



A Story of Ned Low, the pirate who was the terror of the Spanish Main

BY STUART MARTIN

THE FIRST CHAPTER
The Treacherous Mate!

THERE was not a man in old Port of Spain who did not know the qualities of the good sloop *Moth*, which had come to the Spanish Main to take her share in the adventures of those ten wonderful years that lay between 1665 and 1675. Trim and trig, she was, with sails that spread above her deck so widely that they gave her a bird-like appearance, and a poop that rose high above her rudder, well over the dead water that swirled under her quarter.

For the *Moth* was no ordinary vessel. Laid on the lines that Francis Drake had chosen for his Golden Hind, she had been built at Plymouth of good English timber for the work that kept her on the Carib sea. She was a gold-ship, one of the ships that carried the precious metal from the Gulf of Panama and Trinidad to the islands of the North; and now she was lying just

beyond the wharf of Port of Spain, while from the tavern doors men watched the preparations being made for putting her to sea.

No wonder Roddy Stark, captain's boy of the *Moth*, felt a thrill of pride in the craft as he stood in the look-out barrel of the foremast and looked down on the sun-tanned, bare backs of the crew who tramped round the capstan, bending their weight on the bars to the tune of a chanty chorus. Of all the voyages the sloop had made, this one on which they were bound was the most dangerous, as it was the most important.

On the poop stood the captain, clad in a suit of faded velvet and white hose, his long sword hanging from a black scabbard and his feathered hat well back on his brows. In the waist of the ship two heavy culverins, one to port, the other to starboard, with ball ammunition heaped in boxes beside their carriages, groaned and creaked with the movement of the sloop. But presently

their noise was drowned in the chorus of the crew :

*Heave and go, jolly mariners all !
Heave, ye lads, heave and haul !*

*Old Ned Low,
He don't know
We've got gold*

*In the middle hold,
And plenty meat
In the lazaret !*

*So heave and go ! Yo, ho, ho !
To Execution Dock with old Ned Low !*

Up came the anchor to the shout, and as the vessel slid forward and Trinidad was left behind, the flag of England broke at the masthead, and the captain's hat came off with a flourish, while the ship's bell clanged for every man to gather on deck.

Those were the days of lone seas and quaint sailing ceremonies at the close of the seventeenth century, when a draught of sack was given each member of the crew at the beginning of a voyage and the flag was saluted gravely.

The tall, heavily armed galleons of the Dons were not the only enemies with which the *Moth* had to contend on the Main. There were the pirates, more cruel than any Spaniard, more atrocious than any beast of prey ; gaunt, lawless men who slew crews and sank ships without pity and without remorse, plundering and killing for very love of destruction. And of these the most terrible, as the most daring, was none other than Ned Low, one-time lieutenant of the notorious Kidd, who prowled the seas for loot.

The *Moth* was bound for Jamaica. In the captain's cabin was a chest of gold bars from the banks of the Caroni—the very gold for possession of which the Spaniards had sacked the town of San Josef, but they themselves had been scattered in the Caroni jungle by Abercrombie's men from the frigates which had sailed in through the Serpent's Mouth to Port of Spain.

The *Moth* had been chartered to carry the gold from Trinidad northwards, and an English warship was to meet her fifty miles or so north of the island and convoy her

through the most dangerous part of the Main. Reports of incoming craft had brought word that Ned Low was somewhere among the outer islands of the Antilles, so that the *Moth's* crew had a feeling of security as their vessel faced the open seas and Trinidad melted in the evening mist astern.

Roddy Stark was relieved of his look-out aloft, and descended to attend the captain and lay the supper for him and the first mate. The latter was a new member of the crew, having been engaged in Trinidad owing to the disappearance of the original mate on the eve of departure. The new officer was a tall, silent man who had only one eye, but he was a thorough seaman and seemed to know his business. He and the captain were bending over a chart as Roddy entered the cabin.

"Faith," the captain was saying, "but relief will be mine when we sight the frigate ; for though I care little for the big ships of the Dons, there is an uneasy feeling in my heart about this Ned Low."

"Art afraid of this Ned Low, then ?" asked the mate, as he straightened his back and glanced at Roddy. "Has any of your crew seen the buccancer ?"

"None of us have seen him, and I'd liefer never put my eyes on him!" cried the captain. "For those that see Ned Low do not come back to give us his likeness. They say he takes the unmarried men from off his prizes and makes the others walk the plank at sundown. The sharks follow his ship, it is told, always sure of a ghastly meal. As for us, we are not armed enough to offer him resistance ; but once we meet the frigate we may snap our fingers at him and all his breed."

