

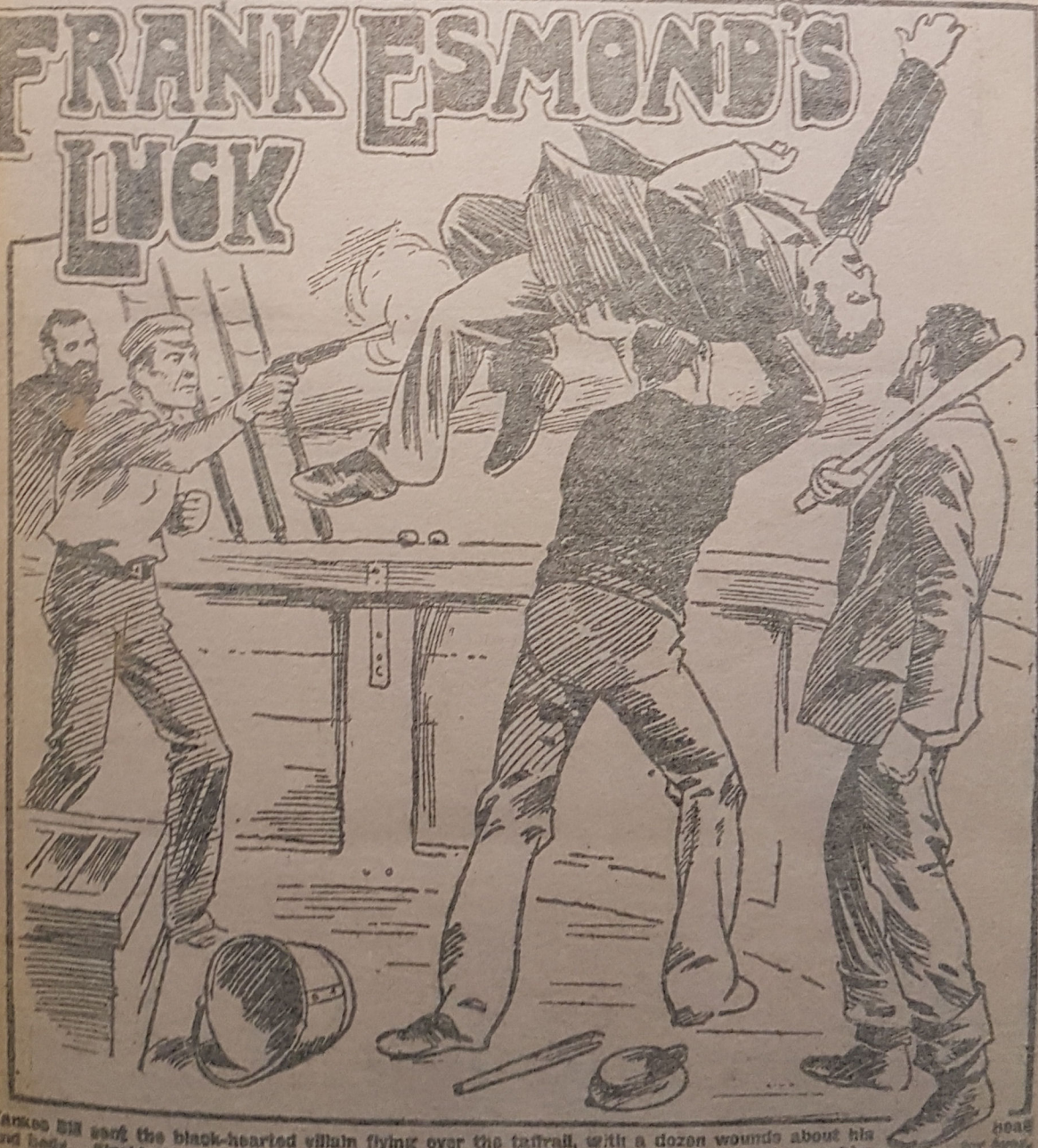
A Stirring Story of the Sea.

THE UNION JACK

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No. 313. — A LONG, COMPLETE NOVEL
EVERY FRIDAY.

FRANK ESMOND'S LUCK



Yanked Bill sent the black-hearted villain flying over the tailrail, with a dozen wounds about his head and body. Flashley's hour had come, and the waters of the Southern Ocean closed over him

HOAG
FOR GARDNER

FRANK ESMOND'S LUCK

By CHARLES HAMILTON.

CHAPTER I.

How Frank Esmond Went to Sleep on Shore and Awoke on the Ocean—Booked for Brisbane—A Change of Name.

"Hallo! Here, wake up, wake up, youngster!" Frank Esmond opened his eyes, and, sitting up, looked round him with an expression of utter amazement.

He last remembered falling asleep in his room at Esmond Chase; but now the sights and sounds around him were those of a ship, and the sensation of pitching and rolling told him that he was on the sea.

"Where am I?" he cried, rubbing his eyes and staring about him blankly, a feeling of dread mingling itself with his astonishment. He saw, leaning over him, a tall, powerfully-built man, with a heavy, brown beard covering the lower half of his face. This was the man whose gruff tones and vigorous shakes had awakened the sleeping boy.

"Where are you?" repeated the towering seaman, who spoke with a strong nasal twang. "Wal, I calc'late you're in the fo'c's'le of the 'May Queen.' What did you reckon you was, sonny?"

The Yankee seaman spoke in a gentler tone; he had thought to be routing out a skulker, but now he saw that there was something wrong with the lad, and Yankee Bill, bos'un's mate of the "May Queen," had a heart as tender as a woman's, in spite of his rough exterior. Frank Esmond rose unsteadily, pale as death; but he would have fallen again had not the seaman caught him by the shoulder.

"I don't belong to this ship. I demand to be set ashore!" exclaimed Frank.

"Nonsense, kiddy, you're booked for Brisbane now, whether you belong to us or not. How did you come here? By Jehoshaphat, he's off agin'!"

Frank Esmond had fainted, and he lay a dead weight in the supporting arms of the Yankee seaman.

"What's the row here?" a gruff voice broke in. "You're wanted on deck, Bill Blake! What are you foolin' round here for?"

"Found a lad who says he don't belong to this here craft!" replied Bill to Boatswain Garnett, for it was that personage who spoke. "Look, sir, he's dressed like a toff's son, he is; that's some mistake here."

The boatswain looked at Frank Esmond with a great deal of curiosity.

"Ain't he a stowaway?" he questioned.

"No, sir, for he was askin' to be set ashore." Garnett laughed at the idea.

"I kin imagine Cap'n Bute puttin' the ship round to take him back to Portsmouth," he said. "But I'm sorry for the youngster. How the dooce could he have got aboard whar he's no bizness? Just haul him out on deck, Bill, and I'll speak to the skipper about it."

Yankee Bill—as the American seaman was called by his shipmates—bore poor Frank through the fore-castle to the deck of the ship "May Queen."

The vessel was some hours out of Portsmouth, and the coast of old England could still be seen upon the starboard quarter. There was a stiff breeze from the Atlantic, and a large show of canvas was drawing. The "May Queen" covered the water in gallant style, and more than one grimy coaster that dropped astern sent a cheer after the great ship that was speeding westward, to dare the perils of the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean. What more inspiring sight is there than a large vessel under full sail, running free, with a stiff breeze bellying out the canvas, cordage rattling cheerily, and orderly British seamen at their posts?

The crew of the "May Queen" were rapidly getting things shipshape; but there was still a certain amount of disorder and untidiness, as there is bound to be on the first day at sea. The captain was directing some work amidships when Yankee Bill carried Frank Esmond on deck. At sight of the boy the captain stopped, as if struck dumb, in the middle of a sentence; but in a few seconds he recovered his composure.

"Whom have you there, Blake?" he asked, stepping towards the stalwart American, who stopped in front of him.

"Dunno, sir, quite. I discovered him in the fo'c's'le, and he says as how he don't belong to this hyer vessel, nohow."

The cold breath of the sea breeze revived Frank, who opened his eyes again, staring wildly at the captain.

"He's not well," said Captain Bute in a mild voice. "Take him to my cabin, Blake, and tell Lebon to attend him."

The kind-hearted American seaman obeyed, and Frank was laid upon the captain's own sofa, and Lebon, Bute's steward, a suave Frenchman, was left to attend him, while Bill returned to the work that awaited him on deck.

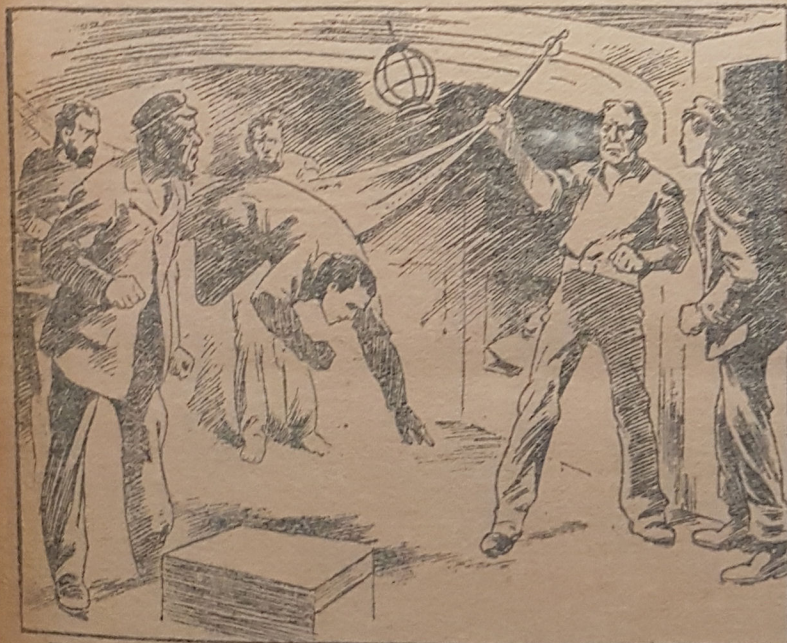
The uncommon kindness of the skipper to the strange lad caused a good deal of comment amongst the seamen, and the general impression was that they were lucky to be sailing under so good-natured a skipper. But some of the hands, who had sailed with Captain Bute before, shook their heads at this. Bute would hardly have been called a soft-hearted man by anyone that knew him.

Bute was supposed to have "got religion" at some time during his career; but he probably took it in its mildest form, for it did not alter his original nature much. His chief virtues were that he never swore, would allow no strong language either fore or aft, never drank to excess, and never got into a passion. But he was suspected of being hard-hearted; he was more than suspected of being mean by men who had sailed with him. And some said that they would prefer an old-fashioned skipper, who knocked a man down with a handspike when he was angered, to John Bute, who never flushed or raised his voice, but gave you a look of cold ferocity that made your blood run cold if you moved his temper.

In person Bute was somewhat spare, but strong withal, and his face was calm and almost expressionless, and his glance full of mildness. He was particularly cleanly in his habits, and both the "May Queen" and her captain were usually in the most spick-and-span condition.

When Yankee Bill had taken Frank below, the skipper of the "May Queen" went aft to where the chief mate was standing, and drew him aside.

"Is that the lad, Finchley?" he asked.



The ill-natured Dalmatian laid his hand upon Frank's hammock, and rocked it so violently that the lad, waking suddenly and starting up, pitched right out of it and landed upon the planks with a concussion that made his bones ache for days afterwards.

"Yes, sir. What are you coddling the brat for?" Chief Mate Finchley was the antithesis of the captain. He was broad-built, red-faced, and loud-spoken. A good seaman, who never lost his head; but a "two-fisted man," and something of a bully to his inferiors, while surly with his equals. Which of the two men was the better at bottom was doubtful—the skipper with his mild manners, or the mate with his frank brutality—probably the latter.

"A little kindness won't do any harm, Finchley," replied Bute. "The lad has enough to go through; we can afford to let him be comfortable while he's on board the 'May Queen.'"

