BULLEN FRANK THOMAS

THE LOG OF A SEA-WAIF: BEING RECOLLECTIONS OF THE FIRST FOUR YEARS OF MY SEA LIFE

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Содержание

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TO

J. ST. LÖE STRACHEY,

IN

GRATEFUL RECOGNITION

OF HIS UNWEARYING ENCOURAGEMENT OF AND

PERSISTENT KINDNESS TO THE AUTHOR,

THIS BOOK

IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

PREFACE

Notwithstanding the oft-reiterated statement that the days of sea romance are over, it may well be doubted whether any period of our literary history has been more prolific in books dealing with that subject than the last twenty-five years. Nor does the output show any signs of lessening, while the quality of the work done is certainly not deteriorating. Writers like Kipling, Cutcliffe Hyne, Joseph Conrad, and Clark Russell, each in his own style, have presented us with a series of sea-pictures that need not fear comparison with any nautical writers' work of any day, although they deal almost exclusively with the generally considered unromantic merchant service. Having admitted this, the question perforce follows, "Who, then, are you, that presumes to compete with these master magicians?"

To that inevitable question I would modestly answer that the present book is in no sense a competitor with the works of any writers of nautical romance. But having been for fifteen years a seafarer in almost every capacity except that of a master, and now, by the greatest kindness and indulgence on the part of men holding high positions in the literary world, being permitted to cater for the reading public in sterling periodicals, it has often occurred to me how little landsmen really know of the seaman's actual life. "Two Years before the Mast," although written by an American, and of life on board an American merchantman, has long held undisputed sway as a classic upon the subject. And for the only reason, as it seems, that no serious attempt has been made by a Britisher to do the same thing for life in British ships.

Still, conscious as I certainly am of small literary equipment for such a task, I should hardly have dared to try my hand but for the encouragement most generously and persistently given me by Mr. J. St. Löe Strachey, who, with that large faith in another's abilities that breeds confidence in its object, however diffident, urged me strongly to tell the public some of my experiences of sea life. And his advice to me was to set them down, just as they occurred, as nearly as memory would permit. Of course, it was not possible to cover the whole field of my experiences at once, except in the most scrappy and unsatisfactory way, and therefore I decided to take the first four years – from the age of twelve to sixteen. Following my friend's advice, I have written nothing but the truth, and, in most cases, I have given the real names of ships and individuals. If the book, then, does not please, it will be owing to my lack of discrimination between interesting and commonplace details, and not because the pictures given of life at sea in the forecastle are not faithful.

And now, as I know that there are a great many people who do not read prefaces, I will close mine by humbly commending this "autobiography of a nobody" to that tremendous tribunal, with whom lies the verdict of success or failure, and from whose fiat there is no appeal – the Public.

Frank T. Bullen.

Camberwell, *September, 1899.*

CHAPTER I.
MY FIRST SHIP

Many boys clamour for a sea life, will not settle down to anything ashore, in spite of the pleading of parents, the warnings of wisdom, or the doleful experiences of friends. Occasionally at schools there breaks out a sort of epidemic of "going to sea," for which there is apparently no proximate cause, but which rages fiercely for a time, carrying off such high-spirited youths as can prevail upon those responsible for them to agree to their making a trial of a seafaring life. All this is quite as it should be, of course, in order that Britain may continue to rule the waves; but many a parent, whose affectionate projects for the future of his offspring are thus rudely shattered, bitterly resents what he naturally considers to be unaccountable folly.

In my own case matters were quite otherwise. I belonged to the ignoble company of the unwanted. In spite of hard usage, scanty food, and overwork, I ridiculously persisted in living, until, at the approach of my twelfth year, an eligible opening presented itself for me to go to sea. Being under no delusions whatever as to the prospect that awaited me, since I had known intimately those who had experienced all the vicissitudes of a sailor's life, I was not unduly elated at the idea. Nevertheless, food and shelter were objects peculiarly hard of attainment ashore, while I felt satisfied that at sea these necessaries would be always provided, even if their quality was none of the best.

The vessel in which I obtained a berth as cabin-boy was commanded by my uncle: a stubborn, surly, but thoroughly capable old seaman. Soured by misfortune and cross-grained by nature, it was small wonder that he had no friends, not even the sterling honesty of his character, or his high ability, being sufficient to counterbalance the drawback of his atrocious temper. His latest command was not calculated to improve him, for she was a survival of a bygone day, clumsy as a Dutch galliot, impoverished by her owner, who was heartily sick of seeing her afloat, and would have rejoiced to hear that she was missing; and withal leaky as a basket. When I first saw her huddled into a more than usually dirty corner of the West India Docks, I was filled with wonder to see that her cutwater was sunken between two swelling bows like the cheeks of a conventional cherub. Though I could be no critic of marine construction, this seemed an anomaly for which there appeared to be no excuse. Her bowsprit and jibboom soared into the air exactly like those of the galleons of old, and her three skimpy masts stood like broomsticks at different angles – the foremast especially, which looked over the bows.

It was a bleak, gloomy day in January when I first beheld her. The snow, which had fallen heavily for some days previously, was, wherever it could be, churned into filthy slush, and where undisturbed, was begrimed more into the similitude of soot-heaps than anything else. Everything wore a pinched, miserable appearance. So forbidding and hopeless was the outlook that, had it been practicable, I should certainly have retreated. But there was no choice; I had burned my bridges.

Climbing on deck, I found such a state of confusion and dirt reigning as I could hardly have believed possible. Owing to the parsimony of the owner, not even a watchman had been kept on board, and, in consequence, the decks had not smelt a broom for a month. The cargo and stores were littered about so that progress was gymnastic, while in every corner and hollow lay the dirty snow. Several discontented-looking men were engaged aloft bending sails, others were gradually coaxing the cargo on deck into the hold, but no one seemed to have any energy left. Seated upon an up-ended beef-cask was a truculent-looking individual whom I instinctively regarded as the boss. Him, therefore, I timidly approached. Upon hearing my message, he rolled off his throne and led the way aft, uttering all the time some, to me, perfectly unintelligible sounds. I made no pretence of answering, so I suppose he took me for a poor idiot hardly worthy of his attention. When, after some effort, he disappeared down the cabin companion, I was close behind him, and, understanding his gestures better than his speech,

made out that here was to be the scene of my future labours. The place was so gloomy that I could distinguish none of its features by sight; but the atmosphere, a rank compound of the reek of bilge-water, mouldering stores, and unventilated sleeping-places, caught me by the throat, making my head swim and a lump rise in my chest. A small locker by the ladder's foot, reminding me curiously of a rabbit-hutch, was pointed out to me as my berth, but I naturally supposed it to be a place for my bag. How could I have dreamed that it was also to be my chamber? But everything began to reel with me, so, blindly clutching the ladder, I struggled on deck again, where the bitter wind soon revived me.

Henceforth no one noticed me, so I roamed about the deck, prying into holes and corners, until the stevedores knocked off for dinner. Presently the mate came towards where I sat, shivering and solitary, on the windlass end, and made me understand that I was to come ashore with him. He conducted me through a labyrinth of mean streets to a spacious building in a wide thoroughfare, around which were congregated many little groups of seamen of all nations. We entered the place at once, and soon reached a large bare room crowded with seamen. Here I was told to wait while Mr. Svensen went to seek the captain. While I stood bewildered by the bustle of the crowded place, I heard occasional hoarse demands for "Three A.B.'s an' one ordinary for Pernambuck!" "Cook an' stooard for Kingston, Jamaica!" "All the croo of the *Star o' Peace*!" and similar calls, each followed by a general rush towards the speaker, accompanied by a rustling of discharges in the air as their owners sought to attract attention.

After about an hour's wait I heard the cry of "Croo of the *Arabella* here!" which was followed by the usual rush; but, to the disappointment of the watchers, the whole of the crew had been already selected. One by one they squeezed through the crowd into an office beyond, whither I managed to follow. I was too much amazed at the hurly-burly to notice who were to be my future shipmates, but I paid a sort of awe-struck attention to the reading of the "articles." Doubtless much excuse must be made for the officials, who have to gabble the same rigmarole over so many times each working day; but I certainly think some attempt might always be made that the essential parts of the agreement should be clear to men who are about to bind themselves for a long period to abide by it. In our case, the only words clearly accented, heard, and understood by all, were the last three, "no spirits allowed." Each man then signed the articles, or made his mark, ending with myself, when I found I was entitled to receive five shillings per month, without any half-pay or advance. Each of the men received a month's advance, in the form of a promissory-note, payable three days after the ship left the Downs, "providing the said seaman sails in the said ship." None of them lost any time in getting away to seek some accommodating (?) shark to cash their notes at an average discount of about forty per cent., most of the proceeds being payable in kind.

This important preliminary over, I was free till next morning, when all hands were ordered on board by ten o'clock. Not feeling at all desirous of returning to the ship, yet being penniless, and in a strange part of London, I made my way westward to the Strand, where I soon managed to pick up enough for a meal. I spent the night in Hyde Park in a snug corner, unknown to the police, that had often served me as a refuge before. At daybreak I started East, arriving on board at about half-past nine very tired and hungry. The mate eyed me suspiciously, saying something which I guessed to be uncomplimentary, although I was still unable to understand a word. But, as before, he did not interfere with me, or set me any task.

The litter of cases, bales, etc., about the deck was fast disappearing under the strenuous exertions of the stevedores and dock-wallopers, while the raffle of gear aloft was reduced to as near an approach to orderly arrangement as it could ever be expected to assume. Presently a grimy little paddle-steamer came alongside, through the clustering swarm of barges, and was made fast ahead and astern. An individual with a stentorian voice, a pilot suit, mangy fur cap, and brick-red face mounted the forecastle, bellowing out orders apparently addressed to no one in particular. Their effect was at once evident, however, for we began to move deliberately away from the wharf, splitting the crowd of barges asunder amid the sulphurous remarks of their attendants. Once out into the comparatively

clear centre of the dock, we made good progress until the last lock was reached; but there we came to a full stop. As yet none of the crew had arrived, the vessel being handled by a shore-gang so far. After about a quarter of an hour's delay, during which the captain and pilot exhausted their vocabulary in abuse of the laggards, the latter hove in sight, convoyed by a motley crowd of tailor's "runners," boarding-masters, and frowsy looking women.

They made a funny little group. The sailors were in that happy state when nothing matters – least of all the discounter of an advance-note; hence the bodyguard of interested watchers, who would leave no stone unturned to see that their debtors went in the ship, although being under the vigilant eyes of the police, they dared not resort to violent means. The ladies, possessing but a fast-fading interest in outward bounders, were probably in evidence more from slackness of business than any more sentimental cause. But having cajoled or coerced Jack to the pierhead, he seemed unpersuadable to the final step of getting aboard. Again and again a sailor would break loose and canter waveringly shoreward, only to be at once surrounded by his escort and hurriedly hauled back again. At last, exasperated beyond endurance by the repetition of these aimless antics, the skipper sprang ashore followed by the pilot. Bursting in upon the squabbling crowd, they seized upon a couple of the maudlin mariners, hurling them on board as if they had been made of rubber. With like vigour the rest were embarked, their "dunnage" flung after them; the warps were immediately let go, and the ship began to move ahead.

Outside the dock-gate a larger tug was waiting in readiness to hook on as soon as we emerged, and tow us down the river. With a final shove, accompanied by a stifling belch of greasy smoke, our sooty satellite shook herself free of us, retreating hastily within the basin again, while, obedient to the increasing strain on our hawser ahead, we passed rapidly out into the crowded stream.

During the uneventful trip the shore-gang, under the direction of Mr. Svensen and the second mate (who, being also the carpenter, was always known as "Chips"), worked indefatigably to get the decks clear for sea – lashing spars, water-casks, boats, etc. But their efforts were greatly hindered by the crew, who, not being sufficiently drunk to lie still in the forecastle, persisted in tumbling continually about the decks, offering assistance while getting in everybody's way. In vain were they repeatedly conducted to their doghole; no sooner were they left than they were out again, until the hard-working "lumpers" were ready to jump on them with rage.

Meanwhile I grew so weary of standing about that I was quite grateful when Chips ordered me to fetch him a marlinespike. What he wanted I had not the slightest idea; but, unwilling to confess such ignorance, I ran forward and asked a labourer who was stowing the cable. He told me that it was a pointed bar of iron with a hole at one end for a lanyard to hang it round the neck by, adding that I should find some in the fo'lk'sle, "right forrard in the eyes of her." Away I went into the thick darkness of the men's dirty cave, groping my way into its innermost recesses among the bags, chests, and beds with which the deck was bestrewn. Reaching the farthest corner, I felt a great bundle of something upon what I took for a shelf, which barred my further search. Tugging heartily at it to get it out of my way, I suddenly felt it move! I did not wait to investigate, but floundered back on deck again almost witless from fright. Breathlessly I reported to Chips my discovery, which brought him quickly to the spot with a light. Sure enough there was a sea-bag, about six feet long, stuffed full – the draw-string tightly closing the mouth. As soon as it was touched, there was a movement within. Its contents were evidently alive. Chips and his assistant promptly muzzled the bag, dragging it out on deck, and, casting the cord adrift, turned it bottom upwards. Out there tumbled, head foremost, a lanky nigger-lad, who had been missing since the previous morning and given up as having deserted. On being questioned as to the meaning of this freak, he humbly explained that, despairing of ever getting warm again, he had put on his entire wardrobe, lain down in his bunk, and crept into his bag, managing somehow to draw the string tight over his head; that he had been there ever since, and was likely to have died there, since he could not get his arms up again to let himself out. He was

dismissed to work with a grim promise of being warmed in an altogether different fashion if he was again guilty of skulking.

