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URDY AND STRONG

G. A. HENTY

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STURDY AND STRONG
G. A. HENTY

"SURLY JOE SAT WITH A CHILD ON EITHER SIDE, TELLING THEM SEA STORIES."—*Frontispiece.*
Sturdy and Strong.

STURDY AND STRONG

OR

How George Andrews Made His Way

BY

G. A. HENTY

AUTHOR OF "THE YOUNG CARTHAGINIAN," "WITH CLIVE IN INDIA," "IN FREEDOM'S CAUSE," "THE LION OF THE NORTH," "FACING DEATH," ETC., ETC., ETC.

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PREFACE.

Whatever may be said as to distinction of classes in England, it is certain that in no country in the world is the upward path more open to those who brace themselves to climb it than in our own. The proportion of those who remain absolutely stationary is comparatively small. We are all living on a hillside, and we must either go up or down. It is easier to descend than to ascend; but he who fixes his eyes upwards, nerves himself for the climb, and determines with all his might and power to win his way towards the top, is sure to find himself at the end of his day at a far higher level than when he started upon his journey. It may be said, and sometimes foolishly is said, that luck is everything; but in nineteen cases out of twenty what is called luck is simply a combination of opportunity, and of the readiness and quickness to turn that opportunity to advantage. The voyager must take every advantage of wind, tide, and current, if he would make a favorable journey; and for success in life it is necessary not only to be earnest, steadfast, and true, but to have the faculty of turning every opportunity to the best advantage; just as a climber utilizes every tuft of grass, every little shrub, every projecting rock, as a hold for his hands or feet. George Andrews had what may be called luck—that is, he had opportunities and took advantage of them, and his rise in life was consequently far more rapid than if he had let them pass without grasping them; but in any case his steadiness, perseverance, and determination to get on would assuredly have made their way in the long run. If similar qualities and similar determinations are yours, you need not despair of similar success in life.

G. A. HENTY.

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STURDY AND STRONG.

CHAPTER I.

ALONE.

"You heard what he said, George?"

"Oh, mother, mother!"

"Don't sob so, my boy; he is right. I have seen it coming a long time, and, hard as it seems, it will be better. There is no disgrace in it. I have tried my best, and if my health had not broken down we might have managed, but you see it was not to be. I shall not mind it, dear; it is really only for your sake that I care about it at all."

The boy had ceased sobbing, and sat now with a white set face.

"Mother, it will break my heart to think that I cannot keep you from this. If we could only have managed for a year or two I could have earned more then; but to think of you—you in the workhouse!"

"In a workhouse infirmary, my boy," his mother said gently. "You see it is not as if it were from any fault of ours. We have done our best. You and I have managed for two years; but what with my health and my eyes breaking down we can do so no longer. I hope it will not be for long, dear. You see I shall have rest and quiet, and I hope I shall soon be able to be out again."

"Not soon, mother. The doctor said you ought not to use your eyes for months."

"Even months pass quickly, George, when one has hope. I have felt this coming so long that I shall be easier and happier now it has come. After all, what is a workhouse infirmary but a hospital, and it would not seem so very dreadful to you my going into a hospital; the difference is only in name; both are, after all, charities, but the one is kept up out of subscriptions, the other from the rates."

His mother's words conveyed but little comfort to George Andrews. He had just come in from his work, and had heard what the parish doctor had told his mother.

"I can do nothing for you here, Mrs. Andrews. You must have rest and quiet for

your eyes, and not only that, but you must have strengthening food. It is no use my blinking the truth. It is painful for you, I know. I can well understand that; but I see no other way. If you refuse to go I won't answer for your life."

"I will go, doctor," she had answered quietly. "I know that it will be best. It will be a blow to my boy, but I see no other way."

"If you don't want your boy to be alone in the world, ma'am, you will do as I advise you. I will go round in the morning and get you the order of admission, and as I shall be driving out that way I will, if you like, take you myself."

"Thank you, doctor; you are very good. Yes, I will be ready in the morning, and I thank you for your offer."

"Very well, then, that's settled," the doctor said briskly. "At ten o'clock I will be here."

Although a little rough in manner, Dr. Jeffries was a kind-hearted and humane man.

"Poor woman," he said to himself as he went downstairs, "it is hard for her. It is easy to see that she is a lady, and a thorough lady too; but what can I do for her! I might get her a little temporary help, but that would be of no use--she is completely broken down with anxiety and insufficient food, and unless her eyes have a long holiday she will lose her sight. No, there's nothing else for it, but it is hard."

It was hard. Mrs. Andrews was, as the doctor said, a lady. She had lost both her parents while she was at school. She had no near relations, and as she was sixteen when her mother died she had remained at school finishing her education and teaching the younger children. Then she had obtained a situation as governess in a gentleman's family, and two years afterwards had married a young barrister who was a frequent visitor at the house.

Mr. Andrews was looked upon as a rising man, and for the first seven or eight years of her marriage his wife's life had been a very happy one. Then her husband was prostrated by a fever which he caught in one of the midland towns while on circuit, and although he partially recovered he was never himself again. His power of work seemed to be lost; a languor which he could not overcome took possession of him. A troublesome cough ere long attacked him, and two years later Mrs. Andrews was a widow, and her boy, then nine years old, an

orphan.

During the last two years of his life Mr. Andrews had earned but little in his profession. The comfortable house which he occupied had been given up, and they had removed to one much smaller. But in spite of this, debts mounted up, and when, after his death, the remaining furniture was sold and everything settled, there remained only about two hundred pounds. Mrs. Andrews tried to get some pupils among her late husband's friends, but during the last two years she had lost sight of many of these, and now met with but poor success among the others. She was a quiet and retiring woman, and shrank from continuous solicitations, and at the end of three years she found her little store exhausted.

Hitherto she had kept George at school, but could no longer do so, and, giving up her lodging in Brompton, went down to Croydon, where someone had told her that they thought she would have a better chance of obtaining pupils, but the cards which some of the tradesmen allowed her to put in the window led to no result, and finding this to be the case she applied at one of the milliner's for work. This she obtained, and for a year supported herself and her boy by needlework.

From the time when George left school she had gone on teaching him his lessons; but on the day when he was thirteen years old he declared that he would no longer submit to his mother working for both of them, and, setting out, called at shop after shop inquiring if they wanted an errand-boy. He succeeded at last in getting a place at a grocer's where he was to receive three shillings a week and his meals, going home to sleep at night in the closet-like little attic adjoining the one room which his mother could now afford.

For a while they were more comfortable than they had been for some time; now that his mother had no longer George to feed, her earnings and the three shillings he brought home every Saturday night enabled them to live in comparative ease, and on Sunday something like a feast was always prepared. But six months later Mrs. Andrews felt her eyesight failing, the lids became inflamed, and a dull aching pain settled in the eyeballs. Soon she could only work for a short time together, her earnings became smaller and smaller, and her employers presently told her that she kept the work so long in hand that they could no longer employ her. There was now only George's three shillings a week to rely upon, and this was swallowed up by the rent. In despair she had applied to the parish doctor about her eyes. For a fortnight he attended her, and at the end of that time had peremptorily given the order of which she had told her son.

To her it was a relief; she had seen that it must come. Piece by piece every article of clothing she possessed, save those she wore, had been pawned for food, and every resource was now exhausted. She was worn out with the struggle, and the certainty of rest and food overcame her repugnance to the house. For George's sake too, much as she knew he would feel her having to accept such a refuge, she was glad that the struggle was at an end. The lad had for the last six months suffered greatly for her sake. Every meal to which he sat down at his employer's seemed to choke him as he contrasted it with the fare to which she was reduced, although, as far as possible, she had concealed from him how sore was her strait.

George cried himself to sleep that night, and he could scarce speak when he said good-by to his mother in the morning, for he could not tell when he should see her again.

"You will stop where you are, my boy, will you not?"

"I cannot promise, mother. I don't know yet what I shall do; but please don't ask me to promise anything. You must let me do what I think best. I have got to make a home for you when you are cured. I am fourteen now, and am as strong as most boys of my age. I ought to be able to earn a shilling a day somehow, and with seven shillings a week, mother, and you just working a little, you know, so as not to hurt your eyes, we ought to be able to do. Don't you bother about me, mother. I want to try anyhow what I can do till you come out. When you do, then I will do whatever you tell me; that's fair, isn't it?"

Mrs. Andrews would have remonstrated, but he said:

"Well, mother, you see at the worst I can get a year's character from Dutton, so that if I can't get anything else to do I can get the same sort of place again, and as I am a year older than I was when he took me, and can tie up parcels neatly now, I ought to get a little more anyhow. You see I shall be safe enough, and though I have never grumbled, you know, mother—have I?—I think I would rather do anything than be a grocer's boy. I would rather, when I grow up, be a bricklayer's laborer, or a plowman, or do any what I call man's work, than be pottering about behind a counter, with a white apron on, weighing out sugar and currants."

"I can't blame you, George," Mrs. Andrews said with a sigh. "It's natural, my boy. If I get my eyesight and my health again, when you grow up to be a man we will lay by a little money, and you and I will go out together to one of the colonies. It will be easier to rise again there than here, and with hard work both of us might surely hope to get on. There must be plenty of villages in Australia

and Canada where I could do well with teaching, and you could get work in whatever way you may be inclined to. So, my boy, let us set that before us. It will be something to hope for and work for, and will cheer us to go through whatever may betide us up to that time."

"Yes, mother," George said. "It will be comfort indeed to have something to look forward to. Nothing can comfort me much to-day; but if anything could it would be some such plan as that."

The last words he said to his mother as, blinded with tears, he kissed her before starting to work, were:

"I shall think of our plan every day, and look forward to that more than anything else in the world—next to your coming to me again."

At ten o'clock Dr. Jeffries drove up to Mrs. Andrews' humble lodging in a brougham instead of his ordinary gig, having borrowed the carriage from one of the few of his patients who kept such a vehicle, on purpose to take Mrs. Andrews, for she was so weak and worn that he was sure she would not be able to sit upright in a gig for the three miles that had to be traversed. He managed in the course of his rounds to pass the workhouse again in the afternoon, and brought George, before he left work, a line written in pencil on a leaf torn from his pocketbook:

"My darling, I am very comfortable. Everything is clean and nice, and the doctor and people kind. Do not fret about me.—Your loving mother."

Although George's expressed resolution of leaving his present situation, and seeking to earn his living in some other way, caused Mrs. Andrews much anxiety, she had not sought strongly to dissuade him from it. No doubt it would be wiser for him to stay in his present situation, where he was well treated and well fed, and it certainly seemed improbable to her that he would be able to get a better living elsewhere. Still she could not blame him for wishing at least to try. She herself shared to some extent his prejudice against the work in which he was employed. There is no disgrace in honest work; but she felt that she would rather see him engaged in hard manual labor than as a shop boy. At any rate, as he said, if he failed he could come back again to Croydon, and, with a year's character from his present employer, would probably be able to obtain a situation similar to that which he now held. She was somewhat comforted, too, by a few words the doctor had said to her during their drive.

"I think you are fortunate in your son, Mrs. Andrews. He seems to me a fine steady boy. If I can, in any way, do him a good turn while you are away from him, I will."

George remained for another month in his situation, for he knew that it would never do to start on his undertaking penniless. At the end of that time, having saved up ten shillings, and having given notice to his employer, he left the shop for the last time, and started to walk to London. It was not until he began to enter the crowded streets that he felt the full magnitude of his undertaking. To be alone in London, a solitary atom in the busy mass of humanity, is a trying situation even for a man; to a boy of fourteen it is terrible. Buying a penny roll, George sat down to eat it in one of the niches of a bridge over the river, and then kneeling up watched the barges and steamers passing below him.

Had it not been for his mother, his first thought, like that of most English boys thrown on the world, would have been to go to sea; but this idea he had from the first steadily set aside as out of the question. His plan was to obtain employment as a boy in some manufacturing work, for he thought that there, by steadiness and perseverance, he might make his way.

On one thing he was resolved. He would make his money last as long as possible. Three penny-worth of bread a day would, he calculated, be sufficient for his wants. As to sleeping, he thought he might manage to sleep anywhere; it was summer time and the nights were warm. He had no idea what the price of a bed would be, or how to set about getting a lodging. He did not care how roughly he lived so that he could but make his money last. The first few days he determined to look about him. Something might turn up. If it did not he would set about getting a place in earnest. He had crossed Waterloo Bridge, and, keeping straight on, found himself in Covent Garden, where he was astonished and delighted at the quantities of fruit, vegetables, and flowers.

Although he twice set out in different directions to explore the streets, he each time returned to Covent Garden. There were many lads of his own age playing about there, and he thought that from them he might get some hints as to how to set about earning a living. They looked ragged and poor enough, but they might be able to tell him something—about sleeping, for instance. For although before starting the idea of sleeping anywhere had seemed natural enough, it looked more formidable now that he was face to face with it.

Going to a cook-shop in a street off the market he bought two slices of plum-

pudding. He rather grudged the twopence which he paid; but he felt that it might be well laid out. Provided with the pudding he returned to the market, sat himself down on an empty basket, and began to eat slowly and leisurely.

In a short time he noticed a lad of about his own age watching him greedily.

He was far from being a respectable-looking boy. His clothes were ragged, and his toes could be seen through a hole in his boot. He wore neither hat nor cap, and his hair looked as if it had not been combed since the day of his birth. There was a sharp, pinched look on his face. But had he been washed and combed and decently clad he would not have been a bad-looking boy. At any rate George liked his face better than most he had seen in the market, and he longed for a talk with someone. So he held out his other slice of pudding, and said:

"Have a bit?"

"Oh, yes!" the boy replied "Walker, eh?"

"No, I mean it, really. Will you have a bit?"

"No larks?" asked the boy.

"No; no larks. Here you are."

Feeling assured now that no trick was intended the boy approached, took without a word the pudding which George held out, and, seating himself on a basket close to him, took a great bite.

"Where do you live?" George asked, when the slice of pudding had half disappeared.

"Anywheres," the boy replied, waving his hand round.

"I mean, where do you sleep?"

The boy nodded, to intimate that his sleeping-place was included in the general description of his domicile.

"And no one interferes with you?" George inquired.

"The beaks, they moves you on when they ketches you; but ef yer get under a cart or in among the baskets you generally dodges 'em."

"And suppose you want to pay for a place to sleep, where do you go and how

much do you pay?"

"Tuppence," the boy said; "or if yer want a first-rate, fourpence. Does yer want to find a crib?" he asked doubtfully, examining his companion.

"Well, yes," George said. "I want to find some quiet place where I can sleep, cheap, you know."

"Out of work?" the boy inquired.

"Yes. I haven't got anything to do at present. I am looking for a place, you know."

"Don't know no one about?"

"No; I have just come in from Croydon."

The boy shook his head.

"Don't know nothing as would suit," he said. "Why, yer'd get them clothes and any money yet had walked off with the wery fust night."

"I should not get a room to myself, I suppose, even for fourpence?" George asked, making a rapid calculation that this would come to two and fourpence per week, as much as his mother had paid for a comparatively comfortable room in Croydon.

The boy opened his eyes in astonishment at his companion requiring a room for himself.

"Lor' bless yer, yer'd have a score of them with yer!"

"I don't care about a bed," George said. "Just some place to sleep in. Just some straw in any quiet corner."

This seemed more reasonable to the boy, and he thought the matter over.

"Well," he said at last, "I knows of a place where they puts up the hosses of the market carts. I knows a hostler there. Sometimes when it's wery cold he lets me sleep up in the loft. Aint it warm and comfortable just! I helps him with the hosses sometimes, and that's why. I will ax him if yer likes."

George assented at once. His ideas as to the possibility of sleeping in the open air had vanished when he saw the surroundings, and a bed in a quiet loft seemed

to him vastly better than sleeping in a room with twenty others.

"How do you live?" he asked the lad, "and what's your name?"

"They calls me the Shadder," the boy said rather proudly; "but my real name's Bill."

"Why do they call you the Shadow?" George asked.

"'Cause the bobbies finds it so hard to lay hands on me," Bill replied.

"But what do they want to lay hands on you for?" George asked.

"Why, for bagging things, in course," Bill replied calmly.

"Bagging things? Do you mean stealing?" George said, greatly shocked.

"Well, not regular prigging," the Shadow replied; "not wipes, yer know, nor tickers, nor them kind of things. I aint never prigged nothing of that kind."

"Well, what is it then you do—prig?" George asked, mystified.

"Apples or cabbages, or a bunch of radishes, onions sometimes, or 'taters. That aint regular prigging, you know."

"Well, it seems to me the same sort of thing," George said, after a pause.

"I tell yer it aint the same sort of thing at all," the Shadow said angrily. "Everyone as aint a fool knows that taters aint wipes, and no one can't say as a apple and a ticker are the same."

"No, not the same," George agreed; "but you see one is just as much stealing as the other."

"No, it aint," the boy reasserted. "One is the same as money and t'other aint. I am hungry and I nips a apple off a stall. No one aint the worse for it. You don't suppose as they misses a apple here? Why, there's wagon-loads of 'em, and lots of 'em is rotten. Well, it aint no more if I takes one than if it was rotten. Is it now?"

George thought there was a difference, but he did not feel equal to explaining it.

"The policemen must think differently," he said at last, "else they wouldn't be always trying to catch you."

"Who cares for the bobbies?" Bill said contemptuously. "I don't; and I don't want no more jaw with you about it. If yer don't likes it, yer leaves it. I didn't ask for yer company, did I? So now then."

George had really taken a fancy to the boy, and moreover he saw that in the event of a quarrel his chance of finding a refuge for the night was small. In his sense of utter loneliness in the great city he was loath to break with the only acquaintance he had made.

"I didn't mean to offend you, Bill," he said; "only I was sorry to hear you say you took things. It seems to me you might get into trouble; and it would be better after all to work for a living."

"What sort of work?" Bill said derisively. "Who's agoing to give me work? Does yer think I have only got to walk into a shop and ask for 'ployment? They wouldn't want to know nothing about my character, I suppose? nor where I had worked before? nor where my feyther lived? nor nothing? Oh, no, of course not! It's blooming easy to get work about here; only got to ax for it, that's all. Good wages and all found, that's your kind."

"I don't suppose it's easy," George said; "but it seems to me people could get something to do if they tried."

"Tried!" the boy said bitterly. "Do yer think we don't try! Why, we are always trying to earn a copper or two. Why, we begins at three o'clock in the morning when the market-carts come in, and we goes on till they comes out of that there theater at night, just trying to pick up a copper. Sometimes one does and sometimes one doesn't. It's a good day, I tell you, when we have made a tanner by the end of it. Don't tell me! And now as to this ere stable; yer means it?"

"Yes," George said; "certainly I mean it."

"Wery well then, you be here at this corner at nine o'clock. I will go before that and square it with Ned. That's the chap I was speaking of."

"I had better give you something to give him," George said. "Will a shilling do?"

"Yes, a bob will do for three or four nights. Are you going to trust me with it?"

"Of course I am," George replied. "I am sure you wouldn't be so mean as to do me out of it; besides, you told me that you never stole money and those sort of things."

"It aint everyone as would trust me with a bob for all that," Bill replied; "and yer are running a risk, yer know, and I tells yer if yer goes on with that sort of game yer'll get took in rarely afore yer've done. Well, hand it over. I aint a-going to bilk yer."

The Shadow spoke carelessly, but this proof of confidence on the part of his companion really touched him, and as he went off he said to himself, "He aint a bad sort, that chap, though he is so precious green. I must look arter him a bit and see he don't get into no mischief."

George, on his part, as he walked away down into the Strand again, felt that he had certainly run a risk in thus intrusting a tenth of his capital to his new acquaintance; but the boy's face and manner had attracted him, and he felt that, although the Shadow's notions of right and wrong might be of a confused nature, he meant to act straight toward him.

George passed the intervening hours before the time named for his meeting in Covent Garden in staring into the shop windows in the Strand, and in wondering at the constant stream of vehicles and foot passengers flowing steadily out westward. He was nearly knocked under the wheels of the vehicles a score of times from his ignorance as to the rule of the road, and at last he was so confused by the jostling and pushing that he was glad to turn down a side street and to sit down for a time on a doorstep.

When nine o'clock approached he went into a baker's shop and bought a loaf, which would, he thought, do for supper and breakfast for himself and his companion. Having further invested threepence in cheese, he made his way up to the market.

The Shadow was standing at the corner whistling loudly.

"Oh, here yer be! That's all right; come along. I have squared Ned, and it's all right."

He led the way down two or three streets and then stopped at a gateway.

"You stop here," he said, "and I will see as there aint no one but Ned about."

He returned in a minute.

"It's all clear! Ned, he's a-rubbing down a hoss; he won't take no notice of yer as yer pass. He don't want to see yer, yer know, 'cause in case anyone comed and

found yer up there he could swear he never saw yer go in, and didn't know nothing about yer. I will go with yer to the door, and then yer will see a ladder in the corner; if yer whip up that yer'll find it all right up there."

"But you are coming too, aint you?" George asked.

"Oh, no, I aint a-coming. Yer don't want a chap like me up there. I might pick yer pocket, yer know; besides I aint your sort."

"Oh, nonsense!" George said. "I should like to have you with me, Bill; I should really. Besides, what's the difference between us? We have both got to work for ourselves and make our way in the world."

"There's a lot of difference. Yer don't talk the way as I do; yer have been brought up different. Don't tell me."

"I may have been brought up differently, Bill. I have been fortunate there; but now, you see, I have got to get my living in the best way I can, and if I have had a better education than you have, you know ever so much more about London and how to get your living than I do, so that makes us quits."

"Oh, wery well," Bill said; "it's all the same to this child. So if yer aint too proud, here goes."

He led the way down a stable yard, past several doors, showing the empty stalls which would be all filled when the market carts arrived. At the last door on the right he stopped. George looked in. At the further end a man was rubbing down a horse by the faint light of a lantern, the rest of the stable was in darkness.

"This way," Bill whispered.

Keeping close behind him, George entered the stable. The boy stopped in the corner.

"Here's the ladder. I will go up fust and give yer a hand when yer gets to the top."

George stood quiet until his companion had mounted, and then ascended the ladder, which was fixed against the wall. Presently a voice whispered in his ear:

"Give us your hand. Mind how yer puts your foot."

In a minute he was standing in the loft. His companion drew him along in the

darkness, and in a few steps arrived at a pile of hay.

"There yer are," Bill said in a low voice; "yer 'ave only to make yourself comfortable there. Now mind you don't fall down one of the holes into the mangers."

"I wish we had a little light," George said, as he ensconced himself in the hay.

"I will give you some light in a minute," Bill said, as he left his side, and directly afterwards a door opened and the light of a gaslight in the yard streamed in.

"That's where they pitches the hay in," Bill said as he rejoined him. "I shuts it up afore I goes to sleep, 'cause the master he comes out sometimes when the carts comes in, and there would be a blooming row if he saw it open; but we are all right now."

"That's much nicer," George said. "Now here's a loaf I brought with me. We will cut it in half and put by a half for the morning, and eat the other half between us now, and I have got some cheese here too."

"That's tiptop!" the boy said. "Yer're a good sort, I could see that, and I am pretty empty, I am, for I aint had nothing except that bit of duff yer gave me since morning, and I only had a crust then. 'Cept for running against you I aint been lucky to-day. Couldn't get a job nohows, and it aint for want of trying neither."

For some minutes the boys ate in silence. George had given much the largest portion to his companion, for he himself was too dead tired to be very hungry. When he had finished, he said:

"Look here, Bill; we will talk in the morning. I am so dead beat I can scarcely keep my eyes open, so I will just say my prayers and go off to sleep."

"Say your prayers!" Bill said in astonishment. "Do yer mean to say as yer says prayers!"

"Of course I do," George replied; "don't you?"

"Never said one in my life," Bill said decidedly; "don't know how, don't see as it would do no good ef I did."

"It would do good, Bill," George said. "I hope some day you will think differently, and I will teach you some you will like."

"I don't want to know none," Bill said positively. "A missionary chap, he came and prayed with an old woman I lodged with once. I could not make head nor tail of it, and she died just the same, so you see what good did it do her?"

But George was too tired to enter upon a theological argument. He was already half asleep, and Bill's voice sounded a long way off.

"Good-night," he muttered; "I will talk to you in the morning," and in another minute he was fast asleep.

Bill took an armful of hay and shook it lightly over his companion; then he closed the door of the loft and threw himself on the hay, and was soon also sound asleep. When George woke in the morning the daylight was streaming in through the cracks of the door. His companion was gone. He heard the voices of several men in the yard, while a steady champing noise and an occasional shout or the sound of a scraping on the stones told him the stalls below were all full now.

George felt that he had better remain where he was. Bill had told him the evening before that the horses and carts generally set out again at about nine o'clock, and he thought he had better wait till they had gone before he slipped down below. Closing his eyes he was very soon off to sleep again. When he woke, Bill was sitting by his side looking at him.

"Well, you are a oner to sleep," the boy said. "Why, it's nigh ten o'clock, and it's time for us to be moving. Ned will be going off in a few minutes, and the stables will be locked up till the evening."

"Is there time to eat our bread and cheese?" George asked.

"No, we had better eat it when we get down to the market; come along."

George at once rose, shook the hay off his clothes, and descended the ladder, Bill leading the way. There was no one in the stable, and the yard was also empty. On reaching the market they sat down on two empty baskets, and at once began to eat their bread and cheese.

CHAPTER II.

TWO FRIENDS.

"I did wake before, Bill," George said after he had eaten a few mouthfuls; "but you were out."

"Yes, I turned out as soon as the carts began to come in," Bill said, "and a wery good morning I have had. One old chap gave me twopence for looking arter his hoss and cart while he went into the market with his flowers. But the best move was just now. A chap as was driving off with flowers, one of them swell West-end shops, I expect, by the look of the trap, let his rug fall. He didn't see it till I ran after him with it, then he gave me a tanner; that was something like. Have yer finished yer bread and cheese?"

"Yes," George said, "and I could manage a drink of water if I could get one."

"There's a fountain handy," Bill said; "but you come along with me, I am agoing to stand two cups of coffee if yer aint too proud to take it;" and he looked doubtfully at his companion.

"I am not at all too proud," George said, for he saw that the slightest hesitation would hurt his companion's feelings.

"It aint fust-rate coffee," Bill said, as with a brightened look on his face he turned and led the way to a little coffee-stall; "but it's hot and sweet, and yer can't expect more nor that for a penny."

George found the coffee really better than he had expected, and Bill was evidently very much gratified at his expression of approval.

"Now," he said, when they had both finished, "for a draw of 'baccy," and he produced a short clay pipe. "Don't yer smoke?"

"No, I haven't begun yet."

"Ah! ye don't know what a comfort a pipe is," Bill said. "Why, when yer are cold and hungry and down on your luck a pipe is a wonderful thing, and so cheap; why, a ounce of 'baccy will fill yer thirty pipes if yer don't squeeze it in too hard.

Well, an ounce of 'baccy costs threepence halfpenny, so, as I makes out, yer gets eight pipes for a penny; and now," he went on when he had filled and lit his pipe, "let's know what's yer game."

"You mean what am I going to do?" George asked.

Bill nodded.

"I want to get employment in some sort of works. I have been an errand-boy in a grocer's for more than a year, and I have got a written character from my master in my pocket; but I don't like the sort of thing; I would rather work with my own hands. There are plenty of works where they employ boys, and you know one might get on as one gets older. The first thing is to find out whereabouts works of that sort are."

"There are lots of works at the East End, I have heard tell," Bill said; "and then there's Clerkenwell and King's Cross, they aint so far off, and there are works there, all sorts of works, I should say; but I don't know nuffin' about that sort of work. The only work as I have done is holding hosses and carrying plants into the market, and sometimes when I have done pretty well I goes down and lays out what I got in *Echoes*, or *Globes*, or *Evening Standards*; that pays yer, that does, for if yer can sell them all yer will get a bob for eight penn'orth of papers, that gives yer fourpence for an hour's work, and I calls that blooming good, and can't yer get a tuck-out for a bob! Oh, no, I should think not! Well, what shall it be? I knows the way out to Whitechapel and to Clerkenwell, so whichever yer likes I can show yer."

"If Clerkenwell's the nearest we may as well try that first," George said, "and I shall be much obliged to you for showing the way."

The two boys spent the whole day in going from workshop to workshop for employment; but the answers to his application were unvarying: either he was too young or there was no place vacant. George took the disappointment quietly, for he had made up his mind that he would have difficulty in getting a place; but Bill became quite angry on behalf of his companion.

"This is worse nor the market," he said. "A chap can pick up a few coppers there, and here we have been a-tramping about all day and aint done nothing."

Day after day George set out on his quest, but all was without success. He and Bill still slept in the loft, and after the first day he took to getting up at the same

time as his companion, and going out with him to try and pick up a few pence from the men with the market-carts. Every other morning they were able to lie later, as there were only regular marketdays three mornings a week.

On market mornings he found that he earned more than Bill, his better clothes giving him an advantage, as the men were more willing to trust their carts and rugs to the care of a quiet, respectable-looking boy than to that of the arabs who frequented the Garden. But all that was earned was laid out in common between the two boys, and George found himself seldom obliged to draw above a few pence on his private stock. He had by this time told the Shadow exactly how much money he had, and the boy, seeing the difficulty that George found in getting work, was most averse to the store being trenched upon, and always gave his vote against the smallest addition to their ordinary fare of bread and cheese being purchased, except from their earnings of the day. This George felt was the more creditable on Bill's part, inasmuch as the latter had, in deference to his prejudices, abstained from the petty thefts of fruit with which before he had seasoned his dry crusts.

George had learned now what Bill knew of his history, which was little enough. He supposed he had had a father, but he knew nothing of him; whether he had died, or whether he had cut away and left mother, Bill had no idea. His mother he remembered well, though she had died when he was, as he said, a little chap. He spoke of her always in a hushed voice, and in a tone of reverence, as a superior being.

"We was poor, you know," he said to George, "and I know mother was often short of grub, but she was just kind. I don't never remember her whacking me; always spoke soft and low like; she was good, she was. She used to pray, you know, and what I remember most is as the night afore she was took away to a hospital she says, 'Try and live honest, Bill; it will be hard, but try, my boy. Don't you take to stealing, however poor you may be;' and I aint," Bill said earnestly over and over again. "When I has seed any chap going along with a ticker handy, which I could have boned and got away among the carts as safe as ninepence, or when I has seed a woman with her purse a-sticking out of them outside pockets, and I aint had a penny to bless myself with, and perhaps nothing to eat all day, I have felt it hard not to make a grab; but I just thought of what she said, and I aint done it. As I told yer, I have often nabbed things off the stalls or out of the baskets or carts. It didn't seem to me as that was stealing, but as you says it is, I aint going to do so no more. Now look yer here, George; they tells me as the parsons says as when people die and they are good they goes up there, yer

know."

George nodded, for there was a question in his companion's tone.

"Then, of course," Bill went on, "she is up there. Now it aint likely as ever I should see her again, 'cause, you know, there aint nothing good about me; but if she was to come my way, wherever I might be, and was to say to me, 'Bill, have you been a-stealing?' do yer think she would feel very bad about them 'ere apples and things?"

"No, Bill, I am sure she would not. You see you didn't quite know that was stealing, and you kept from stealing the things that you thought she spoke of, and now that you see it is wrong taking even little things you are not going to take them any more."

"That I won't, so help me bob!" the boy said; "not if I never gets another apple between my teeth."

"That's right, Bill. You see you ought to do it, not only to please your mother, but to please God. That's what my mother has told me over and over again."

"Has she now?" Bill said with great interest, "and did you use to prig apples and sichlike sometimes?"

"No," George said, "not that sort of thing; but she was talking of things in general. Of doing things that were wrong, such as telling lies and deceiving, and that sort of thing."

"And your mother thinks as God knows all about it?"

George nodded.

"And that he don't like it, eh, when things is done bad?"

George nodded again.

"Lor', what a time he must have of it!" Bill said in solemn wonder. "Why, I heard a woman say last week as six children was enough to worrit anyone into the grave; and just to think of all of us!" and Bill waved his arm in a comprehensive way and repeated, "What a time he must have of it!"

For a time the boys sat silent in their loft, Bill wondering over the problem that had presented itself to him, and George trying to find some appropriate

explanation in reply to the difficulty Bill had started. At last he said:

"I am afraid, Bill, that I can't explain all this to you, for I am not accustomed to talk about such things. My mother talks to me sometimes, and of course I went to church regularly; but that's different from my talking about it; but you know what we have got to do is to try and please God, and love him because he loves us."

"That's whear it is," Bill said; "that's what I've heard fellows say beats 'em. If he loves a chap like me how is it he don't do something for him? why don't he get you a place, for instance? You aint been a-prigging apples or a-putting him out. That's what I wants to know."

"Yes, Bill, but as I have heard my mother say, it would be very hard to understand if this world were the only one; but you see we are only here a little time, and after that there's on and on and on, right up without any end, and what does it matter if we are poor or unhappy in this little time if we are going to be ever so happy afterwards? This is only a sort of little trial to see how we behave, as it were, and if we do the best we can, even though that best is very little, then you see we get a tremendous reward. For instance, you would not think a man was unkind who kept you five minutes holding his horse on a cold day, if he were going to give you enough to get you clothes and good lodging for the rest of your life."

"No, I should think not," Bill said fervently; "so it's like that, is it?"

George nodded. "Like that, only more."

"My eye!" Bill murmured to himself, lost in astonishment at this new view of things.

After that there were few evenings when, before they nestled themselves down in the hay, the boys did not talk on this subject. At first George felt awkward and nervous in speaking of it, for like the generality of English boys, however earnest their convictions may be, he was shy of speaking what he felt; but his companion's eagerness to know more of this, to him, new story encouraged him to speak, and having in his bundle a small Bible which his mother had given him, he took to reading to Bill a chapter or two in the mornings when they had not to go out to the early market.

It is true that Bill's questions frequently puzzled him. The boy saw things in a

light so wholly different from that in which he himself had been accustomed to regard them that he found a great difficulty in replying to them.

George wrote a letter to his mother, telling her exactly what he was doing, for he knew that if he only said that he had not yet succeeded in getting work she would be very anxious about him, and although he had nothing satisfactory to tell her, at least he could tell her that he had sufficient to eat and as much comfort as he cared for. Twice he received replies from her, directed to him at a little coffee-house, which, when they had had luck, the boys occasionally patronized. As time went on without his succeeding in obtaining employment George's hopes fell, and at last he said to his mate; "I will try for another fortnight, Bill, and if at the end of that time I don't get anything to do I shall go back to Croydon again."

"But yer can earn yer living here!" Bill remonstrated.

"I can earn enough to prevent me from starving, but that is all, Bill. I came up to London in hopes of getting something to do by which I might some day make my way up; if I were to stop here like this I should be going down, and a nice sight I should be to mother if, when she gets well enough to come out of the infirmary, I were to go back all in rags."

"What sort of a place is Croydon?" Bill asked. "Is there any chance of picking up a living there? 'cause I tells yer fair, if yer goes off I goes with yer. I aint a-thinking of living with yer, George; but we might see each other sometime, mightn't we? Yer wouldn't mind that?"

"Mind it! certainly not, Bill! You have been a good friend to me, and I should be sorry to think of you all alone here."

"Oh, blow being a good friend to yer!" Bill replied. "I aint done nothing except put yer in the way of getting a sleeping-place, and as it's given me one too I have had the best of that job. It's been good of yer to take up with a chap like me as don't know how to read or write or nothing, and as aint no good anyway. But you will let me go with yer to Croydon, won't yer?"

"Certainly I will, Bill; but you won't be able to see much of me. I shall have to get a place like the last. The man I was with said he would take me back again if I wanted to come, and you know I am all day in the shop or going out with parcels, and of course you would have to be busy too at something."

"What sort of thing do yer think, George? I can hold a hoss, but that aint much for a living. One may go for days without getting a chance."

"I should say, Bill, that your best chance would be to try and get work either in a brickfield or with a market-gardener. At any rate we should be able to get a talk for half an hour in the evening. I was always done at nine o'clock, and if we were both in work we could take a room together."

