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With a yell of agony the two natives fell forward.—p. 252.

Frontispiece.
THE MOSQUITOES.

BY

THOS. FOSTER MORGAN, F.R.S.

LONDON:

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AND

MOSQUITOES.

BY

F. FRANKFORT MOORE,

AUTHOR OF "THE GREAT ORION," "WILL'S VOYAGES," ETC.

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FIRE-FLIES AND MOSQUITOES.

CHAPTER I.

THE INVALIDS.

"You are a pretty pair," said Dr. Hope, shaking his head and smiling in a broad way that was highly irritating to nervous persons; "you are indeed a pretty pair," he repeated, his smile becoming broader still as he looked first at his friend Mr. Cromer, who was lying back in one easy-chair, and then at Harold Cromer, who was lying back in another. Mr. Cromer's face was pale, but not nearly so pale as his son Harold's. Its expression was also much more varied than his son's. For an attack of gout tends to cause the expression upon a sufferer's face to vary—generally for the worse—while a chronic headache means simply a monotony of pain; it does not come in "twinges."
Mr. Cromer was suffering from an attack of gout, and Harold was a victim to chronic headache.

"I don't know what you mean by a pretty pair," said Mr. Cromer, rubbing, in the caressing way one smooths down a horse of uncertain temper, his right leg, that rested on a stool. "I don't know what you mean by a pretty pair, but from the glimpse I get of my features in the mirror there every now and again when an unusually desperate twinge catches me, I should say that I at least would not attract general attention on account of any charm of expression. As for poor Harold there—how do you feel now, Harold, my poor boy?"

Harold's mind seemed to have been wandering. He gave a little start, and turned his eyes slowly and inquiringly to his father, as if he had not caught the exact import of the question.

"How do you feel now, my dear boy?" his father repeated.

Harold smiled weakly, and shook his head sadly.

"Just the same, thank you," he replied in a low tone.

"Don't thank your father, you young jacka-napes," cried the doctor. "Thank yourself for whatever you are suffering; though upon my word I feel very much inclined to blame your father for encouraging you in your folly."

"You are not particularly good-natured to-day, Hope," said Mr. Cromer.

"I assure you I am perfectly good-natured,"
said Dr. Hope; “I only feel out of temper—slightly out of temper—that’s why I laugh. You may have noticed me laughing a moment ago, and you know me long enough to have become aware of the fact that when I am slightly out of temper I invariably laugh.”

“Yes, I believe I noticed that peculiarity; but it deceives no one,” remarked Mr. Cromer. “Your laugh is not a laugh—it’s infinitely more irritating. Now if—oh, Seringapatam—Pondicherry—Kurrachee!”

Each name seemed to do duty for an exclamation of pain. He writhed in his chair, and it was some time before he could resume the caressing of his limb.

“That puts me in mind of the old times,” said the doctor. “Your peculiar fancy for exclaiming against some of the most respectable towns in every Presidency, when you want to express the inmost emotions of your heart, has not left you, I see. It is by no means a bad plan, and I suppose it suits your purpose now as well as it used to do long ago.”

“Dr. Hope, Dr. Hope,” said Mr. Cromer, solemnly, “a few more twinges like that and a Gazetteer of the Indian Empire will be too small to be of any service to me—it will fall lamentably short in assisting me to express myself.”

“Poor old boy! You must be bad indeed! Why, except upon very special occasions, when some of the Lascars were unusually irritating, a
single Presidency was enough for your requirements. Your wrath was generally exhausted before you had worked your way round the coast to Singapore.

"Ah, that was long ago, Hope; that was before I knew the cares of an estate like this—before I had any responsibilities to speak of."

"Responsibilities!" cried the doctor. "And pray what responsibilities have you now?"

"They have made me a magistrate," said Mr. Cromer with unconscious mournfulness.

"And you call that an increase of responsibility?" said the doctor. "You think that you fully discharge all your obligations to your country when you have sentenced an unfortunate poacher to three months' imprisonment, or a passing tramp to a week or two for not being able to produce his family tree to prove his respectability at a moment's notice, and to account for the ducks which he has slung round him."

"That's not all, Hope," continued the other. "I am a member of a Board of Guardians."

"What! Oh, my dear friend, I had no idea it had come to this. Why, your responsibilities are overwhelming. They are enough to bring you to an untimely grave."

"You needn't sneer, Hope. You know I wasn't born to this sort of thing; people are not born members of Boards of Guardians."

"That's a sweeping assertion; however, let it pass. What does it lead to—the gout?"
"It leads to this, my friend; I cannot be expected to discharge all my responsibilities in this way in a moment, never having been accustomed to them until so recently."

"You mean to tell me that you have never been accustomed to responsibilities until recently?"

"Of course you know I had charge of a ship; but no responsibility beyond that—none whatever."

"Well, if I hadn't a stock of patience which is practically inexhaustible I would feel inclined to burst into a passion to hear you talk in this way," said Dr. Hope, rising from his seat, and flourishing his hands before he brought the tips of his fingers down upon the table, making the row of medicine-bottles and measuring-glasses shake.

He was standing in this attitude, leaning over the table, when a solemn-looking gentleman of middle age, and apparently of great respectability, which was undoubtedly increased by his dignified bearing and the swallow-tail coat that he wore, entered the room, and as he paused at the door for a few moments, turned a severe countenance upon the doctor. He seemed to be about to demand an explanation as to how the bottles had been made to shake. He looked severely at the doctor, and the doctor glared at him in return. The severe gentleman then moved in a most dignified, not to say haughty, way up the room and bent over the chair where Harold was sitting, and said a few words to the boy in a low tone.

"What's the matter, Matthews?" said Mr.
Cromer, addressing the dignified gentleman in the swallow-tail coat.

"Nothing, sir," he replied; "leastways, there should be nothing, sir. I was asking Mr. Harold how he felt himself, and was about to put the same respectful inquiry to you."

"Thank you, Matthews; you are very attentive. We are both just about the same," said Mr. Cromer.

"Yes, sir," said Matthews, with an unchanged countenance. His countenance gave one the idea that if Mr. Cromer had replied to the effect that he was at the point of death it would not have altered in the smallest degree. "Yes, sir," he repeated, and after a little pause he added, with only the least little glance toward the doctor, "You will allow me to remind you, sir, that Dr. Knott said that both you and Mr. Harold were to be kept free from every excitement—that complete quiet—they was his words, sir, spoke just like a regular prescription—was necessary for you both."

"Thank you, Matthews," said Mr. Cromer. "We are not likely to suffer through any excitement."

"Yes, sir," was the respectful reply; "but if I don't mistake I heard a noise here just now—a noise that surprised me, and I dessay surprised you, sir."

"What was it like?" said Dr. Hope.

"Sir?" said Matthews, with a coldness of tone that was positively arctic. "Sir, did you speak?"
"I did," said the doctor. "I asked you what the noise was like. Was it something like this?" Down came his fist upon the table, producing a clatter among the bottles and phials, and causing the dignified Matthews so far to forget his position as to jump—actually jump at least a yard from the table and proportionately high. "It was something like that, wasn't it? Perhaps not quite so loud, but of the same type. Thank you; you can go now. You are the butler, I suppose. Oh, it's no wonder there's sickness in this house! I myself begin to feel sick already."

"Sir," said Matthews, looking oppressively dignified when he had straightened his white tie; "sir, I know my place, and what's doo to my place, I hope, but I feel . . . ."

"Oh, Matthews, Matthews, please leave us," cried Mr. Cromer hastily, and with some degree of irritation. Middle-aged gentlemen suffering from an attack of gout have now and again been known to display some measure of irritation, even toward the members of their own household. "When we want you we will ring the bell," he added, in a more subdued tone.

"Very good, sir, very good," said the butler in his pompous way, as if he were condescending to accept an apology from some one who had offended him. He gave a little bow toward Mr. Cromer, and a stiff glance toward Dr. Hope, and then heaving a sigh, stalked from the room.
“Dignified to the last,” said the doctor, with a burst of laughter.

“Upon my word I begin to wish I hadn’t sent for you, Hope,” said Mr. Cromer with increasing irritation. “I fully expected that as you know something of my constitution you would be able to suggest some relief for me in this terrible attack of gout, but here you come and I actually feel worse—a great deal worse instead of better. Yes, I begin to think I was a fool. I forgot that you never had any manners to speak of.”

Once more Dr. Hope burst out laughing as he threw himself back in his chair.

“Manners!” he cried. “You talk of manners—you, who write to a man an imploring letter to come to you without a moment’s delay, and when he puts himself to a large amount of inconvenience to reach you, tell him angrily that you wish he hadn’t come! Don’t you think that the less that is said about manners the better it will be for yourself?”

“I beg your pardon, Hope, old friend,” said Mr. Cromer, pausing in the delicate operation of stroking his thigh, and stretching out his hand; “I beg your pardon. You know I did not mean all that I said. I only mean . . .”

“Now don’t make the attempt to tell me what your exact shade of meaning was,” said Dr. Hope. “You will meet with ignominious defeat if you do.”

“Then I won’t. Only give me leave to say
that you need not have been so hard, at least not quite so hard, upon poor Matthews. He is a most valuable man."

"Valuable fiddlesticks! Oh, my poor friend; I now sympathize with you most deeply. I fancied I knew all that you were suffering from, but I had no idea that such a man as that was at the head of the household. It's no wonder that you are knocked up. Such a butler would be enough to knock up any one, provided that some one did not knock him down beforehand. What is gout as an infliction compared with such a butler?"

"Please be serious, Hope."

"I will. Now listen to me."
CHAPTER II.

DR. HOPE TALKS SERIOUSLY.

"I WISH to talk to you seriously, Cromer," said Dr. Hope, once more settling himself in his chair. "I wish to talk to you very seriously indeed. You are all in a very bad way, as Morison, the old steward, used to say."

"Poor Morison!" said Mr. Cromer. "I recollect that was his diagnosis of every ill, from mal-de-mer to a broken limb."

"Yes, if he could see you now," resumed the doctor, "he would assert fearlessly, and without the likelihood of contradiction, that you are in a bad way."

"Do you mean the gout?" asked Mr. Cromer.

"Not the gout in particular," replied the doctor. "No, the gout is only an incident."

"Only an incident!" groaned Mr. Cromer. "Yes; but what an incident!"
"It merely represents in a concrete form the general badness of the way that you are in. The boy's headache is the same. It is another indication of the deplorable condition of things existing in this ancestral home of yours—a home which you were fortunate—I mean unfortunate enough to inherit five years ago. How much happier you were when in command of the good steamship Polynesia, four thousand tons register, and flying the flag of the P. and O. service!"

Mr. Cromer looked pensively at the phial from which he had just poured his afternoon dose of medicine.

"Perhaps I was happier, Hope," he said. "But you see the responsibilities of this life of mine. . . ."

"Responsibilities!" cried the doctor. "What are your responsibilities now compared with what they were when you were in command of the steamer? Do you remember the morning she ran upon a shoal in the Red Sea? How many lives were dependent upon your skill in handling the ship at that time? Over four hundred men and women were aboard, and no one knew whether or not the ship would become a wreck. What have you done with the presentation plate the passengers gave you on arriving safely in England? What have you done with the presentation chronometer the Company gave you?"

"It was a bad accident that," said Mr. Cromer, passing his hand through his hair. "I don't know
how I got the ship off. The stream anchor was no use, you will remember."

"It came home when it was hauled upon—I remember that well; and it was then that you got out all the empty casks and floated the bows off the shoal. Such a thing had never been done before at sea."

"And though the steamer was six hours fast not a plate was started." Mr. Cromer gave emphasis to his assertion by bringing his hand down upon the table with a force that made all the bottles jump as they had done under the doctor's fist before luncheon.

"Not a plate started," repeated Dr. Hope with renewed vehemence. "And what about that run from Singapore to Rangoon with the coal in the bunkers smouldering? Do you remember that, Cromer?"

"Remember it? I should think I am not likely to forget it," said Mr. Cromer. "But you were more to be thanked for our success than I was. You kept the passengers engaged in a constant series of diversions, so that they knew nothing of the danger."

"There is no commander living who would have accepted the situation as you did," said the doctor. "An ordinary man would have had out the boats within an hour of the first report of the coal being on fire. You accepted that responsibility without hesitation, and the three hundred human beings aboard—to say nothing of the Lascars—knew that
they owed their safety to your coolness. Yes, you had to face some responsibility in those days. You cannot have forgotten the time when, though our propeller was gone, you rescued the passengers and crew of that full-rigged ship which had been dismasted by a typhoon in the Bay of Bengal."

"I have often wondered since if it was not foolhardy on my part to run the risk I did in that case," said Mr. Cromer.

"So have I," said the doctor; "but I have come to the conclusion that you were right to accept the responsibility. Ah! those were the days when you had work to do, and when you did it like a man. There was no talk of gout in those days, Cromer."

"It seems strange, doesn't it?"

"What's strange in the matter, will you tell me? You had too much to do to have time to think of gout or any other complaint. It's only when you take up such a life as you are now leading that you fall naturally into its complaints. The fact is, you are suffering from a lack of responsibility, Cromer."

"Why, have I not told you of the number of affairs that occupy me now, to say nothing of the depression in agriculture which prevents my getting in more than two-thirds of my rents?"

"You made out a formidable list, to be sure; but you must think precious little of me if you fancy that such a list would take me in. I have no doubt that you discharge most ably all the
duties which fall to you now. You are not the man to shirk duty; but I tell you this—I see clearly that your heart is not in your work; your heart is not in this life that you are now leading. Every day you stand at that window and long for a return of the good old days aboard the Polynesia."

Mr. Cromer made no answer to this accusation of the doctor's, he remained looking pensively into the fire.

"Yes," continued the doctor, "I have come in contact with cases like yours more than once. I don't mean to say that you are on a level with the tallow-chandler in the story, who retired from business with a large fortune, but after being absent for some months, implored the man to whom he had sold his business to allow him to come back on the days when the boiling-down was taking place. No, I don't say that you are on a level with that man."

"Thank you," muttered Mr. Cromer.

"But I do say that the transition from the life of activity such as you were leading to the life of ease and luxury which you now lead was too sudden."

"What would you have had me do? Should I have left the Polynesia and have taken command of a coasting schooner for a year or two in order to break myself gently off a seafaring life?"

"Not quite. In fact I don't exactly know what you should have done to perform that operation of
breaking you gently off the life you led, unless you had made up your mind to enter Parliament, and give the country the benefit of your acquaintance with maritime matters in bringing about some of the necessary reforms. But I know that you have done wrong in settling down here and allowing every one in the house to worry you into the condition I now find you occupying. Yes, that butler of yours is not, I am sure, the only one who worries you every day."

"Well, well, I suppose I had better admit all that you have said. But my admission will not mend matters. It will not lessens the twinges I have every five minutes from this gout, nor will it take away from my poor boy's headache."

"You are wrong there," cried the doctor; "I give you my word it will do both. You have, as I told you, no right to the gout."

"I would willingly resign my claim in favour of some one else," said Mr. Cromer.

"And your boy has no right to have a headache at his age. What business has a boy of seventeen to give up tennis and cricket, to say nothing of boating and football, and devote himself altogether to study?"

"Harold has always been studiously inclined," said Mr. Cromer. "When Mr. Wingfield kindly offered to prepare him for Oxford, I considered that the chance was too good to be neglected. I fear, however, that between them they have overdone it."
"I agree with you," said the doctor; "and the consequence of having overdone it is, that instead of being ready for Oxford six months sooner than he should be under ordinary circumstances, he will now be perhaps a year behind."

"I hope you don't think so," came the voice of Harold from the sofa. Up to this point he had been as silent as if he were asleep; but it appeared that the doctor's last remark had roused him.

"What, you are still in the flesh?" cried Dr. Hope. "I was beginning to fancy that you had given up the struggle for existence altogether. Yes, I do think that unless you wish to be a burden to yourself and every one else for the rest of your life—unless you wish to graduate as an insufferable prig—unless you wish to become the worst of all prigs, a prig with a chronic headache, you will have to quit your books as the poet exhorted Father Matthew to do long ago, for fear he should be growing double. You have no wish to grow double, I'm sure."

"Mr. Wingfield said he was sure I should be quite well and able to return to him after I had had a week's holiday at home," said Harold.

"Then he knew nothing about what was the matter with you," said the doctor. "I mean to prescribe six months' holiday—no, a year's holiday for both you and your father. You have both allowed your systems to run down, and I mean to wind them up again for you. Take Macbeth's advice and cast physic to the dogs. All these
bottles and phials and measuring-glasses will do you no good in the world. You may work your way right through the medicine-chest, entering at one end and going out by the other, you will not mend your condition unless you take my advice, and make up your mind to change your way of life from the very foundation."

"What, give up all idea of going to Oxford this term?" said Harold, in a very different voice to the languid one in which he had spoken ever since the doctor had made his first appearance.

"Yes, you must do that, my boy, if you mean to live long enough to get a degree. What good are all the honours you may win by hard study if you injure your health endeavouring to acquire them?"

"In plain words, what do you advise us to do?" asked Mr. Cromer.

"In plain words, I say distinctly, and with all the emphasis at my command, that if you don't leave this place and travel for at least six months you will run a good chance of becoming confirmed invalids. There's my prescription for you. And now you must pardon me if I do a little travelling on my own account. I'm beginning to feel a strange depression through staying so long in a room with so many medicine-bottles—the sight of that grisly phalanx of phials makes me ill, though I am a doctor. Between ourselves, most medicine is nothing but the shrewd device of the profession to make the incompetence of doctors
less apparent. I'm off on a voyage of discovery, and as you needn't expect to see me for a couple of hours, you will have plenty of time to discuss my suggestion, or rather my prescription."

"Dinner at eight," said Mr. Cromer as Dr. Hope waved his hand on leaving the library.

"I'll not be late; you may depend upon me so far."

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CHAPTER III.

THE DOCTOR'S RECOLLECTIONS.

Dr. Hope picked up the soft hat which he habitually wore when not professionally engaged, and strode down the broad avenue leading from the road to Cromer Court.

The early spring was making everything overhead and underfoot brightly green. The terraces of the garden were smooth and brilliant, and from the tender green of the grass around the roots of the giant elms in the park through which the avenue led, the yellow gold of the daffodils appeared. The borders of the avenue were lined with purple and yellow crocus. The sunny air was laden with the scents of the budding trees and with the faint perfume of spring violets. As the doctor paused for a moment when still in view of the Court, the shadow of a white cloud ran across the meadow, and he traced its progress on the
green until it was lost among the darker shadows of the elms where the rooks were cawing.

"Dear me! dear me!" said the doctor, striking the ferrule of his stick vehemently on the ground. "Everything is very lovely here, to be sure; and yet that pair, who should be enjoying all their possessions and tasting the fresh charm of this bright spring afternoon, are immured in that dungeon over there." He pointed his stick to where the gilt weathercock was glittering on the top of the central gable of Cromer Court. "A dungeon it is, sure enough, whether it's called a castle, or a court, or a palace."

Having made this declaration, he strode on to the entrance-gate, his mind full of the good old days when he and Mr. Cromer had sailed together in the fine steamer Polynesia, of the Peninsular and Oriental line.

Only five years had passed since the steam-ship Polynesia had been lying waiting with steam up off Brindisi for the arrival of the Continental train with the overland mails for Bombay, Ceylon, and Calcutta. The captain was on the bridge, and by his side the doctor was standing. In the bows the second officer was waiting until the order should be given to stand by to let go the moorings. The third officer was at the engine-room telegraph. The engineer was blowing off steam, for the train was overdue. On the quarter-deck a few passengers were lounging after the manner of the luxurious seafarers aboard the ships of the P. and O. service—some in
cane-chairs, some in hammock-chairs. The old Indian colonel was explaining—not for the first time—to an old resident returning to his station after his year's leave at home, how some regimental affair had been—according to the views of the colonel—sadly bungled, through the interference of the War Office. The youthful subaltern, going out to join his regiment, was exchanging experiences with an untried Civil servant. The Maharajah, who was on his way home after visiting the Queen and receiving an Indian decoration, was smoking his Havana cigar—he detested the strong "Trichys," the product of Trichinopoly—in solitary state. As he strode to the gate of Cromer Court, Dr. Hope recalled every detail of that scene aboard the Polynesia, when he had stood beside Captain Cromer on the bridge, and had with him directed a binocular glass every now and again toward the shore, in the attempt to catch sight of the signal that the mails had arrived, and were about to be sent aboard.

For a long time the steam continued rushing from the escape-pipe, and the Lascars idled picturesquely in the bows. At last the whistle was heard from the shore, announcing that the bags had arrived, and would be alongside the wharf in a few minutes. Then the lanterns of the post-office sorters flashed along the deck as the waggon ran along the wharf and the bags were carried off by a dozen sailors who adroitly passed one another to the cabin.

"All aboard?" cried the captain.
"All aboard, sir," replied the chief officer.
"Cast off," came the voice of the captain once more. "Go ahead slow, Mr. Toke," he added to the third officer at the engine-room telegraph.
"Go ahead slow, sir." The tinkle of the telegraph bell sounded over all the ship as the steam ceased its whirling roar and the "churning" of the propeller commenced, to be followed by the clinking of the steam-winches as the hawsers were taken in.
"Full speed ahead, Mr. Toke," said the captain, when the officer in the bows announced that all was clear; and at the same moment a quartermaster ran up the rail and handed the captain a large blue envelope with a very official appearance, and marked "IMMEDIATE."
"Came off with the mail-bags, sir," said the quartermaster, saluting.

The doctor saw the captain tear open the envelope and go to the window of the wheelhouse in order to have light enough to read the contents of the enclosure, which was also large, and in its waste of paper truly official. Before he could have read more than half the document he gave a glance around, and called out another order to the third officer. He then finished reading the communication which he had received, and thrust it into the breast-pocket of his coat. After putting the binocular to his eyes for a moment, he gave another course to the man who was at the steam-steering wheel, and then began pacing the bridge as usual.
THE DOCTOR'S RECOLLECTIONS.

The document which he had received could not, after all, have been a very important one, the doctor thought.

On strolling to the captain's side after a short time had passed, and the steamer had been put on the course that was to take her to Port Said, Dr. Hope was made aware of the fact that there was, after all, something of importance conveyed by means of the portentous letter.

"By the way," said the captain, when they had exchanged remarks on some casual topics, "I received a rather curious letter just now. I know you don't care about prying into other people's business, but I fancy you will be in some measure interested in this matter. Carry this to the window of the wheelhouse and glance over it."

He handed him the letter, and the doctor brought it within the light of the wheelhouse window and read it through, the captain meanwhile pacing the bridge and attending to the working of the steamer.

Dr. Hope became aware that the communication which he was reading was from a certain firm of solicitors in London, and its purport was to inform Captain Cromer of the S. S. Polynesia that through the death of his uncle, General Cromer, he had inherited the family mansion of Cromer Court and the adjoining estate, including the village of Netherton, the estimated rental of which was six thousand pounds per annum. On the second page of the communication was a copy of the will of the
late General Cromer, by which he bequeathed all
the contents of Cromer Court to Captain Cromer
of the S. S. Polynesia, together with a considerable
sum of money and some personal effects.

Dr. Hope folded up the communication and
returned it to his friend the captain, who had just
suggested to the chief officer the advisability of
hoisting the foresail, as a fine breeze was blowing
off shore.

"I congratulate you," said the doctor. "You
must have expected such a letter as this for some
time past. General Cromer was a very old man."

"On the contrary," said the captain, "my poor
father always gave me to understand that I should
not inherit a single penny of my uncle's money.
He and my father were unfortunately never on
friendly terms, and when my father got into low
water, and I found it necessary to take to the sea
as a profession, he never got even the offer of help
from his wealthy brother. I assure you I had
almost forgotten of the existence of that uncle of
mine. An hour ago if you suggested to me the
possibility of my inheriting the property I would
have laughed."

"The property is yours now, at any rate," said
the doctor, "and I suppose you will leave the
Polynesia as soon as you can."

"I dare say I shall leave her when I bring her
back to Victoria Dock," said the captain. "I don't
look forward with pleasure to leaving her, I can
assure you."
This scene, and every word that had been exchanged between himself and Captain Cromer, Dr. Hope now recalled as he walked down the long carriage-drive from Cromer Court. Five years only had passed since that evening when the *Polynesia* had steamed away from Brindisi. But what changes had come about within that time! Captain Cromer had brought his ship back to Victoria Dock and had settled down to the life of a country gentleman, and Dr. Hope himself had married and bought a practice in a popular district of London, the duties of which prevented his accepting any of the many invitations that he had received to visit Cromer Court. It was only when he got a letter from his old friend imploring him to come down in a professional capacity that Dr. Hope had left his London patients to the care of an assistant, and had hurried off to the Court, with the result that has just been recorded.

"Dear me! dear me!" said Dr. Hope once again, as he passed through the entrance-gates and returned the salutation of the man at the lodge. "Only five years ago we stood on the bridge of the *Polynesia* long after the lights of Brindisi had sunk beneath the horizon, and laid our plans for the future. Poor Cromer! His good fortune has brought him to the state I have found him in; and his son—poor boy! if his mother had not died when he was a child he would not have been educated on this forcing system, which he actually seems to like. Poor Cromer! Poor Harold!"
CHAPTER IV.

THE VILLAGE AND THE VILLAGERS.

DR. HOPE lit a cigar of gigantic proportions outside the entrance-gates, and then, puffing vigorously, set out on a quick walk to the village of Netherton, which he knew was about a mile and a half along the high road where he now found himself. He had a double aim in undertaking this walk. He not only wished to get as much fresh air into his lungs as he could, but he was also anxious to obtain what hints the men of light and leading in the village could give him as to the treatment necessary for Mr. Cromer. He wished for confirmation of the views he entertained as to the unsuitability of his present mode of life for Mr. Cromer; and he knew that he would have no difficulty in getting some of the village authorities to satisfy his inquiries on all points.

He was not mistaken in his estimate of the people of the village. There was a long shady
seat at the side of the village inn—the 'Cromer Arms'; and here the chief inhabitants were accustomed to sit for half an hour every evening discussing not only the enthralling events that had taken place in their immediate neighbourhood, but such comparatively unimportant matters as a change of government, or the outbreak of hostilities between two European States. This conclave of villagers had just commenced its sitting for the evening when Dr. Hope arrived and asked permission to drink his tankard of home-brewed ale at the rustic table under the spreading boughs of a fine plane tree. On his request being granted without discussion, he soon made himself at home among the heads of the village; and, what was more important, he made them feel at home with him, by a few sympathetic remarks. In the course of a short time he succeeded in leading up the conversation to the subject on which he was most anxious to talk, or rather to hear others talk. He had no difficulty in learning that Mr. Cromer himself was popular in the neighbourhood, though not so popular as he should be if he had given himself up to hunting. The general idea that seemed to prevail was that the Squire—Dr. Hope was highly amused to hear the ex-commander of the Polynesia referred to as the Squire—was quite too fond of reading to run the chance of ever becoming the ideal squire of the villagers' fancy. He then learned that the Squire's son had also the unfortunate reputation of being bookish, and very
“stand-off” in his manner. He had not attended any of the football matches which had taken place between the Netherton men and the Chadwick men, and he did not know any of the people by sight.

Dr. Hope also gathered from the shrewd winks and sly laughs which were exchanged among his informants when he, with the utmost caution, introduced the topic of the servants at Cromer Court, that the opinion which prevailed in the village was that the gardener found it very profitable to have a master who did not understand much about the produce of vines—or, indeed, about the culture of any sort of fruit. It would be a poor year indeed, they thought, when forty or fifty pounds were not cleared by the gardener through the sale of such grapes and peaches as had of course of their own accord fallen from the boughs. As for Matthews, the butler, he was jocularly alluded to by the wheelwright—who was the humorist of the village—as Squire Matthews. It was plain that the general idea that prevailed in the neighbourhood was the same as that which Dr. Hope had acquired by his morning visit to his friend, namely, that Matthews, like Love—according to the poet—ruled the Court.

But if the wheelwright chose to take a humorous view of the situation, the shoemaker, who was a strong-minded man, and, according to report, of republican leanings, could not bring himself to look at the matter except from a serious standpoint, and he gave it as his impression that the
Squire was a poor enough sort of man to allow himself to be bullied by a butler. The carpenter gave expression to a theory which he held, to the effect that if Squire Cromer had a wife the butler would not have many chances of domineering over his master; but here the wheelwright, endeavouring to live up to his reputation for humour—earned by a long and laborious study of Joe Miller—suggested, with extraordinary slyness, the likelihood of the Squire's wife doing all the domineering herself. The brilliancy of this witticism was not acknowledged by the carpenter, whose wife was well known in the neighbourhood for strength of character. He thought that this pleasantry was unworthy of so ingenious a wit as the wheelwright.

Dr. Hope and his friends were becoming more confidential every minute, but he was beginning to find that he had exhausted them on the subject of Squire Cromer, and was not indisposed to make an excuse for taking his departure, when a stranger arrived at the inn, and the group outside gave their undivided attention to him.

Though it was now dusk any one could see that the stranger was a genuine stranger. He had entered the 'Cromer Arms,' and was complaining that no fly or conveyance of any sort had been seen by him at the railway-station where he had arrived half an hour before. No one but a stranger would venture to express surprise at this matter, the conclave outside the inn knew very well.

The landlord was then heard assuring the
stranger that the village of Netherton was a great centre of intelligent enterprise, but the people refrained on principle from sending a fly to meet the trains, for they fully expected that by this course of treatment they would tire out the railway company—it was one of the richest in England—and compel them to build a station nearer the village. The existing station was half a mile away, being meant to do duty both for Netherton and Rookwood, the next village.

The stranger laughed at this explanation, and asked the landlord if the railway company had not a capital of about twenty millions, and the landlord replied that when once the people of Netherton got their backs up it was bad for their opponents, and the railway company had never made a greater mistake than in placing the Netherton folk on a level with the Rookwood folk.

The representatives of Netherton outside cried "hear, hear," when the landlord had offered this explanation; and then winked in a knowing way at one another. The new arrival gave another laugh, and begged the landlord to have the goodness to send to the station for his portmanteau, and while it was in course of transition to get him something in the way of dinner. Having made these simple requests he strolled to the porch, and whistled while he smelt the sweet-briar that hung over the door. He then took a few steps outside and glanced at the now silent conclave, every member of which was engaged in the
endeavour to guess from his appearance in what capacity this stranger—the second to arrive within an hour—came to Netherton. For two strangers to arrive at Netherton on the same day, to say nothing of the same hour, was an incident worthy of being commemorated.

"This seems good weather for the spring, gentlemen," remarked the new-comer. Through the dusk of the twilight it could be seen that he was a man of perhaps a year or two under thirty, with a short beard and moustache and a bronzed face.

"Ay, it be fairish sowing weather," answered the miller, who was supposed to have the exclusive right to reply for the agriculture of the neighbourhood.

"Ay, that it be," acquiesced the wheelwright, which was not a particularly brilliant remark to come from a humorist with a reputation to maintain.

"What is regarded as the most profitable crop in this neighbourhood—perhaps some one can tell me?" said the stranger.

"It depends," answered the miller after a considerable pause.

"Ay, it muchly depends," echoed the wheelwright.

"There's a good deal of wheat grown, I suppose," said the stranger.

"Ay, pretty fair," answered the miller.

"Be the same more or less," said the wheelwright,
who was now becoming so much bolder that none of his friends would have been surprised if the next time he spoke he were to say something smart, neat, and it might be timely—though all the wheelwright's jests could scarcely be said to be timely. His one deficiency as a humorist was his lack of a sense of appropriateness.

"I suppose since the Indian railways have opened up great wheat-growing areas to the world the farmers have been somewhat discouraged," said the stranger. "Do the agriculturists in this neighbourhood fear the Indian or the American competition most?"

This question was too important a one to be answered at a moment's notice; but the miller was a master of the art of avoiding such obviously controversial subjects, so he merely shook his head, saying—

"That's as may be known betimes."

"Ah!" said the stranger, stroking his beard. If he put an enigmatical inquiry to the conclave, assuredly their spokesman had returned him an equally enigmatical answer.

There was another pause of considerable duration; so that it could scarcely be said that the stranger was making any great progress in conversation with the representatives of the village. He apparently did not understand so well as Dr. Hope the art of "drawing out" such men by placing them at their ease with him. After a long silence he spoke once more.
THE VILLAGE AND THE VILLAGERS.

"Captain Cromer lives in this neighbourhood, does he not?"

"There's no Cap'n Cromer that we knows of," said the wheelwright, who fancied that his turn had now come. He would shortly have an opportunity of astonishing the stranger with a brilliant sally.

"What! no Captain Cromer? Why, I understood that this hamlet was the nearest to his house—Cromer Court is its name, I believe?"

"Young man," said the doctor in a solemn voice so unlike his own that the men sitting beside him started, the wheelwright especially, at being obstructed when at the point of delivering a really striking repartee; "young man, you are not aware that Captain Cromer died some five years ago and was buried at sea—or, to be more exact, in Victoria Dock alongside the steamship Polynesia, which he had just brought home after a voyage to the East?"

The stranger gave a little start and then laughed outright.

"My good fellow," said he, "I have no doubt it seems to you a capital joke to hoax a stranger, but you have made a bad attempt in this case, for it so happens that I was by the side of Captain Cromer when he brought the Polynesia into dock five years ago."

"Then you were not in your right place," said the doctor, in a still more artificial voice. "If you were by the side of Captain Cromer you were in
the wrong place, for you should have been in the bows seeing that the dock-gates were cleared. Yes, Captain Cromer ceased to exist the moment he landed from the Polynesia, and Squire Cromer of Cromer Court is a very different person."

The stranger gave another start.

"Who are you?" he cried; "I don’t recognize your voice, and yet—yes, I seem to have heard—what, the doctor!—Dr. Hope!"

He had taken a few steps forward, and the doctor, after rising, had done the same, so that his features were no longer in the shade of the plane tree.

"Neither more nor less," said the doctor in his natural tone, stretching out his hand, which the stranger warmly grasped.

The conclave on the seat stared at this demonstration. Netherton was having a bustling time of it with these strangers, they felt. The fact that the two seemed to be old acquaintances did not take away from the excitement of the incident in the eyes of the Nethertonians.

"Come along for a stroll, and tell me how on earth you came to this sleepy hollow," said the stranger.

"With all my heart, Tom," said the doctor. "Your chop will not be ready for ten minutes yet. Good evening, my good friends," he added, turning to the conclave; but the members of the conclave were too astonished to reply. Even the wheelwright felt like an ordinary man.
CHAPTER V.

A CONSPIRACY.

"COME now and give an account of yourself, Mr. Tom Hampden," said the doctor, as they strolled to the little green beyond the inn, so as to be, as the stranger said, within hail of the landlord when the expected chop should be cooked.

"I'm quite ready to give you a true account of myself, doctor, provided that you return the compliment," said the stranger, whom Dr. Hope had addressed as Mr. Tom Hampden. "I have come here to pay my respects to my old commander—our old commander, I should say. I suppose you are here for the same purpose?"

"I have already paid my respects—my disrespects I fancy Cromer would now call my greeting—to our old commander. He wrote to me three days ago entreat me to come to him, as he felt in very low water indeed—an attack of gout! Can you fancy our commander with an attack of gout?"
"It seems incredible," said Hampden. "And you have already seen him?"

"I have been with him and his son all day—that is why I took this stroll into the village just now. I was anxious—yes, actually anxious to escape from a house that bore such a resemblance to a hospital."

"Then the sooner I 'bout-ship and run for home the better it will be for all concerned, I suppose," said Hampden. "If you, a professional man, cannot stand a hospital, where should an outsider like myself be?"

"Did Cromer not invite you down here?"

"He gave me a general invitation two years ago when I met him in London, and he made me promise just twelve months after that I would visit him during my first leave. Well, I have now got my first leave, and I am here to redeem my promise. I intended putting up at the inn for a day or two, and going out to Cromer Court—that's the name of the place, I believe—when I have let the commander know that I'm here. I'm sure his invitation was a genuine one."

"You may depend upon that," said the doctor. "He is simply dying to meet some one who will remind him of the old days. As a matter of fact, Tom, he is dying because his present life doesn't suit him, and he can't get back to his past."

"The change was too sudden, you think?"

"It was far too sudden. Just think of it! Here is a man who has never known what it is
to have a fortnight's holiday during the twenty years and more that he has been at sea; he suddenly steps ashore one morning and thinks he can settle down to a quiet country life, at a place more than fifty miles from salt water! Is it any wonder that he gets sick of life generally, and takes to the gout simply for the sake of having an interest in life—of having something to live for?"

"I can't exactly follow you up to the end, but I'm sure you are quite right."

"I am quite right. A man who has the gout has something to live for. He lives to get rid of it. He has an interest in life—to be free for an hour or two from its twinges. Now, if you visit Mr. Cromer you will find that he takes a delight in talking about his gout. You will find that he doesn't care about any conversation except upon the gout."

"What! has he come to that?"

"He really has. His interest in life is centred in his joints, poor fellow! But apropos of joints, there is your landlord at the door signalling to you that your sirloin is cooked."

"So I perceive. You will join me at my humble meal, doctor, though my sirloin takes the form of a dish of chops?"

"I will watch you carefully, and try if I can detect any falling off in that marvellous appetite you used to have," said the doctor. "I am reserving myself for Cromer's dinner at eight o'clock."

They returned to the inn, and Mr. Hampden
found that in the preparation of a simple wholesome meal the management was not far behind that of the most pretentious restaurant in London. He seated himself at the old oak table, on which a couple of brilliant silver candlesticks were placed, and by the light of the wax candles which they held, he made an attack upon the dish before him with an impetuosity which the doctor said was worthy of his best days when he had been third officer aboard the Polynesia.

"Then you seriously think that I should not go out to the commander?" said Hampden, pausing in the conflict, but with the flush of victory on his face.

"Why should you not?"

"Oh, well, you see, if he has made up his mind to go in for the gout and cultivate it as you say he does, I'm afraid that he'd find me a very poor companion. I can't express myself sympathetically on the subject of gout or any other ailment."

"Then don't make the attempt; but go out all the same," said Dr. Hope. "The fact is, Tom, my lad, I am prescribing for our friend the commander, and I mean to take him away from his gout and every other complaint. If I had been in search of some one to use as an antidote to our friend's gout, I could not have been more lucky than I am to-day in meeting you. I mean to apply you as a sort of poultice to the offending limb, and if you don't effect a cure you will disappoint me greatly."

Tom Hampden laid down his knife and fork
and gazed at the doctor across the table. He then burst into a laugh.

"You are the same old boy as ever, I find," he cried. "A couple of years ashore has not changed you, at any rate. It's extremely thoughtful on your part to make up your mind to turn me to such good use as a poultice, but I respectfully decline to co-operate with you in this matter."

"Wait until you hear me out," said the doctor. "Don't go away with the notion that I'm anxious to put you into a mortar and pound you with a pestle until you have arrived at the consistency of a jelly, and that I mean to spread you out on a cloth and lay you on the commander's gouty limb. No, I don't want to do anything of the sort."

"I'm much obliged to you," said Tom. "I must have taken you up wrong. I breathe freely once more."

"No, you are only to be a poultice by a figure of speech."

"That sounds more promising, though I can't fancy that I should cut any sort of a decent figure in the capacity for which you say you have designed me."

"To be plain," said the doctor, "I mean you to assist me in taking the commander away from his gout and every other subject of complaint."

"Don't you think that your scheme is rather too like a conspiracy to kidnap a grown man?" said Tom.

"That's exactly what I mean it to be. I mean
that we shall come suddenly down upon him to-night, and talk to him about the old times and nothing but the old times, until he forgets that there is anything the matter with him."

"You think that we would have a chance of succeeding?"

"I'm positive of it. You should have seen how he brightened up a few hours ago, when I merely recalled some of the incidents of five years ago. I gave him to understand what I thought of his present life as contrasted with his past, and then, after telling him that he must make up his mind without the slightest delay to shut up his house and travel for a year or so with his son, I ran off here. He has had a couple of hours to reflect over my prescription, but unless I have you to help me, I don't believe that I shall succeed in getting him away from here."

"Upon my word, I think you are a singularly cool hand, doctor," said Tom Hampden. "Do you really fancy that even with my friendly assistance you will get the commander—commander, alas! no longer—to leave the family seat which he inherited by a stroke of good luck?"

"Of extremely bad luck," interposed the doctor.

"All right; we'll not quarrel over so trifling a point. Do you really fancy, I say, that you will get him to take your advice and clear off, bag and baggage, at a moment's notice?"

"I don't doubt it—with your help, as I say. Tom, my lad, if you back me up in this affair you will be doing our friend a greater service than you
can imagine. If he doesn't make up his mind to take a long tour—or better still, a long cruise somewhere—he may make up his mind to settle down with the gout as his companion for the term of his natural life."

"That sounds like the sentence of a judge decreeing a criminal to penal servitude."

"And that is just what my decree amounts to. But you must remember that not alone is Mr. Cromer to be taken into account in the matter; his son is also to be considered. You remember Harold, the curly-haired lad, who took a trip with us, and was for ever eating bananas, and guavas, and green figs, and suffering agonies in consequence?"

"I remember him very well."

"You could not imagine such a lad developing into a prig of seventeen, who hasn't played cricket for years, and holds lawn-tennis in contempt."

"And that lad has turned out such a young ass?"

"He has, Tom—or rather he is on the fair way to do so, only I hope to arrest his progress. Fancy a boy that promised so well turning out like this! He has a chronic headache, and lunches off iced water with a Naples biscuit occasionally by way of a treat."

"That doesn't sound like the bill of fare for what a properly organized lad would regard as a rollicking feed," remarked Hampden.

"Just think of what you were at his age," said the doctor, "and you will come to understand his deficiencies."
"If he had been brought up on a diet of pork and sea-biscuit he would have a healthier appetite now," said Tom thoughtfully. "If he had been as liberally supplied as I was with iced water when aloft in the gales I have known off the Horn he would not be so fond of this luxury now. But what help can I give you in insisting on the commander adopting your prescription?—that's what I should like very much to know."

"All that I ask you to do is to keep on talking about the good old days aboard the Polynesia. Recall all the incidents and the adventures you can, and draw upon your imagination for as many queer things as you fancy will interest the commander."

"That's just where I'd break down, doctor."

"Not likely. Ah, you young dog, do you fancy that I forget the reputation you had of old for such yarns as kept us all breathless, so that we hadn't words to characterize you as you deserved at the end?"

"I always thought veracity was my strong point."

"That was the greatest of your delusions. Now all you have to do is to yarn away to your heart's content about the old days aboard the steamer, and when you find it inconvenient to continue I'll join in as best I can, and jog on your memory or your imagination as the case may be. Then you may hint—what I'm sure is perfectly true—that the Polynesia hasn't been sailed since he left anything like the way she used to be."

"I can safely say that, for it's a fact."
"By the time you reach this point I'm inclined to think that our friend will be back again in the old days, having left his gout and all his other troubles behind him. If he doesn't there and then make up his mind to take my advice and rush off for a tour or a long cruise—if he isn't seized with a longing to be again on the deck of a ship, if only as passenger—well, all I can say is that I will leave him without having anything to reproach myself with; I will feel that I have done my best for him. Come along, now; it's close upon seven o'clock, and I must be out at the Court before eight. As I said a short time ago, eight o'clock is the dinner-hour at the Court."

"I didn't intend paying my visit before the morning," said Hampden; "but as you are going out now I suppose I may as well join you. I will merely change my coat. I suppose my portmanteau has been brought from the station by this time?"

"Put on your best coat, my lad," said the doctor. "Remember you are about to face a footman as gorgeous as a tropical sunset, and a butler—oh, such a butler!"

"Gorgeous also?"

"Oh dear, no, just the opposite—dignified, sedate, severe. A man who would fumigate a room in which a joke was made, and give his master notice if one of the guests was known to make a pun. Now, be quick with that coat of yours."
CHAPTER VI.

"A SHEER HULK."

WHILE walking from the village to Cromer Court, Mr. Tom Hampden gave his friend Dr. Hope a general account of all that he had come through since they had sailed together under Captain Cromer aboard the Polynesia. He had been Captain Cromer's third officer, and before Dr. Hope had left the ship he had got another step. The year after the doctor had retired he had become chief officer, and had obtained his certificate from the Board of Trade as master. As, however, there was no vacancy for a commander in the service, and as, moreover, there was a general impression among the officers whom he had met that he was too young to have any chance of obtaining a captain's berth, he had made up his mind to accept the offer of sailing as chief officer under the commander of a new steamer which was being built for the Company on the Clyde. He was very
well satisfied with his life, he said; and though he should like to obtain a command, yet he supposed that the Company were quite right in considering that their passengers would have more confidence in an elder man. He was not yet thirty, he said, so that he could not blame the Company if they gave the next vacant captain's berth to an officer with more experience, and with the additional qualification of some gray hairs to inspire confidence among the passengers.

Dr. Hope agreed with him, and commended him for taking so sensible a view of the matter. By the time they had discussed the prejudices of passengers, the great oaken door with its many iron barbs and its massive hinges was reached.

"This is Cromer Court," said the doctor, before he gave a tug at the iron lever that did duty for a bell-pull.

"It takes my breath away," said Hampden, as he stood back to look up at the noble mansion. "I heard that Cromer Court was a fine place, but I had no notion it was half so grand as this. I fancy I could settle down here comfortably for the rest of my days."

"You don't know what you could do until you have tried," said Dr. Hope. "Mr. Cromer, I have no doubt, had the same notion as yourself when he first stood where we are standing, and knew that he was the owner of the mansion and the park so far as can be seen on a clear day, and yet now he is sitting in the smallest room of the house, but in the largest
chair, for obvious reasons, and he is probably en-
gaged at this very moment in repeating through
his set teeth the principal cities to the west of the
Ganges and the east of Euphrates."

"Poor old commander! I remember his pecu-
liarity. I have often laughed over it since I last
heard him indulge in that way. Do you think the
bell rung?"

"I'm sure it did; but do you suppose that any
of those fine fellows whose duty it is to answer a
ring, mean to run the chance of heart disease by
competing with one another as to who should be
the first to open the door? Not likely."

"Well, the commander took precious good care
that his orders were carried out promptly aboard
the Polynesia," said Hampden.

"And the difference between those days and the
present gives you some idea how he has fallen off,"
said the doctor. "He allows himself to be imposed
on by his servants—why, even those men among
whom I was sitting outside the inn, know that he is
being imposed on right and left, and they are not
prodigies of intelligence. Ah, here comes some one
at last."

A languid foot sounded in the hall, and the door
was opened. The doctor entered briskly, and
Hampden followed, but more slowly.

"Is your master still in the study?" the doctor
asked of the footman.

"In the study, sir?" said the man with affected
surprise, not without a suspicion of indignation
at the question being put to him. "In the study? Surely not, sir. He is in the drawing-room as usual."

"Lead us to the drawing-room then, if you please," said the doctor.

"Mr. Cromer expects the other gentleman, I suppose," remarked the footman.

"Lead us to the drawing-room, if you please," repeated the doctor in a firmer tone of voice, which probably convinced the man that the visitors were not to be trifled with, for he made some show of haste across the hall, and knocked at a door which was hidden by a heavy portière. He then threw open the door, and the doctor and his friend entered the large, elegantly furnished drawing-room, lighted by several branches of wax candles and by a Venetian glass chandelier that hung from the centre of the room.

Mr. Cromer and his son were seated as close to the fire as possible, but their appearance did not even suggest comfort, to say nothing of that snugness which most people associate with the idea of home.

"I thought you meant to remain in the study," said the doctor; "this changing about is anything but good for you, considering how the temperatures vary; but I suppose you couldn't eat a comfortable dinner now without having been in the state drawing-room beforehand. Never mind. Just cast your eyes this way and see whom I have brought to cheer you up."
Mr. Cromer glanced round, but failed to recognize Hampden.

