariably started to go back two or three hours before sunset.

About this cave there was a kind of mystery to the imaginative mind of little Nelda, and she peopled the gloom and darkness far beyond with all sorts of strange beings.

But when one day Ransey Tansey proposed exploring it, she evinced very much reluctance to going herself.

"I'm afraid," she said; "the giants might catch me and kill me."

Fitz laughed, and Ransey assured her that the cave was not inhabited by even a single giant. It was all imagination.

"There might be snakes," she persisted, "or awful alligators."

Fitz laughed again, and Nelda felt more assured.

"You see me go, sah!" he said; "Is'e not afraid. Ha, ha! it take one much big giant and plenty big 'gator to flighten dis chile."

He ran out of the cave now, but soon came back carrying a heap of withered grass and foliage.

Then he snatched up a burning brand.

"Now!" he cried, "dis chile done go to 'vestigate."

Fitz was fond of exploiting a big word, although he never succeeded in pronouncing much more than three-quarters of it.

Presently the brave little lad disappeared, for the darkness had swallowed him up.

The cave at its other end turned to the right and then to the left, so that although Fitz lit his fire it could not be seen by those left behind.

Ransey and Nelda were becoming quite uneasy about him, when suddenly his voice was heard in the dark distance, coming nearer and nearer every moment, till he once more stood in the broad glare of day at the main entrance to the cave.

"So glad you've come back, Fitz," cried Ransey, "for we had almost given you up; we thought the 'gators had swallowed you."

Nelda, too, was glad, and so was honest Bob. He ran round and round him, barking.

The echo of the far interior took up the sound and gave back “wowff” for “wowff,” much to the dog’s astonishment. He made quite sure that another dog was hiding away in the darkness somewhere, and promised himself the infinite pleasure of shaking him out of his skin some day.

But the story of exploration that Fitz had to tell was indeed a wonderful one.

He had found an interior cave, and when he lit his fire, the sight of it, he declared to Ransey, was far more beautiful than Paradise. All around him, he said, was a mass of icicles, but all of crystal, and on the floor were hundreds and hundreds of great crystal candles.

“I not can splain (explain) propah,” he said. “Too much foh one leetle niggah boy to splain, but all about me dat cave sparkle and shine wid diamonds, rubies, and rainbows.”

So before they got home that night they made up their minds to explore the marvellous cave in company.

Nothing was said to any one else about their intention; only when they set out some days after this to go to the cave as usual, Ransey Tansey took with him several blue, red, and white lights. He determined in his own mind that this stalactite cave should be turned into a kind of fairy palace for once in a way.

He also carried a small bull’s-eye lantern, so that when lights went out they should not be plunged into darkness altogether.

They had been rather longer than usual in starting on this particular morning, and as the day was very beautiful, and the trees and flowers, butterflies and birds, all looking bright and gay, they must have lingered long on the road. At all events, it was quite one o’clock before they arrived at the cove, reached the cave, and launched their boat.

The fish, moreover, seemed to-day anxious to be caught, and excellent sport was enjoyed.

It only wanted two hours to sunset when they regained the mouth of the cave.

There would be moonlight to guide them home, however, even if they should be half an hour late.

Yes, and it was a full moon too. Mark this, reader, for with each full moon comes a spring tide!

I have no words to convey to any one the glorious sight they beheld when they at last entered the stalactite cave and lit their fire of wood and grass. Fitz had described it well—crystal icicles all around hanging from the vaulted roof, and raised high above the snow-white floor; walls of crystal, and strange, weird statues of a kind of marble.

They sat there in silent admiration until the fire began to burn low; then Ransey Tansey lit up the cave, first with a dazzling white light, then with blue, and finally with crimson.

And this ended the show, but it was one that Nelda would dream about for weeks to come.

How long they had stayed in this wondrous cave they could not tell, but, lo! to their dismay, when they reached the place where they had drawn up the boat, it was gone, and the waves were lapping up far inside. The dinghy had been floated away, and they were thus imprisoned for the night.

The moon, too, had gone down, for in these seas it neither rises nor sets at the same time it does in Britain.

Little Nelda was afraid to spend the night near to the dark water. Some awful beast, she said, might come out and drag her in, so back they went to the crystal cave. Alas! it had lost its charm now.

What a lonesome, weary time it was, and they dared not leave before daylight!

The fearless boy Fitz, after many, many hours had passed, went away, like a bird from the ark, to see if the waters were yet assuaged. He brought back word that the sun was rising, but that the water was still high.

The truth is, they had all slept without knowing it, and during this time the tide had gone back and once more risen, or, in other words, it had ebbed and flowed.

The anxiety of Tandy and the others on board the hulk may be better imagined than described when night fell and the wanderers did not return. For a time they expected them every minute, for the moon was still shining bright and clear in the west and tipping the waves with silver.

Tandy set out by himself at last, hoping to meet the little party. He walked for fully two miles along the track by which they most often came. Again and again he shouted and listened, but no answering shout came back to his, though he could hear now and then the dreary cry of a night-bird as it flew low over the woods in the gauzy glamour that the moon was shedding over everything.

But the moon itself would shortly sink, and so, uncertain what to do next, he returned, hoping against hope that the children might have reached the hulk before him.

What a long, dreary night it was! No one slept much. Of this I am sure, for the lost ones were friends both fore and aft.

But the greatest sorrow was to come, for, lo! when next morning at daybreak they reached the cave, the first thing

that caught their eyes was the dinghy—beached, but bottom uppermost. Fishing gear and the oars were also picked up; but, of course, there was no sign of the children.

With grief, poor Tandy almost took leave of his senses, and it was indeed a pitiable sight to see him wandering aimlessly to and fro upon the coral beach, casting many a hopeless glance seawards.

Good, indeed, would it have been for him had tears come to his relief. But these were denied him. Even the consolations that honest James Malone poured into his ears were unheeded; perhaps they were hardly even heard.

“Death comes to all sooner or later. We do wrong to repine. Ah, my dear Tandy, God Himself knows what is best for us, and our sorrows here will all be joys in the land where you and I must be ere long.”

Well-meant platitudes, doubtless, but they brought no comfort to the anguished heart of the poor father.

It was noticed by one of the men that the strange bird Admiral, who had accompanied the search party, seemed plunged in grief himself. He walked about the beach, but ate nothing. He perched upon the keel of the upset boat, and over and over again he turned his long neck downwards, and wonderingly gazed upon the fishing gear and oars.

Then he disappeared.

We must now return to the cave where we left our smaller heroes.

Ransey Tansey’s greatest grief was in thinking about his father. It would be quite a long time yet before the tide ebbed sufficiently to permit them to leave the cave and scramble along the beach to the top of the cove. Well, there was nothing for it but to wait. But this waiting had a curious ending.

They had returned to the stalactite cave, and Ransey had once more lit his lamp, when suddenly, far at the other end, they heard something that made poor Nelda quake with fear and cling to her brother’s arm.

“Oh, it is a ghost!” she cried—“an old woman’s ghost!”

