

PETE'S EMIGRANTS

A Grand New, Long, Complete Story, introducing the Three Famous Comrades, Jack, Sam and Pete. By S. CLARKE HOOK.



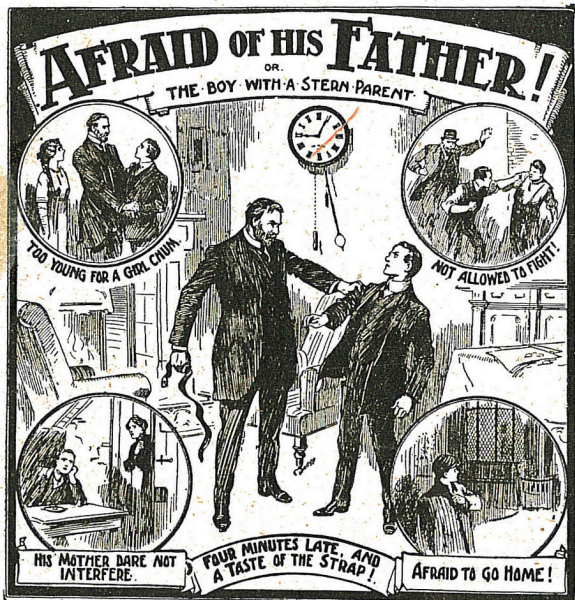
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Pete's Emigrants!

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By S. CLARKE HOOK.

CHAPTER 1.

The Scheme of a Life.

"LOOK here, Pete," exclaimed Jack one dismal afternoon, "the East End of London may be all right for those who like it! But I'm not one of them. Don't you think you could work your scheme, say, in the West End? Bow Road on a rainy day isn't pretty. And the cooking in these apartments is atrocious!"

"Shoo! If our landlady heard you say dat, Jack, dere would be trouble in dis world for you and me. You see, dat boy Algy must be trained. His uncle expects us to improve him, seeing he ain't been able to do it for himself. Bery well. Algy wants to go to foreign countries, and I tink de old man is rader glad to get rid ob him for a bit. Now, I hab got a mighty scheme on—de sort ob scheme dat will kill 'bout forty birds wid one stone."

"Any chance of it killing us?" inquired Sam.

"Well, ob course dere's dat chance," admitted Pete. "At de same time, it is more likely to broaden our minds, and it may possibly broaden de mind ob Algy. Here he comes! Golly! Dere's trouble coming wid him, too, by de sound ob tings."

Pete guessed this by the noise; although he might have guessed it by Algy's previous actions, for he was not what one could call a docile lad. Pete had offered to train him, and he was doing it now as well as he could; although, so far, success had not attended his efforts.

"Here, steady, old party!" cried Algy, darting into the room. "It's a mercy for poor, dear Miggins that he's dead!"

"You little wretch!" yelled the infuriated landlady. "I'll teach you to upset my kitchen!"

"Look here, Mrs. Miggins," exclaimed Algy, dodging round the table—for she was a very big woman, and she was armed with a long-handled mop—"you will jolly well upset your sitting-room as well if you get slap-dashing with that mop! There! What did I tell you?"

The infuriated lady had aimed a blow at Algy's head, and, missing it, swept most of her ornaments, including a clock, off the mantelpiece. This made her very mad. They were valuable ornaments, some of them having cost as much as a shilling; while the clock was got with tea. It did not go, it is true; but it had gone now!

"You little varmint!" she yelled, delivering a second blow with all her strength, which was considerable.

Algy saw it coming, and ducked, with the result that the business-end of the mop caught Pete on the side of the head. And this frightened the

irate lady, for Pete was a grand customer, never looking at a few pounds—or a good many, for that matter.

Such was the force of the blow that the head of the mop was smashed off; and as it rolled on the floor Pete gazed at it in a manner that caused Algy and the comrades to roar with laughter.

"Golly!" exclaimed Pete. "She's knocked my head off dis time! Look at it on de floor! Nunno!" added Pete, clapping his hands to his head. "Seems to be in de right place. I made sure it was knocked off dat time. Felt just like it; and I tought I saw it roll across de floor. I dunno when I had such a shock to my cistern."

"Look at the damage that young villain has done!" yelled the excited lady; although she was toning down a little now. "There's three pounds' damage to the ornaments, and——"

"Dere are de free pounds, my-dear," groaned Pete, diving into his pocket with one hand, while he rubbed his head with the other.

"And he's spoilt my suet-pudding, and made Rory bite me!"

"How much do you consider de bite is worf, my dear?"

"I'm sure I wouldn't go through it again for a sovereign!"

"Well, we will say two sovereigns for de bite; although ebery dog is legally allowed one, I believe."

"Then there's the pudding—a sovereign for that would——"

"Dere's de sovereign for dat, my dear. If your puddings cost a sovereign each, I dunno how you get any profit out ob us. Still, you ought to know der value."

"Then there are my feelings——"

"See here, my dear," interposed Pete, who had an idea that compensation had gone far enough, "we will put your feelings against mine, and call dat quids."

"The mop cost me half-a-crown."

"Well, I ain't paying for de mop. And if you ain't satisfied wid de damage you hab got, in sort ob juxtaposition to de damage done, den we can find oder apartments. 'Nuff said on dat point. What were you trying to do, Algy?"

"I was only taking a cast of Rory's features."

"Eh?"

"You see, I went into the kitchen to see Mrs. Miggins, and she wasn't there. There was a large suet-pudding on the table, which she had made to fill you up, so that you shouldn't yaffle too much meat."

"Pete is a gentleman," declared Mrs. Miggins haughtily, "and he is welcome to all he requires."

"All he pays for, you mean," said Algy. "And he doesn't get all he pays for, either. But, you see, I thought the chunk of dough would be just the thing to make the cast with; but when I stuffed it over Rory's head he didn't like it."

"Strange ting, dat," observed Pete, glancing at Jack.

"The boy ought to be severely punished for such scandalous conduct!" observed Mrs. Miggins. "I'm sure if my poor dear husband had been alive——"

"I wouldn't boder 'bout him, my dear," said Pete. "You told me dat he killed himself wid drink twenty years ago; so it's only fair to let him rest in peace. As regards Algy's punishment, I quite agree wid you 'bout de punishment, which must take place forthwith. Dis conduct must be altered, Algy. If you take casts ob Rory's head, you had better do it when you are alone, and de only one he can bite. And you ain't to do it wid puddings, 'cos it's wasteful, and makes a mess. And, wid dis severe

admonition, we will consider dat de matter is settled, and dat it ain't to occur again."

"Right you are!" exclaimed Algy. "Next time I want to go in for sculpturing I'll take a cast of your classic features, and sell you sixpence a time as a Roman gladiator, and call you a study in black and white. Then I will take a cast of Mrs. Miggins' noddle, and call her Queen of the May. You shall hold her while I'm doing it."

"You wicked little varmint!" cried Mrs. Miggins, shaking her fist at him as she stormed from the room.

But her anger was appeased. Pete's gold had done that.

"Now, boys," exclaimed Pete, prodding his head with his finger to discover where it was most hurt, "we shall hab to go out to commence my scheme! I'm going to raise de lower classes, and I tought we would be able to find a few ob dem in dis part."

"Not a doubt about that," said Jack. "What do you think, Sam?"

"That he will find it far easier to discover the lower classes—of all sorts and sizes—than he will to raise them."

"But, Sammy, de poor men want work."

"Oh!"

"M'yes! Dat's what dey want, and dat's what dey are going to get. It's a mighty big scheme, and will cost a lot ob money; but it will be self-supporting."

"Are you going to give the unemployed employment, and let them work for nothing?"

"Nunno! I shall pay fair wages, ob course."

"Then it won't be self-supporting. But how many are you going to employ?"

"'Bout a hundred, for de start."

"Where are you going to find them work?"

"I ain't settled dat little matter yet; but it will be somewhere abroad. You see, it will hab to be a part where dere are wild savages, 'cos Algy wants savages. Den he wants lions and tigers, and suchlike insecs. Jack shall choose de spot we settle on. De men shall hunt, and fish, and agricult. I'm going to let dem grow cabbages and—and tomatoes, and—and geraniums, and useful tings like dat. We are going to be directors ob de scheme, and dere won't be any shareholders; so dat we shall hab all de profits—after de wages are paid."

"My eyes!" gasped Jack. He was accustomed to a good many of Pete's wild schemes, but really this one appeared to be the limit. "How are you going to get them to their destination?"

"I hab bought a sailing-vessel."

"What?" exclaimed Jack.

"You'm mighty deaf, Jack. I say I hab bought a vessel, and I hab bought most ob de flower-seeds, and spades, and tings like dat—least, de agent has. I tought I would keep dis secret from you till it was all complete. Algy wants to go into de wilds; and I ain't at all sure dat dey ain't de best place for him."

"It's a distinctly good idea, Pete," declared Algy. "I wouldn't have thought a brain like yours could have conceived such an idea."

"Eh?"

"I'll come with you now, just to make sure you don't get into mischief." Dat ain't de way to talk to your trainer, Algy. I tink I shall hab to turn you ober to Mrs. Miggins and de mop-stick for 'bout half an hour. But come 'long. I ain't going to take Rory, 'cos we'm going into de slums, and dere's no telling what dangers dat dog might get into. Algy is quite enough to manage at one time."

"But, look here, Pete!" exclaimed Jack. "You might tell us a little more concerning this precious scheme before we embark on it."

"Why, I'm habing de vessel supplied wid necessaries. De agent I hab employed knows exactly what we shall require."

"Who told you so?"

"He did. I am paying him only on commission, so we are bound to get all we require. You see, he gets paid ten per cent. on all his purchases, so dat it will be to his advantage to get what we require."

"What a splendid arrangement!" exclaimed Jack. "He will spend a fortune."

"Well, he is only going to purchase de tings we require, such as flour and nasturtium-seed, and pickles, and—and grapes, or any ob dose little necessaries. Now, just you come dis way, and if I can't show you one or two men who want work, I'm making a mighty big error."

"There is not the slightest doubt that you are doing that, Pete!" laughed Jack. "However, as your intentions are to do good to those in need, why, we won't bother ourselves with the cost. All de same, I rather fancy you are making the mistake of your life, and you will find your self-supporting colony most frightfully expensive."

"De expense doesn't matter, Jack, so long as we elevate de masses. I don't 'spect dere will be any difficulties in de way ob doing dat."

"Don't you, really? Well, I hope that you will find you are right; at the same time, I am absolutely certain that you will find you are utterly and entirely mistaken. However, as you have taken it into your wooden head to—"

"Eh?"

"I say if you are decided to—"

"Well, I'm glad dat's what you said, Jack, only I must say dat it didn't sound a bit like it de first time you said it. Seems to me dere was too much impersonality in reference to wooden heads. All de same, I hab marked one ob de most frightful, awful slums you eber set eyes on. If you come wid me I'll show you."

CHAPTER 2.

Pete and the Sium Landlord.

PETE led the way down a number of back streets, and on passing a low public-house a big, burly-looking man reeled against him.

"Where are you coming to?" he demanded.

"Are you in want ob work, old hess?" inquired Pete, ignoring the question.

"No fear! But I'm in want of money."

"Tink dat half-crown would be any good to you?"

"I can try," answered the worthy, biting it to see if it were good; although his personal appearance gave the impression that he would have made strenuous efforts to pass it if it had been bad.

"Would you like to come for a long sea voyage, and land on some beautiful spot in de tropics, where you could earn an honest libing?"

"No, mate, I wouldn't. But you can cart my missus there, and drown her on the way, if you like. So-long!"

And he went back into his favourite house to spend Pete's half-crown.

"Golly! Dat ain't de exact class ob man dat I want to get at, eider," growled Pete. "We will hab anoder try furdur afield. I want to get a hundred. But p'r'aps dey will come quicker after I hab got de start. De only stipulation is dat dey must be single men."

At the bottom of the street Pete encountered a cadaverous-looking object, whose clothes were in tatters, and who was in a particularly grimy state.

"In want ob work, old hoss?" inquired Pete.

"It's what I've been looking for all my life," answered the seedy one.

"Well, I don't believe you will find it against dose house walls. De work will be light, and de hours short. Tink dat would suit you?"

"Sounds as though it would."

"De wages will be two pounds a week, commencing from to-day, but not payable in advance. Now, you ain't dressed quite as well as I would like. Do you mind going abroad?"

The individual said he did not mind where he went to, neither did he care what work he did, provided it was not hard.

"What's your name, old hoss?"

"Sym."

"Bery well, Sym, lead de way to de nearest cookshop, enter it, and eat what you require."

"Shall we have a drink on the way, mate?"

"Nunno! Dere's going to be none ob dat. If you can't be happy on good food you won't suit me. Should say what you hab drunk since boyhood ought to be enough to last you your life. Lead de way, if you want to, and if you don't you can buzz off home."

"I'll never do that, 'cos I ain't got none. Still, we can get sorsage and fried onions round the corner."

"Look here, Pete," exclaimed Jack, stopping a little before they reached the cook-shop, which he could smell. "You can go in with Algy and Sam, but I am going to wait outside."

"Don't you tink you would like some sausage and onions, Jack?"

"No, thank you!"

"Den come dis way, Sym, and we will see if we can take de rough edge off your appetite."

It took a quarter of an hour to do this, although Sym ate against time. Pete only did the paying. The smell of the onions mingled with fried fish was a little more than he could stand.

"Now den, old hoss, just you lead de way to de nearest public baths, 'cos you require a wash; and while you are habing it I will buy you a complete rig-out."

Sym looked a little suspicious, but as the police did not require him just then, he felt on the safe side. He told Pete where the outfit could be got, and that worthy promised to bring the clothes round. He left the comrades waiting outside, and in about ten minutes' time returned with a large bundle, which he told the bath attendant to hand to his customer; then they waited until Sym made his appearance, and no one could have recognised him.

"Here, what are you going to do with those old clothes?" demanded the bath assistant.

"You may have them, mate," answered Sym. "You can use 'em for your Sunday togs, and if you find any money in the pockets return it to Jimmy Sym, Esquire."

"Well, dat's all right, Sym," exclaimed Pete. "Dere's a lot ob improvement in your personal appearance already. Now, you follow me about, and if you see any friends who want to work, and to get paid de same wages, just you fetch dem along. Dey must hab no wives."

"Look here, mate," exclaimed Sym. "If you give me your address I'll bring you a few to choose from. I don't say they are all as fine fellows as me; still, I know a few out-and-outers!"

"Dere's de address," answered Pete, handing him one of Miggins's cards.

"You be dere at about nine o'clock, and we will hab supper. 'Nuff said!"

Pete hurried away, followed by his laughing comrades. His extraordinary scheme highly amused them. They foresaw the most alarming difficulties in the way of it; but as Pete had quite made up his mind to carry it through, they knew that it would be useless to try to dissuade him.

"Now, dis is 'bout de worst street dat I know ob," observed Pete. "You see, all de inhabitants ob dis place seem to require work, and— Why, look at dat, now!"

A well-dressed man came from one of the slum houses. He was of middle age, and wore a frock-coat and tall hat, while he carried a book in his hand.

"Are you de missionary, old hoss?" inquired Pete.

"I am Mr. Groog, the owner of this property, and I will request you to address me in a respectful manner, fellow. What do you want?"

"Hab you got a room to let, Mr. Groog?" inquired Pete.

"Yes. I have just turned one family out of this house. There are two rooms, and you can have them for twelve shillings a week, or one room for seven shillings."

"I suppose it wouldn't be convenient for me to see dem now?"

"Oh, yes! I require the first week's rent in advance, unless you can give me satisfactory references."

"Well, dese gentlemen would be able to gib me references, or I could pay de week in advance. Is dat de lowest rent you can take?"

"If you pay in advance, and satisfy me that you will be a regular tenant, I might take six-and-ninepence for the one room."

"Well, dat's a consideration certainly, old hoss—I mean Mr. Groog."

"Come this way."

"You don't mind dese gentlemen coming too?"

"No. I always carry a revolver when collecting my rents," said Groog. "You see, this is a very rough neighbourhood, and such a precaution is necessary."

"I suppose it makes de tenants pay up," observed Pete. He had no doubt that Groog had given him the information to convince him that robbery would be dangerous.

"You don't imagine that I use the revolver to make the tenants pay, surely?"

"Oh, I see! It's to protect your gold. Well, you won't need de revolver wid Jack and Sammy, 'cos dey are quite honest."

"Go up those stairs to the top floor. The rooms are there. I will follow you."

The staircase was in a filthy state, and it creaked at every step. The balusters had been nearly all torn away, and the whole place gave the impression that it had not been done up since it was built.

Groog took a bunch of keys from his pocket, and showed the comrades into two small attics. The windows were all either cracked or broken right out. Two of them had been patched with brown paper, which was sodden with the rain. Rain was coming through the ceiling in several places, if it could be called a ceiling. It was nearer black than white, and the plaster had fallen away in many places. The rooms were utterly unfit for habitation.

"I suppose you would do some repairs to dese rooms, old hoss?" inquired Pete.

"Repairs? Certainly not! You surely don't expect me to do the house up for six-and-ninepence a week?"

"And do you expect human beings to lib here?" inquired Pete.

"They can live where they like, for all I care! They are not bound to take the rooms from me. Do you want them, or do you not?"

"Nunno! I wanted to see dem. I wanted to see what sort ob a hovel a slum landlord expected human beings to lib in. I don't want to say anything to hurt your feelings, Groog; but as I know you ain't got any—why, I shall be able to say what I like. I consider dat you are a viler scoundrel dan de worst one who libs in your houses. You ain't got de conscience ob a human being, and——"

"Clear out of my house, you dog!"

"I'd rader be a dog dan you, old hoss. I'd rader be a reptile, 'cos dey don't know any better. Oh, you won't fire at me wid dat revolver, 'cos you are too timid for your own neck; and I tell you dis, Groog, if you were as big and strong as I am, one ob us would get a full-sized thrashing!"

"Will you go?" roared the infuriated man, striding up to Pete, and thrusting the revolver almost in his face.

With a quick movement Pete whipped it out of his hand, and sent it crashing through one of the cracked windows, and they heard it fall into the yard beneath.

Then Groog leapt at him, delivering a blow at his face.

Pete ducked in time, and struck Groog across the cheek with his open hand with a force that sent him to the floor.

"I'll give you in custody for that, you scoundrel!" he roared, springing to his feet, and glaring at Pete.

"I don't tink so, old hoss," answered Pete quietly. "If I'm anything ob a judge ob human nature you will let de matter rest; but look here, I will gib you a chance to gib me in custody. I will come down into de street wid you, and slap your face again."

"You have assaulted me!"

"What's de good ob telling me dat when I know it? I feel rader inclined to assault you again by stuffing you up dat chimbley. I tink we had better go, boys, 'cos I ain't at all safe in de presence ob a man like dat. How can you expect poor creatures to lead respectable lives when dey lib in hovels like dis? Why, de whole framework ob de window in rotting away! It won't bear de pressure ob my hand."

Pete put his hand against the middle sash of the window and smashed it in half, although it was so rotten that it did not require much pressure to do it.

"Try putting your hand through the wall, Pete," exclaimed Algy; "or you might see if you can stuff that old rascal through it!"

"You shall pay for that damage, you scoundrel!" roared Groog.

"All right, old hoss," answered Pete. "I'm quite ready to pay for it, and I shall send de borough surveyor at my own cost to estimate de damage. I'll report you dis bery day. I'll put de sanitary authorities on your track. See you here, Groog, I'll make you do dis place up. Just you see if I don't. Now you can take my name and address, and you can summon me for assault, while I'm going to summon you for pointing a loaded revolver at me. See? I hab got free witnesses here. You can bully dese poor people, and grind dem down. Bery well, I'll try de same game wid you! Just you come wid me!"

"I don't want any trouble with the police," stammered Groog, as Pete gripped his arm.

"Oh, you don't, don't you! Well, I'm going to gib you all de trouble dat I possibly can, 'cos scoundrels like you ought to be punished. My object is to help your unfortunate tenants; yours is to grind dem down, and take de last farthing from dem. De man who owns dis style ob property ought to be ashamed ob himself, and I don't care who he is, I'd tell him so!"

"I am willing to overlook the damage you have done," said Groog, not liking Pete's manner.

"Damage! Why, I'd knock de whole place down if I had my way! You rob de poor. Dat's what you do; and you'm a lot worse dan a burglar, 'cos he only robs de rich. Now den, dere are five shillings to pay for de damage to dat window, and if you like to hab a proper one put in I'll pay for de rest ob de cost ob it. And mind you dis, Groog, I hab a mighty good mind to gib you in custody for pointing a revolver at me. You can tink yourself lucky dat I let you off so lightly; and mind you dis, it ain't because I hab any consideration for you, but simply because I don't want to be bodered wid such a brute. Come on, boys! I'm going into one ob de lower rooms, 'cos I can hear men's voices dere, and I want to see if I can take away a few ob dat scoundrel's tenants, and make men ob dem, instead ob abject slaves."

—Pete entered the room from which the noise came. It was far larger than he had expected, and in the place there must have been a score of rough-looking men, seated round a table, smoking and drinking. Two or three of them sprang to their feet, as though in fear, then they all glared at the comrades in no friendly manner.

CHAPTER 3.

Pete's Guests Appear.

"LOOK here, old hosses!" exclaimed Pete. "We hab got a little scheme on, and dunno weder you would like to fall in wid it. De idea is to start a sort ob colony in some wild spot. If anyone wants to join dey can come to dis address at nine o'clock to-night, when dere will be a supper. De wages will be two pounds a week, and de work light. You must all convince me dat you hab no one dependent on you."

"What's the plant?" demanded one of the gang.

"Plant? Well, dere will be geraniums and cabbages and tomatoes. De tomatoes are important. On a penny packet ob seeds I find dat one plant gibbs thirty pounds ob tomatoes. Now, selling tomatoes at sixpence a pound, how much does dat make on a plant, Jack?"

"Fifteen shillings."

"Bery well. Dere are fifty seeds in a packet. Multiply fifteen by fifty, and see if it comes to a pound."

"Thirty-five pounds."

"Bery well. I am going to start wid a million plants. Get a bit ob paper, Jack, and multiply a million by thirty-five."

"I don't need paper for that calculation," laughed Jack. "I think I can manage it in my head. We will call it thirty-five million pounds."

"Well, dat's near enough, 'cos I don't mind about de odd shillings. We get dat twice a year, and you can reckon dat would be enough for a hundred men to go on wid. Den dere is de profit from de turnips, and—and geraniums, and tings like dat."

"See here, mate," grinned one of the men, "who's going to find the money for our wages while the tomatoes and geraniums are turning in?"

"I shall find dat."

"Have you got it?"

"M'yes! I hab already bought de vessel."

"Sure you've got enough for the two pound a week, 'cos that's the important part?"

"Yes. I hab got more dan dat."

"Well, we are coming to that supper to-night. Give us your address, and we will be there at nine o'clock. You want a hundred of us?"

"Yes."

"Then you shall have us. I like a little gin—a bottleful is enough for me."

"See here, old hosses," growled Pete, "I'm sorry for you, and I'm going to put you all into a better position; but although you will get all de food you can consume, you will get no intoxicants. Dat's settled, and if you don't like it you needn't come. I can get plenty ob men at my terms, and dose terms ain't going to be altered under any consideration. 'Nuff said!"

"I don't quite see how you are going to feed that little lot!" exclaimed Sam, as they made their way back to their apartments.

"It's all arranged, Sammy. I don't leabe tings to chance. I neber go in for a bit ob speculation unless it's a dead certainty."

"I'm delighted to hear that," said Jack. "But don't you think you are a little sanguine in expecting to make thirty-five million pounds a year out of tomatoes?"

"In six months, you mean, Jack."

"Well, when dealing with a little amount like that, we won't be particular to a month or so."

"And you ain't counting for de profit on de geraniums?"

"I quite overlooked them. Where are you going to sell your tomatoes?"

"Eh?"

"If we go to, say, Africa, or the Arctic Regions, where tomatoes ought to grow like chickweed, how shall you dispose of the little lot?"

"I believe, Jack, dat it ain't legal to count your chickens before dey are hatched!"

"That is what I am complaining of."

"Bery well! On de same lines, it ain't lawful to sell your tomatoes before dey are ripened."

"Do you know how to grow tomatoes?"

"M'yes! You dig a hole, and—and shoot de seed into it, den you—you nip de shoots out ob de axils. Any idiot can do dat. You or Sammy would be quite competent."

"Do you know what the axils are?"

"Eh?"

"What are the axils?"

"Well, I 'spect it's what de wheels work on. I didn't know tomatoes had wheels; still, de book says dey hab axils, and I don't see de good ob dem if you ain't got wheels. But, look here, Jack, I don't consider de Arctic Regions would be a suitable place for tomato growing, 'cos I remember dat it says you need warmth for dem, and you wouldn't get much dere, unless you bought a blanket for each plant. I want my great cistern ob amelioration to be self-supporting."

"It will be," laughed Jack. "You yourself will support it. What you are going to do with a hundred of the greatest rogues in the East End of London I really don't know; but if you don't find them a big handful I shall be greatly surprised. Well, here we are!"

Something had upset Mrs. Miggins' temper, which was in a shocking state that night. She was in the comrades' sitting-room.

"There must be an end to this," she remarked, glaring at Pete. "I cannot have my house destroyed by a wretch of a boy!"

"But Algy has been wid me all de time, my dear. He don't look particularly innocent at de moment, which is a sure sign dat he ain't been up to mischief," observed Pete.

"I'm referring to what he did this afternoon, and you know it."

"But dat matter was settled, my dear."

"I cannot replace some of those ornaments."

"I should say dat was rader a mercy. Dat blue-and-orange shepherdless always got on Jack's nerves, didn't it, Jack?"

"Here, you leave me out of this," laughed Jack. "I don't want you to switch your trials and troubles on to me."

"This is a respectable house, and I cannot allow such goings on——"

"Cheer up, old lady!" cried a ragged-looking object, entering the sitting-room with his cap on. "He'll pay you next week, or the week after. I'll guarantee the debt. See, mate, there's a few of us has come a bit before time, so as to be of any assistance in getting in the things for supper. Come in, mates; don't be bashful. The old gal won't hurt you. Here, stow that penny-whistle of a row, missus. What are you a-squalling at?"

"It's all right, my dear," murmured Pete. "Only a few gentlemen called to see me on a matter of business. I wish you would explain de case to her, Jack, instead ob guffawing like dat."

"Gentlemen!" shrieked the indignant lady. "Do you call these filthy-looking objects gentlemen?"

"Algy, you explain de matter," murmured Pete, who felt that Mrs. Miggins was too much for him.

"These are Pete's children," said Algy, waving his arm towards the dirty-looking objects. "He is taking them in hand, and is going to train them up in the way they should go. It is his intention to teach them how to grow tomatoes on the Sahara, with a few turnips and 'geraniums' thrown in. Of course, there are the chances that they will decide on turning brigands instead, but that is a risk that Pete will have to face, and it's only one of very many risks. They may decide that it would pay them to knock him on the head, like you did with the mop, and chuck him overboard, after robbing him of all his money; but that is only another risk. At any rate, we have invited them to supper to-night, so put on all the kippers you have got, my dear woman, and you would greatly oblige me by not frying them in petroleum, as is your general custom."

"You little wretch, this is all your doing!"

"Not a bit of it, my dear woman," answered Algy. "If I had been working the scheme, I would have had fellows of about my own age, so that we would not have got up to any mischief, unless I had chosen ladies of about your age and temperament."

"Not for one moment shall they stop here! I shall have all my valuables stolen."

"Then you will be able to make Pete pay," said Algy. "If they steal some of your silver spoons, though I rather fancy it would puzzle them to do that, you can make Pete buy you gold ones. If they steal your ornaments, the same remarks apply. I tell you, that little band of beauties will be as good as a small gold-mine to you."

"I won't have them here, and that's decided. Go, you horrible creatures!"

"It's all right," observed Pete. "Dey ain't going to hab supper here. I hab ordered dat at de restaurant. You come dis way, and we will hab dat supper, den we will talk ober matters concerning de future."

Now, strange to say, this annoyed Mrs. Miggins greatly. She felt insulted that she had not been called upon to supply that supper, because she saw that there would be a big profit on the transaction, and she rated Pete for taking the custom out of her hands.

"But you say you won't hab de guests," observed Pete.

"I am willing to supply them with any meals for which you pay. I should not charge more than two shillings each, and extras."

"Well, I should hab sabed money on dat, 'cos I'm paying five shillings a head, and extras."

"It's shameful that I should be defrauded in this way—positively shameful! When you took these apartments, I expected you to have your meals here."

"Dat may be, my dear, but you didn't expect me to bring a hundred guests—you can see de rest ob dem waiting in de street—and I dunno where you would find a body ob men to equal dem. You might call dem de great undressed. But, see here, I ain't got time to argue de point wid you, 'cos I shall be had up for creating an obstruction, and I dunno dat some ob dese guests would care to meet de police. 'Nuff said!"

"You can say the rest when we come back," added Algy. "Get Jack to listen to you. There's nothing he likes more than being jawed by his landlady."

Pete led the way to the restaurant, and here an ample supper was served. It amused Algy to see the way those men behaved. Their one aim appeared to be to make fun of Pete, whom they looked upon as slightly demented; but there were some among the number who rather liked the idea of going to some other country, and making a fresh start in life.

At any rate, they became convinced that the comrades had plenty of money, and so they decided to stick to them until it was all gone, and take their chance after that.

Pete informed them that the vessel, which was named the Shark, lay off Charlton, and that they were to meet him three days hence at his apartments, when all would go aboard. In the meantime, he informed them that they were to go to the shop where he had made arrangements to supply them with an outfit, and he held the man whom he had rigged out as an example of how they would look.

There was not one amongst them who objected to this arrangement, whether he intended to accompany the extraordinary expedition, or not; because he knew he would get a new suit of clothes, a thing that each had been greatly needing for years and years.

A few tried to get their first week's wages in advance, but Pete was quite firm on this point; then some insisted on being supplied with liquor aboard; but that was another point on which he was equally firm.

"You can please yourselves weder you come, or not," said Pete, when the meal was finished. "But, if you do come, you will conform to my rules. You see, I made dose rules, and I ain't going to hab dem altered. You will get good food and wages, and if you ain't satisfied wid dat result, den don't come. 'Nuff said! Be at my apartments free days hence, and we will all go down togeder. Good-night, all!"

The comrades watched them slink off, many of them glancing furtively along the street as they left the restaurant, for the police were their natural enemies, for reasons known to themselves.

"Now, look here, Algy!" exclaimed Pete, as they neared their apartments. "I ain't got time to tell de landlady dat we are going next Thursday. Tink you would be able to manage it for me?"

"Bosh! You are soft, Pete. Are you frightened of her?"

"I don't want to boder de poor woman."

"She has bothered you enough while we have been here, and if we stayed much longer she wouldn't be so jolly poor, at the rate she is robbing you. I'll tell her. You wait till we get in. You don't mind my doing it in my own style?"

"Nunno! Not if we don't hab one ob her squalling rows. I don't want anything like dat."

"Not a bit of it. I'll throw the onus on her head."

"Golly! You mustn't knock de woman about."

"Shucks! The onus isn't a footstool—nor yet a fender."

"Well, don't offend her. I would be able to laugh at dat joke if I wasn't so anxious 'bout gibing notice."

"You will have to pay a week instead of notice."

"I'll pay her a month—or anything, so long as we don't hab a row."

"Well, look here, Pete, you will jolly well have to leave it all to me, or else get Jack or Sam to do it. You must promise not to interfere, if I take the little job in hand."

"M'yes! I promise all dat."

"Then come along, and face the music," said Algy.

He rather liked his task, for Mrs. Miggins had certainly got the better of Pete in money matters.

CHAPTER 4.

The Fugitive From Justice.

HAD the comrades owed several weeks' rent, Mrs. Miggins could scarcely have been more aggressive when she followed them into their sitting-room, which was supposed to be private, but she appeared to imagine that she had a right to enter it whenever she felt so disposed.

She had calculated that she might have made fifteen pounds at least out of that supper, and was furious to think that she had lost such a sum of money.

"I consider you have treated me shameful!" she cried, turning on the unfortunate Pete.

"I refer you to my agent, my dear," murmured Pete, jerking his thumb in the direction of Algy.

"I quite agree with you, Mrs. Miggins!" exclaimed Algy, gazing calmly at the angry lady. "It is quite obvious that Pete is more bother than he is worth as a lodger—"

"Eh?" exclaimed Pete.

"He's a public nuisance, and gives me more bother to train than—"

"Here, Algy, you'm mistaking de position," interposed Pête. "I'm training you—not you training me."

"He gives me more trouble to train than an ordinary gorilla. Now, I'm not going to have a nice-tempered lady like you annoyed in this manner, and so I shall take Pete away next Thursday morning. You will kindly make out your bill up to that date, including what food we have, and I shall pay you a week's rent in Heu of notice beyond that amount. Good-night, my dear madam!"

"You little wretch!" shrieked the angry woman. "How dare you threaten me like this! Pete is not going. You can go if you like, but he is not going!"

"He is going at ten o'clock on Thursday morning, my dear woman. Nothing you say or do will alter that fact; however, if you like to start saying a few things you are quite welcome, because you become rather amusing when you let yourself go. No, you don't! I'm keeping this side of the table, or, at any rate, I'm keeping the opposite to the one you occupy. You are a fine runner, but you can bet your buttons that I'm not letting you catch me!"

Algy dodged her round the table, and then bolted upstairs, locking himself in his bed-room, and placing a few articles of furniture against the door:

for he had an idea that she might take the law into her own hands—and his hair.

He got into bed, and was just dozing off, when something touched his hand.

"Don't make a sound!" exclaimed a gruff voice. "I want you to help me."

Algy's heart gave a leap, and he sat up in bed; then, recovering from his surprise, he stood on the bed, prepared for a combat.

"I have been hiding here—under the bed," said the man, rising to his feet; and Algy could just distinguish a big, powerfully-built man.

"So I see," answered Algy.

"You are a plucky youngster. I am going to light your candle."

"Oh, it does not need much courage to tackle a burglar. They are generally a cowardly lot."

"I haven't come here to steal your property."

"Then perhaps you will oblige me by stealing away. You may be a very nice man, although you do not look it, but if it's all the same to you I prefer to have my bed-room to myself."

The fellow had lighted a candle, and now Algy saw that he was a man of about five-and-twenty, of very powerful build, although he looked very haggard now.

"I was with a gang when Pete came amongst them. I want to go with him, and I want you to help me. I did not dare to come to supper with them, and I stole into this house while the landlady was jawing you. I meant to hide in Pete's bed-room."

"I suppose you are wanted by the police?" inquired Algy.

"What does that matter? Half those men are wanted by the police, and, if they are not wanted now, they will be later on."

"Well, you don't look much better than they do, but you certainly speak better. What's the matter with you?"

"I'm well-nigh starving."

"Well, I'll go and get you some food. What's your name?"

"Burg!"

"I don't suppose it is, but that will do to go on with. Wait till I get a few clothes on, and then I'll fetch you some food."

"You won't give me away?"

"Do you think I'm frightened of you," retorted Algy.

"No!"

"Quite correct, my dear man. But assuming that I should be terrified of you, I don't play those tricks. When I tell you I am going to get you some food, it is what I intend to do. If I intended or wanted to give you away, I should just shout for Jack, Sam and Pete, and there would be the end of your liberty, because one of those three could hold you."

"I'll trust you!"

"You have no choice in the matter. Are you too timid to take such a risk? You must have taken a far greater one when you committed the crime for which the police want you."

"That's what people would think," answered Burg. "Do you think Pete will let me come with him, and ask no questions?"

"If I ask him to do so, he will. He does everything I ask him."

"Will you ask him?"

"I'll consider the matter."

"I'll work for him for nothing—for my food."

"No, you won't! If you come, you will come like the rest. Pete doesn't expect people to work for nothing. He would no more do that than would I give you away. Lend me that light, and stop where you are."

Algy went downstairs. Mrs. Miggins had long since retired, and all Algy discovered in the kitchen was a fine stock of blackbeetles, which crawled away as he crossed the floor.

He commandeered a loaf of bread, a pound or so of cheese, and some butter, and then returned to the bed-room.

"There you are!" he exclaimed, locking the door. "Wire into that. I suppose you want to give no information concerning yourself."

"I dare give no information. I am in your hands. I am at the mercy of a boy."

"Bosh! You could walk out of this place, if you fear the danger."

"And meet a greater peril."

"That's best known to yourself. But I know that you are in no danger here, either from myself or from the comrades. We do not know what crime you have committed, and we are not desirous of bringing men to justice. That is the work of the police. There's a blanket for sleeping purposes, and if you want to rob me in the night you will have an opportunity of doing so. There's money in my pockets, and I'm a pretty heavy sleeper. Good-night! Put the candle out when you have finished feeding."

The man gazed in mute surprise at the lad. He could not understand such coolness. In a very few minutes Algy was sleeping calmly, and when he awoke the following morning he appeared to be rather surprised to find the man still there."

"I did not rob you," he said.

"No! That's all right, and you won't lose by it. Wait a minute! Jack's clothes will about fit you. I'll get him to give me some. You will look less disreputable then. We can stuff your little lot up the chimney, and not let Mrs. Miggins know that you have slept here. You will be safer hiding here than in that den."

The comrades were just seated at breakfast when Algy and Burg entered the room. Algy had already explained matters to Jack, who had told Sam and Pete, therefore they were not surprised at their visitor's appearance.

"So you want to come wid us, old hoss?" inquired Pete.

"If you will have me, and if I can get aboard. You would have to take me as I am. I can give no character."

"Well, you won't be de only one who can't do dat. You see, de qualification for de situation is dat de man is down on his luck. I don't ask questions as to what brought him dere, but I'm going to gib him a chance ob honest work. You are engaged at two pounds a week—not payable in advance—and your food. Start on some ob de food, and see if you like it, 'cos you won't get anything better dan dis, 'scept as regards de cooking. Shco! Here comes dat awful woman!"

"No, she doesn't!" exclaimed Algy, slamming the door and locking it, while Mrs. Miggins banged.

"What is it, my dear woman?" inquired Algy.

"I insist on coming into this room."

"I don't mind your insisting, so long as you don't come in. This is a private sitting-room, Mrs. Miggins, although you would never think it."

"I have the right to enter my own room, boy!"

"Not when you have let it to Pete. You can't let your room and use your room, you know."

"Open this door."

"Later on."

"Do you wish me to burst it open?"

"I really don't care. You can please yourself, and if you were to ask

my candid opinion I would say that you are about the only person on this earth you would be able to please."

"Are you going to open the door?"

"No!"

"Then I shall call the police!"

"Call away! I should say they would be able to hear your gentle bleat already. But, look here, if you are going to kick up this row we shall go at once, and then you will lose all the profit on our food, and we shall lose the benefit of your cooking."

"You are a most impertinent boy."

"Lots of people have noticed that. You see, Pete is trying to train me, only I must say he's not succeeding so jolly well."

