

A FATHER'S
OPINION:

"8, Shelley Avenue, East Ham.—Dear Sir,—I am greatly pleased with the tales you publish in the 'UNION JACK.' I have one son, and your paper is the only one I allow him to read.—Yours, O. ARNOLD."



FATHOMS DEEP.

By JOHN C. ROWE

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In the cabin of the mysterious sunken galleon five skeletons, clad in complete armour, were seated. A strange, unearthly light shone from the visors of their helmets.

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No. 159.

FATHOMS DEEP

OR
IN QUEST OF TREASURE.

By JOHN G. ROWE.

CHAPTER I.

ROY LYSTER AND CHARLEY SIDDELL—THE CRY FOR HELP—A FIGHT IN THE DARK—FLIGHT OF THE MARAUDERS—THE SEAMAN'S LEGACY—"IT WILL BRING YOU A FORTUNE"—THE DEAD MAN IDENTIFIED.

"Well, Roy, and what did the old man say when you asked him for his daughter?"

"What did he say? You mean, what did he not say. He called me every name he could think of; the most opprobrious epithets he could lay his tongue to. He ordered me out of his house, and told me to never set foot within its doors again."

"But I thought you were as great a favourite with him as with the daughter herself?"

"Yes, so I was until the crash came, and I found myself a comparatively poor man. It was my banking account the old gentleman liked, not myself, and when that went his regard for me took its departure also. But you mistake, Charley, I did not ask him exactly for his daughter's hand. I could hardly with honour have done so, seeing my present moneyless state. I simply asked him to consent to an arrangement which Sadie herself and I had already arrived at, and that was that she should remain true to me, and enter into no engagement for two years. I hope to have retrieved my shattered fortunes by that time, when I would return and claim her as my affianced wife. The dear girl said she would wait for ever for me; but her father refused to hear of such an arrangement, and, as I have said, most wantonly insulted me, and ordered me out of the house."

"Ah, well, Roy, you needn't mind the parent, if the daughter's heart be yours. The compact between you two can still hold good. But what are you thinking of doing in order to make this fortune?"

"I was thinking of trying one or other of the South American Republics. I have still a few hundreds by me, which would start me fairly as a planter or ranchman, and I have heard it said that, with all their civil disorders and misgovernment, those Republics are the very places for Englishmen to get on in."

"Look here, Roy, the governor and I cannot hit it. He is always telling me I have no business capacity whatever, and that I should have been a farmer or something of that kind. I will join you. The pater is sure to stump up hand-somely, if only out of pure delight at getting rid of me. We will put our money together, and buy a plantation or ranch in Venezuela or Brazil."

"My dear Charley, I will be delighted if you can see your way to joining me."

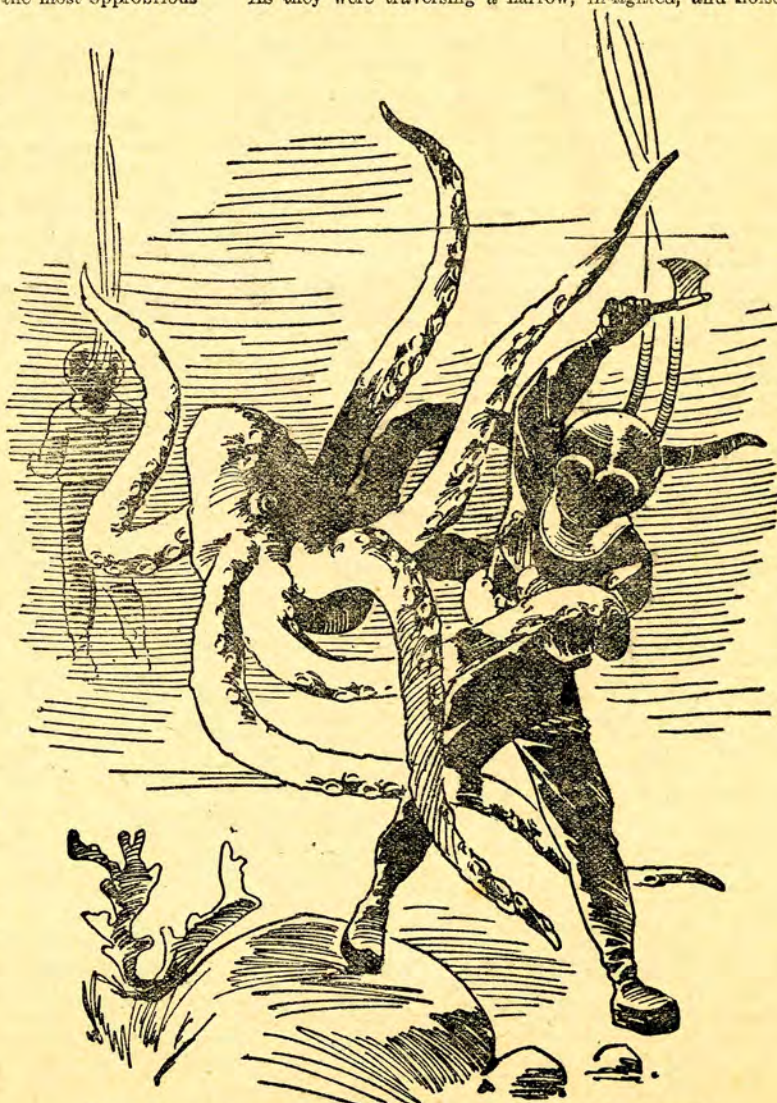
Roy Lyster and Charley Siddell had been chums from the first hour they had met as "new boys" at Eton. Both had come of well-to-do parents; but Roy's father had died with several unredeemed mortgages upon his property, and,

while his son was endeavouring to free it of these encumbrances, the bank in which he had placed all his money suddenly stopped payment, and the family were practically reduced to poverty.

Roy Lyster had still his mother and a younger sister to think of, as well as sweet Sadie Goulding, to whose safe keeping he had entrusted his tenderest affections, and he was naturally anxious to rebuild the fallen fortunes of his house.

The two young men had been seeing a mutual friend off by train from London Bridge Station, and it being a fine night they had decided to walk part of the way home.

As they were traversing a narrow, ill-lighted, and noisome



He was entirely at the mercy of the loathsome animal.

alley, which Charley Siddell had suggested their taking as a short cut, they were both started and surprised to hear sounds of scuffling, and a low moaning from a deep recess or passage leading off it.

"Hark! what is that?" queried Roy Lyster, coming to an immediate stop, and peering into the Egyptian darkness of the recess. Then, as the strange sounds still continued, he took a quick step towards the spot, to be electrified the next moment by a weak attempt at a shout in a man's voice.

"Help! help! Murder! Thieves!"

Without another second's hesitation, Roy called to his chum to follow him, and dashed bodily into the inky passage. He almost fell over a man kneeling upon the ground, and found himself immediately seized by two others; but, with a lithe movement, he wrenched himself free, and his fists shot out like lightning. In both cases, they met with soft substances, which yielded before their impact, and two savage ejaculations in some foreign tongue testified these substances were the faces of his would-be captors.

Charley Siddell had stayed but to utter a ringing shout of "Police! police!" before he, too, plunged into the passage, and now there ensued a terrible scurrying in that confined space. Neither Roy nor Charley could see their antagonists, or, indeed, for the matter of that, could even tell they were not fighting one another, and the affair might have ended most seriously for at least one, if not both, had it not been that their foes showed more anxiety to escape than aught else.

The ruffians were armed with knives, which they did not scruple to use; and, ere they all succeeded in getting out of the passage, our friends had received several very nasty, but not dangerous, slashes upon the wrists and shoulders.

The marauders were three in number, and, as soon as they got out into the open, they took to their heels up the alley, and quickly disappeared in its turnings.

Roy and Charley, though wounded, seemed at first inclined to give chase; but a low groan from the depths of the passage made them think of the man whose cry for help had drawn them to the spot.

They entered the passage again, and Charley struck a match, which, flaring up for a moment, showed them a huddled-up form upon the ground. Between them they tenderly lifted the stranger, and carried him towards the entrance to the alley, where a gas-lamp cast a feeble light around.

Here they laid him on the ground, and bent anxiously over him to learn if he was badly hurt. But they started back in horror, as they saw the awful state of the man. He was covered with blood, and his forehead had been laid open with a couple of terrific gashes.

It was clear he only had a few minutes to live, and Roy told Charley to run and fetch a policeman, while he remained by the poor fellow, and did the utmost to alleviate his sufferings.

Charley was off like a shot, and Roy, who had some rough-and-ready knowledge of surgery, was proceeding to try and staunch the blood that was still flowing freely from the man's wounds, when the latter opened his eyes and gasped.

"Who—who are you? Where are those villains who attacked me?"

"They have got away for the present. My friend and I came to your rescue; but do not talk, you will only exhaust the little strength you have left."

"What does it matter? I—I am done for. I feel it. The lubbers have settled me."

He clutched wildly at his coat, and then continued in the same jerky, gasping way:

"Ha! They did not get what they wanted, after all. The chart is safe. Friend, you came to my assistance, you say. Ha! Feel in my breast-pocket—find a pocket-book. I—I give it to you. Take it—take it, it is no longer any good to me—I am dying. Why don't you take it?"

To humour the poor fellow, Roy put his hand into the pocket, and took out the book.

"Keep it, sir; it will bring you a fortune. Tell no one, but follow the instructions in the book. It is a lost treasure. Ah, ah! lift me up! I—I cannot breathe, nor—nor see you now. Give—give me your hand. Remember, the chart is yours, and will bring you fortune. Ah!"

A long-drawn sigh, a brief convulsive shudder, and the man's head slipped from our hero's hold, and fell back upon the ground. He was dead!

As Roy placed his hand over the region of the heart, to make sure that the vital spark had indeed fled, there came the sound of approaching footsteps, and quite involuntarily he thrust the book the dead man had given him into his pocket. A minute later, he was joined by Charley Siddell and a constable.

The latter, after a brief examination of the murdered man, summoned a couple of his comrades, and then took down in his note-book all that the two friends could tell of the terrible affair.

When the ambulance arrived, Roy and Charley accompanied

it to the police-station, and there they both recapitulated their statements to the inspector in charge. The dead man's pockets were searched, and, from letters and documents upon him, his identity was quickly established.

His name was Thomas Marks, and he was the captain of an American barque, lying in a London dock. A messenger was instantly despatched to the ship, and returned with the mate, who readily identified the body as that of his superior.

Then, as nothing else could very well be done that night, Roy and Charley left the station, and proceeded home. It was not until he had parted from his chum that Roy suddenly bethought himself of the pocket-book the murdered man had given him.

He came to an abrupt halt. He had forgotten all about it at the police-station, and even the examination of the dead man's letters had not made him think of it.

What must he do? Was he bound to hand over the book?

Its owner had given it to him, and told him to keep it. He could, therefore, be doing no harm in retaining it.

But suppose it was found in his possession, who would for a moment believe that the dead man had given it to him? The natural inference would be that he had stolen it from the corpse before the policeman came up.

Roy might well halt when such thoughts as these assailed him; but, reflecting that it was too late then to go back to the police-station and report the circumstance, he determined to wait until morning, when he would take Charley into his confidence, and ask the latter's advice on the matter.

CHAPTER II.

THE MYSTERIOUS POCKET-BOOK — WHAT IT CONTAINED—THE STORY OF THE SUNKEN GALLEON—THE CHUMS DECIDE TO GO IN SEARCH OF THE TREASURE.

"Well, as he gave you the pocket-book, and told you to keep it, I don't see that you are in any way bound to hand it over to the police, especially as his identity has already been fully established," said Charley Siddell on the following day, when Roy called upon him and explained about the murdered seaman's strange bequest. "But what does that book contain—notes? I suppose you have gone through it?"

"Yes; the moment I got it last night, or, rather, this morning, I examined it. It contained two £5 notes and a chart of a small island among the Lesser Antilles. See, here is the pocket-book; but just a moment, until I read you these extracts from it."

The two young men were seated in Charley's room, for Roy had lost no time in calling upon his friend, as he had decided to do on the previous night.

Opening the pocket-book, our hero glanced his eye hastily over several of the pages, and at last, pausing at one, read as follows:

"In October of this year I was wrecked off the island of San Martos, in the Lesser Antilles. Four others besides myself were all of the crew that got ashore. One of these was a fellow-countryman, a seaman named Holt; the others were natives of Caracas. Holt and I left the others, and wandered along the shore.

"On the south-east extremity of the island we found several pieces of wreckage, upon which was still traceable some sort of carving and ornamentation. Our curiosity aroused, we searched further, and alighted upon a small iron-bound box, which, on bursting open with a stone, we found to contain a bundle of documents written in Spanish. The papers were perfectly legible, the stout sides of the box having protected them from the water. I knew Spanish, and made out the papers to be those of a galleon, the 'Santa Virgen,' bound from Carthagena, in South America, to Cadiz with four thousand bars of silver.

"It was evident the galleon had foundered off the island, and its loss remained a mystery through all those years. Holt and I talked the matter over, and were both of the opinion that the treasure the Spaniard had carried must still be lying at the bottom of the sea off this particular part of the coast.

"We decided to say nothing about our find to the three Venezuelans; but as soon as we got off the island, and back to civilisation, we would charter a vessel between us, obtain the services of a couple of expert divers, and have a try for the treasure, which we felt sure lay at the bottom of the sea somewhere in the vicinity. I therefore secreted the papers upon me, and we returned to our shipwrecked companions.

"A few days later we signalled a passing ship, and were taken aboard. Holt and I, on our voyage to London, whither the ship was bound, drew up a chart of the island, and had many consultations as to how we were to get the money together necessary to charter a boat. I fancy one or other of the Venezuelans must have overheard our conversation on one occasion at least, for before we reached England Holt was

lost overboard, and I have good reason to think they had a hand in his death.

"Since my arrival in England I have been trying to collect funds enough to fit out a vessel, with a view to searching for the treasure; but will have to make a couple more voyages before I am in a position to. I can get no one to join me in my enterprise, as all I have approached scout my story, and ridicule the idea that the galleon could have held together all these years, and the bullion not be buried fathoms deep in the sand at the bottom of the ocean.

"I write this statement because I find I am going in peril of my life from the three Venezuelans, who have already made several attempts to waylay and rob me of the chart, for, though they know of the treasure's existence, they have not the slightest idea of its whereabouts—whether it is buried ashore or lies at the bottom of the sea—and the island is several leagues in length.