I cannot otherwise describe the sound than as a weary kind of half sigh, half moan, on a loud falsetto key.

No wonder Nelda thought it emanated from some old lady’s ghost; though what an old lady’s ghost could possibly be doing down here, it would have been difficult indeed to guess.

Bob took another view of the matter. He barked loudly and lustily, and rushed forward. It was no angry bark, however.

Next minute he came running back, and when Ransey Tansey turned the light on him he could see by the commotion among the long, rough hair which covered his rump that the fag-end of a tail he possessed was being violently but joyfully agitated.

“Come on,” he seemed to say; “follow me. You will be surprised!”

Without fear now, the children followed the dog, and, lo! not far off, standing solemnly in a kind of crystalline pulpit, was the Admiral himself. No wonder they were all astonished, or that the bird himself seemed pleased. But off the crane hopped now, the dog and the children too following, and there, not thirty yards from the place where they had been all night, was a landward opening into the cave.

It was surrounded with bush, and how the Admiral had found it must ever remain a mystery.

Ten minutes after this poor Tandy was clasping his children to his breast.

Innocent wee Babs was patting his cheek, and saying, “Never mind, daddy—never mind, dear daddy.” Childish consolation certainly, but, oh, so sweet! No wonder his pent-up feelings were relieved by tears at last.

The crane allayed *his* feelings by dancing a *pas de joie* on the coral sand. Bob gave vent to his by rushing about and barking at everything and everybody, but especially at the boat, which he seemed to regard as the innocent cause of all the trouble.

“Wowff—wowff—wow! Why did it run away anyhow?”

That is what Bob wanted to know.

But the tide had ebbed sufficiently to permit of a visit to the cave of delight, as Ransey called it.

James and Tandy, with Ransey and Fitz, embarked, the others remaining on shore.

Both men were as much delighted and astonished at what they saw as the children themselves had been. A large quantity of withered branches and foliage had been taken in the boat, to make a fire in the crystalline cave.

“But oh, father,” said Ransey, “you should have seen it last night when we lit it up with crimson light!”

“We’ll come again, lad,” replied his father.

They then made their way to the outer opening, and back once more to the inner, where they had left the boat.

It was noticed that James Malone was somewhat silent all the way back to the wreck. And so he continued during breakfast. After this he slowly arose. “Brother,” he said, laying his hand on Halcott’s shoulder, “I have something strange to tell you. Come to the cliff-top, and you too, Tandy, and bring your pipes.”

Book Three—Chapter Eight.

Entombed Alive.

It was a very lovely day now. The sea all round towards the eastern side of the island was deep and blue; but the waters to the west were here and there more shallow, so that the ocean here was patched with splendid colouring—tints of opal, tender green, and crimson were set off by the deep dark-brown of a rocky bottom, whereon masses of sea-weed waved with the ebb or the flow of the tide.

There was not a breath of wind to-day, not a whisper in the woodlands; scarce a sound was to be heard, save the drowsy hum of the waves as they broke far below on the beach of snow-white sand, or the occasional screaming of the sea-birds sailing round and round the beetling crags where their nests were.

In very joy they seemed to scream to-day. Happy birds! There was no one to molest them on this far-off beautiful isle of the ocean. No gun was ever levelled at them, not a pebble ever thrown even by Fitz; and so tame were they that they often ran about the cliff-top, or even alighted on the ship itself.

But slowly indeed to-day does James Malone walk towards the cliff. Out through the inner, out through the great outer gate; for he will not feel comfortable until he is clear of the encampment, and seated near to the very brink of that great wall of rocks.

“Gentlemen,” he said, when at last he had filled and lit his pipe with all the coolness of a North American Indian—“gentlemen, hitherto all our efforts to find the gold mine have been in vain, but mere chance has revealed to us the secret that has been hidden from us so long—”

“James,” said Tandy, excitedly, “you don’t mean to say—”

“But,” interrupted James, “I do mean to say it, Tandy. Halcott there knows that I seldom make an assertion till I have well-considered the matter on all sides.”

“You never do, brother.”

“That cave, gentlemen, which in so strange a way the children have found, is a gold mine—*the* gold mine!

“The land entrance I can now remember, although it is somewhat changed. Show me the map of the island, brother.”

Halcott spread it out before him.

He pointed out Fire Hill, then drew his finger along until it rested on the spot where the cave was.

“The fault has been all mine, gentlemen; I alone led you astray, for appearances deceived me. But it is not yet too late.

“And so you see, Tandy, that, after all, Providence has changed our mourning into joy. I do not now despair of anything. God moves in a mysterious way, brothers, and you may rest assured we shall yet return in peace to enjoy the fruits of our labours in the land of our birth.”

Halcott was silent; so too was Tandy for a time.

Need I tell you what they were thinking about? If they could but return with enough gold to give them an independence, how pleasant would be their prospects for the future!

Well, this world is not all sorrow, and it is only right we should enjoy it. I think I can honestly go further, reader, and say it is a sin not to make the best of the beautiful world we live in, a sin to look always at the darkest side when clouds surround us. Let us not believe in the pessimism of Burns when he wrote his dirge “Man was made to mourn,” a verse or two of which run as follows:—

> “Look not alone on youthful prime,
>   Or manhood’s active might;
> Man then is useful to his kind,
>   Supported is his right:
> But see him on the edge of life,
>   With cares and sorrows worn;
> Then age and want—oh! ill-matched pair!—
>   Show man was made to mourn.
>
> “A few seem favourites of fate,
>   In pleasure’s lap carest;
> Yet think not all the rich and great
>   Are likewise truly blest.
> But, oh! what crowds in every land

Are wretched and forlorn!
Through weary life this lesson learn—
that man was made to mourn."

Tandy had risen to his feet, and was looking somewhat anxiously towards Observatory Hill.

The seaman who took day and day about with Fitz in watching was at this moment signalling.

"He wants us to come up," said Tandy.

"Who knows," said James, with far more cheerfulness in his voice than usual—"who knows but that our deliverance is already at hand? The man may have seen a ship!"

Halcott and Tandy, about an hour after this, stood beside the man on the brow of the hill, with their glasses turned towards the far-off island.

They could see the beach with far greater clearness than usual to-day.

It was crowded with savages running to and fro, into the bush and out of it, in a state apparently of great excitement.

At this distance they resembled nothing more than a hive of bees about to swarm.

Independent of innumerable dug-outs drawn up here and there were no less than five huge war-canoes.

Tandy turned away with a slight sigh.

"Just as the cup of joy," he said, "was being held to our lips, ill-fortune seems to have snatched it away."

"Heigho!" sighed Halcott, "how I envy honest James for the hopefulness that he never appears to lose, even in the very darkest hours, the hours of what we should call despair.

"But look," he continued, pointing towards Fire Hill. "Not a cloud to be seen!"

"The volcano is dead!" said Tandy, with knitted brows; "and now, indeed, we shall have to fight."

Halcott took Tandy's hand, while he looked calmly into his face.

