

EDWARD STRATEMEYER

**YOUNG HUNTERS IN
PORTO RICO: OR, THE
SEARCH FOR A LOST
TREASURE**

Edward Stratemeyer

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The Search for a Lost Treasure**

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Captain Ralph Bonehill

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PREFACE

"The Young Hunters in Porto Rico" has been written at the earnest solicitation of a number of my young readers, who wished to follow the further adventures of the Gun and Sled Club.

In a former volume of this series, "Gun and Sled," I related how the club was formed and what a jolly time its members had during a winter outing on Snow-Top Island. In the present tale, one of the members becomes the proud owner of a yacht, and of course nothing will do but to take an ocean trip on the craft. During this trip the boys learn of a Spanish treasure said to be secreted in one of the great caves near Caguas, on the island of Porto Rico, and at once a hunt is instituted, and many stirring adventures follow.

The work was written primarily for the reader's amusement, yet I have endeavored within its pages to give a fair description of the Porto Rico of to-day, as it appears to a traveler from our States. This new island domain of ours is but little known to the majority of us, but when its picturesqueness, and its mild climate, become a matter of publicity, Porto Rico is bound to become the Mecca for thousands of American tourists, in search of health and pleasure.

From the number of letters received, I am led to believe that "Gun and Sled" was well liked by my readers. If this is so, I sincerely trust that the present volume does not fall below the other in merit.

Captain Ralph Bonehill.

CHAPTER I

A STORM OFF SHORE

"What do you think of the weather, Bob?"

"It looks like a storm, Dick, and a heavy one, too."

"Exactly my idea. I wonder how far we are from the lighthouse?"

"I can't say. Jacob!"

"What is it, Master Robert?"

"How far is it to the lighthouse?"

The old Yankee sailor at the wheel of the Dashaway rubbed his grizzled chin and cast his eyes about before replying.

"I reckon as how it is about two miles or so," he said, with deliberation. "We have been running putty lively, you know."

"Do you imagine we can make it before that blow comes up?" asked Dick Wilbur, anxiously. "We don't want to lose a stick out here."

"We can do our best, sir. But we've got to work for it, for the wind is going down fast."

"I see that, Jacob. Hadn't you better throw her over a point or two?"

"I'll throw her over all she'll stand," answered Jacob Ropes, as he moved the handles of the brass-bound and highly polished steering wheel of the yacht. "Don't you think we had better lower the mainsail?"

"I think a couple of reefs will be enough – for the present," replied Dick Wilbur. "We can get the canvas in on the run when it freshens up."

At this old Jacob Ropes shook his head doubtfully, but as Dick Wilbur was commonly looked upon as the leader in the present outing, he said nothing in opposition. Both Dick Wilbur and Bob Hobart sprang to the halyards, and soon the mainsail was set to the former's satisfaction. The topsail had already been stowed away, and now the jib was likewise made safe.

The Dashaway had been cruising off the shore of the Carolinas for the best part of a week. She was as trim and substantial a yacht as one could meet anywhere, and had been built especially for Dick Wilbur's uncle by a firm of ship constructors who made a specialty of this class of work. She was long and narrow – yet not too narrow for safety – and while her mast was a towering one, the ballast of lead in her keel was sufficient to render her sailing qualities good even in a heavy blow.

In a former story, entitled "Gun and Sled," I told how four boys, Dick Wilbur, Bob Hobart, Don Harrison and Leander Carson organized the Gun and Sled Club, and went off on a long winter outing on Snow-Top Island. They were accompanied by Danny Guirk, a poor but merry-hearted Irish lad, who did all sorts of odds and ends of work for them, and amid snow and ice the club went gunning, fishing, ice-boat sailing and the like to their hearts' content.

When the lads returned to their homes in Waterford, it was decided by a unanimous vote to make the club a permanent one, and the snow still lay on the ground while they were planning for their outing during the coming summer.

At first it was decided to go up the lake upon which the village was situated, again, for another trip to the island where they had had so much sport; but the departure of Dick Wilbur's uncle for China caused a change in their plans. Dick was named after this relative, and before going away, Mr. Richard Wilbur gave to his namesake the Dashaway.

"I am sure you will appreciate the gift, my boy," had been his words. "Have the best of good times on the craft, but take care that you don't get drowned."

My young readers can well imagine how delighted Dick was over this gift. The youth was now president of the club, and it instantly came into his head to invite the members to take the

contemplated outing on board of the yacht. "And I'll take you anywhere that you want to go," had been Dick's concluding remark on making the offer.

The proposition was accepted as quickly as made, and then came the question of where they should go. Waterford lay a good many miles from the ocean, but an easy passage could be had by means of several lakes and a broad river, and it was finally decided that they should spread the Dashaway's white wings on the broad Atlantic, for a sail down the coast to Florida.

This was to be a long trip from home, and it was felt by the boys' parents that some older person should go with them. Squire Hobart, Bob's father, knew old Jacob Ropes well, and knew he was a first-class sailor, and it was this Yankee who was hired to do the main sailing of the yacht and keep a watchful eye over the lads. Old Jacob was as good-hearted a tar as could be found anywhere, and it did not take long for him and the members of the club to become warm friends.

"I don't think we are going to have any fishing to-day," remarked Leander Carson, as Dick came forward to where he and Don Harrison sat, near the companionway.

"I don't believe we're going to have any for several days, Leander," answered Dick, as he again surveyed the clouds.

"We're in for a big storm – I'm certain of it," came from Don. "If we – There goes Danny's gong!"

A loud beating of a wooden spoon on a tin platter had broken in on his speech. Now there appeared above the companionway steps the face of a chubby Irish lad wearing a big apron and a four-cornered cook's cap.

"All hands be afther comin' down fer dinner!" cried the young cook of the club. "An' don't waste no time or dem apple dumplin's will all be cold," he added.

"All right, Danny, we'll be down," answered Dick. "I can tell you what, boys, this sailing around gives a fellow a tremendous appetite."

"As if there was ever anything the matter with your eating apparatus," laughed Bob. "But say, Danny's bluefish does smell immense, doesn't it?" he went on, and was the first to slip down into the small but elegant cabin of which the Dashaway boasted. The others immediately followed, and soon all were feasting on the spread the Irish lad had prepared for them.

"Danny, I'll recommend you to the Waldorf-Astoria if ever I get to New York," observed Bob, as he paused, with a cob of green corn in his hands. "As a cook you're getting to be A No. 1."

"I don't want no recommendation," returned the Irish lad, blushing. "It's good enough fun fer me to be waiting on dis crowd."

"And how do you like the ocean, Danny?" questioned Leander.

