HENTY GEORGE ALFRED

BY SHEER PLUCK: A TALE OF THE ASHANTI WAR

George Henty

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I: A FISHING EXCURSION

"Now, Hargate, what a fellow you are! I've been looking for you everywhere. Don't you know it's the House against the Town boys. It's lucky that the Town have got the first innings; they began a quarter of an hour ago."

"How tiresome!" Frank Hargate said. "I was watching a most interesting thing here. Don't you see this little chaffinch nest in the bush, with a newly hatched brood. There was a small black snake threatening the nest, and the mother was defending it with quivering wings and open beak. I never saw a prettier thing. I sat quite still and neither of them seemed to notice me. Of course I should have interfered if I had seen the snake getting the best of it. When you came running up like a cart horse, the snake glided away in the grass, and the bird flew off. Oh, dear! I am sorry. I had forgotten all about the match."

"I never saw such a fellow as you are, Hargate. Here's the

opening match of the season, and you, who are one of our best bats, poking about after birds and snakes. Come along; Thompson sent me and two or three other fellows off in all directions to find you. We shall be half out before you're back. Wilson took James's wicket the first ball."

Frank Hargate leaped to his feet, and, laying aside for the present all thoughts of his favorite pursuit, started off at a run to the playing field. His arrival there was greeted with a mingled chorus of welcome and indignation. Frank Hargate was, next to Thompson the captain of the Town eleven, the best bat among the home boarders. He played a steady rather than a brilliant game, and was noted as a good sturdy sticker. Had he been there, Thompson would have put him in at first, in order to break the bowling of the House team. As it was, misfortunes had come rapidly. Ruthven and Handcock were bowling splendidly, and none of the Town boys were making any stand against them. Thompson himself had gone in when the fourth wicket fell, and was still in, although two wickets had since fallen, for only four runs, and the seventh wicket fell just as Frank arrived, panting, on the ground.

"Confound you, Hargate!" Thompson shouted, "where have you been? And not even in flannels yet."

"I'm very sorry," Frank shouted back cheerfully, "and never mind the flannels, for once. Shall I come in now?"

"No," Thompson said. "You'd better get your wind first. Let Fenner come in next."

Fenner stayed in four overs, adding two singles as his share, while Thompson put on a three and a two. Then Fenner was caught. Thirty-one runs for eight wickets! Then Frank took the bat, and walked to the ground. Thompson came across to him.

"Look here, Hargate, you have made a nice mess of it, and the game looks as bad as can be. Whatever you do, play carefully. Don't let out at anything that comes straight. The great thing is to bother their bowling a bit. They're so cocky now, that pretty near every ball is straight on the wickets. Be content with blocking for a bit, and Handcock will soon go off. He always gets savage if his bowling is collared."

Frank obeyed orders. In the next twenty minutes he only scored six runs, all in singles, while Thompson, who was also playing very carefully, put on thirteen. The game looked more hopeful for the Town boys. Then there was a shout from the House, as Thompson's middle wicket was sent flying. Childers, who was the last of the team, walked out.

"Now, Childers," Thompson said, "don't you hit at a ball. You're safe to be bowled or caught if you do. Just lift your bat, and block them each time. Now, Frank, it's your turn to score. Put them on as fast as you can. It's no use playing carefully any longer."

Frank set to to hit in earnest. He had now got his eye well in, and the stand which he and Thompson had made together, had taken the sting out of the bowling. The ball which had taken Thompson's wicket was the last of the over. Consequently the

next came to him. It was a little wide, and Frank, stepping out, drove it for four. A loud shout rose from the Town boys. There had only been one four scored before, during the innings. Off the next ball Frank scored a couple, blocked the next, and drove the last of the over past long leg for four. The next over Childers strictly obeyed orders, blocking each ball. Then it was Frank's turn again, and seven more went up on the board. They remained together for just fifteen minutes, but during that time thirty-one had been added to the score. Frank was caught at cover point, having added twenty-eight since Thompson left him, the other three being credited to Childers. The total was eighty-one—not a bad score in a school match.

"Well, you've redeemed yourself," Thompson said, as Frank walked to the tent. "You played splendidly, old fellow, when you did come. If we do as well next innings we are safe. They're not likely to average eighty. Now get on your wicket-keeping gloves. Green and I will bowl."

The House scored rapidly at first, and fifty runs were put on with the loss of four wickets. Then misfortune fell upon them, and the remaining six fell for nineteen. The next innings Frank went in first, but was caught when the score stood at fifteen. Thompson made fourteen, but the rest scored but badly, and the whole were out for forty-eight.

The House had sixty-one to get to win. Six wickets had fallen for fifty-one runs, when Thompson put Childers on to bowl. The change was a fortunate one. Ruthven's stumps were lowered at

the first ball. Handcock was caught off the second. The spirits of the Town boys rose. There were but two wickets more, and still ten runs to get to win. The House played cautiously now, and overs were sent down without a run. Then off a ball from Childers a four was scored, but the next ball leveled the outside stump. Then by singles the score mounted up until a tremendous shout from the House announced that the game was saved, sixty runs being marked by the scorers. The next ball, the Town boys replied even more lustily, for Childers ball removed the bails, and the game ended in a tie. Both parties were equally well satisfied, and declared that a better game had never been played at Dr. Parker's. As soon as the game was over Frank, without waiting to join in the general talk over the game, put on his coat and waistcoat and started at a run for home.

Frank Hargate was an only son. His mother lived in a tiny cottage on the outskirts of Deal. She was a widow, her husband, Captain Hargate, having died a year before. She had only her pension as an officer's widow, a pittance that scarce sufficed even for the modest wants of herself, Frank, and her little daughter Lucy, now six years old.

"I hope I have not kept tea waiting, mother," Frank said as he ran in. "It is not my beetles and butterflies this time. We have been playing a cricket match, and a first rate one it was. Town boys against the House. It ended in a tie."

"You are only a quarter of an hour late," his mother said, smiling, "which is a great deal nearer being punctual than is

usually the case when you are out with your net. We were just going to begin, for I know your habits too well to give you more than a quarter of an hour's law."

"I'm afraid I am horridly unpunctual," Frank said, "and yet, mother, I never go out without making up my mind that I will be in sharp to time. But somehow there is always something which draws me away."

"It makes no matter, Frank. If you are happy and amused I am content, and if the tea is cold it is your loss, not ours. Now, my boy, as soon as you have washed your hands we will have tea."

It was a simple meal, thick slices of bread and butter and tea, for Mrs. Hargate could only afford to put meat upon the table once a day, and even for that several times in the week fish was substituted, when the weather was fine and the fishing boats returned, when well laden. Frank fortunately cared very little what he ate, and what was good enough for his mother was good enough for him. In his father's lifetime things had been different, but Captain Hargate had fallen in battle in New Zealand. He had nothing besides his pay, and his wife and children had lived with him in barracks until his regiment was ordered out to New Zealand, when he had placed his wife in the little cottage she now occupied. He had fallen in an attack on a Maori pah, a fortnight after landing in New Zealand. He had always intended Frank to enter the military profession, and had himself directed his education so long as he was at home.

The loss of his father had been a terrible blow for the boy,

who had been his constant companion when off duty. Captain Hargate had been devoted to field sports and was an excellent naturalist. The latter taste Frank had inherited from him. His father had brought home from India—where the regiment had been stationed until it returned for its turn of home service four years before he left New Zealand—a very large quantity of skins of birds which he had shot there. These he had stuffed and mounted, and so dexterous was he at the work, so natural and artistic were the groups of birds, that he was enabled to add considerably to his income by sending these up to the shop of a London naturalist. He had instructed Frank in his methods, and had given him one of the long blowguns used by some of the hill tribes in India. The boy had attained such dexterity in its use that he was able with his clay pellets to bring down sitting birds, however small, with almost unerring accuracy.

These he stuffed and mounted, arranging them with a taste and skill which delighted the few visitors at his mother's cottage.

Frank was ready to join in a game of football or cricket when wanted, and could hold his own in either. But he vastly preferred to go out for long walks with his blowgun, his net, and his collecting boxes. At home every moment not required for the preparation of his lessons was spent in mounting and arranging his captures. He was quite ready to follow the course his father proposed for him, and to enter the army. Captain Hargate had been a very gallant officer, and the despatches had spoken most highly of the bravery with which he led his company

into action in the fight in which he lost his life. Therefore Mrs. Hargate hoped that Frank would have little difficulty in obtaining a commission without purchase when the time for his entering the army arrived.

Frank's desire for a military life was based chiefly upon the fact that it would enable him to travel to many parts of the world, and to indulge his taste for natural history to the fullest. He was but ten years old when he left India with the regiment, but he had still a vivid recollection of the lovely butterflies and bright birds of that country.

His father had been at pains to teach him that a student of natural history must be more than a mere collector, and that like other sciences it must be methodically studied. He possessed an excellent library of books upon the subject, and although Frank might be ignorant of the name of any bird or insect shown to him he could at once name the family and species.

In the year which Frank had been at school at Dr. Parker's he had made few intimate friends. His habits of solitary wandering and studious indoor work had hindered his becoming the chum of any of his schoolfellows, and this absence of intimacy had been increased by the fact that the straitness of his mother's means prevented his inviting any of his schoolfellows to his home. He had, indeed, brought one or two of the boys, whose tastes lay in the direction of his own, to the house, to show them his collections of birds and insects. But he declined their invitations to visit them, as he was unable to return their

hospitality, and was too proud to eat and drink at other fellows' houses when he could not ask them to do the same at his own. It was understood at Dr. Parker's that Frank Hargate's people were poor, but it was known that his father had been killed in battle. There are writers who depict boys as worshipers of wealth, and many pictures have been drawn of the slights and indignities to which boys, whose means are inferior to those of their schoolfellows, are subject. I am happy to believe that this is a libel. There are, it is true, toadies and tuft hunters among boys as among men. That odious creature, the parasite of the Greek and Latin plays, exists still, but I do not believe that a boy is one whit the less liked, or is ever taunted with his poverty, provided he is a good fellow. Most of the miseries endured by boys whose pocket money is less abundant than that of their fellows are purely self inflicted. Boys and men who are always on the lookout for slights will, of course, find what they seek. But the lad who is not ashamed of what is no fault of his own, who frankly and manfully says, "I can't afford it," will not find that he is in any way looked down upon by those of his schoolfellows whose good opinion is in the smallest degree worth having.

Certainly this was so in the case of Frank Hargate. He was never in the slightest degree ashamed of saying, "I can't afford it;" and the fact that he was the son of an officer killed in battle gave him a standing among the best in the school in spite of his want of pocket money.

Frank was friends with many of the fishermen, and these

would often bring him strange fish and sea creatures brought up in their nets, instead of throwing them back into the sea.

During the holidays he would sometimes go out with them for twenty-four hours in their fishing-boats. His mother made no objection to this, as she thought that the exercise and sea air were good for his health, and that the change did him good. Frank himself was so fond of the sea that he was half disposed to adopt it instead of the army as a profession. But his mother was strongly opposed to the idea, and won him to her way of thinking by pointing out that although a sailor visits many ports he stays long at none of them, and that in the few hours' leave he might occasionally obtain he would be unable to carry out his favorite pursuits.

"Hargate," Ruthven, who was one of the oldest of the House boys, and was about Frank's age, that is about fifteen years old, said a few days after the match, "the Doctor has given Handcock and Jones and myself leave to take a boat and go out this afternoon. We mean to start soon after dinner, and shall take some lines and bait with us. We have got leave till lockup, so we shall have a long afternoon of it. Will you come with us?"

"Thank you, Ruthven," Frank said; "I should like it very much, but you know I'm short of pocket money, and I can't pay my share of the boat, so I would rather leave it alone."

"Oh, nonsense, Hargate!" Ruthven answered; "we know money is not your strong point, but we really want you to go with us. You can manage a boat better than any of us, and you will

really oblige us if you will go with us."

"Oh, if you put it in that way," Frank said, "I shall be glad to go with you; but I do not think," he went on, looking at the sky, "that the weather looks very settled. However, if you do not mind the chance of a ducking, I don't."

"That's agreed then," Ruthven said; "will you meet us near the pier at three o'clock?"

"All right. I'll be punctual."

At the appointed hour the four lads met on the beach. Ruthven and his companions wanted to choose a light rowing boat, but Frank strongly urged them to take a much larger and heavier one. "In the first place," he said, "the wind is blowing off shore, and although it's calm here it will be rougher farther out; and, unless I'm mistaken, the wind is getting up fast. Besides this it will be much more comfortable to fish from a good sized boat."