"Just as you choose!" replied the chief mate indifferently. "It's your business, not mine. Do as you like. But you had better have your jaw with the young swab before he begins to chatter to the hands!"

The captain nodded, and went below. He assumed his mildest expression when he entered the cabin. Frank was sitting upon the sofa eating some captain's biscuits, and a glass of wine which Lebon had given him had infused new life into his cold and shivering body. Colour came into his cheeks, his eyes grew brighter, and he no longer looked scared and bewildered. He now appeared what he was—a well-formed lad of fifteen, of sturdy character.

"Sit still, my lad, and eat," said Captain Bute, when Frank made a motion to rise at his entrance. "You must be hungry, and I am in no hurry."

Frank finished the biscuits in a few minutes, and the French steward took away the tray, leaving our hero alone with the commander of the "May Queen."

"Now," observed Captain Bute, "I wish to know how and why you came on board my vessel? You have done a very serious thing, unless you have money to pay your passage to Brisbane; but if, as I imagine, you came here by mistake, I shan't be hard upon you."

Frank stared a little. Hitherto he had regarded himself as the injured party; but the captain seemed to look at the matter from the opposite point of view.

"I don't know how I came on board," he replied. "Someone must have brought me here last night, sir. The last thing I remember is going to bed in my room at Esmond Chase, in Hampshire. I was very sleepy, for I had a glass of wine with my cousin, Lucas Lumley, and I am not used to it. I know nothing of what happened after I fell asleep."

"What is your name?" asked Captain Bute abruptly.

"Frank Esmond."

"Well, Frank Esmond, do you imagine for one moment that I believe this preposterous story you have told me?" said John Bute, with a stern look.

Frank flushed crimson with indignation.

"I am not a liar!" he cried fiercely.

"Moderate your tone, sir! Do you know who you are addressing?" exclaimed Captain Bute, so imperiously that the boy involuntarily shrank back.

"You have no right to doubt my word!" he said doggedly. "Give me some proof, then, that your words are true. You say your name is Frank Esmond. Have you anything about you to bear out your statement?"

"My name is engraved on my watch-case and my pen-knife. And Frank felt for these articles, but discovered that they were no longer in his possession. Every pocket was empty; not even a handkerchief was left to him. His look of blank dismay elicited nothing but a cold sneer from the captain.

"Now," Bute said, after a short pause, "I fancied at first that you had come aboard the 'May Queen' in mistake for another vessel. But it is evident to me that you are a stowaway, and that your object was to obtain a passage to Brisbane without paying for it. Come, confess the truth; I am not a hard man, and I can pardon a fault, if you'll only tell the truth."

"I've told the truth!" Frank said hotly. "It's in your power to insult me if you choose. I've never been called a liar before!"

The manner of the captain became kinder. He by no means wished to make the lad regard him as an enemy.

"It is possible," he said, "that what you say may be quite correct, strange as it sounds. But that is, in fact, of little importance. The position is this. You are on my vessel, the 'May Queen,' eating the bread of idleness. You must work for your living."

"Could you not put me upon some homeward-bound vessel that you will pass between here and Brisbane, sir?"

"I will consider it. Meanwhile, you must work. Have you ever been to sea before?"

"Only on my guardian's yacht."

"Who is your guardian?" asked the captain sharply.

"Squire Oakhurst, of Oakhurst Grange."

"H'm! If you take my advice, you'll tell none of these cock-and-bull stories in the fo'c's'le. The hands will make a

laughing-stock of you if you do. You may—with a shrewd fellow—be the son of a Royal duke, but you can't expect people to believe it if you come sneaking among them without a card in your pocket! Now, don't flash and look strange; you are only a ship's boy now, and you must put your cards in your pocket. Behave yourself, and you'll find me a kind master. You may remain here to rest until eight bells, when you will report yourself to Mr. Garnett, the boatswain, and he'll show you what to do."

And Captain Bute left the cabin. Frank remained alone in a state of anger and mortification he had hitherto been a stranger to. Evidently the captain did not believe his explanation; and, indeed, when Frank reflected, it did seem a little improbable, as he had no proof whatever which would support it. Bute could not be blamed for his scepticism, or for his brusqueness, if he believed that he was being imposed upon. But Frank had told the truth, and he was not inclined to invent a more plausible tale to please anyone.

Thinking over the strange mischance which had befallen him, he could only arrive at one conclusion—he had been kidnapped! But how—when—by whom—for what purpose? These were mysteries, utterly dark to him. But, he said to himself resolutely, he would find out, and then he would make the unknown scoundrel smart for his treacherous work.

Captain Bute, returning to the deck, held a brief consultation with Finchley, as a result of which he reappeared in the cabin presently.

"Esmond, if that's really your name," said he, "take this. On board this vessel you take the place of Andrew Brown, a ship's boy I sacked at Portsmouth. You will take his name as well as his place. You can keep 'Frank Esmond' for Sundays and Christmas; Andrew Brown's answer well enough for working-days. D'ye hear?"

"Yes, sir."

"Take care that you obey me, then. Now, what's your name?"

"Andrew Brown, sir."

"Very good."

At eight bells (4 p.m.) Frank went up to the deck, and reported himself to the boatswain, whom he easily distinguished, as he was calling the hands for the first dog-watch, which begins at eight and lasts till ten. He explained that the captain had ordered him to work, and asked Garnett for instructions.

"We won't be hard on you the first day, lad," the boatswain said kindly. "Here, you Bill Blake, see that you're fixed out, and show him where to sling his hammock. By the way, kiddie, what's your name?"

"Frank Esmond, sir; but the captain says I am to be called Andrew Brown," replied our hero, who was determined that his real name should not be suppressed, in spite of the captain. He was sharp enough to know that, if he sailed under an assumed name, he might have difficulty in proving his identity when he got back to England, especially as he had nothing whatever about him to prove that he was Frank Esmond, future master of Esmond Chase. The boatswain stared at him when he made the somewhat peculiar reply.

"And why are you to be called Andrew Brown, if that's your name?" he inquired.

"It's Captain Bute's wish, sir, because he had a boy of that name in his employ before."

"H'm! h'm! Well, Brown—if I'm to call you that—with Blake, and he'll see you fixed up."

Frank, saluting the boatswain, followed the brown-bearded Yankee seaman to the fore-castle.

CHAPTER 2

In the Fore-castle—Danner's Brutal Trick—An Unequal Fight—Yankee Bill to the Rescue.

The fore-castle of the "May Queen" was roomy and comfortable, and Frank thought it looked very cosy. There was, of course, an odour of tobacco—a fo'c's'le would not be a fo'c's'le without that.

"You can't have a bunk," Yankee Bill observed. "I can't have a hammock'll hev to do for you, sonnie. Look here, and I'll show you how to sling it."

Bill obtained a hammock, and showed Frank the way to secure it, and also found for him a box to answer the purpose of a sea-chest.

"As for things to put in it," said the good-natured fellow, "we'll hev to make a collection from all the hands; and you don't know sailors, sonnie, if you ain't sure they will fix you out all right."

"I am sure," Frank replied. "I've sailed before, though not in the fo'c's'le, and I always got on well with the guardian's crew."

Yankee Bill looked at him curiously, and took him back to the deck, and spoke a few words to Mr. Garnett. The boatswain nodded, and turned to Frank.

"My lad, as we're to sail alongside, let's start fair and

squarr. Just you spin your yarn to Bill and me; now, heave aboard."

Nothing loth, Frank did so, and both the seamen listened attentively. Frank told them all, without reserve. He had been an orphan from childhood, and had been brought up by Squire Oakhurst, his guardian, a kind-hearted country gentleman of Hampshire. Six months ago his only relative—a cousin named Lucas Lumley—had come to Esmond Chase, to live there. Frank did not say so, but it could be seen that it was only the fact that Lucas was his sole relative that prevented the boy from disliking him. Lucas Lumley was thirty years old; a man who had seen much of life—principally of its worst side. It was something in Frank's tone, when speaking of his cousin, that made Bo'sun Garnett suddenly say:

"And you think this Lucas had a hand in the kidnapping of you, youngster?"

"I don't say that," Frank replied slowly; "but I don't see how I could be removed from the Chase without his knowledge. Besides, I must have been drugged, or I should have awakened during the removal; and, just before I went to bed, Lucas pressed me to take some wine with him, and I did so. I thought it had a funny taste."

The boatswain put many questions to Frank, finally assuring the lad that he was satisfied of the truth of the tale. Frank was then sent to the galley to get something to eat, and when the bo'sun and his mate were alone, the former said:

"That's some party dirty bizness here, Bill Blake. I kin see the motive of that swab Lucas. He's Esmond's only relation, and the lad has money. But that's our sartin' more than only that in it. The kidnapper on shore has a confederate on board this here vessel—that goes without saying. Now, wot does the skipper mean by tryin' to make the kid pass under a false name?"

"The skipper's in the game, bo'sun, I guess."

"That's it. Do you remember, last night, when we lay in the harbour, every man was sent ashore, only Mr. Finchley remainin' on board? Depend upon it, that was when the lad was brought aboard. Now, the kidnapper didn't mean just to give Frank Esmond a v'y'ge, so that he could come back trim and hearty. That wouldn't serve his purpose."

The American tar looked decidedly startled.

"You don't calculate they mean to chuck him overboard?" he said, in a low voice.

"Either that," said George Garnett firmly, "or they mean to maroon him somewhere, in a place he'll never get out of. Bill, you and me are honest seamen, if we don't talk through our nose like the skipper, and it's our biz to see that no harm comes to the lad while he's aboard the 'May Queen.'"

"I calculate you're right, bo'sun." And the two true-hearted seamen, the Briton and the American, shook hands over it.

Frank, it will be seen, had secured two valuable friends on board the 'May Queen.' And he needed them, for he was soon to find that he would have enemies, too.

The second dog-watch—from 10 to 12—was taken that night by the port-watch, to which Yankee Bill belonged. A boatswain usually ends his duties at dark, or soon after, but his "mate" is not so lucky. Garnett had a little "casboose" aft, where he turned in at the end of the first dog-watch. Frank was glad to stretch himself to the port-watch, because his new friend, Yankee Bill, belonged to it, but long before midnight he was terribly sleepy. Luckily for him the chief mate was not in charge of the deck. The second mate, a fine, seaman-like young Irishman named O'Connor, was officer of the watch, and, as, not being how tired Frank looked, kindly told him that he could go below if he chose. Frank thanked him, and gladly went.

He was not unaccustomed to sleeping in a hammock, so this did not occasion him any inconvenience; he turned in, and was soon sound asleep. In this hammock, which swung to the motion of the ship as it ploughed the waves of the darkened Atlantic, he slept as soundly as he had ever done in his downy bed at Esmond Chase.

But his sweet slumber was rudely interrupted. He had been asleep an hour when eight-bells announced the end of the second watch. The "starboards" went on deck, while the "ports" came to the fo'c'sle to get a much-needed rest. The big-bearded American, as it chanced, was detained on deck by some duty, when the relieved port-watch came down. They were a rough-looking set, these sailors, with their red faces, shaggy hair, and heavy beards, large hands, and stamping feet, but rough exteriors frequently conceal hearts of gold, and on the whole the crew of the "May Queen" were a fine set of men. But in every flock, it is said, there is a black sheep, and there was at least one here. The name of him was Fridrick Danner; he was a Dalmatian by birth, a very fair sailor, but a rough, coarse fellow, and a bully. He had sailed for years on British and American vessels, and spoke English as well as any of his shipmates, but he was not much liked by them; he was vindictive in the extreme, and the Anglo-Saxon sailor does not like a man who bears malice.

"Hallo, here's the swab Mr. O'Connor thinks needs more rest than we do!" he growled, as he saw Frank comfortably asleep in his hammock. "It would be a joke to cut him down by the head."

"Let the kid alone," said "Baby" Simpson, a young seaman only a little older than our hero. His youth, and his rosy face, had earned him his name. "Of course he's tired; he's a longshoreman, and we're old hands."

