REID MAYNE

THE CASTAWAYS

Томас Майн Рид

The Castaways

Майн Рид Т.

The Castaways / Т. Майн Рид — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

Mayne Reid
The Castaways

Chapter One.
A Castaway Crew

A boat upon the open sea – no land in sight!

It is an open boat, the size and form showing it to be the pinnace of a merchant-ship.

It is a tropical sea, with a fiery sun overhead, slowly coursing through a sky of brilliant azure.

The boat has neither sail nor mast. There are oars, but no one is using them. They lie athwart the tholes, their blades dipping in the water, with no hand upon the grasp.

And yet the boat is not empty. Seven human forms are seen within it, – six of them living, and one dead.

Of the living, four are full-grown men; three of them white, the fourth of an umber-brown, or *bistre* colour. One of the white men is tall, dark and bearded, with features bespeaking him either a European or an American, though their somewhat elongated shape and classic regularity would lead to a belief that he is the latter, and in all probability a native of New York. And so he is.

The features of the white man sitting nearest to him are in strange contrast to his, as is also the colour of his hair and skin. The hair is of a carroty shade, while his complexion, originally reddish, through long exposure to a tropical sun exhibits a yellowish, freckled appearance. The countenance so marked is unmistakably of Milesian type. So it should be, as its owner is an Irishman.

The third white man, of thin, lank frame, with face almost beardless, pale cadaverous cheeks, and eyes sunken in their sockets, and there rolling wildly, is one of those nondescripts who may be English, Irish, Scotch, or American. His dress betokens him to be a seaman, a common sailor.

He of the brown complexion, with flat spreading nose, high cheek-bones, oblique eyes, and straight, raven black hair, is evidently a native of the East, a Malay.

The two other living figures in the boat are those of a boy and girl. They are white. They differ but little in size, and but a year or two in age, the girl being fourteen and the boy about sixteen. There is also a resemblance in their features. They are brother and sister.

The fourth white, who lies dead in the bottom of the boat, is also dressed in seaman's clothes, and has evidently in his lifetime been a common sailor.

It is but a short time since the breath departed from his body; and judging by the appearance of the others, it may not be long before they will all follow him into another world. How weak and emaciated they appear, as if in the last stage of starvation! The boy and girl lie along the stern-sheets, with wasted arms, embracing each other. The tall man sits on one of the benches, gazing mechanically upon the corpse at his feet; while the other three also have their eyes upon it, though with very different expressions. That upon the face of the Irishman is of sadness, as if for the loss of an old shipmate; the Malay looks on with the impassive tranquillity peculiar to his race; while in the sunken orbs of the nondescript can be detected a look that speaks of a horrible craving – the craving of cannibalism.

The scene described, and the circumstances which have led to it, call for explanation. It is easily given. The tall dark-bearded man is Captain Robert Redwood, the skipper of an American merchant-vessel, for some time trading among the islands of the Indian Archipelago. The Irishman is his ship-carpenter, the Malay his pilot, while the others are two common sailors of his crew. The boy and girl are his children, who, having no mother or near relatives at home, have been brought along with him on his trading voyage to the Eastern Isles. The vessel passing from Manilla, in the Philippines, to the Dutch settlement of Macassar, in the island of Celebes, has been caught in a *typhoon* and swamped

near the middle of the Celebes Sea; her crew have escaped in a boat – the pinnace – but saved from death by drowning only to find, most of them, the same watery grave after long-procrastinated suffering from thirst, from hunger, from all the agonies of starvation.

One after another have they succumbed, and been thrown overboard, until the survivors are only six in number. And these are but skeletons, each looking as if another day, or even another hour, might terminate his wretched existence.

It may seem strange that the youthful pair in the stern-sheets, still but tender children, and the girl more especially, should have withstood the terrible suffering beyond a period possible to many strong men, tough sailors every one of them. But it is not so strange after all, or rather after knowing that, in the struggle with starvation, youth always proves itself superior to age, and tender childhood will live on where manhood gives way to the weakness of inanition.

That Captain Redwood is himself one of the strongest of the survivors may be due partly to the fact of his having a higher organism than that of his ship-comrades. But, no doubt, he is also sustained by the presence of the two children, his affection for them and fear for their fate warding off despair, and so strengthening within him the principle of vitality.

If affection has aught to do with preserving life, it is strong enough in the Irishman to account also for the preservation of his; for although but the carpenter in Captain Redwood's ship, he regards the captain with a feeling almost fraternal. He had been one of his oldest and steadiest hands, and long service has led to a fast friendship between him and his old skipper.

On the part of the Irishman, this feeling is extended to the youthful couple who recline, with clasped hands, along the sternmost seat of the pinnace.

As for the Malay, thirst and hunger have also made their marks upon him; but not as with those of Occidental race. It may be that his bronze skin does not show so plainly the pallor of suffering; but, at all events, he still looks lithe and life-like, supple and sinewy, as if he could yet take a spell at the oar, and keep alive as long as skin and bone held together. If all are destined to die in that open boat, he will certainly be the last. He with the hollow eyes looks as if he would be the first.

Down upon this wretched group, a picture of misery itself, shines the hot sun of the tropics; around it, far as eye could reach, extends the calm sea, glassed, and glancing back his lays, as though they were reflected from a sheet of liquid fire; beneath them gleams a second firmament through the pellucid water, a sky peopled with strange forms that are not birds: more like are they to dragons; for among them can be seen the horrid form of the devil-fish, and the still more hideous figure of the hammer-headed shark. And alone is that boat above them, seemingly suspended in the air, and only separated from these dreadful monsters by a few feet of clear water, through which they can dart with the speed of electricity. Alone, with no land in sight, no ship or sail, no other boat – nothing that can give them a hope.

All bright above, around, and beneath; but within their hearts only darkness and the dread of death!

Chapter Two.
The Hammer-Head

For some time the castaways had been seated in moody silence, now and then glancing at the corpse in the bottom of the boat, some of them no doubt thinking how long it might be before they themselves would occupy the same situation.

But now and then, also, their looks were turned upon one another, not hopefully, but with a mechanical effort of despair.

In one of these occasional glances, Captain Redwood noticed the unnatural glare in the eyes of the surviving sailor, as also did the Irishman. Simultaneously were both struck with it, and a significant look was exchanged between them.

For a period of over twenty hours this man had been behaving oddly; and they had conceived something more than a suspicion of his insanity. The death of the sailor lying at the bottom of the boat, now the ninth, had rendered him for a time more tranquil, and he sat quiet on his seat, with elbows resting on his knees, his cheeks held between the palms of his hands. But the wild stare in his eyes seemed to have become only more intensified as he kept them fixed upon the corpse of his comrade. It was a look worse than wild; it had in it the expression of *craving*.

On perceiving it, and after a moment spent in reflection, the captain made a sign to the ship-carpenter, at the same time saying, —

"Murtagh, it's no use our keeping the body any longer in the boat. Let us give it such burial as the sea vouchsafes to a sailor, – and a true one he was."

He spoke these words quietly, and in a low tone, as if not intending them to be heard by the suspected maniac.