"Any friend of yours, my dear Hope, is heartily welcome," he said, making a movement as if to rise, when Hampden took pity on him.

"I have to report myself come aboard, sir," said Hampden, stepping forward and making a seaman's salute.

"What! can it be possible? Hampden? My dear boy, I'm delighted to see you. If you hadn't had the firelight on your face I should have recognized you at once of course.

"It's not so long since we met, sir; and I don't think I have changed much."

"No, not you—not you—it is not you who have changed," said Mr. Cromer with a sigh. "No one seems to have changed except myself. You find me in a miserable condition, Hampden. I feel as if I were ready to be broken up and sold for scrap-iron—I do upon my word."

"I hope it's not so bad as that, sir," said Hampden with a laugh. The doctor looked at him sternly, as if to warn him that he was not to make light of his host's ailments.

"You must see a great change in me, Hampden," Mr. Cromer went on to say. "I see by your face that you think me a complete wreck. Well, you are not far astray."

"No, sir, you are not a wreck—at least not quite." The modification was due to a signal which Hampden got from the doctor from the other side of
Mr. Cromer's chair. "No, sir, you only look a bit knocked up—worried, I should say, captain—I beg your pardon—Squire; the old habit was too much for me."

"Don't call me Squire, for goodness' sake, Hampden," said Mr. Cromer. "Continue to address me as you did. It does me good to be called 'captain' once again. Maybe it would have been better if—but there's no use repining."

"What were you going to say, Cromer?" said Dr. Hope. "Come now, finish your sentence. You said it would be better if—if what? Don't be afraid, man."

"I was going to say merely that it might be better if I had never resigned my command," said Mr. Cromer.

"So it would have been—a thousand times better," said the doctor.

"We'll not talk about it," said Mr. Cromer.

"But we will talk about it," cried the doctor; "not now, however, but later on."

"This surely can't be my old chum, Harold?" said Hampden, turning from Mr. Cromer to his son, in order to make a diversion from the topic, which the doctor in a somewhat headstrong way was insisting on bringing forward at once.

"Ah, that is Harold," said Mr. Cromer somewhat sadly; "but I'm afraid you will not recognize much of your old chum in him just now. He has not been very well lately, Hampden."

"Ah, too many green figs again," said Hampden.
"Do you remember the basketful of green figs I got for you from one of the fruit-boats at Corfu, when we touched there, during the trip you took with us, Harold?"

"I remember but too well," said Harold. "I wish I could forget it. The thought of it now makes me feel queer."

"It shouldn't do that," said the doctor. "If you were in good condition to-day you should be able not only to look back with pride upon that achievement—upon having finished off that basket of figs—but you should be able to look forward to such another campaign without misgivings. You haven't yet come to the age when a man begins to understand that he has a liver. It should be a matter of complete indifference to you how the process of digestion is carried on. I suppose you would turn away from the sight of a piece of pickled pork."

"Oh, doctor, pickled pork! please don't say anything more," cried the boy with a vague smile.

"I will say no more; but let me tell you, sir, a piece of pickled pork is not to be despised, when it has not been kept too long before the pickling process or after it. Now," added the doctor, turning to his host, "as you wrote for me to come down to you in such a hurry, I didn't wait to pack up a suit of dress toggery, so you'll have to put up with me in mufti. I know you'll excuse me, but I wish you'd put in a good word for me with Matthews. I've got to be nearly as much afraid
of him as you are. Ask him not to be hard on me.”

“Dinner is served, sir,” said Matthews, entering the room at this instant.

“Come along, Hampden,” cried Mr. Cromer. “We can find room for you at my cuddy, I am sure. Give me your arm, my boy, I’m a wreck—a sheer hulk that needs to be towed to its moorings before being broken up.”

It was in vain that Hampden protested that he had dined at the ‘Cromer Arms.’ Mr. Cromer insisted on his taking his place at the dining-table; and when he was induced to commence, Hampden found that the chops which he had eaten at the inn had only given him an appetite for the dainties he now encountered. He made by far the heartiest meal of any one at the table.
CHAPTER VII.

THE PLOT WORKS.

DISH after dish at this dinner was the same as the cook had been in the habit of preparing aboard the Polynesia in the old days, and upon this fact both Dr. Hope and Tom Hampden commented.

"It is rather a coincidence, is it not?" said Mr. Cromer. "Is Halliday still the head of the galley aboard the Polynesia, Hampden?"

"He left more than a year ago," said Hampden. "He told me he was getting tired of seafaring life, and meant to live ashore."

"I hope the change agrees with him," remarked the doctor in a suggestive tone, emphasizing the last word.

"You mean that you hope it agrees better with him than with me," said Mr. Cromer. "Well, all I can say is that I hope so too. If it does not I pity him with all my heart."

"I always thought that no one alive could equal
Halliday at his own dishes, but I now find I was mistaken," said Hampden.

"How?" said Mr. Cromer. "Have you secured a better man aboard the ship?"

"We have done nothing of the sort, captain. In fact we have never changed except for the worse aboard the Polynesia. But I have no hesitation in saying that your cook could make Halliday take a back seat, even in those points in which he considered he was strongest."

"What, you honestly consider these dishes better than Halliday's?" said Mr. Cromer.

"Well, I won't say better, captain—I don't think they could be better. But I will say that they are quite on a level with his. And yet you remember how Halliday used to say that he had the secret for some sauces—this is one of them—and that no man living could reproduce them. I always believed Halliday up to the present, for I never did come across anything like his sauces; but now . . ."

"Don't set him down too hastily as an impostor," said Mr. Cromer.

"I won't," said Hampden. "Until I find placed before me a dish of that pine-apple jelly that he invented, I will regard him as the head of the profession which he adorns."

"Some pine-apple jelly, sir?" said the footman behind Hampden's chair at that moment.

Hampden gave a start; but recovering, he helped himself from the silver dish that was
offered to him. For the first time that day Harold gave a hearty laugh; Mr. Cromer himself was convulsed.

"Captain," cried Hampden, "you need not try to conceal it from me any longer. Halliday is your chef."

"Of course he is," said Mr. Cromer. "He came to me on leaving the Polynesia, and we are not likely to part. I told him the doctor was coming to-day, so that he would have to prove that he hadn't degenerated."

"And he has done so," cried the doctor. "Any one might have guessed that the vol-au-vent and the curry we had were prepared by Halliday!"

"Dear me, dear me!" said Mr. Cromer, when the dessert was on the table and the servants had left the room. "Here we are together just as we used to be now and again aboard the old steamer. What good days we had there, Hope! And you and I were always the best of friends, Hampden. Only a few years have passed, and you have changed in no way, while here am I—well, I needn't make any parade of my infirmities. But tell me, if you can, how it has come about?"

"We all know how it has come about," said Dr. Hope. "What we want to know is how you mean to pull yourself together again. You don't mean to settle down here a confirmed invalid—a martyr to gout before you are forty-five years of age."
"I should hope that is not your intention, captain," said Hampden, remembering that he had promised the doctor to support him in carrying out his beneficial prescription for Mr. Cromer.

"I suppose the doctor told you that he was trying to turn me out of my own house?" said Mr. Cromer.

"Well, he told me something about what you needed, sir; and of course I agreed with him—any one that doesn't agree with the doctor comes to grief in the long run."

"You hear that?" cried the doctor with a laugh. "There is a testimonial on my behalf—quite unsolicited into the bargain, as the vendors of quack medicines say. Now surely you can't fly in the face of such a recommendation of my skill generally."

"I have had my own experience of the person to whom that recommendation refers," said Mr. Cromer, after a pause.

"And you have arrived at the same conclusion as I have?" cried Hampden.

"Well, I must confess that the conclusion at which I have arrived is not so widely different from yours as to cause us to fall out," replied Mr. Cromer.

"Gentlemen," said the doctor, mocking the tone of an orator about to make the world acquainted with his sentiments—"gentlemen, this is, as I may say, the proudest moment of my life. I feel that
I have not lived in vain when within so short a space of time I have received the commendation of two such exacting critics, neither of whom has ever, I may mention casually, taken the advice which I have freely offered."

"Perhaps they are going to begin now, doctor," came a voice from a chair near the fire.

It was Harold who spoke, and as he had been silent during dinner, the sound of his voice seemed to startle his father as well as his father's guests.

"Bravo!" cried the doctor. "The boy has made a happy suggestion—a very happy suggestion, I am prepared to affirm, as a disinterested authority. Come, Harold, old man, give us the benefit of your advice on the point under discussion. Is my prescription to be taken or thrown into the fire? You have suggested the possibility of my counsel being followed. Now only give me your help and I'll guarantee that it is followed."

"What am I to do, or what am I to say?" asked Harold in a rather hesitating tone, as if his courage had suddenly departed.

"Say what you wish, my boy," said Mr. Cromer. "You know perfectly well all that there is on Dr. Hope's mind. You heard all that he said in the library this morning about the necessity there is for me, and for you as well, to leave this place—to leave the land altogether for a year or so, and to take to the sea once more. You have noticed how artfully the good doctor has led up to the
subject again, and how he has made an accomplice of Tom Hampden, my friend, and formerly the most trusted of my officers; you have also heard me say fifty times—a hundred times—a thousand times before to-day that I never have been so well as when I was at sea;—now then, you are called on to adjudicate in this matter of some gravity—a matter upon which perhaps our health and happiness depend. Now, what are we to do?"

"Let us go by all means, pater," cried Harold, brightening up suddenly. "I don't see why we shouldn't go off somewhere—to some strange place, where—where you will be certain to recover, and where I'll have plenty of time for reading, with no one to disturb me."

"The oracle has spoken, Hope," said Mr. Cromer. "I'll take an offer of any decent berth to-morrow—aboard any ship that sails the sea except a collier. I entreat of you, Hope, don't prescribe for me signing articles aboard a collier. I couldn't turn the winches as they should be turned, I know. Have some consideration for my old age."

"What!" cried Dr. Hope, rising in some degree of excitement. "What, you are really serious in your determination to act upon my advice?"

"I never was more serious in all my life," replied his host. "I agreed with you from the very first—nay, I agreed with you before you arrived to-day. I knew that you would find out what was the matter with me; I only wondered if there was any
way to recovery except the one which I have now resolved to take."

"My dear friend," said the doctor, warmly shaking Mr. Cromer's hand, "I am delighted to hear this. I cannot tell you how I felt walking down that avenue to-day, when I thought of the past—when I thought of the man whom I had last seen aboard the *Polynesia*, and contrasted him with the man whom I had just left in the library at Cromer Court giving a copious extract from a Gazetteer of the Indian Empire, so far as the names of the places were concerned. But there is no need to talk further of it now. You have made up your mind to give yourself a chance of recovery, and you have come to a wise conclusion, and one which I believe you will never regret. As for Harold, a cruise such as I prescribe will make a man of him. It will give him a proper idea of the world he lives in, and it will show him what are those qualities that go to the making of a man. Oh, neither of you will ever regret having come to the conclusion that a salt water cruise is the best thing in the world for you."

"It strikes me, doctor," remarked Tom Hampden, "that you don't need much backing up in this affair."

"Ah, the doctor brought you here to back him up, did he?" said Mr. Cromer. "He had you as a reserve force in case he should not be able to carry all before him at the first assault? He is a crafty tactician, this doctor."
"Well, to say the truth, captain, he did not bring me down as a reserve," said Hampden. "I was on my way here to pay you the visit I promised a year ago, when the doctor came across me."

"And having come across you he thought it would be a pity that so much good backing-up material should be allowed to go to waste; and he told you that you would be doing wisely if you cried 'hear, hear' to his proposals on my behalf? Isn't that the whole truth?"

"You have exactly hit it off, sir; and I'm glad that the result has been so satisfactory."

"Why, you don't surely take any credit to yourself for having influenced me?" cried Mr. Cromer with pretended indignation.

"Oh dear, no, captain," replied Hampden. "I see clearly that your mind was made up before I arrived this evening. I had not to speak a word."

"That is so," said Mr. Cromer. "But all the same," he added, "if I hadn't found you here by my side, with the doctor on the other side, to bring back more forcibly to my mind the good old days of the past, I might still have remained in a state of uncertainty—I might still have held out, simply for the sake of holding out, against the prescription that I knew to be for my benefit. There's a confession for you."
CHAPTER VIII.

THE DOCTOR GIVES HIS FRIENDS A SURPRISE.

"NOW that so much is decided," said Dr. Hope, "all that remains to be determined is the great how and when —how do you propose returning to sea, and when do you mean to carry out your purpose?"

"Give a man a chance, Hope," said Mr. Cromer. "Don't grasp him by the throat and force him down to the sea with a rush."

The doctor laughed.

"I don't intend to treat you, or any man, in that fashion," said he. "I never forget the proverb, 'One man may lead a horse to the water'; now I have led my patient . . ."

"Not a horse, but some animal of the same species that shall be nameless," said Mr. Cromer. "Don't interrupt me, if you please. I say I have led my patient to the water's edge, and I know he'll take kindly to the element."
"Why, man," cried Mr. Cromer, "you talk of me as if I were a Newfoundland puppy."

"And if I do it is because I know you have the instincts of one; you have been for the past few years in the position of a water-dog that has not been allowed to approach water."

"And now you want to fling me in neck and crop."

"I won't need to do anything of the sort. I expect that you'll take to the water like one who was used to it. What I want to know is, how you propose setting yourself free from the cares and responsibilities of your present life, and when do you mean to set about the task?"

"I can't see my way clearly just yet," said Mr. Cromer. "Cannot you suggest some way by which I can free myself? Stay! Here we are all together to-night; why shouldn't we remain so? Why shouldn't I buy a ship—a yacht, if you wish—and set out on this cruise with you as surgeon aboard, and Hampden as captain? There's a scheme for you all in a moment."

"It is an excellent one—perhaps the best that could be devised," said the doctor. "With one omission it would work well, I'm convinced."

"And that omission..."

"Is the omission of Dr. Hope. No, my dear friend; greatly as I would enjoy another cruise, it would be impossible for me to forsake my hospital and patients who are dependent on me. Six months away from London would mean ruin to
me just now—that is taking the narrowest view of the matter possible. Besides, you must remember that I am a married man now. That makes all the difference in the world in a man’s roving life. But leaving me outside your scheme I believe it to be a capital one. What do you say, Hampden?"

“Well, to say the truth, doctor,” said Hampden, “I should like to know something more of the captain’s plans before I give an opinion. Were you serious, captain, in saying that we should all go together?"

“I never was more serious in my life, Hampden,” replied Mr. Cromer.

“Then I may say that there’s nothing I should like better than to sail under your command once more, sir; only I can’t see just now how it could be done. I am still in the old service, you must remember, and even if they have said that they can’t see their way to give me a command for some years, I don’t blame them, and I mean to hold on as chief officer of the new ship until they see fit to give me a commander’s berth. There’s the case in a nutshell.”

“It’s best that you should state the case as clearly as possible at the outset,” said Mr. Cromer, “so that we shall know exactly how we stand. Now I’ll state my case more fully. I mean to hire or buy a first-rate yacht, and to take her on a long cruise—to Japan, perhaps, or maybe to the South Seas—upon that point I may be pardoned
for not having made up my mind, as I have only been considering the question for an hour or so. Well, I mean to sail the boat myself, but I must have a trusty chief officer who can take full charge if necessary upon occasions. Now, why should you not gain with me the experience the Company say you need? Why should you not take charge of this boat of mine during your probation of a year or two, and return to step into a captain's berth on one of the Company's steamers?"

"I may say, 'Why not?' sir," said Hampden; "but I'm afraid the Company may not take the same view of the matter. I don't think that they would be inclined to give me such a holiday as you suggest, though I admit that it would be the very thing for me."

"Leave the management of the affair in my hands," said Mr. Cromer. "I fancy I have some influence with the Company—maybe I flatter myself—but have I your promise to come with me on the condition I have just stated, if I can borrow you, so to speak, from the Company?"

"You may depend upon my going with you, captain. It's not likely I'd refuse an offer like what you have made me. There's no man in my position that would not feel flattered at receiving such an offer, especially when it comes from you."

"There's no flattery in the matter, Hampden," said Mr. Cromer. "I know you well, I think; and I'm fully aware of your capacity and seamanlike
qualities. There's no man I would sooner trust than yourself in all points."

"Bravo!" cried the doctor. "You are worthy of a place at a mutual admiration banquet, where every orator compliments the one who has just sat down. But never mind, you have made good progress in the business we have before us. A couple of hours ago I was racking my poor brains thinking what pressure I could bring to bear upon you, Cromer—captain in the past, and captain in the future—to get you away from here. An hour ago I didn't think I had much chance of moving you, and yet now the whole cruise is settled on, and the nucleus of an admirable ship's company is forthcoming already."

"It really is surprising, when one comes to think of it," said Mr. Cromer. "And I assure you no one is more surprised than myself at the way things have turned out."

"Oh, I have a far greater surprise than all in store for you, my friend," said the doctor, taking a piece of paper from his pocket and laying it on the table. "Would you be surprised to find the course you are to steer pricked out on this bit of paper?"

"What do you mean?" said Mr. Cromer, bending forward in the chair where he was sitting near the fire.

"If you want a surprise, just look here," said the doctor, slapping the paper, but making no attempt to hand it to his host.

In that moment of excitement Mr. Cromer rose
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from his chair as rapidly as either of his friends could have risen, and hastened to the table without any assistance.

"What have you on the paper?" he asked.

"Nothing whatever, my friend," said the doctor triumphantly. "But I promised you a surprise. There it is,—the instantaneous cure of your gout. My prescription has already begun to operate. Half-an-hour ago you could not have taken a step without help."
CHAPTER IX.
ABOARD THE ‘FIRE-FLY.’

"SEVEN-AND-A-HALF, sir," said the quartermaster, saluting Mr. Hampden after the patent log had been hauled over the quarter, and the indexes registered.

"Good, Harkaway; if this breeze continues we shall work up to nine knots without difficulty, and save all the coal."

"I believe it will last till the evening at any rate, sir."

"I quite agree with you. If it holds out it will bring our run over the two hundred before we take the sun to-morrow."

The quartermaster again saluted, and went forward.

"Well," said Harold Cromer, coming up at that moment, "which of us was nearer the registry of the log?"

"Neither of us," said Hampden, laughing.
“Why, some one must have made a better guess than the other,” said Harold. “I gave eight knots as my guess, and you said seven only; now which of us made the better guess?”

“We were equally astray,” said Hampden. “You were half a knot over the mark, and I was half a knot below it.”

“I am greatly disappointed,” said the boy; “I fancied that I could guess the speed exactly by taking a note of the height of the bow-wash and then watching the amount of curl there is in the wake.”

“The amount of curl is not a particularly safe guide, my friend,” said Hampden, laughing.

“My dear Tom, if the displacement of water is equal to \( x \), then it follows that if the speed of the ship . . . .”

“Oh, there you go at your mathematics again, trying to puzzle a poor simple seaman like myself. It’s unkind of you, indeed. I understood that it was agreed before you set out on this cruise that mathematics and the value of \( x \) compared with things in general were to be tabooed as a topic, and yet here you come to me with your calculations about washing and curling just as if you were an ordinary barber. I say deliberately that you are not acting up to the agreement that was made at the beginning of the cruise. Why, even Mr. Dugdale has some sense of honour, and does not force his birds, beasts, and reptiles down a fellow’s throat.”
"He certainly doesn't," said Harold. "He has too high a regard for his collections to do anything of the sort; the collections would suffer considerably by the operation."

"I don't suppose they would ever be the same thing afterwards," said Hampden thoughtfully, as if he were not quite confident that he was justified in the assertion.

"To say nothing of our throats," added Harold. "I fancy that your throat would suffer more or less if a few really good specimens such as Mr. Dugdale treasures were forced into the regions of your thorax. There's the bell for tiffin."

"So it is," said Hampden. "Ah, after all, the specimens brought together by the cook are the best. I'll submit with the utmost resignation to have them sent down my throat."

"There will be no need to resort to force so far as they are concerned," cried Harold, running to the deck-house aft where tiffin was served.

Tom Hampden looked after him, and smiled as he disappeared within the house.

"You're a changed lad, Master Harold," he muttered. "You're a bit changed from that pale, flabby-faced young gentleman that seemed afraid to speak above his breath in those grand rooms at Cromer Court. You're come back within easy distance of the boy of ten that didn't turn a hair after a feed of fruit that was meant to last a ship's cabin for a week. There was more sense in the doctor's prescription than we gave him credit for,
though all along I knew that he was talking the soundest of sense."

Having thus soliloquized, Mr. Tom Hampden gave a glance aloft, fore and aft, and then strolled to the deck-house which Harold had just entered.

The scene was upon the deck of the schooner-yacht *Fire-fly*, and she was sailing upon a northerly course in the China Seas. From this information it will be gathered that the prescription ordered by Dr. Hope with a view to affect the cure of Mr. Cromer and Master Harold Cromer had been acted on.

Mr. Cromer had put himself in communication with an agent at Southampton in respect to the procuring of a suitable craft for a lengthened cruise to Eastern seas, and within a week he was on the deck of the *Fire-fly*, making a thorough inspection of her, fore and aft, and not forgetting the engine-room, for, though carrying all the canvas of a schooner-yacht, she was also fitted with a propeller and powerful engines. At full pressure she was capable of steaming eleven knots, and at ordinary pressure seven. She measured three hundred and twenty tons, and her coal-bunkers carried a supply sufficient to allow of her steaming at low pressure for seventy days.

Such was the account which Mr. Cromer received of the yacht which was offered for sale owing to the sudden death of the owner, an aged nobleman who was well known for the interest he took in maritime matters, and for the number of interesting
voyages he had made in his yachts. The *Fire-fly* had been built under his direction, but he had only made one voyage in her. As that was to Terra del Fuego it might be regarded as a very good trial trip for the yacht. She had been away from England for upwards of eighteen months, and had just been put in dock on her return to be prepared for another cruise, when the owner had died.

It is not every one who is anxiously on the look out for a steam-yacht of over three hundred tons. To a considerable number of persons such a craft would appear, if presented to them, something like a white elephant, which, though interesting as a specimen, is somewhat embarrassing as a pet, owing mainly to the extent of its appetite. When therefore the executors of the late owner of the *Fire-fly* learned that Mr. Cromer would treat with them for the craft they were greatly relieved, and met him in the most liberal spirit in negotiating for her purchase.

After satisfying himself on every point in respect to the capacity of the vessel, Mr. Cromer accepted the terms proposed by the executors, and took formal possession of the boat in Southampton Water, giving directions that as many of the old crew as could be got together should be retained for the voyage he purposed making. Owing to the activity of the agent nearly all the old hands were found to be available, and it need scarcely be said that when they heard who was the new owner, they expressed their willingness to sign articles under
a commander of such reputation as Mr. Cromer enjoyed.

Then as to the solution of the important question of Tom Hampden's appointment as mate, Mr. Cromer was equally fortunate. He had not over-estimated his influence with the managers of the Company in this matter, and Mr. Hampden was given permission to add another six months to the leave from duty which had already been granted to him. It was moreover hinted that there was a possibility of a vacancy occurring in a commander's berth in about eighteen months, and that it was not at all unlikely that his claim to this vacancy would be favourably considered.

All this business Mr. Cromer attended to personally, by Dr. Hope's orders. It was marvellous how rapid was his recovery from the gout from the moment he made up his mind to resume his old occupation. His sudden rising to his feet and taking some steps across the floor of the dining-room without assistance gave the first indication that the doctor's prescription was a wise one. The fact was just as the doctor had stated to Tom Hampden—Mr. Cromer had lost all interest in life, and the attack of gout had come to him, as the doctor had implied, to give him something to think about. As soon as he got a more profitable and certainly a more entertaining subject for conversation the gout took its departure. Within a fortnight from the visit of Dr. Hope he was walking about Southampton without being troubled by
even the faintest suggestion of one of those twinges that had caused him such agony on the morning of the doctor's arrival at Cromer Court.

As for Harold, though it could not be said that the perpetual headache from which he had suffered had disappeared as if by magic, yet by Dr. Hope's treatment during the few days that he remained at Cromer Court, the attacks which threatened to become chronic were less severe. He had actually got into such a habit of declining all exertion that it was with difficulty the doctor succeeded in inducing him to take some exercise out of doors. The boy, however, was naturally intelligent, and when, after a ride of ten or fifteen miles with Dr. Hope as his companion, he felt himself better, and discovered that that once good friend, his appetite, had not altogether deserted him, but that it was ready to return to him if any inducement were held out to it, he persevered in his efforts to overcome the repugnance to exercise which he had recently been unfortunate enough to acquire, and the result of his perseverance was highly satisfactory. Only in the evening did he return to his books, and the healthful exercise of the day invariably had so great an effect upon him that he found himself yawning over his favourite studies, and thinking more about the opening cricket match of the Netherton club, which he had promised to attend on the next Saturday.

He promised the doctor to continue this regimen
of outdoor exercise, and he kept his promise, the result being that his cheeks began to glow once more with health, and he had almost forgotten that the head was a part of the human frame liable to certain aches and pains.

He accompanied his father to Southampton and spent hours every day aboard the yacht, when she came out of dock. Then Mr. Cromer returned to the Court to make arrangements for having the house and the park taken care of in his absence; and by the time he had concluded this business and had come once again aboard the Fire-fly, he found that Harold had made considerable progress in practical navigation under the direction of Hampden, who had now taken charge of the craft, and was daily making himself acquainted with her strong points and weak points, for every ship that sails the sea is like a human being, and possesses weak points as well as strong.

All that now remained to be done in getting the yacht ready for her cruise was to obtain the services of a competent man as second officer. Hampden had written to several friends of his who were competent to serve in that capacity, but every day he received replies from these men to the effect that they had already signed articles aboard other ships. It was just when he was giving up the task in despair that there appeared before him a very tall and well-made youth, a perfect young Goliath, in fact.

"You don't remember me, Mr. Hampden, I
suppose,” said the stranger, after standing in silence before the searching eyes of Hampden.

“What,” cried Tom, after a moment’s pause, “you don’t mean to say that you are young Grace?”

“No, I don’t think I can say that I’m young Grace, for I feel the weight of years on me now; but I can assure you that my name is Dick Grace, commonly—very commonly—known as DisGrace aboard the Gloriana, that tub of tubs.”

“I couldn’t have believed it possible that you should develop into such an object as I see before me,” said Hampden. “Why, you must be—let me see—well, eleven feet six I should say is about your height.”

“Not so much in my socks,” said the young giant calmly. “But I admit that I’m too tall for the ordinary wear and tear of life. If many people were up to my height the existing beds would be unsalable, and the ordinary doorways would have to be abolished. They say I’m still growing,” he added with a sigh.

“Cheer up, old chap,” said Hampden. “You needn’t take the most gloomy view of the situation. You may stop short at twelve feet.”

“Stop short?” said the young man. “I wish I could stop short. Every stop of mine is a long stop—I don’t mean in a cricketing sense.”

“We’ll not pursue the topic,” said Hampden, laughing. “How did you come here, and why?—merely for the sake of paying me a visit? Well, I’m glad to see you.”
"I came here on business," said Grace. "I'll tell you all my history from the time I was apprenticed aboard the Gloriana, where you were second mate. It's not long. I served out my time, and was one of the few survivors of the wreck of the old tub that you left for the P. and O. I then passed my examination as mate, and I have been sailing for the past two years as third officer of a large four-master in the American trade. I left her of my own accord to live with my father for the remaining six months of his life; I buried him six weeks ago. I met Jack Walters at a broker's in London yesterday, and he told me that you were at your wits' end to procure an officer, and I made up my mind that if you were so very hard up, maybe you mightn't think that I was too tall. That's my autobiography up to the present hour. It rests with you to add another chapter."

"My dear boy, I couldn't imagine any more happy accident than your coming across Walters," said Hampden. "I believe you will do for us famously; but you must remember I'm not skipper here. The skipper is Captain Cromer—an old P. and O. man. He'll be here shortly and inspect you."

"He can do that without the aid of a powerful microscope," said Grace. "I suppose he's a good enough sort."

"The best commander that ever trod a deck," said Hampden. "Came in for a lot of money, a
country house and all the luxuries of life ashore; but shore life doesn’t agree with him, and he has bought this craft for a cruise."

"To Norway, I suppose—the land of the midnight sun, as the excursion steamers call it."

"No; to the East—Japan, Australia, and New Zealand, perhaps."

"That would suit me exactly," said Grace. "I only hope that I’ll suit the owner. I’m sick of short Atlantic voyages."

In a short time Captain Cromer—as he allowed himself to be called once more—came aboard, and in a few minutes afterwards he had engaged Mr. Grace as second officer, the carpenter being set to work without delay to lengthen the bunk in the second officer’s cabin to accommodate the new occupant of the berth.

But there was yet another member of the ship’s company to join the Fire-fly before she spread her white sails to the breeze. The new-comer was that eminent naturalist, Mr. Dugdale, a small wiry man who lived—and some people said he would die also—for the advancement of the science of Natural History. He had made several voyages to the East in the Polynesia, and when Captain Cromer learned from Dr. Hope that the naturalist was at present in England, he wrote inviting him to form one of the yacht’s company, and promising that, if all went well, several new islands and strange places would be visited in the course of the cruise. As Mr. Dugdale had practised surgery
for several years before devoting himself exclusively to natural history, Captain Cromer felt, and expressed himself to this effect in his invitation, that he was not asking Mr. Dugdale to accompany him solely with a view of increasing that gentleman's collections, and of thereby increasing the knowledge of the world.

Mr. Dugdale expressed himself as being overjoyed at the prospect of taking part in a voyage so entirely after his own heart as that designed for the Fire-fly. Two days afterwards, his gun-cases and butterfly-net-cases arrived alongside the yacht, with several bales of cotton wool and a case of camphor.

"All for the benefit of the blessed butterflies," said Grace, as he helped to stow these things in their proper places.

The great naturalist himself followed his belongings, and was stowed with much less difficulty than they were. He did not occupy much room personally; but with his equipment for active service in the field—in the veldt of South Africa, in the bush of Australia, or in the jungle of India—he was not to be lightly considered. When he meant business he was certainly formidable.

It is unnecessary to refer to the early part of the voyage of the Fire-fly. She met with no more adventures than are usually to be encountered sailing down the Mediterranean and passing through the Suez Canal and thence into the Red Sea. A gale in the Indian Ocean put the sea qualities of the yacht to a pretty good test, and the result was most
satisfactory; not once did she ship a green sea, and Bombay was reached without a spar being carried away. After visiting Ceylon, the Fire-fly went on to Singapore, where she laid in additional coal, though she had not steamed more than seven hundred miles since leaving England, the wind being generally in her favour, thus allowing all the canvas to be spread for several weeks together.

As the voyage progressed, Harold Cromer improved in health. His headaches ceased, and did not return even with the oppressive weather in the Red Sea. He did not quite abandon his studies, and found that his knowledge of mathematics was of great assistance to him in working up the science of navigation. He also commenced the study of ornithology, entomology, and various kindred branches of natural history, until Tom Hampden declared that the multitude of ologies would prove more injurious to him than his studies at home had done when he was hoping to enter college. Harold, however, only laughed at this prediction, knowing very well that now he was only amusing himself with his new studies, whereas he had previously worked for ten hours a day. In spite of his prediction, Hampden was forced to confess, as has just been recorded, that Harold was a changed lad.

The latitude in which the chief officer of the Fire-fly had made this confession was 21° 10' N., and the longitude at noon was 118° 20' East of Greenwich.
CHAPTER X.

ANOTHER CONSPIRACY.

THERE was every sign that a conspiracy of some sort was in progress aboard the Fire-fly upon this warm day in the China Seas, when some of the ship's company who had been at tiffin in the deck-house had testified to the continued excellence of the preparations of the cook who had once been on the Polynesia. There was a good deal of whispering on the deck, in the shadow of the sails, and a good many furtive glances were cast in the direction of the captain, who was mounting an azimuth compass on a tripod stand aft, and who pretended to be so absorbed in this duty as not to perceive the progress of the plot—whatever it was—around him.

Harold Cromer was standing in his white linen suit with his back to the rail amidships, listening attentively, while Mr. Dugdale was impressing on him some particular point which demanded apparently a good deal of energetic action to enforce
—a good deal more than Harold would feel inclined to bestow upon it considering the heat of the day.

"My dear boy," Mr. Dugdale was saying as he struck the palm of his left hand with his right fist, as though he were endeavouring to break an unusually tough walnut in the absence of nut-crackers; "my dear boy, it is all very well to talk of the interesting places to be visited in Japan, and of the need to hurry on there; we shall have done no more than what thousands of our countrymen and countrywomen too have done recently. Japan is now as familiar to the English public as, let us say, San Francisco."

"But when we haven't yet seen it, Mr. Dugdale, it will seem quite fresh, even though thousands of English eyes have gazed upon it."

"No doubt," replied Mr. Dugdale. "I don't wish to suggest the abandonment of the intended visit to Japan; I only desire to say that it seems a great pity to have such an opportunity of visiting places that are altogether strange to civilized eyes, and yet to neglect it. You have never experienced the sensation of being the first to enter a primeval forest, Harold."

"Never," said Harold; "I should like to do so. I can never think of the words of the Ancient Mariner without a feeling of awe—

'We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea.'

You remember the lines?"
“They are wonderful lines,” said Mr. Dugdale. “They describe exactly the sensation of awe that comes over one on reaching a place on the earth where no one has ever been—no civilized person, at any rate. I have experienced the feeling more than once, and I hope you may do so as well. At the island of Formosa there are, I am persuaded, tracts of vast extent which have never been trodden by man.”

“But the island is inhabited, is it not?”

“In some parts it is inhabited,” said Mr. Dugdale. “The western portion has been in the hands of the Chinese for a long time, and it is pretty well cultivated. The southern part is occupied by some of the aboriginal tribes who bore a bad reputation. But I once came in contact with the master of a trading schooner that had touched at several points on the east coast without meeting any natives, and indeed without being in any way inconvenienced. He gave me a glowing account of the marvellous forests. There—there is new ground for the explorer. Hundreds of birds may exist in those forests of which the world still remains in ignorance. What varieties of unknown insects and beautiful reptiles remain within the depths of those forest haunts waiting to be collected and classified! The prospect is glorious!”

“Not for the animals, it strikes me,” said Harold. “I believe they endure the degradation of remaining uncollected and unclassified with the greatest unconcern.”

“I did not think that you would jest on such
a subject," said Mr. Dugdale, sorrowfully. "I did fancy that you were beginning to take an interest in coleoptera at least."

"So I do, Mr. Dugdale," said Harold. "I beg your pardon for attempting to jest, but you must admit that the joke was a very small one—it was entitled to your pity more than your anger. But the fact is, I have been so much with those fellows Hampden and Grace lately, I have got into the habit of making fun, or trying to make fun, of things that are not a bit funny."

"I believe you have the capacity for becoming a naturalist of very fair order, if you are only diligent and careful," said Mr. Dugdale, encouragingly. "It is because I feel so that I am induced to ask you to use your influence with your father to give us a chance of a few days at some part of the coast of the island of Formosa. Such a chance, I repeat, may never occur again. Why, even if I succeeded in obtaining only one new variety of butterfly—one new specimen of coleoptera—one hitherto unknown bird—perhaps a rival to the New Guinea bird of paradise—would not our enterprise be more than rewarded?"

"I don't see why we shouldn't land at some part of the island," said Harold. "We must pass along the coast on our way to the north, and we are in no particular hurry."

"Then you will urge upon the captain the advisability of landing on Formosa?" cried Mr. Dugdale eagerly.
"I'll speak to Mr. Hampden seriously about it first," said Harold. "He may know of some objection that couldn't be got over."

"Ah, he will probably suggest the hostile attitude of the aborigines," said Mr. Dugdale in a tone that implied a sneer. "Don't mind what he says about the natives, Harold," he added confidentially. "Men like him invariably speak from hearsay. If you ask them for evidence on any point you will quickly find out how groundless are the assertions they make in so dogged a manner."

"I will do my best to induce Hampden to be on our side," said Harold; and leaving the great naturalist he went to Hampden and broached the question of landing at Formosa to that officer.

"Mr. Dugdale says that such a chance may not occur again, which is perfectly true," remarked Harold in conclusion.

"It is perfectly true," said Hampden. "It is perfectly true that if any one lands on the east coast of the island and goes even a short way into the jungle, the chances of his doing so a second time are precious small."

"Is it so very unhealthy?" asked Harold.

"Unhealthy? Well, if report is to be believed, a man's constitution is likely to break up very rapidly there—especially if he comes in contact with a native or two."

"You know then for a fact that they are so very bad?"
"My dear boy, I know that they enjoy what the newspapers call an unenviable reputation. Every man among them is a head-hunter by profession. In proportion to the number of heads he can produce at a moment's notice, he is held in high esteem by his neighbours. So far as I can gather it does not appear that this little peculiarity of the place adds materially to its popularity as a health resort."

"Now, don't go on jesting upon what is a subject of vital importance to Mr. Dugdale," said Harold. "Have you any good reason for believing that the head-hunting tribes are to be found at every part of the coast?"

"Only on the east coast," said Hampden, "are the head-hunting tribes to be found, but they doubtless extend to the interior of the island, where it is said the inhabitants are cannibals. They are not nice people at all, Harold; and my own idea is that the wider berth we give them the more satisfactory will be the result for all concerned. Why, though there are, I believe, about three millions of Chinese in the western and northern parts of the island, the supply of camphor wood, of which there are immense forests in every direction, is becoming less every year, for the Chinamen that go to collect the wood don't know the moment when they may be pounced upon, and become the unwilling contributors of craniums to the collection being formed by the natives. It's a toss-up whether or not a
ANOTHER CONSPIRACY.

Chinese camphor-gatherer ever returns to his home."

"A toss-up," said Harold, "it may be, but it's a very unfair transaction, for the native says, 'Heads I win, tails—pig-tails—you lose.'"

"It strikes me that I'm not the only one aboard this craft who makes an attempt to joke now and again," said Hampden. "I thought you meant to talk seriously on this subject."

"And I do mean to do so," replied Harold. "But who could resist the chance you gave me? Never mind; I don't see why we shouldn't have a ramble ashore, keeping the schooner in sight, of course, and arming ourselves with repeating rifles."

"And butterfly-nets," suggested Hampden.

"Exactly; for the sake of another sort of aborigines," said Harold. "All that you have said to me does not make me see that it would be impossible to land."

"It is by no means impossible to land," said Hampden. "It is about the re-embarking that there is supposed to be some difficulty. However, I don't suppose that the captain would raise any objection if Mr. Dugdale only wishes to get his feet upon the island, and does not want to walk across the country."

"I don't think myself that there could be much risk if we creep along the coast, and when we find a safe landing-place, get ashore with a boatful of armed men. We should be a match for any
number of savages, head-hunters or otherwise, that might turn up. With the Gatling gun that the late owner of the yacht rigged up on the quarter, and that my father allowed to remain there in case we should come across any of the Black Flags—with this gun, I say, worked by you or Grace, we should be in a position to keep half the inhabitants at bay."

"We should if they only came out in platoons to be shot," remarked Hampden. "But they are not likely to do that. They have their mountains—some fine ones too—and they will not be likely to leave them, even for the sake of being shot at by a machine-gun of an approved pattern."

"That is exactly what will suit us," said Harold. "If they remain among their mountains we will have a good time of it ashore. We won't bother them, you may depend upon it."

While Harold was talking to Mr. Hampden the naturalist himself had come upon Mr. Grace, and had attacked that young man just as he had attacked Harold on the subject of going ashore on the east coast of Formosa.

In spite of the absorbing nature of his work with the azimuth compass, Captain Cromer found time to have a hearty laugh at the comical appearance presented by the second officer and Mr. Dugdale in conversation on a topic that seemed to be of a highly confidential character. The little man stood on the toes of his canvas shoes, steadying himself by holding on to the belt of the
officer. The belt was within easy reach of Mr. Dugdale's hand. Grace turned his head every now and again to try and catch what his companion was saying; but as the captain said afterwards, the two men were not within hail of each other. It was not until, after many unsteady jerkings about on his toes on Mr. Dugdale's part, the tall young man bent his body almost to a right angle, that he gave the naturalist a chance of stating his case with some likelihood of being heard.

Captain Cromer was convulsed by the comic appearance presented by a conversation between the two men. But observing the eager way in which Mr. Dugdale enforced his theories upon the patient young officer, and having previously noticed the naturalist conversing mysteriously with Harold, causing the latter to become confidential with Mr. Hampden, the commander of the yacht came to the conclusion that all this talk had surely some object of importance in view.

Could it be possible that Mr. Dugdale was trying to set on foot a plot for the seizure of the yacht?

The captain smiled as the absurd idea occurred to him. He would make a good joke about it when he found out what was the object of all the mystery there was in the air.
CHAPTER XI.

A SUGGESTED "ROUND ROBIN."

HAROLD CROMER, after leaving Hampden, joined Mr. Dugdale and Grace, and gave them the result of his conversation with the mate.

"I was quite prepared for his opposition on the ground of the temperament of the natives," said Mr. Dugdale.

"It's rather an unfortunate temperament, isn't it?" said Grace. "It shows an amount of impetuosity, I think, for a man to run his spear into a total stranger, and then chop off his head as though it were a cocoa-nut. I can't see how people who possess such manners can ever become really popular with their neighbours."

"Every time I come to these seas I hear people talk about the peculiarities of the natives," said Mr. Dugdale. "But I have lived among the natives at New Guinea and in the Celebes Islands, and in a variety of places with equally bad names, and
yet here I am alive and well to-day. The native constitutes a bogey in these seas that cannot be got rid of for years by traders. But, as I say, my experience goes to show that he is not so black as he is painted."

"But a copper-coloured savage, if he's a head-hunter and a cannibal as well, is quite as objectionable a person as a regular black," remarked Grace.

"So far as cannibalism is concerned one has to judge almost entirely by report," said Mr. Dugdale. "For the best of reasons," said Grace. "It would be too much to expect that any respectable head-hunter with a character to lose among his own people, would let any one that he had captured return to where he came from to say what he had seen."

"I dare say they are a bad lot taking them all round," said Harold; "but that only adds to the attractions of paying them a visit."

"Hardly a visit—only a passing call," remarked the second officer. "I shouldn't care to be on visiting terms with such a crowd. But so far as I'm concerned myself, I don't mind being told off with a shore party at any time or place. I don't suppose that the east of Formosa is any more dangerous for a man than some parts of the east of London used to be."

"Quite right, Mr. Grace," cried the naturalist. "You display a proper spirit in approaching the subject. There are dangers everywhere; and
surely if we are justified in facing danger, it is on behalf of scientific research—in order to add to the knowledge of mankind.”

“I don’t doubt that there’s something in what you say, sir,” said Grace. “But then, don’t you see, the head-hunters may also be very earnest in the pursuit of knowledge, and they may show their earnestness by the endeavour to add a strange head to their national collections. Now, I’d just as soon not face danger for the sake of increasing the knowledge of such specimens of mankind as are to be found at Formosa.”

“All that we can do is to take every precaution,” said Harold. “If my father gives us permission to land, we will do so, but I don’t think we should wander beyond the range of the Gatling gun. Mr. Hampden is of this opinion also; and he says he doesn’t think there would be much danger in venturing ashore on these conditions.”

“Then Mr. Dugdale means to ask the captain to alter the course of the yacht when we get far enough north, so as to hug the coast of the island and look out for a landing-place?”

“Well,” said Mr. Dugdale, with some hesitation, “I don’t know whether I should be justified in making such a request; but I was thinking that if we were all to ask him to allow us to land in the interests of natural history, he would scarcely refuse.”

“What, get up a ‘round robin’ to the captain?” cried Grace.
A SUGGESTED "ROUND ROBIN."

"I don't exactly know what you mean?" said Mr. Dugdale in a puzzled way.

"You call yourself an ornithologist, and don't know what sort of bird a 'round robin' is? You'll pardon me for saying that you should be ashamed of yourself, sir."

The naturalist laughed as Grace spoke.

"You sailors are very amusing," said he. "You have so many words and phrases of your own you are unintelligible to ordinary people. Pray what is meant by a "round robin,' Mr. Grace?"

"Oh," said Harold, "he'll only try and take you in, Mr. Dugdale. A 'round robin' is a sort of petition, signed all round, so that no one can tell who was the first to write his name on it. I don't think such a thing would be of any use in this case."

"I'm sure it wouldn't," said Grace; "at any rate I wouldn't be one to sign it. I don't believe in dictating to your commander."

"In the interests of science . . ."

"Not even in the interests of science, Mr. Dugdale."

"I was about to say that in the interests of science one might be induced to depart from one's usual course," said Mr. Dugdale.

"And cause the ship to depart from her usual course?" said Grace, shaking his head.

"We needn't quarrel over the matter," said Harold. "Suppose I settle the difficulty by making the suggestion to my father?"
"That would be the very thing for us all," cried Mr. Dugdale, enthusiastically. "If you undertake the duty of spokesman, and let him know how very anxious I am—that is, how very anxious we all are to go ashore, and what an excellent prospect there is of making some discoveries—of obtaining some new species of birds and insects for classification—I am sure the captain will yield."

"Don't forget on any account to say how very eager we all are to land," said Grace.

"I'll tell him exactly how we all feel on the matter," said Harold. "I am very anxious to go ashore, and Mr. Hampden's telling me about the natives being head-hunters and cannibals only increased my interest in the island."

"I don't think you should have much trouble persuading the captain, if you lay plenty of emphasis upon the head-hunting propensities of the natives," remarked Grace.

"Perhaps it might be as well not to say too much on this subject—it is, after all, a secondary consideration," said Mr. Dugdale, thoughtfully.

"I dare say you are right," remarked Grace, also thoughtfully. "Yes, it is perfectly true, I'm sure, that those who want to go ashore are not over particular in the matter of making the acquaintance of the natives. Better keep the natives in the background, Harold."

"Hoping they will remain so," said Harold with a laugh, as he went off to make the naturalist's petition to his father.
Captain Cromer had put away his azimuth compass, and was engaged in a calculation when Harold came up.

"Well, my boy," said he, glancing from the papers he held on his knee. "Well, what is the matter amidships that calls for such earnest consideration? Do you come as a deputation or in your private capacity?"

"As both," said Harold. "The fact is that Mr. Dugdale wants to go ashore at some part of the east coast of Formosa, and he's afraid to ask you to change the course of the yacht when we get some distance further north. He says the chance may not occur again of being able to get a general idea of the natural history of that part of the coast. It appears that it is seldom visited."

"Seldom visited? I should rather think it is seldom visited," said Captain Cromer. "Not only have the natives the worst reputation in the world, but landing is next to impossible. Does Mr. Dugdale want us merely to put him ashore for the purpose of giving him an opportunity that may not return of becoming acquainted with the birds, insects, and reptiles of the coast?"

"I fancy he means that some of us should go ashore also," replied Harold. "Grace says he wouldn't mind being ordered ashore, and Hampden says he doesn't think there would be a great deal of danger if we were to keep along the coast and not go out of view of the yacht."

"I'm afraid that wouldn't satisfy Mr. Dugdale," said the captain. "If he were once landed he
would disappear in the jungle in search of a rare specimen, and we might have considerable difficulty picking him up again."

"We could keep him between us," said Harold, "and only let him loose now and again."

"Like a greyhound in a leash—only slip him when the game comes in sight. I'm afraid that such a course, though undoubtedly having its advantages, would scarcely be in keeping with our ideas of British freedom. I'll not say positively that landing is out of the question, Harold, though it seems so just now. What I'll do is to land at the little island of Samasana—it is fairly civilized—and make some inquiries as to the possibility of getting ashore, and not only so, but, what is more important still, of getting back again to the yacht in safety from the east coast."

"Nothing could be fairer to Mr. Dugdale, I'm sure," said Harold. "I think he should be satisfied with such a promise. He has made me nearly as anxious as he is to go ashore, if only for an hour or two. Think of being the first white man to penetrate even a mile or two into one of those forests!"

