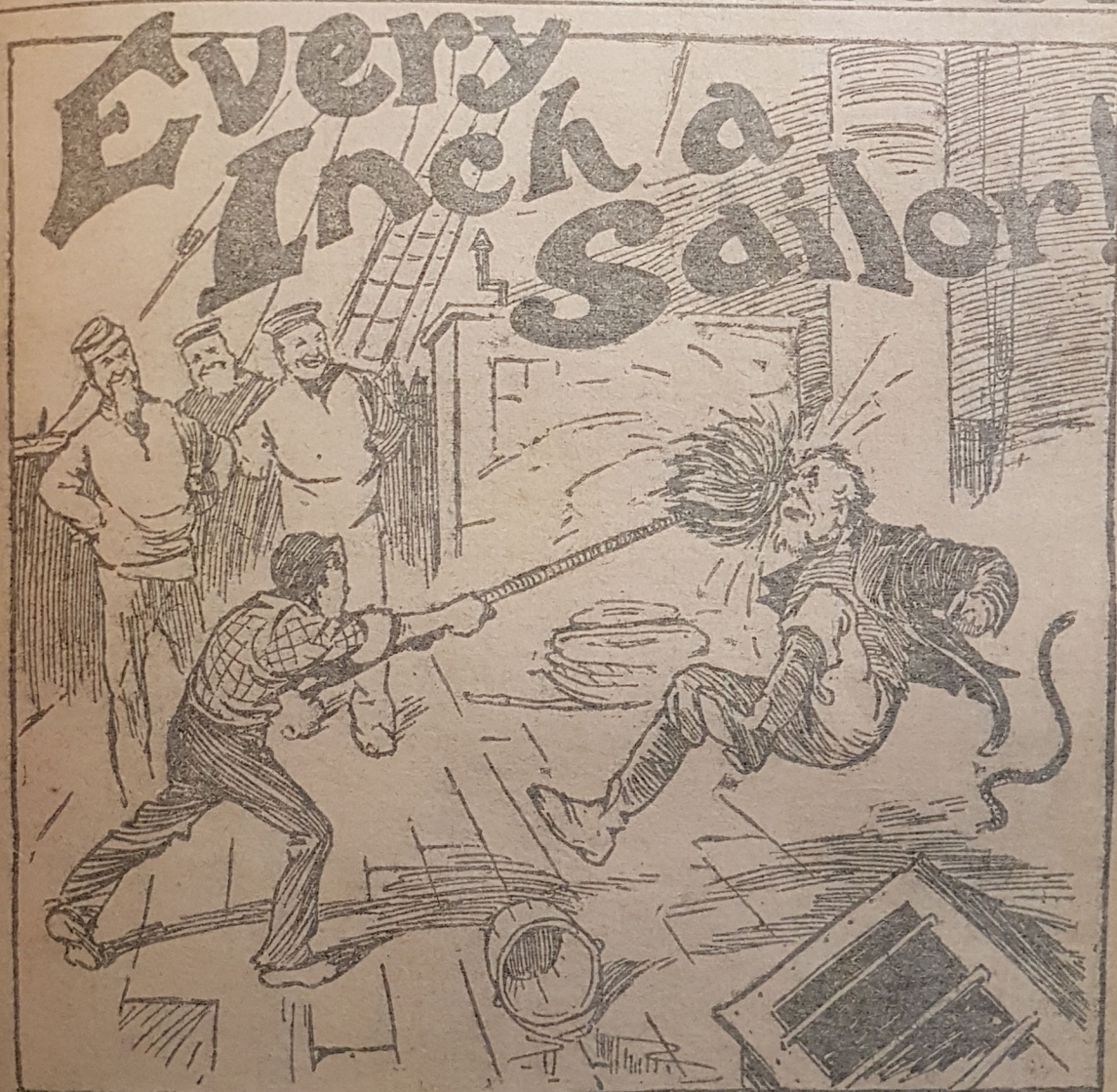


THE UNION JACK

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JACK

THE "UNION JACK"
CONTAINS
A LONG, COMPLETE NOVEL
EVERY FRIDAY.



The boy turned savagely upon his tormentor, and, almost without thinking, whirled the mop around his head, striking the chief mate full in the face. Byng reeled back, half blinded by the dirty water from the mop. (See the grand, complete novel inside—
"EVERY INCH A SAILOR.")

No. 376

LIVING TWO LIVES! our New Serial, is going strong. Read it!

THE UNION JACK



Vol. XV.—No. 377.

A LONG NOVEL IN EACH NUMBER.

EVERY INCH A SAILOR!

A Tale of Adventure Ashore and Afloat.

By CHARLES HAMILTON, Author of "Britons on the Sea," "Pressed Into Piracy," &c., &c.

CHAPTER I.

The Good Ship "Arrow"—Two Old Sea-Dogs—Master Percy Fielding is Sent to Sea "to be made a man of."—His First Experiences—Learning his Lesson—A Heroic Deed and a Narrow Escape.

"Send him aboard the 'Arrow,'" said Captain Brace grimly. "Let me take the boy on the Melbourne voyage, and I'll guarantee to make a new lad of him by the time I give him back to you."

Captain Fielding shook his head doubtfully.

"I'm afraid it's too far gone, Brace," he replied. "The boy is not a bad sort at all, but he's been under the care of his aunt for four years, and she's spoiled him. He's sixteen now—a good-looking lad enough, but a spooney—a regular spooney and an unlicked cub!"

And the old sea-dog sighed heavily, and comforted himself with a stiff glass of grog. The two captains were seated in the cabin of Brace's ship, the "Arrow," lying in the Mersey. Captain Fielding had retired from the sea, but Bill Brace was too fond of the salt water to leave it before he was forced to, and he was now about to sail for Australia.

The lad they were discussing was Percy Fielding, the retired captain's nephew. Left an orphan at an early age, he had been brought up by his aunt, who had made a fool of him, so that, though he had the makings of a man in him, he was at the present time a spooney and a puppy. His aunt's death had left him unprovided for. The old lady had willed nearly all her money to a home for inebriates, and bequeathed Percy to her brother, Captain Fielding. The old skipper had willingly taken the charge, but he looked rather blue when he found out what kind of a boy his protegee was. He talked over the matter with his cronny, Bill Brace, who made the offer our story opens with.

"Where is the boy?" asked Brace. "Did you bring him aboard?"

"Yes, I left him on deck. Tell the steward to call him down, Bill, and have a look at him."

The steward was sent. In a minute or two he came back, trying to conceal the grin upon his ruddy face.

"Where's the boy, Dawton?" asked Captain Brace. "If you please, sir, he says as how he don't want to come down, as he is watching the ships in the Mersey."

The two sea-captains looked at each other.

"It's the way my sister Maria brought him up," said Fielding apologetically. "He always pleased himself in everything. He has no idea of obedience. The only good point about him is that he wants to go to sea."

"Oh, he does, does he? Well, there you are! Let him!"

"But he imagines a different sea to the real one. When he is sick he will expect to be coddled, and he will want his breakfast taken to him in his bunk every morning."

Captain Brace burst into a hearty laugh. "Let him come to sea in the 'Arrow,'" he said. "I will cure him. But if the mountain won't come to Mahomet—you know the rest, so let us go on deck."

The old friends ascended the companion. Percy Fielding stood upon the gangway, evidently interested in all he saw. He was a finely-built, well-set lad, with a prepossessing face, sharp blue eyes, and curly hair. But his attire was curious.

He was sixteen, but he wore a velvet suit, with lace frills round the neck and wrists, and everyone about the "Arrow" was grinning at his peculiar appearance.

"Where in Davy Jones's name did he get those togs, Bob?" ejaculated Captain Brace, in astonishment and mirth.

"That's how Maria dressed him, and he doesn't know any better," groaned Fielding. "When I wanted to make a change he told me I was a boulder of a common sailor, and had no taste."

"Did he, by Jove? Certainly you must send him to sea with me. Well, younker, how do do? I am Captain Brace." Percy surveyed the bearded, sunburnt skipper with a cool gaze.

"Are you?" he said. "Do you command this ship?"

"Yes, I do."

"Why don't you buy your men gloves to do their work in, so that they won't make their hands so dirty and tarry?"

Captain Fielding looked at his friend with a hopeless expression.

"It's a bad case, Bob," admitted Brace. "But we'll cure him yet."

"I give you leave to try, Bill, but I have my doubts."

"I should like to go to sea," continued Master Percy, with an air of reflection. "In a few years I should rise to be captain, and command a ship. If you like, I will come to sea with you. I don't know much about it yet, but I shall soon pick up enough to be an officer."

Captain Brace gasped.

"Yes, yes, you shall come to sea with me," he said. "And whenever I happen to be ill, why, you can take the command in my place, can't you?"

Master Percy nodded eagerly, all unconscious of the sarcasm of the captain's speech.

"Yes, that will be first-rate!" he agreed. "But understand that I shall stand no nonsense. I don't expect too much from a common sailor fellow, but I shall have to be treated well, or I shall insist upon your turning the ship back, and setting me ashore again."

The skipper seemed to gulp something down.

"We sail to-morrow," he said. "It's settled, then; you sail in the 'Arrow.' I can promise you that the voyage will do you a lot of good."

And so Percy Fielding came to sail with Captain Brace in the good ship "Arrow," and the voyage, as the skipper promised, did him a great deal of good, though not in the way he anticipated.

"Oh, this is most uncomfortable! I am sure I shall be sick!"

It was a drizzling morning in the Irish Sea. The good ship "Arrow" was rolling rather heavily; her masts were creaking, her cordage straining, and a stiff breeze cut the crests from the choppy waves, and scattered the spray over the ship as high as the cross-trees. The crew, wet and dirty, and busy as bees, were hard at work getting things shipshape, and the skipper had, in the stress of worry, completely forgotten his new recruit, Percy Fielding. The boy was curled up in a bunk in the fore-castle, and he awoke in the morning with the inward qualms that are inevitable during the first days a landsman spends upon the ocean.

"DEATH FOR TREACHERY!" IN NEXT FRIDAY'S "UNION JACK."

Percy sat up, and nearly pitched out of his bunk. Holding on for dear life, he called out, "Hi, there!" to a seaman near at hand. The seaman happened to be Mr. Ben Grunt, the boatswain of the "Arrow," but Percy did not know that.

"I say, my good fellow, come here and help me out, will you?" said Percy, with the air of a lord.

Ben Grunt had been informed by Captain Brace that a new foot's-boy had been shipped. But Brace had told him nothing of Percy's little peculiarities. His astonishment at being addressed as "my good fellow" by a ship's boy was so great that he stared at Percy open-mouthed.

"What do you stand there gaping for?" said Percy, irritably. "Come and help me out, and quick about it!"

"Oh, yes, I'll help you out!" said the astonished bos'un. From somewhere he produced a short, knotted rope. "This is my patent tickler, young man. I use it to help out all hands who can't get up when I blow my whistle. It has a wonderful effect—I'm sure you'll like it!"

And he proceeded to lay the rope's end about poor Percy with the heartiest goodwill. Percy roared in surprise and pain, and bounced out of the bunk as if he had been made of indiarubber.

"Feel better?" asked the bos'un, with an air of solicitude.

Percy for a moment seemed about to make an assault upon the stalwart bos'un, but the hopelessness of it struck him, and he contented himself with getting out of reach of the rope. He was too proud to cry, but he was smarting all over, and his dignity was cruelly hurt. There came a swelling into his throat, and he had hard work to keep back the tears.

"This is an outrage!" he gasped. "I shall complain to Captain Brace."

"Werry good. But that will do presently. Jest now you will get on your duds in a jiffy, and tumble up to lend a hand in swabbing the decks."

"You horrid fellow! Do you think I can do such nasty work as that?"

"Wal, yes, I think you can, if I help you a little with my patent tickler."

"Where are my clothes?" demanded Percy. "Someone has taken them away."

"Here you are," replied Ben Grunt, pointing to a coarse suit of blue serge, lying on the planks near the bunk.

"They're not my clothes," protested Percy.

"They're what you're goin' to wear, anyhow, so jump into 'em sharp!"

"I won't!"

The boatswain made a stride towards him, flourishing his patent tickler, as he called it, and Percy altered his mind in a hurry. He got inside those clothes at electric speed, and Ben Grunt bundled him out on deck. Here a fresh grief awaited him. His lovely velvet suit, with its lace frills, had been used by someone for the purpose of wiping out a slush-bucket, and it lay near the forecuttle, a mere mass of rags and slime.

But the terrible sea-sickness soon drove all other matters from Percy's mind, and the agonies he suffered during his first day at sea long remained fresh in his mind. After his experience with the bos'un he had expected nothing but brutality and ill-usage from the rest of the crew, and he was agreeably surprised to find that the gruff seamen were nearly all kind to him. Few men are more intelligent and sympathetic than sailors, as a rule, and the men of the "Arrow," recognising Percy as a young cub, with all his troubles before him, considerably made things easy for him. But the sea-sickness—it was awful!

