

Brereton Frederick Sadleir

With Wellington in Spain: A Story of the Peninsula



Frederick Brereton

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F. S. Brereton

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CHAPTER I

Septimus John Clifford & Son

No cooler spot could be imagined on the hottest midsummer day than the picturesque forecourt of the premises occupied by Septimus John Clifford & Son, wine merchants, importers and exporters.

Behind the forecourt, crowding the latter closely towards the edge of the River Thames, some few hundred yards below the point where the stream swept and swirled through the arches of the bridge, stretched an irregular block of buildings, that portion farthest from the court presenting a somewhat severe frontage to the river, its many floors, its narrow windows, and its winches and hoists dangling outside serving to show that it was there that Septimus John Clifford & Son stored their goods from oversea. Huge doors leading by wide, shallow steps to the basement hinted that it was through these easy portals that the wines of France, of Spain, and of Portugal found access to the vast vaults stretching away behind the muddy bank of the river.

The forecourt and its immediate background bore a very different appearance, for the garden, encompassed by moss-grown walls, was ablaze with flowers, while one huge mulberry tree reared its foliage before the main entrance of the building, its leaves rustling against the curious old dormer windows and strangely shaped balconies which adorned the front. Beneath the grateful shade cast by that mulberry tree lay Septimus John Clifford himself, at full length in a capacious basketwork chair, oblivious of his surroundings, careless even of the persistent flies that hovered about the gaudy silk handkerchief with which he had covered his head. Mr. Septimus was asleep. Clerks in the busy office within the huge bay window, not five yards from him, turned the leaves of musty ledgers with pathetic care lest they should awake the ruler of this establishment. The office boy, an urchin with round, rosy cheeks, swelled to the point of bursting, gathered up his feet upon the staves of his chair when the head clerk admonished him for shuffling them, and cast an anxious eye out through the wide-open window. Marlow, the clerk nearest to that sleeping form, almost held his breath; for he was apt to grunt and expand his lungs with a hiss that was exasperating.

"One hour, I think," observed Huggins, a white-haired clerk, who seemed to be the head of the office, consulting a silver watch which was as large as a good-sized turnip. "One hour precisely, I make it."

"And four minutes," ventured his assistant, a thin, lanky man, white-haired like his comrade. "It is time to wake him."

"Yes, now; he would not forgive delay."

Huggins rose silently from the high stool on which he was seated and crossed to the door on tiptoe. He descended the picturesque steps leading from the main entrance to the place with as much care as he would have employed had he been stepping over hot bricks, and advanced to the side of his master, as if determined to leave him asleep till the very last possible moment. For that was the spirit which pervaded the establishment of Septimus John Clifford & Son. A good master was served by loyal and grateful clerks, of whom none were more loyal and thoughtful than Huggins, the stout, clean-shaven, white-haired man who had spent thirty years of his peaceful life in the office.

"Hem! Three o'clock," said Huggins, coming to a standstill and casting his eyes first at the sleeping form of his master, then at the waving foliage of the mulberry tree, and later out across the river to the southern shore, then almost devoid of houses. For we do not speak of London in this year

of grace 1913, but of London in 1810, a city of huge proportions even then, but small and puny when compared with the mass of buildings which now stretch far and wide. Smoke stacks and chimneys belching forth huge billows of dark cloud were not then such a feature of the giant capital. Green fields and waving trees came close up to the opposite bank of the Thames, while the few houses there were, the open country, and the stretch of shimmering water, with its quaint river craft, made a picture that was fascinating. From the shade and shelter of the forecourt the view was perfectly enchanting, and for a little while held all Huggins's attention, even though he looked out upon it every day of his life. Then he hemmed again, and gently touched the sleeve of the sleeper. Mr. Septimus stirred, then, hearing a cough beside him, sat up briskly, drew the handkerchief from his head, and, folding it with care, placed it in his pocket.

"Three o'clock, sir," said Huggins.

"No more?" asked Mr. Septimus.

"Five minutes past."

"Four," declared Mr. Septimus, consulting his own watch – one, too, of vast proportions. "The post has come?"

Huggins nodded.

"From Spain?"

"There are four letters."

"And from Portugal?" asked Mr. Septimus eagerly.

"One only."

"Drat the war!" cried Mr. Septimus, sitting forward with energy. "First this Bonaparte, Emperor of the French, disturbs all trade by pouring his soldiers into the Peninsula, and then he keeps up the disturbance by refusing to agree that he's beaten. He's beaten, ain't he, Huggins?"

"If not quite, then nearly, sir," came the respectful answer. "But they say that Wellington has cleared Portugal of the French. Stocks of wines are coming through more freely."

The reminder seemed to hearten the master of this establishment; his face assumed a cheerful expression. Not that it had appeared seamed with care before, for Septimus was the personification of good humour. He was a short, stout little man, bald headed and slightly bandy legged. Round, inquisitive goggles sat on a broad nose that spoke of good temper. A white muffler and stock, together with an even whiter waistcoat, covered a frame which may be described as decidedly ample, while shapely legs – shapely even though prone to bandiness – were clad in snuff-coloured overalls, which fitted like the proverbial glove, and set off a figure that was decidedly attractive and gentlemanly.

He stretched out a hand and took the letters which his clerk had brought for him. Then, selecting the one from Portugal, he opened it with the blade of his penknife.

"From Dom Juan de Esteros," he said, extracting the sheet within the envelope. "Ha! That is good news. The tide of war turns to Spain, and wines are accumulating at Oporto. That is good, Huggins. Our clients will be glad to hear that we can soon replenish their cellars. Business will look up."

Huggins nodded, while his sallow features reddened a trifle; for what concerned the house of Septimus John Clifford & Son concerned him, not from the pecuniary point of view, seeing that he was paid a steady salary whether business were good or bad, but because of his sympathetic interest in the firm.

"We can do with it, sir," he said. "Things have been a little slow in the office. There has been little work after three o'clock. The clerks have been inclined to become sleepy."

"And no wonder," responded Septimus, looking up with a laugh. "Like master, like man, Huggins. Can't blame 'em for sleeping after dinner if I do. It's a bad habit, Huggins, a bad habit. All the same, I believe it helps one wonderfully. Couldn't get through these hot days if it weren't for the forty winks I snatch. But let's see. Dom Juan – ah! he thinks the time has come for us to have a

direct representative in Oporto. Talks of indifferent health caused by the anxieties of the war. Asks us to send someone."

"Ahem! Yes, sir," came from Huggins suggestively.

"To send someone," repeated Septimus. "A representative, Huggins. Eh?"

"Master Tom," came promptly from the clerk. "And son, sir – Clifford & Son."

He laid special emphasis on the last two words, causing Mr. Septimus to look up at him and discover the old servant's face glowing. As for the owner of this successful business of wine merchants, we can only say that he, too, looked enthusiastic.

"And son – yes, Huggins," he said. "How long is it since there was a son?"

"Seventeen years three months and two days, sir," was the answer. "Master Tom's age exactly."

"To the minute almost," laughed Septimus. "He's the one; he shall represent the firm at Oporto."

By the interest and attention these two gave to the affair one would have imagined that it was an entirely novel subject of discussion, whereas, to be precise, this quaint pair had long since settled the matter. For the "& Son" had become a feature of the business. Two centuries earlier Clifford & Son had first hung their trade sign outside those same premises, only in those days the house was exceedingly small and unpretentious. Still, there had been a son in the business, and thereafter, as the years passed, a succession of sons, while Septimus John had become, as it were, part of the stock-in-trade of this old house which boasted of the "& Son" always attached to it. However, in latter days, there had come a time when that old boast had almost failed them, for Mr. Septimus had succeeded his father at the age of thirty, exactly and precisely one day after the birth of his own boy. It was this same infant, christened Septimus John Esteros Thomas Clifford, who was now under discussion.

"You'll send him, of course, sir," exclaimed Huggins.

"Of course. He'd have gone two years ago if it hadn't been for the war. Drat the war, Huggins!" cried Septimus peevishly. "It has upset all my plans and ruined business. Here's Master Tom kicking his heels about the place and attempting to learn Spanish and Portuguese, when he should be in Oporto learning the languages simply because he couldn't help doing so, and at the same time attending to the business. I did that. I went out when I was sixteen, and came home for good at thirty. The son in this firm has been wanting ever since, for always the father has managed here in London, while the son has worked the business in Oporto. Tom shall go, and quickly too; I'll see him. What's that?"

Both heads were raised promptly, while Mr. Septimus and his clerk remained in their respective attitudes listening intently. From the room behind the wide bay window where the office staff worked there came not so much as a sound. Doubtless the white-haired junior clerk and his helpers still pored over their ledgers, while the fat office boy still sat with his legs curled around the supports of his stool. But from a room overhead there came the sound of strife. A girl's voice was heard, then came that of some young fellow, piercing and high pitched and querulous. The noise of a blow followed, a dull, heavy sound, which gave one the impression that a fist had descended on someone's jaw. A thud telling of a tumble came to the ears of the listeners almost immediately afterwards.

Mr. Septimus rose to his feet with agility and gathered up his letters. There was a severe look on his face as he made towards the steps leading into the house.

"Those two quarrelling," he said over his shoulder.

"Then it isn't Master Tom's doing," declared Huggins, with decision. "That Master José's always at him. He's sly, he is; he's jealous of his cousin."

"Then it'll be a good thing when they're separated. Ah! There again!" cried Mr. Septimus, as the sound of other blows came to his ears, as well as a scream of rage. "I'll go to them; this conduct is disgraceful!"

He bounded up the steps at a speed that would have surprised those who did not know him; for, as we have explained, the head of the firm of wine merchants was distinctly stout, and his appearance belied all suggestion of activity. But Septimus could move quickly when he liked, while his business hours were characterized by bustle. He stepped hurriedly across the hall and went up the wide oak

staircase two steps at a time. He was panting just a little when he reached the door of the apartment wherein the scuffle was taking place and threw it wide open. And there he stood for a little time, breathing deeply, regarding the people in the room with wide-open eyes, which seemed to fill the whole area of his spectacles and take in everything.

"Stop this instantly!" he commanded, seeing two lads struggling together in the far corner. "I have never seen anything more disgraceful."

The scene before him might well have drawn such words from the lips of the head of such a decorous firm as Septimus John Clifford & Son; for the room was in confusion. A heavy desk, occupying the centre, that would have been upset but for its weight, had been jerked out of position and now stood at an angle. A chair lay on its back, while an inkpot of large dimensions lay against the near wall with a wide puddle of ink about it, and the panelled wall itself was splashed in all directions with the same dark fluid. A young girl some sixteen years of age gripped one side of the desk, and stood there watching the contest with staring eyes that were decidedly frightened. Two lads occupied the centre of the picture, and as Septimus entered they were locked together in a firm embrace, each one endeavouring to belabour the other. But at the voice of command they broke away, one of them, a youth of medium height, promptly turning from his antagonist toward the door. The movement was the signal for the other to strike out swiftly, sending his fist crashing against the other's head, and following the cowardly movement by a kick which cut the feet of his opponent from beneath him, and brought the lad with a thud to the floor.

"That was a coward's blow!" declared Septimus hotly, advancing into the room; "the kick was contemptible. Stand away in that corner, José. I will thrash you severely if you attempt another movement."

He closed the door quietly behind him, placed a seat at the desk so that he could see all three within the room, then slowly wiped and adjusted his glasses.

"Please explain," he began icily, when finally his glasses were adjusted. "I left you here at two o'clock. You had work sufficient to last you till the evening. What is the meaning of this disgraceful interruption? You, Tom, answer."

He looked closely at each of the lads in turn, and then fixed his eyes upon the one who had been struck in such a cowardly manner by the other. In doing so Septimus Clifford looked upon the counterpart of himself. For before him was the son who was of so much importance to the house of Clifford, the son who was to represent the firm in Oporto – the one, in fact, whom the reader will already have observed was particularly favoured by Huggins. Tom was of middle height, as we have remarked, well built and solidly put together. In spite of his ruffled hair and his flushed face there was something undoubtedly attractive about the young fellow, so much so that Septimus could not fail but note it.

"Looks me square in the face and eye," he muttered beneath his breath. "That's the way with the Cliffords. Knows he's probably in for a licking, and yet don't funk it. He's ready to receive what he's earned, and ain't going to lie to lessen the punishment. Well?" he asked severely, for Septimus was not the one to show favour.

But Tom made no answer. He stood squarely facing his father, his character clearly shown upon a face that was decidedly pleasing if not exactly handsome.

"Well?" demanded Septimus again, more curtly if anything.

"Ask him, sir," came the reply, while Tom jerked his head at the lad over in the far corner where Septimus had ordered him.