His comrades grumbled at the extra labor which the large boat would entail in rowing. However, they finally gave in and the boat was launched.

"Look out, Master Hargate," the boatman said as they started; "you'd best not go out too far, for the wind is freshening fast, and we shall have, I think, a nasty night."

The boys thought little of the warning, for the sky was bright and blue, broken only by a few gauzy white clouds which streaked it here and there. They rowed out about a mile, and then laying in their oars, lowered their grapnel and began to fish. The sport was good. The fish bit freely and were rapidly hauled on board. Even

Frank was so absorbed in the pursuit that he paid no attention to the changing aspect of the sky, the increasing roughness of the sea, or the rapidly rising wind.

Suddenly a heavy drop or two of rain fell in the boat. All looked up.

"We are in for a squall," Frank exclaimed, "and no mistake. I told you you would get a ducking, Ruthven."

He had scarcely spoken when the squall was upon them. A deluge of rain swept down, driven by a strong squall of wind.

"Sit in the bottom of the boat," Frank said; "this is a snorter."

Not a word was said for ten minutes, long before which all were drenched to the skin. With the rain a sudden darkness had fallen, and the land was entirely invisible. Frank looked anxiously towards the shore. The sea was getting up fast, and the boat tugging and straining at the cord of the grapnel. He shook his head. "It looks very bad," he said to himself. "If this squall does not abate we are going to have a bad time of it."

A quarter of an hour after it commenced the heavy downpour of rain ceased, or rather changed into a driving sleet. It was still extremely dark, a thick lead colored cloud overspread the sky. Already the white horses showed how fast the sea was rising, and the wind showed no signs of falling with the cessation of the rain storm. The boat was laboring at her head rope and dipping her nose heavily into the waves.

"Look here, you fellows," Frank shouted, "we must take to the oars. If the rope were a long one we might ride here, but

you know it little more than reached the ground when we threw it out. I believe she's dragging already, and even if she isn't she would pull her head under water with so short a rope when the sea gets up. We'd better get out the oars and row to shore, if we can, before the sea gets worse."

The lads got up and looked round, and their faces grew pale and somewhat anxious as they saw how threatening was the aspect of the sea. They had four oars on board, and these were soon in the water and the grapnel hauled up. A few strokes sufficed to show them that with all four rowing the boat's head could not be kept towards the shore, the wind taking it and turning the boat broadside on.

"This will never do," Frank said. "I will steer and you row, two oars on one side and one on the other. I will take a spell presently.

"Row steadily, Ruthven," he shouted; "don't spurt. We have a long row before us and must not knock ourselves up at the beginning."

For half an hour not a word was spoken beyond an occasional cheery exhortation from Frank. The shore could be dimly seen at times through the driving mist, and Frank's heart sank as he recognized the fact that it was further off than it had been when they first began to row. The wind was blowing a gale now, and, although but two miles from shore, the sea was already rough for an open boat.

"Here, Ruthven, you take a spell now," he said.

Although the rowers had from time to time glanced over their

shoulders, they could not, through the mist, form any idea of their position. When Ruthven took the helm he exclaimed, "Good gracious, Frank! the shore is hardly visible. We are being blown out to sea."

"I am afraid we are," Frank said; "but there is nothing to do but to keep on rowing. The wind may lull or it may shift and give us a chance of making for Ramsgate. The boat is a good sea boat, and may keep afloat even if we are driven out to sea. Or if we are missed from shore they may send the lifeboat out after us. That is our best chance."

In another quarter of an hour Ruthven was ready to take another spell at the oar. "I fear," Frank shouted to him as he climbed over the seat, "there is no chance whatever of making shore. All we've got to do is to row steadily and keep her head dead to wind. Two of us will do for that. You and I will row now, and let Handcock and Jones steer and rest by turns. Then when we are done up they can take our places."

In another hour it was quite dark, save for the gray light from the foaming water around. The wind was blowing stronger than ever, and it required the greatest care on the part of the steersman to keep her dead in the eye of the wind. Handcock was steering now, and Jones lying at the bottom of the boat, where he was sheltered, at least from the wind. All the lads were plucky fellows and kept up a semblance of good spirits, but all in their hearts knew that their position was a desperate one.

CHAPTER II: A MAD DOG

"Don't you think, Hargate," Ruthven shouted in his ear, "we had better run before it? It's as much as Handcock can do to keep her head straight."

"Yes," Frank shouted back, "if it were not for the Goodwins. They lie right across ahead of us."

Ruthven said no more, and for another hour he and Frank rowed their hardest. Then Handcock and Jones took the oars. Ruthven lay down in the bottom of the boat and Frank steered. After rowing for another hour Frank found that he could no longer keep the boat head to wind. Indeed, he could not have done so for so long had he not shipped the rudder and steered the boat with an oar, through a notch cut in the stern for the purpose. Already the boat shipped several heavy seas, and Ruthven was kept hard at work baling with a tin can in which they had brought out bait.

"Ruthven, we must let her run. Put out the other oar, we must watch our time. Row hard when I give the word."

The maneuver was safely accomplished, and in a minute the boat was flying before the gale.

"Keep on rowing," Frank said, "but take it easily. We must try and make for the tail of the sands. I can see the lightship."

Frank soon found that the wind was blowing too directly upon the long line of sands to enable him to make the lightship.

Already, far ahead, a gray light seemed to gleam up, marking where the sea was breaking over the dreaded shoal.

"I am afraid it is no use," he said. "Now, boys, we had best, each of us, say our prayers to God, and prepare to die bravely, for I fear that there is no hope for us."

There was silence in the boat for the next five minutes, as the boys sat with their heads bent down. More than one choking sob might have been heard, had the wind lulled, as they thought of the dear ones at home. Suddenly there was a flash of light ahead, and the boom of a gun directly afterwards came upon their ears. Then a rocket soared up into the air.

"There is a vessel on the sands," Frank exclaimed. "Let us make for her. If we can get on board we shall have a better chance than here."

The boys again bent to their oars, and Frank tried to steer exactly for the spot whence the rocket had gone up. Presently another gun flashed out.

"There she is," he said. "I can see her now against the line of breakers. Take the oar again, Ruthven. We must bring up under shelter of her lee."

In another minute or two they were within a hundred yards of the ship. She was a large vessel, and lay just at the edge of the broken water. The waves, as they struck her, flew high above her deck. As the boat neared her a bright light suddenly sprang up. The ship was burning a blue light. Then a faint cheer was heard.

"They see us," Frank said. "They must think we are the

lifeboat. What a disappointment for them! Now, steady, lads, and prepare to pull her round the instant we are under her stern. I will go as near as I dare."

Frank could see the people on deck watching the boat. They must have seen now that she was not the lifeboat; but even in their own danger they must have watched with intense interest the efforts of the tiny boat, adrift in the raging sea, to reach them. Frank steered the boat within a few yards of the stern. Then Jones and Ruthven, who were both rowing the same side, exerted themselves to the utmost, while Frank pushed with the steering oar. A minute later, and they lay in comparatively still water, under the lee of the ship. Two or three ropes were thrown them, and they speedily climbed on board.

"We thought you were the lifeboat at first," the captain said, as they reached the deck; "but, of course, they cannot be here for a couple of hours yet."

"We were blown off shore, sir," Frank said, "and have been rowing against the wind for hours."

"Well, my lads," the captain said, "you have only prolonged your lives for a few minutes, for she will not hold together long."

The ship, indeed, presented a pitiable appearance. The masts had already gone, the bulwark to windward had been carried away, and the hull lay heeled over at a sharp angle, her deck to leeward being level with the water. The crew were huddled down near the lee bulwarks, sheltered somewhat by the sharp slope of the deck from the force of the wind. As each wave broke over

the ship, tons of water rushed down upon them. No more guns were fired, for the lashing had broken and the gun run down to leeward. Already there were signs that the ship would break up ere long, and no hope existed that rescue could arrive in time.

Suddenly there was a great crash, and the vessel parted amidships.

"A few minutes will settle it now," the captain said. "God help us all."

At this moment there was a shout to leeward, which was answered by a scream of joy from those on board the wreck, for there, close alongside, lay the lifeboat, whose approach had been entirely unseen. In a few minutes the fifteen men who remained of the twenty-two, who had formed the crew of the wreck, and the four boys, were on board her. A tiny sail was set and the boat's head laid towards Ramsgate.

"I am glad to see you, Master Hargate," the sailor who rowed one of the stroke oars shouted. He was the man who had lent them the boat. "I was up in the town looking after my wife, who is sick, and clean forgot you till it was dark. Then I ran down and found the boat hadn't returned, so I got the crew together and we came out to look for you, though we had little hope of finding you. It was lucky for you we did, and for the rest of them too, for so it chanced that we were but half a mile away when the ship fired her first gun, just as we had given you up and determined to go back; so on we came straight here. Another ten minutes and we should have been too late. We are making for Ramsgate now.

We could never beat back to Deal in this wind. I don't know as I ever saw it blow much harder."

These sentences were not spoken consecutively, but were shouted out in the intervals between gusts of wind. It took them two hours to beat back to Ramsgate, a signal having been made as soon as they left the wreck to inform the lifeboat there and at Broadstairs that they need not put out, as the rescue had been already effected. The lads were soon put to bed at the sailors' home, a man being at once despatched on horseback to Deal, to inform those there of the arrival of the lifeboat, and of the rescue of the four boys who had been blown to sea.

Early next morning Frank and Handcock returned to Deal, the other two lads being so exhausted by their fatigue and exposure that the doctor said they had better remain in bed for another twenty-four hours.

It is impossible to describe the thankfulness and relief which Mrs. Hargate experienced, when, about two in the morning, Dr. Parker himself brought her news of the safety of her boy. She had long given up all hope, for when the evening came on and Frank had not returned, she had gone down to the shore. She learned from the fishermen there that it was deemed impossible that the boys could reach shore in face of the gale, and that although the lifeboat had just put out in search of them, the chances of their being found were, as she herself saw, faint indeed. She had passed the hours which had intervened, in prayer, and was still kneeling by her bedside, where little

Lucy was unconsciously sleeping, when Dr. Parker's knock was heard at the door. Fervent, indeed, was her gratitude to God for the almost miraculous preservation of her son's life, and then, overcome by the emotions she had experienced, she sought her couch, and was still asleep when, by the earliest train in the morning, Frank returned.

For some time the four boys were the heroes of the school. A subscription was got up to pay for the lost boat, and close as were Mrs. Hargate's means, she enabled Frank to subscribe his share towards the fund. The incident raised Frank to a pinnacle of popularity among his schoolfellows, for the three others were unanimous in saying that it was his coolness and skill in the management of the boat, which alone kept up their spirits, and enabled them to keep her afloat during the gale, and to make the wreck in safety.

In the general enthusiasm excited by the event, Frank's pursuits, which had hitherto found few followers, now became quite popular in the school. A field club was formed, of which he was elected president, and long rambles in the country in search of insects and plants were frequently organized. Frank himself was obliged, in the interests of the school, to moderate the zeal of the naturalists, and to point out that cricket must not be given up, as, if so large a number withdrew themselves from the game, the school would suffer disaster in its various engagements with other schools in the neighborhood. Consequently the rule was made that members of the club were bound to be in the cricket field on

at least three days in the week, including one half holiday, while they were free to ramble in the country on other days. This wise regulation prevented the "naturalists" from becoming unpopular in the school, which would assuredly have been the case had they entirely absented themselves from cricket.

One Saturday afternoon Frank started with a smaller boy, who was one of his most devoted followers, for a long country walk. Frank carried his blowgun, and a butterfly net, Charlie Goodall a net of about a foot in depth, made of canvas, mounted on a stout brass rim, and strong stick, for the capture of water beetles. Their pockets bulged with bottles and tin boxes for the carriage of their captured prey.

They had passed through Eastry, a village four miles from Deal, when Frank exclaimed, "There is a green hairstreak. The first I've seen this year. I have never caught one before."

Cautiously approaching the butterfly, who was sunning himself on the top of a thistle, Frank prepared to strike, when it suddenly mounted and flitted over a hedge. In a moment the boys had scrambled through the gap and were in full pursuit. The butterfly flitted here and there, sometimes allowing the boys to approach within a few feet and then flitting away again for fifty yards without stopping. Heedless where they were going, the boys pursued, till they were startled by a sudden shout close to them.

"You young rascals, how dare you run over my wheat?"

