

King o' the Beach: A Tropic Tale

George Manville Fenn

The background of the lower half of the page is a solid blue color. Overlaid on this is a pattern of various red geometric shapes, including triangles, squares, rectangles, and curved lines, arranged in a somewhat abstract, non-repeating fashion.

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK KING O' THE
BEACH: A TROPIC TALE ***

George Manville Fenn

"King o' the Beach"

Chapter One.

“Mind what you’re doing! Come down directly, you young dog! Ah, I thought as much. There, doctor: a job for you.”

It was on board the great steamer *Chusan*, outward bound from the port of London for Rockhampton, Moreton Bay, and Sydney, by the north route, with a heavy cargo of assorted goods such as are wanted in the far south Colonies, and some fifty passengers, for the most part returning from a visit to the Old Country.

“Visit” is a very elastic word—it may mean long or short. In Carey Cranford’s case it was expressed by the former, for it had lasted ten years, during which he had been left by his father with one of his uncles in London, so that he might have the full advantage of an English education before joining his parents in their adopted land.

It had been a delightful voyage, with pleasant fellow-passengers and everything new and exciting, to the strong, well-grown, healthy lad, who had enjoyed the Mediterranean; revelled in the glowing heat of the Red Sea, where he had begun to be the regular companion of the young doctor who had charge of the passengers and crew; stared at that great cinder-heap Aden, and later on sniffed at the sweet breezes from Ceylon’s Isle.

Here the captain good-humouredly repeated what he had said more than once during the voyage: “Now look out, young fellow; if you’re not back in time I shall sail without you:” for wherever the great steamer put in the boy

hurried ashore with the doctor to see all he could of the country, and came back at the last minute growling at the stay being so short.

It was horrible, he said, when they touched at Colombo not to be able to go and see what the country was like.

He repeated his words at Singapore; so did the captain, but with this addition:

“Only one more port to stop at, and then I shall have you off my hands.”

“But shan’t we stop at Java or any of the beautiful islands?”

“Not if I can help it, my lad,” said the captain. “Beautiful islands indeed! Only wish I could clear some of ’em off the map.”

So Carey Cranford, eager to see everything that was to be seen, had to content himself with telescopic views of the glorious isles scattered along the vessel’s course, closing the glass again and again with an ejaculation signifying his disgust.

“Islands!” he said. “I believe, doctor, half of them are only clouds. I say, I wish the captain wouldn’t go so fast.”

“Why?” said his companion, an eager-looking manly fellow of about twice the speaker’s age.

“I should like to fish, and stop and explore some of the islands, and shoot, and collect curiosities.”

“And drive all the passengers mad with vexation because of the delay.”

“Oh! old people are so selfish,” said the lad, pettishly.

“And the young ones are not,” said the young doctor, drily.

The boy looked up sharply, coloured a little through the brown painted by the sun on his skin, and then he laughed.

“Well, it’s all so new and fresh,” he said. “I should like to see a storm, though. One of those what do you call ’ems—tycoons—no, typhoons.”

“You’re getting deeper into the mire,” said the doctor, smiling. “Carey—why, we ought to nickname you Don’t-Care-y, to have such a wish as that.”

“Why? It would be a change.”

“A storm! Here, in this rock and shoal-dotted sea, with its dangerous currents and terrible reefs, where captains need all their skill to pilot their vessels safe to port!”

“Never thought of that,” said the lad. “Let’s see, what does the chart say? New Guinea to the north, and home to the south.”

“Home if you like to call it so,” said the doctor; “but you’ve a long, long journey before you yet.”

“Yes, I know, through Torres Straits and Coral Sea and by the Great Barrier Reef. I say, doctor, wouldn’t it be jolly to be landed somewhere to the south here and then walk across the country to Brisbane?”

“Very,” said the doctor, drily. “Suppose you’d take a few sandwiches to eat on the way?”

“There, you’re joking me again,” said the boy. “I suppose it would be many days’ march.”

“Say months, then think a little and make it years.”

“Oh! nonsense, doctor!”

“Or more likely you’d never reach it. It would be next to impossible.”

“Why?” said Carey.

“Want of supplies. The traveller would break down for want of food and water.”

“Oh! very well,” cried the boy, merrily; “then we’ll go by sea.”

It was the day following this conversation that Carey Cranford’s energy found vent, despite the heat, in a fresh way.

The *Chusan* was tearing along through the dazzlingly bright sea, churning up the water into foam with her propeller and leaving a cloud of smoke behind. The heat was tremendous, for there was a perfect calm, and the air raised by the passage of the steamer was as hot as if it had come from the mouth of a furnace. The passengers looked languid and sleepy as they lolled about under the great awning, and the sailors congratulated themselves that they were not Lascars stoking in the engine-room, Robert Bostock, generally known on board as Old Bob, having given it as his opinion that it was “a stinger.” Then he chuckled, and said to the man nearest:

“Look at that there boy! He’s a rum un, and no mistake. That’s being British, that is. You’d never see a Frenchy or a Jarman or a ’Talian up to games like that in the sun.”

“That there boy” was Carey Cranford, and he had taken the attention of the captain as well, who was standing under the awning in company with the doctor, and the two chuckled.

“There, doctor,” he said; “did you ever see so much of the monkey in a boy before? Wouldn’t you think a chap might be content in the shade on a day like this? What’s he doing—training for a sweep?”

A modern steamer does not offer the facilities for going aloft furnished by a sailing ship, and her masts and yards are pretty well coated with soot; but Carey Cranford, in his investigating spirit, had not paused to consider that, for he had caught sight of what looked like a blue cloud low down on the southern horizon.

“One of the islands,” he said to himself. “Wonder what’s its name.”

He did not stop to enquire, but went below, threw the strap of his large binocular glass over his head, ascended to the deck again, and then, selecting the highest mast, well forward of the funnel, he made his way as far aloft as he could, and stood in a very precarious position scanning the distant cloud-like spot.

The place he had selected to take his observation was on one of the yards, just where it crossed the mast, and if he had contented himself with a sitting position the accident would not have happened; but he had mentally argued that the higher a person was the wider his optical range, so he must needs add the two feet or so extra gained by standing instead of sitting. His left arm was round the mast, and both hands were steadying the glass as, intent upon the island, he carefully turned the focussing screw, when the steamer, rising to the long smooth swell, careened over slightly, and one of the boy’s feet, consequent upon the smoothness of his deck shoes, glided from beneath him, bringing forth the captain’s warning cry and following words.

For the next moment, in spite of a frantic clutch at the mast, the boy was falling headlong down, as if racing his glass, but vainly, for this reached the deck first, the unfortunate lad’s progress being checked twice by his coming

in contact with wire stays, before head and shoulder struck the deck with a sickening thud.

Chapter Two.

The doctor was first by the injured lad's side, quickly followed by the captain and a score of passengers who had been roused to action by the accident.

“Keep everyone back,” cried the doctor, “and let's have air.”

The doctor was for the moment in command of the vessel, and the captain obeyed without a word, forming all who came up into a wide circle, and then impatiently returning to the injured lad's side.

“Well?” he panted, as he took off his gold-banded cap to wipe his streaming forehead. “Tell me what to do.”

“Nothing yet,” replied the doctor, who was breathing hard, but striving to keep himself professionally cool.

“Not dangerously hurt?” whispered the captain; but in the terrible silence which had fallen his words were distinctly heard above the throbbing of the vibrating engines, which seemed to make the great vessel shudder at what had occurred.

“I am not sure yet,” said the doctor gravely.

“But the blood—the blood!” cried one of the lady passengers.

“As far as I can make out at present the leather case of his glass has saved his skull from fracture. He fell right upon it, but I fear that the collar-bone is

broken, and I cannot say yet whether there is anything wrong with the spine.

“No!” he said the next minute, for the sufferer stretched out his hands as if to clutch and save himself, and he moved his legs.

There were plenty of willing hands ready to help, and a canvas stretcher was drawn beneath the sufferer so that he could be carried carefully down to one of the state cabins, which was immediately vacated for his use; and there for hours Doctor Kingsmead was calling into his service everything that a long training could suggest; but apparently in vain, for his patient lay quite insensible in the sultry cabin, apparently sinking slowly into the great ocean of eternity.

And all the time the huge steamer tore on over the oily sea through a great heat which rivalled that of the engine-room, and the captain and first and second mates held consultations twice over in connection with barometer and chart, by the light of the swinging lamp below.

The passengers supposed that those meetings concerned the injured boy, but the sailors, who had had experience, knew that there was something more behind, and that evening after the sun had gone down looking coppery and orange where a peculiar haze dimmed the west, one of the sailors who had gathered round where old Bostock was seated hazarded a few words to his senior.

“Looks a strange deal like a storm,” he said.

“Ay, it does,” said the old sailor; “and as I was saying,” he continued, passing his hand across his eyes, “it do seem strange how these things come about. Here’s me more’n fifty, and about half wore out, and there’s this here young gent just beginning, as you may say, and cut down like that. You lads

mayn't believe it, but he kinder made me take to him from the first, and I'd a deal rayther it was me cut down than him."

"Ah, poor lad!" said one of the men, and there was a low murmur.

"Look at that now," continued the old sailor, passing his hand across his eyes again, and then holding it out and looking at it curiously; "wet as wet! He aren't nothing to me, so I suppose I must be growing older and softer than I thought I was. Nothing to me at all but a passenger, and here am I, mates, crying like a great gal."

"There aren't naught to be 'shamed on, Bob Bostock," said another middle-aged man. "I know what you feels, mate, for I've got boys o' my own, and he's somebody's bairn. Got a father and mother waiting for him out in Brisbun. Ah! there'll be some wet eyes yonder when they come to know."

"Ay, there will," came in chorus.

"'Taren't that he's such a good-looking lad, nor so big nor strong. I dunno what it was, but everyone took to him from the first day he come aboard. Never made himself too common nor free, but there he was, allus the gen'leman with you—what you may call nice."

"Reg'lar true-born Englishman, I say," said another.

"Nay, just aye like a young Scot," said another.

"Hark at that!" said another, looking round defiantly; "it's of Oirish descent he is. Isn't his name Carey?"

"What!" cried another, angrily. "Carey—Carew. It's a Welsh name inteet, and as old as the hills."

“Never mind what he is—English or Scotch or Welsh.”

“Or Irish,” put in one of those who had spoken.

“Or Irish,” said old Bostock; “he’s as fine a lad as ever stepped, I say, and I’d take it kindly if one of you would take my watch to-night, for I want to hang about ready to do anything the doctor may want in the way o’ lifting or fetching water. It don’t seem nat’ral to stand by and see the stooard’s mate doing things for the lad as he’d, ask me to do if he could speak.”

“Ah! he mostly come to you, Bob Bostock, when he wanted a bit o’ fishing-line or anything o’ that kind.”

“He did,” said the old sailor, “and glad I allus was to help him. Maybe we are going to have a blow to-night, and if it comes so much the better. It’ll make it cooler for the poor lad, for it’s hot enough now. Yes, we’re in for a hurricane, my lads, as sure as we’re at sea.”

He had hardly spoken the words when the first mate gave an order, the boatswain’s whistle piped, and the men knew that their officers were of the same opinion as the old stagers among them. A storm was expected, and a bad one, in as bad a part of the world as could have been selected for the encounter.

But no uneasiness was felt, for the *Chusan* was a magnificent boat, with tackle of the finest description: all it would mean in such a boat so well commanded would be a tossing, with the decks drenched by the tumbling waves, for she was well commanded, the crew were in a capital state of discipline, as shown at once by the steady way in which they went to work fulfilling the orders received, battening down hatches, extra lashing loose spare spars, seeing to the fastenings of the boats, and taking precautions against the water getting down into engine-room or cabin, so that in a very

short time everything was, as a sailor would say, made snug, and there was nothing more that the most cautious captain could have wished to see done to ensure the safety of the magnificent vessel in his charge.

The passengers, who were still discussing the accident which had befallen the boy, and who had paid no heed to the peculiar look of the sky, the sea still heaving and sinking gently in an oily calm, now began to notice the work going on, and the rumour soon spread among them that there was the possibility of a storm coming on.

The result was that first one and then another began to hunt the captain to question him, but only to obtain short polite answers, that officer being too busy to gossip after the fashion wished. They fared worse with the chief and second officers, who were quite short; and then one of the most enterprising news-seekers on board captured old Bostock, literally button-holing him with the question:

“Do you think we are going to have a storm?”

“Don’t think about it, sir. We shall have a buster before we’re half an hour older. Going to blow great guns, so hold your hair on, sir. Can’t stop; going to hear how young Master Cranford’s going on, sir.”

“Only a moment, my good friend,” said the gossip. “Do you think there will be any danger?”

“Well, yes, sir,” said the old sailor, with his eyes twinkling, but his face as hard as if it had been cut out of wood; “this here is rather a bad place to be caught in a storm. You see, sir, the water’s rather deep.”

The captain had not been one-half so busy before during the voyage, and his eyes were everywhere, seeing that there was nothing left loose; but he

found time twice over to go below to where Doctor Kingsmead was seated by his patient's cot watching anxiously for every change, the poor lad evidently suffering keenly from the furnace-like heat.

"How is he, Kingsmead?" asked the captain, anxiously.

"Bad as he can be," was the stern reply.

"But can't you— Bah! absurd! you know your business better than I can tell you. Poor lad! How can I face his father when we get into port? It will be heart-breaking work. It is heart-breaking work, doctor, for the young dog seemed to have a way of getting round your heart, and I couldn't feel this accident more keenly if he were my own son."

"Nor I," said the doctor, "if he were my own brother."

"God bless him, and bring him safely through it!" said the captain, softly, as he laid his hand gently on the boy's brow. "I'm glad his face is not disfigured."

"Yes, so am I," said the doctor; "it does not tell tales of the terrible mischief that has been done."

"What do you call it—concussion of the brain?"

"Yes, there is no fracture of the skull; only of his collar-bone, and that is a trifle compared to the other."

"You must bring him round, doctor. Troubles never come singly."

"What, have you some other trouble on hand?" said the doctor, rather impatiently, for he wanted the captain to go and leave him alone with his patient.

“Yes, don’t you know?”

“I know nothing but that I have that poor boy lying there to be saved from death if it be possible. Can’t you have a wind-sail lowered down here? The heat is intolerable.”

“Wind-sail? You’ll have wind enough directly. We’re going straight into a typhoon, and no other course is open to me in this reef-strewn sea.”

“A storm?”

“Yes, and a bad one, I expect. It will be pitch-dark directly.”

“The fresh air will be welcome,” said the doctor, calmly.

“Is the captain here?” said a voice at the state-room door—a voice speaking in anxious tones.

“Yes; what is it?” said the captain, quickly. “Come on deck, sir. It’s rushing upon us like a great wall. Hear it?”

Doctor Kingsmead turned his face for a moment towards the door, to hear a peculiar dull distant roar, different from any sound with which he was familiar. Then the door swung to, and he was bending over his young patient again, thinking of nothing else, hearing no more for a few moments, till the door was pushed open again, and the rough, ruddy bronze face of Bostock appeared in the full light of the swinging lamp.

“Beg pardon, sir,” said the man, hoarsely. “Just going on dooty, and mayn’t have another chance, as things looks bad.”

“What do you mean?” said the doctor, starting.

“Just wanted to have one more look at the dear lad, sir.”

“But what do you mean by things looking bad?”

“Haven’t you seen, sir? Well, you can hear.”

The doctor could hear, for at that moment something struck the vessel a tremendous blow, which made her shiver, and then all was turmoil and confusion as rain, wind, and spray swept the decks, and the steamer careened over and lay for a time upon her beam-ends.

“Come down and tell me if the storm gets worse,” said the doctor, with his lips to the man’s ear.

“Right, sir; but it can’t be much worse till the sea gets up. It’s blown flat just now.”

The man gave a lingering look at the insensible boy, and then crept through the door, passing out quickly as if to keep some of the din from entering the cabin.

The doctor bent over his patient again, and then leaned forward to unscrew the fastening of the circular pane of glass which formed the port-hole.

But he opened it only a few inches and then clapped it to and fastened it again to keep out the rush of wind and spray which entered with a wild shriek and rocked the lamp to and fro, threatening to put it out.

He returned to his seat and watched, paying no heed whatever to the terrific roar of the storm nor the quivering of the great vessel, which was evidently being driven at great speed dead in the teeth of the storm, though really making very little progress.

And then hours went by, with the doctor as insensible to the progress of the terrific hurricane as the boy he watched. There were plenty of passengers

below, but no one came near, and the two within that dimly-lit cabin seemed to be the only living beings on board, so perfectly uninterrupted did they remain.

This did not trouble the doctor in the least, for all he required was to be left undisturbed with Nature, that she might have time to work her cure, for as far as he was concerned nothing could be done.

He knew that a tremendous storm was raging, though there was so little sea on that the motion of the vessel was not violent, for the simple reason that the tops of the waves were cut off by the terrific wind, which literally levelled the white waste of waters through which they tore.

It must have been about midnight when the cabin door was opened again, and the old sailor crept in and close up to the doctor's side.

"How is he, sir?" said the man, with his lips close to the doctor's ear.

"Very, very bad, my man," was the reply.

"Poor dear lad!" growled the old sailor. "So we are up yonder, sir."

"Oh!" said the doctor, quietly, but without taking his eyes from the patient.

"Engine's running at full speed to keep us head to wind."

"Oh!" said the doctor, in the same low, uninterested tone.

"Wust storm I was ever in, sir, and if it don't soon lull goodness knows what will happen next."

"Indeed?" said the doctor. "But go now. Quietness is everything for my patient now."

“Well, I’m blest,” said the man to himself; “it’s like talking to anyone in his sleep. Quietness, eh? Hang it! I didn’t make half so much noise as the wind. He’s thinking of that poor lad and of nothing else.”

It was so all through the night, the doctor hardly noticing the refreshments brought in by the white-faced steward, who tried to get up a conversation, but with very little success. “Terrible storm, sir.”

“Yes,” said the doctor.

“Bad for poor young Mr Cranford, aren’t it, sir?”

“Very bad.”

“Lot of the passengers ill, sir, and asking for you, sir.”

“Sea-sick?” said, the doctor, with a momentary display of interest. “Awful, sir.”

“I could do nothing for them, and I cannot leave my patient,” said the doctor, slowly.

The steward ventured upon another remark, but it was not heard.

During the next few hours the captain sent down twice for news, but did not once leave the deck, the storm raging with, if possible, greater violence; but the vessel fought bravely, backed as she was by the guidance of skilful hands, and evening was approaching, with everybody on board growing worn out with anxiety or exertion.

The night came on weird and strange, the white spray and the peculiar milky phosphorescent surface of the sea relieving the darkness, but giving in its place a terribly ghastly glare.

It was about seven, for the doctor had just glanced at his watch to see if it was time to repeat the medicine under whose influence he was keeping his patient, when all at once there was a tremendous shock as if there had been an explosion, a crashing sound heard for the moment above the tempest's din, and then the doctor was conscious of a change, and he knew what it meant. The thrill and vibration of the screw had ceased, and that could only mean one thing, the falling off of the propeller or the breaking of the shaft on which it turned.

He had proof of this a few minutes later in the movement of the great vessel, which no longer rode steadily over the swell, head to wind, but gradually fell off till she lay rolling in the hollows, careened over by the pressure of the storm, and utterly unmanageable.

There was a mingling of strange sounds now, as, following the motion of the vessel as she rolled heavily, everything below that was loose dashed from side to side of the cabins; but still the doctor paid no more heed. He retrimmed the lamp from time to time, and tried to retrim the lamp of Carey Cranford's young life; but it seemed to be all in vain.

Suddenly the door opened again, and this time it was not the steward's face which appeared, but the old sailor's.

"Any better, sir?" he said, hoarsely.

"No; worse," replied the doctor.

"So it is on deck, sir," whispered the man. "Main shaft broke short off, and propeller gone. They've been trying to hyste a bit o' sail so as to get steering way on, but everything's blew to rags."

The doctor nodded shortly, and after a longing look at the young patient the man went out on tiptoe.

A couple of hours went by, with the vessel rocking horribly, and then all at once there came a heavy grinding crash, and the rolling motion ceased, the vessel for a few brief moments seemed at peace on an even keel, and the doctor uttered a sigh of relief, which had hardly passed his lips before there was a noise like thunder, the side of the steamer had received a heavy blow, and hundreds of tons of water poured down over her, sweeping the deck, and then retiring with a wild hissing noise.

Doctor Kingsmead was experienced sailor enough to know that the steamer had been carried by the hurricane upon one of the terrible coral reefs of that dangerous sea, and he could foresee, as he believed, the result—the billows would go on raising the vessel and letting her fall upon the sharp rocks till she broke up, unless the storm subsided and the breakers abated in violence so that the passengers and crew might take to the boats.

He knit his brow and sat thinking for a few minutes of the chances of life and death at such a time, but became absorbed in the condition of his patient again, for there was his duty. There were the officers to see to the preservation of life from the wreck.

Once more he had warning of the state of affairs on deck, old Bostock hurrying down.

“Got anything you want to save, sir?” he said, excitedly; “if so shove it in your pocket. They’re getting the boats out. I’ll come and give you word, and help you with young squire here.”

“What!” said the doctor, excitedly now. “Impossible; it would mean death for the boy to be moved.”

“It’ll mean death, sir, if he aren’t moved,” said the old sailor, sternly. “You button him up in a coat, and be ready against I come.”

The door banged to, and the doctor hurriedly caught up some of his patient’s garments and stood frowning, as he leaned over him, felt his pulse, and then laid his hand upon the poor lad’s head.

“Impossible,” he said; “it would crush out the flickering flame of life. He cannot be moved.”

As he spoke he threw the clothes aside and went sharply towards the door and looked out, to see that the passengers were crowding up the cabin stairs in an awful silence, the horror of their position having brought them to a state of despairing calm.

The doctor stood looking at them for a few moments, and then turned to cross to his patient’s side, bending over him for a few moments, and then sinking into the seat by his side.

Chapter Three.

Meanwhile, after he had ineffectually tried everything possible to bring the steamer’s head to wind by means of the sails, the captain had to give up and let her drift, rolling heavily in the trough of the sea.

The storm still raged with terrific fury, and it was evident that the unmanageable vessel was being borne rapidly along.

But by slow degrees the violence of the wind began to abate, and fresh efforts were made in the semi-darkness, and with the waves thundering over the deck from time to time, to hoist something in the way of sail.

The men raised a cheer as this was at last successfully accomplished, and once more obeying her helm the great vessel ceased rolling, and rushed on for a few hundred yards at headlong speed.

But it was only to her fate, for rising high upon a huge billow she was borne



on for a short distance, and then there was the sudden check. She had struck on another of the terrible coral reefs, and was fast, offering an obstacle to the seething billows, at which they rushed, broke, and then fell over, deluging the deck, and tearing at everything in their way.

There seemed nothing more to be done but strive in the darkness to save life, and captain and officers clung together and worked manfully.

The minute after the vessel had struck on the reef there was a rush for the boats, but the officers were prepared. Revolvers leaped out, and three or four men were struck down, the captain setting the example.

Then the fit of insubordination died out on the spot, and in perfect order one of the boats was filled with women passengers and a crew, the moment was watched, and it was cast off and floated away on a huge wave, to be seen for a few moments, before it disappeared in the darkness.

Boat after boat was successfully despatched in this way without a single hitch, each receiving its crew commanded by one of the officers; and at last the barge only was left for the remainder and the captain, the last passenger having gone in the boat despatched before—the last so far as could be remembered in the hurry and confusion of the weird scene.

There was ample room for all as the captain stood holding on while men hurriedly brought up and threw in bags of biscuit and such necessaries as could be obtained in the hurry, the barge lying in its chocks, lifting with every wave and ready to float out at the open side at any time.

“Now then,” cried the captain, in a voice hoarse from continuous shouting, “you, Bostock, down below with you and help the doctor bring up the young passenger.”

“Ay, ay, sir,” cried the old sailor, and he waited a moment to avoid the water and then made a rush for the saloon cabin.

The next minute he was down below.

“Now, sir, quick,” he said; “boat’s just off. What! not ready?”

“It is impossible to move him, my man,” said the doctor in sombre tones.

“It’s murder to keep him here, sir,” cried the old sailor. “Come on—for your life!”

As he spoke he caught Carey in his arms before the doctor could interfere, dashed open the door, and quickly carried the insensible lad up to the sea-washed deck, to stand aghast and then hold on for his life.

For something white and ghastly, fringed with phosphorescent light, seemed to rise over the ship’s side, curve down over, glide under the barge lying in its chocks, and then lift the laden boat away over the open side.

It was seen for a few moments and then disappeared, going in one swift glide away into the darkness, leaving the doctor, his patient, and the old sailor amidst the hissing waters alone upon the deck.

Chapter Four.

“Here’s another coming,” roared Bostock, hoarsely. “Back into shelter, or we shall be swept away.”

He set the example, still bearing the insensible boy, and the next minute they had reached the comparative security of the saloon, where the water was now washing to and fro, coming in with a rush and pouring out again.

The first efforts of the two men were now directed towards carefully placing Carey high and dry in an upper berth of one of the state-room cabins, where a lamp was still burning steadily as it swung to and fro.

“Hasn’t killed him, has it, sir?” growled Bostock, excitedly, as the doctor examined his patient.

“No; he is breathing easily, and the bandages have not shifted,” replied the doctor, who then turned upon his companion in misfortune and said in a hard, defiant way: “Well, my man, this seems hard luck; we’re left in the lurch. I suppose the captain will not come back to take us off.”

“Come back and take us off, sir?” said the old sailor, with a bitter laugh. “Not him. He’s got his work cut out to keep that barge afloat. Lord help ’em all, I say, all on ’em in those open boats. There they are afloat among reefs and breakers in a storm like this. For aught we know, sir, they’re all capsized and washing about like so much chaff by now.”

“Then you think we’re better off than they are?”

“No, I don’t,” growled the old man, sourly, as a wave came thundering over the vessel, shaking it from bow to stern. “It won’t be long before one of them breakers’ll make a way in and bust up part of the deck; and after that it won’t be long before she’s ripped in pieces. Lor’ a mussy! the power of a thousand tons o’ water going miles an hour’s awful. Shreds beams into matches, and twists ironwork like wire. It only means a few minutes more to live, doctor; and, as you say, it do seem hard. Poor boy!” he continued, laying his great rough hand tenderly on Carey’s breast. “All his young life before him, and nipped off sudden like this.”

“Poor boy, yes,” said the doctor, gently. “But I’m thankful that he is quite insensible, and will not know the agony we have to face.”

The old sailor looked curiously in his companion’s face.

“Agony!” he said, slowly; “agony! Well, I suppose it is, but I’ve been face to face with the end so many times that I suppose I’ve got a bit blunt. Do you know, sir, it seems to nip me more about that poor young chap than it does about myself.”

The doctor looked at the speaker searchingly for a few moments, and then said, quietly:

“Can we do anything to try and save his life, my man? Life-preservers, raft, or anything of that sort?”

The old sailor laughed softly.

“Life-preserver in a sea like this means being smothered in a few minutes, and such a raft as we could make would be knocked to pieces and us washed off. No, sir; we’re in shelter where we can die peaceably, and all we can do is to meet it like men.”

The doctor’s brow knit, and he looked as if in horrible pain for a few moments. Then a calm, peaceful look came over his countenance, and he smiled and held out his hand.

“Yes,” he said, quietly; “meet it like men.”

The old sailor stared at him for a moment, and then snatched and gripped the extended hand in perfect silence.

“Ha!” he ejaculated at last. “I feel better, sir, after that. Now let’s talk about the youngster there.”

The huge breakers had kept on steadily thundering at the side of the steamer, rising over her and crashing down on her decks with the greatest regularity; but now, as the old sailor spoke and turned towards the insensible boy, it seemed as if a billow greater than any which had come before rolled up and broke short on the reef, with the result that the immense bank of water seemed to plunge under the broad side of the steamer, lifting her, and once more they were borne on the summit of the wave with a rush onward. There was a fierce, wild, hissing roar, and the

great vessel seemed to creak and groan as if it were a living creature in its final agony, and old Bostock gripped the doctor's hand again.

"It's come, my lad," he shouted, "and we'll meet it like men. We shall strike again directly, and she'll go to pieces like a bundle of wood."

The two men had risen to their feet, and to steady themselves they each laid the hand at liberty upon the berth which held their young companion.

How long they stood like this neither of them could afterwards have said, but it seemed an hour, during which the steamer was borne broadside on by the huge roller, each listener in the deafening turmoil and confusion bracing himself for the shock when she struck, till the rate at which she progressed began to slacken into a steady glide, the deafening roar of breakers grew less, and at last she rode on and on, rising and falling gently, and with a slow rolling motion each minute growing steadier.

But she did not strike.

The doctor was the first to speak.

"What does this mean?" he said, loudly, for the hissing and shrieking of the wind kept on.

"The rollers have carried her right over the reef into one of they broad lagoons, or else into the quieter water on the lee of the rocks, sir. She mayn't strike now, only settle down, and sink in deep water."

As he spoke there was a grinding sound, a sudden stoppage, the vessel having lifted a little and been set down with a great shock which threw the two men heavily against the bulkhead of the cabin in which they stood, and extinguished the lamp.

“We aren’t in deep water, sir,” roared Bostock, scrambling to his feet. “Hold on; here we go again.”

For the great steamer was lifted and glided steadily on for a while, to ground once more with a crashing sound.

“That’s scraping holes in her, sir,” cried Bostock.

Then again she lifted and was borne on, apparently hundreds of yards, to go crashing over the rough rocks again with a strange, deep, grinding sound which lasted for some moments, before they were at rest on nearly an even keel.

“Fast!” cried Bostock. “She’ll never stir again, sir. Ground her way all among the jagged coral rock, and she’s held as fast now as a ship’s boat pitched in a sea o’ spikes.”

Doctor Kingsmead made no reply for some little time, while the old sailor waited in vain for him to speak.

“Hurt, sir?” he cried at last.

“No,” was the reply, followed by a deep sigh but faintly heard in the roar of the wind.

“Then I’ll try if I can’t get a light, sir, afore one of us is. Seems nice to be still once more. Do you know, sir, as we may reckon as we’re saved?”

“Yes,” said the doctor, almost inaudibly; “but I can hardly believe it true.”

There was a clicking noise, and spark after spark of faint phosphorescent light across the black darkness.

This was repeated again and again, but without further effect.

“No go, sir,” cried Bostock then. “Got my matches wet, sir. If I lives to get through this I’ll allus keep ’em corked up in a bottle.”

There was another streak of light directly after, followed by a flash and a wax match burned brightly in the doctor’s fingers, for those he carried in a little silver box proved to be dry.

“Ha!” ejaculated Bostock, reaching up to the lamp, which was slowly subsiding from its pendulum-like motion. “I hate being in the dark, even if it’s only a fog. You never know which way to steer.”

“Can you light the lamp?”

“Yes, sir, all right, in a minute. Wick’s got shook down. That’s better; give me hold, or you’ll burn your fingers; mine’s as hard as horn. Well done; first go.”

For the wick caught and burned brightly, the glass was replaced, and the doctor was able to examine his patient once more.

“How is he, sir?”

“Just the same,” replied the doctor.

“Well done; that’s better than being worse, sir. And I say, it’s blowing great guns still, but nothing like what it was an hour ago. Dessay it’ll pass over before long. Come and let’s see what it’s like on deck.”

They went up together into a storm of blinding spray, which swept by them with a hissing rush; but there were no raging billows striking the steamer’s sides and curling over in turns to sweep the deck, and, getting into shelter, they tried vainly to make out their position.

They had no difficulty in stepping to the side of the saloon deck, for there was no water to wade through, and the great vessel was as steady now as if built upon a foundation of rock, and as soon as they had wiped the spray from their eyes they tried hard to pierce the gloom.

But in vain. It was not very dark, but there was a thick mist which seemed to glow faintly with a peculiar phosphorescent light that was horribly weird and strange, and after a few minutes' effort they turned to descend to the cabin again.

“This won't last long, sir,” shouted the old sailor in the doctor's ear; “these sort o' storms seldom do. Dessay it'll be all bright sunshine in the mornin'. We're safe as safe, with the reef and the breakers far enough away, but the old *Chusan* will never breast the waves again.”

“And all our friends?”

“Don't talk about it, sir. They were in sound boats, well manned, and with good officers to each, but—oh dear! oh dear!—the sea's hard to deal with in a storm like this.”

“Do you think, then, that there is no hope?”

“Oh no, sir, I don't say that, for, you see, the waves didn't run high. They may weather it all, but where they're carried to by the wind and the awful currents there are about here no one knows.”

“But are they likely to get back to us?”

“Not a bit, sir. They don't know where we are, and they'll have their work cut out to find where they are themselves.”

“Have you any idea where we are—what shore this is?”

“Hardly, sir. All I do know is that from the time the typhoon struck us we must have been carried by wind and the fierce currents right away to the west and south.”

“And that means where?”

“Most like off the nor’-west coast o’ ’Stralia, among the reefs and islands there. It’s like it is on the nor’-east coast, a reg’lar coral sea.

“Ha!” continued Bostock, when they were once more in shelter. “S’pose we take turn and turn now to watch young Master Carey. We’re both worn out, sir. You take fust rest; you’re worst.”

“No; lie down till I call you, my man.”

“Do you order me to, sir?”

“Yes, certainly.”

“Well, sir, I can’t help it; I’m dead-beat.”

The next minute the old sailor was down on the floor in his drenched clothes, sleeping heavily, while, in thankfulness for the life which seemed to have been given back when they were prepared to die, Doctor Kingsmead watched by his patient’s side, waiting for the cessation of the storm and the light of day, which seemed as if it would never come.

Chapter Five.

“I’m so thirsty! Please, I’m so thirsty; and it is so hot!”

Twice over Doctor Kingsmead heard that appeal, but he could not move to respond to it, for Nature would have her way. He had sat watching his patient's berth till he could watch no longer, since there are limits to everyone's endurance, and that morning he had suddenly become insensible to everything, dropping into a deep sleep that there was no fighting against.

He had slept all that day solidly, if the term may be used, quite unconscious of everything; but towards evening he began either to hear things or to dream and hear external sounds.

Feeling too reasserted itself. He was scorched by the heat, and there was a pleasant lapping, washing sound of water making its way into his ears for some time before someone said the above words.

He smiled at last in an amused way as he lay in a half-conscious state, for it seemed to him that it was he that declared how thirsty he was and how hot, and he felt how breathless it was.

So calm and still too, and so pleasant to lie back there in spite of heat and thirst, listening to that lapping, washing sound softened by distance into a whisper.

Then the words were repeated, and he lay perfectly still with his eyes close shut, thinking in a dreamy way that it would be wise to drink a glass of water and open a window to let in the air, for it must be a hot morning down in his old Devonshire home with the sun shining through upon his bed.

Then all at once he opened his eyes and lay looking down at something upon the floor—something lying in the full glow of the ruddy sunshine which came through the round plate glass of the port-hole, and he was still so much asleep that he was puzzled to make out what it meant.

By degrees he grasped faintly that it was a man fast asleep, and making a gurgling noise as he breathed, but he could not make out why that man should be asleep on the floor of his bed-room in Devonshire, down there at Dawlish where the blue sea washed against the red rocks.

It was very puzzling and confusing, and when for the third time he felt that he was saying that he was so hot and so thirsty he uttered a sigh and said to himself that he must get up and drink a glass of water and open his bed-room window, before lying down again.

This thought roused him a little from his deep, heavy, stupefied state, and he had a surprise. For he made an effort to get up, and then felt startled on realising the fact that he was not lying down, but sitting in an awkward position, his head hanging back over the side of a chair, and his neck stiffened and aching.

Then he knew that he was not at home in Devonshire, but in the state-room of a ship, and that the heat was stifling.

This was enough to rouse him from his state of stupefaction a little more, and then as he straightened his neck and looked about he fully awoke with one mental leap.

His first glance was at Carey, who had moved and lay in a different position, but was quite motionless now.

His next was at the little port-hole window, which he unfastened and threw open, to feel a puff of soft air and hear the gentle washing of the ocean, which spread out calm and still like a sea of gold beneath an orange sky.

It was very calm, just heaving softly, and from a distance came at intervals the deep booming roar of the breakers on a reef; but there was hardly a

breath of air, for the terrible hurricane had passed.

Stiff and aching from the awkward position in which he had slept, the doctor crossed to the door and pushed it open wide, with the result that the suffocating atmosphere of the cabin began rapidly to give place to the soft, warm, pure air, every breath of which cleared the late sleeper's brain and gave him strength.

"Bostock—Bostock," he said, softly; but there was no answer, and he bent down and touched the sleeper on the shoulder.

"Where away then?" grumbled the man.

"Bostock, wake up."

"Heave to! D'yer hear? heave to!" came in low, muttered tones.

"Bostock, man, wake up. You've been asleep these ten or twelve hours."

Still no sensible reply, and the doctor gave the man a rough shake.

"Ay, ay, sir," he shouted. "All hands on deck! Tumble up, you lubbers; tumble up."

