

THE ADVENTURES
OF A SUPERCARGO

BY LOUIS BECKE

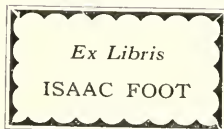
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LONDON: T. FISHER UNWIN

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BY

LOUIS BECKE

AUTHOR OF "BY REEF AND PALM," "TOM GERRARD," ETC.



LONDON

T. FISHER UNWIN

PATERNOSTER SQUARE

1905

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PR 4089
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TO MY OLD SHIPMATE
IN SOUTHERN SEAS
MY DAUGHTER, NORA LOIS

HONFLEUR, CALVADOS.
January 1905.

THE ADVENTURES OF A SUPERCARGO



CHAPTER I

THE night air was heavy with the perfume of the wild convolvulus and the flowers of the golden wattle, as a lad of sixteen, carrying a weighty fish basket slung from his shoulder, began the ascent of a narrow, rocky path leading from the shores of the quiet little bay to the densely timbered uplands.

The summit gained, he freed himself of his load by slipping the leather strap over his head, and as the basket touched the ground, it canted on one side, and a number of large silvery bream, still alive, slid out upon the grass, their bodies gleaming under the light of the myriad stars shining out from a vault of cloudless blue.

With a sigh of content, the youth sat down upon the sward and looked at the scene below, and then across the slumbering water to the blaze of the lights of the city, four miles away.

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Just beneath was the deep, land-locked bay, darkened by the shadows of the high, tree-clad hills, and showing no sign of life, except a faint gleam from the stern ports of a large barque, whose bulk impressively dominated over that of several smaller vessels—brigs, schooners, and a dismantled and ancient paddle-wheel steamer. All—even the lofty-sparred barque herself—were “condemned” craft, and had been moored in the cove for a long time, some for three or four years. And they were all dear to the heart of the boy, who was now regarding them with wistful eyes, and building up romances about them in his imaginative brain. For he had known them ever since they had been towed into the secluded little cove, to await being sold as coal hulks, or to be broken up for the sake of their copper or Muntz metal bolts.

Once, when he was three years younger, there had been as many as fifteen “condemned” in sleepy Sirius Cove, and then one day there came along two panting tugs, and four of them were taken away to be made “fit for sea” again to take coal to California or Panama or Valparaiso. For those were the days when the private marine surveyors had very pleasant financial relations with the official Marine Board of New South Wales, and many hundreds of sailormen went to their deaths in

heavily-insured, ex-condemned, and rotten old crates called ships, whose captains and officers well knew that there were ten chances to one of the vessel not reaching her destination if she met with bad weather. But they were heavily-insured; and the "hard-up" captains and mates who signed the articles at the Shipping Office were always broken and reckless men who cared little for their own lives, and still less for those of the scratch crews of dead-beats and loafers, who called themselves "Able Bodied," and "Ordinary Seamen." If the ship arrived at her port of discharge, the skipper and his officers received a bonus in addition to their wages, and the crew, who had already spent their one or two months' advance, and were in debt to the ship, were encouraged to stick to her for the return voyage by the gift of a few bottles of Queensland rum, and the seizure by the captain of such wretched effects as they possessed. These were locked up in the cabin, so that if any one of the hands before the mast deserted, he would go ashore with nothing but what he stood up in—a ragged shirt, and a pair of worn-out pants, with perhaps an ancient pair of shoes or sea-boots.

But, if the ship never turned up again, and was reported "missing" at Lloyds, there was but little comment made, except by the people in the insurance office. They took big risks,

and charged big premiums, and had no concern otherwise about men's lives. And even in these latter days, the life of a merchant seaman too often counts for naught.

For half-an-hour or more, the lad lay upon the grassy sward, watching the changing lights of the city, and listening to the soft rustle of the branches of the gum-trees overhead as they were stirred by the gentle breath of the land breeze from the west. Then came the sound of hurried footsteps upon the dry, crisp and fallen leaves which covered the path, and he sat up.

"Tom," cried a childish voice, "are you here?"

"Yes, I am, Sab. But whatever has made you come to this place?"

"To look for you, Tom," and the speaker, a girl of ten years of age, who was bare-headed, but had a light muslin shawl over her shoulders, rushed excitedly up to the boy, and placed her trembling hands in his.

"Come home, Tom dear, come home quickly. You said you would be back at five o'clock, and now it is nine, and oh, Tom, Aunt Christina means to do something dreadful! I am sure she does, for she told Mrs Potter to serve dinner for her at eight o'clock, and she has dressed herself in her best black silk dress with the long gold chain——"

The boy put his arm round his sister's waist.

"Yes; but go easy, Sabbie, and don't talk so fast."

"I *must* talk quickly, Tom. Something horrid is about happen! Aunt Christina has written to Canon Cooper about you, and has asked him to come to-morrow to see you—and oh, Tom, I'm sure she means to send you to England to College."

The boy's square jaw set firmly, and he grasped his sister's hand tightly.

"No, Sabbie, she shall *not* send me to England! Aunt has made me pretty miserable for three years, but I am not a toddling infant, and I am sick of her continual bullying. I'll run away from home."

"Oh no, no, Tom, don't do that, and leave me all alone. But come, let us get back. Aunt is so dreadfully angry. You know you said you would be home at five."

"I know I did. But old Ryder is very ill, and I stayed on board the barque and made supper for him. Then at six o'clock he became much worse and asked me to go for a doctor, so I pulled over to the Circular Quay, and brought Dr Lascelles over. He stayed half-an-hour, and then went back in his own boat, but poor old Captain Ryder begged me to stay longer, so I sat on the transoms, and fished out of the stern port until

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eight, when he fell asleep. What else could I do but say 'yes,' when he asked me to stay? He is all alone and very weak. See, there is his cabin light. I filled and trimmed the lamp, and left a note on the table saying I would be back again sometime to-night. And I mean to keep my promise if there were fifty Aunt Christinas."

The girl made no answer. She knew how deeply her brother was attached to the old ship-keeper.

"Aunt Christina" sat alone in the spacious dining-room with her open Bible upon her knees. She was a tall, thin, handsome woman, with a white, stern face, and dressed in a style of fifty years back, the high starched cap she wore was no whiter and stiffer looking than the carefully arranged little curls on each side of her face. A hard, severe face it was, yet at times there would come into the cold grey eyes a gleam of kindly light—but alas! never for her nephew Tom, who was now standing outside the door, uncertain whether to seek admission or not. On his table he had found a few lines written in his aunt's thin Italian hand.

"THOMAS, I have instructed Mrs Potter not to give you any supper, and wish you to at once retire. In the morning, dress yourself in your best clothes, and, after breakfast, come to me in the library at ten o'clock."

“I’ll try and see if she won’t let me explain,” the lad muttered to himself. Then he knocked gently.

“Come in, Sabina.”

Tom opened the door. “It is I, Aunt Christina. Sabbie is in bed. I want to explain, Aunt——”

“I shall listen to no shallow explanations. Go to your room,” and Miss Denison turned slightly in her chair, and bent her eyes upon her Bible.

“But, Aunt, do please hear what I have to say.”

The lady turned sharply, and her nephew’s sun-tanned face flushed as she spoke:

“I am grievously disappointed with you, Thomas. Your conduct has, for many months past, given me very many bitter hours of reflection. Unfortunately, in Australia, the lax scholastic discipline that prevails——”

“I am really very sorry, Aunt Christina——”

“Do not interrupt me. I cannot listen to your excuses. I am too deeply hurt and mortified to discuss any further your outrageous behaviour.”

“Once more, Aunt, let me ask you to listen to me—if only for one minute. Captain Ryder——”

“I desire not to hear you. I place no faith

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in anything you may have to say by way of excuse."

"Am I a liar, Aunt?" he burst out hotly.

"How dare you use such coarse language to me! Leave the room!" and Miss Denison, rising, pointed to the door.

Too mortified to even say good-night, Tom went out and ascended to his room. For a few minutes he stood at the open window, gazing out upon the sleeping waters of Sydney Harbour. Then he looked at his watch—a quaint old-fashioned silver Geneva, the gift of his dead father; it was a quarter past ten.

He tapped against the wall of his room, "Are you awake, Sabbie?"

"Yes, Tom, come in," and then he heard his sister strike a match.

"Sabbie," he said quickly, "Aunt has refused to listen to me, and I am going out again. I could do so without her knowing anything about it, but I won't. I may not be home till the morning perhaps if old Ryder is no better. There, good-night."

A few minutes later he was in the hall, where he met Mrs Potter, the housekeeper, who had just locked up the house and was going to bed.

"Open the front door, if you please, Mrs Potter. I am going out to stay with a sick man."

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Mrs Potter looked at him aghast, "I cannot, Master Thomas—your aunt——"

"Then I'll open it myself," he said with assumed roughness, and taking the bunch of keys from her hand, he quietly opened the hall door.

"Good-night, Mrs Potter. Please tell my aunt that I may not be home till the morning."

CHAPTER II

TOM and his sister, who was six years younger than himself, were orphans, having by a dreadful tragedy, lost both their parents when the boy was thirteen years of age. Mr Denison had been one of the first civilian magistrates appointed in the colony of Tasmania, where he had been stationed for many years previous to his marriage. His wife was the daughter of a retired military settler, a Major Lotherington, who was a man of considerable wealth, and who bequeathed the whole of his fortune to his daughter; he was a widower, and Mrs Denison his only child. He died when Tom was so young that the boy had but an indistinct remembrance of a fussy, red-faced old gentleman with enormous bushy white eyebrows and bright blue eyes, who would come occasionally to visit his father and mother, and who was the terror of the servants. He, however, was very kind to Tom, and indeed, was intensely fond and proud of his sturdy grandchild. He would often, much to Mrs Denison's frantic

terror, insist upon taking the youngster for what he called "a bit of a trot," which meant riding about the station paddocks at a hard gallop, holding the boy in front of him, and making the horse jump huge logs.

"Never mind, Marion," the boy's father would say, "that horse of your father's is one of the best 'leppers' in Tasmania, as he says, and they will never come to any harm."

After the death of the old, hard-riding Irishman, Mrs Denison found herself a fairly wealthy woman, and insisted upon her husband resigning his magistrateship and devoting himself to pastoral pursuits; and so in a few months the family removed to her former home, much to the delight of the late major's servants, "bond" and "free," for they all had a great affection for "Miss Marion," as they still persistently called her.

The estate consisted of about one hundred square miles of splendid cattle country, and Denison entered with a zest into the more active life now afforded him, and the first year of their life in the Huon Valley passed very happily, although the district—as indeed was the whole of the northern part of the colony—was much disturbed by the presence of numerous gangs of desperate bushrangers, who, in addition to daring robberies, had committed many appalling murders. Settlers' homesteads had been

pillaged and the male occupants who offered resistance had been shot down mercilessly by these men, who were nearly all escaped convicts from Port Arthur and other penal establishments. Not only the police but the military were employed in the pursuit of these gangs, but it was not often that many of them were taken alive, for they preferred death by the bullet or starvation in the Tasmanian bush to the certainty of hanging, or at least re-incarceration in that abode of horror—Port Arthur, where the slightest offence against the prison discipline was visited by a severe flogging.

Only those who have read Marcus Clarke's novel, "For the Term of His Natural Life," or studied the penal records of Australia, can gain an idea of the wickedness and savagery of the then "Convict System" of New South Wales (which applied to Tasmania as well as to the mother colony), and the regulations and punishments of which Tom's father, when he was a magistrate, had to administer, though his innermost soul revolted at them. Hundreds of unfortunate prisoners who, even under the severest penal discipline of the present day, would have proved amenable and obedient, were, by the ferocious *régime* that prevailed at Port Arthur, turned into demons, and many convicts in the chain gangs would sometimes agree among themselves to murder one of their

fellow-prisoners or an overseer so that they might escape the horrors and miseries of existence by a simultaneous exit into the other world by the hangman's noose.

Brutalising, soul-destroying and revolting in the extreme was the administration of a system that had been intended as a deterrent to crime—it resulted as an incentive to it.

During Mr Denison's career as a magistrate he had had brought before him several prisoners who had escaped and been recaptured by either the military, the police, or by settlers, and in each case—although he was loth to do so—he had no other course but to send them back to Port Arthur and the chain gang. On several occasions, however, owing to want of a proper escort or to the country being flooded by the heavy rains, he had been compelled to keep the prisoners in confinement at the homestead—much to their satisfaction, for they were, although handcuffed, treated in a humane manner and liberally supplied with food, and, above all, with tobacco.

So far, "Huon Bank," as the station was called, had escaped molestation, although nearly every other homestead in the vicinity had suffered at the hands of these desperate men. One day he guessed at the reason of his immunity from attack. He had sent a man with a cartload of provisions to some of his

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shepherds in a distant part of the run; four miles from "Huon Bank," the cart was stopped by three well-armed bushrangers who, without hurting the driver, made him give them as much salt beef, flour, and tea and sugar as they could carry. Then the leader, a man named Marshall, asked the driver for his "ration book" and a pencil. Tearing out a sheet, he laboriously wrote a few lines and bade the man give it to his master—and Mr Denison had to laugh when he read it.

"Mr Denison sir i am sory we had to stik up your cart we are hard up for tucker but i only took 6 plugs of terbaccer and lef 6 for the sepherds so you must excuse liberty taken. This is to warn you that Tim Hogan and his crowd are about here and mean to stik up huon bank, but me and my pals wil have no hand in it respectfully Samuel Marshall No. 7429."

Marion Denison's face paled when she heard the name of Tim Hogan—a man who had committed several atrocious murders and who was the leader of a gang of six other ruffians almost as bloodthirsty and cruel as himself. For twelve months he had defied all attempts to capture him, and had made a boast that before he "was switched off at Port Arthur he would add a magistrate or a soldier officer to his tally."

Mr Denison did not disregard the warning

of "Samuel Marshall, No. 7429," and for many weeks he and his men-servants slept with their loaded arms by their side. Then word was sent officially from Port Arthur, that Hogan's band, hard pressed by the police, had separated, and that Hogan himself had escaped from the colony in one of the American whaleships that cruised about the Tasmanian coasts in the summer months. But the authorities were deceived, for although the gang had been dispersed, Hogan and one of his fellow-ruffians were in a safe hiding-place in the Huon Valley, about twenty miles from the Denison homestead, watching for an opportunity to slip through the cordon of military and constables and gain the coast.

And then, into the childish lives of Tom and his infant sister came a great tragedy.

One hot, windless night, three or four months after Mr Denison had received Marshall's note, he was awakened by one of the station dogs which began barking furiously — and then suddenly stopped. It was past midnight, and the men-servants were fast asleep in their quarters, which were situated some hundreds of yards distant from the main building.

Springing out of bed, and bidding Mrs Denison not to be alarmed, he seized his heavy Colt's pistol—and walking quietly out of the bedroom he opened the front door as

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noiselessly as possible and looked out towards the men's quarters. All seemed to be quiet, but he determined to ascertain the cause of the dog's barking, and was just about to step out across the dew-laden grass when he felt his wife's arm upon his shoulder.

"Do not go alone, Harry," she whispered, "ring the yard bell. I just looked out of the window and saw two men coming across from the storehouse. They must be here—quite near the house, if not inside. The dining-room windows are all open."

"Take my pistol, Marion," he said, "and stand here, in the shadow, I'll go and ring the bell."

"No, you won't!" cried a mocking savage voice, and a man, whom Mrs Denison instantly divined was the dreaded Hogan, seemed to spring from out of the darkness, and, putting a pistol to Denison's chest, shot him through the heart; and then a second figure dealt the unfortunate lady a blow upon the head with a cutlass and felled her, dying, to the ground.

In a few seconds the men from the out-buildings were rushing towards the homestead, but were too late to seize Hogan and his fellow-criminal, who made their escape and were never again heard of in Tasmania.

Only for a few hours did Marion Denison live.

"Bring my children to me, Williams," she

said faintly to the station-overseer as she was carried into the dining-room, which had been lighted up. "I am dying. Bring them quickly."

And then Tom and little Sabina were aroused from their slumber and brought to the dying woman. She held out her arms to them, and then in a few minutes passed quietly away.

CHAPTER III

SIX months after the deaths of Mr and Mrs Denison Miss Christina Denison arrived from England to assume her charge of the orphaned children. She was quite twenty years older than her late brother, and a more unsuitable person to be given the control of an active, high-spirited lad of nearly seventeen, like her nephew Tom, could not possibly have been found. For the most of her life she had lived in the dull and restricted social atmosphere of a remarkably dull village in the Midlands, where the most exciting function of the year was the Vicar's garden party, which took place on the same afternoon as the local flower show, at which she was one of the judges. The news of the terrible tragedy at "Huon Bank" was communicated to her by one of her brother's executors, an old friend and neighbour named Maning. Denison, actuated no doubt by the disturbed condition of the country owing to the bush-rangers, had been careful enough to make his will a few months before his death. In some respects this will was pleasing to his

sister, in others it was not. Her brother had always allowed her one hundred pounds a year, even when he was only in receipt of his salary as a magistrate, "but," wrote Mr Maning, "the death of Mrs Denison has greatly complicated matters and I am much concerned about my dear friends' boy and girl. I am an old bachelor, lead a very rough life in the Tasmanian bush, and I am quite unfitted to have the care of children; and, unless you come to my assistance—which I earnestly hope you will do—I shall be compelled to commit the care and education of these unfortunate orphans to utter strangers." Then he went on to say that if Miss Denison would come to Australia and take the charge of Tom and Sabina he would increase her allowance to five hundred pounds per annum, and provide her with a suitable house in Sydney, where Tom at least could receive a fairly good education in the public school, and where she, he hoped, would find congenial society and pleasant surroundings. "Your poor brother," he added, "often told me of his intention to send the boy to Sydney to a public school, and therefore I feel bound to carry out his wishes in this respect." With the letter he enclosed a draft for two hundred pounds to cover the lady's travelling expenses, "feeling almost sure that she could not decline the responsibility of the care of an affectionate brother's orphaned children."

Miss Denison would have much preferred to have had her nephew and niece sent to England. The prospect of a voyage to Australia even in a luxuriously-appointed P. & O. steamer filled her maidenly bosom with fear, but, at the same time, she was not devoid of a sense of duty to the children of the brother who had been so good to her in the past; and then the five hundred pounds a year meant positive wealth to her. She was not by nature an unkindly or unsympathetic woman—only an old maid, born, brought up and living for forty years in the prim, conventional and confined circle of an English country village where the vicar and his curates were regarded as beings of a superior order, whose sermons and stodgy dinners were equally to be listened to and to be eaten with that respect due to the Established Church.

And so Miss Denison came to Sydney, where she was met by Maning and taken to the house he had secured for her. It overlooked the placid waters of Sirius Cove, and was furnished in a manner that afforded her considerable surprise. She had expected to find a rude, barn-like dwelling with two or three rough servants, and wanting in all the primary elements of civilisation and refinement; she found a handsome, stone-built house surrounded by orchards, vineyards and gardens, a staff of servants who, in their attire and demeanour, might have been

taken from those of some well-regulated English country manor, and have been approved of by even the wife of the Reverend Chesters-Masters, D.D. LL.D., etc.—a lady with a cross eye and large elastic side boots, who was a severe critic of servants, male and female.

“Where are Master Tom and Miss Sabina, Mrs Potter?” asked Maning of the housekeeper, as she brought in afternoon tea to the new chatelaine.

“Very sorry, sir, but Master Tom and Miss Sabina have gone off on board one of the hulks in the cove. They said they wanted to catch some fish for Miss Denison’s dinner.” Maning laughed; but Miss Denison sat up erect in her chair.

“You should have kept them at home, Mrs Potter,” said Maning.

“Couldn’t, sir. Master Tom took up my apron and tied it over my head, and told me to go to bed. Then he ran off with Miss Sabina. But he promised to be back soon.”

Miss Denison’s thin lips set.

“I wish you, Mrs Potter, to send a messenger to—to—the hulks, did you say? and tell Master Thomas and Miss Sabina that their aunt wishes them to return home at once.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Poor Tom,” said Maning to himself as Miss Denison, with dignified austerity, poured out a

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cup of tea, "you are in for a pretty tough time." And for three years Tom did have a "tough time" with his aunt.

It was past eleven when Tom clambered softly on board, over the barque's port side in the waist, and made his way to the big, roomy cabin in which his old friend lay.

The lamp, which a few hours previously he had set on the table and turned down low, was now burning brightly.

"Is it you, Tom" enquired a feeble voice.

"Yes, Captain Ryder. I said I would come back—I told Dr Lascelles so."

"Come here, my boy. I have been writing since you left me. See, there is a letter for you on the table, Tom, my lad. . . ."

"Yes, sir."

"Will you stay here with me until the morning?"

"Yes, Captain Ryder," and Tom placed his hand on the sailor's forehead—it was cold and grey with the shadows of coming dissolution of soul from body.

"Tom, my lad, I may die before morning. Are you afraid to stay?"

"No, Captain Ryder."

"Ah, you saw your poor father and mother . . . I forgot that. Tom, my lad, keep the lamp

high . . . You have been a good boy to me, and for two years you and your little sister have made the last years of a misspent and broken life happy. . . . When I used to command the *Hypatia* . . . but I have told you the story so often, Tom—how I used to back and fill her among the fishing boats off the American coast, and never once hit anything, and how the owners gave me a bonus of five hundred sovereigns at the end of six years' service . . . And now I am dying . . . a worn-out hulk—as old and worn out as this old barque herself, and the other hulks here in 'Rotten Row.'"

Tom saw by the strange expression in the old seaman's eyes that he was not only very ill but was wandering in his mind; but that he was so near death he did not understand.

"Will you take some more of your medicine, Captain Ryder?"

"No, lad, no; Dr Lascelles need not have left it. But give me some cold water from the bag under the awning, my son, I feel thirsty."

Tom slipped on deck, unhooked a canvas water-bag which was slung under the awning on the poop deck, brought it below, and poured out a tumblerful. The old man drank it eagerly.

"Ah, that is good, Tom, now put a little grog in the glass and fill it up again to the brim. Tom, you have been a good lad to me—a poor, friendless old shellback."

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“And you have been a good, kind friend to me, Captain,” was the grateful reply. “You have taught me so many things.”

“Such as I knew, lad, such as I knew; a bit of navigation, a bit of seaman’s work such as I could teach you on a condemned hulk, and a bit of common-sense. Is the little maid in bed?—ah, of course she is. How goes the time, lad?”

“Seven bells, sir.”

“Tom, lad.”

“Yes, sir.”

“I have a matter of forty-seven pounds at the Savings Bank; it is for the little maid. You will find it all put down in the letter, and Potts and Paul, the ship-chandlers, have ten pounds of mine to see me buried decently, ship-shape and Bristol fashion. And I want you and the little lass to come and see me stowed away under the soil. There will only be you and little Sabbie, and maybe Mr Paul, if he isn’t too busy to come. Tom,” and he partly raised himself in his bunk, “does your aunt know you are here with me?”

“Yes, Captain, I left word with Mrs Potter that I was coming to stay with you until the morning.”

“That’s right, my lad, that’s right. She’s a hard woman is your aunt, a hard woman; but she means well, and is just according to her

lights. And you must obey her orders, Tom. Never go against them as has been put in authority over you. You will give her my respects, lad, and tell her that I never said nothing to you that I wouldn't say to her or any other lady, except the day when you nearly got Jack bitted in halves by a shark. Where is Jack?"

"Asleep on the skylight, sir."

"And Jacob?"

"Here, sir, under the table," and Tom stooped down and lifted up an enormous, plethoric old tom cat, half blind with age.

"Put him here with me, lad, the poor old fellow is like me and Jack and the old *Simon Bolivar*—we have run our time, hulks, old hulks. Now, my lad, bring me the dog."

Jack, the old Newfoundland dog who had sailed with Ryder on many a voyage, rose and stretched himself as Tom aroused him from his slumbers and let him below to his master, who, putting out his hand, patted the animal's head.

"Lie down, Jack, old dog, lie down here, beside me." A few minutes passed, and the old man closed his eyes. Then he roused himself suddenly.

"What is the time, lad?"

"Five minutes to twelve, sir."

"Tom, come closer to me . . . give me your

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hand . . . now strike eight bells and call the watch."

And then his head fell back upon the pillow and he closed his eyes, and the boy knew that the end had come to the sea-worn old guardian of the hulks.

CHAPTER IV

“COME, Tom, you must be reasonable, and remember that you are but a boy,” and Canon Cooper, a ruddy-faced bright-eyed old gentleman of sixty, placed his hand kindly on the lad’s shoulder.

“I am nearly seventeen, sir. And I cannot submit to be treated by my aunt as if I were a boy of ten—I really cannot, sir. I hate being ridiculed, and Aunt Christina makes me cut a very ridiculous figure sometimes,” and as he spoke his sunburnt face flushed angrily and a sullen look came into the grey eyes.

The clergyman was silent. He knew that Miss Denison’s estimate of her nephew’s character and disposition was an entirely erroneous one, and that she was fast alienating the affection that she could have so easily gained.

“For instance, sir,” went on Tom, encouraged by the Canon’s not replying to his remark, “I cannot do as she insists I shall do in the matter of clothes—wear an Eton jacket and top hat on Sundays to church—I should be g^ueyed

out of my life and have to fight someone every-day of my life as long as I was seen in such a rig out. Have you *ever* seen any boy in Australia dressed in that mannikin fashion?"

The Canon shifted uneasily in his chair. "In England it is the proper and correct dress for school-boys, Tom; and young gentlemen who conform to the customs of society are not considered 'mannikins.' Still, I think your aunt does not *quite* see that it would be somewhat inadvisable for her to—to try and—er—inaugurate such a departure from the colonial style of dress," and he turned away to hide a smile.

"As it is, sir, I had the biggest thrashing I have ever had in my life last year from Mr Brodman, the Head Master, all through one of Aunt Christina's collars—I mean a collar she made me wear on Prize Day."

"How was that, Tom?" and the clergyman leant back in his chair and stretched out his legs. "Shut the door, my boy. Here I am, listening to your complaints instead of severely scolding you, for I believe you are not as good a lad as you might be, and have had too much of your own way. Now tell me about the collar."

"It was the biggest turn-down collar you ever saw—as big as a kid's cape."

"*Kid, kid?*—you are vulgar, Tom."

“I beg your pardon, sir. I mean as big, or at least a quarter as big as a baby’s cape. I put it on to please her, but took in my pocket another of the kind I always wear.”

“Deceitful, Thomas Denison, deceitful,” and the Canon tried to assume a severe expression of countenance, but lamentably failed.

“But somehow I lost the other collar, and when I got to Sydney, all the shops were closed as it was Queen’s Birthday; so I had to go to the prize-giving looking like a guy. I had hardly got inside the big gates at Fort Street, when big Sam Buttle, the rich butcher’s son, and a lot of other boys in the Fifth, began to make fun of me, and Sam Buttle sang out, ‘Look at

“Wee Willie Wood
Who was always so good,”’

and all that stuff about the kid—the boy I mean—who was such a marvel of goodness. So I went for him.”

“You mean you quarrelled?”

Tom nodded. “Yes, sir, he’s bigger and smarter with his hands than I am, but I stood up to him all right and caught him one on the left eye and shut it up in the first round, and then up came the Governor’s carriage with Lord Belmore and Lady Belmore and six mounted police riding ahead, and they couldn’t get in

through the gate, because, you see, sir, there were about two hundred boys in the road and we had a regular ring like."

"Shocking, shocking!" and the old clergyman's right foot went pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat, upon the floor as his memory went back to the old college days, and with closed eyes he listened for more—"go on, Thomas."

"Well, Lord Belmore looked very angry and stroked his black beard and said something to Lady Belmore who bent down her head and laughed. Isn't she a lovely woman, sir?"

"Yes, yes very beautiful," assented the cleric hurriedly, "go on, what happened then?"

Tom hesitated—"I thought you might have seen something about it in the *Herald*, sir. It really was not my fault."

"I did see something about a disgraceful affair at Fort Street School, Thomas, but no names were mentioned—for which, for your sake, I am glad."

"Well, two of the assistant masters, that red-headed Fenian Droyer, and Mr Hare, the drawing-master, rushed in and seized hold of me and Sam Buttle, and then one of the mounted trooper's horses began to buck and threw him sky-high into the air, and he fell with an awful crash into the middle of the Governor's carriage, and the four carriage horses began plunging and kicking, and Inspector Scott, who is a very heavy

man, was also thrown from his horse and his sword broke in halves, and he became purple in the face, and the Governor called for a doctor, and Mr Desmazures, the French Consul, who is a doctor, and had just driven up in his carriage to the gate, jumped out, and *his* sword caught something or somebody, and he tripped and fell as he was trying to speak to the Governor, and his cocked hat fell into the road, and one of the horses put his foot on it and squashed it as flat as a board and——”

The old gentleman could no longer restrain his laughter—and Miss Denison, in her sitting-room, heard him and frowned—was this the lecture he was administering?

“And then, in the midst of it all, the two masters and a foot constable dragged Buttle and myself out of the *melée* and locked us up in the lodge-keeper’s storehouse. Then after prize-giving was over we were sent for, and the headmaster gave us both a most awful flogging—it was the worst he ever gave me.”

“Ha, then you have had more than one?”

“Not more than six in all the two years I have been at Fort Street, sir. Mr Brodman does not believe in flogging, but when he has to flog, he does it—properly. Four out of the six times Sam Buttle and I had it together.”

“What for?”

“Fighting,” was the candid reply.

“Why do you quarrel?”

“For nothing. He’s the school bully, and although he has whipped me every time he’s not satisfied; because he takes longer to do me up than he does any one else in the school.”

“Well, well, Tom. I suppose there will always be fighting among boys—it’s natural and very English-like.” He took out his watch and looked at it. “Now, Tom, you have taken me into your confidence and I shall take you into mine. Your aunt has heard from Mr Maning, who now consents to your being sent to school in England.”

The boy’s mouth set. Then he said slowly and firmly, “Mr Maning told me, sir, not once, but often, that I should leave school when I was seventeen. I shall be seventeen in three months from now. If my father were alive he would not send me to England.”

“Mr Maning has changed his views, Tom. And he is one of your guardians and anxious for your future. I urge you to bear that in mind and give a cheerful acquiescence to his and your aunt’s wishes. When ‘Huon Bank’ was sold it only brought eight thousand pounds, which will be divided—what is left of it—between your sister and yourself when you are of age.”

“I shall take none of it, sir. Sabbie shall have it all. I am old enough now to earn

my own living if aunt will allow me. And, sir, I shall NOT go to England."

"I think, Tom, that you are not wise. Furthermore, it is more than likely that your aunt and sister will also go to England later on. And what could you do at your age to earn your living?"

"Bob Stenhouse went to Valparaiso last year, sir, to help his uncle, who has a nitrate mine at Iquique. He is seventeen and could not speak a word of Spanish, and his uncle is paying him two hundred pounds a year. I took the first and two special prizes for Spanish and French, and I think I really can speak both languages pretty well, for twice a week I go for two hours to Captain Herrera, the Spanish Consul, and he and his little daughter Carmen read and talk Spanish with me."

The clergyman nodded. He had heard of this from Miss Denison. "Then you think of a commercial life, Tom?"

"Yes, sir—if I cannot go to sea. Poor Captain Ryder, although he told me he was not a crack navigator, has taught me all he knew, and Commander Pym, of the Marine Board, will take me into his private class for ten guineas the half-year."

"Ah, dear, dear me—the all-embracing sea," and the old man sighed, "'tis like the golden fountain of Ponce de Leon to youthful minds."

He paused; "Would you not like to go into the Navy?"

"Indeed I should, sir; but Commander Pym told me that I might as well try to get to the moon—no Australian-born boy can get into the Navy unless his friends have plenty of money and have some one of influence in England to do 'a bit of back-scratching at the Admiralty.' Australians, he says, have a mighty poor chance for either the Army or the Navy."

"True, true," said the Canon, more to himself than Tom, "and the pity of it is that it is true."

Then aloud. "How would you care to go into the Bank of New South Wales, Tom? I have quite enough influence with the general manager."

"No, sir, no thank you," was the quick and emphatic reply; "I could never become a bank-clerk—I would rather go into a ship chandler's as a shop boy, or drive a baker's cart, than be put behind a counter with a pen in my ear to count filthy bank notes."

"Tom, Tom, you're a radical; banking is considered a very gentlemanly avocation—as good as the law in fact."

The boy was silent, though his heart beat high with hope. He felt sure that he had enlisted the sympathies of the kindly-hearted old clergyman, and that Aunt Christina's plans had fallen to the ground.

“Now, Tom,” said the old gentleman as he rose, “I am going to talk to your aunt. She is very, very angry with you for going out last night.”

“How could I stay at home, sir, when poor Captain Ryder was dying and I had promised to come and stay with him? I *did* try very hard to tell my aunt how very, very ill he was, but she would *not* listen to me.”

“You did quite right, my boy, quite right; and I will explain it all to your aunt presently. And I shall read the burial service over your old friend to-morrow instead of Mr Vickers, who stutters dreadfully and is very nervous. And let your mind be at rest about England.” And then he did a most unclerical thing—he winked.

CHAPTER V

THE "Crows' Nest," as Miss Denison's home was called, being so far from Sydney, necessitated Tom leaving home very early for school. In fine weather he invariably crossed the harbour in his lightly-built, but strong fourteen-foot boat, easy to pull with sculls and a great sailer. It often happened, however, especially during the winter months, that he had to leave his boat in the shed, and walk five miles, through what was practically "bush" to the North Shore ferry, the steamers of which plied between the marine suburb of St Leonard's and the Circular Quay. This was not at all to his liking—walking so far twice a day not being agreeable to the lad who almost from his infancy had been used to horses and riding. But Miss Denison had a mortal terror of, and objection to horses and cattle, and though she was compelled to tolerate a few cows for the sake of their milk and butter, she flatly refused to have even a pony kept for the use of Tom's sister, and when the lady went

either to St Leonard's, or to Sydney, to church, she always walked, sending Tom and Sabina in front of her, armed with sticks to kill any snakes—and there were sometimes many—that might be lying on the path. And so Tom, much to his disgust, was now obliged, when he could not use his boat, to “pad the hoof,” as he termed it, to school, or at least, as far as the steam ferry. But now came a surprise for him.