Upon arrival at Gravesend we anchored; the tremendous racket made by the cable rushing over the windlass giving me a great fright. I thought the bottom of the ship had fallen out. The tug departed for a berth close at hand, the pilot and shore-gang leaving us in a wherry. I looked longingly after them as they went, for I felt strangely that the last link connecting me with England was now broken, and, although I had not a single soul ashore to regret me, or one corner that I could think of as home, there was sufficient sadness in the thought of leaving the land of my birth to bring to my eyes a few unaccustomed tears.

Fortunately the cook, a worn-out seaman, whom, in common with most vessels of that class, we carried for the double duty of cook and steward, was now sober enough to get supper ready. In the emphatic sea-phrase, he "Couldn't boil salt water without burning it;" but, as nobody expected anything different, that passed without comment. My regular duties now began: my uncle, the captain, giving me my first lesson in laying the table sea-fashion, showing me where to find the gear, and so on. The curious atmospheric compound below was appreciably improved, but still there was a prismatic halo round the swinging lamp. The skipper and his two officers took no notice of it, seeming quite at their ease as they silently ate their humble meal, though I got a racking headache. Supper over, I was ordered to "Clear away the wreck," and get my own meal in the pantry: a sort of little-ease in a corner of the cuddy, wherein a man might successfully block all the crockery from falling out by inserting his body in its midst. Hungry as I was, I could not eat there, but stealthily seized the opportunity, as soon as the skipper had retired to his state-room, to flee forrard to the galley with the cook. His domain consisted of an erection about six feet square, with sliding doors on either side, which was lashed firmly down to ring-bolts in the deck. A coal-locker ran across it at the back, its lid forming a seat. Between it and the stove there was just room to turn, while most of the cooking utensils – no great store – had permanent positions on the range.

Here, by the dim flicker of an antique contrivance of a lamp like a handleless teapot – the wick sticking out of the spout and giving almost as much smoke as flame, – I spent quite a pleasant hour with the ancient mariner who ruled there, eating a hearty supper of biscuit and tea. He was not in the best of spirits, for the drink was dying out of him; but his garrulous, inconsequent talk amused me mightily. At last, feeling that I might be wanted, I returned to the cabin, where I found the captain and Chips making melody with their snores; Mr. Svensen being on deck keeping watch, for which none of the crew were yet available. And, finding no other corner wherein I might creep, I made just such a lair as a dog might, in the hutch that held my scanty stock of clothing, and, crawling into it, was soon in the land of perfect peace.

CHAPTER II.
OUTWARD-BOUND

Something banging at the bulkhead close to my ear aroused me from a deep sleep in great alarm. The hole in which I lay was so pitchy dark that, even when I realised where I was, which took some little time, I fumbled fruitlessly about for several minutes before I finally extricated myself. When at last I stood upright on the cuddy-deck, I saw the captain seated at the table writing. He looked up and growled, "Now then, look lively! Didn't you hear, 'Man the windlass'?" Alas! I knew no more what he meant than as if he had spoken in Hebrew; but I gathered somehow that I ought to be on deck. Up I scrambled into a bitter, snow-laden north-east wind and darkness that, but for the strange sheen of the falling flakes, was almost Egyptian. Shivering as much with queer apprehensions as with cold, I hurried forrard, where I found the mate and Chips hard at work getting the hands out of the fo'lk'sle, and up on top of it, to where the two gaunt levers of the windlass made a blacker streak in the prevailing darkness. Tumbling up against Jem, the darky, he said, as well as his chattering teeth would allow, "Specs yo gotter haul back chain longer me, boy; yars a hook fer yer," – putting into my hand, as he spoke, a long iron hook with a cross-handle. Then, when at last the half-dead sailors began to work the levers, and the great clumsy windlass revolved, Jem and I hooked on to the massive links of the cable, dragging it away from the barrel and ranging it in long flakes beside the fore-hatch. Every few fathoms, when the chain had worked its way right across the barrel, and the turns were beginning to jam one another up against the bitt, Jem called out, "Fleet, oh!" Then a couple of men descended from Mount Misery and hooked a mighty iron claw, which was secured by a stout chain to the bitt, on to the cable before the windlass. This held the whole weight while the turns of chain were loosed and laboriously lifted back to the other end of the windlass-barrel again. When thick with mud, so that each link was more like a badly made raw brick than aught else, this primitive performance was an uncouth job, and I could imagine many pleasanter occupations.

Two o'clock on a winter's morning, struggling with mud-besmeared masses of iron, upon a footing so greasy that standing was a feat, hungry and sleepy withal, there was little romance about this business. At last the mate bawled, "She's short, sir!" and told the men to "'Vast heavin'." Out of the gloom around the tug-boat emerged, coming close alongside to receive her end of the big rope by which she was to drag us out to sea. No sooner was it fast than a strange voice aft – the Channel pilot's – roared out, "Heave right up, sir!" "Aye, aye, sir!" answered the mate. "Heave 'way, boys!" The clatter of the pawls recommenced, continuing until the anchor was as high as it would come. The subsequent "catting" and "fishing" of the big "mud-hook" was all a confused dream to me. All I knew was that I had to sit down and pull at a rope which was wound round a capstan by the steady tramp of the crew, of whom one would occasionally growl at me to mind my "surge," and I would feel a jerk at my rope that shook me up dreadfully. It seemed an interminable job; but, like everything else, came to an end at last. The mate now walked aft, ordering Jem and my small self to coil ropes up and clear away generally. But he called out almost immediately, "All hands lay aft to muster!" The whole crowd slouched aft, grouping themselves at the break of the poop, where a sort of elevated deck began just before the mizzenmast. Each individual's name was now read out and answered to as announced. I found that there were six able seamen, and the nigger-boy, Jem, "foremast hands." The captain, mate, Chips, cook, and myself formed the "afterguard."

The "crowd" were now divided into watches, the mate having first pick for the port watch, and getting Jem over. This ceremony concluded, the word was passed to "Pump ship." Several grumbling comments were made on the "one-arm sailor" pumps: a mean, clumsy contrivance, only fit for the smallest vessels, requiring twice the exertion for half the result obtainable from any of the late patents. But the amazement and disgust of the fellows can hardly be imagined when, after half an hour's

vigorous "Clankety, clankety, clankety, bang!" – three strokes and a pause as the fashion is – there was no sign of a "suck." A burly Yorkshireman, leaning up against the brake to mop his brow, said, "Well, boys, if this – old scow ain't just sprung a leak, or bin left fur 'bout a month thout pumpin', we're in for a – fine thing ov it." There was hardly any intelligible response, they all seemed choking with rage and curses. However, they sucked her out, and then the big man asked Chips quietly whether that "spell" was usual. Chips assured him that she had not been baled out for a long time, and that she would certainly "take up" in a day or two. Oil on the troubled waters, but very risky, for he had only just joined himself; nor did he know anything of the old tub's previous record.

Meanwhile the cook, or "doctor," as his sea-sobriquet is, had been busy making coffee. Unlike any beverage called by that name ashore, even the funny mixture sold at a halfpenny a cup at street corners being quite luxurious in comparison with it, yet it was a godsend – boiling hot, with plenty of sugar in it – to those poor wretches with the quenchless thirst of many day's indulgence in the vilest liquor making their throats like furred old drain-pipes. It calmed the rising storm, besides doing them a vast amount of physical good. I was at once busy supplying the wants of the officers, to whom the refreshment was heartily welcome. All the time, we were ploughing steadily along behind the strenuous tug at a greater rate than ever I saw the old barky go afterwards. (I have omitted to mention that we were bound for Demerara with a general cargo, but our subsequent destination was not settled yet.) All hands were allowed a pretty long spell of rest, with the exception of the man at the wheel, and one on the look-out, because, until we were well out, sail would have been more hindrance than help. The wind increased as we got farther down, until, as we passed out of the river, quite a sea was rising, to which the old hooker began to bob and curtsey like a country girl looking for a situation. The relentless tug, however, tore her through the fast-rising waves, making them break over the bows in heavy spray. This was uncomfortable, but the motion was far worse. All the horrors of sea-sickness came suddenly upon me, and, like an ailing animal, I crept into a corner on the main-hatch under the long-boat, wishing for oblivion. Sea-sickness is a theme for jesting, no doubt, but those who have suffered from it much, know how little room there is for laughter at such suffering – suffering too for which, at the time, there seems no hope of alleviation except the impossible one of the motion ceasing.

From that morning for several days I remained in this miserable condition, not caring a pin's point whether I lived or died, nor, with the sole exception of the negro, Jem, did any one else on board seem to give me one moment's thought. Not that I would lightly accuse them of cruelty or callous indifference to suffering; but, being all fully occupied with their work, they had little leisure to attend to a sea-sick urchin that was of small use at his best. However, poor black Jem never forgot me, and, although he had nothing likely to tempt my appetite, he always brought his scanty meals to where I lay helpless under the long-boat, trying in various quaint ways to coax me into a returning interest in life. Fortunately for me, the wind held in a quarter that enabled the ship to get out of the Channel fairly soon, considering her limitations, and, once across the dreaded stretch of the Bay of Biscay, she speedily ran into fine weather and smoother seas.

When I did eventually find my sea-legs, and resumed my duties in the cabin, I was received with no good grace by my uncle or the doctor. The latter had, indeed, special cause to feel himself aggrieved, since he had borne the burden of double duty during my illness: a hardship which he was a long time in forgetting. But she was an unhappy ship. The skipper held aloof from everybody, hardly holding converse with the mate. He even kept the ship's reckoning alone, not accepting the mate's assistance in taking the sun for the longitude in the morning, but doing it all himself after a fashion of his own, so that the chief officer was as ignorant of the vessel's true position as I was. Then the food, both forrard and aft, was, in addition to being strictly on the abominable official scale which is a disgrace to a civilised country, of so unspeakably vile a quality that it was hardly fit to give to well-reared pigs. I have often seen the men break up a couple of biscuits into a pot of coffee for their breakfast, and, after letting it stand a minute or two, skim off the accumulated scum of vermin from the top – maggots, weevils, etc. – to the extent of a couple of table-spoonfuls, before they could

shovel the mess into their craving stomachs. Enough, however, for the present on the food-question, which, being one of the prime factors in a sailor's life, must continually be cropping up.

The bleak, biting edge of the winter weather was now gone, the steady north-easterly breeze blew mild and kindly, while from an almost cloudless heaven the great sun beamed benignantly – his rays not yet so fierce as to cause any discomfort. My sensations on first discovering that no land was visible, that we seemed the solitary centre of an immense blue circle, whose sharply defined circumference was exactly joined to the vast azure dome overhead, were those of utter loneliness and terror. For I knew nothing of the ways of navigators across this pathless plain, nor realized any of the verities of the subject set forth in the few books I had read. School learning I had none. Had there been any one to whom I could have gone for information, without fearing a brutal repulse, I should doubtless have felt less miserable; but, as it was, use alone gradually reconciled me to the solemn silence of the illimitable desert around. At rare intervals vessels appeared, tiny flecks of white upon the mighty waste, which only served to emphasize its immensity as the solitary light of a taper does the darkness of some huge hall.

But the sea itself was full of interest. Of course I had little leisure; but what I had was spent mostly in hanging spell-bound over the side, gazing with ever-growing wonder and delight upon this marvellous world of abounding life. This early acquired habit never left me, for, many years afterwards, when second mate of one of our finest passenger clippers, I enjoyed nothing so much as to pass an hour of my watch below, seated far out ahead of the ship by the martingale, gazing down into the same beautiful sea.

There were no books on board or reading matter of any kind, except the necessary works on navigation on the captain's shelf; so it was just as well that I could take some interest in our surroundings, if I was not to die mentally as most of the sailors seemed to have done. As I got better acquainted with them, even daring to pay stolen visits to their darksome home in timorous defiance of the stern orders of my uncle, I found to my amazement, that they could tell me nothing of what I wanted to know. Their kindness often went the length of inventing fabulous replies to my eager questions, but they seemed totally ignorant of anything connected with the wonders of the ocean.

The days slipped rapidly away, until we entered the Sargasso Sea, that strange vortex in the middle of the Atlantic. It was on a Sunday morning, when, according to custom, no work was a-doing, except for the doctor and me. Even our duties were less exacting than usual; so that I was able to snatch many a short spell of gazing overside at the constantly increasing masses of Gulf-weed that, in all its delicate beauty of branch and bud, came brushing past our sides. That afternoon the sea, as far as eye could reach, bore no bad resemblance to a ripe hayfield, the weed covering the water in every direction, with hardly a patch of blue amid the prevailing yellow. Before the light trade-wind we were hardly able to make any headway through the investing vegetation, which overlaid the waves so heavily that the surface was smooth as a millpond. Through the bewildering mazes of that aquatic forest roved an innumerable multitude of fish of every shape, size, and hue, while the branches themselves swarmed with crustacea, so that a draw-bucket full of weed would have furnished quite a large-sized aquarium with a sufficiently varied population. I could have wished the day forty-eight hours long; but I was the only one on board that derived any pleasure from the snail-like progress we made. The captain's vexation showed itself in many ways, but mostly in inciting Chips to order various quite uncalled-for jobs of pulling and hauling, which provoked the watch so much that there was a continual rumble of bad language and growling. Even the twenty minutes' spell at the pumps, which, from its regularity every two hours, now passed almost unnoticed, was this afternoon the signal for a great deal of outspoken and unfavourable comment upon the characters of ship, owner, and captain. The latter gentleman paced his small domain with uncertain tread, as usual; but the glitter in his eye, and the set of his heavily bearded lips, showed how sorely he was tempted to retaliate. But he prudently forebore, well aware of his helplessness in case of an outbreak, as well as being forced to admit full justification for the bitter remarks that were so freely indulged in.