"De ocean is all right – if only it would stop rollin' once in awhile. Sometimes I'm afther t'inkin' I'm goin' ter turn inside out, dat's all," and Danny hurried off to the galley fire to bring on the dessert.

"I wonder if we'll have any such adventures on this trip as we had up to Hotchkiss and Snow-Top Islands," remarked Leander. "Don't you remember those bears, and how we got lost in the blizzard, and all that?"

"I don't believe we'll meet any bears out here," said Bob, solemnly, as he turned his gaze to the ceiling. He was bound to have his joke whenever he got the chance.

"Oh, stow it, Bob, you know what I mean. Of course we can't meet bears on the ocean, but we might meet a – a, whale, or a waterspout, or something like that."

"And instead of a blizzard we might meet a gale that would send us to the bottom," put in Leander. "That would just suit you, wouldn't it? – just for the excitement."

"I sincerely hope we don't have any trouble," began Dick, seriously. "All I ask for is a pleasant trip, with good fishing and fine bathing, and maybe a little hunting, when we reach the Florida shore."

By this time the apple dumplings had been brought on, and for several minutes the conversation lagged, as the boys paid strict attention to the dainties with their appetizing sauce of butter and sugar. The dumplings were scarcely finished when there came a shrill whistle from the deck.

The sound proceeded from a whistle which old Jacob was in the habit of using when he wanted to call one and another, and they happened to be out of calling distance. Rushing up the companionway, Dick gave one glance at the heavens and saw the reason for the summons. Half of the sky was literally black with clouds of wind and rain, and already behind the Dashaway could be seen the angry white-caps, growing larger and coming closer each instant.

"All hands on deck, and be quick about it!" he yelled. "Jacob, hadn't Leander better take the wheel?"

"Yes, and lose no time," answered the Yankee sailor, and as Leander relieved him, he ran forward with the other boys and began to stow away the mainsail. In the meantime Danny received orders to fasten down the hatch and close up all of the portholes.

"We're in for it, beyond a doubt," said Dick, as the breeze struck the yacht with increasing force, tearing savagely through the riggings and causing Don to shudder. The rain now began to fall, and all of the club members, and old Jacob donned their oilskins.

"We can't make the harbor now," announced the old Yankee. "If we tried it, we may run on the rocks and be smashed to pieces. We'll have to run out." And he threw the yacht over, something that made her dip considerably, and which sent more than one wave rushing over her bow.

The wind now commenced to shriek dismally, and the darkened sky was lit up with distant flashes of lightning, invariably followed by long, low rumbles of thunder.

"I can't see de use uf runnin' into dat storm," piped up Danny Guirk. "If I was runnin' t'ings I'd steer fer de land, dat's wot I would do."

"You be careful, or you'll go overboard – " began Bob, when a yell from Dick interrupted him.

"Here it comes, boys! Hold hard, all of you! My, but isn't it a corker!"

A ripping crack of thunder and a blinding flash of lightning drowned out the last of his words, and then the very heavens appeared to open, to let down a deluge of water that threatened to swamp the gallant yacht. A hurricane of wind followed, and the waves lashed and pounded the craft upon every side.

"By gum!" came suddenly from old Jacob. "Did any of ye see thet, boys?"

"See what?" demanded Don and Dick in a breath.

"The small boat over to starboard. She was bottom side up and somebody was a-clingin' to her!"

CHAPTER II

THE MAN FROM THE WRECK

All on board the Dashaway were intensely interested in the discovery old Jacob had made.

"You are sure you saw the small boat?" questioned Dick.

"I didn't see a thing," declared Don.

"Nor did I," added Leander.

"I saw the boat right enough, lads," returned the old Yankee tar. "It was out there," he pointed with his long forefinger. "Look! look!"

Another flash of lightning had lit up the firmament, making all as bright as day. Not fifty yards from the Dashaway all beheld an upturned rowboat, just rising to the top of one of the long ocean swells. To one end of the tiny craft a man was clinging desperately. It was possible that he was crying for help, but if so, the uproar of the storm drowned out his voice completely.

"Dat fellow will be lost sure!" burst out Danny Guirk. "Poor man, he must feel awful!"

"We must try to save him," came from Dick.

"That's true," said Don. "But how?"

"I don't see what we can do, with such a sea running," added Leander. "If we get much closer we'll run him down."

"We can go a little nearer, and then we can try to throw him a rope with a life preserver attached," concluded Dick.

To attempt to do more than keep the yacht headed in the teeth of the gale was a hazardous undertaking. Yet all on board the Dashaway realized that a human life was in peril, and that some risk must be run in order to effect a rescue, were such a thing possible.

"I can't see him now," said old Jacob, as the lightning seemed to subside for the time being. "It's as black as night."

"Let us fire up with a Bengal light," suggested Leander, and ran off for the article. Soon it was spluttering in the rain, but brightening up the scene about them for several hundred feet.

"Help! help!" came faintly to their ears, as the Dashaway drew closer to the upturned rowboat. "Don't leave me to perish! Help!"

"Catch the life line!" roared Dick, and whirling the article over his head, he let fly with all the strength and skill at his command.

It was a clever throw, the line shooting over the middle of the small boat and the life preserver hitting the water just beyond. The castaway caught hold of both, but hesitated about letting go of the rowboat that had so far saved him from a watery grave.

"Haul in, all of you!" cried Dick. "I'll stand at the rail with this boathook and try to keep him from being pounded on the yacht's side."

The young leader's instructions were obeyed, and slowly but surely the upturned boat and its occupant came closer. But then came a huge wave, and man and boat parted company and disappeared from view.

"Hold tight!" screamed Dick, as the man reappeared, and then he reached down with the boathook, and in a twinkling the rescued one came sprawling on the deck, while Dick slipped flat on his back.

The rescue had taken place none too soon, for now the storm increased in fury, and old Jacob lashed himself to the wheel, while ordering all of the others below.

"He has fainted," said Leander, as he knelt over the man who had been saved. "Let us carry him below;" and this was done. In the cabin the stranger was made as comfortable as possible and stimulants were administered; but it was a long time before he either spoke or moved.

The storm lasted all of the afternoon and the greater part of the night, and nobody thought of going to sleep.

"If you wanted an adventure, Leander, I guess you are getting it," remarked Don, grimly. "This is worse than that blizzard. I'll be thankful if we get out of this with whole skins."

"Dis is de greatest storm I ever seed," put in Danny. "If de boat shakes much more, everyt'ing in de crockery line will be gone to smash, dat's a fact," and he rolled off to secure his dishes and pans from such a catastrophe. Several dishes and glasses were wrecked, but not as many as Danny imagined.

The man who had been rescued was a heavy-set individual of twenty-five or thirty years of age, and Dick rightfully guessed that he was an Englishman. He had been struck on the head, and it was found that a nasty cut must be plastered up and then bound with a cloth.