"A thrue sailor!" rejoined the Irishman. "Truth ye're roight there, captin. Och, now! to think he's the ninth of them we've throwed overboard, all the crew of the owld ship, exceptin' our three selves, widout countin' the Malay an' the childer. If it wasn't that yer honour's still left, I'd say the best goes first; for the nigger there looks as if he'd last out the whole lot of – "

The captain, to whom this imprudent speech was torture, with a gesture brought it to an abrupt termination. He was in fear of its effect not on the Malay, but on the insane sailor. The latter, however, showed no sign of having heard or understood it; and in a whisper Murtagh received instructions how to act.

"You lay hold of him by the shoulders," were the words spoken, "while I take the feet. Let us slip him quietly over without making any stir. Saloo, remain you where you are; we won't need your help."

This last speech was addressed to the Malay, and in his own language, which would not be understood by any other than himself. The reason for laying the injunction upon him was, that he sat in the boat beyond the man deemed mad, and his coming across to the others might excite the latter, and bring about some vaguely dreaded crisis.

The silent Malay simply nodded an assent, showing no sign that he comprehended why his assistance was not desired. For all that, he understood it, he too having observed the mental condition of the sailor. Rising silently from their seats, and advancing toward the dead body, the captain and carpenter, as agreed upon, laid hold of and raised it up in their arms. Even weak as both were, it was not much of a lift to them. It was not a corpse, only a skeleton, with the skin still adhering, and drawn tightly over the bones.

Resting it upon the gunwale of the boat, they made a moment's pause, their eyes turned heavenward, as if mentally repeating a prayer.

The Irishman, a devout believer in the efficacy of outward observances, with one hand detached from the corpse, made the sign of the cross.

Then was the body again raised between them, held at arm's length outward, and tenderly lowered down upon the water.

There was no plunge, only a tiny plashing, as if a chair, or some other piece of light woodwork, had been dropped gently upon the surface of the sea. But slight as was the sound, it produced an effect, startling as instantaneous. The sailor, whose dead comrade was thus being consigned to the deep, as it were, surreptitiously, all at once sprang to his feet, sending forth a shriek that rang far over the tranquil water. With one bound, causing the pinnace to heel fearfully over, he placed himself by the side over which the corpse had been lowered, and stood with arms upraised, as if intending to plunge after it.

The sight underneath should have awed him. The dead body was slowly, gradually sinking, its garb of dark blue Guernsey shirt becoming lighter blue as it went deeper down in the cerulean water; while fast advancing to meet it, as if coming up from the darkest depths of the ocean, was a creature of monstrous shape, the very type of a monster. It was the hideous hammer-headed shark, the dreaded *zygaena* of the Celebes Sea.

With a pair of enormous eyes glaring sullenly out from two immense cheek-like protuberances, giving to its head that singular sledge-hammer appearance whence it has its name, it advanced directly toward the slow-descending corpse, itself, however, moving so rapidly that the spectators above had scarce taken in the outlines of its horrid form, when this was no longer visible. It was hidden in what appeared a shower of bluish pearls suddenly projected underneath the water, and enveloping both the dead body of the sailor and the living form of the shark. Through the dimness could be distinguished gleams of a pale phosphoric sheen like lightning flashes through a sky cloud; and soon after froth and bubbles rose effervescing upon the surface of the sea.

It was a terrible spectacle, though only of an instants duration. When the subaqueous cloud cleared away, and they again looked with peering eyes down into the pellucid depths, there was nothing there, neither dead body of man, nor living form of monster. The *zygaena* had secured its prey, and carried the skeleton corpse to some dark cavern of the deep![1]

[1] The hammer-headed shark, in common language, is rightly designated one of the most hideous of marine animals. We mean hideous in outward appearance, for, of course, there is much both wonderful and beautiful in its internal organisation, and in the exquisite fitness of its structure for its peculiar part in the economy of nature. In the general outline of its body, which is something like that of a cylinder, it resembles the ordinary sharks; and its distinctive feature is its head, which, on either side, expands like a double-headed hammer. The eyes are very large, and placed at each extremity. It is found in the Mediterranean Sea, as well as in the Indian Ocean, and is noted for its fierceness and voracity.

Chapter Three.
The Albatross

Captain Redwood and the Irishman were horrified at the sight that had passed under their eyes. So, too, were the children, who had both started up from their reclining attitude, and looked over the side of the boat. Even the impassive Malay, all his life used to stirring scenes, in which blood was often shed, could not look down into those depths, disturbed by such a tragical occurrence, without having aroused within him a sensation of horror.

All of them recoiled back into the boat, staggering down upon their seats. One alone remained standing, and with an expression upon his face as if he was desirous of again beholding the sight. It was not a look that betrayed pleasure, but one grim and ghastly, yet strong and steady, as if it penetrated the profoundest depths of the ocean. It was the look of the insane sailor.

If his companions had still held any lingering doubts about his insanity, it was sufficient to dispel them. It was the true stare of the maniac.

It was not long continued. Scarce had they resumed their seats when the man, once more elevating his arms in the air, uttered another startling shriek, if possible louder and wilder than before. He had stepped upon one of the boat seats, and stood with body bent, half leaning over the gunwale, in the attitude of a diver about to make his headlong plunge.

There could be no mistaking his intention to leap overboard, for his comrades could see that his muscles were strained to the effort.

All three – the captain, Murtagh, and the Malay – suddenly rose again, and leant forward to lay hold on him. They were too late. Before a finger could touch him he had made the fatal spring; and the next moment he was beneath the surface of the sea!

None of them felt strong enough to leap after and try to save him. In all probability, the effort would have been idle, and worse; for the mad fancy that seemed urging him to self-destruction might still influence his mind, and carry another victim into the same vortex with himself. Restrained by this thought, they stood up in the boat, and watched for his coming up again.

He did so at length, but a good distance off. A breeze had been gradually springing up, and during his dive the pinnace had made some way, by drifting before it. When his head was again seen above the curling water, he was nearly a hundred yards to windward of the boat. He was not so far off as to prevent them from reading the expression upon his face, now turned toward them. It had become changed, as if by magic. The wild look of insanity was gone, and in its place was one almost equally wild, though plainly was it an expression of fear, or indeed terror. The immersion into the cold, deep sea, had told upon his fevered brain, producing a quick reaction of reason; and his cries for help, now in piteous tones sent back to the boat, showed that he understood the peril in which he had placed himself.

They were not unheeded. Murtagh and the Malay rushed, or rather tottered, to the oars; while the captain threw himself into the stern, and took hold of the tiller-ropes.

In an instant the pinnace was headed round, and moving through the water in the direction of the swimmer; who, on his side, swam toward them, though evidently with feeble stroke. There seemed not much doubt of their being able to pick him up. The only danger thought of by any of them was the *zygaena*; but they hoped the shark might be still occupied with its late prey, and not seeking another victim. There might be another shark, or many more; but for some time past one only had been seen in the neighbourhood of the boat; the shark, as they supposed, which had but recently devoured the dead body of the sailor. Trusting to this conjecture, they plied the oars with all the little strength left in their arms. Still, notwithstanding their feeble efforts, and the impediment of pulling against the wind, they were nearing the unfortunate man, surely, if slowly.