Indeed, it was a serious question how long the present peace would last. The rigging was dropping to pieces; so that a man never knew, when he went aloft, whether he would not come crashing down by the run, from the parting of a rotten footrope or a perished seizing. The sails were but rags, worn almost to the thinness of muslin, every flap threatening to strip them from the yards. There was no material for repairs, no new rope, canvas, or "seizing-stuff;" half a barrel of Stockholm tar, and a few pieces of old "junk" for sennit and spunyarn, representing all the boatswain's stores on board. In fact, the absence of all those necessaries, which are to be found on board the most poverty-stricken of ships, for their bare preservation in serviceable condition, was a never-failing theme of discussion in the fo'lk'sle. And one conclusion was invariably arrived at, albeit the avenues of talk by which it was reached were as tortuous and inconsequent as could well be. It was the grim one that the *Arabella* was never intended to return. This thought tinctured all the men's ideas, embittered their lives, and made the most ordinary everyday tasks seem a burden almost too grievous to be borne.

Had it not been for the overwhelming evidence that the condition of the afterguard was almost as miserable as their own, the abject humility of the mate, in spite of his really good seamanship, and the hail-fellow-well-met way in which Chips confessed his utter ignorance of all sailorizing whatever, I very much doubt whether there would not have been a mutiny before we were a fortnight out. But as the villainous food and incessant pumping were not aggravated by bullying and "working up," matters jolted along without any outbreak. Born as I was under an unlucky star, my insignificance nearly overthrew the peace that was so precariously kept. The deadly dulness of the cabin was so stifling, that I felt as if I should die there in the long, dreary evenings between supper and bunk. Nothing to read, nobody to speak to, nothing to do, and forbidden with threats to go forrard among the men – that I should transgress sooner or later was a certainty. I took to creeping forrard oftener and more openly, because no detection followed, until a sharp rope's-ending from my uncle brought me up "with a round turn," as the sailor says. By this time I had become rather a favourite forrard, as well as something of a toy, being very small for my age and precocious as might be expected from my antecedents. One man especially – Joe, the big Yorkshireman – became strongly attached to me, endeavouring to teach me thoroughly the rudiments of sailorizing. This was at considerable sacrifice of his own time, which, as he was an ardent model-maker, was sufficient proof of his liking for me.

Now I was almost destitute of clothing, and what little I did possess I was rapidly growing out of. So the next day after my disciplinary castigation, Joe walked aft in his watch below demanding audience of the skipper. There was an unpleasant scowl on the old man's face, as he came on deck to see the audacious man, that boded ill for the applicant in any case. But when Joe boldly tackled him for a bit of light canvas whereof he might make me a "Cunarder" (a sort of habergeon) and a pair of trousers, the skipper's face grew black with rage. The insult, all the grosser for its truth, was too obvious. When he found his tongue, he burst into furious abuse of Joe for daring to come aft on such an errand. Joe, being no lamb, replied with interest, to the delight of his fellows, who strolled aft as far as the mainmast to hear the fun. This unseemly wrangle, so subversive of all order or discipline, lasted for about ten minutes, during which time I stood shivering at the foot of the cabin ladder in dread of the sequel. Finally the old man, unable to endure any more, roared, "Get forrard or I'll shoot ye, ye d – d ugly thief of a sea-lawyer! I'll have ye by the heels yet, an' w'en I do ye'll think Jemmy Smallback's gruppin' ye!" With this parting shot he turned on his heel without waiting the retort discourteous that promptly followed, descending abruptly into the cabin with the ironical cheers of the delighted crew ringing unmelodiously in his ears.

Under such provocation it was little wonder that I paid for all. It must have been balm to my relative's wounded pride to rope's-end me; at any rate, he did so with a completeness that left nothing to be desired. And, in order to avenge himself fully, he closed our interview by kicking me forrard, daring me, at the same time, ever to defile his cabin again with my mischief-making presence under pain of neck-twisting.

Of course I was received in the fo'lk'sle with open arms. My reception went far to mollify my sore back, for the seclusion of the cabin had grown so hateful, that I would willingly have purchased my freedom from it with several such coltings as I had endured, not to speak of the honour of being welcomed as a sort of martyr. Before long I owned quite a respectable rig-out, made up, by the dexterity of Joe, from all sorts of odds and ends contributed by all hands at a tarpaulin muster. Now each man vied with the other in teaching me all they knew of their business, and I was such an apt pupil that, in a short time, they were able to boast that there was no knot or splice known to seafarers, that I was not capable of making in sailor fashion. Being no climbist, as might be expected from an urchin born and bred in London streets, getting used to the rigging was unpleasant at first; but that was mastered in its turn, until nothing remained unlearned but the helm. The one aim, apparently, of every man forrard was to so fit me for the work I might be called upon to do, as that no excuse might be found for cruelty of any sort. Whether I had the ability to meet his demands or not, it did not seem prudent for the old man to try his hand on me again in the colting line, and I went gaily enough on my progressive way.

CHAPTER III.
ARRIVAL AT DEMERARA

If all sea-voyages were like the usual passage to the West Indies, except for an occasional nasty spell of weather in the English Channel, the sailor's life would be a very easy one. Day succeeds day under the same limpid blue sky fringed at the horizon with a few tufts of woolly cumuli. Placid as a sheltered lake, every wavelet melting into its fellow like a caress, the sapphire sea greets the gazer every morning like a glad smile of unfathomable love. Beautiful beyond description is the tender tropical sea, and hard indeed it is to realize that this same delightsome expanse of inexpressible loveliness can ever become the unappeasable destroyer, before whose wrath even the deep-rooted islands seem to shake.

The nights rival the days. During the absence of the moon the blue-black vault appears like a robe of imperial purple, besprent with innumerable diamonds of a lustre unknown to earth's feeble gems. So brilliant is the radiance of the heavenly host that even the unassisted eye can detect the disc of Venus or Jupiter, while the twin streams of the Galaxy literally glow with diffused light, suggesting unutterable glories in their unthinkable depths. And up from the horizon towards the zenith, with clear yet indefinite outline, as of the uplifted finger of God, rises the mysterious conical flame-shadow of the Zodiacal Light. Under such a sky the sea seems to emulate the starry vault above, for in its darkling depths there is a marvellous display of gleaming coruscations. In the foam churned up by the vessel's bows they sparkle and glitter incessantly, while in her wake, where the liquid furrow still eddies and whirls from the passing of the keel, there are a myriad dancing lights of every size and degree of brilliancy. Like a bevy of will-o'-the-wisps they sport and whirl, glow and fade – never still, never alike, yet always lovely.

But when the full-orbed moon in a molten glow of purest silver, before which the eye shrinks almost with pain, traverses the purple concave as a conquering queen escorted by her adoring subjects, the night becomes a sweeter, softer day, in which men may sit at ease reading or working as fancy dictates. They dare not sleep in that white glare, lest with distorted features and sightless eyeballs, they vainly regret their careless disregard of the pale beam's power. And as the stately satellite settles slowly horizonwards, or ascends majestically towards the zenith, how dazzling the mile-wide pathway of shimmering radiance she sheds along the face of the deep! The whalers, with more poetic feeling than one would expect, call it the "moon-glade," as though she must needs spread a savannah of splendour for her solemn progress over the waste of ocean.

Here, perhaps, I should pause to disarm criticism, if possible. Such thoughts as I have feebly tried to express were undoubtedly mine in those youthful days, in spite of squalid surroundings and brutal upbringings. And if I could fairly reproduce the multitude of fancies which throng my memory as being the daily attendants of my boyish daydreams, I should fear no unfavourable reception of such a book as they would make.

But to our voyage. Coming on deck one morning soon after daylight, I was startled to notice that the bright blue of the sea was gone. In its place a turbid leaden flood without a sparkling wavelet extended all around. I asked the doctor what this strange change meant. "Gettin' near land, I s'pose!" was his gruff reply. Nor did I get any other explanation from the men, for none of them knew that we were in fresh water, which, rushing down to the sea from many mighty rivers, overlaid the heavier salt flood for a great distance from land. We did not sight the lightship *Demerara* until next day at noon, although we were going at fully five knots an hour. Behind it the low palm-fringed coast lay like a sullen black cloud-bank just appearing above the horizon, for in truth it was almost level with the sea. Thicker and dirtier grew the water, until, as we passed the light-vessel, we seemed to be sailing in a sea of mud. Between her and the shore we anchored for the night and to await the coming of the

pilot; thus closing our outward passage, which might have been as successfully performed in an open boat, so steadily fine had we found the weather.

What a strange sensation is that of first inhaling the breeze from a foreign shore! I stood on the forecastle that evening, hardly able to realize that we had crossed the Atlantic, full of queer feelings as the heavy sweet scent of the tropical forest came floating languidly off from that dim, dark line of land. There was a continual chorus of insects, like a myriad crickets chirping, the sharp, crisp notes curiously undertoned by the deep bass of the sleepy line of surf upon the beach. But this persistent music, by its unvarying monotony, soon became inaudible, or acted as a lullaby to which we all succumbed except the anchor-watch.

Shortly after daylight a large canoe came alongside, manned by negroes, bearing a pompous-looking negro pilot in what he, no doubt, took to be a very swell costume of faded serge, surmounted by a huge straw hat. He mounted the side by the man-ropes, with the air of a conqueror. As he stepped over the rail with a ludicrous assumption of importance, he said, patronizingly, "Good mawnin', cap'n, hope you'se berry well, sah?" "Mornin', pilot, same t' you," curtly answered the old man; and, in almost the same breath, "Dy'e think there's water 'nough on the bar frus? We're drawin' fourteen feet aft." "Neb' mine 'bout dat, cap'n; dat'll be all right. I'se bettin' big money dis yah packet gwine beat 'nuff watah 'head ob her ter float in er linerbattle ship. Gorbress my sole, ef I ebber see sich er front eend on er craf' in my days. Wasser name? de *Ark* doan' it? ha! ha! ha!" – and he threw back his head, laughing so capaciously that the broad, glistening range of his teeth illuminated his coal-black visage like a shutter flung suddenly open to the sun. But the old man looked sour. Such jeering at his command by a nigger was in some sort a reflection on himself, and, thenceforward, he held no more converse with our sable guide than was necessary for the working of the ship.

We were soon under way, though poor Jem and myself got in a disgusting condition of mud by the time the anchor was up. The fo'lk'sle, too, from the fact of the cable running through it, was like a neglected sewer, the blocks of foul-smelling mud dropping continually from the links as they came in through the hawsepipes. All sail was loosed previously, but only the jib was set until the anchor was out of the ground, when, humoured by the helm, she turned kindly off the wind, gathering way from its pressure on her broad stern, while the "mudhook" was hove right up. Then everything was set that would draw, the wind being fair and strong; but, in spite of the favourable conditions, our progress against the turbulent ebb of the great river was so slow that we were the best part of the day going the few miles that lay between the roadstead and the moorings.

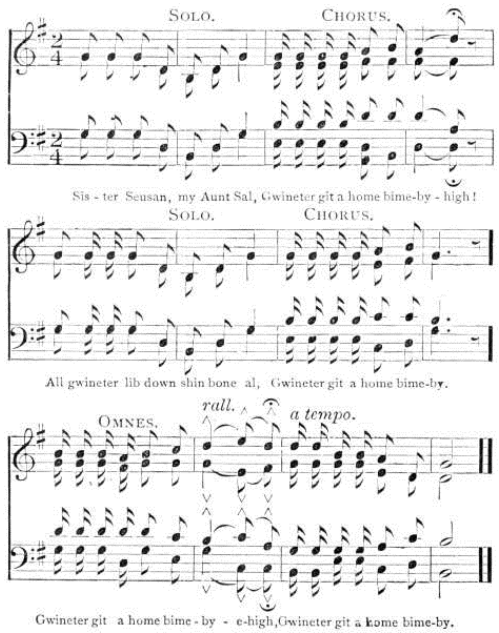
But at last we reached the group of vessels which lay off the business part of the town. With great skill our pilot tried a "flying moor," letting our anchor go while we were forging ahead at a good rate, then immediately clewing up all sail. By the time our way was exhausted, about ninety fathoms had been paid out on the first anchor. The second was then let go, its cable being veered away as the first one was hove in, until an equal amount was out on each; both were then hove in till the moorings were taut, and the vessel swung almost on a pivot. This is a ticklish evolution to perform successfully in a crowded anchorage; but, in our case, the result was entirely satisfactory, saving much labour.

The sails being furled and decks cleared up, work ceased for the day. The curious appearance of the wide verandahed houses embowered in strange-looking trees, the assortment of vessels of all rigs – from the smart Yankee schooner to the stately iron coolie-ship from Calcutta – the muddy rushing river, all claimed attention, but for one attraction that outweighed them all. Waiting alongside were two or three bumboats well stocked with fruit, soft-tack, eggs, and such curios as a sailor might be supposed to covet. I had seen such fruit before, on the other side of plate-glass windows in the West End of London, or in the avenue at Covent Garden, but never in such generous profusion as now. One boat especially was laden to the gunwale with giant bunches of crimson bananas, each fruit treble the size of ordinary ones; baskets of golden mangoes, green limes, luscious-looking oranges flecked with green, and clusters of immature cocoa-nuts: the kind that only contain sweet juice and delicate jelly within a soft shell covered by husk as easy to cut as a turnip. People accustomed to

regular meals of decent food cannot imagine how the sight of these dainties affected our ill-used stomachs. Happily there was little delay in choosing our purveyor, who promptly hoisted great part of his stock on deck for us to choose from. In virtue of being the only person in the fo'lk'sle who could write, I was appointed book-keeper, my remuneration being a fair proportion of the good things without payment. In reply to eager inquiries, the bumboatman declared that he had no rum, saying that he very well understood the unwritten law prohibiting the supply of intoxicants by the bumboats, and assuring the men that if he were detected breaking it, he would forfeit his license as well as all payment for goods he had supplied on credit.