Percy went to his bunk that night worn out and miserable, but with his ideas considerably enlarged, and his sense of his own importance sadly diminished. He understood that he was of less use in the world than the roughest and most untutored of the forecastle hands he had presumed to despise. And the knowledge was most useful to him afterwards.

It was not to be expected, however, that a character would change in a day, and Percy needed many more lessons to cure him of the evil effects of a bad training.

In the morning the "Arrow" was clearing St. George's Channel, in sight of Carnore Point on the Irish coast. Percy came on deck of his own accord, and found the weather brighter, and the sea rolling peacefully. There was plenty of wind to fill the canvas without making the ship pitch. Captain Brace stood near the binnacle, talking to the chief mate—a black-browed, stern-faced man of about thirty-five, not much liked by the crew, but a competent officer, and a thorough seaman. His name was Lynton Byng. Percy, as we have said, was not cured yet, and he saw here a favourable opportunity of making his complaint to the skipper.

Captain Brace met him with a stern look that rather disconcerted him.

"Have you learned to touch your cap to your superiors?" he asked. And Percy sullenly touched his cap. "Now, what do you want? You ought to know that forecastle boys are not allowed in this part of the ship, except when called by some special duty."

"I won't be treated as a 'slave'" barked out Percy, who had known that it would be like this I should never have entered your ship, and you know it! I demand to be set at liberty."

"Listen to me, my lad," said the captain, in a not unkind tone; "you are an unlicked cub, a puppy, and a not very good reason why! You have the makings of a man in you, and there's no reason why you shouldn't become a good sailor. If you do I will see to it that later on you have a good member, you are penniless, and dependant upon your own member. Do you want to eat the bread of idleness all your life? Take my advice—buckle to, and make a man of yourself. You shall fight your own battles, and look out for yourself. You shall have fair play, and when you show promise of improvement you shall not want for a helping hand. Now go back to your work."

This was an unusually long speech for the skipper, and when it was ended he turned away to signify that no more was to be said.

Percy retreated forward, looking very shamefaced, but much food for thought. His complaint against the boatswain remained unuttered. He was glad of that afterwards, when he came to know Ben Grunt better.

One thing Percy clearly understood now. He was looking for a long voyage in the "Arrow," whether he liked it or not, and it behoved him to make the best of it. This he very wisely resolved to do.

And as the days passed on he found that the life of a "ship's boy on the high and giddy mast" was not so very uncomfortable, after all.

The work was hard, and his companions rough; but the continual bustle of the busy ship kept him in good health and spirits. The food was of the plainest, but then the keen air of the ocean gave him an appetite such as he had never possessed on land. His nice white hands became embrowned and hardened; but his chest grew broader, his limbs more active and powerful, his eyes keener, his step more elastic. Sea life was, in fact, making a man of him.

As Percy dropped, one by one, the ways that annoyed his shipmates he made friends among them, and firm friends, too. But one of the officers took a dislike to Percy that did not decrease as he improved. This was Mr. Byng, the chief mate. Percy, in the early part of the voyage, was impertinent to him, and no amount of respect and good conduct afterwards could make the chief mate forgive him. And at length Percy, finding that whatever he did he could not please Mr. Byng, ceased to try to please him, and became careless of his opinion. It was this unreasonable dislike of Mr. Byng's which led to Percy's first narrow escape in the rigging of the "Arrow."

It was a warm, wet day, and the "Arrow" was ploughed across the Bay of Biscay. The weather made everyone irritable. Captain Brace had a touch of toothache, and remained below, the chief mate taking command of the ship.

Mr. Byng was in a bad temper, and did nothing but find fault. Ben Grunt had to bear the edge of his temper, and, as discipline forbade reply, the bos'un had to take it calmly; but he comforted himself by swearing at the seamen, and even "touching-up" some of the youngest members of the crew with his "patent tickler."

He touched up Percy, among others, and, though the boy had learned the uselessness of resisting authority, he could not help looking as black as thunder; whereupon Mr. Byng, noticing his expression, found in it an excuse for bullying.

"What the dickens is the matter with you, Fielding? Take that scowl off your face, you imp, before I knock you into the scuppers!"

This was not the way to banish the scowl. Percy made no reply, but went about his work with his face blacker than ever. The seamen were all looking at them; they knew that there was about to be an outbreak of the chief mate's temper, and they felt sorry for Percy.

The boy, however, was so full of wounded pride and the sense of injustice, that he was reckless, and hardly cared what happened.

Mr. Byng looked about him, saw a rope lying conveniently, and in a moment seized it, and brought it down heavily across Percy's shoulders.

The boy's defiant look exasperated him almost to fury. Percy staggered under the blow, but he straightened up instantly with a blaze in his eyes.

He had a mop in his hands, which he had been using almost without thinking, he whirled it round his head, and struck the chief mate full in the face. The blow was not severe, but Mr. Byng reeled back blinded by the dirty water soused into his eyes.

There was a gasp of horror from the onlooking crew, for them it seemed as if the heavens must fall when a ship's boy struck a chief mate.

Percy, a little scared at what he had done, but still pleased

did not lose his senses, but he was white as death, and he could not stand without support.

"Bear up, my lad!" said Captain Brace kindly. "You've saved Gaspar's life, and you're a little hero. I told Fielding that the sea would make a man of you; and, by Jove, it has done it!"

Percy flushed with pleasure at the words of praise, to which his ears had of late been very unaccustomed. And now he felt heartily glad that he had sailed in the "Arrow." It was the luckiest day in his life when he was sent to sea.

Percy was a lascar, a brawny and active man, and somewhat of a bully. He had had several disputes with Percy, and he was glad to be the instrument of the boy's punishment. He kicked off his shoes, and went nimbly up the ratlines to the top.

"Your blood was up, and he was resolved not to give in. While Gaspar came up to the top, he skinned up to the cross-trees, so when both stopped there was the length of the topmast between them."

Gaspar looked down to Mr. Byng for instructions. The mate was red with rage; while most of the seamen were laughing now, seeing the ludicrous side of the affair.

"Bear him down!" cried Byng harshly.

And Gaspar recommenced his ascent, Percy also going higher. By the time the lascar was in the cross-trees, Fielding had reached the royal mast.

And now the lascar hesitated; a struggle at such a height would be fatal, probably, to both. But Byng's vociferations urged him on, and up he went to the topgallant cross-trees.

And now the men on deck held their breath. What would Percy Fielding do? Would he be mad enough to go higher, to attempt to reach the main-truck? It would be death to him; death to the lascar if he followed.

But Percy did not attempt it. Instead, he slid along the trellis to the foremast cross-trees. Perilous work, and the seamen drew in their breath with relief when he landed safely. And then Gaspar, not to be outdone by a mere lad, ceased to follow.

But the lascar lacked grit and nerve. In the middle of the stay he ceased to proceed. What was he stopping for? It was soon seen. He had lost his nerve, and dared not move backward or forward.

He closed his eyes, and clung convulsively to the stay. At that giddy height he hung between sky and sea, his sole support a swaying rope.

A shiver of horror ran through the crew. Long before anyone could reach him from the deck the wretched lascar would lose his hold, and come whirling down to be crushed to death upon the hard planks or probably drowned in the tumbling sea. Violent tremblings ran through the lascar's limbs, and inarticulate moans issued from his lips.

Was there no rescue—no hope? There was. Looking back to watch the movements of his pursuer, Percy saw his terrible danger; and in that moment the boy proved how superficial were his faults, how chivalrous and generous his nature was at bottom.

Back along the stay he went, climbing it with difficulty, and in a minute he reached the lascar.

"Hold on!" he said courageously. "Catch hold of me; I won't let you fall! Keep your eyes shut, and hold on!"

The sound of a friendly voice, the touch of a helpful hand, were salvation to the lascar in his extremity. Percy, holding him, speaking to him, kept his mind from dwelling upon the terrifying emptiness by which he was surrounded.

It was a labour of peril, for all who looked on saw that if the lascar finally lost his head, he would clutch the English lad and drag him down to death in his fall.

Percy knew it, too; but, though his heart beat hard, he did not falter. He only prayed that help would soon come, before the awful situation robbed him also of his courage and coolness.

Fortunately, help was swiftly coming. Ben Grunt had called up the captain, who, without wasting time in inquiries, gave brief directions that were promptly obeyed.

A half-dozen active and nervy men swarmed up foremast and mainmast with ropes. Ben Grunt himself crawled out upon the stay, and attached a rope to the fainting lascar under the armpits.

"Can you git to the cross-trees, kiddy?" the big, rough boy said, in a voice that was as gentle as a woman's.

"I think so," replied Percy faintly, and he worked his way down.

But in the cross-trees he collapsed, now that the danger was past. Two seamen bore him down to the deck.

The bosun had tied the rope to the lascar none too soon. Before he could be removed he fell, and hung at the end of the rope. The sailors lowered him slowly, and he was received on deck perfectly unconscious, but otherwise unharmed. Percy

CHAPTER 2.

Rough Weather—What Percy Saw from the Cross-trees—The Wreck—Byng's Strange Conduct and Percy Fielding's Bold Move.

Percy was not punished for his insubordination; his courage and his narrow escape earned him his pardon. But Mr. Byng did not forgive him, and in the days that followed he received more than one reminder of the chief mate's ill-will.

The "Arrow" took the Cape route to the South Seas, and the bad weather which she met in the Bay of Biscay accompanied her into the wide-Atlantic.

The adventure of Percy in the rigging was followed by one of the foulest weeks ever known by the oldest seaman on board. Continual gales, with the usual consequences: sloppy decks, dripping cordage, wet and cold and fatigue, made the voyage anything but enjoyable.

By the time the "Arrow" crossed Cancer there was a more favourable turn; the shrieking winds calmed a little, and the thundering seas went down. There was still, however, a heavy swell on the ocean, and Captain Brace did not venture to carry much sail.

One morning, when a watery streak of sun glanced palely through the masses of grey cloud, Percy had occasion to ascend to the foretop. While there he held on to the upper shrouds, and surveyed the sea. It was a nervy thing to do, for the mast was swaying with the roll of the ship, and only a tight grip prevented him from being tossed bodily into the sea.

Around the "Arrow" the swell was strong; a dreary waste of waters wildly tumbling; the prospect made even more cheerless by the pale sunlight filtering through the dull clouds.

But there was something inspiring in the sight of the gallant ship itself, tight and compact, a mere speck on the surface of the broad ocean, yet holding its own successfully against the mighty attacks of the billows and the blast.

As Percy swept the sea with his eyes, it seemed at first that the "Arrow" was alone upon the waters. But soon a sharp exclamation that broke from his lips showed that he had seen something else—something that startled him.

"What is it? A whale would not be visible at that distance. Is it a ship, then? If so, it has no masts. It must be a wreck!"

Holding on with only one hand, he shaded his eyes with the other, and fixed his gaze intently upon the object which had caught his attention.

A long black streak appeared when the swell rose on the starboard, and Percy was almost sure that it was the hull of a ship. The tossing waves baffled his vision. He skinned up to the cross-trees, and there obtained a better view.

Yes, there was no doubt of it now. What he saw was the battered hull of what had been a full-rigged ship, about the same size as the "Arrow." The masts were gone, excepting the stump of the mizzen, of which six or seven feet remained. Bowsprit and jibboom had disappeared, but a half of the spanker-boom hung limply over the stern, tagging at the end of the lifts, which had snapped, but somehow caught fast upon the wheel.

It was a desolate sight, the once proud vessel lying a helpless wreck at the mercy of the waves. But what especially caught Percy's eye was a long strip of white, looking like a sheet, which fluttered from the top of the mizzenmast stump. It could not have got there by accident—that was clear. Was it a signal, then, from some unfortunate being who still survived upon the wreck? Were there living men in that storm-worn shell rolling painfully on the pitiless waves? There must have been when the signal was hoisted, at any rate!

"I say, Fielding, are you goin' to stay up there all day?"

The voice of the bosun broke in upon Percy's ears.

"I'm coming, sir!"

And in a minute the nimble lad stood upon the deck.

"Wot the dickens kept you up there, kiddy?"

"There's a wreck, sir, about a mile off on the starboard bow, and I saw a signal of distress flying!"

The face of Ben Grunt became serious at once.

"No! By George! A wreck? Thank your stars you wur aboard the 'Arer' through the gale, sonny, with a skipper as knows his biz, and likewise a fow'un that knows his'n. I must speak to Mr. Byng about this."

DEATH FOR TREACHERY! in Next Friday's UNION JACK.