"Oh, yes, we are!" sniggered Danner. "How long have you been out of frocks? This kid's hammock is too near mine, and I'm going to shift it."

No one felt called upon to forcibly oppose this, so the ill-natured Dalmatian laid his hand upon Frank's hammock, and rucked it so violently that the lad, waking suddenly and starting up, pitched right out of it and landed upon the planks with a concussion that made his bones ache for days afterwards. Still sleepy, he picked himself up dazedly, but did not burst out crying, as most of the seamen anticipated. Instead, he looked at Danner, and, observing the grin of derision upon his face, walked up to him, in his shirt as he was.

"What do you mean by that?" he said, in a determined voice, his brows set.

"Find out!" retorted Danner scowlingly, for the boy's manner annoyed him; he felt, somehow, small and inferior before Frank's clear eyes.

Frank glanced round him. He saw, hanging over the edge of a bunk, a thick, knotted rope's-end, with which Yankee Bill sometimes aroused his messmates when they were too snugly folded in the embrace of Morpheus to respond to the cry of "Tumble-up!"

The rope's-end, in a second, was in Frank's grasp; in another second it was laid across the Dalmatian's sallow face, with all the force of the angry lad's arm.

The blow, so sudden and fierce, made Danner reel back with a cry of pain. His face became white with passion, and across the deathly skin the scarlet mark of the lash showed vividly. Grinding out a savage curse between his teeth, he sprang at Frank, and fairly rained blows upon him. Frank was both strong and plucky, but the Dalmatian was a full-grown man of great muscular power; the English lad was but an infant in comparison. Frank, reeling under the savage blows, might have fared badly indeed, had not "Baby" Simpson rushed forward to interpose, and taken the enraged man's onslaught upon himself.

Blind with anger, Danner cared little where his blows fell, so long as they struck someone, and he assailed Simpson as ferociously as he had attacked Frank Esmond. Simpson was a sturdy fellow, but no match for the herculean Dalmatian, and in a minute or two he was suffering severely for his chivalrous championship of the ill-used lad.

At a critical moment the big American came into the fore-castle, and, with a glance seeing the state of affairs, interfered promptly.

His large, muscular hand was inserted in the neck of Danner's jersey, and a vigorous twist nearly throttled the ruffian. Danner gasped chokingly, and strove to turn upon his assailant, but Yankee Bill jerked him about, hither and thither, so that he could not keep his feet. Loud roars broke from the Dalmatian's bull-throat, his face was deep red, his eyes starting, but he could not release himself, for every mercent a fresh jerk threw him off his balance.

In this way the two powerful men trampled all round the fo's'le; the American chucking, the Dalmatian spluttering, and the onlookers convulsed with mirth. Frank and Baby Simpson, in spite of their damaged faces, were laughing as loudly as the rest, the sight was so intensely comical.

After a few minutes of this amusement, Blake gave Danner a spin which sent him whirling into a corner, where he tumbled down in a heap, dazed and giddy. He sat up with such an idiotic expression of bewilderment upon his face that the mirth of the seamen redoubled, and they fairly shrieked.

"That, you bouncer!" exclaimed Yankee Bill, glaring at the man he had used so roughly. "I calculate that's a lesson you've been badly in want of, Fridrick Danner. You're as big an' strong as a hoss, an' you ain't ashamed to lambaste two kids not half your size! Darn my boots, if I ain't inclined to wade in now, and give you sich a skinning as you've never had before."

The Dalmatian rose to his feet, with his face like a thunder-cloud, and his Italian-Sclavonic blood boiling with fury.

"You shall have a chance!" he hissed. And he ran at the towering American like a mad bull.

Yankee Bill, however, was no mere lad, like Esmond or Simpson, and the Dalmatian very soon found it out. Instead of burling Bill backwards, as he expected, he was met by a terrific drive in the face, to which his own impetus gave an added force. He dropped like a log, fairly "crumpled up."

He did not rise again to renew the fight, for a very simple reason; he was stunned, and incapable of motion. As soon as Yankee Bill saw his state he showed that he knew how to be tender as well as stern. He knelt and loosened the fallen

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man's neckcloth, called for water, and bathed his face. In a few minutes Danner came to his senses.

He was still dazed, though, and Blake assisted him to his hammock; but his kindness did not stir any softer feeling in Danner's heart. As he turned to leave the man he had "kicked," the latter spoke.

"Bill Blake, I shall not forget this. Some day I will kill you!"

Yankee Bill laughed lightly.

CHAPTER 3.

Frank in Hot Water—The Sentence on Danner—Six Strokes with the Cat.

When Captain Bute came on deck to take his watch he noticed that Frank Esmond did not come up with the rest. He called Bill Blake to him, and asked the reason.

"The lad ain't used to roughing it yet, sir," the big American replied; "so, as he ain't really needed, we calculated that he might be left in his hammock till the forenoon watch."

"You have no right to calculate anything of the kind. I will have no idlers on board my ship. Go immediately and fetch him out!"

"Beg pardon, sir, but he feels rather bad; one of the hands pitched into him last night, and—"

"Did you hear my order, Blake?" the captain said distinctly.

Bill hit his lip, and went slowly and unwillingly to the fore-scuttle. There he hailed Frank, waking him out of a deep sleep.

"Kiddle, tumble up! You must come on deck; captain's orders!"

Frank knew enough of ship-life to be aware that the skipper's will is law, and that an order from the captain cannot be disregarded. He was naturally a quick and active lad, and five minutes had not elapsed when he joined the port-watch on deck. Captain Bute looked at him keenly, and noted the bruises upon his fair face. He signed to him to come forward.

"So you have been fighting already, boy!" he said, with a severe expression.

"I couldn't help it, sir!" Frank protested.

"H'm! Let me hear all the particulars."

Frank hesitated. Brute as Danner was, the lad did not wish to get him into trouble; besides, Yankee Bill had sufficiently punished him already.

"Pardon me, sir," he said respectfully; "but as I am to remain among the crew for some time, I should be making a bad start by telling tales out of the fo'c's'le. I don't bear the man any malice. Will you please pass it over?"

Finchley, the chief mate, who was standing near the skipper, burst into a loud guffaw; and then saluted Frank, as if he were an officer. The unheeded audacity of Frank, in arguing with the skipper, struck him as comical. Captain Bute made it a rule never to get into a passion; but his brows contracted ominously as he replied to the daring lad in hoarse tones.

"Instantly tell me the name of the man you fought with, or I will have you tied up to a grating and flogged within an inch of your life!"

Frank closed his teeth; he was unused to naval discipline, and his obstinacy was now aroused. He was saved from an unpleasant dilemma by "Baby" Simpson, who came forward and told the name. The captain made Simpson tell all the particulars, and then a strange look came over his face. In his cold eyes a gleam for a moment appeared; his thin lips tightened, and he seemed for a space lost in thought, forgetful of his surroundings. The chief mate looked at him with a half-grin, half-sneer, as if guessing his thoughts, and feeling exceedingly amused by them.

"Our virtuous captain has got an idea, and he is trying to justify it to his conscience, the poor milk-and-watery fool!" the more frankly-brutal mate muttered.

Everyone on deck knew that something was on the cards, and the men stood, in the grey light of dawn, eagerly waiting to hear what it was. Captain Bute called several of the port-watch to him, and made them corroborate Simpson, and then had Danner brought before him.

"My man," he said, "owing to the fact that you are an Austrian, I have on several occasions overlooked acts upon your part which are not quite according to our English ideas. But the limit of my patience has been reached. A brutal and unprovoked attack upon a boy too young to take his own part cannot be passed unnoticed on board a vessel where I hold command. Be'st!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" said Garnett, coming forward.

"Tie up that man, and give him six strokes of the cat!"

There was a murmur. The use of the cat is universally condemned by British seamen. More than once a mutiny has been caused by it. But Captain Bute knew well enough how far to go. Had he sentenced a favourite, like Yankee Bill, to the cat, the crew would probably have rescued him by main

force, regardless of consequences. But every man utterly detested the conduct of Danner, and none could find fault with the punishment allotted. Yet there was a murmur. The seamen felt the indignity to themselves as a whole, in this degrading form of punishment inflicted upon one of their number. It was wounded pride, not sympathy for the Dalmatian, that caused the murmur. Captain Bute took no notice of it.

Danner turned deadly pale, and as the boatswain obediently advanced to seize him, retreated with a hunted look in his eyes.

"Trice him up!" repeated Bute harshly.

"I will not be flogged!" Danner cried in a choking voice.

"Anything but that!"

"You should have thought of that before you attacked the lad!" replied the skipper coldly. "Don't think I wish to harm you. Your punishment is entirely due to Andrew Brown—to your treatment of him, I mean."

Captain Bute insisted upon calling Frank "Andrew Brown," but our hero used his own name in the fore-castle always.

Danner glared at Frank like a tiger. Bute had made him understand very clearly that he owed his punishment to Frank.

Garnett took hold of Danner, and, though he resisted, he was tied up with the help of several other seamen. All hands were piped to witness the flogging, and everyone wore a frown of disapproving of the infliction. Captain Bute, following out his secret idea, selected Frank Esmond to administer the lashes. Frank, pitying the unlucky Dalmatian, made an appeal to the skipper for his pardon.

"Nonsense!" said Captain Bute sharply. "No hypocritical boy. Take the cat, and give him six lashes, well laid on!"

Frank drew back, refusing to touch the instrument of torture.

"I cannot do it, sir," he said.

"You insolent cub, do you dare to disobey me?"

"I do not wish to be insolent, sir; but I cannot strike him!" Frank said firmly.

The seamen murmured approval; it was almost a cheer. But the look of cold, savage ferocity that flashed over the captain's calm, stony face instantly restored silence.

"Will you obey me, Brown?" the skipper said, in tones that were perfectly cool and tranquil, but savagely menacing for all that.

"I don't belong to your ship. I was kidnapped on board against my will," the boy said firmly. "I am not bound to obey your orders!"

"Very good. I see that you have some very peculiar ideas, which it is my duty, as an officer and a Christian, to carry you of for your own welfare," said Captain Bute in his mild voice. "You will stand aside for the present, Brown."

Frank knew as well as the rest that the matter was not ended. He was only set aside until the Dalmatian had been disposed of. But he was fearless; he had done what he believed to be right. Frank was a thoughtful, conscientious lad of religious feeling that was sincere, very different from the hypocrisy of Captain Bute. No threat of punishment would have forced the sturdy, generous-natured lad to beat Danner when he was defenceless. Besides this, he had an easy suspicion that Bute was not punishing Danner for the reason he stated. Frank was quick-witted, and he felt that there was something underhanded about this, though what it was he could not quite grasp.

The boatswain, or his mate, usually administer the cat, in the rare cases when it is resorted to in the British service. The skipper ordered Yankee Bill to perform the operation upon the triced-up Danner. Blake hesitated, but had no choice but to obey, and he lifted the lashes over the boatswain's bare back.

There was a universal shudder as the first blow descended. But the next moment the seamen were grinning. For Blake had struck carefully, so as not to hurt the culprit at all. Danner felt nothing but a slight tingling of the skin.

"Blake, I don't permit these antics!" Captain Bute said warningly. "This is no farce; the lashes must be well laid on!"

"I think my arm is weak this mornin', sir," replied Yankee Bill, with a very respectful air. "I may try fifty times, but I'm quite sure I can't hit harder than that."

The captain set his teeth. He could not force the boatswain's mate to strike hard. And if he selected any other man for the work, he knew that the result would be precisely the same. Of course, it was impossible for him to so far disregard the dignity of his rank as to wield the "cat" himself. It was the chief mate who extracted him from the difficulty. Brutal, coarse-voiced Finchley firmly believed in the usefulness of the cat-o'-nine-tails, and was often heard to deprecate the dying-out of the old custom of using it on every occasion. As Yankee Bill was measuring his aim for another barnburning stroke, Finchley stepped forward and jerked the cat out of his hand.

