

Brereton Frederick Sadleir

With the Dyaks of Borneo: A Tale of the Head Hunters



Frederick Brereton

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With the Dyaks of Borneo: A Tale of the Head Hunters

CHAPTER I Tyler Richardson

It was a balmy autumn day four years after Queen Victoria ascended the throne, and the neighbourhood of Southampton Water was looking perhaps more brilliant and more beautiful than it had during the long summer which had just passed. Already the leaves were covering the ground, and away across the water pine-trees stood up like sentinels amidst others which had already lost their covering. A dim blue haze in the distance denoted the presence of Southampton, then as now a thriving seaport town.

Situated on a low eminence within some hundred yards of the sea, and commanding an extended view to either side and in front, was a tiny creeper-clad cottage with gabled roof and twisted chimneys. Behind the little residence there was a square patch of kitchen-garden, in which a grizzled, weather-beaten individual was toiling, whilst in front a long strip of turf, in which were many rose beds, extended as far as the wicket-gate which gave access to the main Portsmouth road.

Seated in the picturesque porch of the cottage, with a long clay pipe between his lips, and a telescope of large dimensions beside him, was a gray-headed gentleman whose dress at once betokened that in his earlier days he had followed the sea as a calling. In spite of his sunken cheeks, and general air of ill-health, no one could have mistaken him for other than a sailor; and if there had been any doubt the clothes he wore would have at once settled the question. But Captain John Richardson, to give him his full title, was proud of the fact that he had at one time belonged to the royal navy, and took particular pains to demonstrate it to all with whom he came in contact. It was a little vanity for which he might well be excused, and, besides, he was such a genial good-natured man that no one would have thought of blaming him.

On this particular day some question of unusual importance seemed to be absorbing the captain's whole attention. His eyes had a far-away expression, his usually wrinkled brow was puckered in an alarming manner, and the lips, between which rested the stem of his clay pipe, were pursed up in the most thoughtful position. Indeed, so much was he occupied that he forgot even to pull at his smoke, and in consequence the tobacco had grown cold.

"That's the sixth time!" he suddenly exclaimed, with a muttered expression of disgust, awaking suddenly from his reverie. "I've used nearly half the box of matches already, and that is an extravagance which I cannot afford. No, John Richardson, matches are dear to you at least, for you are an unfortunate dog with scarcely enough to live on, and with nothing in your pocket to waste. But I'd forego many little luxuries, and willingly cut down my expenditure, if only I could see a way of settling this beggarly question. For three years and more it has troubled me, and I'm as far now from a solution as I was when the matter first cropped up. There's Frank, my brother at Bristol, who has offered his help, and I fully realize his kindness; but I am sure that his plan will fail to satisfy the boy. That's where the difficulty comes. The lad's so full of spirit, so keen to follow his father's profession, that he would eat his heart out were I to send him to Bristol, but what else can I suggest as a future for him?"

Once more Captain John Richardson became absorbed in thought, and, leaning back against the old oak beam which supported the porch, became lost to his surroundings. So lost indeed that he failed to hear the creak of the wicket, while his dim eye failed to see the youth who came striding

towards him. But a moment later, catching sight of the figure screened amidst the creepers in the porch, the young fellow gave vent to a shout which thoroughly awakened the sailor.

"Sitting in your usual place, Father, and keeping an eye upon every foot of Southampton Water. Why, you are better even than the coast-guard, and must know every ship which sails into or out of the docks."

"Ay, and the port from which she set out or to which she's bound in very many cases," answered the captain with a smile, beckoning to his son to seat himself beside him in the porch. "And talking of ships reminds me, my lad, to broach a certain subject to you. A big overgrown fellow like yourself, with calves and arms which would have been my admiration had I possessed them when I was your age, should be doing something more than merely amusing himself. You've the future to look to, your bread and butter to earn, and how d'you mean to set about it? Come, every young man should have his choice of a calling, though I think that his parent or guardian should be at hand to aid him in his selection. What do you propose to do?"

Captain Richardson once more leaned back against the oaken prop and surveyed his son, while he slowly abstracted a match from a box which he produced from a capacious pocket, and set a light to his pipe once more.

"Come, sonny," he continued, "in a couple of years you will be almost a man, and you are as strong as many already. You were seventeen three months ago, and since that date you have amused yourself without hindrance from me. But your playtime must come to an end. Your father is too poor to keep you longer at school, and has so little money that he can give you nothing but his good wishes towards your future."

For more than a minute there was silence in the porch, while Tyler Richardson stared out across the neat stretch of turf at the dancing water beyond, evidently weighing the words to which the captain had given vent. That he was strong and sturdy no one could deny. This was no little vanity on the part of his father, but a fact which was apparent to any who glanced at the lad. Seated there with his cap dangling from his fingers, and the sunlight streaming through the creepers on to his figure, one saw a youth whose rounded features bore an unmistakable likeness to those possessed by the captain. But there the resemblance ceased altogether; for Tyler's ruddy cheeks and sparkling eyes betokened an abundance of good health, while his lithe and active limbs, the poise of his head, and the breadth of his shoulders, showed that he was a young man who delighted in plenty of exercise, and to whom idleness was in all probability irksome. Then, too, there was an expression upon his face which told almost as plainly as could words that he was possessed of ambition, and that though he had at present nothing to seriously occupy his attention, yet that, once his vocation was found, he was determined to follow it up with all eagerness.

"I know the matter troubles you, Dad," he said, suddenly turning to his father, "and I know what difficulties there are. Were it not so my answer would be given in a moment, for what was good enough for my father is a fine profession for me. The wish of my life is to enter the royal navy."

"And your father's also. If I saw some way in which I could obtain a commission for you, why, my lad, you should have it to-morrow, but there!" (And the captain held out his palms and shrugged his shoulders to show how helpless he was.) "You know as well as I do that I cannot move a finger to help you in that direction. I must not grumble, but for all that, your father has been an unfortunate dog. I entered the service as full of eagerness as a lad might well be. I was strong and healthy in those days, and the open life appealed to my nature. Then came an unlucky day; a round-shot, fired from one of the French forts which our ships were blockading, struck me on the hip, fracturing the bone badly. You are aware of this. I barely escaped with my life, and for months remained upon the sick-list. Then, seeing that I was useless upon a ship, the Lords of the Admiralty gave me a shore billet, and for two years I struggled wearily to perform the work. But the old wound crippled me, and was a constant source of trouble, so that in the end I was pensioned off, and retired to this cottage to spend the remainder of my life. I'm a worn-out hulk, Tyler, and that's the truth. Had I remained on the

active list I should no doubt have made many friends to whom I could have applied at this moment. Perhaps even were I to state the facts to the Admiralty they would find a commission for you, but then my means are too small to equip you for the life, and you would start so badly that your future might be ruined. But there is Frank, your uncle, who lives at Bristol, and conducts a large trade with foreign parts; we never had much in common, but for all that have always been excellent friends, and on more than one occasion he has suggested that you might go to him and take a post in his warehouse. If that did not suit you, he would apprentice you to one of his ships, and the life for which you long would be before you. There, I have told you everything, and seeing that I cannot obtain a commission for you in the royal navy, I urge upon you to consider your uncle's proposition seriously. Who knows, it may mean a great future. He is childless, and might select you as his successor; and, if not that, he would at least push on your fortunes and interest himself on your behalf."

Once more the old sea-captain leaned back in his seat and groped wearily for his matches, while he fixed a pair of anxious eyes upon his son. As for the latter, he still remained looking steadily out across the water, as if searching for an answer from the numerous vessels which floated there. At last, however, he rose to his feet and replaced the cap upon his head.

"It's a big matter to settle," he said shortly, "and, as you say, I had better consider it thoroughly. I'll give you my answer to-morrow, Father, and I feel sure that I shall do as you wish. Every day I see the necessity of doing something for my living, and as the navy is out of the question I must accept the next best thing which comes along. I should be an ungrateful beggar if I did not realize the kindness of my uncle's offer, and if I decide to take advantage of it, you may be sure that I shall do my best to please him in every particular. And now I will get off to Southampton, for there is a big ship lying there which I am anxious to see. She's full of grain, and hails from America."

Nodding to the captain, Tyler turned and strolled down the garden. Then, placing one hand lightly upon the gate-post, he vaulted over the wicket and disappeared behind a dense mass of hedge which hid the dusty road from view. A moment or two later his father could hear him as he ran in the direction of Southampton.

Half an hour later Tyler found himself amidst a maze of shipping, with which the harbour was filled, and at once sought out the vessel of which he had spoken. She was a big three-master, and lay moored alongside the dock, with a derrick and shears erected beside her. A couple of gangways led on to her decks, while a notice was slung in the rigging giving warning to all and sundry that strangers were not admitted upon the ship.

A few minutes before Tyler arrived at his destination the stevedores had knocked off work in order to partake of their dinner, whilst the hands on board had retired to their quarters for the same purpose. In fact, but for one of the officers, who strolled backwards and forwards on the dock-side, the deck of the ship was deserted, and Tyler could have gone on board without a soul to oppose him. But he knew the ways of shipping people, for scarcely a day passed without his paying a visit to the harbour. Indeed, so great was his love of the sea that during the last three months he had spent the greater part of his time at the docks, and, being a cheerful, gentle-mannered young fellow, had made many friends amongst the officers and crew of the various vessels which had put in there with cargoes for the port. Without hesitation, therefore, he accosted the mate, who was strolling up and down upon the quay.

"May I go aboard?" he asked. "I hear that you carry a cargo of grain, and I'm anxious to see how it's loaded."

"Then you've come at the right moment, sir," was the answer. "Step right aboard, and look round as much as you want. We've been terrible hard at work these last two days getting a cargo of cotton ashore, and now we've just hove up the lower hatches, and shall be taking the grain out of her when dinner's finished. It's come all this way for your naval johnnies – at least that's what the boss has given me to understand; and we are expecting a party of officers along any moment to take a look at the stuff. I suppose they'll pass it right away, for it's good right down to the keel. Then these

fellows will tackle it with shovels and bags, and you will see they'll hoist it up in a twinkling. Helloo! Blessed if that ain't the party coming along this way!"

He turned, and indicated his meaning by a nod of his head in the direction of three smartly-dressed naval officers who had just put in an appearance.

"The party right enough," he said. "Just excuse me, sir, and get right aboard if you care to."

Having obtained permission to go aboard, Tyler at once stepped to the gangway, and was quickly upon the deck. Then he went to the hatchway, which occupied a large square in the centre of the vessel, and leant over the combing so as to obtain a good view of the scene below. Beneath was a lower deck and a second hatchway of similar dimensions, the covering of which had evidently been recently removed. A glance showed him that the hold was filled with loose grain to within some six feet of the hatchway, and he was occupied in wondering how many sacks of corn had been necessary to fill it, when he was aroused by a voice at his elbow. Turning swiftly, he found the three naval officers and the mate standing beside him.

"A fine cargo, and in splendid condition," the latter was saying. "We've just hove up the hatches for your inspection, and that's the way down."

He pointed to a perpendicular ladder which led from the upper hatch to the one below, and stepped aside to allow the officers to approach it. At the same moment Tyler caught the eye of the elder of the three naval gentlemen, and at once, standing erect, he raised his hand as his father had long since taught him to do.

"Ah, the correct salute, and I thank you for it!" said the officer, acknowledging it swiftly. "Where did you learn it, my lad? I can see that you have been taught by someone who was no landsman."

"My father, Captain Richardson, late of the royal navy, instructed me, sir. He lives close at hand, and would spend his days here upon the docks were it not that he is crippled and cannot get about."

"By a gun-shot wound – obtained in warfare?" asked the officer with interest.

"Yes, sir. He was struck by a round-shot fired from a French fort, and was pensioned from the service."

"That is sad, very unfortunate," said the officer; "but his son must take his place, and repay the wound with interest when we have war with France again. But I must see to this cargo. This is one of the many duties which we sailors have to perform. At one time sailing a three-master, and then conning one of the new steam-vessels which have been added to our fleets. Another day we muster ashore, and then an officer can never say what he may find before him. He may have to visit the hospitals, the barracks, or inspect a delivery of hammocks before it is divided amongst the men. To-day we are here to see this cargo of grain, and to pass it if in good condition."

"Which it is, right away down to the keel, you guess!" burst in the American mate. "Say, sir, there's the ladder, and if you'll excuse me, the sooner the inspection's done with the sooner we'll clear the hold and get away out to sea."

"Then oblige me by slipping down, Mr. Maxwell, and you too, Mr. Troutbeck. Take one of those wooden spades with you, and turn the grain over in every direction. Be careful to see that it is not mildewed or affected by the damp. You can bring a specimen on deck for my benefit."

Hastily saluting, the two officers who had been addressed sprang towards the steep gangway which led below, and swarmed down it with an agility which was commendable. Then they paused for a moment or two upon the edge of the lower hatch until a wooden spade had been tossed to them, when they leapt upon the glistening mass of grain which filled the hold. Meanwhile Tyler and the officer who had remained above stood leaning over the upper hatch, looking down upon the figures below. Indeed, the former was fascinated, for the sight of a naval uniform filled him with delight, while to be able to watch officers at their work was a treat which he would not have missed for anything. It was queer to see the way in which the younger of the two juniors tossed his cane aside with a merry laugh and commenced to delve with the spade; and still more quaint to watch the second as he thrust

his two hands into the corn, and, having withdrawn them filled to the brim, walked towards the edge of the hatch with the intention of spreading the grains there the better to inspect them. But – that was stranger still, for, missing his footing, the officer gave a violent swerve, and with difficulty saved himself from tumbling full length. The sight, the exclamation of astonishment and disgust, brought a smile to Tyler's lips; but a second later his expression changed to one of amazement. Why, the officer had again all but lost his footing, and – yes, as Tyler stared down at him, he staggered to one side, threw one hand up to his face, and then collapsed in a heap, where he lay with hands and toes half-buried in the corn. Almost at the same moment his companion, who had been digging vigorously, let his spade drop from his fingers, and looked about him as if dazed. Then he struggled towards his comrade with a low cry of alarm, only to stumble himself and come crashing into the grain.

"There's something wrong down there!" shouted Tyler, realizing that some terrible misfortune had suddenly and unexpectedly overtaken the naval officers. "Look, sir, they are on their faces, and appear to be insensible!"

He tugged at the sleeve of the senior officer without ceremony, and directed his attention to those below, for the former had been engaged in conversation with the mate, and had not witnessed what had happened.

"Something wrong!" he exclaimed in astonishment. "Why, what could be wrong? Ahoy, there, Troutbeck and Maxwell! Why, they are on their faces, and, as I live, they are insensible!"

His amazement was so great that he stood there dumbfounded, and stared at Tyler as though he could not believe his eyes. But a shout of alarm from the mate quickly aroused him.

"It's the gas!" he cried in shrill anxious tones. "Quick, or they'll be suffocated! Hi, for'ard there! All hands on deck to the rescue!"

He went racing towards the quarters in which the men were enjoying their meal, leaving Tyler and the naval officer alone. As for the latter, his astonishment was still so great that he remained rooted to the spot, leaning over the hatchway, the combing of which he grasped with both hands, whilst he stared down at the two prostrate figures huddled below upon the corn as though the sight was too much for him. Then he suddenly stood erect and screwed his knuckles into his eyes, as though he feared that they were misleading him.

"Gas!" he murmured doubtfully. "What gas? How could there be such a thing down there?" Then, suddenly recollecting the condition of his juniors, and realizing that they were in the gravest danger, he sprang towards the ladder which led to the hold below, and commenced to descend it as rapidly as possible.

But Tyler was before him, for though dumbfounded at first at what was beyond his comprehension, the shout to which the mate had given vent had instantly caused him to understand the danger of the situation. There was gas in the hold, some poisonous vapour unseen by those who entered through the hatchway, but lying there floating over the corn ready to attack any who might enter into the trap. What should he do? The question flashed through his mind like lightning, and as quickly the answer came.

"We must get them out of it," he shouted hoarsely, "and by the quickest way too. Hi, there, get hold of the winch and lower away!"

As in the case of the officer who had stood beside him, his first thought had been to rush for the ladder, and to descend to the hatch below by that means. But a quick glance at the figures lying half-buried in the corn, and an instant's reflection, told him that rescue would be difficult, if not impossible, in that way. For, supposing he leapt from the lowest rung on to the cargo of grain, could he hope to be able to lift one of the victims and carry him up the steep ladder which led to safety? Such an attempt would require more than double the strength which he possessed, and besides there was the deadly gas to be reckoned with. Like a flash the thoughts swept through his brain, for Tyler was a sharp young fellow, and ere another moment had passed his plan for rescue was formed. Pointing to the winch, from which a stout rope ran through a block attached to the boom above, and

from thence dangled down into the hold, he called to the mate, who now came running along the deck with three of the hands, to get hold of the levers and prepare to work upon them. Then, tearing his handkerchief from his pocket, he hastily tied it round his face, fastening the knot behind his head as tightly as possible, so that the thickest folds came across his mouth and nostrils. A moment later he had grasped the rope which hung at one side of the hatchway, and at once passed it around his waist. A rapid hitch which his father had taught him secured it there, and a moment later he had thrust himself over the hatchway and was swinging in mid-air.