"My friend," he said, "we have come through many and many a danger side by side, and here we are alive and well to tell it. If fighting it must be with these savages, neither you nor I shall be afraid to face them. But we may succeed in making peace."

"Ah, Halcott, I fear their friendship even more than their enmity. But for my dear boy and my little girl, I should care for neither."

And now all haste back to the camp was made.

All hands were summoned, and the case laid plainly before them.

The story of the cave was told to them also, and it did Halcott's heart good to hear the ringing cheer with which their words were received.

The next thing Halcott ordered was a survey of stores. Alas! this did not take long; and afterwards the defences were most carefully inspected.

On the whole, the outlook was a hopeful one, even if the savages did come in force and place the strange little encampment in a state of siege. Their provisions and even their ammunition would last for three weeks at least.

And—and then?

Ah! no one thought of an answer to that question. They meant to do their best, and trust in Providence for everything else.

But the expected arrival of these warlike natives was not going to prevent them from finding gold, if gold there were in the Medicine-man's Cave, as it was now named.

So early next morning the discovery party had reached the landward opening. They were provided with lamps to light and hang, with tools, and with provisions for the day.

At the mouth of the cave Fitz was stationed with glass in hand, to watch for a signal to be given from Observatory Hill, in case the boats should start from the distant island.

The lamps were lit at the entrance to the cave, which was gloomy enough in all conscience.

"Surely," cried Tom Wilson, when they reached the interior and saw the great stalactites, the candles and icicles of glass, and the walls all shining with "rubies and rainbows,"—"surely this is the cave of Aladdin. Ah, it is diamonds as well as gold we ought to be able to collect here, maties!"

And now hours were spent in a fruitless search for the mine. Even the floor of the seaward cave was dug up and its

walls tapped, but all in vain.

It was not until they were preparing to leave, that, chancing to hear Bob whining and scraping not ten yards from the outer entrance, Halcott turned his attention in that direction.

A ghastly sight met their gaze! For here lay a pile of human bones half covered with dust, and half buried in the débris that had fallen from the roof.

And near this awful heap, but above it, was a hole about five feet high, and wide enough to admit two men at a time.

The excitement now was intense, but for a time all stood spell-bound with horror.

“Here,” said James, slowly, “is the spot where that fiend, the medicine-man, murdered the boys as an offering to the great fire-fiend. Now we shall find the gold. Come, follow me, men!”

He took a lamp from Tom Wilson’s hand as he spoke, and boldly entered the cave.

It was far from an inviting place where they now stood.

What did that signify to those determined gold-seekers? For hardly had they dug two feet down ere they were rewarded by finding one large, rough nugget of pure gold and several small ones.

They forgot all about the savages now, and nothing could exceed the eagerness with which the men laboured. But fatigue, at last, overcame them, and they were obliged to retire, carrying with them more of the precious ore than many an Australian digger has found during a whole lifetime.

It was very dark as they made their way through the bush; but Fitz was an excellent guide, so they got back in time for supper.

A very happy evening this was, fore and aft, and Tom Wilson seemed the gayest of the gay. The poor fellow had sinned and fallen, it is true, but surely God had already forgiven him. Tom believed so, and it was this belief, he told James more than once, that made him forget his sorrow.

“I’ll meet my wife and children on the other shore,” he said once, with a sad smile, “and they’ll forgive me too.”

In a week’s time the gold fever was at its height. And no wonder, for in whatever direction they dug nuggets were found in this marvellous cave.

The fortune of every man there was made.

But would the gold be of any use to them?

One day, about a fortnight after the wonderful discovery, something very startling occurred. Almost every hour while digging they had heard strange sounds, like the rumbling of heavy artillery along a rough road, with now and then a loud but muffled report, as of a great gun fired in the distance.

No wonder James had remarked that the heathen minds of the savages believed that a great fire-fiend dwelt deep down here, and must be propitiated with human sacrifice.

But on this particular day, after a terrible report, the earth shook and quivered, great masses of soil fell crashing down here and there, and the lamps were all extinguished.

The noise died away like the muttering of a thunderstorm in the far distance.

“Keep quiet and cool, men; we are all right. We can relight the lamps.” It was Halcott who spoke.

Yes, and so they quickly did; but judge of their horror when, on making their way to what had been the entrance to the cave, they found no exit there!

Then the terrible truth revealed itself to them—they were entombed alive!

At first the horror of the situation rendered them speechless.

Was it the heat of internal fires, or was it terror—I know not which—that made the perspiration stand in great beads on their now pale faces?

“What is to be done?” cried one of the men.

“Never despair, lad!”—and Halcott’s manly voice was heard once more—“never despair!”

His voice sounded hollow, however—hollow, and far away.

Book Three—Chapter Nine.

“On Swept the War-Canoes towards the Coral Beach.”

“It was just here, was it not,” said Halcott, “where the entrance was? Keep up your hearts, boys, we shall soon dig

ourselves clear.”

Cheered by his voice, every one set himself bravely to the task before him.

But a whole hour went by, and they were now nearly exhausted.

One or more had thrown themselves on the ground panting.

The heat increased every minute, and the atmosphere became stifling. The thirst, too, was almost unendurable.

Even James himself was yielding at last to despair, and already the lights were burning more dimly.

But hark! the sound of the dog barking. His voice seemed ever so far away, but every heart was cheered by it.

Again, lads, again! Up with your spades; one more effort.

The men sprang up from the floor of the cave and went to work now with a will.

Nearer and nearer the dog’s anxious barking sounded every minute.

At last, with a joyous cry, Bob burst through, and with him came a welcome rush of pure air.

They were saved!

Is it any wonder that when they found themselves once more out in the jungle, with flowers and foliage all around them and the breath of heaven fanning their faces, James Malone proposed a prayer of thankfulness?

They rose from their knees at last.

“We have been taught a lesson,” said this honest fellow; “our ambition was far too overweening. Our lust for gold all but found us a grave.”

They had arrived early at camp, so Tandy and Halcott determined to make another visit to Observatory Hill, for the man had once more signalled.

Extra activity was apparent among the savages in the northern island. It was evident enough now that they would not long delay their coming.

The sun set, and soon afterwards darkness fell, but still the man lingered on the hill-top.

And now they could see a great fire spring up, just a little way from the water’s edge, and soon the savages were observed dancing wildly around it in three or four great circles.

It was evident that some horrible orgie was taking place, and they might easily presume that the medicine-man was busy enough, and that a human sacrifice was being offered up to appease the fiends of war, in which those benighted beings so firmly believed.

Next day, and just after breakfast, on looking towards the hill-top, behold the red British ensign afloat on the flag-pole!

Shortly after this the signalman himself ran in.

“They are coming!” he cried; “they are coming!”

“And their strength?” asked Halcott calmly.

“Five great war-canoes, and each one of them contains at least thirty armed warriors.”

“And there may be more to follow. Humph! Well, we shall have to reckon with between two and three hundred at least. What about making overtures of peace to them, brother James?”