"I'm only used to training wild beasts," observed Pete.

"Then why not try to train Mrs. Miggins?" suggested Algy. "Hark! There she goes. I would know her floppity step anywhere."

"So would I," growled Pete. "And dat step sends cold shudders down my spine. Now den, Burg, hab you quite decided to come wid de great expedition?"

"Yes."

"Shall you come wid de rest?"

"No. If you tell me how to find the vessel I will get aboard by myself—if I can."

"You tink dere might be a difficulty?"

"There will be a difficulty, and a very great one. I may manage it. My only hope in life is to leave this country for ever. I have been a hopeless failure here. Perhaps elsewhere—and where that is I do not care—I may do better. I cannot well do worse."

"But ain't all dat your own fault?"

"I suppose so. What does it matter? The result is the same. I have gone through years of misery and starvation."

"Well, we ain't supposed to know what you hab done, and, derefore, can't be blamed for taking you away. De best ting for you to do is to keep your own counsel in de matter. Now, as regards getting to de vessel, you don't consider it sort ob judicious to travel down by daylight—eh?"

"It would be fatal to me."

"And what about de night?"

"I shall tramp it, and take my chance. But before I leave I would like to solemnly declare that I have committed no crime. I do not suppose that you will believe me, and I am certain that others would not, for the evidence against me is conclusive, although it is but circumstantial evidence. Nevertheless, I am absolutely innocent of the crime of which I am suspected. Low as I have fallen, such a crime as that would be abhorrent to me. For the rest, I will work for you as hard as you like to make me. You shall never hear a complaint, and I will serve you faithfully."

"Well, de work won't be hard, and de wages will be two pounds a week, wid food. I ain't settled where we are going yet, but it will be to some wild spot. Mind, dere is just one ting—dere won't be any intoxicants to drink."

"I never drink, and never have drunk in my life."

"And you ain't committed a crimè?"

"No."

"Den I tell you what it is, Burg, you'm mighty stupid to flee de country. De proper ting for you to do is to face de matter boldly."

"Ah, you do not understand my awful position. The evidence against me would be sufficient to convince any jury. I know that quite well; and I also know that a miserable wretch like myself would be the very first to

be suspected. My only chance is to get out of the country; and it is a very faint chance. I am being shadowed, and probably shall be arrested on my way to your vessel. Even the men with whom I sought shelter might turn against me if they knew, and they would think nothing of putting the police on my track. Still, I shall take the chance. If you will allow me to remain here until midnight, there is just a possibility of getting away."

"Well, we shall hab to work on de assumption dat you hab spoken de troof; and dat being so, I shall get you to de vessel widout any risk. You leabe it all to me, and it will turn out quite all right."

Burg appeared to be satisfied, although there could be no doubt that he was in a very nervous state. He refrained from going near the window, and at the sound of every footstep in the passage he would start up.

"Now, look here, boys!" exclaimed Pete, when the meal was finished. "My idea is for free ob us to go down to de vessel, and bring a boat up de ribber to a certain part, and den walk down to dat part, and take Burg aboard. Bery well. Dat being done widout fear ob de police—'cos dey won't swim—"

"You have forgotten the River Police, Pete," said Jack.

"Do dey swim, Jack?"

"They may come after us in a boat."

"What should dey do dat for?"

"To capture their prisoner, naturally."

"But he says he's innocent."

"I know he does; but you surely don't think they will believe it?"

"Well, I don't care what dey believe. Dey ain't likely to be able to row as fast as we can. Besides, dey won't see us in de darkness; and if dey do, dey will tink we are some more River Police."

"They might take you for a Royal swan," suggested Sam. "It is quite as likely as mistaking you for a River Policeman."

"Well, we won't boder 'bout what ain't going to happen, but confine our attentions to what is going to happen; and dat is, dat we are going to take Burg aboard de Shark and stow him away in some secret hiding-place, where he won't be seen till we set sail. Tink dat will suit your complexion, old hoss?"

"I shall owe you a debt of gratitude that I shall never be able to repay," answered the wretched man.

"Oh, dere's no gratitude needed, old hoss! Mind, if you are innocent, you'm acting against my advice. If it was my case I would face it out. Dey can't imprison innocent men."

"They have done so before now—and even hanged them."

"Well, certainly dat's a drawback. At de same time, we will start off, and den I will bring de boat up de ribber, and arrange to get you aboard. Come on, boys! You stop wid de innocent criminal, Algy, and mind you don't get up to any mischief, 'cos Mrs. Miggins might send for de police; and dat would make it awkward."

Then the comrades started on their journey, Pete promising to return that night.

CHAPTER 5.

Algy's Police-Protector.

"NOW, look here, Burg!" exclaimed Algy, who had not the slightest intention of remaining in those dreary apartments all day. "It stands to reason that the River Police are bound to follow us, and it is equally certain that they will overtake us, capture you, and deal with you according to the law."

"I am innocent!"

"Bosh! That won't make any difference with the judge and jury, not if they make up their minds you are guilty. What we have got to do is to think out a scheme that will prevent them catching us; and that you had better leave to me, because I am rather fond of inventing. I'm going out for a bit to——"

"But Pete said you were not to go out."

"Yes. He often says things like that. You see, he is training me, and it wouldn't do to let him think I'm too perfect for the start."

There was not the slightest chance of Pete ever thinking anything like that. Mrs. Miggins would have been just as likely to think it. Algy went out, and he did not return until evening, when he arrived with a big package, which took two men to carry in.

"That's the patent police-protector," he observed, when his package was landed in the sitting-room.

"It's not a gun, is it?" inquired Burg, somewhat anxiously.

"Oh, no! It's not lawful to shoot policemen, you know, and I wouldn't like to do anything unlawful. No, that is a harmless little idea that could not possibly harm the police in any way, but it will induce them to let us go."

"Do you think they are sure to come after us?"

"I don't know. I hope so; but——"

"You hope so?"

"Rather! I want to try the efficacy of that little idea on a policeman. If it answers, I shall use it on wild beasts and wilder savages when we reach the part where we are going."

"Have you any idea where we are going?"

"Not the slightest; neither has Pete. He knows I want wild beasts and savages, so he's sure to choose a spot like that. I've never seen wild beasts in their primeval forests, and it stands to reason that a fellow ought not to go through life without seeing a little thing like that. Pete is sure to do what I want. He always does, although I don't often do what he wants. He's a splendid fellow, and I don't believe I could possibly find a trainer who suits me better. Hark! I can hear him coming now. He's singing, so you may depend on it he's got the boat handy. When Pete sings it is a sure sign that he has succeeded in what he has undertaken!"

"It's all right!" exclaimed Pete, entering the room, and listening for Mrs. Miggins, of whom he stood in far more dread than the police. "De boat is on de shore, and Jack and Sammy are waiting. Now, I hab arranged to pay Mrs. Miggins what we owe, and den start away. Here she comes! Must hab heard me enter de place. I don't feel at all well. Tink I shall hab to see a doctor. Oh, good-evening, my dear! Nice morning, ain't it? You see, a sudden matter ob attention dat requires business—I mean, business dat requires attention, necessitates our going sort ob sudden, and if you will kindly make out your bill—— Aren't you feeling well, my dear?"

"Never was I so shamefully treated—no, not even in Miggins' time! Oh, that I should have lived to see this day! Oh, the cruelty of human nature!"

There was a glassy expression in Mrs. Miggins' eyes as she fixed them on Pete.

"What's de woman talking about?" he growled. "I'm only going to pay my bill, and I can't see dat dat is cruel!"

"You took these apartments as a permanency, you wicked, sinful monster! I fully expected that you would never leave me!"

"I dunno what made you expect a ting like dat, my dear."

"I claim two hundred pounds damages!"

"Well, rader dan hab a disturbance, I am willing to——"

"Bosh!" exclaimed Algy. "I can't think what makes you so frightened of women, Pete. If Mrs. Miggins were her dear departed you would just take him by the back of the neck, and fling him out of the room. Of course, you can't do that with a woman; but you surely are not going to allow her to rob you of two hundred pounds?"

"But what am I to do, Algy? I don't want a row."

"I'll have the row all right. Look here, Mrs. Miggins, you may be able to fool Pete, but you won't fool me! You sha'n't have two hundred pounds—nor yet two hundred pence beyond your bill! Just you make out that bill, and remember that I'm jolly well going to check it! If you stick on sixpence more than the exact amount, I'll knock it off. Now, then, fire away, old lady! You can yell yourself hoarse for all I care, but I'm not seeing Pete swindled by you. What you have got to charge for is the food we have had up to date, and one week's rent in lieu of notice. And mind you this, you sha'n't have one halfpenny more! I wouldn't have said anything if you were trying to get, say, ten pounds out of Pete; but I'm not going to see him robbed of two hundred!"

"You little wretch, do you dare to say that I am a thief?"

"No; because I'm not going to let you be one!"

"I won't allow your boxes to go."

"Won't you? I'll soon see about that. Are you going to let me have that bill?"

"I shall settle with Pete."

"No, you won't. You will settle with me. Where's your bill?"

"How dare you insult me in this manner, you little wretch? I hate the sight of you!"

"That is all the more reason why you should want to get rid of us. But that doesn't matter a bit. Don't you see, I know pretty well what your bill ought to come to. There's a week's rent due to-morrow; that will be five pounds. Then another five pounds in lieu of notice. Now, Pete has bought nearly all the food we have had this week; but I will call it another ten pounds, making twenty. Fork out, Pete!"

"There's next week's food in lieu of notice," declared Mrs. Miggins.

"Bosh! You won't get that, my dear woman, I assure you. You can't charge us with food we haven't had. There's your money!"

"I shall not allow the boxes to go until I am paid in full," declared Mrs. Miggins.

"You have been paid in full," retorted Algy. "And the luggage is going directly we are ready to start."

"It shall not!"

"Bosh!"

"Don't you use that language at me, you impudent boy, else I'll box your ears! How dare you excite Pete to swindle me out of my hard-earned money?"

"Look here, Pete," exclaimed Algy, "there's no sense in talking to a woman! She's about as sensible and reasonable as a mad dog! Let her yell. It's like a safety-valve to a steam boiler. No, you don't, Mother Miggins. You are too violent for my liking, and you get worse always towards the evening. Suppose we start now, Pete?"

"But how are we going to get de portmanteaus if Mrs. Miggins won't let dem go?"

"I shall tell the cabman to cart them down; and if she dares to interfere

with him, I shall give the dear woman in custody. But she won't interfere. She will only yell a little, and no one minds that!"

Algy was right. They got the luggage down without the slightest difficulty, as Mrs. Miggins contented herself with heaping all the insults she could think of on their heads.

Algy got Pete to carry his police protector, as he called it. It was very heavy, but Pete managed it without difficulty.

They drove to the steps, where the comrades were waiting in the boat, and then commenced their voyage down the river, the tide being in their favour.

The night was dark, and there was some fog, so that it was exactly suited to their purpose; but Algy appeared to be confident that they would be challenged by the police, and so he rigged up his police protector in the stern-sheets.

It was quite a simple thing, being merely a powerful hand-pump with a hose attached. Algy put the suction hose in the river, and held the nozzle in readiness for the police.

"You see, Pete," he explained, "this is a double-barrelled suction pump. You work it by turning this wheel. If the man who sold me the thing did not exaggerate more than four or five hundred per cent., it sends a stream of water with a force that would about knock houses down. I told him I would like a pump that squirted about a quarter of a mile, and he declared solemnly that this one squirted three-quarters when only worked at half speed. He said it never had been worked at full speed, because it would have torn things down. He was a Yankee salesman."

"Dat's one for you, Sammy," observed Pete. "But what are you going to do wid dat instrument ob torture, Algy?"

"Keep the police at bay, of course. A policeman is not going to advance when he has got a stream of water dashing into his face with about the force of the Falls of Niagara, and, according to that salesman, this pump is about as powerful as those falls."

"But, see here, Algy, dere's going to be a lot ob trouble if you get squirting at the bobbies wid dat pump."

"Yes, I know—trouble for them. Now, you get on with your rowing, and leave me to manage my pumping. You can't do everything, you know, Pete!"

The comrades sincerely hoped that no river police would question their movements, and for some distance Fortune favoured them; then, unfortunately, a police-boat came up the river.

The men were evidently on the look-out for someone, for they ordered the comrades to cease rowing.

"Go on as dough you didn't hear dem, boys!" exclaimed Pete.

"I reckon they will know we must have heard a hail like that," answered Sam.

"Well, dey can't be certain, Sammy, 'cos we might be deaf, or we might be tinkin' 'bout some oder matter. Don't you go foolin' 'bout wid dat police protector, Algy. You hear me, now! It ain't to happen, 'cos I'm training you, and you are bound to obey my commands. De consequences would be most serious for you if you didn't, and I should gib you definite commands dat it wouldn't hab to occur again!"

"Don't you think it would be wiser not to let him know that the punishment would be as light as all that, Pete?" laughed Jack.

"This is fun to you," said Burg; "but it is death to me!"

"Well, we shall do our utmost to escape de police," said Pete, quickening his stroke.

All three were rowing a pair of oars each; but there were six rowers in the police-boat, and as they spurred they gradually overhauled the fugitives.

Algy wanted nothing better than this. He was very desirous of testing his patent pump, and when the police-boat was quite close he spun the wheel round.

From Algy's point of view nothing could have been better.

A rush of water caught bow car at the back of the neck, causing him to catch a crab, and as he was jerked forward, the others in the boat got the benefit of that rush.

There could not be the slightest doubt that it was a remarkably powerful pump. The water made a tearing sound as it caught the unfortunate constables, and, considering that Algy was turning the handle as hard as he could go, his aim was remarkably good.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "You'll wet dose bobbies if you do dat, Algy. I'm surprised at you! Didn't I tell you dat I would be seriously annoyed if you did dat?"

"Yes; but you are not as annoyed as they are," answered Algy. "Give way, now; you will easily get out of sight, and they don't want to come within range of that pump. It was rather expensive, but I am quite satisfied with it."

"Seems to me dat de correct ting to do now is to row as fast as we possibly can, and hope dat de fog will deepen, or dat de constables will go home to change deir clothes. I'm most sure dey must be mighty wet!"

"It's all right!" exclaimed Algy. "They are lost in the fog!"

"All de same, dey will know which way we hab gone," answered Pete.

"Think they will follow us?" inquired Algy eagerly.

He wanted to try the efficacy of the pump again.

"It all depends on weder dey hab got a hot supper or not," declared Pete. "If de sergeant has got a hot supper waiting for him, it stands to reason dat he ain't going to annoy his wife and let it get cold."

"But suppose he hasn't got a wife?"

"Den he ain't going to annoy himself by letting dat supper get cold. But I rader fancy dey hab got hot suppers, and dat dey hab giben up de chase, 'cos I can't hear dem rowing."

Burg was evidently in a very uneasy state of mind. He kept peering through the fog, and trying to listen for the sound of oars. The comrades were exerting themselves to their utmost, both for his sake and their own, for they knew that there would be trouble if the police came up with them. However, apparently they were not following, and presently Pete set a slower stroke.

At last they came in sight of a brig lying at anchor, and Pete informed them that she was the Shark.

"You see, boys, I tought a two-masted vessel would be sort ob handier to manage. Den I rader prefer square-sails to fore-and-aft ones; and den, again, she was de only suitable vessel dat I could purchase, and I got her cheap on account ob her age."

"Let us hope she's seaworthy," said Jack.

"She's all dat, Jack."

"How do you know that?"

"'Cos de man who sold her to me said so."

"I would have preferred more uninterested testimony. However, we will hope for the best. Suppose we get aboard and inspect her? So far, we have only seen her outside."

This they did, but, to their surprise, found no signs of a crew. Pete led the way into the principal cabin, which was fitted up in fine style. The agent had spared neither pains nor money to make things comfortable.

CHAPTER 6.

Pete Has Trouble With His Crew.

"NOW, what do you tink ob dat little lot, boys?" inquired Pete.
 "It's all right; but——"
 "All right, Jack! I should tink it was all right! If dis ain't good enough for an ordinary A.B. sailor, I dunno what is!"
 "But where is your crew?" inquired Jack.
 "What crew?"
 "Naturally, the crew to navigate the vessel."
 "Pon my word, Jack, you do ask some silly questions! How many ob a crew do you want to handle a vessel like dis?"
 "Well, say a baker's dozen, and a skipper."
 "I hab got a hundred and a skipper. I'm going to make you de skipper, and I'm going to make de elevated masses de crew."
 "Why, they don't know anything about handling a vessel!" exclaimed Jack.

"Den dey will hab to learn. You don't suppose dat I'm going to allow dem to bask in de sunshine while I pay a crew to sail dis vessel? I hab been put to quite enough expense already ober her, and I ain't going to be put to de expense ob a crew. Nunno, I shall soon train dem—a lot sooner dan I shall train Algy, by de look ob it, 'cos I can't make him mind me, and I'll mighty soon make dem. Dey are in my employment, and dey are bound to do what I order dem. If dey don't den dere will be trouble in dis world for dem!"

"But look here, Pete," persisted Jack. "These men——"

"Are going to act as de crew."

"It's impossible."

"Dere's only one impossible ting on dis earth, Jack."

"What's that?"

"A policeman dat won't eat meat pies."

"This is no joking matter," said Jack. "If we put to sea with a crew like that we shall get shipwrecked."

"Nunno! We hab got de captain in you. Den a first mate in Sammy. And Algy can be de ship's monkey, 'cos he's quite competent for dat purpose. I can be de—well, de one dat don't hab to do any work, 'scept smoke and eat."

"Shucks!" exclaimed Algy. "I'll warrant you are competent to do those two. I'd back you against a famished ostrich, provided they didn't shove glass bottles into the menu."

"Dose are most untrainable remarks to make to your trainer," observed Pete gravely. "I wonder if dat agent has got a supply ob nuts?"

"What do you want nuts for, Pete?" inquired Jack.

"Shoo! It's listening, and you might hurt its feelings. Nuts and bananas are de monkey's favourite food, and I don't see why de poor brute shouldn't hab some. I ain't got time to laugh at dat funniosity, Algy, but p'r'aps you will supply de necessary laughter."

"Well, we will see about Algy's nuts and bananas to-morrow morning, Pete," exclaimed Sam; "and in the meantime you have got to consider the chances of the police coming aboard."

"Dere ain't de slightest chance ob dat, Sammy. Policemen ain't got de right to board vessels."

"And lads have not the right to squirt at them with a powerful pump."

"Well, dat's granted; but, den, you hab got to consider dat de police don't know where we are, and we are a long distance from de spot where we were when we squirted at dem. Nunno! I consider dat you are safe, Burg. All de same, p'r'aps it would be sort ob judicious to find some nice quiet hiding-place in case dey do come aboard. Dere must be plenty ob such places 'bout de vessel, and I dunno any more competent boy dan Algy to discover a secret hiding-place dat can't be found by a bobby or any oder human being."

"Well, there's no hurry about that," declared Algy. "What we need is supper, and I'll cook it for you."

"No, you don't!" exclaimed Pete. "Sammy shall cook dat supper, 'cos he ain't at all bad at cooking."

"Let me cook it for you," said Burg. "I want to be doing something to earn my wages and food. You have been very good to me, and I shall make what return I possibly can. Now, I was once a cook aboard ship, and as I have also been a cook ashore, I ought to be able to turn you out something worth the eating."

"Den you come wid me," said Pete, "and I will show you where de provisions are kept, and also de ship's galley; and while we are waiting for de cooking ob de supper you might go nosing around, Algy, to see if you can drop across dat safety hiding-place."

In about an hour's time Burg served up a most excellent supper. It was really cooked in quite professional style, and formed a striking contrast to Mrs. Miggins's cooking, which was atrocious.

"I tell you what it is, old hoss!" exclaimed Pete. "I'm going to appoint you chief chef ob de Shark at a salary ob four pounds a week. You'm worf dat anywhere, and ebery man aboard is going to hab what he is worf."

"I reckon the other ninety-nine are going to get considerably more than they are worth," said Sam.

"I dunno, Sammy. You see, when dey are trained as practical sailors

"You won't do that this voyage."

"I shall train dem straight away."

"All right. You can try. I fancy I know those men. Just you wait till they come aboard, and then you will find that your difficulties commence."

"Dey are coming to-morrow—at least, some ob dem are; and I 'spect de rest will come wid dem, 'cos, don't you see, dey will want to start on de food. Now, I hab one or two calculations to make, and seeing dat de supper is finished I should say dat dis would be de most oportune time to make dem. 'Nuff said!"

Pete had got some remarkably comfortable chairs in the cabin, and having selected one of them, he lighted his pipe, closed his eyes, and commenced to think.

"Shucks!" exclaimed Algy. "Just hark at him thinking! He will rend the vessel's timbers if he makes that ghastly row!"

"His snoring is rather pronounced," laughed Jack. "One would think that it would make his throat sore."

"Here," cried Algy, shaking him, "what are you thinking about, Pete?"

"Eh?"

"Have you had many brilliant thoughts yet?"

"I wish, Algy, you wouldn't interrupt de train ob my thoughts!"

"Train ob thoughts! It sounded more like a traction-engine going over chunks of china! Do you always make that row when you start thinking?"

"I can tink better wid my eyes shut."

"Well, keep your mouth shut as well, because we can't stand that row. If you do that the River Police will hear you at London Bridge, and come all the way here to see if there has been a railway accident, or whether it is only a war vessel grinding on the rocks."

"Dat ain't at all de way to be trained, Algy," said Pete, shifting his position a little. "You don't seem to have sufficient respect for your trainer. I tink I shall hab to buy you a cage, and keep you in dat, 'scept when I bring you out for daily exercise. Just be quiet now."

"That's what I want you to be."

"Den I tink I'll turn in, and get to sleep."

"Bosh! You won't be so jolly quiet if you do that. However, we will follow your example presently. We sha'n't hear you so much when you are in your own cabin."

The comrades turned in a little before midnight, and Algy sat up with them. He seemed to require a very small amount of sleep, for he was generally up at break of day, especially when he had got one of his schemes in hand.

The following morning Pete's crew commenced to arrive. For reasons of their own they did not come in a body, therefore one of the boats had to be rowed to the shore all through the day to fetch them; but by the afternoon Pete had got a hundred men aboard, and all were well dressed except that some of their clothes were not exactly a perfect fit. However, this neither troubled them nor Pete.

Burg provided food for them, and Pete and the comrades spent the day in going over the vessel's stores, when they discovered that the agent had done his work most thoroughly. What it had cost Pete was a thing the comrades never knew, neither did they care, for they were all possessed of greater wealth than they could ever use, and, after all, Pete's one aim was to benefit the men.

"You see, boys," he exclaimed, when they were in the cabin having dinner, "de great ting is to elevate dose men, and I should say dat it would not be a very difficult matter. Dey appear to be nice, amiable sort ob men."

"Charming!" answered Jack. "They have not done any work yet."

"Nunno! Dey will be better when I start dem on work."

"Do you really think so?"

"Suttinly! A man is neber as happy as when he is working, and——"

"See here, mate!" exclaimed one of the crew, entering the cabin with his hat on, and a clay pipe stuck between his teeth. "I want the boat for a bit, 'cos me and a few of my mates is going ashore."

"Well, I dunno dat dere's any objection to dat, old hoss. You can take dat boat."

"We shall want some of you to row us, 'cos there ain't any of us as understands boats."

"In dat case you had better go and talk to it for half an hour or so, and see if you can understand it a little after dat, 'cos if you tink I'm going to get up in de middle ob my dinner and row you about de Riber Thames, you'm sort ob mistaken."

"Well, we will see if we can make shift to get her ashore. There's a dozen of us going, and we would like our fust week's pay in advance."

"De rules ob dis vessel are dat no money is to be paid in advance."

"We ain't got any money."

"You won't need it, 'cos you get all your food."

"See you here! There's a hundred of us aboard."

"Dat's de correct number. I ordered a hundred suits ob clothes, so dat I know de number ob you; besides, I counted you as you came aboard."

"We ain't a lot of sheep."

"Nunno! A sheep is worf 'bout free or four pounds, and I wouldn't say dat dere is one amongst you dat is worf as much as dat."

"If you think as you are going to make slaves of us you are mistook."

"What's your name, old hoss?"

"Coggin."

"Bery well, Coggin, you ain't going to hab a penny piece in advance, and if you don't like dat arrangement you can go ashore and stay dere. If you tink you'm coming aboard dis vessel to do what you like, den you are mistaken. You say dere's a hundred aboard dis vessel, and you mean dat for a threat. Well, send de hundred forward, and I'll talk to dem in a proper manner. Clear!"

"See you here——"

"Go!"

"Sha'n't!"

Coggin was a big man, and his appearance was not prepossessing. Pete rose, and as he stepped towards his unruly protege, Coggin struck him in the chest; then Pete picked him up, shook him till his teeth rattled, and flung him into the companion-way.

"Send de oders in a heap, old hoss," said Pete. "I sha'n't hab time to tackle dem categorically. I'll just take de ninety-nine togeder, and it won't take me 'bove ten minutes to tackle dem. Oh, don't groan like dat! You ain't hurt yourself."

"All right, mate!" growled Coggin, struggling to his feet. "I ain't saying much, but I'll do a tidy old lot afore I've finished."

"Nunno! I sha'n't let you do too much. You hab four hours on, and den four hours off. I shall just let you do a fair amount ob work, and de oder part ob de time you can rest. Buzz off, and send any ob dose oders who feel like telling me what I am going to do, and what dey are going to do. You see, when you'm dealing wid a hundred men ob your description you hab to take de upper hand wid dem. All de same, I sha'n't hurt you anything to speak ob. Buzz off!"

"I reckon there is going to be trouble on this vessel," observed Sam, as Coggin strode away, muttering fiercely. "You see, Pete, those rascals know perfectly well that we have plenty of money, and they may think that it would be worth their while to rob us at the first favourable opportunity."

"May be worf deir while," answered Pete. "But, you see, dey hab got to do it. Now, I see a great difficulty in de way ob dat, 'cos you don't 'spect men ob dat description to be possessed ob such a mighty lot ob courage. Still, we will hab de matter out wid dem directly we go on deck."

Jack and Sam felt a little uneasy as regarded the consequences of that voyage. But Pete and Algy were quite at their ease, because Pete underrated the capabilities of the men in the direction of desperate deeds, while Algy sincerely hoped that there would be a row.

Immediately they went on deck the men surrounded them, and their attitude was very threatening. Coggin was the one deputed to speak for the rest, although it almost seemed as though someone else could have done it better.

"Now, see you here," he cried, stepping up to Pete in a very bold manner, "we ain't going to stand none of your nonsense! We are men. Understand that!"

"Quite right, Coggin," answered Pete calmly. "I knew dat before you came aboard. Go on wid what you want to say, and don't waste your time telling me what I already know."

"We ain't going to be browbeat!"

"I know dat also, 'cos dere ain't any one here who wants to do it."

"We are going to have our money."

"Noder ting I know, 'cos I'm going to pay it after you hab done de work."

"We are going to have it now."

"Ah, now we are getting to de tings dat I don't know. My impression is dat you ain't going to hab it till de week is up; den you will get it right enough."

"We want it now."

"Dat's one ob de knowable tings. I knew all along dat you wanted de money now. At de same time, I don't know dat you are going to get it."

"How are we to tell you will pay us? We didn't have no references with you."

"Dat's one ob de tings you are going to chance, old hosses! You see, I didn't hab any references wid you eider, and if I was to pay you de money dat you ain't earned, how would I be able to know dat you would eber earn it?"

"If you don't pay us we will go straight ashore!"

"No, we won't!" exclaimed a small man, stepping forward. "I don't see what you want to go ashore for now, mates, except it is to get drink, and you are a sight better without that. I'm not going ashore!"

"Maybe you've got good reasons for not going ashore, Term," sneered Coggin.

"Most likely, and so have you. If I told you I was afraid of the police it's only what you could tell me, if you wasn't afraid to."

"You are a liar!"

"Well, I ain't denying that, 'cos it's correct. At the same time, if you ain't wanted by the police now it wouldn't be the first time that you have been wanted—and caught, too—and served time! You have a perfect right to go ashore if you want to. I only tell you that I'm not coming."

"Why not?"

"One reason is because I've got no money, and I'm thundering certain Pete isn't such a fool as to give it to me before I've done something by way of earning it. I ain't going to do much—at the same time, I'm going to keep to my bargain, and do a bit! I don't expect any man to give me money till I've earned it."

"Then what the thunder do you rob people for?"

"I'd do it to get money, I expect."

"Well, do you earn that?"

"No; and they wouldn't give it to me. I take it, and that makes all the difference in the world."

"What's to prevent us taking our just dues from Pete, then?"

"I'd say he would be one of them, and his friends two others. Then I would go on his side, 'cos I want to sail, and it stands to reason that we couldn't sail if you all went ashore. Neither could we sail if you took Pete's life, 'cos some of us would have to stop to give hanging evidence agin you."

"You'd best be careful how you talk to me, you little brute!"

"Oh, I ain't at all frightened of you. If you was to attack me there would be a burial at sea. But I'd help sink you! I'd do the thing decent!"

"Now den, Coggin," exclaimed Pete, stepping in front of the fellow, "de only fighting dat is allowed aboard de Shark is wid me, 'cos I know exactly how hard to hit widout hurting a man. If you want to fight, just you start on me, and you can get one or two ob dose orders to help you; in fact, you can hab de whole lot if you like, 'cos I ain't particular to a man or so."

"I don't need no one to help me. Take that, you silly brute!"

Pete guarded the blow, and, countering on his chest, sent him to the deck.

Pete had struck fairly hard, as he knew it was necessary to quell the man, and quite a minute elapsed before Coggin recovered his wind—even then he only sat up, gazing around at the astonished men. For the most part they were not of a fighting disposition, and there was not one of them who would have stood up to Pete, after he had delivered a blow like that.

"It's all right, Pete!" exclaimed Algy. "You have settled him, and he ought to be thankful that you did not hit him with your full strength, else you would have knocked him into the middle of next month. If I were you I wouldn't allow any of them to go ashore, because it's ten to one if they come back again."

"Well, Algy," answered Pete, "I dunno dat dat would be much ob a loss. You see, I could do wid fifty men just as well as a hundred. My object is to do dem good against deir wills, 'cos I'm going to teach dem to grow tomatoes, and—and geraniums. Dey are useful tings, you know. Ladies can wear dem in deir hats."

"What, tomatoes?"

"Golly! No! How do you suppose a lady is going to wear a bunch ob ripe tomatoes in her hat. Geraniums."

"I never saw a lady with geraniums in her hat, yet," said Algy. "However, I expect you know more about them than I do, so I won't argue the point."

"Bery well, we will consider dat I am right, and dat de oders are wrong. Now, if dese men want to go ashore dey can, and if dey want to stay dere, de same remarks apply. Dey can please demselves till de vessel sails, and after dat dey will hab to please me."

"Bosh! They will never do that, you can bet!"

"Dey won't be able to please demselves, eider. Now, look here, boys, we will all go ashore to-morrow morning, 'cos I hab got to settle matters wid de agent, and den we will sail away, and Jack, as skipper ob de craft, shall sail under sealed orders, and gib us a surprise when we reach our destination. I hab de idea dat dere will be a great weight taken off de minds ob some ob our crew when we are at sea, where dere ain't de slightest chance ob de police bodering us."

Jack and Sam thought it would be a rather risky thing to leave that precious crew aboard by themselves, but they did not trouble much about the matter, and agreed to Pete's arrangement.

Directly after breakfast the following morning the three comrades and Algy went ashore, and they took Rory with them.

CHAPTER 7.

Captured!

COGGIN tried to get the men to mutiny as soon as the comrades had left the vessel; but there were a good many of the number who were particularly anxious to get away from the country that they had made too hot to hold them, and these would not listen to Coggin, who at that time was clear of any charge.

They were still discussing the matter when a boat put off towards the vessel, and the men watched it with considerable anxiety.

"Blest if it ain't Groog, our precious landlord!" exclaimed Coggin. "Haw, haw, haw! He's come for his rent. You leave me to deal with him. I don't know how many of you chaps are his tenants, but I'll act for the lot, and, mind you this, he's never shown us mercy. It was pay, or go! There was never no waiting with him."

"Mind, mate!" exclaimed Torm. "He will be armed. I owe him a bit of rent."

"We'll pay him," declared Coggin. "I'll show you a bit of fun. You leave him to me. And, see here, when I get him down below, one of you chaps jest tell the boatman to row ashore."

Groog was in a towering passion when he came aboard. He had always been accustomed to bully his unfortunate tenants, and now Pete had taken a fearful lot of them, leaving him with empty rooms. Needless to say, not one of them had offered to pay the rent that was owing, while all of them who had any furniture worth clearing had cleared it out, and disposed of it.

"You utter scoundrels!" cried Groog. "How dare you bolt like this? But you sha'n't go! I'll have you all arrested for fraudulently removing your furniture when the rent was owing."

"Well, that's a good one, sir!" exclaimed Coggin. "You got Pete's letter asking you to come aboard, and saying as how he would pay every penny as was owing, and compensate you for all damages, and pay you a fortnit's rent instead of notice, 'cos he wanted us to man his boat."

"No such thing! I never received a letter from him."

"Why, I posted it myself. You saw me post it, Torm?"

"That's a fact; but I told you that you was running it fine, Coggin. The post-office clock was jest gorn nine, and that's the time the post goes out."

"Still, Mr. Groog would have got it by the second post."

"I did not wait for the second post. I only learnt this morning that you had all absconded."

"See here, sir, you are a gent, and know the law; but I can't have my character took away like that."

"You never had a character worth taking."

"Pete is a honest man, and he's going to see you righted. He said so hisself, and, mind you, he ain't a man as will go from his word."

"Is he aboard now?"

"Yus! He's in his cabin, expecting you. See here, you needn't mention that I was late posting, else it might annoy him, 'cos he was most partic'lar you should get the letter in time. Would you like to see him?"

"Certainly!"

"Then step this way, sir! You need have no fear that he won't see you righted."

They went below, and a good many of the grinning men followed.

Coggin opened the cabin door, and pushed Groog in; then the others crowded in the doorway.

"Now, see here, Coggin!" exclaimed Torm. "You have got to treat him gentle and joodicious."

"I'll treat him joodicious enough, mate, and I'll also treat him gentle, if he obeys my orders. It's this way, Groog, you are like the rest of the slum landlords, and grind down poor men and women. There's none of us got wives and children, but we have got our feelings, and we are thundering sorry for them as has wives and children. Now, you collect your own rents, don't you? Very well, it stands to reason that it's our dooty to them as has wives and children to help 'em all we can, and it stands to reason that if we stop you collecting your rents that will be helping them a bit. Then it's our dooty to help the poor lonely chaps as ain't got no wives and children—and that's us! Well, the best way as we know on to help us is to take all the money you have robbed us of—leastwise, all of it you have got in your possession now, and we will let you off the rest. If that ain't honest, strike me silly!"

"You are the honestest chap as ever I met," declared Torm. "If any

one doubts your honesty all he's got to do is to look at your face, and he won't doubt it any longer."

"Well, that's neither here nor there. We are dealing with Groog's honour."

"You won't find none of that."

"Where is this man Pete, who promised to pay me?" demanded Groog, looking startled.

"He ain't aboard this vessel, mate," said Coggin. "Now, suppose you refund all the money you have robbed hard-working, honest men of!"

"Take care, fellow. I am armed, and——"

"Oh, you are, are you? Well, I'll take the liberty of holding you like this while some of these gentlemen disarm you. Don't you see, we can argue the matter more friendly-like if you are not armed."

The unfortunate man was robbed of every penny and every valuable in his possession, and although he shouted for help no one took the slightest heed of his cries. He had a revolver in his possession, but that was sent through one of the port-holes.

"There you are!" exclaimed Coggin, releasing him. "Now we can discuss our business more comfortable. You see, we gentlemen have come to the conclusion that you have been charging us too much rent. Now, that's criminal, and you will have to be punished for it."

"You cannot possibly get away in this vessel," cried Groog. "I shall have it stopped, and you will all be arrested."

"Well, that might be possible," said Coggin; "because there's a different law for the rich to what there is for the poor. But don't you see, Groog, we ain't going to let you go ashore. You are going to sail with us to the other side of the world, and that's where we shall leave you. It's a small punishment for having robbed poor chaps like us, who strive to get their living by honest, hard work. We are going to stow you away somewhere where you won't be heard or seen, and then when we are the other side of the world we shall bring you up."

"What is he to do for food?" inquired Torm.

"He will have to go without till we get to the other side of the world. I don't know how far it is, but it ain't likely to take very long, and he's had such a lot of food in his time, out of our honest, hard-earnt money, that it won't do him any harm to go without for a bit. We will shove him in the hold, 'cos no one is likely to go there till we are well out at sea, and I'm certain that Pete won't put back then—in fact, we won't let him. You come along of us, Groog, and we'll look after you, and see that you don't do us any harm."

"You desperate criminals!" cried Groog. "You dare not act in this manner!"

"There's no danger about the matter," declared Coggin. "Pete is disgusted with you for grinding us poor, honest fellows down like you have done, and the chances are he will laugh when he finds out that you are aboard; but, as I tell you, he won't find that out until we are well out at sea."

"You dare not execute your threat."

"Well, that's where you don't look at the thing in a proper light," declared Coggin. "We have our duty to perform to society. Very well, men of our honour are going to perform it. You haven't got the right to grind poor people down, and we've got the right to stop that. That being so, we shall do our duty, however great the risk is. And when you come to consider the matter judicially you will plainly see that we run a lot more risk letting you loose than keeping you a prisoner, because the first thing

you would do would be to go for the police, and bring them here. Now the police don't like us, and when a policeman don't like you there's no telling what he will do. I've known a policeman hit a poor fellow over the head jest because he mistook another house for his own, and thought the constable as came after him was a burglar, so he started firing at him. He was a friend of mine, and as innocent as I am, but they put him under lock and key for five long years, poor chap; and all because he mistook a policeman for a burglar. Well, that being so, we are not going to give you the chance of bringing the police down on more innocent men, because we don't want to be hit over the head nor get five long years. You come with me, and I'll hide you where you won't be seen."

"Listen to me! I shall not bring the police down on you if——"

"I know you won't, mate, because we are not going to give you the chance. You are coming across the world with us. We are going to the wilds of Africa, or some of those places, and you shall come along with us."

"You must be mad! I have business matters to attend to, and——"

"Yes, we know all about that. You have got your rents to collect, and you won't be able to collect them for months and months to come. Well, that will be of benefit to the poor people, who will be able to live rent free. You have had enough rent out of them to go on with, and you can bot you won't get any more for a long time to come."