"Poor fellow, he has certainly had a hard time of it," observed Don. "I'm glad we managed to save him."

"And so am I glad," returned Dick. "I'll wager he'll have a story worth telling when he gets around to it."

"Yes, I have a tale worth telling," came with a gasp from the sufferer; but having opened his eyes for a moment, he closed them again, and said nothing more for fully half an hour.

The fury of the storm had caused the Dashaway to move far out to sea, and when, at eleven in the morning, old Jacob announced that all danger was over, they calculated that it would take them twenty-four hours and more to reach Savannah, whither they had been bound for some extra ship's supplies.

"I don't care – so long as we have enough eating to last us," was Dick's comment. "I'm happy to escape with my life."

"And I am happy to think that we have been the means of saving somebody else," put in Don.

Both had gone on deck to see what old Jacob had to say about their next movement. They returned to the cabin to find the rescued man stirring again.

"You have saved my life, lads," were his first words. "I shall never forget you for that, never!" and he put out his hand feebly, for one and another to press.

"Did you fall overboard from some boat?" questioned Dick, kindly.

"I did – that is, I am not quite sure," was the measured answer.

"You are not sure?" repeated Don, with a puzzled look.

"No, I am not quite sure. I was standing by the steamer's rail and the ship was pitching terribly. Suddenly I was lifted off my feet – how I cannot tell – and then I found myself pitching headlong into the water. It is strange! strange! – " And the man drew a long breath.

"Do you mean to say that you think somebody might have pitched you into the ocean?" cried Dick.

"I am sure of nothing, my lads. But – but – there was one man on board the Advance who would not have been above heaving me overboard, were the chance given to him." The sufferer looked around curiously. "You have saved my life; I don't know but that I may as well tell you my secret."

"We would certainly like to hear your story," returned Leander, bluntly.

"Then I will tell it as well as I am able. In the first place, I am an Englishman, and my name is Robert Menden. Less than two weeks ago I took passage on the steamship Advance, bound from Liverpool to Havana, Cuba. I wished to sail direct for Porto Rico, but could not obtain the passage, so took what I considered the next best thing. You know it is easy to get passage to any of the West Indies from Havana."

"Yes, I know that," returned Dick. "Havana is quite a center of trade."

"I was bound to Porto Rico in search of a fortune, which I heard of quite by accident while I was travelling in Spain nearly a year ago. On board the Advance was a man who knew my secret. He

was an old enemy of mine, and I cannot get it out of my head but that he helped me overboard, not only to get rid of me, but also that he might secure the treasure for himself."

CHAPTER III

SOMETHING ABOUT A GREAT TREASURE

"A treasure!" cried Don, as Robert Menden paused, to partake of some soup which Danny had brought to him.

"Yes, a treasure, lads – a treasure said to be worth twenty or thirty thousand dollars. Of course, that is not a fabulous sum, but it is pretty large for a poor Englishman like me, who has never had over two hundred pounds in his life."

"It's enough!" cried Dick. "I'd like to pick it up myself."

"But what kind of a treasure is it?" questioned Leander. "Won't you tell us more about it?"

"And about your enemy?" added Bob.

"I will tell you everything, lads – for I have nothing to conceal, and you have been very kind to me. But first let me say, that I am at present totally unable to pay you for what you are doing for me now."

"We don't want any pay," came from Dick promptly, and the others nodded.

"As far as I know, I am not worth a dollar in the world, as you Americans would put it. I had something like eighty pounds in my pocket when I fell overboard, but my wallet is gone, and here is all I now possess." And Robert Menden held out a shining shilling and several English pennies.

"We'll try to set you on your feet again," came from Bob, who was always generous to the core. "We are not rich, but we can do something; can't we, fellows?"

"To be sure," answered Don. "But won't you tell your story, about your enemy and that treasure? I declare, it sounds like a book!" and he smiled broadly. Don had always been a great boy to read stories of pirates, treasures, Indians, and marvellous boy hunters and trappers. Yet he had never had his head turned by these bits of thrilling fiction.

"Well, to begin with, as I said before, I am an Englishman, and was born and brought up in a village not far from the city of London. Our family was fairly well-to-do, and for twenty years of my life matters ran smoothly enough. But then my parents died, and I being alone, moved into London, and became a clerk in a firearms store.

"In this store there was another clerk named Joseph Farvel. Joseph was not of the friendly sort, and he hated me from the start, because he had expected to get the place I was filling, for a friend of his, who was to pay him five pounds for obtaining the situation for him. He tried to get me into trouble, so that I would be discharged and he would have another chance for his friend, but his little plot against me was discovered, and he was thrown out in consequence.

"From that moment on Joseph Farvel was my bitter enemy, and he tried in several ways to injure me. Finally, I caught him one day in the park and gave him a sound thrashing, and told him if he ever interfered with me again I would have him arrested. As long as I remained in London I never saw him again."

"And I shouldn't think you would want to see him," put in Dick, as Robert Menden paused, to partake of the warm soup once again.

"When I became head clerk for the firearms firm, I was sent to Madrid, Spain, to look up a certain contract with the Spanish Government for small arms. In the meantime, Joseph Farvel had secured a position with another firearms company, and they were also after this contract. We met in Madrid and another quarrel ensued, but nothing came of it.

"I secured the contract, and was on the point of returning to England, when I fell in with an old Spanish sailor who had spent much of his time in Cuban and Porto Rican waters. I did this fellow several favors, and in return for this he told me of a treasure said to be hidden away in one of the

great caves of Porto Rico, which are located to the southwest of Caguas, and five miles west of the village of Aguas Buenas."

"And what was the treasure?" cried Leander, who sat by, his mouth half open in wonder.

"It was a treasure in Spanish gold, said to have been placed in the cavern by a smuggler, who had journeyed inland after he had found the coast of Porto Rico too hot to hold him. It was said to be locked up in a strong cedar chest, and buried under a long, flat stone upon which was cut a cross and the initials M. M. M."

"That ought to be easy to find – if you can locate the cave," said Bob.

"Exactly – if I can locate the cave. But you must remember that, although the caves of Porto Rico are but little known, the largest of them, called the Dark Cave, is said to rival your own Mammoth Cave of Kentucky."

"Gracious! If it's as big as that, then that's another question," returned Bob, and his face fell, for he was already thinking of taking a hand at treasure-hunting himself.

"I have some fairly good directions as to how to reach the cave," went on Robert Menden. He cleared his throat. "But I am getting ahead of my tale. I heard of this treasure in Madrid, and strange as it may seem, Joseph Farvel heard of it, too.

