ROBERT MICHAEL BALLANTYNE

BATTLES WITH THE SEA

Robert Michael Ballantyne

Battles with the Sea

Ballantyne R.

Battles with the Sea / R. Ballantyne — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

R. M. Ballantyne
Battles with the Sea

Chapter One.
Heroes of the Lifeboat and Rocket.
Skirmishes with the Subject Generally

It ought to be known to all English boys that there is a terrible and costly war in which the British nation is at all times engaged. No intervals of peace mark the course of this war. Cessations of hostilities there are for brief periods, but no treaties of peace. “War to the knife” is its character. Quarter is neither given nor sought. Our foe is unfeeling, unrelenting. He wastes no time in diplomatic preliminaries; he scorns the courtesies of national life. No ambassadors are recalled, no declarations of war made. Like the Red Savage he steals upon us unawares, and, with a roar of wrathful fury, settles down to his deadly work.

How does this war progress? It is needful to put and reiterate this question from time to time, because new generations of boys are always growing up, who, so far from being familiar with the stirring episodes of this war, and the daring deeds of valour performed, scarcely realise the fact that such a war is being carried on at all, much less that it costs hundreds of lives and millions of money every year.

It may be styled a naval war, being waged chiefly in boats upon the sea. It is a war which will never cease, because our foe is invincible, and we will never give in; a war which, unlike much ordinary warfare, is never unjust or unnecessary; which cannot be avoided, which is conducted on the most barbarous principles of deathless enmity, but which, nevertheless, brings true glory and honour to those heroes who are ever ready, night and day, to take their lives in their hands and rush into the thick of the furious fray.

Although this great war began—at least in a systematic manner—only little more than fifty years ago, it will not end until the hearts of brave and generous Britons cease to beat, and the wild winds cease to blow, for the undying and unconquerable enemy of whom we write is—the Storm!

“Death or victory!” the old familiar warwhoop, is not the final war-cry here. Death is, indeed, always faced—sometimes met—and victory is often gained; but, final conquests being impossible, and the “piping times of peace” being out of the question, the signal for the onset has been altered, and the world’s old battle-cry has been exchanged for the soul-stirring shout of “Rescue the perishing!”

Though our foe cannot be slain, he can, like the genii of Eastern story, be baffled.

In the days of old, the Storm had it nearly all his own way. Hearts, indeed, were not less brave, but munitions of war were wanting. In this matter, as in everything else, the world is better off now than it was then. Our weapons are more perfect, our engines more formidable. We can now dash at our enemy in the very heart of his own terrible strongholds; fight him where even the boldest of the ancient Vikings did not dare to venture, and rescue the prey from the very jaws of death amid the scenes of its wildest revelry.

The heroes who recruit the battalions of our invincible army are the bronzed and stalwart men of our sea-coast towns, villages, and hamlets—men who have had much and long experience of the foe with whom they have to deal. Their panoply is familiar to most of us. The helmet, a sou’wester; the breastplate, a lifebelt of cork; the sword, a strong short oar; their war-galley, a splendid *lifeboat*; and their shield—the Hand of God.

In this and succeeding chapters I purpose to exhibit and explain in detail our Lifeboats, and the great, the glorious work which they annually accomplish; also the operations of the life-saving Rocket,

which has for many years rescued innumerable lives, where, from the nature of circumstances, Lifeboats could not have gone into action. I hold that we—especially those of us who dwell in the interior of our land—are not sufficiently alive to the deeds of daring, the thrilling incidents, the terrible tragedies and the magnificent rescues which are perpetually going on around our shores. We are not sufficiently impressed, perhaps, with the *nationality* of the work done by the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, which manages our fleet of 270 lifeboats. We do not fully appreciate, it may be, the personal interest which we ourselves have in the great war, and the duty—to say nothing of privilege—which lies upon us to lend a helping hand in the good cause.

Before going into the marrow of the subject, let us put on the wings of imagination, and soar to such a height that we shall be able to take in at one eagle glance all the coasts of the United Kingdom —a sweep of about 5000 miles all round! It is a tremendous sight, for a storm is raging! Black clouds are driving across the murky sky; peals of thunder rend the heavens; lightning gleams at intervals, revealing more clearly the crested billows that here roar over the sands, or there churn and seethe among the rocks. The shrieking gale sweeps clouds of spray high over our windward cliffs, and carries flecks of foam far inland, to tell of the dread warfare that is raging on the maddened sea.