"Ah, I see that Mr. Dugdale has thrown his glamour over you," said Captain Cromer. "Mr. Dugdale is certainly a great magician; I believe that if I were to listen to him he could do what he pleased with me."

"But without hearing him wouldn't you like to explore a forest where no civilized man had ever been?" cried Harold.
"What, are you making the attempt to hold me in a glamour of eloquence?" said the captain. "Well, Mr. Dugdale may congratulate himself on having found an apt pupil. You do him every credit."

"But you haven't answered me yet," said Harold. "Wouldn't you like to explore one of the forests of Formosa that no human being—only those inhuman beings, the head-hunters, can ever have seen?"

"I admit that I should like it above all things," said Captain Cromer. "But I shouldn't enjoy it quite so well if I were to commence my exploring without the certainty of being able to reach my boat again, after I had satisfied my longings. Is that enough for you?"

"Quite enough," cried Harold. "I will tell Mr. Dugdale what you mean to do. He will be perfectly satisfied too, I'm sure."

"I doubt it very much," said the captain in a low tone when his son had run off to give the naturalist the result of his pleading on the matter which Mr. Dugdale had at heart.

The result of his communication was not to satisfy Mr. Dugdale wholly. He was, however, forced to content himself with Harold's assurance that after what his father had said there could be no doubt that permission would be given to a party to land somewhere on the east coast.

"I'm afraid of the people at Samasana," said Mr. Dugdale. "They are sure to give the worst account possible of their neighbours on the island."
CHAPTER XII.

MR. DUGDALE'S TARGET PRACTICE.

It was understood when the Fire-fly left Singapore that her voyage would be through the China Seas to Japan direct, unless the captain were to find the wind so much against him that he would be forced to get up steam and continue burning the coal for several days. In such a case it would be necessary for him to call at Kelung, on the north coast of Formosa, and refill the bunkers there, for there is a large coal district at the north-east of the island, the collieries being worked under the superintendence of Englishmen.

It so happened, however, that after leaving Singapore the yacht got into a steady breeze from the south-west, and went along at the rate of from six to nine knots through the China Sea without the furnaces being once lighted.

By the time the latitude of the most northern point of the Philippines was reached it became
apparent to the captain that his original intention in respect to the voyage could be carried out, and the run made to Japan without the necessity for coaling anywhere. He knew that even if the breeze should fall away in some measure later on, the effect of the strong current which turns northward off the east coast of Formosa would be the same. This is the Kurosiwo or Japanese current, and it is a branch of the equatorial current that sets to the west almost from the coast of Central America. The *Fire-fly*, in common with every craft sailing north, was steered for this accommodating current, and the captain hoped that by its aid he would be able to save a good many tons of coal.

The breeze remained steady for the next two days after Captain Cromer had been appealed to on the question of landing on the coast of Formosa, and while the *Fire-fly* skimmed along a brilliant sea of ripples, as even as the "ribbed sea-sand," Mr. Dugdale thought there could not possibly be any harm in looking after some of his implements of exploration. He brought on deck a short but beautifully finished magazine rifle capable of firing thirty shots a minute, and a double-barrelled sporting gun, mounted with silver. Harold, assisting in taking these weapons from their cases, read an inscription on a silver plate on each, which stated that they were the gifts of a certain European monarch who has for long enjoyed a reputation for encouraging exploration.
When Mr. Dugdale was examining the joints of his guns and attaching the barrels to the stocks, it was generally admitted that he presented a rather comical appearance. The little man with the enormous puggaree wound about his pith helmet seemed as if he would be more at his ease with a weapon that discharged no more deadly a missile than a cork. But when Harold brought out his own rifle, and the second officer produced another which he had taken with him on this voyage, and a morning's practice was announced, the comic aspect of the naturalist carrying a rifle was less apparent.

The usual sea-target—a bottle suspended from a yard-arm—was rigged up, and Harold and the second officer shot at it from beside the steering wheel astern. Mr. Dugdale, finishing the oiling of the joint of his rifle, glanced up now and again to observe the effect of a shot. But six shots had been fired before any result had been attained so far as the bottle was concerned. The seventh shot was Grace's, and the bullet struck the bottle on the lower edge, knocking a piece out of it.

"I've drawn blood at any rate," said Grace.

"You took a feather out of it," remarked the naturalist.

"I did so with a purpose, sir," said Grace with a laugh. "I hadn't the heart to take away your chance of killing it."

"Take feathers out of it till you are tired, and then I'll cut it down for you," said Mr. Dugdale, turning once again to the work before him.
The second officer and Harold as well laughed at the cool unboastful tone in which Mr. Dugdale had spoken. They made signs to one another, and then Harold declared that he would not fire out of his turn. "Mr. Dugdale must have a shot too," he said,—"or a number of shots, if necessary."

"But you boys should continue your practice," said the naturalist. "Why should I give you the trouble of sending up another bottle? Any mark will do for me, when I want to practise."

"Why, there are a dozen bottles ready to swing up," said Harold.

"Well, if you don't think I'm too old to join in such sport, I'll shoot your bottle for you. But it's really too bad on your part to insist on my doing so—I know you want to laugh. You'll want me to play battledore next."

While he was speaking Mr. Dugdale was selecting a cartridge and dropping it into the chamber of his rifle. Almost before he had spoken his last word the silver mounting of the rifle flashed in the sunlight, and with the sound of the shot came the crash of the bottle, and there was Mr. Dugdale dropping tiny beads of fine oil upon the bearings of the lock as before.

Harold and Grace looked at one another in silence, and then gazed simultaneously at Mr. Dugdale. They were too much surprised to be able to speak for some moments.

"Might I ask if you have yet fired, sir?" said the second officer at last, addressing Mr. Dugdale.
"What, is the bottle still hanging there?" said the naturalist, looking up from his work and turning his eyes in the direction of the yard-arm, shading his gleaming spectacles with one of his hands.

"The bottle is smashed to a certainty," said Harold; "but it seems impossible that you could have smashed it, considering that you never rose from your seat."

"Where was the need to rise for such a shot as that?" asked Mr. Dugdale in an off-hand way. "The difficulty would be missing so easy a shot as that."

There was another pause before Harold remarked dryly—

"Somehow we managed to overcome that difficulty, Grace."

"Yes, several times; we deserve a good deal of credit for that, it seems to me, from what Mr. Dugdale has said. Do you shoot sitting from choice, sir?" Grace added, turning to Mr. Dugdale.

"I have no choice in the matter," said Mr. Dugdale. "It would be an unfortunate thing for myself, or for any other person who aspires to add to the knowledge of the world on the subject of wild birds and animals, to have any choice as to attitude in shooting. The best specimens do not usually wait for one to get into a favourite position for—for—collecting them."

"I suppose not," said Grace. "So as they will
not accommodate you in—collecting them, you have to accommodate yourself to them.”

“Precisely. You have mastered the chief essential for a good collector, Mr. Grace. One must be in the first place an unerring shot, and in the second place, impervious to fever.”

“I understand,” said Grace. “There are not many really first-class collectors of this sort going, Mr. Dugdale,” he added.

“Alas, too few!” replied Mr. Dugdale, shaking his head. “Now don't let me interrupt your practice, young gentlemen.”

Mr. Dugdale resumed his examination of the lock of his rifle, and Grace and Harold strolled away amidships.

“I feel ‘kinder mean,’ as they say at Frisco,” remarked the former to his companion. “I don't know how you feel over this business, but I do feel a bit flattened out.”

“If that means ashamed of oneself, I may say that it exactly expresses my idea as to how we should both feel,” said Harold. “I will think twice before I try to jest at Mr. Dugdale’s expense again.”

“I was under the impression that those tremendously learned men could do nothing except study,” said Grace.

“Mr. Dugdale would seem to have studied nothing but snap-shooting,” remarked Harold.

“So it would strike any one who only saw him shoot and didn’t know of the name he has gained
in other ways. I never felt so much taken down in all my life as when the bottle was smashed, just when I was getting ready another good-humoured bit of chaff for Mr. Dugdale."

"Well, it will be a lesson to you in future—it certainly will be to me," said Harold. "How he must have been laughing at us all along!"

"What is in the air now?" asked Hampden, coming up at this moment. "Why have you given up your ball-practice so early? Have you smashed all the spare glass aboard?"

"The fact is we have both been brought down plumb by a single shot fired by Mr. Dugdale," said Harold. "We were pegging away at the bottle hanging from the yard-arm, and only managed to wing it once out of seven shots. But when we asked Mr. Dugdale, half in jest, to have a try at the mark, he smashed it without even rising from his place. That brought us down considerably."

Hampden laughed heartily.

"What," said he, "did you not know that Mr. Dugdale was renowned as a marksman?"

"I thought him about the most unlikely man in the world to be a good shot," said Grace. "Upon my word, I was considering if it was altogether safe to allow him to have charge of deadly weapons without some one to look after him and take care that he didn't injure himself or others with the guns."

"But we find he doesn't need any looking after," said Harold.
"I should think not," said Hampden, when he had recovered from his outburst of laughter. "Why, I thought that every one knew what Mr. Dugdale could do in the shooting line. He never misses. He says he can't afford it now that cartridges are so dear, and a man can get rid of such a lot of them. I recollect some examples of his skill given us aboard the Polynesia, and I have no hesitation in saying he is the best shot I ever came across. And you actually tried to chaff him on this point—I know you did. Well, you have made pretty asses of yourselves."

"We have—we have indeed," said Harold in a humble voice.

"Yes, I frankly admit that I feel a pair of long ears flapping about my head," said Grace. "I feel as if I had eaten a hearty meal of thistles, and that it wasn't altogether agreeing with me. I think we had best put up these rifles, Harold; I don't for my part feel inclined for any more practice to-day; the weather is too warm."

"Yes," said Harold, "the temperature has increased tremendously within the past quarter of an hour. We'll lay aside our guns for the present."

"And take my advice for the future," said Hampden. "Never prophesy unless you know, and never chaff unless you are certain of your man."
CHAPTER XIII.

THE ISLAND OF HEAD-HUNTERS.

It was about noon on the next day that the southern point of the island of Formosa came into sight from the deck of the yacht *Fire-fly*. Telescopes were steadied against stays, and double glasses commanding a wider field were brought to bear upon the land that appeared in the distance very vague and formless. In the course of an hour or two, however, the outline of the coast became distinct, and the two opposite horns of the wide bay with which the southern coast is indented were seen, and shortly afterwards the lighthouse on the promontory of Nan-Sha—the most southerly point of the island—came in view.

Harold Cromer found it hard to reconcile the appearance of this evidence of advanced civilization with the stories of the head-hunting propensities of the natives. He had not had experience enough of strange places to be made aware of the fact that
there sometimes may be found a few miles of civilization on a coast that has an extremely bad name. Examples of this reclamation have, however, been noticed by many travellers. A mission station in Central Africa will form an oasis of civilization, so to speak, in the midst of the most savage people.

"Within view of that lighthouse a stranger is pretty safe," said Captain Cromer in reply to a remark of Harold's; "but a mile or two inland he would require to be well armed. A short time ago the south coast was as bad as any part of the island, but after a few crews had been murdered a treaty was made with one of the head-men of the inhabitants, and a fort was built to shelter any shipwrecked mariners who might be cast ashore there."

"Then it would appear that what Mr. Dugdale said is true—the natives are not so black as they are painted?" remarked Harold.

"Their chief at any rate was made to see that it would be to his advantage to protect the strangers who might come into his power," said the captain. "It would not be well to give them a stronger coat of whitewash than this."

While they were speaking the hills of the coast beyond the bay were becoming more striking. They receded, one towering behind the other, for apparently many miles, and all were magnificently wooded from base to summit. The sun, now in the west, sent his rays against the hills,
bringing out the richness of the tropical foliage before the eyes of all on the deck of the Fire-fly, and Harold declared that with the exercise of a reasonable amount of imagination, he could perceive the scent of the camphor trees, which Mr. Dugdale said were among the forests of the hills.

As evening came on the wind died away to a mere draught, and the yacht drifted to within about a mile of the shore. From this distance the sound of the swell breaking along the coast was distinctly heard, and many native sampans of a curious pattern were seen paddling along the shore. Harold longed for some of them to venture out to the yacht; but the captain did not show the same amount of eagerness in this direction. He seemed quite satisfied that they were not any closer, for though a hundred of them would not have interfered with the sailing of the yacht, yet he had had sufficient experience of the natives of Eastern islands to know that they were usually irritating when allowed aboard a ship, and that they are consequently much better when kept at a safe distance.

The captain was rather uneasy as the yacht drifted toward the coast, and he asked Hampden's advice on the subject of getting up steam. The chief officer, however, gave it as his opinion that a breeze would spring up after sunset, and if the yacht only sailed a mile or two to the northward she would catch the Japanese current, the influence
of which the captain expected to find off the southern cape of the island.

After waiting for some time the captain thought it inadvisable to allow the yacht to drift nearer to the coast, so he gave orders for a boat to be got out and manned to warp her round the point.

The order was promptly obeyed. The lifeboat was lowered, and four men took the oars. A line was dropped from the end of the jibboom into the stern and taken a turn round one of the beams, and when the slack became taut the yacht ceased to drift. It did not need a great strain to be put upon the seamen at the oars to warp the vessel round the point in that calm sea, and it was not long before the sun had set behind the hills of the island, the *Fire-fly* having now progressed so that the lighthouse promontory was off the port quarter.

With the glorious hues of the tropical sunset melting into the dark blue of the sky overhead, the forest-clad hills of the island looked very dim and mysterious. Not a sound came from the shore except the faint crash of the sea-swell upon the coast. Harold stood aft watching the wondrous changes of the sunset over that strange island. His mind was filled with the thoughts that every one must have on watching the shores of an unexplored country. What strange things were hidden among those dense woods? What untold wealth of gold and silver and gems was lying among those dark hills? What curious birds
flash like mighty rubies among the heavy waveless leaves? What gorgeous butterflies float above their counterfeits in plants? What marvellous orchids hang in all the grotesque beauty of tropical vegetation from the withered branches?

Every one who has gazed as Harold Cromer was gazing at the shore of an unexplored country must have had the same thoughts as he had.

But what must have been the thoughts of Mr. Dugdale as he looked across the still waters at that darkening shore above which the sunset was flashing like a mighty crimson banner?

Mr. Dugdale also stood far astern and gazed at the dense forests of those hills, as though he meant his sight to penetrate their depths. There was an eager look in his eyes, Harold thought.

"It's a pity that we can't land there and go for a month or two among those forests, Mr. Dugdale," he remarked after a while.

"A pity indeed!" said the naturalist from the depths of his heart. "No one has ever been there —no one knows what will greet the explorer."

"One can only give a guess," said Harold, thinking of the greeting an explorer would be likely to receive from some of the tribes that devote their leisure to head-hunting.

"Ah, yes, we can give a guess," responded Mr. Dugdale, who thought of the unclassified birds and not of the head-hunters. "Yes, we can all fancy what may be found there. But there are wonders beyond anything that the mind can grasp as yet
unknown to man. When the lyre-bird was discovered it was generally thought that nothing more wonderfully beautiful could possibly exist, and yet the bird of paradise was all this time furnishing the savages of New Guinea with decorations. Who can tell if one of those forests does not hold a lovelier creature still?"

"No one can tell until some one makes the attempt to find out," said Harold.

"The Government of Great Britain," continued the naturalist, with some bitterness, "spends about eighty millions a year upon its army and navy and other kindred matters, which do not profit the country in any way; but when it comes to a question of spending a few thousand pounds in necessary works of exploration, they draw the purse-strings. It is left to private enterprise to discharge a duty which every unprejudiced person possessing even an average amount of culture must admit devolves upon the State. It is sad—very sad! but I'm afraid no change is likely to be brought about in this way for the present at any rate."

Harold said nothing just then, but he could not help wondering if Mr. Dugdale really considered that searching for new species of birds was the highest aim of life. He wondered if Mr. Dugdale really thought that the Government were grossly neglectful of their duty because they had not yet taken steps to explore the forests of Formosa.

With a sigh Mr. Dugdale turned away from the island of silent unexplored forests—the scarlet
shafts from the sunset were the only explorers of those secret haunts of perhaps such birds and insects as had never been seen by the eyes of civilized man. The sight of those forests was too much for Mr. Dugdale. He felt as Tantalus might have felt under slightly different conditions.

Before long Harold became aware of a certain gurgling sound about the rudder of the yacht, and a certain intermittent flapping of the canvas of the sails. At the same instant he heard the chief officer giving orders for the boat to drop astern. There was scarcely a need for these orders, for the yacht was now going ahead much faster than when she had been towed by the boat. It was plain that she was beginning to feel the force of the current which the captain had expected, and almost at the same time her sails were filled by a light breeze from the setting sun.

The boat was allowed to run alongside for a short time, and then, as it could not be doubted that the breeze meant to hold, and that it was not merely a draught that was forced through a hollow in the hills, the boat was once again hauled up to the davits. The dark reflection of the coast in the tranquil water beneath the island became blurred as the breeze stirred up innumerable ripples that ran out to the yacht all crimson with the reflection of the sunset dyes.

"We are on our way to the island of Samasana—so much is certain," said the captain, coming aft to see what course was being steered.
"And will the breeze hold out until we are able to anchor there?" asked Harold.
"There is every likelihood," said his father. "At any rate the current is not likely to fail us. In the morning you will, I hope, get your first glimpse of coral—not your last, I hope."
CHAPTER XIV.

AMONG THE SAMPANS.

All that night, while the Fire-fly was gently moving through the waters on her course to the northward, Harold Cromer had dreams of mingling with strange wild men through a dense forest of trees unlike any that he had ever seen, while down the long vista there floated into the sunshine beyond a number of gorgeous birds, whose wings made the sound as of a winnowing machine.

He awoke to find that the canvas of the yacht was flapping as the lightest of breezes now filled the sails and then suddenly ceased.

On coming on deck he found that the only land visible was to the westward of the yacht's course, where the faintest outline of Formosa could be seen at a distance of perhaps thirty miles. He then learned that the alternations of light breezes and dead calms which prevailed during the night had prevented the vessel from making good progress, though the current had been in her favour. The
chief mate had still hope that it would not be necessary to get up steam in the boilers, but that the little island of Samasana would be reached by the aid of a steady breeze before noon—unless Samasana occupied a different position relative to Formosa to that assigned to it on the charts. Mr. Hampden's expectations were realized, as it turned out. At breakfast-time a fine breeze came from the south, and the yacht flew along at six knots with all sail set.

In a few hours the little island came in view, not right ahead, but off the starboard bow. The course of the yacht had not been direct to the island, but a couple of points to the westward, the reason for this deflection being soon apparent to Harold. Looking through a binocular glass he saw the waves breaking over the coral reef that stretches for some miles out to sea from the southeast point of the island. Only at rare intervals did the reef appear above the surface; but even at the distance of some miles the sound of the waves crashing among the coral was heard. It would, Harold was ready to admit, be awkward if the yacht were to run a chance of drifting upon this dangerous reef.

The captain soon afterwards had sail shortened, for he was by no means certain that another reef of coral might not lie between the island and the yacht. He had heard of there being anchorage in a little bay to the north-west, and he determined to approach this quarter of the island cautiously.
Creeping along in this way toward the low coast, and with a man constantly sounding, and a good look-out kept for sunken coral, it was considerably past noon before the Fire-fly was close enough to the island to allow of those on the deck seeing clearly the native huts along the shore with the plantations behind them. Presently the situation of the little bay became apparent, and as the yacht crept into the anchorage it was plain that her arrival was creating something of a commotion ashore. Natives could be seen running hither and thither, the greater number of them carrying fruit and vegetables down to the beach. Before the anchor of the Fire-fly had been let go the yacht was surrounded by sampans of the most primitive construction, each bearing a couple of natives and a quantity of vegetables, together with eggs wrapped in large leaves.

It was a subject for surprise to Harold that such miserably constructed boats were not swamped with the weight of a couple of men, to say nothing of the produce which they seemed anxious to dispose of. The natives, however, appeared to understand thoroughly the many weak points of their vessels, and they managed them and balanced them most adroitly. Not even an egg was smashed out of the many dozens which were lying among the leaves.

The yacht was well furnished with what is known in these waters and on to the South Seas as "trade." In the absence of any recognized coinage all
transactions with the natives have to be conducted on the principle of barter. Consequently the needs and the tastes of the natives of the various localities have to be carefully consulted in stocking the ship. Any one desirous of conducting a profitable business will require to act on a different principle to that adopted by the gentleman who took out a cargo of warming-pans to the West Indies, hoping to have no great difficulty in making the inhabitants perceive that it would be greatly to their advantage to purchase these articles when he explained their use. That enterprising merchant brought back his cargo, not because he failed to impress the people with the advantages of a warming-pan in its right place, but simply because the islands of the West Indies are not the right place for warming-pans. The peculiar tastes of the natives of the islands of the China Seas and the South Seas must be consulted by any one anxious to trade with them. Some prefer gaudy handkerchiefs to anything else, and have been known to offer a boatful of fruit and vegetables for a single specimen. The handkerchiefs are not put to their legitimate use, it is needless to say, but are turned into waist-cloths. Others have a fondness for glass beads of various colours, and until lately a few beads were sufficient to purchase what would give a man at home a very good start if he were ambitious to attain eminence as a poulterer. The New Zealand natives were fifty years ago supplied with old muskets in exchange for wood that made the best ship's spars known; though the mortality
among the natives who bought and attempted to fire off the weapons must have been enormous. But the most universal trade in the islands is iron. Any article made of iron is valuable in the eyes of all the inhabitants of such islands as still remain unclaimed or unannexed by any civilized state.

Captain Cromer did not know what was the most profitable article of trade at Samasana; but there was no great difficulty in finding out what was at any rate acceptable to the vendors of vegetables. A couple of squares of cloth of so vivid a red that, as Harold remarked, it was only safe for any one of tender eyesight to look at them through smoked glasses, were accounted an equivalent for some dozens of eggs and a sampan load of vegetables of various sorts.

The boatmen were not encumbered with much clothing, and the red cloth made a striking addition to their toilet. They were in appearance unlike any islanders the captain had ever seen. Their faces were suggestive of John Chinaman, but here the resemblance ceased. They discarded Johnny's pride, the pigtail, and preferred having their hair cut moderately short, and allowing it to assume the form of a well-worn mop from which the water has been recently shaken.

There was a Chinaman aboard the yacht, doing duty as the steward's assistant; and on being called on deck to act as interpreter, if he could, between the natives and Captain Cromer on the more intricate subjects that arose for discussion than
the value of eggs and vegetables, this person pro-
fessed an overweening contempt for the islanders.
“Muchey bad young man—all muchey bad!”
he said. “Goody young man not at home! Plenty
do bad by and byer.”
“Tell them we want to go ashore, Loo Chew,”
said the captain.
“Me no speakee what young man speakee,” said
Loo Chew, turning away from his scrutiny of the
pigtailless natives.
“I know you don’t,” said the captain, “but I
want to find out if they speak what a Chinaman
speaks: that’s not quite the same thing, you know.”
But Loo Chew seemed to be under the impres-
sion that if he did not understand what the natives
said they would have considerable difficulty in
understanding what he might say.
“No, no,” he cried, with his mouth puckered into
an expression of contempt as he glanced at the
natives who, though resembling Chinese in some
ways, did not wear that emblem of dignity, the
pigtail. “No, no; nobody no speakee nothing.”
“Come along,” said the captain, “you know as
well as I do, and a good deal better, that you can
make yourself understood here. It doesn’t matter
if they are, as you say, bad men, you can un-
derstand a bad man as well as a good man.”
“Rather better," remarked Grace in an under-
tone to Harold. Mr. Grace had had a considerable
experience of Chinamen, and he was by no means
inclined to take a favourable view of the honesty
of the race.
"Come now, my friend, Loo Chew," continued the captain; "tell these fellows that we want to go ashore, and let us know what they say in reply."

Perceiving that it was in vain to protest any longer, Loo Chew went over to the side, and with many smiles, which showed all aboard the yacht how great a hypocrite he was, he called out in a shrill voice what seemed to be a salutation to the natives. It was responded to with some degree of enthusiasm from the sampans; but the Chinaman immediately turned to the captain declaring that he was not understood.

"Young man no savee," he cried, shaking his head until his pigtail seemed in the act of flapping the flies away with all the vigour of a brisk young Alderney in a summer meadow.

"Plenty savee," said Grace, catching the Chinaman by the shoulder and pointing out to him an elderly gentleman who seemed rather more Chinese than the rest of the natives, making friendly signs as he ceased paddling his sampan. "There's one young man plenty savee—plenty speakee, you rascal," continued Grace, adopting the "pidgin" English of the Chinaman.

Loo Chew reluctantly looked at the elderly gentleman, who had paddled up evidently at the request of the other natives, and when the Chinaman was hailed from the sampan he could not pretend to be ignorant of the language in which he was addressed. He replied to the native, who was probably one that had lived among the Chinese, and had thus acquired a purer acquaint-
ance with the language than was possessed by his brethren. In the course of a few minutes an animated conversation was proceeding between Loo Chew and the other, and from the way the occupants of the sampans hailed the delivery of certain phrases, it was plain that they understood to some extent the language in which the conversation was carried on, and that Loo Chew had only pretended that he would not be understood by the natives, and that he did not understand them.

The result of his inquiries was to assure the captain that if he were to honour the people of the village with a visit he would be received with enthusiasm. It is needless to say that the "pidgin" explanation to this effect took up some time.

"Good," said Captain Cromer; "I will pay them a visit, and see how far that gentleman in the most crazy of all those crazy sampans has been entitled to speak for the great nation of the Samasanans. Give orders to have the gig launched, Mr. Hampden, if you please. We shall get ashore without delay, and return before dark to the yacht."

"Perhaps," said Mr. Dugdale, in a hesitating way, "perhaps that seemingly intelligent person in the sampan could give me an idea as to the likelihood of my obtaining on the island a specimen of the Chibia pectoralis—one of the birds discovered by Wallace?"

"I think we had better not put conundrums to the people until we get better acquainted," remarked Grace in an undertone.
CHAPTER XV.

A DAY ASHORE.

THE gig was soon launched and under way to the shore, bearing the captain, Mr. Dugdale, and Harold, with Loo Chew to act as interpreter by the aid of the intelligent native alluded to by the naturalist. Rifles were placed in the bottom of the boat, for the captain, though the natives seemed friendly in the highest degree, thought it well not to neglect taking precautionary measures, being aware that it was not wise to be over trustful of any strange people. Mr. Dugdale carried his double-barrel shot-gun and a belt of cartridges, but the captain and Harold only brought revolvers, which they carefully concealed.

The sampans undertook the duty of guiding the boat to the proper landing-place, and it was found that the course led through one of the many curious natural arches in the promontory at one side of the little bay. Several of these arches are
high enough and wide enough to allow of a boat of considerable size to pass through. The formation is not confined to coralline rock; it is to be found on many rocky shores as far north as the Luffoden Islands, and as far south as Terra del Fuego.

The men in the gig rowed cautiously through the arch, the captain fearing that the jagged point of a reef might be below. But Harold, looking over the thwarts just at the passage, saw the bottom at a depth of five or six fathoms, and no sign of a reef appeared. The course ashore from this point was plain sailing, and the boat was soon run up on a beach of sand.

All along the coast were standing native huts, built of mud, and cleverly roofed with broad leaves closely braided together. Behind them were extensive plantations up the sloping ground. From these habitations numbers of the people flocked with numberless children. None seemed in the least degree afraid of the strangers; and with them trotted several graceful little deer, of a variety which even Mr. Dugdale had never seen before, but of which he had heard as being peculiar to the island of Formosa. These specimens seemed as little timorous as the natives themselves, though it appeared unlikely that they had ever before been face to face with white men.

As the captain, Mr. Dugdale, and Harold went up to the village, preceded by Loo Chew and the elderly native, and followed by a couple of the seamen carrying rifles, they were met by an immense
concourse of the inhabitants, many of whom bore rude baskets containing eggs and sweet potatoes, which they offered to the strangers. Others carried rice, and these products of the island they offered to the visitors without giving any indication of a desire to trade; they evidently meant to show genuine hospitality after their own fashion to the new arrivals.

The captain directed Loo Chew to tell them to take the vegetables down to the boat, while he distributed some presents to the givers, at which they were greatly pleased, and invited the party into their huts. The captain, however, made a bold stand against the extension of the native hospitality to this point. Knowing that the ideas of sanitation entertained by the majority of savage islanders are somewhat loose, he steadily resisted all the kind invitations to step inside, or, to be more exact, to crawl inside, given to him and his friends by the good-natured people.

When the captain endeavoured to get away from the crowds that surrounded the visitors—for he was anxious to see something of the island—he found that the natives were good-natured to a fault. They seemed to be under the impression that if they let the visitors out of their sight they would be regarded as deficient in the virtue of hospitality. Before an hour had passed it became plain that they would have no grounds for self-reproach on this point. They gave the strangers no chance of escaping from their well-meant attentions, and not only followed them, but ran before
them in every direction where they attempted to stroll. It was only by the exercise of considerable adroitness that they avoided actually treading upon some of the children that ran in their way, and unwillingly prostrated themselves now and again in front of the visitors.

"There is no chance of seeing anything in this place except the natives," said the captain, as the party paused on the borders of a rice field above a picturesque little valley towards which Mr. Dugdale was casting longing eyes, thinking probably of the possibility of some strange bird waiting on a bough overhanging the rocks until the unerring aim of the naturalist resulted in its being classified—the highest honour which any specimen could receive, according to Mr. Dugdale.

"I don't see how we are to get rid of them," said Harold. "I shouldn't mind taking to my heels up the slope, only I don't believe it would be of any use; these fellows are sure to be good runners, and even if they failed to get the better of us immediately, they would be certain to run us down in the end and throw their children under our feet."

"They are not so timorous as one might have fancied they would be," remarked Mr. Dugdale.

"They are not quite so timorous as I wish they were," said the captain. "Is there no native policeman, I wonder, to whom we could appeal to be saved from this mobbing?"

"It's getting uncomfortably warm," said Harold. "The ventilation of the island is not perfect."
"It is not airy in the centre of this crowd, at any rate," said the captain, wiping his forehead. "I think that the best thing we can do is to return to the gig without delay, unless we are anxious to be suffocated."

"I don't think that we are likely to gain much by this sort of exploring," said Harold. "If there's any bird that would not be frightened away by such a crowd as this, it would certainly be a remarkable specimen."

"We might as well have remained aboard the ship," remarked Mr. Dugdale sadly. "And yet," he added, looking earnestly up the little valley,—"and yet there may be within the circle of this little island some treasure in natural history—some remarkable specimen yet unclassified."

"It's not at all unlikely," said the captain. "But it is plain that such a specimen will have to wait for a more propitious occasion to be made amenable to scientific research."

He turned about and headed the party back to the village, the crowd showing no sign of a desire to forsake him or his friends.

Before the party reached the gig that was waiting for them, the Chinaman was ordered to make all the inquiry he could respecting the natives of the east coast of Formosa. The captain was anxious to know if these savages who had formerly had so evil a reputation had improved in any way within recent years. He wished to know if any attempt had lately been made to land
on any part of the coast except that which was
known to be in some measure civilized.

Loo Chew now seemed to be on rather a more
friendly footing than before with the elderly
gentleman with whom he had at first begun to
speak, and who certainly appeared to be the most
intelligent of all the islanders. In reply to all
inquiries on the subject of his neighbours, this re-
presentative citizen of Samasana declared, according
to the interpretation of Loo Chew, that certain
death awaited any one who would venture ashore at
any part of the coast except where the Chinamen
from the mainland had settled. The natives were
in no way improved in their habits. They still
were devoted to head-hunting, Loo Chew's inform-
ant said, and the Chinaman's vigorous rendering
of this information had a tendency to convey
that the head-hunters had recently become quite
reckless in their attacks upon the camphor-
gatherers of the northern parts of the island.

This information was not particularly comforting
to the party; but it did not seem to discourage
Mr. Dugdale to as great an extent as it did his
companions. He was inclined to sneer at what
Loo Chew said the natives had told him, and to
throw doubts upon the correctness of the China-
man's translation of their statements. All the
time that the gig was being rowed back to the
yacht the naturalist continued his criticism of Loo
Chew as an interpreter, until the Chinaman, if he
had not been, in the first place, particularly thick-
skinned, and if he had not, in the second place, utterly failed to catch even the general drift of Mr. Dugdale’s discourse, would have been disposed to join any band of head-hunters among whom Mr. Dugdale might be inclined to go, in order to secure as a trophy the cranium of an English naturalist. Happily Loo Chew was in the bow of the boat, and Mr. Dugdale was in the stern, so that the criticism of the latter was heard only by his immediate neighbours.

“My dear Mr. Dugdale,” said the captain, when the deck of the Fire-fly was once again reached, “I have done all that any man could do on your behalf. I put in here, simply that I might have an opportunity of finding out if the natives were in any way safer to go among than they used to be, and you know what the result of my inquiries has been.”

“I knew what it would be, my dear sir,” said Mr. Dugdale. “I said all along what is perfectly true; the native is everywhere—not merely at Formosa and this island, but in every quarter of the world—regarded as a bogey to frighten strangers with. I have heard the worst character that could be imagined given to some of the islanders among whom I afterwards lived for months with the utmost comfort.”

“Then you don’t believe that we have yet received an accurate account of the Formosans?” said the captain.

“I must confess that such is my impression,
founded upon long experience," answered Mr. Dugdale.

"And you would still advise me to direct the yacht's course to some point on the east coast of the island, for the purpose of allowing you and a party to go ashore and work your way into the interior?"

"Nothing of the kind, sir," said Mr. Dugdale. "As I believe that there is no venturing on a shore which has the evil reputation of Formosa without a little risk, I would only suggest that we land, and that we do not go further from the coast than would be within reach of a signal to or from the yacht. Surely this would involve no risk, even though the natives may be as sanguinary as common report says they are."

"I am not at all inclined to take this view of the point in question," said the captain.

"Then we will say nothing more about it," and Mr. Dugdale turned away, waving his hand, as though dispersing the subject for ever.

"Just wait for one moment until you have heard all that I intend to say," said the captain. "I am not, I repeat, disposed to accept your views as to the harmlessness of the natives, and every one knows that so far as the question of signalling from the yacht is concerned, your suggestion would not insure our safety. Why, man, the natives would have swooped down on us and have stowed our heads in their nets, just as you may have seen a man selling india-rubber coloured balloons do with these playthings when a breeze of wind is blowing.
—they would, I say, have stowed our heads in their nets before we could make any signal to the yacht. When a hundred hungry blacks have come around us is not exactly the time for us to signal the yacht to send a boat ashore to carry us back to our own decks."

"Should not a couple of rifles be enough to keep off half the island for an indefinite period?" said Mr. Dugdale. "Of what value are the resources of civilization in this way if they are ineffectual in keeping off a crowd of the lowest type of savages armed only with bows of primitive construction, and with knives which are, of course, perfectly useless except at close quarters?"

"I'll tell you what it is, Mr. Dugdale," said the captain; "I would not have any hesitation in going ashore at the worst part of the island if necessity arose for such an enterprise. I believe, with you, that a sufficient number of men could be spared from the yacht to constitute a force that would hold its own against a hundred savages. But I frankly confess that I hold human life—even savage human life—in no way so cheap that I would consider myself justified in running any risk by going ashore. I don't mean risk to ourselves, mind, but risk to the natives. In my idea the life of one of these men is more to be considered than the likelihood of making the finest collection of birds, beasts, and fishes in the world."

"What!" cried Mr. Dugdale. "You say you regard the life of a savage—a cannibal—a head-
hunter more precious than... Oh, pardon me, my dear sir; I am forgetting myself. There is no need to discuss the matter."

"None whatever," acquiesced Captain Cromer, with a laugh. "Don't be despondent, my friend; you will have many additional opportunities of increasing your collection while you are in our company, I hope. So long as I can remember I have abhorred that sort of exploration which entails the use of an elephant rifle, and that way of adding to our knowledge which necessitates the shooting of a dozen men for every bird that is brought down."

"So do we all," said Mr. Dugdale. "But civilization usually advances as the savages are thinned out. Look at the case of North America—of New Zealand—of Tasmania—of Australia. You scarcely seem to understand the great natural law of the survival of the fittest. It prevails in every form of life."

"No doubt; but all the same I decline to be the pioneer of that civilization which advances over the dead bodies of men, whether savage or otherwise; and this is the last word of our conversation on this subject."

"I understand the humane motives by which you are actuated," said the naturalist, "and I—I appreciate their force, and—yes, I may say, I respect them."

"I am sure you do," said the captain, as he went to Mr. Hampden to make inquiries as to the advisability of weighing anchor before darkness came on.
CHAPTER XVI.

BENEATH THE CLIFFS OF FORMOSA.

M. HAMPDEN was very glad to be allowed to express himself freely on the subject of the anchorage. He gave it as his belief that if the wind were to alter suddenly, as it frequently did at the change of the monsoon, the yacht might not be so easily got off as she would be in the south-easterly breeze that was now blowing. If by some unlucky accident the anchor were to drag it might foul among the coral, and the cable might part in the attempt to recover it.

"I don't like over-much lying in an unknown bay like this, sir," said Hampden; "and I think that as we have got all we are likely to get at this place, the sooner we shift our quarters the better it will be for all concerned."

"Up anchor then, without a moment's delay," cried the captain; "the breeze holds, and it will
probably hold until long after sunset. With the breeze and the current we should be out of sight of the island before the binnacle lamp is lighted.”

“Up anchor,” shouted the chief officer forward; “stand by winch. Show a bit of the foresail, Mr. Grace, to bring her up to the anchor.”

In a few minutes the light chain cable was being taken in, all the hands who had been making trade with the natives in the sampans over the side, hurrying to the winch, leaving their bargains unconcluded, for the yacht’s crew were like the crew of a man-of-war in point of discipline and smartness. Before the anchor was cat-headed the vessel was drifting out of the bay, much to the dissatisfaction of the natives, who had a considerable quantity of vegetables still to dispose of, though they had already traded away so much as could be grown within the limits of a large market-garden, and so many eggs as would, the cook said, make omelettes for the entire ship’s company for the next month. When once the native mind is turned in the direction of trade, however, it is not easily satisfied, and the general idea that seemed to prevail among the sampans was that the yacht had no right whatever to leave so suddenly. If the people had been civilized, they would probably have sent a respectful deputation to the captain representing to him the hardship that his departure would entail on an influential class of the inhabitants of Samasana—namely, the greengrocers; but not sharing the advantages of civilization, they
could only protest by shouting and putting their crazy sampans in the way of the yacht, taking good care, however, to sheer off as the sails began to draw, and there was a likelihood of the bows of the Fire-fly crashing over the frail timbers of the native craft.

In a short time the last of the sampans was left astern, and the yacht bore away to the north, and at sunset the pretty little island was but faintly visible in the distance.

"I enjoyed that stroll ashore immensely," said Harold, as he hung over the rail astern, near where his father sat in a deck-chair. "If the natives only had not that one failing of over-politeness, we might have had a better time among them, and Mr. Dugdale's game-bag might not have been empty when he returned to the yacht."

"Every allowance must be made for the Samasanans," said the captain. "They are not yet accustomed to strange visitors, and they consequently mob them in a good-natured way. How can any one blame them who has seen the way a single stranger is mobbed in London? Suppose half-a-dozen of these natives were suddenly to appear in Hyde Park one fine afternoon, do you fancy they would be allowed to walk about without receiving some attention from the people? I suppose it would require fifty policemen to keep them from being actually molested."

"Fully that number," said Harold. "But in my idea the policemen themselves would be the first
to molest them if they were to appear in the costume that we saw them wearing to-day."

"Their costume is much better adapted to their climate than ours is to the average climate of the British Islands," said the captain. "I can quite enter into the feeling of the natives when they see such a vessel as this cast anchor in their bay. Perhaps not half-a-dozen chances of trading occur within the lifetime of the oldest inhabitant. What would our leading shopkeepers think if their customers called only once every five or maybe ten years?"

"On the whole I think we have got off very well," said Harold. "I am perfectly satisfied with all I saw, and I think I shall remember the Samasanans as long as they will remember me. They are not more full of curiosity than the people who consider themselves their betters, and they gave us full value for our cotton handkerchiefs. Mr. Dugdale is disappointed, however, I am afraid."

"He is an enthusiast," replied the captain. "He does not invariably look at matters from the standpoint of reason and expediency. He does not think that I am justified in concluding that it would not be safe to go into the interior of Formosa in search of new birds."

"I am sure that we are all sorry that it is impossible to think of facing the head-hunters," said Harold. "But I suppose you will sail close to the coast as you intended, to give us a view
of the cliffs that are spoken of in one of your nautical books?"

"Certainly, I intend doing that," said the captain. "Perhaps we might even be able to land for an hour or two in a safe place; but any exploring is out of the question."

"Mr. Dugdale should be satisfied with that," said Harold. "If we do get ashore, perhaps some rare bird will hurry down to meet him. We can always hope for the best."

"Yes, all of us except Mr. Dugdale," added the captain.

The yacht was put on a course to the north-east, for as the sun had set the captain thought it advisable to stand off the coast during the darkness. The island was only about fifteen miles distant, and even Mr. Dugdale, who was so anxious to land at it, might have objected to the yacht's going ashore at a precipitous part of the coast during the night.

The next morning Harold found that the course of the vessel had been altered to the north-west, and she was consequently approaching the island, and making up for what she had lost by standing off through the darkness. In the course of a few hours the stupendous cliffs of the coast were looming over the little vessel, the clouds floating away in graceful curls and gray smoky rings from ridge to ridge.

Though the sunlight struck full upon the face of these mighty cliffs, it failed to take away from
the darkness of those towering bastions. The sea was black everywhere within the shadow of the enormous precipices of the coast, and within that shadow there was a tendency on the part of every one—except perhaps the boatswain—to talk in whispers. The feeling of awe that comes over one when at the base of a great mountain is intensified when one approaches such a mountain from the sea, but one becomes speechless with wonder and admiration beneath a precipice that rises three thousand feet sheer from the water.

It was beneath such a cliff—such a line of cliffs—that the Fire-fly was now sailing, and it was not surprising that all on her deck should feel the influence of such imposing scenery as was now presented to them. For miles and miles the precipitous line of cliffs seemed to run, their faces varying in rugged features, but their summits scarcely altering. Here and there the long black ridges became rugged, and at one place it seemed that some thousands of tons of rock had at some time become dislodged, and had tumbled into the water, for great triangular spaces appeared in the seaward ridges; but behind such spaces arose the pinnacles and crests of other mountains further inland, and wherever a gorge appeared it only served to show the dim outline of distant hills. The world contains no more wonderful sea-cliffs than those which run for many miles along the eastern coast of the island of Formosa.

When about three miles from the coast, steam
was got up aboard the *Fire-fly*, for the captain was not confident that the breeze from the south-east would last, and he had also had sufficient experience of running along a coast that was hollowed with such mighty gorges as that toward which the yacht was now sailing, to be aware of its dangers. A sudden squall rushing through one of these hollows broken in the mighty precipices would be sufficient to take the ship aback, and tear the sails into handkerchiefs, even if it did not send the masts by the board. He had therefore given the order to get up steam, so as to be able to creep along the shore and be independent of wind altogether.

When it seemed to Harold that the precipices of the shore were about a hundred yards away, though in reality they were more than a mile distant, the sails were stowed and the inky waters were churned by the yacht’s propeller, and became flecked with white patches in her bubbling wake, as she moved slowly beneath that towering natural battlement of dark cliffs.

The captain did not consider it necessary to take soundings, until it seemed to Harold that the next long heave of the swell would fling the yacht against the face of the precipices. Then the deep-sea lead was cast and a hundred fathoms of line run out; but even at a short distance from the shore no bottom was found. The yacht then steamed slowly along the base of the cliffs in search of anchorage. The captain thought it might be that opposite one of the great gorges that divided
the mighty range of cliffs the water would be found somewhat shallower than opposite the most precipitous front of rock. Through these gorges it was plain that for centuries—since, in fact, Formosa had been part of the continent reaching from Japan to New Guinea—all the rainfall from the mountains of the interior had been carried down and discharged into the sea. Such torrents as would be found here at the rainy season, invariably carry with them thousands of tons of earth and stones; and thus the accumulation of centuries should be at the entrance to one of the gorges, and thereby form an anchorage.

For more than ten miles the Fire-fly crept along that rugged coast, frequently approaching so close to the cliffs that Harold fancied he could throw a biscuit ashore. The lead was cast wherever the captain's theory caused him to hope that soundings might be made, but even with the full hundred fathom line run out no ground was reached. Everywhere that an attempt was made to sound the captain noted his chart, taking careful bearings of the coast, so that should any shipmaster in future be in such a position as necessitated his searching for an anchorage, he would be spared a considerable amount of trouble.

It is needless to say that neither Mr. Dugdale nor Harold so devoted themselves to the soundings that they were incapable of giving some attention to the scenery of the island.

It seemed to Harold, at least, that he was gazing
at a series of moving pictures of the most vivid character that he had ever seen. As the yacht crept slowly along, there was no monotony in these magnificent views of precipice and gorge. The shape of the cliffs varied every quarter of a mile. At some places they opposed a bare flat front to the sea, and at others they sloped gradually upwards in a fantastic heap, with giant heads and startling configurations that suggested the weird vision of a sculptor—enormous animals that could never exist but in fancy were here—grim things of unfinished shape, laughing monsters hewn in stone.

The strange island and the mystery overhanging so much of it stimulated the boy’s fancy as he looked up from the deck to those towering cliffs. It seemed not only that a Titanic warfare had once been carried on here, but that some of the combatants had been buried beneath the great rocks that their opponents had hurled at them, and had become petrified through many centuries. Harold was breathless as he stood on the deck while these strange examples of nature’s sculpture passed slowly before his eyes. The cry of the man who was casting the lead at intervals did not take away his attention from these marvels of mountain and rock. He was lost in wonder as the yacht moved slowly along, only lying to on the swell when soundings were being sought for.

Mr. Dugdale was also standing astern with his binocular telescope focussed upon the rocks. He
was not particularly struck with the curious shape of the precipices, nor did he appear to be overcome with awe at their sheer height above the yacht. He was too intent on searching the depths of the gorges between the hills. These gorges were, he could see, thickly wooded a short distance from the shore, and the broad leaves and the luxuriant vegetation of which he caught glimpses represented to him the possibility of "collecting" beyond his fondest dreams.

Those gorges were perhaps the entrance to so many valleys, leading right into the interior of the island. No civilized man had ever been on one of these highways, and the thickets which were there could not but form a dwelling-place for such birds as had perhaps never been seen by the most enterprising travellers—for animals whose form and structure might tend to illustrate some of the theories of science which were as yet imperfect, owing to the absence of certain "links."

It was not altogether left to his imagination to guess what was to be found among those thickets leading to the interior. Once while the yacht was lying for a few minutes opposite an unusually broad and straight valley there flashed across the line of Mr. Dugdale's telescope a bird of plumage as gorgeous as that of the loveliest bird of paradise he had ever seen; and in vainly endeavouring to follow its flight, he found several deer which he recognized as belonging to a species only to be found on the island of Formosa. The graceful little
creatures were quietly grazing on the brink of the stream that flowed down the valley. While he watched them there it seemed as if they had become suddenly conscious of his observation, for they quickly sprang from stone to stone across the stream and dashed up the valley and into the thicket, where they disappeared. Mr. Dugdale sighed. He knew what that sudden scare of the deer meant. He knew that they were flying from some stronger animal than themselves. He was well aware of that endless conflict in nature—the struggle for existence that is perpetually going on, and is seen as clearly in an English woodland as in a tropical thicket.

Mr. Dugdale lowered his glass and moved toward Harold to give that young man the result of his observation.