"Lower away!" he shouted, "and when you see me pass the loop round one of them, hoist as fast as you can. Now, let her go!"

Grasping the length of rope which dangled beneath him, and which he had been careful to leave, he tied it into a strong loop as the men above lowered him into the hold. Then, holding it in both hands, he awaited the moment when he should alight upon the corn. Ah! He was there, and his feet were already sunk ankle-deep in the cargo. Then he became aware of the fact that, though perfectly clear, the atmosphere was stifling. He felt as though he were choking, for in spite of the thick handkerchief about his face the biting gas seemed to fly into his lungs, and at once set him coughing violently. But, determined not to be beaten, he overcame the spasm, and, carefully holding his breath, moved towards one of the prostrate figures.

It was no easy matter to pass the loop around the helpless man, but Tyler worked vigorously at the task. Placing the coil of rope upon the corn close to the feet of one of the officers, he held it there with one toe, and at once grasped the man by the ankles. A lusty heave brought him sliding along through the grain, and scarcely three seconds had passed before the loop was about his body and securely fastened beneath his arms.

"Hoist!" he endeavoured to shout, but his muffled face and the choking gas deadened the words. But for all that, his wishes were clear to those above, who stood staring over the hatchway, for Tyler stood erect and waved eagerly to them. There was a shout, the rope tautened, and then at first slowly, and afterwards with a rush which showed that willing hands were at the winch, Tyler and the officer for whose rescue he had so gallantly descended were hoisted out of the hold. With a swing the boom was brought towards the side, a couple of men rushed at the dangling figures, and ere the naval officer who witnessed the scene had time to give the hoarse command, "Lower away!" the two were lying upon the deck, while the mate of the freight-ship was eagerly removing the loop from the figure of the unconscious officer. As for Tyler, he sat for a short space as if dazed, while he gasped and struggled for his breath. But the knowledge that one victim still remained below, that a second life was at stake, roused him to energy. With a shiver which he could not suppress in spite of every effort, he struggled to his feet and dashed at the hatchway.

"Lower again!" he managed to call out between the paroxysms of coughing which shook him. "Now, let go!"

There was no doubt that the real danger, the urgency of the situation, was impressed upon all who were helping in the rescue; and it did not need the frantic gestures and husky words of command of the elderly naval officer to stimulate the hands to rapid action. By now, too, some fifteen men had assembled, and while a few promptly carried the unconscious officer aside, and set about to restore his animation, the remainder at once leapt to the winch, and set the handles whirling round at such a pace that the rope and its burden were swiftly at their destination. At the same instant the American mate swung himself on to the ladder and went swarming down till he reached the deck below, where he remained ready to lend assistance should he be called for. And well was it that he did so, for that stifling gas well-nigh overcame Tyler in his work of rescue. Holding his breath as he had done before, the latter dashed towards the second prostrate figure once he had obtained a foothold. Then, following the same tactics, he placed the loop in position and grasped the man by his ankles.

"Heave! Pull ho!" As if the words would help the gallant young fellow below, the anxious watchers above gave vent to them, their shouts increasing almost to shrieks of encouragement in their

eagerness. "Heave! He's almost through. Once more, and you will have him in position. Ah! he's down!"

A feeling of consternation and dismay suddenly silenced the voices, and a crowd of eager, anxious faces hung over the hatchway, while a couple of volunteers sprang at the ladder.

"Stand aside!" shouted one of them huskily, a big, raw-boned American sailor. "The lad's down, and we're not the boys to stand here looking on and see him die. Say, mates, pitch me the end of the rope, and I'll go in for him!"

Swiftly descending the ladder, he had almost reached the deck below, and was looking eagerly about him for the expected rope, when another voice reached the ears of the onlookers.

"Easy there! I'm nearest the spot, and I'll pull them out, whatever the cost. Jim Bowman, you can make a turn about your body with the rope, and stand ready if there's need. I'm for it right away as I am."

Stuffing a bulky red handkerchief between his teeth, the mate glanced swiftly at his comrade to see that the words were fully understood. Then with a bound he leapt over the low combing of the hatchway, and alighted on the piled-up corn.

"He'll do it! He's the right man to tackle the business! Stand ready, boys!"

Those above stared down at the scene below with eyes which threatened to burst from their sockets, so great was each one's eagerness. And all the while, as the plucky mate tugged at the prostrate figure of the officer, they sent hoarse shouts echoing down into the hold. Breathlessly they watched as the loop slipped upwards till it encircled the body, and then a dozen lusty individuals rushed towards the winch, ready to lend a hand should those already stationed there prove too weak for the task.

"Hoist!" The big American, who stood on the lower deck, bellowed the command so loudly that it was heard far away along the dock "Hoist smartly, boys!"

Round went the winch, but on this occasion less swiftly than before, for the load to be dragged from the hold was heavier! But still the handles flew round rapidly, and within a short space of time Tyler, the officer, and the American mate lay in a heap upon the deck, where they were instantly pounced upon by those who had helped in the rescue.

CHAPTER II

Eastward Ho!

How's that, my lad? There, open your eyes and look about you, and then take a sip at this glass."

Tyler felt a strong arm about his shoulders, and a hard rim of something cold against his teeth. Then a few drops of water flowed into his mouth, and instantly he was awake, though only half conscious of his surroundings.

"Eh," he murmured, "what's the matter? Time to get up? Oh!"

He gave vent to a little cry of pain as he suddenly became aware of the fact that a red-hot band seemed to encircle his waist. Then he quickly realized the cause, and sat up with a start, remembering that he had placed a coil of rope about him, and that the loop to which the officer was hung must have pulled strongly upon him.

"Feeling sore, my lad?" was asked in tones which seemed familiar. "The rope had hitched as tight as a hangman's noose, and we had to cut it adrift before we could free you. No wonder you have pain, for I expect that your sides and chest are badly chafed. But you're alive, thank God! And have come to at last. Gracious! What a fright you have given us all! But come, see if you cannot stand on your feet and walk about, for it will do you all the good in the world."

"Stand! Rather! I should think I could!" responded Tyler eagerly, suddenly becoming aware of the fact that the elderly naval officer supported him. "Thank you, sir! I'll get up at once."

"Then heave, and there you are."

Placing his hand beneath Tyler's arms, the officer helped him to rise to his feet, and then, fearful lest he should be giddy and fall, stood beside him holding him by the coat.

"Feel steady?" he asked. "A bit shaky, I've no doubt, but another sip and a little water on your head will put you right. Here, one of you lads give a hand and we'll take him to the nearest pump."

There was a group of sailors standing around watching Tyler with interested eyes, and instantly a number sprang forward to support him. Then with faltering steps, and gait which would have caused him to reel from side to side had it not been for their help, they led him across the dock to a shed some little distance away. A pump was erected beside it, and before many seconds had passed a stream of ice-cold water was gushing from the spout into the trough below.

"Now, off with his coat and shirt, and one of you boys hop right along to fetch him a towel," cried the big American, who happened to form one of the party. "Slick's the word, my lad, and back with it smartly. Here, stand right aside, and let me hold on to the youngster."

A big, muscular arm was put around Tyler's tottering figure, and he was deftly placed in such a position as would enable the water to flow upon his head and shoulders. Gush! It came surging from the pump at the handle of which one of the men worked vigorously, and in a little while Tyler was glad to withdraw with dripping head and face, gasping for breath with almost as much energy as had been the case after his first ascent from the hold. Then a towel was thrown over his shoulders, and willing hands set to work to dry him.

"Feel more like yourself, eh? Just bring along that comb, sonny, and we'll fix him up, proper," said the American. "Now, on with your shirt and coat, and where's the boy that's holding on to his cap?"

Their friendly attentions almost bewildered Tyler, for he was unused to them, and, in fact, at another time would have blushed for shame at finding himself treated so much like a child. But in spite of the cold douche to his head he still felt dizzy. His brain swam with the effects of the choking gas, which had been given off by the cargo of corn, while huge black spots seemed to float dreamily about in the air and disturbed his vision. Then, too, though he manfully endeavoured to keep his

figure erect, his legs would tremble in spite of himself, while his knees shook and knocked together in a manner which threatened to bring him headlong to the ground.

"I'm a baby!" he managed to gasp in tones of vexation. "Just fancy a fellow of my age not being able to stand up alone!"

The thought distressed him so greatly that once again he made a futile effort to remain on his feet, only to find himself in much the same helpless condition. Then a biscuit-box was placed beneath him, and he sat down with a feeling of relief.

"Baby! No sich thing, let me tell you, sir!" exclaimed the big American indignantly. "You're just shook up, and that's the truth of it, for I reckon that that 'ere gas wur strong enough to upset a Red Injun, and much more a chap of your constitootion. Jest you sit tight and hold on to your tongue while we pour a few drops of this stuff down yer throat. Baby! Ho!"

With a shake of his head the big sailor turned to one of his comrades and took from him a cracked glass containing a dark and evil-smelling liquid.

"Up with your chin," he said, placing the glass to Tyler's lips. "Now, down with this at a gulp."

Obedient to the order, Tyler opened his mouth and swallowed the draught. Then he shivered again, for the spirit was strong and pungent. But in spite of its nasty flavour, and of the uncomfortable sense of burning which it left in his throat, he was bound to confess that the draught did wonders for him. Indeed, scarcely five minutes were gone before strength came back to his legs, while his brain and eyes seemed to have cleared wonderfully. A pat on the back from the big hand of the American encouraged him to stand again, and with a gay laugh he found himself on his feet.

"That's better!" he exclaimed in cheery tones. "What's become of the officers?"

"I reckon they're jest like you, a trifle shook up and put out, don't yer know," was the answer. "Yer must understand, young fellah, that chaps can't go right down into a hold what's full of that gas without feeling mighty bad. You've all had a near squeak for yer lives, I reckon, and ef it hadn't er been for you, young shaver, them two officers would have been awaiting their funeral right now. I tell yer, me and the other covies is jest hoping to make yer acquaintance. We'd be proud to get hold of yer fingers, and, Jehoshaphat! as soon as you're well we hope to do it. Now, will yer come aboard and take a sleep in one of our bunks, to drive the muddle out of yer head, or will yer go slick away home? Jest say the word, and we'll help you, whatever's the case."

"One moment, please. I desire to speak to this young gentleman," called someone from outside the circle, and as the sailors sprang aside the naval officer who had already befriended Tyler entered the circle and grasped the latter warmly by the hand.

"You are more yourself now," he said with a friendly smile, "and I can therefore speak to you as I would have done half an hour ago had you been in a fit condition to listen to me. On behalf of the two young officers, whose lives you so gallantly saved, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. The deed was a noble one, for, seeing their insensible figures lying in that poisonous hold below, you, like everyone else, must have realized instantly the great risk to be incurred by attempting their rescue. The warning which the mate gave told you that gas lay below the hatchway, and that it had been the cause of striking down my officers. In spite of that you rushed to help them, and I must admit that the promptness of your action, the remarkable rapidity with which you took in the situation and formed your plans, filled me with amazement. To be candid, I myself was so dumbfounded and taken aback that I stood there helpless. But then, you see, I am no longer a young man, and have lost that keenness with which the junior members of my service are invariably filled.

"Now that I come to look into the facts carefully it is a matter of surprise to me that you did not rush to the ladder the instant you realized the necessity for action. But how could you possibly have rescued either of those unfortunate fellows by that means? Obviously two men at least would have been required for the task. You saw that, and at once decided upon an easier and more effective plan. No one could have made his preparations more completely or more rapidly. Your loops were made in a sailor-like manner which does credit to your father's teaching. For the rest, I am too full

of gratitude to you to say much at this moment. Your courage and resolution have delighted me and I congratulate you most heartily."

Placing one hand upon Tyler's shoulder the officer grasped his fingers eagerly with the other, and squeezed them in a manner which showed better than words how much his feelings were aroused. Indeed he might have remained there for many minutes, patting Tyler gently upon the back meanwhile, had it not been for the enthusiastic sailors who stood around, and who had without exception pressed eagerly forward to hear what he had to say. Seeing his final action, however, at once reminded them of their own decision, expressed by their burly comrade, who once more came to the front.

"You'll excuse us, Admiral," he said with a slouching salute, "but like you we're firm set on shaking. Say, young fellow, we're proud to know yer."

Unabashed by the presence of an officer of such seniority in the navy, they crowded forward, and each in turn grasped the blushing Tyler by the hand. Then, as if that had been insufficient to satisfy them, they tossed their caps high in the air, and gave him three rousing cheers.

"There," said the officer, lifting his hands as soon as the shout had died down, "like myself you have shown your appreciation; and now, if you will leave this young gentleman to me, I will see that he is taken home. Come," he continued, turning to Tyler with a smile, "you are still shaken and feel the effects of that poisonous gas. It will be as well if you return to your father, and rest for the remainder of the day. Hail a conveyance, my lads, and tell the man to drive right on to the dock, for we must not allow this young man to walk too much at present. Yes, those are the doctor's orders, and I am here to see that they are strictly enforced," he went on, as Tyler directed an appealing glance towards him. "Fortunately for you and my two officers, one of our ship's surgeons happened to be passing as you were hauled up from the hold, and he was able to attend to you at once. Seeing that you were coming round he left you in my hands and devoted all his care to the others, who were in a very grave condition. They, too, I am thankful to say, have regained consciousness, so that I no longer feel anxiety on their behalf. Permit me, young gentleman, here is the conveyance."

Taking Tyler by the arm, he led him to a fly which had just driven up, and having ushered him in, took the remaining vacant seat himself.

"Drive to Captain John Richardson's," he called out, and then resumed his conversation with Tyler, telling him as they went that the mate of the American ship, who had pluckily helped in the rescue, had suffered no ill effects. Half an hour later, much to the astonishment of the captain, who still sat in his porch keeping watch upon the long strip of water which ebbed before his cottage, a conveyance came rolling along the main Portsmouth road, and halted just opposite the wicket which gave access to his garden. At once his spy-glass went to his eyes, for he was somewhat short-sighted, and his amazement was profound when he discovered Tyler walking towards him, looking pale and shaky, and arm in arm with a gray-headed naval officer. Had it not been for his shattered hip he would have risen to his feet to greet the new-comer, for naval officers seldom or never came his way. As he had said when speaking to his son, he was a poor old hulk, doomed to live in that out-of-the-way spot, forgotten or unknown by men who might have been his comrades had ill-luck not assailed him. In his excitement, the clay pipe and box of matches went tumbling to the ground, where the former smashed into a hundred pieces. Then the old instincts of discipline came back to him and he lifted his hand to his cap with all the smartness he could command.

It was fine to see the way in which this stranger approached the captain. Halting there for one moment, and drawing himself stiffly erect, he returned the salute swiftly. Then he sprang forward and greeted the old sailor effusively.

"Proud to meet you, Captain Richardson!" he exclaimed. "Delighted to make your acquaintance, and to know the father of this gallant young fellow. But, surely we have met before? Richardson? Tell me, sir, when did you enter the service?"

"Forty years ago the fifth of November next. Midshipman aboard the flag-ship *Victory*, bound from Portsmouth for the Mediterranean. And you?"

"An old ship-mate of yours or I much mistake?" exclaimed the officer with eagerness. "Don't you remember Davies – Tom Davies, of the *Victory*– my first commission too. Why, of course you do. A year after I joined I was drafted into another ship, and so we were separated, and have remained so until this moment."

"And I remained aboard for five solid years," burst in the captain enthusiastically, his face all aglow at the recollection of his earlier days. "Then I was transferred to the *Bellerophon*, and again to another ship. We cruised in the East, and many's the brush we had with rascally slave-dealers. Then came war with France, and, returning to home waters, we coasted along the enemy's country, popping in here and there to survey the forts, and dropping upon any vessels that we could come across. At Brest we were under a heavy fire, and that, sir, was the time when the rascals winged me with a shot. It broke me up, and as a consequence of the wound I was laid aside for good in this old cottage."

As the two spoke they still gripped hands, while tears of excitement and happiness streamed down the sunken cheeks of the captain. Poor fellow! It was joy indeed to him to meet a comrade after all these years, and still greater happiness to find himself conversing with a man still upon the active list of the service to which he had belonged. For many years now he had occupied that cottage, and owing to the wound which had crippled him had seldom moved beyond the garden. Occasionally the old salt who lived with him, and acted as his only servant, placed him tenderly in a wheeled chair, and took him for an airing. But Southampton was beyond his reach, and Portsmouth utterly out of the question, and so it had fallen out that the captain had on very few occasions met with officers of the royal navy. A few who had retired lived in the neighbourhood, but they were active men, able to get about, and seldom dropped in for a chat at the cottage. Therefore this unexpected visit, the meeting with a man who had skylarked with him when they were lads, roused him out of his melancholy, and raised his spirits to the highest.

Seating himself beside Captain Richardson, Admiral Davies, – for that was the rank to which the officer had attained, – conversed with him in animated tones for more than half an hour, telling him of the rescue from the hold, and of the gallant conduct of his son.

"I am thankful that it occurred to me to visit the shipping myself," he said. "As a rule two officers would have been considered sufficient for the task, and it is most unusual for one of my rank to undertake such a duty. However, on this occasion I felt bound to go, for the Lords of the Admiralty are trying an experiment. The greater part of their flour is home-grown, but prices are high, and England is not a large corn-growing country. For that reason cargoes have been ordered from America, and when the ships arrive a careful inspection of the grain is necessary. Had that not been the case I should have remained in my office, for I am in charge of the station, and thereby should have lost this opportunity of renewing our friendship. But about your son; have you decided what to do with him? He is a fine young fellow, and would look well in naval uniform."