Near the shore itself numerous black specks are seen everywhere, like ink-spots on the foam. These are wrecks, and the shrieks and the despairing cries of the perishing rise above even the roaring of the gale. Death is busy, gathering a rich harvest, for this is a notable night in the great war. The Storm-fiend is roused. The enemy is abroad in force, and has made one of his most violent assaults, so that from Shetland to Cornwall, ships and boats are being battered to pieces on the rocks and sands, and many lives are being swallowed up or dashed out; while, if you turn your gaze further out to sea, you will descry other ships and boats and victims hurrying onward to their doom. Here, a stately barque, with disordered topsails almost bursting from the yards as she hurries her hapless crew—all ignorant, perchance, of its proximity—towards the dread lee-shore. Elsewhere, looming through the murk, a ponderous merchantman, her mainmast and mizzen gone, and just enough of the foremast left to support the bellying foresail that bears her to destruction.

Think you, reader, that this sketch is exaggerated? If so, let us descend from our lofty outlook, and take a nearer view of facts in detail. I quote the substance of the following from a newspaper article published some years ago.

The violence of the storm on Wednesday and Thursday night was terrific. The damage to shipping has been fearful. On sea the tremendous gale proved disastrous beyond precedent. Falmouth Harbour was the scene of several collisions, and one barque and a tug steamer sank at their anchors. A wreck is reported at Lelant, to which the Penzance lifeboat with a stout-hearted crew had started, when our despatch left, to rescue thirteen men who could be descried hanging in the shrouds. A fine new ship is on Hayle bar, and another vessel is believed to be wrecked there also. Doubtless we have not yet heard of all the wrecks on the Cornish coast; but it is in the magnificent bay which includes Torquay, Paignton, and Brixham that the most terrible havoc has occurred. On Wednesday, about sixty sail were anchored in Torbay. Eleven have gone ashore at Broadsands, five of which are total wrecks. The names of those we could ascertain were the Fortitude, of Exeter; the Stately, of Newcastle; the Dorset, of Falmouth, and a French brigantine. At five o'clock on Thursday evening some of the crews were being drawn ashore by lines and baskets. At Churston Cove one schooner is ashore and a total wreck; there is also another, the Blue Jacket, which may yet be saved. At Brixham there are two fine ships ashore inside the breakwater. At the back of the pier ten vessels have been pounded to matchwood, and all that remains are a shattered barque, her masts still standing, two brigs, and a schooner, all inextricably mingled together. Twelve trawlers have been sunk and destroyed. Out of the sixty ships at anchor on Wednesday night there were not more than ten left on Thursday afternoon. Many of these are disabled, some dismasted. A fishing-boat belonging to Brixham was upset in the outer harbour about eight o'clock, and two married fishermen of the town and a boy were drowned. At Elbury a new brig, the Zouave, of Plymouth, has gone to pieces, and six out of her crew

of ten are drowned. Eleven other vessels are on shore at Elbury, many of the men belonging to which cannot be accounted for. One noble woman, named Wheaton, wife of a master mariner, saved two lives by throwing a rope from the window of her house, which is built on the rocks overhanging the bay at Furzeham Hill. Scores of poor shipwrecked men are wandering distractedly about Brixham and Churston, the greater part of them having lost all they possessed. The total loss of life arising from these disasters is variously estimated at from seventy to a hundred.

Is not this a tremendous account of the doings of one gale? And let it be observed that we have lifted only one corner of the curtain and revealed the battlefield of only one small portion of our far-reaching coasts. What is to be said of the other parts of our shores during that same wild storm? It would take volumes instead of chapters to give the thrilling incidents of disaster and heroism in full detail. To convey the truth in all its force is impossible, but a glimmering of it may be obtained by a glance at the Wreck Chart which is published by the Board of Trade every year.

Every black spot on that chart represents a wreck more or less disastrous, which occurred in the twelve months. It is an appalling fact that about two thousand ships, upwards of seven hundred lives, and nearly two millions sterling, are lost *every* year on the shores of the United Kingdom. Some years the loss is heavier, sometimes lighter, but in round numbers this is our annual loss in the great war. That it would be far greater if we had no lifeboats and no life-saving rockets it will be our duty by-and-by to show.