He found that Harold was no longer intent on watching the island. He had climbed over the bulwarks, and was standing on the moulding that ran round the yacht. He was eagerly peering into the water, as if he had discovered there some object of great interest.
CHAPTER XVII.

A MESSAGE FROM THE DEEP.

"Are you not in a somewhat perilous position?" asked Mr. Dugdale. "Can you depend upon that line you are holding?"

"It's the queerest thing I ever knew," said Harold, still peering into the water.

"What is the queerest thing?"

"That's just what I cannot tell. It's so queer that it is unlike anything I ever knew."

"Make some attempt to define it, and I will make some attempt to tell you what it is."

"It seemed like a jar," said Harold, after a pause, during which he kept his eyes upon the water.

"Then it probably was a jar lately thrown overboard," said Mr. Dugdale.

"There would be nothing queer about it in that case," replied Harold. "But this was something different. I heard the yacht strike it, and I fancied for a moment that she was scraping over a sunken
reef. I looked over the side and saw—well, what I did see—whether it was a jar or a bottle. The seaweed was clinging to it in a curious way, and this probably accounted for its sudden disappearance. It must have been drawn under the yacht."

"Perhaps the propeller struck it," suggested Mr. Dugdale.

"No," said Harold, "the propeller had ceased to work—we were as motionless as we are now. Will you be kind enough to keep a watch for it here, Mr. Dugdale," he added, "while I run for'ard and ask my father not to allow the propeller to move? If it struck the jar one of the blades of the propeller might be injured."

He vaulted over the bulwarks to the deck and ran to where the captain was standing beside the engine-room telegraph, ready to give the signal to go ahead slow when the deep-sea lead would be aboard once more.

"What's the matter aft that you come in such haste?" asked the captain. "Is there anything to report?"

"Not much of consequence," replied Harold. "I only saw a bottle or a jar of some sort in the water, and I'm afraid if the propeller should strike it one of the blades might be injured."

"Or perhaps the jar," said the captain. "Whoever threw it overboard should have thrown it clear of the vessel. All right! I'll not shift the telegraph until we have drifted over the object, whatever it may be."
He then lost no time in securing it and hoisting it on deck.—p. 145.
"Thank you," said Harold. "I'll watch aft and sing out when I know that we are clear."

He hastened back to the place which he had just left, and the moment he returned he cried out, for rising and falling with the light swell, at a distance of about a yard from the rudder, appeared the neck of a stone bottle, with a handle at one part that gave it a "list" and served to hold fast a trailing net of seaweed.

In an instant Harold had sprung on the bulwarks and had caught up the boat-hook, which he knew was in the bottom of the gig that hung in the davits on the port quarter. By getting outside to the moulding once again, and holding on by an earring, he succeeded in "coaxing" the object within reach of the boat-hook. He then lost no time in securing it and hoisting it on deck, where it slipped off the iron and fell with a crash that would have proved fatal to it if it had not been for the soft seaweed that broke the fall.

The captain, watching the transaction from amidships, waved his hand, to show that he had seen the capture made by Harold. Mr. Dugdale in an instant had grasped a portion of the seaweed, and was examining it closely through a pocket microscope, and thus Harold was left to pick up the jar and satisfy himself as to its contents.

He found that it was a common stone jar, such as is used aboard ordinary sailing ships for rum that has been drawn off the cask. It was corked and sealed, and to the handle a piece of
stout twine was attached. The brass "eyelet" of a label was still on the twine, showing either that the person who had committed the vessel to the water had not detached the original label that had been tied to the handle, or that he had fastened another label to it, which had been of course torn away by a fish or by the action of the sea. There was no clue on the outside as to the ownership or purport of the jar—whether it had been cast into the sea by chance or with some object in view.

Harold called out to the steward to send him a corkscrew, and meantime he chipped away the sealing-wax with his penknife. When the cork was drawn a distinct odour of rum was perceptible from the mouth of the jar. Harold had previously shaken the vessel, and hearing no gurgle of a liquid inside, he had pronounced it empty. But now the odour of the spirit was so strong he thought the vessel must contain some rum, and with a view of finding out what quantity there was in it, he cautiously tilted it over. Not until the mouth was opposite the deck did he find that the jar was not empty; but what was discharged from the mouth was not a liquor of any sort, but a small parcel rolled up and sewed in oiled silk.

He picked this up, and then shook the jar, mouth downward, once more, but without any result. It was plain that the sole contents were represented by that little parcel made up in form of a cylinder.

He quickly cut the threads of the parcel, and
found wrapped up in the silk a few papers. The first was a leaf of a log-book, containing the following—

"Barque Mosquito, 660 tons, Ephraim E. Harper, master, sailed from S. Francisco for Shanghai, encountered typhoon, Aug. 7, about 21° 10' N., 126° 20' E. from Greenwich, dismayed and drifting. Two boats stove in; long boat, nine aboard, in command of Silas Blake, chief mate, left ship Aug. 10; master and ten hands stood by ship. Should this be found, the finder will know that we hope to make some of the Spanish Islands, that being, as we think, the safest land, and please report to U. S. consuls at all ports, especially Chinese.

"Silas Blake in command."

"Written this Aug. 15."

This communication was on the first paper that Harold unrolled. The second paper had been rolled up until it was not thicker than an ordinary black-lead cedar pencil. It was inscribed in a cramped hand, "to the finder."

Harold unrolled the paper and found that it enclosed a United States bank-note for three hundred dollars. On the paper there was also a message "to the finder," written in the same cramped hand which was displayed on the outside.

"Mister, i'd be obbligatted to yew by senden this here wich I riskes to the name give as under—"
"Mrs. Blaydes, Hewson & Garton, Brokers, Boston, U.S.A.

"jest sez yew wen yew sends it that it was found sez yew and no more at present from

"yewrs trewly,

"Josiah Blaydes, bosun.

"I wish I'd staid buy the bark. The bote is in a bad way, and not like to reech anywere but davvy jones his lokker.

J. B."

The messages spoke for themselves. The first was evidently the communication of the chief mate of an American barque that had been dismasted in a typhoon scarcely a month ago; the second was the crude production of a sailor who was plainly not accustomed to letter-writing any more than to business, or he would not have carried about with him a bank-note for so large a sum as that which he was now anxious to have forwarded to his wife, without any message as to how it had come into the sender's hands.

Harold Cromer did not need any one to suggest to him the story of these strange messages. He had often heard of the crews of sinking or disabled ships enclosing messages to their friends in bottles —messages which were not found for perhaps many months after being committed to the tender mercies of the deep; but until now he had never seen one of these sad missives.

Standing there on the deck of the yacht with the jar at his feet and the papers curling
themselves about his fingers, no matter how he held them, the scene aboard the dismasted barque *Mosquito* passed before his eyes. He saw the vessel drifting helplessly about—now on the high summit of the waves that followed the destructive typhoon, now sunk in the trough between two giant billows; he saw the only sound boat launched with the mate, Silas Blake, and the eight men aboard; he could see the waving of hands from the shaking deck of the barque as the master and the remaining seamen, whose faces were above the bulwarks, wished their messmates "God speed!"

In another picture of his imagination he saw the boat in the midst of the lonely sea with a scorching blue sky overhead. He fancied he could see the boatswain, Josiah Blaydes, toiling at the pencil with which his singular letter was written; he could see him furtively take out from the breast of his shirt the bank-note, which he enclosed in the paper, and handed to the mate to sew up in the oiled silk. How the poor boatswain would wipe his forehead when his task was ended! Harold thought; and it was this thought, curiously enough, that caused his eyes to fill with tears.

He awoke as if from a dream, and found that the yacht's anchor was being let go, for the lead had suddenly touched ground in twenty-five fathoms, and a second cast nearer shore made it twenty. The captain had worked out his theory to a successful issue. After creeping round the coast of the island and sounding at the entrance to
every gorge without finding bottom, he had at last succeeded in his enterprise. The chain cable was rattling out, and Mr. Dugdale could scarcely conceal his excitement at the prospect of going ashore—for he took it for granted that the captain would at least land, even though he might not think it prudent to undertake any serious work of exploration.

He was so elated that he paid no attention to Harold’s examination of the papers which he had extracted from the jar. He was already making preparations to take the bearings of the mountain peak that was seen towering above the wooded slopes at the furthest extremity of the valley opposite which the Fire-fly was now swinging at anchor, and blowing off her superfluous steam.

Harold met his father coming from the engine telegraph, having satisfied himself that the anchor-age was good.

“Did you find out if that jar had been thrown overboard from the yacht?” asked the captain.

“I had no trouble in making sure on that point,” replied Harold, offering the papers to his father. “I found these inside the jar; they speak for themselves, I think.”
CHAPTER XVIII.

PREPARING TO LAND.

CAPTAIN CROMER took the papers from his son and unrolled them. He glanced first at the boatswain's letter, which was uppermost, and then he read the more official and coherent message signed by the chief mate of the barque Mangoito.

"You found these inside the jar?" he asked.

"I shook them out," replied the boy. "I fancied the jar contained some spirit; the odour of spirit was so great when I took out the cork, I turned the jar over and these fell out. They were tightly rolled up and covered with oiled silk."

"Where did they get the oiled silk, I wonder?" said the captain.

"There is nothing in either of the letters to tell us that," said Harold; "but I think that they tell a plain story. You have often told me about picking up such things, but I never knew until now how one feels on reading such a message from
the deep. I feel as if a dead man were speaking to me.”

“Dead—dead?” said the captain, as if musing upon the remark of his son. “Why dead, Harold?” he asked after a few moments of silence, during which he seemed to be thinking out a question of his own.

“What, you think there is a possibility of the boat’s crew being still afloat?” said Harold.

“I only think that one is scarcely justified in assuming at once that they are all dead,” said the captain. “Let me see. The date at which this was committed to the jar is barely three weeks ago. The boat was then a considerable distance further south than where you found the jar, for the jar would naturally drift northward in the Japanese current that we have felt for the last three days. The mate, who wrote one of these notes, says that he left the barque with the idea of reaching one of the Spanish Islands—he meant probably Luzon or the nearest of the Philippines. I see no reason why he should not have been able to carry out his intention. The letter was written scarcely three weeks ago, so that there would be ample time for the writer and his crew to reach their destination. I will think over the matter during the day.”

“And if the boat’s crew succeeded in reaching the island they sought, would they be safe?” asked Harold.

“They would be at any rate saved from the sea,” replied the captain. “They might work their way
round the coast to Manilla, or they might be picked up by some Spanish vessel in those waters. A gunboat is usually cruising in the neighbourhood."

"There is no way we could find out if they were saved, I suppose?" said Harold after a pause.

"What we can do is to send information respecting the boat to the Spanish authorities through the nearest consul," said the captain. "We can also inform the American consuls wherever we may go. Indeed I think it would be my duty to make for some port on the coast of China, where there is certain to be a United States consul. I will think over the matter. Meantime if we are to land here we should lose no time about it. We shall not wander far from shore, for though there does not appear to be any native village about here, yet that is no guarantee that there are not some fellows straying along the coast in search of whatever they may pick up in the head way. I have no wish to come in contact with such gentry."

"I will leave these letters and also the bank-note in my cabin," said Harold. "If we had come through the Straits of Sunda, as we originally intended, and had gone northward by the Strait of Macassar, we might have come upon the boat."

"I should not like to undertake the duty of searching for a boat in those waters," said the captain. "The chances of success would be too small to make such a project worth considering, and the amount of coral in the shape of reefs and small islands not marked in the chart is too large to allow of any
shipmaster with a due regard for the safety of his vessel embarking on such an enterprise. Now prepare yourself for a run ashore."

Harold went to his cabin rather thoughtfully. His heart was not now set upon the ramble ashore to which he had looked forward in the early morning. There came before his eyes the picture of the lonely boat in the midst of that calm sea that stretched away for thousands of leagues to the eastward. Was that boat still afloat? he wondered. Was she floating keel uppermost among those coral reefs of which his father had spoken? Where were the crew now? Were they looking forth from the highest point of one of the coral islands of these seas—looking forth for the sail which should bear them back to civilization?

All the time he was arranging his ammunition in his belt, and drawing on his high boots, he was thinking of the mate and the boatswain and the crew of the barque whose name he had first heard a quarter of an hour before. He did not, curiously enough, ask himself what was the fate of the captain and those of the ship's company who had been forced to remain aboard when the only boat which was available had put off, hoping to reach one of the Spanish possessions. It seemed that the ship's fate was beyond a question. It was only the fate of the boat and her crew that remained uncertain in his mind.

As for Mr. Dugdale, he had not even the curiosity to ask Harold what he had found in the interior
of the jar which he had discovered. The seaweed Mr. Dugdale found to contain no forms of life with which he was not perfectly familiar. He was now waiting on the deck with his exploring implements about him, and it must be confessed that he formed a picturesque figure. He wore his enormous pith helmet, encircled with an immense muslin puggaree that hung down behind almost to his waist. He had on high boots, and a Norfolk jacket with an ammunition-belt slung to his spare figure. A butterfly-net made on the principle of a toasting-fork drawing out in three tubes was strapped to his rifle, and in a leathern sheath he carried another implement which caused a good deal of discussion among all on deck.

The sheath was about two feet in length and six inches broad. As it was not more than an inch thick, it could easily be strapped on the back of a man—even upon the back of so spare a naturalist as Mr. Dugdale.

"It's a sort of sketching-block," said Grace, in the course of the general discussion as to what was enclosed in this curious case.

"It's far too narrow for that," said Mr. Hampden. "I'm inclined to believe it contains an apparatus for trapping insects. It is laid out in the sun and the insects are attracted to it; as soon as it is as crowded as a piece of fly-paper in a grocer's shop, he sends a current of electricity through the plate and they are killed in a moment. He then collects them at his leisure."
"Oh, you must have seen the thing itself," said Grace. "You know all about it."

"Not I," replied the chief officer. "It might be anything, from a new sort of sextant up to a packet of sandwiches."

"I never was so curious about anything in my life," said Grace, after a pause, during which he gazed at the leathern case from a distance. "As I am going ashore with the party, I think it my duty to become acquainted with the contents of that case. I don't suppose the old gentleman wishes to make a mystery of it."

He went aft to where Mr. Dugdale was standing, and expressed a hope that that gentleman would pardon his curiosity in inquiring what the case held.

"It holds a most useful implement, and one of my own invention into the bargain," replied the naturalist. "I will show it to you, and you will, I am sure, have no difficulty in guessing what are its uses."

He unstrapped the case and disclosed before the astonished eyes of the young man a glittering instrument of steel, made after the pattern of a cook's cleaver, but polished like a razor.

Grace lifted this remarkable instrument by the hilt and poised it for a moment. He was surprised at its weight. It was evidently meant to be used with both hands. Mr. Dugdale watched with an air of triumph the young man poising the glittering steel blade.
"You see what it is meant for, of course?" said Mr. Dugdale.

"I can only give the merest guess," replied Grace. "You are anxious to do a little head-hunting on your own account in the island—isn't that the case? Oh, yes, this is the very thing for that sort of sport. Why, it is as sharp as any razor. It ought to do good work in your hands, sir. In the course of an hour or two, if the island is any way populous, you should have collected far more than would fill that net you have strapped to your rifle."

"Nothing of the sort, sir, let me tell you," said Mr. Dugdale, warmly. "You are dense, sir—you are denser than the jungle this instrument is designed to clear. You can never have done any exploring, or you would be aware in a moment of the immense value of such an instrument in clearing a way through an undergrowth of leaves and brambles. This is a parang."

Grace laid back the weapon in its case and shook his head.

"I think you are quite right to tell people so, Mr. Dugdale," said he. "There are some people who, if you confessed to them what the real use of the thing was, might be disposed to take a narrow view of your intentions for the furtherance of science; but you might have confessed to me, as you must know that I have no foolish prejudices against collecting specimens of heads or anything else. Why should I blame you? It would be
as reasonable to call people fools who collect postage stamps or old china. Yes, sir, you might have known me better."

The young man shook his head gravely and sighed, Mr. Dugdale endeavouring all the time to assure him that the instrument was merely meant for clearing a jungle.

Captain Cromer now came on deck, and Harold arrived shortly after, both being equipped for the shore.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the steward, coming aft with a puzzled look on his face, "but I think it well to let you know that Loo Chew has disappeared; he has not been seen all morning."

"Disappeared? Nonsense!" said the captain. "We brought him from the island with us last evening. I saw him late at night. How can he have disappeared?"

"I can't say, sir," replied the steward. "All I know is, that early in the morning he asked me if you intended to go ashore at Formosa, and since I told him that I believed you had some idea of it, he has not been seen by any one aboard the yacht."

"That is really very odd," said the captain. "Have you made a systematic search for him fore and aft?"

"I have, sir; he is nowhere to be found."

"What can be the meaning of this?" said the captain to Mr. Hampden.

"It doesn't mean very much, sir," answered the officer. "It only means that the Chinaman is not
anxious to accompany you ashore. He has been under the impression that you mean to go into the interior, taking him with you as you did at Sama-sana to act as interpreter. I know these fellows and their ways. Loo Chew will turn up safe and sound as soon as you return from the island.”

“I'll have a conversation with him then,” said the captain. “Don't trouble yourself, Marven,” he added, turning to the steward. “You may take it for granted that what Mr. Hampden says is correct. Loo Chew will turn up all right in an hour or two. We hope to be aboard again by sunset.”

“Very good, sir,” said the steward, touching his cap. “I have stowed the lunch-basket in the bow of the long-boat; you'll find a bottle of brandy in it as well, sir, in case of accidents.”

“Quite right,” said the captain. “It is right to take every precaution of this sort. It is impossible to say what may occur.”

“Lower away the long-boat,” cried Mr. Hampden.
CHAPTER XIX.

THE EXPEDITION LANDS.

The expedition ashore consisted of Captain Cromer and Harold, Dick Grace, Mr. Dugdale, and two seamen, all of whom were armed either with rifles or double-barrelled fowling guns and revolvers. Mr. Dugdale was the only member of the little force who carried another weapon; he could not be induced to part with his jungle-clearer, though its weight must have oppressed him.

The orders for the day were that the yacht was to remain at anchor in charge of Mr. Hampden. Steam was to be kept up in case of the anchor dragging, or any other accident occurring. The boat that took the party ashore was to return to the yacht and haul up under the quarter in readiness to put off at a signal from the shore. If the expedition did not return at sundown or during the next day, Mr. Hampden was on no account to send any of the yacht's crew ashore, or to
organize any search until the second night had passed. He was then to send as many men as he could spare, well armed, to reconnoitre and to report accordingly.

"I don't anticipate any collision with the natives," said the captain to his chief officer, on leaving the yacht. "But it is as well to understand how we are to co-operate in case of any accident. It appears to me that the natives are not to be found along the coast, or we should surely have seen some of them before now. A steamer creeping along the shore as we have been doing could scarcely fail to attract the attention of some of the natives if they had been near."

"So it has occurred to me," said Hampden. "I suppose you have no intention of going far into the interior?"

"I have certainly no idea of doing anything of the sort," said the captain. "I only mean to go a mile or so up the valley, and return when we have got a glimpse of the country. The account we got of the place at Samasana yesterday made me decide not to venture on more than a stroll."

Mr. Hampden said he understood his instructions, and would take care to act upon them, and the long-boat was then lowered, six seamen taking the oars, and a man with a boat-hook being in the bows.

"Now," said the captain, when the boat was ready to start, "you know how the boats are landed at Madeira. The beach here is about as
steep as it is off Funchal. When the bow touches the ground don't let the boat swing about. Two men jump over the quarter as far for'ard as possible, and run the boat up the stones with the next swell that comes. Now, give way."

The sailors bent their backs at the oars with a will, and as the yacht was anchored only about a quarter of a mile from the shore, a few minutes were sufficient to bring the long-boat to the beach. The swell was greater even than the captain had anticipated. When the boat was swept to the beach on the summit of a great wave, a couple of men leapt over the gunwales and endeavoured to carry her on, but the relapse of the swell was so great that it was all the men could do to keep the boat steady so that the stern should not swing round. Had it been so, the craft could not but have capsized. A regular torrent of large pebbles, worn smooth through grinding against one another for centuries, swept down upon the legs of the men who were standing almost up to the waist in water, nearly carrying them away.

"Keep her steady, my men," said the captain. "Wait for the next swell. Now then, altogether!"

The long slow swell came lifting the stern high in the air and sweeping the boat up the beach. The two men at the bows were carried off their feet at first, but they held on to the boat, and as soon as they felt the pebbles under them once more they maintained the impetus given to the boat by the wave, and ran her half-a-dozen yards
clear of the water. The other men were over the
gunwales in another moment, so that when the
wave relapsed the boat was left high and dry.
"That was well done," said the captain. "There's
no need to take the boat up any further. You
would only be giving yourselves extra trouble
launching her."

The exploring party, or rather the picnic party,
as Grace said they should be called, then disem-
barked, and shouldering their guns, went up from
the beach, the two seamen following with the
basket of provisions provided by the steward.

The scenery here was of an extraordinary
character. The gorge at which the party had
landed was not more than a quarter of a mile
across, and the cliffs on either side towered above
them to a sheer height of over two thousand feet.
The stream that flowed down in a hollow bed at
the base of one of the precipices appeared black
as ink in the shadow. It was only a few yards
across, but from the marks which could be seen
between the cliffs, it was plain that in the rainy
monsoon it swelled until it became an immense
torrent rolling down to the sea. It was the
action of this torrent that had formed the anchor-
age for the yacht, by sweeping down thousands of
tons of earth and stones from the interior of the
island.

The sides of the cliffs that faced the sea, and
even a portion of the precipices of the gorge, were
quite barren, only for some hundred feet or so

1 2
from the summit was there growing a curious gray moss. But when the explorers had gone up the gorge for a quarter of a mile they saw what a wealth of vegetation there was all through the valley. The cliffs that showed their bare fronts to the sea fell away gradually as they joined an inland chain of hills on either side—hills that were overgrown with vegetation of a hundred shades of green, varying from the most delicate that could be found in an English lane in spring, to the darkest tint of the woodland that makes the trees appear surrounded with clouds instead of foliage.

The valley had broadened into an immense amphitheatre of hills, and down the wooded slopes there came to the strangers a soft scent of spices and camphor.

Mr. Dugdale's eyes glistened beneath his spectacles as the little party stood at the end of the valley looking upon this scene of wonder and of beauty.

"I cannot say that I recognize a new perfume in that air," said the naturalist. "I can tell every tree that has contributed to it. No, there is nothing new in that way."

"I dare say a chemist could make you up in a pill-box the combination of scents you find here," said the captain.

"There should be no difficulty—if he were an intelligent man," replied Mr. Dugdale thoughtfully, and not perceiving the exact force of Captain Cromer's remark.
“A capital scent ‘essence of Formosa’ would make,” said Harold. “It might be advertised on the backs of magazines in form of a picture showing a Formosan belle using the scent on her handkerchief, while her friends stand around lost in admiration.”

“But we didn’t come here to discuss such unprofitable topics,” said the captain. “Mr. Dugdale has told us that this odour from the hills contains nothing new, and as nothing but a novelty will pay now-a-days, we need not consider the advisability of starting in rivalry to Mr. Rimmel. The only question we have to discuss is which way we should go now that we have got so far.”

The little party were standing just where the chain of hills broadened out on either side of the valley toward the interior of the island, as the captain believed; for in the distance the mighty peak of a mountain could be seen, and it appeared that this mountain was but part of the range of hills that ended only at the ocean. Standing as they were with a chain of hills on either hand, the captain and his friends were naturally puzzled in what direction to go.

“Come, Mr. Dugdale,” said the captain, “the choice lies with you. In what direction are you most likely to meet with the best results?”

“If you are good enough to leave the choice with me,” replied the naturalist, “I would not hesitate a moment in suggesting that we work our way gradually upward on this slope to our right. You
observe there is a waterfall in the distance. I think we could scarcely make a more advantageous excursion than to that place.”

"Onward, then," said the captain. "The waterfall is at least six miles away, and it would take us probably two days to reach it, cutting our way through the undergrowth; but we can at least make a move in that direction. It is a conspicuous object, and we cannot get lost so long as we keep it in view."

A start was made at the base of the hill that formed the northern side of the valley, the waterfall glittering in the sunlight as the water went over a precipice in the distance and lost itself among the dense vegetation beneath. The hollow of the valley was one forest, so thick as to be impenetrable, even with the assistance of Mr. Dugdale's famous clearing implement; but the sides of the slope, though, of course, pathless, were not so densely overgrown, and the higher ridges were comparatively barren. Into a grove of camphor trees Captain Cromer led his friends, taking them aside from the stony ground that marked the river-bed during the wet monsoon.

The shade of the trees was very grateful, for the heat in the gorge at the entrance to the valley was stifling. But those of the party who fancied that progress could be made for any distance through a forest of tropical growth without any more inconvenience than they experienced during the first hundred yards were soon undeceived. The forest
THE EXPEDI TION LANDS.

sloped downward to a small glen which would have to be crossed, unless the explorers were to retrace their steps.

Crossing this glen was not just the same as such an excursion would be in England. Here was an undergrowth, not of light green grass with clusters of blue-bells, and daffodils, and briar, but of thick jungle grass and creeping plants that threw out on every hand their tendrils like steel ropes to catch the feet of the unwary. A network of strange plants seemed to stretch from tree to tree, forming a natural wattling of a stockade that would have to be forced before the depths of that undiscovered forest could be conquered.

"Now, then," cried the captain, "look out for your guns. Better extract the cartridges before entering this quick-set hedge."

The natural barrier was certainly not unlike a quick-set hedge of extraordinary density, and the captain's warning was not unnecessary. Every breech was opened and the cartridges extracted, in case the triggers might be touched by a twig when forcing the weapons through the undergrowth.

For more than half an hour the party crawled and pushed and rolled their way downward to the glen—each method of progression was called into requisition in turn; only perhaps the rolling might have been avoided, but this was not the opinion of one of the seamen, who tripping over a hidden trailer went headlong forward, and his gun being thrown some distance, he tumbled over and over
like an acrobat until he came in contact with a gigantic cactus.

"Hullo, mate," cried the second seaman. "How's your tide's-way? You come up to the wind and hove-to very sudden."

"Ay, that I did, matey," said the other when he had risen and shaken himself. "The fact is, I came across a shoal while I had too much way on."

"You jettisoned your deck-load in good time, at any rate, my man," said the captain. "You've had nothing carried away, I hope."

"Not a stick, sir," said the man. "I'm as fit as ever for another cruise."

Without a second accident they reached the bottom of the little glen, but all were so fatigued—for the passage had occupied nearly an hour—the captain gave the order to halt just above a little stream that trickled among the large stones and the mighty ferns of the glen.

The provision-basket was found worth investigation at this time. The steward had packed it judiciously, besides providing every member of the party with what provisions he could carry in his pocket. The light luncheon under the shade of the broad pandanus leaves was very refreshing, and the water in the stream beneath was found to be delightfully cold.

While they were thus carrying out the idea of a picnic, Mr. Dugdale had laid aside his rifle and borrowed a sporting gun, into the chambers of
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which he dropped a couple of cartridges. He strolled down the bank of ferns for some twenty or thirty yards, glancing under the arch of trailers that clambered from tree to tree. While Harold watched him he saw him suddenly put up his gun and fire to right and left.

"What can he have found there?" said the captain. "It does not seem a promising place for game."

"I saw a blue flash of wings," said Harold; "but I could not fancy any one firing at such an object."

"I promise you Mr. Dugdale will fire at everything that comes in sight, and I promise you that he will bring down nine out of every ten of the objects he aims at," said the captain. "See, he is collecting his spoil. I hope they are a new species that he has shot."

"Congratulate me," cried the gentleman of whom they were speaking; "I have shot a male and a female of one of the rarest kingfishers." He held by the legs a pair of exquisitely-coloured birds not unlike the ordinary kingfisher. "I fancied that I should get something of this sort in the neighbourhood of the stream," he added. "This particular bird is known among the Philippine Islands, but it has not been traced so far north."

"This is indeed a triumph," said Captain Cromer; "they will form the subject of a paper to be read before the Ornithological Society, I have no doubt."
Mr. Dugdale's eyes were seen to brighten beneath the glasses of his spectacles.

"Perhaps so," he said, thoughtfully. "And yet," he added, looking at the birds that Harold had laid on the lid of the basket after examining them, "and yet, my dear sir, you had almost made up your mind not to land on this island. Just think of it! Just think what a chance we ran of missing these! Perhaps years might have passed before it became known to the world that these birds were to be found in Formosa."

"It was a narrow shave," said Grace, somewhat irreverently. "I wonder what the birds thought of the matter in their last moments."

"Who can tell what other treasures are waiting for us?" cried the naturalist. "Why should we remain any longer at this spot? Why should not we push on at once?"

"I don't think we would be justified in going very much farther into the interior," said Captain Cromer. "We are already a mile and a half from the shore, I should say."

"I don't think there can be any natives just here," remarked Harold. "If there were any they would certainly have appeared at the sound of Mr. Dugdale's shots."

"I have been thinking so also," said the captain; "but though it seems that my theory of the natives living away from the coast is correct, yet it would not be wise to assume that they are only to be found in the interior. However, as I am anxious
to reach the summit of the slope in order that I may be in a position to form some opinion as to the geological formation of the island, and see how this line of mountains trends away, and in what direction, I think we had better move on without delay."

The little party of explorers were in motion in a moment. Led by Mr. Dugdale, they crossed the little stream and began the ascent of the opposite slope of the glen.
CHAPTER XX.

THE NATURALIST'S PARADISE.

The nature of the many growths up this slope did not differ materially from all that the party had experienced on the slope down which they had come. The tangled brake at some places was so dense that Mr. Dugdale was forced to take his clearing weapon out of its case and cut a way through the dense growth of various plants. The value of the implement was universally acknowledged.

"I owe you an apology, sir," said Grace contritely, after he had tested the instrument which aboard the yacht he had made the subject of his jests; "I owe you an apology of the humblest character for having even suggested that a joke might possibly be made on the use of this weapon. It is the finest invention I ever came across."

"Any one who has come through a place like this will acknowledge the value of such an imple-
ment," said Mr. Dugdale. "It has saved my life more than once in New Guinea."

"Using it as a wood-clearer, or—or—a meat-cleaver?"

"Using it as you have been doing with such good effect, my tall young friend. I had once to cut my way foot by foot through two miles of New Guinea forest."

"Dear me!" said Grace; "that sounds like an account of a battle. 'The commander, drawing his sword, cried, 'Follow me, my brave fellows,'"—Grace imitated the action of the imaginary commander by flourishing the jungle-clearer—"'and having uttered these words, he cut his way through the ranks of the enemy;’—that's the sort of account of a fight that your words put me in mind of."

"The battles which are fought on behalf of scientific research are the noblest of conflicts," said Mr. Dugdale.

"I am getting more certain of that every minute," said Grace, wiping his forehead. "Now, what do you fancy you see there?"

Mr. Dugdale had suddenly paused, and quick as lightning dropped a cartridge into one of the chambers of his gun and fired. Down there fluttered through the branches about twenty yards ahead of them a small wood-pigeon. Mr. Dugdale ran forward as if to catch it in his arms, "so as to prevent it hurting itself," Dick Grace suggested in giving an account of the affair to Harold, who was some way behind.
"I thought so—I thought so," cried the naturalist in a joyful tone, holding up his spoil.
"A wood-pigeon!" said Grace. "They make capital pies if you only get enough of them. At home they are fourpence each; I wonder what is the market price for them here."
"My dear friend," cried Mr. Dugdale, almost embracing the captain, who just then came up, "I owe you a debt I never can repay. I have just shot an entirely new variety of frugivorous pigeon. It shall be called after you, I promise you that. It will make your voyage famous."
"It is a pretty bird," said Captain Cromer—"too pretty to go without a name; but I hope you will find a more suitable one for it than I can supply. Pray don't fill up the game-bag too quickly, Mr. Dugdale," he added; "remember that the men have their guns to carry."
"I will shoot nothing but what is absolutely new," said Mr. Dugdale.
"How he has time to observe what is new and what is old, I cannot understand," said Harold to Grace as they went on. "Here have I been ready to bring anything down that comes in my way, but I really haven't caught a glimpse of any bird except what Mr. Dugdale has already dealt pretty effectually with, and yet he talks calmly about choosing his birds."
"It is very rough on a fellow," said Grace; "but never mind, our turn will come when we get into some place where the birds are not quite so shy as
they are in this awful thicket. I wonder if the
pheasants are strictly preserved on the island. Do
you fancy there is such a thing here as a grouse
moor? I think if we had a chance at either
pheasants or grouse we could do something worthy
of our country. If I saw a covey of partridgges
too I shouldn’t wait to inquire what’s the close
season in this neighbourhood.”

Harold laughed, and then hastened to crawl on
his hands and knees through an unusually dense
undergrowth.

Up the slope the whole party climbed, Mr.
Dugdale giving every tree and every plant a name.
It could not, however, be said that every one of
the company showed a similar acquaintance with
the resources of nature in that place. Harold and
Grace chanced at one time to be in the rear of
the others, and they had thus an opportunity of
observing a rather amusing scene in which the
two sailors took part.

One of these men was seen to lay down his gun,
and to take off his straw hat slowly as he gazed at
a leaf a few yards from where he stood.

“What are you going to do, mate?” the second
man inquired in a low tone.

“Can’t you see?” whispered the first, holding
his hat by the crown. “Can’t you see that big
butterfly sitting as still as a becalmed sloop in mid
ocean on that leaf? The professor has passed it
without giving a cast of his net over it. I reckon
I’ll board this chap, for a beautifuller one I never
see—he's a perfect pictur'. I'll nab him and send him home in a box if the professor don't want him."

He balanced his hat and crept cautiously forward to catch his prize, but his progress was arrested by the other.

"Don't be too quick about it, Jim," he whispered. "I've heard tell o' butterflies in these parts that's poisonous, and spiders that bites like a hadder—only worse. It's not safe to meddle with the queer things that's to be found in these parts, so you'd best make sure that there thing is 'armless."

"Get along!" said the other. "You don't fancy I'd funk a red butterfly, do you?"

"If it was me I'd not put myself to any bother," said the cautious man. "I can't say I likes the look o' that gentleman; he's lying a bit too quiet for my taste. It's my belief that he means mischief, he does. Don't go for to grab him, Jim, he may give you a nip that the professor himself can't easy cure."

"Well, you are a nice sort of a British seaman," said the first, "to 'bout ship at the sight o' a simple butterfly. That chap's lying quiet like, 'cause why? Well, 'cause he ain't accustomed to the sight o' white men. Haven't you ever knocked over a sight of booby birds on a strange coast 'cause they don't know the looks o' a white man? Now it's the same case with this here inseck that you'll see me grasp in a jiffy."

He crept cautiously up to the object of his ambition, and quickly and adroitly threw his hat upon it.
THE NATURALIST'S PARADISE.

"Hurrah! mate, I've grabbed him, and no mistake," he cried; "he's under the crown safe and sound."

"Ay, but the thing is to get him out," said his companion. "If he shows his claws, and maybe a poisonous tongue like a scorpion, you'll wish you hadn't met him."

"I ain't afeard," said the first; "I never heard tell o' a butterfly that could bite; and what's more, I don't believe that a biting butterfly is to be found in the course o' natur', here or elsewhere; so here goes!"

He raised his hat cautiously an inch or two, and slipped in his hand to the crown. After feeling about inside he seemed to have grasped something. He lifted away his hat, and Harold saw that he had hold of a gorgeous crimson orchid bearing a considerable resemblance to a butterfly with half-folded wings.

"My eyes! ain't he gripped the leaf with his nippers?" cried the sailor. "Fetch your knife and cut him adrift, matey! He's a Tartar, and no mistake."

The second man had out a knife in a moment, and ran forward to help in this remarkable capture.

"Hoist him up a bit, Jim, so that I can see where 'is legs is," he cried, preparing to insert the knife. But as soon as Jim performed the hoisting operation, thereby displaying the tendrils of the plant, the nature of the capture was revealed. "Why, strand me, mate, if you haven't a hold of
a flower, and no butterfly. Ay, it's a flower with an uncommon long stalk. You're a pretty sort of mariner, you are, to mistake a flower for a inseck."

The first man looked in a puzzled way at the orchid, and then turned it over. He let it drop quietly, and put his hat on his head once more.

"Well, if that there thing doesn't beat everything that I've ever come across, my name ain't Jim Sprags—that's all I says," he cried, picking up his gun and shouldering it with a glance of disgust at the crimson leaves that had so taken him in.

The other man roared with laughter and commenced a fire of chaff against his companion. Harold and Grace were also inwardly convulsed at the man's mistake, though they pretended to have observed nothing.

But the amazement of the men was increased by an incident that followed.

They had hastened on, and were only a short way behind Mr. Dugdale—who, it should be mentioned, was invariably referred to by the crew of the yacht as "the professor"—when they saw that gentleman cautiously lengthening the tubes of his butterfly-net. He stopped and peered eagerly forward among the leaves, making a sign for the men behind him to pause.

One of the sailors followed the direction of Mr. Dugdale's gaze, and then turned to his mate, putting his hand to one side of his mouth.

"You needn't blame me for having mistook the flower for a inseck," said he in a low tone. "Strand
me, if the professor ain't doing the same thing himself."

"So he is, so he is," said the other. "Well, this is a pretty lark, and no mistake! It shows what a queer place it is, Jim, when a larned gent like the professor doesn't know a vegetable from a animal. Stand by and you'll see the joke out. Won't we have our laugh just!"

Mr. Dugdale seemed indeed to be under the same delusion as the men, and Harold and Grace could scarcely restrain their laughter when they saw him moving in the most cautious way imaginable toward what none of them would have taken for anything but a green leaf mottled with brown.

"Why, he's worse nor me," muttered the seaman. "I'd know that there thing was a leaf and no insec. There ain't much o' a butterfly about it, I reckon."

Mr. Dugdale crept on as cautiously as before, and then suddenly threw the net over what seemed a green and brown leaf. Before Harold or Grace had given the laugh which they had in readiness for this climax, they saw that the seeming leaf was struggling in a most remarkable way in the hollow of the net. It continued doing so until Mr. Dugdale took a small phial from his pocket and sprinkled a few drops of the contents upon the thing. In an instant its struggles ceased.

"Another prize!" cried the naturalist, extracting the object from the net and holding it up. "It is a rare sort of leaf-butterfly, as you perceive."
"You are certainly in luck to-day," said Captain Cromer. "You have excellent spectacles, Mr. Dugdale, if your eyes are somewhat weak. I had not the least idea that you were making for that thing. It looked just like an ordinary leaf."

"That is the remarkable feature of these insects," said Mr. Dugdale. "They have acquired, through long years in the struggle for existence, the power of assimilation. They can only escape from their enemies the birds by assimilating themselves with certain leaves or flowers."

Neither Harold nor Grace laughed. As for the two seamen they were more puzzled than ever.

"Why, strand me, mate, if that there captur' that I made wasn't a inseck, arter all," said the first; "maybe I weren't such a fool as I seemed."

"Come on, Jim, and say no more about it," remarked the other in a dogged way. "This place doesn't do for simple mariners like we are, Jim. It's only for professors and such-like larned gents. A place where the insecks turns out to be wegetables, and where wegetables turns out to be insecks is not a everyday sort o' locality, says I, and I take leave to say we'd be safer in not meddlin' with what doesn't concern us for the next hour or two. If we don't we may only fall foul o' something worse than we've been and done yet."

"Right you are, matey," said the other, with several suggestive winks.
CHAPTER XXI.

THE FIRST GLIMPSE OF THE HEAD-HUNTERS.

Another hour had passed before the little party had worked their way up the slope of the glen and gained the comparatively clear space at the top. They went on for a distance of about half a mile on a slightly undulating ground until they reached another wooded slope that trended away toward the mountain range leading, as the captain believed, to the interior of the island. It was plain that from the summit of this slope such a view could be obtained of the great central valley as would convey a very good idea of its extent; and such a view of the mountain range could be gained as would enable the captain to say with some measure of certainty if it extended beyond the peak which seemed that of a volcanic mountain at the furthest part of the valley.

The captain paused before commencing the ascent of the wooded slope which was now reached. He was in doubt whether or not he should rest
satisfied with what he had already seen. Up to the present no signs of natives had been observed; but still he was unwilling to run any risk of an encounter with hostile savages such as the aborigines of the island were said to be. After giving due consideration to the question which he put to himself, as to whether or not it would be advisable to return from this point, or to make the attempt to reach the highest part of the hill, so as to be able to report on good grounds what was the structure of the island, he came to the conclusion that it would be safe to continue the ascent. If there were natives in the neighbourhood, they would, he believed, have shown themselves sooner.

In working through the jungle which was now before them, his party would, he was assured, escape observation even if there were some tribes located at this part of the island.

Before the explorers had gone far up this rugged hillside they were startled by the wildest shrieks that could be imagined. They sounded, apparently, in the depths of the jungle, and suggested the murder of some human being. Instinctively every member of the party dropped a cartridge into his gun and waited breathlessly for the appearance of a body of savages.

Mr. Dugdale alone continued on his way, in an unconcerned fashion, even though the shrieks grew wilder and louder.

“What does that mean, can you tell?” said Captain Cromer, hastening to his side.
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"Nothing worth speaking about—only wild cats. I knew they were to be found in the island," answered Mr. Dugdale.

He had scarcely spoken when there sprang from the densest part of the jungle an enormous yellow wild cat, followed by another of about the same size, and then a third. It seemed that a triangular duel was being fought between these creatures. The first was attacked by the second, and the second by the third, while the first clawed and bit at the other two fiercely, the three yelling all the time in savage fury.

Mr. Dugdale merely glanced at the animals which the remainder of his party had halted to watch. He had seen many wild cat quarrels in the course of his travels, and he knew that this particular combat would not offer any exceptional features of interest to an advanced naturalist.

Grace was about to send a bullet among these combatants, but at a sign from the captain he refrained from doing so, and contented himself by throwing a heavy branch at the animals. Never was a peacemaker more immediately successful. The combatants suspended hostilities instantaneously, and the three stood with their fierce eyes glaring at the strangers. It seemed likely for half a minute that the brutes would make common cause against the intruders who had presumed to interfere with their battle; but a second well-directed bough of as great weight as the first appeared to assist them materially in coming to a
decision on the subject. Only waiting to make use of what Grace declared was the worst language he had ever heard, they turned and fled back to the thicket, and once more the jungle sounded with their wild shrieks.

"I thought it better to signal to you not to fire," said the captain to Grace. "We cannot be too cautious now that we have gone so far from the coast."

It was not nearly so laborious working up this slope as it had been climbing that of the glen from which they had emerged. In the course of an hour and a half the visitors had reached a grove thickly planted with camphor and other trees. The captain decided that it would be wiser not to make the attempt to penetrate this grove, which was apparently a dark thicket, but to skirt it, and so reach the side of the hill beyond.

This course was pursued; but to the amazement of all, instead of leading to the side of the high wooded hill, the circuit of the thicket led to a very deep valley, lying between them and the hill which they meant to reach. The captain now perceived that there were alternate hills and valleys radiating, so to speak, from a common centre to the coast. This valley over which he was now looking curved away to the east, when, he had no doubt, it narrowed into such a gorge as that opposite which the yacht was anchored.

"This is wonderful!" cried the captain, standing on a curious high rock overhanging a small ravine
through which a little stream flowed down to the broad and deep valley. "Wonderful! These mountain ranges are like the ribs of the island curving out from the central range."

"Which no doubt forms the vertebrae," said Mr. Dugdale.

"Quite so. And these deep valleys are simply river beds carrying off the drainage of the east side of the island to the sea."

"We may take the credit of the discovery, at any rate," said Grace. "We are the first civilized people who have ever been here."

"Are we indeed?" cried Harold, who came up quickly at this moment from where he had been reconnoitring; "are we indeed? Then if we are, tell me how this came where I found it?"

He held up a cloth cap such as is worn by sailors, considerably frayed, and with the straight peak torn partly away.

No one moved or spoke for some minutes: all appeared to be too much astonished to make any motion. Had Harold Cromer discovered an immense diamond and held it before the eyes of his companions as he was now doing that common cap, their astonishment could not have been greater.

"I found it hanging on a branch of one of those trees," said he, pointing to a portion of the thicket round which he and the others had come. I fancied that I saw something curious in that place. The branches had been broken down on either
side, and I thought I saw something like a bed made of leaves at another part. While I was satisfying myself on this point, I almost knocked this cap off the branch where it was hanging, just as it might be hanging on a hat-stand in the hall of a house at home. What does it all mean?"

Once more he held up the cap, and again the rest of the party gazed at it wonderingly.

At last the captain took it from his son and examined it minutely.

"No one in this company brought this article with him, I suppose," he said, glancing around, for he thought there was a probability of one of the seamen having carried the cap with him and hanging it on one of the trees as a joke. "If the thing was done as a joke I'll let it pass as such," continued the captain. "I don't see the fun of it myself, but that's no reason why others may not do so; I'm not going to say what's fun and what's not." He glanced at the two seamen, and he quickly perceived that neither of them was guilty of an attempt to play such a "lark" as he suggested.

"I take it for granted without further inquiry that no one has ever seen this cap before the present moment," he continued, "so that the only question which now remains to be asked is, how did it get where it was found? It does not by any means appear to be a new article. It has been worn for so long a time that the name of the maker has been worn off the lining of the crown, and there is not the faintest indication of the name of the
The captain took it from his son and examined it minutely.—p. 186.
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owner on the leather of the lining. What do you make of it, Mr. Grace?"

He passed the cap to Grace, who examined it carefully inside and outside.

"Yes," said he at length; "it is not fresh from the maker. It has been in use for a considerable time, it seems to me; and moreover it is of American make—of that I am certain."

"How did it come here?" said the captain.

"Perhaps it came here on a head," said Grace. Though it did not seem a particularly original suggestion, yet the significant tone in which it was made by Grace showed that he meant to suggest that the owner had been deprived of his head by the natives of the island.

"I must confess that I am of your opinion—we know what you mean," said the captain. "I do not think it is at all unlikely that this fell into the hands of the natives with the man who wore it."

"But when?" asked Harold.

"That we cannot say," said the captain. "Only the fact of your having found it here to-day suggests to us the need for retracing our steps with as little delay as possible, and also as silently as possible. No more shots must be fired; it is quite as well, I think, that none were fired as we came from the glen below."

"There is no doubt about that, sir," said Grace, after a pause during which he appeared to be thinking out some point. "But what seems to me very strange is, that if this thing was ever in the
hands of the natives, they should throw it aside as it seems to have been thrown. What experience I have had of natives does not lead me to believe that they would be likely to throw away anything strange such as this cap undoubtedly must have been to the natives here.”

“Perhaps,” said Harold, “the thing was too bad even for a native to treasure. It’s not the sort of cap that any person who was at all particular would care to keep on his head.”

“But the natives are not usually very fastidious,” said the captain. “Yes, Mr. Grace, I think there is something in what you say. If this thing had fallen into the hands of a native he would be very unlikely to part with it, or to leave it among the branches of a tree for any other person to appropriate.”

“It was, I say, hanging on a branch just as if it had been placed there by a man accustomed to hang up his cap on a hat-stand,” said Harold; “it did not seem to have caught in the branches by chance.”

“This is altogether a most mysterious occurrence,” said the captain. “What are we to make of it? What does it mean? What does it suggest to us to do? Is the man to whom this cap belonged at present on the island? If he is, are we to assume that he is still alive, and that it is our duty as Christian men to take some steps to save him from the fate which will undoubtedly overtake him should he fall into the hands of the savages?”
"What can we do?" said Grace.

"That is the question which must be decided without delay," said the captain. "What can we do?"

"If we only knew whether or not the owner of this was alive, we would know what it would be best to do," said Harold.