"When I returned to London, bad news awaited me. The firm I had represented had failed, and instead of getting a large sum of money for my success in Madrid, I was thrown out of employment. Times were hard and I could not secure another situation, and at last I sailed for Havana, intending to go from there to Ponce, Porto Rico, and then strike out into the interior of the island in search of the hidden chest of gold.

"You can well imagine my surprise when on the second day out I ran across Joseph Farvel, who had also taken passage for Cuba. We quarrelled once more, and he accused me of dogging his footsteps, and of wanting to get his treasure away from him. I told him I wanted nothing to do with him and that I reckoned the treasure would belong to the first man who found it."

"And so he threw you overboard later on!" exclaimed Leander. "What a rascal!"

"I am not certain that he did. I was not feeling well and I was also very sleepy, and it may be that I fell overboard by pure accident. And yet I cannot get it out of my mind but that he sneaked up behind me and gave me a gentle lift and a shove, just as the steamship was swinging to aid him." Robert Menden paused. "That is my story, and now let me know what you think of it, and where you are bound, and what you intend to do with me."

CHAPTER IV

A COMPACT OF IMPORTANCE

"It's certainly a strange story," mused Dick, and looked questioningly at the other club members, and at Danny, who stood at the doorway, taking in with wide open eyes all that was being said.

"Sure, an' if I was youse fellers I'd hunt up dat gold!" remarked the Irish lad. "Twenty t'ousand dollars! Dat's a regular – er – mint, dat is!"

"It's not ours to hunt up," answered Bob; but he looked at Dick questioningly, nevertheless.

"You want to know what I think of your story," said the leader of the club, addressing the man they had saved. "I think it's a mighty interesting yarn."

"And where are you bound?"

"We were bound for Savannah, to take on some extra ship's stores. But the storm made us turn out to sea again, and the wind has carried us a good bit out of our course."

"It looks to me as if you lads were out for pleasure."

"You are right. We form an organization known as the Gun and Sled Club. Last winter we spent a large part of our time in the woods and had immense fun. This spring my uncle left me this yacht, and we decided to sail down the Atlantic coast as far as Florida, and then go hunting and fishing and sporting generally. But I guess it's time we introduced ourselves;" and Dick proceeded to go through the usual form for all hands but old Jacob, who was still on deck, in sole charge, now that the storm was over.

The introduction and hand-shaking made everybody feel more at home, and Robert Menden questioned several of them concerning the contemplated outing. "I presume you will land me at either Savannah or in Florida," he concluded.

"Supposing we land you in Porto Rico?" said Bob, with a sudden twinkle in his eye.

"Will you do that?" asked Robert Menden, quickly.

"It's a pretty good sail for the Dashaway," said Bob, thoughtfully. "But I think it would be all right – if we could make the stores hold out."

"Hurrah! let us go to Porto Rico!" shouted Leander, who stood by. "I wanted to say go before, but I hardly dared."

"Can you go if you want to?" questioned the Englishman, as he gazed from one to another of the boys.

"Certainly," said Dick. "We can go where we please, for our time is our own, and so is our money – what little there is of it. We are not millionaires' sons, you know," he added, with a smile. "We are working this outing on as cheap a scale as possible."

"You are better off than I, who haven't a pound – "

"But you'll get that treasure – " broke in Don.

"Perhaps." Robert Menden looked very thoughtful. "Boys, I have a proposal to make to you."

"I'm ready for it, and I'll say 'yes' in advance," cried Leander.

"Then you know what is in my mind," laughed the Englishman.

"You want us to take you to Porto Rico?"

"Yes."

"And want us to help you hunt for that treasure?"

"If you care to do so. And I will give you a share of what is found."

"How much?" asked Don, who was breathing hard, and fancied he had the treasure already in his possession.

"That is a matter to be talked over. You see, I have lost my money, so if we all go together, you will have to bear the expenses of the trip."

"We'll keep the expenses down – we'll have to do it," put in Dick. "What kind of a bargain are you willing to make?"

Robert Menden thought for a moment. "I want to go to Porto Rico immediately, so that I can reach that cave before Joseph Farvel. If you set sail in that direction without delay, I think we can beat him, even if he takes a steamer from Havana to Ponce."

"I guess you are right there," answered Leander. He got out a chart and studied it for a moment. "At a rough estimate we are now about a thousand miles from the coast of Porto Rico, while the distance to that point from Havana, Cuba, is several hundred miles longer."

"And your enemy may have to lay over several days for a steamer," put in Bob.

"If he thinks you are dead he won't hurry," added Dick. "Perhaps he will stay in Havana for a week or two."

"That is what I was thinking," resumed Robert Menden. "Yet he is a very greedy fellow, and he will want to lay hands on that gold just as quickly as he can."

"Well, I guess anybody would want to do that," laughed Leander. "Such a sum of money is not to be sneezed at."

"I am willing to sail for Porto Rico as soon as we can, but we ought to have some ship's stores for such a long trip," said Dick. "We have no fresh vegetables left, so Danny tells me."

"Well, you must do as you think best about that," answered the Englishman. "But to get to business, as you Americans would say. If you will take me to Porto Rico as speedily as you can, and accompany me on a trip inland to where this cave is said to be located, and will bear all expenses – making them as little as possible – I will agree to give you one-quarter of all that is found."

"A quarter of twenty thousand dollars would be five thousand," said Bob. "That's not bad."

"And, remember, the treasure may be worth thirty thousand – or more," put in Leander. "I move this club take up with Mr. Menden's offer."

"I second the motion," cried Don, promptly.

"Ditto!" came from Bob.

"The motion is put – and carried unanimously," said Dick, almost as quickly. "Mr. Menden, from henceforth we are at your service, so far as our means afford and as long as we can keep out of positive danger."

"Let us put our agreement in writing," suggested Leander, who was going to have no trip-up in the matter. This was also agreed to, and the tall youth was set to work on the important document. When it was finished, both Robert Menden and Dick signed it, and Danny Guirk and old Jacob added their names as witnesses.

A long consultation was had, and it was resolved to run for St. Augustine, on the Florida coast, and there procure such supplies as were necessary.

The course of the Dashaway was changed, and the wind being still fresh, they made good progress.

"Get your list ready," said Bob, "so we won't have to stay ashore any longer than is necessary."

"I'm preparing the list now," answered Dick, who was consulting with Danny. The Irish boy was in high delight, having been promised a round hundred dollars extra, should the proposed hunt for the treasure prove successful. Old Jacob had been put down for a like sum, also to the old tar's satisfaction.

The run to St. Augustine proved without special interest. The boys found Robert Menden a nice companion. The Englishman had not only travelled a good bit, but had also been a great reader, and he was not above telling a good story whenever called upon to do so.

