

HENTY GEORGE ALFRED

WITH COCHRANE THE
DAUNTLESS

George Henty
With Cochrane the Dauntless

«Public Domain»

Henty G.

With Cochrane the Dauntless / G. Henty — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

PREFACE	5
CHAPTER I.	6
CHAPTER II.	15
CHAPTER III.	24
CHAPTER IV.	33
CHAPTER V.	43
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	48

G. A. Henty

With Cochrane the Dauntless

PREFACE

In the annals of British sailors there is no name that should stand higher than that of Lord Cochrane. In some respects he resembled that daring leader and great military genius, the Earl of Peterborough. Both performed feats that most men would have regarded as impossible, both possessed extraordinary personal bravery and exceptional genius for war, and a love for adventure. Both accomplished marvels, and neither was appreciated at his full value by his countrymen, both having a touch of originality that amounted in the case of Peterborough to absolute eccentricity. In other respects they had little in common. Cochrane's life was passed in one long struggle on behalf of the oppressed. He ruined his career in our navy, and created for himself a host of bitter enemies by his crusade against the enormous abuses of our naval administration, and by the ardour with which he championed the cause of reform at home. Finding the English navy closed to him he threw himself into the cause of oppressed nationalities. His valour and genius saved Chili from being reconquered by the Spanish, rescued Peru from their grasp, and utterly broke their power in South America. Similarly he crushed the Portuguese power in Brazil and ensured its independence, and then took up the cause of Greece. In all four enterprises his efforts were hampered by the utter corruption of the governments of these countries, just as his efforts on behalf of British sailors and of the British people at large had brought upon him the hatred and persecution of a government as corrupt as those of Chili, Brazil, and Greece. He was rewarded only with the basest ingratitude, and returned home after having expended a large part of his fortune and permanently injured his health in the inestimable services he had rendered. In other respects besides those exploits connected with the sea, his genius was remarkable. After retiring from active service he devoted himself to inventions, and some of these paved the way to later scientific achievements, giving him a place alongside the Marquis of Worcester.

Of Lord Cochrane it can be said that he was the victim of his generous enthusiasm for the oppressed. During the greater portion of his life he rested under a heavy cloud, and it was only in extreme old age that he had the satisfaction of having his name rehabilitated, and of regaining the honours and rank of which he had been so unjustly deprived.

G. A. HENTY.

CHAPTER I. OFF TO SEA

“I am sure I do not know what to do with you, Steve,” Lieutenant Embleton said one afternoon as he and his son were sitting upon a bench on the cliff at Ramsgate, looking over the sea. “Upon my word I don’t see my way at all; this peace has stranded most of us, and at any rate, so far as I am concerned, there is not a ghost of a chance of my obtaining employment—not that I am fit for it if I could get it. I have been nearly ten years ashore. Every one of us who sailed under Cochrane have been marked men ever since. However, that is an old story, and it is no use grumbling over what cannot be helped; besides, that wound in my hip has been troubling me a good deal of late, and I know I am not fit for sea. I don’t think I should have minded so much if I had got post rank before being laid on the shelf. The difference of pension, too, would have been a help, for goodness knows it is hard work making ends meet on a lieutenant’s half-pay. However, that is not the question now. The thing that I have got to consider is what is the best thing to do with you.

“Yes, I know you are ready to do anything, lad, and it is not your fault that you are not in harness; but, in the first place, I found it hard to spare you, and in the next, I wanted you to stick to your books as long as you could. I grant there are many officers even in His Majesty’s service who are as rough as if they had come in through the hawse-hole, but it tells against them. However, as you are past fifteen, I think now that you will do; and as you have been working steadily with me for the past four years, you have got a lot into your head that will give you an advantage over boys sent to sea two years younger.

“You are well up in navigation, and can take an observation as well as any old sailor, either by sun, moon, or stars. You can steer a boat in heavy weather, and knot and splice; you know the sails and ropes, and can go aloft as quickly as a monkey, and do anything that your strength permits. There have been plenty of opportunities for teaching you all this on short coasting voyages and on board ships driven in here by stress of weather. I suppose, Steve, however much we may talk of other professions, it comes to the sea at last. I know that you have always wanted it, but if I could have seen any opening for you on land I would rather that you had taken to it than have gone afloat. You see what it has done for me, lad. It is a poor trade, though as long as it’s war-time there is excitement enough to make up for the shortness of the pay. However, as I have told you many a time, there is no chance whatever of my getting you a midshipman’s berth.

“I have not the slightest influence at the admiralty, and the navy has been so reduced since the war ended that they must have fifty applications for every vacancy; besides, now that there is no fighting to be done, I don’t know that the merchant service isn’t the best, for it is dull work indeed being years on a station when there is no chance of a brush with an enemy or the capture of a prize. In the merchant service you can have at least a change, and a smart young fellow who knows his business and has gentlemanly manners, has much better chances of coming to the front than he would have in the royal navy. So I think the time has come when I must bring myself to make a move in the matter.”

“Thank you, father; I know very well that in studying with you I have learned a lot more than I should have done if I had gone to sea two years ago; but I do want to be working and earning something, instead of being an expense to you, and, as you know, I would prefer the sea to anything else.”

“It is Hobson’s choice, lad; it is the sea or nothing. And after all, I think the mercantile navy is as good a profession as a lad can take to, that is if he has no influence to back him on shore. I wrote a fortnight ago to a friend in London. He is the owner of four or five vessels, and it happened, a good many years ago now, that I recaptured one of them with a valuable cargo that had been taken by a French privateer. I was sent home in her, and when he came down to Plymouth, where I took her in,

we became great friends. We were about the same age, and the loss at that time would have been a very serious one to him. I stayed with him once or twice when I was in town. I have not seen him for some years now—one cannot afford to run about on a lieutenant's half-pay—but I remembered him the other day when I was thinking things over in every light, and wrote to him. I told him how we were situated, and asked him if he would put you on board one of his ships, and this morning I had an answer from him saying that he would gladly do so. He said that he would take you as an apprentice without fees, and that at any time, should anything better turn up, or you see your way to getting into a firm with a larger fleet and better chance of advancement, he would cancel your indentures. No kinder offer could be made, and if you are willing I will write this evening to accept the offer, and tell him that I will go up with you in the hoy directly I hear from him that you are wanted.”

“Thank you very much, father; I am awfully glad that it can be managed without expense, though I should be quite willing to go before the mast and work my way up.”

“I know you would, Steve, but it is much better to start fair, for ship-owners prefer to take a young mate who has regularly served as an apprentice than a man who has only been trained before the mast; for although the latter may have picked up enough to scrape through his examination, he is rarely a good navigator, and works out his reckoning by rule of thumb, which is all very well as long as the weather is fine and he can get his observation at noon, but breaks down directly it comes to having to depend upon a glimpse of the moon through the clouds, or the chance of getting a star.”

Lieutenant Embleton had been a dashing and gallant officer, but his career in the service had been ruined by the fact that he had served under Lord Cochrane, both in the *Pallas*, the *Impérieuse*, and the *Speedy*. The latter was a little sloop mounting fourteen four-pounder guns, in which not only did Lord Cochrane capture many gun-boats and merchantmen, but on the 6th of May, 1801, he took the *Gamo*, a Spanish frigate, carrying six times as many men as the *Speedy* and seven times her weight of shot, an exploit that so aroused the jealousy of Earl St. Vincent that for a long time Lord Cochrane could not obtain employment. Three years later, when Lord Melville succeeded St. Vincent as first lord of the admiralty, Lord Cochrane was appointed to the *Pallas*, in which he again did excellent service; and distinguished himself still more when, in the *Impérieuse*, he attacked the whole French fleet in the Basque Roads, driving three or four of their battle-ships ashore, capturing three others, and compelling the rest to take to flight.

But the honour and popular applause gained by Lord Cochrane was, in the opinion of the authorities, more than neutralized by his fearless exposure, from his place in Parliament, where he sat as one of the members for Westminster, of the scandalous abuses then prevailing in the navy. All attempts to silence him by the offers of valuable appointments being in vain, Lord Cochrane was subjected to a persecution altogether without precedent in parliamentary history. In the court-marshal which was held upon Lord Gambier for his failure to assist Cochrane in the action in the Basque Roads, the admiralty went so far as to forge charts, and so to show that the admiral could not come to Cochrane's assistance, and Gambier was not only acquitted, but received a vote of thanks from the House of Commons for the victory in which he had taken no part. For four years Lord Cochrane received no appointment, but at the close of 1813 his uncle, Sir Alexander Cochrane, was selected for the command of the fleet on the North American station, and nominated Cochrane his flag captain, an appointment resting entirely with him, and with which government could not interfere.

He did not, however, sail, for just as he was about to embark, a relation, who was engaged in stock exchange operations in conjunction with a foreign adventurer, carried out some dishonest transactions, those who were his dupes believing that he was acting under information obtained from Lord Cochrane. As soon as the latter heard a report of the affair he left his ship, came up to London, and demanded an investigation. Then followed one of the most disgraceful parodies of justice ever performed in this country. Lord Cochrane was arrested, tried, and by means of a partisan judge, false evidence, and measures more unscrupulous even than those of Judge Jeffreys, convicted and sentenced to imprisonment. A servile House of Commons obeyed the orders of ministers to expel

him from their body. His name was struck off the order of the Bath, and his insignia torn down from St. George's Chapel with every mark of indignity.

Public indignation at the disgraceful means that had been taken to secure his conviction rose to such a height, that it was only by the persuasions of Lord Cochrane's friends that a riot was prevented. The citizens of Westminster at once re-elected him as their member, no one venturing to oppose him. After remaining in prison for some months he effected his escape and presented himself in the House of Commons. He was seized and carried back to prison, where he was thrown into a dungeon, and there kept until his health so suffered that his persecutors, fearing that fatal consequences would ensue, were obliged to place him in more wholesome quarters. Here he remained until the conclusion of his year's sentence. He then paid the fine of a thousand pounds, to which he had also been sentenced, and on the very day of his release from prison took his place in the House of Commons, and resumed his work as one of the leaders of the reform party.

Eighteen months later he was subjected to fresh persecution, and was tried for his escape from prison and fined a hundred pounds. A penny subscription was at once started, and eleven hundred pounds collected in this way, afforded a signal proof of the intensity of the feeling in his favour. This sum was used to pay the fine, and to reimburse him for the former fine to which he had been subjected. All Lord Cochrane's efforts to obtain a new trial, or an expression of an opinion from the House as to the illegality of the proceedings of his judge, Lord Ellenborough, were ineffective, the House, on each occasion when he brought the matter forward, obeying the orders of ministers and voting against his motions by an overwhelming majority. He had, however, the satisfaction of knowing that the nation at large was heartily with him, and recognized the gross injustice from which he had been a sufferer.

The hostility upon the part of the admiralty and government extended to those who had borne part in his glorious exploits at sea, and Lieutenant Embleton was put on half-pay after the action of the *Impérieuse* against the French fleet, and found himself without any prospect of future employment, and without even a chance of obtaining a nomination for his son to a midshipman's berth. The blow was at first a very keen one, but it was less bitterly felt after the conclusion of peace and the great reduction of the navy, as his fate was only that of thousands of other officers; and he had now come to feel that the effects of his wound, for which he received a small addition to his half-pay, rendered him unfit for further service, even could he have obtained an appointment. He had, since leaving the navy, lived in a little cottage at Ramsgate, where from his garden he could obtain a view of the sea and the passing ships. The education of his son afforded him employment for some hours a day. His favourite position was on a bench in the garden, from which he could watch through a telescope mounted on a tripod the passing ships, criticise the state of their rigging and sails, and form conjectures as to their destination.

It was a great pang to him to part with Stephen, but he felt that he could no longer keep him by his side; and he was sure that the careful training he had given him in all nautical matters would enable the lad to make his way in the mercantile navy. A fortnight after his conversation with Steve, the lieutenant received a letter from his friend in London, saying that one of his ships that had returned a fortnight before was now unloaded, and would at once begin to fit out for a fresh voyage, and it would be therefore as well for him to bring Stephen up, so that he might have the advantage of seeing the whole process of preparing a ship for sea. He gave a warm invitation to Lieutenant Embleton to stay with him for a week or two, and on the following day father and son went on board a Ramsgate hoy, and thirty-six hours later arrived in the port of London. They were warmly received by Mr. Hewson.

"I think your boy is fortunate that the *Tiger* should be the first ship he will sail in," he said that evening. "I regard the captain as my best officer. He is a good seaman and a capital navigator, and he is of a most kindly disposition; therefore, I can put the boy under him with the certainty that he will be well treated and cared for. In the next place, the *Tiger* does not, like my other ships, make regular voyages to and from a foreign port, but carries on the business of a trader among the

East Indian islands. It is not every one to whom such a business could be safely intrusted; but I have great confidence in Captain Pinder. He is a good man of business, thoroughly conscientious, and accustomed to the ways of the treacherous natives of those islands. The *Tiger* is more heavily armed than usual, and has more than once beaten off the attacks of their piratical craft, and there is no fear of Pinder's being caught napping.

"She will in the first place take a cargo to Calcutta, reserving a portion of her hold for my goods for trading among the islands. When she has landed her freight at Calcutta she will cruise in the Archipelago for some months, as long, in fact, as Pinder finds that he can carry on a really good business with the natives. Then she will return to Calcutta and fill up with freight for her return voyage. Thus, you see, your boy will gain a good deal of varied experience, and will see, perhaps, as much adventure and excitement as he would meet with in a score of ordinary voyages, and will have the advantage of being under a kind commander, who will instruct him in the rudiments of navigation."

"Nothing could be better," Mr. Embleton said warmly. "It is the voyage of all others that would be to the boy's taste, and I shall be satisfied indeed at his being in such good hands. As to navigation, it is practice only that he wants. I have taught him all that I know myself, and he can take a lunar, or work his reckoning out from a star observation, as accurately as I could do it myself."

"Is that so, Mr. Embleton? I am glad indeed to hear it. Then there is no doubt about the future of your boy, if he is steady and industrious. I am pleased to hear it for my own sake, if for nothing else; for although Pinder's mates are capital sailors, and in all other respects able officers, they are not men of Pinder's type. They can take, of course, a rough observation at noon, and work it out by rule of thumb and the aid of tables, but beyond that they can do nothing. They have not received the education to enable them to grapple with mathematical problems, even of the simplest kind; and although, in case of Pinder falling sick, they might manage under favourable circumstances to bring the ship home, they would fare very badly if they had a long spell of bad weather and could not get an observation at noon for days or even weeks together. It will be a satisfaction to me to know that in case of anything happening to the captain there is someone on board who could, in such a case, take a lunar or shoot a star. Well, to-morrow morning we will go down to the docks, and I will hand your boy over to Pinder. I should, of course, be very glad to have him here, but I think it is of great advantage to a boy to see everything done from the first step. She is going to have an entirely new fit-out both of standing and running rigging, so she has been stripped entirely, and has nothing but her three lower masts above the deck."

Accordingly, after breakfast next day Mr. Hewson sent for a hackney-coach and they drove down to the docks.

"That is the *Tiger*," Mr. Hewson said as he stopped at the side of a fine craft. "She is six hundred tons, three years old, and a fast sailer. She is not much to look at at present, but when she is in full dress she is a handsome vessel."

"She looks fast," Mr. Embleton said. "And for myself, I would rather command a craft of that size than one of greater tonnage."

The *Tiger* at present certainly did not show to advantage. Her deck was begrimed with dirt. A body of riggers were at work in parcelling and serving with spun yarn the eyes of the shrouds. An officer in a rough canvas suit was superintending the work.

"That is Mr. Staines, the first mate," Mr. Hewson said. "He would not be happy if he was not on board from the very first hour that the riggers were beginning their work. Good morning, Mr. Staines!" he went on, raising his voice. "Is Captain Pinder on board?"

"Yes, sir," the mate said, touching his cap, and then went aft to the poop-cabin, from which the captain came out as his visitor stepped on board. He also was in a working suit.

"Good morning, Mr. Hewson!" he said. "We are all in the rough, you see. One hardly expects visitors on her first day of fitting out."

“We all know that, captain. This is Lieutenant Embleton of the royal navy, and this is his son, of whom I was speaking to you two days ago.”