We were a happy company that evening. A plentiful meal after such long abstinence put every one in good spirits, although there was much wishing for the cup that both cheers and inebriates. In spite of this want, joviality was the order of the night. Song and dance went merrily round, at which the two darkey boat-boys, hired by the skipper to take him backwards and forwards to the shore, assisted with great glee. Their fun was spontaneous and side-splitting, seeming superior to all external influences – a well of continual merriment bubbling up. Song, quip, and practical joke followed one another incessantly, with all the thoughtless *abandon* of happy children, and mirthful enjoyment that might have thawed an anchorite. All the pent-up laughter of the passage burst out that evening, the first really jolly one I had ever spent.

At daylight all hands were busy rigging cargogear, for our lading was long overdue. The discharging-gang of negroes were early on board, awaiting only our preparations to begin their work. They were akin to the boat-boys in their behaviour. Poor, even to the most utter raggedness of the sacking most of them were covered with – hunger-bitten, for all the provision brought by the majority was a tiny loaf, and about two ounces of sugar each – they were yet full to the lips with sheer animal delight of living. Some, the haughty aristocrats of the party, proudly displayed fragments of salt fish or rusty-looking salt pork, flanked by a green plantain, a coco, or chunk of wooden-looking yam; but though these favoured ones were evidently stuck up, their poorer brethren showed no envy. Their pay was the equivalent of one shilling per day, which, as the price of food was high, except for a very few local products, must have been all too little to keep hunger at bay. Yet, when they got to work, how they did go at it! They seemed to revel in the labour, although the incessant singing they kept up ought to have taken most of their breath. Streaming with sweat, throwing their bodies about in sheer wantonness of exuberant strength as they hoisted the stuff out of the hold, they sometimes grew so excited by the improvisations of the "chantey man," who sat on the corner of the hatch solely employed in leading the singing, that often, while for a minute awaiting the next hoist, they would fling themselves into fantastic contortions, keeping time to the music. There was doubtless great waste of energy; but there was no slackness of work or need of a driver. Here is just one specimen of their songs; but no pen could do justice to the vigour, the intonation and the *abandon* of the delivery thereof.



Sis-ter Seusan, my Aunt Sal, Gwineter git a home bime-by-high!
All gwineter lib down shin bone al, Gwineter git a home bime-by.
Gwineter git a home bime-by-e-high, Gwineter git a home bime-by.

The rushing, muddy stream literally swarmed with ground-sharks, who sometimes came to the surface with a rush, looking terribly dangerous. Yet the negroes took but little heed of them, merely splashing a bit before diving if they had occasion to go down and clear some vessel's moorings. Sharks and cat-fish were the only fish to be seen: neither of them available for eating. Strange to say, the great heat troubled me very little. Perhaps because, having for so long regarded cold as one of the chief miseries of my life, the steady searching warmth by night and day was grateful to my puny body. At any rate, but that the bloodthirsty mosquitoes and sandflies tormented me cruelly, as they did all hands, the tropical climate suited me very well. It may have been the healthy season too, for, as far as I know, there was no illness on board any of the ships. All our crew were in robust health, and putting on flesh daily in consequence of the liberal diet.

I wanted much to go ashore, but dared not ask leave; but, to my astonishment, on Sunday afternoon the mate told me to get ready and come ashore with him. Glad as I was of the chance to see a little of this strange land, I felt small gratification at the prospect of being his companion; I would rather a thousand times have gone with Joe. However, it being Hobson's choice as well as dangerous to refuse, I rigged myself up as best I could (a queer figure I made too), got into the boat with my inviter, and away we went. Landing at one of the "sterlings," as the wharves are locally named, we strolled up into the main street in silence. It was a wide avenue with quite a river running down the centre, and doubtless on week-days would have been very lively. But at this time it was deserted, except by a few stray dogs and sleeping negroes. We trudged along without a word, till suddenly Mr. Svensen hauled up at a grog-shop, the bar of which was crowded with sea-farers. Pressing through the throng to the bar he called for some drink, and, meeting a couple of his countrymen, entered at once into an animated conversation with them in Norwegian. For over an hour I waited impatiently, the air of the place being stifling and the babel of tongues deafening. At last, in desperation, I crept in behind him and attracted his attention. He turned sharply upon me, saying, "Vell, 'n vat *jou* vant?" "Please, sir," I humbly replied, "may I go an' have a look round?" "Oh, co to hell ef jou lige, I ton'd care. Only jou ked bag to der poad pefoar sigs o'clog, or I be tamt ef I tond trown jou coin' off – see!" "Thank you, sir," I said gratefully, disappearing promptly before he had time to change his mind.

What an afternoon I had, to be sure. I wandered right out of the town through tangled paths crowded on either side by the loveliest flowers growing wild I had ever dreamed of. I was like a boy in a dream now, except for that haunting reality "sigs o'clog." And, to crown my pleasures, when I had strayed as far as I dared, I came suddenly upon a pretty villa in an open glade, the house itself being embowered in the most gorgeous blossoms. I went up to the back of the premises to beg a drink of water, which an amiable negress gave me with a beaming smile, squeezing into it a fresh-fallen lime with a large spoonful of white sugar. While I drank, a dear little white boy about five years old came running round the corner. When he saw me he stood for a moment as if petrified with astonishment; then, recovering his wits, darted back again. A kindly-faced man in white, with a big brown beard, then appeared, leading the little one. After a few inquiries he invited me into the house to tea, treating me with so much kindness that, between his attentions and those of his beautiful, weary-looking wife, I was several times upon the point of bursting into tears. She plied me with questions, soon getting all my sorrowful little life-story out of me; and more than once I saw her furtively wipe away a tear. The little son sat on my knee, great friends with me at once; and what with the good fare, the pleasant talk, and the comfort of it all, I forgot everything else in the world for a time. Suddenly I caught sight of the clock. It was a quarter to six. I must have looked terrified, for my host, Mr. Mackenzie, asked me with much solicitude whether I felt suddenly ill. As soon as he heard the cause of my alarm he left the house, returning to the front in a minute or two with a beautiful mule and a smart trap. I took a hurried leave of my kind hostess and her child, promising to come again if I could; and presently found myself bowling along a level road at a great rate behind the swift hybrid, who seemed to glide rather than trot. Arriving at the boat, nearly half an hour late, we found the mate not yet there, one of the boat-boys volunteering the information that he was well drunk up at the rum-mill. "That being so," said Mr. Mackenzie, "I will see you on board." So we shoved off for the ship. During our short transit I told my new friend how matters stood between my uncle and myself, begging him not to inadvertently make matters worse for me. He promised to be discreet. We reached the ship and climbed on board. I fled forrard on the instant, while he interviewed the old man. Whatever passed between them in their few minutes' talk, I don't know; I heard no more of the affair. But I was never again allowed on shore while I belonged to the *Arabella*. The mate came on board quietly and turned in, no word reaching us forrard of any trouble about his little flutter.

CHAPTER IV.
THE MUTINY AND AFTER

It must be confessed that during our stay in Demerara the fellows had a pretty good time of it. Since there were no stores on board of rope, paint, or canvas, the work was mainly confined to washing decks or scrubbing paintwork, a good deal of time also being wasted making sennit, *i. e.* plaiting rope-yarns for chafing-gear. What sailorizing was undertaken was in the nature of kill-time, and well understood as such by the men. Nevertheless they were by no means pleased with their easy times, for they had not yet been able to get any drink; their displeasure being heightened by the knowledge that the mate had been ashore and got a skinful. Any one versed in the ways of seamen should have known that mischief was brewing, even though no definite plan of action had yet been discussed. It only wanted a bottle or two of rum to fire the magazine.

At last liberty day drew nigh. The cargo was all out, the ballast all in, no cargo being obtainable for the crazy old *Arabella* in Demerara. I do not now even know whether it be a legal enactment that seamen shall be allowed twenty-four hours' freedom in foreign ports, with some portion of the wages due to them to spend, but if not, the custom is so well established that it has all the force of law. The men were like schoolboys at breaking-up time, half crazy with delight at the thought of the joys (?) that awaited them ashore. They received but a few shillings each, much to their disgust, because there was as yet little wages due to them, and no amount of begging or bullying could avail to get them any more. The mate's watch went first, among them my stout friend Joe, whom I tearfully begged not to get drunk and kick up a row, for my sake. Looking back I wonder at my temerity, for it must have been like getting between a tiger and a shin-bone; but he took it very meekly, and actually promised that he would come aboard sober. During their absence the ship was strangely quiet, very little work of any kind was done, and the waiting watch were as sulky as bears. Next morning about eight o'clock the revellers returned, all except Joe in a bedraggled, maudlin condition that told eloquently of their enjoyment. Had it not been for Joe they would have all been in the lock-up, or "chokey" as sailors invariably call it; but he had worked like a Trojan to keep them together and out of harm as much as possible. He had quite a triumphant air of unwonted virtue as I whispered my delight at seeing him again, and *sober*.

Then the starboard watch, with the doctor, took their innings, with strict injunctions not to be late the next morning, as we were going to unmoor and drop down stream a little in readiness for sailing. The day passed like the previous one, black Jem doing the doctor's work as well as he could with such assistance as I could give. The next morning at daylight preparations were made for unmooring, and at eight o'clock a pilot came on board, a smart-looking, sharp-featured Yankee who looked around the old hooker with undisguised contempt. Nine, ten o'clock, and no sign of the liberty men. The old man went ashore on business, leaving full instructions with the mate about unmooring, which he expected to be carried on in his absence. He had barely been gone half an hour when the starboard watch returned; but it was evident at once that they had their own views upon the unmooring question, which by no means coincided with the skipper's. They were all half-drunk and quarrelsome, especially the doctor, who strutted about more like a bloodthirsty pirate than an elderly spoiler of ships' provisions. Unfortunately, too, each man had brought with him a plentiful supply of rum, which they at once began to share with the port watch, all except Joe, who would have none of it. They even invited Mr. Svensen and Chips to partake, meeting their courteous refusal with quite gratuitous displays of bad language and ill-temper.

At last the mate, mindful of the wigging he might certainly expect on the skipper's return if no work was afoot, ventured to give the order, "Man the windlass!" the pilot taking up his post on the forecastle. For all answer there came a howl of derisive laughter from the den, where all hands, with

one exception, were busy "freshening the nip." Mr. Svensen wisely took no notice; but, in a cajoling tone, said, "Now den poys, gum along, mage a sdart; ids kedding lade, ju dond vant ter ked me indo a row, do jer?" Forth strode the truculent doctor, an uncanny figure, all asway with drunken rage. "Looky hear, yew square-headed son of a gun, yew ain't agoin' ter horder me about any more, so I tell yer! I ain't a goin' ter do another stroke abord the rotten barge-built old bathin' masheen, so there!" (I suppress the every-other-word profanity throughout). During the delivery of this speech he was wildly gesticulating and spluttering right up against the mate's breast, shaking his withered fists in the big man's face, and otherwise behaving like a very maniac. The rest of them gathered around, adding to the clamour; but the burden of all was the same, "No more work, not another hand's-turn aboard this" (collection of all the abusive sea-epithets known) "old lobster-pot." Joe, meanwhile, was calmly doing some trifling job aft, by the break of the poop on the starboard side. To him sauntered an Irishman, hitherto one of his best friends, now laboriously polite and anxious to know whether he intended being a sneak, a white-livered et-cetera and so forth. For all reply, Joe turned his back on him. I was cleaning knives on the same side forrard by the galley door, but not making much progress on account of so many distracting episodes taking place. The babel of abuse around the unfortunate mate was going strong all the time. A thrill of terror went through me as I saw the Irishman suddenly lift his hand and strike Joe on the back of the neck. He turned like a flash, shooting his right fist into Patsy's face, with a crash that laid him out, sounding horrible to me. Without a word Joe turned again to resume his work. Patsy gathered himself slowly up and staggered forward, bleeding profusely, and muttering disjointed blasphemy as he came. He passed me, going into the fo'lk'sle; but my attention was suddenly attracted by a yell of laughter from the other side of the deck. Peeping round the galley, I saw with amazement that the drunken devils had actually triced the poor mate up spread-eagle fashion in the main rigging, and were jeering him to their hearts' content. Then they made a rush for the cabin. Chips was nowhere to be seen. Presently they returned, bringing the ensign, which they proceeded to hoist in the rigging, Union down, a sea signal of the most urgent importance, denoting anything dreadful from fire to mutiny.

A step beside me made me turn, startled, to see who it was, and I just caught sight of the grim blood-besmeared visage of Patsy, who was stowing the long cabin carving-knife in the waistband of his pants. While I stared at him, breathlessly wondering what his little game might be, he broke suddenly into a run aft to where Joe still pursued his peaceful task, all undisturbed by the riot around. "Look out, Joe," I screamed, "he's got the carving-knife!" The warning came only just in time; for as Joe turned sharply he met the raging Patsy at close quarters, aiming a savage stab at him. Naturally lifting his arm, he received the descending blade through the fleshy fore-part of it; but, with the other, he caught the Irishman by the throat, and jammed him back against the rail. Kicking the knife, which had dropped from the wound, far forward as he sprang, he plucked an iron belaying pin from its socket, and brought it down with a sickening thud upon Patsy's already battered face. Again he fell, this time to remain until dragged forward, a limp, disfigured lump.