Captain Brace, worn down by fatigue—for he had hardly left the deck during the past three days—was enjoying a round sleep below. The chief mate was in charge of the deck, and Mr. Alresford, the second mate, was also up. Ben Grunt and Mr. Byng told Mr. Byng what Percy had seen.

"At once went aft, and told Mr. Byng what Percy had seen. 'Stuff and nonsense!' replied the chief. 'The boy's seen a porpoise, and taken it for a ship—that's all.'"

"Shall I go into the top, and see with a glass, sir?"

"You may if you like. But stay! I'll go myself."

Mr. Byng took his glass, and went into the maintop. The wreck lay about a mile to the starboard, and some distance ahead of the "Arrow," so that the onward progress of the ship brought it nearer. In a short time the "Arrow," passing on, would leave it astern.

The chief mate, standing in the top, rested his glass upon a ratline of the topmast shrouds, and looked long and intently in the direction of the wreck. It was only when the ocean swell lifted it into view that he could see it. The glass made it distinct, and he could see the cuddy windows, and at one of them he for a moment caught a glimpse of a face—a pale, girlish face, with large, dark eyes that were haggard with terror and suffering.

Mr. Byng was a hard, harsh, and unfeeling man; but he was not heartless, and the brief sight of that anguished face moved him somewhat; but he was in no hurry to act. He coolly continued to survey the ship, and presently, when a great heave threw the stern higher than usual, he read her name—the "Aspasia."

The glass fell from his hand, and crashed upon the roof of the galley, shattering into a score of pieces. Mr. Byng held on to the shrouds with both hands, his face white, his eyes scintillating, plainly in a state of intense excitement.

"The 'Aspasia'! Is it possible? What a stroke of luck! There is no other vessel in sight. Without help from us she will carry to the bottom of the Atlantic all those who are yet living on board her. Help from us? I will see to it that she gets none of that. What a misfortune that Fielding saw her! The brat is always annoying me; I believe he was born to cross my path. But I shall contrive the matter all right, I think. By thunder! I must contrive it."

If anyone on board the "Arrow" had overheard these mutterings of the chief mate he would certainly have been deemed mad. But he was sane enough. His excitement passed, and he was his hard and cold self again. He looked as usual, but there was a fell purpose in his heart.

"Can you see her, sir?" the bo'sun hailed.

Lynton Byng would have replied in the negative, but he dared not, for the wreck was now visible from the poop and the fore-castle.

"I can see her," he replied; "but there is no one living on board. What Fielding took for a signal is only a strip of canvas caught on the mizzen-stump."

"Shall we bear away a point to come near her, sir?"

"No; that is not necessary. She is completely waterlogged, and it is utterly impossible that anything living can be on board her."

The chief mate said this as he stepped on the poop. His tone was brusque, intended to end the matter. The bo'sun, unsatisfied, asked if he might call the captain. To this Byng replied sharply that the captain was tired out, and should not be disturbed upon any account. He added that he knew what he was about, and ordered the bo'sun back to his duty.

Though Ben Grunt grumbled under his breath, and the sailors looked indignant and dissatisfied, that would have closed the matter, but for the independent action of Percy Fielding.

Convinced that what he had seen was a signal of distress, and that there were yet living beings on board the wreck, he resolved to take the bold step of awakening the captain, in defiance of the chief mate.

Percy had been long enough at sea to know what a serious thing it was to directly disobey an officer's commands; but he was ready to run all risks to baffle the inhumanity of Mr. Byng.

If there really proved to be survivors on the rolling hull, he felt sure that Captain Brace would forgive him. If he were mistaken, he could expect nothing less than a flogging for his insubordination. The idea of a flogging made him shudder; but in the cause of humanity he was prepared to face it.

Mr. Byng saw the lad making for the companion, and angrily shouted to him to go back. As Percy kept on, Byng made a rush at him to hurl him back by main force. Percy eluded him, and leaped down the cabin stairs, darting into the captain's cabin before Byng could reach him.

"Captain Brace! Captain Brace!"

"Is the gale rising again?" exclaimed the skipper, starting up in his bunk, and bumping his head in his haste.

"No, sir; but there is a wreck on the starboard bow, and a signal of distress on it!"

"By George!"

And the good skipper came out of his bunk with a bounce that made the cabin table jump.

"It is false!" cried Mr. Byng, bursting into the binnacle face fairly flaming with rage. "The wreck is a mere water-logged hulk, sir, and there is no signal of distress. I have examined it through my glass. This insubordinate little rascal has called you, sir, in direct opposition to my orders!"

"This is serious, Fielding! If you are mistaken, you know what to expect. Still, I will go up and have a look at the craft."

"I assure you, sir, that it is unnecessary!" said Byng. "I have already examined it thoroughly."

"Captain," said Percy earnestly, "I swear that I saw a signal of distress! I only ask that you examine the wreck for the rest of the voyage!"

The boy's manner influenced the skipper considerably; but he had already made up his mind to see for himself how things were, so that the appeal was not needed. He sent the two intruders on deck, and quickly dressed and followed them. In the companion, Byng turned upon Percy, his face marble-white with passion.

"You whelp!" he hissed. "You infernal whelp, you shall suffer for this! I will make you wish you had never been born!"

"I've done my duty!" replied the boy sturdily. "You can say what you like, but I'm not afraid of you, if you are chief mate! I believe you know that there are survivors on the wreck, and wish to leave them to perish!"

Byng glared at him with a perfectly demoniacal expression. Percy had spoken hastily, never dreaming how near the truth he was; but Lynton Byng's furious look gave rise to strange thoughts in his mind.

Was it, then, possible that Byng had seen someone on the wreck whom he wished to leave there to drown? It seemed a wild conjecture; yet, if not, why Byng's obstinacy and rage? The chief mate, perhaps, saw something of Percy's thought in his face, for he made an effort and calmed down, and went on deck without speaking another word.

As soon as Captain Brace came up he gave orders for the "Arrow" to be rounded to, and the ship soon lay without way on her, merely swaying to the swell of the sea.

The starboard quarter-boat was prepared for a pull to the "Aspasia." The vessels were almost abreast, a mile apart, and the distress-flag on the stump of the mizzenmast was seen by all. Every man aboard the "Arrow" felt sure that fellow-creatures were yonder, watching the "Arrow" and praying for help.

By luck Percy had an oar in the rescuing boat. He was glad of that, but he was sorry when Captain Brace placed the chief mate in charge. Percy knew instinctively that Byng would not do his best for the poor wretches on the wreck.

Fortunately, Ben Grunt, the bo'sun himself, acted as coxswain of the boat. Ben was pretty sure to see that nothing necessary remained undone, in spite of any orders the cold-hearted mate might give.

It was difficult work pushing off from the "Arrow," for there was danger of the swell dashing the boat back against the hull, in which case the little craft would be shattered to fragments. The seamen, however, were skilful. The work was deftly done, and soon the boat was pulling away steadily on her mission of help and rescue.

CHAPTER 3.

On the Wrecked Vessel—Percy to the Rescue—in Dire Danger—The Treachery of Lynton Byng.

"There is a boat coming!"

"Heaven be thanked!"

"We are saved!"

The first speaker was a young girl of about fifteen, or little more—a girl of slim and graceful form, with chestnut curls in masses, now sadly draggled with the sea-water. Her face was fair, with regular features, but anxiety and suffering had dimmed its beauty. Her eyes were full of haunting fear, and the dark rings round them told of long, weary watching.

She stood at the cuddy window, which looked towards the mainmast, on the wrecked "Aspasia." From the window the view was clear enough, the masts and bulwarks being shorn away by the late gale. The "Aspasia" was full of water, which bubbled in and out of her hatchways. It was because her cargo was a light one, mainly of wooden articles, that she still floated.

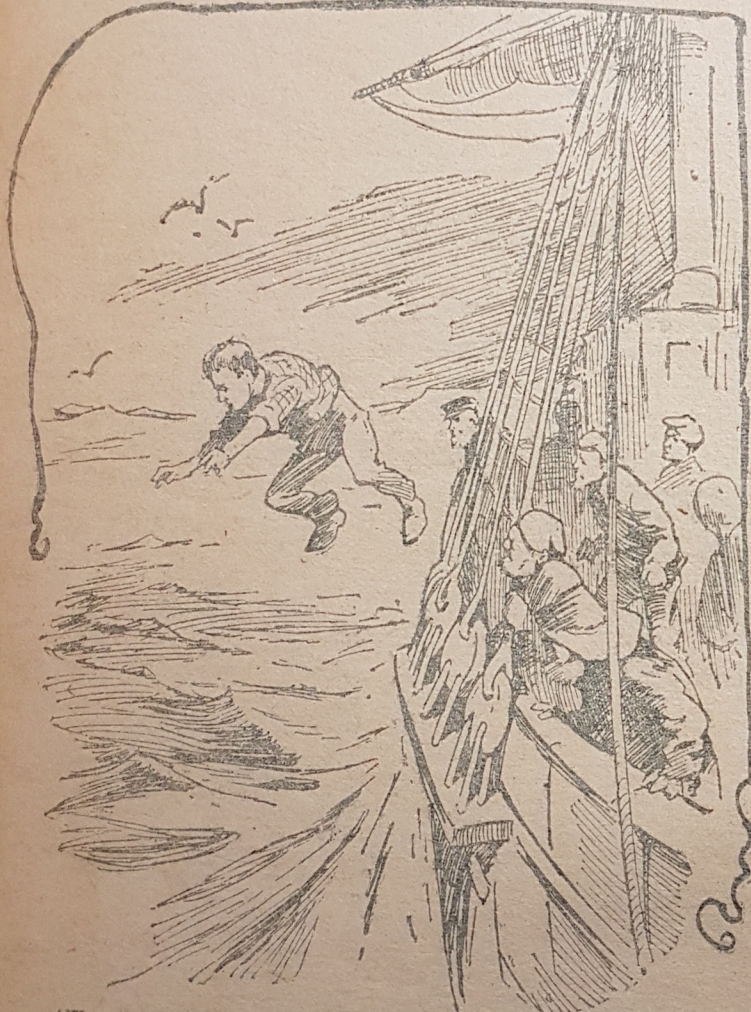
In the cuddy the girl had two companions. One was an elderly lady, whom she addressed as "auntie." The other was the captain of the "Aspasia"; but he was no longer living. He lay close by the centre table, still and inert, swamped by the water which ran over the floor whenever a sea broke upon the "Aspasia."

At the window the girl held to the frame, for the ship pitched heavily to the swing of the sea, and every loose article

One Halfpenny.

in the cabins went scuttling, first to the starboard and then to port, as the ship rolled to one side or the other. The sea, breaking upon the poop, frequently sent a volume of water hissing through the broken windows, so that the inmates were drenched to the skin. For two whole days they had endured this, and at last their hopes had been kindled by the sight of the "Arrow."
 With an agony of anxiety the girl had watched the stately ship. Would the strangers see the signal which the captain sent only a few hours before he died had nailed upon the stump of the mizenmast? If they saw it, would they stop and send succour? Questions, these, upon which hung life and death. The watcher became almost delirious with joy when the "Arrow" rounded to. She could not see the lower part of the ship, but the bracing of the yards was visible to her, and she saw that the stranger was merely standing by and no longer progressing. As the "Aspasia" rose on the swell, she saw a boat lowered, and her joy knew no bounds.
 "We are saved, saved, saved!" she repeated, turning her

"Arrow" was seeking for an excuse to turn back. He had already declared that no one could be upon the wreck, or a signal would have been made.
 "Mebbe they can't see us, sir," the bo'sun suggested.
 "Nonsense! If anyone were there we should be seen. It is not worth while risking valuable lives for such a chance!" Byng said irritably.
 "There ain't a lubber in this here boat, sir, as cares one rap for the risk!" asserted Ben Grunt.
 "I care for it. You can all see that it would be fatal for us to get alongside the wreck."
 It was indeed dangerous work. As the waves broke over the "Aspasia," volumes of water cascaded down her sides into the sea, in sufficient quantities to swamp the boat if it came in the way.
 "Do you mean, sir, to turn back without boarding her, sir?"
 "You can see that it is impossible to board."
 "I can't see nothin' of the kind!" said Ben Grunt obstinately. "Cap'n Brace sent us to board this here vessel, an' that's the work fur us to do, risk or no risk!"
 "I am your officer, Grunt, and I permit no insolence. Back—"
 "There's a scarf wavin' from the cuddy winder!" exclaimed Ben Grunt, catching sight of the signal made by Hetty.
 "I cannot see it," growled Byng, and that was true enough, for the boat had slid into the gap between two waves, and only the mizen stump and sternworks of the "Aspasia" were then visible.
 "You'll see it in a minute, sir."
 As the boat rose again, the sailors, forgetting themselves, turned their heads round to look also, with the result that the oars lost time, and the boat was nearly swamped.
 "Back to the 'Arrow'!" said Byng curtly.
 "You don't mean that, sir?"
 "Back to the 'Arrow,' I say!"
 "Then I say we won't!" almost shouted the bo'sun. "We can all see a feller-critter on that hulk a-signallin' to us, and may Davy Jones take us if we go back without savin' him! Wot d'ye say, messmates?"
 "That's the cheese!" cried the seamen, willingly following the lead of the bo'sun.
 "Do you know that this amounts to mutiny?" hissed Byng, almost black in the face with rage.
 "I reckon Cap'n Brace won't blame us, when we save a pore chap from Davy's locker. Pull hearty, lads! I'm skipper of this here boat now, and I'll take the consequences!"



