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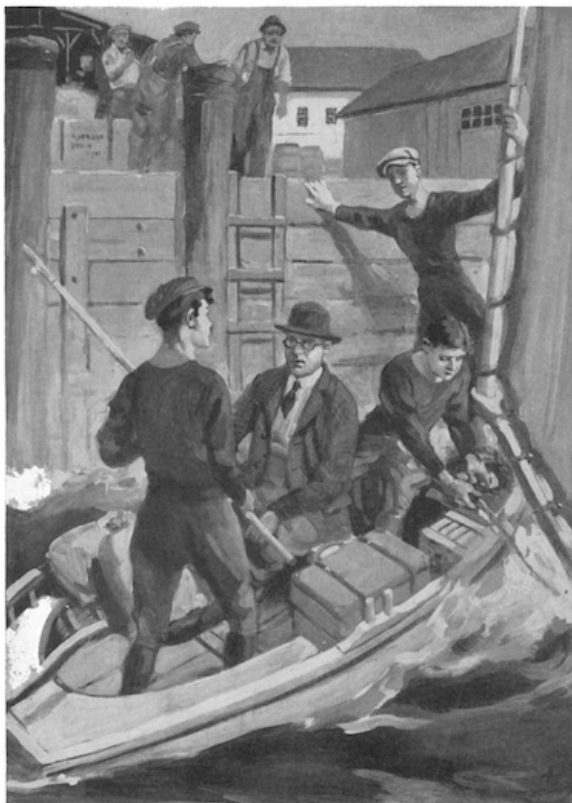
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PETER COTTERELL'S TREASURE ***

PETER COTTERELL'S TREASURE



John Tuckerman sat down carefully, "Now, Captain Hallett, give your orders."

PETER COTTERELL'S TREASURE

BY

RUPERT SARGENT HOLLAND

Author of "The Boy Scouts of Birch-Bark Island,"
"The Blue Heron's Feather," etc.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
WILL THOMSON



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I—JOHN TUCKERMAN COMES TO BARMOUTH

Tom Hallett lived in an old town on the Atlantic seaboard, a port of New Hampshire that was wedged in between the rocky coast of Maine and the sandy beaches of Massachusetts. If he crossed the broad river to the north, the beautiful Pesumpscot, by the old toll-bridge that seemed as ancient as the town itself, he came into the Pine Tree State. If he sailed to the south, he had not far to go before he reached Cape Ann. Back of him, to the west, lay the foothills of the White Mountains, and he had often tramped far enough in that direction to see the noble outline of Mount Washington rise grandly against the sky. In front—for people who live along the seacoast always think of the ocean as being at their front door—was the harbor of Barmouth, a wide semi-circle, its two horns sticking way out to the east, its broad bosom dotted with many islands. Once Barmouth town had sent many ships to sea, merchantmen to the West Indies, around Cape Horn, to the fabled lands of India and China, fishing fleets to the Grand Banks off Newfoundland, whalers to the Arctic; now, however, ships were not so plentiful, sails had given place to steam, and the young men stayed ashore to make their living rather than seek the rigors and gales that were a part of the toll exacted by Father Neptune.

Tom Hallett's house had the cupola on top of its roof that told of the old sailing days, the "widow's

watch," as it was commonly called, for from there the wives of sailors used to watch for the first sign of homebound sails. His grandfather had been a sea-captain, and the house was full of the treasures he had collected. Many a time Tom and his older sister Milly had listened to the amazing yarns the weatherbeaten mariner had spun by the winter fire.

Barmouth was an excellent place for a boy to live. There was plenty of lawn around most of the houses, the streets were wide and well-shaded, open country was near enough to be reached by a ten-minute walk. There was coasting and skating in winter—all that one could wish—and the ponds that rang with the music of steel runners in January were swimming-holes in July and tempting places to fish. And there was always the harbor and the wind from the sea, calling young sailors to launch their dories and try their skill over the rippling waves.

Tom was sixteen that summer, and wanted something to do—something a little different from his usual holiday jaunts. He told his father about it, and his father said he would think the matter over. And then one evening, as Tom was leaning on the garden gate, wishing that some adventure would come his way, he found himself addressed by a stranger.

"Do you know of a young fellow out of a job?" said the stranger. "A likely young fellow, who doesn't mind roughing it?"

Tom regarded the man. The latter was tall and spare, and wore big, horn-rimmed spectacles that gave him the look of a wise and thoughtful owl.

"Maybe I do, and maybe I don't," Tom answered, copying the cautious words and tone of voice that he had often heard his uncle Samuel Jordan, who was a lawyer, use when he was asked questions.

"You're Yankee through and through, aren't you?" said the man. "You don't want to commit yourself to anything definite until you know all the facts. I don't suppose I could interest you in buying a calico horse until you'd got out a pail of water and soap and a scrubbing brush to see if the spots would wash off."

Tom laughed; the stranger looked so extremely solemn in his big glasses, and yet his tone indicated a joke. "Even if the spots didn't wash off I'm not sure you could interest me in that horse," he retorted. "I don't see how I could use him just now."

"Well, he's not for sale, my friend. I need him out on the old farm in Illinois, where I come from." The man stroked his chin while he regarded Tom reflectively. "I'm looking for a young and able seaman, for to tell you the truth, I don't know much about salt water. I provide the grub and the boat and whatever else is needed, and the sailorman provides the lore of the sea."

Tom's interest was aroused. If this stranger really wanted a sailor to help him with a boat it seemed odd that he should be seeking information from a young fellow lounging on a gate in one of the quiet, elm-shaded streets of Barmouth. It would have been much more natural to look for such information along the waterfront, at some of the docks or piers. "Why don't you hunt up one of the captains?" Tom suggested. "They might know just the man for you."

"I don't want a man," was the answer. "I want a likely young fellow, someone about your age and general cut of jib—that's the right seafaring expression, isn't it? I've got an adventure on hand, and I want company. I wouldn't mind two, or even three, young fellows, if they were the right kind."

An adventure! Tom pricked up his ears. The man was certainly interesting, he would like to know more about him. "Where are you going to sail, and how long would you be away?" he questioned.

"My cruise will probably be limited to the islands in Barmouth Harbor, and we'd be away anywhere from a week to a month."

"Well," began Tom, "I don't know——"

"Neither do I," said the stranger, with a grin. "There are a number of things I don't know about this adventure. But then the main point about an adventure is that we can't tell everything about it in advance. Isn't that so?"

"I suppose it is," Tom granted. And after a moment's thought he added, "I know my way round the harbor pretty well, and I can sail a dory, and I've got a couple of friends——"

"Fine!" declared the man. "Do you know, it may seem odd to you, but as I came along the street and my eyes lighted on you, I said to myself, 'that's precisely the type of messmate I'm looking for; an upstanding fellow, with a good head on his shoulders.'"

Naturally Tom felt pleased. He straightened up and stuck his hands in his pockets. "The only thing I don't understand," he said, "is how you expect to find a real adventure in the harbor. Of course we could cruise around, and fish and swim. Is that what you had in mind?"

"Did you ever hear of Cotterell's Island?" The stranger lowered his voice.

Tom nodded. "Of course I have. We call it Crusty Christopher's Island around here."

"Have you ever been on it?"

"No," Tom was forced to admit. "The man who lives there won't let any one land. He's put up signs warning people off and he keeps watch-dogs."

"The island belongs to me," announced the stranger, "and I'm going to camp out on it."

Tom stared at the man in surprise. "But surely you're not Crusty Christopher!" he exclaimed. "I always heard he was old and had a white beard."

"Mr. Christopher Cotterell," explained the stranger, "was my uncle; though as a matter of fact I

only saw him once, when I was a small boy. He died last year and I have inherited his island and the house on it. The house has a history. I'm very much interested in old houses, and particularly in this one. My name is John Tuckerman."

"Well," said Tom, "that's interesting, to be sure. I hope you don't think I meant to call your uncle names."

"Oh no, you didn't offend me," said the man promptly. "I've heard him called Crusty Christopher before, and I shouldn't wonder if he deserved the nickname. There have been a number of queer characters in the Cotterell family; there was old Sir Peter Cotterell, for instance, who built that house on the island and lived there during the Revolution."

"Sir Peter?" queried Tom. "I don't seem to remember him."

"He wasn't really Sir Peter," Mr. Tuckerman explained. "He was only plain Mr. Peter, like his neighbors in Barmouth. But he had the bad taste to side with the King of England when the colonists objected to paying taxes without being represented in the government—in other words, he was what they called a Tory—and so the people nicknamed him Sir Peter in joke. There are lots of stories I could tell you about him. I'm very much interested in history, you see."

Tom nodded. The more he listened to this Mr. John Tuckerman the more he liked him. And yet simply to camp out on an island in the harbor, even on Cotterell's Island, where he had never set his foot—though he had often wanted to—didn't strike him as a very thrilling adventure.

Perhaps Mr. Tuckerman read his thought, for, lowering his voice again, he said, "There's a mystery connected with the place; I've found references to it in some old family letters. And the house is full of old furniture and bric-a-brac. I can hardly wait to explore it."

The man's tone was undoubtedly eager, and though Tom had never felt any great interest in old furniture and such things he found his curiosity rapidly rising. An island and a house to explore—Crusty Christopher's at that—and possibly a mystery. He might be making a great mistake if he let this adventure escape.

Mr. Tuckerman was speaking again. "I might as well explain at once that I'm a dreadful landlubber. I don't know anything about sailing boats, and not very much about fishing. I'm afraid my education has been very much neglected along certain lines. I want to camp on that island, and I want company. Do you know how to cook—to cook the sort of things campers eat, I mean?"

"I can cook some things. But my friend David Norton can cook almost anything. He's one of the fellows I meant."

"It would be splendid if we could get David, too. I'd take along plenty of provisions, but one does get tired of living on canned things."

"Ben Sully's a corking fisherman," said Tom. "Ben and David and I have camped out a lot together."

"I'd like to keep the expedition as quiet as I can," Mr. Tuckerman stated. "I don't want a lot of curiosity-seekers poking round the island."

"I think you're right," agreed Tom. "I'll swear both of them to secrecy; except to their families, of course. You wouldn't mind our telling our parents?"

To that John Tuckerman agreed. "This is just what I hoped to find," he said, "some young fellows with the spirit of adventure. You know the ropes, and I don't. Let's see; what's your name?"

Tom told him. "Wouldn't you like to come in and see my father?" he suggested.

"I must be getting back to the hotel," said Tuckerman. "You tell him my name, and say I'm Mr. Cotterell's nephew. You sign up to go, do you? And you'll try to get your two messmates? I'll see to the boat and grub and cooking outfit—and I think I can promise you a bit of adventure."

"If Father says yes, I sign," agreed Tom, smiling at the man's air of business. "And the more adventure there is, the better I'll like it, too. Things are sort of quiet here this summer."

Tuckerman held out his hand. He had a formal manner about him that amused Tom greatly. "See you at Lowe's Wharf at two o'clock tomorrow afternoon."

"Right," said Tom, shaking hands. "And I'll have the other two fellows there with me. They've always wanted to have a look at that island."

The tall, lank man turned, and shortly disappeared behind the big clump of lilac bushes at the corner of Wentworth Street. Tom, thoughtfully jingling a bunch of keys in his trouser pocket, chuckled as he considered the situation. In fifteen minutes this Mr. John Tuckerman, a total stranger, had persuaded him to camp out for a fortnight or so on Crusty Christopher's island. Tom could well believe that Mr. Tuckerman needed some companions who were used to the water and campcraft; he looked as if he might be a Professor and more knowing about history and such things than about how to reef a sail or hook a flounder.

Still grinning at this unusual happening, Tom went into the house, where in the sitting-room his father was reading, his mother sewing, and his sister Milly trimming a new straw hat. "I'm going camping on Cotterell's Island," he declared. "It's a sort of a secret, so you must all promise not to tell."

Milly looked up quickly. "On Cotterell's Island? If you step ashore there, somebody'll pitch you off."

"Oh no, they won't. I'm going with the owner."

Milly wrinkled her nose, as she did when she felt scornful. "I suppose that pleasant old man has

sent you an invitation. 'Dear Mr. Thomas Hallett, I should be *so* delighted if you'd drop in on me.'" And Milly tilted the straw hat on her hand so as to judge the effect of the ribbon around the brim.

Tom walked across to the fireplace, where he stood with his back to the hearth, as his father often did when he had an announcement to make. "Mr. Christopher Cotterell is dead," he said. "I received my invitation from his nephew, Mr. John Tuckerman."

Milly turned around, surprised. "What are you springing on us? Where did you meet this man?"

"Down at the gate to-night," said Tom calmly. "He wanted a likely young fellow to help him explore the house and the island he's inherited, and naturally he came to me."

"Yes, what Tom says is quite true," declared Mr. Hallett. "Mr. Tuckerman is the new owner. So he asked you to help him, did he?"

"He called himself a landlubber. I've an idea too that he doesn't want to stay on the island alone. I'm to get Ben and David, and we're to sail his boat for him and fish and cook and keep him company."

"Humph!" sniffed Milly. "That doesn't sound very exciting. You're to do the work while he loafs around."

"Oh, I don't know about that. He hinted that we might find something very interesting. He called it an adventure. And he let slip something about a mystery."

Milly put the hat down. She herself was very fond of camping and sailing and swimming, and although she pretended to be quite grown up she still yearned at times for her old tomboy ways. "I suppose he isn't going to be like Old Crusty—I mean Mr. Christopher Cotterell? He won't mind people coming out to see that queer old house."

"That's just what he does mind," said Tom. "He wants to keep the whole thing dark, for the present, at least. Why, if he didn't, all Barmouth would be going out there. Most of them never got nearer the place than to read the signs; and they'd all be crazy to go."

"Well, it seems to me," argued Milly, "if he's going to explore the house he ought to have someone out there who knows something about furnishings. I daresay there's lots of old silver and curtains and rugs and maybe chests of fine linen. Now of course a woman—well, it's only natural that a woman—you know what I mean, a woman could help a great deal in sorting such things out."

"When you say a woman," inquired Tom, "do you happen to be thinking of Miss Milly Hallett?"

Milly, in spite of her tan, flushed a fiery red. "You know perfectly well, Tom, that you've always said I was a great help on a camping party."

"So you are, Milly," Tom admitted loyally. "You cook better even than Dave does. But Mr. Tuckerman didn't say anything about bringing a girl along. I'm afraid he'd think that wouldn't be business-like."

"Tom's right, Milly dear," said Mrs. Hallett. "This is Mr. Tuckerman's affair, and it wouldn't be right to offer him any suggestions. But perhaps, while they're out on the island, he wouldn't mind if some day we went over to look at the house. When do you start, Tom?"

"To-morrow at two—that is, if father says it's all right."

"Oh, you're going to ask my consent, are you?" said Mr. Hallett, with a smile. "Well, if Mr. Tuckerman is such a landlubber as he appears to be, I think it's only right you should give him your help. I don't see how, with Ben and David and you, he can possibly get into hot water."

"He can't," agreed Milly, picking up the hat again and pretending to shiver. "The water isn't even warm around the islands in the harbor. However, I don't suppose this Mr. Tuckerman is apt to care much for swimming." And as she went on twirling the hat in her hands and puffing out the big blue bow, she hummed a little tune to indicate that she was much more interested in her millinery than in Tom's prospective adventure.

Tom walked down the street to the small, pitched-roof house—a white house with green shutters and door, and tall pink and red hollyhocks standing up against the sides—where Benjamin Sully lived. As luck would have it, David Norton was sitting with Ben on the doorstep. "Hello!" cried Tom. "I'm looking for a couple of able-bodied seamen."

"Aye, aye, sir," answered Ben. "What port are you bound for—the Barbary Coast or Barbadoes or round the Cape of Good Hope?"

Ben was a small, dark boy, agile as a monkey. When he was with David Norton he looked smaller and darker than ever, for David was big of frame and his sandy hair topped a cheerful, freckled face. These two and Tom Hallett were about of an age, and had always shared each other's secrets.

"Cotterell's Island, lads. A place where the foot of a white man has never set heel before." And standing in front of his two friends, Tom related John Tuckerman's proposal.

When he had finished, Ben nodded. "The plan sounds good to me. I've always meant to have a look at that island. As I've sized it up, Crusty Christopher wouldn't have been so concerned to keep people away if he hadn't had something he wanted to keep secret."

"I don't know about that," said David. "Some people are made that way; they just naturally don't want other folks around. Maybe the place is just like any other island."

"Well, I'm going anyhow," declared Tom. "I guess I can look after Mr. Tuckerman all right by myself. But I didn't want to seem mean and leave you two out."

Ben jumped up. "I'm going, all right. I'd hate to think of you and that ignorant fellow out there all by yourselves. Count me in on this, Tom."

"I guess your friend wouldn't get much good cooking," said David, "without me to superintend."

"Oh, I don't know about that," retorted Tom. "He's going to take plenty of good stuff."

"Canned!" snorted David. "I know—hardtack and beans out of a tin. No, siree. You'd be squabbling inside of two days if you didn't have me and some of my famous flapjacks to keep you pleasant."

"Nice, modest David," said Ben, stroking his big friend's arm. "However, though he doesn't think very well of himself, I vote that we let him come along. Maybe he'll be useful."

"You bet I'll come," announced the tow-headed one. "Do you think I'd let you two and a queer man go prowling around a mysterious island without your Uncle David? I'll be there when the boat sails, with my pet frying-pan!"

II—COTTERELL'S ISLAND

Early the next afternoon the few occupants of Lowe's Wharf—a couple of men fishing for cunners, a sailor painting the bottom of an upturned dory, two small boys practising tying various kinds of knots with odds and ends of rope—saw three young fellows in dark blue jerseys and khaki coats and trousers and a man rigged out in a homespun Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers and greenish-gray golf stockings assemble as if they were about to start on an expedition.

Tom Hallett, slender but wiry, browned by the wind and the sun, dumped his duffle-bag of blankets and extra clothing on the wharf and introduced his companions. "Mr. Tuckerman, this is David Norton, and this is Ben Sully. They'd both like to go along, if you still want three of us."

John Tuckerman shook hands with each. "I'm proud to have such a fine looking crew," said he. "Though perhaps I ought to put it the other way about and say three such fine looking captains, I myself being the crew. It doesn't need more than a glance to tell me that you three know all about the sea and the woods. Great luck, I call it. And if I'm not mistaken there's our ship, waiting for us Argonauts to go aboard."

At one side of the wharf, a man was holding the painter of an eighteen-foot sailing dory, already loaded with provisions and John Tuckerman's bags. The three boys quickly had their own things stowed away. "All right, Mr. Jackson," said Tuckerman to the man from whom he had rented the boat. "You see I've shipped a good crew. You needn't lie awake nights wondering what's happened to your *Argo*."

The owner grinned. "I know 'em. I'll trust 'em with the boat. But her name's the *Mary J. Jackson*. See, it's painted there in the bow."

"So it is. *Mary J. Jackson*. That's a very nice name; but somehow it doesn't seem exactly to suit this business. We're after the Golden Fleece, like the Argonauts of old; so if you don't mind I'm going to christen her for this trip the *Argo*. Just a little fancy of mine."

"Suit yerself, sir. She's a good boat, no matter what you call her."

"Many thanks, Mr. Jackson." John Tuckerman sat down carefully. "Now, Captain Hallett, give your orders."

The dory slid away, the experienced hand of Tom in charge of the tiller. Out into the harbor she sped, picking up the breeze as she danced along.

The afternoon sun was pleasantly warm, the water was translucent blue, with here and there wide sweeps of green, on the shore every house and tree stood out in vivid, fresh-tinted color. Tuckerman folded his arms and leaned back in great contentment. "This is something like, my lads!" he exclaimed. "My voyages heretofore have only been made on ocean grayhounds and fat-bodied ferry-boats."

Ben looked at him pityingly. "It must be pretty hard," he said, "to live inland, in a big city."

"Yes, in some ways, though it has its compensations. You see, my ancestors grew restless in New England and moved out across the plains. That is, the Tuckermans did; the Cotterells stayed here. And now there aren't any Cotterells left. That's how it came about that I own this island."

"My father," spoke up David, "says that the Cotterells were once one of the best known families in Barmouth; but that old Mr. Christopher was as queer as all get out. He knows lots of stories about him. He says that Mr. Christopher lived there with a colored man for his servant, and never saw anybody."

"Poor old chap!" said Tuckerman. "I can't help feeling dreadfully sorry for him. Think what a good time he could have had in his big house. Why, in the old days it was one of the show places along the coast and the Cotterells used to have celebrated parties." Tuckerman gazed out over the water and pulled his chin with his fingers, in a habit he had. "Do you know what I want to do? I want to take that old house and fix it up properly, make it look as it used to, and give it back its good name." He smiled. "Maybe you'll think it odd, but I feel as if houses were almost like people. I hate to see either the one or the other go to seed."

"They are something like people," Ben agreed. "There's a church with a steeple in Barmouth that looks just like the pictures of the Pilgrim Fathers with their high-crowned hats. And the windows in front look like eyes, kind of boring eyes that are trying to see right through you."

"Ben's always thinking of queer things like that," David explained, half in apology.

Mr. Tuckerman nodded at the small, dark-browed boy. "I'm glad that Ben came along. I think he's going to be a great help in fixing up my house."

In and out between islands, past long jutting ledges, where pine and juniper ran down to the water's edge, the dory sailed smoothly. Sometimes Tom had to tack; again he ran for a stretch on a course due south. And after about an hour he raised his arm and pointed. "There—on the port bow—there she lies. See that white, sandy beach. That's Cotterell's Island."

Ben and David were familiar with the look of the place of course; they had cruised around it many times, and had always examined it with particular interest because it was a forbidden shore; but now they gazed at it as though it were somehow entirely new, as indeed it was to them, except for the beach and trees.

John Tuckerman nodded. "I'll take your word for it, Tom. It lies exactly where it should according to the map of the harbor; though I can't say that it looks very much like the small red dot on the chart Mr. Jackson showed me at his boathouse."

There was not much to be seen except the whitish-yellow beach, several headlands of purple rock, and thick-growing pines that stood out black-green. There was, however, considerable to be heard as the sailing dory drew near. An immense cawing came from the tree-tops, and finally as the *Argo* nosed along close to the shore at least a score of crows flapped away from their meeting-place and went winging off to a more secluded grove.

"Uncle Christopher's neighbors don't seem to like visitors any better than he did," observed Tuckerman with twinkling eyes. "Crows do sound dreadfully scolding, don't they? And I never knew such birds for all wanting to talk at the same time."

Tom knew where the old pier stood, and brought his boat skilfully up to the landing-stage. The sail was dropped and furled, baggage and stores carried ashore, and the four campers looked about them. From the old and rather decrepit pier a graveled path led up to the front of a wide white house, partially screened by trees.

"Cotterell Hall," said Tuckerman, gazing at the ancient mansion. "That's what they used to call it in Revolutionary days. Well, Tom, it's up to you to tell us what to do. The house won't run away, and something tells me it won't be so very long before we'll be hungry."

"Suppose we look for our camping ground then," said Tom, "since it seems to be understood that we're not going to bunk in the house."

"That's the idea," agreed Tuckerman promptly. "Fond as I am of ancestral halls and that sort of thing, I said to myself when I left the Middle-West for the New England coast: 'John, you're to sleep out of doors on a bed of pine boughs, even if the bugs do fall from the trees on your face and the boughs stick you as full of needles as a porcupine. You're going back to the wild, that's what you are!'"

His eyes behind his huge tortoise-shell rimmed spectacles looked so intensely serious that the three boys didn't know whether to laugh or not. For all his dignified appearance he did seem extraordinarily guileless. David, the most outspoken of the three, shook his head solemnly. "This isn't going to be what you'd call so all-fired wild, you know. If you're looking for that, you ought to go up in the North Woods."

Ben came to the rescue. "It'll do as a starter though, Mr. Tuckerman," he said encouragingly. "We can't promise you bears or anything like that, but maybe there'll be owls and loons and other things that sound sort of strange at night."

Tuckerman smiled. "Ben, I can see you're a friendly soul. And you must remember that what may not seem very wild to experienced woodsmen like you three may prove very thrilling to a tenderfoot like me."

They decided on their camp readily; a smooth stretch of turf in a semi-circle of pines on high ground just above a small sandy beach. It was perhaps a quarter of a mile from the pier and from Cotterell Hall. Pine boughs were cut, trimmed, and spread out for bedding, stores were unpacked, driftwood collected for a fire, and the menu determined on for supper.

Tuckerman looked out at the water, a sheet of soft and beautiful opalescent colors in the setting sun. "Is there any reason why we shouldn't take a bath?" he inquired. "I feel extremely sticky."

"No reason whatever," answered Tom. "The first rule of camp-life is, Obey that impulse. There's plenty of room in that bathtub, but you won't find much hot water."

In five minutes they were all in the ocean, frisky as a school of porpoises, making enough noise to scare any wildfowl away. The boys struck out and swam, trying first one stroke and then another. Tuckerman, however, came lumbering along, jerking his arms and legs like an old and stiff-jointed frog. But he enjoyed himself. He was chuckling and gurgling and slapping his thighs with his hands as they all came out of the water.

"Tom, you must teach me to swim," he begged. "I can see I'm not in your class now, but give me a week or so—"

"Righto. I bet you'll learn quick."

In fifteen minutes they were ready for supper. Fried eggs and bacon, grilled sweet potatoes, coffee, bread and butter, and then flapjacks with jam. "I can see," said Tuckerman, as he finished his third flapjack, "that David's reputation as a cook has not been exaggerated. I always wondered what it

meant when I read that the gods lived on ambrosia and nectar. Now at last I know."

"You'll make his head swell," cautioned Ben, "and it's large enough already. We took him to a phrenologist last winter, and the man said he'd never felt such big bumps."

The dishes were washed. The moon rose. Tuckerman lighted his pipe. "Well," said Ben, "aren't we going to have a look at the old house? It seems to me we ought."

The house, when they approached it a little later in the moonlight—for Ben's suggestion had met with favor from the others—presented a blank and shuttered white surface, against which the dark outline of the trees around it showed in jagged forms. It had been a fine old dwelling, built in a day when carpenters and joiners took a real love in their work and were as eager to make a graceful, artistic window or doorway as the medieval masons of Europe were to perfect every detail of their great cathedrals.

Broad steps led up to the front door, which was wide and adorned with a big brass knocker and knob. Tuckerman, taking a little electric flashlight from his pocket, aimed it at the moulding above the door. "Aha," he exclaimed, "there's the green and gold pineapple in all its glory! They used to put beautifully carved pineapples like that in such places in colonial days; they were the emblems of hospitality. My ancestor Sir Peter seems to have been friendly disposed when he built his dwelling at least."

"I've seen pineapples like that over the doors of some old houses in Barmouth," said Ben, "but I never thought much about them. That was a pretty nice idea. There's some style to that front."

"There was style, real dignified style to the houses of those days," Tuckerman agreed. "We may think we're pretty smart nowadays, but let me tell you those ancestors of ours who settled the country could teach us a good deal." He felt in his pocket for a key. "Well, the pineapple bids us welcome. If there are any ghosts in the house, I think they'll turn out friendly."

The lock was rusty, but finally opened to the new owner's efforts. They stepped into a large hallway, from which a wide stairway ascended at one side. Using his flashlight, Tuckerman discovered a gatelegged table, on which stood a cluster of small candlesticks, all ready for use.

"Now that's something like—hospitality again!" he declared in a pleased voice. "They used candles in the old days; every guest in the house had one to light him to bed. I suppose these have been waiting for me here ever since Uncle Christopher died." Lighting the candles with a match, he handed one to each of his companions. "I'm beginning to feel at home already, boys. Welcome to Cotterell Hall."

Even David, who could see nothing very thrilling in going over an old house, felt something of the excitement that had so obviously taken possession of John Tuckerman. As for Tom and Ben, they peered up the stairway and through the open doors as if they half-expected to see gentlemen in curled wigs, knee-breeches and small swords advancing to meet them.

Tuckerman led the way into the room on the left, a spacious apartment, wainscoted and with a pictured paper, representing scenes in fields and woods, covering the walls to the ceiling. There was a large fireplace, with a carved mantel above it. Fine old pieces of furniture filled the room, and, except for the musty air that is to be found in all houses that have been closed for some time, the place looked precisely as though it were lived in, even to a pile of magazines and books that lay on the centre-table.

"The drawing-room," said Tuckerman, holding his candle high as he gazed about him. "And there, if I'm not mistaken, is old Sir Peter himself."

Ben gave a start and looked quickly around. But it was not a ghost to which Tuckerman referred; it was a large painting that hung on the wall across from the fireplace, the portrait of a man in buff-colored coat and breeches, wearing a white tie-wig, and with his right hand resting on the head of a greyhound that rubbed against his knees.

"Fine looking old fellow," said Tom.

"Yes," agreed Tuckerman. "Sir Peter was really handsome. I've seen pictures of him before. He was a great beau in his time, before the Revolution. What a shame it was that he couldn't agree with his neighbors about the right of the colonies to be free. That made it mighty hard for his wife and children."

He went over to look closer at the portrait, and as he held the candle near to the canvas he saw a folded piece of paper stuck into a corner of the heavy frame. "What's this?" he exclaimed, and drew the paper out. "You don't suppose the old fellow has left me a message?"

The candle set on the table, Tuckerman opened the sheet. "This is an authentic portrait of Peter Cotterell, painted in 1770," he read aloud. "He shared with me, his descendant, Christopher Cotterell, a dislike for the society of his kind, though for a different reason. But with me the line of the Cotterells comes to an end, and I care not whether any now learn my ancestor's secret or not."

Tuckerman dropped the paper. "So there was a secret, boys! You remember, Tom, what I told you. And Uncle Christopher knew what it was."

"Hello!" exclaimed Ben. "My candle's blown out!" He turned. "Why, that window's open a little at the bottom. See how the curtains blow."

"Spooks," scoffed David. "It looks to me as if Crusty Christopher were playing a joke on us."

Although David Norton could get around the bases on the Barmouth High School baseball diamond as fast as anyone else, when there was need of it, and could keep on doing a clog-dance in a Minstrel Show until the audience rose up and begged him to quit, he could also at times be as lazy as a jelly-fish stranded on the beach, which as everyone knows is just about the laziest creature in nature. At the present moment he lay extended on the stern seat of the sailing dory, while little Ben Sully, as patient and expert a fisherman as was to be found in Barmouth Harbor, was watching his line for any indication of a flounder nibble.

"Funny old bird," said David. "Reminds me of someone out of a story book."

"Old bird?" queried Ben. "Do you refer to Sir Peter Cotterell or to Crusty Christopher?"

"To neither of them, Benjie. Our friend Professor Tuckerman is the particular feathered creature to whom I was alluding. I opened one eye last night; and what do you think I saw? Professor Tuckerman was sitting up, in his suit of flannel pajamas, staring out at the water as if he saw something."

"Perhaps he did. Or maybe he was only thinking. Some people do think sometimes, you know, Dave. I did some thinking myself last night."

"About old Christopher's secret?"

At the moment Ben was too busy to reply. With practised care he drew up his line and threw a fine, flapping flounder on the bottom of the boat.

"Yes, about the secret," Ben said, as he rebaited his hook. "I believe there is one. And I think that Christopher Cotterell rather hoped his nephew John Tuckerman would find out what it was."

"Why didn't he tell him then, instead of leaving that crazy note?"

Ben shook his head. "Christopher wasn't like most people. But it seems to me he was rather proud of that secret,—it had been in the family so long,—and he didn't want it to be entirely forgotten. So he meant to let it be known there was a secret, even if nobody ever found out what it was. A person might do that, you know."

"It would take a mighty queer sort of person," sniffed David.

Ben resumed his fishing, watching his line as a cat watches a mouse-hole.

But David, in spite of posing as an unbeliever of all things he couldn't see for himself, had a well-developed bump of curiosity. When he saw that Ben didn't mean to continue the subject he raised himself on one arm and demanded, "Do you take any stock in there being a mystery on the island that goes back to the Revolution?"

"Sure," was the prompt answer. "The house goes back that far, and some of the furniture in it, I suppose. Why not a mystery?"

"Well, it might, perhaps. But see here, Benjie—"

"Sh-sh-ish, you'll frighten the fish." Ben brought up another flounder and unhooked it.

As he dropped in the line again he continued, "Mr. Tuckerman told me a few things this morning. You see, this Sir Peter was a man of means. He had a lot of valuable things in this house, silver and such things he'd had brought over from England. When the people of Barmouth were trying to do all they could to help George Washington and his army they thought their rich neighbor out here ought to do his share. But he was a Tory and wanted King George to win, and so he wouldn't do anything when they asked him. The colonists came to his house, but they found very little; his famous silver plate was gone; they took some things, but they always thought he had tricked them. And after that they wouldn't have anything to do with Sir Peter."

"Served him right, the old scamp."

"Now Mr. Tuckerman thinks the secret may have something to do with the things the neighbors couldn't find. At least that's a possibility."

"Huh," chuckled David, "the Revolution was more than a hundred years ago. If that was the secret, some of the Cotterells since then would have found out about it. And when they did, there's an end to the secret."

Again Ben was busy. A third flounder appeared and was carefully landed. "You're right, my boy," said Ben, "if they did find out what became of Sir Peter's valuables. But suppose they didn't? Suppose Crusty Christopher and his father, and his father before that, knew the old story, but never could find the things? How about that, my lad?"