"Then you," exclaimed the stout little man, turning to the second youth, he who had delivered the cowardly blow and kick. "What have you to answer?"

"He started it," came abruptly from the one questioned. "Tom called me names and struck me."

"Ah!" exclaimed Septimus, regarding the youth coldly, till the latter reddened beneath his scrutiny. "He started it, José, you say. Why?"

The youth addressed reddened even more at the question, while his eyes shifted from the face of his interrogator to Tom's, and then across to the girl's. Contrasting the two young fellows, Tom and José, one could not compliment the latter; for he seemed to be the very opposite of Tom. A year his senior, perhaps, he was lanky and lean, while his arms and legs and body seemed to writhe and twist as his eyes shifted from corner to corner. The chin disclosed weakness of character and want of firmness, to which thin lips and watery eyes added nothing. In short, José was anything but attractive.

"Why did Tom start this quarrel?" asked Septimus relentlessly, his glasses turned on José all the while.

"I don't know," came the surly answer. "He's always quarrelling."

"Then you began the matter?" said Septimus, turning upon Tom the same close scrutiny. "Why?"

"He didn't!" came abruptly from the girl, who was standing a few paces from him. "José is not telling the truth. Even though he is my brother, I can't remain quiet and know that he is blaming Tom for what is really his own fault."

José's eyes gleamed as his sister spoke. His brows were knit together and his thin lips pursed, as is the case with one in anger. At that moment this unattractive youth looked as if he would willingly have struck his own sister.

"She favours him," he cried angrily. "She's always on his side."

"Silence!" commanded Septimus sternly. "Now, Marguerite, tell me about it."

"He started to tease me," declared the girl, nodding towards her brother. "He splashed the letter I was writing with ink, and then threw some over my needlework. Tom asked him to stop, and then called him a bully. José threw the inkpot at him promptly."

"Ah!" came from the man seated in the centre. "And then?"

"Tom knocked him down twice; then they began to struggle together."

"It's a lie!" shouted José, beside himself with rage, his pale lips trembling.

"Eh?" asked Tom curtly, advancing a pace towards him, and looking threatening.

"Stop!" ordered Septimus, lifting a hand. "By rights I ought to leave you two to settle the matter between you. I have no fears as to what the result would be; for a man or youth who accuses his sister of lying deserves a thrashing, while you, José, deserve it twice over. You have lied yourself, and I myself saw you deliver a cowardly blow. You will remain here and go on with your work; Tom will come below with me. For the future try to be friendly to one another, at least till you are parted."

"Parted?" asked Tom curiously, while a scowl showed on José's face.

"Yes, parted," repeated Septimus. "The time has come for you to go to Oporto, Tom, there to act as representative of this business."

José's face was a study as he listened to the words and saw the pride and enthusiasm with which Tom was so obviously filled. Even Marguerite was regarding her cousin as if he were a hero, and, indeed, that was the light in which she was wont to look at him. For ever since he was a little fellow Tom had been Marguerite's special protector, and often and often had he saved her from her brother's ill treatment. José was, in fact, a bully. Sneaking and mean by nature, he was the very opposite of his sister, and ever since the two had been brought to the house he had been jealous of his cousin Tom. That was the secret of their ill feeling from the beginning. Provided José treated Marguerite fairly, Tom was prepared to live on good terms with him. But always José regarded Tom as a fortunate rival, as his future master; for was not Tom the son attached to the firm? And now to hear that he was to go to Oporto, there to rule the roast, filled José with envy and hatred. He could see Tom his own master, with clerks to do his bidding, while he, José, the less fortunate, was slaving at a humble desk in England. It roused his ire when he recollected that were there no Tom he himself would fill his place, and would one day be the head of the firm of Septimus John Clifford & Son.

The scowl on José's face had deepened as Septimus spoke. Tom's happy features incensed him to the point of bursting. A moment or so later, when the door had closed between him and the other

three, and while their steps still resounded in the passage, José gave full vent to his hatred and anger. He pranced up and down the room. He glared out through the window as Tom appeared, and if looks could have killed, that young fellow would have ceased to exist forthwith. Then José flung himself petulantly on to a chair, buried his face in his hands, and remained in that position for some few minutes, his restless limbs writhing and twitching meanwhile.

Suddenly, however, he sat up and stared hard at the wall opposite.

"Why not?" he asked himself, as if apropos of nothing, while a cunning leer bent his lips. "If there were no Tom, José would go to Oporto. And who would carry out the work more fittingly? Tom shall not go there. I swear that I will prevent him."

He was poring over a book half an hour later when Septimus entered the room again with the intention of having a serious conversation with him, and to all appearances José was a different individual. He was sorry for the anger he had shown, sorry that he had insulted his sister, and eager to be friendly with everyone. But, then, José was a crafty individual. That night as he lay in bed within ten feet of our hero he was concocting plans whereby to defeat the aims of Septimus, and bring about the downfall of Tom, his cousin.

CHAPTER II

Underhand Conduct

Brisk action was a characteristic of Mr. Septimus Clifford, though his portly frame gave one the impression that he might very well be a sluggard. However, the bustle in those offices and warehouses beside the river, the numerous clerks poring over ledgers and papers, and the hands at work in the vaults amidst the huge butts of wine told a tale there was no mistaking. Order and method pervaded the establishment, and the master of the business was the creator of that order and method. As we have said, too, he was a man of action.

"I'll send Tom off this day two weeks," he told the respectful Huggins on the evening of that very day on which our hero was introduced. "That will put a stop to all fighting, and no doubt separation will wipe out old enmities, and in time to come the two, Tom and José, will be capital friends. There's a boat sailing on Friday fortnight."

"The *Mary Anne*," agreed Huggins. "Takes hardware from us, consigned to the supply department of Wellington's army. There'll be no difficulty in obtaining a passage."

"Then make all arrangements, please," said Mr. Septimus briskly. "I'll have a chat with the lad, and tell him what we expect of him. Send him to me."

The interview between father and son took place beneath the mulberry, in the quaint and picturesque garden before the house in which the firm transacted business, and there, seated in his basket chair, Septimus discussed affairs with Tom.

"You'll make every effort to improve and perfect your Portuguese and Spanish," he said, "and your French will be of the utmost use; for once the Peninsula War is ended, and the French are driven out, it will be one of your duties to arrange for wines to come from their country. Of course, at Oporto you will place yourself in the hands of your uncle, Dom Juan de Esteros, and will learn the business from him. Put your back into it, boy, for Dom Juan will, I fear, not be long with us. His health, always indifferent, has been much broken by the anxieties of the past few years. And now you'd best get your things together. Take a good stock of clothing, and perhaps a good pistol is advisable, seeing that the country of Portugal is still in a condition of disorder."

It may be imagined that the following two weeks were filled with moments of interest for our hero. He was going abroad for the first time in his life. He was about to make a start in the world, and that world at this moment looked exceedingly rosy, so rosy that Tom's face shone, his eyes flashed, he carried himself jauntily, and one and all could see that he was full of good spirits to overflowing, and was eagerly awaiting the voyage.

"That Master José'd give his boots to be in his place," reflected Huggins one afternoon, as Tom went racing across the flower-decked courtyard, and Marguerite after him. "It was a bad day, Emmott, for this house when Mr. Septimus took him in and gave him a home. Not that I say that of the young lady. She's different; she's like Master Tom. We all love her."

"And dislike the brother – yes," agreed the junior clerk; "and I too have a feeling that Master José bodes no good to his cousin. See his face – he's watching the two going off down the river."

José was, in fact, lounging in the forecourt, one hand resting on the boundary wall, while his lean, lanky body and thin limbs twisted and writhed, as if to keep still were with him an impossibility. But it was not those twisting limbs that repelled the two old clerks watching him from the window – it was José's face. The brows were drawn close together, the lips were half-parted, while there was an intense look in the eyes which there was no fathoming.

"Bodes his cousin no good," Emmott ventured in low tones. "There's no love lost between 'em. Not that Master Tom isn't ready to be friendly. He is; for he's one of the easygoing sort. Still, he's

a stickler for what's proper, and he's stood by Miss Marguerite as if he were her own brother. That José's scowling."

The lanky youth was actually doing that. No one could doubt the fact; but nevertheless it was impossible to read the thoughts passing through his brain. Could they have done so, both Huggins and Emmott would have found ample reason for their feelings of uneasiness. For José was scheming. Jealous of his cousin, as we have said already, he had been envious of Tom almost from the day when Mr. Septimus had brought his orphaned nephew and niece to his house. The children of Mr. Septimus's sister, José and Marguerite, had been born in Oporto, and had had the misfortune to lose first their mother and then their father, brother of Dom Juan de Esteros. Thereafter they had lived with Mr. Septimus as if they were his own children. And here was José scheming to wreck his cousin's chances in the world, whereas gratitude towards his Uncle Septimus should have made of him a fast friend, and one ready to help Tom to the utmost.

"Going to Oporto, there to lord it over the office," he was muttering between his teeth, as he watched Tom and Marguerite departing along the river bank. "That leaves me here to slave over musty ledgers and to learn the business from that old slowcoach Huggins. Suppose I'll always be a clerk. One of these days Tom will come back as master, and then he'll order me about."

It was a petty, childish manner in which to look at the matter, and showed the narrow-minded view which José took of life. Contrary from his cradle almost, he was mean in thought and act, and here was one of his mean thoughts muttered beneath his breath, while his scowling eyes followed the retreating figure of his cousin. José writhed his way back into the house, and appeared again with a cap. Huggins, watching from the office, saw him go away along the bank of the river after the retreating figures of the other two.

"He's not up to any good, I'd lay," he told his fellow clerk, the white-haired Emmott. "What's he following for, I'd like to know."

"Then let me go after him?" asked the other. "There's a message to be taken along to the people who should have delivered goods to us this morning, and I may just as well take it as George, the office boy."

The matter was arranged on the instant, and within five minutes Emmott sauntered away in the wake of José. He followed him at a discreet distance along the river bank, till José dived in amongst a number of houses which clambered down to the water's edge. He caught sight of him again beyond them, and half an hour later watched him in converse with a ruffianly looking fellow whom he had accosted.

"Don't know the man," Emmott told himself. "Never saw him in my life before, so far as I am aware. José seems to know him. He's – he's giving him money."

Half-hidden behind the wall surrounding a warehouse, one of the many erected there – for this was a busy part of the city, and huge barges found deep water when the tide was up, and could load right alongside the bank – Emmott watched as José passed something to the hand of the man he was conversing with. The latter, a huge fellow, dressed somewhat like a seaman, and bearded, might have been a sailor from one of the many ships lying in the river, or he might have been employed at one of the warehouses. He touched his forehead as José put something into his hand, while the lad himself looked craftily about him to make sure that no one was watching.

"What's he paying him for, that's what I'd like to know," Emmott asked himself. "He's up to no good; but how can one say that his talk with that rascal and the giving of money has anything to do with Master Tom? Mr. Septimus would laugh at the very idea, and tell us to mind our own business; but I for one shall keep my eyes on this José."

If the clerk imagined that he was thereby to catch José out in some underhand act he was very much mistaken, for the young fellow was as crafty as he was clever. More than that, though in his heart he hated Tom, he was wise enough to know that scowls and bad temper would not help him.

From that very moment, indeed, he put on a smile whenever Tom came near, was urbane and friendly with all, and appeared to be genuinely sorry that his cousin was about to leave them.

"How'd you like to be a soldier, Tom?" he asked his cousin two evenings later, when our hero's preparations for departure were almost complete. "They're embarking troops this afternoon down the river, all bound for Wellington's army."

It was information which was bound to tempt the light-hearted Tom. For years, indeed, he had longed to be a soldier, and even now, when his prospects with the firm of Septimus John Clifford & Son were so apparently good, the old longing still assailed him. But if he could not be a soldier in fact, Tom could vastly enjoy the sight of troops embarking. He leaped at the opportunity, and that very afternoon saw him making his way down the bank to the spot, some two miles distant, where a sloop lay off in the river. Boats were passing to and from her when Tom arrived upon the scene, and for two hours at least he watched party on party of men embark, while his eyes feasted on others drawn up in stiff lines on the bank. The bright uniforms, the bustle, and the rattle of accoutrements and drums fascinated him. His eyes were wide open with envy as he noticed that two at least of the ensigns were no older than himself.

"And no stronger either," he told himself. "I'm as tall as they are, and though they repeat orders splendidly, and don't seem afraid to make their voices heard, I reckon I could do the same. What luck if the French drove the English back and got as far as Oporto. Then I'd see some of the fun. There's been terrific fighting in the Peninsula, and folks say that there will be a heap more. Ah, there goes the colonel's horse aboard! I never saw a horse embarked in my life before."