"I had a pretty fair wardrobe," he said, on the morning following the conversation just mentioned. "But now I haven't anything but what is on my back."

"You can look over the things on the yacht," replied Dick. "Some of them, I think, will fit you – and what else must be had can be purchased in St. Augustine."

Since the start from home all of the boys had taken a deep interest in the yacht, and old Jacob had succeeded in making a fairly good sailor of each of them. But there were still many things to learn, and now Robert Menden announced that he would take lessons in seamanship, too.

"I don't want you to think I am lazy," he said. "I am just as willing to work as anybody. I expect by the time Porto Rico is reached I'll be a regular old salt."

"We can't get to that island fast enough for me," cried Bob. "I'm crazy to get at that treasure." And he felt like dancing a jig for joy, little dreaming of all the thrilling adventures and grave perils in store for the party.

CHAPTER V

AN ADVENTURE IN ST. AUGUSTINE

"Hurrah! we are in sight of the coast!"

It was Dick who uttered the cry, late in the afternoon of the second day after the conversation recorded above.

The Dashaway had made a clean run of over a hundred and thirty miles, and had come in sight of the coast but a few miles above the little river upon which St. Augustine is situated, about two miles from the rolling Atlantic.

Fortunately, old Jacob knew these waters thoroughly, so the run to the river and up to the ancient Spanish city was not a hazardous one. As soon as they dropped anchor, all of the boys went ashore and Robert Menden went with them.

It was no easy matter to rush through Dick's long orders for stores, but they did their best, and by two o'clock of the afternoon following, the yacht was ready for a journey of a thousand miles or more.

"We won't live on the fat of the land," grinned Dick. "But we won't have to live on salt meat, either."

"I don't mind some salt meat," smiled Robert Menden, "but I don't like too much of it."

While Dick was superintending the loading of the stores, Don and Bob strolled off to take a look at the ancient town, which possesses several points of interest.

"It's a good deal different from things North," observed Don. "Even the trees are different. How beautiful the palms are!"

"I guess we'll see as much of tropical life as we care for when we reach Porto Rico," replied Bob. "Gracious, but it's warm!" he added, wiping the perspiration from his brow.

"And we'll find it hot enough, too," laughed his chum. "That trip to the interior won't be exactly a picnic, Bob."

"That's true. But then a fellow can stand something for the sake of making a lot of money. I wish we had time to stay here a few days. I would like to go out into the wood with a gun, and see what I could knock over."

"Yes, it's a pity we can't have at least one day's fishing and hunting. But then we must get to Porto Rico before that Joseph Farvel. What a scamp he must be!"

"The world is full of such chaps. But if only we can outwit him I shall be satisfied."

The walk of the two boys took them to one of the broad highways leading to the residential portion of the city.

The highway was lined with carriages coming and going, and bicycles were likewise numerous.

"I wouldn't mind a ride on a wheel myself," observed Don. "Those fellows seem to enjoy it thoroughly," and he pointed to four boys, all in uniform, who were riding wheels which were peculiarly striped in red, white and blue.

"They carry the flag colors," smiled his chum. "They must be patriotic."

"And what real, live American lad isn't patriotic, Bob?"

"True for you. If we – Hullo, what does that mean?"

Bob broke off short and pointed up the broad highway.

Around a bend a fine carriage had appeared, drawn by a team of coal black steeds.

For some reason not now apparent, the team had taken their bits in their teeth and were running away at topmost speed.

The turnout had two seats, but its sole occupant was a little girl not over six or seven years of age – a pale, blue-eyed creature, with yellow curls streaming down her back.

"Help! stop the bad, bad horses!" sobbed the little girl, as the tears of terror ran down her cheeks.

"By ginger! this is awful!" gasped Don. "That little girl will be thrown out and killed."

"Can't we stop the horses?" questioned Bob. "We must do it somehow!" he added, with sudden determination.

The chums had been walking along the side of the highway, but now Bob ran out directly in the path of the oncoming team.

"Be careful, Bob!" yelled Don, but, nevertheless, he followed his chum, at the same time pulling off the light jacket he wore over his outing shirt.

Bob set his teeth hard. Half a dozen people were yelling at him, but it is doubtful if he heard a word of the advice. His one thought was centered on the little girl and what he might do to save the creature. "I must do it," he muttered. "I *must!*"

On and on came the team, carriage drivers and bicyclists losing no time in getting out of the way, so that they themselves might escape injury. In such a moment, "self-preservation is the first law of nature," to nine out of every ten human beings.

Whizz! It was Don's coat that flew forth, just as the team ranged up almost in front of him. The youth's aim was good, for the garment shot past the nose of the nearest steed, to land on the head of the second, thus momentarily checking the mad dash of the pair.

As the coat came from one side, Bob leaped from the other, clasping the steed nearest to him around the neck. Then Don's garment slipped to the highway, and away went the horses again, the reins dangling at their heels and the carriage swaying violently from side to side, as the wheels found stone, hollow or rut along the way.

Fortunately for Bob, his hold was a good one, and pulling up his legs, the youth was enabled to keep clear of the horse's hoofs, which came up rather high as he kept to his mad chase.

"Bob, look out!" came from Don, and then turnout and boy passed out of hearing of the chum left standing in a cloud of dust, coatless and hatless, and without knowing what to do next.

But a short distance away was a side road, much rougher than the main highway. As the team went on, the horse carrying Bob's weight lagged slightly behind, and when the side road was reached, both steeds turned and darted in the new direction.

By this time poor Bob realized that he had cut out a large piece of work for himself. He wanted to swing himself up on the animal's back, but for several minutes was unable to do so. In the meantime the carriage swayed more violently than ever.

"Stop the bad horses!" shrieked the little girl, and then arose to her feet, as if to jump from the carriage.

"Sit down!" cried Bob, as he caught a brief glance of the little maiden. "Sit down, or you'll get hurt worse!"

The girl heard his words, but hesitated about accepting his suggestion. Bob had now one foot across the horse's back, and with one mighty pull he hauled himself up on the steed's neck. The animal tried to throw him, but the youth was game, and a second later had jumped to the rear and was leaning down, gathering up the reins.

"Oh, dear me!" gasped the little girl, as she saw him pick up the leathers. Then came a leap, and Bob landed on the front seat of the carriage.

The boy now had the reins, and each was twisted tightly about his wrist. But could he haul in such a fiery team? It looked doubtful.

He braced his feet as well as he was able, and hauled back. One horse had lost the bit, but the other had not, and away went the latter with renewed energy, which it seemed that nothing could overcome.

Crack! It was the frail dashboard of the carriage that had given way, and in an instant Bob's foot went through a hole, which held his leg as if in a vise.