By this time the inverted ensign had told its tale ashore, and a large canoe well-manned with negro policemen, under a white sergeant, was coming off to us at a spanking pace. This sight drew all the mutineers to the side, whence they could watch her approach, which they hailed with the liveliest expressions of joy. Chips now put in an appearance, looking very sheepish, and, assisted by Joe, released the mate from his undignified suspension in the rigging. He tottered aft, looking very unwell, and muttering bitter reproaches on the carpenter for having abandoned him to such a fate. The police-canoe bumped against the side, her stalwart crew clambering on board like cats. While the officer hastened aft to hear the news from the mate, his myrmidons were amazed to find themselves hailed with delight by the excited crew, who fraternized with them as if they had come to convoy them to a picnic. The mate's tale being soon told, the sergeant of police gave orders to his men to arrest the mutineers, and, with joyful outcry, all hands hurried forward to prepare for their departure.

During the preparations, the pilot, the mate, and the police-officer foregathered on the poop to indulge in a smoke, and discuss the ways of seamen in general. But though their palaver lasted a long time, there was no sign from forrard. At last, his patience exhausted, the sergeant strode forward to the fo'lk'sle, demanding, with many objurgations, the reason of this delay. To his rage and dismay he found that the supply of rum had been so plentiful, and had circulated so freely, that policemen and sailors were involved in one common debauch. Indeed it was hard to say which was the most drunken of the two gangs. Uproarious was the din, nearly every man shouting some fragment of song at the pitch of his lungs, or laughing insanely at the gorgeous fun of the whole affair. Back came the sergeant, almost speechless with anger and apprehension, for this no doubt meant dire disgrace to him. He was made worse, if anything, by the unstinted laughter with which the mate and pilot received the news. Small blame to them, the thing was so ludicrous.

Up went the police-flag again – to the main truck this time. In addition to this the sergeant hoisted a small weft at the peak, explaining sulkily that this was an urgent private signal for reinforcements. He added, "An' all *I* hope is that the infernal scoundrels 'll fall out an' kill one another before my boss comes, or else I'm booked for a reduction in grade that'll dock me of a quarter of pay – none too much as it is." Before many minutes had passed a large launch was seen approaching, rowed by fourteen men, who, unlike the first lot, were all white. With them came our old man, whose face was a study. I just caught one glimpse of it, and its fury scared me so that I dared not go near him. There was now no more fooling; in double quick time all the roysterers, policemen as well as sailors, were collected from the fo'lk'sle, handcuffs put on them, their effects flung into the launch, and themselves bundled after with scant ceremony. So rapid was the work that in less than ten minutes they were all on their way ashore, making the air resound with their discordant yells.

A painful quiet ensued. Joe and I, sole representatives of the foremast hands, leisurely cleared up the decks, after which he busied himself preparing a meal which should do duty for dinner and supper. The captain went ashore again, much to my relief, for while he was on board I couldn't get quit of the idea that in some way or other he would bring me in responsible for his disappointment, and take his consolation out of my poor little carcass. I had been so used to this vicarious sort of payment of old, that the idea was a fixed one with me whenever there was a row. In fact, I often feel the old sensation now. But to-day he seemed unable to give vent to his feelings, so nothing disturbed the calm of the afternoon. Joe informed me that he had gone ashore to ship a fresh crew, and that we should certainly sail in the morning, he having heard the old man tell the pilot as much when he took the dinner aft.

Sure enough, just before sunset the skipper returned, bringing with him a fresh crowd in place of the old hands, who had each, we were told, received summary sentence of two months' hard labour. Quick work, truly. The new crew were a mixed lot. There was a Newfoundland Irishman named Flynn, a fat-faced blubber-bodied fellow, who was for ever eating tobacco; a stalwart fiery-headed ex-man-o'-war's man who could only be called Ginger; a long, melancholy-looking Englishman, who signed as George Harris; a Eurasian of gentlemanly appearance, but most foul and filthy behaviour; a delicate, pretty-faced Liverpool Irishman, with a fair silky beard, for cook; a broad-shouldered Greek, who had not a word of English; and, lastly, a precious piece of ornament in the shape of a Chinaman, pigtail and all, as if he had just come out of Foochow, whom the captain had shipped as steward for nothing a month. Gloomy Jem, the unfortunate negro youth, of course, remained of the old crew. In some misty fashion he went on his melancholy way, the butt of everybody but myself, his only relaxation an occasional incoherent chatter with me in some dark corner, when there was no work afoot.

Next morning at daybreak we unmoored, and proceeded down the muddy river, without hitch of any kind. The new crew worked well, glad enough, no doubt, to leave such miserable quarters as they had lately been enduring. You Sing, the Celestial, was a great acquisition. He was made to understand at once, that whatever work was to be done, he must take a hand in it, and he certainly toiled like

a beaver. Beautiful weather still favoured us, and with an occasional glimpse of what looked to my exuberant fancy like fairyland rising out of the sparkling blue sea, we crept steadily westwards into the great gulf of Mexico. In spite of the miserable food and swinish forecastle, the fresh crew worked well and peaceably. What growling they did was indulged in out of hearing, and, after late experiences, I hardly knew the old ship. Without a single incident worth recording, we rolled along until we sighted the Mexican coast, which, as the position of our first calling-place was somewhat vague, the captain proposed to skirt until he came to it. The weather now became less settled, squalls of considerable violence being frequent, making a great deal of sail-handling necessary. One night, when we were suddenly called upon to shorten sail in a deluge of rain, it happened that the long Englishman, George Harris, and Ginger, the quondam man-o'-war's man, found themselves together furling the main to'-gallant sail. Now, Ginger, though a big fellow, was, as usual with his class, of very little use at furling sail under merchant-ship conditions. Where one man is employed in the merchantman, six or seven crowd in on board of *Andrew*; and the "bluejacket" is consequently handicapped when he finds himself thus lonely. The sail was stiff with wet, the wind was high, and George, in trying to make up for Ginger's deficiency, ruptured himself badly. He got down from aloft somehow, and took to his bunk, a very sick man. The treatment he received only aggravated his mishap, while he grew rapidly weaker from his inability to eat the muck, which even in his case was unchanged. Although never very friendly with me, I was filled with pity for him, and actually so far forgot my dread of the terrible "old man," as to creep below and steal a few cabin biscuits, which were less coarse and whiter than ours. It was comparatively easy to evade the officers, and I chuckled greatly over my smartness, being richly rewarded by the gratitude of the invalid, who made quite a hearty meal of my plunder soaked with some sugar. But I reckoned without You Sing. That slit-eyed pagan in some unholy fashion found me out, and at once betrayed me to the skipper, of whom he stood in such awe, that he was ready to jump overboard at a nod from him. I was called aft, questioned, and found guilty. There and then, with a bight of the gaff-topsail halliards, he gave me such a dressing down as I have never forgotten, You Sing standing by with a face like a door-knocker for expressionless calm. Even amid my sharpest pangs I rejoice to think I didn't howl. Perhaps I gained little by that. At last the skipper flung me from him, saying grimly, "Now ye can go an' thank George Harris for that." And when, twenty years after, I saw that stern old man, reduced to earning a precarious living as a ship-keeper, fall from a ship's side in the Millwall Dock, injuring himself so frightfully that death would have been refreshment, I could not help thinking of the grist which is ground by the Mills of the Gods. Joe, my faithful ally, was furious when I went forward quivering with pain. He was for vengeance, first on the old man, then on the placid pig who had betrayed me; but I begged so hard that he wouldn't make matters worse by interfering that at last he yielded. But he never settled down again satisfactorily.

Just a week afterwards we came to a slight indentation in the coast, where a Norwegian barque lay at anchor. From her we got the information that the place was called Tupilco, upon which we anchored, it being our port of call for orders. The anchor was no sooner down than Harris crawled aft and implored the captain to take him ashore so that he might get some medical aid. Desire of life made the poor fellow quite eloquent, but he might as well have appealed to a bronze joss. When, exhausted, he paused for breath, the old man said, with bitter emphasis, "Ef I'd ben a loafin' on my shipmets s'long's *you* hev', I'd take 'n heave me useless carcass overboard, ye wuthless sojer. Git forrard 'n die. It's 'bout the bes' thing you ken do." George crept forrard again without a word.

We lay at this forsaken-looking spot for four days, holding no communication with the shore except twice, when a launch came off, manned by a truculent-looking crew of "dagoes," *i. e.* Greeks, Italians, Spaniards, and half-bred Mexicans. Soon after their second visit we weighed again, having received instructions to commence loading at Sant' Ana, some distance along the same coast. We had an easy run thither, with a fair wind all the way, and were pleasantly surprised to find that, although an open roadstead like Tupilco, there was quite a fleet of ships at anchor there. They were of all sizes and rigs, from rakish-looking Yankee schooners to huge fullrigged ships, and of several nationalities

– British, American, and Norwegian predominating. There was a heavy landward swell on when we passed through them to our anchorage, and it was anything but cheering to see how they rolled and tumbled about in far more unpleasant fashion than as though they had been under way. In fact, some of the fore and afters had actually got staysails set, with the sheets hauled flat aft, so as to counteract in some measure the dangerous wallowing they were carrying on. I watched one Baltimore schooner, with tremendously taunt spars, roll until she scooped up the sea on either side with her bulwarks, the decks being all in a lather with the foaming seas tearing across them, and I couldn't help thinking what a heavenly time those Yanks must have been having down below, for there were none visible on deck.

CHAPTER V.
THE LAND OF LIBERTY

We came to an anchor near the middle of the roadstead in seamanlike fashion, every sail being furled before the anchor was dropped, and the old tub brought-to as if going into dock. Then, as it was understood that our cargo was ready for us, preparations were immediately made for its reception. A stout spar was rigged across the forecastle, protruding twenty-five feet on the starboard side, with a big block lashed to its end through which ran a five-inch rope. A derrick was rigged over the main-hatch with a double chain purchase attached, and a powerful winch bolted to the deck, round which the chain revolved. Numbers of iron spikes (dogs), with rings in them, were fitted with tails of rope about three feet long, and lengths of hawser cut for "mother-ropes." The rafts of mahogany and cedar logs are made by driving a tailed "dog" firmly into the side of each log a foot or so from the end. As each one is thus spiked it is secured by a "rolling-hitch" of the tail to the "mother-rope" (*cabo madre* of the Spaniards), until as many are collected as required. This operation is always performed in the river just inside the bar, where the logs are sorted after their long drift from the interior. Then the raftsmen, who are equipped with capacious boats pulling six oars, and carrying about three hundred fathoms of grass rope, secure one end of their tow-line to the mother-rope, and pull away seaward in the direction of the ship, the steersman casting out line as they go. Arriving at the end of their tether they anchor, and all hands turn-to with a will to haul the raft up to the boat. This operation is repeated as often as is necessary to cover the three or four miles between ship and shore, until at last the long line of tumbling logs are brought alongside their destined vessel, and secured to the big spar on the forecastle. At whatever time they arrive all hands must turn out to receive them, and on board the American ships the uproar used to be fearful; oaths, yells, and showers of belaying pins rattling against the bulwarks, bearing eloquent testimony to the persuasive methods of discipline in vogue on board of them. The stevedores, or stowers of the timber, arrived on board shortly after we anchored; like the rest of the population, they were a mixed crowd of Latins and Greeks, but all speaking Spanish. Owing to their presence we fared much better than we should otherwise have done, for they were fed by the ship, and by no means to be offered any such carrion as usually fell to our lot. Their pay was high, five dollars a day; but they certainly worked well, besides being very skilful. With our first raft there was trouble. Flynn, the "blue-nose" Irishman, was sent upon the uncertain row of logs alongside to sling them; but after several narrow escapes from drowning or getting crushed between the rolling ponderous masses, some of them over five tons in weight, he clambered on deck again, and flatly refused to risk his bones any longer. Nor, in spite of the skipper's fury, could any other man be persuaded to attempt so dangerous a task. Finally, the old man turned to one of the Greeks of the stevedore gang, and ordered him to act as slingsman. "Oah yez, capane," said Antonio, "sposa you giva me eight dolla day." After a little more language the old man said, "All right, 'Tonio, I'll give you eight dollars. An' I'll stop it out of your pay, you skulking sojer you" (to Flynn). Which was mirthful, seeing that eight dollars represented a fortnight's pay for our shipmate.

However, Antonio proved a most expert raftsman, being almost amphibious and smart as any eel. But the work was exceedingly severe. Lifting such great masses of timber tried the old sticks terribly, and when she rolled suddenly to windward, tearing the log out of water with a jerk, you almost expected her to fall apart. When, at last, the log showed above the rail, if she started her antics, all hands near stood by for a run, for the log would suddenly slue inboard, and come across the deck like a gigantic battering ram. The whole process was a series of hairbreadth escapes. Down in the hold, where the stevedores toiled with tackles, rousing the logs about, there were many casualties; but these dagoes never seemed to care. For every hurt they had one remedy: plenty of "caña," a fiery

white spirit, fresh from the still. Poured into a gash, or rubbed on a bruise, with half a pint to drink, this vitriolic stuff seemed to meet every emergency.