Bill shook his head.

"That would be wery nice, but I couldn't have it, George. I knows as I aint fit company for yer, and if yer was with a shop-keeping bloke he would think yer was going to run off with the money if he knew yer kept company with a chap like me. No, the 'greement must be as yer goes yer ways and I goes mine; but I hopes as yer will find suffin to do up here, not 'cause as I wouldn't like to go down to this place of yourn, but because yer have set yer heart on getting work here."

A week later the two boys were out late in Covent Garden trying to earn a few pence by fetching up cabs and carriages for people coming out from a concert in the floral hall. George had just succeeded in earning threepence, and had returned to the entrance to the hall, and was watching the people come out, and trying to get another job. Presently a gentleman, with a girl of some nine or ten years old, came out and took their place on the footpath.

"Can I call you a carriage, sir?" George asked.

"No, thank you, lad, a man has gone for it."

George fell back and stood watching the girl, who was in a white dress, with a little hood trimmed with swansdown over her head.

Presently his eye fell on something on which the light glittered as it hung from her neck. Just as he was looking a hand reached over her shoulder, there was a jerk, and a sudden cry from the child, then a boy dived into the crowd, and at the same moment George dashed after him. There was a cry of "Stop, thief!" and several hands made a grab at George as he dived through the crowd; but he slipped through them and was soon in the roadway.

Some twenty yards ahead of him he saw the boy running. He turned up Bow Street and then dashed down an alley. He did not know that he was followed until suddenly George sprang upon his back, and the two fell with a crash, the

young thief undermost. George seized his right hand, and kneeling upon him, twisted it behind his back and forced him to open his fingers, the boy, taken by surprise, and not knowing who was his assailant, making but slight resistance.

George seized the gold locket and dashed back at full speed into the market, and was soon in the thick of the crowd round the entrance. The gentleman was standing talking to a policeman, who was taking a note of the description of the lost trinket. The girl was standing by crying.

"Here is your locket," George said, putting it into her hand. "I saw the boy take it, and have got it from him."

"Oh, papa! papa!" the girl cried. "Here is my locket again."

"Why, where did you get it from?" her father asked in astonishment.

"This boy has just given it to me," she replied. "He says he took it from the boy who stole it."

"Which boy, Nellie? Which is the boy who brought it back?"

The girl looked round, but George was gone.

"Why didn't you stop him, my dear?" her father said. "Of course I should wish to thank and reward him, for the locket was a very valuable one, and the more so to us from its having belonged to your mother. Did you notice the boy, policeman?"

"No, sir, I did not see him at all."

"Was he a poor boy, Nellie?"

"Not a very, very poor boy, father," the girl replied. "At least I don't think so; but I only looked at his face. He didn't speak like a poor boy at all."

"Would you know him again?"

"Oh, yes, I am sure I should. He was a good-looking boy with a nice face."

"Well, I am very sorry he has gone away, my dear. Evidently he does not want a reward, but at any rate I should have liked to thank him. Are you always on this beat, policeman?"

"I am on night duty, sir, while the concerts are on."

"At any rate, I dare say you know the constables who are about here in the daytime. I wish you would mention the fact to them, and ask them if they get any clew to the boy who has rendered me this service, to let me know. Here is a card with my name and address."

After restoring the locket George made his way to the entrance to the stables, where he generally met Bill after the theater had closed and there was no farther chance of earning money. It was not till half an hour later that the boy came running up.

"I have got eightpence," he said. "That is something like luck. I got three jobs. One stood me fourpence, the other two gave me tuppence each. What do yer say? Shall we have a cup of coffee afore we turns in?"

"I think we had better not, Bill. I have got sixpence. We will put that by, with the sixpence we saved the other day, for the hostler. We haven't given him anything for some time. Your eightpence will get us a good breakfast in the morning."

When they had comfortably nestled themselves in the hay George told his companion how he had rescued and restored the locket.

"And he didn't give yer nuffin! I never heerd tell of such a scaly trick as that. I should ha' said it ought to have been good for a bob anyway."

"I did not wait to see, Bill. Directly I had given the little girl her locket I bolted."

"Well, that were soft. Why couldn't yer have waited to have seen what the bloke meant to give yer?"

"I did not want to be paid for such a thing as that," George replied. "I don't mind being paid when I have done a job for anyone; but this was different altogether."

Bill meditated for a minute or two.

"I can't see no difference, nohow," he said at last. "Yer did him a good turn, and got the thing back. I dare say it were worth five bob."

"A good deal more than that, Bill."

"More nor that! Well, then, he ought to have come down handsome. Didn't yer run like winking, and didn't yer jump on the chap's back and knock him down, and didn't yer run back again? And warn't there a chance, ef one of the bobbies had got hold of yer collar and found it in yer hand, of yer being had up for

stealing it? And then yer walks off and don't give him a chance of giving yer nuffin. My eye, but yer are a flat!"

"I don't suppose you will quite understand, Bill. But when people do a thing to oblige somebody, and not as a piece of regular work, they don't expect to be paid. I shouldn't have liked it if they had offered me money for such a thing."

"Well, ef yer says so, no doubt it's right," Bill rejoined; "but it seems a rum sort of notion to me. When people loses things they expects to pay to get 'em back. Why, don't yer see outside the p'lice station, and in the shop winders, papers offering so much for giving back things as is lost. I can't read 'em myself, yer know; but chaps have read 'em to me. Why, I've heerd of as much as five quid being offered for watches and sichlike as was lost by ladies coming out of theayters, and I have often thought what a turn of luck it would be to light on one of 'em. And now yer says as I oughtn't to take the money ef I found it."

"No, I don't say that, Bill. If you found a thing and saw a reward offered, and you wanted the money, you would have good right to take it. But, you see, in this case I saw how sorry the girl was at losing her locket, and I went after it to please her, and I was quite content that I got it back for her."

Bill tried again to think the matter over in his mind, but he was getting warm and sleepy, and in a few minutes was sound off.

Two or three days later the lads had, to their great satisfaction, obtained a job. Walnuts were just coming in, and the boys were engaged to take off the green shucks. Bill was particularly pleased, for he had never before been taken on for such a job, and he considered it a sort of promotion. Five or six women were also employed, and as the group were standing round some great baskets Bill suddenly nudged his friend:

"I say, my eye, aint that little gal pretty?"

George looked up from his work and at once recognized the girl to whom he had restored the locket. Her eye fell on him at the same moment.

"There, papa!" she exclaimed. "I told you if you brought me down to the market I felt sure I should know the boy again if I saw him. That's him, the one looking down into the basket. But he knew me again, for I saw him look surprised when he noticed me."

The gentleman made his way through the women to George.

"My lad, are you the boy who restored the locket to my daughter three evenings ago?"

"Yes, sir," George said, coloring as he looked up. "I was standing close by when the boy took it, so I gave chase and brought it back, and that's all."

"You were off again in such a hurry that we hadn't time to thank you. Just come across to my daughter. I suppose you can leave your work for a minute?"

"Yes, sir. We are working by the job," George said, and looking rather shamefaced he followed the gentleman to the sidewalk.

"This is your boy, as you call him, Nellie."

"I was sure I should know him again," the child said, "though I only saw him for a moment. We are very much obliged to you, boy, papa and me, because it had been mamma's locket, and we should have been very sorry to have lost it."

"I am glad I was able to get it back for you," George said; "but I don't want to be thanked for doing it; and I don't want to be paid either, thank you, sir," he said, flushing as the gentleman put his hand into his pocket.

"No! and why not?" the gentleman said in surprise. "You have done me a great service, and there is no reason why I should not pay you for it. If I had lost it I would gladly have paid a reward to get it back."

"Thank you, sir," George said quietly; "but all the same I would rather not be paid for a little thing like that."

"You are a strange fellow," the gentleman said again. "One does not expect to find a boy in the market here refusing money when he has earned it."

"I should not refuse it if I had earned it," George said; "but I don't call getting back a locket for a young lady who has lost it earning money."

"How do you live, lad? You don't speak like a boy who has been brought up in the market here."

"I have only been here three months," George said. "I came up to London to look for work, but could not get any. Most days I go about looking for it, and do what odd jobs I can get when there's a chance."

"What sort of work do you want? Have you been accustomed to any work?

Perhaps I could help you."

"I have been a year as an errand-boy," George answered; "but I didn't like it, and I thought I would rather get some sort of work that I could work at when I got to be a man instead of sticking in a shop."

"Did you run away from home, then?" the gentleman asked.

"No, sir. My mother was ill and went into an infirmary, and so as I was alone I thought I would come to London and try to get the sort of work I liked; but I have tried almost all over London."

"And are you all alone here?"

"No, sir, not quite alone. I found a friend in that boy there, and we have worked together since I came up."

"Well, lad, if you really want work I can give it you."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" George exclaimed fervently.

"And your friend too, if he likes. I have some works down at Limehouse and employ a good many boys. Here is the address;" and he took a card from his pocket, wrote a few words on the back of it, and handed it to George.

"Ask for the foreman, and give him that, and he will arrange for you to begin work on Monday. Come along, Nellie; we have got to buy the fruit for to-morrow, you know."

So saying he took his daughter's hand, and George, wild with delight, ran off to tell Bill that he had obtained work for them both.

"Well, Nellie, are you satisfied?"

"Yes, I am glad you could give him work, papa; didn't he look pleased? Wasn't it funny his saying he wouldn't have any money?"

"Yes; I hardly expected to have met with a refusal in Covent Garden; but you were right, child, and you are a better judge of character than I gave you credit for. You said he was a nice-looking lad, and spoke like a gentleman, and he does. He is really a very good style of boy. Of course he is shabby and dirty now, and you see he has been an errand-boy at a grocer's; but he must have been better brought up than the generality of such lads. The one he called his friend looked a

wild sort of specimen, altogether a different sort of boy. I should say he was one of the regular arabs hanging about this place. If so, I expect a very few days' work will sicken him; but I shouldn't be surprised if your boy, as you call him, sticks to it."

The next morning the two boys presented themselves at Mr. Penrose's works at Limehouse. These were sawing and planing works, and the sound of many wheels, and the hoarse rasping sound of saws innumerable, came out through the open windows of the building as they entered the yard.

"Now what do you boys want?" a workman said as he appeared at one of the doors.

"We want to see the foreman," George said. "I have a card for him from Mr. Penrose."

"I will let him know," the man replied.

Two minutes later the foreman came out, and George handed him the card. He read what Mr. Penrose had written upon it and said:

"Very well, you can come in on Monday; pay, eight shillings a week; seven o'clock; there, that will do. Oh, what are your names?" taking out a pocket-book. "George Andrews and William Smith;" and then, with a nod, he went back into his room, while the boys, almost bewildered at the rapidity with which the business had been arranged, went out into the street again.

"There we are, Bill, employed," George said in delight.

"Yes, there we is," Bill agreed, but in a more doubtful tone; "it's a rum start, aint it? I don't expect I shall make much hand of it, but I am wery glad for you, George."

"Why shouldn't you make much hand of it? You are as strong as I am."

"Yes; but then, you see, I aint been accustomed to work regular, and I expect I shan't like it—not at first; but I am going to try. George, don't yer think as I aint agoing to try. I aint that sort; still I expects I shall get the sack afore long."

"Nonsense, Bill! you will like it when you once get accustomed to it, and it's a thousand times better having to draw your pay regularly at the end of the week than to get up in the morning not knowing whether you are going to have

breakfast or not. Won't mother be pleased when I write and tell her I have got a place! Last time she wrote she said that she was a great deal better, and the doctor thought she would be out in the spring, and then I hope she will be coming up here, and that will be jolly."

"Yes, that's just it," Bill said; "that's whear it is; you and I will get on fust-rate, but it aint likely as your mother would put up with a chap like me."

"My mother knows that you have been a good friend to me, Bill, and that will be quite enough for her. You wait till you see her."

"My eye, what a lot of little houses there is about here!" Bill said, "just all the same pattern; and how wide the streets is to what they is up Drury Lane!"

"Yes, we ought to have no difficulty in getting a room here, Bill, now that we shall have money to pay for it; only think, we shall have sixteen shillings a week between us!"

"It's a lot of money," Bill said vaguely. "Sixteen bob! My eye, there aint no saying what it will buy! I wish I looked a little bit more respectable," he said, with a new feeling as to the deficiencies of his attire. "It didn't matter in the Garden; but to go to work with a lot of other chaps, these togs aint what you may call spicy."

"They certainly are not, Bill," George said with a laugh. "We must see what we can manage."

George's own clothes were worn and old, but they looked respectable indeed by the side of those of his companion. Bill's elbows were both out, the jacket was torn and ragged, he had no waistcoat, and his trousers were far too large for him, and were kept up by a single brace, and were patched in a dozen places.

When George first met him he was shoeless, but soon after they had set up housekeeping together George had bought from a cobbler's stall a pair of boots for two shillings, and these, although now almost falling to pieces, were still the best part of Bill's outfit.

CHAPTER III.

WORK.

The next morning George went out with the bundle containing his Sunday clothes, which had been untouched since his arrival in town, and going to an old-clothes shop he exchanged them for a suit of working clothes in fair condition, and then returning hid his bundle in the hay and rejoined Bill, who had from early morning been at work shelling walnuts. Although Bill was somewhat surprised at his companion not beginning work at the usual time he asked no questions, for his faith in George was so unbounded that everything he did was right in his eyes.

"There is our last day's work in the market, Bill," George said as they reached their loft that evening.

"It's your last day's work, George, I aint no doubt; but I expects it aint mine by a long way. I have been a-thinking over this 'ere go, and I don't think as it will act nohow. In the first place I aint fit to go to such a place, and they are sure to make it hot for me."

"That's nonsense, Bill; there are lots of roughish sort of boys in works of that sort, and you will soon be at home with the rest."

"In the next place," Bill went on, unheeding the interruption, "I shall be getting into some blooming row or other afore I have been there a week, and they will like enough turn you out as well as me. That's what I am a-thinking most on, George. If they chucks me the chances are as they chucks you too; and if they did that arter all the pains you have had to get a place I should go straight off and make a hole in the water. That's how I looks at it."

"But I don't think, Bill, that there's any chance of your getting into a row. Of course at first we must both expect to be blown up sometimes, but if we do our best and don't answer back again we shall do as well as the others."

"Oh, I shouldn't cheek 'em back," Bill said. "I am pretty well used to getting blown up. Every one's always at it, and I know well enough as it don't pay to cheek back, not unless you have got a market-cart between you and a clear road

for a bolt. I wasn't born yesterday. Yer've been wery good to me, you have, George, and before any harm should come to yer through me, s'help me, I'd chuck myself under a market-wagon."

"I know you would, Bill; but, whatever you say, you have been a far greater help to me than I have to you. Anyhow we are not going to part now. You are coming to work with me to start with, and I know you will do your best to keep your place. If you fail, well, so much the worse, it can't be helped; but after our being sent there by Mr. Penrose I feel quite sure that the foreman would not turn me off even if he had to get rid of you."

"D'yer think so?"

"I do, indeed, Bill."

"Will yer take yer davey?"

"Yes, if it's any satisfaction to you, Bill, I will take my davey that I do not think that they would turn me off even if they sent you away."

"And yer really wants me to go with yer, so help yer?"

"Really and truly, Bill."

"Wery well, George, then I goes; but mind yer, it's 'cause yer wishes me."

So saying, Bill curled himself up in the hay, and George soon heard by his regular breathing that he was sound asleep.

The next morning, before anyone was stirring, they went down into the yard, as was their custom on Sunday mornings, for a good wash, stripping to the waist and taking it by turns to pump over each other. Bill had at first protested against the fashion, saying as he did very well and did not see no use in it; but seeing that George really enjoyed it he followed his example. After a morning or two, indeed, and with the aid of a piece of soap which George had bought, Bill got himself so bright and shiny as to excite much sarcastic comment and remark from his former companions, which led to more than one pugilistic encounter.

That morning George remained behind in the loft for a minute or two after Bill had run down, attired only in his trousers. When Bill went up the ladder after his ablutions he began hunting about in the hay.

"What are you up to, Bill?"

"Blest if I can find my shirt. Here's two of yourn knocking about, but I can't see where's mine, nor my jacket neither."

"It's no use your looking, Bill, for you won't find them, and even if you found them you couldn't put 'em on. I have torn them up."

"Torn up my jacket!" Bill exclaimed in consternation. "What lark are yer up to now, George?"

"No lark at all. We are going together to work to-morrow, and you could not go as you were; so you put on that shirt and those things," and he threw over the clothes he had procured the day before.

Bill looked in astonishment.

"Why, where did yer get 'em, George? I knows yer only had four bob with what we got yesterday. Yer didn't find 'em, and yer didn't—no, in course yer didn't—nip 'em."

"No, I didn't steal them certainly," George said, laughing. "I swapped my Sunday clothes for them yesterday. I can do without them very well till we earn enough to get another suit. There, don't say anything about it, Bill, else I will punch your head."

Bill stared at him with open eyes for a minute, and then threw himself down in the hay and burst into tears.

"Oh, I say, don't do that!" George exclaimed. "What have you to cry about?"

"Aint it enough to make a cove cry," Bill sobbed, "to find a chap doing things for him like that? I wish I may die if I don't feel as if I should bust. It's too much, that's what it is, and it's all on one side; that's the wust of it."

"I dare say you will make it even some time, Bill; so don't let's say anything more about it, but put on your clothes. We will have a cup of coffee each and a loaf between us for breakfast, and then we will go for a walk into the park, the same as we did last Sunday, and hear the preaching."

The next morning they were up at their accustomed hour and arrived at the works at Limehouse before the doors were opened. Presently some men and boys arrived, the doors were opened, and the two boys followed the others in.

"Hallo! who are you?" the man at the gate asked.

George gave their names, and the man looked at his time-book.

"Yes, it's all right; you are the new boys. You are to go into that planing-shop," and he pointed to one of the doors opening into the yard.

The boys were not long before they were at work. Bill was ordered to take planks from a large pile and to hand them to a man, who passed them under one of the planing-machines. George was told to take them away as fast as they were finished and pile them against a wall. When the machines stopped for any adjustment or alteration both were to sweep up the shavings and ram them into bags, in which they were carried to the engine-house.

For a time the boys were almost dazzled by the whirl of the machinery, the rapid motion of the numerous wheels and shafting overhead, and of the broad bands which carried the power from them to the machinery on the floor, by the storm of shavings which flew from the cutters, and the unceasing activity which prevailed around them. Beyond receiving an occasional order, shouted in a loud tone—for conversation in an ordinary voice would have been inaudible—nothing occurred till the bell rang at half-past eight for breakfast. Then the machinery suddenly stopped, and a strange hush succeeded the din which had prevailed.

"How long have we got now?" George asked the man from whose bench he had been taking the planks.

"Half an hour," the man said as he hurried away.

"Well, what do you think of it, Bill?" George asked when they had got outside.

"Didn't think as there could be such a row," Bill replied. "Why, talk about the Garden! Lor', why it aint nothing to it. I hardly knew what I was a-doing at first."

"No more did I, Bill. You must mind what you do and not touch any of those straps and wheels and things. I know when I was at Croydon there was a man killed in a sawmill there by being caught in the strap; they said it drew him up and smashed him against the ceiling. And now we had better look out for a baker's."

"I suppose there aint a coffee-stall nowhere handy?"

"I don't suppose there is, Bill; at any rate we have no time to spare to look for one. There's a pump in the yard, so we can have a drink of water as we come

back. Well, the work doesn't seem very hard, Bill," George said as they ate their bread.

"No, it aint hard," Bill admitted, "if it weren't for all them rattling wheels. But I expect it aint going to be like that regular. They've just gived us an easy job to begin with. Yer'll see it will be worse presently."

"We shall soon get accustomed to the noise, Bill, and I don't think we shall find the work any harder. They don't put boys at hard work, but just jobs like we are doing, to help the men."

"What shall we do about night, George?"

"I think that at dinner-time we had better ask the man we work for. He looks a good-natured sort of chap. He may know of someone he could recommend us to."

They worked steadily till dinner-time; then as they came out George said to the man with whom they were working:

"We want to get a room. We have been lodging together in London, and don't know anyone down here. I thought perhaps you could tell us of some quiet, respectable people who have a room to let?"

The man looked at George more closely than he had hitherto done.

"Well, there aint many people as would care about taking in two boys, but you seem a well-spoken young chap and different to most of 'em. Do you think you could keep regular hours, and not come clattering in and out fifty times in the evening, and playing tom-fools' tricks of all sorts?"

"I don't think we should be troublesome," George said; "and I am quite sure we shouldn't be noisy."

"You would want to be cooked for, in course?"

"No, I don't think so," George said. "Beyond hot water for a cup of tea in the evening, we should not want much cooking done, especially if there is a coffee-stall anywhere where we could get a cup in the morning."

"You haven't got any traps, I suppose?"

George looked puzzled.

"I mean bed and chairs, and so on."

George shook his head.

"We might get them afterwards, but we haven't any now."

"Well, I don't mind trying you young fellows. I have got a bedroom in my place empty. A brother of mine who lodged and worked with me has just got a job as foreman down in the country. At any rate I will try you for a week, and if at the end of that time you and my missis don't get on together you must shift. Two bob a week. I suppose that will about suit you?"

George said that would suit very well, and expressed his thanks to the man for taking them in.

They had been walking briskly since they left the works, and now stopped suddenly before the door of a house in a row. It was just like its neighbor, except that George noticed that the blinds and windows were cleaner than the others, and that the door had been newly painted and varnished.

"Here we are," the man said. "You had best come in and see the missis and the room. Missis!" he shouted, and a woman appeared from the backroom. "I have let Harry's room, mother," he said, "and these are the new lodgers."

"My stars, John!" she exclaimed; "you don't mean to say that you let the room to them two boys. I should have thought you had better sense. Why, they will be trampling up and down the stairs like young hosses, wear out the oil cloth, and frighten the baby into fits. I never did hear such a thing!"

"I think they are quiet boys, Bessie, and won't give much trouble. At any rate I have agreed to try them for a week, and if you don't get on with them at the end of that time, of course they must go. They have only come to work at the shop to-day; they work with me, and as far as I can see they are quiet young chaps enough. Come along, lads, I will show you your room."

It was halfway up the stairs, at the back of the house, over the kitchen, which was built out there. It was a comfortable little room, not large, but sufficiently so for two boys. There was a bed, a chest of drawers, two chairs, and a dressing-table, and a strip of carpet ran alongside the bed, and there was, moreover, a small fireplace.

"Will that do for you?" the man asked.

"Capitally," George said; "it could not be nicer;" while Bill was so taken aback by its comfort and luxury that he was speechless.

"Well, that's settled, then," the man said. "If you have got any things you can bring 'em in when you like."

"We have not got any to speak of," George said, flushing a little. "I came up from the country three months ago to look for work, and beyond odd jobs I have had nothing to do since, so that everything I had is pretty well gone; but I can pay a week's rent in advance," he said, putting his hand in his pocket.

"Oh, you needn't mind that!" the man said; "as you work in the shop it's safe enough. Now I must get my dinner, else I shall be late for work."

"Well, Bill, what do you think of that?" George asked as they left the house.

"My eye," Bill exclaimed in admiration; "aint it nice just! Why, yer couldn't get a room like that, not furnished, anywhere near the market, not at four bob a week. Aint it clean just; so help me if the house don't look as if it has been scrubbed down every day! What a woman that must be for washing!"

"Yes; we shall have to rub our feet well, Bill, and make as little mess as we can in going in and out."

"I should think so," Bill said. "It don't seem to me as if it could be true as we're to have such a room as that to ourselves, and to walk into a house bold without being afraid as somebody would have his eye on you, and chivey you; and eight bob a week for grub regular."

"Well, let's get some bread and cheese, Bill; pretty near half our time must be gone, and mind we must be very saving at first. There will be several things to get; a kettle and a teapot, and a coffeepot, and some cups and saucers, and we shall want a gridiron for frying rashers of bacon upon."

"My eye, won't it be prime!" Bill broke in.

"And we shall want some towels," George went on with his enumeration.

"Towels!" repeated Bill. "What are they like?"

"They are cloths for wiping your hands and face after you have washed."

"Well, if yer says we wants 'em, George, of course we must get 'em; but I've

always found my hands dried quick enough by themselves, especially if I gived 'em a rub on my trousers."

"And then, Bill, you know," George went on, "I want to save every penny we can, so as to get some things to furnish two rooms by the time mother comes out."

"Yes, in course we must," Bill agreed warmly, though a slight shade passed over his face at the thought that they were not to be always alone together. "Well, yer know, George, I am game for anythink. I can hold on with a penn'orth of bread a day. I have done it over and over, and if yer says the word I am ready to do it again."

"No, Bill, we needn't do that," George laughed. "Still, we must live as cheap as we can. We will stick to bread for breakfast, and bread and cheese for dinner, and bread for supper, with sometimes a rasher as a great treat. At any rate we will try to live on six shillings a week."

"Oh! we can do that fine," Bill said confidently; "and then two shillings for rent, and that will leave us eight shillings a week to put by."

"Mother said that the doctor didn't think she would be able to come out 'til the spring. We are just at the beginning of November, so if she comes out the first of April, that's five months, say twenty-two weeks. Twenty-two weeks at eight shillings, let me see. That's eight pounds in twenty weeks, eight pounds sixteen altogether, that would furnish two rooms very well, I should think."

"My eye, I should think so!" Bill exclaimed, for to his mind eight pound sixteen was an almost unheard-of sum, and the fact that his companion had been able to calculate it increased if possible his admiration for him.

It needed but two or three days to reconcile Mrs. Grimstone to her new lodgers.

"I wouldn't have believed," she said at the end of the week to a neighbor, "as two boys could have been that quiet. They comes in after work as regular as the master. They rubs their feet on the mat, and you can scarce hear 'em go upstairs, and I don't hear no more of 'em till they goes out agin in the morning. They don't come back here to breakfast or dinner. Eats it, I suppose, standing like."

"But what do they do with themselves all the evening, Mrs. Grimstone?"

"One of 'em reads to the other. I think I can hear a voice going regular over the

kitchen."

"And how's their room?"

"As clean and tidy as a new pin. They don't lock the door when they goes out, and I looked in yesterday, expecting to find it like a pigsty; but they had made the bed afore starting for work, and set everything in its place, and laid the fire like for when they come back."

Mrs. Grimstone was right. George had expended six pence in as many old books at a bookstall. One of them was a spelling-book, and he had at once set to work teaching Bill his letters. Bill had at first protested. "He had done very well without reading, and didn't see much good in it." However, as George insisted he gave way, as he would have done to any proposition whatever upon which his friend had set his mind. So for an hour every evening after they had finished tea Bill worked at his letters and spelling, and then George read aloud to him from one of the other books.

"You must get on as fast as you can this winter, Bill," he said; "because when the summer evenings come we shall want to go for long walks."

They found that they did very well upon the sum they agreed on. Tea and sugar cost less than George had expected. Mrs. Grimstone took in for them regularly a halfpenny-worth of milk, and for tea they were generally able to afford a bloater between them, or a very thin rasher of bacon. Their enjoyment of their meals was immense. Bill indeed frequently protested that they were spending too much money; but George said as long as they kept within the sum agreed upon, and paid their rent, coal, candles, and what little washing they required out of the eight shillings a week, they were doing very well.

They had by this time got accustomed to the din of the machinery, and were able to work in comfort. Mr. Penrose had several times come through the room, and had given them a nod. After they had been there a month he spoke to Grimstone.

"How do those boys do their work?"

"Wonderful well, sir; they are the two best boys we have ever had. No skylarking about, and I never have to wait a minute for a plank. They generally comes in a few minutes before time and gets the bench cleared up. They are first-rate boys. They lodge with me, and two quieter and better-behaved chaps in a house there never was."

"I am glad to hear it," Mr. Penrose said. "I am interested in them, and am pleased to hear so good an account."

That Saturday, to their surprise, when they went to get their money they received ten shillings apiece.

"That's two shillings too much," George said as the money was handed to them.

"That's all right," the foreman said. "The governor ordered you both to have a rise."

"My eye!" Bill said as they went out. "What do you think of that, George? Four bob a week more to put by regularly. How much more will that make by the time your mother comes?"

"We won't put it all by, Bill. I think the other will be enough. This four shillings a week we will put aside at present for clothes. We want two more shirts apiece, and some more stockings, and we shall want some shoes before long, and another suit of clothes each. We must keep ourselves decent, you know."

From the time when they began work the boys had gone regularly every Sunday morning to a small iron church near their lodging, and they also went to an evening service once a week. Their talk, too, at home was often on religion, for Bill was extremely anxious to learn, and although his questions and remarks often puzzled George to answer, he was always ready to explain things as far as he could.

February came, and to George's delight he heard, from his mother that she was so much better that the doctor thought that when she came out at the end of April she would be as strong as she had ever been. Her eyes had benefited greatly by her long rest, and she said that she was sure she should be able to do work as before. She had written several times since they had been at Limehouse, expressing her great pleasure at hearing that George was so well and comfortable. At Christmas, the works being closed for four days, George had gone down to see her, and they had a delightful talk together. Christmas had indeed been a memorable occasion to the boys, for on Christmas Eve the carrier had left a basket at Grimstone's directed "George Andrews." The boys had prepared their Christmas dinner, consisting of some fine rashers of bacon and sixpenny-worth of cold plum pudding from a cook-shop, and had already rather lamented this outlay, for Mrs. Grimstone had that afternoon invited them to dine downstairs. George was reading from a book which he bought for a penny that

morning when there was a knock at the door, and Mrs. Grimstone said:

"Here is a hamper for you, George."

"A hamper for me!" George exclaimed in astonishment, opening the door. "Why, whoever could have sent a hamper for me! It must be a mistake."

"That's your name on the direction, anyhows," Mrs. Grimstone said.

"Yes, that's my name, sure enough," George agreed, and at once began to unknot the string which fastened down the lid.

"Here is a Christmas card at the top!" he shouted. He turned it over. On the back were the words:

"With all good wishes, Helen Penrose."

"Well, that is kind," George said in rather a husky voice; and indeed it was the kindness that prompted the gift rather than the gift itself that touched him.

"Now, then, George," Bill remonstrated; "never mind that there card, let's see what's inside."

The hamper was unpacked, and was found to contain a cold goose, a Christmas pudding, and some oranges and apples. These were all placed on the table, and when Mrs. Grimstone had retired Bill executed a war-dance in triumph and delight.

"I never did see such a game," he said at last, as he sat down exhausted. "There's a Christmas dinner for yer! Why, it's like them stories of the genii you was a-telling me about—chaps as come whenever yer rubbed a ring or an old lamp, and brought a tuck-out or whatever yer asked for. Of course that wasn't true; yer told me it wasn't, and I shouldn't have believed it if yer hadn't, but this 'ere is true. Now I sees, George, as what yer said was right and what I said was wrong. I thought yer were a flat 'cause yer wouldn't take nothing for getting back that there locket, and now yer see what's come of it, two good berths for us and a Christmas dinner fit for a king. Now what are we going to do with it, 'cause yer know we dines with them downstairs to-morrow?"

"The best thing we can do, I think," George answered, "will be to invite all of them downstairs, Bob Grimstone, his wife, and the three young uns, to supper, not to-morrow night nor the night after, because I shan't be back from Croydon

till late, but say the evening after."

"But we can't hold them all," Bill said, looking round the room.

"No, we can't hold them here, certainly, but I dare say they will let us have the feed in their parlor. There will be nothing to get, you know, but some bread and butter, and some beer for Bob. Mrs. Grimstone don't take it, so we must have plenty of tea."

"I should like some beer too, just for once, George, with such a blow-out as that."

"No, no, Bill, you and I will stick to tea. You know we agreed that we wouldn't take beer. If we begin it once we shall want it again, so we are not going to alter from what we agreed to. We see plenty of the misery which drink causes all round and the way in which money is wasted over it. I like a glass of beer as well as you do, and when I get to be a man I dare say I shall take a glass with my dinner regularly, though I won't do even that if I find it makes me want to take more; but anyhow at present we can do without it."

Bill agreed, and the dinner-party downstairs and the supper two nights afterwards came off in due course, and were both most successful.

The acknowledgment of the gift had been a matter of some trouble to George, but he had finally bought a pretty New Year's card and had written on the back, "with the grateful thanks of George Andrews," and had sent it to the daughter of his employer.

At the beginning of April George had consulted Grimstone and his wife as to the question of preparing a home for his mother.

"How much would two rooms cost?" he had asked; "one a good-sized one and the other the same size as ours."

"Four shillings or four and sixpence," Mrs. Grimstone replied.

"And supposing we had a parlor and two little bedrooms?"

"Five and sixpence or six shillings, I should say," Mrs. Grimstone replied.

"And how much for a whole house?"

"It depends upon the size. We pay seven shillings a week, but you might get one

without the kitchen and bedroom over it behind for six shillings."

"That would be much the nicest," George said, "only it would cost such a lot to furnish it."

"But you needn't furnish it all at once," Mrs. Grimstone suggested. "Just a kitchen and two bedrooms for a start, and you can put things into the parlor afterwards. That's the way we did when we first married. But you must have some furniture."

"And how much will it cost for the kitchen and two bedrooms?"

"Of course going cheaply to work and buying the things secondhand, I should say I could pick up the things for you, so that you could do very well," Mrs. Grimstone said, "for six or seven pounds."

"That will do capitally," George said, "for by the end of this month Bill and I will have more than ten pounds laid by."

"What! since you came here?" Grimstone exclaimed in astonishment. "Do you mean to say you boys have laid by five pounds apiece?"

"Yes, and bought a lot of things too," his wife put in.

"Why, you must have been starving yourselves!"

"We don't look like it," George laughed. "I am sure Bill is a stone heavier than when he came here."

"Well, young chap, it does you a lot of credit," Bob Grimstone said. "It isn't every boy, by a long way, would stint himself as you must have done for the last five months to make a comfortable home for his mother, for I know lots of men who are earning their two quid a week and has their old people in the workhouse. Well, all I can say is that if I or the missis here can be of any use to you in taking a house we shall be right down glad."

"Thank you," George said. "We will look about for a house, and when we have fixed on one if you or Mrs. Grimstone will go about it for us I shall be much obliged, for I don't think landlords would be inclined to let a house to two boys."

"All right, George! we will do that for you with pleasure. Besides, you know, there are things, when you are going to take a house, that you stand out for; such as papering and painting, or putting in a new range, and things of that sort."

After their dinner on the following Sunday the two boys set out house-hunting.

"If it's within a mile that will do," George said. "It doesn't matter about our going home in the breakfast time. We can bring our grub in a basket and our tea in a bottle, as several of the hands do; but if it's over a mile we shall have to hurry to get there and back for dinner. Still there are plenty of houses in a mile."

There were indeed plenty of houses, in long regular rows, bare and hard-looking, but George wanted to find something more pleasant and homelike than these. Late in the afternoon he came upon what he wanted. It was just about a mile from the works and beyond the lines of regular streets. Here he found a turning off the main road with but eight houses in it, four on each side. It looked as if the man who built them had intended to run a street down for some distance, but had either been unable to obtain enough ground or had changed his mind.

They stood in pairs, each with its garden in front, with a bow-window and little portico. They appeared to be inhabited by a different class to those who lived in the rows, chiefly by city clerks, for the gardens were nicely kept, the blinds were clean and spotless, muslin curtains hung in the windows, and fancy tables with pretty ornaments stood between them. Fortunately one of them, the last on the left-hand side, was to let.

"What do you think of this, Bill?"

"It seems to be just the thing; but how about the rent, George? I should think they were awful dear."

"I don't suppose they are any more than the houses in the rows, Bill. They are very small, you see, and I don't suppose they would suit workmen as well as the others; at any rate we will see."

Whereupon George noted down on a scrap of paper the name of the agent of whom inquiry was to be made.

"No. 8," he said; "but what's the name of the street? Oh, there it is. Laburnum Villas. No. 8 Laburnum Villas; that sounds first-rate, doesn't it? I will get Mrs. Grimstone to go round to the agent to-morrow."