"Hush!"

"Eh? The doctor! All right, sir. Why, I've been asleep!"

"Yes, yes, but be quiet," whispered his companion. "I was overcome and have slept too."

"But the youngster, sir?" whispered the old sailor, hoarsely, as he rose to his feet. "How is he, sir?"

“He has slept heavily. He does not seem any worse.”

“I’m so thirsty!” came feebly from the boy’s berth.

“Dear lad!” said Bostock, quickly. “I’ll get some water for him to drink.”

“Yes, quickly,” cried the doctor, as he recalled his dream-like ideas and grasped the truth.

The old sailor hurried out, and the doctor laid his hand gently on his patient’s head, to find it moist with perspiration. As he did so the boy’s eyes opened and he stared at the doctor wonderingly for a few moments before the light of recognition came into them, and he smiled.

“Doctor!” he said. “You here?”

“Yes, my dear boy,” said the doctor, gently. “How do you feel?”

“Been dreaming horribly, and got such a bad headache. But—but—”

He stared about him, then back at the doctor, and an anxious look came into his eyes.

“Have—have I been ill?” he said, in a husky voice, and he raised one hand to catch at the doctor’s, but let it fall with a faint cry of pain.

“Yes, a little; but you are getting better, my dear boy,” said the doctor, soothingly. “Don’t be alarmed; only lie still.”

“My shoulder throbs and burns, and my head is all queer. Ah, I remember now,” he cried, excitedly; “I fell.”

“Yes, yes, but—”

“Oh, doctor,” cried the boy, in a voice full of excitement, “don’t say I broke my new double glass!”

“My dear lad,” cried the doctor, smiling; “I don’t know.”

“Doctor!”

“But if you have I’ll buy you another.”

“So I fell from up aloft?”

“Here you are, sir,” came in a hoarse voice; “got at the tank quite easy, and I found a sound glass.”

Then the sturdy fellow gave a frisk after the fashion of an ancient goat.

“Hooroar!” he cried; “Jack’s alive O! I knew he wouldn’t die a bit!”

“Hush! Silence, man!” cried the doctor. “Mind! you’re spilling the water.”

“So I am,” said the old sailor, gruffly, and he began to pour out a glassful from the tin he held in one hand, raising the other so as to make the clear, cool liquid sparkle in bubbles as if he meant to give it a head.

“Ha!” sighed Carey, smiling. “Quick! I am so thirsty.”

He was about to try and rise, but the doctor checked him.

“Don’t do that,” he said. “I’ll raise you up, pillow and all, and Bostock shall hold it to your lips. No, stop.—Is the vessel much broken up, my man?”

“Not a bit, sir, but I expect she’s got holes in her bottom.”

“I won’t be a minute, Carey, lad. I’m going to my surgery. Don’t move.”

He hurried out, leaving Bostock standing with the glass and tin of water, breathing hard and staring down at the injured boy.

“Here, Bob,” said Carey, faintly. “What’s the matter?”

“You lie still and wait till the doctor comes back, my lad,” said the old fellow, gruffly.

“I am lying still,” said Carey, peevishly. “Tell me directly; what’s the matter?”

“Why, you said you knowed. I heard yer. You said you fell from up aloft.”

“Yes, yes,” cried Carey; “but the doctor asked you if the ship was much broken up.”

“Did he, sir?”

“You know he did, and you said she had got some holes in her bottom.”

“Did I, sir?”

“Yes, yes, of course you did,” cried Carey, impatiently.

“Well, it’s a rum un, then, sir.”

“Now, no nonsense; tell me, surely. Oh, I don’t understand!” sighed the boy, wearily.

“Here we are, my boy,” said the doctor, entering with a piece of glass tube bent at right angles. “Give me the glass, Bostock.”

“Glass it is, sir,” growled the man, and the doctor inserted one end of the glass syphon in the water and the other between his patient’s lips, so that he

could drink without being raised.

Carey half, closed his eyes, and his countenance bespoke his intense enjoyment, as the cool, pleasant water trickled slowly down his dry throat till the glass was emptied, and the old sailor raised the tin he held.

“’Nother go, sir?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Carey.

“No,” said the doctor; “not yet.”

“Ha!” sighed Carey; “but that was good. I say, doctor, I am broken somewhere, am I not?”

“Yes.”

“’Tisn’t my neck, is it?”

“Hor! hor! hor!” chuckled the old sailor.

“Well, it feels like it,” said Carey, pettishly.

“Perhaps I hardly ought to tell you now,” said the doctor, gravely.

“Then it is,” cried Carey, excitedly.

“No, no, no. Nonsense. You have fractured a bone, but it is not a serious matter, my dear fellow. It is the collar-bone, but if you are quiet it will soon knit together again.”

“How queer. But I’ve hurt my head too.”

“Yes, a good deal; but that will soon come right.”

“Not cracked it, have I, doctor?”

“Decidedly not.”

“Ha!” sighed the boy. “That’s a good job. That comes of having a good thick head, Bob. I remember slipping, but no more. I say, didn’t I come down an awful whop?”

“You lie still and don’t talk, my boy,” said the doctor, quietly.

“Yes, directly; but tell me about the ship. Why aren’t we going on? I can’t hear the throbbing of the engine.”

“Nay, my lad,” said the old sailor, shaking his head; “never no more.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, you must know, Carey, my lad,” said the doctor; “but I don’t want you to become excited about it. If I tell you, will you lie still then and be patient?”

“Of course I will, doctor, if I must.”

“The fact is, then, since your fall we have been in a terrible hurricane.”

“A hurricane? Why, it was only this morning I tumbled.”

The doctor shook his head.

“Never mind when it was,” he said. “You have been lying here some time, and I grieve to tell you that while you were insensible we had a great mishap. The main shaft broke, and we have been driven on a reef.”

“Wrecked?”

“Yes.”

“But we’re all saved?”

“I hope so,” said the doctor. “Now I shall tell you no more to-day. Will you have a little more water?”

“Yes, please,” said the boy, eagerly, and he drank the half-glassful more given to him with the greatest of avidity, closed his eyes directly after, and dropped off into a calm sleep.

“That’s bad, aren’t it, sir?” whispered the old sailor, as the doctor bent over his patient.

“Bad? No. Look at the soft dewy perspiration on his temples.”

“I see, sir. Oughtn’t it to be wiped dry?”

“No, no; let him sleep. It is a sign that he will not be troubled with fever, and its following weakness.”

“But he aren’t had no brackfuss, sir.”

“He has had all that he requires, and he will sleep for hours now.”

“Bless the lad! That’s good news, sir. It’s a fine thing to be a doctor, and know all these things. Can he be left, sir?”

“Yes; he will be better undisturbed.”

“Then don’t you think, sir, as you and me’d better go on deck and overhaul things a bit; see how things are and look round?”

“Yes, certainly.”

“Then you lead on, sir, for there’s a deal I’m wanting to see.”

The door was softly closed upon the sleeping lad, and doctor and able seaman stepped into the saloon to try and make out how they stood.

Chapter Six.

The sun was sinking low as the doctor and his companion reached the deck and then ascended to the bridge to have a hasty glance round before the brief tropical evening should give place to darkness, and in that rapidly made observation they grasped that the great steamer, wonderfully uninjured, lay aground in comparatively shallow water, doubtless upon the coral rocks which formed the bottom of a broad lagoon.

Everything loose had been carried away by the waves which had swept the decks, but the masts and funnel were standing comparatively uninjured, and as far as they could make out, scarcely any injury had been done to the structure of the ship.

“The mischief’s all below, sir, I expect,” said the old sailor. “We shall find she’s got a lot of water in her hold.”

“But she lies immovable, I suppose,” said the doctor.

“Quite, sir; she’s fast as fast can be, and’ll lie till she rusts away, which won’t be this side o’ fifty year.”

“Then there is no immediate danger?”

“Not a bit, sir, and it’s a bad job as those boats was launched; they’d all have been better here if the skipper could have known.”

“Yes; waited till the storm had passed,” assented the doctor.

“Ay, sir, but who could tell that we were going to be floated over the reef and set down, as you may say, in dock? Besides, if the skipper hadn’t ordered the boats out when he did there’d ha’ been a mutiny.”

“I suppose so; the crew would have risen against their officers.”

“The crew, sir? Yes, and the passengers too. There’d ha’ been a panic and a rush.”

The doctor sighed, shaded his eyes, and looked out from the side where they stood at the golden lagoon.

In the distance he could see the huge rollers breaking regularly on the coral reef—a wonderful sight in the setting sun, the water glowing orange and blood-red, while the spray which rose was a fiery gold.

“Magnificent,” said the doctor, softly, and he turned to cross to the other side of the deck to look out westward over a couple of hundred yards of smooth water to a grove of cocoanut-trees, beyond which was dense forest, and above that, hill and ravine running up glorious in the golden sunset for hundreds of feet.

“An island—a coral island, I suppose,” said the doctor.

“Nay, sir; there’s coral all about here, but that’s not a coral island; it runs up too big. I daresay that’s been an old volcano some time, and when we land we shall most likely find a bit of a lake of good water up yonder among the hills. Yes, that we shall, for look there among the trees, flashing like in the sunshine; that’s a bit of a waterfall. It’s a little river, you see, where the lake empties out.”

The doctor nodded. "I think we have seen enough for this evening, Bostock," he said, with a sigh; "everything would look so beautiful if one did not feel so sad."

"Sad, sir?" cried the old sailor, wonderingly. "What, with young Master Carey coming round instead o' lying dead and cold; and us safe and sound with a well-stored ship anchored under our feet?"

"Yes, that is all good and comforting, Bostock," said the doctor; "but what about all our companions and friends?"

"Ay, and mates too," said the old sailor. "Yes, that's bad, but there's always a bit o' blue sky behind the clouds. Who knows, sir, but what they may all be making for port over this smooth red sea after riding out the storm?"

"I hope they are," said the doctor, fervently.

"Same here, sir," said the old sailor. "Perhaps they are, and mebbe just at this here very blessed moment there's some on 'em feeling as sorry as we are 'cause they think as the *Susan's* gone down in the deep sea and taken with her that there dear boy, the doctor, and poor old Bob Bostock. Ay, sir, some of our chaps didn't much like me, because I was hard on some o' the young ones over making 'em tackle to. But I'll be bound to say, sir," cried the old man, chuckling till the tears stood in his eyes, "some on 'em'll be saying among theirselves that old Bob Bostock was as good a mate as ever stepped the deck."

"I hope so too," said the doctor, smiling; "people are very fond of finding out a man's good qualities when he's dead."

"But I aren't dead, sir, and I don't mean to be dead as long as I can help it. But don't you feel awful sick and faint, sir?"

“Faint?”

“Yes, sir. Human nature’s human nature, you know, sir, and if you stop its victuals it gets ravenish. I aren’t had a mouthful of anything but salt water for quite thirty hours, and I don’t believe you have neither.”

“I don’t believe I have, Bostock,” said the doctor, smiling.

“Thought not, sir. So what do you say to going and looking up the stooard’s and the cook’s quarters and seeing what we can find?”

“Yes, Bostock, the wisest thing we can do, and I must be thinking about my patient too. I must not let him starve.”

Chapter Seven.

There was not much time for examination before darkness set in, but enough to prove to the two seekers that there was not the slightest cause for anxiety respecting provisions; for, without taking into consideration what the sea and shore might afford them upon being tried, there was the full run of the ample stores provided for about a hundred people, and the great tanks of fresh water. In short, as Bostock put it:

“Why, there’s enough for us three to live like fighting cocks for a whole year, sir, and to have company too. Then there’s water ashore, as we saw plainly enough, and there’s sure to be something or another to eat there, besides cocoanuts, which aren’t bad if you drink ’em. Bound to say there’s hysters too, while, as for fish, I know what these waters are. You’ve only got to put a bit o’ bait on a hook and hold it out, and the fish are so hungry for it that they’ll jump out o’ water or rush ashore to catch it. Why, we’re in luck, sir.”

“Luck, Bostock?” said the doctor, sadly.

“Yes, sir, luck. It’s an awful bad job for the old *Susan* to be wrecked; but she’s well insured, I’ve no doubt, and there must be disasters at sea sometimes.”

“And the passengers and crew, my man?” said the doctor, bitterly.

“Saved, every one of ’em, we hope and pray, sir, and as I said afore, pitying us poor chaps as they think warn’t. Beg pardon, sir, you’re a gentleman and a scholar, while I’m only a poor uneducated sort of a fellow as never had any time for schooling but I’ve larnt a deal in my time, not book larning, but useful stuff.”

“Well,” said the doctor, smiling, for the old sailor had stopped short; “why don’t you go on, Bostock?”

“Thought I was getting too forrard, sir.”

“No, no, go on; what were you about to say just now?”

“Well, sir, only this, that it’s best to take things as they come and not grumble. Here we are, unfortunate, as you may say, but what a lot worse off we might be. Little while ago, as we thought, there was young Master Carey dying as fast as he could, and us just waiting to go to the bottom. Now here’s that there dear lad asleep comf’table and getting better, and you and me with the pick o’ the berths and the saloon all to ourselves, getting ready to have a reg’lar good, square meal. Aren’t got so werry much to grumble at, have we?”

Doctor Kingsmead gave the speaker a hearty slap on the shoulder.

“Bostock,” he said, “you’re a philosopher. There, we’ll make the best of things, and, in the hope that our poor friends are all saved, I will not murmur against our fate.”

“That’s right, sir, and now if you don’t mind my being a bit rough I’ll be cook and stoard, and you’ll soon have your bit to eat, and when you’ve done—”

“You will have done too,” said the doctor, “and we must drop distinctions now. So help me make the coffee, and then we’ll have our meal, and afterwards we must make our plans.”

They made very few plans that night, for in spite of their long sleep that day the exhaustion they had gone through during the typhoon still told upon them so that, after seeing to Carey, who was sleeping peacefully enough, they took it in turns to keep watches of three hours’ length, and passed the night sleeping or listening to the soft, low boom of the breakers on the reef.

The morning broke gloriously, and the sunshine and soft air seemed to send a thrill of elasticity through the doctor, which grew into a feeling of joy as he examined his patient, who slept still as if he had not moved during the night.

He stepped out of the cabin to hear Bostock whistling away cheerily in the steward’s department: but the whistling ceased as soon as the doctor appeared.

“Morning, sir. What do you make o’ the young skipper?”

“Sleeping still,” said the doctor; “a beautiful, restful sleep, without a trace of fever.”

“Hooroar for that, sir. Best thing for him, aren’t it?”

“Yes, so long as we keep up his strength.”

“We, sir? You mean you.”

“I mean we, Bostock, for you will help.”

“All right, sir, ready *and* willin’.”

“The sleep will be the best thing for him, and when we can move him we’ll have him up on deck, and contrive a shade.”

“Oh, I can soon do that, sir. We couldn’t rig up the old awning again, but there’s plenty of canvas to set up a little un. Is he ready for some breakfast, do you think?”

“I would not wake him on any consideration. Let him sleep.”

“Good, sir. There’s a bit ready as soon as you like, and after that we can get to work.”

Carey still slept on whilst the doctor and old Bob made a hearty meal, and, taking advantage of the freedom thus afforded them, they examined their position in relation to the shore by naked eye and with one of the glasses from the captain’s cabin.

There it all was as they had partly seen overnight: the vessel firmly fixed in the rocky shallows of a great lagoon, whose waters were fast becoming of crystal-clearness and as smooth as a pond, while sea-ward there was the great sheltering reef with everlasting breakers thundering and fretting and throwing up a cloud of surf.

On the other side, comparatively close at hand, was, as far as they could make out, the lovely shore of a beautiful island, bathed in sunshine and

glorious in rich verdure and purple shade, while they could now clearly see the sparkling surface of the stream, which tumbled in rapids and falls down to the vivid blue waters of the lagoon.

“Looks good enough for anything, sir, don’t it?”

“A perfect paradise, Bostock,” said the doctor, who could hardly tear his eyes from the glorious scene.

“It just is, sir,” said the old sailor; “makes a man feel quite young again to see it. My word! won’t that dear lad enjoy hisself as soon as he’s well enough to go ashore? I’m reckoning ongoing with him, sir. Won’t be to-day, I suppose?”

“No,” said the doctor, smiling, as he closed the glass in its case; “nor yet this month, Bostock.”

“That’s a long time, sir. I might pig-aback him if we got him ashore.”

“Let’s get him well first.”

“Right, sir, you know best; but I don’t want the poor young chap to be dull and moping. I might rig up some fishing-tackle for him, though, so’s he could sit on deck here and fish.”

“Yes, by-and-by; but he will not be dull. We’ll amuse him somehow.”

“That we will, sir; and now you must be skipper and take the lead, for I s’pose we shall have to live here a bit.”

“Is that likely to be the mainland?” said the doctor, by way of answer.

“Not it, sir. One of the hundreds of islands out in these parts.”

“I see no sign of inhabitants.”

“That’s right, sir. Men’s scarce about here. We shan’t see none, and I don’t expect we shall see any ships go by. Skippers give these waters a wide berth on account of the coral reefs. Strikes me that we shall have to make ourselves comf’table and wait till something turns up. The *Susan’s* as safe as a house. Even if another storm comes, as there will some day, she can’t move. She’ll get to be more of a fixter as the years go by, with the coral growing up all round her.”

“Do you think it will?”

“Think, sir? Why, it grows up just like as if it was so much moss in a wood.”

“Then you are ready to make up your mind to be here for years to come?”

“Yes, sir; aren’t you?”

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

“We couldn’t be better off, sir. Now, just you wait a bit, sir, and you’ll see something. Directly that young chap’s well enough, we shan’t be able to hold him. He’ll be ’bout half mad with delight. He won’t want to go away—not for a long time, at all events.”

“Well, we shall see,” said the doctor. “Now let’s go below.”

“Right, sir. I wouldn’t do anything till you come.”

They began a tour of inspection at once, making their way as far down as they could, to find that the lower hold was eight or ten feet deep in water,

which covered the heavy cargo of railway iron, machinery, casks, and miscellaneous goods.

“’Bout high water now, sir,” said the old sailor. “It’ll sink a good deal when the tide’s out. We seem to have come on at high water.”

“Would it be possible to stop it out, and in the course of time pump the vessel clear?”

“Not if we’d got fifty steam pumps, sir: that water’ll flow in and out and be always sweet—I mean salt—for she’s got plates below there ripped off like sheets of writing paper. But the water won’t hurt us, and the stores such as we want are all above it. There’s nothing to mind there.”

The doctor nodded in acquiescence, and they went on with their search, to find more and more how well they were provided for, old Bostock chuckling again and again as each advantage came home to him.

“I don’t believe no shipwrecked chaps was ever so well off before. Why, it’s wonderful how little the *Susan*’s hurt. Look at the store of coals we’ve got, and at the cook’s galley all ready for cooking a chicken—if we had one—or a mutton chop, if the last two sheep hadn’t been drowned and washed away along with the cow. Now, that was bad luck, sir. Drop o’ milk’d been a fine thing for that there boy if I could ha’ squeezed it out. I never did try to milk, sir, but I’d ha’ tried. Don’t suppose it would ha’ been so very hard, if the old cow would ha’ stood still. Milk would be a fine thing for him, wouldn’t it?”

“Yes, excellent,” said the doctor, with a peculiar smile; “but we have no cow, Bostock.”

“Tchah! Of course not, sir,” said the old sailor, giving himself a slap on the mouth, “and me talking like that. But hi! Look here, sir,” he continued,

pointing shoreward.

“What at?” said the doctor, who was startled by the man’s energy. “What do you see—natives?”

“No, no, sir; there, sir, in a row along beyond the sands. Noo milk for that there lad, sir. Vegetable cows—cocoanuts. Plenty for years to come.”

“Yes, we shall be in the midst of plenty,” said the doctor, looking wistfully round. “Prisoners, perhaps, but happily provided for. Look yonder, Bostock.”

“What at, the birds, sir? I’ve seen ’em all the morning. Ducks and terns as well as gull things. They seem to be nesting about those rocks yonder. And of coarse that means noo-laid eggs for that there boy; yes, and roast duck. There’s shooting tackle down below, isn’t there, sir?”

“Yes, the captain has arms, and I have a double gun in my cabin.”

“There, hark at that, sir,” cried the old sailor. “Now what could one wish for more?”

“What indeed?” said the doctor, smiling at his companion’s enthusiasm.

“Nothing, sir,” cried Bostock. “Yes, there’s something, sir, as we haven’t got and we must have.”

“What’s that?”

“A boat, sir, to get ashore with. Now, that is a bit o’ bad luck.”

“Ah, yes, we must have a boat to go ashore, and every one has gone.”

“Yes, sir, even the little dinghy. That must ha’ been washed away, same as the gig, for that warn’t launched. But all right, sir; there’s other ways o’ killing a cat besides hanging. We must make one.”

“Or a raft,” said the doctor.

“Raft’ll do to begin with. Four bunged-up casks and some boards’ll do first. That’s easy to make on deck, for there’s the carpenter’s tools, and we can easily rig up tackle to hyste it over the side. It’s the boat as’ll bother us, but you never know what you can do till you try.”

“No, Bostock, you never do.”

“That’s so, sir. A boat we want, and a boat we’ll have. I say, sir, just think of it; won’t that there dear lad just enjy having a boat to sail and fish about here in the lagoon, or out yonder across the reef on a calm day?”

“Yes, we must get him well, Bostock,” said the doctor, smiling. “Come along: we need not examine our position any more; let’s see if he is awake.”

“And ready for a drop o’ soup, sir. There’s rows of them tins o’ portable, as they call it, sir, in the store-room. Drop warmed up ought to be just the thing now, poor lad; he can’t work his teeth as he should.”

“We’ll see,” said the doctor, and they made their way towards the saloon, but only to stop short and listen to the sounds which came softly through the cabin bulkheads—sounds which made the old sailor drop into the attitude of one with folded arms about to perform a hornpipe, and executing three or four steps, to end suddenly with a slap on the leg.

“Hear that, sir?” he whispered, softly. “That’s what I call real pluck in a lad with his upper works broke clean in half. Just think o’ that!”

Chapter Eight.

It was a pleasant sound: sometimes a mere humming, sometimes the melody sung to a few of the words.

For Carey was lying in his berth with his head turned so that he could gaze through the open port-hole at the glorious, glistening sea, and as the doctor very softly pushed the door a little open there came clearly to the listeners' ears a scrap of the old sea song, "The Mermaid":—

“And we jolly sailor boys were sitting up aloft,
And the land-lubbers lying down below, below, below,
And the land-lubbers lying down below.

“Hullo! Who's that? Oh, you, doctor! I say, what a time you've been! I'm so hungry. Mayn't I get up?”

“Good signs those, my lad,” said the doctor, cheerily; “but not yet,” and he sat down, after easing the poor boy's bandages, to chat to him about the state of affairs, every word of which was eagerly drunk in, while Bostock played the part of cook and warmed up some gravy soup.

It soon became evident that Carey was going to develop no bad symptoms from the injury to his head, and that his sufferings were to be confined to the broken collar-bone, which, under Doctor Kingsmead's care, gave promise of a rapid knitting together. There was pain enough to bear, but the boy's bright elastic temperament was in his favour. He was what the doctor called a good patient, and health and youth joined to help him on.

As soon as possible he was allowed on deck to watch the making of a raft and use his uninjured glass in studying the shore of the island, with its constant change of hue. Then, too, there was the reef with the clouds of

spray, and the beautiful lagoon, alive at times with the fish which came in with the tide through an opening in the reef, beyond which there was the heaving, open sea.

“It doesn’t seem a bit like being shipwrecked,” said Carey one day, as he lay back in a cane chair. “One has so many things about one. Shipwrecked folk don’t generally have plenty of tools and things. I say, doctor, shall I be fit to go with you the first time you go ashore?”

“Would you like to?”

“Like to! Oh, I say,” cried the boy; “fancy being left here alone in the ship when you two go. I say, don’t leave me; it would make me worse.”

“Wait a bit, and we’ll see. The raft is not ready yet. Bostock has not fitted the mast and sail.”

“No,” said Carey, thoughtfully. “I say, isn’t he dreadfully slow?”

The doctor laughed.

“Well, I was thinking something of the kind, certainly, my boy.”

Carey was silent and thoughtful for a few minutes, and then he began again.

“It’s very beautiful lying back here,” he said at last, “and sometimes I feel as if I should like to do nothing else for a month to come. Then I get hot and fidgety and tired of it all. Yes, he is horribly slow. I’ve watched him, and instead of knocking a nail right in at once he gets boring holes and measuring and trying first one and then another till he gets one to suit him. It makes me feel sometimes as if I should like to throw books at him. I’ll tell him to make haste and finish.”

“Better not, perhaps,” said the doctor, quietly, as he busied himself trying to catch some of the floating jelly-fish over the side with a rope and bucket. “You may hurt his feelings.”

No more was said on the subject then, for there was enough to interest the patient in examining with a magnifying glass the curious creatures captured; but Carey had not forgotten, and that evening when the doctor was below and Bostock had brought up the bag of tools he used to work upon the clumsy-looking raft he was building, the boy lay back watching him chewing away at a piece of tobacco, and bending thoughtfully over the structure.

“I say,” cried Carey at last in a peevish tone, “when are you going to finish that raft?”

“Finish it, my lad?”

“Yes, finish it. How many more days are you going to be?”

Bostock screwed up his face, rose erect in a very slow and deliberate way, laid down the auger he held, and took off his cap to scratch his head.

“Finish it?” he said, thoughtfully. “Well, I don’t quite know; you see, I must make it reg’lar strong.”

“Of course,” cried Carey, “but you spend so much time thinking about it.”

“Well, yes, my lad, I do, certainly; but then, you see, I have to do the thinking and making too. There’s on’y me, you see.”

“Why didn’t you let the doctor help you? He did want to.”

“Ye—es, he did want to, my lad,” said the old sailor, in the slowest and most provoking way. “He’s a wonderful clever man too, is the doctor. See what a beautiful job he’s making of your broken timbers; but what does he know about making a raft? This is my job, and bime-by it’ll be my job to make a boat, which’ll want more thinking about than even this.”

“Pooh! I could have made it in half the time.”

“Ah, you think so, my lad, just the same as I might think I could ha’ mended your broken colly bone. But I couldn’t, and I wouldn’t offer to, and of course I don’t want the doctor to meddle with my work.”

“It’s horrible to watch you,” said Carey, pettishly. “I get sick of seeing you.”

“Do you, now?” said Bostock, smiling; but he shook his head. “Not you, my lad; you only say so. You’re getting better; that’s what’s the matter with you.”

“Pish!” ejaculated the boy, contemptuously. “There, drive in a few more nails to make all fast, and then it’ll be done.”

“Done, sir? Not it,” said the old man, walking slowly round the cumbrous construction. “I’ve been thinking that I shall put in two more casks, one on each side.”

“What!” cried Carey, angrily. “Why, that’ll take you another fortnight.”

“Nay, nay,” said the old sailor, coolly; “not a fortnight; say a week or ten days.”

“And it will make it heavier too. I don’t believe you can launch it as it is.”

“Not launch it?” said Bostock, tapping the casks at the four angles, one after another, with the handle of the auger, and being apparently so well satisfied with the drum-like tones that he worked round once more. “Oh, yes, I can get her launched easy enough with a rope through a block and the stern capstan. There won’t be no trouble about that.”

“Finish it off then, and never mind putting two more casks in.”

“Look ye here, my lad,” said the old fellow, solemnly, “do you suppose I want that there raft to capsize and shoot us off among the sharkses?”

“Of course not. Seen any of them, Bob?”

“Lots, my lad. They come swimming round this morning as if looking out for bits for breakfast. Why, if that raft capsized they’d chew us up like reddishes. I’m not going to risk that, my lad. I’ve got a character to lose, you see. I’m making this raft, and I want it to be a raft as you and the doctor’ll be proud on—a raft as we can row or sail or go fishing with.”

“Yes, fishing,” said Carey, eagerly. “When am I to have that line and try for something?”

“Oh, we’ll see about that,” said the old sailor, coolly. “Let’s get the raft done first.”

“Get the raft done first!” cried Carey, angrily. “You’ll never get it done.”

“Oh, yes, I will, my lad; and it’ll be one you could dance on if you liked. Don’t you be in such a precious hurry.”

“Precious hurry, indeed. Do you know what it means to be sitting here and hardly allowed to move day after day?”

“Course I do, my lad. I see you.”

“But you don’t know how horribly tiresome it is,” cried Carey, who was growing more and more exasperated. “Look here, haven’t you promised me time after time that you’d have a fishing-line ready for me so that I could hold it when the tide came in and get a few fish?”

“To be sure I did,” said Bostock, coolly.

“Then why don’t you do it?”

“Look ye here, my lad, you are getting better, you know, and that’s what makes you so rusty.”

“Anyone would get rusty, doing nothing day after day. Now then, Bob, I’ll stand no more nonsense. You get the fishing-line directly. Do you hear?”

“Oh, yes, my lad, I hear. You spoke loud enough.”

“Then why don’t you go and get one?”

“’Cause I’m busy making a raft.”

“That you’re not. You’re only fiddling about it like an old woman.”

“Hor, hor!” laughed the man. “Like an old woman!”

“Will you fetch me a long fishing-line?”

“No good now, sir; tide’s going out.”

“Never you mind about that. I want a line.”

Bostock carefully placed the auger against one end of a plank, grunted twice over, and then began to turn the handle.

“Precious hard bit o’ wood, sir.”

“Are you going to fetch me that line, sir?” cried Carey.

“Bime-by, my lad.”

“No, I want it now,” cried Carey.

Bostock took the auger from the hole he had begun to make, and held it as if it was a hammer with which he was going to threaten the boy.

“Look ye here, my lad,” he said, “do you know what the fish is like as comes into this lagoon?”

“Yes, of course I do; like fish,” said Carey, angrily.

“Fish they is; but do you know how big some of ’em are?”

“No.”

“Well, I do. There’s some of ’em big enough to pull like donkeys. Now, jest s’pose as you hooks one.”

“Well, suppose I do? We’ll have it out, and you shall cook it. Doctor Kingsmead said it would be nice to have a bit of fresh fish.”

“That’s right enough, my lad; but let’s go back to what I said. Suppose you hook one, what then?”

“Why, I should catch it.”

“Not you, sir. You’d be a bit excited, and you’d pull, and the fish’d pull, and in about a brace o’ shakes we should have your upper timbers, as the doctor’s been taking so much trouble to mend, all knocked to pieces again. Now then, my lad, what have you got to say to that?”

Carey had nothing to say to it, so he lay back with his face puckered up, staring straight before him.

The old sailor used the auger as a hammer and tapped the end of one of the casks so that it sounded loudly.

“Now then, my lad,” he cried, sharply, “aren’t that true?”

“I suppose it is, Bob,” said Carey, rather dolefully.

“That’s right, my lad. You’re getting right, and I want to see you quite right, and then you shall have a line half a mile long, if you like.”

Carey was silent, and after giving him a nod the old sailor turned deliberately to his work, grunting slowly and laboriously over boring at the hole, and resting from time to time, while as the boy watched him a thought flashed into his head and gradually grew brighter and brighter till he could contain himself no longer, for the old sailor’s actions seemed to be so contrary to all that the boy knew, and he felt that he had got hold of a clue.

“Look here, Bob,” he said, “suppose—”

“Yes, sir,” said the old sailor, for the boy stopped, and he was glad of the opportunity for resting. “I am supposing, sir; go on.”

“I was going to say, suppose we knew that the *Chusan* was breaking up under our feet; how long would it take you to finish that raft?”

“But she aren’t a-breaking up under our feet, sir. You might take the old *Susan* on lease for one-and-twenty year, and she’d be all solid at the end.”

“But suppose she was going down, Bob.”

“But she couldn’t be going down, my lad,” argued the old sailor; “she’s got miles o’ solid coral rock underneath her.”

“Never mind what she has underneath her. I say, suppose she was sinking under our feet; how long would it take you to finish the raft so that we could get ashore?”

“Well, ’bout five minutes,” said the old fellow, with a grim smile.

“There, I knew it!” cried Carey, excitedly. “I knew it; and you’re going on day after day regularly playing with the job for some reason of your own.”

“Nay, nay, nay,” cried the old fellow, picking up a nail, seizing a hammer, and driving away loudly.

“It isn’t because you’re lazy.”

“Oh, I dunno, sir; there’s no skipper now, and everything’s to one’s hand. I don’t see why one should work too hard.”

“That’s all gammon, Bob,” said Carey, sternly.

“Hark at him! Why, I never heard you talk that how afore, sir.”

“You’re dawdling on for some reason, Bob. You see, you owned that you could make the raft seaworthy in five minutes.”

“Ay, ay, my lad, but then she’d only be rough. I’m going on polishing like, and making her a raft to be proud on. I said so afore.”

“That’s all stuff and nonsense, Bob,” cried Carey. “I know. Now tell the truth; you’ve some reason for being so long.”

Bostock was silent, and he screwed up his mahogany-tinted face till he looked ten years older.

“Come, sir, speak the truth.”

“Allus does,” said the old fellow, gruffly.

“Let’s have it then. Why are you spinning out this job so long and won’t get it done?”

“Am I, sir—spinning it out like?”

“Yes, you know you are. Now, are you going to tell me why?”

“No, I aren’t,” growled the old fellow.

“Very well, but I believe I know.”

“Not you, my lad. I tell you I’m going to make an out-and-out good job of it.”

“Keeping it back so as not to go till I’m well enough to go too. That’s why,” said Carey, and he looked at the old sailor searchingly, and tried to catch his eye, the one that was open, the other being close shut. But it was impossible, for Bostock made believe to have great difficulty in hitting that nail exactly on the head, and hammered away with all his might.

“Now then, are you going to own it, sir?” cried Carey.

Bostock gave seven or eight final blows with the hammer as if he were performing on an old-fashioned knocker, and finished off with a final bang,

before turning round, and with both eyes open now he said defiantly:

“Own up, sir? No, I aren’t, but there, she’s finished now.”

“Quite ready to go into the water?” said Carey.

“Yes,” said the old fellow, bluntly; “she’d bear us and a load o’ bricks if we had ’em.”

“And that’s why you’ve kept her back,” said Carey, half-mockingly, but with a choking sensation in his throat—due to weakness perhaps.

“I aren’t going to say naught,” said the old fellow, gruffly.

“But you haven’t polished her.”

“No; I aren’t,” said Bostock, and he began to gather up his tools.

“But you can’t be proud of such a rough thing as that.”

Carey laughed at the queer look the old fellow gave.

“There,” he cried, “didn’t I say you were making believe?”

“Nay, that you didn’t, sir. I never heard you.”

“Here’s Doctor Kingsmead coming up.”

“Here, I say, don’t you say a word to him, my lad,” cried the old sailor in an anxious whisper.

“Will you own to it then?”

“Nay, that I won’t,” came in a growl.

“Here, doctor,” cried Carey, loudly.

“Yes, what is it?”

“Oh, Master Carey, don’t tell on a fellow,” whispered Bostock.

“You’re just in time. The raft’s done. Bostock has just driven in the last nail.”

“Glad to hear it,” said the doctor. “Then I suppose we may get her into the water to-morrow.”

“Yes, sir, she’ll do now,” growled the old sailor.

“That’s right,” said the doctor. “Look here, Carey, my lad, we’ll try how she rides in the water to-morrow, and if she’s all right, I think we might swing you down in a chair from a block, and you might go with us, for you need not exert yourself in the least. You would sit in the chair.”

“Yes,” cried the boy, eagerly. “I feel sure it wouldn’t hurt me a bit.”

“What do you say, Bostock? Could we manage?”

“That we could, sir; wrap him up and drop him down so as we shouldn’t disturb a fly on him.”

“Then we’ll try,” said the doctor, to the boy’s great delight.

A few minutes later Bostock watched for his chance when the doctor had gone below, and went up to Carey’s chair.

“Thought you was going to split on me, sir,” he whispered.

“Then I was right?” said Carey.

“Well, what was the good o’ us going and leaving you behind, my lad? You wouldn’t ha’ liked that?”

“No,” said the boy, drawing a deep breath, as he looked half-wonderingly at the rough old sailor, and thought something about good-heartedness and kindly thought, as he said aloud:

“No, Bob, I don’t think I should have liked that.”

Chapter Nine.

The raft was not launched the next morning, and Bostock did not even begin to make preparations with the blocks and pulleys for getting it over the side.

Carey was rather restless when he went to bed, the thought of the coming change and the idea of gliding over the smooth waters of the lagoon producing in his still weak state enough excitement to keep him awake for hours, so that it was well on towards morning before he went off soundly to sleep; but when he was once off he slept as if he meant to indulge himself for eight-and-forty hours.

“Hullo!” he cried when he awoke, “anything the matter?”

For he found the doctor sitting reading close to his berth.

“Matter? No, I hope not,” replied the doctor, closing his book. “Had a good rest?”

“Yes, I have been sound asleep. What made you call me so early?”

“Early, eh? What time do you suppose it is?”