"Then my death lies at your door!" he cried, and leaped from the rigging far out into the billowy sea. The splash was followed by a long-drawn "Ah!" from the crew of the "Arrow," and there was a rush to the side.

face, now bright with hope, to look at her companion.
 "Auntie, we are saved!"
 "Not yet, Hetty, my child," replied the elderly lady.
 "How is a boat to reach us in such a sea as this?"
 She spoke despondently; she had given up hope almost. After two days of black despair, could help really be at hand? It seemed incredible. But to the girl, watching the advance of the boat, matters wore a more cheerful aspect.
 Every time the wreck lifted she saw the boat, which looked a mere speck upon the masses of green water. The boat disappeared from view whenever the "Aspasia" dropped, and she waited in feverish apprehension till she saw it again. To assure the rescuers that living beings were yet on board she took a scarf and waved it frantically from the little window.
 It was fortunate that she did so, for the chief mate of the

The chief mate sat helpless, impotent. He dared not say more. The expression upon the men's faces was ominous. At a word from the bo'sun they would have flung him into the sea. His inhumanity had already exasperated them to a dangerous pitch.
 The boat pulled on. The bo'sun now gave orders. If Byng had spoken he would not have been regarded.
 "We must take keer, lads, or we shall be swamped. We must let a wave carry us up to her main chains, and then the lightest man must make a jump, taking the end of a line with him."
 "Let me go, sir," said Percy eagerly. "I pull the weakest oar, but at that I shall be as good as another. And if it is necessary to get through the cuddy window, a boy can do that better than a man."
 The bo'sun looked at him doubtfully for a moment, and then nodded.
 "Ay, ay!" he said. "You're a plucky lad—you'll do. You've improved since the time you wore lace frills, an' I cured you with my patent tickler. Make ready, then, and when we rise jump fur all you're worth!"
 The end of a thin but strong rope was attached to Percy's belt, as the easiest way of carrying it, for he would need the use of both hands to make good his hold when he sprang upon the wreck.
 Mr. Byng was glad to see Percy selected for the task, both because he believed that a boy must fail to effect a rescue, and because he hoped that Percy would not only fail, but would be drowned into the bargain. The "Aspasia" rose on the swell, and again the scarf was seen floating from the window. As she sank back again the boat came under the remaining

fragments of the main chains, and Percy sprang. Ben Grunt had seized a moment when the "Aspasia" lurched to port, so that the extract of water from her decks rolled into the sea on the opposite side. She lurched back again the next minute, but the boat fell astern in time to escape the flood. Percy was left clinging to the main chains, the life-line dangling from his waist, the loose end held by the men in the boat.

It was a wonder that the boy did not lose his hold. As he clung there the roll of the ship discharged a torrent of water over her side, when the boat escaped by receding astern, but which Percy could not evade. It struck him forcibly, beating out his breath, and for nearly a minute he was completely under water. He was choking, gasping, nearly suffocated, when the "Aspasia" rolled to port again, lifting him high into the air. Severe buffeted as he was, he lost no time. Forward he sprang over the broken bulwarks, and half-leaped, while the sea, breaking over the deck, flooded him nearly to his armpits.

A cry of joy greeted his appearance, and a girl's pale face, with dripping hair, rose before him out of the gloom of the interior of the cuddy.

"Help is come, auntie! We are saved!"

"If we can do it, you shall be saved!" said Percy. "Is there anything in there you can make a rope fast to?"

"The table. It is fixed to the foot of the mizen mast."

"First-rate! Here's the rope!"

Percy jerked it free from his belt, and passed the end to Hetty. The brave girl took it, and bound the end fast to the leg of the table. Then she came back to the window, clinging to the rope to keep herself from falling, for the rolling of the "Aspasia" placed the floor at a different angle every minute.

"How many of you are there?" Percy asked.

"Only two—my aunt and myself."

"Are there any others alive on board?"

"I do not think so. There are none in the cabins, and below the main-deck all is full of water. As for the fore-castle—"

"No one is there. The scuttle is open, and the water washing in and out. Can you get through this window, do you think? The companion hatch is battened down, and I do not think I could raise it."

"Yes, but my aunt must go first," said generous Hetty. "I can wait. Come, Aunt Priscilla, and I will help you through."

"No, child—you first. Sir, I entreat you to take my niece first. The ship may go down at any moment, and—"

"Don't be afraid. The ship won't go down for several days yet. I think the young lady had better come first, as you say. You will need more assistance than I can give. I will send an able-bodied to fetch you. Come, miss, there is no time to lose! This water is tearing me from my hold."

The girl made no further objection, but began to climb through the window. Percy turned his head, and hailed the boat.

"Ahoy, Ben Grunt! Stand ready!"

"Ay, ay!" came back the hoarse reply of the boatswain.

"Got anybody?"

"Two ladies. I'm bringing one with me!"

"Good for you! We're ready! Buck up!"

Hetty, in spite of her soaked clothing, which weighed her down, came nimbly through the window, clinging to the rope.

"Excuse me," said Percy, placing his arm around her slim waist; "we can't stand upon ceremony, you know, when life is at stake."

"Lead on," she answered briefly, and blushing faintly.

"Cling to the rope and to me. If you lose your hold we are lost."

The "Aspasia" rolled to starboard; the breaking waves went thundering in a flood across her deck down to the sea, and the pair went with the torrent, sliding along the life-line. Drained and choked and beaten and bruised, they cleared the side of the wreck, and slipped along the line into the sea. Ben Grunt was on the watch; he gave the word; the boat shot forward, and the bo'sun's hand gripped Percy. Spluttering and gasping, the young sailor and his fair burden were landed in the boat. It was lucky that the bo'sun was so quick, for the whirling in the water had completely bewildered both Percy and Hetty, and their senses were nearly gone. But Percy was himself again in a minute.

"There's an old lady on board," he said. "She looks awfully weak, and won't be able to hold to the rope. It will need a strong man to fetch her out. I think I'm too far gone."

"It's my job," said Ben Grunt. "You've done well, laddy, and I'm proud of you. The sea has made a man of you, as the skipper said it would, and no mistake."

Ben Grunt, when he picked Percy up, had given the helm to Mr. Byng. The chief mate had turned deadly white when he saw Hetty, and he pulled down his cap as low as he could to hide his face. As he sat holding the tiller-lines a sudden glitter shot into his eyes. The expression of his face was that

of a desperate man, who had come to a most desperate resolution. If any of the boat's crew had seen his look he would have thought that followed might have been averted. But as they were busy looking after the boat, or attending to the fallen crew, no one suspected the fiendish intention of the chief mate.

The bo'sun had the assistance of the rope in guiding the wreck, so that his task was not so difficult as it might have been. At a favourable moment the boat closed on the wreck, and Grunt gained the chains. The boat closed on the wreck, as in the former case. But Byng had the helm, and he deliberately sent the bow of the "Aspasia" against the hull of the "Aspasia." At the same moment the "Aspasia" shipped a heavy sea, and rolled to starboard towards the boat. A Niagara of water thundered down the wreck upon the little craft, filling her instantly. In a moment passed in a moment. Before the crew could realize what had done the boat was beneath the sea, and the sailors were struggling for life in the tumult of the waters.

CHAPTER 4.

Percy's Fight for Life—In the Shadow of Death—Saved—The Skipper's Injustice—The Sentence—Disgrace or Death.

Byng had done his fell work well. The girl Percy had saved from the wreck was now in greater danger than ever. For some reason the mate seemed to have set himself the task of accomplishing her death. Some strong motive he undoubtedly had, for he was not the man to run such risks without a purpose. And now it appeared only too likely that he would succeed in his wicked work.

The boat, flooded, sank, and drifted away from beneath the seamen. A number of heads dotted the water, and painful cries were heard. One sailor who could not swim was down under the swell like a stone, his last feeble cry ringing in the ears of his messmates.

Percy's first thought, as he sank in the cold, chilly water, was for Hetty. She, half-fainting, wholly exhausted, was unable to help herself. Fortunately, Percy had learned to swim. He came to the surface in a moment, and looked round for the girl. A pale face, glimmering through clusters of wet hair, was at his elbow. Quickly he grasped the almost insensible form, and kept the head above the water. With this burden he knew he could not long keep afloat, and he bethought him of the rope dangling from the "Aspasia." That would support him if he could get a grip upon it. He saw the rope hanging like a streak over the side of the wreck, and struggled towards it. But one was there before him, and that one was Lynton Byng.

"Help me," panted Percy, as he saw the chief mate.

"Give me a hold upon the rope. The weight is dragging me down!"

Byng took no notice of the appeal, but eluded Percy and kept the life-line out of his reach.

"Will you give me a hold?" shouted Percy.

"Look out for yourself, you whelp!"

"You villain! you scoundrel! I am sinking!"

"Sink, then."

Percy was desperate. His strength was almost spent; he saw death hovering above him, and over the insensible girl he held in his aching left arm. Even at that moment he thought more of her than of himself. How could he get the better of this heartless villain, and obtain a hold upon the rope? He was in such a rage that his eyes flashed fire, and this excitement imbued him with an energy which was only momentary, but which served his turn.

He ceased to swim, and, treading water, dropped his right hand to his clasp-knife. Jerking it loose, he flung it full into the pale, cruel face of the chief mate. The attack was utterly unexpected, and Byng could not guard against it. The closed knife struck him across the eyes with great force, and half stunned him for the instant. His fingers aid from the rope, and he vanished under the water as a fresh cataract came pouring down from the "Aspasia." But Percy, with a herculean effort, gripped the rope as the mate abandoned it, and clung to it tenaciously, in spite of the water that beat upon his head.

The blow only disabled Byng for a moment, but, as he struggled to the surface with the intention of attacking Percy, a wave threw him heavily against the hull of the "Aspasia," and the concussion deprived him of his senses.

Percy had no time to waste looking after him; all his care was needed for himself and Hetty. With his right hand he held the rope, while his left arm encircled the girl; thus he waited, aching in every joint, while each few minutes the "Aspasia" discharged a fresh deluge over him. Had help been long delayed he would have not survived the ordeal. But Captain Braze, from the poop of the "Arrow," had seen the mishap to the boat, and had instantly despatched another, with the second mate in charge, to the rescue.

The boat's crew, swimming for their lives, were picked up one by one by Mr. Alesford, Percy, as he had a support, re-

remaining till the last. Lynton Byng, more dead than alive, was lying on board, and laid in the stern-sheets.

"Help! help!" Percy was crying, in the weak voice of utter exhaustion.

"We're coming, my brave lad!"

Mr. Alresford secured the end of the rope. A sailor then swam to Percy, and helped him along the line to the boat. Alresford dared not venture too near the "Aspasia," for fear of sharing the fate of Byng's boat, unaware that the catastrophe had been purposely brought about. Percy, in the last stage of fatigue, was taken aboard, with the girl he had risked so much to save. The moment he was in safety his senses left him; he sank into a complete unconsciousness, from which he was destined to have a painful awakening.

"What has happened?"

These were Percy Fielding's first words when his eyes opened, and the use of his faculties came back to him.

"Don't get up, laddy. You're all right. Swallow some of this."

The boy was lying in a bunk in the fore-cabin of the "Arrow," and by his side were standing several seamen. Ben Grunt put a glass to his lips. He swallowed something that had a strong flavour of brandy, and it put new life into him.

"Is she safe?" he said then.

"Right as a trivet, lad—likewise the old lady."

"How did you get off the wreck, Mr. Grunt?" asked Percy.

"I came along the line to Mr. Alresford's boat, and got to it safe and sound, the old lady in a faint. How do you feel now, lad?"

"First-rate. But," said Percy, scanning the faces around him, and noting that every brow was contracted, every lip set, "what's in the wind? What are you all looking so glum about?"

The bo'sun looked at the others, but no one answered. There was something in their minds that they did not like to utter.

"Has anyone been drowned?" asked Percy.

"Yes. Pore Jim Robinson has slipped his cable. He couldn't swim, and he went down long afore Mr. Alresford's boat came. But that ain't it. The fact is, sonny, there's breakers ahead for you."

"For me?" exclaimed Percy, in amazement. "Surely I have done nothing? Oh, yes! I suppose Mr. Byng has complained—the cur! I don't care if he is chief mate! I'd have done the same if he'd been skipper."