They had got over half the distance; less than half a cable's length was now between the boat and the struggling swimmer. Not a shark was to be seen on the water, nor beneath it – no fish of any kind – nothing whatever in the sea. Only, in the sky above, a large bird, whose long scimitar-shaped wings and grand curving beak told them what it was – an albatross. It was the great albatross of the Indian seas, with an extent of wing beyond that of the largest eagle, and almost equalling the spread of the South American condor.[2]

They scarce looked at it, or even glanced above, they were looking below for the *zygaena*– scanning the surface of the water around them, or with their eyes keenly bent, endeavouring to penetrate its indigo depths in search of the monstrous form.

No shark in sight. All seemed well; and despite the piteous appeals of the swimmer, now toiling with feebler stroke, and scarce having power to sustain himself they in the pinnace felt sure of being able to rescue him.

Less than a quarter cable's length lay between. The boat, urged on by the oars, was still lessening the distance. Five minutes more, and they would be close to their comrade, and lift him over the gunwale.

Still no *zygaena* in sight – no shark of any kind.

"Poor fellow! he seems quite cured; we shall be able to save him."

It was Captain Redwood who thus spoke. The Irishman was about making a little hopeful rejoinder, when his speech was cut short by a cry from Saloo, who had suspended his stroke, as if paralysed by some sudden despair.

The Malay, who, as well as Murtagh, had been sitting with his back toward the swimmer, had slewed himself round with a quick jerk, that told of some surprise. The movement was caused by a shadow flitting over the boat; something was passing rapidly through the air above. It had caught the attention of the others, who, on hearing Saloo's cry, looked up along with him.

They saw only the albatross moving athwart the sky, no longer slow sailing as before, but with the swift-cutting flight of a falcon pouncing down upon its prey. It seemed descending not in a straight line, but in an acute parabolic curve, like a thunderbolt or some aerolite projected toward the surface of the sea. But the bird, with a whirr like the sound of running spindles, was going in a definite direction, the point evidently aimed at being the head of the swimmer!

A strange commingled shout arose over the ocean, in which several voices bore part. Surprise pealed forth from the lips of those in the boat, and terror from the throat of the struggling man, while a hoarse croak from the gullet of the albatross, followed by what appeared a mocking scream of triumph. Then quick succeeded a crashing sound, as the sharp heavy beak of the bird broke through the skull of the swimmer, striking him dead, as if by the shot of a six-pounder, and sending his lifeless body down toward the bottom of the sea!

It came not up again – at all events, it was never more seen by his castaway companions; who, dropping the oars in sorrowful despair, allowed the boat to drift away from the fatal spot – in whatever direction the soft-sighing breeze might capriciously carry it.

[2] The albatross Is the largest of the ocean-birds. Its wings, when extended, measuring fifteen feet, and its weight sometimes exceeding twenty to twenty-four pounds. The common albatross is the *Diomedea exulans* of naturalists. Its plumage, except a few of the wing feathers, is white; its long, hard beak, which Is very powerful, is of a pale yellow colour; and its short, webbed feet are flesh coloured. It is frequently met with in the Southern Ocean. The species mentioned in the text is the black-beaked albatross, which frequents the India waters. The albatross Is a formidable enemy to the sailor, for if one falls overboard, he will assuredly fall a victim to this powerful bird, unless rescued immediately by his comrades. Its cry has some resemblance to that of the pelican; but it will also, when excited, give rent to a noise not unlike the braying of an ass. The female makes a rude nest of earth on the sea-shore, and deposits therein her solitary egg, which is about four inches long, white, and spotted at the larger end.

Chapter Four.
The Cry of the Dugong

Until the day on which the ninth sailor had died of starvation, and the tenth had been struck dead by the sea-bird, the castaways had taken an occasional spell at the oars. They now no longer touched, nor thought of them. Weakness prevented them, as well as despondency. For there was no object in continuing the toil; no land in sight, and no knowledge of any being near. Should a ship chance to come their way, they were as likely to be in her track lying at rest, as if engaged in laboriously rowing. They permitted the oars, therefore, to remain motionless between the thole pins, themselves sitting listlessly on the seats, most of them with their heads bent despairingly downward. The Malay alone kept his shining black eyes on the alert, as if despair had not yet prostrated him.

The long sultry day that saw the last of their two sailor comrades, at length came to a close, without any change in their melancholy situation. The fierce hot sun went down into the bosom of the sea, and was followed by the short tropic twilight. As the shades of night closed over them, the father, kneeling beside his children, sent up a prayer to Him who still held their lives in His hand; while Murtagh said the Amen; and the dark-skinned Malay, who was a Mohammedan, muttered a similar petition to Allah. It had been their custom every night and morning, since parting from the foundered ship, and during all their long-protracted perils in the pinnace.

Perhaps that evening's vesper was more fervent than those preceding it; for they felt they could not last much longer, and that all of them were slowly, surely dying.

This night, a thing something unusual, the sky became obscured by clouds. It might be a good omen, or a bad one. If a storm, their frail boat would run a terrible risk of being swamped; but if rain should accompany it, there might be a chance of collecting a little water upon a tarpaulin that lay at the bottom.

As it turned out, no rain fell, though there arose what might be called a storm. The breeze, springing up at an early hour of the day, commenced increasing after sunset.

It was the first of any consequence they had encountered since taking to the boat; and it blew right in the direction whither they intended steering.

With the freshening of the wind, as it came cool upon his brow, the castaway captain seemed to become inspired with a slight hope. It was the same with Murtagh and the Malay.

"If we only had a sail," muttered the captain, with a sigh.

"Sail, cappen – lookee talpolin!" said Saloo, speaking in "pigeon English," and pointing to the tarpaulin in the bottom of the boat. "Why no him makee sail?"

"Yis, indade; why not?" questioned the Irishman.

"Comee, Multa! you help me; we step one oal – it makee mass – we lig him up little time."

"All roight, Sloo," responded Murtagh, leaning over and seizing one of the oars, while the Malay lifted the tarpaulin from where it lay folded up, and commenced shaking the creases out of it.

With the dexterity of a practised sailor, Murtagh soon had the oar upright, and its end "stepped," between two ribs of the boat, and firmly lashed to one of the strong planks that served as seats. Assisted by the captain himself, the tarpaulin was bent on, and with a "sheet" attached to one corner rigged sail-fashion. In an instant it caught the stiff breeze, and bellied out; when the pinnace feeling the impulse, began to move rapidly through the water, leaving in her wake a stream of sparkling phosphorescence that looked like liquid fire.

They had no compass, and therefore could not tell the exact direction in which they were being carried. But a yellowish streak on the horizon, showing where the sun had set, was still lingering when the wind began to freshen, and as it was one of those steady, regular winds, that endure for hours

without change, they could by this means guess at the direction – which was toward that part of the horizon where the yellowish spot had but lately faded out; in short, toward the west.