The enormous rate of pay prevailing here during the height of the season, had the inevitable effect of causing frequent desertions; so that as much as three hundred dollars was freely offered for the run to New York or Europe for seamen. Consequently a vigilant watch was kept by the officers of ships, lest any of the crew should take French leave, although getting ashore was difficult. We, however, had a very large long-boat, for which there was no room on deck, and, contrary to the usual practice it was put overboard, and kept astern at the end of a small hawser. The temptation was too much for my friend Joe, who, accompanied by the Eurasian, slipped over the bows one dark night, and swam aft to the unwieldly ark, unheard by the officer on watch. Poor fellow! he couldn't keep awake night and day. At daybreak, when the skipper came on deck, and looked over the taffrail, always his first move, the idle rope hung down disconsolately – the long-boat was gone! Seizing his glass he mounted to the cross-trees, and scanned the horizon, discovering the derelict far out at sea. The gig was lowered and manned by Flynn and Jem, the skipper himself taking the tiller, and off they went in pursuit. It was nearly noon when they returned, towing the runaway, and half dead with thirst and fatigue. Then only did the skipper learn that two of his best men were gone. In his hurry he had not stayed to inquire, and now his rage knew no bounds. Judge, then, how he felt when he discovered, by the aid of his glass, that the deserters were no further away than our nearest neighbour, an American brig that lay less than half a mile away. Anger overcame his prudence, and he actually went alongside the Yank, intending to go on board and claim his men. He was received with contumely, the American skipper refusing to allow him over the rail. His state of mind on his return must have been pitiable; but he sought his cabin without a word, and remained there all the rest of the day.

In some way the news spread round the fleet, and that evening we were boarded by the captain of the *Panuca*, a Liverpool barque, who came to condole and relate his woeful experiences. He said that his men had refused duty altogether, upon which he was advised to take them ashore to the "Commandant," who would deal with them in summary fashion. Accordingly he took them, finding the *soi-disant* official to be a stalwart Greek, who held the position by virtue of his election by his fellow rascals, for law there was none. El Señor Commandante, however, told him to leave his men with him, and he would soon bring them to their bearings. Very reluctantly he followed this advice, since he had no choice, and returned on board, cursing his stupidity for ever taking them there. To his joyful surprise they returned on board, next morning, as meek in their demeanour as if they had, indeed, been taught a lesson. But two nights afterwards there was a desperate hubbub raised, during which the rascals looted the cabin, and, getting into the whale-boat hanging at the davits, went ashore with their plunder. They had strictly followed the instructions given them by the commandant, who made them a handsome present in return for the fine boat they brought him. When the half-frantic captain arrived on shore, and learned the truth, he was so enraged that he actually tried to take his boat off the beach where she lay, narrowly escaping being shot for his pains. This tale, poured into our skipper's sympathetic ears, somewhat reconciled him to his loss, since he still retained his boat.

But one disaster succeeded another. A curious malady of the feet attacked every one of the crew. It caused the legs and feet to swell enormously, and culminated in a suppurating wound horribly painful and slow to heal. Then a deadly encounter took place between the cook and You Sing, which was only settled by sending the Chinaman ashore, since the two seemed bent upon murdering one another. Worst of all, when the ship was half-full, the timber ceased to arrive. Ship after ship sailed away, until there were only three of us left; and the season of the "Northers" being close upon us, when those destructive gales blow right home all along the coast, every one began to look very glum. The unfortunate invalid, George Harris, after lingering longer than any one could have believed possible, was set free from his misery at last, to the manifest relief of his shipmates, who were heartily tired of his taking so long to die. Sounds horrible, doesn't it? But it is the naked truth. Under

such circumstances as ours were, the better part of humanity generally disappears, or only shines in individuals who are often, almost always, powerless to help.

Miserable as the time had been, it was not all lost upon me. As far as the hardship went it was no worse, if as bad, as I had endured in the London streets; and here, at any rate, it was always warm. I had learned to chatter Spanish fluently, although much of it I would gladly unlearn if it were possible, for I have always noticed that, in picking up a language colloquially, one learns easiest and remembers longest the vilenesses. And how vile the Latin tongues can be, few Englishmen can realize. I did not grow much, not being well-enough nourished; but I was wiry, hard as nails, and almost as brown as an Indian, being half naked from want of clothes. At last, one morning, my uncle sent for me. Although unconscious of any offence I was terribly frightened, but went, shaking with dread, to meet him. To my utter amazement he spoke kindly, saying that the ship was so old, and the season so late, that he feared there was great danger of her never reaching home. Therefore he had decided to send me on board the barque *Discoverer*, commanded by a friend of his, in which, as she was a splendid vessel, I should be far safer. She was to sail the next day, so I must go on board that night. I only said, "Thank you, sir," but volumes could not have expressed my gratitude. To leave this awful den, to be once more treated to a kind word occasionally – for, since Joe was gone and Jem had been driven ashore (which I have forgotten to mention), I had no friends at all on board; the prospect was too delightful for contemplation.

My wardrobe being on my back I was spared the labour of packing up. Farewells there were none to say, although, being naturally a tenderhearted little chap, I should have been glad of a parting God-speed. But no one said anything to me as I bundled into the boat and was rowed alongside my new home. As soon as I climbed on board I was met with a very chorus of welcome. The warmth of my reception amazed me, accustomed as I had been for so long to the miserable state of affairs on board my old ship. But I soon overcame a strong temptation to cry for joy, and, steadily choking down the lump in my throat, set about taking stock of my new vessel. To my inexperience she seemed a most noble ship. Everything was on a much finer scale than anything I had yet seen in my brief travels. She had been built for the purpose of Arctic exploration, and consequently presented a somewhat clumsy appearance outside from the doubling of the bow planks and stern bends, and the diagonal oaken sheathing with which she was protected. Inboard, though, she was roomy, clear, and comfortable as could be imagined, while her rigging and spars were all of the very best, and in tip-top condition.

Quarters were assigned to me in the comfortable cabin of the steward, whose helper I was supposed to be, although, from the first, I had the free run of the ship fore and aft. Next morning we weighed with a gentle favouring breeze, homeward bound. But I soon discovered that there was one drawback to all this comfort – the captain was a confirmed drunkard. While the process of getting under weigh was going on, he was mooning about the deck with a fishy eye and an aimless amble, getting in everybody's way, and causing much confusion by giving ridiculous orders. Had he confined himself to that all would have been well, for the men humoured him good-temperedly, and took no notice of his rubbish. But when they had "catted" the anchor, they were obliged to leave it hanging while they got some sail on her, the fall of the cat-tackle being stretched across the deck and belayed to the opposite rail, as there was no fo'lk'sle-head, and consequently no capstan. All hands being aft, the skipper maundered forrard, to find his further progress stopped by this rope. Muttering unintelligibly, he cast it off the pin to which it was belayed. The result staggered even himself, for there was a rush and a roar, a perfect blaze of sparks, a cloud of dust, and, with a jerk that almost threw everybody flat, the last link of one hundred and twenty fathoms of cable brought the ship up all standing. All hands had flown forrard at the first bang, but they were powerless to do anything except pray that the cable might part. It was too good for that, bearing the terrible strain to which it was subjected of bringing a ship up, in twenty fathoms of water, that was going nearly four knots an hour.

The mate got the old man aft into his cabin while the fellows clewed up the canvas again, and then issued the order to man the windlass once more. But this the men flatly refused to do, alleging

that after their forenoon's work, it was unreasonable to expect such a thing. The mate was powerless to insist, so nothing further was done till next day but give the sails the loosest kind of a furl. At daybreak next morning the heavy task of getting the anchor was begun, the skipper keeping out of sight. There was a great deal of growling and bad language; but the mate managed to get hold of a demijohn of the old man's whisky. This he dispensed with no niggard hand, and so the peace was kept; but it was late in the day when she was again fairly under way for home.

After that, everything went on smoothly enough. Although, as usual, the crew were of several nationalities, they all pulled together very well, nor did they take the advantage they might have done of the utter absence of any shadow of discipline on board. The whole working of the ship devolved upon the mate, for the skipper was always more or less drunk, and the second mate was helpless, having had his right foot smashed by a log of mahogany in loading. What work was necessary during the daytime was done cheerfully enough, and a general air of peace and contentment pervaded the ship. For one thing the food was really good and plentiful, and none of the men were of that blackguardly kind that glory in taking every advantage of any weakness aft. Of course the watch-keeping at night was bad. A big London boy, who was much disliked for his lazy, dirty habits, was made to keep the look-out always in his watch – a duty which he usually performed with his head between his knees. The rest of the men slept the night through, seldom knowing whose watch on deck it was; so that if sail required trimming all hands generally turned out to it after a good deal of inviting. The captain was supposed to keep the second mate's watch, but he set a shining example to his crew, by sleeping it out wherever he happened to drop when he came on deck.

I was very happy. Never since the time my troubles began, that is, at about eight years old, had I been treated so well. Being very small, and fairly knowing, besides having a rather sweet treble voice, I was made a sort of plaything – an universal pet. And in the dog-watches, when seated upon the main hatch surrounded by the crew I warbled the songs I knew, while not another sound disturbed the balmy evening but the murmur of the caressing waters alongside and the gentle rustle of a half-drawing sail overhead, I felt as if my halcyon days had dawned at last. That fortnight is one of the pleasantest recollections of my life. The weather was delightfully fine, and by day the ship was like a huge aviary, a multitude of brilliant-hued little birds being continually about her, although we were out of sight of land. They were of many kinds, but all so tame that they freely came and went through cabin and forecastle, hunting for the cockroaches with which she was infested. On the upper yards a small colony of kestrels kept vigilant watch, descending like a flash upon any unwary birdling that dared to venture far into the open. The men made many nocturnal excursions aloft after the "pirates," as they called them, giving them short shrift when they caught them. So the days drowsed on quietly and peacefully, seeming, to my youthful ignorance, as nearly perfection as they could possibly be. Not but what I felt an occasional twinge of sorrow at the continual drunkenness of the captain. Mixing with the men forrard freely as I did, their rough but half-pitying comments upon him and his behaviour could not fail to impress me, although I often wondered how it was that, being so well aware of the danger they ran by reason of such general neglect, they were not themselves more watchful, instead of taking such advantage as they did of the captain's fault, to sleep all night.

At last, on the fifteenth day from leaving port, on a clear starlit night with a gentle, fair wind blowing, and all hands, including the captain – whose watch it was – asleep, the vessel ran upon a coral reef and became a total wreck. Having told the story in another place, I cannot enlarge upon the circumstances attendant upon her loss here; it must suffice to say that, after many perils, all hands escaped safely to land upon the "cay" or sandy islet which crowned the highest point of the reef. A fairly large quantity of food and water was saved; so that we ran no risk of privation, even had the islet failed to furnish us with fish, fowl, and eggs in plenty as it did. One circumstance I must record in passing as being well worthy of notice. As soon as it was evident that the vessel was hopelessly lost, the seamen forrard, though perfectly well behaved, insisted that every drop of intoxicating liquor should be thrown overboard, and, in order that it should be done thoroughly, themselves carried it

out. As the giant breakers destroyed the upper works of the ship, much useful wreckage came ashore, and one calm day a visit was paid to her, which was rewarded by the salvage of several sails and a quantity of cordage. With these, comfortable tents were rigged, and I have no doubt that, had it been necessary, we could have put in several months on that barren patch of sand quite happily. Huge turtle came ashore to deposit their eggs, and were easily caught. Sea-fowl of many kinds, principally boobies and frigate-birds, swarmed in thousands, whose eggs, especially those of the frigate-birds, were delicious eating, although, never being pressed by hunger, we left their rank, fishy flesh severely alone. Fish of course abounded, while the crevices of the rocks concealed great numbers of clams and oysters, and at night the lighting of our beacon fire attracted quite a host of crabs from the sea, who fell victims in great numbers to their curiosity. Hardships there were none, and I would far rather have lived there for six months than for one week on board the old *Arabella*.

Ten days passed gaily away, during which the sail-maker and carpenter had made a fine seaworthy craft of the pinnace in which most of us reached the shore. Fitted with new sails and rigging and half-decked, she was fit for a much longer voyage than was necessary to reach the mainland of Campèche, the nearest town of which, Sisal, was barely a hundred miles distant. But one morning as the look-out man was ascending the rocky promontory, where a flag-staff was erected to hoist the signal of distress we always kept flying by day, he saw a handsome barque lying-to only about two or three miles away. The French ensign was flying at her peak, and a boat had left her side which was being rapidly pulled shorewards. They soon landed, and by expressive signs the officer in charge gave us to understand that he was prepared to take us all on board, but that we must make haste, as the vicinity was much too dangerous to linger in longer than was absolutely necessary. Not one word of each other's language did we understand, yet we found no difficulty in getting at one another's meaning sufficiently near for all practical purposes. To my amazement, however, the skipper, the mate, and four others, refused to avail themselves of the opportunity to escape. They said they did not want to go to Havana, where the barque would land us, preferring to sail in the pinnace to Sisal and take their chance there. When the French officer realized this, he looked as if he thought the small party refusing to come with him were mad. But after an outburst of volubility, quite wasted upon our misunderstanding, he shrugged his shoulders and retreated towards his boat, followed by all who were ready to go with him. His men had made good use of their time by getting a goodly quantity of birds and eggs collected, and now disposed themselves, with a perfect uproar of chattering, in as small a compass as they could, while our fellows took the oars and pulled away for the barque. Looking back, I saw the little group of our late shipmates standing watching us from the beach: a sight so pathetic that I could not help bursting into tears, quite forgetting that it was entirely in accordance with their own desires that they were thus abandoned.

We soon reached the ship, swarmed on board, and swung the boat up to the davits in a twinkling, while the officer who had brought us – the chief mate – held an animated colloquy with the captain on the poop. From the expressive gestures used, we had no doubt but that they were discussing the incomprehensible resolve of our captain and his followers. They terminated their conversation by mutual shoulder-shruggings, as who should say, "But what would you, my friend? they are English, whose ways are past finding out." Nothing could be more cordial than our reception by all hands. The big long-boat was cleared out for our sleeping-place, as the barque's fo'lk'sle accommodation was too limited to admit any more than at present occupied it; and a bountiful meal of *fazhole blanc*, a delicious *purée* of haricot beans, good biscuit, and *vin ordinaire* was served out to us.