You mustn't talk like that, matey! Mr. Byng has put the cap'n into a fearful rage with you. He says there's no curing you, and—"

"And what?"

"Are you strong enough to go on deck?"

"Yes, quite."

Percy scrambled out of the bunk, and, with Ben Grunt's assistance, bundled on a dry suit of clothes. The lad was, in truth, far from well; his great exertions and his drenching had overtaxed him, and an incipient fever was already burning in his veins. This gave an unnatural brightness to his eyes, and a flush to his cheeks that, to a casual glance, appeared symptoms of health and vigour, while in reality he was upon the verge of a serious illness.

Percy understood that he was accused, and he was eager to defend himself. He had the sympathy of the crew, but Byng had had the opportunity of poisoning Captain Brace's mind against him, and the villain had not neglected the chance.

Ben Grunt had been ordered to pipe all hands to witness a punishment, and, with Percy's appearance on deck, the rest of the crew gathered there also. Mr. Byng, pale-faced and malignant-eyed, sat in an easy-chair, which had been brought up out of the captain's cabin. There was a fearful bruise over his nose, and both eyes were blackened, the effect of the blow Percy's missile had given him. There was also a huge lump upon his head, where it had struck the hull of the "Aspasia." Captain Brace stood near the chief mate, a dark frown wrinkling his usually good-natured countenance.

Percy gave a glance round as he left the fore-cabin, and took in all the scene. It was past noon now, and the sun was a little warmer; the heavy clouds were dispersing. The same uneasy swell was upon the ocean, and it made the "Arrow" roll and strain. The wreck of the "Aspasia" he could not see; during his swoon it had been left far astern, and had vanished from the eyes of the "Arrow's" men. Neither Hetty nor her aunt was on deck. Completely worn out, they were sleeping in the cabin assigned to them, knowing nothing of this new predicament of the lad to whom they owed their lives.

Captain Brace fixed his glance sternly upon Percy. If he expected to see the boy quail he made a mistake. Conscious of having done only his duty, and of having done it well, Percy stood erect, respectful, but perfectly fearless. This annoyed the skipper. He had condemned Percy in his own mind, and he regarded the young sailor's attitude as one of impertinence.

"Fielding," he said, with unaccustomed harshness in voice

and manner, "I suppose you know why you are called up in the presence of the whole ship's company?"

"I should think it was for punishment if I had done anything wrong, sir," Percy replied firmly. "But I have done nothing of which anyone has a reason to disapprove, excepting Mr. Byng."

"You make that exception?" said the skipper, ironically.

"Yes, sir. I know that Mr. Byng hates me, and this morning I prevented him from committing a murder."

"You did what?" ejaculated the captain, while a murmur of amazement came from the listening crew. Percy did not falter. Convinced that he was right, he spoke on, regardless of what might be the consequences.

"For some reason, sir, Mr. Byng wished the young lady on the "Aspasia" to be left to drown; for this reason he would have passed by the wreck had I not awakened you; for this reason he refused to board her, and Mr. Grunt had to take the matter into his own hands; for this reason he purposely capsized the boat after I had saved her from the wreck; for this reason he prevented me from getting hold of the rope hanging from—"

"Silence! Do you know who the young lady is?"

"No, sir."

"She is Miss Hester Byng, the cousin of Mr. Byng, and the only relation he has. What becomes of your wild accusation now?"

"His cousin!" murmured Percy dazedly, for a moment shaken in his belief.

"Yes!" Captain Brace's voice grew sterner. "That silences you. Fielding, I thought you at first only a spooney—an ill-trained fool, who could be cured by the rough life of a ship. I was mistaken. Your faults are not superficial, as I deemed; they are of the heart. You have acted in a disgraceful manner, and you seek to defend yourself by uttering a tissue of reckless falsehoods. Mr. Byng says that he saved himself by clinging to a rope hanging from the "Aspasia," and that you attacked him to obtain the support for yourself. He bears upon his face the marks of your brutal assault. Do you deny it?"

"No, but I will explain—"

"Explanations are not needed. Whether you acted in a panic or in cold blood your conduct is equally ignoble. On board my ship discipline shall be maintained, or I'll know the reason why. I have tried gentle measures with you, and they have failed. I will now see what rigour will effect. You are sentenced to receive the dozen from the cat, well laid on."

Percy stood like one turned to stone.

"You sentence me to be flogged?"

"Yes, as you deserve."

"Do you call this justice? You will not hear my defence!"

"No more of your insolence!" cried the skipper, in a rage.

"Bo'sun trice him up!"

When Captain Brace became unreasonable there was no arguing with him. It was not often that such was the case, but he was "pig-headed" now, with a vengeance. Still, the bo'sun put in a word, or, rather, tried to.

"Cap'n Brace, if you'll let me speak—"

"Silence! I have overlooked your insubordination to Mr. Byng, as human lives were saved thereby, but I permit none to myself. Trice up Percy Fielding!"

Unwillingly the bo'sun advanced towards the boy. Percy turned hot and cold all over, and a hunted look came into his eyes.

"I will not be flogged!" he cried. "I will die first!"

"I'm sorry, laddy, but skipper's orders—"

"I say I will die first."

The fever was stronger now, through his excitement, and a strange weakness fell upon the limbs of the young sailor. But his spirit was indomitable still. He bounded upon the weather gangway, and then to the main shrouds.

"Captain Brace," he said steadily, "if you do not recall that order, and promise that I shall not be flogged, I will fling myself into the sea!"

The skipper became crimson with rage.

"You young scoundrel, come down!" he roared.

"Do you refuse, then?"

"Refuse! I should think I do! I'll—"

The captain made a bound towards the defiant boy. His object was to prevent Percy carrying out his desperate threat, more than anything else; but Percy could not understand that. A vision of the grating, the bonds, the stinging lash, floated before his eyes, and his mind was made up.

"Then my death lies at your door!" he cried, and leaped from the rigging far out into the billowy sea. The splash was followed by a long-drawn "Ah!" from the crew of the "Arrow," and there was a rush to the side. Ben Grunt, forgetting himself, shook his fist in the chief mate's face; then, running on the gangway, he leaped into the sea to the aid of Percy.

A deathly-white face showed amongst the foam left by the "Arrow," and in a moment the bo'sun had grasped the



Ben Grunt was not the man to show mercy at the wrong moment. He slashed fiercely with his creese, and the treacherous Dyak rolled at his feet, cut nearly in two, instantly killed by the bo'sun's terrible blow. Hetty, turning in time to see the dead man fall, uttered a shriek, and fell fainting to the deck.

drowning boy. Percy struggled wildly. He was now in a state of delirium, and knew not what he did.

"By George! he's mad!" muttered Ben Grunt, and he did the only thing possible. He gave Percy a thump on the head that stunned him, and put an end to his resistance.

Meanwhile, the "Arrow" was hove-to, and a boat lowered. When Percy was taken out of the water he was pale and inanimate, and a chill came to the hearts of the seamen; they feared that he was dead.

CHAPTER 5.

Percy on the Sick-List—Byng Exposed—Hetty Explains—Percy Guesses the Truth—For Greed of Gold!

There followed a long blank in the life of Percy Fielding.

Fever chained him to his bed; for days and nights he lay still in deathly swoon, or tossing and turning in wild delirium.

At one time his life was despaired of. His frame, sturdy as it was, had been too terribly overstrained, and the intense excitement of the scene on the deck of the "Arrow," after his trying adventure, had given the finishing touch. He had given way utterly, and lay helpless in the grip of a burning fever. When the delirium seized him his cries rang through the ship, and from his babblings, sometimes incoherent, but at all times lucid, the "Arrow's" men learned all the particulars of his affray with the chief mate. After the capsizing of the boat, when the seamen had been battling for their lives with the whelming waters, every man's thoughts had been for himself, and no one had observed Percy's doings, or the chief mate's. This had given Mr. Byng the opportunity to represent to the skipper that Percy had deliberately attempted to dispossess him of the rope, merely to save his own skin. Captain Brace, listening to only one side of the story, of course, formed a very unfavourable opinion of Percy's conduct. But in the young sailor's delirium the truth came out. As soon as the skipper calmed down, and was willing to listen to reason, Mr. Alresford explained to him that Hetty's life had been saved by Percy's clinging to the rope. And then Captain Brace, ashamed of his unreasonable violence, went from one extreme to the other, and Mr. Byng experienced a most unpleasant ten minutes in his cabin. The skipper, always a plain man in

his speech, asked him gruffly what he meant by using such a strain of language.

"I have told you so long," answered Byng, with an air of offended dignity, "and this is the language to use to your first officer, sir."

"Language be hanged! You told me to suppose that Fielding brutally attacked you, to drive you from the rope, and that he would save himself, not caring if you drowned. It now appears that all the time he had a drowning girl in his arms, risking his life to save her, and that but for his seizing the rope she would have been drowned."

And from what he reiterates in his delirium, it seems that he appealed to you to give him a hold, and that you refused him, and saw him sinking with the girl without allowing him to touch the rope."

"The truth is, sir, that I was so buffeted and stunned by the water beating upon me that I was bewildered, and lost my head. I did not see that Fielding was helping my cousin; I only knew that he savagely attacked me, and forced me from my hold."

The skipper looked him squarely in the face. "What you say may be very true," he said slowly. "I won't condemn you. I've been hasty in condemning once, and I don't want to blunder again. But you told me when we sailed that you would leave my ship at Melbourne; that you didn't want to make the return voyage in the 'Arrow'."

"That is correct, sir."

"Well, it is lucky, for in any case I should land you at Melbourne. Your explanation may be true, but I have my doubts, and you're not the kind of man I like to sail with."

"I am sorry you think so, sir," said Mr. Byng, with humility in his voice, but with a savage gleam in his eyes.

"You may go, Mr. Byng. I may say that I shouldn't care to be in your shoes if Percy Fielding should chance to die."

"Why not, sir?" asked Byng uneasily.

"The crew will probably throw you overboard—that's all. You may go."

And Mr. Byng went, with a very worried look upon his face. The captain had spoken only half seriously, but the chief mate could not fail to see that the feeling against him was very strong in the whole ship's company.

He had not forgotten the brawny fist the furious bo'sun had shaken in his face before leaping to the rescue of Percy. Orders that he gave were obeyed sullenly; black looks met him whenever he turned. His inclination was to repay the scowls of the seamen with curses, and even blows, but without the support of the captain he dared not try such measures. Instead, he made an attempt to conciliate the forsook by an assumption of familiar good-humour, but without much success.

While Percy's life hung in the balance there were mutterings forward, and two or three seamen openly said that if the lad "slipped his cable," Byng should follow him to the bottom of the Atlantic.

There is a good deal of intelligence to be found in the average fore-castle, and there were few men on the "Arrow"

Read Herbert Maxwell's Latest Story, DEATH FOR TREACHERY! in Next Friday's UNION JACK.

who were not inclined to believe Percy's accusation against the chief mate—that he had some motive for wishing the survivors of the "Aspasia" to perish. Every action of Byng's pointed that way, especially the capsizing of the boat—a piece of unseamanlike clumsiness that could not have been accidental with a good sailor like Byng.

Of course, these suspicions and surmises did not come to the ears of the two ladies saved from the wreck. Their home was aft, and they came into very little contact with the fore-castle hands.

Hetty Byng was innocently delighted at finding a relation on board the "Arrow," though she knew very little of her cousin, and did not see much to admire in that little. To her, Byng unbent a little from his accustomed harshness, desirous of making a good impression upon her.

After a few days Hetty was able to come on deck, but Miss Priscilla Winter remained a prisoner in her cabin. It was fortunate that among Captain Brace's assorted cargo was a quantity of wearing-apparel destined for the fair dames of Melbourne, and this he placed at the disposal of his destitute guests. Thus supplied, and provided with a cabin as far removed as possible from the officers' quarters, the pair were made pretty comfortable.

Hetty was much concerned when she heard of the dangerous state of her brave rescuer. She would have wished to be his nurse, but, in her position, that was impossible. She could only wait in anxiety, and ply the captain with continual questions as to his progress.

In the close and crowded fore-castle Percy would never have recovered, so Captain Brace had had him carried aft and bestowed in Mr. Alresford's cabin, which the second mate had good-naturedly vacated.

The "Arrow" had no doctor, but the skipper had a medicine-chest and some knowledge of the healing art. He did his best for Percy, and the boy pulled through. He did not want for care, but it was his sound constitution more than anything else that saved him.

There was much rejoicing on the "Arrow" when it was known that Percy was out of danger. Even Mr. Byng was glad, for he had come to entirely believe that Percy's death would be the signal for his own. Hetty almost wept with joy; she had come to take an intense interest in her rescuer.