Westward from the place where the cyclone had struck the ship, lay the great island of Borneo. They knew it to be the nearest land, and for this had they been directing the boat's course ever since their disaster. The tarpaulin now promised to bring them nearer to it in one night, than their oars had done with days of hopeless exertion.

It was a long twelve-hour night; for under the "Line" – and they were less than three degrees from it – the days and nights are equal. But throughout all its hours, the wind continued to blow steadily from the same quarter; and the spread tarpaulin, thick and strong, caught every puff of it acting admirably. It was, in fact, as much canvas as the pinnace could well have carried on such a rough sea-breeze, and served as a storm-try sail to run her before the wind.

Captain Redwood himself held charge of the tiller; and all were cheered with the fine speed they were making – their spirits rising in proportion to the distance passed over. Before daylight came to add to their cheerfulness, they must have made nearly a hundred miles; but ere the day broke, a sound fell upon their ears that caused a commotion among them – to all giving joy. It came swelling over the dark surface of the deep, louder than the rush of the water or the whistling of the wind. It resembled a human voice; and although like one speaking in agony, they heard it with joy. There was hope in the proximity of human beings, for though these might be in trouble like themselves, they could not be in so bad a state. They might be in danger from the storm; but they would be strong and healthy – not thirsting skeletons like the occupants of the pinnace.

"What do you think it is, captin?" asked the Irishman. "Moight it be some ship in disthriss?"

Before the captain could reply, the sound came a second time over the waters, with a prolonged wail, like the cry of a suffering sinner on his death-bed.

"The *dugong*!" exclaimed Saloo, this time recognising the melancholy note, so like to the voice of a human being.

"It is," rejoined Captain Redwood. "It's that, and nothing more."

He said this in a despairing tone, for the dugong, which is the *manatee*, or sea-cow of the Eastern seas, could be of no service to them; on the contrary, its loud wailings spoke of danger – these being the sure precursors of a storm.[3]

To him and Murtagh, the presence of this strange cetaceous animal gave no relief; and, after hearing its call, they sank back to their seats, relapsing into the state of half despondency, half hopefulness, from which it had startled them.

Not so with Saloo, who better understood its habits. He knew they were amphibious, and that, where the dugong was found, land could not be a long way off. He said this, once more arousing his companions by his words to renewed expectancy.

The morning soon after broke, and they beheld boldly outlined against the fast-clearing sky the blue mountains of Borneo.

"Land!" was the cry that came simultaneously from their lips.

"Land – thank the Lord!" continued the American skipper, in a tone of pious gratitude; and as his pinnace, still obedient to the breeze and spread tarpaulin, forged on toward it, he once more knelt down in the bottom of the boat, caused his children to do the same, and offered up a prayer –

[3] We are unwilling to interrupt the course of our narrative by disquisitions on subjects of natural history, and, therefore, relegate to a note the following particulars about the dugong. This strange mammal belongs to a genus of the family *Manatidae*, or Herbivorous Cetacea. The species of which a member was discovered by our castaways, is the *Halicore Indicus*, or dugong of the Indian Archipelago; and, as we have said, is never found very far from land. Its dentition resembles, in some respects, that of the elephant; and from the structure of its digestible organs it can eat only vegetable food; that is, the *algae*, or weeds, growing on submarine rocks in shallow water. When it comes to the surface to breathe, it utters a peculiar cry, like the lowing of a cow. Its length, when full-grown, is said to be twenty feet, but few individuals seem to exceed twelve feet. In its general appearance it is very much like the *manatee*, or manatus, which haunts the mouths of the great South American rivers.

a fervent thanksgiving to the God alike of land and sea, who was about to deliver him and his from the “dangers of the deep.”

Chapter Five.
Running the Breakers

The Almighty Hand that had thus far helped the castaways on their course, with a favouring wind bringing them in sight of Borneo's isle, was not going to crush the sweet hopes thus raised by wrecking their boat upon its shores.

And yet for a time it seemed as if this were to be their fate. As they drew near enough to the land to distinguish its configuration, they saw a white line like a snow-wreath running between it and them, for miles to right and left, far as the eye could reach. They knew it to be a barrier of coral breakers, such as usually encircle the islands of the Indian seas – strong ramparts raised by tiny insect creatures, to guard these fair gardens of God against the assaults of an ocean that, although customarily calm, is at times aroused by the *typhoon*, until it rages around them with dark scowling waves, like battalions of demons.

On drawing near these reefs, Captain Redwood, with the eye of an experienced seaman, saw that while the wind kept up there was no chance for the pinnace to pass them; and to run head on to them would be simply to dash upon destruction. Sail was at once taken in, by letting go the sheet, and dropping the tarpaulin back into the bottom of the boat. The oar that had been set up as a mast was left standing, for there were five others lying idle in the pinnace; and with four of these, Saloo and Murtagh each taking a pair, the boat was manned, the captain himself keeping charge of the tiller. His object was not to approach the land, but to prevent being carried among the breakers, which, surging up snow-white, presented a perilous barrier to their advance.

To keep the boat from driving on the dangerous reef, was just as much as the oarsmen could accomplish. Weakened as they were, by long suffering and starvation, they had a tough struggle to hold the pinnace as it were in *statu quo*– all the tougher from the disproportion between such a heavy craft and the light oar-stroke of which her reduced and exhausted crew were capable.

But as if taking pity upon them, and in sympathy with their efforts, the sun, as he rose above the horizon, seemed to smile upon them and hush the storm into silence. The wind, that throughout the night had been whistling in their ears, all at once fell to a calm, as if commanded by the majestic orb of day; and along with the wind went down the waves, the latter subsiding more gradually. It was easier now to hold the pinnace in place, as also to row her in a direction parallel to the line of the breakers; and, after coasting for about a mile, an opening was at length observed where the dangerous reef might perhaps be penetrated with safety.

Setting the boat's head toward it, the oars were once more worked with the utmost strength that remained in the arms of the rowers, while her course was directed with all the skill of which an American skipper is capable.

Yet the attempt was one of exceeding peril. Though the wind had subsided, the swell was tremendous; billow after billow being carried against the coral reefs with a violence known only to the earthquake and the angry ocean. Vast volumes of water surged high on either side, projecting still higher their sparkling shafts of spray, like the pillars of a waterspout.

Between them spread a narrow space of calm sea – yet only comparatively calm, for even there an ordinary boat, well managed, would be in danger of getting swamped. What then was the chance for a huge pinnace, poorly manned, and therefore sure of being badly trimmed? It looked as if after all the advantages that had arisen – that had sprung up as though providentially in their favour – Captain Redwood and the small surviving remnant of his crew were to perish among the breakers of Borneo, and be devoured by the ravenous sharks which amidst the storm-vexed reefs find their congenial home.

But it was not so to be. The prayer offered up, as those snow-white but treacherous perils first hove in sight, had been heard on high; and He who had guided the castaways to the danger, stayed by their side, and gave strength to their arms to carry them through it.