Company after company of men descended to the boats and took their places. Tom's eyes followed with almost childish eagerness the figure of another youthful ensign. He was envious of his scarlet uniform, of his belts and sword, and of the gaudy headdress he was wearing.

"If only I were a soldier," he sighed. "I'd enjoy a few years' marching and fighting, and then settle down to the business. Ugh! An office stool hardly compares with the life those fellows are leading."

He forgot the hardships inseparable from a soldier's life. Tom failed to remember the reports he had read of the terrible plight of our men and officers in the Peninsula. He knew nothing of wounds, terrible wounds often enough, of disease which swept whole companies away, or sent them back home helpless and useless for the remainder of their lives. He saw only the glamour of a soldier's lot, the gallant uniforms, the jolly comrades, the bustle and movement of the life. So entranced was he, in fact, that he could have remained there for hours an interested and envious spectator. But the evening was drawing in, while only one company remained to be embarked. With a sigh, therefore, Tom turned about and began to retrace his steps along the bank in the direction of the premises of Septimus John Clifford & Son.

"I'm a fool to let the wish to be a soldier upset my keenness for office work," he reflected after a while. "There are lots of chaps who would give their eyes for the opportunities I have. Yes, I'm a fool. I must settle to the thing I've got, and – all the same I hope there'll be some fighting round about Oporto."

"Hello, my sport!" he suddenly heard, as he was passing down a narrow street between two of the many warehouses in that district. "Just hold hard, and give us a pipe of 'bacca."

A huge individual came rolling towards him out of the darkness of a passage cutting into the street, and was followed by a second man, smaller than the first, but, if anything, more forbidding. Not that Tom could see them clearly, for it was very dark in that narrow street, the walls and roofs of the warehouses shutting the place in completely.

"Hold hard, shipmate," the big man exclaimed again, rolling forward. "A fill o' 'bacca ain't too much to ask from a man that follows the sea."

He was close beside Tom by then, while his shorter companion was immediately behind him. Even in that dark place one could see enough of the couple to feel sure that they were anything

but desirable, and for a moment Tom considered the advisability of taking to his heels. But then, reflecting that here in the neighbourhood of the docks and quays there must be many seamen ashore on leave, and all perhaps hilarious, he turned to the strangers and answered them pleasantly:

"Sorry I can't oblige," he said. "I haven't started smoking yet."

"What, my lively! ain't started smokin' yet?" came from the bigger man. "Strike me, Bob, but here's a lubber as don't even chew, let alone take hold of a pipe!"

There came a giggle from the smaller man, who sidled forward, and coming from behind his companion, edged up to Tom's side.

"Don't smoke nor chew," he giggled in a queerly deep, gruff voice. "Most like he's a young gent that has got out o' nights without his mother knowing."

He dropped a parcel which he was carrying beneath one arm, and then stooped at once to pick it up. A moment later he had sprung up behind Tom, and with a quick movement had swung his parcel above our hero's head. What followed took the young fellow so utterly by surprise that he was completely dumbfounded; for a sack was drawn down over his head and shoulders, and long before he could lift his arms the bigger man had flung a coil of rope around him, pinning Tom's arms to his side. But still he could fight, and, seized with desperation and with anger, Tom lurched this way and that, kicking out in all directions, hustling his captors from side to side till what appeared to them at first a game began to annoy them. The bigger man clenched a huge fist and drove hard at the centre of the sack with it.

"That's silenced him and made him quit foolin'," he grunted brutally, for Tom dropped instantly and lay inert on the ground. "Jest get a lift on to his toes, Bob; I'll take his head. We'll have him in chokey afore he's shook the stars out of his eyes."

Without the smallest show of haste the two ruffians picked up their burden and went off down the narrow alley leading from the street. There was no need for them to fear interference, for police hardly existed in those days, while respectable individuals did not patronize the neighbourhood of the docks once night had fallen. Business men, living as they did in the early years of the nineteenth century above their premises, sat in the candlelight behind their shutters once evening had come, and if they ventured forth at all, took some sort of guard with them. It followed, therefore, that no one even observed the two men strolling away with their burden. Even had they been seen, the observer would in all likelihood have hurried away in the opposite direction, for drunken sailors were inclined to be more than rough. Robbery was not by any means unknown, while even murder was now and again committed in the slums adjacent to the river.

In less than ten minutes from the moment when Tom had been so hardly treated the two men came to a halt at a low doorway, the bigger of the two beating upon it heavily.

"Open!" he shouted, as if there were no need for concealment, and he had no reason to fear being overheard. "Open quick, or Sam here'll want to know the reason why there's delay."

"Comin'," ejaculated his small companion in that same strangely deep and wheezing voice, a voice which by rights should have belonged to a man of double his proportions. "I can hear the lass a-comin', Sam. Here she is. This is one more to add to the boys we're collecting."

At that moment, while the little man was in the act of stuffing some hard black cuttings of tobacco into a short pipe, the door of the house they had come to was opened noiselessly, and there appeared a frowsy-headed woman bearing a smoking oil lamp. She stood aside without a word and waited for the two men to carry in their burden. The door closed, and the procession passed through a passage into a large room, just within the doorway of which sat a man as big as he who had been called Sam, armed with pistol and cutlass. Half a dozen other men were in the place, breathing an atmosphere that was almost stifling. A dangling lamp shed a feeble light on every hand, while in one corner stood a bottle, in the neck of which was secured a lighted candle, with the aid of which another armed individual was laboriously spelling out the print on a piece of torn newspaper.

"What ho!" he cried, looking up, and disclosing a countenance which was distinctly brutal. A tawny head of hair, which would appear to have been innocent of receiving any attention for a long while, covered forehead and ears and neck, and was inseparably joined to a pair of side whiskers that might have been combed a year before. One cheek was deeply seamed by a long, straggling scar, while the eye above was covered by a patch of black material.

"What ho!" he cried again, leering at the newcomers, and drawing his clay from between his teeth. "You've had luck to-night. I can see as you've nobbled the one as you was after."

"And gets double pay," growled the man who sat at the door with cutlass and pistol in his lap. "Pay from them as has need for lads aboard, and pay from t'others as wants to get rid of a friend. You've bagged the sum from the covey, Sam?"

Sam made no answer for the moment, but got rid of his burden by the simple and easy method of dropping Tom's person heavily on the floor. Standing over him, he proceeded to fill his pipe, and, having completed the task to his liking, stretched across, snatched the bottle in which the candle was fixed, and sucked the flame into the bowl of his pipe. Then his eyes went slowly round the room, and, passing the wretch at the door and the one against the far wall, he let them fall upon the six individuals who also tenanted the room. He counted them carefully, and then jerked his head in the direction of our hero.

"Pull the sack off, Bob," he said, "and jest you two keep yer tongues close in between yer teeth – hear that, Jem, and you too, Sandy? Tight in between yer teeth. This here business has to be conducted with caution and discretion; and if we does trade with others besides the folks that pays for the men, why there ain't no need to cry it out for everyone to hear – eh?"

The last exclamation was almost in the nature of a threat. Evidently the individual with the patch over one eye, who boasted of the tawny head of hair and the unkempt whiskers, was known as Sandy, and Sam's words, and the scowl he directed at the man, had the instant effect of causing him once more to busy himself with his reading. The other, the man who sat fully armed at the door, and was known as Jem, coloured under his tan, looked as fierce as Sam for a moment, and then laughed uproariously.

"You do work yourself up, Sam," he laughed. "Who's there here to let on what business we do? These?" pointing at the six other inmates of the room. "Not much, me hearty. They'll be aboard come midnight, and to-morrow they'll be that sick they'll have forgotten you and me and everything almost. But you've drawn the stuff; been paid by that young spark as hired you to work it?"

Sam answered him with a snort and with a violent shake of his head.

"Presently," he said, meanwhile watching as the rascal Bob removed the sack from Tom's head. "All in good time. The young nobleman's coming here to make sure as there's no mistake, and once the lad there's aboard, the rest of it'll be paid. But it won't end there."

"Eh?" asked Jem quickly, while Sandy and Bob looked up keenly, avarice and rascality written on their faces. "Don't end there," said Jem; "how's that?"

"Blood money ain't all we gets," lisped Sam, allowing a cruel smile to cross his face. "I'll tell you why. I know the young spark as got us to work this business. Well, when this lad's gone aboard, and is away, I'll be axing for more of his gold. Supposing he can't pay, then – "

A hideous grin wrinkled Sandy's face, throwing into greater prominence the scar that seamed it. Bob dragged the sack from Tom's head and then turned to smile at his leader. Jem brought a massive fist down with a bang on the table, and once more burst into uproarious laughter. It was obvious, in fact, to each one of these rascals that Sam had at hand a ready means with which to force more money from the man who had bribed him to capture our hero. Let us put the matter clearly. José had met the ruffian Sam some time before, and had discovered him to be one of those infamous crimps who earned a rich living by snatching men from their employment ashore and passing them over to ships' captains. The impressment of men in those days was not illegal, and since crews were often enough hard to come by, and these rascally crimps were more or less a necessary evil, they flourished

unmolested, and many a poor lad was suddenly torn from his home to be smuggled aboard ship, and never heard of again by his own people. Also many a private grudge was wiped out in this manner. Tom was not the first youth by a great many who had been suddenly spirited away at the bidding of, and with the aid of gold paid by, a relative.

As for the others in the room, they were prisoners like Tom. Four were young men of twenty-two or three, while the others were almost middle-aged, and undoubtedly sailors. These two sat at the table, smoking heavily and helping themselves to spirits contained in a square jar set upon it. The other men sat despondently upon a form, eyeing their captors resentfully, and yet in a manner which showed clearly that all the fight was knocked out of them. Like the two at the table they were becoming resigned to the position, and no doubt would settle down in time and become good seamen.

"Just throw a pail of water over his head," Sam ordered, pointing the stem of his pipe at Tom, who lay senseless where they had dropped him, his face pale in the feeble light of the lamp, his hair dishevelled, while a thin trickle of blood oozed from the corner of his mouth. "Then pull his duds off and let him have a suit that'll do for him aboard. Ah! He's coming round. Trust Sam to strike a blow that won't do no harm and spoil trade for him. Sit him up, Bob, and when he's feeling more hisself, give him a go of spirits and a smoke."

The whole affair was a horrible exhibition of the brutality and the lawlessness of those times – times even now designated by some as the good ones. The ruffians who plied this human traffic were as utterly devoid of feeling as they well could be, and looked upon each one of their captures, not as a fellow being, but as so much value in gold, silver, and pence, so much profit in their business. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that Tom's forlorn appearance had no effect upon them. The heartless and rascally Bob procured a pail of water and tossed the contents over him, drenching the lad from head to foot. He shook him violently, and when our hero feebly opened his eyes, the wretch placed a pannikin of strong spirits to his lips, dragged his head backwards – for he had placed his captive in a sitting posture, his back resting against a form – and roughly poured the contents into his mouth. The effect was magical. Tom sat forward with a gasp, spluttering and choking. The colour rushed to his cheeks, and in a twinkling he seemed to gather his wits and his memory together. How he got into that room, who the people were, he had no idea. But Bob's grinning face was within his reach, and he was undoubtedly the rascal who had dealt with him so roughly but a few seconds before. In any case Tom waited for no explanation. He launched himself at Bob, struck him heavily with his fist, and then closed with him.

"The young tiger," growled Sam, stretching out a huge hand and catching him firmly by the shoulder. "Blest if he isn't the boy to fight them Frenchies. Avast there, me hearty! Bob ain't used to violent assaults."

Bob evidently was not accustomed to hard knocks himself, though he might often enough have cause to give them to others while plying his nauseous trade. In any case he was furious, and but for Sam, once the latter had torn Tom away from him, the smaller man would have vented his wrath by striking his almost fainting prisoner in the face.

"Avast there!" shouted Sam, keeping him off. "Ain't I axed you to bring him round quick, seeing as how the pressgang'll be along in a winking? Ain't we got to change his duds, and you there trying to make things wuss? Get off for the togs! Sandy, jest mix another go o' grog. It'll pull him round lively. Jem, I leaves him in your charge while I goes into the other room to do a little business."

Let the reader imagine a pale-faced and frightened youth cringing in the squalid den to which the rascal Sam made his way. There, beneath the same smoky lamp which the woman had borne to the door, sat José, writhing this way and that, his limbs never at rest for a moment, his fingers twining, his eyes shifting to every quarter, his lips twisting this way and that. José would have run from his own shadow on that occasion. The enormity of the crime he was perpetrating had frightened him intensely. Not that he thought of Tom; he was considering himself entirely. What if the whole foul scheme were discovered? What if Septimus were to learn of his action?

