THE PENANG PIRATE

BY

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The Penang Pirate

Volume One

Chapter One

In the Pearl River

“Bill!”

“Aye, aye, bo!”

“Guess this’ll be a rum v’yage, mate.”

“Why, old shellback?”

“’Cause I can’t make out why we are wasting our time here, with the cargo all aboard and the wind fair.”

“Don’t you fret yourself about that, Jem Backstay. The skipper knows what he’s a-doing, and has got a heap o’ ’sponsibility on them shoulders o’ his’n—a fine ship and a valuable cargo to get home safe to old h’England with a short crew, and a lot o’ murderin’, blood-suckin’ pirates all over the h’Indian seas!”

“Pirates, Bill!”

“Ay, pirates! I spoke plain enough, didn’t I? But you needn’t shiver in your skin like one of them white-livered Lascars we’ve got aboard in place of honest sailors, worse luck! You needn’t have no cause to fear for the number o’ your mess, bo; the cap’en—God bless him!—will see us safe through, you may be sure.”

“Right you are, Bill; you know the old man better nor I, and I s’pose he’s taking cautions like?”

“No fear, mate. He’s got his head screwed on right enough, my bo.”

“And that’s the reason, p’raps, he’d that long palaver with the admiral’s flagship afore we come up the river?”

“Ay,” said Bill sententiously; “may be so.”

“Well, Bill, if so be there’s pirates about, they might do a’most as they likes wi’ us, for I don’t think there are three cutlasses aboard, and ne’er a musket as I can see, and only powder enough to fire off that little popgun there to summons a pilot.”

“Aye,” answered the other nonchalantly.

The Hankow Lin was lying in the Pearl River, off Whampoa, some twelve miles below Canton, to which anchorage all sailing vessels having business at this port of the Celestial Empire are restricted by the mandarins, only steamers being permitted to ascend the reaches of the river to the city proper and anchor in front of Shah Mien, the English settlement.

The vessel had shipped all her tea and silk, which formed a valuable cargo; and, with her anchor hove short, so that she seemed to ride just over it, and her topsails loose all handy to let fall and sheet home, she appeared ready to start at a moment’s notice on her homeward voyage—down the ugly Canton River and across the pathless Indian seas and the miles of weary ocean journey that lay between her and her final destination, “the tight little island,” with its now historical “streak of silver sea,” supposed to guard it from Continental invasion.

What delayed the Hankow Lin?

Ah! her captain could tell perhaps, for it might be taken for granted that there was some urgent reason for his remaining here with no possible object to gain when his cargo was stowed and the ship homeward-bound. The seamen could make nothing of it, however; and there was much grumbling forwards at this unlooked-for hitch in their departure from the land of “chin chins” and “no bony Johnny.”

Jem Backstay, who was a stalwart, able-bodied seaman, and as smart a “hand” as could be found in a day’s cruise, did not appear at all convinced by what his chum Bill, the boatswain, had said, for he returned again to the conversation after the latter had apparently ended it with his monosyllabic “aye.”

“Lor’, mate!” said he, “I thinks your old brains are wool-gathering about pirates. I’ve been sailing in these here China seas since I were no higher than your thumb and I never see none.”

“Haven’t you?” muttered the other disdainfully.

“No, never a one.”

“And you’ve never seen none of ’em h’executed, as I have, at Canton, in batches of a dozen or more?”

“No, Bill; how does they do it?”

“Why, mate, they makes the beggars all kneel down in a row, with their hands tied behind them so that they can’t put ’em up. Then a chap comes along—I s’pose he’s called their Jack Ketch—and he carries a sword that’s partly made like a cutlass and partly like a butcher’s cleaver, with which he slices off all their heads like so many carrots.”

“Lor’!”

“Yes, bo; and the funny thing is to see this executioner chap going along behind all the kneeling figures, afore he knocks their heads off, and pulling this one here and a-shovin’ that one theer, so arrangin’ on ’em that he can have a clean stroke when he ups with his sword.”

“Lor’!” exclaimed the other on hearing this description.

“Yes, bo, it’s all true as gospel what I’m a-tellin’ on you. The hangman chap don’t seem to make no more account of them poor devils than if they wos so many wooden dummies, like them ‘Quaker guns’ as they call—cos they can’t hurt nobody, I s’pose—that them silly artful Chinese mounted in the Bogue forts to frighten us, as they thought, when we went to war with ’em last time, you know.”

“But, talkin’ about h’executions, Bill, ain’t talkin’ of pirates, is it, bo? P’raps those poor ignorant chaps you seed have their heads chopped off mightn’t no more a’ been pirates than you or I.”

“Mightn’t they!” ejaculated the boatswain of the Hankow Lin in the most indignant tones. “Much you know about it, you son of a sea-cook, that’s all! Why, Jem, I could tell you stories about them cut-throats of the sea in these here waters as would make your hair stand on end. No pirates in the China seas, you say, my joker?”

“I didn’t say as there wasn’t any. I said as there mightn’t ha’ been.”

“Well, and wot’s the difference, I’d like to know?”

“Belay that, and bouse away, old ship, with that yarn o’ yours that’s going to fright my hair off. I ain’t quite frightened yet, I tell you.”

“Wait a minute, then, bo,” said the other, who was suddenly called aft by the officer of the watch to have some order given him for the morning which had been forgotten; and on his return to the foc’s’le Jem was all attention for him to proceed with his promised yarn about the real pirates of whom he had spoken, the worthy seaman continuing to express a strong disbelief in their entity.

“Heave ahead with that ’ere story o’ yourn,” he said.

“Don’t you know, you onbelievin’ swab, as how the Singapore mail steamer was nearly as possible plundered by a whole gang o’ them gettin’ aboard of her as make-believe passengers and then setting fire to her and plundering the cargo, and that this occurred only last year?”

“No, I never heerd tell of it,” said Jem.

“Well, I think I’ve got a noospaper in my ditty-box down below as will tell you all about it, and then, p’r’aps, you’ll feel as if you’d believe there wos sich things as pirates.”

So saying, the boatswain bustled down into the forecastle, and shortly reappeared above, holding a rather dirty crumpled piece of printed paper in his hand, which he handed to Jem.

“There,” he said, “take that and read for yourself.”

The brawny seaman turned it over and over with a solemn face, and then handed it back to the other.

“I ain’t no scholard,” he observed, rubbing his chin thoughtfully; “wish I was, ’twould ha’ been pounds in my pocket now if I could read and write as I once did when I war a little shaver, but I’ve clean forgot it. You reel off the yarn as is printed there, Bill; and then I’ll tell you what I think of it.”

“All right, then,” replied the boatswain, nothing loth to display his superior attainments. “Here goes for a full and true ’count of a tremenjuous piretical plot to seize a mail steamer, from a special despatch of our ’Ong Kong correspondent;” and, holding the dirty scrap of paper at arm’s-length, as if he were somewhat afraid of it, he went on to read the following extract from it.

“The China papers received by the last mail contain full accounts of an attempt made to seize and plunder the Eastern and Australian Mail Steam Company’s steamer Bowen by a party of Chinese who had embarked on board the vessel at Singapore as passengers. The following is extracted from the ship’s report:—

“On the 8th of June, at 1:30 PM, in latitude 13 degrees 09 minutes north and longitude 111 degrees 20 minutes east, Cheang Sioy, Chinese interpreter, reported that the Singapore passengers, forty-two in number, were pirates, and intended setting fire to and plundering the ship, as they had been overheard talking to this effect. An examination was then made below, but the Singapore Chinese passengers were so scattered among 313 Australian Chinese passengers that they could not be readily identified. The interpreter was then ordered to pick them out and muster them and their effects on the poop-house. He first brought up eight or ten choppers, a house-breaking tool, and a box, for all of which no owners could be found. On opening the box it was found to contain twenty-five packages of powder, about one pound weight each, all with a fuse attached. As the matter seemed serious, all hands were mustered and armed, and the Singapore Chinese brought up and secured. A further search disclosed another box containing eleven loaded revolvers of different sorts and sizes, also a large quantity of ammunition to fit the same, a bundle of touch-paper, and a Chinese ship’s compass. On examining the Singapore Chinese passengers, seventeen gave a satisfactory account of themselves; but twenty-five, who could not do so, and had neither money nor luggage, were put into a place of safety with an armed guard over them night and day until arrival, when they were handed over to the authorities in Hong Kong.”

“Is that all?” asked Jem, whose scepticism regarding Chinese pirates this printed account appeared somewhat to shake.

“That’s all the steamer’s log-book say, bo,” replied the boatswain; “but the newspaper tells further on as how the beggars was brought up for trial.”

“Let us have it, then,” said Jem, bending forward to listen to what the other went on to read in a deep sepulchral voice—

“Twenty-six Chinamen were brought before the sitting magistrate at the Hong Kong police-court on the 11th of June, when Captain Miller of the Bowen gave evidence. He stated that the vessel carried the Queensland mail to Singapore and Hong Kong, and vice versa. It also carried the mails to and from Hong Kong. The passengers are Chinese gold-diggers, and have bullion about them. Every voyage the vessel carries a large amount of gold; on the present trip they

had ten boxes of the value of about £10,000. This was the cargo, and had nothing to do with what the passengers had. The captain continued:—

"At Singapore we took in forty-two Chinese passengers, who came on board the morning we left. Our Singapore agents had received a telegram from Hong Kong, warning them to be careful of what passengers I took. After leaving Singapore, all went well until about half-past one o'clock PM, on the 8th inst, when near the Faracel Reefs. The chief officer then came and told me that the Singapore Chinese passengers were pirates, and intended to set fire to and plunder the ship. In consequence of this, I went with the chief officer and interpreter to examine the steerage passengers. I found a difficulty in separating the Singapore passengers from the Australians, as they were so mixed. I then ordered a gang to pick them out and bring them on the poop with their luggage, for examination. The interpreter knew where the Singapore passengers were stowed, and he there found ten choppers, and beneath the forecastle, where eight of the passengers were, he found a box. I ordered the carpenter to open this box, which was locked, and which no one claimed, and found on the top beneath some clothes, twenty-five packages with a fuse attached to each. After counting the packages, I kept one as a sample, and threw the remainder with the box overboard. I did that as I was rather afraid to keep so much loose powder on board. I next called all hands and turned all the Chinese passengers on deck. We then searched the place where they had been, and the box containing eleven loaded revolvers and a quantity of ammunition was produced. I questioned all the passengers, and seventeen of the Singapore passengers had luggage and dollars, and they gave a satisfactory account of themselves. The prisoners had no property or money. They could or would not tell what they had been doing in Singapore, or give any account of themselves. I then locked them in the mail room—which is of iron—and placed an armed guard over them."

"There, now, what do you think o' them murderin' rascals now?" asked the boatswain when he had concluded reading the newspaper extract.

"What do I think o' them, hey? Well, I thinks they ought to ha' been keel-hauled, that's what I thinks! Was these the chaps whose heads you'd saw chopped off at Canton?"

"No, no, man, this here occurred at Hong Kong; couldn't you hear wot I read, bo?"

“I s’poses it’s all true, seein’ how’t is in print; and if so, mate, why I s’pose you’re right about there bein’ pirates hereabouts arter all?”

“Yes, sure, my hearty. Why, look here, Jem, it’s solemn truth I’m tellin’ you,” and the boatswain looked as grave as a judge when speaking, as if to substantiate his words—“only t’other day there was a fine clipper tea-ship, just like ourn, that got becalmed off Hainan island in the Gulf of Tonquin, when, in less nor half an hour arter the wind failed, a lot o’ junks sculled up to her and opened fire on the crew with their cussed jinghals and matchlocks; and, if it hadn’t a’ been fur a breeze a springin’ up as let ’em make sail and get away from the pirates, why the ship would ha’ been captured and sunk after they had taken everything they cared for out of her; and only last year—just you hark to this, Jem Backstay—an English brigantine, bound for the northern ports, was attacked by pirate junks not a hundred miles from Hong Kong—jist think of the impudent rascals having the cheek to come so near us!—and the captain and mate were murdered, the rest of the crew escaping by taking to one of the boats!”

“Well,” said Jem to this, “I hopes we won’t come nigh any on ’em, if there be any sich like as pirates about, as I’ve said afore. I don’t want to lose the number o’ my mess yet awhile!”

“Never you fear, Jem,” returned the other; “our old man’s as ’cute as they make them, out here; and if there’s anything to keep a sharp look-out for, why he’s all there!”

Chapter Two

Dark Suspicions

At this moment, the conversation between the two was again interrupted by Bill the boatswain starting up from the hawser on which he was sitting alongside of Jem Backstay on the topgallant forecastle. “Hallo!” he exclaimed, “I wonder what that ugly beggar of a Malay is prowling about forward for? He’s smelling about them water-casks as came aboard yesterday—he means mischief!”

“Lordsakes, Bill,” said Jem, “you’ve so got them pirates on the brain that you can think of nuthin else!—Do leave the poor yaller devil alone, I’m sure he ain’t up to no harm!”

“Ain’t he?” said Bill scornfully. “You jest look arter your own bizness. Hallo, you Lascar!” he shouted out aloud to the object of his attention; “Hallo, you Lascar! leave that ’ere cask alone; d’ye hear!”

The man, a short, thick-set, black-haired, and yellow-visaged native—who had been apparently endeavouring to unloosen the lashings of the tarpaulin cover of one of six large hogsheads like water-casks that were placed along the gangway of the ship and securely fastened between the ports—started at the sound of Bill’s voice; and, seeing that his eye was fixed on him, pretended slily for a moment to be intently gazing out seawards, and then slunk stealthily along the deck more aft to the bitts of the mainmast, where a group of his tawny fellow-countrymen were gathered together away from the rest of the crew—squatting on their haunches, and gabbling away at a great rate.

“Blow them yaller imps!” said the boatswain to his companion as the native retreated out of earshot. “I don’t like ’em, for they’re a treach’rous lot, and would knife you as soon as look. Why, as you know, Jem, they won’t obey no orders, even from the cap’en, ’cept through their own serang, or chief—ourang-outang I think’d be a better name for him, the ugly beast! And if you was to strike one with a rope’s end—if only in lark, mind you, to make him move quicker—why, you’d be a dead man ’fore morning, safe as houses! I shouldn’t like, mate, for you and me to be the only white men aboard with that ’ere rascal lot of Lascars on the high seas, my hearty! We’re short-handed as it is, with only four men in each watch, barrin’ Snowball the cook and the officers, which makes us twelve white men in all, besides little Jack Harper—for I count Snowball as one of us, although he is a niggur; and there are twenty of them

Lascars altogether and their chief. Howsomedevers, Jem, I've spoke to the cap'en, beggin' his pardin for the liberty, an' he told me as how he was a lookin' out and not unmindful; so, bo, it's all right, you see."

"And you think, Bill, the skipper's goin' to bring off some more hands like us?"

"I don't think nothin' about it, Jem Backstay. When the cap'en tells me it's all right, I knows it's all right; and that's enough for me! Heave an eye out to starboard, mate; ain't that a light on shore, like a signal or something?"

"Ay, ay!" replied the other, drawing himself up to all the height of his six feet, and stretching out his brawny arms lazily as he peered over the bows through the hazy light, for the sun had just set, and the shore could only be faintly distinguished in the distance. "Aye, aye, my hearty! A light it is for certain."

"Then it's the cap'en, sure!" said Bill; "he's late to-night. I hope we'll start our anchor at last; I'm tired o' this Canton River."

"Foc's'le, ahoy!" at the same moment shouted out Mr Scuppers, the first mate, from the poop, where he was pacing to and fro with young Jack Harper, the midshipman.

"Aye, aye, sir!" shouted out in answer Bill and Jem together.

"You are awake, are you? I thought you were all asleep! Hoist up a lantern at the fore, to show the cap'en where we are, it's getting quite dark; and see if that Snowball's asleep in the galley; tell him it's six bells, and time for my coffee."

The negro cook, however, was awake for a wonder, and heard the mate's message, thus saving the trouble of its being repeated to him.

"Yah, yah! me no sleep, Massa Scuppers," he called out with that cheerful good humour that seems characteristic of the darky race, and which seems proof against any ill treatment;—"me jus' goin' brin' coffee, sah, yes sah! It am lubly hot, massa, and 'trong as carthoss!"

"Hot and strong is it, Snowball?" said the first mate in his hearty, jolly way, as the darky cook stepped gingerly past the group of Lascars, and handed the cup of coffee up to him on the poop, with an obsequious bow. "But, how is it you're not asleep?"

“Best to be most circumspectious, massa, wid dem culled pussons aboard; no caulking wid dem nasty yaller gen’lemen for me!”

“Well, that’s a good un!” laughed Mr Scuppers; “the pot calling the kettle black with a vengeance!”

“You mistake sah,” said Snowball with dignity. “I knows, Massa Scuppers, I isn’t ’xactly like you white gen’lemen; but den I isn’t a nasty mulatto like dem poor trash; and dey isn’t to be trusted!”

“Perhaps you’re right, Snowball; but we ought not to suspect them till we’ve found them out, you know.”

After another turn or two on deck, Mr Scuppers cabled the boatswain to him,—

“Martens,” said he, “have those Lascars turned in yet?”

“No, sir,” said Bill; “one of ’em at all events was awake just now, and spying about forward.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed the mate in a tone of surprise, as if the information was both unexpected and alarming. “Pass the word forward for the serang to come aft to me at once!”

“Aye, aye, air,” replied the boatswain, touching his cap as he left the poop; and in another minute or so this Malay—serang is the name given to the chief of the gang—appeared, rubbing his eyes as if just awakened up from sleep.

He was the very same broad-shouldered, thick-set, tawny-yellow native with jet black coarse hair, like that out of a horse’s tail, and low Mongolian type of face, whom the boatswain had seen inspecting the casks on deck. He now cringed and salaamed before the first mate.

“You wantee me, comprador?” said the man, speaking in that species of Portuguese patois which is so common in the Straits Settlements.

“Yes, Kifong,” said the first mate, speaking likewise in broken lingo, with the idea of making himself better understood. “Captain sahib say he wantee you berry early morning, four bell, to get up anchor. You go below now first chop, and turn in; do you hear that!” he shouted out in very unmistakable English, pointing below to the foc’s’le hatch.

“Si, Senor Comprador,” salaamed again the Malay; then, giving a shrill whistle and waving his rattan of office, the gang around the mainmast roused up, and followed him to their bunks below as obediently as a flock of sheep, without a word.

“Get the side-lines ready for the accommodation ladder, Martens,” said Mr Scuppers, “and see that the gig-falls are clear to hoist it in; for we’ll trip anchor at daylight if the wind holds, and leave this blessed Canton River in our wake. Slip down the foc’s’le hatch over the yellow beggars. So there, that’s all right, and the cap’en can come as soon as he pleases!”

Presently the sound of oars was heard approaching the ship; and soon the captain’s gig, pulled by six oars, came alongside quietly. The light was again shown, the ladder let down and side-ropes manned, and the well-known face of the skipper appeared above the gangway. “This way, Mr Meredith,” said the latter to a well-wrapped-up gentleman who accompanied him, besides the second mate, Mr Sprott, who remained behind to see the gig hoisted in. “This way, Mr Meredith; please tell the others to follow!”

The captain thereupon led the way into the saloon—Snowball carrying the lantern to light up—followed by the gentleman whom he had addressed by name, and ten others in single file bringing up the rear behind him; then the cuddy doors were slid to and the saloon cut off from the rest of the ship.

The captain came on deck after a time, and ordered the boatswain to tell the men to give no hints to the Malays as to the passengers, and then an anchor-watch was set, and all hands turned in for the night.

Chapter Three

The Sampan

Towards six bells in the morning watch the intense violet sky of the east began to pale into those shades of green and grey which note the departure of night, the bright twinkling stars that had up to then lit up the firmament disappearing one by one as day broke. Then, rapidly, streaks of warm, salmon-tinted clouds rose across the eastern horizon, shot with bright golden gleams of fire, making the water of the Pearl River glow as if with life, and lighting up the distant house-tops and pagodas of Canton that could be seen far away from Jardyne Point; and then, up danced the sun from beyond the paddy fields, mounting higher and higher in the heavens each moment with majestic strides, as if he wanted to get his day's work done early, so as to get a siesta in the afternoon!

With the rising of the sun, all is bustle and excitement on board the Hankow Lin; for the captain before turning in had told Mr Scuppers that they were to sail at daybreak.

"Whee—eo! Whee—eo! Whee—ee!" The boatswain's shrill whistle was heard piercing through every nook and cranny of the ship.

"Tumble up, there! Tumble up! All hands up anchor!" shouted out Bill Martens in stentorian tones that supplemented the call of his whistle. "Now, you Lascar beggars, show a leg, will you? All hands on deck, and up anchor. Here, look alive, serang! Man the capstan-bars, and be sharp with it. Cheerily, men; cheerily ho! Walk her up to her anchor. Now she rides—heave, men, with a will. Belay!"