The black spots on the Wreck Chart to which we have referred show at a single glance that the distribution of wrecks is very unequal—naturally so. Near the great seaports we find them thickly strewn; at other places, where vessels pass in great numbers on their way to these ports, the spots are also very numerous, while on unfrequented parts they are found only here and there in little groups of two, three, or four. Away on the nor'-west shores of Scotland, for instance, where the seal and the sea-mew have the ocean and rugged cliffs pretty much to themselves, the plague-spots are few and far between; but on the east coast we find a fair sprinkling of them, especially in the mouths of the Forth and Tay, whither a goodly portion of the world's shipping crowds, and to which the hardy Norseman now sends many a load of timber—both log and batten—instead of coming, as he did of old, to batten on the land. It is much the same with Ireland, its more important seaports being on the east.

But there is a great and sudden increase of the spots when we come to England. They commence at the border, on the west, where vessels from and to the busy Clyde enter or quit the Irish Sea. Darkening the fringes of the land on both sides, and clustering round the Isle of Man, they multiply until the ports have no room to hold them, and, as at Liverpool, they are crowded out into the sea. From the deadly shores of Anglesea, where the Royal Charter went down in the great and memorable storm of November, 1859, the signs of wreck and disaster thicken as we go south until we reach the Bristol Channel, which appears to be choked with them, and the dangerous cliffs of Cornwall, which receive the ill-fated vessels of the fleets that are perpetually leaving or entering the two great channels. But it is on the east coast of England that the greatest damage is done. From Berwick to the Thames the black spots cluster like bees. On the coasts of Norfolk and Suffolk, off Great Yarmouth, where lie the dangerous Haisborough Sands, the spots are no longer in scattered groups, but range themselves in dense battalions; and further south, off the coast of Kent, round which the world's commerce flows unceasingly into the giant metropolis, where the famous Goodwin Sands play their deadly part in the great war, the dismal spots are seen to cluster densely, like gnats in a summer sky.

Now, just where the black spots are thickest on this wreck chart, lifeboats and rocket apparatus have been stationed in greatest numbers. As in ordinary warfare, so in battles with the sea, our "Storm Warriors" (See an admirable book, with this title, written by the Reverend John Gilmore, of Ramsgate. (Macmillan and Company)) are thrown forward in force where the enemy's assaults are most frequent and dangerous. Hence we find the eastern shores of England crowded at every point with life-saving apparatus, while most of the other dangerous parts of the coast are pretty well guarded.

Where and how do our coast heroes fight? I answer—sometimes on the cliffs, sometimes on the sands, sometimes on the sea, and sometimes even on the pierheads. Their operations are varied by circumstances. Let us draw nearer and look at them while in action, and observe how the enemy assails them. I shall confine myself at present to a skirmish.

When the storm-fiend is abroad; when dark clouds lower; when blinding rain or sleet drives before the angry gale, and muttering thunder comes rolling over the sea, men with hard hands and weather-beaten faces, clad in oilskin coats and sou'-westers, saunter down to our quays and headlands all round the kingdom. These are the lifeboat crews and rocket brigades. They are on the lookout. The enemy is moving, and the sentinels are being posted for the night—or rather, they are posting themselves, for nearly all the fighting men in this war are volunteers!

They require no drilling to prepare them for the field; no bugle or drum to sound the charge. Their drum is the rattling thunder; their trumpet the roaring storm. They began to train for this warfare when they were not so tall as their fathers' boots, and there are no awkward squads among them now. Their organisation is rough-and-ready, like themselves, and simple too. The heavens call them to action; the coxswain grasps the helm, the oars are manned, the word is given, and the rest is straightforward fighting—over everything, through everything, in the teeth of everything, until the victory is gained, and rescued men, women, and children are landed in safety on the shore.

Of course they do not always succeed, but they seldom or never fail to do the very uttermost that it is in the power of strong and daring men to accomplish. Frequently they can tell of defeat and victory on the same battlefield.

So it was on one fearful winter night at the mouth of the Tyne in the year 1867. The gale that night was furious. It suddenly chopped round to the South South East, and, as if the change had recruited its energies, it blew a perfect hurricane between midnight and two in the morning, accompanied by blinding showers of sleet and hail, which seemed to cut like a knife. The sea was rising mountains high.

About midnight, when the storm was gathering force and the sentinels were scarcely able to keep a lookout, a preventive officer saw a vessel driving ashore to the south of the South Pier. Instantly he burnt a blue light, at which signal three guns were fired from the Spanish Battery to call out the Life Brigade. The men were on the alert. About twenty members of the brigade assembled almost immediately on the pier, where they found that the preventive officer and pier-policeman had already got out the life-saving apparatus; but the gale was so fierce that they had been forced to crawl on their hands and knees to do so. A few minutes more and the number of brigade men increased to between fifty and sixty. Soon they saw, through the hurtling storm, that several vessels were driving on shore. Before long, four ships, with their sails blown to ribbons, were grinding themselves to powder, and crashing against each other and the pier-sides in a most fearful manner. They were the Mary Mac, the Cora, and the Maghee, belonging to Whitstable, and the Lucern of Blyth.