Now brother James, as has already been said, was a very practical kind of a Christian.

“Well,” he said, slowly and thoughtfully, “I think, Charlie Halcott, that in this case our duty lies straight and clear before us, and we’ve got to go for it. We shall just be content to make war first, and leave the peace to follow.”

Every man heard him, and the hearty British cheer they gave was re-echoed even from the hill itself.

It was agreed by all, however, that to fight these savages in the open would be but to court death and destruction to all hands.

Other tactics must be adopted. The enemy would no doubt land on the beach, and so the big gun was dragged towards the cliff-top. Here they would make their first stand, and, if possible, sink some of the war-canoes before they had a chance to land.

In savage warfare cover is considered of very great importance. It was determined, therefore, to deprive the invaders of this at any cost, so heaps of withered branches and foliage were collected and placed here and there all around the bay and close to the edge of the wood; and not only there, but on the table-land itself, between the encampment and Observatory Hill.

One of the most active young men was told off to fire those heaps, beginning at the farther side of the bay. His signal to do so would be a rifle, not the gun, fired from the top of the cliff.

In less than three hours' time the great war-canoes were quite in view, slowly approaching the land. They were still ten miles away, however, and it was evident to every one that they meant to time themselves so as to land on the beach at Treachery Bay about an hour after sunset.

Another hour went slowly by. Through the glasses now a good view could be had of the cannibal warriors. One and all were painted in a manner that was as hideous as it was grotesque. In the first boat, standing erect in the bows, with a huge spear in his hand, the head of which was evidently of gold, for it glittered yellow in the sun's rays, was a stalwart savage, whom James Malone at once pronounced to be the king. Beside him squatted two deformed and horrible-looking savages, and they also were far too well-known to James. They were the king's chief medicine-men.

At the bow of each war-canoe, stuck on a pole, was a ghastly human head, no doubt those of prisoners taken in battles fought with tribes living on other islands. There was no doubt, therefore, that their intentions in visiting the Crusoes were evil and not good, and that James Malone's advice to fight first and make peace afterwards was wise, and the only one to be pursued.

At sunset they were within two miles of the land, and lying-to, ready to make a dash as soon as darkness fell.

The gun belonging to the *Sea Flower* was a small breechloader of good pattern, and could carry a shell quite as far as the boats.

It was trained upon them, and great was the terror of the king when in the air, right above his head, the shell burst with a terrible roar.

They put about and rowed further off at once.

And now, after a short twilight, the night descended quickly over land and sea.

It was very still and starry, and in a very short time the thumping and noise of the oars told those on watch that the boats were rapidly approaching. And now the rifle was fired.

Sackbut, the young sailor, had been provided with a can of petroleum and matches, and hardly had the sound of the rifle ceased to reverberate from the rocks ere those on the cliff saw the first fire lighted. Running from heap to heap he quickly set fire to them one by one. Up on to the table-land he came next, and so in less than twenty minutes the whole of this part of the island presented a barrier of rolling fire towards the sea.

The fire lit up the whole bay until it was as bright almost as if the sun were shining on it. But the savages were not to be deterred or denied, and so on swept the great war-canoes towards the coral beach.

Yet, although they succeeded at last in effecting a landing, they had paid dear for their daring.

Seven rifles played incessantly on them, and the howls and yells that rose every now and then on the night air told that the firing was not in vain.

Only a few shots were fired from the gun, there being no time, but a shell crashed into the very midst of one of the war-canoes, and the destruction must have been terrible. She sank at once, and probably not more than ten out of the thirty succeeded in swimming ashore.

The sharks had scented the battle from afar, and were soon on the field enjoying a horrid feast.

With that bursting shell the war might be said to have commenced in earnest, and it was to be a war *à outrance*, knife to knife, and to the death.

The yelling of the savages now, and their frantic gestures as they rushed in mass to the shelter of the rocks, mingling with the crackling and roaring of the flames and the frightened screams of myriads of sea-gulls, was fearful—a noise and din that it would be difficult indeed to describe.

All haste was now made to get the gun inside the first line of defence, load it with canister, and place it where it would be most handy.

And nothing more could be done now until the savages should once more put in an appearance. So Tandy hurried on board, a sadly anxious man indeed. His anxiety was, of course, centred in his little daughter.

Janeira was the first to meet him.

"Miss Nelda?" he said quickly; "where is she, and how is she, Jane?"

"Oh," replied Jane, "she cry plenty at fuss, sah, cry and dance, but now she done go to bed, sah; come, sah, come."

And down below she ran.

Poor Nelda! There she lay in her bunk, pale and frightened-looking.

No tears now though; only smiles and caresses for her father. She had one arm round Bob, who was stretched out beside the child, as if to guard her from threatened danger.

But strange and earnest were the questions she had to ask.

Were the savages all killed, and shot, and drowned? Would they come back again? Would Ransey, and Bob, and the ’Rallie, and poor daddie be killed and roasted if the awful men came with their spears and knives, and their bows and arrows?

Tandy did all he could to assure her, and if in doing so he had to equivocate a little, surely he would be forgiven.

As they were still talking, in at the door stalked the Admiral himself. He looked more solemn than any one had ever seen him before. Poor fellow! he too had received a terrible fright, and I suppose he felt that he would never, never care to dance again.

The child called to him, and he came to the bunk-side at once, and lowering his long, beautiful neck, laid his beak across her neck. This was ’Rallie’s way of showing affection.

Then he went slowly and sadly away to the other end of the cabin, and “trussed” himself in a corner.

Tandy stopped for two whole hours with Nelda. She promised to be very good, and not to cry, even if the bad men did come back again.

Then she fell soundly asleep, holding her father’s finger.

He kissed her now and quietly left the cabin, and Janeira herself slipped in and took the camp-stool Tandy had just vacated.

The fire was by this time a long distance away, only the trees that had not been destroyed stood at one moment like black spectres in the starlight, but like rugged pillars of crimson and gold when a puff of wind swept through the woods.

Waiting and watching! Ah, what a weary thing it is! Hours and hours passed by, and if the men of this little garrison slept at all, it was on the bare ground, and with only their elbows for pillows.

But not until far on in the morning watch did the enemy show signs of activity, or give a single token of their presence.

The fire was now too far back for the crackling of the flames to be heard, though its red glare and the cloud of rolling smoke that obscured the sky told that it was still blazing fiercely. The sea-birds had gone to rest once more in the rocks, and everything around the encampment was as silent as the grave. A dread silence—a stillness like that which precedes the outbreaking of some fearful storm!

And all too soon the storm burst.

Book Three—Chapter Ten.

“An Eye for an Eye, and a Tooth for a Tooth.”

With a yell that once more scared the sea-birds, and sent them screaming in terror across the waves, a yell that seemed to awaken the echoes in every rock and hill from end to end of the island, the savages sprang to their feet, and rushing towards the palisade, made their first fearful onset.