The ship by this time has been brought up, with all the slack of the cable in; and the chief mate now lends his voice to add to the bustle and movement of the scene.

"'Way aloft there, men; loose topsails; let fall. There! Now, serang, heave with a will! heave with a will! Now it's free; heave away, my hearties!" and the anchor was run up to the bows with a will, and secured with tackles; when, the ship's head being now loosed from her hold of the ground, she began to pay off, with her bows dancing up and down, as if she were bidding a polite adieu to the Celestial Empire and all its belongings.

“Man the topsail halliards; up with the jib; loosen those courses; set the spanker sharp, will you? Hurrah! there she fills!” The sails bellied out and drew; and the ship bore round to her course, and began to move, at first slowly, and then more swiftly, down the river, south and west, on her way towards England—homeward-bound, as it is joyously phrased.

A regular staunch clipper is she—the good ship Hankow Lin; one of the best of the old-fashioned tea-traders that as yet spurned the modern innovation of the Suez Canal, and despised, in the majesty of their spreading canvas, the despicable agency of steam! A sound, teak-built, staunch, ship-rigged vessel of 1200 tons register, and classed A1 at Lloyd’s for an indefinite number of years.

Captain Morton—a bluff old sea-dog, with a jovial red face, and crisp, wiry grey hair, and mutton-chop whiskers that projected on either side as if electrified—was standing on the poop to windward, with the first mate, Mr Scuppers, and the passenger, “Mr Meredith,” looking up aloft at the nimble topmen, who were adding acre to acre to the sail-surface of the ship, and pluming her snowy pinions with a pull here and a shake there. Mr Sprott, the second mate, was to leeward of the helmsman; the boatswain on the forecastle, monarch of all he surveyed in that department; and little Jack Harper, the middy—a special favourite both with the officers and sailors—looking on amidships at the gang of Malays, who were hauling away at halliards, and slackening sheets, and curling ropes, in a more slipshod and leisurely way than regular jack tars are wont.

Jack Harper called out to the serang Kifong to make him rouse up his men, but he was nowhere to be seen. Presently, he perceived him bending over the side amidships, partly concealed by the shrouds, and apparently talking to some one overboard. Wondering what was up, Jack cautiously approached him without being observed, and peered over the side too. His face brightened up with excitement as he heard the sounds of men’s voices speaking in Chinese rapidly, and then he listened with rapt attention for a minute. Only for a minute, however, as the serang, turning rapidly round, saw him, and, calling out something which he could not catch, a sampan, or native boat, quickly sheered off from the vessel, and, impelled by two rowers, darted off shore wards; the serang, with a look of unconsciousness at Jack, sauntering back to his gang, as if he were only doing the most natural thing in the world.

The captain perceived the sampan the moment it left the ship’s side, and hailed Jack.

“Hullo! What was that boat doing alongside?”

“Can’t say, sir,” said Jack, touching his cap. “I suppose some of the Lascars’ friends bidding them good-bye!”

“That so?” said the captain. “It isn’t discipline, but I suppose we can’t help it;” and he resumed his conversation with the passenger and Mr Scuppers.

By and by, when the serang and his gang had gone forward again, to unbit the cable chain and cat and fish the anchor, Jack went up on the poop to the captain.

“Beg your pardon, Cap’en Morton,” he said, “but I think that Malay chap is up to something; can I speak to you privately?”

“Oh, never mind Mr Meredith,” said the captain; “we are all friends here; speak out.”

“Well, you know, sir,” said Jack, diffidently—he didn’t like spinning a yarn, as he called it, before strangers—“that I understand a little Chinese; and I caught something of what the serang was saying to those two beggars in the boat.”

“Did you?” said the captain and Mr Meredith, the passenger, almost together, eagerly. “What was it? what did the rascal say?”

“You may well say rascal, sir,” said Jack. “For though I did not hear all their conversation, from what I gathered I think they’re up to some mischief. I first heard the chap in the boat say, ‘And how about the passengers?’ or something like that as far as I could make out; and the serang said, ‘There’s only one come on the ship.’”

The captain nudged Mr Meredith here, and the first mate, and all three chuckled.

“And then the man in the boat said, ‘You are certain there are not more aboard?’ And the serang answered, ‘No, only that one passenger’—‘strange man,’ he called him—‘and twelve men besides the boy officer,’—I suppose meaning me, sir. And then the man in the boat, who seemed to have some authority over the serang, said, ‘In about ten days, if the wind is good or fair; and don’t be in a hurry, but wait for the signal!’ and then the Malay chap turned and saw me, and the boat shoved off.”

“Very good, Harper,” said the captain; “we’ll keep an eye on him, never fear;” and then, as Jack went off again to his post he turned to Mr Meredith: “I confess that I was wrong, and you and the admiral right, sir!” he said. “And now we must contrive to outwit these yellow devils, and as they’re half-Chinese and ought to know, show them how to catch a Tartar!”

“Ay,” said Mr Meredith, laughing, “we’ll give them a lesson they’ll never forget, too, while we’re about it! But, captain, we have plenty of time before us—ten days or more, just as I calculated; and all we have to do now is to look out sharp for squalls in the meantime.”

“Right, sir,” said Captain Morton, “we’ll all have to look out sharp, for they’re treacherous rascals at the best, and these seem to be the worst! Keep your weather eye open, Scuppers, and give Sprott a hint—although not a word, mind you, to the men yet, with the exception of Bill Martens, who can be trusted to bide his time, as he knows already as much as ourselves. As to little Jack Harper, he’s a ’cute boy, and is not likely to forget what he has heard.” And there the conversation ended and the subject dropped.

All that day the Hankow Lin was working her way down the river from Canton, which lies some eighty miles from its mouth; and at nightfall the ship again anchored, the navigation being somewhat intricate and the breeze dying away; but next morning it was up anchor and away again with everything hoisted that could draw and the wind right astern, the vessel making such good progress through the water that long before mid-day she had passed through the Bocca Tigris, or “tiger’s mouth” passage, and was out in the open ocean.

The nor’-east monsoon, which blows in the China seas as regularly as clockwork from October to April, and is the great trade-wind of the tea-ships, had nearly blown out its course; but still, for a time it was all in the Hankow Lin’s favour, and she went through the water at a fine rate. Although she was pretty well laden, and was rather deep for a vessel of her size, she walked along as if, as the sailors said, the girls at home had got hold of the tow-rope; and when the log was hove at noon she was going twelve knots with all sail set—not a bad pace that for a trader; but, in the old days, before steam transformed the trade through the Red Sea, these tea-ships were built for speed as well as freight room.

Sundown came, and the great orb of day set in a crescent of ruby light, making the sea like a gorgeous pantomime sea of molten gold as far as the eye could reach; and still the wind held up fair and strong, and the vessel careered over the expanse of ocean, that looked like living fire, without slackening her rate of progress, rising and falling to the waves with pendulum-like rhythm. And now night came on with its azure sky, sprinkled with innumerable stars all glorious with scintillating light, and the ship preserved the even tenor of her way;

morning came again with its freshness of roseate hues and golden sun-risings, and purple mists, and transparent haze; and yet, onward—onward, without pause—she flew upon the wings of the wind like a great white dove released from some fowler's snare and panting for the untrammelled freedom of the wide wide sea.

So day after day passed, and everything went on in regular routine on board, without any incident of note occurring to break the monotony of the voyage, the English sailors keeping to themselves, and the Malays apart, without either mixing or speaking with the others save when the duties of the ship called them into temporary association.

Kifong, the serang, however, they could see was wide-awake, and observant of all that went on around him. He was particularly anxious about the saloon and the passenger: and was continually trying to interrogate Snowball as to what went on within the privileged retreat, to which none else of the crew were admitted. What struck him more than anything else was the amount of food which the black cook was preparing, and carrying from the galley into the cabin.

"What for you takee so muchee prog, black-man, in dere for?" he said one day to Snowball, much to that individual's indignation at the reference to his colour, which he always most studiously ignored.

"What for, mister yaller man? Why, for eat, sure!"

The Malay's eyes gleamed like a serpent's, and he showed his teeth like a snarling dog.

"Five men no eatee that much prog," he said in an angry tone. "You tell one lie, black-man."

"Lie yourself, yaller nigger," said the darky. "You no tink dat four officers and de passenger gen'leman all eat muchee food; very good appeta-tites havee."

The serang walked away from Snowball with a strong expression of doubt in his face, and ever afterwards seemed to bear a particular ill-will to the darky, laying traps to trip him up on his passage to and fro between the galley and the cabin when heavily laden with dishes for Mr Meredith's gigantic meals.

Chapter Four

A Strange Sail

The ship sailed on serenely, making from two hundred to two hundred and fifty knots in each twenty-four hours run—on some exceptional occasions clearing indeed as much as three hundred, to the great jubilation of the men—until one day, at noon, Captain Morton announced that they were in the same parallel as the Thousand Islands, and rapidly approaching the Straits of Sunda.

This wide channel of the sea, separating the islands of Java and Sumatra, forms one of the main gateways used by the vast number of ships that navigate the China Sea. All vessels bound thither from the western hemisphere pass either to the north or south of Sumatra, entering the Eastern Archipelago through the Straits of Singapore or else by the Straits of Sunda. Steam-vessels bound through the Suez Canal and Indian Ocean use the former route, and those rounding the Cape of Good Hope the latter. The strait is about seventy miles long, sixty miles broad at the south-west end, narrowing to thirteen miles at the north-east; and it was here that the terrible earthquake occurred in the summer of 1883, by which so many thousands of lives were sacrificed in a moment, through the submerging of some of the adjacent islands in the sea, a catastrophe only second in the annals of history to the earthquake at Lisbon in the last century.

Half-way through the strait, equidistant from the two shores, was a group of three islands, the largest of which was Krakatoa, four and a half miles long and three miles broad, its volcanic summit reaching to a height of 2623 feet above the sea-level, about ten times higher than the surrounding sea was deep. Between it and Java, although the floor of the strait was uneven, the channel was clear of dangers; on the Sumatra side were several islands and rocks, the two largest of which, Bezee and Sebooko, rose respectively 2825 feet and 1416 feet above the sea. The tremendous volcanic eruption, with the accompanying earthquake and inundation of the coasts which lately happened here—on the 26th August, 1883—has now wrought a fearful change here. According to all accounts, it appears that the chain of islets on the Sumatra side of the straits has been added to by at least sixteen volcanic craters rising within the eight miles of water that formerly separated them from Krakatoa. With so enormous an upheaval it would not be unnatural to expect the surrounding floor to be depressed; but when it is learned that the whole island of Krakatoa, containing about 8000 million cubic yards of material, has fallen in, and the greater part of it disappeared below the sea, the magnitude of the convulsion becomes more

apparent, and it is the easier to realise the formation of the destructive volcanic wave that was thrown on the neighbouring shores. It is almost inconceivable that this island, with a mountain summit which rose nearly 2700 feet above the sea-level, should have been so extensively submerged; but it seems to have been in the very centre of the area of this vast earthquake, which convulsed the whole basin of the sea between Lampong Bay, on the south coast of Sumatra, and the opposite shores of Java, extending across a diameter of more than sixty geographical miles. The disturbance of the sea and consequent flooding of the shores, both those of Sumatra to the north and those of Java to the east of the volcanic outbreak, had the most destructive effects upon the Dutch settlements at Telok Betong, at the head of the bay in Sumatra, and likewise in Java, at the well-known commercial port of Anjer, where all homeward-bound ships of every nation were accustomed to call in passing the straits to obtain needful supplies for the voyage across the Indian Ocean; and where also, it may be mentioned, Java sparrows, those delicate little feathered creatures that might teach wiser humanity a lesson in their touching fondness for each other, used to be purchased by sailors for presents to their friends at home—though few, alas, of the poor "sparrows" ever reached England alive of the thousands brought away from their native clime, the majority dying at sea on the first cold night!

The homeward-bound voyager, too, who passes the Straits of Sunda, is sometimes fortunate enough to witness, at the western extremity of the channel, a strange yet beautiful optical illusion, probably akin to the mirage of the desert. It presents a magnificent display of natural architecture, commencing at one particular point—always at the same place—off the coast of Sumatra. Huge granite pillars tower to the sky at nearly regular intervals, beginning at the outlet of one of the valleys, and extending five miles out to sea. So solid and massive is the aspect of the apparent structure that the eye refuses to accept its unreality; binoculars are involuntarily seized, questions are poured into the ear of the captain; or, if no ship's officer be near, such guidebooks or sailing directions as may be within reach are consulted for a solution of the splendid sight. But, before the pages can be turned the gigantic columns begin to waver and vibrate in the intensely heated air: now they come nearer, and the sun glances upon their crystalline sides, anon they retreat and fade, until the whole fabric is transformed into, or lost in, a luxuriant expanse partly covered with enormous trees. It is probably while the feeling of disappointment is rankling in his mind, and the traveller averts his gaze from Sumatra as altogether a delusion and a snare, that he obtains his first glimpse of the opposite shore to the left hand, and sees the romantic island of Java

appearing simultaneously from the waves and from the clouds. As he looks at the vast panorama of jagged peaks—some of them, perhaps, emitting a thin, scarcely-visible thread of vapour, his train of thought may wander to the thrilling fireside tale of how the despairing Dutch criminals used to rush, inclosed in leathern hoods, across the "Poison Valley," to gather the deadly drippings from the terrible Upas-tree.

But none of these thoughts occurred to those on board the Hankow Lin as she neared the straits and the group of islands; for, in the first place, the terrible earthquake of Krakatoa which has so convulsed the face of nature in the vicinity, had not then occurred, and, secondly, instead of the fabled Upas-tree being uppermost in their minds, all were thinking, with a far keener apprehension, of the much more deadly "pirates of the isles," who were reported to haunt the channel-way and rendezvous in the neighbourhood, just keeping out of the reach of the men-of-war cruising in search of them, so as to pounce on unwary merchantmen whenever they had the chance.

Towards sunset on the same day that the captain had remarked on their being close to the Thousand Islands, the nor'-east monsoon, which had accompanied the vessel so far, suddenly failed, and the wind shifted to the southward and westward. A strange sail was sighted—not ahead, but coming up astern, and gaining on them fast as if in pursuit, although the light failed before they could distinctly make her out.

The captain had a conference on the poop; and after dark, as the breeze came stronger from the south, the ship's course was altered, she running off at right angles to her former direction, as if bearing up for Singapore, while a strict watch was kept all night on deck.

Morning broke at last, after some eight hours of anxiety, and Bill the boatswain, on the forecastle, took a keen look round the horizon with the first appearance of the dawning light, as Captain Morton was doing on the poop.

Gradually the haze cleared up from the water in widening circles, and as the sun rose and the horizon cleared still further off, there, some five miles astern, and going quite as fast as themselves, if not faster, was the stranger; and now when she could be clearly made out, she did not improve on acquaintance.

She was a lateen-rigged schooner, with a long, low, dark hull, almost flush with the water, and a wicked look about her which could hardly be mistaken.

The captain hailed the boatswain, and summoned him to the poop, where they were joined by the first mate and “Mr Meredith,” who, strange to say, seemed quite as accustomed to early hours as the officers of the ship.

“It is she, without doubt,” said the captain. “I could almost swear to the description. Where are those Malays?”

“Down below, sir; leastways, they was just now.”

“Well, keep a sharp look-out; and as it seems that it will come to a scrimmage you had better tell the men forward, and I will warn those here quietly. I suppose you have got the revolvers all right?” continued the captain, as “Mr Meredith” left the deck quietly.

“Oh, yes, sir; mine’s here,” said the boatswain, tapping the bosom of his guernsey, “all ready for action; and I’ll soon serve out the others.”

“Very good; only be cool, Martens, till the time arrives, for we may be mistaken after all in the men. I can’t tell why we are not going faster, though, with this breeze and all that sail set. What! only three knots!” said he, as the boatswain hove the log and told him the result. “Something must be wrong, Martens; go forward and see at once.”

And the long, low, dark-hulled schooner was coming up hand over hand, walking almost up into the wind’s eye on the weather-gauge, coming on as if theHankow Lin was at anchor or becalmed.

As Bill the boatswain passed forward he saw the Malays were gathered together in a cluster by the side, amidships, looking at the vessel coming up, and the serang had a peculiar, satisfied, malicious sort of smile on his evil countenance.

“Guess they’re getting ready too,” said Bill to himself. “I’ll give Snowball a hail, and rouse up the others.”

Snowball, however, was bustling about in his galley, and in response to a word from the boatswain he grinned one of his usual broad grins, and tapped the long knife in his belt, that looked almost as deadly a weapon as one of the Malay creases.

“Golly, Massa Bill, me quite ready for the muss when him come! dat for de yaller nigger dat call me black-man; and dese, massa,” he said, pointing to the

ship's coppers, which were full of boiling water, as he had lighted the fires again at daybreak, "dere, is de soup for de yaller nigger's gang!"

The other hands were just turning out as Bill reached the forecastle, and Jem Backstay and the rest were soon made aware of their danger from within as well as without; but, before the boatswain could explain himself properly or give any orders he was startled at seeing that some one had cut the jib halliards, and the sail had come down by the run, and was towing in the water right across the ship's bows.

"Treachery, shipmates!" he called out. "No wonder the poor crippled thing couldn't make more'n three knots with that 'ere sail towing under her fore-foot. Those blessed Lascars did this, I suppose!"

He was in the midst of his exclamation when the lateen-rigged schooner, as if disdaining further concealment, hoisted the dread black pirate flag; and the serang, in response to the signal, gave a shrill whistle, at the same time drawing his crease.

With a yell of defiance he and his Lascar gang rushed aft in a body for the poop, where the captain and his officers were standing together, while the forecastle hands stood for the moment dumbfounded at the suddenness of the attack.

Only for a moment, however; for, almost at the same instant, Snowball, uttering a shout which might have been heard on board the pirate, now little over a mile off, dashed at the Malay chief, with his long knife gripped between his teeth and his arms working like windmills; and as he clutched the serang in his deadly grip the cabin-doors beneath the poop flew open, and the Lascar gang stopped their advance as if struck by lightning, uttering at the same time a howl of terror and dismay.

Chapter Five

Catching a Tartar

No wonder that the murderous band of treacherous Malays stopped paralysed in their desperate assault on the poop.

There, right facing them, in front of the saloon doors, stood the whilom quiet, delicate-looking passenger "Mr Meredith," dressed in the smart uniform of a lieutenant in the Royal Navy, a drawn sword in one hand and a revolver in the other; while drawn up behind him were the whole of the first cutter's crew of HMS Albatross, the name of which vessel stood out embossed on the bright ribbons of their straw hats—ten in number of stalwart blue-jackets, armed with cutlasses and with pistols stuck in their belts—levelling the shining barrels of their Snider rifles point-blank at their heads. No wonder that the swarthy scoundrels recoiled in terror.

"Surrender!" exclaimed Lieutenant Meredith in a loud stern voice; and the men, frightened by the force opposed to them, might possibly have submitted, when, at the moment that Snowball made his onslaught on their leader, Jack Harvey, who stood by his captain on the poop, rather injudiciously fired off a shot from his revolver, which struck and broke one of the Malays' outstretched arms, with crease uplifted ready to stab his enemies.

With a ferocious yell the band again rushed forward.

"Fire!" said the lieutenant; and with one report the blue-jackets delivered a volley which stretched four Malays in front of them lifeless on the deck; and then rushing forward with their drawn cutlasses, a terrific hand-to-hand fight ensued. Captain Morton and his officers on the poop fired into the mass of the Malays, and then leaped down to join the fray; and the boatswain, with Jem Backstay and the other sailors from the forecastle, caught up handspikes and fell upon their rear.

Even in the very midst of the fierce struggle Snowball and the serang, in deadly embrace, were rolling on the deck, each trying to get the upper hand so as to be able to use their knives. Neither could succeed in shaking the other off; and as the two rolled and twisted together about the deck, now a mass of blood and gore, they gradually edged away from the thick of the fight, until they rolled together close to the fore-hatch; then, with one vigorous effort, the black cook, as if he had reserved his final coup until he had wearied the other out, lifted

the Malay over the combing of the hatchway, and both tumbled into the fore-hold, with a smash and crash which even made itself heard above the din, the black cook shouting out as he felt himself falling, dragging his enemy with him, “Golly, yer yeller beggar, I got you at last!”

While this episode was being acted, the Malays were still fighting desperately with their creases, a formidable weapon in the hands of men fighting for their lives; and many of the tars were wounded, and one or two killed. The Malays stood in a group at bay, and fought on desperately, like rats driven into a corner, their numbers being still but little inferior to those of their opponents. At this moment the woolly head of Snowball appeared above the fore-hold with a triumphant grin on his black face, all wet with perspiration; and in a second he leaped on the deck, carrying on his shoulder the body of the serang, who was knocked senseless by the tumble into the hold, although the darky’s head, accustomed to such rude shocks, was not one whit the worse. Laying down his burden he hurried to the caboose.