“I am glad to meet you, sir,” the captain said, shaking hands with Mr. Embleton. “Every sailor knows you by reputation as being one of Lord Cochrane’s officers. It will be a pleasure to me to do all I can for your son.”

“You will find him very different to most of your apprentices, Pinder. He has had the advantage of his father’s teaching, and, theoretically at any rate, he is already well up in his work. When I tell you that he can take a lunar, or an observation from a star, you may imagine that he will not require much teaching in navigation.”

“I am glad indeed to hear it, Mr. Hewson—heartily glad; there ought to be two men on board a ship who can do that, for there is never any saying what might happen if there is only one. It has made me anxious many a time, when we had a bad spell of weather, as to how the *Tiger* would get on if I happened to be washed overboard by a sea or killed by a falling spar. Well, Master Embleton, I can see that I shall have no difficulty in making a first-rate sailor of you. Have you come to stay?”

“Yes, sir. My father thought it would be good for me to be on board from the time the fitting-out began.”

“Quite right, lad. You will then learn as much in a fortnight as you would in a year at sea. I always make a point of being here myself, and my first officer wouldn’t allow anything to prevent his seeing that everything was right from first to last. But I don’t think that you will be able to sleep on board for the next fortnight.”

“Of course not,” Mr. Embleton said. “I intend to take a lodging for him as close to the dock-gate as I can. Perhaps you may know of a tidy place.”

“He can’t do better than lodge with us,” the captain said. “Mr. Staines and I always put up at the same place. We give them notice when we are going to begin to fit out, and they keep the rooms for us. We both slept there last night. The house is kept by a nice clean woman, the widow of a skipper who was lost with his craft about ten years ago. I have no doubt she can put the lad up too, and he can mess with us. I will go round with him myself; till we get the shrouds up, one is quite enough to look after the riggers.”

“I thank you very much, captain. That will be in all respects more pleasant for the boy than lodging by himself.”

The matter was speedily arranged. Mr. Embleton then took Stephen to a clothing shop and bought him two suits of rough canvas.

“You will find it dirty work, Steve. There is no keeping free of the tar. By the way, Captain Pinder, I have not ordered Steve’s outfit yet, for I know that on some lines the apprentices dress like midshipmen, on others they don’t; so I put it off until I saw you.”

“I always like the apprentices on board my ship to be dressed as midshipmen,” the captain replied. “There will only be three on board as far as I know. I make a point of messing with my officers, and if there are only two or three apprentices on board they take their meals with us, it does them good; and I don’t at all approve of their mixing with the men forward. I should say, Mr. Embleton, get him one good suit for going ashore, another rougher suit for duty on board, half-a-dozen duck suits for the tropics, and two or three suits of dungaree for slipping on over the others when there is dirty work to be done. The cap is sufficient to indicate the officer. As for the rest of his outfit, your own experience will tell you what is needed. Railton in Leadenhall Street is a man I can recommend. He keeps the house badges for the caps, and turns out his work well. I generally get my togs there, and find him as cheap as anyone.”

“Thank you! I will take Steve with me as far as that in the hackney-coach, and get him measured. Then he can be back here again by the time you knock off for dinner, and will then put on his slops and get to work.”

Steve returned to the lodgings just as the captain and first mate came in to dinner. Then he carried one of his canvas suits down to the ship, put it on, and was soon at work having his first lesson in seizing ropes. For a fortnight the work continued, and Stephen greatly pleased the captain and first mate by his attention and willingness, working all the time as a rigger's boy, and paying the greatest attention to all the minutiae of the work. Saturday afternoons and Sundays he spent at Mr. Hewson's, where his father was still staying, his host refusing to listen to any talk of his leaving until the *Tiger* sailed. Another four days were spent in planing decks and painting inside and out. The work was scarcely finished when the cargo began to come on board. As soon as this was the case, the second and third mates and the other two apprentices joined. Like Mr. Staines, Towel and Pasley, the second and third mates, had both made their way up from the forecabin; both were active young men and good sailors, who had laboriously mastered the very small amount of bookwork that was needed, in addition to practical seamanship, to pass their examinations, but who, like the majority of their class of that time, knew nothing of navigation beyond taking a rough observation at mid-day and working it out by rule of thumb on the tables. Mr. Staines presented Stephen to them.

"This is our new apprentice," he said; "his father is a lieutenant in the royal navy, one of Lord Cochrane's men, and a great friend of the owner. Stephen Embleton is the lad's name, and some day he will make a fine officer. He has been at work here since the morning the riggers came on board, and is not afraid to put his hands into the tar-pot, as you can see from his appearance. He has learned a lot from his father, so we won't have the trouble with him we generally do have with Johnny-raws."

"That is right, youngster," the second mate said heartily; "if you will learn anywhere, you will learn here, for a better captain never commanded a ship. No passengers, I hope, Staines?"

"No; I believe that the skipper has had two or three applications, but although the owner has no objection to his taking them, he considers the trouble is more than they are worth. Of course, he would make something out of their passage, but there would, almost certainly, be some cantankerous beggars among them, and of course the table costs a good deal more when there are passengers, especially as he will have the apprentices to mess with him. I am sure I am glad indeed that we sha'n't be bothered with them."

The other two apprentices were about Stephen's age. Both had made one trip in the *Tiger*, and were at first a little inclined to patronize the new-comer. The day before the *Tiger* hauled out into the river, the owner and Mr. Embleton came down to look over her. Great was the change that three weeks had made in her appearance. Her deck was beautifully white, the lofty spars well scraped and freshly varnished, and the network of new rigging set her off to the greatest advantage. The new suit of sails were all bent, and lay loose in their gaskets ready for dropping. Four guns were ranged along either side.

"She is a handsome craft indeed," Mr. Embleton said as he stood on the wharf alongside, taking in every detail of her outfit with the eye of a seaman. "What are the guns—twelve-pounders?"

"Yes, but there is a long eighteen down in the hold, which will be mounted as a pivot as soon as she gets among the islands. The others are well enough when you come to close quarters, but the long gun generally keeps the pirates from getting there; they don't like being peppered before they come within fighting distance. I believe the captain would rather part with all the other guns than sail without Long Tom."

"That I would," Captain Pinder, who had just joined, remarked. "Five times has the pivot-gun made them sheer off without venturing to come to close quarters; and indeed I have never had to loose the broadside guns but three times, in each of which they came suddenly round the corner into a bay where we were lying at anchor."

As they had had notice of the owner's intention to come down, the officers were all in their new uniforms, and after Captain Pinder had shown his guests round the ship, they sat down together to dinner in the cabin.

“You have plenty of freeboard, I see,” Mr. Embleton said, as, after returning on deck, he looked over the side.

“Yes, I never will load down my ships,” Mr. Hewson said, “and will never take cargo within twenty per cent of their full carrying power. I have as little as possible stowed either quite forward or quite aft, so that they have not only plenty of freeboard, but are buoyant in a heavy sea. I am sure it pays. I don’t insure my ships, and I have not lost one in the last sixteen years. The insurance money saved makes up for the loss of freight, and I have the satisfaction of knowing that I have done all in my power to ensure the safety of my officers and men.”

“And very good policy, Hewson,” Mr. Embleton said warmly. “I see scores of ships passing inside the Goodwins so loaded down that I would not be on board in a heavy gale for all the money in the bank, and the state of their sails often shows that they are badly cared for in all other respects. The system of insurance is no doubt a good one, but it has been so scandalously abused that it may safely be said that it has largely increased the annual number of wrecks and loss of life. Were it not for insurance, owners would, in their own interest, be driven to see that their ships were made in every respect seaworthy, well provided with gear of all kinds, well manned, and above all, not overloaded. Insurances are responsible for a large proportion of our marine disasters.”

As, if the wind continued favourable, the *Tiger* would drop down the river as soon as she got out of dock, which would be at a very early hour the next morning, it was necessary that Stephen should be on board that evening. He, however, went back with his father to Mr. Hewson’s, spent the afternoon at Exeter ’Change seeing the wild beasts, and returned by eight o’clock to the ship.

The *Tiger* made a quick voyage to Calcutta. She rounded the Cape without encountering bad weather, and was only twice obliged to shorten sail during the whole passage. Stephen enjoyed his life exceedingly. He was in the first officer’s watch, and became a great favourite with Mr. Staines. He astonished his fellow-apprentices, as soon as they were fairly on their way, by producing his quadrant and taking observations at the same time as did the captain and mates; still more so when he took lunar and star observations, working them all out by figures instead of from the tables in the nautical almanac. He found at first some little difficulty in obtaining accuracy when the vessel was rolling, but he was not long in overcoming this, and the captain found that he was able to place the ship’s position on the chart quite as correctly as he did himself.

“I would give a lot, Steve,” the first mate said, when they had been out a fortnight, “if I could work things out as you do. I have gone over and over again to fellows who advertise that they teach navigation, but it is of no use, I can’t make head or tail of all the letters and zigzigs and things. I have tried and I have tried till my head ached, but the more I study it the more fogged I get about it. There does not seem to me to be any sense in the thing, and when I see you sit down and figure away with all those letters and things, it beats me altogether.”

“It is not difficult when you have begun from the beginning,” Stephen said. “Of course, as my father wanted to teach me navigation, he taught me just the things that led up to the problems that you are talking about, so that it really was not hard, but if I had to do any other sort of mathematical questions I should be just as much puzzled as you are. Then you see, my father explained every step as it came, and as one led to another, I learnt them without meeting with any one special difficulty; but I can quite see that it would be very hard for anyone to learn to work it out without having been coached from the start.”

“I shall never try again. I think I could find a port by reckoning and the sun, but as for the moon and stars I give them up altogether. There are hundreds of skippers, nay thousands of them, who don’t know more than I do.”

This was indeed the case, and the skilful navigators had less advantage over experienced men who worked by rule of thumb than is now the case, as the instruments were comparatively rough and the chronometers far less accurate than at present, and even those most skilful in their use were

well satisfied if at the end of a long voyage they found that they were within twenty miles of their reckoning.

“It is different work now, lad, to what it used to be two years ago. Now one walks up and down the deck, and though there may be twenty sail in sight, one pays no more attention to them than one would to as many sea-birds. Then every sail was watched, and one was up, in the tops with one’s glass twenty times a day, for there was no saying whether it was a friend or an enemy. One’s watch at night was a watch then, for there was never any saying whether a French privateer might not come looming out of the darkness at any moment; and if a vessel of about our size was made out a mile off, it was all hands on deck, and cast the lashings off the guns, and stand by till she was out of sight again. Now one jogs along, and all that you have got to look out for, is to see that you don’t run foul of another craft, or let one run foul of you. Yes, we had a rough time of it in those days, and I ain’t sorry that they are over.”

“But you look out sharp for pirates when you are among the islands, don’t you, Mr. Staines?”

“Ay, lad; but when one sees a Malay pirate, there is no mistaking her for anything else. At night it is generally a stark calm, and whether one is lying idle, with the sails hanging flat against the mast, or whether one is at anchor, one knows that they can’t come upon us under sail, and on a still night one can hear the beat of their oars miles away. There is never any fear of being surprised as long as there is a hand wide awake and watchful on deck. Calms are the greatest curse out there; the ship lies sometimes for days, ay and for weeks, with the water as smooth as grease, and everything that has been thrown overboard floating alongside, and the sun coming down until your brain is on the boil.”

“You have storms sometimes, don’t you?”

“Sometimes, not very often; but when it does blow, it blows fit to take your head off, and you have nothing to do but to cruise under bare poles, and hope that nothing will get in your way. There is one thing, they are not gales like we have here, but cyclones, and instead of getting blown along for hundreds of miles, you go round and round, so that if there is no land within fifty miles of you when the storm strikes, the chances are that you are safe. If you can but lie to, you can manage at last to edge out of it on the side that is furthest from land. A cyclone is no joke, I can tell you; but if you get warning enough to get your canvas stowed and to send down your light spars, and have got a ship like the *Tiger* under you in good trim,—not too light, not too heavy,—you ought to be able to live through it. There is no better sailor nor one more familiar with the islands than the skipper. He is not fond of carrying on, and perhaps at times we think him a little too prudent, but he generally turns out right; anyhow, it is a fault on the right side.

“I have sailed under him fifteen years now. I was third mate when I first joined his ship; not this, you know, but the old *Gertrude*. I have never had a cross word with him, nor have the other two mates. He expects every man to do his duty, as is right enough; but if that is done well, everything goes on smooth. I don’t think that there are ten of the crew who have not been with the skipper for years. When we get back to port and the crew are paid off, it is always, ‘When will you want us again, captain?’ and no matter whether it is in a fortnight or in a couple of months, pretty nearly every man will turn up.”

“That speaks for itself, both as to the owner and the skipper, and the mates too, Mr. Staines.”

“Well, we have not much to do with it. Unless a man does his duty, and does it pleasantly and without cursing and swearing, he won’t make two voyages under the skipper; indeed he won’t make one. Three years ago Towel was laid up with a hurt he got on the voyage before, and we had to get a new second mate at the last moment, for Pasley had not got his certificate then, and couldn’t take Towel’s place. The man was highly recommended, and was a good sailor, but he was a bully, and a foul-mouthed one, and the skipper put him on shore at the Cape, and paid his passage home out of his own pocket—though I know the owner returned it to him afterwards, and said that he had done quite right. I tell you, lad, you are lucky in making your first voyage on board the *Tiger*, for, putting

aside everything else, I don't know a single ship, except Hewson's, where the apprentices mess with the master and mates, and are treated as they are here.

“I daresay you wonder why some of us have not been apprentices, but it is only the last two or three years that Hewson's ships have carried them. Before that there was always a fourth mate to each of his ships, so that there were two officers in each watch; but the ships have such a good name, and the owner had so many applications from friends with sons who wanted to go to sea, that three years ago he made the change. But he is mighty particular who he takes, and all his indentures contain a clause that unless the reports by the captains they sail under are favourable, the owner has the right of returning the premium he received and of cancelling the indentures. I can tell you, lad, that if every owner took as much pains for the comfort of his officers and crews as Mr. Hewson does, Jack would have a deal better life than is now the case.”

CHAPTER II. IN THE MALAY ARCHIPELAGO

The stay at Calcutta was a short one, and as soon as the cargo for that port was unladen, the *Tiger* again sailed. The apprentices had a run ashore, but each had gone with one of the mates, as in so large a city the boys, if alone, might well have got into trouble. Stephen went with the first mate, and was glad at the arrangement, as Mr. Staines had frequently been there before and knew the town well, and Stephen therefore saw a great deal more of it than he would have done had he been alone. He was delighted with the native bazaar, and would have laid out much of his spare cash there, had not Mr. Staines prevented him.

“Time enough when you get back, Stephen. But if you have got any money to spend you had better go with me to a stall where, the last two voyages I have been here, I laid in a stock of articles useful for trading with the Malays—looking-glasses, beads, brass buttons, bright handkerchiefs, and things of that sort. I don’t say but that one might get them cheaper in London; but in the first place, one always finds plenty of things there to spend one’s money on; and in the second place, the people here know exactly the sort of goods needed in the islands, and one can get them all at one stall instead of having to hunt about in a dozen shops for them. We are each allowed to trade on our own account up to a certain amount; and, as a rule, I find that when I get back here I can sell the curiosities I buy down in the islands, for about four times as much as the goods cost me, so if you do the same you will have more money to buy things with here than if you bought them now. But for most of the things you pick up you will find you can get a much better price in London than you can here.”

“What sort of things do you buy there, Mr. Staines?”

“The skins of birds, carved wood-work, Malay arms, models of canoes, and things of that kind. The bird skins are the best, especially if you know anything about them. I have got as much as two or three pounds for a rare skin that I exchanged for a twopenny looking-glass and half a dozen brass buttons, but of course that was an exceptional case; for, as a rule, they will average two or three shillings apiece. You had better buy a big pot of arsenical soap, which acts as a preservative to keep away insects, also two or three air-tight tin boxes; they will hold the things you buy here, and you can fill them with trade goods.”

Steve took the advice, and expended four out of the five pounds his father had given him on sailing. The mate laid out twenty pounds in similar purchases, and then they returned to the ship, which was anchored a mile down the river, followed by three coolies carrying their purchases. The other apprentices similarly laid out their spare cash.