On the afternoon following the morning on which the old ship-keeper had been buried, as Tom was sitting in his bedroom feeling very miserable and despondent, Mrs Potter came to him and said that his aunt wished to speak to him in the dining-room. She (Miss Denison) had not attended the funeral, but had, early in the morning, dressed herself in black, and had allowed all the servants to accompany him and Sabina to the little cemetery overlooking a great part of the beautiful panorama of Sydney Harbour.

“Thomas,” said his aunt as he entered the room, and for the first time in many months she actually smiled at him, “I have decided to get a pony for Sabina, and you can buy it for me in town to-morrow.”

“That *is* kind of you, Aunt. Sabbie will be delighted. Can I tell her?”

“No, let it be a surprise for her,”—she paused a moment—“and, Thomas, I am sorry I was so hasty the other day. Mr Cooper has told me the cause of your having been out so late; I regret that I did not listen to you.”

“And I was sorry to go out again, knowing that you were angry with me.”

“Well, we were both in error. Now what are you doing this afternoon?”

“I should like to go on board the old barque, and get the new ship-keeper to give me the things that Captain Ryder left me.”

“Very well,” was the gracious remark, “but try and be punctual for dinner,” and Tom went off, very much pleased that she had not brought up the subject of the clergyman’s visit. But Miss Denison meant to bide her time for renewing the attack upon Tom’s aversion to going to England, and although she had at first been very angry when the Canon had related all that had passed between Tom and himself, she had agreed not to pursue the matter any further till her nephew left school, which would be in two months’ time.

“Don’t try and drive him, my dear Miss Denison. He can be as obstinate as a mule—very like your poor brother in fact—but if you will yield to him in some things, you’ll find him very amenable. And he is by no means lacking in either respect or affection for

you, of that I can assure you. Say no more to him on the matter for the next two months."

"I am afraid I do not understand boys," confessed the lady, with a faint smile.

"Oh yes, you do, you do; but Tom is a boy of boys—as full of animal spirits as a young colt. But he has brains, Miss Denison—he has brains, and will turn out all right in the end, I am certain. He is rough, as you say, but he is as straightforward and truthful as you are yourself, and I am sure that you will never regret your assiduous care of and solicitude for the lad," and with this artful compliment, which Miss Denison thoroughly believed, the old gentleman made his escape, mentally registering a vow to never again attempt to influence Tom in regard to his aunt's cherished scheme of sending him to the Mother Country.

Sabbie met him at the door. She was a fair, delicate child, with ethereal blue-grey eyes, which at times, when she was in thought, seemed to change their hue into a dark brown. A greater contrast than that which existed between the personal appearance of herself and her dark-faced brother could not be imagined.

"Has Aunt forgiven Tom, Mr Cooper?" she asked anxiously.

"Quite, my dear, quite," and the Canon

bent down and kissed the sweet, serious little face.

Tom found the new ship-keeper to be a handsome, stalwart, and very civil Polynesian half-caste, of about five-and-twenty years of age. He met Tom as he ascended the rope-ladder at the waist, and lifted his cap to him.

“Good-day, sir. Mr Paul told me that you might come on board to-day. I have taken Captain Ryder’s place. My name is Jack Castles.”

Tom held out his hand, “How do you do? Mr Paul told me about you, and said that you would not mind my coming on board the barque and the other vessels, and fishing, and pottering about, and all that, just as I have done for the last two years, when Captain Ryder was in charge.”

“Certainly, sir. I shall be very glad indeed. It will be a very lonely game here for me—taking care of these condemned old crates.”

“You are lame, I see.”

“Yes, sir. I only came out of Sydney Hospital last week. I was second mate on the old *Coquette*, which belongs to Potts and Paul, and was shot in the foot at the Solomon Islands in a trading cruise. A man-of-war doctor did something wrong to it, and so I came to Sydney, as every one said I should

have to lose my leg. But the hospital doctors fixed me up, and I shall be all right in a few weeks. Mr Paul came to see me in the hospital, and said he would look after me until I was fit to go to sea again. Then Captain Ryder died, and Mr Paul said I could have this berth. Will you come below, sir, and show me what of Captain Ryder's gear you are taking away, so that I can stow the rest in his chest, and send it ashore to Mr Paul's store."

Tom soon collected the few articles which the old man had asked him to accept—his nautical instruments and books, a watch and chain, and a small oaken cabinet, filled to the brim with all those little odds and ends that every seaman manages to accumulate, and never throws away—from roping-palms to broken knives and spare watch-glasses, and much-soiled reels of cotton, and hanks of thread.

Coming on deck, Tom placed his parcel on the skylight, and leaning on the rail looked at the scene before him. The little bay was quieter even than usual, and no sign of life was visible, except a column of pale blue smoke, ascending straight in air from the barque's galley, where Castles was preparing his supper—the other two ship-keepers being asleep under the awnings of their respective

vessels. The water was as smooth as glass, and lay gleaming like silver under the still torrid rays of the westering sun. Now and then a leaping fish would flash up like a knife blade, and then fall back, sending out widening ripples, then again all would be quiet.

As Tom, with folded arms, leant upon the rail, Castles came out of the galley, and asked him if he would have a cup of tea, and "a bit of supper at six o'clock"?

"Thank you, I will. Isn't it very calm and quiet this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir," assented the sailor, "I suppose you know the names and stories of all these old hookers, sir?" and he waved his hand towards the silent ships.

"Oh yes. I know all about them, and have been over them all dozens of times. This old barque, the *Simon Bolivar*, was once a coolie ship, and on her last voyage to Callao the coolies rose and murdered all the officers and crew. If you look about in the cabin, you will see scores of bullet-holes in the woodwork—the captain and officers made their last stand in the cabin, but the Chinamen fired at them through the skylight, until all were killed. That dismantled old wooden paddle-steamer is the *Queen Carolina*; she was once a Dutch gunboat, and came to Sydney to be docked and repaired, but it was found it would cost

so much that she was sold, and her engines taken out of her, and she was turned into a collier—now she is rotting away; that big fore and aft schooner, with her lower masts painted yellow, is the *Oscar*. She was a slaver, and was captured off New Britain four years ago by the *Virago*, with a hundred natives on board, and her captain and two mates are now in prison. On the voyage to Sydney she ran on a reef, and hogged herself, so no one will buy her, although she is otherwise a beautiful vessel. She belongs to a parson in Sydney; at the captain's trial, he said he really didn't know what the vessel had been doing—he left everything to the captain, and he pretended to be greatly horrified at learning she had been 'blackbirding,' but the captain proved that he knew all about that, and two other voyages as well.

"That fat-looking, chunky brig with the bulging quarters, and stern ports, and built-up masts is one of the oldest vessels afloat; her name is *The Venus*, and she was built for the Navy as a ten-gun brig at Port Royal in Jamaica in 1800, was twice captured by the French, and then recaptured; then she was turned into a convict transport, and I know a lot of old convicts in Tasmania, who came out in her from 1831 to 1838. She has the most lovely old cabin—all mahogany panelling,

black with age. I hear she has just been sold, and is to be docked and rigged, and sent to Port Darwin as a storeship for the Overland Telegraph Company. And," he added with a sigh, "I shall miss the poor old thing very much, for just under her stern, Captain Ryder, the man who is in charge of her, and I caught one of the biggest sharks ever seen in Sydney. It was eighteen feet long, and as big round the body as a bullock. We set a floating bait for him with an empty beef-keg for a drogue, and let it drift about the cove. About nine o'clock at night, we heard a fearful splashing, and saw that he was hooked, and was careering around. We yelled and shouted to the men who live at the sandstone quarries just over there on the point, to come over in their boat and help us. And a nice time we had—it took eleven of us to get the great brute into shallow water, where Captain Ryder and one of the other ship-keepers killed it with whaling-lances."

The half-caste listened with keen interest. "I think after all, I shall have some fun here. I'm great on shark-catching, Mr Denison."

"So am I; I believe I have caught over twenty since we came here to live. That is my shark tackle there, in that hen coop. I always keep it here. Do you mind?"

"Not at all, sir. Perhaps we can use it in a day or two."

“Of course. This bay is full of sharks, especially when the sea salmon come in—‘tigers,’ and ‘grey nurses,’—and even in winter the ground sharks sometimes come into the Cove.”

The half-caste showed his white, even teeth in a pleased smile, and then peering down through the skylight, looked at the cabin clock.

“Will you have supper soon, please?” and he limped off to the galley, and in a quarter of an hour returned with a tin dish, containing a great fried steak, with onions, tomatoes, and potatoes, and a kettle of strong black tea.

“I hope you will come on board to-morrow, Mr Denison,” he said, as he arranged the dish on the skylight.

“Oh yes, I shall,” replied Tom.

But the morrow was to bring about a sudden severance from the quiet little bay and the sleeping hulks, which Tom was not to see again for a long, long time.

CHAPTER VI

THE Manager of the Sydney "Tattersall's" in Castlereagh Street, was well known to Tom, who on the following day called at his establishment, eager to fulfil his aunt's commission, and was told, much to his disappointment, that there was not then a suitable pony in the stables for sale.

"But," said Mr Cosgrove, "I expect a draft of saddle horses for my next Saturday's auction from Dr Jenkins of Nepean Towers, and I'll write and ask him to send down a couple of well-broken-in ponies on approval."

"Unbroken will do as well, Mr Cosgrove. In fact I should like to break-in the pony for my sister. I have plenty of spare time now and will be glad of having something to do with horses again."

Leaving Tattersall's, Tom strolled about the streets for an hour or two, putting in the time till it was time for lunch. He had left home early in the morning, and did not intend to return till late in the afternoon, as he wished

to see the Volunteer Artillery practice from the forts, which was to begin at three o'clock; after lunch he meant to call on his friend Captain Herrera, who lived at Dawes Point, and who was always at home in the afternoon.

Entering Compagnoni's restaurant in Pitt Street, he took a seat, and was scanning the menu card, when he heard his name called from the other end of the room.

"Hallo, Denny! Come over here, and feed with us," cried a tall, stout lad about eighteen, who with three other youths had just come in, "there's plenty of room at this table."

The speaker was Tom's old antagonist—Sam Buttle. He seemed in high good humour, and made room for Tom next to his own seat. He was really, despite his bullying manner, and inordinate conceit of himself, not a bad-natured youth, and although Tom and he had fought so often, there was not the slightest ill-will between them.

"Denny," he said to Tom, "we are all off for a week's camp-out at Narrabeen Lagoon. Will you come with us? We shall have a rattling good time, the lagoon is fairly swarming with fish, and black duck as well. We have four guns—I'll get another for you—any amount of tucker, and a tent. We'll sail down to Manly in Jim Stannard's fishing boat, and

a spring cart will be waiting there to take us to Narrabeen—it will be moonlight after eleven and we'll jog along easy, and be in camp by daylight."

"Ah, I wish I could go, Sam—it's just the thing I like. But I can't manage it. You see I am taking home some stores this evening—a bag of flour, a bag of sugar, meat and a case of groceries. But I daresay I could join you in a day or two. When do you start?"

"Seven o'clock."

Tom thought a moment. "That is a bit late for me—I was thinking we might keep company as far as Pinchgut."

"Well, we'll say six. Will that do?"

"Yes," and thereupon they agreed to meet at the Circular Quay at that hour, and start together. Lunch over, Tom set out for Dawes Point, intending to ask Carmen Herrera to come with him to the battery at Lady Macquarie's Chair, and see the firing of the old muzzle-loading 68-pounder guns at a floating target.

Carmen opened the door to him. She was a handsome girl of eleven, tall for her age, and her dark brown hair fell in clustering ringlets about her shoulders, according to the then prevailing fashion.

"Come up stairs, Tom; mother is there, just writing to your aunt to see if Sabbie can't

come to us for a few days. Father is asleep in the garden—as usual after lunch.”

Mrs Herrera was an English lady who had married Captain Herrera in Spain, where she had been governess to an English family, and she had lived with him at Capetown, and then at Bombay before he was appointed to Sydney at his especial request, for his wife's health had never been good at either of the former places. Carmen had been born in Sydney, and therefore called herself an Australian girl. Like her friend Tom, she was fond of the study of languages, and like him also, had taken all the first and special prizes in the Girl's School at Fort Street, much to her father's and mother's satisfaction, for the family were in poor circumstances—Herrera's salary as Spanish Consul being barely sufficient to enable them to keep up appearances—and they felt sure that Carmen would at least be able to earn her living as a teacher of languages in due course; and a competent teacher in Australia was not paid the starveling fees that were, in those days, grudgingly given to governesses and male teachers in England.

Between Tom and her there was a strong comradeship — cemented by an almost daily intercourse for two years past. It began in a very simple manner.

On the very first day that he went to school, and was leaving at half-past four to go to his

boat, which he had left at one of the wharves on the western side of the Circular Quay, he noticed a little girl of eight or nine years of age walking in front of him, and concluded by the satchel of books she carried that she was also a pupil at Fort Street. Just as she was passing a row of cottages in Upper Fort Street, she stooped down to tie a boot-lace, and a little white, curly-haired French poodle, with the usual bleary red eyes, and disgusting appearance generally, darted out from a doorway, and set its teeth into the calf of the child's white-stockinged leg. In two seconds Tom had seized it by the throat, and after choking it into insensibility, he swung it by the tail against a lamp post, and then with many uncomplimentary remarks threw the dead cur into the house from which it had emerged. Then he bound up the girl's bleeding leg with his handkerchief, and took her home—and from then began a very happy friendship with the Herrera family.

“I am glad to see you, Tom,” said Mrs Herrera, “you can take my letter to your aunt instead of my posting it. Now, Tom, I am sure you want to take Carmen to the battery—I can see it in your eye. But you must not. It is altogether too hot, and I am sure that a ‘southerly’ is coming on.”

“Oh no, not until to-morrow, Mrs Herrera,” said Tom, who was fairly weather-wise, “it’s not hot enough for a ‘southerly burster’ to-day, is it, Carmen?”

“Hardly, I think, Tom,” replied Carmen demurely.

“Carmen,” said her mother placidly, “go downstairs and tell Florence to make tea. Tom, you are *not* going to take Carmen out, and bring her back with her hair and eyes filled with ‘southerly burster’ dust. Now, sit down and tell me all about poor old Captain Ryder.”

After staying for an hour Tom said good-bye, and proceeded to the battery, where he remained until four o’clock, watching the firing, then went to the wharf, where he kept his boat. The provisions he had bought had arrived, and were in the care of the wharfinger, who helped him to stow them in the boat. Besides the fresh meat and provisions, there were some gardening tools for the gardener at the “Crows’ Nest,” and an awkward and heavy roll of oilcloth, which was too long to be stowed under the thwarts, but after some trouble it was placed so that it would not interfere with the jib and mainsail, nor the sculls, if they had to be used. By the time everything was stowed, Sam Buttle and his friends came up in their boat.

“You are not starting a bit too soon,” said

Gable, the wharfinger, to Tom. "There's a heavy sou'wester brewing, and you have rather too much of a load. I think, after all, that you had better leave the oilcloth and tools behind."

But Tom differed with him, both as regards the south-westerly and the boat being too deep, and so he started, a gentle air taking both boats out of Circular Quay as far as Farm Cove, and then it suddenly fell calm.

"Gable was right after all, Sam," cried Tom, and he pointed astern, "we shall get it hot in another ten minutes. You had better reef down, Sam, before it is too late," and so saying, he stood up, and unshipped the sprit of his own sail from the becket, regretting now that he had disregarded the wharfinger's advice.

Buttle and his companions were some time in reefing their large sail, for curiously enough three out of the four lads, unlike most Sydney boys, were not used to boats, and got in each other's way to such an extent that finally Tom sculled up alongside, and went on board and showed them what to do. He was not a minute too soon, for it was now dark, and suddenly a hot gust of wind came sweeping down, and both boats heeled sharply over to it.

"Better lower away the peak, Sam," shouted Tom, jumping back into his own boat, "quick, lower away, or you may lose your mast," and

as he spoke the squall came down upon them in earnest, and enveloped them in thick blinding dust, and Tom's little craft, heavily loaded as she was, leapt forward and passed the other boat in the darkness. The occupants had not been quick enough in lowering the peak of the mainsail, and they were evidently in a great muddle when Tom passed them. He was, however, pretty sure that they would come to no harm—the boat was a centre-board, of great beam, like all the Sydney fishing-boats, and unless they ran her ashore in the darkness, they had nothing to fear. But for himself he did feel somewhat concerned, for in ten minutes after losing sight of Buttle and his friends, the violence of the wind exerting itself against the strong flood tide, set up a rough and dangerous sea for a small boat, and although he had now taken in the mainsail—at the imminent risk of broaching to and filling—and the little craft was under the jib only, she began to take in water so much that he, with one hand on the tiller, could not bale it out fast enough.

“Aunt Christina's oilcloth will have to go to the sharks,” he said to himself; “but how I am going to get it overboard I don't know.”

By this time the darkness was intense, and although he guessed that he was now abreast of Sirius Cove, he had no other course but to

run before the storm. If he could but sight the lights of the lightship on the Sow and Pigs' Reef, he would be able to run the boat ashore on the beach of Watson's Bay. If he missed seeing them, he might drive through the Heads into the open sea.

Suddenly, even through the howling of the wind, he heard the sound of beating surf, and dimly discerned the dark outline of Shark Island a few hundred yards away on the star-board hand. Risking being swamped, he ran under its lee, where there was some shelter from the wind, and then bringing to. Exerting all his strength, he succeeded in "fleeing" the heavy roll of oilcloth overboard into what he hoped was shallow water, where it might be recovered. Then as the boat pitched and tossed, and rolled about, he cut open the 300-cwt. bag of flour, and began shovelling the contents over the side with the bailer, until it was half empty, and he was able to pour out the remainder, and throw away the soddened bag after it.

"Aunt Christina will break her heart over this," he thought, as he took up the light sculls, determined, now that there was no more water coming inboard, to try and get on shore on the lee-side of the rock-bound island—a tiny spot of about three acres in extent. Bending forward, he plunged the sculls into

the water, and, at the first stroke, one broke in halves.

“There, I’m done for now — unless I can anchor.”

He went for’ard and dropped his kellick and line of ten fathoms in the hope that it might touch and catch bottom. It hung straight up and down, and, with some expressions of disgust, hauling it up again, he went aft, and headed the boat for Watson’s Bay, or rather for where he thought Watson’s Bay lay.

Lightened by nearly a quarter of a ton, the boat, as she sped before the storm under her jib only, now took in no more water, and Tom felt very pleased when a quarter of an hour later he discerned the swaying green, red, and white lights of the lightship on the Sow and Pigs’ Reef, and altered his course.

“I am all right now,” he said to himself, and he headed for the lights, little knowing that the *Bramble*, an old ex-ten-gun brig of Her Majesty’s Navy, which had been condemned, after many years of service, to illuminate the Sow and Pigs’ Reef, had just then parted her moorings, and was being blown out through Sydney Heads into the wide Pacific.

CHAPTER VII

“HULLO! what is the matter with the light-ship?” cried Tom, as suddenly from her deck a rocket shot up in the air, and then a blue light was burnt; the ghastly glare of the latter soon showed him what had happened—the *Bramble* was adrift, and was signalling for assistance to the pilot steamer, *Captain Cook*, which was always stationed with steam up at Watson’s Bay, just inside the Inner South Head. In a few seconds an answering rocket made a red, curved line of fire through the blackness, and then, as Tom noticed the direction from which it came, a sudden fear smote him as the startling fact was borne in upon him that he must be right in mid-channel, and in half-an-hour would be between Sydney Heads.

To reach Watson’s Bay beach now was impossible, for he was abreast of it, and had only one scull; to make sail on the boat and try to beat up to it in such a sea meant capsizing in a few minutes, and to bear away

to port meant being dashed to death against the great grim cliff of North Head.

"I must stick to the boat," he thought somewhat despairingly, knowing what a heavy sea he would encounter a little further on.

Then another blue light was burned by the lightship, and answered by a second rocket from the steamer, now hastening to her assistance; and Tom's spirits rose. The pilot steamer would pass pretty close to him, and would very likely see him, and every now and then he glanced astern in the hope of seeing her lights; then he had to give his attention to his steering, for now the boat was rising and falling to the rollers of the Pacific, as they came sweeping in through the Heads.

Ten anxious minutes passed, and then he saw the steamer's mast-head light shining through the inky darkness; but alas! she was half a mile away, and was steaming straight for North Head, towards which the *Bramble* was drifting, and then Tom's heart sank within him.

Every now and then the great flashlight on Outer South Head would send a streak of white across the tumbling blackness between the Heads, but he had but little hope of its rays revealing the boat to human eyes, except that by some luck the look-out on some incoming steamer should see it. He prayed

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silently for succour, and then, as if in response to his appeal to the Power above, there came a gradual, but nevertheless unmistakable lull in the force of the wind, and he thought no longer of possible help from the pilot steamer, but kept steadily on, steering very carefully, and keeping a sharp look-out for any light ahead.

By the time the boat was fairly outside the Heads and on the Pacific, the wind had decreased so much that he was able to bring to, bail out, and take a drink of water. Then he considered what was the best course to be pursued.

Three miles south of North Head there was, he knew, a little cove called Blue Fish Bay, which was well sheltered from any winds except northerly and easterly, and there he could safely anchor till daylight. The moon, he was aware, would rise about eleven; and, looking at his watch, he saw that it was within ten minutes of that time.

After re-stowing the boat, he set the main-sail again, and then stood along, as close as he dared, to the steep-to cliffs of the northern shore, for he was determined not to be carried too far off the land if he could possibly avoid it. At last the moon rose, and revealed the high walls of rock close to on the port hand, with the heavy breakers thundering at their base; and he edged away a little, fearful of

being carried in too close. And to be caught by one of those mighty rollers, or by its backwash, and capsized or swamped, meant one of two deaths — being dashed to pieces against the grim cliffs, or by the jaws of the great “grey nurse” sharks that cruised to and fro, day and night, just outside the break of the surf.

Suddenly he heard, between the thunderings of the surf, a hoarse, humming sound, and looking astern, he saw the lights of a steamer, not a quarter of a mile away. She had stopped, and under the now bright moonlight Tom saw that she was blowing off steam at a furious rate. No lights were visible, but from her stern was arising some thin yellowish smoke.

“She must be on fire,” he thought, and on the impulse of the moment he headed towards her, and was soon alongside.

“What do you want?” cried a gruff voice from the bridge.

“Nothing, only came to see what was the matter,” and then he asked if the ship was on fire.

“She was,” was the reply, after a little pause, and the speaker leant over the bridge, and scanned Tom, “what are you doing out here in that cockleshell, youngster?”

Tom hurriedly told him what had occurred.

“Come on board,” and then a line was thrown

to him, and Tom, jumping up on the sponson on the port side, clambered over the bulwarks on deck.

“Come up here, youngster,” said the voice from the bridge, and Tom obeyed, and found himself face to face with an enormously tall and fat man, with a clean-shaven face, who shook hands with him.

“Don’t be alarmed,” he said, with apparent gruff humour, “a steam-pipe has burst, and we have had to draw the fires, and the steward upset a lamp in the cabin a little while ago, and all but set the ship afire aft. But we have put it out now, and as soon as the engineers have repaired the steam-pipe, I’ll turn round for Sydney again, and you can come with us. That seems a smart little boat of yours.”

“Yes, sir. She was built by Looke of Balmain, and cost nearly fifty pounds. She is beautifully fitted up and rigged.”

“Ah, well, I’ll have her hoisted in,” and leaning over the bridge he called out.

“Bos’un, hoist that boat aboard. We’ll take her and this young gentleman back to Sydney. He was blown out to sea.”

“Aye, aye, sir,” was the reply, and then to Tom’s intense satisfaction, the boat was hoisted up and lowered on the fore-deck.

“There, my young friend,” said the big man, affably placing his great hand on Tom’s

shoulder, "there is your boat all safe and sound, and you need not worry about her. Now come into my cabin and have a tumbler of hot wine to warm you up. Then you had better turn in and get some rest. The engineers won't have that steam-pipe fixed for the next three hours or so, and no one will disturb you in my cabin."

Tom followed him down the bridge to his cabin, which was on the after-deck, and eagerly drank a tumblerful of hot red wine, which a steward brought to him a few minutes later. Then, at the captain's request, he related his adventures since six o'clock that evening, and added that he hoped his aunt and sister would think that he was still in Sydney, having decided to remain there all night on account of the "southerly" lasting so long.

The big man nodded and lit a cigar, "Oh well, Miss, Miss—what is the lady's name?"

"Denison—she is my father's sister. We live at 'Crows' Nest' over Sirius Cove."

"Miss Denison will soon be satisfied that you are all right. But you have had a narrow squeak."

"Yes, and I was thinking only just now that perhaps after all, I might not have been able to anchor in Blue Fish Bay. I have only ten fathoms of kellick line, and the water is quite that depth, even close in to the rocks."

“Just so. But it is an ill wind that blows no one any good—if we had not burst a steam-pipe and had to stop, you might have anchored at Blue Fish, and lost your boat—perhaps your life as well. Now I must go and see the engineers. But I see you are wet through.” He touched the bell, and a man appeared. He was most unlike the usual steward, being dressed like an ordinary seaman, with the addition of sea-boots.

“Sam, can’t you get this young gentleman a change of clothes from some one?”

“Certainly, sir. Frank has plenty. And pyjamas too, sir?” and he looked enquiringly at Tom.

“Thank you,” said Tom, “I’ll be glad of the pyjamas, my own clothes will be nearly dry by the time I am ready to go on shore again.”

“Just so,” said the captain, stroking his fat chin, “pyjamas, Sam. And bring some more hot wine for Mr Denison.”

“Thank you very much, sir,” said Tom to the captain, as a few minutes later the steward appeared with the wine and a clean suit of pyjamas, “what is the name of this steamer, sir?”

The big man had a sudden fit of coughing, and for a quarter of a minute seemed to lose his breath.

"Confound it," he gasped at last, "I chewed a bit of the end of my cigar, and it nearly choked me, oh, this is the *Warrigal*, Sydney to Arakoon River—up the coast to the northward, you know."

"Oh yes," said Tom somewhat sleepily, "I know where the Arakoon is, I should very much like to go there some day—it's just on the Queensland border, isn't it?"

"Yes, just on the border," replied the captain, as he rose, "fine river, but a very bad bar. Now, good-night."

Ten minutes later, when Tom was sound asleep, the skipper re-entered his cabin, looked intently at the slumbering youth with a not unkindly expression, and then turning out the light, went on to the bridge again, and whistled down to the engine-room.

"How much longer are you going to be, Clancy? In God's name hurry up," and then he paced angrily to and fro on the bridge.

Two minutes later the chief engineer ascended to the bridge.

"We can start in another twenty minutes, and then I'll drive her for all she's worth. Does that satisfy you?"

"It must. But we have had a narrow shave. Only for the old *Bramble* breaking away from her moorings as this youngster told me, and as I had imagined was the case, we should

have been collared by the *Captain Cook*, which can steam two knots quicker than we can. But hurry, Claney, hurry."

A quarter of an hour passed, and then the paddle-wheels of the *Warrigal* began to revolve, and the big man, with a sigh of relief, turned to the sailor at the wheel.

"East by north."

"East by north, sir."

But presently the engines stopped. Then once more the captain whistled down the tube for the chief engineer to come on deck.

"What is wrong?" he asked. "Rush her, Claney. Try and get thirteen knots out of her. We must be fifty miles away by daylight, or the game is up."

"Oh well, we are all right, and can start in earnest now very soon. Don't wear out your soul-case."

CHAPTER VIII

FOR some minutes after the engineer left him, the captain restlessly paced to and fro on the bridge, anxiously scanning the surface of the ocean, especially in the direction of Sydney Heads. There was, however, nothing in sight, except a schnapper-fishing boat coming from the fishing grounds off Barrenjoey Reef, and bound for Sydney. She was then about a mile distant, and a light north-east breeze which had now sprung up was bringing her towards the steamer, which lay directly in her course.

“For’ard there,” cried the captain suddenly to the lookout, “come up here on the bridge.”

The man obeyed, and the skipper pointed to the boat.

“Rockett, you see that boat there. Keep your eye on her whilst I write a letter. It won’t take me ten minutes, but don’t let her pass. Hail her if I am not here, and tell them I will give them five sovereigns to take a letter to Sydney for me. But don’t let any of them come aboard, *savee*.”

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“Right you are,” replied the man with an easy familiarity that the commander of the *Warrigal* did not seem to resent in the slightest. In another minute he was again in his cabin, and, lighting the lamp, busily engaged in hurriedly writing a short note, the contents of which would have filled Tom with the most unbounded astonishment had he read the lines.

“MADAM,—Your nephew was last night blown out to sea in the southerly, and had a very narrow escape from death. He is now sound asleep in my berth, and his boat is on board my vessel. I regret that certain circumstances (into which I cannot now enter) absolutely prevent me from letting him return to Sydney, and I shall have to keep him with me for perhaps several weeks, or even months. But I assure you most solemnly that he shall be treated well, and will not be any the worse for having fallen in with me. Only the sternest necessity compels me to act as I do, and I entreat you to believe me that the lad shall come to no harm. I can assure you that I thoroughly realise the distress I am causing you and the lad’s sister, but necessity knows no law,—I am, Madam, your obedient servant,

“JAMES CHRISTIE.

“P.S. If you will read the Sydney papers of to-day, you will gain an idea of the cause of my conduct.”

Closing the letter, he addressed it to “Miss Denison, ‘Crows’ Nest,’ Sirius Cove,” and marked it “urgent,” and then putting out the light again, returned to the bridge. The boat

was now within hailing distance, and in response to his call came alongside.

“Had a good catch, boys?” he asked.

“No,” was the reply of one of the men, who added some very lurid observations about the “southerly burster,” having split the mainsail, and nearly driven the boat on Barrenjoey Reef.

“What is your catch worth?”

“You can have it for a quid (£1)—seven schnapper and half a dozen bream.”

“Very well, pass ’em up; now, see here, boys; if you’ll take a letter ashore for me straightaway I’ll give you five sovereigns. But it is important, very important. Do you know Miss Denison’s place at Sirius Cove?”

“Yes.”

“Well, take this letter to her as quick as you can. With this breeze, light as it is, you’ll get there by daylight.”

“Right you are, skipper. We won’t fail you,” said the man, as the letter and six sovereigns were passed down into the boat.

“What’s the matter with the steamer?”

“Oh, nothing much—burst a steampipe. Now sheer off, lads, as we are ready to start again.”

The boat, with its now exceedingly contented crew of three men, veered astern, and a few minutes later word was sent up from the engine-room that the repairs had been effected.

The big man again heaved a sigh of satisfac-

tion, as he seized the handle of the engine-room telegraph, and rang down, "Full-speed ahead."

And as Tom, under the effects of the "red wine" which had so kindly been given him, was sleeping heavily, the steamer's paddles once more ploughed up the water, and she headed to the east, away from the land.

When the red sun shot up, and illumined a sea that was almost as calm as a mountain tarn, the steamer was twenty leagues from the coast of Australia, and was being driven at her utmost speed, when the man Clancy again appeared on the bridge, followed by a sailor carrying two large mugs of steaming coffee, and a plate of biscuits for the captain and himself. He was hot and tired, and threw himself wearily into a seat.

"We must slow down, Jim," he said to the captain, "I'm done up, and so are the other two."

The captain nodded, went to the telegraph, and rang "half-speed." He had himself been doing two hours' stoking, and was almost as tired, and quite as dirty in his appearance as Clancy.

"Tell Frank and the bos'un to hurry up with their coffee, Sam, and they and you can take a turn in the stokehole for half an hour.

Tell the chaps that we are only running at half-speed for the next hour or two. Who is in the engine-room, Clancy?"

"The little red-headed fellow, and the Savage Island boy. They'll do all right for half an hour. Nothing in sight, is there?"

"Nothing," and the captain swept the skyline astern with his glasses—he had nothing to fear from anything that might be sighted ahead—"and after the way we have been skipping along for the last four hours, I don't believe there's anything in Sydney Harbour which could catch up to us."

"I'm dead certain there is not. The *Cook* might, in a long chase, as she can do fifteen, but then she never has more than two or three days' coal in her bunkers. As for the *Challenger* and the old *Esk*, they can neither of them do more than ten, and their fires would be out in any case." (He was speaking of the two warships lying in Farm Cove—the commodore's ship, the *Challenger*, and a paddle-wheel gunboat, the *Esk*.)

The captain nodded as he sipped his coffee, then he put down the mug, and asked his companion to take the wheel.

"I must go and see our young friend, Clancy—and I don't half like it, I can tell you. But the sooner he knows the better."

Descending the bridge, he went aft to his

cabin, and opened the door. Tom was still asleep, but quickly awakened when the captain spoke to him and asked him to dress.

"There are your own clothes, my lad," he said, pleasantly, pointing to Tom's garments, which had been dried, and placed beside him.

"Are we not in Sydney yet?" asked Tom, as he sprang from the bunk and began to dress. "Why, I thought I could hear the engines going about three o'clock. I could see the time of my watch by the moonlight, but I was too sleepy to come on deck and see where we were."

The man made no answer for a few moments. He was thinking of what he should say, and how he should say it to the unsuspecting lad. But James Christie was a man who was quick to decide and act when emergency demanded it, and he determined to, in a measure, take Tom into his confidence, and tell him a certain part of the truth. So he waited until he was dressed and ready to come out on deck.

"Sit down again, my lad. I have something very serious to tell you—something that will give you great distress. This steamer is not going back to Sydney."

Tom's face clouded with disappointment, and his thoughts flew at once to those at home at "Crows' Nest." Then he raised a faint smile. "I'm sorry to hear this, sir. My poor aunt

and sister will, of course, think that I am drowned. I am sorry now that I came alongside."

"So am I," said Christie quickly, "but I am glad to tell you that by this time your aunt and sister know that you are safe and well."

Tom gazed at him wonderingly, and he saw the man's face flush scarlet.

"When you were asleep I spoke a fishing boat, and wrote a letter to your aunt, telling her what had happened to you, and that you were safe on board this steamer. The fishermen promised me—I gave them five sovereigns—to put that letter in your aunt's hands as quickly as possible. And as a breeze had sprung up they must have reached Sirius Cove not later than four o'clock this morning."