"Ho!" shouted Sam, bursting in upon him. "Come to see as all's well?"

José could not answer; his knees positively shook beneath him, while his bloodless lips would not frame the words he wished to utter. He lifted squirming, trembling fingers to his lips and mouthed at Sam. And then, with a huge effort, he managed to blurt out a few words.

"You – you've done it?" he asked.

"In chokey nice enough, master. Jest come along and take a squint at him. If he's the bird – and I don't doubt it – why, the trick's done, the money's earned, or mighty near it."

He led the trembling youth to the door of the other room, now closed upon the poor fellows placed there, and sliding a shutter to one side bade José look in.

"Eh?" he growled in his ear. "The right bird? No mistake, my hearty?"

Yes, there was Tom, pale and worn and sorrowful-looking, and more than a little dazed if the truth be spoken. José recognized him at once, and in place of feeling compassion for his cousin let all the old feelings of envy and resentment have full sway. The eyes looking through the shutter scowled at poor Tom. José's pallid cheeks suddenly reddened at the thought of an approaching triumph. He backed away, stepped into the smaller room again, and sat down with a swagger.

"He goes to-night?" he asked, with an attempt at firmness.

"To-night! Almost this blessed minute."

"And all his things are taken from him – clothes, letters, and anything likely to let others identify him?"

"Everything, on my davy!" came the answer.

"Then here is the money – take it."

José handed over twenty sovereigns, and as if the act had sealed his guilt promptly began to tremble and writhe again. It was with a grin of triumph that Sam saw him off the doorstep.

"You'll take more golden coins from the same till as you took that from," he gurgled, chinking the money in his pocket. "It ain't hard to read that you stole it. Well, Sam'll have his eyes on you, and ef you don't like to hand out the cash, why, he's always got a way by which he'll make you."

An hour later there was the tramp of many feet in the street outside, and a hoarse command was given. By then Tom was feeling more himself, and indeed was disposed to show fight at any moment. But he was one against many, and in spite of protests had been compelled to change his clothing. Now the door was thrown open, and a dozen seamen marched in, each armed with a cutlass. The impressed men were placed in the centre of their guard, and were marched off down the river. A little later they embarked in a big cutter, a sail was hoisted, and presently they were bowling down stream at a pace which soon left the neighbourhood of London Bridge behind it, and with it the good-hearted Septimus, together with the sneaking nephew who had this very night done him such a mischief.

In the early hours Tom was hustled up the high side of a huge vessel, and was as promptly driven down a steep flight of steps into a dark hole, almost as noisome and unpleasant as the one in which Sam and his gang had first received him. The rattle of ropes and blocks upon the deck reached his ears, and soon the vessel rolled and heaved uneasily. They were off, leaving behind them some few distracted people; for Tom's sudden disappearance caused a commotion. He had disappeared as completely as if the earth had covered him. Nor was that his father's only loss; the cash drawer in his private office had been rifled, and some twenty-five pounds were missing.

"Master Tom steal! Never!" exclaimed Huggins, when all the facts were before him.

Mr. Septimus, as may be imagined, was heartbroken. When days had gone by, and more than a week had passed without even a word from our hero, the head of the house of Septimus John Clifford & Son became despondent.

"Dead!" he almost blubbered, as Huggins stood before him in the forecourt.

"Not a bit, sir," came the brisk answer. "Alive and kicking. Emmott and I have been looking into the matter. Master Tom's at sea; it won't be long before we hear from him."

CHAPTER III

Aboard a British Frigate

"Below there! You can come along up on deck, me hearties!"

An age seemed to have passed since Tom and his six companions were driven from the deck of the big ship to which they had been brought by the pressgang, and though the former had slept for many hours – for he had been exhausted after such a trying experience – yet the few hours he had been awake had dragged on leaden wheels. Meanwhile the rattle of blocks and ropes overhead had been replaced by the gentle surge of water alongside, and by a thousand strange groanings and squeakings common to all sailing vessels. Indeed, placed where he was, with his head close to the foot of one of the masts, that penetrated the deck of the ship and passed through the dark prison in which he and his comrades were confined, Tom could by the vibrations and the groanings of the latter tell exactly when the wind freshened and the sails dragged more strongly. But now, when he had begun to imagine that he would never again see the light of day, there was a banging overhead, then a square of light appeared, with faces framed in it, while a hoarse voice bellowed a command. Tom rose briskly to his feet, and, seeing the ladder, ran up it.

"Here!" he reported, standing erect and cheerful. For Tom was, in his youthful way, quite a philosopher. "What can't be cured must be endured," was one of his maxims. "I'm impressed, by some error I suppose, and soon will be able to get the matter set right; but for the moment it's just as well to appear pleasant. Here, sir!" he reported to a short, stumpy individual with a decided flavour of the sea about him, and with a nautical appearance that would have passed him as a sailor in any port in the world.

"And ready fer duty too, eh, me hearty?" asked this bluff fellow, eyeing him critically, and taking Tom's measure very thoroughly. Looking back at him our hero could not help but see that this sailor had a grim expression. His face appeared to say: "Well, now, you can work if you like. If you don't you'll be hammered." There was a threat in his eyes, and a jaunty manner about him which told that he was prepared for the most refractory conduct.

"Ready fer duty, eh?" he repeated gruffly.

"Yes, sir," responded Tom promptly.

"Then jest you don't sir me, young feller-me-lad, else I'll think you're saucing. But I like yer looks – get up on deck with you. Mr. Riley, above there," he hailed, throwing his head back and staring up through an open hatch, "here's a lubber as is willing and ready fer duty!"

Tom caught a glimpse of an individual dressed in white breeches and stockings, and a blue tail coat with some gilt braid about it, and, realizing that this must be an officer, promptly mounted the steps. In a moment or two he was on deck, standing beneath an expanse of white canvas, and upon boards which were as white as any tablecloth. Bluejackets were moving barefoot about the deck, while right aft an officer stood at the rail of the poop, a speaking-trumpet in one hand, his eye fixed on a dozen active figures scrambling amongst the rigging. Tom gave a gasp of pleasure as the sun's rays fell upon him, braced himself erect, and then looked the officer in the face. He was a young man of twenty-six, perhaps, with clean-shaven, keen features, his skin tanned brown by exposure, and the corners of his eyes wrinkled and puckered as is the case with many sailors. For the rest, Mr. Riley was decidedly a pleasant, jovial-looking officer, and won Tom's confidence at once.

"Well, my lad?" he asked pleasantly.

"Ready for duty, sir," reported Tom again, having nothing better to say. "And hungry, sir," he added, feeling a decided sinking sensation.

That brought a smile to the lips of the officer. He looked our hero up and down, just as the man down below had done, and then smiled again.

"What trade before you joined?" he asked, referring to a notebook, and producing a pencil with which to take notes.

"None, sir; I am the son of Mr. Septimus John Clifford, of London Bridge, wine merchant. My impressment must be a mistake."

"All impressments are mistakes," came the curt answer. "You are ready to serve His Majesty?"

"Yes, sir," answered Tom. "Ready for the moment. Later on, when I am able to prove that a mistake has been made, no doubt I shall be released. I'm ready for any duty, only I'd like a feed first."

"No trade; says he is the son of a wine merchant at London Bridge. Obviously a gentleman," Mr. Riley entered in his notebook. "A likely fellow, and cheerful. Will start duty at once, and willingly. Pass the call there for the master messman."

He stood before Tom, his neat figure swaying as the ship lurched here and there, his eyes now fixed on the swelling canvas, now on the officer at the rail, and often, when Tom's attention was attracted elsewhere, at that young fellow himself.

"Undoubtedly a gentleman," he told himself. "Of course in the case of nearly every man who is impressed there is a complaint that the thing is a mistake, that he ought never to have been impressed. In any case the whole thing is disgraceful. Better pay and better conditions would attract the right stamp of man to the navy. But we're here to carry out regulations, not to frame them. I'll keep my eye on the lad. Name again?" he asked, making Tom jump.

"Tom Clifford."

"That the full name?" asked the officer, beginning to make another note.

"Septimus John Esteros Thomas Clifford," responded our hero, with a grimace. "Rather a lot of 'em, sir, I'm afraid."

"Enough even for an admiral," laughed the officer. "Ah, here's the messman! Waters, just take this young fellow with you and see that he gets a good meal. Report here to me, Clifford, when you have eaten."

He swung round to stare down into the depths of the ship, for sounds were coming from the prison in which Tom and his companions had been confined. There was the noise of a scuffle, while a glance below showed the burly, stumpy salt who had hailed the impressed men swarming down into the depths. Some of the men were, in fact, loath to come up. Unlike Tom, they were disposed to be sulky, and, lest trouble should follow, three sailors were swarming down after the old salt, one bearing a lantern.

"Below there!" called out Mr. Riley, anxious to avoid a struggle. "You men must understand that you have been impressed into His Majesty's Navy, and any disobedience of orders now, or violence, will be treated as mutiny. Send them up, me lad!"

The lamp shining upon the face of the old salt who had led the way below, and the fierce expression he wore quelled any thought of mutiny there may have been, and within five minutes the other six men brought aboard with Tom were ranged on the deck, pale and dishevelled for the most part, sulky and anything but cheerful in appearance. Mr. Riley gave them the same searching examination that he had bestowed on Tom, and then entered their names and notes concerning each one in his book.

"Take them down to the messman and see that they have a good meal," he commanded, when he had finished. "They'll feel better when they've had it; and, mind this, my lads, a sulky face'll do nothing for you aboard this frigate. It'll bring kicks and cuffs and short rations; so look at the matter from the right point of view and take to the life cheerfully."

He dispatched them with a pleasant smile, for this Mr. Riley was a kind individual, and one well accustomed to dealing with men. He had the wisdom to see that hunger may produce easily enough a fit of sulkiness, and seeing that all the impressed men must be in want of a meal, and were undoubtedly sulky, he sent them off for that meal, hoping that with appetites satiated they would take to their duties with the same readiness as our hero had shown. Nor was he disappointed. When, half

an hour later, the six men ascended to the deck again, they looked far happier, and from that moment fell into the ways of the ship with a cheerfulness that was commendable. As for Tom, he was up before them, and scrambling over the deck as best he could – for the breeze had freshened, and the big frigate was jumping about in a lively manner – he drew himself up before the officer.

"Ready, sir!" he said, repeating the old expression.

"Feel seasick?" came the interrogation.

"Not a bit, sir. I've been to sea a few times with my father. We used to hire a sloop and cruise along the coast in summertime."

"Then you're used to getting aloft?"

"A little, sir, but only aboard a sloop. These masts are terrific."

He cast his eyes aloft, and the officer likewise. There could be no doubt that the masts did tower to a great height. But then this was a large frigate, with seventy grinning guns behind her closed ports. Tom knew that already, for the messman who had conducted him below, and who was decidedly a pleasant, kindly individual, had given him much information. The meal, too, had been partaken of on the lower deck, where the space between it and that above was so cramped that even Tom could not stand upright, while all along the sides, firmly cabled to ring-bolts in the deck, were grinning cannon, sponge rods and all the paraphernalia necessary for loading being hung on racks close to them, and secured there firmly.

"You'd go aloft without feeling squeamish then?" asked Mr. Riley, feeling a strange interest in our hero.

"I'd go, sir," came the ready answer. "Whether I'd exactly like it at first is an altogether different matter."

"Then you'll soon have the opportunity of making the test. You'll be in my watch, Clifford. Now come along up on the poop. Don't forget to touch your cap as you come up; ah, wait though! We'll put you into proper sailor rig first; I'll send you down to be fitted."

It was perhaps half an hour later when a smart-looking young sailor obeyed the call of the boatswain and came aft to the poop. Dressed in his new clothing, his hair brushed and his face and hands washed, Tom looked a really smart young fellow, and Mr. Riley smiled his approval when he saw him.

"Pass him up, boatswain," he called, and at the order the burly individual shouted at our hero.

"Mind yer touch yer cap as you get above," he warned him, "just as Mr. Riley had done." And, obedient to the order, Tom raised his hand the moment his foot touched the poop or quarterdeck of the frigate.

"Come with me, Clifford," said Mr. Riley, leading the way. "I'm taking you to the commander. Fair-play is a thing a sailor prizes, and, as you complain that there has been some mistake about your impressment, I reported the same to the commander. He will question you himself."

They passed across a snow-white deck and entered a gallery, outside which an armed sentry was stationed. The officer tapped at a door, and passed in, followed by our hero. Tom found himself in a large cabin, at the back of which two guns were situated, roped and secured to deck rings as were those others he had seen in the 'tween decks. An officer, dressed just like Mr. Riley, but evidently older, sat at a table, with charts spread out before him. He looked up as the two entered, and then went on writing.