“You have done well, lads,” the captain said, as they were at dinner on the evening before sailing. “You must not expect to make a very great deal by your trading, although, no doubt, you will get a handsome return for your money. To do really well you must have some knowledge of what birds are rare and what are common, and I should advise you when we get home to spend any time that you have to spare in visiting the Museum and examining the birds there. No doubt you will be able to find out from one of the attendants which are rare ones, and might be able to consult some books on the subject. You may have the luck to come across skins that are altogether new; and, at any rate, a little knowledge would enable you to exchange your goods to a very much greater advantage than you could otherwise do. A knowledge of that kind is always useful to a sailor, who in his wanderings may well get from the natives rare and valuable specimens in natural history, and there are always plenty of collectors ready to pay good prices for them. I have often regretted that I did not pay attention to such matters when I was young; for besides paying well, it gives a great interest to visits to little-known places, and I have heard of two or three captains who have made a good deal of money by it.”

For two months after getting among the islands no serious adventures were met with. Trading went on steadily. Several times large native craft were seen, but these sheered off when they saw that the *Tiger* was well armed and prepared for defence. As most of the places touched at had been visited by the captain on previous voyages, the natives hailed his return with expressions of apparent pleasure; but however friendly their bearing, there was never any abatement of the vigilance by the captain and his officers. Only a certain number were allowed to come on board to trade. The seamen always carried cutlasses by their side and a brace of pistols in their belts, and even when they went ashore for wood or water two boats were always sent, half the men with loaded muskets keeping guard while the others worked, and the guns of the ship were loaded and trained in readiness to open fire in case of any hostile demonstration on the part of the natives. Occasionally, when a chief had paid a visit to the ship and invited the captain to a feast on shore, a strong guard armed to the teeth accompanied him, and a boat lay by the ship's side in readiness to land another party if necessary.

"They are the most treacherous race on earth," the captain said one day when the third officer remarked that they seemed very friendly. "You can never trust them for a moment; they will shake hands with you with one hand and stab you with the other. Numbers of ships' companies have been massacred owing to the captains putting faith in appearances, and allowing too many of the copper-coloured scoundrels to get on board at once. As long as you make a rule that not more than twenty or thirty can come on the deck, and that all boats must keep at a distance, you are safe, but you must never let yourself be caught napping. I have had one or two very narrow escapes, for it is twenty-five years now since I first came among these islands.

"I had just passed as a third mate when I made my first voyage here. The captain was an easy-going man, and was quite taken in by the appearance of friendliness on the part of the natives. The first mate, too, was a good sailor, but new to the islands, and too fond of his grog; but luckily the second mate had been here before. His ship had once been attacked and nearly half the men killed before they could beat the Malays overboard, and he was always in a fidget.

"I was only about twenty at the time, and, like a young fool, thought that it was pure cowardice on his part; however, at his earnest request I carried a brace of double-barrelled pistols in my pocket, and, unknown to the captain and the first mate, he persuaded a dozen of the crew to do the same, and got the captain to let him keep the cannon loaded with grape, though the latter made no secret that he regarded this precaution as altogether uncalled for. The natives came on board as usual, at first only two or three canoe loads, but gradually the number of Malays on deck became larger and larger, and quite a crowd of boats were clustered round. I could see that Pearson, the second mate, was in a fidget; he glanced at me significantly two or three times, and I began to think myself that he might be right. We were both of us engaged in bartering with the natives, and I noticed that Pearson put the goods under his charge close to one side of the deck, so that standing behind them he leant against the bulwark and could not be taken in rear. I ordered a couple of the men to move my lot also. Both of those I spoke to were, I knew, among those Pearson had persuaded to carry pistols in their pockets.

"I don't like the look of things, Mr. Pinder,' one of them, an old hand, whispered to me.

"No more do I, Jack,' I said. 'Just slip below and bring up four of those boarding-axes. Put one of them down among Mr. Pearson's goods and make a sign to him that it is for his use, put the other three down in front of me, and then do you and Bob Hawkins take your places between me and Mr. Pearson, as if you were going to lend us a hand with the trade; then if there is a shindy the four of us will be able to make a hard fight of it anyhow.'

"He did as I told him, and the second officer nodded to me approvingly. Things went on quietly for another five minutes, then I heard a heavy blow given, followed by a fall; and, as if this was the signal, the quiet crowd of natives became in a moment a mob of yelling fiends; screams filled the air, pistol-shots rang out, and you may guess we fell to work in earnest. I fancy we did not throw away a shot between us, and cleared a space in front of us, then snatching up the axes we made at them tooth and nail. We first fought our way aft. The first mate was fighting like a demon; he had

caught up a handspike, and, being a very powerful man, kept off his assailants fairly till we cut our way through and joined him. The moment he was free from the group that was attacking him, he rushed forward, sweeping the natives over with his handspike like ninepins. Two of us kept on each side of him. There was just breadth enough on the deck to give free play to our axes, and though the Malays came at us furiously, they could not stand the blows of our heavy weapons. The cook and the steward came rushing up behind us.

“‘Turn the cannon on the canoes!’ Pearson shouted. ‘Depress them as much as you can, and give it them hot.’

“I had no time to look round, but half a minute later I heard one of the cannon go off, followed by yells and screams from the water.

“‘Train two of them along the deck,’ I shouted, ‘but don’t fire until you have orders.’

“The Malays were swarming up from the canoes and joining the crowd in front of us, and I saw a rush of some of our fellows up on to the top of the forecastle. We could make no way now, and it was as much as we could do to hold our own. I fought on until I thought the guns were ready; then, looking round, saw the two men standing behind them with lighted matches.

“‘The cannon are trained to sweep the deck, Conklin!’ but it was not until I touched him and shouted in his ear again that the mate heard me.

“‘Now!’ Pearson yelled, ‘throw yourselves on to them, cut down one or two of the rascals, and when I shout ‘Run!’ get back behind the guns.’

“The thought of what was coming gave us fresh strength. We went at them with a will, and drove them back a couple of yards. Then Pearson shouted ‘Run!’ and back we went aft as hard as we could tear, Pearson and I almost dragging Conklin with us. As we passed between the guns, with the Malays close at our heels, both men fired; the guns were crammed almost to the mouth with bullets, and the execution was awful. In a moment we dashed at them again, while the men forward, who had armed themselves with the capstan-bars, ran down the ladder and fell upon them. In another minute it was all over. The Malays who remained alive sprang over the bulwark, and we discharged the remaining five cannons into the canoes, smashing up numbers of them, and the rest paddled for the shore for their lives. We had time now to look around. It was an awful sight. Over fifty Malays lay dead, together with eleven of our men, besides the captain. If it had not been for Pearson not a soul would have lived to tell the tale. After it was over, we found that, as the crowds on deck had increased, most of our old hands, who were the men that had taken the pistols, had gradually gathered near the forecastle. Some of the others had joined them, and when the outbreak came, they had for a time been able to make a stout resistance, until one of their number, who was on the forecastle when the fight began, shouted to them that we were training the cannon forward, and they then made a rush up and joined him.

“Every man who had been among the natives had been cut down at the first alarm. Out of the twenty-eight hands on board when the fight began only sixteen remained. Many of these had desperate wounds from the Malay creases, and two of them died a day or two afterwards. Conklin had been very badly cut about. None of the wounds ought to have been dangerous, but he had heated his blood by drink, and that in a hot climate is fatal, so we buried him ten days after the fight. Thus, you see, we lost two officers and thirteen men, and all for want of taking precautions. Of course we sailed at once for Calcutta, and luckily had fine weather on the way; we should have fared badly with but half a crew had we fallen in with a hurricane. Pearson was a good navigator, and, after taking six more hands on board at Calcutta, he brought her home safely. The owners made us both handsome presents, and the next voyage he sailed as first mate and I as second. So it turned out a lucky stroke for both of us. Three years later he went as captain, and a year afterwards I sailed as his first mate.”

“When was it you had your other adventure, captain?”

“That was in the year before. I did not sail with Pearson that year, for he was promoted suddenly to a ship ready to sail. It was a piece of luck for him. One of the owners went down to the docks late

one afternoon and found the captain blind drunk. So he was sent straight on shore, and Pearson got his billet. I was very sorry that I could not go with him, as after that business we became great friends, and in his report of the affair he gave me more credit than I deserved for my idea of getting those hatchets up, which, he said, alone enabled us to make a successful defence. I had the more cause to regret his transfer, since the captain was an obstinate man, as we found out during the voyage, and just as much inclined to treat the natives with contempt as my former skipper had been. However, the man appointed to take Pearson's place as first mate was a sharp fellow, and lucky he was so. We were lying one night in a harbour where the natives had appeared particularly friendly the day before. Purvis, the mate, suggested to the captain that it would be as well to have the watches kept as if at sea, but the old man pooh-poohed the idea.

"I don't like it," the mate said to me; "those fellows were too friendly. They did not bargain over the goods, but took them at our own terms, which is not their way. I believe they did it just to lull us into a sense of security. As soon as the skipper turns in for the night I will get the guns quietly loaded, and you and I will keep watch, while I will order the crew to turn in all standing, so as to be ready to tumble out at once. It is mighty hard to keep awake on these soft nights when the anchor is down, and with neither you nor I on deck the betting is two to one that the hands on anchor watch will drop off to sleep. The skipper will be snoring by ten o'clock, and you had better turn in now. I will see to getting the guns loaded, and to having plenty of ammunition handy. I will call you at four bells. If we are going to be attacked it is likely to be just as day is breaking."

"You had better call me at two bells," I said, "and then you can get three hours' sleep and be up at eight bells. It won't begin to get light until after that, and you may be sure that if I hear any sound I will wake you at once."

"So we arranged it, and at one o'clock he came down quietly. I had only taken off my shoes and carried these in my hand, so as to avoid making any noise that might wake the skipper, as I went out on deck.

"Everything is quiet," the mate said, "and has been ever since you turned in. Even that is not natural, for, as you know, the natives when they have been doing a trade generally keep on feasting and making a row half the night. Keep your ears well open, for there is no trusting the watch. Every time I have gone forward I have found them sound asleep. Naturally they think that, as there is only an anchor watch, there can be no fear of disturbance; so you must trust to your own ears and not to theirs."

"All right!" I said; "I will keep awake—never fear."

"I think if I had not been confident that the first mate was not the man to take alarm easily, I should have had difficulty in keeping my eyes open, for the night was sultry and not a breath of air was moving. I went forward to the two men on watch and told them that they must keep a sharp look-out, for that it was likely enough we might be attacked before morning. Then I lit my pipe and paced up and down the deck, stopping occasionally to listen intently. It was nearly eight bells when I thought I heard a grating sound on shore. I walked forward and found, as I expected, that the two men on watch were half-asleep. 'Wake up, you fools!' I said; 'there is something moving.' Again I heard the low grating sound.

"Did you hear that?" I asked.

"The men were wide awake now.

"Yes, sir, I heard a noise; but I don't know what it was."

"They are launching their canoes," I said. "I will call the first officer."

"I went aft. Purvis woke directly I touched him.

"I fancy they are launching their canoes," I said. "I have twice heard a grating sound."

"He was up in a moment. We stood listening intently for some minutes. There was certainly a movement on shore, but it was difficult to say of what kind. It was just a low confused murmur.

"You are right," the mate said presently; "look at the water."

“For a moment I scarcely understood him; then I saw what he meant. It had been as smooth as oil before; it was no longer so, but it was broken with tiny ripples as if disturbed by the faintest possible breeze.

“‘These ripples must be made by launching the canoes,’ he went on. ‘A strong body of men might carry them almost noiselessly down that sandy beach and put them in the water without making a splash, but the stir made in wading and in lowering them down, however quietly, would break up this glassy surface, and the ripples once started would run out here. Anyhow we will get the men out. Tell them to come noiselessly. We will serve out the arms and ammunition to them, but we won’t load the guns till we have something more to go upon. It may be some time before they attack. I think it is likely enough that they will wait until they hear the boats—which I have no doubt they have sent for—coming up, before they make a move.’

“‘Shall I wake the skipper?’

“‘Certainly not. As likely as not he would blow us all up and send the men back to their bunks again. He has made up his mind that there is no danger, and the obstinate beggar would risk our having all our throats cut rather than own there was any ground for alarm.’

“I went into the forecastle and roused the men, warning them to muster as quietly as possible. Half an hour passed without the slightest sound being heard. Then the men fidgeted and whispered together, and were evidently of opinion that they had been turned out on a false alarm.

“‘Hush, men!’ Purvis said sharply, ‘I can hear something.’

“‘You could have heard a pin drop in a moment, and I believe every man held his breath. There was a sort of quiver in the air rather than a sound, and Watkins the boatswain, who had been years and years in vessels trading among the islands, said: ‘You are right, Mr. Purvis, that is sweeps; and what is more, it is not one boat, but I should say half a dozen.’

“‘That is what I think,’ the mate said. ‘How far off should you say they were?’

“‘It is difficult to tell. I should say three or four miles. That is the best of these proas. A canoe, if the men take pains with their paddling, will come within a hundred yards of you before you hear them, but as the proas row oars, you can make them out a long way off on a still night like this.’

“‘Well, we will wait a few minutes longer before we wake the skipper,’ Purvis said to me. ‘He will swear that he does not hear any noise at all, and that it is all our fancy. In ten minutes there will be no mistaking it. Watkins, you had better get up that boarding-netting’—for among these islands all the ships carry them, and very useful they are in repelling an attack.

“‘I have got it handy,’ the boatswain said, and soon brought it on deck. ‘Shall we lash it up, sir?’

“‘No; we had better wait till the captain comes out. It won’t take above a couple of minutes, especially if you run it all along by the bulwarks.’

“‘In a few minutes the sound of the oars was unmistakable, and Purvis went in to call the captain.

“‘What is it?’ the skipper said as the mate knocked.

“‘There are five or six proas coming towards us, sir, and we have reason to believe that the canoes on shore are all launched and ready to attack us.’

“‘I believe it is all nonsense,’ the skipper said angrily as he came from his door. ‘You are always fidgeting about pirates, Mr. Purvis.’

“‘He came out on deck, listened a moment, and then said: ‘Stuff and nonsense! What, have you got the men out? Send them to their bunks at once!’

“‘With the greatest respect to you, sir, I shall do nothing of the sort, and if I did the men would not obey me. They can all hear the proas, and we are not going to submit to have our throats cut tamely, Mr. Pinder thoroughly agrees with me, and so does the boatswain, that these proas can be coming for no good purpose at this time of night, and it were madness not to be ready for them. What do you say, Mr. Pinder?’

“‘I entirely agree with you, sir,’ I replied.

“‘This is rank mutiny!’ the skipper said furiously.

“I would rather be tried for mutiny than have my throat cut here. Now, sir, will you give orders, or shall I?”

“I will give no orders,” the captain said. “In the morning I will have you put in irons.”

“Purvis, giving a short laugh, turned on his heel. ‘My lads,’ he said, ‘you have heard the sound of the oars, and know as well as I do that we shall shortly be attacked, and shall have to fight hard for our lives. The captain is of opinion that we are all mistaken, and wants us to turn in again. What do you say?! Will you have your throats cut or not?’

“There was an angry growl from the sailors.

“Very well, then, set to work and load the guns—ball at first, but keep your grape handy, we shall want it before we have done. Do it quietly; it is as well these fellows on shore should not know what we are up to. As soon as you have loaded, rig up the boarding-nettings.”

“In a moment all was bustle. There was no need to run the guns in, for that was already done, the captain insisting upon our always having the ports closed, in order, as he said, that the natives might see that our intentions were perfectly friendly. Consequently, the men were enabled to load the guns without noise, moving about the deck on their naked feet like shadows. Then the boarding-nettings were triced up, arms distributed amongst the men, each having a boarding-pike, a cutlass, and a brace of pistols. By the time that this was done, we judged by the sound of the sweeps that the pirates were not more than a mile away. Lanterns were got up on deck and placed in readiness to be lighted and run up to the yard-arm, so as to throw some light down on the water.

“Now, we will call the old man again. Obstinate as he is he can’t help hearing the oars now, and I know that he is plucky enough, and will fight the ship well as soon as he is once convinced that there is danger.”

“We went together to the skipper’s.

“Captain,” Purvis said in a loud voice, “Pinder and I have come to tell you that the proas are within a mile of us, and to ask you to take the command and fight the ship.”