"What time do we meet the frigate, master ?" asked the mate, his fingers fumbling at a gold chain which hung round his neck.

"At dawn. There is the point we steer for."

The captain jabbed a finger at a spot on the chart and turned to Roddy, who stood close by.

"Lay the supper, sirrah, and be quick !"

As Roddy went about his work he listened to the conversation of the two men, who took

no further notice of him. The mate sat down on a cushioned bench, and drew forth a pipe, which he stuffed with Indian tobacco. He took things leisurely now that the sloop was on the high seas. His dress was almost above his station on the sloop. A pair of velvet breeches covered his legs, and through his belt a long Spanish dagger was thrust. In his ears were rings of curious workmanship. Yet there was an air of surliness about him that was difficult to penetrate or explain.

When the meal was ready for them they drew in their stools, while Roddy waited upon them, running to and from the galley for their dishes. The sun was dipping behind the horizon when the meal was finished. Together the officers rose and went on deck, and the boy heard their footfalls on the planks

above as he tidied up the cabin for the captain's return. The sailing of the sloop was in the hands of the mate after dark, and as Roddy was curtaining the cabin windows the captain returned, and tossed his sword on the table.

"Mask the stern lights to-night, boy," he said, "and then get to your bunk. I shall need you at dawn."

Roddy went out, closing the door of the

cabin softly. He heard the captain turn the key in the lock as he shuffled along the narrow alleyway. The gold bar was a heavy responsibility on the captain's shoulders, and he was making sure that the chest beside him would be undisturbed throughout the night.

Up to the deck Roddy crept. Already it was dark, only the glimmer of a light on the binnacle in front of the steersman flickering feebly. The watch were in the waist, and

the mate was on the poop gazing into the darkness.

Fetching a lantern from the deck store, Roddy struck a light with flint and steel and, as soon as the wick caught, wrapped a piece of canvas round the glass so that the light fell in a small circle on the deck. He was carrying the lantern to the poop when a hand fell on his arm heavily.

"No masked lights, sirrah! Here, give it me!"

The tall mate was beside him and swung the lantern out of the boy's grasp. Carrying it to the taffrail, he placed it in the sidelight socket, throwing the canvas mask overboard.

"But the master's orders!" cried Roddy. "He said—"

"You get below to your bunk, or I'll beset you with a rope's end, you monkey!" roared



Roddy was carrying the lantern to the poop when a hand fell on his arm heavily. "No masked lights, sirrah! Here, give it me!" It was the mate! (See this page)

the mate. "Think you I am not your master on deck? Be off!"

He made a dash at Roddy, who rushed for the alleyway, and dropped down to his cabin in the roundhouse. It was not the first time he had seen the fury of the new mate, who had a temper that brooked no opposition.

Yet the boy lay in his bunk wondering at the cause of the explosion. So long as the master of the sloop was in his cabin the mate was in charge of the ship and his orders must be obeyed; but this hanging out of the stern light was a duty which had been Roddy's ever since he joined the vessel.

He lay wondering at the audacity of the mate in sailing with open lights. He heard the yards creak, the waves beat a regular tattoo on the timbers, the ship's bell sound the half-hours with a subdued clanging. Midnight came. The watch was changed. He heard the men's feet on the deck planks. And then, as he was dozing into sleep, a sudden movement of the sloop woke him up.

The steering gear grated and thudded above him. The sloop swung round, leaning over to port. The helm had been shifted suddenly.

Above the noise of the swinging yards and the thunder of the sea came shouts from the watch in a swift note of alarm. A crash rose above the tumult, followed by a sound of splintering wood.

Roddy Stark leaped to the floor as the vessel staggered and fell away. Now he knew what the crash had been. It was the report of a culverin.

Up to the deck he raced; everything was confusion, the spray lashing over the bulwarks, the crew shouting to each other, rigging lying about the deck entangling his feet. From the bows came the swift cry of the look-out, a cry that sent a thrill through every man aboard; "Pirates on the weather bow!"

The foremast of the sloop had already been shot away and lay athwart the deck, the tangle of rigging, sails, and cordage making it impossible for Roddy to see at first the coming of the dreaded enemy. He scrambled over the ruin, conscious that the watch below were tumbling up in wild fear. From the poop came the voice of the mate; but it was charged with grim menace.