"I am determined they shall not get the treasure if I can prevent it—at any rate, while I live. When I am gone I do not care who finds it."

Roy Lyster ceased reading, and looked at Charley, who was the picture of rapt attention.

"There the writing ends," said the former. "What do you think of it all?"

"Well, I see no reason to believe otherwise than that the story of the treasure is genuine enough. And the circumstances of the man's death bear out, in part at least, what he has written there. He speaks of three Venezuelans continually attempting his life. The ruffians who murdered him were certainly three in number, and dropped Spanish oaths when we attacked them."

"Then you believe this treasure really exists?"

"I do. But, of course, there is no telling that it may not be buried, as the dead man's scoffers said, beyond all possibility of reach in the sand at the bottom of the sea. Yet, the fact that the galleon's strong-box was washed ashore would lead me to think that the ship has held well together, despite the lapse of time, and that the wealth is still waiting for some lucky individual. But let me see the chart."

Roy took from a compartment in the book a folded piece of cartridge-paper, which he spread out upon the table in front of his friend. There was a rude sketch upon it of an island, with the words "rocks," "shoals," and "good landing-place," in crabbéd handwriting on it in various places. At the south-east corner of the island was a cross in red ink, and below the words: "Deep water. Likely place for the galleon."

Charley Siddell examined the chart attentively, and then passed it back to Roy, observing:

"Look here, old chap! that treasure means a fortune for whoever finds it. Your exchequer is not in the most prosperous condition; you want to retrieve the fallen fortunes of your house, and to win the girl of your heart. Why not try for the treasure?"

"I thought of that myself last night, but—"

"Why should there be any buts? Listen! I have an idea. I will join you in the search for this treasure, and, even if the whole thing proves a myth, or the treasure be lost beyond recovery, we will, at any rate, have had plenty of excitement and adventure, for I propose we be our own divers, and explore the bottom of the sea all round the island."

"But what about the ship to take us out there?"

"I have thought of that, too. You remember Harry Wentworth. Well, he has lately bought a handsome yacht, and wrote me only the other day asking me to take a trip with him to China. He is just the man for our purpose. I am sure he does not care to what quarter of the globe he goes, and I know well enough he would willingly place the services of his ship and crew at our disposal. If you wish it, I will write to him to-night. He is fitting out his yacht at Liverpool."

"I do believe you are more eager to find this treasure than I am, Charley."

"I am indeed. Not that I particularly want the money; but I know that the search for it must be accompanied by plenty of adventure, and I long for something like that to vary this monotonous life. That is why I would have joined you in your scheme of emigrating to South America."

"That scheme I have abandoned for the present, for, to be candid, I really do think there is something in this dead man's legacy, and am anxious to try and find the treasure. Four thousand bars of silver are worth trying for, especially considering the low state of my exchequer."

"Hurrah!" cried the delighted Charley. "Then I will write to Harry Wentworth this very night."

"But, say, Charley, are you sure we are not committing a breach of the law in not handing over the pocket-book and its contents to the police?"

"Legally, I think we are; but then we have every real right to retain it. Its owner gave it to you, and if we were to hand it over the sharks of lawyers would soon bell its contents everywhere, and we would have hundreds of expeditions fitted

out to search for the treasure. No good purpose would be served by giving up the pocket-book, beyond it might put the police on the track of the murderers, and that we can do just as well by word of mouth."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, by informing the police that, so far as we could judge in the darkness and the expressions let drop by the assassins, they appeared to be South Americans. Leave the rest to the detectives, who, with that clue to work upon, ought to be able to bring the ruffians to justice."

CHAPTER III.

HARRY WENTWORTH—ABOARD THE YACHT—MARSDEN, THE MATE, IMPRESSES ROY UNFAVOURABLY—THE THREE DAGOES—EXPLORING THE ISLAND—ALARMING SOUNDS—MUTINY!

Even with the clue afforded them by the pretty broad hint given by Roy and Charley as to the nationality of the assassins, the police could not get upon the right track.

The decks and haunts of foreign seamen were visited by detectives, and the crew of the murdered man's own vessel was cross-examined again and again, but to no purpose. It looked as if the crime, foul as it was, must go unpunished.

The police attributed the motive to robbery, and it was more than likely that the ruffians, baffled in the real object of their attack upon the murdered man, had contented themselves with his purse.

Charley Siddell had written to Harry Wentworth, and had received a reply from the latter, saying that he would be only too happy to place his yacht at their disposal, and to join in the search for the treasure.

He asked the friends to make their preparations for starting on the enterprise with all possible speed, and to come up to Liverpool, as his vessel was ready to put to sea.

Roy and Charley lost no time, therefore, in packing up and taking farewell of their beloved ones. To prevent the latter being at all solicitous about them while away on the expedition, as they would assuredly have been had they known its real object, both young fellows represented that they were merely accepting Wentworth's invitation to accompany him in a voyage to South America.

They reached Liverpool, and met Harry Wentworth, as arranged, at the Adelphi Hotel, in Lime Street, where Charley and Roy took the young yachtsman fully into their confidence, and showed him the chart and the pocket-book.

Harry, too, was convinced there was something in the story, and they sat for long discussing matters regarding the appliances they would require, such as divers' suits, pumps, &c.

Then all three left the hotel, and took a hansom cab to the dock in which the yacht lay. She was beautifully modelled, with long, tapering spars and clean cutwater, from which it was evident she had been built for speed.

Harry was naturally very proud of her, and he might well be, for the "Free Lance," as she was called, was one of the fastest schooner-yachts afloat.

As they stepped aboard, a tall, spare, Yankee-looking man, dressed as a mate, touched his cap to Harry, and said:

"I've to report the desertion of three of the men, sir. They came aboard drunk, and gave insolence when I spoke to them. Afterwards I found they had taken their belongings with them and cleared, sir. However, I knew of three chaps who would be only too glad to be given berths aboard this yacht, and I made so bold, sir, knowing you were in a hurry to sail, and did not want to lose time, to as good as take them on."

"You did quite right, Marsden, I know well you are a judge of a good seaman when you see one, and I can rest assured they are all right, I suppose."

"Oh, yes, sir," replied the mate, with a sudden gleam of triumph in his eyes, which escaped his young captain, but not Roy Lyster, who had somehow felt an instinctive repugnance towards the man at first sight.

"There is something fishy about that fellow, or I am a Dutchman!" he muttered to himself, as he followed Harry down the companion to his cabin; and so strong a hold did this conviction take of him, that he asked the owner of the yacht a few indirect questions relative to the mate.

"Marsden, is it, you mean? Oh, he has only been with me one voyage, so I don't know much about him. He is a quiet, surly sort of fellow, but an excellent seaman, or he would not be mate of the 'Free Lance.' He is a little too free at times with the men, I think, and doesn't keep up the dignity of his rank; but still, perhaps, that is pardonable to a great extent."

The topic changed to something else, and Roy forgot about the mate.

The "Free Lance" started upon her voyage, and reached the Caribbean Sea in due course without anything of note occurring on board. Harry Wentworth proved himself an able

commander, and they had favourable breezes almost the whole way, so that they made the run in capital time.

The three seamen Marsden, the mate, had taken on in Liverpool, however, gave the leaders of the expedition some concern almost before the yacht was well out into the Atlantic. They turned out to be Spaniards, and not Englishmen, as Harry had fully expected.

The latter spoke rather sharply to Marsden, when he learnt their nationality, and said he preferred to have British sailors aboard his vessel; but the mate replied that he had engaged them because they had offered themselves, and bore every appearance of being good seamen, and to this answer Harry had nothing to say, because the trio had certainly proved themselves willing and experienced hands.

Roy Lyster had entertained certain misgivings when he first saw the fellows, and a terrible suspicion formed itself in his mind; but he immediately laughed at himself for his folly in thinking such a coincidence could possibly occur.

"No, no, such a thing is utterly impossible in real life," he said to himself. "The bare idea! Why, I ought to sit down and write a romance like 'Treasure Island' at once!"

And he did not even hint what had passed through his mind to even his chum Charley, who, strange to say, had exactly

boat on the beach, the others struck into the woods, and before they had gone very far came upon a drove of wild hogs.

Roy and Charley, with the instinct of hunters, were eager to shoot a couple to carry back to the ship, for they had all brought their rifles with them, but Harry said:

"No; the shots would alarm our friends on the yacht. They would think we were signalling for help. However, you will soon have an opportunity of indulging your sporting propensities, for we will institute regular hunting parties to supply the ship's stores with fresh meat."

They wandered on through the luxuriant vegetation, and found the island teemed with game, though beasts of prey were conspicuous by their absence, and the serpents, several of which they encountered nearly twelve feet long, Harry assured his companions were not venomous.

They were thinking of returning to where they had left their boat, when they were both startled and amazed to hear the reports of several gunshots in rapid succession from the direction of the little bay in which the yacht was anchored.

"What on earth can be the matter?" queried Roy, as they all exchanged anxious and perplexed glances.

"There is something wrong, undoubtedly!" replied Harry Wentworth. "Come, let us get back to the bay as fast as we can."

Without another word, the little party ran at full speed in the direction of the shore, dashing through the tangled and prickly undergrowth, careless of the scratches and rents in their clothing they suffered from the brambles.

All felt that something fraught with great peril to the yacht or her crew must have occurred, or must be on the point of occurring, to induce the latter to fire off their muskets in such a manner; and, as they tore on in a reckless, headlong race, their alarm was increased tenfold by the renewed noise of firing from the bay.

After a few more dropping shots, though, the alarming sounds ceased, and soon after the explorers burst out of the woods on to the beach.

To the utter amazement of all, the boat with the two men left behind was gone, and Roy and Charley, whose thoughts for the past few minutes had been running on the possibility of mutiny, piracy, or something of the kind, turned anxiously to look for the yacht.

Much to their relief, they beheld her still riding peacefully at anchor in the bay; but there seemed to be an unusual commotion going on aboard her.

Harry Wentworth hailed the deck, and demanded what had happened; and, after a few minutes' wait, Marsden, the mate, showed himself, and shouted back:

"There has been an attempt at mutiny aboard, sir; but I succeeded in quelling it, though several lives have been lost. I'll send a boat ashore for you at once, sir."

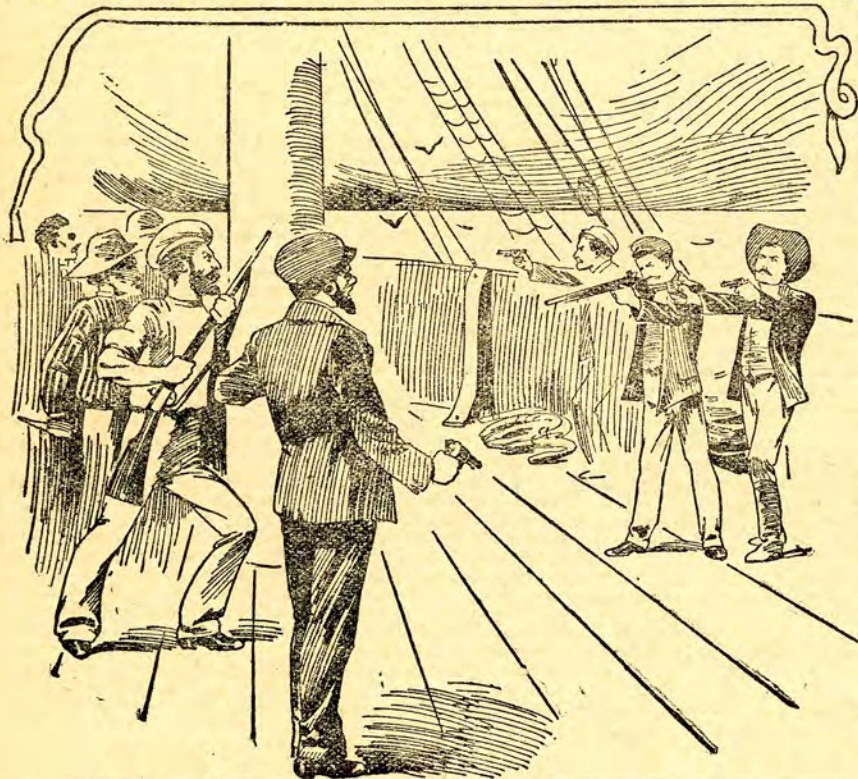
Harry turned to his companions with a white, anxious face, and said:

"A mutiny aboard my yacht! and I thought I had one of the most trustworthy of crews. I suppose those confounded Spanish sailors were at the bottom of it?"

"Ay, sir," answered one of the two seamen, a fine strapping specimen of a young British tar. "I've long suspected they were up to no good; but I didn't care to say so afore, sir, as they seemed to be very friendly with Mr. Marsden, and, 'sides, it weren't my place to speak."

"I suppose it was the story of the treasure excited their cupidity," put in Roy Lyster. "They thought to run off with the yacht, and find it for themselves. But that they could not do without the chart, which is safe here in my breast-pocket. Do you know I have had haunting suspicions lately that those three Spaniards are the murderers of the seaman, Marks; that they either suspected, or in some way found out I had the chart they were after, and, guessing the object of the expedition, contrived to ship aboard."

"What a coincidence!" cried Charley. "Why, I have had exactly the same thoughts about the fellows, but put them from me as too improbable. Ah, they are proceeding to lower a boat. We will soon get at the bottom of the mystery now."



"Stand where you are, and don't attempt to move, one of you!" thundered Harry, covering the mate.

the same dark doubts of the foreign sailors, and, in like manner only laughed at himself for them.

The day before they expected to come in sight of the island of San Martos, Harry called the crew aft, and explained to them the object of the voyage, promising them all a fair share of the treasure if it was to be found.

The men gave three ringing cheers at this announcement, but Roy and Charley both noticed that the news did not seem to come very much as a surprise to Marsden, the mate, or to the three Spanish sailors.

However, both were inclined to attribute the foreigners' lack of interest to their sulky and reserved dispositions.

About noon on the following day they reached the island, and, following the chart of the dead sea-captain, Marks, they ran into a small, natural harbour, and anchored off a shelving beach of yellow sand.

Viewed from the deck of the "Free Lance," the interior of the island appeared to be well wooded, and Roy and Charley were all eagerness to explore it, even forgetting for a time the treasure they had come to seek in the novelty and charm of landing.