“We heard the skipper tumble out of his bunk again with an angry exclamation. He opened the door without a word and went straight up on to the poop. He listened a moment, and then ran down again.

“I beg your pardon, Mr. Purvis,” he said hastily, “but I have been wrong, and there is no doubt we are going to be attacked. I am heartily sorry for what I have said, and I thank you for your watchfulness.”

“Say no more about it, captain. We are ready to begin as soon as you give the orders.”

“I will throw on some things and be out again in a minute;” and in less than that time he turned out again.

“You have the guns loaded?” he asked.

“Ay, ay, sir, and the boarding-nettings up.”

“Can you make them out yet?”

“No, sir. By the sound, they are keeping close in to the shore. I have got the kedge anchor in a boat. Shall I lower it and row a couple of ship’s-lengths and drop it there, then we can warp her round, so as to bring all our guns to bear? I deferred doing that to the last, so that the fellows on shore should not know we were on the alert.”

“Yes; do so at once, Mr. Purvis.”

“The boatswain and two hands were at once called to the boat, which was then lowered and rowed off in the direction the mate pointed out. The anchor was let drop, and the boat returned to the ship, paying out the hawser over the stern. The captain had taken his place on the forecastle, and was looking anxiously ahead.

“I see them,” he exclaimed at last; “they are coming out from behind that low point half a mile away. Haul on the hawser and bring her broadside to bear on them. Get the guns across to the starboard side, Mr. Pinder.”

“The ship was pierced for eight guns a side, and by the time the ship was swung round, they were all in position. The proas, now no more than a quarter of a mile away, were heading straight for us.

“Take a steady aim, lads,’ the captain said, ‘and fire as soon as you are sure of your shot.’

“In quick succession the guns spoke out. At the reports wild yells broke from the proas, and from the shore, now astern of us.

“Load as quick as you can with grape,’ the captain shouted.

“There had been five proas when the first gun was fired, but before we had reloaded one had disappeared, and there was shouting and confusion in one of the others. It was evident that she also was in difficulties.

“Don’t fire until I give the word.’

“The three proas were within fifty yards of us when he gave the order, and the eight guns poured their contents into the crowded decks. The effect was terrible. Two of the proas ceased rowing altogether, and some of the oars of the other dropped into the water and hampered the efforts of those who still continued to row.

“The port watch will repel boarders. The starboard watch will load again,’ the captain ordered.

“There was way enough on the proas to bring them all alongside, but either the men at the steering oars were all killed or they had lost their heads, for, instead of bringing them up alongside, they simply came up bows on. As they struck the side the Malays tried to climb up, but, attacking as they did only at three points, our men had little difficulty in keeping them off, thrusting through the nettings with their boarding-pikes, and giving the Malays no time to attempt to chop down the nettings with their creases.

“Are you all loaded?’ the captain shouted.

“Ay, ay, sir,’ came from the guns.

“Train them so as to take the proas between wind and water,’ the captain said; ‘then run the port guns back to their places; we shall be attacked on that side directly.’

“The sea indeed was sparkling with phosphoric fire, as a crowd of canoes from the shore paddled out towards us. The steward now lit and ran up half a dozen lanterns. We got the guns over in time, but before we could load them the Malays were swarming up the side.

“Take three men, Pinder, and load the guns,’ cried the captain; ‘we will keep these fellows off.’

“The same order was given to the boatswain with regard to the guns on the starboard side. It was exciting work, for spears were flying in showers, stink-pots were hurled over the nettings, and the yelling and shouting were deafening. Our men were sticking to their pikes, for they had been ordered to keep their pistols in reserve in case the pirates obtained a footing on deck. There were two little guns on the poop, and when I had loaded the guns on the port side the captain sent me up to load these. I crammed them with bullets up to the muzzle, and then ran them to the poop railing, and placed one of the hands there with a lighted match. We had a tough ten minutes of it, and if the canoes had come up at the same time as the proas it would have gone hard with us; but the last broadside that had been poured in had sunk two of the big craft, and the other had drifted away, so that, in fact, we had only the shore canoes to cope with. We had hard work to keep them back, but none of the natives managed to cross the netting along the waist of the ship, though a few shoved themselves through holes that they hacked with their creases.

“Some managed to swarm up by the cable on to the bows, but three men who were stationed there disposed of them before enough could gain a footing to be dangerous. The captain had been keeping the guns in reserve in case the proa that had dropped behind at first should come on, but he now saw that she was low in the water, and that many of the Malays were jumping overboard. He therefore shouted out:

“Give them both broadsides. Aim into the thick of them.’

“That broadside settled it; seven or eight of their big canoes were smashed up; several of the others turned and paddled to the shore; and a moment later, the men who were attacking us leapt into the boats alongside and followed their example.

“‘Load as quickly as you can,’ the captain cried, ‘and give them a parting salute.’ We ran the two little quarter-deck guns over and peppered them with bullets, and the other guns joined in as soon as they were reloaded.

“That finished the matter. Our loss was not heavy, considering what a hard fight it had been. We had but two killed, and seven or eight wounded by their spears; while they must have suffered frightfully. In the morning the captain called the crew aft, and made a speech thanking them for their conduct, and saying that they owed their safety and that of the ship to the first mate and myself, and that the night’s work would be a lesson that he should never forget. He privately said the same thing to us, and there was no doubt that it was the first mate who saved the ship.

“This and the other affair were a lesson to me as well as to the captain. No matter how friendly the natives might appear, from that day I have never anchored among the islands without having half my guns double-shotted, and the other half loaded with grape; and there is always an officer and half a watch on deck, so that, whatever happens to us, it will not be because I have been caught napping. On both those occasions the captains well-nigh lost ship and crew by their carelessness.”

For several weeks they cruised among the islands bartering goods with the natives of sea-coast villages. At most of these the captain had touched on previous voyages, and as soon as the ship was recognized the canoes came off freely. Stephen gradually got rid of the goods he had purchased at Calcutta. Knowing nothing of the respective value of the bird skins, he was guided simply by their rarity. Of skins of which numbers were brought on board, he bought none, however brilliant the plumage; but whenever he saw one that was new to him he at once made an offer for it. But as this was seldom, his box filled but slowly, until one day he went ashore with the captain, the first mate, and twelve sailors armed to the teeth, to pay a visit to the chief. On the few occasions on which he had landed he always carried with him a hand-bag filled full of trade goods. On the present occasion, after the feasting had gone on for some time, he stole out from the chief’s hut. The men were sitting down in front drinking palm wine, but keeping a vigilant eye upon the movements of the natives. Presently one of the Malays came up to him and touched his bag, as if to ask what were its contents. He brought out two or three small looking-glasses, some large brass necklaces, and a few of the cheap bangles and rings set with coloured glass, used by the Hindoo peasant women. The native pointed to a hut near, and beckoned to Steve to follow him.

“Jim, you may as well come with me,” Stephen said to one of the sailors. “I think this fellow wants to trade with me; but they are treacherous beggars, and I don’t care about going with him by myself.”

The sailor got up and followed him across to the hut. The Malay was evidently a chief of some importance, and Stephen thought that he might be possessed of articles of a better class than those usually offered. In one corner of the hut stood a seaman’s chest with several small cases round it. It needed but a glance to show that the latter were two chronometers and three quadrants.

“The scoundrels have been plundering a ship, Jim.”

“Ay, ay, your honour, there is not much doubt about that. I should like to knock the black villain on the head.”

The chief caught the tone of anger, and made a variety of signs to the effect that there had been a great storm, and that a ship had been driven ashore and wrecked.

“Ay, ay, that is all very well,” the sailor growled; “but that won’t do for us. Those chronometers would never have floated, and them polished cases have never been in the water.”

“Never mind, Jim; it won’t do to look suspicious.” He pointed to the chronometers, and asked by signs how much was wanted for them. He took out four looking-glasses, two brass chains, and three or four bead necklaces. The chief looked doubtful; but when Stephen added a crimson silk

handkerchief he closed with the bargain at once. He would indeed have given them for the looking-glasses alone if Stephen had held out for them, for he regarded the chronometers with a certain sense of dread; they were to him mysteries, having made, when first brought ashore, a ticking noise, and were generally considered to be in some way alive. They were, therefore, left out in the air for some days, and it was then found that they were, as supposed, dead. None of the other natives would have given them house-room; but the chief, who was less superstitious than the majority of the tribe, had brought them into his hut, although he had not had sufficient courage to break them up for the sake of the brass.

Having disposed of these the chief opened the lid of the chest. He took out some clothes and held them up, but Stephen shook his head decidedly. Then he brought out a gold watch and a heavy bag; he untied the latter, and handed it to Stephen for inspection. The lad had difficulty in repressing an exclamation, for it was full of guineas, but put it down and placed the watch beside it, assumed an air of indifference, and then made up another pile of about equal value to the first, but threw in a couple of dozen brass buttons. The chief nodded, and Stephen slipped the bag and watch into his coat pocket. While this transaction had been going on, Jim had carried the boxes containing the chronometers and quadrants to his comrades.

“Anything more, sir?” he asked, as he appeared at the door of the hut.

“Nothing more to carry, Jim, as far as I am concerned; but there is a good pea-jacket and some togs in that chest. I have no doubt that it belonged to the captain of the ship; they have cut off all the buttons. I will buy them for you.”

The coat and trousers, and half a dozen shirts were, to Jim’s great delight, purchased for him. Stephen then examined the whole contents of the chest, thinking that some papers might be found that would give a clue to the name of the ship that it had belonged to, but nothing of the sort was discovered. However, he bought the whole of the clothes, and, calling in the sailors one by one, divided them among them, and then went back and joined the captain.

“I have been doing some trading, captain,” he whispered to him. “It is white plunder; and I have no doubt that a ship has been surprised and her crew massacred somewhere near here. I have bought the chronometers and quadrants, and they have certainly not been in the water; also the contents of a sea-chest, which I divided among the men. There were no papers of any kind, but from the appearance of the chronometers, I should say that they cannot have been here long.”

The captain nodded.

“We will talk it over when we get on board, Steve. We will be off at once, for these fellows are beginning to get drunk with this beastly liquor of theirs, and it is best that we should get out of the place before there is any excuse for a quarrel.”

A few minutes later they took their seats in the boat and rowed off to the ship.

CHAPTER III. A CYCLONE

As soon as they arrived on board, Captain Pinder examined the chronometers and pronounced them to be excellent ones.

“I would not wind them up until it is Greenwich time as they now stand, and would then compare them with our own.”

“Of course, sir,” Stephen said, “I have bought these not for myself but for the ship.”

“Not at all, Steve; you have traded as you have a right to do, and the ship has nothing to do with it. At the same time I don’t know whether you will be able to keep or sell them. I must give notice on our return home that such things have been found here under circumstances that leave no doubt that the crew of the ship to which they belonged have been massacred, and the ship herself burned. No doubt owners of vessels that have been missing will call at the office to inspect the chronometers. I do not say that anyone would have a legal right to them; they have been absolutely lost and gone out of their possession, and you have bought them in the way of fair trade.”

“If they wish to have them back again, sir, of course I will give them up.”

“Well, at any rate, if you did so, lad, you would get a reward proportionate to their value. However, they may never be claimed. Owners whose ships are missing, and who have received the insurance money, are not likely to trouble themselves further in the matter.”

“This is not all I have, sir,” Stephen went on. “I also got this gold watch and this bag of money. I suppose the chest belonged to the captain, and that he carried this gold with him for the purchase of stores.”

“You are a lucky fellow, Steve. Come down into my cabin and we will count the money. Two hundred guineas,” he went on, when they had finished; “well, that is about the best bit of trade that I have seen done; you had better hand this over to me to keep.”

“Oh, I don’t mean it to be kept, sir,” Stephen said; “it would not be fair at all. I would not think of it. It is like prize-money, and ought to be divided in the same way. I don’t mind keeping the gold watch just now, but if we find out the name of the ship when we get back to England, I should wish to send it to the widow of the captain, and the money too, if it belonged to him.”

“There is no chance whatever of that, lad. No captain would be fool enough to bring out a lot of gold like that on his own account. It was certainly ship’s money that he would hold for making advances to the crew; as for the purchase of stores, he would pay for them by bills on the owner. But still, you are no doubt right about the watch, and the poor fellow’s widow would, doubtless, be glad to have it; as to the gold, I will take charge of it for the present. We will talk the matter over again later on; there is no occasion to come to any decision about it. At present it is entirely yours. I don’t think that you have any right to give up a sum of money like this without, at any rate, very careful consideration. It is a sum that, divided up into shares, would give but a very small amount to each on board, while it might be of the most material service to you some day or other. But please oblige me by saying nothing whatever about it at present. Whatever decision is arrived at in matters of this sort, somebody is sure to feel aggrieved, and it is astonishing what little things upset a crew, especially on a voyage of this kind, where there is no such controlling influence over the men’s minds as that exercised by touching at ports where there are authorities to whom, in case of necessity, the captain can appeal.”

“Very well, sir, I will, of course, do as you wish. Shall I say anything about the watch?”

“Yes; there is no objection to your doing that, especially as that must be mentioned in any inquiries we may make as to any ship being missing, and there is no need for any secrecy about it. I

shall also mention the money to the officers; they will appreciate the offer that you have made, and agree with me, I am sure, that it will be better that nothing should be said to the crew.”

That evening the first mate said to Stephen: “The captain has been telling us about that bag of money you got hold of, Steve, and we all think that your offer to treat it as if it were prize-money is a very kind one, but we agree with him that it would be a mistake. In the first place, the money wouldn’t go far. In any matter of that sort the ship, that is to say the owners, take a large share to begin with, the officers take some shares, and the men’s shares would not come to a pound a head. A pound a head would only suffice for them to have a drunken spree on shore, but they are just as well without that, and, as the captain says, it is astonishing what little things upset sailors’ minds. They might take it into their head that as you got two hundred pounds in that hut there might be a lot more, and they would be wanting to land and to turn the village upside down, and there would be bloodshed and all sorts of trouble. The old saying, ‘Least said, soonest mended’, comes in here strongly. We have, so far, got on very well with the natives this voyage, and I hope that we shall continue to do so to the end. I quite allow that we should all of us be glad to give a sharp lesson to that village ashore. They have been plundering, and I have no doubt murdering, the crew of some ship. Still, we have no evidence of that, and we can’t attack the village on mere supposition. They have been friendly enough with us, partly because we have been here before, and the captain gets on well with them, but more because they are perfectly well aware that we are always on guard, and that there is no chance whatever of their catching us asleep. In nine cases out of ten it is the carelessness and over-confidence of sailors that tempt the natives to take advantage of it; they would never have shown you these things if they had had any idea of attacking us.”

Next morning the operation of filling up the water-tanks was completed, and at noon the orders were given to weigh anchor. Steve saw how rightly the captain had foreseen what was likely to happen, for no sooner was the order given than two of the men came aft as a deputation from the crew.

“What is it, lads?” he asked.

“Well, captain, the boat’s crew that went ashore yesterday came off with a lot of togs that must, in course, have been taken from some seaman’s chest. Now, it seems to us as that chest could not have been there by fair means, and that, like enough, they had been murdering and looting some vessel here; and, for aught we know, the place may be full of plunder of some sort or another, and that, may be, there are twenty or thirty other seamen’s chests there, and other goods. It seems to us, sir, that these chaps ought to be punished, and that we should try to get as much of the plunder they have got hidden as we can; therefore, the crew beg that you will sanction our going ashore and tackling them.”

“No, lads, I can’t sanction that,” the captain said. “It is true that Mr. Embleton was offered by one of their chiefs some chronometers and the contents of a sea-chest. He bought the chronometers, and he also bought the contents of the chest and divided them among the men who went ashore. The chief made signs to him that these things had been saved from a ship that had been wrecked, and it is possible that it may be so. It may not have been wrecked on this island, and those things may have been the share of one of the canoes from here that assisted in looting her; at any rate, we have no proof that the vessel was boarded and captured. If it had been done here, I think we should have seen more signs of it among the natives who have come out to the ship or on shore. There would have been more trade goods about—handkerchiefs, and beads, and so on, and they would not have been anxious to trade with us. At any rate, there are no grounds for attacking a village that has, during the last three or four days, traded peacefully with us, as they have done on several different occasions when I have put in here. Even if there were no other reason, I should refuse to allow them to be attacked, because the news of the affair would spread from island to island, and next time we were in these seas we should do no trade, and should certainly be attacked if we gave them a chance. Of course I shall report the circumstances connected with the discovery of this chest at Calcutta, and endeavour to find out what ship has been lately missing; beyond that we can do nothing in the matter. We are traders; if we are attacked we do our best to beat off the assailants, but it would be altogether beyond

our business to attack sea-side villages because we find that they are in the possession of ships' goods, for were we to do so we should soon put an end to all trade in these islands. Go back and tell your comrades this, and then muster at once and heave the cable short."

