Stables Gordon

O'er Many Lands, on Many Seas

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Содержание

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Chapter One

"And I have loved thee, Ocean! and my joy
Of youthful sports was on thy breast to be
Borne, like thy bubbles, onward; from a boy
I wantoned with thy breakers – they to me
Were a delight…
For I was, as it were, a child of thee."

Byron.

Not a breath of wind from any direction. Not a cloud in the sky, not a ripple on the ocean's blue. Only when a bird alighted on the water, quisling rings of silver formed all around it, and widened and widened, but soon were lost to view. Or when a fish leaped up, or the dorsal fin of some monster shark appeared above the surface, the sea about it trembled for a time, trembled and sparkled as if a shower of diamonds had suddenly fallen there.

And a broad low swell came rolling in from the Indian

Ocean, as if the bosom of the sea were moving in its sleep. But landwards, had you looked, you might have seen it break in a long fringe of snowy foam on a beach of yellow sand; and, had you listened, the distant hum and boom of those breakers would have fallen on your ears in a kind of drowsy long-drawn monotone.

The brave ship *Niobe* (this word is pronounced as if spelt "Ni-o-bee") slowly rose and slowly fell, and gently rocked and rolled on this heaving tide, and sometimes her great sails flapped with the vessel's motion, but, alas! not with the rising wind.

No, not with the rising wind, but whenever they moved, the officer who paced up and down the white-scoured quarter-deck, would glance above as if in hope; then he would gaze seawards, and anon shorewards, wistfully, wishfully, uneasily.

Uneasy, indeed, was the feeling on the minds of all on board.

The vessel was far too near the shore, the wind had been dead for hours, but it had died away suddenly, and the glass had gone tumbling down. That it would come on to blow again, and that before long, everyone from the captain to the dark-skinned Krooboy was well aware. But from what direction would the wind come? If from the east, strong though the *Niobe* was, close to the wind though she could sail, well-officered and manned though she was, there was more than a probability she would be dashed to pieces on that sandy beach.

And small mercy could the survivors, if any, expect from the savage Somali Indians, and the still more cruel Arabs, who dwelt in the wretched little towns and villages on the coast. For the ship

was here in the Indian Ocean for the avowed purpose of putting down slavery and piracy, and by slavery and piracy those Arabs lived.

It was in the days before steam-power was generally adopted by our navy, when sailors were sailors in reality, and not merely in name.

The crew of the *Niobe* numbered about seventy, all told fore – and – aft. She carried ten good guns, and an unlimited supply of small arms, cutlasses, and boarding pikes. The timbers of this brave craft were of the toughest teak, ay, and her men were hearts of oak. They feared nothing, they hated nothing, save uncertainty and inaction. All that they longed for was to be accomplishing the object of their cruise.

Had you been on board the *Niobe* when the wind was blowing half a gale, and the ship ripping through the waves with, maybe, green seas hitting her awful thuds at times, and the foam dashing high over the main or fore-tops, you would have found the men as merry and jolly as boys at cricket. Had you been on board when the battle raged, and the cannon roared, and balls crashed through her sides or rigging, when splinters flew and men dropped bleeding to the deck, you would have found nought save courage and daring in every eye, and calmness in every hand.

But to-day, at the time our story opens, there was neither laughing, joking, nor singing to be heard. The men clustered quietly about bows or fo'c'sle, or leaned lazily over the bulwarks watching the vessel roll – for at one moment she would heel over

till the cool clear water could be touched with the hand, and the next she would raise her head or side until a yard at least of her copper sheathing shone in the sunlight like burnished gold.

There was no sound to break the stillness save the far-off boom of the breakers; so quiet was it that the sound of even a rope's-end thrown on deck grated harshly on the ear, and a whisper could be heard from one end of the ship to the other.

"Bill," said one sailor to another, biting off the end of a chunk of nigger-head tobacco, "I don't half like this state of affairs."

"And I don't like it either, Jack," was the reply, "but I suppose we must put up with it."

"Do ye think it would be any good to whistle for the wind, Bill?"

"Whistle for your grandmother," replied Bill, derisively.

"Bill," persisted Jack, "they do tell me – older men, I mean, tell me – that whistling for the wind is sure to bring it."

"Ay, lad, if you whistle long enough. Look here, Jack, don't be a superstitious donkey. I've seen five hands at one time whistling for the wind; but, Jack, they nearly whistled the whites o' their eyes out."

"And the wind didn't come?"

"Never a breath. Never a puff."

"Hand in sail!" This was an order from the quarter-deck.

"Ay, ay, sir." This was an answer from for'ard.

"Thank goodness," cried Jack and Bill both. "Better something than nothing."

There was plenty of bustle and stir and din now, for a time at least, and bawling of orders, and shrill shriek of boatswain's pipe. But when all was done that could be done, silence once more settled down on the ship – lethargy claimed her again as its own.

"I think, sir," said the boatswain, touching his cap to the officer on watch, "I think, and I likewise hope, the wind'll come off the land when it does come, sir. Anyhow, if it doesn't commence to blow for the next ten hours we'll get away into the open sea."

"You're an old sailor, Mr Roberts, and know this coast better than I do, so I like to hear you say what you do. Well, sure enough, the sun will be down in three hours, then we may get a bit of a land breeze. But the falling glass, Mr Roberts! I don't like the falling glass!"

"No more do I, sir, and I've seen a tornado in these same waters, and the glass not much lower than it is now."

Leaving these two talking on the quarter-deck, let us take a look down below.

Within a canvas screen, that formed a kind of a square tent on the main deck, a cot was swung in which there lay, apparently asleep, the fragile form of a young woman. A woman, a mother, and still to all appearance but little more than a girl.

Presently the screen was gently lifted, and a young soldier, dressed in the scarlet jacket of a sergeant of the line, glided in, dropped the screen again, then silently seating himself on a camp stool beside the cot, he began to smooth the delicate little snow-

white hand that lay on the coverlet. Then her eyelids lifted, and a pair of orbs of sad sweet blue looked tenderly at the soldier by her side.

She smiled.

"Oh, Sandie!" she said, "I've had such a dear delightful dream. I thought that our darling had grown up into such a beautiful child, and that you, and he, and I, were back once more, wandering among the bonnie hills, and over the gowany braes of bonnie Arrandale. I thought that father had forgiven us, Sandie, and kissed and blessed our boy, and was laughing to see him stringing gowans into garlands, and hanging them around the neck of our old and faithful Collie."

"Cheer up, dear wife," said the young sergeant, kissing her pale brow. "Oh! if you only knew how much good it does my heart to see you smiling once again. Yes, dear, and I too have good hopes, brave hopes, that all will yet be well with us. I was but a poor corporal when you fell in love with me, Mary; when, despite the wishes of your father, who would have wedded you to the surly old laird of Trona, and to lifelong misery, I made you my wife. Your father knew I had come of gentle blood – that Dunryan belongs by rights to me – but he saw before him only the humble soldier of fortune; and he cursed me and spurned me.

"But see, dear, look at these stripes on my arm, behold the medal. I carry already a sergeant's sword; that sword I hope to wave and wield on many a field of battle, and with its aid alone, though friendless now, I mean to earn both fame and glory, ay,

and with it win my spurs. Then, Mary, the day will come when your father will be glad to own me as a son.

"But sleep now, dear; remember, the doctor says you are not to move. Sleep; nay, you must not even talk. See, I have brought my guitar; I will sit here and sing to you."

He touched a few chords as he spoke, then sang low, sweet, loving songs to her, and ere long she was back once more in the land of dreams.

The sun sank lower and lower in the heavens, and at last leapt like a fiery ball down behind the waves. A short, very short twilight succeeded, a twilight of tints, tints of pink, and blue, and yellow. Sky and ocean seemed to meet and kiss good-night. Then shadows fell, and the stars shone out in the eastern sky, and twinkled down from above, and finally glittered even over the distant hills of the western horizon: then it got darker and darker.

But no breeze came off the shore, and this was in itself full ominous.

The captain was now on deck with his first lieutenant.

"We cannot be very many miles," he said, "off the river."

"Yes, sir," replied the lieutenant, "I reckon I know what you are thinking about. If we cannot keep off from the shore in the event of its coming on to blow, you would try to cross the bar."

"I would," replied the captain. "It would indeed be a forlorn hope, but better that than certain destruction."

"I fear, sir, it would be but a choice of deaths."

"Better die fighting for life, though," said the captain, "than

without a struggle."

"Quite true," said the other, "and once over the bar we could get round the point and shelter would be certain. But that terrible bar, sir!"

It was far on in the middle watch ere the storm that had been brewing came on at last. It came from the east, as the captain had feared it would. Clouds had first risen up and gradually obscured the stars. Among these clouds the lightning flashed and played incessantly, but for a long time no thunder was heard. This, at last, began to mutter, then roll louder and louder, nearer and nearer, then a bank of white was seen creeping along the sea's surface towards the ship, and almost immediately after the wind was upon her, she was on her beam ends with the sea dashing through her rigging, and the storm seeming to hold her down, but gradually she righted and sprang forward like an arrow from a bow, and apparently into the very teeth of the wind.

The ship had been battened down and made ready in every way hours before the gale began, and well was it for all on board that preparations had thus been made.

She was headed as near to the wind as she would sail, but for some time it seemed impossible for her to keep off the shore. Gradually, however, the wind veered more to the south, and she made a good offing. But the storm increased rather than diminished; still the good ship struggled onwards through darkness and danger.

The royal masts had been got down early on the previous

afternoon so as to reduce top-hamper to a minimum, but the pitching and rolling were frightful, yet she made but little water.

Towards morning, however, fire and wind and waves appeared to combine together for the destruction of the ship. The gale increased suddenly to all the fury of a hurricane, the roaring of the wind drowned even the rattle of the thunder, a ball of fire quivered for a moment over the fore-top-mast, then rent it into fragments, ran along a stay and splintered the bulwarks ere it reached the water, while at the same moment the whole ship was engulphed by a solid sea that swept over her bows, and carried away almost everything it reached, bulwarks, boats, and men.

Then, as if it had done its worst, the gale moderated, the sea became less furious, the thunder ceased to roll, the lightning to play, and in half an hour more the grey light of morning spread over the ocean, and on the eastern horizon a bank of lurid red showed where the sun was trying to struggle through the clouds.

With bulwarks ripped away and boats gone, the *Niobe* looked little better than a wreck, while, sad to relate, when the roll was called five men failed to answer. Five men swept away during the darkness and tempest, five brave hearts for ever stilled, five firesides at home in merrie England made to mourn for those whom their friends would sadly miss, but never, never see again!

But see: the gale begins once more with redoubled fury, and to the horror of that unhappy ship, the wind goes round to meet the sun.

"I fear, sir," said the lieutenant to the captain, "that nothing

can now save us. We must die like men."

"That we will, I trust," replied the captain, "but we will die doing our duty to the very last. Is there any one on board who knows this coast well?"

"The boatswain, sir, Mr Roberts."

"Send for him."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Mr Roberts, what think you of the outlook?"

"A very poor one, captain. But I have been looking at the land, sir, and hazy though it is I find we are right off the bar of Lamoo."

"Why, then, we must have been driven back many many miles; we were off Brava last night."

"I reckon, sir, we made up our leeway at times like, when there was a bit of a shift of wind, and lost it again when it veered. But our only chance now is to head for that bar, sir."

"You've been over it?"

"I have, sir, many is the time; and I'll try to pilot the good *Niobe* over it now."

"Very well, Mr Roberts, you shall try; if you succeed, you are a made man, if you fail – "

"All," said the boatswain, "I knows what failure'll mean, sir."

Half an hour afterwards, stripped of nearly every inch of canvas save what sufficed to steer her, with four men at the wheel, and the sturdy pilot guiding them with hand movements alone – for his voice could not be heard amid the raging of the storm and awful roar of the breaking billows that were

everywhere around them – the brave *Niobe* was rushing stem on through the mountain seas that rolled shorewards over the most dreaded bar on all the African coast.

It is impossible to describe the turmoil and strife of the waves when the vessel was once fairly on the bar; and to add to the terror of the scene more than once she struck the sandy bottom with a force that made every timber creak and groan. Next moment she would be swallowed up apparently in boiling, breaking, swirling water, but rising again on the crest of a wave, she would shake herself free and rush headlong on once more.

But look at her now: she is on the very top of a curling avalanche, and speeding shorewards with it, her jibboom and bowsprit, and even part of her bows, hang clear over that awful precipice of water, and if the ship moves faster than the breaker beneath her then her time is come.

It is a moment of awful suspense, but it is only a moment, for in shorter time than pen takes to describe it, the billow seems to sink and melt beneath her; again she bumps on the sand, but next minute amidst a chaos of snowy foam she is hurled into the deep water beyond.

An hour afterwards the *Niobe* is lying snugly at anchor in a little wooded bay, with all her sails furled, and nothing to tell of the dangers she has just come through, save the splintered mast, the ragged rigging, and sadly-torn bulwarks.

But the wind goes moaning through the mangrove forest, where birds and beasts are crouching low for shelter among the

gnarled boughs and roots, and although the water around the *Niobe* is calm enough, the storm roars through her upper rigging, and she rocks and rolls as if out at sea.

The youthful sergeant is sitting beside the cot within the screen, but his head is bowed down with grief, and a sorrow such as men feel but once in a life-time is rending his heart. The little white hand of his wife still lies on the coverlet, but it is cold now as well as white. The heart that loved him had ceased to beat —

> "And closed for aye the sparkling glance
> That dwelt on him sae fondly."

All his bright visions of yesterday have fled away, all his hopes are crushed, his very soul seems dead within him.

At the very time the gale was raging its fiercest, and the sea threatening every minute to engulph the ship, the lady's life had passed away, and he who sits here pen in hand was left without a mother's care. Born on the stormy ocean, rocked in infancy on the cradle of the deep, no wonder he loves the sea, and can look back with pleasure even to the dangers he has encountered and gone through.

As the sea on which he was born, so stormy has been the life of him who tells this tale.

Chapter Two

"Majestic woods of every vigorous green,
Stage above stage, high waving o'er the hills;
Or to the far horizon wide diffused,
A boundless deep immensity of shade."

Thomson's "Seasons."

"Hearts of oak!" our captain cried, "when each gun
From its adamantine lips,
Spread a death-shade round the ships,
Like the hurricane eclipse of the sun."

Campbell.

There are two events in the history of a man, of which he himself in writing his autobiography can hardly be expected to give any very clear account, namely, his birth and his death. To describe the former, he would require to be born with his eyes very wide open indeed, and instead of a silver spoon in his mouth, which they tell me some children are born with, a silver pencil-case behind his ear; to describe the latter, a man would need to be a prophet in reality. How is it then, it may be asked, that I, Niobe Radnor, am able with truthfulness and accuracy to give an account of the occurrences that were taking place around me

when I first made my appearance on "the stage of life." For the ability to do so, I am indebted to the only father I ever knew, my true and trusty old friend Captain (formerly boatswain) Ben Roberts, who supplies me with the facts.

Yonder he is, sitting out on the rose lawn there, as I write, book in hand, his white beard glittering in the spring sunshine, and his jolly old round red face surmounted by an immensity of straw hat – just as if *his* complexion *could* be spoiled, just as if a complexion that has borne the brunt of a thousand storms, been scathed and scarred in battle, blistered by many a fierce and scorching summer sun, and reddened by the snows of many a hard and stormy winter, *could* be spoiled.

Ah! dear old Ben! he is getting old, wearing up towards the threescore years and ten —

> " – That form
> That short allotted span.
> That binds the few and weary years
> Of pilgrimage to man."

Yes, Ben is getting old. As oaks get old, so is my faithful friend getting old. As oaks in age are hard and tough, and defiant of the gales that rage through the forest, uprooting mighty trees, so is Ben my friend; and for all the storms he has weathered, I trust I shall have him by me yet for years and years to come. Ben is so buoyant and fresh, it always instils new blood into my veins merely to talk to him. "Ben, my boy," I often say, "you are, by

your own confession, some twenty years my senior, and yet I believe you feel as young and even younger than I do."

"Well, Nie," he replies, "I believe it's the heart that does it, you know.

> "For old as I am, and old as I seem,
> My heart is full of youth.
>
> "Eye hath not seen, tongue hath not told,
> And ear hath not heard it sung,
> How buoyant and bold, though it seem to grow old,
> Is the heart for ever young.
>
> "For ever young – though life's old age
> Hath every nerve unstrung;
> The heart, the heart, is a heritage
> That keeps the old man young."

He always calls me "Nie" for short, "because," he added once, by way of explanation, "your name is a heathenish kind of one at best, but a person is bound to make the most of it."

I cannot deny that Ben is right; my name is a heathenish one. How did I come by it? I will tell you. I was born, as you know, at sea, in the Indian Ocean, in the *Niobe*, whilst she was cruising in that region in the search of slavers – born not long before the appearance of that terrible gale of wind described in the first chapter of this story, when the tempest was at its fiercest,

and the stormy waves were doing their worst; born on board a vessel which seemed doomed to certain destruction. And it is the custom of the service to call a child by the name of the ship in which he first sees the light of day.

I never knew a father's love or a mother's tender care, for the gentle lady who gave me birth lived but a little after that event; but she bequeathed me all she had – her blessing – and died. In a glade in the gloomy depths of an African forest my mother is sleeping, in the shade of a banian tree. I stood by that lonely grave one morning not many years ago. The ground, I remember, was all chequered with sunshine and with shade from the tree above; little star-like primulas grew here and there. Among these and the fallen leaves sea-green lizards were creeping; high overhead bright-winged birds sang soft lullabies, and every time the wind moved the boughs a whole shower of sparkling drops fell down, like tears.

And my father? He never seemed to rally after my mother's death until one hour before his own, just a fortnight and a day from that on which he had followed her to her grave in the forest like one dazed. He did not appear in his mess-place after this. He took no food, he spoke to no one, he spent his time mostly within the screen by the empty cot where my mother had been – in grief.

About the tenth day he suffered my friend Roberts (the boatswain) to lead him like a child to the spare cabin where his baby boy was sleeping; and in a daze he had seen her loved

remains laid to rest beneath the tree. He bent over the grave for a moment, and then for the first time he burst into tears.

The *Niobe* remained for ten days where she had cast anchor, in order to make good repairs.

It was a very quiet spot in which she lay, a kind of bay or bight, as the sailors called it, with mangrove trees growing all around it close down to the water's edge, except at the one side where the great river stole silently away seaward, its current seeming hardly to affect in any degree the waters in the bay itself.

At last all repairs were finished, and the "clang, clang, clang" of the carpenters' hammers, that had been till now incessant all day long, and far into the night, was hushed, sails were shaken half loose, and the *Niobe* only waited for a breeze to bear her down the river and across the great and dreaded bar, where, even in the calmest weather, the breakers rolled and tumbled mountains high.

But the breeze seemed in no hurry to come. During the day those dull dreamy woods and forests lay asleep in the sunshine, and stirred not leaf or twig, and the creatures that dwelt therein were as silent as the woods around them. Had you landed on that still shore, and wandered inland through the trees, you would have seen great lizards enjoying themselves in patches of sunlight, an occasional monkey enjoying a nap at a tree foot or squatting on a bough blinking at the birds that – open-beaked as if gasping for more air – sat among the branches too languid to hop or fly. But except a startled cry at your presence emitted

by some of these, hardly any other sound would have fallen on your ears.