The remaining Malays were huddled up in a corner by the capstan, hemmed in by the bluejackets. To all cries of “surrender” they turned a deaf ear, and they were evidently trying to prolong the struggle until their piratical accomplices, as they no doubt were, in the schooner came up to help them.

Lieutenant Meredith, being a humane man, did not wish to slaughter the wretches like sheep, so refrained giving the fatal order to fire another volley, which would have terminated the contest, and was endeavouring to capture them alive. The struggle was so prolonged, however, and so many of his men were wounded, that he was just going to give the word “Fire!” when Snowball came to the rescue in a novel way, which completed the victory.

The darky emerged from the caboose with a bucket of boiling water filled from the galley coppers, which he had got ready with apt forethought, and dashed it full on to the group of huddling Malays.

They did not want a second dose.

Giving out an appalling howl of pain, which no cut or shot had evoked, they threw down their arms with one accord, and the blue-jackets before, and Bill Musters and Jem Backstay in the rear, seized the trembling scoundrels.

“Gag them all, as well as bind them, men!” said the lieutenant to the blue-jackets. “I don’t want them to give the alarm to the schooner. Look alive, men!

Be smart there; we've no time to lose! She isn't half a mile off now, and will be alongside in a few minutes!"

Lieutenant Meredith was right.

It was almost a dead calm, and the Hankow Lin,—her way deadened by the jib, which still trailed in the water across her bows, for no one had time, during the deadly fight in which they had just been engaged, to hoist it clear on board again—was almost motionless on the water; while every breath of the fast-expiring breeze was gently wafting the pirate schooner nearer and nearer.

The sail that obstructed her motion was at last cut away, and the ship began to creep along through the water; but it was too late for her to have got away from her enemy if those on board had so wished—which, however, they didn't!

"Look out, my men," shouted out Captain Morton, who was as keenly alive to the urgency of their situation as the naval lieutenant,—"we've all our work cut out for us!"

In truth they had; still, although only just out of one fight, in which some two or three had already lost their lives, and several were severely wounded, the blue-jackets under their gallant officer, who had already won the Victoria Cross for his bravery, ably seconded by Captain Morton and Mr Scuppers, and the crew of the Hankow Lin set to work to prepare for a fresh struggle with all the alacrity and glee of schoolboys going out for an unexpected holiday.

The conquered Lascars were tightly bound, and then tumbled below, the hatch being secured over them; and all then set to work to unload the heavy hogsheads which had caused the tar such uneasiness on account of their cumbering his decks, when they had first been shipped on board at Canton, some ten days before.

"There, Jem!" said the boatswain, as the staves of the first cask were knocked to pieces, and a nine-pounder Armstrong gun disclosed in all its ship-shape nicety. "There, didn't I tell you that the skipper had his head screwed on straight?"

"Aye, aye, bo, right you were," answered the brawny foretopman as he knocked in the head of another hogshead. "I'll never doubt him again, you be sure."

There were four guns altogether, and the two other casks contained their ammunition, and spare rifles for the Hankow Lin's crew.

These cannon the lieutenant now caused to be loaded heavily with grape-shot, and placed at the midship ports to windward, on the side that the pirate was approaching; the ports still kept closed, but everything ready for raising them, and running out the guns to command the schooner's deck when she got alongside.

The hands were then mustered. Captain Morton, Mr Scuppers, the lieutenant, and Jack Harper had escaped without a scratch on the part of the officers; but Mr Sprott, the second mate, had a cut across his face from a Malay crease, which caused him considerable pain, and undoubtedly spoiled his beauty; although the brave fellow refused to be put on the list of the non-fighters. Amongst the men, two blue-jackets were killed outright, as well as Phillips, the ship's carpenter of the Hankow Lin; while one blue-jacket was wounded severely, and two slightly, as well as another of the ship's regular hands.

Altogether, their defensive force consisted now, therefore, of the lieutenant, captain, and three other officers—for Sprott would fight, and Jack Harper was quite as good with a revolver as any of his seniors—and fifteen men, counting in Snowball, who was as good as two others any day, besides Jem Backstay, who was a regular giant.

"Now, men," said the lieutenant addressing them—"Captain, I have your permission to take the command?"

"Certainly, sir," said Captain Morton. "You're my senior officer in the service, and I wouldn't wish to fight under a braver!"

"Well then, men," resumed the lieutenant, "we all here, Albatrosses and Hankow Lins alike, fight under one flag, the Union Jack of Old England! Stop, don't cheer, men, or those pirate scoundrels will hear us too soon, and we don't want 'em to hear us till they feel us! Men, I want you to be cool—I know you are brave—and wait my word of command before you utter a shout or draw a trigger. That pirate scoundrel is plucky enough, and will take some beating; but he'll get it soon enough if you only obey orders. Captain Morton, will you take charge of the guns, please, with Mr Scuppers? Boatswain, you with that brave black fellow, and two other hands, will mind the forecastle, to prevent boarders coming up while we are attacking them elsewhere. I shall want eight hands along with me for the gig, to clear her away, and get her ready to lower to leeward, when the pirate comes alongside to windward. When we've given them a good sweeping discharge, and cleared their deck, captain, I shall, after reloading, drop into the gig, and board her on her weather-side, so that'll take

them between two fires. Now, men, quick to your posts! Boatswain, to the forecastle with three others; gig's men step out, four blue-jackets and fourHankow Lins; the others of my cutter's crew will work the guns."

"May I come with you, sir?" said Mr Sprott anxiously. "I have no special duty here, and I'd like to pay out that cut across my jib on some of them piratical scoundrels!"

"Aye, you can come," said Mr Meredith cordially, "and glad I'll be to have such a brave fellow with me. Now, is everything ready in the gig, and the falls all slack for lowering?"

"Aye, aye, sir," said the coxswain. "Right as a trivet."

"Well, then, see to your small-arms, men. Have them all loaded ready, like the guns. The surprise will favour us at first, but we shall have to fight hard afterwards, as they'll muster pretty numerous if the account I have received be true."

All these preparations being complete, the guns loaded, and ready for discharging the moment the enemy ranged herself alongside, and each man being in his proper station, they awaited with the courage and caution of brave men the approach of the pirate. Fortunately for them, as it gave them more time to prepare, the breeze had quite died away, and a dead calm had fallen on the surface of the deep, while yet the schooner had scarcely decreased her distance, and they had been making their preparations for the fight. The glassy sea heaved up and down under the burning sun, which was now high in the heavens, with a sort of heavy, waveless throb, as if composing itself uneasily to sleep, the ship rolling with the motion to and fro.

The pirates were not asleep, however. As soon as the breeze failed they rigged out long oars from her low sides, and were leisurely sweeping nearer and nearer to the Hankow Lin with every pulse of the sea.

They must have heard the reports of the rifles and revolvers, as well as seen the smoke of the discharges, and heard the yells of the Malays as they fought hand to hand with the blue-jackets, for the air was as clear as could be; but the stillness now, and the absence of any attempt to trim the sails or to escape, deceived them. They evidently thought that their fellow-conspirators on board had gained the day, or that the slaughter had been so great on both sides that there was no longer anybody capable of resistance; for after a short pause,

when they were a cable's-length distant, the sweeps again set to work, and the low black hull of the schooner was urged forwards again towards the Hankow Lin, until those on the watch between the ports could see down on to her deck, which was crowded with yellow Malays like those with whom they had had such a desperate fight; besides numbers of Chinese, some of the black natives of Borneo and New Guinea, Portuguese desperadoes, and such ferocious-looking ruffians as herd together in Eastern seas.

"Be ready, men, to lift the ports and run out the guns," said the lieutenant, with finger uplifted to impose silence. "Depress your muzzles, and wait till I give the word to fire. She'll come up on this side, as I thought, so we'll give her the benefit of all four at once!"

Up crept the pirate, the ominous black flag still hoisted, although, as the breeze had dropped, it hung down limp from the mast; and they could hear the chatter of voices on board her quite distinctly. Nearer and nearer she came—until the lieutenant could count every man that stood grouped on her flush deck.

There seemed to be sixty or seventy of them, and they clustered together, looking over the side of their vessel at their expected prey.

Nearer and nearer she still continued to glide—until the schooner was almost alongside the Hankow Lin, and not ten yards off. It looked as if the pirate was going to run them aboard!

"Now," whispered the lieutenant again to the expectant Englishmen around him—"small-arm men reserve your fire; you at the guns, be ready to run them out. Now, men, altogether, drop the ports! Run out the guns! Fire!"

The concussion shook the ship to her centre, and a perfect hail of grape-shot was poured on the deck of the schooner, making long lanes or furrows through the ranks of the pirate's crew, as if they had been mowed down by a scythe!

"Again, men; sharp's the word. Load again, and give them another round. Quick! That's right," as a wild yell rose again from the crowded pirate. "Now, Captain Morton, one more round and then I shall board her on the weather-side. Load again as quickly as you can. Fire!"

The terrific shot-shower again swept into the schooner, which had remained in the same position, the first two broadsides having broken the sweeps and killed the men manning them; and before the pirates could recover from their

surprise the guns had been loaded again, and the gig of the Hankow Lin, with Lieutenant Meredith and his chosen crew, not forgetting Mr Sprott, had dashed out from the ship and boarded the schooner on her other side, where they least of all expected a foe, and the smoke concealed the boat's movements.

At the instant that the naval lieutenant jumped into her rigging with his men, another discharge of the Armstrong guns swept her decks, and the schooner, impelled by the calm, which makes floating surfaces approach each other on the water, ranged up alongside the tea-ship. At this moment, Snowball dropped from the forecastle of the Hankow Lin into the bows of the schooner, followed by Jem Backstay and half-a-dozen others.

Assailed thus on all sides—the lieutenant and his crew clearing all before them with a valiant cheer, which Snowball re-echoed with a terrific shout like an Indian war-cry, perhaps from some intuitive recollections of his native wilds on the banks of the Congo, in which the words "golly, take dat now!" could, however, be plainly distinguished—the attack proved a trifle too hot for the mongrel lot of scoundrels whom the pirate captain, or cut-throat, commanded; and they gave way instanter. Some died fighting to the last; some jumped overboard, preferring cold water to English cold steel; and the remainder, some twenty in number, who had escaped the murderous grape from the guns and the keen cutlasses of the blue-jackets, threw down their arms and surrendered, when they were driven into the hold, and the hatches battened down over them.

The fight from beginning to end had not lasted ten minutes; and the pirate ship was captured in almost quicker time than it had taken to overcome the original Malay gang on board the Hankow Lin.

"Hoist the Union Jack, Snowball," said the lieutenant to the darky, who had done so much to gain the victory—seeing him with the flag in his hand, and apparently itching to haul it up. "Hoist away, darky, and let us have honest colours over that dirty black rag! Now, lads, three cheers!"

"Lord bless you!" as Bill the boatswain said to his wife when telling her the story of the pirate's repulse when he got home some time afterwards, safe and sound, as luck would have it, "you oughter have just heard the shout that then went up from our throats to heaven! It sounded a'most like thunder; it were louder nor the report of the Armstrong guns as peppered the varmint!"

Chapter Six

"All's well that ends well"

To make a long story short, I may state briefly that in the second part of the action—the second act of a tragedy, it was for the Malays—both the bluejackets and the men of the Hankow Lin got off scot-free, not another casualty happening to swell the death-roll, or a fresh wound of any consequence being received by any of those engaged. The surprise to the pirates on finding they had "caught a Tartar," instead of assailing a defenceless merchant vessel, as they had expected, was so complete, that, in nautical phraseology, they were "taken all aback."

Not expecting any opposition to speak of, and confident that the ship they were attacking carried no guns—for how could even the most astute of the Malays have supposed, with all their prying and peeping, that the Hankow Lin had a set of Armstrongs on board her, headed up in hogsheads?—the pirates were stupefied by the first broadside they received; and, after that, their resistance amounted to nil, especially the more as one of the discharges killed their chief, when, of course, they had no one to lead them on or rally their drooping energies on the pinch.

The schooner, it was found, was none other than the Diavolo, a pirate craft commanded by a Portuguese renegade, who had already earned for himself a somewhat questionable reputation in Eastern seas; and how Captain Morton got wind of the intentions of the Malay crew to mutiny and bring his ship for destruction may be thus briefly told:—

Several large tea-traders having mysteriously disappeared on their voyage home to England, after shipping Malay crews on board, the English admiral on the station had conferred with the Chinese authorities, and from them learned that the Diavolo was suspected, and that a spy had discovered that an attempt would be made on the Hankow Lin, which was just loading at the time, and which had, like the other missing ships, shipped some Malay hands, in consequence of the loss of the main portion of her English crew on the voyage out.

Accordingly, precautions were taken to counteract the conspiracy of the Malay crew and capture the pirate by putting on board arms and munition—of which they supposed the ship to have none—and concealing in the saloon a force of blue-jackets to combine with the English part of the crew should the

contemplated mutiny break out—the result of which precautions proved, as we have seen, to be eminently successful.

While the calm lasted, the bodies of the dead pirates were hove overboard, and the three bluejackets and Phillips who had lost their life in the first struggle with the Malays committed carefully to the deep with every solemnity; and then the Hankow Lin, as soon as the wind sprang up again, as it did by sundown, was headed towards Singapore in accordance with Lieutenant Meredith's wish, although it was sorely against Captain Morton's will to bear off from his direct course to England, which was almost right in front of him, the Straits of Sunda bearing a point or two off the lee beam.

However, Captain Morton lost nothing by his compliance with the lieutenant's wish. The Hankow Lin when she arrived at Singapore was allotted a half share of the value of the pirate schooner and all she contained; and that craft being pretty nearly crammed full of plunder, which she had accumulated from the different ships that had been captured and scuttled by her in her nefarious career, the sum thus awarded to Captain Morton was more than sufficient to compensate his owners for any delay that had arisen through the Hankow Lin's detention at the Dutch port, besides swelling the handsome bounty that was paid to each and all of the crew engaged in the affair.

This was not all, either.

At Singapore, Captain Morton was able to obtain what he could not have very well voyaged home without, and that was a supply of fresh hands to navigate the ship in place of the treacherous scoundrels who had engaged with him at Canton only to plot her destruction, although the captain had ample satisfaction for all this ere he left the place, for, as Bill the boatswain said in mentioning the fact afterwards, he "saw every mother's son of them hung before he weighed anchor again."

After bidding adieu to their late active comrades the blue-jackets, all went well with the old vessel, from Singapore to the Straits of Sunda, across the Indian Ocean, and round the Cape of Good Hope. Not an untoward event happened on the way home, not a mishap occurred, and, as Snowball said when he stepped ashore in the East India Dock, "All's well dat ends well." And so ended The Voyage of the "Hankow Lin."

Volume Two

Chapter One

At Zanzibar

“Have I ever been to Madagascar?” he repeated, with a look of amazement and wonder quaintly combined on his good-natured, ruddy-brown, weather-beaten face. “Is that what you wanted to know, eh?”

“Yes,” I replied, “that is, if you’ve no objection to answer my question.”

“Why, no! I’ve nothing to keep dark of my doings.”

“All right!” said I; “then you can go ahead.”

“Well, sir,” he began, drawing a deep breath as if he only just took in the import of my question and was turning over in his mind the matter in all its bearings, “I should rather just think I had been to Madagascar, and there’s precious little chance too of my forgetting it, either, in a hurry. Ah! if you’d once been wrecked on sich a queer, outlandish, wild, desolate sort o’ shore as that there, arterwards havin’ to swim miles upon miles through a heavy rolling sea to get to land, and that under a fierce burning sun the while; besides, when got ashore at last, being forced to tramp for ten long weary days and nights across slimy green marshes filled with alligators, crawling through thick jungles of thorny bushes that tore your flesh to pieces before ever you could ha’ come to a civilised place to get your wants attended—you, that is me, not having a morsel of food or a drop of pure water to drink all the way—why, sir, I fancy as how you’d remember the blessed place to your dying day; and, would recollect all about it in the flash of a moment again when any one just mentioned its name again the same as you have done just now!”

The speaker was a fine, robust-looking seaman of middle height, and probably of middle age also, for there was a slight suspicion of grey in the crisp brown beard that covered the lower part of his countenance, while several prominent wrinkles were apparent about the corners of his merry, twinkling, blue eyes.

He was dressed respectably in a sober suit of some rough material that fitted easily to his well-proportioned limbs, and, from his civilian costume and nautical look—for he had a sort of briny flavour about him, so to speak—I took him for a petty officer of the Royal Navy who had retired from the active duties of his profession on account of his length of service afloat having entitled him

to the otium cum dignitate of a pension ashore for the remainder of his days. Such was my surmise at first sight—an impression subsequently in part confirmed; but be that as it may, he and I had got into conversation one bright summer day not long ago while standing on Portsmouth Hard, watching a white-hulled Indian troopship steaming out of the harbour beyond, with the marines for Egypt on board. I had mentioned Madagascar in casually commenting on the plucky behaviour displayed at Tamatave by Captain Johnstone of HMS Dryad in resisting the high-handed proceedings of the French admiral, who appeared to think that he might insult the English flag with impunity from the fact of his being in command of a squadron flying the Tricolour flag while the representative of the Union Jack had only one solitary vessel to oppose to that force.

"Aye, I know the East African station well," continued my friend. "I was invalided home from there, and got my pension three years before my twenty years' term of service was up in consequence."

"Indeed!" said I, to lead him on, in expectation of the yarn I could perceive looming before me; but playing with my fish gently, as anglers know so well how to do, so that I might not frighten him into silence by any undue display of anxiety on my part.

"Yes, I served over a year in the London at Zanzibar before being drafted off to one of the cruisers on the station. Beastly unhealthy place that Zanzibar—all fevers and agues and malaria in the wet season, and as hot as a place you've heard of, sir, when the sou'-west monsoon blows off the African shore. I was there when Sir Bartle Frere came to interview the old sultan to try and make him sign a treaty to put down the slave-trade; but it was all no go—the old sultan was too wide-awake for that, and, indeed, treaty or no treaty, we can never quite stop the dealing in slaves between the Arabs on the one hand and the clove-growers on the other."

"No?" said I interrogatively, wondering what the harmless clove, which forms such an important unit in the "sugar and spice and all things nice" combination of culinary seasoning, could possibly have to do with the slave-trade of East Africa.

"No, sir," he answered emphatically, with the air of a man who well knew what he was talking about and was certain of his facts, "it can't be done. You see, at certain times of the year, about a month after the rainy season ends, in

September, the cloves ripen, and it takes a good many hands to pick 'em all and gather them in. Did you ever see them growing, sir?"

"I can't say I ever have," I responded, "although, of course, I've read about them."

"Well, sir, the cloves grow on tall, biggish-sized trees—"

"Dear me!" I said, interrupting him, "why, I thought they were the fruit of some little shrub like currants and capers."

"Oh, no! They grow on trees, and some of a goodish height too. The cloves are the bud or blossom of the tree before the flower comes; and they must be picked early in time, or else they're not fit for anything. Their name, 'cloves'—I don't know whether you are aware on it, sir—is from the little things resembling a small nail—clavo, as it's called in the Spanish."

"I didn't know that," I said.

"That's it, then," he replied, proceeding with his explanation. "Now, of course you can see that the cloves must be got off the trees before the blossom ripens too much, but as the sun is so terribly hot and such a miasma comes up from the places where the trees grow only niggers can stand the exposure; and so it is that slave labour is wanted, for no whites could undertake the job, and the Arab merchants, you may be sure, wouldn't do it themselves, in spite of the large demand for cloves in the European markets—that is, so long as they can get slaves to do it for 'em."

"How do they gather them?" I asked.

"Why, they have queer-shaped ladders, just of the same sort as those little things they put in pots of garden musk to train the plants on, broad at one end and narrow at the other—something like a triangular grating—so that a lot of the niggers can stand on it at a time and pick away from the same tree, on which, perhaps, there are millions of buds to be taken off in less than no time. When they are all gathered they're spread out in the sun and dried, and then sent off in bags to whoever wants 'em."

"And where are they principally grown?" said I.

"Why, Pemba. That's an island up above Zanzibar, about sixty miles from the coast, though they're very good cloves grown on Zanzibar Island too; but

Pemba is the chief place, and it is to there that the chief runs of slaves are made by the Arab dhows. That is why the London was so long stationed thereabouts: it was in order to intercept these craft and stop the traffic."

"I suppose you've seen some service chasing the dhows yourself, eh?" I said, thinking this a good opening for getting him back to his yarn, as he seemed inclined to end the conversation at this point, hinting that he had an appointment "in the yard"—meaning Portsmouth dockyard—and that it was getting on late, and they would soon be closing up.