"But—but, sir, I don't quite understand," and Tom brushed back his hair with his hand. "Why did you not rouse me, and send me ashore with the fishermen? It will be a fortnight before this steamer gets back to Sydney from the Arakoon."

This remark gave Christie an easier and better opening for telling some of the truth than he had thought would be afforded him.

"Come on deck, and I will tell you."

Tom followed him to the bridge, and as they passed Clancy at the wheel, he saw by

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the compass that the steamer was steering east by north, and then turning on his heel, and looking astern, he saw nothing but the boundless ocean—there was no land in sight!

“Sit down there, please,” said Christie, pointing to a seat on the starboard side of the bridge, and, taking one himself, he drew it near to Tom and placed his hand on the lad’s knee.

“My lad, this steamer is the *Warrigal*, as I told you, but I am going to give her another name. Now, I’ll tell you why I put something into your wine to make you sleep soundly. I, and some friends of mine collared her last night, and are running away with her—piracy, rank piracy. Do you know what that means?”

Tom threw away his hand contemptuously, and then turned upon the big man, his eyes blazing with anger.

“Why could you not let me go on shore, either in my own or the fishermen’s boat? You great hulking beast! I suppose you mean to try and turn me into a cabin boy or an engine-room greaser. But you won’t, you treacherous, fat-faced hound!”

“Stop that, ye young ass,” cried Claney from the wheel, “or maybe ye’ll not be as kindly trated as we mane yez to be.”

“You dirty Irish ruffian,” was Tom’s

passionate response, "I've seen a lot of your breed in Tasmania—in the chain-gangs!"

The Irishman, with blazing eyes, let go the wheel and sprang at him, but Christie gripped him by both wrists, and forced him back to the port side of the bridge—away from Tom.

"Don't you dare to raise your hand to the boy, Terence Clancy; if you do, I'll pound you into a pulp, old mates as we are. Man, you forget yourself."

"Did ye hear what he said about the chain-gangs and Tasmania," said Clancy fiercely.

"I did. And I thought of what you did not know—that his father was always a good friend to any of the prisoners from the ould sod."

"Then God forgive me," said Clancy, and he came up to Tom with outstretched hand.

"I don't want to touch your dirty paw. I won't shake hands with kidnappers and pirates. You are a pair of scoundrels, and if you think you are going to 'haze' me, you are mistaken. I am not such a fool as I may look."

Christie could not suppress a start of astonishment at the word 'haze.'

"What do you mean by talking about 'hazing'?" he said with pretended roughness, "I told you that you would be well treated. Get off the bridge, and out of the way, and go into my cabin or the main saloon, and wait until some breakfast is brought to you."

“I won’t take breakfast in your cabin, you hulking thief,” said Tom sullenly, as he turned away.

Christie made no answer. He turned aside to the starboard rail of the bridge, and leaning over it, gazed moodily down into the swaying curves abreast of the sponson.

“What is the matter, Jim?” said Clancy, after a few minutes.

“Nothing, Terence; but that youngster has upset me a bit—a considerable large bit—and we shall have trouble with him.”

“A bit av a taste av a rope’s ind——”

“Stow that,” and he turned fiercely upon the engineer, and pushed him away from the wheel, “the first man who touches him with a rope’s end, or anything else, won’t forget it. And I’m boss of this racket, Clancy. Do you understand? If you don’t, you had better learn it ‘rightaway,’ as the Yankees say.”

“It’s some breakfast ye’re wantin’, Jim,” said Clancy, as he turned aside with a good-humoured smile, and left Christie alone on the bridge.

CHAPTER IX

EIGHT bells had just struck, and as Tom was leaning over the stern rail, gazing moodily at the steamer's boiling wake, his name was called.

"Will you come to breakfast, sir? It is ready."

The speaker was a young seaman of about twenty-five years of age, with a rather prepossessing countenance, and he spoke very civilly. At first Tom was about to decline, but then thought it would not improve matters by refusing to have any breakfast, so he followed the man below, and for the first time entered the saloon, which was large and handsomely fitted up. Only the after end of the table was laid for four persons; and presently Christie, Clancy, and another man, whom Tom recognised as the boatswain, appeared.

"Will you take this seat, Mr Denison?" said the captain, politely indicating one of the revolving chairs, "you must be hungry."

"Yes, I am, or else I should not have felt inclined to come," was the blunt reply.

Christie laughed — somewhat strainedly. “Ah, well, try and make yourself as comfortable as you can. Frank,” and he turned to the man who had called Tom to breakfast, “which is the best of the staterooms?”

“Number seven, sir.”

“Well, that will be Mr Denison’s as long as he is with us. Fix it up for him properly.”

“It is quite ready, sir.”

“I am obliged to you,” said Tom, whose indignation was fast vanishing under the aroma of beefsteak and onions, to which he was liberally assisted by the captain; and so the meal began, all who partook of it eating as heartily as Tom himself, and losing no time in conversation.

The captain was the first to finish, and leave the table, and as he rose, he asked Tom to come to him on the bridge as soon as he could.

“All right, sir,” said Tom, who was now beginning to feel assured that he should meet with no injury from any one on board—not even from Clancy, who sat opposite to him, and who continued to press him to eat.

The boatswain was the next to leave, and then Clancy, whilst the steward was out of hearing, leant across the table and said :

“I’m wantin’ to tell ye it’s sorry I am fur losin’ me temper.”

Tom could not refuse such an *amende honorable*.

“And I’m sorry for what I said about Irishmen and the chain gangs in Tasmania. You see, although my father was always very kind to the Irish prisoners, he was shot dead by one of them, and my mother was killed, too, at the same time.”

Clancy had heard from Christie half an hour before the story of the tragedy at “Huon Bank,” and now felt a genuine and friendly interest in, and sympathy for Tom, and in his rough way wanted to show it, and so when he held out his hand across the table, Tom could not decline to take it.

“Sure if ye’ll give me the privilege of being of any service to ye, Mr Denison, I’ll feel proud—I will indeed. I’m not an entirely bad mahn, with all me faults,” and then he hurriedly rose and went on deck, leaving Tom alone.

“Are you the regular steward?” he enquired of Frank, who was pouring him out a second cup of coffee.

“Yes, I suppose so,” he replied somewhat evasively, and then he added, “I ain’t allowed to answer questions.”

Tom took the hint, and then went on deck. The captain was on the bridge at the wheel.

“Here, read that,” he said, taking a folded sheet of paper out of his pocket, and handing it to Tom, “that is about as fair a copy as I

can remember of the letter I wrote to your aunt. Thought you would like to see it."

As the youth read it, he felt very thankful that his aunt and Sabbie would by now feel assured of his safety. He thanked the captain, and then asked him if he minded his staying on the bridge.

"Not at all. You can do whatever you like, and have the entire run of the ship, if you will promise me one thing."

"What is that?"

"Not to ask any one but myself any questions about this ship. I mean about the manner of her leaving Sydney."

Tom considered a few moments.

"Very well, I promise."

"That's right, and now in my turn I'll tell you this much straight out. When we took her and turned out those who were in charge of her, we hurt no one."

"I am glad to hear that," and then Tom again noticed what he had observed on other occasions—the big man was steering with his left hand only, and that his right was bandaged in a black silk handkerchief.

"You have a bad hand, I see," he remarked, "I will take the wheel if you like."

"Why, can you steer? but of course you can—what am I thinking about. I shall be obliged if you'll take the wheel for half an hour or so.

You see we are very short-handed and I have neither a first nor second officer, and had to do a bit of stoking last night. I burnt my hand in putting out the fire in the saloon."

Tom took the wheel, and noted the course, E. by N. Christie watched him in silence for a few minutes.

"How was the fire caused, sir," Tom ventured to ask.

Christie replied that he had given orders for all lights to be put out, and the man who was sent to do this must have dropped a lighted match or hot ashes from his pipe amongst the thick cushions and curtains with which the transoms bunks were covered, as soon after the steamer had passed through the Heads it was found that she was on fire; and in extinguishing it the captain had his right hand rather badly burnt.

Leaving Tom at the wheel, Christie went round the ship with the boatswain and gave his orders as to what was to be done; and a few minutes later they were joined by five other hands, and the steward Frank, and then the four boats which the steamer carried were swung inboard from the davits, and made secure on deck. This took quite an hour or more, and then Christie returned to the bridge.

"We are so shorthanded," he explained, "and as all of us have to take a turn in the stoke-

hold, I took the chance of getting the boats inboard whilst it is fine, rather than run the risk of losing them if we meet with heavy weather from the eastward."

"Yes, and we seem very deep in the water."

"Very. There is a full cargo under hatches—I wish some of it was coal. Would you mind taking a look at the taffrail log, and tell me what it shows? It was set afresh at eight bells."

Tom ran aft and glanced at the dial, and then returned to the bridge.

"Nearly seventeen."

"Ah! that's not so bad—a little over eight knots. Now we'll set our canvas, which will help us. The breeze is freshening, and I want to save my coal."

"Can I lend a hand?"

"Only too glad if you will."

Like most of the steamers on the Australian coast, in those days when pole masts and twin screws were not, the *Warrigal* was square-rigged for'ard, and could show quite a spread of canvas for a vessel of under seven hundred tons.

In half a minute Tom was aloft with the big sailor, Sam, casting off the gaskets, and then as the topsails and the foresail were dropped by them and sheeted home by the hands on deck, and the freshening breeze

bellied out the canvas, Christie called down to Clancy.

"How's that, Terence?" he asked, as the engineer appeared, and he pointed to the sails.

"Ah, it's beautiful, me boy, beautiful! It means a ton less of coal an hour." Then he noticed Tom, who had been helping the men to hoist the head sails, and was now coming aft again, flushed and pleasedly excited.

"He's made friends with me, Jim."

"I'm glad of it, Terence. He's a fine lad. And if it can be done safely, I'll try and put him on shore at Lord Howe's Island or Norfolk Island. But if it can't be done, he'll have to come on with us to Callao, poor lad!"

"Maybe we might meet with an Australian-bound ship after we pass Norfolk Island——"

"No, not at all likely on the course we are taking. We may very probably see a few Yankee sperm whalers, but I haven't the heart to put him aboard a whale ship, which might not put into a civilised port for six months."

Tom appeared on the bridge.

"Thank you, my lad," said Christie. "Mr Clancy and I are going into the saloon for a glass of grog. Come with us and have a glass of wine."

"Anything in it this time?"

Christie's face flushed scarlet, "I deserve that, but——"

Tom's laugh interrupted him — "I am not afraid, captain. I'll come with you and Mr Clancy. Then I should like to have a look at the engine-room."

"Indade, you shall," said Clancy, "an' ye'll see no finer nor better engines in the hull of any ship afloat of the size of the *Warrigal*."

CHAPTER X

WHEN the south-wester which blew Tom out to sea burst upon the northern shores of the harbour, and filled the air with dust and flying leaves and twigs torn from the iron-bark and gum trees, neither Miss Denison nor her niece had felt any apprehensions as to his safety; for in the sheltered position of the "Crows' Nest" they had but a faint idea of the fury of the wind. But Jack Castles, the ship-keeper of the *Simon Bolivar*, as he hoisted the barque's bright riding light, felt uneasy as he listened to the howling of the storm through the old ship's weather-worn rigging, and heard, although he could not see it, the beating of the surf upon the southern head of the little cove, a few hundred fathoms away.

"It must be very bad out in the open, when such a sea is breaking in this sheltered spot," he long afterwards told Tom, he had said to himself, "there's not much of a show for a small boat in a blow like this." And for many hours he kept a lookout; and then about three

in the morning, long after the southerly had spent itself, and then ceased, he saw a boat with three men in it sail past, and then land at the head of the cove. Here she remained for half an hour, and having lowered her sail, the crew took to the oars and pulled away again in the direction of Manly.

“Smuggling fishermen,” thought Castles, “been landing and hiding tobacco somewhere in the scrub, I suppose.”

At six o'clock he could see that Tom's boat was not at its moorings, so getting into his own, he pulled on shore, meaning to enquire at the house if Tom had returned home by the road from St Leonard's and left his boat at Sydney. He found the servants in a state of great excitement, and Mrs Potter weeping profusely in the kitchen, and after some questioning, succeeded in learning between her sobs that Master Tom had been “kidnapped and murdered and taken away.” He asked to see the lady of the house, and in a few moments he was shown into the dining-room, where he found Miss Denison and Sabbie, both fully dressed, and both showing traces of recent tears.

“What has happened to the young gentleman, madam?” he asked respectfully.

“Sit down, please, and I will tell you,” and Miss Denison took a letter from her pocket,

and said, speaking very quietly, although the poor lady's voice trembled somewhat :

“As my nephew had not returned at eleven o'clock, I concluded he had decided to stay in Sydney for the night, on account of its being so windy. There is always a bed for him at the house of his friend Captain Herrera ; so my niece and I retired, but left a light burning in the hall in case he did return later on.

“Soon after three o'clock this morning, some one tapped loudly at the front door and awakened the housekeeper. He said he was a fisherman, and had a letter for me that was to be delivered immediately. Then without waiting to see me, he went away. Now, let me read the letter.”

She read it slowly and distinctly, and when she uttered the words, “Your obedient servant, James Christie,” the half-caste started.

“James Christie, madam ?”

“Yes, James Christie. Do you know the person ?”

“Very well indeed, madam. I was boat-swain with him for two voyages about four years ago in a South Sea trading barque named the *Petite Jeanne*. But I left her at Levuka in Fiji, and have never heard anything of him since.”

“Then my nephew is with him on the *Petite Jeanne* ?”

“No, madam, the *Petite Jeanne*, I know, was wrecked on Tahiti soon after I left her in Fiji.”

Miss Denison’s tears began to fall, and Sabbie put her arms around her waist. In a few moments, however, her aunt recovered her composure, and turned to the sympathetic half-caste.

“I cannot help crying, but I must collect my thoughts. No doubt we shall learn the name of the vessel which has taken away my nephew. But I am anxious to learn something about this man Christie. Do you think he will really do as he says—treat my nephew kindly?”

“I am sure, madam,” was the emphatic reply, “whatever he promises to do he will do. If he told a man he would punish him, he would punish him very, very severely; if he said he would let a matter pass, he would not break his word.”

“That is consoling to me. Now this post-script. I am going over to Sydney at once to get this morning’s *Herald*, and see Captain M’Lerie, the Chief of Police——”

“Let me take you over in my dinghy, madam. I can land you at Circular Quay two hours sooner than if you went by road to St Leonard’s.”

Her anxiety to learn all she could as quickly as possible overcame her fear of crossing the harbour in a small boat, and half an hour

later she was seated in Castle's boat on her way to the city, wondering if this handsome, well-spoken half-caste sailor was a reclaimed cannibal, and who was the particular missionary who had plucked him from the burning.

As the boat passed Farm Cove, Castles noticed that H.M.S. *Esk* was leaving her mooring, a cloud of black smoke pouring from her funnels; and hundreds of people were lining the stone embankments of the Botanical Gardens watching her movements. Pulling into the Circular Quay, he set Miss Denison on shore, and almost as soon as she landed she heard numbers of the newsboys crying out a special sheet of the morning paper.

“PIRACY IN SYDNEY HARBOUR!”

She bought a copy and hurriedly entering the Custom House sat upon a bench in the hall, and began to read. It was headed in large letters,

“DARING ACT OF PIRACY.”

and was as follows:—

“This morning at daylight it was noticed that the steamer *Warrigal*, which had been lying in Mossman's Bay, was missing, and some surprise was felt, as her owner, Mr Tobias Pattermore, had, owing to an accident to her machinery, delayed her departure for Fiji for two days.

“Mossman's Bay, as our readers are aware, is a very

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quiet spot, and there are only one or two houses within a radius of some miles. In the bay itself are two hulks, one used as a coal barge, and the other for storing kerosene; no one usually lived on either, but occasionally a man sleeps on the latter vessel when it holds cargo. Last night, however, there was no one on board, nor had there been for some weeks.

“At five a.m. some Greek fishermen entered the bay in their boat, and as they passed the kerosene hulk, they heard the sound of violent hammering within the hold, and, they fancied, also voices. On going on board they found the hatches were on, but the tarpaulin that is used to cover them was thrown aside. Lifting off one hatch they made the astonishing discovery that four men were imprisoned below; they were the chief officer (Mr Watts) second steward (Guy), and two A.B.'s of the *Warrigal*!

“Their story is an astounding one. The *Warrigal* is generally known as one of the fastest (or the fastest) steamers in Australian waters, and is almost new. Some months ago she was purchased by Mr Pattermore, and after being thoroughly overhauled, loaded a valuable general cargo for Levuka on behalf of her owner, who has there just established a large trading business.

“Yesterday the steamer made a satisfactory trial trip, but on returning to port, something went wrong with her machinery, and the chief engineer (Mr Clancy), finding upon examination that it was more serious than he at first imagined, the steamer went into Mossman's Bay, where she anchored.

“Captain Toll went on shore to sleep at his house, and before leaving the vessel also gave liberty to the second officer, and several of the crew to remain on shore for the night, as the *Warrigal* was lying in a perfectly safe and sheltered position, and there was no need for her full crew to stay on board.

“Last night one of the most violent south-westers ever

experienced set in early in the evening, and lasted for an unprecedented time, and Mr Watt, knowing that the steamer was perfectly safe, and that there were two men on watch on deck, turned in about nine o'clock.

"At some time later in the night he was roughly awakened by several men—two of whom he recognised as members of the newly-shipped crew—and a pistol was pressed to his forehead by a tall, stout man, who threatened to shoot him dead if he made the slightest noise, or attempted to resist. Then he was handcuffed and locked in his cabin.

"Half an hour later he was brought out, and saw lying on the deck the second steward and two other members of the crew. They were not bound, and he imagined that they had been murdered; later on he found that they were helplessly intoxicated.

"With a pistol still threatening him, the unfortunate officer was compelled to descend into a boat, into which his three companions were also lowered, and in a few minutes he found himself on board the kerosene hulk, and he then noticed, dark as it was, that a thick volume of smoke was pouring from the funnel of the *Warrigal*.

"His intoxicated companions were first lowered into the dark hold of the hulk, and then himself. Then the hatches were put on, and the officer was left in Cimmerian darkness. Soon after daylight one of the seamen awakened (he declared that he and the other men were given drugged liquor by some of the crew), and by his assistance Mr Watt freed himself of his handcuffs, and tried to gain access to the deck. But the desperadoes who have pirated the *Warrigal* had taken all precautions; both the fore and after bulkheads of the hulk were secured on the other side, and even had they been forced, the fore scuttle was covered with a coiled-up towing hawser weighing nearly a ton. Had it not been for the Greek fishermen, the unfortunate men might still be

imprisoned. Their captors, however, had placed food and water for them, so they would not have suffered the pangs of hunger or thirst.

“One of our representatives has been despatched to Mr Pattermore, who, living at Parramatta, fifteen miles from Sydney, is not yet aware of this astounding act of piracy. We hope to publish a special further edition within a few hours.

“Immediately Mr Watts reported what had happened to the authorities, the Commodore was seen, and he at once gave instructions for the *Esk* to proceed to sea, and search for the pirated steamer.”

Ten minutes later Miss Denison was at the newspaper office, and telling her story of the mysterious letter to the editor.

And at the same time Mr Tobias Pattermore, a fat, bald-headed gentleman, who had just recovered from a fit, was lying on a sofa in the breakfast room, with his wife and daughter by his side, fanning him.

“Christie said he would have his revenge,” he gasped, and then he began to weep. “Oh, why is human nature so wicked! He has robbed me of my steamer—twenty thousand pounds, Maria, twenty thousand pounds! and the cargo, Maria! and the cargo—forty thousand pounds more. . . Sixty thousand pounds! All gone at once.”

CHAPTER XI

FOR ten days under cloudless skies, and through a gently heaving sea the *Warrigal* had been steaming at a moderate rate of speed, economising her coal as much as possible by using her canvas whenever the wind favoured, and was now within a hundred miles of Rapa Island, at which Christie intended to call, for he was ill—so ill that he was barely able to navigate the ship—and was in hopes that he would there be able to obtain relief from one of the French missionaries, who was a medical man, and known to him personally.

There now existed between him and Tom almost a feeling of friendship. When Lord Howe Island was sighted, Christie had sent for him and said :

“Tom, there is Lord Howe Island, four hundred miles from Sydney. I am sending a boat on shore to find out if there is a vessel there bound for Sydney, or, if not, when the settlers expect one. I know that they send away a cargo of produce once every three

months or so, and it may be that there is a vessel there now. If so, or if one is expected soon, I will land you and your boat. If not, we may meet with a Sydney ship at Norfolk Island, five hundred miles further to the east."

Then he added that Tom, even if he did not stay at Lord Howe Island, might as well write to his aunt, and further assure her of his safety, and that the letter could be left with the settlers to forward by first opportunity.

Having reasons for not approaching too near the island, and being boarded by any of the inhabitants—who were nearly all retired English and American whaling skippers with their families—Christie stopped the steamer's engines when she was about six miles from the shore, and sent away Tom's boat. It was absent some hours, and returned laden deep with onions, for which the island is renowned.

"Well?" said Christie enquiringly to Frank, who was in charge of the boat, as he stepped on deck.

"The settlers' schooner left a week ago, sir, and won't be back for three months." Then he called the captain aside, and added in low tones:

"And they told me that the *Orpheus*, corvette, called there two days ago, bound for Norfolk Island, where she will stay for

a week, as the captain is to make a fresh survey of the island."

"All right, Frank, hoist the boat aboard. Tom, come on the bridge with me." Then he asked Frank if he had left the letter.

"Yes, sir; and the man who is a sort of a magistrate there, said it was quite possible that one of the Hobart Town whalers might call there any day on the way home, and if so, he would not fail to send Mr Denison's letter."

As soon as they were on the bridge, Christie said :

"It is no use your landing at this island, Tom, on the chance of a homeward-bound Hobart whaler coming along. And neither can I land you at Norfolk Island, which I must keep clear of—the *Orpheus* is there. It would be good for you, but bad for me, if I had to show my papers. I'm very sorry, but you will have to stay with us for some time longer."

"Well, it can't be helped," was the philosophic answer.

Christie nodded, then the steamer went ahead again on the same course, instead of bearing to the north for Norfolk Island.

It was soon after this incident that Christie was taken ill, and he rapidly became worse, until at last he was unable to go on the bridge, unassisted, to take an observation, and his

anxiety concerning the navigation of the *Warrigal* through the dangerous seas of the Paumotu Group, which the steamer was now nearing, hourly increased, and Tom could not help a feeling of pity for the man; and so one day he told him what he had hitherto carefully concealed from him — that he had been taught navigation by Captain Ryder, and that although he had never had the opportunity of working out a ship's position at sea, he was pretty sure he could do so with a little further instruction from him.

Christie gave a sigh of relief, and at once became more cheerful.

“Ah, my lad, if you will help me—and you can help me greatly—I shall be very grateful. If you will take the sights we can work them out together.” Then he sank back in his bunk, too exhausted to speak further.

After Lord Howe Island was passed, no further land was seen till the bold, rugged outlines and verdant hills of Sunday Island hove in sight, and here the *Warrigal* remained three days at anchor, taking in firewood, which Christie bought from the one family living there, who had a large supply cut and ready for sale to the numerous American whaleships that yearly called at the island. The family consisted of father, mother and eleven children, some of whom were grown up. They had come from

New Zealand—which was distant but a few days' sail—and although their existence was somewhat monotonous at times, it was yet a very happy one, and Tom could not but envy the younger members. They—both sons and daughters—helped their father in his work; he was a boat-builder by trade, and always had one or two beautifully finished whaleboats ready to sell to any whaleship which was short of boats through a mishap; then they cultivated an extensive and prolific garden, shot the wild pigs with which the island abounded, and salted them down, and caught and cured a great quantity of fish, which was taken to Auckland (New Zealand) every few months in a small cutter they owned, or sold to the whaleships, together with the salt pork and vegetables. The house was large and comfortably furnished, and the only disturbing element in their lives was the frequent shocks of earthquake which shook the island.

During the time that the firewood was being shipped, Christie stayed on shore at the settler's house, and his health improved slightly by the rest; Tom remained with him at night, but during the day spent his time with two of the settler's sons, either shooting pigeons, which were very plentiful in the mountain forest, or fishing in the deep waters of the bay in which the steamer was anchored. Meanwhile the

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energetic Clancy and his men had altered the fire bars of the steamer's furnaces, so that either wood or coal could be burned, and Christie was well pleased when, on the evening of the third day he went on board, and found every available inch of deck space piled up with logs of firewood as high as the sheerpoles, with only narrow alleyways on each side of the ship, so that the hands could pass fore and aft without inconvenience when working the running gear if the vessel should be under canvas only. And Christie had great hopes of meeting with strong north-westerly winds in the vicinity of the Paumotu Archipelago, and so still further economise his fuel.

During his stay on the island the hospitable settler had several times pressed Tom to remain there for another month, when he would give him a passage to New Zealand, but Tom, who had only told him as much of his story as he deemed advisable, declined the offer with many thanks. One reason for this was, that he was now certain that Miss Denison and his sister knew of his safety, and that he would return home sooner or later; another was that he had in a manner pledged himself to Christie to stay with, and assist him with the navigation of the steamer during his illness; and thirdly, and lastly, his whole soul was aflame with the desire for adventure, and the wild longing to see strange

lands and strange peoples, and he often congratulated himself upon his knowledge of Spanish, now that he would certainly see South America. Perhaps, too, he might come across his former friend Bob Stenhouse, although Iquique was a long cry from Valparaiso. Then, too, three of the male members of the Bell family, who had made voyages to the Arctic in American whaleships, had fired him with the desire to do the same thing, and a wide vista of his future lay before him like some great and unknown sea suddenly revealed to one, who, standing upon a mountain top, sees it lying before him glinting and sparkling under the roseate glories of the rising sun.

CHAPTER XII

IT was towards sunset on a glorious day that the *Warrigal* stopped her engines off Ahurei Harbour on Rapa, and waited for a native pilot, and Tom, as he stood on the bridge, saw before him a panorama of strange and wondrous beauty. High, forest-clad mountains of a bright vivid green, rose steep-to from a sleeping sea which, under the rays of the sinking sun, gleamed like a mirror of burnished silver; and all along, and nestling in between the deep valleys, were glinting beaches of snow-white sand, fringed with groves of cocos and breadfruit trees, from out of which peeped the russet-brown thatched roofs of the native dwellings, whilst far up on the side of the highest peak of all, whose jagged pinnacle of purpled rock was silhouetted against a sky of cloudless blue, there shone a long, straight line of silvery white — a mountain cascade, which fell a sheer three hundred feet into the dark green shades of a valley below, from whence the brawling water swept eastward to the sea through groves of palms and orange,

sweet-smelling cedar, mango, and other trees. And as he gazed (oblivious even of Christie, who, ill as he was, had taken the wheel, and was watching the approach of the canoe bringing off the pilot), his memory went back to a letter which the Governor of Tasmania had shown to his father—a treasured letter written by the unhappy and maligned Fletcher Christian, the leader of the *Bounty* mutineers, to the woman he loved in far-off Dorsetshire, and who died broken-hearted, when after that one passionate letter reached her, she never again heard from her sailor lover. Christian told her the story of the mutiny, and how after he and his comrades had returned to Tahiti, and had again sailed to seek a resting-place in one of the many islands in the South Pacific they had come to an island of such wondrous beauty, that although the natives were so fierce and warlike, that were she with him he “would be content to live and die there. So beautiful is it, my Doris, that I cannot attempt to pourtray it in paper for those sweet grey eyes of yours to read; and yet my comrade Edward Young and I are told of another island in the same cluster as this of Tubuai, which is still more beautiful, and where the people are mild and gentlemanly. It is called Rapa by our Tahitians, and lies a hundred leagues to the South.”

In the canoe were four stalwart, reddish-brown skinned natives, with straight black hair, and very regular features. Two of them were dressed in the shirts and trousers of civilisation, the other wore the Tahitian *pareu*, or waist-cloth of soft tappa, made from the bark of the paper mulberry tree. Only the pilot spoke English, and as soon as he ascended the bridge, he shook hands with Christie, who asked him if he could take the steamer in to a safe anchorage. He smiled and showed his white pearly teeth under a well-trained and Frenchified black moustache.

“Oh yes, I can take you anywhere through any of the island; but this is the first time of me to take steamer into Ahurei, but plenty time I take in sailing vessel—brig, barque, schooner, full-rig ship.”

Christie, quite satisfied, rang “half-speed ahead,” the pilot took the wheel, and half an hour later the anchor of the *Warrigal* was lying upon a ground of dead coral and sand in nine fathoms of water, so clear that the smallest pebble could be seen lying on the bottom. Just abreast of the steamer was a native village of about thirty houses, surrounded by orange trees, under which were gathered all the women and children, arrayed in their flowing draperies of muslin, awaiting the arrival of the white men. Most of the men folk were

away fishing on the other side of the island, and so had not observed the steamer; but those who had remained at the village, and who numbered less than a dozen, soon came on board, with their canoes laden deeply with fruit and vegetables, fowls, ducks and squealing pigs. All these were bought by Christie and his crew for a few shillings and two 50-lb. tins of ship biscuit. They informed Christie that the French priest he wished to see was away at another village across the bay, but that he would be sure to come on board in a few hours, as the people there had seen the steamer entering the harbour. He was, they said, the only white man then on the island, though a few years previously there had been two others—traders—living on the island. One, however, had died, and the other, who was a native of Pitcairn Island, and a descendant of Quintal, one of the *Bounty* mutineers, had wearied of Rapa and its beauties, and gone back to the lonely little island always so dear to the hearts and memories of its people.

A few hours after the steamer had anchored, the French missionary's whaleboat appeared, sailing across the smooth waters of the lovely harbour, which were now sparkling under the silvery light of an all but full moon. She ranged alongside, and there stepped out of her an active little man with snow-white hair and

beard, dressed in the usual priestly vestment of black. He started with pleased astonishment when he heard Christie's voice addressing him as he stood on the gangway. Grasping the skipper's outstretched hand he poured forth in mingled French and English, questions and compliments in the one breath, and when he learned that Christie was ill, he at once became very sympathetic, and went with him to his cabin, where he remained for some time. Then Christie called for Tom, whom he introduced to the cleric as "the young gentleman who had been blown out to sea from Sydney Harbour." The old gentleman's kindly, beady black eyes lit up with pleasure, when Tom, in answer to his enquiry if he could speak French, answered in the affirmative, and added that he had been taught both French and Spanish.

"Spanish, too, Tom?" said Christie, astonished. "Why, you *are* a secretive youngster. Now, if I had known that you could speak Spanish, I should have asked you to give me lessons, for a little knowledge of it would be a big help to me later on."

"Oh, well, there is plenty of time yet, captain."

Christie nodded pleasedly, and then said, "Tom, I am going ashore to stay with Père Leblond for a few days. He is going to doctor me up and put me to rights. Now, will you

ask Mr Clancy to muster the hands and bring them aft."

Clancy and the eight men who formed the steamer's complement soon appeared, and Christie told them all that on the morrow they could have three days' liberty on shore, and enjoy themselves. "Father Leblond," he added, "tells me that he will get the chief of Ahurai to put a *tapu* on the ship, and that not a single native will come on board if I object."

The men thanked him and then went off; and shortly after Christie and the priest started for the shore. The mission-house was situated on a spur of one of the verdure-clad mountains, and Tom, although he was asked to accompany them, and was anxious to put foot on shore, decided to remain on board with Clancy, who, like himself, was an ardent fisherman, and who had been told by the natives that splendid fish could be caught from the steamer, and that they would bring them off some flying fish for bait. This they did, and Tom and the Irish engineer had some glorious sport with some great bream-like fish, called by the natives *tahulu*, many of which weighed over thirty pounds.

The two slept on the bridge, enjoying to the full the cool breeze from the shore between the deep mountain valley, bringing with it the sweet

odours of orange blossom and the yellow flowers of the pandanus palms.

At dawn, and whilst Clancy was still sleeping, Tom rose, and as he looked across to the entrance of the harbour he saw a large paddle-wheel steamer just bringing to, to anchor, and as her cable rushed through her hawse-pipe, there came a flash and a puff of smoke from her deck, and then the report of a gun.

Clancy sprang to his feet, wide awake in an instant, and with Tom gazed at the stranger.

"She's a Yankee," he said, with a sigh of relief, "see her walking beam. We have nothing to be afraid of; but I wonder what the blazes she is doing in this part of the world. Ah, there's another gun! She wants assistance, perhaps, as well as a pilot."

Rousing the hands, he had one of the *Warrigal's* boats lowered and manned, and a quarter of an hour later he and Tom were on board the stranger, which they found was the *Aztec City*, bound from San Francisco to Sydney, and in distress, with a mutinous crew as well.

CHAPTER XIII

THE captain of the *Aztec City* was a Scotsman, named Seaton, two of his officers were Americans, and the crew of five-and-twenty were, he informed Clancy, a collection of dead-beat loafers, and thieves, put on board by the 'Frisco crimping houses.

He told Clancy his story as briefly as possible. The steamer, which was a cumbersome and very old vessel of sixteen hundred tons, had sailed from San Francisco nearly six weeks before for Sydney *viâ* Honolulu, carrying a number of saloon passengers for both ports. A week after leaving Honolulu the crew began to show a mutinous disposition, and ended up by broaching cargo, and providing themselves with all the liquor they wanted. Then to add to Captain Seaton's troubles, the steamer sprang a-leak, and although some of the crew had worked at the pumps fairly well, most of them had told the officers that the ship could go down as far as they were concerned, and they had plenty of liquor and provisions in the fo'scle. "But,"

Seaton went on, "We have a bit of a pull on them now. Last night my officers and I managed to secure ten of them after a bit of a tussle, in which pistols were used on both sides, though no one was killed. I have the brutes safely in irons now in the after-part of the ship, where they can't be rescued, and where a diet of a biscuit each and water for three or four days will take some of the devilry out of them. The rest of them are a little more civil this morning, but I can't trust them, and am afraid they will set the ship on fire, either in one of their drunken orgies, or out of revenge; for among those in irons are two or three who would hesitate at nothing."

Clancy, after explaining that he was the chief engineer of the *Warrigal*, expressed his sympathy, and said: "I am sure that Captain Christie would lend you some men if he had them to spare, but the fact is we are so short-handed that he is going to try to get half-a-dozen natives here, and we are a long way off our port yet."