"One of the new men, sir; impressed two nights ago; reports that he was taken in error. You have the notes of his case before you."

Once more Tom found himself being inspected with that open gaze which is the right of all officers. He returned the glance of his commander respectfully and firmly.

"Age?" asked the officer jerkily.

"Nearly eighteen, sir."

"Tell me all about yourself, lad," came from the commander, and with such kindness that Tom promptly responded. He gave the history of the family in a few words, and stated how he was about to sail for Oporto, there to learn the business of the firm and take charge when proficient.

"Ah! Anyone with a grudge against you?" was asked quickly.

Tom wondered and racked his brains. He could think of no one, unless it could be the grocer's young man, who was wont to pass along the river bank every morning. Exactly two months before he had had an altercation with that young fellow, who stood a trifle higher than he did, and was at least a year older. He had shown rudeness when passing Marguerite, and Tom had resented the rudeness. The fight that followed had been of the fiercest, and the grocer's apprentice had been handsomely beaten.

"No one, sir," he answered, "unless it could be the fellow I had a row with some weeks ago," and then explained the occurrence.

"Pooh! Impossible," declared the commander. "Lads who get fighting don't bear ill will. The letting of a little blood cures a young chap of that entirely. You shook hands?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Then look elsewhere; someone perhaps was jealous of you, thought you were a nuisance. Who were the other members of the firm and the family?"

Tom told him, wondering all the while whether there were one amongst them capable of getting him impressed so as to remove him. "José?" he asked himself. "Impossible! He'd never be guilty of such ingratitude to father, though I suppose, if I were out of the way, he would succeed to the business one of these fine days."

Little by little the commander ferreted such thoughts out of our hero, and ended by placing his finger on the name of José.

"Your cousin, you said," he exclaimed. "You were always good friends?"

Tom had to reply in the negative, and give the reasons.

"And he was next in succession to yourself, I think?"

"Yes, sir. But – but it's impossible! My father rescued him and his sister from poverty."

"Nothing is impossible, my lad. This matter must be looked into. There seems no doubt that you have been impressed in the hope of removing you altogether. Or the matter may have been a mistake, helped by the fact that you were in those parts at a time when you should have been safely at home. For the moment you are in the service of His Majesty, and although I could order that you be given no duty, I've an idea that that would hardly meet with your wishes?"

"I'd rather work, sir," responded Tom eagerly. "I like ship life, and the experience may be useful. If only you will give me the opportunity of writing home, I will willingly act as one of the hands aboard, and work in that way till I am released."

"That's the spirit, my lad," exclaimed the commander. "He's in your watch, Mr. Riley, and I know you'll look after him. As to writing, you can do that; Mr. Riley shall see to it. I also will write to your father and to the authorities. We shall fall in with a boat homeward bound shortly, and in a week perhaps your people will know what has become of you. There, my lad, I like your spirit."

The commander shook hands with our hero, an uncommon honour, and then sent him off with Mr. Riley. And that very night Tom sat down in the latter's cabin to write his letter, telling his father exactly what had happened.

Next morning, early daylight, the first streak of dawn in fact, found him on deck, his feet naked, a deck brush in his hand. He joined the gang of men engaged in washing down, and, if the truth be known, thoroughly enjoyed the experience. Meanwhile the fine frigate was pressing along under easy sail, a fresh wind abeam, ploughing her way through a sunlit sea that might have belonged to the Mediterranean.

"We're jest cruising on and off watching for a Frenchie, me lad," explained one of his messmates, a jovial old salt who had seen many an action at sea. "There's never no saying when a Frenchie may turn up, and then we're bound to be at 'em. But they ain't so frequent nowadays as

they was. Yer see, Spain and Portugal being joined to France, the French has simply to slip over the mountains, and that's how they're sendin' men in to fill the ranks of their armies. Queer thing, ain't it, that Boney should want them countries for his own? He's always a-grabbin'. The earth won't find lands enough for him by the way he's going on. But he'll get beaten handsome some day. I ain't so sure as we won't do it for him. Know all about this here campaign in the Peninsula, as Spain and Portugal's called?"

Tom modestly admitted that he knew something about the fighting. "It's a long business," he said. "Boney put his own brother on the throne of Spain, and of course the Spaniards wouldn't have him. At the same time he had taken Portugal for himself. He's been the terror of Europe these many years, and as he aims at subjugating England also, why, we gladly agreed to go in and help the Portuguese and Spaniards. As for the fighting, there's been such a heap of it that it is quite bewildering."

"Aye, and it's easy to see as you're a gent as has been used to better things than the lower deck," said the salt. "What're you here for? Grabbin' something that wasn't yourn?"

He put out a hand to touch Tom's sleeve the instant after, for he saw him flush with indignation. "I'm sorry, lad," he said. "It's plain as it wasn't that."

However, the lower deck in those days was not peopled entirely by kindly disposed individuals. Bluff and hearty and plucky men there were in abundance, if their language was not always refined or their habits too particular. But then, as now perhaps, the coming of a young fellow of Tom's stamp amidst a rather rough crowd was apt to draw attention to him, attention not always of the most pleasing. And it so happened that there was one in the mess to which Tom had been posted who seemed to resent his coming. Higgins was a bull-necked, squint-eyed young fellow of some twenty years, and had been sent from a prison to the navy, as had many another. He was possessed of a thin, mean face, over which dangled one long forelock. For the rest, it may be stated that he was accustomed as a general rule to say very little, having discovered himself unpopular amongst the men; though, to be sure, whenever there did happen to arrive aboard the ship a youngster smaller than himself, Higgins was the first to attempt to bully him. For some reason he had taken a violent dislike to Tom. Possibly he was jealous of the attention he had gained, or of the way in which he came to good terms with the men. Whatever the cause, he was determined to browbeat him, and took this, the first opportunity.

"I dunno as you ain't right, Jim," he sang out coarsely, the instant the other had spoken. "Why shouldn't he be here for grabbin'? There's lots comes to the navy on that account, and why shouldn't he? I'll lay he has, too."

"Then you're mistaken," said Tom firmly. "I was impressed; every fool knows that."

"Oh, every fool knows it, do they?" was the sharp answer. "You ain't calling me a fool?"

"Jest you put a stopper on yer tongue and belay," sang out the salt, seeing all the elements of a quarrel in this discussion, and noticing Tom's flushed cheeks, and the rising anger of Higgins. "'Sides, I ain't Jim to you, me lad, and don't you ferget it. I'll take a rope's end to you afore you're a minute older if you ain't careful."

But Higgins had allowed his temper to rise to the point where it was uncontrollable. He had expected Tom to accept his remarks meekly, as became a new hand, and, finding he had not done so, was determined to pick a quarrel with him. There are always such cantankerous individuals in the world, and it was Tom's fortune to hit up against this one. He, too, was roused, for he resented the man's impertinence.

"I'll back as he's a jail bird," declared Higgins, thinking that by making a firm stand in this altercation he would stimulate his own popularity amongst the men. "He's a gent that's took the money out of the till and then been collared. The easiest way to cover the thing was to hand him over to a crimp. That's how he's here – I know him."

He had probably never set eyes on our hero before, and had he done so would not have dared to address him in such a manner. But Tom was one of the deck hands, one of themselves, and, moreover, a newly-joined recruit, too often destined for a time to be the butt of his fellows. Higgins counted on his giving way at once. Most recruits are awe-stricken at first by the strangeness of their surroundings, and perhaps by the roughness of their companions. Besides, bullying airs and ways, backed most probably by other individuals, are apt to cause a young fellow to choose the easier path and swallow his displeasure. However, Tom was one of the obstinate sort. Fighting was nothing new to him, and to show his readiness for a contest, and the fact that he was by no means afraid of an encounter, he promptly began hostilities by pitching the contents of a jug of water over Higgins.

"I'll ask you to understand that when I say a thing I mean it, and that I tell a lie for no one," he said, rising from his seat and undoing the neckerchief which he, like the others, wore about him. "I don't know what the rules are aboard a king's ship; but this I do know, I allow no man to suggest that I am a thief or a liar. Take back what you've said or I'll trounce you."

There was a commotion in the 'tween decks by now. Men crowded about the long narrow tables stretching from the side of the ship towards the centre, and which was one of many. Like the rest, too, it was constructed to lift up to the deck above and be attached there, leaving the decks free for movement. Jim had meanwhile risen to his feet, and now held his hand high for silence.

"Mates," he said, "there's trouble brewin' here. This new mate of ours is a good 'un, and I'll not allow him to be stamped on. Higgins here has just now called him a thief and a liar, and the young spark has drenched him with water. If Higgins don't come down handsome with a 'pology there's only one thing left."

"A set to, and right it'll be," burst in another of the men, one of the seniors. "Fightin' don't do no great harm, and it's necessary when one mate calls another names that tastes nasty. You, Higgins, admit you called him a liar and a thief?"

"Of course," came the coarse answer. "I'm goin' ter thrash him."

"You are, are you?" came the grim reply from the old salt, while he sized up the two young fellows swiftly, craning his head to one side as if he were a bird. "I dunno so much; the new mate looks as if he could use his hands lively. You ain't goin' to 'pologize?"

"Not likely! I'll hammer him till he'll be glad to admit that what I've said's as true as gospel."

If he imagined that Tom would keep him waiting he was much mistaken, for that young fellow had already rolled his sleeves to the elbow. Indeed, as we have intimated, he was no novice. Not that he was by nature quarrelsome; but those were rough days, and like many another boy Tom had need now and again to defend his honour. He stood away from the table, waiting while it and two or three next to it were swung out of the way. Then, bending low so that his head would not hit the deck above, he stepped to the centre of the circle which the men immediately formed.

"Any sort of rules?" he asked coolly. "Anyone keepin' time?"

"Go as you please, mate," came Jim's answer. "A sailor don't ax fer breathing time if he comes up alongside a Frenchie, and you don't have no call for it either. It's the same fer both, and as fair and square as may be. But it'll have to be straight work. We stops the fight if there's foul hitting."

A fight in the 'tween decks was no unusual occurrence in those days, and was a source of some interest to the men of the navy. Hard fellows without an exception, they had been brought up in a stern school which taught that a man must look to himself alone for protection. But they could recognize spirit, and Tom took their fancy wonderfully.

"He's game, he is," declared one of the men, as he doubled his arms and pressed forward to watch the contest. "And he ain't no weakling. You can see as he's not used to haulin' and suchlike, and ain't been a tar over long. But I like his figure-head. It's clean and well-cut, and he's a beam on him that carries weight, and'll lend strength to a blow when he gets one home. He ain't no new 'un at the game, I'll stake my Davy. That boy has been grappled on to a job like this many a time."

The ten minutes which followed proved that Tom was something also of a scientist; for he played with his antagonist. It was clear, in fact, after five minutes that he would be the victor, though at first he had some ugly rushes to stop and some hard hitting to protect himself from. But science and generally good condition told, and while at the end of some ten minutes, during which the two broke away now and again to pant and glare at one another, only to begin once more at the shouts of the crew, Higgins was almost in a condition of exhaustion, Tom was still comparatively fresh. He stopped a furious and last attempt on the part of Higgins to rush him up against the side of the ship, and then, darting forward, struck the man full in the mouth, sending him sprawling.

Higgins lay for a minute without movement, and then his hand went back towards the knife which, sailor-like, he carried attached to his belt and well behind him.

"Drop that!" shouted Jim. "Now, Higgins, you as was a-goin' ter whack this young shaver, say as you 'pologize for callin' him names."

For a second there was defiance on what was still recognizable as that young man's face. Then he nodded his head in assent. Tom at once went towards him, his hand outstretched.

"Shake hands, and let's be friends," he said. "I dare say you didn't understand how I'd take what you said. But where I come from a man fights and fights again when another calls him thief or liar. There, shake hands and let's be friends in the future."

There was a cheer at that, while the men gathered round our hero, patting him on the back with such heartiness that his remaining breath was almost driven from his body. Some of the more enthusiastic even began to chair him, and had carried him as far as the deck ladder, when the sudden shrill piping of whistles and the appearance of an officer put a stop to the movement. It was Mr. Riley, a long glass beneath one arm, his other hand on the rail of the ladder.

"My lads," he began, about to give an order, and then, suddenly catching sight of Tom, ceased abruptly. Casting his eye over the heads of the men, he soon picked out the somewhat miserable figure of Higgins.

"Ah," he said, "a fight! My lads, strictly against orders. But I've news for you – we've rounded up a Frenchman. Clear these decks."

He was gone in a twinkling, his coat tails swinging behind him. But as he turned he contrived to smile at our hero.

"Licked that young man Higgins. That's good," he was saying as he raced up the ladder. "Young Clifford has courage. Wonder how he'll behave when shot and cannon balls come crashing amongst us; he's just the boy for this service."