With a skill drawn from the combination of clear intelligence and long experience, Captain Redwood set the head of his pinnace straight for the narrow and dangerous passage; and with a strength inspired by the peril, Murtagh and the Malay pulled upon their oars, each handling his respective pair as if his life depended on the effort.

With the united will of oarsmen and steerer the effort was successful; and ten seconds later the pinnace was safe inside the breakers, moving along under the impulse of two pairs of oars, that rose and fell as gently as if they were pulling her over the surface of some placid lake.

In less than ten minutes her keel touched bottom on the sands of Borneo, and her crew, staggering ashore, dropped upon their knees, and in words earnest as those uttered by Columbus at Cat Island, or the Pilgrims on Plymouth Rock, breathed a devout thanksgiving for their deliverance.

Chapter Six.
A Gigantic Oyster

"Water! water!"

The pain of hunger is among the hardest to endure, though there is still a harder – that of thirst. In the first hours of either, it is doubtful which of the two kinds of suffering is the more severe; but, prolonged beyond a certain point, hunger loses its keenness of edge, through the sheer weakness of the sufferer, while the agony of thirst knows no such relief.

Suffering, as our castaways were, from want of food for nearly a week, their thirst was yet more agonising; and after the thanksgiving prayer had passed from their lips, their first thought was of water – their cry, "Water! water!"

As they arose to their feet they instinctively looked around to see if any brook or spring were near.

An ocean was flowing beside them; but this was not the kind of water wanted. They had already had enough of the briny element, and did not even turn their eyes upon it. It was landward they looked; scanning the edge of the forest, that came down within a hundred yards of the shore – the strip of sand on which they had beached their boat trending along between the woods and the tide-water as far as the eye could trace it. A short distance off, however, a break was discernible in the line of the sand-strip – which they supposed must be either a little inlet of the sea itself, or the outflow of a stream. If the latter, then were they fortunate indeed.

Saloo, the most active of the party, hastened toward it; the others following him only with their eyes.

They watched him with eager gaze, trembling between hope and fear – Captain Redwood more apprehensive than the rest. He knew that in this part of the Bornean coast months often pass without a single shower of rain; and if no stream or spring should be found they would still be in danger of perishing by thirst.

They saw Saloo bend by the edge of the inlet, scoop up some water in his palms, and apply it to his lips, as if tasting it. Only for an instant, when back to them came the joyful cry, —

"*Ayer! ayer manis! süngi*!" (Water! sweet water! A river!)

Scarce more pleasantly, that morning at day-break, had fallen on their ears the cry of "Land!" than now fell the announcement of the Malay sailor, making known the proximity of water. Captain Redwood, who was acquainted with the Malay language, translated the welcome words. Sweet water, Saloo had described it. Emphatically might it be so termed.

All hastened, or rather rushed, toward the stream, fell prostrate on their faces by its edge, and drank to a surfeit. It gave them new life; and, indeed, it had given them their lives already, though they knew it not. It was the outflow of its current into the ocean that caused the break in the coral reef through which their boat had been enabled to pass. Otherwise they might have found no opening, and perished in attempting to traverse the surging surf. The madrepores will not build their subaqueous coral walls where rivers run into the ocean; hence the open spaces here and there happily left, that form deep transverse channels admitting the largest ships.

No longer suffering from thirst, its kindred appetite now returned with undivided agony, and the next thought was for something to eat.

They again turned their eyes toward the forest, and up the bank of the stream that came flowing from it. But Saloo had seen something in the sea, near the spot where the pinnace had been left; and, calling upon Murtagh to get ready some dry wood and kindle a fire, he ran back toward the boat.

Murtagh, the rest accompanying him, walked to the edge of the woods where the stream issued from the leafy wilderness.

Just beyond the strip of sand the forest abruptly ended, the trees standing thick together, and rising like a vast vegetable wall to a height of over a hundred feet. Only a few straggled beyond this line. The very first of them, that nearest the sea, was a large elm-like tree, with tall trunk, and spreading leafy limbs that formed a screen from the sun, now well up in the sky, and every moment growing more sultry. It offered a convenient camping-place; and under its cool shadow they could recline until with restored strength they might either seek or build themselves a better habitation.

An ample store of dry faggots was lying near; and Murtagh having collected them into a pile, took out his flint and steel, and commenced striking a light.

Meanwhile their eyes were almost constantly turned toward Saloo, all of them wondering what had taken him back to the boat. Their wonder was not diminished when they saw him pass the place where the pinnace had been pulled up on the sand, and wade straight out into the water – as if he were going back to the breakers!

Presently, after he had got about knee-deep, they saw him stoop down, until his body was nearly buried under the sea, and commence what appeared to be a struggle with some creature still concealed from their observation. Nor was their wonder any the less, when at length he rose erect again, holding in his hands what for all the world looked like a huge rock, to which a number of small shells and some sea-weed adhered.

"What does the Malay crather want wid a big stone?" was the interrogatory of the astonished Irishman. "And, look, captin, it's that same he's about bringin' us. I thought it moight be some kind of shill-fish. Hungry as we are, we can't ate stones?"

"Not so fast, Murtagh," said the captain, who had more carefully scrutinised the article Saloo had taken up. "It's not a stone, but what you first supposed it – a shell-fish."

"That big thing a shill-fish! Arrah now, captin, aren't you jokin'?"

"No, indeed. What Saloo has got in his arms, if I'm not mistaken, is an oyster."

"An oysther? Two fut in length and over one in breadth. Why, it's as much as the Malay can carry. Don't yez see that he's staggerin' under it?"

"Very true; but it's an oyster for all that. I'm now sure of it, as I can see its shape, and the great ribs running over it. Make haste, and get your fire kindled; for it's a sort of oyster rather too strong-flavoured to be eaten raw. Saloo evidently intends it to be roasted."

Murtagh did as requested, and by the time the Malay, bearing his heavy burden, reached the tree, smoke was oozing through a stack of faggots that were soon after ablaze.

"Tha, Cappen Ledwad," said the Malay, flinging his load at the captain's feet. "Tha plenty shell-fiss – makee all we big blakfass. Inside find good meat. We no need open him. Hot coalee do that."

They all gathered around the huge shell, surveying it with curiosity, more especially the young people.

It was that strange testaceous fish found in the Indian seas, and known to sailors as the "Singapore oyster" – of which specimens are not rare measuring a yard in length, and over eighteen inches in breadth at the widest diameter.

Their curiosity, however, was soon satisfied; for with stomachs craving as theirs, they were in no very fit condition for the pursuit of conchological studies; and Saloo once more lifting the large oyster – just as much as he could do – dropped it among the faggots, now fairly kindled into a fire.

More were heaped around and over it, until it was buried in the heart of a huge pile, the sea-weeds that still clung to it crackling, and the salt water spurting and spitting, as the smoke, mingled with the bright blaze, ascended toward the overshadowing branches of the tree.

In due time Saloo, who had cooked Singapore oysters before, pronounced it sufficiently roasted; when the faggots were kicked aside, and with a boat-hook, which Murtagh had brought from the pinnace, the oyster[4] was dragged out of the ashes.