The boys stopped, and Frank saw what, in his excitement, he

had not hitherto heeded, that he was now running in a field of wheat, which reached to his knee.

"I am very sorry, sir," he said. "I was so excited than I really did not see where I was going."

"Not see!" shouted the angry farmer. "You young rascal, I'll break every bone in your body," and he flourished a heavy stick as he spoke.

Charlie Goodall began to cry.

"I have no right to trespass on your wheat, sir," Frank said firmly; "but you have no right to strike us. My name is Frank Hargate. I belong to Dr. Parker's school at Deal, and if you will say what damage I have caused, I will pay for it."

"You shall pay for it now," shouted the farmer, as he advanced with uplifted stick.

Frank slipped three or four of his clay bullets into his mouth.

"Leave us alone or it will be worse for you," he said as he raised the blowgun to his mouth.

The farmer advanced, and Frank sent a bullet with all his force, and with so true an aim that he struck the farmer on the knuckles. It was a sharp blow, and the farmer, with a cry of pain and surprise, dropped the stick.

"Don't come a step nearer," Frank shouted. "If you do, I will aim at your eye next time," and he pointed the threatening tube at the enraged farmer's face.

"I'll have the law of you, you young villain. I'll make you smart for this."

"You can do as you like about that," Frank said. "I have only struck you in self defense, and have let you off easily. Come along, Charlie, let's get out of this."

In a few minutes they were again on the road, the farmer making no attempt to follow them, but determined in his mind to drive over the next morning to Deal to take out a summons against them for trespass and assault. The lads proceeded silently along the road. Frank was greatly vexed with himself at his carelessness in running over half grown wheat, and was meditating how he could pay the fine without having to ask his mother. He determined upon his return to carry some of his cases of stuffed birds down to a shop in the town, and he felt sure that he could get enough for these to pay for any damage which could have been inflicted, with a fine for trespassing, for he had seen stuffed birds exposed in the windows for sale, which were, he was sure, very inferior to his own both in execution and lifelike interest.

After proceeding a few hundred yards along the road they met a pretty little girl of seven or eight years old walking along alone. Frank scarcely glanced at her, for at the moment he heard a shouting in the distance and saw some men running along the road. For a moment he thought that the farmer had despatched some of his men to stop him, but instantly dismissed the idea, as they were coming from the opposite direction and could by no possibility have heard what had happened. They were lost sight of by a dip in the road, and as they disappeared, an object was

seen on the road on the near side of the dip.

"It is a dog," Frank said. "What can they be shouting at?"

The dog was within fifty yards of them when the men again appeared from the dip and recommenced shouting. Frank could now hear what they said.

"Mad dog! mad dog!"

"Get through the hedge, Charlie, quick," Frank cried. "Here, I will help you over, never mind the thorns."

The hedge was low and closely kept, and Frank, bundling his comrade over it, threw himself across and looked round. The dog was within ten yards of them, and Frank saw that the alarm was well founded. The dog was a large crossbred animal, between a mastiff and a bulldog. Its hair was rough and bristling. It came along with its head down and foam churning from its mouth. Frank looked the other way and gave a cry. Yet twenty yards off, in the middle of the road, stood the child. She, too, had heard the shouts, and had paused to see what was the matter. She had not taken the alarm, but stood unsuspicious of danger, watching, not the dog, but the men in the distance.

Frank placed the blowgun to his mouth, and in a moment his pellet struck the animal smartly on the side of the head. It gave a short yelp and paused. Another shot struck it, and then Frank, snatching the water net from Charlie, threw himself over the hedge, and placed himself between the child and the dog just as the latter, with a savage growl, rushed at him.

Frank stood perfectly cool, and as the animal rushed forward,

thrust the net over its head; the ring was but just large enough to allow its head to enter. Frank at once sprang forward, and placing himself behind the dog kept a strain upon the stick, so retaining the mouth of the net tightly on his neck. The animal at first rushed forward dragging Frank after him. Then he stopped, backed, and tried to withdraw his head from the encumbrance which blinded him. Frank, however, had no difficulty in retaining the canvas net in its place, until the men, who were armed with pitchforks, ran up and speedily despatched the unfortunate animal.

"That's bravely done, young master," one of them said; "and you have saved missy's life surely. The savage brute rushed into the yard and bit a young colt and a heifer, and then, as we came running out with forks, he took to the road again. We chased 'um along, not knowing who we might meet, and it gived us a rare turn when we saw the master's Bessy standing alone in the road, wi' nout between her and the dog. Where have you been, Miss Bessy?"

"I've been to aunt's," she said, "and she gave me some strawberries and cream, and it's wicked of you to kill the poor dog."

"Her aunt's farm lies next to master's," the man explained; "and little miss often goes over there.

"The dog was mad, missy, and if it hadn't been for young master here, it would have killed you as safe as eggs. Won't you come back to the farm, sir? Master and mistress would be main

glad to thank you for having saved missy's life."

"No, thank you," Frank said; "we are late now and must be going on our way. I am very glad I happened to be here at the time;" so saying Frank and Charlie proceeded on their way to Deal.

On reaching home he at once picked out four of his best cases of stuffed birds. The cases he had constructed himself, for his father had encouraged him to depend upon himself for his amusements. He had asked Charlie to come round to help him to carry the cases, and with these he proceeded to a shop where he had seen such things offered for sale.

"And you really did these yourself?" the man said in surprise. "They are beautifully done. Quite pictures, I call them. It is a pity that they are homely birds. There is no great sale for such things here. I cannot give you more than five shillings each, but if you had them in London they would be worth a great deal more."

Frank gladly accepted the offer, and feeling sure that the pound would cover the damage done and the fine, which might be five shillings apiece for trespassing, went home in good spirits. The next morning the doctor was called out in the middle of school, and presently returned accompanied by the farmer with whom they had had the altercation on the previous day. Frank felt his cheeks flush as he anticipated a severe reprimand before the whole school.

"Mr. Gregson," the doctor said, "tells me that two of my boys were out near his place at Eastry yesterday. One of them gave

him his name, which he has forgotten."

"It was I, sir," Frank said rising in his place; "I was there with Goodall. We ran on Mr. Gregson's ground after a butterfly. It was my fault, sir, for, of course, Goodall went where I did. We ran among his wheat, and I really did not notice where we were going till he called to us. I was wrong, of course, and am ready to pay for any damage we may have caused."

"You are welcome," the farmer said, "to trample on my wheat for the rest of your born days. I haven't come over here to talk about the wheat, though I tell you fairly I'd minded to do so. I've come over here, Dr. Parker, me and my missus who's outside, to thank this young gentleman for having saved the life of my little daughter Bessy. She was walking along the road when a mad dog, a big brute of a mastiff, who came, I hear, from somewhere about Canterbury, and who has bit two boys on the road, to say nothing of other dogs and horses and such like; he came along the road, he were close to my Bess, and she stood there all alone. Some of my men with pitchforks were two hundred yards or so behind; but law, they could have done nothing! when this young gentleman here jumped all of a sudden over a hedge and put himself between the dog and my Bess. The dog, he rushed at him; but what does he do but claps a bag he'd got at the end of a stick over the brute's head, and there he holds him tight till the men comes up and kills him with their forks.

"Young gentleman," he said, stepping up to Frank and holding out his hand, "I owe my child's life to you. There are not many

men who would have thrown themselves in the way of a mad dog, for the sake of a child they knew nothing of. I thank you for it with all my heart. God bless you, sir. Now, boys, you give three cheers with me for your schoolmate, for you've got a right to be proud of him."

Three such thundering cheers as those which arose had never been heard within the limits of Dr. Parker's school from the day of its foundation. Seeing that farther work could not be expected from them after this excitement, Dr. Parker gave the boys a holiday for the rest of the day, and they poured out from the schoolroom, shouting and delighted, while Frank was taken off to the parlor to be thanked by Mrs. Gregson. The farmer closed his visit by inviting Frank, with as many of his schoolfellows as he liked—the whole school if they would come, the more the better—to come over to tea on the following Saturday afternoon, and he promised them as much strawberries and cream as they could eat. The invitation was largely accepted, and the boys all agreed that a jollier meal they never sat down to than that which was spread on tables in the farmer's garden. The meal was called tea, but it might have been a dinner, for the tables were laden with huge pies, cold chicken and duck, hams, and piles of cakes and tarts of all sorts. Before they started for home, late in the evening, syllabub and cake were handed round, and the boys tramped back to Deal in the highest of glee at the entertainment they had received from the hospitable farmer and his wife.

Great fun had been caused after tea by the farmer giving a

humorous relation of the battle with which his acquaintance with Frank had commenced, and especially at the threat of Frank to send a bullet into his eye if he interfered with him. When they left, a most cordial invitation was given to Frank to come over, with any friend he liked to bring with him, and have tea at the Oaks Farm whenever he chose to do so.

CHAPTER III: A TOUGH YARN

"You had a close shave the other night," one of the boatmen remarked to Frank, as a few days after the adventure he strolled down with Ruthven and Handcock to talk to the boatman whose boat had been lost, "a very narrow shave. I had one out there myself when I was just about your age, nigh forty years ago. I went out for a sail with my father in his fishing boat, and I didn't come back for three years. That was the only long voyage I ever went. I've been sticking to fishing ever since."

"How was it you were away three years?" Handcock asked, "and what was the adventure? Tell us about it."

"Well, it's rather a long yarn," the boatman said.

"Well, your best plan, Jack," Ruthven said, putting his hand in his pocket and bringing out sixpence, "will be for you to go across the road and wet your whistle before you begin."

"Thank ye, young gentleman. I will take three o' grog and an ounce of 'bacca."

He went across to the public house, and soon returned with a long clay in his hand. Then he sat down on the shingle with his back against a boat, and the boys threw themselves down close to him.

"Now," he began, when he had filled his pipe with great deliberation and got it fairly alight, "this here yarn as I'm going to tell you ain't no gammon. Most of the tales which gets told

on the beach to visitors as comes down here and wants to hear of sea adventures is just lies from beginning to end. Now, I ain't that sort, leastways, I shouldn't go to impose upon young gents like you as ha' had a real adventure of your own, and showed oncommon good pluck and coolness too. I don't say, mind ye, that every word is just gospel. My mates as ha' known me from a boy tells me that I've 'bellished the yarn since I first told it, and that all sorts of things have crept in which wasn't there first. That may be so. When a man tells a story a great many times, naturally he can't always tell it just the same, and he gets so mixed up atween what he told last and what he told first that he don't rightly know which was which when he wants to tell it just as it really happened. So if sometimes it appears to you that I'm steering rather wild, just you put a stopper on and bring me up all standing with a question."

There was a quiet humor about the boatman's face, and the boys winked at each other as much as to say that after such an exordium they must expect something rather staggering. The boatman took two or three hard whiffs at his pipe and then began.

"It was towards the end of September in 1832, that's just forty years ago now, that I went out with my father and three hands in the smack, the Flying Dolphin. I'd been at sea with father off and on ever since I was about nine years old, and a smarter boy wasn't to be found on the beach. The Dolphin was a good sea boat, but she wasn't, so to say, fast, and I dunno' as she was much to look at, for the old man wasn't the sort of chap to chuck away

his money in paint or in new sails as long as the old ones could be pieced and patched so as to hold the wind. We sailed out pretty nigh over to the French coast, and good sport we had. We'd been out two days when we turned her head homewards. The wind was blowing pretty strong, and the old man remarked, he thought we was in for a gale. There was some talk of our running in to Calais and waiting till it had blown itself out, but the fish might have spoil before the Wind dropped, so we made up our minds to run straight into Dover and send the fish up from there. The night came on wild and squally, and as dark as pitch. It might be about eight bells, and I and one of the other hands had turned in, when father gave a sudden shout down the hatch, 'All hands on deck.' I was next to the steps and sprang up 'em. Just as I got to the top something grazed my face. I caught at it, not knowing what it was, and the next moment there was a crash, and the Dolphin went away from under my feet. I clung for bare life, scarce awake yet nor knowing what had happened. The next moment I was under water. I still held on to the rope and was soon out again. By this time I was pretty well awake to what had happened. A ship running down channel had walked clean over the poor old Dolphin, and I had got hold of the bobstay. It took me some time to climb up on to the bowsprit, for every time she pitched I went under water. However, I got up at last and swarmed along the bowsprit and got on board. There was a chap sitting down fast asleep there. I walked aft to the helmsman. Two men were pacing up and down in front of him. 'You're a nice lot, you are,' I said,

'to go running down Channel at ten knots an hour without any watch, a-walking over ships and a-drowning of seamen. I'll have the law of ye, see if I don't.'