"And he himself longs for the life," exclaimed the captain. "Though I myself had the worst of fortune in the service, and in spite of the fact that their lordships have not treated me too well, I still think that there is nothing like a commission in Her Majesty's fleet. But it is out of the question, for to obtain a nomination nowadays influence is required, and also I have not the means to supply the proper outfit. The lad would be miserable, for he would not have a sixpence to jingle in his pocket, and would have the mortification of living with comrades who were better off than himself. And besides, he is too old. To have obtained a commission I should have applied three or four years ago. Now he is seventeen, and almost a man."

"In pluck and resolution he is at any rate," said the admiral warmly, "and he deserves far more than words of thanks for his gallant action of this morning. Now listen to me. I like the lad, and, as in your case, I too am devoted to the navy. I have by chance come across a young fellow eminently fitted for the service, and I shall not stand aside and allow Her Majesty to lose the opportunity of

obtaining such a suitable young officer. As your son he has a claim on the Admiralty, and when I describe to their lordships the manner in which he rescued two of my officers they will at once waive all question of his age, and I feel sure will promptly appoint him to a ship. But influence, as you very truly say, is necessary to push a young man on in the world. I do not mean that a midshipman cannot fight his way upwards without friends, for that has been done on scores of occasions; but it gives a lad a better chance if he is put under the eye of some commander who will take an interest in him. Then he will get opportunities of special duties, and if he is a smart lad he may distinguish himself. Will you leave the matter in my hands, and trust to me to do the best for him? I would take him myself, as I have a decided interest in him, but then, as I have told you, I have a shore billet, and his duties would give him but few chances of promotion. He must be appointed to a ship cruising in foreign waters, and he must be placed under an officer who is a friend of my own. There will be no difficulty about the matter, for one of the rescued officers happens to be of excellent family, and a son of one of the sea-lords. He will see to it that the commission is granted, and I have little doubt that within a few weeks I shall be able to return to you with the information that your son is appointed to the China squadron, and under the friendly wing of Keppel, a smart young officer with whom I am well acquainted. There, say no more, for I see that you fully agree. Good-bye for the present! I shall hope to have the pleasure of calling again."

Rising from his seat the admiral squeezed the captain's hand, and then, having gone through the formality of saluting, an act of courtesy which pleased his host vastly, he walked with Tyler towards the gate, one hand placed affectionately on his shoulder.

It would be impossible to describe the delight and happiness with which each inhabitant of the tiny cottage was filled at the good news which the admiral had brought. Captain Richardson could scarcely contain himself for joy, and but for the hip which crippled him would have strutted about the place puffed up with pride at the action of his son. As for Tyler, the prospect of a commission was so fascinating and so absolutely unexpected that he felt in a whirl, and, finding conversation impossible, snatched at his cap and went bounding along the great main road.

A month later, as the captain occupied his accustomed seat in the porch of the cottage, a cloud of dust and the clatter of wheels attracted his attention in the direction of Southampton, and instantly up went his spy-glass, one hand steadied the end, and he looked casually to see what might have caused it; for to this poor crippled officer anything, each conveyance which passed, was of interest, and served to brighten the long days. He was familiar with each of the coaches which drove along the main road, the drivers in every case saluting him with their whips as they came rattling by, and no doubt turning the next moment to the passengers seated upon the box to describe the old salt who occupied the cottage. On this occasion, however, it was no coach which had given rise to the cloud of dust, but a smaller conveyance, at the sight of which the captain was thrown into a condition of excitement.

"There's not more than one which passes here in a week," he said, "and for that reason I am sure that that will be the admiral. Tyler! Tyler! Where are you? Just run down to the gate and be ready to meet him."

It proved to be the admiral, as he had prophesied, and within a little while that officer was standing before him, greeting him with a hearty shake of the hand, and looking at him with a smile the serenity of which told that he had been successful. Behind him stepped the same two officers who had been rescued from the hold, and these at once came forward to be introduced. Then they turned to Tyler and gripped his hand in a manner which showed their gratitude.

"For you," said the admiral, suddenly producing a long blue envelope, and handing it to Tyler. "I will save you the trouble of reading it by telling you that you have been given a commission, and that orders are enclosed within for you to sail without delay for the China station. Your post will be on H.M.S. *Dido*, and your commander will be the Honourable Henry Keppel, Captain in the Royal

Navy. And now, if you will kindly show my officers over the garden, I will discuss a little matter with your father.

"I have more to say," he went on, addressing Tyler's father, when the three had moved away, "and my news, I hope, will give you great pleasure. When I left you I went straight to those in authority and represented matters as I had found them. They agreed with me that it was a scandal and a shame that an officer should be treated as you have been. I pointed out that your pension was insufficient, with the result that it has been largely increased, and will enable you to reside, if you wish it, in a more populated district. Another point, you can now see your way to giving your son a small allowance, and so putting him upon an equal footing with his comrades. Then, too, I propose to help, for I am a single man, and my pay is of ample dimensions. I have taken a liking to the lad, and I mean to push his fortunes to the utmost. And now let us consider the question of his outfit, which must be gone into immediately. He will require uniform suited to this climate and also to the China seas, and must be equipped as well as the most fortunate of youngsters. That, again, I shall make my business if you have no objections, for you must recollect that you cannot easily see to the matter yourself, and, besides, it would gratify me to be allowed to provide all that is necessary. Unfortunately it turns out that no ship belonging to our fleets is bound for the East at this moment, and therefore Tyler will have to make the passage in a merchantman. But that will do no harm, for it will give him an opportunity of getting used to the sea, and will prepare him for his coming duties."

"Quite so," gasped the invalid captain, scarcely able to believe the good words to which he had been listening, or to understand the sudden change in his fortunes. "But he is no landlubber, let me tell you, Admiral, for he has hosts of friends in these parts, and during the holidays has often put to sea for quite a week at a time. He can splice and knot, for Tom Erskine, the old pensioner who acts as my servant, has taught him thoroughly. But how can I thank you?"

"Thank the lad, my dear Captain. Tyler is the one to whom you must show your gratitude, and I, too, feel indebted to him; for had it not been for his gallant action you and I would still have remained ignorant of one another, though living separated by but a mile or two. Think of the yarns we shall have together, and of the tales of our boyhood's days which we shall be able to spin. You must come and live close into the town, and I know of a little house there which would suit you admirably, for it is posted high up, and there is a sheltered seat before it from which a more extensive view even than this can be obtained. There is many an old sailor living there who will be delighted to come in and smoke a pipe with you, and instead of sitting here alone for the greater part of every day you will find that you have a new and happier life before you; for you are a man who loves companionship, and in Southampton you will make many a friend.

"And now to complete this matter, for we have very little time in which to delay. Sit here and think quietly about the question of the house, and let me know in a couple of days or more, when I return to visit you. Meanwhile I will take Tyler to my quarters, and will see to his outfit. Let him come for a week, which will give sufficient time to the tailors to try on the various garments. Then he can return to you, and can spend the remainder of his time in England at home."

It wanted very little persuasion on the part of the admiral to convince Captain Richardson that he had made a staunch friend, who was acting for his and Tyler's benefit. And therefore he placed no difficulty in the way of the latter's proposed visit to Southampton, but instead at once shouted for him.

"The admiral has kindly asked you to go into the town with him for a week," he called out. "Run to your room at once, like a good fellow, and pack your best clothes into a bag, for you must remember that you are now a Queen's officer and must dress becomingly."

Half an hour later the admiral and the two officers who had accompanied him to the cottage took their leave of Captain Richardson, and having been joined by Tyler, crowded into the hackney-coach which had conveyed them from the town of Southampton, and went trundling away along the road. Behind them they left the captain, jubilant at the good fortune which had suddenly come to him and his son, and eagerly looking forward to the change before him. No longer was he troubled

by the question of Tyler's future, for now that was thoroughly settled. Then, again, the long dreary winter, which had usually dragged by miserably for him, was likely to prove in the coming months the happiest he had spent for many a year; for he would certainly leave this out-of-the-way spot, to which ill-health and inadequate income had fixed him, and would make his future home in Southampton, where he would be within easy reach of any who cared to show their friendship. In addition he would have the patronage of Admiral Davies, and that, together with the fact that they had been shipmates together in their earlier days, would secure a number of acquaintances – and, with such a man as Captain Richardson was, acquaintanceship would lead to certain and lasting friendships. Yes, the prospect was a bright one, and on that day, as the old white-headed sailor sat back in the porch, pipe and spy-glass in hand, and the old familiar scene before him, he felt that he was about to commence another existence altogether; he looked younger, the sunken cheeks seemed to have filled out a little, whilst the eyes sparkled in an unusual manner. Indeed, so alluring was the future that the captain remained at his post long after the hackney-coach had reached its destination, and only retired within the cottage when night was falling. Then, seated in his cosy parlour, he took up the *Navy List* and looked up the names of a few of his old comrades and that of the officer under whose command Tyler was to be.

"Yes," he murmured, "the lad will have every opportunity, for I have heard of Captain Keppel, and everyone agrees that he is a dashing and distinguished officer."

When Tyler returned to the cottage a week later his father scarcely recognized the spruce young fellow who came walking through the garden towards him, for our hero had now discarded civilian clothes and was dressed in a blue uniform which suited him admirably. Behind him he had left in the admiral's quarters his sea-chest and a very complete outfit with which his generous friend had provided him. In addition, he came primed with the information that he was to sail at the end of three weeks, and that his destination was to be Singapore, where the *Dido* would eventually put in to victual.

The remaining days of his stay in England were extremely busy ones, for, once Admiral Davies had taken an interest in any matter, he was not the man to permit of delay. Indeed, within a very few hours of Tyler's return he drove up in a hackney-coach prepared for the reception of the invalid, with a comfortable couch and thick soft cushions stretched between the seats. On this Captain Richardson was gently placed, and the trio at once drove to the house which the admiral had selected as a likely residence. Arrived there, the captain was carried to the sheltered seat of which mention had been made, and was then shown the interior of the dwelling.

"It will do splendidly!" he exclaimed with enthusiasm as they returned to the cottage. "For, thanks to my increased income, I shall easily be able to pay the rent demanded by the agent. Then, again, the furniture in the cottage will be sufficient to fill the rooms, while outside there is a garden which with Tom's help will produce all the vegetables that we require. But more than all, the sheltered seat commands a view up and down the Water, and from it I can see not only the ships sailing there, but can look right into the harbour, while the Portsmouth road stretches like a white ribbon clearly before me, and my own seat in the porch is under view. No doubt on many a day in the future I shall fix my glass upon it, and bear in mind the times when a poor old crippled sailor sat there forlorn and eager for friends. If it can be arranged I will change houses before Tyler starts; and there should be no difficulty in the matter, for the cottage is held on a monthly tenancy, while the residence in Southampton is ready and waiting for me."

Accordingly notice was promptly given to the owner of the cottage, while certain necessary decorations and repairs were made to the new house. Then a large van arrived, to which, under the admiral's friendly superintendence, the goods and chattels belonging to the captain were transferred, while that individual was once more put into the hackney-coach and driven to temporary quarters in the town. A few days later he was settled in his new residence, and when Tyler set sail from the harbour *en route* to Plymouth, where he was to embark upon a merchantman bound for Singapore, he had the satisfaction of knowing that his father was in comfortable surroundings, with many friends

at hand. Standing by the after-rail he steadied himself against it and fixed the spy-glass, with which he had been presented by the officers whom he had rescued, upon the sheltered corner high up in the town. There was the old crippled captain, his gaze directed through his glass at the vessel which bore his son away. That he realized the fact of Tyler's presence there upon the poop was evident, for as the latter snatched at his cap and waved it about his head, the old sailor dragged a huge red handkerchief from his breast-pocket and let it blow out in the breeze. Thus did father and son take leave of one another, the former to commence a life of happiness to which he had been too long a stranger, and the latter to cross the sea, where many adventures were to befall him.

CHAPTER III

Preparing for a Journey

Six days had passed, from the date when Tyler Richardson set out from Southampton and dropped down to the open sea, before he reached Plymouth Harbour, for the vessel upon which he had sailed had met with contrary winds, and was much delayed. However, arrive he did at last at the busy port, to find the *Alice Mary* on the point of departure. Indeed, as Tyler ascended the gangway, followed closely by his chest, the bell was ringing loudly to warn friends and relatives to leave, while the blue-peter at the fore showed that all was in readiness. Sailors were running about the decks in obedience to the orders of the captain, while passengers stood about in every position, hampering the movements of the men, as they looked towards the shore and waved their hands and handkerchiefs. A few of the gentlemen were smoking placidly on the poop, as though departure from England on a long voyage was nothing out of the ordinary, while elsewhere some of the ladies were weeping bitterly at the thought of leaving. Tyler threaded his way amongst them, and having seen the cabin which he was to occupy, and deposited his smaller belongings there, he returned to the deck and looked on at the scene with interest.

"A big muddle it all looks, does it not?" said a voice at his elbow, and, turning swiftly, he became aware of the fact that one of the passengers, a tall, bearded gentleman, stood beside him with a pleasant smile of greeting upon his face.

"But it will all settle down within a few hours," went on the stranger, without waiting for Tyler's answer, "and, bless you! we shall all feel perfectly at home before we are much older. In fact, within a week we shall be the best of friends, and, I doubt not, shall feel as though we had known one another all our lives. By the end of the voyage some of us will have made such excellent companions that we shall be loth to part, while a few, wearied by the monotony of the long passage, will have squabbled. That is often the ending of a trip like this. But, pardon me, my name is Beverley, and I am for Singapore. May I ask your destination?"

Tyler at once told him, and then the two fell into conversation, which lasted until the ship had warped out of the harbour and was steering for the sea. Then they separated to go to their cabins, only to find that they were to share the same. And so it happened that throughout the voyage, which lasted for three months, they were continually together, and became the fastest of friends.

"And so you, like myself, are bound for Singapore," said Mr. Beverley two months after the *Alice Mary* had sailed from Plymouth; "and you tell me that you are likely to join the *Dido* there. I think that you will be fortunate if you do so, for I happen to be well informed as to the movements of the ships, and I know that the vessel of which we speak is at present in the China Sea, engaged on a special mission, and is not likely to return to Singapore until late next year. Consequently you will either have to remain kicking your heels at the latter place, or you will have to tranship and go aboard the first merchantman bound for Hong-Kong. Now let me tell you of my plans. I am engaged by the Government to go to the island of Borneo, with a view to obtaining information as to its products. At the same time I have other people's interests in hand, for I am travelling for a firm of rubber merchants who are seeking a new field from which to obtain their supplies. Once before I was in the Eastern Archipelago, and on that occasion I obtained experience which will be of great value to me and which will help me on my journey. But you may wonder why I am troubling you so much with my own affairs, and for that reason I will explain. I told you that the *Dido* was in the China seas, and was not likely to reach Singapore for many months. But I did not say what was also in my knowledge, namely that Captain Keppel has been ordered to return by way of the archipelago, where he is to do his best to exterminate the pirates, who are very numerous and infest the islands. Now, supposing you sailed to Hong-Kong and missed the *Dido*!"

"It would be very disappointing," exclaimed Tyler, "and in that case I should scarcely be able to report myself before a year had passed."

"Quite so! but if there was news at Singapore that the *Dido* was already on her way, but would be delayed in the neighbourhood of Borneo, how would you care for a trip to the island yourself, with the hope that you might have the fortune to join her there?"

"Nothing I should like better!" burst in Tyler eagerly. "With you, do you mean?"

"That is my proposition. I want a comrade to accompany me, and if he is an officer in the British navy, all the better, for the power of England is known in Borneo, and your uniform would command respect on the coast. In the interior it would be a different matter, for there the Dyak tribes have probably never seen a white man. Indeed I hear that the country has never been explored, but rumours which have reached us through the Malays tell how the tribes within are for the most part fierce and warlike, and spend their time in attacking one another, often with the sole object in view of obtaining the heads of their enemies. But to return to my proposition. I have known you now so long that I feel sure that we should be capital friends. As I have said, I want a companion, while you desire to join your ship. Her destination is the coast of Borneo, while I also am bound in that direction. If on arrival at Singapore you find it unwise to proceed to China, and can obtain permission from the authorities, will you join me, in the hope of falling in with the *Dido*? There will be no expense, but I can promise you a trip which you may never have another opportunity of taking."

"It would be grand, and there is nothing that I should like more, Mr. Beverley," cried Tyler with eagerness. "Of course I know nothing about this Eastern Archipelago, and indeed did not know that I was bound in that direction until a very few days before leaving England. I am sure that the excursion would, as you say, be most fascinating, and I will join you with the greatest pleasure if the authorities will allow me to do so."