A boat was lowered, and Harry, Roy, and Charley, with four sailors, rowed ashore. Leaving a couple of men with the

The boat was soon pulling towards the shore, and when it came nearer, the five men were almost thunderstruck to recognise one of the Spanish sailors among the oarsmen.

"It seems we have misjudged one of the Spaniards, at any rate," said Roy, who now felt sorry for his rather sweeping doubts of the trio of foreigners.

Harry Wentworth, however, said nothing, but stood with stern, set face watching the boat and its occupants as it approached.

At length it grounded upon the beach, and the five men sprang into it, and took their seats. Then, as the oarsmen pushed off again, Harry asked:

"How did the mutiny arise, men, and who were concerned in it?"

The two English sailors, who, with the Spaniard, formed the crew of the boat, at once broke out simultaneously with:

"It was Will Dobbs and Jack Durrant and Bob Hillard, sir. They was seen coming out of your cabin, sir, with rifles in their hands, and they immediately opens fire, and shoots McIntyre and Roberts dead. The rest of us ran below and told Mr. Marsden, who got out his pistols and went on deck. The mutineers fired at him, but fortunately missed, and he, returning their fire, shot two of 'em dead. Then the third man jumped overboard, and tried to escape to the shore; but Mr. Marsden shot him through the head."

"Good heavens! Dobbs, Durrant, and Hillard, you say? Why, those men have been with me from the first, and I could have staked my life on their fidelity and trustworthiness. And they killed McIntyre and Roberts? Why, I thought Hillard and McIntyre were the best of friends!"

"Mebbe so, sir; any'ow those three tried to seize the ship, and would have succeeded, hadn't it been for Mr. Marsden."

CHAPTER IV.

ROY HAS SUSPICIONS—MARSDEN SURPRISED—TERRIBLE DOUBTS—"THE REAL MUTINEERS ARE THE MEN ABOARD NOW!"—TAKING PRECAUTIONS—THE "FREE LANCE" ANCHORED OFF THE SOUTH-EAST END OF THE ISLAND—ARE LEARY AND MACDOWELL TO BE TRUSTED?

Roy Lyster noticed while the two seamen were speaking that they both seemed somewhat confused, and never once raised their eyes from their oars. The tale they told also seemed as though it had been learnt by rote, and our hero, scrutinising their countenances more closely, felt certain that for some reason or another they were lying.

To what end? he asked himself in some perplexity, and he felt inclined to taboo the notion. However, as he realised that it was seldom his instinct played him false, he determined to keep his eyes about him, and wait developments.

The boat soon gained the yacht's side, and, as Harry was about to scramble up the rope that dangled over the bulwarks, Roy rapidly whispered in his ear:

"Be careful, Harry, I scent treachery."

The other started, and, pausing with one hand on the rope, turned and looked our hero full in the face.

What he read there surprised him not a little. His face paled slightly; then his eyes flashed, and, seizing the rope, he leapt upon the deck almost immediately. Roy was close behind him, and Charley was a good third.

Marsden and five seamen were waiting to receive them, and all had firearms of some kind in their hands; but the moment Harry Wentworth's feet had touched the deck, he had thrown his own rifle to his shoulder, and covered the mate.

Roy and Charley, the latter though with some surprise, at once took the cue from the young commander, and likewise pointed their pieces at two others of the crew.

"Stand where you are, and don't attempt to move, one of you!" thundered Harry. "What are you all doing with arms in your hands? I understood that you quelled the mutiny with your pistols, Marsden, without any need of help from the others?"

"So I did, captain; but, of course, the men all ran for arms the moment the mutineers started shooting. But why do you act like this, sir? You seem to doubt us, too."

"Throw down your arms, then, all of you! What guarantee have we that you yourselves have not seized the ship?"

"You are unjust, sir!" replied the mate, with a great assumption of offended dignity. "Had it not been for myself and these honest fellows, Dobbs and his brother-mutineers would have run off with the yacht, gone in search of the treasure on their own account, and left you, sir, and your friends to live the life of Robinson Crusoe."

With that the speaker flung down his arms on the deck with a loud clatter, and Roy could have sworn he saw a meaning glance pass between him and his shipmates, who at once followed his example.

"Now," said Harry, "all of you, with the exception of Marsden, withdraw to the forepeak. Marsden, kindly pick up all the arms, and bring them to my cabin."

There was a moment's hesitation and evident wavering on the part of the sailors, and significant looks were exchanged, which convinced Harry and Roy that their doubts were well-founded.

However, without a word, Marsden stooped and proceeded to gather up all the arms lying upon the deck, while the seamen, with black looks, and muttering to themselves, sauntered off in a group towards the forepart of the vessel.

"Come into my cabin," said the owner of the "Free Lance" to Roy and Charley.

And the three followed the mate, carrying the arms in his hands, down the companion.

"Put them in that corner," Harry said, addressing Marsden. And when the latter had deposited all the arms in a heap on the floor he went on: "Now, Marsden, you will pardon me for my conduct, and the seeming little trust I repose in you, after the way you have saved my ship. But, my dear fellow, I am sure you will excuse me under the circumstances. Here I return to my yacht to find that a mutiny has taken place during my absence, and, of course, I had to make sure that I was not walking into a trap. For all I knew, you and the others might have been the mutineers, have seized the ship, and planned to shoot us down as we came aboard. You see the force of my reasoning, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, sir, I quite understand! And I can well excuse your doubts now you have explained matters; but it did hurt my pride a bit, sir, the attitude you took up against me, after I had done my best for you and the yacht."

"Forgive me, Marsden, and think no more about it. Pour yourself out a glass of sherry, and then go forward and kindly explain matters also to the crew. They must not think I am ungenerous, and they won't find me so, you can tell them."

Marsden took the wine, and, his wounded pride assuaged apparently by Harry's explanation, he left the cabin.

After he had gone Roy Lyster went to the door, and, opening it, looked out into the passage at the foot of the companion-way, and then left the door of the cabin wide open.

"That will be the best way to guard against eavesdroppers, I think," he remarked, as he returned to the table. "If we shut the door someone might steal down the ladder and listen at the keyhole. They cannot do that with the door open."

"From all this I gather that you both suspect Marsden and the others of the crew of some underhand work," said Charley, who had been greatly surprised by the action of his two companions since their coming aboard. "But what underhand work can they be guilty of? Did they not quell the mutiny and save the yacht?"

"We have only their own word for that," replied Harry; "and the more I look at things I am inclined to view them with suspicion. For instance, the loyalty of the so-called mutineers, whom the mate shot, I could have staked my life upon. They and the other two that were killed have been longer with me than any of the others, and were the last men in the world I should have said to stir up mutiny against me. It strikes me very forcibly that"—and here he lowered his voice, and darted a sharp glance through the door into the passage beyond—"it strikes me very forcibly that not one of those three were mutineers, that the real mutineers are the men aboard now, and that the five dead men were either shot down in cold blood or lost their lives bravely fighting in defence of the ship."

"Gracious heavens!" gasped Charley, "do you really think so?"

"I do. And I must thank you, Roy, for opening my eyes to the whole thing. That whisper and look you gave me in the boat spoke volumes. Had you not thus warned and put me on my guard the lot of us might have been shot down as we mounted the deck. That, indeed, I am convinced was their full intention: but our prompt action disconcerted them, and placed them at a disadvantage. What first made you suspect treachery, Roy?"

"Well, the two sailors in the boat, when they were telling how the mutiny had broken out, appeared to me to be lying. Then, besides that, I did not like their looks at all; whereas the men they mentioned, Dobbs, Durrant, and Hillard, I remembered as three I had singled out as the brightest and best of the crew. The presence of the evil-looking Spaniards, too—fellows who bear the stamp of cut-throat and pirate on their faces, if ever men did—on the side of justice and right increased my suspicions; and, I must tell you, from the first moment I laid eyes on Silas Marsden I never liked the man."

At that moment Charley uttered a warning "Hist!" and, glancing quickly up, Roy and Harry were just in time to see a dark shadow thrown against the sunlit wall of the passage outside. Only for a moment, however; the next it vanished.

"It was a good idea of yours to leave the door open," said Harry. "That was someone thinking to listen to our con-

versation; but when he saw the cabin-door stood open he knew he could not descend the companion without us seeing him."

"Well, what do you propose to do?" asked Roy, after a time. "I would suggest that we pretend to believe Marsden and his friends for the present, but that we take every care to guard against being surprised. You have all the arms here, have you not, Harry?"

"Yes, I think so. And if matters came to a push the three of us could easily defend this cabin against them all. I wonder what the mutineers themselves mean to do? If we had an idea we would know better how to act ourselves. However, in the absence of any certain knowledge on the subject, we must all three go well-armed, and contrive to be always close together and prepared for any emergency."

"I think those two men that were with us on the island can be relied upon," said Charley. "They seemed as much astonished as we were at the firing, and could easily have shot us down in the woods had they been so minded."

"Yes, Leary and MacDowell are all right. I fancy, and we must find an opportunity to warn them and get them to this end of the vessel."

The owner of the "Free Lance" rose as he spoke, and, with a significant look at the others, took up a brace of six-chambered revolvers and thrust them into his breast-pocket.

The others also equipped themselves from the store, and then the three mounted the companion to the deck.

As they stepped up they saw the mate in deep confab forward with several of the seamen, among whom were the three Spaniards.

"The deck, there!" said Harry. "Stand by to weigh anchor. I am going to run down to the south-east end of the island and commence the search for the treasure."

The men answered with a cheer, and quickly manned the capstan. Then, as they tramped round, pushing at the bars, one of their number tipped the staves of a "shanty," in a rousing voice, and the others all joined in the chorus in various voices, the whole blending in perfect harmony.

The words of the "shanty," or working-song, were mere twaddle, but the air was exceedingly taking. It ran something as follows:

"Oh, a little pig lay in a wisp of straw.

(Chorus) Aw! aw! Ally, gee-saw!

And a-lay, and a-lee, and a-lillee go-lay, go-lee.

(Chorus) Aw! aw! and that's the Galloway man!"

When the anchor was tripped the yacht shook out her snowy sails, and, wearing round, stood out of the little cove.

Then her young commander headed her down the coast, and soon she gained the south-eastern extremity, where the dead sea-captain Marks had thought it likely the galleon had been sunk.

As no one aboard had had any practical experience in diver's work, Roy Lyster and Charley Siddell had elected to be the ones to descend into the ocean depths in search of the treasure-ship. They both knew everything theoretically about diving, as they had taken care to read up all they could about the subject during the voyage out from books they had procured before embarking.

Harry, too, had read up all about the working of the air-pumps and other appliances; and so, had everything been all right on board, and there were no fear of treachery among the crew, Roy and Charley would have prepared for their first attempt at diving with light hearts.

As it was, they and Harry had a few minutes' private conversation beforehand in the latter's cabin, when it was decided that MacDowell and Leary, the two sailors who had been with them on the island at the time of the mutiny, should be got at in some way, their loyalty tested, and, if found honest and true, secretly armed, and warned to be on their guard.

Some ingenuity was necessary to communicate with the men without arousing the suspicions of Marsden and his followers; but, by ordering Leary to the wheel and the others aloft, to stand a little closer inshore, Wentworth contrived to get a few words with the Irish seaman.

Harry found the man honest enough, and, having warned him, desired him to speak to MacDowell. He suggested, when an opportunity occurred, that both should come aft, when he would arm them.

"We may be mistaken, you know, Leary," said Harry in conclusion. "We may be misjudging Marsden and the others. But if we are, well and good, there is no real harm done; and it is best to be on the safe side."

"Cert'ly, sorr! An', be jabbers, now I come to think of it, I believe yez're roight in doubtin' 'em, sorr, for I overheard Miguel Nunez, one iv the Dagoes,* spakin' to another, and ez he: "Well, jist wait until they've found the treasure, and all the goold is safe aboard."

"Why did you not come to me before and tell me this, man?"

* The British sailor's generic term for all Spanish or South American seamen.—J. G. R.

"Because, sorr, to tell yez the thruth, they've already bin at me to join 'em, an' they threatened me loife if I didn't."

"And you would never have told me of this—you would have kept your mouth shut, and let us be shot down like sheep! You are as bad as any of the others."

"Oh, no, sir, I'm not; nor MacDowell, either. But we was afraid, and hadn't an opportunity, ayther, sorr."

"Can I rely upon your aid now?"

"Yez can, sorr—be the blessed saints in heaven, yez can! An' I'll answer for MacDowell as well, I will!"

"All right, I will trust you. Come aft when the diving-appliances are being brought out, and I will give you a brace of pistols each."

CHAPTER V.

ROY AND CHARLEY TAKE UPON THEMSELVES THE DUTIES OF DIVERS—THEY FIND THE LOST GALLEON—BATTLE WITH A SHARK—INSIDE THE WRECK—A TERRIFYING SPECTACLE—DISCOVER THE TREASURE—"WE ARE ALL RICH MEN."

When the "Free Lance" was almost over the spot, as near as her captain could calculate, marked on the chart as the likely situation of the sunken galleon, she was hove-to, and Roy and Charley prepared for their descent.

The diving-apparatus was now got out, and during the slight confusion attendant on this and the fitting up of the air-pumps Harry Wentworth managed to convey the pistols to Leary and MacDowell, without Marsden or any of their ship-mates being any the wiser.

At last all the appliances were ready, and Roy and Charley put on their diving-dresses, Harry himself seeing that they were adjusted properly. Next the boots, with their leaden soles, were attached, the electric submarine-lamps fixed, and each furnished with a knife, an axe, and a crowbar.

Then the pair were lowered over the side of the yacht, and it was with a curious sensation, and not a little nervousness, that they felt themselves sinking through the water.

But as they found they could breathe with perfect freedom their self-confidence returned, and almost before they believed they were any great depth they touched the bottom of the sea.

They now turned eagerly to look for one another, but for several seconds they were unable to see anything in the semigloom, though their eyes soon became accustomed to this.

They shook hands ecstatically, and then turned to search for the treasure-ship.

But though the electric-lamps lit up the water for some yards all round, they were at first doomed to disappointment; they could see no sign of any wreck.

The ocean bed was here of solid rock, and they could walk about with perfect ease, though their movements were naturally slow on account of the pressure of the water.