"'Jeerusalem!' said one, 'who have we here?'

"'My name is Jack Perkins,' says I, 'and I'm the sole survivor, as far as I knows, of the smack, the Flying Dolphin, as has been run down by this craft and lost with all hands.'

"'Darn the Flying Dolphin, and you too,' says the man, and he begins to walk up and down the deck a-puffn' of a long cigar as if nothing had happened.

"'Oh, come,' says I, 'this won't do. Here you've been and run down a smack, drowned father and the other three hands, and your lookout fast asleep, and you does nothing.'

"'I suppose,' said the captain, sarcastic, 'you want me to jump over to look for 'em. You want me to heave the ship to in this gale and to invite yer father perlitely to come on board. P'raps you'd like a grapnel put out to see if I couldn't hook the smack and bring her up again. Perhaps you'd like to be chucked overboard yourself. Nobody asked you to come on board, nobody wanted your company. I reckon the wisest thing you can do is to go for'ard and turn in.' There didn't seem much for me to do else, so I went forward to the forecastle. There most of the hands were asleep, but two or three were sitting up yarning. I told 'em my story and what this captain had said.

"'He's a queer hand is the skipper,' one of 'em said, 'and hasn't got a soft place about him. Well, my lad, I'm sorry for what's

happened, but talking won't do it any good. You've got a long voyage before you, and you'd best turn in and make yourself comfortable for it.'

"'I ain't going a long voyage,' says I, beginning to wipe my eye, 'I wants to be put ashore at the first port.'

"'Well, my lad, I daresay the skipper will do that, but as we're bound for the coast of Chili from Hamburg, and ain't likely to be there for about five months, you've got, as I said, a long voyage before you. If the weather had been fine the skipper might have spoken some ship in the Channel, and put you on board, but before the gale's blown out we shall be hundreds of miles at sea. Even if it had been fine I don't suppose the skipper would have parted with you, especially if you told him the watch was asleep. He would not care next time he entered an English port to have a claim fixed on his ship for the vally of the smack.'

"I saw what the sailor said was like enough, and blamed myself for having let out about the watch. However, there was no help for it, and I turned into an empty bunk and cried myself to sleep. What a voyage that was, to be sure! The ship was a Yankee and so was the master and mates. The crew were of all sorts, Dutch, and Swedes, and English, a Yank or two, and a sprinklin' of niggers. It was one of those ships they call a hell on earth, and cussing and kicking and driving went on all day. I hadn't no regular place give me, but helped the black cook, and pulled at ropes, and swabbed the decks, and got kicked and cuffed all round. The skipper did not often speak to me, but when his eye lighted on me he gave

an ugly sort of look, as seemed to say, 'You'd better ha' gone down with the others. You think you're going to report the loss of the smack, and to get damages against the Potomac, do you? we shall see.' The crew were a rough lot, but the spirit seemed taken out of 'em by the treatment they met with. It was a word and a blow with the mates, and they would think no more of catching up a handspike and stretching a man senseless on the deck than I should of killing a fly. There was two or three among 'em of a better sort than the others. The best of 'em was the carpenter, an old Dutchman. 'Leetle boy,' he used to say to me, 'you keep yourself out of the sight of de skipper. Bad man dat. Me much surprise if you get to de end of dis voyage all right. You best work vera hard and give him no excuse to hit you. If he do, by gosh, he kill you, and put down in de log, Boy killed by accident.'

"I felt that this was so myself, and I did my work as well as I could. One day, however, when we were near the line I happened to upset a bucket with some tar. The captain was standing close by.

"'You young dog,' he said, 'you've done that a purpose,' and before I could speak he caught up the bucket by the handle and brought it down on my head with all his might. The next thing I remember was, I was lying in a bunk in the forecastle. Everything looked strange to me, and I couldn't raise my head. After a time I made shift to turn it round, and saw old Jans sitting on a chest mending a jacket. I called him, but my voice was so low I hardly seemed to hear it myself.

"'Ah, my leetle boy!' he said, 'I am glad to hear you speak again. Two whole weeks you say nothing except talk nonsense.'

"'Have I been ill?' I asked.

"'You haf been vera bad,' he said. 'De captain meant to kill you, I haf no doubt, and he pretty near do it. After he knock you down he said you dead. He sorry for accident, not mean to hit you so hard, but you dead and better be tossed overboard at once. De mates they come up and take your hands and feet. Den I insist dat I feel your wrist. Two or three of us dey stood by me. Captain he vera angry, say we mutinous dogs. I say not mutinous, but wasn't going to see a boy who was only stunned thrown overboard. We say if he did dat we make complaint before consul when we get to port. De skipper he cuss and swear awful. Howebber we haf our way and carry you here. You haf fever and near die. Tree days after we bring you here de captain he swear you shamming and comed to look at you hisself, but he see that it true and tink you going to die. He go away wid smile on his face. Every day he ask if you alive, and give grunt when I say yes. Now you best keep vera quiet. You no talk 'cept when no one else here but me. Other times lie wid your face to the side and your eyes shut. Best keep you here as long as we can, de longer de better. He make you come on deck and work as soon as he think you strong enough to stand. Best get pretty strong before you go out.'

"For another three weeks I lay in my bunk. I only ate a little gruel when others were there, but when the skipper was at dinner Jans would bring me strong soup and meat from the caboose.

The captain came several times and shook me and swore I was shamming, but I only answered in a whisper and seemed as faint as a girl. All this time the Potomac was making good way, and was running fast down the coast of South America. The air was getting cool and fresh.

"'I tink,' Jans said one evening to me, 'dat dis not go on much much longer. De crew getting desperate. Dey talk and mutter among demselves. Me thinks we have trouble before long.'

"The next day one of the mates came in with a bucket of water. 'There! you skulking young hound,' he said as he threw it over me; 'you'd best get out, or the skipper will come and rouse you up himself.'

"I staggered on to the floor. I had made up my mind to sham weak, but I did not need to pretend at first, for having been six weeks in bed, I felt strange and giddy when I got up. I slipped on my clothes and went out on deck, staggered to the bulwarks and held on. The fresh air soon set me straight, and I felt that I was pretty strong again. However, I pretended to be able to scarce stand, and, holding on by the bulwark, made my way aft.

"'You young dog,' the skipper said, 'you've been shamming for the last six weeks. I reckon I'll sharpen you up now,' and he hit me a heavy blow with a rattan he held in his hand. There was a cry of 'Shame!' from some of the men. As quick as thought the skipper pulled a pistol from his pocket.

"'Who cried "Shame"?'" he asked looking round.

"No one answered. Still holding the pistol in his hand he gave

me several more cuts, and then told me to swab the deck. I did it, pretending all the time I was scarce strong enough to keep my feet. Then I made my way forward and sat down against the bulwark, as if nigh done up, till night came. That night as I lay in my bunk I heard the men talking in whispers together. I judged from what they said that they intended to wait for another week, when they expected to enter Magellan Straits, and then to attack and throw the officers overboard. Nothing seemed settled as to what they would do afterwards. Some were in favor of continuing the voyage to port, and there giving out that the captain and officers had been washed overboard in a storm; when, if all stood true to each other, the truth could never be known, although suspicions might arise. The others, however, insisted that you never could be sure of every one, and that some one would be sure to peach. They argued in favor of sailing west and beaching the ship on one of the Pacific islands, where they could live comfortably and take wives among the native women. If they were ever found they could then say that the ship was blown out of her course and wrecked there, and that the captain and officers had been drowned or killed by the natives. It seemed to me that this party were the strongest. For the next week I was thrashed and kicked every day and had I been as weak as I pretended to be, I'm sure they would have killed me. However, thanks to the food Jans brought me, for I was put on bread and water, I held on. At last we entered the straits. The men were very quiet that day, and the captain in a worse temper than usual. I did not go

to sleep, and turned out at the midnight watch, for I was made to keep watch although I was on duty all day. As the watch came in I heard them say to the others, 'In ten minutes' time.' Presently I saw them come out, and joining the watch on deck they went aft quietly in a body. They had all got handspikes in their hands. Then there was a rush. Two pistol shots were fired, and then there was a splash, and I knew that the officer on watch was done for. Then they burst into the aft cabins. There were pistol shots and shouts, and for three or four minutes the fight went on. Then all was quiet. Then they came up on deck again and I heard three splashes, that accounted for the captain and the two other mates. I thought it safe now to go aft. I found that six of the men had been killed. These were thrown overboard, and then the crew got at the spirit stores and began to drink. I looked about for Jans, and found him presently sitting on the deck by the bulwark.

"'Ah, my leetle boy!' he said, 'you have just come in time. I have been shot through the body. I was not in de fight, but was standing near when dey rushed at de officer on watch. De first pistol he fire missed de man he aim at and hit me. Well, it was shust as well. I am too old to care for living among de black peoples, and I did not want a black wife at all. So matters haf not turned out so vera bad. Get me some water.'

"I got him some, but in five minutes the poor old Dutchman was dead. There was no one on deck. All were shouting and singing in the captain's cabin, so I went and turned in forward. Morning was just breaking when I suddenly woke. There was a

great light, and running on deck I saw the fire pouring out from the cabin aft. I suppose they had all drunk themselves stupid and had upset a light, and the fire had spread and suffocated them all. Anyhow, there were none of them to be seen. I got hold of a water keg and placed it in a boat which luckily hung out on its davits, as Jans had, the day before, been calking a seam in her side just above the water's edge. I made a shift to lower it, threw off the falls, and getting out the oars, rowed off. I lay by for some little time, but did not see a soul on deck. Then, as I had nowhere particular to go, I lay down and slept. On getting up I found that I had drifted two or three miles from the ship, which was now a mere smoking shell, the greater part being burnt to the Water's edge. Two miles to the north lay the land, and getting out an oar at the stern I sculled her to shore. I suppose I had been seen, or that the flames of the ship had called down the people, for there they were in the bay, and such a lot of creatures I never set eyes on. Men and women alike was pretty nigh naked, and dirt is no name for them. Though I was but a boy I was taller than most. They came round me and jabbered and jabbered till I was nigh deafened. Over and over again they pointed to the ship. I thought they wanted to know whether I belonged to it, but it couldn't have been that, because when I nodded a lot of 'em jumped into some canoes which was lying ashore, and taking me with them paddled off to the ship. I suppose they really wanted to know if they could have what they could find. That wasn't much, but it seemed a treasure to them. There was a lot of burned

beams floating about alongside, and all of these which had iron or copper bolts or fastenings they took in tow and rowed ashore. We hadn't been gone many hundred yards from the vessel when she sunk. Well, young gentlemen, for upwards of two years I lived with them critturs. My clothes soon wore out, and I got to be as naked and dirty as the rest of 'em. They were good hands at fishing, and could spear a fish by the light of a torch wonderful. In other respects they didn't seem to have much sense. They lived, when I first went there, in holes scratched in the side of a hill, but I taught 'em to make huts, making a sort of ax out of the iron saved. In summer they used to live in these, but in winter, when it was awful cold, we lived in the holes, which were a sight warmer than the huts. Law, what a time that was! I had no end of adventures with wild beasts. The way the lions used to roar and the elephants—"

"I think, Jack," Ruthven interrupted, "that this must be one of the embellishments which have crept in since you first began telling the tale. I don't think I should keep it in if I were you, because the fact that there are neither lions or elephants in South America throws a doubt upon the accuracy of this portion of your story."

"It may be, sir," the sailor said, with a twinkle of his eyes, "that the elephants and lions may not have been in the first story. Now I think of it, I can't recall that they were; but, you see, people wants to know all about it. They ain't satisfied when I tell 'em that I lived two years among these chaps. They wants to know how

I passed my time, and whether there were any wild beasts, and a lot of such like questions, and, in course, I must answer them. So then, you see, naturally, 'bellishments creeps in; but I did live there for two years, that's gospel truth, and I did go pretty nigh naked, and in winter was pretty near starved to death over and over again. When the ground was too hard to dig up roots, and the sea was too rough for the canoes to put out, it went hard with us, and very often we looked more like living skelingtons than human beings. Every time a ship came in sight they used to hurry me away into the woods. I suppose they found me useful, and didn't want to part with me. At last I got desperate, and made up my mind I'd make a bolt whatever came of it. They didn't watch me when there were no ships near. I suppose they thought there was nowhere for me to run to, so one night I steals down to the shore, gets into a canoe, puts in a lot of roots which I had dug up and hidden away in readiness, and so makes off. I rowed hard all night, for I knew they would be after me when they found I had gone. Them straits is sometimes miles and miles across; at other times not much more than a ship's length, and the tide runs through 'em like a mill race. I had chosen a time when I had the tide with me, and soon after morning I came to one of them narrow places. I should like to have stopped here, because it would have been handy for any ship as passed; but the tide run so strong, and the rocks were so steep on both sides, that I couldn't make a landing. Howsomdever, directly it widened out, I managed to paddle into the back water and landed there. Well,

gents, would you believe me, if there wasn't two big allygaters sitting there with their mouths open ready to swallow me, canoe and all, when I came to shore."