Not twenty yards away were they when they had given voice. So quickly, too, did they rush across the intervening ground, that scarce was there time to fire a rifle volley, far less to train the gun upon the spear-armed mass, before it was close alongside and had surrounded the stockade.

In their hundreds, these fearsome savages attempted to scale it; but their bodies were frightfully torn with the spikes, and cries of pain now mingled with those of anger. The defenders ran from one part of the stockade to another, firing from the loopholes; and so densely massed together was the foe that every bullet must have found a billet. In spite of all this, several managed to get over, but were immediately shot down with revolvers, or cut down with sword or cutlass.

Small though the loopholes were, spears were several times thrust through, and as each of them was poisoned, a single scratch would have resulted in the agonised death of the receiver.

Dark enough it was, and with nothing now but the stars to direct their aim, yet the little band fought well and determinedly, and at last the foe retired, leaving scores of their dead behind—drew off, dragging the wounded away.

At that black mass, just as it was nearing the woods, and while the rifles still played upon it, the breechloader, grape-loaded, was trained and fired.

So close together were the natives that the carnage must have been terrible.

But twice again ere morning they attacked the fort, receiving the same treatment, and being obliged at last to withdraw.

When morning broke, the defenders were completely wearied out, and so the little garrison, after two sentries were set, lay down to snatch a few hours’ much needed rest. There was no fear of the attack being renewed before sunset, for darkness seemed best to suit the tactics of these sable warriors.

In the afternoon of this first day of siege a sally was made from the great gate, and seven men stood ready with their rifles, while four began to remove the dead. Each was dragged to the edge of the cliff and thrown over into the sea. When all were cleared away the gate was once more shut and barred. But though the burial must have been witnessed, no rush was made by the savages to attack them. The afternoon was spent in taking pot-shots at every figure that could be seen in the burned bush.

The next attack was made at midnight, and in a manner quite as determined as the first.

One of the *Sea Flower's* men was killed by a spear. It had been thrust with tremendous force through a loophole, and pierced the poor fellow's brain.

Tandy himself had a narrow escape. He was about to fire, but, stumbling, fell, and next moment a poisoned arrow whizzed past and over him. There was surely a Providence in this, for only fools believe in blind chance.

With the exception of the death of poor Ross, who was an able seaman, there was no other casualty that night.

The savages withdrew, but when, next day, the men of the *Sea Flower* sallied forth to remove the enemy's dead, which they succeeded in doing, it was noticed that many of the spike-nails had, during the fight, been removed. These, however, were easily replaced by others, and many more were added.

There was no attack this evening. The savages had determined to endeavour once more to propitiate their "fiend of war," and an immense fire could be seen burning at midnight in the centre of their camp, not more than half a mile from the stockade. The big gun was trained upon this, and a shell planted right in the centre of the dusky mob seemed to work great destruction, and quickly put an end to the orgie.

The terrible siege was kept up for three whole weeks, and, harassed beyond measure with the constant night attacks, affairs were becoming very desperate indeed, and the little garrison was already almost worn out. Day after day it was becoming more apparent to all that utter annihilation was merely a question of time.

A council of war was held now, at which every man was present, and various proposals were made, but few indeed were feasible.

The number of the defenders was so small, compared to the hundreds of armed savages opposed to them, that a "sally in force," as Tom Wilson who proposed this called it, was out of the question.

To attempt to make peace would only be to give themselves away. The savage king would be ready enough to promise anything, but in a few weeks afterwards not one of the poor Crusoes would be left alive.

Should they get the largest boat ready, provision her, and put to sea? Surely the ocean itself would be less cruel at its very wildest than those bloodthirsty savages.

The question had been put by Tandy himself. He was hoping against hope; he was like a drowning man clutching at straws. For himself he had no thought. He was brave almost to a fault, and, like any other brave man, was willing to die, sword in hand, fighting the foe.

> "And where can man die better,
> Than in facing fearful odds?"

But his children, especially innocent wee Nelda—ah! that was what softened that heart of his.

"My dear Tandy," said Halcott, "the idea of being once more away out on yonder beautiful and peaceful ocean, even if only in an open boat, is one that commends itself to us all, but, alas, it would in this case be but a choice of death. Even if we should succeed in eluding the savages and escaping, which I believe would be almost impossible, we could never reach the mainland."

So the council ended, and the little garrison remained precisely as before.

It was evident to all, however, that the end could not be far distant, for not only provisions, but ammunition itself, would soon give out. All hands saving Nelda were therefore put on short allowance. Coals were carefully saved, no more being used than was necessary to make steam to be condensed and used as drinking water; and not an unnecessary shot was to be fired.

But now there came a lull which lasted for three whole days and nights. Two things were evident enough: first, that the enemy were making some change in their mode of warfare; secondly, that the final struggle would soon take place—and indeed, as regards that, many of the men within the little encampment would have preferred to rush forth, cutlass in hand, and finish the fighting at once.

Most of the country was devastated by the fire that had been kindled, with the exception of a patch away south and east at the foot of Observatory Hill, on which the proud ensign was still floating, as if to give the besieged some hope and comfort.

But one day this patch of jungle, like the famous Birnam Wood, seemed to be slowly advancing towards the camp.

Tandy was gazing at it, and looking somewhat puzzled, when Halcott came up.

“That is more of their fiendish tactics,” he said; “and the scheme, I fear, will be only too successful. You see,” he added, “they are piling up heaps of branches; these will defy our rifle bullets, and unfortunately we have no shells left to fire them. Gradually these heaps will be advanced, and under cover of them they will make their next and, I fear, final attack, and it will be made by day.”

Halcott was right, and in a few days’ time the savages were within a hundred yards of the palisade. They no doubt meant to advance as near to it as possible during the hours of darkness, and with might and main attack at sunrise.

It was midnight when the movement on the part of the besiegers began, and the cover was then slowly advanced. A gentle breeze had begun to blow away from the camp, and the night was moonless and dark.

Presently a hand was laid on Halcott’s shoulder. He had been lying near the outer stockade quietly talking with James; while Tandy was in the ship’s state-room keeping his little girl company. The poor child was sadly uneasy to-night, and the father was trying his best to comfort her.

“What! you here, Lord Fitzmantle?” said Halcott.

“I’se heah, sah.”

It was probably well he said so, for excepting his flashing teeth and rolling eyes, there wasn’t much else of him to be seen.

“And you’re pretty nearly naked, aren’t you?”

“I’se neahly altogedder naked, sah. I’se got noddings much on, sah, but my skin. I go on one ’spedition (expedition) all same’s Dabid of old go out to meet de giant Goliah. Dabid hab sling and stone though; Fitz hab no sling, on’y one box ob matches. You open dat gate, sah, and I go crawl, crawl, all same’s one snake, and soon makee one big fire to wahm de hides ob dose black niggahs.”

“Brave and generous little fellow!” cried Halcott, shaking the boy’s hand. “But I fear to risk your life.”

“You no feah foh me, sah, all I do. I jes’ done gone do foh de sake ob dat pooh deah chile Babs.