When Tom had washed his face and had clambered to the deck he saw a large vessel some four miles away, bearing up towards the frigate, while a smaller one sailed behind her.

"Ship o' the line, mate," said Jim, who was leader of the squad of men of whom our hero was one, who had the working of one gun. "It'll be tough business, and ef she wasn't so big I doubt as she'd sail up so cocky towards us. But we'll give her what for; we're fair death on Frenchies."

A magnificent sight the Frenchman made as the distance between the two vessels decreased. Tom peeped at her through the wide-open port and admired the enormous spread of white above her, the seething foam at her forefoot, and the gleam of her broad decks that came into view now and again as the ship heaved to the swell of the ocean. Then a spout of white smoke burst from her fo'castle; a flash severed it in twain and was followed after a distinct interval by a dull reverberating report. The shot reached its mark almost at the same moment. There was a crash within ten feet of Tom. The side of the vessel at that point burst inward in a hundred splinters, and the iron messenger struck the very next gun to his, slithered and crashed across the 'tween decks, and finally brought up short against the opposite side. It roused a cheer of excitement from the crew.

"That's shootin'!" cried Jim. "She's the sort for our money. In a jiffy we'll be layin' into her. Just take a sight along the gun, Tom, and larn now how to pitch a ball into a Frenchie."

CHAPTER IV

A Naval Encounter

In the ordinary way the immediate prospect of an encounter at sea might be expected to rouse qualms in the breast of a novice, and we cannot affirm that Tom would have been any exception to the rule on this his first meeting aboard an English frigate with a French man-of-war. But there was so much else to attract his attention. Even in those days the wooden walls of our stout ships contained sufficient to interest even a dullard, and to a lad of active brain, as was our hero, there were things to watch and marvel at, while the men themselves grouped in the 'tween decks were quite a study. They stood about their guns stripped to the waist, joking and merry, the master of each gun with his eye on the sights. Close at hand a lad sat on a long narrow tub filled to the brim with powder.

"Powder monkeys we call 'em," said Jim in a hoarse whisper. "The young villains! They're always up to some sort o' mischief, and when it comes to fighting, blest if they wouldn't take on the whole of Boney's fleet alone. They ain't the lads to squeak. If we fetch up alongside the Frenchman, and there's a call for boarding parties, them imps is amongst the first to answer."

"Stand ready!" the order came at this moment, and turning his head Tom caught a glimpse of Mr. Riley, still with a long glass beneath his arm, his sword belted to his side, and his shapely form bent so as to allow him to peer through one of the ports. "Stand ready, men," he shouted. "Gun layers train your sights on the enemy and aim low. Between wind and water is the mark, lads!"

The crew of the guns answered him with a cheer, and for a while gun layers stretched over the weapons they commanded, sighting for the enemy. Tom watched as Jim squinted along the sights, and then peered out at the French ship of the line. She was bowling along before a fresh breeze, heeling well over, so that half her deck showed. He could see a mass of men on it, and others running to and fro, while quite a number were clambering into the rigging.

"Shows she means to come right up close," said Jim in his gruff way. "That'll suit us nicely. Hammer and tongs is the best sort of fighting for us boys, and we don't get it too often. She's going to run right in and when there's a broadside it'll be a close one, and thunder won't be in it."

"Stand by to fire!" was heard through the 'tween decks, while an instant later there came a roar from the deck above, a trembling and shaking of the whole vessel which all could feel, and then the rumble of wheels as the guns were run in, sponged out and reloaded. By now the enemy had disappeared from sight behind a huge cloud of smoke, which, however, was whisked away swiftly by the breeze. It was a minute later, perhaps, when the French battleship was again visible, that Mr. Riley gave the order to fire, and Tom was witness of the result for the first time in his life. Jim touched the vent of the gun with his portfire, and instantly a squirt of flame and smoke shot upward. There was a huge commotion in the gun itself. Though braced into position by numerous cables it started backward, drawing them as tight as iron bars, while the wheels thudded heavily on their runners. The commotion was accompanied by that of every other gun on that deck in the broadside, while the ship herself shook from end to end. The roar of the discharge was indescribable, and deafened him, while the 'tween decks was instantly filled with volumes of sulphurous smoke.

"Slack off! Haul her back, boys!" came in stentorian notes from Jim. "Run her in quick. Now with the sponge rods, and we'll have a second charge into her before the smoke's cleared."

Five minutes later Mr. Riley's voice was heard. "Stand by for another broadside," he bellowed. "Double shot your guns next time – ah!"

The frigate quivered from end to end; she seemed to have been struck by a cyclone. An iron hail beat on her sides, bursting them in in many directions, while splinters of iron and wood flew across the 'tween decks, striking men down in many directions. In one brief second the orderliness of the place was transformed to the most utter disorder, as the enemy had answered the frigate's

broadside with one of her own. Tom looked about him wonderingly, dazed by the commotion and astounded at what he saw. For by now the wind blowing in at the open ports had cleared all the smoke away, and he could see all that was happening in the 'tween decks. There lay the gun on his right a wreck, turned on its side, its muzzle crushed out of sight, two of its wheels broken and half-buried in the deck. What had before been a square porthole was now an irregular, torn opening, through which a vast expanse of sea could be watched. But it was the poor wretches who had manned the gun who claimed his greatest attention. Five of them lay mangled upon the deck, with pools of blood accumulating about them and draining off towards the scuppers in trickles and streams. On the port side, opposite where the gun had stood, three men had been struck by the missile, and lay silent and motionless. Elsewhere there were rents in the side of the frigate, and men lay about in all postures, some moaning, others silent, nursing a wounded arm or leg. This was war; this was the treatment meted out by one nation to another.

But of loss of discipline there was none. If the 'tween decks was in disorder there was order amongst the men, and no flinching. Already the surgeon's mates and helpers were carrying the wounded away towards the ladder leading to the cockpit, while at every gun stood its crew, immovable and ready, waiting the word of the officer. As for the enemy, the shapely lines of the French man-of-war had changed wonderfully, for she was so near now that one could see distinctly. The white deck, still careened towards the frigate, was seamed and scarred and torn. One mast lay over her rail, the sails towing in the water, and her sides were marked by shot holes, two of her ports having been converted into one by an enormous rent that extended between them.

A dull cheer resounded through the frigate; the men in the 'tween decks took it up lustily, and then came again that commotion above. The vessel shivered, shot and flame and smoke belched from the ports on the upper deck, the roar being followed once again by the rumble of gun wheels on their metal runners.

"Fire!" Mr. Riley stood halfway up the ladder leading to the upper deck and waved his cocked hat at the crews under his own command. Crash! went the broadside. Tom watched the powder at the vent squirt upward in flame and smoke as on a previous occasion, and then sprang to the cables as Jim's husky voice called to his own crew to draw the gun in and reload.

"Double shot; don't forget," bellowed Mr. Riley, and obedient to the order the loaders thrust first one and then a second huge iron ball into the gaping muzzles. In the middle of the operation there came a resounding discharge from the enemy, while huge columns of smoke hid her sides. But the shot failed to strike the frigate, for a few seconds earlier the commander had put his helm up and had sheered off towards the Frenchman. It was a clever manœuvre, and made a wonderful difference to the fight in progress. For the enemy had received four successive broadsides now, and had returned only one effective one, and that not so effective as it might have been had the ships been nearer. Added to that, it was less than five minutes later when the gunners on the port side got their sights aligned on the enemy, and a simultaneous broadside was delivered by the guns of the upper and 'tween decks. Then the commander swung his helm again and made across the stern of the Frenchman.

"Stand ready," sang out Mr. Riley again, his eyes glued upon the man-of-war. "Layers concentrate on the stern. In one minute, men; in one minute we shall be there. Now! Fire!"

Running round in a circle after crossing in the wake of the Frenchman, the frigate had gone about after emptying her complete port broadside, and had then swept round in rear of the enemy. It was a manœuvre which, if not quickly carried out, might have ended in disaster. But nothing occurred to disturb it, while the Frenchman, impeded by his broken mast and the sail dragging in the water – and slowed considerably thereby – was unable to counter the movement by swinging also. It followed, therefore, that the frigate had an enormous advantage, and, making the most of this, crossed and recrossed the rear of the enemy, emptying first the starboard broadside and then every gun on the port side. As for the French battleship, her guns were useless. Not one of her broadsides could be

brought to bear, and though she sheered off to the south a little, the commander was at once able to alter his own position correspondingly.

"It's a victory," said Jim, with elation. "The man that laid the gun that brought down that mast deserves to be made an admiral this minute. It's saved lives aboard this ship, boys. It's won the battle."

"Shall we board her now?" asked Tom, who was densely ignorant of naval matters.

"Board her! Not us!" cried Jim. "Where's the use? She carries two or three men to every man jack of us, and would have all the chances if we boarded, not that I say as we wouldn't do the business. But we've the best of it like this. She's cut that mast adrift, but it'll be hours before she can refit, and meanwhile we've the legs of her. We've only to keep here, astern, plugging shot into her all the while, and she's bound to give in before long. Of course she can't do that yet awhile. That wouldn't be fighting, and I'm bound to say that the Frenchies are good at the game, almost as good as we are. She'll hold on and endeavour to best us; but she'll have to haul down her colours before very long. Ah! What'd I say? Look at 'em!"

The flag of France flying aloft on the enemy was seen to flutter. It dropped a foot or two and then came down with a run. Instantly a hoarse bellow resounded through the frigate. Men gripped hands and cheered, the shouts coming from every deck. Even the wounded, who had not all been removed, sat up with an effort and cheered as best they could.

"Silence, men," came from Mr. Riley at this moment, and turning they saw him standing halfway up the ladder, bent so that the men could see his face. "Stand to your guns all the while; don't draw charges till you get the order. Jim there, from No. 4 gun, send me four of your men to join the boarding party."

Tom noticed that the officer had been wounded, for he carried one arm in a sling, and there were stains of blood on his breeches. He was wondering how he had come by the wound, when Jim struck him heavily on the back.

"Avast dreamin' there, me hearty," he shouted hoarsely, still elated at what had happened. "Get off to the officer and go aboard the ship. You'll see something to interest you."

Tom wanted no more coaxing; he dropped the cable on which he had been hauling and went at a run towards the ladder, followed by the other men. They kept close on the heels of Mr. Riley, and in a twinkling were on the main deck. There the commander was now stationed, and about him a group of officers and men.

"Ah, there you are, Mr. Riley!" he exclaimed. "We'll go aboard in the cutter, taking three men from each deck. Step in, my lads."

Tom scrambled into the boat with the crew, and watched as it was lowered away. He was filled with amazement, first that a boat of such proportions as the cutter could support so many men when hung to her davits, and then that she could be safely lowered with such a load to the water. Meanwhile he noticed the high sides of the frigate, the officer up on the quarterdeck, and the men of the watch away aloft in the rigging. The frigate lay inert, her sails flapping, while, almost a quarter of a mile away now, the French ship lay in the water, slowly heaving up and down, with a peculiar and significant twist in one of her masts.

"Struck by our broadsides as we passed and repassed," Mr. Riley told him as they were lowered away, for the officer happened to be close to our hero. "She had bad luck. It's rare that one brings down a mast at the first discharge, and that of course proved her undoing; the loss of the second makes her useless for fighting purposes. This has been a gallant action and will give us no end of credit. Ah, there goes a recall gun!"

A spout of flame and smoke belched from the frigate a little above the heads of the men in the cutter, for the latter had now reached the water, and turning his head Tom watched the ball discharged strike the sea some two hundred yards ahead of the small sloop that had been sailing in company of the battleship, and which had now changed her course.

"She'll not disobey the order," reflected Mr. Riley. "Once we are aboard the enemy the frigate could sink that vessel within ten minutes. There go her sails aback; she'll swing round and come in like a docile dog. Now, lad, clamber aboard when we reach the ship; you come as one of my escort."

"You're wounded, sir," said Tom. "Let me fasten that sling for you again; it's too long, and doesn't support the arm."

He undid the knot with the help of fingers and teeth and then rearranged the sling. By the time he had finished they were under the counter of the French battleship, to which a man at the stern and bows of the cutter clung with a boathook. At once a midshipman sprang at a dangling rope ladder and went swarming up with the agility of a monkey, two of the crew following. Tom picked up a coil of rope and without a question made a noose fast round the waist of the officer who had already befriended him.

"I'll get aboard and help to haul you up, sir," he said. "You'd never manage to clamber up that ladder with one arm wounded."

He waited for no orders, but, springing at the ladder, went scrambling up, the end of the rope secured between his teeth. A minute later Mr. Riley was being hoisted to the deck of the French battleship. Then the commander followed, and after him more of the crew, with two officers.