This Mrs. Grimstone agreed to do directly she was asked. After speaking to her husband she said, "I will get the key from the agent's and will be there just after twelve to-morrow, so if you go there straight when you get out you will be able to see the rooms and what state it's in."

"But how about Bob's dinner?" George asked.

"Oh, he will have it cold to-morrow, and I will set it out for him before I start."

"That is very kind, Mrs. Grimstone, thank you very much. It would be just the thing."

Accordingly, at ten minutes past twelve on the following day the two boys arrived breathless at No. 8 Laburnum Villas.

"Hurrah!" George shouted, "there is Mrs. Grimstone at the window."

The door was opened and they rushed in.

"It's a tidy little place," Mrs. Grimstone said; "and it's in good order and won't want any money laying out upon it."

The house was certainly small, but the boys were delighted with it. On the ground-floor were two little rooms opening with folding doors, and a little kitchen built out behind. There was a room over this, and two rooms above the sitting rooms.

"That's just the right number," George said, "a bedroom each for us; it couldn't be nicer; and what pretty paper!"

"And there is a good long slip of garden behind," Mrs. Grimstone said, "where you could grow lots of vegetables. Of course in the front you would have flowers."

"And how much do they want for it?"

"Seven and sixpence a week, including rates and taxes. I call it dear for its size, but then of course it's got the garden and it looks pretty and nice. The agent says it's been painted and papered from top to bottom since the last people left, but he says the owner won't let it unless somebody comes who is likely to stop, and he will want references of respectability."

"All right!" George said; "I can manage that," for he had already been thinking of the question in his mind; "and we can manage seven and sixpence a week; can't we, Bill?"

"We will try, anyhow," Bill said stoutly, for he was as much pleased with the cottage as George was.

They explored the garden behind the house. This was about a hundred feet long by twenty-five wide. Half of it was covered with stumps of a plantation of cabbages, the other half was empty and had evidently been dug up by the last tenants ready for planting.

"Why, I should think we shall be able to grow all our own potatoes here!" George exclaimed in delight.

Mrs. Grimstone was a country woman, and she shook her head.

"You wouldn't be able to do that, George, not if you gave it all up to potatoes; but if you planted the further end with potatoes you might get a good many, and then, you know, at this end you might have three or four rows of peas and French beans, and lettuces and such like, but you will have to get some manure to put in. Things won't grow without manure even in the country, and I am sure they won't here; and then you know you can have flowers in the front of the house. But it's time for you to be off, else you will be late at the works. I am sure it's more than half an hour since you came in. I will take the key back and tell them they shall have an answer by Wednesday or Thursday."

George did not think they could have been a quarter of an hour; however, he and Bill started at a trot, which they increased into a run at the top of their speed when the first clock they saw pointed to seven minutes to one. The bell was ringing as they approached the works; it stopped when they were within fifty yards, and the gate was just closing as they rushed up.

"Too late," the man said.

"Oh, do let us through," George panted out; "it's the first time we have ever been late, and we have run a mile to be here in time!"

"Oh, it's you, is it?" the man said, opening the gate a few inches to look through. "Ah, well I will let you in this time, 'cause you are well-behaved young chaps; but don't you run it so close another time, else you will have to lose your hour."

CHAPTER IV.

HOME.

That evening George wrote a letter to Dr. Jeffries at Croydon, saying that he had taken a little house for his mother to come to when she came out of the infirmary, and as he had kindly said that he would render her help if he could, would he be good enough to write to the agent whose address he gave, saying that Mrs. Andrews, who was about taking No. 8 Laburnum Villas, was a person of respectability.

The following evening he received a letter from the doctor saying that he had written to the agent, and that he was glad indeed to hear that George was getting on so well that he was able to provide a home for his mother.

On Wednesday at dinner-time Mrs. Grimstone handed George a key.

"There you are, George. You are master of the house now. The agent said the reference was most satisfactory; so I paid him the seven and sixpence you gave me for a week's rent in advance, and you can go in when you like. We shall be sorry to lose you both, for I don't want two better lodgers. You don't give no trouble, and all has been quiet and pleasant in the house; and to think what a taking I was in that day as Bob brought you here for the first time, to think as he had let the room to two boys. But there, one never knows, and I wouldn't have believed it as boys could be so quiet in a house."

"Now we must begin to see about furniture," Bob Grimstone said. "The best plan, I think, will be for you two to go round of an evening to all the shops in the neighborhood, and mark off just what you think will suit you. You put down the prices stuck on them, and just what they are, and then the missis can go in the morning and bargain for them. She will get them five shillings in the pound cheaper than you would. It's wonderful how women do beat men down, to be sure. When a man hears what's the price of a thing he leaves it or takes it just as he likes, but a woman begins by offering half the sum. Then the chap says no, and she makes as if she was going away; he lets her go a little way and then he hollers after her, and comes down a goodish bit in the price. Then she says she don't particularly want it and shouldn't think of giving any such price as that.

Then he tries again, and so they gets on till they hit on a figure as suits them both. You see that little tea-caddy in the corner? My wife was just three weeks buying that caddy. The chap wanted seven and six for it, and she offered him half a crown. He came down half a crown at the end of the first week, and at last she got it for three and nine. Now, the first thing you have got to do is to make out a list. First of all you have got to put down the things as you must have, and then the things you can do without, though you will get them if you can afford it. Mother will help you at that."

So Mrs. Grimstone and George sat down with paper and a pencil, and George was absolutely horrified at the list of things which Mrs. Grimstone declared were absolutely indispensable. However, after much discussion, some few items were marked as doubtful. When the list was finished the two boys started on an exploring expedition, and the next week all their evenings were fully occupied. In ten days after they began the three bedrooms and the kitchen were really smartly furnished, Mrs. Grimstone proving a wonderful hand at bargaining, and making the ten pounds go farther than George had believed possible. On the Sunday Bob went with his wife and the boys to inspect the house.

"It's a very comfortable little place," he said, "and that front bedroom with the chintz curtains the missis made up is as nice a little room as you want to see. As to the others they will do well enough for you boys."

The only articles of furniture in the sitting room were two long muslin curtains, which Mrs. Grimstone had bought a bargain at a shop selling off; for it was agreed that this was necessary to give the house a furnished appearance. Bob Grimstone was so much pleased at what had been done that he shared George's feeling of regret that one of the sitting rooms could not also be furnished, and on the walk home said:

"Look here, George. I know you would like to have the house nice for your mother. You couldn't make one of those sitting rooms comfortable not under a five-pound note, not even with the missis to market for you, but you might for that. I have got a little money laid by in the savings-bank, and I will lend you five pounds, and welcome, if you like to take it. I know it will be just as safe with you as it will be there."

"Thank you very much, Bob—thank you very much, but I won't take it. In the first place, I should like mother to know that the furniture is all ours, bought out of Bill's savings and mine; and in the next place, I should find it hard at first to

pay back anything. I think we can just manage on our money, but that will be all. I told you mother does work, but she mayn't be able to get any at first, so we can't reckon on that. When she does, you know, we shall be able gradually to buy the furniture."

"Well, perhaps you are right, George," the man said after a pause. "You would have been welcome to the money: but perhaps you are right not to take it. I borrowed a little money when I first went into housekeeping, and it took a wonderful trouble to pay off, and if there's illness or anything of that sort it weighs on you. Not that I should be in any hurry about it. It wouldn't worry me, but it would worry you."

A week later Mrs. Andrews was to leave the infirmary, and on Saturday George asked for a day off to go down to fetch her. Every evening through the week he and Bill had worked away at digging up the garden. Fortunately there was a moon, for it was dark by the time they came out from the works. Bill was charged with the commission to lay in the store of provisions for the Sunday, and he was to be sure to have a capital fire and tea ready by four o'clock, the hour at which George calculated he would be back.

Very delighted was George as in his best suit—for he and Bill had two suits each now—he stepped out of the train at Croydon and walked to the workhouse. His mother had told him that she would meet him at the gate at half-past two, and punctually at the time he was there. A few minutes later Mrs. Andrews came out, not dressed as he had seen her at Christmas, in the infirmary garb, but in her own clothes. George gave a cry of delight as he ran forward to meet her.

"My darling mother! and you are looking quite yourself again."

"I am, thank God, George. It has seemed a long nine months, but the rest and quiet have done wonders for me. Everyone has been very kind; and of course the knowledge, dear boy, that you had got work that you liked helped me to get strong again. And you are looking well too; and your friend, I hope he is well?"

"Quite well, mother, but in a great fright about you. He is glad you are coming because I am glad; but the poor fellow has quite made up his mind that you won't like him and you won't think him a fit companion for me. I told him over and over again that you are not that sort; but nothing can persuade him. Of course, mother, he doesn't talk good grammar, and he uses some queer expressions; but he is very much changed in that way since I first knew him, and he tries very hard, and don't mind a bit how often I correct him, and he is beginning to read

easy words quite well; and he is one of the best-hearted fellows in the world."

"If he is kind to you, George, and fond of you, that's enough for me," Mrs. Andrews said; "but I have no doubt I shall soon like him for himself. You could not like him as much as you do if there were not something nice about him. And you have succeeded in getting a room for me in the house in which you lodge?" for George had never mentioned a word in his letter about taking a house, and had asked Dr. Jeffries if he should see his mother to say nothing to her about his application to him.

"Yes, that's all right, mother," he replied briskly.

"And you have got some new clothes since I saw you last, George. You wanted them; yours were getting rather shabby when I saw you at Christmas."

"Yes, mother, they were."

"I suppose you had to part with your best suit while you were so long out of work?"

"That was it, mother; but you see I have been able to get some more things. They are only cheap ones, you know, but they will do very well until I can afford better ones. I am not walking too fast for you, am I? But we shall just catch the train. Or look here, would you mind going straight by yourself to the railway station? Then you can walk slowly. I will go round and get your box. I went into our old place as I came along, and Mrs. Larkins said she would bring it downstairs for me as I came back."

"No, I would rather go round with you, George. I want to thank her for having kept it for me so long. Even if we do miss the train it will not matter much, as it will make no difference whether we get in town an hour earlier or later."

As George could not explain his special reason for desiring to catch that train he was obliged to agree, and they stopped a quarter of an hour at their old lodging, as Mrs. Larkins insisted upon their having a cup of tea which she had prepared for them. However, when they reached the station they found that a train was going shortly, and when they reached town they were not so very much later than George had calculated upon.

They took a cab, for although Mrs. Andrews' box was not heavy, it was too much for George to carry that distance; besides, Mrs. Andrews herself was tired from her walk to the station from the infirmary, having had no exercise for so long.

When they got into the neighborhood of Limehouse George got outside to direct the cabman. It was just a quarter past four when the cab drew up at No. 8 Laburnum Villas.

"Why, is this the house?" Mrs. Andrews asked in surprise as George jumped down and opened the door. "Why, you told me in one of your letters it was a house in a row. What a pretty little place! It is really here, George?"

"It is here, mother; we moved the other day. There is Bill at the door;" but Bill, having opened the door, ran away out into the garden, and George, having paid the cabman, carried his mother's box in and entered the house with her.

"Straight on, mother, into the little room at the end."

"What a snug little kitchen!" Mrs. Andrews said as she entered it; "and tea all laid and ready! What, have they lent you the room for this evening?"

"My dear mother," George said, throwing his arms round her neck, "this is your kitchen and your house, all there is of it, only the sitting room isn't furnished yet. We must wait for that, you know."

"What! you have taken a whole house, my boy! that is very nice; but can we afford it, George? It seems too good to be true."

"It is quite true, mother, and I think it's a dear little house, and will be splendid when we have got it all furnished. Now come up and see the bedrooms. This is Bill's, you know," and he opened the door on the staircase, "and this is mine, and this is yours."

"Oh, what a pretty little room!" Mrs. Andrews said: "but, my dear George, the rent of this house and the hire of the furniture will surely be more than we can afford to pay. I know what a good manager you are, my boy, but I have such a horror of getting into debt that it almost frightens me."

"The rent of the house is seven and sixpence a week, mother, with rates and taxes, and we can afford that out of Bill's earnings and mine, even if you did not do any work at all; and as to the furniture, it is every bit paid for out of our savings since we went to work."

On hearing which Mrs. Andrews threw her arms round George's neck and burst into tears of happiness. She was not very strong, and the thought of the sacrifices these two boys must have made to get a house together for her completely

overpowered her.

"It seems impossible, George," she said when she had recovered herself. "Why, you have only been earning ten shillings a week each, and you have had to keep yourselves and get clothes and all sorts of things; it seems impossible."

"It has not cost so much as you think, mother, and Bill and I had both learned to live cheap in Covent Garden; but now let us go downstairs; you have not seen Bill yet, and I know tea will be ready."

But Bill had not yet come in, and George had to go out into the garden to fetch him.

"Come on, Bill; mother is delighted with everything. She won't eat you, you know."

"No, she won't eat me, George; but she will think me an out-and-out sort of 'ottentot," which word had turned up in a book the boys had been reading on an evening previously.

"Well, wait till she says so; come along."

So linking his arm in Bill's, George drew him along, and brought him shamefaced and bashful into the kitchen.

"This is Bill, mother."

"I am glad to see you, Bill," Mrs. Andrews said, holding out her hand. "I have heard so much of you from George that I seem to know you quite well."

Bill put his hand out shyly.

"I am sure we shall get on well together," Mrs. Andrews went on. "I shall never forget that you were a friend to my boy when he was friendless in London."

"It's all the t'other way, ma'am," Bill said eagerly; "don't you go for to think it. Why, just look what George has done for me! There was I, a-hanging about the Garden, pretty nigh starving, and sure to get quadded sooner or later; and now here I am living decent, and earning a good wage; and he has taught me to read, ma'am, and to know about things, and aint been ashamed of me, though I am so different to what he is. I tell you, ma'am, there aint no saying what a friend he's been to me, and I aint done nothing for him as I can see."

"Well, Bill, you perhaps both owe each other something," Mrs. Andrews said: "and I owe you something as well as my son, for George tells me that it is to your self-denial as well as to his own that I owe this delightful surprise of finding a home ready for me; and now," she went on, seeing how confused and unhappy Bill looked, "I think you two ought to make tea this evening, for you are the hosts, and I am the guest. In future it will be my turn."

"All right, mother! you sit down in this armchair; Bill, you do the rashers, and I will pour the water into the pot and then toast the muffins."

Bill was at home now; such culinary efforts as they had hitherto attempted had generally fallen to his share, as he had a greater aptitude for the work than George had, and a dish of bacon fried to a turn was soon upon the table.

Mrs. Andrews had been watching Bill closely, and was pleased with the result of her observation. Bill was indeed greatly improved in appearance since he had first made George's acquaintance. His cheeks had filled out, and his face had lost its hardness of outline; the quick, restless, hunted expression of his eyes had nearly died out, and he no longer looked as if constantly on the watch to dodge an expected cuff; his face had always had a large share of that merriment and love of fun which seem the common portion of the London arabs, and seldom desert them under all their hardships; but it was a happier and brighter spirit now, and had altogether lost its reckless character. A similar change is always observable among the waifs picked up off the streets by the London refuges after they have been a few months on board a training ship.

When all was ready the party sat down to their meal. Mrs. Andrews undertook the pouring out of the tea, saying that although she was a guest, as the only lady present she should naturally preside. George cut the bread, and Bill served the bacon. The muffins were piled on a plate in the front of the fire as a second course.

It was perhaps the happiest meal that any of the three had ever sat down to. Mrs. Andrews was not only happy at finding so comfortable a home prepared for her, but was filled with a deep feeling of pride and thankfulness at the evidence of the love, steadiness, and self-sacrifice of her son. George was delighted at having his mother with him again, and at seeing her happiness and contentment at the home he had prepared for her. Bill was delighted because George was so, and he was moreover vastly relieved at finding Mrs. Andrews less terrible than he had depicted her.

After tea was cleared away they talked together for a while, and then Bill—feeling with instinctive delicacy that George and his mother would like to talk together for a time—said he should take a turn for an hour, and on getting outside the house executed so wild a war-dance of satisfaction that it was fortunate it was dark, or Laburnum Villas would have been astonished and scandalized at the spectacle.

"I like your friend Bill very much," Mrs. Andrews said when she was alone with George. "I was sure from what you told me that he must be a good-hearted lad; but brought up as he has been, poor boy, I feared a little that he would scarcely be a desirable companion in point of manners. Of course, as you say, his grammar is a little peculiar; but his manners are wonderfully quiet and nice, considering all."

"Look what an example he's had, mother," George laughed; "but really he has taken great pains ever since he knew that you were coming home. He has been asking me to tell him of anything he does which is not right, especially about eating and that sort of thing. You see he had never used a fork till we came down here, and he made me show him directly how it should be held and what to do with it. It has been quite funny to me to see him watching me at meals, and doing exactly the same."

"And you have taught him to read, George?"

"Yes, mother."

"And something of better things, George?" she asked.

"Yes, mother, as much as I could. He didn't know anything when I met him; but he goes to church with me now regularly, and says his prayers every night, and I can tell you he thinks a lot of it. More, I think, than I ever did," he added honestly.

"Perhaps he has done you as much good as you have done him, George."

"Perhaps he has, mother; yes, I think so. When you see a chap so very earnest for a thing you can't help being earnest yourself; besides, you know, mother," he went on a little shyly, for George had not been accustomed to talk much of these matters with his mother—"you see when one's down in the world and hard up, and not quite sure about the next meal, and without any friend, one seems to think more of these things than one does when one is jolly at school with other

fellows."

"Perhaps so, George, though I do not know why it should be so, for the more blessings one has the more reason for love and gratitude to the giver. However, dear, I think we have both reason to be grateful now, have we not?"

"That we have, mother. Only think of the difference since we said good-by to each other last summer! Now here you are strong and well again, and we are together and don't mean to be separated, and I have got a place I like and have a good chance of getting on in, and we have got a pretty little house all to ourselves, and you will be able to live a little like a lady again,—I mean as you were accustomed to,—and everything is so nice. Oh, mother, I am sure we have every reason to be grateful!"

"We have indeed, George, and I even more than you, in the proofs you have given me that my son is likely to turn out all that even I could wish him."

Bill's hour was a very long one.

"You must not go out of an evening, Bill, to get out of our way," Mrs. Andrews said when he returned, "else I shall think that I am in your way. It was kind of you to think of it the first evening, and George and I are glad to have had a long talk together, but in future I hope you won't do it. You see there will be lots to do of an evening. There will be your lessons and George's, for I hope now that he's settled he will give up an hour or two every evening to study. Not Latin and Greek, George," she added, smiling, seeing a look of something like dismay in George's face, "that will be only a waste of time to you now, but a study of such things as may be useful to you in your present work and in your future life, and a steady course of reading really good books by good authors. Then perhaps when you have both done your work, you will take it by turns to read out loud while I do my sewing. Then perhaps some day, who knows, if we get on very flourishingly, after we have furnished our sitting room, we may be able to indulge in the luxury of a piano again and have a little music of an evening."

"That will be jolly, mother. Why, it will be really like old times, when you used to sing to me!"

Mrs. Andrews' eyes filled with tears at the thought of the old times, but she kept them back bravely, so as not to mar, even for a moment, the happiness of this first evening. So they chatted till nine o'clock, when they had supper. After it was over Mrs. Andrews left the room for a minute and went upstairs and opened

her box, and returned with a Bible in her hand.

"I think, boys," she said, "we ought to end this first happy evening in our new home by thanking God together for his blessings."

"I am sure we ought, mother," George said, and Bill's face expressed his approval.

So Mrs. Andrews read a chapter, and then they knelt and thanked God for his blessings, and the custom thus begun was continued henceforth in No. 8 Laburnum Villas.

Hitherto George and his companion had found things much more pleasant at the works than they had expected. They had, of course, had principally to do with Bob Grimstone; still there were many other men in the shop, and at times, when his bench was standing idle while some slight alterations or adjustment of machinery were made, they were set to work with others. Men are quick to see when boys are doing their best, and, finding the lads intent upon their work and given neither to idleness nor skylarking, they seldom had a sharp word addressed to them. But after Mrs. Andrews had come home they found themselves addressed in a warmer and more kindly manner by the men. Bob Grimstone had told two or three of his mates of the sacrifices the boys had made to save up money to make a home for the mother of one of them when she came out of hospital. They were not less impressed than he had been, and the story went the round of the workshops and even came to the ears of the foreman, and there was not a man there but expressed himself in warm terms of surprise and admiration that two lads should for six months have stinted themselves of food in order to lay by half their pay for such a purpose.

"There's precious few would have done such a thing," one of the older workmen said, "not one in a thousand; why, not one chap in a hundred, even when he's going to be married, will stint himself like that to make a home for the gal he is going to make his wife, so as to start housekeeping out of debt; and as to doing it for a mother, where will you find 'em? In course a man ought to do as much for his mother as for the gal who is agoing to be his wife, seeing how much he owes her; but how many does it, that's what I says, how many does it?"

So after that the boys were surprised to find how many of the men, when they met them at the gate, would give them a kindly nod or a hearty, "Good-morning, young chaps!"

A day or two after Mrs. Andrews had settled in Laburnum Villas she went up to town and called upon a number of shops, asking for work. As she was able to give an excellent reference to the firm for whom she had worked at Croydon she succeeded before the end of the week in obtaining millinery work for a firm in St. Paul's Churchyard, and as she had excellent taste and was very quick at her needle she was soon able to earn considerably more than she had done at Croydon.

The three were equally determined that they would live as closely as possible until the sitting-rooms were furnished, and by strict management they kept within the boys' pay, Mrs. Andrews' earnings being devoted to the grand purpose. The small articles were bought first, and each week there was great congratulation and pleasure as some new article was placed in the rooms. Then there was a pause for some time, then came the chairs, then after an interval a table, and lastly the carpet. This crowning glory was not attained until the end of July. After this they moved solemnly into the sitting-room, agreeing that the looking-glass, chiffonier, and sofa could be added at a more gradual rate, and that the whole of Mrs. Andrews' earnings need no longer be devoted.

"Now, boys," Mrs. Andrews said on that memorable evening, "I want you in future, when you come in, to change your working clothes before you come in here to your teas. So long as we lived in the kitchen I have let things go on, but I think there's something in the old saying, 'Company clothes, company manners,' and I think it is good when boys come in that they should lay aside their heavy-nailed shoes and their working clothes. Certainly such boots and clothes are apt to render people clumsy in their movements, and the difference of walk which you observe between men of different classes arises very greatly from the clumsy, heavy boots which workingmen must wear."

"But what does it matter, mother?" George urged, for it seemed to him that it would be rather a trouble to change his clothes every day. "These little things don't make any real difference to a man."

"Not any vital difference, George, but a real difference for all that. Manners make the man, you know! that is, they influence strangers and people who only know him in connection with business. If two men apply together for a place the chances are strongly in favor of the man with the best manners getting it. Besides, my boy, I think the observance of little courtesies of this kind make home pleasanter and brighter. You see I always change my dress before tea, and I am sure you prefer my sitting down to the table tidy and neat with a fresh collar

and cuffs, to my taking my place in my working dress with odds and ends of threads and litter clinging to it."

"Of course I do, mother, and I see what you mean now. Certainly I will change my things in future. You don't mind, do you, Bill?"

Bill would not have minded in the least any amount of trouble by which he could give the slightest satisfaction to Mrs. Andrews, who had now a place in his affections closely approximating to that which George occupied.

During the summer months the programme for the evening was not carried out as arranged, for at the end of April Mrs. Andrews herself declared that there must be a change.

"The evenings are getting light enough now for a walk after tea, boys, and you must therefore cut short our reading and studies till the days close in again in the autumn. It would do you good to get out in the air a bit."

"But will you come with us, mother?"

"No, George. Sometimes as evenings get longer we may make little excursions together: go across the river to Greenwich and spend two or three hours in the park, or take a steamer and go up the river to Kew; but as a general thing you had better take your rambles together. I have my front garden to look after, the vegetables are your work, you know, and if I like I can go out and do whatever shopping I have to do while you two are away."

So the boys took to going out walks, which got longer and longer as the evenings drew out, and when they were not disposed for a long ramble they would go down to a disused wharf and sit there and watch the barges drifting down the river or tacking backwards and forwards, if there was a wind, with their great brown and yellow sails hauled tautly in, and the great steamers dropping quietly down the river, and the little busy tugs dragging great ships after them. There was an endless source of amusement in wondering from what ports the various craft had come or what was their destination.

"What seems most wonderful to me, George," Bill said one day, "when one looks at them big steamers——"

"Those," George corrected.

"Thank ye—at those big steamers, is to think that they can be tossed about, and

the sea go over them, as one reads about, just the same way as the wave they make when they goes down——"

"Go down, Bill."

"Thank ye—go down the river, tosses the little boats about; it don't seem possible that water can toss itself about so high as that, does it?"

"It does seem extraordinary, Bill; we know that it is so because there are constantly wrecks; but looking at the water it does not seem possible that it should rise up into waves large enough to knock one of those great steamers in pieces. Some day, Bill, not this year, of course, because the house isn't finished, but next year, I hope we shall be able all of us to go down for a trip to the sea. I have seen it stuck up you can go to Margate and back for three or four shillings; and though Bob Grimstone says that isn't regular sea, it would be enough to show us something of what it's like."

The garden occupied a good deal of the boys' time. Bill's long experience in the market had given him an interest in vegetables, and he was always ready for an hour's work in the garden after tea. The results of much labor and plenty of manure were not unsatisfactory, and Mrs. Andrews was delighted with her regular supply of fresh vegetables. Bill's anticipation, however, of the amount that could be grown in a limited space were by no means fulfilled, and seeing the small amount which could be daily gathered, and recalling the countless piled-up wagons which he had been accustomed to see in Covent Garden, he was continually expressing his astonishment at the enormous quantity of ground which must be employed in keeping up the supply of the market.

They did not that year get the trip to Margate; but in the autumn, after the great work of furnishing was finished, they did get several long jaunts, once out to Epping Forest on an omnibus, once in a steamer up to Kew, and several times across to Greenwich Park. Mrs. Andrews found it a very happy summer, free from the wear of anxiety, which, more even than the work, had brought on her long illness. She grew stronger and better than she had ever expected to be again, and those who had only known the pale, harassed-looking needlewoman of Croydon would not have recognized her now; indeed, as George said sometimes, his mother looked younger and younger every day. She had married very young, and was still scarcely five-and-thirty, and although she laughed and said that George was a foolish boy when he said that people always took her for his sister, she really looked some years younger than she was. Her step had regained its

elasticity, and there was a ring of gladness and happiness in her voice which was very attractive, and even strangers sometimes looked round as they passed the bright, pleasant-looking woman chatting gayly with the two healthy, good-looking young fellows.

CHAPTER V.

AN ADVENTURE.

In August the annual outing, or, as it was called, the bean-feast, at the works took place. Usually the men went in vans down into Epping Forest; but this year it was determined that a steamer should be engaged to take the whole party with their wives and families down to Gravesend. They were to make an early start, and on arriving there all were to do as they pleased until they assembled to dine in a pavilion at one of the hotels. After this they were to go to the gardens and amuse themselves there until the steamer started in the evening. The party embarked at Blackwell at ten o'clock in the morning. George and Bill got together up in the bow of the steamer, and were delighted with their voyage down, their only regret being that Mrs. Andrews had declined to accompany them, saying that she would far rather go with them alone than with so large a party.

"What shall we do, Bill?" George said, when they landed. "We are not to dine till two, so we have two good hours before us. I vote we hire a boat and go out. It will be ten times as jolly here as up in that crowded river by London."

This was said in reference to various short rows which they had had in boats belonging to barges which had been sometimes lent them for half an hour of an evening by a good-natured bargeman as they hung about the wharves.

"I suppose you can row, young chaps?" the waterman, whom they hired the boat of, said.

"Oh, yes, we can row!" George replied with the confidence of youth.

"Mind the tide is running out strong," the waterman said.

"All right, we will mind," George answered, scarce heeding his words; and getting out the oars they pushed off.

For some little time they rowed among the anchored vessels, both being especially filled with delight at the yachts moored opposite the clubhouses. These were new craft to them, and the beauty and neatness of everything struck

them with surprise and admiration. Tide had only turned a short time before they got into their boat, and while keeping near the shore they had no difficulty in rowing against it.

Presently they determined to have a look at a fine East-Indiaman moored well out in the stream a short distance below Gravesend. They ceased rowing when they approached her, and sat idly on their oars talking over the distant voyage on which she was probably about to start, and the country she might visit, George was telling his companion the ports she would touch if her destination was China, and absorbed in their conversation they paid no attention to anything else, until George gave a sudden exclamation.

"Good gracious, Bill! Why, the ship is ever so far behind. It is two miles, I should think, from the town. We must set to work or we shan't be back in time for dinner."

The boys' knowledge of the navigation of the Thames was not sufficient to tell them that to row against tide it is necessary to keep close inshore, and turning the boat's head they set to work to row back in the middle of the river. Their knowledge of rowing was but slight, and the mere operation of their oars took up all their attention. They rowed away till their hands burned and the perspiration ran down their faces.

After half an hour of this George looked round, thinking that he ought to be near to the vessel by this time. He uttered an exclamation of surprise and dismay. Neither the ship nor Gravesend were visible. Their puny efforts had availed nothing against the sweeping tide. They had already, without knowing it, swept round the turn in the river, and were now entering Sea Reach.

"My goodness, Bill! what are we to do? Just look at that buoy; we are going past it as fast as a horse could trot. Look what a width the river is. What on earth are we to do?"

"I have no idea," Bill replied. "Where shall we go to if we go on like this?"

"Right out to sea, I should think," George said. "I do not know how far it is; but the river seems to get wider and wider in front."

"Perhaps," Bill suggested, "the tide will turn again and take us back."

"Not it," George said. "It was against us, you know, all the way down, and could only have turned a little while before we got in the boat. Look at that line of

barges sailing down on the right-hand side. I vote we pull to them and ask the men what we had better do. Anyhow we could row to the land and get out there and wait till tide turns. It turned at about eleven, so that it will turn again somewhere about five. The steamer is not to start till eight, so we shall be back in plenty of time to catch it. We shall lose the dinner and the fun in the gardens, but that can't be helped."

"That don't make no odds," Bill said cheerfully; "this is a regular venture, this is; but I say, shan't we have to pay a lot for the boat?"

"Yes," George assented mournfully; "but perhaps the man will let us off cheap when he sees we couldn't help it. He looked a good-tempered sort of chap. Come, let us set to work. Every minute it is taking us further away."

They set steadily to work. The boat was a large and heavy one, and their progress was by no means rapid.

"How thick it's getting!" George exclaimed suddenly.

"Aint it just!" Bill assented. "My eye, George, I can't see the barges!"

Unobserved by them a fog had been steadily creeping up the river. They were just at its edge when they made the discovery. Another two minutes and it rolled thickly over them, and they could not see ten yards away. They looked at each other in silent bewilderment.

"What's to be done, George?" Bill said at length in awe-struck tones.

"I don't know, Bill; I haven't an idea. It's no use rowing, that I see, for we don't know which way the boat's head is pointing."

"Well, it can't be helped," Bill said philosophically. "I am going to have a pipe. Oh, I say, aint my hands blistered!"

"All right, you can have your pipe, Bill, but keep your oar in your hand to be ready to row."

"What for?" Bill demanded. "I thought you said it warn't no use rowing!"

"No more it is, Bill; but we must look out for those big buoys. If the tide were to sweep us against one of them we should capsize to a certainty. That must have been a big steamer," he went on, as the boat rolled suddenly. "It's lucky we were pretty well over towards the side of the river, before the fog came on. Listen—

there's another. I can hear the beat of her engines. I have an idea, Bill!" he exclaimed suddenly. "We know the steamers were passing to the left of us when the fog came on. If we listen to their whistles and the sound of their paddles, and then row to the right, we shall get to the bank at last."

"Yes, that's a good idea," Bill agreed, laying down the pipe he had just lighted. "There's a whistle over there."

"Yes, and another the other way," George said, puzzled. "Why, how can that be! Oh, I suppose one is coming up the river and one down, but it's awfully confusing."

It was so, but by dint of listening intently the boys gained some idea of the proper direction; but they could only row a few strokes at a time, being obliged to stop continually to listen for fresh guidance.

Fortunately for them the fog lay low on the water, and the upper spars of the steamers were above it, and men placed there were able to direct those on deck as to their course. Had it not been for this the steamers must all have anchored. As it was they proceeded slowly and cautiously on their way, whistling freely to warn any small craft, that might be hidden in the fog, of their coming.

Half an hour's rowing and the boys gave a simultaneous exclamation. The boat had quietly grounded on the edge of a mud flat. They could not see the bank, and had no idea how far distant it was. Bill at once offered to get overboard and reconnoiter, but George would not hear of it.

"You might not be able to find your way back, Bill, or you might sink in the mud and not be able to get out again. No, we won't separate; and, look here, we must keep the boat afloat just at the edge of the mud. If we were to get left here we should not float again till tide comes up to us, and that wouldn't be till about two hours before high tide, and it won't be high, you know, until twelve o'clock at night."

"I wish this fog would clear off!" Bill said, looking round at the wall of white vapor which surrounded them. "It regular confuses a chap. I say, I expect they are just sitting down to dinner at present. I feel awfully hungry."

"It's no use thinking about that, Bill. We shall be a good deal more hungry before we are done; but I am so glad we have found the land and stopped going out to sea that I don't mind being hungry."

"But I say, George, if this fog keeps on how are we to find our way back to Gravesend?"

"The only way will be, Bill, to keep quite close to the edge of the mud—just as close as the boat will swim. That way, you know, we must come to Gravesend at last."

"So we must. I didn't think of that. You have got a good head, George, you have. I should never have thought about the way to find the bank if it hadn't been for you, and might have gone on floating and floating till we was starved."

"This fog can't last forever, Bill."

"No, but I have known them last a week in London."

"Yes, but not in August, Bill."

"No, not in August," Bill assented; "but you see these here fogs may last just as long down here in August as they do in London in November."

"I don't think so, Bill. Anyhow it doesn't matter to us; we have got the land for a guide, and I hope we shall be back in Gravesend before it's quite dark."

"But if we don't, George?"

"Well, if we don't we must run her ashore before it gets too dark, and wait till it is morning. We shall be all right if we keep quite cool and use our senses. If we had something to eat I shouldn't mind a bit, except that mother will be getting anxious about us. It's a regular adventure, and we shall have something to talk about for a long time. Look out, Bill, we must push her further off—she's getting aground!"

For an hour they sat and chatted.

"Hullo! what's that?" Bill exclaimed at last. "That's the rattle of a chain. I expect it's a barge anchoring somewhere near. Listen; I can hear voices. I vote we hollo."

George lifted up his voice in a lusty shout. The shout was repeated not very far off, and was followed by the shout of "Who are you?"

"We have drifted down from Gravesend and lost our way," George shouted back. "We will come on board if you will let us."

"All right!" the voice replied; "I will go on shouting and you row to my voice."

It was but a hundred yards, and then a voice close at hand said sharply:

"Row bow hard or you will be across the chain."

Bill rowed hard, and George, looking round, saw that they were close to the bows of a barge. Half a dozen more strokes and they were alongside. Bill seized a hand-rope and sprang onto the barge, and the boat was soon towing astern.

"Well, young men, however did you manage to get here?" one of the bargemen asked. "It's lucky for you you weren't taken out to sea with the tide."

George related the history of their voyage and how they had managed to reach the shore.

"Well, you are good-plucked uns anyhow," the man said; "aint they, Jack? Most chaps your age would just have sat in the boat and howled, and a good many longshoremen too. You have done the best thing you could under the circumstances."

"Where are we?" George asked.

"You are on board the *Sarah and Jane* topsail barge, that's where you are, about three parts down Sea Reach. We know our way pretty well even in a fog, but we agreed it was no use trying to find the Swashway with it as thick as this, so we brought up."

"Where is the Swashway?" George asked.

