ROBERT MICHAEL BALLANTYNE

THE CORAL ISLAND

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Ballantyne R.

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Содержание

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Chapter One.
Beginning—My early life and character—I thirst for adventure in foreign lands, and go to sea

Roving has always been, and still is, my ruling passion, the joy of my heart, the very sunshine of my existence. In childhood, in boyhood, and in man's estate I have been a rover; not a mere rambler among the woody glens and upon the hill-tops of my own native land, but an enthusiastic rover throughout the length and breadth of the wide, wide world.

It was a wild, black night of howling storm, the night on which I was born on the foaming bosom of the broad Atlantic Ocean. My father was a sea-captain; my grandfather was a sea-captain; my great-grandfather had been a marine. Nobody could tell positively what occupation *his* father had followed; but my dear mother used to assert that he had been a midshipman, whose grandfather, on the mother's side, had been an admiral in the Royal Navy. At any rate, we knew that as far back as our family could be traced, it had been intimately connected with the great watery waste. Indeed, this was the case on both sides of the house; for my mother always went to sea with my father on his long voyages, and so spent the greater part of her life upon the water.

Thus it was, I suppose, that I came to inherit a roving disposition. Soon after I was born, my father, being old, retired from a seafaring life, purchased a small cottage in a fishing village on the west coast of England, and settled down to spend the evening of his life on the shores of that sea which had for so many years been his home. It was not long after this that I began to show the roving spirit that dwelt within me. For some time past my infant legs had been gaining strength, so that I came to be dissatisfied with rubbing the skin off my chubby knees by walking on them, and made many attempts to stand up and walk like a man—all of which attempts, however, resulted in my sitting down violently and in sudden surprise. One day I took advantage of my dear mother's absence to make another effort; and, to my joy, I actually succeeded in reaching the doorstep, over which I tumbled into a pool of muddy water that lay before my father's cottage door. Ah, how vividly I remember the horror of my poor mother when she found me sweltering in the mud amongst a group of cackling ducks, and the tenderness with which she stripped off my dripping clothes and washed my dirty little body! From this time forth my rambles became more frequent and, as I grew older, more distant, until at last I had wandered far and near on the shore and in the woods around our humble dwelling, and did not rest content until my father bound me apprentice to a coasting-vessel and let me go to sea.

For some years I was happy in visiting the seaports, and in coasting along the shores, of my native land. My Christian name was Ralph; and my comrades added to this the name of Rover, in consequence of the passion which I always evinced for travelling. Rover was not my real name; but as I never received any other, I came at last to answer to it as naturally as to my proper name. And as it is not a bad one, I see no good reason why I should not introduce myself to the reader as Ralph Rover. My shipmates were kind, good-natured fellows, and they and I got on very well together. They did, indeed, very frequently make game of and banter me, but not unkindly; and I overheard them sometimes saying that Ralph Rover was a "queer, old-fashioned fellow." This, I must confess, surprised me much; and I pondered the saying long, but could come at no satisfactory conclusion as to that wherein my old-fashionedness lay. It is true I was a quiet lad, and seldom spoke except when spoken to. Moreover, I never could understand the jokes of my companions even when they were explained to me, which dulness in apprehension occasioned me much grief. However, I tried

to make up for it by smiling and looking pleased when I observed that they were laughing at some witticism which I had failed to detect. I was also very fond of inquiring into the nature of things and their causes, and often fell into fits of abstraction while thus engaged in my mind. But in all this I saw nothing that did not seem to be exceedingly natural, and could by no means understand why my comrades should call me “an old-fashioned fellow.”

Now, while engaged in the coasting trade I fell in with many seamen who had travelled to almost every quarter of the globe; and I freely confess that my heart glowed ardently within me as they recounted their wild adventures in foreign lands—the dreadful storms they had weathered, the appalling dangers they had escaped, the wonderful creatures they had seen both on the land and in the sea, and the interesting lands and strange people they had visited. But of all the places of which they told me, none captivated and charmed my imagination so much as the Coral Islands of the Southern Seas. They told me of thousands of beautiful, fertile islands that had been formed by a small creature called the coral insect, where summer reigned nearly all the year round, where the trees were laden with a constant harvest of luxuriant fruit, where the climate was almost perpetually delightful; yet where, strange to say, men were wild, bloodthirsty savages, excepting in those favoured isles to which the Gospel of our Saviour had been conveyed. These exciting accounts had so great an effect upon my mind that, when I reached the age of fifteen, I resolved to make a voyage to the South Seas.

I had no little difficulty, at first, in prevailing on my dear parents to let me go; but when I urged on my father that he would never have become a great captain had he remained in the coasting trade, he saw the truth of what I said and gave his consent. My dear mother, seeing that my father had made up his mind, no longer offered opposition to my wishes. “But, oh Ralph!” she said on the day I bade her adieu, “come back soon to us, my dear boy; for we are getting old now, Ralph, and may not have many years to live.”

I will not take up my readers’ time with a minute account of all that occurred before I took my final leave of my dear parents. Suffice it to say that my father placed me under the charge of an old messmate of his own, a merchant captain, who was on the point of sailing to the South Seas in his own ship, the *Arrow*. My mother gave me her blessing and a small Bible; and her last request was that I would never forget to read a chapter every day and say my prayers, which I promised, with tears in my eyes, that I would certainly do.

Soon afterwards I went on board the *Arrow*, which was a fine, large ship, and set sail for the islands of the Pacific Ocean.

Chapter Two.
The departure—The sea—My companions—Some account of the wonderful sights we saw on the great deep—A dreadful storm and a frightful wreck

It was a bright, beautiful, warm day when our ship spread her canvas to the breeze and sailed for the regions of the south. Oh, how my heart bounded with delight as I listened to the merry chorus of the sailors while they hauled at the ropes and got in the anchor! The captain shouted; the men ran to obey; the noble ship bent over to the breeze, and the shore gradually faded from my view; while I stood looking on, with a kind of feeling that the whole was a delightful dream.

The first thing that struck me as being different from anything I had yet seen during my short career on the sea, was the hoisting of the anchor on deck and lashing it firmly down with ropes, as if we had now bid adieu to the land for ever and would require its services no more.

"There, lass!" cried a broad-shouldered jack-tar, giving the fluke of the anchor a hearty slap with his hand after the housing was completed—"there, lass, take a good nap now, for we sha'n't ask you to kiss the mud again for many a long day to come!"

And so it was. That anchor did not "kiss the mud" for many long days afterwards; and when at last it did, it was for the last time!

There were a number of boys in the ship, but two of them were my special favourites. Jack Martin was a tall, strapping, broad-shouldered youth of eighteen, with a handsome, good-humoured, firm face. He had had a good education, was clever and hearty and lion-like in his actions, but mild and quiet in disposition. Jack was a general favourite, and had a peculiar fondness for me. My other companion was Peterkin Gay. He was little, quick, funny, decidedly mischievous, and about fourteen years old. But Peterkin's mischief was almost always harmless, else he could not have been so much beloved as he was.

"Hallo, youngster!" cried Jack Martin, giving me a slap on the shoulder the day I joined the ship, "come below and I'll show you your berth. You and I are to be messmates; and I think we shall be good friends, for I like the look o' you."

Jack was right. He and I, and Peterkin afterwards, became the best and staunchest friends that ever tossed together on the stormy waves.

I shall say little about the first part of our voyage. We had the usual amount of rough weather and calm; also we saw many strange fish rolling in the sea, and I was greatly delighted one day by seeing a shoal of flying-fish dart out of the water and skim through the air about a foot above the surface. They were pursued by dolphins, which feed on them; and one flying-fish, in its terror, flew over the ship, struck on the rigging, and fell upon the deck. Its wings were just fins elongated; and we found that they could never fly far at a time, and never mounted into the air like birds, but skimmed along the surface of the sea. Jack and I had it for dinner, and found it remarkably good.

When we approached Cape Horn, at the southern extremity of America, the weather became very cold and stormy, and the sailors began to tell stories about the furious gales and the dangers of that terrible cape.

"Cape Horn," said one, "is the most horrible headland I ever doubled. I've sailed round it twice already, and both times the ship was a'most blow'd out o' the water."

"I've been round it once," said another; "an' that time the sails were split, and the ropes frozen in the blocks so that they wouldn't work, and we wos all but lost."

"An' I've been round it five times," cried a third; "an' every time wos wuss than another, the gales wos so tree-mendous!"

"And I've been round it, no times at all," cried Peterkin with an impudent wink in his eye, "an' that time I wos blow'd inside out!"

Nevertheless we passed the dreaded cape without much rough weather, and in the course of a few weeks afterwards were sailing gently, before a warm tropical breeze, over the Pacific Ocean. Thus we proceeded on our voyage—sometimes bounding merrily before a fair breeze; at other times floating calmly on the glassy wave and fishing for the curious inhabitants of the deep, all of which, although the sailors thought little of them, were strange, and interesting, and very wonderful to me.

At last we came among the Coral Islands of the Pacific; and I shall never forget the delight with which I gazed—when we chanced to pass one—at the pure white, dazzling shores, and the verdant palm-trees, which looked bright and beautiful in the sunshine. And often did we three long to be landed on one, imagining that we should certainly find perfect happiness there! Our wish was granted sooner than we expected.

One night, soon after we entered the tropics, an awful storm burst upon our ship. The first squall of wind carried away two of our masts, and left only the foremast standing. Even this, however, was more than enough, for we did not dare to hoist a rag of sail on it. For five days the tempest raged in all its fury. Everything was swept off the decks, except one small boat. The steersman was lashed to the wheel lest he should be washed away, and we all gave ourselves up for lost. The captain said that he had no idea where we were, as we had been blown far out of our course; and we feared much that we might get among the dangerous coral reefs which are so numerous in the Pacific. At daybreak on the sixth morning of the gale we saw land ahead; it was an island encircled by a reef of coral, on which the waves broke in fury. There was calm water within this reef, but we could see only one narrow opening into it. For this opening we steered; but ere we reached it a tremendous wave broke on our stern, tore the rudder completely off, and left us at the mercy of the winds and waves.

"It's all over with us now, lads!" said the captain to the men. "Get the boat ready to launch; we shall be on the rocks in less than half-an-hour."

The men obeyed in gloomy silence, for they felt that there was little hope of so small a boat living in such a sea.

"Come, boys," said Jack Martin, in a grave tone, to me and Peterkin, as we stood on the quarter-deck awaiting our fate—"come, boys; we three shall stick together. You see it is impossible that the little boat can reach the shore, crowded with men. It will be sure to upset, so I mean rather to trust myself to a large oar. I see through the telescope that the ship will strike at the tail of the reef, where the waves break into the quiet water inside; so if we manage to cling to the oar till it is driven over the breakers, we may perhaps gain the shore. What say you? Will you join me?"

We gladly agreed to follow Jack, for he inspired us with confidence—although I could perceive, by the sad tone of his voice, that he had little hope; and indeed, when I looked at the white waves that lashed the reef and boiled against the rocks as if in fury, I felt that there was but a step between us and death. My heart sank within me; but at that moment my thoughts turned to my beloved mother, and I remembered those words, which were among the last that she said to me: "Ralph, my dearest child, always remember, in the hour of danger, to look to your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He alone is both able and willing to save your body and your soul." So I felt much comforted when I thought thereon.

The ship was now very near the rocks. The men were ready with the boat, and the captain beside them giving orders, when a tremendous wave came towards us. We three ran towards the bow to lay hold of our oar, and had barely reached it when the wave fell on the deck with a crash like thunder. At the same moment the ship struck; the foremast broke off close to the deck and went over the side, carrying the boat and men along with it. Our oar got entangled with the wreck, and Jack seized an axe to cut it free; but owing to the motion of the ship, he missed the cordage and struck the axe deep into the oar. Another wave, however, washed it clear of the wreck. We all seized hold of it,

and the next instant we were struggling in the wild sea. The last thing I saw was the boat whirling in the surf, and all the sailors tossed into the foaming waves. Then I became insensible.

On recovering from my swoon I found myself lying on a bank of soft grass, under shelter of an overhanging rock, with Peterkin on his knees by my side, tenderly bathing my temples with water, and endeavouring to stop the blood that flowed from a wound in my forehead.

Chapter Three.
The Coral Island—Our first cogitations after landing and the result of them—We conclude that the island is uninhabited

There is a strange and peculiar sensation experienced in recovering from a state of insensibility which is almost indescribable: a sort of dreamy, confused consciousness; a half-waking, half-sleeping condition, accompanied with a feeling of weariness, which, however, is by no means disagreeable. As I slowly recovered, and heard the voice of Peterkin inquiring whether I felt better, I thought that I must have overslept myself, and should be sent to the masthead for being lazy; but before I could leap up in haste, the thought seemed to vanish suddenly away, and I fancied that I must have been ill. Then a balmy breeze fanned my cheek; and I thought of home, and the garden at the back of my father's cottage with its luxuriant flowers, and the sweet-scented honeysuckle that my dear mother trained so carefully upon the trellised porch. But the roaring of the surf put these delightful thoughts to flight, and I was back again at sea, watching the dolphins and the flying-fish, and reefing topsails off the wild and stormy Cape Horn. Gradually the roar of the surf became louder and more distinct. I thought of being wrecked far, far away from my native land, and slowly opened my eyes to meet those of my companion Jack, who, with a look of intense anxiety, was gazing into my face.