Several lifeboats were stationed at that point. They were all launched, manned, and promptly pulled into the Narrows, but the force of the hurricane and seas were such that they could not make headway against them. The powers of man are limited. When there is a will there is not always a way! For two hours did these brave men strain at the tough oars in vain; then they unwillingly put about and returned, utterly exhausted, leaving it to the men with the life-lines on shore to do the fighting. Thus, frequently, when one arm of the service is prevented from acting; the other arm comes into play.

The work of the men engaged on the pier was perilous and difficult, for the lines had to be fired against a head wind. The piers were covered with ice, and the gale was so strong that the men could hardly stand, while the crews of the wrecks were so benumbed that they could make little effort to help themselves.

The men of the Mary Mac, however, made a vigorous effort to get their longboat out. A boy jumped in to steady it. Before the men could follow, the boat was stove in, the rope that held it broke,

and it drove away with the poor lad in it. He was quickly washed out, but held on to the gunwale until it drifted into broken water, when he was swallowed by the raging sea and the boat was dashed to pieces.

Meanwhile the crew of the Cora managed to swing themselves ashore, their vessel being close to the pier. The crew of the Lucern, acting on the advice of the brigade men, succeeded in scrambling on board the Cora and were hauled ashore on the life-lines. They had not been ten minutes out of their vessel when she turned over with her decks towards the terrible sea, which literally tore her asunder, and pitched her up, stem on end, as if she had been a toy. The crew of the Maghee were in like manner hauled on to the pier, with the exception of one lad from Canterbury. It was the poor boy's first voyage. Little did he think probably, while dreaming of the adventures of a sailor's career, what a terrible fate awaited him. He was apparently paralysed with fear, and could not spring after his comrades to the pier, but took to the rigging. He had scarcely done so when the vessel heeled over, and he was swung two or three times backwards and forwards with the motion of the masts.

It is impossible to imagine the feelings of the brave men on the pier, who would so gladly have risked their lives to save him—he was so near, and yet so hopelessly beyond the reach of human aid!

In a very brief space of time the waves did their work—ship and boy were swallowed up together.

While these events were enacting on the pier the Mary Mac had drifted over the sand about half a mile from where she had struck. One of her crew threw a leadline towards a seaman on the shore. The hero plunged into the surf and caught it. The rest of the work was easy. By means of the line the men of the Life Brigade sent off their hawser, and breeches-buoy or cradle (which apparatus I shall hereafter explain), and drew the crew in safety to the land.

That same morning a Whitby brig struck on the sands. The lifeboat Pomfret, belonging to the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, put out and rescued her crew. In the morning the shores were strewn with wreckage, and amongst it was found the body of the boy belonging to the Mary Mac.

All these disasters were caused by the masters of the vessels mistaking the south for the north pier, in consequence of having lost sight of Tynemouth light in the blinding showers.

Of course many lifeboats were out doing good service on the night to which I have referred, but I pass all that by at present. The next chapter will carry you, good reader, into the midst of a pitched battle.

Chapter Two.
Describes a Tremendous Battle and a Glorious Victory

Before following our brilliant lifeboat—this gaudy, butterfly-like thing of red, white, and blue—to the field of battle, let me observe that the boats of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution have several characteristic qualities, to which reference shall be made hereafter, and that they are of various sizes. (A full and graphic account of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution—its boats, its work, and its achievements—may be found in an interesting volume by its late secretary, Richard Lewis, Esquire, entitled *History of the Lifeboat and its Work*—published by Macmillan and Company.)

One of the largest size is that of Ramsgate. This may be styled a privileged boat, for it has a steam-tug to wait upon it named the Aid. Day and night the Aid has her fires "banked up" to keep her boilers simmering, so that when the emergency arises, a vigorous thrust of her giant poker brings them quickly to the boiling point, and she is ready to take her lifeboat in tow and tug her out to the famed and fatal Goodwin Sands, which lie about four miles off the coast—opposite to Ramsgate.