"Well, in that case," answered David slowly, "I should say the betting was a thousand to one the secret would stay a secret."

"Mr. Tuckerman calls it a sporting chance," said Ben. "I said to him just about what you've said to me now; but he grinned and told me he never gave up conundrums."

David dropped back into his former comfortable position, his hands clasped under his head and his cap pulled down over his nose, so as to shield that sensitive feature from burning a more fiery red than it was already. "So Tom and the Professor are prowling around the old house this morning?" he said reflectively. "Well, they're not apt to run into any ghosts at this time of day."

Ben, absorbed in his fishing, continued his careful handling of his line until half-a-dozen flounders

were deposited in the boat. Then he stowed away his tackle, stretched his arms, and looked around. "Now, Dave, you old duffer, I'm going to take a cruise about our island home. There's nothing like knowing all the ins and outs of the place where you're living. Do you think you're strong enough to handle the tiller, or would you rather dangle your feet over the bow?"

David sat up with a grunt. "Don't you get sarcastic, young feller. I can sail this dory with one hand behind my back." And shortly he had the *Argo* headed up into the wind, keeping well out from shore so as to avoid the occasional spits of rock that ornamented the coast.

They started to make the circuit. Cotterell's Island, so far as they could judge from the water, was very much like all the other islands that lay out from Barmouth, thickly wooded for the most part, with alternating beaches and headlands, and here and there a cliff, with little rock-bound basins at the foot. On the eastward side, however, there was an opening, where the tide ran inland for some distance, a fair sort of harbor except when the wind should blow from that quarter. "There," said Ben, "there's a snug landlocked channel. If I'd been one of the Cotterells and wanted to keep a boat hidden that's the place I'd have picked out."

"You're making the Professor's ancestors sound like pirates or smugglers," objected David. "What do you think they did that they wanted to keep so dark?"

"That little inlet can't be so far from the back of the house either," Ben went on, paying no attention to his companion's question. "Yes, that would be the place to steal away when the neighbors came to call."

"I'll take a look up there," declared David, who was beginning to feel that Ben was giving himself airs. "I guess I can find my way up that inlet as well as any of your blessed Cotterells could." And suiting the act to the word, he brought the *Argo* about and kept her bow a little to the north of west until she had cleared a seaweed-covered reef that was high up out of the water at ebb-tide.

Ben said not a word, but picked up a boathook, in case it should be necessary to fend off the dory at some turn of the shore. But David knew his business. Up the winding channel he made his way until the *Argo's* bottom gently ran on to gravel at the head of the stream.

"Yes, I was right," said Ben. "There's the roof of the house on the other side of those trees." A leap, and he landed on shore, the dory careening on one side from the force of his jump.

"Hi there, young feller, what are you trying to do?" cried David. "I didn't tell you you could go ashore."

Again Ben paid no attention to the other's words. He was looking about him as if he was very much interested in the place where he had landed.

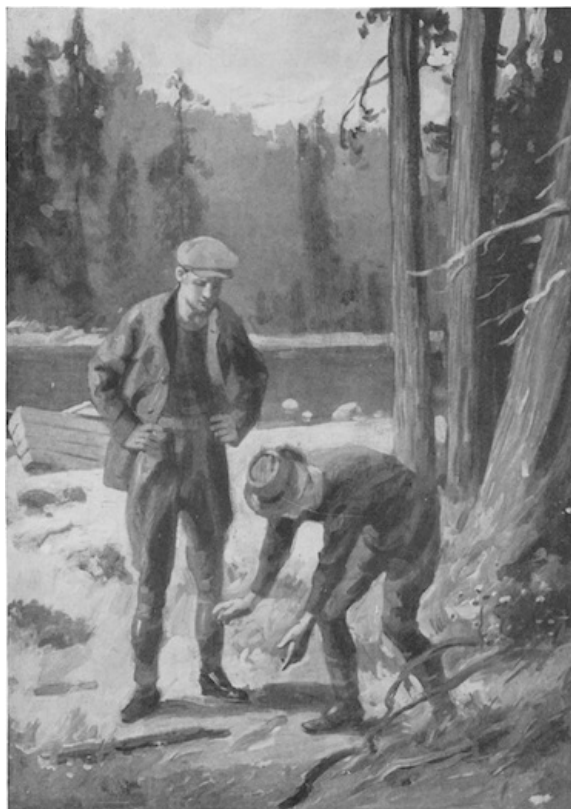
David, making sure the *Argo* was safely aground, clambered over the side. "Was it your intention, Mr. Sully, to scuttle our good ship here?" he inquired with mock politeness.

"Look," said Ben, in a deep and earnest tone.

David looked. In the marshy ground a little in front of them were two distinct footprints, uncommonly large footprints, with very wide toes and very deep heels.

"My word!" whistled David. "Benjie, we've come to the lair of the mastodon!"

"Footprints!" murmured Ben, regarding the marks with the same awed surprise with which Robinson Crusoe first gazed at the prints in the sand of his island.



"A giant's footprints," said David.

"They're never Mr. Tuckerman's or Tom's," said Ben.

"The Professor has rather small feet," stated David, "and I happen to remember that Tom wore sneakers this morning."

"They can't have been there very long,—not for more than a few days at the most."

"I should say not. Benjamin, somebody has been trespassing on our island."

"I wonder if there are any more." Ben began to search.

There were no more footprints, however. The stretch of soggy ground was very limited, almost immediately the soil grew stony. So, after a brief hunt, the two came back to the shore. "Now I wonder," mused Ben, "what that very large-footed person was doing here."

"Do you think," asked David, "he can have been looking for the Cotterell treasure?"

"It's much more likely," said Ben, "he was looking for something easier to find. However—suppose—there's an off chance——" And Ben went on mumbling to himself, while he jingled a bunch of keys in his pocket, as was his custom when he was lost in thought.

"What in the world are you doing?" demanded the exasperated David.

"Putting two and two together—or at least trying to."

"Well, they make four. There are times, Benjie," David continued, imitating the manner of a teacher at the school they both attended, "when I find myself almost on the point of losing patience with you. The crew will now return aboard the *Argo*, leaving the mystery of the mastodon's footprints unsolved."

When they returned to the beach in front of their camp they found Mr. Tuckerman and Tom already getting dinner. That is to say, Tom was actually getting it, while John Tuckerman was carrying out his orders. At the moment the latter was peeling potatoes. His flannel shirt open at his throat, his golf-stockings stuck full of little burrs and his face and arms already showing blisters of sunburn, he looked decidedly different from the very dignified person who had come upon Tom Hallett in the lane.

"Flounders," announced Ben, laying his string of fish on a board that served as a table. "The very best eating, in my humble opinion."

"Put them in the refrigerator for supper," said Tom. "You two were gone so long I decided to knock up an omelette for our midday meal."

"'Knock up' is good," agreed David. "I suppose, Mr. Tuckerman, Tom cracked the shells with a baseball bat."

"I don't know how he did it," Tuckerman said; "it seemed like a miracle to me. But there's the result; and if anybody ever saw anything more truly beautiful—anything so calculated to make the mouth water in anticipation—well, I don't believe anybody ever did." He pointed his paring knife at a golden-brown, crisp object that lay, garnished with watercress, on a big tin plate.

"And speaking of water," said Tom, "we found the well back of Cotterell Hall. Fresh water, guaranteed sweet and pure. There's a bucket of it."

They sat down to dinner, and between mouthfuls they talked.

"Wonderful old house," said Tom. "We explored it from cellar to attic. Four post bedsteads——"

"With wonderful canopy tops!" added Tuckerman, his spectacled eyes gleaming.

"And enormous chests of drawers," continued Tom.

"Full of all kinds of clothes," Tuckerman added. "Ladies' laces and muslins, shawls, mantillas, gentlemen's pantaloons, neckerchiefs, and what waistcoats!"

"Funny old kitchen," said Tom. "With a fireplace as big as a cabin."

"And a crane and a hob and a whole fleet of earthenware crocks," Tuckerman supplemented.

"I say, Mr. Tuckerman," cried David, "why don't you turn the place into a museum? All the people who tour through Barmouth in the summer would jump out of their skins to see such a place as that."

"What I want to know," said Ben, "is whether you got any clue to the Cotterell treasure."

Tuckerman shook his head. "Rome wasn't built in a day, Benjamin; and a treasure that's been hidden for over a century doesn't come to light in twenty-four hours."

"Ah, just you wait till our Benjie gets busy," said David, waving his finger wisely. "There's the bright lad for you. While you two potted about those gigantic bedsteads and chests of drawers and fireplaces, what did our Benjie discover?" He paused to heighten his announcement. "Benjamin Sully discovered a pair of gigantic footprints!"

It took a moment for this to sink in.

"Footprints?" said Tuckerman, puzzled.

"Someone has landed at the little creek near the back of the house," explained Ben, "and since the last rain, too."

"Someone with enormous feet," added David. "Now what do you suppose such a person as that could be doing here?"

Tuckerman put his hand into his coat pocket and drew out a very small and crumpled handkerchief. "We found this on a table in the kitchen. My Uncle Christopher only had a negro man-servant. And yet this belonged to a lady,—a very particular lady, I should say, a dainty lady." He spread the handkerchief out. "With beautifully embroidered initials—A. S. L." He lifted it to his nose. "And it smells of lavender—and quite fresh, too."

Solemnly the tiny handkerchief was handed around. Each smelled it and nodded his head.

"Someone's been in the house," said Tuckerman, "although all the doors were locked."

"A lady with enormous feet," declared David. "My eye, how the plot thickens!"

IV—VISITORS

Two days later the campers were as much at sea as ever regarding the secret to which Crusty Christopher had referred in the note left in the picture frame. They had explored the island and they had explored the house, and neither outdoors nor indoors had provided them with a clue.

John Tuckerman—although David persisted in calling him Professor—was the most exuberant and lively of the four. He delighted in everything,—in the early swim before breakfast, in the cooking and eating, especially in the eating, in sleeping out of doors, and even, it seemed, in washing the dishes. He would sing as he washed, wild, rollicking songs, the words of which he made up as he went along, all about pirates and sailors and sea-serpents, with a great many "Yo-heave-hos" and "Blow the man down, my lads," by way of chorus; all which he accompanied with a pretended hitching up of his trousers as sailors were supposed to do to cheer them at their work.

"There are times when he almost looks like a pirate," David whispered to Tom, as they watched Tuckerman sharpening a knife on the sole of his shoe preparatory to sticking it into a cover of a can of baked beans. "Like a pirate, that is, with one exception,—those horn-rimmed spectacles."

It was true; Tuckerman couldn't look like a daredevil with those enormous glasses. But to offset the studious look they gave him his face was now a beautiful lobster-like red and beginning to peel.

Any one could see, moreover, that Cotterell Hall was the apple of his eye. It amused Tom and David to see the affection and pride with which he regarded every stick and stone of the old house. Ben was more sympathetic, for Ben was by nature interested in old things, and had in turn collected everything from abandoned bird's nests to rusty jackknives.

It was Ben who, searching through a cupboard at one side of the fireplace in the front room at the Hall, pulled out a package of old letters and gave a shout of joy. "Hi there, see what I've found!" he cried as he untied the bundle and threw the envelopes loosely on the table.

"What is it? Old letters," said Tom, glancing at the yellowing paper.

"Postage stamps!" triumphed Ben. "Some of the earliest issues! I'll bet you never saw that St. Louis stamp with the two bears on it before."

"Humph," said David. "Postage stamps! No one collects them now."

But John Tuckerman looked over Ben's shoulder, and then snatched up one of the letters. "You're right, Benjamin. These are rare ones. I shouldn't wonder if they were worth a great deal of money."

It was not, however, the money value of the things in the house that interested Tuckerman. It was partly his love of old things, especially of things that were beautifully made, and partly his feeling that they had belonged to the Cotterells for so long, the Cotterells being his own people. "Uncle Christopher owned all these things," he said. "Poor Uncle Christopher. He was stiff-necked, no doubt; but he had to suffer for it. I've found a book he wrote in, and I can see that he was too proud to sell his heirlooms, and that he had very little money, and didn't want anyone to know how hard up he was. So he turned hermit. He didn't really hate other people; he was simply so made up that he couldn't mix with them on an equal footing."

David pretended to regard the Cotterell family secret as a great joke, although he admitted that he was very much puzzled over what he called "the mystery of the lady with enormous feet." On the same afternoon when Ben found the rare postage stamps, David, being alone with Tom in the front room, cocked an eye at the painted gentleman on the wall, and thus addressed him:

"Sir Peter, I don't want to be disrespectful; but it does seem to me you were mighty tight with your silver when your good neighbors were doing their best to get the thirteen United States started. Or didn't you really have the things they suspected you of having? You've got a long nose and a twinkle in your eye, and I'd say it mightn't be beyond you to have your little game at the expense of Barmouth."

Tom laughed. "You can't judge Sir Peter by yourself, Dave."

"Certainly not," was the instant reply. "I'll admit we are very different. Nothing could induce me to have my picture taken with a dog like that greyhound cuddling up against my shins. The good people of Barmouth didn't have any greyhounds or any pie crust tables or gate-legged tables, or whatever kind of tables it is that the Professor finds so delightful, and they were envious, and rowed their boats out here, and tramped up to the door, probably looking for all the world like a gang of hayseeds."

"Remember, Dave, your ancestors and mine were probably among them."

"I'll admit that also," said David, "and for the sake of your feelings, Tom, I'll take back that about their looking like hayseeds. Let me put it this way. A crowd of very nice looking, but temporarily cross and angry people—men and women, and possibly a few dogs—come up to the house here and demand to see the elegant Sir Peter. Sir Peter doesn't want to see them; he doesn't approve of them; he thinks that good old King George is just about the proper cheese to rule over him and his. But Sir Peter's a gentleman—you can see that from his portrait—and he doesn't want to disappoint the neighbors, who've come all the way out here in boats. So he takes a pinch of snuff and he whistles to his greyhound and he goes out on the front steps. He looks down along his nose at the people of Barmouth and his right eye twinkles—you notice, Tom, that it's his right eye that's the humorous one—and he says: 'Friends and fellow citizens, come in and enjoy yourselves. The green and gold pineapple is over the door and Cotterell Hall is yours for the afternoon. But the silver plate you're so anxious to lay your hands on isn't here any more. It's vanished, vamoosed, flown away; and the family are using the plain blue and white china kitchen set.' Did they believe him?"

"No," sang out Tom.

"Exactly," agreed David, with a bow. "They rushed past him into the house, and they threw things about, and they buzzed around like a nest of hornets you happen to hit with a stick. But they didn't find anything after all; and the reason is simple—there wasn't anything of the sort they had in mind to find. It was just Sir Peter's little joke. And it worked to perfection. Ever since people have been wondering what he did with the silverware he mentioned that day. Sir Peter, my opinion of you is that you were a first-class joker."

"You may be right," Tom assented, "but for goodness' sake don't rub that idea in on Mr. Tuckerman and Ben. They're thrilled to the fingertips about there being a treasure hidden away somewhere."

"Babes in the wood!" sniffed David. "I believe you could put almost anything over on the Professor if you dressed it up in old clothes."

To the skeptical David and the inclined-to-be-skeptical Tom the other two now appeared. They had been in the apartment on the second floor that had been Christopher Cotterell's bedroom and had been rummaging through a little secretary that stood between the windows. Tuckerman had a notebook in his hand. "These are jottings my uncle made from time to time," he declared. "Here's one. 'As regards the saying that the hiding-place is just beyond the three pines that stand between two rocks where the sun goes down, I have scoured and scoured the island, and come to the opinion that the extreme southwestern point must be the place intended, although to-day there are only two pines there. I have dug at this place, but found only sand.'"

"Maybe we can find another place that answers that description," said Ben hopefully. "And it stands to reason that the four of us can dig better than your Uncle Christopher, even if he had his servant to help him."

David, under cover of his hand, winked at Tom, who pretended not to see him.

"Here's another note," Tuckerman continued. "'Find the mahogany-hued man with the long, skinny legs and look in his breast pocket.' That's a saying my father handed down. What can it mean?"

"Mahogany-hued man with long, skinny legs," echoed Ben.

"And a hooked nose and a scar across the left cheek," chortled David. "Pirate stuff, of course. There's always someone like that. I suppose he's the fellow who hid the treasure on a dark, stormy night."

Tuckerman gazed at the speaker with his big, owl-like eyes. "You may be right, although I rather thought of him as a faithful, old-fashioned serving-man, from whom Sir Peter had no secrets."

David grinned; but how could anyone joke on a matter that Tuckerman took so seriously? "Have it your own way," he said. "Probably you're right. But hooked-nose pirate or faithful servant I don't see how the mahogany one can be of much help to us here to-day."

Tuckerman closed the notebook. "Suppose we go down to the southwestern point. At least we'll get a good view of the sunset and freshen up for supper."

When they came to that end of the island they found the ledges and neighboring sand covered with a vast array of sandpipers, all with their heads turned in the same direction, watching, as it were, a score or so of leaders, who stood out in front, closest to the water. Quietly though the four crept up, they were still a couple of dozen yards from the rear ranks when, with one accord and with as smooth a motion as though a sail were being drawn across the beach, the hundreds of little winged bodies rose in air and flew out across the waves.

"By Jove, that's pretty!" said Tom. "They're like ever so many bits of silver paper blowing about in the wind."

So they were. Fascinated, the four watched the sandpipers. When the birds were tilted one way, on one tack, they could hardly be seen against the light, they actually disappeared. Then a tiny deflection, a dip and twist of the wings, and they were a network of silver, drawn this way, then that. They wheeled, they rose, they dropped; no human beings ever moved in such perfect precision; it was not as if they followed a leader, it was as if every single sandpiper of the hundreds knew instinctively what the bird just ahead of him would do. And at last they descended, like falling leaves, on a flat rock out in the water.

"I don't see how they can do it," sighed Ben. "We could drill and drill forever, and never get anything like that. Don't tell me that sandpipers haven't brains."

"You bet your boots they have," said David. "Fine little fellows! I don't see how anybody can possibly want to shoot them."

The little fellows rose again and went soaring off against the sunset sky.

Tuckerman drew a long breath. "You boys who live by the seashore have much to be thankful for. The pioneers who pushed inland must have been awfully homesick for just such sights as that. Gee whillikins! What a gorgeous sky! I could look at it for hours."

His companions, however, had other things to do. They wanted to locate the two pines that stood between the two rocks. A short search discovered them. The trees, old and gnarled, twisted of branches on the eastern side, where the winter winds had lashed them, still stood like sentinels between the lichen-covered boulders, where Christopher Cotterell and doubtless others before him back to the days of Peter had surveyed them.

"They're here all right," said Ben. "What was it the notebook said? 'I have dug at this place, but found only sand.' Well, there's plenty of sand—oodles of it. But if you ask my opinion, this isn't the place to dig."

"You're lazy," scoffed David. "Tell me, Mr. Man, why in your learned opinion isn't this the right place to dig?"

"I've a hunch it isn't," answered Ben.

Tuckerman looked at the serious-faced small fellow, and suddenly gave a laugh. "I've got the same sort of a hunch myself. My uncle Christopher dug here and didn't find anything. I don't want to do his work all over again."

They let it go at that, and slowly, with an eye to the sunset, which every moment grew more like a vast palette on which many colors were mixed, went back by the path through the woods that skirted the western shore. They reached the old house, and were passing it on their way to the camp when Tom abruptly halted. "I say, I saw something moving at that corner window on the second floor! Something white—yes, sir, it moved. I'll take my word to that!"

All stopped and gazed at the house. The windows were closed, no curtain could have been blowing.

"Nonsense," said David. "What you saw was the sunset reflected on the glass."

"I'll bet it wasn't," Tom retorted. And straightway he went up the graveled walk that led to the front door.

Now usually John Tuckerman had been careful to lock the door when he left the house, but this time he had forgotten. Tom turned the knob and pushed the door open.

They all went into the hall and stood there listening. Undoubtedly there was the sound of footsteps on the floor above.

"That sounds to me like a giggle," whispered Ben.

"Sh-ssh," warned David.

Footsteps tapped on the floor, were coming apparently toward the head of the staircase.

Then unmistakably there was a laugh, a light and merry laugh, in a feminine key.

In the silence that followed David's voice rose. "The lady with the enormous feet!" he muttered.

A patter of feet and there came into view two ladies, two ladies in hoopskirts, with white stockings and little black slippers laced with black ribbons, and flowered silk waists and flat, mushroom-shaped hats with streamers falling behind. They stood at the head of the staircase and stared down at the four below.

"It's Milly and Sally Hooper!" exclaimed Tom.

"Did I hear someone whisper 'The lady with the enormous feet?'" Milly Hallett wrinkled her nose and stuck out the tip of her tongue. "Sarah, my dear, the gentlemen aren't so gallant as they used to be. Whoever saw neater, sweeter slippers than these we have on!"

Slowly, with a hand to each side of their skirts, which swayed like great balloons, the two girls came down the stairs.

At the foot John Tuckerman stood, bowing. "Ladies, you greatly honor my poor house," he declared.

"Who is the gentleman, Milly?" asked Sarah Hooper, a black-haired, black-eyed girl with scarlet ribbons to her hat.

"Faith, I think it must be one of the comely Cotterells," said Milly. "What a fine sunburn he has!"

"John Tuckerman, at your service," said that gentleman. "Nephew of Mr. Christopher."

Milly Hallett's blue eyes danced with delightful mischief. "And Mr. Tuckerman, who are the three extraordinary young persons standing in a row behind you? They do look so funny! Such remarkable clothes."

David looked at Ben, and Ben looked at Tom, and Tom looked down at his khaki trousers, which still bore patches of white and green paint acquired a month ago when he was freshening up his canoe.

"Ladies, these are three experts," Tuckerman explained. "The gentleman with the yellow hair and the zebra stripes on his trousers is an expert skipper, the one with the midnight hair and the rich mahogany skin is an expert fisherman, and the third—with the splendid red complexion and the curling locks—can cook a meal that will make you forget every other breakfast or dinner or supper

you ever sat down to."

"Really!" exclaimed Sarah. "Milly dear, something reminds me that it's a long time since we tasted food."

"I was just about to touch on that point," said Tuckerman. "Will you do us the honor of breaking bread with us? That is, if you won't injure your exquisite gowns by eating out of doors."

"They can't sit on the grass in those things," Tom declared. "They'd ruin them for fair."

"Oh, can't we!" cried Milly and Sarah in chorus. "Just you watch us do it!"

And in spite of hoopskirts and tiny slippers and gingerly-perched hats the two girls ran to the front door and down the steps to the path. The other four, catching up with them, piloted them to camp.

On the way Milly explained. She had felt that she just had to find out what was going on at Cotterell's Island—she had feared that bears or ghosts, mosquitoes or robbers might have made an end of her brother and his friends; so she had gotten Sally Hooper, and they had taken Sally's father's sailboat and sailed out to the island. They hadn't seen the boys; but when they went up to the white house they found the front door unlocked. They went in and looked the place all over. In a room on the second floor they found oceans of clothes in chests and closets, and they simply had to try some of them on. Then they thought they'd surprise the campers. And they certainly had done that, she concluded, because she had never seen four people look so astonished as those four had when they saw Sally and her come to the top of the stairs.

In fifteen minutes supper was under way, a truly marvellous supper, for David was determined to show these skeptical girls what a howling cook he was. The guests were not allowed to soil their fingers; as a matter of fact they found they had their hands full with trying to manage their ridiculous hoopskirts and sit down in them without smashing the hoops. But they did contrive to seat themselves on a grassy bank, and Milly took off her slippers—which were horribly tight—and the two watched their four serving-men get supper, and occasionally put in a word or so of advice.

When each of the six had declared that they could not possibly eat a single additional pancake—no matter how much golden syrup was offered as an extra inducement—supper came to a conclusion, and Milly cast a reflective eye out on the water.

"Sally and I must be starting back," she said with a sigh; "and I don't suppose they'd let us land in Barmouth, dressed in these funny old clothes."

Sarah Hooper looked at David, who sat cross-legged on the ground, resting after his labors. "You're a very superior chef," she admitted; "but I want to know what you meant when you heard us upstairs and murmured, 'The lady with the enormous feet.' Oh yes, I heard you; and those were the very words you used."

David laughed. "I plead guilty. But I didn't refer to either you or Milly. I was thinking of a little detective work we have on hand."

Then he had to explain about the discovery of the very large footprints on the bank of the creek and the finding of a lady's lavender-scented handkerchief, with the initials A. S. L., in the kitchen.

"Oh, I love mysteries!" said Sarah. "I'm always reading detective stories and working them out before the author tells you exactly what did happen."

"There's the man for you then," said David, pointing at Ben. "Eats 'em alive, he does."

"Huge footprints and a lady's handkerchief," murmured Milly. "That is a funny combination. But we really must go, or Sally's mother and father will be sending out searching parties."

They all walked back to the house, and the two girls went upstairs to change into their own clothes. When they came down again, much more comfortably dressed, they found the others in the big front room, where Tuckerman had lighted the candles.

"How lovely!" exclaimed the romantic Sarah. "I adore old furniture. What a duck of a divan! And that beautiful secretary." She looked at a desk that stood in a corner, at the other end from the fireplace. "It's mahogany, of course—and what perfect, long, fluted, shiny legs it has!"

"What's that?" said Ben. "Say it again, and slower."

"I tell you we must be going back," declared Milly positively. "Never mind these ducky old things, Sally. Think of your waiting parents."

So Sally had to go, and they all trooped down to the pier, where Mr. Hooper's sailboat was bobbing about on the tide.

Tom insisted that he would take the *Argo*, to convoy the girls home; but Milly also insisted that he should do nothing of the kind; she knew how to handle a boat quite as well as her brother, the wind was right, the water smooth, and she had often sailed later in the evening than that. Nevertheless when Milly's boat was out from the island, the campers embarked in the *Argo* and sailed along after them, until the lights of Barmouth were visible right ahead. Then, with a good-night shout, the crew of the *Argo* brought their craft about and headed back for the pier.

They walked through the moonlit woods to their camp, cleaned the dishes, and made things snug for the night. As Ben, seated on a log, pulled off his shoes, he said to Tom, who sat near him: "Did you hear what Sally said about that desk in the corner?"

"Duck of a thing—some such nonsense."

"No. She said, 'Mahogany, of course. And what long, fluted, shiny legs.'"

"Perhaps she did. I don't remember."

"Doesn't that convey anything to your mind, Tom?"

"Can't say it does. Mahogany—legs. Oh, I'm too sleepy to think of anything."

"Well, it conveys something to me," said Ben. "I think maybe I've got a clue, thanks to innocent Sally. I suppose it's too late to go back to the house to-night?"

"It's too late to go anywhere except to sleep," answered Tom shortly. "I guess your clue will keep. If it's got anything to do with Sir Peter's treasure, it's kept for a hundred years."

Tom gave a gigantic yawn, and rolled over on to his bed.

But Ben lay awake for some time, until he got the sound of the lapping of waves on the beach mixed with John Tuckerman's voice singing "Yo—heave—ho, my lads," and then he fell asleep.

V—THE MAHOGANY MAN

Mr. Tuckerman was doing the crawl-stroke—slowly and laboriously, with almost as much splashing as a small paddle-wheel steamboat makes—but still very much better than he had been able to do it two days before. He was heading toward a rock, on which Tom, straight as an arrow and almost as brown as a chocolate drop, stood with his arms pointed outward, ready to dive.

Ben stood back of Tom, slapping his dripping thighs and hopping about on his toes. In the water David was floating, as comfortable and serene as a harbor seal taking an afternoon nap. "Look out, Professor," he cautioned; "Tom might land on your head. He's a terrible practical joker. Don't you let him use you as a cushion."

Tuckerman plowed along, gasping a little, his eyes fixed on the rock.

Tom dove, and came up alongside David. "If I was picking out a cushion, I'd take you. You'd make a bully springboard. Push right along, Mr. Tuckerman. You're doing nobly."

Ben gave a whoop. "Look out there!" Lithe as an eel, and seemingly made of rubber, he sprang from the rock, turned a somersault, and shot smoothly into the water. He reappeared, looking like a porpoise, his black hair all shiny, and with a few lusty flaps reached the rock again just as Tuckerman, breathless, put out his hands to clutch at the slippery side.

"You're a regular flying-fish," Ben complimented Tuckerman, as the latter, careful not to scrape too close against the rough edge of rock, drew himself slowly up to the level top. "I don't believe any of your friends out in the plain country of Illinois would know you if they happened to see you now."

"I don't believe they would," agreed Tuckerman, sitting down gingerly and embracing his knees with his hands. "I know I look like a red Indian, and I feel as if I'd got a thousand more muscles than I ever had before."

"If you don't mind——" said Ben; and putting his hands on Tuckerman's shoulders he made a leap-frog jump over the latter's head and splashed loudly into the water.

"Well," said David, changing his position from floating to treading water, "I think the coffee must be boiling now. It's time I dropped those eggs." And with leisurely strokes he made for the beach, where he had thoughtfully left a Turkish towel beside his pile of clothes.

The others followed suit, and had soon arrayed themselves in the few garments they thought needful to wear in their island home. David poured the coffee and attended to the toast and eggs, which had been procured the day before from a farmer on the mainland. And as they ate, Ben propounded the question:

"Fellows, what was it Christopher Cotterell said about a mahogany man?"

"He said," Tuckerman answered, "'Find the mahogany-hued man with the long, skinny legs and look in his breast pocket.'"

"Exactly," said Ben slowly. "Well, I've got an idea I know where to find that man."

The other three looked at him in utter amazement. "The dickens you have, Benjie!" retorted Tom. "Why, he couldn't be alive now."

"Perhaps Ben thinks he's a mummy," suggested David, "or a piece of wood that's turned to stone."

"Maybe I do," Ben chuckled. "You're getting warm, old horse. Long, skinny legs—doesn't that remind you of something? Haven't you seen any that answer that description in this neighborhood?"

"You're not referring to mine?" asked Tuckerman.

The breakfast-party laughed, the Professor wore such a look of injured dignity.

"No, sir, not to yours," Ben said. "Yours are fat as a drum compared to those I have in mind."

"I remember Ben mumbled something about this last night," mused Tom. "But I was too sleepy to listen. He said something about Sally Hooper, too; something about her giving him an idea."

Ben nodded. "So she did."

"Didn't I always claim that our Benjie was a real detective?" said David. "Clean up first; and then for the yarn."

Breakfast things were put away in their box, and then the three turned to Ben. "Where's your mahogany man?" they demanded in one voice.

"There's no hurry," was the tantalizing answer. "Perhaps I'd better go fishing first."

Tom laid his hand on the other boy's shoulder and twisted him around. "Lead us to him," he commanded.

Ben shrugged. "Oh, very well. You're more interested than you were last night. Come along, but don't make any noise."

He led them to Cotterell Hall. Tuckerman had locked the front door after the girls had left on the night before, and now he opened it with the key he kept in his trouser pocket.

Ben led them into the hall, and then into the big front room, which was now flooded with sunlight.

"Look around," he announced; "and tell me what you see."

They looked about the room with puzzled faces. "Rats!" exclaimed David. "I don't see any man here."

Ben glanced at Tuckerman. "Long, skinny, mahogany-colored legs," he murmured.

"Not Sir Peter's portrait?" said Tuckerman.

Ben walked across the room in the direction of the secretary. "When Sally came in here last night," he explained, "she said something about this desk. 'Mahogany, I suppose—and what long, fluted, shiny legs.' Well, it has, hasn't it?" He laid his hand on the secretary. "Mightn't this be the man?"

"You're joking," Tom protested; while David looked from the desk to his friend's serious face as if he thought Ben must be plain crazy.

Tuckerman, however, laid his hand also on the piece of furniture. "They liked their little joke in the old days," he observed. "It might be, Ben. If that's so——" He turned the small brass key in the lock of the lid, and pulling out the two supports on either side of the lower drawers let the lid down on them. "If that's so; and this is the mahogany man—where's his breast pocket?"

There were small drawers inside, and a row of pigeonholes to either side of a central compartment that was also locked by a key.

"Somewhere up in his chest," said Ben.

Tuckerman pulled out the drawers and emptied their contents, small objects, keys, pencils, bits of sealing-wax, a few sheets of blank paper. He put his hand in the pigeonholes and drew out several bundles of letters. "I've been through all these things before," he said with a shake of his head.

"That place in the middle," Tom suggested.

"Only an ink-stand," said Tuckerman; and unlocking the little door he drew forth a big glass inkstand with a brass top. That was all there was in the little cupboard; all the contents of the upper part of the secretary were arrayed on the lid.

"No go," said David. "The man hasn't anything in his pocket to give us any clue."

"I must say," said Tom, "it does seem ridiculous to me that anyone could have meant that desk——"

"I've heard," mumbled Ben, who was paying no attention to what the others were saying, "that old desks have secret compartments. My grandfather has an old one that looks something like this. Let me see——" He slipped his hand into the pigeonhole on the right of the little door Tuckerman had unlocked, and began to feel around. "I say! Here's something. It feels like a wooden spring."

Tuckerman put his hand into the central compartment. "Push on the spring," he directed.