"Speak to us, my dear Ralph!" whispered Jack tenderly. "Are you better now?"

I smiled and looked up, saying, "Better! Why, what do you mean, Jack? I'm quite well."

"Then what are you shamming for, and frightening us in this way?" said Peterkin, smiling through his tears; for the poor boy had been really under the impression that I was dying.

I now raised myself on my elbow, and putting my hand to my forehead, found that it had been cut pretty severely, and that I had lost a good deal of blood.

"Come, come, Ralph," said Jack, pressing me gently backward, "lie down, my boy; you're not right yet. Wet your lips with this water; it's cool and clear as crystal. I got it from a spring close at hand. There, now, don't say a word—hold your tongue," he said, seeing me about to speak. "I'll tell you all about it, but you must not utter a syllable till you have rested well."

"Oh, don't stop him from speaking, Jack!" said Peterkin, who, now that his fears for my safety were removed, busied himself in erecting a shelter of broken branches in order to protect me from the wind—which, however, was almost unnecessary, for the rock beside which I had been laid completely broke the force of the gale. "Let him speak, Jack; it's a comfort to hear that he's alive after lying there stiff and white and sulky for a whole hour, just like an Egyptian mummy.—Never saw such a fellow as you are, Ralph—always up to mischief. You've almost knocked out all my teeth and more than half-choked me, and now you go shamming dead! It's very wicked of you, indeed it is."

While Peterkin ran on in this style my faculties became quite clear again, and I began to understand my position. "What do you mean by saying I half-choked you, Peterkin?" said I.

"What do I mean? Is English not your mother-tongue? or do you want me to repeat it in French by way of making it clearer? Don't you remember?"

"I remember nothing," said I, interrupting him, "after we were thrown into the sea."

"Hush, Peterkin!" said Jack; "you're exciting Ralph with your nonsense.—I'll explain it to you. You recollect that, after the ship struck, we three sprang over the bow into the sea? Well, I noticed that the oar struck your head and gave you that cut on the brow which nearly stunned you, so that you grasped Peterkin round the neck without knowing apparently what you were about. In doing so, you pushed the telescope—which you clung to as if it had been your life—against Peterkin's mouth—"

"Pushed it against his mouth!" interrupted Peterkin; "say crammed it down his throat! Why, there's a distinct mark of the brass rim on the back of my gullet at this moment!"

"Well, well, be that as it may," continued Jack, "you clung to him, Ralph, till I feared you really would choke him. But I saw that he had a good hold of the oar; so I exerted myself to the utmost to push you towards the shore, which we luckily reached without much trouble, for the water inside the reef is quite calm."

"But the captain and crew, what of them?" I inquired anxiously.

Jack shook his head.

"Are they lost?"

"No, they are not lost, I hope; but, I fear, there is not much chance of their being saved. The ship struck at the very tail of the island on which we are cast. When the boat was tossed into the sea it fortunately did not upset, although it shipped a good deal of water, and all the men managed to scramble into it; but before they could get the oars out, the gale carried them past the point and away to leeward of the island. After we landed I saw them endeavouring to pull towards us; but as they had only one pair of oars out of the eight that belonged to the boat, and as the wind was blowing right in their teeth, they gradually lost ground. Then I saw them put about and hoist some sort of sail—a blanket, I fancy, for it was too small for the boat—and in half-an-hour they were out of sight."

"Poor fellows!" I murmured sorrowfully.

"But the more I think about it I've better hope of them," continued Jack in a more cheerful tone. "You see, Ralph, I've read a great deal about these South Sea Islands, and I know that in many places they are scattered about in thousands over the sea, so they're almost sure to fall in with one of them before long."

"I'm sure I hope so," said Peterkin earnestly. "But what has become of the wreck, Jack? I saw you clambering up the rocks there while I was watching Ralph. Did you say she had gone to pieces?"

"No, she has not gone to pieces; but she has gone to the bottom," replied Jack. "As I said before, she struck on the tail of the island and stove in her bow; but the next breaker swung her clear, and she floated away to leeward. The poor fellows in the boat made a hard struggle to reach her, but long before they came near her she filled and went down. It was after she had foundered that I saw them trying to pull to the island."

There was a long silence after Jack had ceased speaking, and I have no doubt that each was revolving in his mind our extraordinary position. For my part, I cannot say that my reflections were very agreeable. I knew that we were on an island, for Jack had said so; but whether it was inhabited or not, I did not know. If it should be inhabited, I felt certain, from all I had heard of South Sea Islanders, that we should be roasted alive and eaten. If it should turn out to be uninhabited, I fancied that we should be starved to death. "Oh," thought I, "if the ship had only struck on the rocks we might have done pretty well, for we could have obtained provisions from her, and tools to enable us to build a shelter; but now—alas! alas! we are lost!" These last words I uttered aloud in my distress.

"Lost, Ralph!" exclaimed Jack, while a smile overspread his hearty countenance. "Saved, you should have said. Your cogitations seem to have taken a wrong road, and led you to a wrong conclusion."

"Do you know what conclusion I have come to?" said Peterkin. "I have made up my mind that it's capital—first-rate—the best thing that ever happened to us, and the most splendid prospect that ever lay before three jolly young tars. We've got an island all to ourselves. We'll take possession in the name of the king. We'll go and enter the service of its black inhabitants. Of course we'll rise, naturally, to the top of affairs: white men always do in savage countries. You shall be king, Jack; Ralph, prime minister; and I shall be—"

"The court-jester," interrupted Jack.

"No," retorted Peterkin; "I'll have no title at all. I shall merely accept a highly responsible situation under government; for you see, Jack, I'm fond of having an enormous salary and nothing to do."

"But suppose there are no natives?"

"Then we'll build a charming villa, and plant a lovely garden round it, stuck all full of the most splendiferous tropical flowers; and we'll farm the land, plant, sow, reap, eat, sleep, and be merry."

"But to be serious," said Jack, assuming a grave expression of countenance—which, I observed, always had the effect of checking Peterkin's disposition to make fun of everything—"we are really in rather an uncomfortable position. If this is a desert island, we shall have to live very much like the wild beasts; for we have not a tool of any kind—not even a knife."

"Yes, we have *that*," said Peterkin, fumbling in his trousers pocket, from which he drew forth a small penknife with only one blade, and that was broken.

"Well, that's better than nothing.—But come," said Jack, rising; "we are wasting our time in *talking* instead of *doing*.—You seem well enough to walk now, Ralph.—Let us see what we have got in our pockets; and then let us climb some hill and ascertain what sort of island we have been cast upon, for, whether good or bad, it seems likely to be our home for some time to come."

Chapter Four.
We examine into our personal property, and make a happy discovery—Our island described—Jack proves himself to be learned and sagacious above his fellows—Curious discoveries—Natural lemonade!

We now seated ourselves upon a rock, and began to examine into our personal property. When we reached the shore after being wrecked, my companions had taken off part of their clothes and spread them out in the sun to dry; for although the gale was raging fiercely, there was not a single cloud in the bright sky. They had also stripped off most part of my wet clothes and spread them also on the rocks. Having resumed our garments, we now searched all our pockets with the utmost care, and laid their contents out on a flat stone before us; and now that our minds were fully alive to our condition, it was with no little anxiety that we turned our several pockets inside out in order that nothing might escape us. When all was collected together, we found that our worldly goods consisted of the following articles:

First, a small penknife with a single blade, broken off about the middle and very rusty, besides having two or three notches on its edge. (Peterkin said of this, with his usual pleasantry, that it would do for a saw as well as a knife, which was a great advantage.) Second, an old German-silver pencil-case without any lead in it. Third, a piece of whip-cord about six yards long. Fourth, a sailmaker's needle of a small size. Fifth, a ship's telescope, which I happened to have in my hand at the time the ship struck, and which I had clung to firmly all the time I was in the water; indeed, it was with difficulty that Jack got it out of my grasp when I was lying insensible on the shore. I cannot understand why I kept such a firm hold of this telescope. They say that a drowning man will clutch at a straw. Perhaps it may have been some such feeling in me, for I did not know that it was in my hand at the time we were wrecked. However, we felt some pleasure in having it with us now—although we did not see that it could be of much use to us, as the glass at the small end was broken to pieces. Our sixth article was a brass ring which Jack always wore on his little finger. I never understood why he wore it; for Jack was not vain of his appearance, and did not seem to care for ornaments of any kind. Peterkin said, "it was in memory of the girl he left behind him!" But as he never spoke of this girl to either of us, I am inclined to think that Peterkin was either jesting or mistaken. In addition to these articles, we had a little bit of tinder and the clothes on our backs. These last were as follows:

Each of us had on a pair of stout canvas trousers and a pair of sailors' thick shoes. Jack wore a red flannel shirt, a blue jacket, and a red Kilmarnock bonnet or nightcap, besides a pair of worsted socks, and a cotton pocket-handkerchief with sixteen portraits of Lord Nelson printed on it and a union-jack in the middle. Peterkin had on a striped flannel shirt—which he wore outside his trousers and belted round his waist, after the manner of a tunic—and a round black straw hat. He had no jacket, having thrown it off just before we were cast into the sea; but this was not of much consequence, as the climate of the island proved to be extremely mild—so much so, indeed, that Jack and I often preferred to go about without our jackets. Peterkin had also a pair of white cotton socks and a blue handkerchief with white spots all over it. My own costume consisted of a blue flannel shirt, a blue jacket, a black cap, and a pair of worsted socks, besides the shoes and canvas trousers already mentioned. This was all we had, and besides these things we had nothing else; but when we thought of the danger from which we had escaped, and how much worse off we might have been had the ship struck on the reef during the night, we felt very thankful that we were possessed of so much, although, I must confess, we sometimes wished that we had had a little more.

While we were examining these things and talking about them, Jack suddenly started and exclaimed:

"The oar! We have forgotten the oar!"

"What good will that do us?" said Peterkin. "There's wood enough on the island to make a thousand oars."

"Ay, lad," replied Jack; "but there's a bit of hoop-iron at the end of it, and that may be of much use to us."

"Very true," said I; "let us go fetch it." And with that we all three rose and hastened down to the beach. I still felt a little weak from loss of blood, so that my companions soon began to leave me behind; but Jack perceived this, and, with his usual considerate good-nature, turned back to help me. This was now the first time that I had looked well about me since landing, as the spot where I had been laid was covered with thick bushes, which almost hid the country from our view. As we now emerged from among these and walked down the sandy beach together, I cast my eyes about, and truly my heart glowed within me and my spirits rose at the beautiful prospect which I beheld on every side. The gale had suddenly died away, just as if it had blown furiously till it dashed our ship upon the rocks, and had nothing more to do after accomplishing that. The island on which we stood was hilly, and covered almost everywhere with the most beautiful and richly coloured trees, bushes, and shrubs, none of which I knew the names of at that time—except, indeed, the cocoa-nut palms, which I recognised at once from the many pictures that I had seen of them before I left home. A sandy beach of dazzling whiteness lined this bright-green shore, and upon it there fell a gentle ripple of the sea. This last astonished me much, for I recollected that at home the sea used to fall in huge billows on the shore long after a storm had subsided. But on casting my glance out to sea the cause became apparent. About a mile distant from the shore I saw the great billows of the ocean rolling like a green wall, and falling with a long, loud roar upon a low coral reef, where they were dashed into white foam and flung up in clouds of spray. This spray sometimes flew exceedingly high, and every here and there a beautiful rainbow was formed for a moment among the falling drops. We afterwards found that this coral reef extended quite round the island, and formed a natural breakwater to it. Beyond this, the sea rose and tossed violently from the effects of the storm; but between the reef and the shore it was as calm and as smooth as a pond.

My heart was filled with more delight than I can express at sight of so many glorious objects, and my thoughts turned suddenly to the contemplation of the Creator of them all. I mention this the more gladly, because at that time, I am ashamed to say, I very seldom thought of my Creator, although I was constantly surrounded by the most beautiful and wonderful of His works. I observed, from the expression of my companion's countenance, that he too derived much joy from the splendid scenery, which was all the more agreeable to us after our long voyage on the salt sea. There the breeze was fresh and cold; but here it was delightfully mild, and when a puff blew off the land it came laden with the most exquisite perfume that can be imagined. While we thus gazed we were startled by a loud "Huzza!" from Peterkin, and on looking towards the edge of the sea we saw him capering and jumping about like a monkey, and ever and anon tugging with all his might at something that lay upon the shore.

"What an odd fellow he is, to be sure!" said Jack, taking me by the arm and hurrying forward. "Come, let us hasten to see what it is."

"Here it is, boys—hurrah! Come along! Just what we want!" cried Peterkin as we drew near, still tugging with all his power. "First-rate; just the very ticket!"