When Percy was himself again, and recollection returned of all that had happened, he was rather uneasy as to what the captain's intentions might be. But upon this point he was soon reassured. Brace made him relate all the particulars of his dispute with Byng.

Percy did so truthfully, and his tone carried conviction.

"I believe you, lad," the skipper said. "I did you wrong. I allowed Byng to lead me by the nose, the scoundrel! I ask your forgiveness."

"No, no, sir. If you blamed me once when I didn't deserve it, you have overlooked faults for which I ought to have been flogged a dozen times when I first came on board the 'Arrow,' and that makes us quits."

"That's true enough. I shall never forget how you looked in your lace frills, and how you called me a common sailor-fellow," said the skipper, his ruddy face expanding in a grin. "The sea has done you a lot of good."

"It has, sir. I was exasperated once because my aunt did not leave her money to me, as she had led me to expect. It was unjust of her and inconsiderate, I still think, but I am glad of it now. And I have been horribly ungrateful to my uncle, Captain Fielding. I shall try to make up for it when I am with him again."

It will be seen that an immense change had come over Percy since the "Arrow" sailed from the Mersey. All his noble qualities had been brought out, and his weaknesses had not

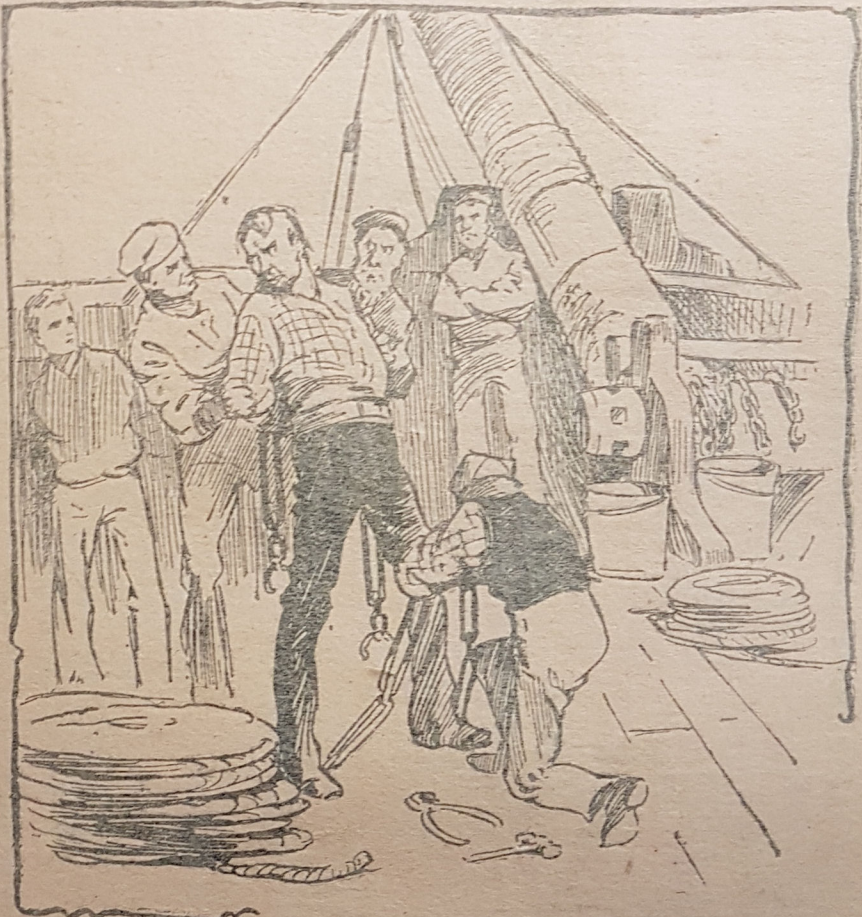
survived a few weeks of rough life. A finer or more manly lad than Percy was now could not have been found in the whole of the merchant service.

When Percy was once on the way to recovery he progressed rapidly, and soon after his conversation with the captain he was able to go on deck.

Captain Brace told him that he was not to go forward again; he had had enough of the fore-castle to effect the skipper's purpose—to "make a man of him"—and now he was to remain aft, to begin the study of navigation; for it had always been the intention of Captain Brace, if Percy proved worthy, to make an officer of him.

The change was welcome to Percy. He missed the jovial good-fellowship of the galley and the fore-castle, but he had gained a step on the ladder, and he had his way to make in the world. And there was a chum for him aft in the person of Hetty Byng.

It was natural that the boy and the girl should like each other, after their perilous experiences together. Hetty's gratitude, besides, knew no bounds. She looked upon Percy as a hero, as indeed he was.



The carpenter stood ready with a set of irons; a couple of seamen seized the miscreant, and the fetters were riveted on.

"Wh-what does this mean?" he gasped.

"The Dyak has confessed your villainy, you scoundrel! I fetter you now; but if Ben Grunt dies of his wound, I will hang you!" said the skipper.

"I shall never, never be able to thank you enough!" she told him more than once, and her admiration of his courage was very pleasant to Percy.

Hetty had talked with Ben Grunt. She had taken a liking to the bluff old bo'sun, and he had told her how it was due to Percy's pluck that a boat had been sent to the wreck at all. She knew that in saving her he had risked not only his life, but a severe punishment, which he had narrowly escaped.

As Percy remained aft, he was frequently in the company of Hetty, and at length he learned her history, which she told him simply. He was eager to hear it, for he was more convinced than ever that Mr. Byng had planned Hetty's death, and he thought that her story might give him the clue to the mystery.

Hetty had been going to Melbourne in the ill-fated

"Aspasia." In England she had been in somewhat poor circumstances, living with her Aunt Priscilla, until she received news from Australia that her uncle, who had gone to the colonies poor, had died rich in Melbourne. He had made a lucky strike at the Ballarat mines, and he left twenty thousand pounds to his niece Hester, and five thousand to his nephew Lynton Byng.

Hetty at once set out for Melbourne, with her aunt, in the "Aspasia," to take possession of her inheritance, some legal technicality requiring her presence in that city. A glimmering of the truth dawned upon Percy as he listened to the tale.

"Did Mr. Byng know that you sailed in the 'Aspasia'?" he asked.

"Yes. He paid me a visit in London before we sailed, to talk over the matter of Uncle Robert's legacy."

"If," ventured Percy—"if you had gone down in the 'Aspasia,' to whom would your inheritance have gone?"

The girl reflected for a moment.

"To my cousin Lynton. He is my only relative, excepting Aunt Priscilla."

The answer satisfied Percy as to the correctness of his surmises.

"When Byng looked at the wreck from the maintop that day he must have recognised her as the 'Aspasia,'" the cute boy said to himself. "I wondered what could have so startled him as to make him drop his glass. The heartless villain! He resolved to let his cousin drown, so that upon his arrival at Melbourne he could claim the whole of the fortune left by Robert Byng. The question is, will he plan further foul play? It is one thing to leave a person to perish; another to actually take life. Byng is none too good for that, but I doubt if he has the courage. I shall keep my weather-eye open, though."

CHAPTER 6.

In the Indian Ocean—The Sea-Dyaks—Byng's New Move—On Board the Proa—The Bo'sun on Guard—Treachery—For Life or Death.

By the time Percy was completely recovered the "Arrow" had passed the Cape of Good Hope, and was ploughing the waters of the Indian Ocean.

The vessel rounded the "cape of storms" in pretty fair weather, but in the broad ocean beyond there was a gale "waiting for her," as sailors say.

If there was still any thought of foul play in the mind of Mr. Byng, he gave no sign of it. To Hetty he was always kind, though there was a certain distance in his manner which Percy observed, and easily accounted for.

Even the hard-hearted chief mate could not become really friendly with a girl whose death he had attempted to bring about. His hatred for Percy he tried to conceal, but it sometimes showed itself, in spite of his self-control. Percy, however, did not care how Byng regarded him. He was a student now, instead of a fore-castle boy, and no longer in the power of the mate.

Captain Brace had taken an intense dislike to Byng, and would have disrated him if there had been anyone to fill his place; but his services could not be dispensed with until Melbourne was reached, so he retained his post. That he was regarded as a sort of outcast on board did not trouble him; his nature was the reverse of sensitive.

Percy, who had the lowest opinion of Byng's spirit, began to believe as time passed on that he had abandoned his schemes against Hetty. He had striven to cause her death by drowning upon the wreck; but that was a very different thing to actual murder.

In this conclusion Percy was only partly correct. Byng would never have dared to attempt anything openly, anything bold. He was by no means a daring criminal; but he possessed a sort of low cunning. He could wait for opportunities, and when they came he knew how to make the best of them.

As we have said, the "Arrow" met a gale in the Indian Ocean. It was something more than a gale; in fact, a hurricane that raged with tropical force and fury.

When it came on, the "Arrow" was near one of the rocky islets in the vicinity of St. Paul's Island. The islet was well known to Captain Brace, who had more than once before found shelter there during a storm. The "Arrow" was accordingly anchored in a small bay on the south side, which a ridge of reefs protected from the rage of the sea. Within this natural harbour peace was not to be found, but it was infinitely more secure than the open sea in a tropical tempest. The force of the ocean billows was broken upon the reef, but the shoreward surge made the "Arrow" rock and strain at her cable.

The "Arrow" was not the only vessel that had taken refuge in the little bay. Through the blinding sheets of rain the English seamen caught glimpses of another craft, moored close

in shore, under the lee of a big cliff. The stranger was a small vessel, of the kind commonly met with in the Eastern Indian seas—a "proa," or sail-canoe, with oars for use when a calm should render the sail useless. These frail craft are fatal to "the stately ship of Clyde." This proa, at which the men of the "Arrow" looked with curiosity, was larger than most of her kind. She had a cabin in the centre, made of hard wood, with two doors, one opening towards the bow, the other towards the stern. This formed the sleeping quarters of the crew whenever they slept under cover, which was seldom, in the fine, warm nights of the south.

The wind was choppy and changing, and, whenever it blew from the direction of the proa towards the "Arrow," the watch on deck heard a continuous shrill squeaking and creaking borne on the breeze.

"What on earth can that noise be, Mr. Grant?" Percy said to the bo'sun.

"Parrots, laddy," was the reply. "When you've sailed these waters as often as I have you'll know that squeaking when you hear it. That there boat's got a cargo of parrots aboard from Java or Borneo."

"When the sea goes down I'd like to go aboard and look at them," said Percy. "I should like to have a parrot, and teach it to speak."

"If the skipper of that cockleshell knows his biz he'll sell a parrot to every man Jack of us afore we part company," said the bo'sun chuckling. "Atween here an' Melbourne there'll be nothin' but cacklin' and shriekin' on board. There's nothing a tar likes so much as teachin' a parrot to speak—pretty strong language too, sometimes."

The storm, though fierce, was brief. It had blown itself away by dawn on the following morning, leaving only a heavy swell upon the sea, which reminded Percy of the day when he had sighted the wreck of the "Aspasia."

By noon the swell had almost subsided, and by that time the "Arrow's" crew had cleared away the traces of the ship's rough experience, and made everything "all atwain'to" again.

Then Mr. Byng suggested to the captain that the men should be allowed to visit the proa, and look over the cargo of the Dyak skipper. Captain Brace already intended this, and he at once assented. The suggestion of the chief mate somewhat surprised him, for Mr. Byng's most prominent trait was an utter disregard for the interests of anybody but himself, and he had never before done anything to please the crew.

A boat was lowered, and Mr. Byng went to the proa with eight seamen, and they were politely received by the swartzy skipper, who saw here a chance of doing a good stroke of trade. The crew of the proa numbered six—all stalwart, brawny fellows, of the Dyak race. They were not at all bad-looking, but their dark faces and big black eyes were full of a latent ferocity. Though now occupied as peaceful traders, it was not hard to see that opportunity would transform them into ferocious pirates. Each of them wore an enormous creese and an old-fashioned pistol—very necessary equipment, for, if they had been unarmed, the first Malay boat they fell in with would probably have boarded them, and seized both proa and cargo.

The Dyak captain, a man of about forty, whose face and arms showed scars received in many a sanguinary encounter, introduced himself to Mr. Byng as Buyong Seroy. In his white sarong, scarlet sash, and gold-braided vest, with his creese and pistol, he looked thoroughly practical, and was, indeed, no doubt a pirate whenever it served his turn. Mr. Byng, after a short scrutiny of Buyong Seroy's, seemed to feel extremely satisfied. While the seamen gave all their attention to the parrots the chief mate sat on one of the rower's benches and talked with Seroy.

The Dyak knew some English, picked up at Singapore and Hong Kong, and Mr. Byng knew some Malay, so that their discussion, though not without difficulties, was carried on clearly enough. Buyong Seroy expected to discuss the price of parrots, but Lynton Byng had other matters in his mind, and the expression upon Seroy's face showed that he was astonished by what the white man said. His astonishment, however, did not prevent him from coming to an agreement with Byng, when their talk had lasted about half an hour.