"But as there are no newspapers here so far as I have heard," said Grace, "and as we, consequently, cannot advertise for the person we want, all that remains for us to do is to seek for him. I believe he is still alive and in this neighbourhood, for I agree with the theory the captain expressed some time ago, that there are no natives within several miles of the coast."

"Look to your weapons," cried the captain in a low voice almost before Grace had finished speaking. "Be ready, but don't fire."

He pointed toward the thicket of camphor and sago palm which the party had skirted in their ascent. There was a sound of crackling branches near where Harold had found the seaman's cap, and this was followed by a number of strange unmusical cries. In another instant there emerged from the thicket three figures of men—rather undersized but muscular men—almost entirely naked, but bearing shields of an elliptical form and long spears, the heads of which carried long tufts of hair. Upon the back of every man was a knife of exactly the shape of Mr. Dugdale's thicket-clearer. The men were almost black in
colour, and they wore their hair in several thick tufts over their head. It could not be doubted that the exploring party were face to face with the dreaded natives.

In a second every gun was ready.

The three natives had sprung suddenly out from among the trees, and were evidently quite as astonished to find themselves face to face with the visitors as the latter were under the same circumstances. Each party stood staring at the other for several moments, the natives with their hands on their spears, the visitors with their fingers on the triggers of their guns.

At length the natives seemed to recover from their surprise; they gave a shout, and turning, plunged once more into the thicket, and disappeared.

"A remarkable variation in the ordinary Malayan type," said Mr. Dugdale. "I trust I shall be able to recollect their most prominent characteristics."

"This is a serious affair," said the captain. "Our theories may be thrown to the winds. Those fellows are undoubtedly natives, and I'm afraid that they are now gone to give the amplest information to their brethren respecting the discovery they have made. We are in an awkward situation. We may have to fight our way back to the shore."

"I think that is very likely," said Grace. "However, we need not be alarmed on this account. With what weapons we have we are far more than matches for all the savages that are likely to appear."
"That may be so," said the captain. "But we did not come ashore to slaughter the natives. Whatever those fellows may be we have no right to take their lives."

"We haven't done it yet, sir," remarked Grace. "We need not do it if we are allowed to get back to the shore and re-embark for the yacht. But if it comes to a question of bloodshed, I must say that for my part I'd rather shed the blood of those fellows than allow them to shed mine—especially as they have a reputation for not stopping at that point."

"We must retrace our steps," said the captain, "and that without the delay of a moment. We have learnt something from this adventure."

"Undoubtedly," said Mr. Dugdale. "Yes, we have learnt of what variations the Malayan type is susceptible."
CHAPTER XXII.

A N A R R O W E S C A P E.

"We shall endeavour to return by the route that brought us here," said the captain. "We must, however, keep as far away as we can from the thicket, where it's evident the natives are to be found. Let every man look to his gun, but no shot must be fired unless our lives are in danger. A bullet will carry further than a spear can be thrown, you must recollect. Our object must be to keep out of spear range. I cannot tell whether or not their spear-points are poisoned; I do not want to learn by experience. Let us keep close together and make for the shore."

"About this 'ere bastik, sir," said one of the seamen, saluting the captain, and holding out the basket in which the lunch had been stowed, but which now carried only the birds Mr. Dugdale had shot, and the large insect which he had netted.
A NARROW ESCAPE.

"Throw it down, and let the savages make what they choose of it," said the captain.

"But the poultry, sir?" said the man, taking out one of the specimens by the legs.

"Don't lose them on any consideration," cried Mr. Dugdale. "Give them to me, my man, and throw the basket where you please."

The seaman without any reluctance handed the birds and the insect to Mr. Dugdale, and the latter quickly fastened the legs of the kingfishers to his belt at one side, and the legs of the wood-pigeon at the other side, and after putting the insect into the crown of his pith helmet, he smiled at his own ingenuity, and set off with the birds dangling somewhat grotesquely from his belt.

Harold turned for a moment to look at the naturalist, and stooped to give one of the birds a twist on the cord so that it might dangle less obtrusively.

It was well that he had stooped, for that very instant a long spear went with a whizz through the air just above him. Had he not bent his body the weapon would have transfixed him. Almost before the boy had started up, Mr. Dugdale had fired into the clump of sago palms whence the spear had come, and then there was a yell of pain, followed by the shouting as of a hundred men.

Mr. Dugdale had transferred his shot-gun to one of the seamen, and was now using his magazine rifle. It could be discharged twenty times without
being reloaded. His finger remained on the trigger, his head leaning slightly forward. It would scarcely have been safe for any native to display a hand’s-breadth of his person among the clump of trees at that moment.

“You are safe to run for the open,” said Mr. Dugdale to Harold. At the same instant he raised his rifle and fired once more.

Almost at the very second that a yell came from the trees a spear went high into the air, and after whirling round fell to the ground ten yards from where the naturalist stood.

“To the open!” shouted the captain. “Get out of spear range before it is too late.”

The party retreated from the neighbourhood of the thicket, Mr. Dugdale and the captain covering their retreat with their rifles, and afterwards walking slowly back to rejoin the others.

“This is worse than I fancied it would be,” said the captain. “I thought we would be allowed the chance of reaching the lower slope before those fellows that we first saw could give the alarm, but I see I was mistaken. That thicket is swarming with savages. You had a narrow escape, Harold.”

“If I had not stooped it would have caught me,” said the boy. “I had no notion we were within spear throw of the thicket.”

“It is something to know that their weapon is a spear for long distances,” said Mr. Dugdale. “The natives here possess the Dyaks’ custom of head-hunting, it is understood; and if it could be
shown that they use the sumpitam—the tube through which poisoned arrows are blown—there would be strong evidence in favour of the conclusion that they are more of the Dyak type than the ordinary Malayan. My mind is now at rest on this point. You saw that they carry the parang—that long knife exactly the same as mine that you scrutinized this morning?"

"Yes, we saw the knives," said Grace. "I don't suppose that any one wants a closer acquaintance with them."

"We shall make a move downward," said the captain. "If we keep clear of the trees we are pretty safe; those fellows are not such fools as to attack us in the open."

They marched for about a mile along the hill summit overlooking the second deep valley, which the captain believed narrowed into a gorge leading to the coast. They expected that they would be able to gain the lower slope of the glen, through which they had passed a few hours previously, by skirting the dangerous thicket at the other side—not the way they had taken in their ascent. Only now and again had they to approach the thicket of the slope, and in doing so they had no reason to use their weapons. No native appeared at any place.

The captain saw by the pocket-compass he had brought with him that he was going in the right direction. If this thicket were not interminable the lower slope would be reached at a point much
nearer the shore than that at which they had begun their journey.

“If the thicket does not soon end I think we had better resign ourselves to fight our way through it,” said Grace.

“That will, indeed, be a last resource,” said the captain. “I don’t wish to run any further risks. We are on the right course—of that I am persuaded. We are bound to come upon a clearing before long.”

“I hope so, sir,” said Grace. “But are you quite sure that we would not be wiser if we were to double now so as to deceive those natives that we met, and return to the lower ground by the way we came?”

“Why do you make that suggestion?” asked the captain.

“Because I’m afraid that we’ll come suddenly upon some of their villages,” replied Grace. “Those fellows that we met are bound to belong to a village in this neighbourhood, I think. I have even fancied that I caught a glimpse of smoke floating up the valley below us. There! doesn’t that seem like a curl of gray smoke about the face of that hill which appears to be one side of another gorge?”

All eyes were turned in the direction indicated by Grace. At a distance of perhaps three or four miles from where they were standing there certainly was perceptible a faint curl of gray vapour. It was slowly crawling along the brow of the hill,
spreading itself out as smoke does in the faintest of breezes.

"It is not smoke," said the captain, after a long gaze into the distance—"it is not smoke; it is a vapour such as comes from the sea shortly before sunset to many islands. I have had experience of it at St. Helena."

"It is increasing, as you may observe," said Harold. "It is clinging to the sides of the hill; see how it curves round the ridge half-way up its face!"

"I see it," said the captain gravely. "I am wondering if another such mist is driving up the gorge where we landed from the yacht."

"It would make no difference to the yacht," said Harold.

"None whatever; but it might to us, my boy," said his father. "If we reached the opposite side of the glen that we passed through and found ourselves enveloped in a mist and among hostile natives as well, the consequences might be unpleasant."

"You could steer us to the coast with your compass," said Harold.

"Perhaps so; but do you fancy Mr. Hampden would allow a boat to leave the davits in hope of reaching the landing-place ashore? I trust he has more discretion than to make such a fool-hardy attempt."

"In any case we cannot remain here," said Grace. "We must push on in some direction
before sunset, and we have not much time to spare till then."

"I agree with you," said the captain. "There is nothing gained by imagining a number of dangers which may not exist. But I think we would be doing wrong if we were to make that 'doubling' movement you suggested. It would be too late to work our way down to the coast by the route that brought us up. We are safer in pushing on as we are going. We should reach the coast in very much less time than by returning along the ridge."

Without further delay they resumed their march; and before they had passed over more than another half mile of ground, the thicket which they were skirting—at a safe distance—and which seemed interminable, showed signs of coming to an end. The trees became somewhat straggling, and the undergrowth of plants and jungle grass was higher, owing to the extra light which the vegetation obtained by the scarcity of trees. But just when the captain was congratulating himself upon the success of the course which he had adopted, he found to his surprise that their way was intercepted by another valley deep and broad, and then the discovery was made that the valley beneath the slope on which they had been travelling did not merely narrow into the gorge facing the sea, but was turned aside almost at a right angle so as to form a new ravine between the great precipices facing the sea and the chain of hills which, accord-
ing to the captain's theory, ran to the "backbone" ridge of the interior of the island.

But it was not merely this fact that surprised the captain and his party; they were more startled by seeing in the hollow of this valley a cluster of huts, which were evidently inhabited by the natives, for the smoke was streaming from several, and a number of women and children were seen moving about in every direction.

These huts evidently constituted a native village, and as they were built in a straggling fashion, it was plain that any one wishing to cross the valley would have to pass through the centre of the village. A single glance down the slope was sufficient to make the visitors aware of the position in which they were placed. They drew back almost to the thicket, so as to be out of sight of any of the inhabitants of the village who might chance to be looking in the direction of the slope—they trusted they had not been observed previously.

"We are not in luck to-day," said Grace; "on the contrary, we are singularly unfortunate."

"I agree with you," said the captain gravely. "We seem to be going from bad to worse. It would have been better for us if we had made up our minds to fight our way down at the other side of the thicket. We shall have a fight in any case, I am afraid."

"It looks uncommonly like it," said Harold. "But I don't think that we should fear such a fight, considering how we are armed."
The seamen exchanged signs of assent to this sentiment. They had had a good deal of rather tame work since they had come ashore, and they were by no means disinclined to an encounter with the savages who had shown themselves such adepts at spear-throwing.

"I do not doubt the pluck of any one," said the captain; "but, as I said before, I will not, if I can possibly avoid it, provoke an encounter with the natives."

"The question is how to avoid an encounter," said Grace. "We may look on ourselves as being between two fires just here. The thicket is probably swarming with natives, and if we make the attempt to go on across the valley we shall have to make up our minds to bombard the village below. Is there a third course, sir?"

"The only other course open to us is to make the attempt to work our way down the slope, taking a circuit so as to avoid the village. We can then climb the opposite side of the valley by the light of the moon—it was full moon two nights ago, you will remember, so that it will be almost as clear as day; and let us hope that all the good citizens of that town below us will be in bed and sound asleep long before midnight, so that we shall escape their notice."

"There is only one reason why we cannot carry out your ideas, sir," said Grace. "Just give a look down the valley where we noticed the light mist a short time ago."
He pointed in the direction of the gorge formed by the narrowing of the valley towards the sea, and the captain saw that what had only been a faint gray vapour had increased to a long, thin bank of mist. It was fast filling the whole valley —spreading along the sides of the hills and enwreathing the higher rocks. From the way it was spreading none could doubt that in the course of an hour it would have reached the slope above the village, and have penetrated the thicket.

"You are right," said the captain. "We have no chance of escape that way. You know what is best to be done in a mist? Remain where you are. A step in any direction may be fatal. We may prepare for the worst. There is no chance of our being able to leave before nightfall. We must do all we can for our safety, however. We must make a camp for ourselves—a stockade in case we are attacked."

"That is the best thing we can do," said Grace. "And we had better lose no time in making a commencement, or we shall have the mist about us, and there will be no chance of our collecting wood to go on with the work of a stockade."
CHAPTER XXIII.

PREPARING FOR THE WORST.

IT was decided that a narrow clump of trees at some distance from the general line of the thicket should do duty as a fortification in case of an attack being made by the natives. It was isolated, and as the ground at one side fell away into a great hollow, it could only be attacked from three sides. The trees afforded admirable cover, but in order to increase the natural advantages of this position, Mr. Dugdale's wood-clearer was called into requisition, and a number of branches were cut down from the trees at the borders of the thicket and wattled between the trunks of the clump which they meant to fortify. This breastwork of boughs would effectually resist the spears of the natives, should an attempt be made by them to carry the position by storm.

But before the last of the boughs had been cut down and worked in with the others the mist had floated across the valley and was spreading itself
over the slope, as though it were a delicately spun table-cloth unrolling itself along the herbage.

Fortunately at the approach of the vapour the little party of explorers had hastened within their fortification. Had any of them been at the borders of the thicket when the mist had floated up the valley they might not have been successful in finding their companions. So dense was the mist that those in the centre of the clump could not see their friends who were putting the finishing-touches to the breastwork.

"This is not the most agreeable part of our run ashore," remarked the captain. "I should have been more cautious than to leave the glen that we passed through; I should have resisted the temptation to get a better view of the island."

"There's no harm done yet, sir," said Grace.

"On the contrary," said Mr. Dugdale, who had hitherto been silent—"on the contrary, my dear sir, you have been the means of clearing up a question which has for many years remained unanswered. The Malayan race..."

"Is distinctly disagreeable, Mr. Dugdale, when you meet with some samples unexpectedly in a strange place like this," said Grace. "I knew what was on your mind, sir."

"I am not referring to the place individually, but only from an ethnological standpoint," replied Mr. Dugdale, "and thus I say that..."

"Hush!" whispered Harold, "I fancy I heard sounds outside."
There could be no doubt on the matter. A faint cry like a signal sounded from the thicket. It seemed to be answered several times, and shortly after there came the sound of crackling branches and leaves torn away, suggesting the passage of a large company through the wood. Then came a shout or two, and some words spoken in a strange language. It was evident that a band of natives—probably the very band by whom the explorers had been attacked—had just emerged from the thicket. They could be heard tramping through the jungle grass only a short way from the wattled clump.

Within that rude breastwork every trigger had a finger on it; and it must be confessed that for a few moments every heart was beating rather more rapidly than upon ordinary occasions. The little garrison of that rudimentary fortification—a fortification such as Julius Caesar's legions had to capture in many places when they landed on the shores of Albion—stood with the barrels of their guns resting on the topmost of the interwoven branches of pandanus facing the savages whom they could hear but not see. The question that remained to be answered was, would they avoid the clump that apparently lay in their path, or would they come close enough to discover how it had been treated by the visitors?

In a few moments the question was answered. The dark forms loomed through the gray mist as they went past—for they did go past. At least
twenty figures could be dimly seen in the crowd; but none of these glanced in the direction of the muzzles of the visitors' guns. The visitors themselves were not desirous of attracting attention. They did not feel that they were being slighted by the natives taking no notice of them. They kept behind the trees so far as they were able, and remained silent until the others had disappeared. Then the captain drew a long breath of relief, though it must be confessed that he was the only one of the garrison who did so. The seamen were good-natured fellows who would willingly have shared their grog with the natives had they showed themselves to be friendly; but having showed themselves to be distinctly unfriendly, the sailors would have had no objection in the world to fighting them. Mr. Dugdale was a scientific gentleman of a mild disposition, but he would have had no objection to learn something further of the mode of fighting adopted by certain tribes of Formosa. Grace was indifferent on the subject of fighting, as most very tall men are; and as for Harold, though he would have resented the suggestion that he was looking forward to an encounter with the natives, still he did not forget that they had flung a spear at him, and an ordinary youth cannot be expected to think of such a reception as in keeping with any principle of hospitality, so that if he had been called on to use his rifle—well, he would have used it.

The captain, however, was heartily relieved when he heard the sounds of the natives passing away
down the slope towards their village. He had no longing for a fight. All that he asked was to be allowed to go back to his yacht without molestation. He was not inclined to look forward to adventures with any degree of pleasure, and he felt that if he succeeded in getting out of his present difficulty, and in getting his friends safely aboard the vessel once again, it would be a long time before he would allow himself to be led away by Mr. Dugdale or any one else to attempt the exploration of any place possessing the evil reputation that was borne by Formosa.

"I am greatly relieved," said the captain, when the sound of the natives became fainter in the valley below; "a fight in a mist like this is perilous enough. No matter how well one may be entrenched, a stray spear might find its way through the closest breastwork."

"No doubt," said Grace; "and the best-intentioned bullet may be lodged in a gum tree instead of in a head-hunter's skull."

"My dear sir, one cannot possibly call these gum trees," said Mr. Dugdale. "There may be some that suggest the Australian blue gum, but the species is altogether different."

"I give in," said Grace, with a laugh. "Like the 'possum, I'll come down from my gum tree, colonel, so don't fire."

"I have no intention of firing," cried the naturalist in some bewilderment, for it seemed that he had never heard of the artful "'possum up a gum tree."
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Every one laughed except Mr. Dugdale, and then the captain gave orders for rations to be distributed. Only the provisions which had been in the basket had been eaten during the day; before starting the steward had, as has been mentioned, provided every member of the party with as many sandwiches as his pocket would hold. These were now brought together, and the captain distributed them equally. There was also a flask of brandy, but the captain did not think there was any need to treat this as a ration; he said he would keep it in case of emergency.

"If I only had a cup of coffee I would be quite satisfied," said Harold, after finishing his third sandwich.

"I'm sorry I'm such a stranger in these parts, I can't direct you to the nearest restaurant," said Grace. "For my own part I'd be satisfied with a glass of spring water."

"If you don't mind, sir," said one of the seamen, "I'll take a run down below to bit of a brook I caught sight of before the thick weather came on. If the professor, sir, lends us his helpmut, I'll take my davy that I can bring it back full o' water."

"My helpmut?" said Mr. Dugdale in a puzzled way.

"That there hat o' yourn, sir; it's a helpmut, ain't it?" said the seaman. "It'll hold half a gallon, sir, if it holds a pint."

"Neither with Mr. Dugdale's helmet nor with any other vessel can I permit such an enterprise,"
said the captain. "We are too small a company to run any chance of being broken up for the sake of a drink of water."

"Very good, sir; only it's my notion it might be mixed with the brandy, and then it wouldn't be so tasteless," said the seaman in an apologetic way. He seemed to be under the impression that the captain objected to the enterprise solely because water was such an insipid thing, and not worth running any risk to procure.

"There's no need for you to bother yourself, Craig, on my account," said Grace to the seaman. "I'm not particularly thirsty, and I hope we'll be out of this place in an hour or two. I dare say that after the sun has set a short time the mist will clear away."

"And we shall follow its example," said Harold.
CHAPTER XXIV.

NATIVE MUSIC.

There was no further talk about any one leaving the fortified clump. The captain had spoken decisively, knowing as he did the enormous risk that would be involved in taking such a step. He knew the strange deceptiveness there is in a mist, causing persons to lose themselves and move in a circle when they are all the time fancying themselves going direct to their destination. He had no intention of allowing the safety of the whole party to be jeopardized for the sake of getting a glass of water, or even a helmetful.

From the valley beneath there now came more than the sounds of the returning warriors shouting. It seemed that they were beating an instrument that resembled the tom-tom in sound, and a curious chant was being uttered at intervals. What these noises meant the strangers could not, of course, know; but they guessed that they were part of some rite. It might be that the shots which Mr.
Dugdale had fired into the thicket, after the spears were thrown, had more than wounded the natives against whom they had been directed, and that the sounds in the village were in connection with a ceremony of the savages, previous to the burial of their relatives.

The captain, however, thought it most likely that the noises were of a warlike character, and indicated the commencement of a campaign against the visitors to the island. It was satisfactory for them to reflect that, as the sounds seemed to come from one spot only, there was no likelihood of their fortification being discovered and stormed.

So dense was the mist that continued driving up the valley, they could not tell without the aid of the compass in what direction the sun was setting. The light failed to break through the gray vapour. But quickly after the captain had looked at his watch and found that the hour of sunset had come, the mist darkened. The night approached with tropical swiftness; but the darkness did not seem to interfere in the smallest degree with the ceremony, involving a considerable amount of noise, which was being performed in the native village. The beating of the wooden instrument and the curious monotonous chant never ceased. The combination of noises was almost becoming too much for the little garrison of the rudimentary fort on the summit of the slope, and more than one severe criticism of the chorus and orchestral accompaniments was heard.
NATIVE MUSIC.

"I reckon, matey," muttered one of the seamen to his companion, "we've about lit on a native Bedlam. I s'pose these chaps has a quarter o' the island that they give over to the lunattics o' the population. Now it strikes me that, being strangers, you know, and having no chart of the middle of this here barbarous place, we've unbe-known like come upon the resarved seats for lunattics."

"Right you are, mate," said the other with his hand at the side of his mouth. "Leastways if so be that we're not among lunattics, I don't want to be within hail o' a more lunattic crew. If you was to bring such idjits to Bedlam, I'll take my davy the decent Bedlamites would go in a body to the governor and say, 'Old man, we're left, if these chaps is to be brought nigh us!'"

Though this highly plausible lunatic theory did not occur to any of the other members of the party, they were equally severe in their criticisms of the performance in the village.

"If they go on much longer," said Harold, "I think we would be quite justified in making a descent upon them. I shall never be in a mist again without hearing those dismal noises."

"They are not high-class musicians to a man," said Grace. "I've heard a good deal better music than that at feeding time, in the neighbourhood of a second-class menagerie."

"It's not inspiring, I must confess," said the captain. "But then you must recollect that the
object of the performance is not to inspire us," he added cheerfully.

"I should like to know what its object is," remarked Harold.

"So should I," said Mr. Dugdale earnestly. "I have been trying to discover what are the component parts of that interesting native chant, but I admit that I have not yet succeeded."

"I should say that it is composed of nine-tenths discord and the remainder as far removed from harmony as any being could imagine."

The speaker was Grace, and there was a general murmur of assent to his analysis of the noise.

"It is certainly rudimentary," said Mr. Dugdale. "I can perceive in it, I fancy, something of the true Malayan chant mixed with the early Mongolian orchestration."

"Then all I can say is, that the true Malayan chant may be heard in Billingsgate, when a difference of opinion takes place between half-a-dozen of the dealers, and that the Mongolian orchestra is beaten hollow on the back walls of a lonely street on a moonlight night such as cats love."

Once more Grace's description met with hearty approval from all except Mr. Dugdale.

"We don't look at the matter from the same standpoint, Mr. Grace," said he. "I do not regard it from a musical standpoint."

"I think you are quite right, sir," said Grace heartily.

"I only regard it from the standpoint of race."
"And if the captain would give me leave, I should do the same; that is to say, I'd run away from it."

"You do not quite understand me," said Mr. Dugdale. "I mean that I am anxious to obtain, from listening to what is evidently a national custom in this island, a clue to the exact race of the aborigines."

"I hope you may be successful," said the captain. "But to come to a more important matter—in my eyes at least—may I ask if it does not appear to you that the mist is less dense than it was half-an-hour ago?"

"It certainly appears so to me, sir," said Grace. "There are not many signs that one can judge by in the dark, but so far as I am able to form an opinion, I should say that the mist is actually clearing away. Just take a look in the direction of the wood, sir; every now and again you can see the shape of the trees nearest us. You could not do much more than that if the mist had gone completely."

"I fancied a short time ago that it was clearing," said Harold. "If you look aloft you will see how different the tops of these trees seem compared with what they did."

"I thought I was not mistaken," said the captain. "Yes, the mist is undoubtedly clearing away, as I fancied it would. But we cannot afford to run any chances. We cannot leave here until no trace of the mist remains. I must confess I have no
wish to come within reach of one of those native spears. It would not be very pleasant to wander into the midst of their village unless one were certain that they would all be asleep."

"There doesn't seem to be much sign of the village shutting up for the night," said Grace.
"They are giving Mr. Dugdale every chance of finding out all about them and their music."
"They are a queer set of people," said Harold.
"I don't think it is much to their credit that they sit up all night. I hope when Mr. Dugdale writes a history of them he will say something severe about them for not going to bed in decent time."

"Ah, my dear boy," said Mr. Dugdale, "I am afraid that I'll never know enough about them to attempt writing their history."

"And I heartily hope that you may never know more about them than you do at present," said the captain.

"Hush!" said Grace in a whisper, "I hear the sound of feet."

The little party listened attentively. The sound of the native revelry or mourning—it might be either the one or the other—floated up from the valley as before; but from the side of the thicket came the sound of quick footsteps. They approached with a sudden rush through the jungle grass toward the fortified post, as though it were to be taken by storm. Up went five of the six guns ready to check the advance of the cunning natives, who had given no sign of their intention to attack
the strangers in this fashion. Mr. Dugdale did not raise his rifle.

"Don't fire," he said in a low voice, and at the sound of his whisper the impetuous rush of footsteps was suddenly arrested.

Were the natives preparing to throw their spears? the captain wondered.

For some moments there was a silence, and then came the sound of a curious sniffing not far from the wattling of the tree-fort. Harold ventured to peer above the breastwork nearest the point whence this strange sound came, and the instant he did so he gave a laugh. It was followed by the scamper of feet through the undergrowth and into the thicket.

"Natives," said he. "Beyond a doubt that is a band of natives—I could make out their forms distinctly. Yes, natives—but in the shape of deer, not men."

"I knew it," said Mr. Dugdale. "It is to be hoped I know the sound of a deer's tread from that of a naked savage; that is why I told you not to fire. I was anxious to secure one of those graceful creatures, and I might have succeeded if they had not been startled away."

"I am glad it is no worse," said the captain; "I was preparing for an attack of savages."

"Nothing could be less savage than the cervus pseudaxis," said Mr. Dugdale, with sadness in his tone. It was not that he regretted that the nature of the deer was far from savage, but that he was
disappointed at the animals being frightened away before he had an opportunity of seeing them, or, as he fondly hoped, of securing one.

"I'm sorry I laughed, Mr. Dugdale," said Harold; "but really I don't think that we should be likely ever to reach the shore driving an active little deer before us."

During this incident the sounds from the village were becoming louder, and it seemed that as they increased the mist dispersed; for in the course of a quarter of an hour a star or two appeared overhead—faintly at first, but becoming gradually brighter. The outline of the trees of the thicket could be seen looming through the darkness. There came from the valley below a great glow of red light, which the captain, on leaving his post, found due to an enormous bonfire that was blazing in the centre of the village. Round it he could see a number of the natives sitting, some beating tom-toms and other simple but effective noise-producing instruments, and many apparently beating time to the chant which had now been moaning through the valley for some hours. The dusky figures of several dancers had a weird appearance with the red light glowing upon them.

The captain returned and reported all that he had seen, and Mr. Dugdale gave it as his impression that the natives were engaged in some heathen ceremony, but whether it was one that indicated joy or one that was meant to be expressive of grief he would not venture to say. He made
several observations respecting the religion of the Malayan races, but on the whole they did not throw much light upon anything the captain had seen in the valley.

The last breath of mist had now cleared away, and the night could not be said to be a dark one. The stars were shining out of a deep blue sky with all the splendour of a fine night in a tropical country—for it is too frequently forgotten that there are many wet nights in the tropics, and many misty nights. Tropical starlight varies quite as much as northern starlight. On this night, however, the sky was clear over this land of mountains and valleys—of dense woods and slopes of jungle grass and rich vegetation.

But soon there shone on the surface of the broad leaves of the thicket a brighter light than that of the stars. The moon had just risen in the distance, and her rays were streaming through the gorge in the hills and brightening the foliage of the opposite slope—that on which the strangers remained. They knew that in a short time the light would be nearly as clear as that of day, and they prepared for their march back to the coast. They felt as though they were released from prison when the light of that glorious moon streamed across the broad valley, and penetrated the secret depths of the wood, throwing the shadows of the clump, in the midst of which the strangers had fortified themselves, far along the dense herbage of the ground beyond.
"Now," said the captain in a low tone, as his friends displayed in various ways their restlessness and anxiety to march, "now, we must remember that we are as liable to be observed by the natives as if it were day instead of night."

"Of course, sir, you don't intend to try and find out a track to the coast by the side of the valley?" remarked Grace.

"No; I think it wiser to make the attempt to retrace our steps," replied the captain. "Yes; I don't think we can do better than return just as we came."

"We can hope that the natives further west may keep better hours than these fellows below us," said Harold.

"I must confess that their wakefulness has disordered my plans considerably," said his father. "I took it for granted that at nightfall we should have a chance of getting off without being perceived, but now it is plain that we must creep away in another direction. We cannot afford to run any chance."

"Returning by the way we came only means a march of a few more miles," said Harold. "I'm sure after our long rest we are all equal to that."

"Then let us lose no time in starting," said the captain. "Look to your cartridges, and keep as much as possible in the shadow of the trees."

It did not take the party long to prepare themselves for leaving the clump; and all were soon obeying the captain's instructions by marching as
close as possible to the side of the thicket which still remained untouched by the rays of the moon, though in the course of perhaps half-an-hour the orb would have risen sufficiently high to flood with light this part of the forest.

Every one seemed relieved on marching such a distance that the monotonous sounds of the natives in the valley were heard no longer.

"What a relief it is, to be sure!" said Harold. "I felt just now as if I would enjoy having a rush among those fellows that were making that noise, even though they may all be beating time with spears and ready to run me through. It was becoming too much for any one's patience."

"It was bad enough no doubt," said his father; "but after all it was the shadow and not the substance. We may consider ourselves particularly lucky if we encounter nothing worse than an outburst of savage music. Now the less conversation we have the better it will be for ourselves in case of a surprise."

"We are dumb," said Harold in a whisper.
CHAPTER XXV.

A GREAT SURPRISE.

In silence the little party worked their way through the jungle grass and dense vegetation by the side of the thicket. Knowing the ground, they did not find it so difficult as they fancied it would be to travel over in the darkness, for they never ventured to take a step outside the line of shadow. The night was very silent. Only now and again there rang through the forest the yells of a wild cat, occasionally mixed with the cry of some bird that had been caught either by a wild cat or another animal of the same nature. When these sounds died away the peaceful murmuring of the brook that flowed through the valley below could be heard.

Once when Harold paused to recover himself after climbing over an unusually difficult piece of ground he closed his eyes, and with the music of the running water in his ears, he fancied himself
only straying through a portion of his father's park where a brook ran; surely he was listening to that brook "in the leafy month of June," while it was singing "to the silent woods all night."

For a few moments he could believe himself back at his home, and he almost fancied that when he would open his eyes an English landscape of green meadows and softly undulating slopes would appear before him.

"Look out, there!" cried Grace, a short way ahead of him. "Look out where you tread; there may be others of the same family still in the neighbourhood."

Harold opened his eyes quickly, and saw not half-a-dozen yards before him a long snake gliding swiftly over the grass into the moonlight, hissing fiercely. He had no difficulty realizing in a moment that he was not taking a moonlight stroll through a peaceful English landscape.

For about half a mile the party marched in Indian file as nearly as they could, though owing to the uneven nature of the ground their line was generally somewhat straggling. Grace was by far the most active of them all. His mighty strides went indifferently over all grounds. He was consequently some distance ahead of his companions at the end of half a mile, and having reached a higher part of the slope which was bathed in moonlight, they could see his gigantic figure like a silhouette against the clear sky beyond. He had been striding vigorously on, when he suddenly
stopped, and kneeling down, appeared to be listen-
ing to some sound that came from the distance. It is unnecessary to say that all the others of the
party paused at that moment also.

It seemed that Grace had satisfied himself as to the sound, for he crept closer to the trees of the thicket, and then, rising, made signs to his com-
panions to follow his example. They lost no time in getting within cover of the trees, and silently and swiftly the second mate returned to them, not walking upright for a moment.

"A band of natives is approaching," whispered Grace. "You can hear the row they are making from where I was. They are in the open, and coming this way. If we keep behind the trees we are all right. The shadows are too dense to give even the sharpest eyes a chance of seeing us."

"Our safety depends on our perfect silence," whispered the captain. "If those fellows hear even the crackling of a dry twig the result will be the same to us as if we were to show ourselves."

Without another word they crept behind an immense growth of tropical foliage that would have been sufficient to conceal twice as many men; but through a space between the plants the country outside the thicket could be seen.

Before they had more than settled down in this place they heard the crics of the approaching band of natives, and from the sounds the captain judged that there were at least fifty men on the march. They were shouting what seemed to be a chorus
A GREAT SURPRISE.

of triumph; though of course the captain, not being acquainted with the politics of the community, or with their social differences, could not give a guess as to the event which was causing such an ebullition of feeling. In a few minutes the shouts swelled almost into a roar, and the crowd of natives, crushing their way through the jungle grass and the undergrowth, could be seen by the captain, who was looking out from between the leaves that concealed him and his companions.

By the aid of the moonlight, the figures of the natives were as distinctly seen as they would have been had the time been midday instead of an hour before midnight. They came along with their spears over their shoulders. But where the crowd was densest, just opposite the place of the strangers' concealment, a halt was made; the shouting seemed to decrease for a few moments, and then, to the astonished ears of all who were in hiding, there came the sound of a voice saying in a sharp American accent—

"I reckon I've had about enough of this sort o' foolin'. I don't know what more you want of a man before killing him; but I know that you'll not get me to go any further. I may as well die here as anywhere else, so do your worst."

The voice was lost in the shouts of the natives, and not only the captain, but Harold and Grace, looking out from the place of concealment, saw what seemed like a struggle among the crowd in the moonlight. It only lasted for a moment, and
then they saw a man hoisted upon the shoulders of two of the savages, and the march was resumed with loud cries and the waving of spears and the noise made by striking the butt of a spear against the flat of a shield.

Before the noise had passed away into the distance, the captain and his friends had sprung to their feet, but the instant they had done so a cry sounded behind them. There stood a tall savage in the act of throwing his spear. Down dropped every member of the party except Grace, who, heedless of the risk, made a rush at the stranger. The spear just grazed his shoulder, tearing away part of the cloth of his coat, and causing its aim to be diverted from the rest of the party; the next moment the savage had gone down beneath the force of the blow which Grace dealt him full on the face before he had time to draw the parang which he wore at his back.

"If you dare to open your lips I'll crush the life out of you," the others heard Grace say as he put his knee upon the chest of his opponent, and pressed his fingers upon his throat. It seemed that the native comprehended the force of the young man's action if he failed to understand his words.

"Give him a chance," said the captain. "Don't throttle him altogether. He is completely in our power; and he may be useful to us."

"If you'll put your hand into the left pocket of my jacket you'll find a trustworthy bit of
hemp," said Grace, not releasing the man, but at the same time not tightening his grasp upon his throat.

"Here you are, sir," cried both the seamen, hastening forward, each hauling out of his own pocket a stout piece of hempen line.

"If three fathom is of any use, sir, here you are. Shall I take it a turn round his legs, sir?" continued one of the men.

"And I'll tie this in a timber-hitch round his arms, sir," said the other, unwinding a roll that he carried.

"Pass it underneath," said Grace, removing his knee from the man's chest.

In spite of his struggles the sailors had no difficulty binding the native hand and foot.

"Shall we moor him fore and aft to a tree, sir?" asked one of the seamen, contemplating with evident satisfaction the hitch he had tied between the man's feet, leaving about six feet of the line over.

"I think he will do very well as he is," said the captain. "He seems pretty secure, Mr. Grace, does he not?"

"I don't think we can do more for him, sir," replied Grace. "I made for him as I did, for fear any of us might be tempted to fire at him. A shot would certainly have brought those fellows back on us."

"You ran a very good chance of getting the spear through you all the same," said Haro'd.
"He is safe now, however. If he had not let us know he was here he might have speared one of us without difficulty. I was paralyzed with astonishment at what we saw. What can it mean?"

"It means simply that a man speaking the English language is in the hands of savages, and that we must save him from being butchered," said Grace.
CHAPTER XXVI.

PREPARING FOR THE RESCUE.

"My breath was taken away," said the captain. "I can hardly realize as yet what we have heard and seen. The unfortunate man! He seems to be an American."

"So I should judge," said Grace. "I hope we may still speak of him in the present tense."

"He is the owner of the cap I found hanging on the tree to-day," cried Harold.

"No doubt," said his father; "but how did he come here?"

"How is he to be got away from here?" said Grace; "that's the question you are thinking of, captain, is it not?"

"There's not a moment to lose in this matter," said the captain, decisively. "At the same time it would be a great misfortune if we were to do anything foolhardy. We must save that man's life, but we can only do so by preserving our own
lives. It is perhaps quite as well that this fellow at our feet turned up as he did to give us breathing-space, and prevent us from following our first impulses and attacking that army of natives in the open."

"That would never do, sir," said Grace; "so much is clear. We should have no chance in such an encounter, and you may depend upon it that their first act would be to run their spears into their prisoner if they found themselves attacked."

"But we cannot leave him to be butchered by them," cried the captain. "What must our tactics be? They are undoubtedly carrying him off to the village in the valley. It may be that his capture was known all day, and that the tom-toms were being beaten in expectation of his arrival at this time."

"I don't doubt it," said Grace. "The question is, shall they be disappointed, and if so, how are we to do it?"

"The only way that suggests itself to me," said the captain, "is to overtake that crew, make a dash at them from the covert of the wood, and rescue their prisoner. If we could do it so suddenly that they would not have time to spear him, he could join us, and we might be half-way through the wood before they should recover from their surprise."

"I don't see why we shouldn't be equal to that," said Grace; "only what I'm afraid of is, that we shall not be able to overtake them if we go through
the thicket, and if we take to the open we shall have no chance of surprising them."

"We can trust for the best," said the captain. "Stay," he added suddenly; "why should not we make a circuit to regain the place we have just left? If we once reached that clump of trees with the wattled breastwork of branches, we might pick off our men by the light of the moon as they passed us."

"The very thing," cried Grace. "See, for some way down the side the slope of the valley is in shadow. Now, if we keep in this shadow for about half a mile and put any sort of a pace on, we can easily make our way up to the clump at the turn of the valley without even running a chance of being perceived."

"We shall not lose a moment," said the captain. "The only time we need be in the moonlight is when we are climbing up the slope at the bending of this valley round to that where the village is waiting the arrival of the stranger. Behind that breastwork we can aim carefully, and not put the man we want to save in peril of being shot instead of his enemies."

"And there is every likelihood that the band will pass between the clump and the thicket," said Harold. "Don't you recollect that the other band did so in the evening when the mist came on?"

"On with you!" said Grace. "This friend of mine, I promise you, will lie perfectly still until our return." He pointed to the prostrate native, who
having found that the sailors had made him fast by such hitches that the more he tried to free himself the more closely he was bound, was now lying quietly on the ground, with a touch of moonlight on his body where the beams shot downward from a rift in the leaves overhead.

"Captain," said Mr. Dugdale, who had been examining the prostrate form of the man, and satisfying himself as to the way in which the structure of his hair was built up—"captain, you surely do not intend to leave that man lying there with his parang at his back."

"I am greatly obliged to you for reminding me of the danger," said the captain. "Slice the thongs of the dagger he carries on his back," he ordered one of the seamen.

The seaman had out his knife in a moment, when Mr. Dugdale hastily interposed.

"Don't cut anything, my man," he cried. "Pray loose the knots, and let me have the implement with its mountings complete—that would be a treasure indeed. There is not one in any European museum. Make a neat job of it, my man, and I will give you half-a-sovereign for your trouble."

"It ain't hard making a handsome job of it, sir," said the man, "if I can only find the hitches."

"I'm afraid we cannot wait for such a trifle," said the captain.

"Trifle!" cried Mr. Dugdale; "why the identification of a race is largely dependent on such matters as their weapons."
Happily the adroitness of the sailor prevented the need for any further discussion on this subject. At the sight of the seamen's knives the captive seemed to fancy that his last hour had come, and he was no doubt considerably relieved, and perhaps surprised, to find that the weapons were not employed to deprive him of his head to be worn as a trophy by his captors, but simply to cut the thorns which fastened the thongs of his parang.

A few minutes were sufficient to place Mr. Dugdale in possession of the weapon, and it must be confessed that the sailors entertained anything but a feeling of respect for him when they saw him clasp the sheath—which had certainly not been vigorously cleaned—to his breast, as he hastened after the captain, who, with Harold and Grace, had already passed out of the thicket.

Mr. Dugdale, with the remains of the birds still dangling from his belt, his own parang, which he used as a wood-clearer, strapped on his back, and the native's weapon clasped in his arms, presented a somewhat remarkable picture when he emerged from the shadow of the trees into the moonlight; and the two seamen, one of whom carried the naturalist's gun, might be pardoned for indulging in a hearty laugh, even before he had got out of hearing.

"These professors is a rum lot," remarked one of the men confidentially to the other. "Now, the idea o' that there respectable gent, that would pass in England as the father of a family that he was
tryin' to bring up sensible like—I say the notion o' that there gent running about a wild place like this with a savage's cleaver bent on to a bit of raw hide and hoisted round his neck is pretty rum."

"It's all o' that, mate, and a good bit more besides," said the second man. "But what I calls summat rummier still is that there Yankee among the savages. How did he get there, I'd like to know? If he's not on a lee shore, I dunno what a lee shore is. He's pooped is that there Yankee, if any master mariner ever was pooped. How did he ever manage to reach this coast?"

"The point is, how will he manage to get off clear?" remarked the other man. "All I wish is, that whatever fighting there's going to come off would come off as soon as possible. It's a poor sort o' time we're having awhile, mate, with them yellin' savages about us and not one fight yet. I never heard tell o' the like. It don't sound fair. I says nothing about the shortness of rations; but I says as how if rations is short they should be made up to us with a bit o' a fight."

"Don't you fear but we'll have full rations o' fighting before we get clear, and before we get that there Yankee clear," said the first man. "Don't you know the trick we're on for just now? Why, we're to tack about on the slope here till we reaches the ambrush. We're to lie in ambrush among the timber that we left an hour ago, and to give the niggers a broadside as they passes, which I takes leave to doubt they will do so easy and
nat'ral like as the captain and Mr. Grace looks as if they believe they must do."

"Anyhow we'll have a trick at the guns, and that's all that seamen like us need look for. 'We're plain men,' says us; 'but when there's fighting to be done, give us share and share alike,' says us. That's what my belief is, and has always been."

While the two men were talking together in this very pleasant and cheerful manner, they were not standing idly at the edge of the forest; they had left the savage bound under the trees and had followed Mr. Dugdale into the open. They had marched briskly back over a part of the ground which they had just traversed, following the others of the company. At a signal from the captain they began gradually to descend the slope, and soon they reached the part which remained in shadow, and would probably remain so for another hour, when the moon would have risen sufficiently high to flood the entire valley with light.

It was by no means easy making progress over the rougher ground at the lower part of the slope, more especially as it was in darkness. The herbage was dense, and the luxuriant jungle grass was like wire. More than once Mr. Dugdale's parang was brought into action, and he was reluctantly compelled to lend the implement taken from the native, to clear a path through the thick undergrowth.

It was not until they were thoroughly tired of
this mode of advance that the party heard on the summit of the slope high above them the sounds of the march of the aborigines with their prisoner. The noise sounded very strange as it floated over the deep valley, stirring up the echoes of the rocks and the woods on every side.

"It will take us all our time to reach the fort," remarked Grace, in a low tone.

"The fort?" said Harold, in a puzzled way.

"Well, we may as well call the clump of trees a fort as anything else," replied Grace. "I say it will take us all our time to reach it."

"It will," said the captain. "But we'll manage it all the same, unless some one of our party is compelled to give in."

"I feel as if I could keep on all night," said Harold, who was afraid that his father was suggesting that the forced march was too much for him.

"And Mr. Dugdale is not likely to break down," said Grace.

Mr. Dugdale, hearing his name mentioned, looked up. He had been walking in advance of the others, his head bent as he was working out some problem concerning the divisions of the Malayan race.

"Were you speaking to me, Mr. Grace?" he asked.

"I was saying that I didn't believe you would be likely to break down before reaching our destination," replied Grace.

"You must have your jest, young gentleman," said the naturalist, quietly.
"He is hard as nails," remarked Grace to Harold, in a whisper. "He could lead us by half a mile at any time he wished, even though he is hampered with that poultry round his waist."

"It's my belief that he hasn't the least idea where we are bound for now, or what we mean to do," said Harold.

"Well, he won't be kept long in doubt," said Grace. "It will soon be time for us to think about getting on the ascent to the fort."
CHAPTER XXVII.

WAITING FOR THE NATIVES.

The captain took in the situation at a glance, when he and his party had worked their way to within a short distance of where the valley through which they had come joined that where the native village was situated.

"We are a long way ahead of those fellows now," said the captain, "and it would, I think, be a pity if we were to lose any chance in this matter. We will not begin the ascent until we have actually reached the turn to the other valley. We can then make a rush up for the fort, as you call it, without a chance of being noticed, unless by whatever natives may be there."

"And whatever natives are there are too far to the south to catch a glimpse of us if we make the ascent at the curve of the slope," said Grace.

The captain's orders were fully carried out.
WAITING FOR THE NATIVES.

The little party did not attempt to gain the summit until they had actually reached the place where the two valleys joined. By ascending any sooner they would have reached the summit full in the moonlight, and thereby have run the chance of being seen by the approaching natives.

They were fortunate enough to come upon a track leading almost directly up to the clump of trees that was their destination. It was plain that the natives had at one time been in the habit of ascending from the valley at this place; for the track had, beyond doubt, been artificially beaten. The herbage here was not thick, and the travellers were able to reach their "fort" on this track with the greatest ease.

"If we had been planning the whole affair for ourselves we could not have done it better," said Grace. "It seems as if the niggers were expecting us or some other visitors in the same circumstances when they laid that track for us."

"We have time to spare," said Harold, throwing himself on the ground, for he was very tired, in spite of his previous protestations. "Yes, we have made the journey in the fastest time on record, I'll be bound. The natives are not yet within hearing."

"We have done extremely well indeed," said his father. "You may take a rest for a few minutes, but not before we arrange upon a plan of attack and defence."

In an instant Harold leapt to his feet.
"I will obey my orders wherever I am posted," said he.

"Then my idea is that you remain where you can easily command the track we have just passed over, as well as the general approaches from that side of the enclosure. Mr. Dugdale, Mr. Grace, and I will make the attack from the side nearest where the natives must pass, and the seamen will be on either side of us. We may expect that as soon as those fellows recover from their surprise they will return our attack; that is what we must be prepared for. Remember we must not throw a shot away, and remember also that it would be cruel to fire wantonly on them if they turn about and run. We have no right to butcher them; our purpose is simply to save the white man whom they are undoubtedly going to butcher—perhaps to devour, for there is every reason to believe that some of the tribes on this island are cannibals. Now, you all understand the position."

"Thoroughly," said Harold. "I will do my best to prevent either a native or a native's spear from entering the fort from my side."

"Same here, sir," said the seamen, posting themselves where the captain directed.

Mr. Dugdale took up his place beside a tree that had a conveniently low branch upon which he saw he could conveniently rest the barrel of his rifle. Grace made himself sure of a correspondingly favourable position a little way further round, and the captain remained between them.
"Here we are," said Grace. "All that we want is the niggers to attack. They are a long way behind us, it seems."

"We came up here faster than we thought we should, you must remember," said the captain. "No one could have had an idea that the track we lit upon would be there."

"Oh, I'm not grumbling, I assure you, sir," said Grace. "Those fellows needn't hurry on my account. I would be perfectly well satisfied if I never heard or saw anything more of them—if no fight were to take place."