"Ye have no chance, ye dogs! Ferrard every man!"

Now Roddy saw looming through the night the bulk of a tall ship. She was within a boat's length of the sloop, her sides high above and ending in a poop that was on a level with the cross-trees of the mainmast. Not a light was on this vessel, but from her sides there came shouts enough to curdle the blood of the bravest. She seemed to be packed with men.

Crash!

The two vessels came together with a grinding sound as timber bore against timber. The sloop lay over on her side. Grappling irons were flung from the high ship to the deck of the sloop, and she was hauled close. Next moment her decks were flooded by a swarm of fierce men who ran over the ship, beating the crew below and shouting those who made a stand of it.

"Ned Low for ever! Ned Low and treasure!"

Roddy Stark crouched low in the shadow of the break of the poop as the pirates ran to and fro clearing the deck of the crew. Their shouting filled his ears, and their wild appearance struck fear to his heart. Great, fierce men they were. Their cutlasses flashed in the dim light of the lanterns, and their pistols crashed out every now and then, mingling with the cries and groans and defiant roars of the sloop's men.

There was not much chance for the crew. They had not had time to find weapons, and all they had was what they could pick up in the wild moments of attack. The pirate had come upon them out of the night, silently and ghost-like, and had run alongside and shot away the mast to disable the ship.

Down the steps of the poop came the tall, dark mate. Roddy saw him race aft towards the captain's room. In a moment his voice came across the deck.

"This way, lads! The chest is here! Get it aboard quickly!"

Roddy put his head round the corner, and saw a sight that made him gasp. The tall mate was standing at the door of the captain's room. In his hand was a smoking



A swarm of fierce men ran over the ship, beating the crew below. "Ned Low for ever!" they shouted. "Ned Low and the treasure!" (See opposite page)

pistol. In that moment the boy realised the truth of the situation. The mate was one of the pirates! He had guided the ship so that the pirates could have an easy prey.

Half a dozen of the rogues laid hands on the chest and dragged it forward. A rope was tied round it, and it was slung upward to the deck of their ship, and the buccaneers climbed aboard. The tall mate went with them, his pistol still in his hand and his voice giving orders with authority.

Roddy sat still in his corner as the grappling irons were thrown off. He looked along the deck of the sloop. Dead and dying men lay everywhere. The decks ran red.

"Give her a broadside, gunner! Dead men tell no tales, and sunk ships are never found!"

The voice came from the deck of the pirate vessel. On the poop, high above him, Roddy saw the man who had been mate of the *Moth* gazing down at the sloop. His arm was raised and there was a terrible expression on his face, made all the more ghastly by the flicker of a lantern which

hung from the mast of the *Moth* almost on a level with him.

A roar as of thunder filled the air. The *Moth* shivered from stem to stern as the balls went through her. Her deck burst open. Splinters were thrown far into the night and the mainmast tottered, swayed, and fell outboard, carrying with it the rail, the wheel, and single lifeboat.

Up came her starboard gunwale, rising against the sky until it reached the zenith. The deck sloped at a terrific angle, and Roddy was shot to port like a stone out of a catapult. He caught hold of some cordage and hauled himself back from the sea that surged towards him. The ship was turning turtle.

Up the sloping deck the boy toiled in agony. He was struck time after time by the falling wreckage, but he held to the stump of the mast. The ship was turning slowly on top of him.

With a last effort he gained the gunwale and sat astride to gain his breath. He heard the pirates cheering, but the roar of the

sea and the crashing of falling timber mingled with their shouts. They did not see him, or he would have been shot. He crouched low as he swung over to the side of the sloop which was now where the deck ought to have been.

Down the sloping hull he slid towards the sea. The waves seemed to thrust him back, but he plunged into the water and swam as fast as he could. He rose to the surface under the lee of the pirate ship. A rope hung down from her stern. He saw it against the star-studded sky, and swam for it.

Gripping it with an energy born of despair, he scrambled up hand over hand. Up above the helm he went, until he reached the beams which told him he was under the stern windows and the short "admiral's walk" leading to the cabin.

He paused for a moment to gain his breath.

He saw the *Moth* turn over and plunge beneath the waves. Her keel was uppermost, her stern high in the air as she took the final plunge. Then, a moment later, there was nothing of her left save a mass of wreckage and some floating spars.