The only creatures that seemed to be busy were the beetles on the ground and the bees, the latter long, dark, dangerous-looking hornets that flew in clouds about the lime and orange-trees, and behaved as if all the forest belonged to them, the former of all shapes and sizes, and of colours more brilliant than the rainbow. No doubt they knew exactly what they were about and had their ideas carefully arranged, but what their business was in particular would have puzzled any human being to tell – why they dug pits and rolled little pieces of stones down them, or why they pulled pieces of sticks along bigger than themselves, dropped them, apparently without reason, and went in search of others. There was, one would have thought, no method in the madness of these strange but lovely creatures: it looked as though they were doomed to keep moving, doomed to keep on working, and doing something, no matter what.

In the great river itself sometimes small herds of hippopotami would appear, especially in parts where the water was shallow. They came but to enjoy a sunshine bath and siesta.

But at night both forest and river seemed to awaken from their slumbers.

The river cows now came on shore to feed, and their grunting and bellowing, that often ended in a kind of shriek, mingled (Two pages missing here).

"Well, my friend, how much for your bananas, and that bottle

of honey, and those eggs, and fowls? Come, I'll buy the lot," said the boatswain.

"De Arab chief come in big ship, two three week ago. De ship he hide in de bush. He come to-night when de moon am shine. He come on board you big ship, plenty knife, plenty spear, plenty gun, killee you all for true. Den he take all de money and all de chow-chow. Plenty much bobbery he makee, plenty much blood he spillee, plenty much murder. Sweeba tell you for true."

While this conversation was going on the fruit, eggs, and fowls were being handed on board and money thrown into the boat, which was quickly concealed by the natives in their cummerbunds.

They found themselves richer than they had ever been before in their lives.

"But why do you come and tell us?" then inquired Roberts. (Roberts, by the way, was the only one the native would converse with. He had eagerly requested the captain and officers to keep away, for fear of exciting the suspicion of those who he averred were lurking in the forest.)

"What for I come and tellee you?" he replied. "English have been good to me many time 'fore now. Arab chief he bad man. He come to my house, he tie me to a tree by de neck. He think I dead. Den he takee my poor wife away, and all de poor piccaninnies. My poor ole mudder she berry bad. She not fit to trabbel away to de bush, so he cut her head off, and trow her in de blaze. He burn all my hut, all my house. I not lub dat Arab

chief berry berry much."

"I shouldn't think you did," was the reply; "but now, my friend, if all goes well come back to-morrow, and we will reward you."

About eight o'clock that same night, the full moon rose slowly up over the woods, bathing the trees in a soft blue haze, but changing the river, 'twixt the ship and the distant shore, into a broad pathway of light that shimmered and shone like molten gold. There was hardly a cloud in the heaven's dark blue, and the stars shone with unusual brilliancy.

No one was visible on the *Niobe's* decks, and never a light burned aloft, but, nevertheless, sentinels were watching the water on all sides, and down below the crew, fully armed, were waiting. The guns were all ready to run out, and there was no talking save in whispers, and when any one had occasion to cross the deck he did it so lightly that you could scarcely have heard his footfall.

Except the officers of the watch, all others were in the saloon or ward-room. They too were armed, but passing the time in quietly playing draughts and other games. Instead of being in his cabin, the captain was there along with his officers.

Presently the boatswain, whose duty it was to keep one of the night-watches, came quietly in to make a report.

"There are no signs yet, sir. The forest is quiet enough, except for the birds and beasts. It is very bright now. If they do come, we will have light enough to give 'em fits."

"I hope they will, then," replied the captain; "I sincerely trust that tall native wasn't a-gammoning us."

"I feel sure enough he wasn't, sir."

"Hark!" cried the captain.

It was the sentry's hail. Next moment his rifle rang out on the night air. It seemed to be caught up by the echoes of the forest, and the sound multiplied indefinitely, but there was instant evidence that this was no echo.

A long line of fire swept across the forest shore, and bullets rattled through the rigging or on the vessel's sides.

The attack was about to commence.

Guns were speedily run out in the direction from which the volley had come, and just by way of showing the enemy that the *Niobe* was prepared, two loaded with shrapnel were fired.

The yell of rage and pain that rang through the forest, told plainly enough that some of the savages had bitten the dust. The battle had begun.

But it was not to be a fight of rifle against big guns. The Arabs, unless at close quarters, are ever at disadvantage. The chief who led this particular band bore a fierce and implacable hatred to the English race, more especially to those who wore the blue uniform of the Royal Navy. Many a time had he been thwarted in his designs by the ubiquitous British cruiser, and, sword in hand, he had sworn by Allah – sworn on his "book" – to have revenge.

His time, it almost seemed, had come to-night. Though far south when the first news of the disaster to the *Niobe* had been brought to him by a swift-footed Somali spy, Zareppa had lost no time in setting sail in his largest dhow – he was the proud owner

of many – and making his way north.

It was no trouble for this daring piratical slaver to cross the bar even on a light wind. He had stolen up the river by night unseen, and soon after planned his attack.

Now at the very moment that a whole fleet of canoes filled with armed Somalis and Arabs left the forest shore, under cover of volley after volley from the bush, Zareppa, the pirate chief, was stealing round the corner of the bay with over a hundred of his best warriors, who were lying down so that they might not be seen, to attack the *Niobe* on the other quarter.

Swiftly came they while guns thundered forestward, and all hands lay on the port side to repel boarders. It looked as though the fate of the good ship were sealed.

Till this moment the soldier sergeant – my father – had lain apparently helpless and apathetic in a screen berth on the main deck. But the sound of warfare will stir the blood of even a dying soldier, as the blast of a bugle does that of the aged and worn-out war-horse. No sooner had the firing commenced than he started from his cot and speedily dressed himself, often tottering as he did so.

Captain Roberts tells me that even then my father could hardly have known what he was about: that all he could have been certain of was that a fight was going on, and it was his duty to be in it.

Grasping sword and pistol, he rushed on deck. Still staggering, and gazing wildly around him, almost the first thing he saw was

the approach of Zareppa's boats. He was all alive now, he rushed across the deck, and more by gesture than by voice made the commander aware of the terrible danger.

None too soon. Already the heads of the foremost boarders were appearing above the bulwarks. But our men were speedily divided into two parties, and in a minute more the battle was raging fiercely on both sides of the deck.

"Deen! Deen! Deen!" was the fierce and shrill Arab war-cry.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" was the bold and answering shout of our marines and bluejackets.

The tall form of Zareppa seemed everywhere. It towered high on the bulwarks. It was seen springing down on deck, and vaulting backwards, and wherever it came death followed in its wake.

Soon no sound even of pistol was heard. It was a hand-to-hand fight *on* deck, for the *Niobe* had been boarded: hand to hand, and breast to breast; cutlass and sword 'gainst Somali dagger and Arab spear. There were the shrieks of pain, the cries of exultation, and horrible oaths as well, I blush to say, mingling with the groans of the dying in this dreadful *mêlée*.

How peacefully the moon shone – how quiet and lovely and still the forest looked all around! How great the contrast 'twixt man and nature!

But, see! the fight is finished. The enemy are borne backwards into the sea. Our fellows hack them down as they fly, for they are wild with the excitement of the strife.

But high on the poop a young soldier is engaged in a deadly strife with the Arab chief himself. All his skill would hardly save Zareppa. For several minutes the duel seemed to rage. Then with a wild rash the Arab dashed forward on the soldier, his sword passed through his body and – my father fell dead.

"English dogs!" shouted Zareppa, standing for a moment on the bulwarks with bleeding sword upheld. "Dogs of English, Zareppa's day will come! Beware!"

He would have vaulted into the sea, but up from behind the very place where he stood rose a dark naked figure. A dagger gleamed one instant in its hand, and next was plunged into the back of the chief, who gave a fearful shriek.

"Ha! ha! aha!" yelled this strange figure, "Zareppa's day *hab* come. Plenty quick. Ha!"

The Arab chief fell face forward on the deck.

It was the negro Sweeba, who had brought the news of the intended attack.

From his own side of the river he had heard the firing and the wild shouts that told of the raging combat, and had speedily launched his rude canoe, intent on revenge for the murder of his poor wife and babes.

Chapter Three

"Hope, with her prizes and victories won,
Shines in the blue of my morning sun,
Conquering hope with golden ray,
Blessing my landscape far away."

Tupper.

Not a single prisoner was taken.

Those who were not fatally wounded had sprung overboard.

The rest of the night passed in quietness, but when day broke, the sun shone on a sad and ghastly scene. There still lay about broken cutlasses, spears, torn pieces of cloth, and all the *débris* of fight, and blood, blood everywhere.

On one side of the deck, with upturned faces, lay in ghastly array the dead of the enemy, on the other our own poor fellows had been put, and carefully covered with flags.

All hands were summoned to prayers, to bury the dead and clear up decks.

When, after service, the commander and his officers – alas! among those who lay beneath the Union Jack were one or two officers – went round to view the bodies, to their astonishment, they found that Zareppa had gone.

He had only shammed death, then, in order to escape!

Incidents of the very saddest character are soon forgotten in the service. It is as well it should be so. But a battle is no sooner fought than the decks are carefully washed, the damages all made good, and even rents and holes in the ship's side, that might well redound to her honour, are not only carefully repaired but painted over. And whenever a vessel has had sails torn in a gale of wind, sailors are put to mend them on the following day.

For modesty always goes hand-in-hand with true valour.

In a fortnight after the fight in the river the brave *Niobe* was once more at sea, and looking all over as smart a craft as ever sailed.

Just as I wrote these lines my good friend, Captain Roberts, looked over my shoulder.

"Ay, lad," he said, "and she *was* a smart craft too. They don't make such ships now, and they couldn't find the men to man 'em if they did. I tell you, Nie, it was a sight that used to make Frenchmen stare to see the old *Niobe* taking down top-gallant masts."

"Well, my dear old sea-dad," I replied, "of course you are fond of the good old times. It is only natural you should be."

"But they *were* times. Why, nowadays they could no more do the things we did than they could pitch a ball o' spun yarn 'twixt here and Jericho. I'm right, lad, I tell you, and I should know."

"Oh!" I replied, "for the matter of that, I was living in those brave old days as well as yourself."

"Yes, so you were," cried the old captain, laughing. "You were

borne on the books o' the old *Niobe* as well as myself, and a queer little chap you were when first we met. Heigho! time flies: it's more'n forty years ago, Nie."

"Wait half a minute," I said, for I knew the old man was going to spin me a yarn that I was never tired of hearing – the story of my own early years. Why was it that I liked to hear him tell the tale over and over again, you may ask. For this reason – he never told it twice quite the same: always the same in the main incidents, doubtless, but with something new each time.

"Wait half a minute."

"Ay, ay, lad!"

I brought out the little table and set it down under his favourite tree on the lawn, and placed thereon his favourite pipe and his pouch.

The old sailor smiled, and drew his great straw chair up and sat down, and I threw myself on the grass and prepared to listen.

The captain had his two elbows on the table; he was teasing the tobacco, and when he began to speak he was evidently following out some train of thought, and addressing the tobacco, not me.

"As saucy a wee rascal he turned out as ever put a foot on board a ship," said Captain Roberts.

"Whom are you talking about, old friend?" I asked.

"I'm talking about baby Nie," replied the captain, still addressing the tobacco. "I wonder, now, what would have become of him, though, if it hadn't been for old Bo'swain Roberts. Why, he would have died. Died? Ay, but I wouldn't see

poor Sergeant Radnor's baby thrown to the sharks, not for all the world. Fed him first on hen's milk (the name given by sailors to egg beaten up in water). Didn't do well on that. 'Cap'n,' says I to the skipper one day, 'soon's we go to Zanzibar we must get a nanny-goat for the young papoose, else he'll lose the number of his mess, and the doctor will have to mark him D.D.' (discharged dead.) 'Very well, Roberts,' says the skipper, 'that's just as you like.'

"Now our purser was a mean old fellow. 'Nanny-goat!' he cries, when I went to ask him for the money. 'What next, I wonder? the service is going to the deuce. No, Her Majesty pays for no nanny-goats, I do assure ye.'

"I just touches my hat and marches off to our dear old doctor. I knew he had a kindly heart. 'Nanny-goat,' cries he, 'why, of course the darling baby'll have a nanny-goat. We'll keep it out of the sick-mess fund, and mark it down medical comforts.'[1] 'Excuse me, sir,' said I, catching hold of the doctor's hand – it was as rough as my own – 'but you're a brick.'

"And that, 'Nie,' is how you came for the first five years o' your life to be called nothing else but young 'medical comforts.'"

"Five years!" I said, "that is a long spell for a ship to be on one station."

"Ay, lad, you're right. But ships were ships in those days.

"Young 'medical comforts'," he continued, "as they called

[1] Medical comforts are luxuries for the sick, bought at the surgeon's discretion out of the sick-mess fund.

you, in less than four years was a deal smarter than any monkey on board. Not that he could climb quite so high, maybe, but he was more tricky, and that is saying a lot. And it was among the monkeys that 'medical comforts' would mostly be, too.

"But the monkeys all seemed to like you, Nie; they would tease each other, and fight each other, but they never touched you. There was one animal in particular, and he was your favourite, the queerest old chap you ever saw. We got him down in Madagascar, and they called him the Ay-ay. Doctor always said he was a being from another world, a kind of a spirit, and the men used to be afraid of him. He had hands like a human being, but the middle finger was much longer than the others, and not thicker than a straw. When only a baby, he used to dip this long skinny finger in milk and give you to suck, and when you went to sleep he never left your side. Sometimes he would stroke your face and say, 'Ay-ay' as tenderly as if he'd been a mother to you. But the men always declared it was 'Nie, Nie,' he'd be saying.

"But you had one pet on board that maybe you mind on – the Albatross?"

"I do," said I, "young as I must have been at the time."

"People say," the captain went on, "they've never been tamed; but there he was, sure enough, in an immense great hencoop, that the doctor had made for him, and there you'd be in front of him often enough, though he would have cut the nose of anyone but yourself; and never a flying-fish was caught you didn't get hold of, and take to him. The men got small share of these. But, bless

you, Nie, you were the ship's chief pet, and the men would have gone through fire and water for you any hour of the day or night.

"The jealousies there used to be about you, too, Nie! Why, lad, if it had been a young lady it couldn't have been worse. Jealousies, Nie, ay, and more than jealousies, for our fellows didn't need much to make them strip to the waist and fight. Fact is, when times were dull with us, I think they rather liked the excuse. I've heard a row got up for'ard just in the following fashion:

"You would be playing on Davis's knee.

"'Give us half an hour o' the wee chap,' Bill would say.

"'Go along,' Davis would reply, 'you 'ad him all day yesterday.'

"'He's smilin' to me,' Bill would say.

"'Smilin' *at* you, you mean,' Davis would answer derisively.

"'Smilin' at your ugly face. Why, that mouth o' yours couldn't be made any bigger 'athout shifting your ears back.'

"This would be enough.

"'Come below,' Bill would cry, 'and I'll see if a big ugly lubber like you is to cheek me!'

"'Go with him, Davis!' half a dozen would cry. '*I'll* hold the youngster!'

"And there would be such a scramble to get you, that I used to wonder you weren't torn to pieces. And all the while that animal with the long skinny middle finger would be jumping around like a demon and crying —

"'Ay-ay! – Ay-ay! – Ay-ay!'

"As he never cried like this without all the monkeys following

suit, and all the parrots whistling and shrieking – on occasions like these, Nie, there was five minutes of a rough ship, I can tell you."

Chapter Four

"Still onward, fair the breeze nor rough the surge,
The blue waves sport around the stern they urge;
Far on the horizon's verge appears a speck,
A spot – a mast – a sail – an armed deck."

Byron.

"Well, Ben," I said, "life must have been very pleasant to me then."

"And isn't it now, Nie? isn't it now, lad? Look at the beautiful old place that you have around you – all your own; you ought to be thankful. Listen to the birds on this delightful morning, their songs mingling with the cry o' the wind through the poplars. And, lad, you cannot draw a breath out on the lawn here, without inhaling the odour of honey, and the perfume of flowers."

"You are quite poetic, Ben Roberts," I replied.

"Quite enough to make the barnacliest old tar that ever lived feel poetic, Nie," quoth Ben.

"Well, fill your pipe again, Ben."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the old man, "fill my pipe again, eh? That means heave round with another yarn, eh?"

"Something very like it," I said.

"Well," said the captain, "an old man is to be forgiven if he

does get a little bit gossiping now and then, and wanders from his subject, and I always was fond of a bit o' pretty scenery, Nie – pretty bits like the old mill by the riverside down yonder."

"And a bit of fishing and shooting, Ben?"

"Ay, lad. But memory is at this moment taking me back to one of the loveliest bits o' woodland landscape in the world. What a poem our Robbie Burns could have written there! You were still the *Niobe's* pet, but old enough now to be left at times without your sea-dad. Away miles and miles into the wooded interior of Africa, we were a good long distance south the Line, and just sitting down, me and my mates, to a snack o' lunch on the banks of a roaring tumbling brook, where we'd been bathing. We'd had a smartish week's shooting, and were thinking of returning to the ship the very next day.

"Our guns were lying carelessly enough at some little distance, when suddenly a branch snapped, and before any of us could have stood up to defend ourselves, had it been an unfriendly Arab, or a savage Somali, a dark skin pushed the branches aside and stood before us.

"It was our faithful Sweeba, the negro who had brought us the news of Zareppa's intended attack on the night your poor father was killed, Nie.

"'Sweeba, what on earth brings you here?' says I.

"'Commander's orders,' said Sweeba, saluting.

"Now Sweeba was always dressed when on board like a British sailor, but here he was almost as naked as the stem of a palm-

tree.

"'What have you done with your clothes, Sweeba?' I asked.

"'I expect he has pawned them,' said little Brown, our purser's clerk.

"'I not can run muchee wid English clothes,' Sweeba said modestly.

"'And so you hid them in the bush, eh?'

"'Ah! Massa Roberts,' replied the negro, smiling; 'you berry much clebber.'

"'Well, and what are the commander's orders?'

"'You come back plenty much quick.'

"'Ship on fire?'

"'No, sah.'

"'Anything happened to Nie?'

"'No, sah. Nie and de monkey all right, sah.'

"'Well, explain.'

"'Only dis, sah, we goin' to fight Arab dhow.'

"We were all up quick enough at this intelligence. We didn't stop to finish our luncheon.

"'Lead the way, Sweeba,' I cried.

"And off went Sweeba through the forest, we following in Indian file. We didn't take more of the game with us than we could easily carry, so the jackals had a good feed that night.

"It was a long and a rough road to travel. You know the style of thing, Nie; the dark dismal woods, the broad swamps, the hills and the wide stony uplands, where never a thing lives or thrives,

bar the lizards and a few snakes, and then last of all the mangrove forests. Our anxiety to get back made us hurry all the more. We made forced marches, and burned but two camp fires ere we reached the coast.

"The ship we had left lying at anchor in a little wooded creek. We returned to find it gone.

"'Massa, massa; we too late,' cried Sweeba. 'Now de Arab men come quick and kill us all for true.'

"'Where is the nearest village, Sweeba?'

"'Long way, sah; long way, and no good. Dey kill Englishman. No gib mooch time to tink.'

"'Well, we're in a fix, I think,' I said.

"'Not a bit of it,' cried a cheery voice close behind us; and looking round there stood little Midshipman Leigh, of the starboard watch. The young rascal had heard us coming, and hidden his boat among the trees, making his men lie close, as he expressed it, to see how we'd look.