[4] Strictly speaking, the Singapore oyster is a gigantic species of Clam, (*Tridacna*).

Almost instantly it fell open, its huge valves displaying in their concave cups enough “oyster-meat” to have afforded a supper for a party of fifteen individuals instead of five – that is, fifteen not so famished as they were.

With some knives and other utensils, which the Irishman had also brought away from the boat, they seated themselves around the grand bivalve; nor did they arise from their seats until the shells were scraped clean, and hunger, that had so long tortured them, was quite banished from their thoughts.

Chapter Seven.
A Dangerous Locality

After their ample meal of oyster "roasted in the shell," which was a breakfast instead of a supper, they rested for the remainder of the day, and all through the following night. They required this lengthened period of repose, not because they stood in need of sleep, but from the exhaustion of weakness, consequent upon their long spell of hunger and thirst.

They slept well, considering that they had no couch, nor any covering, but the tattered clothes they wore upon their bodies. But they had become accustomed to this kind of bed; as to one even less comfortable, and certainly not safer – on the hard planks of the pinnace. Nor did the cold discomfort them; for although the nights are colder on land than at sea, and in the tropics sometimes even chilly, that night was warm throughout; and nothing interfered with their slumbers except some horrid dreams, the sure sequence of suffering and perils such as they had been passing through.

The morning rose bright and beautiful, as nearly all Bornean mornings do. And the castaways rose from their recumbent position, feeling wonderfully restored both in strength and spirits. Henry and Helen – these were the names of the young people – were even cheerful, inclined to wander about and wonder at the strange objects around: the beautiful beach of silvery sand; the deep blue sea; the white breakers beyond, rising over it like along snow-wreath; the clear fresh-water stream alongside, in which they could see curious fish disporting themselves; the grand forest-trees, among them stately palms and tall lance-like bamboos; – in short, a thousand things that make tropical scenery so charming.

Notwithstanding the scenic beauty, there was something needed before it could be thoroughly enjoyed, and this was breakfast. The contents of the great oyster had given full satisfaction for the time; but that was nearly twenty-four hours ago, and the appetites of all were once more keenly whetted. What was to take the edge off them? This was the question that occupied their thoughts, and the answer was not so easy.

Saloo went in search of another Singapore oyster; Murtagh started along the bank of the stream, in the hope of beguiling some of the red and gold fish he saw playing "backgammon" in it, as he had seen the trout and salmon in his native Killarney; while the captain, having procured a rifle, that had been brought away in the boat, and which he well knew how to handle, wandered off into the woods.

Henry and Helen remained under the tree, as their father did not think there could be any danger in leaving them alone. He was well enough acquainted with the natural history of Borneo to know that there were neither lions nor tigers in the island. Had it been on the neighbouring island of Sumatra, or some desert coast of the mainland – in Malacca, Cochin-China, or Hindustan – he might have dreaded exposing them to the attack of tigers. But as there was no danger of encountering these fierce creatures on the shores of Borneo, he told the children to stay under the tree until he and the others should return.

The young people were by this time rather tired of remaining in a recumbent position. It was that to which they had been too long constrained while in the boat, and it felt irksome; moreover, the oyster, wonderfully restoring their strength, had brought back their wonted juvenile vigour, so that they felt inclined for moving about a bit. For a time they indulged this inclination by walking to and fro around the trunk of the tree.

Soon, however, weariness once more came upon them, and they desired to have a seat. Squatting upon the ground is an attitude only easy to savages, and always irksome to those accustomed to habits of civilised life, and to sitting upon chairs. They looked about for something upon which they might sit but nothing appeared suitable. There were neither logs nor large stones; for the beach, as well as the adjacent shore, was composed of fine drift sand, and no trees seemed to have fallen near the spot.

"I have it!" exclaimed Henry, after puzzling his brains a bit, his eye guiding him to a settlement of the difficulty. "The shells – the big oyster shells – the very things for us to sit upon, sister Nell."

As he spoke, he stooped down and commenced turning over one of the shells of the immense bivalve – both of which had been hitherto lying with their concave side uppermost. It was nigh as much as the boy, still weak, could do to roll it over, though Helen, seeing the difficulty, laid hold with her little hands and assisted him.

Both the huge "cockles" were speedily capsized; and their convex surfaces rising nearly a foot above the level of the ground, gave the young people an excellent opportunity of getting seated.

Both sat down – each upon a shell – laughing at the odd kind of stools thus conveniently provided for them.

They had not been long in their sedentary attitude, when a circumstance occurred which told them how unsafe a position they had chosen. They were conversing without fear, when Henry all at once felt something strike him on the arm, and then, with a loud crash, drop down upon the shell close under his elbow, chipping a large piece out of it.

His first impression was that some one had thrown a stone at him. It had hit him on the arm, just creasing it; but on looking at the place where he had been hit, he saw that the sleeve of his jacket was split, or rather torn, from shoulder to elbow, as if a sharp-tooth curry-comb had been drawn violently along it. He felt pain, moreover, and saw blood upon his shirt underneath!

He looked quickly around to ascertain who had thus rudely assailed him – anxiously, too, for he was in some dread of seeing a savage spring from the bushes close by. On turning, he at once beheld the missile that had rent his jacket-sleeve lying on the sand beside him. It was no stone, but a round or slightly oval-shaped ball, as big as a ten-pound shot, of a deep-green colour, and covered all over with spurs like the skin of a hedgehog!

He at once saw that it had not been thrown at him by any person; for, with the sharp, prickly protuberances thickly set all over it, no one could have laid hand upon it. Clearly it had fallen from the tree overhead. Helen had perceived this sooner than he; for sitting a little way off, she had seen the huge ball drop in a perpendicular direction – though it had descended with the velocity of lightning.

Beyond doubt, it was some fruit or nut, from the tree under which they were seated. From the way in which the jacket-sleeve had suffered, as well as the skin underneath – to say nothing of the piece chipped out of the shell – it was evident, that had the ponderous pericarp fallen upon Henry's skull, it would have crushed it as a bullet would the shell of an egg.

Young as the two were, they were not so simple as to stay in that spot an instant longer. On the tree that could send down such a dangerous missile there might be many more – equally ready to rain upon them – and with this apprehension both sprang simultaneously to their feet, and rushed out into the open ground, not stopping till they believed themselves quite clear of the overshadowing branches that so ill protected them. They looked back at the seats they had so abruptly vacated, and the green globe lying beside them, and then up to the tree; where they could see other similar large globes, only at such a vast height looking no bigger than peaches or apricots.

They did not dare to venture back to their seats, nor, although tempted by a strong curiosity to examine it, to approach the fallen fruit. In fact, the arm of Henry was badly lacerated; and his little sister, on seeing the blood upon his shirt sleeve, uttered an alarm that brought first Saloo, and then the others, affrighted to the spot.

"What is it?" were the interrogations of the two white men, as they came hurrying up, while the impressive Malay put none – at once comprehending the cause of the alarm. He saw the scratched arm, and the huge green globe lying upon the ground.

"*Dulion*!" he said, glancing up to the tree.