"Then I think that there will be no difficulty, though I am uncertain at the present moment to whom your request should be made. I am aware that there is a resident governor at Singapore, but whether the Admiralty has a representative is another matter. In any case I should go with you, and should show my orders, which would command some amount of influence; then again, in six weeks' time, when we hope to arrive at our destination, those at Singapore will be able to tell us more about the *Dido*, and will be able to say whether she is then in the China seas or whether she is shortly due at the port. We must be guided by their report, though I think that you will find that your ship is on her way to Borneo, and to the islands thereabout. That being the case, we shall promptly get sanction for you to join me, and as soon as we have made the necessary preparations shall set sail. As for the latter, I propose to purchase a small sailing schooner, and fit her up with a quantity of muskets and a couple of six-pounder guns, for our journey will take us into a part where the pirates from Sarebus abound, and they will think nothing of pouncing upon us. However, if they see that we are fully prepared, they will be more inclined to leave us alone, while, should they be bold enough to attack us, we shall, I hope, beat them handsomely, for we shall carry a crew of Malays, besides an interpreter. But how is it that you obtained your commission? You are decidedly over the age when youngsters are admitted to the navy, and as you have never broached the subject yourself I have not ventured to open it for fear of seeming curious. However, should you care to tell me I should be most interested to hear."

Thus invited to give an account of his adventure at the docks, Tyler did not hesitate to describe the latter in full, and to tell Mr. Beverley how Admiral Davies had come forward to help the family.

"It was done on the spur of the moment," he said, as if in excuse for his action, when referring to the rescue. "You see, there were the two officers insensible, a shout from the mate told us clearly that gas was the cause of the mishap, and, of course, after that the only thing to do was to get them out as rapidly as possible."

"That may be so, Tyler, my lad," responded Mr. Beverley warmly, "but I tell you that, though the need for rescue was apparent, there are many who would have stood there on the deck wringing their hands and incapable of giving active help. That's just where you came to the fore, and it must

have been solely due to your promptness that those officers are alive to-day to tell the tale. I am glad that you have won your commission in such a manner, and I prophesy that your promotion will be rapid, for you are about to serve under a very distinguished officer, and will come to him with a character which will at once command his respect and approval. If he sees that you are level-headed and a hard worker he will no doubt give you many an opportunity of showing your worth. But it's time for dinner, and we had better go below and dress. Later on we can discuss the question of this trip to Borneo more completely. At the present moment it is sufficient for me to know that I have obtained the services of a young fellow who will be a companion, and who, moreover, will be of great assistance should it ever be our fortune to get into a tight corner."

Five weeks later the *Alice Mary* sighted the Island of Sumatra, and, having passed through the Malacca Strait, made for the harbour of Singapore. Tyler and Mr. Beverley, having seen their baggage landed, at once went to an hotel, the latter promptly despatching a note to the governor to ask for an appointment. Then they walked about the town for an hour, to find on their return that an answer had arrived requesting them to attend at the residency immediately.

"Glad to meet you," said the governor cordially, as they were ushered into his room. "I am aware of your proposed expedition, Mr. Beverley, for I have had orders to help you as much as possible. Advices also have reached me with the information that Mr. Richardson would come here with the object of joining H.M.S. *Dido*; but I fear that there is disappointment before him, for a brig which arrived last week came with the news that the ship in question had left Hong-Kong recently in search of the pirates in the neighbourhood of Borneo, and also to forward, if possible, the work of an ardent philanthropist, by name James Brooke. I fear that our young friend will have to remain in idleness for many weeks, unless, of course, he receives orders to proceed to some other port in the Archipelago."

"Which would exactly suit him, sir," exclaimed Mr. Beverley, who at once proceeded to tell the governor of the proposal which he had made to Tyler.

"It sounds an excellent plan to keep him out of mischief," was the answer, given with a smile, "and I am sure that the voyage would be most instructive for a young fellow such as he is. As to the necessary permission, I can give you that on the spot, for there is not a single representative of the royal navy in port at this moment. I will write a letter, which he can carry with him, stating that as the *Dido* is not likely to put in an appearance for some little time, and is in all probability cruising in the neighbourhood of Borneo, this officer is to proceed there with you on the distinct understanding that he is to join the *Dido* as soon as he obtains news of her precise whereabouts. That will smooth all possible difficulties, will it not?" he went on with a pleasant smile, seating himself at the desk which stood in the room, and making ready to write. "If questions are asked as to why he did not remain here, he has only to produce the letter; while again, should it turn out that by going with you the date of his joining is delayed longer than it would have been had he remained at Singapore, why, my written orders will clear him from all reprimand."

Taking a piece of official paper, the governor hastily scrawled some lines on it and stamped it at the bottom. Then he enclosed the letter in an envelope and sealed it with wax.

"There," he said, handing it to Tyler, "may you have a very pleasant trip! and when you fall in with the *Dido* just be so good as to give my compliments to her commander. For you, Mr. Beverley, I trust that your journey into the interior may lead to a favourable report, for I myself am deeply interested in the island, and in Mr. James Brooke, whose name I have already mentioned to you. I met him here, where he stayed quite recently, refitting his vessel, the *Royalist*, and I had the opportunity of many a conversation with him. He has the interests of the Dyaks and inhabitants of Borneo Proper at heart, and for that purpose he has sailed a second time for Sarawak. I fear that he will encounter many difficulties and dangers, and that it will be long before he meets with real success. But excuse me, I am very busy to-day, and there are many others waiting to speak with me."

Extending his hand the governor bade them farewell, and ushered them out of his room, promising to help them in their preparations if they should be in need of assistance. As for Tyler

and his friend, they returned to the hotel, and began to discuss the preparations to be made before their departure.

"We shall require special clothes, of course," said the latter, "and I think that corduroy breeches and high boots, and a strong but thin linen jacket, will be necessary. A light sun-hat, which will retain its position on the head when the wearer is moving actively, must form part of the outfit, and in addition a cloak of heavy material must be taken, for in Borneo scarcely a night passes without rain, often amounting to a heavy downpour, from which we must be protected. Indeed, my experience of these regions has taught me that a white man rapidly falls a victim to ague if he is exposed to much damp and cold. We must try to keep fever at arm's-length, and as a precaution I shall take with me an abundance of quinine, besides other drugs and surgical necessaries. A spare suit, with flannel shirts, and a supply of foot-gear, will meet our requirements, and will allow us to turn our attention to another portion of the outfit.

"Now about guns. I have already told you that I shall carry a supply on board the schooner which I propose to purchase, but I shall also obtain the best of weapons for ourselves, and in any case we shall carry with us a pair of heavy revolvers. Don't think that I am inclined to be pugnacious," he went on with a smile, "but there is nothing like being fully prepared. We may, and I'm sure I hope that we shall, pass amongst these tribes without molestation, but there is no saying for certain, and it will do no harm to let the Dyaks see that we are well armed. But I hope to win them over by presents, and for that purpose I shall take with me bales of beads and coloured cotton, besides looking-glasses, and cheap knick-knacks. A few instruments for the preservation of specimens will be necessary; and last, but by no means least, it will be desirable if you bring a suit of uniform, to be worn on state occasions.

"And now for a vessel in which to sail. As we have little time to spare, I propose that we leave for the docks at once and go to a shipping agent. If there is anything in the port likely to prove serviceable he is certain to have knowledge of the craft, and will be able to give us particulars."

Issuing from the hotel once more, Tyler and Mr. Beverley walked through the town, passing scores of natives of every hue and colour as they went. Indeed, Singapore, like many another Eastern seaport, is noted for its cosmopolitan population; and as they threaded their way through the sunlit streets, Malays, Chinese, Hindoos from India, and many another native from adjacent parts, jostled one another. Europeans also were to be seen in abundance, but for the most part these were driving in light carriages, or were mounted upon ponies. To Tyler the scene was particularly fascinating, for he had never been in the East before, and as he walked along, his eye noted with admiration the lithe and graceful figures of the Malays, and the stolid, heavily-built appearance of the Chinese.

"Yes, John Chinaman looks dull and uninteresting," remarked Mr. Beverley, "but note his prosperity. He has found that his own native land is filled to overflowing, and that competition is too severe, and in consequence has emigrated. I have met him in divers parts, for he is to be found in large numbers in the Straits Settlements, in Borneo, and other islands in this archipelago. He has also found his way to North America and to Australia, and everywhere he is prosperous. A hard worker from his earliest days, and almost always contented with his lot, he can feed himself upon the smallest wage, and still save sufficient for a rainy day. Then in the course of years he becomes his own master, the employer of labour, and a wealthy citizen of whatever town he has made his home. But we must hurry on, for there is much to settle before we set sail for Borneo."

Half an hour later they stood upon the dock-side looking with admiration at a tiny schooner which lay moored in the basin, floating daintily upon the water.

"A derelict," explained the shipping agent, who had accompanied them to the quay. "She was found off the northern coast of Sumatra, driving hither and thither upon the sea. No one can say to whom she belonged, or how it happened that she was adrift and left all alone. Perhaps her crew went ashore somewhere in the Archipelago and were set upon by the natives. But it is idle to guess, and all that I can tell you is that she was salvaged by a vessel making for this port, and that the usual period allowed in these cases having passed without a claimant coming forward, she is now to be sold by

auction, or to any private bidder who will give the price. There, sir, you can see what handsome lines she has, and I can assure you that she is sound and seaworthy. I have already mentioned the figure asked for her, and you are at liberty to take her out for a day's cruise before coming to a definite decision. Shall I make the necessary arrangements and place a crew aboard?"

"I like her looks," said Mr. Beverley, "and we will try her. When can you be ready?"

"To-morrow morning shall see all arrangements completed, and I myself will come with you," replied the agent. "And now as to the other questions which you put to me. I can find you ten men to form a crew with the greatest ease, and I happen to know of a young fellow who would gladly go with you as boatswain. He was a sailor aboard a merchantman, but fell sick when the ship lay here discharging her cargo, and was at once taken to the hospital, where he remained for long after the ship had sailed. He is now well and strong, and eagerly looking for some work. His name is John Marshall, and I can give him an excellent character."

"Then if I like him I will engage him for the trip," said Mr. Beverley; "but what about an interpreter? It will be necessary to take someone with us who can speak the Dyak language, and I think that amongst the Malay crew should be included natives who speak some English besides their own tongue."

"The last can be easily managed, but an interpreter would be a difficulty, for you want an intelligent man, and they are few amongst these natives. But wait – it suddenly occurs to me that I know the very person to suit you. How would a Dutchman do?"

"Provided he was honest, and had no particular failing, there is no reason why he should not suit me," replied Mr. Beverley thoughtfully. "I admit that I am not charmed with the race of Dutchmen which I have met in the islands of the Archipelago, for they are indolent, and many of them, I fear, cruel in their treatment of the natives. But some were excellent fellows, and there is no reason why this man should not prove the same. Who is he, and how comes it that he is here in Singapore?"

"That is a question which I am unable to answer," was the agent's reply. "I only know that he is here in search of employment, for I am the man who is supposed to know everything in this town. His own tale is that he comes from Java, and that he is here for his health. He is quiet and well-behaved, and, I should judge, some thirty years of age, I remember that he told me that he had been in Borneo, and could understand the Dyaks. But I will send him to call upon you, and you can form your own opinion of the man."

Having settled the matter in this way, and promised to be at the quay by daylight on the following morning, Tyler and his friend returned to their hotel, and having drawn out a list of articles which they considered useful, they sallied into the town once more and set about making their purchases. A week later their preparations were complete, the schooner had been tried and approved of, and duly bought. Then, thanks to the agent, a crew was easily found, while provisions were to be had in abundance. A Chinese gunsmith had supplied the necessary weapons, and had himself mounted the two six-pounders upon the deck.

"We will sail to-morrow at noon," said Mr. Beverley as he and Tyler retired to their hotel that evening. "I think that all our preparations are completed, and I feel that everything is most satisfactory. Our crew are sturdy, well-built fellows, while John Marshall promises to be a treasure. Of Hanns Schlott, our Dutch interpreter, I can say very little, for it is difficult to understand him. He is quiet and reserved, and never speaks unless he is addressed. But I have hopes that he will prove a good companion."

Mr. Beverley said the last few words with hesitation, and then lapsed into a thoughtful silence, which Tyler did not venture to interrupt. But a few minutes later he turned to our hero sharply and asked him a question.

"What is your own opinion?" he demanded somewhat curtly. "How do you like the man?"

"I scarcely know," was Tyler's doubtful answer, "and I do not care to say anything now which may prove wrong in the end. But, honestly, I do not trust him. He has a hang-dog expression, and if you notice, he never looks one steadily in the face. Then again I do not admire his companions."

"Companions! Why, he describes himself as being friendless," exclaimed Mr. Beverley with some surprise. "Surely you are mistaken. Where have you seen him in company with other men?"

"On three separate occasions I have caught sight of him in close conversation with a rascally-looking fellow who has the appearance of being partly Dutch and partly Malay. I must say that I also was astonished, and watched them for some little while until they boarded a native craft which lay out in the basin. She sailed yesterday, but I said nothing about the matter, as I did not wish to prejudice you. Still, I thought it strange, and determined to mention the matter after we had set sail."

For some considerable time there was silence between the two, both being occupied with their thoughts. As for Tyler, he was bound to confess to himself that he had taken an instant dislike to the Dutchman, and felt uneasy at the prospect of his company. But then it was not his business to interfere, for this was Mr. Beverley's expedition, and besides, even though Hanns Schlott failed to please him, he would be one amongst many, and could do no harm even though he might desire to be troublesome.

"Hum! It is strange that I too have had the same feeling about this man," said Mr. Beverley. "But, for fear of doing him an injustice, I failed to mention it. But I was not altogether satisfied with him, and had it not been for the fact that it is absolutely necessary that we should carry an interpreter, and that a suitable man was hard to obtain, I should never have accepted his services. However, he is engaged, and must accompany us, though I shall be careful to keep my eye upon him. Now let us turn out into the town for a walk. After to-morrow there will be little opportunity of taking exercise."

Early on the following morning all was bustle above and below the deck of the tiny schooner. John Marshall, the young fellow who had been engaged as boatswain, was busily handling his native crew in a manner which showed that he was a thorough sailor. Obedient to his orders, which were given in quiet but resolute tones which commanded instant attention, the Malays were stowing water-barrels in the hold, while a portion of the crew were laying out the sails in preparation for hoisting. Right aft, seated upon the six-pounder which was mounted there, was a short, thick-set individual, dressed in slouching clothes and wearing a broad felt hat upon his head. His cheeks were sallow and flabby, and his whole face was destitute of colour, save for a few black bristles upon his chin. Of moustache he had absolutely none, and his head had been cropped so close that it seemed to be entirely bald. With the brim pulled down over a pair of narrow, slit-like eyes, he sat there gazing vacantly at nothing, while he puffed lazily at an enormous pipe, now and again lifting his head to watch the smoke as it circled about him. Not once did he make a movement to help those on board, and even when Tyler and Mr. Beverley stood close beside him, tugging laboriously at an enormous case of ammunition, he did not venture to stir or lend a hand in the task. Instead, he lounged there as though he had quite made up his mind that his work would begin later on, and that here, at any rate, there was no call for the interpreter to the expedition to exert himself.

"Hanns Schlott is a ne'er-do-well, I fear," whispered Mr. Beverley a few minutes later, whilst he and Tyler were in the hold. "For the last hour he has sat there idly, looking at nothing in particular, and lifting not a finger to help those who are to be his comrades. I fear that he will prove unsuitable, and if only I had a good excuse, and could be certain of replacing him instantly, I would pay him a portion of the wages agreed upon and dismiss him. But then a substitute is not to be found, so that we must make the best of matters as they are and trust to things improving in the future."

Consoling themselves with this reflection, they stowed the ammunition safely and then returned on deck. By now all was in readiness for departure, and the tiny hatch of which the schooner alone boasted having been battened down, the order was given to hoist the sails. Then the rope which secured her to the moorings was cast off, and the dinghy, by means of which the operation was performed, having been attached to a ring-bolt at the stern, the little vessel swung round, and,

careening to the steady breeze which was blowing, headed from the harbour of Singapore. An hour later her course was set direct for the north-western point of Borneo, towards which she sped at a gentle pace.

"Once we make the land, I propose to veer to the north and cruise along the north-western coast," said Mr. Beverley, as he and Tyler stood side by side on deck. "Then I shall look out for a river which seems wide enough for navigation, and after landing and obtaining information from the Malays who may happen to be in the neighbourhood, I shall push on up the river till the shallows or other difficulties prevent me. After that we shall act as circumstances direct, though my aim and object is to wander from end to end of Borneo Proper, ending my journey in the neighbourhood of Sarawak."

"Land ho! Land in sight!"

John Marshall's shout brought all aboard the little schooner hurrying to the deck early one morning six days after the voyage had commenced. "Away there a couple of points to starboard," he continued, directing Tyler's gaze in a line which would show him the object in view. "Hilly land, with green trees, sir, and it's Borneo, I'm thinking."

"Borneo, sure enough, John," sang out Mr. Beverley in tones of pleasure, fixing his eyes on the distant land through a pair of glasses. "Take a look, Tyler, and tell me what you see. There is such a haze upon the water that I am confused, though I am certain, from the direct course that we have made, that the island before us is the one for which we are bound."

"I can make out a long range of hills," said Tyler, after he had taken a steady look at the distant object, "and – why, I declare that there is the very craft that lay close alongside us at Singapore."

"Where? Which vessel do you mean?" demanded his companion quickly. "Not that it matters much, or is of the least importance," he added, "for there is quite a considerable trade done with Borneo, and ships pass to and fro."