They soon found themselves pestered with all kinds of fish, big and small, which, attracted by the electric-lamps, simply swarmed around them. Hideous-looking specimens of the finny tribe peeped into the eye-windows of their helmets, blinking and seemingly grinning at the wearers. Crabs and lobsters clawed viciously at their boots and dresses, and occasionally the small fry would nibble and snap at their fingers as though those members were bait, sometimes nipping pretty hard indeed, and causing our friends to utter a sharp ejaculation in the depths of their weird helmets.

Moving slowly over the bed of the ocean, they came to where a jagged pile of rocks, shooting suddenly up from the comparatively level plain around, formed a sunken and treacherous reef—a reef which the friends suddenly realised with a thrill of horror the yacht was closer to than perfect safety advised.

The reef was scamed and cleft by numerous cavernous recesses; and, to the inexpressible delight of both men, they discovered, tightly wedged in one of these, the hull of a large ship.

Beyond the possibility of doubt, she was the galleon they were in search of, for the high, castlelike poop, covered, though it was with weeds, barnacles, and shell-fish, bore a sufficiently striking resemblance to those they had seen in pictures of ancient Spanish ships.

She stood upright as in a graving-dock, with the sharp, jagged edges of the submarine ravine, into which she had been bodily drawn, or had possibly slipped down, piercing her sides here and there, and fixing her immovably.

It was astonishing how well her timbers had held together through the centuries, which must have rolled by, ere she found her last resting-place there. But the rocky walls of the chasm in which she lay would save her in great measure from the buffeting of the storm-lashed waves, and, as Roy surmised, as he gazed upon her extraordinary situation, would actually prevent the very plankton from breaking up.

However, our readers must not think that the vessel was entire, or by any means perfectly preserved. She was simply

the skeleton of a ship; but still the fact that as much as a single plank was left of her was remarkable, considering the time she had been sunk.

Roy and Charley approached the wreck, and were about to clamber up the water-logged and rotting bulwarks, when suddenly there came a quick rush through the water, and a large fish, which both at once recognised, with a thrill, as a shark, darted past them. The next moment it turned, and came at them again, turning on its side as it did so, and opening its capacious mouth, so as to show the glistening rows of teeth.

Roy tore the axe from his belt, and, as the monster was almost upon them, he struck it a blow on the head with all the strength his arm was capable of. But the stroke only caught the shark glancingly, and, though it was sufficient to change the monster's course, it did not inflict a mortal wound.

Again it turned, and rushed upon them with gaping jaws. Roy and Charley both struck at it; but the weight of water in great measure broke the force of their blows, and this time they were unable to stay its career. It caught Charley full in the chest, and knocked him head over heels, fortunately though without catching him in its great mouth.

Roy realised his friend's deadly peril, and, as the shark swept by, turning completely over on its back to bite, he brought the axe down upon the white, exposed throat. The keen blade sank deep into the soft flesh, and a torrent of blood followed, dying the water around a horrid hue.

Lashing around with its powerful tail, the infuriated fish made another desperate effort to seize one or other of its human foes. But it was wounded to the death, and another blow from Roy, that almost severed the tail, finished its life, and it floated up to the surface of the water—dead.

Roy breathed more freely as he saw he had disposed of their terrible foe, and he turned to assist his chum to rise; when he was horror-stricken to behold several more of the monsters hovering near.

The divers were literally surrounded by sharks.

None others of the huge fish, however, seemed to take any notice of the strange-looking intruders in their domains, or appeared to have noticed the fate of their fellow, so Roy moved slowly and cautiously towards Charley, who had now risen to his feet, and was standing motionless though upright. Doubtless, he was petrified with horror at sight of so many voracious enemies round them.

Roy's movements, however, slow and cautious though they were, had the effect of rousing one of the monsters' curiosity concerning the visitors to their realms, and it came sweeping down upon Roy.

But as it drew within arm's-reach, though it made no attempt to turn on its back, he struck at it fiercely with his axe. Fortunately, perhaps, he missed his aim; the monster shied aside, and, palpably scared by his action, it wheeled round, and made off in the opposite direction, and, to the intense relief of our friends, the entire shoal of sharks followed it in its retreat.

Almost immediately after, the divers, as they stood together on the ocean-bed to gain breath after their exertions, felt several sharp tugs at their communication-cords.

Their friends above had seen the dead body of the shark, and were naturally filled with fears for their safety.

Roy and Charley both signalled that they were all right, and then turned once more to mount to the galleon's deck. They gained it without much difficulty, and found it encrusted with shell-fish, and covered with weeds and fallen rocks.

Picking their way carefully over these impediments, they at last reached the main hatchway, and descended the rotting and crumbling companion.

They ranged through the eerie cabins, taking every precaution as they went not to foul their air-tubes, and ready at any moment for an attack from any other horrible monster of the deep that might have made the inside of the wreck its home. However, they met with no foe; but came upon several spectacles, uncanny enough to drive weaker-minded men crazy.

There were gruesome skeletons everywhere, some still wear-old-fashioned armour, which was now dulled and rusted by the action of the water.

In one cabin, evidently that of the captain, several weird figures were seated at a table, all in complete mail, though with the visors of their helmets down, and from between the bars shone forth a strange, unearthly light.

Roy and Charley recoiled in horror on beholding this strange and certainly terrifying spectacle. Then, like a flash, the former remembered that almost all the lower forms of life in the depths of the sea possess the power of emitting light from their bodies.

With an effort of the will, he threw off the feeling of awe and almost panic, which had fastened upon him, and, approaching the skeletons at the table, perceived that the helmeted-skulls were full of tiny animalcules, none of them so large as the head of a pin, but all giving forth a remarkably brilliant light. He guessed that they must be specimens of

the noctiluca scintillans, and he beckoned to Charley, who, still unable to understand the weird circumstance, seemed inclined to fly from the spot.

With slow and hesitating steps, Charley drew nearer; but when he, too, beheld the floating sparks of fire, as the tiny creatures looked like, his dread of the supernatural vanished, and his wonder was aroused.

Leaving the captain's cabin, with its gruesome occupants, the pair now proceeded towards the stern of the galleon, where they eventually came upon a hold, the floor of which was littered with a number of huge iron-bound chests.

Both divers uttered simultaneous cries of expectation in the cavernous depths of their helmets; and, rushing forward, with eager blows from their axes, they burst open the lid of one of the chests.

It was even as they had hoped. The chest was full of bars of silver!

In ecstatic delight that at last the fortune for which they had so long striven was in their grasp, Roy and Charley decided by pantomime to leave the chests where they were for the present, and, as they had already been long enough under the water for a first essay, to return to the surface. They, therefore, mounted to the deck again, and signalled to be drawn up.

In a few moments they were on the deck of the "Free Lance" once more, their helmets were hastily removed, and they were able to breathe the fresh air of heaven.

They were at once besieged with a host of questions by the eager crew.

"We are all rich men!" cried Roy, when he could get his breath. "We have found the treasure, and, as soon as we have rested a while we will descend and bring it up."

"Hurrah! hurrah!" rang out the jubilant shout from every seaman's throat, and the cries were taken up, and re-echoed by the cliffs and woods ashore.

CHAPTER VI.

RECOVERING THE BULLION—SOMETHING WRONG ABOARD THE YACHT—ROY AND CHARLEY'S AIR-SUPPLY STOPPED—SUFFOCATING—THEY ARE DRAWN TO THE SURFACE TO FIND THEMSELVES PRISONERS—A TERRIBLE MUTINY—AT DEATH'S DOOR—THE HURRICANE—THE ENGLISH MUTINEER IS DESERTED BY HIS VILE ASSOCIATES.

Some time later, when Roy and Charley had rested and refreshed themselves, they prepared to make another descent, and tackle was rigged out over the side of the yacht for the purpose of raising the heavy treasure-chests.

The two chums donned their diving-dresses, and were lowered once more into the ocean depths.

Climbing on to the deck of the galleon, they sought the hold where the treasure was, and first proceeded to clear the companion-way with their axes, so as to permit of the bullion being hauled to the surface more easily. Then they attached one of the chests to the ropes, and gave the signal to the men above.

The chest was immediately drawn up to the surface, and in a few minutes the tackle came down again, when they attached another of the boxes. In this way they sent up all the treasure within the wreck, and then signalled to be drawn up themselves; but there was no answer.

Again they gave the signal; but again there was no attempt to pull them up.

The same awful, paralysing thought suggested itself to both men.

Marsden and his followers, now that all the treasure was safe aboard, had again mutinied, and, for all the pair at the bottom of the sea knew, a desperate conflict might even then be going on board the yacht.

And they were to be left on the deck of the sunken galleon to die miserably of want of air, unless their comrade, Harry Wentworth, and those who might be loyal enough to stand by him, triumphed. And could there be much hope that the result would prove so happy, seeing how greatly outnumbered their friends must be?

Horror of horrors! the air in their helmets was already becoming exhausted, and they were beginning to experience the sensations of semi-suffocation.

The men above had ceased to pump air to them, and death stared them in the face—and such a death!

Yet those two brave men did not despair. They hoped against hope that Harry Wentworth would overcome the mutineers in time, and save them.

They looked at one another through the glass of their helmets, and, as though each felt his last hour had come, they clasped hands fervently, and stood thus, waiting.

The seconds slowly passed, every one seeming an hour almost

to the hapless men, who were now both gasping, struggling madly in their iron casques for breath.

Charley Siddell's head swam, his limbs collapsed under him, and he fell to the deck unconscious almost at the same moment as Roy felt himself dragged up with furious haste through the water.

Another few moments, and the two men were lying upon the deck with their helmets off, gasping in new life and vigour.

Roy Lyster was the first to recover his senses sufficiently to look about him and grasp the situation.

He saw the gloating, demoniacal faces of Silas Marsden, Miguel Nunez, and others of the crew looking down upon them, while around lay several men dead or badly wounded, amongst whom was the bleeding and unconscious form of the owner of the yacht.

It was as Roy and Charley surmised. The mutineers had taken advantage of their being below the surface to make another attempt to seize the "Free Lance," with all the treasure aboard.

There had clearly been a most desperate fight, for there were splashes of blood on the deck everywhere. Four out of the eight mutineers had been killed outright, while MacDowell and Leary, who had loyally stood by Harry, as they had promised, were both so seriously wounded that they breathed their last only a few minutes after.

Harry himself, who had used his revolver to good effect, had at last been overpowered by numbers and beaten to the deck under a shower of blows.

Then the mutineers, masters of the yacht, had laughingly hauled up Roy and Charley, fully expecting them to be dead as doornails for want of air.

The ruffians were greatly astonished, and not a little chagrined, to find the pair still breathing, though they were certainly almost at the last gasp; and Miguel Nunez and his surviving fellow-foreigner were for throwing them, still in their heavily weighted diving-dresses, back into the sea, to sink like stones.

But the English mutineer was not anxious to have any more blood on his hands, and said sulkily:

"No; let the beggars have a chance for life, I say. Set the three of them on the island—maroon them, in other words—and we can return to Europe in the yacht."

"Do you take us for blarneyed fools, Tate?" was the mate's fierce rejoinder. "This 'ere island is not a desolate one in the Pacific, cut of the track of merchant ships. Why, the moment we are out of sight they would hoist a flag to attract the attention of some passing vessel, and they would be back in Europe hard upon our heels."

"Well, mebbe; but I doesn't want no more lives lost. There's bin too much blood spilt already to my liking."

"Bah! you're getting squeamish, Tate. Think of all the treasure we have aboard, and only to be divided among four of us! I'll tell you what"—and he dropped his voice so that the three bound and helpless men could not hear his words—"we'll offer them their lives if they promise not to turn Queen's evidence upon us when we reach civilisation."

"Dios de mi alma! why should we?" demanded Nunez. "Why not pitch them to the sharks now, and have done with them?"

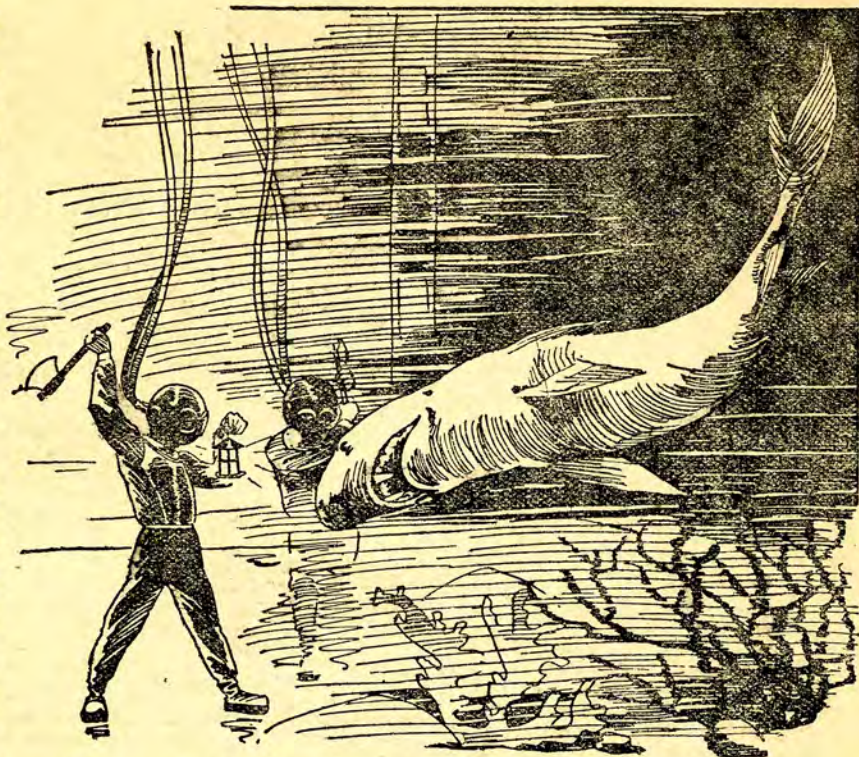
"Why, because we are short-handed as it is, owing to the deaths of our comrades, and without their help we cannot hope to navigate the yacht to port."

As Marsden spoke he gave the two Spaniards a meaning look, which both only too well comprehended, and, turning to the English mutineer, he went on:

"How will that arrangement suit you, Tate? We will swear them all three to eternal silence, and then there need be no more bloodletting."

"Yes, yes, that will be better!" replied the fellow. "They cannot blab then, for they will have put their own necks in the noose."