"Our orders were to follow the *Niobe* south, where she had gone to pitch into a whole fleet of piratical slavers, and it was currently reported that our old friend Zareppa was admiral of the pirates, and thirsting for his revenge.

"What a lovely day it was, Nie; the sea as blue and tranquil as the eye of a beautiful child."

"More poetry, old tar," I said.

"Wait a bit," said Captain Roberts. "Well, we cruised along down the coast with just enough sea-breeze to bear us onwards

and keep the oars in-board.

"We expected to find our ship at a little island called Chaksee, where she would wait us; or, if absent when we went home, as our middy called it, we could wait till she returned to this rendezvous.

"There wasn't a sail in sight when we started, nor a speck on the ocean's breast, except a jumping skip-jack now and then, or a big shark asleep on the surface, with a bird perched upon his protruding fin.

"The breeze held, and very pleasant it was, and most of us, I think, were asleep at the moment the outlook at the bows sang out —

"'Sail ho!'

"'Where away?' cried the midshipman.

"'Rounding the point yonder, sir.'

"The midshipman scrambled forward, and we were all alert enough now. She wasn't a dhow, and no one could make anything of her at first, but we soon made her out to be one of those low freeboard one-masted craft that the Portuguese had in those days as coasters, and which they often used as slavers or even pirates.

"'She seems very low in the water,' said the midshipman, 'Is she too big to fight, Mr Roberts?'

"'A deal too big,' I replied, 'We'd better let her alone, I think.'

"We got to windward of her anyhow, so we could have a peep on board. We loaded with ball cartridge, and stood by for whatever might happen.

"The strange craft stood right on her course, and never seemed

to heed us, though the lowering glance her captain gave us showed he bore us no good will. She was crowded with a rascally crew of Portuguese and negroes, and many bore ghastly wounds, that showed she had been in a recent fray; and it afterwards turned out that she had had a brush with the *Niobe*, but escaped.

"On her deck were four or five biggish guns. Discretion in this case was evidently then the better part of valour, for she could easily have blown us out of the water, but she seemed too disheartened for anything else but flight.

"I think we were pleased also to escape an encounter that would certainly have ended in disaster.

"The wind fell about sunset, then oars were got out, and, laden as we were, it was a stiffish pull. All in the dark too, until eight o'clock, when the moon rose, half hidden at first by a bank of greyish clouds, which she soon surmounted, and then shone out with a splendour that you only see in one part of the world."

"And that," said I, interrupting him, "is the Indian Ocean."

"True, Nie, true," said Roberts.

"We were among islands now, some bare and level, others wooded, a few with lofty cocoa-palms.

"We had just landed on one of the latter, because owing to the cocoa-nut trees there would be, as you know, Nie, a few natives, and we expected a bit of hot supper. We had drawn our boat well up on the sandy beach of a little cove, hidden by some scraggy bushes when —

"'Look, look!' cried our purser's clerk.

"All eyes were directed seaward.

"Two great dhows stealing out to sea! They were off in the same direction that we were going, and from the cut of their sails we could tell they were pirates, that is Arab fighting slavers.

"'I say, Mr Roberts,' said the middy, 'I wouldn't tackle those, would you?'

"'We'd never see England again if we did,' I replied.

"'Well,' said the boy, 'I'm precious hungry, aren't you, Mr Roberts?'

"'I could do with a pick,' I replied.

"Then young Leigh gave his orders like a prince.

"'Bear a hand, lads,' he cried, 'and get supper; gather sticks, light a fire, on with the pot; some of you run to the village and bring half a dozen fowls. Cut up the bacon. Did you bring the onions? Smith, if you've forgotten the onions, I'll have you flogged.'

"'Then I won't be flogged,' said Smith.

"Well, Nie, the remembrance of that stew, that cock-a-leekie soup, made gipsy-fashion in that lonely island of the ocean, makes me truly hungry to think of even now."

"Shall I get you a ham sandwich, Roberts?" I asked provokingly.

"A ham sandwich!" he cried, "What! sawdust and paint, and the memory of that stew hovering round one like the odours of Araby the Blest? Don't insult me, Nie. I tell you, boy, that a hungry man might have been content to dine off the steam.

There!

"Well, we had a good long rest after supper."

"You needed it, I should think," I said, laughing.

"None o' your sauce," said the old captain. "We rested, and smoked our pipes, and looked on the sea. Oh! to see the moonlight dancing on the rippling waves!"

"I can easily imagine it, because I've often seen the like myself," I replied.

"It was late that night when we got to Chaksee. The ship was in behind the rocks so snug that we thought at first she wasn't there.

"All on board were glad to see us, including Nie himself."

"How old would I be then, Roberts?"

"About five. The *Niobe*, it seems, was ordered down to the Cape to refit; all her crew were to return to England, but, as you know, I preferred to stop in the old ship with the new crew. I'm like the cats, I don't like to move.

"The captain and I had a long talk. He treated me just as if I'd been a commissioned officer. He told me he had found a whole nest of pirates, that he had given one fits a day or two before, and meant to pepper the others soon if he had a chance. They were over there, he said, pointing to the African coast, and he would have them.

"The commander of the *Niobe*, indeed, was in high glee. He had been ordered home, he said, but he would wait for those piratical scoundrels and old Zareppa if it were a month. Then, surely, if he destroyed him and his ships his country would, in

some way or other, requite his good services, and either promote him or give him a better command.

"We lay snug behind the rocks at Chaksee for two whole days. Our top-gallant masts were down, and no one in passing the island could have told there was a vessel there at all.

"On a hill, not far off, two men were kept always on the outlook.

"On the morning of the third day the signalmen left their posts and hurried towards the ship.

"Three large piratical dhows, carrying the blood-red flag of the Arab nation, were bearing down towards the island. They turned out to be the very same we'd seen two nights before, in company with another and much larger one.

"We determined not to frighten them off by coming out too soon. We didn't know then that these fellows rather courted fight than otherwise.

"All sails were loosened and at last we got clear, took up the boats that had been heading us, lifted sails, and stood out to meet them.

"Every man was at his post. The marines lying down on deck under arms, the bluejackets, stripped to the trousers, standing by the guns on both decks. There was a glorious breeze blowing. Oh! Nie, lad, it was just the morning for a fight. My old blood dances in my veins yet at the very thoughts of it.

"I must say that those Arabs managed their little craft beautifully. The largest one was the first to advance, and the first

to receive and return our fire. She had even the daring and pluck to fire at us."

"Did she succeed?"

"She did, alas! and she poured a broadside into us that made our upper deck like shambles. Meanwhile the other two dhows were at us, *on* us almost, for we were sometimes fighting gun to gun, and we had to fight on both sides of our vessel at once.

"The commander of the *Niobe* wanted all his wits about him, for it was a trying time.

"We had one advantage over the pirates, namely, our marines.

"The pirates had muskets, it is true, but either they were very bad ones, or they couldn't use them properly, one or the other.

"We stationed our marines in the tops and rigging, and every shot told home, every bullet got its billet.

"There were times during the fight when all the combatants seemed to pause. It was as if the ships were taking breath, but in reality we stopped to allow the smoke of battle to clear away, for our ship was surrounded, so to speak, and all our gear was hanging anyhow.

"The impetuosity of the attack of Arabs fighting at sea is very similar to the way in which they charge on *terra firma*; it is furious while it lasts.

"It lasts as long as hope promises brightly, when it goes it goes at once, and, except in the case of fanatics in a religious war, there is a wild stampede. Victory for a time hung in the balance, then it seemed to sway to the side of the enemy, because the *Niobe*

became for a time unmanageable.

"It was a trying time to the nerves of the bravest of us. There would be small mercy accorded to those among our poor fellows who happened to fall into Zareppa's bands.

"The commander held a hurried consultation with his first lieutenant, at which I was present. It was over in two minutes; in ten minutes more, during which time the battle raged with unabated fury, we had all the sails set which the few hands that could be spared were able to clap on her, and were clearing sheer away from the scene of action, steering as close to the wind as possible. And the *Niobe* could luff too, I can tell you.

"Shots tore through our rigging as we fled, or seemed to fly, and derisive jeers and cheers, worse by far than bullets, were fired after us, till we were out of earshot, out of reach. We replied not either by shot or shout. We drew the big dhow after us – and that was all we wanted – as near as she could come. We even let her gain on us, and her shots began to tell again. Then all sail was clapped on, and next —

"'Ready about,' was the cry.

"Ah! Nie, my boy, it was a beautiful sight, and a supreme moment.

"We thundered down on that devoted pirate. She never even divined our intention. We might overwhelm her perhaps, she thought. She prepared to out-manoeuvre us. Then all seemed to become confusion on board her. Mind, she was over-manned to begin with, her rigging too was badly damaged, and her decks

hampered with her dead and dying.

"In a minute more we had hurtled into her. We actually cut her in two; she sank before our eyes, almost before we could sheer off."

At this part of his yarn, poor old Captain Roberts stopped. I feel sure he was thinking of that dreadful scene; that, long ago though it was, he saw again that blood-stained ship sinking beneath the waves, with its living freight, many of them innocent slaves.

He filled his pipe before he resumed.

"Ah, well! poor misguided wretches, to do them justice they died bravely, and cheered wildly as they sank beneath the billows."

"And so," I said; "Zareppa escaped even yet."

"Yes, it was a plucky thing. He swum out from the wreck ere she sank, and one of the dhows ran up even under our guns, and picked him out of the water.

"Then both got clear away."

Chapter Five

"Like mountain cat that guards its young.
Full at Fitz-James's throat he sprung."

Scott.

"He watched me like a lion's whelp,
That gnaws and yet may break its chain."

Byron.

"Ben Roberts, dear old friend," I said, as soon as the captain had finished. "I remember that sea-fight which you have just so graphically described."

"And pray," said he, "what and how much of it could you remember, seeing you were down below, and were so well used to guns thundering over your baby head, that you often went to sleep during general quarters? Now, just you tell me."

"Well," I replied, "I suppose it must have been the collision at the conclusion, for I was knocked all of a heap off the chair, and the Ay-ay and I threw ourselves into each other's arms and wept."

"Yes, lad, and I found you, when I went down to my cabin, in each other's arms, and both fast asleep."

I myself, dear reader, must now resume the thread of my narrative, from the place where Captain Roberts gives it up.

When the crew of the *Niobe* returned to their native land from the Cape, and the new crew joined, I remained with my foster-father – my dear old sea-dad.

From the Cape we sailed straight to Bombay, it being found that the old *Niobe* would require to go into dry dock.

I remember being dazzled with all I saw in Bombay, except those terrible Towers of Silence, on which the dead bodies of the Parsees are exposed to be devoured by birds. What I think struck me most was the gorgeous dresses of the natives, and the enormous amount of gold and silver ornaments they wore about them; bangles, and bracelets, and jewelled noselets, and ear-rings as big as cymbals, or the brass plates that barbers hang out in front of their doors. If I wondered at the natives, the natives wondered at me – the piccaninny sailor-boy, as they called me – for I was now dressed out quite like a man-o'-war's man.

From Bombay we returned to our cruising ground, which was at that time called the Cape station, and stretched all along the entire east coast of Africa, from the Cape to the Red Sea, including not only Madagascar with its circlet of tiny islets, but Mozambique, the Comoro Islands, and Seychelles as well. Were I to tell you all my adventures on these shores, I should have no space to devote to sketches probably quite as interesting.

Let me come then as speedily as I may to the one great event of my life: my capture by that arch-fiend Zareppa, and my treatment while a prisoner for ten long years in the wildest part of the interior of Africa.

As soon as we reached Zanzibar, I being then of the ripe age of six years, the captain called me aft, and Roberts the boatswain came along with me.

"My man," said the captain to me, "You are six now, and it is high time you were rated."

I began to cry. A rating I thought meant a flogging, and I had seen poor fellows tied up over and over again and flogged until the blood gushed out of their backs.

"It is nothing," said the kindly captain; "I'm going to make a man of you."

"Oh!" I said, and wiped my eyes.

"But," continued the captain laughing, "We'll make a second-class boy of you first."

Roberts laughed now.

"I'll teach him sir," he said, saluting the captain, "to splice and reef and steer."

"Well, away you go," said the captain, "and see, my little man, that you do all you are told."

I touched my forelock, and went away forward with the good boatswain; so proud that I'm sure I didn't feel my feet touching the deck.

My education had begun long before; it continued now, and I hope I did my duty.

For the next four years we had plenty of chasing of ships, plenty of cruising, plenty of jollity and fun, both on shore and afloat, and now and then a pitched battle.

We had never seen Zareppa again, but we had often and often heard of him. We knew that he was in the habit of marching into the interior upon peaceful negro villages lying about the Equator, burning them, and capturing the inhabitants as slaves.

Oh! boys at home, if you but knew the horrors of the slave trade; if you could but realise even a tithe of the misery and wretchedness and fearful crimes included in that one word "slavery," as applied to Africa alone, you would not deem yourself entitled to the proud name of British boy, until you had registered a vow to do all that may ever lie in your power, be that little or be it much, by deeds or by words alone, to wipe out the curse.

Had you seen what I have seen of it, had you sojourned where I have sojourned, you would have witnessed deeds that would harrow your mind to think of even till your dying day.

My life on board the *Niobe* was altogether a very pleasant one; the best part of it was the long glorious cruises we used to have in open boats. Fancy, if you can, going away in a well-found boat, away from your ship entirely for, perhaps, a month or six weeks at a time, in the glorious summer weather, with the blue sky above, the blue sea below, and hardly ever more wind than sufficed to cool and fan you, and to raise the sea into a gentle ripple. We cruised along the coast, we cooked our food on shore – and oh! what jolly "spreads" they used to be, what soups, what stews! – we cruised along the coast, and we sailed or pulled up rivers, and into many a lovely wooded creek, going everywhere, in fact,

where there was a chance of capturing a slaver, or of making a prize. When the slave ships ran we chased them, when they fired on us we fought them, and they were always beaten. They might win a race, but never a battle. We were some fifty men strong; we never stopped, therefore, for an invitation to go on board; we went, sword or cutlass in hand, and they were bound to give way.

But to me, I think, the glad sense of being away from the ship and of leading a free and roving life, was the greatest part of the pleasure, and I used to be so sorry when we bore up at last for the rendezvous where we were to meet our ship.

That, then, was the bright side of the picture of my life in these glad old days. And I must confess that it really had not a dark one, although sadness used to steal over my heart, when letters came from what others called home – England.

Home! To me the word had no other meaning except the wide ocean, and yet when I saw others reading their letters with such joy depicted on every countenance, well – it was very foolish of me, no doubt – but I used to steal away into some quiet corner, and weep.

"Now, my lad," cried Roberts to me one day. "Get that twopenny-ha'penny cutlass of yours out, and prepare to go on shore. We're going up country to fight those rascally Arabs. We are going to storm Zareppa's own stronghold."

"Hurrah!" I shouted; "And you will really take me with you, Mr Roberts?"

"That I will, lad; and you're not your father's son unless you

know how to behave yourself in presence of a foe."

I said nothing; but at that moment I almost thought that Roberts instigated an act on my part, which followed some days after this. Had he not mentioned Zareppa and my father in two consecutive sentences – my father and my father's slayer?

"Oh!" I said inwardly, "could I but meet the man face to face!" What a childish thought, you will say, for a mere stripling, with a twopenny-ha'penny cutlass! The cutlass, by the way, was a middy's dirk, of which I felt very proud indeed.

The boats were called away. The expedition against the Arab stronghold was going to be "a big thing," as Roberts said, so every man that could be spared from the ship joined it.

Our guide was poor Sweeba. This negro had but one thought in life; namely, to avenge the murder of his family. I'm afraid that revenge is a very human though an improper feeling; and it is easy enough to understand, without attempting to justify, Sweeba's thirst for vengeance. I hope that I myself shall never forget that Bible text which says —

> "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay."

The utmost caution was necessary in passing up through the forest and jungle, for we were surrounded by enemies on all sides. However, we made forced marches in silence and all by night, and in three days' time, being favoured by fortune, we arrived in front of Zareppa's stronghold, and within two miles of the

place. We lay closely hidden till daybreak, a good two hours, sending Sweeba forward to scout. He returned shortly with the intelligence that the Arabs were in great force, and had both camels and cavalry, and that they had also thrown up a strong earthwork on the hill around their position.

Before sunrise we were ready; a mere band we were, but a brave one, about one hundred and twenty in all, bluejackets and marines. Ere the sun had mounted over the forest land we were close upon Zareppa's position, and in the darkness our fellows had even cut out a company of war and baggage camels. It was here that the fighting first began, but taken by surprise, the camel-drivers, after a faint show of resistance, fled hurriedly up towards the fort.

It was now daylight, but the beams of the sun were sadly shorn by the smoke that arose from the fort as a tremendous volley was fired to check our advance. Under cover of this volley down thundered the foe to the charge. But little more than two hundred yards intervened between the fort and our fellows. Yet many a horse lost its rider, many a brave and stately Arab bit the dust, ere the enemy reached us.

I cannot describe what followed. No one can give an account of anything save his own experience in a fight like this. The enemy fought with terrible courage. Again and again were they foiled, again and again did they return to the charge with redoubled determination. They leaped on our very bayonets, over their own wounded, and their dead and dying fell together in

heaps. But all in vain. Zareppa at last, despairing of success, withdrew his daring followers.

"Now, lads," cried our commander, "follow me into the fort. They have shown us how Arabs fight; we will now show them what true Britons can do. Hurrah!"

The wild "Deen! deen!" of the Arab is nothing in strength of volume to the stern British "Hurrah!" It is a war-cry that has struck terror into the hearts of foemen on every land on which the sun shines. It is a war-cry that means business. It meant business to-day, as our fellows dashed up that hill and entered the fort. Then the fighting commenced in deadly earnest; the Arabs had leaped from their chargers, which were held in readiness in the rear, and fought with swords only, even their spears being for a time discarded. Our fellows fought with sword, with bayonet, or with butt-end, and men fell fast on both sides.

Only once during this fight Roberts was near me, but then his good sword saved me from a fearful cut. "Back to the rear, boy," I heard him yell; "you're too young for this work."

But, look! yonder is the chief, yonder is Zareppa. Though I had never seen him before, an instinct seemed to tell me that that was the man who had slain my father. I flew at him – foolishly enough, no doubt – flew at him as if I had been a wild cat. I clutched his belt and raised my arm to strike. He bore me to the ground by a blow from his sword-hilt. He seemed to scorn to fight with such as I.

Next moment he himself was down. Sweeba had felled him,

but was, in his turn, cut down almost immediately. On the ground I grappled again with the pirate chief. It seems all like a dream now, but I have little doubt my agility saved me, and enabled me to make such good use of my dirk that Zareppa never rose again.

Years after this I knew we had gained this fight, but now, as for me, I was taken prisoner, bound hand and foot, and carried into the interior. After the death of their chief, the Arabs had fought only long enough to secure possession of the boy who had killed their leader. This done, they mounted and fled.

I was, it would seem, reserved for the torture. But the king of a warlike tribe fancied the boy for a white slave, and the cupidity of the Arabs overcame their love even for vengeance – I was sold into slavery.

Then began a long, dreary march into the interior. It is only fair to say, however, that from the commencement King Otakooma was not unkind to me. He ordered my wrists to be untied, and I was set free – such freedom as it was, for with a mob of savages around me I dared not attempt to escape. Indeed, I cared little now what became of me, and for the first few days I refused all food. Then nature asserted herself, and I ate greedily of the fruit that grew plentifully everywhere in the country through which we were passing.