CHAPTER VI.
TO HAVANA AND AFTER

This seems to be an appropriate place for noticing how, at less cost, the Frenchmen fared so much better than in any sailing ship I have ever been in. The Board of Trade scale of provisions for the Mercantile Marine must strike every landsman as being a most absurd compilation. On four days of the week each man is entitled to one and a half pounds of salt beef, including bone, accompanied by half a pound of flour, except on Saturdays, when half a pint of rice *may* be given, or nothing. The other three days each bring one and a quarter pounds of salt pork and one-third of a pint of split peas. Every day there is an allowance *per capita* of one pound of bread (biscuit), an eighth of an ounce of tea, half an ounce of coffee, and three quarts of water; and each week twelve ounces of sugar and half a pint of vinegar is allowed per man.

What scope is there here for any variety or skill in cookery? Even supposing that the beef and pork were in any way comparable with the same articles on shore – which they cannot be in the nature of things – such a diet must soon become infernally monotonous. But the very best ship's beef and pork is not nice; the second best is nasty; and what will pass an inspector, is often utterly unfit for men to live upon entirely for any length of time, while it would be considered loathsome ashore. And what can be done with half a pound of flour? Lacking *anything* else, except a few hops, obviously the best thing to do is to make bread, which is a little more palatable than the flinty outrage on the name of food that is called ship's biscuit. What is usually done is to make "duff." This is really boiled bread, with the addition of some skimmed grease from the coppers in which the meat is boiled. As an act of grace, but by no means of necessity, a pannikin (pint) of molasses is doled out for all hands on duff days, but the crew are not allowed to forget that they have no claim to this dainty by Act of Parliament.

On pork days pea-soup is made, or "yellow broth," as sailors call it. But pease and water with a flavouring of pork (not too much lest the soup become uneatable from salt) needs a stretch of courtesy to be called soup. A little, very little, addition of vegetables would make it palatable, but "'tis not i' the bond." And even if so, do you think, reader, you would feel contented with fat pork and pea-soup for dinner three times a week for four months on end? For breakfast and supper (tea) there is biscuit and beef, or biscuit and pork, washed down with the result of the modicum of coffee or tea. And that is all. For very shame's sake, a minority of shipowners do provide a few extras: such as butter, an occasional mess of tinned meat, and a few preserved potatoes and pickles. But these are the exception and not the rule. Moreover, whenever these additional helps are given, the men are always reminded that they have no right to them, that no owner need give anything more than the bare pound and pint of the Board of Trade scale.

Contrast this with our living on board the Bordeaux barque *Potosi*. In the first place the bread, which was in large puffy cakes, became, under the slightest moisture, as easy to eat and as palatable as baker's bread. This alone was an enormous boon. Breakfast, which, like all other meals, was taken by all hands at once, was hardly a meal in our sense of the term. It was only a cup of coffee (exceedingly good), some bread, and about a gill of cognac. Luncheon at noon consisted of half a pound of meat, free of bone, and some preparation of vegetables, bread, and half a pint of wine. Dinner at four p. m. was a grand affair. The changes were rung upon haricot beans, lentils, vermicelli, macaroni, and such legumes cooked with meat and flavoured so that the smell was intensely appetizing. Bread, and half pint of wine. And there was abundance, but no waste. Yet I am persuaded that the cost was much less than that of our authorized scale of provisions, about which it is difficult to speak with patience. It will, I think, be admitted that where men are shut up to a life of such monotony as the seaman's calling must necessarily be, their food ought at least to have some consideration. The meal-hours form almost the only breaks in the day's sameness, and if the food be poor in quality and without variety,

it is bound to engender bad feeling and a hatred of those of whose fault it is the outcome. This by way of apology for such a lengthy dwelling upon the subject, if any be needed, though I have always felt that its importance is great enough to merit much more attention than it commonly receives.

We had a very pleasant passage. The barque was a wonderfully handy vessel, and her equipment was so good that it excited the wondering admiration of all our men. The discipline was quite naval in its character, and the day's duties went on with the regularity of clockwork. Of course we could not understand the language, and were, in consequence, unable to know whether there was the same amount of grumbling commentary forward, upon the sayings and doings of the officers, as is almost universal in British ships, with the exception of "Blue-noses" (Canadian vessels). But it was admitted by all of us that the crew seemed well content and heartily willing, and that she was indeed a model ship. My scanty knowledge of Spanish came in useful, for the captain spoke that language about as well as I did. On his discovering this fact he sent for me, and, by dint of patience, succeeded in learning from me such facts as he wished to know, rewarding me with many a tit-bit from his table, as well as some very useful gifts of clothing, which, as I was almost naked, were most acceptable.

Arriving at Havana, we were handed over to the British consul, leaving the friendly Frenchmen with much regret and three hearty cheers, which they returned with interest *à la Française*. We were no sooner clear of her than they began to get under way again, and, by the time we were on the wharf, she was once more heading for home. By the orders of the consul we were marched up to a "fonda," or eating house, facing the Plaza de Armas, which we understood was to be our home during our stay. A plentiful meal was set before us, but we did not appreciate it much, every dish being saturated with the flavour of garlic. But as two bottles of wine were apportioned to each individual, the meal was a merry one, all hands declaring that bread and wine would suit them down to the ground. A bundle of cigars were distributed by a benevolent-looking old stranger, who introduced himself as the shipping-master, and spoke excellent American, being, as he informed us, a native of New Orleans.

After a smoke, we were conducted to a large paved room at the back of the premises, which was simply furnished with a couple of huge tables and sundry benches, and had in one corner an unprotected well. Here we were told we must spread such bedding as we had, and make ourselves as comfortable as we could, until our proper dormitory was vacated by the recruiting party that at present occupied it. The said party were by no means an inviting crowd. They swarmed about the big chamber we were in, looking fit for any villainy, and ostentatiously displaying their vicious-looking bowie-knives. All our fellows had been deprived of their sheath-knives upon first coming ashore, under the plea that the carrying of weapons was unlawful, though we were the only unarmed people I saw in the city during my stay. However, we had no choice of quarters, so we proceeded to spread such ragged blankets as we possessed upon the flagstones against one of the bare walls, and in due time ranged ourselves thereon. Owing, I suppose, to the unusual quantity of wine they had drunk, all our men were soon asleep, and when some one took away the smoky kerosene lamp, the place was pitchy dark, except where the silver bars of moonlight, streaming through the unglazed holes in the walls, divided the blackness into rigid sections. I could not sleep. The novelty of the situation, the strange smells, and an indefinable fear of that truculent crowd of armed men, kept all my senses at highest tension. There was no door, and, through the opening in the wall, dark shapes of men came and went softly on Heaven knows what errands. I had reached a condition of mind when I felt as if I must scream to relieve my pent-up feelings, when I saw some figures bending over my sleeping shipmates as if searching for something. By this time my eyes had become able to distinguish objects in the surrounding gloom, and I found that there were at least twenty men in the place.

Terribly frightened, and hardly knowing what I did, I roused the carpenter, by whose side I lay, and whispered hoarsely in his ear what I had seen. The word was passed along, and in a few minutes we were all afoot and straggling out into the moonlight-flooded courtyard. There we stood like a flock of startled sheep, irresolute what to do. But some of the knife-carrying gentry emerged after us, and began whetting their weapons on the blocks of stone laying about – portions of a ruined wall. This

significant hint decided us, and we passed out into the silent street, feeling to the full that we were strangers in a strange land. Lights of any kind there were none, and the intense brilliance of the moon cast shadows as solid as does the electric glare. A few yards of uncertain wandering, and we were lost. There seemed to be no one about, and yet I could have sworn I saw dark shapes gliding along in the inky shadows. And presently I fell headlong over something in the road, my outstretched hands striking with a splash into a pool of mud. A cold thrill ran along my spine when I found I was lying across a corpse, and that the sticky paste on my hands was red. We quickened our steps after that, keeping in the middle of the streets, but as ignorant of our direction, or our purpose, as if we had been a herd of swine devoid of instinct. At last, from sheer weariness, we sat down upon the steps of some large building, and drooped our heads. As if he had risen from the ground, a "vigilante" (watchman) appeared, bearing a short spear, from the upper third of which dangled a lantern. "Vamos, perros!" he growled, prodding those nearest to him into instant wakefulness. No one needed a translation, or a second bidding to "Begone, dogs!" So we tramped wearily along, our bare feet bruised by the littering stones. As often as we dropped for a brief rest, one of those ubiquitous sereños moved us on again to the same monotonous epithet of contempt. I often think what a queer-looking procession we must have been. My only garments were a flannel singlet and a pair of canvas trousers, so stiff that they creaked woodenly as I trotted along. Cap or boots I had none. The rest were in much the same plight, though none were quite so naked as me. Going along a narrow lane, whereof I read the title, "Aguacallè," on a building at the corner, I slipped off the hummocky sidewalk into a slough of soft slush up to my armpits, and was dragged out by my next friend with a new covering of such evil odour that I had to keep a respectful distance from my companions thenceforth. Finally we emerged upon what seemed to be a wide common or piece of waste ground. Here at last we were permitted to squat unmolested. Fear of scorpions, centipedes, and snakes, kept me from sleep; but all my companions lay sound in strange attitudes, under the full glare of the moon, while I watched, wondering if the night would ever end. At the first glimmer of dawn I aroused my companions, who were all reeking with dew, and we made for the streets again, going as straight back to our lodgings as if we knew the road. When we entered, the warriors had all gone. No one belonging to the establishment was astir, so we cast ourselves down on our rags and slept like stones until roused at eight o'clock by the servants. Until eleven we dozed on the benches, or in whatever corners we could find, when a plentiful breakfast revived us in spite of the garlic.

After our meal the vice-consul paid us a visit. He listened gravely to our complaints of the accommodation we had found. Then he invited us to accompany him to the consul's office. On our arrival all hands were shown into a large, bare room, while I was called upstairs to undergo a searching cross-examination by the consul as to what clothes the men had saved, the incidents of the shipwreck, etc. I suppose he thought that so young a boy would be more likely to tell a true tale than those artful rogues of sailors, as he seemed to regard them. He was not at all kind or sympathetic: that was no part of his business, I suppose; but as he was writing an order upon a slop-seller for some clothing for us, a handsome young lieutenant from an English man-o'-war came in. His eyes fastened upon me at once, and, after a hurried question or two of the consul, he came to me and spoke pitifully, giving me two dollars out of his pocket as a solid token of his sympathy. Then the consul had all hands in and harangued them, telling them to be sure and keep sober (which, as they were penniless, was rather uncalled-for advice), and by no means to stray away from the immediate vicinity of the shipping-office. They would be sure to get a ship in a day or two, he said. Dismissing us with a curt good-day, he retired, while we followed the vice-consul to the clothier's. Here the men received each a rig-out of cheap garments, but I was treated much better; why, I do not know. After all the men had been served and had returned to our lodging, I was furnished with quite a nice suit of clothes, with good underclothing, patent leather shoes, and broad-brimmed Panama hat. A brilliant red silk sash was given me by the shopkeeper as a present, and, thus glorified, I felt quite transformed. With many cautions as to my behaviour, the official bade me good-day, and I was left to my own devices.

And then began one of the strangest experiences of my life. Wherever I went, people looked kindly at me, and spoke to me as if they were interested in me. I entered into shop after shop to spend some of my money, but found it impossible, for the shopkeepers insisted upon giving me what I asked for without payment, and often added to my store of cash besides. When at last I returned to the fonda, I was loaded with cigars, fruit, pastry, and all sorts of odds-and-ends, so that my shipmates were loud in their welcomes. By nightfall we were all in a very contented condition of mind, and, when the landlord politely requested me to inform my friends that our sleeping apartment was prepared, we felt that our comfort was complete. But our joy had a tremendous setback when we were shown the said bedroom. It was a long lean-to shed erected against an ancient wall of rubble that had never known contact with a whitewash brush. The floor was of dried mud. Along the centre of its whole length ran an open ditch, which carried in a sluggish stream all the sewage of the house. On either side of this foul *cloaca* were ranged "charpoys," a sort of exaggerated camp-stool, which constituted the entire furnishing of this primitive bed-chamber. It was well ventilated, although there were no windows, for daylight was visible in many places through gaps in the boarding of the outer wall and roof. Many and vigorous were the comments passed upon the filthy hole, but there was no suggestion of raising any complaint, as all felt that it would be useless, and, at any rate, the place was our own, and we could barricade the door. So spreading our blankets upon the charpoys, we turned in, and were soon oblivious of all our surroundings.

Next day, in the course of my wanderings, I entered the fine billiard room of the Hotel St. Isabel and chummed up with the marker. I was well acquainted with the game, having learned how to mark in one of the strange by-paths of my nomad life before going to sea. And this knowledge now came in usefully, for the marker was a one-armed man who was often sorely bothered by the management of his three tables, especially when the players were lively American and English skippers. I was made heartily welcome, being helpful, in a double sense, from my knowledge of Spanish as well as my acquaintance with the game. From that time forward the "Fonda del buen gusto" saw little of me, and that little at uncertain intervals. I had a comfortable chamber, the best fare the hotel afforded, while as for money, the customers supplied me so liberally that my pockets were always full. As I could not spend it, most of it found its way to my shipmates, for I never came across one without handing some of it over. The idea of saving any never dawned upon me, and, when all my old shipmates were gone afloat again, I could always manage to find some English-speaking mariners to whom I was welcome company for a ramble round town.