The orders were obeyed, but it was evident that there was a lack of the usual briskness and willingness. However, before the ship had been many hours on her way, matters settled down and the work went on as usual.

"You see, lad," the first officer said to Stephen as the sails were sheeted home, and the *Tiger* glided away from her anchorage, "the captain was quite right, and if it had been known on the ship that you had got that money, there would have been a good deal more trouble than there was. It would have been no good to tell them that, no doubt, it was the ship's money. Sailors are like children; they would have argued that if you could obtain two hundred pounds from one hut, they would each be likely to get as much in a general loot of the village. You see, giving them those togs you bought was enough to stir them up, and things would not have passed off so pleasantly had they known about the money.

"I do not say that there would have been a mutiny, or anything of that sort, because the great majority of them have sailed for years under the skipper; still, there would have been great discontent and grumbling, and if there happened to be among the new hands one or two sea-lawyers, they might have worked upon the men, and caused a great deal of trouble."

"I see that, sir," Steve said.

"Well, there is no harm done, lad, and you will see that in a day or two the matter will have been forgotten. But it is a lesson that you may profit by; it is always best to avoid anything that, even remotely, is likely to set sailors talking together. All crews are not as trustworthy as the *Tiger's*, and you would be astonished what mischief two or three cunning plausible rascals can do among a crew, if they have got ever so small a grievance to work upon."

A week later the ship was passing along the coast of a small island when Joyce, the eldest apprentice, who was examining the shore through a glass, said to the second officer:

"There is a wreck of some sort, sir, in among those black rocks."

"So there is," the mate said, shading his eyes with his hand. "I see it plainly enough now that you call my attention to it."

He went aft and reported it to the captain, who came out and examined it carefully with his glass.

"It is a wreck certainly, and not the work of the natives this time," he said. "She has been blown on shore and left almost high and dry; her spars are all gone, the bulwarks are swept away, and though I cannot see the line of her broadside, I fancy that she has broken in two. Anyhow, as we have hardly steerage way, we shall lose no time by sending to find out what ship she is. Mr. Towel, you might as well lower the gig. Take six men; let them all take muskets and pistols with them. As Mr. Joyce was the first to make her out he may as well go with you. If you see no signs of natives, you can land and ascertain whether she has been plundered. It may be that she has not been discovered yet by the natives. If you see any of them about, content yourself with getting the ship's name and port from her stern."

The boat was lowered.

"You may go too, Steve," he added as Stephen was looking down into the boat. "It is Mr. Archer's turn; but as he had got a touch of fever this morning, he is better sitting under the shade of that sail than in an open boat."

"Thank you very much, sir," Stephen said, and, running below, shoved his pistols into his pocket.

"You have got water in the boat?" the captain asked the mate just as Steve returned on deck.

"The keg is about half-full, sir," he said as one of the sailors lifted and shook it.

"Hand them another down from the long-boat," the captain said, turning to one of the men; "it is better always to make sure. Mr. Towel," he went on, leaning over the side, "one is never sure of the weather for an hour, and I don't altogether like the colour of the sky now. But if there are no signs

of change aloft, and you see the natives have not been near the place, give a look round beyond the rocks for anything that might show whether some of the crew got ashore—fires made, or anything of that sort. Should you see signs, we will fire a gun or two when you return, and lay off for a few hours to give them a chance of coming down to the beach.”

“Ay, ay, sir,” the mate said, “I will take a look round for them; but from the way she has been thrown up I should doubt whether there is the slightest chance of anyone having got ashore.”

The captain nodded, then the mate gave the word, and the boat pushed off from the ship. Four men rowed, two sat in the bow, Mr. Towel and the two apprentices sat aft. They were some three miles from shore. There was a ripple on the water, but the wind was very light. There was, however, a ground-swell that had caused the *Tiger* to roll, but which was scarcely perceptible in the boat. Steve remarked on this.

“No,” the mate said, “these long swells do not affect a boat in the least. I have often gone ashore on the west coast of Africa, when one was scarcely conscious in the boat of there being any swell on at all, and yet the vessels at anchor outside were rolling almost gunwale under. Still, I would rather that we had not got it, it is a sign that there is wind somewhere, and I agree with the skipper that it is an unnatural-looking sky. Still, it may be hours yet before there is any change.”

Half an hour’s rowing took them to shore. “She could not have picked out a worse place, lads,” the mate said when they approached the wreck. “You see there are black heads sticking out of the water all round, and it must have been a tremendous sea to have carried that ship right through them and chucked her up there where there are not two feet of water.”

“The *Lady Vernon*, London,” Joyce exclaimed at this moment, “I can make out her name plainly.”

“Then your eyes are better than mine, Joyce, for I can’t say I can read it yet. Row easy, men, and you in the bow keep a sharp look-out on the water. If we were to come bow-on to a hidden rock we should have to wait ashore until another boat came out to fetch us.”

Rowing very gently the boat kept on her course until within half a length of the ship, then she ran quietly up on a flat rock some seven or eight inches under water. They could see now that the captain’s conjecture was correct. The ship had broken her back, having, as she was carried in on the crest of a great wave, dropped on a sharp ledge of rocks about amidships. The sea had rushed in through the hole in her side, and had torn away all her planking and most of her timbers forward, while the after part of the ship had held together. The hold, however, was gutted of its contents.

“The natives have not been here since,” Steve said as he pointed ahead where, apparently far out of reach of the water, lay a quantity of wreckage, splinters of planks, bits of timber, bales of goods, and a great litter of loose cargo.

“It is of no use climbing up above,” the mate said in answer to an offer on Joyce’s part to endeavour to reach the deck. “The waves, you see, have rushed in through the stern windows, and have made a clean sweep of everything. Half the deck has burst up and gone. We will have a look at the things on shore. Step out, lads, and pull the boat a bit higher up.”

This was done, and they waded through the water knee-deep to shore. The wreckage lay a hundred yards further up, on ground quite twenty feet higher than that on which they were standing. The bales were all marked with the ship’s name. There were no signs of casks or boxes, these had doubtless been smashed into splinters. Among the wreckage five skeletons were found. They searched further inland, but could discover no sign whatever of life between the shore and a dense forest that began four or five hundred yards away.

“It is certain that no one has escaped,” the mate said. “In the first place, no living creature could have ever gained his feet if cast up by such a sea as that must have been. The first wave that struck her after she was thrown up there must have swept the decks clean and finished them all at one blow. In the next place, if by a miracle any of them did get safely ashore, you may be sure that they would have buried their comrades the next morning. You see, it is sand up there where the wreckage lies,

and it would not have taken long to scrape a hole deep enough and large enough to bury them. Ah! the captain is getting impatient,” he exclaimed, as the sound of a gun came across the water. “No wonder,” he went on as he looked at the sky.

They had been about an hour on shore, and had been so fully occupied in examining the wreckage, and in looking for some signs that might tell them if any of the crew had gained the shore, that they had paid no attention whatever to the weather. A great change had taken place since they had left the ship. The wind had entirely died away, and a darkness had crept over the sky; it was not a cloud, but a sort of dull vapour.

“Quick, lads, to the boat,” the mate said, “there is not a moment to be lost. There is a storm brewing, and the sooner we are on board the better.”

They ran through the water, got into the boat, and pushed her off.

“Be careful, men; paddle quietly until we are well beyond the rocks. Keep a sharp look out forward.” Another gun was fired from the ship as he spoke. “Steady, men, steady!” he said; “you can row as hard as you like when we get outside, but it is of no use knocking a hole in her to start with.”

As soon as they were beyond the rocks they bent to the oars. At the mate’s orders, the two apprentices and the sailors in the bow took their seats by the rowers and double-banked the oars.

“The skipper is getting every rag of sail off her,” the mate said, as he looked ahead. “There is another gun! It is getting darker and darker, I don’t suppose they can make us out. Give way, lads.”

The gloom deepened rapidly. The ship continued to fire guns every minute or two, and it was well she did so, for the mate had now lost sight of her.

“Which way do you think it will come, sir?” Stephen, who was at the stroke-oar, asked.

The mate shook his head. “There is no knowing,” he said. “If it is inshore, the *Tiger* will lay her bones by that wreck behind us. We can’t be above a mile away from her by the sound of that last gun. But it will be a close thing, I can hear the wind coming.”

Even those rowing were conscious of a low moaning sound.

“It comes from behind I think,” the mate said in answer to a look from Stephen. Suddenly a puff of wind from behind rippled the water round them and then died away again. “Row, lads,” the mate exclaimed, “I can see the ship now, she is not half a mile away; five minutes will do it.”

The men strained at the oars and the boat sprang forward at every stroke. They could hear the moaning sound growing louder and louder.

“The captain has got her head off shore,” the mate said; “he has been towing her round. They have just hoisted the boat up. He has got the little storm-jib on her. Now, lads, another four or five hundred yards and we shall be alongside.”

It was a race with the storm, but the odds were too great. They were but a hundred yards from the ship when the roar rose into a wild scream, and a line of white water sprang towards them with fearful velocity.

“In oars, men!” the mate shouted. “Throw yourselves flat in the bottom of the boat,—quick!”

The order was executed almost as soon as given. The mate, too, slipped off his seat on to the floor-board, while still retaining hold of the tiller. The next moment the storm struck them. It was well that the boat was still flying through the water with the way full on her; had she been lying motionless she would probably have sunk like a stone under the force of the blow. As it was she leapt forward like a horse under a spur. They passed but half a length or so from the ship. The latter had not yet gathered way, but lay pressed down until her bow was well-nigh level with the water. As the mate looked up he saw the captain holding on by the shrouds. Each waved a hand and then the boat flew on, and in a minute the ship was out of sight. The mate shouted in the ear of the sailor who rowed the stroke-oar and who was lying next to him:

“Crawl forward and try and fix the floor-board there, so as to show a few inches above the bow to act as a head-sail. If she broaches to, it is all up with us. As you go along tell each man to shift himself a bit more aft. Her stern must be well down or I can never keep her straight. If you

can't fix the floor-board, get up the mast; tie up the foresail in a roll, and then hoist it, that will give hold enough to the wind."

The man nodded and made his way forward; he endeavoured to carry out the first part of his orders, but the moment he raised the floor-board above the level of the gunwale it was wrenched from his hands and blown ahead. With the aid of two other men he managed to step the mast. The mate waved his hand to him to say that that would do for the present. The man, however, prepared the sail ready for hoisting, rolling it up tightly and winding a cord round and round it; then he hooked the head on to the traveller on the mast, and lay down at its foot, holding the halliard in readiness to hoist it. The water was still perfectly smooth, and the boat flew straight before the wind without any tendency to broach to. Stephen, after the stroke-oar had gone forward, crept aft until he was beside the mate, and there lay for a time, feeling half-stupefied by the tremendous roar of the cyclone.

Captain Pinder was, as every good officer should be, most particular about his boats, and always had them built specially from his own design. They were broader than usual, and had a flat floor and a deep keel, thus they were extremely buoyant, their lines resembling those of the surf-boats on the west coasts of India and Africa, while their deep keels enabled them to sail close to the wind. The men chafed sometimes when, on their way to shore, they found themselves passed by the narrow boats of other ships; but the captain was perfectly indifferent to this, and used to say to other skippers who laughed at him for what they called his "walnut shells":

"A boat is not made for racing; she is made to carry her crew in a heavy sea. My boats will live where yours would be swamped in five minutes, and with their great beam they will carry all sail, while you would not dare show a shred of canvas. It makes no difference to me whether I get to shore five minutes earlier or later; properly handled, the smallest of my boats ought to weather any ordinary gale, while the long-boat would be as safe to cross the Atlantic in as the *Tiger* herself, though I don't say that she would be as comfortable."

The crew, every one of whom had many a time grumbled at the contrast between their beamy craft and the smart gigs of most other ships, now felt the advantage. The boat sped lightly along, raising her head higher and higher out of the water whenever a fresh blast of wind added to her speed, and, save for the sound of the rushing water against the sides, might have been at rest, for any motion that could be perceived. In half an hour the sea began to get up; as soon as it did so the mate made a signal to the man at the halliards, and the sail was drawn up. Tightly as it was rolled, the difference was at once perceptible, and the boat flew along faster than before. The men were now sitting up in the bottom of the boat; they knew that the battle with the storm had as yet scarcely begun, and that when the sea once got up they would have a terrible time of it. In an ordinary ship's-boat the prospect would have been absolutely hopeless; but the Norwegian pilot-boats—whose model the captain had pretty closely followed—are able successfully to ride out the heaviest gale in the North Sea, and the mate and the two apprentices, the latter of whom had often heard from Captain Pinder, with whom the matter was a pet hobby, of the wonderful power of these craft in a gale, entertained a strong hope that she would live through whatever might come. As the sea rose, a small portion of the foresail was loosed, then more was freed, until the whole of the little sail was drawing, and the speed with which it dragged the boat along saved her from being swamped by the following waves. But in another hour the water no longer ran in waves, it was broken up in a confused and tumultuous sea; the greater part of the sail was again bound up, for there was no longer the same risk of being swamped, and it was necessary to moderate the boat's speed in such a tumult of water.

"What makes it like this?" Stephen shouted.

"The circular motion of the wind," the mate replied in a similar tone of voice. "I dare say we have made two or three circles already."

"There is a compass in the locker behind you, sir."

The mate nodded.

"That may be useful when the storm is over, but would not help us now, and might get broken."

That Stephen could quite understand, for the motions of the boat were so sudden and unexpected that the crew often grasped at the thwarts and gunwale, fearing they would be thrown right out of her. At one moment a wave seemed to rise underneath her, and almost chuck her into the air, then she would sink between two masses of water, that looked as if they would tumble over and fill her, then she would dash head-forward at a wave that rose suddenly in front of her. For a time it seemed to all on board as if her destruction was imminent, but as the buoyant little craft struggled bravely on,—shipping no more water than one man with the bailer could free her of as fast as it came aboard, in the shape of spray,—they began to breathe again more freely.

It was now nine hours since the gale had burst upon them, and there were no signs of an abatement, when, as they were on the top of a wave, the mate shouted:

“There are breakers ahead.”

Every head was lifted, and when the boat rose again on a wave they could see a line of white foam ahead of them as far on either side as the eye could see through the mist.

“Keep a look-out for a break in the line, Wilcox,” the mate shouted.

The man forward waved his hand, and, holding to the mast, stood up. A minute later he turned and shouted something to the man next to him, and the message was passed from mouth to mouth to the mate.

“It is not a reef, sir; it is a low sandy coast.”

“Take your places on the thwarts,” the mate shouted, “and get your oars out.”

The men did so. Then, in a momentary lull in the blast, the officer said:

“Get ready to pull for your lives when I give the word. Our only chance is to go in on the top of a wave. The instant we touch the ground and she loses her way, jump out and stick your heels in the sand.”

They approached the edge of the surf rapidly.

“Stick your oars in deep and check her way,” the mate shouted.

He stood up in the boat when they were within fifty yards of the point where the waves curled over and fell with a roar like thunder on the beach. Two or three waves passed under her, then he saw one of greater height approaching.

“Row, lads! row for your lives!”

The wind helping them, they flew forward. The wave rose higher and higher behind them—it looked almost as steep as a wall—and an involuntary cry broke from several of the men as the boat’s stern rose up it.

“Row! row!” the mate shouted.

But six strokes were pulled and then the wave fell over with a crash, and in a moment they were shooting along with the speed of an arrow in the midst of a mass of seething foam.

“Get ready to jump!” the mate shouted.

His voice was lost, but the action which accompanied it was understood. They were flying up a steep slope, when suddenly the motion became slower, then there was a bump.