Ben pushed and Tuckerman at the same moment pulled out the cupboard that had harbored the inkstand. It was a box that fitted snugly into the centre of the secretary.

"Well, that's a great stunt," said Tom. "It comes to pieces like a nest of drawers."

The four, their heads close together, looked into the space from which the cupboard had come.

All they saw was an unvarnished piece of pine board, apparently the back of the desk.

"Looks like my grandfather's," said Ben. "Yes, there's a couple of holes." And putting his forefinger and thumb into two indentations in the wood at the back, he wriggled his hand around and drew out a small drawer.

"Empty!" he muttered, disappointed, holding the drawer so that the others could see.

Again he put his hand into the opening and drew out a second drawer that had been under the first one. This also was empty.

"One more chance." He pulled out the bottom drawer. In this there was something. Holding it upside down, a small roll of paper fell out on the lid of the desk.

"A piece of parchment," said Tuckerman, picking up the roll. He opened it out, holding it taut in his two hands.

All eyes focussed on the sheet, on which were scrawled, in a faint purplish ink, these lines:

I took the box
cliff where was
meaning to es
but they were
and so I hid
pocket in the
are two big
make a mark

Tuckerman read these words aloud, three times over. Then he gave a grunt. "Well, that's that. And it's not so very illuminating, is it?"

Ben took the parchment. "Somebody's cut it across. See, the right hand words are close to the edge. How disgusting!"

David and Tom each handled the parchment, which was finally laid on the desk-lid, with the inkstand to keep it from curling up into its original tight roll.

David stroked his chin, pretending to be lost in thought. "Somebody took the box—to the cliff—but they were—and so somebody hid the box—in his pocket—there are two big—that make a mark. I gather from that line about the pocket that the box was pretty small."

"It doesn't say he hid it in his pocket," Ben objected. "It might have been a pocket in the cliff just as well."

"Who do you suppose he was?" asked Tom.

"Why, Peter Cotterell, of course," David answered promptly.

"I don't know about that," said Tuckerman. "This handwriting doesn't look like that of a man who was used to holding the pen. See how he's gone over some of the letters several times, as if he wasn't precisely sure how he ought to form them. Sir Peter was a well-educated gentleman. He must have known how to use a quill."

"Perhaps he wanted to disguise his handwriting," David suggested.

"Why would he want to do that?" Ben retorted. "Whoever wrote that meant to leave a record of what he'd done with the box. There wouldn't be any sense in faking his handwriting—certainly not if he intended to hide the parchment away in a secret drawer of the desk."

"What sense would there be in his cutting it in two then?" Tom inquired.

Tuckerman, who was sitting on the arm of a chair, threw back his head and laughed. "Here we are arguing about something that happened ever so long ago, and we haven't the least idea why it happened this way." He turned to the portrait on the wall and shook his finger at it. "You—or some of your household—knew how to make first-class puzzles, Sir Peter." Then, as he swung around to the three boys, he added:

"My guess is that there's a pocket in a cliff somewhere on this island, and that there is—or was—a box hidden in it."

"Find the cliff," said Tom.

Ben shook his head. "There are dozens of cliffs."

"Well, you won't find anything more in your mahogany man's breast pocket," Tom answered. "You can see for yourself it's empty."

"My idea is," said David, "that we get the *Argo* and sail round the island till we sight a likely-looking cliff."

"That appeals to me," agreed Tuckerman, "and Tom can give me another lesson in how to handle a boat."

The parchment was put in its drawer, the three drawers replaced, the cupboard pushed back and caught by its spring, and the desk-lid lifted and locked.

"I'd a heap rather hunt for clues out of doors on a day like this," said David.

But Ben sat down on a divan. "I want to do a little thinking, fellows. You go along without me. Maybe I'll go fishing for dinners off the rocks after a while."

They laughed at Ben; but he would not be dissuaded. He wanted to do some thinking, and he meant to. "Stubborn as a mule," said Tom. "He gets his mind set on a thing, and dynamite won't budge him."

So the others went down to the sailboat; and presently Ben, getting up from the divan, went out and cut himself a stick of willow. He brought it back and began to whittle shavings all over the hardwood floor of Cotterell Hall. He had seen men down on the Barmouth docks whittle shavings for hours, and he had copied the habit. He found it a great help when he wanted to think things out.

VI—THE CLIPPER SHIP

Ben Sully was a boy who would rather work out a puzzle than do almost anything else. He had a tremendous amount of patience, which possibly explains why he was such a successful fisherman, since he could wait longer, dangling a piece of bait in the water, than nine out of ten fishes could

resist the temptation to find out what the bait tasted like. Any kind of a *puzzle*, from cut out sections of cardboard that fitted together to make a picture all the way to ingenious contraptions of metal links that didn't want to come apart, was a delight to Ben. He had boxes and boxes of them stored away in a closet at home. He had invented secret codes and cryptograms by the score, and when he was only ten years old had constructed a private language of twenty-five words that he had taught to Tom and David and which the three of them had used among themselves to the great admiration and envy of all the rest of their school.

Naturally then Ben felt that this *puzzle* of Peter Cotterell's treasure was right in his line, and the finding of the half-sheet of parchment whetted his appetite to discover more. He walked about the room, whittling shavings right and left, he sat down and kept on whittling, he stood up again, and since by now the willow-stick had been whittled down to almost nothing, he threw what was left in the fireplace.

That done, he went to a bookcase and took down from the shelf on top the old notebook that Tuckerman had found in his uncle's bedroom. He thumbed the pages until he came to the place where Tuckerman had inserted a slip of paper. Ben read the words at the top of the page out loud. "Find the mahogany-hued man with the long, skinny legs and look in his breast pocket. That's a saying my father handed down. What can it mean?" Ben looked at the desk. "Well, we've done that, anyhow." He shook his head in deep thought. "I don't understand why that piece of parchment wasn't discovered before. They might not have taken the desk to be the mahogany man; but surely Crusty Christopher or his father would have known of those three little drawers. However, they might have found that writing and left it there. That's possible, of course. Probably it didn't tell them any more than it's told us so far."

Turning again to the notebook, he ran his eye down the page. Nothing but Christopher Cotterell's comments on all sorts of subjects, nothing that interested Ben. He turned a page, two pages, another, and then his glance fell on this: "I've heard that the old clipper ship got some of the cargo that the mahogany man carried. But if she did, what use is that to us now? She sailed out of Barmouth Harbor during the Revolution."

On and on down the page Ben's eyes traveled, but lighted on nothing that caught his special attention. So he went back and reread that passage. Then he closed the book, replaced it on the shelf, stuck his hands in his pockets, and stared through the window.

"I wonder if there was a real mahogany man," he mused, "and a real ship. There might have been. There were men from the West Indies in this part of the country in those days. One of them might have had valuables in his clothes, and part of the things he was guarding might have been carried off in the hold of a ship. Was there a real man, or was it that secretary? And how about the ship?"

Presently Ben walked around the drawing-room, as if he were searching for something. From there he went to the dining-room and the kitchen, and then upstairs to Christopher Cotterell's bedroom. He looked into closets and behind curtains, he pulled open wardrobe doors and peered in at the shelves. But each time he shook his head, as much as to say: "There's nothing there that I want."

Under the slanting roof at the top of the house was an attic, already explored by Tuckerman and the boys. It was filled with every kind of thing, from an ancient lacquered Indian temple—the green and gold of the lacquer now sadly tarnished and chipped—to a collection of Red Men's arrowheads, neatly fastened to a board by small straps of leather. Ben looked around at the strange medley of objects, thinking how many countries and how many different races of men had contributed to the furnishing of this attic; and then his roving eyes lighted on something that made them glisten—on a bracket against the wall sat the model of a ship.

Ben knew the model to be that of a Yankee clipper—three masts, loftily rigged, with three sky-sail yards, and a long mainyard. She was beautifully built, every detail complete, the deck and hull shining with varnish. "Hello," sang out Ben, "clipper ship ahoy!" And pushing a box close against the wall he stepped up opposite the bracket.

In the deck of the model was a little lid. He pried this up with his knife-blade. There was just room for him to squeeze his fingers through, and when he drew them out again they held a small roll of paper.

"Yes," said Ben, "it's parchment," and very much thrilled he took his find over to the window and smoothed it out.

The ink on this parchment was faint and purplish, like that on the sheet already found in the desk, and the left hand words were close to the edge. Ben read them aloud:

to the north
the boat
cape with it
off the shore
it in the
rocks. There
veins that
like a cross.
James Sampson.

"Good enough!" said Ben, and ran down the stairs to the first floor.

The little drawer in the secretary was again made to disgorge its half-sheet of parchment and Ben laid the two papers side by side on the desk-lid. They fitted perfectly; now their message was

complete.

I took the box to the north
cliff where was the boat
meaning to escape with it
but they were off the shore
and so I hid it in the
pocket in the rocks. There
are two big veins that
make a mark like a cross.

James Sampson.

"Well, that's clear enough," said Ben, "though why anyone should cut James Sampson's writing in two is more than I can understand." He copied the words on a sheet of paper and put the two pieces of parchment in the secret drawer. "Now let's see what we've got. Sampson meant to leave the island with his box at the northern end, but he saw some enemies waiting there, so he hid the box in a crevice where the rocks are marked like a cross. All right for Mr. Sampson. That's easy sailing. But why didn't some of the Cotterells find what was in the hold of that little ship's model long before this? Funny—that is." Again his brows bent in thought. "Was James Sampson the real mahogany man? Was there a real clipper ship?" At last he shook his head. "I don't know. But at least I've found something."

Ben left the house. It was noon, and warm. The others were sailing around the island; there was no knowing when they would be back. He debated whether to go fishing, and finally decided against it. Without any definite purpose in mind he took the path at the back of Cotterell Hall that led toward the little creek.

It was only a short distance across to the inlet where David and he had landed. He went through the bushes and trees until he saw the water before him. There was the creek and there was the marshy ground where they had found the footprints. He descended the bank to look at the marks again.

There were no footprints there now: they had utterly vanished!

Ben hunted along the edge of the creek, although he was positive where the marks had been. There was not a sign of them. There had been no rain to wash them out. The soggy ground was above the reach of the tide. There was only one explanation: someone had been there since David and he had landed and had carefully removed any sign of footsteps.

To discover footprints on a supposedly uninhabited shore is thrilling, but to discover that those footprints have disappeared is even more exciting. What did it mean? Well, to Ben it clearly indicated that the person who had made those marks in the first place had some very good reason for wanting no one to know that he had been there.

Cotterell's treasure was an ancient mystery; but this was a new one, no older in fact than the day before yesterday. This was new matter over which to cudgel one's brains, and Ben, sitting on the bank, gave deep consideration to it until he saw the sail of the *Argo* creeping up from the south.

Should he tell the others of his discoveries or not? He decided to keep them a secret, including the vanished footprints, for a short time at least. But he jumped up, and ran down to the shore, and sent an ear-piercing yell across the water. The answer was a wave from Tom, and presently the *Argo* drew closer inland and laid her course for a small, grass-topped headland on Ben's side of the creek.

"Don't jump; slide down, Benjie, slide," directed Tom.

"And slide gently," added David. "Not as if you were making for third base with the ball getting there before you. Remember the Professor's at the helm and we don't want to tilt the boat."

"Don't you worry," sang out Ben. "I'll drop in so you'll think I'm as light as a feather." And as the *Argo* slipped along under the headland he let himself down, lightly and easily, but, as it happened, right on the shoulders of David.

The big fellow gave a growl. Ben's legs had somehow contrived to twine themselves around David's neck, and Ben was sitting there on the broad shoulders, his hands on the other boy's head.

"Hi there! Look out!" cried Tuckerman. "You'll upset the whole shebang!"

But Tom came to the skipper's rescue. A steady hand on the tiller and the *Argo* moved out from the shore.

Slowly Ben pushed David forward until they both came down in a heap in the little cockpit. "Behave yourselves," ordered Tom. "I've got a dipper here and I'll souse you both with cold water!"

The threat was enough. The two sat up. David grinned. "The little feller's all right; he's got some muscle. I shouldn't wonder if I could make a real man out of him some day."

Under Tom's teaching John Tuckerman was learning something about handling a sailing dory, just as Ben had given him lessons in flounder fishing, David in making flapjacks, and the three in various swimming strokes. It was true that he still regarded the *Argo's* sail, when a sudden puff of wind filled it, as an inexperienced driver regards his horse when the animal shows signs of shying—his muscles grew tense, and he frowned, and stopped talking—but he didn't ask Tom what to do and he managed to keep the dory fairly close to the course he intended. And he was a good sport! He didn't try to crawl out of his mistakes by arguing about them; he admitted them with a grin, and that grin was always so whole-souled and hearty that it made one want to slap him on the back and tell him

that he hadn't really made a mistake after all.

When Tuckerman had the *Argo* well in hand again and could think of other matters, he said to Ben, "We've seen plenty of rocks and ledges, but nary a thing that could properly be called a cliff. A cliff, I take it, is something fairly high and mighty, not so steep as Gibraltar perhaps, but as large as a good-sized barn-door."

"While we've been hunting for cliffs," said David, "I suppose Ben has worked this all out. What are your conclusions, oh wise one?"

"Never you mind, my boy. The clever magician waits till he has everything in order before he performs his trick."

"Ben's got something up his sleeve," put in Tom. "I can always tell when he talks in that grand way. But there's no use trying to make him tell us, Dave. The way to make an oyster talk is to pay no attention to it."

Ben said nothing, though the temptation was great as the *Argo* reached the northern end of the island, where high rocks came down to the water.

Tuckerman admitted these were cliffs, but there were a number of them, and how was he to tell which was the one they wanted? They sailed slowly along, watching the shore and speculating as to what the message in the desk referred. And while the other three talked Ben sat silent, trying to picture what had happened to James Sampson there more than a century before.

Ben had a good imagination, and it led him to see Sampson as a servant of Sir Peter Cotterell, a faithful serving-man, who always did what his master told him. When the men of Barmouth threatened to take Sir Peter's treasure the old Tory gave some of his most valuable possessions to Sampson, and the latter carried them to this end of the island where he had a small boat that should carry him to the mainland. When he reached the shore, however, he saw other Barmouth men patrolling the coast in their own boats and so his escape that way was cut off. With quick wit he hid the treasures in a cleft of the rock and blocked up the hiding-place. Ben could see it all, even to Sir Peter, in knee-breeches and wig, commending James Sampson when the man returned and related what he had done. "Good and faithful servant," said Sir Peter; "the rascals are outwitted again!" And doubtless Sir Peter took Sampson into the dining-room and poured him out a glass of rum. Ben wasn't sure about that; it might not have been rum; but rum sounded well, it smacked of old-time adventure. Yes, probably it was rum; and Sampson had wiped his mouth with the sleeve of his jacket and laughed with his master at the thought of the men of Barmouth sitting out there in their boats, like so many cats waiting outside a mouse-hole.

"Come out of it, Ben! Wake up!"

Ben looked up with a start. Tom was laughing at him. "Where are you, Benjie? A million miles away!"

"No," answered Ben, "I was listening to Sir Peter talking to a man you don't any of you know anything about."

"Your precious mahogany man?" asked Tom. "Don't tell me you learned something more about him while you were up at the house."

"He means the man with the big feet," said David. "Did you find his prints in the house?"

"David," said Ben solemnly, "you're absolutely certain you saw those footprints of a man on the bank of the creek, are you?"

"Absolutely," David stated. "You don't think it was some animal wearing a man's shoes, do you?"

"No. I thought you saw them. But I looked this morning in the same place, and there aren't any prints there now."

There followed a moment's silence; then Tuckerman exploded a loud "What?"

"Vanished, vamoosed, flown away," Ben said with a nod.

"My eye!" exclaimed David. "This is too horrible! Is the island haunted?"

"It is peculiar," said Tuckerman, frowning at the shore.

"Look out!" sang out Tom.

The *Argo*, her helmsman unheeding his business, was slowly coming about, with a ledge of rock dead ahead. Tuckerman wheeled around, put the tiller over—the dory righted again.

"Ben," said Tom, "don't you spring anything like that on us again, with the Professor sailing this boat. If you've got any other fairy tales, you keep them till we're on shore."

"My fault," said the skipper. "I'm learning. My first business is to bring us safe up to the dock."

"And my first business," added David, "is to get something to eat. Mysteries may come and go, but three square meals a day are always needful. How about that, Ben, my son? What did Sir Peter and this other friend of yours live on?"

"Rum," said the solemn Ben.

"Rum! You're a rum one! Are you sure you didn't drink some of Sir Peter's rum before you went to the creek and found that the footprints were missing?"

But Ben only smiled. He could afford to smile when he knew that he, and he alone, had a copy of James Sampson's complete message tucked away in his pocket.

VII—THE TIGERS PLAY CAMP AMOUSSOCK

Needless to say, Ben would have liked to start out immediately after dinner to look for the pocket in the rocks that was marked with a cross, provided he could have found a good excuse to get away from the others; for he was still of a mind to keep his discovery a secret for the present. But the larder was in need of fresh supplies, and as soon as they had finished their cleaning up Tom announced that their immediate business was to sail across to Farmer Hapgood's and buy some eggs and milk. So the *Argo* put out into the bay again, and soon the four campers, the sailboat safely moored at the Hapgood landing, were tramping up the road toward a gray-shingled cottage that had a couple of beautiful, tall elms at either side of it.

Mrs. Hapgood sold them eggs, milk, and butter, and some large loaves of freshly-baked bread. These were packed in a basket the boys had brought. When they came out from the house they stopped a few moments to chat with Mrs. Hapgood, and while they were talking two large automobiles swung in from a crossroad and raced past the farmhouse door.

The two cars were filled with boys, boys on the seats and on the running-boards. "They're from Camp Amoussock, down along the shore a way," Mrs. Hapgood explained. "They're going to have a baseball game with the boys around here. My Sandy's playing. He's getting into his things upstairs now, but he'll be down in a minute."

The cars disappeared in a cloud of dust, and almost immediately a red-haired, freckle-faced young fellow, in a baseball suit, dashed out from the front door.

"Hello," he cried, nodding to the others. "That crowd made as much noise with their horns as if they'd won the game already."

"Pretty good team, are they?" asked David.

"Yes, they're a good team," said Sandy; "but mighty stuck on themselves. They come from a lot of different cities, and most of them play on their school nines. They've beaten us the last two summers. Gee, but we'd like to get back at 'em to-day!"

"Who's on your team?" asked Tom.

"Well, we call ourselves the Tidewater Tigers. Most of us live around here. One, Billy Burns, comes from Barmouth. Native sons of New Hampshire against the strangers—that's what my father says."

"We know Billy Burns," said Ben. "He's a good batter."

"Yes, he's good," agreed Sandy. "But they've got a pitcher who's a corker. Lanky Larry they call him. He's the goods all right—lots of speed and a curve. I'll say he is! Fanned me three times last year." Sandy clutched his bat. "Gee, but I'd like to sting him!"

"Let's feel it," said David. He took the bat and swung it several times. "A little light, but not bad," he pronounced judicially.

"Say, why don't you all come along? We'll show you some real excitement. You can leave that basket here."

The boys looked at each other, and suddenly Tuckerman burst out laughing. "Lead us to it, Sandy. I can see these three have got their tongues hanging out."

"Well," said David slowly, "I do hate to pass a good thing by."

"He wants a sight of this Lanky Larry," said Tom. "A good pitcher to Dave is like a red rag to a bull."

Mrs. Hapgood relieved Tom of the basket. "You boys are native sons," she said with a smile. "Go along and root for the Tigers."

Up the road they went until they came to an open field marked out with a baseball diamond. The two automobiles were parked on one side, and on the other was a crowd of boys and girls, interspersed with a few older people. Already some of the Tigers and some of the Amoussocks were knocking out flies to their fielders.

"There's Lanky, warming up," said Sandy, pointing to a tall, dark-skinned fellow who was throwing a ball to a catcher in front of the automobiles. "They're a swell lot, aren't they? They've all got brand new suits this summer, with red and white stockings, and a red A on their chests."

The Amoussocks did look very trim; more especially in contrast to the native sons, who were dressed in all sorts of suits, the most of them old and mud-stained.

"Here's Billy Burns," said Sandy; and as Tuckerman and the three boys went up to join the crowd, Sandy darted away to report himself to his captain.

Billy came up. "Hi, you fellows. What you doing here?"

"Digging clams for bait," answered David. "Benjie wants to go fishing."

"Come down to see us smear the strangers?" Billy continued, ignoring David's joke.

"I hear that Lanky Larry's a terror." This from Tom.

"Terror's the word," Billy admitted. "Say, Dave, you think you're some hitter in Barmouth. But you've never stacked up against his class."

"Oh, I don't know," said David. "I've sent some good men to the discard. Howsomever, it's not up to me this afternoon to tackle the strangers. I'm neutral to-day."

"Go to it, Billy!" said Ben. "We're going to root for you. Of course we are. We're not pikers."

It was clear that this was a big day in the eyes of the community. A hay-wagon rattled up, loaded with empty boxes and a pile of boards. The boxes were stood on end on the ground and the planks placed across them, and the seats thus made were instantly filled by boys and girls. On the opposite side waved a large banner, white with a gigantic red A in the centre. There were shouts and cheers from both sides as the two teams gathered round the umpire; then the Tigers ran out to take the field and the first Amoussock batter stepped up to the plate.

The campers from Cotterell's Island sat on the grass with the New Hampshire boys. Half the fun of watching any contest is in rooting for one side to win, and naturally the campers were backing the home nine. The Amoussocks had a superior air, partly due perhaps to their snappy suits and partly to the fact that they had beaten the Tigers each of the two summers before. And they knew how to play baseball; there was a snap and precision about their work that was the result of constant coaching in teamwork.

Against them the home team, mostly the sons of neighboring farmers, boys who had to coach themselves and only played together on Saturdays, showed at a decided disadvantage. They had plenty of fighting spirit and kept right up on their toes, playing for all they were worth, taking big chances in stealing bases and backing each other up on every throw. But they couldn't hit Lanky Larry—not to any extent; and the Amoussocks could, and did, hit Sam Noyes, the Tiger pitcher.

David shook his head as the third inning ended. "That Lanky's got 'em where he wants 'em," he said. "He eases up a bit, and lets us get a hit or two; but watch him in the pinches. He can tighten up and shoot 'em over. Yes, siree,—nothing he likes better than a couple of them on the bases, and then putting over three strikes, simple as you please."

Tom took a blade of grass from his mouth. "And he keeps grinning. Nothing riles a batter worse than that sort of a pitcher. 'See how simple it is,' he says with that smile. 'Like taking candy from a kid to get a strike on you'—and he goes ahead and shoots one over while you're planning how you'll wipe the grin from his face."

Billy Burns dropped down beside them. "Two to nothing," he declared. "Sam's doing mighty well, but Lanky's doing better. It's that in-shoot of his. I know just where it's going, but hang it all! every blessed time I reach right out for it."

"He's got your goat," said David. "You're so all-fired mad that you don't wait for the ball to get near you."

"Huh, it's easy to talk! I suppose you could wait all day."

"Well, I wouldn't get tied up tight, stiff as a stick. That's the trouble with all our team. They're so keen to hit they can't wait. Larry's got them going before they walk out there; and he knows it too, believe me!"

"I suppose you'd be as cool as a cucumber," Billy jeered.

"As fat as a cucumber, you mean," suggested Ben. "When Dave leans against the ball it's like a ton of bricks."

"We're out again," announced Billy, picking up his fielder's glove. "We're not so worse in the field; but golly, if we could only hit!"

The Tigers couldn't hit, however. The crowd on the benches rooted as hard as they could, but the native sons stayed behind. And the visitors grew more dashing. They kept talking to each other on the bases, little remarks filled with self-esteem; it was easy to see they were very well pleased with themselves.

David kept pulling blades of grass, chewing them, spitting them out. Every time that a Tiger came to bat David felt as if it were he himself who was facing that smiling pitcher.

The fifth inning came and went; the score was still the same. Billy Burns, in spite of what David had told him, had struck out again.

Tom stood up and stretched. "No, boys, it isn't our day—unless something different happens. I guess that old New Hampshire's got to take the short end."

Something did happen; but not what Tom expected. Billy Burns, in the outfield, running after a deep fly to centre, made a dive for the ball at full speed, stumbled, fell headlong, but held up the ball in his hand.

"Batter's out!" cried the umpire.

The loyal rooters cheered. Billy, however, lay flat, and when, after a moment, he tried to get up, he sat down quickly again.

The other fielders ran over to him and stood him up between them. Billy held up one foot, put it down, gave a groan. "Twisted my ankle, I guess," he muttered. He tried to take a step forward. "No go," he added. "Hang it all, just my luck!"

Two fielders brought him in between them, Billy hopping on one foot. The Tigers held a consultation, while the Amoussocks threw the ball around. Then Sam Noyes, the Tiger captain, stepped over to David. "Billy's down and out," he said. "He can't play any more. But he says you think you can hit their pitcher; and you're from Barmouth, so that'd be all right. Want to take Billy's place?"

David glanced up. He knew by the look on Sam's face that the Tiger captain didn't believe he could

bat any better than the others. "All right," he answered. "I didn't mean to boast, you know; but I'll do my darndest."

"No one can do more," murmured Tuckerman behind him.

David peeled off his coat and put on Billy's glove. He lumbered out to centrefield while Sam Noyes explained the substitution to the Amoussock captain.

In the last half of the sixth inning David came to bat. Lanky Larry patted the ball caressingly, surveyed the new player from head to foot, and then grinned as if he had suddenly remembered a tremendous joke. David dug his feet into the earth of the batter's box, wishing he had on the cleated shoes he wore when he played on his school team, swung his bat—one he had carefully selected from the varied assortment offered by the Tigers—and then grinned as if he also had thought of something very funny.

"I say, what's the joke, you two fellows?" sang out a man who was standing back of the benches.

That made everybody laugh, with the result that Lanky, when he pitched the ball, threw it wide and missed the plate by a couple of inches.

"Ball one!" proclaimed the umpire.

"Make it be good!" yelled Ben.

David hitched up his trousers and lifted his bat again. Lanky patted the ball and smiled, but not so broadly. He shot the next one across the plate with speed and precision, David letting it go by without swinging at it.

"Strike one!" sang the umpire.

"You've got him, Lanky!" came a voice from the ranks of the Amoussocks.

"Oh dear!" sighed a girl on the Tiger's bench, loud enough to be heard across the diamond; "I thought this fellow looked like he could knock a home run!"

There was a titter, a ripple of laughter, and Larry, fondling the ball, looked over in the direction of the girl and grinned from ear to ear.

The ball shot from his hand. There was a crack—sharp and stinging;—Larry reached out, missed the ball as it whizzed by—whizzed on over the bag at second base, sizzled on into the outfield. Centrefield couldn't touch it; that ball simply wouldn't stop, and didn't until it struck a stone wall at the end of the field.

By the time the ball got back David was standing on third base, and the Tiger rooters were splitting the air with yells.

"Dave leaned against it all right, didn't he?" said Ben to Tuckerman. "He came around on it just as easy; but when he struck he made every ounce tell."

"He'd have had a home run if it hadn't been for that stone wall," said Tuckerman. "The field's too short; it doesn't give our Dave a show."

Lanky Larry looked less amused. He frowned and grew thoughtful; with the result that the next Tiger up got a neat hit to right field, and David came trotting home.

But the inning ended on the next play, the Tiger being caught out at second base. The score was two to one, in the Amoussock's favor. The crowd felt somewhat better as the Tigers took the field again. The Amoussocks, however, managed to get in another run at their turn at bat, and had a good lead of two.

The seventh and eighth innings repeated the same old story. Lanky was in form again, and none of the batters could hit him. And with the score at three to one the Amoussocks prepared to mow down their rivals in the last half of the ninth.

David was to be the third batter, and he swung two bats over his shoulder as he waited for his turn. Lanky knew what he was doing, was in fact watching him out of the corner of his eye, and looking forward to his next chance at the cocky David. Thinking what he would do to David he forgot the job in hand, and struck Sam Noyes on the arm. The umpire sent Sam to first. Larry scowled and bit his lip. The next Tiger got a hit, and Sam went to second.

The crowd jumped to its feet, both sides were rooting madly. "If only there was room for a home run!" sighed Ben. "Old Barmouth could do it! Keep cool, Dave my lad!"

David was perfectly cool, to all appearance at least, as he walked up to the plate. He smiled and gave the least little nod at the tall, dark-skinned pitcher.

A duel between these two;—that was what the crowd felt in the air. The fielders were hopping about, crouching, their hands on their knees; Sam and the Tiger on first base were flapping their arms, all ready to dash for the next base. But nobody looked at them; all eyes were on the two who were regarding each other with pleasant smiles.

"Strike one!"

David stepped back, a bit surprised, while the crowd gave a groan.

"Ball one!" There was a little ripple of satisfaction.

"But he's got to hit it," Tom muttered in Tuckerman's ear. "A base on balls won't do. The next fellow'd go out."

And David knew he'd got to hit it, and kept telling himself not to tighten up. "Easy does it, easy does

it," kept singing over and over in his mind. If he tried too hard Lanky would get him just as he had gotten the others; and he knew perfectly well that was what Lanky intended that he should do.

"Strike two!"

Larry had outguessed him that time, giving him a slow drop. David eased his muscles, smiled his confident smile, settled evenly on his feet. This next would be the in-shoot. Larry would save that for the last. "Easy does it; take your time." David looked at the pitcher, not angrily, not intently, just with a jovial dare.

And the bat, with David's shoulders behind it, and his waist and his legs as well, met that ball as it curved in toward him fair and square on the nose. There was a mighty crack—the sort that sings in the ears and makes the pulses tingle—and away and away went the ball. Over the pitcher's head, over the heads of the fielders; far out in the field it struck the ground at last and bounded over the stone wall. It brought up against a cow, that was lying down in a meadow, and it gave her such a bump that she rose in haste and went galloping away, not knowing what had struck her. And by the time the first Amoussock outfielder touched that ball Sam Noyes and the next Tiger and David had circled the bases and the game was won.

Billy Burns hopped over to David, forgetful of his sprained ankle. "Put it there, old scout!" he cried, holding out his hand. "I never saw such a hit! Gee whillikins! Dave, you're the stuff all right!"

"Easy does it," said David, who couldn't think of anything else to say.

"Easy!" exclaimed Billy. "You call that easy! I'd like to know what you do to a ball when you hit it hard!"

VIII—THE CANOE

David would have liked to have taken to his heels and beaten it down the road to the bay, but he was not allowed to do this. Not only the Tigers, but all that section of New Hampshire appeared to think that he had vindicated the honor of the country against the big cities, represented in this case by the boys of Camp Amoussock. Horny-handed farmers insisted on coming up and shaking his hand, slapping him on the back, inviting him to supper. And what tickled Ben more than anything else was to see the girl who had exclaimed, "I thought this fellow looked like he could knock a home run!" push her way through the crowd and thrust out her hand at David.

Ben nudged Tom. "Look at our brave boy now."

The girl was saying, "I knew you looked like a winner. I've got a kid brother at home; he's got a sore foot and couldn't get over here; but I'm going to tell him how you soaked that ball and hit the old cow, and maybe he won't be excited! What's your name? He'll want to know."

No beet was ever redder than David's face as he gave a sheepish grin. "David Norton," he said. And as the girl insisted on shaking hands he touched her fingers gingerly. "Much obliged," he stammered. "Hope the kid's foot gets well again. Funny about that cow;—hope it didn't hurt her."

"I wouldn't care," said the girl, "if it broke one of her ribs. But don't you worry, Mr. Norton. I'm right glad to have met you." And she pushed her way out of the throng again, delighted to be able to tell her kid brother that she had shaken hands with the hero of the day.

"You may be a mighty batter," said Ben, when David was able at last to rejoin his friends, "but when it comes to the girls you're a beautiful imitation of a wooden Indian. You shake hands like a pump."

"Oh, cut it out," growled David, who always stood more or less in fear of girls, and hated to be teased about them. "I suppose you'd have made her some kind of a pretty speech; asked her to dance, perhaps."

"I'd have looked as if I liked being told how fine I was. Oh, what a shame it is that nobody ever says such things to me," sighed Ben, "when I'm the one that could really appreciate them!"

Sandy Hapgood now came up, and David, eager to be rid of any more talk about the game, hurried his friends away. "Looks like a thunderstorm," he said, squinting at the sky, where dark clouds were rapidly rising.

They passed the meadow, where the cow was now peacefully chewing her cud again. She cast a reproachful eye at the boy in the baseball suit. "That's the longest hit that was ever made on our field," remarked Sandy. "And against Lanky Larry, too! Oh boy! Did you see Lanky after the game? He looked—well, he didn't look so all-fired stuck on himself."

"He's a fine pitcher," said David; "a mighty good one."

They quickened their steps, for big drops of rain were beginning to fall. They turned in at the Hapgood farmhouse and stopped long enough for a word with Sandy's mother. Tom swung the basket of provisions on his arm.

"Don't you think you'd better wait a short spell," said Mrs. Hapgood. "Looks to me as if we were in for a right smart shower."

They looked at the sky—pierced now with frequent sharp jabs of lightning.

"It's not raining hard yet," said Tuckerman. "How about it, boys?"

"Let's beat it," said Tom.

Out in the road again they jogged down to the water, where the *Argo* was fastened. Casting her

adrift, Tom took the tiller.