"Not vessels like that one," said Tyler under his breath, turning to Mr. Beverley swiftly and lifting a warning finger, for he had suddenly become aware of the fact that Hanns Schlott was beside them, eagerly listening to their words. "Yes," he went on, as if agreeing to what had been said, "she is no doubt just an ordinary trader, and we shall probably meet with many more. Are you going below to work out our position?"

Conscious that Tyler must have some occasion for speaking as he did, and at once noticing his signal to be cautious, Mr. Beverley indulged in one more glance through the glasses, so as to disarm suspicion, and then, taking the hint which had been thrown out, disappeared below, where he was at once joined by our hero.

"Well," he demanded, as soon as they were in the cabin and had closed the door, "why this mystery? Why is there need for caution? You puzzle me, my lad."

"Perhaps I have no right to be suspicious," answered Tyler, "but you will recollect that I told you that I had seen Hanns Schlott speaking with a stranger while at Singapore, and that he accompanied his friend on board. The vessel upon which they went is the one now in view, and its commander is the rascally-looking fellow I described to you."

"But surely – " commenced Mr. Beverley, and then suddenly became silent. "What do you fear?" he asked in a quiet voice some moments later, turning a thoughtful face towards his young companion. "Come, do not hesitate to speak your mind, for I shall not laugh at you. You have seen something which has aroused distrust in your mind, and you are anxious. I can see that plainly, and as I know well that you are a young fellow upon whom I can rely, and moreover, that you are not inclined to cry out without a cause, I feel sure that there is really something serious. Now, what is it exactly, and, first of all, are you positive that the ship we have seen is the one upon which Hanns Schlott's friend was quartered?"

"I am absolutely certain," was the emphatic answer. "The vessel in the offing is a low-built native craft, and to anyone who had not observed her closely she would appear much the same as

others to be seen in and about Singapore. However, I happened to take good stock of her, for I tell you that from the very first I have distrusted our interpreter, and I noticed that she had a large slit in her sail, which had been roughly stitched. The craft lying under the land has a jagged hole in the very same position, and I feel positive that it is the one which we are discussing."

"But supposing she is the identical boat," burst in Mr. Beverley, "surely there is nothing in the fact of her being in this neighbourhood?"

"Perhaps not. It may turn out that I am giving an alarm for which there is no need; but of this I am confident, the vessel owned by Hanns Schlott's friend is no peaceful trader, or if she is at times, she occasionally indulges in warfare of some description."

"How could you know that, Tyler? You must be romancing."

"I think not," was the steady answer. "At the time, I recollect that I merely noticed that her wood-work was riddled with bullet-holes in many places, and that while some had been the work of months ago, others had been recently made. I remember thinking it strange, but then we were so busy fitting out for the expedition that I quickly forgot all about it. I ought to have mentioned it when we were discussing Hanns, but felt that I might have turned you against him in an unjust way. Now that I see the very same ship the whole thing recurs to me with added force, and makes me feel that all is not as it should be. You yourself have told me that pirates abound in these seas. Then why should this vessel not be one of that type, and how are you to know that Hanns Schlott is not in league with the commander and crew, and merely awaiting a favourable opportunity to take possession of this schooner?"

Tyler put the question quietly, and in as low tones as was possible, but for all that his heart beat fast, whilst his pulses throbbed with excitement. For he was a thoughtful and an observant young fellow, and was by no means dull or devoid of sense. What, then, was more likely than that news of Mr. Beverley's expedition should have leaked out and become common property at Singapore? Indeed, the governor had had tidings of it, and had Tyler and his chief only known, many in Singapore were aware of their intentions. Then was it not possible that a whisper should have reached the ears of the pirates about Borneo? And supposing that to have been the case, supposing, for an instant, that the very vessel which the two were discussing in the cabin of the schooner had chanced to put into some port near at hand to obtain a supply of provisions, and had happened to gain the tidings from a crew recently from Singapore – providing the crew and their commander were given to piracy, was it not almost certain that they would at once make plans to swoop down upon the members of what could only be a weakly-manned expedition? Yes, as Mr. Beverley reviewed the facts, he could not help but realize the gravity of the case, and at once he turned a troubled face to his companion. As for the latter, he, too, was worried, and filled with vague fears for the safety of all on board. Had he but been able to read Hanns Schlott's thoughts at that moment he would have been more alarmed, and would have seen that there was ample cause for his concern. Indeed, a glance at the interpreter would have sufficed, for once his two leaders had retired the latter seized a glass which he carried in an inner pocket and applied it to his eye. A moment later he gave vent to a guttural exclamation of satisfaction, and having looked about him to see that he was not observed, went into the bows, where, hidden by the bulging sail, he held a big red handkerchief well above his head, and let it flutter there.

"Ja!" he growled beneath his breath. "Meinheer shall see. He thinks that Hanns Schlott is too fat and too tired to be anything but an interpreter, but he shall find out for himself. And Christian van Sonerell is there as he promised. Ha, ha, ha! He is a bad man to have such a name, but he can keep to his word. 'When you sight the island you will find me there', he said; and see, his vessel sails before us, an innocent trader for the moment, but later – ah, we shall see!"

With one more glance in the direction of the distant native craft, and a second furtive flutter of the handkerchief, he turned and went along the deck, laughing softly, as though the prospect of some piece of villainy which he were about to undertake were delighting him.

CHAPTER IV

A Traitor and a Villain

"I begin to think that there is some reason in your fears, and that, after all, your good sense and powers of observation are about to save us from a very ugly encounter," said Mr. Beverley slowly, turning to Tyler after some minutes' thought. "I am a man who dislikes to do anyone an injustice, and it is on that account, and because I tried to persuade myself that I had no right to take a dislike to the man, that I determined to think well of our interpreter. But I fear that Hanns Schlott is a rogue, if not worse, and that he is a party in a conspiracy. However, we are not taken yet, and shall give much trouble before any harm comes to us. What do you advise?"

"That we arm at once," said Tyler promptly, "and show these fellows that we are prepared. Say nothing to Hanns, but watch him carefully, and at the first sign of treachery make him a prisoner. Above all, refuse to allow the native boat to come within more than hailing distance."

"Yes, the plan seems a good one, and we will set about it immediately," cried Mr. Beverley, springing to his feet. "As for this Hanns Schlott, he seems to be a rogue, and as a rogue I will treat him if he shows any inclination to be mischievous. As you suggest, I will make him a prisoner if he gives me the opportunity, and then I shall take steps to hand him over to the Dutch Government. There are numbers of his countrymen in the neighbouring island, for the Dutch have had many stations in the Archipelago for numbers of years, and by slipping round to Celebes, or across to Java, we should have no difficulty about placing him in the custody of one of the residents appointed by his country. But I am sure that at the present moment our best plan will be to keep on terms of friendship with him, to make believe that we trust him, while secretly we keep watch to avoid treachery. Now how are we to set about it?"

"Let us call John Marshall and take him into our confidence," said Tyler promptly. "He is a thoroughly good fellow, and has our interests at heart. Shall I send for him now?"

A few minutes' consideration told Mr. Beverley that it would be as well to warn the young English sailor who accompanied them, for should there be any trouble with the crew, these three Europeans would naturally fight side by side. As for Hanns Schlott, it was useless to think of him as a friend, for the more his conduct was considered the more certain did it become that he was engaged in some dark conspiracy.

"We have to recollect that as a prize we should prove valuable," remarked Mr. Beverley suddenly. "You see, Tyler, the Government and the firm of rubber merchants for whom I am making this expedition have given me a liberal sum with which to pay my way; and indeed they are wise in doing so, for money expended now in a journey such as ours is likely to be, and presents made to Dyak chiefs, are likely to bear very good interest in the future. There are sufficient dollars aboard to make a handsome fortune, and in addition our equipment is of considerable value. Indeed, there is no denying the fact that to one of these native prahus we should be a rich haul, and it is mainly with such a prospect in view that I determined to thoroughly arm the schooner. Who can say how much Hanns Schlott and his accomplices know? If there is actually a conspiracy they must have considered it worth their while to follow us, for otherwise why should they take all the trouble? But there is no use in wondering. The question now is, how are we to protect ourselves? Forewarned is forearmed, and now that our suspicions have been aroused, let it not be said that we have proved rash and careless. Just sing out for John, and tell him to come down at once."

Going to the narrow companion, which led to the deck above, Tyler ascended slowly, and having reached the upper level, looked carefully round. There was John standing close beside the tiller, which was manned by one of the Malays, while a few of the crew sat and lounged near at hand. Of Hanns Schlott there was not a sign, but a moment later something red fluttering in the breeze

beyond the mainsail of the schooner attracted his attention, and, taking a step to one side, he saw the Dutch interpreter standing with his back against the mast, with his handkerchief held at arm's length above his head. A second later the arm dropped, and the square of red disappeared into one of his pockets. Then, as Tyler darted back to the companion and descended a few steps, the slouching Hanns Schlott turned and came walking along the deck. A few paces carried him beyond the sail, and instantly his eye fell upon Tyler, who made pretence to be just emerging from the cabin.

"Had he been seen? Had this young Englishman, whom from the very first he had detested, been spying upon him?" Hanns Schlott flushed red at the thought as he asked himself the questions, and then turned to address our hero.

"The land in sight is Borneo," he said. "Ja, I know it, for I have been there before. We have a pleasant trip before us, meinheer."

"Perhaps you have friends there," responded Tyler quietly, directing a keen glance at the Dutchman, which caused the latter's eyes to drop, while his face again flushed.

"Does he know more than he should, this young idiot?" he murmured beneath his breath. "Does he suspect the prahu lying under the land? Pooh! It is impossible, for like all of his country he is dull, and thinks it honourable to trust all with whom he comes in contact. But I must be cautious, and should he show an inclination to thwart me I will silence his tongue for good. Ja, Hanns Schlott, you are clever, and more than once have you paid a visit to Singapore on the same errand, with Christian van Sonerell to help you. A few months back you contrived to capture a merchantman, and on this occasion you will not be balked by any of these fools. The youngster means only to be pleasant when he suggests that I have friends at hand, and it is absurd to think that he suspects me."

Banishing all fears of discovery from his mind in this sweeping manner, the Dutchman waited only to assure Tyler that he was unknown to any in Borneo, and then went sauntering along the deck. As for the latter, he remained on the companion ladder for some moments watching the interpreter.

"He is a rogue, I am sure," he said to himself, "and the fact that I have caught him in the act of signalling to the prahu convinces me that I am right. He started when I suggested that he had companions on the island, and for the moment I could see that he feared that I had witnessed his act. Otherwise why did he address me? For he is a silent man, and during the week or more that I have known him has never ventured to say a word unless directly asked a question. Now, if I call John Marshall down into the cabin without a sufficient excuse, Hanns Schlott will begin to think that matters are not going smoothly for him. Ah, I know!"

Springing up the remaining steps of the ladder, he emerged upon the deck and walked towards the young sailor, pausing as he did so to gaze at the distant land, to which the schooner had drawn distinctly nearer, and under the shadow of which the native prahu which had aroused his suspicions still lay. Then he went to the tiller and addressed John Marshall.

"We wish to make arrangements for the landing-party," he said so that all on board could hear. "Mr. Beverley requests that you will come down into the cabin and help him in selecting the men."

Turning upon his heel he at once retraced his steps and was soon joined by the young sailor in the cabin.

"Close the door, please," said Mr. Beverley as the latter entered. "Now sit down there, John, and tell me candidly what you think of our crew?"

Thus bidden, the boatswain dropped on to a wooden form and sat there uncomfortably twirling his cap between his fingers for some minutes, as though unable to do what he was asked. Then he suddenly raised his head, and, looking first at his interrogator and then at Tyler, blurted out his news.

"They ain't right, and that's the whole matter with 'em," he said shortly. "Away in Singapore they were just easy to handle, and worked almost as hard as a British crew. But the feeding's too good for 'em by half, and they're getting above themselves. It's the truth, sir, and I tell you that they are altogether out of hand. As for the Dutch cove aboard, well – "

John Marshall shrugged his shoulders disdainfully, and lifted his hands as much as to say that the matter was beyond expression. Then he sank back on the form and looked at Mr. Beverley as if awaiting another question.

"What about Hanns Schlott then?" demanded the latter. "Do you think that he is in league with rogues who have followed us to Borneo? My young friend, Mr. Richardson, declares that the prahu lying under the island is one which was moored in the harbour at Singapore close to this schooner, and that her condition and the appearance of her commander led to the suspicion that she was not altogether a peaceful trader."

"Then he ain't far out," cried the boatswain, suddenly leaping to his feet and coming forward to lean with both hands upon the cabin table. "I don't know as how I've seen anything particular, but there's pirates in these seas, for I learnt that when in Singapore, while the Dutchman aboard is a wrong 'un. It wouldn't surprise me to hear that he had fixed it up to murder the whole lot of us, and if I had my way I'd pitch him ashore at the very first landing-place."

He gave vent to a snort of indignation, and changed his cap from one hand to the other, while he kept his eyes closely fixed upon Mr. Beverley.

"Then you will be all the more ready to follow the plan which we have decided upon," exclaimed the latter; "but secrecy is a thing which we must carefully observe. Remember this, that our suspicions may be unfounded, and that the prahu over there and our interpreter may be as innocent of treachery as we are. As for the crew, it grieves me to hear that they are not to be relied upon, and now that I have heard it I realize that should trouble come we three must depend upon ourselves alone. From this moment we must carry weapons upon us, and as soon as it is dark we must take it in turn to keep watch. Then, too, at the very first opportunity we will load our six-pounders, cramming them with grape-shot, and replacing the tarpaulin covers over the touch-holes once we have laid the fuse. If there is trouble we will rush to one end of the boat and defend ourselves there."

"Then only one of the six-pounders must be prepared," cried Tyler with emphasis, "for otherwise, while we were posted in the bows, those in the stern would lay the gun there upon us and blow us into pieces."

"Ah! I had forgotten that, my lad, and I thank you for giving the warning," said Mr. Beverley. "Who knows, it may be the saving of our lives! And now as to the watch to be set. We will divide the night into three parts, and will settle upon a signal which will awaken those who are off duty and bring them on deck."

"Then let it be a pistol-shot, if I may make so bold as to give a bit of advice," burst in John. "Yer see, sir, the crack of a little weapon like that is loud enough to reach to any part of the schooner, unless a gale is blowing, and it's so sudden-like and unexpected that it fetches yer upon yer pins before yer know what's happening. Besides, a pistol's a handy weapon to carry in one's pocket."

"And as it is the only one with which we shall be armed, we will adopt your suggestion," said Mr. Beverley. "Then, all understand that the firing of a shot means trouble, and that all three of us instantly make for the stern of the vessel, there to fight whoever may come along. And now I propose to go on deck and take a closer look at the land. Then we will turn to the north-west and coast along in that direction until evening falls, when we will haul in and let go our anchor. Once set up for the night, you, John, will take the first watch, our young friend here joining you as soon as the Malays are out of the way, and helping to load the six-pounder in the stern. When that is done he will return to the cabin, and when you have completed three hours of your watch I shall come and relieve you, to hand over the duty after a similar period to Mr. Richardson. Here are weapons for all of us. See that you place them well out of sight and give no indication of their presence."

Going to a locker which was built beneath one of the cabin seats, he lifted the lid and groped in the interior, to withdraw his hand in a few moments grasping a bundle wrapped in a piece of old blanket. Placing it upon the table he cut the cord which surrounded it, and gingerly opened his parcel.

"The latest weapon," he said with a smile; "as you will see, some clever fellow has invented a revolving drum which will enable us to fire as many as six shots without reloading. I purchased six, so that each one of us should have twelve shots in his belt. Here is the ammunition, too, and we will at once commence to divide it."

Ten minutes later, when the three ascended to the deck, it was with curiously mingled feelings of excitement and anxiety, for who could tell what was about to happen? That some plot was afoot to capture the schooner and murder the three Englishmen upon it Tyler had no doubt, and the information which John Marshall had given as to the crew had served only to make the danger more real. Standing there beside the sail, with his eyes fixed upon the native prahu, he realized that he and his two comrades were helpless, for how could they fight a crew of ten muscular Malays led by Hanns Schlott? And if, in addition, the men on board the prahu came to the assistance of their friends, what chance would there be of resisting them?

"We should be cut to pieces," he said to himself, "or should be driven off the boat. But we shall see. Perhaps, after all, we have no need to be frightened, and matters will turn out better than we anticipate."

To attempt to console himself with this thought was useless, for do what he would Tyler could not allay his suspicions. If he turned to the coast of Borneo his eyes invariably fell upon the prahu there, while if he tramped restlessly up and down the deck of the schooner the slouching figure of Hanns Schlott came into view, sending his thoughts once more to the evil-looking companion with whom the latter had consorted. Then again, now that his attention had been drawn to the crew of Malays who manned the schooner, he could not help but notice an air of insolence which had been strange to them a week ago. Then they had been almost too cringing and polite, while now they glanced at their three English officers as though conscious of the fact that the position was about to change. But thinking could do no good, and as every precaution had been taken Tyler and his friends had to content themselves with watching the distant shore and waiting patiently for the night to come. At length the sun disappeared behind a bank of clouds, while the light perceptibly faded. Almost at the same moment a deep bay was noticed in the coast of Borneo, and into this the schooner was promptly headed. Running in till within a mile of the shore she hauled down her sails and let go the anchor just as the short twilight which reigns in the Archipelago gave place to darkest night.