"I'll show you how to handle this rickler!" he said gruffly. And he laid on the first stroke with such scientific accuracy that it took a strip of skin from the back of Friedrich Danner, and elicited a wild howl of anguish from the poor wretch.

Captain Bute, though not at all conscientious, was squeamish, and the sight of blood sickened him.

"That will do, Finchley," he said. "Everything considered, we can let him off with that; but remember for the future, Danner, that no complaints from Andrew Brown reach my ears."

"I did not complain, sir," said Frank.

"Silence! Bo'sun, cut him loose."

Danner was released, and, as he staggered away to the fore-castle, he gave Frank a look of malevolence that the boy never forgot.

"And now," said the skipper grimly, "I have to punish this insolent cab for his insubordination! Men, you may go to your duty."

Very curious to know what would take place, every seaman kept an eye upon Frank while the work of cleaning up the decks went on. The captain had evidently decided upon something out of the ordinary. He had the main hatch raised, and ordered Frank to descend into the hold. The lad, surprised and alarmed as he was, knew the uselessness of resistance, and he went quietly.

"Solitude is the punishment inflicted in convict prisons for insubordination," Captain Bute said, with his snake's smile. "I shall try its effect upon you, young man. By the time you see the light of day again, you may be able to appreciate more justly the difference between a captain and a ship's boy."

The hatch was closed and fastened. Below, Frank Esmond remained in the utterest darkness. Above, consternation fell upon the crew. Boatswain Garnett impulsively made a stride towards the icy-faced captain.

"Do you mean to keep the lad shut up in the dark there, sir?" he exclaimed.

"Most certainly I do! Do you criticise my actions? Stand back!"

The boatswain, not troubling to repress the indignation that glowed in his face, turned away silently. He was powerless.

Captain Bute gave one of his cold glances round the deck, and then went to his cabin. Finchley followed him there.

When inside, the chief mate made his superior officer a mocking salute.

"Captain, with all your pious ways, you are a cleverer scamp than I am, and a bigger one," he said. "It was perfectly splendid to set Danner against Esmond by flogging him on the boy's account. You've made the brute fit to murder Frank, and he'll do it, too, when he gets a chance, if I know his nature. It was a stroke of diplomacy."

"Shut up! I punished Danner for his brutality. He deserved it. If he hates Esmond for it, and seeks revenge, that's no fault of mine," answered the captain, who really did his best to believe this. For he had a conscience of a sort had John Bute.

Finchley looked at him quizzically.

"Maybe you believe that, cap'n, an' maybe you don't. In either case, it won't do you much good on the Day of Judgment!"

"You are so outspoken and brutal, Finchley. Now," said Bute testily, "I suppose you think I meant harm by the boy when I agreed to take him aboard the 'May Queen'?"

"Well, I didn't think you meant to maroon the kid on a desert island just out of pure kindness!" was the sarcastic reply.

"You are a clumsy fool. I knew that Lucas Lumley was determined to get rid of the boy, and if I didn't take him, he'd be disposed of some other way, perhaps by murder, so I was, in fact, doing the lad a good turn by—"

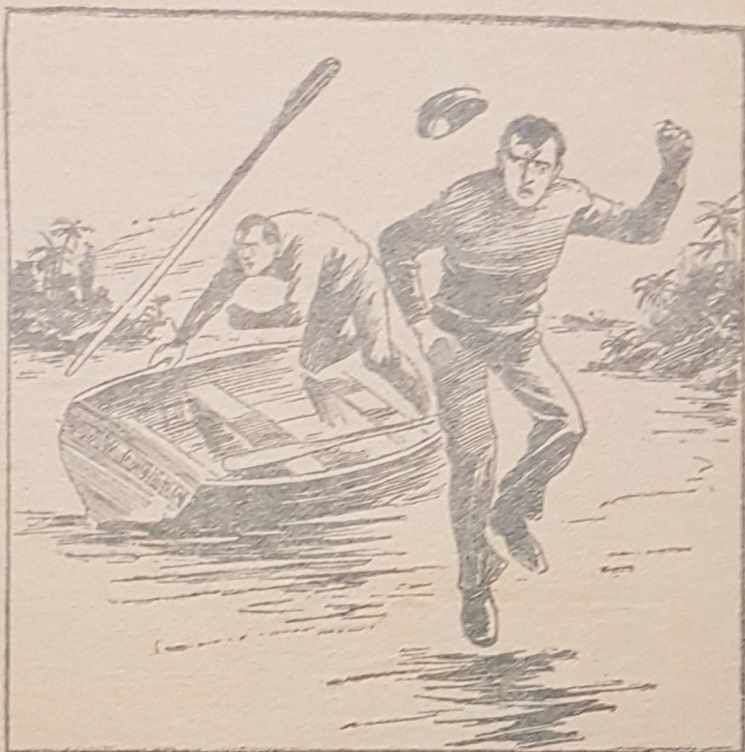
Finchley interrupted him with an uproarious burst of laughter, which made the would-be self-deceiver flush crimson with anger.

"By running his life, and cheating him out of his inheritance!" Finchley said, concluding the sentence for the other.

"Very good. And what was your virtuous motive for accepting Lumley's thousand pounds?"

"Don't make too free with me, Finchley, or you'll regret it!"

"Have your own way. After all, there's no reason why



As the oar crashed downward Frank Esmond sprang far out into the shining water. The back-kick of his spring made the boat rock violently, and Danner also striking with all his force, the result was that the villain lost his footing and tumbled down upon the thwarts.

"You shouldn't be a hypocrite if you choose to!" retorted the candid mate. "But the facts are these. You agreed to maroon Esmond in a place he can't escape from, and Lucas Lumley paid you for it. And he offered you an extra five thousand if the brat died aboard your vessel. He couldn't be open and honest, and say, 'Kill him, and the money's yours!' You can't be so, either, for you won't do it. You only stir up an outsider to do it, and when he does it, you'll say, 'How sad, I never expected this!' And you'll have Danner properly hanged as a salve to your conscience. But, in case Danner don't have the pluck to do it, you don't lose chances; you lock the kid up in the hold, hoping that he'll break his neck in the dark, or die of fright!"

The captain's usually calm face was convulsed with rage.

"Will you hold your tongue?" he hissed.

Finchley started. He had never seen the skipper so moved before. Bute looked perfectly furious, and his eyes darted fire. This outburst on the part of a man who was always calm and icily impassive warned the ruffianly mate that he had gone too far.

"No offence, captain," he said half apologetically. "I have my way, and you have yours; let us have each other alone."

"You had better be careful for the future, Finchley. I permit no liberty to be taken with me. I have a conscience—an exacting conscience, and I do my humble best to walk in the right path. It is human to err, and I am but human; but I am a man of religious feeling, Mr. Finchley."

The captain's passion was gone, as his resumption of his usual cant showed. Finchley muttered something under his breath. The chief mate had plenty of vice, but he had one virtue—he never tried to deceive himself as to his own character, and he did not affect such a luxury as an exacting conscience. Captain Bute, on the other hand, wished to feel himself good and pious, and at the same time to make money by every honest and dishonest method he could, so that he was never comfortable in his mind.

While the officers were talking in the cabin, the crew also were talking forward in loud and excited tones.

The captain's sentence on Frank excited loud indignation amongst the men of the "May Queen." To shut a mere lad up in the dark hold, and keep him there for an indefinite period, seemed barbarously cruel to the honest Jack Tars. The boy had been curvly, doubtless; but he was new to the sea, and did not know the ropes, and, in fact, did not belong

to the "May Queen's" crew at all, and was not under the orders of the captain, strictly speaking.

While sympathizing with Frank, and condemning the cruelty of Bute, the seamen could do nothing to serve our hero, though some of the bolder spirits suggested sending a "round robin" to the captain, while others thought of ceasing work as a protest against Frank's confinement. As is usual among men who have no recognised leader, there was much talk, and no decision arrived at.

CHAPTER 4.

O'Connor Plays the Man—Frank's Fright Among the Rats in the Darkness—On the African Coast.

Help for Frank came from an unexpected quarter. The shutting-up of the poor lad gave food for reflection to Mr. O'Connor, the second mate. He considered the subject in all its bearings, and finally came to the conclusion that Captain Bute's conduct was illegal as well as barbarous. The Irish mate was kind-hearted and conscientious, and, serious matter as it is for a mate to oppose a captain, he made up his mind to risk everything, and remonstrate with the skipper. With this intention he left the deck in charge of Garnett, and went below and tapped at the captain's door.

"Come in!" called out Bute's voice. And O'Connor entered, feeling uncomfortable enough. He did not beat about fixed their eyes upon his questioning. He did not beat about the bush, however, but came to the point directly.

"Captain Bute, I wish to speak to you upon the subject of young Brown's imprisonment," he said. "He has been in the hold half an hour. Will you tell me how long you intend to keep him there?"

The skipper raised his eyebrows. "Of what concern is the matter to you, Mr. O'Connor?" he asked.

"Have you thought, sir," said O'Connor earnestly, "what may be the result of this punishment? The boy may stumble and break his neck. He may go raving mad in the terror of the darkness."

"Your opinions are doubtless valuable, Mr. O'Connor; but I have made my decision, and I consider it my bounden duty to adhere to it," answered Bute. "And now, will you have the kindness to return to the deck?"

"Then, sir," said the second mate, becoming pale but resolute still, "I protest against this revolting barbarity to a mere lad!"

The brows of Captain Bute contracted in a frown. "You protest? Very good!" he said coolly. "And now you have protested, be good enough to return to the deck."

"You refuse, then, to release the boy?"

"The subject is ended, sir. Leave the cabin!"

O'Connor was hot-headed, like most Irishmen, and the captain's calm insults did not fail to rouse his anger.

"The detention of Andrew Brown in the hold is illegal!" he said. "You exceed your power, Captain Bute. In view of the possible consequences of the punishment, I shall take the matter into my own hands!"

Captain Bute jumped up, his eyes beginning to glitter.

"You will do what?" he cried.

"I will call upon the crew to release Brown, taking all the responsibility of that step upon my own shoulders!" O'Connor said firmly. "Think, before you force me to that, sir. The habit of discipline once broken, it is not easily mended, and your obstinacy may lead to fearful disasters."

Finchley wanted to clap O'Connor in irons on the spot; but Captain Bute was sharper. He saw that the second mate held all the trumps. There was nothing for it but a graceful surrender.

"To save the possibility of such disasters," he said, "I will release Brown. But I shall not forget, Mr. O'Connor, that you have dictated to me in my own cabin!"

O'Connor knew that he had made an implacable enemy, who would do the best he could to ruin his professional prospects. He was likely to have to pay heavily for his generous protection of Frank. But, thinking of the poor lad shut up in darkness and solitude, he did not regret the course he had taken.

Captain Bute went on deck, and he was greeted by scowls and sullen silence. But his first words cleared the clouded faces.

"Bo'sun, you will raise the main hatch and release Brown," he said. "I think he has been sufficiently punished for a first offence."

The seamen had seen Mr. O'Connor go to Bute's cabin, and they were not long in putting two and two together, and guessing that the skipper's sudden clemency was due to some remonstrance of O'Connor's, though, of course, they did not know that the remonstrance had been carried as far as a threat. Readily the hands rushed to the main hatch, and unrolled the yawning opening.

"Aboy, there, Frank Esmond!" shouted the boatswain. "Show yourself, laddie!"

There came no reply. Frank was not visible. A shade of anxiety crossed the boatswain's rugged face. The skipper turned away aft that the tars might not see the excitement in his pious face. Something had happened to the lad, that was certain. Perhaps he was dead—dead, and the captain's hands unstained with his blood. Bute, with his peculiar conscience, had reason to be satisfied.

George Garnett went down into the hold, and all hands waited breathlessly for his reappearance. In five minutes time he came up, bearing Frank Esmond in his brawny arms. He laid the lad on the deck, and called for water. Yankee Bill brought it, and it was dashed into Esmond's face. The cold shock brought a sigh to his lips, and the crew breathed more freely to know that he yet lived. As for Captain Bute, whatever he felt he concealed under a mask of ice.