"The Swashway is a channel where the barges go when they are making for Sheerness. It's well buoyed out and easy enough to follow with the help of Sheerness lights on a dark night; but these fogs are worse than anything. It aint no use groping about for the buoy when you can't see ten yards ahead, and you might find yourself high and dry on the mud and have to wait till next tide. Mayhap this fog will clear off before evening, and we shall be able to work in; and now I expect you two young uns would like some grub. Come below."

The two boys joyfully followed into the little cabin, and were soon satisfying their hunger on bread and cold meat. The bargee drew a jug of water from the breaker and placed it before them.

"The fire has gone out," he said, "or I would give yer a cup of tea—that's our

tipple; we don't keep spirits on board the *Sarah and Jane*. I like a drop on shore, but it aint stuff to have on a barge, where you wants your senses handy at all times. And now what are you thinking of doing?" he asked when the boys had finished.

"What we had made up our minds to do was to lie where we were at the edge of the mud till tide turned, and then to keep as close to the shore as we could until we got back to Gravesend. The steamer we came by does not go back till late, and we thought we should be back by that time."

"No, you wouldn't," the man said. "Out in the middle of the stream you would be back in two hours easy, but not close inshore. The tide don't help you much there, and half your time you are in eddies and back-currents. No, you wouldn't be back in Gravesend by eight noway."

"Then what would you advise us to do?"

"Well, just at present I won't give no advice at all. We will see how things are going after a bit. Now let's take a look round."

So saying he climbed the ladder to the deck, followed by the boys. The white fog still shut the boat in like a curtain.

"What do you think of it, Jack?"

"Don't know," the other replied. "Thought just now there was a puff of air coming down the river. I wish it would, or we shan't make Sheerness to-night, much less Rochester. Yes, that's a puff sure enough. You are in luck, young uns. Like enough in half an hour there will be a brisk wind blowing, driving all this fog out to sea before it."

Another and another puff came, and tiny ripples swept across the oil-like face of the water.

"It's a-coming, sure enough," the bargeman said. "I'd bet a pot of beer as the fog will have lifted in a quarter of an hour."

Stronger and stronger came the puffs of wind.

The fog seemed as if stirred by an invisible hand. It was no longer a dull, uniform whitish-gray; dark shadows seemed to flit across it, and sometimes the view of the water extended here and there.

"There's the shore!" Bill exclaimed suddenly, but ere George could turn round to look it was gone again.

"I shall have the anchor up directly, lads. Now I tell you what will be the best thing for you if the wind holds, as I expect it will. We shall be at Sheerness in little over an hour—that will make it four o'clock," he added, consulting his watch, "and the young flood will be coming up soon afterwards, and I shall go up with the first of it to Rochester. We shall get there maybe somewhere about seven o'clock. Now the best thing I can do for you is to tow that ere boat up to Rochester with me, and you can get a train there that will take you up to town in goodish time."

"You are very kind," George said; "but what are we to do about the boat?"

"I shall be going back to-morrow night, or more likely next morning, and I will take her along and hand her over to her rightful owner at Gravesend."

"James Kitson."

"Yes, I know him."

"But how about paying for it?" George said. "I am afraid he will expect a great deal of money, for it has been away all the time, and we have only got six shillings between us."

"You will want that to get up to town. Never mind about the boat. I will put that square for you. I will tell Kitson as how you have been shipwrecked, and he will think himself precious lucky in getting the boat without being damaged. If I take the trouble to tow it up to Rochester and back, he needn't grumble about getting no fare."

"I would rather pay something," George said; "though, you see, we can't afford to pay much."

"Well, then, you send him a post-office order for five bob. I will tell him you are going to send him that, and he will thank his stars he has got so well out of it. If you had drifted out to sea, as he expects you have by this time, and the boat didn't get smashed by a steamer, you would likely enough have been taken off by one of them; but the captain wouldn't have troubled himself about that old tub. I looks upon Kitson as being in luck this job, so don't you worry about him. There, the mist's driving off fast. We will up with the kedge."

The boys lent a hand at the windlass, and the anchor was soon hanging from the bow. Then the brail of the mainsail was loosed, and the great sail shaken out. The foresail was hoisted, and in a few minutes the *Sarah and Jane* was running before a brisk wind down Sea Reach.

The fog had rolled off now, and it was clear astern, though a thick bank still hung over the river ahead, but this was rapidly melting away; and the bargeman, who told them his name was Will Atkins, pointed out a large building low down on the water ahead.

"That's Sheerness Fort," he said. "You can lend Jack a hand to get up the topsail. The wind is rising every minute, and we shall soon be bowling along hand over hand."

Both ahead and astern of them were a line of barges, which had, like the *Sarah and Jane*, anchored when the fog was thickest, and were, like her, making their way to Sheerness. The wind was blowing briskly now, and the barge made her way through the water at a rate which surprised the boys.

"I had no idea that barges sailed so fast," George said.

"There are not many craft can beat them," Atkins replied. "With a breeze so strong that they can only just carry their topsails, they will hold their own with pretty nigh anything afloat. There are mighty few yachts can keep alongside us when we are doing our best."

As Atkins had predicted, in little over an hour they brought up just inside the mouth of the Medway, and dropped the anchor to wait till the tide turned to help them up to Rochester. At six o'clock they were again under way. The wind had fortunately veered round somewhat to the north of west, and they were able for the most part to lay their course, so that soon after seven they were abreast of the dockyard, and a few minutes later dropped anchor off Rochester.

"Jump into the boat, boys," the good-natured bargeman said; "I will put you ashore at once. There is the station close to the end of the bridge."

With many very hearty thanks for his kindness the lads jumped ashore and hurried up to the station. They found that there would be a train in half an hour, and by nine o'clock they arrived in town.

Before they had landed the bargeman had scrawled on a piece of paper, "Your boat was picked up by the *Sarah and Jane*. Will bring her back on return trip. No

damage done. William Atkins." This he had handed to the boys, and they now got an envelope and directed it to "James Kitson, Waterman, Gravesend," and posted it, and then set out to walk home.

"It's not been the sort of day we expected," George said; "but it's been good fun, hasn't it?"

"Grand!" Bill agreed. "But I didn't think so when we were in the middle of that fog listening to them whistles and trying to find out the way. I didn't say much, George, but I felt downright funky."

"I didn't like it either, Bill. There was such a horribly lonely feeling, lost in the fog there; but it was all right as soon as we touched the mouth, and got an idea where we were. I was worrying most about mother getting anxious if we did not get back to-night, and a little about what we should have to pay for the boat. It was lucky that bargeman took the matter in his hands for us. I expect we should have had to pay over a pound. He was an awfully good fellow, wasn't he?"

"I should just think he was," Bill said. "He was a good un, and no mistake. It aint cost us so very much either, considering."

"That it hasn't, Bill. Two and threepence apiece railway fare, that's four and sixpence, and five bob we are to send down for the boat, nine shillings and sixpence. Well, we should have paid two shillings for the boat anyhow, and I expect we should have spent another shilling apiece in things at the gardens, perhaps more; that would make four shillings anyhow, so we have only spent about five shillings more than we calculated. And haven't we got a lot to talk about! It's been a regular adventure."

"It has," Bill said doubtfully; "but I don't think I want many more of them kind of adventures. It's all right now, you know, but it wasn't jolly at the time. I always thought as adventures was jolly; but that didn't seem to me to have no jolliness about it, not when we was out there. It's all very well to hear tell of shipwrecks and fights with savages, but I expect there aint no larks about it at the time. I suppose you will send that five bob off to-morrow, and get it off your mind?"

"No. Atkins said we had better not send it for another three or four days. The man will have got his boat back all right then, and the five bob would come upon him unexpectedly. He was going to tell Kitson that he had arranged with us that was what we were to pay, as we couldn't afford more; but he will never expect to

get it, so when it comes he will be only too glad to receive it."

They were met at the door of the house by Bob Grimstone, who was just coming out.

"Why, what have you boys been up to?" he said angrily. "I have been wondering all day what has become of you, and the missis has done nothing but worry and fidget. It's regular spoilt the day. What have you been up to? I haven't seen you since we got ashore at Gravesend, and I have just come round to ask your mother if she has heard of you."

"I am very sorry, Bob, but it wasn't our fault, at least it was not altogether our fault. We went for a row, and the tide took us down, and then the fog came on and we got lost."

"I expected better of you," Grimstone said angrily. "Foggy, indeed! I've been anxious and worried all day. I did think as you warn't like other boys, but could be trusted, and then you go and play such a prank as this. Well, go in; your mother is in a nice taking about you."

"My dear mother," George said as he ran in, "I am so sorry you have been uneasy about us, awfully sorry; but really it hasn't been our fault altogether."

"Never mind that now, George," Mrs. Andrews said, throwing her arms round his neck. "Fortunately I did not know anything about it till Mr. Grimstone came in a few minutes ago. I had been expecting you in for some little time, but I supposed the steamer was late, and I was not at all uneasy till Mr. Grimstone came in and said that he had not seen either of you since the steamer got to Gravesend, and that you had not come back with the rest. Is Bill with you?"

"Yes, mother; he is at the door talking to Bob."

"Ask Mr. Grimstone to come in again," Mrs. Andrews said. "He has been most kind, and he had promised to go down to Gravesend by the first train in the morning if you did not come home to-night, and to make inquiries about you there. He tried to cheer me up by saying that as you were together nothing could very well happen to you and that probably you had only got into some boyish scrape—perhaps, he suggested, only gone out into the country and had helped yourselves to some apples, and had so got locked up."

Bob, however, would not come in again, but went off saying he would hear all about it in the morning, but would go off to tell his wife at once that they had

returned safely, for "that she was in such a worry as never was."

Hearing that the boys had had nothing to eat since two o'clock, Mrs. Andrews at once laid the table for supper; and when they had finished it listened to George's account of their adventure.

"You had a very narrow escape, boys," she said when they had finished. "You might have been swept out to sea, or run down by a steamer in the fog. I hope to-night that you will neither of you forget to thank God for his protection through the danger you have run; and I do hope, my dear boys, that you will be more careful in future."

The next evening, after work was over, George went in to Bob Grimstone's and told them all that had happened. When the story was told, Bob agreed that after all it was not altogether their fault, and that, indeed, they had, in some respects, justified his opinion of them. Mrs. Grimstone, however, was not so easily pacified. They had come back, she said; but it was more than likely that they wouldn't have come back at all, but might have been drifting out far at sea, perhaps cutting each other's throats and eating each other alive, which was, as the good woman said, what she had heard happened when boats were lost at sea.

Two days later they sent off the money to the waterman, and received in reply a letter from him saying that the boat had been brought safely back by the *Sarah and Jane* and that he was glad to get the five shillings.

"Bill Atkins told me as you said you would send it; but knowing what boys is, I say fair as I didn't expect to see the color of your money. It aint everyone as would have paid up when they got safe away, and I consider as you have behaved handsome."

They had heard from Atkins of the wharf off which the *Sarah and Jane* might generally be found moored, between her cruises, and after one or two ineffectual attempts they one day found the barge there when they rowed up to the spot. She had but just returned from a trip to Rochester and Bill Atkins was still on board. He was very glad to see the boys, but they had great difficulty in persuading him to accept a pound of tobacco which their mother had sent off to him with her compliments as a token of gratitude for his kindness to them.

"Well, young chaps, I didn't look for nothing of the sort, but seeing as your mother has got it for me it wouldn't be manners to say no. Well, look here, any time as you are disposed for a sail down to Rochester and back you're free of the

Sarah and Jane, and heartily glad shall I be to have you with me."

The boys thanked him for the offer, but said as they were still at work there was but small chance of their being able to accept it, but that they should be glad to come and have a chat with him sometimes when he was in the Pool.

CHAPTER VI.

FIRE!

One Saturday evening early in October the boys had been for a long walk down among the marshes. They had told Mrs. Andrews they would be late, and it was past eight o'clock when they came along past the works.

"We shan't get home at this hour again for some time, I expect," George said, "for they say that we are going to begin to work overtime on Monday, and that the orders are so heavy that it will very likely have to be kept up all through the winter."

"I am glad it didn't begin earlier," Bill replied; "it would have been horrid if we had lost all our walks while the weather was fine. How dark the place looks how it's shut up, and how quiet and still it is after the rattle we are accustomed to!"

"Stop a moment," George said, putting his hand on his arm.

"What is it, George?"

"I don't know. It seemed to me, for a moment, as if I saw the big stack clearly and then it was dark again."

"How could that be, George?"

"I don't know; it looked to me as if it was a reflection of light from one of the windows at the back there. There it is again."

"Yes, I saw it," Bill agreed. "What can it be?"

"I don't know, Bill; let's run around to the back. There might be—it's awful to think of—but there might be a fire."

The boys ran down a narrow lane by the side of the works onto a piece of waste ground behind.

"Look, Bill, look at the glare in the molding-room. There must be fire. Here, help to put this bit of old timber against the wall."

The piece of wood was placed into position, the two lads climbed up it onto the wall, and dropped into the yard within. Just as they did so there was a clatter of falling glass, followed by a glare of light as a body of flame burst out from one of the windows.

"Let's ring the dinner-bell, Bill; that will call people's attention, and then we must do the best we can."

They ran along until they reached the front gate, and then, seizing the bell-rope, rang it violently.

In a minute or two there was a clatter of feet outside, and shouts of "What's the matter?"

"There is a fire in the molding-room," George shouted; "run for the engines, someone, and break the gate open. Now come on, Bill."

The two boys ran towards that part of the building where the flames had been seen, broke a window, and climbed in. There was an almost stifling smell of burning wood and at a door at the end of the planing-room they could see a light flame flickering through the cracks of the door leading into the molding-room, which was next to it.

"Quick, Bill, screw that leather pipe onto the hydrant. We must stop it from getting through here till the engines come."

The hydrant communicated with the great tank at the top of the building, and as soon as the hose was screwed on and Bill stood with the nozzle directed towards the burning door, George turned the cock and volumes of water flew out.

The first result seemed disastrous. The door was already nearly burned through, and, as the powerful jet flew against it, it seemed to crumble away and a mass of flame darted out from the molding-room. The joists and timbers supporting the floor above the planing-room would have caught at once, but the boys deluged them with water, as also the framework of the door, and then, throwing the stream of water into the blazing workshop, they kept down the flames near the door. The smoke was stifling.

"We shall be choked, George!" Bill gasped.

"Lie down, Bill. I have heard the air is always better near the ground."

This they found to be the case, and they were still able to direct the jet of water. But three or four minutes had elapsed when the outer door of the planing-house was unlocked and Bob Grimstone and several other men rushed in, but were at once driven back by the smoke. George had recognized Grimstone's voice, and shouted:

"This way, Bob, the fire hasn't got through yet. Come and lend a hand, for it's gaining on us in spite of the water. You can breathe if you kneel down."

Grimstone, with two or three of the men, crawled in and joined the boys.

"What! is it you, George? How on earth did you get here?" Bob exclaimed.

"We saw a light as we were passing, and got in from behind. When we saw what it was we rang the alarm-bell, and then came on here to do what we could till help came."

"You are good-plucked, you are," Grimstone said admiringly; "but I am afraid it's not much good."

"You take the hose, Bob, and keep the rafters drenched there. Bill and I will crawl forward and clear the shavings out of the way if we can. They have caught half a dozen times already."

The two boys crawled forward, and although the heat was tremendous they managed to clear away the shavings for a considerable distance. The smoke and heat were so great that they were obliged to crawl back into the outer air, where for a while they lay almost insensible. There were crowds of men in the yard now, but most of them were round at the back, powerless to aid at present, and only watching the flames as they roared through the whole of the windows of the molding-room.

Men were hurrying past with buckets of water, and one of them, seeing the condition of the boys, dashed some over their heads and faces, and they presently staggered to their feet. It was now a quarter of an hour since they had first given the alarm, and they were just about to re-enter the planing-shop to rejoin Bill when they met him and his comrades coming out.

"All the water's gone," he said; "if the engines aint here in a minute or two it will be too late."

But just at that moment there was a cheer outside, and immediately afterwards a

fire-engine dashed through the gate. Grimstone ran up to the firemen as they leaped off.

"The great thing," he said, "is to prevent it spreading from that shop into this. We have been keeping it back till now, but the tank has just run dry."

While the other firemen were fitting the hose to the fire-plug just outside the gates one of them made his way into the planing-room to ascertain the exact position of affairs.

"Quick, lads," he said; "there's no time to be lost; the fire is making its way through. Another five minutes and we should have been too late to save any of this block. Is there any communication through the upper floors?" he asked Grimstone.

"Yes, there is a door on each floor,"

"Have you got any empty sacks about the place?"

"Yes, there is a pile of them in there."

The fireman gave instructions to one of his comrades, while he himself made his way into the planing-room with the hose; the other got out the sacks, and assisted by Grimstone and some of the hands drenched them with water, and then proceeding to the door on the first floor piled them against it.

"It is hot already," he said as he laid his hand upon it. "Now, do you men bring me buckets of water. Keep the sacks drenched till another engine comes up."

George and Bill, finding they could be of no more use, made their way out to the back and joined the crowd watching the flames, which had already spread to the first floor. They were, however, with the rest of the lookers-on, speedily turned out of the yard by the police, who, having now arrived in sufficient strength, proceeded at once to clear the premises of all save a score or two of men who were engaged in assisting the firemen.

As the boys went out through the front gate another engine dashed up at full speed, dropping lighted cinders on its way.

"Hurray!" Bill said; "this is a steamer. I expect they will do now."

Then the boys made their way round again to the back, and by means of the pieces of timber established themselves on the wall, where they were soon

joined by a number of others, and watched the struggle with the flames.

In half an hour six engines were on the spot; but even this force had no visible effect upon the flames in that portion of the building in which they had taken possession, and the firemen turned the whole of their efforts to prevent it from spreading.

The party wall dividing it from the main building was a very strong one; but so hot had it become that the floor boards touching it were over and over again in flames.

A score of men with saws and axes cut away the flooring adjoining the doors on the first and second stories. The planing-room was fortunately not boarded. While a portion of the fire brigade worked unceasingly in preventing the spread of the flames in this direction, the rest turned their attention to the great wood piles, which were repeatedly ignited by the fragments of burning wood.

Presently the roof fell in, and the flames shot up high into the air, but grand as the sight was, the boys did not wait any longer looking on. Their faces smarted severely from the heat to which they had been exposed; their hands had been a good deal burned by the shavings; their hair, eyebrows, and eyelashes were singed, and the eyeballs ached with the glare.

"I will run home now, Bill; mother will likely enough hear of the fire, and as we said we should be back soon after eight she will be getting anxious."

"I will go and tell her it's all right; you stop and see the end of it here."

But this George would not hear of.

"Very well, then, I will go with you. I must get some grease or something to put on my face and hands; they are smarting awfully."

Mrs. Andrews gave an exclamation of surprise and alarm as the boys entered. The irritation of the wood smoke had so much inflamed their eyes that they could scarcely see out of them, and their faces looked like pieces of raw beef.

"Whatever has happened, boys?" she exclaimed.

"There's a great fire at Penrose's, mother; it broke out just as we were passing, so we stopped to help for a bit, and then came home to tell you, thinking that you might be anxious."

"A fire at the works!" Mrs. Andrews exclaimed; "that is dreadful. Dreadful for Mr. Penrose, and for all of you who work there; more, perhaps, for you than for him, for no doubt he is insured, and you may be out of work for months. Thank God I have plenty of work, so I dare say we shall be able to tide it over."

"It is not all burned, mother; only the molding-shop and the floors above it are on fire at present, and as there are six fire-engines at work, and they keep on arriving every minute, I hope they will save the rest; and now, mother, what can we do to our faces and hands, they are smarting awfully?"

"Dear me, George, are you burnt? I thought you were only dreadfully hot."

"We feel hot, mother, just as if our faces were being roasted."

"I will get some oil, that will be the best thing," Mrs. Andrews said, hurrying away to the kitchen, and coming back with a piece of cotton-wool, and some olive-oil in a cup.

"You are burned, George. Why, child, your hair is all singed, and your eyebrows and eyelashes. Why, what have you been doing to yourselves? There could have been no occasion to put your heads into the flames like that. Why, your hands are worse still; they are quite blistered. I had better wrap them up in cotton-wool."

"It's the inside that's the worst, mother; perhaps if you put a bit of cotton-wool there and tie it round the back it will do; we can't go out with our hands all swaddled round like that. And now, please, directly you have done we want to go down again to see the fire. Just you go up to the road corner, mother. It's a grand sight, I can tell you."

"We will have tea first," Mrs. Andrews said decidedly; "everything has been ready except pouring the water in since eight o'clock, and it's a quarter past nine now. After we have done I will put on my bonnet and walk down with you as near as I can get. I am not going to lose you out of my sight again."

So after their meal they went down together, but could not get anywhere near the works, all the approaches now being guarded by the police. It was a grand sight, but the worst was over, and there was a general feeling of confidence in the crowd that it would spread no further. A dozen engines were at work now. Some of the firemen were on the roof, some on the stacks of timber, which looked red-hot from the deep glow from the fire. The flames were intermittent now,

sometimes leaping up high above the shell of the burned-out buildings, then dying down again.

"Thank God it's no worse!" Mrs. Andrews said fervently. "It would have been a bad winter for a great many down here if the fire had spread; as it is, not a quarter of the buildings are burned."

"No, nothing like that, mother; not above a tenth, I should say. It's lucky that there was a strong wall between that and the next shops, or it must all have gone. I have heard them say that part was added on five or six years ago, so that the wall at the end of the planing-shop was an outside wall before; that accounts for its being so thick."

After looking on for about half an hour they went back home. But neither of the boys got much sleep that night, the excitement they had gone through and the pain of their burns keeping them wide awake till nearly morning. As Mrs. Andrews heard no movement in their rooms—whereas they were usually up and about almost as early on Sundays as on other days, being unable to sleep after their usual hour for rising—she did not disturb them. George was the first to awake, and looking out of the window felt sure by the light that it was later than usual. He put his head out of the door and shouted:

"Bill, are you up?" There was no answer. "Mother, are you up; what o'clock is it?"

"Up! hours ago, George. Why, it's past eleven!"

George gave an exclamation of astonishment and rushed into Bill's room. The latter had woke at his shout.

"It's past eleven, Bill, and mother has been up for hours;" and he dashed off again to his room to dress. It was but a few minutes before they came downstairs just at the same moment.

"Why didn't you wake us, mother?"

"Because I thought it better to let you sleep on, George. I guessed that your burns had kept you awake for some time."

"That they did. I thought I was never going to get to sleep," George said; and Bill gave a similar account of himself. "Still, mother, a short night does no harm for once, and you haven't been able to get to church."

"It does not matter for once, George. What figures you both are!"

"We are figures," George said ruefully. "I hardly knew myself when I looked in the glass. My eyes are almost shut up, and the skin is peeling off my nose, and my hair is all rough and scrubby; and Bill looks as bad as I do. You are a figure, Bill!" and George burst into a fit of laughter.

"He's no worse than you, George; but come along, breakfast is waiting."

"You haven't waited breakfast for us, I hope, mother?"

"I made myself a cup of tea the first thing, boys, and had a slice of bread and butter, for I thought you might not be down for some time; but I am quite ready to join you; we have got fish. I put them down directly you called."

"Well, I am glad you are not starving, mother; and I am glad too you didn't have your regular breakfast. It would have been horrid to sit down on Sunday morning without you, when it's the only regular breakfast we get in the week."

Just as they had finished their meal there was a knock at the door. It was Bob Grimstone. Bill opened the door.

"Well, how are you to-day, lad? I thought I would just come round and see. You look pretty badly burned; and so do you, George," he added, as he followed Bill into the sitting room.

"Good-day, Mrs. Andrews."

"Good-morning, Mr. Grimstone," Mrs. Andrews said. Since her coming the Grimstones had several times come in on Sunday afternoon to Laburnum Villas. Mrs. Andrews would, indeed, have wished them to come in more frequently, for she felt much indebted to them for their kindness to George, and, moreover, liked them for themselves, for both were good specimens of their class.

"I see you were busy last night too, Mr. Grimstone; your face looks scorched; but you did not manage to get yourself burned as these silly boys did. What a blessing it is for us all that the fire did not spread!"

"Well, Mrs. Andrews, I don't think those two lads can have told you what they did, for if they had you would hardly call them silly boys."

Mrs. Andrews looked surprised.

"They told me they lent a hand to put out the fire—I think those were George's words—but they did not tell me anything else."

"They saved the building, ma'am. If it hadn't been for them there would not have been a stick or stone of Penrose's standing now; the shops and the wood piles would all have gone, and we should all have been idle for six months to come; there is no doubt about that at all."

"Why, how was that, Mr. Grimstone? How was it they did more than anyone else?"

"In the first place they discovered it, ma'am, and rung the alarm-bell; it mightn't have been found out for another five minutes, and five minutes would have been enough for the fire. In the next place, when they had given the alarm they did the only thing that could have saved the place: they got into the planing-shop and turned on the hose there, and fought the fire from spreading through the door till we got in seven or eight minutes later. It was all we could do to stop it then; but if they hadn't done what they did the planing-shop would have been alight from end to end, and the floors above it too, before the first engine arrived, and then nothing could have saved the whole lot. I can tell you, Mrs. Andrews, that there isn't a man on the works, nor the wife of a man, who doesn't feel that they owe these two lads their living through the winter. I don't know what Mr. Penrose will say about it, but I know what we all feel."

"Why, George," Mrs. Andrews said, while her eyes were filled with happy tears at the praises of her son, "why did you not tell me about it?"

"Why, mother, there was not anything to tell," George said, "and Bob has made a great fuss about nothing. As I told you, we saw a light as we came along and when we went round behind and got on the wall we saw the place was on fire, so we rang the alarm-bell, and then turned on the hose and flooded the place with water till Bob and some more came to help us."

"It sounds very simple, Mrs. Andrews, but I can tell you it wasn't so. When we opened the door of the planing-shop it was so full of smoke that it didn't seem as if anyone could breathe there for a minute, and as we could see the glare of the flames at the other end we thought the place was gone. We should have gone out and waited for the engines if we hadn't heard the boys sing out that they were there; and even though we knelt down and crawled in, as they shouted to us to do, we were pretty nearly stifled. When we took the hose they crawled forward and got the shavings cleared away; that was how they burned their hands, I

expect; and I hear they tumbled down insensible when they got out. Now, ma'am, they may make light of it, but if ever two young chaps behaved like heroes they did, and you have every right to be proud of them—I say of them, because although Bill's no son of yours I know he is what you and your boy have made him. He was telling me about it one day."

"Will work go on to-morrow as usual, Bob?" George asked, in order to change the subject.

"In some of the shops it will, no doubt," Bob said; "but in our shop and the floors above it it will take a day or two to clear up. I saw the foreman just now, and he tells me that a strong gang of carpenters will be put on, for both the floors are burned away at the end of the wall and pretty near twenty feet of the roof are charred. Two surveyors are coming down this afternoon to examine the wall and say whether it is safe. The walls of the shops that are burned out must come down, of course. The surveyor says that if the wall at the end of the planing-room looks pretty strong they will build up another wall against it as soon as it gets cold enough and the rubbish is cleared away for men to work; that will make a strong job of it, and there won't be any loss of time. Of course if the old one has to come down there can't be much work done in the shops till it's finished. The governor got down about ten o'clock last night. A messenger went up to him almost directly after the fire broke out, but he was out at dinner, and by the time he got down here all danger of it spreading was over. He had a talk with the foreman and arranged about the wall with him. He is as anxious as we are that there should be no delay, for there are some heavy orders in, and, of course, he doesn't want them taken anywhere else."

"Will you look at their hands, Mr. Grimstone. I don't know much about it, but they seem to be badly burned."

"That they are, ma'am," Mr. Grimstone said when he had examined them; "pretty nigh raw. If I might give an opinion, I should say as the doctor had better see them; they are precious painful, aint they, George?"

"They do feel as if they were on fire, Bob, but I don't see any use in a doctor. I don't suppose he can do more than mother has."

"Perhaps not, George, but he had better see them for all that; he may give you some cooling lotion for them, and I can tell you burns on the hand are apt to be serious matters, for the muscles of the fingers may get stiffened. I have known two or three cases like that. You had better go at once to Dr. Maxwell; he always

attends if there are any accidents at the works. You know the house, George; it is about halfway between this and the works."

"Yes, you had better go at once, boys," Mrs. Andrews said; "there, put on your hats and be off."

"I will walk with them. I must be off anyway, for the missis will be waiting dinner for me."

"Are we to pay, mother?"

"No, not till you have done, George. I dare say you will have to have your hands dressed several times."

"There won't be any occasion to pay him, Mrs. Andrews. The firm always pays the doctor in case of accidents, and you may be very sure that in this case they will be only too glad."

"Well, in any case, George," Mrs. Andrews said, "you can tell the doctor that you will pay when he says that you need not come to him again. If Mr. Penrose hears about it and chooses to pay I should not think of refusing, as you have been burned in his service; but certainly I should not assume that he will do so."

"Shall I go in with you, boys?" Bob asked when they reached the door. "I know the doctor; he attended me two years ago when I pretty nigh had my finger taken off by one of the cutters."

"Yes, please, Bob, I wish you would."

They were shown into the surgery, where the doctor soon joined them.

"I've brought these two young chaps for you to look at their hands, Dr. Maxwell. They got them burnt last night at the fire. Mrs. Andrews, the mother of this lad, wished me to say that she would pay the charges when you have done with them; but as if it hadn't been for them the works would have been burnt down as sure as you are standing there, I expect the firm will take the matter in their own hands."

"Yes, they are nasty burns," the doctor said, examining the boys' hands. "Can you open and shut them, boy?"

"I think I could if tried, sir," George said, "but I shouldn't like to try, for if I move my fingers at all it hurts them awfully."

"I see you have had oil and cotton-wool on your hands."

"Yes."

"The best thing you can do, boys, is to put on some soothing poultices. Tell your mother to get some linseed and mix it with olive-oil. I will give you a bottle of laudanum. Let her put about twenty drops of that into the oil before she mixes it with the linseed. Every four or five hours change the poultices. I think you will find that will relieve the pain a good deal. I see your faces are scorched too. You can do nothing better than keep them moistened with sweet-oil. I should advise you to keep as quiet as possible for three or four days."

"But we shall want to get to work, sir," George said.

"Nonsense! You will be very lucky if you can use your hands in another fortnight. I will send in the usual certificate to the works."

"Will you tell the foreman, Bob," George said when they left the doctor's, "how it is we can't come to work? You tell him we wanted to, and that we hope to come back as soon as our hands are all right; because, you see, the men and boys at the shops which have been burnt down will be all out of work, and it would be awful if we found our places filled up when we went to work again."

"Don't you be afraid, George; there is no fear of your being out of work after what you have done."

"Well, what did the doctor say?" was Mrs. Andrews' first question when they returned home.

"He didn't say much, mother, except that we must not think of going to work for a fortnight anyhow, and we are to have poultices made with linseed mixed with oil, and twenty drops of laudanum from this bottle, and it must be put on fresh every three or four hours. I am afraid it will be an awful trouble."

"The trouble won't matter," Mrs. Andrews said brightly. "Did he say you were to go to bed?"

"No, mother; but we were to keep as quiet as we could."

"Then in that case, George, I think you had better go to bed."

"No; I am sure we had better not," George said. "I should toss and fidget about there horridly. The best thing will be for us to sit here, and then we shall be all

together. And if you talk to us, and perhaps read to us, we shan't feel it half so much. What are you going to do, mother?" he asked five minutes afterwards, as Mrs. Andrews came down with her bonnet on.

"I am going to get some linseed, George, of course. I haven't got any in the house."

"But it's Sunday, mother, and the shops will be shut."

"I shall get it at the chemist's, George. They will always supply things that are needed even on Sunday. People are ill on Sunday as well as any other day, you know. I shan't be gone more than a quarter of an hour. You must keep very quiet till I come back."

The boys found a good deal of relief from the effect of the poultices, and were very much better after a good night's rest. At ten o'clock the next morning, as Mrs. Andrews was sitting at her work, with the boys both on the hearthrug in front of the fire, there was a knock at the door. It was a loud double knock, quite unlike the ordinary summons of the baker's boy, who was the only regular caller. The boys jumped up in surprise.

"Who can that be, mother?"

"We shall soon see," Mrs. Andrews said quietly.

She was not surprised, on opening the door, to see a gentleman standing there, whom, by the description the boys had given of him, she guessed to be their employer. A little girl was standing by his side.

"Is this Mrs. Andrews?" the gentleman asked.

"I am Mrs. Andrews," the lady answered quietly.

"My name is Penrose. I have called with my daughter to inquire after the two lads—one of them your son, I believe—who so gallantly saved my place from being burned down on Saturday evening. I only heard about it late yesterday evening, when I came down to arrange about some matters with the foreman. He did not know the facts of the case on Saturday night, but had learned them yesterday, and there can be no doubt whatever, from what he says, that had it not been for the presence of mind and bravery of these two lads nothing could have saved the entire works and all the wood piles from destruction. I told my daughter this morning, and she insisted on coming down with me. You know she

is already indebted to your son for saving a locket which we both greatly valued."

"Will you walk in, sir?" and Mrs. Andrews showed them into the sitting room.

Mr. Penrose had been somewhat surprised by Mrs. Andrews' manner, although the foreman, in telling him of the boys' conduct, had also stated what he knew about them.

"They are out-of-the-way sort of boys, sir," he said. "There was quite a talk about them in the shops in the spring. They lodged with Grimstone, and it seems that after they had been here at work five months Andrews' mother, who had been ill, was coming to them, and they got Grimstone to take a house for them, and it turned out that ever since they had been at work here they had been putting by half their wages to furnish a place for her, so they must have lived on about five shillings a week each and got clothes for themselves out of it. Now, sir, boys as would do that aint ordinary boys, and there was quite a talk among the men about it. I hear from Grimstone that Mrs. Andrews is a superior sort of person, he says quite a lady. She does work, I believe, for some London shop."

Mr. Penrose, therefore, was prepared to find the boys in a more comfortable abode than usual, and their mother what the foreman called a superior sort of woman; but he perceived at once by her address that Grimstone's estimate had been a correct one, and that she was indeed a lady. The prettiness of the little sitting room, with its comfortable furniture, its snowy curtains and pretty belongings, heightened this feeling.

"I have come to see you, boys," he said, "and to tell you how indebted I feel to you for your exertions on Saturday. There is no doubt that had it not been for you the place would have been entirely burned. It was fully insured, but it would have been a serious matter for me, as I should have lost four or five months' work, and it would have been still more serious for the men to have been thrown out of employment at this time of the year, so we all feel very much indebted to you. I hope you are not much burned."

"Oh, no, sir! our hands are burned a bit, but they will be all right in a few days. Bill and I are very glad, sir, that we happened to be passing, and were able to give the alarm and do something to stop the flames till the others came up; but we don't feel that it was anything out of the way. It was just a piece of fun and excitement to us."

"They didn't say anything about it, Mr. Penrose, when they came home, and it was only when one of the men came in next day to ask after them that I heard that they had really been of use."

"It is all very well to say so, lads," Mr. Penrose replied; "but there is no doubt you showed a great deal of courage, as well as presence of mind, and you may be sure that I shall not forget it. And now, Mrs. Andrews," he said, turning round to her, "I feel rather in a false position. I came round to see the lads, who, when I last saw them, were not in very flourishing circumstances, and I was going to make them a present for the service they had done me, and my daughter has brought them a basket with some wine, jelly, and other things such as are good for sick boys. Finding them as I find them, in your care and in such a home, you see I feel a difficulty about it altogether."

"Thank you, sir," Mrs. Andrews said, "for the kindness of your intention; but my boys—for although one is in no way related to me I feel towards him as if he were my own—would not like to take money for doing their duty towards their employer."

"No, indeed!" George and Bill exclaimed simultaneously.