“Hold to her, lads, if you can; every man spring overboard.”

For a moment they seemed drawn backwards by the rush of the water, then the boat became fixed, and a moment later the water left them.

“Now, all together before the next wave reaches her.”

With a united effort they lifted and ran the boat her own length further up. The next wave barely reached the boat’s stern. Before another came she was well up on the sand. Then the mate pointed upwards. The roar of the surf and the howl of the wind would have drowned any words, but his gesture was sufficient. Most of the men had, like their officer, lost their hats, but those who had not done so took them off. Several of them, including Stephen and Joyce, threw themselves on their knees, the others stood with bent heads, and all uttered a fervent thanksgiving for their preservation from what had seemed almost certain death. The mate was the first to move. He went to the side of

the boat, and began to take double handfuls of sand, and to throw them into her. The others looked at him in surprise, but he made signs that the wind might lift the boat up, whirl her round, and dash her to pieces; then all set to at the work, which they continued until the boat was half-full of sand. Then the two barrels of water were carried up, together with a bag of biscuits and a bottle of rum from the locker, where a supply was always kept in case of an emergency like the present. They went on beyond the brow of the sand-hill, and ensconced themselves in a hollow at its foot, where they were completely sheltered from the wind. The mate got out his jack-knife, and managed to get the cork out of the bottle, and pouring water from one of the breakers into a tin pannikin that formed part of the boat's equipment, gave a ration of grog to each, and served out a biscuit all round.

As soon as these were eaten and the grog drank, they threw themselves on the sand and were soon fast asleep, utterly worn out with the prolonged strain they had gone through.

When they woke, day was just breaking. The mate was the first to leap to his feet.

"Tumble up, lads," he said, "we must have had twelve hours' sleep. The storm is over."

All were soon at the top of the sand-hill. A heavy sea was still breaking on the sands, but there was scarce a breath of wind, and the sea, though rough and agitated, was no longer covered with white heads, and looked bright in the rosy light. The boat lay where they had left it, securely anchored by the weight of the sand it contained. Their next glance was inland. For a quarter of a mile away the sand covered everything, then a few bushes rose from it; beyond were some stunted trees, and a hundred yards further a thick forest bordered the sandy belt as far as they could see on either hand. It was evidently a large island, for two or three miles away the country rose hill beyond hill, culminating in a jagged mountain dome twenty miles distant.

"Do you know where we are, sir?" Stephen asked, as the mate stood silently looking at the peak.

"No, I wish I did. I have either never seen that hill before, or, if I have, it has been from some other side that gave it quite a different outline. You see, we were nine hours in the gale, and during that time I fancy we must have run nearly a hundred miles; but I do not suppose we are half that distance from the point where we started, for we are sure to have gone round and round several times in the first hour or two. The island we were at, was some fifty or sixty miles from the coast of Sumatra, and possibly it is there that we have been cast ashore; but, on the other hand, we may have gone quite in another direction. Anyhow, there is no denying that we are in an awkward fix. It matters little enough which of the islands we have hit upon, the natives are all pirates and scoundrels, and the possession they prize most is a human head. The first thing to do, lads, is to draw the charges from our muskets and pistols and to reload them, then we will have a consultation."

This was done, and then they went down to the boat.

"I half expected it," the mate went on, after examining her; "the shock has started the butts of three planks on one side, and two on the other. We will get the sand out first and turn her over, bottom upwards."

This was done.

"I think we might make a shift to cobble it up," the mate said. "Some of the wood here is as hard as iron, and we might cut some pegs and fasten the planks into their place again. I don't suppose we shall be able to make them watertight, but we might caulk them up with pitch or gum from some of the trees. But that is not the first thing to think of; it is no use having a boat if we have not food or water to put into her. These biscuits would last us two or three days, and the water, if we are careful, as long again, but that is not enough to start with on a long cruise. The place we have to make for is Timor. Do you think that you could find your way there, Steve, and how far is it?"

"I was looking at the chart the last day I was on board, sir, and I noticed that Timor lay to the south of where we were then, and I should say it was something like six or seven hundred miles away."

"Well, it is of no use starting on such an expedition as that with such a stock of provisions as ours, so I propose that, in the first place, we see what is to be found in the forest. It will be hard if we do not find a supply of fruit. If we can collect a store enough we might venture upon making a start.

You see, we must keep well off the land, for if we were made out from any of the coast villages, we should have one of their craft after us in no time; but, in any case, I should say we had better stay here for a week. If the *Tiger* got safely through that gale, you may be sure the captain will be cruising about looking for us. He has sufficient faith in his boats to feel pretty positive that if we have not been cast ashore we are still afloat.”

CHAPTER IV. A RESCUE

They were soon in the forest. It required care and caution to make their way through the tangled growth of climbing canes and vines. Some of these were armed with terrible thorns, and as they had no hatchets to chop their way through them they were often obliged to make detours to escape these obstacles. Orchids of brilliant colours and fantastic shapes grew thickly on the trees, ants in countless numbers swarmed up and down the trunks, and many an angry exclamation was wrung from the seamen as a bite as sharp as the sting of a wasp told that some of these insects had crawled up the legs of their trousers or made their way down their neck.

“Unless we are going to live on ants,” the mate said ruefully as he gave a savage slap at his leg, “it seems to me we are likely to starve, for I have seen nothing whatever to eat since we entered the wood. Even if some of the trees did bear fruit I don’t see how we are going to get at it, for one would be eaten alive by these little brutes before we reached the top.”

“I vote we turn back, Mr. Towel,” one of the men said. “I would rather put to sea and take my chance than keep on being stung by these ants, when there doesn’t seem the least hope of our finding anything.”

“There doesn’t seem much chance here, Nixon. I think we had best get out of the wood and follow the edge along. We may come to some place where it is more open, and may even strike on a stream. If we could do that we might patch up the boat and pull up stream a bit. Anyhow, I don’t think it is any use pushing on here. My jacket is torn in a dozen places already by the thorns.”

“One of them has nearly taken my eye out,” another grumbled; and indeed all were bleeding from the gashes they had received from the thorns. They made their way back carefully, and there was a general exclamation of satisfaction when the light could be seen ahead through the trees. As soon as they were out on the sands shirts were hastily pulled off and a hunt for ants carried out.

“It is lucky the bites don’t swell up,” Joyce said, “or I should be a mass of bumps. It is as bad as if one had been attacked by a swarm of bees. Yet there is only a little red spot to show for each bite.”

As soon as they had freed themselves from the ants they started along the edge of the forest. After walking for two miles they gave a shout of joy, for a river some fifty yards wide issued from the forest. The sand-hills had hidden it from sight until they were close upon it.

“Thank God, we sha’n’t die of thirst,” the mate said. “It will be a hard job to get our boat here, but it has got to be done. Even if we could launch it through the surf there would be no getting in through the rollers on the bar, at least I should not like to try it. So we have got to drag her here somehow. It will be a tough job, but as there seems no chance of getting food in any other way we must undertake it. Hurrah!” he exclaimed suddenly, “there are some cocoa-nut trees on the other side of the river. That settles it. Let us be off back again at once.”

They returned in much better spirits than they had before felt. On the way they went a short distance into the forest, and cut off a number of thorns some two inches long and seemingly as hard as iron. They breakfasted on a biscuit, with a full allowance of water, and then set to work at the boat. The thorns answered their purpose as nails admirably, and the planks soon were securely fastened into their places against the stem; but without nails to clench the planks together, it was evident to them all that the boat would not float five minutes. They stood looking at it discontentedly.

“What is to be done with it?” said Mr. Towel. “Can anyone make a suggestion?”

“I should think, sir,” Stephen said, “that if we could get some strong fibre, or some of those thin climbers that barred our way—they were not thicker than string, but there was no breaking them, and I should think that they would do—that with them we could sew the planks together and caulk them afterwards with the threads from a bit of the leg of one of our drill trousers.”

“A capital idea, Stephen. At any rate, it would be worth trying.”

“I will go and fetch some of those climbers, sir, and some long thorns to make the holes with.”

“We may as well all go, Stephen; we have nothing to do here, and at any rate it is cooler in the forest than it is on the sands. We shall want a good stock of thorns, for we are sure to break lots of them in making the holes.”

“I have a thing in my knife that will do for that, sir,” Joyce said; and he produced from his pocket a knife with many blades, one of them being a long pricker. “It was given to me the day before we sailed, and I have always wondered what use that thing could ever be. Here is a use for it at last.”

“Capital, Joyce! That is just the thing. There is flint and steel, and a tinder-box in the locker, and our best plan will be to make a fire and heat that pricker of yours red-hot. It would make the work a great deal easier, and there will be less risk of breaking it or of splitting the wood. So now we will collect dry wood and creepers and leave the thorns alone.”

This was done; but when they returned to the edge of the forest all agreed that they should lie down there in the shade until the sun had lost its power, for their position being almost on the equator the heat out on the sand was unbearable.

“It will be as well for one to keep a watch, lads,” the mate said. “We have seen no signs of natives, but there may be some about. The sun is nearly overhead, so it will be another four or five hours before we can set to work. I will take the first watch. In an hour I will wake Mr. Joyce; Mr. Embleton will follow him; then you, Nixon; that will take us on till it’s time to move.”

These arrangements were carried out, and as the sun sank towards the horizon the party went down to the beach. Some rotten wood was crumbled up and a fire quickly made, then the work of boring the holes began, and was kept up all night. As it was necessary to put them very closely together, and the piercer had to be heated two or three times for each hole, two worked by turns while the rest slept, and by sunrise the holes were all finished. Then the work of sewing the planks together began, the boat being turned on its side to allow the string, as they called it, to be passed backwards and forwards. In two hours their work was completed. Stephen cut off four or five inches of duck from the bottom of each leg of his trousers, and unravelling the thread he and the mate pressed it into the seams as fast as the sewing was completed.

“I think that that will do,” the mate said, looking with a satisfied air at the work. “Now, what it wants is a little tallow to rub in; but there is no candle handy.”

“When I was on watch, sir, I saw lots of bees flying in and out of the trees. If we could light on a hive the wax would do first-rate.”

“So it would, Steve. However, until we can find one I fancy we shall get on well enough. Five minutes’ bailing occasionally will keep her dry enough, I am sure, at any rate for river work. Now we have got the big job before us; let us have a try how we can move her.”

The nine men put their strength to the boat, but they found that the deep keel buried itself in the sand, and that they could not drag her along. Then they tried carrying her, the mate, the two boys, and two men on one side, and the other four men on the other. She was a heavy weight, but they could just manage it, and carried her for some twenty yards before they put her down.

“This will never do,” the mate said. “We can’t use our strength to advantage, else the weight would not be too great for us. Let us go up to the wood, lads, and chop four poles, turn her over, and lay her down on them. In that way I don’t think we shall have much difficulty about it.”

It took them longer than they expected, for the wood was so tough that their cutlasses produced but little impression upon it. After an hour’s hard work, however, they cut four poles, each about twelve feet long. With these they returned to the boat, laid the poles down on the sand at equal distances apart, and turned the boat over upon them; then a man took each end of a pole, the two boys taking one end together, and at a word lifted the boat with comparative ease. It was very hard work under the blazing sun, and they had to stop every hundred yards or so to rest their arms. Still they were successful, and after three hours’ toil they reached the river. The oars had been lost when

they landed, and they determined to take the bottom boards out and cut them into paddles. The first thing, however, was to bathe.

“Don’t go far out,” the mate said, “there may be sharks or alligators in the river for aught we know.”

Greatly refreshed by their dip, they took the boards out of the boat, carried them up into the shade of the trees, and with their jack-knives fashioned them into rude paddles, with thin creepers strips of wood tying down the handles to add to their strength. This took them all the afternoon. When the sun had lost its power they put the boat into the water, and made an experimental trip in her, and were glad to see that the seams were almost water-tight, and that it would need but an occasional use of the bailer to keep her clear. They at once paddled across the river to the opposite side, and then pulling the boat up made a rush for the cocoa-nut trees that they had seen the day before.

“How are we to get up?” Joyce inquired, looking with dismay at the smooth trunks.

“I learnt that on the west coast of Africa,” the mate replied. “I was there two years and got to know, I think, all there was to know with regard to steering a boat in a surf; climbing a cocoa-nut tree is easy work in comparison. Fetch the head-rope of the boat.”

This was done, and he asked who volunteered for the first climb.

“I will try it, Mr. Towel,” Joyce said, “if you will show me how.”

“Stand by the side of the tree, Joyce. Now I will put this rope round you and round the tree, leaving a certain amount of slack in the loop. Now you get a grip of the tree with your knees. Then with your hands you shift the loop up as high as you can, and lean against it. Get a sort of purchase, and so shift your knees a bit higher. No doubt you will feel it awkward at first, but after a little practice you will find no difficulty whatever in going up at a fair rate of speed.”

In spite of his experience aloft Joyce found it hard work to climb the tree. As soon as he was at the top he broke off the nuts and dropped them; when he had picked two nuts for each of the party he descended.

“They are not a bit like cocoa-nuts,” Stephen remarked as the first came to the ground. “They look more like queer-shaped gourds.”

“They do, lad,” the mate agreed. “But you see they are not ripe yet, while those we get in England are over-ripe; instead of the inside nut being enveloped in fibre the whole thing is soft, and, you see”—here he suited the action to the word—“you can cut a hole down right through, and then all that you have got to do is to drink the milk.”

The men followed the officer’s example, and were soon taking long draughts of the sweet, cool liquor, which differs widely indeed from that of the ripe cocoa-nut.

“How is it that the milk is so cool, sir?” Steve asked.

“That is more than I can tell you, for no matter how hot the weather, the milk of fresh cocoa-nuts is always cool; why it should be so I have no idea.”

After they had drunk the milk they broke open the nuts and scraped the soft cream-like paste which lined the inside, and which, when the nut ripened, would have become hard and solid.

“You will find them of different degrees of ripeness,” the mate said, “Some of them will furnish us with drink, some with food, and as there are trees along here as far as we can see, we need not worry ourselves as to victuals. Well, we have done our work for the day and will make this our camp, and talk over what is the best thing to do next.”

After much deliberation it was decided that they should paddle up the river the next day, leaving two of their number at the edge of the forest to keep a look-out for the ship.

“It is as well to see what there is on the river,” the mate said. “Of course if we come to a village we shall let ourselves drop down quietly again. And we must keep a sharp look-out as we go; it would never do to let them get a sight of us, for none of the natives of these islands are to be trusted, and I am sure that none of us wish to have our heads used as a decoration in their huts. What I hope to come upon is the site of an abandoned village. These people often shift their quarters. They have

no belongings to speak of to move, and a couple of days' labour is enough for them to put up fresh huts. But in the places they have occupied we are sure to find bananas; and if we can but get a boat-load of them we shall be victualled for a voyage, and after waiting long enough to give the ship a chance of finding us, the sooner we are off the better. Many of these islands are inhabited by tribes that spare no one who falls into their hands, and it would be better to take our chance on the sea than to remain here. There are a good many little Dutch settlements scattered about. What we have got to do is to light upon one of these. There is no mistaking them for native villages, and once we can get a point of departure we shall have no difficulty in laying our course either for Timor or Java. Stephen, I shall leave you as the junior officer here to-morrow. Wilcox will stay with you. If you see the ship you will light a big fire and throw green leaves on it to make as big a smoke as possible. They would know at once that it was a signal, for the natives would do nothing to attract notice, especially if their intentions were hostile."

"All right, sir! We will keep a sharp look-out. You won't be away many hours, I suppose?"

"Certainly not. We don't want to do any exploring. All we want to do is to look for food, and the most likely food for us to find is a troop of monkeys among the trees overhanging the river. As a rule, I should not like to shoot the beasts. They are too much like human beings. But if we can get a supply of meat it will be welcome, no matter what it may be. Of course we should not shoot many, for a couple of days would be the outside that meat would keep good here."

"But might not firing a gun bring the natives down on you, sir?" Stephen said.

"Oh, we have seen no signs of natives!" the mate said impatiently, "and there mayn't be any within miles and miles of us, probably not nearer than those hills; for I believe it is there that they principally do what cultivation there is—in the first place, because it is cooler, and in the next place because there are, we know, tremendous swamps in the low land of Sumatra, though whether this is Sumatra or not I cannot say."