There was little choice for Roddy Stark. He must either climb up and board the pirate, or drop back into the sea. He resolved to take his chance on the vessel. Gripping the protruding beam above his head, he swung himself up. The rails of the admiral's walk formed a good hold. Over the rail he went, and found himself facing the cabin. The windows were open, and two men stood in the room. Their backs were turned towards the boy, but they heard the noise of his movements and turned.

Next moment Roddy was seized by the collar and jerked into the cabin.

"Well, if it isn't the captain's boy of the *Moth*! How did you get here, lad?"

Roddy stepped back from the man who addressed him, for the man was he who had been mate of the sloop. A black patch over his right eye seemed to lend a sinister aspect to his face now. He had changed his clothing, too, and now wore a frock-coat of bright colour and a pair of long top-boots reaching

to his knees. Around his waist was a silk sash, through which were thrust a pair of pistols and a cutlass of fine steel. On his head was a large handkerchief tied in knots which hung behind his right ear.

"You know me now, youngster," he said with a laugh. "Sink me if I thought we should have you as a recruit. You must have liked our company or you would not have come through the stern windows."

"You are Ned Low, the pirate!" exclaimed Roddy.

The other bowed in mock appreciation of the recognition.

"That's my name, just as it ever was. What do you think of my coup? Why, lad, I saw to it that your mate did not go back to the sloop once he came ashore at Trinidad, and so I offered myself in his place and sent word to my crew to take the chest before the frigate arrived. Smart, wasn't it? And here we are on board the *Sea Hawk*, all safe and sound with the gold, and not a trace of the *Moth* anywhere. So now you've come aboard you'll be my cabin-boy and grow up to be as good a buccaneer as any of us. What do you say to that, hey?"

"I won't join you!" cried Roddy boldly. "I came aboard to save myself from drowning—"

"And drown you will or die with a bullet in you and have pennies in your eyes, if you ain't more civil," roared the pirate. "I'm captain here, and I'm obeyed, as Bahama Jack, my chief mate, can prove."

The other man, heavy-jawed and stout, grinned as he pushed a plug of tobacco into his mouth.

"You bet, cap'n. Them as comes on board the *Sea Hawk* comes as recruits or goes to the sharks. That's the rule of the Main, and a good rule it is. But, cap'n, there ain't time to squall about this kid now. I was telling you that the frigate is due. I saw a pin point of light on the horizon when we put the broadside into the sloop. If it's the frigate she'll have heard the guns. We'd better be going."

Low jumped to his feet and strode to the stern windows.

"Turn down the lights."



The tall mate was standing at the door of the captain's room. In his hand was a smoking pistol. "This way, lads! Get the chest aboard quickly!" The mate was one of the pirates! (See page 138.)

The stout buccaneer lowered the wicks of the two lanterns that illumined the cabin as his chief stared out into the night.

"Yonder she is, Jack—just above the sea-line. You see her white sails? That's a king's ship, or I'm a yellow Don."

He drew the curtains across the window and clapped his hand on Bahama Jack's shoulder.

"Hark ye, we'll have a run, but we'll win. Dowse all lights on deck. Give the men a swig of rum and beat to quarters. Put every stitch of canvas on her that she'll carry. We're going to the cache to bury this loot, then north to the Tortugas again! See to it."

The older man nodded and withdrew. Low stood biting at his fingernails in deep thought. Suddenly he laughed, and turned to the boy.

"I'm Ned Low and my word is law on the *Sea Hawk*, sirrah, so attend to what I say.

You're one of my crew now, or else you walk the plank at dawn. I'll take you on trial as my boy. In that cupboard you'll find crockery. Lay a meal for me and bring a mess from the galley. You'll find the cook preparing something for me—"

"Prisoner I may be," rebelled Roddy, "but never a pirate like you, Master Ned Low, even if I do your bidding—"

"That'll do," shouted Low, giving the boy a clip on the ear that sent him sprawling. "There's bin others as said the same thing, but they changed their minds. And you'll change yours, too. Ever heard of Skeleton Cove?"

"No, I don't know where it is."

"You'll know by mornin', lad. It's to Skeleton Cove we're bound, up by the Grenadines, and it's there you'll finish your cruise if you run athwart me and my plans. You

get the dishes out and a bottle of rum, or I'll whale the hide offen you."

He laughed and went out of the cabin, closing the door behind him, and Roddy heard him turn the key.