Carey glanced towards the round window, which looked dim and grey, and the cabin quite gloomy.

“I don’t know,” he said. “Close upon sunrise, I suppose.”

“Close upon mid-day. Don’t you hear the rain?”

“Rain? Yes, I was wondering what it was.”

“A regular tropical downpour. No going ashore to-day.”

“Oh, how tiresome! I say, though, why did you let me sleep so long?”

“Because Nature said you wanted rest. It was better to let you have your sleep out.”

“But it will soon clear up, will it not?”

“I’m thinking it will not,” said the doctor.

He thought right, for on and off the downpour lasted a fortnight, with storm after storm of thunder and lightning, and the occupants of the stranded vessel were kept close prisoners, only getting a short visit occasionally to the drenched deck, where Carey used his glass to watch the torrent ashore, which had grown into a tremendous fall, whose roar came like muffled thunder to his ears.

“It’s horribly disappointing,” he said, gloomily, on the fourteenth day. “I did so want to go ashore.”

“Out of evil comes good,” said the doctor, cheerily. “You have had another fortnight’s enforced rest, and it has done wonders towards the knitting up of the bone.”

“No,” said the boy, quickly, “it’s not so well. It aches more than ever today.”

“That’s only from the weather,” said the doctor, laughing. “I daresay you will feel aching sensations like that for months to come, whenever there’s a change in the weather.”

Carey looked at him with so pitiful a countenance that the doctor laughed now heartily.

“I don’t see anything to laugh at,” said the boy.

“Bah! you don’t mind a little pain. Come, cheer up; this long wait has been all for the best. You are a wonderful deal stronger now.”

“But look here, Doctor Kingsmead,” said the boy, earnestly; “am I really better and stronger, or are you saying that to comfort me?”

“I am saying it because it is the simple truth.”

“Ha!” ejaculated Carey, and his face lit up, and then grew brighter still, for the sun came out, glorifying everything, the clouds were floating off the hills so that they could once more be seen, looking dazzlingly green, and the island, as far as they could see, appeared ten times more beautiful than ever.

“You’ll have the raft lowered at once now?” cried Carey, eagerly.

“What, while everything is still drenched with rain? No, let’s wait till tomorrow.”

“And then it may be raining again.”

“I think not,” said the doctor. “Use your glass a little, and you’ll see that everything ashore is so saturated that we could not go a dozen yards without being drenched.”

“It does look rather wet,” said Carey, grudgingly; but he soon brightened up, and looked on while the doctor got out his gun and cleaned a few specks of rust from the barrel, while that afternoon Bostock prepared everything for the launching, getting done in such good time that, as there were a couple of hours’ more daylight, it was decided to try and get the raft over the side.

It looked cumbersome enough, but there was no difficulty in levering it along the deck by means of capstan bars, after which the rope running through the block high up was made fast to one side, and the doctor and Bostock began to haul: but the effect was not satisfactory, and Bostock stopped and scratched his head.

“Here, let me help,” cried Carey; but the doctor roared at him, and the boy wrinkled up his brow.

“Well,” said the doctor, when, after hauling one side up a little, they had lowered it again.

“Seems to me, sir,” said the old sailor, “that we’ve got our work cut out to haul her up and lower her down.”

“Yes, we want a couple of men to help,” said the doctor.

“And we aren’t got ’em,” growled Bostock.

“Why don’t you haul one side up till the raft’s edgewise, and then work it out through the gangway with the levers till it overbalances and tumbles in?” said Carey.

“Ah, to be sure, sir,” said Bostock, mopping his dripping face; “why don’t we?”

“What, and shake the thing all to pieces with the fall?” said the doctor.

“Nay, nay, nay, sir; don’t you say such a word as that,” grumbled Bostock. “I don’t do my work like that. I took lots o’ time over her, didn’t I, Master Carey?”

“You did, Bob,” said the boy, with a queer cock of one eye.

“Consekens is, she’s as strong as can be.”

“You think it would hold together then?” said the doctor.

“Sure on it, sir.”

“Let’s try, then.”

The rope was fastened, the capstan bars were seized, and in a few minutes, as the two men turned, the rope tightened, the raft gradually rose, and soon after stood up edgewise, resting on two of



“Yo, ho, ho, and look out: over she goes!” (p. 99).

the corner tubs, and without the slightest disposition to topple over. Then the rope was slackened so as to allow enough to act as a painter to moor the unwieldy framework to the side, levers were seized, and inch by inch it was hitched along the deck to the gangway, and then on and on till a quarter of it was outside, when there was a halt for inspection to see if all was right for it to fall clear.

Bostock declared that it was, but the doctor shook his head.

“It is my belief,” he said, “that it will turn wrong side up when it falls.”

“I believe it will tumble all to pieces,” cried Carey, mischievously.

“If she do I’ll eat my hat,” growled Bostock. “Let’s have her in and chance it, sir. Mebbe if she falls topsy-wopsy we can get the capstan to work and turn her back again.”

“Well, we’ll try,” replied the doctor.

“Come on then, sir,” said the old sailor, picking up the capstan bar again; “and you stand well back, Master Carey. We don’t want to break you again if she topples over.”

The boy drew back and the levers were thrust in beneath, and once more the raft began to move inch by inch outside the gangway.

“Both together, sir,” cried the old sailor; “easy it is—heave ho—heavy ho—steady—ay, oh! One, two, three, and a cheerily ho! One more, sir. Two more, sir. Yo, ho, ho, and lock out; over she goes!”

For the clumsy structure was hitched on and on till it was pretty well on the balance. Then a couple more touches did the business, for the half projecting through the gangway began to sink, overbalancing more and more till all at once, after hanging for a moment as if suspended in the air, it plunged outward, falling with a tremendous splash, sending the spray flying in all directions; and then, to the delight of all, after seeming to hesitate as it rose, turning over and floating high out of the water and right way up.

Carey gave a hearty cheer, while Bostock threw down his capstan bar with a rattle on the deck.

“Play up, you lubber!” he shouted to an imaginary fiddler, as he folded his arms and then dashed off in the sailor’s hornpipe, dancing frantically for a couple of minutes, and ending with three stamps and a bow and scrape.

“Now then,” he cried, panting hard with his exertions, “did she tumble all to pieces, sir? I knowed better than that.”

“Capital, Bostock,” said the doctor. “It floats splendidly, but will it bear all three?”

“Will it bear all three, sir? Yes, and a ton o’ stuff as well. Here, just you wait a minute.”

He ran and got hold of the rope, hauled the raft alongside, and made it fast, before sliding down on to the raft, where he repeated his hornpipe performance, the buoyant framework rising and falling a little, but seeming as safe as could be.

“There,” he cried, shouting up breathlessly to those looking out from the gangway; “it seems to me that she’s far safer than any boat I could make, and you can pole her, or row her, or put up a sail, and go anywhere on her; but, you know, I don’t say as she’ll be fast. No; I don’t say that.”

“You ought to be proud of your work, Bob,” cried Carey, laughing.

“Proud on her, sir? I just am. Them tubs are good uns; no fear o’ them leaking for years.”

“Leaking for years, Carey,” said the doctor, in a low tone of voice; “he speaks as if he were quite settled down to staying here.”

“Well, it will be nice,” said the boy. “I mean,” he added, hastily, “for a month or two, for, of course, we expect to be fetched away soon.”

“Yes,” said the doctor; “of course we expect to be fetched away soon.”

The doctor turned away and went down into the cabin, leaving the boy looking after him.

“How strangely he spoke,” thought Carey; “just as if he didn’t like what I said. Of course, I don’t want to stay here, but to go on to Brisbane to see *them*. Only, after being shut up like a cripple so long, it’s natural to want to go ashore on this island and see what the place is like. I say, Bob,” he cried, going to the side, “do you think there’s a volcano—a burning mountain, up yonder where the clouds hang so low?”

“Might be anything, sir. I shouldn’t be a bit surprised. You never know what you’re going to find in an island where nobody’s been before.”

“Want a hand up?”

“Nay, sir; I can swarm up the rope. We must lower down some steps, though, so as we can haul ’em up again of a night and keep out the savages as might come in their canoes.”

“Savages? Canoes? Do you think there are any, Bob?”

“One never knows, sir. I don’t think there’s any here now, or we should have seen some of ’em; but they goes wandering about far enough, and they might turn up any time. Rather nasty ones they are, too, off the west coast and to norrard there, Noo Guinea. There we are,” he continued, climbing on deck. “Won’t take me long to-morrow morning putting on the oars, poles, and mast, and the bit o’ sail we have made.”

“Then we shall go to-morrow morning?”

“If it keeps fine,” said the old sailor, shading his eyes and looking round. “And fine weather it is, my lad, as far as I can see.”

Chapter Ten.

The old sailor was right—fine weather it was: and after a heavy meal and providing themselves with another in a basket, they stepped down on to the raft, where Bostock had rigged up a mast, and pushed off from their home, which lay looking enormous from where they stood.

The doctor had passed judgment that if Carey did not exert himself he might do a little in the way of going about. He was bandaged still and debarred from using one arm at all; but as he half-lay on the raft looking round he was ready to declare that he would have liked to come even with both arms bandaged to his sides, for it was glorious on that sunny morning, with the air clear and soft, the sky of an intense blue, and the water, over which they glided very slowly, looking like crystal.

The square sail had been hoisted; it filled out slowly and, obeying the long rough oar which Bostock used as a scull, the raft behaved splendidly, leaving the long dark hull of the steamer behind, and steadily nearing the yellow stretch of sand backed by an enormous cocoanut grove.

There were birds circling overhead and flock after flock flying about the shore, which grew more beautiful each minute; but before they had glided far over the lagoon, Carey's attention was taken up by the shallowness of the water, and he reached out over the side to gaze in wonder through the perfectly limpid medium at what seemed to be a garden of flowers of the most beautiful and varied tints. There were groves, too, of shrubs, whose branches were of delicate shades of lavender, yellow, orange, and purple, and through the waving sea growths fishes, gorgeous in gold, orange, scarlet, and blue, flashed in the softened sunshine, as they were startled by the coming of the raft.

Bostock was very busy piloting their craft, but he was referred to from time to time as a mine of knowledge to be worked, for the old sailor had long been acquainted with the Eastern Seas, and had been fairly observant for an uneducated man.

Hence he was able to point out the fact that there were thousands of the great pearl-oysters clustering about the coral reefs which looked so shrub-like below.

“Look here, doctor,” cried the boy, excitedly; “it’s just like a lovely garden.”

“Exactly,” said the doctor; “a garden that lives and grows without a soul to admire its beauties.”

“No, we’re admiring them, sir,” said Carey, promptly.

“But most likely we are the first white people who ever saw them.”

“Don’t let the raft go so quickly, Bob,” cried Carey; “we want to have a long, long look at the things now we have found them. Look, doctor; oh, do look! there was a fish glided by all of a watch-spring blue, with a great bar across it like a gold-fish’s.”

“You are missing those flowers,” said the doctor.

“No, I see them,” cried the boy, with his face close to the water. “Sea anemones; clusters of them like those I’ve seen in Cornwall, only ten times as handsome. Look there, too, lying on the patch of sand there, seven or eight, oh! and there’s one—a five-pointed one, scarlet, crimson, and orange-brown; but they don’t seem to have any feelers.”

“No; those must be star-fish—sea stars.”

“Beautiful,” cried the boy, who was half-wild with excitement. “Oh, what a pity we are going so fast! Look at all this lilac coral; why, there must be miles of it.”

“Hunderds o’ miles, sir,” growled Bostock.

“Yes, it’s very pretty to look at, and if you touch it, it feels soft as jelly outside; but it has a bad way o’ ripping holes in the bottoms of ships. Copper and iron’s nothing to it. Goes right through ’em. Ah! that coral’s sent hunderds o’ fine vessels to the bottom o’ the sea, the sea. ‘And she sank to the bottom o’ the sea.’”

The old sailor broke into song at the end of his remarks, with a portion of a stave of “The Mermaid”; but singing was not his strong point, and he made a noise partaking a good deal of a melodious croak.

“This is a famous region for coral reefs, I suppose, Bostock,” said the doctor.

“Orfle, sir. Why, as soon as you gets round the corner yonder, going to Brisbane, they call it the Coral Sea, and there you get the Great Barrier Reef, all made of this here stuff.”

“More of those great oysters,” said Carey. “I say, Bob, are they good to eat?”

“Not half bad, sir, as you shall say. They make first-rate soup, and that aren’t a thing to be sneezed at.”

“Then we shan’t starve,” said Carey, laughing.

“Starve, sir? No. I can see plenty of good fish to be had out o’ this lagoon.”

“But are these the oysters they gather for the mother-o’-pearl?” asked the doctor.

“Them’s those, sir, and it seems to me here’s a fortune to be made gathering of ’em. Why, they fetches sixty and seventy pound a ton, and the big uns’ll weigh perhaps ten or twelve pound a pair.”

“Then we must collect some, Carey, ready to take away with us when we go.”

“And that aren’t all, sir,” continued the old sailor; “when you come to open ’em you finds pearls inside ’em, some of ’em worth ever so much.”

“Oh, doctor, what a place we’ve come to,” said Carey, excitedly. “Isn’t it lucky we were wrecked?”

“That’s a matter of opinion, my boy,” said the doctor, drily.

“’Scuse me, Master Carey, sir,” said the old sailor, with a peculiar smile.

“Excuse you—what for?”

“What I’m going to say, sir,” said the old fellow, as he leaned against the handle of the big oar as he steered. “You’ve got a very nice-looking nose, sir. It’s a bit big for your size, but it’s a nice tempting-looking nose all the same.”

“Is it?” said Carey, shortly, and his disengaged hand went up to the organ in question. “I daresay it is. I don’t know; but why do you want to meddle with it?”

“I don’t, sir; I only want to keep anything else from having a go at it.”

“What is likely to have a ‘go’ at it, as you say?”

“Young shark might be tempted, sir.”

“Pooh! Nonsense! But are there sharks in this lagoon?”

“Thousands, I’ll be bound, sir. So don’t you never try to bathe. What do you say to running up between those two bits of bare reef, sir—sort o’ canal-like place? We could run right up to the sand there.”

“Try it,” said the doctor, and the raft was steered between the long ridges of coral, whose points stood just out of the water. Carey had the satisfaction of seeing that there was a shoal of fish being driven along the watery passage to the shallow at the end, over which they splashed and floundered till they reached deep water again and swam away.

“Some o’ they would have done for the frying-pan, sir, if we’d had a net handy,” said Bostock. “We must come prepared another time.”

The raft grounded the next minute in what seemed to be a magnificent marine aquarium, into the midst of whose wonders the old sailor stepped to mid-thigh, crunching shells and beautiful pieces of coral in a way which made Carey shiver.

“All right, sir, there’s millions more,” he said, coolly. “Now, doctor, there’s no need for you to step down,” he continued; “it’s wonderful slimy, and there’s shells and things sharp enough to cut through your boots. You give me the guns and basket, and I’ll take ’em up on the sands and come back for you. I’m more used to the water than you are.”

The doctor nodded and handed the two double guns they had brought, along with the basket of provisions, with which Bostock waded ashore, returning directly to take the doctor on his back, after which he came again for Carey.

“Hadn’t I better wade ashore?” said the boy; “one ought to get used to this sort of thing.”

“After a bit, my lad,” said Bostock, shaking his head. “You get used to growing quite well first. Now then, you stand up close here, and I’ll nip you ashore in no time.”

“Well, turn round then; I can’t get on your back like that.”

“You’re not going to get on my back, my lad. I’m going to take you in my arms and carry you.”

“Like a little child,” cried Carey, pettishly.

“No, like a hinwalid who won’t take a bit of care of his tender bones. Lor’-a-mussy, how orbsnit youngsters can be! Don’t yer want to get well?”

“All right,” said Carey, gruffly. “Don’t drop me in the water: I’m precious heavy.”

“Now, is it likely, my lad?” growled the old fellow, taking the lad up gently and starting for the shore. “I’m not going to let you down, so don’t you—here, steady there—steady!”

Carey burst out into an uncontrollable roar of merriment, for Bostock’s right foot suddenly slipped on the slimy shell of one of the great pearl-oysters, and he was as near going headlong as possible; but by making a tremendous effort he saved himself and his burden and hurried panting to the shore.

“Have I hurt you, my lad?” he cried, excitedly, perspiration starting out in great drops on his face. “No, not a bit,” said Carey, merrily. “Phew! I

thought I'd done it, sir. Now, you see, that comes of being too cocksure. Thought I knowed better, but I didn't. Now, are you sure you aren't hurt?"

"Quite, Bob," said Carey, wiping his eyes. "Well, you needn't laugh so much, sir."

"I can't help it," cried Carey, indulging in another hearty burst. "There, I'm better now."

The doctor, who had at once walked off towards the great grove of cocoanuts with a gun on his shoulder, now returned.

"Plenty of birds, Carey, my lad," he said; "cocoanuts by the thousand, and through yonder, where you can hear it roaring, there is an ample supply of fresh water. You can see from here where it runs through the sand. Now, the first thing I want to know is whether we are on an island, and the second, have we any savage neighbours."

"Let's go up the hills and take a good look round then," suggested Carey.

"That is the way to find out, of course; but it would be like so much madness for you to attempt such a climb."

"Would it, sir?"

"Yes, for some time to come. You are getting on so well that I don't want you to be driven back by over-exertion."

"But I could try and give up if I got tired."

"Yes, but I don't want you to grow tired, so you must content yourself here. There is plenty to see along the shore here."

"And suppose a lot of blacks come while you are away."

“Pick up the gun I shall leave with you; they will not face that. But I have no fear of that happening. I feel sure that there are no inhabitants. Still, I only feel so, and I want to be perfectly certain.”

“You’ll be ever so long,” said Carey, gloomily, “and it will not be very pleasant to be quite alone. All right, though, sir, I don’t mind.”

“You are not going to be alone,” said the doctor, quietly. “Bostock will stay with you.”

“Oh, but that will not be right,” cried the boy, eagerly. “Who knows what dangers you may run into?”

“I have my gun, and I daresay I can take care of myself.”

“But you ought to take Bostock with you, doctor.”

“I think not: and besides, as we have to divide our force it ought to be done as equally as possible. There, I shall take six hours for my expedition—that is to say, if it is necessary—and I shall go straight away for three hours, and then turn back.”

“And suppose you lose yourself?”

“I have no fear of that,” said the doctor. “But don’t you go far in either direction. Consider that you have to guard the raft till I come back.”

Carey felt ready to make fresh objections, but the doctor gave him no time. He stepped to the provision basket, took out one of the bread cakes that Bostock made every other morning, thrust it into his pocket, and gave his patient a final word or two of advice.

“Don’t be tempted to over-heat yourself in the sun,” he said. “Get into the shade of the grove here if you begin to grow tired,” and, shouldering his gun, he stepped off through the sand, disappearing directly after among the trees, but only to step back and shout:

“I shall try and follow the stream as near as I can to its source in the lake that must be up yonder. *Au revoir.*”

He disappeared once more, and Carey and Bostock stood looking at one another on the sandy shore.

Chapter Eleven.

“What’s that here mean as the doctor said, sir?” growled Bostock, when the last rustle of the growth made by their companion died out.

“Till you see me again,” said Carey.

“Why couldn’t he say it in plain English so as a man could understand him?”

“Don’t know,” said Carey, shortly. “Ask him when he comes back.”

Bostock chuckled and shook his head.

“I’d a deal rather we’d kep’ together, sir,” he said; “but I dessay he knows best. So we’ve got to wait six hours—six hours’ watch, and we mustn’t go very far away. Well, it’s a very pretty place, and the sand’s soft, and I mean to have some of them cocoanuts by-and-by.”

“How are you going to get at them?” said Carey, looking up at the trees. “I suppose I mustn’t try to climb one.”

“Not likely.”

“Well, I don’t believe you could.”

“Dunno,” said the old fellow. “I’m thinking I can if I uses a sort o’ stirrup.”

“What’s that?”

“I’ll show you bime-by. Well, what shall we do?”

“I’m going to get out on one of those coral rocks and have a good look at the pools of water and the things in them. Perhaps collect some shells.”

“Why not?” said Bostock. “I’ve got the bucket yonder, and one of the axes. We might collect a lot to take on board, and the oysters’ll do for soup.”

“Oh, you mean the pearl shells.”

“Yes; didn’t you, sir?”

“No, I meant any kind: but let’s try for some of those big shells and open them. We may find some pearls.”

“That’s right, Master Carey, and when you’re tired o’ that look here.”

He gave the boy a knowing look, and took a roll of long stout line out of one pocket, a leaden weight and a cork stuck full of fish-hooks out of the other.

“Fishing-tackle,” cried Carey, eagerly.

“That’s right. When we’ve got some oysters for bait we’ll get out on the raft again, shove her off to the end of that bit of a canal, and try after a fish.”

“Oh, we’re not going to be dull,” cried Carey, eagerly.

“Dull, not us; why, it’ll be six hours before we know where we are. Come on.”

The old sailor went back to the nearest spot to the raft, carefully examined the rope, which was fastened round a block of coral, and then waded out to the rough construction and returned with the bucket and a small axe.

“Now then,” he said; “you keep here where it’s dry, and I’ll go and see what I can find.”

He had little seeking to do, merely to wade amongst the fragments of coral and pick up pair after pair of the great molluscs, which he had no difficulty in detaching; and before long he had a score, which he carried to a spot on the rock which seemed suitable.

“You feel what a weight they are,” he said, and Carey took up a couple which were about the size of pudding plates.

“They are heavy,” cried Carey. “Why, you could soon collect a ton.”

“Dessay I could, sir; but do you know the best way to open ’em?”

“Force a knife in between the shells.”

“And break the knife,” said the old sailor, chuckling. “No, there’s a better way than that. Lay ’em out in the sun away from the water, and they soon open their mouths and gape.”

“But then they die and go bad.”

“That’s right, sir; they do, and smell lovely. That’s the way to do it best.”

“But you can’t eat bad oysters.”

“Not likely, sir. I’m going to open these with the axe, and after we’ve felt whether they’ve got any pearls in ’em we shall put the soft fish in the bucket of clean water and take ’em back for cooking. Here goes. I’ve seen how it’s done before now.”

He took one of the oysters, laid it in a particular way upon the rock, gave it a smart blow over the muscular hinge, and then, taking advantage of the half-paralysed mollusc, he managed to get the edge of the axe between the shells, wriggled it about a little, and then, mastering the opposition offered by the singular creature within, he wrenched the two shells apart and used his knife to scrape out the flesh of the oyster, felt it well over and then thrust it into the bucket, which he half filled with the clear water.

“How many pearls?” said Carey.

“Not one, sir.”

“I thought not. But I say, Bob, that’s a precious nasty job.”

“Not it, sir. I don’t mind. Done worse than this.”

“And the oyster looks horribly messy.”

“It won’t when it’s made into soup. But I say, nice shells, aren’t they?”

“Beautiful,” said Carey, who was examining them. “So these are to cut up for mother-o’-pearl?”

“Yes, sir, and to make shirt buttons.”

Bang! a wrench with the axe, and another fat oyster was cut out and the shells cast aside, before a fresh search was made for pearls, but without

result.

“Not much luck, Bob,” said Carey.

“What! Look at these two shells; and there goes another oyster for the pot. Reg’lar fat one. I do call it luck. Bet a penny we do better with the oysters and the tackle for the soup than the doctor does. Besides, we’re going to ketch some fish.”

It was very pleasant sitting there in the sunshine, with the cocoanut-trees waving and bending in the soft breeze to his right, the calm lagoon, dazzling in its brightness, to his left, and away beyond it the silver spray of the breakers thundering softly upon the coral reef. Then, too, there was a submarine garden in every pool, and a luxury of beauty on all sides, even to his very feet. The only thing which seemed repellent to Carey was the growing heap of pearl shells, and the work upon which Bostock was engaged, which the boy looked upon with disgust.

“Bah!” he exclaimed at last; “you’re a regular oyster butcher, Bob. It’s horribly messy.”

“Don’t you call things by ugly names, Master Carey,” said the old man, stolidly. “Butchers aren’t a nice trade sartinly, but think of the consekenses. Think on it, my lad. Who’s got a word to say agin the butcher when there’s a prime joint o’ juicy roast beef on the table, with the brown fat and rich gravy. Ah! it seems sad, it do.”

“What, to kill the oxen?”

“Nay, not it. They was made to be killed. I meant having all that beautiful stock o’ coal on board, and the cook’s stove ready, and no beef to roast. There, you needn’t look at my messy hands; I shall wash ’em when I’ve

done. You look at the insides of them big shells; they're just like to-morrow morning when you've got the watch on deck and the sun's just going to rise. I've seen the sky like that lots o' times, all silver and gold, and pale blue and grey. I say, seems a pity; we've got lots o' crockery ware in the stooard's place. Them shells would make lovely plates, painted ten hunderd times better than those we've got aboard. It's just as if natur had made 'em o' purpose. Just think of it eating—or drinking: which do you call it?—soup, oyster soup, out of an oyster shell, enjoying the look o' the shell with your eyes. There, that's the last of 'em," he continued, as he wrenched open the last pair of shells.

"But I expected we were going to get some pearls as well, and out of these twenty great oysters you haven't got one."

"Haven't I?" cried the old sailor, with a hearty chuckle. "Just you feel here."

"I'm not going to mess my hand with the nasty thing," said Carey, with a look of disgust.

"Who wants you to, sir? Only wants the tip o' one finger. Here you are. Yes, and here, and here. I say, what do you think of that?" cried the old fellow, reaching out the shell he held. "Just one finger and you'll feel 'em, nubbly like."

"Pearls!" cried Carey, excitedly, and, forgetting all about the messiness of the great wet shapeless-looking mollusc, he used both finger and thumb. "Here, cut them out."

This was soon done, and the boy sat with his face flushed, gazing with delight at three beautifully lustrous pearls lying in the palm of his hand

glistening in the bright sunshine, one being of the size of a large pea, and the others of good-sized shot.

“Beauties, aren’t they, sir?”

“Lovely,” cried Carey, who, recovering as he was from a painful illness, was full of appreciation of everything he saw. “Yes, they are lovely; and only to think of it, if we had not found them they would have lain there and perhaps never have been seen.”

“Like enough, my lad. There must be millions and millions about here.”

“Yes,” said the boy, with a sigh. “Here, put them in your pocket, Bob,” and he held them to his companion as if wanting to get them out of sight.

“What for? Aren’t you got one?”

“Yes, but you found them; they’re yours.”

“Nay, we found ’em; and besides, I’m only a common sailor, and like your servant. You keep ’em.”

“It wouldn’t be fair, Bob,” said Carey. “You have the best right to them.”

“Tchah! They’re no good to me. I should on’y sell ’em to somebody if ever we got away, for the price of a pound o’ ’bacco as would go away all in smoke. Once upon a time I should ha’ took ’em home to my old mother. Now I aren’t got one, and you have. So you have ’em made into a ring some day, with the big un in the middle and the little uns one on each side.”

“Shall I, Bob?”

“O’ course. There. Now I shall just sink that bucket in the clear, cool water so as the soup stuff keeps good. There we are, and those bits o’ clean coral

to keep 'em down. Now I washes my hands in that little bit of a rock basin and they aren't a bit messy; dries 'em in the hot sand, and now what do you say to trying for a bit o' fish?"

"Capital," cried Carey, excitedly.

"On'y I tell you what; we'll tie one end of the line to the raft, so that you can let go if we get hold of a big un. I'm not going to have you hauling and hurting your sore place."

"That will be all right."

"No, it won't, unless you promise you'll let go if it's a big un."

"I promise," said Carey, "for I don't believe we shall catch any."

"Well, there's something in that," said the old sailor, "for the number o' times a man goes fishing and don't ketch nothing's a thing to think on."

Bostock talked a great deal, but he was not like a gardener, who somehow can never answer a question without stopping short; say, if he is digging, driving the spade into the ground, resting one foot upon it, and resting his fist upon the handle. Bob Bostock's hands were always busy, and while he was chatting about the fish he was picking up a few damaged scraps of shelly oyster, laying them in a shell for bait, and then preparing the line by tying on the lead and a good-sized hook.

"Now then, my lad; ready?" he cried.

"Oh, yes, I'm ready and waiting," replied the boy. "I say, doesn't it make you feel in good spirits to be out here? I should like to run and shout."

“Then you just won’t, my lad. But it do seem jolly and comf’table like. I feel as if I could sit down and whistle for hours. Now then, don’t you get that line tangled. I’ve laid it all in a hank ready to run out; and don’t ram them hooks in your fingers, because they’re hard to cut out. Now, you carry them and the shell o’ bait and I’ll carry you.”

“No, no; I’ll take off my shoes and socks, and tuck up my trousers.”

“Tucking up wouldn’t do. You’d have to take ’em off, and then you’d cut your feet on the sharp coral. You’re going to do what I sez.”

“I say, Bob, what an old tyrant you are! Just you wait till I get well and can do as I like.”

“All right, my lad; I’m waiting. Then you can do as you like, but you can’t yet. Here, you be off. None o’ them games, or I shall have to shoot you.”

“No, I shall,” said Carey.

“Nay, that you won’t,” growled the old sailor. “I’m not going to stand by while you fires that gun as’ll kick and upset your shoulder again.”

“Bother my shoulder!” cried Carey, impatiently, and he leaned back to gaze up at two beautiful grey and white gulls which for the last few minutes had been sailing gracefully round them and coming nearer and nearer, watching the two strangers curiously the while.

“They’re after the oysters, Bob,” said Carey.

“Yes, smells ’em, or sees ’em. Birds have got wonderful eyes and noses.”

“Beaks, Bob,” said Carey, laughing.

“Smellers, then, my lad. Well, they can’t get at the soup meat in the bucket, and they only clean the shells, so we’ll let ’em alone. Now then, up you come.”

The next minute Bostock was wading out to the raft with Carey in his arms, after which he poled their clumsy craft out to the end of the two coral ridges which formed the little canal.

As soon as he had made fast, the hook was carefully baited, the line laid in rings with one end fastened to a plank, and with a gentle swing the lead thrown out into a clear spot, to fall with a splash in the smooth water, forming rings which ever widened as they glided away.

“I wonder whether there are any fish there,” said Carey, and then he started in astonishment, for there was quite a little wave raised as, with a rush, a shoal of fish made for the bait.

“Got him?” cried Bostock, as there was a tug at the line.

“Yes—no—no—yes,” panted Carey, and there was a heavy pull as a fish made for the open water, its actions sending its companions flying out of the water, some even leaping out and falling back with a splash.

Carey held on, but with a sudden quick action Bostock caught hold of the line behind the boy’s hand.

“Oh, Bob!” cried the lad, appealingly.

“Too heavy for you alone, sir. ’Sides, you’ve only got one hand to work with. You go on, sir; I’m on’y easing it for you, and you know you couldn’t haul him in yourself. That’s the way; don’t let him run. Now then, in with him, and think you’re a three-handed man.”

The captive made some bold dashes for liberty, but in vain, and a minute had not elapsed before it was lifted on to the raft, proving to be a fish of four or five pounds' weight, in dazzlingly beautiful armour of silver and steel-like blue, one which needed handling carefully on account of an exceedingly sharp saw-like back fin, which was stroked carefully down before Bostock extracted the hook.

“Looks as if he ought to be good to eat, sir.”

“It's a beauty,” cried Carey, excitedly.

“I dunno,” said Bostock, stolidly, as he rebaited the hook.

“Nonsense; look at the silver and pearl and steel-blue on its sides.”

“Ah, but some of these furren fish are poisonous, sir.”

“I was thinking about its beauty,” said Carey, impatiently.

“Was you, sir? I was thinking about the frying-pan. He'd be all we should want, but we'd better try for another in case the doctor thinks this one not good to eat.”

“Oh, yes, try for some more. I wish Doctor Kingsmead were here, though, to help. I wonder where he is now.”

“Ay. Wonder how he's getting on, and what he has found. There, if that isn't a tempting bait, don't know what is. Line all free?”

“Yes.”

“Then off we go again,” said Bostock, and once more the lead went flying in a low curve over the glistening water, to fall with a gentle splash.

There was a wave raised in the shallow directly, and in less time than before, and ere the bait could have reached the bottom, it was seized and the line ran out, to give Carey's arm a heavy jerk and elicit a cry of pain.

"Hurt you much, my lad?" cried Bostock, as he made a snatch and caught the line.

"Yes, rather," said the lad. "You're right, Bob; I'm not quite strong there yet."

"No wonder it gave you a nip, sir," cried the man, excitedly. "This is a regular rampayger. My word! look at him; he's going all over the place."

"Let the line run," cried Carey, excitedly, and quite forgetting the pain.

"Nay, he aren't a whale, sir; but from the games he's playing he might be a shark four or five foot long. I'll tire him out though. I say, sir, you ought to be glad you aren't got hold; line reg'larly cuts into my hand. Look at that now. I say, sir, we shan't want for something on the table. Strikes me there hasn't been anyone fishing here lately."

There was a grim smile on the old sailor's face, as he stood there easing the line a little, as the fish darted here and there in the most vigorous way, and would have broken free had not the sailor's arms acted like yielding springs.

The playing of that fish lasted what seemed to be five minutes, and its darts and rushes were as vigorous as ever when all of a sudden it gathered up its forces and made a rush into shallow water amongst the coral, some of which bristled above the surface. Then they had a good sight of its size and gleaming golden scales, for it leaped a good two feet out of the water, came down with a heavy splash and jerk, and the next minute Bostock was

hauling in what was left of the line, fully half, with lead and hook, having been borne away.

“Oh—oh!” groaned Carey, giving utterance to that sound so full of disappointment peculiar to fishermen.

“Ay, ’tis a pity, sir,” said Bostock, “such a fine fish too. Reg’lar golden-red.”

“Yes; what was it?”

“Can’t say, sir. I don’t think,” he added, with a grim smile, “that it was a red herring.”

“But you should have let it run.”

“Didn’t want it, sir; he took the bit in his teeth, and he has run.”

“I mean eased it and wearied it out.”

“Yes, sir, I s’pose so; but I aren’t big at fishing. Wait a bit, and you’ll have your turn. How’s your shoulder?”

“Oh, that does not hurt now, but I do feel rather queer.”

“No wonder,” said the old sailor, looking at the boy searchingly as he ringed up the remainder of the fishing-line. “Let’s get ashore.”

“Oh no. Try for another fish.”

“Can’t, sir; he’s taken away my lead sinker, and I don’t think we could ketch one on the surface; besides, my line’s too short.”

There was nothing to say to this, so the raft was unmoored again and poled back to its old place with alacrity, made fast, the fish rolled up in some wet seaweed, and then Bostock turned with a grim smile to his young companion.

“Feel no better, sir,” he said.

“No, Bob; if anything, worse.”

“And it aren’t your shoulder?”

“No,” sighed Carey; “I feel faint and sinking. I suppose it was from the shock of the pain.”

“I don’t, sir,” said the old fellow, gruffly. “I know what’s the matter with you.”

“What is it, then?” said Carey, rather anxiously.

“You’ve got the eight bells complaint, sir.”

“What do you mean?” said Carey, suspiciously.

“Dinner-time, sir; that’s what’s the matter with you.”

“Absurd. It can’t be dinner-time yet.”

“Can’t it, sir? Doctor’s been gone hours. Just you look up at the sun.”

It was undoubtedly beyond its highest point, and as he gradually grasped the truth of his companion’s words, though feeling no better, Carey’s despondency passed away, and he became cheerful.

Soon after, as the pair sat together in the shade of the cocoanut grove, eating the lunch they had brought with the greatest of enjoyment, the weary symptoms passed rapidly away, and the boy was himself again.

“I say, Bob,” he said, “we must have one of those cocoanuts. Couldn’t you knock one down by throwing the hatchet?”

“P’raps it would be throwing the hatchet, sir, if I said I could,” said the old fellow, with a grim smile. “But I’ll try soon. I say, I wonder how the doctor’s getting on.”

“So do I. I wish he were here to have some lunch.”

Carey had his wish a few minutes later, for there was a loud hail from the open, and Carey replied to it and hurried out from the shade where they were hidden, to find the doctor half-way down to the raft with his gun over his shoulder and a brace of huge crowned pigeons hanging from the barrel by their tied-together legs.

Chapter Twelve.

Doctor Kingsmead said nothing about his adventures until he had made a hearty meal and grown cooler. Then he began to talk cheerily.

“Something for you to cook, Bostock,” he said; “they’ll make a pleasant change after so much tinned and salt meat.”

“Where did you shoot those?” asked Carey.

“Up yonder in the open forest under one of the trees, not far from the river. There are plenty of them about, and so tame that I felt satisfied that there were no blacks near.”

“Then you’ve seen no signs of any, sir?” asked Bostock.

“Not a sign.”

“That’s good, sir, but it don’t mean much, for we might have a visit from a big canoe-full at any time.”

“How far did you go?” asked Carey.

“To where the little river glides out of a lake up yonder in the hills. I fancy it must have been the crater of a volcano, for I kicked against pieces of obsidian and slag. The volcanic glass broke up with edges as sharp as a razor.”