Tom found himself looking down upon a scene which was almost indescribable; for the ship had been cruelly mauled by the broadsides of the frigate. There were a dozen holes in her deck, where shot had penetrated, while in many places the rails were driven in. A dismounted gun lay in one of the scuppers, with part of her crew crushed beneath it; and from end to end of the ship there were signs of the awful havoc the iron tempest had created. Men lay in all directions and in all postures. The damaged mast swung by the starboard halyards and threatened to fall inboard at any moment, while a huge stretch of crumpled and shot-holed canvas covered one portion of the deck. To add to the scene of ruin, smoke and flames were belching from a hatch towards the stern of the quarterdeck, and some fifty sailors were endeavouring to quench the conflagration with water cast from buckets. Almost opposite the spot where the ladder dangled, and where the victors had come aboard, was a group of officers, and in their centre one seated on a chair, pallid to the lips and obviously wounded. The commander went towards him instantly and took him by the hand.

"You are hurt?" he asked. "You have fought your ship gallantly, but fortune was against you. Go to your quarters, please. I will take no sword from an officer of such courage."

He put aside the sword that was offered him so feebly, and signed to men of his crew to lift the injured officer. Then he shook hands with the other Frenchmen present, many of whom shed tears as they replaced their swords in their scabbards.

"Ah, monsieur," said one, who seemed to be the second in command, "it was the fortune of war, but bad fortune for us. With that mast shot away we were helpless, and then your broadsides poured into our stern tore the lengths of the decks, and did terrible damage. Our poor fellows were shot down in heaps. War, monsieur, is a terror."

None could fail to admit that who visited the French ship, for what had been a well-found, trim vessel was now a shambles. It turned Tom sick and faint when he looked about him, so that he was forced to cling to the rail. But a moment later, when Mr. Riley called him, he was able to pull himself together.

"We're to go aboard the sloop and see what she is," he called. "Help to lower me into the cutter."

Half an hour later Tom clambered up the side of the smaller vessel, and hauled his officer up after him. They found a French midshipman in command of a crew of five, while beneath the hatches there were three prisoners.

"Release them," Mr. Riley ordered; and, taking a couple of the French crew with him, Tom saw the hatch lifted, and called to the men below to come up. The smart uniform of an officer showed through the square hatch at once, and in a moment or two a youth stood on the deck before him, whom one would have said was British to the backbone.

"Ensign Jack Barwood, 60th Rifles, sir," he reported, drawing himself up in front of Mr. Riley and saluting. "Going out to join my regiment, this little sloop in which I had taken passage was held up by a French man-of-war. Our men were taken off, that is, the crew. I and two of my own men were left here as prisoners. We heard heavy firing, and guessed there was an action. What has happened?"

Mr. Riley turned and pointed at the French prize won by the frigate. "We beat her," he said, with pride in his tones. "You've had luck to escape so early from a French prison. Where were you bound for?"

"In the first place, Oporto," came the answer. "Later, as a prisoner, for Bayonne. Now, I suppose, we shall have to return to England?"

As it turned out, however, it was to Oporto that the little sloop made.

"The frigate makes for home at once," Mr. Riley reported, when he had rowed back to the ship, and had again come out to the sloop. "She sails in company with her prize, and no doubt the homecoming will be a fine triumph. I have orders to take this sloop to Oporto, there to hand over this young fellow to the authorities."

He pointed to Tom and smiled, while the ensign, turning upon our hero, surveyed him with amazement, and with some amount of superciliousness if the truth be told.

"Pardon, sir," he said, "I don't understand."

"Of course not," came the smiling answer; "nor does he. Come here, Tom."

Our hero, as may be imagined, was just as dumbfounded as the ensign; for though Mr. Riley had been wonderfully kind to him from the beginning, his manner had suddenly changed. He addressed him as if he were an equal, not as if he were one of the crew.

"I'll explain," he smiled, seeing the bewilderment expressed by both young fellows. "While the action was passing between us and the man-of-war our lookouts reported a sail in the offing. She has come up to us since, and turns out to be a smaller frigate than ourselves. But the point is this – she left the Thames after us, and has carried a brisk breeze with her all the way. She asked at once for information concerning a young fellow brought aboard just before we weighed, who had been impressed by a gang having quarters near London Bridge. That, sir, is the young fellow."

He pointed at Tom, whom the ensign still regarded in amazement.

"The whole thing has been cleared up, of course," said Mr. Riley. "There is no longer any doubt that this gentleman is the son of Mr. Septimus John Clifford, wine merchant, of London Bridge."

"Eh?" suddenly interjected the ensign, staring hard at Tom. "Clifford, of London Bridge. Well, I'm bothered! Why, Tom, don't you know me?"

It must be confessed that our hero was somewhat taken aback. In this young officer so much above himself, clad in the handsome uniform of the 60th Rifles, he had not recognized an old friend. Indeed his attention had been centred on his own officer. But now, when Jack Barwood lifted his cap, Tom recognized him at once, and gave vent to a shout of delight.

"Why, it's you!" he cried, gripping the hand extended. "Haven't seen you since – now when did we meet last?"

"Time you licked that cub of a grocer's boy," laughed Jack, who seemed to be just such another as our hero, and who was evidently a jovial fellow. "He passed when we were with your cousin, and grinned and sauced you. You were at him in a jiffy."

Mr. Riley laughed loudly when he heard what was passing. "Why, he's been at one of our men aboard the frigate," he cried. "Hammered him badly just before we fell in with the Frenchman. He's a tiger."

"He's a demon to fight, is Tom, sir," laughed Jack. "Ask him how we became acquainted."

"Eh? How?" asked the officer curiously, and then pressed the question when he saw that Tom had gone a crimson colour and was looking sheepish. "Eh?" he repeated.

"He's pretending to have forgotten," shouted Jack, enjoying the situation. "I'll tell the tale. It was at school one day. Tom was chewing toffee, mine had disappeared from a pocket. I tackled him

with the theft, and we went hammer and tongs for one another. It was a busy time for us for some ten minutes."

"Ah!" smiled Mr. Riley. "Who won?"

"Drawn battle," exclaimed Tom, somewhat sulkily.

"I had a licking," laughed Jack. "It was a certainty for him from the beginning."

"Not surprised," came from the officer. "And the toffee?"

"Eh?" asked Jack.

"The toffee you accused him of stealing?" asked Mr. Riley. "You found it later?"

"In another pocket – yes," admitted Jack, with a delightful grin. "I deserved that hiding; it made us fast friends. So Tom's been impressed."

"By the machinations of his cousin."

That caused Tom to lift his head and come nearer. He had wondered time and again how that impressment had been brought about, whether by accident or design, and had never been able to bring himself to believe that José was responsible. Mr. Riley's words made him open his ears.

"You are sure, sir?" he asked.

"The commander has letters from your father with positive proof. However, things seemed to have happened fortunately. You are to be taken to Oporto after all, and here you meet with an old friend. Things couldn't have been better. Now I shall leave you both aboard while I go to get together a crew. We'll set a course for Oporto when I return, and ought to reach the place inside the week. Tom, you'll no longer be a sailor before the mast. I have the commander's orders to take you as a passenger, or, if you wish it, to appoint you an officer for the time being. How's that?"

It was all delightful hearing; and when at length the sloop turned her bows for Oporto, leaving the frigate to sail away with her prize, and incidentally to carry Tom's letter to his father in England, the party aboard the little vessel could not have been merrier.

"You'll have to turn soldier yet," declared Jack to our hero, standing so that the latter could inspect his uniform, and indeed the young fellow cut such a neat figure that Tom was even more tempted than formerly. For Jack was slimmer and shorter than he, while the few months of training he had experienced had taught him to hold himself erect. A jollier and more careless ensign never existed. It can be said with truth that, had the fortunes of the troops in the Peninsula depended on Jack's wisdom and military knowledge, disaster would promptly have overtaken our arms. He was just one of those jolly, inconsequential sort of fellows, always skylarking, always gay and laughing, who go through the world as if serious subjects were not in existence.

"Hooray for the life of a soldier!" he shouted, knowing Tom's ardent wishes that way, and anxious to fill him with envy. "Who'd ever sit on a stool and sweat over books in an office?"

"I'll lick you if you don't stop short," growled Tom sourly, and yet laughing for all that; for who could take Jack seriously? "Who knows, I may be a leader of troops before you have cut your wisdom teeth? Who knows?"

Who could guess the future indeed? Not Tom. Not the jovial, thoughtless Jack. Not even the wise Mr. Riley, with all his experience of the sea and of the men who go upon it. It seemed that Oporto would receive them in the course of a few days, and that Jack and Tom would there part. But within twenty-four hours of that conversation the scene was changed. Two vessels raised their peaks from the offing, and, sailing nearer, declared themselves as French. They overhauled the little sloop, in spite of a spread of canvas that threatened to press her beneath the water. And that evening Tom and his companions were prisoners.

"My uncle! What awful luck!" groaned Jack, in the depths of despair, as is often the case with high-mettled people when reverses come along. "No soldiering, Tom; no office for you. I'd prefer that to a prison."

"It's the fortune of war," exclaimed Mr. Riley with resignation. "For me it makes no great difference. The wound I received aboard the frigate has not improved, and, even if I become a

prisoner, I shall receive proper treatment, which is impossible aboard this sloop. I'm sorry for you two young fellows."

"Pooh, sir," smiled Tom, "we'll give 'em the slip! Seems to me I'm not meant for Oporto yet awhile. We'll give 'em the slip, and then I'll take on as a soldier."

"Slip? How?" asked Jack, somewhat staggered, for the idea had not occurred to him.

"Depends; couldn't say now how we'll bring it about. But we'll manage it some way. I speak Spanish and Portuguese and a little French. If with those advantages we can't manage the business, well, we're only fit for a prison."

"Hooray!" shouted the excited Jack; whereat one of the French officers accosted them angrily. But Tom quickly appeased him.

"Where do we get landed, *Monsieur le Lieutenant*?" he asked politely.

"Ah, you speak our tongue! That is good," came the more pleasant answer. "But where you land I cannot say; you will be sent with troops to the north of Spain, and so to a prison."

It was not very cheering news, but Tom made the best of it.

"I don't put my nose into a French prison if I can help it!" he declared, in that particular tone of voice to which Jack had grown accustomed when they were chums at school.

"And he won't!" declared the latter. "I know Tom well – a pig-headed, stubborn beggar from his cradle. Tom'll give 'em the slip, and we with him. One thing seems all right in the meanwhile – there's grub and drink in plenty. I never could stand starvation; I'd rather go to prison."

But whatever thoughts they may have had as regards escaping were set aside when they landed. Putting in at an obscure port, Tom and his friends found a squadron of horsemen waiting to receive them, for the ship had flown signals. The three friends, together with the two men belonging to Jack's regiment, were given horses, while a trooper took their reins, two other men riding close to each one of them. And then they set off across a barren country, which, however fair it may have been in other days, was burned black, stripped of all eatables, while those villages which had not been swallowed by the flames were wrecked and useless.

"You will be careful not to attempt an escape," said the officer in command of the squadron, speaking to Tom, the only one of the prisoners who could understand him. "I have given orders for the troopers to shoot at the first attempt. We ride now to join our main army, and through a country inhabited by people who would flay us alive if they could catch us. Let that alone warn you not to attempt escape. The Portuguese peasants are more dangerous than my soldiers."

He shouted to the head of the column, set his own horse in motion, and led the way at a pace that threatened to be trying. It was obvious, in fact, that he was anxious to reach the summit of the hills near at hand, and not to be found in the open when night fell. As for Tom and his friends, the outlook seemed hopeless; an attempt at escape meant a bullet from their guard. And, even were they successful, they were in a country where bands of peasants scoured the valleys murdering all who were too weak to oppose them. It looked indeed as if a French prison would shortly shelter them, and as if there Jack's military career would come to a halt before it had actually begun, while Tom's ambitions in that direction would be cut in twain and end only in bitter disappointment.

CHAPTER V

Prisoners

If ever a band of prisoners could be described as jovial it was the little band with whom Tom Clifford was travelling. For the confinement at sea made a trip ashore most enchanting; then the quick and unaccustomed movement, the efforts more than one of them were forced to make continually to keep in their saddles, provoked an amount of amusement which even infected their escort.

"I was as near off as anything that time," shouted the irrepressible Jack, when his horse had shied at a rock and nearly thrown him. "Wish one of these fellows would rope me to the saddle instead of leading me as if I were a child."

"What does he say, monsieur?" asked the trooper riding near our hero, and at once Tom explained.