The "Arrow's" boat then returned, each of the seamen in possession of a gorgeously-coloured parrot, and with an orchid stuck in his jersey. The proa, being from Borneo, had orchids without number on board, stuck all over her by way of ornament, most of them faded, but some still fresh. As the "Arrow" was ready for sailing, and Captain Brace did not wish to delay, Byng informed him that he had arranged with Seroy for the proa to sail in company with the ship, and keep with her until their dealings were ended.

"But that cockleshell will never keep up unless we slacken sail, Mr. Byng," the skipper said.

"Oh, yes, sir; these proas fly, and I shouldn't be surprised

One Halfpenny.

if this one could outtail the 'Arrow.' Under his breath he added: "I hope so."

Why did he hope so? We shall see. The skipper sniffed at the idea of the proa outsailing his vessel. But it was not such a wild idea, as he was soon to see. Both vessels sailed out of the bay, with a fair breeze to fill the canvas. The "Arrow" sailed under her courses alone, and the proa kept under her quarter. The Dyaks, with sailor-like skill—for the sea-Dyaks are first-rate sailors—kept the proa so near the ship that the Englishmen were able to jump from one to the other. This was great sport to the seamen, who enjoy anything a little out of the ordinary run which breaks the monotony of a long voyage. One or two narrow escapes which clumsy hands had of falling into the sea provoked loud mirth. No one dreamed of suspecting that Mr. Byng had a deep motive in wishing the proa to leave the bay along with the "Arrow."

By the use of a rope and a hook the cages of plaited rushes containing the birds purchased by the seamen were slung aboard the "Arrow." While this was going on, Hetty was below, reading aloud to her aunt, whose delicate state of health forced her to still keep her cabin.

By the time the British sailors had all returned to the "Arrow," and Captain Brace was thinking of parting company with the proa, Mr. Byng had brought his cousin on deck. The graceful proa, the piratical-looking Dyaks, the gorgeous plumage and jarring cries of the parrots, were all intensely interesting to Hetty. It was not necessary for Byng to suggest to her the idea of visiting the Dyak craft. She wished to do so the moment she saw it.

Although Captain Brace did not like delay, he acceded to the desire of Hetty, and gave orders that a boat be lowered immediately. But when the "Arrow" rounded to, and the men began to lower the gig, Ben Grunt went to the skipper looking very serious.

"Is the young leddy goin' to the proa, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, Grunt."

"Sluse me, sir, but I'm an old sailor in these waters. My idee is, that a purty gal like Miss Hetty oughtn't to be allowed among them pirates—leastways, not without a guard. The Dyaks are all right if you git on their right side, sir; but these chaps are strangers to us, and we don't know what they mought do."

"Come, Grunt, you don't think six Dyaks would dare to try to carry off my cousin, with forty Englishmen within a few cables' length?" said Byng laughing.

"No, sir; but you can't be too keerful."

"Nonsense, Grunt!" said Captain Brace. "It is out of the question. Besides, Miss Byng will have a boat's crew with her."

"Will you let 'em take their outlasses, sir?"

"There would be no harm in that," said Byng, "only Bu-yong Seroys would take it as an insult. It would be express-ing suspicion so plainly. If you think, captain, that there's anything in what Grunt says, my cousin had better not go; though, as she seems set upon it, it's a pity to disappoint her for nothing."

"I don't think there's anything in it," replied the skipper. "Your fears are altogether unfounded, Grunt. Because there are Dyak pirates in the Eastern seas you see a pirate inside every Dyak sarong."

Hetty, who was standing on the gangway watching the proa, heard nothing of this; but Percy Fieilding heard it. Percy, quick-witted as he was, did not attach much importance to the bo'sun's fears, thinking Grunt was misled by his unfavourable opinion of Orientals generally. But, as one cannot be too cautious, Percy, who was to go in the boat, decided to go armed. In the cabin, which he now shared with the second mate, Mr. Alresford kept a revolver in his locker, as the other officers did. Percy slipped below, took out the revolver, and loaded it—a box of cartridges being in the locker—and hid it in his breast-pocket. Then he took his place in the gig, in which the bo'sun also sat. There were two oarsmen, and Mr. Byng and Hetty sat in the stern. The gig reached the proa in a few minutes. A rope was made fast, and they went aboard. Bu-yong Seroys gave Hetty a bold glance, which she did not notice, but which made Percy frown, and our hero took a dislike to the Dyak on the spot.

Most of the cages were stacked in the little cabin which, as we have mentioned, occupied the centre of the proa. The two doors, of interlaced bamboo, were wide open.

"How beautiful!" exclaimed Hetty, as she passed into the cabin, and looked with wonder and admiration upon the variegated plumage of the birds of the tropics.

Ben Grunt meanwhile watched, not the parrots, but the Dyaks. It was perhaps unreasonable that he should suspect Seroys and his men of bad intentions; but he had known so much treachery amongst these rovers of the tropic seas that his uneasiness was perhaps natural. And, as he knew of the Byng fortune at Melbourne, he more than expected that Byng

would take every opportunity of thrusting his cousin into danger. That the chief mate had made a definite arrangement with Seroys did not cross his mind. He was too honest to be able to gauge the full extent of Byng's baseness.

One man remained in the gig, by Mr. Byng's orders. The other, who happened to be Gaspar, the lascar, followed our friends into the little cabin. Mr. Byng remained at the side. The bo'sun, without appearing to do so, kept his eyes upon Bu-yong Seroys. To his utter amazement he saw a sign pass between the Dyak chief and Byng.

"Jumpin' Jupiter! wot does that mean?" muttered the bo'sun under his breath. He felt danger in the air; his bronzed face became less ruddy.

Seroys and another drew near to Byng. Two men began to handle the single wide-spread sail. One was at the helm, steering. The sixth Dyak was in the cabin, pointing out the parrots to Hetty and Percy.

Upon the huge creese this man wore the bo'sun fixed a long-ing eye. Bitterly he repented allowing Brace and Byng to laugh him out of bucking on his cutlass. He drew close to the Dyak. The creese had no sheath, being merely hooked upon the sash. A swift snatch would place the bo'sun in possession of it. Fortunate—very fortunate—was it that Ben Grunt was on his guard.

For the crisis came suddenly.

Seroys and his companion threw themselves upon Mr. Byng. He made a show of struggling, but was tossed into the sea in a moment. The two Dyaks at the sail at the same time braced it, and the proa shot away like an arrow from the side of the English ship.

The Dyak in the cabin sprang to join his comrades. Ben Grunt acted with equal swiftness, snatching the swarthy villain's creese before his intention to do so could be suspected. As the Englishman gripped the weapon, which he knew well how to use, the Dyak turned upon him like a tiger, drawing his pistol.

Ben Grunt was not the man to show mercy at the wrong moment. He slashed fiercely with his creese, and the treacherous Dyak rolled at his feet, cut nearly in two, instantly killed by the bo'sun's terrible blow.

Hetty, turning in time to see the dead man fall, uttered a shriek, and fell fainting to the deck. For the moment she was unregarded; life or death was now the issue.

Percy, already on his guard, instantly comprehended the state of affairs. The lascar, Gaspar, stood like one petrified.

"Shut the door, kiddy!" exclaimed the bo'sun.

The huge sail of the proa, extending far beyond each side of the craft, fortunately needed great care when the proa took a new course. The two men who braced the enormous yard were assisted by Seroys and his companion, and for a full minute the attention of all four was fully occupied.

The fifth Dyak was steering, and, of course, could not leave his post upon any account, for the "Arrow" was already in pursuit.

The Englishmen had therefore a brief interval in which to prepare for the coming strife. Brief as it was, it sufficed for them. The two doors were shut. The fastenings were mere bamboo latches, as easily opened from the outside as the inside; but Ben Grunt and Percy dragged the largest cages from their places for barricading.

Before closing the door, Ben had flung out the corpse of the Dyak. The sight of it caused a howl of vengeance to rise from the five others.

"You hear that, lad?" said the bo'sun grimly. "There's no mercy for us if they gain the upper hand. Keep your courage up; they'll be at us in a minute. Darn it! I wish we had a couple of six-shooters here. When they open fire we sha'n't be able to reply."

"I have Mr. Alresford's revolver, sir," said Percy quickly, and he drew it out. "I got it from his locker because of what you said to Captain Brace. It is loaded in all six chambers."

"Thank goodness for that!" exclaimed the bo'sun fervently.

"You'd better give it to me. You can't shoot, can you?"

"Not very well, I'm afraid, sir," said Percy, handing him the revolver. "But what weapon shall I use?"

"Take Gaspar's pig-sticker, and give him your clasp-knife."

The poor lascar was in a pitiable state of terror, and of little use as a combatant. His long, two-edged dagger, which, like most of his race, he carried instead of the ordinary clasp-knife, was a formidable weapon at close quarters. Percy took it, giving his own smaller knife in exchange, the frightened lascar raising no objection.

Hetty's faint had not lasted long. By the time Ben and Percy had piled the rush-cages against the doors, she rose, conscious and calm, but deadly pale.

"What does this mean, Percy?" she said, trembling.

"Courage, Hetty! These scoundrels of Dyaks are attacking us, but, with Heaven's help, we will keep them off until Captain Brace sends aid to us!"

"But—but my cousin—where is he?"

"Safe; gone back to the 'Arrow'!" said the bo'sun. He did not utter the suspicion—or, rather, the certainty—that was in his mind, though by a glance he conveyed it to Percy. The sign he had seen pass between Seroy's and Byng, and the subsequent happenings, had told him everything.

Buyong Seroy's was in something of a difficulty. He had meant to rush the unarmed Englishman, and terminate the affair with a few slashes of the Dyak creeses; but he had reckoned without his host. The quick-witted and brave-hearted Britons were behind a barricade now; one at least was armed, and one of the Dyaks had been slain.

This state of affairs upset all Seroy's calculations; but, as force was still overwhelmingly upon his side, he entertained no doubt whatever of ultimate success.

One man he was compelled to leave at the helm; but the sail, once secured, required no further care, so the rest of his men were at liberty. The four Dyaks separated, and approached the cabin from both ends, two fore and two aft. The flimsy doors would not withstand long the cutting blows of the creeses; and when they were down the work would be hand to hand, with but one possible result, according to Seroy's ideas.

"Ready, lad?" exclaimed Ben Grunt. "They are here!"

"Ah, we are lost!" murmured Hetty, white with fear.

"Cheer up, Hetty! We shall beat them off," said Percy reassuringly. He stood beside the bo'sun, holding Gaspar's dagger in his right hand, in his left the huge pistol dropped by the slain Dyak. Unfortunately, it was not loaded.

"Now for a tussle, my hearties!" murmured the bo'sun, as the keen creeses began to slash away at the barricade.

CHAPTER 8.

The Chase—Fighting Odds—A Terrible Tussle— A Respite—Percy's Device.

Captain Brace, from the poop of the "Arrow," saw Mr. Byng splash into the sea, and remembered Ben Grunt's misgivings.

"Treachery!" he exclaimed. "By James! they are flying, with Miss Byng on board! Man the lee braces! Look alive!"

The seamen with a shout ran to their posts, and the huge ship swung in pursuit of the lightly-skimming proa.

The seaman left in the gig, which had been cut loose by Seroy's, saw Byng's fall, and hurried to save him. The chief mate clutched the gunwale of the boat, and the seaman helped him in, soaked to the skin and pale as death.

"Hurt, sir?" said the man, with solicitude.

"No, only the shock; but the piratical villains are off, and they're taking Miss Byng with them!" gasped the mate.

"Aho, the 'Arrow'!"

"Are you all right, Byng?" Captain Brace called.

"Ay, ay; but stop for us!"

"Can't; not a moment to lose! Pull in our wake, and we'll come back and pick you up afterwards."

A frightful expression of rage convulsed the face of Lynton Byng. He had calculated upon delaying the pursuit by calling upon Captain Brace to pick him up.

"We shall be lost if you are led far!" he cried.

"Better lose you than Miss Byng!" Captain Brace replied, his voice faint in the distance, as the "Arrow" went tearing on.

Byng ground his teeth. He was not really afraid of being lost upon the ocean, but he had not been able to make Brace lose time. He dreaded now that the proa might be overtaken; and he, left behind, must remain in suspense, and never know the result of the chase until the "Arrow" returned to pick him up. 'Twas enough to make him furious.

Onward swept the gallant "Arrow." Her yards were covered with seamen, shaking out more sail; and soon the noble ship appeared like a vast mass of white, masts and spars being hidden by the flowing canvas.

Courses, top and topgallant sails, then the royals and skysails, staysails and stun'sails. The masts strained under their load, but Captain Brace knew his limit. One more trysail would have made the "Arrow" stagger. He had clapped on every inch she could safely carry, and she went through the water like a dolphin.