I need scarcely say to my readers that my companion Peterkin was in the habit of using very remarkable and peculiar phrases. And I am free to confess that I did not well understand the meaning of some of them—such, for instance, as "the very ticket;" but I think it my duty to recount everything relating to my adventures with a strict regard to truthfulness in as far as my memory serves me, so I write, as nearly as possible, the exact words that my companions spoke. I often asked Peterkin to

explain what he meant by “ticket,” but he always answered me by going into fits of laughter. However, by observing the occasions on which he used it, I came to understand that it meant to show that something was remarkably good or fortunate.

On coming up we found that Peterkin was vainly endeavouring to pull the axe out of the oar into which, it will be remembered, Jack struck it while endeavouring to cut away the cordage among which it had become entangled at the bow of the ship. Fortunately for us, the axe had remained fast in the oar, and even now all Peterkin’s strength could not draw it out of the cut.

“Ah, that is capital indeed!” cried Jack, at the same time giving the axe a wrench that plucked it out of the tough wood. “How fortunate this is! It will be of more value to us than a hundred knives, and the edge is quite new and sharp.”

“I’ll answer for the toughness of the handle, at any rate!” cried Peterkin; “my arms are nearly pulled out of the sockets. But see here, our luck is great. There is iron on the blade.” He pointed to a piece of hoop-iron as he spoke, which had been nailed round the blade of the oar to prevent it from splitting.

This also was a fortunate discovery. Jack went down on his knees, and with the edge of the axe began carefully to force out the nails. But as they were firmly fixed in, and the operation blunted our axe, we carried the oar up with us to the place where we had left the rest of our things, intending to burn the wood away from the iron at a more convenient time.

“Now, lads,” said Jack after we had laid it on the stone which contained our little all, “I propose that we should go to the tail of the island, where the ship struck, which is only a quarter of a mile off; and see if anything else has been thrown ashore. I don’t expect anything, but it is well to see. When we get back here it will be time to have our supper and prepare our beds.”

“Agreed!” cried Peterkin and I together, as, indeed, we would have agreed to any proposal that Jack made; for, besides his being older and much stronger and taller than either of us, he was a very clever fellow, and, I think, would have induced people much older than himself to choose him for their leader, especially if they required to be led on a bold enterprise.

Now as we hastened along the white beach, which shone so brightly in the rays of the setting sun that our eyes were quite dazzled by its glare, it suddenly came into Peterkin’s head that we had nothing to eat except the wild berries which grew in profusion at our feet.

“What shall we do, Jack?” said he with a rueful look. “Perhaps they may be poisonous!”

“No fear,” replied Jack confidently. “I have observed that a few of them are not unlike some of the berries that grow wild on our own native hills. Besides, I saw one or two strange birds eating them just a few minutes ago, and what won’t kill the birds won’t kill us. But look up there, Peterkin,” continued Jack, pointing to the branched head of a cocoa-nut palm. “There are nuts for us in all stages.”

“So there are!” cried Peterkin, who, being of a very unobservant nature, had been too much taken up with other things to notice anything so high above his head as the fruit of a palm-tree. But whatever faults my young comrade had, he could not be blamed for want of activity or animal spirits. Indeed, the nuts had scarcely been pointed out to him when he bounded up the tall stem of the tree like a squirrel, and in a few minutes returned with three nuts, each as large as a man’s fist.

“You had better keep them till we return,” said Jack. “Let us finish our work before eating.”

“So be it, captain; go ahead!” cried Peterkin, thrusting the nuts into his trousers pocket. “In fact, I don’t want to eat just now; but I would give a good deal for a drink. Oh, that I could find a spring! but I don’t see the smallest sign of one hereabouts. I say, Jack, how does it happen that you seem to be up to everything? You have told us the names of half-a-dozen trees already, and yet you say that you were never in the South Seas before.”

“I’m not up to everything, Peterkin, as you’ll find out ere long,” replied Jack with a smile; “but I have been a great reader of books of travel and adventure all my life, and that has put me up to a good many things that you are, perhaps, not acquainted with.”

"Oh, Jack, that's all humbug! If you begin to lay everything to the credit of books, I'll quite lose my opinion of you," cried Peterkin with a look of contempt. "I've seen a lot o' fellows that were *always* poring over books, and when they came to try to *do* anything, they were no better than baboons!"

"You are quite right," retorted Jack; "and I have seen a lot of fellows, who never looked into books at all, who knew nothing about anything except the things they had actually seen, and very little they knew even about these. Indeed, some were so ignorant that they did not know that cocoa-nuts grew on cocoa-nut trees!"

I could not refrain from laughing at this rebuke, for there was much truth in it as to Peterkin's ignorance.

"Humph! maybe you're right," answered Peterkin; "but I would not give *tuppence* for a man of books if he had nothing else in him."

"Neither would I," said Jack; "but that's no reason why you should run books down, or think less of me for having read them. Suppose, now, Peterkin, that you wanted to build a ship, and I were to give you a long and particular account of the way to do it, would not that be very useful?"

"No doubt of it," said Peterkin, laughing.

"And suppose I were to write the account in a letter instead of telling you in words, would that be less useful?"

"Well—no, perhaps not."

"Well, suppose I were to print it and send it to you in the form of a book, would it not be as good and useful as ever?"

"Oh, bother! Jack, you're a philosopher, and that's worse than anything!" cried Peterkin with a look of pretended horror.

"Very well, Peterkin, we shall see," returned Jack, halting under the shade of a cocoa-nut tree. "You said you were thirsty just a minute ago. Now jump up that tree and bring down a nut—not a ripe one; bring a green, unripe one."

Peterkin looked surprised, but seeing that Jack was in earnest, he obeyed.

"Now cut a hole in it with your penknife and clap it to your mouth, old fellow," said Jack.

Peterkin did as he was directed, and we both burst into uncontrollable laughter at the changes that instantly passed over his expressive countenance. No sooner had he put the nut to his mouth, and thrown back his head in order to catch what came out of it, than his eyes opened to twice their ordinary size with astonishment, while his throat moved vigorously in the act of swallowing. Then a smile and a look of intense delight overspread his face, except, indeed, the mouth, which, being firmly fixed to the hole in the nut, could not take part in the expression; but he endeavoured to make up for this by winking at us excessively with his right eye. At length he stopped, and drawing a long breath, exclaimed:

"Nectar! perfect nectar!—I say, Jack, you're a Briton—the best fellow I ever met in my life—Only taste that!" said he, turning to me and holding the nut to my mouth. I immediately drank, and certainly I was much surprised at the delightful liquid that flowed copiously down my throat. It was extremely cool, and had a sweet taste, mingled with acid; in fact, it was the likest thing to lemonade I ever tasted, and was most grateful and refreshing. I handed the nut to Jack, who, after tasting it, said, "Now, Peterkin, you unbeliever! I never saw or tasted a cocoa-nut in my life before, except those sold in shops at home; but I once read that the green nuts contain that stuff; and you see it is true."

"And, pray," asked Peterkin, "what sort of 'stuff' does the ripe nut contain?"

"A hollow kernel," answered Jack, "with a liquid like milk in it; but it does not satisfy thirst so well as hunger. It is very wholesome food, I believe."

"Meat and drink on the same tree!" cried Peterkin; "washing in the sea, lodging on the ground—and all for nothing! My dear boys, we're set up for life! It must be the ancient Paradise—hurrah!" and Peterkin tossed his straw hat in the air and ran along the beach, hallooing like a madman with delight.

We afterwards found, however, that these lovely islands were very unlike Paradise in many things. But more of this in its proper place.

We had now come to the point of rocks on which the ship had struck, but did not find a single article, although we searched carefully among the coral rocks, which at this place jutted out so far as nearly to join the reef that encircled the island. Just as we were about to return, however, we saw something black floating in a little cove that had escaped our observation. Running forward, we drew it from the water, and found it to be a long, thick, leather boot, such as fishermen at home wear; and a few paces farther on, we picked up its fellow. We at once recognised these as having belonged to our captain, for he had worn them during the whole of the storm in order to guard his legs from the waves and spray that constantly washed over our decks. My first thought on seeing them was that our dear captain had been drowned; but Jack soon put my mind more at rest on that point by saying that if the captain had been drowned with the boots on, he would certainly have been washed ashore along with them, and that he had no doubt whatever he had kicked them off while in the sea that he might swim more easily.

Peterkin immediately put them on; but they were so large that, as Jack said, they would have done for boots, trousers, and vest too. I also tried them; but although I was long enough in the legs for them, they were much too large in the feet for me. So we handed them to Jack, who was anxious to make me keep them; but as they fitted his large limbs and feet as if they had been made for him, I would not hear of it, so he consented at last to use them. I may remark, however, that Jack did not use them often, as they were extremely heavy.

It was beginning to grow dark when we returned to our encampment; so we put off our visit to the top of a hill till next day, and employed the light that yet remained to us in cutting down a quantity of boughs and the broad leaves of a tree of which none of us knew the name. With these we erected a sort of rustic bower, in which we meant to pass the night. There was no absolute necessity for this, because the air of our island was so genial and balmy that we could have slept quite well without any shelter; but we were so little used to sleeping in the open air that we did not quite relish the idea of lying down without any covering over us. Besides, our bower would shelter us from the night-dews or rain, if any should happen to fall. Having strewed the floor with leaves and dry grass, we bethought ourselves of supper.

But it now occurred to us, for the first time, that we had no means of making a fire.

"Now, there's a fix! What shall we do?" said Peterkin, while we both turned our eyes to Jack, to whom we always looked in our difficulties. Jack seemed not a little perplexed.

"There are flints enough, no doubt, on the beach," said he; "but they are of no use at all without a steel. However, we must try." So saying, he went to the beach, and soon returned with two flints. On one of these he placed the tinder, and endeavoured to ignite it; but it was with great difficulty that a very small spark was struck out of the flints, and the tinder, being a bad, hard piece, would not catch. He then tried the bit of hoop-iron, which would not strike fire at all; and after that the back of the axe, with no better success. During all these trials Peterkin sat with his hands in his pockets, gazing with a most melancholy visage at our comrade, his face growing longer and more miserable at each successive failure.

"Oh dear!" he sighed; "I would not care a button for the cooking of our victuals—perhaps they don't need it—but it's so dismal to eat one's supper in the dark, and we have had such a capital day that it's a pity to finish off in this glum style. Oh, I have it!" he cried, starting up: "the spy-glass—the big glass at the end is a burning-glass!"

"You forget that we have no sun," said I.

Peterkin was silent. In his sudden recollection of the telescope he had quite overlooked the absence of the sun.

"Ah, boys, I've got it now!" exclaimed Jack, rising and cutting a branch from a neighbouring bush, which he stripped of its leaves. "I recollect seeing this done once at home. Hand me the bit

of whip-cord." With the cord and branch Jack soon formed a bow. Then he cut a piece about three inches long off the end of a dead branch, which he pointed at the two ends. Round this he passed the cord of the bow, and placed one end against his chest, which was protected from its point by a chip of wood; the other point he placed against the bit of tinder, and then began to saw vigorously with the bow, just as a blacksmith does with his drill while boring a hole in a piece of iron. In a few seconds the tinder began to smoke; in less than a minute it caught fire; and in less than a quarter of an hour we were drinking our lemonade and eating cocoa-nuts round a fire that would have roasted an entire sheep, while the smoke, flames, and sparks flew up among the broad leaves of the overhanging palm-trees, and cast a warm glow upon our leafy bower.

That night the starry sky looked down through the gently rustling trees upon our slumbers, and the distant roaring of the surf upon the coral reef was our lullaby.

Chapter Five.
Morning, and cogitations connected therewith—We luxuriate in the sea, try our diving powers, and make enchanting excursions among the coral groves at the bottom of the ocean—The wonders of the deep enlarged upon

What a joyful thing it is to awaken on a fresh, glorious morning, and find the rising sun staring into your face with dazzling brilliancy! to hear the birds twittering in the bushes, and to hear the murmuring of a rill, or the soft, hissing ripples as they fall upon the seashore! At any time, and in any place, such sights and sounds are most charming; but more especially are they so when one awakens to them, for the first time, in a novel and romantic situation, with the soft, sweet air of a tropical climate mingling with the fresh smell of the sea, and stirring the strange leaves that flutter overhead and around one, or ruffling the plumage of the stranger birds that fly inquiringly around as if to demand what business we have to intrude uninvited on their domains. When I awoke on the morning after the shipwreck, I found myself in this most delightful condition; and as I lay on my back upon my bed of leaves, gazing up through the branches of the cocoa-nut trees into the clear blue sky, and watched the few fleecy clouds that passed slowly across it, my heart expanded more and more with an exulting gladness, the like of which I had never felt before. While I meditated, my thoughts again turned to the great and kind Creator of this beautiful world, as they had done on the previous day when I first beheld the sea and the coral reef, with the mighty waves dashing over it into the calm waters of the lagoon.