Seaton nodded. "Perhaps I may induce a few to ship with me, too; I must do something drastic with my pack of sweeps. You see I have a number of passengers on board as well; some are a theatrical company. You will see them presently, they're dressing to go on shore before breakfast, I think." Then

he enquired if there were plenty of fresh provisions to be obtained at Rapa.

“Tons,” replied Clancy, “pigs, wild goats, a few cattle, and poultry, vegetables and fruit galore.” Then he rose to return to the *Warrigal*. “Captain Christie is ill on shore at the Marist Brothers’ Mission, but he will be glad to see you. Perhaps he may be able to assist you in the matter of getting some men here, through the priest.”

“Ah, thank you, I will,” and he introduced his chief officer—who had just then entered the captain’s cabin — “this is my chief officer, sir — Mr, or rather, I should say, ‘Captain’ Thoreau.”

Thoreau, a quiet-faced, grey-eyed, and determined-looking young man of thirty shook hands with the two visitors, and, as he sat down, Tom saw the outline of a pistol in his hip pocket.

“Thoreau, I’m going on shore to see the captain of the steamer. You’ll be all right for a couple of hours, eh?”

The officer nodded. “I guess so, sir. I have just bagged two more of our beauties and put them with the other ten saints.”

Seaton’s face lit up. “Ha, that is good, how did you manage it?”

“Found them both asleep under the windlass, and snapped the bracelets on them. Then

Mason" (the second officer) "and I hustled them aft. Good-morning, gentlemen," and with a brisk nod to Clancy and Tom he went off.

Just as they, accompanied by Captain Seaton, were leaving the cabin, the latter enquired if they would care about seeing any Californian papers.

"There is not much news," he added, as he took up a bundle of San Francisco journals, "except that there is another burst-up coming off between Chile and Peru."

Clancy's eyes sparkled. "Ah, that is news for us, and will please the captain. Which will come out on top, do you think?"

"Hard to say, just yet. They have both been spoiling for a fight for a year past. The Peruvians, however, want arms badly for their troops, but if there is any sea-fighting, I think they'll give the Chilenos some nasty shocks. They have some good ships, officered mostly by Europeans—Englishmen and Germans—and are buying and arming more."

Clancy made no further remarks, but Tom could see that he was very anxious to get on shore and tell Christie the news. Without losing time over breakfast on board the *Warrigal*, where Tom was just given time to get the gun and ammunition which Christie had lent or rather given him at Sunday Island, a few minutes later they had landed in

front of the village. Tom was instantly pounced upon by two stalwart young natives, each carrying a smooth-bore; they were, they said, just about to start for the mountains to shoot wild goats—would he come?

“Go, by all means,” said Clancy, as Tom hesitated.

“Yes,” cried one of the natives, who spoke English, “plenty goat on mountain—plenty goat, and plenty big, fine pigeon. But first you come to my house and get some things to eat.”

The “some things to eat” was a revelation to Tom. Led by the hand by one of the young men as if he were a child of five, he was brought to one of the largest houses of the village, where he was met by the mother, wife, and the family of his new friend. They all first shook hands and then gravely rubbed noses with him, and appeared delighted to see him. When his host, whose name was Tao, addressing the household, told them that their visitor was a *taata Beretane* (an Englishman), they were still more pleased, one charming young lady of sixteen coming over to him, and stroking his hand, said, “*Beretane: maitai maitai, Oui, Oui,*” (the contemptuous term for Frenchmen) “*e kino.*” By this she meant that Englishmen were very, very good, and that Frenchmen were the reverse. Later on Tom learnt that the

people of Rapa, whilst some of them were converts to the Roman Catholic faith, greatly resented the idea of France seizing their island as they had Tahiti. The girl, whose name was Téro, was remarkably handsome, and had eyes that Clancy afterwards said were like "two great black pearls floatin' in a say of crystal."

Somewhat embarrassed by the attentions lavished upon him, Tom seated himself upon a fine, soft mat, which was spread out for him on the coarser kind that covered the ground of the clean and delightfully cool house, and then with some dismay watched the kindly-natured people place before him a repast of cold-baked fowls, fish, vegetables, and fruit, that would have sufficed for three starving men. But, as he was hungry, he contrived "to do full justice, etc.," but had to blush at the tender ministrations of the beautiful Téro and her brother Toa, who sat one on each side of him, gravely picking out the best portions of food, and placing it upon his platter of banana leaf, whilst the rest of the family, in the old-time Rapa fashion, sat in respectful silence with their backs turned to their guest. But the culminating point was reached when Toa, asking him if he had had enough, and being answered in the affirmative, said something to the family, who all "slewed round," with smiling faces and nodding heads, as Mademoiselle Téro,

bringing a wooden bowl containing clean water, first washed his hands—using the pith of a wild orange as soap—and then carefully dried them with a spotlessly white handkerchief, produced by the mother from a wooden chest containing the family treasures.

“Now we go,” said Toa.

The entire population of the village greeted Tom as he and the two natives passed through it towards the mountains, nearly every family asking them to “stop just a little while and eat and drink.” But they pressed on, and in a few minutes had entered the fringe of the cool, dark forest of huge, many-buttressed trees called *tamana*, in whose boughs the deep, booming notes of the great blue pigeon mingled with the soft plaintive coo of the ring-dove, and the shrill cries of thousands of green and golden-hued parrakeets feeding upon the sweet berries of the *masoi*—a species of cedar.

It was nearing sunset when Tom and his companions returned. Each of the natives had shot a goat, and Tom had as many pigeons as he could carry. He had had a delightful day, for in addition to excellent sport, he had ascended to the summit of the highest peak, and examined the ruins of an ancient native fortification which crowned it; and then two thousand feet below he had seen the placid blue waters of Ahurei Harbour shining in the

sun, with here and there tiny moving specks, which he knew were canoes passing to and fro between the *Aztec City* and the shore, or engaged in fishing.

As they came into the village they were met by the young sailor Frank, who had been anxiously awaiting Tom's return for some hours.

"The captain is very ill, sir, so ill that the priest thinks he cannot last through the night. And he wants to see you."

Throwing down his birds, and giving his gun to Toa, Tom, with Frank, set off towards the mission-house, which was a mile distant, and half-way up the verdured side of a spur of the mountain he had just descended.

CHAPTER XIV

THE old priest met Tom and the seaman as they stepped on the verandah of the neat, trim-looking mission-house.

“I am glad, very glad, that you have come,” he said to Tom, “Captain Christie is so ill that I fear for him very much. He brightened up after he had seen Mr Clancy and the American captain this morning, but at noon and afterwards he had several fainting fits. When he recovered from the last he asked for you, and now he wishes to see Mr Clancy again. I have sent for him, and expect him here in a few minutes. Come in and see him.”

Christie was reclining on a cane lounge in the priest's sitting-room, and his usually florid face was now deathly pale. Extending his hand to Tom he enquired if Clancy was coming.

“He will be here in a few minutes, Captain Christie.”

“Ah, that is well, I wish to see him—he cannot come too soon. Tom I expect I shall slip my cable before to-morrow's sun—in fact

I know I shall—and I have much to say to him;” he smiled feebly, “that is to say it is much for me, for talking is difficult and painful.”

“Then do not talk to me, Captain,” said Tom, who was deeply distressed at the unmistakable signs of suffering on the big man’s face.

“No, Tom, I shall not have much to say to you; but in my despatch box in my cabin there is a letter for you. When I am gone Clancy will give it to you. Read it, it is the story of my life. I wrote it nearly a week ago, after I had my worst attack, and when I began to feel that I had not much time before me. And I wanted you to know, after I am dead, that the man who pirated the *Warrigal* was not altogether bad.”

Tom pressed his hand. “Can nothing at all be done for you, sir? Cannot the priest, who is a doctor, help you——”

“No, lad, no. Nothing can be done for me.” He paused. “I sent for you, Tom, to say good-bye—for even if I recovered we should have to part, for I have arranged with Captain Seaton for your saloon passage to Sydney in the *Aztec City*; she will sail in a few days.”

“I shall not leave you Captain Christie. I could not—as I see you now. And you have always been very good to me.”

The man's eyes gleamed with pleasure. "Ah, it does me good to hear you say that, Tom. But it must not be. You will obey my wishes in this matter, and then some day—after you have read my story—you will forgive me for tearing you away from your home so cruelly."

"I forgave you long ago for that. And much as I wish to return to Australia I can wait. A month or two more will make no difference now that my aunt and Sabbie know that I am well and that——"

Christie shook his head.

"I cannot leave you when you are so ill," resumed Tom so resolutely that Christie sighed.

"You must, Tom—it is your duty to go, and mine to see that you go."

"Who is to navigate the *Warrigal* to Valparaiso when—I mean if——"

"When I am dead? That is all arranged, Tom. Captain Seaton is lending his second mate to me—or I should say my comrade Clancy."

Tom was silent, and an irresistible feeling of disappointment swept over him. Christie saw it in his face, and sighed again.

"You see, Tom,"—he began, when he was interrupted by loud cries in the native tongue from without, and then he and Tom heard the priest speaking; he was asking what was the matter. A chorus of excited voices answered

him, and in a few moments he entered the sitting-room very hurriedly.

“What is the matter, father?” said Christie quickly, raising himself on his couch. “Why is not Mr Clancy here?”

The old *père* placed his hand gently but firmly on the seaman’s forehead. “Lie down, my friend. Mr Clancy cannot be far off now, for he landed on the beach ten minutes since, and is now climbing the path. But the American steamer is on fire, and is, I fear, doomed, for there is a vast body of flame to be seen.”

Christie, with his seaman’s instincts to render assistance brought into sudden life, sprang from his couch, and staggered to the door; ere he could reach it he fell heavily and for some minutes remained unconscious.

As soon as he was sufficiently recovered, Tom and the priest, assisted by some natives, carried his burly figure back to the couch, and then gave him half a tumblerful of brandy and water. He drank it eagerly.

“It is no use, father,” he muttered, “I can do nothing. My head swims. Can you see her, Tom?”

“No, sir, not from here, but she must be burning fast, for the whole harbour is lit up, and standing on the verandah we can hear the crackling and roaring of the flames.”

“God help those on board—with such a crew!

Seaton told me that he feared they would some day set the ship on fire," and the big man's hands clenched in angry impotence.

Presently in came Tom's friend, the girl Téro, with the news that two of the steamer's boats, and a number of canoes were leaving the burning vessel crowded with people.

"Thank God for that," said Père Leblond, as he put on his hat, "I will go to the shore and meet them. Ah, here is Mr Clancy."

"Can we help that steamer in any way, Clancy?" was Christie's first question, as the engineer, sitting beside him, took his hand.

"No. She's alight from stem to stern, and all her superstructure has gone already. When I was half-way up the path I saw our two boats pulling for her, and her own and a lot of canoes as well coming away crowded with people, so I don't think any lives will be lost. Don't trouble about her, Jim. How are you now?" and he looked anxiously in the sick man's face.

"Better for your coming, Terence," and then he turned to Tom.

"My poor lad, I am sorry for you," meaning that the burning of the *Aztec City* had destroyed his chance of returning to Australia.

"Don't trouble about me, I beg of you, Captain Christie," said Tom earnestly. "Now, as you want to talk to Mr Clancy, I think I will go down to the village and get a canoe to take

me off to the *Warrigal*, and find out all that is happening."

"Do, and come back as quickly as you can," said Clancy. "Tell the hands that I shall be back in an hour or so."

Running down the narrow mountain path, which was illumined not only by the moon, but by the glare from the burning steamer, Tom soon reached the village, which he found in a state of wild commotion, for the escaped passengers and the crew had just landed, and were taken to the various houses by the sympathetic natives, who thronged around them. Among the terrified passengers were five or six ladies, whom Tom at once guessed to be some of the theatrical party. Two of them, who were in a fainting condition, were being carried by the male members of the company. As he pushed his way through the excited natives, Tom heard the voice of the chief officer of the steamer, Mr Thoreau, cry out in menacing tones:

"Back into that boat again, you mongrel curs! There may be some one still on board, or floating about the harbour on wreckage. There are three of the stokehold hands missing."

"Man de boat yerself, me gallant count," replied a mocking voice, "we boys don't take any orders from you now. We've come on shore to be gentlemen."

A pistol shot, dulled by the clamour of the natives, sounded, and Tom saw one of a group of half-a-dozen men fall upon the sand, the rest turned and fled among the coconut trees followed by bullets from Thoreau's revolver. Tom ran up to the fallen man, and saw that he was dead. There was a bullet hole through his forehead.

"Don't trouble about him, my friend," said the American as he reloaded his pistol, then as he came closer he recognised Tom as one of Captain Seaton's morning visitors.

"Where is Captain Seaton?" asked Tom.

"Dead. He, the second mate, and the boatswain, were shot by the crew just before supper. The rest of them managed in some way to set free the twelve men we had in irons, and in the fighting that followed Captain Seaton and the others were killed. Before this, however, the mutineers had already set the ship on fire in the 'tween decks, and I and those few of the crew who stood to me had a hard time to save the lives of those of the passengers who were still on board. Luckily, we had had all our boats lowered, and two of them were alongside—the others had been taken on shore by some of the passengers, who meant to remain for the night."

As he was speaking Père Leblond came up, accompanied by a number of natives, who

offered to man the officer's boat and take him out to the burning steamer, although they were certain, they said, that if there had been any more survivors they would have been rescued by the numerous canoes still paddling about in the vicinity.

"Very well, sir," said Thoreau to the priest, "I shall not trouble about making any search. I thank you very much. Will you ask some one to get me a drink of water. I can scarcely speak."

In a moment or two he had satisfied his raging thirst, and then declining the good father's invitation to come to the mission-house, on the ground that he wished to see if any of the passengers were missing, he, accompanied by Tom and the priest, went from house to house, finding out who were the people brought in, and how they were being cared for. In one house they found one of the mutineers, surrounded by natives, lying upon the matted floor, dying from a bullet wound. The priest knelt beside him, cross in hand.

Thoreau watched in silence, and listened to the old man's whispered words, to which there was no response, for the man was past speaking. Presently Père Leblond rose.

"He is dead, M'sieur le capitaine."

Thoreau nodded. "It is as well, father. Had he lived it would only have been for the gallows."

Leaving Thoreau (who was now joined by two or three of the crew, who promised obedience to him) to attend to the welfare of the passengers, Tom and the priest returned to the mission-house. Clancy was sitting beside Christie's still figure, his face buried in his hands.

CHAPTER XV

UNDER the wide spreading branches of a lofty *masoi* tree, which stood on the verge of one of the many mountain spurs overlooking the bay, Tom was sitting alone, thinking of James Christie and of the story that the dead man had written, and which lay beside him on the leaf-carpeted ground.

Three days had passed since the captain of the *Warrigal* had died, and the fire-gutted hull of the American steamer had sunk, a charred and blackened mass, to lie amidst the coral forest at the bottom of the deep waters of Ahurei; and in those three days many things had happened, and Tom and Clancy had taken no small share therein.

In the first place, Thoreau, aided by the natives and some of the hands from the *Warrigal* had captured and disarmed all the mutinous members of the crew of the *Aztec City*. They were brought into the village square, and placed upon the ground, bound

hand and foot with native cinnet; and then left there under guard with their backs against coco-palms for some hours until the entire population of the island were assembled from the various villages, all wondering what was to happen, for the natives had heard that the captain and two of his officers had been killed, and that Thoreau had shot two of the mutineers.

Among those who came to witness the proceedings were the members of the theatrical company—five ladies and nine men, and Tom noticed among the former an extremely beautiful, but delicate-looking girl, with big hazel eyes, who clung to the arm of a fat old actress (with a kindly Irish face) whom he had heard addressed as “Auntie Riley,” by her associates.

Presently from one of the houses there stepped forth the head chief of the island, an old bald-headed, but vigorous man of seventy years of age. Beside him walked Father Leblond and Thoreau, and as the mutineers saw the expression on the officer's dark sunburned face, they felt their hearts sink—for they knew the man.

Standing in the midst of the circle formed by the people, the old priest, after one shuddering glance of repulsion at the ruffianly faces of the bound men, raised his hand to command silence.

“Men of Rapa! Look at these eleven men bound hand and foot, and hear from me of the crimes they have done. They last night rose

against their captain, and slew him and two of his *ariki* (officers). This did they so that they might get possession of the casks of grog which were in the belly of the ship, and of the money which was in the care of the captain. And in their madness and rage they set fire to the ship in many places, so that now it hath sunk, and lieth at the bottom of the sea, and all the *koloa* (merchandise) with which she was loaded is destroyed, and many people will suffer poverty through their wickedness."

He paused a moment and a low murmur of anger came from the natives, who looked threateningly at the mutineers.

Thoreau, who had stepped back, and was now standing with Tom and Clancy, moved his feet restlessly, "I wish the old gentleman would hurry up," he said in low tones; "but I suppose he is doing his best."

"Thirteen of these evil-hearted men were there last night," resumed the old man, raising his voice to its highest pitch, "but two of them were killed by this ariki" (he turned and pointed to Thoreau)—"he killed them because they disputed his authority. Whether he did right or not in the sight of God I cannot tell, but yet he is, I believe, a just man, and it is not for me nor ye to question what he hath done. The laws for the sailor and the soldier are different from the law for the people.

“Now as for these eleven men. We cannot keep them bound for days and days and moons and moons, until we be rid of them should an English or French ship-of-war come here. Neither can we give them liberty to roam about Rapa and make mischief.

“This is what the chief Patari, and the white *ariki* Toro (Thoreau) and I think is best to be done. They shall be put together in the little valley of Ma-hi-rua, where a house shall be built for them this day, and there must they stay till a ship-of-war comes. Food shall they have in plenty, but if they put foot out of bounds of the valley they do so at peril of their lives. Is it well?”

A loud chorus of *Maitai! Maitai!* (good! good!) came from the assembled natives, and then Thoreau, at the priest's request, stepped forward and addressed the mutineers. He was to explain to them the conditions on which they could have their freedom. But first of all he signed to the natives who were guarding them to cut their bonds and give them water, for they were suffering from thirst—not from the inhumanity of the natives, but at Thoreau's request.

“You darned, infernal cut-throats. Instead of hanging the lot of you, or shooting you like the rats you are, I am going to give you a chance for your lives. The natives are putting

you into a little valley three miles from here, where you will be supplied with food. Put a foot outside the marked boundary of cinnet cord you will see there, and you are dead men. The natives will watch you, and I have promised them ten dollars for every one of your dead, dirty carcasses they bring to me. Get!" and he turned away from them with savage contempt, and as he ceased speaking, and at a sign from the old chief Patari, a number of natives silently closed in upon the white seamen, and hurried them away to the valley of Ma-hi-rua.

Then Thoreau, who seemed bent upon business, whispered a few words to Père Leblond, who nodded his head and smiled.

"My son, I can refuse you nothing," he said in French, "you are irresistible, and I feel that you mean well to the young lady, and that it will be best for her to be away from that man."

Thoreau, a grim smile for a moment moving his quiet, but somewhat saturnine features, stepped up to where the group of the ladies and gentlemen of the Imperial Dramatic Company were gathered together, and addressed himself to the manager, a fat, tall and dark-faced, hook-nosed man, who bore the name of Courcy d'Épinasse.

"Now, Mr Courcy d'Épinasse, or Moses

Solomons, or whatever is your real name I have a chance of talking to you pretty freely in the presence of your company. Poor Captain Seaton always said he would give a month's pay for the pleasure of kicking you, for he thought, as I think, that you are the two ends and bight of a low-down scoundrel. Now Seaton is dead, and therefore you are safe from him, but I have formed myself into a committee of one, and I am going to let myself out upon you a little for the benefit of your company. You thought that we didn't know that you beat your wife, and that you have been persecuting Miss Rawlinson with your beastly attentions ever since she was so unfortunate as to join your company in 'Friseo six months ago. But we *did* know. And now, my fat friend, I am going to give you a hammering. Ladies, will you kindly withdraw. Mrs Riley, will you and Miss Rawlinson accept the hospitality of Father Leblond—it is his wish that you do so during the time we may have to remain on the island. Now, my greasy friend, come down to the beach.”

A young, pale-faced actor darted in front of him.

“No, no, Mr Thoreau, let me settle with the brute. It will add five years to my life.”

Thoreau glanced with satirical amusement, first at the slender-framed young actor, and

then at the burly figure of the scowling Jewish manager, who was endeavouring to make a retreat, but was impeded by the male members of the company, who were delighted at the prospect of seeing him receive a thrashing.

“No, Mr Courtney,” said Thoreau, “I cannot deprive myself of such a pleasure, so don’t ask me. Now, ladies, you must retire. Come, Moses, or Isaacs, or whatever your name may be.”

The manager, gripped by the iron hands of Clancy and Toa, was led to the beach, and, as he refused to fight, was kicked, first by Thoreau, and then by the members of his company, who hated him to a man for his meanness and brutality.

Then Thoreau, who had managed to save some cigars, passed them around to the company, and said as they watched the writhing figure of the manager of The Imperial Dramatic Company, lying upon the sand :

“I feel real good to-night, boys. I have saved all the specie that was on board the old *Aztec*, have put out two of the men who murdered poor Captain Seaton and Mr Mason and the boatswain, have seen that low-down bully of a Jew manager of yours kicked by his own company, and am to be married at the mission-house to-morrow to Miss Rawlinson. Nine o’clock is the time.”

A cheer broke from the company, a cheer in which the pale-faced young actor did not join—for he was in love with the girl with the hazel eyes.

· · · · ·
And of all these things Tom was thinking as he lay under the shade of the great *masoi* tree.

CHAPTER XVI

JUST as Tom was about to return to the village he heard the sound of footsteps approaching, and, presently, Thoreau, his two days' bride, and Clancy appeared. They had been directed to his retreat by the girl Téro, who had pointed out the spot to him early in the morning, and then left him alone to read Christie's story.

"Tom," said the Irishman, "I came on shore to look for you, and on the way up I met Mr and Mrs Thoreau. I'm sorry to disturb you, but I shall be glad if you will come on board for an hour or so."

"I was just leaving to come to you," replied Tom gravely as he put Christie's manuscript in his pocket, and then leaving Mr and Mrs Thoreau to themselves—which was what they no doubt desired—he and Clancy returned to the village, and then went off to the *Warrigal*.

"Tom," said Clancy, as they seated themselves at the cabin table, "now that you know the story of the wrongs of James Christie and myself, can you wonder at our revenging our -

selves upon the scoundrel who made us suffer as we suffered."

"No, I do not wonder. You have both suffered cruelly, and I think that this old villain of a Tobias Pattermore deserves to lose his ship and go to prison for the rest of his wicked life. But then, Clancy, you must not forget that you and all those with you are pirates, and if you are captured you know what it means."

The Irishman nodded. "Yes, ten years' penal servitude at least for me—seven for the others." He paused, and then said very slowly. "Tom, now you know our whole story, and how truly sorry both poor Jim Christie and I were for you. We acted cruelly, but we were desperate men."

"Say no more about that—it has passed, and I bear no resentment. And, what is more, I decided this morning to tell you that I am willing to navigate the steamer to any South American port, if you will sign a statement to the effect that I had no hand in the Sydney business, but you must get the hands to witness it."

Clancy's eyes sparkled. "Indeed I will! To tell you the exact truth, Tom, I don't know what on earth I should do if you cut adrift from me. I daresay I could blunder along somehow, and hit the South American coast somewhere,

but against that is the very great likelihood of our knocking up against some of these low-lying coral islands in the night and losing the ship."

"Just so—there is a very great risk. But first of all, tell me what you intend to do when we get to Valparaiso?"

"Sell the ship and cargo to the Government. The *Warrigal* is just the sort of steamer Chile should want now, that country is going to war with Peru, and she is worth from twenty to thirty thousand pounds, for she is almost new, and very fast. And then the cargo is worth between thirty and forty thousand pounds. I'll show you the manifest."

He went to his cabin and returned with the document, and then he and Tom together went over the contents.

"You see, Tom, that there are over five thousand rifles of various kinds — principally Sniders, with nearly a million rounds of ammunition. Now, if we can only get along either to Valparaiso or Callao, I can sell these arms to either the Peruvians or the Chilians at almost any price I ask. The Chilians have the most money, and so I think that Valparaiso will be the best place for us."

"Yes, I suppose so. And I shall be glad of it, as I have a friend in Chili named Stenhouse. I am looking forward to the expression on his fat face when he sees me. Now look here,

Clancy, I know that I am doing wrong in having any further hand in your venture—'venture' sounds more polite than 'piracy,' just as 'gentleman of the road' sounds better than 'highwayman,' but if you wish it I'll copy out all of that manifest into Spanish. I daresay I shall make a few mistakes in the names of some of the goods, but it won't matter much."

Clancy was delighted. "We'll start at it right away—no, not at once, for I shall now write out that statement, and get the hands to witness it."

"Very well. I'll go on deck, and soon as you are finished, you can give me a call."

Half an hour later the crew were assembled in the saloon, and Clancy, after reading the "statement" concerning Tom, asked them to sign it. This they did most willingly, even to Pohiri, the Savage Island sailor, for Tom was a great favourite with all on board.

Then after Pohiri had made his "cross"—his hand being guided by Tom, who then went on deck again—Clancy addressed the men, and told them what his intentions were in regard to the *Warrigal*, and the disposal of her cargo.

"Boys," he said, "we must stand to each other in the future as we have done in the past, when we collared the steamer. Captain Christie is gone, and now I am skipper and chief engineer as well, and you must stand to

me as you did to him. Young Mr Denison is going to navigate for us, and I want you to treat him with proper respect and not call him 'Tom,' as I have heard some of you doing at times. He is 'Mr Denison, the Supercargo,' and I am 'Captain Clancy,' and by — if any one of you forget that, he will be sorry for it."

He scanned the face of each man in turn, and then taking up a small canvas bag before him, cut the string, and poured out a stream of sovereigns upon the table.

"Here are a thousand of old Tobias Pattermore's sovereigns, meant for Fiji. You know that Captain Christie told every one of you that you would have a hundred each when we got to Callao or Valparaiso. Well, the skipper is dead, but before he died he asked me to give you your money before we left Rapa. Here, Rockett, and you, Sam—you are the two oldest men—count out a hundred yellow boys for each man—that makes nine hundred—the other hundred goes back into the bag until we get to Valparaiso. Then, as soon as I sell the ship and cargo to the Dagoes, I'll give every man another hundred pounds in Spanish or American gold. Satisfied?"

"Aye, aye, Captain Clancy," said Rockett, as he and the big sailor, Sam, divided the money. Then he asked, as he and his com-

panions were about to leave the saloon, what were "Captain" Clancy's orders?

"Make ready for sea. We leave at daylight to-morrow."

"Aye, aye, sir."

As Tom stood on the bridge waiting for the boat to take him on shore to say good-bye to Père Leblond and Thoreau, Rockett came up and touched his cap.

"The boat is ready, Mr Supercargo."

CHAPTER XVII

ONCE more the *Warrigal* was steaming eastward over a sea now flecked with the white horses of a strong south-east breeze, keeping an E. by N. course, so as to skirt the westerly oceanic current until Easter Island was sighted, when a direct course would be steered for Valparaiso.

It was with a feeling of sincere regret that Tom had bade good-bye to the kind old priest, and Thoreau and his fair young wife; but he found it hardest of all to part from his friend Toa and his beautiful sister, Téro, for they both evinced such profound grief that Tom was not only sorrowful but distressed to witness it.

“Never more shall we see each others’ faces, Tamu,”¹ said the girl sadly through her sobs, Pohiri, the Savage Islander, translating her words, for he could speak Tahitian, a language very similar to that spoken by the people of Rapa.

Tom asked Pohiri to tell the poor girl and

¹ Tom.

her brother that they certainly would meet again—perhaps within a year, for he meant to return to the South Sea Islands in another ship as a *tuhi tuhi* (supercargo) or trader, and if he came in the latter capacity he would surely come to Rapa to settle, for it was a very beautiful island, and he liked the people very much. At this Téro dried her tears, and her brother's handsome face beamed with delight. They were the last to leave the steamer, and from the bridge Tom could see them a quarter of an hour later, sitting in their canoe gazing sadly at the swiftly receding vessel, which, sweeping around the wooded point of Ahurei was at once out of sight, leaving behind her only a long trail of black smoke.

“I wonder how Captain Thoreau will get on, Tom,” observed Clancy; “he has his hands full with that theatrical company, let alone a mutinous crew who know that he saved the three thousand pounds in gold belonging to the *Aztec City*. Any one of them would murder him for three thousand cents if he were given the chance. And then he has a brand new wife to look after as well.”

“That ought to console him for all his worries,” said Tom with an air of profound wisdom. “I like Captain Thoreau, and feel sorry to think I shall never see him again.”

“One never knows. If you have made up

your mind for sailorising you may meet him. When I was ten years old and at school at Rathmines in the ould sod, there was a red-headed boy in the same class with me named Peter Croly. I left school when I was eleven, and just twenty years afterwards, when I was second engineer of a Hong-kong-Penang steamer I had an arm very badly blood poisoned, and was taken to the hospital at Hong-kong.

“‘Your arm will have to come off, my man,’ says one of the doctors to me, looking at it lovingly.

“‘If ye put a knife on me, I’ll have your life, ye murtherous young butcher,’ says I. ‘All it wants is a thumping poultice of bran, mixed with the yolks of a dozen eggs.’

“Just then I heard another voice say, ‘Don’t be in such a hurry, Saunders. Let me have a luk at the mahn,’ and then who should come up but red-headed Peter Croly—we knew each other at once.

“‘Get out, ye murdering Scotch villain,’ I said to the young doctor, ‘get out, or I’ll do ye to death this minute. Peter, me boy, stand to me.’ And stand to me he did, and saved my arm.”

For three days the steamer made good progress, and then as she drew near Easter Island, the wind hauled round to the eastward and blew with so much violence that a heavy head sea

soon arose, and the *Warrigal* began to make such bad weather of it that Clancy slowed down to half-speed—had he not done so the steamer's decks would have been swept, for she now carried a higher deck-load of timber for her furnaces than that taken on board at Sunday Island. It consisted of thick, heavy and irregularly shaped logs cut by the natives of Rapa, and known as *ngia* ("the hardest wood"), and whilst it was an excellent fuel, the awkward shape of the logs had made it very difficult to stow them securely, and their weight made the steamer roll so dangerously that Tom at times thought she would "turn turtle" and go to the bottom.

"We can't sacrifice a single log, Tom," said Clancy to him, "there's over two hundred stowed away below in all parts of the ship, where we could find room—in the engine-room, stokehole, and among the bunker coal. But the worst of it is, that in this sort of weather we cannot use as much of it as I should like, and so are digging into our coal again—it is impossible to get such crooked logs through the furnace doors when we are rolling and pitching like this. If it gets any worse we shall have to shift some more of this deck-load below some way, or else we shall have trouble. The forehold is full to the coamings with casks and cases of liquor, and all sorts of goods, but it will be better for us to sling the lot overboard, and dump the firewood down.

The wood is worth more to us than that part of the cargo. And if we lost our wood fuel we should have to put in to Juan Fernandez to get more, and we shall not have enough coal to take us there if this sort of thing keeps up."

That night was an anxious and trying one for all on board the *Warrigal*, for although the wind did not increase in strength, the sea was something fearful even to look at, and huge volumes of water every now and then descended upon the decks and smothered her. So much water found its way below that the stokehole plates were covered, and all through the night the donkey pump clanked and clattered madly to save the furnace fires from being extinguished. To have tried to heave-to under such conditions would have been courting destruction—there was nothing else to be done but to keep on, head to the sea. Rockett, an old and experienced seaman, twice urged Clancy to let the deck-load of fuel go, so that the steamer might be hove-to with safety, but he refused.

"As long as we can keep the fires alight we can do," he said, "if the stokehole is flooded the wood will go adrift of its own accord, mighty quick, once she falls off into the trough of the sea. But I mean to save that wood."

When dawn broke the sea was still running

mountains high, but was fast settling down into a long steady sweep, and the wind had sensibly decreased, and the exhausted stokers were enabled to get a little rest, Clancy, Tom, and the native sailor, Pohiri, taking their places.

Soon after breakfast both wind and sea had moderated to such an extent that thirty tons of firewood were, after hard work, passed below, and the furnaces denied further coal; and, as the day wore on the steamer was breasting the surging waves at ten knots an hour, tossing up showers of spray as her sharp cutwater bows rushed into the sweeping billows. The damage done to the deck-houses and other parts of the steamer's superstructure was repaired as well as could be done without a carpenter, and only the salt-coated and rust-stained funnel and two badly damaged boats showed what she had passed through during the night.

Towards evening on the third day after the storm, and when the grey loom of Easter Island was in sight, right ahead, a little red-headed man, who was now chief engineer in place of Clancy, came on the bridge, and told the Irishman that two of his three men were so done up that they were lying down exhausted.

"It's no use, boss," he added, "we can't go on like this for another day. I'm fairly cooked

myself, and unless you and Rockett and Sam give us a spell, I can't keep up enough steam to give us steerage way. That —— wood is all right enough, but we can't get one log in five into the furnaces, it's that twisted and curled like a ram's horns."

"How much coal is left, Tanker?"

"About forty ton."

Clancy leant on the bridge rail and thought for a few moments. Then he called to Tom.

"Tom, do you know if there are many natives on Easter' Island?"

"Captain Christie told me that there were about five hundred."

"Quiet?"

"Oh yes, quite. They are like the Rapa people."

"Well, we'll have to stop there and try and get a dozen or so of them. The men are breaking down," and then he repeated what Tanker had just told him, adding that he (Clancy) was a fool not to have got some of the Rapa natives.

Tom then told him that Christie, who had twice visited the island had said that there were two white settlers there engaged in sheep and cattle breeding, and there were several good anchorages.

"Very well, we'll see what can be done in the morning. Tanker, tell those two men to

take a good spell, and we'll keep her going dead slow until daylight."

Soon after dawn the *Warrigal* anchored in the roadstead of Hanga Roa Bay, in sight of a native village, and Tom and Clancy went on shore.

CHAPTER XVIII

ON landing they were met by a European and a number of handsome, light-skinned natives, who received them very kindly. The white man invited them to his house, and on the way thither told them that he was the manager for the firm of Brander and Salmon of Tahiti, who had twenty-five thousand sheep and cattle on the island. Neither of the partners were there then, they having only just left the place, after a stay of six months, and returned to Tahiti.