I had pulled what appeared to me a most delicious-looking large berry, when suddenly I heard our chief shriek.

"*Oa eeah wa ka*!" and at the same moment the fruit was dashed from my hand ere I could convey it to my lips. I knew

from this it was poison. Then the chief called me towards him, and placed me on the grass, and put before me a plate of boiled paddy (a kind of rice) and a bright glittering dagger. I knew what he meant, and chose the paddy. Then the king laughed till his fat sides shook again. He was a sort of half-caste Arab, I suppose, and yellow, not black. Perhaps his colour made him king, for his followers were very black, tall, wiry, and savage-looking.

The king on the other hand simply looked good-humouredly idiotic, but I found out afterwards that he could be both cruel and fierce, and though not a cannibal, he was addicted to human sacrifices. Piles of skulls adorned his palace grounds. He built them up like rockeries, and flowers actually grew on them, although they had never been planted.

As soon as I had eaten the rice, he patted my cheek and asked me, through a boy interpreter, if I would have some rum. I refused; upon which a cocoa-nut half full and the dagger were again placed before me.

I drank the rum, and I learned a lesson; and whenever afterwards the king asked me to do anything that I had scruples at performing, I pretended to be exceedingly eager to do it – and thus got off.

Our adventures on our journey inland were many and varied. Under other circumstances I should have enjoyed them, but every mile west was taking me away from all I held dear in the world, so no wonder my heart sank within me and that I loathed the savages, loathed the fat old king, and even the boy interpreter,

although he was the only one with whom I could converse.

Jooma was his name, and he turned out no friend to me. He entertained me from the first with terrible stories about the cruelties of the tribe I was going amongst, tales that made me long for death and my very blood run cold.

Then I thought of the poison berry, and was strangely tempted to eat a few. Thank Heaven, I did not give way to the fearful temptation! It is an awful thing for a human soul to hurry unbidden into the presence of its Maker.

One adventure thrilled me at first with delight, afterwards with grief. We met and attacked a caravan of English travellers. I was bound to a horse and strictly guarded, at a distance from the scene of action. I do not know what occurred, but from the exultant looks of the savages on their return, and from the blood-stained booty they brought with them, I feared the worst.

Another adventure I remember was a night attack on our camp by a rhinoceros. The savages fled before the infuriated brute more speedily than they would have done before a human foe.

But my experience, gained since then, is that rhinoceroses are not as a rule dangerous animals, although a great many marvellous stories are told about them, usually travellers' tales.

Sometimes the hill and the jungle gave place to wide marsh lands, through which the cattle were driven first, the horses following, and last of all the foolish old king on his litter, with his rum bottle beside him.

Often he used to drink till he fell asleep. Sometimes he would

make me sit by him. Once he had his great hand on my shoulder, and kept feeling at my neck.

I afterwards asked Jooma what he meant.

"Nothing he mean," replied Jooma, grinning, "only feel for proper place to cut your head away. Dat nothing!"

This was pleasant.

At last we arrived in the king's country, and a small tent was assigned to me near the royal palace.

The country all round, although unfilled, was fertile and lovely in the extreme. Giant cocoa-palms waved on high, some parts of the landscape were wild orchards of the most delicious fruit, the hills were covered with purple heath, the valleys carpeted with grass and flowers of every shape and hue; while the birds that flitted among the boughs, and the monster butterflies that floated from one bright blossom to another, were lovelier than anything you could imagine in your happiest dreams.

To King Otakooma's country bands of wandering Arabs occasionally came, and visited the king in his summer tent or his winter palace – for he had both. They came to solicit his assistance in the inhuman raids they made upon surrounding tribes of less warlike negroes.

Did I hope for escape through these Arabs? As well might the linnet beg the hawk to deliver her from the talons of the owl.

Chapter Six

"Much I misdoubt this wayward boy,
Will one day work me more annoy.
I'll watch him closer than before."

Byron.

When I look back now to the first two, or even three, years that I spent in Otakooma's country, among Otakooma's savages, I wonder that I was not bereft of reason, or that, knowing escape by death to be in my power, I did not have recourse to the deadly poison berry that grew in abundance in many a thicket. Our goats ate freely of this berry, by-the-bye, but it seemed to have no other effect upon them than to make them lively.

But even at this date, strange to say, there are certain sights and sounds that never fail to recall to me not merely my life among those savages, but the very feelings I then had. For instance, in the county in England where I now reside, the cow-boys, or sheep-herds (I will not call them shepherds), have a peculiar way of calling to each other; it is a kind of prolonged shrill quavering shout, and it bears some faint resemblance to the howl of Otakooma's savages, as heard by night in the forest. Again, anyone drumming on the table with his finger-nails will sometimes bring to my mind the feelings I used to have on

hearing the beating of the horrid tom-toms. The beating of tom-toms and the howling, combined now and then with a shriek as of some poor wretch in mortal agony and dread, even when I was not present, but probably a prisoner in my hut, used to tell me as well as words could, that a human sacrifice was progressing somewhere in the vicinity of the royal palace.

The smell of weeds burning in a field only yesterday depressed me; the savages were constantly burning fires of different kinds of dried roots and weeds.

Just one more instance. I would not have a rockery in my grounds or garden; it would remind me of Otakooma's terrible piles of skulls on which weeds grew green, and flowers bloomed, and lizards – sea-green lizards with crimson marks on their shoulders, and lizards the colour of a starling's breast, that is, metallic-changing colour – used to creep.

If ever at that time I spent a happy hour it was in studying and wondering at the tricks and manners of the many strange denizens of the forest. Monkeys, mongooses, and even chameleons I managed to tame.

You see, then, I could not have been very happy. How could I? For at least two years I lived in constant dread of a violent death, and I never knew what shape it would take. I might die by the spear of some angry savage; I might be sacrificed to please some sudden fancy of the king; I might be burned at the stake or die by the torture.

My enemy – and he ought to have been my friend – was the

boy Jooma. He was jealous, no doubt, of my influence with the king. I tried my best in every way to please this lad, because he could talk English, but in vain. He belied me one day after I had been a whole year in the country, belied me to the king in my presence – he pointed his hand at me. I struck the hand.

Then, as he threatened to kill me with his knife, I squared up in good English fashion and let my enemy have one straight from the shoulder. He went down as if he had been shot.

The fat old king shouted for joy. That boy Jooma had never had a proper British bleeding nose before in his life, I expect. And he did not like it. He kept lying on the ground, because he saw me in the attitude to give him another blow. But the king made him stand up, and for fear of offending the king I had to put him down again. Then he refused to rise. The king told him that a cock and a goat and two curs were going to be carried in procession to the execution ground that afternoon, and that if he, Jooma, did not fight "the foreign boy" he should head the procession and finally lose his head. So Jooma had to fight as well as he could, and although I did not punish him willingly, he was paid out for many an ill turn that he had done me.

I was a favourite with the king for fully a month after this. He brought boy after boy for me to thrash. Indeed, three or four times a day I was fighting. I suppose every boy about the king's village had a set-to with me. I cannot say I blacked their eyes because they were already black, but they must have felt my knocks, and I know they did not love me any the better for it.

I did not know how all this would end, but my heart leaped to my mouth when one day the king himself, valiant through the rum he had drunk, stood up and announced his intention of trying conclusions with me himself.

What could I do?

What would you have done, gentle reader?

I knew I could have thrashed him, for though not old I was very hardy and wonderfully strong for my years, but I did not want to figure in a procession. So I submitted to be knocked down. Then I had to get up and be knocked down again and again. It didn't hurt very much, but there was indignity attached to it.

The king had found a new pleasure, and every afternoon or evening I was summoned to the palace yard or grounds, and first I had to fight the king, then a boy of my own standing. Well, I am afraid that if I suffered in body and mind from my encounter with the king, I took it out of the smaller savage to follow. There was some satisfaction in that.

But one day, to show his own wonderful powers of fisticuff, the king summoned a crowd of his warriors to his palace, and made them form a great ring. Then I was ordered in and pitted against an Indian boy bigger than myself. I never cared how big they were, they held their arms wide and hit downwards as if thumping a piano.

After one or two boys had been disposed of, to the wild delight of the warriors, the king took a drink of rum and handed the leather bottle to his chief executioner; then he took off his extra

garments – his one boot and his crown, an old tin kettle without a bottom to it – and stood up in front of me. I went down several times according to my own programme, and the savages shook their spears and rattled them against their shields of buffalo hide, and shouted and shrieked to their hearts' content.

Then the king hit me rather hard, and I suppose my English pride was touched, for the next thing I remember is – horror of horrors! – the sacred person of his Majesty King Otakooma sprawling on the dusty ground and his nose bleeding.

A silence deep as death fell on all the crowd.

Then there was a rush for me. Spears were at my breast and I expected only instant death, when the king sprang to my rescue and all fell back.

If I had knelt to him and begged his pardon, even then I might have been forgiven.

But an English youth to sue on his knees for mercy from a savage! Nay, it was not to be thought of.

The king sat down.

The king was silent for a space of time. The king took more rum.

Then he ordered ropes of skin to be brought, and I was bound hand and foot and taken away to a loathsome dungeon.

I knew I was to die next day, and I longed for sunrise to have it past, for I suffered excruciating agony from the tightness of the cords that bound me.

The time came. I was to form part in a procession, and did; I

was carried shoulder-high, lying on my back on a kind of bark tray, amid tom-tom beating, howling, shrieking, and a deal of capering and dancing that at any other time I should have laughed most heartily at.

At the execution ground goats and cocks were killed, then it came to my turn.

The king came to have a last look at me. The cords were undone, and I stood up staggering because my feet were swollen. The king looked at my hands: they were swollen double the size.

The king rubbed his nose.

The king was thinking.

"Now," he must have thought, "here is a hand (meaning my swollen fist) that couldn't hurt anybody. What a chance to redeem my lost honour!"

The king took more rum.

Then he started from his throne and shouted. What he said matters little. At the conclusion of his speech I was again dragged up to fight the king. If I could have hit him then I would have done so. But with such hands, how could I? So it ended in my being fearfully punished.

Then there was such shouting and yelling as I had never before heard in my life. But I was free.

The king took more rum.

For a whole year after this I was kept under almost constant surveillance, but there was no more fighting.

Sometimes the king and his savages went away on the war-

path, for many weeks together. When they did so, I was confined in a dungeon, and had no other companions except frogs, lizards, and centipedes. All the food they gave me was a piece of dried cassava root (the root from which arrowroot is made), daily, and I had very little water.

But in spite of my hardships, I grew strong and robust. Probably, if I had not been a friendless orphan, if I had had a mother for instance, or a father, or sisters, or brothers, in a far-off home to think about, my misery would have been greater; as it was I had no one, for I believed that Roberts and all the people of the *Niobe* had been slain in that terrible fight at Zareppa's fort.

Amelioration of my sufferings came at last, and in a strange way.

The king fell ill.

The king took more rum.

The king grew worse, and all the sorcery of his medicine men could not cure him, so I was sent for.

I had seen Jooma putting poison into the rum, and I told the king he had been poisoned. Who had done so? he asked: the culprit should die. No human being, I was determined, should die on account of anything I said. I told him, however, that next day I should fetch the evil creature who had destroyed the health of the king. Meanwhile the rum was poured on the ground, and I made him a pill of the poison berry, and a little scraped cassava root. He saw me mix it. His medicine men assured him it would be death to take it; I took a pill myself, and when he saw I did not

die, he followed my example, and took two or three. For I had found out that in small doses this poison berry was medicinal. The king slept, and awoke refreshed.

Then he called for the culprit who had dared to poison his rum.

I went and found Jooma. I told him that his guilt was discovered, and that his life was in my hands; that a word from me would march him to the execution ground. He knelt and prayed for mercy. I told him he needn't trouble, that Englishmen were far too honourable to harbour revenge. Then I made him bring a very old and savage billy-goat, and together we brought it to the king.

The king was greatly pleased. He said he never had liked the looks of the billy-goat, and he had no doubt that it had worked some deadly spell upon his rum. So the billy-goat – poor beast – was slain, and after a few more pills the king got better, and I was chief favourite among all the tribe.

Chapter Seven

"But what avails this wondrous waste of wealth,
This gay profusion of luxurious bliss?
Ill-fated race! the softening arts of peace,
Kind equal rule, the government of laws,
These are not theirs."

Thomson.

I became the king's head-counsellor, his prime-minister, so to speak, his chief medicine man. There was not much honour in this, certainly, but nevertheless it procured me some amelioration of my sufferings. There was less of the dungeon after this, and fewer threats of decapitation.

I think the king still hankered after rum, and it was an anxious day for me when some Arab chiefs appeared in camp. Otakooma assembled not only, all his forces but most of his people. Something was going to happen, I knew, but till now I had had no idea of the utter depravity of this wretch.

He was positively going to barter his people for rum. The Arabs would buy them as slaves.

It was terrible to see these same Arabs walking round among the sable mob, as calmly as a farmer does among a herd of cattle, and picking one out here and there. But, oh! the grief, and

the agony, and the anxiety displayed in voice and in action by these poor doomed creatures – the scene defies description. Here was the child torn shrieking from its mother's side, there a wife separated from her husband, or a husband from a weeping wife.

Some indulged their grief quietly, others gave vent to loud howls and lamentations; while others lay moaning and groaning on the ground, ever and anon taking up great handfuls of dust, and throwing it up over their poor heads!

I could not help turning away and shedding tears. But had they been tears of blood they could not have saved these people. They were relentlessly marched away, and I was really glad when night fell, and sleep sealed the eyes of even those who mourned.

It was bright clear moonlight. I rose from my couch, and stole out into the open air. I wanted to think. The close warm atmosphere of the tent seemed to stifle me, and I could not sleep.

I passed slowly up the beaten footpath towards the king's tent. There was not a single soul astir, it had been a busy exciting day with everyone, and the king had been liberal enough in his offers of rum to his chief favourites; and although some of them ought to have been doing duty as sentinels near to his sacred person, they had preferred retirement and slumber.

I stole away from the camp, and ascended an eminence some distance from it, and sat me down on a rock. It was cool and pleasant here, away from that blood-stained camp. The moonlight flooded all the beautiful country, bathing plain and rock and tree in its mellow rays. The only sounds that broke

the stillness were the yapping howl of the cowardly jackal, and farther off in the woods the mournful roar of lions.

It was a lovely scene, but terrible in its loveliness. I buried my face in my hands. I was boldly struggling against my sorrow. How long, I thought, would this life last? Should I live and die among these terrible savages? Escape there seemed none. To attempt it, I knew, would end in failure, and probably in death by torture. I was many hundreds of miles from the sea. I did not even know in what direction Zanzibar lay. No, I must wait for a time, at all events. What mattered a year or two more to one so young as I!

I suppose this last reflection had some kind of a drowsy influence on me, for I lay down with my head on a piece of rock, and with face upturned to the sky, fell fast asleep.

How long I had slept I know not. I awoke with a start: something cold had touched my face, and I had heard a creature breathing close at – almost into – my ear. I started, as well I might. The thing that had waked me was a jackal; but there, not thirty yards away, standing boldly out against the moonlit sky, was a gigantic lioness!

There was astonishment depicted in every line of her great face. Strange to say, at that moment I could not help thinking that she looked far from cruel, and I could not help admiring the splendid animal. I never moved, but gazed as if spell-bound. Probably it was my fixity of look that saved me, for after staring steadily, but wonderingly, at me for fully a minute, she turned round and stalked solemnly off, giving many a look behind, as if

expecting I should follow her.

I waited till she was well away. I felt very happy at that moment, and very bold. I went straight back to camp, and approached the tent of the king, and softly entered. He was fast asleep and snoring. In the matter of rum he had been even more liberal to himself than to his followers. There lay the skins of spirits in a corner, not far from the couch of the drunken king. I hesitated not a moment, but seizing the king's own dagger, I stabbed – not the king, but the skins of rum.

Then I hastened away with my heart in my mouth. Remember, I was very young.

There were terrible doings next day in camp, and, I'm sorry to say, more than one human sacrifice. I, as medicine man and chief sorcerer, went through a great many mummeries, which I managed to make last all the forenoon. I was endeavouring to find out the wretch who had dared to spill the great king's rum; that is, I was pretending to. There was more than one chief on whose shoulders I permitted my magician's wand to rest for a while, just by way of a mild revenge, but the lot finally fell once again on an aged billy-goat. I had saved the king, and saved many of his subjects, for when the king was intoxicated, human sacrifices were of everyday occurrence. At ordinary times they were no more numerous than Bank Holidays in our own country.

When it was all over I stole away to the shady banks of a stream to bathe, and lie and watch the kingfishers. It was a favourite resort of mine, whenever I dared be alone.

The warriors of this tribe spent most of their time either on the hunting grounds – forest and plain – or in making raids on their neighbours. I was allowed to join the hunting expeditions, but not the forays. I became an expert horseman. I could ride bare-backed as well as any circus-man I have ever seen since. The king was too fat to ride much, but he used to follow to the chase of the koodoo.

This is a kind of beautiful antelope, and excellent eating, its principal recommendation in the eyes of Otakooma. We often caught the young, and they became as tame as our goats.

Now once having taken it into my head that escape from this country of savages was impossible, strange to say I began to settle down, in everything else except human bloodthirstiness, and soon became a very expert savage, taking a wild kind of pride in my exploits.

Mine was now a life of peril and hardship; adventures to me were of everyday occurrence; I carried my life in my hand; I grew as wily as a jackal, and I hope as bold as a lion. I take no credit to myself for being bold; I had to be so.

The king and I continued friends. At the end of the sixth year of my captivity, Jooma died. He died from wounds received at the horns of a wild buffalo in the forest.

This buffalo-hunting had for me a very great charm, and it certainly was not unattended with danger, for there were times when, headed by an old bull or two, a whole herd of these animals would charge down upon us. This was nothing to me. I could

climb trees as well as most monkeys, so I got out of harm's way, but it was hard upon the savages, who were not always so nimble.

Jooma was terribly tossed and wounded by a bull, and he died at the tree foot. He called me to him before his eyes were for ever closed, and asked me to forgive him for all the ill he had done me, and tried to do me.

"I have been to you one ver bad fellow," said poor Jooma; "I have want to kill you plenty time. Now I die. You forgive Jooma?"

"I do, Jooma," I said, and pressed his cold hard hand.

"Ver well," said the lad, faintly and slowly. "Now I die. Now, I go home – go home – home."

We buried him just where he lay, between the gnarled roots of a great forest tree, and piled wood over the grave to keep the sneaking jackals at bay.

One morning about two years after this, I was awakened early – indeed it was hardly dawn – by hearing a tremendous uproar and commotion in the camp, with much warlike shouting and beating of those everlasting tom-toms[2].

The king was running about wildly – too wildly, indeed, for his weight – and was summoning his warriors to arms.

White men were coming to attack the camp!

This was glorious news for me.

But who, or what could they be, or what could they want?

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[2] A tom-tom is a kind of kettle-drum. It is simply a log of wood hollowed out at one end, and a dried skin stretched over it.

All that day, from far and near, the warriors of Otakooma came trooping into camp. To do them justice they were fond of fighting, and eager for the fray; they loved fighting for its own sake, but a battle with white men was a thing that did not happen every day.

The old men, the women and children, and the cattle were separated from the main or soldier portion of the tribe, and taken westwards towards the distant hills. So it was evident that Otakooma and his people meant business.