While thus meditating, I naturally bethought me of my Bible, for I had faithfully kept the promise which I gave at parting to my beloved mother—that I would read it every morning; and it was with a feeling of dismay that I remembered I had left it in the ship. I was much troubled about this. However, I consoled myself with reflecting that I could keep the second part of my promise to her—namely, that I should never omit to say my prayers. So I rose quietly lest I should disturb my companions, who were still asleep, and stepped aside into the bushes for this purpose.

On my return I found them still slumbering, so I again lay down to think over our situation. Just at that moment I was attracted by the sight of a very small parrot, which Jack afterwards told me was called a paroquet. It was seated on a twig that overhung Peterkin's head, and I was speedily lost in admiration of its bright-green plumage, which was mingled with other gay colours. While I looked I observed that the bird turned its head slowly from side to side and looked downwards, first with the one eye and then with the other. On glancing downwards I observed that Peterkin's mouth was wide open, and that this remarkable bird was looking into it. Peterkin used to say that I had not an atom of fun in my composition, and that I never could understand a joke. In regard to the latter, perhaps he was right; yet I think that, when they were explained to me, I understood jokes as well as most people. But in regard to the former, he must certainly have been wrong, for this bird seemed to me to be extremely funny; and I could not help thinking that if it should happen to faint, or slip its foot, and fall off the twig into Peterkin's mouth, he would perhaps think it funny too! Suddenly the paroquet bent down its head and uttered a loud scream in his face. This awoke him, and with a cry of surprise, he started up, while the foolish bird flew precipitately away.

"Oh, you monster!" cried Peterkin, shaking his fist at the bird. Then he yawned, and rubbed his eyes, and asked what o'clock it was.

I smiled at this question, and answered that, as our watches were at the bottom of the sea, I could not tell, but it was a little past sunrise.

Peterkin now began to remember where we were. As he looked up into the bright sky, and snuffed the scented air, his eyes glistened with delight, and he uttered a faint "Hurrah!" and yawned again. Then he gazed slowly round, till, observing the calm sea through an opening in the bushes, he started suddenly up as if he had received an electric shock, uttered a vehement shout, flung off his garments, and rushing over the white sands, plunged into the water. The cry awoke Jack, who rose on his elbow with a look of grave surprise; but this was followed by a quiet smile of intelligence on seeing Peterkin in the water. With an energy that he only gave way to in moments of excitement, Jack bounded to his feet, threw off his clothes, shook back his hair, and with a lion-like spring, dashed over the sands and plunged into the sea with such force as quite to envelop Peterkin in a shower of spray. Jack was a remarkably good swimmer and diver, so that after his plunge we saw no sign of him for nearly a minute, after which he suddenly emerged, with a cry of joy, a good many yards out from the shore. My spirits were so much raised by seeing all this that I, too, hastily threw off my garments and endeavoured to imitate Jack's vigorous bound; but I was so awkward that my foot caught on a stump, and I fell to the ground. Then I slipped on a stone while running over the sand and nearly fell again, much to the amusement of Peterkin, who laughed heartily and called me a "slow coach;" while Jack cried out, "Come along, Ralph, and I'll help you!" However, when I got into the water I managed very well; for I was really a good swimmer and diver too. I could not, indeed, equal Jack, who was superior to any Englishman I ever saw; but I infinitely surpassed Peterkin, who could only swim a little, and could not dive at all.

While Peterkin enjoyed himself in the shallow water and in running along the beach, Jack and I swam out into the deep water and occasionally dived for stones. I shall never forget my surprise and delight on first beholding the bottom of the sea. As I have before stated, the water within the reef was as calm as a pond; and as there was no wind, it was quite clear from the surface to the bottom, so that we could see down easily even at a depth of twenty or thirty yards. When Jack and I dived into shallower water we expected to have found sand and stones, instead of which we found ourselves in what appeared really to be an enchanted garden. The whole of the bottom of the lagoon, as we called the calm water within the reef, was covered with coral of every shape, size, and hue. Some portions were formed like large mushrooms; others appeared like the brain of a man, having stalks or necks attached to them; but the most common kind was a species of branching coral, and some portions were of a lovely pale-pink colour, others were pure white. Among this there grew large quantities of seaweed of the richest hues imaginable, and of the most graceful forms; while innumerable fishes—blue, red, yellow, green, and striped—sported in and out amongst the flower-beds of this submarine garden, and did not appear to be at all afraid of our approaching them.

On darting to the surface for breath after our first dive, Jack and I rose close to each other.

"Did you ever in your life, Ralph, see anything so lovely?" said Jack as he flung the spray from his hair.

"Never," I replied. "It appears to me like fairy realms. I can scarcely believe that we are not dreaming."

"Dreaming!" cried Jack. "Do you know, Ralph, I'm half-tempted to think that we really are dreaming! But if so, I am resolved to make the most of it and dream another dive; so here goes—down again, my boy!"

We took the second dive together, and kept beside each other while under water; and I was greatly surprised to find that we could keep down much longer than I ever recollect having done in our own seas at home. I believe that this was owing to the heat of the water, which was so warm that we afterwards found we could remain in it for two and three hours at a time without feeling any unpleasant effects such as we used to experience in the sea at home. When Jack reached the bottom, he grasped the coral stems and crept along on his hands and knees, peeping under the seaweed and among the rocks. I observed him, also, pick up one or two large oysters and retain them in his grasp, as if he meant to take them up with him; so I also gathered a few. Suddenly he made a grasp at a

fish with blue and yellow stripes on its back, and actually touched its tail, but did not catch it. At this he turned towards me and attempted to smile; but no sooner had he done so than he sprang like an arrow to the surface, where, on following him, I found him gasping and coughing and spitting water from his mouth. In a few minutes he recovered, and we both turned to swim ashore.

"I declare, Ralph," said he, "that I actually tried to laugh under water!"

"So I saw," I replied; "and I observed that you very nearly caught that fish by the tail. It would have done capitally for breakfast, if you had."

"Breakfast enough here," said he, holding up the oysters as we landed and ran up the beach. —"Hallo, Peterkin! Here you are, boy! split open these fellows while Ralph and I put on our clothes. They'll agree with the cocoa-nuts excellently, I have no doubt."

Peterkin, who was already dressed, took the oysters and opened them with the edge of our axe, exclaiming, "Now, that's capital! There's nothing I'm so fond of."

"Ah! that's lucky," remarked Jack. "I'll be able to keep you in good order now, Master Peterkin. You know you can't dive any better than a cat. So, sir, whenever you behave ill you shall have no oysters for breakfast."

"I'm very glad that our prospect of breakfast is so good," said I, "for I'm very hungry."

"Here, then, stop your mouth with that, Ralph," said Peterkin, holding a large oyster to my lips. I opened my mouth and swallowed it in silence, and really it was remarkably good.

We now set ourselves earnestly about our preparations for spending the day. We had no difficulty with the fire this morning as our burning-glass was an admirable one; and while we roasted a few oysters and ate our cocoa-nuts, we held a long, animated conversation about our plans for the future. What those plans were, and how we carried them into effect, the reader shall see hereafter.

Chapter Six.
An excursion into the interior in which we make many valuable and interesting discoveries—We get a dreadful fright—The bread-fruit tree—Wonderful peculiarity of some of the fruit-trees—Signs of former inhabitants

Our first care, after breakfast, was to place the few articles we possessed in the crevice of a rock at the farther end of a small cave which we discovered near our encampment. This cave, we hoped, might be useful to us afterwards as a storehouse. Then we cut two large clubs off a species of very hard tree which grew near at hand. One of these was given to Peterkin, the other to me, and Jack armed himself with the axe. We took these precautions because we purposed to make an excursion to the top of the mountains of the interior, in order to obtain a better view of our island. Of course we knew not what dangers might befall us by the way, so thought it best to be prepared.

Having completed our arrangements and carefully extinguished our fire, we sallied forth and walked a short distance along the sea-beach till we came to the entrance of a valley, through which flowed the rivulet before mentioned. Here we turned our backs on the sea and struck into the interior.

The prospect that burst upon our view on entering the valley was truly splendid. On either side of us there was a gentle rise in the land, which thus formed two ridges, about a mile apart, on each side of the valley. These ridges—which, as well as the low grounds between them, were covered with trees and shrubs of the most luxuriant kind—continued to recede inland for about two miles, when they joined the foot of a small mountain. This hill rose rather abruptly from the head of the valley, and was likewise entirely covered, even to the top, with trees—except on one particular spot near the left shoulder, where was a bare and rocky place of a broken and savage character. Beyond this hill we could not see, and we therefore directed our course up the banks of the rivulet towards the foot of it, intending to climb to the top, should that be possible—as, indeed, we had no doubt it was.

Jack, being the wisest and boldest among us, took the lead, carrying the axe on his shoulder. Peterkin, with his enormous club, came second, as he said he should like to be in a position to defend me if any danger should threaten. I brought up the rear; but having been more taken up with the wonderful and curious things I saw at starting than with thoughts of possible danger, I had very foolishly left my club behind me. Although, as I have said, the trees and bushes were very luxuriant, they were not so thickly crowded together as to hinder our progress among them. We were able to wind in and out, and to follow the banks of the stream quite easily, although, it is true, the height and thickness of the foliage prevented us from seeing far ahead. But sometimes a jutting-out rock on the hillsides afforded us a position whence we could enjoy the romantic view and mark our progress towards the foot of the hill. I was particularly struck, during the walk, with the richness of the undergrowth in most places, and recognised many berries and plants that resembled those of my native land, especially a tall, elegantly formed fern, which emitted an agreeable perfume. There were several kinds of flowers, too; but I did not see so many of these as I should have expected in such a climate. We also saw a great variety of small birds of bright plumage, and many paroquets similar to the one, that awoke Peterkin so rudely in the morning.

Thus we advanced to the foot of the hill without encountering anything to alarm us, except, indeed, once, when we were passing close under a part of the hill which was hidden from our view by the broad leaves of the banana-trees, which grew in great luxuriance in that part. Jack was just preparing to force his way through this thicket when we were startled and arrested by a strange pattering or rumbling sound, which appeared to us quite different from any of the sounds we had heard during the previous part of our walk.

"Hallo!" cried Peterkin, stopping short, and grasping his club with both hands; "what's that?"

Neither of us replied; but Jack seized his axe in his right hand, while with the other he pushed aside the broad leaves and endeavoured to peer amongst them.

"I can see nothing," he said after a short pause. "I think it—"

Again the rumbling sound came, louder than before, and we all sprang back and stood on the defensive. For myself, having forgotten my club, and not having taken the precaution to cut another, I buttoned my jacket, doubled my fists, and threw myself into a boxing attitude. I must say, however, that I felt somewhat uneasy; and my companions afterwards confessed that their thoughts at this moment had been instantly filled with all they had ever heard or read of wild beasts and savages, torturings at the stake, roastings alive, and such-like horrible things. Suddenly the pattering noise increased with tenfold violence. It was followed by a fearful crash among the bushes, which was rapidly repeated, as if some gigantic animal were bounding towards us. In another moment an enormous rock came crashing through the shrubbery, followed by a cloud of dust and small stones, and flew close past the spot where we stood, carrying bushes and young trees along with it.

"Pooh! is that all?" exclaimed Peterkin, wiping the perspiration off his forehead. "Why, I thought it was all the wild men and beasts in the South Sea Islands, galloping on in one grand charge to sweep us off the face of the earth, instead of a mere stone tumbling down the mountain-side!"

"Nevertheless," remarked Jack, "if that same stone had hit any of us it would have rendered the charge you speak of quite unnecessary, Peterkin."

This was true, and I felt very thankful for our escape. On examining the spot more narrowly, we found that it lay close to the foot of a very rugged precipice, from which stones of various sizes were always tumbling at intervals. Indeed, the numerous fragments lying scattered all round might have suggested the cause of the sound had we not been too suddenly alarmed to think of anything.

We now resumed our journey, resolving that, in our future excursions into the interior, we would be careful to avoid this dangerous precipice.

Soon afterwards we arrived at the foot of the hill, and prepared to ascend it. Here Jack made a discovery which caused us all very great joy. This was a tree of a remarkably beautiful appearance, which Jack confidently declared to be the celebrated bread-fruit tree.

"Is it celebrated?" inquired Peterkin with a look of great simplicity.

"It is," replied Jack.

"That's odd, now," rejoined Peterkin; "I never heard of it before."

"Then it's not so celebrated as I thought it was," returned Jack, quietly squeezing Peterkin's hat over his eyes; "but listen, you ignorant boobie! and hear of it now."

Peterkin readjusted his hat, and was soon listening with as much interest as myself while Jack told us that this tree is one of the most valuable in the islands of the south; that it bears two, sometimes three, crops of fruit in the year; that the fruit is very like wheaten bread in appearance, and that it constitutes the principal food of many of the islanders.

"So," said Peterkin, "we seem to have everything ready prepared to our hands in this wonderful island—lemonade ready bottled in nuts, and loaf-bread growing on the trees!"

Peterkin, as usual, was jesting; nevertheless, it is a curious fact that he spoke almost the literal truth.