A curious sound like a grunt came from either side to testify that the seamen did not join in this sentiment, and that they were desirous of uttering their protest against it.

"I would be more than satisfied," said the captain. "If it would be possible to rescue that man without striking a blow I would be very well pleased."

Another murmur of disapproval came from the seamen; they seemed at the point of mutiny; the suggestion of no fight taking place after this long midnight march, and after all preparations had been made, was too much for the men.

"If there is any one among us who is particularly anxious for a fight he will be fully gratified in a short time," said the captain, who had not failed to notice the protests of the two sailors. "Yes," he continued, "I can hear the queer song that they are singing as well as the chant that those fellows are at still in the village below."
"We certainly came along a good deal faster than I thought we should," said Grace. "The niggers are a long way off yet."

"They are," said the captain. "They may have halted on the way for some purpose. It may be that their prisoner has refused to allow himself to be carried any further."

"He might refuse if he were so minded," said Grace; "but I don't think that his refusal would amount to much if those fellows have made up their minds to bring him along to the village. What chance would he have in their hands?"

"What, indeed?" said the captain.

Again there was a pause; and though the chant floated up from the village the same as it had done since sunset, yet the sound of the wild advance of the natives along the hill slope seemed not to be appreciably increasing.

After a few minutes of silence the captain and Grace looked at each other.

"It's very odd," remarked the former; "but really it appears to me that the noise in the distance is diminishing rather than increasing. Is my hearing at fault, or does the same idea occur to you?"

"It occurs to me," said Mr. Dugdale, from the other side. "It occurs to me so forcibly that I am persuaded they have left the summit of the slope, and that they are not coming in this direction just now."

"I hadn't the courage to say so much," said
Grace; "but it certainly struck me that the sounds were not so loud as they were ten minutes ago. I don't know what we should infer from that. Do you know, sir?"

"I hardly dare speak all that is on my mind at this moment," said the captain. "Were we too hasty in concluding that they were on their way to the village below us? Were we too hasty in assuming that the prisoner's life would be spared so long?"

"We only know one thing for certain," said Grace, "and this is that we were not too hasty in attacking them from where we concealed ourselves. Had we been too hasty then not one of us would in all probability be alive now. No, sir, I don't believe we have made a mistake yet—at least a mistake that we could be expected to avoid. Why should not I find out whether or not those fellows that we have been waiting for have left the summit of the slope? I'll be at a point of observation in a minute. Just look after my gun, if you please."

He laid his gun against the wattles, and in an instant had commenced climbing one of the highest palms, after the fashion known as "swarming." He was plainly an adept at this style of ascent, for in a few minutes he was thirty feet from the ground, and with his face turned toward that part of the slope from which the natives and their prisoner might be expected to come.

The summit of the slope was flooded with moonlight. The night was so bright that a single
figure could have been seen there at a distance of half a mile. After gazing eagerly in one direction Grace turned his eyes in another; he looked over the thicket beside which the natives had been marching. After a few moments' gazing he turned his head and seemed listening for some sound.

"I have found it out," he cried, beginning to lower himself gently down the high stem of the tree, his stalwart form causing it to sway. "I have found how it was we have been waiting here in vain," he said, on reaching the ground and knocking the particles of bark off his hands. "The fact is, sir, there is no sign of the natives on the summit of the slope; but from the middle of the thicket there are plenty of signs of them. The noises that we heard before we came upon them in the march—that we hear now so faintly—they come from the middle of the wood, and not from the summit of the slope, where we expected the fellows would be marching in order to be caught nicely in our trap that we have laid here."

"We have laid the trap, but the game refuse to enter," said the captain.

"That is the case in a nut-shell, sir; only they refused to enter, not because they suspected any trap, but simply because they had no intention of coming in our direction. I never knew of any well-laid plan like this of ours turning out a success—some hitch has always occurred where it was least expected."
"But such a hitch as this!" said the captain; "it should never have occurred."

"We had no means of compelling them to come on, sir."

"No, of course not; but we should have been more cautious than we were. We should have at least taken some precautions to observe them—to see if they were really coming in our direction."

"It is easy to be wise after the event," said Grace. "Of course we know now what we should have done; though I must say I don't know how we could have done it without risk to ourselves."

"There's no use talking over the matter any longer," said the captain. "We have failed in our first attempt to rescue the man; but that is no reason why we should abandon all hope of success. We must make another attempt, tired though we may all be."

"Every moment is precious," said Grace. "As the mountain would not come to Mahomet, Mahomet went to the mountain. As those fellows would not come to us to be shot, nothing is left for us but to go to them."

"I don't like taking to the forest in the chance of having an encounter," said the captain. "The spears have a better chance there than the rifles, and the natives are more accustomed than we are to that sort of warfare. Still, I suppose there's no help for it; we must follow them wherever they may go."

"That's what I say; there's no choice left to us."
I don't think, sir, that we have any right to assume that we shall have to fight in the wood. They may only be passing through the wood to some place beyond—some place where they intend to finish off their prisoner. We can follow them there, and perhaps have the fight on even better terms for us than we should have had here."

"We can only hope for the best," said the captain.
CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE ATTACK ON THE HEAD-HUNTERS.

It must be confessed that by this time there was very little good-humour remaining among the party. They had had a long evening of waiting within the enclosure of the "fort," and a very dreary night's march along the borders of the forest and back by the descent to the valley. To find now that all their toil was to no purpose was certainly disappointing. It would not have been well for a number of natives had they put in an appearance within range of the seamen's guns just at this time. The men were in a condition bordering on exasperation at being cheated out of the fight that they anticipated; they looked on the transaction pretty much in the light of a fraud.

"The low hounds!" muttered one of the men, referring to the natives, whose conduct in not coming up to be shot he considered worthy of all the vituperation that could be heaped upon it.
"The low hounds! to fetch us along such a march as we have come through, and then sneak off like that! Why it's enough to make a plain homely seaman give up follering the sea, and take to farming, or something o' that sort."

It must be remembered that the men had had nothing to eat since early in the evening; and yet they had had to go through much more than if they had remained in the fo'c's'le of the yacht, where their meals were served with scrupulous regularity.

"We must make our way as best we can through the thicket," said the captain. "We can, as you say, Mr. Grace, follow those men until we find out their destination; after that we must be guided by circumstances in the course we adopt."

"That's all we can do," said Grace. "I took the bearings of the place that the noise came from when I was aloft there, and I can promise to guide you in the right direction, even though they may have ceased their row."

"Come along then," said the captain. "All that we can do is to make another attempt."

"If I leave that there timber without having a shot at them black boys, never call me a British seaman again," muttered one of the sailors to the other, as they followed the remainder of the party across the uneven space between the clump and the thicket.

"Same here," remarked the other man, behind his hand. "We'll not be done out of our fight if we can help it."
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Into the thicket Grace literally plunged, for the undergrowth where the sun penetrated the wood was so luxuriant that it could scarcely be walked through. At times only the head and shoulders of the tall young fellow himself appeared above the surface of that wonderful dark green sea of vegetation. The others of the party could only struggle through it. In a short time, however, they reached a part which the sun had never touched, and here it was comparatively easy to advance.

Not until they had forced their way to a depth of fully half a mile into the thicket, being frequently compelled to use the implements to effect a clearing, did they hear what they believed to be the sound of the natives who were carrying off the white man. The sounds were heard faintly through the distance; but they were loud enough to guide Grace in the direction which he knew he and his friends should take if they meant to come upon the natives. They went grimly on without exchanging a word; the fact was that every one in the party knew that he himself was in a thoroughly bad humour, and consequently, every one felt that the fewer words that were spoken the better it would be for all who were taking part in this difficult march.

After forcing their way on through the darkness of the thicket for nearly a mile, there appeared at some distance ahead a vista of moonlight.

As this evidently meant a clear space, they
pressed on in the direction of the light. They were, however, standing with the moonlight about them before they had become aware of the fact that they had passed right through this part of the thicket—that they were standing on the brink of a small valley almost free from wood, and winding away toward the waterfall which they had seen on setting out on their expedition in the morning.

The fact was now plain to them; the wood was not much more than a mile broad at any part, and it lay on a high plateau, with a valley on three sides.

Before they could express their surprise at this discovery, they made another which was of more immediate importance to them: there was a native village in the valley beneath them, a short way to the west. The smoke was rising from one of the huts, and a great fire was smouldering in an open square. In no respect, only in point of size, did this newly-discovered village differ from the other, which they had seen in the valley they had just left.

While they halted for a few moments at this place, they suddenly heard, almost close at hand, the sound of the natives yelling.

"Down with you!" cried the captain. "Down into the grass! They are close at hand!"

Before he had spoken every head had stooped until no sign of any of the band appeared above the vegetation. The yelling increased, and raising
his head just above the long jungle grass, the
captain saw that the crowd of natives were in
the act of issuing from the wood and preparing
to descend the slope. They were not more than
a quarter of a mile away, and in the bright
moonlight he had no difficulty perceiving that
the prisoner was now on foot, and being forced
forward by the spears of the savages.

It was now clear that these natives belonged to
the village which they were now approaching. They
had doubtless captured the unfortunate man further
inland even than where they had first been seen
by the party from the Fire-fly. They had crossed
the wood with their captive in order to reach
their own village at this point, while the captain
had expected that they were on their way to the
village which had been first discovered.

"If they get down to the valley we shall have
no chance against them," muttered the captain.
"Just crawl behind that big palm plant, and have
a look at them, Grace," he added.

In an instant Grace obeyed. He only needed a
single glance to become aware of the position of
matters.

"I agree with you, sir," he said; "they must never
be allowed to reach the village. If they succeed in
doing so, we may give up all hope of rescuing the
man. They would have his head off within one of
their huts while we would be trying to break down
the walls, and then they could spear us at their
leisure."
"We must intercept them," said the captain.
"Yes; but how, sir?"
"I'll tell you," replied the captain. "I noticed just now a hollow in the side of the slope; I believe it is the bed of a torrent in the rainy monsoon. If we can manage to crawl there unobserved, we can conceal ourselves without trouble at a point that must be crossed by the natives, and we can then treat them as we meant to have done in the first instance."
"Time is everything," said Grace. "I think we have a very good chance of escaping notice just now; those fellows are too intent on looking after their prisoner to devote a moment to the scenery of the valley in general. We are in your hands, sir."
"Then follow me," said the captain, "and we shall see if it is not possible to get the better of those fellows still, though they did take us in just now. Keep well down among the vegetation, and take advantage of every shadow. Once we reach the hollow we are all right, if it is all that I believe it to be."

He crept through the thick vegetation down the slope for some way, taking an oblique course to reach the hollow that he had observed running for a considerable distance almost parallel to the valley. Grace followed close behind him, and the remainder of the little company in the rear.

They had all rather stiff backs by the time they had gained the hollow, which, as the captain had conjectured, was the bed of a small torrent in the
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wet monsoon, when the rains that fell on the moun-
tains of the interior and upon the hill-sides were
drained off into the many valleys, and rushed in
foaming masses through the great chasms to the
sea.

The bed of this torrent was now sparsely over-
grown with vegetation. It was about six feet broad
and sufficiently deep to allow the captain and his
party to straighten their backs. It wound along
for a considerable distance on the side of the slope,
and probably, as the captain thought, reached the
bed of a broader water-course.

The company from the Fire-fly went along as
swiftly as they could over the sand and pebbles of
the torrent bed. In a short time they reached a
part that was unusually rocky; here the hollow
broadened out considerably, and several huge rocks
about four or five feet high blocked the direct route,
having been detached from the highest part of the
hill it might be some hundreds of years before,
and arrested on their way to the valley by the
hollow through which the torrent ran.

At these rocks the captain and his second officer
stood for a few moments, thinking whether it would
be safe to risk skirting them, or if it would be safer
to climb over them; and at that very instant there
swept down the slope and into the watercourse not
twenty yards beyond the rocks, a torrent, not of
water, but of dusky men, making a noise that could
not be surpassed by the most turbulent torrent that
ever rolled.
Some leapt into the hollow, and others went across it at a bound, until perhaps thirty of them had passed; then a couple of the biggest men that had yet appeared sprang across and commenced hauling at a rope which they had in their hands. The object of this hauling was soon apparent. A man with his arms bound behind him stumbled from the opposite bank, and lay prostrate among the pebbles of the hollow, while the two natives tugged at the rope which was about his waist, until by a great effort he contrived to regain his feet.

"I'll take the far one," whispered the captain to Grace, behind the highest of the rocks.

"I'll not miss the near one," said Grace, through his set teeth.

The two natives bent themselves for another great tug at the rope—a tug which they meant should bring their prisoner half-way up the bank. It was their last moment. Almost at the same instant a couple of rifle-shots startled the echoes of the hollow, and with a yell of agony the two natives fell forward, a bullet through the heart of one and the head of the other.

In a second there was a rush of savages to the brink of the hollow. One of them raised his spear to transfix the prisoner below; the weapon fell backward instead of forward as he lifted his arm, and he himself went headlong into the torrent bed. The prisoner had succeeded in freeing his hands, and he was clever enough to grasp the man who
had fallen dead beside him, and to place the body between himself and the spears which he knew would come upon him in a shower. He was probably rewarded by observing that half-a-dozen spears in as many seconds were lodged in the body of the savage, while he himself escaped without a wound.

But there gleamed in the air a bright blade—the blade of a parang. A stalwart native leapt from the bank, and in an instant his left hand had grasped the hair of the man who had been in bonds. The blade was raised, but it fell beyond the man against whom it was aimed, and who was nearly smothered by the weight of his antagonist, who now lay across him—a bullet from Mr. Dugdale's rifle in his brain.

A series of disorderly shrieks came from the natives on both banks, and it seemed that every man was in full flight.

Without waiting for orders the two seamen clambered over the rocks, and leaping over the prostrate bodies beyond, made a rush over the pebbly watercourse, pausing to fire among the retreating crowd at every fifty yards, and reloading as they ran. Four shots had each of them fired before it appeared that they heard the order that the captain shouted to them. They stopped and pretended to discuss whether or not the captain was giving them an order to cease firing.

One of them ran back some way and sang out, making a speaking-trumpet of his hands—
"Are we to 'vast firing, sir, or to keep at it? We couldn't make out your orders, sir."
"'Vast firing and return at once," shouted the captain.
"Ay, ay, sir."
"Who gave you the order to fire at all?" said the captain, when the men returned, wiping the perspiration from their foreheads with the sleeves of their shirts.

"Why, we heard no orders nohow, sir; but we rather guessed it was a kind o' all round scrimmage," replied one of the men.

"That's so, sir," said the other. "We thought as how every hand that carried a piece was to let fly after the signal had been given by you, sir. We did surely, sir."

"You had no right and no reason to fire," said the captain, severely.

"Very sorry, sir, I'm sure," said the first man. "It were a misunderstood affair altogether. It'll not occur again now that we knows your will in the matter."

"I trust it will not," said the captain.

"If it does, sir, may it come off as handsome as it did just now," said a voice from among the prostrate bodies of the natives. The accent of the voice was somewhat nasal; it was, in short, the voice that had been heard in the early part of the night when the band of natives had first come in view. "I reckon the whole affair has been a kinder success. I feel a bit more spry now."
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than I reckoned on feeling by this time, if my
calculation wasn't kinder upside down."

"That is how you feel, my friend?" said Captain
Cromer. "I'm delighted to hear it. I feared that
with all that spear throwing you might have got
an awkward wound."

"I catch on to your meaning, sir. Yes, I'm
bound to confess that there's more or less danger
among citizens like those that has left us so
sudden like, or these lying stranded to leeward,
whose constitooshons broke up so quick after
meeting you. It's near as injurious to the health
as playin' the pianner organ in a Kansas saloon.
No, thank you, sir, I'm not ready to turn up
my toes yet; but all the same, if there's a drop
of brandy, Jamaica, old Irish, or any other
sort of desp'rate intoxicating liquor among the
party, let me have a thimbleful for charity's
sake. If you haven't anything, just roll me up
in the Stars and Stripes and lay me under a
green tree. Gentlemen all, thirty-six hours is
too long to fast for them that's not professional
starvers."

"Thank goodness, we have a bottle of brandy,"
said the captain. "Here it is, my man. Allow
me to caution you against drinking too much all
at once."

He handed the flask of brandy which the
steward had thoughtfully put into the lunch
basket, and which remained untouched all day.
Harold never forgot the look that came over the
unfortunate man's face as he grasped the flask and detached the cup.

After drinking about half a glass of the spirit the man closed his eyes and leaned back his head; it was against the body of one of the savages who had been so nearly successful in taking his life, but he did not seem to mind the proximity of the body.

"Thirty-six hours is a long fast, indeed," said the captain. "Let us hope you will be nothing the worse for it, however. You must feel weak still."

"Nothing to speak of, sir—nothing to speak of," said the man in a low voice. "I feel kinder weak in my mind just now; I don't seem altogether to know what has taken place to fetch me here. I calc'late that I've been picked up somehow when things were low with me. Give me time, sir, give me time."

As soon as Mr. Dugdale had completed, to his own satisfaction, an examination of some of the characteristics of the natives who had fallen, he turned his attention to the exhausted man, who had again closed his eyes as though he meant to go asleep.

"It is a case simply of complete exhaustion," said Mr. Dugdale. "A little more brandy will contribute to hi's recovery, and then he must be put on a regimen of the most nourishing foods, when he will quickly recover."

"Then the sooner we get him down to the yacht the better," said the captain. "It would be too much to expect that the natives will not return
to this place in greater force than ever, so that unless we can contrive to make our way back to the boat, we may find ourselves awkwardly situated. If we have only rescued this man from the natives in order to give them a chance of butchering him later on, it strikes me we might as well not have interfered."

"That's true, sir," said Grace. "But we can still hope to be half-way down to the boat before the natives recover from their surprise."

"Meantime we must take care that we are not surprised ourselves," said the captain. "Be good enough to take a turn up the valley, Mr. Grace, and tell off the men for duty in other directions."

"I'll not lose a moment, sir," said Grace, picking up his rifle and singing out to the two seamen who were lying on the ground at some little distance, exchanging notes on the events of the night. They were in excellent spirits, considering the rebuke they had received from the captain, and considering also that they were as hungry as two healthy seamen were likely to be after a day of very laborious work and the shortest of short commons. At the hail of the second officer they jumped up and hastened off to reconnoitre as he directed them.
CHAPTER XXIX.

THE RESCUED MAN.

HAROLD CROMER could scarcely be blamed for seeking out a particularly comfortable part of the slope, upon which he laid himself and went quietly off to sleep. He had had an unusually tiring day on this island, and he could not be said to be in good training to meet the fatigues which he had undergone. The weeks which he had passed aboard the yacht had tended to make him lazy, so that it was not singular that, after holding out so long as he had on this eventful day, he should think himself entitled to a short doze. He slept with his rifle beside him, however, in case of the natives making the attempt to recover their prisoner.

His father, meantime, was attending to the man, who had once again opened his eyes, after drinking a small quantity of the brandy. The captain was very anxious about the man, and he had very
good reason for his anxiety. If the stranger were in such a condition that he could not undertake the march down to the coast before the natives in every direction were aroused, the result would be very serious. He knew that the natives must ultimately prevail, should they make the attempt to keep the visitors on the island, for he was well aware that numerical strength in such a case can eventually overcome the most scientific method of warfare. The natives would, for instance, have control of the commissariat department in any campaign that might be commenced between them and the Fire-fly company, and they could thus starve out the latter, for, so far as the captain could see, no supplies of food were available in this inhospitable island. He had no desire to shoot down some hundred or so of natives, and even if he were to do so, he would not be placing himself and his party in a more favourable position for continuing the conflict.

In short the captain perceived that the only course that could be adopted with any chance of success was a forced march down to the coast before morning, when the yacht’s long-boat would be sent ashore for the party. Under these circumstances he waited anxiously for the recovery of the stranger.

It was with feelings of great relief that he saw the man open his eyes after a considerable interval, during which the sound of a tumult in the native village below was wafted up the valley slope.
"Wal," said the stranger, "I don’t know that the thing comes out any clearer for the thinking over it. I’m here safe and sound, however the trick was done. It ain’t a downy couch I’m lying on, and this pillow ain’t a bed o’ vi’lets; these niggers ain’t folks that’s over partikler in the scents they patronize. They like ile, and they ain’t economical in their use of grease of all sorts. I’ve lived in South Carolina State for a while, sir, though I were raised in the State o’ Maine, and I’ve had my time with niggers."

"I hope you feel sufficiently recovered to make a move with us," said the captain. "The natives have disappeared just now, but I don’t know for how long; they may return at any moment, and I need hardly say that under these circumstances our position is one of the greatest peril."

"A flitting would not be without its attractions, sir," said the man. "I admit freely that I ain’t partiklerly satisfied with my present crib, though it’s a Frisco saloon for gorgeousness in comparison with what I fancied was in store for me when those niggers got round me so tender and friendly like that they couldn’t bear me to be out of their sight for five minutes together. Yes, siree, you and yours have done me a good turn this night. I’m afraid there won’t be much chance of my ever being able to return the compliment."

"Don’t let us talk about that for a moment," said the captain. "It is absolutely necessary that we should think of getting away from here without
delay. We cannot tell if the natives are not just now in the act of returning, and should they return we would be placed in a rather awkward position."

"I don't doubt it, sir," said the man, quietly. "But after what has happened to-day I'll not be the one to call any position whatever awkward. I'll tell you how it came about, sir."

The man shifted his position slightly, so as to make himself more comfortable in settling down to what promised to be a pretty long story, and the captain was beginning to lose patience with him, when Grace came hastily up.

"I'm afraid that if we stay here much longer, sir, we shall be in for another fight with the natives," said he, saluting the captain.

"How have you come to that conclusion?" asked the captain.

"I have been some way down the valley, sir, and I have seen as much as convinces me that the natives who escaped just now are urging the others in the village to return to the attack. I did not go far enough down to run any risk of discovery; but even from here you can see that preparations are being made in the village for an attack. Just climb the bank, sir, and see how they are mustering below in front of the fire."

The captain quickly climbed from the rocks to the bank and looked in the direction of the village. He could see that some hundreds of natives were now mustered in the large square of the village,
where the fire was blazing fiercely, sending clouds of smoke upward through the still air. They were all armed, and were evidently being addressed by a chief who was standing in the centre of a circle of squatting figures, gesticulating fiercely, and waving his spear frantically round his head, occasionally making highly suggestive movements with his parang. At such times all the natives rose and waved their spears. The sound of their shouting floated through the valley, and its volume was increased every moment by the contributions of the recruits who entered the square, and took up their places in the ranks of the men already mustered around the chief. It was plain that all this ceremony and all the shouting meant something.

"They are undoubtedly preparing to enter on a campaign against some enemy," said the captain; "and though they didn't see us, but only became acquainted with the power of our weapons from a distance, yet I think we may safely conclude that they suspect our presence."

"They're a shrewd lot," said the stranger, not changing his position. "I do believe that it's quite likely they may begin to have a sorter suspicion there's more in this matter than meets the eye. It ain't possible that they're deluded savages enough to fancy that I was the boss o' the shootin' gallery here."

"They mean an attack upon us in force," said Grace. "So much we may reckon on without any fear of being disappointed."
“And the sooner we commence to make tracks the better. That’s about the measure of what you mean to say,” remarked the stranger.

“You’ve not made a bad guess,” said Grace. “The sooner we make tracks, or mizzle, or clear off—put the act in any words you choose—the better it will be for ourselves.”

“And for them poor benighted critters as well,” said the man, coolly. “They take a deal of killing, these niggers. I ought to know, for, as I think I mentioned, I lived in South Carolina, though I was raised in the State o’ Maine.”

“And unless you make a move pretty quickly your executors may add another chapter to your biography, and say that you were buried in Formosa,” said Grace. “Come along! I’ll give a hoist to your feet.”

“Best be cautious, mister,” said the man, looking up the stalwart figure of Grace, from his boots to his head; “best be cautious, say I. A bit of a hazel twig like you shouldn’t try athletic feats. I may break you down, and though I ain’t a vindictive man, I’d never forgive myself if I was the cause of ruining your health. Now, cautious, mister, if you have any respect for the feelings of a man and a brother.”

Grace laughed as he stooped, and putting his hands underneath the man’s arms, lifted him and set him on his feet as though he were a child.

“I don’t think I’ll be the direct cause of the break-down of your constitoooshon, young man,”
said the stranger, holding Grace by the arm, and passing his hand over his own eyes as if he were dazed.

"I'm afraid," said Grace, feeling how the man was leaning on him—"I'm afraid you are not so strong as you might be."

"Wal, sir," replied the man, "I don't say that you've been too economical of the truth when you make that statement. Though I've kept this gentleman here for the past half-hour, listening to my bosh, in the hopes that I should be strong enough and steady enough to make a move, yet I'm afraid it has all been no use. I feel kinder mean, sir. There's no need to play a game o' bluff any longer. I'll come down. Yes, if I don't have your arm, my friend, you may ring the bell and tell the waiter to send up that star-spangled banner for one. I'm a gone coon, sir."

"Trust to us," said the captain. "I knew from the first that you were too weak to move. Still, move we must, without delay. If you lean on us I think you will be all right in a very short time."

"Maybe that's true," said the man. "Anyhow I'll do my level best, you may bet your bottom dollar on that. I don't suppose that this gentleman here has ever had propositions made to him by the boss of a dime museum, or the professor that's running a curiosity show, to exhibit himself as the missing Midget, and anything over the calibre of a midget could carry me along straight this minute."
"You're a light weight," said Grace; "I think I wouldn't shirk carrying you a few miles any morning before breakfast. Let me get my arm round you—so! Now, when the captain gives the word to march, I fancy we'll be able to keep up with the best in the party."

"Just wait one moment until I hear what your plans are," said the man. "We haven't been introduced yet. Where have you come from, may I ask? Have you been, like myself, shipwrecked upon this miserable coast?"

"I am happy to say that we left our vessel safe and sound at an anchorage we discovered opposite one of the gorges," said the captain. "We came ashore exploring in the morning, and were on our way back to the vessel when we were fortunate enough to hear your voice and to know that you were a prisoner among the savages. Of course nothing was left for us but to try and rescue you."

"Of course not," said the man; "that's English logic, but it doesn't hold good among all other nations. Wal, you have rescued me, I reckon, and if I only find that my crew have been able to hold their own against the savages, you may place them to the credit of your account alongside of me."

"What do you mean?" cried the captain, in astonishment. "You don't surely mean to say that you are only one of a party who are present on the island?"

"I don't catch on, sir," replied the man. "I haven't said that my party are on the island.
But I know this, sir; when I landed from the
dismasted hull of my ship about forty-eight hours
ago, I left ten able-bodied seamen on the deck,
with orders not to come ashore until further notice.
Now, my belief is that those boys haven't left the
deck yet, and what's more, they ain't likely to leave
until they hear from me either personally or by
cablegram. I am the skipper o' that thar craft,
sir, as long as her timbers hold together, and my
boys know that I won't desert them. That's my
story, sir, up to the latest chapter. The rest is to
be continued in our next;—you will maybe have
the writing of it, young man."
CHAPTER XXX.

THE AMERICAN'S STORY.

HEN the American had done speaking the captain looked at Grace, and Grace looked at the captain. Mr. Dugdale was too busily engaged examining the construction of the shields of the natives who had fallen to have a moment to spare for any discussion bearing upon the ordinary business of life.

"Then all that we can do is to make our way to your ship and pick off your men, march them further round the coast, and ship them and yourself aboard my vessel," said the captain.

"What, you are a master mariner too, are you?" said the American, addressing the captain.

"Yes, I am a master mariner," replied the captain.

"Why, I thought from your get-up you were reg'lar English aristocrats. That's why I was so stand-off like."

Neither the captain nor Grace thought that the American skipper had room to apologize for
having been unduly reserved. If he had hitherto been stiff, they wondered what he would be when he unbent.

"We're seamen all," said the captain, "and we're ready to bear a hand for those that are in a worse position than ourselves. I should like to know if it is possible to board your vessel. How did you contrive to save her from being made match-wood of among the rocks? I didn't know that there was as much beach on this part of the coast as would serve for the beaching of a birch-bark canoe."

"And you were right there," said the American. "There's no beach, unless you call a slope of pebble stones about the size of ostrich eggs a beach. No, siree, if I had run my hull upon all the beach I heard tell of, she'd be in a convenient form just now for any enterprising citizen that wanted to set up a cedar pencil factory on the island."

"Where did you run her then?"

"When we drifted on the coast I saw that our only chance was to steer, not for what might be called the beach, but for a hollow that I spied between the big cliff at one side, and a rock about the size of a Broadway block on the other. The tide was running all it knew at the time, and the rollers was rolling all they knew; the old hull didn't answer her helm so easy as make me be under the impression that I was aboard a White Star Liner, or a clipper ship in half a gale of wind, but for all that I ran her straight into that hollow I speak of, and we jammed there in the waist, when a heavy
roller lifted us up. There we lay rocking like a baby's cradle, and we'd have broken in two if I hadn't dropped an anchor over the port bow and swung it so that it gripped with one fluke under a ledge of rock. When I hauled the cable taut, I reckon there was no more likelihood of a stranger mistaking that hull for a rocking-chair or a hobby-horse. The stern was high in the air, I don't doubt, though I didn't get out to see; but it was clear of the rollers, and there was no danger of the craft breaking up and the bow and the stern dissolving partnership amidships. In that position I left the barque forty-eight hours ago, to see if I couldn't find out a spring to fill our casks, and a handy spot that would do to plant the American flag on, and in that position I hope to find her when I return. How's that for straight, sir? If I've made too much of the story, it ain't the less straight, I opine. I didn't stand off and on, though I feel that I might ha' done it, considering that every minute is bringing me round. The brandy takes some time to operate, and I reckon that its time is about come to work on me. I knew if I waited a bit I'd be all right, and now, though I ain't a strong man, gener'ly speaking, I'd accept a contract for cutting down all the trees in that thar forest with any man in the lumber trade."

"I'm truly glad to hear that you are recovering yourself," said the captain. "Even though the delay may have given the natives a better chance if they come against us, still the time is not wasted if your strength has been coming back to you. In
what direction is your ship ashore? You can lead us to the rocks?"

"I can't say as how I could prick you off the exack spot on a chart," replied the skipper. "But I don't believe I have lost my bearings so far, that I couldn't fetch you down to the place where I swum ashore."

"You swam ashore?" said Grace.

"Why, certainly, young man. I didn't say I had run the barque alongside a wharf, did I? Yes, I had to drop from the bows into maybe fifty fathom o' water, but a few strokes took me ashore. My! ain't those citizens making a row below there! they are about as noisy as they make them, those savages! They are very noisy for savages, though it's my proud boast as an Amer'can citizen that they can't equal a lively meeting of Congress. We have them there, though I admit that these do wonderfully, considering that they're only niggers and heathen, and not highly civilized representatives of the foremost democracy in creation."

"Beg parding, sir," said one of the seamen, coming up at this moment and saluting. "Beg parding, sir, but the enemy flies signals o' weighing anchor. They have got on even keel and they are waving their spears pretty free. I took a cruise round their crib, sir, and spied them pointing their spears next us—leastways in this direction."

"You have done very well, my man," said the captain. "We will march at once." Then turning to the American, he inquired how the ship was to be reached. From the description the skipper gave of the valley which he had passed through, it
was plain to the captain that this valley was the one above which the fortified clump of trees was standing. The mist that had come over the island shortly before sundown had been first seen on the side of the precipice below which—so far as the skipper’s account of the topographical features of the neighbourhood could be relied on—the unfortunate vessel was lying.

"Our best plan is to cross the wood by the way we came," said the captain. "We can then descend without difficulty to the valley below, just at the junction of the two valleys, and then on to the coast along the foot of the hills."

"Just so, sir," said the American; "but if you'll let me chip in, I'd say that it was all plain sailing except when you get to the foot of these same hills. Any man that would wish an enemy worse than a walk over the ground at the foot of them hills would be a very hard man, sir."

"Is it so very bad as that?" said the captain.

"I don't know what you call bad, sir," replied the man; "but what I do know is that that place is worse paved than a street in Jerrymander city, State of Kansas, and that's saying a good deal. For half a mile up from the sea there's a lot of boot-breakers like nothing I ever come across in all my travels. If you can fancy all the broken bottles and pickle-jars that have ever been emptied since the days of the ancient Romans—and we have emptied a few bottles and jars since then—if you can imagine all these broken jars spread over a piece of naturally uneven ground, and then all
the smooth places laid with all the smashed tins of lobsters and oysters and crayfish that have been smashed since the canning trade commenced—if you can imagine all of this, I say, you will be able to form some trifling idea of what that place is like for about half a mile up from the sea.”

“No matter what it’s like, we’ll have to get over it,” said Grace, who was beginning to get impatient at the apparently interminable flow of speech on the part of the American. “We cannot stand here talking until the morning; we have remained too long already.”

“I agree with you,” said Captain Cromer. “We must make our way up the slope to the wood as quietly as possible. It will not do for us to allow the extent of our force to be seen. If the natives knew that we were but seven all told we should have no chance; they would come on us like a flood.”

“I don’t know what tactics they mean to employ,” said Grace; “but they have certainly made up their minds to prevent our escape, if they can. I see a complete army of them marching through the valley.”

“We shall, I trust, have passed through the wood before they reach the valley where we noticed the other village,” said Grace. “If we fail in this, we deserve the worst that can happen to us.”

“And I dare say we shall get all that we deserve,” said the American. “Gentlemen,” he added, “it seems to me that you have done all on my behalf that any Christians can be expected to do. If you find that you can’t escape with me in tow, just sliver
the manilla, and let me go adrift. I was struck all of a heap when you came upon me just now, and I can't say that I've altogether recovered as yet. But I won't stand by and see you pooped on my account. The game ain't worth the candle—that's the truth. Now, we understand one another, and we'll march as long together as we can, but if we're blockaded it'll take you all your time to look after yourselves, leaving me out of the question."

"There is no need to anticipate the worst," said the captain. "We shall, of course, keep together to the end. We are all Christian men in a land of savages, so there need be no talk about separating under any circumstances."

"Sir," said the skipper, "you are, I opine, an Englishman, but you are worthy to be an Amer'can citizen. You are, indeed."

"That flattery is cloying," said Grace, with a laugh, as he ran to arouse Harold from the comfortable sleep into which he had fallen.

"Not at all, sir; not at all," cried the American. "Let me tell you, young man, that . . . ."

But what he was going to tell the young man was never made known, for Grace was setting Harold on his feet and brushing away the remains of the leaves and grass that adhered with great pertinacity to his hair and his clothes—Harold yawning furiously all the time.

"Only half-an-hour's sleep," he muttered. "Well, never mind, half-an-hour is better than nothing."
CHAPTER XXXI.

THE MIDNIGHT MARCH.

In spite of Harold Cromer's philosophical attempt to prove to his own satisfaction that he had some reason to be satisfied, it must be confessed that he felt rather miserable; not perhaps quite so miserable as he had felt some months before, when Dr. Hope had found him with his chronic headache at Cromer Court, but still miserable enough. He had not eaten anything, though he had had an active day, or nearly nine hours; and when he found himself crawling along the slope among grass which was so high and thick that he could not see the man in front of him, he was forced to admit that half-an-hour's sleep, if better than no sleep at all, was quite insufficient for an ordinary boy at the close of a very tiring day.

"If you yawn so loud," came the voice of Grace in his rear, after he had given way to another fit of yawning,—"if you yawn so loud, the natives in
the valley below will certainly hear you, and discover our whereabouts."

"They are making too big a row among themselves," muttered Harold. "If this sort of thing is the exploration that Mr. Dugdale painted in such glowing colours to me, all that I can say is, that his ideas and mine differ on the subject of what is agreeable."

"I must say that I thought he laid on the colours a bit too thick when he began to talk about the glories of a tropical forest, and the marvels of an unexplored country," whispered Grace. "The fact is, that he himself is so thoroughly accustomed to the inconveniences of exploring, I don't believe he is happy unless he is enduring all the hardships of a poisonous climate, on short commons, in a country swarming with savages. He is, as I remarked before, as hard as nails, and he thinks that every one else is the same. He is as happy as any one could be, just now. Just take an observation of him over the grass."

"It's too much trouble," said Harold. "My back is bent to the proper angle just now, and if I straightened it, I might not be able to get it into its place again. What is he like?"

"Oh, I couldn't describe him to you," said Grace. "He looks like a large-sized insect crawling through the jungle."

"If a brother naturalist were to come suddenly upon him he'd be netted to a certainty as a queer specimen," said Harold. "He would undoubtedly
be the queerest specimen ever found in the primeval forest."

It would indeed be impossible to deny that Mr. Dugdale presented some peculiarities in his appearance as he forced his way through the thick vegetation. He wore his enormous pith helmet on the back of his head, and around it he had arranged a number of curious spiders held down by an elastic band, for he had been active in observing and collecting specimens during the day. He bore on his back one of the native shields in addition to a parang; his own implement of the same character was in the hands of a seaman, who used it now and again to clear a way through the dense undergrowth. Then about his waist the naturalist carried a number of new plants, some of which were of a considerable, and as some people would be inclined to think, an embarrassing, size. They were enclosed within his belt, and some of the leaves showed signs of flapping in his face.

Under these circumstances it was not surprising that Harold Cromer should have some difficulty stifling his laughter when he and his companions reached the thicket, and were thus able to stand upright without running the chance of being perceived from below. But if Harold was amused by Mr. Dugdale's appearance, he did not the less admire the spirit which prompted the naturalist to make himself such a peculiar object. His devotion to science was certainly worthy of admiration.

"If we succeed in getting out of this scrape,"
said Harold to Grace, "Mr. Dugdale's discoveries will cover him with glory."

"If we remain much longer on the island," said Grace, "I'm afraid that he will gather so many plants around him, he will become the centre of a small forest, and we shall have difficulty finding him. As he stands at present, one would have some trouble in saying that he was the distinguished naturalist. He looks uncommonly like a chief of the aborigines, only if any chief were to appear in that get-up, he would run the chance of losing all his influence with his tribe."

"One thing is certain, however," said Harold; "Mr. Dugdale can hold out with the best of the company in point of endurance. He has been more active than any of us during the day, and yet he does not appear to be in the least done up."

"That's what I say," acquiesced Grace. "He is as hard as nails. He does not suffer the least inconvenience from the want of sleep and food. His profession is more to him than such matters, which ordinary people like you and me think of greater or lesser importance."

"I wish I knew of some way by which I could forget that I have had nothing to eat since last evening, and that I have only had half-an-hour's sleep during the night," remarked Harold.

"It's awkward that a fellow should now and again be reminded of such trifles," said Grace. "But I give you my word that I have been doing my best for the past three hours at least to forget
that supper time has passed without supper having been served. I can't say that I have been at all successful in my attempts in this direction. Now and again I feel reminded that such a thing has happened. It's very unfortunate to have so good a memory for such matters."

"We'll change the topic, if you don't mind," said Harold; "it's slightly painful to me just now. Will you please tell me how it is that we are making our way in this direction? If we mean to reach the coast opposite where the yacht is anchored, we are losing our time by keeping so far to the east. We should go through this wood as far to the west as possible, and so shorten our course. Two sides of a triangle are greater than the third, you know."

"You are, I dare say, the best mathematician among us," said Grace; "and I believe that the voyage in the Fire-fly has helped to clear your brain of many unnecessary problems. It is as well that you haven't forgotten your Euclid altogether. The value of the application of the problem about the sides of a triangle depends in this case upon the direction of the third side. It so happens that our course just now is to the eastward."

"I don't understand how that has come about," said Harold, in surprise.

"You were asleep when the American skipper explained that his ship with several hands aboard was lying ashore at a part of the coast further to the north than where the yacht is anchored. We
are on our way to the ship just now to rescue the other hands. I only hope that she will not be broken up before we reach her. But from the man's description of the way she was lying when he left her, it appears to me that she runs a very good chance of parting."

"I suppose there was nothing left for us to do but to make our way down to the place where he said the craft was to be found. Well, all I hope is, that when we reach the place we shall find the ship safe and with something to eat aboard. I frankly admit that I am too tired, too hungry, and too generally miserable to be able to set out on the journey to the yacht without previously having some rest and food. I'm not quite equal to Mr. Dugdale in hardness."

"And to tell you the truth, I feel a bit done up myself. If we don't find the ship where she was left we shall all be in a bad way. Just now, however, you can understand how much depends upon the rapidity of our march. You saw how the natives were defiling through the valley. Well, at the next village—where we heard them tom-tomming in the early part of the night—they will doubtless gather additional forces, and so, if we give them time, they will cut off our way to the coast."

"We shall have to fight our way through them."

"It will not be so easy to do that and to get aboard the ship in safety if the skipper described her position accurately. It appears that she is lying jammed between two great rocks, and she can only be reached by swimming."
"That is a pleasant prospect for us indeed. I don't see that we would have much chance of getting aboard with whole skins if those fellows get between us and the sea."

"That is the case beyond doubt; so that unless we get down to the shore without the delay of a moment, matters may go hard with us. The stranger seems to understand this as well as ourselves; he is trudging along very well. I was afraid he was too far gone to be able to keep up with us at the needful pace. He had certainly no confidence in his own powers. You may thank him for the half-hour's sleep you got."

"How may I thank him?"

"When the captain administered half a glass of brandy to him, he was so much overcome he could not speak for some time; but when he did speak it was like the opening of flood-gates: I thought he was never going to end. It was not until half-an-hour had passed that I found that he was merely talking in order that he might gain time to recover his strength so as to be able to march with us."

"Did he tell you if it was he who lost the cap that I found in the morning?"

"He never mentioned it, nor did I ask him if he had lost the cap. It is not too late to do so, however. We are coming to a comparatively clear place in this horrid thicket; you can ask him if the cap is his. You have it still with you, I believe? Yes, I see it thrust into your belt."

"The only question is, would he not be ashamed to own such a thing as this?" Harold pulled the
cap out of his belt and looked at it. "For my part," he continued, "I would feel inclined to disown the loss. The possession of such an article of dress would not make any man vain."

"It is pretty far gone," said Grace, "but the man, if it is his, may have an affection for it through long association, just as one sometimes has for an old coat."

They paused until the American had come up with them.

"Can I give you a hand?" said Grace.

"No, I thank you, sir," replied the man. "I'm getting for'ard pretty well—a good bit better than I opined I would. Yes, we'll be pretty spry before long."

"You didn't mention, I think," continued Grace, "how far inland you went when you came ashore."

"I didn't go a particularly long way, sir; only about a couple of English miles along this plantation. I came ashore in the evening, and a mist—just the same as drew down on us last sundown—made me lose my reckoning a bit. I wasn't such a fool as to wander about like some idjits do in a fog, but I was fool enough to make myself a bed and to lie down for the night."

"Hanging your cap at the head of your bed?" said Grace.

"That's so, sir; though how you come to guess that, I can't say."

"Perhaps you can tell me if your cap was made after this pattern," said Harold, producing the article and handing it to the stranger.
"Wal, if this don't lick a boss conjurer into blue fits may I never stand on my own deck again!" cried the man. "Yes, siree, this is the very cranium cover that I have worn for the past two voyages."

"And how many years before?" said Grace.

"Wal, it ain't what you'd call a brand new article, mister," said the American, "but it has got kinder moulded to the shape of my skull, and it somehow sticks on of itself. You've done me a good turn, sonny, in restoring it to me. I reckon you passed by where it was hung, or maybe you found it with some of them niggers; they're nuts on finery of all sorts, sir."

"That's not saying that they would have anything to do with your cap, friend Jonathan," remarked Grace.

The Yankee laughed.

"Wal, I shouldn't wonder if you were right," he said, closing one eye and subjecting the cap to a rigid scrutiny, after which he threw it into the air and caught it upon his head. "I'm glad to feel the old rag on my head again for all that; I feel as if you had restored my lost brother to my arms. You see them niggers came upon me in a crowd and quite sudden like before I awoke. They had a grip of me like a grizzly bear before I could use my seven-shooter, and I reckoned on being a gone coon. They didn't do more to me than put the lashings on my arms, and carry me off first to the west'ard, where there is big thing in villages. For some reason of their own they didn't carry me into their city hall, but wheeled about and returned
almost by the way they came and through this wood to where you found me and took me in charge. Wal, I am glad to get back the skull-cover, and no mistake. I feel as if everything wasn’t going to turn out wrong with me after all.”

“I found the cap in the morning on the branch of a tree,” said Harold, “and I need hardly say that it surprised me. It was the first sign we had that there was another stranger who did not belong to our company on the island. I meant to keep it as a memento of our day ashore; but I am happy to have an opportunity of returning it to you.”

“You acted for the best, sir,” said the Yankee. “There ain’t a newspaper or an advertising bureau on this island, I suppose, where missing property could be inquired after? Even if there was, I reckon it couldn’t be run at a profit. There’s a deal too many niggers about for any man to have a chance of recovering what was lost, strayed, or stolen. I expect if any of those blacks had laid a paw upon this cap he would have put it on a carved log of wood and have worshipped it as an idol. Wal, I don’t say but what there’s more homely idols than what could be made by a smart amator if he worked up to the level of smartness displayed in this cap. Tie the star-spangled banner round the body, give the face a dab of pitch, place this cap on the crown, and you have a decent amator idol that would take the fancy of any heathen. The poor critters! We should pity them and not make fun of them.”
CHAPTER XXXII.

IN SEARCH OF THE BIG CANOE.

By this time the moonlight became visible through the furthest trees of the wood through which the explorers were passing. In a few minutes they reached the cleared space between the thicket and the clump where the captain and his party had passed the evening.

On reaching this place a council was held as to the advisability of pushing on for the shore, in order to get aboard the ship with the smallest amount of delay. The natives in the village in the valley below the clump were evidently on the alert, leading the captain to believe that those who had been mustering in the other valley had aroused these tribes to action. The question therefore was, might it not be wise to get within the protection of the clump for the remainder of the night, so that every member of the company would have a chance of recruiting his strength
before meeting the hostile natives in the fight that seemed inevitable?

The captain put this question to the party when he pointed out that the village below was astir. He had not to wait long for his answer. Harold, the American, and the two seamen had thrown themselves on the ground on finding themselves clear of the thicket; but the instant that the captain suggested it might be wise to remain at this place to recover their strength, they leapt to their feet and declared that so far as they were concerned, they were ready to continue the march in any direction, whether or not the natives showed themselves in full force.

It was clearly the desire of all in the company that the attempt should be made to push on to the shore and reach the ship with as little delay as possible; consequently the captain gave the order to march once more.

The American skipper pointed out the course that he had taken when he had left his ship on that unfortunate excursion of his inland. From his description of the place where the ship was to be found, it was plain that the mountains to the east, over which the mist had come in the evening, turned precipitous fronts to the sea. The division between the mountains, where the chain trended away to the west, was wide enough to constitute the valley, but at the seaward side it was narrow enough to be termed a gorge.

Cautiously the little party descended to the
valley, making as wide a circuit as possible to avoid the south valley, where the village first observed was situated. By this means they hoped to escape notice, though, as the American pointed out, they were not taking a direct course to the ship, and thus they ran a considerable risk of being interrupted by a native force.

On the whole, however, the captain thought it more prudent to make the attempt to march without attracting observation than to try and reach the shore with the greatest expedition, but at the same time with greater risk of being perceived.

Nearly an hour was passed making the descent to the valley in the way suggested by the captain. They met with no natives, but came in contact with several herds of deer that had come to drink at the stream which flowed in a bed closely resembling that of an English trout stream. Following the course of this stream, the company were led to the eastward, and soon they passed the junction of the two valleys, and found themselves at the base of a mountain that became gradually more precipitous as it stretched toward the east.