It was a real summer thunderstorm that had come up quickly—sprurts of rain and banks of black clouds—at the end of the warm day.

But the boys were used to a wetting, and Tom had often sailed through a heavier downpour than this. David stretched himself out on a seat in luxurious comfort. “A shower-bath feels good,” he murmured. “All I want now is a good swim.”

The wind, however, wouldn’t stay in any one quarter; it kept jumping about as if it were trying to box the compass and succeeding pretty well. Tom had to keep changing course. The *Argo* zigzagged about like a darning-needle flying over a pond. And the thunder kept crashing louder, and the lightning opening bigger and bigger cracks in the violet-black of the sky.

“Hello, there’s a canoe!” sang out Ben suddenly.

Ahead of them, an eighth of a mile from shore, a cockleshell craft was dancing over the waves. There were two people in it, one at either end, and each was paddling fast.

“Ticklish business,” said Tuckerman. “There’s white water off that point. See how it jerks about. I say, Tom, couldn’t we get up near them?”

“Righto,” answered the skipper. “Confound those blooming gusts!”

If the *Argo* was having her hands full in standing up to the constant squalls that kept chasing over the water, the canoe was finding the struggle an even more difficult task. She careened, righted, almost disappeared in a wave. The *Argo*’s crew were now all at the rail, except the skipper, watching the little craft battle her way along.

Then Ben sang out: “Why, it’s Lanky Larry and the Amousock captain! Gee, but that water’s rough!”

A lightning flash so vivid that it seemed to daze the crews of both the boats, was followed by a roll of thunder that shook the sea and the sky. Next instant the waves leaped up as if in a frenzy of fright. A great roller caught the canoe and twisted her nose about; another slapped her amidships; a third—All that the crew of the *Argo* saw was a swirl of wild waters where the little craft had been.

Tuckerman muttered something. Tom, with a shout of warning, brought the *Argo* about. Now there were to be seen in the water two heads, two tossing paddles, and the upturned bottom of the canoe.

The point of land was not far distant, and for some reason the boys in the water were striking out in that direction, possibly because they thought the sailboat, in such a squall, could not keep her course.

While Tom manoeuvred the *Argo*, the other three watched the swimmers. Both were making fair headway, the Amousock captain somewhat in the lead. Then suddenly Larry threw up his hands and disappeared.

Tom swung the sailboat around, and almost instantly Ben and David, coats and shoes stripped off, dove into the water. For the moment the sea was calmer, and the two made the most of their chance. Hand over hand, in great spurts, they drew closer and closer to the place where Larry had vanished.

Tom said things to the sail, which would not fill as he wanted. Tuckerman clutched the rail, his eyes never leaving the swimmers. And at last—an eternity, it seemed to the watcher—the two boys reached the spot. A moment later, and in some way they had managed to draw Larry up between them.

By now the Amousock captain had turned and was swimming back; and by now Tom had contrived to make the *Argo* behave. With a rush she arrived where the boys were struggling in the waves. Ben clutched at the side; with his other hand he helped David lift Larry up into Tuckerman’s arms.

Larry was hauled aboard. David and Ben climbed in. The other boy was pulled up from the water.

The *Argo*, restive, cavorting, commenced to dance again. “Can’t stop to pick up the canoe,” muttered Tom. “Thank Heaven, Lanky’s all right!”

Larry, very white and shivering, was rubbing the muscles of his legs. “It was a cramp,” he explained. “Doubled me up in a minute.”

Tuckerman put his coat around Larry’s shoulders. “Never mind, never mind,” he kept murmuring. “We’ll have you up at my house in a couple of jiffies.”

And, the wind blowing great guns, but keeping in a fairly steady direction, the *Argo* soon reached the island. By that time Larry, assisted by Tuckerman, had managed to rub the kinks out of his leg muscles, and was able to hobble ashore.

Cold, and drenched, and all of them shivering more or less, the party went up to the house. “The kitchen’s the place,” said Tuckerman. “There’s plenty of firewood there.”

Shortly the logs were blazing on the wide kitchen hearth, and Tuckerman, finding a tin of coffee in a cupboard, was making a steaming drink. Tom in the meantime had brought an armful of Christopher Cotterell’s clothes from a room abovestairs, and the boys who had been in the water put on dry things.

“Well,” said Larry, when he was warm and dry, and had swallowed half-a-cupful of Tuckerman’s steaming hot coffee, “I knew this David fellow was a good sport when I tried to strike him out this afternoon; though I tell you it made me mad when he stung that ball for a homer.”

"Don't mention it," said David. "A fellow's got to do his duty."

"You do yours, all right," nodded Larry. "I guess we'll have to forgive him now, won't we, Bill?"

Bill Crawford, the Amoussock captain, gave his knee a great slap. "We'll have to elect him to the club of good scouts, Lanky. And the rest of this bunch, too."

"Pass the coffee pot," said David.

Stretched at his ease in a cane-bottomed kitchen chair, Larry's eyes roved around the room. "I thought there wasn't anybody on this island this summer," he said. "That's the story they tell at the camp."

"Oh yes, it's deserted," said Ben, "except for Professor Tuckerman and his three able assistants."

"What is the Professor doing here?" asked Bill Crawford.

There was a momentary silence, broken by Ben's solemn voice. "He's busy polishing up the knocker of the big front door. I don't know whether you noticed it when you came in, but there is a beautiful knocker, made of pure brass. He shines it every day."

An amused snicker from Bill was followed by Larry's asking another question.

"This is the Cotterell house, isn't it? There's some old yarn about it, seems to me I've heard."

"Did you ever hear of an old house that didn't have some yarn attached to it?" demanded Tuckerman.

"Change the subject, Lanky," sang out Bill. "'Tisn't fair to pry into the family's secrets."

"Right you are." Larry stretched his arms. "Well, the question before us is how are we going to get back to camp before they find that canoe, and us missing?"

Tom went to the kitchen door and looked out. "The storm isn't over yet," he announced. "Couldn't you lads stay to supper? If you will, I'll sail you back afterwards. Likely as not the water'll be smooth as a mill-pond in an hour or so."

"They won't be looking for you at your camp yet," said Tuckerman. "They'll think you landed somewhere, and are waiting for the squall to blow over."

"We'll stay to supper," said Bill. "It would be a shame to have you fellows get wet again on account of us."

David jumped up. "We've got provisions stowed away right here in the kitchen." Rolling up his sleeves, he gave directions to his assistant cooks.

The kitchen of Cotterell Hall had never seen as much activity as it did in the next half hour, with the result that a sumptuous feast was soon set out on the table.

They ate as if they hadn't tasted food for a week, cleaned up, and trooped out to the front door. The squall was over, a light wind was blowing—not enough to ruffle the water—and stars were beginning to shine in a cloudless sky.

The *Argo's* sail was raised, and the skipper sent her across the bay to the place where the canoe had upset. Search soon found the canoe rocking in the surf on a sandy beach of the mainland. She was righted and her painter fastened to a cleat at the stern of the sailboat, and the *Argo* took a course alongshore. Presently, rounding a point, the crew saw a bonfire at Camp Amoussock lighting a stretch of woods.

They all went ashore, and found the Camp just about to start out on a search for the missing boys. The visitors had to stay a while and be entertained by their hosts, and it was not until the moon was high in the sky that the *Argo* again pushed her nose across the water, a southerly breeze filling her sail.

As they came abreast of the western end of their island another sailboat, looking like a great white moth in the moonlight, went scudding away over the silver sea.

"Hello," said Ben, "what is she doing here? Poaching on our preserves, it seems to me."

"The harbor's free to everyone," said David. "I don't suppose even Crusty Christopher objected to people sailing boats on the water, if they didn't try to land on his shore."

"Lanky knew there was some old yarn about the Cotterell house," Ben continued, paying no attention to David's remark. "And if he knew, why shouldn't others?"

"Well," said Tom, "what's the answer?"

"The answer is that we're likely to have callers. Not the kind that leave their visiting-cards, but the sort that snoop around when nobody's home."

"Thieves?" questioned David.

"No," said Ben, "I didn't mean thieves exactly. Detectives come nearer to what I meant."

Tuckerman chuckled. "Benjamin, you're a wonder! You never let go of an idea once you get your teeth in it, do you? I'd forgotten all about the treasure. I was studying the stars, and Dave was thinking about baseball, and Tom about the course he's steering; but you—why, you were puzzling your wits about Sir Peter and the mahogany man, and goodness knows what else. Keep it up, Ben my boy. That's the road to success."

And Ben, thinking of what he had found that morning, grinned but said nothing. If he could only work out the scheme he had in his mind, he felt that he would be prouder than if he knocked home

runs against the very best baseball pitchers in the major leagues.

IX—THE CHEST IN THE ROCKS

John Tuckerman was leaning on his arm and looking out at the sparkling, gleaming blue-green water when Ben Sully woke next day. Ben kept still and watched him, as he had watched him on several other mornings. Tuckerman looked so absorbed, so intent. He seemed to be sniffing the air. And Ben, to whom a summer morning on the New England coast presented no novelty, appreciated that to this man everything about him seemed like a part of wonderland.

The only sounds were the lapping of waves and the calling of birds in the woods back of the camp. A great gray-white gull was soaring far out over the water, slanting first this way, then that, as though he were trying his wings before he made a real flight. Nearer shore two white terns circled round and round, and then dropped straight in the bay, their sharp beaks darting at fish. The shore of the mainland rose in a green swell, on which pearl-colored fleecy clouds seemed to be floating, and the shore of the island itself, above the beach, was a tangle of bay and juniper and wild roses, all shades of greens and pinks in the early sun.

Ben saw this through Tuckerman's eyes, and felt the spell of enchantment. Then David rolled over, stretched his arms, grunted; and the spell was broken. A pine-cone, tossed by Ben, landed on David's nose. "Hi there, you mosquito!" exclaimed the nose's owner. He threw the pine-cone at Tom. "Time to be up, lazybones. Breakfast in half-an-hour, and those who aren't down when the bell rings won't get any!"

"The tub's mine first!" shouted John Tuckerman, and pulling off his pajamas he took a few leaps across the grass and raced over the sand to the water, where he ducked under a wave and bobbed up again, splashing and yelling.

Ben, then David, then Tom, followed, making more noise between them than all the wildfowl on the island put together. The water was cold, but fine for a morning swim, and when, after fifteen minutes, the four came out on the beach again, they seized the Turkish towels that hung conveniently on a juniper, and rubbed themselves to a brilliant lobster-like glow.

"That particular swimming-pool," said John Tuckerman,—*"I refer to the one commonly called the damp spot, or the ocean,—beats all the porcelain-lined tubs it has ever been my privilege to bathe in. It's true there's only cold water; but come out into this sun for a few minutes and you'll be hot enough. Now it seems to me"*—but at that particular moment he began to pull his flannel shirt over his head, and when his words again became audible he was saying *"shake well, and take a teaspoonful in a glass of water every morning before breakfast."*

Breakfast! Magic word after a swim in the ocean! The boys jumped into their clothes and set to work. For the next half-hour the thoughts of all the campers were centred on food.

But as soon as his plate was cleared Ben began to consider another matter. He quoted lines to himself, *"I took the box to the north cliff... I hid it in the pocket in the rocks. There are two veins that make a mark like a cross."* Very good; that was plain. And as soon as the after-breakfast chores were done he said, rather self-consciously, *"I know where there's a pool full of cunners,"* and picking up his fishing-rod and tackle, he hurried into the woods.

He looked back over his shoulder once or twice, but no one was following him. Through the thickets, dappled with sunshine, he went at a brisk trot. This brought him out on the north shore, where the high rocks towered above the beach like a line of battlements. He swung himself over a cliff and dropped lightly on to the sand. Leaving his fishing-rod in a convenient place where he could pick it up quickly if anyone came by, he began his search.

There were crevices in the rocks, and each of these had to be explored. Bushes and trailing vines, growing from little footholds, covered the seaward surface of many of the cliffs. But Ben, thrilled with the sense of exploration, and persevering by nature, stuck to his task, and was rewarded at last by finding what he sought, two veins of a light yellow color that made the distinct mark of a cross.

"That's it!" he muttered, excited. "And, by Jove, there's the pocket!"

Down on his knees he went, and thrust his head into an opening. He pushed himself forward by digging his toes in the sand. And soon his outstretched hand touched a large chest, he felt metal bands about it, he pushed it, but it was wedged in tight.

Presently he pulled himself out, stood up, and considered the situation. He had found the box that James Sampson had hid in the rocks. His first thought was what a tremendously strong man Sampson must have been to carry such a chest all the way from Cotterell Hall to this north shore. However, Sampson might not have carried it; he might have brought it in a cart or by some other means. And his next thought was, how could Benjamin Sully get that chest out of the pocket.

That took a good deal of thinking, and he sat down and considered it from various angles.

Into his brown study two voices from somewhere back of him made interruption abruptly.

"He's fishing for cunners on the dry sand! First time I ever saw that done. He just coaxes 'em out of the water."

"Keep quiet! He's counting the grains of sand. He's got up into the millions."

"He's thinking up a way to hypnotize the fish. Stare at them hard enough, and they'll swim right up

on the beach.”

“He’s copying King Canute. Telling the waves to go back.”

“He’s working out a time-table for the tides.”

Ben turned his head. “As a matter of fact, the thing I’m thinking about is a thousand times more interesting than anything you’ve guessed.”

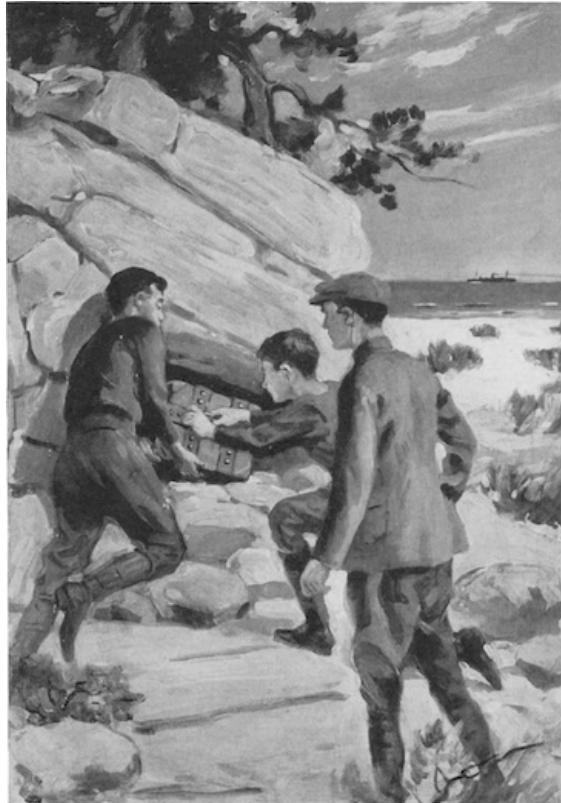
The two voices were those of David and Tom.

“I’ve always said,” observed David, “that you can’t catch our Benjie napping. He seems to be sitting there like a bump on a log, but he’s really thinking of the most remarkable things.”

“I shouldn’t wonder,” nodded Tom, “if it was something utterly prodigious—like why the water’s wet or fish have scales.”

“No,” said Ben pleasantly, “I was wondering how I could get Peter Cotterell’s treasure chest out of the place where his servant James Sampson hid it. It’s rather too heavy for me to handle by myself.”

The other two stared. “Benjie oughtn’t to have come out here without a cork helmet,” said David. “I suppose he’s got a sunstroke.”



“Sampson put the chest there,” he concluded.

“What are you driving at?” asked Tom. “Have you really found the treasure, Ben?”

Ben pointed negligently toward the cleft in the rock. “There,” he answered. “See that yellow cross? That marks where he hid the chest.”

“You’re dreaming!” David snorted.

“How do you know?” questioned Tom.

Ben took from his pocket the piece of paper that bore James Sampson’s message. He read it aloud, slowly, giving each word full weight. “Sampson put the chest there,” he concluded. “And there it is now. I crawled in and found it.”

Even David was impressed by that. He got down on his knees and poked into the cavern, and when he stood up he nodded solemnly.

“There is something in there,” he said. “I shouldn’t wonder if Ben might be right.”

“Well,” said Tom, “there’s a rope in the sailboat. We left her around the point.” He hurried away.

In a few minutes he was back, with a coil of good-sized rope.

Taking an end of this, Ben again crawled into the opening and made the rope tight about the chest. Then the three boys took hold of the other end of the rope and began to pull. The sand was not very secure footing and the chest was heavy, but gradually they pulled it out. They discovered it was a box made of hard wood, with iron fastenings.

“Well,” declared Tom, “if James Sampson carried that all the way here by himself, all I’ve got to say is that he deserves his name.”

“These mahogany men,” added David, “supposing that the fellow who carried this chest was a mahogany man—must belong to a race of giants. I wonder if it was a mahogany man who made those footprints on the edge of the creek?”

Ben had picked up a flat stone, shaped something like a large Indian arrowhead, and another round stone; and inserting the first stone under the lid of the chest, he struck it several blows with the other.

Tom watched him a moment. "You can't pry it open that way," he asserted. Looking along the beach, he selected a big, egg-shaped stone and brought it back to the chest. Lifting it in both hands, he dropped it on the iron band just above the lock. The iron snapped apart. The stone bounced off on the sand.

David and Ben seized the lid. With a creaking of hinges it was lifted. There before them was a light blue coat, gold-braided, a three-cornered hat of felt, a sword in a tarnished scabbard.

"My eye!" exclaimed Tom. "Just clothes! Why in the world did he want to hide such things?"

Ben was flinging them aside. Underneath were other garments, several suits of the style worn by gentlemen in Revolutionary days, and then the oddest collection of bric-a-brac, candlesticks, pewter pitchers, a silver snuff-box, a couple of lacquered platters, and even some china plates.

David started to laugh. "Well, if that's the Cotterell treasure, I can't give it much! I don't see why the Barmouth people wanted to lay hands on it, or why Sir Peter and his precious James Sampson were so eager to get away with it. Why, it's regular junk-shop stuff. I don't suppose the whole collection, if they'd sold it at auction, would have fetched enough to feed a soldier a week."

Ben looked very much crestfallen. He fingered the suits, the snuff-box, the platters. "No," he said, "it does seem mighty queer. And to think that Sampson brought these things over here, intending to take them away in a boat! I don't understand it at all."

"Never mind, Benjie." Tom slapped his friend on the shoulder. "You found the chest anyway."

"That's right. You did," said David. "You worked out the puzzle. It isn't your fault if the treasure was just old junk."

Ben was scratching his head. "But surely Sir Peter did have some valuable plate," he argued. "The people of Barmouth knew that. Then what did he do with it?"

"Maybe he melted it down himself," said David. "Anyhow it isn't in that chest."

"That's so." Ben picked up the snuff-box and stuck it in his pocket. "Where's the Professor?"

"He went up to the house. Said he was going to write a letter," Tom answered. "I'll tell you what we'll do, old sport. I'll take you out in the *Argo* and let you have some fishing."

The chest was shut again and pushed back into the pocket. Ben regained his fishing-rod and tackle, and the three embarked in the sailboat. And presently the satisfaction of pulling flounders on board made Ben forget everything else.

When they returned to camp, with a fine catch of fish, they found John Tuckerman busy preparing dinner. Ben told his story, while Tuckerman listened with the greatest interest. "It does seem odd," he said, when Ben had finished. "Most peculiar, in fact." He mused a moment, his eyes regarding the water. "But then my good old ancestor Sir Peter was an odd kind of fish. I wonder now—do you suppose he could possibly have been planning to have a joke at the expense of his Barmouth neighbors?"

"You mean," said Tom, "that he might have hid those things expecting the neighbors to find them?"

Tuckerman nodded. "It might have been so. Perhaps he, or James Sampson, even expected the men in the boat that was waiting off shore to find where Sampson hid the chest."

"But why all this puzzle then about the pieces of parchment Ben found in the house?" asked David.

"Well, I'll admit," said Tuckerman with a smile, "that it's not as clear as a pikestaff. Only Sir Peter does seem to have liked his joke. However, the bacon's sizzling." Brandishing a fork in his hand, he bent over the frying pan.

That afternoon Tuckerman said that he had an important letter to mail, and the campers sailed to Barmouth. Tuckerman went to the post-office, and each of the boys dropped in on his family. Ben had a chat with his mother, then told her he must do an errand. This took him into a side street, where there were a number of small, unpretentious shops.

He stopped before a window that was filled with old furniture, andirons, odds and ends of china. He opened the door, and a little bell tinkled somewhere back in the house, and after a moment a small, wizened-faced man, wearing a big blue checked apron, came into the room.

"Afternoon, Mr. Haskins," said Ben.

"It's Ben Sully, ain't it?" said the proprietor. "Well, are you goin' to get married, an' want a nice set of furniture to go to housekeepin' with?"

"Not to-day, Mr. Haskins." Ben acknowledged the joke with a grin. "No, sir, I'm more interested just as present in what you call antiques."

"Antiques, eh? Well, what was you thinkin' of wantin'? I've some nice three-legged kettles, a soup tureen that came over in the *Mayflower*, an ivory back-scratcher that hails from India. Just look about, an' tell me what you want."

"I want you to tell me something about this." Ben put his hand in his pocket and drew out the snuffbox he had taken from the Cotterell chest.

"This?" Mr. Haskins took the snuff-box, pulled his spectacles down from his forehead on to his nose, walked nearer the window, and peered at the small silver box.

"What do you want me to tell you?" he asked after a moment.

"Is it a real old one?"

"Certainly it is. See that monogram? That's the finest embossed work." Mr. Haskins gave a chuckle. "I ought to know about that box, I ought."

"Why ought you?" asked Ben.

"Well, you see, this here particular snuff-box has been in my shop some time. I sold it to a customer just about a week ago."

"I thought perhaps you had," said Ben, trying hard not to show his excitement.

X—LIGHTS ON THE ISLAND

The information that Ben obtained that afternoon from Mr. Haskins concerning his sale of the snuff-box gave a new direction to his thoughts. He could not follow up this new clue just yet, however, without telling the others, and this he didn't want to do. They would be waiting for him aboard the *Argo*, and so, after a fifteen-minute talk with the shopkeeper, he hurried away to join them at the wharf.

One other thing he did, however, before the sailboat left Barmouth, and that was to get a canoe he owned out from a shed on the waterfront and fasten it behind the *Argo*. If he had the *Red Rover* with him—he had laboriously painted that name in orange letters on a scarlet background on the canoe—he would be able to come and go about the harbor as he wished and to leave the island without explaining his plans, as he would have to do if he wanted to take the sailboat.

"What's the idea?" asked David, who never overlooked a chance to ask a question. "Are you going to teach the Professor how to paddle a canoe?"

Ben nodded. "I thought that ought to be part of his education. The *Red Rover's* steady enough for any beginner to paddle."

Tuckerman looked askance at the little craft bobbing up and down in the wake of the *Argo*. "Any canoe's unsteady enough for me to upset in, I guess. However, I like Ben's idea. It was thoughtful of you, my lad."

At that they all laughed, for whatever Ben's reason had been for wanting the canoe at the island it was fairly obvious that he was not taking it there to further John Tuckerman's seafaring education.

That evening, however, Tuckerman reminded Ben of his suggestion. The water was calm, the breeze was light. "How about a paddle?" he asked. "Just along the shore? I promise not to rock the boat."

"Righto," said Ben. "Come on."

They went to the landing-stage at the pier and put the canoe in the water. Ben got in at the stern and balanced the boat while Tuckerman gingerly stepped in and squatted down at the bow.

"Not much room for long legs," said Tuckerman. "I'll have to tie mine up in a bow."

"You'll get used to it soon," encouraged Ben. "I'll do the steering. All you have to do is to put your paddle in, give a long, slow push, and take it out again."

"Sounds easy enough." Tuckerman tried to shift the position of his knees, with the result that the canoe rolled over almost far enough to ship a gallon of water. He threw his weight the other way, and the canoe nearly capsized.

"Plague take it!" he muttered. "It's worse than walking a tight-rope!"

"Easy there, easy," laughed Ben. "First rule in a canoe is never to move quickly. When you shift your weight, do it slowly. Pretty soon it'll come as natural as riding a bicycle."

"Riding a balky horse, you mean," said Tuckerman. "All right; I'll remember." He dipped the tip of his paddle into the water and gave a tiny shove.

Ben gave a long sweep with his paddle, a dexterous twist at the end of the stroke, and the *Red Rover* floated smoothly away from the landing-stage.

With Ben's coaching, Tuckerman soon was able to paddle fairly well. He found it somewhat difficult to keep the bow evenly balanced, but as Ben anticipated his movements and shifted automatically from side to side, Tuckerman gained confidence and soon was sitting steady.

They paddled along shore, past the camp and on to the upper end of the island. Tuckerman, feeling more and more at ease, was delighted with the motion, with the gentle swish of the water, with the still, starlit night, with the panorama of beach and cliffs and woods as they floated by.

"Let's go on around the island," he suggested. "This isn't real work at all."

Ben smiled to himself. He knew that Tuckerman would discover next morning several muscles in his back and shoulders that he wasn't accustomed to feeling. But the night was perfect for a paddle. "All right," he agreed. "No, don't you try to do any steering. The man in the stern does that." With a couple of twists he turned the bow to the north. "There," he said, "there's the cliff where Sampson hid the chest in the pocket."

Tuckerman turned to look. The *Red Rover* wobbled, slanted.

Ben shifted and righted her quickly. "Hi there!" he warned.

"My mistake," said the penitent Tuckerman. "I see that it won't do for me to think of two things at once when I'm out on this lily-pad."

"Paddle—quickly now," Ben ordered. "But not too quickly. There's a rip off that ledge."

They passed the rip and came into smoother water. Presently they were on the ocean side of the island. "There's the creek where we saw the footprints," said Ben.

"Don't point out anything else to me," said Tuckerman. "If I move my left leg I can't get it back in place."

By the time they reached the southern end of the island the bow-paddler felt as if the muscles of his knees were tied in hard knots. "Do you mind," he said in a tone of apology, "if I stop paddling for a couple of minutes and unwind myself? I'll move very slowly."

"Go ahead," said Ben. "I'll balance the canoe."

Tuckerman pushed himself back, then very carefully unwound his long legs, stretched them out with an exclamation of relief, rubbed the muscles, and then readjusted himself in a new and more comfortable position. "I suppose to be a really proficient canoeist," he observed, "one ought to be made of rubber. There—how's that? Didn't I do it cleverly?"

"Wonderful!" said Ben.

Tuckerman picked up his paddle again, and, proud of his ability to move without rocking the boat, stuck the paddle in the water and gave a mighty sweep. The bow swung around, rocked, tilted; Tuckerman pressed his arm hard on the left-hand gunwale.

"Hold on, Professor!" cried Ben. "We don't want to head out into the ocean. Keep your paddle out of the water. Steady there!" With alternate strokes to right and left Ben soon had the canoe back on its course parallel to the shore.

"I *am* a duffer," muttered Tuckerman contritely.

"Oh no, you're not," said Ben. "You're doing very well. Only you must remember to let the stern man do the steering. A little more practice and you'll find the *Red Rover* as easy to manage as falling off a log."

"Falling off a log is good," was Tuckerman's comment. "Falling into the water would be more like it."

They rounded the lower end of the island and came back on the bay side. They had almost reached the landing-stage when Ben said, "See, there's a light at Cotterell Hall. It's in the front door. It looks like a pocket flashlight. I suppose Tom and David went up there to get something."

Cautiously Tuckerman looked in the direction of the house. There was a small circle of light. It moved away from the door; after a minute it shone through a window.

"I thought I locked the doors," he said. "However, they may have climbed in through a window."

The light disappeared. The canoe floated smoothly up to the stage, and Ben held it level while Tuckerman climbed out. Ben jumped up lightly. Then they both pulled the *Red Rover* out and turned it bottom side up.

They went up the walk to the house. The front door was shut, and when Tuckerman turned the knob he found that the door was locked. He opened it with his own key, and the two went in. The hall and the rooms were dark, there was no sound of voices or footsteps anywhere.

"That's funny," said Tuckerman. "We didn't see Tom and David come down the path. Maybe they went out the back way."

But the kitchen door was locked, and when the two opened it and looked out there was no sign of the others leaving in that direction.

"I wonder what they've been up to?" said Ben. "Playing some joke perhaps."

They returned to the camp, and there were Tom and David, toasting marshmallows on long sticks over a bed of hot coals.

"We were betting ten to one," said David, "that you'd come back nice and wet. Want to dry your clothes at the fire?"

"No, thanks," answered Tuckerman. "We've been all round the island, and we didn't ship a thimbleful of water."

Tom glanced at Ben. "The Professor hasn't been fooling us, has he? He didn't know all about handling a canoe, did he?"

"No," said Ben with a smile. "He didn't know all about handling a canoe when we started. But he knows almost everything about it now." Then, as he sat down cross-legged on the grass, Ben said carelessly, "We saw your light in the house. I suppose you climbed in through a window."

"Saw our light in the house?" Tom echoed. "What are you giving us?"

His tone was perfectly sincere. Ben saw that he wasn't joking.

"Well, we certainly saw some light," Tuckerman stated. "It looked like a pocket flashlight, at the front door and at one of the windows."

"Not guilty," said David. "Are you sure it wasn't a firefly?"

"You two have been right here ever since we left?" asked Ben.

"Yes," answered the two in chorus.

"And you haven't seen anyone land, or heard anyone?" Ben continued.

"No," came the chorus.

Ben looked at Tuckerman. "Well, someone was in the house. How about that, Professor?"

"Somebody was. But I can't imagine what they could have been doing. I don't suppose they were thieves."

"It's my opinion," said David sagely, "that they were hunting for the famous Cotterell treasure. And now that you've found it, Benjie, I'd suggest that you put up a big placard, stating 'The treasure has been found. No seekers need apply.'"

"Very good," said Ben. "Only the real treasure hasn't been found, you see."

"What!" exclaimed David.

"No," said Ben, "that's my humble opinion." And then, as if he wanted to change the subject, he added, "I'm going to toast one large, juicy marshmallow, and then I'm going to turn in."

Half-an-hour later the moon, riding up in the sky, looked down through the branches and saw that the four campers were sound asleep. There was the lap-lap of waves, the gentle purring noise as the water washed over pebbles, and in the tops of the pines a soft lullaby of the breeze.

Tom stirred, turned, opened his eyes. It seemed to him that something had waked him. He looked about; there was only the familiar scene. He gave a satisfied grunt and curled his head in the hollow of his arm. Then he looked around again to make sure that they had put out all the embers of the fire. And at some distance through the woods, in the direction of the pier, he saw a light that moved.

Immediately he remembered what Ben and Tuckerman had said about seeing a light in the house. Noiselessly he got up, pulled on his shoes and stuck his arms in his jacket. Through the woods he stole, stealthily as an Indian. The light had disappeared, but he thought he heard the sound of feet on the planks of the pier.

He came to the trees nearest to the clearing about Cotterell Hall. The house was dark; there was no sound or light in the neighborhood. But he was convinced that there had been someone there, and presently he darted forward and crossed the open space to the shelter of the porch.

After a few minutes he stole to the corner of the house, and now his search was rewarded. Someone was leaving by the kitchen door. In the moonlight he counted three figures. They were heading away from the shore, toward the grove at the back; he guessed that they intended to take the path that led down to the creek.

Tom followed them at a distance. They went through the woods, and now he saw the moonlight on the water. They had reached the head of the creek, but they didn't stop there. They went on along the bank to the higher shore where the creek flowed into the ocean. Then for the first time Tom noticed the silver tip of a sail. Lying flat behind a bush, he watched the three men go to the rim of the shore, and, one after another, slide over the edge where the boat waited.

He wanted to see that boat, to get a closer view of the men; but there were no bushes between him and the shore. Now the tip of the sail was bobbing, now it was filling out; presently it was moving to the southward, a white wing, still as a floating gull.

He crept forward and watched. The boat was stealing away, soon she was only a dancing speck of white in the glittering moonpath. He had no way of identifying her or of making out her crew. He noted that she did not turn or tack when she came to the lower end of the island, but held on to a course that would bring her south along the main shore.

Tom stood up and eased his feelings by a long whistle. "What were they doing here? It must be something mighty important," he said aloud.

No answer occurred to him, and after watching the sail until it disappeared in the distance he turned and walked back to the house.

He tried both the doors; they were locked. He looked at the lower windows; they were all closed. He went down to the pier; the *Argo* was there and the *Red Rover*; there was nothing to tell him what these night-time prowlers had been doing.

He went back by the beach to the camp. As he stepped up on to the bank Ben opened his eyes and sat up. "Hello," he said sleepily. "Why, Tom, what are you doing?"

"Sh-ssh," murmured Tom.

Ben rubbed his eyes, crawled out of his bed, caught Tom's arm, and pulled him down to the beach. "What were you doing?" he demanded in an insistent whisper.

"Well, I saw a light, and I went to find out what it was."

"Yes? And you saw them, did you?"

"Saw whom, Benjie?"

"Saw the pirates, did you?"

"The pirates! You're half-asleep. What are you talking about?"

Ben nodded his head. "Oh, I know something about them."

"Well, I saw three men. They went away in a sailboat."

"Who were they? What did they look like?"

"I don't know. I didn't get very close."