Frank came to, and Garnett forced brandy down his throat further reviving him. He sat up, shuddering and shivering. His face, wet with tears, was white as the face of a cold corpse. He appeared to be in the last state of exhaustion, caused by darkness and solitude, and the frightful unreasoning terror which seizes upon even strong men when in solitary confinement, and denied the blessing of light. The generous Irish mate had saved his reason, if not his life. He had fainted, and had he recovered the consciousness in the hold, another hour in that living grave would have left him a gibbering idiot.

Garnett and Blake carried him to the fore-castle, and put him to bed; but he could not sleep. He remained pale as death, with wide, staring eyes. For a time it was believed that he would die. Captain Bute, not satisfied with what he had already done, ordered Garnett to send Frank on deck, saying that he would have no skulkers aboard his ship. The boatswain refused, for his blood was up now, and he would not have needed much more provocation to knock Bute down on his own deck. Bute would have clapped Garnett in irons, but that he saw that every man was on the boatswain's side, excepting Danner, who didn't count. The skipper gave Garnett one of his cold scowls, and recalled his order.

Frank did not die. In a couple of hours he was almost himself again. In broken sentences he spoke of the horrors he had endured.

The blackness had seemed to close upon him like a stifling fog, and he heard no sound but the faint wash of the sea outside the hull, with the occasional scampering and squeaking of a bright-eyed rat. Soon it seemed to him that threatening eyes peered at him from the darkness, and the faint sea-murmur changed to ghostly whispers. He was in an atmosphere of dread. He tried to banish his terrors by repeating to himself verses he knew by heart, counting up, and so on; but his brain failed to grasp either words or figures. And finally he collapsed, falling in a swoon; but he was for a time conscious enough to know that rats were running over him and sniffing at his lips. Complete insensibility succeeded, from which the boatswain aroused him upon the "May Queen's" deck.

It was morning on the following day when Frank left his hammock, still looking pale and languid. Hearing from his messmates the part O'Connor had played, as they guessed, he took the first opportunity of thanking the second mate. O'Connor was rather glum, for Bute showed his enmity in a thousand petty ways, making the young officer's life a misery. Frank knew that his benefactor would lose by doing as he had done, but he knew not how much.

O'Connor received his thanks with a good-natured smile, but our hero saw how displeased he was.

"I know Captain Bute will try to injure you, sir, in return for your kindness to me," he began, after thanking O'Connor. The mate made him a sign to stop, but he went on rapidly. "But in England, sir, I may be able to repay your kindness. When I am twenty-one, I shall be one of the richest land-owners in Hampshire, and I will show you that I know how to be grateful."

O'Connor had not heard Frank's story, and these words naturally astonished him. He looked sharply at Frank, and asked him to explain. Then the lad told his story in simple words, and O'Connor was keen enough to see that every word was true. And he knew now the cause of the barbarous punishment inflicted upon Frank. He made no comment upon the story, beyond expressing his full belief of it, but his thoughts were busy. When Frank left him, he felt that in the Irish mate he had found a friend and a protector, and he was right.

The "May Queen" found fair weather in the Atlantic, and nothing of note occurred on board until the Equator was left far behind.

Captain Bute had been rather kind to Frank during the last week or two. This was policy on his part; but Frank was too youthful to look very deeply into things, so that he soon

forgave Bute, and even began to like him a little. For the brutal Finchley he never felt anything but hatred. Fridrick Danner had not lost his malignity, and Esmond was always on his guard against him. Danner had threatened to have his life, and Frank knew very well that the half-civilised Sclavo-Italian ruffian would keep his word if he could. Once the lad had a close shave in the rigging, when a rope to which he held was cut above, and he fell into the foretop, fortunately without hurting himself, excepting for a shaking. He suspected Danner's hand; but he had not seen the villain, so, as he had no proof, he said nothing about the matter. But after that experience he was doubly vigilant.

By the time the "May Queen" crossed the Equator Frank Esmond had become a very fair sailor. He was a favourite with all his mates, who had contributed with sailor-like generosity to the collection made by Yankee Bill on his behalf. Frank had come on board the "May Queen" possessing nothing but the clothes he stood in; but ere long he was the owner of a better-supplied chest than any man on board. Seamen are usually neat at cutting and sewing, and Yankee Bill very deftly reduced some men's garments in size for the use of his proteges, so that Frank was fitted out in sailor garb. The kindness of these rough, rugged sons of the sea deeply touched Frank, who vowed to himself that he would repay it when it was in his power to do so.

The "May Queen" was abreast of the mouth of the River Congo when the skipper drew his vessel in towards the coast of Africa. This excited much surprise and surmise in the fore-castle, for everyone knew that the ship's destination was Brisbane. Captain Bute could not mean to put in at Walfisch Bay, for that was a thousand miles further south than the Congo. It was then some foreign port he sought. Which—and for what reason? These questions much puzzled the seamen.

The ship coasted along Portuguese West Africa for some days, and finally came to anchor in the mouth of a river in the Benguela region. The coast appeared to be deserted, but after a few hours a Portuguese official appeared in a boat, with a guard of six native riflemen. He came from a fort up the river, and his business was to warn the English captain that no trading with the natives would be permitted. Captain Bute took the El Commandante into his cabin, and cracked a bottle or two, and was soon upon excellent terms with him. When he left the "May Queen" the skipper said to him:

"Then I will send the boat to-night."

"The cargo will be ready, senhor," replied the half-tipsy commandante. And his black rowers pulled away.

Then Captain Bute gave a word of explanation to the wondering crew.

"This region," he said, "produces the most luscious fruits, and I mean to lay in a supply of them for the voyage. Trading is not lawful here without the permission of this officer's governor, but a bribe will do much. I am to send a couple of men in a boat after dark to bring away as much fruit as I like."

After weeks of junk and biscuit, the prospect of a "feed" on a variety of rich tropical fruits was so pleasing that every man's face expressed intense satisfaction. And as a run ashore is bliss to a sailor, every man wanted to be one of the pair selected to go up the river in the boat. Before deciding about this, Captain Bute had a talk with Finchley.

"Why not maroon him here, cap.?" the chief mate asked.

"That Portugee would do anything for ten doubloons. He'd undertake to kidnap the boy so that we should be compelled to sail without him."

"Esmond would tell his story, and the Portuguese would befriend him in the hope of reward," answered Bute. "No; if it comes to marooning we'll stick to our original plan."

"Don't let it come to marooning. All the hands are eager to go in the boat. Tell them that they shall draw straws for it, and leave the rest to me."

Finchley had of late taken to humouring the captain in his assumed squeamishness. He knew that Bute's idea was to send Danner and Frank alone up the river, to give the revengeful Dalmatian a chance to kill the boy if he chose to do so. But Finchley knew also that Bute would not have the courage for such villainy, unless someone else was at hand for him to throw the blame upon, to ease his own queer conscience. Now, the chief mate was to have a goodly portion of the death-money if Frank did not survive the voyage. He therefore thought it worth while to check his propensity for plain speaking, and to take upon himself the whole of the scheming and its responsibility.

Captain Bute told the crew that, as all could not go, they should draw straws for it, the chief mate holding straws, plucked from a packing-case in the hold, and equal in number to the sailors, two of the pieces being shorter than the rest. The two men who drew the shorts were to go in the boat. Finchley held the straws with the ends protruding between his fingers, one at a time, and the seamen came in rotation and

drew, so that it was easy for the mate to let the short straws be drawn by whoever he wished.

Frank Esmond got the first, and was much elated thereby, and he waited eagerly to see who would get the other, hoping that it would be Yankee Bill or "Baby" Simpson. It proved to be Fridrick Danner.

Frank was disappointed. Had he seen the look which for an instant flashed over Danner's face, he would have been alarmed also.

George Garnett was made a little uneasy. He knew the Dalmatian's untamed nature well; he more than suspected that Danner had quitted his native land on the shores of the Adriatic to escape the penalty of a crime. He was full of fears for Frank's safety. He consulted with Yankee Bill, and when the hour for launching the boat drew near, the two men called Frank to them.

"My lad," said the boatswain, "that Austrian bounder don't love you too much, and it's occurred to me that he may cut up rusty while you're alone on the river. Would you like to ask the captain to let you off going?"

"I'm not afraid of Danner," replied Frank. "I shouldn't like to ask Captain Bute without being able to give a good reason."

"I s'pose that's so, too. Arter all, Danner may do no harm. But keep your weather eye open, lad. And take this—hide it in your jacket." It was a long bowie-knife belonging to the American. "If Danner tries to run foul of you, just stick him for all you're worth."

"I calc'late you're a match for the galoot with that thar sticker," remarked Yankee Bill. "Be spy, kiddie, and kyarve the cuss if he so much as looks cross-eyed at you."

Frank laughed, and promised to do so, and he kept the big knife hidden in his jacket, though it was rather an awkward article to handle. Soon after sunset the boat was lowered—the smallest of the ship's boats, merely a skiff. With Danner at the oars, and Frank steering, the boat pulled up the river, and soon passed beyond the range of vision of the watch on the deck of the "May Queen."

CHAPTER 5.

On the River—Danner's Treachery—A Struggle for Life.

The moon was coming up over the tree-tops, and soon after the setting of the sun the moonlight lay in a silver sheet upon the ocean, the river, and the forest.

'Twas a typical West African river, abounding in yellow mud along both banks, where thick mangroves grew in the water. The forest, which began within a score of yards of high watermark, loomed darkly round the river, and many of the great branches, extending clear across the water, intercepted the moon-rays, so that the silver-breasted stream was barred with black streaks.

The plash of Danner's oars broke weirdly upon the stillness. The scene, so new and strange, had a great effect upon Frank Esmond, who looked about him with quick, curious eyes. He saw some objects floating upon the water which he took to be logs, but a movement of one of them showed that they were alive, and he knew them to be hippopotami then. The proximity of these terrible monsters made him tremble at first, but they took no notice of the boat, and he soon became careless of them.

When the boat was about a mile from the sea Danner laid in his oars.

"I am tired with rowing," he said. "Will you change for a time?"

"Certainly," answered Frank cheerfully; but he had not forgotten Boatswain Garnett's warning, and he was wary enough as he changed places with Danner, not giving the fellow a chance to take him unawares.

While Frank handled the oars Danner stared at him with glittering eyes, and could not help observing that the boy was on his guard against treachery. The boatswain had been warning him, Danner guessed. Garnett had also warned Danner, telling him plainly that if he took advantage of the trip up the river to do the boy any injury, he should be made to pay for it when he came back to the "May Queen." But Danner did not mean to go back to the "May Queen." He intended to revenge himself upon Frank, and escape by the land. Before he quitted the ship he secured about his person all the valuables he possessed, and a good many that he did not possess—the property of his shipmates. As he would forfeit his pay by deserting he meant to thus indemnify himself as much as possible.

The boat advanced up the moonlit river. Frank soon observed the Dalmatian securing the tiller-lines, so that the boat could not turn broadside to the stream, there being now a stretch of clear water in front of them.

"I will take the oars now," Danner said, and once more Frank crossed to the stern. But instead of rowing, Danner poised one of the oars in the air.

"Your time has come, brat!" he hissed, with a cruel grin. "Look, I am about to crush in your skull with one blow!"

Frank started up, changing colour, but keeping his courage. He saw now the murderous design of the Dalmatian. It appeared that he was at the ruffian's mercy.

"You scoundrel!" he said. "Haven't you enough pluck to attack a lad without taking an unfair advantage?"

"The mark of the lash is still on my back," said the Dalmatian, grinding his teeth. "It shall be wiped out in blood!"

"It was Mr. Finchley that lashed you, not I."

"You were the cause. I would kill the chief mate if I could, but you are in my power. I only regret leaving the 'May Queen' without revenging myself upon Yankee Bill. But that shall come some day. But you, you viper, shall pay the penalty now."