Marsden chuckled softly to himself, and, approaching our



Roy tore the axe from his belt, and, as the monster was almost upon him, struck it on the head.

three friends as they lay bound hand and foot, he made his proposal.

"Look here, Wentworth! we will grant you your lives and a share each in the treasure if you will swear most solemnly never to utter a single word about what has taken place. We want your assistance to work the yacht into some port, and we will share and share alike as true mates if you will agree to keep your mouths shut for ever. What do you say?"

"What do we say, you utter villain!" cried Harry, whom the mate's proposal seemed to lash into a perfect frenzy. "We say no, most decidedly. We will never join hand and glove with such bloodguilty wretches as you are. We prefer death a thousand times to such dishonour! And, let me tell you, if we live we will never rest satisfied till we have brought you to the fate you all so richly merit."

Marsden's face was the very incarnation of savage fury, and a look of diabolical hatred shone in his bloodshot eyes as he retorted:

"Very well, then, your fate be on your own heads. We would have spared your lives and shared the treasure with you. You see, Tate, they won't accept the only terms we can offer them with safety to ourselves, so you must admit the advisability of our cutting their throats where they lie."

The English mutineer remained silent for several minutes; then he said:

"Oh, well, I suppose we must kill them for our own safety's sake!"

The ruffianly mate grinned fiendishly, and, motioning to the two Spaniards, he drew his knife and approached Harry Wentworth, who, believing his last hour had come, breathed a prayer to that Almighty Being who watches over all our destinies.

Nunez and the second Spaniard, whose name was Soldan, also bared their gleaming blades and approached the other two captives with the intention of simultaneously cutting their throats—butchered them like sheep at a slaughter-house.

Miguel Nunez caught hold of Roy Lyster by the shoulder, and, as he prepared to give the fatal stroke, he hissed through his clenched teeth:

"Die, you Ingleeze dog! and take with you to the grave the knowledge that Soldan, myself, and our countryman whom your friend shot, are not Spaniards at all, but Venezuelans. We it was whom you surprised in that London alley. We settled Marks, and now we intend to settle you."

That moment would have been the last for each of our three friends—indeed, the points of the knives were within

NEXT WEEK, "THE FLYING WHEEL,"

an inch of their throats—had not a sudden shout of alarm from the English mutineer, Tate, startled the would-be assassins so much that the fatal blade fell from their nerveless hands and clattered upon the deck.

"A hurricane!" he shrieked. "We are lost—we are lost!"

The others leapt to their feet, and saw a great seething mass of foam racing towards them from seaward, while up from the horizon were rolling inky-black clouds, which were fast covering the erstwhile clear sky, and shutting out the light of the sun.

Hurricanes of great fury are very common in those latitudes, and arise almost without any preliminary warning; and the mutineers, in an agony of apprehension, rushed about the deck like madmen, striving to get the yacht's head round, and try and stand out from the leeshore.

Once caught in the grip of that fierce tempest, there could be no hope of saving the vessel. She would be inevitably dashed to pieces upon the rocks, and perhaps not one of those aboard her escape.

Marsden alone among the mutineers seemed to preserve his presence of mind. He seized an axe, and, with a single blow, severed the cable; then, springing to the helm, he swung it sharply round while thundering orders to the other panic-stricken wretches.

They tried to obey him, but their very eagerness defeated their object, and the hurricane was almost upon them before the yacht's head would pay off. Then she darted through the water as though realising her own peril and anxious to escape.

But she had not time to beat out to sea before the hurricane struck her with fearful force, and she careened over under the tremendous pressure until her topmasts almost touched the surface of the water.

Nunez and Soldan uttered shrieks of terror, and clung with might and main to the running-gear to prevent being tossed overboard. But, like the gallant little craft she was, the "Free Lance" righted herself with a shudder, and Marsden, who, after all, was not devoid of animal courage, laboured to put her about.

He shouted orders upon orders, he cursed and swore; but the howl of the tempest drowned his voice, and at that critical moment a monster of a wave struck the yacht a thundering blow, which made her quiver from stem to stern. Then immediately followed a sharp, cracking noise, and the wheel flew round with lightning-like speed, flinging the mate half across the deck.

The rudder had gone, and the "Free Lance" lay pitching and rolling, as helpless as a log, in the trough of the boiling sea.

"Santissima Virgen, we are doomed!" screamed the Venezuelan Nunez, as heavy seas now began to break over the vessel and sweep the deck from end to end.

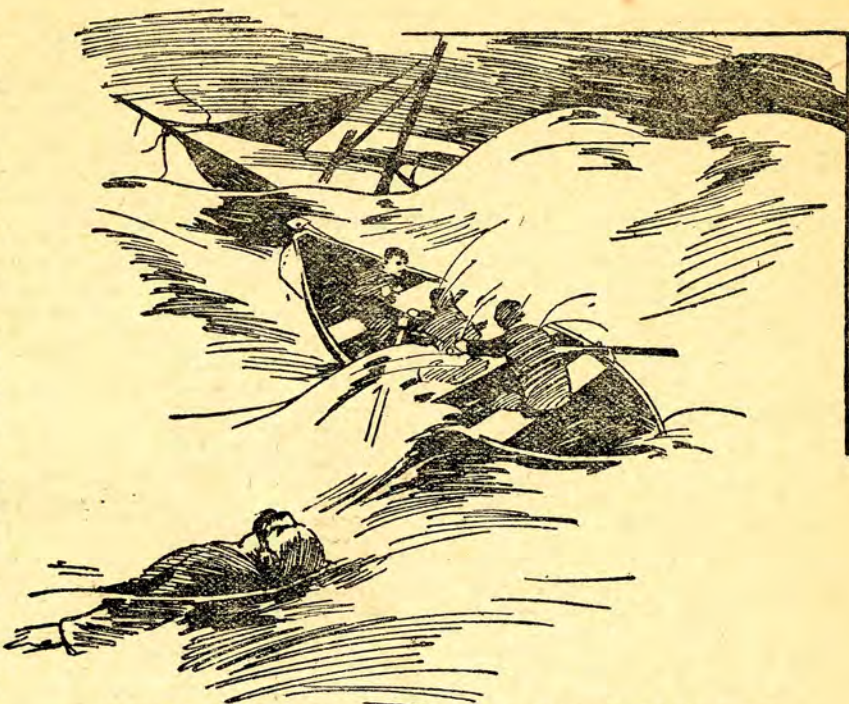
The yacht turned broadside on to the storm, and she drifted towards the rocks, with the waves beating in great claps upon her timbers, threatening every minute to stave them in.

The mutineers rushed to the lee-davits and attempted to lower a boat; but ere they could succeed in getting the tackle clear the yacht struck upon a reef, with a force that snapped off both her masts close to the deck, and sent them crashing overboard with all their topmasts.

Roy and Charley were still wearing their heavy diving-dresses, and their ankles and wrists were securely bound, as were also those of Harry Wentworth. They expected every moment to be swept away by the huge waves that washed the decks. But an all-wise Providence was watching over them, and, as though by a miracle, they escaped this miserable fate.

Meanwhile the four mutineers had launched the boat, and Marsden, Nunez, and Soldan, hastily leaping into it, pushed off before the Englishman Tate could follow their example.

In an instant several yards of boiling surf separated the boat from the wreck, and the distance was too great for the abandoned man to jump. He shouted to his whilom shipmates to return and take him off; but they paid no heed to his entreaties, and devoted all their energies to keeping the frail craft alive in that raging sea.



He was swept away in a moment beyond all hope of succour from his companions.

CHAPTER VII.

TATE LIBERATES OUR FRIENDS, AND THE FOUR GET OUT A BOAT—THE MUTINEER FALLS OVERBOARD AND IS DROWNED—ROY AND HIS COMPANIONS REACH THE SHORE—THEY VISIT THE WRECKED YACHT, AND, FINDING THE DIVING-APPARATUS UNINJURED, DETERMINE TO RECOVER THE TREASURE—CHARLEY IN THE CLUTCHES OF AN OCTOPUS—ROY'S HEROIC FIGHT WITH THE MONSTER.

Tate acted like a man deranged when he saw his former associates thus row away, leaving him to a miserable fate, and he ran about the deck wringing his hands and uttering piteous screams.

The yacht was fast going to pieces under the thunderous blows of the waves, and our three young heroes had meekly placed themselves in the hands of Death.

A horrible doom it seemed, to be thus drowned, with hands and feet bound, unable to make one effort even for life.

But that all-wise Providence which had guarded them so far was not to abandon them in this, their greatest hour of need.

The half-crazed mutineer suddenly bethought himself of the three helpless men—his own fellow-countrymen—whom he had already once so basely betrayed, and for the sake of wretches who could now abandon him to his fate.

He might yet save their lives and retrieve his former villainy. Four men might escape when one by himself had no chance.

As the thought suggested itself the seaman drew his sheath-knife, and, running towards where the trio lay, under the shelter of the deckhouse, he rapidly cut the cords which bound their limbs.

The young fellows scrambled to their feet, Roy and Charley, however, in their heavy dresses and weighted boots, finding it a considerable effort to do so.

"Quick!" cried the mutineer. "The wreck will hold together for a little longer, and there may be time to get out a boat."

Roy and Charley still retained their axes and knives, which their foes had not thought it worth while removing from their belts, and, with the aid of these implements, despite the dangerous rolling and rocking of the yacht upon the reef, a boat was at last cut free of the fouled tackle and launched.

It required some skilful manoeuvring to prevent the cockleshell of a craft being stove in against the yacht's side; but at

length they succeeded in getting it afloat, and, one after the other, Roy and his companions slid down ropes into it.

They were about to dip their oars, and leave the side of the doomed "Free Lance," when a larger wave than any that had yet struck her, came pouring right over her, deluging all four men, and almost swamping the boat.

As it was, the small craft heeled over, and one of her gun-wales went under water, when Tate, leaping to his feet in affright, lost his balance, and tumbled over the side. He was swept away in a moment beyond all hope of succour from his comrades, who saw him for a while bobbing up and down among the white-crested billows, his face ghastly with its wild, horrified look; then he disappeared, and they saw him no more.

The three chums were not yet out of danger. It seemed impossible that the boat could live in such a raging sea, and for long enough, she was tossed about like a plaything, the sport of the wind and waves.

But at last a towering wave caught her up on its crest, and, rushing her along at terrific speed, carried her safely over the reef. Beyond there was a heavy swell, which would cause the little craft to rise to a great height one moment, and then fall to an alarming depth the next. But she lived through it all, with Roy and Charley pulling at the oars, until within a couple of yards of the beach, when she capsized, and tumbled her crew into the surf.

All three scrambled hastily to their feet, and attempted to run up the low-lying shore, so as not to be caught by the back flow. Roy and Charley, however, found their heavy diving-suits a terrible drag, and they were overtaken by the following wave, which immediately buried them in its watery heart, and, carrying them along with it, hurled them breathless and half-drowned, but fortunately high up upon the strand.

Utterly exhausted, Roy and Charley lay where they had been flung, scarcely capable of making another effort, if their lives had depended upon it. But, luckily for them, the last wave had carried them out of reach of all the others, and Harry Wentworth, putting forth all his strength, was able to drag them a little higher still up the sands, when all three lay for fully ten minutes perfectly motionless to recuperate.

Somewhat refreshed by this brief spell, they at last sat up, and Harry proceeded to remove the diving-dresses of his comrades. As both Roy and Charley's clothes, of course, were quite dry, and they had a box of matches each upon them, they determined to light a fire, at which Harry could dry his garments.

They soon had collected plenty of fuel from the woods, and had a roaring fire; and, as they gathered round it, they felt they were not so very badly off after all. They were on an island, well-watered, full of fruit-trees, and teeming with game, as they had already discovered, and, moreover, they were well within the track of ocean-going steamers, so that they believed they need not long play the part of Crusoes.

The hurricane continued with unabated fury all day; but our three friends no longer felt any uneasiness from it. They ate a hearty meal of fruit, washed down by clear, spring water, and then wandered along the shore to pick up whatever might have been washed from the wreck.

Casks of ale, flour, and water, and several seamen's chests they found, and a little further on, to their intense delight, they found their boat washed up high and dry, and practically uninjured, though, of course, the oars were gone.

Still this loss did not give them much cause for repining, for they knew that with their axes and knives, as well as the still more serviceable tools, which they found in one of the seamen's chests—probably the carpenter's—they would be able to easily trim several pairs of oars from the branches of trees.

Night was fast coming on, so they searched out a small cave among the rocks, and, having made themselves each a bed of dry moss and brushwood, they lay down to seek a well-earned repose.

When they awoke next morning the storm had passed away; and, going down to the beach, they were delighted to still find the fore-half of the "Free Lance" stuck fast upon the reef, though the violence of the waves had broken her right in two, and her stern had sunk in deep water.

Roy and his companions decided to visit the yacht, and try and get ashore such provisions and necessities as they could. With this design, they made two pairs of oars, and launched their boat, reaching the wreck in safety.

The ropes, by which they had swung themselves into the boat the previous night, still dangled over the side, and they were able to clamber aboard, when, almost the first thing they came upon as they entered the deckhouse, was all the diving-apparatus quite undamaged.

The mutineers had pushed the pumps and other appliances into the house out of the way, and the solid timbers, of which the latter was composed, had protected the machinery from all mishap, either from the action of the waves or the floating debris.

As his eye rested upon the apparatus, and he saw it was all still in perfectly good condition, a thought struck Roy, and he decided at the earliest convenience to communicate it to his companions. They loaded the boat with all the food, fire-arms, and kitchen utensils they could find, and were about to return to the shore, when Roy said:

"Look here, chaps, here is the diving-apparatus uninjured. Let us take it also. The treasure is sunk with the stern; but there is no reason whatever why we should not be able to recover it at our leisure, seeing we have the diving-dresses and everything complete."

"A grand idea, Roy," answered Charley. And at once the three threw overboard some useless old chests, which they had been thinking of taking with them, to make room for the apparatus, which was thereupon safely lowered over the side, and stowed away.

They returned to the island in safety, and they spent the rest of the day in fitting up their cave with the commodities they had brought ashore. As these comprised a table, a couple of chairs, and several rugs, they were able to give to their rocky retreat almost a comfortable and home-like appearance.

On the following day they decided to try and recover the treasure, as Roy suggested, so immediately after breakfast the diving apparatus was put into the boat, and they rowed out to the reef.