"Now is your time to see about the gun," said Mr. Beverley, who had taken his station beside Tyler. "The natives have their meals at this hour and will be huddled together in the bows. Our interpreter is seated at this moment in his cabin, where he will be out of the way. Get the work done quickly, and let me know when all is in readiness."

Tyler at once ran to carry out the orders, for now that the night had fallen he realized that if trouble were in store for them it would be at such a time, when darkness covered the water and hid their surroundings. Going to the bulkhead which closed one end of the cabin, he unlocked the door there and entered the tiny magazine with which the schooner was provided. Then he emerged again with the necessary ammunition, and ere long was able to assure his leader that all was in readiness. That done he lay down upon his bunk and attempted to sleep, but without success; for though he closed his eyes tightly his brain still remained actively at work, while his ears were ever open for that pistol-shot which was to give the signal agreed upon. Hour after hour dragged wearily by, and it was a relief to him when at last Mr. Beverley touched him upon the shoulder and told him that it was time for him to go on deck and take his turn in looking after the safety of the vessel.

"There has not been a sound," he whispered, "and nothing has occurred so far to arouse our suspicions. Both John and I have endeavoured to discover the position of the prahu, but the night is too dark. When we ran into the bay she was some distance higher up the coast, and for all we know may have anchored there. Keep your eyes and ears open, and do not hesitate to give the signal if there should be cause."

Promising to follow the advice given to him, Tyler leapt from his bunk and crept up on deck, to find that the schooner lay without a movement on the water, and that the sky above was lit up by myriads of bright stars. All round, however, was impenetrable gloom, and though he went to either side of the schooner, and with arms leaning upon the bulwarks peered into the darkness, nothing caught his eye, while there was no sound save the gentle lisp of the water against the vessel's side to attract his attention.

"What was that?" He stood still beside the companion which led from the cabin and listened eagerly, while his heart beat heavily and thumped almost audibly against his ribs. "Ah, there it was again; a splash somewhere near at hand!"

Darting to the side he slipped his boots from his feet, and then ran silently along the deck till close to the bows, when he suddenly caught sight of a figure standing before him. In an instant his hand grasped the butt of one of his revolvers, and, drawing the weapon, he advanced upon the man.

"Who is that?" he demanded in low but commanding tones. "Answer at once."

At the words the figure before him started suddenly and turned swiftly about. Then a second voice broke the silence.

"Who but Hanns Schlott, meinheer?" was the answer, in tones which the speaker endeavoured to render suave. "Who but the interpreter, who, finding sleep impossible on this fine night, has come upon deck to enjoy silence and solitude."

"Then what caused the splash?"

"The splash, meinheer! Ah! I recollect there was a rope coiled here beside the halyard, and as I leaned against the rail my arm touched it, and it fell into the water. See, here it is; I will pull it on board."

He grasped a thick cable close at hand, and pulled upon it till the end came over the bulwark and fell upon the deck. Then, yawning loudly, he bade Tyler a curt "good-night!" and disappeared below, leaving the latter standing upon the deck full of suspicion and with vague fears of some unknown but impending trouble. Indeed, had he but followed the crafty Dutchman to his cabin, and watched his behaviour there, the signal which had been agreed upon would have at once awakened the silence of the night, and brought his two comrades rushing up to support him. But his duty was to watch above, and therefore, slipping his boots on to his feet, once more he slowly trudged the length of the vessel, halting every now and again to listen intently for sounds, and stare into the darkness. Meanwhile Hanns Schlott had disappeared within his cabin.

"All is well," he was saying to himself, as he knelt beside the tin trunk which contained his possessions. "The young fool was suspicious, that I could see, but my word satisfied him, and he is now tramping the deck in the full belief that no danger threatens. But Hanns Schlott knows better. Ha, ha! Christian van Sonerell will make nothing of the climb on to the schooner, though the rope which I had secured over the side would have been of great service to him. In a little while he will be here, and then I shall be ready."

Searching amongst the contents of his trunk he produced an enormous pistol, which he carefully examined. Then, thrusting a small bag of money into one of his pockets and gently closing the lid of the box, he stole from the cabin, weapon in hand, and went creeping across the floor in the direction of the bunk in which lay Mr. Beverley. Twice he came to a sudden halt in the course of his murderous journey, and crouched there silent and motionless beside the cabin table, for the rustle of the sleeper's bed-clothes, and an interruption in the regularity of his breathing, told that Mr. Beverley was not so deeply unconscious as this rascally Dutchman would desire. Indeed, for a minute or more it seemed as though some sense of impending danger, some vague dream of a levelled weapon and the hand of an assassin, had crossed the mind of the sleeper, for he suddenly awoke to a troubled half-consciousness, and, raising himself upon an elbow, peered with blinking eyes into the darkness. Did he hear anything? He lay there so still, breathing so silently, that the Dutchman's craven heart leapt into his mouth, while the fingers which grasped his weapon trembled as though they would relinquish

their grasp. Squeezing his body as far as possible beneath the table he crouched still closer to the floor, in the attitude of a tiger about to spring upon his victim. And all the while he kept those slit-like eyes fixed in the direction of the bunk, while his ears listened eagerly for outside sounds.

"Will those fools never come?" he said with many a curse beneath his breath. "If only Christian van Sonerell and his men would arrive at this moment I would send the bullet crashing into his body. And if this man should stir again I will press the trigger without a doubt. Ja, I will risk it, for to be discovered now would be to ruin our enterprise and get myself into trouble. Ah! the dolt thinks better of it, and has placed his face once more upon the pillow. Then I will remain as I am and give him a few minutes longer to live. By then he will have settled to sleep once more, and will fall the more easily to my weapon. Hist! There is someone moving."

As he spoke, a slight sound from the far end of the alleyway, where John Marshall had his quarters, broke upon the villain's ear, and instantly he became even more alert, while once more an unsteady arm levelled the pistol, prepared to turn it upon the sleeper or on anyone else who should be so unfortunate as to come into the cabin and disturb him in the midst of his work. "Ah!" Hanns Schlott's head became suddenly erected, while the face turned involuntarily with a rapid movement towards the companion ladder. At the same moment the splash of an oar broke the silence, causing Tyler to suddenly halt in his restless tramp upon the deck and then dash towards the side. There it was again, followed in succession by others, proving that a boat was approaching, while scarcely had the fact dawned upon his senses than a dim object, rapidly becoming more visible through the darkness, suddenly came into view. Whipping a weapon from beneath his coat, he levelled it in the direction of the object and gave vent to a shout.

"Stop there!" he cried in piercing tones. "If you pull a stroke nearer I will fire into you. Halt, I say!"

Leaning upon the rail which guarded the schooner's side, he stretched towards the oncoming boat, closely watching its movements, while at the same time he eagerly listened for sounds from below, for some sign which would tell him that Mr. Beverley and John Marshall had sprung from their bunks and were rushing to his aid. Nor was he destined to be kept long waiting, for hardly had the words left his lips, warning those on the boat to come no nearer, than a pistol-shot rang out in the night with startling loudness, the sharp report rushing up from the cabin below. Then a piercing shriek awakened the echoes, telling of the foul crime which had just been committed. Almost instantly there was the noise of a scuffle below, followed by the soft thud of a heavy blow delivered, and a second afterwards a crash and the sound of splintering wood as some unwieldy body fell upon the table.

Utterly bewildered at the turn which events had suddenly taken, Tyler stood there leaning upon the rail, dumbfounded and uncertain how to act. Not for long, however, did he hesitate, for whatever the trouble below there was no doubt that a serious danger threatened them outside. Indeed, one quick glance told him that in spite of his warning words the dim ghostly object which he had caught sight of was rapidly approaching, while the splash of oars became now still more distinct. Instantly his finger closed round the trigger of his weapon, and just as the clatter of heavily-booted feet ascending the companion told him that John Marshall was at hand, his revolver spoke out, sending a bullet into the very centre of the men crowded together in the oncoming boat. There was another shriek, still more piercing than that one which had ascended from below, while a shadowy figure, which he could just see through the gloom, suddenly tossed a pair of lanky arms into the night and then collapsed in a heap. But what was a life to these marauders? With a savage heave, as the lifeless body fell upon him, one of the oarsmen tossed his dead comrade overboard, and then bent to his oar once more, stimulated to do so by the encouraging shouts of a burly individual who stood in the bows of the boat.

"On them!" he shouted in stentorian tones, using a mixture of the Dutch and Malay language. "Clamber aboard and slit the throats of any of the Englishmen who may still be alive. Pull for it, for if you do not hurry Hanns Schlott will have done the work, and you will be disappointed."

Bang! Once again Tyler's smoking revolver launched a missile at the enemy, a shrill cry of pain clearly denoting the fact that it had found a billet. Then John Marshall's lithe figure suddenly appeared beside him and another weapon opened into the darkness. In rapid succession, and with steady and unerring aim, did the two young fellows fire upon the pirates. But they might have been a hundred yards away for all the effect they produced, for these men were used to such scuffles, and were not to be so easily turned aside, particularly when they recollected the fact that the schooner had at the most but three white men to protect her, whilst on board were staunch allies of their own. Every moment they waited to hear the voice of the Dutchman, Hanns Schlott, who had so cleverly obtained the post of interpreter. They listened eagerly and peered into the gloom as they plied their oars, looking to see his bulky figure at the head of the Malay crew. Nor was their patience severely tried, though in the case of the rascally Dutchman they were doomed to disappointment; for when a few yards separated the bows of their boat from the schooner's side, ten dusky figures came rushing from their quarters for'ard and swept in a body along the deck.

"Look out!" shouted Tyler in warning tones. "The crew have joined against us and we must fight for our lives. Back to the stern, but first of all where is Mr. Beverley, for we cannot think of retiring till he is with us? Steady, John! Stand side by side with me, and rush for the cabin."

Grasping his comrade by the sleeve, Tyler made a movement towards the companion, with the full intention of darting down into the space below and rescuing his leader. But scarcely had he moved a pace than the strong fingers of the boatswain arrested his progress and urged him towards the stern.

"Yer can't do it. It's out of the question, I tell yer, sir, for Mr. Beverley's dead, he's been murdered by that scoundrel."

"Dead! Killed by Hanns Schlott!" exclaimed Tyler, instantly realizing that any deed of violence and treachery must be attributable to the Dutchman. "How awful! But how do you know? Are you not making a terrible mistake?"

He blurted out the words in short sentences, and remained there, determined not to budge an inch or to do anything to secure his own retreat until he was assured by his companion that it was useless to attempt to bring help to their leader. And all the while the two young fellows stood resolutely side by side, resolved to support one another to the end, and die rather than submit, for each realized that capture would be followed by nothing else but a cruel death. Indeed, the knowledge that that would be their end without a doubt should they fall into the hands of these enemies who had suddenly sprung up from the darkness braced their nerves, and helped their determination to fight desperately. Dragging their reserve weapons from their belts they levelled them at the crew who had mutinied, whilst each kept his eye turned ever and anon to the side from which the boat-load of pirates was approaching, prepared to send a bullet in that direction the instant the marauders appeared.

"Quick! How do you know that he is dead, that this villain, Hanns Schlott, has murdered him?" demanded Tyler hoarsely. "Tell me at once, for otherwise I will dash below and see things as they are for myself."

Once more he stepped towards the companion as though doubtful of the information which his companion had given, and anxious to clear up the mystery of Mr. Beverley's absence for himself. But a shout from John and a firm grip of his fingers once more arrested him, while the explanation of this strange silence of their leader, the reason why he was not there to stand or fall beside them, was hissed into Tyler's ears.

"He's dead, sure enough," said John Marshall. "Just before your shout to those beggars came rushing down below I thought I heard suspicious sounds in the cabin. I didn't like to think that some villainy was afoot, and so I just hopped out of my bunk and came into the alleyway. Then I stole softly into the cabin, match-box in hand, and a lucifer between my fingers. I was just in the act of striking a light when your shout startled me. A second later a pistol went off within three yards of where I stood, while Mr. Beverley gave a shriek which made my blood run cold. I dropped the match in my terror, but a second after it flared up in the darkness, lighting the cabin from end to end, and

showing me Hanns Schlott kneeling on the floor with a smoking pistol in his hand. Like a flash I guessed the murdering game he'd been after, and I scarcely gave him time to get on to his feet when I was upon him. I just gave a jump across the cabin and then let fly with my fist, sending him crashing into the table. Then I struck another lucifer, and finding him capsized all in a heap, and completely stunned, I ran across to Mr. Beverley. He's dead I tell yer, sir, for there's a bullet wound as big as my fist over his heart and not a breath came from his lips. Let's get back to the stern."

Hissing the words in Tyler's ear, but a few moments had been employed in imparting the information. But short though the interval had been, it had been sufficient to increase the gravity of the position, for by now the crew of Malays who had manned the schooner, and who up to this had hung back awaiting the arrival of Hanns Schlott to lead them, had decided to attack without his help, and one of their number springing forward, kriss in hand, the remainder came rushing in a body towards the two young Englishmen, brandishing their weapons above their heads and shouting at the top of their voices. Almost at the same instant the rays from the lantern, which was slung as a riding-light in the for'ard part of the schooner, fell upon the villainous face of the Dutchman, Christian van Sonerell, who came climbing over the bulwarks, quickly followed by a dozen cut-throat Malays.

"Back to the stern!" shouted Tyler, turning swiftly about. "Get behind the gun and stand ready to shoot!"

Joined by John Marshall, he raced towards the end of the schooner till his progress was suddenly obstructed by a cable which stretched from the rail to the end of the tiller, and then again across to the opposite bulwarks.

"Look out for the rope!" he cried in warning tones. "Now step over it, and give it a hitch to pull it taut. It will stretch as a barrier between us and the Malays."

Quick to grasp his meaning, the young boatswain thrust his weapons into his belt so as to set his hands free, and then, darting to the side, rapidly unloosed the rope which kept the tiller amidships and from swaying from side to side as the vessel lay at anchor. With the deft fingers of a sailor he rearranged it, pulling it taut till it stretched between the bulwarks like a bowstring. Then, finding that there was some yards of slack, he darted forward once more to where the binnacle stood some six feet beyond the end of the tiller, and, making a turn of the rope around it, brought the tail-end to the opposite side.

"That'll fix 'em!" he cried in tones of excitement as he returned to Tyler's side. "It's too dark for those fellows to see the cable, and they'll find themselves brought up sharp when they come rushing towards us. Are yer ready for them, sir?"

Meanwhile Tyler had been by no means idle, for there was much to be done to prepare for the contest. Seeing that his companion had realized the help which the rope barrier would give them, he turned his attention to the gun, and hastily threw off the tarpaulin jacket with which it was covered. Gently running his fingers over the breach, they quickly came in contact with a small heap of powder which he had carefully left in position there when loading the weapon. A moment's search discovered the touch-hole, and a rapid movement of the hand swept the glistening grains over it. Stooping down he looked along the barrel, and aided by the light cast by the lantern which swayed in the for'ard rigging, and with one hand turning the wheel which altered the elevation, he rapidly levelled the barrel so that the contents would sweep about waist-high across the deck. A slight movement of the breech towards the left pointed the gun clear of the binnacle and towards that portion of the ship where the pirates were massing.

"That's done," he shouted in answer to John Marshall's question; "and now I'm ready to blow a hole through the rascals. Stand aside, John, and just keep your eye upon them. The lamp swings in just the right position, and by its aid every one of the enemy can be seen as he moves. It is more than likely that the leader is the only one possessed of a pistol, so watch him closely, and when you see him about to fire let drive with your own weapon. I will stand beside the gun, but unless they rush at us in one dense body I shall not discharge it, for the ropes will protect us, and, moreover, it is probable

that at first only a few of the most courageous will venture to attack. Later on, when matters become more serious, I will fire my pistol over the touch-hole and send a shower of grape scattering through them. Ah, there is the ringleader, and by his movements he is about to lead them to the assault!"

CHAPTER V

Escape from the Schooner

Scarcely five minutes had elapsed from the time when Hanns Schlott's cowardly finger had pressed the trigger and sent the murderous bullet into the breast of the sleeper. Indeed, to Tyler, as he stood there upon the stern, pistol in hand, prepared to discharge the contents of the six-pounder into the midst of the pirates, the sharp report, that piercing, piteous scream still rang in his ears, while the thud of John's massive fist and the crash and noise of splintering wood-work as the rascally Dutchman was knocked to the floor were fresh in his memory. Then had come the rapid appearance of the boatswain, to be followed shortly afterwards by the figures of the mutinous crew rushing up on deck to aid their comrades. And all the while his own weapon had been snapping, sending a shower of bullets amongst the occupants of the approaching boat. So much had happened in that short space of time, so rapid had been the succession of events, that the moments had flown by. Now, however, it was so different, for, waiting there beside the gun, with one companion alone to support him, to help him face a horde of ruffians intent upon their lives, the seconds seemed minutes, the minutes hours, so desperate was the situation. A shout, a shot in their direction, or the sudden rush of the pirates would have been a welcome relief to the tension, but as yet their condition was unchanged.