"Durion!" echoed the captain, pronouncing the word properly, as translated from Saloo's pigeon English.

“Yes, cappen; foolee me no think of him befole. Belly big danger. It fallee on skull, skull go clashee clashee.”

This was evident without Saloo’s explanation. The lacerated arm and broken shell were evidences enough of the terrible effects that would have been produced had the grand pericarp in its downward descent fallen upon the heads of either of the children, and they all saw what a narrow escape Henry had of getting his “cocoa-nut” crushed or split open.

Chapter Eight.
Shooting at Fruit

As soon as the three men had got well up to the ground and ascertained the cause of Helen's alarm, and the damage done to Henry's jacket and skin, Murtagh was the first to make a demonstration. He did so by running in under the tree, and stooping to lay hold of the fruit that had caused the misfortune. Saloo saw him do this without giving a word of warning. He was, perhaps, a little piqued that the Irishman should make himself so conspicuous about things he could not possibly be supposed to understand, and which to the Malay himself were matters of an almost special knowledge. There was a twinkle of mischief in his eye as he contemplated the meddling of Murtagh, and waited for the *dénouement*.

The latter, rashly grasping the spiny fruit, did not get it six inches above the ground, before he let go again, as if it had been the hottest of hot "purtatees."

"Och, and what have I done now!" he cried, "I'm jagged all over. There isn't a smooth spot upon it – not so much as a shank to take howlt of!"

"You takee care, Multa," cautioned Saloo. "You lookee aloff. May be you get jagee in de skull!"

Murtagh took the hint, and, giving one glance upward, ran back with a roar from under the shadow of the tree.

The Malay, seemingly satisfied with his triumph, now glided underneath the durion, and keeping his eye turned upward, as if intently watching something, he struck the fruit with the piece of pointed stick which he had been using in the search after Singapore oysters, and sent it spinning out upon the open sand beach. Then following, he took out his knife, and inserting the blade among its thickly set spines, cleft it open, displaying the pulp inside.

There was enough to give each person a taste of this most luscious of fruits, and make them desirous of more; even had they not been hungry. But the appetites of all were now keen, and neither the chase nor the fishery had produced a single thing to satisfy them. All three had returned empty-handed. There were many more nuts on the durion-tree. They could see scores of the prickly pericarps hanging overhead, but so high as to make the obtaining of them apparently impossible. They were as far away as the grapes from the fox of the fable.

The stem of the tree rose over seventy feet before throwing out a single branch. It was smooth, moreover, offering neither knot nor excrescence for a foothold. For all this Saloo could have climbed it, had he been in proper strength and condition. But he was not so. He was still weak from the effects of his suffering at sea.

Something more must be had to eat – whether game, fish or shell-fish.

The one great oyster appeared to be a stray. Saloo had begun to despair of being able to find another. The fruit of the durion proved not only pleasant eating, but exceedingly nutritious. It would sustain them, could they only get enough of it. How was this to be obtained?

For a time they stood considering; when Captain Redwood became impressed with an original idea.

In addition to his own rifle, a large ship's musket had been put into the pinnace. He thought of chain-shot, and its effects; and it occurred to him that by this means the durions might be brought down from their lofty elevation.

No sooner conceived than carried into execution. The musket was loaded with a brace of balls united by a piece of stout tarred string. A shot was fired into the tree, aimed at a place where the fruit appeared thickest. There was havoc made among the adjacent leaves; and five or six of the great pericarps came crashing to the earth. A repetition of the firing brought down nearly a dozen, enough to furnish the whole party with food for at least another twenty-four hours.

Having collected the fallen pericarps, they carried them to another tree that stood near, amid whose leafy branches appeared to be no fruits either so sweet to the lips or dangerous to the skull.

Thither also they transferred their quarters, along with the paraphernalia brought up from the boat, intending to make a more permanent encampment under the newly chosen tree.

For the time they kindled no fire, as the weather was warm enough, and the durions did not require cooking; and while making their mid-day meal of the raw fruit, Saloo interested them by relating some particulars of the tree from which it had been obtained.

We shall not follow the Malay's exact words, for, as spoken in "pigeon English," they would scarce be understood; but shall lay before our readers some account of this strange and valuable fruit-tree, culled partly from Saloo's description and partly from other sources.

The durion is a forest tree of the loftiest order, bearing resemblance to the elm, only with a smooth bark, which is also scaly. It is found growing throughout most of the islands of the Indian Archipelago; and, like the mangosteen, does not thrive well in any other part of the world. This is perhaps the reason its fruit is so little known elsewhere, as when ripe it will not bear transportation to a great distance. The fruit is nearly globe-shaped, though a little oval, and in size equals the largest cocoa-nut.

As the reader already knows, it is of a green colour, and covered with short stout spines, very sharp-pointed, whose bases touch each other, and are consequently somewhat hexagonal in shape. With this *chevaux-de-frise* it is so completely armed, that when the stalk is broken close off it is impossible to take up the fruit without having one's fingers badly pricked. The outer rind is so tough and strong, that no matter from what height the fruit falls it is never crushed or broken. From the base of the fruit to its apex, five faint lines may be traced running among the spines. These form the divisions of the carpels where the fruit can be cut open with a sharp knife, though requiring a considerable exertion of strength. The five cells found within are of a silken white colour, each filled with an oval-shaped mass of cream-coloured pulp containing several seeds of the size of chestnuts. The pulp forms the edible portion of the fruit, and its consistence and flavour are both difficult to be described. Mr Wallace, the celebrated hunter naturalist, thus quaintly describes it: —

"A rich, butter-like custard, highly flavoured with almonds, gives the best general idea of it; but intermingled with it come wafts of flavour that call to mind cream-cheese, onion-sauce, brown-sherry, and other incongruities. Then there is a rich glutinous smoothness in the pulp, which nothing else possesses, but which adds to its delicacy. It is neither acid, nor sweet, nor juicy; yet one feels the want of none of these qualities, for it is perfect as it is. It produces no nausea, or other bad effects; and the more you eat of it the less you feel inclined to stop. In fact, to eat durions is a new sensation, worth a voyage to the East to experience. When the fruit is ripe it falls of itself; and the only way to eat durions to perfection is to get them as they fall, and the smell is then less overpowering. When unripe, it makes a very good vegetable if cooked, and it is also eaten by the Dyaks raw. In a good fruit season large quantities are preserved salted, in jars and bamboos, and kept the year round, when it acquires a most disgusting odour to Europeans, but the Dyaks appreciate it highly as a relish with their rice. There are in the forest two varieties of wild durions with much smaller fruits, one of them orange-coloured inside. It would not perhaps be correct to say that the durion is the best of all fruits, because it cannot supply the place of a sub-acid juicy kind; such as the orange, grape, mango, and mangosteen, whose refreshing and cooling qualities are so wholesome and grateful; but as producing a food of the most exquisite flavour, it is unsurpassed. If I had to fix on two only as representing the perfection of the two classes, I should certainly choose the durion and the orange as the king and queen of fruits.