After the manager, whose name was Tate, had given his guests some refreshment, he heard from Clancy the reason of his visit to the island, and said he had no doubt but that he would be able to engage some natives as seamen if they were offered good wages. Many of the men had served in American whale-ships, and were fairly good sailor-men if well treated.

“But I must tell you that you will have some trouble in getting them at first, when you tell

them that the *Warrigal* is going to South America. They don't like South America or the Spanish people; they have good reason to hate them after what occurred here in 1863.'

"What was that?" enquired Clancy.

"Three vessels under Peruvian colours—two barques and a brig—anchored here on a Sunday morning, and some hundreds of natives—there were over two thousand in the various villages on the island then—crowded off on board in boats and canoes. As many as possible were enticed below to the cabins, and then suddenly those on deck were attacked by the crews of the ships, who made them prisoners, tumbled them into the 'tween decks, and leg-ironed them. Some jumped overboard, and tried to escape in the boats and canoes, but were nearly all captured by the ship's boats, which had been lowered and manned and armed in readiness. Some, who resisted, were either shot or cut down.

"After all those who had been seized on board had been securely ironed in the 'tween decks, seven boats crowded with Chileno and Peruvian sailors, and officered by Europeans of some low-down breed, left the ships and landed. They captured every poor beggar they came across, chasing them from one village to another, and bagged over sixty. With their hands tied behind their backs the wretched creatures were driven at the cutlass point down

to the boats and taken on board. The rest of the people fled to the interior of the island and hid among the craters and ancient cemeteries, where they could not be followed.

“In all there were three hundred and seventy of them carried away by the slavers, who took them to work the guano deposits on the Chincha Islands, off the coast of Peru, where most of them died in slavery before France and England made the Peruvian Government send the survivors back. Those that did return brought with them the small-pox, which nearly exterminated the rest of the population. So you see it is only natural they don't like Dagoes.”

Clancy nodded. “Quite so. But I can assure you that I'll treat well any men you can get me, give them a hundred dollars each in advance, before I leave, another hundred each when we get to Valparaiso, and a free passage back to their home.”

“That is an offer they can't resist,” said Tate, “and although they would rather go anywhere else than to South America, they know well that they will be safe from harm under the old red flag of England. You can easily get ten—or twenty—good men, but not right away, as these people are much attached to their homes, and have strong family ties and all that sort of thing, and there will have to be some feasting

and farewelling which will take a couple of days."

"Ah well, it's not grumbling I am," said Clancy with a laugh, and then he asked Tate if he would get some natives to at once come on board and cut or saw the troublesome *ngiia* logs into lengths suitable for the furnaces.

This matter Tate soon arranged with the chief of Hanga Roa, who was present, and who was most anxious to go on board the steamer, and see the wondrous engines which "made the ship fight the eye of the wind."

Clancy and Tate, accompanied by the chief and a number of natives, went off to the *Warrigal*, and Tom remained on shore, for he was anxious to see as much of Easter Island as he possibly could. Christie had told him that the island was one of the wonders of the world, on account of the huge sculptured human figures, stones, and terraced platforms which were to be seen all round the coast, and constituted an ethnographical problem that had never yet been solved. The present people had but one tradition, which was that the builders of the platforms, and the carvers of the mighty statues had come to Rapa Nui (Great Rapa) as they called the island, from Rapa-iti (Little Rapa) the island at which the *Warrigal* had stopped, in five great canoes, each carrying many

hundreds of men. With them were two kings, brothers, who caused the statues and the terraces to be made from the hard trachyte taken from the extinct crater of Otu-iti on the north side of the island.

As Tom was leaving the trader's dwelling, he was met by several natives, some of whom spoke to him in English, and asked him to visit their houses and "eat something." Declining their hospitable offers, he explained his desire to see the carvings, terraces and curious and ancient houses of stone, some of which were in present use by the natives.

Two of the men at once volunteered their services as guides, and after providing themselves with some bottles of water—for the island being almost treeless, walking under a fierce sun over the red volcanic sand, scoriæ and jagged lava which covers much of the land, soon created a great thirst.

After a tramp of half a mile, the first of the great *papaku* or terraces was reached, and here at its base were two of the huge stone images of trachyte, both in an upright position, with their bases buried deep in the volcanic sand, and their faces turned towards the sea. Each head was crowned with a circle of red tufa stone quarried from one of the many craters with which the island abounds, and the figures themselves were nearly twenty feet in height.

Tom stood beside the colossal figures, gazing upward at their strange, massive, and disdainful faces, wondering whose were the hands that had carved them, and for how many long centuries those hands had been turned to dust, and when occurred the awful catastrophe that had wiped out of existence what had certainly been a teeming population, and changed a once forest-clad and fertile land into a barren and sterile wilderness of blasted mountains and sand-covered valleys of desolation, melancholy and appalling to the human eye.

Leaving the first terrace they were proceeding towards the coast, where there was an ancient village of the circular stone dwellings, which Tom was anxious to examine, when they heard a cry from behind, and turning, Tom saw Pohiri, the Savage Islander, running towards them, shouting and gesticulating wildly, and pointing backwards over his bare, red-brown shoulder—he had discarded his shirt on account of the heat. When within a few yards of Tom and the two men, he gave full play to his lungs, which were by no means weak.

“*Te vaka afi, Misi Tamu! Te vaka afi pu fana! Te mana-oa! Ke toso te vaka kila tolu?*” (“A steamer, Mr Tom! A steamer with cannons! A man-of-war! It is towing a ship with three masts.”)

Then he added that soon after Tom had left

the village the steamer had appeared suddenly coming round the western point of the island, with a barque in tow, and had dropped anchor quite close to the *Warrigal*.

“Is she an English man-of-war, Pohiri?”

“No, Spaniola (Spanish),” replied Pohiri in English, “but the barque has English flag.”

Then he added that Clancy and Tate, who had gone off to the man-of-war, had sent him to seek for Tom, and ask him to return to the village as quickly as possible.

No time was lost, Tom and his three companions setting off at a run, despite the intense heat. When they reached the trader’s house they found it surrounded by excited natives, and inside, seated around the table, were Clancy, two strangers in the Chilian naval uniform, another in civilian clothes, and Tate.

As soon as Tom entered Clancy rose.

“Tom, I am glad you have returned so soon. This gentleman here is Captain Ramon Tompson, commander of the Chilian war-ship *O’Higgins*. This is the doctor, whose name I cannot pronounce, as I didn’t catch it and don’t understand Spanish, and this is Captain Grace of the barque *Meg Merrilies*. And now you will have to talk Spanish for me to Commander Tompson.”

Tom shook hands with them all in turn, and the Chilian commander, a little grey-headed man

with a long snow-white moustache, said that he would like him to act as interpreter on an important matter to be discussed by himself and "El Captain Clancy."

CHAPTER XIX

BEFORE entering upon the "important business" Clancy told Tom how it happened that the *O'Higgins* came to be at Easter Island at a time when her presence would be urgently needed in home waters. She had, it appeared, been making an extended cruise to the eastward for the training of a number of cadets she carried, and amongst other islands had touched at Tahiti, where her commander learned of the impending struggle between Chile and Peru. He put to sea immediately he had coaled, and steamed as hard as possible for Valparaiso, and when within a few miles of the north side of Easter Island, had fallen in with the English barque, whose rudder gudgeons had carried away. It was a dead calm at the time, and the barque's boats were trying ineffectually to tow her off the iron-bound coast, towards which she was being carried to destruction by a strong current. In response to Captain Grace's urgent appeal for assistance, the Chilian

commander, although time was of vital importance to him, consented to at least tow her into Hanga Roa roadstead to an anchorage.

The barque was from Liverpool, bound to Sydney *viâ* Samoa and the Fiji Islands, and almost the first words which Captain Grace spoke to Tom was to offer him a passage home.

Tom looked at Clancy with a troubled air, then said, "I thank you, Captain Grace; but I cannot decide just at the moment."

Tate and Grace then left the room, leaving Clancy and Tom with the two Chilian officers. The business, important as it was, did not take half an hour. Briefly it was this: Clancy had already contrived to make Commander Tompson understand that the *Warrigal* carried a very valuable cargo, amongst which were some thousands of small arms and ample ammunition, and that he was willing to sell the cargo, and ship as well, to the Chilian Government; and the commander had eagerly taken upon himself the responsibility of accepting the offer on behalf of his government; the price which Clancy asked was to be paid as soon as he and Commander Tompson handed over the *Warrigal* to the senior naval officer at Valparaiso.

"Tell Captain Clancy, Señor Denison, that I pledge him my personal honour that my country will not repudiate my action in this matter." He spoke with such sincerity that neither Tom

nor Clancy could doubt his integrity. And long after Tom learnt that they were not mistaken.

Clancy was as eager to sell as the nava. officer was to buy, and a tentative agreement was drawn up in English and Spanish, which was duly signed and witnessed, much to the delight of the two officers, and Clancy as well.

Then it was agreed that as it was possible the two steamers might fall in with Peruvian cruisers on the South American coast, and have to fight, that part of the armament of the *O'Higgins* should at once be transferred to the *Warrigal*, with the first lieutenant and forty men. The two steamers were to keep close company—the *Warrigal* accommodating her speed to that of the cruiser, which, although heavily armed for her size, was slow.

The commander and surgeon with Tom and Clancy then went off to the war-ship, where, after a considerable number of bottles of champagne had been drunk with the other officers, work was proceeded with in earnest. Six of the cruiser's Armstrongs were dismounted, and their traverses taken up whilst the *Warrigal* came alongside, and her crew, having nothing to do, either lounged about the decks, or went on shore; Clancy, after having explained what had occurred, having given

them a whole night and day's liberty. Then he and Tom had a long conversation.

"Much as I hate the idea of our parting, Clancy, I know that what you say is right, and that I must accept Captain Grace's offer. But, oh, by Jove, it *is* hard."

"It is that, Tom," was the sympathetic reply, "and when we part I'll have a hole in my heart that a mountain won't fill; but——"

"I know, Clancy, I know. I daresay if it were not for the thought of my poor sister Sabbie waiting and longing to see me again, that the temptation would be too strong for me." He walked away and looked out upon the harbour through one of the stern windows.

"You will not fail to write to me, Clancy?" said he, without turning his face to the Irishman, who sat at the saloon table with a pile of papers before him.

"Indeed I will not, Denison. Of course I can never put foot on British soil again, but maybe we shall meet again. I hope so, most truly. And as for writing, I promise you that you will have many and many a letter from the man you have befriended."

"And I shall answer them, wherever you may be, Clancy."

"South America—Chile, most likely—will be my home, Tom. I have neither kith nor kin in the world except an uncle, who is a priest

somewhere in New Zealand, and whom I have never seen, and don't want to see." Then he added with his infectious Irish laugh. "It's a Spanish, or a Mexican, or a Chileno grandee I'll be, wid a sombrero an' velvet jacket, an' silver spurs, an' me own special father confessor."

"I wish you well, Clancy, whatever you do, or wherever you go," then Tom turned, and, hiding his depression under a smiling face, added :

"You're a nice sort of a man ! You have not told Tate that you won't need those natives, now that the *Warrigal* is turned into a man-of-war. So get away on shore and tell him, whilst I go on board the barque and let Captain Grace know that I am sailing with him. I see that he is heaving down his ship so as to get at her stern post, and repair his rudder. And, oh, Clancy ! Will you let me have Pohiri ? You will have no need of him on the *Warrigal*."

"Take him with you by all means, Tom. He is, I know, very fond of you. Christie and I picked him up in Sydney when he was stranded and in want of a ship, and although he doesn't know the true story of the *Warrigal*, I think he guesses a good deal."

Tom laughed, "I am sure he does, although he has never said anything to me beyond that

you and Christie met him one night as he was loafing about the street, and asked him if he wanted a ship."

Clancy went off on shore, and Tom, in his own boat, pulled over to the *Meg Merrilies*. She was a fine, handsome barque of seven hundred tons, and although she was now hove-down, and all her standing and running gear in disorder, Tom, as soon as he clambered on board, saw that she was a ship so well kept that her master had good reason to be proud of her.

Aided by the carpenter from the *O'Higgins*, the mate and carpenter of the barque soon had new gudgeons fitted, and the rudder re-shipped; and just as Tom came on board, the work was completed and the vessel being put back on an even keel.

"Captain Grace," he said to the master, "I shall be glad to go to Sydney, with you. But you were saying that you wished you had a supercargo to help you in your trading cruise. Now, give me the berth. I'll do my best to please you—and I'll come without pay rather than make the voyage as a passenger."

Grace shook hands with him heartily—"That will suit me splendidly, Mr Denison. When will you come aboard? I shall be ready for sea to-morrow."

"I'm ready at any time, captain. But I want

you to take my boat, if you can find stowage for her."

"Certainly. She's a beautiful little craft, and from what Captain Clancy told me I know you would not like leaving her behind."

"Then I want another favour."

"Out with it."

"There is a young South Sea Island sailor on board the *Warrigal* who wants to come with me. He is a good seaman, and I should like to take him to Sydney with me."

"Done. I'll put him on the ship's articles. Anything else?"

"Nothing, thank you."

"Then what say you to a glass of good old Tennant?" said Grace, who was a rough, sturdy mariner of the old school.

"With pleasure. I'm thirsty, captain."

They went below, and Grace called the steward.

"Steward, bring two bottles of Tennant. This is Mr Denison, who is to be my supercargo. Fix up a berth for him. Savee?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"I really shall believe I am a genuine supercargo at last," thought Tom, as he sat down and began a chat with the genial old captain.

Soon after breakfast next morning Tom bade Clancy and the crew of the *Warrigal* a sorrowful good-bye, and then returned on board the

barque, which, with cable hove-short, was waiting for him and Captain Grace.

As the *Meg Merrilies* paid off, the *O'Higgins* dipped her colours, together with the *Warrigal*, and the barque, with her white canvas swelling to the breeze, stood out upon the sun-lit billows of the wide Pacific.

CHAPTER XX

THREE weeks had slipped by uneventfully on board the *Meg Merrilies*, which had passed safely through the dangers of the Paumotu Archipelago, and was now rippling over a gently undulating sea sparkling under the morning sun and scarcely disturbed by the breath of the cool south-east trade wind. Three miles away on the starboard hand was Palmerston Island, a long, low stretch of living green, encircled by beaches of gleaming white — the whole lying within the great circle of barrier reef, denoted by its wavering line of creamy surf.

The ship was very quiet, for it was Sunday, and scarce a sound broke in upon the pleasant silence save the swish and rustle of the water along her sides, as the barque clove her way through it, and now and then the creaking of a block, and the soft rustle of a sail as it filled and swelled, and then sank again, for the wind was as yet very light.

Tom, lying against the raised after-flap of

the skylight, had come on deck to laze away an hour or two, but he first wished to re-read James Christie's story, and as he looked at the big firm characters, the writing reminded him of the man himself.

“My dear Tom,” it began, “I have a conviction that I have not many days to live, for the complaint from which I suffer, is, I fear, beyond the power of the best doctors, let alone the French priest, who has not had much chance of practising since he became a missionary.

“So I have made myself ready. Clancy will know what to do in all matters concerning the *Warrigal*, and also about yourself. When you return home I want you to tell your aunt and your sister that James Christie begs their forgiveness as he begged yours for the wrong I did you.

“Now I will tell you my story in as few words as possible.

“Seventeen years ago, I was master of a steamer named the *Bass Rock*. She belonged to Liverpool, and was owned by Tobias Pattermore, who was then living in Birkenhead. The steamer was in the Mediterranean trade, but was not making much money for Pattermore, who was always grumbling, and hinting to me that he would have to make a change of skippers if I could not make things ‘hum.’

“ Now I must go back a bit.

“ At this time I had been married six years, and had one dear child—a girl of five. My wife had married me much against the wishes of her people, who loathed the idea of her uniting herself to a common merchant sea-captain—a man, too, of a ‘common’ family—for my father was a farm bailiff. Then, too, she had money—a few thousand pounds left her by a relative. God knows I didn’t want the money, I only wanted her.

“ When we first met, I was mate of a Calcutta ship, the *Earl Bathurst*, and my future wife, her father and mother, and her two sisters were passengers. The father had been in the Indian Civil Service, and was returning to England to live on his pension. He was a pompous, over-bearing man, and his wife thought him a small God Almighty—like most wives of Indian officials.

“ We had a bad voyage from the start, calms and hurricanes alternating, and once nearly foundered through being taken aback between Calcutta and the Cape. All this rough experience brought the passengers and ship’s officers much more in contact than would have been the case if nothing out of the common had occurred, and somehow or other Alice Chester and I became great friends, and before I knew it I was in love with her, and felt sure

that she cared for me more than her father would have liked had he known of it.

“Colonel Chester—he had been one of the old Company’s soldiers before he went into the Civil Service—never dreamt that very often when it was my watch below I was on deck talking to his daughter. If any one had told him of it, he would have rejected such a tale as utterly preposterous—for a daughter of his to display more than a condescending interest in a common merchant ship-officer would be transcending the bounds of possibility.

“Soon after rounding the Cape, several of our sixty cabin passengers were taken ill with fever, caught no doubt at Capetown, and among them was Alice’s younger sister—a girl of thirteen. The doctor had his hands full, for most of his patients soon became delirious.

“One night in the middle watch, just after I had come on deck to relieve the second officer, and whilst the ship was running free over a lumpy sea, one of the hands told me that one of the strands of the log line had parted. I went to reeve another, and just as I passed the companion-way, Nina Chester, followed by one of the cuddy-boys, in her nightdress, rushed past me, clambered up on the wheel gratings, and sprang overboard. I followed, and the cuddy-boy—who was Terence Clancy—jumped after me.

“To make my yarn of this matter as short as possible, Tom; I soon found the child and collared her. She was a thin, delicate creature, and gave me no trouble to keep her up, although she was unconscious. Then presently Terence, who is as good a swimmer as I am, found us, and in a quarter of an hour we were all back on board again, for the third mate had brought the ship to in no time, and lowered a boat.

“Old Colonel Chester was very grateful—and next morning offered me fifty pounds! I looked at him and then at Alice, and without a word walked out of his cabin. Before many hours had passed Alice Chester and I had met again, and she had told me that she loved me and would be my wife.

“‘It is no use asking my father for me, Jim,’ she said. ‘You might as well ask him to blacken his face and sing a comic nigger song to the sailors in the foc’sle.’ Then she cried a bit over the fifty pounds matter, and said that her father had treated Terry, the cuddy boy, just as he had treated me—had offered him ten pounds.

“‘Never mind, Jim, dear,’ she said, half-crying, half-laughing, ‘if my kisses are worth only a farthing each, and Terry will take them in payment, he shall have more than ten pounds’ worth before we reach England. I have made a good start already, and Nina will help me as soon as she is able to get up.’

“ Well, Tom, she kept her promise. Within a month after I was paid off from the *Bathurst*, I was in Belfast waiting for her. She left home, came to me, and there we were married. Her father never answered her letters, but he wrote to me in such terms that even now, when I have not many suns to see, the recollection of those insulting words stings me like the lash of a whip.

“ I was not long out of a berth, and was soon in command of a barque belonging to Pattermore, in which I made a two years' voyage to the South Seas. It was then that I met old Père Leblond in Samoa.

“ When I returned home, Pattermore offered me the command of the *Bass Rock*. I eagerly accepted, and the first thing I did was to write to Terence Clancy, who was second engineer on one of the Holyhead and Dublin boats, and ask him to come with me as chief. We had always kept in touch since we had left the old *Bathurst*.

“ We made several voyages to the Mediterranean, and, as I have said, the steamer did not pay. She was slow, and a great coal-eater, and Pattermore always had a black face for me when the ship's accounts were squared.

“ One day, however—soon after he had hinted to me that he would have to make a change of skippers, he asked my wife and me to dinner.

He was very gracious and oily, and 'slithery' as Irish people say, and after dinner took me into the library and said :

" 'Christie, I am sure I can trust you, and can take you into my confidence, can I not? '

" 'You can, sir,' I replied.

" 'Well, there is a certainty offering me to make a pot of money if I have a man like you to carry out my plans. But there are risks attached.'

" 'What are they? '

" 'The possibility of your being seized or even killed if you fail—I want you to land a cargo of arms for the rebel party in Venezuela. But everything will be so arranged that you will not fail. I have been in treaty with the rebel agent here, and have decided to make the venture. If you will carry out my instructions I will pay you one thousand pounds on your return.'

" I jumped at the offer. 'Put it down on paper,' I said.

" He shook his head. 'No, Christie, there must not be anything like that. I am a big shipowner, and run more risk than you will in going into this business. I have Government contracts, and if it was known that I had a hand in this matter it would mean ruin to me. But to show you how much confidence I have in you I am going to transfer the ownership of

the *Bass Rock* to you, and put her under the Liberian flag. The cargo of arms is ready at this moment in Liverpool; as soon as it is under hatches you can steam away as fast as you can for a place called Cazonés between Porto Cabello and La Guayra. There you will find General Padro Valdez, with part of the rebel forces waiting for you, and you can land your cargo without danger, as the Government have only two cruisers, and both of these will be engaged in watching the coast about Caracas.' Then he added that I could pay off the present crew if I liked and ship another—men whom I could trust.

“Perhaps I was too eager; but things had gone badly with us since our marriage, my wife having lost her little fortune in a bank smash.

“I went home with my wife, highly elated, and a week later bade her good-bye, and left the *Mersey*, ostensibly bound for Sierra Leone. I never saw my wife and child again.”

CHAPTER XXI

“ I GOT to Cazonas all right, and found Valdez and his ragged rascallions awaiting me, and within forty-eight hours we had landed all the arms, and I was ready for sea again, when at sunset a Government cruiser suddenly appeared round the point. I slipped the cable, and having a full head of steam, tried to escape, when the cruiser at once opened fire on us at less than a couple of cable lengths, and the fourth shell from her Armstrong 40-pounders burst in the engine-room, killed three men, made a holy smash up of the engines, and brought us to.

“ Half an hour afterwards I, Clancy, big Sam and Rockett, and the rest of the crew were in irons and on our way to Caracas. There we were tried and sentenced to death, but later on the sentence was commuted to seven years in irons. The ship being under the Liberian flag the British Government could not, or would not interfere on our behalf, and left us to our fate.

“ For three long years we suffered the torments of the damned in that hell of a prison

in Caracas, and would have been there for another four, had not a second revolution burst up the rotten government, and opened the doors of our prison.

“With Clancy I made my way back to Liverpool, and found that my wife and child had left for Caracas two months after the *Bass Rock* had been captured. She wished to at least be near me in my captivity, for she had learnt from the Foreign Office that there was no possible hope of the British Government attempting to interfere on my behalf, but thought that with the two hundred pounds she possessed she would perhaps be able to do something for me with my gaolers. First of all, though, on the day after that on which the news of my seizure was published, she went to Pattermore and begged him to lend her a few hundred pounds. (I was told all this by Nina Chester.) He professed to be highly indignant at her making such an appeal to him.

“‘What have I to do with your husband, madam?’ he said. ‘The *Bass Rock* was not my ship; if your husband chooses to engage in such improper transactions and is caught, what right have you to come begging to me for assistance? It is quite bad enough for me to see reports in the newspapers that I was the owner of the steamer—reports which I have promptly contradicted. Good morning, madam.’

“My poor wife went away bewildered, and desperate. On the following day she wrote to her father and begged him to give her a hundred pounds to aid her in effecting my release. Her letter was returned to her unopened. Then she and her sister Nina, who had always been loyal to her, tried to see Pattermore at his office. A clerk came and said that Mr Pattermore declined to see Mrs Christie either then or at any other time.

“She made her way to London, and took passages for herself and the child in a steamer named *The Hope*, for La Guayra. She was an old and ill-found craft, but my wife had no choice; she had not anything like enough money to pay her passage in a better ship, and the captain of *The Hope*, taking pity on her, only charged her a nominal sum, for which the Almighty will reward him.

“Six weeks after the steamer sailed from London, one of her boats was picked up near Blanquilla Island, off the Venezuelan coast. In it were the dead bodies of my wife, my child, and the captain and five other men—they had all perished of thirst. Another boat in charge of the mate reached Tortuga, and reported that *The Hope* had foundered in a hurricane between Grenada and Tortuga.

“When Clancy and I reached England we found that Tobias Pattermore had sold out his

English interests and gone to Australia, where he had established a big business. We, accompanied by Rockett and big Sam, followed, for I was burning with resentment against the hypocritical scoundrel for the way in which he had treated my wife. At night, Tom, I would dream, oh God! such agonising dreams! I saw her with blackened lips and hollow eyes, waving her hand to me and trying to utter my name, and then, pointing to our dead child, who lay upon her knees, as the boat drifted upon a sea of glass under a blazing sun, and I called to her, 'Alice, my Alice, I am coming,' and tried to rise, and then I would hear the clank of my chains as I tried to burst my fetters in my agony of despair, then the vision would fade and I awoke with trembling limbs and aching heart.

"We worked our passages out to Sydney in a sailing ship, for we had only a few pounds between us. But I felt sure that Pattermore would—dared not refuse to pay me the one thousand pounds he had promised me, cruelly and meanly as he had treated my poor wife, for whose dreadful fate I held him to be responsible. It was my intention to make him pay me the money—which was to be divided between us four—and then give the scoundrel a thrashing.

"On reaching Sydney I went direct to

Pattermore's offices in Pitt Street. In that I made a mistake—I should have waited and gone to his house at Parramatta, where our conversation would have been private—but I was too impetuous and spoilt everything, at least as far as making him pay me was concerned.

“I sent in my name by a clerk, who returned and said Mr Pattermore did not wish to see me—I was no longer in his employ, and he had no time to waste. I pushed the clerk aside, and stepped into the private office; Pattermore was there and certainly was busy, for there were two other men seated at the table with him.

“‘What do you mean, sir, by coming in here after receiving my message?’ he said, leaning back in his chair, and scowling at me, ‘what do you want?’

“‘I want that one thousand pounds you owe me for delivering a cargo of arms for you to General Valdez, three and a half years ago,’ I said, trying to speak calmly.

“‘Bah! the fellow is mad—or intoxicated’—he said with a sneer, turning to an old gentleman next to him. ‘Now, look here, Christie, take yourself off as quickly as possible, before I send for a policeman.’

“A mad fury possessed me. ‘Murderer of my wife and child!’ I cried, and then I sprang at him and seized him by the throat, with murder in my heart.

“I have no doubt but that I should have strangled him had not three or four of his clerks rushed in, and one of them, seizing a heavy ruler, struck me blow after blow on the head until I became insensible, and my grip was taken from his throat. When I came to I found two policemen beside me, and a doctor attending to Pattermore.

“As I was led away to be charged at the police station, I turned to Pattermore, who had recovered consciousness and said: ‘You heartless scoundrel. I have not done with you yet. Some day I shall have my revenge.’

“I was sentenced to six months’ imprisonment in Darlinghurst Gaol—an imprisonment, that wearisome as it was, was heaven compared to the horrors I endured in Caracas, for the officials treated me not only kindly, but considerately.

“The day I was liberated the governor handed me sixty pounds, which had been sent to him for me in several sums from time to time by Terence Clancy, Rockett, and big Sam, who had all written to me during my imprisonment. All three had stuck together; Clancy getting a berth as chief engineer on one of the Melbourne boats, and Rockett and big Sam were quarter-masters.

“They were away when I came out of Darlinghurst, but a week later we met, and I then

told them that I meant to have my revenge on Pattermore, and explained how I meant to carry it into effect. They agreed to join me when I was ready—no matter when or where.

“Within a few weeks, I got the command of a South Sea trading barque named the *Petite Jeanne*, running between Sydney and Fiji, and during the following two years I was patiently watching for my chance. At last it came. Clancy got the berth of chief engineer on the *Warrigal*, which had just been bought by Pattermore, and he and I made our plans definitely.

“How we got possession of her, Clancy will tell you.

“Tom, dear lad, good-bye, and try to think kindly of poor JIM CHRISTIE.”

CHAPTER XXII

THE *Meg Merrilies* lay at anchor in Apia Harbour, Samoa, which port she had reached three weeks after sighting Palmerston Island, light winds and calms having made the passage a lengthy one, though not too long for Tom, who had spent the time very advantageously. In the first place, he, Captain Grace, and the carpenter had built a new deck house, or rather extended that on the after-deck, and fitted it up as a trade room with shelves, etc., and by the time the barque reached Apia it was stocked with samples of nearly everything that was under hatches—much to the skipper's satisfaction.

“Tom,” he said, as, on the day the work was completed, he sat down on a case of rifles, lit his pipe, and looked around the trade room, “you're a genius. It's a regular emporium—anything from a needle to an anchor; silk ribbons for the brown girls' hair, and cutlasses for the men to cut each other up; Jamaica rum for the common garden trader, and Moet

and Chandon for the Consuls and other big swells."

The supercargo laughed, "I told you I knew how to fit up a trade room. Poor old Captain Ryder told me all about it in the first place, and then whenever an island trading ship came to Sydney I always went on board and had a look around. I have fitted up ours as near as I could to that of the brig *Au Revoir*—you can put your hand on anything you want right-away."

Every evening since the barque had left Easter Island, Pohiri, the Savage Islander, had come aft and given Tom two hours' instruction in his own and the Samoan language. The former, which is a sort of bastard Maori-Samoan, was easy to acquire, the mellifluous Samoan, though akin to the Savage Island dialect in some respects, he found more difficult, owing to his instructor's habit of always substituting the Nuiean K for the Samoan T (there is no K in the latter language) and his only speaking the "common" language, which is distinct from that used by the common people to chiefs and strangers, though they (the chiefs) never use it if speaking of themselves. Still Pohiri knew a few of the terms used when addressing chiefs or members of their families. He told Tom, for instance, "S'pose you want to tell some chief you been shoot wild pig, you don' say

'I shoot *puaa*' (pig), you say 'I shoot *le vae fa*' ('I have shot the four-legged thing'). If you ask chief if he has headache, you don't say *ulu*; you say *ao*. You see, *ulu* is same name for breadfruit, but you mus' not call chief's head *ulu*. And you mus' not call chief's wife *ava*—that is what common man call his wife, you mus' say *faletua* or *masiofo*. But if some chief speak to you 'bout his wife he will say *l'ou ava* (my wife) like common man. If he has headache he will say *lau ulu* (my head) and not say *lau ao*; but if he speak to you or some other stranger he will say *lau ao* (your head). If he say *lau ulu* to you it mean he want to *soli* (insult) you."

Soon after Tom landed in Apia he was given a Samoan grammar by a storekeeper, in which he found Pohiri's statements practically confirmed by the Rev. S. G. Whitmee, a missionary, who remarks on the peculiarities of the Samoan language:

"There is a large number of words used to chiefs and strangers; and to use any other when addressing such is equivalent to an insult. These words are never used by a chief when speaking of himself. Amongst these are words used according to the rank of the person addressed; e.g., *tausami*, to eat—a respectful term to a *tulafale* (the town orator), *taumafa*—to a chief; *taute* to the highest chief. This

use of special words in addressing persons of rank is an important feature of the Samoan language . . . there is a great number of words used specially to a chief. Almost every member of his body has a name different from that applied to a common man. His feelings, his actions, and his possessions have different names. In many instances the common name of a thing is changed for another when that thing is spoken of in his presence. In some cases the particular grade of a man's rank is indicated by the word used, as in the words *to eat*, mentioned above. The following words *to come*, furnish another example of this. *Sau* is used to a common man, *maliu mai* is a respectful term a grade higher; *susu mai* is used only to titled chiefs; *afio mai*, properly only to those of the highest rank."

Grace was highly pleased at the result of his visit to Apia, for he had sold nearly half of his cargo to the merchants and traders at a large profit, and Tom felt delighted when the old man told him that he had that day at the British Consulate put him (Tom) on the ship's articles as supercargo at twenty-five pounds a month.

"You see, Tom, I asked Mr Williams" (the Consul) "what was a fair wage for a supercargo, and he told me that an experienced man usually gets thirty to forty pounds a month, so I thought—and he thought too—that it would be a fair thing if I gave you twenty-five pounds to start

with, beginning from the day you came on board. And although you haven't had any previous experience, you have done very well for me, and taken a lot of work off my hands. I was told in Liverpool that I ought to take a supercargo, and the agent wanted to shove one of his sons on to me, but I wouldn't have him, meaning to pull along by myself as well as I could until we got to Sydney, where I knew I could get a proper supercargo, and not a quill driver from an office."

"Well, Captain Grace, I hope to gain more experience, and if you will have me for your next voyage I shall be very pleased. My aunt won't like it, but as I am nearing eighteen, it is time I struck out for myself and earned my living."

"Right you are, Tom, it's a deal. You shall come with me next voyage, and I hope we shall be together for a good many years. I intend to stay out in the Pacific for four or five years; and, if things go as well as they are going now, I mean to sell the barque, and buy another and bigger ship."

One afternoon, nearly a month after the *Meg Merrilies* had reached the port, and just as Grace and Tom were about to go on shore for a bathe in the Vaisigago River, they saw a barque beating up to the port from the westward against the lusty south-east trades, and, as she

drew nearer, Tom recognised her as a Sydney vessel—the *Rotumah*. She was soon abreast of the passage, and came flying in in gallant style. In order to bring up under Matautu Point she had to pass close to the stern of the *Meg Merrilies*, and then Tom saw a man jump up on the after rail and wave his cap.

“Mr Denison, Mr Dennison!” he shouted “come aboard!”

In an instant Tom recognised him—it was Jack Castles, the former ship-keeper of the *Simon Bolivar*.

Hurriedly explaining to Grace who the man was, Tom called some of the hands, and in a few minutes was in one of the ship’s boats, pulling after the *Rotumah*, which presently brought to, and let go anchor.

Clambering on deck he was met by Castles and the skipper, Captain Robertson, who both shook hands with him warmly.

“Wal, wal, this ez a knock-out surprise,” cried Robertson, a big, burly new Englander, “Mr Denison, yew will be glad to hear thet your aunt got that letter from Captain Christie all right, and she and your sister Sabbie were mighty pleased, I can tell yew. Naow, Jack,” and he turned to the half-caste, whose handsome face was beaming with smiles, “I’ll let you go off with Mr Denison, so that you can spin him the yarn.”