Thanks to the light shed by the riding-lamp, both he and John Marshall could see the Malays grouped upon the deck, and could watch as their leader, Christian van Sonerell, went amongst them, urging them to dash aft and fall upon the white men. At length, rendered desperate and utterly reckless by the precarious position in which he found himself, Tyler levelled his pistol at the leader of the pirates, and taking deliberate aim, pressed steadily upon the trigger. At once there was a shout, and the Dutchman swung round with a curse, showing that the bullet had struck him. Indeed, there was little doubt that he was heavily hit, for he staggered to one side, and would have fallen had it not been for the mast against which he placed one hand. But he was a sturdy fellow, this rascally marauder, and to do him but common justice he was not the man to cry out till badly hurt, or to give in till thoroughly beaten. With a gasp, therefore, he recovered his breath, and at once leapt in front of his following.

"At them!" he shouted. "Get together on this side and rush at them in a body. Now, I will lead you."

Turning for one moment to his men, he swung round in the direction of the stern, and as if to show his hatred of the white men, he levelled a pistol and fired, sending a bullet swishing so close to Tyler's head that the latter stepped aside involuntarily. Then, tossing the weapon to the deck, he drew a cutlass from his belt, and, snatching a second pistol with his left hand, led the pirates in a mad rush towards their victims.

"Some are hanging back," shouted Tyler, "so I will do as I said. If they come on too strongly it will be madness to wait, and I shall fire the gun and then do my best with my pistol."

"And what then?" demanded John Marshall eagerly. "Are we to stay here on the deck and get sliced to pieces? Why, it's throwing our lives away!"

"What else can we do?" said Tyler eagerly. "We are hemmed in, so far as I can see, and have no means of flight."

"But what about the dinghy?" asked his companion swiftly. "Ain't she all right? What's to prevent us jumping overboard and swimming to her? It wouldn't take no more than a minute, and then before these beggars guess what we were up to we'd be into her and dodging away in the darkness."

Tyler had barely time to give his assent to the proposal when the Dutchman and his followers were upon them. Scampering along the deck, they came in a confused crowd towards the stern, each one grasping a weapon, and all with their eyes fixed upon the two solitary figures standing there. That those who came close behind their leader were filled with courage and with the determination to be

victorious there was little doubt, for the eagerness with which they dashed forward showed it plainly. Quite a number, however, showed far less resolution, for the Malay does not love a struggle which is likely to prove difficult, and dangerous to his life. Some there may be of the pirates whose days are passed in stern encounters, but the majority spend their time in looking for helpless individuals upon whom they may fall suddenly and when least expected. Here, however, the matter was quite different, for opposed to them, and standing beside a gun which, for all they knew, might be crammed to the muzzle, were two of the three Englishmen whom they had hoped to make easy victims. That they would fight, and fight hard too, was evident, for otherwise they would have thrown down their weapons at the sight of so many enemies and begged for their lives. But this they had shown no inclination to do; and that fact, combined with the resolute air with which they faced the tide of pirates rushing down upon them, caused a few of the more faint-hearted to hold back. Instead of racing recklessly forward they halted there upon the deck, and made up for their lack of courage by shrieking shrill words of encouragement to their friends.

Crash! The Dutchman, charging madly upon the gun, came in contact with the rope stretched between the binnacle and the bulwarks, and in a moment his feet were cut from under him and he pitched forward upon his face; a huge Malay followed, kriss in hand, and attempted to leap the unseen obstacle. But he failed to rise sufficiently high, and catching his toes upon the cable came with a thud upon his leader. The third was more cautious, for, realizing the cause of their downfall, and the crafty trap which had been set for the attackers, he stretched his hand into the darkness and felt for the rope. A second, and his fingers lit upon it, when his weapon flashed above his head as he prepared to sever the hempen obstacle. But John Marshall was closely watching the scene, and realizing that once the barrier had gone their chances would be lessened, he stretched towards the man and, just as the blow was falling, fired point-blank at him. Then with a shout he leapt the rope which stretched from the tiller, and dashing upon the Malay who had fallen upon his leader, he clutched him by the waist and tossed him over the side.

"Well done!" cried Tyler enthusiastically; "but get back at once, for the others are coming. Quick, or they will be upon you!"

The warning to which he had given vent came by no means too soon, for hardly was John Marshall in his former position than the leader of the pirates sprang to his feet and once more rushed upon his opponents.

"English dogs!" he shouted in his fury; "for the fall which you have given me I will make you suffer well. You shall know what it is to scream with pain, and then –"

He did not finish the sentence, for, failing to notice the second rope, stretching between the tiller and the bulwark, he came into violent contact with it, and, as in the former case, fell sprawling upon the deck. Another second and the active John had plucked him by the coat, and with a quick heave had sent him sousing into the sea.

"Stay there, you Dutchman!" he cried with a short laugh, "and let that teach you to be more cautious when next you attack a Britisher. Ah, no you don't, my beauty!"

The last part of the sentence was addressed to one of the Malay crew, who, taking advantage of the fact that John Marshall was fully engaged in dealing with Christian van Sonerell, had crept on all-fours along the deck, and, feeling in the darkness for the obstacles which had been the undoing of his comrades, had safely negotiated them, and at that moment sprang, kriss in hand, to his feet. Then, as the boatswain turned towards him and gave vent to the words, the Malay darted forward and lunged at him with his weapon with such swiftness that it was only by springing swiftly aside that John escaped the blow. Next second the butt of his pistol crashed into the native's face, and he, too, tumbled full length beside the binnacle.

"Didn't I tell yer that yer wouldn't do it," growled John in low tones of excitement. "Jest look out for that other fellow, sir."

"Right!" exclaimed Tyler in reply, "I'm watching carefully, and that will stop him."

Hoping to rush in upon the Englishmen while their attention was distracted, two of the Malay pirates had followed the example set by the one whom John had stunned with his pistol, but, unfortunately for them, they had failed to discover the position of the rope with sufficient celerity, and as they fumbled in the darkness they rose so far from the crouching position which they had assumed that their heads suddenly became outlined against the swaying lamp behind. The movement was fatal, for ere they could avoid the shot Tyler had pointed his weapon in their direction, and, aided by the feeble rays beyond, had sent a bullet crashing into the nearest.

"Perhaps that will stop them," he cried in tones which betrayed no little excitement "These fellows must not be allowed to think that they are to have it all their own way. Indeed they seem to be inclined to hang back, and I begin to think that a rush on our part might clear the decks. They are without a leader, and now is the time to attack them. Make ready for a charge."

There was little doubt that the proposal which Tyler had so boldly made might, in the absence of the rascally Dutchman who led the pirates, have proved more than ordinarily successful, for the losses which they had already suffered, the unlooked-for manner in which they had been opposed, and the sudden downfall of Christian van Sonerell, had filled the Malays with dismay. Some, indeed, had hung back from the very first, recognizing with the instinct of men possessed of little courage that danger and death were possibly in store for them. But now, finding themselves so suddenly arrested in their furious attack, and their leaders brought crashing to the deck by some unseen means, the remainder faltered, and, as Tyler's last pistol-shot rang out, to be followed instantly by the heavy thud of a falling body and by the clatter of a native kriss upon the deck, they turned about in a body and fled into the bows, placing as great a distance between themselves and the weapons of their opponents as was possible. Peering into the darkness, they looked towards the stern with anxious eyes, and noted with feelings almost of despair that the two Englishmen whom they had hoped to kill so easily were stepping across the rope which had formed a barrier between themselves and their numerous opponents. Indeed, so terror-stricken were they at the sight that thoughts of flight instantly occurred to them, and they would have rushed to the boat which had brought them from their own prahu to the schooner had not a head suddenly appeared over the bulwark where it was secured. Then an arm came into sight, whilst the feeble rays of the lamp struggled down upon the dripping figure of a man clambering over the rail. It was Christian van Sonerell, and at the sight cries of delight escaped the Malays. They sprang forward to help him, and then crowded about him while they urged him in pleading tones to leave the schooner or to lead them once more against the Englishmen.

"They are too strong for us, and we fear their gun," cried one of them. "By some means of which we are ignorant they have caused you and others of our comrades to come crashing to the deck, and see how swiftly fate has followed them. You, too, also came to grief, and when we saw you tossed overboard as if you were a child we gave you up for lost, and seeing that the white-faces were about to turn and rush upon us we contemplated flight. But you are here once more, you have rejoined us by a miracle, and we again place ourselves in your hands. Shall we gather in a body and attack them for the second time, or is it your advice that we retire and leave these men to themselves? for it is clear that much suffering will come upon us before they are conquered."

"Leave them! Fly like hounds from the schooner and forsake the spoil which is already in our hands! Surely you are children to make such a proposal! You laugh at me and would make believe that you are frightened!" cried Christian van Sonerell, turning suddenly upon them, and staring each one in the face as if he would read his inmost thoughts. "Leave the vessel when there is gold below, and when we have expended so much time and patience to take her! You are joking and cannot mean what you say. You see for yourselves that the two English fools have been favoured by luck, and, taking advantage of my disappearance, have been bold enough even to think of driving you from the deck. Now look at them. As I came climbing over the rail they hesitated, and now have retreated to their old position, out of which we will drive them. Forward, my men! Follow Christian van Sonerell!"

While the rascally Dutchman had been haranguing his men, Tyler and his companion had paused to discuss the question of attacking the Malays. A moment before they were intent upon rushing upon them, for that they were disheartened and demoralized was easily to be seen. But the aspect of affairs had suddenly changed, and as Christian van Sonerell had remarked, his unexpected appearance had caused them to alter their determination.

"They have gathered in a body again," cried Tyler, stretching out an arm to detain John Marshall, "and see, there is their leader. What bad luck for us! For I had hoped that he had disappeared over the side for good. But he is with his men again, and there is no doubt that he will persuade them to renew the attack. Stand back, John, and employ the breathing-space allowed us in reloading our weapons. Then we shall be prepared to fight them again."

"Ay, that we will, sir," was the ready answer; "we'll stand by one another as firm as two rocks, and when things get too warm for us, why, we'll be over the stern before they can look round. But I reckon that this time it will be a case for the gun."

"I think so too," agreed Tyler, looking along the deck and noting with some concern that the mood of the pirates had already changed. "Their leader is no doubt telling them of the gold and stores below, and of the riches they will lose if they retreat. Depend upon it, now that they know of the presence of the ropes they will hack them asunder and come at us in a body. Well, if they do I'm fully prepared."

At the words he thrust one hand into his pocket and commenced to rapidly replace the emptied cartridges in his revolver. Then, flicking a few more grains of powder into the touch-hole of the gun, lest by chance a gust of wind or some sudden jolt during the past conflict should have disturbed the fuse which he had already prepared, he placed the muzzle of his weapon across the top of the hole, and held it there in readiness to send a charge of grape bursting through the ranks of the pirates. As for John Marshall, the success which they had already enjoyed, the fact that it was he who had tossed the Dutchman overboard, and the example of coolness which Tyler had set him seemed to have raised his spirits to the highest. With a short reckless laugh he, too, commenced to cram cartridges into his weapons, and having completed the operation to his satisfaction, stood close beside his companion, one hand resting upon the bulwark and his eyes fixed upon the gathering of natives beyond.

"Helloo!" he suddenly exclaimed, as the rays from the swinging lamp fell upon a figure ascending from the cabin below, "there's our friend the interpreter, looking a little upset after the blow I've given him. Just stand aside, Mr. Richardson, while I take a shot at the fellow. He's only a murderer, and if we treat him like a dog, neither he nor his comrades can complain."

Lifting his left arm till the wrist was on a level with his eyes, John Marshall rested the muzzle of one of his weapons there, and took steady aim at the bulky figure of Hans Schlott, which could be seen in the companion-way. Squinting along the barrel, he was in the act of pulling the trigger when a movement on the part of the criminal disturbed his aim. Indeed it almost seemed as though Hans Schlott had dreamt of the danger threatening him, for in spite of the fact that the figures of the two young Englishmen were with difficulty visible through the darkness which covered the vessel, he suddenly ducked and disappeared below, the movement undoubtedly saving his life. A minute later he reappeared from the direction of the bows, having crawled to the deck by way of the men's quarters. Then he staggered towards Christian van Sonerell, as if still suffering from the stunning blow which John Marshall had delivered, and at once commenced to address him.

"On them!" he shrieked in high-pitched tones, which grated upon Tyler's ears. "Rush at them, and sweep them out of existence, for if you do not, I tell you that we are doomed. Our lives will not be safe for another hour, for one of them, known to us as John Marshall, happened by ill chance to be in the cabin when I fired. He saw the deed, and I know well that neither he nor the other young fool will rest until we are captured. They must not escape! We must kill them, and then send their bodies to the bottom of the sea with some pounds of shot at their feet. Quick, I say, or even now, when the odds are against them, they will give us the slip, and bring a certain end to our fortunes."

He gripped Christian van Sonerell by the arm so fiercely that the latter almost winced, while he bellowed the words in his ear as if the Dutchman were a mile away. Then, leaning against the bulwarks to support his unsteady weight, he shook his fist with frantic energy at the two dim figures to be seen in the stern, and called loudly to them.

"Listen to me, you fools of Englishmen!" he shouted. "You think that because you have resisted us so far you will escape us altogether. But I tell you that that will not be the case. For lives which you have already taken you shall pay, and I prophesy that within five minutes both of you will be slain like your comrade below. Him I killed with my weapon, and see now, this is for you, Tyler Richardson."

Scarcely had the words left his lips than a pistol-shot rang out, and a bullet struck heavily against the front of the binnacle, shattering there into a hundred fragments, which splashed the two young fellows standing beyond. A moment later Tyler's voice broke the silence.

"A bad shot and an unsteady hand," he called out. "Now, hear my words, Hans Schlott, and you, too, who have aided him in this murderous attack. I swear that if I escape from this ship with my life I will never rest till I have hunted you down, for you are murderers. In cold blood you yourself killed my comrade, and for that act you shall be punished. Now, take my advice, leave the ship at once, for if you attack I will fire the gun and blow you to atoms."

That the warning to which he had given vent caused consternation amongst the Malay pirates was evident, for up to this they had imagined that owing to the suddenness of their attack, and to its unexpected nature, the six-pounder in the stern of the schooner was harmless, and that Tyler's behaviour in arranging a fuse and tossing the covering aside was merely a blind with which to frighten them. Now, however, his own words assured them of the fact, for quite a few were able to understand their meaning, and instantly those who from the first had been inclined to show the white feather retreated to the bows of the ship, where they displayed every sign of terror. But it was not likely that two desperate men such as the Dutchmen were would permit themselves to be balked of their prey in such a manner. Indeed, so carefully had their plans been made, so completely did Hans Schlott imagine that he had hoodwinked the leader of the expedition and his companions, that he was convinced that the sudden attack, the rising of the crew, and the arrival of a boat-load of Malay pirates had been unforeseen, and that plans for defence were wholly unprepared. Thanks to the secrecy which Tyler had observed, the crafty interpreter was ignorant of the fact that a conspiracy was suspected, and at the news that Tyler ventured to give him he openly scoffed, and at once turned to reassure the native following.

"He lies!" he shouted. "Until I fired he was walking the deck half in his sleep, while his two companions lay below resting in their bunks. But for the weapons which they carry in their belts they have not a cartridge between them, while I swear to you that the gun is empty. Come, lead our men forward, Van Sonerell, and clear these Englishmen from our way."

"Head the charge yourself," was the answer, "and show us that you too are able to fight. For myself, I will rush at them by your side, and do my best to help you; but much must not be expected of me, for, see here, my strength is gone, and I am weak with loss of blood."

He pointed to his left shoulder, where Tyler's bullet had struck, and showed a large red patch which oozed through the cloth, and, mingled with the salt water with which his garment was saturated, splashed heavily to the deck.

"Then join me and do your best," cried Hans Schlott, roused to desperation by the thought that if Tyler and his companion escaped there would be no peace for him, at any rate, in the neighbourhood of Borneo. "Forward, my men, for I swear to you that you have nothing but their pistols to fear. The gun contains air alone, and can do you no harm," he continued, turning to the Malay crew. "Come, we will rush at them and bear them from the deck."

Snatching a cutlass from one of them, he waited to see that they were ready to aid him, and then came full tilt along the deck, his eyes fixed upon the six-pounder, which was dimly visible, and the direction of which he endeavoured to make out. A few seconds and he satisfied himself that

the muzzle was presenting to the right, and instantly he changed the course of his frantic charge and came rushing along the opposite side of the deck. As for his companions in villainy, they too came towards the stern at their fastest pace, and, scattering as much as the narrow space between the bulwarks would allow, charged upon the young Englishmen, careless of the presence of the gun which Hans Schlott had assured them was empty. And all the while Tyler and his solitary companion stood there awaiting the conflict with steady courage, but with the certain knowledge that on this occasion they would be beaten back. Holding their fire until Hans Schlott and his Dutch comrade were within a few yards, they levelled their weapons steadily, and at a word from Tyler firmly pressed upon the trigger. Four times in succession did they discharge a bullet into the ranks of the attackers, and on each occasion one of the Malay crew threw his arms into the night and came crashing to the deck. But in spite of their efforts to bring down the leaders, Hans Schlott and Christian van Sonerell still remained unharmed upon their feet, seeming by a miracle to escape the bullets intended for them. Determined to slay the two Englishmen who stood between them and the rich prize which had aroused their cupidity, and brave in the knowledge that they had nothing to fear from the gun, they came on without a pause, and before Tyler could have thought it possible were at the binnacle. At once down came Hans Schlott's cutlass, severing the tightly-stretched cable with such swiftness that it flew aside with a twang, while the weapon itself hit the planks beneath and penetrated deeply. A wrench, and the blade was withdrawn, while the Dutchman prepared to sever the second and only remaining barrier which stretched between him and the Englishmen.