"More trouble," was his thought, and he sought to extricate himself from this new difficulty, but still keeping tight hold of the lines, knowing only too well that if they slipped down again, the attempted rescue would be a failure.

"Please, please stop the bad, bad horses!" pleaded the girl, who occupied the seat behind him.

"I will – if I can," panted Bob. "But sit down, or you may be thrown out. There's a bend ahead."

The bend was not far off, and Bob still trying to free his leg from the wreck of the dashboard when the team made the turn so closely that the carriage went up high on the wheels of one side. For a few seconds it looked as if the turnout would be thrown over, but it gradually righted itself, and on they went again, more madly than ever.

Around the bend, the trees and bushes were thick, and but little could be seen. Yet presently a sight caught Bob's eyes which fairly made his heart stop beating.

They were approaching the river bank fairly and squarely, and in less than half a minute more the end of the road would be gained.

"The river!" wailed the little girl. "We will drown!"

"Not if I can help it!" answered Bob, and pulled on the reins harder than ever.

Then came a snap, as one of the reins parted close to the boy's hand, and over he tumbled to the side of the seat, leaving the team, uncontrolled, to dash on to their fate, carrying himself and the little girl with them.

CHAPTER VI

INTO THE RIVER AND OUT

"My gracious! what had I best do now?"

Bob uttered the words mechanically, as with staring eyes he gazed at the stretch of water which the carriage was approaching so rapidly. He felt that it would be impossible to stop the team before the river bank was gained.

With might and main he sought to loosen his foot. But that member had caught between a bit of the dashboard and a brace, and was as fast as if in a bear trap.

The little girl began to scream, but Bob hardly heard her. Along jounced the turnout, then came a slight pause, and over the bank went the team, landing in the river with a loud splash. The carriage followed, and on the instant the youth found himself under the water.

It was truly a situation of extreme peril, and it is a wonder that poor Bob did not lose utter control of himself. But even in that dire hour he felt that if he would save himself he must have his wits about him.

As he went under, the horses were forgotten, and bending forward, he caught the shattered dashboard in both hands and endeavored to wrench it asunder.

It was hard work, and as he applied himself to it he felt the carriage turning, until it was bottom side up.

"That poor girl!" he thought, and tugged away harder than ever.

At last came a pull that loosened his foot. It was high time, for his breath was almost gone and a strange light seemed to flicker before his brain. Clearing himself of the wreck, he darted upward to the surface.

"She's gone!" was his thought, as he filled his lungs with the fresh air which they so much needed. He had saved himself, but his heart was heavy to think that most likely the little girl had been drowned.

Suddenly his eyes caught sight of a white object floating some twenty feet away. He gave a second look and recognized the little girl's dress.

Fortunately, as my old readers know, Bob was a good swimmer, and without hesitation he struck out for the floating object. As he came closer he saw that the little maiden was still conscious.

"Help me!" she wailed, when she saw him. "Don't let me go down in the cold water, please!"

"I will save you," said Bob, firmly. "Here, put your arms around my neck," and he caught hold of her, for he saw that she was more than ready to sink to rise no more.

It was wonderful what trust the little girl imposed upon this youth whom she had never before met. Bob's face was a thoroughly honest and reliable one, and youth sometimes reads character better than old age, doing so by instinct rather than reason.

The boy had just struck out for shore when there came a shout, and two bicycle riders appeared, followed by an elderly man on horseback.

The elderly man was very much excited and waved one hand wildly over his head.

"Save Bessie!" he yelled. "Save my daughter!"

And then dismounting, he attempted to leap into the stream, but one of the bicyclists held him back.

"I'll bring her in," called out Bob.

"Papa! papa!" cried the little girl. "I want my papa!"

Slowly but surely Bob neared the bank of the river. The elderly man was close at hand, and the instant he was able to do so he caught his child by the arm and raised her up. "Thank God!" he murmured hoarsely, and strained the little one to his breast, while the tears started to his eyes.

One of the bicycle riders gave Bob a hand, and almost exhausted, the lad was drawn up to a place of safety. He tried to stand up, but could not, and sank down on the sward.

In the meantime the horses had come up and were plunging wildly, close to the wreck of the carriage. Both were on their sides, but presently one raised himself to a swimming position and struck out for the shore, dragging his mate and the wreck after him.

The bicyclist, who up to this point had done nothing, now ran forward, and as the horse came closer he caught the animal by the curb, and soon both steeds were safe, although each was bruised by hoof strokes received from the other.

"Your horses are all right now," said the wheelman, as he cut the team loose from the carriage, and tied them fast to a nearby palm tree. The carriage was fastened to the river bank.

"Never mind the horses – it is my child I was thinking of," responded the elderly man. He turned to Bob. "Young man, you have done me a great service – a very great service, indeed."

"Bessie is all wet," put in the little girl. "And so is that boy, papa. We want dry clothing."

"Yes, yes, child, you shall go back to the hotel directly. But first I must reward this brave young man for what he has done."

"Thank you, but I am not looking for a reward, sir," answered Bob, frankly. "I am glad that I was able to be of assistance."

"You are as generous as you are brave; I can see that. May I ask your name?"

"Robert Hobart; although all my friends call me Bob."

"My name is Garrison Grey, and this is my only child, Bessie. I am glad to know you, Robert, and I'll not forget you; rest assured of that. Do you live here?"

"Oh, no; I'm from a place away up North, and just came in on a yacht with some of my friends. We are off on a summer cruise to Porto Rico."

"Porto Rico! Why, I am in business in that island," cried Garrison Grey.

"Then perhaps we'll meet in Porto Rico," returned Bob.

"That is true; and if we do, rest assured that I will do what I can to entertain you. I live and do business in Ponce, and here is my card," and Mr. Grey handed over the pasteboard, which showed that he was in the wholesale coffee business.

By this time Don came up on a run, anxious to know the result of the runaway.

"It was an adventure and no mistake," he observed, after he had been introduced and Bob had told his tale. "As soon as I caught sight of the river I was afraid you had all been drowned."

Mr. Grey was stopping at the Grand Hotel, and he insisted that the two boys accompany him to the place, and be introduced to his wife. Then he followed Bob and Don down to where the Dashaway was taking on the last of her stores, and was invited on board.

"Certainly a fine craft," he observed, as he was taken around. "She ought to stand the trip to Porto Rico very well. What place do you expect to stop at first?"

"We haven't decided that point yet," answered Dick.

"Well, don't forget to come to Ponce sooner or later. I will be at home very shortly – as soon as my business in St. Augustine is finished. I am going to take several friends with me."

In less than an hour the anchor of the yacht was pulled up and the sails set, and off they glided down the smooth river, Garrison Grey waving them an adieu from the dock.