“How strange it is that we should meet, Castles,” said Tom, as the boat was being pulled back to the *Meg Merrilies*.

“Aye, sir ; strange indeed. I never thought that when I shipped as A.B. on the *Rotumah*, that I would meet you in Samoa.”

CHAPTER XXIII

DENISON was delighted to know that his aunt and Sabbie knew that he was safe, and he, Castles and Captain Grace had quite an hour's talk before the half - caste returned to the *Rotumah*. He told them that the last time he had called at the "Crows' Nest" to say good-bye to Miss Denison and Sabbie, he had found Carmen Herrera there.

"Miss Denison told me, sir, that Miss Herrera had come to stay with Miss Sabbie until you came back."

Tom laughed. "She will be there for a long time, Castles."

"Not too long for your aunt, sir. Miss Denison has regular took to her, and one day all three with Canon Cooper, came on board the old *Bolivar*, and I made tea for them. And then I was foolish enough to show them your shark-fishing gear in the hen-coop, and Miss Sabbie and the Spanish girl both began to cry—and I felt as if I could kick myself."

Just as Castles was going over the side he

said to Tom, "I wish I were sailing with you, sir. Do you think Captain Grace would take me—the skipper of the *Rotumah* will be willing to let me leave if you ask him."

Tom was only too delighted at the suggestion, and telling the half-caste to wait, he went below to Captain Grace; in a few minutes he returned with a beaming face.

"It is all right, Castles, and I'm coming with you to see Captain Robertson."

The skipper of the barque very good-naturedly acceded to the half-caste's request, paid him what wages were due to him, shook hands and wished him and Tom good-bye, and "whips of luck," as the *Meg Merrilies* was to sail in the morning for Levuka.

Pohiri, who was much attached to Tom, eyed Castles at first with some jealousy, but this soon wore off, especially when the half-caste addressed him in his own language, which he spoke very fluently, as he did many other Polynesian dialects, for in his many voyages throughout the South Seas, he had had for shipmates natives of many of the Pacific Isles, from Easter Island to the far-away Pelews.

The *Meg Merrilies* sailed at noon on the following day, and Denison looked back at the green mountains of beautiful Upolu with a feeling of regret, for during his month's stay he had made many friends—especially with the natives

—and he made a resolution that if ever he did decide to settle down as a trader, that Samoa would run Rapa very closely in his choice, although he had not forgotten his promise to Toa and the beautiful Téro.

The barque made a splendid run from Samoa to Levuka—the then capital town of Fiji—and dropped anchor amongst a number of vessels of all rigs and sizes, with which the little reef-bound harbour was crowded. Grace went on shore to the Consul with his papers, leaving Tom to entertain a noisy and thirsty host of visitors — planters, traders, merchants, and officials of the newly-established government of His Majesty King Cacobau. Some merely came to talk—and get free liquor—others to buy it, and provisions, etc., and Tom had a busy two hours ere the last of them departed.

Shortly before lunch Grace returned, evidently in a great hurry.

“Tom,” he said, as he entered the cabin, hot and perspiring, “I have some news for you. First of all, though, I must tell you that if you want to get to Sydney quickly, you can leave here to-morrow in that little brig lying astern of us—the *Rio*. She sails in a couple of days.”

“I am in no hurry, captain. I will stay with you. But I can write by her and tell my people that they will soon see me.”

“Ah, do—for I want you to stay with me. But I must tell you that the news I have heard from the Consul means that we won't be in Sydney for the next six months.”

“I don't mind that, captain. I mean to keep with you till the end of this cruise—and after as well. But what has changed your plans?”

“I have just met a man in Levuka named Ross, who has offered me big money for a four months' charter for the barque. He has found a big bed of pearl-shell somewhere about New Guinea, and came here with his wife and one native in a little bit of a cutter—a voyage of two thousand five hundred miles, and most of it beating against the south-east trades. He has some friends here who are backing him, and from what I gather, he and they expect to make a pile out of his discovery. I have come to terms with them, and agreed to have the barque ready for sea in a week from now. Where we are going to exactly I don't know, for Ross—he's an American—would not tell me anything more just now, than that he wanted me to proceed to 'somewhere about 2° 30' S. long. and 147° E.'; but once we are clear of Levuka he will give me exact sailing instructions.”

“I see. I suppose he thinks you might talk about it to some one here.”

“Exactly; and so I said I would take my sailing directions from him when he chose to

give them." Then he went on to say that Ross had told him that the natives of the island where the pearl beds were situated, were a very dangerous lot of savages, and the crew of the barque would have to be doubled, and all well-armed.

As quickly as possible Grace sold the remainder of his cargo, and in a few days began to prepare the ship in accordance with Ross's wishes. Ross himself, with his friends, had meanwhile found ten good native seamen—Rarotongans, Nuiéans, and two Samoans. They were told that they were required for boat work, and supposed, as did the white residents of Levuka, that the barque was fitting out for a "labour" cruise among the Solomon Islands and the New Hebrides Group. In those days vessels engaged in the labour trade, or "black-birding" as it was termed, had to be well-armed to resist the determined attempts sometimes made to capture them by the savage natives. The German ships in particular more resembled old-time privateers than any other kind of craft, and yet in some cases they had had narrow escapes from capture.

On the following day Ross came on board with his wife and introduced himself to Denison. He was a tall, thin, grey-haired man of over fifty years of age, with deep-set, resolute eyes, and a square jaw, and although he was a some-

what reserved man, Tom and he were quickly on friendly terms. His wife, who was a half-caste Marquesan, was a slenderly-built woman, or rather girl, of about twenty, and when Tom asked her if she was coming with her husband, she opened her dark, beautiful eyes in astonishment at his question.

“Why, of course I am, Mr Denison. Do you think he would leave me behind, or that I would let him go alone?” and she smiled at her husband.

CHAPTER XXIV

Six hours after the *Meg Merrilies* left Levuka, and when the lofty irregular peaks of Ovalau Island were low down on the horizon astern, Ross came to Grace.

"Boudeuse Bay, Admiralty Island, is the place, Captain Grace."

The master of the barque took down his roll of charts and spread out Sheet No. 12.

"There it is," and the American indicated a small inlet on the north side of the island.

"All right. North about round New Ireland will be our best course, I suppose?"

"Yes, best and easiest. We'll run into the two knot westerly current just off the Santa Cruz Group, and carry it right along up to Admiralty Island."

Steering a north-westerly course the barque was soon clear of the Fiji Group, and under every stitch of canvas she could set was flying before the strong south-east trade. At supper that night, as there was now no further need

of concealment, Ross told Denison and Grace his story.

“You saw my little cutter in Levuka. I built her myself three years ago at Nuku-Hiva in the Marquesas, where I was trading, and where I married. My wife’s father was an Englishman, and had knocked about the South Seas for forty years. He died a year ago from sheer old age.

“One day he and I were talking about our experiences, and he told me that when he was cooper of a Marblehead whaler, the ship put into Callie Harbour on Admiralty Island to wood and water—Callie Harbour is about four miles to leeward of Boudeuse Bay—and that the natives who came on board brought with them for barter lots of big, golden-edged pearl shells and pearls as well, and told him that there was any amount of shell at several places on the north side of the island.

“I was not doing well at trading on Nuku-Hiva, and after the old man died, Sina and I made up our minds to try the Admiralty Group, and see if we could hit upon the pearl beds of which he had been told. We left Nuku-Hiva in June with a crew of four, all Nuku-Hiva men, and all good divers, and reached a place near Boudeuse Bay in the middle of July. I anchored for the night off a village of about fifty houses, and at daylight we were boarded

by a lot of natives, and in a few minutes I was satisfied that we had come to the right place, for one of them brought off a small basket with ten of the biggest pearl shells I have ever seen. In the course of the day I was shown one place where, in six fathoms, I could see big shell quite plainly without a water glass.

“I arranged with the chief of this particular village to build me a small dwelling-house on a tiny island of less than three acres in extent, and situated a mile from the mainland. Here, I felt, we would be safer from attack than were we living in or near the native village. We could not remain on the cutter until after she had been beached and repaired; for she was leaking badly; so we put her ashore on the lee-side of the islet, and set to work. The natives from the village, which was under a chief named Norok, visited us several times, bringing provisions, and giving me assistance with the cutter in a friendly manner.

“All went well for about ten days. The cutter was finished and was afloat again, and at anchor a cable length from the beach, ready to start on a trip along the coast in the morning with Norok as pilot. Norok himself slept on the island that night with some of his young men—about twenty.

“My wife, most fortunately, decided to stay on shore with me, and slept in the little house;

Norok, one of my Marquesans, and I spread our mats outside under the trees, and remained up smoking and talking well past midnight. The chief is a very intelligent man—you'll see him when we get to Boudeuse—and had given me much useful information about the great island and its people, who are divided into several clans, and always at war with each other. Thirty miles away from his own village, he told me, was a big village under a chief named Voragi, who had living with him a white man called 'Timi.' Norok had never seen him, for Voragi and he (Norok) were enemies—their respective clans having been at loggerheads for over fifty years.

“‘The white man,’ said Norok, ‘came here ten years ago, and Voragi, who is a *kai kanak* (man-eater) made much of him, and gave him land, a house, and many wives. He has red hair, and his nose is broken in the middle, and is turned on one side. Five years ago a sandal-wood brig anchored off Voragi's village, and he and Timi enticed the captain and three other white men on shore to sleep, and murdered them as they slept. Then, at dawn, as the rest of the white men on board the brig were asleep, Voragi's young men, led by the white man, swam off to her and killed all of them. They plundered the ship, and then burnt it; and after they had eaten the bodies

of the white men, they dried and smoked their heads and put them in the *gamal* house.'

"I had told the three Marquesans who were sleeping on board, that they need not keep watch. They had been working hard all day, were tired out, and wanted a rest, and, besides that, Norok's men were lying on their mats on the beach close to their canoes, and, if anything did occur in the night, such as sudden squalls coming down from the mountains and causing the cutter to drag, we could have gone to the crew's assistance in less than five minutes.

"The night was calm and quiet, and only the dulled sound of the surf on the reef, and the swish of the coconut branches as they swayed to the land breeze was heard by those of Norok's men who were not asleep. Then, just as dawn broke, I was aroused by wild cries, and Norok cried out that the cutter was being attacked by four strange canoes, which had laid alongside of her unseen by any of our people from the shore.

"We all made a rush for our canoes on the beach, and in a few minutes were on board, fighting hand to hand with over fifty natives. We succeeded in beating them off after a sharp struggle, killing seven and taking three prisoners. These—before Norok's men clubbed them on the deck—told us that the white man, Timi, from Varogi's village, had led the party,

and had gone away wounded. He had seen the cutter off the coast on the day we came, and he and Varogi arranged to cut her out, if they had to do it right under Norok's eyes. And they would have succeeded if this cut-throat of a Timi—which I suppose means either 'Jim' or 'Tim' had been a sailorman, and known how to slip the cable and make sail. The prisoners said that he and his crowd were trying to get the anchor aboard by hauling in the cable by hand when we came upon them.

"My three poor Marquesans had been slaughtered in their sleep, I imagine. Their headless bodies were lying on the main hatch. We took them ashore to the little island, and I buried them decently. Then Norok and I had a long talk, and I told him that I was going away to Fiji, but should come back with a big ship and a strong crew, get the pearl shell, and give him a chance to get even with Varogi. Now, gentlemen, that's the end of my yarn. Captain Grace, I'm thirsty. Sina, turn in."

Ross was not a talkative man, and said nothing to Denison and Grace of the fearful hardships that he, his wife, and the surviving native seaman had endured on the long voyage to Fiji.

CHAPTER XXV

TEN weeks had gone by, and the barque was at anchor in the little bay on the shore of which stood Norok's village. She had made a very fast passage from Fiji, and Norok and his people were delighted to see Ross back so soon, and for some days there was much slaughter of hogs and fowls, and subsequent feasting in honour of the visitors.

Denison found Norok to be as Ross had said, a very intelligent person. He was a handsome well-built man of about fifty years of age, but had lost the use of his left arm by a pistol shot, which had fractured the elbow joint. He frankly admitted that he had received the injury in his younger days, when he and a number of his people cut off an American whaleship, and massacred every soul on board.

Within a week after the arrival of the barque, Ross had begun operations. Every morning, two boats manned by the native crew left the

ship, and proceeded to the pearl shell beds, seven miles distant, returning at night. Norok always sent a large canoe, manned by thirty of his men to protect Ross and his divers, should they be attacked by Varogi's people, for the beds were near to that part of the coast of which he was chief, and on several occasions canoes from Varogi's villages had approached within musket shot of the boats, and fired at the divers with the few old-fashioned smooth bore muskets they possessed. Then, one day, Ross let them approach so near that he and his natives were able to use their breech-loading rifles with effect, killing and wounding several of the enemy, who at once headed for the shore with all possible speed, and they did not again venture within gunshot of the boats.

But, shortly after this some of Varogi's people captured a little girl belonging to Norok's village, and held her to ransom. The ransom was paid, and when the child was brought back she delivered a message from Varogi to the chief.

"Tell Norok that I, Varogi and my white man Timi, will have his head, and the head of some of the white men in my *gamal* house before many moons have passed."

The insult stung Norok, and he pressed Ross to lend him his native crew with their rifles, so

that he could make a night attack on Varogi's town and burn it.

“Not now, Norok. But I will fulfil the promise I made to you when I was here before. When I have finished the work I am doing, I myself will lead my men, and help you to your revenge. I mean also to have *utu* (revenge) upon the white man with the broken nose—he who killed my three sailors, one of whom was my wife's foster-brother.”

Norok was so pleased that he summoned a meeting of the people, and told them that before long Varogi's head, and the head of the white man as well might be in his (Norok's) *gamal* house, and old Captain Grace shuddered when a savage yell of delight burst from many hundreds of throats, and Pohiri translated his words to him and Denison.

“Well, I won't have any hand in it,” he said, “Captain Ross can do what he likes with his natives, but none of my men will go.”

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The barque was moored so close in to the beach that the end of her jibboom almost touched the branches of a giant teak tree, which, with other forest monarchs, stood on a spur of the mountain range that seemed to start sheer upwards from the north side of the usually calm waters of the little bay; on the south side was

the village, lying back a few hundred yards from the white beach, and almost hidden from view by groves of breadfruit and orange trees, and far back a waterfall—a thin, silvery thread—showed out clearly against the verdured mountain side.

One afternoon, as the sun was sloping westward, and the forest shadows were lengthening out across the unruffled surface of the bay, Denison and Sina Ross were lying in their hammocks under the awning on the after-deck. The ship was very quiet, for Grace, with the two mates, and most of the hands had gone on shore with the ship's seine to drag one of the mountain pools for fish, leaving only two or three men on board with Jack Castles (who was now boatswain) in charge.

“Of what are you thinking, Mr Denison?” asked Mrs Ross, as she turned in her hammock and looked at the supercargo, who was lying with his hands under his head, buried in thought.

“I was thinking, Mrs Ross, of this scoundrel of a white man Timi, as the natives call him, and trying to piece together what I was told when I was a child, of the man who shot my father in Tasmania. He was, as I have told you, named Tim—Tim Hogan—and had a broken nose and red hair, and soon after my

father's death it was rumoured that he had escaped from Tasmania in an American whale-ship."

"Ah!" and Sina Ross's dark eyes gleamed as she sat up and tossed back her jetty locks, "ah, you think it is the same man! I wonder if he is! If it is the man, then you have the greater right for *utu* than I, for although he killed my foster-brother and took away his head, he murdered your father cruelly—oh, I long for the time when my husband has finished with the pearling; for I mean to go with him and Norok when they burn that town."

"And so do I, Mrs Ross. If possible, I mean to see this man Timi, alive or dead, and satisfy myself as to whether he is the man who murdered my poor father."

"Ah, you must see him alive, Mr Denison," and the half-caste showed her white teeth, "you must see him alive, and find out if he is the man—then if he is, you can kill him yourself—oh, yes, take your *utu*."

"I could not do that in cold blood, Mrs Ross. If he is the man who killed my father, I should like to take him to Australia, and hand him over to the authorities, who——"

The Marquesan, with eyes aglow, slipped from her hammock, and came over to him.

"What good will that do you? *that* is not

revenge. Do you think if any one killed my husband that I would be satisfied to know that his murderer would be put to death by strangers! Ah, no, Mr Denison, I should kill him myself, even if I died for it."

And as Tom looked into her flashing eyes, he fully believed her.

CHAPTER XXVI

ONE gloriously bright morning, just as the rising sun began to dispel the fleecy sea mist, and the loud croo! croo! of the great red-crested pigeons sounded from the teak tree forest, Denison, Castles, Pohiri, and one of the Norok's men set out in Tom's own boat for a three days' cruise around the coast, intending to go as far as a town named Lâk, nearly forty miles to the eastward of Boudeuse Bay. Its chief was a very old man, who was a blood relation of Norok, and the latter assured Tom that he and his party would be treated with the greatest hospitality. The Lâk people, he said, were, like his own, at enmity with Varogi, whose territory lay between, and he warned Tom against keeping in too close to the land when sailing past that part of the coast belonging to Varogi.

"The wind might fail you," he said, "and although you have rifles which fire many shots quickly, Varogi's men could shoot you all from the forest, which is very thick, and which comes right down to the water's edge—so beware."

During the passage from Levuka, Castles had China-rigged Tom's boat, *i.e.*, fitted her mainsail with a dozen of bamboo laths running all the way across it, which had the effect of so flattening the sail that the little craft sailed much closer up into the wind, and when going about, she would spin round on her heel like a top.

The native who was accompanying them as pilot and interpreter was a nephew of Norok. He was a fine, stalwart young fellow of about twenty-five years of age, and had proudly informed Denison that he had taken the heads of seven of Varogi's people, had three wives, two slaves, and had made a voyage in a New Bedford whaler. He insisted on bringing with him his own arms—half-a-dozen slender spears pointed with obsidian, a club, and an obsidian dagger, and observed in a casual manner to Castles that on the way back he intended to try and purchase or abduct one of the Lâk girls for a fourth wife. If he failed at Lâk, no do doubt Tāmu (Denison) would let him try his luck at some small isolated village elsewhere on the coast; perhaps if he could not secure a girl handsome enough for a wife, he might capture a boy for a slave—possibly also he might be lucky enough to get the head of a grown man.

Denison laughed as Castles translated these

remarks to him, "What a thundering ruffian he is, Jack. He'll get us into trouble if we don't watch him. If he wants to do any wife-stealing he can go in his own craft, and not lead us into any mess."

Pāt, as the would-be abductor, head-searcher, and slave-seeker was named, looked disappointed when he was told that the boat was not bound on a wife-stealing trip, and would avoid Varogi's villages. However, he soon brightened up when Sina Ross presented him with a new pipe, two sticks of tobacco and a large box of wax matches.

"Why, Mr Denison," she said as she leant over the rail and looked down at the boat, "your boat is a little man-of-war—two rifles, two shot guns and spears, a club, and Pāt's glass dagger. Oh, I wish I had known you were going—I am sure my husband would let me come with you. I *shall* be dull until the boats come back."

"Why not take your gun and go pigeon-shooting up the mountain, Mrs Ross. Pāt says that now is the time, too, for the *manu mea*¹ in the banana plantations. Come, get

¹The *manu mea* (the "Red Bird" of Samoa) is, although now almost extinct in Samoa and Fiji, still fairly plentiful in New Britain and other islands to the N.W. It is a tooth-billed pigeon (*Didunculus Strigirostris*) and has the beak of a parrot, the upper mandible hooked, the lower deeply serrated. It feeds upon the wild yam, and also upon bananas and pineapples. It is

your gun, and we will put you on shore on the other side of the river."

"Ah, that is just the thing," said the lively Marquesan, and she tripped below, returning in a few minutes with her gun and game bag, and looking very charming in her white blouse, short blue skirt, and white Panama hat, which almost hid the dark oval face and black glossy locks.

Descending the gangway ladder, Mrs Ross seated herself beside Tom, the boat cast off, and was soon gliding gently over the smooth waters of the way, as yet only beginning to ripple to the first breaths of the trade wind. A run of a quarter of an hour, and she was run on to a soft beach of yellow sand, fringed by the usual forest of coconut and areca palms, through which a shady path led to Norok's banana and taro plantations. Some young girls who were seated on the beach making baskets, ran to meet Mrs Ross and begged her to let them come with her, for she was already a

about the size of a three-quarter grown hen pheasant ; plumage of head, neck, breast and back, of dark greenish black ; the sides, wings and lower parts of the body generally of a purple red ; the bill, reddish orange, with tips of pale yellow ; legs and feet a brilliant scarlet, the toes thick, coarse, and wide-spread like those of a turkey. The writer confesses with sorrow, that in his younger days, not knowing that the *manu mea* was a bird eagerly sought for by the scientific world, he has shot and eaten numbers of them ; others he kept as pets, and had them either stolen or devoured by cats.

great favourite, especially with the women and children, and they all soon disappeared among the trees.

Pushing off again, the boat was headed to the east and north, making a short leg and a long one against the now freshening breeze. In another hour, just after rounding a low, wooded point, Ross's pearling boats were sighted at work about a mile from the shore, with Norok's big canoe containing the covering party of armed natives standing by on guard.

After spending an hour with Ross, and watching the diving, Denison bade him good-bye, and then once more the smart little craft spun out to sea, beating to the eastward.

CHAPTER XXVII

TOWARDS four o'clock in the afternoon the boat had worked up to within ten miles of Lâk, and was abreast of Varogi's principal town, the houses of which could be seen. Two miles further to the eastward, there was, so Pât said, another and much smaller town, in which the white man Timi lived, and which could not be seen from the sea, as it was situated inland, on a spur of the mountain range facing to the south.

Towards sunset, the boat was put about, and was lying well up along the barrier reef when the wind became very light—a most unusual occurrence at that time of the year, and soon, much to Denison's disgust, it fell a dead calm, and the air grew hot and uncomfortable.

"I think we are going to have a bit of an *afa* (squall) from the eastward," said Castles. "Look," and he pointed to the eastern horizon, "it's blackening up much too fast for my liking. We had better reef down at once. It will be no joke if we get caught here with the

reef so close under our lee, and no opening to run for until we get abreast of Lâk passage."

"Why not let us down sail and pull back for a couple of miles, till we get abreast of Varogi's town," said Denison; "there is a passage through the reef there, and as it is now dark, no one will see us, and once we are inside the reef we shall be in smooth water, and can rip along up the coast."

But to this proposition Pât objected most strongly. There were certain to be some of Varogi's people out on the reef fishing, for the tide was on the ebb; and, as if to confirm his words, there suddenly flared out the lights of several torches, and in less than ten minutes there were several scores of them visible and moving about.

"They are men catching crayfish," said Pât, "and could not but see us, for they are walking along the reef on both sides of the passage." And then he added that even if the boat did get through unobserved, that the smooth water inside the reef was full of hidden dangers—detached coral reefs, and a great number of stone fish weirs, upon which the boat would certainly strike, for they were scattered about everywhere between the outer or barrier reef and the shore. And then he remarked in a very decided tone that he at any rate did not

mean to go into one of Varogi's ovens, and have his head put into a *gamal* house.

"Oh, well, it is no use talking," said Denison crossly, "down sail and mast, Castles, and let us pull out and get as good an offing as we can before the squall is down on us—as it is we are too close in to the breakers."

In a very few minutes the boat was heading due east, Castles and Denison pulling, and Pohiri steering. The sky was now of an intense blackness, not a single star was visible, and as the two men strained at the oars, and the little craft rose and fell over the heave of the sea, the perspiration poured from them.

"I should like to see it whiten a bit," remarked the half-caste, as he turned and looked ahead, "there's a lot of wind, and very little rain. Listen," and he stopped pulling, "by Jove, sir, we shall get it hot and no mistake. Listen to the hum of it."

There was no need to listen, for a curious droning sound could be distinctly heard.

"Up with the mast again, Mr Denison, and we'll give her just a couple of the laths only. Smart's the word, or we'll feel sorry."

Quickly stepping the light but strong mast, and hooking on and tautening the stays, Denison then went aft, and sent the native amidships to stand by and bail, and Castles hoisted the closely-reefed sail, and all four

anxiously awaited. Suddenly the whole firmament was ablaze, for one brief moment, with a network of chain lightning, then again the black pall of darkness enveloped them, and a breath of hot air smote their heated faces, and the boat heeled over to it.

“Hard up, hard up!” cried Castles, “let her run a bit until we get the hang of it” (he meant the direction of the squall), and in a few minutes the boat was racing over the long rolling swell, and their voices drowned in the angry roar of the wind.

“That’ll do, sir,” shouted Castles, “let her come up a bit. She’ll stand it, and we can lie along the reef without getting in any closer.”

Tom obeyed, and the boat heeled over, and then plunged and darted over a sea and into the trough beyond with a splash that half-smothered her.

“Watch her, sir, watch her!” roared the half-caste, as he and his companions were almost blinded by a quick succession of appalling lightning flashes, and Pāt threw himself on his face on the bottom boards, too terrified to again look up, and not troubling to attend to his bailing.

For nearly a quarter of an hour the boat flew along over the tops of the now fierce sea, shipping but little water, but straining and working in an alarming manner. Every now

and then the fearful lightning would for a moment reveal the wild swirl of seething billows, and Denison and Castles sat in anxious silence, hoping that the strength of the squall would soon pass.

Then came a savage gust that nearly capsized the boat, and a yell from Castles, as with one hand he let go the halliards, and with the other "downed" the bit of sail. He was too late. The weather stay had parted, and the mast snapped off at the thwart and went overboard.

CHAPTER XXVIII

As the mast and sail went over the side, Castles, a born sailor-man, cut the other stay and saved the boat from being overwhelmed by the seas, for the whole gear—mast and bamboo-lathed sail was soon floating ahead, and made an excellent sea-anchor, held to the boat's head by the steel wire forestay, which was, however, too short for her to ride at with safety.

Shouting to Denison and Pāt to keep aft and bail, the half-caste and Pohiri broke the ring of the stay with a hatchet, and then made the end of it fast to the painter and gradually payed out the lengthened line, with the result that the staunch little craft rode much more easily over the seas.

“Can you see anything of the reef?” called Castles to Tom, as he sat on the mast-thwart with his back turned, peering, or rather trying to peer, through the darkness at the sea-anchor line, fearful that it would part.

“No, but we cannot be more than a mile

away, I think ; but I can see nothing—not even any of the natives' torches now.”

“Oh, they will light up again, I daresay, as soon as the wind takes off. It can't last much longer—it came on too suddenly.”

Some anxious minutes passed, and then all four of them heard through the wild whistle of the wind the dulled thunder of the surf, and knew that despite the sea-anchor retarding their drifting very considerably, they would be among the breakers in another quarter of an hour, or less.

“Look!” cried Castles presently, “it is beginning to break to windward—I can see a few stars coming out. I have never known any of these black easterly squalls with no first rain to last more than an hour—sometimes not more than twenty minutes.” Then he asked Pāt his opinion, and the native replied that he was sure that the wind would die away very quickly, and most likely be followed by a heavy downpour of rain.

“All the better for us,” said Castles, “for if the wind and sea go down, and we have some more starlight, we ought to be able to get the boat somewhere over the reef. Those natives who are fishing must be a mile off, and cannot see us, and they'll have no chance at all of discovering the boat if the rain begins to fall. Now, this is what I think the four of us

should do, Mr Denison. Can you hear me speaking?"

"Yes, go ahead. I can hear you whispering something," shouted the supercargo, "and I can hear that beastly reef making a deuce of a row as well."

"Well, let us drift in as we are, until we get close enough to the surf. Then we'll get the mast and sail aboard, stow everything as well as we can, and stand by for a chance to get over the reef in front of a big sea. I and Pāt will come aft and steer, and you and Pohiri must pull your best—it is our only chance."

One by one the stars came out, and the violence of the squall rapidly decreased. Again the extinguished torches of the savages who were fishing on the reef were lit and began to move about, and Denison and Pohiri set to work, and secured every article of value not wanted in connection with the proposed attempt to get over the dreaded reef. The guns were rolled up in Castle's oilskin coat, parcelled quickly but strongly around with native cinnet cord, and lashed under the thwarts, so that if the boat was capsized, they at least would not be lost, unless the craft went to pieces. The European provisions—tinned meats, a 50-lb. tin of biscuits, and a 2-cwt. tierce of twist tobacco, intended as a present for the chief of Lâk, were dropped overboard, and the boat

lightened as much as possible. One small water-tight chest containing a few pounds of tobacco, matches, fishing tackle, and ammunition for the two rifles and two shot guns, was placed in the after locker, which itself was water-tight, as Tom knew by his former experience when he was blown out to sea from Sydney Harbour.

Nearer and nearer the gallant little craft, straining at her sea-anchor, stern-on, approached the howl and roar of the boiling surf, which was now plainly visible under the starlight. The black ledge of the reef itself—much to the satisfaction of Castles—could not be discerned, which showed that the tide was not very low, and that the boat, if “rushed” in, in front of a sea at the proper moment, would, if she did not broach-to, get over without striking or being capsized.

When within a few cable lengths of the backwash of the breakers, the boat was hauled up to her sea-anchor, the mast and sail taken inboard, and lashed fore and aft amidships, across the four thwarts.

“Steady now, sir, steady,” cried Castles to Tom and Pohiri, as they wore the boat round, “pull easy, very easy until I give you the word,” and then under the excitement of the moment he became “Jack Castles, the Recruiter,” and did not mince his words.

“Pull steady when I tell you. D’ye under-

stand? and don't turn your heads to see what is ahead of us—if you do, I'll smash you with the tiller. I'll do all the looking out ahead; but you two must watch astern and tell me when you think there is a bit of a lull.”

They were now so close to the wild boil of surf that Castles caught a glimpse of several jagged coral teeth, which were bared for a few seconds by the back-wash.

“Mr Denison,” he cried, “if we should touch on the edge, you and Pohiri jump out and hold on to the bows like grim death, or we'll be sucked over by the back-wash—I and Pāt will jump over astern to lighten her, and——”

“Now's our chance!” shouted Tom, who although listening to Castles was intently watching the seas astern, and then he and Pohiri put forth all their strength, as a long, heaving sea came sweeping after the boat. As her stern rose to it, and her bows went down, she sped forward like an arrow, and then with a wild yell of excitement and triumph from Pāt, was lifted high on the crest of the wave, as it burst with a thundering roar, and the boat shot forward like an arrow as it broke, and swept her, in the midst of seething foam, a hundred fathoms shorewards.

“Did it like a bird,” panted Castles, as the boat gradually lost her way, and then touched sandy bottom in smooth water.

CHAPTER XXIX

SCARCELY had the boat grounded, when rain began to fall—a heavy downpour, which drowned even the roar and clamour of the ever-restless surf, but it was very welcome to Denison and his companions, for it ensured their safety from observation.

“I think we all deserve a drink,” bawled Denison to Castles, as he opened one of the stern lockers, and pulled out a demijohn of rum and a tin pannikin.

“Aye, sir, it will do us good, but we must be quick and get the boat into deeper water, as the tide is falling fast, and it won’t do for us to be stranded for six hours. I think we had best all get out, and feel our way along—as soon as we have struck a light and had a look at the compass. Pāt says that there are channels between the reef and the mainland, but they are very tortuous and blocked in places by those cursed fish weirs. But close in to the land the water is deep, and clear of rocks or weirs, and we can

pull along the shore as hard as we like without fear of hitting anything."

After serving out the rum, Denison lit the boat lantern, covered it over with the sail, and placed the compass beside it. Then he cut up enough tobacco for all four men, filled and lighted pipes for his three companions in turn, passed them out, and then they all had a short smoke in the pouring rain with the bowls of their pipes turned upside down.

Castles, daring as he was, was yet always cautious, and before they started to wade with the boat through the darkness and blinding rain, he loaded the rifles and guns, and placed them on the thwarts, where they could be seized in a moment.

"We might run up against a fish weir with some of Varogi's people dragging it—now that the sky is clear—and the tide is low," he said, "and I, like Pāt, don't want to have my head put into one of Varogi's *gamal* houses, and my bones gnawed by cannibals."

For two hours they waded with, or pulled the boat through narrow channels, jumping in when the water deepened, and getting out when it shallowed; their course lightened at intervals when the rain ceased and the stars shone out, but always keenly on the alert. Once only did they see the blaze of torches on a fish weir on the star-board hand, less than a quarter of a mile distant,

and heard the shouts of the fishermen as they, beating the water with canoe paddles, drove their prey into the long, narrow and curved *cul-de-sac* at the sea end of the weir.

“You have never killed a man yet, Mr Denison,” said Castles, as the boat was brought to at the foot of a high, densely-wooded bluff, where they rested for a few minutes, and again filled their pipes, “and I hope you won’t have to make a beginning here; but, to tell you the exact truth, I think we may find ourselves in a tight place when daylight comes. I don’t see how we can possibly get clear of this part of the coast before sunrise, and get to the country bossed by the old chief of Lâk. It must be quite seven miles to the boundary and we can’t feel our way along much further—the tide will be dead low in a couple of hours. We must try and find a hiding place before dawn—somewhere where we can hide the boat and lie low ourselves until it is dark again.” Then he spoke to Pât—asking him a question, and the native made him an answer that was evidently satisfactory, for they conversed rapidly for some minutes, and Denison several times heard the native use the word *baran-o* (alligators), and wondered what alligators had to do with the situation. Then Castles explained.

“I asked him if there was any place along the shore where the tree branches overhung the

water, so that we could get the boat under them. He says no, but that a mile or so away there is a creek running out through a belt of mangroves. There is a bar of rocks at the mouth, but even at dead-low tide there is enough water on it to float the boat. Once over the bar, he says, we shall be as right as rain, for the creek takes a sharp turn to the left, and the belt of mangroves outside quite hides it from the sea. But he doesn't like the idea of our going there, and says that even Varogi's people always keep clear of it, as it is full of alligators, and that the mosquitoes will eat us alive."

"Better to chance the *baran-o* and the mosquitoes than run the risk of being cut off by some of Varogi's amiable gentry."

"Just so. Let us push on, and get there as soon as we can."