The next morning the boat started as soon as a supply of cocoa-nuts, sufficient for the day, had been thrown down, two or three of the sailors adopting the means the mate had taught Joyce, and going up the trees very much more quickly than he had done.

"What do you think of this 'ere business, Master Stephen?" Wilcox said as they watched the boat making its way slowly against the current.

"I don't know, Wilcox, what to think of it."

"I calls it a risky affair," the sailor said after a pause. "Mr. Towel is a good officer, I don't say as he isn't, but I would rather see an older head on his shoulders just at present. It is all very well for him to say as there may be no natives within twenty miles; but how is he to know that? There may be a village just round the turn of the river. All these chaps are pirates when they get a chance, every mother's son of them, and there may be half a dozen war-canoes lying a mile up this river. It would be natural that they should be somewhere near its mouth, ready to start out if a sail is sighted, or news is brought to them that there is a ship anchored off a coast village within a few hours' row. As to firing a gun, in my opinion it is just madness. As he says himself, meat won't keep two days, and it is just flying in the face of Providence to risk attracting the attention of the natives, for the sake of a day's rations of fresh meat.

"It was all very well to bring the boat up here so as to lie out of sight of any canoes that happened to be passing along the shore; but I would much rather have left her where she was, though I allows it would have been risky. I would have just chucked the sail over her and covered that with an inch or so of sand, so that it would not have been noticed by a boat a short way out. But if there is a village up here, why, a boat might come down any moment to do some fishing, and there we should be caught at once; as for getting away with them makeshift paddles, it would not be worth even thinking of. I hope our chaps will come back without having seen a monkey or a village, or as much as a banana, then the mate won't be hankering to go up again; and I should make free to advise him to get the boat up amongst the trees here till we have decided that the ship won't come, and agree to make a start."

“I am with you to some extent, Wilcox, and I do think that it is a risky thing going up the river. If we were to fill up with cocoa-nuts they would last us for a week anyhow, and then when we saw another grove of them we could land and load up again.”

“You can’t take an observation, I suppose, Mr. Stephen, and find out in a rough way whereabouts we are?”

Steve shook his head. “No, Wilcox. If I had had my quadrant I might have got near enough to have made a rough guess, for I have got that watch I bought in my pocket, and I have timed it every day with the chronometers, and find that it does not gain more than half a minute a day, so that at the present moment it is not much more than a minute out by them, and if I had had the quadrant I could have made a pretty close calculation. We were about a degree and a half south at noon before that cyclone struck us, but I don’t see that that would help us now.”

“It is a pity, sir,” the sailor said, “for it would help us wonderful if we could find out our position within fifty miles or so.”

“I wish we could, Wilcox;” and Stephen sat for some time thinking. At last he said, “I might, anyhow, find out in a rough sort of way whether we have been blown north or south. We will see if we can find a perfectly straight stick, ten or twelve feet long. If I fix that upright in sand the shadow would help us. It was the 25th of March yesterday, and the sun at noon would therefore be exactly overhead of the line at twelve o’clock. Therefore, if we have been blown north, we should get a very short shadow to the south at twelve o’clock; whereas if we have been blown south, there would be a shadow north. It might not be more than an inch long; but even that would tell us something.”

They selected a long straight stick, drove it deeply into the sand, walked round it several times so as to assure themselves that it was perfectly upright, and then returned again to the shelter of the trees. An hour later the sound of a gun came to their ears.

“He has found some of them monkeys,” Wilcox growled.

Three more shots were heard. “How far are they off, do you think?” Stephen asked.

“I dunno, sir. If it was on the open sea and calm like this, I should say they might be two or three miles, but in this ’ere forest there ain’t no saying at all. I don’t reckon they would be above two miles anyhow, that is if the stream is as strong up there as it is here. They were making very slow way against it when they started. I reckon they have been gone about an hour, and they would not have got more than two miles away against this stream. Well, I hope that they will be content now and turn back again.”

Half an hour passed, then they heard a gun again; it was quickly followed by another and another.

“More monkeys,” Wilcox exclaimed in a tone of disgust.

“I hope it is monkeys,” Stephen said. “Listen. There are four more shots close together.”

The sailor leapt to his feet. “I believe you are right, sir, that cussed firing has brought the natives down upon them. They would not want to keep on firing at the monkeys. We shall hear in a minute if they fire again. They have all emptied their pieces. If they load quick and fire again it will be a bad sign. There they are!” he broke off as two shots were heard. “I am afraid that settles it, sir, and settles us too, for if they are attacked there ain’t a ghost of a chance of their getting away, and there won’t be much more chance of our doing so.”

Four more shots were heard, and then all was quiet. “Now, sir, we will be getting pretty deep in among these trees, keeping close to the bank, so that we can look through the bushes without being seen. If the boat comes along all right, there ain’t no harm done; if it don’t come along after a bit, we shall know what has happened.”

Picking up his gun, Wilcox was about to turn off into the wood when Stephen said:

“We had better take three or four cocoa-nuts each, Wilcox. There is no saying whether we shall come back to this place, and it is as well to have something to eat.”

Each tied some nuts together, threw them over their shoulders, and started along the river bank. The stream was bordered by a thick undergrowth, which afforded an effectual screen for anyone behind it. After going for about a quarter of a mile they stopped to listen. There was a faint throbbing sound in the air.

“Paddles!” Steve exclaimed.

“Ay, and native paddles, sir. Our men don’t paddle like that, and I fancy,” he went on after listening again, “there is more than one canoe. That settles it, sir. There isn’t a chance of our ever seeing our mates again.”

“Oh, don’t say that, Wilcox! Even if some have been killed, the others may have been taken prisoners. I can’t believe they have all been murdered.”

“Well, I hope not, sir, but it looks very black. If they had pounced upon them sudden, and there had been no fighting, they might have kept them prisoners a day or two till they made a grand feast and killed them; but that firing we heard settles it to my mind. I should say there ain’t no manner of doubt that our fellows will have killed some of the niggers, and I expect that the two canoes closed in on them, and then it would be all over in a minute.”

When the canoes were within a quarter of a mile the rowers broke into a sort of chant, with occasional wild shouts and yells.

“There they come,” Wilcox said as two long canoes, paddling abreast, rounded a turn in the river a short distance away. “There must be something like fifty men in each canoe.”

In a short time the canoes came along at a high rate of speed. The sailor gave a sudden exclamation of fury.

“What is it?” Steve asked.

“Don’t you see, sir, in the stern of each of the canoes, piled up by the steering oar, there are some heads.”

“I can’t look at them,” Steven said, drawing back from his peep-hole through the leaves.

“They are whites,” the sailor muttered. “There ain’t no doubt about it. I would give all my pay for the voyage to have the *Tiger’s* crew here, that we might give them murdering villains a volley.”

But Stephen did not hear him; he had thrown himself down, and the tears were running down his cheeks. The loss of the second mate, who had always been cheery and kind, and of his fellow apprentice, Joyce, completely unnerved him. Up to now he had hoped, but what before had been doubt as to their fate had now been converted into certainty.

“Don’t give way, Master Steve,” the sailor said, stooping over him and laying his hand on his shoulder. “It is a bad job, there ain’t no denying it. What happened to them half an hour ago may happen to us before long; we have got to be up and doing, sir.”

“You are right, Wilcox,” Steve said, as he rose to his feet. “In the first place, could you count the heads?”

“No; there was a pile of them in each boat; there may have been three, there may have been four in each.”

“Well, one thing is certain, Wilcox; we must find out if any of them are still alive, and if so we must try and get them out of the Malays’ hands.”

“I am ready to try, sir. When a chap sees such a thing as that he don’t seem to care much for his life; and at least if we are caught we can polish off a few of the villains before we go under, so I am game to do anything you may order.”

“It is not for me to order, Wilcox; I am only a young apprentice, and you are an experienced sailor; and now that we are alone and in danger together, it is for you to lead.”

“Well, if that is the way you look at it, sir, I am willing to do all I can; and if we find there is any of our mates alive we will get them out if it is possible, never fear.”

“Do you think those canoes are going to put to sea?” Steve asked.

“Not they; they have just gone down to the mouth of the river to see whether that boat came from a ship lying off the shore or whether it was alone. There, do you hear those yells? They have got out of the canoes, and found the place where we camped last night. We walked about there a good bit, and it ain’t likely they will be able to find out whether there was seven or nine of us. Besides, I don’t think they will look much, for they would take it for certain we should all go up the river together; and so we should have done if it had not been that you and I were left behind to look out for a sail.”

In half an hour the two canoes came back again. They both kept well over to the opposite side of the river to avoid the full force of the current, and the sailor and Stephen attempted to count the heads in their sterns. They could not make out the number, but were inclined to agree that the two dark masses were about the same size.

“I think there can only be three in each boat,” Steven said. “In that case one man may have been made prisoner; at any rate, Wilcox, we will go on and see.”

As soon as the canoes had gone round the bend of the river, they proceeded on their way. The ground presently became exceedingly swampy, and they could see by the pieces of dead wood and litter caught among the bushes, that in times of flood the river must overflow its banks and extend a long distance into the forest. From time to time they had to wade waist-deep across channels by which the water from the marsh was draining slowly into the river. Before crossing these, at Wilcox’s suggestion they each cut down a bush and beat the water with it.

“I expect there are no end of alligators in this swamp,” the sailor said; “and I know that the natives, before they cross streams where the brutes are likely to be hiding, beat the water with sticks or bushes to frighten them away.”

It was hard work walking, for they often sunk knee-deep in the wet soil, but after toiling for nearly an hour they heard a confused noise ahead, and could ere long make out the beating of drums and the wild shouts of Malays, mingled with a deep roaring sound made by horns. They now went on more cautiously, and presently could make out through the trees a large native village standing upon rising ground by the side of the river. Creeping cautiously to the edge of the bush they could see that a large number of men, women, and children were assembled in an open space between the houses and the water. The women were bringing bundles of wood, and a column of smoke rising in the centre of the crowd showed that the preparation for a feast had begun.

“If we had but one of our ten-pounders loaded with grape with us,” Wilcox said, “I would pour a volley into those black devils if it cost me my life afterwards.”

“What do you think they are going to do, Wilcox?”

“I reckon there ain’t much doubt about it,” the sailor replied; “they are going to make a feast of our mess-mates.”

Stephen uttered an exclamation of horror and disgust. “Do you mean to say that they are cannibals, Wilcox?”

“In course I can’t say for certain, Master Steve. Some of these tribes are cannibals and some ain’t, and I reckon by what I see going on that those villains are. Are you a good climber, sir?”

“Do you mean climbing a tree. I have never had much practice at that, Wilcox, but I dare say I could manage it.”

“Well, sir, you are lighter and more active than I am, and I was thinking that if you could get up to the top of this tree you would have a view down over the village. The leaves are pretty thick, and as the niggers are busy there is not much chance of their looking about for a man up a tree. You see the village ain’t above a hundred and fifty yards away, and the ground ain’t more than twenty feet above the river. I should say that this tree was seventy or eighty feet high, so that from the top you can get a view pretty well over the place; if there is one of our chaps there he may be lying tied up somewhere. Of course he might be in a hut, but it is much more likely that they would have just chucked him down until they wanted him. I think if you got on my shoulder you would be able to

get hold of that lowest branch where it bends down, and climb along it to the trunk; after that the branches come pretty thick together.”

“I think I could manage that easily enough.”

“Well, then, here goes,” the sailor said, and took up his post beneath where the bough was lowest. “If you can’t reach it from my shoulder, sir, you step on my head. I can hold you easy enough. You keep the trunk as far as possible between you and the village.”

“The leaves are thick up high,” Steve said, looking up at the tree; “directly it gets above the level of these smaller trees it spreads its branches out well.”

“Now, jump upon my back, sir, and then climb upon my shoulders. You had best take hold of my hands to steady yourself.”

It was necessary, as the sailor had suggested, for Steve to stand upon his supporter’s head before he could get hold of a branch sufficiently strong to bear his weight. As soon as he did so he drew himself up, and was soon climbing the main trunk. The higher he got the more convinced was he that he would not be observed by the natives, for the trees behind him formed a background, and therefore he could not be seen against the sky. He kept, however, as the sailor had told him, on the other side of the trunk, and when he had gained the smaller branches at the top of the tree he looked out through an opening in the foliage. The village seemed to lie almost at his feet, and he could see every object on the ground. It was not long before he perceived a figure lying full length in front of one of the huts, close to the spot where the people were gathered. It was certainly an European, and from the whiteness of the trousers he felt sure that it was either the mate or Joyce. He counted the number of huts, and found that the one beside which the figure was lying was the eighth in the line facing the river. There were two lines of huts with a sort of street between them. Behind the second row the rise on which the village was situated fell rapidly away and the jungle grew almost up to the back of the huts. Those in the second line stood somewhat further apart than those in the first, and he observed that the sixth house in the back line was opposite the eighth in the front. Having gathered this information he descended the tree.

“What news, sir?” the sailor asked, as Stephen dropped from the bough to his side.

“There is one of our comrades lying by the huts, Wilcox. I can tell by his white ducks that it is either Mr. Towel or Joyce; whether he is alive or dead, of course I can’t say. I did not see him move, but no doubt he would be tied hand and foot. I saw nothing of the others, and there would be no reason why he should be treated differently from them if he were dead.”

“You may be sure of that. Well, that is better than I had hoped. If we can save one it will be something.”

“I have been examining the ground,” Stephen went on, “and we could work round close up to the second row of huts. We must count six of them, then go along by the side of the sixth and cross the street to the hut opposite. The prisoner is lying in front of that, I mean on the river side of it. Of course, there is no doing anything until the sun has set, except that we might work round to that hut. It will be easier to get through this horrid swamp before it gets dark than afterwards, and there will be less fear of our stumbling and breaking a branch. What time do you think it is now?”

“I don’t think it is more than eight bells yet,” Wilcox said. “It is a lot of hours to wait, and I would give a good bit to be out of the swamp before it gets dark. Howsomever, if we keep along by the river coming back we can’t lose our way, that is one comfort. Well, let us work round at once, and then we shall see how the land lies. It is like enough that as soon as they have got a big fire made up, and the cooking begun, they will most of them turn in for a sleep till the heat of the day is over, and begin their feast after sundown. They generally do sleep half the day, and then keep it up half the night.”

Accordingly they started through the wood, and in a quarter of an hour found themselves at the foot of the rising ground on which the village stood. They had counted the huts, and now crawled up through the thick bushes and stood within a few yards of the sixth hut. The swamp had been very deep on the way, and they had had the greatest difficulty in getting through it. Stephen had once sunk

below his waist in the mud, and would have been unable to extricate himself, had not the sailor held on by a young tree with one hand while he stretched out the other to him.

“I am all right now as far as colour goes, Wilcox. Now, do you stay here and I will crawl along by the side of the hut and have a look up and down the street. I did not see a soul between the row of huts when I was in the tree.”

When Stephen peeped out by the side of the hut he saw that there were several people about, apparently returning from the spot where they had congregated. He rejoined his companion, and they waited an hour. By this time perfect silence had fallen on the village. The heat was intense, and even in the forest all sound had ceased, as if birds and insects were alike indulging in a mid-day sleep.

“I will go and have a look again now,” Stephen said. “If I find no one about I will cross the street and try to cut the ropes, and bring him here at once. If there is a guard over him I will come back again to you. We ought to be able to silence the guard without his giving the alarm, especially as he is likely to be half-asleep.”

“You had better leave your pistols here, Master Steve, and take your cutlass. A pistol-shot now would bring the whole village down on us, and we should have no chance of getting through the swamp with a hundred of those fellows after us. You had better draw your sword, and leave the scabbard and belt here. In the first place, it is handier to have the sword ready; and it is not so likely to knock against anything when you have got it in your hand as it would be trailing behind you as you crawl along. I shall be on the look-out, sir, and shall be by your side in a brace of shakes if you hail.”

Stephen parted the bushes, and then stepped lightly to the corner of the hut. Not a soul was to be seen moving about, and he dashed across to the house opposite, crawled along by its side, and then looked round. The great fire had burned low, and Stephen shuddered as his eye fell upon the mass of embers and thought of what was lying below them. There was no one about—the whole of the natives had retired to their huts. In another moment he was beside the prisoner. It was Joyce. Bands of cord-like creepers were wrapped round his legs; his wrists were tied together, and from them a rope went to a peg four feet beyond him, extending his arms at full length beyond his head. A similar fastening from his ankles kept his legs at full stretch in the other direction. Fastened thus, the Malays evidently considered that there was no necessity for a guard over him.