"Stand aside!" shouted Tyler in warning tones, seeing that ere a minute had passed he and his companion would be overwhelmed "They are massed in a body, and will be upon us if we do not check them. Now, I will fire the gun, and dive overboard immediately afterwards."

"Fire!" bellowed John, as if to encourage his young leader. "Blow them all clear of the decks."

Swiftly placing the muzzle of his revolver against the top of the touch-hole, Tyler waited an instant to assure himself that his friend was clear of the discharge, and that the critical time had arrived. Then, steeling himself to the task, he pulled at the pistol, sending a livid flash against the breach of the gun. Fizz! The powder spluttered up in his face, giving out a column of dense smoke, which was swallowed up instantly by the sulphurous vapour which poured from the muzzle. There was a loud roar as the six-pounder spoke out into the night, and then, ere the echo had died down, and long before Hans Schlott and his accomplice could dart to the rear of the gun and fall upon the Englishmen, Tyler and John Marshall had sprung clear of the deck and were swimming through the deep water which surrounded the schooner.

"For the dinghy!" said Tyler as he came to the surface, shaking the salt water out of his eyes. "But silence, or they will learn where we are and fire into us."

"They are over the side, and will escape us," bellowed Hanns Schlott, peering over the bulwark in his endeavour to pierce the darkness. "Stand still, all of you, and hold your tongues, you men. Now, listen! Where are they?"

"Swimming for their dinghy or I am mistaken," said Christian van Sonerell with an oath. "She lies directly aft, where the tide has set her, and if we fire in that direction we shall blow them out of the craft. Here, get aboard our own boat some of you lads, and after the English pigs. Now, Hanns, level your pistols and let go."

The two Dutchmen at once leaned over the rail as far as they were able, and having judged what must be the position of the dinghy, fired together in that direction. But only the echoes from the neighbouring shore answered the reports, while the surface of the water, which had momentarily been lit by the flash from their weapons, again disappeared in the gloom of the night.

"Missed!" growled Hanns Schlott. "It seems to me that we might as well expect to hit a fly under the circumstances. Let us not waste our time, but send a party after them at once. Fortunately we have a boat at our service, and can follow them. Take charge of the vessel while I go with our men and hunt down these Englishmen."

"Do so," answered his comrade faintly, for now that the excitement of the contest was gone he was beginning to feel the effect of his wound. "After them, Hanns, my friend, and do not rest till you have killed them; for remember that one of them witnessed the shot which killed their leader, while if that were not sufficient to bring us to the gallows, their evidence as to this act of piracy would certainly lead to the loss of our lives."

"I will hunt the island. I will follow as though they were rats upon whose extermination I am determined. Make your mind easy, Christian van Sonerell; this is a matter which concerns my safety perhaps more than your own, for I am the man who killed this Mr. Beverley. I will go to the end of the world to capture them, and when I have them in my hands, ah – !"

He clenched his fists in the darkness, and ground his teeth with rage. Then, realizing that if he was to have the smallest hope of success he must not delay, he turned swiftly about, and, forgetful of the throbbing pain in his head, which had followed John's lusty blow, went racing along the deck to the point where the boat was made fast. Already a crew of willing Malays were seated in it, and as soon as the bulky Dutchman had lowered himself into the bows, one of the former threw off the painter and sent the boat away from the schooner with a vigorous thrust from his foot.

"Pull!" shouted Hanns Schlott, using the Malay tongue. "An extra share of the prize if you lay hands upon these English dogs. Indeed, I myself will give a special reward to anyone who is successful in killing them. Pull! Let us not waste time, for if we are swift we shall overtake them ere they reach the shore."

Dipping their long oars into the water, the crew of pirates sent the boat on her course, and within a few seconds she was well away from the schooner, with her nose directed for the island of Borneo. Meanwhile, what had happened to Tyler and his friend?

Once their heads had risen free of the water, they had turned towards the point where they imagined the dinghy would be, and after swimming a few strokes had the good fortune to come across her in the darkness. At once each grasped her by the gunwale, and hung on there while they prepared for the final effort of climbing in. Suddenly, however, an idea occurred to Tyler.

"No," he whispered, seeing that John was about to hoist himself up, "do not get into the boat yet awhile, for then we should be easy targets if they caught sight of us. Let us swim beside her, and push her away from the schooner."

"The very thing, sir! There's the painter, and now I've slipped it from the ring. I reckon that they will follow towards the shore, for what would take us in the direction of the open sea?"

"Then we'll do what they least expect," said Tyler sharply. "That way, John, and when we are a hundred yards from the ship let us lie still and listen. Then we shall learn what steps they are taking to capture us, and can make our plans accordingly."

Acting on this advice, they silently pushed the small craft out to sea, swimming with one hand in the water and the other grasping the gunwale. Soon they had put quite a respectable distance between themselves and their enemies, and at a jerk from Tyler, who back-watered with his feet, and so attracted his comrade's attention, they hung without a movement in the deep water, and listened eagerly for sounds of the pursuers.

"I heard pistols fired," said Tyler softly. "The sea was about my ears and deadened the sound, but for all that I am sure that they fired. Perhaps they thought that they saw us in the darkness, or, more likely, they let go their bullets in the hope of making a lucky shot."

"That's the case, I reckon," answered John. "But steady, sir, the sound of a voice carries far across the sea on a still night like this. Listen to that. They are in their boat, and are after us. I can hear that ruffian's voice."

Once again both were silent, while they turned their faces towards the shore and listened carefully. Yes, there could be no doubt about the matter, for Hanns Schlott's voice broke the stillness of the night as he urged his men at their oars.

"To the shore!" he shouted. "I will give a handful of dollars to the man who lays his fingers upon them dead or alive. Can anyone see or hear them?"

No answer was made to his question, though many eyes were staring into the darkness, and, therefore, without further delay they pulled on for the shore, hoping to capture the fugitives as they landed, or, if fortune were kind to them, to arrive on the shore of Borneo before the white men could reach it, and there lay a trap into which they would fall. As for Tyler and John Marshall, they clung to the frail boat for many minutes as she lay there motionless in the water, listening with all their ears for sounds of the pirates. So calm was the atmosphere, and so still the night, that, as the latter had remarked, the slightest sound travelled along the surface of the sea in a remarkable manner, and could be heard quite a distance away. Thanks to this fact, the splash of oars as the boat was rowed away from them reached their ears distinctly, as did also the hoarse commands of the Dutchman who accompanied the searchers as he gave the order to cease pulling. Then there was silence once more, and for many minutes the gentle lap of water against the frail sides of the dinghy could alone be heard.

"We will tire their patience out by remaining where we are," whispered Tyler, "and fortunately for us the water is so warm that we are not likely to become chilled by remaining in it for a long period. Perhaps they will imagine that we have already landed, and in that case they will not venture to go far afield, for the night is too dark for pursuit. An hour or more of waiting may convince them that it is useless to remain, and as soon as they return to the schooner we will swim towards the land."

"And supposing they remain ashore till the morning?" asked John Marshall in anxious tones. "In that case we should certainly be taken, unless, of course, we waited for, say, a couple of hours and then pushed our boat away to the right or left, so as to land farther up or down the coast."

"It is a good idea, John," answered Tyler thoughtfully, "and if the pirates show signs of their determination to waylay us in the morning we will do as you say. For the present, however, I feel sure that we are acting for the best by lying quietly here. Our movements in the future must depend upon circumstances, though you may be sure of this, that whatever happens we will not be taken without a struggle. Unfortunately our weapons are practically useless, for the cartridges will have been destroyed by the water."

"I don't know so much," whispered John hastily, "for just as I was going overboard I thought of the matter and crammed a handful into my cap, while I jammed it firmly down upon my head. It's made of thick pilot cloth, and as I was only under the surface for a few seconds, it's possible that the ammunition has escaped. Look here!"

Pulling himself a little higher out of the water, he leaned his chin on the gunwale and gently drew his cap from his head. Then, one by one, he picked some twenty or more cartridges from the lining and placed them upon one of the seats.

"Not even damp," he said in low tones of delight. "Now, let's have the revolvers and place them here to dry. The water will quickly drain away from them, and in half an hour or so they will be fit for use again."

Dragging their weapons from their belts or pockets, as the young boatswain had suggested, they placed them within the boat with open breeches and muzzles pointing downwards. Then, satisfied that they had done all that was possible, they once more turned their attention to the schooner, and to the pirates who had landed upon the shore.

"Hush!" whispered Tyler earnestly, some little time later, as a voice came reverberating across the water. "Someone is talking, and I think that it is the Dutchman."

"Sure enough, sir," agreed John, "and what's more, he's hailing the schooner. I wonder what he's saying!"

Both listened attentively, but owing to their ignorance of the Dutch language could make nothing of what they heard. That it was Hanns Schlott whose hail had come across the water, was evident, for both Tyler and John were well acquainted with the tones of his voice. Then someone

shouted an answer back from the deck of the schooner, and again, in spite of the small knowledge that they had of Christian van Sonerell, they were certain that it was he who responded to his friend.

"There is some movement afoot," remarked Tyler, placing his lips as close to John's ear as their respective positions would allow. "And hark! there is someone moving ashore. Yes, I heard the boat splash as she was run into the water, and there is the clatter of oars."

Clinging there, with their heads just above the surface and their ears clear of the sea, both Tyler and his companion could hear the sounds as though they were made close at hand. Indeed, the calm sea, with its unruffled surface, seemed to accentuate the sounds and transmit them with such clearness that, though some hundreds of feet away, the noise of an oar falling into its place in the rowlock, and the splash as the blade was dipped, were heard as though close at hand. Then, at a word of command from Hanns Schlott, the boat shot from the shore, and the sound of many oars forcing her through the water came to their ears.

"Going back to the schooner," whispered Tyler. "Have they given up the chase and decided to content themselves with the vessel as a prize, or are they merely returning there until the day dawns and allows them to carry on the pursuit with energy? We will wait and keep watch, and if there is no movement after an hour or more we will follow your plan."

"And what if they are just going aboard to get more men?" said John Marshall eagerly. "Yer see, sir, it's a long stretch of coast to set a watch on, and that Dutch rascal is cute enough to know it. Supposing that's his game, then we shall find escape more difficult still, and shall have to swim a good mile or more to get clear of the watchers."

"And when we touched the land we should never know whether we were beyond them or not," replied Tyler thoughtfully. "How many men do you think went ashore with Hanns Schlott?"

"Just about the number that come aboard with the other rascal, sir."

"And how many do you suppose are now aboard the schooner, John?"

"Ten at the most, and that's an outside figure," was the unhesitating answer. "I reckon that the Dutchman cleared off with his own fellows, leaving behind the crew which manned the schooner."

"Then we will change our plans, and for the present will decide not to go ashore," said Tyler resolutely. "If Hanns Schlott has come to fetch more men, as I feel sure he has, we will wait until he and the crew have reached the shore again. Then, John, my friend, we will float silently down upon the schooner, and will do our best to take possession of our property. We have arms at hand to help us, and if only we can effect a complete surprise we should be able to drive the pirates from the deck. Steady! The boat has just reached the vessel, and by the sounds which come to us I feel sure that some of the crew are entering her."

That this was the case was quickly evident, for within a few minutes the splash of oars again sounded across the water, while the pirates' boat was pulled towards the shore, this time manned by more men than had accompanied her on her outward journey.

CHAPTER VI

Courage Wins the Day

For long did Tyler Richardson and his companion John Marshall maintain silence as they clung to the boat, for they were conscious that the slightest sound, even a gentle splash or hasty movement in the water, might declare their whereabouts to the pirates who still remained upon the schooner. Scarcely daring to breathe, they listened eagerly, and ere long had convinced themselves that Hanns Schlott had returned to the vessel for one purpose alone, and that was to obtain more men, whom he might place at intervals along that part of the coast of Borneo, there to wait for the landing of the Englishmen. Indeed, had there been any doubt in Tyler's mind, the squeaking of the oars and the more frequent splash of paddles told him at once that a greater number were in the boat on this occasion. Then, too, resting there as he did with his eyes on a level with the surface, the schooner every now and again became dimly silhouetted against the stars, and by peering steadily in her direction the feeble rays of the riding-lamp enabled him to distinguish some half-dozen figures which alone seemed to occupy the deck.

"Give Hanns Schlott and his rascals half an hour to reach the shore and separate," he whispered in John's ear. "Then we will float slowly down upon the schooner, and endeavour to make the boat fast. After that we will climb aboard and see how matters stand, though I am determined, whatever the odds, to regain possession of her."

An hour later silence had once more settled down upon the neighbourhood, and though the two young fellows had been careful to listen all the while, nothing had occurred to arouse anxiety. Once Hanns Schlott and his boat-load of Malays had reached the shore there had been confused shouts and words of command, but these had quickly died down as the pirates separated and went to their stations. An occasional cry denoted the fact that they were still within hearing, but very soon they were silent, and once more stillness came over the sea.

"Now for the schooner!" whispered Tyler in tones which he endeavoured to steady; "come to the stern of the boat, John, and help me to shove her along. But first let us discuss our plans so that there shall be no confusion. We must make for our old position, and if it is possible we must contrive to load the six-pounder again. Otherwise there may be sufficient men aboard to rush upon us and sweep us into the sea."

"Not if we once get safely on her deck," answered John Marshall stubbornly. "It'll want more than the crew of Malays to turn us out, I reckon. Jest you take a bit of advice from me, Mr. Richardson, and when we get aboard go tooth and nail for those fellows. A rush, a few shots into their midst, and some hard knocks with our fists'll send 'em leaping overboard, and once that's the case we'll up anchor and away. Then our turn will come to talk to these Dutchmen, and Hanns Schlott and his comrade shall take our place. We'll turn the tables on 'em, sir, and do our best to capture 'em. But I'm under your orders, and ready to obey."

Having given vent to his feelings, the boatswain moved gently along the gunwale till he joined Tyler at the stern, when the two at once commenced to push the dinghy towards the schooner. With shoulders sunk beneath the surface, and finger-tips alone resting upon the edge of the boat, they urged her gently through the sea, halting every now and again to make sure that they were unobserved. At last they arrived close to their destination, and at once, at a nudge from Tyler, turned towards the stern.

"Now for the painter!" whispered the latter. "Remain where you are while I go for'ard. When you feel the boat shaking you will know that all is in readiness, and can creep along towards me."

A moment later he had disappeared in the darkness, and though his companion peered in the direction which he had taken he could see no sign of him. A gentle splash, however, told that he was moving, and ere long a sharp dip as the dinghy was pulled to one side told him that Tyler had been

successful. At once the sailor commenced to move towards him, and soon found himself beside his leader and directly beneath the schooner's stern.

"We are in luck," whispered Tyler, placing his lips close to John's ears, "for one of the ropes which stretched from the binnacle, and was severed by Hanns Schlott, is trailing over the side and will help us to ascend. Here it is. Keep the tail of it in your hand while I swarm up, and be ready to follow immediately."

Without further explanation he thrust the end of the cable into his companion's hand, and then, grasping the other portion, slowly raised himself out of the water. Lifting one hand above the other, it was not long before his fingers lit upon the bulwarks, and at once relinquishing the rope, he clambered over on to the deck, where he was soon joined by John Marshall.

"Now let us lie down and listen," he whispered. "Then if anyone is about we shall get notice of their presence before they catch sight of us, and shall know how to act. If the decks are empty we will creep below and will see what can be done in the way of ammunition."

Crouching close to the bulwarks they lay for some five minutes without venturing to move, peering all the while into the darkness to discover, if possible, some trace of the Malays. But not a soul was to be seen, and though they left their hiding-place and crept into the bows, no trace could be found of the pirates.

"All sleeping below," whispered John Marshall with a chuckle, "and taking it easy after the fight. The Dutchman will be down in the cabin, occupying one of our bunks, for all the world as though he were owner of the vessel, but we'll turn him out in double-quick time and give him cause to regret the fact that he failed to set a watch. What's the next move, sir?"

"Remain on deck while I go below," answered Tyler promptly. "But wait, we have forgotten our revolvers, and must return for them. Slip along to the stern with me and I will drop into the dinghy and hand them up to you. That done, we shall feel more confidence, and shall have something with which to defend ourselves should the crew discover our presence. Now, stand by!"

Taking care to impart his orders in a whisper, Tyler quickly reached the stern and once more grasped the rope. Then, swinging himself over the rail, he lowered himself till his feet touched the water within a few inches of the dinghy. Groping in the darkness as he dangled there it was not long before his toe struck with a gentle tap against the gunwale, and at once he began to draw the boat towards him. A moment later he was safely on board, and had grasped the weapons for which he had returned. A glance above showed him John Marshall's figure stretching out towards him, and ere long the revolvers and the cartridges had been safely transferred.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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