Once more they set out on their tedious course, winding their way through shallow, narrow channels, bumping up against coral "mushrooms," dragging the boat over the hated fish weirs, and then suddenly dropping into deep water, and clambering on board again, only to find a few minutes later their progress barred by a sand-bank or bed of rotten coral left bare by the tide. At last, however, the rain ceased, and the whole sky was lit up by the stars, and they were able to

make much more rapid progress; and all uttered an exclamation of satisfaction when the low, dark line of mangroves came in sight.

“We must not get out of the boat again now, if we can help it,” said Castles. “Pāt says that all about here the place swarms with alligators—short, ugly black devils like those on Santa Anna in the Solomons. If it were daytime we could see them lying around on the mud-banks, or swimming about in the channels.”

Clambering into the boat, they felt their way along, “poling” her with the oars, striking every now and then upon a sand or mud-bank, and having to push off again.

At last, however, after nearly three hours' exhausting toil, they succeeded in crossing over the bar of rocks, entering the creek, and mooring the boat to a tree trunk, which stood up in the black, evil-smelling water.

CHAPTER XXX

THE long night wore out at last, and at dawn the four voyagers stood up and stretched their weary, aching limbs. In addition to the discomfort of the cramped positions they had had to assume, all of them had suffered tortures from the myriads of mosquitoes which had assailed them throughout the night, and which showed no disposition to abate their venomous fury with the coming of daylight.

"We can't stand any more of this, Castles," said the leader, as he felt his swollen face, and then looked at his hands, which had lost their deep tan, and were now more of a purple hue; "we'll be blind in another hour."

Unmooring the boat, they went up-stream, poling with the oars, for the creek was very narrow. After proceeding half a mile, and seeing nothing but the hideous, mud-covered forms of scores of alligators lying on the banks, they came to a bar of rocks—or rather a cataract—above which the water was fresh and clear, the tide ascending only as far

as the bar. Here the air was much cooler, and the mosquitoes not at all troublesome, so the boat was brought in to the bank, and they stepped out, wet, hungry, and tired, and, before even thinking of breakfast, laved their swollen faces in the sweet, cool water as it rippled over its gravelly bed to lose its purity in the foul, mangrove-banked, alligator-haunted pool below.

Although not daring to light a fire to make coffee, they yet made an excellent breakfast of tinned beef and biscuit, with rum and water instead of tea or coffee, Castles urging his companions not to drink the water alone, pure as it looked.

“When I was in the labour trade in the Solomon Islands our skipper would not let us drink the river water,” he observed; “you stand every chance of getting a dose of fever—that is why the natives seldom drink anything but rain water caught in old canoes and coconuts. I daresay if we have a look about, we’ll find a coconut grove somewhere—once we get out of this thick jungle of heavy timber.”

The next few hours were spent in taking everything out of the boat and drying whatever had been wetted, the arms examined, and the shortened mast deftly repaired by Pāt stepping the broken end into a thick piece of green

bamboo, cut from a clump he had discovered growing a little further up-stream.

Then, although Pāt assured Denison and Castles that there were no natives anywhere in the immediate vicinity—except on the shore—and that the boat was quite safe where she was, they decided to take her back among the mangroves and leave her there, till nearly dark. The country on the left bank, so Pāt said, consisted—away from the creek—of fairly open forest country, with here and there small groves of coconuts and areca palms. There, he said, they could rest for the day, or climbing up the side of the range, could get a view of the coast, east and west, for many miles, and see if any of Varogi's canoes were about, fishing within the reef.

His suggestion was quickly adopted—the boat taken back, and moored to the bank in deep water, and then, with Pāt as guide, they started off inland. Denison and Castles had their rifles, Pohiri a shot gun, and a tomahawk, and Pāt his own weapons.

The morning, although extremely hot, was beautifully bright, and the sun shone from a sky of matchless blue as they emerged from the dark jungle shades into more open country, and felt a cool breeze upon their heated faces. The ascent of the mountain was, although somewhat steep, not difficult, for, crossing a

space of open grassy country covered with clumps of wild banana trees, Pāt, after a little searching, found a disused path, which wound up the mountain side. It was in many places overgrown with vines and creepers, and had evidently not been trodden upon by human feet for many years.

“There was once,” he said, “a village up there on the top of the mountain. Varogi built it for a stronghold, and when I was but a lad, Norok and two hundred of our people surprised it in the night and killed all in it. He marched only at night time, and was three days passing through the forest and fell upon the village just before dawn, when all the people were asleep. Only very few escaped; and, after that, Varogi would let no one live there again, although Norok did not burn all the houses. Shall we go and look at it?” Then he added that in some of the deserted plantations they would be sure to find plenty of ripe bananas and pine-apples which they could take to the boat.

This was an inducement, as they were now short of provisions, and did not know how long they might be in getting to friendly Lāk, so they told Pāt to “go ahead.”

An hour’s climb brought them to the deserted village, which was built on the flattened summit of one of the mountain spurs, and was almost

hidden from view by a number of huge banyan trees. Many of the houses had been burnt, but there were still half a dozen standing, surrounded by the usual lines of many-hued crotons. The place was very silent, save for the rustling leaves overhead, and seemed utterly devoid of bird or animal life. Far below were the green waters between the shore and the white waving line of surf upon the barrier reef; beyond, the deep blue of the ocean; and Pāt pointed out quite a fleet of canoes scattered about, either fishing, or proceeding on voyages along the coast, which, he said, were all manned by Varogi's people. Lāk, owing to the configuration of the land, could not be seen from where they stood.

Presently Pohiri discerned, a quarter of a mile away, a grove of mountain banana trees, and went off to get a bunch of the fruit, Pāt remaining with the white men, engaged in fashioning a wooden spade to dig some yams to take to the boat. The three had clambered to the top of a square platform of stone about ten feet in height, and which was directly under the wide-spreading branches of a great banyan tree. It was nearly twenty feet square, and on it had once stood, so Pāt said, the chiefs' "rest-house," which had been burnt by Norok when he surprised the village. A thick layer of leaves had fallen upon it in the course of years, and

whilst Denison and Castle stretched themselves out upon it to await Pohiri's return, their savage companion squatted beside them and shaped his paddle. Yielding to fatigue, and to the delightfully cool breeze, the two white men were soon asleep, and their example was so contagious that Pāt, after his rude spade was finished, lay down near them.

An hour had passed ; Pohiri had not returned, and the three still slumbered. Then came the murmur of distant voices, and Pāt awoke with a start and listened intently, then, turning on his stomach, crawled to the edge of the platform and peered down toward the valley. In an instant he crept over to Castles and Denison, and aroused them in hurried whispers.

“Lie still, keep quiet! There are many people coming up the hill from the valley. I can hear their voices—and they are Varogi's men!”

CHAPTER XXXI

“WHERE is Pohiri?” whispered Castles to Pāt, as they lay flat upon the soft leaves.

“I know not. He should have been here long since,” replied the native, “see, the sun is towards the west.”

Denison looked at his watch. “We have been asleep for an hour and a quarter; Pohiri ought to have been back half an hour ago. I hope the poor fellow has not been killed.”

“I think he is all right,” said Castles, “I daresay he saw or heard these people coming, and has hidden.” Then he questioned Pāt, who replied that he was sure their shipmate was in hiding somewhere. “If these people who are coming had seen him, I should have heard their shouts; but they are coming up the path talking very quietly. Listen—some of them are singing. We shall see them very soon. Look, look! Here they come! It is a war party, with Timi the white man leading.”

The half-caste and Denison put their hands on their rifles, but Pāt in a fierce whisper told them to keep quiet.

“They do not seek us,” he said emphatically, “for they know not we are here. See, some of them carry baskets of food. They have come here to eat and rest a while on their way to Varogi’s town. Let us wait as we are—they will not stay long. We are safe; for they have no dogs with them—else we should be quickly smelled out, and our heads taken.”

Marching up the steep path in double file, and led by the “white man” Timi, at whom Denison and Castles looked with horror and disgust—and Pāt with envy—came two hundred savages, all fully armed. Some of them carried baskets of cooked food, such as baked pork, pigeons, fish and yams and taro. They halted at the bidding of their leader, who, taking a seat upon the fallen post of a house, proceeded to cut up some tobacco and fill his pipe, whilst his followers, laying down their arms, proceeded to open the baskets of food, and spread the contents upon the ground.

The “white man,” who was attended by two young men, who waited upon him in a most servile manner, sat directly facing Denison and his companions, and was not more than twenty yards distant from the platform—so close that Denison and his watching companions could hear every word he uttered in his deep, growling tones, and as he turned his face to speak to one of his savage attendants, Denison, as his hand

gripped his rifle, muttered, "that is the man, Castles! That is the man who murdered my father—he is Tim Hogan!"

"Steady, sir, steady, for God's sake, and keep quiet," muttered the half-caste, as he gripped Tom's rifle by the barrel, and near the muzzle, "if you shoot him now we shall all be wiped out. Listen, he is going to speak."

The renegade had taken his pipe from his lips, and stretched out his bare right arm.

"Eat, my children, my head-seekers. The way is long, Varogi awaits us, and we must not delay here. After ye have eaten, I will speak. But first bring to me he who has whispered that the *mana*¹ of Timi hath weakened because I was wounded when I tried to take the little ship."

"He means when he tried to cut off Captain Ross's cutter," whispered Castles.

Two natives sprang to their feet, and placed their hands on the shoulder of an elderly man, who was seated on the ground opening a basket of food. He rose quietly, and came with them, and stood before the dreaded Timi, who eyed him with a cold, but savage ferocity.

"He is Ga—one of Timi's fathers-in-law," whispered Pat to Castles.

The old man, who was fully accoutred as a warrior, stood calmly before his son-in-law. He knew what was coming.

¹ *Mana* has many meanings; in this case it meant prestige.

“Ga, my father, you have spoken foolishly of me, and I have let thee live many moons because of the women-folk who will miss thee. But they shall be told that thou wast killed in battle. For this alone have I let thee come so far with me.” Then, motioning to the doomed man to come nearer, he took up a musket which was handed to him by one of his attendants, and, without rising from his seat, shot the old man through the heart.

“Take him away quickly, and give me to eat,” he cried savagely to his followers; “we have no time to lose. Is there any other man who thinketh that the *mana* of Timi hath decayed? If so, let him come before me, and we shall try it out by spear or club. I am old; but my *mana* is strong.”

No one dared answer the tyrant, who after a scowling glance at his followers, tossed aside the musket, and drawing a basket of food to him, began to eat, and as Tom watched him, he wondered how any white man could sink so low, and present such a terrifying and degrading appearance.

With the exception of a thick girdle of coloured grasses which descended from his waist to his knees, the man was as naked as his savage companions, and his hair, which was long, was twisted into innumerable little ringlets, greased and powdered over with sandal-wood dust in the

style of the natives of New Britain; they fell around his face and down upon his shoulders like a mat of twisted tow; his brawny arms, which like the rest of his body were tanned by the sun to the hue of old leather, were adorned with the usual heavy armlets of white shell, and his repellent appearance generally was accentuated by the scarlet lips and blackened teeth of the habitual betelnut chewer. Slung across his shoulders by a broad leather strap was a short carbine, and in a belt around his waist, were two ivory-handled Colt's revolvers—taken by him from the murdered captain of the sandalwooding brig which he and Varogi had cut off five years before.

Presently he motioned to one of his attendants to give him a young coconut to drink. He drank, and then as he threw away the empty shell, said something that brought forth a chorus of laughter from his followers—all anxious to please the great man.

“What did he say?” asked Castles of Pāt.

“He says that ere many days have passed he and those with him will be drinking *rom*¹ instead of coconuts or water.”

His meal finished, Timi smoked his pipe for a few minutes, then placed it in his girdle of grass and began to speak, his followers crouching around him and listening with eager, savage

¹ Rum

interest, and Pāt and Castles caught every word that was uttered, though the latter did not understand all of the speech, which occupied only a few minutes.

As he concluded, the savages uttered a loud peculiar cry—a quivering, yet hoarse *Ah-h-h-h-e!* and then each man sprang to his feet, seized his weapons, and with the white man leading, marched swiftly away in the direction of Varogi's town.

Then Pāt, his eyes rolling with excitement, quickly explained to Castles in detail all that had been said, and he translated to Tom.

“By heavens, Mr Denison! it is lucky we came here! Varogi and Timi have planned to cut off the ship, and murder every one on board, except Mrs Ross, who Timi means to keep for a wife!”

CHAPTER XXXII

“It seems, sir,” said the half-caste, “that since the barque anchored, Varogi and the white man have been sending messengers to each other, and a week ago Timi told his people to get their arms and canoes in readiness, as he had great work in hand. He would not tell them what it was, but yesterday he picked out two hundred of his best men, and told them that they were to come with him overland to Varogi’s town, and that on the way there he would explain to them what was the work in store for them. The reason he would not do so before was that there are some slave women in the village, who belong to Norok’s town, and he was afraid that any one of them, if she heard what was afoot, would make her escape into the bush, and give Norok warning—hullo, what is that?” and he broke off abruptly, “I hear some one coming. Down flat, sir.”

All three threw themselves upon the bed of leaves, and listened, and then to their great joy they heard a low whistle. It was Pohiri, who

was searching for them. He had, he told them, seen the war party approaching, and hidden himself until they had passed. Carefully following, he had watched Timi and his followers ascend the path to the abandoned village, seen them eating, and then depart.

“Here, Pohiri—wait a moment, Castles—take a pull at this,” and Tom handed the Niuéan a bottle of mixed rum and water, “you look as if you wanted a drink. Now, go on, Castles.”

“Well, sir, before Timi and his crowd, which were here just now, left their town, he gave orders for another two hundred men to start to-night in canoes for Varogi’s place, and join him there. The reason for this is that although there are plenty of canoes to carry four hundred men, Timi thought that, as there are signs of bad weather, he had better take half of his infernal cannibals overland, in case the whole crowd had to turn back, and Varogi be disappointed. If there is bad weather, the canoes are not to start until it is fine, as they will have to go outside the reef on account of the tides.”

“Tell me, Castles—how does Timi know anything about Mrs Ross being on board? Ask Pāt.”

Pāt replied that he had no doubt but that Timi knew exactly the number of people on board the barque, how they were armed, and much else; all this he would learn through

some of Norok's slave women—captives. It was easy, he said, for these women to meet one of Varogi's spies outside the town at night. A few days after Ross had begun his pearling operations, one of these women had escaped, and she would certainly have given Timi and Varogi much information, especially as to how the barque was moored.

“We must get back at once, sir,” said Castles, “even if we have to fight our way. It is now flood tide, and there is a stiff breeze. If any of Timi's, or Varogi's canoes try to intercept us, they will have their work cut out, for our boat can certainly outsail them in any kind of a breeze, and if it did fall a calm, and we had to fight, our long range of rifles should pull us through, as they have nothing but smooth-bore muskets—and only a few at that. Norok told me that when the sandal-wooding brig was cut off, Varogi and Timi divided all the arms on board between them—forty muskets, and about twenty cutlasses. But we must remember that these Admiralty Islanders are about the pluckiest natives in the Pacific. Ten years ago, a fleet of a hundred canoes attacked a little but well-armed barque named the *Fawn*, off the west end of the island, and although her big guns smashed half-a-dozen of them, the rest came on, laid alongside, and their crews tried to board again and again. Thirty or so of

them did get over the bulwarks, and fought like tigers, and although they were only armed with clubs and daggers, they killed seven of the barque's hands before they were wiped out. I heard that the skipper killed nearly a dozen at one shot from a whaler's bomb gun loaded with slugs, and only then did they draw off, after having lost nearly fifty men."

"Well, they will have a tough job if they tackle the *Meg*," said Tom, "and although we carry no big guns, there are at least four whaler's bomb guns on board. Captain Grace brought them from Liverpool to sell, but we did not meet with any whaleships, and no one in Levuka wanted them. Now, let us start."

Fāt, highly elated at the prospect of a fight, again led the way, and an hour before sunset they had reached the boat, taken her over the bar, and were spinning along before a strong breeze, heading for the passage through the barrier reef. They saw several canoes inside the reef, engaged in fishing, but no attempt was made to intercept them. But that they were seen from the shore was soon made evident by numerous signal fires, the smoke of which could be seen arising from the many small villages along the coast.

Once outside the roaring line of the barrier reef the boat was kept away on a direct course for Noān—the town where Norok lived. There

was such a stiff breeze that Tom felt certain Ross would not be out with his divers, for there was too much of a swell on the pearling beds for any diving to be done.

As night fell, the breeze lost its strength, but the boat still made great progress, and Tom felt a thrill of pride when Pohiri asked him to let him steer the *Sabbie*.

“Such a boat as this was never before built,” said the Niucan, speaking in Samoan, “she riseth to the seas and skimmeth over them as does a *katafa* (frigate bird) when he catches a flying-fish in flight.”

Then as they sped on their course, under the starlit heavens, Pāt told them tales of the deeds — or rather misdeeds — of his people, their head-huntings, their former cannibalism, their cuttings off and massacring of the crews of sandal-wood and whaling ships; and then Pohiri spoke of his own island, which was known as “Savage Island,” because Tuti (Captain Cook) had thrice been repulsed in his attempts to land and make friends with the people.

“But my land,” he said, “though not so great as thine, Pāt, is a much better country, except that in it there are no streams of sweet fresh water. But it is rich, very rich in food — and never have we eaten human

flesh," and he bent over the gunwale and spat in disgust.

The wind had almost died away when as the boat came near the *Meg Merrilies*, they were hailed by the anchor watch.

"Where are Captain Grace, and Captain Ross?" asked Tom, as he stepped on deck.

"Below, sir, playing euchre with Mrs Ross and the mate."

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE euchre party broke up very suddenly when Tom and Castles entered the cabin, and told their story, and Pāt was at once sent on shore to tell Norok the news, and ask him to come on board.

He came quickly, late as it was, and he, Grace, and Ross were soon in earnest consultation as to the means to be adopted, not only to defend the ship, but to inflict a crushing defeat upon Varogi and his ally, Timi.

Ross, always quiet and imperturbable, said but little until towards the end of the discussion; then he turned to Castles, who was present as interpreter, and asked him when Norok thought the attack would be made.

“In three or four days,” replied the chief; “but it may be longer.” Varogi, he explained, would be sure to await the arrival of Timi’s fleet of canoes, and he, Norok, was sure that bad weather was coming on, that it would last for several days, and that no attempt to attack the barque would be made if there was any wind,

for the canoes could not range alongside without getting into confusion. But," he added, "it may be that there will be no wind and much rain some night, and that is the time when we must keep good watch, as the night dies and dawn comes, for the rain hides everything, and makes a great noise, and the canoes could creep up to the ship without being seen or heard."

Ross nodded. "He is quite right about the weather, Captain Grace, we are going to have a change pretty soon, of that I'm certain. Now Castles," and he turned to the half-caste, "I have a mighty high respect for Norok, and want you to tell him so before I ask him a rather delicate question."

Castles translated, and the chief's grim features relaxed into a smile at Ross's complimentary remarks. "What does Rossi (Ross) desire to ask me?" he enquired.

"I want him to tell me if he will lend us the six brass cannons that were taken from the American whaleship, which his people cut off here thirty years ago, when he had his elbow smashed with a pistol bullet. Tell him that I know he has those guns stowed away somewhere, and if he wants to see Varogi and his crowd wiped out, he must lend them to us."

As Castles translated Ross's remarks, the chief's eyes opened in astonishment. He wondered how Ross knew anything about the

brass guns, which for thirty years had lain in one of the *gamal* houses. As a matter of fact, all that Ross knew was that when the whaleship was cut off and her crew massacred by Norok's people, her guns were taken on shore.

"Yes," he said, "I have the guns, but only four. The two others sank with the ship when we burned her; we had not time to take them away. But the four you shall have. They are buried under one of my *gamal* houses, and shall be dug up in the morning. But I have no powder for them, and only ten cannon balls were brought on shore; those are in my own house."

"Tell him that I don't think I shall want the cannon balls," said Ross to Castles, "but he must get his men to carry the guns over to the point at the east side of the bay. Then I'll have them cleaned and mounted in some sort of fashion. Varogi's canoes will have to come in so close to the point to get into the bay that they will be within thirty yards of the muzzles of the guns. But I mean to let them pass in and tackle the ship first, then when Captain Grace has given them a doing with the four bomb guns and his crew's breechloaders, I'll be ready for them when they try to get out of the trap I am setting for them."

Castles explained this to Norok, whose eyes gleamed with the anticipative lust of slaughter,

and then as he rose to return on shore, he asked Sina Ross, who was seated at the after end of the cabin, listening to the discussion, if she would not leave the ship in the morning and stay in his house, where she would be away from the fighting. She thanked him and replied with a smile that she was not afraid, and would stay with her husband, either on board the ship, or at the place where the guns were to be mounted.

“Ah,” said the chief admiringly, “I forgot. Thou canst use a gun and shoot straight like him.” Both Ross and his young wife were excellent shots.

After breakfast on the following morning, Ross, Grace, Denison, and the barque's carpenter, went on shore to look at the guns, which Norok had had dug up in readiness for their removal to the point commanding the entrance to the little bay. Their long burial had done them no harm, and Ross smiled grimly when the carpenter said he would mount all four on rough carriages by sunset if he had some assistance (the former carriages had long since gone to decay).

Whilst the carpenter returned on board for his tool-chest, and some heavy pieces of timber, Norok's natives, under Ross's supervision, lifted the guns and put them in a position for cleaning, this work being undertaken by Castles, Pohiri, and two white seamen.

“Now,” said Ross in his slow, drawling tones to Grace and Tom, “come with me and I’ll show you where the guns are to be mounted. Ha! ‘Lo, the poor Injun,’ is coming too, I see. Well, I guess I can instruct his untutored mind some on the subject of how to get even with Varogi.”

He pointed to Norok, who was coming towards them followed by several of his young men, who were carrying the ten round shot taken with the guns from the unfortunate whaleship.

“Tell him, Castles,” he said to the half-caste, “that, after all, they (the shot) may come in handy, so they can carry them over to the point with us. But if Norok will come on board with us presently I will initiate him into the art of making case shot from broken bolts, nuts, and washers.”

Norok was deeply interested, and informed Ross that he had seen both case and chain shot when he was a lad—shown to him by the captain of a Singapore sandal-wooding ship. Then he gave the white men an important piece of information. Immediately on his returning on shore the previous evening he had had all his women-slaves who were in any way suspected of being friendly to Varogi, seized and placed in strict confinement. He had done this on his own initiative, knowing

that they would certainly see (or hear about) the guns being dug up, and would perhaps communicate with Varogi. "I thought at first," he remarked, "that it would be best to kill them all; but knew that you white men do not like women being killed."

Ross slapped him on his shoulder. "You are a genius, Norok. I never thought about the slave-women. Can you make this clear to him, Castles?"

CHAPTER XXXIV

By noon of the next day the four guns were in position. They were placed on their carriages at the extreme end of the point, and commanded the passage, which was so narrow that the barque had been kedged through it to her moorings inside the bay. On the opposite side to the point—which was covered with a low, dense scrub—was a wall of solid reef, the top of which, even at high tide, was four or five feet above sea-level. This wall, which rose steep-to from its base, formed a perfect and natural breakwater from the sweeping seas of the barrier reef, and extended from the west side of the entrance, right along to the land, gradually decreasing in height as it joined the shore.

The distance between the end of the reef at the passage, and the muzzles of the guns, was less than seventy yards, and old Captain Grace shuddered at the thought of case shot being fired at crowded canoes that would have to pass within thirty or forty yards of the guns,

some of them even closer, if they came in abreast. And although he had declined to let any of his own crew join in the attack Ross had meditated making upon Varogi's village, before the barque sailed for Sydney, it was a different matter from defending his ship from capture—for capture meant that every soul on board would be ruthlessly slaughtered—and so he now took a keen and active interest in the preparations that were being made.

The complement of the barque, exclusive of Ross and his ten divers, was fifteen—Grace, the two mates, Tom, the carpenter, boatswain, and nine A.B's; the latter, all steady reliable men, though several of them were unused to handling firearms. In addition to the Sharp's breech-loading rifles that were for the ship's use, there was also a case of twelve breech-loading pin-fire shot-guns—cheap Belgian-made weapons, intended for sale to natives for pigeon-shooting. These guns Grace had been unable to sell, either in Samoa or Fiji—much to his present satisfaction, for they would certainly inflict greater losses at a short range upon a boarding party than the rifles. Two of the whaler's bomb guns he mounted, or rather slung in the mizzen rigging, just above the rail, and two on the topgallant forecastle. For these, and for the big guns on shore, there was an ample supply of ammunition; for the former there was a keg

of buckshot—for in the Arctic seas, and especially on the Alaskan coast, when the sea salmon are in season, the whalers frequently fire a charge of buckshot from a bomb-gun into the swarming masses of fish, killing hundreds at one shot.

Ross had been busy preparing his case-shot, cutting up rod-iron into inch lengths, and packing the pieces tightly in 1-lb. salmon tins, which just fitted the bore of the guns. In this work he was eagerly assisted by Norok and his admiring natives. The chief had also made separate preparations of his own, of which Ross had greatly approved. All along the west side of the little bay, and especially about the masked battery huge torches of dry coconut leaves had been placed in readiness to be lit at a signal to be given by him.

“I think,” said Ross that day at dinner, “that this will be the last time that any of the natives of this island—on the north side at any rate—will attempt to cut off a ship.”

In the evening, Mrs Ross, Tom, Grace and Pāt, went on shore and took a walk along the beach in front of the battery; so carefully was it masked by shrubs and tree branches that it was impossible to discover it from the beach. At intervals of ten yards or so was one of the great torches before mentioned, each carefully covered with matting to protect it from rain.

Turning inland, Pāt led the way along a narrow path which practically encircled the entire village and its plantations, and found it guarded by a close cordon of sentries, who kept watch day and night; for although Norok did not fear an attack in his rear, he was very apprehensive of spies penetrating to the village during some rainy or stormy night. His orders were that if any strangers were seen they were to be taken—dead or alive.

Entering the village, they were received by Norok, who insisted on their partaking of food, and then witnessing a wild dance of his young men. Then bidding him good-night, they returned on board and turned in.

Just as seven bells struck, Tom heard rain falling, and went on deck, where he found Owens, the Welsh mate, keeping watch, with four hands. All were in their oilskins, for the awnings—fore and aft—had been taken down during the day, Grace fearing that they might take fire during the coming fight—if they were dry, and a piece of burning wadding should fall upon the canvas.

“Well, Mr Tenison,” said Owens, an old ex-man-of-war’s man who never seemed to sleep, “here is the rain at last, and a ferry good thing it is too, for the sooner these damdt savages show up the petter it will be for all of us, so that we can have the whole thing over, and go

about our proper business. I hope that Captain Ross will not make a mess of things—that is all.”

“I hope not,” was the soothing reply, for Denison knew that the worthy mate felt affronted with Ross, who had declined his offer to assist him with the guns, saying that although he knew that Owens knew more about working guns than he did, it would not be right to deprive Captain Grace of his executive officer. (Ross had really a great respect for Owens, whom he knew had many years’ experience in the Navy on the China station, where he had seen some fighting with pirates.)

Presently Grace and Ross came up from below, and stood in the companion, smoking their pipes, and watching the steady downpour.

“Old Norok is a true weather prophet,” remarked Ross, “he said that if rain came on to-night from the eastward, it would come about midnight, kill the wind, and continue for two or three days without ceasing, though during the mornings it would be very light. It is just the weather that Varogi and that cut-throat Hogan want, and I daresay we shall have the pleasure of their company by daylight the day after to-morrow.”

Then he added that Norok had advised him to send away the diving boat as usual in the morning. She would be sure to be seen by

Varogi, who would be satisfied that no one on board the ship, nor Norok, had any suspicions of his intentions—else the divers would not have been sent out to their daily toil.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE diving boat, attended by Norok's covering canoe, left as usual at six in the morning, although the rain was still falling heavily, and the green mountain forest was enshrouded in a thick, heavy mist. About ten o'clock, however, it cleared slightly, and the sun came out for an hour or so, and Tom, Mrs Ross, and the second mate were just leaving the barque in the dinghy to shoot some fish for dinner with dynamite, when a messenger arrived from Norok, requesting Captain Grace, Tom, and Castles, to come on shore quickly, as he had news for them. They at once started, and on landing were met by Pāt, who told them with a proud smile that he and a companion had succeeded in taking a prisoner—one of Varogi's warriors, who, with two others, they had surprised in the forest that morning at daylight, near the boundary, whilst they were raiding one of Norok's mountain banana plantations. Two of them they killed and decapitated, the other they wounded and took prisoner.

On reaching Norok's house, they found him there with the prisoner, seated on the matted floor. The man had been speared through the thigh, and was sitting up against one of the house posts, eating baked fish and taro, and hardly crediting Norok's assurances that he would not be killed.

Through Castles, Norok told Captain Grace that the prisoner, as he lay on the ground, and was about to be decapitated by Pāt, cried out that if he would spare his life, he would tell Norok of something—of a very great danger that was impending over his town and the white men on the ship under his protection.

“I am the son of Ga,” he said, “and the brother of my sister,¹ who is one of the wives of Timi; because my father said that the *mana* of Timi was growing weak, Timi shot him dead before me. Take me to Norok, and I shall tell him great news; for I fear that the ghost of my father will visit me unless I take revenge for him upon Timi.”²

The prisoner was brought in to Norok, who asked him what he had to say.

“This—to-night Varogi and Timi, with all

¹ It is the custom among many of the Melanesian peoples for a brother never to mention a sister by name after her marriage.

² The natives of Admiralty Island, like those of the Santa Cruz Group, firmly believe in seeing visions of dead relatives or friends, who come to remind them of some dereliction of duty; to neglect the warning would mean death.

their fighting men leave Varogi's town in canoes to seize the ship, and kill all on board." Then he went on to say that they intended to attack at daylight on the following morning.

After a brief consultation with Norok, it was decided to send a canoe out to Ross with the news, so that he could return earlier than usual, and Denison and Grace went back to the ship, taking with them the prisoner, as Norok hinted to Castles, that although he had promised to spare his life, he, Norok, would not be responsible for anything that might happen to the man in his absence; so on reaching the barque Castles locked him up in the sail locker, and told him that he would be freed in a day or two, and allowed to return to his own country.

Two hours before sunset, Ross and his party returned, and reported that one of Varogi's canoes had put off from the shore to see if the divers were at work as usual, and had then returned.

The night wore on quietly, rain falling steadily through the darkness. Norok, who remained on board till past midnight, was in an almost uncontrollable state of excitement, quivering for the coming fight. The enemy, he said, were now well on their way down the coast, as the prisoner had told him that Varogi and Timi had everything in readiness to start immediately it became dark. It was probable, he added, that

before the fleet of canoes entered the passage into the bay, Varogi, with a hundred of his best men, would land at a spot about two miles distant from the point, march through the bush, and surprise and burn Noān at the same moment that Timi attacked the barque. Timi and Varogi, he said, were discussing this matter when he and his two companions set out on the adventure which had terminated so fatally, but he was almost certain that Varogi would attack the village, as he (the prisoner) had seen a number of women engaged in making small torches from the spathes of the coconut tree. They were to be used in firing the houses by thrusting them under the eaves, where the thatch of pandanus leaves would be both thick and dry, being protected from the rain.

In view of this, Norok decided to change his plans. He had intended to have remained on board with a hundred or so of his best men to assist Grace, whilst the rest of his forces would man their canoes, and cut off any of the enemy who succeeded in escaping out of the bay. He therefore determined to remain on shore with most of his men, and cut off Varogi and his landing party, leaving only twenty men with Grace, and one hundred, with ten canoes, near the battery; these, the moment the last of Varogi's fleet had passed in through the passage, were to launch their canoes and block the egress

of any of the enemy who tried to escape by water. Forty out of these hundred men were armed with muskets, which Ross had personally loaded with heavy charges of buckshot.

Slowly the hours passed by. On board the barque everything was in readiness. No lights were visible on deck, but in the closed galley there were a dozen ship lanterns lit in case they were wanted, and in the silent cabin the swinging lamp was burning brightly; on the table were some bottles of spirits and glasses.

"Tom," said Grace, looking at the clock in the companion, "it is just three bells. Take half a dozen of our hands, and half of Norok's men below, and tell the steward to give them each half a tumblerful of grog; then I'll follow with Mr Owens and the rest."

Silently the seamen and the natives followed the supercargo below, eagerly drank their grog, and then returned on deck.

"Off with your oilskins, men," said Grace. "you can handle your guns better," and then he and the mates and the remainder of the crew and natives descended into the cabin.

The barque was now lying with her stern towards the entrance of the bay, and so close in to the shore that the end of her jibboom touched the lower branches of a teak tree, and there was only about ten feet of water separating her on the starboard side from the shore, Grace and

Ross having altered her moorings so that she could only be assailed on one side.

On shore, at the masked battery, Ross, his wife, and the ten native seamen were sitting crouched under rude shelters of banana leaves spread over light frameworks of stick. Near by were the guns, loaded with case, and covered over with mats. Under one of the shelters, and carefully protected with a tarpaulin so that its reflection could not be seen, was a small, bright fire, in which were two of the ship's pokers, tended by a watchful Manahikian—one of the divers.

The rain had ceased, and many stars had come out, when one of Norok's men ran silently in among them panting.

"They are coming, Rossi. We can hear their paddles!"

The American threw away his cigar, and sprang to his feet. "Stand by, boys, but don't cast off the mat housings until I give the word. Sina, keep back."

CHAPTER XXXVI

THERE was a faint flush of red tinging the eastern horizon, as Ross, peering over the breastwork of the battery, discerned the advancing canoes; they were about five hundred yards distant, and approaching the passage very rapidly four abreast. As he watched, a second messenger arrived—this time from Norok—saying that Varogi had landed, and was leading his men into the trap, and that he (Norok) only awaited the sound of the first shot to fall upon them.

Nearer and nearer came the canoes, four abreast, and urged along silently but swiftly by the crowded natives, their paddle blades plunging into and withdrawing from the water in perfect unison. Quickly in the semi-darkness they passed the battery, and then bore a little to port, as the four leading canoes caught sight of the barque, lying so quietly before them, with the ends of her fore and main yards almost touching the branches of the giant teak tree, and as Timi and his savages swept forward, Ross and his men threw aside the

branches and shrubs that covered the guns, and waited. They had not to wait long.