"As you see, sir, thanks to the work you were good enough to give the boys and to my needle,"—and she glanced towards the articles on the table,—"we are very comfortable; but I am sure the boys will be very glad to accept the things which your daughter has been so kind as to bring down for them, and will feel very much obliged for her thoughtfulness."

"That is right," Mr. Penrose said, relieved. "Nelly, you may as well leave the basket as it is. I am sure you don't want to carry it back again?"

"No, papa," Nelly said; and indeed even the empty basket would have been more than the child could well have carried. It had come on the top of the carriage to the railway-station, and a porter had accompanied Mr. Penrose with it to Laburnum Villas.

"You would have hardly known your young friend. Would you, Nelly?"

"I don't think I should," she said, shaking her head. "He looks dreadfully burned, and his hair is all funny and frizzled."

"It will soon grow again," George said, smiling. "The doctor says our faces will be all right when the skin is peeled off. Thank you very much, Miss Penrose, for

all the nice things. It was a fortunate day indeed for us when I caught that boy stealing your locket."

"And it was a fortunate day for us too," Mr. Penrose responded. "Now, Mrs. Andrews, we will say good-by. You will not mind my calling again to see how the boys are getting on?"

"It will be very kind of you, sir, and we shall be glad to see you," Mrs. Andrews replied; "but I hope in a few days they will both be out of the doctor's hands."

"I can't shake hands with you," Mr. Penrose said, patting the boys on the shoulder, "but I hope next time I see you to be able to do so. Good-morning, Mrs. Andrews."

CHAPTER VII.

SAVED!

"Now let us have a look at the basket, mother," George said as Mrs. Andrews returned into the room after seeing her two visitors off. "It's very kind of him, isn't it? and I am glad he didn't offer us money; that would have been horrid, wouldn't it?"

"I am glad he did not, too, George. Mr. Penrose is evidently a gentleman of delicacy and refinement of feeling, and he saw that he would give pain if he did so."

"You see it too, don't you, Bill?" George asked. "You know you thought I was a fool not to take money when he offered it for getting back the locket; but you see it in the same way now, don't you?"

"Yes; I shouldn't have liked to take money," Bill said. "I sees——"

"See," Mrs. Andrews corrected.

"Thank you. I see things different—differently," he corrected himself, seeing that George was about to speak, "to what I did then."

"Now, mother," George said, "let us open the basket; it's almost as big as a clothes-basket, isn't it?"

The cover was lifted and the contents, which had after much thought been settled by Nelly herself, were disclosed. There were two bottles of port-wine, a large mold of jelly, a great cake, two dozen oranges, some apples, a box of preserved fruit, some almonds and raisins, two packets of Everton toffee, a dozen mince-pies, and four pots of black-currant jelly, on the cover of one of which was written in a sprawling hand, "Two teaspoonfuls stirred up in a tumbler of water for a drink at night."

"This will make a grand feast, mother; what a jolly collection, isn't it? I think Miss Penrose must have chosen it herself, don't you?"

"It certainly looks like it, George," Mrs. Andrews replied, smiling. "I do not

think any grownup person would have chosen mince-pies and toffee as appropriate for sick boys."

"Yes; but she must have known we were not badly burned, mother; and besides, you see, she put in currant-jelly to make drinks, and there are the oranges too. I vote that we have an orange and some toffee at once, Bill."

"I have tasted oranges," Bill said, "lots of them in the market, but I never tasted toffee."

"It's first-rate, I can tell you."

"Why, they look like bits of tin," Bill said as the packet was opened.

George burst into a laugh.

"That's tin-foil, that's only to wrap it up; you peel that off, Bill, and you will find the toffee inside. Now, mother, you have a glass of wine and a piece of cake."

"I will have a piece of cake, George; but I am not going to open the wine. We will put that by in case of illness or of any very extraordinary occasion."

"I am glad the other things won't keep, mother, or I expect you would be wanting to put them all away. Isn't this toffee good, Bill?"

"First-rate," Bill agreed. "What is it made of?"

"Sugar and butter melted together over the fire."

"You are like two children," Mrs. Andrews laughed, "instead of boys getting on for sixteen years old. Now I must clear this table again and get to work; I promised these four bonnets should be sent in to-morrow morning, and there's lots to be done to them yet."

It was three weeks before the boys were able to go to work again. The foreman came round on Saturdays with their wages. Mr. Penrose called again; this time they were out, but he chatted for some time with Mrs. Andrews.

"I don't wish to pry into your affairs, Mrs. Andrews," he said, after asking about the boys; "but I have a motive for asking if your son has, as I suppose he has, from his way of speaking, had a fair education."

"He was at school up to the age of twelve," Mrs. Andrews said quietly; "circumstances at that time obliged me to remove him; but I have since done

what I could myself towards continuing his education, and he still works regularly of an evening."

"Why I ask, Mrs. Andrews, was that I should like in time to place him in the counting-house. I say in time, because I think it will be better for him for the next two or three years to continue to work in the shops. I will have him moved from shop to shop so as to learn thoroughly the various branches of the business. That is what I should do had I a son of my own to bring into the business. It will make him more valuable afterwards, and fit him to take a good position either in my shops or in any similar business should an opening occur."

"I am greatly obliged to you, sir," Mrs. Andrews said gratefully; "though I say it myself, a better boy never lived."

"I am sure he is by what I have heard of him, and I shall be only too glad, after the service he has rendered me, to do everything in my power to push him forward. His friend, I hear, has not had the same advantages. At the time I first saw him he looked a regular young arab."

"So he was, sir; but he is a fine young fellow. He was very kind to my boy when he was alone in London, and gave up his former life to be with him. George taught him to read before I came here, and he has worked hard ever since. No one could be nicer in the house than he is, and had I been his own mother he could not be more dutiful or anxious to please. Indeed I may say that I am indebted for my home here as much to him as to my own boy."

"I am glad to hear you say so, Mrs. Andrews, for of course I should wish to do something for him too. At any rate, I will give him, like your son, every opportunity of learning the business, and he will in time be fit for a position of foreman of a shop—by no means a bad one for a lad who has had such a beginning as he has had. After that, of course, it must depend upon himself. I think, if you will allow me to suggest, it would be as well that you should not tell them the nature of our conversation. Of course it is for you to decide; but, however steady boys they are, it might make them a little less able to get on well with their associates in a shop if they know that they are going to be advanced."

"I don't think it would make any difference to them, sir; but at the same time I do think it would be as well not to tell them."

One day Bill was out by himself as the men were coming out of the shop, and he stopped to speak to Bob Grimstone.

"Oh! I am glad to find you without George," Bob said; "'cause I want to talk to you. Look here! the men in all the shops have made a subscription to give you and George a present. Everyone feels that it's your doing that we have not got to idle all this winter, and when someone started the idea there wasn't a man in the two shops that didn't agree with him. I am the treasurer, I am, and it's come to just thirty pounds. Now I don't know what you two boys would like, whether you would like it in money, or whether you would like it in something else, so I thought I would ask you first. I thought you would know what George would like, seeing what friends you are, and then you know it would come as a surprise to him. Now, what do you say?"

"Its very kind of you," Bill said. "I am sure George would like anything better than money, and so should I."

"Well, you think it over, Bill, and let me know in a day or two. We were thinking of a watch for each of you, with an inscription, saying it was presented to you by your shopmates for having saved the factory, and so kept them at work for months just at the beginning of winter. That's what seemed to me that you would like; but if there is anything you would like better, just you say so. You come down here to-morrow or next day, when you have thought it over, and give me an answer. Of course you can consult George if you think best."

Bill met Bob Grimstone on the following day.

"I have thought it over," he said, "and I know what George and me would like better than any possible thing you could get."

"Well, what is it, Bill?"

"Well, what we have set our minds on, and what we were going to save up our money to get, was a piano for George's mother. I heard her say that we could get a very nice one for about thirty pounds, and it would be splendid if you were all to give it her."

"Very well, Bill, then a piano it shall be. I know a chap as works at Kirkman's, and I expect he will be able to give us a good one for the money."

Accordingly on the Saturday afternoon before the boys were going to work again, Mrs. Andrews and George were astonished at seeing a cart stop before the house, and the foreman, Bob Grimstone, and four other men coming up to the door.

Bill ran and opened the door, and the men entered. He had been apprised of the time that they might be expected, and at once showed them in.

"Mrs. Andrews," the foreman said, "I and my mates here are a deputation from the hands employed in the shop, and we have come to offer you a little sort of testimonial of what we feel we owe your son and Bill Smith for putting out the fire and saving the shops. If it hadn't been for them it would have been a bad winter for us all. So after thinking it over and finding out what form of testimonial the lads would like best, we have got you a piano, which we hope you may live long to play on and enjoy. We had proposed to give them a watch each; but we found that they would rather that it took the form of a piano."

"Oh, how good and kind of you all!" Mrs. Andrews said, much affected. "I shall indeed be proud of your gift, both for itself and for the kind feeling towards my boys which it expresses."

"Then, ma'am, with your permission we will just bring it in;" and the deputation retired to assist with the piano.

"Oh, boys, how could you do it without telling me!" Mrs. Andrews exclaimed.

George had hitherto stood speechless with surprise.

"But I didn't know anything about it, mother. I don't know what they mean by saying that we would rather have it than watches. Of course we would, a hundred times; but I don't know how they knew it."

"Then it must have been your kind thought, Bill."

"It wasn't no kind thought, Mrs. Andrews, but they spoke to me about it, and I knew that a piano was what we should like better than anything else, and I didn't say anything about it, because Bob Grimstone thought that it would be nicer to be a surprise to George as well as to you."

"You are right, old boy," George said, shaking Bill by the hand; "why, there never was such a good idea; it is splendid, mother, isn't it?"

The men now appeared at the door with the piano. This was at once placed in the position which had long ago been decided upon as the best place for the piano when it should come. Mrs. Andrews opened it, and there on the front was a silver plate with the inscription:

"To Mrs. Andrews from the Employees at Messrs. Penrose & Co., in token of their gratitude to George Andrews and William Smith for their courage and presence of mind, by which the factory was saved from being destroyed by fire on Saturday the 23d of October, 1857."

The tears which stood in Mrs. Andrews' eyes rendered it difficult for her to read the inscription.

"I thank you, indeed," she said. "Now, perhaps you would like to hear its tones." So saying she sat down and played "Home, Sweet Home." "It has a charming touch," she said as she rose, "and, you see, the air was an appropriate one, for your gift will serve to make home even sweeter than before. Give, please, my grateful thanks, and those of my boys, to all who have subscribed."

The inhabitants of No. 8 Laburnum Villas had long been a subject of considerable discussion and interest to their neighbors, for the appearance of the boys as they came home of an evening in their working clothes seemed altogether incongruous with that of their mother and with the neatness and prettiness of the villa, and was, indeed, considered derogatory to the respectability of Laburnum Villas in general. Upon this evening they were still further mystified at hearing the notes of a female voice of great power and sweetness, accompanied by a piano, played evidently by an accomplished musician, issuing from the house. As to the boys, they thought that, next only to that of the home-coming of Mrs. Andrews, never was such a happy evening spent in the world.

I do not think that in all London there was a household that enjoyed that winter more than did the inmates of No. 8 Laburnum Villas. Their total earnings were about thirty-five shillings a week, much less than that of many a mechanic, but ample for them not only to live, but to live in comfort and even refinement. No stranger, who had looked into the pretty drawing room in the evening, would have dreamed that the lady at the piano worked as a milliner for her living, or that the lads were boys in a manufactory.

When spring came they began to plan various trips and excursions which could be taken on bank holidays or during the long summer evenings, when an event happened which, for a time, cut short all their plans. The word had been passed round the shops the first thing in the morning that Mr. Penrose was coming down with a party of ladies and gentlemen to go over the works, and that things were to be made as tidy as possible.

Accordingly there was a general clearing up, and vast quantities of shavings and sawdust were swept up from the floors, although when the machines had run again for a few hours no one would have thought that a broom had been seen in the place for weeks.

George was now in a shop where a number of machines were at work grooving, mortising, and performing other work to prepare the wood for builders' purposes. The party arrived just as work had recommenced after dinner.

There were ten or twelve gentlemen and as many ladies. Nelly Penrose, with two girls about her own age, accompanied the party. They stopped for a time in each shop while Mr. Penrose explained the nature of the work and the various points of the machinery.

They had passed through most of the other rooms before they entered that in which George was engaged, and the young girls, taking but little interest in the details of the machinery, wandered somewhat away from the rest of the party, chatting among themselves. George had his eye upon them, and was wishing that Mr. Penrose would turn round and speak to them, for they were moving about carelessly and not paying sufficient heed to the machinery.

Suddenly he threw down his work and darted forward with a shout; but he was too late, a revolving-band had caught Nelly Penrose's dress. In an instant she was dragged forward and in another moment would have been whirled into the middle of the machinery.

There was a violent scream, followed by a sudden crash and a harsh grating sound, and then the whole of the machinery on that side of the room came to a standstill. For a moment no one knew what had happened. Mr. Penrose and some of his friends rushed forward to raise Nelly. Her hand was held fast between the band and the pulley, and the band had to be cut to relieve it.

"What an escape! what an escape!" Mr. Penrose murmured, as he lifted her. "Another second and nothing could have saved her. But what stopped the machinery?" and for the first time he looked round the shop. There was a little group of men a few yards away, and, having handed Nelly, who was crying bitterly, for her hand was much bruised, to one of the ladies, he stepped towards them. The foreman came forward to meet him.

"I think, sir, you had better get the ladies out of the shop. I am afraid young Andrews is badly hurt."

"How is it? What is the matter?" Mr. Penrose asked.

"I think, sir, he saw the danger your daughter was in, and shoved his foot in between two of the cog-wheels."

"You don't say so!" Mr. Penrose exclaimed, as he pushed forward among the men.

Two of them were supporting George Andrews, who, as pale as death, lay in their arms. One of his feet was jammed in between two of the cog-wheels. He was scarcely conscious.

"Good Heavens," Mr. Penrose exclaimed in a low tone, "his foot must be completely crushed! Have you thrown off the driving belt, Williams?"

"Yes, sir, I did that first thing."

"That's right; now work away for your lives, lads." This was said to two men who had already seized spanners and were unscrewing the bolts of the bearings in order to enable the upper shafting to be lifted and the cog-wheel removed. Then Mr. Penrose returned to his friends.

"Pray leave the shop," he said, "and go down into the office. There's been a bad accident; a noble young fellow has sacrificed himself to save Nelly's life, and is, I fear, terribly hurt. Williams, send off a man instantly for the surgeon. Let him jump into one of the cabs he will find waiting at the gate, and tell the man to drive as hard as he can go. If Dr. Maxwell is not at home let him fetch someone else."

George had indeed sacrificed himself to save Nelly Penrose. When he saw the band catch her dress he had looked round for an instant for something with which to stop the machinery, but there was nothing at hand, and without an instant's hesitation he had thrust his foot between the cog-wheels. He had on very heavy, thickly nailed working boots, and the iron-bound sole threw the cogs out of gear and bent the shaft, thereby stopping the machinery. George felt a dull, sickening pain, which seemed to numb and paralyze him all over, and he remembered little more until, on the shafting being removed, his foot was extricated and he was laid gently down on a heap of shavings. The first thing he realized when he was conscious was that someone was pouring some liquid, which half-choked him, down his throat.

When he opened his eyes, Mr. Penrose, kneeling beside him, was supporting his

head, while on the other side knelt Bill Smith, the tears streaming down his cheeks and struggling to suppress his sobs.

"What is it, Bill? What's the matter?" Then the remembrance of what had passed flashed upon him.

"Is she safe; was I in time?"

"Quite safe, my dear boy. Thank God, your noble sacrifice was not in vain," Mr. Penrose answered with quivering lips, for he too had the greatest difficulty in restraining his emotion.

"Am I badly hurt, sir?" George asked after a pause, "because, if so, will you please send home for mother? I don't feel in any pain, but I feel strange and weak."

"It is your foot, my boy. I fear that it is badly crushed, but otherwise you are unhurt. Your boot threw the machinery out of gear."

In ten minutes the doctor arrived. He had already been informed of the nature of the accident.

"Is it any use trying to cut the boot off?" Mr. Penrose asked in a low voice as Dr. Maxwell stooped over George's leg.

"Not the slightest," the doctor answered in the same tone. "The foot is crushed to a pulp. It must come off at the ankle. Nothing can save it. He had better be taken home at once. You had best send to Guy's and get an operating surgeon for him. I would rather it were done by someone whose hand is more used than mine to this sort of work."

"I am a governor of Guy's," Mr. Penrose said, "and will send off at once for one of their best men. You are not afraid of the case, I hope, Dr. Maxwell?"

"Not of the local injury," Dr. Maxwell replied; "but the shock to the system of such a smash is very severe. However, he has youth, strength, and a good constitution, so we must hope for the best. The chances are all in his favor. We are thinking of taking you home, my boy," he went on, speaking aloud to George. "Are you in any great pain?"

"I am not in any pain, sir; only I feel awfully cold, and, please, will someone go on before and tell mother. Bill had better not go; he would frighten her to death

and make her think it was much worse than it is."

"I will go myself," Mr. Penrose replied. "I will prepare her for your coming."

"Drink some more of this brandy," the doctor said; "that will warm you and give you strength for your journey."

There was a stretcher always kept at the works in case of emergency, and George was placed on this and covered with some rugs. Four of the men raised it onto their shoulders and set out, Mr. Penrose at once driving on to prepare Mrs. Andrews.

Bill followed the procession heart-broken. When it neared home he fell behind and wandered away, not being able to bring himself to witness the grief of Mrs. Andrews. For hours he wandered about, sitting down in waste places and crying as if his heart would break. "If it had been me it wouldn't have mattered," he kept on exclaiming—"wouldn't have mattered a bit. It wouldn't have been no odds one way or the other. There, we have always been together in the shops till this week, and now when we get separated this is what comes of it. Here am I, walking about all right, and George all crushed up, and his mother breaking her heart. Why, I would rather a hundred times that they had smashed me up all over than have gone and hurt George like that!"

It was dark before he made his way back, and, entering at the back door, took off his boots, and was about to creep upstairs when Mrs. Andrews came out of the kitchen.

"Oh, Mrs. Andrews!" he exclaimed, and the tears again burst from him.

"Do not cry, Bill; George is in God's hands, and the doctors have every hope that he will recover. They are upstairs with him now, with a nurse whom Mr. Penrose has fetched down from the hospital. He will have to lose his foot, poor boy," she added with a sob that she could not repress, "but we should feel very thankful that it is no worse after such an accident as that. The doctor says that his thick boots saved him. If it hadn't been for that his whole leg would have been drawn into the machinery, and then nothing could have saved him. Now I must go upstairs, as I only came down for some hot water."

"May I go up to him, Mrs. Andrews?"

"I think, my boy, you had better stop down here for the present for both your sakes. I will let you know when you can go up to him."

So Bill crouched before the fire and waited. He heard movements upstairs and wondered what they were doing and why they didn't keep quiet, and when he would be allowed to go up. Once or twice the nurse came down for hot water, but Bill did not speak to her; but in half an hour Mrs. Andrews herself returned, looking, Bill thought, even paler than before.

"I have just slipped down to tell you, my boy, that it's all over. They gave him chloroform, and have taken his foot off."

"And didn't it hurt it awful?" Bill asked in an awed voice.

"Not in the least. He knew nothing about it, and the first thing he asked when he came to was when they were going to begin. They will be going away directly, and then you can come up and sit quietly in his room if you like. The doctors say he will probably drop asleep."

Bill was obliged to go outside again and wrestle with himself before he felt that he was fit to go up into George's room. It was a long struggle, and had George caught his muttered remonstrances to himself he would have felt that Bill had suffered a bad relapse into his former method of talking. It came out in jerks between his sobs.

"Come, none of that now. Aint yer ashamed of yerself, a-howling and a-blubbering like a gal! Call yerself a man!—you are a babby, that's what you are. Now, dry up, and let's have no more of it."

But it was a long time before he again mastered himself; then he went to the scullery and held his head under the tap till the water took away his breath, then polished his face till it shone, and then went and sat quietly down till Mrs. Andrews came in and told him that he could go upstairs to George. He went up to the bedside and took George's hand, but he could not trust himself to speak.

"Well, Bill, old boy," George said cheerily, but in a somewhat lower voice than usual, "this is a sudden go, isn't it?"

Bill nodded. He was still speechless.

"Don't you take it to heart, Bill," George said, feeling that the lad was shaking from head to foot. "It won't make much odds, you know. I shall soon be about again all right. I expect they will be able to put on an artificial foot, and I shall be stumping about as well as ever, though I shouldn't be much good at a race."

"I wish it had been me," Bill broke out. "I would have jammed my head in between them wheels cheerful, that I would, rather than you should have gone and done it."

"Fortunately there was no time," George said with a smile. "Don't you fret yourself, Bill; one can get on well enough without a foot, and it didn't hurt me a bit coming off. No, nor the squeeze either, not regular hurting; it was just a sort of scrunch, and then I didn't feel anything more. Why, I have often hurt myself ten times as much at play and thought nothing of it. I expect it looked much worse to you than it felt to me."

"We will talk of it another time," Bill said huskily. "Your mother said I wasn't to talk, and I wasn't to let you talk, but just to sit down here quiet, and you are to try to go off to sleep." So saying he sat down by the bedside. George asked one or two more questions, but Bill only shook his head. Presently George closed his eyes, and a short time afterwards his quiet regular breathing showed that he was asleep.

The next six weeks passed pleasantly enough to George. Every day hampers containing flowers and various niceties in the way of food were sent down by Mr. Penrose, and that gentleman himself very frequently called in for a chat with him. As soon as the wound had healed an instrument-maker came down from town to measure him for an artificial foot, but before he was able to wear this he could get about on crutches.

The first day that he was downstairs Mr. Penrose brought Nelly down to see him. The child looked pale and awed as he came in.

"My little girl has asked me to thank you for her, George," Mr. Penrose said as she advanced timidly and placed her hand in his. "I have not said much to you about my own feelings and I won't say much about hers; but you can understand what we both feel. Why, my boy, it was a good Providence, indeed, which threw you in my way! I thought so when you saved the mill from destruction. I feel it tenfold more now that you have saved my child. The ways of God are, indeed, strange. Who would have thought that all this could have sprung from that boy snatching the locket from Helen as we came out of the theater! And now about the future, George. I owe you a great debt, infinitely greater than I can ever repay; but what I can do I will. In the future I shall regard you as my son, and I hope that you will look to me as to a father. I have been talking to your mother, and she says that she thinks your tastes lie altogether in the direction of

engineering. Is that so?"

"Yes, sir. I have often thought I would rather be an engineer than anything else, but I don't like——"

"Never mind what you like and what you don't like," Mr. Penrose said quietly. "You belong to me now, you know and must do as you are told. What I propose is this, that you shall go to a good school for another three years, and I will then apprentice you to a first-class engineer, either mechanical or civil as you may then prefer, and when you have learned your business I will take good care that you are pushed on. What do you say to that?"

"I think it is too much altogether," George said.

"Never mind about that," Mr. Penrose said, "that is my business. If that is the only objection we can imagine it settled. There is another thing. I know how attached you are to your friend Bill, and I am indebted to him, too, for the part he played at the fire, so I propose, if he is willing, to put him to a good middle-class school for a bit. In the course of a couple of years he will get a sufficient education to get on fairly with, and then I propose, according as you may choose to be a civil or mechanical engineer, to place him with a mason or smith; then by the time that you are ready to start in business he will be ready to take a place under you, so that you may again work together."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" George exclaimed, even more pleased at the news relating to Bill than at his own good fortune, great as was the delight which the prospect opened by Mr. Penrose's offer caused him.

As soon as George could be moved, Mr. Penrose sent him with his mother and Bill down to the seaside. Here George rapidly regained strength, and when, after a stay there of two months, he returned to town, he was able to walk so well with his artificial foot that his loss would not have been noticed by a stranger.

The arrangements settled by Mr. Penrose were all in due time carried out. George went for three years to a good school, and was then apprenticed to one of the leading civil engineers. With him he remained five years and then went out for him to survey a railroad about to be constructed in Brazil, and remained there as one of the staff who superintended its construction. Bill, who was now a clever young mason, accompanied him, and through George's interest with the contractor obtained the sub-contract for the masonry of some of the bridges and culverts.

This was ten years ago, and George Andrews is now one of the most rising engineers of the day, and whatever business he undertakes his friend Bill is still his right-hand man. Mr. Penrose has been in all respects as good as his word, and has been ready to assist George with his personal influence in all his undertakings, and in all respects has treated him as a son, while Nelly has regarded him with the affection of a sister.

Both George and Bill have been married some years, and Mrs. Andrews the elder is one of the proudest and happiest of mothers. She still lives with her son at the earnest request of his wife, who is often left alone during George's frequent absence abroad on professional duties. As for Bill, he has not even yet got over his wonder at his own good fortune, and ever blesses the day when he first met George in Covent Garden.

DO YOUR DUTY.

Early in the month of March, 1801, an old sailor was sitting on a bench gazing over the stretch of sea which lies between Hayling Island and the Isle of Wight. The prospect was a lively one, for in those days ships of war were constantly running in and out, and great convoys of merchantmen sailed under the protection of our cruisers; and the traffic between Spithead and Portsmouth resembled that of a much frequented road.

Peter Langley had been a boatswain in the king's service, and had settled down in his old age on a pension, and lived in a small cottage near the western extremity of Hayling Island. Here he could see what was going on at Spithead, and when he needed a talk with his old "chums" could get into his boat, which was lying hauled up on the sand, and with a good wind arrive in an hour at the Hard. He was sitting at present on a portion of a wreck thrown up by a very high tide on the sandy slope, when his meditations were disturbed by a light step behind him, and a lad in a sailor's dress, some fifteen years of age, with a bright honest face, came running down behind him.

"Hallo, dad!"

"Hallo, my boy! Bless me, who'd ha' thought o' seeing you!" and the old man clasped the boy in his arms in a way that showed the close relationship between the two. "I didn't expect you for another week."

"No! we've made a quick passage of it," the boy said; "fine wind all the way up, with a gale or two in the right quarter. We only arrived in the river on Monday, and as soon as we were fairly in dock I got leave to run down to see you."

"What were you in such a hurry for?" the old sailor said. "It's the duty of every hand to stop by the ship till she's cleared out."

"I have always stayed before till the crew were paid off; but no sooner had we cast anchor than one of the owners came on board, and told the captain that another cargo was ready, that the ship was to be unloaded with all speed, and to take in cargo and sail again in a fortnight at the utmost, as a fleet was on the point of sailing for the West Indies under a strong convoy."

"A fortnight! That's sharp work," the old sailor said. "And the goods will have to be bundled out and in again with double speed. I know what it will be. You will be going out with the paint all wet, and those lubbers the stevedores will rub it off as fast as it's put on. Well, a few days at sea will shake all down into its place. But how did you get leave?"

"I am rather a favorite with the first officer," the lad said. "The men who desired to leave were to be discharged at once and a fresh gang taken on board, so I asked him directly the news came round if I might have four days away. He agreed at once, and I came down by the night coach; and here I am for eight-and-forty hours."

"It's a short stay," the old sailor said, "after more than a year away, but we mustn't waste the time in regretting it. You've grown, Harry, and are getting on fast. In another couple of years you'll be fit to join a king's ship. I suppose you've got over your silly idea about sticking to the merchant service. It's all very well to learn your business there as a boy, and I grant that in some things a merchantman is a better school than a king's ship. They have fewer hands, and each man has to do more and to learn to think for himself. Still, after all, there's no place like a saucy frigate for excitement and happiness."

"I don't know, dad," the boy said. "I have been learning a little navigation. The first officer has been very kind to me, and I hope in the course of two or three years to pass and get a berth as a third mate. Still, I should like three or four years on board a man-of-war."

"I should think so," the old sailor said, "for a man ought to do his duty to his country."

"But there are plenty of men to do their duty to their country," the boy said.

"Not a bit of it!" the sailor exclaimed. "There's a great difficulty in finding hands for the navy. Everyone wants to throw their duty upon everyone else. They all hanker after the higher wages and loafing life on board a merchantman, and hate to keep themselves smart and clean as they must do in a king's ship. If I had my way, every tar should serve at least five years of his life on board a man-of-war. It is above all things essential, Harry, that you should do your duty."

"I am ready to do my duty, dad," the boy said, "when the time comes. I do it now to the best of my power, and I have in my pocket a letter from the first officer to you. He told you when you went down with me to see me off on my last voyage

that he would keep an eye upon me, and he has done so."

"That's right," the old man said. "As you say, Harry, a man may do his duty anywhere; still, for all that, it is part of his duty, if he be a sailor, to help his majesty, for a time at least, against his enemies. Look at me. Why, I served man and boy for nigh fifty years, and was in action one way and another over a hundred times, and here I am now with a snug little pension, and as comfortable as his gracious majesty himself. What can you want more than that?"

"I don't know that I can want more," the boy said, "in its way, at least; but there are other ways in the merchant service. I might command a ship by the time I am thirty, and be my own master instead of being a mere part of a machine. I have heard the balls flying too," he said, laughing.

"What! did you have a brush with Mounseer?" the old tar said, greatly interested.

"Yes; we had a bit of a fight with a large privateer off the coast of Spain. Fortunately the old bark carries a long eighteen, as well as her twelves, and when the Frenchman found that we could play at long bowls as well as himself he soon drew off, but not before we had drilled a few holes in his sails and knocked away a bit of his bulwarks."

"Were you hit, Harry?"

"Yes, two or three shots hulled her, but they did little damage beyond knocking away a few of the fittings and frightening the lady passengers. We had a strong crew, and a good many were sorry that the skipper did not hide his teeth and let the Frenchman come close before he opened fire. We should like to have towed him up the river with our flag over the tricolor."

"There, you see, Harry," the old sailor said, "you were just as ready to fight as if you had been on a man-of-war; and while in a sailing ship you only get a chance if one of these privateers happens to see you, in a king's ship you go looking about for an enemy, and when you see one the chances are he is bigger, instead of smaller, than yourself."

"Ah! well, dad, we shall never quite agree on it, I expect," the boy said; "but for all that, I do mean to serve for a few years in a man-of-war. I expect that we may have a chance of seeing some fighting in the West Indies. There are, they say, several French cruisers in that direction, and although we shall have a considerable convoy the Frenchmen generally have the legs of our ships. I

believe that some of the vessels of the convoy are taking out troops, and that we are going to have a slap at some of the French islands. Has there been any news here since I went?"

"Nothing beyond a few rows with the smugglers. The revenue officers have a busy time here. There's no such place for smuggling on the coast as between Portsmouth and Chichester. These creeks are just the places for smugglers, and there's so much traffic in the Channel that a solitary lugger does not attract the attention of the coastguard as it does where the sea's more empty. However, I don't trouble myself one way or the other about it. I may know a good deal of the smuggling, or I may not, but it's no business of mine. If it were my duty to lend a hand to the coast-guard, I should do it; but as it isn't, I have no ill-will to the smugglers, and am content enough to get my spirits cheap."

"But, dad, surely it's your duty to prevent the king being cheated?" Harry said with a smile.

"If the king himself were going to touch the money," the old sailor said sturdily, "I would lend a hand to see that he got it, but there's no saying where this money would have gone. Besides, if the spirits hadn't been run, they would not have been brought over here at all, so after all the revenue is none the worse for the smuggling."

The boy laughed. "You can cheat yourself, dad, when you like, but you know as well as I do that smuggling's dishonest, and that those who smuggle cheat the revenue."

"Ah, well!" the sailor said, "it may be so, but I don't clearly see that it's my duty to give information in the matter. If I did feel as it were going to be my duty, I should let all my neighbors know it, and take mighty good care that they didn't say anything within earshot of me, that I might feel called on to repeat. And now, let's go up to the cottage and see the old woman."

"I looked in there for a moment," Harry said, "as I passed. Mother looks as hale and hearty as she did when I left, and so do you, dad."

"Yes, we have nothing to complain of," the old man said. "I have been so thoroughly seasoned with salt water that it would take a long time for me to decay."

When they got up to the cottage they found that Jane Langley had got breakfast

prepared. Rashers of bacon were smoking on the table, and a large tankard of beer stood by, for in those days the use of tea had not become general in this country.

"Have you heard, mother," Peter Langley said, "that the boy is to leave us again in forty-eight hours?"

"No, indeed," the old woman said; "but this is hard news. I had hoped that you would be with us for a bit, my boy, for we're getting on fast in life, and may not be here when you return."

"Oh, mother! we will not think of such a thing as that," Harry said. "Father was just saying that he's so seasoned that even time cannot make much of such a tough morsel; and you seem as hearty as he is."

"Aye, boy," Peter said, "that be true, but when old oak does come down, he generally falls sudden. However, we won't make our first meal sad by talking of what might be."

Gayly during the meal they chatted over the incidents of Harry's voyage to India and back. It was his second trip. The lad had had a much better education than most boys in his rank of life at that time, the boatswain having placed him at the age of ten in charge of a schoolmaster at Portsmouth. When Harry had reached that age Peter had retired from the service, and had settled down at Hayling, but for two years longer he had kept Harry at school. Then he had apprenticed him to a firm of shipowners in London, and one of the officers under whom Peter had served had spoken to the heads of the firm, so that the boy was put in a ship commanded by a kind and considerate officer, and to whose charge he was specially recommended. Thus he had not forgotten what he had learned at school, as is too often the case with lads in his position. His skipper had seen that he not only kept up what he knew, but that he studied for an hour or so each day such subjects as would be useful to him in his career.

After breakfast the pair again went out onto the sandhills, Peter, as usual, carrying a huge telescope with him, with which he was in the habit of surveying every ship as she rounded the west of the island and came running in through the channel to Portsmouth. Most of the men-of-war he knew in an instant, and the others he could make a shrewd guess at. Generally when alone with Harry he was full of talk of the sea, of good advice as to the lad's future bearing, and of suggestions and hints as to the best course to be adopted in various emergencies. But to-day he appeared unusually thoughtful, and smoked his pipe, and looked

out in silence over the sea, scarcely even lifting his telescope to his eye.

"I've been thinking, Harry," he said at last, "that as you are going away again, and, as the old woman says, you may not find us both here when you come back, it is right that I should tell you a little more about yourself. I once told you, years ago, that you were not my son, and that I would give you more particulars some day."

The lad looked anxiously up at the old sailor. It was a matter which he had often thought over in his mind, for although he loved the honest tar and his good wife as much as he could have done his natural parents, still, since he had known that he was their adopted son only, he had naturally wondered much as to who his parents were, and what was their condition in life.

"I thought it as well," the old sailor began, "not to tell you this here yarn until you were getting on. Boys' heads get upset with a little breeze, especially if they have no ballast, and though it isn't likely now that you will ever get any clew as to your birth, and it will make no difference whether it was a duke or a ship's caulker who was your father, still it's right that you should know the facts, as no one can say when they start on a voyage in life what craft they may fall aboard before they've done. It may be, Harry, that as you intends to stick to the merchant service—saving, of course, that little time you mean to serve on board a king's ship—you may rise to be a skipper, and perhaps an owner. It may be, boy, that as a skipper you may fall in love with some taut craft sailing in your convoy. I've seen such things before now, and then the fact that you might be, for aught you know, the son of a marquis instead of being that of a boatswain, might score in your favor. Women have curious notions, and though, for my part, I can't see that it makes much difference where the keel of a craft was laid as long as it's sound and well-built, there are those who thinks different.