"Oh yes, sir! I served my time dhow-chasing when I was in the London; and saw a few sights, too, in the different craft we overhauled that would ha' made your blood boil against slavery. One dhow, I remember, we captured with nearly a hundred on board, all crammed into a space that you couldn't have thought would have held half that number of human beings, for it was a small dhow, of probably not more than forty tons at the outside. On the ballast at the bottom of the vessel were huddled up twenty-three women, some with infants in their arms. They were literally doubled up, sir, as they could not stand from the position they were in, as right over them was placed a bamboo deck not three feet above the keel of the boat, on which forty men were jammed together in the same way. This was not all, either, for, right above the men, right on to their heads almost as they squatted down, was another deck of bamboo, on which were over fifty children of all ages. The whole lot, too, when we boarded the dhow, were in the last stages of starvation and dysentery, not to speak of what they must have suffered from the cramped position in which they were confined and the want of air. They smelled something awful when we unkiverd them; it was enough to knock down a horse."

"It was horrible," I said in sympathy.

"No doubt it were all that," replied my friend the pensioner. "But from what I saw out there I do believe the very attempts our government make to put down the slave-trade only increases the evils of the poor wretches we are trying to liberate."

"How is that?" I asked.

"Why, you see, when the traffic used to be permitted, as it was once for a period of eight months in the year, just as you have at home a set time for shooting game, the slaves used to be carried in large dhows, more comfortably, and well supplied with food and water in their passage from the mainland to

Pemba and Zanzibar; but when our cruisers began to look out for them and stopped the trade, no matter whether it was in the dry season or not, then the Arabs would pack 'em up in small craft that could lie hid in the creeks or shallows of the coast and smuggle the niggers in during the night-time, for these Arabs are just like cats, and can see in the dark when our men couldn't perceive their hands afore their face. Once upon a time, when I first went on the station, we used to capture good big dhows that were of a hundred and eighty tons burden and upwards; now our men only get hold of little Mtpe dhows that are hardly worth taking—I suppose you know, sir, as how we get a bounty or prize-money, according to the size of the vessels and the number of slaves we liberate?"

"Yes," said I, "I'm aware of that, as I have noticed advertisements in the London Gazette about the distribution of the bounty for such and such slave-dhows 'captured by the boats of HMS London' or some other cruiser named. How are these dhows built?"

"Of a sort of close hard wood like African oak, but harder than our English timber of the same nature. The planks of the small Mtpe dhows are sewn together with a thread-like stuff they get from the reeds in the lagoons. They are built broad and shallow, with a keel deepening towards the stern, almost like a wedge, so that they can turn quickly. They're good sea-boats, too, and can sail almost up into the wind's eye, with their large lateen sails, which are cut something like an old-fashioned leg of mutton, or short tack lug. The stem of them rises high out of the water, having a poop on it, which is thatched over with matting and banana leaves; and altogether they don't look unlike a Chinese junk. Some of the bigger dhows, which are used as war craft by the Arab chiefs of Lamoi and Mozambique, are fine craft, and carry six and twelve brass guns sometimes, like the old carronades of the service."

"They sail well, you say?" I inquired.

"Don't they, that's all! Why, none of our quickest steam-pinnaces can overhaul them when they're going on a wind, for even with the lightest breeze their sails, being made of twilled calico and light, waft them along as if by magic. There are twenty that escape us for every one we catch, as, in the busy season, the caravans from the interior bring the slaves down to the coast wholesale. The Portuguese and Arabs are the chaps that manage the business; and once the slaves are aboard the dhows, they sneak along the land until night-time, when, if the wind blows fair for them, they're off and away to Pemba, or further up

towards the Arabian coast, where our boats can whistle for them for all the chance they have of overhauling them!"

"What becomes of the slaves that are liberated when the dhows are captured?" said I.

"Oh, the boys are sent to the Boy's Mission Schools at Zanzibar, and the girls to the Female Mission there also; while the men folk, at least all the able-bodied and strong ones that are not too old, are enlisted into the sultan's army—the Sultan of Zanzibar, I mean, the Seyyid Burgash that was. When I was there, the commander of his army was a lieutenant of our navy who had been 'lent' by government for the purpose for three years, and now he has left the service altogether and is known as 'General Matthews' on the east coast. A right smart chap he is too, for he drilled the niggers as well as if he were a born sojer instead of a sailor!"

"Do the slaves like this business?" I asked, thinking that their "freedom" seemed rather questionable; and then, too, consider the cost both in men and money it is to England every year.

"Well, I don't believe they do," answered the ex-man-o'-war's-man—"I've heard some of them say that they were quite contented to work on the clove plantations, and preferred that to loafing about the streets of Zanzibar, where hundreds of them are to be seen every day, with nothing to do and very little to eat, unless they take to thieving!"

"What sort of a place is Zanzibar?" said I now.

"Well, sir," replied the pensioner, "like all them oriental towns I have ever seen in the Levant and elsewhere, it looks ever so much better as seen from the sea than it does at close quarters. Coming into the harbour from the southwards, as I've entered it many a time when returning from a trip down to the Mozambique, your vessel has to wind slowly along through numerous little coral islands, which are, however, grown with stunted trees and bush quite close down to the water."

"That must be lovely!" I remarked.

"Aye, aye, so it is," said my friend; "but the navigation is awfully difficult, not to say dangerous, even with a man in the chains heaving the lead and singing out the depth every moment, for the soundings shoot from the 'deep nine' to the 'short five,' and less nor that too, before you know where you are!

Howsomdever, once you've got inside and cast anchor, it's as pretty a roadstead as I ever clapped eyes on—as pretty as Rio in South America, which I daresay you've heard of?"

"Yes, and seen too," I said in response.

"Have you, sir?" replied the ex-man-o'-war's-man—"then all I can say is that you've seen the handsomest harbour in the world! But, still, Zanzibar ain't far behind it. The front of the town, which faces the anchorage, looks quite imposing like. The water of the bay is clear too, so that you can see the bottom down to any depth; and the white sandy beach fringing it round is just like snow against the dark background of palm-trees and green foliage. Along the beach are the warehouses and residences of the English-speaking merchants, the grand mansions of the richer sort of citizens, and the offices of the different foreign consuls—each with its own national flag fluttering gaily from the top, the British Union Jack and the Yankee Stars and Stripes being very prominent; while, in the very centre of the lot, is the palace of the sultan, a fine concern. From the top of this flies the red ensign of Arabia, and around it may be seen sentries in a sort of zouave uniform, selected from that very slave army I told you of just now."

"What struck you as most peculiar about the place?" I asked.

"Well, I'm hanged if it weren't the niggers, sir!" said my informant. "You see there the most extraordinary number of little darkies you ever saw in your life, all with nothing on 'em, no more than Adam—not even a fig-leaf! The next thing to strike you, if a stranger, would be the heat, for it is far hotter, strange to say, ashore there than it is aboard your own ship. Some of the houses are curious to look at, for they have neither windows nor doors; for the best dwellings are built round an open court, and the windows, or air-holes as they might more properly be called, open on to that. Instead of being light and built of some flimsy stuff, as you might expect, the houses are all put up 'on the heat-resisting principle,' as I heard an engineer describe them—just like the Irishman that wore his Connemara frieze coat in summer to keep out the sun, as he said, in the same way as he put it on in winter to keep out the cold!"

"Indeed!" I said.

"Yes, sir," continued my friend; "the walls of all the large houses at Zanzibar are many feet thick of solid stone masonry; and even the floors and partitions dividing the rooms are of several thicknesses too, all made of wood and stone

and lime, the wood being covered over with mortar. The roof is the best part of them, however. It is made quite flat, and it is the principal spot for the family to go of an evening when the sun has gone down and the night-breeze begins to blow. The Arabs and Parsees go on top in the mornings too, at sunrise, to say their prayers, spreading out a bit of sacred carpet over the stone flagging that forms the floor of the roof."

"Are there many shops?" I next inquired.

"Bless you, the town's crammed full of them! but they're only open sheds, in the centre of which some Hindoo or Banian merchant is to be seen squatting all day long, chewing hashish or smoking his hubble-bubble, as if he hadn't a stroke of business to do, and didn't care about doing it either if he got the chance!"

"I suppose they have goods to sell, though, eh!" I said.

"Oh, yes, shawls and sandals and silks and such like; while in the eatable line you can get coffee and sherbet, and arrack too, or what they call English rum, besides pine-apples and mangoes, oranges, citrons, guavas, green cocoa-nuts, and every fruit you could think of, as well as cakes and sweetmeats. The streets in the town are very narrow and are crowded with these sorts of shops or rather stalls, for they're just like the places you see old apple-women rig up at the corners in London; but the bazaars are the best spots to look at—they're just like those in India, and some that I've seen too in Constantinople. Lor' sakes! why, they're crowded with Arabs and Hindoos, Persians, Africans, Somali Arabs, and every sort of coloured native you can imagine, sir, from the lightest coffee-tinted mulatto down to the jettiest black of the pure nigger brought originally from the interior as a slave.

"The funniest thing, too, about these bazaars is to see the different trades or handicraftsmen at work, the goldsmiths making rings by hammering and beating the metal, the jewellers stringing pearls together for necklaces and bracelets, the toy-makers rigging up the queerest curios you ever saw, and the sandal-makers cutting out shoes of leather; but the biggest treat of all is to watch a Parsee school and see how the master instructs the little shavers. The children, to the number of fifty or more, all squat on the floor of the school-room, which is a large open shed on a raised platform, each holding in one hand the blade-bone taken from the shoulder of a camel to serve as a slate, on which they make marks with a pencil-like brush. They are pretty little trots, the children; and are mostly all smartly dressed in little jackets and trousers of various coloured silks, green, yellow, and red, with turbans on top of their heads, just like their fathers, to complete the picture."

"The end of the rainy season, you say, is the best time for catching the dhows?" I asked now, to bring my friend back to the main point of all my interrogatories.

“Yes, there’s the greatest demand then for the slaves; besides which the south-west monsoon sets in at that time, and is favourable for their crossing from the mainland.”
“Do they ever show fight?” I inquired.
“Bather!” ejaculated my informant; “they’re about as treacherous a lot as you could ever come across, them Arabs; for, I tell you what, they’ll sometimes let a boat’s crew overhaul ’em, and come up alongside as if everything was ship-shape and clear sailing—that is to say, sir, that they have nothing contraband aboard and could show a clean bill o’ lading; when, drat ’em, they’ll turn round on you like a parcel o’ tigers with their sharp knives and spears. It was in this way my poor skipper, Capt’in Brownrigg, was killed in December ’81—just at Christmas time, when I were out there.”
“That was a sad thing,” said I sympathisingly.
“Yes,” replied the pensioner; “but, saddest of all, it was to know his poor wife had just come out from England to join him, and was aboard the London at the very time his body was brought alongside the ship in the steam-pinnace in which he had met his death. Ah! he was a fine officer was Capt’in Brownrigg, and liked by everybody—not only by his brother officers and equals, but by the men under him. Bless you, they’d a’ gone anywheres to win a smile from his cheery face. Hullo, though, sir, look there, they’re shutting up the dockyard gate!”
Such indeed was the case, showing that the afternoon was pretty nearly “expended,” as they say in the service.

“Ah! that comes along o’ yarning with you and not minding the business that brought me down here, for now I’m too late.”

“Well, in that case,” said I, seeing my chance now for getting the oft-evaded yarn of my friend’s long service, “suppose you come home to my place and have a cup of tea, when you can tell me the story of your shipwreck off Madagascar, eh?”

He hemmed and hawed for a moment; but seeing that my invitation was cordially given, and I suppose having nothing else particularly to do, he accepted—whence this story.

Chapter Two

Wind and Steam

When I had made the pensioner as comfortable as I could at my little place—attending carefully to the wants of his inner man before appearing to have any curiosity regarding the matter that had made me invite him home—and the tea-things were cleared away, I gave a sort of inquiring cough, which he immediately took as my signal for him to begin his yarn.

"After serving a year in the London, as I told you before, sir," he commenced, without any preliminary beating about the bush, as many a landsman would have done, "I was drafted on to an old cruiser called the Dolphin. She's been broken up now, like the old London, though I hear they've got a rare smart despatch-boat just building called by the same name; but the Dolphin as I'm speaking of is quite different and not the same vessel—remember that, sir, please, in case anybody should try to throw doubts on my yarn, as some of them sea-lawyers will."

"I assure you," said I to encourage him, "that I am quite satisfied as to the truth of your story."

"Well, then," he resumed, "the Dolphin I am speaking of to you, sir, was a pretty fast boat for a paddle-steamer, and had already made some tidy captures of slave-dhows—that is, since she had been commissioned and sent out from England, about six months before, to replace an old sailing brig that formerly did duty on the station as tender to the old London; so I fully expected when I jined her to have some smart work afore me—and I warn't disapinted neither!"

"No?" said I questioningly to lead him on, settling myself cosily in my chair.

"You're right, sir, I warn't," replied my friend Ben. "The very first day I shipped aboard the Dolphin we took two Mtpe dhows close inshore near Pemba. That brought me in a niceish bit of prize-money for a start; and, just a week arter that exactly, when we had got down to our proper cruising ground—that was, sir, just atween Zanzibar and the Mozambique Channel, which, as I daresay you know, sir, is about two hundred and fifty miles wide and runs between Madagascar and the mainland of Africa—why, we came upon the biggest haul that had been made on the coast for years; but we had to work for it, I tell you. That was a chase and no mistake!"

“Was it?” I asked, glad of Ben’s coming now to an actual yarn concerning some of the stirring events of his life; for he had previously only been “beating about the bush,” so to speak.

“Yes, sir; and not only a chase that was something to boast of, but a fight as well at the end of it—one of the smartest scrimmages I ever had all the time I was out there. If you don’t mind my lighting a pipe, for I allers, sir, can tell a yarn better when I’m smoking, I’ll just haul my jaw-tackle aboard and give you a full account of the whole adventure.”

“Do,” I said.

“There!” exclaimed he with a grunt of satisfaction, carefully filling a briar-root pipe with some dark tobacco, which he produced from out of a little round brass box that he carried in his waistcoat pocket, telling me it was “the right sort,” and proceeding to light it—“now, we can go on serenely.”

“Fire away!” said I, to encourage him, “I’m all attention.”

He did not waste any more time; but at once began his story.

“The Dolphin had run down south with the fag-end of the north-east monsoon, economising her coals as much as possible, as all the men-of-war have to do nowadays, worse luck—sometimes when it’s a question between saving a few pounds or sacrificing a ship! We had passed Mazemba island, and had just weathered Cape Delgado, which is some ten degrees south of the equator, when—it was close on sunset at the time, and it grows dark all at once after that, you know, in the tropics—the look-out man sang out, ‘sail-ho!’ This was just as we were piped down to tea. Bless you, we didn’t think no more of going below, I can tell you!”

“I suppose not,” I put in, to show I was listening attentively to what he was saying, for he paused at this juncture, as if waiting for me to say something.

“No, sir. Of course, although we were running down under easy sail the engine-fires were ready banked up, so that it didn’t take us long to get up steam; and we were soon round like a shot, and retracing our way, right in the face of the wind, after a large dhow which we could see stealing up along-shore and hugging the land. She was what the Arabs called a batilla, and had two large lugs, or lateen sails set, besides a sort of square-cut jib forwards on her high-peaked bowsprit, by the aid of which she was sailing close-hauled, almost in the very teeth of the nor’-easter that was blowing pretty stiffly at the time,

making it risky work for a vessel to approach so near a lee-shore as she was doing. However, I suppose her captain thought he would be able to slip by us in the darkness, when he might have got under the shelter of the island we had passed only a short while previously in our downward passage to the Mozambique; and, once he was out of sight of the Dolphin, of course he could have put out to sea again at his leisure, making his way north as soon as the coast seemed clear, and thus escaping us altogether."

"But he reckoned without his host that time, eh?" said I.

"Aye, that he did," responded the ex-man-o'-war's-man, warming up to his subject as he proceeded. "He made a great mistake, did that there Arab slave skipper when he thought he'd hoodwink us aboard the Dolphin this evening I'm a-talking of—a mistake, sir, as I'll soon show you, that cost him not only his vessel, but his life as well!"

"Indeed?" I interposed, beginning to get interested in Ben's yarn now that he had actually got under weigh with it in earnest.

"Yes, that it did," replied Ben Campion, striking another match to relight his pipe, which had gone out in the interval, and puffing away vigorously for a few seconds in order to get it in full blast.—"He was a 'cute chap, though, that skipper," continued Ben presently when he had got the pipe to go to his satisfaction;—"for no sooner had he perceived that we had observed him and were in chase, than he threw off all pretence of attempting to deceive us by passing off as a simple trader. Abandoning his design of beating up to Cape Delgado, he wore the dhow round as sharp as lightning and made off down along the coast, right before the full strength of the monsoon; where, with the wind in his favour, he would have a better chance of getting away from us, those dhows, as I've told you, sometimes walking away from a steam-pinnace as if she were standing still. This time, however, he had no cockle-shell of a pinnace after him, but a smart paddle-steamer, and one, too, that could go along well also before the wind, carrying square sails as did the Dolphin on her foremast and a huge spanker aft. A stern-chase, of course, is a long chase all the world over, as everybody knows, and ours was no exception. Still, all the time we gradually overhauled the dhow; and just about sunset we got within range of a long seven-inch gun, which we carried forwards. This, Mr Shrapnel, our gunner, trained right across the slaver's bows, and at the word of command, 'Fire!' let drive with a bang that shook the steamer right down to her kelson and seemed to stop her way for the moment, sending her back, as it were, with the recoil.

“The gun was well aimed, the shot pitching up the water some fifty yards in front of her, but it didn’t seem to make any difference to the dhow a bit, her captain keeping right on with every stitch of his canvas set, the wide lateen sails bellying out to their full, as we could see, and the queer-looking craft burying herself in the foam that she churned up as she dived down into the waves every moment with a plunge, as if she were going headlong down to the bottom, taking in huge seas over her cat-heads; for it was blowing more than half a gale at the time, and even we in our bigger craft found it hard work carrying on as we did with both wind and steam. And I tell you we were going too! Our engines were revolving full speed ahead, and our canvas must have helped us full another five knots, with the wind dead astern as it was, and we running before it, while, to aid us, there was the usual inshore current—that runs down the coast of the Mozambique from Cape Delgado to right opposite Madagascar, where it turns off more in an easterly direction—carrying us along like a mill-race, some rate of three knots more. It made the Dolphin quiver and tremble through every timber as she seemed literally to fly through the water, but it didn’t make us approach the dhow any closer, although we held our own. As the wind got up more and more, for it was the tail-end of the north-east monsoon, as I told you, and those blessed monsoons always die out with a brush when they’ve got to the end of their tether, the slaver appeared to rise bodily out of the water and skim along the surface from the top of one rolling wave on to another—just as you see an albatross does off the Cape of Good Hope when it has taken its first dart downwards after its prey, and has then to pursue it over the sea, the large sheets of the triangular sails of the dhow standing out on either side of her low dark keel in the same way as the pinions of the albatross touch the water in its flight.

“Mr Shrapnel was told to fire another gun; but it had no greater effect than the first one, and our skipper hardly seemed to know what to do; for the dhow was now heading more towards the land, and the Dolphin would soon be in shoal water, as there are lots of reefs about them parts. It would never do, either, to fire right into her, although we were well within range now, as we might probably damage some of the poor slaves aboard, who were no doubt packed as tightly as herrings in a barrel; and yet, it was growing dark, the sun being just on the point of setting over the highlands of the great African continent on our starboard hand. If we didn’t do something pretty soon Mr Arab dhow would be able to cry, ‘Walker!’ and laugh at us for the wild-goose chase he had led us!”

“You must have been pretty anxious as the moments flew by, the sun setting, and the darkness creeping up, without your being able to overhaul her?” I said.

“We were all that,” replied Ben, knocking the ashes out of his pipe viciously as if he were giving the slave captain a rap on the head;—“and as we stood grouped around the deck amidships close by the engine-room hatch, fixing on our cutlasses and getting ready for the scrimmage, should luck enable us to have one, I don’t know what we said we wouldn’t do to the impudent beggars when we got aboard!

“The land was looming well on our beam, some six miles distant, and those breakers visible between us and it. The situation was a ‘tight’ one, if there ever was such, for it looked uncommon like as if the captain of the dhow intended running ashore and risking her breaking to pieces on the rocks, if he couldn’t find an opening in the coast into some lagoon where he could with his light draught beach the craft in safety. He was evidently determined to escape us, run what risk he might!

“I was standing alongside our skipper on the bridge; and I could see that he, too, was bound not to be licked, for he had screwed up his mouth in a way that he had when he had made up his mind to something, and then the admiral himself wouldn’t have turned him from it!—He was a bold, courageous officer, was Captain Wilson, and every inch a sailor. Poor chap! he afterwards fell a victim to the fatal coast fever at Zanzibar.

“Well, I could see from the look on his face now, that if the Arab skipper was a determined fellow, and had resolved to circumvent us, why, Captain Wilson was equally determined, too, that he shouldn’t, and that it was a case of ‘pull baker, pull devil’ atween the two!