"Talk sensibly, Coggin!" exclaimed Groog, looking really frightened. He knew that he had desperate characters to deal with, but scarcely believed that they would dare to go to such lengths as this man threatened. "I have no intention of harming you. You need be in no fear——"

"I'm not—not in the least. One reason is, that I've got nothing to fear, and the other is, that there is no danger—not as far as I am concerned. There may be a bit of danger for you, because there will probably be rats in the hold, and you might die of hunger before we get to Africa or Asia, or wherever we are gong. All the same, you will be fairly safe as my prisoner, 'cos I shall come to look after you occasional, if I don't forget. You come along with me, and jest you help me bring him, Torm."

Groog was in a state of abject terror now. Pete had picked his crew indiscriminately, and there were some desperate criminals amongst them. The terrified man knew this, nor did he feel at all sure they would not take his life. He pleaded earnestly, and offered them a large sum of money to release him; but this offer had not the slightest effect on them, because they knew it would never be fulfilled.

"Look here, mate," said Torm, "there's a bit of a cabin in front of the forecastle, where old bits of rope and sail is stowed. Now, his howlings wouldn't be heard there, and he will be nice and handy for us to feed him."

"That ain't a bad idea," said Coggin. "Let's fetch him up, and if he starts howling I'll flog him fust, and gag him second. We shall soon see how he shapes."

Finding entreaty was in vain, Groog commenced to try force, but he was quite powerless, and he was forced into a stuffy and black cabin, which could only be entered through the forecastle.

Coggin bolted the door, and Groog commenced to bang at it and howl for help; then Coggin went in with a rope's end, and the slum landlord had a fearfully hard time of it.

"If that don't stop his noise, I'll gag him!" declared Coggin. "You see, we daren't let him loose now, and I always said as I would have vengeance on him."

"Taking him with us will about ruin him," said Torm. "Still, I don't

care. He sold me up once. But, see here, mates. You have got to keep your eyes on that chap Burg. I mean the cook. He's well in with Pete, and might tell about Groog, if he knew."

"But he don't know," answered Coggin. "Directly he heard someone was coming aboard, he bolted away, and hid like some rat."

"That's because he's wanted," answered Torm.

"Do you know what he's wanted for, mate?" inquired one of the others.

"Well, it's jest as serious as it can be," answered Torm. "I don't rightly know the facts of the case, only I know he's wanted, and that he's in deadly terror of being caught. He's never served time, and that makes him a bit timid. That chap wants a bit more attention. Here, you let me deal with him this time, 'cos you are too soft. When you are flogging a hound, you should do it thorough."

The unfortunate man was soon brought into a state of complete subjection. Torm was a brutal rascal, and he remained in the fore-castle to listen. Each time the prisoner made the slightest sound Torm went in and struck him, with the result that when Pete and his comrades came aboard the prisoner was perfectly silent, though it is scarcely likely that his loudest shouts would have been heard by the comrades, unless they happened to be near the spot.

Pete had made arrangements with the skipper of a tug to tow them down the river, and that evening they got under way, and when day dawned the Shark was sailing southwards before a gentle breeze.

It was a lucky thing that the weather remained fine, for Burg was the only one aboard who had had any experience of the sea, and he never once came on deck, while each time one of the comrades went down he appeared to be in a state of great dread.

Algy was delighted with the voyage, and got the comrades to teach him as much as possible. The questions he asked were innumerable, but he was a very quick learner, and when once he had grasped a thing he never forgot it.

In the Channel the wind freshened, but as it was in their favour they made excellent progress. Pete made his crew work as well as he could, but Jack and Sam came to the conclusion that there would be a considerable amount of trouble when they encountered the first storm.

All went well, however, until they lost sight of land, and were sailing southward in the Atlantic.

CHAPTER 8.

A Little False Evidence.

THE Shark was becalmed, and drifting slowly southwards with the tide. Her course had been left entirely to Jack, and the comrades had, practically, navigated her into the tropical seas; for Pete soon discovered that his crew were about as hopeless as men well could be. They did not like work, never having been accustomed to it, and he found it extremely difficult to make them perform a single duty.

"We hab been mighty lucky wid de weader, boys," observed Pete, one night, as they were seated on the deck, although there was absolutely nothing to do as they waited for the wind.

"But storms will come, Pete," said Jack. "The glass has fallen rapidly, and we are in for wind before the morning, if I'm not much mistaken."

"Well, dat's just what we want, Jack. "We can't possibly sail widout wind."

"That's true enough; but my impression is that we are going to get more wind than we shall care for. Hark! What is that?"

It was a strange, wailing sound, and it was followed by a noise as though there were a free-fight in the fore-castle.

"I tink dey are habing a heated argument," observed Pete. "Dose men ain't reforming wid de celerity dat I would like to see. Still, p'r'aps dey will get better when we set dem to work on de shore."

"Don't you believe it, Pete!" exclaimed Algy. "You will find the whole lot of them past reformation, with, perhaps, one exception, and that is Burg."

"Dunno! Seems to me dat man has got more cause to be frightened ob de police dan all de oders put togeder."

"That's right; but I really believe he is trying to reform now. He won't speak of his crime, but— Hallo! Here's a row on!"

It was Groog rushing aft, followed by a regular gang, and Torm, armed with a rope's-end, was using it with a freedom that caused the slum landlord to utter yells at almost every step.

"Golly!" exclaimed Pete, as Groog dashed aft. "Why, it's de slum landlord. Now, I wonder how he got aboard dis vessel?"

"He's a wicked stowaway!" declared Coggin. "We have jest discovered him a-wolfing our hard-earned food. What right has he to come aboard our vessel?"

"Demons!" howled Groog, actually showing his teeth as he turned on his tormentors. "I'll have you hanged for this infamous treatment. The fiends have nearly killed me!"

"But how did you get aboard dis vessel, old hoss?" inquired Pete.

"They took me prisoner. They have robbed me—and ruined me! All my business is at a standstill. I have most important matters to attend to. Oh, this villainy shall be severely punished!"

"Did you take de man prisoner, Coggin?" inquired Pete.

"Well, that's a good one!" exclaimed Coggin, looking as virtuous as he could. "He's a sinful story-teller. It wouldn't be lawful to take a man prisoner, and I've never done an unlawful act in my life."

"I dunno dat I'm going to accept dat evidence. What I want to know is, did you take him prisoner?"

"Not me! What should I want him for?"

"They have robbed me—and ruined me! My business is—"

"Well, dat ain't de question. You see, old hoss, I ain't responsible for de actions ob dose men."

"They are your servants, and—"

"Eh?"

"As their employer, you are answerable for your servants' actions. I shall make a claim on you for thousands of pounds. My loss is enormous! I'll send you all to prison!"

"Is he legally right, Jack?"

"Well, you pay the men, don't you?" said Jack, looking serious; "therefore, I suppose they are your servants."

"But I ain't going to be responsible for deir actions," said Pete.

"You must be," declared Groog. "It is the law!"

"Den I tell you what it is, old hoss," said Pete. "I'm going to bring in a short Act of Parliament to alter dat law, 'cos I refuse to be answerable for de actions ob dis little lot. You see, a few ob dem might commit

murder, and den I should hab to be hung two-free times ober, and I wouldn't like a ting like dat."

"I don't care. You——"

"But I do care!" growled Pete. "I don't mind paying de men deir lawful wages, but I strongly object to being made answerable for all deir actions. Now, dis case wants treating judicially; and, in order to do that, I must be convinced dat you didn't come aboard dis vessel ob your own free will."

"They kept me prisoner, I tell you. I have been treated in the most shameful manner all the time! I have been nearly killed!"

"Well, you ought to be thankful dat you ain't been quite killed. How did dey get you aboard dis vessel widout my knowledge?"

"I learnt that they were aboard, and came to stop them sailing."

"Den you came aboard ob your own free will?"

"I came to——"

"Nebber mind what you came to do, 'cos I can't deal wid dat. You see, dat ain't de question before de court. What I want to get at is weder you came aboard ob your own free will?"

"Of course I did. I came to see you."

"Bery well, den you hab succeeded, and I gib you free permission to look at me as long as you like."

"You must take me back to England immediately, and then I shall punish these miscreants!"

"Eh?"

"I say you must take me back to England immediately! How long will it take to get there?"

"Well, dat all depends which way I go, old hoss. If I sail due north, and den go east, it might take 'bout a month."

"Preposterous! I will not be absent a month. It is ruin, I tell you! How long will it take if you go the other way?"

"Well, dat all depends on circumstances, 'cos we are going to found a colony, and dat might take 'bout a year. Now, you see, it's dis way. I hab been put to some little expense ober dis scheme——"

"Little!" exclaimed Algy.

"I wish you wouldn't interrupt me, Algy. When I say some little expense, ob course I mean——"

"Some large expense?" suggested Algy.

"How do you suppose I'm going to train you, when you keep interrupting me like dat, Algy? Den, again, I want to set Groog's mind at rest, and sort ob please him."

"Jingle-coppers at him!" suggested Algy. "That would be the best way to please him. The rattle of money would have the same effect on him as would a rattle to a baby. He loves the chink of coin!"

"Well, I tink you are 'bout right dere. But it's dis way, Groog. According to your own showing, you came aboard dis vessel ob your own accord, and now you will hab to stay on it till we return again. We can't sort ob expedite our expedition in order to suit your requirements. You must adapt yourself to circumstances. But I tell you what I'll do for you, Groog. Are you a married man?"

"No, I'm not; and——"

"Well, dat's all right. No married man is eligible. But I will take you into my employment at two pounds a week. De work is light, and——"

"You insolent rascal! How dare you insult me in this manner?"

"Golly! What's de man talking about? I ain't insulting you! If you don't want to take de situation you need not. At de same time, I tink you

ought to do some sort ob work for your board and lodging. You see, de chances are you will wOLF a considerable amount. I dunno how you hab been libing all dis time, if Coggin is speaking de troof."

"It's the solemnest truth you ever set eyes on," declared the veracious Coggin.

"After you with the soap, dear!" sang Algy.

"Who wants soap?" snarled Coggin, who did not like Algy.

"You do, my man," retorted Algy.

"If I had the handling of you, I'd soon alter your ways, my young shaver! I can prove as we never knew Groog was aboard until this very moment, when he nearly frightened us out of our lives by rushing into the fore-castle."

"I tink I would like a little proof," observed Pete.

"Torm!" cried Coggin. "Step forward and tell the truth—the whole truth and nothing but the truth! Did I know Groog was aboard until this moment? Answer without fear or favour!"

"You did not," said Torm.

"Did anyone know it?"

"Only one."

"There wasn't one."

"Yes, there was."

"Who was he?"

"Groog hisself. He must have known it, though, mind, I ain't speaking for my own part. I assume he knew it."

"Well, there's no doubt about that. But you say no one else knew it?"

"They did not."

"Why, you lying rascals!" gasped Groog. "Did you not force me into that black hole, and—"

"We did not," said Torm.

"Do you mean to say you did not strike me?"

"We did not."

"Why, I never heard such abominable falsehoods in all my life!" cried Groog. "These men declared to me that you had written to me asking me to come there, and saying that you would pay all the rent the scoundrels owe!"

"Did we say that?" inquired Coggin.

"We did not," answered Torm. "We wouldn't think of telling such a falsehood!"

"Do you mean to say you never struck me, you utter villain?" howled Groog.

"Me strike you!" exclaimed Torm. "Why, I wouldn't dare do such a thing! You surely don't suppose that I would quarrel with my landlord, especially as I owe him a trifle in the way of rent?"

"I insist on being taken back at once!" cried Groog, giving the case up as hopeless.

"Well, we ain't got any wind, so you can't be taken back at once," answered Pete. "Den, again, I ain't going back at once. I'm going to found de colony first, and start dese men going. Dat's bound to take some time, 'cos we ain't fixed on de spot yet. Den, again, if this dead calm lasts for anoder few weeks, we shall hab to stay where we are. Nunno, Groog! You hab started on dis voyage, and you will hab to continue it!"

"You mean to say that you will take me to a foreign country against my will?"

"Dat ain't exactly de point. I don't want you. I would much rader be widout you; but as you hab come against my will, it stands to reason

you must stay. I ain't going to sail dis vessel back to England to please you. Consider de cost ob de ting. Dese men ain't self-supporting yet—"

"You will have to wait for the geraniums to grow for that," said Algy.
 "Do be quiet, Algy. You spoil de train ob my thoughts. Now, Groog, it ain't any good your arguing de matter furdur, 'cos you will hab to come dis voyage wid us, and you will hab to remain at de colony for a week, until de tomatoes are in full flower, and we can dig dem; den—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Algy. "He thinks tomatoes grow beneath the ground like potatoes. Besides, I don't believe they will fruit in a week. No, Pete, you will have to wait a bit longer for them than that; and if you wait till they bring in a profit, Groog will be buried in the wilds of Africa—unless we go to Asia, in which case he will be buried there."

"You know nuffin' 'bout de matter, Algy," declared Pete.

"How much do you know?"

"A good lot. I hab read some ob de destructions on de penny packets ob seed. Do you know much about flowers? Do hold your row, Groog! Can't you see dat I'm seeking information 'bout flowers, and—and geraniums?"

"Tomatoes aren't flowers," said Algy.

"Do you know anyting 'bout dem, Algy?"

"Flowers? Yes! I watered my uncle's orchids once—and killed the little lot!"

"Den you don't touch my tomatoes. I ain't habing dem killed. I'd rader you watered Groog."

"See here, mate," exclaimed Torm, "you leave Groog to me, and I'll see that he doesn't trouble you! I know his playful ways, because I was once his tenant. He's methodical. He used to call every Monday regular for his rent."

"Den I 'spect he went away widout it," said Pete. "But de man is going to be a sort ob free agent under confinement aboard dis vessel. He can please himself 'bout what he wants to do, and he can hab all de food he requires; but I ain't putting back just to oblige him. 'Nuff said! Buzz off, old hoss, else I'll order my crew to take you away, and I don't 'spect you will like dat!"

Groog appeared to realise that his case was hopeless, and went below, muttering fiercely, and declaring that he would be ruined.

Torm followed him; and as Pete noticed the action, he told Algy to go below to make sure that there was no bullying going on.

"You see, dey hab punished de man more dan enough, keeping him a prisoner all dis time, Algy, and taking him away from his peaceful home. All de same, it's quite impossible for us to take him back now. He will hab to wait till we all return."

"All right!" exclaimed Algy. "I'll see what that fellow is up to."

"And see here, Algy, don't you let him know dat you are watching him, else he may take some sort ob vengeance on you."

"Why, you don't think that I'm afraid of the brute, Pete?"

"Now, just you do what I order you, my lad, and don't you let it occur again, else I shall be most seriously vexed."

"I reckon, as far as obeying your orders, he had never let it occur at all," said Sam.

"Bosh!" exclaimed Algy, hurrying below.

He found Groog alone in the comrades' cabin, and he passed along the

companion-way towards the galley, which was aft; then he heard Torm's voice, but he only caught a few words:

"... if you don't I'll split, and Pete would maroon you on the nearest island if he knew your secret. I tell you straight, Burg——"

"Do you really!" exclaimed Algy, entering the galley, where he found Burg and Torm in earnest conversation.

"So you've been listening to my conversation, you little demon!" cried Torm fiercely.

"I haven't been listening at all, you hulking great ruffian!" retorted Algy. "I happened to overhear a few of your words—just sufficient to convince me that you are a brutal blackmailer! And I tell you this—Pete would be far more likely to turn on you; because he is a brave and honourable man, and anything like blackmailing would assuredly infuriate him. Take my advice, Burg, and don't you allow the brute to get the upper hand with you! If I were in your place, whatever I had done, I'd jolly well pull off my coat, and I'd go for that brute beast! I'd thrash him—or he should kill me!"

"You know nothing about the matter, you little idiot!" retorted Torm. "I've been a true friend to Burg——"

"I'm jolly well certain that Pete would never believe a fellow who could lie like that," interposed Algy. "Do you call it being a true friend to blackmail another man?"

"I was making arrangements with him—for him to pay me some money he owes me!"

"That's not a fact, you scamp! You were threatening him. No doubt your object was to make him hand you his wages. Well, I'll stop your little game!"

"You will stop me?"

"That is exactly what I said, and you will soon discover that it is exactly what I will do."

"Haw, haw! You will, will you? I'd like to know how!"

"Very well. Pete is coming down. Just you come into his cabin, and I'll show you. Pete is training me, so it stands to reason he's bound to do what I ask him. You come too, Burg; and I tell you plainly that you are jolly soft to allow that blackleg to blackmail you. However, seeing that you do not dare to stop him, I'll stop him for you!"

"You are not doing me any service," muttered Burg.

"I never said I wanted to do you any service," answered Algy. "But I know this. The man who allows another to blackmail him is a fool! He is a fool, whatever he has done, because his life wouldn't be worth living under the circumstances. Are you coming, Torm?"

"No, I ain't. And if I have any more of your impertinence, I'll wring your neck!"

"Do you think you will frighten me, you scamp?" exclaimed Algy. "I don't know how long we shall be aboard this vessel, nor for how long you and I will be together; but for every hour of that time you can try to scare me with your bluster, and you won't succeed, you low-down hound!"

"You little dog!" cried Torm, striding towards him.

But Burg stepped between them.

"Stand back, there!" he cried. "You sha'n't touch that lad!"

"What's it got to do with you?"

"This! He gave me food when I was starving. It was through him that I got aboard this vessel."

"Do you know what I could do with you?"

"You can blackmail me how you like, and I would pay much to keep my secret, but I'll stand by that lad while life lasts!"

"Then you are a senseless fool, Burg!"

"That may be, and my past life proves it; but I'm not such a scoundrel as to forget what that lad has done for me. I never shall forget it, and if I ever can repay him, one day I will. But listen to me, Torm; there's no need for you and me to quarrel. I agree to your terms."

"Which means that you will hand him over the best part—or perhaps all—of your wages," said Algy.

"I have no need for money."

"Then neither has he. You would allow the brute to blackmail you."

"Put it which way you like. What does it matter? I have lost all interest in life, and do not care."

"All right!" exclaimed Algy. "I have got something to say about this matter, and you may as well hear it, Torm. You shall not take a penny from him."

"It's got nothing to do with you, and you can't stop it."

"Can't I? Well, you will see if you come this way," retorted Algy, proceeding towards Pete's cabin, while the other two followed, Burg imploring Algy not to interfere.

CHAPTER 9.

Trouble Aboard the Shark.

PETE had not come down, and he was examining the barometer, which had fallen with a rapidity that betokened a storm.

"I tink we are in for it, Algy!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, well, that does not matter! I——"

"Eh?"

"Bother the storm! Look here, Pete! This fellow Torm happens to have learnt Burg's secret somehow, and is blackmailing him."

"Oh, I ain't going to allow dat."

"So I thought. Well, the only way to stop it is to stop Burg's money, and hand it to him in a lump at the end of the voyage, after we have got rid of Torm. We could land them in different countries, and Burg would have a nice little bit to go on with."

"Why, dat ain't at all a bad idea," answered Pete. "You see, Torm, Burg hasn't got any choice in de matter, and if you choose to tell his secret I sha'n't believe a word you say. His past life has nuffin' to do wid me."

"Suppose I tell you that he is a murderer?"

"Shouldn't believe a ting like dat. You look a lot more like one dan he does. Nunno! I'm no more habing his past life raked up dan yours; and I rader 'spect we would find a few black cinders in your little life. Still, we ain't dealing wid tings like dat. De object ob dis voyage was dat all you men might turn ober new leaves, and cancel de old ones. I ain't got anything to do wid your past lives, but only your future ones, and if you don't behave to my liking I shall try de efficacy ob flogging."

"I'd like to see you lay a hand on me!" snarled Torm.

"Well, I won't promise you dat you shall see it, old hoss, 'cos it will be at your back; but you can be quite certain dat you will feel it if you don't behave yourself!"

"See you here," cried Torm, "if you was so much as to lay a hand on me I'd knock you senseless!"

"Well, ob course you would be at perfect liberty to try to do dat, my poor old hoss. Weder you would be able to succeed or not is anoder matter, and it is one dat we needn't boder ourselves to discuss, 'cos we are bound

to find de solution to it directly you misbehave yourself, and I commence de flogging. In de meantime, what you had better do is to behave yourself as well as you possibly can, and den you won't hab to receive de flogging."

"I'll behave as I like."

"Well, dat's all right, Torm—so long as it happens to be as I like; but don't you see, old hoss, it stands to reason dat as leader ob dis expedition I am bound to keep de men in order. Well, de only way I can do dat is to punish dem when dey do anyting wrong. I shall hold back your money, as Algy suggests, Burg, but you will hab it in full at de end ob de voyage."

"Suppose I tell you he has killed a man?" said Torm.

"Shouldn't believe you."

"You would be brought in an accessory after the fact."

"Den what about you, old hoss? Ain't you an accessory as well? Nunno, you'm got de wrong man to frighten, Torm. Just you buzz off, and bear in mind dat if I hab any nonsense wid you I shall gib you a sound flogging. Nuff said! And you take my advice, Burg. If dat man knows anyting against you, don't you let him bully you. If he tries any ob his nonsense, go for him, and teach him who's de better man."

The pair left the cabin, and then Pete closed the door.

"We'm in for a tropical storm, Algy. You hab neber seen one, so don't know what it's like; but dere's danger in dem, 'specially when you ain't got a proper crew."

"They are not so dangerous as Torm," answered Algy. "I tell you that fellow glared at you in a manner that convinces me he will have his knife into you if he gets the chance."

"Oh, boder de man! I ain't gibing him de chance. It's rader awkward 'bout Groog, 'cos dere ain't de slightest possibility ob sending de man home, unless we happened to meet a vessel returning."

"Serve the brute right!" exclaimed Algy. "What do you care? Consider the way he treated his wretched tenants."

"It might ruin him, you know, Algy."

"Well, it isn't your fault. You jolly well can't go back, even if you were stupid enough—"

"Eh?"

"Even if you were stupid enough to want to do so. You let him look after himself, and I'll bet he's one of the most-competent of men to do that. It was rather cleverly done, too. I hadn't the slightest idea that he was aboard."

"Well, dat's so. I 'spect he will hab to wait till we return. Do you tink you would like to superintend de growing ob de geraniums?"

"I will if you like, only if they come up it will surprise me. They are about the most hopeless things you could have chosen to grow. But look here, Pete. We don't want to go fooling around growing vegetables, which will never come up, and even if they did you would never be able to sell them. What we want to do is to fight savages and other wild beasts. We want a wild and perilous life in the African forests, where lions roam and—"

"Here, steady dere! You'm going a lot too fast, Algy. You appear to forget dat it is my duty to train you up in de way you should go, and—"

"Well, start training me as a hunter. That's the sort of life that will suit me best. Don't you see, while we are hunting wild beasts I can't get in trouble in hotels, and places like that."

"Seem to hab my doubts 'bout dat being de way your uncle wanted you trained. Still, we will consider de matter later on. Now, you buzz off to bed, 'cos I'm going to get some sleep. Jack says dat we are in for a

might by storm, and I'm inclined to tink he's right, because I tink de same. He's generally right when he tinks de same as dis child."

"You had better get to sleep after that little lot. I'm going to have a talk to Burg. I don't believe that man is the scoundrel Torm would make out. He declares to me that he is innocent of the crime charged against him, only he says that the evidence against him is overwhelming, and he dare not face it."

"Tink it is a serious charge, Algy?"

"You heard what Torm said. I'm afraid that it is one of the most serious charges that can be brought against a man, and you know that that means death. All the same, I don't believe for one moment that he is guilty, and that being so we ought to try to clear his name. The worst of it is that he won't tell me what the charge is, so that it is quite impossible to deal with it."

"We are bound to find dat out if he is arrested."

"Yes. And then, probably, it would be too late. However, I will go and question him a bit."

And Algy made his way towards the galley.

"So you have come, you little demon!" cried Torm, shutting the door, and then Algy saw that the ruffian was there alone. "I guessed you would, and waited for you. Now, what do you mean by setting that beast Pete on me?"

"I've stopped your blackmailing, and there's the end of the matter."

"Is it the end of the matter? You don't know me if you think so. It's only the beginning of it. My vengeance shall be the end of it—and the end of you!"

"What an empty-headed crocodile you must be, Torm, if you think to frighten me with your bluster!" exclaimed Algy, who certainly did not look the slightest bit afraid. "Do you think I fear a low-down scamp like you? If so, you do not know me."

"And what about Burg? Is he such a thundering honest man?"

"How should I know? And what has that got to do with the matter? He is a man, at any rate, and that is more than you are, you miserable blackmailer!"

"You take care, boy!" cried Torm, in a low, fierce voice. "Just you take care, or it will be the worse for you!"

"It will be the worse for you if you threaten me. Open that door, you dog, or I'll send this chunk of lard at your head!"

Algy had got to the opposite side of the galley table, and as he spoke he picked up a large piece of lard which Burg had left there, for he had been in the middle of some cooking, and now over the galley fire a huge cauldron of pea-soup was simmering, getting ready for the men's dinner on the morrow.

Perhaps Torm imagined that Algy would not dare to execute his threat; if so, it was because he did not know him.

"I'll open that door after I have paid you, and not before," snarled the ruffian.

There was a loud smack. Algy had been as good as his word, and his aim was true. The lard caught Torm full in the face, scattering all over it.

Uttering a fierce imprecation, he sprang at the daring lad, who went down in a heap, and stumbling over his prostrate form, dived into the galley stove, while he clutched at the cauldron as he fell, and dragged it over on himself.

It was a lucky thing for him that the soup was not boiling, for about three-parts of it went over him. Even as it was it was most uncomfortably hot, and his howls awoke the echoes.

"Well, you are a silly, careless man!" exclaimed Algy, getting the door open, and holding himself in readiness to flee, for he had an idea that Torm would be far from safe.

"You little démon!" howled Torm. "You have scalded me to death!"

"Bosh! I never touched you; and if you are scalded to death, all I can say is that you are the noisest corpse that I have ever heard. Look what a beastly mess you have made! You will be clammy, too, when that stuff dries. Ha, ha, ha! You won't need pomatum for a day or so."

"I say, you ain't making much noise in dis establishment!" exclaimed Pete, hurrying to the spot. "Why, what's all dis? You ain't got de right to yaffle up de next day's soup in dat fashion, Torm."

"Fury! I'm scalded!"

"Well, what can you expect oderwise when you start wallowing in red-hot soup? I neber came across such a silly man in all my life! You ain't a salamander or a phoenix, dat prefers red-hot tings."

"You stupid vagabond!"

"Now, look here, Torm, dat ain't de way to address your employer. Den again, you hab got to consider dat although I mayn't hab de intellect ob—say a Lord ob de Admiralty or de King ob Kibollyboshoo, still I ain't so stupid as to go and wallow in hot soup, and den complain ob being scalded."

"It is that little demon's doing."

"Oh, it looked just as dough it was your doing. Still, if Algy tought it would look funny to see you wallow in hot soup, you can't blame a boy for habing a little fun. Did you frow de soup at him in your slight—er—playfulness, Algy?"

"Not I. The silly bounder made a dash at me because I flung a chunk of lard in his face."

"Oh, well! Dat makes quite an alteration in de difference. If you had flung de soup saucepan at de man I might hab reprimanded you, and told you it mustn't occur again; but when you come to just frowing a simple pice ob lard at de man's countenance, I don't see dat he's got de right to object at all. You see, Torm, you are employed by me at two pounds a week and your food, and get dem bof. It was perfectly well understood dat you had to work for de food and money, and if Algy wants a little pleasurable excitement by habing cockshies at your countenance wid a bladder ob lard, it stands to reason dat you ought to enter into de fun ob de t'ing, and help him all you can to enjoy de jokes. And wid dese onion remarks—"

"Shucks! Don't you mean sage remarks, Pete?" inquired Algy.

"I believe you are right, Algy. I remembered de word by onions—sage and onions—and I used de onions instead ob de sage."

"I wonder you didn't call them roast-geese remarks while you were about it," observed Algy. "But hold your row, Torm. You are not hurt, and even if you are, you must know that it serves you right, and that it was entirely your own fault. Get Burg to swab you down with a mop, and you will be as right as rain. If I were you, Pete, I would stop de value of those clothes out of his wages. He has no right to spoil good clothes in that reckless manner. Oh, go to bed, you silly brute! What's de sense in talking like that? You appear to be a very violent and stupid man, and if you don't behave yourself as a respectable member of society I shall ask Pete to give you the thrashing he spoke about."

Then Algy followed Pete from the galley, and both of them turned in.

Jack had arranged to take duty that night, and he felt a little anxious, for although he had some of the men on deck, he was under the impression that they would be quite useless in time of peril.

He knew that the vessel was off the west coast of Africa, although how far she had drifted from the shore he was not at all certain.

But concerning this, the threatening storm, or anything else, Pete did not trouble himself. He was sleepy, and at times like that it took a lot to trouble him. In a few minutes he was snoring lustily, and not even when the storm burst forth did it awaken him; indeed, the first he knew of the storm was when Algy shook him violently, and then he found the vessel rolling heavily.

"Here, wake up, you image!" exclaimed Algy. "The storm has come!"

"Den get to bed at once, Algy, and just you wake me when it becomes sort ob serious, but I don't 'spect it will. Sounds like de firing ob guns, and I tought I previously saw de flash ob one ob dem."

"That was lightning, and then you heard the thunder," answered Algy. "You ought to know by the rolling of the vessel that the sea is pretty rough, and the wind is blowing great guns!"

"Well, I'll consider de matter, Algy. You let me know when de storm increases, and I will be considering what is best to be done in de matter."

"Here, you get up. The fact of the matter is, you are lazy."

"Golly! He's de most untrained boy I eber came across. Why, I hab only just gone to sleep."

"Out you come!" cried Algy, seizing him by the ankle, and wrenching violently. "You are a lot too sleepy to argue with. Get up!"

"Hi, Algy! Stop it! I want to get up. Dere's nuffin' I like more dan getting up, unless it's getting to bed. Stop it! You will hab me out of bed!"

"Just what I want," declared Algy, giving the final wrench. And the rolling of the vessel helped him. Pete took the floor with a heavy bump, and the back of his head came in contact with the boards.

"Now, see here, Algy," he growled, sitting up, and rubbing the back of his head with one hand, while he rubbed his eyes with the other one. "Dis must not occur. I'm training you. Oh, it's nuffin' to laugh at! I'm seriously displeased."

"Jolly sorry, Pete! Dunno when I felt so mighty sorry. Yah, yah, yah!"

"Why, de boy is mocking me now. Howeber, if you are so sorry, Algy, don't let it occur again. Now, just you get back to your cabin, and den I will consider de matter ob getting up."

"Bosh! You'll do nothing of the sort. I'm going to see you get up now, and then we are going on deck. It will be jolly there. It's blowing a hurricane, and the thunder is deafening; then almost every sea is bursting over the vessel. It will be downright jolly!"

"Sounds it, too," growled Pete, drawing on his sea-boots, because he knew it would be quite useless to attempt to turn in again. Algy was a most determined lad, once having made up his mind.

They went on deck, and then a surprising scene met their gaze.

CHAPTER 10.

Algy Proves His Valour.

THE lightning was so incessant that, although the night would have been black, the sea was now illumined by a purple flickering light. One flash of lightning came upon the other with such rapidity that it was seldom dark. The thunder never ceased, and, as it died away into a crackling roll, a fresh terrific crash would burst forth.

Then the howl of the wind was simply terrific! Some of the vessel's sails, all of which had been set when the tempest burst upon her, were carried away from the bolts, and her two masts were whipping down in a manner so threatening that it was imperative to shorten sail forthwith.

"We must get some men up!" shouted Jack, who was at the helm.

"Golly! What are you tinkin' about, Jack!" exclaimed Pete. "Dere ain't a man aboard dis vessel who would dare go up dose masts; and, eben if he did, he would come down a lot faster dan he ascended. Nunno! I will attend to de shortening ob sail, and I fancy I can manage it. I see you hab lowered her mizen sail. Her topsails are de worst part 'bout her, but I tink I can manage dem. 'Nuff said!"

Pete sprang up the mainmast, and Sam followed him, while Jack looked on in deep anxiety, for he feared they would not be in time, and that the mast would go by the board, in which case his comrades' deaths must have been certain, because no man could live for many minutes in such a tempestuous sea.

He had little fear that either Sam or Pete would lose their hold, for they were most remarkably active; but, if the mast went, there would be no help for them.

He was running before the tempest, and he took particular care to keep her on that course, so as to keep her sails square set; but, unfortunately, the wind kept changing, and Jack had all his work cut out to keep her before it.

"I'm jolly well going to have a try at the foremast!" declared Algy, darting away; and, although Jack shouted for him to come back, he took no heed of the command, pretending not to hear it.

He shinned up the mast; while Pete shouted to him from the other one to come down, but Algy had an idea that the vessel's life was in danger, and he was determined to do his utmost.

He knew perfectly well that he would not have sufficient strength to take in the sails, but he determined to cut them away. They had spare sails aboard, and it would be far better to lose a few sails than the mast—or, perhaps, the vessel herself.

Her fore-topgallant sail was set, and Algy gained the fore-topgallant yard, and, at that great height, he worked his way along it until he gained the starboard extremity of the fore-topgallant yard, then, clutching at it with all his strength, he drew his knife, and severed the rope that held it.

There was a sound like a pistol-shot as the sail blew out at that corner, while the tempest lashed it to and fro, until it was ripped to shreds.

The yard was lashed to and fro, and Jack held his breath as he gazed at the daring lad, each moment expecting to see him hurled into the sea, or to the deck.

The vessel was rolling so heavily that Algy's peril was really terrible, and it was astounding how the lad could retain his hold!

Jack knew that he should have shortened sail ere the storm burst upon them, but it came with unexpected suddenness, and he had been anxious to catch every breath of wind. Besides this, he knew that his crew would be useless for the purpose of shortening sail, and, therefore, he was prepared to run some risk in order to save labour. But now he blamed himself bitterly for leaving the sails all set.

Algy had imagined that he would have to free the sails from each side of the yards, but he quickly discovered that such was not at all necessary, for, directly one corner was cut adrift, the tempest did the rest; the only thing was that he was in imminent peril of being swept from the yard as it lashed to and fro.

Every now and then he could hear the comrades' shouts above the storm, ordering him to come down; but this he was determined not to do until he had saved that mast, for, judging by the way in which it was lashing to and fro, he really believed that it must be carried away.

Knowing that every moment might make all the difference, Algy now determined on a thing that was utterly foolhardy. He wanted to reach the fore-topsail yard, which was, of course, immediately beneath him. Now, to have done this, he should have worked his way along the topgallant yard, on which he now was, until he reached the mast, and then descended, then worked his way outwards along the lower yard; for the sails could not be handled from the Shark's deck.

But, instead of adopting this course, Algy got back to the mast, and then descended to the topmost crosstrees, then slid down the topsail lifts.

In a calm sea it would have been no easy matter to do this, but in the storm that raged it appeared almost suicidal; and Jack gazed breathlessly until he saw Algy slide down to the extremity of the lower yard, to which the lifts were, of course, made fast.

Now he cut the forecourse adrift, clutching at the yard as it swept round, while the sail was torn to shreds; but the strain on the mast was lessened, and there was no fear of it being carried away. Algy worked his way to the mast, and, descending by the shrouds, approached Jack.

"We've lost our sails, but—"

"That does not matter," interposed Jack. "You have undoubtedly saved the mast; but it was at a risk that I would never have allowed you to take, had Pete taught you anything like obedience."

"He may be all right in training a wild beast, Jack; only he is not firm enough for a boy," retorted Algy. "However, I don't tell him so, because I am having a jolly easy time of it while he's trying to train me."

"All right, you beauty!" exclaimed Jack. "I'll just repeat your remarks, and then, perhaps, you won't have such a jolly easy time of it. You don't know what obedience is."

"You can bet I do; only I don't follow it. Now, look here, Jack; you are a good man, and I'm—well, we will say an indifferent boy; but you jolly well know that if that mast hadn't been freed from the strain without a moment's loss of time, the blessed thing would have gone overboard, and punched holes in the vessel's sides. Probably it would have carried the mainmast with it, and then we would have been a wreck. That means every life aboard would have, most likely, been lost. Now, can you argue that a chap ought not to have taken a bit of risk to stop all that?"

"One of us should have done it."

"Ah, there you go! Why should you risk your lives any more than I—provided always that there was any risk?"

"We needn't discuss that question," said Jack, smiling. "There is not the slightest doubt that there was the gravest risk."

"Then Pete will tell you it is silly to worry about the future; and, if he is right, it stands to reason that it is ten times sillier to grouse over the past. I didn't lose my life, so there's an end of the matter. I say, Sam and Pete are taking in those sails in a more professional style than I did. Still, we have spare sails, and Pete won't mind the cost."

"Certainly not, in a case like this," said Jack. "There is no doubt that you did the right thing, except that you were not justified in running such a terrible risk; or, rather, we were not justified in allowing you to do so."

"Then don't bother yourself about that," retorted Algy, "for you jolly well couldn't stop me. If you had left the helm, the chances are that

Sam and Pete would have come down with a run, and the vessel would certainly have been wrecked."

Sam and Pete did not descend until their work was finished, and now the Shark was running before the wind under almost bare poles. Jack felt confident that the few sails she carried would eventually be swept away, but there was not sufficient strain now to endanger the masts.

"Whateber did you want to let dat boy go up for, Jack?" exclaimed Pete, shouting, so as to make himself heard above the storm.

"I didn't let him go, Pete," answered Jack. "He went of his own accord. I ordered him to come back, but he would not obey."

"Ah, dat's 'cos I wasn't here!" said Pete. "You see, Algy knows dat he takes his orders from me."

"That's so, Pete," said Algy. "I get them all day long. I don't believe that there is any living boy who receives more orders than I do. Still, it is quite right of you to give them; in fact, you are bound to give a lot of orders when you are training a boy. Why don't you keep a book, and write all the orders down, then I can learn them by degrees?"

"I wish you would learn to obey dem by a sudden," growled Pete. "Orders are giben to be obeyed, and not to be played de fool wid. But, see here, Algy, it——"

"It must not occur again. 'Nuff said!" exclaimed Algy, grinning.

"Why, de boy is mocking my customary mode ob punishment!" exclaimed Pete. "Oh, don't laugh, Jack and Sammy! I believe dat boy will turn me grey and bald at de same time."

"I reckon it would puzzle him to do that," said Sam. "But here comes Torm. Ha, ha, ha! He's making a mess of it, too. Look out, Torm! Hold fast, or you will be overboard! Here, don't you dare to use that language here, my man!"

"I'm drenched—bust it!"

"What of that? We were drenched long ago. If you don't want to get wet keep in the cabin until we order you on deck."

"We are sinking!"

"No, you don't, old hoss," said Pete. "Besides, eben if you were, it is just as easy to sink in de cabin as it is on deck. Just you buzz back to de forecassle, and get all de sleep you can, 'cos if dis storm lasts for a day or so, and it looks as dough it would, dere will be plenty ob work for you to do."

"We are ill! Some of the men are nearly dead," said Torm. "It's impossible for us to go on like this any longer."

"Did you eber hear such nonsense!" exclaimed Pete. "Do you suppose we are going to put wheels to de vessel, and run her across country?"