"A fine man," mused Bob. "I hope we do meet again."

"We'll have to stop at Ponce before we leave the island," answered Leander.

And so they parted with the coffee merchant, little dreaming of the curious future meeting in store for the merchant and themselves.

CHAPTER VII

SAVING THE TRAIN

For several days the weather proved delightful, and as the wind was strong and steady the Dashaway made rapid progress.

All felt in the best of spirits, and with fishing and telling stories the time passed as quickly as could reasonably be expected.

The boys soon learned that Robert Menden was a great story-teller, and never tired of sitting around him when he was spinning one of his yarns.

One day they were talking of bicycle riding, when the young Englishman shook his head slowly. "No more riding for me," he said. "I have had enough and to spare of it. I once came close to losing my life in England through it – when I was out with a friend named Rexwell. I'll never forget that adventure."

"Tell us of it!" shouted several of the boys at once; and sitting in a cozy corner of the deck, Robert Menden told his story as follows:

"Rexwell and I were two days out from Orelle in the heart of England. We were following the smooth, winding road which leads from Paxton to Riley's, and which crosses the K. T. & B. railway at half a dozen or more points.

"Rexwell had proposed the bicycle tour, as being different from the ordinary run of outings, and as I was on the lookout for excitement of any sort, I eagerly agreed to join him in a trip to last the best part of a week, never dreaming of all that was to follow in the shape of a close shave from death.

"We both rode our favorite wheels, which, fortunately, were of the same make, thus doing away with the possibility of any dispute regarding the superiority of either. To our handle bars we had strapped a decidedly limited amount of baggage; our pocketbooks were sufficiently filled to meet all wants in that direction, and as both of us were in the best of health and free from worldly care, we went speeding along the highway in the best of spirits.

"'Sixteen miles to Midland Cut,' sang out Rexwell, as he slowed up at a guideboard placed where a wagon trail crossed the road. 'We ought to be able to make that by supper time with ease.'

"'It looks to me as if there was a hill back of yonder woods,' I replied, as I took a long look ahead.

"'It can't be much of a climb, or we would see it over the treetops, Bert. We'll soon know,' he went on, as he forged ahead by an extra spurt, giving me some quick work on the pedals to catch up to him.

"It was a little after four in the afternoon, or evening, as the residents of some localities termed it. The fore part of the day had been somewhat oppressive, the usual southwest breeze having died down by ten o'clock, leaving the glaring sun its full sway. Now I noticed a dense mass of clouds creeping and rolling up from over to our right, and drew Rexwell's attention to it.

"'By Jove! that looks as if we were going to have a storm, Robert,' said he. 'Those clouds are rolling up fast, too. We must strike shelter before we get wet to the skin.'

"We crossed the polished tracks of the railroad and descended into the woods. The road was not sufficiently used to clear it of its overhanging branches, which more than once struck us in the face as we bowled along. Before the heavy growth was passed, the sun was obscured, and we heard the distant roll of thunder.

"We pressed on faster than ever, only to find ourselves at the foot of an extra steep hill, at the entrance to another dense patch of timber. Here the way was rather soft, and we were glad enough, after a few minutes more of riding, to leap down and trundle our wheels beside us.

"Pat, pat, pat, patter, patter! It was the rain, striking the leaves overhead, and soon some came down upon our heads. Up at the top of the hill was an opening, and there the drops seemed to be coming down in a deluge. The thunder now increased, accompanied by occasional flashes of lightning.

"'We're in for it, old man,' said Rexwell, dismally. 'What had we best do? seek shelter among the trees?'

"'If you're not afraid of being struck by lightning,' I replied; and then the pair of us made a break to where a clump of trees stood, their branches tightly interlaced. This spot reached, we crouched down in a hollow, and I brought out my rubber blanket and made of it an apology for a tent, by throwing it over our bicycles.

"Hardly had we become settled than we heard the sounds of horses' hoofs on the road. Looking forth we beheld four horsemen dash into view. All were drenched with rain and one was muttering savagely at his ill-luck.

"'Come on in here, boys; we can stay under the trees until the worst is over,' we heard the leader of the quartet remark; and he turned in not fifty feet from where we crouched. 'Ricketts, be sure and keep that dynamite dry,' he added, to the man who had been doing all the grumbling.

"'Oh, that's all right – I wish I was as dry,' responded Ricketts. 'Hang such a night as this is going to be!'

"'You're crazy, man, to grumble,' put in a third of the party. 'Why, we couldn't have it better. The railroad people will never be able to follow us.'

"'That's all you know about it, Larson. Mud leaves an ugly trail,' growled Ricketts. 'Ain't that so, Shorer?'

"'We can follow the creek from Weemer's, and that will throw 'em off the scent,' responded the leader. 'All we'll have to do is to stop the train this side of Blowfen's instead of the other. By the way, keep your ears open for Jamison and the others. We don't want them to go below Blowfen's by mistake.'

"'I'm watching, all right,' said Larson. 'Ain't he got my gun?'

"'Yes, and Lewis promised to bring me some .42 cartridges, too,' said Ricketts. 'Refley sold me a lot of .38's by mistake. When will the express get to Blowfen's?'

"'Eight-fifteen, or thereabouts. We must be on the watch at eight,' came from the leader of the quartet. 'And I want every one of you to do the right thing. If you don't, that twenty thousand will slip through our fingers, and we may get our necks stretched instead.'

"A clap of thunder broke off the conversation at this point, and when the reverberations rolled away, it was not resumed. The horsemen had gathered under some trees to the right of us, and now occupied their time in watching for their comrades and in examining the arms and other traps which they carried.

"I had listened to their talk in rising horror, and the clutch Rexwell took upon my arm told me plainly that he was not less affected. As the thunder died away, he whispered hoarsely into my ear: 'Train wreckers!'

"I looked at him and nodded. 'They are going to wreck the express to-night, too,' I added in a whisper.

"'We must stop them.'

"'Yes, that was plainly our duty. But how was the deed to be accomplished? We were only two to four, or more, and our small pocket arms would prove of small value should we expose ourselves and provoke a 'mix-up.'

"'That Shorer is the notorious train wrecker from Scotland,' said Rexwell. 'There is a reward up for his capture, I think.'

"'Let's effect his capture, and collar the reward,' I cried eagerly.

"'Hush, Robert! Collar the reward! If they found us here they wouldn't hesitate to fill us full of holes. That Shorer is as cold-blooded as they make them.'

"If we could get away without being seen, we might ride back to Wheatland and inform the authorities.'

"Providing we could get there before the express goes through.'

"To do that, we'll have to get out at once.'

"A noise on the road made us break off. The rest of the train wrecker's gang were coming up – six stalwart and bronzed men, each on a powerful horse, and all heavily armed. The ten horsemen made an imposing cavalcade.