“‘Campion,’ say he to me, ‘pass the word forra’d for Mr Shrapnel to come here to me for a moment.’

“Of course I did as he told me; and soon the gunner arrives on the bridge, where, as I still stopped, it being my station there for the time, I heard all that was said between the skipper and him.

“‘Mr Shrapnel,’ says Captain Wilson, ‘we’ll have to fire at the fellow in earnest now, or else he’ll escape us; but I don’t want to hurt any of those poor creatures, who are on board against their will. Can’t you manage to shoot away a spar so as to cripple his wings a bit, so that we can manage to get alongside before he gets too close inshore?’”

“‘I’ll try, sir,’ says the gunner, turning to go away.

"'Do,' replies our skipper, 'and look sharp about it, too, or else it will be too late. Mind, though, and aim high. I wouldn't have the slaves hurt for anything. As for the Arab crew, we'll give 'em a taste of cold steel when we come across them, and that will be better than all the shot and shell we can send after them now!'

"'Aye, aye, sir,' said Mr, Shrapnel, going forwards again without any delay; and the gun detachment being all ready, our seven-inch spoke out again to the slaver, with more purpose than it had done before.

"The first shot went wide of the mark, and so did the second; but the third carried away her main halliards apparently, for the big sail came down all at once by the run, making the dhow broach-to as it fell over the side to leeward. Our men gave a tremendous cheer at this, but the slaver captain was a smart chap, as you might have noticed before, and would not give in yet; as before you could say 'Jack Robinson,' he had the halliards spliced again, and the sail hoisted, bearing away straight for the land now, and not edging along it as he had previously done. He was evidently determined to destroy the vessel rather than give in.

"'Silence, men!' shouted out Captain Wilson to stop our fellows cheering, which, as you know, sir, is against the rules of the service, although winked at sometimes in the enthusiasm of the moment. 'We haven't got the slaver yet, and it will be time to cheer when we've captured him! Mr Shrapnel,' he added then, as soon as all was quiet, the men being as mum as a mouse fore and aft—'you must send another messenger after, my joker; try if you can't do him a little more damage this time!'

"'Aye, aye, sir,' sang out the gunner; and he set to work again with a will, for the brief time during which the dhow's big main lug had been down had enabled us to get within half a mile of her, and Mr Shrapnel was better able to see what he was shooting at. He was a knowing hand, was the gunner! Watching his opportunity when the Dolphin rose on the top of the heavy rolling swell that set in towards the land, and when the dhow was right down in the hollow of the combers, he pulled the lanyard of the trigger, and with a bang and a belch of flame and smoke a heavy conical shot went rotating through the air, making as much noise as a railroad train as it hurtled forwards at the chase, whose hull was hidden from view, but whose masts seemed quite close to us.

"He didn't require to fire a second shot this time.

“No sooner had the report sounded and the roaring rumbling thunder of the discharge died away in the distance, rolling in towards the coast—the smoke being blown away, too, as quickly by the wind—than we could see the dhow dismasted before us, swaying about in the trough of the sea.

“She was a hopeless wreck, for both her masts had been snapped off short by the shot, and the yards to which the sails had been attached were lying athwart the deck. The Dolphin now ranged up alongside her on the leeward bow, and the captain hailed her to know if she surrendered, when one of the Arabs on board, who must have been the skipper, waved a red handkerchief or cloth of some kind in token of truce. He was a tall, swarthy chap, with a turban instead of a fez, which the others wore, on his head; and the belt round his body, as we could see from looking down on to the deck of the dhow, which was much below the level of our vessel, was filled choke-full with long-barrelled pistols and dirks, and a round-shaped scimitar-like sword without a sheath that seemed as if it could give a fellow a very tidy cut.

“The sea was rough and both the dhow and the Dolphin were rolling about terribly, we dipping our foreyard-arms as we lay-to; but Captain Wilson at once ordered the first cutter to be piped away, with one of the lieutenants in charge; while nothing would suit him also but to have his own gig manned. He said he mistrusted the slaver and would board her also himself, as she had a number of Arab rascals on her deck who would probably show fight.

“The boats were soon in the water, under our lee, the men shinning down into them by the falls, each chap with his cutlass tucked into his waistband; and, in another moment, rounding under the stem of the Dolphin, and getting nearly swamped as we breasted the sea, we made for the dhow, that now lay about half a cable’s-length from our vessel, which had drifted a bit astern.

“‘Put your backs into the stroke!’ sang out Captain Wilson from his gig—for I was in the cutter; and with grim earnestness we stretched out as hard as we could, gripping the water firmly and then pulling with all our strength. It was hard work against such a sea as was then running and in the face of the wind, which was still rising and more gusty than before; but we were soon alongside the chase, both the boats boarding her of course to leeward, although the captain in his gig dashed at the high poop astern, while we in the cutter made for her bows, which lay lower in the water and would thus enable us to get more easily on board.

“Captain Wilson was right in his suspicions about the Arab skipper’s surrender. Although he had waved that red rag of his to make-believe that he had given in, so that we might not give him a broadside as he probably expected—for of course he didn’t know that we would not fire the big guns for fear of killing the poor slaves in the hold—no sooner had we got alongside than the beggars showed fight.

“I and another chap managed to grab hold of the bowsprit gear to haul ourselves up by into the fo’c’sle of the dhow, when chop came a cut that severed the ropes we had clutched, causing us to let go and drop back again into the bottom of the cutter with a thump that nearly knocked the bottom out of her, while another Arab shoved out the muzzle of a long matchlock right amongst us and fired it off so closely that the charge singed my whiskers. That did one good job, however, for it made us pretty angry, as you might imagine, and the whole cutter’s crew tumbled aboard in a way that astonished them, I can tell you. They fought pluckily though, but they were more like mad cats than men, screaming and tearing us with their nails when we had knocked their long knives out of their hands and disarmed them. As for the skipper of the dhow, he was a perfect demon, and would have settled Captain Wilson had it not been for the coxswain of the gig giving him a drive through with his cutlass just as he had got our captain down and, kneeling on his chest, was preparing coolly to cut his throat with the keen curving scimitar that we had seen in his belt. Captain Wilson looked, sir, as pale as a ghost when he got on his feet again; for although he was as brave an officer as ever stepped, it does give a fellow a bit of a turn sometimes to be face to face with death, as he was then, and know that nothing, probably, can save you!

“When we had got the better hand of the slave crew, in which we did not quite get off scot-free, five of our men being killed outright and several wounded with ugly gashes from the sharp knives of the Arabs, we set about opening the hatches to release the slaves, who had all this while been kicking up a thundering row below, yelling and hollering as if they were all being murdered.

“Well, bless you! why, there were no less than three hundred and fifty crammed in the hold fore and aft on the two decks that were underneath the main one, and which had not four feet of space between them; the people, men, women, and children, being packed together so close that you couldn’t have got a sheet of paper edgeways between them. As for the smell; well, sir, I think you’d prefer that of a gas main just opened, or the foulest scent you could think of, to what we all smelt in the hold of that there dhow; for it seemed to smother us and

make the strongest men aboard turn faint just like a girl does when she cuts her finger and sees the blood.

“After releasing half of them and bringing them up on the upper deck of the dhow, for there was not space to let the whole of them out of the hold at once, we had to rig up the masts of the craft again so that she could make sail, the weather being too ticklish for the Dolphin to take her in tow; although she did so for awhile, just in order to get a little further away from the coast, which was not too pleasant a neighbour with a north-east monsoon blowing and a heavy sea setting in towards the land.

“By the time we had rigged up jury-masts on the dhow it was dark, so, warning the prize-crew that was on board, of which I was one, to keep a sharp look-out and mind that our tow-rope didn’t part, Captain Wilson went back to his own vessel—he wouldn’t leave us till everything was ship-shape again with the slaver and everybody seemed comfortable-like; taking with him the majority of the Arabs who had been uninjured in the scuffle, and who might have tried perhaps to recapture the dhow from the small lot of men whom our captain was able only to spare to man her. Of course, there was very little chance of their attempting this now that their skipper was dead, the coxswain’s thrust with his cutlass having lost the dark gentleman the ‘number of his mess’; but still, after the treachery they had already shown, it was best to take all proper precautions to spoil any little game they might try on.

“During the night, the Dolphin kept under easy steam head to sea, only just preventing us from drifting ashore, as our tow-rope was hardly ever taut the whole time, for the wind blew so strongly still from the northward and eastward, the very direction we had to make for to reach Zanzibar with our prize, that it was impossible for the steamer to make any way against it, especially with the dhow in tow. The sea, too, was also very rough, breaking over the frail craft so frequently that we had to pack down all the slaves again below to prevent their being washed overboard.

“Towards morning, the wind gradually lessened, showing signs of shifting, which was to be expected at the season, being near the end of March. The sea, too, calmed down a bit, but there was still a heavy ground-swell, and from all appearances it looked as if there was going to be a squall, the more especially as it began to rain heavily. I had been left by Captain Wilson in charge of the prize-crew, and this change in the weather made me feel somewhat uneasy of the tow-rope breaking from the increased strain there was now on it through the labouring of the dhow; for I thought it would be better for both the Dolphin

and ourselves that we should cast loose and each sail on her own account, as at this time of the year the south-west monsoon, which takes the place of the north-eastern 'kizkasi,' as it is cabled, or Indian trade-wind, generally sets in with a violent tornado blowing from off the land.

"Accordingly, as soon as daylight I hailed the steamer to send a boat aboard for me as I wished to speak to the captain. I had something more to tell him, however, than about my fears concerning the weather; for, while I was keeping watch during the night, I had heard some words dropped from the Arab prisoners on the foc's'le which I thought it best for him to know."

"Did you?" I said.

"Yes," said Ben, continuing his story. "While I was at Zanzibar I made it a point to study the lingo of the natives there, and had learned a good many words of the Kisawahili tongue, which is the lingua Franca of the coast; and hearing these half-caste Arabs talking together I listened to what they said, for being a Feringhee in their eyes they did not think I could understand them. Of course I couldn't manage to stumble to everything I heard, some of their words being incomprehensible to me; but I gathered enough to learn that the dhow we had captured was in company with another one equally as large, loaded with slaves, that had got off clear and was now probably making its way towards the Persian Gulf out of reach of the Dolphin.

"This would be good news, I knew, for Captain Wilson; for, although the Arabs believed that this dhow had escaped us, if the Dolphin at once went in pursuit of her in the right direction there was not the slightest doubt of her being able to overhaul her before she reached her destination, which was, I learned through the chatter of the prisoners, first to Mafiyah, as a sort of hiding-place until we should be reported out of the way, and then on to Muscat on the Arabian coast.

"I had no sooner got on board the Dolphin in the dinghy sent for me, than, the skipper confirmed my own opinion as to the importance of the information I had obtained, although he said something which slightly damped my enthusiasm, in giving me a job I had not bargained for.

"'You've done quite right, Campion, my man,' said he, 'in not losing time. I am glad you hailed me when you did, for every hour is precious in getting up with a chase that has got such a good start. I shall take care to mention you in my despatches for your prompt assistance in giving me news of this vessel, as well

as for your gallantry in the capture of the Fatima,'—that was the name of the one we had already taken, sir, and now had in tow.

"So far Captain Wilson quite flabbergasted me with his compliments and made me feel as proud as Punch; but his next words lowered me down a peg, I can tell you!

"'I'm sorry, however, I sha'n't be able to take you with me, Campion,' he went on, 'to see the end of this other affair; for now that I have to start off in chase of the other slaver, which will take me off the station, where some of the little Mtpe dhows will be trying to make runs from the mainland, thinking the coast unguarded, I intend leaving the pinnace behind to cruise about the Comoro Islands until I get back with the Dolphin, and, as you are the only responsible man I could trust to take charge of the boat and crew, you must remain here. Pass the word at once for the boatswain to pipe away the pinnace and see that she is properly stowed and provisioned.'

"This was a good deal more than I had bargained for. I thought I should have been allowed to remain as prize-master of the Fatima and sail her up to Zanzibar, as that was what the captain had hinted the night before. However, of course I put the best face I could on the matter, and contented myself with seeing that the water barricoes and stores were properly put on board the pinnace, while all the other men who had not to remain behind with me and the boat were in high glee getting ready for the fresh chase, the news being already whispered about in the messes—hoping that they would have just such another scrimmage again as they had had the day before at the capture of the Fatima.

"Captain Wilson did not 'let the grass grow under his feet,' as the saying goes—though it's rather a queer one for a seaman to use—in carrying out what he had decided on.

"Before the blazing African sun was an hour old, by which time too the rain had stopped falling, the second lieutenant of the Dolphin was transferred to the command of the captured dhow, our 'First Swab' having been wounded, taking with him all the prisoners that had been previously removed to our vessel for safety, although they were now bound securely with ropes and had a guard set over them to prevent their doing mischief, besides some additional hands to navigate the Fatima—which, hoisting her big lugs on the jury-masts we had rigged up the previous evening, and casting off the Dolphin's tow-rope, was

soon standing up the coast on her way to Zanzibar, keeping well inshore now, as that course was safest since the wind had changed.

“Hardly had the dhow got well off than the pinnace was lowered into the water alongside the steamer, her crew dropping in one by one, and I, of course, descending last. We had provisions and water on board to last us for six weeks, the usual time that boats are sent away from the vessels to which they belong on the east coast when cruising independently, as they all take it in turn to do; and Captain Wilson told me I was to hover about between Madagascar and the mainland in the Mozambique Channel until we might expect him back, which would be a month at farthest, even making allowances for his being detained at Zanzibar about the condemning of the slave-dhows which we had already captured and the one which he now hoped to get hold of.

“The Dolphin then took us in tow till we were abreast of the Comoro Isles, when she cast us adrift, starting off up the channel full speed and steering north-east and by north, so as to get well out to sea before stretching in to the land towards Mafiyah, where she expected to pick up the slaver; while we, hoisting the sails of the pinnace, and taking it easy under the boat’s awning that was spread fore and aft, bore away for Madagascar. Ah! sir, that was the commencement of an unfortunate voyage, for it was months before some of those that formed the pinnace’s crew ever met their old shipmates again on board the Dolphin; the majority of those with me in the boat never met the hands we left on board the steamer again at all, nor will they till that great last day of all when the sea gives up its dead!”

“I suppose you refer to that time when you said you were capsized off the coast of Madagascar, eh?” said I, noticing that Ben Campion paused at this point.

“Aye,” he replied; “but I’m afraid it’ll take a precious long time to reel off the yarn concerning that period of the story!”

“Never mind, please go on,” I replied. “Now you’ve begun and got so far, I’m sure I should like to hear the end of it.”

“All right, then,” he replied; but, before proceeding, he had to load up a fresh pipe, and while performing this interesting little operation he informed me, en passant, that the Dolphin he afterwards heard had succeeded in capturing the second dhow, and her first prize the Fatima had safely reached Zanzibar; and, consequently, that his prize-money for both seizures was safe, the sum accrueing to him amounting to over £50, being subsequently paid over to him

when he rejoined his ship some time afterwards—“and spent, too, long since,” as he said.

These little matters, relevant and irrelevant, being thus disposed of, Ben continued his narrative as follows.

Chapter Three

In the Mozambique Channel

“Where was I, sir?”

“You had just been turned adrift from the ship, I think,” said I, “and left to cruise on your own account—wasn’t that so?”

“Ah! yes, I remember now, sir. Well, then, when the Dolphin had got well away from us, leaving us poor chaps to our own resources, we in the pinnace, now well under her canvas, were sailing along on a course almost at right angles to that taken by our old ship, which somewhat took away from the nasty feeling of being sort of left behind, you know; but, we could not help watching her with longing eyes as she sped away northward under full steam and with all her fore-and-aft sails set that could draw, going fourteen knots at the least!

“It was a lovely morning that there—the loveliest I ever saw on the African coast; for there was no mist, and the rain having ceased, the strong sou’-westerly breeze that was blowing right offshore from the mainland tempered down the heat of the broiling sun, which only those who have been on the coast can have an idea of as to how intense it can be, while the pinnace was moving quickly through the water; and it was not long before the Dolphin was hull down on the horizon, the white gleam of her upper canvas vanishing soon after. But, for a long time succeeding that, we could still see the smoke from her funnel spread out in the shape of a fan to leeward, where it was blown by the following wind right across the sky and was clearly apparent in the clear blue air above as well as reflected in the sea below. Then, too, that disappeared at length, and we were left alone in our little boat on the waste of waters!

“I tell you we did feel a bit melancholy and down in the dumps then, especially as all hands knew the errand on which the old ship had gone and felt that we were out of the fun! However, I did not give the men time to think of this too long; for, acting under the directions given me by the skipper, I steered the pinnace towards the coast to windward of the Comoro Islands, intending after dark to creep up under the lee of Saint Juan, where I’d been told the dhows mostly made for when the coast was clear; and, what with trimming the sails and making taut the sheets, as well as stationing a special look-out in the bows and one in the stern behind me at the helm, I soon managed to turn the men’s attention away from the Dolphin, though some of them still seemed chop-fallen, being new to boat cruising and not relishing the work.

“Of course, I knew in what a responsible position I was—almost like that of the captain of a ship; for, I could order the men to do anything I pleased, and if they disobeyed me have them tried for mutiny, while I had the right to attack and capture any native vessels I suspected of having slaves on board—so, soon after noon, when I piped all hands to dinner, I made them a little speech after the grub had been stowed away comfortably, pointing out that their circumstances were considerably better than they themselves appeared to think. In course, I said, our shipmates in the Dolphin had a bit the advantage of us in starting off on another chase, with perhaps the chance of a second scrimmage at the end of it, the same as we had all had together on the previous evening; but then, I says, what we were doing was equally for the good of the service; and, besides, as soon as the steamer had overhauled the slaver she was after she would have to go back to that beastly Zanzibar in the thick of fever time, remaining there probably for weeks, until she got rid of the slaves from the captured dhows, while, on the contrary, we would be down here cruising about on the free open sea and enjoying ourselves!

“We lost nothing by remaining there, I said. If our old ship took the slaver she was now chasing, why, we would share in the prize-money just the same as if we’d been on board her, without running the risk of any hard knocks or having some Arab’s dagger cutting daylight into us; and if she didn’t succeed in hunting down the dhow, which was more than likely, considering the long start the latter had got, why, then we would be well out of a wild-goose chase.

“In addition to such arguments,” continued Ben, who sometimes spoke with a purity of diction that is much more common amongst seamen of the navy of to-day than it was in “the good old days” of our ancestors before education was much in vogue, “I hinted that nobody could say we might not pick up a slave-dhow down there on our own hook quite as good as the other one we could not go after; and if not, well, at all events we would have an easier time of it than if we had been kept on board the ship! There, as they knew, the skipper took jolly good care to serve us out full purser’s allowance of drill if there was nothing else stirring; for it was beating to quarters, or small-arm exercise, or manning the big guns, and playing all such fancy tricks with us when he had no better work to keep us employed with between watches. I can tell you, I never saw such a hand as Cap’en Wilson for that. He used to say that the devil always found something for idle hands; and the way he went about remedying this reminded me of the old poetry lines I once heard a Yankee sailor call the ‘Philadelphia Catechism’—

"'Six days shalt thou labour and do all thou art able,

And on the seventh,—holystone the decks and scrape the cable!'

"These words of mine had such an effect on the men that I assure you, sir, they grew quite cheerful like, chatting and laughing together as they lolled about on the thwarts under the boat awnings that were spread fore and aft I allowed them to take it easy, with the exception of the hands having charge of the sheets of the sails and those on the look-out, as I don't think discipline is preserved any the better by keeping fellows continually on the stretch when there's nothing particular to do, merely to see them slaving their hearts out.

"Presently, the look-out forward said he thought he saw the white sail of a dhow close in to the island we were beating to windward of; and of course every one immediately must take it for granted that she's a contraband carrying slaves."

"I suppose you didn't undeceive them?" said I.

"Not I," replied Ben. "I was only too glad of the chance. It banished at once all thoughts of the old Dolphin out of their heads better than all my palaver, for all hands were so anxious to come up with the strange craft that they themselves voted for taking to the oars, which I certainly wouldn't have ordered their doing in the terrible afternoon heat, as, while we were having our dinner, the wind had been gradually dying until it was now almost a dead calm, and the sails flapping against the masts, with the boat rocking on the heavy rolling swell that you always meet with out there when the sun is at the meridian."

"I thought you expected a tornado in the early morning?" I here suggested.

"Ah! never you mind about that," said Ben. "We haven't yet done with the east-coast weather, as you'll see presently. Howsomever, as I was saying," he continued, "I told them to take in the sails, being so minded, and rig out the oars. They didn't lose any time about it either, for as soon as I gave the order it was all haul down and furl up; and, getting a good grip of the water, they started pulling like madmen, putting their hearts into every stroke—although the day was so hot and sweltry that a fellow seemed to melt away into perspiration, even lying still in the stern-sheets of the boat, as I was, without moving a muscle.