Roy and Charley lost no time in getting into their diving-suits, which, though somewhat battered and the worse for wear from what they had passed through, were still serviceable and air-tight.

Then, Harry having tested the air-pumps to see that they worked all right, the divers once more prepared to explore the ocean depths. They were lowered over the side of the boat, and soon found themselves at the bottom of the sea, close to the sunken after-part of the yacht.

They at once set to work with hatchets and levers to clear away the heap of wreckage which blocked up their entrance into the interior, and were thus busily engaged, when Charley suddenly felt his left arm grasped by some living thing.

The sensation was horrible in the extreme. A slimy, whip-like shape had twined itself round his arm, just above the elbow, and was tightening like a noose.

A second long, undulating tendril was waving through the water within a few feet of him, and before Charley could make a single effort to break from the hold of the first ligature, this second one struck him on the chest, and instantly wound itself round his waist.

An involuntary shiver ran through the limbs of the snared young fellow, and, with a thrill of unutterable horror, he realised that he was in the clutches of a cuttle-fish or octopus.

He tried to use his axe to lop off the horrible tentacles; but, ere he could move his arm, a third antenna circled through the water, and pinioned it helplessly to his side.

He was now at the mercy of the loathsome thing, and already the clinging suckers were striving to reach his flesh through the stout sheet indiarubber of which his dress was composed.

Roy Lyster, busily hacking and hewing away with his axe at the heap of wreckage, did not notice what had befallen his comrade, till, suddenly chancing to look up, he saw him, to his horror, fast-locked in the frightful embrace of the octopus.

It was a sight sufficient to unnerve many a man; but Roy saw from the convulsive struggles of his friend that the latter still lived, and, realising there was no time to lose, with fearless courage he hurried to the rescue.

One mighty swing of his hatchet, and he had severed the tentacle which clasped Charley round the waist; then the infuriated monster strove to clasp its new foe with one of its other snake-like feelers; but, frenzied at the thoughts of his chum's peril, Roy was utterless regardless of his own. He slashed wildly to right and left, and lopped off a tentacle at almost every blow.

The hideous creature, finding itself being worsted, began to retreat towards a large cavern in the reef, dragging Charley with it. Roy followed it up doggedly, and presently the monster shot forth a thick, inky scum, which dyed the water around, so that he lost sight of the bloated body, with its glassy eyes.

But, totally undaunted, he plunged into the turbid water, and, though he found himself immediately encircled by one of the feelers, he cut through it with a terrific stroke of his axe. Almost immediately after he was clasped again by the slimy folds, and, though he hacked and slashed like a madman, he found this time he could not free himself.

Others of the monster's antennae twined round his limbs, and suddenly he saw the head of the octopus darting at him.

With a last desperate effort he buried his hatchet deep in one of the dull, glassy eyes. There followed another discharge of the black fluid, and then the loathsome thing's suckers relaxed their grasp upon Roy's almost crushed frame, and its misshapen body sank in a collapsed heap upon the rocky floor of the cavern.

GRAND CYCLING STORY NEXT WEEK.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN OCEAN DEPTHS ONCE MORE—THE TREASURE RECOVERED—ROY'S AIR-TUBES BURST—CHARLEY'S RESOURCE—THEY REACH THE SURFACE, TO FIND HARRY ATTACKED BY MARSDEN AND HIS FELLOW-MUTINEERS—THEY WARN THE RUFFIANS OFF—MARSDEN'S TREACHERY.

Roy's first thought after he had killed the octopus were of his chum, and, though his own brain was reeling with what he had gone through, he hunted about, and was at length rejoiced to find Charley lying senseless upon the ocean bed.

One of the hideous coils of the monster was still round him, but it had been lopped off in the early part of the struggle, so there was reason to hope that his comrade was still alive. Finding, to his great delight, that neither of their signal-lines nor air-tubes had been fouled in the fearful combat, he now signalled to Harry in the boat, and was immediately drawn up to the surface, with Charley in his arms. With Harry's assistance, he got his senseless chum over the side, and then was helped in himself.

Hastily Charley's helmet was removed, and the hearts of both his friends lightened when they saw the lips move and his eyes open. In a few minutes he was able to sit up, and at once poured out his gratitude to Roy for saving him from so horrible a death.

Neither of the divers, after their late experience, felt any desire to make a second descent—at any rate, just then—so they decided to return to the island. As they sat round a comfortable fire at the entrance to their little cave, and partook of a good meal, Charley Siddell and Roy Lyster recovered something of their usual nerve, and declared that they would be ready on the morrow to recommence their diving operations.

Sure enough on the succeeding day they decided to once more make an attempt to recover the treasure, and rowed out again to the sunken reef.

As the divers were preparing to don their dresses they were suddenly startled to hear a loud splashing in the water near, and, looking up, they beheld a strange marine conflict.

It was between a medium-sized whale and the curious fish known as the thresher. The mode of attack carried on by the latter is to wait until the whale rises to the surface to breathe, as it must do occasionally, then flying bodily out of the water, to bring itself down with crushing force upon the whale's back.

In this conflict, however, the whale evaded receiving a telling blow from the thresher by its quick movements, and in turn the thresher had to keep clear of the powerful tail of its foe as he lashed about.

All at once, though, there seemed a sort of commotion under the water, and the whale suddenly dashed off at lightning speed over the surface of the sea, as though fleeing from some more terrible enemy even than the thresher.

Then our watching friends saw a long stick, as it at first seemed, rise out of the water, and, looking closer, saw that this issued from the head of another strange fish.

The three men at once knew this new-comer to be a swordfish, which, like the thresher, wages unceasing warfare upon all of the whale kind.

Even as they watched the swordfish darted through the water like a streak of lightning, and plunged its peculiar weapon deep into the side of the whale. But, though badly wounded, the great animal swerved round, and "swish!" came its tail within an ace of the back of the swordfish.

Again the latter charged, and again rammed the whale deep in the side, and at the self-same moment the thresher, overtaking the two, once more flew up into the air, and brought its body down with a crash upon the back of the leviathan.

It was the last straw, and, with a convulsive shudder, the whale floated upon the surface, dead.

Their fell work accomplished, the thresher and the swordfish disappeared once more into the ocean depths, and, rowing up to the carcass of the victim, our friends found on examination that the last blow from the thresher had broken the monster's backbone.

Returning to the wreck, Roy and Charley now prepared to descend, though not, it must be admitted, without some little dread of encountering another such horrible sea-monster as the cuttle-fish. However, though they examined all the nooks and recesses among the rocks as a precaution before recommencing work upon the wreck, they came upon nothing more alarming than a few crabs and shellfish, though once a great water-skel gave Charley a start by swimming between his legs. The touch of the cold, slimy object made him imagine he was once more caught in the coils of the dreaded octopus.

At length, free from all further apprehensions on this score,

they set to work with a will, and had soon succeeded in bursting their way into the wreck. Then between them they carried the treasure-chests out on to the bed of the ocean and signalled to Harry to lower the tackle for hoisting them.

One after the other the chests were attached to the ropes and hauled up, until at last they stood alone at the bottom of the sea, awaiting their turn to be pulled to the surface.

All at once a dull noise was borne to their ears, and Roy's air-tubes, cut clean through close to the pump, came falling through the water, the air escaping in great bubbles from the severed end.

Had it not been for his own quick presence of mind Roy would have been miserably drowned in another instant; but hastily he caught hold of the tube close to the helmet and squeezed it tightly together, until Charley, who saw his terrible predicament, could tie it up.

Then, as he was on the point of signalling to be hauled to the surface, he was anticipated by being suddenly whisked upwards at great speed.

As his head clove the waves, and he clutched the side of the boat, he was astonished to hear the unmistakable crack of a pistol-shot, and the ball struck him on the helmet with almost sufficient force to knock him backwards. Through the glass of his bull's-eyes he saw, to his utter amazement, a boat containing three men rowing swiftly towards them.

In a moment he had unfastened the front eyepiece of his helmet, and saw that the fellows were none other than Marsden and his brother-mutineers. The two Venezuelans were rowing, while the mate was taking pot-shots at them with a revolver.

It was his first shot, intended for Harry's head, that had severed Roy's air-tubes as clean as a knife might have done.

Fortunately the villain was intoxicated (where he and his friends got the liquor from we will presently explain), and his bullets flew wide, though one or two had pierced the sides of the boat above the water-line, however.

Luckily for our three heroes they had brought their rifles with them, or they would have been completely at the mercy of the murderous ruffians. So, while Harry proceeded to haul Charley up, Roy picked up his rifle, and, still in his diving-suit, pointed it at the head of the drunken mate.

"Throw that pistol into the water instantly," he shouted, "or I will shoot you with as little compunction as you deserve!"

For answer Marsden discharged it at the speaker, with so true an aim this time that, had he not been wearing his diver's helmet, the ball would assuredly have pierced his brain. As it was, the impact of the bullet upon the iron made his head sing for long after.

Quickly throwing his rifle to his shoulder, Roy took aim at the drunken rascal's hand which held the pistol, and fired.

The mutineer uttered a bellow of mingled pain and rage, and the revolver fell into the sea.

"Take yourselves off, you villains!" cried Roy. "I don't want to be your executioners, but I will assuredly shoot the first man dead who again raises a weapon."

Charley had by this time come to the surface and been helped over the side by Harry, and as soon as he grasped the situation he, too, picked up a rifle, and Harry likewise. So that the mutineers found themselves all three covered, and, drunk though they were, they realised it would go hard with them were they to attempt further treachery.

"Sheer off now, and be smart about it!" called out Roy again.

And, with looks of diabolical hatred and baffled fury, the Venezuelans began to back water as a sign that they obeyed.

Marsden sat down in the stern-sheets cursing and swearing, but not daring to make any hostile movement, for the three deadly muzzles were still trained upon him.

"Look here!" cried Harry; "you fellows had better not venture near us on the island, or we will shoot you down like the vermin you are. Keep to the northern end of it. We won't interfere with you if you don't interfere with us. As my friend here said, we have no wish to be your executioners—indeed, we consider shooting too good a death for such wretches. To dance at the end of ropes is the fate yet in store for you."

These words seemed to lash all three mutineers into perfect frenzy, and, suddenly dropping their oars, Nunez and Soldan stooped and picked up a couple of rifles from the bottom of the boat.

Ere they could sight them, though, the pieces of our three friends spoke in quick succession, and Soldan's rifle was knocked clean out of his hands by a well-aimed bullet from Roy, while Nunez sank down in the bottom of the boat with a leaden missile through his left shoulder.

"Death to the miscreants!" shouted Charley.

And he and Harry seized the oars to urge their own craft towards that of the mutineers.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CHUMS FIND THE MUTINEERS HAVE
 RAIDED THEIR CAVERN HOME—ON THE
 TRACK OF THE RUFFIANS—THE FATE OF
 MARSDEN AND HIS ASSOCIATES—THE DIVERS
 IN A QUICKSAND—CONCLUSION.

But our friends forgot the heavy treasure-chests, which weighed down their boat almost to the gunwale, and, though they plied their oars with might and main, they found they made but very poor headway through the water.

Seeing this, the mutineers took heart, and Marsden and Soldan bent to the oars, while Nunez nursed his wounded shoulder at the tiller.

Roy could have picked all three scoundrels off with ease had he been so minded; but he felt the natural repugnance of a brave man to shooting even such guilty wretches in cold blood.

He therefore allowed the mutineers to row off towards the northern end of the island, and when they were out of sight he threw down his rifle, and, taking up an oar himself, helped his companions to urge the heavily laden craft to the shore.

They landed almost immediately opposite their cave, and Roy remained in the boat, with his rifle ready in case of another attack from the mutineers, while Charley and Harry carried the treasure-chests up the rocks.

An indescribable scene of confusion and wanton destruction awaited their entrance.

Their few household utensils and articles of furniture were smashed to pieces; their provisions had been either carried off by the invaders or were trampled underfoot and thrown about until quite unfit for food. Several of the spirit-casks and flour-barrels had disappeared, and what liquor had been left lay in a muddy puddle on the ground. All their stock of arms and ammunition, too, had gone; and Charley and Harry stared at one another in horror and alarm as they realised the full extent of their loss.

The marauders, who without the slightest doubt had been Marsden and his two associates, had secured a perfect arsenal, while they themselves were left with but the handful or so of cartridges which they had thought it almost superfluous, as it was, to take with them when setting out. This small supply of ammunition would soon be expended, and then they would be at the mercy of the three murderous ruffians.

They returned in haste to Roy with the alarming news, and the three consulted what was best to be done. Charley was for boldly going in search of the vandals who had wrought the destruction, and settling the quarrel once and for all, while they still had sufficient ammunition to make the combat fairly equal. Harry suggested that they should set out in their boat for one of the neighbouring inhabited islands, or make for the coast of South America.

But, as they calculated they were over a hundred miles from the nearest land, they did not entertain the last suggestion for long, and it was at length decided that Charley's plan should be put in execution.

As it was quite possible the mutineers might visit the cavern during their absence, they hid in nooks and crannies around such of their household goods as were still intact, as well as their diving-apparatus; and, as the best way of hiding the treasure, they lowered the chests by means of the tackle over the cliffs into moderately deep water.

Then, each man armed with his repeating-rifle and a brace of revolvers, loaded in every chamber, they set out northwards, following the line of shore, but keeping as much under cover as they could, lest the mutineers should spy them first and lie in ambush.

In this way, they got over the ground fairly rapidly, and, resting frequently, so as not to unnecessarily tire themselves, they reached the northern extremity of the island shortly after sunset. This was just what they wanted, for they expected that the mutineers would light a fire, and the blaze would reveal their whereabouts.

Our friends, therefore, lay perdu in the dense woods until darkness had come on, when they sallied forth, and, walking along the shore, were at length gratified by the sight of a fire about a quarter of a mile distant.

The trio advanced towards it quickly, until they came within a couple of hundred yards, and then they crept stealthily through the bush. They had heard loud singing, or rather bellowing, while at a distance, from which they guessed that Marsden and his associates were carousing. But, as they came nearer, they were astounded to hear the sudden whiplike crack of a revolver, which was followed immediately by a shriek of mortal agony.

A dead silence followed for a brief interval, and was succeeded by a regular popping of pistol-shots, and a series of fierce yells. Then, as our three friends, guessing that the mutineers were quarrelling and fighting amongst themselves, ran hastily for-

ward, the shots and cries suddenly ceased; and, in the circle of light cast by the fire, they beheld two men wrestling fiercely together.