Suddenly the leading canoes formed into single line, the second followed, and then all eight made a rush at the dark bulk of the barque, and as they came alongside, two blue-lights flared, a line of fire burst from the bulwarks, and a crashing volley of musketry awakened the mountain echoes, followed by a cheer from the ship, and yells and screams of agony.

“Light up, light up!” shouted Ross, and, as one of the huge torches blazed forth, there came the sound of the bomb guns and the crashing of wood, mingled with dreadful cries, as the hapless wretches in the first eight canoes fell dead or dying amid the wreckage of their craft. As the glare from the battery torch lit up the dark water, Norok’s ten canoes shot out from the beach, and then the whole of the shore burst into light, and revealed more clearly the fierce struggle centred round the *Meg Merrilies*.

Standing by the guns, Ross’s swarthy-faced natives watched the attack with bated breath, waiting for their turn to fire.

“Not yet, not yet,” cried Ross, “our turn will be when they are coming back. Ah, look at that!”

Castles and the carpenter, who were on the

top-gallant fore-castle, had reloaded their bomb guns, and fired together at two fresh canoes, which, ploughing their way through the wreckage of the first eight, had shot alongside, unheeding the fire from the rifles—the murderous hail of buckshot took the leading canoe fore and aft, and killed or wounded almost every one of the twenty savages who manned her.

But undaunted by the slaughter, the second canoe, and then half a dozen others in her wake, swept up, their crews yelling defiance, as casting aside their paddles, they seized their weapons, and tried madly to board, only to fall back dead or dying into the blood-stained water, or upon the wreckage of their canoes. From the shore behind the battery came the sound of musketry, as daylight enabled Norok and his men to pursue their work of slaughter upon the landing party, and the whole air was filled with demoniacal cries, as the clamour from the barque was answered by savage cries of triumph from the shore, mingled with the screams of terrified women and children.

Three separate times did these valorous savages try to gain a footing on the barque, the canoes clustering around her like bees. Two, manned by over forty men, made a dash at her bows, and in a few seconds two-thirds of them had clambered up on the top-gallant

forecastle, armed only with clubs and daggers ; and Castles, the carpenter, two white seamen, and some of Norok's men were hurled below upon the fore deck, where the poor carpenter and two sailors were quickly slaughtered, and Castles, as he rose, was felled by a blow on the head, dealt him by a youthful warrior of about eighteen years of age, who, however, was shot dead the next moment by the second mate, who, with several other men, had rushed forward to beat back the boarders. They, however, fought with such insensate fury that before they were all killed or driven over the side, the steward was badly wounded, and four of the Noān people killed.

Then, crowded with wounded men, the rest of the canoes suddenly drew off, gave up the fight, and turned seaward to escape, but quickly brought to again, when they saw their way barred by the ten canoes awaiting them in the passage. Their indecision, however, lasted but a few moments, for, with three of the largest canoes leading, they made a rush for the entrance, and then from the now unmasked battery there came two bursts of smoke and flame, and the sharp, crashing bang of two of the brass guns, and a hail of case shot ploughed through the naked bodies of the unfortunate natives, smashing the canoes to fragments, and stinging the water into a seething foam.

Grace covered his face with his hand, and turned away, sick at heart and shuddering.

“Horrible, horrible—it is sheer, useless butchery,” he cried; “Owens, and you, Peters, put down your rifles—this sickens me! Take away the guns of these infernal savages of ours and drive the brutes on shore.”

As the mate, Denison, and Pohiri ran along the deck, calling out to the white seamen and their savage allies to cease firing, they heard the two other guns thunder out their messages of death, and the cries of agony from the water were drowned in a long, exultant *Ah-h-h-e!* from Norok’s people in the waiting canoes.

Fourteen only out of the entire invading fleet of canoes succeeded in getting past the battery without being hit when the guns opened upon them a second time; and of these six were cut off by Norok’s people. The remainder, with their crews too exhausted to paddle more than a mile or so, in order to escape their relentless pursuers, were run on shore, and the savages took to the bush, hiding in the jungle until nightfall.

An hour after the din of the combat had ceased, and the crew of the barque were endeavouring to remove the dreadful traces from her once spotlessly white decks, Ross

and his wife came on board. They found Grace and Denison in the cabin, talking in low tones. The old captain, as he held out his hand to the American, could scarcely speak, and his face looked white and haggard.

CHAPTER XXXVII

WITH a trembling voice, the master of the barque asked Tom to call the two mates and Castles, and as the three men came below, he motioned to the half-caste to bring some liquor.

"Well, it is all over," said Ross, as he poured out some brandy for Grace, then passed the decanter to the mate and the others.

"Yes, thank God," said Grace, "but please don't say anything more about it just now. I daresay I'll feel all right presently. Don't hurry on deck, Mr Owens. I'll see to the ship awhile," and the old man left the cabin, too upset to discuss the subject of the fight with Ross.

Castles, whose head was bound up, soon followed him with the two mates, and then Mrs Ross went to her own cabin to lie down.

"Denison," said Ross, "I have come on board to tell you that we have Mr Tim Hogan on shore."

Tom sprang up from his seat. "Alive?"

"Yes—just about, and that's all. He may

live through the day, but I doubt it. He was found lying among the scrub just abreast of the ship. I had him carried to a house in the town, where one of my men is with him. Do you want to see him?"

"Oh, yes, indeed I do—I should like to know for certain if he really is Tim Hogan. Can he speak?"

"Yes, but he's so badly wounded that I don't think he will be able to say much. He told me that he was in the leading canoe, and when the ship opened fire, he was almost the first man to fall, and tumbled overboard. When he came to the surface, he found that his right thigh was broken near the hip, and as he was trying to swim round under the stern, he was hit again in the back. He held on to the rudder for awhile, and then managed to swim the few yards between the ship and the shore, and crawl into the low bush under the big trees, where two of my natives found him—if they had been Norok's beauties Mr Timi's head would now be the admiration of the intelligent populace of Noān. As it was, we had trouble in getting him into the village, when he was recognised. Some of the young bucks wanted to take him away from us, but as I had taken Timi's two Colts, and looked ugly at them, they sheered off, but followed us to a house, and are waiting outside to see what is going to

happen. I told them that if any one of them so much as put his head inside the door whilst I was away, I should know how to deal with him. Oh, bring some brandy for the poor wretch. He asked for it."

Walking through the crowd of silent, armed natives who were gathered outside the house, and who stepped quickly aside to let them pass, Tom and Ross entered the house, and the latter motioned to the seaman who was guarding the wounded man to stand at the door.

The once-dreaded Timi lay upon the cane-work floor, his body, from his bared chest down to his feet, covered with a coarse mat, and his head resting upon a bamboo pillow; beside him was a gourd of water. His eyes were closed, and for a few moments Ross and Tom stood over him in silence, thinking that he slept, and unwilling to disturb him. He moved, opened his eyes, and then with calm indifference, looked steadily at his visitors.

Ross, pouring out some brandy into a glass which Denison held, knelt beside the renegade, raised his head from the bamboo pillow, and told him to drink. He eagerly swallowed the liquor, and then lay back again upon the pillow. Then he spoke.

"What are those — niggers doing outside?" he said, in his hoarse, growling tones,

unsoftened even when death was so near; "are you going to let the swine take my head?"

"No—not if I can help it," was the contemptuous reply, "you are *my* prisoner. But if you were not a dying man, you would now be swinging from the end of the barque's main-yard."

The man made no answer, and then he looked at Tom, who was regarding him intently.

"Well, young fellow," he growled, "what the —— are you looking at?"

"At *you*, Tim Hogan," was the quiet answer.

"Ah," and his fierce eyes glared at the supercargo as, with a great effort, he sat up, "ah, who are you?"

"I am the son of the man you murdered."

"What man?"

"My name is Denison," said Tom, slowly, "do you remember it?"

Something like fear crept into the wild eyes, and the clenched hands trembled. Hogan breathed heavily for a moment, then sank back again.

"Well, now is your chance to get even with me," he said, "that chap at the door will lend you his rifle. Come, hurry up—and don't stand looking at me."

"I am not a murderer, Tim Hogan. I could have shot you days ago, when you were within

a dozen yards of me, and when you murdered your wife's father in cold blood."

"You were there!" and the ex-convict's eyes blazed.

"I was there, as I said, not a dozen yards from you, and saw and heard all you did and said. And, the moment I saw you, I was almost certain that you were the man who killed my poor father—who was always kind to the convicts."

"Timi" closed his eyes for a few moments. "I am sorry I did it," he muttered. Then he signed to Ross to give him some more brandy.

Ross looked at Tom, who took the glass, half filled it with brandy, and was about to add water from the gourd, when Hogan stayed him.

"Don't put any water in it—give it to me neat."

Again Ross raised him, and this time it was Tom who held the glass to the cruel mouth.

"Thanks, young fellow," he said in softer tones. "Look here, I'm done for—and—and I'm sorry for what I did at 'Huon Bank.'"

Tom made no answer, beyond an inclination of his head, as he turned his face away, rose, and stepped outside into the blazing sunlight, followed by Ross.

Telling the seaman who was guarding the door to fire his rifle if any of the waiting natives tried to get into the place, Ross, with

Tom, then sought out Norok, who was in his own house waiting to receive them. He told them that in the fight with the landing party he had only lost ten men, but that Varogi's party had been almost annihilated, only a score or so of them succeeding in escaping. Varogi himself had been killed by a spear thrust, and the chief was anxious for Ross and Tom to come and see his head, but Ross spat in disgust, and sternly told him that white men did not like such sights.

Returning on board the barque, they found that Grace was just about to tow her further in up the bay, for the water all round was alive with sharks, and the spectacle was so horrifying that even Ross's native divers shuddered as they manned the boat and took the ship in tow.

At sunset Norok sent off word that "Timi" was dead and buried.

"Old Norok has been mighty smart in burying him," remarked Ross to Captain Grace. "I guess that Mr Timothy Hogan is shorter by a head than when Denison and I saw him this morning."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

FOR six weeks after the fight, Ross continued to work the pearl beds with very satisfactory results; then the rainy and stormy season set in, and as nothing could be done during the four months it would last, the barque was made ready for sea again.

The four brass guns had been brought on board, mounted on the main deck, and gun ports cut in the bulwarks. Norok had presented them to Grace, together with an enormous quantity of yams, and as many pigs and as much poultry as there was room for on the decks. Furthermore, he had promised Ross that he would guard the pearl-shell beds most carefully should any other ship attempt to work them during the six months that he (Ross) expected to be away.

A few days before the barque sailed, the survivors of Varogi's expedition, with their wives and children, came to Noān, made their submission to Norok, and begged him to spare their lives. He, satisfied at the terrible

slaughter that had been inflicted upon them, and anxious to please Ross and Grace, who pleaded for mercy to be shown to his enemies, graciously permitted them to live; and, being an astute old savage, quickly provided a number of his young unmarried men with wives from the female prisoners.

Early one Sunday morning the barque lifted anchor, and stood out of the little bay, accompanied by a fleet of canoes. Norok and Pāt remained on board until the last moment, and the savage old warrior actually wept when he bade Ross good-bye, imploring him to come back as soon as possible; for he now had the most intense admiration for the American, and was really sincere in his expressions of regard.

As soon as the ship was outside, she brought to, still surrounded by canoes filled with clamorous natives, all yelling out their farewells, and then, to please the old chief, the four guns were fired in a parting salute, and every native stood up and waved his paddle in acknowledgment, as the *Meg Merrilies* filled again, and stood away to the westward before a steady breeze.

By sunset she had rounded the western end of the great island, and then to the delight of Grace and every one else on board, the north-westerly "season" set in—short, sharp squalls accompanied by rain—and a course was set to pass between New Ireland and New Britain.

All that night the squalls continued, and by daylight a steady half-gale was blowing, and the barque was leaping along before it at twelve knots, under fore- and main-courses, and topgallant sails. Four days later, she was sweeping through the smooth water of St George's Channel, between New Ireland and New Britain, the wind still blowing with steady force, and the barque now carrying more sail. The Channel — which that gallant old freebooter and navigator, Dampier, "prince of nautical description," when he passed through it in 1705, described in one of his private letters, as "the Devil's own tortuous water-way, full of tide rips and currents and counter currents, with fierce, unlooked-for squalls howling down from the land between the gloomy valleys that split up the savage mountain-sides — a place where, when the wind falls at night, and the ship is turned round and round like a spun top by the roaring eddies, the blue heaven above turns black, and changes into a vaulted hell of chain lightning as fine as a spider's web covering the whole firmament, and reaching down to the sea-rim, staying thus for an hour or more . . . with corposants hissing out their dreadful light, as they travelled to and fro along the yards."

From the "Devil's Own Waterway," Grace steered an S.S.E. course for the Huon Islands,

off the north-west end of New Caledonia; and Tom, as the old skipper spread out his chart, and he saw the words "Huon Islands," wondered at the coincidence of names—"Huon Islands" and "Huon Bank," and his thoughts went back to that sad night when he and Sabbie were brought in to bid farewell to their dying mother, cut down at the threshold of her home by Tim Hogan's fellow criminal.

Day after day the *Meg Merrilies* spun along before the brave and lusty north-west breeze, under a sky of cloudless blue by day and star-spangled by night, and Tom and Sina Ross, who were now sworn "comrades" would often remain on deck the entire night, talking of all they would do when they came to Sydney.

"Tom," said the pretty Marquesan, "do you think your sister Sabbie will like me? Ah, I hope she will! Your aunt, I am sure, will not, especially if she should find out that I smoke cigarettes all day. And I want to meet Carmen Herrera and that nice old clergyman who has the fat laugh; and I want to go to a theatre, and to all sorts of places, and to dress like English girls dress, so that my husband will not feel ashamed of me."

"He is very proud of you, Mrs Ross, and so he ought to be, for you are very beautiful," said Tom frankly.

"Ah, it is kind of you to say that! I am

glad that you think I am pretty," and then in the most artless and innocent manner she asked, "Am I as pretty as little Carmen?"

"Quite," was the prompt reply.

Sina clapped her hands delightedly—in some things she was but a child—"I am so glad, Tom. I am very vain, because my husband says the same thing; sometimes I have thought that perhaps he only told me I was pretty to please me. Tom, your Carmen and I are going to be *taio*,¹ as we Marquesans say. And Tom," she added, as she laughingly pinched his ear, "perhaps, when you marry Carmen——"

Tom made a bolt for'ard, but the lively girl caught him on the main deck—"When you marry Carmen Herrera, some time within the next five years, I mean to be at the wedding, for my husband says that he means to settle in Sydney."

Tom laughed. "It is very kind of you to promise to come to my wedding, but I am going to be a real downright bachelor with Sabbie to keep house for me—not in Sydney, but somewhere in the South Seas, Rapa, perhaps, or else Samoa." Then he added, slyly, "I think, as Captain Ross does, that no one whose business lies in the South Seas should marry at all."

"Ah, but it is different when the wife sails

¹ Close friends.

with the husband, and keeps him out of mischief," was the quick reply.

Tom made good use of his time during the voyage; from Grace he daily had an hour or two hours' lesson in navigation, and the Welsh mate and Ross taught him much practical seamanship, and then in the evenings he and Sina Ross studied Samoan and Nuiéan under Jack Castles and Pohiri.

One calm afternoon, just before sunset, and when the barque was becalmed off Middleton Reef—midway between New Caledonia and Sydney—Tom went aloft with Captain Grace's glasses to get a better view of a spot made notorious by the many shipwrecks that had occurred there. Seating himself on the foreyard, he adjusted his glasses, and began to scan the long, curving line of foaming breakers, which, forming an almost perfect circle, enclosed a lagoon of great dimensions. The sun being against his vision, he could not at first obtain a clear view, but when he did, he gave a shout.

"Come up here, Captain Grace! There is a vessel either lying at anchor outside the reef, or drifting. Her foremast is gone."

The old captain and Ross both ran aloft, and a brief scrutiny showed them that the vessel was drifting. Her foremast was gone about four feet from the deck, and she had also lost her jibboom, and no boats were visible.

“She’s drifting in upon the reef, and will be in the breakers in another hour,” said Ross.

Grace hailed the deck. “Lower and man the two boats, Mr Owens, there’s a ship drifting ashore on the reef over there.”

In ten minutes the two boats—one manned by five of Ross’s natives, and the other by five of the barque’s white seamen—were pulling swiftly towards the drifting vessel. Tom went with Ross in his boat, the other was in charge of the second mate.

Half an hour’s pull brought them alongside the derelict, a new vessel of about three hundred tons. Her decks had evidently been swept by a terrific sea, or seas, for most of the bulwarks were gone, as well as the galley and the for’ard deck house; the cabin and forecastle had been flooded, and the water, escaping through the bulkheads, gone into the hold.

“This is a bit of luck, Tom, for Captain Grace,” said Ross; “what there is under hatches I don’t know, but I *do* know that we have picked up a brand new vessel which is worth about four thousand pounds—dismantled and half a wreck as she is. Now the first thing to do is to tow her into soundings and anchor. Her ground tackle is all right.”

The two boats soon towed the vessel into a bight of the reef, where, in ten fathoms of water, her anchor was let go, and she rode in safety.

One boat, with the second mate, was then sent back to the barque for Captain Grace, and as night came on he was alongside, having left the *Meg Merrilies* in charge of Owens, with instructions to tow her in, and anchor near the derelict, if possible at once.

Grace brought with him half a dozen ship lanterns, and he, Ross, and Denison made a thorough examination of the cabin, found the vessel's papers in the captain's sea chest, and learned that the derelict was the brigantine *Cassie Revel*, of Sydney, bound to Nouméa (New Caledonia) with a cargo of general merchandise of the value of seven thousand pounds.

"Tom, my hearty," cried old Grace, "do you know what this means? Salvage money, my son, thumping, big, salvage money! Ten thousand pound's worth is in this ship, and we shall get two-thirds of it! And Tom, as you sighted her first, you shall chip in with me and Captain Ross, and share even with us."

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE night was calm and fine throughout, and at daylight the barque also was brought to an anchor, and immediate preparations made to rig a jury-mast for the *Cassie Revel*, for there were several spare spars on the larger vessel. All that day work was continued with unabated vigour under the supervision of the two captains; the weather was all that could be desired for the task, and there was but a very little swell coming into the bight in which the two vessels were anchored. In addition to the jury-mast there were other repairs to be effected, notably replacing the wheel (which was hopelessly smashed) by a tiller; then came the work of overhauling the stores, and much else that was absolutely necessary for the voyage of six hundred miles to Sydney.

On the afternoon of the sixth day, the brigantine was ready, and Ross, who was to sail her, went on board with his native seamen, and lifted her anchor whilst Grace stood by with a boat's crew ready to tow her clear of the reef,

for the wind was light, and the currents very tricky. With the boat towing, and the jury-foresail filled, the brigantine sailed slowly past the barque; and then the boat cast off, and the crew gave Ross a cheer, which was responded to by his swarthy seamen. Then, as the smaller vessel went slowly on ahead, the barque weighed anchor and followed under her fore- and main-courses only, so as not to outsail her crippled companion.

As night came on, the wind, to the delight of every one on both ships, came away from the north-east and settled into a fine steady breeze, and at ten o'clock, in answer to Grace's signal of inquiry, Ross replied "five knots."

Early in the morning, Tom, who was sleeping on deck as usual, was roused by Jack Castles, who asked him if he would care to board the brigantine, which was only a quarter of a mile distant and abreast of the barque—Ross had signalled to Grace to send him some carpenter's tools, and some planking, as he meant to employ his spare time in building a new galley. The timber and tools were soon put into one of the barque's quarter boats, and in a few minutes Tom and Castles were on board, and having coffee with Ross and his wife; a temporary galley having been made by housing in one side of the deck under the topgallant forecastle with a tarpaulin. Ross was greatly pleased with the brigantine,

and said that he meant to give her some more fore-and-aft canvas during the day ; she already had her mainsail set.

“ A thumping big staysail will give her nearly another two knots with the wind abaft the beam as it is now—and as I think it means to stay for another week or so.”

Tom remained with the American and his wife for an hour, the boat with two hands in her towing astern. Then he bade them good-bye.

“ You’ll miss your afternoon tea to-day, Mrs Ross,” he said to her as he was getting over the side.

“ Shall I indeed, Mr Supercargo ? At eight bells, if you care to look over this way, you will see me drinking it as usual. Perhaps some day, if you are nice and civil, I will ask you to come on board and have tea with me ; a proper tea, not horrid stuff boiled in the cook’s coppers.”

“ All right. When you signal ‘ tea,’ I and Castles will put the *Sabbie* over the side and pay you a visit.”

Scarcely a day passed that the two vessels were not close together, and it was evident that the *Cassie Révé*, had she been fully rigged, would have outsailed the barque, smart as was the latter, especially when on a wind. The brigantine had been built at Auckland, New

Zealand, and launched from a yard famous for the fast, kauri-built fore-and-aft and square-rigged vessels, of from a hundred to three hundred tons, that it had turned out.

Nine days after leaving Middleton Reef, and when the two vessels were lying becalmed at midday, half-way between Lord Howe Island and Sydney, the smoke of a steamer was seen to the northward, and in a few hours she was in sight, steering a direct course for the *Cassie Revél*, which was about three miles distant from the barque.

“Ah,” said Grace to Tom and the mate, “that fellow scents salvage. Lower away the port whaler, Mr Owens, and I’ll get away to Captain Ross. We’ll be alongside of him long before the steamer.”

As the mate called the hands to lower and man the boat, Grace turned to his supercargo.

“Tom, that steamer is pretty sure to be bound to Sydney. Now wouldn’t you like to pack up your gear and get a passage? He will be there in another forty or fifty hours—we may be a week.”

“No, I won’t. As I told you before, Captain Grace, I am not going to leave the *Meg* until I hear the cable rattling through the hawse-pipe, then I’ll get ashore in a hurry. But as there is plenty of time, I can at least scribble a few lines to my people, and ask the steamer captain to

send or post the letter to my aunt. By this time she can't be very much alarmed about me."

Again the old skipper was pleased at Tom's determination not to leave the *Meg Merrilies*.

"Right you are, Tom. Now write your letter, and we'll be aboard of the brigantine and hear what the steamboat skipper has to say to Ross. I daresay he thinks that there is five hundred pounds or more hanging on to a tow."

The distance between the barque and brigantine was soon covered, and Ross and Grace decided not to accept any offer of towage now that they were so near to Sydney, and the brigantine sailed so well under her jury-rig.

The steamer stopped her engines when within a short distance of the *Cassie Revel*, and Ross, Grace, and Denison, boarded her, and were welcomed by the captain, who told them that his steamer was the *Phæbe*, a Sydney collier returning from Nouméa with a cargo of chrome ore and nickel; and then he offered to tow the *Cassie Revel* to Sydney for four hundred pounds. He knew all about her, and was aware that she carried a valuable cargo.

Ross laughed. "I guess not, Captain. We have paddled along in a bully old style from Middleton Reef, and I'll take my chances of getting inside Sydney Heads within the next week or so."

"Well, I'll do it for two hundred and fifty,"

said the collier skipper. "Come now, skipper, give me a chance to do a bit for myself, and it's not worth your while running the risk of losing your ship for the sake of a bit of towing money. Now, look here, hang me if I don't pull in for two hundred pounds. Come, it's a deal."

Both Grace and Ross laughed heartily at his persistency, and assured him that they really meant to work the *Cassie Revel* into Port Jackson under her jury-rig. The worthy captain's face fell, and then he came down to one hundred and fifty pounds, "which means I'll practically take you in for almost nothing," he pleaded.

"We wouldn't object to paying you three hundred pounds to tow the vessel into port," said Grace, "but the fact is that we are in no hurry for a few days, and I don't feel justified in spending money unnecessarily. If I thought that there was bad weather coming on, it would be a different matter. But if you are willing to take a letter for me to Sydney and burn a few extra tons of coal, I'll give you fifty pounds. Tom, where is your letter?"

"What are you doing, Captain Grace?" began Tom.

"Just hand me that letter and sit quiet. This young man, Captain," and he turned to the master of the *Phæbe*, "is Mr Denison, who was taken away by the *Warrigal*."

“Holy frost!” shouted the collier captain, as he jumped up from his seat, seized Tom’s hand, and shook it vigorously again and again. “I *am* glad to see you. You’ll have a regular reception when you get to Sydney. I knew Jim Christie, and I’m not a bit sorry that he got even with that old shark, Tobias Pattermore. Here, steward, show a leg and bring us something to drink,” and he again shook hands with Tom, thumped him on the back violently, and told him that Thoreau and some of the crew and all the passengers of the *Aztec City* had reached Sydney safely, and that Miss Denison had been interviewed by “the newspaper fellows,” and had told them the contents of Tom’s letters.

Old Grace presently drew him aside, and gave him Tom’s letter to his aunt, together with fifty sovereigns.

“Look here, captain, I’ll take the letter for nothing. I don’t want to be paid for doing a simple thing like that; towing and salvage is a different matter, and I have a family.”

“You take the fifty pounds, Captain Foster, and give it to the old woman—and I daresay that Miss Denison won’t be backward in coming forward, when you take her her nephew’s letter. You can tell her that I wanted him to leave the barque and take a passage with you, but he wouldn’t do it—he signed on with me as supercargo in Samoa, and I couldn’t kick him

out of the ship now—he won't leave until our mud hook is down in Sydney Harbour."

Highly delighted at getting fifty pounds for simply carrying a letter, the fat little skipper of the *Phæbe* could scarcely contain himself, as he bade his visitors good-bye.

"Mr Denison," he said, "as soon as the *Phæbe* is abreast of Sirius Cove, I'll send a boat ashore with your letter. And then after I have been to the Customs, I'll go and see your aunt—if it costs me two quid for a waterman. Good-bye, gentlemen all. In ten minutes you'll see the *Phæbe* shaking her old carcass under a full head of steam, and bounding along like a dog with a tin pot tied to his tail."

CHAPTER XL

DURING the night, the pleasant weather that the two vessels had met with all the way from Middleton Reef changed, and by daylight both were running before a strong easterly breeze amidst a cold, sleety rain. As the day wore on, the wind became lighter, but the rain heavier, and the vessels lost sight of each other, and Grace began to feel somewhat anxious about "the prize," as the brigantine was now called. At midnight, however, the rain ceased, the stars came out, and the barque hove-to until the morning, as nothing could be seen of her consort; but soon after breakfast she was discovered, hull down, and by noon was within hailing distance of the barque, and then both ships kept on their S.-W. course, making from three to four knots an hour; and from this time forward close company was kept.

On the evening of the fourth day after the *Phæbe* had been spoken, the outer light on Sydney South Head was sighted, twenty miles distant, and the vessels hove-to again until

daylight, no one caring to turn-in, for every one on board both the barque and the "prize" were too excited to sleep. All sail was made at dawn, and at breakfast-time, and when Sydney Heads were within ten miles, the vessels were discerned by two or three prowling tugs, and speedily taken in tow. Off Watson's Bay they were boarded by the health officer, who greeted Tom very warmly, for he knew his story, and had also heard of his being on board the *Meg Merrilies* from the collier skipper. There being no sickness on either vessel, both were allowed to proceed, and an hour later they were safely anchored off Sirius Cove, not a mile from the "Crows' Nest."

But long before the barque's cable rattled out through her hawse-pipes, Tom, Castles and Pohiri had hoisted out the *Sabbie*—resplendent in all the glory of a new coat of varnish inside and out—and let her tow alongside.

The moment the barque swung to her anchor Tom went aft.

"Good-bye for the present, Captain Grace—I'm off on shore. See, there are the chimneys of the 'Crows' Nest' over there among the trees—and hullo! look, some one has hoisted the ensign old Captain Ryder gave me; I do believe they know this is the *Meg* with the prize! Now, remember, captain, you have to rush your shore business over in Sydney, then go to

Dawes' Point, and tell Captain and Mrs Herrera I am back, and bring them over with you to dinner at the 'Crows' Nest.' If you fail to be there with them at five o'clock, I'll talk to you. I'm not a supercargo now—not until to-morrow morning."

The old man laughed, said he would not fail, and asked Tom if he would like Jack Castles to pull him ashore.

"Ah, indeed I should, but I didn't like to ask you." Then he went to the break of the poop, and called the half-caste.

"On with your shore-going duds, boatswain. The captain says you can come on shore with me. Hurry up, man."

"Aye, aye, sir," and Castles dived into the deck-house.

As Tom was impatiently pacing the after-deck, the pilot came up to him, "I'm very sorry, Mr Denison, but I forgot to tell you that there is a letter for you with Miss Denison from Captain Thoreau. He went to sea two days ago, in command of the brig *Au Revoir*, bound for the Solomon Islands, on a trading voyage. I took him out, and the last thing he and Mrs Thoreau said to me as I was leaving the brig outside the Heads, was to tell you that they were sorry they had to leave without seeing you." Then, much to Tom's pleasure, he added that not only had Mrs Thoreau been to see Miss

Denison, but that stately lady had actually visited the *Au Revoir*, with Sabbie and Carmen Herrera, to bid Mrs Thoreau good-bye.

“My aunt must be getting inclined to be giddy, Captain Grace,” said Tom, “just fancy her making friends with an ex-actress! I once heard her tell Canon Cooper that she would rather be burnt at the stake than go to a theatre.”

Castles shot out of the deck-house, “I’m ready, sir.”

Over the side they went into the boat, and cast off the painter, then with Castles pulling, and Tom steering, passed under the stern of the *Cassie Revel*, and saw Sina Ross standing on the poop with her husband.

“Don’t you dare to take Mrs Ross into Sydney with you to-day, captain,” bawled Tom, standing up with his hand on the tiller, “after I have been wept over, and have changed my wet clothes, I am coming back for her, and you’ll find her at the ‘Crows’ Nest’ when you and Captain Grace come back from Sydney.”

The handsome, grey-haired American lifted his hat. “Guess I’ll be on hand, Tom. It is real kind of you to think of my wife; she let me into the secret just now, when I wanted her to come on shore with me.”

“And, Tom, do try and get your sister to come with you,” cried Mrs Ross, who really felt nervous at meeting the dignified Miss

Denison without the presence and company of Tom's sister, who, she felt, would be a power of strength to her—she had indeed once told Tom that when she met and spoke to his aunt she should take refuge in French, which she spoke much better than English.

“Of course Sabbie will come with me,” shouted back Tom reassuredly, “I'm going to show her all over the prize.”

Castles, equally as excited as Tom, sent the *Sabbie* flying over the water towards the little stone jetty at the head of the cove, and as they approached it Tom saw a procession—a rather undignified one—hurrying down the steep path to meet the boat.

First came his sister Sabbie, Carmen Herrera, and the stable-boy, all panting with excitement; after them Mrs Potter, the housekeeper, arrayed in her best, and gasping; then some twenty or thirty men and boys of all ages from the surrounding district of St Leonard's, who had heard that Miss Denison's nephew Tom had come back, and were anxious to welcome him home, and then Miss Denison herself, “supported” by the gardener, who was evidently slightly intoxicated; and, bringing up the rear, were the two chambermaids of the “Crows' Nest,” and the sergeant of police from St Leonard's, who was mounted, and had galloped over from the police station to tell

Miss Denison that the *Meg Merrilies* and the prize had entered the Heads, and were coming up the harbour.

Before Tom could jump out of the boat, Sabbie and Carmen Herrera tumbled in, and all three, together with Jack Castles, were, for some moments, involved in apparently inextricable confusion, and the boat nearly stove in. Then Tom freed himself, kissed the two joyously-weeping girls as hard and as quickly as he could for a minute or so, and then jumped on shore, and made a bee-line for Miss Denison.

“Tom, you have come back a man,” said the now very undignified spinster, as she laughing and blushing, was lifted off her feet by her nephew, who carried her unresisting up the path, “let me down at once, you disgraceful young person.”

“Indeed I shall not, Aunt Christina. I am just going to carry you all the way up to the crest of the hill; then, perhaps, I may let you down, just for the sake of appearances—yours, not mine.”

Once inside the house alone with her now dearly-loved nephew, Miss Denison became the tender-hearted woman, and wept copiously as Tom hurriedly gave her a brief outline of all that had passed since that wild night on which he had been swept out to sea, down to the present time.

"Now, Aunt," he concluded, "I am sure you will be glad to meet old Captain Grace and Captain Ross, and Mrs Ross, won't you?"

"Indeed I shall, Tom—very, very glad to meet any one who has been kind to you; but oh, Tom," and she began to weep again, "I know what it all means. You will not be at home with me long, and now that love for you and Sabbie and Carmen has filled this old maid's heart of mine, I shall miss you sadly. Now, go away, Tom, for Mrs Ross, and take Sabbie and Carmen with you. But to-morrow, no matter if Captain Grace *does* grumble, you are not to be 'Mr Denison, supercargo,' and go off with him to Sydney—you are to stay at home with me, and be the 'boy' Tom—the boy whose crusty old Aunt Christina never knew how much she loved, until she had lost him."

"Never crusty, Aunt Christina—only sometimes mighty stiff, as you had reason to be—with such a scapegrace as me."

With her hand on his shoulder, the stately old lady walked to the hall door with him, where they found Sabbie and Carmen eagerly listening to Jack Castles' story of his and Tom's adventures.

"Here, Sabbie and Carmen—here is your wanderer. Ah, how do you, Mr Castles?" I am so pleased to see you again. Now, Tom,

don't stay away too long ; but come back quickly with Mrs Ross, but at the same time not too quickly, for I hope that she will stay here at the 'Crows' Nest,' and Mrs Potter and I will get ready a room for her."

"Tom," said Sabbie, as he, Carmen, herself, and Jack Castles hurried down the steep, narrow path to the boat, "Aunt Christina isn't a woman now. She has turned into an angel—a perfect angel—ever since that awful night. Hasn't she, Carmen?"

Sina Ross, looking very beautiful, awaited them on the after-deck of the "prize," and came forward with sparkling eyes and outstretched hands to meet the two girls.

"Mrs Ross," said Tom, as the young Marquesan freed herself from his sister's loving embrace, "you need not be afraid now of meeting my aunt. She has turned into a ground angel—so Sabbie says."

"*Vraiment*, Tom?" she said smilingly.

"She has, indeed, Mrs Ross. And she is now quite content that I shall be 'Tom Denison, Supercargo.'"

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