"The craft which had been sighted by the look-out forward was a small Mtpe dhow well under the lee of the island and creeping along-shore, her light sails

and the wider spread of canvas which her lateen rig permitted enabling her to take advantage of the slightest puff of air; while our heavy pinnace, with her small-cut sails hardly raised above the surface of the sea, so as to get the full force of the wind, required a strong breeze to move her at all, although then she had pretty fair speed.

"Now that the men had taken to the oars, however, we began to approach the stranger more rapidly; but she was over five miles off, and a pull of that length under a burning sun is no joke, I can assure you. Stroke after stroke, our plucky seamen kept at it in spite of the heat, one minute appearing to gain and then again to lose distance as a whiff of air would waft the dhow along; so that, it was not until nearly sunset that we got within gunshot, and could hail her to see what she was up to.

"'Now, Adams,' said I to the man in the bows, who had command of the seven-pounder boat-gun we had fixed there, 'I think we may invite the stranger gentleman to have a little chat. Fire away, my man, and make her come to.'

"All was ready, so without more ado he fired, the shot ricochetting across the prow of the Arab craft, which had by this time cleared the island and seemed making for Madagascar, that lay east and by south some three hundred miles off. At all events, the dhow was steering in that direction, with whatever wind there was on her beam, and she paid no attention to us at all apparently.

"Still, she didn't long keep on that course. The first message from our seven-pounder did not bring her to, nor did a second, but when a third went unpleasantly close, right through her broad lug-sail, we could see her come up to the wind sharp, while a fourth shot, which we now sent to show those on board that we meant business and would be obeyed, caused her heavy yard to be dropped by the run in token of surrender.

"We had a long pull yet to come near her; but on getting alongside we found it had been all labour for nothing. There was not the ghost of a slave aboard, nor any signs neither of her having carried any recently. She was only a trading dhow with a lot of Banians taking goods from the mainland to the islands; and so we had had all our chase for nothing. Well, the men were so vexed that they would have liked to have scuttled her. I was glad I hadn't suggested their taking to the oars, or perhaps they might have turned on me for making them toil so when it wasn't necessary; but of course I wasn't to blame, and they knew that.

“Having no authority to stop her, I was obliged to let the dhow proceed on her way, while we lay-to for the night in a sheltered creek under the lee of Saint Juan; for it was now getting dark, and the navigation being rather treacherous with a lot of coral reefs about, I thought it best to wait for daylight before we did any more cruising.

“On the wind rising again, towards midnight, I anchored the pinnace about a cable’s-length off the beach, where we were pretty secure from drifting ashore on account of the tide setting the other way. Towards morning, however, it came on to blow more strongly, and as the boat rocked uneasily I hauled up the kedge again, for it was bad holding ground, the tackle chafing against the coral banks and sawing away in a manner that promised to make it part if it remained down much longer, the boat’s head bobbing down and up every wave with a jerk that must snap our painter in time.

“Setting the mainsail reefed, and a small storm-staysail forwards, we ran before the wind, which had now increased to a gale, blowing stiffly, as it had done in the early part of the day before, from the south-west. It was of no use trying to lay-to in the open sea, for the rollers were too heavy for the boat to ride over, so we bore right away across the channel towards the north part of Madagascar, having a clear space of water in front of us with no chance of running ashore, for the next twenty-four hours or so at all events, if we kept on to the same point of the compass that the wind was now carrying us to. The pinnace being a good sea-boat, we were all right otherwise, that was, unless the gale shifted, when we would be driven back on to the rocky reef which encircled the Comoro Islands, and no doubt go to pieces there.

“‘Let her drive,’ said I to the men, whom I kept baling out the occasional seas that came in over the weather gunwale. ‘As long as she keeps on running like this we can come to no harm, but you mustn’t stop baling, for if she once gets waterlogged she’ll founder and then we’ll all be lost.’

“This made them stick to it, although most of them were tired out with the long pull they had had in the afternoon after the dhow, and when morning broke we were still all right and buoyant, although the tornado showed no appearance of slackening, and we were quite out of sight of land, nothing but sky and sea being around us, and the waves rolling that high as they followed in our wake that if we had not scudded on we would have been swamped in an instant.

“All that day we continued driving ahead, for we could not stop, or wear the boat round, or do anything but simply let her go where the wind chose to take

her. We could not even lower the mainsail, as if we had done so it might have capsized her, besides which, as long as it held out without being blown away, although it almost made the pinnace bury her nose in the waves in front, it prevented the following rollers behind from coming too close, just keeping way enough on her to be out of their reach. But, it was a perilous run of it, and every big comber that raced after us looked as if it would overtake our tiny craft and swamp her!

"By about four o'clock in the afternoon, as near as we could reckon, we sighted the highlands of Madagascar, for it couldn't be any other coast from the direction we had been sailing in ever since midnight. The land was right ahead and some distance off yet; but approaching it rapidly as we did, it made us tremble, for unless we could manage to steer inside the reef that lay outside the shore of the island, the same as at Saint Juan, we must be dashed against the cliffs. It was wonderful to think we had run all that distance in less than twenty-four hours.

"How we did it I'm sure I can't tell, but I believe in addition to the force of the wind, that must have driven us at the rate of twenty knots an hour, more or less, there was a strong easterly current in the Mozambique Channel with the south-west monsoon, and this must have carried us so speedily across from the Comoro Islands. I can't account for it otherwise.

"Be that as it may, sir, there was Madagascar now before us, with the pinnace closing in with the land every second, seeming as if she were flying towards it rather than sailing; soon, too, we could distinguish the noise of breakers, which grew every minute more distinct. We were rushing rapidly to destruction, and it looked as if no earthly power could save the boat from being dashed to pieces.

"However, there was a power above watching over us.

"Presently I noticed from the contour of the land that we were near Cape Tangan, which I well knew from a coasting voyage I had made round the island in a cruiser the year before when I came out to join the London, and I recollected that this headland ran out into the sea in a north-westerly point, so that, if we could contrive to get the boat to leeward of the cape, we would soon be in comparatively still water and protected alike from the force of the wind and the rolling waves.

"I sang out to the men therefore to get their oars out ready, and, watching my opportunity when we were just almost abreast of Cape Tangan, I told Adams, who was in the centre of the boat now, to lower away the mainsail, directing the others at the same time to pull with a will, as their lives depended on our

rounding the promontory, against which it looked as if we were going to be hurled as we came up to it—it was so terribly near and frowning over us!

"This plan fortunately succeeded, for in another minute, during which I held my breath in suspense, we were round the cape and in still water, although close to a coral reef that girdled the land, which was still some three miles off. We really were safe for the time and dropped our anchor, glad enough at our escape; but I saw that the haven could only be of temporary assistance to us, for should the wind shift more to the northwards we would even be in a worse position than when scudding before the gale, as the reef would then be immediately to leeward of us and the gale in our face.

"It would serve no good, however, to meet evil half-way, so as the men were all dead tired out and exhausted with hunger, having eaten nothing since dinner the day before the storm set in, I ordered the provisions to be served out, telling them after that to lie down and have a good sleep in the bottom of the boat while I remained on the watch till morning, having had less exertion than any of them.

"But the poor fellows did not have half so long a rest as that. Towards midnight—it seemed indeed as if all our misfortunes came at that time - the pinnace dragged her anchor and drifted on to the reef, when I had to rouse all hands to jump out in the darkness and shove her off again before she knocked a hole in her bottom. Then, no sooner were we afloat again than the wind veered round, just as I had fancied it would do, without the slightest warning, to the northward.

"This of course rendered it impossible for us to remain any longer under the lee of the cliff, our anchorage there being now untenable; and, putting out to sea again, we bravely endeavoured to ride out the gale in the offing under a close-reefed mainsail and fore-staysail, so as not to be in too close proximity to the reef, which was doubly dangerous to us now.

"Fortune favoured us in the attempt to weather the worst of the storm, until shortly after daybreak; when, the rollers coming rolling in heavier and more heavily each hour, the poor pinnace sank below the surface of the sea in twenty-five fathoms of water, leaving thirteen of us struggling for our lives some seven miles away from shore."

"That must have been awful!" said I sympathisingly.

"It was awful," replied Ben gravely. "I can hardly bear to tell of it now."

Chapter Four

A Terrible Experience

"The only things left floating in the water after the pinnace sank down under us," resumed Ben after a lengthened pause, during which he puffed vigorously at his pipe as if to make up for lost time as well as to restore his equanimity, "were, the rain awning, a sort of long tarpaulin; the sun awning, which was of lighter stuff, and soon got saturated by the sea, making it go to the bottom too; a couple of oars that had become, somehow or other, unfastened from the rowlocks and went adrift; a pork breaker or barrel; and two water barricoes, one of which was empty, while the other contained only about a couple of gallons of the precious fluid which in a short time would be worth more to us than gold—but, I'm anticipating matters.

"Five of the boat's crew went down almost as soon as the pinnace, thus leaving only eight of us to battle against the waves and try to swim ashore if we could; although I, for one, didn't believe a soul would ever live to set foot on land again, that is if I gave any thought to it at all!

"What the others did at the moment I can't say; for with that selfish instinct of self-preservation which makes a man in the instant of danger grasp anything, regardless of what his comrades in distress might be doing, I grappled hold of one of the oars and the pork breaker, besides the stern-sheet grating, which I forgot to say also floated from the wreck. These I lashed together into a sort of raft with a long woollen comforter, which I had fortunately wound round my neck the night before while keeping watch to protect me from the damp dew, and now took off for the purpose. I was treading water all the time I was doing this, and the sea being very buoyant in the Indian Ocean on account of its extra saltness, I managed to rig up my raft pretty well. Then, when I had finished it to my satisfaction, I looked around me, being too busy to do that before; and, seeing Bellamy, one of the crew who I knew could not swim, holding on to the other oar, and Russell, another chap in the same predicament, clutching tight to the gaskets of one of the barricoes, I helped them both on to my little platform, keeping them and myself afloat as well as I was able by swimming alongside and pushing it; for neither of the poor fellows could aid me—they seemed perfectly helpless.

"By this time the sun was high in the heavens and blazing right down upon our heads with an intensity of heat that almost seemed to shrivel up our hair, making us feel as if a red-hot cinder was laid on top of it. There was not much

wind, that having died away soon after daybreak, the tornado having spent all its force and blown itself out; but the sea was still rough, the heavy rolling waves washing over us every now and then as they broke against the raft. Perhaps this moisture was good for us, the rapid evaporation of the water under the burning heat keeping us cool; but, what with the exposure and the fright he had sustained at our sudden upset, poor Russell went clean out of his mind, becoming as mad as a March hare. Although I was trying all I could to keep him on the raft to preserve his life, he thought I was struggling to prevent his holding on; and he commenced fighting with me, clutching hold of my neck and trying to force me under the water. I stood this for some time; when, seeing he only got worse instead of better, and that I had no means of fastening him down to the raft, I thought the best thing I could do for my own safety, as well as to give the other two a chance for their lives, was to trust to my own unaided strength and strike out for the shore, leaving the two on the raft to look after themselves. Before abandoning that frail support, however, I adopted the precaution of taking off every stitch of clothing I had on—my boots I had chucked away when in the boat, preparing even then for the worst. Had I not done this, I'm certain I would never have reached land or be now telling you this tale."

"I'm sure I'm very glad you took the precaution," I observed, "it was a sensible one."

"Yes," said Ben, "there's no use a man attempting to swim any distance with his things on. A fellow can do it in a bath, as a sort of exhibition like; but when he comes to battle for his life against the sea, the only chance he has is when he's stripped; for his clothes suck in the water and weigh him down so as to take all the buoyancy out of him and cripple his efforts to keep afloat—that's my opinion from painful experience.

"Soon after I quitted the raft," continued Ben, proceeding again with his narrative after my interruption, "I saw on looking back that Russell had clutched hold of Bellamy the same as he had done with me. But Bellamy hadn't half my strength, for the other soon got the better of him, and although I tried to swim back against the rollers so as to prevent the mishap, I couldn't make headway in spite of all my efforts, so in a minute or so I saw both tumble off the raft into the sea, and go down locked together in an embrace of death. Poor fellows, the madman had caused both to perish, when, by keeping quiet, they might have been washed safely ashore in time. I tried myself to regain the raft then, it being now vacant and ample enough to support me alone comfortably;

but the waves were too much for me, so I had to give up that hope and strike out once more for the shore, although the latter was so far off and low down too in the water that I couldn't even get a glimpse of it now to cheer me up and lead me on. I could only judge the direction of it by the set of the tide and the sun; and although I swam as manfully as I could, the thought occurred to me more than once that I might be making for the open ocean instead of the land after all, and was only prolonging my last agony!

"However, a little way on, the sight of one of my lost shipmates gave me fresh courage, for I had believed up till then, when Bellamy and Russell sank under water, that I was the only one of the pinnace's crew left alive.

"His name was Magellan, one of the smartest topmen of the old Dolphin, and he seemed now to rival the reputation of the fish after which our vessel was named, as he was swimming ahead of me with a proper breast stroke, and going well through the waves. I first saw him as he rose on top of a roller; and he, looking back at the same moment, when turning his head to avoid the wash of the wave, caught sight of me.

"'Hullo, Campion!' he sang out, 'where are you bound for?'

"'For the shore, you lubber,' I retorted jokingly, for seeing him put such fresh life in me that I felt almost inclined to laugh out aloud with joy!

"'Have you got anything to support you in the water?' he asked with surprise.

"'No,' said I, 'nothing but my own carcass and the use of my hands and legs.'

"'The same with me, old ship,' he replied, 'let's see who'll get to land first.'

"'All right!' I cried, 'start away!' and we both of us struck out hard; but he was a far better swimmer than I was, and I soon lost sight of him although I followed in the same track as well as I could steer.

"About noontide, when the sun had got vertical in the sky overhead and blazed down with even greater power than it had done before, I had another cheer up; for, as I rose on the send of the sea I could faintly discover the tops of two trees in the distance standing out amidst the waste of waters. This put additional pluck into me, and made me exert myself to the utmost, as before then I could not see any sign of land at all; but, after swimming on for some time I began to lose heart again and became assailed by all manner of miserable fancies that almost made me despair!

“I thought it was strange that I could not see Magellan, if he were still in front of me, in the same way that I could observe the two trees. He must have gone down at last and got drowned like the others, I said to myself; or else a shark has snapped him up and made an end of him, so that I alone was left out of all the thirteen of the pinnace’s crew. What was I reserved for?—a worse fate perhaps than the others—possibly to reach a desolate shore, where I would starve to death in solitude without a single soul to share my misery! The idea of sharks, however, haunted me more than any other thought, for I knew that there were plenty of these sea monsters in the Mozambique Channel, and I dreaded more being caught by one of them than the mere fear of drowning, which now seemed to lose all its terrors, although I still swam on mechanically. Every time a wave broke over me, or when I splashed up the water with my own feet, the haunting horror seized me that the wide capacious maw and gaping saw-like teeth of a shark were ready to close upon me, paralysing my heart nerves, and making my blood run cold right through me. I never wish to pass through such a terrible time again, sir—not for the mere peril I was in from the sea and the long distance of water I had to traverse before I could hope to reach the end, so much as from the thought that my shipmates were all drowned, and the nervous dread I suffered on account of those devils of the deep, although all the while I actually never saw one. This was fortunate for me, as I’m sure only the sight of one in my then state of mind would have taken all the fight out of me and made me an easy prey!

“My fear of the sharks indeed grew so strong upon me that I absolutely tried to drown myself, but I could not keep myself down below the surface of the water long enough to carry out my intention. The attempt, however, did one good thing for me, as, seeing that I could not sink, try as hard as I could, it appeared to me that I wasn’t born to be drowned—sailors,—you know, are rather superstitious sometimes—so, thinking this, and assured that I was certain now to get to land, if only the sharks left me alone, I struck again towards the direction of the two trees that I saw every now and then to encourage me as I rose up on the crest of each alternate wave, determined to persevere to the last as long as the breath was left in me.

“Why, sir, it was a swim that beat poor Captain Webb’s exploit in crossing the Channel, for the pinnace had gone down soon after daybreak, and I had been swimming ever since, while now the sun was sinking in the west, looking as if it were going to dip in another hour at the most. Yet, I seemed as far off from the land as ever, those two trees that I watched so earnestly, and shaped my course by never appearing to rise out of the water or come nearer to me than

two miles off—for, whether the tide had turned or there was a current carrying me along in a parallel direction with the shore, or some other cause, for ever so long a time I never got any closer than that. It was very hard, I thought, with the land so near to me now, and I unable to reach it, strive how I may! Perhaps, I fancied, those trees are a mere fanciful dream like the fairy-like mirage of the desert that tortures poor lost wanderers with pictures of cool lakes and rivers, while they are really in the middle of burning sandy plains. I began to doubt they were real trees at all, for I should have got up to them long since; and so, harassed again with despair, I tried a second time to drown myself, clenching my hands tightly to my side and making no effort to swim—but it was all in vain, I could not keep down. I must have been delirious I think then, and perhaps imagined it all, going out of my senses as poor Russell had done previously, and wandering in my mind, for I can recollect perfectly seeing the faces of people I knew in England—my father and mother and my young wife—beckoning to me and holding out their hands to drag me out of the water, when I knew all the while that I saw them that I was swimming for my life in the Mozambique Channel, and that they were safe at home in the old country! I suppose in my delirium two different trains of thought were running through my head?

"After that, I forget what happened. I must have become insensible, for I don't remember what occurred between. I seemed to wake up to consciousness all at once, and then I found myself lying on a low sandy beach, where I must have been washed up and left by the retreating tide.

"Although the sun had now set—which showed that I must have been unconscious for some time, as the last thing I recollected was its scorching my back, for of course as I was swimming in an easterly direction towards Madagascar, as it sank down the horizon it got behind me,—it was still light; and, looking about me, I perceived that I was on a small island or sand-bank, some distance still off the mainland, from which it was separated by a wide channel of water. I tried to get up on my feet to notice better how wide this channel-way was; but I was so weak from my long immersion in the sea, having stopped all circulation, that I fell back again flat on my back like a dead man. The exertion of trying to rise, however, made me bring up a considerable quantity of sea-water, some two gallons or more, which I must have swallowed when insensible, for I certainly never took down half that quantity while swimming, having carefully avoided letting any get into my mouth for fear of its increasing my thirst; but, however it got into me, the emetic did me good, and I felt much better after thus disgorging it from my inside.

“Resting a bit, stretched out on the sand-bank, I could not help thanking the merciful Providence that had thus preserved my life when I had abandoned myself to despair, and had been powerless to aid myself; and I wondered whether any of my comrades had been saved too, or if I were the sole survivor of the ill-fated boat’s crew?

“The evening growing darker my mind was soon brought back to thoughts of action, especially as the tide rising on the beach where I was lying began to lap against my body. Crawling on my hands and knees, for I was still unable to rise to my feet and walk, my limbs being perfectly numb from the thighs downward, I managed to get out of the way of the water for a while; but as it yet continued to rise, and I thought it might possibly cover the whole sand-bank at high tide, I determined to attempt to swim across the intervening channel that lay between the little islet I was on and the main coast—although the latter in the evening gloom seemed more than a mile away, and I felt utterly feeble and worn out. But, I had to do it somehow or other, so I nerved myself up for the task.

“Strange to say, however, the moment I rolled myself into the water again, for I cannot say I walked in, I found I could use my arms and legs again as freely as ever when swimming, albeit so cramped and powerless when I tried to move them ashore; and so, striking out again for the last time with all my remaining strength, I crossed the little channel that separated me from the Madagascar coast in much less time than I had calculated on, the haze having made it appear wider than it really was.

“It was dark, however, when I grounded on the other side, where the land fortunately shelved down into the water gradually—for if there had been any steep bank or cliff to climb I could never have succeeded in surmounting it, the last exertion of swimming the channel having exhausted all my energies. Now, completely prostrated with all I had gone through, as soon as I had crawled up far enough to be out of reach of the tide, I laid down under the trunks of the two trees that had been my beacon guides to safety, and which grew close together out of a clump of sand on the shore, falling asleep at once. I was so utterly worn out that I was not only powerless to proceed any further, but I had no dread of the savage country I was in, or any fear of being attacked by wild beasts!”

Chapter Five

Hunger and Thirst

"When day broke next morning," Ben went on to say, "there I found myself under the shade of the two cocoa-nut palms, as I discovered my beacon trees to be, lying on the warm sandy bed covered over with leaves which I had accidentally selected for my night's couch—being the first comfortable spot I came to on crawling up from the beach. I felt thoroughly rested and restored to my old self, although still somewhat stiff and sore all over, as if somebody had given me a good thrashing—which of course was owing to my long exposure to the waves and the beating about they gave me; but, I was able to stand on my feet now and work my limbs more freely than I could on first landing, which was decidedly a point to the good, as I had thought I was paralysed.