"I wish you'd taken me along with you. I'll bet I'd have found out something."

That nettled Tom, and he answered more loudly, "Oh, you would, would you? I thought you knew all about them."

"Sh-ssh," muttered Ben. But David had wakened now, and his voice boomed out, "What are you two lobsters quarreling over?"

"Nothing," said Tom. "Keep quiet, or you'll wake the Professor."

Tuckerman sat up. "You don't mean to say it's morning!" he exclaimed.

"No, it's not," Tom answered. "Can't a fellow take a stroll in the moonlight without rousing the whole town?"

"Stroll in the moonlight!" chuckled David.

"Go on with your beauty sleep, Professor. That's what I'm going to do. Let the two lobsters fight it out."

"All right," said the sleepy Tuckerman, nestling down again.

Tom turned to Ben. "So you know something about these pirates, do you?" he asked. "What were they doing here?"

"That," said Ben, "is going to take some thinking. You see what you can find out, and I'll see what I can. They won't be back here to-night. And I'm too doggone sleepy to argue anyhow."

XI—THE MAN IN GREEN

Ben, having explained to the other three campers that he had important business to attend to in Barmouth, set out in the *Red Rover* directly after breakfast the next morning. He paddled the canoe across the bay, landed at the town wharf, and went up the main street to Barmouth's one good hotel. He knew the clerk, Mr. Pollock, and after saying "Good morning" very politely, he helped himself to a small folded automobile map from a pile that lay on the counter for anyone to take.

"Going motoring, Ben?" asked the clerk. "Seems to me I heard you were camping on Cotterell's Island. How are things over there?"

"Fine," said Ben; and in return he promptly asked a question. "Had many automobile parties for dinner the past few days?"

"Quite a lot. Yes, business is pretty good. They like our special broiled lobster dinners."

Ben leaned on the counter, copying the familiar manner he had noted in hotel guests. "You had a party on Tuesday, didn't you? A big red car, with a Massachusetts license, driven by a man in green-checked knickerbockers?"

"Expect me to remember that?" Nevertheless, Mr. Pollock scratched his chin and considered the question. "Yes, seems to me I do recall such a party. Somebody said those knickerbockers were loud enough to be heard all the way to Boston." The clerk thumbed the pages of the hotel register and presently pointed out a name. "That's the fellow, Joseph Hastings. He comes from Cleveland, Ohio. There were four in his party."

"And he came in a big red car, with a silver eagle on the radiator cap?" Ben persisted.

"Well, now, I can't say as to that." But Mr. Pollock, being a good-natured man and having nothing else to do at the moment, scratched his chin again, and again considered. "I do think of something. He told me he'd punctured a tire and asked me the best place to go to buy a new one."

Ben nodded. "I suppose you told him Hammond's?"

"You're right. I did. Frank Hammond is a good friend of mine."

Then Ben changed the conversation to the subject of the big league pennant race, in which the clerk was very much interested, and after some further chat, departed from the hotel.

Frank Hammond knew Ben also, and was not too busy that morning to exchange a few words with him. After a number of questions about the state of the roads in the neighborhood of Barmouth, Ben said, "Mr. Pollock tells me you sold a tire to Joseph Hastings, of Cleveland, Ohio, Tuesday of this week."

"That's so," said Mr. Hammond, "I did. I sold him a couple of those big Vulcan tires for his rear wheels. Is he a friend of yours?"

"I don't know him very well," Ben evaded. "But I hear he's a fine fellow. Is he touring along the coast?"

"No. He said he was staying at a place called the Gables, down on the Cape Ann Road. Wonderful car he's got. He told me he'd had it built according to his own ideas."

"Big red car, with a silver eagle on the radiator cap?"

"That's the bird. Yes, sir, he must be a millionaire."

When he left the dealer in automobile supplies Ben went to his uncle's house and secured the loan of a small, ramshackle car he had often driven before. He made sure that the car had plenty of gasoline and oil, that the radiator was full of water, and he took a look at the tires. Then he drove south from Barmouth over the State Road.

It was a fine day, and many cars were out. Ben kept a watchful eye for such a car as that of Joseph Hastings, but none answering the description passed him. So he jogged along until he came to the fork of the Cape Ann Road and turned into it. There were fewer automobiles here, the road was not made for speeding, the little car bounced about a good deal going over ruts, and rattled like a load of tinware.

He met a boy on a bicycle and asked him if he knew a place called the Gables.

"Down the road a couple of miles," the boy told him. "Big house with a ship for a weather-vane."

Ben thanked him and drove on. Pretty soon he saw the weather-vane on a roof to the left of the road.

The Gables had a wide lawn, stretching down to a stone wall. The entrance to the drive was at the southern end, and the gateposts were flanked with larches. Ben drove to the gate, and stopped. So far his plan had been simple; now he was undecided what course to follow next.

He was musing over this when a voice hailed him.

"Give you greetings, sir. May I ask what you're pondering over?"

The words were so peculiar that Ben looked around in surprise. A young man had stepped out from among the trees and was nodding at him.

"Why—good-morning," said Ben.

"Has your car run out of juice?"

The man came up, a broad smile on his face. He himself looked very much like any sunburned fellow; but his costume was most peculiar. He wore a tight-fitting jacket of green, open at the throat, without any necktie. His knee-breeches were green, too, and so were his stockings, and on his low brown shoes were large brass buckles.

"No," said Ben, with an answering smile, for there was a twinkle in the stranger's eye as if he knew some joke, "I've gasoline enough to run this car all day. I'll admit it isn't the very latest model—not what you'd call a show car—but we do get wonderful mileage per gallon of gas."

"Don't make any apologies for your equipage," said the gentleman in green. "Many a valiant knight has ridden on a steed that wouldn't have taken the blue ribbon at the horse show. Don Quixote, for example. You remember him, of course? The Spanish cavalier who rode forth to tilt at windmills?"

"Yes," said Ben with a laugh. And then, seeing that the man was friendly, he added, "That's a wonderful suit of clothes you're wearing."

"You like it?" The owner looked down at his costume. "I designed it myself. It seems to me an improvement on the usual thing. And now, kind sir, since you tell me that your steed has plenty of fodder, may I ask how you happen to be sitting here on such a fine day?"

"This place is called the Gables, isn't it?" asked Ben. "Mr. Joseph Hastings lives here?"

"Right you are," answered the man. "But Mr. Hastings isn't at home this morning. Did you have business with him?"

"In a way. I wanted to find out if he'd lost a silver snuff-box."

"A snuff-box? That's interesting. But I don't think Joseph Hastings takes snuff."

Ben drew the box from his pocket. The man in green looked at it. "Now where did you find this?" he asked.

"On an island in Barmouth Harbor," said Ben. "Cotterell's Island, it's called."

"Well!" exclaimed the man. "Well, well—you don't say so!" He looked at the boy in the car with a new interest. "So that's where you come from, is it?" He returned the snuff-box. "May I be so inquisitive as to ask your name?"

"Benjamin Sully."

"Thank you. My own appellation is Roderick Fitzhugh. If you have no objection, Mr. Sully, I should greatly enjoy the pleasure of riding with you."

Ben didn't know what to say; and Mr. Fitzhugh evidently took his silence for consent, for he immediately hopped into the seat beside the driver.

"That's all right," said Ben; "but you see I wasn't thinking of riding anywhere. I came to find out whether Mr. Hastings had lost a snuff-box on Cotterell's Island."

"Just so. But you can't find that out, as he's not at home at present. And meantime I suggest that we go on a little adventure. A fine day, a steed with plenty of gasoline, and two gentlemen looking for amusement."

Ben was mystified. "What sort of adventure?" he asked.

"Well, what would you say to hunting for hooked-rugs?"

"Hooked-rugs?" Ben laughed; he was now so much amused at Roderick Fitzhugh's company that he

wanted to see more of him. "Do they grow on bushes?"

"No. They grow in these thrifty Yankee cottages. I'll tell you where to go."

Ben started the engine and drove on. At his companion's direction he soon turned into a by-road that led westward.

Roderick Fitzhugh nodded toward a cottage, in the yard of which a woman was scattering grain to a flock of chickens. "There is a likely-looking hunting-ground," he said. "Please stop when you come to the gate. I will exchange a few words with this respectable lady."

The car stopped, making its customary noise of clattering tinware as Ben put on the brake. The woman looked round, and in the usual neighborly fashion of farmers walked over to the gate.

"Morning," she said.

"Good morning to you, Madam," responded Roderick Fitzhugh. "You have a fine flock of hens."

"Yes," she said, looking at the man in the green clothes as if she didn't know exactly what to make of him.

"My friend and I," continued Fitzhugh, "were just discussing the subject of hooked-rugs. As soon as I saw you I said, 'There's a woman who knows all about them.'" His tone was so deferential that anyone would have been pleased to be addressed in such a manner.

The woman smiled. "Well, now, I don't know as how I know all about them; but I do have a few old rugs. Been in the family some time."

"You see!" exclaimed Fitzhugh, turning to Ben. And to the woman he added, "Would it be possible for my friend and me to have a look at them?"

"Surely it would. But they're not the new shiny kind you can buy at the stores in the city."

Fitzhugh and Ben descended and followed the woman indoors. Presently they were viewing half-a-dozen antique rugs, all of the hooked variety, that the woman collected from the upstairs rooms.

Ben looked on with interest and amusement while his new friend discussed the rugs with their owner. And after listening to Fitzhugh's admiration for these things that she evidently regarded as rather faded and only fit for service in bedrooms and attic, the woman said, "I'd be pleased to have you take one, if you care to."

"Oh, madam, you are too generous," Fitzhugh answered. "And yet I should like to have one. That medium-sized one, with the purple border. I'd be glad to pay five dollars for it."

"Why, it's not worth that much."

"It is to me," said Fitzhugh, and he brought out a five-dollar bill from his trouser pocket and laid it on the table.

With the rug they returned to the car. As they drove on again Fitzhugh said, "They used to tell me, when I was a small boy, that you could take one egg from a nest, and if there were several others left the mother bird wouldn't know the difference. I don't know whether that's so. But I'm certain this good woman won't miss that rug very much. So my conscience is easy, though I got that prize at a bargain. Now, Mr. Benjamin Sully, what do you say? Isn't hunting for hooked-rugs exciting?"

It was fun to hunt them with this amusing companion. Fitzhugh collected three more at three other houses, paying five dollars for each. At the third house the farmer and his wife and children were just sitting down to dinner and the strangers were invited to join them. They had an excellent meal, during which the man in green did almost all the talking, and when they returned to the car and started on again he rubbed his hands gleefully and said, "Mr. Benjamin Sully, it isn't so hard to find adventures if you look for them, is it?"

"Well," Ben answered, "this is all very well; but I set out this morning to see Mr. Hastings and learn if he'd lost a snuff-box."

"That's so, you did. Joseph Hastings—a silver snuff-box—found on Cotterell's Island. What makes you think that the snuff-box you found there belonged to Joseph Hastings?"

Ben considered how much to tell this Roderick Fitzhugh, and finally decided to supply him with more facts. "The snuff-box was bought by Mr. Hastings at a shop in Barmouth, and I found it yesterday in a chest hidden in a crevice in the rocks on the island. Why did he put it there?"

The man in green beamed with delight. "In a treasure chest? Why, that's splendid!" He looked at Ben with new approval in his eyes. "So you're mixed up in a real adventure, are you? Treasure hidden in the rocks—on an island! Why, that's magnificent! No wonder you didn't get excited over my tame hooked-rugs. Turn the car about, and drive back to the Gables. We must investigate this."

Half-an-hour later the little car turned in between the gate-posts at the Gables. It clattered up the drive to the front of the house. On the wide porch were at least a dozen people, men and women; and when they saw the occupants of the car they gave a shout of welcome.

"Hello, here's the lad in green!"

"We thought you'd been kidnapped!"

"Where'd you find the jitney?"

"Hope you've had some lunch!"

"We thought you'd been arrested as a suspicious character in those clothes!"

These were some of the exclamations.

The man got out of the car and threw his bundle of rugs on the steps of the porch. "My good friends," he said, "Roderick Fitzhugh has been adventuring, and there's his booty. Four beautiful hooked-rugs to add to the collection. And this is Mr. Benjamin Sully. Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Sully has found a silver snuff-box belonging to Joseph Hastings in a treasure chest on Cotterel's Island. What do you think of that?"

There was another chorus of exclamations, expressive of great surprise.

"Mr. Sully," the man in green continued, "if you'll get down from your steed we will partake of a long glass of lemonade—two glasses to be exact."

Ben climbed down and went up the steps. And then he noticed that all the people on the porch were dressed in quaint costumes, as milkmaids or archers or foresters. He looked at Fitzhugh, and the latter nodded. "Queer crowd, aren't they?" said Fitzhugh. "However, they won't bite."

XII—THE ADVENTURE AT THE COVE

That same morning, while Ben had been hunting for the owner of the red automobile with the silver eagle on the radiator cap, Tom and David and John Tuckerman had sailed down to Camp Amousock in the *Argo*. They found the boys at the camp in their bathing-suits, practicing for some water-sports that were to be held that week. A raft, with a spring-board, was moored off shore, and from this boys were diving and turning somersaults, backward and forward, like acrobats in a circus.

Other boys were swimming, practising for races, and still others were paddling round in tubs, trying to steer with their feet while they propelled the tubs forward by splashing the water with their hands.

"There," said John Tuckerman, as he saw a fat youngster revolving round and round in a tub, "that's the game for me. I believe, with my long arms and legs, that I'd make a hit at it."

The fat boy splashed too hard, and the tub went over neatly. There was a shout of laughter as the boy bobbed up in the water and tried to turn the slippery tub rightside up again. This was hard work; the tub went round and round, continually evading his fingers; and finally he swam to shore, pushing the tub before him.

"No," said Tuckerman, "that isn't the game for me. I used to be pretty good at picking up a pea in a tablespoon, but that was on dry land. When it comes to wrestling with a tub in the water—" He gave an expressive shrug—"I'd rather let the fishes do it."

The *Argo* landed, and the three guests were provided with bathing-suits from the camp's supply. For half-an-hour they swam and dived and perched on the raft, watching the boys in tubs. Then a bugle sounded on shore, telling them it was time to get ready for dinner.

The guests did full justice to dinner, sitting between Mr. Perkins, the Chief Counsellor, and Lanky Larry. Afterwards Mr. Perkins and John Tuckerman had a chat, while Lanky invited Tom and David to take a walk along the shore.

"There's a queer sort of place a couple of miles to the south," said Lanky. "It's a cove with a lot of shanties. Fishermen used to go there; there are boats and nets lying around; but I think it must be deserted. I saw some men there one day last week, but they didn't look like fishermen."

"Lead us to it," said David. "Deserted villages are right in our line."

The path along the shore brought them to the cove. A little tidal river ran inland, wandering up into marshes. On each side of the river was a stony beach, and a rickety bridge, with a single handrail, connected the banks of the stream. Small weatherbeaten shacks, doors and shutters sagging outward, fishing-dories, rusty anchors, lobster-pots, a few nets with round black buoys, these cluttered up either shore.

"Nice place, if it wasn't for the shanties," said David, regarding the cove.

"I found a chap painting here one day," said Lanky. "He told me it made a great picture; he liked the shanties first-rate."

"Funny what things painters like," chuckled David. "The more ramshackle a house is, the more they want to paint it."

They went down a rocky path to the nearer beach, and sat on the bottom of an upturned scow. As they were chatting they heard the creak of a door, opening on rusty hinges. A man came out from one of the nearer shacks. His clothes were fairly new, he wore a brown slouch hat and tan shoes—evidently he was not a fisherman; neither was he a farmer nor a common loafer; he looked as if he came from a town. He was smoking a small briar pipe.

"What are you doing here?" The man's tone was a little peremptory, though not exactly surly.

David enjoyed such a question. With a pleasant, friendly smile he answered, "Just sitting here and thinking."

"That's all you're doing, eh?"

"It is at present," David answered. "What are you doing yourself?"

The man frowned; looked up the creek, looked across at the opposite shore. "Nobody lives here now," he stated after a minute. "Sometimes I come and fish from that bridge."

"What's happened to the place?" asked Lanky.

"I don't know. Only nobody comes here now."

"Well, we came this afternoon," said David. "You see, we're explorers."

"You won't find anything to explore."

"Oh, I don't know about that."

The man shot a glance at David, not a very amiable glance. And with that he walked to the bridge, crossed it, and went into the huddle of shacks on the other bank.

"Pleasant sort of customer," said Lanky.

"He'd make a cow laugh," said Tom.

"He didn't like our being here," observed David, "Now I wonder why."

"He wants it all to himself," said Lanky. "He must be some sort of hermit."

"And just for that," said David, "I feel like sitting right here on this scow till he gets more hospitable."

As a matter of fact, however, sitting on the upturned boat and watching the waves surge gently up over the stony beach and then withdraw in a network of little rivulets that made the stones and pebbles glisten was not entertaining enough to keep the three boys there more than five minutes. Tom got up. "I'm going over the bridge," he said. "If our friend the hermit doesn't like it—well, he'll just have to lump it."

The bridge shook as the three of them stepped upon it. "For goodness sake, don't lean against that railing," Lanky warned. "Stop bouncing up and down as you walk, Dave, or you'll have us all in the water."

David went on bouncing; but in spite of that they reached the other shore safely. No one was to be seen here; somewhere in the clutter of shanties the man had disappeared.

"I'd like to know what that precious hermit is up to," said David, and he walked toward the shacks that were furthest from the bridge.

Lanky and Tom investigated in the other direction, where a clump of oaks came close down to the stream. At the edge of the trees was a shack a little larger and better built than the others. The door was open, and the two boys looked in. "Hello!" exclaimed Tom. "What's that on the bench? It looks like jewelry."

A brown cloak, a brown hat with a red feather stuck at one side, and a chain of gold links with a large green stone as a pendant, were piled on the bench.

Tom picked up the ornament. "It's imitation," he said. He looked around the room. "Why, there's a whole wardrobe of queer hats and cloaks and things here!"

"So there is," said Lanky. "What do you suppose they are? Actors' things?"

"Actors' things?" Tom glanced at the outfit of costumes that hung on pegs on one wall. "They're certainly not fishermen's things. But what would actors be doing in this cove?"

"I don't know," Lanky admitted. "It is funny, isn't it?"

They looked at the costumes more closely, and then went out of the shack. "I wonder if that man knows something about them," Lanky suggested. "He might have been keeping guard."

"Let's see what Dave's doing," said Tom, and started along the bank.

He had only taken a few steps, however, when he stopped. "Here comes a boat around the point. Let's beat it, and see what they do."

The two slipped back of a cabin, then to a shelter of bushes. Crouching there, they watched the boat nose its bow into the cove.

The boat was a dory. One man was rowing, two others sat in the stern. They looked no more like the usual type of fishermen than had the man whom the boys had first encountered.

With considerable splashing the boat was rowed up to the bridge. The tide was low, and there was hardly enough water at that point to float the dory. The rower shipped his oars and tied the boat to the railing of the bridge. Meantime the other two men stepped over the side and came up on to the beach.

All three headed toward the shack that the boys had just left and went in at the door.

"They seem to know their way about," whispered Lanky. "I wonder why Dave's friend didn't come down to meet them."

In a few minutes the three men came out again, and now they had some of the cloaks and hats in their hands. Each put on a cloak and a hat and strutted about; they laughed and joked at each other.

"What in the world—" muttered Lanky. "Actors. I told you," Tom whispered. "They look like highwaymen."

The men now seemed satisfied with their costumes. Hats pulled well down on their heads and cloaks thrown over their shoulders, they took the path toward the clump of oaks.

"I say," muttered Lanky, "what do you suppose they're going to do? Hold up some farmer's wagon?"

Come on, I want to find out what's their game."

"I'd better get Dave," said Tom. "You follow them. I'll catch up with you in a minute."

"All right."

Lanky went one way, and Tom the other.

Tom ran over the stones between the shanties, and looked in at the open doors; but he did not see David nor the man they had met first. He gave the whistle he used to call David in Barmouth. There was no answer. The shacks on this side of the stream all appeared deserted.

David was not to be found, and Tom supposed he must have gone further along the shore. Meantime he would be losing the chance of finding Lanky, so after whistling several times more Tom turned and ran toward the oaks.

The path along the cove was well marked, it traversed the high ground at the edge of the marshes and turned into fairly thick woods. At a dog-trot Tom soon came up with Lanky. "I couldn't find Dave," he grunted. "I guess he found the hermit so fascinating he went for a stroll with him."

"I've kept my eye on the three highwaymen," said Lanky. "This seems to be the only path around here, marshes on one side and the forest primeval on the other." He glanced at his wrist-watch. "I ought to be getting back to camp; but I can't leave an adventure like this. It wouldn't be decent, would it?"

"It would not," Tom assented. "If they try to blame you, you refer them to me. I'll say that we thought those fellows were up to some kind of mischief, and that it seemed to be our duty to investigate them. And that's telling the truth; they're what Benjie would call 'suspicious characters.'"

Every once in a while the boys would catch a glimpse of one or other of the cloaked men through the vista of the trees. Then the boys would stop and let the others get well ahead of them. And presently they reached a dusty road and saw the men tramping along to the south.

Tom and Lanky had to come out in the open then, but, as Lanky pointed out, there was no reason why the men, if they saw them, should think the two boys were at all interested in what they were doing. They walked a half-mile without encountering anyone, and then the boys saw an automobile coming toward the three in front.

"Now," said Tom, "we'll see if they're highwaymen. This is a nice quiet place to hold up a car."

But the men disappeared by jumping over a fence that ran along the woods on the left. The automobile, a man and a woman in it, dashed by the boys, leaving a cloud of dust.

"So ho!" exclaimed Lanky, "our friends don't want to be seen! Suppose we make ourselves scarce till they come back to the road."

The boys hid in the woods, and presently the three men reappeared on the road. Tom and Lanky followed suit, and the march was resumed.

A mile more, and the men came to a crossroad. They turned toward the west. When the boys reached the crossroad Lanky stopped. "This is a private lane," he said. "See, it leads up to that barn and stable. And there's a big house. Our friends are going in the back way."

There was a screen of trees at the corner. The boys went along the lane until the screen gave way to a close-cropped hedge. Here they had a view of a wide, velvety lawn and the large house, red-striped awnings at the windows, on a gently-rising slope.

"Hello!" exclaimed Tom. "Look there!"

There was no heed of his telling Lanky to look. Lanky was staring at that part of the lawn that was shielded by the trees at the corner. There was a small, one-story house that looked as if it were made of cardboard, a very picturesque building, brightly painted to resemble cross-timbers, with two little lattice windows. And grouped about the grass in front of the house were a dozen or so men and women, all of them dressed in fancy costumes, looking as if they had just stepped out of a picture book or down from the stage of a theatre.

"My eye!" said Tom. "What is it? A fancy dress party?"

"Looks like a Robin Hood scene," said Lanky. "Some of them have bows and arrows. See that girl in pink working that churn." He watched for a moment; then added, "So that's why our friends the highwaymen came along this way."

"They don't seem to have joined the crowd," said Tom. "Why didn't they jump over the hedge?"

The people on the lawn were too busy to notice the boys in the lane. Lanky nodded. "That's so. And it seems to me, Tom, that that crowd are a different type from our three friends. These people belong here; but I don't think the others do."

The boys looked up the lane. The three men had entered at a gate that led to the rear of the big house.

"Let's see what they're doing," said Tom.

Along the lane went the two boys, and turned in at the gate.

The men had disappeared. Lanky shook his head. "It's queer, mighty queer. Of course those fellows may belong here. But why should they come all the way from that cove? And bring those hats and cloaks with them?" He scratched his ear, as he did when he was puzzled.

"Come along," said Tom. "Nobody'll throw us out."

They crossed the lawn to the steps of the porch. A man came out from the front door, a man in livery, apparently the butler. He held himself very straight, he was an angular person, with a fishy eye.

"Yes?" he said; and though the word was a short one he managed to express in it a cold sense of disapproval.

"Er—" began Tom, "we would like to know if three men, wearing brown cloaks and big slouch hats, just came into this house."

The butler shrugged his shoulders. "There are gentlemen and ladies wearing every kind of costume coming in and going out all the time," he answered stiffly.

That seemed to put an end to further questions; but Lanky, after considering the matter for a moment, inquired, "Whose place is this?"

"It belongs to Mr. Hastings," said the butler, eyeing the boys most disapprovingly. "He is not at home at present. But I can answer any questions for him."

Neither Lanky nor Tom, however, could think of any questions to ask. It seemed absurd to tell this fishy-eyed servant that they had followed the three men from the cove. And after all the men might have a perfect right to have entered the house.

"Very well," said Tom, and turned on his heel, followed by Lanky.

But when they were out in the lane again, Lanky said, "I'm going to wait around here a little longer. That servant's a fool. Anybody could put anything over on him."

So they climbed up on the stone wall on the other side of the lane and sat there like two sentries.

XIII—ON THE FISHING-SMACK

When Tom and Lanky had turned to the right and investigated the fishermen's shanties that were nearest to the marshes, David had turned to the left, in the direction of the ocean. He had no particular object in view, except to see what the man they had met on the other bank of the cove was doing and exchange a few more words with him, if the opportunity offered.

He looked through the clutter of small, weatherbeaten sheds without seeing the man, and came to the beach on the ocean side. A short distance to the south was a spit of sand, and there, seated on a log, was the fellow with the straw hat.

David enjoyed an argument. He was not by nature so curious about other people as Ben was, but he liked to tease. So, with his hands stuck in his pockets and a little swagger in his walk, he went toward the man.

"Looking for a boat to come along and take you for a sail?" he said. "It's a long walk to town."

"You'd better be on your way then," the man retorted. His tone was not very civil, and it made David flush.

"I can look out for myself."

"Oh, you can, can you?" The man turned round and glared at the young fellow. "Well, my advice to you is to make yourself scarce pretty quick."

David squared his shoulders. "You don't want me and my friends round here, do you? A person might think you owned the beach."

"No," said the man, "I don't want you round here." He looked at the boy fixedly for a minute. "That's plain enough, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's plain enough," David admitted. "But I don't see that it's any reason why we should go."

"I've business here, and you haven't."

"Business? You don't seem very busy."

The man got up from the log and walked away, down the beach toward a ledge of rock that shut off the southern end.

What was the man's business? David, rather amused at the other's surliness, followed after, walking jauntily.

He climbed the ledge of rock. There was another scallop of beach, with bushes close down to the sand. The man was not in sight. But there was a small fishing-smack at anchor not far from the shore, and a dory was just pulling away from her.

David stepped down on the beach, and the first thing he knew something had knocked him flat. He lay sprawling on the sand, a heavy weight on his back. Someone had caught his two hands and held them like a vise.

"Holler if you want to," said the man with the straw hat.

David had no wish to shout. The breath was knocked out of him.

The man pinned him down, and after kicking a little, David decided the wisest course was to lie still. After a few minutes there was a grating sound on the sand. David twisted his head enough to see

that the dory had landed and that two men were coming ashore.

"Hello, Sam, what you got there?" exclaimed one of the strangers.

"A fresh guy, who wouldn't mind his own business," was the answer. "Now I'm going to teach him not to meddle."

"Good for you, old sport! Give him a good licking."

"Pity we left the cat-o'-nine-tails out on the boat," said the second man.

"Three of them came to the cove," said the man on David's back. "The other two went away; but this fellow had to go nosing around into other people's business. I told him to make himself scarce. But not he! Oh no, he had to find out what I was doing. And now I'm going to take him out on the boat and watch me do some fishing."

There was a laugh at this. "You'll let him bait your hook, won't you, Sam?" asked one.

"I'll let him take the fish off," Sam retorted. "You fellows row us out, will you?"

The others agreed. The man on David's back eased his position. "Now," said he, "you can come along without any fuss or trouble, or you can come with a black eye. Suit yourself; it doesn't make any difference to me."

Three to one was greater odds than David cared to tackle. "I'll go along," he grunted.

The man got up. David followed. Assuming a care-free manner he walked to the boat and climbed over the high side. A man sat at the oars, and Sam and the two others took seats on the thwarts. The oars dipped in the water, and the dory was rowed out to the smack.

David and Sam went aboard, and the dory with her crew of three rowed away again in the direction of the cove.

"Now," said Sam, "make yourself comfortable. You've found out my business. I'm going to fish for flounders." And he walked aft and down into the cabin.

David was puzzled. He could understand that this man might have had a grudge against him, even that he might have lost his temper and attacked him as he had; but why should he carry a grudge so far as to make him a prisoner on his fishing-boat?

He stared at the shore some time, then walked up toward the bow. Sam had reappeared from the cabin with fishing-tackle and was angling over the side. There was a line for David, and so, there being nothing better to do, David also set to fishing.

Fish were not biting on that particular afternoon, however. Presently Sam hauled in his line. "The pesky things never come when you want them," he said morosely. "I suppose there are lots of them swimming around everywhere except where I cast my hook."

"You're not a real fisherman," said David. "There's a knack to catching fish."

"No, I'm not; and I don't want to be," was the man's answer. "Of all the stupid jobs, I think fishing takes the cake."

David was about to argue this point when another man came out from the cabin and joined them. At once David, wise in the look of sailormen from his acquaintance with them on the docks of Barmouth, decided that this was the skipper. The new arrival stretched his arms and yawned prodigiously. "Golly, I'm only half-awake yet," he declared. "Sam, where'd you pick up this fellow?"

"He wanted to have a look at the boat," said Sam. "In fact he was so set on having a look at her that I just had to invite him aboard."

He said this with a sly glance at David, but if he had expected to get an angry denial he was disappointed, for David, leaning his arms on the rail, appeared to be in such a deep study of the shore as to allow for no interruption.

"The others gone ashore?" asked the skipper, evidently regarding the reason for David's presence on the boat as a matter of small importance.

"Yes," said Sam. He pulled a large watch from the upper pocket of his coat and looked at it. "And it's about time they were coming back."

There was no sign of them, however; and the sun began to slant toward the west, and then to dip behind the trees, and still there was no boat to be seen coming out from the cove. David, strolling up and down the deck, noticed that Sam was becoming impatient. After a while there was a fragrant odor of cooking, and David, putting his head in at the cabin door, saw that the skipper was getting supper in the galley.

The sun had set when the skipper's voice announced that food was ready. "Come along," Sam said to David, and though the invitation was not very cordial David went down to the cabin and ate his fair share of the meal.

Afterwards the three, on deck, watched the shore for a boat. And when the beach was quite dark and Sam had looked at his watch a dozen times, he said, almost angrily, "Well, Captain, I think it's about time to beat it. They must have changed their plans. We don't want to stay here all night."

The skipper glanced at David. "How about him?" he asked, with a jerk of the head.

"He can help you sail the boat down to Gosport. That'll pay for his supper."

David was tired of inaction. To sail to Gosport attracted him much more than staying here at anchor any longer. He spoke up quickly:

"Yes, Captain. I know something about handling sails."

"Good enough. That's more than Sam does," remarked the skipper. "He's about as useful in handling this boat as a belaying-pin."

Shortly the anchor was up and the fishing-smack under way. David carried out the skipper's orders with proper efficiency. With a gentle breeze the boat stole southward along the shore, and in half-an-hour the lights of the little settlement of Gosport were glimmering over the water.

The smack came up to a wharf. "Now," said Sam to David, "you can go ashore if you like. The captain and I may do a little cruising, but we don't need you any longer."

"Thanks," said David. He had a retort on the tip of his tongue, but wisely forbore to utter it. He jumped ashore. "If you come to Barmouth, look me up," he called back. "I'll be glad to show you the town."

There was a laugh from the skipper, but none from Sam. Immediately the fishing-smack pushed out again.

Gosport was a small place, and David knew no one there. He felt in his pocket, and found he had no money to pay his fare to Barmouth. He walked along the waterfront, considering what he should do, and presently came upon a young man, who was starting the engine of a small motor-boat.

"You're not going anywhere in the neighborhood of Camp Amousock, are you?" David asked the man in the boat.

The other looked around and surveyed the fellow who had asked the question. "Are you one of the boys from the camp?"

"I was there at dinner." And in a few words David told the story of what had happened to him during the afternoon.

"Well," said the man, "that's a queer yarn. I was just going out for a moonlight spin, and I might as well go up to the camp as anywhere. Jump aboard."

David accepted with alacrity. The motor-boat chugged out from the landing-stage, and leaving a smooth silver ripple, darted north.

The owner of the motor-boat—he had told David that his name was Henry Payson—said that, although he had only been a month at Gosport, he knew that part of the coast quite well, and had never happened to see any fishermen in the cove that David described. "That fellow Sam was a vindictive chap," he added musingly. "But you know, it almost seems as if he had some other object than merely showing his spitefulness when he took you off in his boat."

"That's what I thought," agreed David. "But Tom and Lanky were still at the cove. He didn't lay hands on them."

"Well," said Payson, "the cove's around that next point of land. No use stopping there now, I suppose. Your friends will surely have gone back to camp."

When the motor-boat rounded the point, however, Payson changed his mind. On shore there were a score of lanterns; both banks of the cove fairly bristled with them. "Hello," exclaimed Payson, "there's something doing there all right!" And he altered his course so as to bring his craft into the mouth of the river.

As the boat ran up to the bridge boys came down from both sides, apparently all the boys of Camp Amousock.