“Good-night, ge’men. You soon see big fire, and you heah de niggahs fizz. Suppose dey killee me, dey no can kill de soul. Dis chile findee his way to Hebben all the same, plenty quick.”

They let the little lad out.

Whether the acute ears of the savages had heard the bolts drawn or not will never be known. Certain it is, however, that Fitz was discovered and wounded. But wounded as he was, he had the determination to light the pile.

The savages threw themselves at it, and tore at the burning branches, but this only helped to scatter the flames about.

"*The men of the 'Sea Flower' advanced in a semicircle.*"

Page 327.

Fitz crawled back, just in time to die inside the stockade.

"I go to Hebben now," he said faintly to James, who was kneeling beside him holding his hand. "I'se dun my duty I fink—heah below. I see my pooh old mudder to-night—she—she—"

He said no more, and never spoke again. The noble little fellow had indeed done his duty, and doubtless would receive his reward.

James Malone was like a wild man now.

"Brother Halcott," he cried, "summon all hands to arras, and let us sally forth and give these fiends a lesson. They have done to death this noble little fellow. Come, Halcott, come. An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth!"

He waved his sword aloft as he spoke.

So sudden and determined was the sally now made by ten resolute men that, taken thus unexpectedly, the savages became at once unmanned and demoralised.

The men of the *Sea Flower* advanced in a semicircle, and well spread out. After the first volley, the blacks threw a few spears wildly into the darkness, for the terrible conflagration blinded their eyes; but, huddled together as they were, they made an excellent target for the riflemen.

Volley after volley was poured into their midst with terrible effect, increasing their confusion every minute.

"Lay aft here now, lads!" shouted James. "Down with your guns! Charge with cutlass and revolver. Hurrah!"

High above the demoniacal shrieks of the savages and the roaring of the flames rose that wild British cheer. Next moment the revolvers poured upon the foe a rain of death.

Again a cheer. Sword and cutlass flashed in the firelight. Right and left, left and right, the men struck out, and blood flowed like water.

Towering above all was James himself, with flashing eyes and red-stained blade, his long hair streaming behind in the

breeze that fanned the flames.

Short but fearful was that onslaught. In the eyes of the terror-stricken savages every man must have seemed a multitude. And no wonder. It was death or victory for the poor Crusoes; and never before did soldier on battlefield, or sailor on slippery battle-deck, fight with greater fury than they did now.

But, lo! James has seen the king himself, with his golden-headed spear, which he tries in vain to poise, so crushed and crowded is he in the midst of his mob of warriors.

“It is I,” shouts James, in the native tongue, “I, whose blood you would have drunk. Drink it now if you dare!”

Nothing can withstand him, and soon he has fought his way towards the chief, and next moment the savage throws up his arms and falls dead where he stands.

As if moved now but by a single thought, the enemy, with a howl of terror, go rushing away and disappear in the darkness. The victors are left alone with the dead!

But, alas! the victory has cost them more than one precious life.

Here, stark and stiff, lies the brave young fellow Sackbut, who had fired the bush on the first landing of the savages.

And not far off poor Tom Wilson himself.

At first they can hardly believe that Tom is dead. He is raised partly on his elbow, and his eyes are fixed on a portrait he has taken from his bosom. Tandy, who found him, had seen that picture before. It was that of his wife.

Ah, well, he had sinned, he had suffered, but his sorrows were all past now.

Another man is wounded—honest Chips himself.

Is this all? Ah, no, for James himself, as he turns to leave the scene of carnage, leans suddenly on his sword, his face looks ghastly pale in the firelight, and Halcott springs forward only in time to prevent him from falling.

Book Three—Chapter Eleven.

Death of James.

The morning of the victory was a sad enough one in the camp of the Crusoes.

The enemy was routed, the king was slain. For a time, at least, there would be a cessation of strife. For how long no one troubled himself to consider; sorrow seemed everywhere, on board and in the camp around.

Poor James lay on a mattress on deck. Perhaps he was the only man that smiled or seemed happy. *He* knew, and Halcott knew too, that he could not last for many days, so grievously was he wounded.

Halcott, I need not say, was constant in his attendance on him, and so too was little Nelda.

The girl would sit for hours beside him, sometimes reading childish stories to him, which she felt certain, in her own mind, would help to make him better. Or she would gently pat his weather-beaten face, saying, as she did so, “Poor uncle James! poor dear uncle! Never mind! never mind!”

The dead were tenderly wrapped in hammocks which were heavily loaded. Theirs would be a sailor’s grave. Halcott himself read the beautiful words of the English Church service, the few that were now left of the brave crew of the *Sea Flower* kneeling bareheaded beside the bodies of their late comrades; more than one was weeping.

> “We commit their bodies to the deep,
And their souls to Him who gave them.”

Their shipmates just patted the hammocks, before they let them slide, in a way that was very pathetic; then down, one by one, over the cliff they dropped—

> “To lie where pearls lie deep.”

When Halcott returned one day from the cliff-top, some time after this sad funeral, there was a shade of greater uneasiness than usual on his face.

James was quick to note it.

“They are coming again?” he said quietly.

“You have guessed aright,” said Halcott. “And they are using the same tactics—coming up under cover of brushwood. There is no Fitz now to fire the heap, and our strength is terribly reduced.”

“Be of good cheer, Halcott—be of good cheer; it is God Himself who giveth the victory. But death cometh sooner or later to all.”

“Amen!” said Halcott; “and oh, James, I for one am almost tired of life.”

“Say not so, brother, say not so, ’tis sinful.”

How terrible is war, reader! The accounts that we read of this scourge, in papers or in books, seldom show it up in its true colours. We are told only of its glory—its tinsel show of glory. But that glory is but the gilded shell that hides the hideous kernel, consisting of sorrow, misery, murder, and rapine.

I am not poor Tandy’s judge, and shall not pretend to say whether the resolve he now made was right or wrong.

Just under the saloon was the magazine, and when the worst should come to the worst, and the savage foe burst through the outer barrier with yells and howls of victory, his child, he determined, should not be torn from his grasp, to suffer cruelty unspeakable at the hands of the foe. *He would fire the magazine*!

“My friends,” said Halcott, a morning or two after this, as he stood talking to his garrison of five, “the enemy is advancing in even greater force than on any previous occasion. I have but little more to say to you. Let us bid each other ‘good-bye’ just before the fight begins, and die with our swords in our hands—

> “‘Like true-born British sailors.’”

The time came at last—and the enemy too.

It was one of the brightest days the Crusoes had ever witnessed on this Isle of Misfortune. Even from the cliff-top, or over the barricade, the distant islands could be seen, like emeralds afloat between sea and sky. The volcanic mountain—so clear was the air—appeared almost within gunshot of the camp.

For hours and hours there had not been a sound heard anywhere. The monster pile of brushwood, behind which those dusky, fiendish warriors hid, had been advanced to within seventy yards of the palisade, but all was silence there. Even the sea-birds had ceased their screaming. All nature was ominously hushed; the bare and blackened country around the camp lay sweltering in the noon-day heat; and the ensign on Observatory Hill had drooped, till it appeared only as a thin, red line against the upper end of the pole.