"Well, to tell you the yarn. It were nigh fourteen years ago that I was boatswain aboard the *Alert* frigate, as taut a craft as ever sailed. We had a smart captain and as good a crew as you'd want to see. We were cruising in the West Indies, and had for months been, off and on, in chase of a craft that had done much damage there. She carried a black flag, and her skipper was said to be the biggest villain that ever even commanded a pirate. Scarce a week passed but some ship was missing. It mattered little to him whether she sailed under the English, the French, or the Spanish flag; all was fish to him. Many and many a vessel sailed laden that never reached Europe. Sometimes a few charred timbers would be thrown up on the shore of the islands, showing that the ship to which they

belonged had been taken and burned before she had gone many days on her way. Often and often had the pirate been chased. She was bark-rigged, which was in itself a very unusual thing with pirates—indeed, I never knew of one before. But she had been, I believe, a merchantman captured by the pirate, and was such a beauty that he hoisted his flag on her, and handed his own schooner over to his mate. Somehow or other he had altered her ballast, and maybe lengthened her a bit, for those pirates have a rendezvous in some of the islands, where they are so strong that they can, if need be, build a ship of their own. Anyhow, she was the fastest ship of her class that ever was seen on those seas, and though our cruisers had over and over again chased her, she laughed at them, and would for a whole day keep just out of reach of their bow-chasers with half her sails set, while the cruisers were staggering under every rag they could put on their masts. Then when she was tired of that game she would hoist her full canvas and leave the king's vessel behind as if she was standing still. Once or twice she nearly got caught by cruisers coming up in different directions, but each time she managed to slip away without ever having a rope or stay started by a shot. We in the *Alert* had been on her footsteps a dozen times, but had had no more luck than the rest of them, and the mere name of the *Seamew* was sufficient to put any one of us into a passion. There wasn't one of the ship's company, from the captain down to the powder-monkey, who wouldn't have cheerfully given a year's pay to get alongside the *Seamew*. The *Alert* carried thirty-two guns, and our crew was stronger than usual in a vessel of that size, for there was a good deal of boat service, and it was considered that at any moment 'Yellow Jack' might lay a good many hands up—or down, as the case may be. Well, one night we were at anchor in Porto Rico, and the first lieutenant had strolled up with two of the middies to the top of a hill just before the sun went down. He had taken a glass with him. Just as the night was falling, a middy on our quarter-deck, who was looking at the shore with a glass, said to the second lieutenant, who was on watch:

"'Look, sir; here comes Mr. Jones with Keen and Hobart down that hill as if he were running a race. He isn't likely to be racing the middies. What can he be after?'

"'No,' the second lieutenant said, with a smile; 'Mr. Jones is hardly likely to be racing the middies'; which, indeed, was true enough, for the first lieutenant was as stiff as a ramrod—a good officer, but as strict a martinet as ever I sailed under.

"The second lieutenant took the glasses, and saw that, whatever the reason might be, it was as the midshipman had said. The news that Mr. Jones was coming down the hill, running as if Old Nick was after him, soon spread, and there was

quite an excitement on the quarter-deck as to what could be the matter.

"Ten minutes afterwards the gig was seen coming off to the ship, and it was evident, by the way the spray was flying and the oars bending, that the men were pulling as if for life or death. By this time the news had spread through the ship, and the captain himself was on the quarter-deck.

"'Give me the speaking-trumpet,' he said, and as the boat came within call he shouted, 'What's the matter, Mr. Jones? Is anything wrong?'

"'I've sighted,' the lieutenant said, standing up and making a trumpet with his two hands, 'two craft together round the point of the island some fifteen miles at sea. They're low down on the sea-line, but by their look I think that one is the *Seamew* and the other a merchantman she has captured.'

"Not a moment was lost. The captain gave the orders sharp and quick. The men, who were all standing about, were in a minute clustering on the yards, and never was canvas got on a ship faster than it was on the *Alert* that evening. Before the boat was fairly run up to the davits the anchor was at the cat-head, and the *Alert's* bows were pointing seawards. Five minutes afterwards, with every stitch of canvas set, we were running out of the harbor. The first lieutenant had taken the bearings pretty accurately, and as there was a brisk evening breeze blowing we spun along at a famous rate. By this time it was dark, and we had every hope that we might come upon the pirate before she had finished transferring the cargo of her prize under her own hatches. Not a light was shown, and as the moon was not up we hoped to get within gunshot before being seen, as the pirate, seeing no craft within sight before the sun went down, would not suspect that the *Alert* could be on his traces. We had to sail close to the wind till we were round the point of the island, and then to run nearly before it towards the spot where the vessels had been seen. In two hours from the time of starting we reckoned that we must be getting close to them if they still remained hove-to.

"All of a sudden, some two miles ahead, a point or two off the starboard bow, a great flame shot up. Every moment it grew and grew until we could see a large ship in flames, while another lay about a quarter of a mile distant. Three or four boats were pulling from the ship in flames towards the other, and as this was a bark we had no doubt that we had caught the *Seamew* at her villainous work. The pirate was lying between us and the burning merchantman, so that while her spars stood out clear and distinct against the glare of light we must have been invisible to her. The word was passed quickly forward for the men to go to

quarters. Every gun was double-shotted and run out, and then, all being ready for the fight, the men stripped to their waists, cutlasses and boarding-pikes ready to hand, we waited with breathless anxiety. We were already within range of our bow-chasers, and as yet there was no sign that the pirate was conscious of our presence. The boats were now near him, and no doubt those on board were looking rather in their direction than to windward. Rapidly the *Alert* tore through the water, the sail trimmers were all ready to take in her light canvas at a moment's notice. The officers clustered on the quarter-deck, and the men stood by their guns with every eye strained at the pirate. Nearer and nearer we came, and our hopes rose higher and higher. We were within a mile now, when suddenly a great movement was seen on board the pirate. The breeze was steady, and the sea quiet, and loud words of command could be heard shouted as a swarm of men ran up the rattlins. It was clear we were seen. There was no further need of concealment, and the captain gave word for the bow-chasers to open. Quickly as the pirate got her canvas spread—and I do think that sharp as we had been on board the *Alert*, the *Seamew* was even quicker in getting under canvas—we were scarce a quarter of a mile from her when she got fairly under way. Up to this moment not a gun had spoken save the two bow-chasers, as the captain would not yaw her until the last moment Then round she came and poured a broadside into the *Seamew*. Orders had been given to fire high, and every man was on his mettle. The maintop-mast of the *Seamew* fell, snapped at the cap; the peak halyards of the mizzen were shot away, and a number of holes were drilled through her sails. A loud cheer broke from our men. Fast as the *Seamew* was she was sufficiently crippled now to prevent her getting away, and at last she was to show whether she could fight as well as run, and I must say for her she did.

"She carried but twenty guns against our thirty-two, but they were of far heavier metal, and after ten minutes the *Alert* was as much bruised and battered as if she had been fighting a Frenchman of equal size for an hour. However, we had not been idle, and as our shot had been principally directed against the enemy's rigging, as our great object was to cripple her and so prevent her from getting away, she was by this time a mere wreck above, although her sides were scarcely touched; whereas two of our ports had been knocked into one, and some thirty of our men had been struck down either by shot or by splinters. Pouring a last broadside into her, the captain ordered the *Alert* to be brought alongside the *Seamew*. There was no need to call upon the boarders to be ready. Every man was prepared, and as the vessels came alongside our men rushed to the assault. But the crew of the *Seamew* were as eager to board us as we were them, and

upon the very bulwarks a desperate combat ensued. Strong as we were, the *Seamew* carried fully as many hands, and as they were fighting with halters round their necks it's little wonder that they fought so well.

"I've been in a good many fights, but never did I see one like that. Each man hacked, and hewed, and wielded his boarding-pike as if the whole fight depended upon his single exertions. Gradually the men whose places were at the guns on the starboard side left their places and joined in the fight, while those on the port side continued to pour a fire of grape into the enemy. It was near half an hour before we got a fair footing on the pirate's deck, and then steadily and gradually we fought our way forward. But it was another half-hour after the pirate captain and all his officers had been killed, and fully half the crew cut down, that the rest surrendered.

"On board the *Alert* we had fully one-third of our complement killed or wounded. Mr. Jones had been shot through the head; the second and third lieutenants were both badly wounded, and the captain himself had had his jaw broken by a pistol fired in his face. I got this scar on my cheek, which spoiled my beauty for the rest of my life, but as I had been over thirty years married to the old woman that made but little difference. Never were a crew more glorious than we were that night. Even the wounded felt that the victory had been cheaply purchased. We had captured the scourge of these seas, which had for ten years laughed at all the fastest cruisers of our navy, and we felt as proud as if we had captured a French first-rate.

"All hands were at work next day in repairing damages. I was up aloft seeing to the fitting of fresh gear to the topgallant-mast when I saw something floating at sea which took my attention. It seemed to me like a box, and an empty one, for it floated high on the water. Its lid seemed to be open, and I thought once or twice that I saw something inside. I slid down to the quarter-deck and reported what I had seen. The third lieutenant, who was doing duty with his arm in a sling, was not disposed to take the men off their work to lower a boat; but as I pointed out that the box might have belonged to the merchantman which had been burned overnight, and that it might afford some clew as to the name of the ship, he consented, and with four hands I was soon rowing towards the box.

"I don't know what I had expected to see, but I was never more surprised than when, getting there, I found that it was a trunk, and that in it, sitting up, was a child about eighteen months old. That was you, Harry. In the bottom of the trunk were a locket with a woman's likeness in it, a curious Indian bangle, and a few

other articles of jewelry. How you got there we never knew, but the supposition was that when the pirate was overhauling the merchantman, and her true nature was ascertained, some mother, knowing the fate that awaited all on board, had put you in an open trunk, had thrown in what ornaments she had about her, and had dropped the trunk overboard, in hopes that it might drift away and be picked up by some passing ship. It was a wild venture, with a thousand to one against its success, but the Lord had watched over it, and there you were as snug and comfortable as if you had been laying in your own cot, though, by the way, you were squalling as loud as a litter of kittens, and I expect had missed your breakfast considerably. You were sitting up, and it was lucky that you were backward of your age, for, although by your size we guessed you to be eighteen months, you were still unable to walk. If you had been as active as some chaps of that age you would have scrambled onto your feet, and no doubt capsized your boat.

"Well, we brought you on board, and there was a great talk as to what was to be done with you; but as I was your discoverer I claimed you as a lawful prize, and I thought you would amuse the old woman while I was at sea, and perhaps be a comfort to me when I got laid up in ordinary, as indeed you have been. So that's all I know, Harry. Every inquiry was made, but we never heard of any ship which exactly answered to the description. You see, beyond the fact that she was a square-rigged ship we could say but little about her. The ornaments found in the box seemed to show that she had come from the East Indies, but of course that could not be, for what would she be doing there? But at any rate the person who put you into the trunk, and who was no doubt your mother, had been to the East Indies, or at least had been given those ornaments by someone who had, for there was no doubt where they were turned out.

"Well, on board the *Alert* everyone got promoted. There was enough valuable property found on board the *Seamew* to give us a handsome sum all round, and it was my share of the prize-money that enabled me to buy this little cottage, and went no small way towards paying for your schooling and board. As no one else claimed you, and your friends could not be heard of, no one disputed my right to your guardianship; and so, my boy, here you have been cruising about the world as Harry Langley ever since."

The old sailor was silent, and Harry was some time before he spoke.

"Well, dad, you may not have been my real father, but no one could have been a better father to me than you have, and as it isn't likely now that I shall ever hit

upon a clew which could lead me to discover who I am, I shall continue to regard you as my real father. Still, as you say, it may perhaps in life be some advantage to me to be able to claim that I am the son of a marquis;" and he laughed merrily. They talked the matter over for some time, and then Harry changed the subject.

"Are all our friends well?" Harry asked.

"All except poor Tom Hardy. He slipped his cable six months since, and his wife, poor old soul, is gone to some friends near Winchester."

"Who's living in the cottage?"

"Black Jack has taken it."

"What! has he moved from his old place, then?"

"No, it is said that he's taken it for a Frenchy, who comes down off and on. They say he's in the smuggling business with Black Jack, and that he disposes of the silks and wines that are brought over in the *Lucy*, and that Jack trades over in France with his friends. The lieutenant at the coast-guard station has his eye upon him, and I believe that some day they will catch Black Jack as he runs his cargo; but he's a slippery customer. It would be a good day for Hayling if they could do so, for he and his crew do a lot of harm to the place. They look more like men who have belonged to the *Seamew* I was talking to you about than honest English fishermen."

"It is a curious thing, dad, that the Frenchman should be coming backwards and forwards here, and I wonder that the revenue people don't inquire into it."

"I don't suppose that they know very much about it, Harry. He comes off and on, generally arriving at night, and leaving a few hours afterwards. I hear about these things because everyone knows that old Peter Langley is not the chap to put his nose into other people's business. I don't like these goings on, I must say, and consider they will end badly. However, it is no business of ours, lad. We get our brandy cheap in Hayling—nowhere cheaper, I should say—and that, after all, is the matter that concerns us most. The wind's rising fast; I think we're in for a gale."

It was as Peter said. The clouds were rising fast behind the island, the waves were breaking with a short, sharp sound upon the beach, white heads were beginning to show themselves out at sea, the fishing craft were running in

towards Portsmouth under reefed sails, the men-of-war at Spithead could be seen sending down their topmasts, and everything betokened that it would be a nasty night.

"What time must you leave, Harry?"

"I shall go off at three to-morrow morning; shall cross the ferry, and catch the coach as it goes along at eight. I promised that I would be back on the following morning, and I would not fail in keeping my appointment, for as the captain has been so good I should be sorry that he should think that I had broken my word."

In the course of the day Harry went over to the village and saw many of his boy friends. Bill Simpkins, however, his great chum, happened to be away, but his parents said that he would be back at nine in the evening. He had gone over to Winchester to see a brother who was in a regiment quartered there. Accordingly, soon after nine o'clock Harry said to his father that he would just walk over to have a chat with his friend, and be back in an hour or so.

"Thou had best stop at home and go to bed at once," Jane Langley said; "if thou hast to start at three o'clock, it were time thou wert in bed now."

"I am accustomed to short nights," Harry said, laughing, "and I shall be able to sleep long to-morrow."

Putting on his hat, he nodded to the old couple, and went off at a run into the darkness.

The road was a wide one, and but little frequented, and the grass grew thick over a considerable portion of the sides, therefore as he ran along with a light, springy tread the sound of his footsteps was deadened. As he came along by the cottage of which he had been speaking to Peter Langley he heard the sound of voices within. Being curious to see what this mysterious Frenchman was like, Harry paused, lightly lifted the latch of the gate, and entered the little garden. He had intended to peep in at the window, and having satisfied his curiosity to be off; but just as he reached the door the latter opened suddenly, and Harry had only time to draw back behind the little porch before two men came out. In one Harry recognized by his voice the smuggler Black Jack; the other was by his halting English evidently the foreigner. They stopped for a moment, looking out into the night.

"I tell you," the smuggler said, "it's going to be a storm, and no mistake. The

Lucy is a tight craft, and has weathered gales when many a bigger ship has gone down. Still, I don't like running out into it without necessity."

"Necezity," said the Frenchman. "I sould have sought zat ze earning of five hundred pounds was as urgent a necezity as was wanted."

"Aye, the money will be handy enough," the smuggler said, "though one does put one's head into the noose to earn it. However, the sum is bigger than usual, and, as you say, the affair is important."

"Bah!" the Frenchman said, "what does it matter about ze nooze? It hasn't got over your zick neck or my zin one, and till it does we needn't trouble about it. I tell you zis is ze most important dispatch we have ever sent, and if it gets safe to hand zey cannot grudge us double pay. I have ridden from London wizout stopping, and have killed a horse worth fifty of your guineas. However, zat matters not. Zis letter should fetch us ze money to pay for a dozen horses and a dozen of your *Lucys*."

"All right!" the smuggler said; "in an hour we will be off. Letters like that in your pocket are best not kept on hand. You are sure that the *Chasse Marée* will put out to meet us in such weather as we are likely to have?"

"She will put out if a hurricane's blowing," the Frenchman said. "Zey know ze importance of ze news, which is expected, and which I am bringing zem. *Mon Dieu!* what sums have been paid to get ze news zat's in zis little dispatch!"

"Do you know what it is?" the smuggler said.

"Not for certain," the Frenchman replied, "but I believe it is ze orders zat are to be sent to ze British fleet, and zat zey are about to strike a great blow zomewhere."

"Well," the smuggler said, "I will go round and tell the boys. I warned them to be in readiness, and I will send them straight down to the beach. In a quarter of an hour I will return for you."

While this conversation had been going on Harry had been standing against the porch, the sides of which were filled with latticework over which a creeper grew. He had been frightened at the importance of the secret that he was hearing, and had been rapidly meditating in his mind how this all-portant information which was about to be conveyed to the enemy could be stopped. He had made up his mind that the instant the smuggler moved out he would make his way down to

the village, tell the tale to half a dozen men, and have the Frenchman seized. He saw at once that it would be difficult, for the smuggler and his gang were not men to be attacked with impunity, and the fishers of the village would hesitate in taking part in such a struggle merely on the information of a boy. However, Harry saw that it was the only chance.

In his anxiety to stand close to the lattice and so hide himself from the view of the two men who were standing on the little garden-path in front, he pressed too hard against it. The woodwork was rotten with age, and suddenly with a crash it gave way.

With an oath the smuggler turned round, and he and the Frenchman dashed to the spot, and in an instant had collared the lad. In a moment he was dragged into the room.

"We must cut his throat, mounseer," the smuggler said, with a terrible imprecation. "The scoundrel has heard what we've said, and our lives won't be worth a minute's purchase if he were to be let free. Stand by and I'll knock out his brains;" and he seized a heavy poker from the side of the hearth.

"No, no," the Frenchman said, "don't let us have blood. Zere might be inquiries, and zese sings will sometimes be found. Better take him to sea wis you in ze *Lucy*, and hand him over to ze *Chasse Marée*. Zey will take care zat he does not come back again."

"I will take care myself," the smuggler said. "I'm not going to risk my neck on the chance of his blabbing. It's better, as you say, to have no blood, but as soon as the *Lucy's* at sea overboard he goes."

"We can talk of it," the Frenchman said. "I'm wis you zat he must be silenced, but it may be better—my plan zan yours. Zis boy belongs, I suppose, to ze village?"

"Yes," the smuggler said, "I know him by sight. He's the son of an old man-of-war's man who lives half a mile away."

"Well, you see, some of your men might some day, if they quarreled wis you, or in zeir drink, drop some words which might lead to inquiries. Better put him on board ze *Chasse Marée*. I will see ze matter is settled."

Harry had spoken no word from the time he was grasped. He felt in an instant that his life was forfeited, and was surprised that he had not been instantly killed.

He had not raised his voice to hallo, for he knew that no cottagers were near, and was sure that an attempt to give the alarm would insure his instant death. To struggle would have been useless. He was unarmed, and although a stout lad, was but a child in the grasp of a powerful man like the smuggler. He saw, too, that on the instant the Frenchman had drawn a dagger from his breast, and though more quiet than the smuggler he felt by the tone of his voice that he was as determined as his colleague that his silence should be secured by death.

In another minute he was bound and thrown into a corner. The Frenchman then took his seat near him, assuring him in a low tone that he would at his first movement plant his dagger in his heart. The smuggler strolled off to summon his crew, and for a quarter of an hour silence reigned in the cottage.

"You are one fool," the Frenchman said at last, as if he had been thinking the matter over—"one meddlesome fool. Why you want to listen at people's doors and learn zeir secrets? I don't want to kill you, but what are we to do? You make us kill you. You push your own head into ze trap. Zat is ze way wis boys. Zey are forever meddling in affairs zat concern zem not, and zen we have ze trouble to kill zem. I would give a hundred pounds if zis had not happened; but what can I do? It is my life against yours, and alzough I am sorry to have to do it —*parbleu!* my life is of much more value zan zat of a fishing boy. Bah! you are one meddlesome fool."

So exasperated was the Frenchman at the trouble which the prying of this lad had brought upon him that he got up and angrily gave him a kick. A few minutes later the smuggler returned.

"The men have all gone down to the boat," he said briefly. "Come along, mounseer. Bring that tin case with you, and those pistols."

"Zere is no fear zat I forget ze tin case," the Frenchman said. "As to ze pistols—zey are not of much use. However, I will take zem;" and he thrust them into the pockets of his coat.

The smuggler stooped, picked up Harry, threw him onto a sail which he had laid on the ground, wrapped this round him, and then cast him over his shoulder.

"I'm not likely to meet anyone on my way to the boat," he said, "but should I do so I'm taking the mainsail of the *Lucy* down to her."

In another minute Harry heard the door slam, and then he felt himself being carried steadily along, his weight being as nothing to the smuggler. Not a word was spoken between the two men on their way down to the shore. Presently Harry felt by the deadened sound of the footsteps, and by the more uneven motion, that he was being carried over the sandy slopes down to the edge of the sea, and through the canvas he could hear the loud roar of the waves, which were now breaking violently.

Presently he was flung roughly down on the sands. A minute later he was lifted by the head and feet, and swung into a boat. Not a word was spoken as it was shoved off through the breakers, and after ten minutes' hard rowing he felt a shock, and knew that they were alongside of the *Lucy*. He was hauled up on deck. He heard a few words of command, and then felt the vessel was on her way. A minute or two later the covering was unloosed. His cords were cut, and the smuggler said to him, "You can't get away now, and may as well make yourself handy for the present. Give a haul on that rope."

The *Lucy* was, in fact, short-handed, two of the six men who composed her crew being absent. She was a lugger of some twenty-five tons' burden, built something like an ordinary fishing-boat, but longer and lower, and was, in fact, used for fishing when her crew were not engaged upon other adventures. She was a remarkably fast craft, and had more than once showed her heels with success when chased by the revenue cutters. She owed her immunity from capture,

however, chiefly to her appearance, as from her size and build she generally passed unsuspected as an innocent fisherman.

The storm increased in violence, and the little lugger, although a good sea-boat, had difficulty in making her way almost in the teeth of the gale. She was bound, Harry gained from a word or two dropped by the captain, for the mouth of the Loire, off which she was to be met by the *Chasse Marée*. Long before morning the coast of England was out of sight, and the lugger was struggling down Channel bravely holding her way in the sou'westerly gale.

"Will she be zere true to her time?" the Frenchman asked the smuggler.

"Aye, she will do it," Black Jack said, "if the wind holds as at present. Two o'clock in the morning is the time named, and if your people are as punctual as I shall be, the five hundred pounds will be gained. There's one thing—in such a gale as is blowing to-day none of our cruisers who may be off the coast are likely to trouble themselves about a boat like ours. They may wonder what we are doing at sea, but are scarcely likely to chase us."

Once or twice in the course of the day large vessels were seen in the distance, which Harry knew, by the cut of their sails, to be English cruisers. All were, however, lying-to under the smallest canvas, and Harry knew that any assistance from them was out of the question. Towards evening the gale moderated, but the sea was still very high. During the day Harry had turned over in his mind every possible plan by which he might destroy the tin case which contained, as he knew, such important documents. From what he had gathered he learned that the success of some great undertaking upon which the British fleet were about to embark would be marred if these papers were to find their way into the hands of the French authorities. His own life he regarded as absolutely forfeited, for he was sure that no sooner was he fairly on board the French *Chasse Marée* than he would, at the orders of the French spy, be thrown overboard, and that his life had been so preserved, not from any feeling of mercy, but in order that his death might be accomplished with less risk to those whose safety demanded it.

He was determined, if opportunity presented, to seize the little case and to leap overboard with it. The French spy never for one moment put it down. It was a small tin case, with a handle at the top, and some eight inches long by three inches wide, and the same deep. Sometimes the Frenchman put it in his pocket, beyond which it projected, but even then he took the precaution always to keep his hand upon it. During the day Harry was constantly employed in work on

board the lugger, hauling at ropes and acting as if he were one of the regular crew. He had shared in the meals with the men, but beyond a curse now and then not a word had been addressed to him by any on board. The night came on; the wind was still going down, but the sea was very heavy. From the occasional rifts in the clouds the stars could be seen shining brightly, and once or twice the moon broke through and spread a light over the angry sea. As time went on the smuggler became anxious, and kept a keen lookout ahead.

"It is past two," he exclaimed presently to the Frenchman, "and we are nearly off the mouth of the river. When the moon shone out just now I thought I caught sight of a vessel coming out, and I believe to windward an English cruiser is lying. However, I will get ready the lanterns."

The next time the moon came out a vessel was clearly seen. The smuggler raised the lantern above the bulwarks, held it there for half a minute, and then lowered it. This he repeated three times. A moment later a similar signal was made on the bows of the vessel.

"That's her," the smuggler exclaimed exultingly, "and the five hundred pounds is as good as in my pocket!"

As he spoke a bright flash was seen to windward.

"Confound it!" the smuggler said, "that cruiser has caught sight of the Frenchman. However, we shall be on board in plenty of time, and whether she gets safe to shore or not matters not much to me. I shall have done my part of the work, and you, mounseer, will give me the order for payment on London."

"It's done, my friend," the Frenchman said; "you've done your work well. Here's the order."

By this time the French craft was within a distance of a quarter of a mile, running down at a great pace under her reefed sails.

"It'll be no easy matter to get on board," the smuggler said, "for the sea is running tremendously. They will have to throw a rope, and you will have to catch it, mounseer, and jump overboard. I suppose your dispatch-box is water-tight?"

"And the boy?" the Frenchman asked.

"Let them throw another rope," the smuggler said, "and you can haul him on

board too. It won't make much matter whether I slip the noose round his body or his neck. The last will be the easiest plan perhaps, for then, if he happens not to be alive when you pull him out, it would be an accident; and even if anyone chooses to peach, they can't swear that it was purposely done."

Harry was standing near, and heard the words. He was close to the helm at the time, and watched with intense anxiety as the *Chasse Marée* ran rapidly down to them. It was clear that what had to be done must be done quickly, for another flash came up from the cruiser; and although in the din of the wind and the toss of the waves it could not be seen where her shot had fallen, the brightness of the flash showed that she had come up since the last shot was discharged. The *Chasse Marée* ran down, and as she came her captain stood upon the bulwarks and shouted at the top of his voice "Keep her steady, and as I run past I will throw a rope."

"Throw two," Black Jack shouted. "There are two to come on board."

The course taken by the *Chasse Marée* would bring her along at a distance of some ten yards from the side of the lugger. At the moment a squall came, and the lugger's head turned a little towards the approaching craft. When she was just upon them Harry saw that his one chance of escape had come. With a sudden rush he knocked the man at the helm from his footing, and put the tiller up hard. The lugger paid off instantly. Black Jack, with an oath, turned round and sprang at Harry. The lad leaped beneath his uplifted hand, sprang at the Frenchman, who was standing with his back to him, and snatching the tin box from his hand leaped overboard.

Momentary as had been his hold upon the tiller it had been sufficient. The vessel had paid off from the wind, and before the helmsman could regain his feet, or Black Jack could seize the tiller, she lay across the course of the *Chasse Marée*; and in another moment the French craft plunged down upon her, and with a crash the *Lucy* sank under her bows, and went down with all on board.

As Harry sank beneath the waves he heard a shout of dismay from those on board the *Lucy*. When he came up a minute later he saw the *Chasse Marée* plowing her way from him, but no sign of the *Lucy* was to be seen. Harry was a good swimmer, and fortunately the dispatch-box which he grasped was water-tight, and buttoning it within his jacket he felt that it kept his head easily above the water. He swam as well as he could away from the spot where the Lucy had disappeared, for he knew that if Black Jack or the Frenchman had escaped being

run down and should see him, his death was certain—not indeed that his chances were in any case good, but with the natural hopefulness of boyhood he clung to life, and resolved to make a fight for it as long as possible. Had it not been for the dispatch-box he must have speedily succumbed, for in so heavy a sea it was difficult in the extreme to swim. However, after a short time he turned his back to the wind, and suffered himself quietly to drift.

Hour passed after hour, and at last, to his intense delight, morning began to break. He saw on his right the low shores of the French coast, and looking round beheld seaward the British cruiser which had fired at the *Chasse Marée*. She was running quietly along the coast, and was evidently on guard at the mouth of the river. The sea had now gone down much, and the sun rose bright in an almost cloudless sky.

Invigorated by the sight of the vessel Harry at once swam towards her. She was farther out by a mile than the spot where he was swimming, and was some two miles astern of him. She was sailing but slowly, and he hoped that by the time she came along he would be able to get within a distance whence he might be seen. His fear was that she might run back before she reached the spot where she would be nearer to him.

With all his strength he swam steadily out, keeping his eye fixed steadily on the ship. Still she came onward, and was within half a mile when she was abreast of him. Then raising himself as high as he could from the water, he shouted at the top of his voice. Again and again he splashed with his hands to make as much spray and commotion as possible in order to attract attention. His heart almost stood still with joy as he heard an answering hail, and a moment later he saw the vessel come round into the wind, and lay there with her sails back. Then a boat was lowered, and five minutes later he was hauled in, his senses almost leaving him now that the time for exertion had passed. It was not until he had been lifted onto the deck of the *Viper*, and brandy had been poured down his throat, that he was able to speak. As soon as he was sufficiently recovered he was sent for to the captain's cabin.

"And who are you, boy, and whence do you come?" the captain asked. "Do you belong to the *Chasse Marée*, which we chased in the night?"

The officer spoke in French, supposing that Harry had fallen overboard from that craft.

"I am English, sir," Harry said, "and escaped from a lugger which was run down

by the French craft just as you were firing at her."

"I thought," exclaimed the captain, "that my eyes had not been wrong. I was sure that I saw a small fishing-boat close to the *Chasse Marée*. We lost sight of her when a cloud came over the moon, and thought we must have been mistaken. How came you there in an English fishing-boat?"

Harry modestly told the story, and produced the dispatch-box.

"This is important news indeed," the officer said, "and your conduct has been in every way most gallant. What is your name, lad?"

"Harry Langley," he replied. "I am an apprentice on board the Indiaman *Dundas Castle*, and was to have sailed this week in the convoy for the West Indies."

"You will not be able to do that now," the captain said. "This is most important. However, the steward will take charge of you, and I will talk to you again presently."

The steward was called, and was told to put Harry into a cot slung for him, and to give him a bowl of warm soup; and in a few minutes the lad was asleep.

The *Viper* shortly afterwards hauled her wind, and ran down to a consort who was keeping watch with her over the mouth of the Loire. The captain repaired on board the other ship, whose commander was his senior officer, and a consultation was held between them, after which the *Viper* was again got under sail and shaped her course for Portsmouth.

The wind was fair, and the next morning the *Viper* passed through the Needles, and soon afterwards anchored at Spithead. Here a large number of men-of-war and frigates were at anchor, and above two of the largest floated the flags of admirals. The *Viper* had made her signal as she came in sight of the fleet, and a reply was instantly run up from the masthead of the admiral's ship, directing the captain to come on board immediately the anchor was dropped. The moment this was done the captain's gig was lowered, and calling to Harry to follow him the captain took his seat in the stern-sheets, and rowed for the admiral's ship. Directing the lad to remain on deck, the captain at once entered the admiral's cabin, and a few minutes later the admiral's orderly summoned Harry to enter.

Admiral Sir Hyde Parker had evidently had a breakfast party, for a number of naval officers, including Admiral Nelson and most of the captains of the men-of-war, were seated round the table. The admiral turned to Harry.

"So you are the lad who has brought this box of dispatches?"

"Yes, sir," Harry said modestly.

"Tell us your story over again," the admiral said. "It's a strange one."

Harry again repeated the account of his adventures from the time of leaving his father's cottage. When he had done Admiral Nelson exclaimed:

"Very well, my lad. You could not have acted with more presence of mind had you been a captain of the fleet. You showed great bravery and did your duty nobly."

"There wasn't much bravery, sir," Harry said modestly, "for I knew that they were going to kill me anyhow, so that it made no difference. But I was determined, if possible, that the dispatches should be destroyed."

The admiral smiled. He was not accustomed to hear his dicta even so slightly questioned by a lad.

"You are an apprentice in the merchant service, Captain Skinner tells me," Sir Hyde Parker said, "and have been two years at sea."

"Yes, sir," Harry said.

"Would you like to be on the quarter-deck of one of his majesty's vessels, instead of that of a merchantman?"

Harry's eyes glistened at the question.

"I should indeed, sir," he said.

"Then you shall be, my boy," the admiral answered. "Have any of you gentlemen a vacancy in the midshipmen's berth? If not, I'll have him ranked as a supernumerary on board my ship."

"I am short of a midshipman, Sir Hyde," one of the captains said. "Poor little De Lisle fell overboard the night before last as we came round from Plymouth. He was about the size of this lad, and I'll arrange for him to have his togs. I like his look, and I should be glad to have him with me. I am sure he will be a credit to the service."

"That's settled, then," the admiral said. "You are now, sir," he said, turning to Harry again, "an officer in his majesty's service, and, as Captain Ball remarks, I

am sure you will do credit to the service. A lad who does his duty when death is staring him in the face, and without a hope that the act of devotion will ever be known or recognized, is sure to make a brave and worthy officer."

Harry's new captain wrote a few words on a piece of paper, and said to the admiral's servant, "Will you tell the midshipman of my gig to come here?"

A minute afterwards the midshipman entered. The captain gave him the slip of paper and said, "Take this young gentleman on board the ship with you at once, and present him to Mr. Francis, and with him give this note. He will be your shipmate in future. See that he's made comfortable."

The midshipman then beckoned to Harry to follow him, gazing askance, and with no slight astonishment in his face, at the appearance of his new messmate. Harry's attire, indeed, was not in accordance with the received ideas of that of a midshipman freshly joining a ship. His clothes were all so much shrunk that his ankles showed below his trousers, and his wrists below his coat-sleeves. Without a word the midshipman took his place in the stern-sheets, and beckoned Harry to sit beside him.

"Where have you sprung from?" he said shortly.

"I hail last from the admiral's cabin," Harry said with a laugh. "Before that from his majesty's ship *Viper*, and before that from the sea."

"You look like the sea," said the midshipman. "But what have you been doing? Have you served before?"

"Not in a king's ship," Harry said; "I have only just been appointed."

The midshipman was too surprised at Harry's appearance to question him further. He felt that there was some mystery in the affair, and that it would be better for him to wait until he saw the footing upon which Harry was placed. He had little doubt from the fact of his appointment being made under such circumstances that there must be something at once singular and noteworthy about it.

Upon reaching the ship Harry's new messmate at once led him up to the first lieutenant, and presented the captain's note. The lieutenant opened it and glanced at the contents. They were brief:

"Harry Langley has been appointed midshipman on board the *Cæsar*, and has been promoted by Sir Hyde Parker himself. He has performed a most gallant

action, and one of the greatest importance. Make him at home at once, and let him have poor De Lisle's kit. I will arrange about it."

The senior midshipman was at once sent for by Mr. Francis, and Harry handed over to him. The first lieutenant intimated to him briefly the contents of the captain's letter, telling the midshipman to make him as comfortable as possible.

Harry was led below to the cockpit, where his arrival was greeted with a storm of questions, as his appearance on the quarter-deck had naturally excited a great deal of observation. The midshipman who had come with him could, of course, furnish no information, and beyond the brief fact mentioned by the captain and repeated by the first lieutenant, his new conductor could say no more.

"Just wait," the midshipman said, "till he's got into his new clothes and looks presentable. He's in my charge, and I am to make him comfortable. As he has been put on the quarter-deck by Sir Hyde himself you may be sure he has done something out of the way."

In a few minutes Harry was rigged out in full midshipman's dress, and being a very good-looking and gentlemanly lad, his appearance favorably impressed his new messmates, who had at first been disposed to resent the intrusion among themselves of a youngster whose appearance was at least the reverse of reputable.

"Now," said one of the passed mates, "this meeting will resolve itself into a committee. Let everyone who can, sit down; and let those who can't, stand quiet. I am the president of the court. Now, prisoner at the bar," he said, "what is your name?"

"Harry Langley."

"And how came you here?"

"I was brought in the captain's gig."

"No equivocation, prisoner. I mean what brought you onto the quarter-deck?"

"I had the good luck," Harry said, "to prevent a very important dispatch falling into the hands of the French."

"The deuce you had!" the president said; "and how was that? That is to say," he said, "if there's no secret about it?"

"None at all," Harry said, "the matter was very simple;" and for the second time that morning he told the story.

When he had done there was a general exclamation of approval among those present, and the midshipmen crowded round him, shaking his hand, patting him on the back, and declaring that he was a trump.