"No, Jack, I'm afraid we can't believe that. We would if we could, you know, but alligators are not fond of such cold weather as you'd been having, nor do they frequent the seashore."

"Ah, but this, you see, was a straits, Master Ruthven, just a narrow straits, and I expect the creatures took it for a river."

"No, no, Jack, we can't swallow the alligators, any more than they could swallow you and your canoe."

"Well," the sailor said with a sigh, "I won't say no more about the allygaters. I can't rightly recall when they came into the story. Howsomdever, I landed, you can believe that, you know."

"Oh yes, we can quite believe, Jack, that, if you were there, in that canoe, in that back water, with the land close ahead, you did land."

The sailor looked searchingly at Ruthven and then continued:

"I hauled the canoe up and hid it in some bushes, and it were well I did, for a short time afterwards a great—" and he paused. "Does the hippypotybus live in them ere waters, young gents?"

"He does not, Jack," Ruthven said.

"Then it's clear," the sailor said, "that it wasn't a hippypotybus. It must have been a seal."

"Yes, it might have been a seal," Ruthven said. "What did he do?"

"Well he just took a look at me, gents, winked with one eye,

as much as to say, 'I see you,' and went down again. There warn't nothing else as he could do, was there?"

"It was the best thing he could do anyhow," Ruthven said.

"Well, gents, I lived there for about three weeks, and then a ship comes along, homeward bound, and I goes out and hails her. At first they thought as I was a native as had learned to speak English, and it wasn't till they'd boiled me for three hours in the ship's copper as they got at the color of my skin, and could believe as I was English. So I came back here and found the old woman still alive, and took to fishing again; but it was weeks and weeks before I could get her or any one else to believe as I was Jack Perkins. And that's all the story, young gents. Generally I tells it a sight longer to the gents as come down from London in summer; but, you see, I can't make much out of it when ye won't let me have 'bellishments."

"And how much of it is true altogether, Jack?" Frank asked. "Really how much?"

"It's all true as I have told you, young masters," the boatman said. "It were every bit true about the running down of the smack, and me being nearly killed by the skipper, and the mutiny, and the burning of the vessel, and my living for a long time—no, I won't stick to the two years, but it might have been three weeks, with the natives before a ship picked me up. And that's good enough for a yarn, ain't it?"

"Quite good enough, Jack, and we're much obliged to you; but I should advise you to drop the embellishments in future."

“It ain’t no use, Master Hargate, they will have ‘bellishments, and if they will have ‘em, Jack Perkins isn’t the man to disappint ‘em; and, Lord bless you, sir, the stiffer I pitches it in the more liberal they is with their tips. Thank ye kindly all round, gentlemen. Yes, I do feel dry after the yarn.”

CHAPTER IV: A RISING TIDE

The half year was drawing to its close, and it was generally agreed at Dr. Parker's that it had been the jolliest ever known. The boating episode and that of the tea at Oak Farm had been events which had given a fillip to existence. The school had been successful in the greater part of its cricket matches, and generally every one was well satisfied with himself. On the Saturday preceding the breaking up Frank, with Ruthven, Charlie Goodall and two of the other naturalists, started along the seashore to look for anemones and other marine creatures among the rocks and pools at the foot of the South Foreland. Between Ruthven and Frank a strong feeling of affection had grown up since the date of their boating adventure. They were constantly together now; and as Ruthven was also intended for the army, and would probably obtain his commission about the same time as Frank, they often talked over their future, and indulged in hopes that they might often meet, and that in their campaigns, they might go through adventures together.

Tide was low when they started. They had nearly three miles to walk. The pools in front of Deal and Walmer had often been searched, but they hoped that once round the Foreland they might light upon specimens differing from any which they had hitherto found. For some hours they searched the pools, retiring as the tide advanced. Then they went up to the foot of the cliffs, and

sat down to open their cans and compare the treasures they had collected. The spot which they had unwittingly selected was a little bay. For a long time they sat comparing their specimens. Then Frank said, "Come along, it is time to be moving."

As he rose to his feet he uttered an exclamation of dismay. Although the tide was still at some little distance from the spot where they were sitting, it had already reached the cliffs extending out at either end of the bay. A brisk wind was blowing on shore, and the waves were already splashing against the foot of the rocks.

The whole party leaped to their feet, and seizing their cans ran off at the top of their speed to the end of the bay.

"I will see how deep the water is," Frank exclaimed; "we may yet be able to wade round."

The water soon reached Frank's waist. He waded on until it was up to his shoulders, and he had to leap as each wave approached him. Then he returned to his friends.

"I could see round," he said, "and I think I could have got round without getting into deeper water. The worst of it is the bottom is all rocky, and I stumbled several times, and should have gone under water if I could not have swam. You can't swim, Ruthven, I know; can you other fellows?"

Goodall could swim, as could one of the others.

"Now, Ruthven," Frank said, "if you will put your hand on my shoulder and keep quiet, I think I could carry you around. Goodall and Jackson can take Childers."

But neither of the other boys had much confidence in their swimming. They could get thirty or forty yards, but felt sure that they would be able to render but little assistance to Childers, and in fact scarcely liked to round the point alone. For some time they debated the question, the sea every minute rising and pushing them farther and farther from the point. "Look here, Frank," Ruthven said at last; "you are not sure you can carry me. The others are quite certain that they cannot take Childers. We must give up that idea. The best thing, old boy, is for you three who can swim to start together. Then if either of the others fail you can help them a bit. Childers and I must take our chance here. When you get round you must send a boat as soon as possible."

"I certainly shall not desert you, Ruthven," Frank said. "You know as well as I do that I'm not likely to find a boat on the shore till I get pretty near Walmer Castle, and long before we could get back it would be settled here. No, no, old fellow, we will see the matter out together. Jackson and Goodall can swim round if they like."

These lads, however, would not venture to take the risk alone, but said they would go if Frank would go with them.

"Chuck off your boots and coats and waistcoats," Frank said suddenly, proceeding to strip rapidly to the skin. "I will take them round, Ruthven, and come back to you. Run round the bay you and Childers, and see if you can find any sort of ledge or projection that we can take refuge upon. Now, then, come on you two as quick as you can."

The sea had already reached within a few feet of the foot of the cliff all round the bay.

"Now, mind," Frank said sharply, "no struggling and nonsense, you fellows. I will keep quite close to you and stick to you, so you needn't be afraid. If you get tired just put one hand on my back and swim with the other and your legs; and above all things keep your heads as low as possible in the water so as just to be able to breathe."

The three lads soon waded out as far as they could go and then struck out. Jackson and Goodall were both poor swimmers and would have fared very badly alone. The confidence, however, which they entertained in Frank gave them courage, and they were well abreast of the point when first Jackson and then Goodall put their hands on his shoulders. Thanks to the instructions he had given them, and to their confidence in him, they placed no great weight upon him. But every ounce tells heavily on a swimmer, and Frank gave a gasp of relief as at last his feet touched the ground. Bidding his companions at once set off at a run he sat down for two or three minutes to recover his breath.

"It is lucky," he said to himself, "that I did not try with Ruthven. It's a very different thing carrying fellows who can swim and fellows who can't. What fools we've been to let ourselves he caught here! I had no idea the tide came so high, or that it was so dangerous, and none of us have ever been round here before. Now I must go back to Ruthven."

Frank found it even harder work to get back than it had been to come out from the bay, for the tide was against him now. At last he stood beside Ruthven and Childers.

"We can only find one place, Frank, where there is any projection a fellow could stand upon, and that is only large enough for one. See!" he said, pointing to a projecting block of chalk, whose upper surface, some eight inches wide, was tolerably flat. "There is a cave here, too, which may go beyond the tide. It is not deep but it slopes up a bit."

"That will never do," Frank said; "as the waves come in they will rush up and fill it to the top. Don't you see it is all rounded by the water? Now, Childers, we will put you on that stone. You will be perfectly safe there, for you see it is two feet above this greenish line, which shows where the water generally comes to. The tides are not at spring at present, so though you may get a splashing there is no fear of your being washed off."

The water was already knee deep at the foot of the rocks, and the waves took them nearly up to the shoulders. Ruthven did not attempt to dispute Frank's allotment of the one place of safety to Childers. Frank and he placed themselves below the block of chalk, which was somewhat over six feet from the ground. Then Childers scrambled up on to their shoulders, and from these stepped onto the ledge.

"I am all right," he said; "I wish to Heaven that you were too."

"We shall do," Frank said. "Mind you hold tight, Childers! You had better turn round with your face to the cliff, so as to be

able to grip hold and steady yourself in case the waves come up high. The tide will turn in three quarters of an hour at the outside. Now, then, Ruthven, let's make a fight for it, old man."

"What are you going to do, Frank?"

"We will wade along here as far as we can towards the corner, and than we must swim for it."

"Don't you think it's possible to stay here," Ruthven said, "if the tide will turn so soon?"

"Quite impossible!" Frank said. "I have been nearly taken off my feet twice already, and the water will rise a yard yet, at least. We should be smashed against the rocks, even if we weren't drowned. It must be tried, Ruthven. There is no other way for it. The distance is a good deal farther than it would have been if we had started at first; but it isn't the distance that makes much matter. We've only got to go out a little way, and the tide will soon take us around the point. Everything depends on you. I can take you round the point, and land you safely enough, if you will lie quiet. If you don't, you will drown both of us. So it's entirely in your hands.

"Look out!"

At this moment a larger wave than usual took both boys off their legs, and dashed them with considerable force against the cliff. Frank seized Ruthven, and assisted him to regain his feet.

"Now, old fellow, let me put you on your back. I will lie on mine and tow you along. Don't struggle; don't move; above all, don't try and lift your head, and don't mind if a little water gets

in your mouth. Now!"

For a moment Ruthven felt himself under water, and had to make a great effort to restrain himself from struggling to come to the surface. Then he felt himself lying on his back in the water, supported by Frank. The motion was not unpleasant as he rose and fell on the waves, although now and then a splash of water came over his face, and made him cough and splutter for breath. He could see nothing but the blue sky overhead, could feel nothing except that occasionally he received a blow from one or other of Frank's knees, as the latter swam beneath him, with Ruthven's head on his chest. It was a dreamy sensation, and looking back upon it afterwards Ruthven could never recall anything that he had thought of. It seemed simply a drowsy pleasant time, except when occasionally a wave covered his face. His first sensation was that of surprise when he felt the motion change, and Frank lifted his head from the water and said, "Stand up, old fellow. Thank God, here we are, safe!"

Frank had indeed found the journey easier than that which he had before undertaken with the others. He had scarcely tried to progress, but had, after getting sufficiently far out to allow the tide to take him round the point, drifted quietly.

"I owe my life to you, Frank. I shall never forget it, old fellow."

"It's been a close thing," Frank answered; "but you owe your life as much to your own coolness as to me, and above all, Ruthven, don't let us forget that we both owe our lives to God."

"I sha'n't forget it," Ruthven said quietly, and they stood for

a few minutes without speaking. “Now, what had we better do? Shall we start to run home?”

“I can’t,” Frank laughed, for he had nothing on but his trousers. These he had slipped on after the return from his first trip, pushing the rest of his things into a crevice in the rocks as high up as he could reach.

“You had better take off your things, Ruthven, and lay them out to dry in the sun. The boat will be here in half an hour. I wonder how Childers is getting on!”

“I think he will be safe,” Ruthven said. “The tide will not rise high enough for there to be much danger of his being washed off.”

“I don’t think so either,” Frank agreed, “or I would try and swim back again; but I really don’t think I could get round the point against the tide again.”

In half an hour a boat rowing four oars was seen approaching.

“They are laying out well,” Ruthven said. “They couldn’t row harder if they were rowing a race. But had it not been for you, old fellow, they would have been too late, as far as I am concerned.”