“Joyce, old fellow,” Stephen whispered in his ear, “are you conscious?”

The lad opened his closed eyes with a start.

“Don’t speak,” Stephen went on.

“Is it really you, Steve, or am I dreaming?”

“You are awake enough, Tom. I am here with Wilcox and will soon get these things off you.” Drawing his jack-knife he cut the bonds. “Do you think that you can walk, Tom?”

“Yes, the things were not very tight, only being pegged out like this I could not move an inch.”

Stephen was lying down by his side while he cut the fastenings. He now looked round again.

“There is no one in sight, Tom, but you had better wriggle yourself along until you get to the corner of the hut.”

As soon as they were round the corner they stood up. As they did so, the sailor put his head out through the bushes and waved them a silent cheer. Stephen went first, and as soon as he saw that the street was empty he beckoned to his companion, and they ran across to the other side; a moment later they joined the sailor. The latter gave a grip to Joyce’s hand, and then held out to him a cocoa-nut he had just cut open in readiness. This he seized eagerly and took a long drink.

“I was choking with thirst,” Joyce gasped, as he finished the contents of the nut.

“Take care how you go through the bushes,” the sailor whispered, as he turned and led the way; “everything is so quiet that a rustle might be heard.”

They went along with the greatest caution. Their bare feet fell noiselessly on the spongy soil, but sometimes as they sank into the mud the suck of the air as they drew them out made a sound that startled them. At last they reached the tree where they had left all the cocoa-nuts with the exception

of the one that the sailor had brought on. When they stopped, Joyce threw himself down and burst into tears.

“Leave me alone,” he said, as Stephen began to speak to him, “I shall be better directly, but it has been awful. I will tell you about it afterwards. I tried to make up my mind to stand it bravely, and it is the getting out of it when there did not seem to be a chance in the world that has upset me.”

In five minutes he rose again to his feet. “I am ready to go on now,” he said.

“Yes, I think it is time to be moving, sir. As soon as those beggars wake up and find you have gone, they will set out in chase, and the longer start we get the better.”

CHAPTER V. AGAIN ON THE ISLAND

Over such ground it was impossible to hurry, but in three-quarters of an hour they reached the edge of the wood.

“I have been thinking that we had better take to the water for a bit,” Stephen said. “They are sure to think that you have made for the coast, and they will not be long in finding our footmarks. Though I don’t know much about the Malays, I expect they can follow a track like all other savages. The only thing to settle is whether we shall swim across the river and go along in that direction, or keep on this side. We have not seen anything of alligators, and I don’t think the sharks ever cross the bars and come into fresh water.”

“All right, sir! If you think it is best to cross, I am ready,” Wilcox said. “A dip will do us good, for the heat in that wood is enough to roast an ox; besides, it will wash the mud off us. But we must look about for a log to put the gun and our pistols and the ammunition on, we must not risk wetting that.”

There were many pieces of drift-wood by the edge of the water, and choosing one of them they fastened the weapons and cartridges on the top, and then, entering the water and pushing it before them, swam over to the opposite side. Then taking the arms again they let the log drift down the river, and keeping in the water ankle-deep they followed the stream down to the sea, and continued their course along the sand washed by the surf.

“How long a start do you think we shall get, Wilcox?” Stephen asked.

“I should say that two hours is as much as we can hope for.”

“Well, we shall be a good long way off by that time. I feel a new man after that swim.”

“So do I,” Joyce said, speaking more briskly than he had hitherto done.

“Well, we had better set off at a trot,” the sailor said. “I expect those beggars can run a good deal faster than we can. The great thing is for us to get so far away before it gets dark that they won’t be able to see our figures. If it is eight bells before they fairly set off after us, they will only have a little better than two hours and a half. They are sure to be thrown out for a bit at the mouth of the river. They will see our footsteps at the water side, but won’t know whether we have crossed or have kept along on that side. Very likely some of them will go one way and some the other, still they are sure to have a talk and a delay. They ought not to travel twice as fast as we have, at any rate, and they would have to do that to catch us before it is dark.”

They set off at a brisk trot. The sand was fairly hard below the spot where the surf rushed up over it, and the walking was easy in comparison to that in the swamp or on loose sand. Still it was hot work. The sun blazed down upon them, there was not a breath of wind, and they were drenched with perspiration. They kept on steadily, however, slackening only occasionally into a walk for two or three minutes, and then going on again at a sharp pace.

“They won’t catch us before it gets dark,” the sailor said confidently. “I reckon we must be making near seven knots an hour, and even a Malay could not go at fourteen; besides, they will have to keep a sharp look-out for footmarks in the sand above water-mark, as we might at any time come up from the water and take to the forest. Anyhow, we must keep it up as long as we can go. We ain’t running for amusement, it is for a big prize, for our lives depend on our keeping ahead.”

Anxiously they watched the sun as it sank down towards the horizon, and there was an exclamation of satisfaction as it disappeared below the water.

“Another half-hour and we shall be able to take it easy,” Stephen said. “I should not think they would keep up the search after dark, and then we could safely take to the forest. The wind is springing up already, and this light drifting sand will cover all signs of our footsteps before morning.”

“We had better keep in the water as long as we can, Master Steve. They can’t trace our footsteps here, but they might under the trees. These sort of chaps are like dogs. I expect they can pretty well follow you by smell, and the hope of getting heads will keep them at it as long as there is the slightest chance of their overtaking us.”

“Well, we may as well be on the safe side anyhow, Wilcox, and will keep on here as long as we can drag our feet along. We have got no boots to pinch our corns, and every time the surf rushes up it cools our feet, so we ought to be able to keep on till eight bells in the middle watch, by that time I should think we shall have gone something like forty miles from that river.”

“All that,” the sailor agreed. “It was about four bells when we swam across, and in the four hours we have certainly gone twenty-four knots, and I should say a bit further than that. If we only make three knots for the next six hours, we shall have logged over forty by eight bells, and I should say that even the Malays will hardly come as far as that, especially as the men who take this side won’t be sure that we have not gone the other, and have been caught by their mates.”

They kept steadily on, but their speed gradually abated, and for the last two hours before the hands of Stephen’s watch pointed to twelve o’clock, they stumbled rather than walked.

“I think that will do,” he said at last, “it is nearly eight bells now. Let us tread in each other’s footsteps as well as we can, so that there shall only be one line of marks.”

The change from the firm sand to the yielding drift—in which their feet sank three or four inches—finished them, and although they had not more than a hundred yards to walk to the trees, it seemed to them that they would never get there. At last they reached the edge of the forest, staggered a few paces in, and then without a word dropped down and almost instantaneously fell asleep.

The sun was high when they woke. Stephen was the first to get on to his feet. He went to the edge of the trees and looked across. To his satisfaction he saw that the drifting sand had obliterated all trace of their passage.

“Then I vote,” Wilcox said, when he was told the news, “that we go a bit further into the wood and camp there for the day. I am just aching from head to foot.”

“I think we must go on a bit further, Wilcox. You see there are no cocoa-nuts here, and we must keep on until we come to a grove of them. The trees are never far apart, and we may not have a mile to go. We certainly can’t stay here all day without something to eat and drink. You see we threw our nuts away when we started.”

“I suppose you are right, sir,” the sailor said, slowly getting up on to his feet; “but it is hard, after such a run as we made yesterday, to have to get up anchor again.”

“Well, we can take it easily, Wilcox, and we will stop at the first cocoa-nut tree we come to. Now, Tom, as we go along you shall tell us about yesterday, we have not heard a word yet.”

“Well,” began Joyce, “we paddled up the river, as you know. It was as much as we could do sometimes to make head against the current. I suppose we had been gone about an hour when we saw a troop of monkeys on the boughs of a tree overhanging the water. They did not seem a bit afraid of us, but chattered and screamed. We shot three of them. I did not fire, for I could not bring myself to kill one of them. It was like shooting at a child. We picked them out of the water and put them in the boat, and then paddled on again. We had just got to a turn in the river when two big canoes came round the corner. It was of no use our trying to get away, for they could go six feet to our one. Mr. Towel stood up in the stern and held both his arms up to show that we were friendly, but directly afterwards a shower of spears came whizzing down at us. One hit Jackson, who was in the bow, somewhere in the body. He fired at them, and then fell down in the bottom of the boat. Then the rest of us fired, and for a moment they sheered off, but the men had just time to reload their guns when the Malays came at us. The men fired again, and a moment later the canoes ran alongside. We took to our pistols, but the Malays came leaping on board like demons.

“I don’t know anything more about that part of the business, for I got a crack on the head with a club, and did not know anything more till I was hauled on shore and chucked down. Then I saw

them bring from the canoes the heads of all the others. It was frightful. Then they dragged the bodies out from the bottom of the canoes. They had all been stripped, and I believe I should have fainted if a big Malay had not given me a tremendous kick, and made me walk up to the village. As soon as I got there they tied me up and staked me out. There was a tremendous noise and shouting and yelling, but what was done I don't know, as I could see nothing but the sky and the wall of the hut. It was an awful time; first because I knew that sooner or later they would kill me, and in the next place, because I was driven pretty nearly mad by the flies and things that settled on my face. Of course I could not brush them away, and all that I could do was to shake my head, and they did not seem to mind that. It seems ridiculous that, after seeing one's friends killed and knowing that one is going to be killed oneself, one should worry over flies, but I can tell you I went nearly out of my mind with irritation at the tickling of their feet. It seemed to me that I was there for ages, though I knew by the height of the sun that it was only about noon. The thirst, too, was fearful, and I made up my mind that the sooner they came and killed me the better. I found myself talking all sorts of nonsense, and I do think that I should have gone out of my mind before the day was over. When first I heard your voice I thought it must be a dream, like some of the other ideas that came into my mind. I had thought of you both when I was first fastened up, and wondered whether the Malays would find you. I had even thought at first that if you only knew where I was you might try to get me away after dark if I was not killed before that, and you can guess my feelings when I became convinced that it was really you. How did you know what had happened?"

"You must have been insensible for a good bit, Tom. We heard the firing, and thought that there was too much of it for shooting monkeys, and that you must have been attacked, so we made our way along among the bushes by the bank. Presently the two canoes came down, and we made out some heads in the stern of each boat. They went to the mouth of the river, to see, no doubt, if there was a ship there. They came back again in half an hour. We tried to count the heads, and both of us thought that there were about the same number in each boat. Of course we could not be sure, but we determined to come on to the village and find out for certain. I climbed up a high tree a short distance from it—the one where we came upon the cocoa-nuts—and made you out lying beside a hut. I knew by the white ducks that it was either you or poor Towel. Then we worked round, waited until the village had gone off to sleep, and then came for you. You see the Malays had no idea that there were any more whites about, and therefore took no trouble about you. No doubt they thought that the boat had escaped from a wreck, and that all who had got away in her had gone up the river together. Ah! there is a cocoa-nut. I am glad our walk is over, for I am beginning to feel hot and thirsty."

"So am I, and stiff and sore all over."

The cocoa-nut tree was the first of a grove. Stephen, who was by far the most active of the party, soon climbed one of the trees, and threw a score of nuts down. They went a little distance further back into the forest. Each consumed the contents of four nuts, then two of them lay down to sleep again, while the other kept watch. The march was not resumed until after sunset. They had another meal of cocoa-nuts before they started, and each took three nuts for use on the journey. They again walked at the edge of the water, as they had done the day before. It was by far the pleasantest way, and they kept on until daylight appeared, and then again went into the wood.

"I should think now," Stephen said, as after a good sleep they ate a cocoa-nut breakfast, "that we need not bother any more about the Malays of that village. It is quite possible that we passed another last night, though of course the sand-hills would have prevented our seeing it. The question is now, what are we to do next?"

"That is what I was thinking all the time that we were walking last night," Joyce said. "We can't keep on tramping and living on cocoa-nuts for ever."

"That is quite certain, Tom, but there is no reason why we should do so. There must be some villages on this coast, and when we start this evening I vote we keep along here instead of going down to the water. Where there is a village there must be fishing canoes, and all we have got to do is to take

one, and put to sea. I don't mean to say that we can get in and push straight away, for we must have some provisions; but when we have found a village we can hide up near it, and get as many cocoa-nuts as we can carry. Besides, there are sure to be bananas and other fruit-trees close by, and after laying our cocoa-nuts down by the edge of the water, we can go up and cut as many bananas as we like, and then we shall have enough food to last us ten days or so. There is one comfort, wherever we may land there cannot be a worse lot of Malays than there are about here."

"That is a capital plan, Master Stephen," Wilcox said. "I have not been thinking of a village, except as to how to get past it; but, as you say, there is no reason why we should not make off in a canoe."

The next night they kept along just inside the trees, and had walked but two hours when they found that these ended abruptly, and that they stood on the edge of a clearing.

"Here is your village, Stephen."

"Yes; one hardly hoped to find one so soon. Well, the first thing is to go down and search in the sand-hills for canoes."

Four or five were found lying together in a hollow some twenty yards beyond high-water mark. They examined them carefully.

"Any of them will do," Wilcox said, "but I think this is the best one. It is a little larger than the others, and the wood feels newer and sounder. I expect she is meant for four paddlers, and she will carry us and a fair cargo well."

"That is settled, then," Stephen said. "I propose that we go back some little distance from the village, get our cocoa-nuts at once, and bring them back and hide them in the bushes not far from where the clearing begins. It will save time to-morrow."

"Why should we not go to-night?" Joyce asked. "It is only about nine o'clock now, and if we get the cocoa-nuts near here, we can make two or three journeys down to the boat with them, and be off before midnight."

"So we might, Tom. What do you say, Wilcox?"

"The sooner the better, says I," the sailor replied. "As Mr. Joyce says, we can be off by eight bells easy, and we shall be out of sight of this village long before daybreak."

"Well, Wilcox, will you and Mr. Joyce get the cocoa-nuts, and while you are doing it I will creep round this clearing and get bananas. I can see lots of their broad leaves over there. As I get them I will bring them to this corner, and by the time you have got a store of nuts, I shall have a pile of bananas. I think you had better go four or five hundred yards away before you cut the nuts, for they come down with such a thump that any native who is awake here might very well hear them."

"We will go a bit away, sir," Wilcox said, "but if we take pains to let them drop each time just as there is a puff of wind, there is no fear of their hearing them."

They separated, and Stephen, entering the clearing, soon came upon a banana tree with long bunches of the fruit. Two of these were as much as he could carry, and his portion of the work was soon done, and indeed he had carried them down to the water's edge before his companions had brought three loads of cocoa-nuts to the point where he had left them. He helped to take these down, then the canoe was lifted and carried to the edge of the water, being taken in far enough to float each time the surf ran up. Then the fruit was placed in it.

"I wish we had poor Mr. Towel with us to take her through the surf," Wilcox said.

"I wish we had; but fortunately it is not very heavy."

"No, sir; it is sure not to be," the sailor said. "I have noticed that they always put their villages at points where the surf is lighter than usual. I suppose the water is shallower, or deeper, or something. I don't know what it is, but there is certainly a difference. Besides, there has been no wind to speak of since we landed, and the waves are nothing to what they were then. Now, gentlemen, as I am more accustomed to this sort of thing than you are, I will take the place in the stern, where I can steer her a bit. The moment she floats as the surf comes in, and I see the chance is a good one, I will give the

word; then we will all paddle as hard as we can, and go out as the surf draws back, so as to meet the next wave before it breaks. Everything depends on that.”

They took their places in the canoe, and grasped the paddles that they had found in her. Two or three waves passed under them, and then they saw one higher than the others approaching them.

“We will go out on the back of this one,” Wilcox said. “Paddle the moment the surf lifts the canoe, and don’t let her be washed up a foot.”

The wave fell over with a crash, and a torrent of foam rushed up towards them.

“Now,” Wilcox exclaimed, as the white line reached the bow, “paddle for your lives!”

For a moment, in spite of their desperate efforts, they were carried upwards, then the canoe seemed to hang in the air, and they were riding forward with the speed of an arrow on the receding water.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.