"Looking about me, I noticed that I had managed to fetch a low curving bay or arm of the sea considerably to the south of Cape Tangan, which I could recognise stretching away to the northward. The shore was of fine white sand; and in the background was a dense bush of jungle and forest trees, principally palms and such like tall upright trunks, that had no branches, all their foliage being on the top in a cluster like a lady's parasol.

"My two cocoa-nut trees were evidently the outlying sentinels, or advance-guards of these; for they stood alone on the beach a hundred yards or more in front of the jungle and brushwood, which extended back from the shore in a mass of green that stood well out, in pleasant relief to the gleaming sand, as far away as the eye could reach, clothing the slopes of the high mountains which rose up in the centre of the island running like a backbone or rocky spine all along its length from its extreme nor'-easterly point down far away to the south.

"This forest belt of green encircles the whole coast of Madagascar, I've been told, beginning close almost to the water's edge in some places and extending back inland until the higher levels are reached; and it is of a uniform width of some fifteen miles across, except where, of course, it has been cleared away at the different settlements and colonies at the heads of the various bays with which the coast is indented. I know, at all events, that this jungle seemed endless and impenetrable; for I had quite enough to do with it in the following ten days that I was thus brought face to face with it, as I can tell you!

“As soon as I woke up, the first thought that crossed my mind was, where could I find water? I was so parched with thirst that my tongue seemed glued to the roof of my palate, and I believe it was feeling this that roused me; so, naturally, I turned about, hunting for some brook or streamlet where I could get a drink, as rivers mostly run to the shores of the majority of islands I ever heard of. However, there were none close in sight that I could see from the beach, and all the water there was salt; and, as I argued to myself that all the green jungle must have been produced and kept alive by moisture of some sort, I abandoned the sea-shore as hopeless and directed my steps towards the bush, with the expectation of finding there the object of my quest. I didn’t go with any lagging steps either, for by this time my thirst was almost unbearable, becoming the more intense the longer I waited for water.

“I proceeded after getting into the bush to where the ground sloped down into a sort of valley, fancying that such would be the likeliest place for a river; but I had not got very far through the rough thicket, which scratched my exposed skin pretty sorely by the way, when, as I emerged again into the open, I saw before me a group of men in front amongst some detached trees. Two or three were moving about, while the rest were lying on the ground; so, taking them to be natives, and knowing that the Sakalavas who inhabited this part of the coast were, unlike the Hovas, friendly to foreigners, many Hindoo families and Portuguese being settled amongst them, besides a few stray Frenchmen and Americans, I at once made towards the group. Judge of my surprise, however, on coming up to the men, to find that they were none other than Magellan and four others of the pinnace’s crew, whom I had supposed to be lost, but who had managed to get ashore safely long before myself!

“Well, what a hand-shaking there was that went round them—why, it was like meeting chaps that had been dead and buried over again! We none of us could say anything for some time, the emotion of seeing each other again being too much, for I was a pretty good favourite with all the hands, and Magellan had told the rest about his having passed me swimming ashore early in the day they all got to land; and then, through my not turning up, of course they all believed I had gone down to Davy Jones! One thing was now certain, however; and that was, that we were the whole number that were saved; for, if you will recollect, five out of the thirteen comprising the crew of the boat had gone down with her when she filled and sank, leaving eight only struggling in the water. Of these remaining eight, six of us were now together on the Madagascar coast, and the other two, Bellamy and Russell, I had myself seen drown when they

tumbled off the raft on which I had left them in that last deadly embrace of theirs.

"I was so knocked of a heap at meeting my old shipmates so unexpectedly that I declare to you I forgot all about my raging thirst for the moment; but as soon as the excitement had calmed down and all sorts of questions and answers had been asked and replied to, with much palavering and congratulating of one another, the intense feeling returned to me worse than ever—my tongue being so swollen up that it seemed to fill my mouth!

"'Have you got any water?' says I to Magellan; 'I'm dying with thirst!'

"'Bless you, my hearty!' replied he, 'why didn't you say that afore? But mind now, you must go gingerly. This is all we've got till we find some more, and we've agreed to allowance ourselves. Half a pint is all you can have, shipmate, now, and if you drinks it all you'll get no more to-day. I advise you to rinse your mouth out with it, for that'll make it go further, bo!'

"So saying, Magellan hands me a pannikin into which he had drawn off the quantity of water he had said was the allowance out of the barrico, which I told you contained some when the pinnace was wrecked. It had floated ashore all right, fortunately for us all; and Magellan, picking it up, had had the good sense to economise it for the advantage of the lot. I can't tell you how it felt as I drank it down! Nothing that I ever tasted before or since all the world over ever came up to that drink of water. It was like the nectar as I've read of that the old Greek gods used to drink on Mount Olympus, for it was sweeter than any wine or liquor that ever crossed my lips before I learnt to wear the blue ribbon!

"I took Magellan's advice and drank it sparingly, washing my mouth out to make it go further before I swallowed it and spinning it out as long as I could, giving a great gasp of satisfaction as I drained down the last drop. I never thought such a chap as Magellan would have had the sense to lay hands on the barrico as he did and serve it out on allowance—considering the little amount of water there was, and how all must have been pretty nigh as thirsty as myself; but, I suppose the peril he had been in and the fact of his not seeing any river near taught him caution!

"Now, on seeing me drink, the others wanted the pannikin passed round; but Jem Magellan said 'No,' putting the barrico back under some leaves alongside of where he had been sitting when I came up, which was the reason I hadn't noticed it as I was certain to have done; and I, taking command of the party

again, as I was entitled to do as senior petty officer, endorsed his authority, saying that it was for the good of all that some restriction should be placed on the water so as to make it last out till we got more. I daresay, sir, as how you must have thought it strange that Captain Wilson should have put me in charge of the pinnace, instead of a warrant officer or middy?"

"Yes, I must say I have been wondering at that," I replied to Ben's question.

"Well, it seems rather queer," said Ben; "but you must know that when the Dolphin captured the dhow that time, the only officers on board fit for duty that weren't down in the sick bay with fever were the first and second lieutenants, one middy and the boatswain, besides Chips the carpenter, who couldn't be spared from the ship; and in boarding the Fatima, the first swab, as I told you, got an ugly scrape in the leg that prevented him from moving; so when the second lieutenant was put in charge of the dhow to take her up to Zanzibar, I was the only responsible man the captain could think of to send cruising with the pinnace, as the middy was a harum-scarum youngster, who hadn't got thought enough, and neither the boatswain nor Chips could be taken away from their duties without perhaps the ship suffering. Besides, I had a very good character, standing on the books for promotion, with three good-conduct badges; and being at the time well acquainted with the coast and the ways of the slave-dhows I was just the man to be put in charge of the boat as 'jaunty,' as we say in the service."

"All right, I've no doubt the captain selected you as a fit person for so responsible a post," said I. "Fire away with the yarn."

"Very good, sir," said Ben, continuing his narrative now that he had given this explanation. "I was in command of the party anyway, though I must say I wasn't very much like an officer in appearance, for I hadn't a rag of clothing on. Indeed, most of us were in the same condition; for, only Magellan and one other chap had trousers, the remaining three being, like myself, as naked as when they were born! However, that did not trouble us much then, as we were under the shade of the trees, and in those parts of the world the less you have on the more comfortable you are; although, when exposed directly to the sun it soon raises blisters on a bare skin.

"Before doing anything else, as soon as I resumed my proper post as headman of the crew, I thought the best thing was to organise a proper search for water, that being our principal necessity for the moment; and, accordingly, directing the lot to separate, each going a different way so as to properly overhaul the

ground, but not keeping too far apart to be out of hail of one another lest we might get lost, we dispersed through the bush—I taking the beach line for my course, and telling the rest to keep the two cocoa-nut trees in sight for a general rendezvous and report progress in an hour's time or thereabouts if they had not found water before. If they found it, of course they were to sing out at once.

"Our courage was pretty well up then, for we had yet only seen the beginning, so to speak, of our trials, and the men went off laughing and skylarking; one calling out as how he'd soon be piping us down to a real good feed, with lashings of grog; and another saying he'd look in and ask the Queen of Madagascar to send down a carriage and fetch us to the palace. Bless you! you know what light-hearted chaps sailors are, even in the midst of danger. As for myself, I was more serious like; for, besides having the responsibility of the whole party on my shoulders and wishing to do the best for all, I couldn't help thinking we were in a very sorry mess altogether. I knew what the coast was, you see; for it was a wide extent of savage country all the way from Cape Tangan to Majunga, with only some little native settlement here and there between, all of which were separated by this endless belt of jungle I've mentioned, and wide lagoons and rivers, in addition to high mountains in many places—that would have been tough climbing at the best of times, without the heavy brushwood and tangled thickets that ran up from their bases to their summits, and the deep crevices and gorges in which they abruptly ended, making one come to a dead stop on the edge of some awful abyss, over which one step further would precipitate you. I knew all this, sir, from my own past acquaintance with the coast, as well as from what I had learned from others who had seen more of it than I had; so, I did not see quite such a satisfactory end to our difficulties as all the rest did, with the exception of Magellan, who had been shipwrecked before, on the coast of China, and knew it wasn't child's play. But, as for the other poor fellows, they had to learn the reality in bitter earnestness. Now that they had succeeded in getting ashore such distance from where the pinnace had sunk under us, they believed they had passed through the worst peril they could possibly have to contend against and that thenceforth all was plain sailing for them. Ah! before that first day of their experiences in Madagascar was over they would have a very different tale to tell, as you'll see.

"So thinking, and, as luck would have it, anticipating exactly what happened, though perhaps this was more owing to the melancholy frame of mind I was in than any pretence of being able to foretell the future, as some folks set up for

doing, I went from the little clearing in the bush, where we had been assembled, down to the sea, the glimmer and shimmering of which, from the sun shining on it, could be seen through the openings in the foliage of the trees—first directing my footsteps, being now able to walk easily and well, to the bank at the foot of the twin cocoa-nut trees where I had rested for the night, and from thence to the place where I had crawled ashore; for, I could trace my way without any difficulty by the tracks and marks I had made in the clear white sand, which being above high-water mark had not been washed out by the tide, as would otherwise have been the case.

"From this spot, I followed along the beach the whole curve of the bay, a good two mile or more, to where it ended in a precipitous cliff, without finding the mouth of any stream or river emptying itself into the sea; but I found one thing of some service, for, attached to an oar, which must have formed part of the raft I had made and abandoned to Russell and Bellamy, was the comforter that I had taken off my neck and bound the spars together with. It came in now even handier than ever; as, wrapping it round my loins I converted the old comforter into a sort of petticoat that did duty for my missing 'unmentionables,' as delicate people call them, and I confess I felt more comfortable with this apology on, even though I was in those savage wilds with but my own messmates to see me.

"Only the oar had been cast up by the waves; neither the pork breaker, which had contained one or two junks of meat that might have been useful to us, nor the stern-sheet grating, which I had lashed together with it, being observable anywhere on the strand, so they must have been carried by the current round the cape.

"I retraced my way sadly to our meeting-place; for, as I argued, if I couldn't see the mouth of any river there they wouldn't find one in the bush, as the ground shelved down gradually towards the sea in the neighbourhood, so if there was any water stream, it was bound to find its way there, not being able to run uphill!

"During all this time I could hear our chaps hollering and calling out to each other, sometimes the voices being far away and then again close at hand; but when I had got up to the cocoa-nut trees there they all were once more, with the same story of an unsuccessful search. Diving beneath the brushwood and jungle they had peeped and peered into every likely spot they came across, without finding a trace of water, nor even the empty bed of what had been a stream in the rainy season. It was evident that the valley we were in was too

northerly for the rivers that I had heard entered the sea mostly on the west side of the island; and that to come to such we would have to make our way over one of the intervening chains of hilly land lying between.

“The men, however, were too tired to attempt this now, for instead of an hour, we had been nigher three searching through the forest and coast; and, it being close on noontide, from the elevation of the sun, which being in the zenith was right over our heads, I called a halt—all of us lying down under the trees till it should get a bit cooler towards evening. All, too, were so thirsty, and clamouring out so much for water, that I and Magellan had to give in to their entreaties and serve out another half-pint apiece, which we told them would have to last them until noon next day; but still, this second allowance all round made a serious drain on our store, for there being six of us now, and each, including myself, having had half a pint in the pannikin before, that made six pints out of the two and a half gallons the water barrico originally held—nearly a third of the whole quantity. If we went on at that rate, why it would only last for three days, or two more at the outside, when, as I calculated, it would take us a week at least to reach Majunga, that is if we could manage to surmount the mountain ranges that I was aware lay between where we were and that port. I said a word or two to that effect to the men, but they didn’t pay much attention to my caution, all being tired out and the majority falling asleep as soon as they drank their allowance, without waiting to see the next served out even, they were so drowsy.

“I tried to keep watch for a bit, but the exertion of walking about had been too much for me too, and I soon followed suit in dropping off with the others, not waking up until it was close on sunset, when the slanting rays of the fiery orb shining right into my eyes roused me and made me turn out, although I took care not to wake the rest.

“I felt thirsty now no longer but hungry as a hunter, and started up to see if I could find anything to eat. I thought there might be cocoa-nuts about, for these when they are old, as you generally only see them in England, contain, instead of juice, or ‘milk’ as they term it in the tropics, which the nut is filled with when young, a valuable amount of solid matter, which is not only tasty to eat but nourishing as well, being mostly a kind of vegetable fat or oil. However, on looking up at the trees over our sheltering place I could see no cocoa-nuts; while a hunt amongst the bushes disclosed nothing there in the fruit line either. I saw some tamarind trees certainly, but the beans on these were only just sprouting out from the blossom; and although I gathered some of these

and chewed them, thinking they might have an acid taste which would alleviate thirst if it did not allay hunger, they were so nasty that I had to spit them out again and wash my mouth out with sea-water to take away their flavour, going down to the shore for this purpose, as well as to see if there was anything eatable there to pick up.

“Presently, Magellan woke up too, and then the others, all suffering like myself from hunger. One chap said he could eat his boots; but then we had all pulled those off when the pinnace was labouring in the sea before she foundered. I told them about my unsuccessful try for cocoa-nuts and fruit, so they were perfectly satisfied that if I failed it would be useless for them to worry themselves by searching; and after a time chatting together and planning out that, next day, we would try to cross the mountains to Majunga, we all settled down to sleep again after the sun had gone down in the west—when night came on suddenly, without any twilight the same as you have here, enveloping the forest and all our surroundings in a darkness so dense that it could almost be felt, no moon rising or any stars peeping out until long after we were snoring, that is, if any at all came out then.

“The next morning, we made a terrible discovery.

“Through some carelessness or other in putting back the bung-stopper of the barrico, or from one of the chaps getting up in the night and ‘sucking the monkey’ while we were all asleep, every drop of water had disappeared from the vessel, and although we all awoke thirsty, the same as we had done the previous morning, there was nothing left now to quench our drought with.

“The men were so angry over it that they nearly came to blows, Magellan and I having much difficulty in pacifying them; the more especially, as some of them complained that if they had been allowed to have had their fill before going to sleep, at all events the water would have done some good then instead of being wasted, and they would besides not have been so thirsty as they now were, while they also would have been able to hold out longer till they got more.

“Of course this was absurd on their part, although very aggravating; so to stop any more hard words and argufying in the matter, I suggested that as there was nothing to be gained by our remaining any longer in the vicinity of the bay where we had first come ashore, we had better start off at once on our journey to Majunga while we were fresh in the early morning, before the sun got high in the heavens to enervate us with its scorching heat.

“This motion was carried, with one or two dissentients, and we accordingly at once started off due south, as nearly as I could calculate by the position of the sun and sea, making our way through the stiff jungle up the side of the mountain that spurted right across our course in that direction, the way getting steeper and steeper each step that we took forwards, and the jungle thicker and more dense.

“Gracious goodness! what a climb that was! Up and up we struggled and toiled, perspiring all the way and gasping with heat and thirst. We tore all the skin off our arms and legs in forcing ourselves through the prickly patches of jungle, and almost splintered our feet against the rocks and gnarled roots of some of the trees, besides bruising our bodies all over with the repeated falls we had; and, all the while, we were suffering the most unmitigated pangs of hunger and thirst that mortal man could experience when in full strength.

“To add, too, to the misery of the toilsome journey, we could hardly see an inch before us, although the sun took right good care to blaze down right immediately over our heads through the tops of the trees. We could only tell we were ascending from the extra fatigue it entailed in lifting our weary feet in stepping upwards; and although we climbed up several trees that looked taller than the rest near, so that we might better observe our whereabouts, when perchance we might discover some welcome oasis in sight in the midst of this desert of green, not a single yard could we see beyond the tree tops immediately near, which closed in the view completely—the only break apparent being the intense glaring blue of the burning sky just overhead, with its molten coppery disc of a sun darting down fiery rays from the zenith.

“At last, when every man Jack of us felt that he could not proceed a single step beyond if we had any more climbing to do, the ground suddenly began to descend, telling us that we had reached the slope that led into the next valley.

“This put fresh life into us and made us press onwards with renewed vigour, everyone hoping that, as soon as we got to the bottom of the declivity, we would reach one of those rivers which, as I had told the men, emptied themselves from the west coast of Madagascar into the Mozambique Channel—buoying up their drooping energies whenever they appeared to falter on their toilsome way by holding out this dream to them, for I believed in it fully myself.

“It was but a futile hope, however; and one, too, that was doubly disappointing.

“On getting to the lower part of the hill, something was seen shining through the trees, like as the sea had been observed shimmering in the sun on the other side of the mountain, but this now evidently could not be any portion of the Indian Ocean or Mozambique Channel, from the direction we had been proceeding in since the morning?

“No, it could not be the sea.

“It could be nothing else, thought the men, than the much-longed-for river which I had led them shortly to expect to see in sight; so, with a glad cheer they rushed between the trunks and branches of the intervening trees in mad, hot haste to quench their thirst in the cooling stream.

“But oh! the terrible surprise!

“The water was salt and brackish, not fresh. It was a lagoon, or arm of the sea, running up between a gorge of the hills, and not a river after all.”

Chapter Six

The Crocodile's Victim

"You won't think I'm exaggerating, sir, or that we were unmanly; but I assure you that one and all of us broke down under this disappointment, and cried as if we were a parcel of children. It was like the last straw, you know, that broke the camel's back!

"As soon as we all recovered a bit from the disappointment, I told the men that we must make the best or worst of it, and that it would probably ease their thirst if they bathed in the lagoon. This some of them did, but the majority gave way to despair; and if we had not lugged one chap out he would have drowned himself.

"We had a long rest here, if rest you can call it when fellows felt utterly burnt up with the heat, and so parched with thirst and famished with hunger that their whole inside was all one gnawing crave for food and drink; but it eased us a bit, and Magellan and I held a council of war, as you might say, looking matters in the face and studying our position.

"As near as I could judge from what I had observed when cruising off the coast, we should have to cross three more mountains similar to the one we had just got over, and travel through three more valleys like this in the same way, before arriving within hail of Majunga; for I knew there were three bays between Cape Tangan and the port we were aiming for—Pasanda, Radama, and another whose name I forget. The question was, would we ever get over the distance? If we did not meet with water soon, it would be utterly impossible for us to accomplish the journey; and, as the dry season had now set in, our chance of finding stray rivulets and mountain streams would grow each day less and less—unless, sir, you've ever been in the tropics you can't tell how quickly the appearance of the country alters with the change of the season! A place, one day, may be all foaming down with cataracts and mountain torrents, with a river perhaps lying in your way that you would have to swim through to get over to the other side of it; while, the next time you visit the same locality, even within a week, the mountain torrents and cataracts will have vanished as if by magic, and the river you had to swim over or found impassable will now have dwindled down to a tiny streamlet that a child could paddle in, or else have completely dried up, leaving only a rocky channel in the ground with huge boulders tossed about here and there to show where it had been.

“It was fortunate for us we had the sun to guide us through all this forest waste, as otherwise we could not possibly have steered in any constant direction, but would probably have gone round in a circle like a horse in a mill. As it was, however, even amidst the depth of brushwood and jungle by the side of the salt-water lagoon where we were camping for the time, we could easily distinguish the western point of the compass from the sun circling almost directly towards that quarter after it had passed the meridian, for we were only some fifteen degrees south of the equator; and in the morning, likewise, we had no difficulty in telling when we faced east.

“Under these circumstances, therefore, I advised all hands to get up when they felt a little less tired and trudge on steadily due south, where our only hope of safety lay, as long as the light through the trees enabled us to see where we were going. Once the light became uncertain, it would be better to stop for the night than to wander about and fatigue ourselves unnecessarily, only perhaps to find out when the sun rose again at dawn that we had been merely retracing our previous day’s steps to no good.