"That would not be good for him," laughed the man. "If we have to gallop at any time, and the horse fell, he would be left to be butchered. I tell you, monsieur, these peasants are terrible. I do not say that they are not justified, for our men have behaved cruelly to them. But the peasants care nothing whether it be horse soldiers or foot. If a man of ours falls into their hands he is butchered; that would be your fate also if you were to lag behind."

Every now and again, as the small party made for the hills, groups of men were seen hovering in the distance. And once, when the squadron was riding through a narrow defile, rocks descended from above.

"Gallop!" commanded the officer, and striking their heels into the flanks of the horses the soldiers soon passed through. When the dusk of evening began to fall, shots rang out in the distance, and one of the troopers was wounded.

"I see men gathering in front of us," suddenly exclaimed one of the sergeants. "They fill the gap through which we must pass to gain the road for the hill."

"Halt!" came from the commander. "Place the prisoners in the centre. We will ride forward steadily till within shot of them, and then we will charge. There is nothing else to be done. To retreat would be to have the whole population of the country about us to-morrow; monsieur," he said, as if by an afterthought; "you and your comrades realize the danger?"

Tom nodded at once. "We see the position, *Monsieur le Capitaine*," he said. "You are a detached party away from the army."

"We are one of hundreds of squadrons told off to clear the country during the retreat of our armies across the Tagus," came the answer. "From to-day we march for Spain, and I hope we may never put foot in Portugal again. It is not a pleasant duty, this burning of villages and crops, but orders must be obeyed. We are detached, as you say, and to join our friends we have to run the gauntlet. Monsieur and his friends can have temporary liberty, and arms with which to fight, if they will give their word of honour to respect me and my men, and hand themselves over later on as captives to us."

"I will speak with my friends," replied Tom at once, overjoyed at the proposal; for he could see easily that there was a strenuous time before the little party, and in the event of a reverse to the troopers the position of himself and his friends might be very serious. Armed and ready they would be in a different position. Rapidly, therefore, he explained the position to Mr. Riley.

"Agreed!" cried the latter eagerly. "Not that I'm much use either way. It takes me all my time to stick to this animal, let alone use a weapon; for I have only one useful arm. Tell him we agree. You men," – and he swung round on Andrews and Howeley, the two men of the 60th accompanying them, "you men understand the position, no doubt. We are fighting for the Portuguese, and against the French; but here is a case where our friends will not know us. They will kill us with the others before we can explain. It is a question of self-preservation."

"Right, sir," answered Andrews cheerily. "We're game, and though it'll be hard luck to have to become prisoners again, we see the reason. We give our word."

"Good, then," exclaimed the officer of the party with relief, and at once gave orders to his troopers to throw off the leading reins, and to hand each of the prisoners a sabre. To Mr. Riley he presented a pistol.

"For you, monsieur," he bowed. "If there is need, you will know how to use it. Now, men," he commanded, "we will ride forward in column of files, and when I shout, spread out into line. A charge should carry us through them. Gallop right through the village and up the road. Forward!"

Nowhere, perhaps, were there finer troopers to be found than those in the French army invading the Peninsula. Napoleon had, in fact, swamped the country with divisions of magnificent cavalry, with numerous veterans in the ranks, and under leaders skilled in cavalry work who had taken their squadrons into action many and many a time, and had won victories. The preceding years of this eventful campaign in the Peninsula had seen detached parties of French horsemen penetrating far into country held by Wellington's troops, or by Spanish or Portuguese irregulars; and while the former had taught them many a lesson, and had, indeed, shown the French troops that if they were brave, the lads from England were equal to them, there is little doubt that, just as Wellington and our armies had learned to despise the Portuguese irregulars, and those of Spain in particular, the French held them even more in contempt. It was the detached bands of guerrillas, however, that did them the greatest injury. No wandering party of horsemen could bivouac without fear of having sentries and outposts murdered in the night. Sudden and ferocious attacks were frequent, and at this time, when the French were retreating before our armies, and when without shadow of doubt they had treated the Portuguese peasantry and townspeople with horrible cruelty, a detached squadron such as the one Tom accompanied was liable to annihilation unless handled with great skill. However, this squadron in particular and its officer seemed to make light of the difficulties before them. They were accustomed to the hatred of the peasants, accustomed also to see them take to their heels when they charged, and disappear in their mountains. It was, therefore, with a cheer, in which Tom and his friends joined, that they jogged forward in column of file, their sabres drawn and ready, their leader a horse's length in advance of them.

Tom rose in his stirrups and surveyed the enemy. Even through the gloom he could see that there must be two hundred at least gathered at the entrance of the village through which the squadron must pass to reach the road to the heights. Shots came from the mass every now and again, while there were red flashes from the buildings. Shrill cries of rage and hate reached his ears, and amongst the voices he could distinguish those of women.

Phit! Phit! Bullets whizzed overhead, while the trooper next to him suddenly gave vent to a growl of anger.

"Struck me in the arm, monsieur," he said, after a few moments. "I would rather far receive a wound in proper battle than from these wolves. But you will see; they will scatter as we charge. We shall cut down a few of the laggards, burn the village, and thus light our way to the mountains. Poof! The Portuguese are brutes, the Spaniards are gentlemen beside them."

That was the way in which the French looked at the nations in the Peninsula. Truth compels us to admit that they had reason for liking the Spaniards; for not only were they able to play with them as if they were children, utterly despising them as soldiers, but also they obtained real help from them in their campaign, and though England had sent troops to repel the invader, and to help the Spaniards as well as the Portuguese to rid their country of oppression, yet throughout the campaign the Spaniards in particular foiled the wishes of Wellington and his generals in every direction. They withheld supplies even from the wounded. They parted with nothing save at an exorbitant price, and always there were traitors amongst them ready to disclose our plans to the enemy. The Portuguese, too, were not guiltless in this matter; but, on the whole, their irregulars did some excellent work, and they at least made an attempt to help the British to drive Napoleon and his armies out of the Peninsula.

"Canter!" the command rang out loudly as a wide splash of flame came from the peasants, while bullets clipped the air, sang shrilly overhead, and sometimes hit horses or accoutrements. Tom heard a sharp metallic sound, and lost a stirrup, shot away by one of these bullets; but he managed to secure it again, though he was no great horseman.

"Form line on the left!" The command rang out, while answering howls and shouts came from the village. "Charge!"

Tom could see the commander standing in his stirrups, his sword raised overhead, his face turned towards his men. And that exhilarating shout, the excitement in the air, the bullets and the cries, sent his blood surging through him. Let us remember that Tom was young, and possessed of excellent health and spirits, also that soldiering was no new ambition with him. Fear for the future he had none, but all the while he was wondering how the matter would progress, and what would happen supposing the villagers held their ground and refused to be driven from the village. The hammer of the horses' hoofs, the jingle of bits and stirrups, and the sharp reports of muskets sent a thrill through his frame from head to foot, and in a moment he was leaning forward like the troopers, his sabre down over his knee, all eagerness to reach the enemy. Nor was it long before the squadron got to striking distance. The peasants held their ground till the horses were fifty paces away, and then raced into the houses. A storm of bullets came from windows and doorways, and then, of a sudden, there was a clatter in front, and the commander of the squadron disappeared from view entirely. By then Tom was within ten paces of him; for the formation had brought him to the very centre.

"Halt!" he bellowed, seeing what had happened. "The road is blocked. The peasants have dug a huge ditch, and the commander has gone into it. Here – hold my horse!"

He flung the reins to a trooper riding at his knee, and slid to the ground. A moment later he was down in the rough and deep ditch which the peasants had made ready, and leaning over the unfortunate commander of the squadron found that he was dead.

"*Il est mort!*" he shouted to the troopers, making his way back to his horse at once.

"Monsieur, this is terrible!" cried the trooper who had held the reins. "We are being shot down rapidly, and nothing is being done to help us. The captain is dead and his lieutenant; I think the sergeants are also hurt."

The engagement, so far as the squadron was concerned, had indeed come to a curious and dangerous halt. The troopers sat bunched together, some of the men reining their horses back as if about to flee. Yet no order came. There was no one to give the word of command. It was then that Tom showed the stuff of which he was made. It is true Mr. Riley should perhaps have come to the fore, or Jack; but neither could speak the language, while, in any case, it was the duty of one of the troopers to conduct the action. However, when no one comes forward, and men are being shot down rapidly, it is clear that he who takes command on his shoulders, and acts wisely, is a blessing to his comrades. Jack took the post without a thought. To sit still longer was madness, and quite impossible.

"Wheel about," he shouted in French. "Ah, they have closed in on us! We are caught between two fires. Forward, men, charge!"

He led them at the enemy at full gallop; but what could fifty men do against some hundreds? It happened that this squadron of horse had been watched by the peasants, and for two days past efforts had been made to surround it. The wild inhabitants of this mountainous region, burning with hatred of the invader, had been brought together, and gradually, as the horsemen retreated from the coast and got into difficult country, the net had been drawn about them. There were perhaps five hundred peasants in rear of the party when Tom faced them about and charged. A crashing discharge of musketry swept the ranks of the troopers, dropping a dozen of the men from their saddles, and then began a rush on the part of the enemy. It looked, indeed, as if the remnant would be annihilated, and slashed to pieces where they stood. Tom looked anxiously and swiftly about him, and perceiving a building on the outskirts of the village, a little to one side, he instantly decided to occupy it.

"Right wheel!" he shouted. "Now gallop to that building. If the door is big enough, and we can open it, ride right in. Forward! Clear the rabble coming towards us."

It happened that another section of the circle was approaching the scene of the action from the direction of the building towards which he and the troopers were now making, and these at once opened fire. But Tom set heels to his horse, and in a minute he and the men supporting him burst amongst the peasants, slashing at them to right and left, riding them down, and scattering them in every direction. It was exciting work while it lasted, and it had the effect of allowing the party a little breathing time. They rode up to the door of the building, to find it was a church, and in a twinkling the door was open. Up the five steps leading to it rode Tom, and after him came his comrades.

"Dismount," he commanded. "Draw your carbines and scatter about the place, to make sure that no windows or doors are open. Two of you stand guard over the horses."

It was pitch dark within the church; but a trooper quickly discovered a torch, and then some candles stored away in a box.

"It won't do to keep them burning," said Tom, thinking rapidly. "The light would help the enemy to shoot us; but we must have something with which to inspect the place. Ah, I know – Andrews!"

"Yes, sir?"

The big rifleman was standing stiffly at attention before Tom, his arm at the salute.

"Take the torch and this trooper with you. Go round; return when you have inspected, and report."

The soldier saluted again with as much briskness as he would have displayed had Tom been a regular officer, and went away with one of the troopers whom Tom called.

"Howeley!" he shouted.

"Sir?"

Like Andrews, the man was drawn up with the rigidity of a bayonet.

"Collect all ammunition, place it in a central position, and dish it out ten rounds at a time. Report the total amount."

"Yes, sir."

The fine fellow went off like a rocket to perform the task, while Tom called to the troopers.

"My lads," he shouted, "let us be silent; I have sent a man to inspect the place, and will post you all presently. Another will collect the ammunition, and give it out ten rounds at a time. Don't forget that we may be held up here for hours, and our lives will depend on the amount of cartridges we have. Now, I want two of you for another purpose."

Two men at once came forward. "We are ready, monsieur," one of them said. "For the moment we and our comrades look to you as the leader. Indeed you are a leader; but for your quickness and decision we should be back there at the entrance to the village shot down beside our comrades."

"Then collect all saddle bags," said Tom, "pile them in a corner, and with them all water bottles. They are the most important. I'm not afraid of starvation; for we have horses here, and one of them slaughtered will provide us with ample food. It is the water that is important; see to it, please."

It was perhaps some ten minutes later that the defences of the church were ready. Tom busied himself posting men at all vulnerable spots, and then clambered into the tower with Andrews. It was quite a modest erection, some fifty feet in height, but sufficient to give a view over the village. Lights could be seen in many directions, while shouts echoed through the air. There was the tramp of feet also, and a dull mass over at the entrance to the village.

"They're gloating over the poor chaps they shot and knocked out of their saddles, sir," said Andrews. "It was sharp business; I was never in a brisker, and I've done two years of the campaign already. Came out in 1808, sir, and went home wounded. Beg pardon, sir, but what might your corps be?"

"Corps? Corps?" exclaimed Tom, mystified for the moment. "Oh, I follow! I'm not in the army, Andrews. I was on my way out to Oporto, or, more correctly, I was going to sail for that place when

I was impressed and sent aboard a British frigate. We had that action with the French man-of-war, and you were released. News had come out to the frigate, meanwhile, that I ought never to have been impressed, and so the captain sent me on in the sloop to Oporto. By rights I ought to be seated at a desk adding up long, dry columns."

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