No one spoke save in a whisper.

But with a little more excitement than usual, Halcott advanced to the place where Tandy stood, rifle in hand, his pistols in his belt, waiting like the others for the inevitable.

Halcott did not even speak. He simply took his friend by the arm and pointed westward.

A cloud lay like a dark pall on the very summit of Fire Hill.

Tandy knew the meaning of it. He only shook his head, however. “Too late, I fear!” That was all he said. But hardly had the last word been spoken, before a stranger thing than that cloud on the mountain attracted attention.

A huge, smooth, house-high billow was seen gradually approaching the bay from seaward. It gathered strength, and speed too, as it came onwards, and finally it broke on the beach in one long line of curling foam, and with a sound as loud as distant thunder.

Wave after wave succeeded it, though they were neither so high nor so swift; then silence once more prevailed, and the sea was as quiet and still as before.

Not for long though.

For a few minutes’ time every man’s senses seemed to reel, and a giddy, sickly feeling passed through the brain, such as only those who have visited countries like Japan or South America have ever experienced.

It was the first shock of an earthquake!

Peal after peal of strange subterranean thunder accompanied it, and a kind of hot wave spread suddenly over the island, like a breeze blowing over a burning prairie.

The effect of these manifestations on the enemy was marvellous. For a few moments they were dumb and silent with terror; then yells of fear arose, and they fled indiscriminately away towards the sea beach, throwing away bows, arrows, and spears, and even their scanty articles of apparel, in their headlong, hurried flight.

“The fire-fiend! He comes! he comes!”

That was their cry now, and their only cry.

In a marvellously short time they were seen swarming on the beach, and in all haste dragging down and launching their great war-canoes; and in less than twenty minutes’ time they were, to the immense relief of the little garrison, afloat on the now heaving bosom of the deep.

When Halcott ran on board the hulk, I do not think he knew quite what he was doing or saying. He seemed beside himself with joy.

“Oh, live, brother James! live! Do not die and leave us now that our safety is assured. The savages have fled, they will never return. Live, brother, live?”

“Oh, live, poor uncle! live!” cried Nelda; “live for *my* sake, dear uncle!”

Tandy was the next to rush on board, and his first act was to catch his little daughter up, cover her face with kisses, and press her to his breast.

“And now, Halcott,” he cried at last, “there is just one more shot in the big gun. Come, let us drag her to the cliff. If I can sink but a single boat, I shall be satisfied.”

But the dying man lifted his hand, and Halcott and Tandy both drew near.

“No, brothers, no,” he murmured. “Fire not the gun—the battle is the Lord’s. He alone—hath given us the victory.”

And the men knelt there, with bent heads, as if ashamed of the deed they had been about to commit.

Ah! but the tears were flowing fast from their eyes. Poor James was dead!

Book Three—Chapter Twelve.

Leaves from First Mate Tandy’s Log.

Like all the other dead, poor James Malone received the honours of a sailor’s burial on the very next day.

But, unlike the rest, he was not slipped over the cliff.

On the contrary, Halcott determined he should rest far out in the blue, lone sea, where nothing might disturb his rest until “the crack of doom.” The last words were those of Halcott himself.

So the lightest boat was dragged all the way to the beach, and there, with the body sewn up in a hammock and covered with a red flag, it was launched.

There had been no return of the earthquake, but all the previous night flames and smoke had issued from Fire Hill, and no one doubted that an eruption on a vast scale was imminent. There was, however, no danger in leaving little Nelda and her brother alone in the hulk with Janeira and Chips—who was already able to walk—for the savages were far away, indeed, by this time. So Tandy accompanied Halcott, and with them went the others—only five in all.

Not a word was spoken until the boat was beyond the bay and in very deep water.

“Way enough!” cried Halcott. “In oars!”

All sat there with bent, uncovered heads while the captain read the service; but his voice was choked with emotion, and when the shotted hammock took the water with a melancholy boom and disappeared, he closed the book. He could say no more for a time.

As a rule seafarers are not orators, though what they do say is generally to the point.

Halcott sat for fully a minute like one in a trance, gazing silently and reverently at the spot where the body had disappeared.

The bubbles had soon ceased to rise, and there was nothing now to mark the sailor’s cemetery. Though—

> “He was the loved of all,
> Yet none on his low grave might weep.”

“My friends,” said Halcott, “there in peace rests the body of my dearest friend, my adopted brother. I never had a brother save him. How much I loved him none can ever know. The world and the ship will be a deal more lonesome to me now that James has gone. For many and many a long year we sailed the seas together, and weathered many a gale and storm. Sound, sound may he sleep, while wind and waves shall sing his dirge. Unselfish was he to the end, and every inch a sailor. His last word was ‘Victory;’ and well may we now add, ‘O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?’

“Out oars, men! Give way with a will!”

They reached the shore in safety, and drew up the boat high and dry. But none too soon; for, before they got on board once more, a terrible thunderstorm had come on, with lightning more vivid than any one on the hulk ever remembered.

I have Tandy’s log before me as I write, and I do not think I can do better than make a few extracts therefrom.

“*The lost Barque, Sea Flower.*—On the rocks, in Treachery Bay, Isle of Misfortune, latitude —, longitude —, August 5, 18—. Buried poor James Malone to-day. Halcott terribly cut up. Doesn’t seem to be the same man. But we all miss James; he was so gentle, so kind, and true. We miss Fitz also. His merry ways and laughing face made him a favourite with us all. And honest Tom Wilson; we shall never again hear his sweet music. Thank Heaven that, though the thunder is now rolling, the lightning flashing, and a rain that looks like mud falling, I have my darlings both beside me! In the darkest hours I have ever spent in life, I’ve always had something to comfort me. Yes, God is good.

“The sun is setting. I never saw a sun look so lurid and red before. The thunder continues, but the rain has ceased. There are frequent smart shocks of earthquake.

“*August 8.*—Two awful days and nights have passed, and still we are all alive. The days have been days of darkness; the ashes and scoriae have been falling constantly, and now lie an inch at least in depth upon our deck. Nights lit up by the flames that spout cloud-high from the volcano, carrying with them rocks and stones and steam. There is a terribly mephitic vapour over everything. How long this may last Heaven alone can tell.”

“*August 12.*—Four more fearful days. The eruption continues with unabated horror—the thunderings, the lightnings, the showers of stones and ashes, and the rolling clouds of dust through which, even at midday, the sun glares like a ball of crimson fire.

“Poor Chips is dead; we buried him yesterday. More of us are ill. Halcott himself is depressed, and my wee Nelda cares for nothing save lying languidly on the sofa all day long. The thought that she may die haunts me night and day.”

“*August 13.*—Almost at the last of our provisions. The biscuit is finished; the very dust has been scraped up and eaten. Not more than a score of tins of *soupe en bouille* left in the ship, and about one gallon of rum. Served out to-day what remained of the salmon, and gave double allowance of rum to-night.