"Why, it's Dave!" cried John Tuckerman. And immediately the two in the boat were the target of a volley of questions.

"Hold on!" cried David. "Wait a minute." He swung himself out of the boat and up to the bridge.

"Where are Lanky and Tom?" someone asked.

"Aren't they here?" said David. And as Tuckerman and Mr. Perkins and the boys from the camp crowded around he told them briefly his adventures since dinner.

"We've been hunting for you ever since supper," said Mr. Perkins. "I can't imagine where Larry and Tom can have gone."

"Those three men rowed in here in the dory," said David. "Perhaps they carried Larry and Tom off somewhere."

"We've hunted through every shack," said Bill Crawford. "And we've been down the coast a couple of miles."

The chorus of voices explaining where they had hunted started in again, interrupted by Mr. Perkins giving the order to his troop to take the road back to camp.

David thanked Henry Payson, and the motor-boat chugged away. By the path along the shore the searchers regained Camp Amousock. And there Mr. Perkins and John Tuckerman and David held a council as to what to do next.

The upshot was that Mr. Perkins got out a small car, and with Tuckerman and David set out to see if they could learn any news of the missing boys.

Ben that afternoon had a long, cool glass of lemonade on the porch of the Gables while his friend Roderick Fitzhugh introduced him to the men and women who were sitting in wicker easy chairs. It seemed to Ben that their names were somewhat fantastic, but then so were their clothes, and the names did appear to suit the costumes.

"This lady," said Fitzhugh, nodding to a rosy-cheeked girl, who wore her brown hair in two long plaits down her back and whose dress was of primrose yellow, "is the fair Maid Rosalind. She can sing like a nightingale and dance like a wave of the sea, and when she churns butter it comes out pure gold."

The girl stood up and made a curtsy. "Thanks, kind Master Roderick," she said. "But perhaps your friend Master Ben doesn't care for gold on his bread."

"The more fool he," answered Fitzhugh.

"However, he can eat plumcake." And Ben's host pushed a plate of delicious-looking cake toward his guest.

"Yonder man in the high boots, with the fierce mustaches," Fitzhugh continued, "bears the high-sounding name of Sir Marmaduke Midchester. He looks like a sword swallower, but he is really as gentle as a lamb. He has been known to eat crumbs out of Maid Rosalind's hand."

"Glad to meet Master Sully," said Sir Marmaduke. "I wrote a song this morning—words and music both—perhaps he would like to hear me sing it."

Fitzhugh held up his hand. "Not just now, Marmaduke, please. Let my guest digest his plumcake in quiet."

So the introductions went on, with all sorts of jokes and banter. It was a jolly crowd, and Ben was enjoying it hugely. He began to find his tongue and make retorts of his own. But when he had finished the lemonade and the cake he turned to his host. "I'd like to stay, but I think I had better be getting back," he said. "I've got to go out to Cotterell's Island."

"No, no, Master Ben. If you'd like to stay, you shall stay. Cotterell's Island can wait. We need you here at present."

"Well, but—" began Ben.

"There are no 'buts' about it," answered Fitzhugh. "List to me, my lad. This place is a green oasis in a desert of modern things. Here we do as we please. And it pleases us now to be ladies and gentlemen of good Sherwood Forest and Nottingham." Fitzhugh stood up. "Come with me. I'll find you more fitting clothes than those simple togs you have on."

Ben grinned. He was fond of dressing up and had often acted in school theatricals in Barmouth. He didn't know what Fitzhugh and his friends were planning, but he thought he would like to take part in the game. After all, his car would take him quickly back to town and he could paddle out to the island by moonlight, if necessary. So he followed Fitzhugh indoors and up a wide staircase to the second floor.

When he came down again he wore brown doublet and hose, with a brown cloak slung from his shoulders and a broad-brimmed brown hat on his head. There was a chorus of approval from the group on the porch.

"Master Ben, apprentice to an armorer," Fitzhugh introduced him. "And now, my lads and lasses, let us hie us out to the greenwood tree."

There was nothing formal about Roderick Fitzhugh's friends. The crowd had hardly more than descended the steps of the porch when the girl called Maid Rosalind and the man called Sir Marmaduke Midchester each took one of Ben's hands and raced across the lawn. Luckily Ben had pulled his broad-brimmed hat on tight. His cloak flew back from his shoulders. And he heard shouts and laughs from the rest of the party as they followed pell mell.

The lawn of the Gables was wide and gently sloping. When Rosalind and Sir Marmaduke finally slackened speed Ben found they had come to a corner where poplars and spruces made a background against a road. One oak tree stood out by itself, and there was a small house with picturesque criss-crossed windows and a door with big curved hinges.

"There," said Sir Marmaduke, "behold the Forest of Sherwood! There aren't so many trees, but each of them is a giant."

Rosalind flung herself down near the oak. "Oh, Master Ben," she panted, "fan me with your hat."

And while Ben gallantly flapped his hat close to the red-cheeked lady, the others came bounding into the glade, like so many children just let out from school.

In a few minutes Fitzhugh, a paper in his hand, was calling out directions. Ben, observing everything, saw a couple of men crossing the lawn with what looked like a big camera. He turned to Rosalind. "I know what it is," he whispered. "You're moving-picture people doing a play."

"Good for you," she answered. She nodded toward Fitzhugh. "He wrote the plot, and we've been dressing up and doing it every day this week."

The play began, and went on for an hour or so, with frequent interruptions. Some scenes were done over and over again before Fitzhugh was satisfied with them. He found a part for Ben, and instructed him carefully how to act before the camera. And whenever the company got tired the cameramen turned off their machine, and the actors lounged on the greensward while somebody sang or did a fancy dance.

It was great sport, and Ben was surprised when, glancing toward the west, he saw that the sun had set behind the trees.

"I must be going," he said to Fitzhugh. "I've had a splendid time."

Fitzhugh waved his hand at the cameramen. "That's enough for to-day. We always end with a woodland dance, Ben, and then, back to the house for dinner."

"I can't stay to dinner," began Ben; but before he could say more Rosalind and another girl had each caught a hand of his and the whole company had spread out in a ring. Rosalind started to sing, and all the others took up the song. There followed a dance, in which Ben did his share, and then the crowd formed into a line, each with his hands on the shoulders of the one in front, and led by Fitzhugh they wound across the wide lawn and back to the Gables.

"Now," said Ben to his host, when they arrived on the porch, "I'll get into my own clothes and dash back to Barmouth."

"What? Without dinner? I can't let you go hungry." Fitzhugh turned to a servant. "Show this gentleman up to the yellow guestroom and get him whatever he wants."

It was difficult to argue with such a positive man as that; and moreover Ben was thoroughly enjoying his adventure. To be shown up to the yellow guestroom, and later to dine with such a company of moving-picture people would be a new and delightful experience. He would have a story to tell Tom and David and John Tuckerman when he got back to the island that would make them open their eyes. So Ben followed the servant into the house, where the lamps were already lighted.

There was a gallery on the second floor, with ever so many rooms opening from it. The servant went to a door and turned the knob. "This is the yellow room, sir. You'll find clean towels in the bathroom. If you want anything, there's an electric push button."

Ben went in and shut the door. He had never seen a more luxuriously furnished bedroom. He switched on an electric light and a little orange-shaded lamp on a table shone forth. He threw his hat on the bureau and rolled up the sleeves of his doublet.

The door of a bathroom stood open. He went in, turned on the water, and washed his face and hands. As he was drying them with a towel he walked over to a window. Looking out, he saw a garage and a circular driveway. Beyond that was a lane that led back of a big barn. And on the stone wall on the opposite side of the lane two boys were sitting.

Ben stopped using the towel, and stared. The two boys looked surprisingly like Tom and Lanky Larry. They were at some distance from the house and the shadow of the barn fell across the stone wall. But they did look like Tom and Lanky. However, it was inconceivable that those two should be sitting there. He must be mistaken. For what could possibly have brought those two to the neighborhood of the Gables? And why should they perch on a stone wall as if they had nothing to do?

Ben turned to go back to the yellow room; but in the doorway he stopped. Someone was there, at the bureau, a man in a brown hat and cloak. He had pulled a bureau drawer out and was looking in it. Some one of the guests must have mistaken this room for his own.

"Hello," said Ben, "I didn't know there was anyone here."

The man looked over his shoulder. "My mistake," he said. "I thought this was my room. I beg your pardon. My room is next door."

"I don't wonder you didn't know the right one," Ben said politely. "I never saw a house with so many rooms. I say, in that cloak and hat you look very much like me in my costume. I don't remember seeing you in the moving-pictures."

"I changed my things," muttered the man. "Sometimes I wear one set and other times another." He walked to the door, opened it, and went down the hall.

"That's funny," said Ben, half-aloud. "He keeps his hat on in the house. I suppose he thinks, because it's part of his costume, it's a perfectly proper thing to do."

Before the mirror at the bureau Ben put on his own broad-brimmed hat, turned on the light at a wall-bracket, and surveyed himself in the glass.

"The hat does help to make a fellow look different," he said to himself. "I guess I'll keep mine on when I go downstairs; though I don't suppose it would be the right thing to wear a hat to dinner."

He switched off both the lights and went out into the hall. The gallery and the lower floor of the big house appeared to be empty; he supposed the guests had all gone to make ready for dinner. He walked around the gallery to the staircase. The afterglow of sunset partly lighted the lower floor, and here and there soft lamps shed circles of radiance, but for the most part the house was pleasantly shadowy, which made its fine furnishings all the more interesting.

Ben went down the stairs and stopped in the large hall to look at a grandfather's clock that stood opposite the front door. Above the dial was a painted ship that sailed on a deep-blue sea. He was admiring the ship when somewhere in the upper part of the house someone gave a scream.

Ben waited a moment. There was another shout. Doors on the gallery opened. He heard people calling "What's the matter?" There was confusion above-stairs. Someone shouted "Lock the doors! Don't let him get away!"

The front door was open. Ben dashed across the polished floor to shut it.

His hand was on the knob when someone caught him from behind. A rug slipped under his feet and

he came down hard on the floor.

Someone had fallen on top of him, someone had tackled him tight about the knees, a regular football tackle.

There was a babel of voices. Someone shouted, "We've got him all right!"

Ben tried to speak, to explain. "Hold on there!" he grunted.

But someone else was explaining. He heard someone say, "We heard the yells, and we came in at the side door, and we saw this fellow dashing for the front door."

Then Ben heard Fitzhugh's voice. "Well, he won't get away now," Fitzhugh said. "Suppose you let him up."

The fellow who had made the tackle released Ben's knees and Ben turned around and sat up.

"My eye! If it isn't Ben Sully!"

Ben saw Tom and Lanky Larry staring at him in wide-eyed wonder.

"Of course it is, Tom, you goat!" Ben responded. "Who did you think it was?"

"We thought you were one of the men we tracked here from the cove," said Tom. "They wore cloaks and hats like yours; and you did look as if you were trying to escape."

"I was going to lock the front door," said Ben, getting to his feet. "What's the trouble anyhow, Mr. Fitzhugh?"

"Two of the ladies found things missing from their rooms—jewels," explained Fitzhugh. "And one of the men saw a fellow sneaking down a passage." He turned to Tom and Lanky. "I don't know who you two are, but Ben seems to, so that's all right. Let's see if we can find the thief."

Immediately everyone was busy. Some went outdoors, some hunted through the house. The Gables blazed with light; the garage and the other outbuildings were thoroughly searched. But no thief was found, and half-an-hour later the whole company met on the porch to talk over the matter.

Tom and Lanky by turns told their tale, how they had seen the three men at the cove put on cloaks and hats and how they had followed the men to the Gables. The butler, looking rather sheepish, admitted that the boys had spoken to him about the strangers and that he had not thought their story merited his attention. Then Tom said that he and Lanky had sat on the stone wall until they heard shouts in the house, and had then run in at a side door, and in the hall had seen a fellow dressed just like the three they had followed apparently making his escape. "We didn't know Ben was anywhere near here," he added; "and anyway we wouldn't have recognized him in that blooming hat."

Ben told about his finding the stranger, dressed like himself, hunting through the bureau drawer in the yellow room. The guests who had missed their jewels and the man who had seen someone stealing along a passage repeated their stories. "Well," said Fitzhugh, when they had all finished, "you remember we couldn't find some of the things we left in the playhouse the other day. I believe these fellows took them, and thought they could pass themselves off as some of my guests and ransack all the rooms in the house."

"They did it," said Marmaduke Midchester. "And they must have got away by one of the back doors while we were all here at the front."

"Do you suppose they've gone back to the cove?" asked Lanky. "They might have. They didn't know we were following them."

"That's an idea," agreed Fitzhugh. He spoke to the butler, and in a few minutes the chauffeur and two other men were receiving instructions to take the car and drive to the cove, look for the men, and if they were not to be found there to drive on to Barmouth and report the thefts to the police.

"And now, my friends," Fitzhugh added to his guests, "let us have dinner. Master Ben's two pals must need sustenance after their long tramp. Come, the soup will be getting cold."

They were still at the dinner table when a motor horn sounded outside. Everyone ran to the door. It was not Fitzhugh's car, however, but a much smaller one. From it descended David, John Tuckerman and Mr. Perkins.

"Well, I declare," exclaimed Tuckerman, "here's Tom and Larry! And that fellow in doublet and hose—why, I do believe that's Benjamin Sully!"

XV—VARIOUS CLUES

John Tuckerman and David and Mr. Perkins went up on the porch, where Ben introduced them to Roderick Fitzhugh. Fitzhugh, after shaking hands cordially with each of them, bowed toward his house-guests. "My friends," said he, "we have the pleasure of welcoming the worthy Chief Counsellor of Camp Amoussock, and Mr. Tuckerman, who is the owner of famous Cotterell Hall on Cotterell's Island in the harbor of Barmouth, and Mr. David Norton—er, Ben, what is the best way to describe your good-looking friend?"

"The best batter in New England," piped up Lanky Larry. "I ought to know. He knocked me out of the box."

"Thank you," said Fitzhugh in his amusingly formal manner. "Mr. David Norton, the famous Yankee slugger." He turned to the three new arrivals. "Gentlemen, let me present you to my friends," and

he called out the names, beginning with Maid Rosalind and the other ladies and ending with Sir Marmaduke Midchester.

Tuckerman laughed. "I'd no idea Ben mixed in such high-sounding company. What is he?—Sir Marmaduke's squire?"

"He's the apprentice to an armorer," said Fitzhugh. "Incidentally he was mistaken this evening for a robber."

Then Fitzhugh told the story of the robbery, including the adventure of Tom and Larry with the men from the cove.

"Those men must be the three that belonged to the fishing-smack," said David. "I thought there was something crooked going on. That's it—they're a gang of thieves."

David related his adventure, and then Mr. Perkins told how he and Tuckerman and the boys from the camp hunted for the three missing fellows. "We drove in here on the chance that you might know something about them," he said to Fitzhugh. "We came straight up the road from the cove, but we didn't see any men answering the description of the thieves."

"Well," said Fitzhugh, "we'll get the police on their track, and I'll telephone down to Gosport to have the people there keep an eye out for that fishing-boat. And now won't you come in and let me offer you some refreshments? Master Ben will want to change his clothes before he sets out in his racing-car."

While the others were in the dining-room Ben exchanged his doublet and hose for his everyday garb. Then he went to the garage and got out the little car he had borrowed from his uncle in Barmouth. It clattered up to the front door and a few minutes later Fitzhugh was saying good-night to Tuckerman, Perkins and the boys.

David got into Ben's car. The car from Camp Amoussock moved off along the driveway. Roderick Fitzhugh came up to Ben, who was starting his engine. "I regret that Mr. Joseph Hastings wasn't at home," he said, "so that you could have learned whether he did lose a silver snuff-box on Cotterell's Island. I'll ask him when I see him."

Ben grinned. "I'd almost forgotten about the snuff-box," he answered, "but I think you'll find when you ask Mr. Hastings that he did lose it there."

"You're a bright fellow, Master Sully."

Fitzhugh gave a wink. "Don't tell all you know. And if you're in the neighborhood any time come in and see Joseph Hastings."

The little car rattled away, following the tail-light of the other automobile.

"Who is that man?" asked David, as they turned into the highroad.

"Do you mean Mr. Roderick Fitzhugh?" inquired Ben innocently.

"Chuck it, Benjie. That isn't his real name."

"Why isn't it, smartie?"

"Roderick Fitzhugh! Marmaduke Midchester!" David repeated the names of some of the other people he had met at the Gables. "Stuff and nonsense, Benjie! They made them up."

Ben said nothing, and after a few minutes David began again.

"Where'd they get those clothes?"

"Where do people usually get their clothes? Tailors and dressmakers made them, I suppose."

"What are they? A crowd of actors?"

Ben smiled. "They're not professional actors. They're doing a play that Mr. Fitzhugh wrote for the moving-pictures, and they like their costumes so much they keep them on most of the time. I'm in the pictures," he added in a tone of pride.

The car clattered loudly over a rough stretch of road. Then David resumed his questions. "How in thunder did you happen to get mixed up with them?"

"I was driving along this morning and I met Mr. Fitzhugh and he suggested that we go on a hunt for hooked-rugs."

"Hooked-rugs!" exploded David.

"Yes. They don't grow on trees. They're to be found in the cottages around here. We caught some fine specimens."

David put his hand on Ben's knee. "It was time we rescued you from that fellow, my boy," he said. "I don't know anything about hooked-rugs, but I think your Mr. Fitzhugh has bats in his belfry."

The car driven by Mr. Perkins had stopped, and Ben brought his own noisy equipage to a standstill at the side of the road. "We're going to have another look at the cove," said Tuckerman. "We can't drive in through the woods."

But the cove, when they reached it by the path through the woods, was as deserted as it had been when the boys from Camp Amoussock explored it earlier in the evening. Lanky and Tom pointed out the dory, still beached on the shingle, in which the three men had come ashore, and the shack in which they had kept the costumes. "I think the dory is pretty good proof that they didn't come back here," said Tom. "I guess they must have made off toward Gosport, to join the fishing-smack

somewhere in that neighborhood.”

They returned to the two cars and drove on to Camp Amoussock. There Tom and John Tuckerman embarked in the *Argo* to sail back to Cotterell’s Island, while Ben and David continued their clattering ride to Barmouth.

At Barmouth, Ben restored the car to his uncle, and the two boys went down to the harbor and launched the canoe. Over the placid water they paddled easily, for they were old hands at handling a canoe together. And presently they landed at the island, and found the other two sitting on the pier.

There was much to talk over, and none of them were sleepy. They sat on the bank above the beach and swapped adventures. “I’ve been wondering,” said Tom, “whether there was any connection between the men who stole those things at Mr. Fitzhugh’s house and the men I saw here on the island last night.”

“And the gigantic footprints,” said David. “I’ve been thinking about that, too. But how would you explain the lady’s handkerchief, with the initials A. S. L.?”

They argued about that for some time before they went to bed. Ben, however, took little part in the discussion. He was trying to find a reason for the discovery of the silver snuff-box that Joseph Hastings had bought in Barmouth in the chest hidden in the cliff.

Next morning Ben went with Tuckerman to Cotterell Hall. “What do you make of it, Ben?” said Tuckerman. “We don’t seem to be any nearer to finding the treasure than we were when we first came here. I know you’ve got some theory in that wise head of yours.”

Ben walked up and down the living-room. “Well,” he answered slowly, “I think somebody has mixed up the trails. Let’s see how the matter stands. We know that your Uncle Christopher thought there was a secret. We found that out from the note in the frame of the picture.”

“Uncle Christopher knew there was a secret,” agreed Tuckerman. “I think that’s very clear.”

Ben nodded. “What did we find next? Those jottings your uncle made in his notebook.” Ben stopped at the secretary, took out the notebook, turned to the marked page, and read aloud. “‘As regards the saying that the hiding-place is just beyond the three pines that stand between two rocks where the sun goes down, I have scoured and scoured the island, and come to the opinion that the extreme southwestern point must be the place intended, although to-day there are only two pines there. I have dug at this place, but found only sand.’ That’s what your uncle wrote. But he didn’t find the treasure at the southwestern point.”

Tuckerman smiled. “So far so good.”

Ben ran his eye down the page. “Now we come to this. ‘Find the mahogany-hued man with the long, skinny legs and look in his breast pocket. That’s a saying my father handed down. What can it mean?’ Well, it seems to me that’s where the trails begin to get mixed.”

“Why, I thought we decided that referred to the mahogany secretary,” said Tuckerman.

“So we did,” answered Ben. “But were we right? Let’s see. We looked in the secretary and found a piece of parchment with half a message on it. We couldn’t make out much from that. Then I read this in the notebook.” He turned again to the page, “‘I’ve heard that the old clipper ship got some of the cargo that the mahogany man carried. But if she did, what use is that to us now? She sailed out of Barmouth Harbor during the Revolution.’”

“I’ve always thought you were mighty clever in finding that model of the clipper ship up in the attic,” said Tuckerman.

“Well,” agreed Ben, “I’m not denying that I was pretty well pleased with that myself. But what did we learn? That James Sampson took a box to the north cliff, meaning to put it on a boat, but found that there were some people off shore in another boat and so hid the box in the rocks, and that the rocks were marked like a cross. Very good. We found the place and we found a box there. But there wasn’t anything very valuable in the box when we found it.”

“That’s so,” Tuckerman assented. “But I don’t see any other clue to the treasure.”

Ben was staring through the window at the trees glistening in the sunlight. “I think that box was hidden in the cliff since we’ve been on the island,” he said reflectively, “and I don’t believe that any of the things in it ever came from Cotterell Hall.”

“You don’t!” exclaimed Tuckerman.

“And that means,” continued Ben, who was following the line of his own thoughts, “that somebody was trying to set us on a wrong trail by hiding those two pieces of parchment in this house.”

“But what object would anyone have in doing that?” Tuckerman asked. “I can’t see any good reason for their taking so much trouble.” He considered this idea for several minutes, while Ben continued his study of the trees and the glimpse of blue water that was to be seen from the window.

“And we thought we’d kept the problem of the Cotterell treasure pretty much a secret,” Tuckerman said presently.

“Gigantic footprints, lady’s handkerchief, men prowling about the house in the dark.” Ben chuckled softly. “That doesn’t look as if we had the island much to ourselves, does it?”

“No,” Tuckerman admitted. “We haven’t kept up the Cotterell tradition for exclusiveness.”

“Well,” said Ben, “if somebody has been trying to set us on a wrong trail, the question is was it the

giant, the lady, or the night-prowlers? Or did the three belong to one party."

"The lady is a stumbling-block," nodded Tuckerman.

"If there were two parties," said Ben, turning around, "my own opinion is that it's the giant and the lady who've been making game of us."

"Benjamin, what are you driving at?"

For answer Ben laughed. "Never mind, Professor. If I should tell you what's in my mind, and it shouldn't prove to be true, think how flat I'd feel. And now I think it's time we went back to camp if we're going in swimming before dinner."

Just before sunset that afternoon the chug of a motor-boat broke the stillness of the water around the island. The boat stole up to the landing-stage and two men got out. They went up the walk toward Cotterell Hall. "A beautiful mansion, Marmaduke," said the man in the white flannel suit to the one in brown jacket and knickerbockers.

"I agree with you, Roderick," said the other. "I suppose you would like to pick it up and carry it off to the Gables."

"Not at all. But what is to prevent us from making use of it here? Sir Peter Cotterell defying the people of Barmouth." Roderick Fitzhugh pointed in this direction and that, talking eagerly, until his companion interrupted him with a whispered, "They're coming up in their sailboat."

The *Argo* touched the landing-stage, and Fitzhugh and his friend went out on the pier. "Hello, lads," cried Fitzhugh. "We came out to take a look at the famous island Ben told us about."

"Did you learn anything about the thieves?" Tom called from the *Argo*.

"No, not yet. But we've got the local police scouring the country. I don't expect much from them," added Fitzhugh. "What I hope is that the rascals will make us another call."

"We've been fishing," said Ben. "Hope you'll stay to supper."

"Well," said Fitzhugh, "I've got my guests at the Gables."

"You wouldn't take any excuse from me yesterday," Ben retorted. "Turn about's fair play. You've never tasted Dave's fried flounder."

"That's so, we haven't," said Marmaduke Midchester. "I vote to stay."

They had supper on the beach, and afterwards Ben urged Midchester to sing the song he had written.

"Oh, Master Ben," Fitzhugh protested, "why break in on the evening calm?"

"Go ahead," said Tom. "We'd all like some music."

"Music?" echoed Fitzhugh. "Who said anything about music? Well, if you're determined to have him commit the crime, on your own heads be it!"

Midchester, who was a big man, stood up and sang in a deep bass, a song about a knight who loved a lady but who rode off to the wars. It had a spirited chorus, with many gestures, such as drawing a sword, waving a hand, and shaking a knight's banner. By the time that Midchester sang the second chorus all the others were up, singing loudly and imitating his motions. It ended in a final loud cheer that could be heard at least a mile away.

"That's better than I expected," said Fitzhugh. "See, it scared the geese."

He pointed to the western sky, across which a distant triangle of wild geese were flying.

"Now," said Tuckerman, "I will give you a song of the sea as sung in the prairie schooners of the west."

He had a good voice, and his song was so popular that he had to give an encore. Afterwards Fitzhugh said that he must take Midchester away or he would break out again.

Good-nights were exchanged on the pier and the motor-boat headed south.

"Well," said Tuckerman, "they're a good pair of scouts. I don't suppose this island has heard so much noise since old Sir Peter's day. I like guests myself. And as there doesn't seem any likelihood of finding the Cotterell treasure, I don't see why we shouldn't keep open house."

"Oh, we haven't given up hope of finding it, have we?" asked Tom.

"Benjie hasn't," said David.

They all looked at the black-haired boy.

"Why, of course, I haven't," he answered calmly. "And the more people who come out here to look for it, the more chance we have of finding it, I think. You don't suppose Fitzhugh and Midchester came here just to see us, do you?"

"I bet they did," said Tom.

"I bet they didn't," said Ben. "They took us in as a side-show on their way to the big tent."

XVI—THE CAMPERS CALL AT BARMOUTH

The *Argo* was scudding along in a good breeze to Barmouth. Ben was carving a small piece of wood

into what he fancied was a resemblance to a mermaid. David, his hands clasped behind his head, lounged in a comfortable corner. Tuckerman was at the tiller, and Tom surveyed his pupil through approving eyes.

"Professor, I think we're ready to give you your diploma," Tom said, as he noticed the easy manner in which Tuckerman handled the sailboat. "You're an able seaman. I'll give you an honor mark as a navigator."

"And I'll pass you as a first-rate cook," said David, turning and nodding his head. "You fried those eggs this morning just as well as I could have, and praise can't be higher than that."

"You coax the fish right out of the sea," said Ben, looking up from his carving. "There was a time when I didn't believe you'd ever learn to bait a hook so the fish couldn't nibble it off; but you can do it now. I'll graduate you as a competent fisherman."

"And my swimming?" asked Tuckerman, his eye on the water curling over the bow.

"Well, as to that," said David, "you're not exactly a merman, but you can paddle along at a decent pace. Yes, we'll call you a swimmer. I should say you were a pretty good all-around fellow now, Professor."

Tuckerman looked pleased. Praise from these three boys was very satisfying. And he knew that what they said was not mere idle banter. He had learned a great deal since he had been camping with them.

"Thanks," he said. "To be able to sail a boat, to cook, to fish, to swim—why, that's more than I ever expected to learn when I came here from the west. I tell you what! It was a great thing for me when I decided to take a look at my Uncle Christopher's island."

"And what are you going to do with it now that you've seen it?" asked Tom.

"I don't know. I've got to go back to my home. I don't suppose anyone would want to live way out in the harbor nowadays. There's not enough to do there. But I hate to take all those fine old furnishings out of the house. They belong there, and they don't belong anywhere else."

"There's an old house out on the Boston road," said Ben, "that the owner keeps up as a sort of a museum. He has all the old furniture that was used in colonial days. There's a great deal of travel on that road in summer, and he charges a quarter for every person that goes over the house. There's a care-taker, of course. I think she serves tea for a quarter extra."

"That's an idea," said Tuckerman. "Only my house isn't on a main road. It's a rather hard place to reach."

"All the better," put in Tom. "People like excursions. We could put up signs in Barmouth and all along the road. 'Be sure to take the boat to famous Cotterell Hall on Cotterell's Island and hunt for the treasure!' That would get them all right. You could charge as much as you like."

"And Tom could run a ferry, and Ben be the care-taker and serve ginger-ale at a dollar a glass," suggested David.

"And you could cork your face and be the famous mahogany man from the Barbadoes," retorted Ben. "He's a wonder in a minstrel show, Professor."

"It sounds good," Tuckerman agreed. "It's certainly up-to-date. But somehow I don't feel that it's quite dignified enough for Cotterell Hall."

"You can make it dignified enough," said Tom, "by charging enormous prices."

Tuckerman laughed. "You're right. You fellows are Yankees sure enough. You make me feel like a greenhorn."

"And think of the business it would bring to Barmouth," said Ben, putting the attempt at a mermaid into his pocket and sitting up straight. "People who went to the island would probably have to spend the night at the hotel. Why, you ought to be able to make a deal with the proprietor to share his profits."

"Ben's started now," exclaimed David. "Stop him somebody quick, or he'll be spending the money we're making from the concern."

"I think it's a great idea," Ben proceeded, as usual paying no attention to David's jibe. "It'll put Barmouth on the map. 'Cotterell Hall, the most famous treasure house on the Atlantic Coast!'"

"I wish you wouldn't use that word 'treasure,'" Tom protested. "It has a hoodoo sound."

"And speaking of putting things on the map," said Tuckerman, "here's the wharf ahead. Don't get me all excited while I bring her up to the dock."

The *Argo* made a perfect landing. "Good enough," said Tom. "That couldn't have been done better. Professor, you're a dandy."

They went up the main street and turned off to the elm-shaded lane where the Halletts lived. They were going to call on Milly Hallett.

Milly was at home. She was, in fact, enjoying an afternoon nap in the Nantucket hammock on the side porch when Tom spied her from the lane.

The sound of footsteps woke her, and seeing who was coming in at the gate she swung her feet down from the hammock, smoothed her rumpled skirt, and patted her fluffy hair. And because she still felt a trifle piqued that Tom was having all the fun of camping on Cotterell's Island, she decided on the spur of the moment to be a little standoffish with the callers.

"Hello, Milly," said her brother, in the offhand way brothers have, "we thought we'd come over to see how you were getting along."

"Good afternoon, Mr. Tuckerman," said Milly, standing up and giving that gentleman the tips of her fingers. "I hope the boys are looking after you all right on your island."

"I can't complain," smiled Tuckerman. "We do as well as we can, without any ladies to help us."

"Won't you sit down?" Milly invited politely.

Tuckerman took a chair, and the three boys, impressed in spite of themselves by Milly's society manner, perched on the rail of the porch.

"We were wondering," said Tuckerman, "whether we could induce you to come out to supper on the island. We hoped the simplicity of the meal would be atoned for by the beauty of the scenery. I can promise you a fine sunset."

"Thank you for the invitation." Milly swung gently back and forth. "Let me see—what did I have on hand for this evening?"

"Oh, chuck it, Milly!" said Tom. "Of course you want to come along."

"I remember now," said Milly suavely. "I have a date with my friend Sarah Hooper. There's a new movie in town."

"Well, of course," said Tuckerman in a regretful tone, "we can't compete with a new moving-picture show."

Milly smiled. "The boys are still giving you plenty of good food, are they? And keeping you amused?"

David moved impatiently on his perch. "The Professor never got better food anywhere. He says so himself."

"I thought perhaps the menu might get a little tiresome," Milly suggested sweetly. "Boys are so apt to stick to one or two of the same things when they have to cook for themselves."

"We don't," grunted David.

"She knows we don't," said Tom. "I say, Milly, what's your game?"

"Game?" Milly wrinkled her pretty nose. "I don't know what you mean!" She glanced again at Tuckerman. "Boys are funny creatures, aren't they?"

The boys came down from the rail with one accord. Indignant replies were on the tongues of each; but Milly pointed beyond them at the lane. "Here comes Sarah Hooper now," she said. "It's just possible I can get her to change our date."

Up the path came the black-eyed girl, a yellow sweater on her arm. "Hello, everybody!" she sang out, as she reached the porch. "What is it? An experience meeting?"

"They want me to go to supper with them on Mr. Tuckerman's island," said Milly. "I told them I had a date with you."

"Perhaps Miss Sarah Hooper will join the party," Tuckerman added promptly. "We'd like her to."

"Fine!" exclaimed Sarah. "I don't know why I shouldn't."

"Milly said," put in Tom, "that you and she were going to a new movie."

A glance passed from Sarah to Milly, and Sarah nodded her head. "That's so," she agreed. "I do remember we were."

"However," said Milly, "if Sally would really like to accept your invitation, we can go to the movies some other time."

There was a pause, for Sarah was not sure what her friend wanted her to say; and then Ben broke the silence by pounding the porch-rail with his fist. "By jiminy, girls are funny creatures, aren't they? They're crazy to come, but they don't want to admit it."

"Oh!" began Milly. But Tuckerman interposed.