What part should I take in the coming fray? I might have fled, and remained away until the victory was secured by the white men, but this would have been both unkind and cowardly. On the other hand, I would not lift a spear or poise a lance against my own people.

That same evening, after all was hushed in the camp, I sought out the king. He looked at me very suspiciously before I spoke.

I sat quietly in front of him on the ground, and explained to him my situation.

He was wise enough to see exactly how I stood, but he told me there was an easy way out of the difficulty. Early in the morning he would chop off my head. He bore me no grudge, he explained, *it was a mere matter of policy*.

"Quite right," I replied, "and, if he chose, he might take my head off then and there. I didn't at all mind; and would just as soon be without a head as with one."

The king smiled, and seemed pleased.

"But," I continued, "you may look at the possession of a head in a different light, so far as your own particular head is concerned. If your people are beaten, you will assuredly lose that head, unless a white man is near to take your part. I will be your friend," I said, "in this matter, and during the battle I will stand by your person and never leave you."

Otakooma was delighted at the proposal, and so we arranged matters to our mutual satisfaction, and I felt glad I had come; I had certainly lost nothing by my candour. No one ever does.

Firing began early in the morning. The battle raged till nearly noon, with dreadful slaughter on the side of the savages, who were finally borne backwards a disorganised mob.

I stuck by the king. He did not fly. He felt safe and said so, but he wept to see his children, as he called them, slain before his very eyes.

Oh! the glad sight it was to me, after all these years, to behold the bold bluejackets, and brave marines, dashing after the foe, gun and bayonet in hand!

But a more joyful surprise awaited me when the battle was over; for the very first man to rush up to me and shake me by the two hands was my dear friend Ben Roberts.

"Nie, old boy!" he cried, "I wouldn't have known you. You've grown a man, and what a savage you do look! And do you know, Nie, what all this fighting has been about?"

"No," I said innocently.

"Why, about *you*!" He almost shouted the last word, and I

could see in his honest eyes the tears which he could hardly keep from failing.

Chapter Eight

"The sea! the sea! the open sea!
The blue, the fresh, the ever free!"

Proctor.

"England, thy beauties are tame and domestic,
To one who has roamed o'er the mountains afar."

Byron.

Yes, all the fighting had been about me.

Our fellows had not lost the battle that day at Zareppa's fort; on the contrary, they had given the Arabs a grievous defeat. I had at first been reported killed, but as I was not found among the dead and wounded, search was made for me more inland, and it was soon elicited that I had been carried away prisoner, and no doubts were left in the minds of my shipmates, that I had died by the torture, in order to avenge the death of the pirate chief.

The old *Niobe* had been wrecked since my incarceration in the land of the savages. Roberts had been made lieutenant, and it was not until he returned to the shores of Africa, several years after, that he heard from friendly Arabs that there was an English prisoner in the hands of a warlike tribe of savages, who lived almost in the centre of the dark continent. After this my dear

friend never rested in his hammock, as he himself expressed it, until he had organised the expedition that came to my relief.

What a delightful sensation it was to me to feel myself once more at sea!

> "The glorious mirror, where the Almighty's form
> Glasses itself in tempest."

We were homeward bound. I was a passenger, and we had splendid weather, so everything seemed to combine to make me feel joyful and happy. Joyful, did I say? why, there were times when I wanted to run about and shout for joy like a schoolboy, or like the savage that I fear I had almost become.

But I could not run about and shout on board a trim and well-disciplined man-o'-war. The very appearance of the forbade, so at such moments I used to long to be away in the woods again, in order to give proper vent to my exultation.

> "White and glassy deck, without a stain
> Where, on the watch, the staid lieutenant walked,"

Besides, I had good cause to be staid and sedate. Roberts had heard news that changed the whole course of my life. I was no longer a friendless sailor-boy. My grandfather was dead, and I was the heir to his estate. It was not a very large patrimony, I admit. It was simply a competence, but to me, when I heard it described, it appeared a princely fortune. There would be no

longer any need for me to sail the seas. I could settle down in life, or I could choose some honourable career on shore, and, if I was good for anything at all, distinguish myself therein.

Or, stay, I thought, should I become a soldier? "No, no, no," was the answer of my soul. The war was past and gone; even the terrible Indian Mutiny had been quelled at last. To be a soldier in the field was a career worthy of a king's son. To be a soldier, and have nothing to do but loll about in some wretched garrison town, play billiards or cricket, have a day's shooting, English fashion, now and then, be admired by school-misses and probably snubbed by men with more money than brains; no, such a life would not suit me.

I should much prefer, I thought, to stay at home and till my garden. With my jacket off, my shirt-sleeves rolled up, and an axe or spade in hand, I should feel far more free than playing with a useless sword.

Lieutenant Roberts was about to retire from active service in the Royal Navy, and he had already been promised the command of a ship in the Merchant Service. But before he left England he would, he said, see me, his foster-son, well settled down.

The ship was homeward bound. There was nothing but laughing and talking and singing all day long, for many of the poor fellows on board had not placed foot on their native shores for five long years and more. What a glorious place England must be, I mused, to make these men so happy at the prospect of returning to it. How brightly the sun must shine there! How blue

and beautiful must be the seas that lave her coasts!

So we presently crossed the Line and sailed north, and north, and north. Past Madeira – and then the brightness began to leave the sky. The wind to me grew chilly, biting, and cruel. The sea became a darker blue, and finally, as we entered the Bay of Biscay, a leaden grey. My hopes of happiness fell, and fell, and fell. Roberts tried all he could to cheer me up, told me of the monster cities I should see, of the ballrooms, of the concert-rooms, and of a multitude of wonderful things, not forgetting cricket and football.

We sailed past the Isle of Wight with a grey chopping sea all around us, grey clouds above us, a bitter cold wind blowing, and a drizzling rain borne along on its wings.

Then we entered Portsmouth harbour, and cast anchor among the wooden walls of England. Finally I landed. Landed, much to my disgust, upon stones instead of soft sand. Landed, still more to my disgust, among crowds of people who stared at me as if I had a plurality of heads, or only one eye right in the middle of my brow. I glanced around me with all the proud dignity of a savage prince. The crowd laughed, and Roberts hurried me on.

I daresay a visit to a fashionable tailor and its subsequent results made me a little more presentable, but I disliked this town of Portsmouth with a healthy dislike, and was glad when my friend took me away.

I had to go to London. The railway amused me, and made me wonder, but used as I was to the quiet of the desert and forest, it

deafened me, and the shaking tired me beyond conception.

My solicitor, a prim white-haired man, said he was *so* glad to see me, though I do believe he was a little afraid of me. Probably not without cause, for at the very moment he was entering into business as he called it, and arranging preliminaries, I was thinking how quickly Otakooma's savages would rub all the starch out of this respectable citizen. *They* would not take long to arrange preliminaries with the little man, and as to entering into business, they would do so in a way that would considerably astonish his nerves.

"Bother business!" I exclaimed at last, in a voice that made the prim solicitor almost spring off his chair.

"Oh! my dear sir," he pleaded, mildly. "We *must* go into these little matters."

He ventured to give me two fingers to shake as I left the office with Roberts. I feel sure he was afraid to entrust me with all his hand.

"And as soon as you get home you will telegraph to me; won't you, Mr Radnor?"

"Telegraph!" I said in astonishment. "Telegraph! and you tell me it is five hundred miles from here to Dunryan. Do you think you can see a fire at that distance? It must be a precious big one I'll have to light, and the mountains around Dunryan must be amazingly high."

Both Roberts and the solicitor laughed; they could see that the only idea I had of telegraphing was the building of fires on hill-

tops.

I arrived at Dunryan at last – my small patrimony. If I was pleased with it at all, it was simply because it was my own; but everything was so new and so strange and so tame, that as soon as my friend saw me what he called "settled," and went away to sea and left me, I began, in the most methodical manner possible, to dislike everything round me.

People called on me, but I'm sure they were merely curious to hear my history from my own lips, and partly afraid of me at the same time. They invited me out to tea! Ha! ha! ha! I really cannot help laughing about it now as I write; but fancy a savage sitting down to tea, of all treats in the world, with a company of gossiping ladies of both sexes.

Now my neighbours made me out to be a bigger savage than I really was, because, to do myself justice, I did know a little of the courtesies of civilised life. There was one lady who expressed a wish to have the "dreadful creature" to tea with her. I found out before I went that she had styled me so, though her note of invitation was most politely worded.

The "dreadful creature" did go to tea, intent on a kind of quiet revenge. They could not get a word out of me – neither my hostess nor the three old ladies she had asked to meet me by way of protection. I did nothing but drink cup after cup of tea, handing in my cup to be replenished, and drinking it at once. The bread and butter disappeared in a way that seemed to them little short of miraculous. I saw that they were getting frightened, so I

thought I would make them a little soothing speech.

"Ahem!" I began, standing up. I never got any further.

One old lady fainted; another "missed stays," as a sailor would say, when making for the doorway, and tumbled on the floor; a third fell over the piano-stool. All screamed – all thought I was about to do something very dreadful.

All I did do was to step gingerly out into the hall, pick up my hat, and go off.

I lived in Dunryan for a year. The scenery all around was charming in the extreme. The very name will tell you that Dunryan is in Scotland; the very word Scotland conjures up before the eye visions both of beauty and romance.

But one year even of Scotland, the "land of green heath and shaggy wood," was enough for me then.

There was no sport, no wild adventure; all was tame, tame, tame, compared to what I had been used to.

But if following game in Scotland seemed tame to me, what could I say of sport in English fashion? I tried both; grew sick of both. Hunting the wild gorilla in the jungles of Africa was more in my line.

One night, soon after the first snow had fallen, a carriage drove up to my door. It was to bear me away to the distant railway-station. The moon was shining brightly down upon our little village as we drove through; here and there in the windows shone a yellow light; but all was silent, and neither the horses' hoofs nor the carriage wheels could be heard on the snow-muffled street.

It was a peaceful scene, and I heaved one sigh – well, it might have been of regret. For many and many a long year to come I never saw Dunryan again.

Chapter Nine

"The dismal wreck to view
Struck horror to the crew."

Old Song.

The earlier history of a human being's life is engraved upon his mind as with a pen of steel. After one comes to what are termed years of discretion, the soul is not so impressionable, and events must be of more than usual interest to be very long remembered. The story, then, of a chequered life cannot be told with even a hopeful attempt at minuteness, unless a log has been kept day after day and year after year; and my opinion is, that although diaries are often most religiously commenced, especially about New Year's time, they are seldom if ever kept up very long.

My own adventures, and the scenes I passed through in the first stages of my existence, were not, as the reader already knows, of a kind to be very easily forgotten, even had my mind never been very impressionable. It was easy enough, therefore, to record them in some kind of chronological form.

The few adventures I and my friend Ben Roberts tell in the pages that follow, and our sketches of life, are given as they occur to our memory; often brought back to our minds by the incidents of our present everyday life.

But I do not think that even if Ben and I live as long as Old Parr, we shall either tire of spinning our yarns, or fall short of subject matter.

Let me say a word or two about the place I live in now, and where Ben so often pays me a visit.

We call it Rowan Tree Villa.

It stands mid-way up a well-wooded hill, about two and a half miles from a dreamy, drowsy old village, in one of the dreamiest, drowsiest nooks of bonnie, tree-clad Berkshire.

The top of the hill is covered by tall-stemmed pine trees, and from this eminence you can see, stretching far away below, all the undulating country, the fertile valley of the Thames, and the river itself winding for many and many a mile through it – a silver thread amidst the green.

From the top of this hill, too, if you take the trouble to climb it, you can have a bird's-eye view of Rowan Tree Villa.

There it is, a pretty, many-gabled cottage, with a comfortable-looking kitchen garden and orchard behind it, and a long, wide lawn in front. Now this lawn has one peculiarity. From the gate on each side up to the terrace in front of the house sweeps a broad carriage drive, bounded on both its sides, first by a belt of green grass, carefully trimmed and dotted here and there with patches of flowers, and secondly by two rows of rowan trees (the mountain ash), trained on wires, and forming the prettiest bit of hedge-work you could easily imagine.

If you were Scotch, and looked at that hedge even for a

moment, the words, and maybe the air as well, of the Baroness Nairne's beautiful song would rise in your mind —

"Thy leaves were aye the first in spring,
  Thy flowers the summer's pride;
There was nae sic a bonnie tree
  In a' the country side.
And fair wert thou in summer time,
  Wi' a' thy clusters white,
And rich and gay thy autumn dress
  Of berries red and bright.
    Oh, rowan tree!"

Well, it is June to-day – an afternoon in June; a day to make one feel life in every limb – a day when but to exist is a luxury. The roses are bending their heads in the sweet sunshine, for there is not a cloud in Heaven's blue. The butterflies are chasing each other among the flowers on the lawn, where we recline among the daisies, and the big velvety bees go droning and humming from clover blossom to clover blossom.

"Strange, is it not, my dear Ben," I said, "that on such a day as this, and in the midst of sunshine, I should bethink me of some night-scenes at sea and on land?

"I remember well my first experience of a storm by night in the Northern Ocean. We were going to the Arctic regions, cruising in a sturdy and, on the whole, not badly fitted, nor badly found ship.

"The anchor was weighed, the sails were set, and spread their

wings to the breeze; the crew had given their farewell cheer, and the rough old pilot, having seen us safely out of Brassy Sound, had shaken the captain roughly by the hand, and wishing us 'God-speed and safely home,' had disappeared in his boat round a point.

"We were once more on the deep and dark blue ocean. Then the night began to fall, and soon the only sound heard was the tramp, tramp on deck, or the steady wash of the water, as our vessel ever and anon dipped her bows or waist in the waves.

"The captain had given his last orders on deck, and came below to our little saloon, the only occupants of which were myself and the ship's cat.

"Poor Pussy was endeavouring, rather ineffectually, to steady herself on the sofa, and looked very much from home, while I myself was trebly engaged: namely, in placing such articles as were constantly tumbling down into a safer and steadier position, in keeping the fire brightly burning, and in reading a nautical book.

"There was a shade of uneasiness on the captain's face as he looked at the barometer; and when he entered his state-room, and presently after emerged dressed in oilskins and a sou'-wester hat, I felt as sure we were going to have a dirty night as though he had rigged himself out in sackcloth and ashes.

"He sat down, and, calling for some coffee, invited me to join in a social cup.

"'Is there plenty of sea-room?' I inquired.

"'Very little sea-room,' he replied; 'but she must take her chance.'

"Then we relapsed into silence.

"About an hour or two after this it became a difficult matter to sit on a chair at all, so much did the vessel pitch and roll.

"The captain had gone on deck, and as I had neither the need nor the desire to follow him, I threw myself on the sofa, at the risk even of offending my good friend and companion, Pussy.

"The storm was now raging with terrible fury.

"Two watches were called to shorten sail, and the din and noise of voices could be distinctly heard rising high over the dashing of the waves, and the whistling of the wind among the rigging and shrouds. Every timber was stretched, every plank seemed to creak and wail in agony; yet the good ship bore it well.

"Tired of the sofa I turned into bed, hoping to have a few hours of sleep; but was very soon obliged to turn out again, having been awakened from a pleasant dream of green fields, pine-clad hills, and a broad, quiet river, where ferns and water-lilies grew, by the crashing of crockery in the steward's pantry. It sounded as if bottles, dishes, plates, and cups were all in a heap in the middle of the floor breaking each other to infinitesimal pieces. And that is precisely what they were doing.

"Things in the saloon were fast verging into a state of chaos, and appeared to be making very merry in my absence. The fender and fire-irons presided over the musical department.

"The captain's big chair was dancing very emphatically, but

rather clumsily, with the coal-scuttle as a partner; the table was bowing to the sofa, but the sofa begged to be excused from getting up. The only reasonable-looking article of furniture in the room was a chair, which was merely staggering around with my coat on, while the cat had gone to sleep in my sou'-wester; and while endeavouring to restore quiet and order, I was thrown below the table like a pair of old boots, where, for the want of ability to do anything better, I was fain to remain.

"'Clear away the wreck!' I could now hear the captain's voice bawling, for our fore-mast had gone by the board.

"*His* voice was not the only one I heard. On passing the man at the wheel, I heard the captain ask, 'What! are you getting afraid, man?' And the brave British voice that so firmly replied 'Not at all, sir!' explained better than printed volumes could have done the secret of all our naval greatness; for to hearts like his, and hands like his, in many a dark and stormy night, Britannia entrusts her honour, and bravely is it kept and guarded.

"Musing on this fact, I fell soundly to sleep beneath the table, and when I awoke the storm had ceased.

"There are few situations in which a healthy man can be placed that are more full of discomfort than that of being at sea in a small ship during a storm. I do not refer to a mere 'capful of wind;' I mean a great-gun gale. There is, literally speaking, no rest for the sole of the foot. Tossed about in all directions, in vain do you seek to exchange your chair for the sofa. Probably you are sent rolling off on to the deck, and thankful you ought to

be if the cushions are the only things that follow you. Flesh-sore and weary, perhaps you seek for solace in a cup of tea: thankful you may be again if the steward succeeds in pouring it into your cup, instead of spilling it down your neck. Then, if you so far forget the rules of the sea as to place it for a moment on the table without a hand to guard it, you are instantly treated to a gratuitous shower-bath.

"Still the ocean has its pleasures and its charms as well as the land. My mind, even now, carries me back and away to a scene very different from that which I have just been describing.

"I am sitting in my little cabin. It is a summer's evening, and all is peace within and around my barque. Yonder is my bed, and the little port close by my snow-white pillow is open, and through it steals the soft, cool breeze of evening, and wantonly lifts and flutters the little blue silken hangers. Not far off I can catch glimpses of the wooded hills and flowery valleys of a sunny land. And night after night the light wind that blows from it is laden with the sweet breath of its flowers; and between there lies the ocean, asleep and quiet and still, and beautiful with the tints of reflected clouds.

"Often in the cool night that succeeds a day of heat have I lain awake for hours, fanned by the breath of the sea, gazing on the watery world beneath and beyond me, and the silvery moon and tiny stars, that make one think of home, till sleep stole gently down on a moonbeam, and wafted me off to dreamland.

"But in witnessing even the war of the elements at sea, a

sailor often finds a strange, wild pleasure. Enveloped in the thundercloud you mount with every wave to meet the lightning's flash, or descend, like an arrow, into the gulf below – down, down, down, till the sun, lurid and red, is hidden at last from view by the wall of black waters around you.

"Or fancy the picture, which no artist could depict, of a ship far away in ocean's midst by night in a thunderstorm. Dimly through the murky night behold that tumbling sea, lighted only by its own foam and the occasional flash from the storm-cloud. See that dark spot on the sea; it is a ship, and living souls are there – human beings, each with his own world of cares and loves and thoughts that are even now far away, all in that little spot. Whish! now by the pale lightning's flash you can see it all. The black ship, with her bare poles, her slippery, shining deck and wet cordage, hanging by the bows to the crest of that great inky wave. What a little thing she looks, and what a mighty ocean all around her; and see how pale appear the faces of the crew that 'cling to slippery shrouds,' lest the next wave bear them into eternity.

"Whoever has been to prayers at sea during a storm has had a solemn experience he will never forget."

"Perhaps there is no more impressive ocean-scene ever beheld by the sailor," said Captain Ben Roberts, "than the phosphorescent seas witnessed at times in the tropics." But though far more common in these regions than in the temperate zones, this extraordinary luminosity of the water is sometimes observed around our own coasts.

"I shall always remember," he continues, "the first time I witnessed the phenomenon, though I've often seen it since.