“But how far was it to the lake?” asked Carey.

“Ah, that I can’t tell you in miles. In time it was two hours and a half hard walking. Coming back, one hour and a half. I was away just about four hours.”

“Did you get a good view from the lake, sir?”

“No, but I climbed a peak close by it, and from there I could see all round the island.”

“Round the island!” grunted Bostock, nodding.

“Yes, round the island; and nearly all round it at a distance are reefs of coral, with the rollers breaking upon them in white foam.”

“Then it’s only a little place,” said Carey.

“Yes, only a few miles across.”

“And all ours. Doctor Kingsmead, we ought to take possession of this place for our own. But I say, did you see anything wonderful?”

“N–no. Plenty of beautifully coloured birds; lovely flowers in abundance. Beetles and butterflies as beautiful as I ever saw.”

“Any snakes?”

“I saw none, and I should hardly think there would be any; but I saw two crocodiles.”

“Did you?” cried Carey. “Where—up in the lake?”

“No, directly after I started, in the little river. Monsters.”

“Any fish in the lake?”

“I could not tell. Most likely there would be. But I’m tired with my walk. I’ll tell you more as I think of what I saw.”

“Just one thing, sir,” said Bostock, apologetically. “When you was up atop of the peak, could you see land anywheres?”

“I could not be quite sure, but I think so, in three different directions. I certainly saw reefs with the breaking water in several places as far as I could see. I ought to have taken a glass with me. Next time I go up I will. Well, what have you been about?”

Carey eagerly related how they had passed the morning, not forgetting the fishing and the pearls.

“Well,” said the doctor, “we shall not starve. Pearl shell and pearls, eh? We must collect and save all we can, and I should think that we could collect

enough cocoanuts to be very valuable, so that when the time comes for us to leave this place we shall not go empty away.”

The rest of the afternoon was spent leisurely strolling about the shore, for the most part in the shade of the coconut grove, a couple of the nuts



“Carey signed to them to approach cautiously” (p. 134).

being cleverly knocked down by throws with the hatchet, used boomerang fashion, fortunately for the throwers without its displaying any of that weapon’s returning qualities.

They strolled on as far as the mouth of the river, where it glided as a shallow stream into the sea, not without result—a satisfactory one to Carey, who was well in advance, threading his way amongst the masses of bleached coral which here encumbered the shore.

Bostock was about to close up with the lad, but the doctor checked him.

“Let him have the satisfaction of saying that he was the first to discover the mouth of the river,” he said; but the words were hardly out of his lips when they saw the boy begin to stalk something, for he stopped and crept behind a mass of rock, and then after peering cautiously round it he crept to another and another till he was hidden from the lookers-on.

But directly after he re-appeared about a couple of hundred yards away, and signed to them to approach cautiously.

“Look to your gun, sir,” whispered Bostock, cocking the one he carried. “He’s seen a canoe.”

“Think so?” said the doctor, rather excitedly, following the old sailor’s example.

“I just do, sir, for there’s nothing else he’s likely to see. There aren’t no wild beasts and things in an island like this. Better look out.”

Following out Carey’s tactics, they crept from rock to rock till they reached the mass which sheltered Carey, who waited till they were close up, and then whispered, “Quick! look round that side drawn out on the sands by the water.”

“Then it is,” said the doctor to himself, and troubles with a canoe-load of blacks rose before his eyes as he advanced to the rock, peered round one side, while Bostock as cautiously peered round the other, each occupying some time, Carey anxiously eager to follow their example, but unable to do so without being seen.

Quite a couple of minutes had elapsed before the pair drew back, looked at each other, and then turned to Carey.

“Well,” he whispered, impatiently, “can’t you see it?”

“See what?” whispered back the doctor. “Is that a canoe full of blacks?”

“No!” cried Carey, in a voice full of disgust; “an enormous crocodile, sleeping in the sun.”

Both looked round the side of the sheltering rock again, and Bostock’s head popped back.

“There!” said Carey, eagerly.

“Where?” said Bostock. “There aren’t nothing but some bits o’ stone and seaweed.”

“Nonsense!” cried Carey, impatiently. “You can see it, can’t you, doctor?”

“No, I see nothing,” was the reply.

“Here, let me look again,” cried Carey, and the doctor made way.

“Oh!” ejaculated the boy, in a disappointed tone; “it’s gone!”

Bostock shook his head solemnly.

“You’re a-getting better, young gen’leman,” he said.

“Of course I am,” said Carey; “but what do you mean?”

“You shouldn’t, sir. There was a young chap once as kep’ sheep, and he’d got a larky sort o’ sperrit, and every now and then he used to begin running, and—”

“Yes, yes, I know,” cried Carey, indignantly; “and cry ‘wolf! wolf!’ But do you think—”

“He’s been gammoning on us, sir,” said Bostock to the doctor.

“I haven’t! I wouldn’t play such a trick,” cried Carey, indignantly. “There was a great crocodile that looked five-and-twenty or thirty feet long lying close to the water when I signed to you both to come. It wasn’t twenty feet away.”

“Where ’bouts were it, then, sir?” growled the old fellow, only half-convinced.

“Come and see,” cried Carey, and he hurried round the rock, followed by his companions; but there was apparently no sign of any reptile, till the doctor pointed to a great groove in the soft dry sand.

“Yes, that’s where he was,” cried Carey. “Ah! and look here. You can see the marks of his paws.”

“I see,” cried the doctor. “Yes, Carey, it must have been a monster.”

“Pst! pst!” whispered Bostock, raising his gun, and pointing away to their right.

“Don’t fire,” said the doctor, hurriedly; “those small shot cartridges are of no use. See it, Carey?”

“No! Where?”

“Yonder, floating and looking this way. You can only see the monster’s eyes.”

“Where—where? Ah, I see; those two knobs close together?”

“Yes; the brute must have taken alarm, and glided back into the river. It is evidently watching us.”

“Beg your pardon, Master Carey. I thought it was games. Well, sir, it’s a good job you see that chap. We know he harnts the place. Who knows but what you might ha’ took a fancy to bathe there some day?”

“I was thinking what a beautiful place it would be, because there’d be no fear of sharks in such a shallow place.”

“No sharks perhaps, sir, but they’re innocent babies to a thing like that. Why, he might have swept you in with his tail before you’d undressed yourself. You and clothes and all.”

“What are you going to do?” said the doctor, as the old sailor handed Carey the gun and stooped to pick up a piece of coral as big as a child’s head.

“On’y going to show him, cunning as he is, thinking that he’s snugly hid under water, that we can see him, and that we know what’s the meaning of two knobs on the water.”

The doctor nodded and looked on, Carey feeling an intense longing to follow the old sailor’s example, but feeling that it would be some time before he could throw a heavy stone.

Meanwhile Bostock walked slowly to the edge of the water, and then along towards the sea, reducing the distance till he was not above five-and-twenty yards from the floating reptile, when he stopped short and pitched the lump of coral with pretty good aim; but as it described an arc and was still in the air, there was a tremendous wallow, a wave rose on the surface, and they could trace the course taken by the monster, which, with one tremendous stroke of its powerful tail, glided right away towards the sea.

“Wish it had made a dint in his skull,” said Bostock. “Beasts! how I do hate ’em! Dessay there’s lots more, so we shall have to take care.”

“How big was it, Bob?” said Carey, triumphantly.

“Oh, I wouldn’t like to say, sir. I’ve seen a lot of ’em in my time—Africa, Indy, and in Chinee waters, as well as off the east coast yonder; but I should think this must be all you said. P’raps more.”

Satisfied with the day’s adventures, they now made for the raft, and were soon after sailing slowly across to the stranded vessel, where that evening Bostock was in his glory with the cook’s stove sending up a cloud of black smoke, and saucepan and frying-pan were well occupied in the preparation of soup and fish.

“The pigeons’ll have to stay till to-morrow, Master Carey,” he said, confidentially. “But I say, sir, don’t say as that hyster soup aren’t good.”

The lad did not. In fact he was helped twice, while the doctor sent a thrill of pride through the old sailor as he made comparisons between it and turtle.

“Well, no, sir,” said the old fellow, modestly, “not so good as that. I dessay, though, we shall find some turtle floating in this lagoon. If we do we must get one, and then you shall see the difference.”

“Do you think they are likely to be about these shores?”

“Sure to be, sir. We shall see one, I dessay, floating on the water, fast asleep; and I dessay we shall find something else, Master Carey, and if we do, look out.”

“What for?”

“Sea-serpents, sir. I’ve seen ’em.”

“What! have you seen the sea-serpent?” said Carey, laughing.

“Ah, I mean the black and yaller ones as basks in the calm sea ’bout these parts, six, eight, and ten foot long, and as poisonous as any o’ them on land; so be on the look-out, sir; I knowed one man as died from a bite.”

Chapter Thirteen.

“Oh, do make haste and get me quite well, doctor,” cried Carey.

“What a fellow you are!” said the doctor, laughing. “I can do no more.”

“Can’t you?” said the boy, plaintively. “Oh, do try. I heard the captain say one day to one of the passengers that you were one of the cleverest surgeons he ever knew.”

“That was very complimentary of the captain, I’m sure.”

“Then if you are, can’t you get my bone mended more quickly? It’s so miserable to be like this.”

“Why, you told me last night after our supper that you never enjoyed a day more in your life. Surely you had adventures enough, finding pearl-oysters and pearls, eating green cocoanuts off the trees, fishing, and finishing off with an interview with a gigantic saurian and a sail back here.”

“Yes, yes, yes, it was all glorious, but every minute I was being checked either by you or old Bob, or by a sharp pain. Can’t you put some ointment or sticking plaster over the broken place and make it heal or mend up more quickly?”

“No, sir, I cannot,” said the doctor, smiling. “That’s Dame Nature’s work, and she does her part in a slow and sure way. She is forming new bone material to fill up the cracks in your breakage, and if you keep the place free from fretting it will grow stronger than ever; but you must have patience. The bark does not grow over the broken limb of a tree in a week or two; but it covers the place at last. Patience, patience, patience. Just think, my boy, isn’t it wonderful that the mending should go on as it does? Waking or sleeping, the bony matter is forming.”

“Oh, yes, I suppose it’s all very wonderful, but—”

“But you want me to perform a miracle, my dear boy, and you know as well as I do that I can’t.”

Carey sighed.

“I know it is very irksome,” continued the doctor; “but just think of your position. Only the other day I was afraid you were going to die. Now here you are, hale and hearty, with nothing the matter with you but that tender place where the bone is knitting together. Don’t you think you ought to be very thankful?”

“Of course I do!” cried Carey. “That was only a morning growl. But tell me this: will my shoulders and neck be all right again some day?”

“I tell you yes, and the more patient you are, and the more careful not to jar the mending bone, the sooner it will be.”

“There, then, I’ll never grumble again.”

“Till next time,” said the doctor, smiling.

“I won’t have any next time,” cried Carey, eagerly. “Now then, what are we going to do to-day?”

“You must be tired with your exertions yesterday.”

“No; not a bit,” cried Carey, “and going out seemed to do me so much good.”

“Very well, then, we’ll sail to the island again, and fish and collect.”

“And get some more cocoanuts. I say, I could climb one of the trees, couldn’t I? That wouldn’t hurt my shoulder.”

The doctor gave the boy a droll look.

“There, how stupid I am!” cried the boy, flushing. “I want to do things like I used to, and I keep forgetting.”

“Try not to, then, my boy. Surely your own common-sense tells you that nothing could be more injurious than the exertion of dragging yourself up a tree by your arms.”

“Of course, doctor,” said the boy, grinning. “It’s my common-sense has a bad habit of going to sleep.”

“Keep it awake, then, not only now, but always.”

“All right, sir. What are we going to collect, then?”

“Well, it is tempting to try and find some more pearls.”

“Yes, very; but I say, doctor, oughtn’t we to—I don’t want to go yet, for there’s so much to see here—but oughtn’t we to try and do something about going on to Moreton Bay?”

“Ha!” ejaculated the doctor. “I’ve lain awake night after night thinking about that, my lad, but I always came to one conclusion.”

“What’s that?” asked the boy, eagerly.

“That we are perfectly helpless. I don’t think we could construct a boat sufficiently seaworthy to warrant our attempting a voyage in her. There is plenty of material if we tore up the deck or the boards from below, and of course Bostock is very handy; but I am wanting in faith as to his making us a large enough boat.”

“Why not a bigger raft?”

“My dear boy, we should be washed off in the first rough sea. Besides, a raft would be perfectly unmanageable in the fierce currents. We might be stranded on the mainland, but more probably we should be drifted out to sea. Either there or ashore we should perish from want of food. I am not wanting in enterprise, Carey, my lad, and it is terrible in spite of the beauty of the place to be stranded here; but I think our course, surrounded as we are with every necessary of life, is to wait patiently and see what may turn up. There is the possibility that some of the *Chusan*’s boats may get to one of the western ports or be picked up by a vessel, and in time, no doubt, the agents of the company will send a steamer round the coast to see if there are any traces of their great vessel. I believe we have a large sum in gold stowed somewhere below.”

“No fear of our taking any of it to spend,” said Carey, laughing. “I say, then, you think we ought to settle down quietly, not bother about building a boat, and make the best of it.”

“Certainly, for the present. Let’s get you sound to begin with, and let the matter rest till you can swing by your arms and climb cocoanut-trees

without a twinge.”

“All right! I want to see my father and mother again, and I’d give anything to be able to send them word that we’re safe; and every night when I’ve lain down in my berth it’s just as if my conscience was finding fault with me for not doing something about getting away, for all day long I seem to have been enjoying myself just as if this was a jolly holiday; and you know, doctor, I can’t help feeling that I should like to stay here for ever so long.”

“You can be quite at rest, Carey, my lad,” said the doctor. “Certainly for the present.”

“Then hurrah for a day ashore and some more fishing! How soon shall we start?”

“As soon as Bostock is ready. He’s cooking now.”

“Yes, those two big pigeons. I’ll go and tell him.”

“And I’ll load a dozen cartridges with ball ready for the crocodiles.”

“Are they crocodiles or alligators?”

“Crocodiles, my lad. You may take it for granted that alligators belong exclusively to America.”

Carey hurried forward, led by his nose partly, for there was a pleasant smell of roasting, and he reached the cook’s place—a neatly fitted-up kitchen more than a galley—to find Bostock looking very hot, and in the act of taking the pigeons, brown and sizzling, from the oven.

“Not quite done, sir,” he said. “I shall put ’em in the oven again for half an hour just before you want ’em. It wouldn’t have done to leave ’em waiting.

Things soon turn in this hot country.”

“We’re going ashore again as soon as you’re ready.”

“That’ll be in ten minutes, then, my lad.”

“You’ll take a stronger fishing-line this time?”

“Don’t you be feared about that,” said the old fellow, nodding his head sideways; “but come along o’ me on deck. I’ve saved this here on purpose for you to see.”

“Pah! How nasty!” cried the boy, as Bostock brought forward an iron bucket containing the internal parts of the pigeons.

“Don’t look very nice, but I thought I’d save it till you come.”

“What for?”

“Come and see. I’m just going to chuck it overboard and wash out the bucket.”

Carey grasped the man’s reason directly, and they went on deck to the side where the water was deepest.

As they looked over the side they could gaze down through the crystal-clear water into the groves of seaweed and shrubberies of coral, where the anemones and star-fish were dotting every clear spot with what looked like floral beauties.

“Seems a shame to throw all that filth overboard, and spoil all that lovely clearness,” said Carey.

“Do it, sir? Ah, it won’t spoil it long. There’s them there as’ll think it good enough, and in five minutes the water’ll be as clear as ever.”

“But I don’t see a single fish.”

“More do I, sir, but they’re all about somewhere. Ah, look yonder; there’s one of them black and yaller snakes. He’s a big thick one too. See him?” said the man, pointing.

“No—yes, I do,” cried the boy eagerly, and he shaded his eyes to watch the strikingly coloured reptile lying apparently asleep on the surface, twined up in graceful curves, some thirty yards away.

“You see if he don’t go like a shot as soon as I make a splash.”

A line was attached to the handle of the bucket, which was then raised from the deck.

“Stand clear,” cried Bostock, and with a dexterous heave he spread its contents far and wide, dropping the bucket directly after to fill itself and be washed clean.

“Where’s the snake?” he said.

“It went down like a flash, Bob; but what a horrid mess, and there are no fish.”

“Aren’t there?” said the old fellow, coolly.

“Yes! hundreds; where did they all come from?”

“Oh, from below, I suppose,” and after giving the bucket three or four rinses the old sailor stood watching the water, now alive with good-sized fish, darting about and bearing off every scrap of the refuse, not even a

floating feather being left, so that in five minutes the water was as crystal-clear as ever.

“What do you think of that, sir?” said Bostock, smiling. “Fish are pretty hungry about here. Be ’most ready to eat a chap who was having a swim.”

“It’s plain enough that we could catch plenty from the deck here.”

“Yes, sir, if you didn’t get your lines tangled in the coral. I’d rather moor the raft out in deeper water yonder off the shore. Couldn’t have a better place than we had yesterday.”

Half an hour later they were being gently wafted towards their previous day’s landing place, where cocoanuts were obtained, fish caught, and a large addition made to the number of pearl shells, which were laid on the sand in the bright sunshine, it being decided that on a large scale the task would be too laborious to open the great molluscs one by one.

“I’ll show you how it’s done, gen’lemen,” said Bostock. “I’ve seen it. Before long those shells ’ll be gaping, and the oysters dead. Then we’ll haul one of the biggest casks we can get ashore and scrape out the oysters and drop ’em in along with some water.”

“To decay?” said the doctor.

“That’s it, sir. Give ’em time and a stir-up every now and then, and they go all into a nasty thin watery stuff which you can pour away, wash what’s left with clean water, and there at last are all the pearls at the bottom without losing one, while the shells have lain in the sun and grown sweet.”

Enough pearling being done for the day, Bostock attacked one of the heaviest laden cocoanut-trees, making a “sterrup,” as he called it, by passing a short piece of rope round himself and the tree, tying it fast, and

then half-sitting in it and pressing against the trunk with his legs, hitching the rope up foot by foot till he reached the leafy crown, where he screwed off a dozen fine nuts and threw them down upon the sand before descending.

“Why, Bob,” cried Carey, “I didn’t think you were so clever as that.”

“More did I, sir.”

“But you must have had lots of practice.”

“Nay, sir, I never did it afore; but I’ve seen the blacks do it often, and it seemed so easy I thought I’d try.”

Later on, when well refreshed, they went cautiously to the mouth of the little river, stalking the crocodiles by gliding from rock to rock, but without result; not a single pair of watchful eyes was to be seen on the surface. There were, however, plenty of a mullet-like fish.

But the party preferred to make use of their lines from the raft moored at the edge of the deep water, where they were not long in securing half-a-dozen fine fish partaking of the appearance of the John Dory as far as the great heads were concerned, but in bodily shape plumper and thicker of build.

Then the raft was unmoored and the sail hoisted, to fill out in the soft land breeze, which wafted them back to their stranded home.

Chapter Fourteen.

The weather was glorious, and the days glided by in what would have been a luxurious life had it not been for the busy, investigating spirit which kept them active.

For they were in the midst of abundance. The well-stored ship, victualled for a couple of hundred people, offered plenty for three, while from sea and land there was an ample supply in the form of fish, fowl, and eggs, both birds' and turtles', places being discovered which were affected by these peculiar reptiles, and where they crawled out to deposit their round ova in the sand, while a fine specimen could be obtained by careful watching.

Then, too, there was an abundant supply of fresh water easily to be obtained by taking a water cask up the river on the raft.

As Carey's injury mended he was restlessly busy either superintending the pearl fishing, whose results were visible in half-a-dozen casks sunk in the sands and an ever-increasing stack of the great shells carefully ranged in solid layers by Bostock, to whom fell the lot of pouring water in the casks and giving their contents a stir-up from time to time.

"Smell, sir?" he said, in answer to a remark from Carey, who always went carefully to windward. "Oh, I s'pose they do; so does fish if you keep it too long, but I don't mind."

"But it's horrid sometimes," said Carey; "and if it wasn't for the pearls I wouldn't have anything to do with the mess."

"Dirty work brings clean money, my lad; and if you come to that, the fresh lots of shells I piles up don't smell like pots of musk. But it's all a matter o'

taste. Some likes one smell, and some likes another, and then they calls it scent. Why, I remember once as people used to put drops on their hankychies as they called—now, what did they call that there scent, my lad?”

“Eau de Cologne.”

“No, nothing like that.”

“Lavender water?”

“Nay, nay.”

“Millefleurs?”

“Nay, nothing like it. Here, I’ve got it; something like Paddy Chooly.”

“Patchouli?”

“That’s it. I knew it was something about Paddy. Well, sir, if you’ll believe me, that stuff smelt just like black beetles in a kitchen cupboard near the fire. I don’t mind the smell o’ pearl soup.”

“But I want to see number one emptied. When is it to be?”

“When it’s quite ripe, and it aren’t ripe yet.”

“Takes a long time, doesn’t it?” said Carey.

“And no mistake. So much the better. You’ve been expecting and expecting, and thinking about emptying that tub, and getting shovels full o’ pearls out o’ the bottom, and it’s made you forget all about your sore chesty and give it time to get well. ’Tis quite well now, aren’t it?”

“I think so, Bob; only the doctor says I’m to be very careful.”

“Of course you have to be, my lad. But don’t you fidget; I’ll tell you when number one cask’s ripe, and then don’t you expect too much, for it’s like lots o’ things in this here world; it may turn out werry disappointing. You puts in pounds o’ trouble, and don’t get out an ounce o’ good. P’raps there won’t be a teaspoonful o’ pearls, and them only as small as dust.”

“Oh!” ejaculated Carey.

“No use to reckon on them, sir, but all the same, sometimes when a tub’s emptied it turns out wonderful.”

But the time wore on; tub after tub was filled, and the contents grew more and more liquid, and the testing was still kept in abeyance.

“Never mind,” said the doctor, laughing, when Carey protested; “there is no harm in waiting.”

And day by day Carey grew stronger, gradually taking his part in the daily avocations, fishing and shooting; and it was a grand day for him when one day the doctor thought that he might join him on an expedition to the lake.

“I’m all right now, Bob,” he said, hurrying to the old sailor after this.

“Well, yes, you seem to be, sir,” said Bostock; “what with the doctor’s looking you up and down and me feeding you, we’ve pretty well made a man of you, and you’re nearly all right; but I don’t quite take what you mean.”

“I’ve passed my last examination now, and Doctor Kingsmead seems to think he can give me up.”

“I’m glad of it, my lad. Hearty, my lad.”

“And we’re going to explore a bit, going right up to the lake.”

“Am I coming too?”

“Of course. You’d like to, wouldn’t you?”

“Course I should, sir. Going to take the guns?”

“Oh, yes, and I mean to shoot. I want to see that lake too. It has been so tiresome only keeping along the shore and about the sands.”

“You’ve had some tidy sails about the lagoon, and some good fishing, my lad.”

“Of course I have, but I want to shoot.”

“Well, I s’pose it’s natural, sir,” said Bostock. “I know when I was a boy I always wanted to do something else. If I was in a garden it allus seemed as if the next garden must be better, and I wanted to look over the wall. One allus wants to be doing something fresh. It’s Natur, I s’pose. Do we start soon?”

“Oh, yes, as soon as we can get off.”

The early breakfast was over, and the satchel of provisions being prepared they were soon over the side, each bearing a double gun and a fair supply of ammunition, Bostock carrying, in addition, a small axe ready for use, and Carey hanging a billhook to his belt—a handy implement for getting through cane or tangled thorn.

It was another lovely morning, with the submarine gardens more beautiful than ever; but there was very little wind, and their progress across to their

regular landing place was very slow, but not wearisome, for there was always something fresh to see in the sunlit waters. On this particular morning they sailed over sandy openings among the rocks, where Bostock drew attention to the abundance of those peculiar sea-slugs known in commerce as sea-cucumbers.

“Why not try some o’ them cooked one of these days, Master Carey?” said the old sailor.

“Pah! Horrid! You never ate one, did you?”

“No, sir, but the Chinese think a deal of ’em, and give no end of money for a hundredweight salted and dried. We shall have to take to collecting them when we’ve got all the pearl hysters.”

“Why, that will never be, Bob. There’s all round the island to go, and even if we finished them we could sail to first one and then another reef.”

“Yes, that’s so, sir. Strikes me that when we do go away from here, what with pearl shells, pearls, and dried cocoanuts, we ought to be able to lade a ship with a valuable cargo.”

“Look at the fish,” said Carey.

“Yes, sir, there’s plenty; but we’re not going to fish to-day, of course?”

“Oh, no. Get ashore as soon as we can, and follow the stream right up to the lake.”

“It’s going to be a hot walk, my lad, and—”

“Hist! Look, Bob. Here, doctor, look! look!”

Both looked in the indicated direction, to see that the raft was on its way to glide by a turtle basking in the hot sunshine and apparently fast asleep.

“We’re not going to fish,” whispered Carey, “but we ought to have that.”

“Yes,” said the doctor, and Bostock was evidently of the same opinion, for he bent down softly to pick up a little coil of fine rope to make a noose at one end.

“You just make the other end fast to one of the planks, sir,” he whispered. “He’ll make a big rush as soon as he feels the rope.”

Bostock crept forward softly and knelt down ready, with the raft gliding right for the sleeping reptile.

Then both the doctor and Carey held their breath with excitement, as the old sailor reached out, slipped the noose over one of the fins, and then started back deluged with water dashed up by the startled creature, which rushed off with all its might till it was brought up short by the line coming to an end.

At this there was a violent jerk, the raft was drawn out of its course and began to move at increased speed in the direction of the opening in the great reef, the prisoner making for the open sea.

“Better come and give a hand here, Mr Carey, sir,” cried Bostock. “I ought to guide him a bit and make, him tow us our way so as to get him ashore. What do you say to the mouth of the river? If we could get him to run up there it would be splendid.”

“And what about the crocodiles, Bob?”

“Eh? Ah! I forgot all about them, sir. Never mind; anywhere ’ll do. That’s right, sir; lay hold. Strong a’most as a helephant, aren’t he? Wo ho! my lad. Don’t be in a flurry. Well, I *am* blest!”

One minute they were gliding steadily over the lagoon; the next the rope hung loosely in their hands.

“Lost him?” said the doctor.

“Yes, sir. We must have pulled one of his fins out. Dessay we’ve got it here.”

“The rope slipped over it, Bob,” said Carey, in disappointed tones, as the noose was hauled aboard. “Oh, we ought to have had that. It was a beauty.”

“Never mind,” said the doctor. “Steer for the shore, and let’s get off on our trip.”

Bostock turned to his steering oar and shook his head in a very discontented way.

“It’s just as I said about the pearls, Master Carey; it don’t do to reckon on anything till you get it. But I ought to have had that chap.”

They made fast the raft and landed soon after, a little chipping with a crowbar having turned a rough mass into a pier which ran right up to the sand and sort of put an end to the necessity for wading.

Then kits and guns were shouldered, and, light-hearted and eager, Carey followed the doctor, who struck in at once through the great belt of cocoanut palms, and, pushing upwards through beautifully wooded ground, soon took them beyond the parts heretofore traversed by Carey, who now began to long to stop at every hundred yards to investigate a flowering tree

where insects swarmed, or some clump of bushes noisy with cockatoos or screaming parrots. But the doctor kept steadily on till a dull humming roar away to the right began to grow louder, and at the end of about a mile of climbing there was a soft moist feeling in the air, which increased till all at once their guide halted upon the brink of a precipice.

“Now then,” he said, speaking loudly, for the roar of the hidden falls nearly drowned his voice; “come forward cautiously and look down.”

Carey and the old sailor approached, parting the mass of ferns and creepers, which flourished wonderfully in the soft moist air; and then they found themselves on a level with the top of the hills which they had seen from the lagoon, where the little river suddenly plunged down into a deep hollow a couple of hundred feet below, and from which a faint cloud of mist floated, now arched by an iridescent bow. It was a beautiful sight, but the doctor gave them little time to admire it.

“You can come up here any time now,” he said. “Let’s push forward and get to the lake and the peak which we have to climb, so that you can have the view.”

“But where was it you saw the crocodiles?” asked Carey.

“Oh, half a mile lower down, nearer the sea. I came straight across to-day, so as to take the nearest cut. The little river runs up through a winding valley right away from here.”

“But we shall be missing all the beauties,” said Carey.

The doctor laughed.

“There’ll be more beauties and wonders than you can grasp in one excursion,” he said. “I suppose you mean to come again, and to use your

gun.”

The boy was silenced, and followed the doctor as he pressed on for some distance farther, till the valley opened out a little and there was ample room to walk on the same level as the river, here gliding gently in the full sunshine, with its banks beautiful with flower, insect, and bird.

Every here and there, though, there were hot sandy patches dotted with peculiar-looking black stone lying in masses, cracked and riven as if by fire, while parts were cindery and vesicular, others glistening in the sunshine like black glass.

“You take the lead now, Carey,” said the doctor. “You can’t go wrong; only follow the river; it will lead you right up to the lake.”

“Wouldn’t you rather lead, sir?”

“No, my lad; I want you to have the first chance at anything worth shooting. Keep your eyes well open, and you may catch sight of the great crowned pigeons. There, forward.”

Carey needed no further orders, and full of excitement he stepped on in front, looking keenly to right and left, and scanning every bush and tree. For the first mile he saw nothing larger than parrots, but turning into a stony part where the sand and pebbles reflected the sun with a glowing heat, something suddenly darted up from before him and ran rapidly in amongst a rugged pile of scattered stones.

“Here! a young crocodile,” he cried.

“Nonsense, boy. There are no crocodiles here,” cried the doctor. “One of the great mountain lizards.”

“Too big! Six feet long,” said Carey, excitedly.

“Well, they grow seven or eight. Go on.”

Carey went on, but so as to follow the glistening creature he had seen disappear, cocking his gun for a shot if he had a chance.

The chance came the next minute, but he was not able to take advantage of it, for on turning one of the black masses of slag which looked as if it had lately come from a furnace, the great lizard was started again, and what followed was over in a few seconds, for the lithe, active creature turned threateningly upon its pursuer with jaws thrown open, and it looked startling enough in its grey, glistening armour as it menaced the lad, who stood aghast—but only to be brought to a knowledge of his position by the attack which followed.

It was no snapping or seizing, but there was a sharp whistling sound and, quick as lightning, the long, tapering thin tail crooked twice round Carey’s legs, making him utter a cry of pain, for it was as if he had been flogged sharply with a whip of wire.

The next minute the great lizard had disappeared.

“Why didn’t you shoot?” said the doctor.

“Hadn’t time. Oh, how it did hurt! Why, it was like steel.”

“Never mind; you must be quicker next time, but I daresay there will be marks left.”

“And Bob’s laughing at it,” said the boy, in an ill-used tone. “Here, you had better lead.”

“Never mind, lead on,” said the doctor; “the smarting will soon pass off. It is not like a poisonous bite.”

All the same the whip-like strokes stung and smarted terribly, as the boy went on again, vowing vengeance mentally against the very next lizard he saw.

But he did not take his revenge, though he started two more at different times from among the sun-baked stones, and Bostock bantered him about it.

“Why don’t you shoot, sir?” he said, in a low voice so that the doctor, who was a little behind, examining plants, did not hear.

“Who’s to shoot at a thin whip-lash of a tail?” said Carey, angrily. “They’re here one moment and gone the next. They dart out of sight like a flash.”

As they went higher the doctor pointed out various tokens of some ancient eruption, it being plain that there must have been a time when the bed of the river formed that of a flow of volcanic mud, mingled with blocks of lava and scoria. Then the lake must in the course of ages have formed, and its overflowings have swept away all soft and loose débris.

“Yes, it’s all very interesting,” said Carey, “but it’s precious hot,” and he gave himself a sort of writhe to make his clothes rub over his skin. But the attempt was in vain, for his shirt stuck, and a peculiarly irritable look came over his countenance.

“Do the weals sting?” asked the doctor.

“Horribly. That lizard’s tail must be all bone. Oh, it does hurt still.”

“It will soon go off. Think of it from a natural history point of view, my boy, and how singular it is that the creature should be endowed with such a

wonderful power of defence. It regularly flogged and lashed at you.”

“Yes; cracked its tail like a whip.”

“No, no; the sound you heard was caused by the blows. It seems as if the saurian tribe make special use of their tails for offence and defence.”

“Why, what else does?” said Carey, rubbing himself softly.

“Crocodiles and alligators strike with tremendous force; the former will sweep cattle or human beings off a river bank into the water; and I daresay those monster lizards attack small animals in the same way.”

“But I’m not a small animal, sir,” said the boy, shortly. “Yes, it’s all very well to laugh, Doctor Kingsmead, and talk about studying a whopping from a natural history point of view, but one couldn’t study wasps comfortably sitting on their nest.”

“No, and I daresay the cuts were very painful, but the sting will soon pass off.”

“Yes, it’s getting better now,” said Carey, looking a little more cheerful; “but old Bob keeps on grinning about it. He doesn’t look at me, but he keeps on chuckling to himself every minute, and that’s what it means. I wish he’d get stung, or something. Hi! look out. Snake!”

His shout aroused a sleeping boa—not one of the giants of its kind, but a good-sized serpent of the sort known among Australian settlers as the carpet snake.

The reptile had been sleeping in the sunshine and, startled into activity, made for its lair, a dense patch of woodland, escaping before anyone could get a shot.

“That’s a pretty good proof that this isle was at one time joined to the mainland, Carey,” said the doctor, “and this would account for the volcano we are ascending being so dwarfed. There must have been a gradual sinking, and so it is that we find creatures that would not inhabit an ordinary island. For instance, we should not find monitors and carpet snakes in a coral island. Look at the birds too; those kingfishers. Do you see, Bostock, there’s an old friend of ours, the great laughing jackass?”

“Nay,” said the old sailor, shading his eyes; “that’s not the same. He’s a deal like him, but our old laughing jackasses down south haven’t got all that bright blue in their jackets. Going to shoot him, Master Carey?”

“No,” said the boy; “I don’t want it. ’Tisn’t good to eat.”

“There’s a lovely bird there,” said the doctor, pointing to where there was a flash of dark purply orange, as the sun played upon the head and back of a bird nearly the size of a jay. “A regular Queensland bird. I’ve seen it there.”

“What is it?” said Carey.

“The rifle bird; a near relative, I believe, to the birds of paradise.”

“But it’s nearly black,” protested Carey. “Birds of paradise are all fluffy buff feathers.”

“Some of them,” said the doctor, “but there are many kinds, some much more ornamental than the kind you mean.”

He raised his gun to shoot the rifle bird, but lowered it again.

“I couldn’t preserve it if I shot it,” he said. “Come along.”

They continued the ascent, finding the heat in the sheltered valley rather more than they could bear, and Carey looked longingly down to his right at the placidly flowing river, thinking how pleasant a dip would be.

“I say,” he said at last, “what a little shade there is.”

“And unfortunately,” said the doctor, “it grows less the higher we get—a way with the growth on mountains; but we shall soon be high enough to feel the sea breeze, and after all it’s a wonderfully interesting tramp.”

Carey agreed that it was, for the bird life now was most attractive—gaily dressed parroquets, green, and with breasts like gorgeous sunsets, were plentiful.

There were the lovely little zebra parrots, too, in abundance, black cockatoos, white with sulphur crest, beauties in pink and grey, and finches with black or scarlet heads and breasts shot with topaz, amethyst, and vivid blue.

Then every rock had its occupants in the shape of silvery-grey, golden-green, or black and orange lizards, some looking as if they were bearded, others bearing a singular frill, while again others were dotted with hideous spikes and prickles, all being given to turn defiantly upon the intruders to their domain, and menacingly open their gaping mouths, lined with orange, yellow, or rich blue; but ready to take flight all the same and plunge into the rock rift or hole which made their home.

At last there was a rocky slope to climb, up to the left of which a sugar-loaf peak rose, which Carey at once concluded was the one which the doctor had climbed; so, feeling that their task was pretty well achieved, he manfully breasted the rock-strewn slope, ignored the lizards basking in the sun, and directly after gave a shout of satisfaction, for on one side there came a

deliciously cool breeze, while on the other he was looking down at a vividly blue lake lying in a hollow a couple of hundred feet below where he stood, and quite sheltered from the wind, so that its surface was like a mirror and reflected the hills all round.

“Lovely, eh, Carey?”

“It is glorious,” panted the boy. “Isn’t it fine, Bob?”

Bostock grunted, laid down his gun, swung round the satchel containing the food, and passed the strap over his head, setting it afterwards on the ground in a very significant manner.

“Yes,” said the doctor; “we may as well have our lunch.”

“But I say,” said Carey, “do you really think this was once a volcano, doctor?”

“Certainly, and the blue water we look down upon was preceded by a lake of fire.”

“But how was that? Where did the water come from? Not from the sea.”

“No, from the draining of these hills or mountains all round, upon which you have seen the clouds gather and melt into rain.”