For a moment the boy stood considering the situation. He had escaped from the sinking sloop, but he had landed into a ship which was as likely to prove as bad for him as if he had gone to the bottom with the crew of the *Moth*.

As he stood wondering what he ought to do, he felt the ship move forward. The sails had been hoisted and the *Sea Hawk* was on the move, running away from the frigate in the darkness. At the thought of the frigate the boy lifted the corner of the heavy curtains which fell over the stern windows.

Away astern a light bobbed on the top of the waves. It was the masthead light of a frigate. Scarcely bigger than the head of a pin, it was coming in his direction. A sudden desperate idea entered Roddy Stark's head. If the frigate had a light to guide her she would come up on the pirate ship. Was it possible for him—

He mounted the small table, and lifted one of the lanterns from the hook on which it was hung. Searching about for a piece of cord, he found a small length of rope under the bunk, and this he unravelled quickly. To the ring on the top of the lantern he tied the cord, and, leaning out of the window, fastened it to one of the rails of the narrow walk, letting the lantern hang down under the projecting beam, after he had turned up the light.

Then he closed the curtains and set about getting the dishes out of the cupboard as he had been ordered. The lantern, swinging under the rail, was out of sight, and could not be seen from the poop, nor from below, for it was just over the cut-away of the ship's quarter above the rudder. But it was a mark for the pursuing frigate. Even a lighted match can be seen for three miles in darkness at sea. The lantern was a guide.

Roddy had already got some of the dishes on the table when the door opened and Ned Low reappeared. He grinned as he saw the

boy at work, and took a quirt of tarred rope out of his pocket.

"If you hadn't bin setting the meal, lad," he said, "I'd hev given you the heavy end of this tickler. It brings most rebels to their senses. Now then, get farrard and bring the stuff from the cook. He's waiting for you. And if you show a light on deck I'll throw you overboard."

On deck Roddy found that every effort was being made to escape the frigate. Every sail possible was set, studding sails were being bent, and under the press of canvas the tall ship was fairly flying.

The cook had his cuddy screened round by canvas so that no glimmer of his fire appeared over the deck. The crew went about their work like gnomes of the night. There was not a sound but the creaking of the cordage and the crash of the waves on the bows.

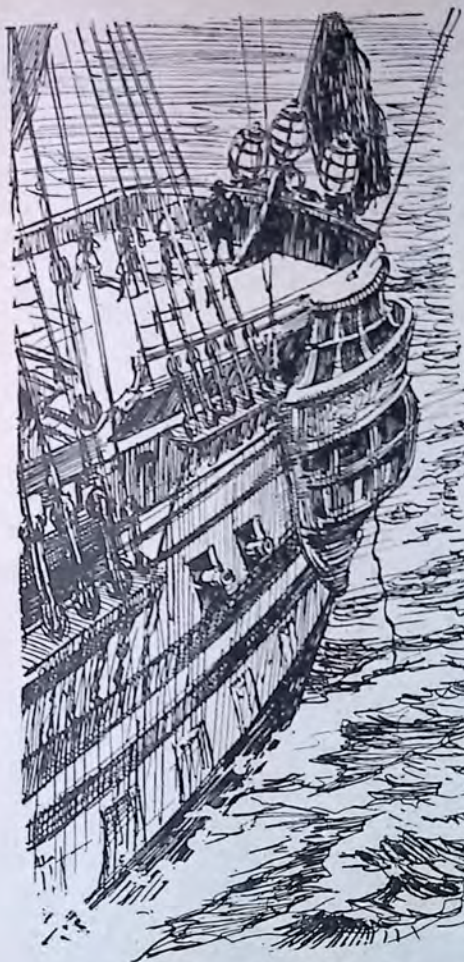
And far across the ocean, through the dim light of the misty night there gleamed the masthead lantern of the frigate as she kept on the trail of the pirate.

Roddy acted as steward to Ned Low, who ate alone. He was, indeed, more than a cut above his crew, who were mostly low fellows, hardened with crime and steeped in iniquity. When the meal was finished Roddy was told to get something for himself from the cook, and then go forward and find a berth in the forecabin.

But the boy was in no mood for finding such a berth. He remained on deck, curled up on a piece of sail in the bows, watching as well as he could the progress of the chase.

Several times he heard the look-out grumbling that the frigate had not been shaken off, and he heard one of the crew growl out that Ned Low was of opinion that there must be some reason for the insistent pursuit, as he had changed his course time after time, and still found the frigate hanging on behind.