"What a happy day we had had, to be sure! We were a party of five – I but a schoolboy, my comrades little more. It was the first time I had been to that most bewitching of western islands called Skye. We had started off one morning early on a ramble. We simply meant to go somewhere – anywhere, so long as we did not come back again for a night or two. Not that we were not happy enough in the old-fashioned manse of K – . But we wanted change, we wanted adventure if we could find any, and if we did not, then probably we should be able to make some. There was, at all events, the wild mountain peak of Quiraing to be climbed, with its strange top – the extinct crater of a burning mountain. Ah! but long before we came anywhere near it, there was a deal to be done.

"We had started from the beautiful little bay of Nigg, keeping a northerly course over a broad Highland upland.

"It was the month of June; the heather was not purple yet, but it was long and rank and green, and it was inhabited by many a curious wild bird, whose nests we hunted for, but did not rob; we saw some snakes, too, and one of us killed a very long one, and we all thought that boy a very hero, though I know now it was no more dangerous or deadly than a tallow candle.

"But the best fun we got was when we took to horse-catching. There was not much harm in this after all. There were dozens of ponies roaming wild over the green moor, and if they allowed

themselves to be caught and ridden for miles through the heather, why, it did not hurt them; they soon danced back again.

"We laughed, and screamed, and whooped, loud enough to scare even the curlews, and that is saying a good deal. I'm not sure, indeed, that we didn't scare the eagles from their eeries; at all events we thought we did. Then we began to ascend Quiraing, a stiff climb and somewhat hazardous; and light-hearted though we were, I believe we were all impressed with the grandeur of the view we caught from between the needle-like rocks that form one side.

"We went down to the plains below more quickly than we came up.

"Presently we came to a little Highland village close to the sea, and there, to our joy, we found that a large fishing-boat was going round the northernmost and east part of the island to Portree, the capital. For a trifle we managed to take a passage. We had lots of bread and cheese in our wallets, and we had some money in our pockets, good sticks, and stout young hearts; so that we should not be badly off even although we should have to trudge on foot back again to the old manse. Which, by the way, we had to.

"Our voyage was a far longer one in time than we had expected it would be, because the wind fell. But the beauty of the scenery, the hills, the strange-shaped mountains, the rocks and cliffs, with waterfalls tumbling sheer over them and falling into the sea; the sea itself, so calm and blue, and the distant mainland, enshrouded in the purple mist of distance, repaid us for all, and made the day

seem like one long, happy dream.

"But daylight faded at last, and just as the gloaming star peeped out there came down upon our boat a very large shoal of porpoises, which the boatman gravely assured us at first was the great sea-serpent. These creatures were in chase of herrings, but they were so reckless in their rush and so headlong, that we were fain to scream to frighten them off, and even to arm ourselves with stones from the ballast, and throw at those that came too near.

"Night fell at last, and we were still at sea, and the stars came out above us. But if there were stars above us there were stars beneath us too; nay, not only beneath us, but everywhere about and around us. The sea was alive with phosphorescent animalculae; the wake of the boat was a broad belt of light behind us, every ripple sparkled and shone, and the water that dripped from the oars looked like molten silver."

"Ah!" said I, "that was one of your first experiences of the open sea, wasn't it, Ben?"

"I was only a boy, Nie," replied my friend. "I've had many a sleep in the cradle of the deep since then."

"I was reading this morning," I said, "of that terrible shipwreck in the Atlantic. It puts me in mind of the loss of the *London*. I was in the Bay of Biscay in that very gale, Ben; our vessel unmanageable, wallowing in the trough of the seas, the waves making a clean breach over us; and, Ben, at the very darkest hour of midnight, we saw, by the lightning's gleam, a

great ship stagger past us. We were so close that we could have pitched a coil of rope on board. There were no men on her decks; her masts were carried away, and her bulwarks gone, and it was evident she was foundering fast. There were more ships lost, Ben, that night in the Bay of Biscay than ever we shall know of —

"'Till the sea gives up its dead.'"

Chapter Ten

"Throned in his palace of cerulean ice,
Here Winter holds his unrejoicing court."

Thomson's "Seasons."

"I don't think," said I, as Captain Ben Roberts and I sat at breakfast one day in a homely old hotel in Bala, North Wales, "I don't think, Ben, my boy, I ever ate anything more delicious in the way of fish than these same lovely mountain trout."

"Well, you see," replied my friend, "we caught them ourselves, to begin with; then the people here know exactly how to cook them. But, Nie, lad, have you forgotten the delicious fries of flying-fish you used to have in the dear old *Niobe*?"

"Almost, Ben; almost."

"Well, I can tell you that you did use to enjoy them, all the same."

"Ay, and I've enjoyed them since many and many is the time in the tropics, and especially in the Indian Ocean."

"So have I," said Ben Roberts. "Funny way they used to have of catching them, though, in the old *Sans Pareil*. Of course you know they will always fly to a light if held over the ship's side?"

"Yes."

"Well, but the orders were not to have lights kicking about

the deck at night, either naked or in a lantern; so some of our fellows – not that I at all approve of what they did – utilised a wild cat the doctor kept in a cage. When they came on deck to keep the middle watch – we were on a voyage from Seychelles to the Straits of Malacca – they would swing him, cage and all, over the stern. His eyes would be gleaming like bottled wildfire. 'Twasn't long, I can tell you, before the flying-fish sprang up at the cage. Old Tom put out his claws and hooked some of them in; but lots flew on board, and they were being fried five minutes afterwards."

"I quite believe you, Roberts," I said; "though some would call that a traveller's tale. But just look at that lovely pair of Persian cats in the corner there, Ben; it seems almost impossible to believe they can belong to the same family as the wild cat you've been speaking about."

"Yes, Nie, civilisation is a wonderful thing when it can extend even to the lower animals. You were once a savage yourself too, Nie. Think of that."

"I shan't think about it," I replied. "None of your sauce, my worthy friend. What were you doing at Seychelles, and what were you doing with a wild cat on board?"

"We had queerer things than wild cats on board, Nie; the fact is, we were what they call cruising on special service. We had a fine time of it, I can tell you. We seemed to go everywhere, and do nothing in particular. At the time we had that wild cat on board, Nie, we had already been three years in commission,

and had sailed about and over almost every ocean and sea in the world."

"What a lot of fun and adventure you must have had, Ben! Wish I had been with you."

"You were in the Rocky Mountains then, I believe?"

"Yes, and in Australia, and the Cape. You see, I had a turn after gold and diamonds wherever I thought I could find them. But help yourself and me to some more of those glorious trout, and spin your yarn."

"Let us get away out of doors first, Nie. On this lovely summer's day we should be on the lake."

So we were, reader, one hour afterwards; but the sun was too bright; there were neither clouds nor wind, and the fish wouldn't bite; so we pulled on shore, drew up our boat, and seated ourselves at the shady side of a great rock on a charming bit of greensward, and there we stayed for hours, Ben lazily talking and smoking, I listening in a dreamy kind of way, but enjoying my friend's yarn all the same.

"Yes," said Ben, "we were on special service. One day we would be dredging the bottom of the sea, the next day taking soundings. One day we would be shivering under polar skies, the next roasting under a tropical sun."

"Come, come, be easy, Ben; be easy," I cried, half-rising from the grass. "If you were under polar skies one day, how, in the name of mystery, could you be in the tropics next, Captain Roberts? I shall imagine you are going to draw the long bow, as

the Yankees call it."

"Well, well, Nie; the fact is, we passed so pleasant an existence in the *Sans Pareil*, that time really glided away as if we had been in dreamland all the while. We sailed away to the far north in the early spring of the year. We didn't go after either seals or whales; but we did have the sport for all that. Our captain was one of those real gentlemen that you do find now and then commanding ships in the Royal Navy. Easy-going and complacent, but a stickler for duty and service for all that. There wasn't a man or officer in the ship who wouldn't have risked his life at any moment to please him – ay, or laid it down in duty's cause. Indeed, the men would any day do more for Captain Mann's nod and smile, than they would do for any one else's shouted word of command.

"We dredged our way up north to Greenland. It was a stormy spring. We often had to lie-to for a whole week together; but we were a jolly crew, and well-officered, and we had on board two civilians – Professor kind of chaps I think they were – and they were the life and soul of the whole ship. Whenever we could we took soundings, and hauled up mud and shingle and stuff from the bottom of the dark ocean, even when it was a mile deep and more. But when that mud was washed away, and the living specimens spread out and arranged on bits of jet-black paper, what wonders we did see, to be sure! Our Scotch doctor called them 'ferlies': he called everything wonderful a 'ferlie.' But these particular ferlies, Nie, took the shape of tiny wee shells of all the

colours in the rainbow, and funny wee fishes, some not bigger than a pin-point. But, oh! the beauty, the more than loveliness of them! The roughest old son of a gun on board of us held up his hands in admiration when he saw them. We cruised all round Spitzbergen, and all down the edge of the eastern pack ice. We shot bears and foxes innumerable; walruses, narwhals, seals, and even whales fell to our guns; while the number of strange birds we bagged and set up would have filled a museum.

"Some of those walruses gave us fun, though. I remember once we fell amidst ice positively crowded with them. They seemed but little inclined to budge, either. Again and again we fought our way through them; but the number seemed to increase rather than diminish, till at last our fellows – we were two boats' crews – were thoroughly exhausted, and fain to take to the boats. Was the battle ended then? I thought it was only just beginning, when I saw around us the water alive with fierce tusked heads evidently bent on avenging the slaughter of their comrades.

"Our good surgeon was as fond of sport as anyone ever I met, but he confessed that day he had quite enough of it. At one time the peril we were in was very great indeed. Several times the brutes had all but fastened their terrible tusks on the gunwale of our boat. Had they succeeded, we should have been capsized, and entirely at their mercy.

"The surgeon, with his great bone-crushing gun, loaded and fired as fast as ever fingers could; but still they kept coming.

"'Ferlies'll never cease,' cried the worthy medico, blowing the

brains clean out of one who had almost swamped the boat from the stern. Meanwhile it fared but badly with the other boat. The men were fighting with clubs and axes, their ammunition being entirely spent. One poor fellow was pierced through the arm by the tusk of a walrus and fairly dragged into the water, where he sank before he could be rescued.

"The ship herself bore down to our assistance at last, and such a rain of bullets was poured upon the devoted heads of those walruses that they were fain to dive below. The noise of this battle was something terrible; the shrieks of the cow walruses, and the grunting, groaning, and bellowing of the bulls, defy all attempts at description.

"What do you think," continued Captain Roberts, "I have here in my pocket-book? Look; a sketch of a strangely fantastic little iceberg the doctor made half an hour after the battle. He was a strange man – partly sportsman, partly naturalist, poet, painter, all combined."

"Is he dead?"

"No, not he; I'll warrant he is busy sketching somewhere in the interior of Africa at this very moment. But I loved Greenland so, Nie, that old as I am I wouldn't mind going back again. The beauty of some of the aurora scenes, and the moonlight scenes, can never be imagined by your stay-at-home folk. We went into winter quarters. Well, yes, it was a bit dreary at times; but what with fun and jollity, and games of every kind on board, and sledging parties and bear and fox hunts on shore on the ice around

us, the time really didn't seem so very long after all."

"What say you to lunch, Ben, my boy?" I remarked.

"The very thing," replied my friend; "but first and foremost, just shake that ferocious-looking stag-beetle off your shoulder; he'll have you by the ear before you know where you are."

"Ugh!" I cried, knocking the beast a yard away. The creature turned and shook his horrid mandibles threateningly at me, for a stag-beetle never runs away. Although admiring his pluck, I could not stand his impudence, so I flicked him away, and he fell into the lake.

"Ah! Nie," Captain Roberts said, "if the wild beasts of the African jungle were only half as courageous and fierce as that beetle, not so many of our gay sportsmen would go after them. Only fancy that creature as big as an elephant!

"Well, Nie, in that cruise of ours, we had no sooner got back to England and been surveyed than off we were down south, across the Bay of Biscay. No storms then; we could have crossed it in the dinghy boat. Visited Madeira. You know, Nie, how grand the scenery is in that beautiful island."

"And how delicious the turtle!" I said.

"True, O king!" said Ben; "the bigwigs in London think they know what turtle tastes like, but they're mistaken; there is as much difference between the flavour of a turtle newly caught, and one that has been starved to death as your London turtles are, as there is between a bit of cork and a well-boiled cauliflower."

"Bravo! Ben, you speak the truth."

"Then we visited romantic Saint Helena. It used to be called 'a rock in the middle of the ocean.' How different now! A more fertile and luxuriant place there isn't in all the wide, wide world. We called at Ascension next; well, that is a rock if you like, not a green thing except at the top o' the hill (it has since been cultivated). But the birds' eggs, Nie, and the turtle. It makes me hungry to think of them even now.

"We had whole months of sport at the Cape and in South Africa, and all up the coast as far as Zambesi. We visited Madagascar; more sport there, and a bit of honest fighting; then on to the Comoro islands – more romantic scenery, and more fighting; then to Zanzibar. Captured prizes, took soundings, dredged, and went on again. On, to Seychelles, then to Java, Sumatra, Penang, then back to India, and thence to Africa, the Red Sea, Mocha; why, it would be easier far to mention the places we did not visit. But the best of it was that we stayed for months at every new place where we cast anchor."

"Visited Ceylon, I dare say?"

"Yes, hid, and had some rare sport elephant-shooting. I tell you what, Nie, there was some clanger attached to that sort of thing in those days, but now it is little better than shooting cows, unless you get away into the little-known regions of equatorial Africa; there you still find the elephant has his foot – and a big one it is – upon his native soil. But I remember once – I and my man Friday – being charged by two gigantic tuskers, and the whole herd rushing wildly down to their assistance. It was

a supreme moment, Nie. I thought my time was come; I would have given anything and everything I possessed to get up into the top of the palm-tree close beside me.

"'Now, Friday,' I cried, 'be steady if you value your own life and mine.'

"I fired, and my tusker dropped. But the terrible noise and trumpeting must have shaken Friday's nerves a bit. He was usually a good shot, but on this occasion he missed. I loaded at once again, and as the great brute came down on us, let him have it point-blank. He reeled, but still came on. I felt rooted to the spot. My life in a moment more, I thought, would be crushed out of me. Ah! but there must have been a mist of blood before the tusker's eyes; it was a tree he charged; his tusk snapped like a pipe-stalk, and the great elephant at once fell dead."

"It was a narrow escape."

"Well, it was, but for the matter of that, Nie, who knows but that our lives may be ever in danger, no matter where we are. A hundred times a day, perhaps, we are upheld by the kind hands of an unseen Providence, 'our eyes are kept from tears, and our feet from falling.'

"Should we be grateful when our lives are spared? I think so, Nie, lad; only the reckless, and the braggart, and too often the coward, boast of the dangers they have come through, just as if their own strength alone had saved them."

Chapter Eleven

"They are all, the meanest things that be.
As free to live, and to enjoy that life,
As God was free to form them at the first,
Who in His sovereign wisdom made them all."

Cowper.

We had just finished lunch by the lake-side at Bala, my friend Ben Roberts and I, and were thinking of trying the fishing once more, for the clouds had banked up from the west and obscured the sun's glare, a little breeze had rippled the water, and everything looked promising, when the Captain burst out laughing.

"Shiver my timbers! as sailors say on the stage, Nie," cried he, "if there isn't that same old stag-beetle making his way up your jacket again, intent on revenge."

"Plague take it!" I exclaimed, shaking the brute off again; "I have flicked him away once; I shall have to kill him now."

"No you won't," said Ben Roberts; "the world happens to be wide enough for the lot of us. Let him live. I'm a kind of Brahmin, Nie; I never take life unless there is dire necessity.

"We in England," continued Captain Roberts, "have little to complain about in the matter of insects; our summer flies annoy

us a little, the mountain midges tickle, and the gnats bite, and hornets sting. But think of what some of the natives of other countries suffer. I remember as if it were this moment a plague of locusts that fell upon a beautiful and fertile patch of country on the seaboard of South Africa. It extended only for some two hundred miles, but the destruction was complete.

"The scenes of grief and misery I witnessed in some of the villages I rode through, I shall remember till my dying day.

"'All, all gone!' cried one poor Caffre woman who could talk English, 'no food for husband, self, or children, and we can't eat the stones.'

"These poor wretches were positively reduced to eating the locusts themselves."

"I shouldn't like to be reduced to eating insects," said I; "fancy eating a stag-beetle fried in oil."

"And yet I doubt," replied the Captain, "if it is a bit worse than eating shrimps or swallowing living oysters. You've seen monkeys eating cockroaches?"

"Yes, swallowing them down as fast as they possibly could, and when they couldn't eat any more, stuffing their cheeks for a future feast."

"On the old *Sans Pareil* we had fifteen apes and monkeys, besides the old cat and a pet bear. Ah! Nie, what fun we did use to have, to be sure!"

"Didn't they fight?"

"No, they all knew their places, and settled down amiably

enough. The very large ones were not so nimble, and some of them were very solemn fellows indeed; the smaller gentry used to gather round these for advice, we used to think, and apparently listened with great attention to everything told them, but in the end they always finished up by pulling their professors by their tails. If at any time they did happen to find that old cat's tail sticking out of the cage, oh! woe betide it! they bent on to it half a dozen or more, and it was for all the world like a caricature of our sailors paying in the end of a rope. Meanwhile the howls of the cat would be audible in the moon, I should think. Then up would rush our old cook with the broom, and there would be a sudden dispersal. But they were never long out of mischief. The little bear came in for a fair share of attention. You see, he wasn't so nimble as the monkeys; they would gather round him, roll him on deck, and scratch him all over. The little Bruin rather liked this, but when three or four of the biggest held his head and three or four others began to stuff cockroaches down his throat, he thought it was taking advantage of good nature; he clawed them then and sometimes squeezed them till they squeaked with pain or fright. They used to bathe Bruin, though. The men brought the bath up, then the monkeys teased the bear until he got on his hind-legs and began clawing the air; this was their chance. They would make a sudden rush on the poor little fellow, he would step back, trip, and go souse into the bath. Then the chattering and jumping and grinning of the monkeys, and the laughing and cheering of the men, made a fine row, I can tell you. We had

two monkeys that didn't brook much nonsense from the others – an orang, and a long-nosed monkey – we got her in Sumatra – who looked a very curious old customer. The best of it was that the sailors taught the long-nosed one to snuff, and the orang to drink a glass of rum.

"As soon as the old orang heard the hammering on the rum-cask to knock out the bung, he began to laugh, and he beamed all over when his basin of grog was brought. The other old monkey taking a pinch was a sight to see. She stack to the box at last, and when any of her friends came to see her would present it to them with a 'hae! hae! hae!' that spoke volumes."

"Any other funny pets on the *Sans Pareil*?"

"Oh, yes, lots. We had an adjutant. Ah! Nie, we did use to laugh at that bird, too. Five feet tall he was, and a more conceited old fop of a fellow I never did see. He had a pouch that hung down in front. Well, he used to eat everything, from a cockroach to half a leg of mutton; and when he couldn't hold any more he used to stuff his pouch.

"'Comes in handy, you see,' he seemed to say, alluding to this pouch of his. 'But, dear me!' he would continue, 'ain't I a pretty bird? Look at my pretty little head; there ain't much hair on it; but never mind, look at my bill. There is a bill for you! Just see me eat a fish, or a frog, or a snake! And now, look at my legs. Pretty pair, ain't they? See me walk!'