"The funnier people are, the pleasanter it is to be with them. We do need the company of ladies on our island. We've only been seeing each other, and sandpipers and gulls. It would be doing us a great favor if these two ladies would come and freshen us up."

"Well," said Sarah, charmed by this gallant speech, "I'd be glad to come. It'll be a perfect evening."

Milly got up from the hammock. "I'll contribute a box of fudge."

"That's all that's needed to make it complete," said Tuckerman.

The girls went indoors, Milly to tell her mother about the party, and Sarah to telephone to her house.

"Now," said Tuckerman, on the porch, "we've got to give them as good a time as they'd have had at the movies."

"Milly wanted to come all along," said Tom. "Why didn't she say so?"

"I think," answered Ben, "that she wanted to show us that she was having just as good a time here at home as we were having in camp; and she knew she wasn't."

Tuckerman smiled and nodded. "Ben's hit it on the head. And that's all the more reason why we

should see that they enjoy themselves this evening.”

They all agreed to that line of reasoning, and the first result of it was that they suggested to Milly that she should sail the *Argo* back to the island. She was very much pleased, and Milly, on her mettle, handled the craft as skillfully as Tom could have done himself.

They landed, and Sarah said that she would like to see the island, since all she had seen of it on her first visit had been Cotterell Hall and the shore about the camp. So the boys and Tuckerman took their guests on a regular tour, through the woods, where the russet-green pine-needles made a clean and fragrant carpet, dappled with patches of sunlight; along the little beaches, curves of yellow sand, where sandpipers played and strutted, or flew in silver bands; up on the ramparts of cliffs, against which the waves rolled in and slipped and slid in white cascades over the low-lying ledges, and so to the southern point, where they watched the sun setting in all its glory, tinting the sky and the sea in wonderful combinations of shifting colors.

Then they went to the camp, where David made a marvelous fish chowder of cunners and cod that Ben had caught that morning. And for dessert they had apple fritters and Milly’s home-made fudge.

When it was time to take their guests back to Barmouth, Tom suggested that they sail around the island. As they cruised up the ocean side they saw a sail to the east. And after watching the distant boat intently for some minutes David exclaimed, “I think that’s the fishing-smack that took me from the cove to Gosport!”

Tom shifted the tiller, and the *Argo* took a course toward the larger boat. As they sailed, David, in answer to Milly’s questions, told of his adventure with the crew of the smack.

To the northeast lay a small island, and the larger boat sailed around its southern point. The *Argo* kept up its chase, and presently came on the fishing-smack at anchor off a half-moon beach.

The big boat stood silhouetted against the violet sky of the summer night. It was too dark to distinguish figures on her deck. Apparently she had come to anchor there for the night.

“How about it, Dave?” asked Ben. “Is that the craft that kidnapped you?”

“Looks like her picture,” was the answer.

“Want to hail your good friend Sam?” inquired Tom.

“No, I don’t,” said David. “He might throw something out here that the girls wouldn’t like.”

“Oh, don’t mind us,” exclaimed Milly and Sarah in chorus.

“I don’t know what the smack—if it is Dave’s boat—is doing around here,” said Tuckerman. “There can’t be much to steal from that island.”

For a time the *Argo* bobbed about, but there came no hail from the boat, no light appeared, she might have been a ship without a crew.

“Let sleeping hornets lie,” Tuckerman advised. And at the suggestion Tom sheered away. The *Argo* sailed up the shore of the island and pointed her bow toward the twinkling lights of the town.

They were all enjoying the breeze, the star-sprinkled sky, the soft swish of the water against the side of the boat when Ben, from a brown study, spoke. “If the men on that smack are the thieves who broke into Mr. Fitzhugh’s house, might they be hunting around here for the Cotterell treasure?”

“Well, I wish them luck at finding it,” said David.

“Thieves who broke into Mr. Fitzhugh’s house!” cried Milly. “Oh, do tell us about that!”

Then the whole story came out, and when she had heard it all Milly said positively, “I think Ben’s right. They’re planning to steal something from your island.”

“Hope they don’t take our cooking outfit,” said Tom.

“Or any of my fine old colonial furniture,” added Tuckerman.

“Oh, no,” scoffed David. “It’s the treasure they’re after.”

“Don’t you want to take our watch-dog back with you?” said Sarah. “He’s fine at biting tramps.”

There was a laugh from the crowd. And they were still talking of ways of protecting the island from prowlers when the sailboat ran up to the wharf.

The campers escorted the girls to their homes and then went back to the harbor.

On the waterfront they encountered a man—he had been a sea-captain in his day—smoking a pipe and regarding the lights of the harbor. He knew the boys. “Hello, Tom,” he said, “I hear you’re out on the island, hunting for Sir Peter’s treasure.”

“Well, we’re camping on the island,” Tom admitted.

“Haven’t found the treasure yet, have you?” The mariner chuckled. “There’s treasure hid all along the coast, if you believe the stories. I was brought up on yarns about treasures, Captain Kidd’s and others. And I’ve hunted for ’em, too. But I never laid my hands on none. Howsomever, I always thought there might be something to the story about Sir Peter. But it’s one thing to think there’s a treasure, and another to lay hands on it.”

“Where would you look?” asked Ben.

The mariner reflected. “Well, if I was hiding a treasure I’d put it where I could get it if I wanted it in a hurry. Seems to me I’d pick out a place in the chimney-breast. I’ve heard of folks hiding things in

places like that."

"Seems to me we've got to pull the house down," said David. "And then like as not we wouldn't find it."

"Might be so," the mariner agreed. "It don't pay to take too much trouble hunting for things like that. But some people just have to."

The four embarked in the *Argo*. "Ben's one of the people that just have to," said David. "I guess he'll pull the house down."

"I hadn't thought of the chimney-breast," said Ben. "We'd better look there to-morrow."

"Go to it, Tige," laughed David. "We'll get out the pick-ax and crow-bar."

XVII—PETER COTTERELL

Next morning the four campers, following the suggestion made by the sea-captain on the Barmouth wharf, resumed their search for the Cotterell treasure. David treated the whole matter as a joke; he thought that either the story about Sir Peter having hidden his silver plate was a legend without any foundation in fact, or that one of the family had found the treasure and disposed of it. Tom leaned to the same opinion, although he did not say so as openly as did David, perhaps because he saw that both John Tuckerman and Ben thought the treasure was yet to be found. Ben was still as positive as ever, and argued that if Sir Peter's plate had ever been discovered that fact would certainly have been mentioned in Crusty Christopher's notebooks.

They examined the chimney-breast in the kitchen and dining-room, looking for any possible hiding-place. They went all over the house again, looking for any secret door or panel that they might have missed before. They tapped the walls and they measured them; but nowhere could they figure out such a place as they were hunting. Finally Tuckerman said, "I don't see how we can search anywhere else, unless we do as Dave suggested—pull the house down—and I don't want to do that."

"The house is worth more than the treasure," said Tom.

"That's so," Tuckerman agreed. He frowned and bit his lip. "I don't like to be stumped, that's the long and short of it. I don't like to admit that I can't work out the puzzle."

"Puzzles never bother me," said David. "I think they're stupid things. I never want to know the answer to any of the problems in the algebra books. What good does it do you to know them? Of course some people get so hipped over knowing the answers they can't eat till they find them out—whether a dog or a rabbit will reach a given point first, things like that, or about men rowing a boat against the tide; but they don't get me the least little bit excited. Leave them to Benjie, I say."

And that was what they did. They left Ben up in the attic, the last room they had searched. Attics fascinated Ben. In a way they were like puzzles; there were so many odds and ends that needed putting together. He walked idly about, looking at chairs and tables that had lost some of their legs, at statuettes that were broken and disfigured, until he came to the window that opened to the east. There he stopped in a brown study.

A distant sail caught his eye. It reminded him of something. Oh, yes, from the window he could see the line of the little island where they had found the fishing-smack at anchor the night before. He couldn't tell if this sail belonged to the smack; it was too far away; but the sight of it started a train of thought he had been working over that morning.

He went downstairs and was glad to find that the others had left the house. In the living-room he took the two pieces of parchment from the drawer of the secretary and carefully copied the writing on them on a large sheet of paper. This he laid on the lid of the desk and put an inkstand on the paper. Then he returned the pieces of parchment to the drawer.

Satisfied with this, he went outdoors and crossed the island to the beach where he had found the chest. He sat on a log, and waited patiently. Presently he saw a sail, to the east; and this time he felt fairly sure that it was the same fishing-smack that they had chased the previous night.

He jumped up and began to burrow in the crevice between the rocks. He did not attempt to pull the chest out; it was too heavy for him to do that unaided; but he kicked his heels and pushed himself in. And after a while he pushed himself out again and stood up. Looking at the smack, he decided that she was near enough for anyone on her deck to have witnessed his strange performance.

The next step in his plan came when the dishes had been washed after dinner. He proposed that they should sail over to the little island and see if the smack was still in the neighborhood.

"After the thieves, are you?" asked David. "Now see here, my lad, if we should find them, what then? Are you going to step aboard and tell them they're arrested?"

"Dave's had enough of his friend Sam," said Tom. "He thinks if Sam meets him again he'll get a belaying-pin on the back of his head."

"Benjie wants to argue with them," said David. "I'll admit I'd like to get square with the rascal, but I don't see how we can do it that way."

"If Dave's sure it's the same boat," suggested Tom, "we might notify the police at Barmouth."

"Well," said Ben, "the only way to make sure that Dave's right is to sail around and look at her in daylight."

"That sounds sensible," Tuckerman agreed. "We needn't get into any kind of a scrap with them."

So the *Argo* set sail and cruised eastward; but although she rounded the other island several times that afternoon her crew caught no sight of the bark they were looking for.

When they got back to their own island they found Lanky Larry and Bill Crawford fishing from the pier. The canoe in which they had paddled over from Camp Amoussock floated at the landing-stage.

"If you're after cunners," said Ben, "you ought to try the rocks on the ocean side; if it's flounders you're trying to tempt you won't find them near the pier."

"We didn't really come over here to fish," responded Bill, "but we always carry a couple of lines in the canoe; that is, when it doesn't upset. We came over to invite you four fellows to the water sports to-morrow morning. We've got a fine program, and you can enter any of the events when you get there."

"I guess the Professor will want to enter the tub-race," said Tom with a grin.

"Maybe I will," agreed Tuckerman. "Well, mates, how about it? The invitation sounds very good to me."

Tom and David both nodded and said they would like to go. "You'd better count me out of it," said Ben. "I've got a date for to-morrow."

"Date?" inquired Tom. "What sort of a date? With a lady or a man?"

"A date with myself." Ben looked a trifle embarrassed. "I've got something on hand I meant to do in the morning."

"Shucks!" exclaimed David. "All right, Bill, we'll be over right after breakfast. And we'll bring Benjie along. You might enter him in the fancy diving contest."

Bill and Lanky pulled in their fishing-lines and embarked in their canoe. The campers started to get supper. But Ben, making an excuse that he thought he must have mislaid his pocket-knife in the house, hurried through the woods to the beach at the northern end. So far as he could see no one had been there since he had left in the morning; the chest was still in the crevice between the rocks.

That evening Ben prowled about the island. He went to Cotterell Hall, he went to the beach at the north again, he kept a watchful eye for sails in any quarter. When he came back to camp the other three had turned in. And being very sleepy, he followed their example.

He was up at dawn next morning, and again made his rounds. The paper he had placed on the lid of the secretary was apparently untouched, the chest was still in the crevice. Breakfast was waiting when he returned. "Now, Benjie," said David, "get busy with the bacon. We're going over to Camp Amoussock, and we want you to show those fellows your famous flip-flap."

"You go along without me," Ben urged.

"No, sir," said David. "This is a sporting proposition, and it's up to every man to do his bit."

So Ben went along with the others.

All of Camp Amoussock was in bathing-suits, and the four guests were shortly attired likewise. Then began all sorts of water sports. Tom and David and Ben went in for most of the swimming races and the diving contests. Tom took second place in the fifty-yard race, and Ben won the competition for fancy diving. When they came to the tub-race John Tuckerman entered his name.

Amid shouts and cat-calls a dozen tubs set out from the float. The race was to be around a buoy and back to the starting-place. Tuckerman paddled easily, keeping his tub out of the course most of the others were taking. Two tubs jostled, and two boys were upset into the water. Bill Crawford rounded the buoy first, then a small, red-headed boy who sat very still, barely patting the water with careful finger-tips.

"Here comes the Professor!" cried Tom from the beach. "Keep it up, keep it up, Professor! You're doing wonders!"

Tuckerman reached the buoy. He had found it fairly easy to keep a straight course, but now he had to steer to the left. To do this he tried to give a sidewise sweep with his foot. The tub rocked, rolled. He attempted to counter-balance; and then he was in the water, splashing about and trying to get hold of the tub.

He flopped up on one side, only to slip over on the other. The tub might have been greased, so difficult was it to make the round thing stay in one position for more than a minute. At last he gave up trying to make it behave, and swam, pushing it before him, until he could touch bottom with his feet.

"Never mind, Professor," said David, as the bedraggled Tuckerman walked up on the beach. "Many a man has found a tub-race his Waterloo."

There were cheers from the float, and all turned to look. Bill Crawford and the red-headed boy were now neck and neck. Someone shouted, "Now's your time to spurt, Bill!"

Bill spurted. His tub lost its balance; Bill somersaulted backward into the water. The red-headed boy just managed to avoid Bill's splashing and paddled along more cautiously than ever, hardly touching the water now, just directing his course with his fingers and toes.

Up to the float he came. He grasped the edge, and a moment later the boy and the tub were on the float, and the race was won.

"The Tortoise wins!" cried Lanky. "Good old Tortoise! He may be slow, but he gets there away ahead of the Hare."

Then came dinner, and then the *Argo* set sail again. "Now, Benjie," said David, "you can keep that date you were telling us about. My word, but you look impatient."

Ben was impatient. He sat in the bow, keeping a lookout for a certain sail.

There were no boats to be seen, however, nearer than a three-masted schooner that moved like a pasteboard ship along the rim of the horizon. The *Argo* appeared to have that part of the off-shore ocean entirely to herself, and except for the swish of the water against her side there was no noise to break the quiet of the summer afternoon.

The island stood out in its shades of green against the brilliant blue sky. The house was a patch of white as the sailboat drew up to the pier. The landing made, the four campers went ashore. Ben started up the path toward the house, and the others, as people are apt to do when someone leads the way, followed without any definite object in mind.

Ben had almost reached the front steps when the door of Cotterell Hall opened. He stopped in surprise; and so did the other three.

A man in colonial costume, buff-colored coat and breeches, with a three-cornered hat in his hand, stepped out at the front door.

The man made a bow and held out his hat in a gesture of welcome. "I give you a good-day, gentlemen," he said. "What fortunate chance brings you to Peter Cotterell's door?"

Tuckerman took it on himself to answer. Returning the bow, he said, "The good ship *Argo* has brought four adventurers to your island, worthy sir. We trust we do not trespass."

The gentleman in buff stood with his hat at his hip. "You're not from the town of Barmouth?" he asked.

"Oh, no," said Tuckerman, and added, "Your island looked so inviting that we made bold to come ashore."

"I'm glad you're not from Barmouth," said the gentleman. "I have no stomach for those folks, rebels against His Britannic Majesty's lawful government. To visitors such as you my island and my house are always open. Will you come in and refresh yourselves?"

"You are very good, Sir Peter," said Tuckerman, with a smile.

"Why do you call me 'Sir Peter'?"

"I understood that was your title."

The gentleman frowned. "I believe that some of the rebels call me that, because of my loyalty to the King of England. However, it is an honorable title. I have no objection. Yes," he added, "you may call me Sir Peter. I like the sound."

"Well then, Sir Peter," said Tuckerman, "I think we'll accept your invitation with the greatest pleasure."

The gentleman on the step stood aside, and the four marched into the house. Sir Peter indicated a room on the left. They went into the large drawing-room, and Ben, casting a hasty glance at the secretary, saw that the paper he had placed on the lid was still there.

"Be seated," said Sir Peter. He stood for a moment near the portrait on the wall, and the campers saw how much his face and figure and the cut of his clothes resembled those of the man in the picture. He caught their eyes comparing him with the portrait. "Yes, my picture," he said. "It's considered a rather fair likeness." And he added deprecatingly, "Of course no one can ever judge a likeness of himself."

He pulled a bell-rope that hung by the big fireplace. "I can offer you a glass of negus," he continued. "Something unusual, that I get from the Barbadoes."

A moment later a dark-skinned servant—mahogany-hued in fact—came into the room and received his master's orders.

"Will any of you take snuff?" asked Sir Peter, when the servant had withdrawn. He produced a small silver snuff-box from his waistcoat pocket.

He passed the snuff-box, but each of his guests declined. Ben, looking up with a grin, asked, "Does your servant come from the Barbadoes, Sir Peter?"

"Why yes, he does." Sir Peter helped himself to a pinch of snuff, then dusted his coat with a fine cambric handkerchief. "An excellent servant, too. Indeed, I am much pleased with all my service, from my steward James Sampson down."

"James Sampson!" exclaimed Ben, his eyes dancing. "Where have I heard that name before?"

At this point the servant reappeared, bearing a lacquered tray on which were five glasses and a decanter. He set the tray on a table, and as Sir Peter filled the glasses the servant handed them to the guests.

The refreshment was delicious. None of the boys had ever tasted anything like it before, but all of them declared it fine. Sir Peter poured a second glass all round, and then, when the servant had left again, the gentleman in buff seated himself in an arm-chair, swung one leg over the other, and beamed at his new friends. "As you say, the negus is excellent," he observed, "but several glasses will, to use a somewhat common expression, begin to make one see things."

"We're seeing things already," put in David.

Sir Peter disregarded this remark. He twisted his glass in his fingers. "As it happens, I'm particularly glad that you arrived here to-day," he continued. "I have a number of guests here. I am giving an entertainment this evening. The guests are at present on the upper floors."

There was a light tap of heels in the hall. Sir Peter looked toward the door. "Here comes one of them—a lady." He stood up, and the campers did likewise. "Ah, it's Mistress Penelope Boothby," Sir Peter declared with a bow.

A young woman stood in the doorway, a very lovely young woman in a flowered silk gown. She courtsied down to the floor, then with a light laugh exclaimed, "Oh la, Peter Cotterell, whom have you here? What odd costumes the gentlemen wear!"

XVIII—THE PIRATES ASHORE

The gentleman in buff coat and breeches turned from the young woman in the doorway to the four campers, who as they glanced at their own rough outing clothes did look like a line of embarrassed schoolboys standing in front of a teacher.

"Now that you mention it, Penelope," said Peter Cotterell, "I do note a difference between the garments of these lads and this gentleman and those we are accustomed to seeing worn by our neighbors. I understand, however, that they come from a distance, and one would hardly expect costumes to be the same in all the colonies. It occurs to me that possibly my new guests might like to make fresh toilets in one of the rooms abovestairs. I have a large wardrobe, gentlemen, and it is yours to choose from."

"That's a good idea," said Tom. "I wonder if you have anything big enough to fit my friend David Norton?"

"When in Rome, do as the Romans do," said Tuckerman. "I'm sure I could pick out something much better looking than these togs."

The young woman stepped into the room. Her blue eyes were very merry as she looked at the awkward row. "I think an apricot coat would suit this one," she said, nodding at Ben. "Something in puce this one," she indicated Tom. "Lavender for him," she waved at Tuckerman. "And for the fourth—let me see—" She squinted her eyes and tilted her head on one side.

"A beautiful green," Ben suggested. "The color of seaweed in water."

Miss Boothby laughed, and David flushed a magnificent scarlet.

"He certainly oughtn't to wear a red coat," said Peter Cotterell. "He'd be too much all of one color."

"I like these things I've got on," said David. "They mayn't be very good-looking, but they suit me first rate."

"Oh, I like them, too," agreed Miss Boothby, and her quick smile made David flush again, this time at the stubbornness of his tone.

"If you care to look at my wardrobe—" Cotterell resumed. "Ah, here is James Sampson now."

At the door appeared a man in chocolate-colored coat and breeches, his brown hair tied in a queue.

"My steward," stated Cotterell.

"So you're Sampson, are you?" asked Ben. "I've heard of you, and I'm glad to make your acquaintance. I think I've seen some of your handwriting."

"He writes a legible hand," said Cotterell. "He keeps some of my accounts. Sampson, please show my guests to the rooms upstairs. They desire to change their attire."

Miss Boothby touched David's arm. "For my sake wear a suit of green," she whispered.

David blushed. "Oh, very well," he said awkwardly. "But I guess I'll look like a frog."

They followed Sampson into the hall and up the stairs. As they passed open doors they saw a number of people in gay, colonial clothes. All through the house there was the hum of voices.

Sampson conducted them into the attic, where many suits and dresses hung on pegs along the walls.

"Here is the wardrobe," he said. "I think you will find everything you may need. And yonder is a mirror." With a bow he withdrew.

"Well," exclaimed David, when the servant was out of earshot, "what do you make of all this?"

"Sir Peter is certainly much more amiable than I'd been led to suppose," mused Tuckerman. "There's nothing of the hermit about him."

"He's a bird!" chuckled Tom. "I'll bet he gives us a mighty fine supper."

"I don't blame him a bit for wanting to keep those roughnecks over in Barmouth from melting up his silver," Ben asserted.

"See here, you fellows," broke in David, "I want to know what's the game."

"Game?" echoed Ben.

"Game?" said Tom. "What do you mean?"

"Game?" repeated Tuckerman, and his tone was a trifle indignant. "I don't call it a game when a gentleman like Sir Peter Cotterell invites us to his party."

David sat down on a sofa. "All right, all right. I'm the goat, as usual. Fetch me a green coat and trousers."

"I daresay Miss Boothby will dance with you," Tom cheered him.

"*You* may like this sort of thing," said David, "but it's not in my line."

Ben threw a coat at him. "Take that. Hello, here's a shelf full of wigs. Want to try a white one, Dave?"

For the next five minutes they looked about the room, at the coats and the breeches and waistcoats, at the wigs and the other articles that made up Sir Peter's wardrobe.

Then they began to try on the costumes, seeking for the proper sizes. Ben could find nothing that suited him exactly. And while they were trying on different coats, there came a sound of singing from downstairs.

Ben, holding a coat in each hand, went into the hall and leaned over the banisters. Men and women were singing a quaint, old-fashioned song in the dining-room. The tune was fascinating, at times it sounded like a jig, at times there were different parts for the different voices. Ben listened, nodding his head in rhythm with the music. "You ought to hear this," he called over his shoulder to the three in the attic. "It's a regular musical show."

The others came out into the hall. Tuckerman beat time on the banister with a powdered wig he had been trying to squeeze on his head. Tom, putting his hands on David's shoulders, began to dance to the tune.

With a grin, Ben turned and went back to the attic. "I'll beat them to it," he muttered, and flinging down the two coats he was holding he took a yellow satin coat, embroidered with silver lace, from a peg on the wall.

This coat was a fine sample of the tailor's art. But Ben, having taken it down, stared at the peg from which it had hung, and at the wall behind it.

He gave an exclamation, a low whistle of surprise. He knocked on the wall with his knuckles. He glanced through the open door, and saw that the others were still occupied with the singing. He backed away from the wall, still keeping his eyes on it. And then he stumbled over a footstool and sat down with a bump on the floor.

He got up and laid the embroidered coat on a chair by the window. He looked outdoors. And then for the second time in five minutes he uttered an exclamation. The fishing-smack was standing close inshore on the eastern side of the island. He could see her moving slowly to the north, her canvas plainly visible above the tops of the trees.

"Gee whillikins!" muttered Ben. "I'll bet my scheme worked!"

Another minute and he was out in the hall. The singing downstairs had stopped and there was a clapping of hands.

"Come here!" ordered Ben.

The other three followed him into the attic, to the window opening to the east.

"Is that your fishing-smack, Dave?" Ben demanded.

David looked. "By Jove, I believe it is!"

"Do you want to know where she's going?" was Ben's next question.

"Shoot," said Tom.

"She's going to the beach where I found the chest in the hiding-place in the rocks. Her crew are after that chest, I'll bet you a fiver!"

The three stared at him in surprise. "What makes you so certain?" asked Tuckerman.

"Because I know. I have reasons for knowing. They're after that chest. They think it's the Cotterell treasure, just as I thought it was."

"You mean they're going to land on our beach and carry off our chest under our very noses?" demanded Tom.

"They are unless we stop them," nodded Ben.

"Then," said David, "I'm going to stop them. Seems to me there was an old musket somewhere around here."

There was an old musket in the corner of the attic; there were two, in fact; and a fowling-piece and a couple of antique duelling-pistols. The boys and Tuckerman seized on all the firearms, regardless of the rust that came off on their clothes, and hurried into the hall.

Down the stairs they went, making a great noise. And the clatter of their feet was so loud that the gentleman in buff and all his friends ran out from the dining-room to see what was the matter.

"Why, it's an army coming!" cried Peter Cotterell in great surprise.

The four halted in the front hall.

"What's the meaning of this!" exclaimed Cotterell. "I invited you to share my wardrobe, not to ransack the house for weapons. Come, will one of you please explain?" Indignation mingled in his

tone with surprise.

"There's a boat off-shore, and her crew is going to land on the beach at the northern point and steal your treasure chest," said Ben.

"My treasure chest! My silver plate!" Cotterell raised his hand, clenched it into a fist. "Those rascally rebels from Barmouth!"

"I don't know where they come from," said Ben. "But we're going to chase them away."

"Chase them away?" Cotterell spurned the suggestion. "No, sir. We'll capture them."

He looked around at his guests. "Gentlemen, what do you say? Would you like to bag a few robbers?"

There were shouts of approval.

"Not so loud, not so loud," said Cotterell. He turned to the boys and Tuckerman. "Can you spare us a few of those extra musketoons, or whatever they are, that you found abovestairs? With those, and the fencing swords in the living-room, and a few other odds and ends, we should do quite nicely. I have a pistol myself. I never go without it in these revolutionary days. Let me see. I left it in the kitchen, in a pot on the shelf, where it would be out of the way."

The firearms were handed around, and shortly a group of fantastically-garbed people stood in front of the house. The campers and Cotterell and Sampson were to lead the expedition, and some of the ladies insisted on bringing up the rear.

They had not gone far, however, when Sampson suggested a new idea to the others, and after a few minutes' talk Cotterell's steward and two of the other men left the main party and turned off in the direction of the creek.

Through the woods went the expedition, a long line of people following Ben, who had a musket almost as long as himself stuck over his shoulder, which necessitated his constantly ducking and dodging to avoid overhanging branches.

When they reached the northern edge of the woods they divided into three bands. One was headed by Ben and David, the second by Tom and Cotterell, and the third by Tuckerman. Each band was to make its way down to the beach in front of the rocks by a different path, but not to come out from the shelter of the bushes in the ravines until its leader was sure that the crew from the fishing-smack had landed and were looking for the chest. The ladies were to stay in the woods. To this Miss Penelope Boothby objected. She said that with the riding-crop she had picked up in the house she could easily defend herself against a dozen pirates. Cotterell said, "I'm sure you could, my dear Penelope. But the bright colors of your gown might give us away. And if we have to crawl through the brambles, what would happen to your light silk dress?"

Ben and David, with two men, threaded their way down a ravine to a network of bushes that fringed the edge of the beach. From here, without being seen themselves, they could see what was going on. The fishing-smack had come to anchor a hundred yards off shore, four men had rowed to the island and were now on the beach. Pointing to one of these men, David whispered in Ben's ear, "That's my friend Sam. I'd know his ugly mug anywhere."

"They're after the chest," Ben returned. "Yes, they've found the right place. See, one of them's crawling in, with a rope in his hand."

Three bands of watchers, at three places along the beach, saw the crew of the smack haul the chest out from the crevice. As soon as they had it out they threw open the top. And as they all bent over, eager to lay hands on the Cotterell treasure, a voice hailed them from a clump of bushes not fifty feet away.

"Throw up your hands!" cried the voice. "Throw them up quick!"

The crew stood up. They saw a man in buff coat and breeches facing them, a pistol in his hand.

"Up with your hands!" cried another voice from a bush on the other side.

The crew hesitated a second. One of them glanced over his shoulder. "They've got us cornered!" he muttered, and stuck his hands up over his head.

The three scouting parties marched out on to the beach. The muskets and firearms were leveled at the four men round the chest.

"It's a regular army!" exclaimed one of the crew. And putting on as much of an air of bravado as he could with his hands above his head, he demanded, "What do you want of us? We're not stealing anything. We found that chest here."

"Keep your hands up!" cautioned Cotterell, as he walked forward. "As you say, you're surrounded by an army. And while your hands are up, I'll ask some of my friends to see if you have weapons in your pockets."

The search was quickly made, and each man relieved of a pistol.

"Now," said Cotterell, "you may ease your muscles. But let me tell you the first one who tries to get away will be knocked down and handcuffed."

"All right. We'll go easy," said the man who was known to David as Sam. "But I don't know what you're after. We came ashore and saw this box in that crack in the rocks."

"It's my box," said Cotterell. "I own everything on this island."

"Well, take it if it's yours," growled Sam. "We don't want it. I thought a box on the beach was public

property."

"You think a good many things are public property," Cotterell retorted. He looked at Ben and David. "Have either of you seen this man anywhere before?"

"I have," said David. "He's the fellow who carried me off in that boat out there."

"Has anybody here seen any of these other men?" Cotterell asked next.

Tom spoke up. "I'm pretty sure they're the fellows Lanky Larry and I followed from the cove to the house called the Gables."

"And what are they suspected of having done at the Gables?" continued Cotterell.

"Of stealing some jewels," said Tom.

The man in the buff coat nodded. "In other words, they are probably not very desirable citizens to have at large. I think it's my duty to give them into custody."

"Oh, come now," said Sam. "You don't really know anything about us. There's your chest. You see we haven't taken anything from it. We were sailing along the coast and we came ashore to have a look at the island. That's a reasonable thing to do."

"You haven't any right to arrest us!" exclaimed one of the other men. "You haven't got a warrant. And who's going to believe what that young fellow said about seeing us somewhere else?"

"Perhaps we can supply the authorities with further proof," said Cotterell with a smile.

There came a shout from someone on board the fishing-smack, and all those on the beach looked in that direction. A man was waving a handkerchief over the side of the boat.

XIX—THE COTTERELL SILVER PLATE

While the campers and Cotterell and his guests had been making prisoners of the four men on the beach, the steward Sampson and the two others who had separated from the main party had embarked in a motor-boat that was moored in the creek and made their way out to the fishing-smack. To the surprise of the skipper, who was the only man aboard, two men in fantastic knee-breeches had swung themselves over one side of his boat while he was idly surveying the northern point of the island from the other side. He turned to find himself looking at the muzzle of the most remarkable pistol he had ever seen. Being unarmed himself, he had immediately put up his hands. Whereupon the two men had smiled, and the one with the pistol, lowering that ancient weapon, had said, "That's a good fellow. Is there anyone else aboard?"

"No," said the skipper, not wanting to have the smack searched.

"Take a look through his clothes for a weapon," the man with the pistol said to his companion.

No weapon was found. The man in the motor-boat came aboard, and two of the men went into the smack's cabin, while the third guarded the skipper.

When the two returned from the cabin some time later, one of them went to the rail and shouted and waved his handkerchief toward shore. And presently Cotterell and Tom, David and Ben rowed out in the smack's boat.

In the cabin were the hats and cloaks and the other things that Tom and Lanky had seen in the shack at the cove. Sampson set out at once in the motor-boat for Barmouth, and before the sun had touched the tops of the trees the four men on the beach and the skipper were in custody of the police, charged with having stolen certain valuables from the Gables.

"Well," said Cotterell, when he and his guests were again on the island, "my treasure is still secure from the rebels, thanks to you," and he bowed to the campers.

"Oh, is your famous dinner-set really in that chest?" asked Miss Penelope Boothby. She went to the chest and looked at its contents. "Why, it's only clothes and bric-a-brac! There's no silverware there."

"No," said Cotterell, smiling. "That is not my silver plate. I keep it better hid than that."

"Oh, do let us dine off it to-night," begged Miss Boothby. "I should dearly love to see it."

Cotterell looked perplexed. "Why, I should like you to," he answered. Then he glanced at the sun. "But the party waits. And it was my intention to dance a minuet on the lawn before my house while it was daylight. Come, friends, come along with me."

They went back through the woods. The boys and Tuckerman branched off by the path to their camp, promising to come to Cotterell Hall in time to join the party. And, once out of hearing of the others, David turned to Ben. "You're a cute fellow, Benjie. How'd you ever guess that the men from the smack would go after that chest?"

"I don't mind telling you now," said Ben with a grin. "I was pretty sure that those men were snooping around the house, looking for clues to the treasure, and so I put a copy of that message on the parchment out on the lid of the desk, where they couldn't very well fail to see it. Then I went down on the beach by the cliff when the smack was fairly near shore, and tried to give them the notion that I was looking for something. Well, they bit all right. They thought the treasure was hidden there, just as I thought myself when I first saw Sampson's message."

"I'll hand it to you, sonny," said Tom. "You turned the trick! And that's the crowd that stole the

jewels from the Gables, just as I thought.”

“They stole some of Mr. Fitzhugh’s costumes,” said Ben. “It seems to me that the fact that we found those costumes in the cabin shows what they’ve been doing.”