"Moreover," continued Jack, "the bread-fruit tree affords a capital gum, which serves the natives for pitching their canoes; the bark of the young branches is made by them into cloth; and of the wood, which is durable and of a good colour, they build their houses. So you see, lads, that we have no lack of material here to make us comfortable, if we are only clever enough to use it."

"But are you sure that that's it?" asked Peterkin.

"Quite sure," replied Jack; "for I was particularly interested in the account I once read of it, and I remember the description well. I am sorry, however that I have forgotten the descriptions of

many other trees which I am sure we have seen to-day, if we could but recognise them. So you see, Peterkin, I'm not up to everything yet."

"Never mind, Jack," said Peterkin with a grave, patronising expression of countenance, patting his tall companion on the shoulder—"never mind, Jack; you know a good deal for your age. You're a clever boy, sir—a promising young man; and if you only go on as you have begun, sir, you will—"

The end of this speech was suddenly cut short by Jack tripping up Peterkin's heels and tumbling him into a mass of thick shrubs, where, finding himself comfortable, he lay still, basking in the sunshine, while Jack and I examined the bread-fruit tree.

We were much struck with the deep, rich green colour of its broad leaves, which were twelve or eighteen inches long, deeply indented, and of a glossy smoothness, like the laurel. The fruit, with which it was loaded, was nearly round, and appeared to be about six inches in diameter, with a rough rind, marked with lozenge-shaped divisions. It was of various colours, from light pea-green to brown and rich yellow. Jack said that the yellow was the ripe fruit. We afterwards found that most of the fruit-trees on the island were evergreens, and that we might, when we wished, pluck the blossom and the ripe fruit from the same tree. Such a wonderful difference from the trees of our own country surprised us not a little. The bark of the tree was rough and light-coloured; the trunk was about two feet in diameter, and it appeared to be twenty feet high, being quite destitute of branches up to that height, where it branched off into a beautiful and umbrageous head. We noticed that the fruit hung in clusters of twos and threes on the branches; but as we were anxious to get to the top of the hill, we refrained from attempting to pluck any at that time.

Our hearts were now very much cheered by our good fortune, and it was with light and active steps that we clambered up the steep sides of the hill. On reaching the summit a new, and if possible a grander, prospect met our gaze. We found that this was not the highest part of the island, but that another hill lay beyond, with a wide valley between it and the one on which we stood. This valley, like the first, was also full of rich trees—some dark and some light green, some heavy and thick in foliage, and others light, feathery, and graceful, while the beautiful blossoms on many of them threw a sort of rainbow tint over all, and gave to the valley the appearance of a garden of flowers. Among these we recognised many of the bread-fruit trees, laden with yellow fruit, and also a great many cocoa-nut palms. After gazing our fill we pushed down the hillside, crossed the valley, and soon began to ascend the second mountain. It was clothed with trees nearly to the top; but the summit was bare, and in some places broken.

While on our way up we came to an object which filled us with much interest. This was the stump of a tree that had evidently been cut down with an axe! So, then, we were not the first who had viewed this beautiful isle. The hand of man had been at work there before us. It now began to recur to us again that perhaps the island was inhabited, although we had not seen any traces of man until now. But a second glance at the stump convinced us that we had not more reason to think so now than formerly; for the surface of the wood was quite decayed and partly covered with fungus and green matter, so that it must have been cut many years ago.

"Perhaps," said Peterkin, "some ship or other has touched here long ago for wood, and only taken one tree."

We did not think this likely, however, because, in such circumstances, the crew of a ship would cut wood of small size and near the shore; whereas this was a large tree, and stood near the top of the mountain. In fact, it was the highest large tree on the mountain, all above it being wood of very recent growth.

"I can't understand it," said Jack, scratching the surface of the stump with his axe. "I can only suppose that the savages have been here and cut it for some purpose known only to themselves. But, hallo! what have we here?"

As he spoke Jack began carefully to scrape away the moss and fungus from the stump, and soon laid bare three distinct traces of marks, as if some inscription or initials had been cut thereon.

But although the traces were distinct, beyond all doubt, the exact form of the letters could not be made out. Jack thought they looked like JS, but we could not be certain. They had apparently been carelessly cut, and long exposure to the weather had so broken them up that we could not make out what they were. We were exceedingly perplexed at this discovery, and stayed a long time at the place conjecturing what these marks could have been, but without avail; so, as the day was advancing, we left it, and quickly reached the top of the mountain.

We found this to be the highest point of the island, and from it we saw our kingdom lying, as it were, like a map around us. As I have always thought it impossible to get a thing properly into one's understanding without comprehending it, I shall beg the reader's patience for a little while I describe our island, thus, shortly:

It consisted of two mountains: the one we guessed at five hundred feet; the other, on which we stood, at one thousand. Between these lay a rich, beautiful valley, as already said. This valley crossed the island from one end to the other, being high in the middle and sloping on each side towards the sea. The large mountain sloped, on the side farthest from where we had been wrecked, gradually towards the sea; but although, when viewed at a glance, it had thus a regular sloping appearance, a more careful observation showed that it was broken up into a multitude of very small vales—or, rather, dells and glens—intermingled with little rugged spots and small but abrupt precipices here and there, with rivulets tumbling over their edges and wandering down the slopes in little white streams, sometimes glistening among the broad leaves of the bread-fruit and cocoa-nut trees, or hiding altogether beneath the rich underwood. At the base of this mountain lay a narrow bright-green plain or meadow, which terminated abruptly at the shore. On the other side of the island, whence we had come, stood the smaller hill, at the foot of which diverged three valleys—one being that which we had ascended, with a smaller vale on each side of it, and separated from it by the two ridges before mentioned. In these smaller valleys there were no streams, but they were clothed with the same luxuriant vegetation.

The diameter of the island seemed to be about ten miles, and as it was almost circular in form, its circumference must have been thirty miles—perhaps a little more, if allowance be made for the numerous bays and indentations of the shore. The entire island was belted by a beach of pure white sand, on which laved the gentle ripples of the lagoon. We now also observed that the coral reef completely encircled the island; but it varied its distance from it here and there—in some places being a mile from the beach, in others a few hundred yards, but the average distance was half-a-mile. The reef lay very low, and the spray of the surf broke quite over it in many places. This surf never ceased its roar; for, however calm the weather might be, there is always a gentle swaying motion in the great Pacific, which, although scarce noticeable out at sea, reaches the shore at last in a huge billow. The water within the lagoon, as before said, was perfectly still. There were three narrow openings in the reef: one opposite each end of the valley which I have described as crossing the island; the other opposite our own valley, which we afterwards named the Valley of the Wreck. At each of these openings the reef rose into two small green islets, covered with bushes, and having one or two cocoa-nut palms on each. These islets were very singular, and appeared as if planted expressly for the purpose of marking the channel into the lagoon. Our captain was making for one of these openings the day we were wrecked—and would have reached it, too, I doubt not, had not the rudder been torn away. Within the lagoon were several pretty, low coral islands, just opposite our encampment; and immediately beyond these, out at sea, lay about a dozen other islands, at various distances, from half-a-mile to ten miles—all of them, as far as we could discern, smaller than ours and apparently uninhabited. They seemed to be low coral islands, raised but little above the sea, yet covered with cocoa-nut trees.

All this we noted, and a great deal more, while we sat on the top of the mountain. After we had satisfied ourselves we prepared to return; but here, again, we discovered traces of the presence of man. These were a pole or staff, and one or two pieces of wood which had been squared with

an axe. All of these were, however, very much decayed, and they had evidently not been touched for many years.

Full of these discoveries, we returned to our encampment. On the way we fell in with the traces of some four-footed animal, but whether old or of recent date none of us were able to guess. This also tended to raise our hopes of obtaining some animal food on the island; so we reached home in good spirits, quite prepared for supper, and highly satisfied with our excursion.

After much discussion, in which Peterkin took the lead, we came to the conclusion that the island was uninhabited, and went to bed.

Chapter Seven.
Jack's ingenuity—We get into difficulties about fishing, and get out of them by a method which gives us a cold bath—Horrible encounter with a shark

For several days after the excursion related in the last chapter we did not wander far from our encampment, but gave ourselves up to forming plans for the future and making our present abode comfortable.

There were various causes that induced this state of comparative inaction. In the first place, although everything around us was so delightful, and we could without difficulty obtain all that we required for our bodily comfort, we did not quite like the idea of settling down here for the rest of our lives, far away from our friends and our native land. To set energetically about preparations for a permanent residence seemed so like making up our minds to saying adieu to home and friends for ever that we tacitly shrank from it, and put off our preparations, for one reason and another, as long as we could. Then there was a little uncertainty still as to there being natives on the island, and we entertained a kind of faint hope that a ship might come and take us off. But as day after day passed, and neither savages nor ships appeared, we gave up all hope of an early deliverance, and set diligently to work at our homestead.

During this time, however, we had not been altogether idle. We made several experiments in cooking the cocoa-nut, most of which did not improve it. Then we removed our goods and took up our abode in the cave, but found the change so bad that we returned gladly to the bower. Besides this, we bathed very frequently, and talked a great deal—at least Jack and Peterkin did; I listened. Among other useful things, Jack, who was ever the most active and diligent, converted about three inches of the hoop-iron into an excellent knife. First, he beat it quite flat with the axe; then he made a rude handle, and tied the hoop-iron to it with our piece of whip-cord, and ground it to an edge on a piece of sandstone. When it was finished he used it to shape a better handle, to which he fixed it with a strip of his cotton handkerchief—in which operation he had, as Peterkin pointed out, torn off one of Lord Nelson's noses. However, the whip-cord, thus set free, was used by Peterkin as a fishing-line. He merely tied a piece of oyster to the end of it. This the fish were allowed to swallow, and then they were pulled quickly ashore. But as the line was very short and we had no boat, the fish we caught were exceedingly small.

One day Peterkin came up from the beach, where he had been angling, and said in a very cross tone, "I'll tell you what, Jack, I'm not going to be humbugged with catching such contemptible things any longer. I want you to swim out with me on your back, and let me fish in deep water!"

"Dear me, Peterkin!" replied Jack; "I had no idea you were taking the thing so much to heart, else I would have got you out of that difficulty long ago. Let me see;" and Jack looked down at a piece of timber, on which he had been labouring, with a peculiar gaze of abstraction which he always assumed when trying to invent or discover anything.

"What say you to building a boat?" he inquired, looking up hastily.

"Take far too long," was the reply; "can't be bothered waiting. I want to begin at once!"

Again Jack considered. "I have it!" he cried. "We'll fell a large tree and launch the trunk of it in the water, so that when you want to fish you've nothing to do but to swim out to it."

"Would not a small raft do better?" said I.

"Much better; but we have no ropes to bind it together with. Perhaps we may find something hereafter that will do as well, but in the meantime let us try the tree."

This was agreed on; so we started off to a spot, not far distant, where we knew of a tree that would suit us which grew near the water's edge. As soon as we reached it Jack threw off his coat, and wielding the axe with his sturdy arms, hacked and hewed at it for a quarter of an hour without stopping. Then he paused, and while he sat down to rest I continued the work. Then Peterkin made a vigorous attack on it; so that when Jack renewed his powerful blows, a few minutes' cutting brought it down with a terrible crash.

"Hurrah! Now for it!" cried Jack. "Let us off with its head!"

So saying, he began to cut through the stem again at about six yards from the thick end. This done, he cut three strong, short poles or levers from the stout branches, with which to roll the log down the beach into the sea; for, as it was nearly two feet thick at the large end, we could not move it without such helps. With the levers, however, we rolled it slowly into the sea.

Having been thus successful in launching our vessel, we next shaped the levers into rude oars or paddles, and then attempted to embark. This was easy enough to do; but after seating ourselves astride the log, it was with the utmost difficulty we kept it from rolling round and plunging us into the water. Not that we minded that much; but we preferred, if possible, to fish in dry clothes. To be sure, our trousers were necessarily wet, as our legs were dangling in the water on each side of the log; but as they could be easily dried, we did not care. After half-an-hour's practice, we became expert enough to keep our balance pretty steadily. Then Peterkin laid down his paddle, and having baited his line with a whole oyster, dropped it into deep water.

"Now, then, Jack," said he, "be cautious; steer clear o' that seaweed. There! that's it; gently, now —gently. I see a fellow at least a foot long down there coming to – Ha! that's it! Oh bother! he's off!"

"Did he bite?" said Jack, urging the log onwards a little with his paddle.

"Bite? Ay! he took it into his mouth, but the moment I began to haul he opened his jaws and let it out again."

"Let him swallow it next time," said Jack, laughing at the melancholy expression of Peterkin's visage.

"There he's again!" cried Peterkin, his eyes flashing with excitement. "Look out! Now, then! No! Yes! No! Why, the brute *won't* swallow it!"

"Try to haul him up by the mouth, then!" cried Jack. "Do it gently."

A heavy sigh and a look of blank despair showed that poor Peterkin had tried and failed again.

"Never mind, lad," said Jack in a voice of sympathy; "we'll move on and offer it to some other fish." So saying, Jack plied his paddle; but scarcely had he moved from the spot when a fish with an enormous head and a little body darted from under a rock and swallowed the bait at once.