"The sea is too rough, and——"

"Dat's nuffin' to what it will be when de tide turns, and de wind increases, as I 'spect will be de case. I ain't quite positive 'bout de wind, but I'm mighty certain 'bout de tide."

"Well, what are we to do?"

"Grin and bear it, de same as we do."

"You are not ill!"

"Nunno! But you see, we used to be when we first went to sea. De rolling ob de vessel don't affect Algy, and de rest ob us are quite accustomed to it."

"Well, I must have some brandy for the men."

"You want dat brandy for yourself, old hoss," answered Pete. "I foresaw dat you would want it. Now, see here, if you feel like wanting any stimulant, you may go and drink as much pea-soup as you like; but——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Algy. "Pea-soup would be a splendid thing for a seasick man."

"Well, if dey don't like dat dey can hab tea or coffee."

"I think perhaps you might let them have a little brandy, Pete," said Sam.

"Den I ain't going to, Sammy!"

"See you here," cried Torm fiercely. "There's a hundred of us, and there's three of you. Now, we are not standing this nonsense. We are determined to have brandy, even if we start fighting for it. Do you understand that—and what it means to you?"

"M'yes, old hoss. You would chuck us oberboard, so dat dere would be no evidence against you. All de same, I ain't allowing you to hab any brandy."

"I say we will have it!"

"And I say you sha'n't!"

"Those other two would let us have it, and you will have to do the same, else you will have to take the consequences, and I warn you that they will be thundering serious for you."

"Bery well, I'll take all de consequences, 'cos I'm quite determined dat you sha'n't hab a drop ob intoxicants. I know what it means. You would all get drunk to calm your fears, and keep drunk till de danger was ober, and dat may not be for days to come. Nunno! We are taking no spirit, and we are doing all de work, so far. You are enjoying yourselves in de fore-castle—"

"Enjoying ourselves be hanged!"

"Well, if you ain't enjoying yourselves, you had better start doing it straight away. But you will hab to do it on tea and pea-soup. You ain't habing brandy."

"We will be satisfied with a little."

"You will hab to be satisfied wid less dan dat."

"I tell you we will have it!"

"I tell you that you sha'n't!"

"Very well, then we will break into the spirit-room."

"Go and break into it, old hoss, only it will puzzle you to find it, 'cos dere ain't a drop ob spirit aboard dis vessel, and dat's one ob de reasons why I won't let you hab any. See! I took de negative precaution ob not bringing any spirit aboard, and you ain't got de right to complain, 'cos dat was one ob de stipulations dat I made when I engaged you. I told you plainly dat you could hab as much food as you liked, but no intoxicants. Nunno! Dis is a teetotal vessel, and you will hab to make de best ob it, 'cos I was mighty certain dat if I brought spirits aboard you would make de worst ob it. Buzz off! I'm tired ob you! And just you remember dis—you men ain't any good at navigating a vessel, but it ain't at all unlikely when de sea washes off her coat ob paint she will start leaking, and den it will be all hands at de pumps. It's work dat you ain't accustomed to—in fact, I fancy it would be difficult to find work dat you are accustomed to. At any rate, you will hab to get accustomed to it, dough you won't like it while you are doing so."

Torm staggered away. He felt thoroughly ill and miserable, and certainly not in a condition to tackle a man of Pete's abnormal strength.

Algy had never witnessed a tropical storm, and it seemed to him impossible that its fury could increase; and yet it did so.

The tempest struck upon them with a fury that tore away the few remaining sails, and even then the masts whipped down, while the vessel rushed onwards through the foaming sea.

Great billows towered above her deck, and it appeared inevitable that

they must engulf her; still, she rose to each one, until she was on the seething crest, which the tempest lashed to fury. And then the wind would howl round her.

Suddenly an enormous billow appeared towering above all the rest, and came rolling after the vessel.

"Hold fast for your lives!" shouted Jack. "Cling to the wheel—anything! Hold fast!"

They could hear the roar of the mighty billow, as the tempest lashed its crest into a mass of foam. It dwarfed the other seas by comparison, and Algy firmly believed that hope was over.

He felt Pete's arm placed round him, and the grip almost stopped his breathing.

"Hold fast for your lives!" roared Pete, and those were the last words spoken.

The next instant the billow curled over the vessel, and burst upon her deck, while the comrades were buried beneath that vast volume of water.

It seemed as though it would never clear away, and even when it did so the deck was several feet deep with water, which was spurting through the scuppers.

"We are all right, boys!" exclaimed Pete, glancing anxiously at his comrades, as a vivid flash of lightning illumined the tempestuous scene. "Some ob dat water will find its way below, but we can rig de pumps to clear it, and we hab got plenty ob hands to work dem."

"The deckhouse is carried away," said Jack.

"Well, I dunno dat you require a deckhouse on a vessel in tropical regions," observed Pete. "You see, it's a lot cooler on deck beneath an awning. If we find we do require it, we will rebuild it. Our masts are safe, and dat is de most important matter. I don't 'spect for a moment dat she has sprung a leak, and eben if she has we can easily keep de pumps going till we reach de shore. Nunno! I consider dat we are mighty lucky in habing escaped de storm so well."

"I reckon that we are going to see a bit more of it yet," said Sam.

"Neber mind, Sammy. You ain't got de right to boder yourself 'bout de future. De present is de most important matter, and seeing dat we are enjoying ourselves just now—"

"Enjoying ourselves!" exclaimed Jack.

"Well, Algy is, I feel mighty certain. I don't believe dat boy wants de storm to stop yet, 'cos he wants to see a full-sized tropical storm, and I must say I tink we are going to hab one, judging by the beginning."

"Shucks!" exclaimed Algy. "I made sure we had seen the worst of it. Still, it's all in a day's march. I don't mind, so long as the vessel doesn't sink. I wouldn't like that, because the boats wouldn't be of much service, especially those that are smashed."

"All right!" exclaimed Pete. "We will make arrangements for de vessel not to sink. Just you come below, Algy, and we will make de first arrangement by rigging de pumps. 'Nuff said!"

Pete thoroughly understood his work, and while Jack and Sam remained at the helm he rigged a couple of pumps, for he knew that there must be an enormous amount of water in the vessel.

To rig the pumps was a comparatively easy matter, but to get the men to work them was very difficult. They all declared they were too ill, with the exception of Burg, who set about the work with a will. He had been accustomed to the sea before he came aboard the Shark, and, therefore, was about the only useful man aboard. Pete forced Torm to work with him, while he and Algy took the other pump.

At first Torm flatly refused to help, but when Pete pointed out that the

vessel would founder if not pumped dry, and forced him to the pump, threatening to rope's-end him if he did not do his duty, he changed his mind, and set to work with Burg.

Presently Pete forced more men to work, giving those two a rest; but he had great trouble, and more than once they showed signs of mutiny.

At first he tried persuasion, pointing out to them that unless they cleared the vessel of water she would founder; then, finding this had no effect, he adopted a different course.

He just went below, and selecting two of the likeliest-looking men, gripped them by their collars, and forced them to the pumps. After that, if they refused to work them, he used a rope's-end until they obeyed.

What Jack feared was that the men would stand by each other, and then matters would have become very serious, for Pete could scarcely have much chance against such numbers, unless he had used his revolver—a thing, of course, that he would never have contemplated.

The hatches had been battened down, but the pumps appeared to make but little impression on the immense amount of water that the Shark had shipped.

For two days the storm raged with unabated fury, and then the comrades saw a break in the black clouds to windward, and before that day had passed the sun was shining, although the sea still ran very high.

The Shark was now comparatively clear of water, and as she did not appear to have sprung a leak, Pete allowed his precious crew to leave the pumps, while the comrades took all the rest they could get, by turns.

The sails were once more set, but the unfortunate part about it now was that the wind sank so low that there was scarcely enough to fill the sails.

CHAPTER 11.

Fire on the High Seas.

ONE night Pete was sleeping peacefully, when once more Algy entered his cabin and awoke him.

"You'm a perfect nuisance, Algy," growled Pete. "You'm worse dan a prowling ghost."

"Get up, Pete!"

"I ain't going to get up. I'm going to pass de remainder ob de night here, and if—"

"Then you will be cooked!"

"Eh?"

"The vessel is on fire!"

"Golly!" cried Pete, leaping from his berth. "And de boy takes it as coolly as all dat!"

"If howling would do any good I'd start it louder than those men are doing it," answered Algy. "I expect the silly brutes have caused the fire. But she's well alight, and we are going to have a frightful job to put her out. Jack and Sam sent me to call you, and they are rigging the fire-hose."

Pete sprang on deck, calling to Rory to follow him, and then from the fore-hatchway he saw a ruddy glow.

Jack and Sam had removed the hatch with a view to pouring water on the fire, and soon it was hissing on the flames, which had got a firm hold.

Clouds of steam rose in the air, and the fire tinged them with a ruddy glow, while the crackling of the flames was distinctly audible.

The men were in a state of abject terror. Some of them rushed to and fro, howling for the boats to be launched, while others got as far aft as possible, and crouched there in a state of helplessness.

"I insist on the boats being launched," cried Torm, approaching Pete, who was helping with the hose.

"See here, Torm," growled Pete. "It's your duty to help extinguish de fire, and it would be a lot better if you did it dan talk like a child. We ain't going to launch de boats for a long time yet. It might be days and nights before we get dat fire under; but we shall do our best, and if de ammunition I hab brought doesn't explode——"

"Fury! Do you mean to say that there are explosives aboard?"

"Ob course dere are! How do you suppose dat we are going to hunt in de forests, and defend ourselves from de attacks ob savages, widout explosives?"

"Then we shall all be hurled into eternity?"

"Nunno, we sha'n't! Least, not if de explosives don't catch fire, and I don't 'spect dey will."

"Are they near the flames?"

"Nunno! Some little distance. Do go away. You are only bodering me for no purpose at all."

"Are the explosives fifty yards from the fire?"

"What's de man talking about? Dey would be in de sea if dey were. If you knock de nought off dat will be 'bout de distance; but, although de fire is spreading in dat direction, I 'spect we shall be able to stop it."

"We shall be blown to atoms!" cried Torm.

"We sha'n't be done anyting ob de sort to. 'Bout de worst dat could happen would be dat dey blew a hole in de vessel, and den we should sink; but dat ain't nearly such a painful death as being burnt, so dat you hab a let to be thankful for."

"Demon! I believe you are a maniac," cried Torm, "and don't know what danger is. Can't you realise that we are standing on the brink of the grave, that at any moment we may be hurled into eternity?"

"And do you fear eternity so much?" said Pete, gazing at his pallid face, revealed by the glow of the fire, which seemed to surely bring them death. "Dat's because ob your past life, Torm, and all de crimes dat now lay on your conscience."

"Don't talk that cant to me, you dog! Have you no past crimes?"

"Well, I ain't talking ob myself. But what I mean to say is dis. Death ain't pleasant to any one on dis vessel, and we are going to fight against it like men should, and like brave men always do, and, if it conquers us, den we are going to meet it bravely, and not whimper like whipped curs. And dere's nuffin in our past to make us dread eternity. We ain't got vile crimes on our consciences, and if I ain't much mistaken, you hab. Blackmailing is one ob dem. Get away, 'cos I won't talk to you any more. Dis is a time for working, and not talking."

"But you shall hear what I am going to say. I insist on the boats——"

"Eh?"

"I will make you hear me, and——"

Pete turned the nozzle of the hose full in his face, and the force of the water knocked him over backwards, then Pete once more turned it on the fire.

Torm picked himself up; and Pete's action had an excellent effect on the remainder of the men. None of them cared to risk a drenching, and, after all, they must have known that the comrades were doing their utmost to save the vessel, and, therefore, the lives of all aboard.

Torm, however, was so terrified that he had made up his mind the case was hopeless, and he actually went to one of the boats, and, with the aid of others, tried to lower her.

"Let dem be!" growled Pete, glancing in that direction. "It may mean de loss ob a boat; but we hab got some more, and de work keeps dem out ob mischief!"

"I reckon they would never be able to row the boat, even if they got it in the water," said Sam.

"Besides, where could they row to?" exclaimed Jack. "We are probably hundreds of miles from the west coast of Africa; and, if the truth must be told, I am not at all certain of our position. They might be able to get the boat ten miles, but certainly not a hundred, and they would be just as likely to take ten miles in the wrong direction. Of course, we must not let them start, supposing they can launch the boat."

"Dey ain't going to launch it de road dey hab started," observed Pete. "Golly! Dere it goes bows first, and dat's exactly what I expected!"

Pete had scarcely uttered the words when the boat plunged into the water bows forward, and in a few seconds it was swamped, while one side was stove in against the vessel.

"Look here, Torm," shouted Pete, "dat wasn't a submarine boat! Now, it's just possible dat we may hab to use dose boats, and if dere ain't room for all, you will be one ob dose who won't go. You ain't to touch anoder boat; and if you make de attempt, I shall squirt at you. 'Nuff said!"

Possibly the men became convinced of the absurdity of their action, for they made no attempt to launch a second boat, nor did they interfere with the comrades, although they lent them no aid.

"I fancy we have got the fire under considerable, Pete," said Jack at last. "I believe our best plan will be to batten down the hatches, in the hope that the flames will be stifled. You must remember that there is a fair amount of water in the vessel, so that the fire should not spread."

"Right you are, Jack," answered Pete. "We could put on de hatch, and cut a hole frough it to continue pouring in de water."

And this idea was adopted. The comrades now had no means of telling what progress the fire was making; still, they hoped for the best, and kept pumping in vast quantities of water.

Strange to say, now that the peril was hidden from them, the men appeared to regain courage; while the comrades felt far more uneasy, because they had no means of telling what was occurring in the depths of the burning vessel. They knew that the magazine might catch at any moment, and there were no means of getting at it, for the heat below would have rendered it quite impossible for any living man to have entered that part of the vessel.

All through the night water was poured on the fire, and the fierce hiss was continuous. At times it would increase in a manner that gave the comrades the impression the fire must be increasing, and then it would die down until they could scarcely hear it; but when they began to hope, that all danger was at an end, again the roar would burst forth, and fill their breasts with dread.

At last day dawned, and now they ventured to remove the hatch.

Dense clouds of smoke rolled up, and this terrified the men, all of whom had remained on deck all night; but there were no signs of flames.

"Now, what's your opinion 'bout dat little lot, Jack?" inquired Pete.

"That we have got the fire under," answered Jack. "All that now remains for us to do is to make sure that it does not start again. Get that hatch on, and we will continue to pour water in. I believe the worst is over."

This proved to be the case, because by the time the day had passed the fire was practically extinguished.

"Now you see, Tom," exclaimed Pete, when all danger was at an end, "how mighty stupid it would hab been to hab taken to de boats, 'cos if we had done dat it is nearly certain dat if we had not died ob hunger we would hab died ob thirst. You should neber lose your head in time ob danger—unless, ob course, you are sentenced to be guillotined. In dat case you can't bery well help it. Come 'long, boys! We will go below and get some food!"

"And what about us?" growled Tom.

"Why, I 'spect you will do de same, old hoss," retorted Pete, "'cos I neber came across men better able to look after demselves as regards taking all de best for demselves, and letting oders do all de hard work. 'Nuff said!"

The comrades were greatly in need of both food and rest, and as there was scarcely any wind, they determined to leave the vessel to chance, for it was imperative that they obtained rest.

Algy was the first to turn in. His idea was to awake before the others, because he wanted to turn his hand to steering. He had learnt a good lot from Pete, but had not tried his hand at the helm.

As a matter of fact, he scarcely slept an hour; then, going on deck, he found that the wind had increased, which was exactly what he wanted.

He soon discovered that it was not so easy to handle a brig as he had imagined. It was all right running before the wind; but he was not at all satisfied with this, and tried coming about.

He was still hard at it when Pete came on deck, and then Algy got a really useful lesson. Pete was not at all particular concerning their course, and he showed Algy how to tack many times, while when Jack came on deck he wondered where they were.

"Neber mind, Jack!" exclaimed Pete. "I know you are pretty lively at reckonings, and dere will be some dead ones for you to take. You hab got de sun to help you; and if you two can't find out where we are, you may be certain it is because we ain't dere, but in anoder place!"

Jack took his reckonings, and then steered an eastward course, while two days later they sighted land, and Jack declared that it was the west coast of Africa.

"Tink we can land dere, Jack?" inquired Pete.

"Not the slightest difficulty," answered Jack. "Where the difficulty comes in is to find some safe anchorage for our vessel."

"A sort ob bay?"

"Well, if we could come across the mouth of some river, that would do all right. I think our best plan will be to cruise southwards along the shore until we come to a safe anchorage. We are bound to do so sooner or later."

"Bery well, Jack; and I hope it will be sooner, 'cos I want to start dose tomatoes."

"And the 'geraniums,' Pete!" exclaimed Algy. "You must not forget them; and perhaps you will be able to sell them for the adornment of the fair sex who inhabit this country. But you have got to recollect that the principal thing is big-game hunting. We don't want you fooling around scattering geranium seed that neber by any possibility can come up!"

"What's de boy talking about? Dat seed is warranted to grow; and if it don't grow to my satisfaction under proper circumstances, de people will—I 'most forget what dey will do!"

"Eat their hats?" suggested Algy.

"Nunno! But I fauncy dey will gib you anoder for de one dat didn't come up; or I know dey will do someting-like dat, dough I don't see how

I'm going to count a sackful ob small seeds. It would be bad enough to count de plants dat I grow!"

"Why, that won't take you two seconds."

"You can't count, say, a hundred thousand plants in two seconds, Algy!"

"I know you can't. But it will take you something less than two seconds to count all the plants you grow."

"I shall water dem."

"You can boil them if you like, but you won't get any plants."

"Oh, shut up, Algy! You don't know anything 'bout horticulture or geraniums. I shall surprise you before I hab done!"

"Well, I don't doubt that, because you do it every day of your life; but if you grow one geranium I'll eat it!"

"No, you won't. I ain't going to hab my plants yaffled up by hungry boys directly dey come up! You can eat de cocoanuts off de shore, like de oder monkeys!"

"I never knew cocoanuts grew on the shore. I always thought they grew on trees."

"Well, you didn't suppose de trees grew in de air, did you? Now, you shut up while I'm tinkering out my plans for de United African European Horticultural British and Foreign Agricultural Associated Society, Unlimited."

"It's got a jolly good name to start with, at any rate," observed Algy. "You might cut it shorter by calling it by the first syllable of Associated. That is to say, the Ass' Society. It would be a lot more appropriate, because you will have one ass working at it, while you will certainly never have any plants!"

Pete, however, had made up his mind to found a colony, so that all the chaff in the world would not turn him from his purpose. The following day they sighted the mouth of a broad river, and, as the wind was westerly, they had no difficulty in running up the river. Then Jack brought the vessel to an anchorage some few miles from the sea.

By that time it was dark, so Pete declared that he would wait until the morning before he grew his tomatoes. Algy particularly wanted to see him start on the job; but Pete made up his mind to be alone, because he knew that Algy would make personal remarks.

Thus it was that at break of day Pete went to the shore in a boat in which he had already placed his implements, and the comrades did not miss him till breakfast-time.

"We will go ashore!" exclaimed Jack, when they had finished their meal. "It will be rather interesting to see how the image commences operations!"

Taking another boat, they went ashore, when they saw Pete at some little distance from the river-bank, with a bag, evidently containing seeds, by his side. He was digging vigorously.

"Keep behind these bushes," whispered Algy. "I'd really like to see his idea of gardening!"

"The amusing part of it is that he could not possibly get a market for his produce!" laughed Jack.

"He would find that a lot easier than getting his produce for the market," declared Algy. "Look! He's digging a two-foot hole. Looks as though he were going to make a grave!"

Pete had dug out a square of about six feet, and he had got it over a foot in depth.

Into this he shot the contents of the bag, spreading the seeds a little with his spade. Then he filled it in, and commenced to prance on it.

"Starting work?" inquired Algy, coming up.

"So you hab come ashore, hab you?" exclaimed Pete. "I don't want to be interrupted in my work, Algy. If you want to learn how to grow tomatoes you can watch, but you must not interfere wid de arrangements."

"You prefer to sow them rather thickly, don't you?"

"Well, you see, I want to show you dat you are utterly wrong 'bout my not being able to grow dem, and so I thought if one wouldn't come up anoder would."

"They will have to do a frightful lot of burrowing," said Algy. "Why didn't you bury them twenty or thirty feet while you were about it?"

"You tink dey are too deep?"

"About two feet too deep. They ought to be just covered. At least, our gardener used to do it that way, and he used to put in every seed singly."

"Golly! Dat man must hab had more time on his hands dan I hab got!" growled Pete. "Well, I ain't going to labour any more dis morning. I tink I will start de men on building a place to lib in."

"Don't you think it would be better to live aboard ship, Pete?" inquired Jack.

"Nunno! Planters neber lib on vessels. We hab got to hab a proper building, wid a stockade round it. You see, we may get attacked by savages, 'cos dere are bound to be some in dis country. Den, again, Algy wants hunting, and you can't go hunting aboard a vessel. You leabe it to me, and I will set de men to work!"

"Well, I think we will go into the forest to get some fresh meat, if we can," said Sam. "Algy will prefer that to building houses. Come along! You have got your rifle, Algy, and don't forget that you may have to use it at any moment!"

Algy was in his glory. There was just a spice of danger in connection with that hunting excursion that exactly suited him; but, although he hoped they would come on a few lions, the largest game they saw was an antelope, which Sam bagged, and they only saw that on their return journey.

They found Pete chopping down trees, and the men sprawling on the ground on every side.

"Are you doing all the work, Pete?" inquired Jack.

"Yes!" growled Pete. "Dese men are too mighty awful for words! Dey won't work, dough dey don't mind watching me do it!"

"I'd make them work," declared Algy. "They are paid for it!"

"Nunno! I am paying dem for not working," declared Pete. "It's more trouble to make dem start dan to do de work myself. Dere's Coggin, frinstance. Directly I try to make him start he commences to groan wid pain, and declares dat he's got a weak heart. Den anoder one will declare he's got a kink in his spine—in fact, dey hab all got something. I neber came across such a diseased crew in all my born days!"

"Well, you should take a stick to them!" declared Algy. "Men like that always need a little compulsion. You see, they have never been used to working, and it comes rather hard at the start."

"See here, boy!" exclaimed Coggin, who could hear Algy's observations. "Don't you dare to talk to me like that, else it will be the worse for you!"

"Go and drown yourself, you lazy scamp!" exclaimed Algy. "You wouldn't dare to hit me if I were alone—much less now Pete is here. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, you lazy, hulking brute! Here you are, drawing your wages, and have not done a stroke of work since you have received them. If it were my case, I'd soon make you work! You should

have no food if you didn't. Pete is too soft and easy-going, but I would make you sit up if I were in his place!"

"I'll chuck you into the river, if you talk to me like that!"

"Nunno, you won't, Coggin!" said Pete. "Algy is under my protection, and I should feel it my duty to horsewhip you if you attempted to harm him. But see here, boys! I tink we may as well come aboard, 'cos dat deer looks rader nourishing, and I remember dat I'm getting mighty hungry. We will start work again in de morning, and den, perhaps, de tomatoes will be growing, and dis may gib de men a sort ob incentive to work, when dey see de mighty full-sized profits dere are in de concern."

CHAPTER 12.

The False Accusation.

ALGY frequently went to the galley after dinner to have a chat with Burg. The fact is, the lad did not believe he was guilty of any crime, and he hoped one day that Burg would tell him his story.

That evening he found Burg alone, and he appeared to be in rather a communicative turn of mind.

"Look here, Algy!" he exclaimed, when they had chatted about various matters. "I'm going to tell you just what happened to me, because I shall never return to England. I'm not going to ask you to make any promise not to tell, because if you kept it you might get into trouble; at the same time, I would like you to know all about it, because I'm downright certain Torm will tell sooner or later. He's threatened to tell Pete to-night. He doesn't know the truth of the story, but you shall.

"On my last voyage I was under a captain who was about the worst bully I ever met in my life, and he was never fairly sober. I suppose he was one of the lucky sort, or the chances are he would have wrecked his vessel.

"Well, you have sampled my cooking, and will know that it's quite up to the average. I'll guarantee there isn't one sea-cook in a dozen who cooks better. Of course, I'm talking of trading vessels. On the liners, I know, they get tiptop chefs, and I don't profess to be anything like that. All I pretend to being able to do is to turn out a fair dinner.

"Well, naturally I did my best with this skipper. It was my game to please him all I could, because he had the chance of making matters hot for me. I served up the very best cooking possible; but he swore at everything I placed upon the table. There was no satisfying him. The fact of the matter was he drank so much that he couldn't eat; and, don't you see, it came very rough on me.

"Well, one day I sent him up an omelet done to a turn. Maybe he didn't like them. At any rate, he ordered me into his cabin, and, after a little hard swearing, he sent that omelet slap into my eye.

"The thing was scalding hot, and it hurt above a bit. I'd stood a good lot from him, but that was a bit more than I could bear. I caught the drunken brute a back-hander over the mouth, and he went over the back of his chair, and banged the back of his head on the floor with a force that half stunned him.

"The worst part about it was that we had no witnesses to the scene, and when the mate came rushing in he put me in irons. There was no charge made against me till we got into Bristol, which was our port, but then I was handed over to the police. The next morning I was taken before the magistrate, and that skipper appeared against me. He swore hard and fast that he had never touched me—denied the whole thing, in fact—and the magistrates believed him, and gave me a month's imprisonment.

"I had wages due, of course, but I was so taken aback at the disgrace of going to prison that I never thought about them. Well, I served the month, and when I came out I was penniless. My idea was to get to London, but it meant tramping every foot of the distance. However, I started off, begging a bit of bread here and there, and sometimes getting a lift in a cart, and at last I arrived at a place which must have been some ten miles out of London, though to this day I don't know the name of it.

"I had walked far that day, and was so dead-tired that I entered some grounds surrounding a big house, and lay down in a wood-shed. This must have been about midnight, and I thought I would have been safe till the morning; but presently I heard a heavy crash of glass, then shrieks rang out—and they came from the house.

"I sprang from the wood-shed, and then I saw the front door of the house flung open, and a man dart from it. At that moment an old man, in a dressing-gown, appeared at the door, and he fired. The shot was returned by someone I could not see in the darkness, and the old man fell back with a bullet in his breast—at least, he clutched at his breast as he fell.

"The shrieks were still continuing, and now a constable rushed towards the spot and seized me, while something struck my foot. It was a revolver, and had evidently been thrown away by the man who fired the shot. The constable picked it up, and I firmly believe he thought I had dropped it. He was blowing his whistle, and this brought a second constable on the scene. He went to the poor old man.

"'He's dead, mate,' he said. 'Shot through the heart. You had better take the prisoner to the station at once, and send the surgeon. I won't have the body moved. Caution him!'

"'Anything you say I may use in evidence against you!' exclaimed my captor. 'I arrest you on the charges of burglary and wilful murder.'

"Now, you see, Algy, how black things looked against me. Of course, I could have told the constable the truth; but who would believe it? The constable had the revolver, and he would have sworn that I dropped it, for I'm certain he thought that was the case. Then I was on the premises, quite close to the poor old man. Then, again, I had just come out of prison for assaulting my captain. You see, lad, everything was against me, and I hadn't a friend in the country to speak for me; in fact, there wasn't much to be said in my favour, for I had always led a roving life, and although this imprisonment was the only thing against me, it was exactly what would tell.

"I suppose I ought to have faced it out, but I knew it meant more imprisonment, and I argued with myself that even if I should be recaptured, it wouldn't make matters much worse. Then there was the chance of escape.

"The constable pulled out a pair of handcuffs, and was about to snap them on my wrists when I sent him flying into the bushes, and fled as hard as I could go. I struck across country, and he followed for some distance, but he lost me in the darkness.

"Before daybreak I was in London, and entered it at the East End. Well, I took shelter with a lot of the gang who are aboard the Shark, and Torm was one of them. Then I heard Pete's offer, and crept into your bed-room, hoping it was his, and that he would take me with him. You know the rest."

"How did Torm know that you were suspected?" inquired Algy.

"He heard me talking in my sleep one night. I don't know what I said, but it was enough for him to guess the rest."

"Well, if you have told me the whole truth——"

"It is the solemn truth. I am absolutely innocent, but didn't dare to face the charge, under all the circumstances."

"In that case, Burg, I wouldn't bother myself about it. And don't you see how jolly stupid you would be to let Torm blackmail you? It is certain he can't give you away here, and Pete would not take you back to England against your will."

"Not if he believed me guilty?"

"If you have spoken the truth—and I believe you have—he would do his best to clear your name. He certainly would do nothing against you."

"You see, what I fear is that Torm will tell the others what he knows, and then they would have nothing to say to me. They are a pretty rough lot, but I don't think there is one amongst them bad enough to commit a crime like that!"

"I don't know that. All the same, your proper course would have been to face the charge; but, as you have got away—why, there's an end of the matter. It is quite likely that the police will capture the guilty man, they are sure to be looking for him."

"They are a lot more likely to be looking for me!"

"It's much the same thing. I don't suppose the policeman would be able to recognise you again, and if he catches the real criminal, he will naturally come to the conclusion that you and he are the same man."

"I don't see how he can capture him. He would have no clue."

"What about the revolver?"

"Yes; I had forgotten that. I suppose they will be able to tell where it was purchased, unless it had been in the ruffian's possession for some time."

"Then he may have left some other clue in the house. Some of those policemen are jolly keen, and they would probably be able to ferret out something. Ah, here comes Torm! The fellow doesn't love me, so I think I had better be going."

"What are you doing here, boy?" demanded Torm, entering the galley.

"I might ask the same question of you, Torm," retorted Algy. "You see, you silly owl, I have more right here than you have, because I am a friend of your master—and that is what you will never be! Pete hates anything like a blackmailer, and he knows you to be one!"

"It's a lie, and if you dare to speak like that to me again, I'll shake the life out of your rat's body!"

"You are a silly brute, Torm!" exclaimed Algy. "Of course, I could not tackle a lout like you; but if you were to lay a hand on me, Pete would give you the worst flogging you have ever had in your life—although I expect you have had some severe ones! You certainly have, if you have received what you deserve!"

"Take that, you insolent little demon!" howled Torm, striking Algy in the face with his fist with a force that sent him to the floor.

"You contemptible coward!" cried Burg, striding up to him. "Do you think that I will see a lad who has befriended me struck in that manner? If so, you don't know me, you bully! You shall answer to me for that blow!"

And as Burg spoke, he struck the miscreant across the cheek with his open hand.

Torm uttered an imprecation, and, clenching his fists, went for Algy's champion with a furious rush.

Both men were powerfully built, and both were good boxers. At first Burg had a considerable advantage, for his opponent fought wildly; but

he soon steadied down when he discovered that he was not going to have matters all his own way.

He tried to end the conflict by delivering an upper-cut beneath his adversary's jaw, but Burg was on his guard. He kept his right well up, and every now and then he would counter with it in a manner that drove his opponent backwards.

For some moments Torm sparred, and then, springing forward, he landed a blow on Burg's temple, and a second one on the mark that sent him to the floor.

Severe though those blows were, Burg was up in an instant, and he kept his temper admirably; indeed, he boxed better now than he had done at the commencement, and Algy, who was pretty well up in the art, could not help admiring the clever manner in which he guarded his adversary's furious blows.

Suddenly Burg's left shot out, and landed between Torm's eyes, driving him backwards; indeed, had he not reeled against the side of the cabin, he would have fallen.

Burg might have followed up his advantage had he chosen, and Algy had no doubt that if he had done so he would have had his foe at his mercy; but Burg waited for a fresh attack, and again Torm sparred, while he was breathing heavily.

Again he struck, but his blow was guarded, and, countering on the mark, Burg sent him to the floor, completely winded.

"I think that will finish the fight," said Algy.

"This is all your doing, you little demon!" panted Torm.

"Don't see that at all," answered Algy calmly. "Burg has had something to do with it. You have met your master, Torm, and may as well give in. If you don't, the chances are that you will get severely punished. Burg has more strength and skill than you."

"You, lie, boy!"

"If you go on fighting, it will prove that I am correct, I think. At any rate, it is nothing like a lie, because I am merely expressing an opinion. If you are so anxious to prove me wrong, go on fighting, although I firmly believe it will prove me to be right."

"You think to defy me, Burg!" cried Torm, rising, and glaring at his adversary.

"Well, I do not want to do anything of the sort," answered Burg. "I don't particularly want to defy you in any way; at the same time if you dare to strike that lad again I shall go for you, and I shall not spare you next time. You can try to bully me as much as you like, and I'll stand it, because I don't care. I would even have given you money to stop your talk, but Algy has prevented that. There's only one thing. If you touch that lad again I'll knock you down. You know that I can do it, and I will. In England I might have to fear you. Here, you have to fear me. If you want to fight more, say so; if not, clear out of this place, or I shall fling you out."

"So you think to defy me!"

"Yes. As far as I have said. I shall never return to England."

"You forget that someone from England may come after you!" sneered Torm.

"I haven't the slightest doubt that you would send them. Whether they catch me or not is another matter."

"If caught you would be hanged!"

"I believe innocent men have been executed. But go. I have no patience to talk to such a creature as you. If you think to frighten me by telling

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this lad as much as you know of my history, you are mistaken, for he already knows the whole of it. Now go, or you know what the consequences will be!"

Burg strode up to him so menacingly that he slunk from the place, muttering fiercely as he went, and when he turned and scowled at his victor Burg laughed.

"You have a vicious foe there," observed Algy.

"Yes. I'll have to keep my eye on him," answered Burg. "But it's quite certain that he will do me no harm here."

"Nor anywhere else," answered Algy. "You leave the matter to Pete. You see, a man with unlimited money can do a good deal, and he can surely clear you from a false charge. Mind you, it is a thing he would do directly. All we should have to do would be to convince him of your innocence. Now, look here, I want you to come ashore with me to-night. It will be moonlight, and I've got a little scheme on that will cause Pete a big surprise. I want to switch his mind off this nonsense about growing geraniums, as he calls them."

"He seems to be keener on tomatoes just now," laughed Burg.

"Yes. Well, we are going to deal with tomatoes. In our wanderings in the forest to-day I spotted just the very thing I require, and that's what we are going to get. Will you come?"

"Certainly. I suppose it won't annoy Pete?"

"Why should it?"

"Well, if you are going to play him a practical joke——"

"I have played him forty. He is always playing them himself. When I play one on him all he says is that it must not occur again. We will wait till all are asleep, because they never keep watch, and then we will make the little excursion. I have got the boat all ready."

The night was well advanced before the couple proceeded to the shore, and having made the boat fast, Algy led the way into the forest. They had taken the precaution of bringing rifles, and judging by the howling of the beasts of prey they were likely to need them.

Travelling through an African forest in the daytime is no easy matter; by night Algy found it remarkably different, for although the moon was shining brilliantly, the dense foliage of the trees prevented the light penetrating, and in some places he had to grope his way amongst the bushes in almost total darkness.

"Here, steady!" exclaimed Burg, when they had proceeded some distance. "I'm caught up by brambles, and the beastly things are prodding me all over!"

"Jack calls them wait-a-bit thorns," observed Algy. "At least, I believe those are the ones that have caught you."

"I'd call them wait-a-good-long-while thorns!" grumbled Burg. "The beastly things are tearing my flesh. They seem to hook into it, and stop there."

"Yes. That's so. They are like little fish-hooks."

"They feel to me more like big fish-hooks."

As Burg spoke a terrible roar echoed through the forest. It was repeated thrice, and then died away, while Algy heard a rustling in the bushes close to his back.

It was the roar of a lion. Algy had heard it several times from one of the terrible brutes when in captivity, but that seemed a very feeble thing to what he now heard. It appeared to send a vibration through his body, and for an instant a feeling of horror took possession of him.

Had it been daylight he would have born the ordeal better; but at that

spot they were in almost complete darkness, and he could not see the awful brute; but he could hear its low, fierce growls, and the rustling of the bushes, as its tail lashed to and fro.

Then as Algy peered into the dense bushes, with his rifle held in readiness, he saw two gleaming eyes fixed upon him.

It is doubtful if he could have fled, had he even so desired. Those gleaming eyes appeared to fascinate him, and hold him spellbound.

Then the monster sprang, and Algy fired two shots from his repeating-rifle, while a third ball whizzed past his cheek. He was hurled to the ground with a force that nearly stunned him, and he saw a huge male lion above him, its jaws gaping open, while he felt its hot breath on his face.

"Strange to say, all fear now had left the lad's breast. His feelings appeared to be completely numbed, and he was as though in some dream. Yet he was in full possession of his senses.

He heard several shots, and then Burg sprang to his side, dragging him from beneath the lifeless body of the lion, for the shots he had fired proved fatal.

"Are you injured, Algy?" inquired Burg anxiously.

"No! Not a bit. At least, I don't think so. I can't feel any pain, and that's a good sign, isn't it?"

"Yes—or a bad one. However, you appear to be all right."

"Wasn't I frightened, though! I don't believe I have ever been in a worse funk in my life."

"That's not to be wondered at."

"You saved my life."

"Well, that is as it should be. The death I saved you from was as nothing to the death and degradation that you saved me from. But look here, Algy, don't you think we are going through rather much to get a little? I have come to the conclusion that this forest is not safe in the dead of night. Don't you think we could play your little trick in the morning?"

"Well, I believe we are just at the spot I marked," answered Algy. "It seems a pity to turn back now. And, don't you see, we are not at all likely to meet another lion."

"No. We may meet savages next time. If they are in the vicinity they will have been bound to hear the firing. All the same, lead the way. That lion certainly extricated me from those wait-a-bit thorns."

For a few hundred yards Algy, who appeared little the worse from his experience, pushed on, and then he stopped beneath a large spreading tree in the centre of a little glade.

"That's the tree I want!" he exclaimed. "You see, it is a species of crab-apple tree, I believe, and the fruit is blood red. It doesn't taste particularly nice, but those apples—or whatever they are—look exactly like tomatoes. Now, don't you understand my little plot? I'm going to pull off a jolly lot of branches with the red fruit on, and I'm going to stick them all over the ground where Pete has been burying about a sack of tomato seeds. It will be rather funny to watch his face when he catches sight of his tomato plantation. He would not know a tomato plant from a potato haulm—in fact, they are so much alike that I don't believe I would. However that doesn't matter. Apple leaves won't be any different to him—especially in the distance. Help me pick some branches, and mind you don't knock the fruit off. I want those manufactured tomatoes to look as natural as possible."

They climbed the tree, and commenced operations, and they pulled off so many branches that they were compelled to make three journeys to get them to the tomato plot. But Algy did not mind trouble when playing one of

his practical jokes. He shoved the branches into the ground all over the place, both where Pete had been digging and in other parts, until he had a tomato plot of about a quarter of an acre.

Then the two plotters returned to the vessel, and got back without detection, while as Algy turned in he could hear Pete's peaceful snoring.

CHAPTER 13.

Some Perilous Hunting.