As the boat approached, the coxswain waved his hat to the boys. Frank motioned with his arm for them to row on round the point. The boat swept along at a short distance from the shore. The boys watched them breathlessly. Presently as it reached the point they saw the coxswain stand up and say something to the men, who glanced over their shoulders as they rowed. Then the coxswain gave a loud shout. “Hold on! We’ll be with you

directly."

"Thank God!" Frank exclaimed, "Childers is all right."

It was well, however, that the boat arrived when it did, for Childers was utterly exhausted when it reached him. The sea had risen so high that the waves broke against his feet, throwing the spray far above his head, and often nearly washing him from the ledge on which he stood. Had it not been, indeed, for the hold which he obtained of the cliff, it would several times have swept him away. About eighteen inches above his head he had found a ledge sufficiently wide to give a grip for his hands, and hanging by these he managed to retain his place when three times his feet were swept off the rock by the rush of water. The tide was just on the turn when the boat arrived, and so exhausted was he that he certainly would not have been able to hold out for the half hour's buffeting to which he would have been exposed before the water fell sufficiently to leave him. After helping him into the boat the men gathered the clothes jammed in fissures of the cliffs. These were, of course, drenched with water, but had for the most part remained firm in their places. They now pulled round to the spot where Frank and Ruthven were awaiting them.

"Childers must have been pretty nearly done," Frank said. "He must be lying in the bottom of the boat."

Childers gave a smile of pleasure as his schoolfellows jumped on board. He had, glancing over his shoulder, seen them drift out of sight round the point, and had felt certain that they had reached shore. It was, however, a great pleasure to be assured of the fact.

"You have made quite a stir upon the beach, young gentlemen," the coxswain of the boat said. "When they two came running up without their shoes or coats and said there were three of you cut off in the bay under the Foreland, there didn't seem much chance for you. It didn't take us two minutes to launch the boat, for there were a score of hands helping to run her down; and my mates bent to it well, I can tell you, though we didn't think it would be of any use. We were glad when we made you two out on this side of the point. Look, there's half Deal and Walmer coming along the shore."

It was as the boatman said. Numbers of persons were streaming along the beach, and loud were the cheers which rose as the coxswain stood up and shouted in a stentorian voice, "All saved!"

Frank put on his things as they approached Walmer. His shoes were lost, as were those of Ruthven, and he had difficulty in getting his arms into his wet and shrunken jacket. Quite a crowd were gathered near the castle as the boat rowed to shore, and a hearty cheer arose as it was run up on the shingle and the boys were helped out. Frank and Ruthven, indeed, required no assistance. They were in no way the worse for the adventure, but Childers was so weak that he was unable to stand. He was carried up and laid on a fly, the others sitting opposite, the driver having first taken the precaution of removing the cushions.

There were among the crowd most of the boys from Dr. Parker's. Goodall and Jackson had arrived nearly an hour and a

half before, and the news had spread like wildfire. Bats and balls had been thrown down and every one had hurried to the beach. Goodall and his companion had already related the circumstance of their being cut off by the water and taken round the point by Frank; and as Ruthven on jumping out had explained to his comrades who flocked round to shake his hand, "I owe my life to Hargate," the enthusiasm reached boiling point, and Frank had difficulty in taking his place in the fly, so anxious were all to shake his hand and pat him on the shoulder. Had it not been for his anxiety to get home as soon as possible, and his urgent entreaties, they would have carried him on their shoulders in triumph through the town. They drove first to the school, where Childers was at once carried up to a bed, which had been prepared with warm blankets in readiness; Ruthven needed only to change his clothes.

The moment they had left the fly Frank drove straight home, and was delighted at finding, from his mother's exclamation of surprise as he alighted from the cab, that she had not been suffering any anxiety, no one, in the general excitement, having thought of taking the news to her. In answer to her anxious inquiries he made light of the affair, saying only that they had stupidly allowed themselves to be cut off by the sea and had got a ducking. It was not, indeed, till the next morning, when the other four boys came around to tell Mrs. Hargate that they were indebted to Frank for their lives, that she had any notion that he had been in danger.

Frank was quite oppressed by what he called the fuss which was made over the affair. A thrilling description of it appeared in the local papers. A subscription was got up in the school, and a gold watch with an inscription was presented to him; and he received letters of heart felt thanks from the parents of his four schoolfellows, for Childers maintained that it was entirely to Frank's coolness and thoughtfulness that his preservation was also due.

On the following Wednesday the school broke up. Frank had several invitations from the boys to spend his holidays with them; but he knew how lonely his mother would feel in his absence, and he declined all the invitations. Mrs. Hargate was far from strong, and had had several fits of fainting. These, however, had taken place at times when Frank was at school, and she had strictly charged her little servant to say nothing about it.

One day on returning from a long walk he saw the doctor's carriage standing at the door. Just as he arrived the door opened and the doctor came out. Upon seeing Frank he turned.

"Come in here, my boy," he said.

Frank followed him, and seeing that the blinds were down, went to draw them up. The doctor laid his hand on his arm.

"Never mind that," he said gently.

"My boy," he said, "do you know that your mother has been for some time ailing?"

"No, indeed," Frank said with a gasp of pain and surprise.

"It is so, my boy. I have been attending her for some time.

She has been suffering from fainting fits brought on by weakness of the heart's action. Two hours since I was sent for and found her unconscious. My poor boy, you must compose yourself. God is good and merciful, though his decrees are hard to bear. Your mother passed away quietly half an hour since, without recovering consciousness."

Frank gave a short cry, and then sat stunned by the suddenness of the blow. The doctor drew out a small case from his pocket and poured a few drops from the phial into a glass, added some water, and held it to Frank's lips.

"Drink this, my boy," he said.

Frank turned his head from the offered glass. He could not speak.

"Drink this, my boy," the doctor said again; "it will do you good. Try and be strong for the sake of your little sister, who has only you in the world now."

The thought of Lucy touched the right chord in the boy's heart, and he burst into a passionate fit of crying. The doctor allowed his tears to flow unchecked.

"You will be better now," he said presently. "Now drink this, then lie down on the sofa. We must not be having you ill, you know."

Frank gulped down the contents of the glass, and, passive as a child, allowed the doctor to place him upon the sofa.

"God help and strengthen you, my poor boy," he said; "ask help from Him."

For an hour Frank lay sobbing on the sofa, and then, remembering the doctor's last words, he knelt beside it and prayed for strength.

A week had passed. The blinds were up again. Mrs. Hargate had been laid in her last home, and Frank was sitting alone again in the little parlor thinking over what had best be done. The outlook was a dark one, enough to shake the courage of one much older than Frank. His mother's pension, he knew, died with her. He had, on the doctor's advice, written to the War Office on the day following his mother's death, to inform the authorities of the circumstances, and to ask if any pension could be granted to his sister. The reply had arrived that morning and had relieved him of the greatest of his cares. It stated that as he was now just fifteen years old he was not eligible for a pension, but that twenty-five pounds a year would be paid to his sister until she married or attained the age of twenty-one.

He had spoken to the doctor that morning, and the latter said that he knew a lady who kept a small school, and who would, he doubted not, be willing to receive Lucy and to board and clothe her for that sum. She was a very kind and motherly person, and he was sure that Lucy would be most kindly treated and cared for by her. It was then of his own future only that Frank had to think. There were but a few pounds in the house, but the letter from the War Office inclosed a check for twenty pounds, as his mother's quarterly pension was just due. The furniture of the little house would fetch but a small sum, not more, Frank thought, than thirty

or forty pounds. There were a few debts to pay, and after all was settled up there would remain about fifty pounds. Of this he determined to place half in the doctor's hands for the use of Lucy.

"She will want," he said to himself, "a little pocket money. It is hard on a girl having no money to spend of her own. Then, as she gets on, she may need lessons in something or other. Besides, half the money rightly belongs to her, The question is, What am I to do?"

CHAPTER V: ALONE IN THE WORLD

"What am I to do?"

A difficult question indeed, for a boy of fifteen, with but twenty-five pounds, and without a friend in the world. Was he, indeed, without a friend? he asked himself. There was Dr. Parker. Should he apply to him? But the doctor had started for a trip on the Continent the day after the school had broken up, and would not return for six weeks. It was possible that, had he been at home, he might have offered to keep Frank for a while; but the boys seldom stayed at his school past the age of fifteen, going elsewhere to have their education completed. What possible claim had he to quarter himself upon the doctor for the next four years, even were the offer made? No, Frank felt; he could not live upon the doctor's charity. Then there were the parents of the boys he had saved from drowning. But even as he sat alone Frank's face flushed at the thought of trading upon services so rendered. The boy's chief fault was pride. It was no petty feeling, and he had felt no shame at being poorer than the rest of his schoolfellows. It was rather a pride which led him unduly to rely upon himself, and to shrink from accepting favors from any one. Frank might well, without any derogation, have written to his friends, telling them of the loss he had suffered

and the necessity there was for him to earn his living, and asking them to beg their fathers to use their interest to procure him a situation as a boy clerk, or any other position in which he could earn his livelihood.

Frank, however, shrunk from making any such appeal, and determined to fight his battle without asking for help. He knew nothing of his parents' relations. His father was an only son, who had been left early an orphan. His mother, too, had, he was aware, lost both her parents, and he had never heard her speak of other relations. There was no one, therefore, so far as he knew, to whom he could appeal on the ground of ties of blood. It must be said for him that he had no idea how hard was the task which he was undertaking. It seemed to him that it must be easy for a strong, active lad to find employment of some sort in London. What the employment might be he cared little for. He had no pride of that kind, and so that he could earn his bread he cared not much in what capacity he might do it.

Already preparations had been made for the sale of the furniture, which was to take place next day. Everything was to be sold except the scientific books which had belonged to his father. These had been packed in a great box until the time when he might place them in a library of his own, and the doctor kindly offered to keep it for him until such time should arrive. Frank wrote a long letter to Ruthven, telling him of his loss, and his reasons for leaving Deal, and promising to write some day and tell him how he was getting on in London. This letter he did

not intend to post until the last thing before leaving Deal. Lucy had already gone to her new home, and Frank felt confident that she would be happy there. His friend, the doctor, who had tried strongly, but without avail, to dissuade Frank from going up to London to seek his fortune there, had promised that if the lad referred any inquiries to him he would answer for his character.

He went down to the beach the last evening and said goodbye to his friends among the fishermen, and he walked over in the afternoon and took his last meal with Farmer Gregson.

"Look ye here, my lad," the farmer said as they parted. "I tell ye, from what I've heerd, this London be a hard nut to crack. There be plenty of kernel, no doubt, when you can get at it, but it be hard work to open the shell. Now, if so be as at any time you run short of money, just drop me a line, and there's ten pound at your service whenever you like. Don't you think it's an obligation. Quite the other way. It would be a real pleasure to me to lend you a helping hand."

Two days after the sale Frank started for London. On getting out of the train he felt strange and lonely amid the bustle and confusion which was going on on the platform. The doctor had advised him to ask one of the porters, or a policeman, if he could recommend him to a quiet and respectable lodging, as expenses at an hotel would soon make a deep hole in his money. He, therefore, as soon as the crowd cleared away, addressed himself to one of the porters.

"What sort of lodgings do you want, sir?" the man said,

looking at him rather suspiciously, with, as Frank saw, a strong idea in his mind that he was a runaway schoolboy.

"I only want one room," he said, "and I don't care how small it is, so that it is clean and quiet. I shall be out all day, and should not give much trouble."

The porter went away and spoke to some of his mates, and presently returned with one of them.

"You're wanting a room I hear, sir," the man said. "I have a little house down the Old Kent Road, and my missus lets a room or two. It's quiet and clean, I'll warrant you. We have one room vacant at present."

"I'm sure that would suit me very well," Frank said. "How much do you charge a week?"

"Three and sixpence, sir, if you don't want any cooking done."

Frank took the address, and leaving his portmanteau in charge of the porter, who promised, unless he heard to the contrary, that he would bring it home with him when he had done his work, he set off from the station.

Deal is one of the quietest and most dreary places on the coast of England, and Frank was perfectly astounded at the crowd and bustle which filled the street, when he issued from the railway approach, at the foot of London Bridge. The porter had told him that he was to turn to his left, and keep straight along until he reached the "Elephant and Castle." He had, therefore, no trouble about his road, and was able to give his whole attention to the sights which met his eye. For a time the stream of omnibuses,

cabs, heavy wagons, and light carts, completely bewildered him, as did the throng of people who hastened along the footway. He was depressed rather than exhilarated at the sight of this busy multitude. He seemed such a solitary atom in the midst of this great moving crowd. Presently, however, the thought that where so many millions gained their living there must be room for one boy more, somewhat cheered him. He was a long time making his way to his place of destination, for he stared into every shop window, and being, although he was perfectly ignorant of the fact, on the wrong side of the pavement, he was bumped and bustled continually, and was not long in arriving at the conclusion that the people of London must be the roughest and rudest in the world. It was not until he ran against a gentleman, and was greeted with the angry, "now then, boy. Where are you going? Why the deuce don't you keep on your own side of the pavement?" that he perceived that the moving throng was divided into two currents, that on the inside meeting him, while the outside stream was proceeding in the same direction as himself. After this he got on better, and arrived without adventure at the house of the porter, in the Old Kent Road.