As they drew nearer, they recognised the pair as Marsden and Nunez. Both men were streaming with blood from the terrific cuts they had already inflicted on one another with their knives, and were so drunk, or weak, as to be hardly able to stand. Soldan lay upon the ground motionless, and apparently lifeless—doubtless it was his death-cry they had heard follow the first pistol-shot.

The three young fellows were running forward to separate the combatants, when suddenly they saw Nunez plunge his knife deep into the throat of Marsden, who almost simultaneously drove his weapon to the hilt in his slayer's breast.

The two men crashed to the ground, one a-top of the other; and when Roy and his companions pulled them apart, they saw that both were dead. Soldan, too, they found had been slain, as they conjectured; and thus these three vile miscreants had themselves been the instruments by which Fate visited their crimes on their heads.

Roy and his comrades bivouacked that night around the camp-fire built by their late foes, and in the morning they buried the bodies, and removed many of the stolen goods to their cave.

Relieved now of all immediate cause for alarm, they decided to bring up the treasure from the bottom of the bay, into which they had thrown it, as the reader may remember, for fear of the mutineers.

Accordingly, the tackle was rigged up on the brink of the cliff, and Roy and Charley, donning their diving-suits, descended once more to the bottom of the sea. They found all the chests but two, and, after sending the others, up, they proceeded to hunt round for the missing ones.

The bed of the sea a little way out from the cliffs was of sand, and, as they were walking over this, looking eagerly about for the missing boxes, Roy all at once felt himself sinking. His leaden-shoes and heavily-weighted dress naturally caused him to go down with lightning-like rapidity, and, almost before he could realise his extreme peril, he was up to his waist in the treacherous quicksand.

He was about to signal to Harry to haul him up, when, glancing round, he saw that Charley was in an even worse predicament, being sunk to the very armpits. Instantly, with heroic self-denial, he refrained from signalling to be pulled up himself, and motioned to his chum to signal instead.

Charley gave the signal after a minute's generous hesitation; and presently the ropes tautened, and then quivered again with the strain upon them. But the strands held bravely, and Roy had the satisfaction of seeing his chum gradually drawn up out of the gripping sand, and whisked up to the surface.

But even those few moments had been sufficient to permit of our hero's sinking up to his neck in the treacherous sand; and, as the time passed, and still there came no welcome tug upon the ropes, he felt himself being dragged lower and lower down into the earth.

Presently the sand had reached his eyeglasses, covered them, and he was in total darkness, and knew that but the crown of his helmet must be above the ocean bed.

He was suffocating, and his senses were fast leaving him, when he felt the ropes about him tauten; then slowly—oh! how dreadfully slowly—he was dragged up, up out of the bowels of that horrible quicksand, until his dazed eyes once more looked forth into even the welcome semi-gloom of the ocean depths.

He fainted before he gained the summit of the cliffs; but Charley and Harry lost no time in screwing off his helmet, and the cool, fresh air soon revived him.

Fortune favoured them, for, though several ships passed by without appearing to notice the flag they made out of a couple of their jackets, one at last came close enough to see it. A boat was sent ashore, and they were taken aboard, along with the treasure.

The vessel proved to be a British cruiser, homeward bound, and so they were landed safely in old England a week or two later.

The treasure, even without the two lost chests, proved greater than they had anticipated, and it was divided between the three young men.

Roy Lyster was welcomed home as one from the grave by his darling mother and sister; and when he presented himself at the house of his fair young sweetheart, Sadie Goulding, he met with a cordial reception from both father and daughter. The discovery of the galleon's treasure had crept into the papers, and Mr. Goulding, as a man of the world, was bound to look more favourably upon Roy as a wealthy individual than as the son of a bankrupt.

Some months later our hero led the winsome girl to the altar, and on the self-same day Charley Siddell and Roy's sister, Lucy, were made one.

THE END.

OUR CYCLING STORY NEXT WEEK.

THE BLACK SEAL

OR THE QUEST OF "ZUB" THE DOG DETECTIVE

READ THIS INTRODUCTION.

Viola Norris is found dead, murdered in the rooms which she occupies, in an aristocratic London mansion, with her only sister Jessie, and her guardian, General Cardwell.

Jessie Norris, being suspected of the murder, summons to her aid Jack Fairfax, a young detective, with his trained bloodhound Zub; and, Fairfax, despite many suspicious circumstances, believing in Jessie's innocence, agrees to take up the case, and track down the real criminal.

The principal clues are a great splash of blood on the wall of an adjoining room, and a black seal, on which is clearly traceable the impression of a man's thumb.

Extraordinary experiences are encountered in the opening chapters. Zub, the dog, traces a mysterious figure to the Underground Railway Station at Charing Cross. Jack enters the carriage with this individual, but is chloroformed, and the party leaps from the train. Zub and his master follow, and trace the weird figure to an underground passage, where they discover a wax-image of the murdered girl.

The trail leads to a London barracks, to the quarters of Captain Mortimer the friend of Lieutenant Glyn, who had been engaged to the murdered Viola.

Fairfax, with difficulty gains admittance, and Mortimer receives him with apparent frankness, inviting the detective to lunch. Mortimer, however, drugs Fairfax, and also stupefies Zub; then steals from the detective a scarf, which the latter had just found, cuts it up, and burns all except one fragment, bearing a name, which he hides in his pocket.

A knock is heard. Mortimer escapes by the window, and Jessie Norris enters the room, making straight for the cabinet where the scarf had lain. Missing it, she rushes from the apartment; but is seized at the door by Captain Mortimer, who threatens her.

Jack Fairfax, recovering from his stupor, intervenes, and Mortimer flies.

Following on the track, Fairfax, with Zub, comes again across the weird figure previously met with, and, after several adventures, tracks it down to a mausoleum in West Brompton Cemetery. He throws open the door, and dashes in pursuit into the tomb.

Jack Fairfax crashed headlong into the mausoleum, overturning some trestles supporting the coffin of Viola Norris standing in the centre of the vault, and one end of the leaden chest fell to the ground, pinning him under it. The mausoleum was faintly lighted by a steely-blue glow, and, as the detective fell, a weird, wild figure started up from the corner, Fairfax recognising in her Jessie Norris herself, the girl who had employed him to hunt down her sister's murderer. Then, swiftly opening a secret door, the girl rushed from the vault, leaving all in darkness.

Lighting his lantern, the pinioned detective sees an oak hand-spike standing against the wall out of his reach; but Zub fetches it, and, prizing up the coffin, he releases himself.

The dog picked up the track of the girl outside, and followed the trail, which, however, was lost in the Fulham marshes.

Next morning another £100 banknote is mysteriously conveyed to the detective at breakfast time; but Fairfax determines to return it and give up the case, as it appeared that the woman who employed him was only fooling him, and was herself the murderess.

He goes round to the Norris' mansion.

Zub expresses confidence in Jessie's innocence, and the girl declares that her's could not have been the figure chased by the detective. She proves she could not have been at the mausoleum at the time Jack was there. Fairfax believes her, and agrees to continue the quest.

Jessie relates some family history, showing that she and her sister were born in India; that her father had been twice married, his previous wife and infant child having been massacred during a native rising.

Captain Mortimer and Lieutenant Glyn had returned last year with their regiment. Glyn, a nephew of General Cardwell, became engaged to Viola; Mortimer was rejected by Jessie, who loathes and distrusts the captain.

Jessie then explains the mysterious wax image.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WAXEN IMAGE EXPLAINED.

"Poor Viola was rather peculiar in some respects. One of her fancies was to have a miniature figure of herself, which she could use as a depository for her private papers, instead of keeping them in a locked desk or strong-box. Thus, she had a wax model made, a quarter-size miniature of herself, exact in every particular. The bust of the figure opened by a concealed spring, disclosing a fitted cavity, like the interior of a Miner's safe; there poor Viola deposited all her papers (she was always reserved and uncommunicative), declaring that she would keep all her secrets locked within her own breast.

"Her strange fancy carried her even further. After dressing the doll-like figure in facsimiles of her own garments, she declared it must have a soul. Accordingly, she induced General Cardwell—Viola was always his favourite, and could twist him round her little finger—to hand her a large sum in notes, a great part of her fortune, and she locked away the amount in the breast of her doll.

"Now the image cannot be found anywhere. Under the shock of the awful event, no one gave a thought to it; but last night—last night at eight o'clock, when you thought you saw me in the mausoleum—General Cardwell came round here in a state of great excitement. The image has disappeared, and my guardian declares that I have made away with it; that it was for that paltry motive I murdered my only sister. Oh, I could almost laugh amidst my anguish. What need had I for money? I, who have plenty of my own, for we both received a large fortune under our father's will. Money!" she added passionately; "we both had far, far too much. Had we been penniless girls, poor Viola might have been still alive, and I should have been spared this horrible torture.

"Oh, if you could but find that image, Jack!" cried the almost hysterical girl, wringing her hands—"oh, if you could but produce it. Not for the wretched money it holds, but for the secrets it may contain. The whole explanation might there be found, the entire solution of this horrid, harrowing mystery. Oh, if you could but lay hands on that model, Jack!"

During the narration, Fairfax had listened eagerly, breathlessly, excitement rising to fever-heat, as the girl described exactly the model he had found in the underground passage, the image he had deposited at the district-messenger office, the subsequent whirl of events having driven all thought of the occurrence from his brain. Now he started up, trembling with hard-held excitement, as violently as the girl herself, and, seizing both Jessie's hands, cried:

"I can! I will! I have it already! Fool that I was not to think of it sooner. If that image can clear the mystery, it is already elucidated. Give me but half an hour, Jessie. Wait here till I return, and I will lay the model with its contents at your—"

The closing words were drowned in a tremendous explosion, the windows were shattered, the glass flying inwards like hail, and crashing on the floor. The whole house shook and rocked, then trembled as if about to collapse. The effect of the concussion of air on those within the room was deafening and stunning.

First recovering self-possession, Jack gazed around the wrecked room, now in the wildest confusion; but the floor seemed still sound, the shaking, shivering building had settled down again. There appeared no risk of collapse for a time at least.

"Come from beneath that couch, Mrs. Maggs!" he shouted. "Come out, you silly woman; there seems to be no immediate danger, and, in any case, you would be no safer there, rather the reverse. Come here, you foolish creature, and attend to your mistress!"

"Oh! Ah! I'm all right, Jack. Don't trouble about me!" gasped Jessie.

Jessie seemed quite content to accept the masterful man as her champion and protector, nestling in his arms with a contented little sigh; then, preceded by the nurse, Jack carried the girl to her own room.

The explosion had occurred in front of the house; this apartment faced the rear, and was consequently undamaged; so,

DO YOU LIKE THIS?

leaving Jessie under the care of Mrs. Maggs, with strict injunctions to remain there until his return, Jack rushed away to ascertain the nature of the outburst, and the extent of the damage.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE INFERNAL MACHINE.

The staircase was more encumbered than before; as Fairfax descended the litter increased, patches of plaster from floor and ceiling strewed the steps, and the air grew thick with dust.

The hall-door was partly open, and, throwing it wide, Jack darted out, remarking, however, as he passed, a couple of blotches, something like clots of blood, on the floor, as the door swung wide.

That the explosion had occurred outside was evident, a large, pit-like furrow being ploughed in the front garden, while the shrubs and bushes were twisted and broken as by a hurricane blast.

"Dynamite!" muttered Jack. "Wonder if I can find the canister." But though he hunted all about, he could trace no infernal machine.

Then, recollecting the clotted gouts at the front-door, he rushed back, examined them, and discovered more.

Behind the door were similar marks; a dense, oily liquid was there in a little pool. There was also a square mark, as if a leaking canister, shaped like a kerosine oil tin, had rested there.

Clear traces of an infernal machine. It had originally been placed behind the door, then removed to the front garden. What a mercy! what an escape! Had the demoniac thing exploded in the hall, it would have blown out the front foundations of the house, probably causing the collapse of the entire building, with the death of all within it. Who was the fiendish miscreant who had deposited the case in the hall? who the preserver who had removed the explosive to the open?

As Fairfax stood gazing at the blotches, a hurried, heavy tread sounded from the front path, and a stout, red-faced man, clad in the unmistakable blue garb of Scotland Yard, ran panting into the hall.

"Hallo! Sergeant Whipp, you on this case, then?" was Jack's greeting.

"Ha!—poof!—yes, Mr. Fairfax. I'm on dooty here. I'm watchin' the house!" replied the man, mopping his streaming brow.

"Watching the house? A pretty watch you are to allow such a thing as this to happen under your very eyes!" replied Fairfax contemptuously.

Whipp would doubtless have made an angry rejoinder, but he was checked by the arrival of his superior, Superintendent Fox, a lean, hatchet-faced man, who appeared on the scene, his first remark being:

"What? You here, Mr. Fairfax? Are you interesting yourself in this affair?"

"What if I am?" was the quiet reply.

"Only this, sir!" snarled the other. "If you mean to investigate this explosion business, do so and welcome. I won't interfere with you there, as I have bigger game afoot. But, sir, if you venture to meddle in the murder business, I tell you you're only wasting time. I have it all clear already. My evidence is complete."

"Then you think you have found the murderer of Viola Norris?"

"Think, sir? I'm sure of it. I wish I was as certain of my promotion. Only, I'll give you a tip, change the sex—say murderess, and you'll hit the nail. Now don't you interfere with me here, Mr. Fairfax. You have had your innings—and made some fair scores—in tracking down those Anarchists, and that Whitechapel murderer; but you can't do anything here. Viola Norris was killed by her sister, and you will never prove the contrary, clever as you think yourself!"

"Wrong again, superintendent," replied Fairfax; "murderer is the true word, not murderess. I shall prove you at fault again, friend Fox."

"But, there, you are not to blame for the faults of your general system. Now, Fox, I will give you a tip in return. There has been an infernal machine fired here. It exploded, as you can see, in the front garden; but, look at this"—throwing back the door—"the case was at first intended to be burst here; then, Heaven help all in the building at the time. Afterwards it must have been removed, at tremendous risk, to the spot where it actually exploded."