"Then he would set off to promenade up and down the deck till the ship gave a bit of a lurch, when down he would go, and

the monkeys would all gather round to laugh and jibber, and Snooks, as we called him, would deal blows with his bill in all directions, which the monkeys, nimble though they were, had some difficulty in dodging.

"'Can't you see,' he would say, 'that I didn't tumble at all – that I merely sat down to arrange my pretty feathers?' And Snooks would retain his position for about half an hour, preening his wings, and scratching his pouch with the point of his bill, just to make the monkeys believe he really hadn't fallen, and that his legs were really and truly serviceable sea-legs.

"I've lain concealed and watched the adjutants in an Indian marsh for hours; there they would be in scores, and in every conceivable idiotic position.

"Suddenly, perhaps, one would mount upon an old tree-stump, and spread wide his great wings. 'Hullo, everybody!' he would seem to cry, 'look at *me*. I'm the king o' the marsh! Hurrah!

> "'My foot's upon my native heath,
> My name, Macgregor;'

"or words to that effect, Nie."

"You were always fond of birds, and beasts, and fishes, weren't you, Ben?"

"I was, Nie, lad, and never regretted it but once."

"How was that?"

"I was down with that awful fever we call Yellow-Jack; and,

oh! Nie, it seemed to me that at first all the awful creatures ever I had seen on earth or in the waters came back to haunt my dream; and often and often I awoke screaming with fright. Indeed, the dream had hardly faded when my eyes were opened, for I would see, perhaps, a weird-looking camel or dromedary's head drawing away from the bed, or a sea-elephant, a bear, an ursine seal, or an old-fashioned-looking puffin.

"In my fever, thirst was terribly severe, and I used to dream I was diving in the blue pellucid water of the Indian Ocean, down – down – down to beds of snow-white coral sands, with submarine flowers of far more than earthly beauty blooming around me; suddenly I should perceive that I was being watched by the terrible and human-like eyes of a monk shark, or – I shudder even now, Nie, to think of it – I should see an awful head – the uranoscope's – with extended jaws and glaring protruding eyes. Then I would awake in a fright, shivering with cold, yet bathed in perspiration. But, Nie, when I began to get well a change came o'er the spirit of my dreams. The terrible heads, the horrid fishes, and the slimy monsters of the deep appeared no more; in their place came beautiful birds, and scenery far more lovely than ever I had clapped a waking eye upon. So, in one way, Nie, I was rewarded for my love for natural history."

"What a lovely day!" I remarked, looking around me.

"Yes," replied Ben; "but do you know what this very spot where we are now standing puts me in mind of – lake and all, I mean?"

"I couldn't guess, I'm sure," I replied.

"Well, it is just like the place where I was nearly killed by a panther, and would have been, but for my man Friday."

"He must have been a useful nigger, then," I said, "that man Friday."

"He came in precious handy that day, Nie. You see, it was like this: – Neither he nor I had ever been to South America before; so when we went away shooting together we weren't much used to the cries of the birds or beasts of the woods. The birds seemed to mimic the beasts, and reptiles often made sounds like birds. We had been away through the forest, and such a forest – ah! Nie, you should have seen the foliage and the creepers. We had had pretty good sport for strangers. We shot and bagged everything, snakes and birds and beasts, for I was making up a bag for the doctor, who was a great man for stuffing and setting up. We had just sat down to rest, when suddenly the most awful cries that ever I heard began to echo through the woods.

"They came from a thicket not very far away, and at one moment were plaintive, at the next, discordant, harsh, dreadful.

"'Friday,' I cried, starting up and seizing my gun, 'there is murder, and nothing less, being done in that thicket. Let's run down and see.'

"'It seems so, massa,' said Friday; 'it's truly t'rific.'

"We ran on as we spoke, and soon came to the place, and peered cautiously in.

"It was only a howler monkey after all."

"And was nothing the matter with him?" I asked.

"Nothing at all. It was merely this monkey's way of amusing itself."

"Did you shoot him?"

"I never shot a monkey in my life, and never will, Nie; it appears to me almost as bad as shooting a human being.

"'We'll go back to the lake-side now, Friday,' I said, 'and have dinner.'

"Alas! I had no dinner that day, Nie, nor for many a long day to come.

"There is no fiercer wild beast in all the forests or jungles than the cougar or puma, and none more treacherous. I have an idea myself that the darker in colour the more courageous and bloodthirsty they are; however that may be, I would any day as soon fight hand-to-hand with a man-eating tiger as I would with some of the monstrous pumas I have seen in South America. And yet I have heard sportsmen despise them, probably because they have never met one face to face as I have done, and as I did on the day in question.

"We were quietly returning, Friday and I, to the place where we had left our provisions and bags, when he suddenly cried, 'Look, massa! look dere!' We had disturbed one of the largest boa-constrictors I had ever seen, and it was moving off, strange to say, instead of boldly attacking us, but hissing and blowing with rage as it did so. It looked to me like the trunk of some mighty palm-tree in motion along the ground.

"'Fire!' I cried; 'fire! Friday.'

"The crack of both of our rifles followed in a second, but though wounded, the terrible creature made good its escape.

"I hurried after him, loading as I went, and thus got parted for a short time from my faithful servant and body-guard.

"I soon discovered, to my sorrow, the reason why the boa had not attacked us.

"In these dense forest lands, the wildest animals prey upon each other. Thus the boa often seizes and throttles the life out of even the puma, agile and fierce though it be. This particular boa had been watching a puma, evidently, when we came up. The brute gave me not a moment to consider, nor to finish my loading.

"I yelled in terror as I found myself seized by the shoulder. I remember no more then.

"Friday had boldly rushed to my rescue. He struck the puma over the head with his useless rifle. The beast sprang backwards fully fifteen feet, and prepared to give Friday battle, but the brave fellow was on him, knife in hand, in a moment. Friday told me afterwards that he literally flung himself on the puma. Had he missed his aim, he would never have had another chance, but deep into the monster's very heart went the dagger, and he never moved a muscle more. Friday was unwounded."

"And you, Ben?"

"Fearfully cut in the shoulder with the puma's teeth, cut in the back with the talons of his fore feet, and lacerated in the stomach

with his hind. They have an ugly way of cutting downwards with those talons of theirs, few who have felt it are likely to forget."

Chapter Twelve

"Wide-rent, the clouds
Pour a whole flood; and yet, its flame unquenched
Th' unconquerable lightning straggles through
Ragged and fierce, or in red whirling balls,
And fires the mountains with redoubled rage."

Thomson.

My old friend Captain Roberts is quite a remarkable man in his way – yes, I might go farther and say, in many of his ways. As a pedestrian, for example, there are few young men can beat him. When he and I make up our minds to have a walk, the elements do not prevent us. We start and go through with it.

But in summer or spring weather, when the roads are not quite ankle-deep in mud, we dearly love to mount our tricycles and go for a good long spin. We like to return feeling delightfully hungry and delightfully tired; then we dine together, and after dinner, when good old Ben gets his pipe in full blast, it would indeed do your heart good to listen to him. Everything or anything suggests a yarn to Ben, or brings back to his mind some sunny memory or gloomy recollection.

One day last summer we started for a ride, for the morning looked very promising, and the roads were in splendid form. We

followed the course of the Thames upwards, and about noon found ourselves enjoying our frugal luncheon near a pretty little reach of the river, one of the thousand beautiful spots by the banks of this famous old stream.

As the clouds, however, began to bank up rather suddenly in the west, and as they soon met and quite hid the sun, and as the day was still and sultry, we expected, what we soon got, a thunderstorm. Neither my friend nor I am very shy, when it comes to the push, so we ran for shelter, and just as the thunder began to roll and the raindrops to fall, we got our 'cycles comfortably housed in a farmer's shed.

The farmer was not content, however, until he had us both indoors in his comfortable parlour. He threw the window wide open, because, he said, the glass drew the lightning; so there we sat with the thunder rattling overhead, the rain pattering on the grass and sending up delicious odours of red and white clover, while the lightning seemed to run along the ground, and mix itself up with the sparkling rain-rush in quite a wonderful way.

"Terrible thunder!" said Captain Roberts. "Terrible! puts me in mind of South America."

The farmer looked eagerly towards him.

The farmer's wife entered with tea, and this completed our feeling of comfort.

"You've got something to tell us, Ben," I said. "There is something which that storm reminds you of. Better out with it, without much further parley."

"Ah, well," he said, "I suppose I must. Not that it is very much of a story; only, gentlemen, it is true. I haven't lived long enough yet to have to invent yarns. I haven't told half what I've seen and come through. But not to weary you – what delicious tea, ma'am!"

"So glad it pleases you, sir."

"I've sailed around a good many coasts in my time; but I think you will find scenery more charming on the seaboard of some parts of South America than in any other country in the world. Round about Patagonia, now, what can beat the coast line for grandeur and stern beauty? Nothing that I know of.

"But farther north – on the shores of Bolivia, for instance – the scenery is just a trifle disappointing; the coast is low and sandy, and very rough in places.

"They call the ocean that laves it the Pacific. Bless my soul! friends, had you but seen it one day in the month of April, 18 – , you wouldn't have said there was much 'pacific' about it. The bit of a barque I was coasting in was on a lee-shore, too, and there was nothing short of a miracle could save her. We all saw that from the first. That miracle never took place. We were carried on shore – carried in on top of a mountain wave, struck with fearful force, and broke in two in less than an hour.

"It was a wonder anybody was saved. As it was, seven of us got on shore one way or another, and there we lay battered and bruised. The sun dried one half of our clothes; then we rolled round, and he dried the other. We had tasted no food for four-

and-twenty hours, for we had been battened down, and all hands had to be on deck. So when a case rolled right up to our very feet we weren't long looking inside it, and glad enough to find some provisions in the shape of tinned soup.

"Stores floated on shore next day, and spars, and one thing and another, so we rigged a tent, and made ourselves as much at home as it was possible for shipwrecked mariners to do.

"We had been shipwrecked apparently on a most inhospitable shore. To say there wasn't a green thing in sight would hardly be correct. Bits of scrubby bushes grew here and there in the sand, and a kind of strong rough grass also in patches; but that was all. Inland, the horizon was bounded by a chain of mountains; to the west was the ocean, calm enough now, very wide and dark and blue, with not even an island to break its monotony.

"It was a poor look-out for us, only we all agreed that it would be better to stay where we were until our wounds and bruises were somewhat healed, and until we had gathered sufficient strength to explore the country.

"We had plenty to eat and drink where we were; we could not tell how we might fare elsewhere. Only we were quite out of the way of ships, and our provisions would not last for ever.

"For the first three or four days, I may say we did nothing else but bury our dead. Sad enough employment, you must allow. But after this a breeze of wind sprang up, which during the night increased to a gale, blowing right on to the shore. When the darkness lifted, to our great joy we found our ship, or rather the

pieces of her that had in a sort of way held together, floated high and dry on the beach.

"Had we wished now to become Crusoes we should have had every convenience, for we not only got provisions of all kinds out of the wreck, but boxes of stores, guns, and ammunition. For the last we were very grateful; and rough sailors though we were, we did not forget to kneel down there on the sands and thank the Giver of all good, not only for having mercifully spared us from the violence of the sea, but for giving us this earnest of future good fortune.

"The hawk scents the quarry from afar, and early next morning we were not surprised to receive a visit from some armed Indians. They rode on horses and on mules that seemed as fleet as they were sure-footed. These Indians were kind enough to express a wish, not over-politely worded, to possess samples of our various stores. We gave them to eat as much as they liked; but when they attempted to pillage the wreck, we first and foremost smilingly and persuasively hinted our disapproval of such a proceeding.

"This hint not being taken, we tried another: we levelled guns at them, and they fled.

"They came again the next day; and we made them many presents, and asked them, in broken Spanish and a deal of sign language, to conduct us safely over the mountains to the nearest Bolivian town or settlement.

"They were in all about twenty, and if they were half as bad in heart as they looked, then they were indeed scoundrels of the

first water. But we numbered seven – seven bold hearts and true, and we were well armed, and able enough to drive a bargain with these fellows to our mutual advantage.

"We did so in this way: we were to have several horses and five mules, which should be laden with all our own especial baggage. They – the Indians – should have as much as they liked of the stores that remained.

"They appeared to consent to this willingly enough. So we made our packs up – taking the best of everything, of course, and whatever was of the greatest value.

"It was now well on in the afternoon, so we determined to start on our journey inland the very next morning. The Indians had still half a dozen good mules left, and they at once set about making preparations for loading them.

"There was a deal of squabbling and wrangling over the division, and more than once they seemed coming to blows.

"As soon as they had chosen all they could carry, we set about piling up the rest of the wreckage in a heap, preparatory to setting fire to it. This was absolutely necessary, for if anything was left behind it would be but a short convoy those Indians would give us. They would hide their mule packs among the mountains and hurry back for more.

"They were very much displeased, therefore, to see what we were about.

"But nothing cared we; and just as the sun dipped down into the western ocean we set fire to the immense pile.

"When darkness fell, and the flames leaped high into the air, the scene was one worthy of the brush of a Rembrandt. The sea was lit up for miles with a ruddy glare; the sands were all aglow with the blaze; the Indians and their mules thrown out in bold relief looked picturesque in the extreme, while we, the white men, armed to the teeth, and carefully watching the Indians, though not in any way to give them cause for alarm, formed a by no means insignificant portion of the scene.

"We were early astir the next day, and on the road before the sun had begun to peep down over the eastern hills.

"We marched in single file, an old grey-bearded Indian leading the van as our guide.

"Before many hours we had left the sandy hills along the seashore, and had entered the mountain defiles.

"Scenery more rugged, wild, and beautiful I had seldom clapped eyes upon, either before or since. At the same time we could not help feeling thankful that we had obtained the guidance of these Indians, treacherous though they no doubt were, for we never could have made our way otherwise across this range of rugged mountains, nor through the wild entanglement of forest.

"By day many a wild beast crossed our pathway, but only seldom we shot them, and we never followed far; we were shipwrecked sailors trying to make our way to some semi-civilised town, where we could live in some degree of safety until we found out the lay of the land, as our mate called it, and fell in at last with some British ship.

"These fellows, our guides, could tell us nothing, but they led us day after day towards the east and the north.

"We kept a strict watch over their every movement, and it was well we did so. At night we bivouacked but a little distance from their camp, and had separate fires and separate sentries.

"Almost every evening after supper they made themselves madly drunk with the wine they had received from us, and without which they would have refused to guide us at all.

"After four days' wandering we arrived, during a pitiless storm of thunder and rain, at a strange and semi-barbarian village. The houses or huts were built upon piles, and the inhabited portion of them stood high above the ground; you had to ascend to this on a sort of hen's ladder.

"The street itself at the time we entered the town was more like a river than anything else. But we were glad enough to find shelter of any kind, drenched to the skin as we were, and wet and weary as well.

"Next day was bright and clear again, and it seemed to me that every one of the villagers turned out to see us start. They appeared to be peaceable enough, so we made little presents to the women, and advised our Indian guides to do the same. They were not inclined to part with anything, however, and evidently looked upon us as fools for what we did.

"Our march that day was across vast plains and swamps towards another mountain-chain, more rugged and grand than any we had yet seen.

"We chatted pleasantly and sang as we rode on, for the Indians assured us that in two days more we should arrive at a very large and populous city, where plenty of rich white men lived, with splendid houses, broad paved streets, hotels, and even palaces. We bivouacked that night at the very foot of the chain of mountains, and next morning entered and rode through gloomy glens and dark woods, and the farther we rode the wilder the country seemed to become. Yet some of the woodland scenes were inexpressibly lovely. We came out at last on the brow of a hill, just as the sun was setting over the distant forest, and bathing with its golden glory a scene as lovely as it was sad and melancholy.

"A vast plain in the centre of an amphitheatre of hills, clad almost to their summits with lofty trees, a broad river meandering through this plain, and on both banks thereof what appeared from where we stood to be a city of palaces. Alas! on entering it we found it a city of ruins. Trees and shrubs grew where the streets had been, the gardens had degenerated into jungles; we saw wild beasts hiding behind the mouldering walls, and heard them growl as we passed; and we saw monster snakes and lizards wriggling hither and thither, and these were the only inhabitants of this once large and populous town.

"Yet in the halls of its palaces the banquet had once been spread, and gaiety, mirth, and music had resounded in its streets and thoroughfares, till war came with murder and pestilence, and then all was changed. The city's best sons were sent to work

in mines, or slain; the city's fairest daughters marched away in chains to become the slaves of their terrible foes.

"I could not help thinking of all this as I rode through this ruined city of the plain, and sighed as I did so. The words and music of the sad old song came into my mind:

> "'So sinks the pride of former days
> When glory's thrill is o'er.
> And hearts that once beat high with praise
> Now feel that pulse no more.'

"But the sun set and night came on, and with it storm and darkness."

Chapter Thirteen

"Here roams the wolf, the eagle whets his beak.
Birds, beasts of prey, and wilder men appear."

Byron.

My friend Ben paused for a moment.

A sheet of lightning almost blinded us. It was followed instantaneously by one of the most terrific peals of thunder I have ever heard in this country.

"It was in just such a storm as this," said Captain Roberts, "that we took shelter in the ruins of an old fort. We tethered our mules outside, and we had not even the heart to keep the Indians from sharing our quarters. For once, and it was the last time, we ate with them, drank with them, and talked to them. How little we suspected them of treachery!

"We found plenty of dry wood in the old fort and soon had a roaring fire with which to warm up our soup and cook our vegetables.

"'Who goes sentry to-night?' I said to the mate.

"'Well,' replied the mate, 'I guess we'd better draw for it. He'll have a wet skin whoever does it.'

"It was just after dinner when this conversation took place.

"'But,' continued the mate, stretching himself before the fire,

'I expect it will be between you and me, for, look, the other fellows have all gone to sleep, and I feel so drowsy I really – don't – know – how long – '

"He said no more; he was asleep.

"'Poor fellows,' I said to myself, as I took up my gun and prepared to leave the room, 'they're tired. I'll station myself here by the door, where I can be in the dry and still see all that is going on.'

"The storm continued with unabated violence. The rain came down in sheets; the thunder seemed to rend the old fort and shake it to its very foundation, while the lightning was everywhere; the whole world looked as if on fire. Night was coming on, and rude though our shelter was, I felt thankful we were not out in the gloom of the forest.

"'How soundly they sleep!' I said to myself about half an hour after when I went to heap more wood on the five. 'How I envy them! I'll sit a moment and think. The Indians are not so bad as they look. First impressions are not always – the – best.'

"The next thing I was conscious of was hearing voices close beside me. It was the Indians bending over me and over my companions, and seeming to listen for our breathing.

"'They're dead,' one said.

"'Better make sure,' said another.

"Then with half-open eyes I could see drawn daggers gleaming in the fire-light; but I was unable to stir hand or foot; I felt like one in some dreadful nightmare. I tried to shriek, but my voice

failed me. Then, 'O God, be merciful to us!' I inwardly prayed, 'for our hour is come.'

"Two Indians advanced, knives in hand, towards the mate. One pulled his head back, the other had his arm uplifted to strike, when suddenly he sprang back appalled.

"Was it sent as in answer to my prayer? I know not; yet I firmly believe nothing happens by chance. The electric fluid had entered by the roof, shattering the masonry and scattering the fire. It gleamed on the uplifted knife of the would-be assassin; he dropped it, and with arm paralysed and hanging by his side fled shrieking from the building. The others uttered exclamations of terror and surprise, and quickly followed the first.