"Silently I took down the rubber blanket and rolled it up, strapping it fast in its place. Seeing this, Rexwell felt of his machine and examined the pedals and running gear.

"Follow me,' I whispered; and lifting my bicycle from the hollow, I darted behind the clump of cottonwoods, and hurried through the woods in a direction parallel to the highway. My chum came close behind me. Inside of ten minutes we were several hundred feet away, and then we turned into the road, mounted to our saddles, and pedalled down the back track as rapidly as our weary legs and the state of the muddy highway would permit. Once we fancied we heard a shout from behind, but we never looked back and nothing followed.

"It was still raining; not as heavily as before, but still sufficiently to reach our skins and render us far from comfortable. The wet bushes and tree branches slashed in our faces, and twice both of us ran into hollows and took nasty headers. But we minded nothing of it all, our one thought being to get to Wheatland ahead of the express. If we failed, we could well imagine what dreadful consequences would follow. If any one was killed in the hold-up, we would consider ourselves little short of being murderers.

"On, on, and still on we sped, the cold perspiration mixing with the rain on our necks and faces, our hearts beating wildly and our breath coming heavily. We were fagged out, yet we must keep on and cover the fourteen miles which still lay between us and the nearest stopping place of the express on the K. T. & B. railway.

"As we reached the top of a hill and sped like rockets down the opposite slope, Rexwell forged ahead in a truly reckless fashion. I had just started to call to him to be careful, when I heard a crash, saw his machine bounce up in the air, and he went sailing into a lot of brush. Luckily I avoided the rock he had struck, and slowing up as quickly as possible, I dismounted and went to his assistance.

"The wind had been knocked out of him, but no bones were broken, and when I reached his side he was struggling to rise, his face and hands scratched in a dozen places, from which the blood streamed freely.

"How's my bike?' were his first words; and I picked the machine up, to discover the front tire collapsed and the wheel twisted in two places.

"That settles it; I can't ride any further to-night,' he groaned. 'You'll have to go it alone, Robert.'

"And leave you?' I answered, quickly.

"Yes, why not? I can take care of myself. I'll get to Wheatland somehow, by morning. Or you can send a horse and wagon out to meet me. Now, hurry up.'

"It would have been useless to argue with Rexwell, even had I felt inclined to do so, which was not the case; so with a cheering word, I went on alone through the wet and the gathering darkness.

"It was a solitary ride I shall never forget. I stopped once at the foot of a second hill, to light my lamp, and that was the only time I dismounted until I wheeled into the outskirts of Wheatland, panting for breath, my eyes bulging out of their sockets from the tremendous strain to which they had been subjected in the gloom, and my legs aching so greatly that I could scarcely stand upon them.

"Show me the nearest way to the depot,' I cried to the first person I met; and receiving the directions, sped on through the mud until the end of the long platform was reached. With awful distinctness I heard the clear whistle of an incoming locomotive, and heard the clanging of the bell. It was the express sliding into the station. I fairly tumbled from my bicycle and lumbered forward as

the long train slowed up. The engineer was looking back from his seat in the cab, as I came closer and called to him:

"For heaven's sake, don't go ahead yet!" I gasped. 'You'll be wrecked if you do.'

"What's that?" he cried, and as I repeated my words he leaped down and caught me by the arm. I was soon surrounded by a crowd, consisting of the engineer, fireman, conductor and half a dozen of the train and station hands. Everyone listened to my story with close attention.

"Hank Shorer means to keep his word,' said the engineer. 'He vowed four years ago to do me and the express. Where's the head constable?'

"The officer was not at hand, but soon a posse of men from town were marshalled together under the leadership of the conductor, a man of fifty, with an iron will and, so I was told by an outsider, one who could shoot as straight as anybody in the country.

"Tired out as I was, I still could not resist the temptation to board the train as a passenger, after sending a man with a wagon back for Rexwell.

"We pulled out of the station with exactly twenty-six armed men on board. In the cab were the engineer and the fireman, each with a rifle at his elbow. It was still raining, although not as heavily as before.

"Down the glistening tracks pounded big No. 657, which had drawn the express for three years. Women and children had been left behind, and the face of each man bore a look of determination and alertness. They meant to teach the train wreckers a severe lesson, and, if possible, break up the notorious gang which had terrorized the country for many months.

"The flash of a red light ahead! It was the signal to halt. The engineer set his teeth. One hand went to the lever, the other to the gun. The struggle was at hand. The long train slowed up, and came to a halt fifty feet ahead of the spot where the danger signal had been seen.

"Up with your hands there!' came the command from two masked men, who leaped aboard the tender and faced those in the cab. At the same instant the remainder of the gang surrounded the train and began to board the cars.

"A single shot rang out, followed by a dozen reports. Then came groans and more shots.

"We've been betrayed!' yelled a voice from beside the coach in which I stood. 'Make for the hosses, boys!'

"It was the voice of Shorer. Hardly had he uttered the command, than the conductor of the train took careful aim at the man and pulled the trigger of his heavy rifle. There was a shriek, a half-leap into the misty air, and the career of the most notorious train wrecker in that section was closed forever.

"I was not left undisturbed. At the beginning of the encounter a bullet had shattered the window glass beside me. In return for this I used my own weapon, and succeeded in wounding one of the gang outside, in the leg. Five others were wounded, and the remainder ran off as fast as they could to where their horses were tethered in a nearby grove.

"To the horses!' cried one of the posse from Wheatland, and a rush was made for the express coach, in which half a dozen trusty animals had been brought along. A gangplank was put out, the horses brought forth, and in less than three minutes the riders were in the saddle and in hot pursuit of the fleeing criminals.

"The dead body of Shorer was picked up and taken on board, along with his wounded comrades. On the run back to town one of the wounded men died. The others were taken to the county jail.

"By the time Rexwell arrived, I had cooled off somewhat, although I was still far from being thoroughly calm. Both of us were surrounded, and we had to tell our story from beginning to end.

"By nightfall of the next day the horsemen came back with two additional prisoners, who were also jailed. The others of the gang escaped for the time, though I have since heard that they were captured out in Wales.

"For the part we had played in the memorable incident narrated, Rexwell and I were well rewarded, both by the railroad and the express company. But, while the reward was a highly acceptable one, I had no desire for another such adventure while touring on my wheel."

CHAPTER VIII

A FIRE AT SEA

"Well, that's one of the greatest bicycle stories I ever heard!" cried Dick, when Robert Menden had concluded. "I reckon those train wreckers deserved their fate."

"I don't like to think of the affair, to tell the truth," replied the Englishman. "For a good many nights after it happened I scarcely slept a wink."

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