But even the frigate was no match for the flying *Sea Hawk* in speed. The latter had been one of the East India clippers before Ned Low captured her, and she had a reputation for flying that was second to none. Her speed now saved her from defeat. If she had not lost sight of the frigate by midnight she



had outdistanced her before dawn, and when the sun flashed up on the horizon there was no sign of the pursuer.

Roddy had been dozing from weariness when he was awakened by the shout of the man on watch.

"Land ho! Skeleton Cove dead ahead!"

The boy lifted his eyes and saw a small, almost flat, island within half a dozen miles. It was not more than five miles long, but its shore curved round like a horseshoe, and the surf beat upon the sand with a constant murmur.

The *Sea Hawk* was brought into the shore as near as she could be handled, her canvas was dropped loosely from her yards, and instantly the deck was bustle and excitement. As soon as the anchor was cast a boat was lowered and Ned Low appeared on deck.

He was a gorgeous figure now, all bright colours and weapons. Bahama Jack lumbered up to his chief and spoke a word into his ear and pointed to the sea-line.

"Boys," said Low, as the pirates gathered round him, "the

Roddy rose to the surface under the lee of the pirate ship. A rope hung from her stern and for this he swam (See page 140.)

frigate is still on our track. Jack tells me that the look-out says she is topping the horizon, so we may have to make a running fight of it after we bury the chest. It is short work we must make of our landing, for a plague seems to be on the *Sea Hawk*. All night this cursed frigate has hung on our heels, though we steered among the Grenadines and doubled on our tracks. And there is another thing. We have a passenger aboard who is to take the oath, or otherwise, this morning. I mean the whelp who climbed aboard from the *Moth*. Set him here."

Roddy was pushed forward by the pirates and stood facing the leader.

"Boy," said Low threateningly, "we're here at the Cove, and here we give all who board us a chance to make their choice. Will be one of us, or do you choose to join the company of Skeleton Cove?"

"Why should you force me to be one of

you?" cried Roddy. "I climbed aboard to escape drowning——"

"Enough, enough! Stow the gab on that score. The thing that matters is that you came aboard. We are all merry men on the *Sea Hawk*, each for all and all for each. We cannot take a rebel to creak on us. Say what you choose and have done."

"I will never be a pirate!" cried the boy desperately. "Ye are outlaws, every man of ye! I'd rather walk the plank and get it over than be hanged at Execution Dock in London town. Yet I shall die knowing that I have done my best to outplot you all. It was I who caused the frigate to chase you——"

"What's this?" roared Low, his hand grasping his pistol, while he waved back his men who crowded round. "Hold back, my hearties. Blood and bounds, if what this cockerel boasts is true he'll pay right well for it! Come, jackanapes, out with it! What hast thou done?"

"Look at the stern of your ship," cried Roddy boldly, "and you'll see a lantern hanging there. I tied it so last eve——"

Low swore a great oath and then made a sign to one of his men. The latter ran aft, but in a few moments he was back again bearing the tell-tale lantern in his hand.



Ned Low stood rigid as a statue, his face convulsed with rage. The Dago was lying in the sand where he had sprawled. "Rush him!" yelled Low

"It's true, cap'n," he said hoarsely. "Twas tied to the admiral's walk, and not a drop of oil left. It has burned all night!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER:

Turning the Tables!

A ROAR went up from the pirates. They made a rush at the boy, but again Low held them back. His face was white and his teeth showed through his beard.

"That settles it!" he hissed. "This boy goes to Skeleton Cove. We'll bury him beside the gold. Jack, seize him and tie his hands!"

Buffeted and kicked, Roddy was bundled into the boat into which the chest of gold had been lowered. Low sat in the stern at the tiller. Bahama Jack was beside Low, and five others came as the crew. One man who looked more Dago than English had charge of Roddy.

They pulled ashore swiftly, and landed on the white beach. Two pirates hoisted the chest on their shoulders, and the party marched upwards towards the woods. Low halted them at a mound of sand where small shrubs grew here and there.

"Dig!" he ordered sharply.

Two of the men fell to digging with a shovel which they had brought for the purpose. Two others remained on the slope facing the ship to watch for signals. The boy stood between the Dago and Bahama Jack, the latter leaning on his long rifle.

The men who were digging the pit were deep in the hole when Low turned to the boy, and pointed to a shrub not far off. A shiver ran through Roddy as he saw a human skull at the base of the shrub.