"The prisoner is acquitted," the president said, "and is received as a worthy member of this noble body. Boy!"

"Yes, sir."

"Go to the purser and ask him to send in two bottles of rum for this honorable mess to drink the health of a new comrade."

Presently the boy returned.

"The purser says, sir, who is going to pay for the rum?"

There was a roar of laughter among the middies, for the master's mate, who had acted as president, was notoriously in the purser's books to the full amount of his credit. However, a midshipman, who happened that morning to have received a remittance, undertook to stand the liquor to the mess, and Harry's health was drunk with all honors.

"I suppose," one of the midshipmen said, "that the contents of the dispatch were with reference to the point to which we are all bound. I wonder where it can be?"

Here an animated discussion arose as to the various points against which the attack of the fleet, now rapidly assembling at Spithead, might be directed. So far no whisper of its probable course had been made public, and it was believed indeed that even the captains of the fleet were ignorant of its object.

Upon the following day Harry at once obtained leave to go on shore for twenty-four hours. Immediately he reached the Head he chartered a wherry, and was on the point of sailing when he heard a well-known voice among a group of sailors standing near him.

"I can't make head or tail of it," Peter Langley said. "My boy left me merely to go down to the village, and was to have returned the first thing in the morning to join his ship in London. Well, he never came back no more. What he did with himself, unless he sailed in a smuggling lugger which put out an hour or two

afterwards, I can't make out. The boy would never have shipped in that craft willingly, and I can see no reason why he should have gone otherwise. He didn't cross the ferry, and I can't help suspecting there was some foul play. When Black Jack returns I will have it out of him if I kill him for it. He has a strong party there, and I want half a dozen good tight hands to come with me to Hayling. He will probably be back in a couple of days, and if we tackle him directly he lands we may find out something about him. Who will go with me?"

Half a dozen voices exclaimed that they were willing to assist their old mate, when suddenly Harry stepped in among them, saying, "There's no occasion for that. I can tell them all about him."

Peter Langley stepped backwards in his astonishment, and stared open-mouthed at Harry.

"Dash my buttons!" he exclaimed; "why, if it isn't Harry himself, and in a midshipman's rig. What means this, my boy?"

"It means, father, that I am a midshipman on board his majesty's ship *Cæsar*."

Peter stood for a moment as one stupefied with astonishment, and then threw his tarpaulin high in the air with a shout of delight. It fell into the water, and the tide carried it away; Peter gave it no further thought, but, seizing Harry's hand, wrung it with enthusiastic delight.

"This is news indeed, my boy," he said. "To think of seeing you on the quarter-deck, and that so soon!"

It was some minutes before Harry could shake himself free from his friends, all of whom were old chums of the boatswain, and had known him in his childhood. Drawing Peter aside at last he took him to a quiet hotel, and there, to the intense astonishment of the veteran, he related to him the circumstances which had led to his elevation. The old sailor was alternately filled with wrath and admiration, and it was only the consideration that beyond doubt Black Jack and the Frenchman had both perished in the *Lucy* that restrained him from instantly rushing off to take vengeance upon them.

An hour later the pair took a wherry and sailed to Hayling, where the joy of Peter was rivaled by that of Harry's foster-mother. That evening Peter went out and so copiously ordered grog for all the seafaring population in honor of the event that the village was a scene of rejoicing and festivity such as was unknown

in its quiet annals.

The next day Harry rejoined his ship, and commenced his regular duties as a midshipman on board.

A week later the whole of the ships destined to take part in it had arrived. The "Blue Peter" was hoisted at the ship's head, and on a gun firing from the admiral's ship the anchors were weighed, and the fleet soon left Spithead behind them. It consisted of eighteen sail of the line, with a number of frigates and gunboats. The expedition was commanded by Sir Hyde Parker, with Admiral Nelson second in command. Contrary to the general expedition they sailed eastward instead of passing through the Solent, and, coasting along the south of England, passed through the Straits of Dover and stood out into the North Sea.

Harry had had an interview with his captain four days after he had joined. The latter told him that the dispatch-box which he had taken had been sent up to London, and that its contents proved to be of the highest importance, and that the Lords of the Admiralty had themselves written to the admiral expressing their extreme satisfaction at the capture, saying that the whole of their plans would have been disconcerted had the papers fallen into the hands of the enemy. They were pleased to express their strong approval of the conduct of Harry Langley, and gave their assurance that when the time came his claim for promotion should not be ignored.

"So, my lad," the captain said, "you may be sure that when you have passed your cadetship you will get your epaulette without loss of time, and if you are steady and well conducted you may look out for a brilliant position. It is not many lads who enter the navy under such favorable conditions. I should advise you to study hard in order to fit yourself for command when the time should come. From what you tell me your education has not been neglected, and I have no doubt you know as much as the majority of my midshipmen as to books. But books are not all. An officer in his majesty's service should be a gentleman. That you are that in manner, I am happy to see. But it is desirable also that an officer should be able in all society to hold his own in point of general knowledge with other gentlemen. Midshipmen, as a class, are too much given to shirking their studies, and to think that if an officer can handle and fight a ship it is all that is required. It may be all that is absolutely necessary, but you will find that the men who have most made their mark are all something more than rough sailors. I need say nothing to you as to the necessity of at all times and hazards doing your duty. That is a lesson that you have clearly already learned."

As the fleet still kept east, expectation rose higher and higher as to the object of the expedition. Some supposed that a dash was to be made on Holland. Others conceived that the object of the expedition must be one of the North German or Russian forts, and the latter were confirmed in their ideas when one fine morning the fleet were found to be entering the Sound. Instead of passing through, however, the fleet anchored here, out of gunshot of the forts of Copenhagen; and great was the astonishment of the officers and men alike of the fleet when it became known that an ultimatum had been sent on shore, and that the Danes (who had been regarded as a neutral power) were called upon at once to surrender their fleet to the English.

Upon the face of facts known to the world at large, this was indeed a most monstrous breach of justice and right. The Danes had taken no part in the great struggle which had been going on, and their sympathies were generally supposed to be with the English rather than the French. Thus, for a fleet to appear before the capital of Denmark, and to summon its king to surrender his fleet, appeared a high-handed act of brute force.

In fact, however, the English government had learned that negotiations had been proceeding between the Danish government and the French; and that a great scheme had been agreed upon, by which the Danes should join the French at a given moment, and the united fleets being augmented by ships of other powers, a sudden attack would be made upon England. Had this secret confederation not been interfered with, the position of England would have been seriously threatened. The fleet which the allies would have been able to put onto the scene would have greatly exceeded that which England could have mustered to defend her coast, and although peace nominally prevailed between England and Denmark the English ministry considered itself justified—and posterity has agreed in the verdict—in taking time by the forelock, and striking a blow before their seeming ally had time to throw off the mask and to join in the projected attack upon them.

It was the news of this secret resolve on the part of the cabinet that, having in some way been obtained by a heavy bribe from a subordinate in the admiralty, was being carried over in cipher to France in the *Lucy*, and had it reached its destination the Danes would have been warned in time, and the enterprise undertaken by Parker and Nelson would have been impossible, for the forts of Copenhagen, aided by the fleet in the harbor, were too strong to have been attacked had they been thoroughly prepared for the strife. As all these matters were unknown to the officers of the fleet, great was the astonishment when the

captains of the ships assembled in the admiral's cabin, and each received orders as to the position which his vessel was to take up, and the part it was to bear in the contest. This being settled, the captains returned to their respective ships.

Several days were spent in negotiations, but as the Danes finally refused compliance with the English demands the long-looked-for signal was hoisted and the fleet stood in through the Sound. It was a fine sight as the leading squadron, consisting of twelve line-of-battle ships and a number of frigates under Admiral Nelson, steered on through the Sound, followed at a short distance by Sir Hyde Parker with the rest of the fleet. The Danish forts on the Sound cannonaded them, but their fire was very ineffectual, and the fleet without replying steered on until they had attained the position intended for them. The Danes were prepared for action. Their fleet of thirteen men-of-war and a number of frigates, supported by floating batteries mounting seventy heavy guns, was moored in a line four miles long in front of the town, and was further supported by the forts on shore.

This great force was to be engaged by the squadron of Admiral Nelson alone, as that of Sir Hyde Parker remained outside menacing the formidable Crown Batteries and preventing these from adding their fire to that of the fleet and other shore batteries upon Nelson's squadron.

The *Cæsar*, the leading ship of the fleet, had been directed to sail right past the line of ships and to operate against a detached fort standing on a spit of land on the right flank of the Danish position. This fort mounted many guns, much superior to those of the Cæsar in weight, but the crew were in high spirits at the prospect of a fight, little as they understood the cause for which they were engaged. Stripping to the waist, they clustered round the guns, each officer at his post, Harry, with two other midshipmen, being upon the quarter-deck near the captain to carry orders from him as might be required to different parts of the ship. As the *Cæsar* passed along the line of ships to take up her position she was saluted by a storm of fire from the Danish vessels, to which she made no reply. She suffered, however, but little injury, although shot and shell whistled between the masts and struck the water on all sides of her, several striking the hull with a dull, crashing sound, while her sails were pierced with holes. Harry felt that he was rather pale, and was disgusted with himself at the feeling of discomfort which he experienced. But there is nothing that tries the nerves more than standing the fire of an enemy before it is time to set to work to reply. As soon as orders were given for the *Cæsar's* fire to be opened, directly the guns could be brought to bear, and the roar of her cannon answered those of the fort, the feeling

of uneasiness on Harry's part disappeared, and was succeeded by that of the excitement of battle. The din was prodigious. Along the whole line the British fleet was engaged, and the boom of the heavy guns of the ships, forts, and batteries, and the rattle of musketry from the tops of the ships, kept up a deep roar like that of incessant thunder.

"The water is very shallow, sir," the first lieutenant reported to the captain. "There are but two fathoms under her foot. The wind, too, is dropping so much that we have scarcely steerage-way, and the current is sweeping us along fast."

"Prepare to anchor, Mr. Francis," the captain said.

He had scarcely spoken, however, when there was a slight shivering sensation in the ship, and it was known by all on board that she was aground, and that on a falling tide. While the starboard guns were kept at work the men were called off from those of the port side, boats were lowered and hawsers were got out, and every effort was made to tow the ship off the shoal. The sailors pulled hard in spite of the storm of shot and shell which fell round them from the fort and the nearest Danish ships. But the *Cæsar* was fast. Calling the men on board again, the captain requested the first lieutenant to go aloft and see what was going on in other parts of the line. He returned with the news that four or five other ships were plainly aground, and that things appeared to be going badly. In the meantime the *Cæsar* was suffering heavily. The fire of the fort was well directed, and the gunners, working their pieces under comparative shelter, were able to pour their fire steadily into the *Cæsar*, while a floating battery and two frigates also kept up an incessant fire.

The number of killed and wounded was already large, but as only the guns of the starboard side could be worked the fire was kept up with unabated zeal, and the fort bore many signs of the accuracy of the fire. The parapet was in many places shot away and several of the guns put out of action. But the *Cæsar* was clearly overmatched, and the captain hastily wrote a note to the admiral, stating that the ship was aground and was altogether overmatched, and begging that another vessel might be dispatched to his aid, if one could be spared, in order to partially relieve her of the enemy's fire.

"Here, Mr. Langley, take the gig and row off to the flagship instantly."

Harry obeyed orders. Through the storm of shot and shell which was flying, striking up the water in all directions, he made his way to the admirals ship, which was lying nearly a mile away.

Admiral Nelson opened the note and read it through.

"Tell Captain Ball," he said, "that I haven't a ship to spare. Several are aground, and all hard pressed. He must do the best he can. Ah! you are the lad whom I saw in Sir Hyde Parker's cabin, are you not?"

"Yes, sir."

The Admiral nodded in token of approval, and Harry prepared to leave. Suddenly a thought struck him, and running into the captain's cabin he asked the steward for a small tablecloth.

"What on earth d'you want it for?" he exclaimed.

"Never mind. Give it me at once."

Seizing the tablecloth he ran down into the boat. As they returned towards the *Cæsar* they could see how hardly matters were going with her. One of her masts was down. Her sides were battered and torn, and several of her port-holes were knocked into one. Still her fire continued unabated, but it was clear that she could not much longer resist.

"Do you think she must haul down her flag?" Harry said to the coxswain of the boat.

"Aye, aye, sir," the coxswain said. "Wood and iron can't stand such a pounding as that much longer. Most captains would have hauled down the flag long before this, and even our skipper can't stand out much longer. There won't be a man alive to fight her."

"Will you do as I order?" Harry said.

"Aye, sir," the coxswain said in surprise, "I will do what you like;" for the story of the conduct by which Harry had gained his midshipman's promotion had been repeated through the ship, and the men were all proud of the lad who had behaved so pluckily.

"At least," Harry said, "it may do good, and it can't do harm. Where's the boat-hook? Fasten this tablecloth to it and pull for the fort."

The coxswain gave an exclamation of surprise, but did as Harry told him, and with the white flag flying the boat pulled straight towards the fort. As he was seen to do so the fire of the latter, which had been directed towards the boat,

ceased, although the duel between the battery and the *Cæsar* continued with unabated vigor. Harry steered direct to the steps on the sea face and mounted to the interior of the fort, where, on saying that he brought a message from the captain, he was at once conducted to the commandant.

"I am come, sir," Harry said, "from the captain to beg of you to surrender at once. Your guns have been nobly fought, but two more ships are coming down to engage with you, and the captain would fain save further effusion of life. You have done all that brave men could do, but the fight everywhere goes against you, and further resistance is vain. In a quarter of an hour a fire will be centered upon your guns that will mean annihilation, and the captain therefore begs you to spare the brave men under your orders from further sacrifice."

Taken by surprise by this sudden demand, which was fortunately at the moment backed up by two ships of the squadron which had hitherto taken no part in the action being seen sailing in, the governor, after a hasty consultation with his officers, resolved to surrender, and two minutes afterwards the Danish flag was hauled down in the fort and the white flag run up. One of the Danish officers was directed to return with Harry to the ship to notify the captain of the surrender of the fort.

The astonishment of Captain Ball at seeing the course of his boat suddenly altered, a white flag hoisted, and the gig proceeding direct to the fort, had been extreme, and he could only suppose that Harry had received some orders direct from the admiral and that a general cessation of hostilities was ordered. His surprise became astonishment when he saw the Danish flag disappear and the white flag hoisted in its place; and a shout of relief and exultation echoed from stem to stern of the *Cæsar*, for all had felt that the conflict was hopeless and that in a few minutes the *Cæsar* must strike her flag. All sorts of conjectures were rife as to the sudden and unexpected surrender of the fort, and expectation was at its highest when the gig was seen rowing out again with a Danish officer by the side of the midshipman.

On reaching the ship's side Harry ascended the ladder with the Danish officer, and advancing to Captain Ball said:

"This officer, sir, has, in compliance with the summons which I took to the commander of the fort in your name, come off to surrender."

The Danish officer advanced and handed his sword to the captain, saying:

"In the name of the commander of the fort I surrender."

The captain handed him back his sword, and ordering Harry to follow him at once entered his cabin. His astonishment was unbounded when the latter informed him what he had done, with many apologies for having taken the matter into his own hands.

"I saw," he said, "that the *Cæsar* was being knocked to pieces, and the coxswain told me that it was impossible she could much longer resist. I therefore thought that I could do no harm by calling upon the governor to surrender, and that it was possible that I might succeed, as you see that I have."

"You certainly have saved the *Cæsar*," Captain Ball said warmly, "and we are all indeed indebted to you. It was a piece of astounding impudence indeed for a midshipman to convey a message with which his captain had not charged him; but success in the present case a thousand times condones the offense. You have indeed done well, young sir, and I and the ship's company are vastly indebted to you. I will report the matter to the admiral."

A hundred men speedily took their places in the boats. Lieutenant Francis was sent ashore to take possession, and a few minutes later the British flag was flying upon the fort.

Ordering Harry to accompany him, Captain Ball at once took his place in his gig and rowed to the flagship. The battle was still raging, and to the practiced eye there was no doubt that the English fleet was suffering very severely. Captain Ball mounted the quarter-deck, and saluting the admiral reported that the fort with which he was engaged had struck, but that the *Cæsar* being aground was unable to render any assistance to the general attack.

"A good many of us are aground, Ball," Admiral Nelson said, "but I congratulate you on having caused the fort to haul down its colors. Several of the Danish men-of-war have struck, but we cannot take possession, and fresh boat-loads of men came off from shore, and their fire has reopened. Our position is an unpleasant one. Sir Hyde Parker has signaled to me to draw off, but so far I have paid no attention. I fear that we shall have to haul off and leave some four or five ships to the enemy."

"The fact is," Captain Ball said, "it wasn't I who made the fort haul down its flag, but this midshipman of mine."

"Ha!" said the admiral, glancing at Harry, who, at Captain Ball's order, had left the boat and was standing a short distance off. "How on earth did he do that?"

"When you told him, sir, that you could give us no aid he took upon himself, instead of returning to the ship, to row straight to the fort with one of your tablecloths fastened to the boat-hook, and summoned the commander in my name to surrender at once so as to save all further effusion of life, seeing that more ships were bearing down and that he had done all that a brave man could, and should now think of the lives of his troops."

"An impudent little rascal!" the admiral exclaimed. "Midshipmen were impudent enough in my days, but this boy beats everything. However, his idea was an excellent one, and, by Jupiter! I will adopt it myself. A man should never be above learning, and we are in such a sore strait that one catches at a straw."

So saying, the admiral, calling to his own captain, entered his cabin, and at once indited a letter to the King of Denmark begging him to surrender in order to save the blood of his subjects, expressing admiration at the way in which they had fought, and saying that they had done all that was possible to save honor, and might now surrender with a full consciousness of having done their duty. This missive was at once dispatched to shore, and the admiral awaited with anxiety its result.

A half-hour elapsed, the firing continuing with unabated fury.

"By Jove, Ball," the admiral suddenly exclaimed, "there's the white flag!" and a tremendous cheer broke along the whole of the British ships as the flag of truce waved over the principal fort of Copenhagen. Instantly the fire on both sides ceased. Boats passed between the shore and the flagship with the proposals for surrender and conditions. Nelson insisted that the Danish fleet should be surrendered, in so firm and decisive a tone as to convince the king that he had it in his power completely to destroy the town, and had only so far desisted from motives of humanity. At length, to the intense relief of the admiral and his principal officers, who knew how sore the strait was, and to the delight of the sailors, the negotiations were completed, and the victory of Copenhagen won.

"Where's that boy?" the admiral asked.

"That boy" was unfortunately no longer on the quarter-deck. One of the last shots fired from the Danish fleet had struck him above the knee, carrying away his leg. He had at once been carried down to the cockpit, and was attended to by

the surgeons of the flagship. In the excitement of an action men take but little heed of what is happening around them, and the fall of the young midshipman was unnoticed by his captain. Now, however, that the battle was over, Captain Ball looked round for his midshipman, and was filled with sorrow upon hearing what had happened. He hurried below to the wounded boy, whose leg had already been amputated, above the point at which the ball had severed it, by the surgeon.

"The white flag has been hoisted, my lad," he said, "and Copenhagen has been captured, and to you more than to anyone is this great victory due. I am sorry, indeed, that you should have been shot."

Harry smiled faintly.

"It is the fortune of war, sir. My career in the navy has not been a long one. It is but a fortnight since I got my commission, and now I am leaving it altogether."

"Leaving the navy, perhaps," the captain said cheerfully, "but not leaving life, I hope. I trust there's a long one before you; but Admiral Nelson will, I am sure, be as grieved as I am that the career of a young officer, who promised to rise to the highest honors of his profession and be a credit and glory to his country, has been cut short."

A short time later the admiral himself came down and shook hands with the boy, and thanked him for his services, and cheered him up by telling him that he would take care that his presence of mind and courage should be known.

For some days Harry lay between life and death, but by the time that the ship sailed into Portsmouth harbor the doctors had considerable hope that he would pull round. He was carried at once to the Naval Hospital, and a few hours later Peter Langley was by his bedside. His captain frequently came to see him, and upon one occasion came while his foster-father was sitting by his bedside.

"Ah, Peter, is it you?" he said. "Your son told me that you had served his majesty; but I didn't recognize the name as that of my old boatswain on board the *Cleopatra*."

"I am glad to see your honor," Peter said; "but I wish it had been on any other occasion. However, I think that the lad will not slip his wind this time; but he's fretting that his career on blue water is at an end."

"It is sad that it should be so," Captain Ball said; "but there are many men who

may live to a good age and will have done less for their country than this lad in the short time he was at sea. First, he prevented the dispatch, which would have warned the enemy of what was coming, from reaching them; and, in the second place, his sharpness and readiness saved no small portion of Admiral Nelson's fleet, and converted what threatened to be a defeat into a victory. You must be proud of your son, old salt."

"Has not the boy told you, sir, that he's not my son?" the boatswain said.

"No, indeed!" Captain Ball exclaimed, surprised; "on the contrary, he spoke of you as his father."

In a few words Peter Langley related the circumstances of the finding of Harry when a baby. Captain Ball was silent for a while, and then said, "Do you know, Peter, that I have been greatly struck by the resemblance of that lad to an old friend and school-fellow of mine, a Mr. Harper? They are as like as two peas—that is, he is exactly what my friend was at his age. My friend never was married; but I remember hearing a good many years ago—I should say some fifteen years ago, which would be about in accordance with this lad's age—that he had lost a sister at sea. The ship she was in was supposed to have foundered, and was never heard of again. She was the wife of the captain, and was taking her first voyage with him. Of course it may be a mere coincidence; still the likeness is so strong that it would be worth while making some inquiries. Have you anything by which the child can be identified?"

"There are some trinkets, sir, of Indian workmanship for the most part, and a locket. I will bring them over to your honor to-morrow if you will let me."

"Do so," Captain Ball said; "I am going up to London to-morrow, and shall see my friend. Don't speak to the boy about it, for it's a thousand to one against its being more than a coincidence. Still I hope sincerely for his sake that it may be so."

The next evening Captain Ball went up by coach to London, and the following day called upon his friend, who was a rich retired East-Indian director. He told the story as Peter had told it to him.

"The dates answer," he said; "and, curiously, although the ship was lost in the West Indies, it's likely enough that the ornaments of my poor sister would have been Indian, as I was in the habit of often sending her home things from Calcutta."

"I have them with me," Captain Ball said, and produced the little packet which Peter had given him.

The old gentleman glanced at the ornaments, and then, taking the locket, pressed the spring. He gave a cry as he saw the portrait within it, and exclaimed, "Yes, that's the likeness of my sister as she was when I last saw her! What an extraordinary discovery! Where is the lad of whom you have been speaking? for surely he is my nephew, the son of my sister Mary and Jack Peters."

Captain Ball then related the story of Harry's doings from the time he had known him, and the old gentleman was greatly moved at the tale of bravery. The very next day he went down to Portsmouth with Captain Ball, and Harry, to his astonishment, found himself claimed as nephew by the friend of his captain.

When Harry was well enough to be moved he went up to London with his uncle, and a fortnight later received an official letter directing him to attend at the Board of Admiralty.

Donning his midshipman uniform he proceeded thither in his uncle's carriage, and walked with crutches—for his wound was not as yet sufficiently healed to allow him to wear an artificial leg—to the board-room. Here were assembled the first lord and his colleagues. Admiral Nelson was also present, and at once greeted him kindly.

A seat was placed for him, and the first lord then addressed him. "Mr. Peters, Admiral Nelson has brought to our notice the clever stratagem by which, on your own initiation and without instruction, you obtained the surrender of the Danish fort, and saved the *Cæsar* at a time when she was aground and altogether overmatched. Admiral Nelson has also been good enough to say that it was the success which attended your action which suggested to him the course that he took which brought the battle to a happy termination. Thus we cannot but feel that the victory which has been won is in no small degree due to you. Moreover, we are mindful that it was your bravery and quickness which prevented the news of the intended sailing of the fleet from reaching the Continent, in which case the attack could not have been carried out. Under such extraordinary and exceptional circumstances we feel that an extraordinary and exceptional acknowledgment is due to you. We all feel very deep regret that the loss of your leg will render you unfit for active service at sea, and has deprived his majesty of the loss of so meritorious and most promising a young officer. We are about, therefore, to take a course altogether without precedent. You will be continued on the full-pay list

all your life, you will at once be promoted to the rank of lieutenant, three years hence to that of commander, and again in another three years to the rank of post captain. The board are glad to hear from Captain Ball that you are in good hands, and wish you every good fortune in life."

Harry was so overcome with pleasure that he could only stammer a word or two of thanks, and the first lord, his colleagues, and Admiral Nelson having warmly shaken hands with him, he was taken back to the carriage, still in a state of bewilderment at the honor which had been bestowed upon him.

There is little more to tell. Having no other relations his uncle adopted him as his heir, and the only further connection that Harry had with the sea was that when he was twenty-one he possessed the fastest and best-equipped yacht which sailed out of an English port. Later on he sat in Parliament, married, and to the end of his life declared that, after all, the luckiest point in his career was the cutting off of his leg by the last shot fired by the Danish batteries, for that, had this not happened, he should never have known who he was, would never have met the wife whom he dearly loved, and would have passed his life as a miserable bachelor. Peter Langley, when not at sea with Harry in his yacht, lived in a snug cottage at Southsea, and had never reason to the end of his life to regret the time when he sighted the floating box from the tops of the *Alert*.

SURLY JOE.

"You wonder why I am called Surly Joe, sir? No, as you say, I hope I don't deserve the title now; but I did once, and a name like that sticks to a man for life. Well, sir, the fish are not biting at present, and I don't mind if I tell you how I got it."

The speaker was a boatman, a man some fifty years old, broad and weather-beaten; he had but one arm. I had been spending a month's well-earned holiday at Scarborough, and had been making the most of it, sailing or fishing every day. Upon my first arrival I had gone out with the one-armed boatman, and as he was a cheery companion, and his boat, the *Grateful Mary*, was the best and fastest on the strand, I had stuck to him throughout. The boatmen at our watering-places soon learn when a visitor fixes upon a particular boat, and cease to importune him with offers of a sail; consequently it became an understood thing after a day or two that I was private property, and as soon as I was seen making my way across the wet, soppy sand, which is the one drawback to the pleasure of Scarborough, a shout would at once be raised for Surly Joe. The name seemed a singularly inappropriate one; but it was not until the very day before I was returning to town that I made any remark on the subject. By this time we had become great allies; for what with a bathe in the morning early, a sail before lunch, and a fishing expedition afterwards, I had almost lived on board the *Grateful Mary*. The day had been too clear and bright for fishing; the curly-headed, barefooted boy who assisted Joe had grown tired of watching us catch nothing, and had fallen asleep in the bow of the boat; and the motion, as the boat rose and fell gently on the swell, was so eminently provocative of sleep that I had nodded once or twice as I sat with my eyes fixed on my line. Then the happy idea had occurred to me to remark that I wondered why my companion was called by a nickname which seemed so singularly inappropriate. Joe's offer to tell me how he obtained it woke me at once. I refilled my pipe,—an invariable custom, I observe, with smokers when they are sitting down to listen to a story,—passed my pouch to Joe, who followed my example; and when we had "lighted up" Joe began:

"Well, sir, it's about twelve years ago. I was a strong, active chap then—not that I aint strong now, for I can shove a boat over the sandbar with any man on the shore—but I aint as active as I were. I warn't called Surly Joe then, and I had my

two arms like other men. My nickname then was Curly; 'cause, you see, my hair won't lay straight on my head, not when it gets as wet as seaweed. I owned my own boat, and the boys that worked with me warn't strangers, like Dick there, but they were my own flesh and blood. I was mighty proud of the two boys: fine straight tough-built lads was they, and as good-plucked uns as any on the shore. I had lost their mother ten years, maybe, before that, and I never thought of giving them another. One of 'em was about twelve, just the size of Dick there; the other was a year older. Full of tricks and mischief they was, but good boys, sir, and could handle the boat nigh as well as I could. There was one thing they couldn't do, sir—they couldn't swim. I used to tell 'em they ought to learn; but there, you see, I can't swim myself, and out of all the men and boys on this shore I don't suppose one in twenty on 'em can swim. Rum, aint it, sir? All their lives in the water or on the water, seeing all these visitors as comes here either swimming or learning to swim, and yet they won't try. They talks about instinks; I don't believe in instinks, else everybody who's got to pass his life on the water would learn to swim, instead of being just the boys as never does learn. That year, sir, I was doing well. There was a gentleman and his wife and darter used to use my boat regular; morning and afternoon they'd go out for a sail whenever it warn't too rough for the boat to put out. I don't think the old gentleman and lady cared so much for it; but they was just wrapped up in the girl, who was a pale, quiet sort o' girl, who had come down to the sea for her health. She was wonderful fond of the sea, and a deal o' good it did her; she warn't like the same creature after she had been here two months.

"It was a roughish sort of afternoon, with squalls from the east, but not too rough to go out: they was to go out at four o'clock, and they came down punctual; but the gentleman says, when he gets down:

"'We have just got a telegram, Joe, to say as a friend is coming down by the five-o'clock train, and we must be at the station to meet her, she being an invalid; but I don't want Mary to lose her sail, so will trust her with you.'

"'You'll take great care of her, Joe, and bring her back safe,' the mother says, half laughing like; but I could see she were a little anxious about lettin' her go alone, which had never happened before.

"'I'll take care of her, ma'am,' I says; 'you may take your oath I'll bring her back if I comes back myself.'

"'Good-by, mamma,' the girl says as she steps on the plank; 'don't you fidget: you

know you can trust Joe; and I'll be back at half-past six to dinner.'

"Well, sir, as we pushed off I felt somehow responsible like, and although I'd told the boys before that one reef would be enough, I made 'em put in another before I hoisted the sail. There warn't many boats out, for there was more sea on than most visitors care to face; but once fairly outside we went along through it splendid. When we got within a mile of Fley, I asks her if we should turn, or go on for a bit farther.

"'We shall go back as quick as we've come, shan't we, Joe?'

"'Just about the same, miss; the wind's straight on the shore.'

"'We haven't been out twenty minutes,' she says, looking at her watch; 'I'd rather go a bit farther.'

"Well, sir, we ran till we were off the brig. The wind was freshening, and the gusts coming down strong; it was backing round rather to the north too, and the sea was getting up.

"'I a'most think, miss, we'd better run into Filey,' I says; 'and you could go across by the coach.'

"'But there's no danger, is there, Joe?'

"'No, miss, there aint no danger; but we shall get a ducking before we get back; there's rain in that squall to windward.'

"'Oh, I don't care a bit for rain, Joe; and the coach won't get in till half-past seven, and mamma would be in a dreadful fright. Oh, I'd so much rather go on!'

"I did not say no more, but I put her about, and in another few minutes the squall was down upon us. The rain came against us as if it wanted to knock holes in the boat, and the wind just howled again. A sharper squall I don't know as ever I was put in. It was so black you couldn't have seen two boats' length. I eased off the sheet, and put the helm up; but something went wrong, and—I don't know rightly how it was, sir. I've thought it over hundreds and hundreds of times, and I can't reason it out in any sort of form. But the 'sponsibility of that young gal weighed on me, I expect, and I must somehow ha' lost my head—I don't know, I can't account for it; but there it was, and in less time than it takes me to tell you we were all in the water. Whatever I'd ha' been before, I was cool enough now. I threw one arm round the gal, as I felt her going, and with the other I caught hold

of the side of the boat. We was under water for a moment, and then I made shift to get hold of the rudder as she floated bottom upwards. The boys had stuck to her too, but they couldn't get hold of the keel; for you know how deep them boats are forward, drawing nigh a foot of water there more than they does astern. However, after a bit, they managed to get down to'rds the stern, and get a hand on the keel about halfway along. They couldn't come no nigher, because, as you know, the keel of them boats only runs halfway along. 'Hould on, lads!' I shouted; 'hould on for your lives! They'll have seen us from the cliff, and 'll have a lugger out here for us in no time.'

"I said so to cheer them up; but I knew in my heart that a lugger, to get out with that wind on, would have to run right into t'other side o' the bay before she could get room enough to weather the brig. The girl hadn't spoken a word since the squall struck us, except that she gave a little short cry as the boat went over; and when we came up she got her hands on the rudder, and held on there as well as she could with my help. The squall did not last five minutes; and when it cleared off I could look round and judge of our chances. They weren't good. There was a party of people on the cliff, and another on the brig, who were making their way out as far as they could on the brig, for it were about half-tide. They must have seen us go over as we went into the squall, for as we lifted I could see over the brig, and there was a man galloping on horseback along the sands to'rds Filey as hard as he could go. We were, maybe, a quarter of a mile off the brig, and I saw that we should drift down on it before a boat could beat out of the bay and get round to us. The sea was breaking on it, as it always does break if there's ever so little wind from the east, and the spray was flying up fifty feet in places where the waves hit the face of the rock. There aint a worse place on all the coast than this, running as it do nigh a mile out from the head, and bare at low water. The waves broke over the boat heavy, and I had as much as I could do to hold on by one hand to the rudder, which swung backwards and forwards with every wave. As to the boys, I knew they couldn't hold on if they couldn't get onto the bottom of the boat; so I shouted to 'em to try to climb up. But they couldn't do it, sir; they'd tried already, over and over again. It would ha' been easy enough in calm water; but with the boat rolling and such waves going over her, and knocking them back again when they'd half got up, it was too much for 'em. If I'd ha' been free I could have got 'em up by working round to the side opposite 'em, and given them a hand to haul them up; but as it was, with only one hand free, it took me all my time to hold on where I was. The girl saw it too, for she turned her face round to me, and spoke for the first time.

"'Let me go, please,' says she, 'and help your boys.'

"'I can't do it,' said I. 'I've got to hold you till we're both drowned together.'

"I spoke short and hard, sir; for, if you'll believe me, I was actually beginning to hate that gal. There was my own two boys a-struggling for their lives, and I couldn't lend a hand to help 'em, because I was hampered by that white-faced thing. She saw it in my face, for she gave a sort of little cry, and said:

"'Oh, do—do let me go!'

"I didn't answer a word, but held on all the harder. Presently Bill—he was my youngest boy—sang out:

"'Father, can't you get round and lend us a hand to get up? I can't hold on much longer.'

"'I can't help you, Bill,' says I. 'I've given my promise to take this young woman back, and I must keep my word. Her life's more precious to her father than yours is to me, no doubt, and she's got to be saved.'

"It was cruel of me, sir, and altogether unjust, and I knew it was when I said it, but I couldn't help it. I felt as if I had a devil in me. I was just mad with sorrow and hopelessness, and yet each word seemed to come as cold and hard from me as if it was frozen. For a moment she didn't move, and then, all of a sudden like, she gave a twist out of my arms and went straight down. I grabbed at her, and just got hold of her cloak and pulled her up again. She never moved after that, but just lay quiet on my arm as if she was dead. Her head was back, half in, half out of the water; and it was only by the tears that run down sometimes through her eyelids, and by a little sob in her breast, that I knew that she was sensible.

"Presently Bill says, 'Good-by, father. God bless you!' and then he let go his hold and went down. Five minutes afterwards, maybe, though it seemed a week to me, Jack did the same.

"There we was—the girl and I—alone.

"I think now, sir, looking back upon it, as I was mad then. I felt somehow as that the gal had drowned my two boys; and the devil kept whispering to me to beat her white face in, and then to go with her to the bottom. I should ha' done it too, but my promise kept me back. I had sworn she should get safe to shore if I could, and it seemed to me that included the promise that I would do my best for

us both to get there. I was getting weak now, and sometimes I seemed to wander, and my thoughts got mixed up, and I talked to the boys as if they could hear me. Once or twice my hold had slipped, and I had hard work enough to get hold again. I was sensible enough to know as it couldn't last much longer, and, talking as in my sleep, I had told the boys I would be with 'em in a minute or two, when a sound of shouting quite close roused me up sudden.