"Now, you just follow that mound in your eye," said the American, "and you will be led to where my unfortunate big canoe is lying. We keep along the foot of this height, and if the sea is still there, we'll catch a glimpse of it; on we go for another bit, and if the big canoe is still there we'll catch a glimpse of her."
Hitherto they had had no sign of a native being in the neighbourhood, and they had every reason to believe that they had escaped notice. The moon had now passed behind the hill, which rose probably about a thousand feet above them on leaving the valley. In the black shadow of this "mound," as the American had called it, the party marched; the broken hills on the opposite side being bathed in light.

In a short time the hollow roar of the sea was heard. It rolled through the depths of the gorge, and seemed to shake, as with thunder, the mighty rocks on either side. Then continuing in the same direction at the base of the hills, the sea itself came into view, and seemed in the moonlight like a sheet of burnished gold suspended between the precipitous headlands.

The captain and his party stood silent for a moment in admiration of that magnificent sight. But the Yankee skipper did not seem incapable of giving expression to his feelings at that moment.

"You ain't looking for the big canoe, are you?" he inquired. "'Cause if you are you'll say it's a fraud. It'll take you all your time finding her when you're close to the shore, and you've got to cross the worst paved bit o' ground that natur' ever accepted the contrack for, and then only half did. Talk of Jerry builders, and United States road contractors, why the worst o' them would turn out a better job than what you're about to face."

"Lead us down to it," said the captain, laughing.
"We have gone through so much to-day, another hardship can mean nothing particular to us."

But when they reached the place referred to in such uncomplimentary terms by the American, the company were forced to confess that his description had not been exaggerated.

For about half a mile down to the sea, between the precipitous headlands that formed the entrance to the gorge, there was a beach of stones, each about the size of a man's head, rugged, and lying close together; too close to allow of any one picking one's steps between them, but not close enough to form a pavement that one could walk over. They were, moreover, unsteady where they lay, so that when a foot was placed on one of them, the possibility of the pedestrian being thrown forward or back, as the case might be, was by no means remote.

When Harold had become practically acquainted with this peculiar feature of the ground, and only just succeeded in saving himself from falling, he felt greatly inclined to seat himself on one of the stones and make no further attempt to proceed.

"After all that we have gone through to-day, to meet with such a beach—if you can call it a beach—as this, is like hitting a man when he is down."

"If you take my advice," said Grace, "you'll not make the attempt to realize too literally the feelings of the man who is down. Keep up your heart."
"It's not my heart I'm afraid of," said Harold, "it's my head I'm particularly anxious to keep up. Well, never mind; the walk can't last for ever. We are bound, if we don't come to an end ourselves first, to reach the end of this dreadful place."

"Ain't it large-sized gravel?" said the American. "It wants something done to it, I reckon, before it can be walked over with real unalloyed pleasure."

By dint of scrambling and jumping and carefully balancing themselves the company managed to get half-way down this difficult piece of ground, when they reached a comparatively pleasant beach of pebbles, upon which the rollers were breaking with that heavy slow swing which marks an ocean swell.
CHAPTER XXXIII.

HAROLD STARTLES THE STRANGER.

THE company stood on the shore for a few minutes, and many eyes looked eagerly around the beach and along the base of the cliffs for the ship which they were led to believe was somewhere in this neighbourhood. No ship was to be seen. On their right hand the hills sloped upward at a distance of about half a mile. The small rocks beneath the cliffs at that side were jagged; a ship going upon them would be broken up in an hour. But the mountain precipice, at the base of which the captain and his party were standing, did not slope upward; its ascent was sheer, and with no break that was perceptible by night.

"Where is the vessel, may I ask?" said the captain to the American.

"It's a reg'lar Chinese puzzle, ain't it?" was the reply. "I suppose it may be called Chinese in these parts. Wal, you say, 'Give it up; ask
me another’? You need a key to that puzzle, you say. Wal, you come on a bit and keep your eyes fixed on that thar pebble; it looks like a part of the reg’lar mound, don’t it?"

It was not until they all had attentively observed the place he pointed out that they became aware of the fact that a black mass of rock rose out of the water to a height of fifty or sixty feet. Though it was perhaps a hundred feet from the great precipice, yet in the shadow its outline was not defined against the dark cliff face beyond it.

"Keep your eyes on that pebble," said the American, pointing to the rock, "and continue your journey for a while, and you shall see what you shall see. I feel as if I was running a show."

They obeyed the instructions they received, and walked down the beach for some distance. It was not, however, until they had almost reached the water that they perceived, projecting beyond the great rock, the bows of a vessel. The stern was of course hidden by the wall of stone. From this point of view they also saw that a second rock, like a gigantic roughly-hewn spire, lay closer to the precipice.

"I see how it is now," said Captain Cromer. "The hull is jammed between those two rocks."

"Tight jammed, sir," said the American; "as tight as the lid on a tin of canned lobsters. She would rock like a baby’s cradle in the swell if it wasn’t for the chain cable that’s run out over the
bow with an anchor at the end locked fast below a ledge of rock. I shouldn't care to be one o' the hands that get an order to weigh that anchor, sir."

"It will never be weighed," said the captain. "The vessel is bound to break in two in the course of a short time."

"She ain't a lath either," said the American. "She'll stand a bit of a strain yet, don't you fear."

"Your steering does you credit, skipper," said Grace.

"I had to steer a drifting craft, sir. Think of that, and of what that means. I hadn't a minute and a half to make up my mind what I should do, but I made it up in the time, and had a minute to myself to go a-foolin' round the deck with my hands in my pockets. Now, I guess we'd best get aboard. I feel a bit peckish myself, I don't know what the rest o' the company does."

He went as close to the cliff as possible, and following him, the others of the party saw more clearly how the ship was lying, jammed at the waist, but with the bows held fast by a chain cable.

The skipper gave a hail, and a man appeared in the bows of the hull.

"Stand by to lower away the Jacob's ladder and to haul in the line," shouted the skipper. The man made a motion with his hand and disappeared. The skipper then went to the base of the cliff, and after kicking aside some stones,
returned with a life-buoy and a long coil of stout line on his arm.

"The worst of the matter is getting aboard," said he. "If anybody wishes I'll rig up a hawser and whip in less than no time, and all can get aboard dry."

But even Mr. Dugdale protested against going to the trouble of such an arrangement. The hull was only about a hundred yards from the shore, and every one was willing to trust to the life-buoy.

In a few minutes a number of men appeared in the bows of the hull, a Jacob’s ladder was quickly lowered, and the slack of the life-buoy line was taken in.

One by one the company faced the rollers—they were very light at this part of the beach, owing to the fact that the rocks acted as a natural breakwater—and with their arms over the life-buoy, were hauled out to where the rope-ladder was hanging. Most of them found the bath refreshing after the day’s fatigue; but Mr. Dugdale, through his efforts to keep his botanical specimens out of the water, was more than once placed in considerable peril.

Captain Cromer was the last to leave the shore, holding his rifle above his head as the others had done with theirs, and as his course out to the rock could not be steadied by the line from shore, he fared worse even than the naturalist in making the passage. He carried the life-buoy with him up
the ladder, and was met by the skipper as he jumped from the bow to the deck.

"I have the honour to welcome you aboard the Mosquito, sir," said the American. "So long as a plank remains of the Mosquito you are welcome, sir, and all your friends."

"The Mosquito!" cried Harold in astonishment. "Then you are Captain Ephraim Harper?"

"Ephraim E. Harper, sir; that's my name, though how you come to know it is a riddle to me."

"And your mate's name is Silas Blake, and the bo'sun is Josiah Blaydes."

"This puzzle is too much for me, young man. You don't hail from 'Frisco, do you?"

"Not I. But yesterday morning I picked up a jar containing a message from the mate in the long-boat, and another from the bo'sun. The same paper mentioned that the Mosquito had been dismasted."

"This is a stunner!" cried the American. "Did the paper say how the boat was getting along, and if they were making good progress?"

"It merely stated that they hoped to make the most northern of one of the Philippine Islands. How the jar came to this island I cannot say; but I know that I picked it up where our vessel is lying at anchor, only a few miles further south than this part of the coast."

"Why, it's the simplest thing in the world," said Harper. "The jar was cast adrift in the
current that sets northward, and it was carried in the or'nary course of business to this coast. All the time we were drifting to the west in this broken-down hull until we also got into the current that brought us here. Wal, I'm right glad to hear this news of Silas. He was a smart boy, though a bit self-willed. Give me your fist, young man; you have cheered me up well, you have made me feel spry again. Yes; I believe that after all the Mosquitoes will be able to make tracks to where the star-spangled banner waves. Now that I've told you we are Mosquitoes, will you tell me what you call yourselves?"

He turned to Captain Cromer, who laughed as he replied—

"If you are Mosquitoes we are Fire-flies. And now, if you don't mind, we'll turn in and have a doze. I shouldn't wonder if you'd like one yourself."
CHAPTER XXXIV.

ABOARD THE BIG CANOE.

Not until the skipper had provided the party with the means of making a hearty breakfast did he or they turn in. A variety of luxuries in hermetically sealed tins were laid out on the cabin table, together with delicious biscuits.

"You needn't spare the vittels by taking thought that we'll maybe run short," said the skipper. "We have as much aboard as would provision a small army. The fact is, the Mosquito was chartered to carry a cargo of canned goods to Chinese ports from 'Frisco. I reckon the consignees will have to wait awhile for their parcels. You're more welcome to them than the fish would be, or the natives; though if what I hear is true, and they are cannibals, canned meats would seem kinder insipid to them."

In spite of their wet garments the company managed to make a hearty meal in the cabin,
and the dawn was appearing through the windows astern before they rose from the table and went to turn in to the bunks, to which they were shown by a huge negro, who acted as steward, and who took away the wet clothes to lay them out on the deck to dry in the sun; for the sun had now risen and was shining along the water, where only half-an-hour before the moonlight had streamed.

Harold Cromer, as he wrapped himself up in the blankets in his bunk, felt that all the hardships of the past day were not worth thinking about. They were more than counterbalanced by the comfort of that moment. He had scarcely begun to realize this comfort, however, before he became lost to all sensation, by falling gently asleep.

Aboard the Mosquito Captain Cromer felt that he was only on a level with an ordinary hand. He was ready to issue his orders ashore, regarding himself as in command of the company, but so long as a plank of the hull held together, Ephraim E. Harper was master of the Mosquito. Captain Cromer consequently only suggested to him, before turning in, the advisability of having a careful watch set on deck, so that any appearance of the natives ashore might be reported without delay.

The skipper agreed that such a watch was absolutely necessary; and on giving directions respecting it to his second mate, he learned that during the previous day several groups of natives had been observed. They had come down to the shore, and had gazed in wonder at the ship. Only
one, however, seemed to have any ambition to get aboard. He had taken to the water, and had swum some distance when he was hailed from the bows of the hull, and as he showed no intention of turning, a cartridge had been discharged in his direction, and this had had the effect of arresting his course. He had returned to the shore, where he afterwards made a hostile demonstration toward the ship.

It was thus plain that the natives in this part of the island were aware of the fact that the ship was lying helpless between the rocks. They might return in immense force, and endeavour to take possession of the prize. In addition to the chance of the return of the natives who had discovered the hull, there was of course a likelihood that those who had captured the skipper would join the others in an attempt to be revenged upon the strangers who had taken their prisoner out of their hands. The skipper perceived this, and he thought it well to give the second mate orders to awake him, should the natives be observed in any force.

Poor Ephraim E. Harper! He had had a hard time ashore, after falling into the hands of the savages, and the march back to the ship after he had been so exhausted as to be scarcely able to rise, had almost broken him down completely. The good meal he had just eaten, and the glass of brandy which he had drunk, failed to do more than partially restore him. He felt that it would
be too bad if the sleep which he had surely earned were to be rudely broken by a report that the natives were about to attack the vessel.

For six hours only was he allowed to rest. At the end of that time, his mate knocked at his berth with the information that an immense band of natives had just marched down to the shore, and were apparently about to make an attack upon the vessel.

In a short time not only was the skipper on deck, but all the company of Fire-flies had mustered. Harold found himself thoroughly refreshed by his sleep, much to the surprise of his father, who was very uneasy, lest the boy's health might suffer through the unusual exposure of the previous day. As for Mr. Dugdale, he polished the glasses of his spectacles, and made himself as much at home on the deck of the Mosquito as if he were in his own cabin aboard the yacht; and Grace, it need hardly be said, had not experienced any ill effects from the exciting day ashore.

"What do you make out that they mean to do, sir?" asked the American skipper of Captain Cromer. "See how they are wagging their spears! Does that mean business, do you think?"

"It looks very like it," replied the captain. "The story has evidently spread that there is a ship ashore, and the inhabitants of all parts of the coast probably know what that means. How many crews have been massacred here, no one can tell; no man has survived to tell the tale."
"This crew won't be added to the number if my name is Ephraim E. Harper," cried the skipper. "I owe those boys something for the way they entertained me when I visited them, and I hope they will place it in my power to prove to them that their kindness ain't lost upon a stranger. I reckon we're pretty secure here, sir?"

"I cannot see how they mean to attack us," said Captain Cromer. "I suppose there are close upon a thousand of them on the beach; but with half-a-dozen guns and a sufficiency of cartridges, we should have no difficulty in keeping them at a distance."

"They may try swarming up the chain cable," said the skipper, "but I will welcome any man of them that reaches the deck by that back-door sort of way. Then they may climb that large pebble at one side of us, and come down on our deck as if they were on a toboggan slide. I fancy that we can meet them from this quarter with as little inconvenience. Let them come. We'll have some breakfast before they make up their minds whether they'll be shot at this side, or blown to bits the size of cutlets in the bows. It's a kinder Hobson's choice with them. It's all one to us."

He had bitten about an inch off the end of a cake of tobacco while he was speaking. He was about to offer the remainder of the cake to Captain Cromer, but he suddenly stopped short. He looked rather shyly at the captain for a moment, and then put the cake into his pocket again. There was something about Captain Cromer that told him he
did not make a practice of chewing tobacco—that he did not even indulge in this luxury upon a special occasion.

"Come and have breakfast, sir," said the skipper. "We can discuss the situation easier below, we've a deal of arrears to make up in the eating line for our fast yesterday. Take a squint now and again in the direction of those niggers, Cullen," he added to his mate. "Sing out if they look a bit wild."

He led the way to the cabin and the captain followed him. It certainly appeared as if Harold and Grace took the same view of the matter of arrears as the skipper had expressed. Their appetites were of the most robust type, and even Mr. Dugdale joined in the general attack upon the interminable tins of preserved meat with a vehemence that astonished and delighted the skipper.

On the whole the skipper was very well pleased with his company, and with the situation of matters in general. He expressed himself to this effect before tiffin was over—the skipper alluded to the meal as breakfast.

"Just you think how affairs have changed with me since this time yesterday, gentlemen," said he. "Why at this time yesterday I took it for granted that I was as gone a coon as could be found in creation. I was in the hands of cannibal savages, and it was near dinner-time with them, I could see by their eyes. Not only so, mind you, but I had no hope that my hands aboard this hulk would ever see a Christian face again. I took it for granted
that though the canned goods would hold out for some time, yet as soon as the last can was empty they might quietly come ashore and lay them down like Annie Laurie—or was it the young man?—and quietly turn up their toes with the star-spangled banner about them. Just look at that pictur', then on this.” He waved his hand gracefully around the company at the cabin table. “Why, gentlemen, ain't it enough to make a man stop turning gray to meet with such a change as this?”

“We are not yet safe, you must remember,” said Captain Cromer; “we may have some trouble before we find ourselves all right on the deck of the Fire-fly, with this miserable island looking very misty as it sinks below the horizon.”

“After what we went through yesterday, the worst trouble will seem light, sir,” said the skipper. “And now I'll just get on deck and see what notion those niggers have of bombarding a fort like this, or of proclaiming this harbour in a state of blockade.”

He went on deck and was quickly followed by his guests, who met the coloured steward entering the cabin with an armful of tins, to replace those that had been emptied at tiffin.

There were certainly a thousand natives in view; they lined the beach and—to the admiration of the skipper—strolled over the rough stones without the least apparent inconvenience. They were all armed with spears, and Mr. Dugdale declared that he saw among them several sumpitans or long blow-guns, similar to those common among the Dyaks, or to
the pucuna of the Macoushis of Guiana, formed of the ourah reed, the arrow-tips being dipped in poison, and blown through the tube with great precision, the consequences being fatal to those who are struck. Mr. Dugdale was interested in his discovery from a different standpoint from that of Captain Cromer and the American skipper, to whom he communicated what he had seen. It was a problem to him whether the sumpitan had been imported to the island of Formosa, or derived from the source whence the Dyaks had obtained the weapon.

It appeared as if the native force did not mean to take any action against the ship, but were content to make a demonstration without endangering their lives. They waved their spears and shook their parangs in a very threatening way, it is true; but their action seemed only part of a ceremony. The men arose in ranks and went through what might be supposed to constitute the spear exercise as practised at Formosa, but it did not appear to mean anything more than a suggestion that if the ship's company were only ashore, they would find themselves in a more or less uncomfortable position.
CHAPTER XXXV.

THE ATTACK ON THE 'MOSQUITO.'

"T'S a game of brag those niggers are playing," said the skipper. "What do they mean by foolin' around with them walking-sticks? They're real mean! They demonstrate at a distance, but they take precious good care to keep their distance. If they had any manliness in their natur' they'd go for us direct."

"I am quite as well satisfied that they keep at a distance," said Captain Cromer. "I am not thirsting for the blood of those poor wretches."

"I am," said the American. "If you had been in their hands for twenty hours, I reckon you'd like something for your money. If they had hauled you about as they hauled me, I reckon you'd like to make it up to them in some way, to give them some slight return for the attention they paid you, a total stranger in their midst."
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"Perhaps I might," said Captain Cromer, laughing.

"It ain't that I mind what they did to myself personally," said the skipper. "I could bear that without a lamb's bleat. But the insult that they did to the flag of the Republic, that, sir, is a wound that rankles in my breast! I guess I'll have a chaw o' torbacco."

The skipper indulged in his one luxury; but before he had returned the remainder of the cake of tobacco to his waistcoat pocket there was a considerable stir among the natives. They had risen altogether, and were waving their spears frantically in the direction of the sloping cliff, opposite that beneath which the hull of the Mosquito was lying.

"That's good athletic exercise," said Grace. "It should develop their muscles in course of time, if persevered in."

"You've never been in one of the drill halls in New York city, sir," said the skipper. "If you had, I fancy you'd revise your notions on the subject of athletics."

"Perhaps so," replied Grace. "But I don't know that ever any of your athletes attempted such a feat as those fellows are going in for over there."

"What's that? Why, if they ain't carrying the hull of a ship on their shoulders—two of them—two hulls that they mean to launch against us! That's about the size of it."
Those are praus, let me tell you," cried Mr. Dugdale. "We shall have an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the characteristics of the native workmanship in this way, and of comparing it with that displayed in the praus of the Malayan races further south—in the Sulu Archipelago for instance."

"I'm afraid we shall," said Captain Cromer, rather sadly.

Mr. Dugdale glanced at him reproachfully, and then resumed his observation of the natives.

It seemed that the conclusion come to by the American was correct. Two companies of natives, each numbering perhaps fifty men, appeared in the distance, carrying on their shoulders a couple of enormous praus, with beaked stems and raised sterns. When the bands had come closer to the stones of the beach, it was seen from the deck of the Mosquito that in the stern of each of the praus there was seated a native, who seemed to be a chief. Both were adorned in the same way with coloured plumes projecting from a curious head-dress, not unlike a helmet. They carried spears with enormous tufts of hair hanging half-way down the shaft, and Mr. Dugdale, who was scrutinizing them through the binocular telescope, declared that they wore necklaces of human bones.

It was plain that the intention of the natives was to launch these vessels fully manned with warriors against the Mosquito. The praus were, it seemed, usually allowed to remain in one of the
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villages, so as to save them from the likelihood of being broken up by the rollers, which would happen were they to be left in the water. As soon as the position of the Mosquito was ascertained, a message was despatched to the Admiralty department of the island, to send the navy overland to the beach as quickly as possible.

While the natives were continuing their demonstration on the appearance of the praus, the American skipper was consulting with Captain Cromer and Grace as to the best means of repelling the attack which was evidently coming.

It was taken for granted that one of the vessels would attack the Mosquito in the bows, and that the other would make for the stern. Half the crew were consequently posted in the forepart of the ship and the other half aft. Each division had five guns and several revolvers. Harold was stationed in the bows and Grace aft. The skipper insisted on Captain Cromer taking command of the deck.

"I can fight like fury when the time comes," said he, "but I don't think it's in me to organize a naval engagement on a grand scale like what this is going to be. Now if you, sir, will become admiral of the fleet, and let me take the place of sailing master, I'll be obliged to you."

It was therefore Captain Cromer who made the arrangements for meeting the attack, the American acquiescing in all; only when the captain suggested that Mr. Dugdale should not be posted in any
special place, but should hold himself in readiness
when his services would be required in either
quarter, the American glanced in the direction of
the naturalist.

"He won't be much good with a cartridge
expeller, I suppose?" said he, with a jerk of his
head in the direction of Mr. Dugdale. "Ain't he
better out of the way down below, and not loafing
about the deck to get in everybody's way?"

"It so happens that he is worth all the men that
are in the bows at the present moment," said
Captain Cromer. "He has never yet been known
to miss his mark."

"Wal, that licks all I ever heard tell of," cried
the skipper. "If I didn't look on him as a dead
head all this while. I suspected him to be a
professor of herbs, on the look out for some-
thing queer that he could advertise as a patent
medicine."

The plan of defence being arranged and the
men properly posted, nothing remained for the
Fire-flies and Mosquitoes to do; they could only
wait for the attack.

They were not kept long in suspense.

The enormous praus were laid on the beach
close to the water previous to being launched.
The launching was simplicity itself. From eighty
to a hundred men raised each craft on their
shoulders and bore it into the water. The fore-
most men waded through the rollers until the water
was up to their necks, and then, at a signal
from the chief in the stern, the craft was set afloat, and the men scrambled as best they could over the sides.

Setting up a series of wild and monotonous yells the paddlers commenced their work. Around the chief in the stern of each prau a dozen warriors stood, while others lined the sides or crowded together in the bows. All carried spears and shields and parangs; no sumpitans were, however, visible from the deck of the _Mosquito._

The foremost prau steered, as the captain had assumed it would, outside the rock, so as to attack the hull in the stern; and as it was altogether protected by the rock while taking this course, the captain saw that it would be almost under the stern before a shot could be fired at it, and fifty spears might thus be thrown on deck from a distance of ten yards. In an instant he had sent a couple of men down to the cabin, with directions to give the prau a volley through the cabin scuttles the instant it passed the rock.

"Sink the craft, if you can, and give the men a chance for their lives," were the directions the captain gave the seamen before sending them below.

The men said, "Ay, ay, sir," and saluted respectfully; but when they got to the cabin they put their tongues in their cheeks and winked at each other suggestively.

"Ay, ay, sir, we'll give them a chance o' their lives," muttered one of the men.
"To be sure, to be sure," said the other.

They posted themselves at the scuttles as far aft as they could go, and brought their rifles to bear upon the point of the rock round which the attacking craft was expected to appear. Through the open ports came the sound of the native war-song—faintly from the craft that was at the other side of the rock, but clearly from that which was approaching the bows.

"We'll change their tune," said one of the sailors.

"Don't you fear," said the other.

On the deck of the *Mosquito* there was silence, as the foremost prau was hidden by the rock on the port side, and the second paused, so that both attacks might be made simultaneously.

"Not a shot more than is necessary," said Captain Cromer, in a clear voice, as he stood amidships.

"Wait till you see the whites of their eyes," said the American.

He had scarcely spoken, when the prau nearest the shore made a dash for the bow of the ship, and at the same instant a wild yell, coming from fifty throats beyond the rock, told that the attack was about to be made astern as well.

The Yankee skipper ran to the bows, and lying down beside the stock of the broken bowsprit, sent the muzzle of his rifle through the woodwork where the figure-head had been. Just above him, Mr. Dugdale stood, intent on observing the
shape of the stem of the enemy's craft. He held his rifle carelessly in his arms.

Almost at the same instant the defenders of the Mosquito opened fire fore and aft. The wild war-song yelled by the natives was broken up with fierce cat-like shrieks of agony, while the cheers of the Mosquitoes and Fire-flies rang loud through the air, when the smoke cleared away and showed the crowd of native warriors struggling in the water beneath the bows, their craft lying on its side, and dipping every now and again as its crew endeavoured to right it. The skipper's shot had knocked over the man who was at the steering oar, and Mr. Dugdale's conical bullet had penetrated the side just at the water-mark. In an instant the frail craft had capsized, the demoralized crew moving simultaneously to one side.

The second prau was, however, not so easily disposed of. The seamen had fired from the cabin scuttles among the crew, and had wounded two of them. The instant a head appeared above the bulwarks astern, a shower of spears flashed through the air; the next instant a volley of musketry came from the decks; but the men fired so much at random it seemed as if only a few of the natives were wounded, and the advance of the prau was scarcely checked. The natives with triumphant yells prepared to throw their spears once again, when there was a rush aft on the deck of the Mosquito, and the men who had not had a chance of a shot at the other prau now poured
what should have been a destructive fire into that which was now advancing.

The effect was that which is invariably produced by a random fusilade; scarcely a man was injured, and in a few moments the natives would have been clambering up the side of the ship, had not Mr. Dugdale picked off the man who was steering. He fell forward with a howl, and the prau's stem turned aside a point or two. A second native grasped the steering oar, but before he had given it a sweep, a bullet crashed through his skull, and Mr. Dugdale was putting another cartridge into his rifle. A third man was making for the oar, but before he had even grasped it, he was sent sprawling. The remainder of the crew of the prau were so completely demoralized by the effects of Mr. Dugdale's marksmanship, that they lost their heads, and dropping their spears, seized the paddles and frantically endeavoured to back the craft.

"Aim for the boat," cried Captain Cromer, as the men beside him cheered and prepared to fire a volley at the retreating prau.

"Sink the canoe," shouted the Yankee skipper. "No matter where you aim, sink the canoe."

The rattle of a volley was echoed by the rocks around, and the sound seemed to dwindle into the distance of the cliffs on the opposite side of the gorge.

When the smoke cleared away the prau was nowhere to be seen. The skipper fancied that it had been sunk, but he soon found out his
mistake. It had escaped, and was now sheltered by the great rock round which it had just come for the attack. The sound of the paddles mingled with the shouts of the natives aboard, and those ashore joined in the general tumult, not the least noisy of the crowd being those who had manned the craft that had made the attack upon the bows of the Mosquito. They had swam ashore without difficulty.

In a few minutes the surviving prau was paddled to the beach and lifted out of the water by a gang of natives.

"That's about as bad as they make them," said the American. "How did that thar craft get off when you all fired at it?"

"I expect it got off simply because everybody did fire at it," said Captain Cromer.

"They would have their shot at it!" said the skipper. "Why couldn't they leave it for the professor to handle as he pleased? The professor is the only marksman on this deck. Did you see how he drilled the canoe for'ard? The hole looked as if it had been made with an auger—it did surely. I'm much obliged to you, professor; you have saved this hulk, sir. If ever you want to make a fortune in the shooting-galleries I'll give you a line to a man that is boss at running a glass ball-breaker like Carver. Meantime if there's any partic'lar sort of canned produce that you've set your heart on, just you nominate it and it'll be laid before you."
Mr. Dugdale took off his spectacles and carefully wiped the glasses.

"I cannot say that I ever saw a similar head-dress to that worn by the chiefs," said he, after a considerable pause. "The feathers I failed to identify, they evidently belong to some yet un-classed species."

"I don't quite see what course you're steering, sir," said the skipper. "But if you just run your eye over the cans that the steward will lay out for you, it's likely that you'll see some relishing name among the lot. You've done for them savages, professor, and that's a fact."
CHAPTER XXXVI.

HAROLD'S OBSERVATIONS.

"THINK we came very cheaply out of that affair, sir," remarked Grace to the captain, as they stood together in the bows, watching the natives, who appeared settling down along the shore to recover, so far as they were able, from the effects of their attack upon the Mosquito.

"We got out of it very cheaply indeed," replied the captain. "But what I am thinking just now is, how we are going to get out of the whole business. Look at those fellows squatting in their hundreds along the shore. They don't show any sign of being disheartened at their repulse; they may sit there for a couple of days still."

"We have no guarantee that they won't," said Grace.

"None whatever. If we make the attempt to go ashore, they will spear us one by one as we land."
"To a dead certainty."

"And yet you must remember that a boat's crew will leave the yacht to-morrow morning in search of us."

"I never thought of that," cried Grace. "Sure enough, you gave that order to Mr. Hampden."

"Do you fancy the crew will ever come here in search of us?"

"Not likely, sir. They will take it for granted that we've gone inland."

"I believe you. And the consequences will be most serious both for them and for us."

Grace shook his head.

"There's no doubt that we are in a bad way," he said, after a pause. "I don't see how we are to get clear, unless we contrive to signal to the yacht that we are here. If she had been ordered to stand off and on, instead of anchoring, we should have some chance; but as it is, I don't see what we can do, except trust that those fellows will make another attack on us, and when they are beaten back, get so discouraged that they will throw up the whole affair in disgust."

"That is not much to hope for," said the captain. "It's the best that is in our power, sir," said Grace.

Harold Cromer was in the bows when this conversation took place. He was observing the movements of the natives through the binocular glass, and he continued doing so after Grace had gone, and after his father had walked away also.
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He had not hitherto given much thought to the situation in which all aboard the Mosquito were placed. He had taken it for granted that they could repel any attack that might be made on them by the natives, and the result of the attempt made by the natives to board the hull had confirmed his impression in this respect. But the conversation that had just taken place between his father and Grace rather startled him.

He now perceived the peril of the situation, not only so far as the company aboard the Mosquito were concerned, but also in respect to the boat's crew of the yacht, who would probably come ashore the next day, and endeavour to force their way into the interior, in a fruitless search for their captain and his party. He saw clearly that if the boat's crew were to be intercepted by natives, scarcely a man of the crew could escape.

Another matter which he regarded with considerable apprehension, was the position of the hull of the Mosquito. He had heard some of the sailors discussing this point, and they had agreed that if a sea were to rise so as to heave up the stern, the fabric would part in the waist.

Under these circumstances it was not surprising that he should feel that something should be done to alter the situation of the hour.

Of course the best step to take with this end in view, would be to communicate with the yacht. If Mr. Hampden only knew the position in which the captain and the party who left the yacht for
a day's excursion were placed, he could rescue them in half-an-hour. He could steam round the coast, and run a boat under the stern of the hull without the smallest trouble. The problem was, however, how to communicate with Mr. Hampden.

The more Harold thought over the matter, the more clearly did he perceive that the yacht must be communicated with, at all hazards, before the next morning, when the boat's crew would leave the yacht on their fruitless and perilous task.

The yacht must be communicated with. But how?

This was, of course, the most difficult part of the problem. It was easy enough to see what should be done, but it was not quite so easy to see how the thing was to be accomplished. After a good deal of thinking, he came to the conclusion that the only chance of reaching the yacht would be by stealth. No one, in fact, could land except by stealth. The natives lay in hundreds all along the beach opposite the rocks, and any organized landing of the ship's company must result in disaster. One man might, he thought, succeed in evading the notice of the savages, and land just at the foot of the slope that constituted the southern headland at the entrance to the gorge leading to the interior; for the natives did not think it necessary to guard this part of the shore. They contented themselves remaining just opposite the hull, the point at which it was natural to expect that a landing would be attempted.
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Harold examined carefully, with the aid of the powerful glass, the shore at the foot of the slope in the distance. He saw that a ledge of rock ran out for some way to sea at that place, forming a narrow shelf that became, about ten feet up the side of the slope, a ridge, beyond which there was a crevice in the rock that seemed some feet deep, and was, so far as he could judge, continued for a considerable distance along the side of the cliff.

He could not help thinking that if any one could but manage to swim across the water that lay between the headlands, that narrow ledge would afford a capital landing-place at the opposite side of the gorge, the entrance to which formed a sort of bay, though scarcely indented sufficiently to be regarded as a real bay.

The more frequently he examined the place through the glass, the more impressed did he become with its suitability as a landing-place for a swimmer. It was, however, quite half a mile away, and as it lay to the south, while the current, as he well knew, set northward, a possible swimmer would have a difficult task reaching the headland.

While he was considering this point, Mr. Dugdale came beside him to borrow the binocular glass, in order to observe one of the paddles of the disabled prau which was floating a short way from the ship.

"I should like to possess that implement," said
Mr. Dugdale, "but I suppose it would be impossible under the present circumstances. It seems to be slightly carved, but I cannot, of course, make out the design from this distance."

"I don't see how you could lay your hand on it, Mr. Dugdale," said Harold. "But keep up your heart. I dare say we shall be attacked again before long, and you may have a chance of getting half-a-dozen perhaps."

"You think so?" said Mr. Dugdale, eagerly. "Oh, that would be too much to hope for—too much!"

He resumed his scrutiny of the floating paddle, and Harold continued watching it also. In a few minutes he had become thoroughly interested in this object, owing to the fact that he noticed it was actually drifting to the south instead of to the north.

"Why," he cried, "that paddle seems to possess a vitality of its own. It is making its way in the opposite direction to the current."

"That is impossible," replied Mr. Dugdale.

"Cannot you see that it is drifting southward, while every one knows that the current sets all along this coast to the northward?"

"That is true enough," said Mr. Dugdale. "But you must remember that every current running along an indented coast creates several counter-currents in the indentations. When the current outside sets to the northward, it strikes against the northern headland there, and a southerly current..."
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is to be met close to the shore. That is why that interesting implement is floating to the south. If it is not thrown ashore it will pass into the outer current and be carried along the coast for perhaps many miles."

"I see that distinctly now," said Harold. "I should have remembered that feature of currents."

This incident proved to him that the task of swimming to the southern headland would not be so difficult as he at first believed; and during the remainder of the day he could think of nothing but the likelihood of some one being able to reach that rocky ledge without the natives' attention being aroused.

All the time that he was considering this matter, the natives were squatting along the shore opposite the rocks where the Mosquito was lying. They seemed to be simply waiting for the next move to be made by the men aboard the hull. They did not show any sign of being anxious to make another attack either upon the bow or the stern. It seemed as if they were under the impression that the ship's company would be compelled to come ashore eventually, when of course they could be speared without difficulty.

Shortly before sunset the mist came up from the sea and shrouded the coast just as the mist of the previous evening had done. But though the cliffs and the shore were covered, there was only the lightest haze over the sea. The fear that Captain Cromer had, that the natives might be led
to attack the ship in the mist, in the expectation of being able to run under the stern without being noticed, was banished, for the outline of the shore could be clearly seen from the deck, though ashore it was probable that one would not be able to see half-a-dozen yards ahead.

"They mean to starve us out," said the skipper, shortly after sunset. "They will not find it as easy as skittles. Them savages little know of the resources of civilization, especially in the canned meat line. If this big canoe don't part in the middle, we can hold out for a month."

"No doubt," said Captain Cromer. He did not tell the skipper what was on his mind—that he was thinking of the position the boat's crew from the yacht would be in, should they come ashore and be met by a band of some hundreds of natives.
CHAPTER XXXVII.

A PERILOUS ENTERPRISE.

The night had come, but the mist had not lifted from the shore. A watch was set in the bows of the Mosquito and the remainder of the ship's company turned in to their berths.

All was silent aboard the hull; but from the shore there came the monotonous sound of the native chant just as it had been heard from the valley the previous evening. It mingled with the long roll of the waters and their crash along the pebbles of the sloping beach.

It wanted an hour of midnight when Harold Cromer crept cautiously out from one of the cabins in a deck-house and walked noiselessly to the stern of the ship. A stout line was hanging over the quarter—he had seen to this previously—and without a moment's hesitation he slid down and dropped quietly into the water beneath. A few strokes were sufficient to send him beyond the
outside rock, so that there was no possibility of his being observed from the ship; and then he struck out slowly but strongly for the opposite headland, but gradually curving in toward the beach, so as to be caught by the current. In the course of a few minutes, when he had swum within about two hundred yards of the coast as quietly as he could, he felt the force of the current which he sought. It carried him along with scarcely any exertion to the south, and though there was a considerable swell on the water below the headlands, it did not inconvenience him in any way; his head and shoulders were above the surface; the fact being that he had found a cork belt in one of the cabins, and this circumstance had caused him to make up his mind to undertake the journey to the yacht.

He had timed himself in setting out, so that two-thirds of the distance to the headland would be in shadow, for the northern headland projected so far that the moonlight, until the orb had risen some degrees in the sky, would be only over a small portion of the surface of the water. When at last he found himself striking out through the glittering waters, he knew he was beyond the notice of any one ashore. As simply as if he had been merely taking a midnight bathe, he reached the ledge of rock which he had noticed through the binocular glass, and though the swell was of great strength at this place, he succeeded in preventing himself from being carried back to the water when he had once grasped the rock.
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The ledge where it ran into the water was scarcely six inches wide, but it was wide enough to allow of the boy's kneeling on it, and working his way along until it became so broad that he could sit upon it. He did so, and then hauled in the little bundle which he towed behind him. It contained his shoes and socks, a revolver and thirty cartridges, a quantity of biscuit and a piece of tinned meat, wrapped in paper. In order to prevent the sea-water from getting at these things, he had wrapped them in two oil-skin sou'westers, and wound a line closely around them. When he now cut the line with the knife which he always carried in his pocket, he had the satisfaction of finding everything perfectly dry in the bundle.

He shook all the water that he could from his canvas trousers and jacket, and then putting on his socks and boots, he loaded his revolver, made up his provisions into a bundle which he tied to the back of his cartridge-belt, and prepared for his dangerous journey.

He had written a few lines to his father before leaving the hull, stating that he meant to try and reach the yacht and have her sailed round to relieve all who were aboard the Mosquito, and that he had only started without asking leave because he knew that his father would never forgive himself, if any accident happened to him, for having allowed him to go. Harold added that he knew he was the one who could best be spared from the defence of the ship, and so was most entitled to
risk the journey back to where the Fire-fly was anchored.

When he was writing those lines he had not felt the least fear; but now, when he found himself alone on the side of the slope and about to make his way through a country so full of dangers, he faltered for the first time. He cast a longing look toward the great rock behind which the Mosquito lay. He almost felt inclined to put around him once more the cork belt and endeavour to swim back to the rock.

Only for an instant did this impulse come over him. In another moment he was strong again. He would not return without having at least attempted to carry out his intention of saving his friends. He walked along the ledge with unaltering feet, and soon reached the place where it formed the ridge above what seemed, when seen through the binocular glass from the deck of the Mosquito, to be a slight crevice or fissure along the side of the slope, but which he now found was a deep chasm forming a path for some distance up the slope. He was overjoyed to make this discovery, for his greatest fear had been lest he might be seen in the moonlight, creeping along the side of the slope, by the natives on the beach. Now his mind was relieved on this point, for the ridge made a wall from six to ten feet high between himself and the natives.

He went on beneath the shadow of the ridge for nearly half a mile; when at last it fell away, allowing him a glimpse of the country, he found
that if he were to continue walking in the same
direction, he would find himself in the midst of the
native village below the fortified clump of trees.
He now stood at the meeting-point of the two
valleys. He had only to cross from one slope to
the other to regain the thicket through which he
and the rest of the Fire-fly company had passed
twice on the previous day. He could not help
thinking how easily the natives could have inter-
cepted the party on their way to the shore on the
previous night, by taking this course along the
slope and then turning aside to the beach, while
the strangers were making their wide détour that
occupied so much time.

With the utmost caution he crossed the entrance
to the valley, keeping a sharp look-out for enemies,
and with his revolver in his hand. He knew that
as he climbed the opposite hill-side the moonlight
made him a conspicuous object, and only when he
gained the well-known clump did he breathe freely.
He had seen nothing of any natives so far, and he
did not believe that he had been perceived by any.
Resting among the trees for a short time, he looked
in the direction of the village. It was quite dark,
and no human being seemed to be stirring. He was
somewhat surprised to notice this, remembering,
as he did, how lively the village had been on the
previous night, when he had accused the inhabit-
ants of keeping disreputable hours. He now felt
that they were either more respectable than he
had fancied, or all the fighting men had left the
village and were among the watchers on the beach opposite where the Mosquito was lying.

After only the briefest rest he pushed on once more by the side of the wood with which he had become so familiar; for he was wise enough to make up his mind not to try and find out any "short cuts" to the gorge, at the entrance to which the Fire-fly was at anchor; but to retrace, as nearly as he could, the original track which had been pursued on landing from the boat.

He went on by the side of the wood until he came to the place where he and his friends had entered the thicket on hearing the noise of the approach of the natives with the American skipper. He had the curiosity to turn aside here to see if the man who had thrown the spear at Grace, and who had been overcome and left bound among the trees, had been rescued by his brethren.

He had no trouble satisfying himself on this matter. When he passed the great mound of vegetation a series of howling and snarling and fierce yelling arose. He crouched behind the mound and saw what filled him with horror. The wild cats and other creatures of the same nature were at a feast. The remains of a man's body were there; but he saw that the body had been deprived of its head.

Harold turned away in horror. He knew that the man who had been left there bound had been killed by a head-hunter, and the body thrown to be devoured by wild animals.

The boy went on quickly, leaving the fierce
creatures snarling and clawing one another at their ghastly banquet. In a short time he reached the lower plateau, and entered the lovely glen at the very point where he and his party had left it, after Mr. Dugdale had shot the curious pigeon and the kingfishers. No ray of moonlight penetrated the dense foliage of the glen. It was as black within the shade of the trees as though the world outside was not flooded with moonlight.

As Harold went down by the aid of the trailiers, holding on by one long line of creepers until he was able to grasp another, so that it would have been impossible for him to fall, he was of course unable to see if he was going in the right direction. He knew, however, that so long as he reached the little stream below he could not go astray. He had only to cross the stream and climb the opposite bank when he would certainly be able to find his way to the gorge.

Without mishap he reached the stream, and was glad to take a rest and to eat some of his provisions. He had been singularly fortunate hitherto in his enterprise, and his spirits rose proportionately. Surely in the course of a couple of hours he would be in a position to signal to the yacht to send a boat ashore for him; nay, perhaps he would be on the shore at the very moment that Mr. Hampden would be carrying out the instructions which he had received from the captain on this point; the boat might be in the act of landing a crew to go inland in search of the absent party.
He reckoned that it wanted two hours of being dawn, and as he would only be an hour and a half at the furthest making his way down to the beach, he thought he could not be in a better hiding-place than where he was, for the half-hour he had to spare. He took a hearty draught of the cool water that trickled through huge masses of maiden-hair fern at this place. He felt no fatigue whatever. He was as fresh as if he had merely had a summer morning walk. He had taken it for granted that the mist would disperse as it had done before, shortly after moonrise, and the result proved that his judgment was not in error. From the moment he had landed he had breathed only the purest air.

In excellent spirits he began the ascent of the other side of the glen, and reached the summit just as the moonlight was becoming pale before the first glance of dawn. He hurried along through the thick vegetation, for he knew that the brief dawn would soon give place to a brilliant sunrise. When he got within a short distance of where the *Fire-fly’s* company had turned aside from the course of the gorge, two days before, he began to move more cautiously, taking advantage of all the cover available to conceal his approach. He believed that he could not be too cautious, having previously had proofs of the way the natives went about.

Without perceiving the least indication of any natives, he at length came within view of a point from which the entrance to the gorge could be seen. The sun had just risen, and he pictured to
himself how the rays would stream across the water and lighten up the graceful outline of the Fire-fly swinging at anchor outside.

He was almost breathless with excitement when he reached this point. He shaded his eyes with his hand and looked out. The sea was sparkling gloriously beneath the rays of the newly risen sun, but no yacht was to be seen. He gazed for long out to that dazzling sea, mistrusting the evidence of his eyes. He turned away for a few moments and then looked again through the entrance to the ravine.

The result was the same as before. No yacht was to be seen.
CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A TERRIBLE DISAPPOINTMENT.

HAROLD CROMER felt a terrible sinking at heart at that moment. He felt that his enterprise had failed. He had consulted no one before setting out on his journey; he had acted entirely on his own judgment in the matter, and up to this point he had been more successful than he could ever have hoped to be. But what did his success avail him now? It only increased his consciousness of failure.

Why was the yacht not there? Where had she gone? Perhaps she had cruised round the coast to the northward, and was now in the act of relieving those who were on the Mosquito. Perhaps some means had been found by his father of communicating with Mr. Hampden and of directing him to sail the yacht round the coast for the relief of the company. If he had only been wise enough to consult his father or even Grace before setting out
on his enterprise, he might possibly have learned how it could not succeed.

He had heard of no counter orders being given to Grace respecting the movement of the yacht; but perhaps his father had a private understanding with the chief officer that under certain circumstances he was not to send a boat's crew ashore, but to weigh anchor and stand off and on for some time.

All these suggestions came crowding upon him at once, and it is needless to say that they did not tend to lessen his disappointment. He felt that he had failed, miserably failed.

He threw himself on the ground and buried his face in his hands.

It was as well that he did so. There came to his ears the sound of voices, shouting and yelling in a way that he knew only too well. The sound came from the entrance to the valley beneath the mound on which he had thrown himself. He lay motionless among the great leaves of the palm plants, not daring to raise his head until the sounds had dwindled away in the distance. Then, removing his cap, he peered out cautiously through the leaves.

What a narrow escape he had had! How great cause he had to be thankful to Providence for protecting him!

There on the beach of pebbles, not more than a quarter of a mile from where he lay, a score of natives were standing. They had come from along the valley while he was still in the glen, and had he
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not thrown himself on the ground when he did, he would certainly have been seen by them. They had passed not more than fifty yards below the mound. Now he saw them stand looking eagerly out to where the Fire-fly had been anchored. They only remained still for a few minutes; then they began to caper and to make frantic gestures with their spears toward the sea. Very strange and wild those creatures seemed, with the bright sun beyond them shedding his rays over the sparkling sea and making a brilliant background for their dark figures.

Harold wondered what all this gesticulating meant. He could only guess, however, that the natives had previously seen the yacht at her anchorage, and that their demonstration at her disappearance was one of triumph. Was it possible, he asked himself, that the boat's crew had already landed and been massacred by the natives?

For a few moments it seemed to him quite possible that such a disaster had taken place. Why might it not be that the boat's crew had been overwhelmed by the natives? What chance would ten men entering the valley have against five hundred natives in ambush among the trees or the dense vegetation? None whatever. But then, even if such an encounter had come about with the most terrible results, why should it have caused Mr. Hampden to weigh anchor?

Without being able to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion, he cautiously crept through the under-
growth back to the slope of the glen. He concealed himself once more, waiting to hear the noise of the natives returning to their valley. Not for some hours did he hear the sound of their wild chant, which, he noticed, was the same as that which the others had uttered when they were bearing the American skipper captive.

When the sounds had died away in the distance he came out of hiding, and crawled back to the mound. His first glance was in the direction of the sea. It did not relieve him from his sense of disappointment. The sun had risen beyond the line of cliffs, but still no yacht was to be seen. No sight or sound of life was apparent in any direction. A consciousness of loneliness overwhelmed poor Harold. He felt that he could enter into the emotions attributed to Alexander Selkirk by the poet Cowper. The solitude of the place had no charms for him, though on the whole he preferred to experience it rather than the society which was to be found on the island.

He remained for some hours deep in the vegetation of the mound, glancing every now and again to that sparkling piece of sea that lay between the two mighty precipices at the entrance to the ravine; but no yacht appeared. In the other direction no natives appeared. Those whom he had previously seen had evidently departed, perfectly satisfied with the result of their visit to the shore.

He now began to consider if it would not be
wise for him to make the attempt to return to the Mosquito. It was now midday, and he should be pretty far on his way back before the usual mist would come over the island.