But the proa also flew, almost as fast. Swift as the little craft was, the huge spread of canvas on the British ship would have told in a stern chase; but the Dyaks did not intend to pit the sailing powers of the proa against those of the "Arrow."

They headed for the islet, which had been left a considerable distance behind. On the south side were reefs and sunken rocks and shallow water. Among these the proa would be safe; but among them the great ship could not venture. The shoals, passable to a proa, were a barrier to the "Arrow," an obstacle that could not be overcome.

Captain Brace guessed soon the intention of Buyong Seroy; but, though the "Arrow" strained in pursuit, he could not overtake the Dyaks in time to prevent their reaching this refuge.

The proa went in amongst the reefs unharmed, while the "Arrow" was forced to stop ere reaching the line of oncoming foam that marked the outermost barrier. The proa kept on until beyond the furthest limit of rifle-range, and then the pursuers cursed their luck. The sail of the proa became only a speck to the British, a tiny patch of white against the white background of the island cliffs.

"What's to be done, sir?" Mr. Alresford asked. "Shall we out with the boats?"

"Yes, that is our only course, though there is little chance of success. The Dyaks know the channels of this labyrinth, it is clear, and they will elude us. I know Buyong Seroy's idea. He will skulk amongst the reefs until night, and then escape in the dark. To-morrow by dawn he will be out of sight; in what direction we shall be unable to guess. Heaven! the proa more than once while we were chasing her. I would give ten years of my life to be standing on her deck with a outlass in my hand!"

The skipper was in a terrible state of mind. The girl in his charge had been carried off under his very nose, with only the very faintest chance of rescue. The Englishmen, sent on board unarmed, had doubtless already fallen beneath the creeses of the Dyaks. But Hetty? The fear of her fate made the skipper grind his teeth and bite his lips with impotent rage.

Every man on board the "Arrow" was equally enraged. If by good fortune the British tars did reach the proa, the Dyaks had little mercy to expect.

A merchant ship is not usually well supplied with arms, but Captain Brace was able to provide a dozen cutlasses and half as many revolvers. These, with the addition of heavy bludgeons for those who had nothing better, formed the arms of the seamen whom Captain Brace selected to go with him in the longboat. The preparations did not take long. The boat was lowered, manned, and provisioned, the sails were spread, and away it flew towards the distant proa.

Meanwhile, what of those in the cabin of the Dyak craft?

While Ben Grunt and Percy stood on the defensive, the lascar remained trembling in a corner; but the bo'sun forced him to stand in front of Hetty, to stop any bullets that might fly towards the girl.

The poor wretch was too terrified to fight, and this was the best use he could be put to. He objected at first, but a flourish of the bo'sun's creese subdued him.

The blades of the four Dyaks made short work of the bamboo doors. A terrific screaming arose from the parrots in the cages forming the barricade, many of the luckless birds being hacked to pieces by the creeses of the assailants. This destruction of their property exasperated the Dyaks more than the death of their comrade had done, and they uttered yells of rage as they Hewed.

"Come on, you varmint!" muttered Ben Grunt. "If you get the upper hand, you sha'n't all live to crow over it!"

He was looking for a chance to use his revolver. He soon found one. The Dyaks exposed themselves when they had cut away the barricade. As soon as a gap was made in the door, guarded by the bo'sun, a brawny Dyak pushed himself in, with his creese extended before him to ward off blows. He was not on his guard against fire-arms, for he thought the Englishmen had come aboard the proa unprovided with them, and he had not yet seen that the bo'sun held a pistol in his left hand.

Ben Grunt made a feint, pretending to thrust; then, abruptly lifting his left hand with the revolver in it, he fired full in the face of the Dyak.

There was a fearful yell of agony as the wretch received the ball, which struck him over the nose. Down he went upon his face, writhing; and a cut from Grunt's blade finished him.

His companion sprang back as Ben fired, and drew a pistol. The bo'sun saw it raised, and dodged to avoid the ball, but unsuccessfully. It struck him in the shoulder, and he could not suppress a cry; but, with iron nerve, he remained standing, and fired a second shot. The Dyak received it in the stomach, and went down, twisting like a snake in convulsions of agony.

At the other end of the cabin Percy's task was even more difficult. He had only a dagger and an unloaded pistol to use against the two savage pirates who were assailing him. His face was pale and set, but his eyes were clear, his heart-beats steady.

Watchful as a cat, he waited for the crisis. A gap was torn in the door, and the cages were slashed to bits, the uninjured birds whizzing about the cabin and filling the air with deafening cries. Seroy's forced his way in through the ruins just at the moment when Ben Grunt fired his first shot.

Up went Percy's hand, and he hurled the pistol at the Dyak's face. Seroy started back, jerking up his creese to ward off the missile. He caught it upon the hilt; but ere he could resume his guard the desperate boy leaped at him like a tiger-cat, stabbing fiercely.

(The story is concluded on page 16 of this number.)

EVERY INCH A SAILOR.

(Concluded from page 12.)

Seroys protected his breast at the expense of getting an awful gash along his right arm; his creese clattered upon the floor, lost by his nerveless fingers.

Howling with rage, he seized Percy with his left arm. The other Dyak was pressing behind, the door being too narrow to admit two men abreast. Seroys sought to swing Percy round, to let his companion cut him down. The lad, helpless in the grasp of the brawny Dyak, gave himself up for lost.

But the bo'sun had now disposed of his assailants, and, wounded as he was, he turned to the aid of his young comrade.

The creese of Seroys' follower was whirling aloft to cut at Percy, when the bo'sun fired, crippling the upraised arm. Then his barrel turned upon the swarthy chief. Seroys, with a yell of rage, hurled Percy away from him, and sprang out of the cabin just in time to elude the bullet.

Percy staggered to his feet, dazed. The contest, it seemed, was over for the moment. Seroys and his companion, each with his right arm disabled, had retreated to the stern, joining the steersman. The proa being now amongst the reefs, it would have been destruction swift and sure for the steersman to leave his post, or he might have turned the scale against the Englishmen.

"Are they gone?" gasped Percy. Then, as Ben Grunt sank upon a bench with a groan: "You are wounded?"

"A bullet in the shoulder, kiddy! But we've licked 'em for the first round, ain't we? It was a close shave, though. Kiddy, you've never bin nearer Davy Jones afore, not even when that black-hearted sea-lawyer capsized you under the hull of the 'Spasia.' If you hadn't brought this here barker from the 'Arrow,' we should be cat's-meat now."

"Let me bind up your wound."

"That can wait. Drag out some more of those cages an' block up the doors. If those scoundrels rush us, we shall go under."

Percy obeyed. The remainder of the cages, heaped in the apertures where the doors had been, formed a frail defence, which would at least stop a rush for a minute or so. The Dyaks did not interfere. Ferocious as they were, they were for a time sickened of fighting. The wounds of Seroys and his companion were painful, agonising, though not disabling. The man who had been shot in the stomach was dying, and sending the air with his awful cries. Only one was silent—the villain who had been slain outright by the bo'sun.

"We ain't done so bad," said the bo'sun, as Percy bound up his wound as well as he was able. "Two of 'em done for an' two badly hurt. They won't come fur us agin in a hurry. I've two shots left if they do. Wonder what the 'Arrow' is doin'?"

"Captain Brace is after us, of course!"

"Can't git amongst these shoals in the 'Arrow.' Still, he can send a boat. We must wait."

It was weary waiting. The proa flew on. Ben Grunt soon grew so weak that he had to lie down. Soon he became unconscious. Fortunately, this could not be seen by the Dyaks, who did not know that he was wounded. Hetty, silent in a swoon, sat motionless in the corner, leaning against the wall. Percy, with the creese in his hand, kept sharp watch upon the Dyaks.

Through the gaps in the barricade he saw the blue sea beyond the proa, and soon caught sight of the longboat of the "Arrow."

The proa moved on amongst the reefs, easily eluding the British, who, ignorant of the channels, had to feel their way cautiously. Percy felt a chill of despair. He saw that the longboat would never reach the proa.

All at once a brilliant idea flashed into his mind.

The mast of the proa stood in the centre of the craft, the cabin being built round it. The mast was not like one of the "Arrow's," being no thicker than a ship's mainyard. Percy gripped the creese, and began to slash at it. If he could cut it through, the wind in the huge sail would sent it overboard, and completely disable the proa.

Fiercely he hewed and hacked, the razor-like blade cutting large slices from the mast, shaving it thinner and thinner. The mast began to sway, to the astonishment of the Dyaks, who could not conceive what was the matter with it. In a very short space of time Percy had weakened it sufficiently for the wind to do the rest.

Crash!

Cries of terror broke from the Dyaks, as the mast went by the board. A ringing hurrah came across the water from the longboat.

"Pull hard, my hearties!" cried Captain Brace.

The proa, heeling over to the side upon which the mast had fallen, floated like a log upon the water. The Dyaks looked at each other in dismay. What was to be done?

For a moment Seroys thought of sending the proa to sea, murdering its inmates before the longboat could arrive. Percy, who expected this, stood prepared to fight to the last. He had little hope of saving himself; but he hoped to carry the Dyaks long enough to allow Captain Brace to arrive and save Hetty.

But Seroys was no fool. He reflected that, as he had not succeeded in murdering his victims yet, the English would not take his life. And could he not win his liberty by saving Byng? He thought he could.

The longboat touched the proa. The British seamen leaped aboard. To their surprise, Seroys came forward unarmed, and fell upon his knees.

"We surrender!" he cried. "Your friends are safe."

A load was lifted from the heart of Captain Brace.

"Thank Heaven! Where are they?"

"Here we are, captain!" called out Percy.

In a minute the barricade was down, and Percy came out bearing Hetty in his arms.

Seroys had calculated well. Captain Brace decided to take the Dyaks to Melbourne for trial, but Byng bought his liberty by his revelations. The honest skipper at first refused to believe that even Byng could have been guilty of such black villainy, but Seroys produced a roll of banknotes which Byng had paid him. The skipper had himself paid the money to Byng in Liverpool, and he knew the numbers, so the matter was placed beyond all doubt.

The "Arrow" returned to pick up the gig. When Byng came aboard, and saw his cousin safe and Seroys a prisoner, he nearly fainted with fear. The carpenter stood ready with a set of irons; a couple of seamen seized the miscreant, and the fetters were riveted on.

"Wh-what does this mean?" the prisoner gasped.

"The Dyak has confessed your villainy, you scoundrel! I fetter you now; but if Ben Grunt dies of his wound, I will hang you!" said the skipper grimly.

Ben Grunt, fortunately, pulled through, and was sound again by the time the "Arrow" reached Melbourne. Seroys and his men were allowed to go in their proa. The skipper at first intended to keep them as evidence against Byng, but Hetty interceded for her cousin, and, to save the disgrace of an exposure, it was agreed that Byng should not be prosecuted.

He was, however, kept in irons during the remainder of the voyage, and when Melbourne was reached Captain Brace gave him the choice of going to prison or boarding a ship for San Francisco.

He chose the latter, and the skipper saw him off. It was then beyond his power to trouble Hetty again until she had claimed her fortune. This did not take long, and, once Hetty was in possession, legal precautions were taken to prevent a penny of her money going to Lynton Byng in case of her demise, so that she could now consider herself quite secure from him.

By the time Captain Brace's business at Melbourne was concluded, Hetty's also had come to an end, and she and her aunt returned to England as passengers on the "Arrow," much to the delight of Percy.

The homeward voyage was uneventful, and the "Arrow" in due course dropped anchor in the Mersey, where Captain Fielding was the first man to come aboard.

The old sea-dog was astonished, when a handsome, bronzed young sailor rushed up to him, grasped his hand, and shook it.

"Why, who are you?" exclaimed Fielding.

"Don't you know me? I am Percy."

"Percy!" exclaimed the old skipper, looking at him with incredulous wonder.

"Yes, it is I, dear uncle, and reformed—a very different fellow to the one you sent to sea," said Percy. "I want you to promise to forget the past, and let us make a fresh start."

"Well, well, shiver my timbers!" said Fielding. "Captain Brace was right when he said the sea would make a man of you. What a fine lad you've grown! Bless me!"

"I told you so, Bob," chimed in Captain Brace. "Percy will be a credit to you. I wish he were my nephew instead of yours, by George! I have a yarn to spin you over our grog this evening. I told you I'd cure him."

"Well, blow my topgallants!" was all Fielding could say.

And now, reader, the time has come for us to part. We have had a long voyage together, and we are now in port. We cannot end our story with a happy marriage, for our hero and heroine are much too youthful to think of that for a long time to come. But Percy is very fond of Hetty, and Hetty time of Percy, and whenever he is home from a voyage they spend a good deal of time together. Percy is now a second mate. When he becomes a commander he may lead Hetty to the altar.

THE END.