"Then I saw we had drifted close to the brig. Some men had climbed along, taking hold hand-in-hand when they passed across places where the sea was already breaking over, and bringing with them the rope which, as I afterwards heard, the man on horseback had brought back from Filey. It was a brave deed on their part, sir, for the tide was rising fast. When they saw I lifted my head and could hear them they shouted that they would throw me the rope, and that I must leave go of the boat, which would have smashed us to pieces, as I knew, if she had struck the rocks with us. Where they were standing the rock was full six feet above the sea; but a little farther it shelved down, and each wave ran three feet deep across the brig. They asked me could I swim; and when I shook my head, for I was too far gone to speak now, one of 'em jumped in with the end of the rope. He twisted it round the two of us, and shouted to his friends to pull. It was time, for we weren't much above a boat's length from the brig. Three of the chaps as had the rope run down to the low part of the rock and pulled together, while another two kept hold of the end of the rope and kept on the rock, so as to prevent us all being washed across the brig together. I don't remember much more about it. I let go the boat, sank down at once, as if the girl and I had been lead, felt a tug of the rope, and then, just as the water seemed choking me, a great smash, and I remember nothing else. When I came to my right senses again I was in a bed at Filey. I had had a bad knock on the head, and my right arm, which had been round the girl, was just splintered. They took it off that night. The first thing as they told me when I came round was that the gal was safe. I don't know whether I was glad or sorry to hear it. I was glad, because I had kept my promise and brought her back alive. I was sorry, because I hated her like pison. Why should she have been saved when my two boys was drowned? She was well-plucked, was that gal, for she had never quite lost her senses; and the moment she had got warm in bed with hot blankets, and suchlike she wanted to get dry clothes and to go straight on to Scarborough in a carriage. However, the doctor would not hear of it, and she wrote a little letter saying as she was all right; and a man galloped off with it on horseback, and got there just as they had got a carriage to the door to drive over to Filey to ask if there was any news there about the boat. They came over and slept there, and she went back with them

next day. I heard all this afterwards, for I was off my head, what with the blow I had got and one thing and another, before I had been there an hour. And I raved and cussed at the girl, they tell me, so that they wouldn't let her father in to see me.

"It was nigh a fortnight before I came to myself, to find my arm gone, and then I was another month before I was out of bed. They came over to Filey when I was sensible, and I hear they had got the best doctor over from Scarborough to see me, and paid everything for me till I was well, but I wouldn't see them when they came. I was quite as bitter against her as I had been when I was in the sea drowning; and I was so fierce when they talked of coming in that the doctor told them it would make me bad again if they came. So they went up to London, and when I could get about they sent me a letter, the gal herself and her father and mother, thanking me, I suppose; but I don't know, for I just tore 'em into pieces without reading them. Then a lawyer of the town here came to me and said he'd 'struction to buy me a new boat, and to buy a 'nuity for me. I told him his 'nuity couldn't bring my boys back again, and that I warn't going to take blood-money; and as to the boat, I'd knock a hole in her and sink her if she came. A year after that lawyer came to me again, and said he'd more 'structions; and I told him though I'd only one arm left I was man enough still to knock his head off his shoulders, and that I'd do it if he came to me with his 'structions or anything else.

"By this time I'd settled down to work on the shore, and had got the name of Surly Joe. Rightly enough, too. I had one of them planks with wheels that people use to get in and out of the boats; and as the boatmen on the shore was all good to me, being sorry for my loss, and so telling my story to people as went out with them, I got enough to live on comfortable, only there was nothing comfortable about me. I wouldn't speak a word, good or bad, to a soul for days together, unless it was to swear at anyone as tried to talk to me. I hated everyone, and myself wuss nor all. I was always cussing the rocks that didn't kill me, and wondering how many years I'd got to go on at this work before my turn came. Fortunately I'd never cared for drink; but sometimes I'd find my thoughts too hard for me, and I'd go and drink glass after glass till I tumbled under the table.

"At first my old mates tried to get me round, and made offers to me to take a share in their boats, or to make one in a fishing voyage; but I would not hear them, and in time they dropped off one by one, and left me to myself, and for six years there wasn't a surlier, wuss-conditioned, lonelier chap, not in all England, than I was. Well, sir, one day—it was just at the beginning of the season, but was too rough a day for sailing—I was a-sitting down on the steps of a machine doing nothing, just wondering and wondering why things was as they was, when two little gals cum up. One was, maybe, five, and the other a year younger. I didn't notice as they'd just cum away from the side of a lady and gentleman. I never did notice nothing that didn't just concern me; but I did see that they had a

nurse not far off. The biggest girl had great big eyes, dark and soft, and she looked up into my face, and held out a broken wooden spade and a bit of string, and says she, 'Sailor-man, please mend our spade.' I was struck all of a heap like; for though I had been mighty fond of little children in the old days, and was still always careful of lifting them into boats, my name and my black looks had been enough, and none of them had spoken to me for years. I felt quite strange like when that child spoke out to me, a'most like what I've read Robinson Crusoe, he as was wrecked on the island, felt when he saw the mark of a foot.

"I goes to hold out my hand, and then I draws it back, and says, gruff, 'Don't you see I aint got but one hand? Go to your nurse.'

"I expected to see her run right off; but she didn't, but stood as quiet as may be, with her eyes looking up into my face.

"'Nurse can't mend spade; break again when Nina digs. Nina will hold spade together, sailor-man tie it up strong.'

"I didn't answer at once; but I saw her lip quiver, and it was plain she had been crying just before; so I put my hand into my pocket and brings out a bit of string, for the stuff she'd got in her hand was of no account; and I says, in a strange sort of voice, as I hardly knew as my own, 'All right, missy, I'll tie it.'

"So she held the broken pieces together, and I ties 'em up with the aid of my hand and my teeth, and makes a strong, ship-shape job of it. I did it sitting on the bottom step, with a child standing on each side watching me. When I had done it the eldest took it, and felt it.

"'That is nice and strong,' she said; 'thank you. Annie, say thank you.'

"'T'ank you,' she said; and, with a little pat on my arm as a good-by, the little ones trotted away to a nurse sitting some little distance off.

"It may seem a little thing to you, sir, just a half-minute's talk to a child; but it warn't a little thing to me. It seemed regularly to upset me like; and I sat there thinking it over and wondering what was come over me, till an hour afterwards they went past me with their nurse; and the little things ran up to me and said, 'The spade's quite good now—good-by, sailor-man!' and went on again. So I shook it off and went to my work; for as the tide rose the wind dropped, and a few boats went out; and thinking what a fool I was, was gruffer and surlier than ever.

"Next morning I was lending a mate a hand painting a boat, when I saw the two children coming along the sand again, and I wondered to myself whether they would know me again, or think any more of me, and though I wanted them to do so I turned my back to the way they was coming, and went on with my painting. Somehow I felt wonderful glad when I heard their little feet come, pattering along the sand, and they sang out:

"'Good-morning, sailor-man!'

"'Good-morning!' says I, short-like, as if I didn't want no talk; and I goes on with my work without turning round.

"Just then one of the men at the boats hails me.

"'Joe, there's a party coming down.'

"'I'm busy,' shouts I back; 'shove the plank out yourself.'

"The children stopped quiet by me for a minute or two, watching me at work, and then the eldest says:

"'May we get inside the boat, Joe? we've never been inside a boat, and we do want to so much.'

"'My hand is all covered with paint,' says I, making a fight with myself against giving in.

"Then the little one said:

"'Oo stoop down, Joe; sissy and me take hold round oor neck; then oo stand up and we det in.'

"Well, sir, the touch of their little arms and those soft little faces against my cheeks as they got in fairly knocked me over, and it was some time before I could see what I was doing.

"Once in, they never stopped talking. They asked about everything, and I had to answer them; and as I got accustomed to it the words came freer, till I was talking away with them as if I had known 'em all my life. Once I asked them didn't their papa and mamma ever take 'em out for a sail, and they shook their heads and said mammy hated the sea, and said it was a cruel sea; by which I judged as she must have lost someone dear to her by it.

"Well, sir, I must cut a long story short. Those children used to come every day down to talk with me, and I got to look for it regular; and if it was a wet day and they couldn't come I'd be regular put out by it; and I got to getting apples and cakes in my pockets for them. After a fortnight I took to carrying them across the wet sands and putting them on the stand as I wheeled it out and back with people to the boats. I didn't do it till they'd asked their mother, and brought back the message that she knew she could trust them with me.

"All this time it never once struck me as strange that their nurse should sit with a baby-brother of theirs at a distance, and let them play with me by the hour together, without calling them away, for I wondered so much at myself, and to find myself telling stories to 'em just as I'd do with children who came out sailing with me in the old time, and in knowing as I was so wrapped up in 'em that I couldn't wonder at anything else. Natural like, I changed a good deal in other respects, and I got to give a good-morning to mates as I had scarce spoken with for years; and the moment the children turned down onto the sands there'd be sure to be a shout of 'There's your little ladies, Joe.'

"I don't know why my mates should ha' been pleased to see me coming round, for I had made myself onpleasant enough on the shore; but they'd made 'lowances for me, and they met me as kindly as if I'd cum back from a vyage. They did it just quiet like, and would just say, natural, 'Lend us a hand here, Joe, boy,' or 'Give us a shoulder over the bank, Joe,' and ask me what I thought o' the weather. It was a hard day for me when, after staying nigh two months, the little ladies came to say good-by. It warn't as bad as might have been, though, for they were going to stay with some friends near York, and were to come back again in a fortnight before they went back to London. But they kissed me, and cried, and gave me a pipe and a lot o' 'bacca, and I was to think of them whenever I smoked it, and they would be sure to think of me, for they loved me very much.

"That very afternoon, sir, as I was standing by my stage, Jim Saunders—he'd been mate with me before I owned a boat of my own—says out loud:

"'Lor', here's my party a-coming down, and I've jammed my hand so as I can't hoist a sail. Who'll come out and lend me a hand?'

"Well, everyone says they were busy, and couldn't come; but I believe now as the whole thing was a got-up plan to get me afloat again; and then Jim turns to me as if a sudden idea had struck him.

"'Come, Joe, lend us a hand for the sake o' old times; come along, old chap.'

"I was taken aback like, and could only say something about my stage; but half a dozen chaps volunteers to look after my stage, and afore I scarce knew what I was after I was bundled aboard the boat; and as the party got in I'm blest if I don't think as every chap on the shore runs in to help shove her off, and a score of hands was held out just to give me a shake as we started.

"I don't think I was much good on that vyage, for I went and sat up in the bow, with my back to the others, and my eyes fixed far ahead.

"I needn't tell you, sir, when I'd once broken the ice I went regular to the sea again, and handed my stage over to a poor fellow who had lost his craft and a leg the winter before.

"One day when I came in from a sail I saw two little figures upon the sands, and it needed no word from anyone to tell me my little ladies had come back. They jumped and clapped their hands when they saw me, and would have run across the water to meet me hadn't I shouted to them to wait just a minute till I should be with them.

"'We've been waiting a long time, Joe. Where have you been?'

"'I've been out sailing, missy.'

"'Joe, don't you know it's wicked to tell stories? You told us you should never go on sea any more.'

"'No more I didn't think I should, missy; and I don't suppose I ever should if I hadn't met you, though you won't understand that. However, I've give up the stage, and have taken to the sea again.'

"'I'm glad of that, Joe,' the eldest said, 'and mamma will be glad too.'

"'Why should mamma be glad, little one?' I asked.

"'Mamma will be glad,' she said positively. 'I know she will be glad when I tells her.'

"We'd sat down by this time, and I began to talk to them about their mamma. Mamma very good, very kind, very pretty, they both agreed; and then they went on telling me about their home in London, and their carriage and amusements. Presently they stopped, and I could see the eldest wanted to say something particular, for she puckered up her forehead as she always did when she was

very serious; and then she said, with her hands folded before her, almost as if she was saying a lesson:

"'Mamma very happy woman. She's got two little girls and baby-brother, and papa love her so much; but there's one thing keeps her from being quite happy.'

"'Is there, missy?' I asked. 'She ought to be happy with all these things. What is it?'

"'Mamma once had someone do a great thing for her. If it hadn't been for him Nina and sissy and little baby-brother could never have been born, and papa would never have had dear mamma to love; but it cost the man who did it a great deal—all he cared for; and now he won't let mamma and papa and us love him and help him; and it makes mamma unhappy when she thinks of it.'

"Here she had evidently finished what she had heard her mamma say, for her forehead got smooth again, and she began to fill my pockets with sand.

"'It don't sound likely, missy, that doesn't,' I says. 'It don't stand to reason nohow. You can't have understood what mamma said.'

"'Mamma said it over and over again, lots of time,' Nina said. 'Nina quite sure she said right.'

"We didn't say no more about it then, though after the children had gone I wondered to myself how a chap could go on so foolish as that. Well, sir, three days after come round from Whitby this very boat, the *Grateful Mary*. She was sent care of Joe Denton; and as that was me, I had her hauled up on the beach till I should hear whose she was. Several visitors that had been out with me had said, promiscuous like, that they should like to have a boat of their own, and I supposed they had bought her at Whitby and sent her down, though why they should have sent her to my care I couldn't quite see.

"Two days afterwards them children come down, and says:

"'We want you to go through the town to the other cliff with us, Joe.'

"'I can't,' says I. 'I'm all right talking to you here, missies; but I shouldn't be a credit to you in the town, and your pa wouldn't be best pleased if he was to see you walking about in the streets with a boatman.'

"'Papa said we might ask you, Joe.'

"I shook my head, and the little ladies ran off to their nurse, who come back with them and says:

"'Master told me to say he should be pertickler glad if you would go with the young ladies.'

"'Oh, very well,' I says; 'if their pa don't object, and they wishes it, I'd go with 'em anywheres. You wait here a quarter of an hour, while I goes and cleans myself, and I'll go with you.'

"When I comes back the youngest takes my hand, and the oldest holds by my jacket, and we goes up into High Street, and across to the other cliff. We goes along till we comes to a pretty little cottage looking over the sea. There was a garden in front, new planted with flowers.

"'Are you sure you are going right?' says I, when they turned in.

"They nodded, and ran up to the door and turned the handle.

"'Come in, Joe,' they said; and they dragged me into a parlor, where a lady and gentleman was sitting.

"The gentleman got up.

"'My little girls have spoken so much to me about you, Joe, that I feel that we know each other already.'

"'Yes, sir, surely,' says I.

"'Well, Joe, do you know that I owe you a great deal as to these little girls?'

"'Bless you, sir, it's I as owe a great deal to the little missies; they have made a changed man of me, they have; you ask anyone on the shore.'

"'I hope they have, Joe; for had they not got round your heart, and led you to your better self, I could never have done what I have done, for you would have rendered it useless.'

"I didn't say nothing, sir, for I could make neither head nor tail of what he was saying, and, I dessay, looked as surprised as might be. Then he takes a step forward, and he puts a hand on my shoulder, and says he:

"'Joe, have you never guessed who these little girls were?'

"I looked first at the children, and then at him, and then at the lady, who had a veil down, but was wiping her eyes underneath it. I was downright flummuxed.

"'I see you haven't,' the gentleman went on. 'Well, Joe, it is time you should know now. I owe to you all that is dear to me in this world, and our one unhappiness has been that you would not hear us, that you had lost everything and would not let us do anything to lighten your blow.'

"Still, sir, I couldn't make out what he meant, and began to think that I was mad, or that he was. Then the lady stood up and threw back her veil, and come up in front of me with the tears a-running down her face; and I fell back a step, and sits down suddenly in a chair, for, sure enough, it was that gal. Different to what I had seen her last, healthy-looking and well—older, in course; a woman now, and the mother of my little ladies.

"She stood before me, sir, with her hands out before her, pleading like.

"'Don't hate me any more, Joe. Let my children stand between us. I know what you have suffered, and, in all my happiness, the thought of your loneliness has been a trouble, as my husband will tell you. I so often thought of you—a broken, lonely man. I have talked to the children of you till they loved the man that saved their mother's life. I cannot give you what you have lost, Joe—no one can do that; but you may make us happy in making you comfortable. At least, if you cannot help hating me, let the love I know you bear my children weigh with you.'

"As she spoke the children were hanging on me; and when she stopped the little one said:

"'Oh, Joe, oo must be dood; oo mustn't hate mamma, and make her cry!'

"Well, sir, I know as I need tell you more about it. You can imagine how I quite broke down, like a great baby, and called myself every kind of name, saying only that I thought, and I a'most think so now, that I had been somehow mad from the moment the squall struck the *Kate* till the time I first met the little girls.

"When I thought o' that, and how I'd cut that poor gal to her drowning heart with my words, I could ha' knelt to her if she'd ha' let me. At last, when I was quiet, she explained that this cottage and its furniture and the *Grateful Mary* was all for me; and we'd a great fight over it, and I only gave in when at last she says that if I didn't do as she wanted she'd never come down to Scarborough with the little

ladies no more; but that if I 'greed they'd come down regular every year, and that the little girls should go out sailing with me regular in the *Grateful Mary*.

"Well, sir, there was no arguing against that, was there? So here I am; and next week I expect Miss Mary that was, with her husband, who's a Parliament man, as she was engaged to be married to at the time of the upset, and my little ladies, who is getting quite big girls too. And if you hadn't been going away I'd ha' sailed round the castle tower, and I'd ha' pointed out the cottage to you. Yes, sir, I see what you are going to ask. I found it lonely there; and I found the widow of a old mate of mine who seemed to think as how she could make me comfortable; and comfortable I am, sir—no words could say how comfortable I am; and do you know, sir, I'm blest if there aint a Joe up there at this identical time, only he's a very little one, and has got both arms. So you see, sir, I have got about as little right as has any chap in this mortial world to the name of Surly Joe."

A FISH-WIFE'S DREAM.

Falmouth is not a fashionable watering-place. Capitalists and speculative builders have somehow left it alone, and, except for its great hotel, standing in a position, as far as I know, unrivaled, there have been comparatively few additions to it in the last quarter of a century. Were I a yachtsman I should make Falmouth my headquarters: blow high, blow low, there are shelter and plenty of sailing room, while in fine weather there is a glorious coast along which to cruise—something very different from the flat shores from Southampton to Brighton. It is some six years since that I was lying in the harbor, having sailed round in a friend's yacht from Cowes. Upon the day after we had come in my friend went into Truro, and I landed, strolled up, and sat down on a bench high on the seaward face of the hill that shelters the inner harbor.

An old coastguardsman came along. I offered him tobacco, and in five minutes we were in full talk.

"I suppose those are the pilchard boats far out there?"

"Aye, that's the pilchard fleet."

"Do they do well generally?"

"Sometimes they do, sometimes they don't; it's an uncertain fish the pilchard, and it's a rough life is fishing on this coast. There aint a good harbor not this side of the Lizard; and if they're caught in a gale from the southeast it goes hard with them. With a southwester they can run back here."

"Were you ever a fisherman yourself?"

"Aye, I began life at it; I went a-fishing as a boy well-nigh fifty year back, but I got a sickener of it, and tramped to Plymouth and shipped in a frigate there, and served all my time in queen's ships."

"Did you get sick of fishing because of the hardships of the life, or from any particular circumstance?"

"I got wrecked on the Scillys. There was fifty boats lost that night, and scarce a hand was saved. I shouldn't have been saved myself if it had not been for a

dream of mother's."

"That's curious," I said. "Would you mind telling me about it?"

The old sailor did not speak for a minute or two; and then, after a sharp puff at his pipe, he told me the following story, of which I have but slightly altered the wording:

I lived with mother at Tregannock. It's a bit of a village now, as it was then. My father had been washed overboard and drowned two years before. I was his only son. The boat I sailed in was mother's, and four men and myself worked her in shares. I was twenty-one, or maybe twenty-two, years old then. It was one day early in October. We had had a bad season, and times were hard. We'd agreed to start at eight o'clock in the morning. I was up at five, and went down to the boats to see as everything was ready. When I got back mother had made breakfast; and when we sat down I saw that the old woman had been crying, and looked altogether queer like.

"My boy," says she, "I want you not to go out this trip."

"Not go out!" said I; "not go out, mother! Why? What's happened? Your share and mine didn't come to three pounds last month, and it would be a talk if I didn't go out in the *Jane*. Why, what is it?"

"My boy," says she, "I've had a dream as how you was drowned."

"Drowned!" said I; "I'm not going to be drowned, mother."

But what she said made me feel creepy like, for us Cornishmen goes a good deal on dreams and tokens; and sure enough mother had dreamed father was going to be drowned before he started on that last trip of his.

"That's not all, Will," she said. "I dreamed of you in bed, and a chap was leaning over you cutting your throat."

I didn't care much for going on with my breakfast after that; but in a minute or two I plucks up and says:

"Well, mother, you're wrong, anyhow; for if I be drowned no one has no call to cut my throat."

"I didn't see you downright drowned in my dream," she said. "You was in the sea—a terribly rough sea—at night, and the waves were breaking down on you."

"I can't help going, mother," I says, after a bit. "It's a fine day, and it's our boat. All the lads and girls in the village would laugh at me if I stayed at home."

"That's just what your father said; and he went to his death."

And my mother, as she says this, puts her apron over her head and began to cry again. I'd more than half a mind to give way; but you know what young chaps are. The thought of what the girls of the place would say about my being afraid to go was too much for me.

At last, when mother saw I was bent on going, she got up and said:

"Well, Will, if my prayers can't keep you back, will you do something else I ask you?"

"I will, mother," said I—"anything but stay back."

She went off without a word into her bedroom, and she came back with something in her arms.

"Look here, Will, I made this for your father, and he wouldn't have it; now I ask you to take it, and put it on if a storm comes on. You see, you can put it on under your dreadnaught coat, and no one will be any the wiser."

The thing she brought in was two flat Dutch spirit-bottles, sewn between two pieces of canvas. It had got strings sewed on for tying round the body, and put on as she did to show me how, one bottle each side of the chest, it lay pretty flat.

"Now, Will, these bottles will keep you up for hours. A gentleman who was staying in the village before you was born was talking about wrecks, and he said that a couple of empty bottles, well corked, would keep up a fair swimmer for hours. So I made it; but no words could get your father to try it, though he was willing enough to say that it would probably keep him afloat. You'll try it, won't you, Will?"

I didn't much like taking it, but I thought there wasn't much chance of a storm, and that if I put it under my coat and hid it away down in the forecastle, no one would see it; and so to please her I said I'd take it, and that if a bad storm came on I would slip it on.

"I will put a wineglass of brandy into one of the bottles," mother said. "It may be useful to you; who can say?"

I got the life-preserver, as you call it nowadays, on board without its being seen, and stowed it away in my locker. I felt glad now I'd got it, for mother's dream had made me feel uneasy; and on my way down old Dick Tremaine said to me:

"I don't like the look of the sky, lad."

"No!" says I; "why, it looks fine enough."

"Too fine, lad. I tell ye, boy, I don't like the look of it. I think we're going to have a bad blow."

I told the others what he had said; but they didn't heed much. Two boats had come in that morning with a fine catch, and after the bad time we'd been having it would have taken a lot to keep them in after that.

We thought no more about it after we had once started. The wind was light and puffy; but we had great luck, and were too busy to watch the weather. What wind there was, was northerly; but towards sunset it dropped suddenly, and as the sails flapped we looked round at the sky.

"I fear old Dick was right, lads," Jabez Harper, who was skipper, said, "and I wish we had taken more heed to his words. That's about as wild a sunset as may be; and look how that drift is nearing our boat."

Even I, who was the youngest of them, was old enough to read the signs of a storm—the heavy bank of dark clouds, the pale-yellow broken light, the horse-tails high up in the sky, and the small broken irregular masses of cloud that hurried across them. Instinctively we looked round towards the coast. It was fully fifteen miles away, and we were to the east of it. The great change in the appearance of the sky had taken place in the last half-hour; previous to that time there had been nothing which would have struck any but a man grown old upon the coast like Dick Tremaine.

"Reef the mainsail," Jabez said, "and the foresail too; take in the mizzen. Like enough it will come with a squall, and we'd best be as snug as may be. What do you say? shall we throw over some of the fish?"

It was a hard thing to agree to; but every minute the sky was changing. The scud was flying thicker and faster overhead, and the land was lost in a black cloud that seemed to touch the water.

"We needn't throw 'em all out," Jabez said; "if we get rid of half she'll be about in

her best trim; and she's as good a sea-boat as there is on the coast. Come, lads, don't look at it."

It was, as he said, no use looking at it, and in five minutes half our catch of the day was overboard. The *Jane* was a half-decked boat, yawl-rigged; she wasn't built in our parts, but had been brought round from somewhere east by a gentleman as a fishing-craft. He had used her for two years, and had got tired of the sport, and my father had bought her of him. She wasn't the sort of boat generally used about here, but we all liked her, and swore by her.

"It will be a tremendous blow for the first few minutes, I reckon," Jabez said after a while. "Lower down her sails altogether; get her head to it with a sweep. I'll take the helm; Harry, you stand ready to hoist the foresail a few feet; and, Will, you and John stand by the hoists of the mainsail. We must show enough to keep her laying-to as long as we can. You'd best get your coats out and put 'em on, and batten down the hatch."

I let the others go down first, and when they came up I went in, tied the life-belt round me, and put on my oilskin. I fetched out a bottle of hollands from my locker, and then came out and fastened the hatch.

"Here comes the first puff," Jabez said.

I stowed away the bottle among some ropes for our future use, and took hold of the throat halyard.

"Here it comes," Jabez said, as a white line appeared under the cloud of mist and darkness ahead, and then with a roar it was upon us.

I have been at sea, man and boy, for forty years, and I never remember in these latitudes such a squall as that. For a few minutes I could scarcely see or breathe. The spray flew in sheets over us, and the wind roared so that you wouldn't have heard a sixty-eight-pounder ten yards off. At first I thought we were going down bodily. It was lucky we had taken every stitch of canvas off her, for, as she spun round, the force of the wind against the masts and rigging all but capsized her. In five minutes the first burst was over, and we were running before it under our close-reefed foresail only. There was no occasion for us to stand by the halyards now, and we all gathered in the stern, and crouched down in the well. Although the sun had only gone down half an hour it was pitch-dark, except that the white foam round us gave a sort of dim light that made the sky look all the blacker. The sea got up in less time than it takes in telling, and we were soon obliged to

hoist the foresail a bit higher to prevent the waves from coming in over the stern. For three hours we tore on before the gale, and then it lulled almost as suddenly as it had come on. There had scarcely been a word spoken between us during this time. I was half asleep in spite of the showers of spray. Jim Hackers, who was always smoking, puffed away steadily; Jabez was steering still, and the others were quite quiet. With the sudden lull we were all on our feet.

"Is it all over, Jabez?" I asked.

"It's only begun," he said. "I scarce remember such a gale as this since I was a boy. Pass that bottle of yours round, Will; we shall be busy again directly. One of you take the helm; I'm stiff with the wet. We shall have it round from the south in a few minutes."

There was scarce a breath of wind now, and she rolled so I thought she would have turned turtle.

"Get out a sweep," Jabez said, "and bring her head round."

We had scarcely done so ere the first squall from behind struck us, and in five minutes we were running back as fast as we had come. The wind was at first south, but settled round to southeast. We got up a little more sail now, and made a shift to keep her to the west, for with this wind we should have been ashore long before morning if we had run straight before it. The sea had been heavy—it was tremendous now; and, light and seaworthy as the *Jane* was, we had to keep baling as the sea broke into her. Over and over again I thought that it was all over with us as the great waves towered above our stern, but they slipped under us as we went driving on at twelve or fourteen knots an hour. I stood up by the side of Jabez, and asked him what he thought of it.

"I can't keep her off the wind," he said; "we must run, and by midnight we shall be among the Scillys. Then it's a toss-up."

Jabez's calculations could not have been far out, for it was just midnight, as far as I could tell, when we saw a flash right ahead.

"That's a ship on one of the Scillys," Jabez said. "I wish I knew which it was."

He tried to bring her a little more up into the wind, but she nearly lay over onto her beam-ends, and Jabez let her go ahead again. We saw one more flash, and then a broad faint light. The ship was burning a blue light. She was not a mile ahead now, and we could see she was a large vessel. I had often been to the

Scillys before, and knew them as well as I did our coast, but I could not see the land. It was as Jabez had said—a toss-up. If we just missed one of them we might manage to bring up under its lee; but if we ran dead into one or other of them the *Jane* would break up like an egg-shell.

We were rapidly running down upon the wreck when the glare of a fire on shore shone up. It was a great blaze, and we could faintly see the land and a white cottage some hundred yards from the shore.

"I know it," Jabez shouted; "we are close to the end of the island; we may miss it yet. Hoist the mainsail a bit."

I leapt up with another to seize the halyards, when a great wave struck us; she gave a roll, and the next moment I was in the water.

After the first wild efforts I felt calm like. I knew the shore was but half a mile ahead, and that the wind would set me dead upon it. I loosened my tarpaulin coat and shook it off, and I found that with mother's belt I could keep easily enough afloat, though I was half drowned with the waves as they swept in from behind me. My mother's dream cheered me up, for, according to that, it did not seem as I was to be drowned, whatever was to come afterwards. I drifted past the wreck within a hundred yards or so. They were still burning blue lights; but the sea made a clean sweep over her, and I saw that in a very few minutes she would go to pieces. Many times as the seas broke over me I quite gave up hope of reaching shore; but I was a fair swimmer, and the bottles buoyed me up, and I struggled on.

I could see the fire on shore, but the surf that broke against the rocks showed a certain death if I made for it, and I tried hard to work to the left, where I could see no breaking surf. It seemed to me that the fire was built close to the end of the island. As I came close I found that this was so. I drifted past the point of land not fifty feet off, where the waves were sending their spray a hundred feet up; then I made a great struggle, and got in under the lee of the point. There was a little bay with a shelving shore, and here I made a shift to land. Five minutes to rest, and then I made my way towards the fire. There was no one there, and I went to the edge of the rocks. Here four or five men with ropes were standing, trying to secure some of the casks, chests, and wreckage from the ship. The surf was full of floating objects, but nothing could stand the shock of a crash against those rocks. The water was deep alongside, and the waves, as they struck, flew up in spray, which made standing almost impossible.

The men came round me when they saw me. There was no hearing one speak in the noise of the storm; so I made signs I had landed behind the point, and that if they came with their ropes to the point they might get something as it floated past. They went off, and I sat down by the fire, wrung my clothes as well as I could,—I thought nothing of the wet, for one is wet through half the time in a fishing-boat,—took off mother's belt, and found one of the bottles had broke as I got ashore; but luckily it was the one which was quite empty. I got the cork out of the other, and had a drink of brandy, and then felt pretty right again. I had good hopes the boat was all right, for she would get round the point easy, and Jabez would bring her up under the lee of the island. I thought I would go and see if I could help the others, and perhaps save someone drifting from the wreck; but I did not think there was very much chance, for she lay some little distance to the right, and I hardly thought a swimmer could keep off the shore.

Just as I was going to move I saw two of them coming back. They had a body between them, and they put it down a little distance from the fire. I was on the other side, and they had forgotten all about me. They stooped over the figure, and I could not see what they were doing. I got up and went over, and they gave a start when they saw me. "Is he alive?" says I. "Dunno," one of 'em growled; and I could see pretty well that if I had not been there it would have gone hard with the chap. He was a foreign, Jewish-looking fellow, and had around him one of the ship's life-buoys. There were lots of rings on his fingers, and he had a belt round his waist that looked pretty well stuffed out. I put my hand to his heart, and found he still breathed; and then I poured a few drops of brandy which remained in my bottle down his throat.

While I was doing this the two men had talked to each other aside. "He's alive, all right," says I. "That's a good job," one of 'em said; but I knew he didn't think so. "We'll carry him up to our cottage. You'll be all the better for a sleep; it must be past two o'clock by this time."

They took the chap up, and carried him to the cottage, and put him on a bed. He was moaning a little, and between us we undressed him and got him into bed. "I doubt he'll come round," I said.

"I don't believe he will. Will you have a drink of whisky?"

I was mighty glad to do so, and then, throwing off my wet clothes, I got into the other bed, for there were two in the room.

The men said they were going down again to see what they could get. They left

the whisky bottle on the table, and as soon as I was alone I jumped out and poured a little into the other chap's teeth, so as to give him as good a chance as I could; but I didn't much think he'd get round, and then I got into bed and shut my eyes. I was just going off, when, with a sudden jump, I sat straight up. Mother's dream came right across me. I was out of bed in a moment, and looked at the door. There was no bolt, so I put a couple of chairs against it. Then I took my clasp-knife out of my pocket and opened it. I gave the other chap a shake, but there was no sense in him, and I got into bed again. I thought to myself they would never risk a fight when they saw me armed and ready. But I soon found that I couldn't keep awake; so I got up and dressed in my wet clothes, and went to the door. I found it was fastened on the outside. I soon opened the window and got out, but before I did that I rolled up some clothes and put 'em in the bed, and made a sort of likeness of a man there. The poor fellow in bed was lying very still now, and I felt pretty sure that he would not live till morning. The candle was a fresh one when they had first lighted it, and I left it burning.

When I had got out I shut the window, and went away fifty yards or so, where I could hear them come back. Presently I heard some footsteps coming from the opposite direction. Then I heard a voice I knew say, "There is the fire; we shall soon know whether the poor lad has got ashore."

"Here am I, Jabez," I said. "Hush!" as he and the other were going to break into a shout of welcome, "hush! Some wreckers are coming up directly to cut my throat and that of another chap in that cottage."

In a word or two I told them all about it; and they agreed to wait with me and see the end of it. Jabez had brought the *Jane* up under the lee of the island, and, leaving two of the men on board, had come on shore in the cobble with the other to look for me, but with very faint hopes of finding me.

"You had best get hold of something to fight with, if you mean to take these fellows, Jabez."

"A good lump of rock is as good a weapon as another," Jabez said.

Our plan was soon arranged, and half an hour later we heard footsteps coming up from the shore again. Two men passed us, went into the cottage, and shut the door. Jabez and I made round to the window, where we could see in, and John Redpath stood at the door. He was to open it and rush in when he heard us shout. We stood a little back, but we could see well into the room. Presently we saw the door open very quietly, little by little. A hand came through and moved the

chairs, and then it opened wide. Then the two men entered. One, a big fellow, had a knife in his hand, and drew towards the bed, where, as it seemed, I was sleeping, with my head covered up by the clothes. The other had no knife in his hand, and came towards the other bed.

"Get ready, lad," Jabez said to me.

The big fellow raised his knife and plunged it down into the figure, throwing his weight onto it at the same moment, while the smaller man snatched the pillow from under the other's head and clapped it over his face, and threw his weight on it. As they did so we pushed the casement open and leapt in. I seized the smaller man, who was suffocating the other chap, and before he could draw his knife I had him on the ground and my knee on his chest. The big fellow had leapt up. He gave a howl of rage as Jabez rushed at him, and stood at bay with his knife. Jabez stopped, however, and threw his lump of rock, as big as a baby's head, right into his stomach. It just tumbled him over like a cannon-shot. John burst in through the door, and we had 'em both tied tightly before five minutes was over. Then we lit a big fire in the kitchen, and with warm clothes and some hot whisky and water we got the foreign chap pretty well round.

In the morning I went off and found a village on the other side of the island. I woke them up and told my story, and, to do 'em justice, though there were some who would have shielded the fellows we had caught, the best part were on our side. Some of 'em told me there had been suspicion upon these men, and that they bore a bad name. There was no magistrate in the island, and no one objected when I said we would take them across to Penzance and give them in charge there.

So we did; and they were tried and got transportation for life for attempting to murder the foreign chap, who, it turned out, was a Brazilian Jew, with diamonds. He offered us all sorts of presents, but we would have none; but that's neither here nor there.

So you see, master, mother's dream saved me from drowning and from having my throat cut. I gave up fishing after that and went into the queen's service. Mother sold the boat, and went to live with a sister of hers at Truro. The Scilly Islands have changed since those times, and you'll meet as much kindness there if you're wrecked as you will anywhere else; but they were a rough lot in those days, and I had a pretty close shave of it, hadn't I?

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