"I told you you were bound for Skeleton Cove," said Low. "You see them shrubs? Every one covers a man who defied me. That is the reason for the name—Skeleton Cove! We've buried many a one here, and they are all buried the same way—the way you are to be buried. How's that, you ask? Why, up to the neck in sand! We're giving you a special treat. We're letting your feet rest on the gold chest. That's about enough, lads. Put in the chest!"

He drew a pistol and held it in his folded

arms, as his two men lowered the chest into the sand.

"Step in, Roddy Stark!"

The boy shivered. His bound hands were tightly clasped. His eyes glanced from side to side, looking for a way of escape. There was none.

On his left Bahama Jack had raised his gun. On his right the Dago was smiling under his broad-brimmed hat.

"Step into your grave, lad!"

All eyes were on Roddy. He stepped forward, then suddenly his hands went up, pointing towards the horizon.

"Look!" he cried.

Instinctively they wheeled to see the cause of the exclamation. The white sails of the



"The first who lifts a hand is a dead man!" cried Roddy.

frigate were above the sea-line; but in that moment Roddy Stark was not thinking of the frigate.

He kicked at the Dago behind him, toppling the man down the slope; and as he kicked he swung round and tore the gun from the hands of Bahama Jack and leaped back, the weapon at his shoulder, and his finger on the trigger.

"The first who lifts a hand is a dead man!" he cried. "I shan't be buried alone, Ned Low!"

His gun waved steadily from one to the other. Low stood rigid as a statue, his face convulsed with rage. The two men who had dug the pit were gaping in amazement at the swift development. The Dago was lying in the sand where he had sprawled.

Roddy backed cautiously until he reached the Dago, and stamped the man's pistol into the sand. That put it out of commission.

"Rush him!" yelled Low. "He can't shoot us all!"

"Will you begin the rush, cap'n?" asked one of the men sarcastically.

No one moved.

"Put down that pistol, Ned Low! I'll shoot when I count three. One—two——"

The pistol fell from Low's arms to the ground.

As it landed the boom of a gun came from the sea.

"Look here, cap'n!" cried Bahama Jack, "did you hear that? It's the frigate! Let's leave this kid on shore with the gold. He'll starve to death, anyway. We can come back and settle his hash after we get the frigate, for if we wait much longer——"

"They're signalling us to return to the ship!" cried one of the men, as a second gun echoed over the cove. "That's the urgent call!"

A third gun boomed out. Roddy Stark was backing towards the woods, his gun still pointed towards the pirates.

"By the holy poker, cap'n, look. We're caught!"

No wonder Bahama Jack roared out the words. The pirates forgot all about the boy who menaced them, and turning, ran headlong towards the beach.

A second frigate had appeared on the horizon.

The *Sea Hawk's* sailing qualities availed her nothing. She was caught between two forces, each of which were equal to her in gun power.

Yet she sailed straight out to her doom. It was a terrible doom that met her, but it was one which she had inflicted on many peaceful merchant ships.

Until mid-day the thunder of the guns reverberated over the sea. Great clouds of smoke rolled betwixt the ocean and the heavens, and for some time Roddy Stark could not guess how the battle of giants progressed.

At length, out of the dark billows there drifted a stricken ship, her masts gone by the board, her hull riddled with shot, her gear trailing like the feathers of a wounded bird.

It was the *Sea Hawk*, which had fought her last fight. Smitten fore and aft she drifted towards the beach, and was caught on a reef and hung there, while the survivors of her crew plunged into the water and swam towards the shore to escape the destruction which the frigates poured into her.

And after the fugitives came men from the king's ships, who pursued the pirates and took them all; and in the pursuit found Roddy Stark beside his chest of gold bar waiting to be rescued.

They made much of the boy who had guided them to the attack; and when he was taken on board one of the ships he was told how his lantern swinging at the stern of the pirate had been the cause of the frigate keeping on her trail, and how, just before dawn, when another frigate had hove in sight, she, too, had come to join in the hunt for Ned Low.

Yet the curious thing was that Low's body was not found after the fight, nor was he among the men who had come ashore. And it was not until Roddy Stark had arrived at Jamaica and had handed over the chest of gold bar to its destination, that he received his reward in a percentage of the treasure, which made him a wealthy man for life. As for the majority of the crew who were the scourge of the Spanish Main under Ned Low, the records of Execution Dock on the Thames tells how they were hanged, defiant and careless to the last.

THE END