"Got him this time—that's a fact!" cried Peterkin, hauling in the line. "He's swallowed the bait right down to his tail, I declare! Oh, what a thumper!"

As the fish came struggling to the surface we leaned forward to see it, and overbalanced the log. Peterkin threw his arms round the fish's neck, and in another instant we were all floundering in the water!

A shout of laughter burst from us as we rose to the surface, like three drowned rats, and seized hold of the log. We soon recovered our position, and sat more warily; while Peterkin secured the fish, which had well-nigh escaped in the midst of our struggles. It was little worth having, however. But, as Peterkin remarked, it was better than the smouts he had been catching for the last two or three days; so we laid it on the log before us, and having re-baited the line, dropped it in again for another.

Now, while we were thus intent upon our sport, our attention was suddenly attracted by a ripple on the sea, just a few yards away from us. Peterkin shouted to us to paddle in that direction, as he thought it was a big fish and we might have a chance of catching it. But Jack, instead of complying, said, in a deep, earnest tone of voice, which I never before heard him use, "Haul up your line, Peterkin; seize your paddle. Quick—it's a shark!"

The horror with which we heard this may well be imagined; for it must be remembered that our legs were hanging down in the water, and we could not venture to pull them up without upsetting the log. Peterkin instantly hauled up the line, and grasping his paddle, exerted himself to the utmost, while we also did our best to make for shore. But we were a good way off, and the log being, as I have before said, very heavy, moved but slowly through the water. We now saw the shark quite distinctly swimming round and round us, its sharp fin every now and then protruding above the water. From its active and unsteady motions, Jack knew it was making up its mind to attack us; so he urged us vehemently to paddle for our lives, while he himself set us the example. Suddenly he shouted, "Look out! there he comes!" and in a second we saw the monstrous fish dive close under us and turn half-over on his side. But we all made a great commotion with our paddles, which, no doubt, frightened it away for that time, as we saw it immediately after circling round us as before.

"Throw the fish to him!" cried Jack in a quick, suppressed voice; "we'll make the shore in time yet if we can keep him off for a few minutes."

Peterkin stopped one instant to obey the command, and then plied his paddle again with all his might. No sooner had the fish fallen on the water than we observed the shark to sink. In another second we saw its white breast rising; for sharks always turn over on their sides when about to seize their prey, their mouths being not at the point of their heads like those of other fish, but, as it were, under their chins. In another moment his snout rose above the water; his wide jaws, armed with a terrific double row of teeth, appeared; the dead fish was engulfed, and the shark sank out of sight. But Jack was mistaken in supposing that it would be satisfied. In a very few minutes it returned to us, and its quick motions led us to fear that it would attack us at once.

"Stop paddling!" cried Jack suddenly. "I see it coming up behind us. Now, obey my orders *quickly*. Our lives may depend on it. Ralph—Peterkin—do your best to *balance the log*. Don't look out for the shark. Don't glance behind you. Do nothing but balance the log."

Peterkin and I instantly did as we were ordered, being only too glad to do anything that afforded us a chance or a hope of escape, for we had implicit confidence in Jack's courage and wisdom. For a few seconds, that seemed long minutes to my mind, we sat thus silently; but I could not resist glancing backward, despite the orders to the contrary. On doing so, I saw Jack sitting rigid like a statue, with his paddle raised, his lips compressed, and his eyebrows bent over his eyes, which glared savagely from beneath them down into the water.

I also saw the shark, to my horror, quite close under the log, in the act of darting towards Jack's foot. I could scarce suppress a cry on beholding this. In another moment the shark rose. Jack drew his leg suddenly from the water and threw it over the log. The monster's snout rubbed against the log as it passed, and revealed its hideous jaws, into which Jack instantly plunged the paddle and thrust it down its throat. So violent was this act that Jack rose to his feet in performing it; the log was thereby rolled completely over, and we were once more plunged into the water. We all rose, spluttering and gasping, in a moment.

"Now, then, strike out for shore!" cried Jack.—"Here, Peterkin, catch hold of my collar, and kick out with a will!"

Peterkin did as he was desired, and Jack struck out with such force that he cut through the water like a boat; while I, being free from all encumbrance, succeeded in keeping up with him. As we had by this time drawn pretty near to the shore, a few minutes more sufficed to carry us into shallow water; and finally, we landed in safety, though very much exhausted, and not a little frightened, by our terrible adventure.

Chapter Eight.
The beauties of the bottom of the sea tempt Peterkin to dive—How he did it—More difficulties overcome—The water garden—Curious creatures of the sea—The tank —Candles missed very much, and the candle-nut tree discovered—Wonderful account of Peterkin's first voyage —Cloth found growing on a tree—A plan projected, and arms prepared for offence and defence—A dreadful cry

Our encounter with the shark was the first great danger that had befallen us since landing on this island; and we felt very seriously affected by it, especially when we considered that we had so often unwittingly incurred the same danger before while bathing. We were now forced to take to fishing again in the shallow water until we should succeed in constructing a raft. What troubled us most, however, was that we were compelled to forego our morning swimming-excursions. We did, indeed, continue to enjoy our bathe in the shallow water; but Jack and I found that one great source of our enjoyment was gone when we could no longer dive down among the beautiful coral groves at the bottom of the lagoon. We had come to be so fond of this exercise, and to take such an interest in watching the formations of coral and the gambols of the many beautiful fish amongst the forest of red and green seaweeds, that we had become quite familiar with the appearance of the fish and the localities that they chiefly haunted. We had also become expert divers. But we made it a rule never to stay long under water at a time. Jack told me that to do so often was bad for the lungs, and instead of affording us enjoyment, would ere long do us a serious injury. So we never stayed at the bottom as long as we might have done, but came up frequently to the top for fresh air, and dived down again immediately. Sometimes, when Jack happened to be in a humorous frame, he would seat himself at the bottom of the sea on one of the brain-corals, as if he were seated on a large paddock-stool, and then make faces at me in order, if possible, to make me laugh under water. At first, when he took me unawares, he nearly succeeded, and I had to shoot to the surface in order to laugh; but afterwards I became aware of his intentions, and being naturally of a grave disposition, I had no difficulty in restraining myself. I used often to wonder how poor Peterkin would have liked to be with us; and he sometimes expressed much regret at being unable to join us. I used to do my best to gratify him, poor fellow, by relating all the wonders that we saw; but this, instead of satisfying, seemed only to whet his curiosity the more, so one day we prevailed on him to try to go down with us. But although a brave boy in every other way, Peterkin was very nervous in the water; and it was with difficulty we got him to consent to be taken down, for he could never have managed to push himself down to the bottom without assistance. But no sooner had we pulled him down a yard or so into the deep, clear water than he began to struggle and kick violently; so we were forced to let him go, when he rose out of the water like a cork, gave a loud gasp and a frightful roar, and struck out for the land with the utmost possible haste.

Now all this pleasure we were to forego, and when we thought thereon, Jack and I felt very much depressed in our spirits. I could see, also, that Peterkin grieved and sympathised with us; for, when talking about this matter, he refrained from jesting and bantering us upon it.

As, however, a man's difficulties usually set him upon devising methods to overcome them, whereby he often discovers better things than those he may have lost, so this our difficulty induced us to think of searching for a large pool among the rocks, where the water should be deep enough

for diving, yet so surrounded by rocks as to prevent sharks from getting at us. And such a pool we afterwards found, which proved to be very much better than our most sanguine hopes anticipated. It was situated not more than ten minutes' walk from our camp, and was in the form of a small, deep bay or basin, the entrance to which, besides being narrow, was so shallow that no fish so large as a shark could get in—at least, not unless he should be a remarkably thin one.

Inside of this basin, which we called our Water Garden, the coral formations were much more wonderful, and the seaweed plants far more lovely and vividly coloured, than in the lagoon itself. And the water was so clear and still that, although very deep, you could see the minutest object at the bottom. Besides this, there was a ledge of rock which overhung the basin at its deepest part, from which we could dive pleasantly, and whereon Peterkin could sit and see not only all the wonders I had described to him, but also see Jack and me creeping amongst the marine shrubbery at the bottom, like—as he expressed it—"two great white sea-monsters." During these excursions of ours to the bottom of the sea we began to get an insight into the manners and customs of its inhabitants, and to make discoveries of wonderful things, the like of which we never before conceived. Among other things, we were deeply interested with the operations of the little coral insect, which, I was informed by Jack, is supposed to have entirely constructed many of the numerous islands in the Pacific Ocean. And certainly, when we considered the great reef which these insects had formed round the island on which we were cast, and observed their ceaseless activity in building their myriad cells, it did at first seem as if this might be true; but then, again, when I looked at the mountains of the island, and reflected that there were thousands of such (many of them much higher) in the South Seas, I doubted that there must be some mistake here. But more of this hereafter.

I also became much taken up with the manners and appearance of the anemones, and starfish, and crabs, and sea-urchins, and such-like creatures; and was not content with watching those I saw during my dives in the Water Garden, but I must needs scoop out a hole in the coral rock close to it, which I filled with salt water, and stocked with sundry specimens of anemones and shell-fish, in order to watch more closely how they were in the habit of passing their time. Our burning-glass, also, now became a great treasure to me, as it enabled me to magnify, and so to perceive more clearly, the forms and actions of these curious creatures of the deep.

Having now got ourselves into a very comfortable condition, we began to talk of a project which we had long had in contemplation—namely, to travel entirely round the island, in order, first, to ascertain whether it contained any other productions which might be useful to us; and, second, to see whether there might be any place more convenient and suitable for our permanent residence than that on which we were now encamped. Not that we were in any degree dissatisfied with it. On the contrary, we entertained quite a home-feeling to our bower and its neighbourhood; but if a better place did exist, there was no reason why we should not make use of it. At any rate, it would be well to know of its existence.

We had much earnest talk over this matter. But Jack proposed that, before undertaking such an excursion, we should supply ourselves with good defensive arms; for, as we intended not only to go round all the shore, but to descend most of the valleys, before returning home, we should be likely to meet in with—he would not say *dangers*—but at least with everything that existed on the island, whatever that might be.

"Besides," said Jack, "it won't do for us to live on cocoa-nuts and oysters always. No doubt they are very excellent in their way, but I think a little animal food now and then would be agreeable as well as good for us; and as there are many small birds among the trees, some of which are probably very good to eat, I think it would be a capital plan to make bows and arrows, with which we could easily knock them over."

"First-rate!" cried Peterkin. "You will make the bows, Jack, and I'll try my hand at the arrows. The fact is, I'm quite tired of throwing stones at the birds. I began the very day we landed, I think, and have persevered up to the present time, but I've never hit anything yet."

"You forget," said I, "you hit me one day on the shin."

"Ah, true!" replied Peterkin; "and a precious shindy you kicked up in consequence. But you were at least four yards away from the impudent paroquet I aimed at, so you see what a horribly bad shot I am."

"But, Jack," said I, "you cannot make three bows and arrows before to-morrow; and would it not be a pity to waste time, now that we have made up our minds to go on this expedition?—Suppose that you make one bow and arrow for yourself, and we can take our clubs?"

"That's true, Ralph. The day is pretty far advanced, and I doubt if I can make even one bow before dark. To be sure, I might work by firelight after the sun goes down."

We had, up to this time, been in the habit of going to bed with the sun, as we had no pressing call to work o' nights; and, indeed, our work during the day was usually hard enough—what between fishing, and improving our bower, and diving in the Water Garden, and rambling in the woods—so that when night came we were usually very glad to retire to our beds. But now that we had a desire to work at night, we felt a wish for candles.

"Won't a good blazing fire give you light enough?" inquired Peterkin.

"Yes," replied Jack, "quite enough; but then it will give us a great deal more than enough of heat in this warm climate of ours."

"True," said Peterkin; "I forgot that. It would roast us."

"Well, as you're always doing that at any rate," remarked Jack, "we could scarcely call it a change. But the fact is, I've been thinking over this subject before. There is a certain nut growing in these islands which is called the candle-nut, because the natives use it instead of candles; and I know all about it, and how to prepare it for burning—"

"Then why don't you do it?" interrupted Peterkin. "Why have you kept us in the dark so long, you vile philosopher?"

"Because," said Jack, "I have not seen the tree yet, and I'm not sure that I should know either the tree or the nuts if I did see them. You see, I forget the description."

"Ah! that's just the way with me," said Peterkin with a deep sigh. "I never could keep in my mind for half-an-hour the few descriptions I ever attempted to remember. The very first voyage I ever made was caused by my mistaking a description—or forgetting it, which is the same thing. And a horrible voyage it was. I had to fight with the captain the whole way out, and made the homeward voyage by swimming!"

"Come, Peterkin," said I, "you can't get even *me* to believe that."

"Perhaps not, but it's true notwithstanding," returned Peterkin, pretending to be hurt at my doubting his word.

"Let us hear how it happened," said Jack, while a good-natured smile overspread his face.