“And that put out the volcanic fire?” said Carey, quickly.

“Oh, no,” replied the doctor, smiling. “If those trickling streams had run down into a lake of fire they would have flown up again in steam with tremendous explosions. This lake of water did not form until the volcano was quite extinct, and—”

“Shall I cut up the wittles, sir?” said Bostock, who had been impatiently waiting for the doctor to end his lecture.

“Here, fall to, Carey; Bostock is getting ravenous.” And they ate their lunch, with Carey longing to go down the inner slope to examine the lake for fish and try to find out how deep it was.

It was a double feast, one for the body and one for the brain, the long walk and exertion having made all hungry, and as soon as this was appeased the doctor led the way for the final cone to be climbed.

Here Carey feasted indeed—the glass showing him through the limpid air reef after reef silvered with spray, and what were evidently islands, looking like faint amethystine clouds floating between sea and sky.

These islands lay to the north-east, but though they all looked long and carefully there was no sign of any great tract of land or continent.

“These are the times, Carey, when one feels one’s ignorance,” observed the doctor.

“Ignorance? I thought you knew nearly every thing.”

“Nearly nothing,” said the doctor, laughing. “I mean as compared to what there is to know. Now, for instance, there are charts in the captain’s cabin, and the proper instruments for taking observations—sextants and chronometer. I ought to be able to tell exactly where we are, Carey, and mark it upon a chart, but I can’t.”

“Never mind, sir, it’s very beautiful,” said the boy. “I say, though, we can’t see the *Chusan* from here.”

“No, it is cut off by the projecting part of the mountain.”

“Yes, and the lower parts and mouth of the river too. But we can see all round the other side of the island.”

“Yes, and see what prisoners we are and shall be till some ship comes on a voyage of discovery and sees the great wreck.”

“Well,” said Carey, thoughtfully, “if it wasn’t for one thing I like it, and don’t feel in a bit of a hurry to go away.”

“And what is the one thing?” asked the doctor.

“Mother and father’s trouble. They must think I’m dead.”

Chapter Fifteen.

The trio rested at the top of the peak for a couple of hours, and then started back, the doctor taking the lead again so as to vary the way of descent, and gain an acquaintance with as much of the island as was possible.

This had the effect of lengthening out the journey, for there were many detours to be made to avoid dense jungly patches through which they would have had to clear their way; so that it was getting on towards evening when, after descending slope after slope and dodging, as Carey termed it, through little maze-like valleys, they came in sight of the waving cocoanut palms beneath them, and finally passed through to reach the sands.

They were still some distance from the landing place where the raft lay, and the sand was hot, loose, and painful to walk upon; but at last the rocky natural pier was reached, the raft cut loose, and, there being a pleasant evening breeze sufficient to ripple the water, they sailed steadily across.

“Might get a fish or two for supper easy to-night, sir,” said Bostock. “I’ve got a line, sir. Shall I try?”

“No, we’ve done enough to-day,” replied the doctor. “Let’s be satisfied with what we’ve done and the provisions we have on board.”

“Right, sir,” said Bostock. “There is plenty of pickled fish.”

“I feel more like a cup of tea than anything,” replied the doctor. “It was a thirsty climb. Better take out the cartridges from your gun, Carey.”

“Mind taking mine out too, Master Carey?” said Bostock, who was steering.

“All right,” said Carey, following the doctor’s example and returning the little charges to the ammunition bag. “I say, we shall only just get aboard before dark.”

“We ought to have been half-an-hour sooner,” observed the doctor, and five minutes or so later the raft rubbed with a grinding sound against the side, where it was made fast to a ring bolt by their hanging ladder.

The doctor ascended first to the darkened deck, for the night had fallen very rapidly during the last few minutes. Carey followed him, and leaned down before he reached the top of the ladder for the guns, which he took from Bostock’s hands and passed up to the doctor.

The satchels and bucket of treasures they had found followed, and then Carey finished his ascent to the lofty deck.

“Look sharp, Bob,” he said, “and let’s have some supper at once.”

“Supper it is, sir, in a brace of jiffies,” replied the old sailor, as he stepped on deck, and he was in the act of turning to his left to go below to the galley, when he stopped short and uttered a warning cry.

“The guns—the guns!” he yelled.

Too late. There was a rush of bare feet on the soft deck, and through the gloom Carey was just able to make out that they were surrounded by a party of blacks, each poising a spear ready to throw and holding in his other hand either a knobkerry or a boomerang.

“Go mumkull white fellow; baal, lie down, quiet, still!”

This was said in a fierce voice by one of the savage-looking fellows, and Carey mastered the desire to bound away and take refuge below.

“Who are you? What do you want?” cried the doctor.

“Go mumkull white fellow; baal, lie down, quiet, still!”

“Says they’re going to kill us all if we don’t lie down and be quiet,” growled the old sailor; then aloud to the blacks, “Here, what do you want—’bacco—sugar? Give plenty. Black fellow go.”

“Want ’bacco, sugar, take white fellow old ship,” cried the black who had first spoken.

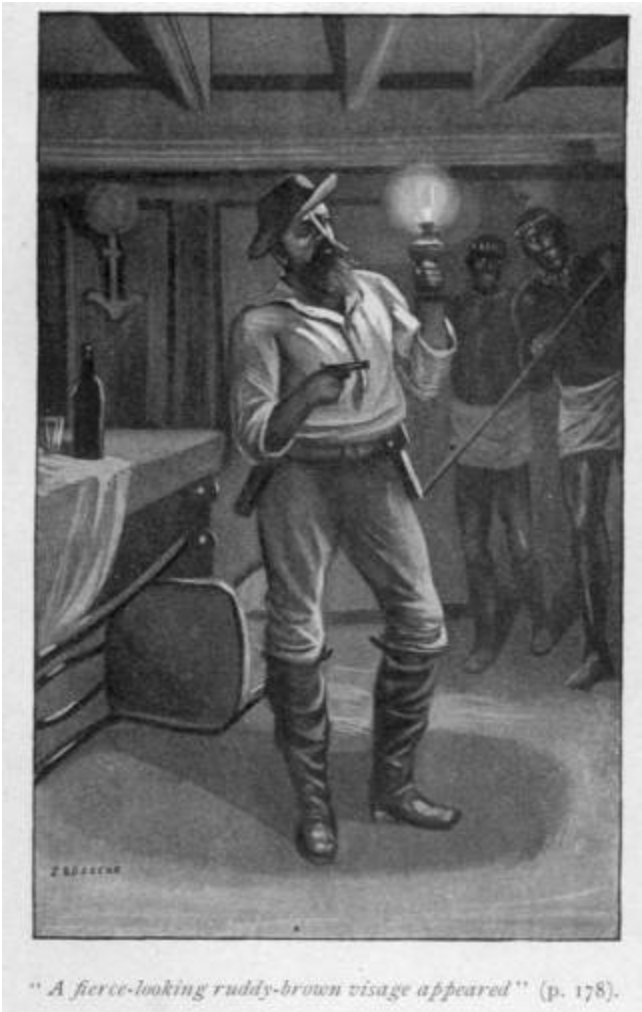
“Take our old ship, will you?” said Bostock. “I think not, my lad. There, put down spear, mulla-mulla. We’ll give you sugar, ’bacco.”

The man laughed, and his companions too.

“Where boat?” said Bostock, speaking as if he thought the savages must be deaf, and the spokesman pointed over the other side of the vessel.

“It’s all right, sir,” said Bostock. “Nothing to mind; they’re a party who’ve come in contact with English folk before, and they must have seen the ship. It only means giving them a bit of ’bacco and sugar and sending ’em away again. Don’t look afraid of ’em. Better give ’em what they want and let ’em go. They wander about, so we may never see ’em again.”

“Very well; fetch up some tobacco and sugar and give them,” said the doctor; but at the first step Bostock took half the men rushed at and seized him, making his companions snatch at their guns, but only to have them wrested away, the blacks cocking them and drawing the triggers so as to



“A fierce-looking ruddy-brown visage appeared” (p. 178).

fire them off if loaded, with a

sharp *click, click*, as the hammers fell.

“That’s bad, sir,” said Bostock, in his sourest growl. “It means fighting, and we aren’t got no tools.”

“It is horrible to be taken by surprise like this,” replied the doctor; “but it only means giving them presents; they were afraid we meant to shoot them.”

“Mumkull white fellow, baal, lie still,” cried the principal man, fiercely.

“All right, you dirty thick-headed black rough ’un,” growled Bostock. “Now then, what do you want? Give it a name. Tobacco or sugar, isn’t it, or both?”

“What’s that?” said Carey, quickly, for the sharp sound of a match being struck in one of the cabins came up. “There’s someone down below, getting a light.”

The attention of the blacks was taken too, and they stood as if listening, till there was the sudden glow of a lamp seen in the cabin entry, and directly after a fierce-looking ruddy-brown visage appeared, the swollen-veined, blood-shot eyes looking wild, strange, and horrible as the light the man carried struck full upon it and made the great ragged beard glisten.

Carey stared at him in wonder, taking in at a glance his rough half-sailor-like shirt and trousers and heavy fisherman’s boots. He noted, too, that the man wore a belt with holsters which evidently contained small revolvers.

The question was on his lips, “Who are you?” with its following, “What are you doing there?”

But the words were taken out of his lips by the doctor, who asked the questions angrily.

“Eh?” came in a hoarse, raucous voice, as the man rolled forward, with the lamp, till he was near enough to hold it close to the doctor’s face, and then to those of the others.

“Only three on ’em, then. Don’t let ’em go, my sonnies. Now then, you, what do you say? What am I doing here? What are you doing—what do you want aboard my ship?”

“Your ship, you bullying, drunken ruffian!” cried the doctor, in a rage. “You’ve been down in the cabin helping yourself to the spirits, or you would not dare to speak to me like this.”

“Well! You do talk,” cried the man, with a hoarse laugh. “Yes, I’ve had a drop I found down there. Thirsty, my lad, thirsty.”

“Did you bring these black scoundrels aboard?” cried the doctor, who was beside himself with rage.

“Sartain I did; they’re my crew, and I’m their master, and I’ve only got to say the word and over you go to the sharks. Eh, sonny? Sharks, eh?”

“Sharkum, sharkum!” cried the man who seemed to be the leader, and he caught hold of the doctor, his example being followed by his fellows; but in an instant he was sent staggering back, and Bostock’s assailant met with similar treatment, while Carey struck out, but with very little effect, save that he hurt his knuckles against the grinning teeth of the black who seized him.

“Hold hard, my sonnies; not yet. Let’s see how they behave themselves. Stand back.”

It was evident that the great coarse-looking ruffian had perfect command over the party of black fellows, who shrank back at a word, and waited with

glistening eyes, their faces shining in the lamplight.

“There,” said the man, “you see; so don’t be sarcy. I let you off this time, because you didn’t know; only if there’s any more of it I says the word, and over the side you go. Now then, who are you?”

“I am the medical officer of this stranded vessel, the *Chusan*, upon which you have trespassed; and I hold her in charge for the company of owners until they send a relief expedition to reclaim or salvage her.”

“That all?” said the man, with a hoarse laugh. “That for you, then, and all you say,” and he snapped his fingers in the doctor’s face. “Now, look here, my fine fellow, I’m Dan Mallam, Beachcomber (see note), as they call me, King o’ the Pearl Islands, dealer and merchant in copra, pearl shells, and pearls. These are my reefs and islands. This is my estate, and all flotsam and jetsam as is washed ashore is mine. Do you hear me?—mine, to do as I likes with. This steamer’s come ashore on my land, and my black lads, as has been out shelling and collecting nuts, saw it come and tell me, who have come over to see what the sea has washed me up this time, for I’ve been getting short o’ odds and ends, and the rum was getting low. There was the steamer, empty and cast away, and I’ve took possession, when you come and begin bullying and pretending you’ve got a claim on her.”

“Claim on her, you scoundrelly pirate!” cried the doctor. “Why, men have been transported for life for what you are attempting to do.”

The man scowled at the word transportation, and his right hand went to one of the holsters, whose flap he pressed over the stud so as to lay bare the butt of the pistol within. This he drew out and cocked.

“I just warn you to be civil, my fine fellow,” he said. “I’ve only to say a word to my black fellows, and, in spite of your kicking, over you’d go into

water that swarms with sharks; but when a man insults me, Dan Mallam, King o' the Pearl Islands, my temper gets warm, and I show my boys what a shot I am. Do you hear?"

The pistol clicked, and sent a shudder through Carey, who started at the ominous sound and looked wildly round for the guns, in the mad idea that he might be able to catch one up, load it, and fire in defence of the man towards whom he felt as if he were an elder brother. But the guns were all in the hands of the blacks, and others had possession of the satchels containing the cartridges.

Second thoughts convinced him that such an attempt could only result in the ruffian carrying out one of his threats, for he was beyond the reach of the law, if he were, as he said, a dweller in some neighbouring island, ruling probably over a little tribe of blacks.

What was to be done?

Just then the doctor spoke.

"Look here," he said, "I do not wish to insult you, but I am not going to give up to a man who is acting as you are. I tell you once more, I hold this vessel in my charge, and I am prepared to defend it on behalf of the owners."

"How?" said their visitor, with a mocking laugh.

"Never mind how," replied the doctor, more calmly. "I am not to be frightened by empty threats. We are not so far from civilisation that you dare injure me and my companions. The news would be carried to Brisbane, Adelaide, or Sydney, and one of her Majesty's war ships on the station would soon be here to call you to account."

“How’d they get the noos?” said the man, mockingly.

“In the same way that you did: the blacks would hear it.”

“Let ’em,” said the man, fiercely. “A black fellow’s life aren’t worth much, but they think too much of it to care about chucking it away.”

“The report would certainly reach headquarters, and, like the black fellows, sir, you care too much for your life to care about chucking it away, as you call it. Now, look here, I am not frightened by your threats, neither do I want to quarrel.”

“Same here, sonny, so let’s forget what’s passed and be friends,” said the man, replacing his little revolver.

“Hear me out first,” said the doctor. “I am in command here, and I mean to retain it, but I do not wish to be grasping or unfair to an Englishman in want of necessaries out in this wild place. I will let you have what things you require in the morning.”

“Thankye,” said the man, drily. “Now then, we’ve only just got here after a long paddling against the currents, and the wind against us. I want something to eat, and my boys are pretty sharp set. Where do you keep your prog?”

“Call the men off, and tell them to camp down forward on the deck,” said the doctor. “They can have a sail for tent, and they shall have such rations as we have ready. You would like a cabin, I suppose?”

“Well, rather,” said the man, with a peculiar smile.

“We shall have a kind of supper ready soon; so call off your men at once.”

“All right; only no games.”

“Treachery?” said the doctor; “I had no thought of anything of the kind.”

“Here, Black Jack, let go, and take the boys forward. No mumkull, baal, spear, baal, nulla-nulla. Plenty much eat soon. Get out.”

The man grunted, said a few words to his fellows, and they all trooped forward and squatted on the deck.

“Beg pardon, sir,” growled Bostock; “give ’em some ’bacco; there’s plenty.”

“All right,” said their leader; “give ’em plenty of ’bacco. That’ll keep ’em quiet for the night. Only I say, just a word of advice. Don’t try to play no tricks, for they’re about as nasty as a bag o’ snakes. Rile ’em or rile me, and they’ll bite. If they bite they kill, and if they kill you three there’ll be no work got out of ’em for a week. Understand?”

“No,” said the doctor, quietly.

“Then I’ll tell you: they’ll take you ashore, and make a fire, and cook you.”

“Ha, ha, ha!” laughed Carey, derisively.

The next moment the man’s hand closed tight upon the boy’s shoulder, holding him fast.

“You don’t believe it, eh?”

“No,” said Carey, boldly; “not a word of it, and don’t grip my shoulder like that—it hurts.”

“Meant it to, puppy,” growled the man, menacingly. “D’ye hear? Cook you and eat you, and they’ll begin on you, because you’re young and tender; and they’ll go on eating you till they’re as dizzy as drunken men. Then they’ll go to sleep, and wake up again, and go on cooking and eating till they can’t see, and keep on till they’ve finished you all.”

“Find me pretty tough,” growled Bostock.

“Not they,” cried the man. “You’d be tender by the time they got to you. They don’t mind how long it is first. Don’t believe it, eh?”

“No,” said Carey, setting his teeth hard to master the pain he felt. “It’s a silly story about cannibalism to frighten me.”

“Think so?” said the man. “All right. Here, Black Jack!” he roared.

The leading black snatched up spear and club and bounded to the speaker with wonderful alacrity, his eyes flashing, and he looked from one to the other as if expecting orders to slay.

“Ask him,” growled his leader.

Carey was turning faint with pain, and the doctor saw it and stepped forward.

“Take hold of his arm,” he said to their captor; “the boy has had his collar-bone broken.”

As he spoke he removed the great coarse hand to the boy’s fore-arm, and Carey uttered a sigh of relief. Then, turning to the fierce-looking savage, he said quickly, “Here, you blackie.”

“Not Blackie; Black Jack.”

“Well, Black Jack, what do you do with your prisoners?”

The fierce look died into a broad grin, and he showed his white teeth.

“Make fire; eatum,” he said, promptly. “Make big feast.”

“Go back!” growled the so-called king.

“No. Mumkull; kill, eatum.”

“Not now. Be off.”

The black darted back to his companions, and the beachcomber turned to Carey.

“Want some more proof?” he said.

Carey was silent.

“Here, you,” said the man, turning to Bostock. “Been in these parts before?”

“Lots o’ times,” said the old sailor.

“Tell him, then.”

“Is it true, Bob?”

“Yes, my lad, it’s true enough,” said Bostock. “They eat their prisoners, their old folks, and the babies and wives, too, when starvation times come.”

“What, do you mean to tell me that such things go on out here in Australia and the islands—now?”

“It’s true enough, Carey,” said the doctor, gravely. “I’ve seen the bones at one of their camps after a feast.”

The beachcomber laughed hoarsely.

“Now you know what you’ve got to expect, youngster; so behave yourself,” he said. “Now, doctor, you know. Be civil, and I daresay we shall be very good friends; be nasty, and I shan’t keep my black pack quiet, but let ’em do as they like. Hi! Black Jack!”

The savage bounded once more to his side.

“See that the canoe and boat are fast, and then you shall have a feast.”

“All fast. Tie rope,” said the black, pointing to the farther side of the steamer deck. Then, to Carey’s horror, he made a peculiar gesture and pointed at him.

“No. Salt beef. ’Bacco,” growled his leader, and the man once more bounded away.

“Come below,” continued the man, hoarsely, “and get those brutes something to keep ’em quiet; and I want a big drink. You three go first.”

Carey glanced at the doctor and then at Bostock, both of whom avoided his eye and went to the cabin entrance, leaving the boy to follow, feeling half-stunned and wondering whether they ought not to make some effort to drive the intruders overboard.

Note: Beachcomber. A white man who settles down in one of the South Sea Islands and lives by trading with the natives for copra—the dried kernels of cocoanuts—pearl shells, and the sea slug *Beche de mer*; often living by

wrecking, kidnapping the natives, or any nefarious scheme. Many of them have been drunken, unprincipled scoundrels, their ranks in the old days having been recruited from the convicts escaped from Botany Bay or Norfolk Island.

Chapter Sixteen.

To Carey's rage and discomfiture he found that their captor treated him as the ship's boy, following Bostock to the store-room and ordering him to carry the most solid of the provisions to the blacks.

"They won't want any knives and forks and plates, young 'un. Wait a moment. Where's the tobacco?"

This was produced in its tub, and in obedience to his orders Carey took out twenty of the long square compressed cakes.

"That's right. Twenty of 'em, and don't let either of the warmint snatch two."

"How am I to stop them?" said Carey, bitterly.

"Got a fist, haven't you?"

Carey nodded shortly.

"Hit the first as does in the mouth."

"To be knocked down with a club," said the boy, bitterly.

"No one dare touch you, my lad, unless I give 'em leave. I'm king here, I tell you, and the black dogs know it. Be off."

“You hideous, red-eyed brute!” said the boy to himself, as he took his load and turned to go. “How I should like to—”

He did not mentally say what, for he was brought up short by the word “Stop!” roared in a bullying tone.

“Here, you,” cried the man to Bostock, “light a lanthorn; it’s dark on deck. Follow him, and hold it till he’s done. And look here, bring it away again, or they’ll be setting the ship afire. They can see in the dark like cats. They want no light.”

Bostock fetched a lanthorn, lit it in a surly way, and then went first, closely followed by Carey, who just caught sight of their captor pouring himself out a tumbler of rum from a half-emptied bottle; but there was no water near.

“Bob,” panted the boy, as they reached the deck, “are we going to put up with this?”

“Dunno yet, my lad,” growled the old sailor. “Not for long, I hope. Seems to me like me knocking that there red and white savage’s head off, and then blowing up the ship.”

“But why doesn’t the doctor do something?”

“Aren’t made up his mind yet what to do, my lad, seemingly. He’s hatching. That’s what I think he’s a-doing of. I s’pose we’d better wait.”

“I can’t wait,” whispered Carey, “I feel in such a rage, I must do something.”

“Take the prog to them black beasts then, sir, now. They aren’t much better than annymiles.”

“Look sharp, you two, and come back to the cabin,” came in a fierce, hoarse voice from the cabin stairs, proving that they were watched.

“Come on, and get the dirty job done, Master Carey,” whispered Bostock. “I shall ’ave to kill somebody over this before I’ve done.”

Carey said nothing, but walked forward with his load, hearing the savages, who were chattering loudly, suddenly cease as if listening, and the next moment Black Jack came bounding to their side, looking eagerly from one to the other.

“Why can’t you walk?” growled Bostock. “Can’t you get over the deck, and not come hopping like a hinky-rubber ball, or one of your kangaroos?”

“Kangaroo? Wallaby?” said the black. “Over there. Lots.”

“Go and join ’em then, you sable son of a three-legged pitch-pot.”

“Got meat?”

“Yes,” said Carey, and he served out the big lumps cut ready, while Bostock held the light, the blacks taking it steadily enough till all were served, and Carey stood looking at them.

Then a murmur arose, Black Jack shouting the one word “’bacco,” and his fellows all joining.

“Can’t you wait a minute, you set o’ undressed nigger minstrels?” growled Bostock. “There, give ’em the cakes o’ ’bacco, sir, and I wish it would make ’em sick.”

Carey had placed the oblong squares of compressed leaf in his pocket, and he now took out half-a-dozen, the light being cast upon his hands and

giving the boy a glimpse of one of the party in the act of making a snatch.

Carey recalled his orders, and he was in the right humour for taking advantage of it, for his blood was up, and he jumped at the opportunity of getting a little satisfaction out of his enemies.

The black was quick, but the boy was equally so, and as the savage made a snatch, Carey's disengaged fist flew out in good school-boy fashion. There was the sound of a heavy blow, a yell, and the black bounded off the deck, to come down again club in hand and grinning ferociously as he raised it as if to strike.

Carey did not pause to think.

"Ah, would you?" he cried, and he struck out again quick as lightning, striking the black on the right cheek and drawing back quickly, expecting a general attack for his pugnacity.

But to his great surprise and satisfaction there was a yell of laughter, and the party danced round him, shouldering their fellow away, as in a series of strange antics they displayed their delight at his discomfiture.

"'Bacco, 'bacco!" they kept on shouting, as they pressed round, each taking his portion eagerly enough, but there was no snatching, till all had received a cake save the one who had been made to give way.

"There you are," cried Carey, holding out the last, but standing on his guard so as to avoid an expected blow.

But it did not come. The black took his cake and joined the others, to go back chattering to partake of their meal, while Carey and Bostock turned to go back to the cabin.

“Now, I call that there plucky,” said the old sailor, gruffly.

“What?” said Carey, wondering.

“You hitting that walking blacking bottle twice over in the mouth. I don’t know as I should ha’ dared.”

“Plucky!” said Carey, wonderingly. “You don’t know what a fright I felt in when I did it; but I was in such a passion that I was obliged to hit something.”

“And so you did, sir, a regular smeller. I don’t believe a French or a Jarman boy would ha’ done it.”

“Nonsense, Bob.”

“Oh, no, it aren’t, my lad; it’s some sense, and it’s taught me a deal.”

“What do you mean?”

“Why, it’s give me a feeling as we’re going to get out o’ this job without being cooked and eaten. You see how they go down on their knees like to old Bottle-nose yonder?”

“Yes.”

“Well, it’s because he’s a white man and not a bit afraid of ’em.”

“Yes, of course; but we—I mean, I am.”

“Not you, sir. Didn’t look like it just now. Well, you’re a white un. I won’t call you a white man; that would be gammoning you, because man you aren’t yet. But you’re a plucked un, and they was all delighted to see you hit their mate. Well, you go on like that, and they’ll be afraid of you. There’s

something in a white skin as is too much for them, and you've only got to let 'em see that you don't care a quid o' 'bacco for their blunt wood sticks and knob clubs, to keep 'em where they ought to be, down—right down. For they're only good enough to make door-mats to wipe your shoes on. Eat us? I should like to ketch 'em at it!"

"I shouldn't, Bob."

"Ah, well, I didn't quite mean that, sir; it was only a way o' speaking."

"Are you two chaps going to be all night?" came in a fierce voice from the cabin stairs.

Carey stepped up to the speaker directly.

"My black pack haven't worried you, then?" said the man, with a grin which showed two or three yellow teeth. "I began to think they'd eaten you raw, as you didn't come back. There, I don't want to starve you; get below and have your supper along with your mate. I've half done mine."

They went into the saloon, to find the doctor waiting for them with some food ready at one end of the table, while at the other the beachcomber's stood, consisting of a ship's biscuit and about half of the bottle of rum, which he had taken possession of before they came back.

"Get your prog, my lads, and then go to sleep. And look here, don't you either of you try any games, or maybe you won't see daylight again."

As may be supposed, the trio had not much appetite for their suppers, but they made pretence of eating, and saw that their captor was watching them all the time, sipping his neat rum and nibbling a little of the hard biscuit, which he softened a little at times by dipping it in his rum glass.

“Now then,” he said at last, “is that your cabin?”

“It is mine,” said the doctor.

“All right. Go in then, all three of you.”

“I don’t sleep here,” growled Bostock. “I’ve got a bunk below.”

“You’ll go in there,” said the man, fiercely.

“But there aren’t room.”

“Sleep on the floor then.”

Bostock turned to the doctor, but the latter’s eye was averted, and he made no sign, nor spoke.

“All right,” growled the old sailor, and he turned to Carey. “I won’t snore more’n I can help, sir,” he said. “It aren’t my fault.”

“In with you all,” said the beachcomber, roughly; “and look here, I’m going to sit here a bit to finish my physic, so don’t come out and disturb me. My black pack used to come prowling round sometimes of a night, but they never do now.”

As he spoke he took out a revolver and cocked it, before laying it down beside his tumbler of spirits with a meaning look.

“Are we to consider ourselves prisoners, sir?” said the doctor, speaking at last.

“Dunno,” was the reply, shortly given. “All depends. If you ride the high horse I may tell my pack to set you ashore somewhere else, but if you’re civil—well, we shall see. Only just recollect this, and don’t argue. These are

my islands all round here, and all that comes ashore's mine. Now go to bed."

He threw himself back in his chair and raised the glass to his lips, and without a word the three prisoners filed into the state-room, and the door swung to and clicked behind them.

Chapter Seventeen.

They were in total darkness, but Bostock took out his match-box and struck a light to apply to the lamp, which he coolly proceeded to regulate, and then turned to wait for the doctor to speak.

Doctor Kingsmead was standing with the veins in his forehead swollen, his teeth set, and his hands clenched.

"The dog—the brutal ruffian!" he said, as if talking to himself. "So helpless. Quite at his mercy. Seemed like a coward and a cur."

"No, you didn't," said Carey, shortly. "We were taken by surprise, and they're seven to one, and all armed."

The doctor turned to him sharply.

"Seven to one?" he said.

"Yes, I counted them; twenty black fellows and him."

"And threes into twenty-one goes seven times," growled Bostock.

"Yes, yes, seven to one," said the doctor, drawing a deep breath, "and the ruffian has us at his mercy, for those black fellows would rush at us at a

word, like the black pack he calls them. It's plain enough they have been within sight in a canoe, and reported to him what they saw. The scoundrel has, no doubt, played the part of wrecker for years and taken possession of every unfortunate vessel that has come ashore, plundered and burnt it."

"Humph!" growled Bostock.

"What do you say?"

"On'y grunted, sir. That's it. I've heard tell of chaps like him here and there in the South Seas. They knocks a few of the black fellows or coffee-coloured ones down, and makes 'em afraid, and then they do as they like, sir."

"But is it true about their eating people?" said Carey, in a low voice, and he glanced at the door as if half-expecting to be overheard.

"Oh, yes, sir, that's true enough. Our captain once said, when we had a report of a ship going ashore and the crew being massacred, that these chaps in some of the islands get such a little chance to have anything but fruit and fish that they're as rav'nous as wild beasts for flesh."

"Yes, yes, true enough," said the doctor. "So unfortunate for them to come when we were away. We could have defended the vessel easily."

"That means fighting, sir," growled Bostock.

"Yes; wouldn't you have struck a blow to defend the vessel?"

"Well, you see, sir, I'm only a sailor and not a fighting man," said Bostock, slowly.

“You coward!” cried Carey, indignantly. “Why, boy as I am, I’d have tried to do something, if it was only reloading the guns.”

“Course you would, sir; I know that,” said the old sailor, quietly. “Didn’t you give that there nigger a smeller just now?”

“What!” cried the doctor, sharply.

“Got in a temper with one of ’em for trying to steal more’n his share o’ ’bacco, sir, and give him two, one in the mouth and one in the cheek. Stop a moment; let’s tell the truth if I die for it. Warn’t one o’ them cracks on the nose, sir?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Carey, hurriedly. “But I did think at a time like this, you’d have been ready to fight, Bostock.”

“Bob, if it’s all same to you, Master Carey, and I didn’t say I warn’t ready to fight. Why, o’ course I will at the proper time.”

“Then I beg your pardon, Bos—”

“Bob, sir.”

“Well, Bob then, for we can’t sit down quietly like this.”

“That’s what I think, sir, but I aren’t the skipper, and it’s what the doctor says as’ll have to be done.”

“Yes, of course, Bostock,” said the doctor, hastily; “but I was so absolutely stunned by this surprise.”

“Yes, sir, reg’lar took aback, I know.”

“I have not known what to do or say. I must have time to think.”

“That’s it, sir. I know you’ve got to make your plans. Bit o’ scheming, because we none on us want one o’ them dirty black warmint’s skewers run through us. You make up your mind what to do, and tell me which rope I’m to pull, and I’ll spit on my hands and haul like a man.”

“Yes, yes, I know you will,” said the doctor. “As to that old beachcomber, sir, shooting aren’t in my way, but ’volvers or no ’volvers, you give the word when you’re ready and I’ll chuck him overboard to get some water to mix with his rum; and I believe that’d be doing a good action.”

“Yes,” said the doctor. “Look here. That man can’t go on drinking strong spirit as he does without soon being quite prostrate.”

Bostock looked at the speaker with an expression of disgust and contempt upon his face.

“I What, sir? Do you think that old rough would ever drink enough rum to make him stupid?”

“Of course.”

“Never, sir. He just about lives on it. Bound to say he’s gone on for a score o’ years. Didn’t you see as he only nibbled a biscuit?”

“Yes, I noticed that,” said Carey, quickly.

“Yes, sir. Rum won’t have no more effect on him than tea would on you and me. You try another idea, sir. What do you say to frightening them black fellows overboard? They’re a rum lot; just like a pack o’ children. Frightened o’ bogies. Show ’em a good scarecrow or tatty dooly, as the Scotch folk call it, and they’d think it was what they call a bunyip.”

“What’s a bunyip?”

“What they calls a debble-debble, sir. They’re awful babies in anything they can’t understand. You must give ’em some red fire, or blue fire, or ’lectricity.”

“Wait, wait, wait,” said the doctor, impatiently. “We must temporise. It is no use to try and do anything in haste. The first thing we have to find out is whether that ruffian goes off to sleep or keeps watch.”

Carey pointed to the ventilator over the door.

“I could see through that,” he whispered, “if you could take me on your shoulders.”

Bostock nodded, and placed his hands firmly on the sides of the door, bending down his head and standing as firm as a rock, while Carey’s first instinct was to take a run and a jump; but he did not, for one reason, there was not room, another, that it would have been folly; but he placed his hand upon the man’s shoulders and steadily climbed up till he could stand stooping upon his back, and then he cautiously peered through a little crack, and the first thing he saw was the beachcomber sitting back fast asleep.

This sent a thrill of satisfaction through him, and he turned his eyes towards the saloon door, and a chill of horror ran through him, for he caught sight of something bright and flashing, and it was a few moments before he grasped the fact that it was the lamp reflected from the eyes of one of the blacks close to the floor.

Nearly a minute elapsed before he could make out the black figure of their owner, and then he saw it move.

It was plain enough now as it crept in and nearer to the shaded rays of the lamp. Carey could even see that the black had his club and the curved knife-

like blade of his boomerang stuck behind in the coarse hair girdle he wore about his waist.

“Why, he’s creeping in to kill his master,” was the boy’s first thought, and a chill of horror ran through him.

The black crept slowly and silently over the floor of the saloon, and Carey would have uttered words of warning to his companions, but he could not speak, every faculty seeming frozen, save that he could see; and he stared wildly as he saw now two more pairs of eyes and a couple of the blacks creep in silently, but only to stop at the door, squatting on their heels, as if watching their leader.

The latter took up Carey’s whole attention now, and he waited to see him take out his club before he uttered a warning shout to the sleeping man, for he felt that he could not stand and see him murdered in cold blood.

The black crept on till he was quite close to the sleeper, and then he rose, squatted like his companions, and at last raised his hand.

The warning cry rose to Carey’s lips, but it did not leave them, for the black did not bring out his club, but softly took down the empty glass, smelt it and then thrust in a long black finger, passed it round and sucked it, repeating the action several times, till he could get no more suggestion of the taste of the spirit, when he replaced the glass, to sit staring at the bottle; but he did not touch it, only squatted there like a great dog watching over his master, while his two companions remained silent as a couple of black statues at the door.

That was enough, and Carey softly dropped down and whispered what he had seen to his companions.

“And they could brain the old scoundrel at any moment with their clubs,” said the doctor. “It is astonishing.”

“Yes, sir,” said Bostock, softly; “but aren’t it a bit like big savage dogs as I’ve seen? They could take a man by the throat and shake the life out of him in a minute, but they don’t. They sits and watches over him, and it’d be an ugly business for any one as attempted to touch him. He’s got hold of the black fellows, sir, and can do just what he likes with ’em. That’s how it is there.”

“That makes our position more difficult,” said the doctor.

“Well, it do, sir; but if I might make so bold, I should like to propose something.”

“Yes, by all means, Bostock. What is it?”

“You sleep on it, sir, and see how you feel in the morning—both on you, and I’ll take the watch.”

“It is impossible to sleep to-night,” said the doctor, with a sigh.

“Yes; suppose those blacks were to take it into their heads to come and finish us.”

“Nay, they won’t do that, sir. Besides, I shall be on the watch.”

“No,” said the doctor; “you and Carey will lie down and sleep if you can. I will take the watch. Do as I tell you at once.”

“But it isn’t fair, sir,” said Carey, protesting.

“I must be obeyed in this time of emergency,” said the doctor, sternly. “Lie down and sleep if you can, and I will try and think out some way of

proceeding. Good-night.”

Ten minutes later the doctor was sitting with his back to the door, and in spite of all that had gone by and the belief that he could not sleep a wink in the midst of the peril, Carey dropped off fast, and Bostock’s loud breathing told that he had followed suit, while the three blacks squatted there hour after hour, watching their master and tyrant like so many faithful hounds.

Chapter Eighteen.

Carey opened his eyes just at sunrise, feeling, as a healthy lad should, light-hearted and happy; for he was perfectly unconscious of all that had taken place overnight till he turned his head a little and saw Doctor Kingsmead with his arm resting against the side, gazing out of the open port.

Then it all came to him, and he felt horribly selfish and miserable.

“Oh, doctor!” he cried.

“Ah, Carey, lad!” said the doctor, starting and turning to him. “Morning. You’ve had a capital sleep.”

“Yes, and you watching there. Why didn’t you rouse me up to take my turn?”

“I’ve not been watching all the night. I sat thinking till I felt that it was of no use to worry any longer, and then I dropped asleep. I’ve not been awake now for more than half an hour.”

“Ah, that’s better,” said Carey, raising himself a little to look towards the door, to see Bostock lying across it, turning himself into a human bar to

prevent any one from entering without waking him up. He was now on his back, sleeping heavily, with his mouth open.

The doctor looked at him too and then smiled sadly at Carey.

“I say,” said the latter, “it seems rum, doesn’t it, for us three prisoners to go off to sleep like that without minding a bit?”

“Nature will have her own way,” said the doctor.

“Eh? Right, sir! I—well, look at that now! It’s a rum ’un.”