White, desperate, the boy glared at Danner as he aimed the oar to strike. How could he elude the terrible blow?—how?—how? Ah, the river! As the oar crashed downward Frank Esmond sprang far out into the shining water. The back-kick Esmond made the boat rock violently, and Danner also striking with all his force, the result was that the villain lost

gripped his left leg tenaciously, effectually preventing ascent into the tree. Standing knee-deep in the mud, the Dalmatian held Frank's ankle with one hand, and felt for a knife with the other, while a grin of savage excitement wreathed his bloodstained face.

But Esmond was now in such a state of desperation that fear had left him; he acted with quickness, decision, and vigour. One foot was still free, and he could use it. As he hung from the branch he kicked Danner full in the face with his right boot, throwing all his strength into the kick. It was a frightful blow. Danner fell backwards into the river with a stifled cry, and the water closed over him.

Untrammelled now, Frank clambered upon the branch and actively worked his way along it until he reached the trunk. Within the circle of foliage no moonlight penetrated, and all was black darkness. But beyond it Frank could see the silver river, with Danner's head a black dot upon the surface. The Dalmatian's face was hardly recognisable; his nose was disjointed, and the features masked by blood and bruises. He had evidently suffered severely, but he was not disheartened, and the pain he endured only served to further inflame his fury and render more resolute his determination to kill Frank Esmond.

He drew himself upon the low branch and sat astride of it for a few minutes, to rub the slime out of his eyes and to recover his breath.

Frank did not descend to the ground as he had at first intended. In his present position Danner could only reach him by crawling along the branch—a most dangerous feat in face of an armed enemy. Danner knew not that Frank was armed; and the bowie-knife would come as a surprise to him. Frank stood upon the branch, which was a foot thick where it joined the trunk. He placed his back against the massive trunk, and with his left hand grasped a small bough that jutted out almost exactly over his head. In his right he gripped the big knife, holding it as he would a cutlass. The blade was ten inches long, and it made a very handy "young" sword. As he held it he blessed the forethought of the boatman and his mate in providing him with such an effective weapon.

Danner soon began to work his way along the branch, which bent and swayed beneath his weight. As soon as he entered the shadow of the foliage, Frank could no longer see him; but he could catch the greenish-glimmer of his eyes, and sometimes the glimmer of his open knife. The fiendish-looking eyes drawing steadily nearer and nearer in the dense darkness of the tree's interior, seemed uncanny enough to scare any man of strong nerve. But Frank's blood was up, the battle-fever was in his veins, and he was as eager for the conflict to recommence as the Dalmatian himself could be.

Danner was very near, when dimly he saw Frank's form, and the faint glimmer of the ten-inch bowie caught his eye. He paused as he discerned the weapon. The fight was to be a harder one than he anticipated. But his stop only lasted a moment. The next, he was advancing again. He was cautious, but he had to take more risks than the stationary defender.

He never paused until a slash of Frank's bowie missed his nose by only an inch. Then he drew back for an instant, gathered his strength, and flung himself forward, striking at the same time with his knife.

He counted upon pinning Frank to the tree, and catching a neighbouring branch to save himself from a fall. But he was too confident. As he came on, Frank kicked out vigorously, planting his boot in the ruffian's stomach, and the descending knife only just grazed the boy's leg. Danner reeled, and, ere he could recover himself, Frank struck a sword-blow with his long bowie. The slash took the villain upon the shoulder; he reeled, and, with a groan, lost his hold and fell off the branch.

Whether he had been killed or not, Frank never paused to ascertain. He sheathed his reddened bowie, and scrambled along the branch into the moonlight. His idea was to regain the boat, and attempt to return to the "May Queen" before Danner could get at him again. Once in the boat he could easily keep off his foe with the oars. At the end of the branch, where it overhung the water, he stopped to look for the boat. In a minute he saw it. It had drifted to the bank and lay jammed on the mud. Dropping into the water, he



Danner reeled, and, ere he could recover himself, Frank struck a sword-blow with his long bowie. The slash took the villain upon the shoulder; he reeled, and, with a groan, lost his hold and fell off the branch.

his footing and tumbled down upon the thwarts. He got a bad blow on the face, and when he rose, his nose and lips were cut, and bleeding profusely. His eyes burned like those of a wild beast, as he glared round in search of Frank Esmond.

The boy was swimming shoreward with vigorous strokes, and had already nearly reached the thick mud that rimmed the river. Danner saw that he would never overtake him in the boat. Flinging off his hat and jacket and boots, in a few seconds he sprang into the river and swam after Frank.

Frank did not look round, but the panting and splashing behind told him that he was pursued. He exerted all his strength to reach the bank, and in a short space he was dragging himself through the mud. But the sticky mass clogged his boots; he sank up to the knees in it, and could hardly force his way on. Fortunately a large tree growing near extended a long, low branch over the river at this point, and by reaching upward Frank succeeded in grasping the branch. Holding it with both hands, he endeavoured to pull his feet up out of the mud, intending to gain the branch, crawl along it to the tree-trunk, and thence descend to terra-firma.

He had just succeeded in freeing his legs, and had placed both arms over the branch, when Danner reached him, and

waded along to the boat, climbed in, and, seizing an oar, tried to push off into the river.

So occupied was he with this task that he did not hear an oar-stroke on the river, nor did he see a boat coming up from seaward in the moonlight.

Fridrick Danner fell, when Frank dislodged him from the tree, only a few feet, and the fall did not hurt him much. His wound, though, was terrible, and for five minutes he lay unable to move. When at length he staggered to his feet his only thought still was revenge upon his enemy. He forced his way through the underwood and slime to the river, into which he had heard Frank drop. He soon discerned the boy, who had just succeeded in pushing off.

The boat came drifting towards Danner, who drew back into the shadow of the mangroves, gritting his teeth, and poising his knife above his head. It must pass close to him, and by a deft throw he could send his knife into the face or throat of his foe. Even if the missile did not do its fatal work, it would knock Frank down, thus enabling the ruffian to get into the boat and finish the fight at close quarters, when his great strength would place his success beyond a doubt.

Frank came nearer, the knife was about to whiz through the air, when a sharp crack broke the stillness of the moonlit river.

Danner's arm fell nerveless to his side; he pitched forward upon his face in the slime, which closed above him—for ever!

CHAPTER 6.

The Boatwain to the Rescue—O'Connor is Sent Ashore.

The shot was fired by George Garnett, the boatwain of the "May Queen."

Shortly after the departure of the boat, Captain Bute went to his bunk, and Mr. Finchley let the second mate take the first watch, going below to his cabin to smoke a cigar and reflect upon a matter he deemed of great consequence—in fact, the disposal of the money he would receive from Lucas Lumley, when Frank Esmond's death left that gentleman in possession of the Esmond Chase-estates. The chief mate had studied Danner's character carefully, and he felt quite sure that Frank would never return from his journey alive.

Mr. O'Connor being in charge of the deck, Boatwain Garnett took the opportunity of acquainting him with his uneasiness on Frank's account, and asked permission to follow the boat in another. O'Connor guessed that Captain Bute would not like that; but he had no desire to please the captain, and he readily gave the required permission. The boat was lowered noiselessly, in case Bute or Finchley should discover what was going forward, and Garnett picked out six men to man it, and borrowed a revolver of O'Connor. The tide carried the boat silently into the channel, when the oars were put out, and the brawny seamen pulled their hardest, making the light craft fairly fly. Once the boatwain thought he heard a hail from seaward; but he took no heed of it, and the oars did not cease play for a moment.

"If that's the old man, I calc'late he'll hev to shout a durned sight louder afore we hear him!" chuckled Yankee Bill.

Finchley had, in fact, come on deck about ten minutes after Garnett left, and, noticing that a boat was missing, inquired the cause. When O'Connor said that he had sent it after Frank, the chief mate fairly panted with rage. All his schemes were upset, then, unless Danner had been very quick about his work.

"You lubberly swab!" roared the bully. "How dare you send a boat without orders, hey?"

"While you are below, I am in command, I believe, and at liberty to act according to my own judgment!" O'Connor replied quietly.

"You confounded son of a sea-cook, I'll—"

"Take care, Mr. Finchley. You are my superior officer, but I permit no man to insult me!" the young Irishman said, with a flash of fire in his eyes.

The chief mate, snarling out curses, clenched his fist to strike; O'Connor stood on the defensive, and for a space there seemed a prospect of a fistful encounter between the two officers. Fortunately this was averted by the timely appearance of the skipper upon the deck.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," exclaimed the skipper, looking

very shocked, "what is the meaning of this unseemly scene!" "He has sent a boat to look after young Es—Brown!" spluttered the enraged chief mate.

Captain Bute set his teeth; but his good sense told him that it was useless to make trouble over what was done, and could not be undone.

"What did you do that for, O'Connor?" he said mildly.

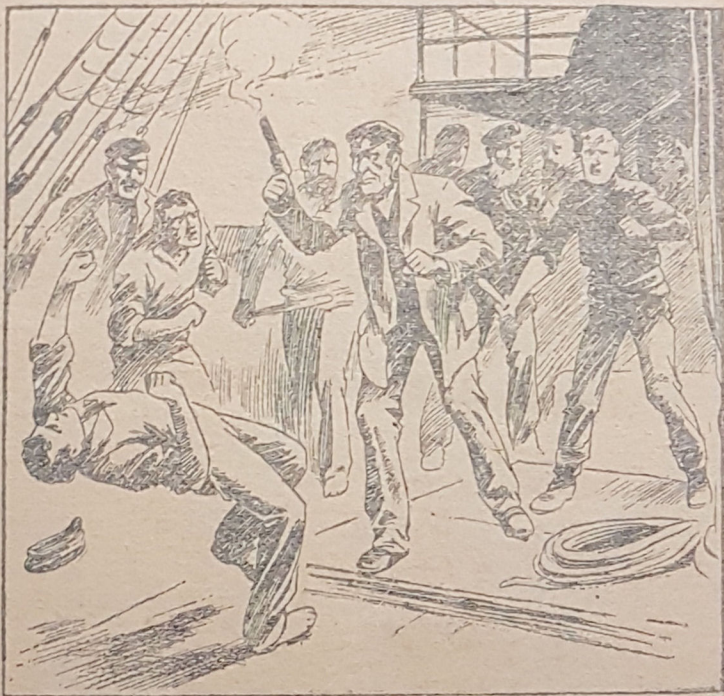
O'Connor explained what the boatwain had said to him. While he was speaking, Finchley went to the side and hailed the boat with all the power of his lungs. In vain, as we have seen.

Captain Bute forced himself to nod approval when O'Connor explained, skilfully hiding his rage. To find fault would only excite suspicion, and serve no purpose. But later on, when the precious pair were alone, Bute said to Finchley, "We must get rid of O'Connor!"

"Shall I knock him on the head some night?"

"No; but I will dismiss him from my service at Walfish Bay. We will put in there, and I will land him; you must invent some insubordination as a pretext, but don't let him guess what's coming until the time comes."

Garnett and his companions made the best speed up the river, but could not overtake the first boat, owing to the start



"Down with the murderer!" shouted Garnett, beside himself. And the infuriated seamen rushed at Finchley. He fired, and wounded young Simpson. The shot was his death-knell. The men thought "Baby" Simpson was killed, and their senses left them.

it had had. They only arrived upon the scene when the struggle was about to end; but the arrival was in the nick of time, and the boatwain's pistol-shot probably saved the life of Frank Esmond.

Frank was surprised and delighted to see his friends, and he thanked them warmly for their solicitude. They listened eagerly to his description of what had happened, and Yankee Bill gave him a slap on the back that took his breath away, in approval of his pluck.

"That scallywag Danner won't trouble you agin," he remarked. "He's got the lead where he can't digest it, and he'll never cuss or chew terbacker no more. He's gone over the range, sonnie—good-bye to him."

"We won't go back to the 'May Queen' yet," the boatwain observed. "We'll go on up to the Portuguese settlement, an' git the fruit Danner was sent for. That'll please the skipper, and he won't be so riled at our leavin' the ship."