The time flew by on golden wings. All my former miseries were forgotten in my present luxurious life, and I blossomed into that hateful thing, an impudent boy uncontrolled by anybody, and possessing all the swagger and assurance of a man. Such as I was, however, I attracted the attention of a gentleman who held a most important post under government as a civil engineer. He was a fairly constant visitor at the hotel when in Havana, and our acquaintance ripened into a strong desire on his part to adopt me, and save me from the ruin he could see awaited me. His only son, a young man of three-and-twenty, was his assistant, the two being more like brothers than parent and child. Having made up his mind, he fitted me out with an elegant suit of clothes made to his liking, and one day took me in his carriage to see the consul and arrange matters. To his intense surprise and disgust the consul flatly refused to sanction the affair, telling him that he was responsible for my return to England, and that, as I had admitted that my father was alive, any inquiry after me, which resulted in the discovery that I had been allowed to remain in Cuba without my parent's consent, would make matters very unpleasant for him. All attempts on Mr. D.'s part to shake this decision were fruitless. The consul refused to discuss the matter further, and closed the conversation by warning me that I was liable to severe punishment for absenting myself so long from the home (?) where he had placed me. What I felt I cannot describe. Mr. D., with a deeply dejected face, bade me good-bye, his duties calling him into the interior next day. He gave me twenty-five dollars as a parting present, and advised me to get a ship as soon as possible for home. It may readily be imagined that I had no hankering

after the sea again. The pleasant, aimless life I had been leading, the inordinate petting and luxury I had grown accustomed to, had made me look upon ship-life with unutterable loathing, and I secretly determined that if I could avoid it I would never go to sea any more.

About this time a terrible epidemic of yellow fever set in. So great was its virulence, that even the never-ending warfare between the royalists and insurgents slowed down, and instead of a ragged regiment of wastrels being despatched into the mountains about twice a week, the authorities were hard put to it to collect recruits at all. The great bell of the cathedral tolled unceasingly. All night long the rumble of the waggons over the uneven causeways sounded like subdued thunder, as they passed from house to house collecting the corpses of the victims. The harbour was crowded with vessels denuded of their crews, and from every masthead flew the hateful yellow flag. It was heart-breaking to see and hear the agony of the sailors being taken ashore to hospital. They knew full well that there was hardly a glimmer of hope that they would return. The Chinese, who acted as nurses, were destitute of any feeling of humanity, and the doctors were worked to death. The nuns, who gave their lives nobly, could do little but minister such ghostly comfort as they knew how; but the net result of the hospital treatment was, with hardly an exception, death. Yet, in spite of the scourge, and general paralysis of trade in consequence, life, as far as I could see, went on much the same as ever. The inhabitants seemed determined to put a brave air on, whatever their inner feelings might be, and I declare that I saw very little to frighten me. One can get used to anything, especially when one has not learned to think. Several weeks passed away, and I was still free, though not quite so flush of money, for the customers at the hotel were necessarily fewer.

One day I was taking a stroll down by the deserted wharves, when I noticed a peculiar glow in the sky. It came from the heart of a gigantic cloud that draped half the heavens, and seemed as if it hid hell behind it. Fascinated by the sight, though my heart thumped furiously, I waited on the wharf and watched its development. The cloud spread until the whole dome was covered in by it, and the fierce glare took a strange greenish tinge. All around the edge of the darkness ran an incessant tangle of vari-coloured lightnings, and a continual rumble of thunder seemed to make the earth vibrate. Suddenly the storm burst. Jamming myself into a corner between some posts, whence I felt sure no wind could dislodge me, I waited and watched. For the first few minutes I thought I should have died of fright. Torrents of water, like the fall of a sea, were lashed into foam as they fell, and all torn into gleaming fragments by innumerable flashes flying in every conceivable direction. An overpowering smell like burning sulphur pervaded all. As for the wind, its force must have been frightful, judging from its effect upon the shipping and houses; but where I stood only a very strong gale could be felt, such as no seaman would think extraordinary. This lasted about an hour (but I cannot say much for time), and then the rain ceased. What a scene of horror the bay presented! Vessels of all kinds drifted aimlessly about, wrecking each other, and covering the boiling mäelstrom of the harbour with their *débris*. Overhead a louder roar occasionally made me look up to catch sight of a flying roof like a cloud fragment fleeting through the murky air. A large Yankee schooner was torn from her anchors, and lifted on to a ledge beneath the Moro Castle, which jutted out of the perpendicular cliff about a hundred feet above high-water mark. There she remained upright, with her bottom stove in like Columbus's egg. Of all the vessels in the harbour, the only ones that survived without serious damage were the warships, which, with topmasts housed and cables veered out to the clinch, were all steaming full speed ahead, and, even then, hardly easing the tremendous strain on the latter.

Taking advantage of a lull I emerged from my corner, drenched to the skin, of course, and so cramped from my long crookedness, that at first I could hardly feel my feet. As hurriedly as I could I made my way towards the hotel, finding the roadways almost blocked with ruins. The hotel had escaped much damage, and I was received with open arms, soon forgetting all my fears in a good meal and cheerful talk. In spite of the havoc it had made, the general feeling was one of thankfulness, it being taken for granted that the hurricane would be found to have swept away the far more dreaded "Yellow Jack." And this was literally true, for not a single fresh case was reported from that day

forward. Business revived with a bound, for there was much work to do everywhere, shipwrights especially commanding almost any wages they liked to ask. About a week after the hurricane, I was standing watching the transport of a huge steam-launch over an isthmus to the dockyard, when I felt a hand on my shoulder. Turning sharply, I saw the yellow visage of the vice-consul, who was accompanied by a man in uniform, to whom he gave me in charge. I was fairly caught, and without further delay, in spite of my vehement protestations, I was put into a boat and taken on board a large barque, the *Sea Gem* of St. Andrews, N. S. The captain, a kindly-looking old gentleman, heard my impudent remarks in amused silence, until he thought I had gone far enough. Then he stopped me with a quiet, "That'll do, my lad, you don't want a rope's-ending, I'm sure." I had not lost all sense, so I pocketed my grievance and crept sullenly forward.

CHAPTER VII.
OFF TO SEA AGAIN

The *Sea Gem* had suffered greatly from the hurricane, but, by dint of strenuous effort on the part of her agents, was now fairly seaworthy again. The ravages of pestilence, however, had left her almost unmanned, the only survivors being the second mate, the carpenter, and a couple of American negro youths. The new captain, I learned from the carpenter – who had taken me under his protection – had been retired for some years, occupying a fairly well-paid post ashore in Havana. But tempted by a lucrative offer from the agents, and greatly longing to return home again, he had accepted the post of master of the *Sea Gem.* He had succeeded in collecting another crew to take the vessel home; but they were, indeed, a motley crowd. Three Austrians, a Montenegrin, a Swede, a Frenchman and two more negroes made up the complement forward, all of whom spoke a barbarous dialect of Spanish among themselves, although the Austrians also conversed indifferently in some Slav tongue as well as in Italian. There was as yet no chief mate, but another American negro had been secured for cook and steward.

No cargo being procurable, we were to proceed in ballast to Mobile for cotton, and thence home. I had not yet lost hope of being able to escape before sailing; and the carpenter, who seemed to be greatly amused by my company, rather encouraged me in the idea. Strangely enough, nobody seemed to trouble about me, and I foolishly sulked about all day, doing nothing but brood over the possibility of getting away. At last a chance presented itself. All the members of the new crew were taken ashore to the consul's office to sign articles, and I, of course, went along. I had still a good deal of money, and, as soon as I had signed, and been ordered by the captain to go down to the boat and await his coming, I demurely obeyed, and bolted in a contrary direction as soon as I had turned the street corner. I was free. True, I had an uneasy feeling that at any moment I might be arrested for desertion; but I refused to entertain it, and hurried up town to the Hotel St. Isabel. Here I got a shock. My old friend the billiard marker was gone, and the new man did not look upon me at all favourably. My other acquaintances in the hotel, too, appeared anxious to avoid me, as if they had been warned not to give me harbourage there. So I wandered forth disconsolately, feeling as if the place was quite strange to me. In the course of a long ramble I fell in with a young American seaman who was outward bound, i. e. hard up, but as full of fun as if he had just been paid off. We had a great time together for a couple of days, getting as far away as Matanzas, and using up my stock of dollars at an alarming rate. The third day we were a bit weary of skylarking about, and decided to return to his boarding-house and have a good night's rest. When we arrived there it was past closing time, and the place was all dark and silent. It was a big corner building, springing straight from the roadway, with flat walls, up to a height of about fourteen feet, where a balcony ran right round the building. To rouse the landlord was more than we dared; so, after much scheming, we managed to find a light cart under a shed, which we dragged from its place and up-ended under the balcony. My chum, who was very tall, climbed up the shafts and scaled the balcony, then lowered his long sash to me. I was speedily by his side, and together we sought and found his room, which opened on to the balcony and was luckily unoccupied. Feeling secure, our love of fun overcame weariness, and after a boisterous pillow-fight we strolled out on to the balcony again. Just then a sereño loitered round the corner and uplifted his voice, "Ave Maria purissima, sin pecado concebida. Doce hora; noche sereña!" As the echoes died away, he caught sight of the cart standing where it ought not, and proceeded to investigate. Moved by the same spirit of mischief, we hurried to the chamber, and found a big jug of water, which Zeke carefully poured upon the head of the muttering vigilante. The effect was amazing. Raving like a lunatic, he assaulted the great door with feet and spear-butt, making an uproar that speedily aroused everybody within earshot. Our house hummed like a hive, and, before many minutes, we heard the

hurried tramp of feet along the uncarpeted corridors, and the babel of many voices – the drenched official's shrilly predominant. Presently they entered our room, to find us just awaking from a sound sleep! and blinking at the lanterns like owls. So deep had been our slumbers, that it was some time before Zeke could explain how I came to be there; but the landlord, whom I recognized as an old acquaintance, was quite easily satisfied about me. Clearly we were not the offenders, and the search-party passed along, leaving us to enjoy a frantic jig at the glorious disturbance we had aroused. How the affair was settled I never heard, for the next day was my last of liberty.

Zeke went down to the shipping-office to look for a ship in the morning, leaving me to my own devices. After an hour's ramble up town, I began to feel a miserable reaction, helped on doubtless by the fact that I had shared my last dollar with my chum, and couldn't for the life of me see where any more were coming from. Presently I turned into a café and called for a cup of coffee (I had not learned to drink anything stronger). While I sat moodily sipping it, a drunken, disreputable-looking man of about forty, roused himself from one of the tables, and, coming over to where I was, addressed me in broad Scotch. With maudlin tears he assured me that he was the chief mate of the *Sea Gem*, and that he must get on board that day, but how he did not know. He dared not go out for fear of being arrested; would I take pity on him, and see him on board? He must have been in a queer state of mind, for I was but a boy of thirteen, and small for my age. My pride was touched, and I readily assented, leading him carefully down to the wharf, and engaging a boat for him. There I would have left him, but he held on to me like a bear, swearing he would be lost and undone without me, so I had to go off with him. When we got alongside, the second mate appeared at the gangway, and lowered a bowline, which I slipped over the helpless creature's head and under his arms. Thus he was hauled on board like a sack of flour. Then the second mate sternly ordered me to come up. I refused. But he quietly said, "Well, then, I must come and fetch you." That was sufficient; I mounted the side, and said good-bye to Havana.

That a rope's-ending awaited me, I felt sure; but instead of that, the captain called me into his cabin, and gave me a most fatherly talking to. His kindness made me feel bad, and I promised him forthwith to be a good boy, and forget my vagabond, independent way of living ashore. Patting me on the head, he dismissed me to make my peace with the second mate, who was very angry with me indeed. He received my apologies in silence, and, although never friendly, I had no cause to complain of his treatment afterwards. Of the mate I saw nothing for two or three days, for, although we left Havana the next morning, he was in such a woeful condition, after his long debauch, that he could not leave his berth. When he did appear he seemed to have forgotten who I was. His manner to me was extremely brutal; in fact, he was a brute all round – although a lively regard for his own skin made him careful how he treated the curious crowd of "dagoes" forward. They were not at all a bad lot, and, considering their limited vocabulary, got on fairly well with the work of the ship. The little Frenchman, in particular, was like a bundle of watch-springs. When he once comprehended an order, it was delightful to see him execute it. But his desperate attempts to understand what was said were quite pathetic. He spoke a mixture of Spanish and French, which the others did not well understand; and at last he pitched upon me as the only one he could hold anything like a conversation with, though how we managed it I have now no idea.

Everybody liked the old man. He was so genial, so simple, that it was a pleasure to see him. But I am afraid he would have had a bad time of it with a crew of Britishers. They appreciate a tight hand, and are quick to take advantage of anything like easy-going on the part of their officers. This polyglot crowd, however, gave no trouble; and, in spite of the bungling stupidity of the mate, who never seemed to get quite clear of the after-effects of his big drunk, things went on oiled wheels.

We were drawing near our port, when one afternoon, during a fine wholesail breeze, there was a sudden gloom which rapidly overspread the sky. Somebody was keeping a bad look-out, doubtless, for before any sail could be reduced, a squall of wind and hail struck the vessel, throwing her on her beam ends. It was so sudden that, although all halliards and sheets were let fly at once, not a yard

would come down, the ship lying over at too great an angle. And above the roaring of the wind, and the flapping of the flying canvas, the ominous rumble of the stone ballast rattling down to leeward could be plainly heard. The deck was like the wall of a house, and, when I saw the foaming sea rising up on the leeside as high as the hatches, I felt sure she was turning bottom up. By God's mercy, we had an old suit of sails bent, which the wind stripped from the yards and stays like muslin. Great sheets of canvas flitted away into the darkness to leeward, while the flying running-gear cracked like volleys of musketry. Gradually as the pressure weakened she righted, regaining as even a keel as the shifted ballast would allow, and we were safe. But there were many pale faces besides mine, the old captain especially looking terribly shaken up.

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