“It was a hard job to make the poor chaps buckle to their tramp again, and it was as much as Magellan and I could do to get them to start. One of them, Denis Brown, he was a faint-hearted man even on board ship, entreated us to let him lie down there and die where he was; but of course we would not leave him behind, and he had to come on with us whether he liked it or not, Magellan and I forcing him on his legs and dragging him on.

“Our first task was to get round the lagoon, which was so overgrown with reeds and suchlike rank vegetation as grows in swamps that we couldn’t tell where it began or ended; but as the sea must lay towards the west, I came to the conclusion that if we skirted the bank in the opposite direction we would soon come to the neck of the water and be able to wade across it. This we did, but it was arduous walking—through mud and slime, with snakes darting out every now and then upon us, and huge crocodiles crawling out of our way, just as we almost set foot on them, which frightened some of the timid ones pretty much, I can tell you!

“At last we managed to get round the lagoon; and then, steering steadily again to the south, this bit of easting having taken us a good deal out of our straight course southwards, we had a second mountain to climb up through tangled brushwood and jungle. This seemed harder work a good deal than the first one, for we were almost tired out when we started on the journey, while our feet were so swollen and blistered with all the walking we had already done, besides

being torn to pieces with the stones and jagged bits of tree roots we had trodden on, that we could hardly crawl up, although we grasped hold of the branches of the shrubs and brushwood to drag ourselves up by. When we arrived at the top of this chain of hills—for it was first up and then down most of the way—the sun was just setting; so, down we squatted in the first open place we reached, resting for the night and leaving the descent into the valley for the next morning. Indeed, we were so weary and worn out that if we had known for a certainty that water was within reach of us at the bottom of the hill, although we were so thirsty that we couldn't hardly speak to one another, I don't believe a man of us would have stirred after once lying down to get a drink—we really couldn't have stirred a step!

"The sun had been up a good time before we rose from the ground, on this, the third day of our being in the bush, and when we got up it was as much as we could do to stand in an erect position at all, our energies being so exhausted that hardly a man had a scrap of strength left to drag himself up. Of all the miserable scarecrows you ever saw in your life, we must have then looked the worst—with our bare pelts burnt and blistered, our tangled hair and beards, our woebegone faces, out of which our eyes were almost starting from their sockets, and our bleeding feet and limbs, the latter all scratched, and with pieces of flesh torn out of them by the briars and thorns through which we had to scramble in our climb up the mountain!

"'We look just fit for Madame Tussaud's chamber of horrors,' said Magellan, contemplating himself ruefully, and then looking at the rest of us, who were all in the same sorry plight—like a parcel of naked white savages.

"'Aye,' said I, 'and I wouldn't mind being there in London now! Howsomdever, old ship'—I added on to what I was saying, seeing that the fellows laughed and cheered up a bit at Magellan's comical way—'if we ever hopes to get there we must trudge on now. Our course is all downhill, thank goodness, and perhaps we'll meet with a river at last—as soon as we get down to the gully.'

"'That's your sort,' shouted out Magellan heartily; 'rouse up, my hearties, and let us push on. There's no good our remaining here, and the sooner we start, why, the sooner we'll get to Majunga. Yo, heave ho! Up anchor, men, and make sail! Heave ahead with a will and follow me!'

"With that, we got under way again, with Magellan leading, as he was stronger than me now, and the first man of course made the path easier for those coming after him—which was the reason I went in advance as long as I was

able. In proportion as it had been harder to climb, so was this mountain steeper and more dangerous to descend than the first one we had surmounted, for it sloped down so suddenly in some places that it seemed as if we were sliding down the pointed roof of a house; while we had to look out narrowly for several ugly chasms or crevices in the ground on which we popped every now and then most unexpectedly. Denis Brown, the most unlucky of the party, as generally happens to timid nervous people, nearly got his neck broken in one of these gullies soon after we started, and it was only by the exertions of all our party that we saved his life.

"Slipping, sliding, swinging ourselves forward sometimes by the branches of the trees from one foothold to another, but still ever descending, we made our way down the side of the mountain for ever so long, going on till we thought we must be diving into the heart of the earth, the gorge was so deep. Occasionally, when we arrived at some little open space, we could see the tops of the trees underneath us, as if under our feet, and felt inclined to jump on them and go right through to the ground below with a crash, and have done with it at once. The work, however, was so different to the climbing we had the day before that the men went at it more cheerily, besides which it was like running downhill, and when once they had begun descending they could not stop themselves, but had to go on like a rolling ball.

"Thank God, though, it was toil well spent! As we got nearer the bottom, I could fancy I heard the noise of water running, the sound coming to my ear in the silence of the still solemn forest when the noise we made crashing through the brushwood had ceased. I couldn't believe it, however, at first, and thought it was a dream, or arose out of the delirium occasioned by the thirst from which I was suffering; but it grew clearer and more distinct as we proceeded, and being assured of this I halted of a sudden.

"'Jem,' I sang out to Magellan, who was still in front forcing a way for us, 'stop a minute! Don't you hear anything?'

"He therefore halted like myself, and so did the rest, who were pressing on between us, he leading and I bringing up the rear, the other four being in the middle like a wedge.

"'Listen!' I cried. All was stillness for a moment, but soon, above the hush that succeeded the noise of our movement through the bush, we could hear a faint silvery trickling sound that was sweeter than the sweetest music to our ears. It

was the murmur of running water, with an occasional splash as it leaped over a stone.

"'Hooray, boys!' exclaimed Jem. 'We've fetched the water at last—follow my leader now, and we'll be able to slake our thirst!'

"So saying, he plunged again downwards through the jungle, and we after him, helter skelter through the forest in our mad race for the precious element of which we had been so long deprived, and whose real value we did not properly appreciate till we had lost it. Our rush must have resembled what I've read takes place on the prairies of America when there is a stampede of the wild animals frightened by the forests catching fire or some other scare.

"Thank God, as I said then, it was not another deception this time like the salt lagoon that had disappointed us so sorely that time when we thought we had a drink at last!

"As we got nearer and nearer the bottom of the valley, the sound of the running water increased, and mingled with it was heard that bubbling and splashing that echoes so delightfully on one's ears on a warm summer day in England from a garden fountain; so you can imagine how it appealed to our parched senses. Why, we wouldn't have stopped then in our progress towards it if a fiery volcano lay between us, or if a thousand bayonets tried to arrest our movement!

"Another moment of suspense, and then, there lay the stream before us. I never experienced before that saying in Scripture so thoroughly, about the sight of the water in a thirsty land. It was like heaven to us!

"It wasn't a big river—only a little streamlet of about six feet in width, yet pretty deep, for it came up to our shoulders when we stood in it; but it was quite enough for us, and we dashed into it, plunging in and rolling over in our hot haste and eagerness to drink, so wildly, so madly that it was a wonder that we did not drown one another, all clumped up together as we were. We swilled and swilled till we well-nigh felt that we were bursting; while some continued to drink even after their stomachs were unable to contain any more, and the water rolled back out of their mouths. We were more like beasts than human beings for over a quarter of an hour; and then, we roared with an agony of pain from the distension this sudden repletion gave us. After a time, however, this passed off and we felt more comfortable, when we were able to sit down by the green banks through which the stream leaped and raced along in its course

down to the sea to the westwards beyond. The river, we could now see, when we had more leisure to contemplate it, came from a little cataract or waterfall that sprang down a niche in the rocks at the point where two gorges met, and if we had gone half a mile further to the eastward we must have missed it. Providence surely guided our steps that day, for I'm certain we could not have lived another twenty-four hours without water, nay, not twelve!

"As soon as our thirst was appeased, all of us began to feel ravenously hungry; the men, to my eyes, seeming by the looks they were casting at each other as if they would turn cannibals if no other proper food turned up. Glancing about the little glade where we were resting, I fortunately saw just by the side of the streamlet some lace-like leaves of a climbing plant which resembled very much what I knew in the West Indies as the water yam—a very good vegetable that serves the niggers there instead of our potato, and indeed some folks, myself included, like it better than that even, when roasted, with lots of butter on it.

"I told Jem of this; and he, fortunately having his knife with him slung on to the lanyard round his trouser band—he was the only one of us that had a weapon of any sort—at once began to dig about the roots of the plants, soon dragging out from the ground a large bulb something like an elongated beet-root. It was the water yam, sure enough. I recognised it the moment I looked at it, and I was glad that the leaf had attracted my attention; so, telling Jem it was all right, he at once sliced it up into six pieces and shared it out to us. I can't say it tasted nice, being raw; but it was something in the food line at any rate, and we ate it all ravenously, the same as we would have eaten the leather of our boots if we had any.

"Jem Magellan dug out three more yams, one of which he shared out in the same way and which was just as quickly demolished; but the two others he reserved for the next day, in case we should not chance to come across any more plants. Then, we had another good drink of water, which tasted not the less sweet the more we had of it; and as the sun was now setting we turned in for the night by the bank of the stream, intending to stay there a bit until we had recruited ourselves after all the exhausting privation and terribly hard work we had experienced in getting through the bush since quitting Cocoa-nut Bay, as we had christened the place we had come ashore from the wreck of the pinnace.

"Next morning we woke up more at our usual time aboard ship, soon after the sun rose, the rest and food and drink having refreshed us so greatly that we felt almost ourselves again; but we were still mighty hungry and polished off

our two yams for breakfast in a brace of shakes, the men not listening to the injunctions of Magellan and myself that perhaps they would feel the want of them more before the day was out. Now they had had their ravenous cravings appeased, they thought they had come to the end of all their privations. Poor chaps, they and myself had to suffer a good deal more yet before we had quite done with Madagascar!

"A little later on, a sort of large parrot or cockatoo came flying down the valley, perching on the branch of a tree near the waterfall, where he began to croak away; so Denis Brown ups with a piece of stone and chucking it at the bird brings it down. In a moment he had picked off the feathers, when Magellan, taking out his knife again, cuts the parrot into six portions, entrails and all, and distributes it amongst us. That was the first thing we had between our teeth in the shape of meat for nearly six days, for we had our last meal on board the pinnace the day before she upset; so the fowl tasted better to us than the best fancy dish ever served up at the lord-mayor's dinner—the only thing against it being that there was so little of it, divided amongst the six of us! However, it was a godsend any way; and it gave us so much additional strength and courage, combined with the effects of the yams we had already eaten and the plentiful supply of good water, that it was unanimously resolved, after having a thorough rest that day by the side of the river, to resume our march to Majunga the next morning at daybreak and to keep on till we got there.

"But, 'Man proposes and God disposes,' says the old proverb, and a very wise one too, as we proved before the next forty-eight hours went over our heads.

"There was no breakfast this morning of our second day's rest by the banks of the river that had so providentially been sighted in time to save our lives; but, notwithstanding that drawback, the whole party of us started gaily afresh on our way through the jungle, resuming our southerly course towards Majunga. Magellan and I regretted very much that we had omitted bringing the empty water barrico from Cocoa-nut Bay with us, for now we could have filled it and carried a supply with us in the event of our being unable to come across another spring; but none of the other men would carry it, and he and I after taking it along for a time had thrown it away before the end of our first day's pilgrimage, it being as much as we could do to drag ourselves along without being hampered with an empty cask that might after all be a useless incumbrance.

"So, once more depending on the chance of what we might meet with on the way, we set out; our way was, as at first starting, lying again uphill and the

steepest bit of climbing we had yet had. In spite of our good intentions of the previous night, what with prospecting our journey and one thing and another, it was past mid-day before we got well off from the valley, and it was nightfall when we reached the top of the third mountain; but the men were not near so tired as they had been on the last two days of our wandering before getting water, and even now did not complain again of thirst as they had done at their former halts for the night—moaning through their sleep and bursting out sometimes in incoherent ravings as if they were going mad. From the top of this eminence, too, we had more of an outlook than we had yet been able to gain, seeing a distant peep of the sea through the trees, and below us far away, wandering in and out between the masses of thick foliage, the silvery gleam of a river coursing its way to the coast. We went to sleep, therefore, with the comfortable assurance that everything would turn out well for us on the morrow, when we should be in clover if appearances were to be trusted.

"Alas, it was a day of calamity and greater peril than we had yet undergone!

"Our downward progress this morning was as rapid as that into the oasis we had discovered in the wilderness on the day before, and indeed seemed much easier, the vegetation not being so thick and the ground shelving less abruptly; but then, in compensation for this, we did not receive a similar thankful reward for our toil on reaching the bottom, for, although we came to a river, its water was utterly unlike that of the spring in the glade, being muddy and brackish. However, to men thirsty like ourselves it was drinkable, and we had to content ourselves with it, taking as little of it as we could help and that only sufficient to quench our cravings.

"What upset us more than this, though, was that this river was some three hundred yards across from bank to bank, so that we would have to wade it or swim it to get over to the other side, our investigations on the shore where we were deliberating showing us that it would be impossible to circle round it without going for miles out of our way. We were not frightened at the mere fact of having to venture into unknown depths—men who had swam the distance we had done in the Mozambique Channel could afford to laugh at the paltry width of the stream. What troubled us was the sight of innumerable crocodiles, sluggishly dragging themselves up the slimy mud banks on either side and swimming about in the centre of the stream as if on guard over its precincts. We did not care about tackling these; and so it was we hesitated, none wishing to be the first to venture the passage.

"At last, Jem Magellan, as usual, came to the fore.

"'Come now, men,' says he; 'what are you minding them air crocodiles for? They won't harm you, when the sharks let you t'other day in swimming ashore from the pinnace! Jest follow me, and you'll soon see that my splashing in the water will frighten them off! They are as cowardly as they're big and ugly!'

"With these words, he leaped into the river and was very shortly across safely on the other side, the hideous reptiles taking no more notice of him than if he had been one of themselves, continuing to wallow about in the green slime.

"Seeing this, I too followed, for I own to being a bit skeared of the animals before Jem put courage into me; and so did two of the others; but Denis Brown and the sixth man got terrified when they were in mid stream, shouting out and hollering that the crocodiles were after them. Jem, who was as brave as a lion, opening his knife and putting it between his teeth, plunged into the water again, swimming back to where Denis Brown was struggling in the river alone, the other chap having abandoned him and made for the shore. But, the true-hearted fellow was too late; just as he was within a yard or two of Denis, the other gave out a shriek which went right through us all like an electric shock and disappeared below the water, into whose muddy depths one of the hideous brutes we had seen had dragged him down. I declare, it affected us more, that did, than all we had gone through; and we were not calm till Jem Magellan stood once more amongst us, for we thought the crocodile might capture him next. We did not any of us like Brown much; but our misfortunes had drawn us all closer together and we felt his loss deeply.

"That wasn't the end of our troubles for the day either.

"Resuming our course sadly across the level marshy land which adjoined the river and apparently extended some distance before we could reach our last hill, we had just entered within the outskirts of another forest of jungle when our ears were assailed with the most terrible yells. The next moment, without the slightest warning, a band of natives rushed at us with savage cries—hurling spears and darts at us, before we could put ourselves into a posture of defence—poor, unarmed, defenceless fellows that we were!"

Chapter Seven
Rescued at Last

"The savages," continued Ben, "in their rapid onslaught on us, fortunately, missed their aim, only one of us getting a spear-wound through the body, the rest of their weapons expending their force harmlessly in the bush, and by the time they were ready for a second go at us we were better prepared to receive them, although sadly wanting in the means of defence, only Jem Magellan having a knife. This he at once drew, however, while the rest of us, using the sticks we had previously cut in the forest, as I had forgotten to tell you previously, made an effort to save our lives with the determination of fighting to the last.

"But, Jem was our guardian angel now, as he had been before. Darting at one of the natives before he was apparently aware of his intention, he stabbed him through the heart, and then catching him up without a second's deliberation by his legs, and using his body as a club, he floored three others in rapid succession. We, too, were not behindhand with our sticks; and the savages—struck more with consternation at Magellan's tremendous strength, for he was built like a giant, and stood over six feet high, than by our prowess—ran away back into the jungle as fast as they had come upon us; leaving some four of their number struck lifeless on the ground, besides the one Jem had first settled, and whom the club exercise to which his body had been subjected had knocked out of any semblance it had originally possessed to the human form.

"We breathed hard when the scrimmage was over, for it was warm work while it lasted; and then, our sadly-lessened little party thinking discretion the better part of valour, and that our foes might get reinforced and return to attack us in numbers, only ten altogether having belonged to the body assailing us, we too took to our heels in the opposite direction. This was the very one, indeed, in which our proper course lay; and we ran on without giving a thought as to whether any of those we had knocked on the head would come to life again or not, or that we had to answer for their deaths.

"It would weary you to hear all the further trials we had to go through. We had three other rivers to ford before reaching the base of the next mountain; and, on essaying to climb this latter, we found it so steep and matted with rank vegetation that it was impossible to ascend it. Besides, the mosquitoes stung us almost to pieces on our going into the forest here; and, seeing that our route southwards was impracticable any longer, we bent our steps due west, following the track of the last river we had crossed so as to gain the beach again, which latter course seemed to offer now the best chance of escape.

"Arrived here, we sat down facing the sea, without a single sail passing by within hail, as we had hoped would soon have been the case, for two long

weary days and nights—one of us always keeping watch that we should not miss a vessel, in the first place, and, secondly, for fear of another attack from the natives. During all this time, recollect, we had nothing to eat since we swallowed the last fragment of the solitary parrot that poor Denis Brown had knocked down, although plenty of brackish water was at our disposal from the river.

"On the third morning, however, just when we were pretty nigh done up with the heat and hunger, thinking each moment would be our last, an Arab dhow passed by close inshore to where we were stretched almost lifeless on the sand, watching the monotonous sea that broke with a heavy wash on the beach.

"We hailed the people on board, but they took no notice of us, and we abandoned ourselves to despair. However, another trading dhow came by soon afterwards, luckily for us, and the skipper of this showed more sympathy to shipwrecked seamen in distress, for, responding to our appeals for help, he said he would lie to for us, but as he had no boat we would have to swim off to the vessel.

"This we did, braving our fear of the sharks, though we had seen plenty of them about during the two days we had been staring at the sea; and, plunging into the waves, were soon hauled aboard in safety, the revulsion of feeling at being thus saved from a lingering death almost making us helpless at the last!

"The captain of the dhow, who was in the employ of some Banian traders, carried us to Majunga, where we were most hospitably treated, a house being set apart for our accommodation, and the Queen of Madagascar herself sending down provisions for our use during our stay there. I recollect, on the very day of our arrival, she despatched three casks of rice, along with a dozen ducks and twelve fowls, for us to have a feast with; and I don't think we had left a bone of the poultry or a grain of rice by the end of the following day.

"I shall never forget the kindness we all met with at Majunga. It is an Arab colony, with lots of Hindoos and Portuguese there besides, although only a small mud town. It was this place that the French bombarded the other day for no cause whatever that I can see save to get a foothold on the island and establish their blessed republic there. But then, we need not talk. I've known English men-of-war set fire to native villages amongst the islands in the South Pacific just to avenge a fancied insult which some blackbirding schooner had once received when its crew were trying to kidnap the natives, and I have known cruelties committed because the merchants were unable to get the proper price for their Manchester cottons and Brummagem goods; while when serving on the west coast of Africa, up the Congo river, I have seen whole colonies of poor niggers annihilated, with their little towns wrecked over their heads, simply because they did not choose to do exactly what we told them.

You may say that the French have no right to do as they have done and are doing in Madagascar; but circumstances alter cases, sir. We only think these bombardments and colonising schemes bad when they are carried out by other nations; when we do similar things, of course it is all right and just."

"Did you rejoin your ship ultimately?" I asked, when Ben had finished his little bit of moralising, apropos of international differences.

"Oh yes, sir. The Dolphin came cruising in search of us down the coast after capturing the second slaver and settling all her business at Zanzibar; and, on her putting in to Majunga, of course we went on board, reporting the accident that had happened to the pinnace. The excitement had borne us up to then; but, soon after we found ourselves once more in the old ship, the whole lot of us broke down and went raving mad, being out of our minds for weeks. Magellan and the others recovered out there, but I was invalided home and sent to Haslar Hospital—being ultimately allowed to leave the service on a pension before I had quite finished my time, all through that exposure I had had when swimming ashore in the Mozambique Channel and journeying through the bush afterwards. I have quite recovered since, however, and am now as hale and hearty a man, thank God, as ever I was in all my life."

"I'm glad to hear that," said I cordially.

"Aye, I am," he repeated, as if to impress that point carefully on my mind; and then, seeing me looking at my watch, he asked me what the hour was.

"Just eleven o'clock," I answered.

"Lord bless us!" he exclaimed, "I'd no idea what time it was. Why didn't you stop me? I must be off home or my wife will be thinking I'm lost. Good-night, sir. Hope I haven't wearied you with my yarn?"

"Oh no," I said, "I have not found it a bit too long. Good-night." And so ends Ben Campion's story of "The Lost Pinnace."

The End