With Frank on board, and the other boat in tow, the seamen pulled up the river to the Portuguese fort, where the commandante gave them the supplies Captain Bute had paid him for. With piles of tropical fruit on the two boats, the return trip was made. Dawn was breaking when Boatwain Garnett reported himself to the skipper on the deck of the "May Queen."

To the surprise of the truant boat's crew, Bute made no sign of disapproval or anger. He inquired after Danner, and appeared deeply concerned when Garnet told him what had happened.

"Then your suspicions of that man were not unfounded," he remarked. "I thank you, Mr. Garnett, for doing as you have done. And you, lad"—patting Frank on the shoulder—"you have had a narrow escape, and I congratulate you. But you must not think with bitterness of that unfortunate man. He has sinned, but he has suffered for it. Remember him in your prayers."

Frank was touched by the feeling with which the skipper spoke, and the crew decided among themselves that the "old man" wasn't such a bad sort after all. No one but Finchley knew how fearfully enraged the hypocritical villain was to see Frank Esmond alive among his messmates. There was nothing for it now, Bute knew, but to resort to the original plan of marooning the kidnapped lad.

With the morning-light the "May Queen" spread her white wings, and left behind the Portuguese-African territory.

The crew expected that there would be no more interruptions to the voyage, at least before Cape Town; but the "incidents" were not yet over.

That there was ill-feeling aft, the fore-castle hands had long known, and their sympathies were with O'Connor. But no one expected the outbreak which occurred on the third day after leaving the Portuguese territory.

Mr. Finchley came on deck in the forenoon watch in a bad temper. Something was wrong with him, doubtless, for he was as savage as a bear. He found fault with the state of the ship, which had been under Mr. O'Connor's charge since dawn. As O'Connor took no notice of his remarks, he went beyond veers to abuse.

"Do you call yourself a sailor?" he demanded, planting himself directly in front of O'Connor, and staring rudely in his face. The young man flushed up.

"Mr. Finchley," he said, with difficulty curbing his temper, "if your object is to provoke me into insubordination, you will soon succeed, for I swear I will not stand this treatment much longer!"

"You won't, hey? You Irish varmint, you lubberly—"

"Hold your tongue, sir, before I strike you to the deck!" O'Connor cried, his eyes flaming, his fists clenched.

"By George, this is too much, Paddy!" And the brute deliberately struck the second mate across the face with his open hand. "There, that will teach—"

Before he could finish, a well-directed blow laid him on his back. O'Connor forgot everything, with his hot Celtic blood on fire, and he would have returned the blow even if death had been the penalty.

The seamen who witnessed the fracas gave a cheer, half involuntarily, as the plucky mate knocked down the coarse bully; but Captain Bute's arrival upon the scene stopped it, and instantly restored perfect silence.

Finchley, rising unsteadily, seemed about to hurl himself upon the Irishman, who stood defiant, with flashing eyes; but the skipper interposed.

"Hold!" said Bute. "No more blows. Have I two British officers under me, or a pair of Billingsgate rowdies?"

"He struck the first blow!" O'Connor said coldly.

"I do not ask for explanations. This is the second time you two have quarrelled. It is the first time blows have been struck, and I intend that it shall be the last. One of you must quit my ship at the first port."

"You cannot disrate me except for certain offences, of none of which I have been guilty," said the chief mate. "This affair does not come under the head of—"

"I am aware of it. It is Mr. O'Connor with whose services I must dispense."

"I am willing to leave your ship as soon as you like," the second mate answered. "You, Captain Bute, have always been my enemy since I befriended Frank Esmond. I shall be glad to be rid of you!"

The captain shrugged his shoulders, and gave orders for the course of the ship to be slightly altered, to take her again to the African coast. He informed the second mate that he was to go ashore at Walfisch Bay—a little British possession on the West African coast, hemmed in by the German territory. Before the ship dropped anchor there Mr. O'Connor found an opportunity of speaking privately to the boatswain.

"I believe this is a put-up job, Garnett, to get me out of the ship," he said. "It's my firm belief that John Bute means harm to Frank Esmond, who could not have been brought on board without his knowledge. Keep an eye upon the lad, Garnett, and see that there's no foul play."

"I mean to, sir," the boatswain answered sturdily. "If the kid's hurt, the fo'e'sle will have something to say about it, you bet!"

Frank was deeply grieved when he heard that the second mate, whom he liked well, was to be sent ashore in disgrace.

As the ship drew in towards the coast, Frank, seeing O'Connor standing by the gangway, moodily gazing at the Danish vessel, went up and spoke to him.

"I am sorry that you are leaving us, sir," he said; "and partly on account of your kindness to me that Captain Bute dislikes you. Shall you return to England, sir?"

"I think so."

"Might I ask you, if you are able, to run down to Oakhurst in Hampshire, and tell my guardian that I am safe? He would be fearfully anxious about me."

"Write a letter, lad, and I will take it to him."

"And, sir, my guardian has a great interest in shipping, and he will be a friend to you if you need one."

"I do need one," O'Connor said gloomily. "A mate who is dismissed for striking his superior officer can never look for employment again, except as a fo'e'sle hand. You are a good lad, Esmond, and if your guardian is able to help me I shall be very grateful."

Frank found an opportunity of writing a brief letter to Squire Oakhurst, of Oakhurst Grange, County Hunter. He told of his kidnapping, of his suspicions of Lucas Lumley, of his refusal of Captain Bute to transfer him to a homeward-bound craft, and, above all, he dwelt upon what O'Connor had done for him, and besought the squire to see that the gentleman young Irishman did not lose by it. This letter he gave to O'Connor, taking care to let no one see him doing it. The two schemers, in driving O'Connor from the ship, had thus enabled the kidnapped lad to communicate with his friends at home.

At Walfisch Bay O'Connor was sent ashore in a boat, with his effects, and the "May Queen" put out to sea again with out her second mate.

CHAPTER 7.

Marooned!

Cape Town was the last stopping-place of the "May Queen" before she cut the sunny waters of the Indian Ocean.

By the time she came to Table Bay, the crew were accustomed to the absence of the second mate. O'Connor's dismissal threw the work upon the captain, who was obliged to take watch and watch with Finchley, instead of taking it easy, as a skipper is entitled to do. Bute did not mind this; he was one of those hard men upon whom whom work makes no impression, and who have few occupations for their leisure. All the skipper's spare time now was spent in counting his chickens—as yet unhatched. He was part-owner of the "May Queen," and with the payments he meant to extort from Lucas Lumley, he would buy out the other owners, and become sole possessor of the ship he commanded. This was the programme he mapped out, and Frank Esmond's liberty, if not his life, was to be the price of John Bute's success.

A hurricane in the Indian Ocean delayed the "May Queen" somewhat, but at length she drew near the Australian continent.

The course lay along the southern coast of this vast British possession, and through Bass Strait, up the eastern shore.

But Captain Bute's vagaries were not yet ended, and the crew saw with wonder that, instead of passing along the correct route, the ship took a more southerly course. Did Bute intend to pass south of Tasmania, instead of through the strait separating that island from Victoria? No, for the new course of the vessel lay too far south for even that. If the "May Queen" kept on the Antarctic regions would be reached, and what then? In the fore-castle the skipper's strange conduct was severely criticised.

John Bute had his reasons. After a few days of this erratic cruise, land was sighted to the south-east. Unknown land, for it was not marked upon any chart; it was merely one of those barren islets that stud the great southern ocean, tenanted only by seabirds, and very different from the green and beautiful islands of the Pacific.

Captain Bute felt his way carefully along the rocky shores, and finally drew the "May Queen" into a cove, the secure anchorage he could find. It was not a particularly safe place for a large ship, for a tempest would have exposed her to fearful risks from the reefs; but it was the best that could be found, as the skipper was well aware, for he had touched at the isle once before, when driven a hundred miles out of his course by a terrific hurricane.

No explanation was given to the crew of the visit to the lonely sea-rock, the captain, in fact, having no explanation to give. He gave permission to the crew to go ashore in parties, and for a couple of days the seamen enjoyed the luxury of stretching their legs upon dry land. Frank Esmond was as pleased as anyone, little dreaming then what woes were to be his upon that solitary islet. With his mates he explored every corner of it, penetrating into the cliff caverns, and scaling the high rocks for the eggs of the seabirds. On the second night

the skipper meant to sail, and he warned all hands to be aboard by dusk.

When the afternoon of the second day was drawing on towards evening the chief mate sent Frank Esmond to his cabin for a glass, and followed him below.

"Kid," he said, in his rough voice, "I left my binoculars on the shore to-day. You know the sugarloaf rock on the west side? That's the place. Just go and fetch them, and don't make a parade of it; I don't want Captain Bute to know that I was so careless. Here, take a glass of this before you go."

The weather was cold so far south, and Frank was glad to accept the glass of wine the mate offered him, astonished as he was by Finchley's unusual good-humour.

The "May Queen" lay alongside a flat stretch of rock, resembling a natural wharf, and a gangway was placed across the intervening strip of water. Frank crossed the gangway in the gathering dusk. Finchley had planned cunningly. Half the crew were in the fore-castle, the rest ashore, with a range of cliffs between them and the ship. No one, consequently, saw Esmond's departure. The lad disappeared before the shore-party came back.

He made his way to the sugarloaf-shaped rock, about half a mile from the ship. He felt strangely tired, and there was a humming in his ears before he reached the spot. The glass was not there, and he spent ten minutes looking for it, without success. All the while his brain was succumbing to the drug the treacherous mate had administered.

"What's the matter with me?" Frank muttered, passing his hand dazedly over his aching eyes. "Am I ill—or what? Was it the wine?"

The wine? There was the clue. He had taken a glass of wine with Lucas Lumley once, and had awakened to find himself kidnapped. Was this one also drugged? He did not doubt it.

He turned back towards the "May Queen," and started to run, desperately anxious to reach the ship before the dose overpowered his senses. He had not taken six steps when his legs bent under him, and he fell. In vain he strove to rise; his brain reeled, and he fell, powerless. A few minutes more and the prostrate boy was stretched as still and inert as the rocks beneath him.

Meanwhile, darkness had closed in, and all the men of the "May Queen" had returned to the vessel. The seamen, not being aware of Frank's absence, did not think of him when anchor was weighed. There was a favourable breeze for Australia, and that, they thought, was Captain Bute's reason for sailing after dark. The ship drew out upon the broad ocean, and the wind filled the sails, and away she flew into the ocean darkness.

Frank Esmond lay senseless, how long he knew not, but when he awoke the sun was in the sky.

'Twas morning, and the ocean rippled in the sunshine, and a thousand sea-birds were fluttering over the lonely islet. Nature smiled on earth and sea, and the ories of the birds, discordant as they were for the most part, were cheering and lively. But for the marooned sailor-lad there was no cheer.

He lay for some time after his consciousness came back, unable to grasp his situation, and vainly trying to recall what had happened. When his brain grew clearer he rose, and gazed around him with wild eyes. Huge cliffs hid from his view the cove where the "May Queen" had lain at anchor the previous night. He started towards it, nearly falling a dozen times in his haste to see if the ship were still there.

He came in sight of the cove at last, and, after a single eager glance, he gave a loud cry and fell upon the earth.

This time he did not faint, but he lay in a state of utter despair. The ship was gone! And he could not deceive himself with the delusive hope that he had been forgotten, and that his friends would come back for him. No; he was marooned, and he knew it. He had been drugged and purposely left on the desolate ocean-rock by Captain Bute and Finchley, who were in the pay of the villain Lucas Lumley. All was clear to him now.

It was only too clear. He was marooned upon a desolate Antarctic isle, to spend a weary life there, until death ended his sufferings. Squire Oakhurst would never see him again. His Cousin Lucas would squander his wealth. The white cliffs of Albion would never rise before him on his homeward voyage, as he had often so fondly dreamed. He was alone—alone for ever!