They sat on the bank a few minutes, talking over the adventure. Then Tuckerman stood up. “Well, we’re due at Cotterell Hall. Wash your hands and brush your hair, so you’ll look your smartest.”

“Do you suppose we’ll have to dance?” asked David, as he ran a comb through his thatch of hair.

“I think that one of the ladies has her eye on you,” said Tuckerman, laughing. “However, if you’ve got a game leg, I’ll be glad to take your place.”

As they reached the house Peter Cotterell came out at the door. Behind him were Miss Boothby and Sampson. “My wardrobe is still upstairs,” the buff-coated man said genially. “Make what use of it you please.”

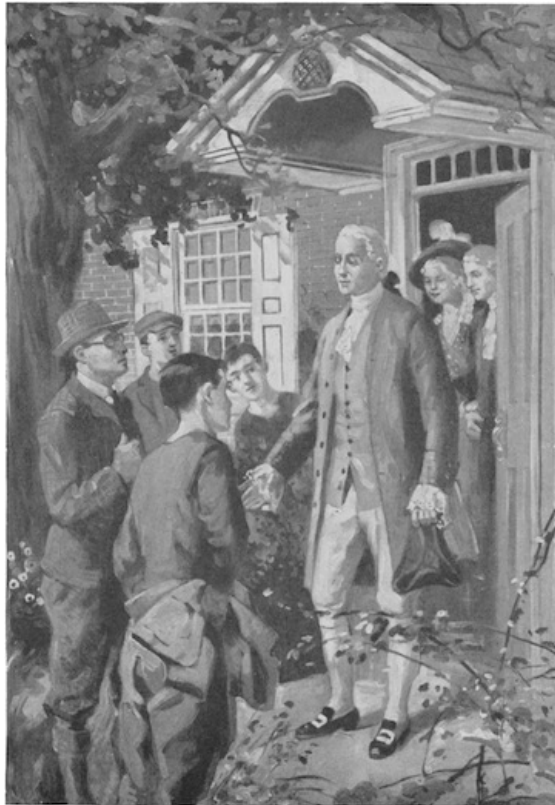
This time the campers found costumes quickly. Even Ben, who kept looking at the row of pegs from which he had taken down the yellow satin coat, got into that coat and a pair of breeches. There was the sound of a violin in front of the house, and as they came down the steps they found the whole party taking places for a dance.

“I’m afraid we don’t know the minuet,” said Tuckerman, hesitating.

“Oh, it’s easy enough,” said the host. “I’ll call off the figures.”

Ben gave Tom a nudge, and pointed out two men who stood at a little distance with a big camera. “Sir Peter’s up to date,” he whispered. “I guess it’s the first time anyone ever took moving-pictures on Cotterell’s Island.”

Meantime Miss Boothby had gone up to David and boldly proclaimed that he was to dance with her. The suit that David had put on in the attic happened to be green, and when she reminded him that that was the color she had asked him to wear he turned beet red and stammered something about “trying to please a lady.”



“My wardrobe is still upstairs. Make what use of it you please.”

“We will stand near Mr. Cotterell, and I will show you all the steps,” she said. “I could tell you were very light on your feet the very first time I saw you.”

“Well, I can pick them up pretty well in a clog or a shuffle,” admitted David.

“I knew it! I knew it!” exclaimed the delighted Miss Boothby; and pouncing on David’s hand she led him to where Peter Cotterell was assigning places to the dancers.

Tom and Ben and Tuckerman all had partners. The violin began to play, and Cotterell led off the dance. The host was very graceful and so was the lady he danced with, and they posed and bowed and courtsied constantly as they went through the stately measures of the minuet. The others copied their leaders, and after a few minutes’ practice contrived to do it well. Meantime the camera clicked, taking reels of pictures of the old-fashioned dance.

There was a final bow and courtesy, a final posing in position. Then Cotterell raised his hand. “That was beautifully done, my friends,” he said. “Surely my island home has never witnessed a more graceful scene. I trust you have all gained an excellent appetite for dinner.”

“What a gorgeous sunset!” exclaimed Miss Boothby, looking toward the water.

They all moved down in the direction of the pier. As they came in view of the broad and many-colored bay they saw a sailboat heading for the landing. Cotterell stopped and again raised his hand. "Can it be that the people of Barmouth are coming out here again?" he demanded indignantly. "I'll have nothing to do with them, and they know it! I will not give them my plate!"

The sailboat came on. Cotterell, followed by the others, walked out on the pier.

"What do you want?" called out the buff-coated man. "This is Cotterell's Island."

"We know it is," answered a man in the boat. "Who are you? You look like Sir Peter."

"I don't want any rebels from Barmouth landing here," came the reply.

"There aren't any rebels nowadays. We won the Revolution."

"You shan't have my silver plate."

There were laughs from those in the boat. "We don't want it. We've brought paper plates of our own."

"Well," said Cotterell, "this is most extraordinary!" He turned to his guests. "Shall I let them land?"

"We've got an ice cream freezer aboard," called a girl in the boat. "Fresh strawberry ice cream."

"Yes," said Miss Boothby, at Cotterell's elbow, "we'll let them land with that cargo."

The sailboat touched the landing-stage, and two men, two women and two girls got out. "Hello, Benjie," cried Milly Hallett, waving her hand to the dark-haired boy. "What grand company you've got!"

The arrivals were Mr. and Mrs. Hallett and Mr. and Mrs. Hooper and Milly and Sarah. They went up on the pier, where Tom introduced them to Peter Cotterell.

Mr. Hallett looked at the company. "I'd no idea, sir," he said, addressing Cotterell, "that your island was entertaining so many guests to-day. I wish I'd brought a dozen gallons of strawberry ice cream."

"You are welcome anyhow, Mr. Hallett," answered Cotterell graciously. "I think perhaps I can supply any deficiency." He turned to his steward. "Sampson, will you bring Mr. Hallett's ice cream freezer up to the Hall?"

"Oh, no, Sir Peter," protested Mr. Hallett. "We were going to have a simple picnic supper outdoors."

The buff-coated gentleman bowed. "Your pardon, sir; but I am the overlord here. Those whom I allow to land on my island are my guests during their stay. You must dine at my board."

Peter Cotterell offered his arm to Mrs. Hallett, and led the way up to the house. Sampson and Tom brought up the rear, carrying the ice cream freezer.

They all went into the large front room. "Dinner in half-an-hour," announced the host.

"That reminds me," said Miss Boothby; "since we're all friends here, aren't you going to offer us dinner from your silver plate?"

"Really, Penelope," expostulated Cotterell, "you repeat yourself. That's the second time this afternoon you've mentioned the same idea."

"It seems only hospitable," pouted Miss Boothby.

Cotterell looked at the floor. "Well, you see," he began. "You see——"

The lady interrupted. "I believe you've forgotten where you put it!"

There was an awkward pause. Cotterell flushed, bit his lip.

"Well, if he has," piped up Ben, "he's only mislaid it. I think I can show him where it is."

Everyone turned to look at the fellow who spoke with such confidence. John Tuckerman stared, and so did Tom, while David gave a low whistle and muttered, "It's just like Benjie to do something ridiculous."

Cotterell smiled. "I am a great hand at mislaying things—it's my besetting sin. Now I would be very much obliged if you would show me where I did put that silverware."

"How funny," said Miss Boothby, "that a total stranger should know. I understand that he came here for the first time this afternoon."

"What joke is he going to play on them?" Tuckerman whispered to Tom. "I can't imagine what he's got in mind."

"He's putting up a good bluff," Tom whispered back. "He looks very much in earnest."

And Ben did look as if his statement had been perfectly reasonable. He nodded at Cotterell. "You may be a great hand at mislaying things—I don't know much about that; but I do know that you're a wonder at hiding them."

"That's so, I am," agreed the buff-coated man with a pleased chuckle. "I can hide things so well that very often I don't know where to look for them myself."

"Well," said Miss Boothby, "where is the silver? It's almost time for dinner."

Ben bowed, imitating the courtly manner of Cotterell. "Ladies and gentlemen," said he, "if you will be so good as to fall into line behind me, I will endeavor to answer Miss Boothby's question."

Like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, Ben, in his yellow satin coat and knee-breeches, went into the hall and up the stairs, followed by Cotterell, Penelope Boothby, Milly and Sarah, Tuckerman, Tom and David, and a line of men and women.

He led them into the attic. When they were all in the big room he pointed to the wall along which ran the row of pegs from one of which he had taken the coat.

"Now," he said, "please tell me what you see."

"A wall," answered Milly promptly, "with some pegs to hang things on."

"Miss Hallett is certainly right," said Tuckerman. "There may be some cobwebs, too, up under the ceiling. Do you mean the cobwebs, Ben?"

"There are lots of more interesting things here," said Sarah, looking around. "There's that lovely green lacquered temple."

"Don't joke with the magician, Sally," David admonished her. "He wants you to look at those pegs."

"No, that particular wall is the most interesting thing in this attic," Ben declared stoutly. "I think it's the most interesting thing in the house."

They all looked where he pointed, but none of them caught what he was driving at.

"Why, Professor Tuckerman," said Ben, "I thought you were a better observer."

"Well, I don't see anything but the pegs and some rather dingy wallpaper," Tuckerman confessed.

"Ah, now you're talking! You do see the wallpaper, do you?" Ben continued.

"Of course," said Tuckerman. "It's the pictured kind, like that in the rooms downstairs."

"Oh, no, it's not," exclaimed Ben. "There's not another piece like that in Cotterell Hall."

"Is that so?" said Tuckerman. "Well, it represents some sort of outdoor scene."

"I think those are meant to be pine trees," Cotterell put in.

"And that looks like a sunset," Miss Boothby contributed. "Though some of the red has rubbed off."

Ben bobbed his head. "And those yellowish things are rocks." He stepped up to the wallpaper and pointed with his finger. "Three pines that stand between two rocks where the sun goes down." He turned. "Does that convey anything to you, Professor?"

"By Jove! You're right! So it does!" Tuckerman exclaimed. "That was the old saying! The hiding-place is just beyond the three pines that stand between two rocks where the sun goes down."

"Exactly!" said Ben, in a quiet tone of triumph. He rapped on the wall with his knuckles. "It's wood. Mr. Cotterell, have you any objection to our taking this part of the wall down?"

"None in the least," answered Cotterell. "Sampson, will you be so good as to get some chisels and hammers? I think you'll find them in the little room to the right of the kitchen."

While Sampson went on his errand Ben and Tom and Tuckerman fingered that part of the wall that was bounded by the picture. They found the edges of two boards, running from floor to ceiling, and when they had peeled off the paper that concealed these edges they discovered there was a panel.

Sampson returned with a couple of chisels and hammers. Wedging the chisels in between the boards and giving a couple of light blows, he pried the panel loose. Ben pulled it away. Behind it, under the eaves of the house, was a compartment. And in the compartment was a big square box.

Ben and Tom and Tuckerman pulled the box out into the attic. It was fastened with a single lock. Hammer and chisel soon knocked the lock off. Tuckerman raised the lid. "Yes, it's the Cotterell silver plate!" he cried. "By Jove, we've found it now!"

They handed the plate around, magnificent old silverware that was worth a small fortune. And they were still admiring it when a dinner gong sounded downstairs.

XX—SIR PETER'S PARTY

When none of his guests could eat any more of the delicious ice cream that topped off a wonderful dinner, the buff-coated gentleman rose from his chair at the head of the table. They had dined from the famous Cotterell silver service, and the candles that now illuminated the shining mahogany table were fastened in exquisite candlesticks that had been in the treasure chest.

The buff-coated gentleman raised a glass that stood beside his plate. "My friends," he said, "our guests from Barmouth tell us that the Revolution is over; so there would be no object in keeping the Cotterell treasure hidden any longer. But it was well hidden. So well hidden indeed that it required a genius like Benjamin Sully to find out where it was. I propose a toast to that master detective, Benjamin Sully."

All, except Ben, lifted their glasses and drank, nodding at the dark-haired boy.

Then Ben stood up. "I propose a toast to Sir Peter," he said, "who surely does know how to give people a good time."

That toast was drunk also. Then Tuckerman got to his feet. "Sir Peter, I am proud of you," he said. "I don't believe a more delightful party was ever given in Cotterell Hall."

The man at the head of the table smiled. "I'm glad to hear you say that, John Tuckerman," he

responded. "For, in a way, I felt that to-night I'd been usurping a place that was rightfully yours. For, of course, this is your house, and this is your silver plate."

"Then who are you?" piped up Sarah Hooper from the foot of the table.

"I think he's Roderick Fitzhugh," said Tom, who sat beside Sarah.

"I think he's Mr. Joseph Hastings," volunteered Ben.

The buff-coated gentleman nodded, "You are both right. Joseph Hastings, Roderick Fitzhugh, and Peter Cotterell. I'm quite a versatile fellow. I've a passion for acting, to tell the truth."

"I thought you were Joseph Hastings," said Ben, "when I met you at the Gables."

"Yes, that's my right name. But Roderick Fitzhugh sounded so much more romantic. And I'd invited a houseful of guests to help me act a play I'd written for the moving-pictures. We all took the names we were to have in the play." He pointed to Penelope Boothby. "She was the fair Maid Rosalind. And my steward Sampson yonder was Sir Marmaduke Midchester. And we liked our costumes so much that we wore them most of the time. That's how I happened to be in Lincoln green when Master Ben drove up."

"And it was the snuff-box you bought in Barmouth that I found in the chest in the cliff," asserted Ben. "How did it happen to come there?"

Joseph Hastings pushed his chair back from the table and crossed his legs. "That's quite a long story. But I suppose you'd like to hear it. I have a friend who knows John Tuckerman very well, and he wrote me that Tuckerman had come here to take possession of this island and its house. That sounded very interesting. So I came over here in my motor-boat with Martin Locke—that's Sir Marmaduke, alias Sampson, and Miss Adelaide Lawson—that's Penelope Boothby—it was a day or two before you campers arrived—and we found we could open one of the drawing-room windows and get into the house that way. Then we discovered the note stuck in the picture frame, and so we learned there was a secret about a family treasure."

"And you left the window open a little when you went out," put in Tom. "That's how it happened that Ben's candle blew out."

"Did we?" said Hastings. "I didn't know we did that. But we found some wax and took an impression of the key-hole in the front door, and I had a key made to fit it in Barmouth. I thought we'd have some fun with John Tuckerman and his friends."

"You did, all right," said Tuckerman. "I'll forgive you for making that key. I suppose that's what those men from the fishing-smack did when they broke in here."

"I'm sorry if I set a bad example," Hastings answered. "But they didn't learn the trick from us. Well, a day or two later we three came back again."

"You landed from the creek?" Ben asked.

"Yes; we didn't want you to see us, and the creek was on the other side of the island from your camp."

"And one of you took off his shoes before he landed?" Ben questioned again.

"Yes, Martin did. He carried Miss Lawson ashore." Hastings laughed. "You saw his footprints, didn't you? We thought you might find them, so we came back later and rubbed them out."

"Gigantic footprints," murmured David.

They all laughed, while Martin Locke blushed red.

"Yes, they are pretty big," Hastings continued. "Well, when we came that time we found the notebooks in the drawing-room. Miss Lawson glanced through them, and read that part about a mahogany man with long, skinny legs and the clipper ship. We got an old piece of parchment and some purplish ink and we wrote out that message and signed it James Sampson. Then we cut it in two and put one-half in the secret drawer of the secretary and the other half in the model of a ship in the attic. We wanted to find out just how clever you were. We thought you might take the desk to be the mahogany man."

"We got the idea of that from something Sally Hooper said," Ben put in. "And the secretary certainly has long, skinny legs and is made of mahogany. Still, we mightn't have connected it with Sir Peter's mahogany man, if it hadn't been for Sally."

"Well, if you hadn't," Hastings continued, "we'd have thought up some other way to have you find that message on the parchment. We were very proud of that little scheme. Martin wrote the letters with his left hand, so they'd look as if Sir Peter's servant might have done them, and he put water into the ink, so as to give it a nice, antique, faded appearance. We wanted you to have the fun of finding some sort of a treasure, you see."

"And didn't you take a look around for the real treasure mentioned in the note in the picture frame?" Tuckerman asked.

"Well, we did take a squint," Hastings acknowledged. "But we didn't think it likely we'd find that, if none of the Cotterells had been able to do it. We thought more about having some fun with you campers." He looked at the three boys. "And we did give you a good time, didn't we?—particularly Ben?"

"Yes, you did," nodded Ben. "I was pretty well excited when I found that second piece of parchment in the hold of the ship."

"When we'd fixed up the message," Hastings resumed, "the next thing was to provide the treasure. Of course we'd already made a note of that crevice in the cliffs with the mark like a cross. I had an old chest at the Gables, and we filled it with some old costumes I had on hand, and then one day when I was in Barmouth I picked up some odds and ends from a dealer in antiques there, a fellow by the name of Haskins."

"And that's where the silver snuff-box comes in," said Ben.

"Yes, that's where it comes in," Hastings admitted. "Though I must say that I was surprised when you drove up to the Gables that day and wanted to know if Joseph Hastings had anything to do with that snuff-box you'd found on the island. I didn't tell the dealer my name."

"No, he didn't know your name," said Ben. "I asked him that. You see, as soon as I saw what was in the chest I had a suspicion that someone was playing a game on us. Those things weren't the Cotterell treasure; and why should anyone take so much trouble to hide such things on the island? Then I knew there had been people here, the footprints by the creek, the handkerchief in the kitchen—"

"What's that about a handkerchief?" interrupted Martin Locke.

"The Professor found a handkerchief on the table in the kitchen," Ben explained. "A lady's handkerchief, with the initials A. S. L."

"So that's where I left it!" exclaimed Miss Lawson. "Those are my initials—Adelaide Sanderson Lawson."

"Yes, there was the handkerchief and there were the footprints," Ben continued. "That showed we weren't the only people who had been to the island. And so, when we went to Barmouth, I took the snuffbox along, and dropped in on Mr. Haskins. He knew the snuff-box at once, and told me that the man who had bought it from him, and some other things too, had come in a big red car with a silver eagle on the radiator cap, and that the car had a Massachusetts license and the man was wearing green-checked knickerbockers. He didn't know the man's name."

"I guess those green checks are rather conspicuous," murmured Hastings. "But how did you connect the purchaser with me?"

"Through the clerk at the hotel where you stopped for dinner, and the man you bought a new tire from," Ben answered, and he told how he had found his way to the Gables.

"Pretty clever," laughed Hastings. "But instead of finding out why I'd put those things in the chest you went hooked-rug hunting with me."

"Well," said Ben, "when we came back to your house I thought you must be Joseph Hastings, but I didn't get any good opening to follow up the clue. And then there was all that excitement over the robbers. But when I saw you doing those moving-pictures I sized you up as a person who'd like to play a game of some sort on us."

"I don't know whether that's a knock at me or not," said Hastings. "But I do like to play games. And that's why, when I learned that you'd found the chest, I thought it would be good fun to come over here as Sir Peter Cotterell, dress my guests in Revolutionary costumes, and take some moving-pictures on the island. Martin and I came over to see about it; that was the afternoon when you invited us to stay to supper and Martin sang his song."

"It was a splendid idea," said Tuckerman, "and you did it up brown."

"Thank you." Hastings bowed. "Such words from a descendant of Sir Peter are a compliment indeed. We learned that you were going over to the water sports at Camp Amousock this morning, so we thought we'd have a clear field. We brought a flotilla of boats—they're moored in the creek now—and a good supply of costumes, and cooks and food and the moving-picture camera. I had one of my men make up like a servant from the Barbadoes, stain his face and hands with mahogany juice; he's the one who brought us the negus; though it isn't really negus—it's loganberry juice and soda-water—and I got Martin Locke to play the part of Sampson." Hastings looked at Locke and laughed. "Though I don't think Martin could possibly have carried that treasure chest all the way from here to the north shore."

"You certainly do things up thoroughly," said Mr. Hallett.

"But what made the party a real success," said Hastings, "was what our friend Ben Sully did. First, the capture of the thieves, and second, the finding of the real Cotterell treasure. That's a pretty fine showing for one day, Ben."

"It was just luck I found that chest in the attic," Ben answered. "I thought all along that the pines and the rocks mentioned in that notebook were actual outdoor pines and rocks, just as I suppose everybody's thought who's hunted for the treasure. I've been up in the attic a lot of times, and never particularly noticed the wallpaper—it's pretty much faded and blurred, as you saw; but when I was taking this coat off one of the pegs this afternoon, I did happen to notice that there was a yellowish sun and some pines and rocks in the design on the wall. Then the idea struck me all at once. Mightn't that be the place the words in the notebook meant? And the more I looked at that wallpaper the more I felt certain of it. I suppose Sir Peter told someone jokingly one day that the treasure was hidden beyond the three pines that stand between two rocks where the sun goes down, and that fooled the people who've looked for it ever since. He surely did like his joke."

"Why didn't you tell us about it as soon as you hit on that great idea, Benjie?" It was Tom who asked the question.

"Why, then I saw the fishing-smack, and wanted to go after the thieves."

"But afterwards?" said Tom. "Don't tell me you'd forgotten about it when we stopped at the camp."

Ben looked a trifle embarrassed. "Why, the fact is," he replied, "I thought I'd like to spring it at a dramatic moment. I had an idea that Miss Boothby would ask Sir Peter again to show us the Cotterell silver plate—she wanted to tease him about it—and when she had him up a tree would be the right time for me to speak out and tell what I'd discovered."

"That's one on you, Adelaide," laughed Joseph Hastings. "Ben saw how you love to ask awkward questions. And he likes dramatic things as much as I do. He sprung it at just the right moment."

Tuckerman stood up and walked to the door that opened into the hall. From there he looked down the length of the room, at the table gleaming with silver, at the many candles, at the gaily-clad company. "Yes," he said, "I think this is worthy of Sir Peter. I'm glad that Cotterell Hall has held high festival once more."

"Sir Peter was a dear," said Miss Lawson. "I've liked him ever since I saw that picture of him in the drawing-room. And it's a wonderful house, Mr. Tuckerman. What are you going to do with it? Are you going to live here?"

"I can't very well," Tuckerman answered, with a shake of his head. "My home's in the middle West. I'm not like my Uncle Christopher and his ancestors; I can't live on an island in solitary grandeur. I'm too fond of people."

"Why don't you turn it into a show-place?" suggested Milly Hallett. "That's getting to be quite the fashionable thing to do with colonial houses."

"We've talked about that," said Tuckerman. His eyes roved over the fine room; and after a minute he shook his head. "Cotterell Hall a museum? No, I couldn't do that. But I'll tell you what I would like to do. I'd like to come here every summer, and have Tom and Ben and David camp out with me, and have Joseph Hastings bring his house-parties over here and spend a week as my guests."

There were cheers from all the company, the rafters rang with the noise as each and every one shouted his or her acceptance. Hastings jumped to his feet.

"In the name of us all I accept your invitation. We will come, and dance in your drawing-room and dine from your table, as they did in Sir Peter's day. And now, friends and fellow-citizens, I propose three cheers—three long and rousing cheers—for John Tuckerman!"

The cheers were given—long and rousing enough to suit even Joseph Hastings.

Then the buff-coated man waved his hand. "As your host for the evening, I invite you to go to the drawing-room and dance something a little more modern than the minuet. Miss Sarah Hooper, will you do me the honor?"

Sarah and Mr. Hastings led the way across the hall to the front room, where the rugs had been removed from the polished floor. The music was a piano and violin. And everybody danced, even David, who contrived to jig about not too awkwardly with Milly Hallett.

Then there were songs. Martin Locke sang the ballad he had written, and Tuckerman sang, and Miss Lawson sang several times. Presently Hastings glanced at the clock. "I don't like to mention it," said he, "but it's almost midnight. To the boats, to the boats, and away!"

They all trooped out to the creek, where the flotilla was moored. Ladies in silks and satins and beruffled gentlemen embarked. With cheers from the shore, Joseph Hastings' fleet steered down the inlet and turned south.

Then the sailboat from Barmouth, with the Halletts and Hoopers, flitted away from the landing-stage on the other side of the island. The boys and Tuckerman went along the shore to their camp.

"Great doings!" said Tom. "But how are we ever going to keep Benjie busy now that the treasure is found?"

"Don't you worry about me," Ben retorted. "I've got plenty to do. The sea is still full of fish."

"He's after a mahogany fish with long, skinny legs," said David.

"What I want to know," said Ben, "is whether there ever was a real mahogany man."

"I think there was," said Tuckerman. "But he sailed away in the clipper ship. He probably went to the Barbadoes."

Tom gave a great yawn. "Well," he said, "Ben can sit up and talk about him as long as he likes; but for me—I'm going to bed. It's been what I'd call a full day."

XXI—THE BOYS AND JOHN TUCKERMAN

Tuckerman pulled himself up on to the rock where Tom and David and Ben were sitting in the sun. The quiet of early morning was on the water; a few terns were fishing for their breakfast; there was the distant chug-chug of a lobsterman's motor-boat somewhere to the south; but otherwise the campers had the shore and the bay to themselves. Tuckerman sat down, sticking his long legs out in front of him. "I may not be a duck," he said, "but I'm certainly getting web-feet. I feel almost as much at home in the water as on dry land."

"You're a good swimmer," said Tom. "In fact, you're an all-around sport. I don't believe any of the Cotterells knew a quarter as much about the water as you do."

"I can't picture Sir Peter sunning himself on this rock after a morning swim," said David.

"Customs change with the times." Tuckerman slapped his wet knees. "But I can tell you I'm glad I came on East this summer and learned to be a real man."

"So am I," said Ben. "No, I didn't mean it that way. Of course you were a real man before. What I mean is that the camp on your island has been a great success. It's taught me a lot."

"Benjie, are you really going to be a professional detective?" David inquired. "Seems to me I heard someone say that you were thinking of it."

"One mistake I made at first," Ben remarked solemnly, "was in thinking that the men who put that chest in the rocks and those that Tom saw leaving the island in the sailboat were the same people. I thought there was only one set of men prowling around here, when there were really two."

Tuckerman smiled. "I don't wonder you got them mixed. Well, I'm glad Joseph Hastings' guests got their jewels back from those thieves."

"You see," Ben continued, following his own line of thought, "the thieves came out here on the night when Tom saw them in a sailboat, and not in the fishing-smack. And I think it must have been that same sailboat we saw close to the island the night when we returned from Camp Amoussock in the *Argo*." He pried loose a sliver of rock and threw it into the water. "Naturally, I didn't connect that sailboat with the fishing-smack."

"You're forgiven," said Tom. "Don't let that weigh on your conscience."

"I'm not sure," suggested David, "but that we ought to call Benjie the Professor and call Mr. Tuckerman, John. Benjie's getting to be a real professor. Just listen to the way he talks."

"Ever since he found the treasure——" began Tom.

"Oh, let up on a fellow, can't you?" Ben interrupted. "I haven't mentioned the treasure to-day."

David gave a chuckle. "You haven't been out of bed an hour yet. And that puts me in mind of something important. Breakfast is waiting on the beach."

Four splashes of water as the campers dove from the rock. Tuckerman could manage a very passable dive now. A swim across to the beach, a rub-down, a quick donning of clothes, and then preparations for breakfast. "I've never known coffee to taste so good as it does on Cotterell's Island," said Tuckerman, draining his cup.

Tom looked up at the man with the horn-rimmed spectacles. "Have you ever known anything to taste so good as it does on Cotterell's Island?" he asked with a twinkle in his eye.

"No, now I come to think of it, I don't believe I ever have. It's a wonderful place."

"Wonderful cooking, you mean," put in David.

"Wonderful fish," said Ben.

"Just listen to them," expostulated Tom. "Each taking the credit to himself. When the fact of the matter is that it's all due to me. You'd never have come out here, Professor, would you, if I hadn't agreed to come along?"

"Picture me alone here!" said Tuckerman. "No, I didn't believe I should. Alone on a deserted island. It sounds all right in stories; but for practical purposes give me three companions. Boys, when I go back to my middle-western city I'll think a great deal about this summer on the coast."

"It is pretty good here," David admitted, looking across the water to where a white sail was peeping around a point of land. "And in winter there's fine skating."

"And wonderful coasting," said Ben. "There's a hill back of Barmouth where you can coast for a mile."

"And skiing," Tom added. "You ought to be good at that, Professor, you've got such long legs."

Tuckerman put his hands to his ears. "Hold on, hold on!" he exclaimed. "You overwhelm me. Do you want to make me desert my home and business, and do nothing but play?"

The three boys laughed. "We don't play all the time by any means," said Ben.

"Not a bit of it," said David. "Sometimes we wash the dishes." And taking Ben by the collar of his flannel shirt he lifted him to his feet. "Benjie'll show you how we do it."

When they had cleaned the dishes they walked over to Cotterell Hall. Tuckerman opened the front door, which was unlocked. "While I was so very particular about the key," he chuckled, "both Joseph Hastings and the crew of the fishing-smack were coming in whenever they wanted. They made their own keys to fit the locks. Well, I ought to have been more hospitable."

A week had passed since the famous party, and in that week the police of Barmouth had found the jewels that were stolen from the Gables, and also duplicate keys to the front and back doors of Cotterell Hall, hidden in the cabin of the fishing-smack. On the strength of that, and of the testimony of Tom and David and Lanky Larry as to what they had seen on the afternoon when they were at the cove, Sam and the other men had been held in jail for the next term of court.

"There's one thing," said Ben, as the four went into the big room on the left of the hall, "that still puzzles me a bit. Why did Christopher Cotterell write those lines in his notebook? 'Find the mahogany-hued man with the long, skinny legs and look in his breast pocket. That's a saying my father handed down. What can it mean?'" Ben looked at the others. "What do you suppose the mahogany man did have in his pocket?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Tuckerman. "He certainly didn't have Sir Peter's silver plate. That may

be one of those legends, Ben, that get changed from their original meaning as they are handed down from one to another."

"I suppose that may be it," agreed Ben, though he did not look altogether satisfied.

"Every colonial house," Tuckerman continued, "ought to have some legend to make it interesting. The mahogany man can be the legend of Cotterell Hall."

Tuckerman looked at the portrait of his ancestor. "We've found what you meant by the place of the three pines and the two rocks where the sun goes down," he said; "but we haven't found what it was that the mahogany man had in his breast pocket. So you've still provided a conundrum for Ben to puzzle over. Sir Peter, I don't believe you'd have any objection to our having found the plate. I think that to-day you'd be as good an American as any of the rest of us."

"Of course he would," said Tom, "I can understand how he'd have objected to his neighbors telling him to hand over his silver to them. I'd have objected myself."

Tuckerman turned to the three boys. "You approve of Sir Peter, don't you?" he asked. "Even if he was a Tory?"

"I do," said Ben promptly.

"I do," said Tom.

"I think he was a corker, Professor," said David. "I wish he'd been in my family."

"And that's the opinion of three boys of good old Barmouth families," said Tuckerman with a pleased smile. "Well, boys, you're to feel free to camp on Sir Peter's island and use his house any time you want."

"Now," said Tom, "the next thing is to get the Professor to sail us around to the north shore, so we can get Mr. Hastings' chest and bring it back to the house. We don't want to leave any tempting bait for other prowlers to find."

They went aboard the *Argo*, and Tuckerman took the helm. He was now a proficient skipper, and he gloried in it, as he gloried in all the new accomplishments he had acquired in the past month.

The chest was brought to Cotterell Hall, and again the *Argo* set sail. This time the three boys fished, while Tuckerman handled the boat. Flounders were biting in plenty, and soon they had enough for dinner. Ben pulled in his line. "We'd better leave some for another day," he suggested.

"The wind's just right for a southerly run," said Tom.

"Aye, aye, Captain," said Tuckerman, and brought the bow about.

South they sailed, past the flag at Camp Amoussock, past the cove with the shacks on each side, past Joseph Hastings' private dock, almost down to Gosport before Tuckerman came about.

North to the island and dinner. And as they sat on the bank afterwards and Tuckerman smoked his pipe, he said, "Well, to-morrow I must start back to the city. But I tell you, I've learned more since I've camped out in Barmouth Harbor than I ever learned in college."

"If you stayed here much longer," said David, "you'd be almost as learned as Benjie."

"I don't know about that," Tuckerman answered. "I'm not as keen-witted as he is. I'm more lazy, like you, Dave."

David grinned. "Well, it takes something really important to make me move around. I wouldn't go trailing a snuff-box all over the country."

"It takes Lanky Larry's pitching," said Tom. "Dave has to get mad before he does his best work."

"I wasn't mad. I was cool as a cucumber," David responded. "I have a nice friendly nature."

"If it hadn't been for my following the snuffbox," Ben spoke up, "Joseph Hastings wouldn't have come out here and given his party; and if he hadn't given his party and told us to get our costumes up in the attic, I wouldn't have noticed that wallpaper; and if I hadn't noticed the wallpaper we'd never have found the treasure. Q. E. D."

"There!" exclaimed David, "Ben's off again! No, Professor, I was wrong; you couldn't possibly be as learned as he is; nobody could."

"I've half a mind to duck you for that," said Ben.

"Come on!" retorted David, pretending to roll up his sleeves.

"Only it's too soon after dinner," answered the dark-haired boy. "I'll overlook it this once; but don't you do it again."

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PETER COTTERELL'S TREASURE ***

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