"The durion is however sometimes dangerous. When the fruit begins to ripen it falls daily and almost hourly, and accidents not unfrequently happen to persons walking or working under the trees. When the durion strikes a man in its fall it produces a dreadful wound, the strong spines tearing open the flesh, whilst the blow itself is very heavy; but from this very circumstance death rarely ensues, the copious effusion of blood preventing the inflammation which might otherwise take place. A Dyak

chief informed me that he had been struck by a durion falling on his head, which he thought would certainly have caused his death, yet he recovered in a very short time."

Both the natives of the Malayan Archipelago and strangers residing there regard the durion as superior to all other kinds of fruit – in short, the finest in the world. The old traveller, Luischott, writing of it as early as 1599, says that in flavour it surpasses all other fruits. While another old traveller, Doctor Paludanus, thus speaks of it: "This fruit is of a hot and humid nature. To those not used to it, it seems at first to smell like rotten onions, but immediately they have tasted it they prefer it to all other food. The natives give it honourable titles, exalt it, and make verses on it."[5]

[5] To these particulars we may add that the durion (*Durio zibethinus*) belongs to the natural family of *Sterculiaceae*, of the same sub-order (*Bombaceae*) as the silk-cotton tree. It grows to a great stature; its leaves are like those of the cherry, and its pale yellow flowers hang in large bunches. Each tree yields about two hundred fruit in a year. The fruit contains ten to twelve seeds, as large as pigeons' eggs, and these, when roasted, are as good as, and taste very much like, roasted chestnuts.

Chapter Nine.
Gagging a Gavial

After finishing their dinner of durions, the three men again sallied forth, to see whether something more substantial could be found for a later repast – either flesh, fowl, or fish. As before, they went in different directions – Captain Redwood into the forest, Murtagh up the stream, and Saloo along the sea-beach, where he waded out into the water, still in the hope of picking up another large oyster. He took with him a stalk of bamboo, pointed at one end, to be used as a probe in the soft bottom in case any oysters might be lying *perdu* beneath the sand.

Henry and Helen were again left to themselves, but this time they were not to remain seated under any tree – at least, not all the time. The father, before leaving, had enjoined upon both of them to take a bath; ablution having become very necessary on account of their having been so long cribbed up in the somewhat dirty pinnace. It would be also of service in promoting their restoration to health and strength. They went into the water, not together, but at some distance apart – Henry choosing to go down to the sea, while Helen entered the stream close by, as it had clear water with a smooth, sandy bed; besides, she thought it was safer, being free from surf or currents.

It was only safer in appearance, as the sequel proved; for the hunters and fisherman had scarce scattered off out of hearing, when a cry broke upon the still air of noon that startled the bright-winged birds of the Bornean forest, and stopped their songs as quickly as would have done a shot from Captain Redwood's rifle. It was heard by the captain himself, strolling among the tree trunks, and looking aloft for game; by Murtagh on the river bank, endeavouring to beguile the sly fish to his baited hook; by Saloo, wading knee-deep in search of Singapore oysters; and by Henry swimming about upon the buoyant incoming tide. More distinctly than all the rest, the little Helen heard it – since it was she who gave it utterance.

It was a cry of distress, and brought all the others together, and running toward the point whence it came. There was no difficulty about their knowing the direction, for one and all recognised Helen's voice, and knew where she had been left.

In less than sixty seconds' time they stood together upon the bank of the stream, on the same spot from which they had parted; and there beheld a spectacle that thrilled them with fear, and filled them with horror.

The girl, finding it not deep enough by the edge of the stream – at this point nearly a hundred yards in width – had waded midway across, where it came quite up to her neck; and there she stood, her head alone showing above the surface. Beyond her, and coming from the opposite side, showed another head, so hideous it was no wonder that, on first perceiving it, she had given way to affright, and voice to her terror.

It was the head of an enormous reptile, of lizard shape, that had crawled out from a reedy covert on the opposite side of the river, and having silently let itself down into the water, was now swimming toward the terrified bather. There could be no mistaking the monster's intent, for it was coming straight toward its victim.

"*A gavial*!" cried Saloo, as his eyes rested on the body of the huge saurian, full twenty feet in length, with its head over a yard long, and jaws nearly the same, the upper one surmounted by a long knob-like protuberance, that distinguishes it from all other reptiles.

"A gavial!" echoed the others, though not inquiringly; for they knew too well both the shape and character of the creature that was crossing the river.

As all four first reached the bank – arriving nearly at the same instant of time – there were about twenty yards between the hideous saurian and her who seemed destined to destruction. On first perceiving her danger, the girl had made a few plunges to get back to the bank; but, hindered by the

depth to which she had unwarily waded, and overcome by terror, she had desisted from the attempt; and now stood neck-deep, giving utterance to cries of despair.

What was to be done? In less than a minute more the jaws of the saurian would close upon her crashing her fair, tender form between its teeth as though she were only some ordinary prey – a fish, or the stem of some succulent water-plant!

Her father stood on the bank a very picture of distress. Of what use the rifle held half-raised in his hands? Its bullet, not bigger than a pea, would strike upon the skull of such a huge creature harmlessly, as a drop of hail or rain. Even could he strike it in the eye – surging through the water as it was, a thing so uncertain – that would not hinder it from the intent so near to accomplishment. The Irishman, with only fish-hooks in his hand, felt equally impotent; and what could the boy Henry do, not only unarmed but undressed – in short, just as he had been bathing —*in puris naturalibus*!

All three were willing to rush into the water, and getting between the reptile and its victim, confront the fierce creature, even to their own certain sacrifice.

And this, one, or other, or all of them, would have done, had they not been prevented by Saloo. With a loud shout the Malay, hitherto apparently impassive, called upon them to hold back. They obeyed, seeing that he intended to act, and had already taken his measures for rescuing the girl. They could not tell what these were, and only guessed at them by what they saw in his hands. It was nothing that could be called a weapon – only a piece of bamboo, pointed at one end, which he had taken from among the embers of last night's fire and sharpened with his knife, when he went off in search of the Singapore oysters. It was the same stick he had been using to probe for them under the sand. On seeing the gavial as it started toward the girl, he had quickly drawn out his knife, and sharpened the other end of the stake while coming across the beach.

With this sorry apology for a weapon, and while they were still wondering, he dashed into the stream; and almost before any of the others had recovered from their first surprise, they saw him plunge past the spot where stood the affrighted girl. In another instant his black head, with the long dark hair trailing behind it, appeared in close juxtaposition to the opened jaws of the reptile. Then the head was seen suddenly to duck beneath the surface, while at the same time a brown-skinned arm and hand rose above it with a pointed stake in its grasp – like the emblematic representation seen upon some ancient crest. Then was seen an adroit turning of the stick, so quick as to be scarce perceptible – immediately followed by a backward spring upon the part of the lizard, with a series of writhings and contortions, in which both its body and tail took part, till the water around it was lashed into foam.

In the midst of this commotion, the head of the Malay once more appeared above the surface, close to that of the girl; who, under the guidance of her strangely-skilled and truly courageous rescuer, was conducted to the bank, and delivered safe into her father's arms; stretched open to embrace her.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.