He looked toward the shore and he felt an irresistible impulse to go down and seek some clue to the singular course pursued by Mr. Hampden. Perhaps he might be able to learn there why the yacht had disappeared. He saw that his revolver was loaded, and without hesitation he walked down to the shore. He had no difficulty perceiving that the visit just paid by the natives to the beach was not their first since the Fire-fly had dropped her anchor outside. The remains of what had been an enormous fire were visible, and half-burnt branches were scattered on every side. This sight did not surprise Harold, for he guessed, from the way he had seen the natives gesticulating at this place, that they had been here a short time before. But when he saw lying on the pebbles under the cliff the blade of a broken oar, which he recognized as belonging to one of the yacht's boats, it must be confessed that he was startled.

He stood for a long time gazing blankly at that piece of wood.

What did it mean?

All that he could suppose was, that a conflict had taken place between the boat's crew and the natives, who had endeavoured to prevent them from landing. But what the result of the encounter had been he could not tell. If the boat's
crew had been victorious, why was not the yacht at her anchorage?

He was completely puzzled. He was afraid even to hazard a conjecture on the subject. He seated himself on the pebbles and remained thinking what he should do under the circumstances. Should he return to the Mosquito without doing anything, merely with an account of his journey and of the disappearance of the yacht?

After some time he came to the conclusion that he should not too hastily assume that Mr. Hampden had taken away the yacht without meaning to return to the anchorage. If the vessel remained afloat, he believed that Mr. Hampden would bring her back to the anchorage. Feeling that this was so, he began to think how he could communicate with any one who might land at this place.

The result of his deliberation was that he cut a long chip off the blade of the oar, and scratched upon it, with the point of his knife-blade, the following message—

"IN GREAT DISTRESS, BUT ALL SAFE. TAKE YACHT NORTH, ENTER A GORGE WHERE THE SUMMIT OF FURTHEST PRECIPICE OVERHANGS A GREAT WAY—ONLY A FEW MILES ROUND COAST. DON'T DELAY."

He scratched the letters as deep as he could; but in order to make them more distinct, he picked up a half-burnt branch and rubbed the charcoal
well into the scratches. By this means the letters were as distinct as though they were engraved.

But now that the letter was written, where was the post-office to which it should be consigned?

Not for some time did he hit upon a scheme that he thought should prove successful. He placed the chip under a large stone at the side of the cliff. Then on the steep slope of the beach he arranged white pebbles so as to form the words—

"SEEK HERE,"

picked out in colossal letters so that they could not fail to attract attention even at a distance of a hundred yards, the ordinary ground of pebbles being dark. Then he made a line of white stones to the place where he had secreted the chip, and finally he scratched upon the blade of the oar, the same words, "SEEK HERE," and forced the end into the beach beside the stone that covered the message. If any boat's crew were to come ashore from the yacht they could not fail to be attracted to the place where the missive was to be found, and it was quite unlikely, should any natives arrive, that they would understand the significance of the ornamental design into which he had worked the white pebbles on the dark ground.

Well satisfied with his work, and hoping that his trouble would not go unrewarded, he set his face once more to the glen, and journeying as
He arranged white pebbles so as to form the words 'Seek Here.'—p. 338.
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cautiously as he could, remembering that his chances of discovery by daylight were very much greater than by night, he gained the well-known clump of trees when the first breath of the usual mist swept up the ravine.

Remembering his father's caution on the subject of moving from place to place in a mist, he made up his mind that it would be very unwise for him to trust to luck to find the end of the chasm on the opposite slope that would lead him down to the ledge where he had landed. So he threw himself on the thick undergrowth, and as the mist spread through the valley and crawled up the sides of the slope, he fell asleep.

When he awoke he found that the mist had cleared away; the night was one of brilliant starlight, but the moon had not yet risen. He hoped to make his way across the entrance to the valley before the moon rose, and he succeeded in doing so. He reached the ledge of rock in safety, and had no trouble finding the cork belt where he had thrown it, not expecting to need it again, for he had hoped to bring the yacht round the coast.

He had just put on the belt, and was about to take off his boots, when the moon rose. It sent its light along the water and over the shore where the rollers were breaking in silvery foam. Though the rocks beyond which the Mosquito lay were still in shadow, he could see a tiny light at the shoreward side of the cliffs, and he knew that this was a lantern hanging in the bows of the hull.
Knowing as he did the strength of the current that set along the shore, Harold anticipated a hard swim against it, for he dared not risk being caught by the outward current that set northward.

It occurred to him that as he was on his way to the ship, he would not be running a great risk were he to go along the shore for some distance, so as to reduce the length of his swim, and also to save him from the task of making his way directly against the current. The further he went along the shore the less he should feel the force of the tide.

He left the ledge, and with the greatest caution crept in the direction of where the natives had been squatting on the previous night. But he soon perceived that not half the number that he had left now remained on the beach; and these were exactly opposite the bows of the hull. This he felt to be fortunate for his purpose just now, leaving out of the question altogether the extra chance it gave his friends of having—to say the least—a quiet time aboard the Mosquito.

When he had gone as far as he dared, he threw himself boldly into the embrace of a returning roller, and was soon striking out for the rock. When about twenty yards off the bows he was hailed by one of the seamen on watch. He sung out a response, and in a few minutes every one aboard had run to the bows.

"Bravo, old boy!" cried Grace, encouragingly. "You are coming along famously."
A TERRIBLE DISAPPOINTMENT.

"Hurrah, sonny!" cried the skipper. "There's a thirty dollar ready-made suit of clothes waiting for you, and a fine specimen of the Hail Columbia Canning Company's produce into the bargain. Lower away that Jacob's ladder."

In a few minutes Harold was on deck, shaking hands all round, while the seamen cheered and struck up "Rule Britannia!" The two Fire-flies sung the melody correctly; but the Mosquitoes were not quite so sure about it, and it gradually dissolved into "Yankee Doodle," about which there could be no mistake.
CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE SKIPPER'S PHILOSOPHY.

"Well," said Captain Cromer, "you must have had a pretty excursion. How far did you go?"

"I went to the place where we first landed," said Harold.

"And what have you done?"

"Nothing—absolutely nothing!" cried the boy.

"I have failed to see anything to relieve us. I might as well have stayed here."

"I see," said the captain. "The natives were on the beach there, as they are here, and you did not get a chance of signalling to the yacht? Never mind! you did your best."

"I did my best; but the natives did not annoy me. The fact is, there was no yacht to signal to."

"What! No yacht?"

"Not a sign of a yacht. I waited in sight of the beach from sunrise until the afternoon, but I saw nothing of the *Fire-fly.*"
The captain and Grace looked at one another. "I give it up," said the latter. "The whole affair is beyond my reach. I never did altogether understand Mr. Hampden, and this move of his does not tend to make him less incomprehensible. Did you see nothing whatever that would indicate that the yacht had been there?" he added, turning to Harold. "Did you see any sign of a row between our men and the natives?"

"I saw the blade of a broken oar; nothing further."

"Look here, gentlemen," cried the skipper; "I'm boss of this deck so long as a plank remains, and I won't stand by and see a young kid like this shivering in his pants. Why, see if there ain't a stream of the briny running off him that it takes our scupper-holes all their time to get rid of! Young man, you change your pants without delay, and dive your head into a Hail Columbia can of prairie beef. You'll be a bit smarter then."

When Harold had carried out the skipper's orders, he admitted that he felt very much more comfortable than before; but while he was eating a hearty supper in the cabin, he contrived to tell all that he had seen, and what he had done, in order to attract the attention of any boat's crew that might land at the beach, should the Fire-fly return to her anchorage.

"You did very well, my boy," said the captain. "I thought your enterprise foolhardy at first,
and when I got your note, telling me that you had gone ashore, I felt a little uneasy. But you have done your best for us, though all to no purpose."

"You think the yacht will not return to her anchorage?"

"Not until it is too late to find your message. The natives will return to the beach, and take good care that nothing you have left there will be available for any one who might come ashore."

"But I'm convinced that the yacht will return to the anchorage, and endeavour to put a boat's crew ashore," said Grace. "When you come to think of the matter, it is plain that this course would be steered by every man who is not actually mad."

"But where is the yacht now?" said the captain.

"That I can't tell, sir. I can only suppose that Hampden has thought it possible that we have strolled around the southern coast instead of going into the interior, and that he has sailed the yacht to the south, searching every gorge for us, and signalling to us. If he had only come to the north, we should be all right. He will, I am convinced, return to the anchorage."

"But he has plainly had an encounter with the natives," said the captain; "so much, I think, is certain; and that being so, he will most certainly be met by them on his return, and how will he then be able to send a boat's crew ashore?"

"I'll tell you what he'll do, sir," said Grace.
"If he returns and finds the natives waiting for him, he'll give them to understand that they have put him out of patience. He'll run in close to the shore, and bring the Gatling gun to bear upon them; that's what he'll do, I believe. By the time he has thrown a few hundred bullets among them, they'll begin to understand that the patience of a white man has its limits."

"I hope he may not have to resort to that," said the captain.

"If he had done so at first, sir, I hope you will allow me to say, he would have cleared them off the coast, and Harold would have reached the beach just in time to meet the boat coming ashore, according to order, to search for us."

"The question is, what are we to do under the present circumstances?" said the captain.

"I'll just chip in, if you don't mind," said the American. "I'll give you my opinion direct. We've got to fight our way with them niggers, sir, across the island, and that's a fact. I ain't over-fond o' such work; but we've got to fight, I see that plain, and I'll not be shy when the time comes."

"That's what I believe we shall have to do, sir," said Grace. "We'll have to do the best we can for ourselves and for our shipmates. We'll have to fight our way round to the anchorage. The yacht will be there, you may depend upon it."

"We'll leave our humanity and 'Lo the poor
Indian' sentiments aboard this hulk, sir," said the skipper, "and we'll call for them when we're steering round the coast in your craft. I hear now for the first time that she's a yacht. I have been guessing all along what trade you were in. Yes, sir, Lo may be a noble savage in poetry, but he has got to be fought by white men now and again. We've got to fight him now, and we'll do it."

"How are we to get ashore, to start with?"

"On a raft, sir. We'll run up a raft in a short day's work with what material we have aboard, and I wouldn't like to be in the shoes of the savage that would stand in our way. What do you say, sonny?"

Harold laughed at the idea of the savage's shoes.

"I think the plan would succeed," he replied. "It appears to me that more than half the number of natives who were on the beach when I left the ship last night have gone away. Have they got tired waiting?"

"I think it more likely that they are making the attempt to trap us," said his father. "They seemed to be holding a council in the evening, and to have come to the conclusion that we should be tempted ashore, for a crowd of them immediately marched off."

"I saw no sign of them on my way across the valley," said Harold. "I kept a sharp look-out, I need hardly say; and if such a body of men
had been anywhere between the coast and the wood, I could not have failed to see them."

"Was the village as lively as before?" asked Grace.

"Not a sound came from it," Harold replied. "I waited in your fort, and in fact fell asleep there; but the inhabitants seemed to have deserted the village, so quiet had it become."

"That bears out my theory of the surprise," said the captain. "If those fellows had returned to their village, we would be justified in coming to the conclusion that they meant to give over the attempt to capture us; but having merely left the shore, I think we are safe to assume that their intention is to draw us into their clutches."

"I believe you are right, sir," said the American. "But it strikes me that if they knew what we could do, they would not be partic'lar uneasy to have us among them. All that we have done is to beat them back when they attacked us. Suppose we give them a chance of doing the same to us?"

"We will talk of that to-morrow," said Captain Cromer. "I must confess that I shrink from the idea of attacking those wretches, and I would also be reluctant that any man in this company should be injured. Just think that if they managed to throw even one spear among us, it would almost certainly mean the death of one of us!"

"There is no fighting without some little risk, I suppose," said Grace.

"That's so, sir," remarked the skipper. "Men
have even been known to be hurt when the boys have been firing seven-shooters at one another in Sacramento."

"And in my opinion such risk should be avoided as far as is possible," said the captain.

"Yes, sir, so far as is possible," said Grace. "But the time comes when it is no longer possible to avoid the risk, and then it seems to me it should be faced boldly."

"Anyhow we can do nothing to-night," said the skipper. "The sooner our young explorer here gets a sleep, the more he will think of us. Toddle off, my friend; this meeting is now adjourned. I haven't done more than play 'possum myself during the past three nights. I want a good square sleep, that's what's the matter with Ephraim E. Harper. What do you say, sonny? what sort of a game is 'possum? Wal, it's something like sleeping with one eye open. You won't need to do it to-night."

"I certainly don't intend to make the attempt," said Harold.

In a short time Fire-flies and Mosquitoes, with the exception of those who were on watch, had turned into their bunks, and it may be taken for granted that there was not much playing 'possum among the company.
CHAPTER XL.

THE RAFT.

The natives were the first to awake the next morning. They evidently meant to have a field-day, whatever their ultimate designs may have been. They no longer squatted upon the shore; they were on their feet and in a condition of the greatest liveliness. They had made a huge fire, and it seemed that they were cooking their breakfast; but this duty did not so completely absorb them as to make them incapable of giving some attention to the Mosquito. Every now and again a company of them spent some minutes in the exercise of shaking their spears and parangs in the direction of the ship.

"They're at their athletics again," said the skipper to Grace, when they went on deck after performing the operation in the cabin which the skipper described as "sampling the cans."
"They seem to be trying to make us understand what they intend to do," said Grace. "I only wish that we had a chance of showing them what we could do."

"Your old man ain't fond o' the war-path as a place o' promenade," said the skipper.

"He has his own notions about humanity and the rights of the natives," said Grace. "I believe he is right up to a certain point. I hate cruelty; but when I am taking a morning stroll, and a noble savage stands in my way and flourishes a spear, I—well, I have my morning stroll."

"Civilization goes marching on, sir, whatever objections the original proprietors of the land may have," said Ephraim E. Harper. "My platform is civilization. You represent civilization in taking that morning stroll of yours. When the steam cars began running across the prairie, the original proprietors objected. The bison charged the locomotives; the locomotives went on, the bison didn't. That's civilization. It may be rough on the bison, but it's civilization. Now, if we teach these savages a lesson now, they'll be likely to mind it when the next crew is shipwrecked on this coast. Yes; we should go for them natives with as little foolin' around as possible."

"I agree with you," said Grace. "But tell me, if you can, what they mean by pointing with their spears to the precipice."

"They've been wagging them walking-sticks all morning," said the skipper. "But it's a fact that
there's not half the savages there that squatted on the shore two mornings ago."

"Where are the others?—that's the question," said Grace.

An answer soon came. A spear descended apparently from the clouds, and striking against the high rock between the starboard side of the hull and the shore, was shivered to pieces, and the splinters went flying over the deck.

"Hallo! what is the meaning of that?" said Grace.

"It means that your question is being answered," said the skipper. "You want to know where the other niggers are. Now you know where they are."

"They have marched round by a way of their own, and have got on the summit of the cliff. They mean to attack us from above."

"That's about the size of it."

There could, indeed, be no doubt that this was the plan which the natives meant to pursue. The ship lay beneath a precipice of fully two thousand feet high. Only, as has already been mentioned, the rocks between which the hull was so firmly jammed stood up on either side, the one in pyramidal form to a height of forty or fifty feet; the other—which was furthest from the precipice—was scarcely twenty feet above the port side of the hull. It was, however, longer and broader than that nearest the shore.

"There's not much to fear," said Captain Cromer, coming up at this moment. "We are completely
protected by that pyramid of rock on the starboard side. They can only drop their spears over the edge of the precipice and trust to luck. They have no chance of taking aim from where they are. We have only to keep under the rock to be in perfect safety."

"For that matter, we have only to go below, and they may continue shying their spears till doomsday," said Grace. "The spears are not likely to make auger-holes in the deck. There comes another."

Down flashed another weapon, and striking the rock obliquely, went into the water with scarcely a splash. Again and again spears were flung from the natives, who could but faintly be seen along the summit of the precipice. None of the weapons, however, reached the deck of the _Mosquito_; some were shivered into splinters against the rocks, others glanced off the smooth sides into the water.

The natives who remained to guard the shore had, at the first flight of spears, set up a great howl of triumph, but when they perceived that the weapons produced no impression upon the deck of the hull they lapsed into silence. It seemed, too, that those on the cliffs had become discouraged, for there was a cessation in the spear-throwing.

"Now, sir," said the skipper to Captain Cromer, "I think you'll agree with me that the sooner we set about this business of landing, the better it will be for all concerned. You know now where
the other natives have got to, and that they're not likely to have any other tricks that they can play against us. All that we have got to do, is to give those ashore a volley, and I can promise you we shall be able to run our raft upon the beach without over-much trouble."

"I am willing to join in any enterprise that may be decided on," said the captain. "If you have made up your mind to take to the shore on a raft, I'll bear a hand with the best of you."

"Thank you, sir. Now we'll see what can be done. Stand by with axes, carpenter, and send amidships all the spare timber you have. Lash together whatever spars are handy, and throw a grating across them. That will do for a foundation. We'll be pretty hard up if we find that we can't break away as much of the bulwarks as will make us a deck for our raft."

In a few minutes the deck of the Mosquito presented a busier appearance than it had done since the skipper had returned. The carpenter had a number of spare spars below, and all hands were employed getting these on deck and lashing them together.

"It's the only chance we have of turning them into account," said the skipper. "I don't suppose that many extra spars are needed for a ship when once she's dismasted. Now then, a grating or two will steady the fabric, and we'll talk about fitting up some cabin furniture on it after a while. Meantime we'll lash down a hen-coop or two for
bulwarks and stow them with cans, for we'll not set out on this excursion without squaring the commissariat."

The steward was assisted by Harold in carrying on deck a number of the tins of meat ready to be stowed in the hen-coops; and while some of the crew were using their axes upon the bulwarks astern, providing timber for the raft, others were shaping a couple of the thinnest spars to act as sweeps—long oars capable of propelling an unwieldy craft.

All hands were soon working busily away, only taking a glance now and again to the shore to see that the natives were not projecting an attack upon the ship. The natives seemed to have long since abandoned all hope of reaching the ship by means of the one sound prau which they possessed. They were now quietly squatting on the beach, apparently waiting to see how the situation would develop. They could not but have heard the sound of the hammering aboard the Mosquito, but if they felt any curiosity on this point, they succeeded in hiding it effectually. They did not rise to their feet even once, but maintained a sullen and, as it appeared, a disappointed manner.

"They're kinder dull, them niggers," remarked the skipper; "but you may bet your boots that we'll make them lively before long—we'll rouse them up a bit—we'll startle them."

But the skipper himself was the first to be startled. He had scarcely spoken before there was a shout from a man aft, and a regular
stampede amidships. In another second there was a crash upon the face of the rock on the starboard quarter, and a hail of stones over the deck and in the water on every side.

The skipper gave an exclamation, and Captain Cromer cried out "Pondicherry!" and then muttered several other Indian names, as was his custom when he found that he could not express his feelings in ordinary rational language.

"What does that mean?" said the skipper, at length. "Did any of this ship's company see a planet falling, or is it an earthquake run by an amatoor?"

"It's not hard to know what it is," said Grace. "Those fellows aloft there have no more spears to waste, so they have taken to heaving lumps of the rock down at us. They are not such fools as I fancied they were a short time ago."

"I don't know what to think," said the captain. "Did you see that rock in the air? If it had struck our deck the ship would have parted."

"There's a likelihood that she would have parted," said the skipper. "But if I'm c'rectly advised up to the latest date, that thar comet didn't come kerchunk on the deck, so it might as well have flopped into the middle o' the Pacific. There's no harm done to us that a broom couldn't make square; there's a kinder dust o' pebbles about the deck, but that's all."

"We have had an escape," said Captain Cromer. "I dare say that's only the first of a series."
“Like enough,” said the American. “I shouldn’t wonder if we’d have a blizzard o’ them pebbles before night.”

He had scarcely spoken when a shout from one of the hands caused all on the deck to look up. The figures of the natives on the summit of the cliff looked like pigmies, but through the binocular glass Captain Cromer saw that they were rolling over the edge a mass of stone so large that a dozen of them had to bend their backs before they could stir it.

“Now, then!” cried the captain. But he did not require to warn all on deck; they could see without the aid of a telescope that the mass was coming over the edge.

It seemed about the size of a pigeon’s egg on leaving the cliff. Down it came, growing in its descent, until it went with a terrific plunge into the water, a mass fully four feet in diameter.

Before any one could speak another smaller piece of stone came down with a crash upon the rock where the first had fallen. A shower of earth and pebbles followed, but this was evidently only the result of the great masses of stone breaking away a portion of the crumbling edge of the cliff.

“You steered this craft into a neat harbour, let me tell you,” said Grace to the skipper. “We are fully protected by that rock on the starboard quarter.”

“They may shoot that rubbish into the water so long as they have a mind to,” said the skipper,
taking a neat square of tobacco out of his waistcoat pocket and biting off something less than a square inch. "They're only making their island smaller; but they may throw the whole island bit by bit into the water, they'll not strike us. You can see how they're fixed. Their chief engineer will have to take a back seat so long as we remain to lee of that rock."

"That's perfectly true," said the captain. "I can see without difficulty that by merely rolling the stones over the edge they can never send one on the deck. We are just far enough away from the cliff to be perfectly safe."
CHAPTER XLI.

A FORMOSAN BATTLE.

For the next half-hour a regular assault of big stones was maintained by the natives against the ship, but without producing any effect upon her. An immense fragment that seemed half the size of the hull itself—it was a part of the cliff summit that had become undermined and detached—crashed downward and broke into a thousand pieces against the side of the rock below. Other fragments fell clear of the rock, displacing great volumes of water, and sending the waves rolling through the channel where the vessel was jammed; only a few small pieces came upon the deck.

"Those fellows are what we call cranks," said the skipper. "They are crazy on the theory of geology. What's the good of them forwarding us their geological specimens? We don't want them; they're only throwing their island bit by bit into the water—it's getting visibly smaller every minute."
I can see a big difference in its size already. It's nothing like the island it was when I landed. If they go on much longer they'll have thrown it all away, and will be applying to us for terms for a passage to a bigger place, with promises to use it more economically. Let us get back to our raft-building, my friends; this exhibition ain't edifying. It's a very one horse sort of show at best."

There was a general movement made toward the place where the spars that were being lashed together for the raft were lying; but work was not resumed with the same vigour as before. There was a certain fascination in the sight of those great masses of rock rushing through the air and falling on the rocks with horrible crashes and splashing into the water, and no one seemed to have an inclination to work.

The skipper was annoyed.

"Look here, boys," he cried, "there ain't no time for foolin' around the deck watching them niggers flinging pebbles into the water. It's not good enough fun for grown men. If any of you has took such a fancy to the island that he can't take his eyes off it, don't let his notion of politeness keep him here. He's free to go ashore and set up a shanty wherever he finds a vacant lot. If you wish to invest in real estate, now's your time; but if you mean to stay by the ship, you've just got to set to at that thar raft. Am I right, sir?" and he turned to Captain Cromer.

"Quite right," said the captain. "I'm ashamed
to have idled so long, for my own part. Never mind, we’ll make up for lost time. Here, Harold, take that axe aft. I want a piece of timber to bind on the angles of the spars. Don’t let it be too thick. We have no time to spare.”

Harold took the axe and ran aft; but before he reached the deck-house, the bulwarks on the port side were smashed away as cleanly as though they had been sawn by the carpenter, by an enormous stone from the summit of the cliff; and the hull shook to her very keel beneath the blow.

The boy did not continue his journey aft.

“I guess the captain has changed his mind,” said the American. “You won’t need that cross-piece just now, sir, will you?”

“How did that occur? Did any one see that stone coming?” inquired Captain Cromer, looking around.

“I saw it coming,” said Grace; “I thought it was falling like a plummet into the sea. So it would have, only that it struck against a projecting ledge about forty feet up the side, and cannoned off at an oblique angle. It was by the merest chance that it came aboard.”

“Another chance like that and the hull must break in two,” said the skipper. “You heard the timbers creak just now? I did. She won’t bear many more such blows either fore or aft. She has stood a deal already, but every piece of timber has its breaking strain, and the sooner we finish the raft the better pleased I will be.”
A FORMOSAN BATTLE.

He knelt on the deck and resumed the lashing of the spars, at which he had been interrupted. Captain Cromer found a piece of wood that apparently answered his purpose, and he also resumed the work at which he had been engaged. In the course of a few minutes every one aboard was hard at work once more, and the skipper declared that the part of the bulwarks had been broken away just as he was about to direct its removal, in order to facilitate the launch of the raft when the time should come for that operation. Besides, the broken bulwarks constituted the best timber possible for the deck of the raft, and it was easily hoisted on deck by passing a line with a hitch under it.

While half-a-dozen hands were engaged in this way abaft the deck-house, a look-out was kept for any other piece of rock that might be thrown in the same direction. It appeared, however, that the effect of the lucky throw made by the natives was not perceived by them, for they did not give any indication of aiming for the ledge off which the stone had cannoned. All the missiles that followed either dropped into the water between the pyramidal rocks and the cliff face, or, striking the rocks, were broken into small fragments.

"This excitement is healthy," said the American. "But personally I'd be quite as pleased to watch this performance from the shore. Throwing stones is agreeable enough, no doubt, it develops the chest and pumps fresh air into the lungs. If I
was to have any choice in the matter, I'd prefer throwing the stones to being throwed at. I speak for myself only. I may be thought pecooliar; so I don't want to force my private views on any one. This raft must be got under weigh before another hour has passed. Now what on earth is the row those niggers are making ashore? Is there a crisis in the government, or is there to be a Presidential election?"

"Something strange has undoubtedly taken place," said Harold. "They are all on their feet again. Oh, reinforcements."

"Reinforcements?" cried the skipper. "Well, this is just like our luck! I was under the impression that all the natives in the place were either on that shore or on the top of that mound. We needn't go on with that raft, I reckon. We'll have another interval for refreshments."

It certainly did seem as if the forces ashore were being rapidly increased. All the valley was crowded with dusky warriors, who advanced in regular order with tom-toms beating. They spread themselves out between the shore and the entrance to the valley, and appeared desirous of intercepting those of the islanders who were already on the beach, and who, at the first appearance of these strangers in the distance, had leaped to their feet and fastened their shields on their arms, turning away from watching the ship, and giving every evidence of a desire to pay some attention to the approach of the strangers.
"Hallo! what is the meaning of this?" said Captain Cromer. "They don't seem to be meeting as if they were the best of friends."

"They certainly don't," said Grace. "On the contrary they seem to meet as enemies who have not had a chance of an encounter for some time. I thought so. We shall have an opportunity of being spectators at a Formosan battle."

He had drawn a correct conclusion from what he had seen. The strangers were evidently a hostile tribe to those natives who were on the beach and those who had gone to the summit of the cliffs. They continued to spread themselves across the defile so as to make flight impossible. As they far out-numbered those against whom they were advancing, it seemed that the only chance of safety that the latter had was by flight.

With a series of the wildest battle-cries that could be imagined the two forces met. Spears were waved frantically on both sides, and in a few moments a perfect arch was made between the two front ranks as the weapons were thrown across. In the first shower about a score of the warriors fell, and all the beating of the tom-toms failed to smother the shrieks of the wretches who were writhing on the ground, transfixed with spears.

In another instant the sun flashed upon the glittering blades of hundreds of parangs; the bodies of the fallen were pounced upon, and a swift blow with the parang beheaded every man who
had fallen. The ghastly trophies were held up by all who had secured them, and were then placed in netted bags carried by certain men whose duty apparently was to take charge of them.

More spears were then thrown, but the shorter weapons seemed reserved for the hand-to-hand fight which quickly followed. So fierce was the onslaught on either side, it was plain that the shields were of no use whatever. Mr. Dugdale saw with interest that every cut made by a parang and intercepted by a shield divided the latter easily. All that the shields could be effectually used for, was to intercept the spears when thrown. The broad keen blades met in the air and fire flashed from them; they only needed to give a single blow or thrust—for they were not only keen of edge but fine of point—every cut or thrust brought down a man, and a swift stroke left him headless. Numbers were also transfixed by spears, and some who had fallen endeavoured to withdraw the shaft before their implacable enemies could come upon them.

The fight was a barbarous one while it lasted; but it did not last very long. The natives who had been attacked by the strangers were decimated; and of those who sought refuge in flight, almost all were overtaken and massacred.

With wild yells the victors displayed the nets laden with the horrible trophies of their triumph, and running down to the water's edge, held them up to be seen by the company who crowded the
bows of the *Mosquito*. In making this display the victors added some signs, the import of which could not be doubted. They were meant to assure the spectators that in the course of a short time they should be treated in precisely the same way.

"Yes, I dare say, you are very fine fellows," said the skipper. "But I don't think you'll find it as easy as skittles to carry out your little games on us. We've chipped our shells, we have."
CHAPTER XLII.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE FIGHT.

"What will the consequences of that fight be to us?" said Grace.

"It is hard to tell," replied the captain. "One thing only we may be assured of—the fact that these strangers have beaten the others does not make them our friends."

"One can see that by their attitude," said Harold. "See! they are examining the prau and discussing how it may be used against us."

"Let them come on," said the American skipper. "The sooner we show them what we are made of, the better it will be for all parties concerned. I've got kinder careless about savages. It's an everlasting game of bluff that they play. Let them come on! Now, what are they straining their eyes after up there? They ought to have sent a surprise party round the precipice if they have any schemes against those pebble-slingers up there."
THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE FIGHT. 367

"And that is what I fully believe they have done," said the captain. "We shall probably hear nothing of whatever encounter may take place at the summit of the precipice, but it's my impression that an encounter will take place there before long."

They had not long to wait for confirmation of the captain's opinion. Shortly after the battle on the shore had commenced, the natives on the summit of the precipice had ceased throwing over the huge stones. They had evidently caught a glimpse of the beach, and had become aware of the fact that their brethren were suffering in the encounter; and they had either left the cliffs with a view of helping them, or in order to make their escape from the strangers. Now, however, hundreds of the conquerors thronged the shore, gazing up expectantly at the cliffs.

In a short time they were seen waving their spears and gesticulating with frantic eagerness, as they pointed to the summit of the cliffs. It was evident that a fight was in course of progress on the summit, though of course the company on the Mosquito, being almost beneath the precipice, could see nothing of it.

Suddenly a wilder series of yells broke from the natives, who had crowded to the furthest part of the shore in order to see the most of what was taking place on the cliff-head. They yelled and beat the tom-toms with extraordinary vehemence.

"What does it all mean?" said the captain.
He had not long to wait for a reply. Over the summit of that precipice there was projected a dark object; it seemed at first to be a portion of rock, but as it whirled downward through the two thousand feet of space, that object was seen to be a man. His shield parted from his arm in mid-air and skimmed along like a strange bird; but the wretched man, tumbling over and over wildly as he fell, dropped flat upon the water not fifty yards from the stern of the hull.

He never rose to the surface. The sea that rolled into the channel where the hull was lying became tinged with red, showing that the unfortunate wretch had been killed by the force with which he had struck the surface, if he had not been mortally wounded before he was thrown from the summit. In another moment a second man was projected into space, and came down with a crash upon the water; a third—a fourth—a fifth followed—the last not falling clear of the face of the precipice, but his head coming against a projecting spur of rock that split his skull and sent his body far beyond where the other men had fallen.

All aboard the Mosquito turned away from the horrible spectacle. But it is needless to say that the natives on the shore only increased their wild demonstrations of triumph, seeing what had happened.

A passage that Harold had frequently read came to him with its full force now. The secret
places of the earth were, indeed, full of the
habitations of cruelty.

The behaviour of the natives along the shore
signified beyond the possibility of doubt that a
complete victory had been gained by their friends
on the summit of the cliff. It now appeared that
the latter, having finished their business, considered
that they might indulge in a little pleasure. They
came in crowds to the edge of the precipice, waving
their spears, and then all at once they sent down
a score of their weapons at the Mosquito.

Most of them broke into splinters against the
rock, and the remainder went harmlessly into the
water.

"Only one shower!" said Ephraim E. Harper,
when the spears had fallen. "Only one shower!
The mercury must be rising. It's going to be a
calm after the blizzard that has been blowing up
there."

"I hope so," said the captain. "But meantime
we are in a worse position than ever, so far as
getting off is concerned. These strangers have
not learnt the lesson that we were compelled to
teach the others."

"No, sir," said the American; "but if their
schooling has been neglected so far, they have only
to show a proper desire to learn, and we'll do our
best for them. What, are they as particular anxious
as the others to find out if that rock is plumb?"

His question was suggested by the crash of a
large stone upon the pyramidal rock beside the
ship, followed by the splash of another huge mass in the water astern.

"They can make no further progress in this way than the others," said Harold. "They are wiser than the others, for they do not intend to take any further trouble in the same direction."

It certainly did seem as if the natives who had now possession of the cliffs meant to abandon the attempt to get the better of the Fire-flies and Mosquitoes by adopting the means that had been unsuccessfully tried by the others. After they had dropped a few masses of rock they desisted, and, in fact, disappeared from the edge of the cliffs altogether. In a short time, however, they were seen again, but on the edge of the highest cliff, not immediately above the hull, but some way to seaward.

"What is their little game, I wonder?" said the skipper. "They look as if they were photographers searching about for a spot that will give them a better view of us. What are they about?"

"They seem scraping a sloping path from the edge of the cliff," said the captain, who was observing them by the aid of his binocular glass. "What they mean by that I can't tell."

He was not left long in suspense on this matter. An immense fragment of rock came whirling down from the point toward which his glass was directed, and splashed into the water only about five yards astern of the hull, causing the natives ashore to set up a howl of delight.
THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE FIGHT. 371

"Hallo!" shouted Grace. "This is too close to be comfortable. How are they managing this business? I thought we were perfectly secure."

"They are cleverer than the others," said the captain. "They have made an incline on the summit of that cliff, and the stones that roll down this are of course projected far from the side of the precipice, and not dropped plumb as the others were."

"They are clever rascals! We cannot wait here to be smashed to pieces. Back, all of you—back! if you don't wish your skulls opened."

Grace had not to enforce his words. Every one astern saw the danger, as a second mass of stone rushed down the incline at the summit of the cliff and far over the edge. It fell with a terrific crash on the remains of the bulwarks at the square of the stern, smashing them in and carrying away a portion of the deck above the rudder-stock. The force of the concussion also caused the chain cable to jerk so that every one expected it would part at the clinch.

In an instant the feeling of security on the part of all on the deck was changed to one of apprehension. A few more blows—nay, perhaps only one more blow such as had just been experienced, and the hull would most certainly part. The chain cable would snap or the anchor would be wrenched away, and the stern would fall into the channel and speedily be smashed to atoms.

"Gentlemen," said the American, "it's my duty
to tell you that we are up a gum tree. We'll be everlastingly smashed inside the turning of a logglass if we don't find a way out of this scrape. We're in irons, and that's a fact."

"The raft or the rock, which shall it be?" said Grace. "If we don't choose one or other now there will soon be no choice left to us."

Before he had well spoken another crash had come, and the result was to leave no choice to the company on the hull. A huge mass of rock was projected from the summit of the cliff, and came obliquely down on the deck just abaft the deckhouse astern.

Every one standing amidships was thrown down. The chain cable had parted. There was the sound of the straining and creaking of timbers, following the terrific crash of the falling rock. All seemed to know what was coming, and rushed to the port side, where the face of the rock was not precipitous, Grace flinging up to a ledge a couple of rifles that were lying against the bulwarks amidships.

"Up with you all," shouted the American skipper, tossing up two more weapons. "Up with you all, like a flash o' lubricated lightning."
CHAPTER XLIII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

Up the face of the rock from the crazy bulwarks the whole company scrambled, some with rifles slung on their backs, others with cartridge boxes under their arms. Before the last man, who was Ephraim E. Harper himself, had got half-way up to the ledge, the hull of the Mosquito had parted. The bow half tumbled forward and the stern half went with a tremendous splash among the great waves that rolled through the channel. There was a sound of gurgling waters, of grinding timbers, and on the raging surface there went swirling among the bubbles a number of loose articles that had been on the deck, and innumerable sealed cans of the Hail Columbia Company's produce.

"Are we all up?" said Ephraim E. Harper, as he stood on the ledge of the rock.

"We are all up, thank heaven," said Captain Cromer.
“And I’m afraid it’s all up with us,” remarked Grace.

“You’ll be happy to learn that I have succeeded in saving all my specimens,” said Mr. Dugdale. “Perceiving a catastrophe imminent, I took the precaution to stow them here last night. Here you will find them all, including the native spear.”

“Then my mind is easy,” said the American. “You can roll me up in the Stars and Stripes as soon as you please. I’ll part happy.”

“There is no reason to despair altogether,” said Captain Cromer. “We are pretty safe here for the time being. We have seven rifles and some hundreds of cartridges; we ought to be able to keep those fellows at bay for some time. The rock is not a difficult one to hold on by, there are several ledges up to the summit.”

“We’ll soon have a chance of trying what we can do,” said the skipper. “We are quite clear of that system of pebble slinging. But if you cast your eyes to the shore you’ll see that those niggers there ain’t howling for nothing.”

“They are launching the prau,” said Grace. “So much the better. We’ll show them that they haven’t licked us yet.”

“We’ve got spring in us yet, and that’s a fact,” said Ephraim E. Harper. “Let them come early and often, we’ll welcome them.”

With their usual demonstrations, the natives, seeing the disaster that had befallen the hull, and believing that the men who had been aboard were
now helpless upon the rock, set about launching the prau which had survived the severity of the repulse from the stern of the Mosquito, two days before. They bore it down to the water and it was launched full of warriors, eager to add a second victory to that they had already won.

With twenty men at the paddles the huge ungainly craft bore down for the rock.

"Now," said Captain Cromer, "we shall endeavour to run no risk of being speared. We shall keep to the seaward side of the rock and rest the muzzles of our weapons wherever we find a crevice. We must receive them with a broadside."

Adopting these tactics, the muzzles of seven rifles were soon brought to bear upon the craft that was quickly advancing amid the yells of all aboard and hundreds ashore.

"Wait till you see the whites of their eyes," said the skipper.

Whether or not his injunction was literally obeyed, no shot was fired until the prau was only about twenty yards from the rock; then a dozen of the warriors aboard stood up and got their spears ready for throwing.

"Now then," said the captain, and before he had more than spoken, the volley was fired into the midst of the advancing craft.

The shrieks that followed showed that the weapons had been well aimed. The progress of the prau was arrested, but only for a few moments. When it came within ten yards of the rock, a second volley was sent against it, but though
several of the warriors fell over the side, a number of spears were thrown and just skimmed over the heads of the marksmen.

"They must not land!" said the captain.
"Give them another volley, my lads!"

Every rifle that was loaded was emptied into the prau.

In another moment the craft was lying over on her side, helplessly drifting in the waves. The little band on the rock gave a cheer; but to their surprise, the men who had been thrown into the water, instead of making for the shore, swam toward the rock, and at the same instant a hundred of the natives ashore plunged into the sea, also making for the rock. When the captain looked over the ridge at the summit he scarcely knew in what direction he should fire. The surface of the water was black with the heads of the natives, who were swimming to the rock.

He saw that even though every shot should tell against them, yet in the course of a few minutes a hundred fierce savages would have reached the rock, and have thrown their spears.

What would be the result?

Half-a-dozen warriors from the disabled prau had just succeeded in reaching the rock; three of them dropped on their faces, and rolled back to the sea. Half-a-dozen others scrambled up, and a score of others were making their way through the channel, so as to surround the defenders; another score were within ten strokes of the rock, when there sounded through the air a deafening
report followed by a long fierce hissing shriek, like nothing human; then came an explosion that scattered the swimmers in every direction. With a wild glance to seaward, the savages who had already touched the rock leapt back into the water, diving below the surface. A terrific volley, as if from a hundred rifles, crashed through the air, and every yard of the surface between the rock and the shore was ploughed with bullets, and the stones of the beach were dashed about as if by magic.

Then came the sound of an ordinary steam whistle, making the sweetest music that had ever been heard by any of that little company who stood up on the ledge of the rock, waving their rifles and cheering, pretty much as the savages ashore had done a quarter of an hour before.

"She's a pretty craft, that of yours, sir; and whatever people may say, I don't believe that that machine gun which she carries spoils the lines of the bow. If it wasn't the bark of that Gatling we heard just now, may I take root on this bit of pebble, and live and die like Robinson Crusoe."

"Another five minutes would have done for us," said the captain, as he looked toward the yacht that came steaming up to the channel. "Providence has been kind to us."

"Providence has given you a son that you may feel proud of," said the American. "His smartness brought that boat round here. We couldn't raise a smarter lad in the States, and that's a fact."
CHAPTER XLIV.

AN EXCHANGE OF STORIES.

IN a few minutes a boat had been dropped into the water from the *Fire-fly*, and running alongside the rock had borne the captain and his party to the hand-rail of the yacht.

"I reckon, sir, that that bit of land was about the most thickly populated of any place in creation," remarked Ephraim E. Harper; "and yet now it's the most forsaken that the human eye can mark."

"If you wish to return to it, just say the word," said the captain.

The deck of the yacht was soon reached, and the crew set up a cheer when their captain appeared safe and sound in their midst.

"Put her on a course to the south'ard, Mr. Hampden," said the captain, as coolly as if he had come aboard in the ordinary way.

Round went the yacht, whistling a farewell to the natives who once again crowded the shore; but there was certainly a want of hearty enthusiasm
in the way they shook their spears in the direction of the departing craft.

"You arrived just in time," said Harold to Hampden, as he introduced the American skipper to the mate of the *Fire-fly*.

"So it struck me," said Hampden. "I luckily suspected the worst, and I had a shell ready for those gentlemen, with Gatling gun to follow. I carried out the order given in this remarkable despatch of yours."

He produced the splinter cut from the oar, upon which Harold had scratched his message.

In the course of a few minutes they had exchanged stories. All that Harold had to tell is already known. As for Mr. Hampden, he explained that when sending a boat's crew ashore on the evening before Harold's excursion, they had been attacked by the natives, and had only managed to push off to the yacht with difficulty and with the loss of that oar, a portion of which Harold had found on the shore. The chief mate had therefore thought it advisable to weigh anchor and put to sea, in order to cause the natives to believe that no further attempt would be made to land.

Returning through the night, however, a boat's crew had gone ashore in the morning, and not meeting with any opposition from the aborigines, they were about marching inland, when Harold's device to draw attention to where the message had been hidden was discovered, and no time was lost in steaming to the gorge indicated in the despatch scratched on the splinter.
After being made aware of whatever story Hampden had to tell, Harold, at the request of the American skipper, while the Fire-flies and Mosquitoes were fraternizing in the fore-part of the yacht, went down to his cabin and produced the jar with the messages it contained.

The skipper looked long and mournfully at the papers written by his mate and boatswain.

"Poor chaps!" said he, "I don't suppose they had much chance. It seems as if it was kinder mean in us to be sailing about at ease in a pleasure-craft like this, while these poor chaps may be ready to eat one another for want of the canned produce they've been accustomed to. I should much like to know if they reached any of the Spanish islands."

"I hope we shall know all that is to be known in the course of a week," said Captain Cromer.

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean that I intend to shape a course to the most northern of the Philippines, and from there we shall work our way south to Manilla. It will be odd if your mate and his party have landed there without our being able to hear any tidings of them."

"Sir," said the American, putting out his hand to the captain, "sir, you are—wal, I don't relish trying to say what you are."

The course of the yacht was directed to the south, and before long the little island of Sama-sana was passed, where, as it now appeared, the Chinaman had heard such an evil report of the natives of the east coast of Formosa, that he had
hidden himself on the morning that the yacht cast anchor, lest he should be forced to go ashore in order to make an attempt to interpret between the captain and the natives.

The southern point of Formosa was reached in the evening; but it seemed as if the captain’s charitable intentions in respect to the boat of the Mosquito were not to be realized, for off the southern point a vessel flying signals of distress was sighted. The craft was a steamer, but she was not under steam, she was little more than drifting, for all the sail she carried was not sufficient to give her two knots of speed.

The yacht answered the signal and steamed within hail of the great vessel now lying so helplessly there. On reading the name on the quarter-board, Captain Cromer said he knew the steamer well and the service to which she belonged. He replied to her captain’s hail, and learned that she was on a voyage from Valparaiso to Canton, and having broken her propeller, the captain was anxious to have her towed to Hong Kong, where the necessary repairs could be done.

Captain Cromer said he would do what he could for the steamer, and would let the captain know whether he could undertake to tow her to the coast of China.

He immediately represented the matter to the American, saying that as he had promised to go to the Philippine Islands, he would do so if Mr. Harper so desired; but the captain added that in his opinion the large steamer would be in con-
siderable danger if left to drift on the chance of meeting any other craft that could undertake the duty of towing her to Hong Kong.

At once the American declared that he would not bind the captain to his promise.

"A few days is nothing here or there, sir," he said. "If my mate and his boat's company have reached the island, I reckon they'll remain there for an extra week; they'll be there when we go to pick them up."

Captain Cromer accordingly gave an answer to the steamer that she might send a couple of hawsers aboard the yacht.

A boat was quickly lowered from the steamer with a long coil of line, to which the hawsers were made fast. The boat came under the companion rail of the Fire-fly, and a man went up the side with the coils of line over his arm. The moment he reached the deck, however, where Ephraim E. Harper was standing, the coils slipped off his arm, and at the same instant the cigar that Mr. Harper was smoking dropped from his fingers.

"Blaydes!" he cried, "Bo'sun Blaydes, it ain't never you!"

"It's me indeed, skipper," said the man. "We're all safe and sound; picked up by that thar craft five days ago."

The man had gathered up the coils of line by this time, and transferred them to some of the hands of the yacht, who began hauling in the hawsers.

In a few minutes all the Mosquitoes aboard the yacht had swarmed round the man, who was,
indeed, none other than Josiah Blaydes, their late boatswain. All the boat's company were aboard the steamer, he said, having been picked up while trying to make for one of the islands.

It was not until the boatswain was on his way back to the steamer that his former captain remembered the paper which, as has been mentioned, Harold had showed him that day.

He ran over to the side.

"Blaydes, Josiah Blaydes!" he sung out. "That thar bank-note that you posted in the jar is safe as if it was banked. Don't you lie awake dreaming about it any more." The man made a motion with his hand indicating that he had heard the message. "Wal," continued Ephraim E. Harper, addressing Harold, "I reckon all has come about right, so far as the Mosquitoes is concerned."

"And I can assure you the Fire-flies are satisfied," said Harold.

"All that I'm sorry for is that Hail Columbia canned produce," said Ephraim. "It's heartbreaking that those cans should be unpacked by such a set of rascals, as will hook them out of the channel where they lie."

The remainder of the story, so far as it bears upon the Mosquitoes, is easily told.

The steamer was safely towed to Hong Kong, where Mr. Ephraim E. Harper and his mates remained until they were able to return to San Francisco; but the boatswain and the others of the crew were transferred to various ships in the harbour, and thus parted company.
FIRE-FLIES AND MOSQUITOES.

As for the Fire-flies, they pursued their voyage northward to Japan, and then southward to Australia; but Mr. Dugdale's collections were not greatly increased since he left Formosa. He was, however, thoroughly satisfied with the result of his few days' exploration.

Almost the first person to board the yacht at Melbourne was Dr. Hope. His appearance, it is needless to say, was a great surprise to Captain Cromer and Harold.

"Why," said the former, "I thought you had altogether settled down in London."

"So did I, Cromer, so did I," said the doctor. "But, alas! my case was the same as another that I prescribed for ten months ago. I began to get wearied of the land, and to long for a sea breeze. I prescribed for myself what I prescribed for my former patient, a long sea voyage."

"And if your case is attended by as satisfactory results as your patient's, I congratulate you," said Captain Cromer, laughing. "Not a touch of the gout since I saw you; and as for Harold, he does not know what headache means. We are on our way to New Zealand, and then he goes back to England with a stock of health sufficient to last him through his college course. You were right, my friend; there is nothing like a long voyage to set a man on his feet."

THE END.

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