"Well, you must know," began Peterkin, "that the very day before I went to sea I was greatly taken up with a game at hockey, which I was playing with my old school-fellows for the last time before leaving them.—You see I was young then, Ralph." Peterkin gazed, in an abstracted and melancholy manner, out to sea.—"Well, in the midst of the game, my uncle, who had taken all the bother and trouble of getting me bound 'prentice and rigged out, came and took me aside, and told me that he was called suddenly away from home, and would not be able to see me aboard, as he had intended. 'However,' said he, 'the captain knows you are coming, so that's not of much consequence; but as you'll have to find the ship yourself, you must remember her name and description. D'ye hear, boy?' I certainly did hear, but I'm afraid I did not understand; for my mind was so taken up with the game, which I saw my side was losing, that I began to grow impatient, and the moment my uncle finished his description of the ship and bade me good-bye I bolted back to my game, with only a confused idea of three masts, and a green-painted taffrail, and a gilt figurehead of Hercules with his club at the bow. Next day I was so much cast down with everybody saying good-bye, and a lot o' my female friends cryin' horribly over me, that I did not start for the harbour, where the ship was lying among a

thousand others, till it was almost too late. So I had to run the whole way. When I reached the pier, there were so many masts, and so much confusion, that I felt quite humble-bumbled in my faculties. 'Now,' said I to myself, 'Peterkin, you're in a fix.' Then I fancied I saw a gilt figurehead and three masts belonging to a ship just about to start; so I darted on board, but speedily jumped on shore again when I found that two of the masts belonged to another vessel and the figurehead to a third! At last I caught sight of what I made sure was it—a fine large vessel just casting off her moorings. The taffrail was green. Three masts—yes, that must be it—and the gilt figurehead of Hercules. To be sure, it had a three-pronged pitchfork in its hand instead of a club; but that might be my uncle's mistake, or perhaps Hercules sometimes varied his weapons. 'Cast off!' roared a voice from the quarter-deck. 'Hold on!' cried I, rushing frantically through the crowd. 'Hold on! hold on!' repeated some of the bystanders, while the men at the ropes delayed for a minute. This threw the captain into a frightful rage; for some of his friends had come down to see him off, and having his orders contradicted so flatly was too much for him. However, the delay was sufficient. I took a race and a good leap; the ropes were cast off; the steam-tug gave a puff, and we started. Suddenly the captain walks up to me: 'Where did you come from, you scamp, and what do you want here?'

"'Please, sir,' said I, touching my cap, 'I'm your new 'prentice come aboard.'

"'New 'prentice!' said he, stamping; 'I've got no new 'prentice. My boys are all aboard already. This is a trick, you young blackguard! You've run away, you have!' And the captain stamped about the deck and swore dreadfully; for, you see, the thought of having to stop the ship and lower a boat and lose half-an-hour, all for the sake of sending a small boy ashore, seemed to make him very angry. Besides, it was blowin' fresh outside the harbour, so that to have let the steamer alongside to put me into it was no easy job. Just as we were passing the pier-head, where several boats were rowing into the harbour, the captain came up to me.

"'You've run away, you blackguard!' he said, giving me a box on the ear.

"'No, I haven't!' said I angrily, for the box was by no means a light one.

"'Hark'ee, boy, can you swim?'

"'Yes,' said I.

"'Then do it!' and seizing me by my trousers and the nape of my neck, he tossed me over the side into the sea. The fellows in the boats at the end of the pier backed their oars on seeing this; but observing that I could swim, they allowed me to make the best of my way to the pier-head.—So you see, Ralph, that I really did swim my first homeward voyage."

Jack laughed, and patted Peterkin on the shoulder.

"But tell us about the candle-nut tree," said I. "You were talking about it."

"Very true," said Jack; "but I fear I can remember little about it. I believe the nut is about the size of a walnut; and I think that the leaves are white, but I am not sure."

"Eh! ha! hum!" exclaimed Peterkin; "I saw a tree answering to that description this very day."

"Did you?" cried Jack. "Is it far from this?"

"No, not half-a-mile."

"Then lead me to it," said Jack, seizing his axe.

In a few minutes we were all three pushing through the underwood of the forest, headed by Peterkin.

We soon came to the tree in question, which, after Jack had closely examined it, we concluded must be the candle-nut tree. Its leaves were of a beautiful silvery white, and formed a fine contrast to the dark-green foliage of the surrounding trees. We immediately filled our pockets with the nuts, after which Jack said:

"Now, Peterkin, climb that cocoa-nut tree and cut me one of the long branches."

This was soon done; but it cost some trouble, for the stem was very high, and as Peterkin usually pulled nuts from the younger trees, he was not much accustomed to climbing the high ones. The leaf or branch was a very large one, and we were surprised at its size and strength. Viewed from a little

distance, the cocoa-nut tree seems to be a tall, straight stem, without a single branch except at the top, where there is a tuft of feathery-looking leaves that seem to wave like soft plumes in the wind. But when we saw one of these leaves or branches at our feet, we found it to be a strong stalk, about fifteen feet long, with a number of narrow, pointed leaflets ranged alternately on each side. But what seemed to us the most wonderful thing about it was a curious substance resembling cloth, which was wrapped round the thick end of the stalk where it had been cut from the tree. Peterkin told us that he had the greatest difficulty in separating the branch from the stem on account of this substance, as it was wrapped quite round the tree, and, he observed, round all the other branches, thus forming a strong support to the large leaves while exposed to high winds. When I call this substance cloth I do not exaggerate. Indeed, with regard to all the things I saw during my eventful career in the South Seas, I have been exceedingly careful not to exaggerate, or in any way to mislead or deceive my readers. This cloth, I say, was remarkably like to coarse brown cotton cloth. It had a seam or fibre down the centre of it, from which diverged other fibres, about the size of a bristle. There were two layers of these fibres, very long and tough, the one layer crossing the other obliquely, and the whole was cemented together with a still finer fibrous and adhesive substance. When we regarded it attentively, we could with difficulty believe that it had not been woven by human hands. This remarkable piece of cloth we stripped carefully off, and found it to be above two feet long by a foot broad, and we carried it home with us as a great prize.

Jack now took one of the leaflets, and cutting out the central spine or stalk, hurried back with it to our camp. Having made a small fire, he baked the nuts slightly and then peeled off the husks. After this he wished to bore a hole in them, which, not having anything better at hand at the time, he did with the point of our useless pencil-case. Then he strung them on the cocoa-nut spine, and on putting a light to the topmost nut we found, to our joy, that it burned with a clear, beautiful flame, upon seeing which Peterkin sprang up and danced round the fire for at least five minutes in the excess of his satisfaction.

"Now, lads," said Jack, extinguishing our candle, "the sun will set in an hour, so we have no time to lose. I shall go and cut a young tree to make my bow out of, and you had better each of you go and select good strong sticks for clubs, and we'll set to work at them after dark."

So saying, he shouldered his axe and went off; followed by Peterkin; while I took up the piece of newly discovered cloth, and fell to examining its structure. So engrossed was I in this that I was still sitting in the same attitude and occupation when my companions returned.

"I told you so!" cried Peterkin with a loud laugh.—"Oh Ralph, you're incorrigible! See, there's a club for you. I was sure, when we left you looking at that bit of stuff, that we would find you poring over it when we came back, so I just cut a club for you as well as for myself."

"Thank you, Peterkin," said I. "It was kind of you to do that instead of scolding me for a lazy fellow, as I confess I deserve."

"Oh, as to that," returned Peterkin, "I'll blow you up yet if you wish it; only it would be of no use if I did, for you're a perfect mule!"

As it was now getting dark we lighted our candle, and placing it in a holder made of two crossing branches inside of our bower, we seated ourselves on our leafy beds and began to work.

"I intend to appropriate the bow for my own use," said Jack, chipping the piece of wood he had brought with his axe. "I used to be a pretty fair shot once.—But what's that you're doing?" he added, looking at Peterkin, who had drawn the end of a long pole into the tent, and was endeavouring to fit a small piece of the hoop-iron to the end of it.

"I'm going to enlist into the Lancers," answered Peterkin. "You see, Jack, I find the club rather an unwieldy instrument for my delicately formed muscles, and I flatter myself I shall do more execution with a spear."

"Well, if length constitutes power," said Jack, "you'll certainly be invincible."

The pole which Peterkin had cut was full twelve feet long, being a very strong but light and tough young tree, which merely required thinning at the butt to be a serviceable weapon.

"That's a very good idea," said I.

"Which—this?" inquired Peterkin, pointing to the spear.

"Yes," I replied.

"Humph!" said he; "you'd find it a pretty tough and matter-of-fact idea if you had it stuck through your gizzard, old boy!"

"I mean the idea of making it is a good one," said I, laughing. "And, now I think of it, I'll change my plan too. I don't think much of a club, so I'll make me a sling out of this piece of cloth. I used to be very fond of slinging, ever since I read of David slaying Goliath the Philistine, and I was once thought to be expert at it."

So I set to work to manufacture a sling. For a long time we all worked very busily without speaking. At length Peterkin looked up. "I say, Jack, I'm sorry to say I must apply to you for another strip of your handkerchief to tie on this rascally head with. It's pretty well torn at any rate, so you won't miss it."

Jack proceeded to comply with this request, when Peterkin suddenly laid his hand on his arm and arrested him.

"Hist, man!" said he; "be tender! You should never be needlessly cruel if you can help it. Do try to shave past Lord Nelson's mouth without tearing it, if possible! Thanks. There are plenty more handkerchiefs on the cocoa-nut trees."

Poor Peterkin! with what pleasant feelings I recall and record his jests and humorous sayings now!

While we were thus engaged we were startled by a distant, but most strange and horrible, cry. It seemed to come from the sea, but was so far away that we could not clearly distinguish its precise direction. Rushing out of our bower, we hastened down to the beach and stayed to listen. Again it came, quite loud and distinct on the night air—a prolonged, hideous cry, something like the braying of an ass. The moon had risen, and we could see the islands in and beyond the lagoon quite plainly; but there was no object visible to account for such a cry. A strong gust of wind was blowing from the point whence the sound came, but this died away while we were gazing out to sea.

"What can it be?" said Peterkin in a low whisper, while we all involuntarily crept closer to each other.

"Do you know," said Jack, "I have heard that mysterious sound twice before, but never so loud as to-night. Indeed, it was so faint that I thought I must have merely fancied it; so, as I did not wish to alarm you, I said nothing about it."

We listened for a long time for the sound again; but as it did not come, we returned to the bower and resumed our work.

"Very strange!" said Peterkin quite gravely.—"Do you believe in ghosts, Ralph?"

"No," I answered, "I do not. Nevertheless, I must confess that strange, unaccountable sounds, such as we have just heard, make me feel a little uneasy."

"What say you to it, Jack?"

"I neither believe in ghosts nor feel uneasy," he replied. "I never saw a ghost myself, and I never met with any one who had; and I have generally found that strange and unaccountable things have almost always been accounted for, and found to be quite simple, on close examination. I certainly can't imagine what *that* sound is; but I'm quite sure I shall find out before long, and if it's a ghost I'll—I'll—"

"Eat it!" cried Peterkin.

"Yes, I'll eat it!—Now, then, my bow and two arrows are finished; so, if you're ready, we had better turn in."

By this time Peterkin had thinned down his spear, and tied an iron point very cleverly to the end of it; I had formed a sling, the lines of which were composed of thin strips of the cocoa-nut cloth, plaited; and Jack had made a stout bow, nearly five feet long, with two arrows, feathered with two or three large plumes which some bird had dropped. They had no barbs; but Jack said that if arrows were well feathered they did not require iron points, but would fly quite well if merely sharpened at the point, which I did not know before.

"A feathered arrow without a barb," said he, "is a good weapon, but a barbed arrow without feathers is utterly useless."

The string of the bow was formed of our piece of whip-cord, part of which, as he did not like to cut it, was rolled round the bow.

Although thus prepared for a start on the morrow we thought it wise to exercise ourselves a little in the use of our weapons before starting, so we spent the whole of the next day in practising. And it was well we did so, for we found that our arms were very imperfect, and that we were far from perfect in the use of them. First, Jack found that the bow was much too strong, and he had to thin it. Also the spear was much too heavy, and so had to be reduced in thickness, although nothing would induce Peterkin to have it shortened. My sling answered very well; but I had fallen so much out of practice that my first stone knocked off Peterkin's hat, and narrowly missed making a second Goliath of him. However, after having spent the whole day in diligent practice, we began to find some of our former expertness returning, at least Jack and I did. As for Peterkin, being naturally a neat-handed boy, he soon handled his spear well, and could run full tilt at a cocoa-nut, and hit it with great precision once out of every five times.

But I feel satisfied that we owed much of our rapid success to the unflagging energy of Jack, who insisted that since we had made him captain, we should obey him; and he kept us at work from morning till night, perseveringly, at the same thing. Peterkin wished very much to run about and stick his spear into everything he passed; but Jack put up a cocoa-nut, and would not let him leave off running at that for a moment except when he wanted to rest. We laughed at Jack for this, but we were both convinced that it did us much good.