It was a small house, but was clean and respectable, and Frank found that the room would suit him well.

"I do not wait upon the lodgers," the landlady said, "except to make the beds and tidy the rooms in the morning. So if you want breakfast and tea at home you will have to get them yourself. There is a separate place downstairs for your coals. There are

some tea things, plates and dishes, in this cupboard. You will want to buy a small tea kettle, and a gridiron, and a frying pan, in case you want a chop or a rasher. Do you think you can cook them yourself?"

"Frank, amused at the thought of cooking and catering for himself, said boldly that he should soon learn.

"You are a very young gentleman," the landlady said, eyeing him doubtfully, "to be setting up on your own hook. I mean," she said, seeing Frank look puzzled, "setting up housekeeping on your own account. You will have to be particular careful with the frying pan, because if you were to upset the fat in the fire you might have the house in a blaze in a jiffey."

Frank said that he would certainly be careful with the frying pan.

"Well," she went on, "as you're a stranger to the place I don't know as you could do better than get your tea, and sugar, and things at the grocer's at the next corner. I deals there myself, and he gives every satisfaction. My baker will be round in a few minutes, and, if you likes, I can take in your bread for you. The same with milk."

These matters being arranged, and Frank agreeing at once to the proposition that as he was a stranger it would make things more comfortable were he to pay his rent in advance, found himself alone in his new apartment. It was a room about ten feet square. The bed occupied one corner, with the washstand at its foot. There was a small table in front of the fireplace, and two

chairs; a piece of carpet half covered the floor, and these with the addition of the articles in the cupboard constituted the furniture of the room. Feeling hungry after his journey Frank resolved to go out at once and get something to eat, and then to lay in a stock of provisions. After some hesitation regarding the character of the meal he decided upon two Bath buns, determining to make a substantial tea. He laid in a supply of tea, sugar, butter, and salt, bought a little kettle, a frying pan, and a gridiron. Then he hesitated as to whether he should venture upon a mutton chop or some bacon, deciding finally in favor of the latter, upon the reflection that any fellow could see whether bacon were properly frizzled up, while as to a chop there was no seeing anything about it till one cut it. He, therefore, invested in a pound of prime streaky Wiltshire bacon, the very best, as the shopman informed him, that could be bought. He returned carrying all his purchases, with the exception of the hardware. Then he inquired of his landlady where he could get coal.

"The green grocer's round the corner," the landlady said. "Tell him to send in a hundredweight of the best, that's a shilling, and you'll want some firewood too."

The coal arrived in the course of the afternoon, and at half past six the porter came in with Frank's trunk. He had by this time lit a fire, and while the water was boiling got some of his things out of the box, and by hanging some clothes on the pegs on the back of the door, and by putting the two or three favorite books he had brought with him on to the mantelpiece, he gave

the room a more homelike appearance. He enjoyed his tea all the more from the novelty of having to prepare it himself, and succeeded very fairly for a first attempt with his bacon.

When tea was over he first washed up the things and then started for a ramble. He followed the broad straight road to Waterloo Bridge, stood for a long time looking at the river, and then crossed into the Strand. The lamps were now alight and the brightness and bustle of the scene greatly interested him. At nine o'clock he returned to his lodgings, but was again obliged to sally out, as he found he had forgotten candles.

After breakfast next morning he went out and bought a newspaper, and set himself to work to study the advertisements. He was dismayed to find how many more applicants there were for places than places requiring to be filled. All the persons advertising were older than himself, and seemed to possess various accomplishments in the way of languages; many too could be strongly recommended from their last situation. The prospect did not look hopeful. In the first place he had looked to see if any required boy clerks, but this species of assistant appeared little in demand; and then, although he hoped that it would not come to that, he ran his eye down the columns to see if any required errand boys or lads in manufacturing businesses. He found, however, no such advertisements. However, as he said to himself, it could not be expected that he should find a place waiting for him on the very day after his arrival, and that he ought to be able to live for a year on his five and twenty pounds; at this

reflection his spirits rose and he went out again for a walk.

For the first week, indeed, of his arrival in London Frank did not set himself very earnestly to work to look for a situation. In his walks about the streets he several times observed cards in the window indicating that an errand boy was wanted. He resolved, however, that this should be the last resource which he would adopt, as he would much prefer to go to work as a common lad in a factory to serving in a shop. After the first week he answered many advertisements, but in no case received a reply. In one case, in which it was stated that a lad who could write a good fast hand was required in an office, wages to begin with eight shillings a week, he called two days after writing. It was a small office with a solitary clerk sitting in it. The latter, upon learning Frank's business, replied with some exasperation that his mind was being worried out by boys.

"We have had four hundred and thirty letters," he said; "and I should think that a hundred boys must have called. We took the first who applied, and all the other letters were chucked into the fire as soon as we saw what they were about."

Frank returned to the street greatly disheartened.

"Four hundred and thirty letters!" he said. "Four hundred and thirty other fellows on the lookout, just as I am, for a place as a boy clerk, and lots of them, no doubt, with friends and relations to recommend them! The lookout seems to be a bad one."

Two days later, when Frank was walking along the strand he noticed the placards in front of a theater.

"Gallery one shilling!" he said to himself; "I will go. I have never seen a theater yet."

The play was The Merchant of Venice, and Frank sat in rapt attention and interest through it. When the performance was over he walked briskly homewards. When he had proceeded some distance he saw a glare in the sky ahead, and presently a steam engine dashed past him at full speed.

"That must be a house on fire," he said. "I have never seen a fire;" and he broke into a run.

Others were running in the same direction, and as he passed the "Elephant and Castle" the crowd became thicker, and when within fifty yards of the house he could no longer advance. He could see the flames now rising high in the air. A horrible fear seized him.

"It must be," he exclaimed to himself, "either our house or the one next door."

It was in vain that he pressed forward to see more nearly. A line of policemen was drawn up across the road to keep a large space clear for the firemen. Behind the policemen the crowd were thickly packed. Frank inquired of many who stood near him if they could tell him the number of the house which was on fire; but none could inform him.

Presently the flames began to die away, and the crowd to disperse. At length Frank reached the first line of spectators.

"Can you tell me the number of the houses which are burned?" Frank said to a policeman.

"There are two of them," the policeman said "a hundred and four and a hundred and five. A hundred and four caught first, and they say that a woman and two children have been burned to death."

"That is where I live!" Frank cried. "Oh, please let me pass!"

"I'll pass you in," the policeman said good naturedly, and he led him forward to the spot where the engines were playing upon the burning houses. "Is it true, mate," he asked a fireman, "that a woman and two children have been burned?"

"It's true enough," the fireman said. "The landlady and her children. Her husband was a porter at the railway station, and had been detained on overtime. He only came back a quarter of an hour ago, and he's been going on like a madman;" and he pointed to the porter, who was sitting down on the doorsteps of a house facing his own, with his face hidden in his hands.

Frank went and sat down beside him.

"My poor fellow," he said, "I am sorry for you."

Frank had had many chats with his landlord of an evening, and had become quite friendly with him and his wife.

"I can't believe it," the man said huskily. "Just to think! When I went out this morning there was Jane and the kids, as well and as happy as ever, and there, where are they now?"

"Happier still," Frank said gently. "I lost my mother just as suddenly only five weeks ago. I went out for a walk, leaving her as well as usual, and when I came back she was dead; so I can feel for you with all my heart."

"I would have given my life for them," the man said, wiping his eyes, "willing."

"I'm sure you would," Frank answered.

"There's the home gone," the man said, "with all the things that it took ten years' savings of Jane and me to buy; not that that matters one way or the other now. And your traps are gone, too, I suppose, sir."

"Yes," Frank replied quietly, "I have lost my clothes and twenty-three pounds in money; every penny I've got in the world except half a crown in my pocket."

"And you don't say nothing about it!" the man said, roused into animation. "But, there, perhaps you've friends as will make it up to you."

"I have no one in the world," Frank answered, "whom I could ask to give me a helping hand."

"Well, you are a plucky chap," the man said. "That would be a knock down blow to a man, let alone a boy like you. What are you going to do now?" he asked, forgetting for the moment his own loss, in his interest in his companion.

"I don't know," Frank replied. "Perhaps," he added, seeing that the interest in his condition roused the poor fellow from the thought of his own deep sorrow, "you might give me some advice. I was thinking of getting a place in an office, but of course I must give that up now, and should be thankful to get anything by which I can earn my bread."

"You come along with me," the man said rising. "You've done

me a heap of good. It's no use sitting here. I shall go back to the station, and turn in on some sacks. If you've nothing better to do, and nowhere to go to, you come along with me. We will talk it all over."

Pleased to have some one to talk to, and glad that he should not have to look for a place to sleep, Frank accompanied the porter to the station. With a word or two to the nightmen on duty, the porter led the way to a shed near the station, where a number of sacks were heaped in a corner.

"Now," the man said, "I will light a pipe. It's against the regulations, but that's neither here nor there now. Now, if you're not sleepy, would you mind talking to me? Tell me something about yourself, and how you come to be alone here in London. It does me good to talk. It prevents me from thinking."

"There is very little to tell," Frank said; and he related to him the circumstances of the deaths of his father and mother, and how it came that he was alone in London in search of a place.

"You're in a fix," the porter said.

"Yes, I can see that."

"You see you're young for most work, and you never had no practice with horses, or you might have got a place to drive a light cart. Then, again, your knowing nothing of London is against you as an errand boy; and what's worse than all this, anyone can see with half an eye that you're a gentleman, and not accustomed to hard work. However, we will think it over. The daylight's breaking now, and I has to be at work at six. But look ye here,

young fellow, tomorrow I've got to look for a room, and when I gets it there's half of it for you, if you're not too proud to accept it. It will be doing me a real kindness, I can tell you, for what I am to do alone of an evening without Jane and the kids, God knows. I can't believe they're gone yet."

Then the man threw himself down upon the sacks, and broke into sobs. Frank listened for half an hour till these gradually died away, and he knew by the regular breathing that his companion was asleep. It was long after this before he himself closed his eyes. The position did, indeed, appear a dark one. Thanks to the offer of his companion, which he at once resolved to accept for a time, he would have a roof to sleep under. But this could not last; and what was he to do? Perhaps he had been wrong in not writing at once to Ruthven and his schoolfellows. He even felt sure he had been wrong; but it would be ten times as hard to write now. He would rather starve than do this. How was he to earn his living? He would, he determined, at any rate try for a few days to procure a place as an errand boy. If that failed, he would sell his clothes, and get a rough working suit. He was sure that he should have more chance of obtaining work in such a dress than in his present attire.

Musing thus, Frank at last dropped off to sleep. When he woke he found himself alone, his companion having left without disturbing him. From the noises around him of trains coming in and out, Frank judged that the hour was late.

"I have done one wise thing," he said, "anyhow, and as far as

I can see it's the only one, in leaving my watch with the doctor to keep. He pointed out that I might have it stolen if I carried it, and that there was no use in keeping it shut up in a box. Very possibly it might be stolen by the dishonesty of a servant. That's safe anyhow, and it is my only worldly possession, except the books, and I would rather go into the workhouse than part with either of them."

Rising, he made his way into the station, where he found the porter at his usual work.

"I would not wake you," the man said; "you were sleeping so quiet, and I knew 'twas no use your getting up early. I shall go out and settle for a room at dinner time. If you will come here at six o'clock we'll go off together. The mates have all been very kind, and have been making a collection to bury my poor girl and the kids. They've found 'em, and the inquest is tomorrow, so I shall be off work. The governor has offered me a week; but there, I'd rather be here where there's no time for thinking, than hanging about with nothing to do but to drink."

CHAPTER VI: THE FIRST STEP

All that day Frank tramped the streets. He went into many shops where he saw notices that an errand boy was required, but everywhere without success. He perceived at once that his appearance was against him, and he either received the abrupt answer of, "You're not the sort of chap for my place," or an equally decided refusal upon the grounds that he did not know the neighborhood, or that they preferred one who had parents who lived close by and could speak for him.