"I TINK we will go to hab a look at de plantation dis morning," observed Pete, when they had finished breakfast. "You see, boys, dere's a lot to be done dere, and it stands to reason dat I'm de only competent man to do it. I'm a bit worried 'bout de shoots dat want taking out ob de axils. You see, I dunno where to find dose birds. Tink you could find dem, Jack?"

"Not on your tomato plants."

"Ain't my plants de same as oder people's?"

"I should say not. You have planted the seed so deeply that it won't know which way it has got to grow, and it may make a shot for the other side of the world."

"I tell you dey are bound to grow."

"Do they take long in growing, Pete?" inquired Algy.

"Nuuno! I don't quite remember de exact time, but——"

"Was it six months?"

"Golly! I hope not. It might hab been six days."

"Sure it wasn't six weeks?"

"I ain't at all sure, Algy. I tell you I don't know de exact time."

"It might have been six minutes, for instance?"

"M'yes! It certainly might, 'cos I ain't certain. Aldough I must say dat six minutes appears rader quick for a flower to grow."

"Well, there's a lot of heat here, and that makes flowers grow quicker, especially if they are vegetables. Suppose we get ashore. It would be a thousand pities to let the beastly things grow too high. Then again, if the tomatoes ripen too quickly the birds might hop around and yaffle them up."

"I don't tink birds like tomatoes, Algy. I know they don't like potatoes or parsnips, so I don't see why dey should like tomatoes. But come along, and den we shall be able to see what sort ob progress dey hab made."

The comrades, taking Rory with them, rowed to the river bank, and when they came in full view of the plantation it was as much as Algy could do to remain serious.

The expression of blank surprise on Pete's face was only equalled by that on Jack's and Sam's, for Algy's tomatoes really looked like the real thing in the distance.

Pete rubbed his eyes, and gazed again at the astonishing tomatoes, then he gave himself several prods in the ribs, as though to make sure that he was awake.

"Can you see anyting in de direction ob my gaze, Jack?" he inquired.

"Why, I can see what looks like a lot of tomatoes!"

"Can you see dose birds, Sammy?"

"Yes; but——"

"Yoorooh! Yah, yah, yah! Dey hab all come up! Didn't I tell you dey would grow?"

"But you don't surely credit that a field of tomatoes can come up like that?" exclaimed Jack.

"Yah, yah, yah! You'm jealous ob my tomatoes, Jack. Dat's what's de

matter wid you. I know I could grow dem. Dis way to de tomato fair. Come 'long. I must find dose axils and nip out de shoots, else dey will—dey—well, I forget what will happen, but I know it's someting serious. Now, I must say I'm perfectly satisfied wid de result ob de enterprise. I shall plant de whole ob South Africa wid tomatoes."

"What ever can it be?" murmured Sam, as they followed.

"I haven't the slightest idea," answered Jack. "Of course, those are not tomatoes; but where did they come from, unless— Well, Algy looks very surprised and innocent. You may be pretty sure that he would be able to give us some information. Just watch him having Pete on. Don't say anything."

"I say, Pete," exclaimed Algy, gazing at the extraordinary crop, "you have got a fine little lot there!"

"Did you eber see tomatoes like dat, Algy?"

"I never have in all my life. They are really most extraordinary. Quick growing ones, too, because I didn't see them growing yesterday."

"Nunno! Dey came up in de night."

"And ripened in the early morning sun. Nice even fruit, too. You are to be complimented on your success."

"M'yes! Just go and pick de first crop while I sit on dis little mound and smoke my pipe, and watch you."

"Hadn't you better taste one to see if it is ripe?"

"Must be ripe when it's red, Algy. Dat's de law ob tomatoes."

"Well, taste one, to make sure."

Pete approached his precious plants, and, for the first time, seemed to have his doubts. They did not look like tomatoes when he got close. He picked one, and took a bite, then made an extraordinary face.

"Golly! Dis tomato must hab been eating quinine!" growled Pete. "It's as bitter as gall, and as nasty as medlars!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jack. "Perhaps it isn't grown quickly enough. I believe vegetables do get a strong flavour if they grow slowly."

"Perhaps it wants sugar," suggested Algy, looking quite serious. Pete was gazing at him severely.

"Or it may want boiling," suggested Sam.

Pete made no reply, but, grasping one of the plants, he rooted it up, while he gazed at the broken-off end of the branch in a manner that was too much even for Algy. He joined in the comrades' laughter, and Pete went rooting up plant after plant, but their roots were far from convincing.

"Oh, you beauty!" he growled, gazing at the convulsed Algy. "Ain't it enough dat you play off your monkey tricks on me aboard, but dat you must come and play dem ashore? I'm sure I dunno how to train you."

"He's almost as difficult to train as a tomato plant, isn't he, Pete?" roared Jack. "You were a little too sanguine. I must say the rapidity of their growth surprised me."

"What are dey, Jack?"

"I don't exactly know, but they look like red crab-apples, except that they are remarkably large. You ought to be the better judge as to their nature, because you have tasted them."

"Golly! I couldn't tell what fruit it was by its taste; only, I should say, it would be a mercy if dere weren't any more ob dem knocking about."

"Try a few more. Some of them may taste differently, and after you have eaten a peck or so you may get to like them."

"I ain't trying a single oder one, Jack. De first one was too mighty nasty for words. But look here. We can't fool about here all day long."

I'm going to sacrifice de remainder ob de plantation. I dunno how Algy made it, nor when he made it, but it can stop where it is, and we will go for some hunting in de forest."

"What about your building operations?" inquired Jack.

"It's going to be a lot too hot for building purposes," declared Pete. "Dere's just de right temperature for hunting, so dat's what we will do."

Algy wanted nothing better than this, neither did Rory, and they both started off in the most joyful mood; then, at Pete's request, Algy explained what had happened to him the previous night, and how Burg had saved him from the lion.

"I'm jolly certain that he is innocent of the crime they charge him with," declared Algy.

"Well, in dat case, we will see what we can do for him," said Pete. "You can generally get yourself or any oder man out ob a difficulty if you try. Now, dis seems to be a tributary ob a broader river. Probably de one where our vessel lies. What do you tink 'bout following it, Sammy?"

"Why, that we are more likely to come across game near the water."

"Den dat's de direction we will take. You see, when you follow a stream, dere ain't de slightest difficulty in finding your way back again eben when it's dark."

"Don't you think we ought to let the men know we shall be away all day, Pete?" inquired Jack.

"Can't see dat dere's any sense in dat, 'cos dey would rader we were away dan dere. You see, if we are hunting in de forest we can't set dem to work, and work is de ene ting on de face ob dis earth dat dey don't like. As for being anxious 'bout us—well, I believe dat dere's only one man aboard who would care if we were eaten up by lions, or demolished by soldier ants, and dat man is Burg. Ob course, dey would be sorry 'bout deir wages, but den I hab got a lot ob gold aboard, and dere ain't de slightest doubt but dat dey would burst deir way into de strong-room and steal de little lot, which would be much more dan de wages I shall pay dem."

"Suppose they steal it in our absence, and desert the vessel?" suggested Sam.

"Well, Sammy," exclaimed Pete, "dose men hab giben me such a mighty lot ob trouble dat I dunno if it would break my heart! You see, we hab got lots more gold, and we should hab got rid ob de crew. Dey won't work, and dey are always grumbling at deir hard life, dough it seems to me dat it is a lot softer dan when dey were in de East End ob London."

"But you have got to reform them yet, Pete," said Jack, looking serious.

"I know I hab, Jack; and dat's exactly de matter dat is worrying me. You see, dey ain't so mighty easy to reform; and if dey were to bolt, and I neber saw deir faces again, it stands to reason dat dey wouldn't be able to blame me for not carrying out my side ob de contract. My impression is dat dey don't want to be reformed, and dey don't like my teetotal cistern at all. Still, dey will hab to put up wid it, 'cos I ain't lettin' dem go on drinking lines."

"I reckon it would puzzle them to find anything stronger to drink than water in this wild spot," said Sam, "even if they did run away."

"Might be some town near, Sammy."

"So there might; but then, again, they might walk a thousand miles without finding one."

"Dose men ain't going to walk as far as dat!" exclaimed Pete. "But lead on. You ain't shooting so mighty much game."

"Because there is nothing to shoot, except monkeys or parrots, and I'll warrant you would not care to eat either of those."

For many a weary mile they made their way through the dark forest, following the course of the river. The great trees shaded them from the glowing sun; but the air beneath them was most oppressive, while there was a gloomy light, although it was not yet noon.

"See here, boys," exclaimed Pete, at last, "I think we may as well hab a bit of rest! I can see dat Algy is getting tired."

"Yes; and he is not the only one!" retorted Algy.

"Well, sit down here, and don't grumble so much, Algy," said Pete, seating himself in the bracken.

"The worst of you is that when you once get planted you require such a frightful lot of shifting," said Algy. "There's one consolation, you will be getting hungry soon, and then you are certain to want to be moving. There might be some game on the other side of those rushes."

"Well, don't you try to cross dem, Algy, 'cos, if I ain't much mistaken, dat is a swamp, and crocodiles dwell in African swamps, to say nuffin' ob malaria, and oder wild beasts and insecks. We will just hab a pipe to soothe our nerves, and den, when we are rested, we will renew de march in a backward direction."

"Bosh! It won't do to go home without any game. Them men will laugh at you quite enough about your tomatoes."

Pete was soon in a very sleepy condition, nor was this to be wondered at, for that intense heat was sufficient to make any man feel drowsy.

Although Algy had not taken much sleep the previous night, the heat appeared to have very little effect on him. He was a lad who did not like to remain still for long, and presently he rose, and made his way round the swamp. He was rather desirous of seeing a crocodile, and Pete's hint that they might be in that swamp decided him on making the little excursion.

The comrades saw him making his way amongst the bushes, and, guessing his intention, decided on following him; for, although they had come across no traces of wild beasts that morning, they knew that some might be lurking amongst the bushes.

Suddenly Algy went down on his hands and knees. He had caught sight of a large ostrich on the borders of the swamp, and it occurred to him that if he could capture it single-handed it would be a feather in his cap. He had left his rifle by Pete's side, not contemplating the fact that he might be called upon to use it at any moment; but he was anxious to capture the ostrich alive, which plainly showed that he knew nothing of their nature. Algy fondly imagined that a bird could not be possessed of much strength.

The ostrich was squatting down on its nest, and, although it probably heard the venturesome Algy approaching, it made no attempt to escape.

Nearer and nearer he crept; then, darting forward, he seized the bird by its leg, and held on with both hands.

The scene that followed was surprising, especially from Algy's point of view. He must have thought that earthquakes were obtaining, for he was flung about in the most extraordinary manner.

Needless to say, he at once released his hold; but this did not satisfy the angry bird at all.

It uttered a roar that would have done credit to a young lion, and then, taking a run at the venturesome Algy, kicked him into the swamp.

Not satisfied with this punishment, the infuriated bird made another dash at him, and then the pair appeared to be trying to turn Catherine-wheels, while black mire spurted all round them.

It was at this critical moment that Pete rushed on the scene. He saw that rescue must be attempted forthwith, although he did not like the task at all.

Taking a running leap, he landed on the ostrich, and then matters became worse mixed than ever, for the indignant bird fairly let itself go, and its strength of leg was prodigious.

Pete was kicked head-over heels, and, when he sat up, the ostrich made a run at his back, and almost kicked his head off. After that it sped along the borders of the swamp, and seemed to disappear like a flash of light.

"Where's dat bird?" groaned Pete, scooping mud out of his eyes.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Sam. "He's in the next field. You are five seconds too late, and an ostrich can go a long way in five seconds."

"Why didn't you shoot him, Sammy?"

"Well, I felt sorry for the bird."

"Den all I can say, Sammy, is, dat you had better start being sorry for me, 'cos I need it a lot more. Are you hurt, Algy?"

"Bosh! The beastly bird has planked its trilby in my mouth, and nearly kicked me into the middle of next week, and you ask me if I am hurt!"

"You ain't got de right to interfere wid sitting ostriches, and—it must not occur again, Algy."

"You can bet your last button that it won't," grumbled Algy. "Ha, ha, ha! You are in a jolly mess, Pete."

"And you ain't as clean as new pins, Algy. You could gib points to a full-sized mudlark, and I believe I could grow my geraniums all ober you."

"I believe the beastly bird must have thought it was a kicking donkey," declared Algy.

"Seems to me, de boy was more ob a donkey," observed Pete. "Yah, yah, yah! Can't tink how de boy could hab been so silly as to collar an ostrich by de leg. Why, dey can kick like a hoss, Algy."

"I jolly well know that!" growled Algy. "Look what a beastly mess the brute has made me in!"

"Well, when a poor bird is striving to hatch his eggs, you ain't got de right to go and catch him by de leg. He's most sure to raise objections to de operation."

"How was I to know it was sitting on its eggs?"

"I dunno de signs, but I 'spect you ought to be able to tell by de expression ob his countenance. Still, dere are his eggs. We won't upset de poor insecck's calculations and disturb his nest. Golly! He's coming back for de second round."

"Then I'm off!" cried Algy. "I'd rather fight lions than ostriches; and I tell you what it is, Pete, the roar of that bird, when it is really vexed, isn't unlike that of a lion.—Let's get away. It's a plucky bird, and it would be a shame to shoot it, which seems to me about the only way to tackle one of them."

"I tink you and I had better hab a swim in de riber, Algy. We shall look a lot more respectable after dat. Come along; den we will go a little farder afield, 'cos it stands to reason we must get someting to eat if we are going to camp in de forest for de night, and dat's what I 'spect you to do."

Pete was correct. It is what Algy had been hoping for. They had a swim in the clean water, and, when they came out, Jack informed them

that they looked quite respectable. After that they continued their way through the forest; but now they left the river track, for apparently there was no game there.

Through a forest denser than anything Algy had yet seen they proceeded slowly, for in places it was necessary for Pete to use his axe to clear away the bushes and tangled creepers.

The heat was almost unbearable, and at last Pete ceased to complain of it, which was a sure sign that he felt it keenly.

For a couple of miles or more, they fought their way through this tangled labyrinth, and then they struck another swamp, which caused them to imagine that the river wound round that way.

On the borders of this swamp Sam brought down a young water antelope, and they decided to camp at that spot, although it was not particularly safe. A thick mist rose from the camp, and fever might lurk there; however, they were so fatigued by their fight through the dense forest that they felt a rest was needful at any risk.

Pete chopped the wood for the fire, which was soon burning brightly, and by the time that Sam had cooked the supper, the short twilight had turned to darkness.

CHAPTER 14.

In Forest Depths.

PRESENTLY the roaring of the beasts of prey commenced, and now fireflies darted to and fro over the miasmal swamp, while occasionally there was a strange, sighing sound, such as Algy had never heard before.

"Dat's de crocodiles, Algy," said Pete, in answer to his inquiry. "Dey often make dat sound at night, and dey do a little bellowing, too. You can hear some ob it now in de distance, and dat's de most pleasant place for it, 'cos a croc. ain't a pretty bird when he gets close to you, and he smells ob musk, while he bites 'bout as hard as any inseck dat I know. You see, when a croc. attacks a man or a boy—dey love boys and puppy-dogs. A croc. prefers boys to most anything, 'cos dey are tender. Still, a full-sized croc. don't consume many boys—not more dan fourteen or fifteen a day—and sometimes dey just roll on dem. I tink it's on de same principle as a cook beats beef-steak when she wants to serve it up as prime rump-steak. It makes it tender. Well, de croc. likes his food tender, so don't you get near one, 'cos he would hab you in a twinkling."

"It's all right, Pete!" exclaimed Algy. "Do you know any more fairy-tales? Or perhaps ghost stories would be more in keeping with this gloomy place. I can just imagine a ghost creeping—creeping—— Ah!"

"Woohooh! Where, Algy?" gasped Pete, as Algy fixed his eyes towards the bushes at Pete's back.

"Oh, I don't see one now, Pete," exclaimed Algy, looking serious, "only I thought there might be one!"

"Well, look here, Algy!" growled Pete, picking up his pipe, which he had let fall. "De next time you tink dere might be one, just tink ob de bird in front ob me. I like to face de foe as a general rule; and if it's anything like a ghost, I like him to be facing me a mighty long way off. Now, just you stop your silly tricks, Algy! You hab made my heart leap about like a frisky grasshopper, and I don't like it at all."

Pete was the first to fall asleep. Jack and Sam chatted and smoked, while Algy was very silent. Being quite unaccustomed to forest life, the howling

of the wild beasts, especially when it drew close, filled his breast with awe, and several times he heard a rustling in the bushes. Then he would glance at Sam; but if he heard these ominous sounds, he took no heed of them.

To Algy it seemed that their peril was imminent. He imagined that some wild beast might leap upon them at any moment, and, strive as he would, he could not help casting many a fearful glance at the black bushes, expecting to see the gleaming eyes of some fierce beast lurking there, as he had seen the lion's.

Presently the moon rose, shedding a bluish light over the vast quagmire, and now Algy could see many crocodiles wallowing in the mud.

There was one lying quite close to the spot where the comrades were camped, and at first Algy imagined that it was the trunk of a tree; but as he watched, he saw the awful reptile move slowly, and then come creeping towards them.

"Look here, Sam!" he exclaimed, as the monster gradually approached. "I don't believe that I have sufficient pluck for forest life. And I'm remembering that Pete says crocodiles are fond of boys."

"I reckon you are not accustomed yet to forest life, Algy," answered Sam. "In a few weeks' time you would think no more of that crocodile than a firefly, and they are harmless enough."

"Aren't crocodiles dangerous, then?"

"Well, they are if they get too close."

"Seems to me that brute is too close already!"

Sam pulled a burning brand from the camp fire, and flung it towards the crocodile, which slowly turned, then wallowed deeper into the swamp.

"They are pretty easily startled off," said Sam, "and although they are dangerous—to an extent, if you don't keep watch—there are so many unseen perils in the forest that you become accustomed to those you can see."

"What sort of perils?" inquired Algy.

"Well, savages for one. A savage might be lurking in those bushes, ready to hurl a poisoned spear at any of us. In the forest you face death at every turn, and yet you might travel through this forest for months, and not meet a human being. As for the wild beasts, you can generally hear them approaching. There's one thing for you to learn, and that is always be ready to fire at any moment of the day or night; and take heed of every sound you hear, then try to learn its significance. But greater than all the perils that you can see and hear, and consequently fight against, are the perils that are invisible, and which no human being can guard against in any way."

"Phew! Sounds pleasant—that!" exclaimed Algy. "But look here, Sam, what are those perils?"

"Do you see that mist rising from the swamp?"

"Rather! Looks like a blessed hot bath!"

"Fever may lurk there—probably it does. One of us might be stricken down by it, and few recover. Mind, Algy, I'm not trying to frighten you. I know you are plucky enough for anything, but it is only right that you should realise the perils of a forest life. It too often spells death, and it is death in a hundred forms. A bite from one of these swarming mosquitoes might even bring death."

"That chance must be jolly remote, too—unless I'm going to die, for it seems to me that about forty thousand have bitten me already, and the little brutes keep on doing it."

"Yes; you are right there. We have travelled through these forests many times, and no harm has come to us. For that reason, it is only natural that we do not heed perils that must seem to you alarming. All the

same, you need not imagine that you are timid. I'll defy the bravest man who ever lived to camp in an African forest without feeling awe—especially by night, for then is the greatest danger."

"Well, I don't care!" exclaimed Algy. "I'll admit that I'm in a funk; but all the same, I like it. This wild life just suits me. Any idiot can sit in an easy-chair, and let others wait upon him and work for him; but a real man ought to work, and face the perils of life. They can come as fast and thick as they like, and although I may feel scared when they are coming, when they have come I'll do my best to face them."

"Right you are!" exclaimed Sam. "I haven't a doubt on that point. Now, the best thing for you to do is to get some sleep! And the same remarks apply to you, Jack. I'll take first watch, and you can take the second, for Pete is no good at that work. He's not safe till day is breaking."

Algy's first impression was that sleep would be quite impossible; nevertheless he lay down at full length, and before long all the weird sounds of the great forest were lost to him, and he slept till Pete awoke him the following morning, telling him that breakfast was ready.

And now that the sun was shining brightly, it seemed to Algy that he had been a coward the previous night, and had conjured up perils that were not there. It amused Jack and Sam to hear him talk of his cowardice, while Pete chaffed him, and declared that infants were always nervous when they were being weaned.

"You will get ober it in time, Algy," declared Pete. "Children frequently frighten demselves in de dark."

"With ghosts?"

"Eh?"

"Do they frighten themselves with ghosts?"

"We ain't talking 'bout ghosts, Algy. We'm talking 'bout de perils ob de forest. Just you pay great attention to my training, and den you will become quite a good little boy, and I shall be able to return you to your uncle one ob dose nice little boys wid a clean white collar, and blue ribbon round it."

"Tomatoes!"

"What's de boy talking 'bout?" growled Pete. "Dere's no sense in dat expression. It's just as stupid as saying, 'Rats!'"

"I don't see anything stupid about tomatoes," observed Algy. "Not when skilfully and quickly grown. Ripe tomatoes are valuable things, and if you get them to ripen in one night——"

"Oh, shut up, and finish your breakfast! And, look here! Do you want to go fooling 'bout dis forest for anoder day and night, or do you want to return to de vessel?"

"The forest, by all means," answered Algy. "I want to see savages in their wild state, and hear a real war-whoop."

"Well, we will see what can be done in dat direction, only savages don't like liberties to be taken wid dem as a rule, and dey are a lot safer at a distance dan close by. All de same, I 'spect if you hab made up your mind to see wild savages, you won't be happy till you do."

The meal was soon finished, and then they determined to strike deeper into the forest. How they would find their way back puzzled Algy greatly, but Jack was steering his course by the aid of a pocket-compass, and he knew that when they struck the river again it would be an easy matter to return to the main river, where the Shark lay.

"Look here, Pete!" exclaimed Jack at last. "You are getting into frightfully swampy ground!"

"I'm noticing dat, Jack," growled Pete. "In fact, you can't help noticing a little ting like dat when you are knee-deep in de mire. But I don't want to know dat sort ob information. What I want to know is how to get out ob de swampy ground. I tink dis seems 'bout de best way out ob de quagmire. One would tink it was de rainy season, wid all dis clammy sloppiness 'bout. Den dere's a smell ob rotting vegetation which ain't at all pleasant to de refractory organs."

"I'd like to know what those are," laughed Jack, as Pete went floundering about. "I fancy you mean olfactory, but it's near enough for you."

"Grooh! Dis mud is a lot too near for me. Is my head above de mire, Jack?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Well, dat's a mercy, 'cos I know I'm sinking a lot too deep for undiluted pleasure. Here, come back, Algy! Quick! Come back!"

By reason of being lighter, Algy did not sink so deeply, and he had got some little distance ahead of the rest. And at that moment Pete, to his horror, saw an enormous crocodile making for the lad.

The terrible reptile was coming in a straight course towards the lad, and its movements were rapid, while Algy, being nearly knee-deep in the mud, found it impossible to move quickly, although he now saw the fearful peril that menaced him.

Pete went plunging forward, and as he went he drew his axe. It was impossible for Jack and Sam to fire from where they stood, for Algy and Pete were in their line of fire, and they could only move slowly in the mud. Long before they could have got into a position from whence they would have dared to fire, the terrible scene would have ended. Not only that, but the chances of their hitting the crocodile in a vulnerable part were very remote.

Pete dashed onwards, and just as the reptile was about to seize the helpless lad Pete got a grip on his collar, and with prodigious strength wrenched him backwards, then tossed him over his head.

The thing was so close that Pete heard the snap of the reptile's jaws as they closed. But for his quick action, Algy would certainly have been between them.

Algy's life was saved, but Pete had now to face a similar peril. Retreat was out of the question. Had he turned, before he could have proceeded many yards the crocodile must have caught him.

He faced it, waiting calmly for its approach, and then, as the awful jaws gaped open once more, Pete's axe flashed in the sunlight, and down it came with all the great strength of his right arm.

The blow was so terrific that the keen blade was completely buried in the reptile's skull, and in its death struggles it caught Pete a blow with its tail that sent him flying for several yards, while he landed head-first into the mire.

At any other time Jack and Sam would have laughed, for Pete's legs waved in the air in a truly funny manner; but they feared that he must have been injured by that blow, and, hurrying to the spot, they wrenched him from his unfortunate position.

"Bub—grooh!—hab you seen my hat and—m'my—pipe?" spluttered Pete. "Golly! I hab got a pailful ob mud in my mouf."

"A mud-bath is good for rheumatism," observed Sam, delighted to find that his comrade was not injured.

"So it may be, Sammy. But if you swallow seventeen quarts ob it, like I hab done, it ain't at all good for de digestion."

"Did you count the quarts?"

"I'm guessing at de feel ob dem. I hope dere weren't any worms or oder fish in dat mud. Yah, yah, yah! You'm got a little muddy, too, Algy. Funny ting dat you and I no sooner get clean dan we get dirty again. And it wouldn't be a bit of use to roll in dis grass, 'cos we would be bound to pick up more mud. But lead de way out ob de swamp, Jack. Dat old bird has about stove in my starboard timbers. I didn't know weder I was in de middle ob next week or in Germany. Just put your ear to my heart, Sammy, and listen if it's beating."

"Look here, you muddy beauty," exclaimed Sam, "you will have to get that mud off before I am going to clap my ear to your jacket! And, if it's all the same to you, we will continue the hunting excursion on dry ground. Swamps may be very pleasant for crocodiles, but they have a fearful lot of drawbacks for human beings."

"Shoo, Sammy! If dose crocs. hear you referring to dem as unhuman beings dey may be vexed wid you, and come after us again. Now, port your helm, and go ahead!"

They got out of the swamp with difficulty, and as they came upon no water, Pete and Algy were compelled to let the mud dry on them—which was not at all a pleasant sensation. However, at about mid-day they struck a small spring, where the water flowed into a little basin, and here they were able to get a wash; while the comrades decided to make that their camping place for the night.

"There's one thing against it," said Sam, examining the surrounding ground. "The chances are, we are likely to have savages come here. They are sure to know of the spring. And you must remember that water is scarce in this country."

"Mud ain't, Sammy!" said Pete.

"Never mind the mud."

"Well, dat's all right, as far as it goes; but you can't help minding it when a few quarts go squelching down your froat! Can you recommend someting to take de taste ob mud out ob my mouf, Algy?"

"You might try some quick-growing tomatoes," suggested Algy.

"Oh, do shut up 'bout dose tomatoes! I wonder you like referring to de matter."

"Well, when you have done puddling in that water, Pete, perhaps you will come away," said Jack. "Sam is quite right about the savages coming to this spring. They are nearly sure to do so if any are in the vicinity; and we don't want them to catch us, because savages are a lot more dangerous than crocodiles."

They selected a spot at a considerable distance from the spring, and now they ventured to build a camp-fire. The bushes grew so thickly that there was little fear of the fire being seen unless savages came quite close. At any rate, they would be unable to see it from the spring.

During the morning Sam had shot some rabbits and wildfowl, while Pete soon found some edible roots, and bread fruit from the baobab-tree; therefore, they had plenty of provisions. Then the tramp through the forest had given them healthy appetites, so that by the time the food was cooked they were quite ready for it.

When they had finished they chatted until it was dark; then Pete began to show signs of drowsiness.

"My impression is that savages are in the vicinity," said Sam.

"What makes you think that, Sam?" inquired Algy.

"Because you cannot hear the roaring of the wild beasts; and that is a sure sign. The savages have probably been hunting or fighting in this part. You can generally reckon on their doing the one or the other; but either would be sufficient to frighten wild beasts away."

"You think they will come to this part?" inquired Algy, who was really rather anxious that they should do so.

"They are pretty certain to do so if they require water. As I tell you, springs are few in these forests, and that one yonder is bound to be known by the natives. Hark! Do you hear that?"

"The cry of the night-bird, wasn't it?" answered Algy.

"That is what it was intended to represent; but no bird uttered that cry, unless I am much mistaken. There you are! It is the answering cry. The savages are signalling to each other. Here, Pete, wake up!"

"You want to keep Rory quiet, Sammy?"

"I want you to keep yourself quiet. You are snoring like an asthmatic Christmas sow, and——"

"Eh?"

"I say you are snoring."

"Oh, well, dat's all right; only I tought you added a simile to it dat I didn't consider at all complimentary. Now, what are you frightened about, Sammy?"

"Savages!"

"Den take my hand, and I will keep away all danger."

"All right, you beauty! You go and grow tomatoes, and try to stop talking. I know it is a thing you very seldom do. But I dare say you will be able to stop your silly talk if you try."

"Seems to me dere are too many compliments knocking about dis part ob de forest," growled Pete. "Howeber, if savages are coming in dis direction, de next best ting for us to do would be to shift from our campfire. It's too dark for de brutes to follow our trail, but dey would be bound to smell dis fire, eben if dey don't see it. And it ain't at all pleasant to fight a few hundred savages in de middle of an African forest."

This advice appeared to be good, and the comrades decided on following it. They made a circuit to the opposite side of the glade, and took up their position beneath an enormous baobab-tree, that appeared to be nearly dead.

The girth of the rugged trunk must have been quite thirty feet, while they had to stoop to pass beneath some of the enormous branches.

They had scarcely reached the spot when they heard shouts, which were answered by others in the opposite direction.

"I reckon two parties of savages are approaching," said Sam, "and as they both appear to be coming this way, we stand an excellent chance of falling into the hands of one of them."

"Suppose we climb the tree?" suggested Algy. "I don't suppose that they could see us in the branches, for there's not much moonlight gets down here; and they are not likely to remain at the spot all night."

"De boy has made up his mind to see de savage races," said Pete. "What do you say, boys? Shall we climb into de tree? It must be eider dat, or we shall hab to bolt pretty sharp."

The worst of it was they did not know in which direction to retreat, and as the tree would probably conceal them from their enemies' view, they decided to seek shelter there.

Pete hoisted Algy into one of the great branches, and then the others followed, Pete fixing Rory beneath his coat.

They worked their way to the trunk, and then discovered that the enormous tree was completely hollow. The crown had rotted away with age, although the great shell of the trunk was upwards of two feet thick.

"Mind you don't drop into dat hole, Algy," said Pete. "It would be a pretty big drop, and dere is no telling what dere might be at de bottom to fall on."

"It's all right, Pete," answered Algy. "I'm not going to fall. You see, I'm jolly well accustomed to climbing trees of all sorts and sizes, though I have never seen one a quarter as large as this one, much less climbed it."

"This is about full-sized," said Jack. "They are the largest trees in Africa, and it is said that they live for two thousand years. But keep quite quiet. Here come the savages!"

"Be shot if I don't believe we have stumbled on their meeting-place!" murmured Sam. "This glade would form an excellent camping-ground, and there would be no difficulty in finding the spot with this great tree to guide them. It is quite close to the spring, too. Here they come, right enough!"

CHAPTER 15.

In the Depths of the Earth.

A FEW moments later savages thronged into the glade from every side, until there must have been several hundred of them; and the worst of it was that they commenced to build a camp-fire, showing that they intended to pass the night there.

Fortunately the great branches of the tree prevented the moonlight penetrating, but the comrades had little hope of remaining undiscovered.

Pete had no difficulty in keeping Rory quiet. He was so well trained that he seemed to understand what was expected of him, and not once did he utter a sound.

In a very short space of time a huge camp-fire was piled up, and while some of the savages lighted it, others brought great joints of meat. It could not be said that these were cooked; it seemed as though they could scarcely have been warmed through when the savages commenced their feast.

"What do you tink ob dat little lot, Algy?" murmured Pete.

"Beastly!" answered Algy.

"Well, I must say de feast is rader underdone."

"Yes; and it's rather overdone, too. There's one ugly brute there eating like a wolf. I believe he must have put away a couple of pounds already, and he is still going at it as though he were starving."

"Well, you see, dey only eat 'bout twice a day."

"Should say what they are eating now would last them for a week. Think they will spot us, Pete?"

"Well, I must say dat I do."

"What are we going to do, then?"

"Fight for our lives, and hope for de best, while expecting de worst. Still, you neber know what you are going to get in dis world, and de same remarks apply to what you are not going to get. I must say dey might gib dat meat a little more cooking. Still, if wild beasts eat it dat way, I don't see why wild savages shouldn't do it. Now, see here, boys, I'm inclined to tink dat de safest possible place for us will be to drop into de hollow ob dis tree."

"But how are we to get out again?" inquired Jack. "The depth is considerable, you must remember."

"Why, dat's true enough," answered Pete. "But you hab got to recollect dat we hab axes, and— Dat settles de matter."

It seemed as though one of the savages had caught sight of the fugitives, for he leapt to his feet and brandished his spear; then he uttered a hideous yell, which was taken up by the whole throng, and it appeared to Algy that many of them pointed their spears towards the tree.

"It's all right," whispered Sam. "Keep still for the present. I don't think they have seen us."

"Then what are they making that awful row for?" inquired Algy.

"They seem to be going to perform their war-dance," answered Sam.

And he was right, for the next moment the whole throng of savages commenced to leap about like so many maniacs, while they struck furious blows in the air with their war-clubs, and stabbed with their spears.

The hideous yells they uttered made the forest resound, and Algy's first impression was that they would injure one another, for the blows they struck seemed to be utterly reckless, many of them just shaving the heads of some of the savages.

Round the fire they danced, until the whole gang appeared to be in a state of maddened fury, while many of them took tremendous leaps over the huge camp-fire.

It was a weird sight, and one that fascinated Algy, for he had never seen anything like it before. He could now realise how terrible it would be to fall into the hands of such a savage foe, for there was something horribly fierce and cruel about that strange war-dance.

It lasted for about a quarter of an hour, and then at a sign from the chief every savage became motionless, while the din died away as suddenly as it had arisen.

The chief's eyes were fixed upon the tree, and, glaring in that direction he slowly drew closer to it. His fierce face was distinctly visible in the moonlight and firelight, and there could be little doubt that his keen eyes had caught sight of the comrades.

Suddenly he uttered a yell of fury, and hurled his spear, which grazed Algy's hand as it struck the bough on which he sat.

"Drop into the opening!" cried Sam, firing several shots.

They dropped almost simultaneously, and landed on a heap of rotted wood. And now they were safe from the enemies' spears for the time being.

"I see no chance of escape," said Jack, gazing upwards.

"Well, dat's true enough," answered Pete. "But we ain't going to be taken so easily. You see, if a savage or so were to climb de tree and look into dis hollow, he wouldn't stop dere long enough to hurt his spear. Now a savage ain't stupid, and dey are bound to realise dat; so de chances are we sha'n't get attacked from dat point ob view. All we hab got to do is to watch for deir next move, and checkmate it if we can. If we can't, den we will die fighting—which is a lot better dan being tortured to death."

For some moments there was silence outside, then arrows commenced to fall into the opening; but there was no chance of much damage being done, for they descended slowly through the branches, and only one or two of them entered the hollow tree.

"Which shows you that the savages know the peril of ascending that tree," said Sam. "All we have to do is to keep close watch, although we should probably hear them ascending."

Presently the arrows ceased to fall, and for several minutes the comrades heard no noise from without.

They kept a keen look-out, expecting that the foe would be daring enough to ascend the tree; but they had a surer means to taking the comrades' lives than this.

About five minutes elapsed, and then there was a crackling sound.

"That finishes it," said Sam. "They have lighted a fire. They are going to burn us to death!"

"I don't see how de heat can get frough dat trunk, Sammy," observed Pete. "Den de smoke is bound to go straight up. We wouldn't get much ob it down here."

"That's true enough," answered Sam; "but you have got to recollect that the tree itself will burn in time. It may not be for hours, but the savages will not mind waiting for their victims."

"What do you tink about it, Jack?" inquired Pete.

"I fear that we are doomed," answered Jack. "I can see no possible way of escaping. All we could do is to get out of the tree, if possible, and then try to make a dash through those yelling wretches; but there would scarcely be a chance of succeeding."

"In dat case, we will wait for de last moment," said Pete. "You neber know what is going to happen in dis life, except dat it is likely to be someting you neber expected; and it stands to reason dat if we hab got de faintest chance ob fighting our way frough deir midst, we had better not do it till we hab giben someting its last chance ob turning up. De men from de Shark might come to our rescue."

"About as likely as that tomatoes would grow and ripen in one night," said Algy.

"Neber mind 'bout dat, my lad!" growled Pete. "I wonder you ain't ashamed to refer to your silly trick, 'cos it shows dat you ain't taken as much advantage ob your training as you ought to hab done. But mind you dis, boys—I blame myself for habing brought Algy into dis danger. I don't consider dat I was justified in doing it. We are accustomed to facing perils, and hab de right to please ourselves 'bout de matter, but I hadn't de right to——"

"You talk a lot of nonsense sometimes, Pete," interposed Algy. "At times you talk quite sensibly, but at others——"

"Eh?"

"You speak like a babbling idiot!"

"Golly! Just listen to de untrained way de boy is talking! It's too mighty shocking for words!"

"Well, if you have got a right to risk your life, I suppose I have got a similar one."

"And he says I speak like a babbling idiot after dat little lot!"

"Besides, how were you to know there was any danger?"

"De same as a man who levels a gun at anoder, and says he didn't tink dere was any danger, 'cos he didn't know it was loaded. It's all right, Algy. I know you are good at arguing black is best quality home-brewed

milk in colour, but you won't make me believe it. Now, shut up, and listen to de crackling ob de flames!"

"Pleasant thing to listen to, I must say!" exclaimed Algy. "But when I start howling with terror, you can say that you are to blame for letting me do what I wanted to, while you jolly well knew all the time that it would be impossible to stop me. Now, you shut up, and stop the crackling of the flames, so that we may escape from this place, and then you will be able to try your hand at 'geraniums,' and see if you succeed as well and quickly as you did with tomatoes!"

"I tink de boy is untrainable!" growled Pete. "But look here, Sammy, I don't see dat we hab got de right to die like rats in a trap!"

"I reckon I wouldn't like to kill rats in such a brutal manner!"

"Nunno! I'm speaking figuratively. But suppose I hack a hole in de trunk ob dis tree, and you fire at de savages until dey retreat. Den we make our exit."

"It would but hasten the end, Pete," said Jack. "The heat is increasing, and that shows that they must have a tremendous fire outside. It is impossible to bear your hand on the wood. Well, if you were to cut a hole through, flames and smoke would pour in."

"Well, I 'spect dat's right. But look here, Sammy! Just you try to frow your lasso upwards, so dat it may catch on some branch, den I'll go up it, and show dose demons dat dey ain't going to hab matters all deir own road!"

This Sam did, but he tried four times before the lasso caught.

"You had better stand clear ob me!" cried Pete, ascending. "I ain't at all sure dat de branch de lasso has got fixed on will bear. I 'spect it is some broken bough, and as it will be dead it's sure to be rader rotten!"

He gained the top, and, getting his elbow over the side, opened fire with his revolver; but the heat and smoke up there was so stifling that he was compelled to hold his breath.