Bostock had suddenly awakened, and he now rose quickly and stared at Carey.

“I say, I aren’t been asleep all night, have I?”

“Yes, Bob. There, it’s all right.”

“Well, they haven’t killed and eaten us, sir; but I don’t like this. You ought to ha’ wakened me, doctor.”

“I was not awake myself, Bostock.”

“Oh! That was it, was it?” said the old sailor, shaking his head and looking very serious. “Then about work, sir; what’s the first thing? Shall I see about breakfast?”

The doctor was silent for a few moments.

“Yes,” he said at last. “I have thought over our position again this morning, and it seems to me that the best thing to do, if we are allowed, is to go on quietly and submit, until a good opportunity occurs—say of the blacks going ashore in their canoe.”

“And then seize the vessel again?” said Carey, eagerly.

“And chuck Mr King Beachcomber overboard, sir,” whispered Bostock.

“Or make him prisoner till we can hand him over to the authorities,” said the doctor.

“But there are no authorities to hand him over to, sir,” said Carey.

“Have patience, my lad; we never know what may happen. We had a piece of bad luck last night; to-day we may have a bit of good. Yes, we’ll go on as usual. See to the breakfast.”

“Right, sir,” cried the old sailor, and he turned the handle of the door without effect.

“Locked?” said Carey, in a hoarse whisper.

“Can’t say, sir, but it’s made fast somehow.”

To the surprise of all, though, the door was opened the next moment, and their captor stood before them, looking from one to the other, while at a glance Carey saw that the blacks had disappeared.

“Come out of that,” growled the ruffian, sourly. “I want some breakfast; and you, sailor chap, get out rations of beef or pork for my pack. They’ll be hungry again by this time. Light the fire first, and let’s have some tea soon.”

Carey involuntarily glanced at the bottle on the table, and saw that it was empty. He saw, too, that his glance was noticed, for the beachcomber said with a hoarse laugh:

“Oh, yes, I drink tea too. But put another bottle of that stuff on the table as well.”

They passed out into the saloon, and Carey made at once for the door.

“Where are you going, boy?” cried the beachcomber.

“To get a bucket of fresh water and have a sluice,” replied Carey, sulkily, for he objected to be called “boy.”

“Humph! You look clean enough,” growled the man. “Be off then, and make haste back to get breakfast.”

Carey stepped back to catch up a towel, and then went to the saloon doorway and out on deck.

“Yes, I’ll come back soon, and I’ll help,” muttered the boy through his teeth; “but only wait till I get my chance. Brrrr!” he snarled, “how it all makes me feel as if I should like to do something to somebody.”

He walked sharply to where the bucket he used every morning stood ready, with a line attached to the handle; but before he reached it, there was the soft pattering of feet, and the pack of black fellows came running to meet him, headed by Black Jack, who stopped short close upon the boy to strike an attitude, making a hideous grimace, and poising his spear with one hand while he rested it upon the fingers of the other as if to steady it for hurling, while his companions snatched melon-headed clubs or boomerangs from out of the cord-like girdles which supported a broad shell hanging in front.

Carey had not had his breakfast, a fact which added fuel to the hot temper he was already in, consequent upon his treatment in the saloon.

Feeling perfectly reckless and irritated by the action of the naked blacks, and the most utter contempt for their childish attempt to frighten him, Carey’s temper boiled over.

“Out of the way, you black monkey,” he cried, and, treating the threatening spear with the most perfect contempt, he made a dash at the black and flicked at him sharply with the towel, catching him with a smart crack on the thigh and making him utter a yell, as he bounded back, dropping his spear and stooping to rub the place.

As soon as Carey had delivered the flick so dexterously, one often practised on bathing excursions when at school, he repented, fully expecting that the others would rush upon him with their clubs.

But to his utter astonishment and relief, they uttered a shout of delight on seeing their leader’s discomfiture, and some broke into a triumphal dance, chattering and laughing, while three of the party threw themselves on deck and rolled about in convulsions of mirth.

“I don’t care,” muttered Carey; “I’ll let them see I’m not afraid of them,” and, without pausing now, he walked to the side, caught up the bucket, and twisting one end of the line round his left hand, went to the open gangway of that side of the vessel to throw down the bucket into the clear, cool water.

But he paused, for just beneath him, fastened by ropes, were a small whale-boat and an outrigger canoe.

He walked farther, and as soon as he was clear of the two craft, he sent the bucket down topsy-turvy so that it filled; hauled it up and turned to find himself hemmed in by a semi-circle of blacks.

Again acting on the impulse of the moment, Carey placed a second hand to the bucket and gave it a quick swing round, discharging its contents in an arc, with the intention of dowsing the savages; but they were too quick for him, bounding back, grinning with delight at their cleverness, but coming

forward again, laughing like a pack of mischievous boys to tempt him to throw again.

“Oh, I’m not going to keep on at that,” muttered Carey, as he raised the bucket again and threw it overboard for a fresh supply; and as soon as he had it up, he knelt down by it, had a good sluice, and rose to begin towelling, while the grinning blacks looked on.

As he finished, with the towel now well damped, he made believe to throw the water over his audience, and as they bounded away, he hurled the contents over the side, put down the bucket under the bulwarks and turned to go back to the cabin, making the wet towel snap like a whip as he flicked at first one and then at another of the naked bodies so temptingly displayed, the blacks roaring with laughter as they leaped and bounded about to avoid the cuts; but far from showing any resentment against the boy, evidently treating it all as a magnificent piece of fun.

The boy left them chattering and laughing, Black Jack as merry as the rest, while the object of their mirth began to wonder at the power he seemed to have exercised over the pack of childlike savages, and to ask himself whether there was anything in these people to mind.

“But dogs will bite if they are set at any one by their master,” the boy said to himself in conclusion, and found himself face to face with the man of whom he had been thinking.

“Oh, there you are,” he said, sourly. “Go and help them with the rations, and then go and feed the black dogs.”

Carey nodded, and from some half-conceived and misty notion that he could not even analyse to himself, more than that it had something to do with trying to make himself as much master of the black fellows as the

beachcomber seemed to be, he went about the work with alacrity, finding Bostock with his jacket off and sleeves rolled up, fast filling a basket with ship's biscuit.

"I s'pose I shall have to boil up a lot of the men's pork, Master Carey," he said. "The black beggars must be satisfied with biscuit this morning."

"I'll take it to them, Bob," said Carey. "I say, though, can you find a jar of molasses?"

"Ay, there's plenty, my lad. Going to give 'em that?"

"Yes, look sharp."

In another minute or so, the jar was brought out of the store, and Carey provided himself with a big iron cooking spoon, and thus armed and with basket and jar, he made his way towards the deck, to be met directly by the blacks, ready to chatter, grin, and dance about him, as he brusquely walked right through them till well forward, where he seated himself on a ship's fender and set the basket and jar before him.

Black Jack did not seem to display the slightest animosity as he pressed forward, grinning and showing a set of the whitest teeth.

"Whar bull cow meat?" he cried. "Baal beef."

"None cooked yet," said Carey, shortly.

"What dat?" he cried, and his hand darted at the treacle jar.

Crack!

Carey was as quick, bringing the iron spoon down heavily on the black's hand, making him utter a sharp cry as he snatched it away, sending his

companions into an ecstasy of delight, and making them dance about and twist and writhe.

Black Jack clapped the back of his hand to his mouth, and then, as if the injury were not of the slightest consequence, he pointed now at the jar, in which the boy was inserting the big spoon.

“Dat not good,” he shouted. “Dat mumkull, kill a fellar. Chuck um—chuck um away.”

“Ah, you thick-headed, tar-faced idiot!” cried Carey. “Not good, indeed! I suppose you want raspberry jam.” And he brought out the spoon covered with the stringy treacle, turned it a few times and placed a great dab on one of the biscuits.

“Baal good!” cried Black Jack, angrily. “Mumkull. Black fellow. Chuck um ’way.”

He made a snatch at the biscuit, but down came the spoon on his black hand.

“Yah!” he yelled, and clapped the treacly place to his mouth, tasted the molasses, and the fierce look died out, his countenance expanding into a grin as he sucked, and then in good animal fashion began to lick, holding out his other hand for the biscuit.

The next minute he was munching away in a high state of delight, while the others crowded round with hands extended, and were served as fast as the boy could place dabs of the sticky syrup on the hard biscuits.

They crowded him so that several times over he whisked the spoon round, giving one a dab on the hand, another on the cheek, while one had a topper on his thick, black-haired head—all these rebuffs being received with

shouts of laughter, the recipients setting to work at once to prevent the saccharine mess from being wasted.

But at last all were supplied, and the boy rested for half a minute, looking at the merry, delighted crowd with good-humoured contempt.

“Well, you are a set of savages,” he said.

“More—gib more,” cried Black Jack, who had just finished.

“You look a pretty sticky beauty,” said Carey.

“Berry ’ticky good,” said Black Jack. “Gib more; plenty ’ticky.”

Carey took another biscuit from the basket and put a very small dab of treacle upon it, to the black’s great disgust.

“No, no, no!” he yelled, with childlike annoyance. “Plenty ’ticky—plenty ’ticky.”

“Not good,” said Carey, mockingly. “Kill a black fellow.”

Black Jack’s face expanded again into a tremendous grin.

“Yah!” he cried; “baal mumkull. Good—good—good!”

“There you are, then,” said Carey, giving the spoon a twirl and dabbing a goodly portion on the biscuit. “That do?”

“Good, plenty ’ticky,” cried the savage, gumming his face gloriously and grinding up the biscuit as easily as if it were a cracknel.

By this time the others were finishing, and for another quarter of an hour the boy was kept busy at work, to find in the very thick of it that he had an

addition to his audience in the shape of the coarse-faced beachcomber, who looked less ferocious now, with his countenance softened by a good-humoured grin.

“Feeding ’em up then,” he said. “Mind they don’t finish up by eating you.”

“I’m not afraid of that,” said Carey, shortly.

“Aren’t you? Well, perhaps we shall see. But it’s your turn now: breakfast. Come on.”

Carey followed him without a word, and, like his companions in adversity, ate the meal in silence.

Chapter Nineteen.

The doctor made no opposition and showed no sign of resentment, for he was biding his time. The beachcomber asked questions and he answered them, about the lading of the vessel; but both Carey and Bostock noticed that he carefully avoided all reference to the bullion that was on board.

Later on in the morning the invader announced his intention of inspecting the stores, and made his prisoners march before him and show him all they could; it was hot and stifling between-decks, and he was soon tired and ordered all on deck, where he had a long look round, and at last caught sight of something on shore.

“Hullo, here!” he cried, turning his fists into a binocular glass without lenses; “who’s been meddling with my pearl-oyster grounds?”

The doctor, being referred to in this question, turned to the man and laughed bitterly.

“Your pearl-oyster grounds!” he said, in a tone full of the contempt he felt.

The man thrust his unpleasant-looking face close to the doctor’s.

“Yes,” he said, with an ugly smile; “mine. Didn’t I tell you before that all the reefs and islands here, and all that’s on them or comes ashore on them’s mine? Someone’s been meddling over yonder and collecting and stacking shells; someone’s been sinking tubs and rotting the oysters to get my pearls. It’s been done by your orders, eh?”

“Yes,” said the doctor, quietly; “I suppose I am to blame for it.”

“Ho! Well, I suppose you did it for me, so I won’t complain. Here, bring out the box.”

“What box?” said the doctor.

“What box?” roared the man, fiercely; “why, the box o’ pearls you’ve got put away. Now don’t you put me out, young fellow, because when I’m put out I’m ugly. Ask Black Jack what I can do when I’m ugly. He can understand and talk English enough to tell you.”

“I tell you this,” began the doctor, but he was stopped by a growl that might have emanated from some savage beast.

“You wait till I’ve done. Coo-ee!”

“Coo-ee!” came in answer, and Black Jack rushed forward in a series of bounds, nulla-nulla in one hand, boomerang in the other.

“Here, Jack, what do I do when I’m ugly?”

“Mumkull—killa fellar,” said the black, grinning as if it were a fine joke.

“Mumkull now?” he continued, with his eyes beginning to look wild, as he

turned them questioningly on one after the other.

“Not yet. Get out.”

The black darted away again as quickly as he had come.

“That chap’s a child o’ nature, young fellow,” said the beachcomber, scowling; “so I say to you, don’t you try to gammon me. Fetch out that box.”

“How can he,” cried Carey, boldly, “when he hasn’t got one?”

“What?” roared the man, clapping his hand upon his revolver, and turning fiercely upon the boy. “What’s that?”

“You heard what I said,” cried Carey, in no way daunted. “Why, we haven’t tried one of the tubs yet.”

“Good job for you,” growled the man, fiercely, as he tried to look Carey down; but the boy did not for a moment wince. “You’re a nice imprunt young cock bantam, though. But you’re shivering in your shoes all the same—aren’t you?”

He made a snatch at the boy’s shoulder, but quick as thought Carey struck at the coming hand, catching it heavily with his fist and eluding the touch.

“Don’t do that,” he cried, fiercely, “you know I’ve got a bad shoulder.”

“Why, you insolent young cock-sparrow, I’ve a good mind to—No, I won’t—I’ll let them do it by-and-by.”

He jerked his head sidewise in the direction of the blacks, who were eagerly watching and seeing everything, the sight of the boy striking at their white king sending a thrill of excitement through them; however, they did not

advance, but stood watching and noting that the beachcomber was laughing heartily.

“I like pluck in a boy,” he growled. “Hi, coo-ee.”

Black Jack darted to his side, with eyes flashing and nostrils distended.

“Boat,” said the man, abruptly.

Black Jack shouted something incomprehensible, and three of the black fellows bounded to the side and disappeared into the whale-boat with their leader.

“Now then,” said the beachcomber, “you stop aboard, cookey, and get something ready for dinner. Hi, Black Jack. Fish. Tell ’em.”

“Tell boys kedjee fis’?”

The beachcomber nodded, and the black shouted again, with the result that six more of the blacks came running to the side and dropped over into the canoe.

“Hi, Jack, tell the others, if cookey here—”

“Dis cookey?” asked the black, touching Carey on the head.

“No, stupid. That one.”

“Iss. Dat cookey,” and he nodded and grinned at Bostock.

“Tell ’em if cookey tries to get away, mumkull.”

“Iss. Mumkull,” and the black darted forward, to return with the remaining ten, all grinning, to seat themselves in a row, spear in hand, upon the

starboard bulwarks, staring hard at Bostock, who tried to appear perfectly calm and composed; but his face twitched a little.

“They’d better not try to mummify me,” he whispered to Carey. “Two can play at that game. But what’s he going to do?”

“Now then,” cried the beachcomber, “into the boat with you. I’m going to have those casks tapped and see what the stuff’s like. Hi! Jack, take some buckets in the boat.”

The black darted about and secured three buckets, which he tossed over the side into the boat.

“Now then, down with you,” growled the beachcomber, and Carey and the doctor had to go, leaving Bostock with his eyes far more wide open than usual.

“I wish the doctor would talk to me,” said Carey to himself as he took his seat in the well-formed whale-boat, which he rightly supposed must have come ashore somewhere on this ocean king’s dominions. “He is so horribly quiet.”

Then the boy looked at Black Jack and his three companions, who as soon as their ruler was in his place, gun in hand, thrust out their oars and began rowing with the skill and jerk of men-o’-war’s men.

A minute later he was watching the outrigger canoe being paddled along quickly, its occupants trailing mother-o’-pearl baits behind, and soon after he saw them hook and drag in a fish.

Then Carey turned to gaze at the shore they were approaching with a bitter feeling of resentment arising as he thought of all their labour in the hot sunshine, collecting and piling up the great pearl shells, and more bitterly

still as he dwelt upon the tubs of liquid and liquefying oysters which would, he did not doubt, now have quite a thick deposit of pearls at their bottoms.

“Oh, it does seem so hard for that ruffian to get them!” he said to himself, and he sat there with his teeth set, gazing straight before him, till he caught Black Jack’s eyes twinkling laughingly at him as that individual shone like a well-polished pair of boots, and glistened in the sun, while he lustily pulled stroke.

As soon as he caught Carey’s eye he laughed loudly, and in the most perfectly good-humoured way, as if they were the very best of friends, and when the beachcomber was looking another way he raised one hand to go through the pantomime of licking treacle off his fingers and rubbing his front, to the delight of his toiling companions.

It did Carey good, and he smiled back, and nodded.

“I don’t believe they’d hurt me,” he said to himself. “They’re just like a lot of schoolboys, only so much uglier.”

The beachcomber made a movement, and the blacks’ faces were in a flash like so much carved ebony, and they rowed on, choosing as if from old habit the way into the canal-like passage among the rocks, and leaping out at the home-made wharf. Here they held the boat steady in a regular naval style, while their chief and his companions stepped out, the former using the black backs for support, for big and strong as he was his obese state made him far from active.

“That’s the way I taught ’em,” he said, with a grim smile at Carey, who nodded back, said nothing, but thought very deeply, his fancies taking the direction of wondering whether the wretched tyrant would ever go too far with his followers, and they would kill and eat him.

His thoughts took a fresh current directly, for the subject of them shouted the one word, "Buckets!" and after making the boat fast the crew came running with the buckets to where the beachcomber was now standing examining the first tub, which happened to be the last filled, and he growled, moved to the next, and then on and on to the last.

"Here you are, Jack; this first."

The black fellow nodded, looked in the tub, and then as if quite at home at the work, picked up the great bamboo lying ready for the purpose and set two of his followers to give all the other tubs a good stir-up, the result being a most horrible odour of such extent that, but for the breeze blowing and their getting on the windward side, it would have been unbearable.

But it had not the slightest effect upon the beachcomber, who stood looking on while Black Jack and a companion heaved together and tried to overturn the oldest tub, but without result.

A yell to the other two brought them up, and with their aid the tub of malodorous thick water was gradually overturned, and the foul water poured off, to sink at once into the thirsty sand.

"Hold hard," cried the beachcomber, when the bottom was nearly reached.
"Water."

Three black fellows ran off with a bucket each and returned to Jack, who poured one in and gave it a swirl round, handed the bucket to be refilled, allowed the contents of the tub to settle, and then began to pour out the top very gently.

Carey was so intensely interested that for the time being he forgot his painful position.

“I say,” he cried, “these black chaps have done this sort of thing before.”

“Hundreds of times,” growled their chief, and then he was silent, while even the doctor began to feel that his eagerness to see the contents of the tub was mastering his misery and disappointment that the pearls should fall into such hands.

So they watched till half a dozen buckets had been severally poured in and emptied out, and then there was a hoarse chuckle from the beachcomber.

“I’ll forgive yer,” he growled. “You aren’t done so badly for me. That’s a nice take o’ pearls, and there’s some fine big uns among ’em. Up higher, Jack, and let the sun dry them a bit. Next one.”

The tub was tilted so that the last drops of water could run out while the next was being emptied.

Carey’s eyes met the doctor’s, and the boy ground his teeth softly as he gazed in at the soft lustrous pearls drying rapidly from the heat of the air.

There they lay along the side of the great cask, seed pearls, pearls of fair size, and here and there great almond-shaped ones, while fewest of all were the softly rounded perfectly shaped gems, running from the size of goodly peas to here and there that of small marbles, lustrous, soft, and of that delicate creamy tint that made them appear like solidified drops of molten moonlight, fallen to earth in the silence of some tropical night.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders and turned away to watch the emptying of the next tub, which ended with even better result than the first.

“Bucket,” said the beachcomber, when this second watering had come to an end, and Jack, who knew what was expected of him, took a bunch of grass to make a brush, crept into the first tub, and while one of his fellows held

the bucket ready, the pearls, worth scores, perhaps hundred of pounds, were swept into it.

The next tub was served the same, and then after the other tubs had had a final stir the beachcomber cried abruptly:

“On board. That’s enough for to-day. I’m dying for a drink.”

“Oh,” muttered Carey to himself, “I wish I could stop you drinking.”

Chapter Twenty.

The party which had been out with the canoe reached the vessel with a goodly supply of beautiful fish just at the same time as the whale-boat with the treasured-up pearls, over which Mallam had sat chuckling all the way back, pointing out to Carey the beauties of the large ones, and glancing furtively the while at the doctor in his delight over that gentleman’s discomfiture.

Carey was bitterly annoyed, but he took it all pretty coolly.

“All right, old gentleman,” he said to himself. “You’ve only set your slaves to work and washed and cleaned them for us; we’ll have them all back again when you’ve cleaned the rest.”

But Carey had not been without his anxious feelings, though, all the time, regarding Bostock; and his first glance as he ascended the side of the stranded steamer was directed to the spot where he had last seen the old sailor with the row of black fellows watching him.

But a chill ran through the boy, for there was no sign of Bostock, and the ten blacks, his guards, were all forward in a cluster.

Carey sighed with relief the next minute, for, hearing them on deck, he thrust his head out of the cook's galley, and the boy grasped the fact that Bostock was busy preparing dinner, and the blacks were attracted there by the smell.

Directly after the old sailor had an addition to his work in the shape of fish to fry, and Carey seized the opportunity the examination of the fish afforded to whisper to the old sailor.

“Well,” he said, “you're all right.”

“Yes, I'm all right, my lad, but I were a bit mouldy when I saw you go, and went and got ready for action.”

“Yes? What did you do?”

“Went and shoved the poker in the oven stove, sir; for I says to myself they tames lions and tigers in wild beast shows with red-hot irons, and if these here wild, black fellows tries on any of their games with me, I'll try if I can't tame them.”

“Capital!” said Carey, eagerly.

“I calls that an out-and-out good idee, Master Carey, and look here, sir, when it comes for a strike for liberty, I'll undertake to tackle the black uns with a couple o' hot pokers and a few kettles o' boiling water, and if I don't clear the deck I'm a Dutchman, which can't be, for I was born in Bromley-by-Bow.”

“We'll win yet, Bob,” whispered Carey, eagerly.

“Course we will, my lad, only take it coolly, and go about as if your comb were reg'larly cut and your spurs took off. I say.”

“Yes?”

“I shall expect you and the doctor to tackle Old King Cole.”

“Yes, yes, but we must have arms.”

“Course you must. You wait.”

“Yes. Were the blacks civil to you?”

“Yes, but they sat and gloated over me as if they were picking out tit-bits, sir, till I felt all cold down the back, and as it didn’t seem the ripe time for the hot poker, for they didn’t begin to show fight, I thought I’d try a bit o’ civility.”

“Yes, what did you do?”

“Give ’em a civiliser.”

“I don’t understand you, Bob. Oh, you mean you gave them some spirits.”

“Tchah! Think I’m off my head, sir? Sperrits? Why, ever so little drives those black chaps mad as hatters. No,” whispered the old sailor, with a low chuckle, “I beckoned to one of ’em, and he come down off the rail where he’d been sitting in a row like a tame monkey with his mates, and he followed me, club in hand, to the stooard’s place, where I got a big jar and a table fork, and brought it back on deck to where his mates were waiting, and down they hopped as soon as they saw the jar, and began to dance round, singing, ‘ticky! ’ticky!’ in a regular chorus.”

“Ah,” cried Carey, “they heard Black Jack call the molasses sticky.”

“Soon, though, as I cut the string and pulled off the bladder cover, and they saw it was all yaller, they began to show their teeth and snarl. ‘Ticky!

'Ticky!' they says again, but 'all right, my lads,' I says, and I sticks the fork into an onion, winks at 'em, and pops it into my mouth. Then I does the same with a gherkin, and, my word, didn't they all change their tune! Everyone wanted a taste, so I gives the fork to the chap as come with me, makes him squat down, and claps the big brown jar between his legs."

"Mixed pickles!" cried Carey, eagerly.

"Piccadilly, sir," said the old sailor, correctively. "Then I makes all the rest sit round him in what you calls a silly circle."

"Silly circle!" cried Carey, laughing. "I should think it was!"

"That's right, sir—a black silly circle. 'There you are, grinning idgits,' I says; 'now amuse yourselves with that, and while you're busy I'll go and cook the dinner and see if I can't get hold o' something for the Guvnors to cook Old King Cole's goose.'"

"And did they eat the pickles?" said Carey, eagerly.

"Eat 'em, sir? That they did, very slow and careful too as soon as they found what they were like. They played fair too, each chap taking his bit in turn like young birds in a nest, beak wide open, bit o' cauliflower or a couple o' French beans popped in, beak shut, and then each chap shut his eyes, jumped up, and danced."

"Just like children," said Carey.

"They seemed to think the beans was some kind o' worms or grubs, sir, and when it come to the capsicums, the chaps as got 'em rolled themselves on the deck with delight, and all the rest wanted 'em too. But I didn't stop long; I was off, and they took no more notice o' me till I began cooking,

when they stood about to grin and smell. I got 'em, though," said Bostock, mysteriously.

"Got what?"

"Three double guns, three revolvers, and a box o' cartridges."

"Oh!" whispered Carey, excitedly. "Where are they?"

"Rolled up in what's left o' the mains'l, and I folded it up and twisted a rope round it. Yonder it is, amidships."

"Hi! You! Come along here," came in the beachcomber's harsh voice, and Carey had to hurry to him. "Come and help with these," and he pointed to the bucket of glistening pearls. "Get me something to put them in."

Carey thought for a moment, and then went below, to return with the first things he thought suitable, and Mallam nodded his satisfaction.

"They'll do," he said. "'Bout dry now. Your back's easier than mine. Pour 'em in. No smuggling—"

The pearls were carefully emptied into a couple of cigar boxes, and placed under lock and key in a small closet in the captain's cabin, of which Mallam now took possession, while that evening his followers, who quite scorned the forecabin below deck, camped above it, close up to the bulwarks, starboard or port, according to which way the wind blew, these seeming to remind them of their humpies or wind-screens, which some of the most savage used instead of huts.

Chapter Twenty One.

Carey was not long in communicating to the doctor all he had heard from Bostock, and his words revived his companion wonderfully.

“Capital!” he said. “The fact of our being unarmed and this scoundrel keeping all the weapons out of our reach half maddened me.”

“Yes, wasn’t it horrid?” said Carey. “I felt better directly, and, do you know, I don’t think we have half so much to fear now from the blacks. I don’t feel a bit afraid of them. I can make them do just as I like; so can Bob.”

“Perhaps so, and if we were alone we could make them our obedient servants. They look up to the whites as superior beings, but they are not to be trusted, my boy. This Mallam has had them under his thumb for years, and as you must have seen, a few sharp orders from him bring out their savage instincts, their faces change, their eyes look full of ferocity, and if their white chief wished it they would kill us all without compunction.”

“And cook and eat us afterwards without salt?” said the boy, merrily.

“You laugh,” replied the doctor, “but it is a horrible fact, my boy; and if we knew all that has taken place in connection with this man’s rule over them, we should have some blood-curdling things to dwell upon.”

“I don’t feel afraid,” said Carey, coolly. “Of course, I should if it came to such a state of affairs as you hint at. But if it came to the worst, I should jump overboard and try to swim ashore.”

“To be taken by a shark or a crocodile?”

“Well, that would be a more natural way of coming to one’s end, sir. But, pooh! we’re not going to be beaten, doctor. We must get Mr Dan Mallam—Old King Cole, Bob calls him—shut up below somewhere and out of sight

of the blacks. They'd obey us then, and we should be all right. Why, we're not going to be afraid of one man."

"One man?" said the doctor.

"Yes, one man. He's only one man when he's alone. I felt yesterday that we had twenty-one enemies. Now I feel that we've only one. Bob says we must wait."

"Yes, it is good advice," replied the doctor, "and we will wait. Carey, my lad, we must bend to circumstances till our chance comes. There, I have been behaving in a poor, cowardly way."

"Oh, nonsense, sir!"

"I have, Carey, and there is no disguising it; but I am going to pluck up now. Let the scoundrel go on thinking we are submitting and are as much his servant as the blacks are."

"Till the right time comes, sir, and he wakes up to the fact that he's our prisoner. I say, if a ship came in sight and saw us we could hand him over and he'd be taken right off and treated as a criminal."

"Exactly. It seemed very galling to see him seize the pearls."

"Yes," said Carey, "but let him think they're his, and the ship, and all below. We know better."

This was a trifling bit of conversation, but from that hour hope grew stronger in the breasts of the three oddly made prisoners and slaves of such a king. Their semi-captivity seemed more bearable, and it showed in their looks and actions, the beachcomber noting it and showing a grim kind of satisfaction.

“That’s right,” he said. “Glad to see you are all settling down and making the best of it. It’s no use to go kicking against stone walls or rocks. Be good boys, and I won’t be very hard on you. You’ll eat and drink your food better, and instead o’ grizzling you’ll enjoy yourselves and get nice and fat. My pack, too, will like you all the better. I don’t think I shall let ’em have that ugly chap Bostock, though; he cooks too well.”

But Carey took matters, according to the doctor’s ideas, too easily—too freely. He did not shrink from speaking out and taking liberties with his position. It was as if he had forgotten that he was a prisoner, and he pretty well did as he liked.

“Here, what are you after, youngster? Where are you going?”

“Along with the pack to get cocoanuts,” said Carey, coolly.

“I never told you,” growled the old fellow, fiercely.

“No, but I want to see them get the nuts down,” said Carey, nonchalantly, and he went.

It was the same when a party of the blacks went fishing, which was nearly every day, so that there was always an ample supply, and the boy returned flushed and brown, full of the adventures he had had.

Black Jack now took to heading the fishing expeditions, and always looked after Carey at starting time, grinning and making signs suggestive of hauling up the fish and hitting them over the heads with a nulla-nulla, while the crew of the outrigger canoe always greeted the boy with a grin of satisfaction.

“They are all awfully civil to me now,” said Carey to Bostock, “but I think it’s a good deal due to the ticky-ticky. I say, Bob, how long will the

molasses last?”

“Oh, some time yet, sir.”

“But when the last jar’s eaten?”

“Then you must try the pickles, sir. And when that’s done, as it used to say on a big picture on the walls in London, ‘If you like the pickles, try the sauce.’ There’s no end o’ bottles o’ sauce.”

“Are there? Are you sure?”

“Yes, sir. There’s a big consignment, as they call it, sent from London to Brisbane. One part o’ the hold’s chock full o’ cases. Why, there’s a lot o’ sugar things too. Oh, we shall find enough to keep them beggars going for a long time yet.”

Meantime the great tubs had all been emptied with more or less satisfactory results, and re-filling began with the accompanying stacking of the shells. The pearls were stowed away in cigar boxes, which were emptied for the purpose, the beachcomber now taking to smoking some of those turned out, and giving an abundance to Carey, who took them eagerly, always carrying several in his pocket.

“Surely you are not going to smoke those, my boy?” said the doctor, who looked quite aghast. “Wait a few years before you try anything of that kind.”

“Why?” said the boy, with an arch look. “Because if you begin now you will most likely be laying up a store of trouble for the future in the shape of a disordered digestion, which may hang about you all your life.”

“I’m not going to smoke them,” said Carey, laughing. “Look here, I roll each one up tight in a bit of paper, and then cut it with a sharp knife into six, ready to give the black fellows if they behave themselves. They’ll do anything for me for a bit of tobacco.”

“But don’t they ever try to take it away from you?”

“Not now. They tried snatching once or twice, but I gave the one who did a good sharp crack, and they left it off, for I’m always fair to them.”

“A dangerous game to play.”

“Oh, no. The others always laugh at the one who’s hit. They don’t seem to mind taking a crack from me.”

Those fishing trips were an intense pleasure to Carey, for there was so much that was novel. Now fish with scales as brilliant as the feathers of humming-birds would be caught; now the blacks would be warning their companions to beware of the black and yellow or yellow snakes.

“Mumkull—kill a fellow,” Black Jack said, and to emphasise his meaning he put out a hand in the water towards one of the basking serpents, snatched it back as if bitten, and went through a regular pantomime indicative of his sufferings. First he drew up one leg, then the other, threw himself on his back in the bottom of the canoe, kicked out, threw his arms in the air, straightened himself out, rolled over, and then, with a wonderful display of strength, curved his spine and sprang over back again, repeating the performance, which was wonderfully like the flopping of a freshly caught roach in a punt, even to the beating of the tail, which was here represented by the man’s legs. By degrees this grew more slow; then there was a flap at intervals, finishing with one heavy rap, and he lay quite still as if dead.

“Dat a way,” he cried, raising his head and grinning hugely. “Mumkull—kill a fellow.”

But Carey’s greatest treats were upon the hunting expeditions made by the beachcomber’s blacks ashore to obtain fresh meat in the way of a delicacy or two for their chief and something substantial for themselves.

One day Carey was gazing rather disconsolately at the shore and wondering when the time would come for him and his companions to be free again, when Black Jack bounded to his side, making the boy start round, to find the man in a menacing attitude, his teeth bare, eyes wide open displaying scarcely anything but the whites, for he was squinting so horribly that his pupils had disappeared behind his thick nose, while the club he held was quivering as if he were about to strike. The suddenness of the approach startled Carey for the moment, and he leaped back, but the reaction came as quickly, and with doubled fist he rushed at the black; but the latter was too quick, leaping aside, and Carey’s second attack, which took the form of a flying kick, was also unsuccessful.

Black Jack’s face was now covered with a series of good-tempered wrinkles.

“Come ’long,” he cried. “Kedge bird—wallaby. Be ticky-ticky, up a tree.”

“Be ticky-ticky?” said the boy, wonderingly.

“Ess. Come ’long; be ticky-ticky. Buzz-zz-uzz,” he went, with a wonderfully good imitation of the whirr of an insect’s wings, while he made his hand describe the dartings to and fro.

“Big fly so,” he cried, and drawing his boomerang from the hair girdle, he took a few steps, whirled it a moment or two, and then hurled it towards the

shore. “Buzz—hum!” he cried, and then he stood grinning with delight at the boy’s admiration of the gyrations made by the curious implement.

At the first throw it seemed to Carey that it would drop as soon as the force was exhausted into the sea, where the hard wood must cause it to sink. But nothing of the kind; it went skimming over the water like some gigantic insect, and at last made a graceful curve, rose up on high quivering and fluttering, and came back till it was over the deck, and then came twirling down.

“Big tree, ticky-ticky, fly dat how.”

“Oh, I see; fly ticky-ticky,” cried Carey. “Honey?”

“Good ticky-ticky,” said the black, licking his fingers and smacking his lips. “Come ’long.”

“Yes, I’ll come,” cried the boy, and the next minute he was over the side and in the boat, where half-a-dozen more of the blacks were waiting and received him with a frantic shout of delight, flourishing their paddles, which they plunged into the smooth water of the lagoon as soon as Black Jack had dropped to his place; and away they went, with the latter standing up beside Carey.

As they were passing round the bows, Bostock’s head suddenly appeared over the side, and at a sign from the boy the blacks ceased rowing.

“Where away, lad?” said the old sailor.

“Ashore, hunting wallabies or something.”

“I say, young gentleman, is it safe to go alone with those chaps?”

“Oh, yes; there’s nothing to mind. Haven’t I been fishing with ’em lots of times?”

“Yes, but that was on the water, my lad,” said Bostock, shaking his head.

“Bob—Bob, come along; kedge wallaby—snakum—ticky-ticky.”

“Who’s to do the cooking if I do?” growled Bostock.

“Cookie, come kedge ticky-ticky.”

“No. I say, my lad, keep your weather eye open.”

“Both of them, Bob. I’ll take care.”

The paddles were plunged in again, and the boat glided onward.

“I don’t half like it,” muttered Bostock. “That there boy’s too wentersome. S’pose they got hungry—they most always are—and took it into their heads to make a fire. Ugh! They aren’t to be trusted, but I b’leeve they all like him and would be precious sorry when they got back and Old King Cole asked where he was. There’d be a row and a bit o’ shooting, I dessay, for it’s amazing, that it is, amazing, the way the old vagabone has took to our lad. But I don’t like his going off with ’em, and with nothing better than a bit of a toothpick of a knife. Wouldn’t be long before he got hold of a club, though, I know.”

Bostock went back to his galley shaking his head, and at the same time Carey was mentally shaking his own.

“An old stupid,” he said. “I wish he hadn’t said that. Just as if it was likely that Black Jack or either of the others would hurt me without Old King Cole

was there to say ‘Css!’ to them and hound them on. Wouldn’t hurt me, would you, Black Jack?” he said aloud.

“Hey? Wood hurt um?” cried the man, and he pulled the boy on one side, dropped on his knees, and began to feel about the bottom of the canoe with his hand. “No hurt.”

“No; all right now,” said Carey, smiling. “Here, Jackum, I want to learn to throw the boomerang. Give me hold.”

The boy made a snatch at the crescent-moon-like weapon, and got hold; but the black seized it too, shouting, “No, no, no!” and his companions began to shout what sounded like a protest.

“No, no throw. Go bottom.”

“I should make it come back.”

The black grinned knowingly.

“Jackum show soon. Jackum fro.”

He sent the strange weapon flying on before them, and cleverly caught it as it returned; but then he stuck it in his girdle again, shaking his head.

“Go bottom,” he said.