"I remember no more then. Daylight was shimmering in through the broken roof of the building, and the fire had long gone out, when I awoke shivering, and started to my feet.

"Almost at the same moment the mate jumped up. He was the first to speak.

"'We have been drugged,' he cried, pressing his hand to his aching head.

"'Drugged?' I answered. 'Yes, fools that we were to trust those scoundrels; we've been drugged, and, doubtless, robbed.'

"The mate looked very pale and ghastly in the early light of the morning; probably I myself looked little better. My surmise was right: the Indians had gone. They had taken all our goods and our pack-mules with them, and driven away the spare animals. Thank goodness, they had left us our arms and ammunition.

"Not even on the morning after the shipwreck did we poor fellows feel so miserable as we did now, seated round a meagre meal of bananas and gourds.

"But we were intent on regaining our goods.

"Clever though these Indians might be if alone and unencumbered, they could hardly go fast, nor far at a time, through forest and jungle with horses and laden mules. Nor could they go anywhere without leaving a trail that even a white man could pick up and follow.

"The rain of the previous night favoured us. We soon found the trail, and, better still, we had not gone very far ere a sound fell upon our ears that caused us to pause and listen. It was soon repeated – the neighing of a horse. I sprang into the jungle, and there, to my joy, found not only the horse I had ridden, but two others and some mules besides. The poor brutes were quietly browsing on the herbage and the tender leaves of young palm-trees, but were evidently delighted to see us.

"We went on now with more comfort, and had good hope of speedily coming up with the pillaging Indians, of whom we never doubted we could give a good account.

"Somewhat to our surprise we found they were taking a westerly direction, instead of going east and by north, as they had been leading us. They were either then bent upon returning to their own village, or making their way to some seaport where they could sell their plunder. If this latter surmise was the correct one, we were comparatively safe; if the former, any chance we had

of recapturing our goods lay in our being able to come up with them before they were reinforced by members of their own tribe. This thought made us redouble our exertions. But we were weak for want of food and from the effects of the drug that had been administered to us on the previous evening, so that our progress was not so great as we wished it to be.

"The trail continued all day to lead us through the jungle; but before sunset we found ourselves out in the open, on the brow of a hill that overlooked a vast, almost treeless, swamp. It was bounded on the further horizon by a chain of mountains – spurs, no doubt, of the ubiquitous Andes. Away to the left, and just under the hills, we could see smoke rising, and had no doubt that here our friends were encamped.

"We speedily held a council of war, at which we discussed the best plan for attacking the Indians.

"We stirred not then till long past nine o'clock, when the moon rose and flooded all the landscape. Then we took to the swamp. It was a terrible ride: at times our horses floundered in the quagmires, at other times they had to swim, to our imminent danger of being devoured by the huge alligators with which the place seemed to swarm. We startled the birds from their beds in the reeds, the wild beasts from their lairs in the patches of jungle, and herds of fleet-footed creatures fled, bounding away towards the forest at sight of us. It was a dangerous ride. But we cared for nothing now; it was life or death with us. We must reach the camp of the Indians, conquer them, or die in the attempt.

"All night we rode, struggling and fighting against fearful odds; but at five o'clock in the morning, or about one hour before sunrise, we left the plain and entered the forest, determined to take our foes by surprise. The ride through the tangled forest, without any pathway save that made by the beasts, was one of extreme difficulty. But we were free at last; and tethering our horses, we prepared for the attack. We could see the Indians on a small plateau not three hundred yards beneath us, asleep by their smouldering fires. But we were on the brow of a hill, they much nearer the plain; beneath was a precipice, overhung with trailing shrubs and creepers, fully five hundred feet in depth, which it was impossible to descend without risk of being seen.

"The place the Indians had chosen for a camping-ground was fortified by nature. Probably that is the reason they had not troubled to set a sentry. We saw our advantage at once; it was to make a détour, gain the level of the plain, then creep up the hill upon them, attacking both in flank and rear.

"We carried out our plans most successfully. Few but sailors could have climbed up the rocks which led to the plateau. So steep were they that in some places the loosening of a stone or one false step might mean death.

"Just as we were at the very brink of this precipice, and within twenty yards of where the enemy lay, a bough snapped with a loud report, and next moment they were all up and on the alert.

"There was no need for further concealment; we speedily showed ourselves, poured a volley into their bewildered ranks,

and before they could recover from their surprise we were on them with our muskets, which we used as clubs.

"They were nearly three to one. They fought like fiends. So did we, and the battle for a time was desperate. They were beaten at last, and the few who remained alive ran shrieking away towards the rocks. We cared but little how they fared.

"Our mate and another man were wounded, but not severely, and in two days' time we were able to resume our journey.

"Providence was kind to us. We came upon a broad old war-road that led through the forest and jungles and plains towards the setting sun, and in one week more we were overjoyed to find ourselves standing on a hill-side overlooking a verdant plain, with a river and a town, and beyond it the blue sea itself, studded with the ships of many nations.

"And those who climb the hills in Greenland in spring-time to catch the first rays of the returning sun, were not more joyful than we were now. We laughed and shouted, and I believe the tears rolled down over our cheeks.

"But we did not forget to kneel down there, and, with our faces on the ground, thank in silence the kind Father who had led us through so many troubles and dangers. And now, Nie, the storm is gone. We must thank these good people for their kind hospitality, and start."

Chapter Fourteen

"Some say, that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
The bird of dawning singeth all night long:
And then, they say, no spirit dare stir abroad.
The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike.
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm;
So hallow'd and so gracious is the time."

Shakespeare.

It was Christmas Eve. It was going to be an old old-fashioned Christmas, too, there was no mistake about that. And to-night the snow lay fully two feet deep on the lawn in front of Rowan Tree Villa. The sky was overspread with masses of darkest cloud that were being continually driven onward on the wings of a fierce north wind, seldom permitting even one solitary star to peep out. The storm roared through the leafless elm trees, and shrieked and moaned among the giant poplars. It was indeed a wild and wintry night.

Ah! but it didn't prevent my old and faithful Ben from making his appearance, though what with his long white beard, his snow-clad coat, and his round, rosy, laughing face, when I went myself to open the hall door to him, I really took him for King Christmas himself.

But half an hour afterwards, when the crimson curtains were closely drawn, when the table was laden with good cheer, the two great Newfoundlands sleeping on the ample hearthrug, old Polly asleep on her perch, the cat singing on the footstool, and the kettle on the hob, with Ben at one side of the fire, his pipe in full blast, and myself at the other, you would have admitted we looked just as snug and jolly as there was any occasion to be.

"Well, Nie, lad," said Ben, "this is what I call the quintessence of comfort. Heave round with a yarn."

"Just the thing," said I; "but what shall it be?"

"Well, we're cosy enough here, that's certain, Nie, and as contrasts are pleasant sometimes, why, let's hear of some doings of yours in the ice and snow."

"So let it be, Ben; I will tell you of a Christmas I once spent in the Arctic Ocean."

"Not a very jolly one, I suppose," Ben replied.

"Not so dull as you might imagine, I can tell you. Ours was a brave brig, as strong as iron and oak could make us. It seemed to me that there were no icebergs big enough to hurt us. We had spent the summer whaling in Baffin's Bay. The sport we had, so far as birds and bears and seals and foxes were concerned, was as good as anyone could have wished; while the wild grandeur of the scenery, and the very desolation of some of it, are painted on the tablets of my memory, and will remain for ever. But we had not the fortune to kill a single whale.

"Then winter came on us all at once, and we found ourselves

frozen in, in one of the dreariest packs of ice it has ever been my lot to lie in. The days got shorter and shorter, till the sun at last went down to rise no more for months. We had the glorious aurora, though, and moonlight and stars, but sometimes for weeks together snows fell and storms raged, and we were enveloped in total darkness and a silence deep and awful as that of the very vaults of death. We managed, despite the weather, to give Christmas a welcome, and were gay enough for a time. Perhaps it was our very gaiety at this season that caused us to be so gloomy and disheartened afterwards.

"Sickness came, the black death almost decimated our crew, and when, in the cold bleak spring-time, the sun returned, and the ice opened and allowed us to stagger southwards, though the whales were plentiful, there were not men enough to man the boats, and hardly enough to set the sails.

"I had been an invalid; indeed, I had barely escaped with life, and it would be long ere I was fit again for the wild roving existence and wild sports in which my soul was so much bound up.

"'Come with me, sir,' said our captain when we reached New York at last. 'I'm going south for the good of my health, and I have cousins near San Francisco, and it is right welcome we both shall be.'

"'Are they ladies?' I asked.

"'Ay, and dear good sisterly girls at that,' he answered.

"My savage nature rather rebelled against the society of ladies,

Ben; bears and wolves were more in my line. But I could not offend my kind friend, so consented to go.

"'We'll take it easy,' he said, 'and have a look at the land as we go south.'

"We did take it easy. We visited all the lovely and enchanting scenery of the Adirondacks, then went slowly south and west; we lingered for weeks in the Yellowstone Park. It was summer, all the woods and forests were astir with life, the prairies gay with gorgeous flowers; there was joy all around us; we drank in health in every breath we breathed.

"I felt myself no longer an invalid when we arrived at the home of my captain's cousins, an old-fashioned log mansion, with verandahs and porticoes around which gigantic creepers flower-laden trailed and twined, and cooled the sun's rays that sifted through their leaves, ere they entered the beautifully-furnished rooms. There were wide, grassy, park-like lawns, terraces, and fountains, and everything that wealth could bestow or luxury suggest adorned this lovely spot. The owner was a retired planter. His servants were still slaves, but the master was kindness itself to even the meanest of them.

"I would now fain have resumed my old life, and gone with rod or gun in hand to the forest, the mountain, and stream. But I was not to be permitted to do so. I must still consider myself an invalid. Such were the orders of my captain's cousins. So I became a willing captive, and did all that the dear kind-hearted girls told me.

"And, indeed, sitting under the shade of a cool and leafy orange-tree, the air perfumed with its delightful scent, with Letitia quietly sewing beside me, and Miriam reading 'The Lady of the Lake,' was as good a way, Ben, of passing a drowsy summer's afternoon as any I ever tried."

"Didn't you fall in love?" asked Ben slyly.

"Don't ask any questions," I replied. "Stir the fire, my boy; just hear how the wind is roaring, and the hail rattling against the panes."

"Ugh!" said Ben, with a little shudder as he applied the poker to the blazing coals. "Well, go on, Nie."

"When I got still a little stronger, we, the captain's cousins and I, used to go for long rambles to the hills and woods, and sometimes south to a picnic or dance.

"There are giants in the forests of California, Ben. Once, I remember, our ball-room was the stump of an old tree, the lofty pines its walls, and the blue sky its roof.

"As I happened one day to let out rather inadvertently that I was, virtually speaking, a homeless man, a wanderer over the wide, wide world, my good host said bluntly, but kindly:

"'Then, my dear sir, you are a prisoner here for the next six months. Come, I won't take a word of denial.'

"Well, I had to give in, if only for the simple reason that both the girls added their influence to that of their father; I promised to stay, and didn't repent it.

"Though I say it myself, Ben, I was soon a favourite with all

the slaves about the old estate. I daresay I had my favourites among them; it is only natural. One of these was Shoe-Sally, another was Shoe-Sally's little brother Tom. They were both characters in their way, and both oddities. Shoe-Sally was quite a personage about the old mansion. She seemed to do anything and everything, and to be here, there, and everywhere all at the same time. Shoe-Sally also knew everything, or appeared to do so, and she was just as black and shiny as the shoes she polished. Sally was bound up in a little brother of hers called Tom.

"'Leetle tiny Tom,' she told me one day, 'is so cleber, sah. He read de good Book all same's one parson, sah. Make parson hisself one o' dem days. Sure he will, sah.'

"But Tom had a deadly enemy in the person of Joliffe the overseer, a perfect brute of a fellow, with slouching gait and murderous eye. How his master retained him so long I don't know, but he had been overseer for more than ten years, I was told. Well, he might have been useful in some ways, but he was terribly cruel. He did not dare to let his master see him with a whip in his hand, but he had a short thick one in his pocket with which he flogged the poor slaves most unmercifully.

"Once Shoe-Sally came running to me; I was playing with a little pet dog belonging to Tom:

"'Oh! for mussy sake, come quick, sah!' she shrieked; 'Massa Joliffe he done whip my pooh brudder most to death.'

"I followed her quickly enough, and I never want to see again what I saw then. Joliffe had stripped the poor black boy, tied

him up in the stable, and was lashing him across the face and shoulders. He had injured one eye badly, and the blood was flowing everywhere about.

"'You cowardly savage!' I roared.

"Ben, I have a hard fist. That wretch's head was under my arm in a moment, and I simply punched it till I was tired, then I threw him into the stall and let him have a bucket of water over him by way of a reviver. Joliffe's face was a sight to see for some weeks. I told my host what I had done, and the verdict was, 'Serve Joliffe right!'

"Poor Shoe-Sally came to thank me with the tears streaming over her honest black cheeks.

"'For what you hab done dis day,' sobbed Sally, 'Hebbin will bress you ebery hour in your life. And, oh, sah!' she added, 'Sally will die for you!'

"I shudder even now, Ben, my friend, when I think of how true, how terribly true, the latter part of this little grateful speech turned out.

"Time passed, and I felt happier far in that old Californian home than I believe I ever did anywhere before. I never once, however, met Joliffe the overseer, but he scowled a dreadful scowl at me, and I knew he was inwardly vowing deep revenge. As for the little boy, Tom, he was taken entirely out of the overseer's charge, and became message-boy and 'buttons' about the house.

"It was before the tremendous civil war had broken out in

America, Ben, and I was very young and just a bit romantic. Perhaps I really was in love with dear Miriam. At all events, there was nothing I would not have done for her, and I was never so perfectly, so serenely happy as when in her sweet presence. But everyone loved Miriam, ay, every slave about the place, and every beast and every bird. The wandering Indians that occasionally came around looked upon her as some being better than themselves, and I believe that even when they were on the war-path she might have gone to their camps, or to their fastnesses in the wilderness, and need have dreaded nought of ill.

"It came to pass that Miriam was invited to spend a week at the house of a friend who lived some twenty miles from the old mansion.

"Her father took her over, and – for sake of the drive we shall say, Ben – I went along with him. I never enjoyed any drive so much, at all events. At the end of the week, as my host was not over well, I boldly volunteered to go alone for Miriam, and my proposition was accepted.

"I should sleep one night at the house where she had gone, and together we should drive home next day. I knew every foot of the road and every feature of the scenery; even should we be belated, there would be bright moonlight. At any time, a ride through the forests and hills of the far West, when the full moon is shining down from a clear sky, is a treat to be remembered, but with such companionship as I should enjoy, why, it is bliss, Ben, and nothing less.

"Now, something out of the common occurred on the very day I left to bring Miriam home. It was this: both Joliffe and Shoe-Sally were missed. Poor Tom was disconsolate in the extreme, and went about all the forenoon with tears coursing along his nose, almost as big as the silver buttons he wore on his jacket.

"That same day at noon a strange meeting took place between two braves, apparently Indians, in one of the deepest and darkest nooks of the great forest. The spot was on the brink of a deep canon almost filled up with fallen trees, the result of some terrible storm.

"One savage, who evidently belonged to the warlike Apaches, and was a chief, sat quietly and meditatively smoking. The other leaned upon his club, and did all the talking, and this most energetically.

"'Ugh!' said the sitting chief; 'but the paleface and I am at peace. I like it not. I care not for his scalp.'

"'But think of the gold I offer you,' said his companion; 'think of the fire-water it will buy you. You will be happy for ever with such wealth and riches, and think of the *prize*. You are a great chief, this paleface girl will be brighter than the sunshine in your wigwam, sweeter far than the wild bee's honey. Think.'

"Nearer and nearer to a rifted tree not far from these two men crept a dark figure, moving along low on the ground, and as silently as a snake glides, till their every word became audible, their every gesture visible.

"There was much more that the club-armed savage said which

need not be repeated. Suffice it to say that the listener heard all, or heard enough, then retired with the same stealthy gliding motion as it had approached.

"Miriam and I set out about noon next day on our return journey.

"With our spirited horse, and light waggonette, three hours would have taken us home easily. But we did not hurry the horse, and it was two o'clock ere we had accomplished half the distance.

"'We must be quick,' cried Miriam, looking at her watch with some degree of anxiety depicted on her lovely face.

"She had hardly spoken these words ere an Indian woman tearing a child on her back in her blanket, suddenly appeared at the bend of the road, and begged for a few coppers. I felt too happy to refuse, and drew up. The woman leaned against the wheel, a silver coin glittered in her hand, and next moment we had driven on.

"Our path now wound along through a beautiful forest, and close by the banks of a lake.

"The view was charming in the extreme, and I could not help stopping for just a moment that we might gaze on it. The day was hot and still; there was silence on the hills, silence on pine wood and lake, broken only by an occasional plash as a fish leaped up, or a bird stirred the glassy waters with glad wing. We were almost close to the edge of a fearful precipice.

"'Get me that flower,' murmured Miriam, pointing to a deep crimson anemone that grew by the side of the road.

"I sprang down to get it. I had hardly reached the ground ere one of the front wheels flew off and rolled over the rock; it took all my strength to support that side of the machine, until Miriam should alight.

"My thoughts at once reverted to the Indian woman who had leaned against the wheel. She had doubtless drawn the linch-pin.

"There was treachery of some kind in the wind. But what could it mean? I never for a moment thought of Joliffe and his possible revenge.

"As quickly as fingers could work, I took out the horse and tied him to a tree, then I backed the carriage into a sheltering corner of the rock, and hardly had I done so ere the whole forest resounded with the howling of vengeful savages.

"I had expected no assistance from Miriam, and was surprised to get it. But the dear girl had all the courage and coolness in danger of a true American woman. Armed with a revolver each, we gave those Redskins a warm reception; and though the bullets rattled on the rocks behind us like the hail on our window panes, Ben, they retired discomfited.

"We could hardly expect to remain where we were much longer, and hope itself was sinking in my heart, when the yelling was renewed, and the Indians came on a second time to the attack.

"Ah! but help was at hand. Savages can *yell*, but there is nothing so blood-stirring as the wild 'hurrah!' of a Briton or an American.

"We heard it now, and sent back cheer for cheer.

"I can hardly describe the scene that followed. It was a fierce *melée*, a hand-to-hand contest, and dreadful while it lasted. But the Redskins were beaten, Ben, at length, as Redskins always have been in the long run who crossed sword or spear against civilised man.

"For the life of me I could never tell how long that fight continued. It might have been but five minutes – it might have been an hour.

"But there, in the midst of the dead and the dying, stood Miriam, locked in her father's arms.

"Ben," I continued, after a pause, "the most mournful part of my tale remains to be told. It was poor, droll, innocent Shoe-Sally who had followed Joliffe to the forest that day, dodged him while he disguised himself, and crept after him, and listened to all he had said to the Apache chief. She had hurried home again and exposed his treachery, and as it happened our friends were on the spot barely in time to save our lives."

"And Shoe-Sally?" said Ben; "what became of her?"

"We found her among the dying.

"'My brudder, my brudder!' was all she ever said ere death stepped in and closed the scene."

There was moisture in my friend's eyes as he bent down to stir the fire.

"'Poor Sally!' he said; 'and were these her last words? Well, Nie, we are all of us brothers and sisters in this world.'"

Yes, my dear readers, all of us, as Ben said, black or white. Remember that.

The End