Nevertheless, he emptied every chamber in his revolver, and was feeling for the other one when he lost his hold, and came down with a run.

There was a crashing sound as Pete landed on the ground inside the tree; then the comrades felt the ground give way, and they all fell into a deep hole.

The impact of Pete's fall had caused the rotten roots and the undermined ground to give way, and they were all precipitated into what appeared to be a deep pit.

"Where did I come from?" inquired Pete, struggling to his feet.

"Top of the tree," answered Algy.

"Den de next ting I want to know is where hab I got to?"

"A little beyond the bottom of the tree. Have you hurt yourself?"

"Well, I don't tink I hab improved my external feelings, and I 'spect I hab got a shock to my cistern, while I'm mighty wet and splashy, 'cos dere's 'bout a foot ob water at de bottom ob de floor. But look here, boys—

"I believe dere's anoder chance ob escape turning up. Tink you could strike a few matches, Sammy, while I take a bird's-eye view upwards?"

"They are generally taken downwards," answered Sam. "But wait a minute!"

Sam had no sooner struck a match than Pete uttered a yell of delight.

A subterranean watercourse ran immediately beneath the great tree, and this had possibly caused its death by rotting the roots away.

The tunnel through which the water flowed was about three feet high at that part, and Pete at once came to the conclusion that it might be possible to work their way along it, as he knew there must be an exit somewhere.

"Here, Rory," he exclaimed, "you come along wid me, and you follow me, boys! We shall hab to travel in de darkness, but I believe we are going to find our way out somewhere. You see, it does not much matter where it is, so long as it is far enough away from dose yelling savages. Golly! Won't dey be surprised when dey discover dat de birds are flown!"

Pete now groped his way along the subterranean river, and the others kept close to him. They were about up to their knees in water, and in some parts the roof of the tunnel was so low that they had to crawl in the water on their hands and knees; but they succeeded in getting along all right, and at last Pete saw a faint light ahead.

"I believe we are saved, boys!" he cried. "I can see de cold, clear waters ob de risen moon shining on de— Nunno! I mean, de cold, clear moon shining on de waters ob Regent's Canal, or one ob dose upper subterranean waterways. I dunno its name, 'cos dere ain't no signpost. You can depend on it dat it's water, dough, 'cos it looks wet. Now den, come along! And mind you don't clump your nappers against de solid rocks, 'cos you will find dem just above your heads!"

The subterranean watercourse flowed into a river beneath an overhanging bank, and Pete waded a little way down the stream, followed by the others.

They had escaped from a terrible death, and felt very thankful for it, although they knew that the chances were the savages would follow, for they were certain to discover the way the comrades had got out of the hollow tree.

"But, you see, boys," exclaimed Pete, when Jack mentioned this, "dat doesn't matter much! It will be some time before de tree is burnt frough, and de savages won't discover our mode ob escape till den. Bery well; while dey are discovering dat, we shall be in anoder place. Suppose we swim across de riber, and continue de journey home on de oder side. Do you tink dis is de riber we followed yesterday, Jack?"

"I fancy it must be," answered Jack. "It evidently winds round. At any rate, we shall be safer on the other side. Keep a sharp look-out for crocodilés!"

A few strokes took them to the further side of the river, and then they hurried along the bank; but they heard nothing of their foes, and were beginning to hope that they would not follow until the morning.

"I reckon they are certain to strike our trail," said Sam. "Probably they will know where that subterranean stream disgorges."

"But, even if they do, they won't see our trail on that side of the river," said Algy.

"A fact that will at once convince them we have crossed," answered Sam. "It is no easy matter to put a savage off your trail. However, we are sure to have a pretty good start, and, unless Pete suddenly comes to the conclusion that he is tired and wants a rest, we ought to be able to maintain that start. The peril we have escaped from makes this one very slight in comparison."

"Dat's de way ob de world. Sammy. When you get a big difficulty you gib up bodering ober little ones; and when you hab got ober de big difficulty, you start worrying about de little ones again. Dat's human nature, and he's about de most perverse beast dat you can find in a day's march. Did you say you tought we had better rest for de remainder ob de night?"

"No, I didn't; and, what is more, it would be fatal to do so. In my own mind I am absolutely certain that the savages will strike our trail, and if they do that it is equally certain that they will follow it until they capture us. You know what capture by those inhuman demons would mean!"

"I 'spect dey would torture us to death."

"There is not the slightest doubt about that. We must not stop until we reach the vessel."

"Golly! Dat's a mighty long march, too, 'specially widout food and sleep!"

"We may get some wild fruits."

"Dey won't be so mighty restful, eider. However, we shall hab to make de best ob a bad job. But mind you dis, boys—I ain't at all sure dat when we do reach de vessel de men will fight; and if dey won't, it wouldn't be such a difficult ting for de savages to capture dat vessel!"

"They will have to fight," declared Jack.

"You may be right, Jack; at de same time, I dunno how you are going to make men fight against deir will," said Pete. "All de same, we will keep on hoping for de best, den if de worst happens we can start grumbling at it. 'Nuff said!"

They travelled all through the remainder of the night at a rapid pace, and it was not until day dawned that they ventured to take a rest, although even then it was a very short one.

The comrades knew that by following the stream they were going considerably out of their way, for its course was very sinuous; but what they feared if they struck a straight line through the forest was that they would come upon the savages.

"Think the vindictive brutes know where our vessel is, Jack?" inquired Algy.

"I should not be at all surprised," answered Jack. "That war-dance we witnessed may have been preparatory to their making an attack on the vessel; but, you see, if we were once aboard, we should have an excellent chance of keeping the savages at bay, even if the men refused to fight."

"There is one calamity that you forget, though," said Algy, looking very serious.

"What is that?" inquired Jack.

"Why, if they get fighting at that spot they are likely to trample on Pete's tomato plantation, and that would be a thousand pities—now that the tomatoes are coming up so nicely. It would be a fearful disappointment for Pete, and all his profits would go with one fell swoop!"

"Oh, do shut up 'bout dat plantation, Algy," growled Pete. "I wonder you like to refer to your silly practical jokes in dat manner. You ought to be ashamed ob dem. But see here, boys! It would be a mighty serious ting if dose savages got possession ob de Shark before we can get back to her, 'cos once dey got aboard I dunno how we would be able to capture de vessel again."

"Well, we must hope that the men will defend her if the attack is made," answered Jack. "All we can do is to get back as fast as possible; and I don't believe that we would get back quicker by striking a straight line through the forest. Travelling in the dense brushwood would be considerably slower than along the river bank, besides the risk of running into the savages."

The journey was continued at the greatest pace that the comrades could command, but when they neared the river some hideous yells warned them that the attack had already commenced.

As Jack had feared, the savages had got ahead of them, and when the comrades came in sight of the main river they saw at least five hundred savages on the bank, hurling their spears at the vessel's side, and sending flights of arrows on her deck.

The worst of it was, the men aboard appeared to be making no attempt to resist the attack, and presently they commenced to lower the boats.

They did their work in a very awkward manner, but succeeded in getting all the boats on the port side—the Shark's bows were upstream—into the water, and then, scrambling in until the boats were so crowded that it appeared inevitable they must be swamped, the men rowed towards the opposite bank, keeping the vessel between themselves and the foe.

For some time the savages continued to fling their weapons, and then the whole party plunged into the water, and swam towards the vessel.

"Now, ain't dat mighty disgusting, boys?" exclaimed Pete. "Our men neber offered de slightest resistance. If dey had fought I don't see how dose savages could hab taken de vessel. What's de next best ting to do, Jack?"

"I really don't know," answered Jack. "It stands to-reason that we can't retake the vessel."

"Nunno! Not by ourselves, and I don't believe dat we are going to do it wid de help ob dose cowards."

"I reckon our only plan is to cross the river by swimming," said Sam. "Then we must join the party, and see if we can induce them to fight. There is one thing certain, and that is that we must recapture that vessel at any risk, otherwise we should be stranded in this forest. I do not

suppose that there is any settlement within hundreds of miles of this place, and those men are not the sort to stand a march like that through an African forest. We had better cross this narrow river, then make our way up the broad one for a mile or so. You see, the tide is running out, and it will sweep us down a long way before we get across. We don't want to be swept near the Shark."

"Dat's true enough, Sammy," answered Pete. "Neider do we want to be swept near de crocodiles. You hab got to remember dat dere will be a good lot in de riber."

"I know," answered Sam; "but it is a peril that we must risk. We cannot leave those helpless men to their fate."

"Dey ought to be horsewhipped," growled Pete. "At de same time, dat doesn't say dat dey deserve to be scalped; so lead de way, Sammy, and don't dive into a shoal ob crocodiles, 'cos dey bite."

A few strokes carried them across the stream, and then they walked up the river bank for several hundred yards.

It was a long swim to the opposite side, but Pete knew that Algy would manage it easily, while Rory seemed to thoroughly enjoy the coolness of the water.

There was not very much fear of crocodiles in the deep water; all the same, Pete kept a keen look-out, while Sam turned several times towards the shore to see if any of the savages had detected them.

He was beginning to hope that such was not the case, when a furious yell arose, and a large canoe, crowded with armed warriors, shot out from the bushes, and came in hot pursuit after the swimmers.

Doubtless the cunning savages had been watching them, and had allowed them to take to the water, knowing that they would then have them at their mercy.

"Keep on as fast as you can, Algy!" exclaimed Sam. "It is a good thing that our cartridges are waterproof."

"For the savages, Sam?" inquired Algy.

"No; for us! That canoe must not come up with us. It would be fatal!"

As he spoke he unslung his rifle, for the range was too great for his revolvers to take much effect.

CHAPTER 16.

At Bay in the Forest.

ALGY was wondering how Sam would be able to take accurate aim with a rifle in the water, and watched him as he swam.

He dropped a little behind the rest, and, treading water, levelled his rifle, and fired so quickly that it seemed impossible he could have taken aim.

"I struck the canoe, I think," said Sam, swimming on once more. "Whether I struck it below the water-line or not is another matter."

"Dey are coming on, Sammy!" exclaimed Pete. "Don't forget dat your rifle is a repeater, and dat de proper ting for you to do is to repeat de shot."

"It's all right, Pete," answered Sam. "I want to give them a chance of discovering the effect of the first one. If I have drilled a hole in their canoe they are not likely to notice it at once. You see, my object is to make them turn their canoe towards the shore."

"Bery well, Sammy; and after you hab turned dat canoe you will hab a second one to turn, for here comes anoder. Golly! And dere's a third one. It's mighty certain dat all de savages hab not boarded de vessel, and yet dere were enough to go on wid."

This was so. Two more canoes were coming in hot pursuit, and some of the savages in them now commenced to shoot arrows and hurl spears at the swimmers; but as yet the distance was too great for those weapons to take effect, and they all fell into the water short of the mark.

This time Sam fired two shots, and in both cases he aimed at the canoes, knowing that if he could damage those sufficiently it would certainly check the pursuit; for if the savages were to take to the water the comrades were so far ahead that their vindictive foes would scarcely overtake them ere they gained the river bank.

"You caught dat canoe to de right dat time, Sammy!" exclaimed Pete. "See dem springing to stop de leak? You can use my rifle when yours is empty, and I shall be able to reload all right in de water. I ain't firing against you, 'cos I don't want to make you jealous."

"All right, you beauty, you won't do that," answered Sam. "But those canoes must be stopped at once. They are getting a lot too close for safety. You notice the spears are falling around us now. I shall want your rifle directly, Pete."

As Sam fired his last three shots Pete swam to his side, and exchanged rifles. To reload in the water was a simple matter to Pete. He was wonderfully buoyant, and the rifle was of no great weight. He handed it back to Sam as soon as he had emptied the second weapon, and now two of the canoes turned towards the shore. But the third one came on, while all the time its occupants were yelling hideously.

"Bit low in de bows, Jack," observed Pete, turning from time to time to watch the effect of Sam's shots.

"Yes," answered Jack. "My impression is that she is half full of water, and that her crew will have to finish their voyage by swimming. Are you all right, Algy?"

"Rather! We are not far from the shore, either."

"Den now look out for de crocs., Algy," said Pete. "Now den, Sammy, can't you hit an Indian canoe when you see it? Pity we ain't got some barn doors 'bout de place! Shall I fire for you, just to show you how to take correct aim?"

"I reckon that's the way!" exclaimed Sam, firing another shot. "That has ripped her side up. See!"

The canoe rapidly filled, and the savages leapt into the water, and then swam onwards at a surprising pace.

"I'm off!" exclaimed Pete. "Mind de crocs. Look after de boy, Jack!"

Pete turned on his side, and then sped onwards at a pace that not one of the savages could have commanded. His strokes were not quick, but they were both long and powerful, and the speed he made was surprising.

He appeared to take no heed of the crocodiles, although the chance of some of the terrible reptiles being in the shallow water was very considerable. However, Pete gained the bank without mishap, and now he drew his revolver.

The range was long, and Pete was not nearly such a good shot as Sam, but as the balls tore their way into the water around the savages they quickly turned, and swam out of range.

A few moments later the other three swimmers landed, while Rory also scrambled up the bank, and leapt around his master as though he had not seen him for days.

"Rory evidently tought dat I was shot, and dat was what made me go so fast," laughed Pete. "At de same time, I tought dat dose savages ought to be turned, and you notice, Sammy, dat dey went back directly dey found dey had got to face a man who could hit a barn door."

"That's all right! You didn't hit any of them, and chance it! But you frightened them, and that had the same effect. See here, Pete, if I were anything like as vindictive as they are, not one of them would ever reach the opposite bank."

"Well, you can't bery well fire at helpless men, Sammy," said Pete, "eben dough dey are fierce savages, who don't know de meaning ob mercy. But it seems to me dat we ought to stop at dis part, 'cos we shall want to keep our eyes on dose savages in de vessel. Suppose we form a sort ob barricade here? De riber will protect us on one side, and it stands to reason dat de savages can't attack us on de oder side, unless dey get across de riber. What do you say, boys? Do you know ob a safer place?"

"I can't say I do," answered Jack. "At the same time, I don't consider dat this is anything like a safe one."

"Well, dat's true enough, Jack, as it is at present, but I'm ob de opinion dat I shall be able to make it safer before so mighty long. Just you two keep watch on de foe, and I will drop a few trees, and use deir truncated trunks and branches for de purposes ob my barricade. You can help me, Algy."

Pete drew his axe, and, selecting the likeliest trees, commenced operations, while he astonished Algy with the speed at which he felled them.

Some of the smaller ones he brought down with a few blows of the axe, and then he cut them up into equal lengths, piling the great logs up in the form of an oblong close to the water's edge.

Several hours elapsed before his task was completed, and he made a breastwork some four feet high, which completely surrounded the comrades.

As the savages carried no firearms it would be an extremely difficult task for them to dislodge the comrades, who were armed with repeating-rifles and a brace of revolvers apiece.

The day had passed by the time Pete's work was finished, but already the moonlight was streaming over the water, and every object was distinctly

visible. The comrades could even see the savages moving about the vessel's deck.

A shot from Sam's rifle had the effect of sending them to cover. He had fired to convince them that they were keeping a close watch, for he thought one of the boats might have been left aboard the vessel, in which case the savages would probably use it for the attack, if they imagined that their enemies were not keeping a close watch.

"I'm rader anxious about dose men," observed Pete, as the time passed by. "I tought dat when dey heard de firing dey would come dis way."

"From what I know of them they would be a lot more likely to go the other way," said Algy. "If you want to entice men like that, never start firing, for they would not be at all likely to come in its direction."

"Well, dat's true enough, Algy, unless dey tought deir friends were firing de shots."

"You can bet they wouldn't come even then," said Algy. "If they thought that their friends were in danger, they would come to the conclusion that they would also be in danger if they came in that direction, and they would go in the other one. With the exception of Burg, I don't believe there is one amongst them possessed of the slightest courage."

"But what I am afraid ob is dat de savages will get across de riber at a part where we can't see dem, and den make an attack on de men."

"They are a lot more likely to make it on us," declared Algy. "You surely don't think that they are going to attack a hundred men in preference to three men and a boy? I'll bet we are in a lot more danger than they will ever be. Besides, what can we do? If we go fooling around the forest we are bound to get pounced upon by the savages. Don't you think so, Jack?"

"Yes, we can only stop here, and try to prevent the enemy from crossing. Even if they do cross, we are protected by the breastwork. No doubt they would be able to take the place by storm, but as a rule a savage does not care to face a heavy fire even to have vengeance."

"We shall be able to hold out here for some time," said Sam. "All the same, they are certain to cross the river, and you may be sure they will do it at a part, out of our sight. No doubt they will hope to take us by surprise, and advance upon us under cover of the surrounding bushes. All we can do is to keep the strictest watch, and hope for the best if the attack comes."

More than an hour passed by without the slightest sign of the foe, and Algy found this remarkably trying to his nerves.

Personally, he would rather the attack had been made straight away; but as he had no choice in the matter, he kept his eyes fixed on the surrounding bushes.

Beneath the shadows of the trees it would be most difficult to detect the advancing savages, and more than once Algy imagined that one of the stealthy wretches was approaching, as the night wind fanned a bush, causing it to move slightly. Once he almost fired, but Sam stopped him just in time.

"Don't fire till one of us gives the word!" said Sam. "What you saw was only a moving shadow. I am so accustomed to savages that it is nearly certain I shall see them approach, and the same remark applies to Jack and Pete. We don't want to waste any shots, and, above all, we don't want the savages to know that we are on the look-out. Our game is to let them imagine they are going to take us by surprise, while we surprise them with our first volley."

Algy saw the wisdom of this; at the same time, he wished the fighting would commence, for he felt certain that it would be far less trying to his nerves than that suspense.

Another hour passed by, and then Sam caught sight of one of their stealthy forms amongst the bushes. He saw it for a second only, but he had no doubt on the point.

"They are coming now," he murmured. "Use your rifles first, and if we cannot drive them off with those, then your revolvers, firing as quickly as you can take aim. And remember, Algy, we must not waste shots. It is a matter of life or death, and no time for sparing the foe. There may be a hundred against us—or even thrice that number! It would never do to fall into their hands alive, so that there must be no surrender."

Another ten minutes passed by, but the comrades only heard the sighing of the wind through the trees and the gentle lapping of the water.

Then suddenly the savages' war-cry, echoed through the forest, and a black mass rushed towards the barricade, yelling furiously.

It seemed to Algy that resistance must be all in vain; but now the repeating rifles flashed into the moonlight, and spears and arrows flew thickly against the barricade.

"Don't expose yourselves more than you can possibly help!" cried Sam, when he saw how thickly those missiles were flying. "Remember those arrows and spears may be poisoned, in which case the slightest scratch might mean death."

All the time he spoke he was firing. The savages dashed right up to the barrier, and some of them actually tried to clamber over, but the galling fire was beginning to tell its tale. The chief, who led the party, tried to urge them on; then one of the bullets struck him in the shoulder, and he uttered a cry of pain.

That cry appeared to dishearten the savages even more than the shots had done, and when they saw their chief reel, they turned and fled to the sheltering bushes.

"Reload as quickly as you can!" exclaimed Jack. "They are certain to renew the attack, and we must be ready for them."

The little party quickly reloaded their repeating rifles. They had not yet had to use their revolvers.

Amongst the forest bushes the savages disappeared with surprising suddenness. The hideous uproar died away as though by magic, and once more silence reigned in the great forest.

"It seems to me that if you were to fire into those bushes, Sam, you would be bound to drive the foe from the spot," said Algy.

"Not one shot would take effect," answered Sam. "Every savage will be behind some tree. No; we must wait for the next attack."

"To tell the honest truth, I get frightened while waiting," declared Algy. "When the fight is going ahead, I forget all about it, except that we have got to conquer; but this waiting work makes a coward of me."

"You can reckon that it has the same effect on every man," said Sam, "only most of them will not own it. Of course, after years of forest life—and I was almost born in the forest—you get accustomed to it; but the bravest soldiers who have ever lived have felt that strange sensation while waiting for the battle to begin. You needn't worry yourself, Algy. You are not by any means singular in that respect."

"Well, that's a blessing," exclaimed Algy, "because it isn't pleasant to come to the conclusion that you are a coward. Think they will attack again?"

"Yes; I'm downright certain that they will. They may try flinging their spears for a bit, but they won't leave this spot until they have had vengeance for their wounded chief. He will get wounded again, too, if he leads the attack. It is the surest way to defeat the inhuman wretches."

"It seems to me that their best plan would be to scatter, and attack us from all sides," said Algy. "Some could come by the water, and others all round."

"Golly! What's de boy trying to do?" growled Pete. "Do you want to help de foe wid advice, Algy?"

"They can't hear it!"

"Well, dat's true enough; but if dey acted on it, we wouldn't be here for so mighty long."

"Then why don't the silly idiots do it?" inquired Algy.

"Because they are afraid," answered Sam. "A savage does not like to attack singly. Each man holds back, and that is fatal to success. When they charge in a body it is a different thing. They get excited, and one urges the other on. Now, all of you keep close watch! We do not want a surprise."

Algy kept his eyes fixed on the dark bushes. It appeared to him that the comrades were keeping a very careless watch, but such was not really the case. Sam was very alert, though he did not appear to be so. No sound escaped his keen ear, but he knew what each one signified, while Algy did not. The cry of a night-bird seemed to him to be a signal for the attack, but Sam could detect it for the real thing, although the savages could imitate such cries with wonderful accuracy.

Suddenly an arrow leapt into the little enclosure; then many others fell.

"Keep close to the front breastwork," said Sam. "They are firing into the air. You notice that some of their arrows are falling into the water. Keep Rory near you, Pete. It won't do to let him get hit. It would make you fight too fiercely when the combat comes."

"You ain't going to gib me a lesson in gentle fighting, eider, Sammy," said Pete, calling his dog to his side, and making him lie down so close to

the breastwork that it was quite impossible for one of the falling arrows to strike him.

Sam fired a few shots at random, for not one of the savages was visible; but those shots did not have the effect of stopping the shower of arrows, and Sam soon desisted, feeling that he was merely wasting his ammunition.

All through the night this was kept up, but directly day dawned the arrows ceased to fall, and by the silence in the forest Algy imagined that the foe had gone. He even suggested as much to Sam.

"Don't you imagine that for one moment," answered Sam. "If one of us was to walk twenty yards into the bushes on either side, he would never return alive. My opinion is that the savages will not make a second charge, because they suffered so heavily in the first one; but they will surely remain there until we are starved out."

"Dunno 'bout dat," growled Pete. "Seems to me I would rader die fighting dan starving. But we can only wait for de present, 'cos dere ain't de slightest chance ob getting any food, and de water is 'bout as salt as fresh butter bought in London."

And so they waited through the day, and each one believed that he was waiting for his death.

CHAPTER 17.

Recapturing the Vessel.

BY night the wind had fallen, while a white heat-mist rose from the hot earth. The ripple of the water, as the tide swept up the river, and the occasional splashing of a crocodile were the only sounds audible.

It seemed as though a fog were veiling the heavens, and that the moonlight failed to penetrate it, for the night was black.

Then into that blackness shot a red light. It went up like a rocket, and fell into the enclosure, where it lay burning in the long grass.

It was a fiery arrow, and the next moment scores of them shot into the air.

"Tink dat will burn us out, Sammy?" inquired Pete, glancing at the burning arrows.

"No," answered Sam; "but yonder will."

The comrades gazed towards the forest, and then they saw that the bushes were burning in a dozen places, and those spreading fires formed a semi-circle round the little stronghold.

"What wind there is coming this way," said Sam, "and that is the way the fire will come. The cunning wretches knew that when they fired the forest. Now, look here! There is only one thing for us to do, and that is to charge through the foe. I fear it is a hopeless thing to do, and yet it appears to be the only one."

"What about the lake, Sam?" exclaimed Jack. "We might take to the water."

"Yes, I thought of that; but it would mean fighting in the water instead of on land. Then we should also have the crocodiles to contend with. You see, it is absolutely certain that the savages will have made

preparations to attack us on the water, because they will imagine that it is our only possible chance of escaping. They will have got some canoes over this side, and no doubt they are now lying in wait, although it is too dark to see them. We have not many minutes to decide, because that fire is leaping towards us with fearful rapidity, and it will come faster still as it gains in volume."

This proved to be the case. The long grass ignited with surprising rapidity. The flames seemed to flash along it, and already the grass was burning outside the barricade.

Then the sun-dried bushes crackled up, and the slight breeze that there was fanned the flames into a roaring fire.

Each moment its roar grew fiercer, and Sam came to the conclusion that escape through it would be quite impossible. The belt of fire was so broad that no man could have passed through it, while each moment it was growing fiercer.

"Well, there's only one thing now," said Sam. "We must take to the water and trust to luck. I feel certain that canoes crowded with armed savages will be close at hand to cut us off. Probably they will play with us like cats play with mice, and——"

"What, bite us, Sammy?"

"Oh, I don't suppose they would stop at that! Still, what I mean to say is that there must be no surrender. We cannot wait here another minute. The heat is too fearful. Step lightly into the water, and then strike out from the shore."

"And don't forget, boys, dat our objective is de Shark, 'cos it stands to reason dat if we are to save our own lives and de lives ob all de men I hab brought here, we must recapture dat vessel. 'Nuff said!"

They entered the water together, Pete keeping close to Algy. He knew that Rory would be all right; indeed, he was the likeliest to escape, by reason of being small. It was quite possible that the savages would not see him in the darkness.

They had not gained fifty yards from the river bank, when by the fire-light they saw half a dozen canoes coming in chase, and the comrades at once opened fire, aiming as well as they could in the water.

Pete blazed away with a rapidity that gave Sam the impression he was not taking accurate aim, but the range was so short that he could scarcely miss his mark.

At first it appeared as though the heavy fire had no effect on the savages beyond causing them to yell more furiously, if that were possible; but as they drew quite close and hope seemed to be at an end, they suddenly ceased paddling, and then, turning their war-canoes, made for the shore, keeping between the swimmers and the land.

"First defeat, boys!" exclaimed Pete. "And it will gib us de chance ob reloading, although dat ain't such a mighty easy matter in de water. However, I dare say we shall be able to manage it all right, and I tink we had better do it before we get farder away from de foe!"

The work was soon done, and once more the comrades struck out for the

middle of the river, up which the tide was carrying them, and consequently away from the vessel.

This, perhaps, was all for the best, as it gave the savages the impression that the fugitives were making for the opposite side of the river, and not for the vessel; but the tide was nearly at its height, and when it turned would carry them in the direction in which they desired to go.

How Pete proposed to recapture the vessel was a mystery, and neither Jack nor Sam believed it would be at all possible; but he appeared to have made up his mind to do so, therefore they raised no obstacles.

They had not proceeded far when again they saw one of the canoes giving chase; but, although the firelight was behind it, they could see no savages at the paddles. The cunning wretches were crouching down in order to escape the comrades' unerring aim.

They occasionally shot arrows in the direction of the swimmers, but it is doubtful if they had yet sighted them in the darkness, for they were now beyond the radius of the firelight.

Pete dropped a little behind the rest, then dived, and while beneath the water he drew his axe.

Unless that canoe was stopped, death to all was certain.

He had judged his distance well, for when he rose the canoe was just upon him, and coming swiftly onwards.

With a terrific blow he brought down his axe, which crashed into the side of the frail craft, cutting it to the water-line; but, not content with this, he dealt blow after blow, and in a few moments the canoe filled and sank beneath the surface, leaving him in the midst of the struggling savages.

"Come on, you wild beasts!" roared Pete. "Dere's one man in your midst! Let me see de one who dare come within reach ob dis axe!"

At that moment Jack, Sam, and Algy opened fire, for they could just discern Pete in the midst of the yelling throng.

Those shots completed the savages' panic, and they struck out for the river bank, while a galling fire followed them.

"'Noder victory to de boys!" exclaimed Pete, swimming up. "I dunno weder I am right or not, but it seems to me dose savages ain't going to renew de attack in a similar manner. You see, dey are losing deir canoes, and, if I ain't much mistaken, some ob dem are getting wounded!"

"You are about right there," answered Sam. "At any rate, we are pretty safe from a fresh attack at present. Make a bit more for the vessel. I think the tide is on the turn now, so we must be careful it doesn't carry us out to sea. You must remember that our chances of recapturing the Shark are very remote, Pete."

"I dunno dat, Sammy. My impression is dat dere won't be such a mighty lot ob de savages remaining aboard. Dey will all hab wanted to take part in de man hunt, and de chances are not bery many ob dem will hab remained on de vessel. Howeber, dat's a ting dat we hab got to risk,

Now, let me lead de way, 'cos I want to be de first aboard, so as to be as free from danger as possible!"

How being the first aboard could keep him out of danger was a mystery to Jack and Sam. However, they had no choice in the matter, for Pete was by far the fastest swimmer, and if he had made up his mind to be the first to board the vessel, there was not a doubt that he would succeed.

"You help Rory up, Jack," murmured Pete, as they neared the Shark, which had now swung with the tide, and her bows were pointing up the river. "He will be all right as far as de swimming goes, but, not being an American buffalo, he can't climb trees nor ship's cables."

"So you are going up the cable, Pete?" inquired Jack.

"M'yes, Jack! Not being a fly, it ain't at all possible for me to go up de side ob de vessel. But just you follow me, and stop asking your foolish questions! And dere's anoder ting to remember—don't you make de slightest sound, 'cos it's possible dat de savages will be keeping watch!"

Jack thought this was absolutely certain, and he also knew that Pete was running into very grave peril. However, he had made up his mind, and argument would only have been so much waste of time.

Now Pete shot ahead and grasped the cable; then he commenced his ascent.

Apparently, the comrades' approach had not been detected by those aboard. Having had such proof of their adversaries' cowardice when the men abandoned their vessel in terror, the chances are that the savages underrated their foes, and so did not anticipate an attack.

At any rate, Pete gained the vessel's deck; but as he rose to his feet a tall savage strode forward, apparently surprised at seeing a man standing there.

The savage warrior came forward with his head a little advanced, and his hand on his spear, as though he half expected to meet a foe; but the night was so dark that it was impossible for him to see Pete distinctly, and he uttered some words that were quite incomprehensible.

"Well, dat may be true enough, old hoss," exclaimed Pete, springing forward and seizing him round the body: "but, as I don't understand what you want to say, p'r'aps you wouldn't mind going oberboard like dat, and telling me de rest anoder time!"

And as Pete spoke he hurled the savage over the bulwarks. Then he watched to make sure that the man could swim, and directly he struck out for the shore Pete sprang to the companion-way, for, quick though his action had been, the savage uttered his war-cry as he went over the side, and Pete knew that such a yell as he gave must have been heard by all aboard the vessel.

This proved to be the case, too, for as Pete gained the top of the companion-way he saw a large number of savages spring up it.

It seemed as though the whole party had been spending their time below, doubtless enjoying some of the many dainties that Pete had taken the precaution of bringing on the vessel.

He did not draw a weapon, but met the foremost savages with his fists, and the blows he dealt hurled them backwards down the stairs.

A savage who had been clinging to the handrail sprang at Pete, who received him with a blow in the chest that sent him flying backwards, while he carried others in his fall.

"Just stop down dere for a few moments, old hosses!" exclaimed Pete, slamming the door and bolting it on the outside, while he also turned the key, although he knew that if the savages wanted to burst the door open they would not have the slightest difficulty in doing so with their axes.

"It's all right, boys!" he exclaimed, as the others came up. "One ob de enemy hab fallen oberboard, and de oders hab gone below. You can hear dem trying to burst dat door if you listen. Hellup! Dere goes one ob de panels. We will see if we can induce dem not to break any more. Now den, you dere!" he shouted. "Do you want me to fire dis revolver frough de opening? Nunno! I tought you wouldn't. Well, just you behave yourselves like respectable savages, else de chances are you will get hurt!"

"What you want with us?" demanded a voice; and the savage spoke English very well.

"Dat's just where you are off your horse. We don't want anyting wid you. But you hab got to recollect dat dis is our vessel, and dat you ain't got any right aboard. Now, if you had had a vessel like dis, and we had boarded her widout your permission, dere ain't de slightest doubt dat you would hab scalped us, if we had fallen into your power, de same as you hab fallen into ours. If we were to start firing frough dis opening, den you would hab de roughest voyage any longshore savage eber had widout putting to sea at all!"

"But what you want with us?"

"You silly old parrot, don't I keep telling you dat we don't want you at all? De question is, weder we can get rid ob you widout shooting you all down. You see, we don't want to do dat; at de same time, if you don't behave yourselves, it stands to reason dat we shall hab to do it. On de oder hand, if you like to come out one at a time, leabing your weapons behind you, den I shall deal sort ob separately and categorically wid you!"

"You want to kill all?"

"I don't intend to kill one ob you—not if you do what I order. Ob course, if you won't do it, you must know dat we shall hab to open fire, and den you would need two-free hospitals, and a staff ob medicated dressers and undressers, wid a few undertakers frown in!"

Probably the savage did not understand all this, but he understood sufficient to know that he and his people were in a very awkward position.

"We set ship on fire and burn you," he said, by way of a feeler.

"Don't see how you could burn us, old hoss, dough I must say you might be able to burn yourselves widout de slightest difficulty. You can try dat cistern ob escape, alough I am inclined to tink it will be rader painful."

"If we come out quiet, what you do?"

"Send you to de shore one by one."

"And not kill?"

"No. We ain't a lot ob vindictive savages!"

"We come!"

"Bery well. But you hab got to understand dis little lot, and it will be well for your healths if you bear it well in mind before you come out. Dere are only four ob us, but we hab a mighty lot ob weapons, and dey fire just as fast as we want dem, and almost as often. Now, if more dan one savage comes at a time, de rest must expect to get shot. If one comes, he will just go oberboard!"

"How do we know you won't kill?"

"If we wanted to kill you we could start firing now, and you wouldn't hab much chance."

"I will trust you."

"It's a lot more dan I would do wid you, old hoss. At de same time, I consider you are quite wise to trust me, 'cos you can't help yourself. I 'spect if you are one ob de chiefs you will send some ob your warriors first to see how dey get on."

"Why cannot all come out at once?"

"Well, one ob de reasons is dat we would start firing if you did, and de oder reason is dat we wouldn't allow you to come out all at once. Now, you can please yourself as to what you will do!"

"Open the door, and one warrior shall come out."

"Bery well; and just you tell him to take particular notice dat he comes out widout his weapons, else he may meet wid a rader rough reception!"

Pete opened the door, and a savage came out timidly.

"Just bolt de door again, Sammy, while I deal wid dis one. Here, you hab got a knife, old hoss. Dat's going oberboard like so, and now you are going after it; but dere's no doubt dat you can swim, so dat you won't hab any difficulty in reaching de shore."

Pete seized the man round the body, bore him to the vessel's side, then flung him overboard, while he watched him swim away.

"We shall get rid ob de lot by dat cistern, boys!" exclaimed Pete.

"Suppose some of them can't swim?" suggested Sam.

"Dat ain't at all likely, Sammy. I neber yet met a savage libing anywhere near de water who couldn't swim; but I will ask dem de question, and den watch dem; and, ob course, if dey can't swim, I shall hab to go in after dem. But dat won't be much trouble, seeing dat I'm wet frough already!"

One by one Pete got rid of his enemies, and every one of them swam ashore. Then the comrades went below, and lighted up.

They found a large pile of weapons on the floor, and they also found that their unwelcome visitors had been helping themselves to provisions pretty freely. Perhaps it was just as well that there were no intoxicants aboard;

and as Pete had a far larger store of provisions than were ever likely to be required, he did not mind what the savages had taken.

"Now, look here, boys," he exclaimed, "we will hab a mighty big feed, and den we will consider de question ob rescuing dose men from de forest! I should say dey ought not to come to much harm, dough I dunno how dey are going to get anything to eat, seeing dat dey hab no weapons!"

"It is to be hoped the savages will not come across them," said Jack.

"I reckon that's not likely," answered Sam. "They will be after us first. You can depend on that. You see, they would rather attack a small party like ours than all those men. The chances are that the whole tribe will make an attack on this vessel for the start!"

"If we only had the men aboard, we could easily escape it by putting to sea," said Algy. "The only objection to that would be abandoning Pete's tomato plantation. That would be a thousand pities, considering the enormous profits he is going to make out of it—to say nothing of his 'geraniums.' You might grow corn, Pete, and keep fowls to eat it; then turn the eggs into pancakes, and live on roast chicken and pancakes for the remainder of your life. You could get your profit by selling the fowls' feathers to the savage ladies, and you might marry one of them and live happy ever afterwards!"

"Algy," said Pete gravely, as he helped himself to more food, "your ideas are ridiculous and quite untrained. I can quite see dat you ain't making de progress dat you ought to make under my skilful tuition, and I 'spect it will end by a rope's-end. Dat seems to be de only way to train you up in de way you should go. Now, get on wid your supper, and don't talk 'bout tings you don't understand."

"How do you think we had better act, Jack?" inquired Sam, paying no heed to Algy's chaff, for he considered that they were in a serious position.

"Well, my opinion is that, first of all, we should sail the vessel across the river, and anchor on the other side," answered Jack. "You see, we know that the men are on that side, and it stands to reason that we would have a better chance of rescuing them if we were on that shore. Then again, if the savages are going to attack us, and that is only too probable, they will come this side, and they would have to cross over in canoes, a thing they could not possibly do under our fire, unless they crossed higher up the river, at a spot where they would be out of sight. All that would take time, and if the men caught sight of the vessel on the other side, they would probably guess that we were aboard."

"Den consider all dat is done, Jack!" exclaimed Pete; "only it has got to be done to-morrow morning, 'cos it stands to reason we must hab some sleep. We ain't had proper sleep for some days, and——"

"Don't you mean nights, Pete?" inquired Algy.

"Same ting. Little boys ought to be in bed, 'specially when deir clothes are drenched."

"All right!" exclaimed Algy. "I'll be off. I expect you will want to

smoke a pound of tobacco or so, and talk tomatoes and geraniums. Good-night, all!"

"I ain't quite satisfied wid dat boy's progress, Jack," observed Pete, lighting his pipe. "You see, de only ting is, he seems to hab giben up playing practical jokes, and dats a great advantage."

"Very great!" answered Jack. "It's no use your taking him back, and telling his uncle that you have vastly improved him, if he starts playing one of his tricks on the old chap."

"Nunno! Dat makes it awkward for his trainer. Still, as I say, he's giben up practical joking, and dat's a great improvement. He ain't played a joke on me for days and days."

"Perhaps he's frightened of the rope's-end," suggested Sam.

"Maybe, Sammy. You see, I always hold dat in terror ober him. He neber knows when it's coming, nor what it would feel like when it comes."

"I reckon you would have a better chance of improving him if he did know what it felt like," laughed Sam. "The fact of the matter is, he is downright certain it will never come."

The comrades remained chatting for some time. They were so accustomed to wet clothes that they did not trouble themselves about the matter, and it was not until Pete had smoked a couple of pipes that he showed signs of sleep.

"Do you tink we ought to keep watch, boys?" inquired Pete, at last.