Words cannot describe the awful feeling which came over Frank Esmond when the terrible truth forced itself upon his stunted brain. He lay for an hour or more without movement. When he rose at last he looked twenty years older. His face was of a chalky whiteness, and his eyes shone with lips continually trembled. He moved like one in a dream, and his body face.

He looked around him dizzily. The solitude, the immense expanse of the sky and the sea seemed to crush and stifle him.

The pale sky, the drifting clouds, the stretch of sunlit ocean—all were hateful to him now, for they were what he was always to behold till death sealed his eyes.

His head ached—the effect of his long sleep and of the drug he had swallowed. But hunger asserted itself, and thirst. He remembered where, in his ramshackle, he had seen a pool formed of rainwater in the hollow of a rock. He made his way to it, and found a little left. He put his lips to what remained of the brackish fluid, drinking it slowly but eagerly. It was nasty, but he did not notice that so much; what struck him was its small amount. The sun would soon dry it up, and there were no springs upon the isle. If rain did not fall frequently he would die of thirst.

For food, he could plunder the sea-birds' nests, and the supply of eggs would be nearly inexhaustible, but he had no means of cooking them, he would have to eat them raw. He collected some, but he was not yet famished enough to be able to attack them, so he placed them in a cleft until he should need them.

With the thought that he might yet see the topsails of the "May Queen," he climbed to the summit of a cliff, and scanned the sea in every direction. But about a league from the rock a mist was rising from the ocean, and his view was cut off. But his sense told him that the ship must be far below the horizon by this time.

He tried to think that his friends on board the "May Queen" would, when they discovered his absence, force the captain to return for him. But doubtless Captain Bute would satisfy them in some specious way, or compel them to let the matter alone. The power of a captain is practically unlimited, and resistance to his will is mutiny—a terrible word, a more terrible reality. If Garnett made the crew revolt, it might mean a bullet through his head, or a long term of imprisonment in England.

Frank had little hope of being saved by the crew of the "May Queen." But in this he did the seamen scant justice. British sailors are not prone to consider consequences too nicely when it is a question of sticking to a messmate in distress.

Frank scanned the sea till his eyes were weary. Then, throwing himself upon the hard rock, tears came to his relief, and he wept bitterly.

CHAPTER 3. Shipmates True.

While the darkness still lay upon the sea, the "May Queen" left the isle far behind, the night breeze filling out her canvas, and the voyage to Australia recommenced, while on the rocky islet shore Frank Esmond lay, alone, heartlessly abandoned.

It was no part of the schemers' plan to let the crew know what had been done with Frank, and Finchley had a cunning plan in his mind to deceive them upon this point. He allowed no lights above deck, save the head-lights, which were indispensable, and he sent as many of the crew as he could to the fore-castle. Being unobserved, about four hours after sailing, he hurled a parcel of old pieces of iron into the sea, making a loud splash.

"Man overboard!" he shouted.

The cry was instantly taken up by a score of voices.

"Man overboard! Man overboard!"

The skipper, who was quite ready to play his part, came up the companion in two bounds.

"Man the lee-braces! All hands on deck!"

The seamen eagerly rushed to their posts, the ship was put about, and a boat dumped into the water. Garnett took charge of it, and it was rowed hither and thither, the boatswain flashing the lantern and shouting at the top of his voice to the supposed drowning man. The search was long and careful, and two more boats were lowered to assist, and two or three hours thus were spent; but, of course, no one was picked up. In despair at last, gloomy-faced and dispirited, the seamen pulled back to the "May Queen," and the boats were slung up to the davits.

"But who is missing?" said the captain, looking much concerned. "Bo'sun, pipe all hands, and find out who has been lost."

All hands answered to their names but one. Frank Esmond was missing. As this became known every man looked grieved, for the lad was a favourite with all. But in some faces other emotions were visible beside grief. Suspicion, and the dawn of rage, could be read in the countenances of at least two men, and these two were George Garnett and Yankee Bill.

"Poor, poor lad," Captain Bute said, in a tone of deep sorrow, "I am more grieved than I can say to lose him!" Then the boatswain came slowly forward and faced the captain, who was startled by the look upon the seaman's honest, rugged face.

"Captain Bute," said George Garnett steadily, "can you

lay your hand on the Good Book and say you know nothing of Frank Esmond's death!"

The captain could hardly have been more surprised if Davy Jones had stuck his head out of the sea and asked the question.

He turned pale, reeled a step, and stared at the determined boatswain, whose suspicions were confirmed by this show of agitation.

"What do you mean, Garnett!" he said, in a gasping voice. "Men of the 'May Queen,' rang out the boatswain's clear voice, "you have all heard Frank Esmond's story—how he was kidnapped—"

"Hold your tongue!" broke in Finchley, with his usual bullying bluster. "The brat was not kidnapped; he was a stowaway!"

"He was kidnapped," the boatswain said firmly. "You thought, sir, that fo'e's'le hands are too busy to think, too thick-headed to see, too dense to put two-and-two together. The first night at sea I questioned the boy, and learned his story. That story has been explained to all the fo'e's'le, and the fo'e's'le will see fair play, that was what we all swore!"

And a murmur from the crew backed up the boatswain. Captain Bute, fairly scared by this development, was compelled to clutch a stay to steady himself. Brutal, rough-voiced Finchley showed more pluck, keeping up his bluster.

"S'pose you mind your own business, Garnett!" he suggested. "Insolence to your officers may be punished by irons, or the cat, man. Take care!"

"By the Lord Harry," cried Garnett, his indignation and his temper fast rising, "there shall be something more than insolence here! Do you think we don't know, you bully, why we were all cleared out of the ship the night before sailing from Portsmouth? It was so that Frank Esmond could be smuggled aboard. Do you think we don't know why he was shut up in the hold? or why he was sent alone up the river in Africa with Danner? D'ye think we don't know that Mr. O'Connor was sent ashore merely because he was Esmond's friend? D'ye think we don't know why it was pretended that Esmond's name was Andrew Brown? D'ye think," the boatswain fairly shouted, his voice rising as he became more exasperated—"d'ye think that we don't know that you two seelawyers meant to murder the poor kid all along?"

The anger of the boatswain and the expression of the crew daunted the brazen-faced chief mate. He saw danger ahead—danger of mutiny and death!

"You are entirely mistaken," he said. "You don't mean to impute foul play to Captain Bute or to me, do you?"

Garnett did not answer him, but turned to the excited sailors.

"Mates, Frank Esmond has been lost overboard. Who saw him fall into the sea?"

There was, of course, no reply.

"Who first gave the alarm of 'Man overboard'?"

"Mr. Finchley did!" cried a dozen voices.

"And I calculate," said Bill Blake, with his Yankee drawl, "that that durned cuss knows how poor Frank went over, if no one else does!"

"Murderer!" came a menacing shout.

"This is madness!" cried Captain Bute, white to the lips.

"How can you think that I, a man of piety and—"

"A durned lying hypocrite, you mean!" Yankee Bill interrupted him unceremoniously.

All order, all discipline was gone; no one showed the slightest respect to the officers, and matters were momentarily assuming a more dangerous aspect. The two schemers had arranged to make the crew believe that Frank had been lost overboard, for if they had known of the marooning they would have forced the captain to return for Frank—or, at least, would have exposed the villainy as soon as they reached port. And this plot, which Bute had deemed exceedingly cunning, had been the means of raising an unexpected cry of "murder." The seamen, sharper than Bute had given them credit for being, were not to be hoodwinked so easily as he had anticipated.

There was but one chance of restoring order, and Finchley seized it, for the threatening looks of the seamen showed that revolt and violence were at hand.

The chief mate drew a revolver from his pocket and levelled it at the crew, his finger on the trigger.

"Disperse!" he said curtly. "Another word on this subject, and the speaker of it will never step up to the grog-tub again. Be off!"

It was the last chance, but it did not succeed. The spirit of the crew was too thoroughly aroused. The sight of the revolver only made their rage burst all bounds.

"Down with the murderer!" shouted Garnett, beside himself. And the infuriated seamen rushed at Finchley.

He fired, and wounded young Simpson. The shot was his death-knell. The men thought "Baby" Simpson was killed, and their senses left them. No one knew, afterwards, exactly how it happened, but a second after the shot was fired Finch-

ley was caught up in the powerful arms of Yankee Bill, and went flying over the taffrail, with a dozen wounds on his head and body, and the waters of the Southern Ocean closed over his dead body.

The men were mad now, and Captain Bute grovelled on the deck in abject terror as they came towards him.

"It's a durned lie!" Yankee Bill said roughly. "You sha'n't save your skin that way! We're in for it now, you and two's no wuss than one! Over with him!"

"I swear it's true!" yelled the unhappy wretch, as his hands dragged him to the side. "Finchley threw a lamp of iron into the sea! Frank Esmond's on the island!"

"Hold hard, mates," said Garnett, "I believe he's speaking the truth. We'll return and see, afore we send him to Jones's locker!"

The captain was released, and the "May Queen" backed and stood back towards the sea-rock as the new day dawned upon the ocean.

Frank rose, his face wet with tears, and wearily turned his eyes seaward. What did he see to make him utter a shout of frantic joy, and dance upon the cliff-summit like one who had been mented? He saw the ship "May Queen" emerging from the mist, coming towards him, close-hauled, within six points of the wind. He shouted, waved his cap, gesticulated wildly, and soon a cheer from the "May Queen" told him that he had been seen.

Then he raced down to the beach, reaching it at the same time as a boat from the ship. He jumped into it, fairly dragging the seamen in his almost delirious joy. Some of the rough sailors were moved to tears by his emotion. Frank could not fully realise his good luck until he felt the deck of the "May Queen" beneath his feet. There he calmed down somewhat.

The boatswain, who was very grave now, told him what had taken place on board, and Frank learned the cost of his rescue. Simpson, as it turned out, was only slightly wounded, and, in fact, was upon his feet again in a few days.

The death of Finchley, deserved as it was, was unfortunately it made the position of the seamen serious. It was proposed by some to throw John Bute overboard, and to sink the ship and get to Australia in the boats with a story of shipwreck. The skipper, in deadly fear for his life, proposed to come to terms with his revolted crew.

After much consideration it was agreed that Bute's life should be spared on condition of his entering Finchley's name in the log as "lost overboard," and swearing never to reveal what had taken place. For the seamen, perfectly in the right as they were, were, legally, utterly in the wrong, and liable to severe punishment as mutineers. And Frank promised the skipper, in the name of his guardian, that he should not be prosecuted for his share in the kidnapping. Bute's design against our hero he, of course, abandoned now. Frank had nothing more to fear from him.

This patched-up peace lasted while the "May Queen" voyaged to Brisbane. Captain Bute kept his word to the men, not from honourable motives, but because a general exposure would have brought him disgrace, ruin, and imprisonment, and he did not care to face these merely for the sake of revenge.

Garnett and Yankee Bill took Frank back to England, and they arrived safely at Esmond Chase. There Squire Oakhurst awaited them, having learned all from O'Connor. Lumley fled in time to escape arrest, and Frank, for the honour of the family, took no proceedings against him. But Nemesis was on his track. The vessel in which he left England went down in an Atlantic gale, and Lumley met the fate he had destined his cousin to.

Frank had no difficulty in proving his identity, his guardian's conviction being the best evidence on that point. And he easily persuaded the good-natured squire to advance him a large sum, to be repaid out of his inheritance, for the purpose of rewarding the brave seamen who had stood by him in the hour of danger. By the squire's influence a good benefit was procured for O'Connor on an ocean liner.

And when at last Frank came into his property one of his first acts was to purchase the "May Queen" from its owners, give the command of it to O'Connor, and man it with the crew gathered together.

And since then he has taken many a pleasure-trip in the vessel that has played such an important part in the story of FRANK ESMOND'S LUCK.

THE END.

THE WAR FUND COMPETITION

It has been found impossible to give the results of the Competition this week. Full details will appear in next Friday's number.

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