Carey was disappointed, but his attention was taken up directly by something more exciting, for as the canoe glided along, with the outrigger literally skipping over the water, the boy suddenly became conscious of what seemed for the moment like another canoe of nearly the same size, sunk beneath the surface and gliding along at the same speed.

For the moment he thought it must be the canoe's shadow somehow cast beside them, but the next moment he grasped the fact that it was a great fish, probably a shark, which had come in through the opening with the last high tide, and was now on the prowl.

There was no doubt about it, for the blacks had seen it, and they laughed as they saw their passenger shrink to the other side and lean over towards the outrigger.

The next moment Jackum drew his attention with a touch, and began making hideous grimaces at the creature, while the others began to shout and were apparently calling it every opprobrious name that their limited vocabulary supplied.

But the monster, which must have been some fourteen feet long, only rose a little so that his black triangular fin appeared above the surface.

Jackum grinned, stooped, and picked up one of a bundle of spears which lay along at the side, and handed it to the boy, signing to him to stand up in the boat.

It was not much of a weapon, being only a straight bamboo sapling with an ill-made point hardened in the fire.

"Gib big poke," cried the black.

"If I don't they'll think I'm afraid," thought Carey; so he seized the spear, feeling not the slightest inclination for his task, and drove the point down on the shark's back.

It was an unlucky stroke, for, instead of penetrating as intended, it glided over the slimy skin, while, overbalancing himself in consequence of meeting with no resistance, Carey to his horror found himself following his

stroke, and he would have plunged overboard had not a muscular black arm darted like a great snake about his waist and plucked him back. For a moment or two the boy gasped, but he recovered himself directly.

“Shake hands, Jackum. Thankye.”

The black grinned, and took the extended hand for a few seconds.

“Let’s try again,” said Carey; but the shark had sunk down out of sight.

“Ticklum,” said the black, grinning. “Come soon.”

Carey was disappointed, for he wanted to redeem his character, though it was not an easy task to try and emulate the blacks with their own weapons. But Jackum was right; it was not long before the great fish re-appeared, now on the other side of the canoe, rising slowly till its fin was above water, its intention being apparently to pick one of the paddlers out for a meal.

His appearance there, however, was not approved of, the blacks by their actions showing that they considered it highly probable that their visitor would get entangled with the bamboos of the outrigger and capsize the boat.

Jackum took the lead by snatching the spear from Carey, evidently considering that the position required skilled instead of amateur manipulation; and, as his fellows turned their paddles into choppers and struck heavily at the shark’s back, Jackum drove his spear down with all his might.

It went home in spite of its clumsy make and miserable point, for in a moment it was twitched out of the strong hands that held it, the water came flying in a shower over Carey, consequent upon a tremendous blow delivered by the fish’s tail; then there was a violent eddy at the boat’s side, a great shovel-shaped head rose, and the monster shot out of the water, rising

several feet and falling with a crash across the main boom of the outrigger, taking it down lower and lower, while Carey clung to the other side of the boat. The water came creeping in over the lower side, and they would, he felt, be taken down and lie at the mercy of the enemy the blacks had tried to destroy.

In rushed the water faster and faster, and Carey looked towards the shore to see how far it was to swim, when all at once the weight glided off the great bamboo, which rose quickly, the boat was level again, but half full of water, and the blacks chattered and grinned with delight, as they began shovelling the water out on both sides with their paddles.

Jackum used his hands, but stopped short directly after to point.

“Tickum, tickum. Mumkull,” he cried, and Carey made out the spear-shaft performing some strange gyrations some twenty yards away, before it once more disappeared.

As Carey owned afterwards to the doctor and Bostock, he still felt a little white, and his heart was beating heavily. But it calmed down rapidly as he felt that the worst that was to happen to him was to feel his legs wet until the sun had dried his trousers and boots, while the blacks chattered away, taking it as an every-day occurrence, rapidly emptying the boat, and once more in high glee paddling hard for the shore, where the great enjoyments of the day were to begin.

Chapter Twenty Two.

As Carey landed he glanced at the now enormous stack of pearl shells and at the tubs once more well filled with oysters, for the beachcomber had not let his men be idle. But the sight of the treasures of which they had been

robbed only irritated the boy, and he turned away to forget it in encountering the grinning face of Black Jack close by.

“Come, fro boomerang,” he said, handing the wooden scimitar-like blade, and pointing along the sands.

“Ah,” cried the boy, eagerly, “give me hold.”

As he caught the boomerang, the other blacks started off along the sands as if they were going to field for a ball, and Carey laughed as he prepared to throw.

“It will begin to sail up before it gets to them,” he thought to himself, laughingly, and he rather enjoyed the idea of the big, lithe fellows running through the hot sand in vain.

Then, imitating, as he thought, the black’s action exactly, Carey sent the weapon spinning along about a yard above the sand; but it did not begin to rise, and before it dropped one of the men caught it cleverly and sent it back with such accuracy that Jackum caught it in turn and handed it to the boy.

Carey threw again half-a-dozen times, for the curved blade to be caught by one or the other, no matter how wildly diverse were the casts, and sent back to Jackum, who never missed a catch, standing perfectly calm and at the proper moment darting out his right or left hand, when *flip*, he had it safely and handed it back, grinning with delight.

“White boy no fro boomerang,” he said.

“No,” cried Carey, who was hot and irritable with the failure attending his exertions. “You’re cheating me; this one won’t go.”

“No make um go,” cried Jackum, slapping his thighs and dancing with glee.

“No; it’s a bad one; it won’t fly back.”

“Yes, fly bird come back.”

“But it doesn’t when I throw it.”

“No, won’t come back.”

“And it won’t when those black fellows throw.”

Black Jackum understood him perfectly and threw himself down on the hot sand to roll himself over in the exuberance of his delight.

“Look here,” cried Carey, growing more irritated; “you’re a cheat. You knew that thing wouldn’t go when you gave it to me. Get up, or I’ll kick you.”

He made a rush to put his threat in execution, but the black rolled over and sprang up laughing.

“White boy get wild likum big Dan. No fro boomerang. Look, see.”

“It’s too bad, you’re a cheat. Bad one. Bah!” cried Carey, throwing the wooden blade down. “You’ve changed it.”

“Look, see,” cried the black, catching it up; and in the most effortless way he sent it skimming along the sand right away, full fifty yards beyond the farthest fielder, before it began to mount high in the air, executing a peculiar series of twirls and flutterings as it came back, till the momentum died out as it dropped not half-a-dozen yards from Carey’s feet.

“Ah!” cried the boy, excitedly, “I see how you do it now. Here, let me try.”

“Jackum fro makum come back ebry war.”

“Yes, but let me try.”

Bang, bang, came softened by the distance, and, looking sharply in the direction of the stranded vessel, two faint puffs of white smoke were visible.

“What does that mean?” cried Carey, as he saw the fielders come running towards him.

“Big Dan shoot, shoot. Say go hunt, get bird to cookie, cookie. Come, run fas’.”

He set the example and plunged at once into the great cocoanut grove, followed by Carey and his companions.

“Big Dan no see now,” cried Jackum, and he grinned and pointed up at the nuts overhead. “Good, good?”

“Yes,” cried Carey; “let’s have some.”

The black said something to his companions, two of whom took off their plaited hair girdles, joined them together, and then the band was passed round a likely tree, knotted round one of the wearers’ loins, and the next minute he was apparently walking like a monkey up the tree, shifting the band dexterously and going on and on till he reached the crown of leaves and the fruit, which he began screwing off and pitching down into the sand, where they were caught up, the pointed end of a club-handle inserted, and the great husk wrenched off. Then a few chops with a stone axe made a hole in the not yet hardened shell, and a nut with its delicious contents of sweet, sub-acid milk and pulp was handed to the boy, the giver grinning with satisfaction as he saw how it was enjoyed.

The blacks were soon similarly occupied, each finishing a nut, and then Jackum led the way inland.

“Are you going to the river?” asked Carey.

“No, walk, kedge fis’,” said Jackum, shaking his head. “Bully-woolly dar.”

“Bully-woolly?” said Carey, wonderingly.

Jackum threw himself on the ground, with his legs stiffened out behind, and his hands close to his sides. Then with wonderful accuracy he went through the movements of a crocodile creeping over the sand, and then made a snap at the boy’s leg with his teeth, making believe to have caught him, and to be dragging his imaginary prey down to the water, ending by wagging his legs from side to side like a tail.

“I see,” cried Carey. “Crocodiles. Yes, I know.”

“Big, big. Mumkull black fellow, white boy. Come ’long.”

Jackum started off, followed by Carey and the rest in single file, their leader with his head down and eyes reading the ground from right to left as if in search of something lost. He made straight for the forest, but selected the more open parts where the undergrowth was scarce, so as to get quickly over the ground, stopping suddenly by a great decayed tree, about which his companions set to work with the sharp ends of their club-handles, and in a very short time they had dug out of the decayed wood some three double handfuls of thick white grubs as big as a man’s fingers, and these were triumphantly transferred to the grass bag one man had hanging to his girdle.

Starting once more, Jackum suddenly caught sight of traces on the ground which made him begin to proceed cautiously, his companions closing up, club, spear, or boomerang in hand, and then all at once there was a rush and

a spring, then another, and a couple of little animals bounded away, kangaroo fashion, in a series of leaps through the open, park-like forest, till as they were crossing a widish patch Carey saw the use of the boomerang, one of which weapons skimmed after the retreating animals, struck it, and knocked it over, to lie kicking, till one of the men ran swiftly up and put it out of its misery with one blow of his club.

The other was missed, the boomerang hurled just going over its back and returning to the thrower after the fashion of a disappointed dog, while the little animal took refuge in a tree, leaping from bough to bough till brought down by one of a little shower of melon-headed clubs.

Jackum held up the two trophies with a grin of delight, tied their legs together, and hung them on a stump.

“Back, come fetchum,” he said, nodding.

The hunt continued till a couple of brush turkeys sprang up and began to run and flutter among the bushes, but only to be brought down by the unerring boomerangs; and these were also hung against a tree ready for picking up as the hunting party returned.

The traces on a sandy patch, showing that a snake had crossed and left its zigzag groove, were next spied, and a little tracking showed the maker of the marks coiled up on an ant-heap basking in the sun.

The reptile was on the alert, though, and raised its spade-shaped head high above its coils, displaying a pair of tiny diamond-bright eyes for a few moments, before a blow from the end of a spear dashed it down, broken and quivering.

“Mumkull—bite a fellow,” said Jackum. “Makum swellum. Brrr!”

Carey grasped the fact that the snake was of a poisonous tendency, and it was left writhing on the ant-heap, with the little creatures swarming in an army out of their holes to commence the task of picking its bones into skeleton whiteness.

A couple more large turkey-like birds were brought down and hung up in the shady forest they were now passing, the spreading branches of the huge trees being most grateful interposed between Carey's head and the sun. Here the blacks proceeded with the greatest care, starting no less than three snakes, which were allowed to scuffle off. At last one of the blacks uttered a faint cry, and he took the lead, following the trail of something quickly, till he stopped short beneath a huge fig-tree whose boughs spread far and wide.

The black here turned to Carey and pointed upward with his spear to where, half hidden by the dense foliage, a clump of knots and folds upon some interlacing horizontal boughs revealed the presence of a carpet snake, whose soft warm brown and chocolate markings of various shades were strikingly beautiful.

"Ugh! the monster!" exclaimed Carey, shrinking back. "Are you going to kill it?"

"Mumkull, eatum. Good, good," cried Jackum, and the noise made below roused the sleeping serpent, whose head rose up, showing the mark where the mouth opened, and Carey could see the glistening forked tongue darting in and out through the orifice at the apices of the jaws. And now the creature seemed all in motion, fold gliding over fold, and one great loop hanging down from the bough some fifteen feet above their heads.

"I mustn't run off," thought Carey; "but it looks a dangerous brute."

He stood fast then, and the attack began, the blacks hurling their clubs up at the reptile with such accuracy and force that in less than a minute the creature had been struck in several places, and was striking out with its jaws and lashing its tail furiously.

Another blow from a whizzing boomerang made the creature cease its attempts to get to a safer part of the tree and writhe so violently in a horrible knot of convolutions that it lost its hold upon the branch and came down through the interlacing boughs with a rush and a thud upon the ground.

Here it seemed to see its aggressors for the first time, and, gathering itself up, its head rose with the jaws distended, and it struck at the nearest black.

But his enemy was beforehand. Holding his spear with both hands he used it as a British yeoman of old handled a quarter-staff, and a whistling blow caught the reptile a couple of feet below the head, which dropped inert, the vertebrae being broken, and a series of blows from other spears, one aimed at the tail, finished the business.

The danger was over, and the serpent began to untwine itself, till it lay out, a long heaving mass of muscles, completely disabled and dying after the slow fashion of its kind.

“Why, it must be sixteen or eighteen feet long,” thought Carey, and then he stood looking on while the delighted blacks, who looked upon their prize as a delicacy that would be exclusively their own, cut a few canes, twined them into a loose rope, made a noose round the writhing creature’s neck, and after one of the party had passed this rope over a convenient bough the reptile was hauled up so that the tail was clear of the ground and safe from the attacks of marauding ants.

Then the hunt was continued. Several splendid birds were knocked over, and they were now high up in the river valley, where the great monitor lizards haunted the sun-baked volcanic stones.

“Knock one of those down, Jackum,” said Carey, who was anxious to see how the blacks would deal with the tail-lashing creatures.

“Plenty, plenty,” said the black, grinning; but he obeyed directly after, sending his boomerang whizzing at one, which suddenly bounded on to a rock and turned defiantly with open jaws upon those who had interrupted his noon-tide sleep.

Carey had ocular proof that the nude blacks were cautious enough to keep their skins clear of the fearful lash formed by the steel-wire-like tails. For the boomerang struck the distended jaws with a sharp crack, and the next moment the reptile was down, with its silvery-grey scales flashing in the sun like oxidised silver, as it lashed its tail about like a coil-whip. It was not round Jackum’s legs, however, when he ran up to recover his boomerang, but round and round the spear-shaft which he held ready for the purpose.

A few minutes later the great lizard was dead. “Plenty cookie now,” said Jackum, and they began to return, picking up their trophies as they went back exactly over their trail.

“They’ll only cut a piece out of the carpet snake,” thought Carey. “It’s too big to take back.”

But he was mistaken. That serpent was too fat and juicy, and promised too many pleasant cookings, to be left behind, and it was soon lowered down, to be dragged after the party by two of the blacks, who harnessed themselves to the canes about the reptile’s neck, the smooth hard scales

making the elongated body glide easily enough over the grass and sandy earth.

“But I’m not going to ride in the canoe with that horrid beast,” muttered Carey. “It’s alive and moving still.”

But he did, for, when all their game had been successively picked up and they reached the edge of the lagoon, the great serpent was dragged in and fitted itself in the bottom of the canoe, and the rest was thrown fore and aft. Carey set his teeth, for he dared not let the blacks see him shrink, and stepped calmly in, to sit down with his knees to his chin and the thickest part of the serpent passing round behind his heels, the head and tail lying forward, with the paddlers sitting inside the loop it formed.

They had cargo enough to make the slight vessel seem heavily-laden, but it was sent rapidly across the lagoon, the blacks eager and triumphant to display their successful efforts to their companions, who were all perched up on the bulwarks on either side of the gangway, face outward, waiting to see the portion that would come to their share.

Chapter Twenty Three.

The proximity of the evil-smelling serpent to Carey’s legs doubtless had something to do with the speed of his movements in quitting the canoe and climbing the side; and on reaching the gangway he looked round in vain for the doctor and Bostock, for they were not visible, neither was Mallam on the deck.

“Where’s the doctor?” he said to one of the blacks, but the man merely stared at him blankly. “Cookie?” cried Carey, and the man grinned and pointed towards the galley.

But Carey did not go in that direction, turning aft towards the saloon entrance, where on reaching the top of the brass-bound stairs he stopped in alarm, for a hoarse groan ascended to his ears.

A shiver of dread ran through the lad, for it was evident that something terrible had happened during his absence, and for a few moments he stood listening.

Then, mastering the coward dread, he took a few steps down.

“What’s the matter?” he cried, excitedly, but there was only another groan, and he leaped down the remaining stairs to the saloon door, but only to find that it was shut and fastened, and that the startling sounds had not come from there, but from the lower cabin.

The boy did not stop to question, but began to descend. He had not taken two steps, however, before there was the sharp report of a pistol, and a bullet whistled by his ear. Then there was another shot, which was better aimed, striking him in the chest, and he fell back against the bulkhead, to slide down in a half-sitting, half-lying position upon the stairs, struggling to get his breath, while a deathly feeling of sickness made his head swim and everything seemed to be turning black.

It was some minutes before he came sufficiently to himself to realise that he was lying back there upon the stairs, unable to move, and a greater time elapsed before he fully recalled the cause and clearly knew that he had been shot at, the second shot having caused the dull, heavy pain in his breast, with the accompanying oppression.

His first movement was to clap his hand to his chest, the act dislodging a bullet, which flew off and went rattling loudly down the brass-bound stairs.

The next moment another shot was fired, and struck the wood-work above his head, while before a puff of evil-smelling smoke had risen far there was another shot, with the shivering of plate glass, which fell jangling down.

There was a feeling as if a tiny hand were passing among the roots of Carey's hair and he tried to crouch lower, but it was impossible. Feeling though, that his life—if he were not already fatally injured—depended upon his getting beyond reach of the person firing, he gave himself intense pain by trying to ascend the stairs. But at the first movement he could not restrain a sharp cry, and immediately there followed two more shots, which crashed into the wood-work overhead.

Not daring to stir now, Carey clapped his hand once more to his breast, where the pain was most acute, shuddering meanwhile at the thought that his breast must be wet with blood.

But no; his flannel felt dry enough, and plucking up courage as he recalled the fact that the first two shots stung by his head and breast, while the last four had flown high, he felt pretty sure that by crawling to the top he might reach there in safety. Besides, a revolver contained only six shots, and that number had been fired.

Acting upon this, he turned quickly over upon his breast, and in spite of the sickening pain he felt, began to crawl up; but his hope that the last shot had been fired was damped on the instant, for the firing once more began, and he felt certain that his assailant must be Dan Mallam, since he always carried two revolvers.

Carey was desperate now, and he kept on breathlessly, hearing three more shots fired, nine in all, before he sank down on the landing now by the saloon door, to faint dead away.

How long he lay he could not tell, but it could not have been any great space of time before in a sickened drowsy way he found himself listening to the distant chattering of the blacks on deck.

Carey's hand went to his breast again, where the heavy dull pain continued; but there was no trace of blood, and, satisfied on this point, he crouched there listening to a dull, moaning sound coming from the bottom of the stairs.

What did it all mean, and where was Doctor Kingsmead? He knew that Bostock was forward in the galley, for the black had pointed there when he asked, and the thing to do now was to go and find him to hear the worst.

Just then, like a flash, came the recollection of the two reports he had heard that morning when he was on the sands, and he began to wonder whether that was in any way connected with what had happened.

And now he tried to rise and get up on deck, but at the first movement the sick feeling came back, and he leaned back to let it pass off.

As he sat there, there was a burst of laughing from the blacks—a sound so full of careless, boyish merriment that it cheered him with the thought that perhaps, after all, nothing very serious was the matter.

He made another effort, and stood up to take a step or two, with the sick feeling passing off as he once more listened to the laughter of the blacks.

And now a fresh thought came to him; he must not let the blacks see that he was suffering, or they might look down upon him with contempt, so that he would perhaps lose the high position he had won in their estimation.

This seemed to give him strength, and, setting his teeth hard he put on an air of stoical indifference as he stepped out on deck, feeling that he was

growing firmer each moment.

There was a strange sight before him as he walked aft, for the blacks were gathered round four of their party, who had evidently begun in the middle and worked away from thence towards head and tail, in pairs, skinning the great snake, to the great defilement of the clean deck.

Black Jackum made way for the boy to see as he came up, grinning as was his wont.

“Good eatum,” he said, eagerly. “Cookum, good.”

“Yes,” said Carey, quietly. “Where is Cookie?”

“Cookie?” repeated the black, half-wonderingly, and he turned to one of the party who had stopped on board.

“Baal. Cookie he.”

The man made some reply, and ran towards the fore-castle to squat upon the deck and thump upon the hatch with his fists, saying something with great rapidity of speech, the only words Carey could grasp being Dan and mumkull.

Black Jackum turned to the boy as soon as his companion had finished.

“Cookie,” cried Jackum, pointing down at the closed and fastened hatch. “Big Dan mumkull everybody open dat.”

“Big Dan says he’ll kill everyone who opens that hatch?” cried Carey.

“Issum,” said the black, nodding a good deal, looking sharply from Carey towards the cabin entry and back.

“Mumkull ebberbody. Shoot, bang.”

“Let him shoot me then if he dares,” cried Carey, in a fit of desperation, and the two blacks looked at him with horror and admiration as the boy bent down over the hatch, pulled out an iron bolt thrust through the staple, and threw open the heavy lid of wood; but all was still below.

“Bob! Are you there?” cried Carey, for there was a chilling silence below.

“Ay, ay!” came in half-smothered tones, and this was followed by the sound of someone turning out of a bunk. The next minute Bostock’s bloodstained face appeared, with a tremendous swelling on the brow, the result evidently of a blow given with marlin-spike or club.

“Bob!” cried Carey, wildly, as he caught the old sailor’s hand.

“Master Carey!” cried the injured man, stumbling out as if giddy. “This is a good sight, dear boy.”

“Which of the blacks struck you that cowardly blow?”

“Nay, nay, it warn’t one of the black fellows, my lad, but Old King Cole himself.”

“But how? why—what for?”

“Don’t you puzzle a chap with too many questions at once, my lad, for my head’s a bit swimming.”

“Oh, Bob, my poor fellow! Here, Jackum, a bucket of water to bathe his head.”

“Bucketum waterum? Iss!” cried the black, darting off, and Bostock seated himself on an upturned barrel.

“Let’s see,” he said; “how was it? I forgot, sir.”

“Never mind that, then. Where’s the doctor?”

“The doctor, sir?” faltered the old fellow, to Carey’s agony, “I dunno. Ah, I ’member now. Comes to me in the galley, he does.”

“The doctor?”

“No, sir; Old King Cole. ‘Come here,’ he says, ‘and get me something out o’ the forecastle.’ I goes with him, gets to the hatch, and he says, ‘Fetch me up that noo axe as is down there.’ ‘Right, sir,’ I says, and I’d got down three steps when I sees his shadder across me as if he was lifting something, and I turns sharply to see a club in his hand just lifted up. I shies and dodges, but I was too late; down it comes dump on my forrid, and I dropped down into the forecastle.”

“Bob!” cried Carey.

“That’s true enough, sir, and then I seemed to go to sleep with every idee knocked out o’ me. I just recklect thinking I should be better in a bunk, and I lay there dreaming like till you calls me, and that woke me up. What’s o’clock, sir?”

“Time we bestirred ourselves, Bob, to find the doctor. Bob, he must have served poor Doctor Kingsmead the same.”

Chapter Twenty Four.

Poor Bob Bostock’s head had seemed as much swollen mentally as it had been externally, but these words on the part of Carey gave a fillip to his

power of thinking, and he stared at the lad with his mouth open and, instead of being stupefied and weak, he grew rapidly stronger.

“My eyes and limbs, Master Carey!” he gasped; “you don’t mean to go and say such a thing as that, do you?”

“I do, Bob, but look here,” he went on, keeping to a whisper; “try and be cool and take it all as a matter of course. Everything may depend upon our taking our troubles calmly. We must not let the black fellows think we are upset over it.”

“I see, sir. Yes, that’s right. You mean if we show the white feather these fellows’ll come and pluck us.”

“Something of the kind, Bob. There, go on bathing your head and keep friendly with Black Jack.”

“Right, sir. I see. Chuck dust in their eyes?”

“Exactly.”

“Here goes, then, sir, and I’ll begin with water and make out that I think it all a big lark.”

The old sailor knelt down before the bucket and began to bathe his forehead and the tremendous swelling, while Black Jackum looked on anxiously. The next minute Bostock raised his head, saw that the second black was looking at him solemnly, and he made a hideous grimace at him—an extremely hideous grimace, for his swollen and disfigured forehead helped to make it so.

The black stared, with the opalescent whites of his eyes forming rings around his irides. Then, grasping the fact that it was done as a joke, he burst

into a loud guffaw, slapped his thighs and cried, “Bunyip—bunyip!” bounding away the next moment, for Bostock sent a handful of water splashing all over his face.

Black Jackum roared at this, and Bostock made a feint of splashing him, to the other blacks’ great delight.

Jackum dodged and ducked his head, Bostock keeping up the threatening till Jackum protested.

“No—no—no,” he cried. “Let feel um,” and he stretched out his hands.

“All right,” cried Bostock, ceasing his watery threats; “feel then.”

“Feel cookie,” said Jackum, solemnly. “Cookie brokum?”

The black’s fingers were applied with delicate touch to the old sailor’s head.

“Gently, old soot-box,” said Bostock, quietly submitting; “it feels as if it was red-hot.”

“No brokum,” said Jackum, turning sharply to Carey and catching at the boy’s wrist. “Feelum.”

Carey felt the injured head gently, and was not a bit the wiser, save that he could not feel the movement of fractured bones, so he nodded back to Jackum and repeated the black’s words.

“No brokum,” he said, and the black laughed, caught hold of Bostock’s loose neckerchief, slipped it off, and tied it round the injured place, laughing and nodding as he turned the old sailor round and pointed out the bandage to Carey. “Big Dan hit um,” he said.

“That’s right, sonny,” cried Bostock, laughing. “I say. Big Dan, drinkum, drinkum,” and he made a pantomimic gesture with his hand as if tossing off a dram.

Black Jackum gave a sharp glance aft to make sure that his white chief was not on deck, and then, grinning with delight, he imitated Bostock’s action with his doubled hand as if drinking.

“Rum—rum,” he said, and then, with a wonderful display of the imitative faculty, he went through a clever pantomime, turning his black face into a grotesque copy of Mallam’s, as he made believe to pour rum out of a bottle, drinking again and again, smiling in an imbecile manner at first, and then beginning to grow fierce, while his companions squatted on the deck, nodding and enjoying the performance.

In a few seconds Jackum’s countenance changed, his eyes began to roll, his face seemed puffed out, and a brutally savage look came over it. He growled like a wild beast, turned on his black companion suddenly, and kicked him over, ending by jumping on him softly, to the black fellow’s great delight. Then he seemed to run *amok* among a number of imaginary people, pulling out his boomerang, pretending to cock it, and shooting in all directions, ending by making a furious rush at Bostock, making believe to drag him to the hatchway, where he took out his club, struck one tremendous blow and clapped down the trap-door. Then he took up a bottle and glass from where they did not stand on the deck, drank two glasses and, after pretending to drain the bottle, threw it overboard, and, with his eyes half shut and a horribly brutal look, went slowly to the side, settled himself down, and went to sleep.

The whole performance did not take a minute, and then he was back beside Carey.

“Big Dan,” he whispered, with his eyes twinkling with the same delight which infused his companion, who rolled on the deck in the excess of his mirth.

“Yes, that’s it,” said Carey, impatiently. “Big Dan. Drink. Bad. Now, Jackum, look here.”

“Look?” said the black. “What look?”

“Listen, then. Find doctor.”

“Find doctor. Where doctor?”

“Yes,” said Carey.

Jackum turned to his companion and asked him, but it was evident that the man knew nothing, and Jackum stood for a moment or two thinking.

“Doc-tor,” he said at last, making a significant gesture downward. “Sleep um,” and he shut his eyes and laid his face upon his hand.

“No,” said Carey.

“Jackum go see.”

He started to run aft, and Carey and the other two followed, the black fellows, who were busy picking and cleaning the game they had brought back, paying no heed.

As they reached the cabin entry Carey anxiously caught Jackum’s arm.

“Mind,” he whispered, pointing downward. “Big Dan. Shoot, shoot!”

The black nodded, and dropped upon his face, to crawl up and cautiously thrust his head inside and listen, drawing it back again directly, shutting his eyes, puffing out his face and uttering a low deep snore.

The next moment he was in again, crawling like a huge black slug head first down the stairs, till they saw only the soles of his feet, and then they disappeared, the other looking on grinning as he squatted down.

“It’s not snoring, Bob,” whispered Carey. “There is something terrible below. I think the doctor is dead, after wounding Mallam badly.”

“Oh, don’t say that, my lad; but hullo! what’s wrong with your chesty? You keep putting your hand there.”

“I don’t think it’s much,” said the boy. “Never mind now. It hurts badly now and then. Mallam shot at me.”

Bang!

There was a sharp report, a rush, and quite in a little cloud of smoke Jackum bounded out on the deck, whipped his club out from where it was stuck in his girdle behind, and made several vicious blows at nothing in the direction of the cabin stairs, his teeth bared, and a savage look of rage in his eyes.

Then, clapping his left hand to his ear, which was bleeding, he whispered:

“Big Dan shoot.”

He turned to his fellow, who examined the wounded ear, the lobe of which was split. Then the injury was pinched together for a few moments, a little grass bag was produced from somewhere, and a pinch of clay-dust applied to the wound.

This done, Jackum grinned again.

“Big Dan there,” he whispered.

“But the doctor?” whispered Carey, excitedly.

“Jackum find,” was the confident reply, and with a quick nod he bounded to one of the open saloon skylights, lay down, and edged himself through the slit, let his body go down, hung by his hands a moment or two, and let go, dropping into the saloon without a sound.

Carey and Bostock stood listening for some minutes, but there was no sign made, and though the boy lay down on the deck with his ear close to the opening he could hear nothing; and at last he rose and made for the cabin entrance, to kneel down and listen there to the low, deep groans uttered from time to time.

It was horrible, and in spite of the pain he was in Carey was ready to risk everything and rush down to put an end to his suspense.

Just when this was unendurable he felt a light touch upon his shoulder, and turned to find the second black pointing upward to the quarter-deck.

Carey went up at once, and found that Jackum was just squeezing himself edgewise beneath the hinged opening of the saloon skylight.

He grinned with satisfaction.

“Find doc-tor,” he said, fumbling in his girdle. “Big Dan shoot—shoot.”

“Not killed—mumkull?” whispered Carey, in a voice full of the anguish he felt.

“No, no, no. Baal mumkull. Big Dan shoot. Doctor broke.”

“Where, his head?” said the boy, with a sigh of relief, as he touched his own.

“Baal head. Leggum,” said the black, touching his thigh; and then from out of one tightly clasped hand he took a roughly doubled-up piece of paper, holding it out to the boy with a peculiar look of awe in his countenance.

“Ah!” cried Carey, joyfully, as he snatched at the paper, a leaf evidently torn out of a little pocket-book. “Here, Bob,” he said, with his voice trembling, as he opened out the scrap to display a few words hastily pencilled in straggling characters, and he read:

“Thank Heaven you are alive. That ruffian fired at me, and the shot divided an artery. I am too weak to stir. Take care. He is somehow injured and lying at the bottom of the cabin stairs groaning. I am dreadfully weak and faint, but I managed to stop the bleeding.”

“Three cheers for that,” said Bostock, softly. “This is bad noos, Master Carey, but there’s a deal o’ good in it, though; now, aren’t there?”

“Good?” cried Carey, with a look of horror.

“Yes, sir, good,” said the old sailor, stolidly. “You see, he says he’s stopped the bleeding.”

“Yes, yes, that is good, certainly,” said Carey, with his hand pressed to his aching breast.

“Then there’s something better, sir; he says Old King Cole’s somehow injured, and lying at the bottom o’ the cabin stairs groaning, and if that aren’t a blessing in disguise I should like to know what is.”

“And we don’t know how he is.”

“No, sir, we don’t know how he is, but he must be pooty bad, or else he wouldn’t go on shooting at everybody who goes nigh. I wish, though, he’d ha’ hurt old Jackum a bit more.”

“Why?”

“Might ha’ made the nigger so savage that he’d ha’ gone down and finished him off. I aren’t a murd’rous sort o’ man, Master Carey, but he tried to kill me, only he didn’t hit hard enough, and I get thinking that there old ruffian won’t be perfeck till he’s quite finished. Well, sir, what’s to be done? You’re skipper now as t’others is both wounded. I should say first thing is for you to rig yourself out with a revolver and a gun as I’ve got waiting for you ready, and, as it used to be when I was aboard a man-o’-war, you just read your commission out loud to the crew. They won’t understand it, but that don’t matter; we Jacks never did. Next you’d better make me your first lieutenant as well as cook, and then go and knock over a nigger or two just to let ’em see you mean business.”

“Don’t trifle, Bob,” cried Carey, angrily.

“Nay, sir, I aren’t trifling; I mean it. You’ve got the whip hand o’ they niggers, and they ’bout worships you. Just you bounce about a bit and let ’em see what you’re made of, and then give ’em your orders what to do.”

“Yes, what would you do first?”

“Well, sir, if it was me I should send Jackum and a couple more—no, I wouldn’t send jackum, because he’s not a bad sort o’ fellow, and we couldn’t spare him. He’ll be a splendid go-between, because you see he understands the language, and it’ll be better to tell ’em what they’re to do than knocking it into ’em with a club. You send three of ’em down below, and let ’em put the old king out of his misery.”

“What! Kill him?”

“Ay, sir, he must be badly hurt and half dead. Such chaps as him aren’t a bit o’ use in the world.”

Carey looked at the man with so much disgust painted in his face that Bostock shrugged his shoulders.

“Well, p’raps that would be a bit strong, sir, but one must do something, and it won’t do to leave him down there shooting at everyone who goes nigh.”

“Let’s get to the doctor first,” said Carey.

“Nay, sir; I aren’t going to let you go down them stairs and be shot again, whether you’re my officer or whether you aren’t,” said the old sailor, stoutly.

“I am not going down that way. We must get axes to work and enlarge the opening through the skylight,” said Carey.

“Ah, now you’re talking sense, sir. Of course, but you’ll have a revolver?”

Carey nodded, and Bostock hurried off, to return in a few minutes without the objects of which he had been in search.

“Well, where are the arms?” cried Carey.

“Aren’t got ’em yet, sir. Them chaps want me to light a fire and cook the thumping big snake they’ve got, and it’s a horrid idee, sir. The oven’ll never be fit to use again. They made signs that if I didn’t they’d light a fire on the deck, and one chap began rubbing his fire-sticks to get a light.”

“I can’t spare you, Bob,” cried Carey, anxiously. “What am I to do? Here, I know,” said the boy, rising to the emergency. “Here, Jackum!”

The man, who had been watching him intently, sprang to his side on the instant, looking ready to obey the slightest order.

“Tell your boys to take the snake over to the sands and light a fire there to roast it. They can make a feast.”

The black nodded, as if fully endorsing the plan. “Jackum go too.”

“No, stop, I want you. Send all the others.”

“Jackum want eat.”

“You shall have plenty to eat,” cried Carey, and the man grinned, spoke sharply to his companions, who ran with him forward, and, as the pair watched them and listened, they heard quite a babel of excited voices rise, and Carey’s heart sank.

“They won’t go,” he said.

“Oh, won’t they, sir,” said Bostock, with a chuckle. “You’ll see directly.”

The old sailor was right, for directly after they were seen carrying the carefully skinned and cleaned serpent to the side, where they lowered it into the boat, into which they crowded till it was full, four of them perching on the outrigger.

Then with a loud shout the heavily-laden canoe was pushed off, the paddles began to splash, and Jackum came back.

“All gone ’way,” he said, rather solemnly, as if disappointed at not being able to join the banquet. “Jackum want eat.”

“Yes, of course. Come along. Here, Bob, what can you give him to eat?”

The black's eyes sparkled, as he turned eagerly to Bostock.

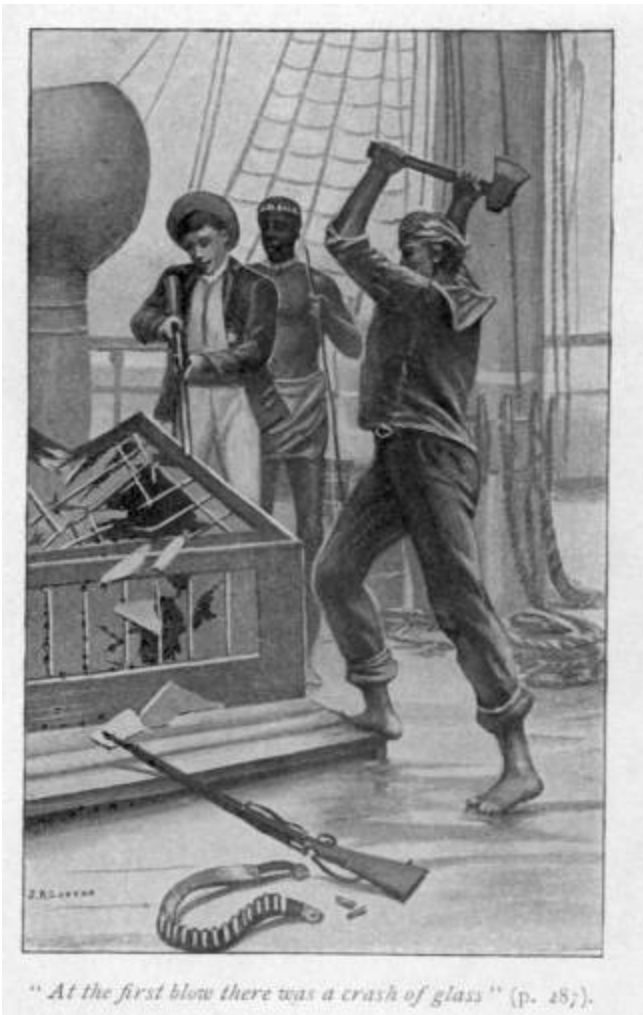
“What yer like, Sooty?” said the latter.