"Jack and I will do that by turns," answered Sam. "We don't want the savages to board us in the night. You would go to sleep, and they might wake you with their scalping-knives. Good-night!"

"Well, I will take de early-morning watch," said Pete; "'cos, I must say, dat one suits my delicate constitution best. Good-night, boys. Golly! Ain't it wet, too; and I'm 'bout as tired as a man could be. I 'spect it must be de swimming, or someting."

Pete took down a ship's lantern, which he lighted, then he left the cabin, and, proceeding along the companion-way, entered his own cabin, which was at the further end of it.

CHAPTER 18.

Pete and the Savage Chief.

PETE had no sooner entered his cabin than, by the dim light of his lantern, he saw a savage chief with upraised battle-axe, while he uttered a war-cry that was distinctly audible to the comrades in the other cabin.

Pete dropped his lantern, and, with a terrific spring, hurled himself upon the fierce form; then they both went to the floor with a loud bang.

"What's the matter, Pete?" gasped Jack, rushing into the place, which was now all in darkness.

"I hab been attacked by a mysterious savage warrior, boys—and I hab broken him into two-free several pieces. I beliebe I'm guilty ob unculpable

homicide, 'cos I hab fairly ripped him up, and I hab banged my nose on de cabin floor."

"Well, never mind that, Pete!" exclaimed Jack, striking a light.

"Dat's just de part about it dat I do mind, Jack," growled Pete. "Golly!"

As he sat up on his fractured foe, the comrades burst into roars of laughter, for the expression on Pete's face was peculiar.

He was sitting on a suit of his own clothes, which had been stuffed with a bolster. The dummy's face was made of brown-paper; so was the warrior's plume. He was armed with a real battle-axe.

"Is anything the matter, Pete?" inquired Algy, entering the cabin, and looking as innocent as a newly-born infant. He had, of course, supplied the howl by means of his ventriloquism, and there could not be a doubt but that he had also supplied the dummy.

"Oh, you beauty!" growled Pete, feeling his nose, and shaking it a little. "I really dunno how I'm going to train a boy like you. Here I was just boasting dat you had giben up playing practical tricks, and now look what you hab done. Not only hab you giben me pulpitation ob de heart, but you hab made me slam by nasal concertina on de floor, and sniff up a pint ob dust, to say nuffin' ob de pain ob de ting."

"I'm astonished at you, Pete!" said Algy severely.

"You ain't so astonished at me as I am at you, you beauty!"

"Here you blame a poor, innocent boy for a silly trick, and you have not the slightest evidence that he played any trick at all."

"My nose feels as dough it had got two-free pounds more evidence dan it requires," growled Pete. "I'm 'most afraid, Algy, dat you are inderiorating instead ob improvating under my training tuition. I tink I shall get 'bout forty monkeys from de forest, to see if dey can teach you not to play tricks. You seem to forget how severely I might hab hurt dat savage chief—if he had been really here."

"Then doesn't that prove kind-heartedness towards the savage chief that only a dummy was there."

"Eh?"

"It proves kind-heartedness towards him."

"Does it, Jack?" inquired Pete, slowing rising, and looking at his scattered clothes.

"I'll give it up," laughed Jack.

"I dunno weder it does or not, Algy; but I'm mighty certain it proves you ain't vacated your practical jokes. Now, see dis. It must not occur again!"

"Right you are, Pete; but I certainly think you ought to prove that I did it before you accuse me."

"Who else could hab done it, Algy?"

"Well, there's Rory."

"Well, I ain't going to believe dat a well-bred dog would play his master a trick like dat. When Rory plays tricks, it's generally stealing my dinner, or someting like dat, which he benefits by. Nunno! Rory

couldn't dress up a savage warrior like dat. I'm mighty certain dat my nose is nearly knocked off. Shouldn't wonder if it fell off in de night from de fracture."

"I wouldn't bother about my nose, if I were you, Pete."

"I ain't bodering 'bout your nose, Algy. I'm bodering 'bout my own. It's as loose as American false teef at a guinea de set."

"I think I could stick the thing on for you, Pete."

"I don't tink you will be able to try, my lad, so just you buzz off to bed, and try to remember dat if you want to play any more practical jokes dat Jack and Sammy are quite handy. 'Nuff said."

Pete turned in, and slept like a top till morning, although he made more noise than any humming-top. Sam could hear him on deck while keeping watch, but then the night was very silent.

At break of day Pete sat up in his berth, and then he uttered a wild yell, while he clapped his hand to his face, and uttered a few more.

Dangling in front of his eyes was his nose, while he could feel no nose on his face.

"Hi! Jack and Sammy! Come dis way! My nose has fallen off, and it's dangling in de air before my eyes."

Then a roar of laughter burst forth, for the comrades were outside the cabin door, watching that scene. Algy was in the cabin, and had just given Pete a few prods to awaken him.

Algy had carved a nose out of a piece of wood, and blackened it, then he had hung it up with a piece of thread, while to make the thing more realistic he had stuck a large piece of plaster over Pete face, so that, when he put his hand to it, he did not feel his nose.

"Why, whateber has de boy done now! Golly! He's plastered my face all ober, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jack. "Did it startle you, Pete?"

"Now, ain't dat a mighty silly question. Tink it would startle you, Jack, if you saw your nose dangling in front ob your eyes, and de place where it ought to have been—I mean de nose gone from de place where it ought to be. You hab stuck de plaster on my hair, Algy, and it won't come off."

"You don't want your hair to come off as well as your nose, do you, Pete?" inquired Algy, who looked perfectly serious. "But what I complain of so much with you is that you will persist in blaming a chap without any evidence. How do you know that I did it? Jack and Sam are laughing as though they knew something about the matter; then there's Rory. I call it a three to one chance. Can't you get that plaster off, Pete?"

"Nunno! I'm frightened ob hurting de hair at de sides ob de head."

"Well, let me try, because I sha'n't be frightened of hurting it."

"I ain't going to let you try anyting ob de sort, Algy; and I'm quite ashamed ob your monkey tricks after all my training. Didn't I tell you distinctly dat dere were Jack and Sam de next time you wanted to play any ob your practical jokes, yet you will keep playing dem on me. Oh,

go away, and stop your laughter, boys! I brought dis plaster in case any ob de men got wounded, and not to conceal de natural beauty ob my nose. Now, see here, Algy! Dis must not occur again, and just you go and get breakfast, Sam."

"And what are you going to do while I get breakfast?" inquired Sam.

"I shall get ready for it. In fact, I believe I'm ready now. Just you get out ob my cabin while attend to de dressing part ob de business, and you will find dat I'm dere or dereabouts by de time you hab cooked de food; and you won't forget, Sammy, dat I'm mighty hungry."

Pete found plenty to eat when he entered the other cabin, and while they were having the meal they discussed their plans.

It was decided to sail the vessel across the estuary, Jack stating that there would be sufficient wind for the purpose; and directly after breakfast they went on deck to set a few sails.

Jack took the helm, and he ran her across, bringing her to an anchorage at some little distance from the shore.

One boat had been left aboard, although where the others were the comrades did not know. Probably the men had deserted them in their terror, and they had now drifted out to sea.

"Now, de question is, how are we to get to de men?" observed Pete.

"It's mighty certain dat we dare not leabe de vessel, and den——"

"Look here!" exclaimed Algy. "You three stop aboard to guard the vessel, and I'll go and find the men."

"You will do nuffin' ob de sort, Algy!" said Pete.

"Why not?"

"I ain't arguing de point wid you."

"But that only shows you are in the wrong. There won't be any danger, and——"

"I know dere won't, 'cos you ain't going."

"Nonsense, Pete! I tell you——"

"I ain't being told. I won't listen to you. You sha'n't go! Mind, I'm determined on dat point."

"But, look here, Pete——"

"I ain't looking here at all. I'm looking towards de forest."

"Well, won't you listen to reason——"

"No! I don't want to hear any reason. If you tink dat I'm going to allow a boy under my charge to go fooling around in a forest infested wid savages, den you make a mighty big error, 'cos I won't allow any such ting."

"You brought those men out, and——"

"I know I did, and I brought you out, and now I'm going to keep you in."

"You seem to have lost your brains as well as your nose."

"Neber mind 'bout dat——"

"I don't. It is a matter that concerns you. If you ever had any brain to lose you have certainly lost it. You are loony, Pete. You are really, and I think it is our duty to clap you in irons for fear you do any damage. Then I shall have an opportunity of going."

"You ain't going to get any such opportunity. Dose men will see de vessel here, and den dey will guess dat we hab come for dem, and after dat dey will come aboard, and den we shall——"

"Oh, go and grow geraniums!" exclaimed Algy. "You are really the simplest idiot I ever came across, Pete!"

"What's that you say ob me, boy?"

"I said that you were a poor, simple, babbling idiot—at least, I didn't say that exactly, but it is what I thought, and what any sensible man would think if you act in this obstinate, pig-headed manner."

"It is you dat is pig-headed and obstinate, Algy, and——"

"Well, I won't argue the matter with you. I suppose you cannot help your stupidity; but——"

"And dis is de boy I'm training. I dunno what my meder would hab said to me if I had spoken to her in——"

"But you see, Pete, you are not my mother, although I must admit that you are rather like an old woman in some respects; but——"

"Golly! Dis is getting too awful for words, and it seems to me dat it is a case for de rope's-end."

"Well, I'm going," declared Algy.

"I tell you dat you ain't."

"Well, let's come below, and——"

"No, you don't! You want to make a bolt on deck, and then go."

"You see, Pete," exclaimed Algy, "it is this way. When I know that I am right, all the argument in the world won't change me from my purpose——"

"Nunno! And de same remarks apply when you know dat you are in de wrong. I tell you dat you sha'n't go, and dat finishes de matter—— Hi, golly! Come back, Algy! Do you hear me, boy? I'm most severe, and quite in earnest."

Algy darted away, and, climbing on to the roof of the forecastle, he raised his arms above his head, and dived into the water.

"Dat's what I call a mighty pretty dive for a boy!" exclaimed Pete, as Algy took the water with scarcely a splash, in spite of the height, for it was a big dive.

Pete uncoiled his lasso, and, watching his opportunity, dexterously flung it over Algy's head. Then he gave it a jerk that tightened it round the middle of his body, and now Pete commenced to haul up, and when he had got Algy dangling helplessly a few feet above the surface of the water, he held him in that helpless position.

"Now, Algy," exclaimed Pete, turning to wink at Jack, "I hope you will listen to reason, and not go against my will."

"Here! Let me down, Pete!" bawled Algy, trying to get his knife out of his waistcoat pocket—but the rope was in the way.

"I hope you won't go, Algy. You know, you ought to obey your trainer, and de swim is quite a long one, 'cos——"

"Here, Pete! Stop your fooling!"

"My poor, denuded lad, I ain't fooling. I'm sort ob in earnest, and what I want to do is to try to induce you not to go."

"How can I go when you have got me slung up like a blessed sheep?"

"I dunno de answer to dat one, Algy, but I will ask Sammy in 'bout half an hour's time, after I hab tried to persuade you not to go. Dere are lots ob reasons why it would be much better for you not to go. You see, one ob dem is dat you might get wet if you swam ashore, and anoder is dat it would be sure to rumple your hair. Now, I do hope you will take dese reasons into consideration, and promise me not to go."

"Haul me up, and we will talk it over."

"I tink I prefer talking it ober where you are, tank you all de same. You see, you might take anoder dive, and den you would get wet again, and I would hab all de trouble ob lassoing you a second time. Now, I hab free hundred and forty free reasons why you hadn't better go, and I will gib you dose reasons in regular rotation. In de first place it is bad for a boy to get damp, 'cos he might catch cold. Many years ago, when I was travelling in Warrywoorywobblumy, I met a boy who got damp. It's rader a long story, but I tink it will illustrate de first reason, and alough de oder forty thousand and free hundred and fifty-free reasons are rader longer dan de first, we shall get frough dem in time, and I feel quite sure dat you won't mind waiting where you are while I just run frough dose five hundred and fifty-free reasons, 'cos——"

"Oh, shucks!" yelled Algy. "Your reasons are increasing at a most frightful rate, and if I have got to hang like a dying duck while you are going through them, I'll jolly well more closely represent a dead one."

"But, Algy, you must listen to de reasons. We ain't got frough de first one yet, but it won't take more dan half an hour—or about an hour and a half, and den we will get on to de second one. I ain't letting you up till we hab got frough de reasons for not letting you go."

"But it will take you forty years."

"As long as dat? Well, I'm bound to train you, so I shall do my duty in dat respect. You ain't in any danger where you are, and de position is likely to keep you out ob mischief."

"Now, look here, Pete!" exclaimed Algy. "Stop this fooling, and let me up."

"De boy doesn't seem to comprehend de difference between judicial training and fooling—still, I will explain dat before we continue wid de recitation ob de first reason for keeping him dere."

"Well, haul me up, and explain your reasons on deck."

"Well, ob course, I can easy do dat, if you prefer it," observed Pete, pulling him aboard. "Now, see here, Algy! I know your playful ways. You'm determined to go, and I'm determined dat you sha'n't. On dis occasion I am going to prove to you dat I'm de master ob de situation. Just you come along wid me to your cabin. You will dere change clothes, and den you will remain a close prisoner for de remainder ob de day."

"Now, look here, Pete!" exclaimed Algy. "I'm not going to do anything of the sort——"

"Eh?"

"I say I won't go to my cabin, because——"

"Oh, well, ob course, if you won't go it must not occur again," said Pete, lifting him in his arms, and carrying him below. "You ain't got de right to argue wid a boy who has really made up to do a ting you say he sha'n't do. Kindly wait in dat cabin till furdur orders, Algy. We will stop in dis one, boys, 'cos I can keep watch on de door, and see dat he doesn't come out."

Pete turned the key, and put it in his pocket, then he seated himself in an opposite cabin, and smoked his pipe while he discussed their plans with Jack and Sam. For some time Algy banged at the door, and then he got tired of it, and remained quite silent.

"How long do you consider dat boy has been dere, Jack?" inquired Pete, at last.

"About five minutes."

"Only as long as dat? Well, dat ain't long enough for him to change his clothes. I'll gib de poor boy anoder five minutes, and den disreleas him."

"He will be overboard," laughed Jack.

"Nunno, he won't. He knows dat I'm in earnest, and I'm determined he sha'n't go. It would be too mighty dangerous. I'll gib him a quarter ob an hour to come to his senses—if he's got any. A boy must learn to obey, and dat's what I'm going to make Algy do. I don't want to be hard on de poor boy; at de same time——"

"It's all right, Pete," laughed Jack. "You never will be hard on him, or on any other living thing. You need not worry yourself about that in the slightest."

Pete allowed another ten minutes to elapse, but it was evident to Jack and Sam that he was uneasy in his mind, because he was wondering whether he was not punishing Algy too severely.

"Time's up, boys!" he exclaimed. "Now I will just explain to Algy dat I would not let him go under any circumstances. 'Nuff said!"

Pete opened the door, and then a big card dangled in front of his eyes. On it was printed, in huge characters, the one word:

"G O N E."

"Woohooh!" yelled Pete. "Why, he's got frough de port-hole!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jack. "I had an idea that he would get the better of you. You have been had, Pete."

"Now, ain't dis too mighty annoying for words?" growled Pete. "How does de boy expect me to train him when he won't obey a single word I say?"

"I'll give it up," laughed Jack. "He has been one too many for you, Pete."

"I reckon he has taken his rifle with him," said Sam, examining the cabin. "He had evidently made up his mind that there will be fighting in the forest."

"Tink we can follow him, Sammy?"

"Without a doubt, if we abandon the vessel."

"Den it seems to me dat is de only ting to be done. We must chance de savages. Come on, boys! It ain't safe for dat lad to go fooling round de forest. I'm mighty certain dat dere are hundreds ob savages in de place, and dey are most certain to be on de watch for him. 'Nuff said!"

CHAPTER 19.

Algy's Capture by the Savages.

ALGY had not found much difficulty in getting through the port-hole, which was a large one, and he had strapped his repeating-rifle across his shoulders. But there was one thing he forgot, and that was that he would have to drop close to the vessel, and that there would be grave danger of suction.

By means of a chair he went out feet first; but he had no sooner dropped into the water than he felt himself dragged downwards.

With all his strength he struck out for the surface, but he seemed to make no progress, and the tide carried him beneath the vessel, while, struggle his hardest, he could not get clear of it.

Now, for the first time, he realised the peril of his action. He was being suffocated, and at first the feeling was a terrible one, but soon all pain left his breast, and he heard a strange moaning in his ears.

He still struggled, but it was mechanical now. His senses were fast leaving him, and he knew that death was very near.

At last a dreadful aching seized his breast again, and air rushed into his lungs. The tide had carried him from beneath the vessel and he had risen to the surface, but he was so exhausted that he had scarcely sufficient strength to keep himself afloat.

He allowed the tide to drift him onwards, and as he floated away from the vessel the pain in his breast diminished, while he felt strength and hope returning.

Presently he struck out for the shore, and when he gained it he crept into the bushes, and rested for some minutes.

His idea was to strike the men's trail, and he did not anticipate any difficulty in this matter, for he knew that it must necessarily be a broad one. The only thing was that he did not know at what spot they had landed.

For a mile or more he walked along the river bank, in an upward direction, and then he saw the trail quite plainly. The bushes were broken down in places, and the footprints were quite clear in the long grass.

It seemed to Algy that the men must have wandered on for many miles, although distance in a dense forest is very hard to gauge. A mile in some

parts seems like a dozen, and it is far harder than twelve miles over clear country to travel.

He suffered considerably from the intense heat, while myriads of stinging insects almost maddened him.

"Wonder if the whole crew are worth it?" muttered Algy, at last. "I'm going to have a rest, at any rate."

It was the most dangerous thing he could have done. He had taken no proper rest for some time, for when he could have taken it the previous night he had been playing his practical joke on Pete. The consequence was that in a very few minutes he was fast asleep.

He was awakened by being rudely shaken, and, when he tried to spring to his feet, he found himself gripped by a couple of savages, while a hundred more, at least, surrounded him in the bushes. He could not see them all, but he saw more than enough to convince him escape was hopeless.

"You shall die!" exclaimed one of the savages, advancing. He was a fierce-looking creature, and Algy had little doubt that he was the chief, for he wore an enormous plume, and the remainder of the warriors treated him with marked respect. "Your death is very close!"

"Very well, old chap," answered Algy, determined not to exhibit the dread he naturally felt. "I suppose savages die sometimes—and sometimes die in battle. You will die one day. Well, if it is in battle, I presume you will die like a brave man, and defy your foes. I'm going to try to do the same. Fire ahead! Do your worst, and I'll bear it as bravely as I can. I don't know whether you have a son of your own, but if you have, and he fell into the hands of your enemies, I expect you would like him to face his death bravely. I'll try to do the same."

Algy's words had a visible effect on the savage chief, as the lad hoped would be the case. He knew that a dauntless mien would stand him in better stead than the slightest signs of cowardice, and he also felt convinced that no pleading would touch his fierce foe's breast.

His defiant action was the very best that he could have adopted.

"Listen!" exclaimed the chief, who spoke English both fluently and remarkably well. "I am Zura, chief of the wild Fantis, and I have power of life and death. Some of my race have become the white man's slaves, but I am still free, and so are my people, and we are deadly foes to the white men. I have said that you shall die. And you shall die by torture, for I will have vengeance on you, and those who care for you."

"As for the Fantis being slaves to the white men, that is not so!" retorted Algy. "Those who told you such a thing have lied to you, and you were simple to believe it. You call yourself a great chief, Zura, and no doubt your people look on you as such; but you must remember that in this forest you can learn naught but forest life. Now, young though I am, I have had the advantage of the best white men for teachers, and from them I could have learnt ten times more than I have done had I so chosen. However, I have learnt more of the world than you can ever learn in this forest, and therefore I have learnt to know that you are but a simple savage, who have the power of life, it is true, but only by brute force. You

are like the wild beasts of the forest, and kill your foes for the sheer love of murder. White men don't do that. We had many of your followers in our power last night, for we recaptured the vessel, and——"

"You lie!" cried the chief, striking his spear into the earth.

Algy fixed his eyes on him, and continued:

"We recaptured our vessel, but we did not kill your warriors who were aboard, as we could have done. Pete, my friend—he thinks he is my trainer—flung the struggling wretches into the river, one by one, as he could fling any six of your strongest warriors. Now, hear me, Zura! And you may just make up your mind that I do not lie. Savages can do so, no doubt—and you amongst them; but I am not going to do it. You can take my life. Probably you will do so by the cruellest means that you can devise. Well, the torture will last for some time—days, perhaps—but the end for me will come, and I shall bear the suffering as bravely as I can. Then Jack, Sam, and Pete—they are only three—will avenge my death. That I know. They will teach you a lesson that you will remember for your lives, but you, Zura, as instigator of the villainy, will hang from the yard-arm of our vessel. Pete will execute you for the murder. Now, do your worst!"

"Listen to me!" cried Zura, who appeared to be surprised and impressed at Algy's calm demeanour, and the cold manner in which he spoke, which was so far different from the speech of a savage lad—and, for that matter, from that of a white lad either. But then, Algy was possessed of abnormally good intellect, and he had chosen every word, knowing that perhaps his life depended on it. "You speak bravely. It is easy to be brave before the danger comes."

"I don't know that, Zura!" retorted Algy. "I always feel more fear before the fight commences. When that fight begins, all fear leaves me."

"Then you feel fear now?"

"Undoubtedly; and so would you, were our positions reversed—although you would have no occasion for it. My comrades are too brave to strike a helpless foe! They would aid him all they could."

Zura's face grew very fierce, and his black eyes gleamed.

"Do you dare to question my bravery, boy?" he cried, raising his spear, as though to plunge it into Algy's breast.

"I dare say you are a brave fighter," retorted Algy, looking him full in the eyes, "but there are other kinds of bravery about which you know nothing! White men have gone to their deaths to save the life of their foes before now. No savage would do that!"

"And would you face death to save a foe, boy?"

"I don't know. I have never been called upon to do so."

"You shall do so now. You shall face certain death for your foes. You shall make their last days peaceful, and you shall die with them! And you shall suffer for the insults you have heaped on me. You have told me how white men treat their prisoners. Now I will show you how Zura the chief treats his! Hold him! Bare his arm!"

The chief spoke in English, probably so that Algy should comprehend his

cruel orders, and there was a fierce glittering light in Zura's eyes as he watched the helpless lad.

The chief shouted out a few words of command to his followers, many of whom glided away into the bushes; and now Zura drew a long-bladed knife, and waited in silence, while the two savages held Algy's bare arm extended.

The lad did not attempt to struggle, because he knew that it would be useless, and because he was fully determined to show no signs of fear if he could possibly avoid it.

Several minutes elapsed, and then some of the savages returned, one of them carrying a piece of some root. Zura took it and smelt it, then muttered something as he pierced it with the point of his knife. After that he pricked Algy's arm slightly. At first Algy experienced an itching sensation, which gradually changed to smarting, and then to intense pain which spread all over his body, and soon became excruciating.

Zura watched the hapless lad in silence, and saw his face turn deathly white.

For ten minutes or more Algy suffered torture. It seemed to him as though his body were being seared; then, when the sufferings were excruciating, unconsciousness came to his relief.

When he regained his senses, it was to find himself alone in a small cave, which was lighted by several torches, that threw a flickering glow upon countless stalactites depending from the roof, and flashing every conceivable colour—colours that he had never seen before.

At first his brain was so dulled that he could not recall what had happened, but almost suddenly the terror of his position flashed through his aching brain, and he shuddered to think he had escaped death to be submitted to further torture.

His arms were bound behind his back, and his ankles were also secured by thongs, while he felt terribly ill. But presently the deathlike sickness left him, and the throbbing in his temples ceased; then he fell into a deep sleep, and when he awoke from it he felt no ill effects from the virulent poison that the chief had injected into his veins.

It was evident to him that the savages did not intend to take his life at present, otherwise they could certainly have done so with that poison. The chief had just given sufficient to produce torture and subsequent insensibility.

Presently Zura made his appearance, and for some moments he stood watching the lad in silence; then he severed his bonds, and ordered him to rise, while he kept a firm grip on his arm.

"Don't you think it would have saved you trouble if you had taken my life straight away?" demanded Algy, fixing a contemptuous gaze on the inhuman savage. "I suppose that would not have satiated your vile nature! You are a contemptible coward, Zura! I do not know whether you can fight, but even if you can you are a coward to strike a helpless foe. If I were a man, I would knock you down. Be careful that Pete does not horsewhip you as you deserve. He will surely follow on your trail."

"And do you think a savage warrior cannot conceal his trail when he chooses to do so? Besides, you have no hope of rescue from your friends, for they are dead, and the vessel is retaken!"

"I don't expect that's true. Such a miserable coward as you have proved yourself to be would think little of lying. But do your worst, you inhuman wretch!"

"You shall die!"

"So you have said before. I can only say that you are not fit to live."

"Listen to me, boy! The fever has stricken down some of my people. They are in a cave yonder. No one goes near them because I have forbidden it, for the fever spreads amongst them, and all would die for the sake of a few. The cave is sealed up, and none are allowed to enter it. Therefore they have neither food nor water. Now, Zura is just. His orders for the families of others apply to his own. Amongst those dying people is my daughter. I would have her last days made peaceful, and the others shall share the food and water that I send. You shall take it! The fever will seize you, but your death will be far swifter than at the torture-stake. Each day food and water will be supplied. Do you promise to give it to the rest?"

"What does it matter what I promise, you cowardly creature?" retorted Algy. "Of what avail would it be to speak to an inhuman wretch who would allow his own daughter to die of fever, hunger, and thirst, so that he might run no chance of sickness? You are not fit to live, Zura! Nor can you complain if the fate that you have dealt to others falls to your share."

"Speech is useless!" retorted the chief, after a slight pause. "You yourself have said so. Had I not placed my daughter there my people would have rebelled, and——"

"Exactly! You let her die so that you may escape danger! Well, after that there is certainly no more to be said, for you are the vilest wretch that I have ever met!"

"If you do not distribute the food and water I shall know, and then the sufferings of those in the cavern will be as nothing to yours. Torches will also be supplied to you, so that you will have light to see the sufferers, and you will have to attend to all until you are stricken down with the fever, and death comes to you, for none recover from it."

Algy did not see how the poor wretches could recover if left without food and water, but he made no reply. He was too disgusted with the inhuman wretch to discuss the matter with him.

He was led to a narrow archway guarded by a great boulder, which the savages standing by pushed aside; then Algy was thrust into an enormous cavern, and a lighted torch was handed to him, while a pile of torches lay on the rocks, as also an ample supply of food and water.

Now the boulder was pushed back into its place, and Algy was left alone with the sufferers.

Men and women were there huddled together, as also little children. Some were dying, others dead, and some were moaning pitiably.

Algy did what he could for the wretched creatures, but he had neither hope for them nor for himself. The horrors of the place sickened him, and he knew the chances of ever leaving that horrible place alive for any who were in it were quite hopeless.

He went to and fro distributing the food and water, and speaking to some of the poor creatures. But there were only a few who understood his words, and they appeared to be too ill to gain any hope from them.

He lighted a few torches, but their light only served to reveal the horrors of the place, and he shuddered to think that it would form his tomb.

When all the food and water had been distributed, Algy returned to the great boulder that buried him from the world above, and now he found that fresh food and water had been placed in the cavern.

This was done at intervals, and Algy distributed it; not that he feared the chief's threats, but because he deeply pitied the poor, helpless creatures. That he would eventually share their fate he did not doubt, but until stricken down by the grim scourge he was determined to do his utmost for them.

CHAPTER 20.

Rescued from Death.

"NOW den, boys," exclaimed Pete, when they had got ashore, "de first ting to do is to strike dat lad's trail! Tink you can do dat, Sammy?"

"Yes. It is only a matter of time."

"And we hab no time to lose."

"Well, he is a smart lad, and will certainly keep a keen look-out for the savages. Then you must remember that they are more likely to be on the other side of the river. At any rate, we can but do our best. It is a great pity that Algy went, because we should certainly have got the men back. As it is, the chances are that the savages will capture our vessel in our absence. However, it is no use crying over spilt milk. You two go towards the sea, and I'll go up the river. I expect we shall strike the trail before many minutes."

This proved to be the case. Sam presently came upon Algy's footprints, and, shouting to his comrades, they followed the trail until they came to the spot where Algy had struck the broader trail of the men. Now they followed on at their utmost pace, Sam leading the way, until they gained the spot where Algy had rested, and where he had been captured by the savages.

"Keep back there, boys!" exclaimed Sam, holding up his hand. "Something has happened here. I can see the tracks of savages, unless I am much mistaken!"

"Hurry up, Sammy!" exclaimed Pete. "I trust de boy ain't been captured."

"So do I, Pete," answered Sam, going down on his hands and knees to examine the ground more closely. "Savages have certainly been here. It

looks to me, judging by the manner in which the long grass has been trampled down—or, rather, beaten down—that Algy rested here. You can see the marks where he lay down. Ah! And here are the savages' foot-prints again. If I read this aright, the worst has happened, and the lad has been captured, for I cannot trace his footsteps from the spot—only those of the savages."

"I hope you are wrong, Sammy!" exclaimed Pete, gazing earnestly into Sam's anxious face.

"I fear there can be no doubt," answered Sam. "To my mind, it is evident that the lad lay down here, and that the savages came upon him when he was resting. Otherwise we should see Algy's trail leading further on. You see, it is quite distinct up to this spot. Here, even, are his foot-marks, where he appears to have been moving about—possibly struggling; and here are the footprints of the savages. Then here is the savages' trail through the forest, in the opposite direction from whence they came. Now, Algy's trail does not appear amongst the other footprints, and, therefore, it follows that they must have carried him off a prisoner."

"Golly! Den if we follow swiftly we ought to come up wid dem, Sammy!" exclaimed Pete.

"Yes. But just wait a moment. I will examine the ground again to make certain that Algy has not left this spot on foot."

It seemed to Pete that Sam took a very long time over the task; but he said nothing, knowing that Algy's life might depend on the accuracy of Sam's deductions.

"There is no trail from the spot," said Sam at last. "It is evident that the savages have carried him off a prisoner. They have not taken his life. We have that to be thankful for. Had they done that, they would not have troubled to move the unfortunate lad. Come this way. The savages' trail is quite clear. I do not imagine that they can be far ahead. We may come up with them before any harm is done."

But in spite of his words, Sam had grave doubts, for he knew how vindictive and cunning the savages were; and although the trail was so clear at present, he felt quite confident that they would have taken care to conceal it before they had proceeded far.

And such proved to be the case, for presently the trail led to a narrow stream, which doubtless flowed into the main river, although the comrades were now at a considerable distance from it.

"It's all right, Sammy!" exclaimed Pete. "Here's de trail, leading straight on."

"So I see, Pete," answered Sam. "But I do not think that the captive was taken that way."

"Which way could he hab been taken, den? And why shouldn't he hab been taken straight onwards?"

"Because only a few of the savages have gone straight on. The trail on your side of the stream is much narrower than on the opposite side, which makes it certain that some of the savages have gone either up or down the stream, and it is probable that they have taken Algy with them. I believe

that if we were to follow that trail it would merely lead us into the depths of the forest, and then we should come to a spot where it was concealed. At any rate, I feel pretty certain that those savages who were carrying Algy have gone either up or down this stream."

"Which do you tink it will be, Sammy?" inquired Pete, greatly disappointed. He had imagined that they would soon come up with the lad, and now it seemed to him that they were as far off as ever.

"I believe that they will have gone up-stream," answered Sam, after a pause. "Down-stream would probably lead to the main river, and certainly in the direction of the vessel. It is scarcely likely that they would take the lad in that direction, because there would always be the chance of a rescue. I think up-stream will be our safer course; and it will be necessary to examine the banks of the stream every foot of the way."

They started off once more, and in the very shallow water Sam also examined the bed of the stream, in the hope of finding a footprint there. But he could detect none.

At last darkness came, and then Sam stopped.

"We dare go no further," he said. "Or, if we do wander on, we must return to this spot to take up the trail again. You see, it is very likely that they will leave the water somewhere about here, for they have travelled a long way in it. Now, it would be fatal to pass the spot where they have come out. We can only wait until the morning."

"But tink what a mighty lot ob time we are losing, Sammy," said Pete. "And tink ob all de tings dat might happen to de poor lad!"

"I have thought of all that, Pete—I have thought of it a hundred times. But we cannot do impossibilities."

"Do you think we could follow with torches, Sam?" inquired Jack.

"I think it would be very risky," answered Sam. "If the savages should happen to be near—and they cannot possibly be very far—they would see the lights, and then our chances of rescuing Algy would be gone. No; the only thing to be done, to my way of thinking, is to search at random through the night, and, if we do not come across the savages' encampment, to return to this spot, and take up the trail again."

Jack and Pete at once agreed. They knew that Sam was very skilful in such matters, and that he would do his very best for Algy, and so they left the matter in his hands. For many hours they searched, but they searched in vain, and when day was breaking they once more struck the stream.

Directly it was sufficiently light they continued their journey, and at last their search was rewarded, for Sam pointed to the river-bank, where the savages had scrambled up.

"Now, Pete," exclaimed Sam, "you must be absolutely certain that Rory makes no sound! I have an idea that we are not very far from the savages' encampment, and all depends on our approaching without being detected. Follow me, and don't make the slightest sound that you can avoid."

For an hour they crept onwards, but their progress was very slow. The bushes were dense, and Sam was very careful not to make a noise. Sometimes he would stop to listen, but he heard no sound to guide him. However,

the trail was still plain enough, so that he knew he was taking the right direction.

At last they came in sight of a deep dell, and here the savages' encampment lay. There were hundreds of them there, and small huts lay on every side.

"What's to be done next, Sammy?" inquired Pete.

"Keep watch. Creep to the edge of the ravine on your hands and knees, and then we must take up a position from whence we have a view of the place. We shall have to try to locate the hut—or the place where Algy is kept a prisoner—and then wait till it is dark, and effect his rescue at all costs."

"Quite right, Sammy. We can go separately, and I'll go first; den if I succeed, you and Jack need not follow."

"Ah, we won't decide that yet, Pete," said Jack. "What we have to do now is to find out where Algy is. After that, we will settle how to act."

Creeping close to the brink of the ravine, they watched for the remainder of the day, and as the sun was setting they saw a couple of savages cross the dell with a large quantity of food and water. They passed between the rocks on the further side, and presently reappeared without the provisions.

"Depend on it, that is the place where the lad is," said Jack.

"It seems quite likely," answered Sam. "Although what puzzles me is that they should take such a large quantity of provisions for one lad. It is pretty evident that other prisoners must be there—unless it is the chief's home. At any rate, we can only wait for night, and then creep down and take our chance."

Pete was so anxious about the matter that it seemed to him night would never come; but at last a huge camp-fire was lighted in the centre of the dell, and now the savages commenced to prepare for their mighty feast.

"Tink we had better descend now, Sammy?" inquired Pete.

"Not yet. Let them get well started. They don't appear to have placed sentries at the top of the dell, and I think we shall be able to make the descent at the very spot where those rocks are. The firelight will not reach so far, and when it blazes up more brightly it will render objects beyond its radius more indistinct still. We will get round to that spot, so as to be in readiness to descend when the savages are all seated at their feast."

The comrades reached the further side of the dell without detection, and then Pete took off his coat, ordering Rory to guard it, for he knew he would remain at that spot if given charge of the coat.

In about half an hour's time, when the savage throng were intent on their feast, the comrades commenced their descent, and they reached the bottom of the ravine without mishap, and apparently without attracting the attention of the savages. In fact, they were at such a distance, and were making so much noise, that they would not be likely to hear the comrades' movements.

Pete was the first to enter the place, and he groped his way round the

outer cave. Then Jack ventured to strike a match, and Pete saw the great boulder that blocked the entrance to the gruesome cavern.

There were signs that it had been lately shifted, and now the three comrades put their shoulders against it, and, exerting all their strength, rolled it sideways, while Algy came out.

"I never thought to leave that place alive!" he exclaimed. "Dying people are there—savages stricken down with fever!"

"Golly! Dat's mighty dangerous for you, Algy!" exclaimed Pete. "I don't see how we can help dem."

"They are doomed. Many of them are dead already."

"We must go."

"I have been giving the poor wretches food and water."

"Come! It's no good staying here, Algy. I would help dem if I could, and so would Jack and Sammy, but de first duty we hab got to perform is to rescue you. Dis way. Hab you been injured?"

"No; nothing to speak of."

Stealing from the terrible place, they ascended the side of the dell without detection, and then made their way back to the vessel.

They camped in the forest that night, Algy telling them exactly what had happened, and the comrades felt very uneasy concerning him, for it seemed to them that he must certainly have contracted the fever from which the wretched creatures suffered; but there was nothing to be done. They could only wait to see what would happen.

"Look here, Pete," exclaimed Jack, as they continued their journey towards the vessel the following morning, "my impression is that we are not in a very safe part; and if you are determined to improve your precious crew, I would strongly advise you to grow your tomatoes and geraniums on some island where you are not likely to meet with savages!"

"I'm 'most inclined to grow dem in hothouses in England, Jack. Tink dat would be more profitable."

"It might be less expensive. You see, you would want to sell a fearful lot of tomatoes to pay your wages bill."

"But he's got his 'geraniums,' Jack," observed Algy. "What I would advise him to do is to invent geranium soup, and that would get rid of a lot of the plants. We might try my uncle with a bucketful of it, and see how he likes it. If he likes it, other people are sure to do so, because he's jolly particular as to what he eats. I tried him once with some soup I made. Got the cook out of the kitchen, and changed it without her knowing. But my uncle knew. If you had heard him going on about it, you would have come to the conclusion that soup was one of the most important things on the face of the earth. Well, there's the vessel, and—Shucks! People are aboard her!"

"Well, dey ain't savages!" exclaimed Pete, gazing towards the vessel. "I do believe de men hab returned. Look here, suppose we swim out to her? Dat may take de infection off you, Algy!"

This was agreed to. It was not a long swim, and when they all gained the vessel's deck Coggan came forward.

"We thought we would bring the vessel over this side," he said. "You see, the savages attacked us, and we beat them off several times; then we sailed the vessel to this side, and had a fierce fight with them here."

"Den you hab been aboard all de time?" inquired Pete.

"Of course we have, waiting for you; and I'd like to know what you mean keeping us waiting all this time?"

"Oh, you would, would you, Coggin? Where is Groog?"

"Drowned!"

"What!"

"Drowned! Are you deaf?"

"Nunno! I can hear perfectly well. How did he get drowned?"

"Fell overboard in a gale of wind."

"But dere hasn't been a gale ob wind."

"There has here. Came on a regular tempest; and if I hadn't handled the vessel carefully, we should all have been wrecked."

"I'm mighty certain dat you would handle de vessel in a careful manner!" growled Pete. "I must say, you are de worst liar I eber came across, Coggin! De fact ob de matter is, you hab only just come aboard dis vessel!"