I draw attention to this boat, first because she is exceptionally situated with regard to frequency of call, the means of going promptly into action, and success in her work. Her sister-lifeboats of Broadstairs and Margate may, indeed, be as often called to act, but they lack the attendant steamer, and sometimes, despite the skill and courage of their crews, find it impossible to get out in the teeth of a tempest with only sail and oar to aid them.

Early in December, 1863, an emigrant ship set sail for the Antipodes; she was the Fusilier, of London. It was her last voyage, and fated to be very short. The shores of Old England were still in sight, the eyes of those who sought to "better their circumstances" in Australia were yet wet, and their hearts still full with the grief of parting from loved ones at home, when one of the most furious storms of the season caught them and cast their gallant ship upon the dangerous Sands off the mouth of the Thames. This happened on the night of the 3rd, which was intensely dark, as well as bitterly cold.

Who can describe or conceive the scene that ensued! the horror, the shrieking of women and children, and the yelling of the blast through the rigging,—for it was an absolute hurricane,—while tons of water fell over the decks continually, sweeping them from stem to stern.

The Fusilier had struck on that part of the sands named the Girdler. In the midst of the turmoil there was but one course open to the crew—namely, to send forth signals of distress. Guns were fired, rockets sent up, and tar-barrels set a-blaze. Then, during many hours of agony, they had to wait and pray.

On that same night another good ship struck upon the same sands at a different point—the Demerara of Greenock—not an emigrant ship, but freighted with a crew of nineteen souls, including a Trinity pilot. Tossed like a plaything on the Sands—at that part named the Shingles—off Margate, the Demerara soon began to break up, and the helpless crew did as those of the Fusilier had done and were still doing—they signalled for aid. But it seemed a forlorn resource. Through the thick, driving, murky atmosphere nothing but utter blackness could be seen, though the blazing of their own tar-barrels revealed, with awful power, the seething breakers around, which, as if maddened by the obstruction of the sands, leaped and hissed wildly over them, and finally crushed their vessel over on its beam-ends. Swept from the deck, which was no longer a platform, but, as it were, a sloping wall, the crew took refuge in the rigging of one of the masts which still held fast. The mast overhung the caldron of foam, which seemed to boil and leap at the crew as if in disappointed fury.

By degrees the hull of the Demerara began to break up. Her timbers writhed and snapped under the force of the ever-thundering waves as if tormented. The deck was blown out by the confined and compressed air. The copper began to peel off, the planks to loosen, and soon it became evident that the mast to which the crew were lashed could not long hold up. Thus, for ten apparently endless

hours the perishing seamen hung suspended over what seemed to be their grave. They hung thus in the midst of pitchy darkness after their blazing tar-barrels had been extinguished.

And what of the lifeboat-men during all this time? Were they asleep? Nay, verily! Everywhere they stood at pierheads, almost torn from their holdfasts by the furious gale, or they cowered under the lee of boats and boat-houses on the beach, trying to gaze seaward through the blinding storm, but nothing whatever could they see of the disasters on these outlying sands.

There are, however, several sentinels which mount guard night and day close to the Goodwin and other Sands. These are the Floating Lights which mark the position of our extensive and dangerous shoals. Two of these sentinels, the Tongue lightship and the Prince's lightship, in the vicinity of the Girdler Sands, saw the signals of distress. Instantly their guns and rockets gleamed and thundered intelligence to the shore. Such signals had been watched for keenly that night by the brave men of the Margate lifeboat, who instantly went off to the rescue. But there are conditions against which human courage and power and will are equally unavailing. In the teeth of such a gale from the west-nor'-west, with the sea driving in thunder straight on the beach, it was impossible for the Margate boat to put out. A telegram was therefore despatched to Ramsgate. Here, too, as at Broadstairs, and everywhere else, the heroes of the coast were on the lookout, knowing well the duties that might be required of them at any moment.

The stout little Aid was lying at the pier with her steam "up." The Ramsgate lifeboat was floating quietly in the harbour, and her sturdy lion-like coxswain, Isaac Jarman, was at the pier-head with some of his men, watching. The Ramsgate men had already been out on service at the sands that day, and their appetite for saving life had been whetted. They were ready for more work. At a quarter past eight p.m. the telegram was received by the harbour-master. The signal was given. The lifeboat-men rushed to their boats.

"First come, first served," is the rule there. She was over-manned, and some of the brave fellows had to leave her. The tight little tug took the boat in tow, and in less than half an hour rushed out with her into the intense darkness, right in the teeth of tempest and billows.