At six o'clock he rejoined the porter. He brought with him some bread and butter and a piece of bacon. When, on arriving at the lodging of his new friend, a neat room with two small beds in it, he produced and opened his parcel, the porter said angrily, "Don't you do that again, young fellow, or we shall have words. You're just coming to stop with me for a bit till you see your way, and I'm not going to have you bring things in here. My money is good for two months, and your living here with me won't cost three shillings a week. So don't you hurt my feelings by bringing things home again. There, don't say no more about it."

Frank, seeing that his companion was really in earnest, said no more, and was the less reluctant to accept the other's kindness as he saw that his society was really a great relief to him in his trouble. After the meal they sallied out to a second hand clothes shop. Here Frank disposed of his things, and received in return

a good suit of clothes fit for a working lad.

"I don't know how it is," the porter said as they sat together afterwards, "but a gentleman looks like a gentleman put him in what clothes you will. I could have sworn to your being that if I'd never seen you before. I can't make it out, I don't know what it is, but there's certainly something in gentle blood, whatever you may say about it. Some of my mates are forever saying that one man's as good as another. Now I don't mean to say they ain't as good; but what I say is, as they ain't the same. One man ain't the same as another any more than a race horse is the same as a cart horse. They both sprang from the same stock, at least so they says; but breeding and feeding and care has made one into a slim boned creature as can run like the wind, while the other has got big bones and weight and can drag his two ton after him without turning a hair. Now, I take it, it's the same thing with gentlefolks and working men. It isn't that one's bigger than the other, for I don't see much difference that way; but a gentleman's lighter in the bone, and his hands and his feet are smaller, and he carries himself altogether different. His voice gets a different tone. Why, Lord bless you, when I hears two men coming along the platform at night, even when I can't see 'em, and can't hear what they says, only the tone of their voices, I knows just as well whether it's a first class or a third door as I've got to open as if I saw 'em in the daylight. Rum, ain't it?"

Frank had never thought the matter out, and could only give his general assent to his companion's proposition.

"Now," the porter went on, "if you go into a factory or workshop, I'll bet a crown to a penny that before you've been there a week you'll get called Gentleman Jack, or some such name. You see if you ain't."

"I don't care what they call me," Frank laughed, "so that they'll take me into the factory."

"All in good time," the porter said; "don't you hurry yourself. As long as you can stay here you'll be heartily welcome. Just look what a comfort it is to have you sitting here sociable and comfortable. You don't suppose I could have sat here alone in this room if you hadn't been here? I should have been in a public house making a beast of myself, and spending as much money as would keep the pair of us."

Day after day Frank went out in search of work. In his tramps he visited scores of workshops and factories, but without success. Either they did not want boys, or they declined altogether to take one who had no experience in work, and had no references in the neighborhood. Frank took his breakfast and tea with the porter, and was glad that the latter had his dinner at the station, as a penny loaf served his purposes. One day in his walks Frank entered Covent Garden and stood looking on at the bustle and flow of business, for it happened to be market day. He leaned against one of the columns of the piazza, eating the bread he had just bought. Presently a sharp faced lad, a year or two younger than himself, came up to him.

"Give us a hit," he said, "I ain't tasted nothing today."

Frank broke the bread in half and gave a portion to him.

"What a lot there is going on here!" Frank said.

"Law!" the boy answered, "that ain't nothing to what it is of a morning. That's the time, 'special on the mornings of the flower market. It's hard lines if a chap can't pick up a tanner or even a bob then."

"How?" Frank asked eagerly.

"Why, by holding horses, helping to carry out plants, and such like. You seems a green 'un, you do. Up from the country, eh? Don't seem like one of our sort."

"Yes," Frank said, "I'm just up from the country. I thought it would be easy to get a place in London, but I don't find it so."

"A place!" the boy repeated scornfully. "I should like any one to see me in a place. It's better a hundred times to be your own master."

"Even if you do want a piece of bread sometimes?" Frank put in.

"Yes," the boy said. "When it ain't market day and ye haven't saved enough to buy a few papers or boxes of matches it does come hard. In winter the times is bad, but in summer we gets on fairish, and there ain't nothing to grumble about. Are you out of work yourself?"

"Yes," Frank answered, "I'm on the lookout for a job."

"You'd have a chance here in the morning," said the boy, looking at him. "You look decent, and might get a job unloading. They won't have us at no price, if they can help it."

"I will come and try anyhow," Frank said.

That evening Frank told his friend, the porter, that he thought of going out early next morning to try and pick up odd jobs at Covent Garden.

"Don't you think of it," the porter said. "There's nothing worse for a lad than taking to odd jobs. It gets him into bad ways and bad company. Don't you hurry. I have spoken to lots of my mates, and they're all on the lookout for you. We on the platform can't do much. It ain't in our line, you see; but in the goods department, where they are constant with vans and wagons and such like, they are likely enough to hear of something before long."

That night, thinking matters over in bed, Frank determined to go down to the docks and see if he could get a place as cabin boy. He had had this idea in his mind ever since he lost his money, and had only put it aside in order that he might, if possible, get some berth on shore which might seem likely in the end to afford him a means of making his way up again. It was not that he was afraid of the roughness of a cabin boy's life; it was only because he knew that it would be so very long before, working his way up from boy to able bodied seaman, he could obtain a mate's certificate, and so make a first step up the ladder. However, he thought that even this would be better than going as a wagoner's boy, and he accordingly crossed London Bridge, turned down Eastcheap, and presently found himself in Ratcliff Highway. He was amused here at the nautical character of the shops, and presently found himself staring into a window full of foreign birds, for the most

part alive in cages, among which, however, were a few cases of stuffed birds.

"How stupid I have been!" he thought to himself. "I wonder I never thought of it before! I can stuff birds and beasts at any rate a deal better than those wooden looking things. I might have a chance of getting work at some naturalist's shop. I will get a directory and take down all the addresses in London, and then go around."

He now became conscious of a conversation going on between a little old man with a pair of thick horn rimmed spectacles and a sailor who had a dead parrot and a cat in his hand.

"I really cannot undertake them," the old man said. "Since the death of my daughter I have had but little time to attend to that branch. What with buying and selling, and feeding and attending to the live ones, I have no time for stuffing. Besides, if the things were poisoned, they would not be worth stuffing."

"It isn't the question of worth, skipper," the sailor said; "and I don't say, mind ye, that these here critturs was pisoned, only if you looks at it that this was the noisiest bird and the worst tempered thievingest cat in the neighborhood—though, Lord bless you, my missus wouldn't allow it for worlds—why, you know, when they were both found stiff and cold this morning people does have a sort of a suspicion as how they've been pisoned;" and he winked one eye in a portentous manner, and grinned hugely. "The missus she's in a nice taking, screeching, and yelling as you might hear her two cables' length away, and

she turns round on me and will have it as I'd a hand in the matter. Well, just to show my innocence, I offers to get a glass case for 'em and have 'em stuffed, if it cost me a couple of pounds. I wouldn't care if they fell all to pieces a week afterwards, so that it pacified the old woman just at present. If I can't get 'em done I shall ship at once, for the place will be too hot to hold me. So you can't do it nohow?"

The old man shook his head, and the sailor was just turning off when Frank went up to him:

"Will you please wait a moment? Can I speak to you, sir, a minute?" he asked the old man.

The naturalist went into his shop, and Frank followed him.

"I can stuff birds and animals, sir," he said. "I think I really stuff them well, for some which I did for amusement were sold at ten shillings a case, and the man who bought them of me told me they would be worth four times as much in London. I am out of work, sir, and very very anxious to get my living. You will find me hard working and honest. Do give me a chance. Let me stuff that cat and parrot for the sailor. If you are not satisfied then, I will go away and charge nothing for it."

The man looked at him keenly.

"I will at any rate give you a trial," he said. Then he went to the door and called in the sailor. "This lad tells me he can stuff birds. I know nothing about him, but I believe he is speaking truthfully. If you like to intrust them to him he will do his best. If you're not satisfied he will make no charge."

Much pleased at seeing a way out of his dilemma, the sailor placed the dead animals on the counter.

"Now," the old man said to Frank, "you can take these out into the back yard and skin them. Then you can go to work in that back room. You will find arsenical soap, cotton wool, wires, and everything else you require there. This has been a fine cat," he said, looking at the animal.

"Yes, it has been a splendid creature," Frank answered. "It is a magnificent macaw also."

"Ah! you know it is a macaw!" the old man said.

"Of course," Frank said simply; "it has a tail."

The old man then furnished Frank with two or three sharp knives and scissors. Taking the bird and cat, he went out into the yard and in the course of an hour had skinned them both. Then he returned to the shop and set to work in the room behind.

"May I make a group of them?" he asked.

"Do them just as you like," the old man said.

After settling upon his subject, Frank set to work, and, except that he went out for five minutes to buy and eat a penny loaf, continued his work till nightfall. The old man came in several times to look at him, but each time went out again without making a remark. At six o'clock Frank laid down his tools.

"I will come again tomorrow, sir," he said.

The old man nodded, and Frank went home in high spirits. There was a prospect at last of getting something to do, and that in a line most congenial to his own tastes.

The old man looked up when he entered next morning.

"I shall not come in today," he remarked. "I will wait to see them finished."

Working without interruption till the evening, Frank finished them to his satisfaction, and enveloped them with many wrappings of thread to keep them in precisely the attitudes in which he had placed them.

"They are ready for drying now, sir," he said. "If I might place them in an oven they would be dried by morning."

The old man led the way to the kitchen, where a small fire was burning.

"I shall put no more coals on the fire," he said, "and it will be out in a quarter of an hour. Put them in there and leave the door open. I will close it in an hour when the oven cools."

The next day Frank was again at work. It took him all day to get fur and feather to lie exactly as he wished them. In the afternoon he asked the naturalist for a piece of flat board, three feet long, and a perch, but said that instead of the piece of board he should prefer mounting them in a case at once. The old man had not one in the shop large enough, and therefore Frank arranged his group temporarily on the table. On the board lay the cat. At first sight she seemed asleep, but it was clearly only seeming. Her eyes were half open, the upper lip was curled up, and the sharp teeth showed. The hind feet were drawn somewhat under her as in readiness for an instant spring. Her front paws were before her, the talons were somewhat stretched, and one

paw was curved. Her ears lay slightly back. She was evidently on the point of springing. The macaw perch, which had been cut down to a height of two feet, stood behind her. The bird hung by its feet, and, head downwards, stretched with open beak towards the tip of the cat's tail, which was slightly uplifted. On a piece of paper Frank wrote, "Dangerous Play."

It was evening before he had finished perfectly to his satisfaction. Then he called the naturalist in. The old man stopped at the door, surveying the group. Then he entered and examined it carefully.

"Wonderful!" he said. "Wonderful! I should have thought them alive. There is not a shop in the West End where it could have been turned out better, if so well.

"Lad, you are a wonder! Tell me now who and what are you? I saw when you first addressed me that you were not what you seemed to be, a working lad."

"I have been well educated," Frank said, "and was taught to preserve and stuff by my father, who was a great naturalist. My parents died suddenly, and I was left on my own resources, which," he said, smiling faintly, "have hitherto proved of very small avail. I am glad you are pleased. If you will take me into your service I will work hard and make myself useful in every way. If you require references I can refer you to the doctor who attended us in the country; but I have not a single friend in London except a railway porter, who has most kindly and generously taken me in and sheltered me for the last two months."

"I need no references," the old man said; "your work speaks for itself as to your skill, and your face for your character. But I can offer you nothing fit for you. With such a genius as you have for setting up animals, you ought to be able to earn a good income. Not one man in a thousand can make a dead animal look like a live one. You have the knack or the art."

"I shall be very content with anything you can give me," Frank said; "for the present I only ask to earn my living. If later on I can, as you say, do more, all the better."

The old man stood for some time thinking, and presently said, "I do but little except in live stock. When I had my daughter with me I did a good deal of stuffing, for there is a considerable trade hereabout. The sailors bring home skins of foreign birds, and want them stuffed and put in cases, as presents for their wives and sweethearts. You work fast as well as skillfully. I have known men who would take a fortnight to do such a group as that, and then it would be a failure. It will be quite a new branch for my trade. I do not know how it will act yet, but to begin with I will give you twelve shillings a week, and a room upstairs. If it succeeds we will make other arrangements. I am an old man, and a very lonely one. I shall be glad to have such a companion."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.