"That's nothing like the truth, and Torm will tell you the same as me."

"You mean to tell me, Torm, dat dis man has spoken de troof?"

"Of course he has," answered Torm. "We had a very fierce fight with the savages, and——"

"Well, I know all about it," said Pete. "It doesn't matter. You are a pack of cowards!"

"If any man called me a coward, I'd knock him down!" declared Coggin.

"I call you de worst coward I hab ever met—unless de worse one is Torm," said Pete. "You are a great, hulking creature, Coggin, but you habn't got a tenth ob de bravery ob Algy! You ought to be ashamed ob yourself for deserting de vessel like you did widout striking a blow. As for bringing her across de riber, you couldn't do it if your life depended on it. We brought her across, after we had cleared her ob de savages. I suppose you tought dey sailed her across, and so you were going to pretend dat you did it. Now, dat doesn't matter so much, 'cos I neber expected you to be anything like troofol; but what does matter is about Groog. don't like de man, and consider dat he's quite as big a scoundrel as you are, Coggin; but——"

"Do you want me to knock you down?" roared Coggin, striding up to Pete with his fists clenched.

"But de man ain't going to disappear in dat mysterious manner, and I'm going to learn de rights ob it!"

"I ask you for the last time, do you want me to knock you down?"

"Nunno!"

"Then just you beg my pardon for calling me a scoundrel!"

"I know, Coggin, dat you and Torm would be capable ob most crimes, 'cos I don't consider dere is much to choose between you. You are bof a pair ob black scoundrels, and you ought to be hung!"

"Now you've asked for it, and you are going to get it!"

"Eh?"

"I am going to knock you down!"

"Oh, you are, are you, Coggin?"

"You've heard me, mates!" cried Coggin. "I'm going to knock that man down!"

"Don't you tink you would save time if you started doing it, instead ob keep saying dat you are going to do it?"

"You mark my words!" cried Coggin, shaking his fist in Pete's face. "I never make a threat that I don't intend to carry out; and as sure as you are standing there, I'm going to knock you down. No man shall insult me with impunity. I've knocked down bigger men than you, and I'm going to serve you the same!"

"When are you going to do it, old hoss?"

"As sure as you are a living man, I'll knock you down one of these days!"

"Dat removes a great anxiety from my mind," observed Pete. "You see, I don't boder myself 'bout de future, 'cos you don't know what is going to happen in it, and one ob dese days might mean a long time ahead. I might die ob old age before you knock me down. Seeing dat you ain't going to do it now, we won't boder ourselves 'bout de matter. Now, if you will kindly tell me what has become ob Groog, I shall be obliged, 'specially if you do it widout knocking me down!"

"I've told you!"

"Yes. You hab told me what is false. Now, suppose you tell me what is true!"

"I ain't telling you no more, if you won't believe my word!"

"Well, dat's rader unfortunate—for you. It's dis way, Coggin. I mean to know what has happened to de man; and if he has come to any harm at your hands, you will hab to answer to me for it. You brought him on dis voyage against his will, and you hab probably 'bout ruined de man. Well, you ain't got de right to kill him as well. Are you going to tell me what has happened to him?"

"I've told you!"

"But you ain't told me de troof."

"Yes, I have. He fell overboard!"

"Just fetch me a rope's-end, Algy. I can plainly see dat we shall hab to learn de troof for de old hoss's sake, and I tink I can fetch it out ob Coggin wid a rope's-end and a little energy!"

"Hands off!" roared Coggin, as Pete grabbed him by the collar. "Mind, I won't be answerable for my actions if you don't take your hands off me!"

"Don't you worry 'bout your actions, old hoss," answered Pete, making no attempt to release him. "I'll look after dose directly I get de correcting instrument. Ah, here it comes! Now, see here, Coggin, dere's no occasion for you to be in a hurry to gib me de information dat I require, 'cos I hab de feeling dat you deserve a flogging, and it will afford me particular pleasure in gibing it to you—like so, and so! Oh, it ain't any good yowling like dat, 'cos—"

"We left him aboard this vessel along with Burg, and I expect they are both hiding somewhere, unless the savages carried them off," said Coggin, between his yells, for Pete was not sparing the rod.

"Well, if dose are de facts ob de case, we shall soon find out; and if dey ain't, den I can repeat de dose until I get at de real facts!"

"It's all right, Pete!" exclaimed Algy. "He has spoken the truth, and I expect it must have been by accident. Here comes Groog and Burg!"

"The villains would not take us," Burg explained, when questioned as to what had happened. "I wanted them to fight, but they were all too cowardly. Torm refused to take me, and I didn't much care. We were in hiding in the vessel's hold, and did not know that they had gone until we heard some yells just now. We took enough provisions to last us, and when the savages came aboard we hid in the hold."

"You didn't know dat we sailed across?" inquired Pete.

"Hadn't got the slightest idea that you were aboard at all. I recognised Coggin's howls—at least, I wasn't certain it was him, but judged it was a white man."

"M'yes! It was a white man all right. I had to flog him a little to learn de troof, 'cos he ain't de most troofol man dat I hab eber met. Now, let's come below, boys, and get someting to eat, 'cos I'm downright hungry, and I 'spect you'm all suffering from de same complaint. De only beauty 'bout it is dat it is a curable complaint. Dis way to London!"

CHAPTER 21.

Algy's Great Sacrifice.

BURG prepared the dinner, nor did he take long about it; then Pete told him to join them, and Groog said he would do the same.

"Well, I suppose you must, old hoss," growled Pete, "seeing dat you ain't had proper food for some time; but, to tell you de troof, I don't like your company. I only like to dine wid honest men, and you ain't anything like dat, else you would not rob de poor in de shameful manner dat you do!"

"Your language is libellous, and your assertion is untrue. As an owner of property, I can charge what rent I like."

"It's robbery all de same."

"That is a shameful assertion, and one I shall punish you for, fellow. You will also be made answerable for having forced me to take this voyage against my will. I have been treated in a most scandalous manner. It is almost ruin to me. My property is going to wrack and ruin, and——"

"Golly! One would tink de man did up his houses ebery week to hear him talk, and I don't 'spect he's done dem up for years and years!"

"What has it to do with you?"

"De same as it would hab if I saw a big man hitting a little boy. I should go for de big man, and flog him severely, if he didn't happen to flog me. Now, get on wid your dinner, and don't talk a lot ob foolish nonsense, unless you want me to frow you out ob de cabin!"

"I insist on being taken back immediately!"

"I'll consider de matter."

"You are placing yourself in a very serious position."

"Den, according to you, it will match yours. I didn't bring you aboard dis vessel; in fact, I didn't know you were here till after we had sailed a good long way on our voyage. If I had known before we had started, I'm mighty certain dat you would neber hab come, 'cos I didn't want you. Coggin says he brought you out ob de kindness ob his heart, 'cos he wanted to gib your tenants a rest in paying deir rent. My impression ob de man is dat he wanted to hab vengeance on you, knowing what a miserable scoundrel you are!"

"How dare you speak to me like that, fellow?"

"Well, I 'spect it is because I ain't afraid ob you in any way. I don't see any reason why I should be, seeing dat you ain't got a friend aboard; and as I'm de owner ob dis vessel, why, I can do pretty well what I like. Still, as I don't want to take any mean advantage ob you, if you like to bring an action against me, I am perfectly willing to tell de judge dat you are one ob de most contemptible scoundrels I hab eber met! Ain't you hungry, Algy?"

"Not particularly."

"Oh, dat's nuffin'!" exclaimed Pete, looking as though he thought it was very much. "Boys are often not hungry. You hab been frough a good lot, but you will be all right in de morning. You had better turn in now, and I'll bring you a hot drink just directly."

"Right you are!" exclaimed Algy. "I think I'll get a bit of rest. It's no good sitting at table if you don't feel inclined to eat. Good-night, all!"

"I trust dat boy ain't ill," muttered Pete, pushing away his plate. "What do you tink about it, Jack?"

"He looked far from well, certainly," answered Jack.

"It may be the fatigue of what he has gone through," said Sam.

"I'm tinkin' ob dat fever den, boys," said Pete, "and it frightens me!"

"What fever den?" gasped Groog.

"Why, one eben more dangerous dan dose you make women and children lib in," answered Pete. "Algy has been in de company ob people suffering from some kind ob fever which seems to be always fatal, and we are frightened dat de poor lad may hab caught it."

"You scoundrel!" yelled Groog, leaping to his feet. "Do you mean to say that you have dared to expose me to the infection?"

"Neber tought ob you," growled Pete.

"Then you should have done so, you thoughtless idiot. Don't you understand that if that boy has caught some fever, I might also catch it?"

"Well, I 'spect you will hab to take your chance like de rest ob us. Algy took his chance, and did all he could for de poor suffering creatures. You would hab left dem to deir fate, if you had had de chance, just de same as de savages would hab done. You'm really worse dan de savages, 'cos you know better, and dey don't."

"Tell me at once what has happened," cried Groog.

Then Jack explained exactly the risk that Algy had run, and Groog was in a state of abject terror. He left the cabin, and remained all night on deck.

"Ain't de man too disgusting!" growled Pete. "He only tinks ob himself. What do you tink is de best to be done, Sammy?"

"I don't see that we can do anything at present," answered Sam. "We can only wait till morning to see how he is. Of course, the fact of his having been in the place makes us alarmed. But for that we should think nothing of it."

"I know dat, Sammy; but I must say I feel mighty frightened 'bout de matter. He looked bad; don't you tink so?"

"He certainly looked poorly, but you have got to recollect that he has been through a good deal, and that would naturally upset him."

"I dunno. De boy has been frough a good lot before, and it has neber had any effect on him. Do you tink we could gib him someting?"

"I believe the very best thing we can do is to leave him alone till the morning. We may then find him all right."

But Pete was not satisfied, and several times during the night he stole to Algy's cabin door to listen, but he did not dare to go in for fear of waking him.

As a rule, Pete did not meet troubles half-way, but on this occasion he was seriously alarmed, and, tired though he was, he did not go to sleep at all that night.

The following morning he paid an early visit to Algy's cabin, to find the door ajar, and when he entered the lad was not there.

Pete hurried to Jack's cabin, but he was not there either, nor was he

in Sam's cabin. All three returned to Algy's cabin, and then they saw a note on the table, and this is what they read:

"Dear Pete,—I believe I've caught that beastly fever, and as I don't want to give it to you and the rest aboard, I am going ashore into the forest. I am taking a boat, but will leave it on the shore, and shall find a safe hiding-place. I have taken provisions, so shall be all right. Don't try to find me. I shall take every precaution to prevent it. If I get all right, I'll turn up again. If the worst happens, farewell.—ALGY."

"Golly! We must find him. He must hab been off his head when he did dat!" exclaimed Pete. "I 'spect de fever was on him, and dat he was delirious."

"Yet the letter is quite clear," said Jack. "He is a plucky youngster, and I tell you what it is: in spite of his wild tricks, he is a downright good lad. He has thought more of us than of himself."

"I reckon we must try to find him," said Sam. "It will never do to allow the boy to remain alone in the forest. Shall we go at once?"

They did so, and searched all day; but Sam failed to find the lad's trail. The shore was rocky, and it was impossible to tell which way he had gone. They thought he might have gone along the trail made by the men returning, in which case it would have been impossible to detect Algy's footprints amongst so many.

They followed on that trail for miles, and then, failing to find any trace of the missing lad, searched for him at random; but it was all in vain, and they became seriously alarmed.

Day after day they continued that search, and Pete tried to induce the men to help him; but most of them appeared to be relieved that the lad had left the vessel, and the few who did search gave themselves very little trouble.

"I dunno what to do for de best, boys!" exclaimed Pete, one night when they were aboard, having spent the day in the forest. "He has been gone a fortnight now, and we ain't seen de slightest trace ob him."

"We can only continue the search," answered Jack.

"Continue the search!" cried Groog, entering the cabin just as Jack uttered the words. "You must be mad! The boy is evidently dead, and you cannot do the slightest good in remaining here."

"We shall remain here till we find him," answered Jack coldly.

"This is scandalous!" cried Groog. "I tell you that it means ruin to me. I insist on returning to England forthwith. The matter has become most serious."

"What is your ruin compared to dat boy?" said Pete sternly. "You only care for yourself, and if Algy had done de same we would not hab been searching for him now, 'cos he would hab remained aboard dis vessel, and perhaps giben all aboard de fever. He tought ob us before himself, and he went alone to face death, rader dan allow his friends to run any risk. But we did not mind de risk. It's awful to tink dat de poor lad may hab died alone in de depths ob de forest, when we might hab been able to help him."

"I am not saying anything about that!" exclaimed Groog. "I am only telling you that I must return to England at once!"

"And I am only telling you dat we ain't going to return till we hab found de lad."

"He is dead!"

"I don't tink so. I trust not. At any rate we shall find him sooner or later. Don't you tink so, Sammy?"

"It seems certain that we shall. At any rate, Pete, we shall certainly do our very utmost."

"You have done as much as could be expected of you," said Groog. "I tell you that the boy is dead."

"You don't know dat any more dan we do," retorted Pete. "You are only saying it because you want to return to England. You would rader risk de boy's life dan lose a few hundred pounds; but we ain't going to desert him."

"He has deserted you."

"Don't you talk dat nonsense to me, Groog, 'cos it ain't safe. I'm not in de humour to listen to it. He left dis vessel for de good ob oders, and not for his own good. De poor lad was frightened ob injuring us, and so he went away to—to wander in de forest all by himself. You are a man, and he is a mere lad, but you wouldn't dare to do what he has done, and eben if you had dared you would not do it, 'cos dere ain't a person on all dis earth dat you care for except yourself."

"It is you who are talking nonsense now," declared Groog. "I am not blaming the boy. In fact, I consider that he behaved in a very proper manner; but it is useless to remain here longer. It is obvious that he has either died of the fever, unless he has been attacked by wild beasts or captured by the savages. In any event he must have met his death, and therefore it is useless for us to remain here."

"We are going to remain," said Pete firmly.

"I tell you I will not."

"You cannot help yourself, Groog," said Jack. "It is quite certain that you would never be able to leave this spot until we do, unless, of course, a strange vessel came here bound for England, and there is not the slightest chance of that, I should say. Now, Pete is perfectly right. It would be a shameful thing on our part were we to abandon the lad, and I can assure you it is a thing that we would never think of doing. You can talk as long as you like, but you will never make any impression on us. Now go because we want to get some rest until we commence our search again to-morrow."

But Groog was quite determined to get away, and although he had come to the conclusion that it was hopeless to appeal to the comrades, he did not yet despair.

As soon as they had gone ashore on the following day, he got Torm and Coggin into his cabin, and then spoke seriously to them.

"If we allow those men to dictate to us, and to treat us how they like, we shall all lose our lives. I am quite ready to overlook the past, and to work with you, and against those three. They will remain ashore till dark. What is to prevent our putting to sea? We are not called upon to consider them in any way, seeing how shamefully they are treating us. What do you say? Are you ready to start? You must remember that Pete has a large sum of money aboard this vessel in gold, and I should consider that under all the circumstances of the case that money would belong to us. He owes us compensation for the manner in which he has treated us."

"Well, that's neither here nor there," answered Torm. "We wouldn't need to make excuses to pretend that his money belongs to us, because if we did get away you can be thundering certain it would belong to us. But suppose we were to set sail now, who do you suppose is going to handle the vessel?"

"We could surely manage that. You know something about it."

"I don't know enough to sail that vessel to England; and, what's more, there's no one aboard who does."

"What about Burg?" inquired Groog.

"Well, he knows a bit, but I don't believe even he could manage it. At any rate, he's out of the question, because he is on their side, hang him! He wouldn't act against them under any circumstances."

"You could force him to do so."

"I don't know so much about that. He's not an easy man to force against his will. But we couldn't force him to do what he doesn't know how. Those three understand thoroughly how to navigate a vessel, and that's more than anyone aboard does."

"We would never get to England," said Coggin.

"That wouldn't matter if we got to some port."

"Well, we would never get to a port, for the simple reason that we don't know where one is, and even if we did we couldn't sail the vessel to her. We would never get her out of the river, except by letting her drift with the tide, and then most likely she would run aground. You don't seem to realise the difficulties of sailing a vessel."

"Consider the money I am losing."

"Oh, we don't care twopence about that, mate!" answered Coggin.

"You must put up with that loss, and I don't suppose it will hurt you much. You have got more money than you know what to do with, and I don't suppose for a moment you will ever feel the loss of a few hundred pounds."

"Besides, even if he does, we don't care," said Torm. "For my part I wouldn't care at all if he spent the rest of his days in the workhouse. It's got nothing to do with us, and I'm downright certain that it would serve him right."

"Do you mean to say you are going to allow that fellow to keep you here as long as he likes?" demanded Groog.

"Well, we can't help ourselves in the matter," said Coggin. "If we could force him to start we would do so straight away, but there's not the slightest chance of forcing the obstinate brute to do anything against his will."

"Then what are you going to do?"

"Nothing, because we can't. If I could navigate this vessel we wouldn't be here for another five minutes; but we should merely wreck her if we got her out. There isn't one of us who could set a sail."

"He declared that he will not leave this part until he has found the boy. We might be here for months."

"I don't much care," answered Torm. "I'm deadly sick of the hole, safe enough; at the same time he's paying us two pounds a week, and that's more than anyone would pay us in England, especially if we didn't work for it."

"But look at my position!"

"Oh, blow your position!" exclaimed Torm. "We can't always be thinking of you. I never came across such a selfish chap in all my life. Here you come for a voyage with us, and just because you are kept a little longer than you care for, you start going on about your hardships as though it was our fault."

"Coggin knows perfectly well that it was his fault," said Groog.

"Now that ain't fair, mate!" exclaimed Coggin, winking at his confederate. "I never asked you to come aboard this vessel. You wanted to come."

"It is false! Fury! You know that it is false!"

"Now, don't you bully me, 'cos I won't stand it!" said Coggin. "You had no right to come aboard the vessel; and how was I to know that you didn't come to steal something? Well, Pete was my employer, and it was my duty to see that he wasn't robbed. Very well, I shoved you in the

cabin, and then forgot all about you till the vessel sailed. After that I didn't want you to worry Pete, so I just kept you a prisoner, and merely flogged you a bit when you didn't behave yourself. Now you turn round and bully me for having done my duty. After all, what's the sense of making this fuss about the matter? We are bound to return to England sooner or later, and it can't make much odds to us whether it's in three months' time or six."

"Perdition! But it makes a difference to me!" cried Groog.

"There you go again! It's self, self, self with you! I wonder you ain't ashamed of yourself. You ought to think of others, the same as Torm and me do. He thinks of me, and I think of him, and we are going to help each other all we can, and help ourselves at the same time. It's my belief that they will find the boy one of these days. Mind, I don't say they will find him alive, 'cos I don't think they will. But if they find his body, it will satisfy them just as well, and when they do that Pete will want to sail, 'cos I think he's come to the conclusion that his idea about farming is about as stupid as they make them."

"And you are going to allow him to keep you here for perhaps weeks longer?"

"Don't I keep telling you that we can't help ourselves? It's for them to say when we shall go. They know that we can't sail without them. They are masters of the situation."

"You could fling the brutes overboard!" said Groog, glancing at the two rascals.

"Of course we could; and then we might just as well shoot ourselves, 'cos we would never reach home alive."

"Suppose you put the brutes in irons, and flogged them until they told you how to manage the vessel! Pete flogged you, Coggin."

"You are the stupidest scoundrel as ever I set eyes on!" cried Coggin, with a fierceness that frightened Groog. "Who do you suppose is going to start putting Pete in irons? There isn't a man aboard this vessel as could do it—no, and not three of them! He's as strong as a lion, and he'd use that strength if you started that game."

"Are you afraid of one man?" sneered Groog.

"Not me! Why, I threatened to knock him down the other day! And I would have done it, too, if there hadn't been three to one against me."

"There are a hundred of you!"

"You can't rely on the rest, Groog. They aren't brave. Now, there's me and Torm ain't frightened of the fiercest scoundrel that ever walked this earth. We ain't frightened even of you! Are we, Torm?"

"Haw, haw, haw! We are not; and I wouldn't tell a lie about the matter. No, we are no more frightened of Groog than we were when we were his lodgers, and he used to come with his pistol and collect his rents, which we, like honest men, didn't pay."

"Do you call that honest?" demanded Groog.

"Certainly. It's doing our duty to the others," answered Torm. "If we had paid you, it would have been inciting the rest to do the same, and it ain't likely honest chaps like us would do that when the poor creatures hadn't got enough to buy themselves a pint. You didn't get so thundering much money out of us, and I won't deceive you."

"He did not," said Coggin. "I don't know how much he got out of you, but—"

"He didn't get anything out of me," observed Torm, winking. "And if you were to ask my private opinion, I would tell you in the strictest confidence that he never will. And mind you this—there's a lot more who

have been enjoying themselves in his absence who he won't get so much from either! We've done our duty well in bringing you on this voyage."

"You are miserable, sickly cowards——"

"We ain't so sickly as you will be when you catch that fever!" declared Coggin, grinning. "You are not looking the thing, Groog, and I won't deceive you. What do you think of his personal appearance, mate?"

"Now, see here, Coggin!" exclaimed Torm. "You are not playing the game. Didn't you say to me this morning that we weren't to tell Groog how ill he looked?"

"Well, I don't care——"

"Then you ought to care, mate. It isn't the thing to tell a man that he looks ill when fever is knocking about. I have heard that a man can frighten himself into it. Mind you, I don't believe that Groog is a man to let fever frighten him. And even if he has caught it, that's no reason why he should die. The boy has died, it's true. Mr. Groog will be resigned to his fate. He's faced danger before, and I dare say had several fevers."

"It comes on with headache and a tired feeling," observed Coggin. "I heard the lad say so."

"And a yellow look about the eyes," declared Torm, looking hard at the frightened man.

"What!" cried Coggin, springing to his feet, and gazing hard at Groog.

"Yaller about the eyes?"

"Well, that's a fact."

"Come, mate—come away from this! It's all right, Groog! You haven't got it, and are not at all likely to have it; but—well, we are off. And see you here—for the present you are not to come on deck! You are to keep down here, and you can use Pete's cabin; but if you come on deck, we shall throw you overboard!"

"I—I am not ill," stammered Groog, looking at himself in a small glass.

"That's right enough, mate. Don't you worry yourself, and just you keep yourself to yourself! It's a question whether it isn't our duty to throw him overboard, Torm, before he does any harm to the rest."

"Well, you can do it if you like," said Torm; "but if you do, you are not coming near me again! I'm not touching him! I wouldn't touch him for all the gold that is in Pete's safe! Do you think I want to be struck down with fever? I'm surprised you should suggest such a thing to your friend!"

"The danger would be no greater for you than me."

"That's true enough," answered Torm, "but it is the duty of a friend to take all the danger."

"Then I'm not taking any," answered Coggin, leaving the cabin. "Still, we might wrap him up in a blanket, and fling him overboard that road. I'd say there wouldn't be much fear then, and we owe it to the rest of the men. It would be a wicked thing to let the fever spread all over the vessel when we can stop it with a little risk."

"Well, we will think the matter over, mate," said Torm, carefully closing the door.

CHAPTER 22.

Pete's Great Joy.

HERE was, of course, nothing whatever the matter with Groog, but he still felt the effects of his imprisonment in the hold, where he and Burg had had insufficient food and water, and he really began to think that he felt ill. In about an hour's time he had convinced himself that he was ill. He was a man who was absolutely terrified at infection,

and it so preyed on his mind that when he made his way on deck he looked quite white.

"Here, you go down!" howled one of the men, for Coggin had spread the report all over the vessel that Groog was raving with fever. "Don't you come nigh me, else I'll brain you!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Coggin. "He ought soon to get well with that treatment!"

"He deserves it!" declared Torm. "But whether he deserves it or not don't matter a great deal; he's going to get it, mate. His sick nusses won't deal so kindly with him. See there! They are bolting in all directions. Now, look here, Coggin! What we have got to do is to crack that safe. It's a strong one, and will take time; but we have got time, and we can do it. Then we will cut this vessel, and carry off the plunder—share and share alike."

"But where can we go in this awful hole, mate? We have had enough of the forest, and if we were left in it for a week we would be done."

"That's true enough," answered Torm, "but we will bide our time. We will wait till the vessel is near some port, and then make off. I can work the safe so that it's all ready for the last touch, and Pete will never be any the wiser. It's just possible that we might be able to sneak the keys from him when he's asleep."

"I'd like to knock him on the head."

"No; no violence, because it's too risky. That chap Sam can shoot straight, and he would do it, too, if we harmed Pete. Just look how kindly they are nursing the sick patient. There's one of them has chucked a bucket of water over him. Still, it has driven him below, and that's the great thing. Keep it up with the chaps. Let them think that the brute is really ill, and he will convince himself that it's the fact—especially if we keep telling him it is all right."

"Burg is pretty sure to do that."

"So he may, but Groog won't believe him. I wish he would get a headache, and then we would be all right. We are bound to get a bit of fun out of him, and I'd like to pay the brute."

One of the men had drenched the unfortunate Groog with water, and he was compelled to go into his cabin, where he sat in drenched clothes, for he had no change.

The comrades did not return that night, and Groog worked himself into such a state of terror that by the following morning he was really ill, and about as wretched as a man who had no great trouble could be.

When the comrades did return from another fruitless search, they found Groog lying on his berth groaning, and declaring that he was stricken down with fever and dying fast.

"It's a bad job," exclaimed Pete, as Sam examined the sick man. "I'm most afraid it is going to spread, in spite of poor Algy's precautions; but de worst part 'bout it is de boy. Men can look after demselves; but to tink dat a sick boy is alone in de great forest wid—well, it's too awful for words! Is Groog bery bad, Sammy?"

"I don't believe there is anything the matter with the brute!" growled Sam. "He may have a bit of a cold, but nothing more; and I can't see that he's got much of that. I believe these rascals have been fooling him."

And when Sam discussed the matter with Burg he became convinced that such was the case.

It was only when all fear of infection was at an end that Groog got well, and the trouble he gave was extraordinary. Pete spent each day in the forest with the comrades, and each night he spent looking after Groog,

for he had come to the conclusion that he was really ill, although he did not believe that it was anything like fever.

Groog soon discovered that Pete was very easily imposed on in a case like that, and he thought nothing of calling him up in the night to get something that he required; then he would commence blaming Pete for all the trouble.

But when the comrades were in the forest Groog had a fearful time of it. Torm and Coggin played him innumerable tricks, and one day they came into his cabin with some burning stuff in a bucket, and insisted on his keeping it in the cabin to fumigate him, with the result that he was nearly choked, while the two rascals were so delighted that they howled with laughter.

"Pete," exclaimed Jack one night, as they returned from their hopeless search, "I fear the worst has happened. It is no use disguising the fact longer."

"I know, Jack," answered Pete, in a low voice. "We hab got fond ob dat boy. I dunno how I shall bear missing his tricks, and—and tings like dat."

"We will go on searching, of course, but we must be prepared for the worst now. Sam and I have been talking it over, and we have come to the conclusion that hope is at an end. No doubt we shall one day discover how—where he went, but it must now be too late."

"I'm going to turn in, boys," answered Pete. "Good-night. It has been a disastrous voyage, and I am guilty ob it."

"That's ridiculous, Pete. You could not help—"

"It's no good talking, Jack. I know! Good-night."

Pete was deeply grieved. He felt that Jack's words were true, and that now nothing more could be done.

Groog called to him in the night, but he was too sick at heart to go, and he left him shouting; then day broke, but Pete had not closed his eyes. He had wanted to do so much for Algy, and felt he had done so little.

With his head bowed on his breast, he walked slowly to the lad's cabin, and entered it as softly as he would have done had the lifeless lad been lying there.

Then Pete stopped and his eyes dilated, while his jaws twitched. For, lying on the berth was Algy, fast asleep!

Five minutes passed ere Pete crept from that cabin, and even then he waited ere entering the one Jack occupied.

He could hear voices from within, and Pete gave a gulp, then pulled himself together.

The comrades were making preparations to start on another day's search, and were talking about the hopelessness of it.

"Boys," murmured Pete, "Algy has come back, and I tink he is well again. Going to be a nice, fine day, too; just de sort ob day to set sail. De boy is sleeping; we won't set sail until he wakes. Dere will be a fair breeze all de way home, I 'spect. 'Nuff said!"

And Pete bolted from the cabin.

Later, Algy entered the cabin, looking very little the worse for his experience, and he treated it with a coolness that was rather surprising to the comrades, although they knew his style.

"Well, I thought it would be downright stupid letting you run the risk," he said. "I got ashore, and concealed my trail. I walked up the river, knowing that the rising tide would hide my footprints. Then miles up I found a cave. I had got provisions, you know, and there was a spring of fresh water. Well, it was rather a rough time, but when I got all right again I determined to stop there till there was no fear of

infection. And here I am. Now, what about planting some geraniums, Pete."

"We ain't going to do any more planting, Algy. The vessel puts to sea dis bery day, and she sails for Old England, and it must not occur again."

Jack was about to express his opinions, when cries of terror rang out, and men called for Pete.

"Stay where you are, Algy!" exclaimed Pete. "You ain't to come up on any account. Come along, boys!"

And when they went on deck they saw a great force of savages lining the shore, while a fleet of canoes was coming down the river. It seemed to Jack that a thousand fierce warriors menaced them.

"Up anchor!" he cried. "Get some sail set! We'll make for the open sea!"

Pete set some men to run the capstan round, while he and Sam hastened to set sail. And all the time the air was dark with spears and arrows.

Most of the men rushed below, but a few stuck to their posts, and Burg was amongst them.

The comrades got some sails set, and fortunately the tide was running out, so that, although the breeze was very light, scarcely sufficient to get the vessel under way, she drifted towards the sea, and Jack was able to keep her off the shore.

Some of the canoes had darted to the vessel's side, and the savages hurled their spears with blind fury, while the comrades opened fire on them. One of the chiefs actually gained the vessel's deck, but Pete saw him in time, and, rushing forward, hurled him into the sea, although he narrowly missed the spear the savage hurled.

And now, as the Shark cleared the land, she caught the wind, and stood out from the shore on the starboard tack, while she soon left the enemy far astern.

"I dimno when I felt so happy," declared Pete, when they were far away from all danger. "I shall hab to take care ob Algy, and not let him get up to any mischief, but——"

"Jolly kind of you, Pete!" exclaimed Algy, coming up, and catching his last words. "I'll make you a cap and apron, and teach you how to cook gruel, then you can ram it down Jack's throat to see if it will do me any good."

"He's getting better. You can always tell dat, when de boy starts fooling. It's a sure sign, and, I must say, if you judge by dat, it is bery seldom dat Algy is ill, 'cos he's always fooling. But see here, Algy. I don't mind what practical jokes you play till I take you in hand for training purposes again—especially if you play dem on Jack and Sammy—but you hab got to understand dat if you get up into any danger I shall be mighty savage."

"Stick a feather in his noddle, Jack, and let him pose as a savage chief," suggested Algy. "He may frighten me then. He's not very formidable in his present state, and will be still less so when I make him his nurse's apron."

"Oh, shut up, Algy, and get on wid your training!"

"Why not grow geraniums on the deck?"

"I ain't going to."

"Think of the enormous profit you would make."

"I don't want any profit; I want to make a loss ob de enterprise."

"Then you will succeed, Pete," laughed Algy. "Shucks! You will succeed right down to the ground, and a bit beneath it. I feel certain that you will attain your heart's desire in that respect."

And the Shark sailed on. The comrades had hard work at times, because they could get so little help from the men; but the weather favoured them.

One day, when they sighted land, Pete commenced to fumble in his pockets in a manner that showed he had lost something.

"It's de keys ob de safe," he muttered. "I had dem safe."

"Pooh! What's the good of bothering about a little thing like that!" exclaimed Algy. "You haven't much money there; only a few thousand pounds."

"I know Algy; but dese are more thousand pounds dan I care to lose."

"But you have only lost your keys, and not your gold."

"Well, dat's true; but, when a man loses de keys ob his safe, de inference is dat he's going to lose de cubical contents ob dat safe aforesaid."

"Hope for the best."

"M'yes! And dat's what de men will hab to do next pay-day, if I don't find dose keys. Still, p'r'aps dey will turn up."

They did turn up. Pete found them in the side pocket of his coat, and the following morning he found that the safe had been forced open in the night, and that there was not a penny left there.

"Do you know who has done dat, Algy?" inquired Pete, gazing at the empty safe, and guessing by the expression of Algy's face that he knew something about the matter.

"Torm and Coggin. I watched them doing it last night. You see, I happened to overhear a little of their conversation about going ashore to-day, as we were close to it, and, putting two and two together, I guessed the rest. Well, I learnt that they were going to force the safe, and that is why I borrowed your keys, because it seemed to me advisable to let them have a little work. They had it last night, and I watched them through that hole in the partition, made for the purpose. They succeeded, and found the safe empty—that's what I wanted your keys for. Now, come along with me. They have not gone ashore, because they could not go without the money. You won't find them in a very amiable mood, and, of course, they will deny the crime, but I have learnt a little more. They commenced to quarrel about the division of the spoil before they had got it, and in their anger hinted at one or two little matters that do not redound to their credit. One of them is rather important. But come along, and let me deal with them."

"What do you want?" demanded Coggin, as Pete and Algy entered the fore-castle.

"What sort of a haul did you have last night?" inquired Algy.

"Rather disappointing, wasn't it?"

"I don't know what you mean!" declared Torm, glancing fiercely at the lad.

"What does it matter, Torm!" exclaimed Algy. "Pete knew all along that you were a thief. The fact that you burgled his safe would be no surprise to him. That you did not succeed must have been rather surprising to you. But don't you see, my simple creature, I took the gold away, and it is quite all right, thank you. You have nothing to fear from your attempted crime, because Pete would not put you in prison for that. I have another charge to make against you, and one that is far more serious; and it is one that Pete will put you in prison for."

"You think yourself clever, but—"

"We need not discuss my thoughts. I don't think you clever, at any rate; but, then, I don't think Pete clever—"

"Eh?" growled Pete.

"Don't interrupt me, Pete!"

"But I must interrupt when you make silly remarks 'bout my cleverness."

"Shucks! Well, it is this way, Torm. The fact that you knew Burg's secret was surprising to me. He said that you had asserted you heard him talking in his sleep. Now, I did not believe this, for the simple reason that if you make a statement, I should at once believe the reverse. It struck me as strange that you should know so much about him, and working on the assumption that he was innocent, and knowing that you were quite capable of being guilty, and could not by any possible chance be innocent, I began to wonder whether you were the burglar who fired that shot at the old man."

"Golly!" cried Pete. "If we could only prove all dat it would clear Burg's name."

"And bring a dangerous criminal to justice," added Algy. "I know this from what I have overheard of their conversation."

"It's a lie! You pretend you've been listening, but——"

"I have been both listening and watching for many a day past," interposed Algy. "And I say the result is that I know you were guilty of that crime, and that you allowed another man to bear the blame, and actually blackmailed him under threats of revealing his secret, which was yours. It is true that Burg was at the spot and saw all that happened; but he did not see you sufficiently to recognise you, and it never occurred to him that you were the guilty party. You are a cunning rascal, Torm, but I fancy you will have no scope for exercising your cunning for the next year or so."

"I suppose you know, my boy, that you are making a dangerous enemy in me!" cried Torm, glaring fiercely at Algy.

"That is correct; but, although you are a dangerous enemy, you would be a far more dangerous friend! I do not know whether Coggin was a party to your crime or not, but he evidently knew your secret, or some of it."

"It's all a lie. You can prove nothing," cried Torm. "I know nothing about the matter."

"Well, of course, that remains to be seen. I admit that there are difficulties in the way of proving Burg's innocence; but I don't think there will be the slightest difficulty in proving your guilt."

"Don't you, really! Well, you can't possibly prove what never happened."

"I am not going to try to do so; but I am going to try to prove what did happen. Of course, the police will have the matter in hand, and they have the revolver as evidence. That revolver must have been purchased somewhere, and it may be proved that you purchased it. Again, there will be your past life to be taken into consideration, and my impression is that there will be some flaws in that. At any rate, I shall do my best, and Jack and Sam and Pete are sure to help me all they can. Now, Pete, I know, from what I heard, that Torm is the guilty man, and I would suggest to you that you keep these two close prisoners until we reach port; and then hand them over to the police. The proper thing for Burg to do will be to make a clear statement of the whole affair just as he made it to us. The police may detain him, but he has absolutely nothing to fear."

"Well, dat's right, Algy," answered Pete. "I shall act as you suggest; but, at de same time, I shall keep Burg in hiding until we hab proved someting against Torm. Dere's only your word for it, so far, and aldough

I know dat's all right, de police won't. Nunno! Dey must get de evidence."

"You see, Torm will declare that Burg committed the deed," said Algy, "and it is certain that the police will want to arrest him."

"I know dat, but I shall tell dem dat dey ain't going to do it."

"The chances are, they would arrest you in that case, Pete."

"But I didn't do it!"

"Shucks! I know you didn't; but the police would declare that you were harbouring a criminal."

"I should tell dem he wasn't a criminal; and it would want seberal bobbies to take me against my will."

"Well, we will decide on that when we reach port," said Algy, "and it will be well, in the meantime, to clap those ruffians in irons, because there must be no chance of their escape."

This was done, while Pete told Burg to see that they were properly attended to, and had all the food that they required.

The comrades felt considerably relieved when at last the Shark reached port. Algy and Pete at once went to the police-station, where they were delighted to learn that the old man who had been shot had not succumbed to his injuries, and had now completely recovered. Further than this, the old man declared that he would be able to identify the criminal, because he distinctly saw his face when in the house.

Then Algy told the whole story exactly as Burg had told it to him, and now all doubt concerning its veracity was set to rest; for the police had discovered where the revolver had been purchased, and it had been bought by a man answering to Torm's description during the very time that Burg was in prison for having struck his superior officer.

Both Torm and Coggin were taken in custody, the latter being detained by the police on suspicion, for as yet they had no evidence against him.

The old man who had so nearly met his death was confronted by the prisoners, amongst whom were several other men, and he at once picked out Torm; while the man who had sold the revolver also identified him.

"Well, dat's all right, boys!" exclaimed Pete. "Dey hab been committed for trial, and I 'spect you will hab to gib evidence, Burg. At de same time, your name is cleared, and you hab Algy to tank for dat little lot. Now, you'm got a good lot ob wages to draw, and, as it is our wish to gib you anoder start, what you hab got to decide on is what you will take to, and we will find de capital. Den all you will hab to do is to keep steady, work hard, and make a nice income. You are sure to do de last latter, if you do de first former. 'Nuff said!"

At the trial, Torm was convicted, while Coggin turned King's evidence; but it appeared that he was only an accessory after the fact, and had helped to hide the real criminal. No doubt, had the worst happened, he would have been imprisoned, but, as it was, he got off, and Torm received fifteen years' penal servitude.

And thus the voyage of the Shark ended.

THE END.

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