That night we examined and repaired our arms ere we lay down to rest, although we were much fatigued, in order that we might be in readiness to set out on our expedition at daylight on the following morning.

Chapter Nine.
Prepare for a journey round the island —Sagacious reflections—Mysterious appearances and startling occurrences

Scarcely had the sun shot its first ray across the bosom of the broad Pacific when Jack sprang to his feet, and hallooing in Peterkin's ear to awaken him, ran down the beach to take his customary dip in the sea. We did not, as was our wont, bathe that morning in our Water Garden, but in order to save time, refreshed ourselves in the shallow water just opposite the bower. Our breakfast was also despatched without loss of time, and in less than an hour afterwards all our preparations for the journey were completed.

In addition to his ordinary dress, Jack tied a belt of cocoa-nut cloth round his waist, into which he thrust the axe. I was also advised to put on a belt and carry a short cudgel or bludgeon in it, for, as Jack truly remarked, the sling would be of little use if we should chance to come to close quarters with any wild animal. As for Peterkin, notwithstanding that he carried such a long and, I must add, frightful-looking spear over his shoulder, we could not prevail on him to leave his club behind; "for," said he, "a spear at close quarters is not worth a button." I must say that it seemed to me that the club was, to use his own style of language, not worth a button-hole; for it was all knotted over at the head, something like the club which I remember to have observed in picture-books of Jack the Giant-killer, besides being so heavy that he required to grasp it with both hands in order to wield it at all. However, he took it with him, and in this manner we set out upon our travels.

We did not consider it necessary to carry any food with us, as we knew that wherever we went we should be certain to fall in with cocoa-nut trees—having which we were amply supplied, as Peterkin said, with meat and drink and pocket-handkerchiefs! I took the precaution, however, to put the burning-glass into my pocket lest we should want fire.

The morning was exceedingly lovely. It was one of that very still and peaceful sort which made the few noises that we heard seem to be quiet noises (I know no other way of expressing this idea)—noises which, so far from interrupting the universal tranquillity of earth, sea, and sky, rather tended to reveal to us how quiet the world round us really was. Such sounds as I refer to were the peculiar, melancholy—yet, it seemed to me, cheerful—plaint of sea-birds floating on the glassy waters or sailing in the sky; also the subdued twittering of little birds among the bushes, the faint ripples on the beach, and the solemn boom of the surf upon the distant coral reef. We felt very glad in our hearts as we walked along the sands, side by side. For my part, I felt so deeply overjoyed that I was surprised at my own sensations, and fell into a reverie upon the causes of happiness. I came to the conclusion that a state of profound peace and repose, both in regard to outward objects and within the soul, is the happiest condition in which man can be placed; for although I had many a time been most joyful and happy when engaged in bustling, energetic, active pursuits or amusements, I never found that such joy or satisfaction was so deep or so pleasant to reflect upon as that which I now experienced. And I was the more confirmed in this opinion when I observed—and, indeed, as told by himself—that Peterkin's happiness was also very great; yet he did not express this by dancing, as was his wont, nor did he give so much as a single shout, but walked quietly between us with his eye sparkling and a joyful smile upon his countenance. My reader must not suppose that I thought all this in the clear and methodical manner in which I have set it down here. These thoughts did indeed pass through my mind; but they did so in a very confused and indefinite manner, for I was young at that time and not much given to deep reflections. Neither did I consider that the peace whereof I write is not to

be found in this world—at least in its perfection—although I have since learned that, by religion, a man may attain to a very great degree of it.

I have said that Peterkin walked along the sands between us. We had two ways of walking together about our island. When we travelled through the woods we always did so in single file, as by this method we advanced with greater facility, the one treading in the other's footsteps. In such cases Jack always took the lead, Peterkin followed, and I brought up the rear. But when we travelled along the sands, which extended almost in an unbroken line of glistening white round the island, we marched abreast, as we found this method more sociable and every way more pleasant. Jack, being the tallest, walked next the sea, and Peterkin marched between us, as by this arrangement either of us could talk to him or he to us, while if Jack and I happened to wish to converse together we could conveniently do so over Peterkin's head. Peterkin used to say, in reference to this arrangement, that had he been as tall as either of us, our order of march might have been the same; for, as Jack often used to scold him for letting everything we said to him pass in at one ear and out at the other, his head could, of course, form no interruption to our discourse.

We were now fairly started. Half-a-mile's walk conveyed us round a bend in the land which shut out our bower from view, and for some time we advanced at a brisk pace without speaking, though our eyes were not idle, but noted everything—in the woods, on the shore, or in the sea—that was interesting. After passing the ridge of land that formed one side of our valley—the Valley of the Wreck—we beheld another small vale lying before us in all the luxuriant loveliness of tropical vegetation. We had indeed seen it before from the mountain-top, but we had no idea that it would turn out to be so much more lovely when we were close to it. We were about to commence the exploration of this valley when Peterkin stopped us, and directed our attention to a very remarkable appearance in advance along the shore.

"What's yon, think you?" said he, levelling his spear as if he expected an immediate attack from the object in question, though it was full half-a-mile distant.

As he spoke, there appeared a white column above the rocks, as if of steam or spray. It rose upwards to a height of several feet, and then disappeared. Had this been near the sea, we would not have been so greatly surprised, as it might in that case have been the surf, for at this part of the coast the coral reef approached so near to the island that in some parts it almost joined it. There was, therefore, no lagoon between, and the heavy surf of the ocean beat almost up to the rocks. But this white column appeared about fifty yards inland. The rocks at the place were rugged, and they stretched across the sandy beach into the sea. Scarce had we ceased expressing our surprise at this sight when another column flew upwards for a few seconds, not far from the spot where the first had been seen, and disappeared; and so, at long, irregular intervals, these strange sights recurred. We were now quite sure that the columns were watery, or composed of spray; but what caused them we could not guess, so we determined to go and see.

In a few minutes we gained the spot, which was very rugged and precipitous, and, moreover, quite damp with the falling of the spray. We had much ado to pass over dry-shod. The ground, also, was full of holes here and there. Now, while we stood anxiously waiting for the reappearance of these waterspouts, we heard a low, rumbling sound near us, which quickly increased to a gurgling and hissing noise, and a moment afterwards a thick spout of water burst upwards from a hole in the rock and spouted into the air with much violence, and so close to where Jack and I were standing that it nearly touched us. We sprang aside, but not before a cloud of spray descended and drenched us both to the skin.

Peterkin, who was standing farther off; escaped with a few drops, and burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter on beholding our miserable plight.

"Mind your eye!" he shouted eagerly; "there goes another!" The words were scarcely out of his mouth when there came up a spout from another hole, which served us exactly in the same manner as before.

Peterkin now shrieked with laughter; but his merriment was abruptly put a stop to by the gurgling noise occurring close to where he stood.

"Where'll it spout this time, I wonder?" he said, looking about with some anxiety and preparing to run. Suddenly there came a loud hiss or snort; a fierce spout of water burst up between Peterkin's legs, blew him off his feet, enveloped him in its spray, and hurled him to the ground. He fell with so much violence that we feared he must have broken some of his bones, and ran anxiously to his assistance; but fortunately he had fallen on a clump of tangled herbage, in which he lay sprawling in a most deplorable condition.

It was now our turn to laugh; but as we were not yet quite sure that he was unhurt, and as we knew not when or where the next spout might arise, we assisted him hastily to jump up and hurry from the spot.

I may here add that, although I am quite certain that the spout of water was very strong, and that it blew Peterkin completely off his legs, I am not quite certain of the exact height to which it lifted him, being somewhat startled by the event, and blinded partially by the spray, so that my power of observation was somewhat impaired for the moment.

"What's to be done now?" asked Peterkin ruefully.

"Make a fire, lad, and dry ourselves," replied Jack.

"And here is material ready to our hand," said I, picking up a dried branch of a tree as we hurried up to the woods.

In about an hour after this mishap our clothes were again dried. While they were hanging up before the fire we walked down to the beach, and soon observed that these curious spouts took place immediately after the fall of a huge wave, never before it; and, moreover, that the spouts did not take place excepting when the billow was an extremely large one. From this we concluded that there must be a subterraneous channel in the rock into which the water was driven by the larger waves, and finding no way of escape except through these small holes, was thus forced up violently through them. At any rate, we could not conceive any other reason for these strange waterspouts, and as this seemed a very simple and probable one, we forthwith adopted it.

"I say, Ralph, what's that in the water? Is it a shark?" said Jack just as we were about to quit the place.

I immediately ran to the overhanging ledge of rock, from which he was looking down into the sea, and bent over it. There I saw a very faint, pale object of a greenish colour, which seemed to move slightly while I looked at it.

"It's like a fish of some sort," said I.

"Hallo, Peterkin!" cried Jack. "Fetch your spear; here's work for it!"

But when we tried to reach the object, the spear proved to be too short.

"There, now," said Peterkin with a sneer; "you were always telling me it was too long."

Jack now drove the spear forcibly towards the object, and let go his hold. But although it seemed to be well aimed, he must have missed, for the handle soon rose again; and when the spear was drawn up, there was the pale-green object in exactly the same spot, slowly moving its tail.

"Very odd!" said Jack.

But although it was undoubtedly very odd, and although Jack and all of us plunged the spear at it repeatedly, we could neither hit it nor drive it away, so we were compelled to continue our journey without discovering what it was. I was very much perplexed at this strange appearance in the water, and could not get it out of my mind for a long time afterwards. However, I quieted myself by resolving that I would pay a visit to it again at some more convenient season.

Chapter Ten.
Make discovery of many excellent roots and fruits —The resources of the coral island gradually unfolded—The banyan tree—Another tree which is supported by natural planks—Water-fowl found —A very remarkable discovery, and a very peculiar murder—We luxuriate on the fat of the land

Our examination of the little valley proved to be altogether most satisfactory. We found in it not only similar trees to those we had already seen in our own valley, but also one or two others of a different species. We had also the satisfaction of discovering a peculiar vegetable, which, Jack concluded, must certainly be that of which he had read as being very common among the South Sea Islanders, and which was named taro. Also we found a large supply of yams, and another root like a potato in appearance. As these were all quite new to us, we regarded our lot as a most fortunate one, in being thus cast on an island which was so prolific and so well stored with all the necessaries of life. Long afterwards we found out that this island of ours was no better in these respects than thousands of other islands in those seas. Indeed, many of them were much richer and more productive; but that did not render us the less grateful for our present good fortune. We each put one of these roots in our pocket, intending to use them for our supper—of which more hereafter. We also saw many beautiful birds here, and traces of some four-footed animal again. Meanwhile the sun began to descend; so we returned to the shore and pushed on, round the spouting rocks, into the next valley. This was that valley of which I have spoken as running across the entire island. It was by far the largest and most beautiful that we had yet looked upon. Here were trees of every shape and size and hue which it is possible to conceive of, many of which we had not seen in the other valleys; for, the stream in this valley being larger, and the mould much richer than in the Valley of the Wreck, it was clothed with a more luxuriant growth of trees and plants. Some trees were dark, glossy green; others of a rich and warm hue, contrasting well with those of a pale, light green, which were everywhere abundant. Among these we recognised the broad, dark heads of the bread-fruit, with its golden fruit; the pure, silvery foliage of the candle-nut, and several species which bore a strong resemblance to the pine; while here and there, in groups and in single trees, rose the tall forms of the cocoa-nut palms, spreading abroad, and waving their graceful plumes high above all the rest, as if they were a superior race of stately giants keeping guard over these luxuriant forests. Oh, it was a most enchanting scene! and I thanked God for having created such delightful spots for the use of man.

Now, while we were gazing around us in silent admiration, Jack uttered an exclamation of surprise, and pointing to an object a little to one side of us, said:

"That's a banyan tree."

"And what's a banyan tree?" inquired Peterkin as we walked towards it.

"A very curious one, as you shall see presently," replied Jack. "It is called the *aoa* here, if I recollect rightly, and has a wonderful peculiarity about it. What an enormous one it is, to be sure!"

"*It*!" repeated Peterkin. "Why, there are dozens of banyans here! What do you mean by talking bad grammar? Is your philosophy deserting you, Jack?"

"There is but one tree here of this kind," returned Jack, "as you will perceive if you will examine it." And, sure enough, we did find that what we had supposed was a forest of trees was in reality only one. Its bark was of a light colour, and had a shining appearance, the leaves being lance-shaped, small, and of a beautiful pea-green. But the wonderful thing about it was that the branches, which grew out

from the stem horizontally, sent down long shoots or fibres to the ground, which, taking root, had themselves become trees, and were covered with bark like the tree itself. Many of these fibres had descended from the branches at various distances, and thus supported them on natural pillars, some of which were so large and strong that it was not easy at first to distinguish the offspring from the parent stem. The fibres were of all sizes and in all states of advancement, from the pillars we have just mentioned to small cords which hung down and were about to take root, and thin brown threads still far from the ground, which swayed about with every motion of wind. In short, it seemed to us that, if there were only space afforded to it, this single tree would at length cover the whole island.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.