“Bob gib ticky-ticky; Pick Dilly. Much cake.”

“Look ye here,” said the old sailor. “You love damper?”

“Iss. Damper.”

“Ticky-ticky?”



“Iss. Much ticky-ticky.”

“And I’ll light a fire and roast something for you to eat by-and-by.”

“Jackum no like roast somefin. Cooky big bird.”

“Yes, I’ll cook a big bird for you. That do? Come along then.”

A minute or two later Jackum was seated with a big damper cake and a basin of treacle between his legs, smiling all over his face wherever it was not coated with molasses, and that was naturally about the mouth. When they saw him fully occupied Carey and Bostock turned to where the arms were hidden, and soon after each was provided with a revolver and gun loaded, and with an ample supply of cartridges.

“Now, Bob,” cried Carey, excitedly, “the *Chusan* is once more our own. If we fastened up the gangways we could keep all those blacks off.”

“What about Jackum?”

“He would obey me now.”

“Dessay he would, sir, but what about Old King Cole?”

Carey gazed at him with wrinkled brow and was silent for a few moments, for the question was hard to answer, and he gave it up.

“Get an axe,” he said.

This—was soon done, and they repaired to the saloon skylight, where Bostock leaned his gun against the erection ready for use if wanted, and began to use the axe.

At the first blow there was a crash of glass, followed by a revolver shot from the bottom of the stairs, when Bostock dropped the axe and seized and cocked his gun.

“The old un’s at it, sir. Look out; maybe he’s coming out.”

“Fire at him if he fires at us,” said Carey, excitedly.

“I’m a-going to fire at him, sir, afore he does,” said the old sailor, sturdily.
“See my swelled head, sir?”

Carey nodded.

“That’s right, sir. Well then, ’cordin’ to the rules of the game it’s my first play this time, and yours too.”

Carey was silent, and nothing followed the shot.

“He must be disabled, Bob?” whispered the boy. “Go on again.”

Bostock struck once more, and there was another shot below, but this time the old sailor went on, striking again and again, beating out glass and dividing the cross pieces of wood to make an easy entrance for anyone to get down. But not a dozen strokes had been delivered before the black was once more at their side.

“Hullo!” cried Bostock; “you haven’t eat all that damper.”

“Jackum eat allum damper, allum ticky-ticky. Good!” cried the black, grinning.

“Well, I couldn’t ha’ done it myself in the time,” said Bostock. “Here, lay hold.”

He pointed to the partially demolished light, which the black seized and wrenched off, threw it down on the deck, and then, without hesitation, glided through, and dropped softly into the saloon cabin.

“You go next, Bob.”

“Nay, sir, oughtn’t you to order me on guard to shoot down the enemy if he comes on deck?” Carey nodded.

“Yes, keep watch,” he said. “I’ll go down.” The way was easy enough now, and the next minute Carey was on the saloon table, from which he leaped to the floor, to face Jackum, who cried, eagerly:

“Doctor. Jackum know.”

The black led the way to the captain’s cabin, and there was a faint cry of delight as the boy sprang forward and let his gun drop against the locker, to grasp Doctor Kingsmead’s extended hands.

“Oh, doctor, doctor!” he cried. “At last! at last! But how thin and white you look.”

“Loss of blood, my lad. Ah, Jackum!”

For the black had crept close up to the berth and squatted down, gazing anxiously in the sufferer’s face.

“Doc-tor mumkull?” he said.

“Killed? Oh, no, my man. I hope not for a long time yet.”

“Mumkull—no,” said Jackum. “Brokum?”

“Yes, broken if you like,” and he pointed to the slit-up leg of his trousers and a large bloodstained bandage, tightly bound round.

“Who ’tick ’pear froo doctor leggum?” cried the black, springing up, with his eyes flashing and the look of war in his set teeth; and it was as if he

wanted the name of the member of his pack, as he drew his club from behind, to shake it menacingly.

“No, no. Shot-gun,” said the doctor.

“Ho! Big Dan?” whispered the black, and he pointed downward.

“Yes,” said the doctor, and for a few moments his voice grew a little stronger. “Carey, lad, the cowardly ruffian must have been mad drunk this morning, for he came to me furious and foaming and accused me of encouraging you to set the blacks against him. I denied it, of course, and he grew more furious, using bullying and insulting language, till in my irritation I struck him, and he went away, while I began to repent, feeling how awkward our position was. But a few minutes later I had come to the conclusion that the time had arrived when we must strike for freedom, and I was looking longingly across the lagoon at where I could see you practising throwing the boomerang, and wishing you back. Then I turned to go forward and speak to Bostock, who was busy in the galley, when I saw that ruffian standing just outside the cabin entry, taking aim at me with a gun.

“I shouted and rushed at him, but he fired twice before I could reach him. I felt a tremendous blow on the leg, but I closed with him and we fell together, struggling down step by step to the saloon door, where I loosed my grasp and rolled in, to lie half insensible; but I heard the door banged to and locked on the outside. Then a deathly feeling of sickness came over me, and I lay wondering at the sounds I heard as of water splashing, as if bucket after bucket was dashed down to wash something away.

“That sound saved my life, Carey,” said the doctor, after a pause, “for it seemed to revive me to a sense of what was wrong, and I crawled from the dreadful pool in which I lay, to tear a strip from the tablecloth and staunch the bleeding, before I fainted away, to be revived again by hearing a

horrible crash as if someone had slipped upon the wet stairs. The door was nearly driven in, but the fall continued, and I could hear Mallam cursing horribly as he tried to get up, but only to fall back and lie silent for a time. I must have fainted again, but the desire for life was strong, and I forced myself to see to my injury. It's a horrible wound, Carey, and bled so that I thought it would never stop; but the bone was sound, and I was surgeon enough to tie the artery, and—and—"

His voice had been growing weaker and weaker, and now it ceased, the poor fellow lying with his eyes half-closed.

"Doc-tor go mumkull," whispered Jackum, but Carey made an angry gesture and, fetching water from the table, he moistened the wounded man's lips, and in a short time had the satisfaction of seeing him revive a little and in a faint whisper ask for a drink. Carey raised his head a little, and half a glassful was swallowed with avidity. This was reviving, and the doctor was soon able to press his young companion's hand.

"Where's Bostock?" he said at last.

"On deck," said Carey, promptly; but he said nothing about the old sailor's injury.

"Hah!" replied the doctor; "I can get better now. But what is the matter with you, my lad? Your voice sounds strange, and you keep one hand over your breast. What is it?"

"Oh, nothing much," said Carey, with a feeble attempt at a smile.

"Tell me," said the doctor, in almost a whisper; but there was a stern look in his eyes as he said, "I know. You have been overtaxing yourself. The old trouble has broken again."

“No, no,” cried Carey, eagerly now. “I was on the cabin stairs seeking for you, when that old wretch fired at me, and I felt something strike me here.” He pressed his hand upon his breast.

The knowledge that another was suffering seemed to renew the doctor’s strength.

“Let me see,” he said, more firmly.

Carey hesitated, but the stern eyes forced him to obey, and as he sat there with the last rays of the setting sun streaming into the cabin, he bared his breast, to show a great red patch as large as the palm of his hand.

“Spent or badly loaded bullet, Carey,” said the doctor, faintly. “Painful, but no danger, lad. The skin is not pierced.” He could say no more, but lay holding the lad’s hand, while Jackum watched in the midst of an intense silence, till a shot suddenly rang out, just as the cabin was darkening.

“Hullo! What’s that mean?” came in a deep growl from the top of the cabin stairs.

“Ahoy there!” roared Mallam. “Where’s that there doctor?”

“You ought to know,” shouted Bostock, every word in the silence of the gathering night sounding plainly on the listeners’ ears. “Down below, with your shot in his limb.”

“Curse his limb!” roared Mallam.

“Look ye here,” said Bostock, in hoarse, stentorian tones, “I’ve got a double gun, double-loaded, in my fins, and I’m pynting down straight at you, my old beachcomber; and I tell you what it is, if you begin any of your games again I looses off both barrels and ends you. D’yer hear?”

“Yes, I hear, cooky. I won’t fire any more. You must bring that doctor down to see to me. I’m wrecked.”

“What’s the matter with you?” growled Bostock; “too drunk to move?”

“No-o-o-o!” roared the beachcomber. “I fell down these cursed stairs and broke both my legs.”

“Oh, that’s it, is it?” said Bostock, coolly. “I was wondering what was the matter. Well, it’ll keep you quiet for a bit.”

“You send down the doctor, I tell you.”

“He can’t come, and if he could he wouldn’t. I’ll send some of your black fellows to come if you give up your pistols and gun.”

“What!” roared Mallam. “I’m king here, and—here, you tell the doctor to come to me directly.”

“Shan’t,” growled Bostock.

“Big Dan brokum,” whispered Black Jackum.

“Yes,” said Carey, “both legs.”

“Black Jackum go and men’. No. Big Dan shoot um.”

At that moment there was the sound of joyous shouting from the island, and the ruddy glare of a big fire played through the saloon window.

“Boy big eat corroborree,” said the black, sadly. “Jack go eat snake? No. Big Dan not shoot, Jackum ’top men’ both leggum.”

“Ahoy, there!” roared Mallam, from the bottom of the stairs, “if that doctor aren’t down here ’fore I count five hundred I’ll fire down into the powder store and blow up the ship.”

Chapter Twenty Five.

“Master Carey, sir!” came through the broken skylight. “Hear that? Hadn’t we better begin first?”

“Wait a minute,” replied Carey, who was trembling with excitement, brought on by the responsibilities of his new position. “Let me speak to Doctor Kingsmead.”

Bostock grunted, and the boy turned to the wounded man.

“Did you hear what this wretch said?” he asked.

The doctor pressed the hand which took his, but made no reply in his utter exhaustion, and Carey drew back uttering a sigh, as much from pain as anxiety.

“It’s no use,” he muttered, “there’s no help for it. I’ve got to do it all.”

“Big Dan go mumkull ebberybody?” asked Jackum, quietly, and as if it was all a matter of course.

“No, no,” cried Carey, angrily. “I’d soon kill him.”

“Ha!” cried the black out of the darkness, for it was night now, with the black’s figure just visible in the flames from the shore. “No kill Jackum?”

“Not I,” cried Carey. “Here, let me come by.”

He thrust the black aside, and went under the broken light.

“Look here, Bob,” he cried. “Can that old wretch blow up the ship?”

“Well, sir, that’s what I’ve been thinking. It’s all very well to say you’ll do a thing, but it aren’t always easy, you see.”

“But is the powder magazine close by where he’s lying?”

“That’s what I want to know, sir?”

“Don’t you know?”

“No, sir; and that sets me a-thinking, how can he know?”

“But you’ve belonged to the ship for years.”

“Ay, sir, I jyned for the first v’y’ge.”

“And you’ve seen her loaded.”

“That’s so, sir.”

“And you don’t know where the powder magazine is?”

“Well, sir, to speak quite fair and honest, I don’t.”

“Isn’t that strange?”

“Sounds so, sir, but ’tween you and me I don’t b’lieve there is any powder magazine. The old *Soosan* aren’t a man-o’-war.”

“No, of course not.”

“She aren’t got no great guns like we had aboard the *Conkhoorar*. What do we want with a powder magazine?”

“But there is a gun on deck.”

“Tchah! A little brass pop-shot, to make signals with. The skipper had got some charges for her, and a few boxes o’ cartridges in a locker; but I don’t believe there’s even the ghost of a magazine.”

“Then it’s all an empty threat, Bob.”

“I don’t say that, my lad, because though I never heard o’ one there’s room for half a dozen. All I say is, it aren’t likely. Only I don’t want you if we are blowed to bits to pull yourself together afterwards, and come and blame me.”

“No fear, Bob,” said Carey, speaking with some confidence now.

“You see, sir, that old ruffian says that he’ll blow the old *Soosan* up, and it may be solemn truth, and same time it may be only gammon; but it makes a man feel anxious like and think o’ our raft and the whale-boat Old King Cole come in, and think he’d rather be aboard one o’ them than stopping here.”

“Retreating to the boat, Bob?”

“Yes, sir, or else chancing it, and that last aren’t pleasant. I think we ought to say, ‘Look here, my fine fellow, two can play at that game o’ yours,’ and get a tin o’ powder, put a bit o’ touch paper through the neck, set light to it, and chuck it down the stairs and blow him to smithereens first.”

“And explode the magazine ourselves if there is one?” cried Carey.

“Well, I *ham* blessed!” cried Bostock. “I never thought o’ that! Anyone would think I was an Irishman.”

“If I’m to take the lead now, Bob, I won’t have any talk of murder like that.”

“But it aren’t murder, sir; it’s on’y fair fight; tit for him before it’s tat for us. Not as we need argufy, because it wouldn’t be safe to try that game. Oughtn’t we to take to the boat, sir?”

“How can we, Bob?” cried Carey, angrily. “You wouldn’t go and leave the doctor?”

“Nay, sir, that I wouldn’t. I shouldn’t call a chap a man who’d go and do a thing like that. We should take him with us.”

“Hoist him with ropes through that broken skylight! Why, it would kill him.”

“Well, Jackum and me we’d carry him out o’ the s’loon door, sir. We’d be werry careful.”

“Pish! You know that the old ruffian commands the staircase, and he shot both Jackum and me when we were there. He’d riddle you both with bullets, and perhaps quite kill Doctor Kingsmead.”

“Well, sir, he’s riddling of me now, sir; I dunno what to say; on’y it don’t seem nat’ral to stand still and be blown up in a splosion, when you might get away. Ha! I have it, sir. S’pose I get the boat round under the cabin window, and you and Jackum shove the doctor out and lower him down. What d’yer say to that?”

“Nonsense!” cried Carey, impatiently. “I don’t understand wounds much—no, not a bit; but from what the doctor said I’m sure if we tried to move him he’d bleed to death.”

“That settles it, sir, then; you and me’s got to stay. But look ye here, Master Carey; they say it’s best in a splosion to lie down flat till it’s over. Ah, there he goes again. It’s coming now.”

For Mallam's voice was heard once more, roaring for Bostock.

"No; he will not fire the magazine till he has had another talk to you."

"Think not, sir? I were reading in the *Mariner's Chronicle* that pirates always blows up their ships when things go again 'em, and he's nothing better than a pirate, say what you will."

There was a savage roar from the beachcomber, and as Bostock hurried along the quarter-deck and descended to the cabin entrance two shots were fired in rapid succession.

"Big Dan go mumkull—kill a feller," whispered Jackum, as the exchange of words came to where they stood listening.

"Drop that! D'yer hear?" roared Bostock. "Drop it, before I come and finish you off."

"Yes; come!" snarled Mallam.

"I've a big mind to, you cowardly old thief. I want to pay you for that crack on the head you give me from behind."

"Come down, then, you sneaking hound. Where's that doctor?"

"Too bad to move, with your cowardly shooting."

"Wish I'd killed him," growled Mallam.

"You've bit your own ugly red nose off in revenge of your face. If you're waiting for the doctor to come and put you right you'll have to wait a couple o' months; and then if he's a bit like me he'll finish you off out of the way."

“Are you going to send him down?”

“No; I aren’t going to send him down; but I tell you what I will do—if you don’t hand up that revolver I’ll pitch a lanthorn down alight so as to get a good aim at you, and then I’ll give you two barrels o’ this.”

There was a few minutes’ silence, and then the beachcomber began again.

“Send that Black Jackum down to me. Where’s he been all this time?”

“Keeping out of your reach, you old madman,” growled Bostock.

“You send him down.”

As Carey listened it became plain to him that no matter how defective the black was in speech he understood pretty well every word that was said, for a firm sinewy hand was laid upon the lad’s arm and the man said softly, “Jackum won’t go. Want ’top ’long you. Big Dan mumkull Jackum.”

There were a couple more random shots fired, eliciting raging threats from Bostock, and then the old sailor came back to the light.

“How’s the doctor, sir?” he said.

“Sleeping heavily.”

“Good job too, sir,” said the old sailor, with a sigh. “Wish I could go to sleep and never know what’s going on. Come much easier to be blowed up when one didn’t expect it. Wonderful how cowardly a man feels when he knows that there’s a lot o’ gunpowder as may go off any moment just under his feet.”



"They're dancing round it like a lot o' children" (p. 303).

"But you must see, Bob," said Carey, softly, "that it's only a bit of bragging. He can't blow up the ship."

"Think not, sir?"

"I feel sure of it."

"Ah, I wish I could feel like that, sir," sighed Bostock. "You wouldn't, though, if you come up on deck and heard how he's going on."

"I can hear every word, Bob, and so can Jackum."

“Jackum? Ah, I ’most forgot him. I say, sir, his brothers, or whatever they are, seem to be carrying on a nice game, over yonder. P’raps it’s ’cause they feel that they’re safe enough. They’ve got a thumping big fire, and they’re dancing round it like a lot o’ little children playing at may-pole. Seems to me, sir, that these here blacks grow up to be children, and then they makes a fresh start; their bodies go on growing like anything, but their brains stops still and never grows a day older. Hark, there he goes again.”

“What, Mallam?”

“Yes, sir; you can hear him talking to himself as you stand at the top o’ the stairs listening. He was at it when I was there, and he’s at it again.”

“What is he doing?” whispered Carey.

“Seems to me, sir, as if he’s tearing a way through a bulkhead so as to get a clear opening to the powder barrels.”

“If there are any,” said Carey, sharply. “O’ course, sir; that’s what I mean. Hear that?”

Yes, Carey had heard that—a sharp cracking tearing sound as of wood splitting and snapping, and as the sounds continued it was easy enough for the listeners in the dark to imagine what was going on, and that the old beachcomber was preparing his mine.

“Here, Jackum,” said Carey, in a sharp whisper.

There was a quick movement, and the black squatted beside the lad.

“You had better go ashore and join your men.”

“Jackum men? Jackum boys.”

“Yes, go and join them.”

“Jackum ’top ’long o’ Car-ee boy.”

“No, it is not safe. You must go. Big Dan is going to shoot powder and kill.”

“Big Dan shoot big gun; mumkull eberybody?”

“Yes; be off while you can.”

“Car-ee boy come too?”

“No, I am going to stay here with the doctor.”

“Jackum ’top ’long doc-tor too.”

“But it is bad. Big Dan mumkull—kill. Shoot powder.”

“Jackum don’t care fig,” said the man, nonchalantly. “Jackum baal want be mumkull.”

“But you will be killed if you stop,” said Carey, excitedly.

The black laughed softly.

“Jackum be mumkull, Jackum ’top? Car-ee no kill Jackum. Like Jackum lots. Give Jackum ticky-ticky.”

“You don’t understand,” cried Carey. “Big Dan will kill us all if we stop.”

“Hey? Big Dan brokum.”

“Going to shoot. Powder—gun.”

“Ho!” exclaimed the black, who seemed now to have some idea of there being danger. “Car-ee no ’top. Come ’long shore. Eat snake.”

“No,” said Carey. “You go; I must stop with the doctor.”

“Doctor not go,” said the black, thoughtfully. “Hole in leggum. Jackum won’t go. ’Top ’long o’ Car-ee.”

“Better give it up as a bad job, sir,” said Bostock, from the light. “He means he won’t go away and leave you. They’re rum chaps, these black fellows, when they take to a man.”

“Because they won’t leave me, Bob?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then some white fellows are as queer, don’t you think so?”

Bostock chuckled, but made no reply.

“Bob,” said Carey, suddenly, “it is quite plain, isn’t it, that we can’t move the doctor?”

“Well, sir, I s’pose so.”

“Then it is impossible for me to leave him. If there is an explosion I hope and pray that we two may escape.”

“What about me, then, sir?”

“You will go to the boat directly with Jackum. I shall make him go.”

“Right, sir, and wait in the boat till the ship blows up. And some day if I get away from here and reach Brisbane and your father comes to me and says,

‘Where’s my boy?’ I ups and says, ‘He wouldn’t leave the doctor, sir, who was lying bad, having been shot; so me and a black fellow takes to the boat and rows half a mile away so’s to be out o’ reach o’ the falling bits when the *Soosan* blew up as she did; and a werry beautiful sight it was.’ Then he says to me, he says—Yah! I’m blessed if I know what he’d say; all I knows is that I aren’t going to meet him; not me, my lad; I’d sooner have a blow up from the *Soosan* than one from him.”

“Bob,” said Carey, softly, “I wish I could reach up and shake hands with you.”

“Well, so you can, dear boy,” said the old sailor, huskily. “Thankye, my lad. Go and sneak away at a time like this? I’m made of a different bit o’ stuff to that. I say, lookye here, Master Carey; I bleeve it’s all flam and bunkum. He aren’t got no magazine to fire, or else he aren’t got no pluck to do it. There won’t be no blow up, and we’re a-going to face it with a bit o’ British waller, eh?”

“Yes, Bob, we must face it,” replied Carey.

“That’s right, sir; then we’ll do it comf’table and like men. Lookye here, my lad, you must be ’bout starving.”

“Starving, Bob? I had not thought of it,” said the boy, sadly.

“Then I’ll think for you. I say you must have something, and so must I. Fellow’s engine won’t work without coal. Hi! Jackum! Something to eat?”

The black bounded to his side.

“Jackum want eat. Baal hab bit snakum.”

“More you did, Sootie; but you shall have something better. Come along.”

“Car-ee come ’long too.”

“No,” said Carey; “I’ll stop here.”

“Car-ee come. Doc-tor farss ’sleep. Big Dan brokum. Sit alonga long time. Baal fetch um too much drinking grog. Old man no good.”

“Go along with Bob.”

“Go alonga Cookie now?”

“Yes, and he’ll give you plenty.”

“Plenty eat. Jackum come back soon.”

Bostock reached down his hand, but the help was not needed, the black springing up and rapidly making his way on deck, where he stood for a few moments gazing across the lagoon, stained blood-red now by the big fire; and he laughed softly.

“Black fellow eat plenty snakum. Jackum eat plenty now. Sit alonga self.”

A few minutes later he was happily sitting on the deck by the galley “alonga self,” eating half the overdone bird which Bostock had given him, while the old sailor had roughly prepared the most tempting part for his young companion and taken it to the saloon skylight.

“Here you are, Master Carey,” he said. “Brought your coals. How’s the king?”

“I have heard him groan several times.”

“That’s because he’s low-sperrited, sir, because he didn’t quite mumkull me and the doctor. But I say, sir, he’s a long time blowing up the ship. Got it,

sir? That's right! You'd better eat it in the dark, for fear he might crawl up a few steps if he saw a light, and want to pass the time practising his shooting. Now, no gammon, sir."

"What do you mean, Bob?"

"You'll eat that bit?"

"I don't feel as if I can."

"But you must, dear lad. It's to make you strong to help the doctor, and mebbe to shoot straight again' Old King Cole."

"I will eat it, Bob."

"Right, sir! That's British pluck, that is. How's your chesty now?"

"Very bad, Bob."

"Then sorry I am. Next time the doctor begins to talk you ups and asks him what he's got in his medsome chest as is good for it. I say, though, I s'pose it's no use to try and coax the doctor with a mossick of anything, is it?"

"Oh no, no."

"Not a cup o' tea and a bit o' toast?"

"Not now, Bob; he's sleeping calmly, and that must be the best thing for him."

"Right, sir. It's Natur's finest fizzick, as well I know. There, I'll go and have a snap myself, for it's the middle o' the night, and I haven't had a bite since breakfast."

There was silence then, and Carey thought the man had stolen softly away; so he was trying to keep his promise, though the first effort he made to partake of the food gave him intense pain. Then he started, for Bostock said softly:

“He’s pretty quiet now, sir; I hope he aren’t hatching any noo tricks again’ us. Tell you what it is; I’m going down to him to-morrow with a mattress to see if I can’t smother him down till I’ve got his shooting irons away. We shan’t feel safe till that’s done. My word! I should like to chain him up in the cable tier till we could hand him over to the ’Stralian police.”

“Yes,” said Carey, gravely. “Bob, that’s the most sensible thing I’ve heard you say.”

“Is it, sir? Then I’ll go and give myself a bit o’ supper after that. Are you eating?”

“I’m trying to, Bob.”

“Trying’s half the battle, sir. There, now I am off.”

Chapter Twenty Six.

The dreary hours crawled along, and it seemed to Carey that he was suffering from a long-drawn weary nightmare, made up of his own pain, a sigh or two at times from the doctor and restless movements, groans, and threats and cursings from the beachcomber.

It was a horrible night, for the boy, in addition to his other troubles, felt as if he were somehow to blame for the sufferings of the wretched man below.

Lying there in agony with broken legs! It was horrible, and the boy could not have suffered more if he had himself been the victim of the accident.

But there were breaks in the misery of that long dark night. Bostock was soon back, announcing that his head was two sizes larger than usual, but that he was all the better for his supper, and ready for anything now.

He told the watcher, too, that the black fellows ashore were still keeping up their fire, stopping probably to eat sometimes, but at others re-making the fire till it blazed again, and playing in the bright light at “Here we go round the mulberry bush.”

But the little incident that gave Carey the most satisfaction was that soon after Bostock’s return to his post at the skylight there was a soft rustling, a light thud on the floor, and directly after the black squatted down close by where the lad was seated, and, though he could not make out his figure, he felt sure that the Australian was watching him with the dumb patience of a dog.

“That you, Jackum?” he said, softly, and he stretched out his hand, to find it touched the black’s rough head, which seemed to press itself into his palm.

“Iss. Jackum eat big lot. ’Top here now. Car-ee go sleep.”

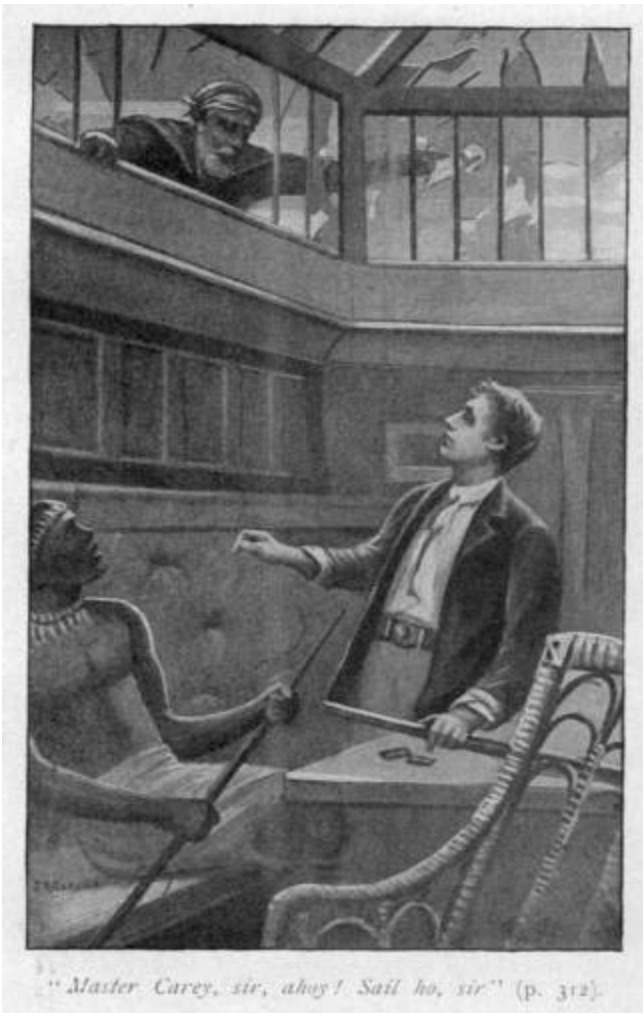
The boy sighed, and then there was silence till he spoke again.

“Will the black fellows come back soon?” he said, as he thought of the idea he had had about keeping them off.

“No come back. Go sleep roun’ fire. ’Top all snakum eatum.”

Twice over it seemed to Carey that he lost consciousness, though he never went fairly off to sleep, but sat there suffering terrible mental pain and the

burning sensation in his chest as if he were being seared with a hot iron.



The night seemed as if it would never come to an end. Mallam had begun muttering hoarse threats again, and at last startled all into preparation for action by firing three times, each shot striking some place on the upper part of the staircase, and once shivering some glass.

Then he became quiet again, and it seemed directly after that Bostock said:

“The blacks’ fire’s out, sir, and the stars are beginning to get whitish. Be sunrise in less than an hour. I’ll go and light our fire now, and as soon as the kettle boils I’ll make you a cup of tea.”

“Thank you, Bob,” said Carey, huskily. “I shall be glad of that.”

It seemed a long time to one suffering from a parched throat, and the pale light of dawn was beginning to steal in through the broken opening and the cabin ports, when there was the click of a teacup on the deck, and Jackum said softly:

“Cookey make billy boil. Car-ee tea.”

Crash!

Down went the tray with the refreshing cup on the deck, and Bostock thrust his head through the broken light.

“Master Carey, sir, ahoy! Three cheers, and another for luck. If ever there was a sight for sore eyes it’s now. Sail ho, sir, not three mile out, lying just beyond the reef. A small steamer, dear lad, as must ha’ seen the fire last night.”

“Help at last!” panted Carey.

“Ay, my lad, they’ve kept their fires banked up, and the smoke’s pouring out of her funnel and hanging to leeward like a flag.”

“Iss. Ship come,” said Jackum, who had bounded up and inspected the vessel. “Jackum fess all aboy. Car-ee going fight him?”

“No, no,” cried the boy; “they must be friends,” and, utterly worn out now, he broke down and hid his face.

“Don’t do that, dear lad,” whispered Bostock. “Keep it up a bit longer, for I must leave you now. Jackum and I must go off in the whale-boat and pilot

them inside. Can't you keep it up just an hour more?" and the old sailor's voice shook as he spoke.

"Yes," said Carey, as his teeth grated together. "Go on."

"Right, my lad. I don't think there's anything to fear, but take my gun, and if that old ruffian does rouse up and crawl to the saloon door—'tarn't likely, or he'd ha' been here before, but I says it, my lad, because it would be your dooty, and you must—shoot, sir; shoot him. He aren't a human man, only a something in a man's shape; a murderer, that's what he is, and you must shoot him as if he was a wild beast. Now, Jackum, give him the gun, and come with me."

The black obeyed with alacrity, and a few minutes later Carey heard the faint splash of oars, and sat there in the utter silence, watching the doctor's pallid thin features, as he still slept deeply, and listening for the sounds from below which did not come.

It must have been close upon two hours before that silence was broken by the sound of voices, the grating of a boat against the steamer's side, and the trampling of feet on deck.

"Jackum backum," cried the black, as he dropped down, with his face shining with excitement.

"Ahoy there!" cried Bostock. "How goes it, my lad? Here we are. Boat's crew well armed, and we're going to have Old King Cole out before many more minutes are gone."

"Take care," cried Carey, excitedly. "Think of the danger. What are you going to do?"

“Roosh him, sir, somehow or another,” cried the old sailor, “and I’m a-going first.”

“What! He will shoot you.”

“Let him try,” cried Bostock, grimly. “I aren’t forgot what he did to me with one of the nigger’s clubs. I’ve got Jackum’s here, and maybe I shall get its big knob home quicker than he can put in a shot.”

Carey had no further protest ready, and he sat in agony, hardly realising that it was strange the various sounds had not awakened the doctor.

But his every sense was on the strain, as he listened to a sudden rush down past the saloon door, expectant of shot after shot from the beachcomber’s revolver.

But no shot was fired, though a revolver was fast clenched in the old ruffian’s hand.

There was, however, to be no hand-cuffing and carrying off to the justice of man, for the spirit of Dan Mallam the beachcomber had passed out that morning, as the old sailor said, with the tide.

The small steamer lying anchored close by in the lagoon had after a long and dangerous search at last achieved her purpose, having been despatched, with Carey’s father and the captain and chief officer of the *Chusan* on board, in search of the wreck if it were still on the reef, and the meeting was a joyful one.

“I never could think you were dead, my boy,” was whispered in Carey’s ear; “and your dear mother always felt the same. I knew I should find you, and I have, thank God! thank God!”

“Car-ee’s ole man?” said a voice just after, and Mr Cranford turned sharply round to stare at the shining black face.

“Yes,” he said, frowning; “I am Carey’s—er—old man.”

“Me Jackum! You shake han’?”

“Next to Bostock and the doctor, father, my best friend,” said Carey, eagerly.

“Then he is mine,” said Mr Cranford.

“Here’s a canoe of savages off from the island,” shouted the captain of the *Chusan* from the deck. “Does this mean a fight?”

“Jackum boy come back,” cried the black. “No shoot; all good boy. Jackum take you Big Dan island. Plenty shell, plenty copra, plenty old ship ’tuff. Big Dan mumkull. Jackum give all Car-ee now.”

But no start was made for the other portion of the King’s domain, for a few days were necessary in the way of rest for the doctor; and the captain of the *Chusan* and the mate had to satisfy themselves of the impossibility of getting the vessel off. During these days, though, there were busy times, for the specie the *Chusan* had been bearing was all hoisted out in safety and transferred to the smaller vessel.

Not much else was done save the taking on board of the pearl shells as the freight belonging to the doctor and Carey. The pearls were already in safety, and Bostock made a greater haul with the help of a chum and the blacks from the tubs ashore.

“Twice as many as the first go, my lad,” said the old sailor, rubbing his hands, “and, I say, oughtn’t you and the doctor to lay claim to what we’re a-

going to find?”

“No,” said Carey, “and besides, we have not found it yet. If there is much worth having it will go, I should think, to the company that owns the *Chusan*. But we shall see.”

Carey Cranford saw the great treasures in pearls, pearl shell, and valuables collected from wrecked vessels in the course of some twenty years, during which Dan Mallam had reigned paramount in a lonely island off the north-west coast of Australia, for Jackum piloted the steamer there in triumph, and looked proud of his achievement, while he pointed out everything he thought of value to Carey, and could not understand the lad’s hanging back from helping himself to articles he did not want.

The steamer was nearly laden with valuable pearl shell and the boxes of pearls hoarded up by the old beachcomber, who was supposed to have escaped from Norfolk Island with a party of his fellows who had all passed away.

These must have been enough, with their insurance, to quite compensate the company for their loss. In fact, voyage after voyage was made to the *Chusan* and to Jackum’s island during the following twelve months on salvage business, and with excellent results.

But we have nothing to do with that. It is enough to state that the boats on the night of the wreck had been carried in safety to a western Australian port; that the doctor rapidly began to mend; that Carey’s injured chest was doctored by a sick man; and that Jackum wanted badly to follow the young adventurer when the time came for saying good-bye, and was only stopped by its being impressed upon him that he was King of Pearl Island now, and was to go on collecting till Carey came to see him some day on a voyage with his father, to trade for all his copra, shell, and pearls.

Jackum nodded and grinned.

“Get big lot. You come some day,” he cried.

“Some day, Jackum, if my father will fit out a vessel.”

“Iss,” said Jackum. “No Big Dan. Killa feller. Mumkull eberybody. You come sit along Jackum. Jackum show Car-ee how fro boomerang next time. Ha, ha!”

The last Carey saw of him then was the tall black figure waving his boomerang as he stood up in his canoe, before showing his teeth and then hurling the weapon, to fly far after the retreating steamer, to curve up and return—to the canoe—not quite, for it dropped into the sea some fifty feet away, to be lost somewhere in the lovely submarine gardens of the reef along by whose side the steamer glided.

A fortnight later, with the doctor steadily gaining strength, the vessel glided into Moreton Bay. Then Brisbane was soon reached; but the message had flown before on wire to the lonely watcher, waiting for the son she would not believe to be dead, month after month, till three-quarters of a year had passed.

And when the house was in sight there was a figure at an open door, and Carey dashed off, his father hanging back, while Robert Bostock, mariner, who was laden with luggage, placed it in the road, turned his back, sat upon it, and began to fill his pipe. This done, he struck a match, but somehow when he held it to the tobacco there was a sudden *ciss*, and the match went out.

“Now, how did that there ’bacco get wet like that?” he growled. “Dear! and she a-waiting all this time for the dear lad as didn’t come. Ah, it’s no use

wishin', but I do wish as my old mother was alive now to do that to me."

"Bob ahoy!" came in a cheery shout. "Come on! Never mind the things. Here's mother wants to shake your hand."

"Ahoy, sir; hand it is," shouted back the old fellow. Then in a growl, "S'pose I must go. Think on it, though; me havin' a drop o' salt water in one eye!"

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