"But, still more pertinent and pressing, pray look to this, Mr. Fox. These clots are a preparation of nitro-glycerine, more deadly than the original compound. In this form it is called 'blasting gelatine,' and its explosive force is greater than that of dynamite. One good, sharp blow will cause an explosion. Nay, don't jump back, man, the thing is harmless enough so long as it is left alone, but pray have it strictly watched and guarded. Send word to your officer for the immediate attendance of your inspector of explosives. Eh! you imp of darkness, are you the Guy Fawkes?"

The closing words were addressed, not to Inspector Fox, but to the black page, who came sneaking along from the back premises, and Fairfax noticed that the lad's hands and jacket were smeared with the same sticky, pale-brown substance—blasting gelatine.

At once Jack sprang towards the boy, but the imp made a weasel-like dart to the back stairs, and sped swiftly down the dark steps, Fairfax following hot-foot.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CHASE.

The stairs led to the basement; the passage was as dark as a pit-mouth; but Fairfax dashed in unhesitatingly, intent on capturing the page, and calling him to account for the stains of explosive matter on his hands and jacket.

Down Jack hurried, slipping and stumbling over the rubbish-strewn steps, guided only by the quick, light footfalls of his quarry, Zub blundering behind.

Accustomed to the darkened stairs, the boy made much speedier safer way, his footsteps rapidly receding in the distance; and, ere proceeding very far, Zub made an extra stumble, lost his balance, fell forward, and the big, heavy dog cannoned against the man with the force of a football charge; then hound and master rolled blindly, irresistibly, to the bottom of the flight.

"Oh! Zub, Zub!" remonstrated Jack, picking himself up; "you are too eager, old fellow. You should play with your head as well as with your feet; you have spoiled my shot at goal." And the dog whined his regret, unmistakably expressing his keen desire to repair his blunder.

The basement floor was closely shuttered, the whole place was in utter darkness, and all sounds of the quarry had ceased.

Quickly drawing his lantern, Jack adjusted and lighted it, throwing its searching rays around. The flat was utterly dismantled, like all the other floors in the house—save only the third, where the girl was a prisoner on parole. The basement had been denuded of its furniture, and it showed all the confusion, dirt, and litter consequent on a hasty removal.

Hurriedly, yet carefully, Jack searched through all the apartments for the fugitive page, but without avail; the lad was not to be found. Zub, willing as he was, could be of no assistance, as there was no clue to set the dog on the scent, and the detective was forced to confess defeat in this game of hide-and-seek, owning, with a discomfited laugh: "Well, it's no use searching in a dark basement for a black boy who isn't there." And, turning back, he re-ascended the stairs.

"Back again, you will-o'-the-wisp," was the inspector's greeting, as Jack entered the hall. "What startled you, eh? You are as mercurial as a flash of lightning."

"Saw a ghost, but failed to lay it," was the enigmatical response; and Jack noted, with some amusement, that Fox was carefully, and very nervously guarding the clots of blasting-gelatine, having sent Sergeant Whipp to summon the inspector of explosives. Fox felt as uncomfortable as a sentry guarding a powder magazine; more so, indeed, as he knew not exactly the dangerous nature of the explosive.

Fairfax felt inclined to return to Jessie, and insist upon some account of this page-boy; but she had already declared her inability to afford it. Besides, the sight of the inspector, and of the nitro-glycerine, reminded him of the uncomfortable—nay, the perilous position of the girl. She must be removed from this dismantled, damaged house at once, and her guardian was the proper person to conduct such removal. So Fairfax determined to wait on General Cardwell at once, and compel him to do his duty by his ward.

As the young detective strode along, his active mind reverted to recent events.

Who had caused this dastardly explosion? The mysterious page? Certainly the boy appeared to have had some complicity in the outrage, judging by the marks upon him. But, what could be his object? Stay, Jack had seen Captain Mortimer by the gate of the mansion, torturing and threatening the boy, and the officer had hurried away on the detective's approach. Was Mortimer the author of the dastardly act? Certainly, he was more likely to be conversant with such explosive matter than an ignorant black boy, and he would have every opportunity to obtain it, while the boy could have few or none. Had the scoundrelly officer deposited the machine in the hall? Had the infernal engine been there when Fairfax first passed in? It might well have been, without attracting notice, especially if it was a clockwork affair. Had the page, at the imminent peril of his life, afterwards removed the deadly thing to the garden, leaving it to explode in the open, as probably he did not know how to stop the machinery? That might be so. That would account for the stains on the boy's hands and jacket, also for the threats of the captain.

General Cardwell had taken a large house in an adjoining square, and, on presenting his card, Fairfax was shown into the presence of the retired officer.

(To be continued in next week's number.)

SEND YOUR PORTRAIT TO THE EDITOR.

Life in Hand

By Viscount Y

Only two persons in the world know exactly who I am. For it were certain death to reveal more than this—that I am a viscount and an Englishman. For my name, Y, will serve. In disclosing as I am those secret dangers which I have encountered during a life of travel and adventure in all parts of the world, I run a real and very terrible risk, for I deal with stern and grim realities, and not with fiction.

There are men, be it known, moving in vastly different circles who would rather answer for my death than allow a word of what I am about to tell you to go forth to the world.

THE RESTLESS STAR.

I had been travelling night and day for weeks under a sullen, copper sun and cold moon, through the land of the unspeakable Turk. I was in disguise, in quest of a marvellous jewel called the "Restless Star," which for grave political reasons it was necessary to secure.

If I failed, human blood would flow like water.

A strange prophecy was attached to this precious stone, which, up to a month of two before, had been for ages in the possession of the sacred emirs, the descendants of Mahomet.

Thus went the legend: If this stone, guarded securely by the emirs, should by a Turkish soldier be upheld in the midst of a Turkish army, the time was ripe for sweeping the Christians off the face of the earth. The Turk who so upheld the stone should be acclaimed the prophet of this new order of things, and the power and wealth of the emirs be stripped and made over to him and his family.

At the time this strange superstition was held universally in the East.

Yet, so great was the awe in which the emirs were held that no true Mahometan dared, on penalty of his life, to assail them, and so the stone had been held for ages securely.

The jewel itself was an irregular, cone-shaped stone of pale-blue translucency, clouded with a delicate white fleeciness, and radiating from its apex were six quivering, ever-restless rays of light that danced upon its surface. When a light was placed on each side of it three distinct stars appeared.

It was truly a priceless gem, and for ages had been guarded in a monastery of the emirs. Now it was missing.

I had followed the thief day and night for weeks. I was disguised as an emir, wearing Mahomet's sacred colour, green, which in Turkey is a colour none but an emir may wear, on pain of death.

Terrible danger beset me everywhere, for discovery meant something worse than death—it meant a lingering life of fearful torture.

The quarry had a good week's start to begin with; he was making, with characteristic caution, for a large Turkish encampment in the heart of the country.

I learnt this, but no more, for, though no one dared to steal me, and no hand dared to turn me aside, my very disguise, while it saved my skin, made the thief doubly cautious, since he knew that he was being followed.

Again, I often had to go out of my way to avoid a meeting with real emirs and speedy discovery.

At last I tracked the man into the Turkish camp. He arrived there seven hours before me.

I did not enter, nor allow my proximity to be known, for that would have been the signal for the upholding of the jewel; whereas I could tell great preparations were being made for the event. My quarry felt secure.

Darkness had set in an hour since. If I failed to secure that precious stone before daybreak the chance had gone for ever, and one of the most frightful massacres the world has ever known would be certain to follow.

Gathering up my disguise as well as I was able, I managed by dint of great caution to enter the heart of the camp. The greatest excitement prevailed.

I watched my chance, and presently I managed to appropriate a soldier's great-coat and cap. Placing the latter close down on my forehead and buttoning the coat tightly round, I was fairly disguised, and felt thoroughly safe.

"Ah, comrades, the day at last has come! This is grand!" cried a soldier, addressing me.

"Ay, ay! And the Christian dogs shall die, brother—when?"

"Ha, ha! know you not? To-night in the nether world our brave comrade Islam is proclaimed the prophet of the Restless Star! To-morrow the Orient will be red with the dogs' blood!"

"And after, friend?" I ventured to remark.

He stood stock still, and glanced at me keenly.

"Afterwards we shall overrun the world. The Eastern peoples will rise and destroy their white conquerors!"

He moved on again, and I, keeping close to his side, presently stepped across the threshold of a great marquee. It was thronged with soldiers, all exclaiming, and behaving in a frenzied manner, which set the blood curdling in my veins.

How could I recover that jewel? If my disguise saved me, I should be put under such severe cross-examination that would almost surely disclose the deceit.

Still I followed the crowd, all pressing onward and down some broad steps, which led into a vast natural cavern.

It was the spot chosen in ages past for this very purpose.

On a strange altar, brilliantly lighted, lay exposed the dazzling stone.

The altar was placed on a wide platform, high above the excited crowd of armed men.

I pushed and fought a passage through, until at last I stood on the first rung of a rude ladder, up which the thief had just mounted.

A hoarse yell of fury from a thousand throats bade me retreat.

They would have hustled me away, but, knowing now that my only chance had come, I flung off my soldier's disguise, and in a twinkling lowered the long, flowing dress of an emir.

"I demand that stone in the name of Allah and his prophet Mahomet!"

There was an awful hush. I have never felt its like before or since.

Then a fierce and brutal cry broke from the thief.

"Uphold the Restless Star, comrades!"

"The star! the star! the star!" roared the mighty audience, furious to find themselves balked, yet not daring to lay a hand on me, an emir, for fear of eternal perdition.

The thief started across the platform at a run, but I was agile, and mounted the ladder and darted beside him ere he reached the altar.

"Stay!" I thundered. "A curse blight you and yours if you disobey!"

It was a dangerous game to play.

The thief stood still.

"If he be an emir, let him remove the star. He knows the secret of the altar!" cried an officer in high authority.

"Look, comrades, he pales!" yelled the fanatical crowd.

The thief seemed to regard me with eyes hungry for my blood.

"Yes, the stone—the stone! Raise the stone, comrade!" yelled the crowd.

If he touched it first I was done, yet might I not betray all by my ignorance? I knew enough of the horrible ingenuity of these Eastern people to feel that some snare was laid to catch the unwary. Their cunning bid fair to outmatch me. Yet it was a matter of life and death.

"Stay your hand, fool!" I cried, for the thief, knowing the nature of the snare, which I perceived depended on avoiding a certain spot, had leapt from the platform on to the altar, and was stooping down to raise the jewel before the maddened throng.

My words made him quicken his movements.

A deafening yell broke from the crowd.

"The star! Allah be praised! Death to every Christian dog!"

He had touched it almost.

It was impossible for me to secure it first. But I trod the spot he had avoided.

A scream of baffled misery broke from himself and the crowd. My weight released a spring concealed underneath the altar. Next moment the glittering jewel was shot high up against the roof. It appeared to break into a thousand pieces, but that was an optical illusion.

It shot back. Down, down, down, amid breathless silence, broken at last by a mighty sob. I had caught it.

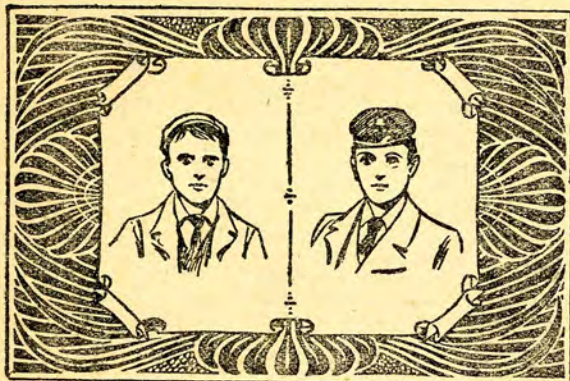
Shall I ever forget that moment? A rush was made for the wretched soldier. He was literally torn limb from limb. It was a sickening spectacle. My sacred disguise saved me, and I got away in the excitement.

(Another of this series next week.)

DO YOU LIKE THIS SERIES?

From the Quarter-Deck.

BY THE SKIPPER OF THE "UNION JACK."



DAN. TWOMEY
(Cork).

DOUGLAS STUART WORTLEY
(Wortley Hall, Yorks).

Here I give again two more portraits of my readers. One of them, as you will see in his letter given below, asks me to print his photograph "this week." Now, I am very sorry indeed to disappoint my young friend. I always try to please all my readers, but he will readily see I am not to blame, when I tell him that this number of the UNION JACK was printed nearly three weeks before my readers see it.

"Wortley Hall, Yorks.
"My Dear Skipper,—I enclose my photograph, as invited in this week's UNION JACK, and would be pleased if you would insert it this week, as I have shortly to rejoin my ship, outward bound for Shanghai, China.

"I am a middy in the Merchant Navy, and sail from the Port of London, and always take a packet of UNION JACKS to pass away the time on board when off duty.

"Should you happen to go out to Nagasaki, Japan, or 'Frisco, you, I believe, would see some of your covers pasted up by my brother middies and myself.

"My brother at Eton, and myself when there, were, I am sure, amongst your most enthusiastic readers.

"Trusting that the UNION JACK may always be as successful as hitherto.—Believe me, yours very faithfully, 'A Young Middy,' DOUGLAS STUART WORTLEY."

Are you a cyclist? If so, you will revel in next week's story. It is called "The Flying Wheel; or, 'Cross Australian Wilds on Bicycles." Tell your cyclist friends about it.

I know that I have a very bright band of readers, and I want them to add their brains to those of my staff, and tell me how they think this paper can be improved. I shall be very pleased to give a

PRIZE OF TEN SHILLINGS

to the writer of the letter containing the best suggestion, or suggestions. As you all must be aware, it is about the most difficult thing on earth to equally please everybody, so your ideas are always welcome. Address, "Suggestion," UNION JACK, 24, Tudor Street, London, E.C. All attempts must reach me before Friday next.

WANTED NEW READERS.

I am always glad to welcome new readers—what Editor is not? To encourage my regular readers to introduce new ones, I here offer any readers a prize of a knife, a cricket belt, a pocket-book, a pencil case, or some other useful article, for every twelve new readers they get me. If you get more, you will get a more expensive prize. Hand your friend a copy of this number, and ask him to read it, and then sign this form:

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Address your letters to "Reader," UNION JACK, 24, Tudor Street, E.C.

Wanted two more complete sets of the UNION JACK, from No. 1 to present date; clean. State price to

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THE FLYING WHEEL

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Across Australian Wilds on Cycles

By MORTIMER AUSTIN.

See Next Friday's

“UNION JACK.”