“Not a green thing seems to be left on the island.”

“*August 15.*—Feel languid and weary. Went to prayers to-day. All our hopes must now centre in the life to come; we have none for this.”

“*August 18.*—The strange crane lies trussed in a corner of the saloon. We force him to eat a little, and Bob sits near him and licks his face.

“To-day Bob went off by himself. He was away for hours, and we thought we should never see him again; but in the afternoon he returned, driving before him five little black pigs. Thin and miserable are they, but a godsend nevertheless.

“Lava pouring down the hill-side all night long, shimmering green, red, and orange through the sulphurous haze.”

“*August 20.*—Men more cheerful to-day. The clouds have cleared away, and we can see the sea, and the sun is less red.

“Halcott and I climbed Observatory Hill. What a scene! The once beautiful island is burnt as it were to a cinder. Trees are scorched; all, all is dead. We could not bear to look at it. But we cut down the flag-pole, and brought away the ensign. They are useless now.

“Who will be the next to die? ‘O Father,’ I cry in my agony, ‘spare my life while my little one lives, that I may minister to her till the last! Then take my boy and me!’”

“*August 22.*—Four bells in the middle-watch. I awoke an hour ago with a start. Halcott, too, had rushed into the saloon.

“‘Did you hear it?’ he cried wildly.

“Yes, I had heard.

“The unusual sound awoke us all—the sound of a ship blowing off steam in the bay yonder, far beneath us. The sound of anchor chains rattling out, the sound of voices—the voices of brave British sailors!

“‘Halcott! Halcott!’ I cried; ‘we are saved!’

“I’m sure I have been weeping. Nelda is on my knee at this moment while I write, her cheek pressed close to mine. Oh, how good God has been to me! We have fired off guns, and raised our voices in a feeble cheer, and the people have replied.

“It is no dream then.

“Surely I am not mad!

“Oh, will the morning never come? and will the sun never shine again? I—”

The log breaks off abruptly just here, and all that I have further to say was gleaned from Halcott and Tandy themselves.

The steamer, then, that had arrived so opportunely to save the few unhappy survivors of the lost *Sea Flower* was the

trader *Borneo*. The very first to welcome them when they went on board at early dawn was honest Weathereye himself. He had a hand for Halcott and a hand for Tandy—a heart for both.

“God bless you!” he hastened to say. “Ah! do not tell me your sad story now—no, never a bit of it. The *Dun Avon* brought your letters, and I could not rest till I came out.

“But run below, Halcott; some one else wants to welcome you. You’ll be surprised—”

Halcott never knew rightly whether he had descended to the saloon on wings or on his feet, or whether he had jumped right down through the skylight.

A minute afterwards, however, Doris was weeping in his arms—ah! such glad, glad tears—and Doris’s mother arose from a couch with a happy smile.

That same day, after taking all that was valuable out of the dear old *Sea Flower*—and that *all* included a fortune in gold—the hull was set on fire.

In the evening the steamer left the island, but not before Tandy and Halcott had taken the bearings of the hidden mine.

In that cave lies an immense fortune for some one some day.

Some hard work and digging will be required, however, before the fortune is finally brought to bank, and those who go to seek it must go fully prepared to fight as fiendish a tribe of man-eating savages as ever yet has been faced in the South Pacific Ocean.

Ideal voyages by sea are still to be made, although not in torpedo-boats or in *Majesties*, and this was one of them.

The Crusoes of the Island of Gold, once fairly afloat on the briny ocean, soon waxed healthy and strong again, and all hands on board the saucy *Borneo* were just as happy as happy could be.

I must admit, however, that “saucy *Borneo*” is simply a figure of speech. There wasn’t, really, a trace of sauciness about the dear, old rumble-tumble of a ship. The skipper was about as rough as they make them; so was his mate—and so were all hands, for that matter. *But* if they were rough, they were *right*, and just as Dibdin describes a seaman:—

“Though careless and headstrong if danger should press,
    And ranked ’mongst the free list of rovers,
He’ll melt into tears at a tale of distress,
    And prove the most constant of lovers.

“To rancour unknown, to no passion a slave,
    Nor unmanly, nor mean, nor a railer,
He’s gentle as mercy, as fortitude brave—
    And this is a true British sailor.”

As before, Bob and Nelda were the pets of the ship; and ’Rallie, who now did the drollest antics any bird ever attempted, kept all hands laughing from binnacle to bowsprit.

Happiness is catching. I gather this from the fact that, after watching Halcott and Doris walking arm-in-arm up and down the quarterdeck one lovely day, with pleasure and love beaming in the eyes of each, bold Captain Weathereye said to himself,—

“How jolly they look! He makes *her* happy, and she makes *him*. Blame me if I don’t make somebody happy myself as soon’s I get to port. I’m not so old yet, and neither is Miss Scragley. Ahem!”

Well, the reader can guess how it turned out. Many years have passed since the voyage home of the old *Borneo*. Doris is Mrs Halcott now. A pleasant home they have, and Tandy often visits there.

Tandy built himself a beautiful house on the very spot where the humble cottage stood; but it isn’t called Hangman’s Hall. Bob is there, and Murrams is there—good Mrs Farrow kept him while our heroes were at sea; and little Nelda—not so little now—is there, too; while, high and dry, in the gibbet-tree still roosts the droll old Admiral.

Ransey Tansey is a man now, and walks his own quarterdeck; but I did hear, only yesterday, that he will soon marry Eedie. There is no Miss Scragley any longer, however. But there is a Mrs Weathereye. Ahem!

Yes; and Weathereye and Tandy are almost inseparables, and many a yarn they spin together over their pipes.

As the canal yonder, with the sunlight glinting on its breast, goes calmly meandering through the woods and meadows green, so gently pass their lives along.

Good-bye, lads! Please, may I come again?

The End.

| Book 1 Chapter 1 | | Book 1 Chapter 2 | | Book 1 Chapter 3 | | Book 1 Chapter 4 | | Book 1 Chapter 5 | | Book 1 Chapter 6 | | Book 1 Chapter 7 | | Book 1 Chapter 8 | | Book 2 Chapter 1 | | Book 2 Chapter 2 | | Book 2 Chapter 3 | | Book 2 Chapter 4 | | Book 2 Chapter 5 | | Book 2 Chapter 6 | | Book 2 Chapter 7 | | Book 2 Chapter 8 | | Book 2 Chapter 9 | | Book 2 Chapter 10 | | Book 2 Chapter 11 | | Book 3 Chapter 1 | | Book 3 Chapter 2 | | Book 3 Chapter 3 | | Book 3 Chapter 4 | | Book 3 Chapter 5 | | Book 3 Chapter 6 | | Book 3 Chapter 7 | | Book 3 Chapter 8 | | Book 3 Chapter 9 | | Book 3 Chapter 10 | | Book 3 Chapter 11 | | Book 3 Chapter 12 |

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE ISLAND OF GOLD: A SAILOR'S YARN ***

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