The engines of the Aid are powerful, like her whole frame. Though fiercely opposed she battled out into the raging sea, now tossed on the tops of the mighty waves, now swallowed in the troughs between. Battered by the breaking crests, whelmed at times by "green seas," staggering like a drunken thing, and buffeted by the fierce gale, but never giving way an inch, onward, steadily if slowly, until she rounded the North Foreland. Then the rescuers saw the signals going up steadily, regularly, from the two lightships. No cessation of these signals until they should be answered by signals from the shore.

All this time the lifeboat had been rushing, surging, and bounding in the wake of her steamer. The seas not only roared around her, but absolutely overwhelmed her. She was dragged violently over them, and sometimes right through them. Her crew crouched almost flat on the thwarts, and held on to prevent being washed overboard. The stout cable had to be let out to its full extent to prevent snapping, so that the mist and rain sometimes prevented her crew from seeing the steamer, while cross seas met and hurled her from side to side, causing her to plunge and kick like a wild horse.

About midnight the Tongue lightship was reached and hailed. The answer given was brief and to the point: "A vessel in distress to the nor'-west, supposed to be on the high part of the Shingles Sand!"

Away went the tug and boat to the nor'-west, but no vessel could be found, though anxious hearts and sharp and practised eyes were strained to the uttermost. The captain of the Aid, who knew every foot of the sands, and who had medals and letters from kings and emperors in acknowledgment of his valuable services, was not to be balked easily. He crept along as close to the dangerous sands as was consistent with the safety of his vessel.

How intently they gazed and listened both from lifeboat and steamer, but no cry was to be heard, no signal of distress, nothing but the roaring of the waves and shrieking of the blast, and yet they were not far from the perishing! The crew of the Demerara were clinging to their quivering mast

close by, but what could their weak voices avail in such a storm? Their signal fires had long before been drowned out, and those who would have saved them could not see more than a few yards around.

Presently the booming of distant cannon was heard and then a faint line of fire was seen in the far distance against the black sky. The Prince's and the Girdler lightships were both firing guns and rockets to tell that shipwreck was taking place near to them. What was to be done? Were the Shingles to be forsaken, when possibly human beings were perishing there? There was no help for it. The steamer and lifeboat made for the vessels that were signalling, and as the exhausted crew on the quivering mast of the Demerara saw their lights depart, the last hope died out of their breasts.

"Hope thou in God, for thou shalt yet praise Him," perchance occurred to some of them: who knows?

Meanwhile the rescuers made for the Prince's lightship and were told that a vessel in distress was signalling on the higher part of the Girdler Sands.

Away they went again, and this time were successful. They made for the Girdler lightship, and on the Girdler Sands they found the Fusilier.

The steamer towed the lifeboat to windward of the wreck into such a position that when cast adrift she could bear down on her. Then the cable was slipped and the boat went in for her own special and hazardous work. Up went her little foresail close-reefed, and she rushed into a sea of tumultuous broken water that would have swamped any other kind of boat in the world.

What a burst of thrilling joy and hope there was among the emigrants in the Fusilier when the little craft was at last descried! It was about one o'clock in the morning by that time, and the sky had cleared a very little, so that a faint gleam of moonlight enabled them to see the boat of mercy plunging towards them through a very chaos of surging seas and whirling foam. To the rescuers the wreck was rendered clearly visible by the lurid light of her burning tar-barrels as she lay on the sands, writhing and trembling like a living thing in agony. The waves burst over her continually, and, mingling in spray with the black smoke of her fires, swept furiously away to leeward.

At first each wave had lifted the ship and let her crash down on the sands, but as the tide fell this action decreased, and had ceased entirely when the lifeboat arrived.

And now the point of greatest danger was reached. How to bring a lifeboat alongside of a wreck so as to get the people into her without being dashed to pieces is a difficult problem to solve. It was no new problem, however, to these hardy and fearless men; they had solved it many a time, before that night. When more than a hundred yards to windward of the wreck, the boat's foresail was lowered and her anchor let go. Then they seized the oars, and the cable was payed out; but the distance had been miscalculated. They were twenty yards or so short of the wreck when the cable had run completely out, so the men had to pull slowly and laboriously back to their anchor again, while the emigrants sent up a cry of despair, supposing they had failed and were going to forsake them! At length the anchor was got up. In a few minutes it was let go in a better position, and the boat was carefully veered down under the lee of the vessel, from both bow and stern of which a hawser was thrown to it and made fast. By means of these ropes and the cable the boat was kept somewhat in position without striking the wreck.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.